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Blake’s Other Tigers, and “The Tyger”

MARY R. and RODNEY M. BAINÉ

Although William Blake’s best-known tiger, the Tyger of *Songs of Experience*, has been viewed as a salutary force, like revolutionary energy or even Christ militant, such misrepresentations distort or even radically misinterpret Blake’s beast. They ignore the visual design of the animal, its traditional symbolism, and the symbolism of its opposite, the lamb. Most important, they ignore the symbolism suggested by Blake’s numerous other tigers.

As Blake scholars have now firmly established, Blake’s illuminated poems are a composite art;¹ but most critics have written about “The Tyger” as if they were studying it in some recent edition of Blake’s complete works, without the benefit of his visual design. Some who have examined this design have found the Tyger an “artistic failure.”² Others have felt impelled to discover there redemptive qualities which they evidently thought implied in the verses.³ Most, however, see Blake’s Tyger as a foolish and ugly beast. The brutal muzzle, with vestigial nose and tiny ears, is tightly joined to a thick-set body and placed within a setting of rank or dead vegetation: a single tree at the right has put forth three branches which, now dead, punctuate the poem; this tree is joined at the top of the design by weeds sprouting up from the bottom left. As John Grant has suggested, “The fact that the tree is distinctly striped in some versions shows that it is the vegetable equivalent of the Tyger.”⁴ Indeed in one copy (British Museum Copy T) the Tyger’s right hind leg is indistinguishable from the vegetation of the tree.

The temptation to ignore this design is understandable. Having come to know the poem through the verses alone, we have imagined “fearful symmetry.” However, Blake did not show us here the tiger’s frightening fangs and claws; he obviously wanted us to see his Tyger

²For example, Coleman O. Parsons, “Blake’s ‘Tyger’ and Eighteenth-Century Animal Pictures,” The *Art Quarterly*, 31 (1968), 310.
³See John E. Grant’s able rebuttal of Wicksteed’s and Erdman’s views in “The Art and Argument of ‘The Tyger,’ ” *Discussions of William Blake*, pp. 76-81.
⁴Grant, p. 79.
not only as fearful but as ugly and stupid. A similar conflation of
verse and design occurs in Jerusalem 6: here the lines suggest that
Los’s Spectre is wolf-like; in the illumination we see instead a bat-like
figure. As David Erdman remarks, “Whether the Spectre is bat, wolf,
or man . . . depends on how the mind sees it or him.” The Tyger is
an alternative image of the Spectre.

Blake could have made the image of his Tyger one of fearful
symmetry. He did in fact endow with bared fangs the tiger which in
1802 he drew and engraved for William Hayley’s “The Elephant”;
but this tiger is partly Hayley’s creation, and it is a physical tiger,
lacking any symbolic value. Even so, it has the same stupid and ugly
profile as the Tyger. In 1807 Blake even created a terrifying Stubbsian
tiger in a watercolor illustration for the expulsion scene in Paradise
Lost, Book XI. 184-189:

The Bird of Jove, stoopt from his aerie tour,
Two Birds of gayest plume before him drove:
Down from a Hill the Beast that reigns in Woods,
First Hunter then, pursu’d a gentle brace,
Goodliest of all the Forrest, Hart and Hinde;7

Blake annotated his version of this expulsion: “Satan now awakes
Sin, Death, & Hell, to celebrate with him the birth of War & Misery:
while the Lion seizes the Bull, the Tiger the Horse, the Vulture and
the Eagle contend for the Lamb.” Although Milton himself may
have intended the change in the animals to signal merely nature
fallen because of man’s fall, Blake had long before 1807 developed his
myth in which the fallen or brutalized animals symbolize primarily
the fallen state of man himself. Since Milton’s lion and eagle alone
were too noble in Blake’s symbolism to exemplify man’s, or even
Nature’s degeneration, Blake added the unambiguous, bestial tiger
and vulture so that the degeneration would be unmistakable.

