

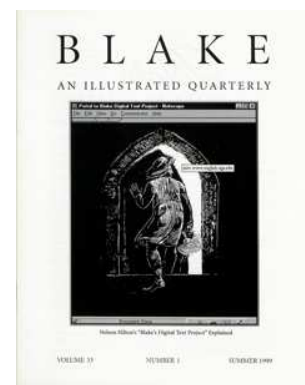
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A R T I C L E

Animal Rights and “Auguries of Innocence”

David Perkins

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BY DAVID PERKINS

Sermons, magazines, novels, pamphlets, children's literature, and Parliamentary speeches in Blake's time denounced cruelties to animals. In 1822 Richard Martin, introducing his bill in Parliament against cruelty to cattle, could claim that "there was not a pulpit in London that had not spoken in a pronounced manner in approbation of it."¹ The practices that reformers condemned were traditional, highly visible, and hitherto unregulated by law or social opinion. Blake's "Auguries of Innocence" alludes to several of them: the caging of wild birds as parlor pets, the whipping, goading, overloading, and overdriving of horses and oxen, the use of animals in war, hunting, cockfighting, cruelties of the slaughter house, and childish plundering of birds' nests and tormenting of insects. The campaign of reform was part of a profound swing of middle-class sentiment, which was also expressed in poetry, such as Blake's "Auguries of Innocence," Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Wordsworth's "Hart Leap Well," Burns's "To a Mouse," and passages in Cowper's *Task* and Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*.² And the poetry also had practical effect, swaying opinion.

The animals in Blake's poetry are mostly traditional meta-

phors—the lark of joy, the wolf of ferocity, the grave's hungry worm, the gentle lamb. Such images are unrelated to the protest on behalf of animals. But a few passages voice, as it seems, utmost sympathy and compassion for animals, and indignation at their treatment, and some of these passages are still quoted as oracles of animal rights. "As it seems," because, like most of Blake's poetry, these texts sustain multiple, sometimes discrepant interpretations.

For example, the first couplet that speaks of animals in "Auguries of Innocence" goes,

A Robin Red breast in a Cage
Puts all Heaven in a Rage.³

(lines 5-6)

The literature of Blake's time abounded in sympathy with wild birds and denunciations of keeping them in cages. James Thomson thought the practice "inhuman," and compared the captive birds to "pretty slaves," thus evoking the harem, though women were likely to be the captors.⁴ Women poets were especially drawn to the theme, as one sees in lyrics by Elizabeth Bentley, Ann Yearsley, Helen Maria Williams, Ann and Jane Taylor, Mary Robinson, and Letitia Barbauld. For all these poets, to confine a wild bird is not a kindness but a thoughtless cruelty, though some of them doubt whether the prisoners could survive in freedom.⁵ The robin especially was viewed as a friendly, trusting bird that would often come into a house for a crumb. To cage one had a smack of betrayal. One of the most popular books for children told the story of four young robins, Sara Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories, Designed For the Instruction of Children, Respecting Their Treatment of Animals* (1786). Emphatically it warns children not to cage robins.⁶ That God loves all his creatures was pointed out repeatedly in church, in Methodist, open-

¹ Hansard, vol. 7, 24 May 1822, cols. 758-59, cited in Hilda Kean, *Animal Rights: Political and Social Change in Britain since 1800* (London: Reaktion, 1998) 35.

² For a survey of the campaign in the eighteenth century and the Romantic era, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983) 36-192. The following books deal mainly with Victorian and modern developments, but have some preliminary material on the period of Blake's lifetime: Ernest S. Turner, *All Heaven in a Rage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965); Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987); James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humility in the Victorian Mind* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980); Hilda Kean, *Animal Rights: Political and Social Change in Britain since 1800* (London: Reaktion, 1998). Discussion of poems on this topic include Dix Harwood, *Love for Animals and How It Developed in Great Britain* (New York: no publisher listed, 1928) and Dagobert De Levie, *The Modern Idea of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (New York: S. F. Vanni, 1947). I have written on the complex relation of certain poets and poems to the campaign on behalf of animals: "Cowper's Hares," *Eighteenth Century Life* 20 (1996): 57-69; "Wordsworth and the Polemic against Hunting: 'Hart-Leap Well,'" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52 (1998): 421-45; "Compassion for Animals and Radical Politics: Coleridge's 'To a Young Ass,'" *ELH* 65 (1998): 929-44; and "Sweet Helpston! John Clare on Badger Baiting," forthcoming in *Studies in Romanticism*.

³ "Auguries of Innocence," in *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 2: 1312. Further quotations from this poem are identified only by line numbers in the text.

⁴ James Thomson, *The Seasons*, "Spring," in *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford UP, 1908) 29.

