NOTES, DOCUMENTS, AND CRITICAL COMMENT
TENSE AND THE SENSE OF BLAKE’S “THE TYGER”

PROFESSOR FRED C. ROBINSON’S article, “Verb Tense in Blake’s ‘The Tyger’,” which appeared in the December 1964 issue of PMLA, was largely devoted to a study of the word dare in Blake’s poem. Robinson was concerned to correct the following sentence in my article “The Art and Argument of ‘The Tyger’”:

“If should also be observed that dare is probably the present subjunctive tense of the verb, a fact which tends to bring these presumably past events into the imagination’s present focus as the questioner mediates on them.” He adds a number of reasons for believing that the verb should be identified as a preterite rather than a present subjunctive. As a result of his discussion it is clear that I may well have erred and that Robinson was justified in reopening the question.

I must add immediately, however, that neither Robinson’s method of argument nor his conclusions seem to me sound. When his evidence is carefully evaluated it often turns out to be weighty rather than conclusive. Apparently he searched Keynes’s standard text for Blake’s other uses of the word dare, but all the examples he cites are present tenses of the verb, whether indicative or subjunctive. At the beginning of his argument all he attempts to show is that Blake used both forms, dare and darest, of the third person singular present indicative. But when his article reaches the decisive stage he forgets to raise the obvious question of whether Blake ever used the word dare as a past tense elsewhere than in “The Tyger.” This is the kind of factual question about which one will be able to attain certainty when the Blake Concordance, now being prepared under the supervision of David V. Erdman, is published by Cornell University Press. Mr. Erdman has most kindly consulted the proofs of the Concordance and has given me a complete list of references. There would be no point in presenting the full data here since they will soon be generally available. But it is suggestive that (except where dare is used with an auxiliary verb) Blake’s thirty-one usages in prose and verse exclusive of “The Tyger” are all unmistakably present tenses, whether indicative or subjunctives. His preterite usages, on the other hand, consist of dared (four times) and did dare (once). Thus if dare in “The Tyger” is taken to be a preterite, it must be argued that in this poem alone Blake contradicted his practice in all the rest of his writings. While this is not inconceivable, it seems sufficiently improbable to make one skeptical about Robinson’s contention.

Robinson does provide a number of examples of dare as a preterite in the work of other writers from Chaucer to Thackeray and remarks, “In the first half of the nineteenth century, and especially in the twenty-five years following Blake’s death, evidence for the form bulks very large.” Such evidence as he finds encourages him gently to chide the OED for its relative indifference to the dare preterite. But since five of his examples are taken from the works of one writer (Kingsley) while three others are from the writings of sisters (the Brontës), there is no real proof of widespread currency of this usage. Moreover, the tense of several examples is problematic. Thus the evidence actually tends to support the judgment of the OED that this preterite form was “carelessly used.” Furthermore, the examples Robinson quotes from works published as much as “twenty-five years following Blake’s death” date from thirty-five to sixty years after “The Tyger” was written and therefore tend to blur the particular case at issue. Some examples of dare used as a preterite by Blake’s contemporaries Godwin and Crabbe are, however, included. The passage from Crabbe is particularly interesting because it contains a double occurrence of the preterite subjunctive of dare (together with would as an auxiliary); Robinson also evinces some other examples of this form of the word.4

When such a correction as Robinson proposes is advanced the central question for literary criticism, as