Like Lavater and Swedenborg, Blake saw the tiger as cruel and
visionless, with a retracted nose indicating spiritual insensitivity. As
Lavater remarked concerning the tiger, “The fiery, sharp-angled,
eyes, the broad flat nose, or what is analogous to the nose, and,

6In The Note-Book of William Blake Called the Rossetti Manuscript (1935, rpt. New
337.
8The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, 1970),
p. 662. Subsequent quotations from Blake will be based upon this edition; but for ease
of reference, citations will prefer plate and line numbers to page numbers.
especially, the line of the mouth, all betoken the fearfully brutal and cruel." Even more appositely, Emanuel Swedenborg pointed out the correspondence between the brutal, animal senses and those of fallen man: "The natural Man, who is become sensual by Evils and consequent Falses, in the spiritual World in the Light of Heaven does not appear as a Man, but as a Monster, also with a Nose retracted . . . because the Nose corresponds to the Perception of Truth: He also cannot bear a Ray of heavenly Light, but what is like that of a Coal-fire." 10

If many Blake critics have ignored the visual design for "The Tyger," they have also ignored the traditional symbolism of the animal. In the poetic and artistic tradition of the Western World the tiger has consistently symbolized bloodthirsty cruelty. 11 Although occasionally poets like Shakespeare or Milton utilized the beast to suggest only untamable fierceness, they generally used him to suggest savage cruelty, never to connote such noble qualities as the lion often symbolized. For Shakespeare the tiger was a favorite symbol for human depravity. Thus Regan and Goneril were "Tigers, not daughters." 12 In Paradise Lost as Satan descends from archangel to serpent, he briefly assumes the guise of a lion, but then quickly degenerates to the bloodthirsty tiger and the venomous toad.

Blake critics who see redemptive qualities in the Tyger have, however, done worse than confound the tiger with the lion. They have confused the tiger with the lamb. Thus they have ignored in the Ars Poetica, the most frequently quoted artistic authority of the eighteenth century, Horace's warning against the poet's mixing his animals so that, in Christopher Smart's translation (1767), "the tame should associate with the savage: nor that serpents should be coupled with birds, lambs with tigers." 13 Henry Fuseli, who probably had his friend Blake's "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" in mind, insisted even more strongly that artists must not confuse their different symbolism: "Were man and man as easily discriminated as the lamb and the tiger, the Physiognomist's would be a useless science; but since both lamb

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12King Lear, IV, ii. 40.
and tiger may dwell in human frames, he surely deserved our thanks, who points them out to us before we wound the one or sink beneath the other."14 This confusion of lamb and tiger is difficult to understand, for the lamb is opposed to the tiger within the poem itself: "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" (E, p. 25). Of course the lamb symbolizes human innocence and Christ, the Lamb of God. Such a symbol had been universal within the Christian tradition from the time of Revelation. The lamb symbolized for Blake not only all that is sacrificial or innocent in nature; it also embodied the quality of divinity which man can attain as well as emulate. The identity of child, lamb, and Christ in "The Lamb" he dramatically established: "I a child, & thou a lamb,/ We are called by his name" (E, p. 9). Elsewhere in Songs of Innocence he identified God with Christ: wherever God is mentioned in the verse, Christ is shown in the design. For the only human God is Christ. In his 140 uses of the lamb image Blake consistently utilized the lamb as a symbol of all that is divine in man. On the other hand, nowhere did he create a tiger which reinforces the suggestion that the Tyger symbolizes some aspect of Christ, or of any other benign force.