⁵ Most of these poems are in *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era*, ed. Paula R. Feldman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1957): Elizabeth Bentley, "To a Redbreast, That Flew into the House, and Suffered Itself to be Taken by the Hand of the Authoress," 89-90; Ann Yearsley, "The Captive Linnet," 838-40; Helen Maria Williams, "Elegy on a Young Thrush, Which Escaped from the Writer's Hand, and Falling Down the Area of a House, Could Not Be Found," 808-09; Ann Taylor and Jane Taylor, "The Little Bird's Complaint to his Mistress," and "The Mistress's Reply to Her Little Bird," 736-38; Mary Robinson, "The Linnet's Petition," 595-98. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, "Epitaph on a Goldfinch," *Works*, 2 vols. (New York: G. & C. Carvill, et. al., 1826) 2: 322-23.

⁶ Sarah Trimmer, *The Story of the Robins: Designed to Teach Children the Proper Treatment of Animals* (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1873) 28.

air meetings, in magazine essays, pamphlets, Parliament, and, as I said, in books for children. A grand couplet in "Auguries of Innocence" affirms that heaven incessantly hears the cries of the animals:

The Bleat, the Bark, Bellow & Roar
Are waves that Beat on Heaven's Shore.
(lines 71-72)

Because ill treatment of animals was impious, it was dangerous (as the Ancient Mariner discovers), for heaven would revenge. In Christopher Smart's fable "A Story of a Cock and a Bull," the cock is reassured "from out the sky": the man who baits a bull will himself be refused mercy.⁷ In a sermon of unknown authorship against the cruel sport of throwing cocks, the congregation is warned that "Clemency to the inferior Animals is a Duty from us as we . . . are Christians; and . . . our Happiness in the future World depends in some Measure on our practice of it."⁸ To write, as Blake did, that heaven threatens because of a caged robin was to repeat a simple, pious truth habitually impressed on children. Blake's innocent reads this augury as he or she has been taught.

How we read it today of course depends on the context we bring to bear and also on the particular reader. The once-common approach to Blake through occult and traditional lore yields, in the case of John Adlard, a legend of "the robin bloodying his breast in removing thorns from Christ's head, or scorching it in carrying a beakful of water through the fires of Hell." Adlard, deeply versed in folklore about birds, tells that the robin and the wren were "sacred." "There is a Cornish rhyme:

Hurt a robin or a wren,
Never prosper, boy or man,

which was surely in Blake's mind" when he wrote "Auguries of Innocence."⁹ For other readers the whole body of Blake's work in literature and the visual arts make the most relevant context for interpreting any of his productions. Most of these readers have not commented on the robin, but Hazard Adams says that the theme of this couplet is "enclosure." He maintains that a caged robin pictures "man surrounding himself unimaginatively with a prison of Lockean matter."¹⁰ For me the caged bird associates with the one in Blake's "Song: How sweet I roam'd from field to

⁷ Christopher Smart, "A Story of a Cock and a Bull," *Collected Poems*, ed. Norman Callan, 2 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949) 1: 69.

⁸ *Clemency to Brutes, The Substance of Two Sermons Preached on a Shrove-Sunday* . . . (Dublin: Peter and William Wilson, 1769) 11.

⁹ John Adlard, *The Sports of Cruelty: Fairies, Folk-Songs, Charms and Other Country Matters in the Work of William Blake* (London: Cecil and Amelia Woolf, 1972) 17-18.

¹⁰ Hazard Adams, *William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems* (Seattle: Washington UP, 1963) 161.

field," and thus the couplet activates Blake's problematic of sexual confinement and liberty. The bird that has lost its freedom may figure the phallus, as birds do in "The Blossom" of *Songs of Innocence*. The "heaven" of Blake's couplet is an ambiguous concept, since it may represent the transcendent realm known to visionary innocence or repressive, Urizenic morality, as in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

II

Literature provoked or challenged sympathy for animals by taking as its object an especially humble or—better still!—repellent creature. The best-known instances are in Schiller and Goethe, in Schiller's inclusion of the worm in the ode "To Joy" and in Werther's gush of sympathy, as he lies in the grass, for the worms and flies.¹¹ Wordsworth, Southey, Barbauld, and John Clare voiced affection for flies, spiders, caterpillars, and beetles.¹² Catherine Anne Dorset's address to the coccinellid beetle is still taught to children:

Oh! Lady-bird, Lady-bird, why dost thou roam
So far from thy comrades, so distant from
home?¹³

Many an English preacher reapplied Job's despairing, "I have said . . . to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister" (Job, 17, 14), as a command of tenderness to animals.¹⁴ Blake's *Book of Thel* takes this tactic to a sentimental but imaginatively brilliant extreme by describing a worm as a helpless, naked, and weeping infant. As such the worm arouses maternal emotions in the clod of clay and presumably in the reader also.¹⁵

Many writers conceived that tiny creatures such as insects had especially delicate, intense sensations. To cite Alexander Pope:

The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine!
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line.¹⁶

¹¹ Friedrich Schiller, "An die Freude," line 31, in *Das große deutsche Gedichtbuch*, ed. Karl Otto Conrady (Königstein: Athenäum Verlag, 1978) 290; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, in *Werke*, ed. Georg Witkowski, 12 vols. (Leipzig: H. Fikentscher, no date) 6: 9.