2 It must be said, however, that the evidence of the drafts for the fifth stanza complicates the matter considerably. Mr. Erdman (whose complete textual notes are now available in David V. Erdman, ed., The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, with a Commentary by Harold Bloom, Garden City, N. Y., 1965, p. 717) has detected an untranscribed variant in line 26, which should read as follows: “And [(is del.)] dare he [smile del.] [laugh del.] his work to see.” This discovery that Blake initially started with a present tense, is, before changing to an indubitable preterite, did, then changing again to the problematic dare, and finally changing back to the preterite did will be discussed further in the main text of this article. But the fact that did was finally substituted for dare does not necessarily mean that Blake thought of the two words as being in the same tense, as Robinson, “Verb Tense in Blake’s ‘The Tyger,’” PMLA, xxxix (1964), 669, infers. On the contrary, it is quite possible that Blake felt a difference in tense to be one reason the exact word was so difficult to decide. And Robinson’s contention, p. 669, that the substitution of could for dare indicates that dare must be a preterite is certainly unsound. The verb could is by no means an indubitable preterite and often has both present and future senses.
4 P. 667, n. 13. How slippery these questions may become is indicated by a sentence in a letter written in 1811 from Bell to Southey, “I wish I dare put them down among our books.” Robinson asserts that this usage is a preterite subjunctive without indicating that the OED identifies it simply as a “past.” It is also suggestive that two of the four other examples given by the OED of dare as a “past” were also written by Kingsley, who loves so large among Robinson’s examples of the dare preterite, though for some reason Robinson chose not to include them in his list. This evidence does seem rich enough to establish the dare preterite as an idiosyncratic unit in Kingsley’s personal style, whatever it may have been for earlier writers.
opposed to philology, is "How much difference does it make?" When Robinson finally indicates what should happen to our reading when dare is regarded as a pretetere, we find that the poem becomes almost exclusively a series of questions about the origins of the Tyger "in the primeval past." But such a reading obscures the essential point that the questions of the speaker in the poem are really concerned with the problematic circumstances of creation rather than the time of origin. This is announced clearly enough in the first stanza: "What immortal hand or eye / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" Consequently the chief verbs in all the subsequent stanzas concerned with the work of creation (2–4, 6) are could and dare. And both of these words are ambiguous present-preterite forms. What is most important, however, is that they must both be subjunctives in which the hypothetical capacities of the creator are more in question than the time of creation.

At this point true philology, which is concerned with accurate description rather than neat pigeon-holing, should rejoin literary criticism and frankly admit an indeterminacy in Blake's verbs while rejecting Robinson's solution as being itself imprecise. I now believe that Blake's particular usage of dare in this poem can best be classified as a "past potential subjunctive," but this label does not help very much in understanding the real linguistic problems raised by the poem. One must consider that unshooled Blake was probably not in the habit of making the sharp tense distinctions to be expected of university graduates. Since he had never been obliged to perform grammatical exercises, it is unlikely that he would have questioned the precise tenses of his own verbs. His well-known epigram, while it literally refers to art schooling, shows his cast of mind when confronted with academic punctilios: "Thank God, I was never sent to school / 'To be Flog'd into following the Style of a Fool.'" When dare is recognized as a kind of preterite the reader is relieved of the necessity of having to alternate between present and past tense verbs and thus interpretation of the poem is somewhat simplified and clarified. Blake was elsewhere perfectly capable of shifting his verb tenses in a way outrageous to traditional grammatical usage in order to signify apocalyptic visions and does so, for example, in the "argument" of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. I now agree that this kind of alternation between past and present does not take place in "The Tyger," yet I have always believed that the poem is not intelligible as a prophetic utterance and thus I was inconsistent in arguing that dare is a present tense because this would imply a more comprehensive vision than the speaker ever achieves. In this connection, however, it should be recalled that in the drafting of the fifth stanza Blake did shift his tenses, abandoning both the present indicative is and the subjunctive dare before settling on the past indicative verb did. A complete interpretation of the poem would have to account for this evolution, but it is not possible to do so without going quite deeply into Blake's symbolism.

In spite of his errors Professor Robinson has assisted in understanding the word dare, but I must disagree entirely with him on another question hardly less important than the main verb of the poem. He argues that the word twist in the third stanza introduces an important subordinate image of spinning before the more elaborate image of blacksmithing appears in the following stanza. This spinning image, he believes, would account for the word feel in stanza three because feet are used in spinning whereas they are not significant in smithing. And he criticizes me for suggesting that at this point in the poem the blacksmith image begins to become apparent.

Actually I was guilty of locating the emergence of this image too late in the poem. As Adams correctly shows, the fact that in the second stanza a "hand" is imagined capable of seizing the fire is an unmistakable pre-figuration of the blacksmith image. But the third stanza also contains blacksmith imagery which cannot be explained away by dictionary work on the word twist: "And what shoulder and what art / Could twist the sinews of thy heart?" Certainly spinning, which was woman's work anyway and is so depicted in the prophecies, does not demand the kind of energetic heave of the (masculine) shoulder implied by both the movement and the developing imagery of the poem.

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5 P. 660. Robinson insists several times on the "temporal remoteness" of the creation.


7 "Verb Tense," p. 660.

8 Hazard Adams, "Reading Blake's Lyrics: 'The Tyger,'" in Discussions of William Blake, p. 57. The fact that Robinson's page references from this volume are usually incorrect suggests that he may not have studied the literature about the poem with sufficient care.