Even if we ignore the design and the continuing sweep of this traditional symbolism of the tiger and the lamb, then familiar to every poet and reader, we find the same tiger symbolism throughout Blake's work. Somehow in the exegesis of Blake's Tyger, Blake's other tigers have either been completely overlooked or very exclusively examined. Evidently no one has ever carefully surveyed and analyzed them. Tigers appear in Blake's writings no less than thirty-six times, or forty-seven if one counts each incidence of the word in "The Tyger" in its etched and manuscript forms.15 Examination of these tigers reveals that Blake employed the symbol in traditional manner. Occasionally they represent the fiercest wild beasts or, specifically, are tigers of wrath.16 But generally in this fallen world of experience Blake's tigers symbolize cruel rapacity. Nowhere short of the Apocalypse do they, like all the other redeemed animals, suggest the noble or divine qualities which some critics see in the Tyger of Songs of Experience.

16In Tiriel, when Hela leads her father into the forests, "where wild beasts resort," "from her cries the tygers fled" (E, p. 281). The tiger is in fearless company in Night IX of The Four Zoas: "Wherever the Eagle has Explord or Lion or Tyger trod" (E, p. 372).
The tigers so far selected for notice by Blake critics have been a special group, Blake's tigers of wrath. Thus in his article on the Tyger in his *Blake Dictionary*, S. Foster Damon oversimplified, "The TYGER is Wrath." "He is the fallen Luvah," he suggested, "when Love has turned to Hate; he is Orc (revolution)." It is upon these tigers of wrath that Paley and others have concentrated, especially upon their association with Orc and revolution. These tigers of wrath have caused most of the confusion about Blake's symbol. In the paradoxical "Proverbs of Hell" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake wrote: "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction" (E, p. 36). Obviously the wrath symbolized here by the tiger contrasts an extreme of energy or passion with sheer reason embodied in the horse of instruction, which Blake evidently associated with Swift's controlled and rational Høylnnmns. Blake's contrast of the tigers of wrath with the horses of instruction has misled many critics to interpret Blake's tigers—not only in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* but elsewhere—as salutary or even heroic because in *The Marriage* the tiger is identified with energy, or the passions, which Blake, being here "of the Devil's party," praised. Throughout *The Marriage* Blake was indeed defending the passions from the attacks of extreme rationalists and championing them as necessary for full life and vision. Though he paradoxically overemphasized this comparatively disparaged aspect of man's personality, he did not advocate the abdication of reason in favor of man's complete domination by the passions, certainly not by wrath. Moreover Blake here carefully specified only one quality of the tiger: he thereby divested him of the pejorative qualities traditionally evoked by the image. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake relied indeed upon animal examples to suggest or reinforce many of his ideas and their implications; but many of these animals lack full symbolic value. By their variety they seem to exemplify variations in men's natures.

The tigers of wrath are further developed in *Europe* and *The Book of Ahania*. In both poems the tiger symbolizes not merely energy, but the passions which, when uncontrolled, become cruel and malevolent. In *Europe* the visionless "night of Enitharmon," in which the female will and rational forces dominate, compels the passions into their uncontrolled form—the raging violence of Orc. When Orc

finally bursts out in all his fury in France as the Revolution, his passions do not reawaken to vision, but begin corporeal war characterized by wrath, cruelty, and bloodshed:

The furious terrors flew around!
On golden chariots raging, with wheels dropping with blood;
The Lions lash their wrathful tails!
The Tigers couch upon the prey & suck the ruddy tide. . . .

(15:4-8)

Similarly, in The Book of Ahania, published after the Reign of Terror and the rise and fall of Robespierre, Blake dramatized through Fuzon the fate of thwarted passions and employed the tiger as a symbol of tyrannizing emotions. Here Fuzon appears as a Moses figure offering to lead his people from the domination of repressive reason; but like his Biblical and French counterparts,19 he degenerates as soon as he attempts to set up his own tyranny of the passions devoid of reason:

While Fuzon his tygers unloosing
Thought Urizen slain by his wrath.
I am God! said he, eldest of things! (3:36-39)