¹² The poems are William Wordsworth, "Written in Germany"; Robert Southey, "The Spider"; Anna Laetitia Barbauld, "The Caterpillar"; John Clare, "Clock a Clay."

¹³ Catherine Ann Dorset, "To the Lady-Bird," in *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era* 230.

¹⁴ James Granger, *An Apology for the Brute Creation, or Abuses of Animals Censured; In a Sermon on Proverbs, XII, 10* (London: T. Davies, 1773) 9-10; *Clemency to Brutes*, "the very meanest Worm is our Sister" 6.

¹⁵ "The Book of Thel," lines 75-82, in *Writings*, ed. Bentley 1: 69.

¹⁶ Alexander Pope, "Essay on Man," 1: 217-18, *An Essay on Man*, ed. Maynard Mack (London: Methuen & Co., 1950) 42.

If this was so, such creatures might also be susceptible of acute pain. The worm is "tortured" on the fisherman's hook, said Thomson, and twists "in agonizing folds."¹⁷ As for a fly in a spider's web,

the fluttering wing
And shriller sound declare extreme distress,
And ask the helping hospitable hand.¹⁸

In Blake's *Book of Thel*, the language on the worm resembles Cowper's in *The Task*, where Cowper famously condemns the man "Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm" or crushes "the snail / That crawls at evening in the public path."¹⁹ Thel also alludes to the common religious argument I mentioned:

That God would love a Worm I knew, and
punish the evil foot
That wilful, bruised its helpless form.²⁰

But one could also read Blake's poem as ironic about the kindness of the vale of Har. Thel's final, terrified retreat suggests that a tougher, more energetic virtue is needed.

Had Blake's contemporaries read his *Songs of Innocence*, they would certainly have thought it a book for children. Such books often depicted idyllic relations between children and animals, as Blake does in "The Lamb." They also humanized animals, that is, they endowed them with human emotions, and completely sympathetic ones. The ants, glow worm, and beetle in Blake's "A Dream" are an example. "The Fly" in *Songs of Experience* is another poem of sympathy with an insect. As in Robert Burns's "To a Mouse," the feeling of affection and identification in this poem is activated by guilt at having injured the bug inadvertently:

Little Fly
Thy summers play
My thoughtless hand
Has brush'd away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?²¹

For today's reader of Blake, the happiness of the animals in *Songs of Innocence* expresses a perspective, the world as seen by the innocent mind:

Birds delight
Day and Night.
Nightingale
In the dale,
Lark in Sky
Merrily . . .²²

But in Blake's time enlightened persons believed in the natural happiness of animals as an objective truth. They are "born for joy," as Blake's school boy puts it—

How can the bird that is born for joy,
Sit in a cage and sing?²³

Innumerable descriptions of animals in Romantic poetry present them as bundles of gladness—the flitting, singing, soaring birds, the bounding deer and lambs, even the owls in Wordsworth's "There Was a Boy." To describe them otherwise would have impugned God's benevolence. There are, of course, exceptions, such as Keats's limping hare and "small gnats" that "mourn."²⁴ But these hardly matter against the total affirmation of animal happiness. We are speaking, of course, of animals as God intended them to be, animals living their wild lives in freedom or domestic animals rightly treated. When animals were hunted, driven, imprisoned, or otherwise tormented, their sufferings were all the more shocking to reformers, since humans caused them and, in doing so, deprived animals of their natural endowment, or rather of their endowment from heaven.

III

"Auguries of Innocence" was not printed during Blake's lifetime. G. E. Bentley, Jr., the editor of Blake's writings in the Oxford edition, believes that the sole, surviving text was copied from an earlier manuscript, now lost, after 1805 and possibly after 1807. He thinks the poem was composed at some time between 1800 and 1804; other editors suggest about 1803.²⁵

This would place "Auguries of Innocence" during the period when Blake was a friend and protégé of the gentleman writer William Hayley. Living in the rural village of Felpham, Blake was a neighbor of Hayley and saw a great deal of him. Before Blake's stay in Felpham, Hayley's poems and memoirs do not express any particular sentiment about animals.

¹⁷ James Thomson, "Spring," *The Seasons*, in *Complete Poetical Works* 18.

¹⁸ James Thomson, "Summer," *The Seasons*, in *Complete Poetical Works* 63.

¹⁹ William Cowper, *The Task*, VI, *The Poetical Works of William Cowper* 2 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1830) 2: 180.

²⁰ "The Book of Thel," lines 94-95, in *Writings*, ed. Bentley 1: 70.