9 See Jerusalem, pl. 59. Here is a sample of how the evidence contained in the Concordance, for which I am again indebted to Mr. Erdman, complicates the picture without actually contradicting the line of argument I am following. In the prophecies women are at work twisting cords of nets that are compared to the brain (though not to the heart—except when twist is used as a noun in Th'ol vi.4, K 130), e.g., The First Book of Urizen xxx.20–21, K 235. Another crucial passage, but one of exceptional complexity, occurs in The Four Zoas ii.157. More relevant to "The Tyger" is The Four Zoas viii.92, K 343, where "Horrible hooks & nets [Urizen] form'd, twisting the cords of iron . . . " as he constructs a monstrous hermaphrodite antithetical to Los. Most of the passages containing some form of twist similarly have to do with a malign creation designed to counteract the productions of Imaginon. While twist is often connected with the manipulation of threads or fibres (e.g., Jerusalem ixv.28, K 704) there is also a reference to the "twisted mail" of a suit of armor (King Edward the Third i.3, K 17). If one broadens the inquiry from questions of diction to questions of symbolic action, however, he finds such a line as this: "Sith [Tirzah] ties the knot of bloody veins into the red hot heart" (Milton xix.56, K 501). Here the sinister impersonation of the Female Will is seen at work on the heart of a monster. But this passage presents a prophetic vision of creation (more exactly, of sabotage of creation) such as cannot be achieved by the benighted questioner who speaks Blake's lyric "The Tyger"—at least as long as he remains in his present state.

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Even before the speaker becomes aware in stanza two of having conjured up a vision of a numinous blacksmith as the Tyger's creator, his whole conception of the beast's origins is immersed in cosmic fire. But in stanza three the creator must have had both the power in his shoulder and the art in his brain to twist the sinews of the burning heart of the great beast. The point about the Tyger's heart, of course, is that its constituents are hard with wrath, not weak (like thread) with pity. Thus its "sinews" must be at least as resistent to shaping as strands of iron wire or even, perhaps, woven bars of iron—which can also be twisted.  

For these reasons Blake's words shoulder and twist add significantly to the emerging smith imagery, whereas Robinson's concern to account for feet in stanza three introduces discordant images and deprives shoulder and twist of all their force and function. We know that in the draft version feet merely served a vehicular purpose in the fetching of the Tyger's heart. While the owner of the feet becomes somewhat ambiguous in the final version, the reader probably first imagines "dread feet" to be Tyger paws—unless the creator was dreadfull too. But for the reader to think too precisely on these feet and to neglect the shoulder is to reverse the emphasis of the stanza and to draw the whole poem out of focus.

Professor Robinson announces that he has no wish "to explain or even explore the poem's larger mysteries," but it is really not possible to talk meaningfully about this poem without falling into one of the distinctively defined positions taken on the work by such critics as Bloom, Miner, Adams, and myself. While complete critical unanimity about such a poem may never be achieved and might even be undesirable, a number of the questions that divide us should be amenable to arbitration. Certainly no interpreter should rejoice if his comment on a major question cannot be verified by qualified readers. It is not enough to know in your heart you are right.

Here I shall indicate one such question and suggest how my own previous interpretation should be corrected. Critics have generally assumed that the great fifth stanza of the poem refers exclusively to the War in Heaven and the original Creation, but I chose to follow Wicksteed in arguing that the time primarily referred to is the Advent. While I did qualify this assertion in a note I still believe to be generally sound, it is now clearer to me that the time in question cannot accurately be reduced to either alternative. Indeed the choice of either can only produce a "clown fiction" or half-truth that distorts the poem. Though Blake the poet probably had a definite idea in mind when he wrote "The Tyger," I suspect that his own thinking underwent some subsequent development. If one compares the relevant designs from Blake's illustrations for the Book of Job (1825) with those for Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (c. 1808), it becomes evident that Blake carefully distributed portions of his symbolism between the two in a way that indicates how both Creation and Advent are equally germane to the fifth stanza of "The Tyger." Plates 13–16 in the Job series are all relevant, but plate 15 is crucial. There the Voice from the Whirlwind reveals the case for Creation in the design entitled "Behold now Behemoth which I made with thee." The dragons of sea and land depicted are metaphysical projections of the same thing for which the Tyger is the ultimate natural symbol. On the other hand, plates 2–5 of the "Christ's Nativity" series are no less relevant, particularly the third depicting "The Old Dragon Underground," whose tail draws down stars from heaven simultaneously with the Incarnation. As Apollo and Moloch these stars are shown in subsequent designs to be in effect throwing down their spears.