The tigers here released represent the visionless cruelty of the passions isolated into sheer wrath such as Blake evidently saw in the Terror and the followers of Robespierre. As the immediate death of Fuzon at the hands of Urizen suggests, isolated wrath brings not the return of vision but the cruelty of the tiger and eventually makes way for a far more repressive tyranny. One recalls from The Prelude Wordsworth’s view of Paris after the September massacres: “defenseless/ As a fear-haunted wood where Tygers roam.”20

The transition from the tigers of wrath to the tigers of malicious cruelty is in Blake natural and inevitable: isolated passions, working reasonless, naturally become furious and cruel. This tiger of cruelty is Blake’s usual, bestial tiger, as it is the conventional tiger from the earliest traditions of Western literature. Thus Blake’s first tiger, in

“Samson,” from *Poetical Sketches*, is linked with the wolf and suggests cruelty. Dalila, in an effort to elicit Samson’s secret, accuses him of being more cruel than the wild beasts, as “worse than wolves and tygers” (E, p. 435).

In 1789, in his *Songs of Innocence*, Blake again employed the tiger as a symbol of violence and bloodthirstiness. In “Night,” as in “Samson,” the tiger and the wolf are predacious, noxious beasts. Their destructiveness is emphasized by their opposition to the innocent, defenseless sheep which they kill for prey—symbolically, the life-giving qualities which are their opposite. Here Blake carefully discriminated between the vicious wolf and tiger and the redeemed lion which in “New worlds” guards “o’er the fold” (E, p. 14). If Blake wanted to ennoble the passions with the image of a wild animal, he ordinarily used the King of Beasts to do so.

Like the tigers of “Night,” Blake’s subsequent tigers are, except for the apocalyptic tigers of the major prophetic books, predatory and cruel. Particularly vicious are a special group of these tigers—Blake’s tigers of selfhood. These tigers appear first in *Tiriel*. Ijim sees his brother Tiriel successively as a “dreadful lion,” a tiger, a cloud “fraught with swords of lightning,” a bright serpent, a toad or newt, a rock, and a “poisnous shrub” (E, p. 278). Doubtless Blake had in mind here the metamorphosis of Proteus in the *Odyssey* and Satan’s similar series of disguises in *Paradise Lost*, IV. 396-408, 800. But as Northrop Frye has pointed out,21 the passage certainly derives in part from Swedenborg’s *True Christian Religion*. There a remarkably similar list of noxious animals suggests the disguises of selfhood: “In that region of hell where it reigns this love [of self] causes its lusts to appear from a distance like various kinds of wild beasts, some as foxes and leopards, some as crocodiles and poisonous serpents. It also causes the deserts where they live to consist solely of heaps of stones or barren gravel, interspersed with bogs where frogs croak, while over their miserable hovels fly birds, dolefully screeching. These creatures are what are meant by the Ochim, Tziim, and Ijim, mentioned in the Prophetical Books of the Word where the subject is the love of dominion arising from the love of self.”22 Tiriel’s encounter with Ijim, read in Swedenborgian terms, would be the encounter of one form of selfhood with another. Ijim’s identification of himself with


the lion ("Who art thou Eyeless wretch that thus obstructst the lions path" [E, p. 277]) establishes him as a higher form of selfhood than Tiriel, who has almost completely degenerated. Although Ijim is fallen, he still retains enough honest indignation to recognize hypocrisy, "the corruption by which visionless self assumes masks of ever-increasing meanness and ends as a rock or poisonous shrub."23 Thus the tiger symbolizes not only cruelty in general, but more specifically the cruelty caused from domination by the fallen, degraded self, of which Tiriel, blind and visionless, is a striking embodiment in human form.

In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* Blake again equated the tiger with cruelty and self-love. Early in the poem Oothoon, the enlightened advocate of free and selfless love, established the tiger as a representative of inhuman ferocity:

Ask the wild ass why he refuses burdens: and the meek camel
Why he loves man: is it because of eye ear mouth or skin
Or breathing nostrils? No. for these the wolf and tyger have.