²¹ William Blake, "The Fly," lines 1-6, *Songs of Experience*, in *Writings*, 1: 182.

²² William Blake, "Spring," lines 3-8, *Songs of Innocence*, in *Writings*, 1: 45.

²³ William Blake, "The School Boy," lines 16-17, in *Songs of Innocence*, in *Writings* 1: 59.

²⁴ John Keats, "The Eve of St. Agnes," lines 3 and "To Autumn," line 27, in *Poetical Works*, ed. H. W. Garrod (London: Oxford UP, 1956) 195, 219.

²⁵ William Blake, *Writings*, ed. Bentley, 2: 1733n. *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford UP, 1966) 907n.

But he was a friend of William Cowper and of Cowper's circle, became Cowper's biographer, and probably shared Cowper's compassionate, protective feeling for animals for which Cowper was well-known. Denouncing cruelty to animals in "Auguries of Innocence," Blake may have been confident of Hayley's approval. Possibly he thought Hayley would help publish the work.

Such a hope might have been suggested by Hayley's project of *Ballads: Founded on Anecdotes Relating to Animals*. In order to employ Blake and acquaint Hayley's genteel friends with his skills as an artist, Hayley planned to write a series of poems for Blake to illustrate. Each would be published as a separate pamphlet. When this proved too expensive, the ballads were brought out in 1805 as a volume with five designs by Blake. Hayley's poems describe surprisingly virtuous animals, but lack Cowper's reforming indignation and pity. If verses about animals were required as occasions for engraving, passages in the "Auguries for Innocence" were splendid candidates.

This is merely speculative. Collateral information about "Auguries of Innocence" is lacking. We cannot say whether in Blake's eyes these lines were rough jottings or finished, whether they amounted to a poem or disjunctive passages. The verses are dissimilar in imaginative quality and theme, and more than half of them are not auguries, not, at least, as this poetic form is established in the opening lines. My commentary on this poem is directed only to the couplets on cruelties to animals, and only to the ones among these that are auguries, though the poem includes much else.

An augury is either a small, known thing in which a great, unknown one can be read, or else it is the reading, the prophecy itself.²⁶ As an example, the augurs of ancient Rome foretold the outcome of a battle from the pecks of the sacred chickens. Augury has a temporal structure, in that the large event comes after the small one, but it lacks logic or causality. Neither is the small, disclosing thing related to the large thing as a part to a whole. How or why the two things are interconnected is a mystery, though experience or, at any rate, faith testifies that the interconnection exists. Augury locates us in a world that defies reason.

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand," the opening verse, exemplifies what may be meant by augury in the poem. The

²⁶ My sentence summarizes the usual interpretation of the term in commentary on the poem. For Janet Warner and for E. Kegel-Brinkgreve the term "auguries" also indicates the formal character of the poem, in which apparently disordered and random couplets have an occult connection. See Janet Warner, "Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence,'" *Colby Library Quarterly*, 12 (1976) 127; E. Kegel-Brinkgreve, "Auguries of Innocence," *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters* 4: 119. For John E. Grant the Roman derivation of the term "auguries" (*augures*) also serves as an interpretive clue, since Blake opposed the "pernicious" classical tradition. Moreover, Grant adds, since animals were sacrificed in some forms of augury, the term prepares "the alert reader ... for the concern for victimized birds and other animals" (John E. Grant, "Apocalypse in Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence,'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 5 [1964] 490).

hugely large is seen in the tiny and insignificant. Such seeing is of course not literal, not seeing with what Blake called the vegetable eye, but would be the more expanded, non-literal kind of seeing that Blake called "vision." However, to call it "vision" does not explain or interpret what is said. The interrelation of sand and world could be explained as sympathetic magic, for the world may be like a grain of sand if the latter is envisioned as a single particle and the former as a lump of matter in space. But these are not visions from the perspective that Blake called innocence. For innocence, the world is vital, joyous, and full of spirits, and to see such a world in inert silicon is all the more wonderful and paradoxical. In other poems of Blake, sand is that on which imagination creates its visions: "sands upon the Red sea shore / Where Israels tents do shine so bright."²⁷ The power of the augur would be all the more strongly asserted if it is said not merely to transcend external appearance but to defy it.

The formal structure of the opening quatrain differs from the ensuing lines, which are couplets. In the couplets, line one usually presents the event that augurs and line two what is augured. The rhyme connects the terms, and thus reflects on the formal level the irrational, inexplicable interconnection that is predicated of augury. In other words, the two lines hang together formally as a rhyming couplet and usually as grammar but as meaning their union may seem random. Blake wrote,

Each outcry of the hunted Hare
A fibre from the Brain does tear.
A sky lark wounded in the wing,
A Cherubim does cease to sing.

(lines 13-16)

But might one not also write,

A skylark wounded in the air
A fibre from the Brain does tear?

However, at the level of connotation "wing" and "sing" say "lark," that is, they belong to the concept, intensify it, and make it concrete.

The title "Auguries of Innocence" is grammatically ambiguous, since it could suggest either auguries that foretell innocence or auguries that are interpreted by the innocent mind.²⁸ In the latter meaning the phrase would be analo-

²⁷ Blake, "Mock on Mock on Voltaire Rousseau," lines 11-12, in *Writings*, ed. Bentley, 2: 927. The meaning of sand within Blake's "system" has been explained in opposite ways by different commentators. The passages usually cited include those mentioned above, *Milton*, pl. 18, lines 27-29, and *Jerusalem*, pl. 41, lines 15-18, in *Writings*, ed. Bentley 1: 357, 503.

²⁸ Cf. John E. Grant, "Apocalypse in Blake's Auguries of Innocence" 489: "it is not evident whether the poem is to be understood as auguries of the state of innocence discovered by those in the state of experience or as auguries delivered by those in the state of innocence for the

gous to "Proverbs of Hell" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Just as, according to the *Marriage*, the proverbs "shew the nature of Infernal wisdom,"²⁹ the auguries show how the innocent mind reads the world.

The point is of some importance, for the question is, who is speaking these auguries. Most readers seem to assume that the speaker is the "poet-augur," the "prophetic seer."³⁰ I think the voice is that of innocence; moreover, it is innocence at a moment of crisis, when it beholds the world of experience. This moment, as I shall argue, makes dramatically appropriate the otherwise surprising fact that the aphorisms of innocence warn and bloodily threaten. How can the innocent mind—the lamb!—harbor thoughts of violence and terror:

A Horse misusd upon the Road
Calls to Heaven for Human blood.
(lines 11-12)

Famous though the auguries are, very little has been said about the couplets on animals in commentaries on Blake.³¹ One understands why if I am right in thinking that the auguries were designed to be inexplicable. But many of the auguries can be unriddled as metaphors and thus made intelligible. "The Bat that flits at close of Eve" seems a brilliant metaphor of the uncertain flight of "the Brain that wont Believe," the doubter "Born to Endless Night" (lines 25-26, 124). In the couplet,

The Game Cock clipd & armed for fight
Does the Rising Sun affright,
(lines 17-18)

benefit of those in the state of experience . . . Probably the second alternative is the basic implication of the title, but the first is a better indication of the purpose of the poem, which is to help every man to become his own prophet"; E. Kegel-Brinkgreve, "Auguries of Innocence" 119: "the auguries of innocence could also be . . . warnings, given by innocence as the repository of real insight."

²⁹ Blake, *Writings*, ed. Bentley 1: 80.

³⁰ The phrases are cited respectively from Janet Warner, "'Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence'" 127, and John E. Grant, "Apocalypse in Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence'" 490, though Grant seems to waver a bit on this question. Apparently Hazard Adams, *William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems*, and Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1963), also assume that the speaker is an authoritative voice uttering Blakean truths.

³¹ For most of the animal couplets, the main discussion is in Hazard Adams, *William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems* 161-65. Adams interprets them within Blake's system of symbolism as Adams understands it. For example, in the couplet, "The wanton Boy that kills the Fly / Shall feel the Spiders enmity" (lines 33-34), the fly represents the "prolific," the spider "the devourer," and the "wanton Boy" acts the part of "the Elect" (162-63). Except for Adams, I have found only brief remarks on one or another couplet on animals in commentaries that focus on other parts of the poem. The interpretation of the animal couplets that is usually assumed seems to be that they assert

readers may take the cock as metaphorically a soldier, and they have ample warrant for doing so, both in writings of Blake and in the culture and literature of his time. Another couplet in "Auguries of Innocence" is a variation:

The Soldier armed with Sword & Gun
Palsied strikes the Summers Sun.
(lines 77-78)

The spectacle of cockfights was said to inspire with martial virtues, so impressive was the aggression, fury, and courage of the animals. An anonymous satire in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1747 compared war to "a cock-fight, and a game."

Are sieges, battles, triumphs, little things;
And armies only the gamecocks of kings?³²

Similarly "A dog starvd at his Masters gate" (line 8) could very well be interpreted metaphorically as a guard dog, a policeman, or a servant. With this interpretation, its starved condition "Predicts the ruin of the State" (line 9) in the same way that, in "London," the sufferings of the exploited, oppressed and excluded threaten the social institutions that exploit and create the suffering.³³ Or alternatively, if one were looking for a rational explanation, one could remember that the common, traditional argument against cruelty to animals was that it led to cruelty to humans, with manifest danger to society. The Emperor Domitian, as James Granger remarked, "began with killing flies, before he made such a havoc of his own species."³⁴ Just how "The wild deer wandering here & there" may keep "the Human Soul from Care" (line 21-22) is mysterious, but certainly their free roaming is a beguiling metaphor of motions of thought. To shoot a lark (lines 15-16) closes a communication with heaven.