(3:7-9)

If man’s senses were all that attracted the camel, it could just as easily love its enemies, the bloodthirsty wolf and tiger. But the “meek camel” finds in man something which directly opposes the savageness of the tiger and to which his meekness responds: the unselfish capacity for love and gentleness. At the close of the poem Oothoon again uses the tiger as a symbol, this time linked with the bat and the owl as three representatives of the dark and visionless existences in which miserly self-love thrives:

Does the sun walk in glorious raiment on the secret floor
Where the cold miser spreads his gold? or does the bright cloud drop
On his stone threshold? does his eye behold the beam that brings
Expansion to the eye of pity? or will he bind himself
Beside the ox to thy hard furrow? does not that mild beam blot

The bat, the owl, the glowing tyger, and the king of night.

(7:30-8:5)

Just as, in *Jerusalem*, Los’s spectre is bat-winged, so here the bat and the owl emphasize the complete lack of vision in the fallen world of

self-love and the glowing tiger emphasizes the cruelty of such love. In the day of selfless love the sun will bring “expansion” to the visionless, “lamplike” eyes of the bat and the owl; and the cruel ferocity of the tiger, now “burning bright,” will be replaced with selfless, resplendent benevolence.

Blake’s major and most comprehensive use of the tiger symbol appears in the major prophecies. Here he developed his most detailed system of animal imagery. According to his myth, when Albion the Ancient Man fell, the state of visionary, prelapsarian Innocence changed into one of visionless, post-lapsarian Experience. This fall completely reversed the unfallen values: “All love is lost Terror succeeds & Hatred instead of love . . .” (E, p. 297). As selfhood rises to power in man, the selfless and peculiarly “human” ideals of brotherhood, freedom, and forgiveness are abandoned in favor of the divisive and inhumane forces of law, war, hatred, and self-love.

Another result of the fall afforded Blake an apt set of symbols to dramatize this change. According to Blake’s myth, Albion in his unfallen state contained within himself all nature, including all the animals. When he fell from total vision, he objectified what is in imaginative reality only various portions of himself. Thus in observing nature, man is viewing aspects of his own personality:

. . . Man looks out in tree & herb & fish & bird & beast
Collecting up the scattered portions of his immortal body
Into the Elemental forms of every thing that grows. (E, p. 370)

In Jerusalem and The Four Zoas even more than in his previous works, Blake relied upon this close correlation between man’s personality and the animal kingdom to describe the fallen world and man’s condition in that world. In Jerusalem, when Albion falls, the loss of the gentle and selfless affections in the Spectre suggests the rage of wild beasts. These Spectres

curse their human kindness & affection
They rage like wild beasts in the forests of affliction
In the dreams of Ulro they repent of their human kindness.
(42:60-62)

And in Night II of The Four Zoas the perversion or inversion of prelapsarian values and affections is specifically represented by the appearance of warhorses, fierce tigers, and other noxious beasts: “The Horse is of more value than the Man. The Tyger fierce/ Laughs at the Human form. the Lion mocks & thirsts for blood” (E, p. 304). The
appearance of cruel, bloodthirsty tigers and lions in nature signals
the ascendancy of savage, bestial affections in man himself. As soon as
he denies his innate capacity for selflessness, the quality which sets
him above the tiger and the wolf in *Visions of the Daughters of
Albion*, he acquires the cruelty which the tiger symbolizes. Like the
tiger he becomes a fierce, ravening beast whose proverbial lust for
blood manifests itself in corporeal war:

Troop by troop the beastial droves rend one another
sounding loud
The instruments of sound & troop by troop in human forms
they urge
The dire confusion till the battle faints those that remain
Return in pangs & horrible convulsions to their beastial state
For the monsters of the Elements Lions or Tygers or Wolves
Sound loud the howling music . . . terrific men
They seem to one another laughing terrible among the
banners.