But auguries are not metaphors. Such interpretations of Blake's couplets are attempts to rationalize connections that Blake deliberately made irrational. Moreover, to read the dog, the cock, the lamb, the wren, the ox, the chafer, and so forth as metaphors weakens the protest of the poem against cruelty to animals. The poem represents animals being starved, whipped, mutilated, and pierced and whirled on a string,

the "mystic unity" of all life or maybe of all things. As Adams expresses it, if "the world exists in each microcosmic object, a crime against that object is a crime against the world and against God" (160). The phrase "mystic unity" is from E. Kegel-Brinkgreve, "Auguries of Innocence" 118. See also John Beer, *Blake's Humanism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1968) 198-99; Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument* 301-02.

³² *Gentleman's Magazine* 17 (June, 1747): 292.

³³ Hazard Adams, *William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems*, 161, notes the possible association of the starved dog with the soldier of "London."

³⁴ James Granger, *An Apology* 22.

among other tortures, and to take these as metaphors is another mode of animal exploitation. Neither, generally, do Blake's couplets work very well as metaphors. In the couplet,

The Game Cock clipd & armd for fight
Does the Rising Sun affright,
(lines 17-18)

the cock has had some of its wing feathers removed, its beak scraped smooth and sharpened, its comb and wattles cut off, and a long metal spur attached to its heel. Perhaps some readers may take these mutilations as metaphors for a soldier's uniform and drill. But when we read that the cock, so prepared, "Does the Rising Sun affright," this effect is, if anything, less appropriate to a soldier than to a literal cock. The couplet speaks, to repeat, of a small thing having an inexplicable effect on a greater thing that is unrelated or related in a completely irrational way. If we have in mind that the cock is associated with the rising sun by its call, and that it might have orange, red colors like the sun, we might suppose that the rising sun, with its red streamers, is a cock who sees a rival cock about to do battle. If the sun is frightened and retreats, the consequences for the world are apocalyptic.

On the other hand, certain metaphors were inherent in the discourse of Blake's time about animals. Had Blake's contemporaries read his couplets, they would have understood them in accordance with such stock ways of speaking. No one believed that animals were hierarchically equal to human beings, and the caged, hunted, baited, plucked, ridden, worked, and slaughtered creatures were obviously inferior in power. Inevitably, they might serve as figures for subordinated human beings—women, children, other races, and especially the lower classes. Thus James Granger ends his splendid 1773 sermon by urging that we imitate God's benevolence by showing kindness "to every living creature," and, with a typical link of association, "may we treat our poor servants and labourers in these times of dearth and scarcity with still greater kindness than we treat our dogs and horses."³⁵ Almost any discourse about the proper treatment of animals could have been understood as also about human inferiors. In Blake's couplet,

A dog starvd at his Masters gate
Predicts the ruin of the State,
(lines 17-18)

the word "Master" especially invites such readings. Allusions to starvation and revolution might have seemed timely in 1803, when many persons feared that the one might lead to the other.

³⁵ James Granger, *An Apology* 24.

But before embracing this social, political reading of Blake's couplet, we should note that when animals figuratively represented servants, soldiers, agricultural laborers, and so forth, the metaphor asserted their radical inequality, a powerlessness and inferiority that was unchangeable because it was essential. For this reason, the political allegories of animal discourse were patriarchal and conservative in their attitude, and deeply reassuring to the genteel. If better treatment for animals were to come, it would be granted by their superiors. The only way to amelioration was by persuasion and law. Revolution was not a possibility. This, of course, made unkindness to animals the more culpable. William Drummond would later point out, in *The Rights of Animals and Man's Obligation to Treat Them with Humanity*, that a "tyrannical prince may often have some plausible pretext for his tyranny," but the "tyrant of animals" has not: "he cannot plead that he dreads their conspiracy or rebellion," or that they "want only an opportunity to depose him."³⁶ We can hardly foist upon the radical and antinomian Blake a metaphor that naturalized extreme social inequality. We may also note that in the animal lore of Blake's time, the dog above all animals was said to be faithful. Even when abused, it famously would not turn against its master. Buffon was the scientific authority of the age on animals, and he stressed that "to the cruelty of his master, he [the dog] only opposes complaint, patience, and submission."³⁷ Such a creature hardly represented a threat to the governing class.

How, then, should we understand this couplet? The augury is read by innocence, that is, by a mind that is naive, credulous, loving, and ignorant of this world as it is. The dog also is innocent in several senses, and the innocent augurer presumably identifies with it. The innocent mind believes in the benevolent goodness of the creator, who is often figured as a loving father, both in Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and also, of course, in the religious mythology of his time. Innocence would assume that the Master has this relation to his dog, is its protector and provider. When the Master starves his dog, the shock to feeling carries also one to faith. Like the lamb that "forgives the Butcher's Knife" (line 24), the dog forgives its master, in the sense that, even when starved, it faithfully remains at the gate. In none of Blake's couplets do the animal victims revenge their injuries; to do so is not in their nature or their power, no more than it is with the innocent children in *Songs of Innocence*. Nevertheless, revenge is threatened, and its scope and vio-

³⁶ William H. Drummond, *The Rights of Animals and Man's Obligation to Treat Them with Humanity* (London: John Mardon, 1838) 207.

³⁷ Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular*, trans. William Smellie, 9 vols. (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1791), quoted in Katharine M. Rogers, *The Cat and the Human Imagination: Feline Images from Bast to Garfield* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1998) 157.

lence measures the shock, horror, and anger in the innocent onlooker, who sees these torments being inflicted.

This emotional state is what Blake's couplets primarily convey, and it carries them into the hearts of readers. Nevertheless, this shock and anger is deeply incompatible with Blakean innocence. In this connection the most interesting couplet is,

The Lamb misusd breeds Public strife
And yet forgives the Butchers Knife.
(lines 23-24)

Most readers associate the Lamb of this couplet with Jesus, a linking that is as relevant as it is inevitable. But in the context of Blake's poem and his contemporary London, the couplet alludes more immediately to cruelties in the driving of animals to market and in methods of slaughtering them. Such "barbarities," as they were usually called, were everyday sights, and they aroused strong protest, "Public strife." Hogarth's "The Stages of Cruelty," for example, showed lambs being beaten along the streets of London. His purpose was to stop such practices. I do not perceive what line of reasoning leads Hazard Adams to assert that "the butcher's act is not wanton cruelty but use,"³⁸ but if Blake's innocent speaker agrees with him, a doubtful point, the use of animals for food is not what is meant by "the Lamb misusd." The aim of reformers was to make the slaughtering of food animals as quick and as painless as is possible. The second line of the couplet can of course be interpreted in many ways. Possibly Blake had in mind the lamb that licks the butcher's knife or hand, as in Pope's *Essay on Man*, 1: 84. However we interpret the line, the meek, unresisting, even loving lamb does not participate in the public strife, and if the lamb is exemplary, the line opens a perspective from which the contemporary campaign on behalf of animals might also be seen as righteous, accusatory, retaliatory, and part and parcel of a fallen world.

The couplets on animals, then, display the strong, confused, appalled reaction of the innocent mind as it encounters the world of experience, in which innocence is victimized. That these are encounters may be emphasized, for Blake's phrasing allows us to imagine that the cruelties described—a horse misused, a screaming hare, a shot lark, a hurt wren—are being seen as auguries are seen, that is, in the moment. They are taking place before the augurer's eye. With a reaction that is deeply rooted in human psychology and cultural history, the innocent mind does not fall into disillusion, but wishes the world of experience away by entertaining fantasies of its destruction. Identified with the victims, enraged, and yet powerless to prevent, the innocent augurer invokes (and maybe invents) a higher power

to punish the wrong. Again, he or she does so with full support from the religious culture of Blake's time. Again, the innocent augurer is only repeating what he or she has been taught. It is heaven that will ruin the state, and the Master with it, just as heaven will revenge the robin. If this is retribution, the apparent excess of the retribution over the crime may seem paradoxical and, as in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," may cause us to ponder on why the punishment is so excessive and how it can be justified. I will try to answer these questions in a moment. Whatever the answer, the apocalyptic prediction expresses the degree of anger and frustration in the innocent augurer.

The reason why the ruin of the state is foreseen, rather than some different but equally apocalyptic event, lies in associations clustering around the terms "Master," as I suggested, and around "gate." Obviously "Master" connotes hierarchy, governance, possession, and the like, and "gate" speaks of exclusion and private property, and the ruin of the state might eradicate these. The prediction threatens the Master, the governing and property-holding classes, and for the speaker (and for Blake) is a prediction of triumph, ridding the world of an evil.

For within a Blakean perspective, the events that are augured, even though terrible, may be finally positive and desirable. They may be moments or portions of the Last Judgment, the apocalypse or destructive transformation of this world into another. The ruin of the state is obviously a portion of apocalypse, but as Blake describes the apocalypse in other poems (most especially in *Night the Ninth of The Four Zoas*), so are the shuddering of Hell (line 8), the shedding of human blood (line 12), and other items. If the sun does not rise (line 18), this would be the end of time or, in Blakean terms, the dissolving of time as an imprisoning dimension. And in the couplet,

Each outcry of the hunted Hare
A fibre from the Brain does tear,
(lines 13-14)

the destruction of brain fibers, though agonizing, would end confinement of the spirit within an intertwined knot or labyrinth.