(E, p. 360)

On a more particular level, in *The Four Zoas* Blake showed in two
of the fallen Zoas the same sort of transformation by means of imagery
and symbolism drawn from wild beasts. When he falls, Luvah, the
Zoa of the emotions, becomes Orc, the violent, raging figure of the
minor prophecies. As he had done in *Europe*, Blake suggested Orc’s
rage through tigers and other wild animals, but here in *The Four Zoas*
he supplied a more particular dramatization of Orc’s degeneration.
When Orc is first bound down with the Chain of Jealousy, he retains
potentialities of creative emotions as well as of blind wrath. Blake
represented this dual potentiality with varied animal imagery: tame
animals symbolize the creative possibilities; the wild beasts, the
destructive ones (E, p. 335). After Orc begins to vegetate upon his
rock—after he falls even further from vision and degenerates into a
Spectre—the innocent animals disappear, and only the predacious
beasts and the brutalized warhorses remain:

But Urizen silent descended to the Caves of Orc & saw
A Cavernd Universe of flaming fire the horses of Urizen
Here bound to fiery mangers furious dash their golden hoofs
Striking fierce sparkles from their brazen fetters, fierce his
lions
Howl in the burning dens his tygers roam in the redounding
smoke
In forests of affliction. . . (E, p. 346)
In the visionless wrath of the spectrous Orc, Urizen's horses, which originally drew the plow of nations, have maddened into warhorses among the raging tigers and lions of Orc's den; and the bulls of Luvah, formerly symbols of fertility, now appear as embodiments of animal rage (E, p. 346). Just as in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Europe, and The Book of Ahania, love has been perverted into maddened, bestial wrath characterized by the destructive rage of tigers and lions: “Luvah King of Love thou art the King of rage & death” (E, p. 333).

Paradoxically, fallen Urizen also is characterized by tigers and other wild beasts. Mercy, which was justice in Eden, becomes vengeance, and the change is symbolized by the appearance of Urizen's tigers:

They call thy lions to the fields of blood, they rowze thy tygers 
Out of the halls of justice, till these dens thy wisdom framd 
Golden & beautiful but O how unlike sweet fields of bliss 
Where liberty was justice & eternal science was mercy. 
(E, p. 320)

As Urizen begins to construct the fallen world, his various animals appear around him:

The tygers of wrath called the horses of instruction from their mangers 
They unloos'd them & put on the harness of gold & silver & ivory 
In human forms distinct they stood around Urizen prince of Light, 
Petrifying all the Human Imagination into rock & sand. 
(E, p. 310)

At this moment Albion “gave his loud death groan” and “the stars of heaven Fled.” Here Blake clearly implies that reason, degraded and subordinated to wrath, petrifies. When the tigers of wrath assume control of the intellect, the human imagination becomes a spiritual wasteland where no vision can exist.

In later passages Blake expanded this association of the tiger and wrath with petrified or fallen imagination in order to represent a second aspect of man in a state of selfhood: man imbruted or bestialized in his fallen senses. As Albion degenerates deeper into selfhood and the bestial emotions take more control, he loses his visionary capability and becomes increasingly like a mere animal, locked up in the cavern of the fallen senses. In the major prophecies, just as in
Tiriel, Blake represented this dehumanizing process with animal imagery. In Night VI of The Four Zoas, Urizen, exploring his dens or caverns of the fallen world, encounters men in the form of savage or noxious beasts:

Then he beheld the forms of tygers & of Lions dishumanized men
Many in serpents & in worms stretched out enormous length
Over the sullen mould & slimy tracks obstruct his way
Drawn out from deep to deep woven by ribbd
And scaled monsters or armd in iron shell or shell of brass

His voice to them was but an inarticulate thunder for their Ears
Where heavy & dull their eyes & nostrils closed up.
(E, pp. 340-341)

Urizen “knew they were his Children ruind in his ruind world.” In contrast Urizen here appropriately recalls the lamb, perhaps the very lamb of Songs of Innocence: “In Climes of happy Eternity/ Where the lamb replies to the infant voice” (E, p. 341). These Spectres or selfhoods with their contracted senses appear later in Night VI as those who refuse to expand their senses and rise from Ulro, the Abyss of the purely sensual:

The eyelids expansive as morning & the Ears
As a golden ascent winding round to the heaven of heavens
Within the dark horrors of the Abyss lion or tyger or scorpion
For every one opend within into Eternity at will
But they refusd because their outward forms were in the Abyss.
(E, pp. 343-344)

Like Tiriel, these men are in their Spectres or the state of selfhood and have become so dominated by their bestial passions that they themselves appear as beasts, some like cruel tigers and lions, others completely degraded into serpents.

Thus Blake established the tiger as a symbol of fallen or brutalized man; only when man is regenerated or redeemed does the tiger, like the other beasts, reassume his unfallen, creative vitality. In Eternity or Eden tigers do not run rampant, because those who dwell in perfect vision know how to restrain their selfhoods, their tigerishness. Thus the Eternals or the Council of God who appear to Albion in Jerusalem are represented as “Curbing their Tygers with golden bits
& bridles of silver & ivory” (55:35). If Albion is to rejoin the Eternal Men who live as one in Jesus the Imagination, he too must learn to subdue his bestial selfhood. In Night IV of The Four Zoas as the Apocalypse begins and Albion’s Zoas begin to reorganize, the Ancient Man begins to gather up from nature the scattered portions of his fallen being (E, p. 377). When the savage passions have been subdued in man, the manifestations of those passions in external nature—lions and tigers and reptiles—lose their ferocity also.

More specifically, as man rises again into vision, the values which were perverted or inverted with the fall are reasserted in their original form. The love that became hatred returns to love, and the constructive energies which turned into martial passions are again channelled towards constructive ends. In The Four Zoas Blake represented this change by the conversion of destructive beasts into creative animals:

The tygers from the forests & the lions from the sandy desarts
They Sing they seize the instruments of harmony they throw away
The spear the bow the gun the mortar they level the fortifications.

(E, p. 378)

Similarly, rehumanized tigers and lions draw the wagons of Luvah to the winepresses of the Apocalypse (E, p. 388). But perhaps Blake’s most vivid description of the redeemed animals occurs at the close of Jerusalem:

On Chariots of gold & jewels with Living Creatures starry & flaming
With every Colour, Lion, Tyger, Horse, Elephant, Eagle, Dove, Fly, Worm,
And the all wondrous Serpent clothed in gems & rich array Humanize
In the Forgiveness of Sins. . . . (98:42-45)

When Albion accepts the ideals of self-annihilation and forgiveness taught by Jesus, all animals and the affections they represent “Re-humanize,” become part of the Divine Human Form again. In the rehumanized state, tigers and lions can lie down with lambs and children because man is no longer the enemy of man.

In the light of this symbolism, it is easier to understand the animal symbols in “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found” of Songs of Innocence and Experience. Obviously Lyca, who may well
be an antitype of Thel, willingly enters the state of Experience. The embracing of the lovers on the first plate, the entwined trees of the last, and the thus patent awakening to sexuality in "The Little Girl Lost"—all suggest that Lyca journeys into the sexuality of adulthood, of experience. The wild animals here evidently represent not so much selfhood or the debased senses as they do the passions of adult life and experience, passions frightening to Ona’s father and momentarily to Lyca’s parents. But they can symbolize also, especially when they emerge from the caves of their debased sensuality, a higher innocence, where the lion becomes “A Spirit arm’d in Gold,” where the lion lies down with the lamb, and all animals are humanized. If tigers appear in the poem, they do not occupy the center of the stage. The lioness conveys Lyca to the lion’s palace, and the lion reassures her parents. In the plates we see only the lion and the lioness—together in the final plate, the lioness alone in the second plate, with her long nose lifted on her long neck to indicate, probably, her spiritual sensitivity. This is not the brutal snout of the tiger.