The apocalyptic raising of a "Human Soul" is done by fierceness—"Every Wolfs & Lions howl" (line 19-20). Hence there is hope in the augury that

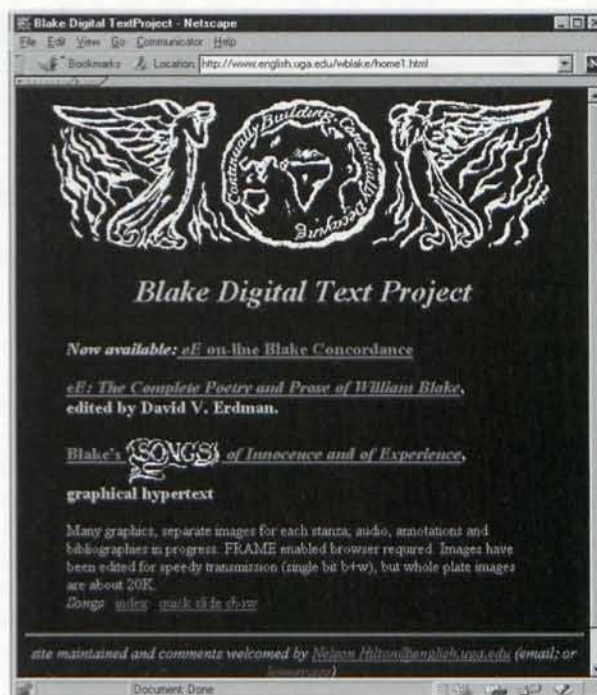
A dove house filld with doves & Pigeons
Shudders Hell thro all its regions.
(lines 7-8)

To a traditional reader, the couplet might suggest that hellish malignity is activated against so much goodness, as Satan was by the garden of Eden. But the context in "Au-

³⁸ Hazard Adams, *William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems* 162.

guries of Innocence" makes clear that a dove house is a cruelty, in which, as its special feature, the animals have been tamed to the point that they no longer desire liberty. Like all the cruelties in the poem, it causes shock and revulsion, arousing the fierceness necessary to reform.

Blake's couplet on the hare was one of a great many contemporary attacks on hunting for its cruelty. That the tearing of brain fibers may be apocalyptic would hardly have been apparent to Blake's contemporaries. But they probably knew more about hares and hunting than Blake's modern readers, and might have registered more strongly than we can the horror that Blake alludes to. Obviously the reference to tearing fibers can be read as a displacement, since it applies to the brain what is actually being done to the hare as the dogs attack it. With this displacement, the brain becomes the hunted animal. Moreover, the "outcry" of a hare in extreme danger resembles that of a terrified baby.³⁹ William Somerville, in *The Chase* (1735), describes the final moment of a hare surrounded by dogs: "with infant screams / She yields her breath."⁴⁰ Thomas Bewick tells that as a boy he "caught the Hare in my Arms, while surrounded by the Dogs & the Hunters, when the poor terrified creature screamed out so pitously, like a child, that I would have given any thing to save its life."⁴¹ Thus the "outcry" of the hare suggests the more strongly that it is an innocent, a child. Even hardened and joyous hunters were disturbed by the hare's scream, as though the animal they were killing had transformed itself into a baby.



www.english.uga.edu/wblake

BY NELSON HILTON

The "Blake Digital Text Project" (<http://www.english.uga.edu/wblake>) originated in 1994 with the desire to create an electronic, online, interactive, enhanced version of the long out-of-print 1967 *Concordance to the Writings of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman. A simultaneously growing acquaintance with hypertext led to reconsideration of Blake's best-known work in that light and prompted the "Songs Hypertext." Both of these exercises, then, arise from possibilities opened by the manipulation of text in digital form, and so prompt the project's rubric, which denominates an effort unrelated to any attempt at an "archive."

The enabling circumstance for the concordance comes in a letter of 14 March 1995, which conveys the permission of the copyright holders David V. Erdman and Virginia Erdman to use freely David Erdman's edition of *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (1982, rev. 1988). Such generosity is characteristic of the vital political and intellectual commitment of a life devoted to making Blake more accessible and permits a fitting conclusion for a work which originated in Erdman's preparation of a text for the 1967 *Concordance* (though the difficulty of that task resulted in Keynes's edition being used).

The initial text file was created by unbinding a copy of the Erdman edition and scanning the text with optical-charac-

³⁹ Henry Tegner, *Wild Hares* (London: John Baker, 1969) 36-37.

⁴⁰ William Somerville, *The Chase* (1735), Book II, lines 271-72, in *The Poetical Works of Joseph Addison; Gay's Fables; and Somerville's Chase*, ed. George Gilfillan (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1859).

⁴¹ Thomas Bewick, *A Memoir of Thomas Bewick Written by Himself*, ed. Iain Bain (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979) 6. This *Memoir* was published posthumously, in the Victorian era.