Thus Blake consistently used the tiger in the fallen world as a symbol of cruelty, destructiveness, and bestiality. Nowhere does the tiger appear as righteous indignation or Christ militant. On the contrary the tiger in his full tigerishness is the cruelty of Tiriel, the bloodthirstiness of war, the rage of visionless passions, the wrath of moral law, the bestiality of dishumanized man. He is the devourer of lambs, the monster of the Abyss, the cohort of the bat and the owl. Never is he associated with the prophetic Los or with Christ. Even more important, never does the tiger rage against the evils around him.

With this understanding of what the tiger symbol meant to Blake’s readers and to the poet himself, we do not need the line by line exposition of “The Tyger” which seems demanded for contorted or paradoxical interpretations where the Tyger is ennobled into some salutary or redemptive force. Symbolizing nature red to tooth and claw, the Tyger poses the question of the origin of evil and the nature of its Creator. The perennial problem of believing in a benign Creator while viewing a malign universe has been the most agonizing of all moral dilemmas—at least to imaginative poets like Milton, Blake, Tennyson, and Hardy—and Blake returned to it with a more extended dramatization in his engravings for Job. For the observer in “The Tyger,” already shocked repeatedly as he realizes that evil permeates the world of experience, the Tyger is the ultimate terror, just as the Lamb is the final reassurance for the child of Innocence that the universe and its Creator are benign. Lacking the facile or
Urizenic optimism of Alexander Pope or Soames Jenyns, the observer in "The Tyger" feels compelled to ask, "Who is responsible?" and to try to reconcile the malignant beast before him with a Creator conventionally credited with the best of intentions.

The horrified reaction of the questioner is paralleled by the despair of the stars, the guardian angels. Their sorrow is contrasted with the Creator's assumed satisfaction with his monster, or in a draft of the poem, his possible glee ("And did he laugh his work to see?"): 

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?
(E, pp. 717, 25)

As Swinburne paraphrased, "the very stars, and all the armed children of heaven, the 'helmed cherubim' that guide the 'sworded seraphim' that guard their several planets, wept for pity and fear at sight of this new force of monstrous matter seen in the deepest night as a fire of menace to man." In "To the Evening Star," of Poetical Sketches, Blake had already invoked the star, as "fair-hair'd angel," to protect the flocks from the wolf and the lion which, like the Tyger, glare "thro' the dun forest" (E, p. 402). Later, in "Night," of Songs of Innocence, he assigned this same task to the guardian angels:

When wolves and tygers howl for prey
They pitying stand and weep;
Seeking to drive their thirst away,
And keep them from the sheep.
(E, p. 14)

In some copies he even colored in three brilliant stars, probably to imply their identity with the angels. But in an even more apt parallel, the benign stars in The Four Zoas lament the fall of man and assume their duties as his protectors:

Thus were the stars of heaven created like a golden chain
To bind the Body of Man to heaven from falling into the Abyss.
Each took his station & his course began with sorrow & care.
(E, p. 315)

Here and in "The Tyger" the stars bewail a malignant universe,

but even more, the beginning of nocence in mankind. Man in his potential innocence is established in *Songs of Innocence* as Christ the Lamb, the Divine Humanity. In the Tyger of *Songs of Experience* we see his opposite, fallen man, dominated by his spectrous selfhood. Blake posed the same contrast in "The Divine Image" and its ironic counterpart "A Divine Image." These poems also contrast man's possible ideals, the realization of his divine Humanity or that of his selfhood. Similarly in "The Tyger" man, not some Nobodaddy, has inverted eternal values. For in Blake's myth man alone is Creator. Man himself chooses to live in his bestial or spectrous state and, like a tiger, to roam, predacious, the benighted forests of his own desires. Only by suppressing his selfhood and asserting his Christlike, divine Humanity will he, in Tennyson's lines, "Move upward, working out the beast/ And let the ape and tiger die."25

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