While much more might be said about these designs, I believe that, together with a passage from Jerusalem cited in my article, they do much to clarify the temporal references contained in this stanza of "The Tyger" which uniquely employs the indicative preterite did. For the theologian in us who wants an answer to the question "when" in relation to this stanza, these references indicate that apocalyptic beasts appear "whenever" eternity reveals its productions in time. But in this stanza "when" is a relative not an interrogative, and here the dramatized frightened speaker of the poem attains his utmost clarity in his attempts to imagine the god who created the Tyger. His suspicion that this creator smiled, whether at having produced the Tyger or at having overturned the stars, together with his belief that the creator could indifferently produce either the Lamb or the Beast, naturally fills him with horror. For some readers so much concern with such matters can only result from superstition or folly, but for Blake the questions were urgent enough to cry out for clarification. While agonized concern is not the same as the fullness of understanding, it is impossible, as Keats reminds us, to arrive even at the threshold of wisdom if one does not feel it. Blake would have judged his speaker in "The Tyger" with no greater severity than he does the miserable and rebellious voice of Earth in "Earth's Answer."

At this point the crucial problem of the identity of the speaker arises again just as it does eventually in any discussion of major problems in this poem. What...

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10 As I shall point out again, the Tyger is imagined as being practically equivalent to the climactic eschatological beasts of the Book of Job: Behemoth and Leviathan. The obdurate bodily members of these beasts are particularly described in Job xl.17–18 and xli.24.

11 "Verb Tense," p. 666.


14 Ibid., p. 75.
ever our differences about particular words, I was happy to see that Professor Robinson's conception of the speaker as a man having "average human intelligence" and "limited understanding"18 agrees closely with my own interpretation of this variously described figure. For reasons I have indicated in my article I continue to believe that the speaker in "The Tyger" cannot be identified either as Adams' Urizenic speaker through whom prophetic Blake is somehow discerned or with Bloom's hypothetical "Bard of Experience" who preaches pernicious doctrine. Nor is it at all helpful to avoid this question and continue to speak of "Blake" in the rather vague way Miner and older critics were inclined to do. The time has come when this fundamental question should be thrashed out. Blake gives us plenty of evidence on which to form a critical consensus divested of error. I shall be glad to count Professor Robinson on my side in the controversy until such time as we are given substantial evidence that our position is untenable.

JOHN E. GRANT

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II

It is gratifying to see that Professor Grant now accepts the view that dare in Blake's "The Tyger" is preterite, not present, and that consequently there is no shift of tense in the poem. He sums up very well the point of my paper in his concise statement, "When dare is recognized as a kind of preterite the reader is relieved of the necessity of having to alternate between present and past tense verbs and thus interpretation of the poem is somewhat simplified and clarified," and he is gracious enough to add the explicit comment, "I now agree that this kind of alternation between past and present does not take place in 'The Tyger.'" His further suggestion that the verb is a preterite subjunctive is quite interesting, I think, and merits careful consideration. As I pointed out in my original paper, dare could serve either as preterite indicative or preterite subjunctive, and the fact that Professor Grant prefers the latter is in itself a good reason for other critics of the poem to give this possibility close attention.

Despite the fact that we are now agreed that there is no tense-shift in "The Tyger," however, Professor Grant has subjected the evidence supporting our mutual opinion to a most penetrating scrutiny. He seems to feel that this examination is damaging, if not to the conclusion which I drew, at least to my scholarly methods. But in point of fact, it seems to me that his observations tend rather to confirm our feeling that dare is preterite and that there is no shift of tense and thus to vindicate, perhaps, the degree of confidence with which I stated this interpretation of the verb. For example, the statistics he has obtained from the unpublished concordance materials show that aside from the four preterite uses of dare in "The Tyger" Blake used a past tense form of dare only five times: four times in the form dared and once in the form did dare. I do not agree with Professor Grant that this casts serious doubt on the validity of an assumed preterite dare in "The Tyger." Rather, I would suggest that the concordance reveals such a paucity of evidence for past tense dare forms in Blake that we should hesitate even to declare which form—dared or dare—was the poet's usual preterite form in his idiolect at the time he was composing the Songs of Experience. Had the concordance turned up something like twenty-five dared forms to one preterite dare, perhaps one's confidence in the preterite meaning of dare in "The Tyger" might have been shaken. Yet even then there would have been reason for doubting the significance of the numerical predominance. Wordsworth, for example, uses two of the available preterite forms of dare: dared and durst. The former occurs twenty-one times, the latter but once. Yet no one would doubt that in that one instance it does occur, for, like preterite dare, durst is well-attested in other, non-Wordsworthian texts of the period. Again, Coleridge uses dared twenty-five times while durst appears but thrice. Glancing back to Milton, we find the situation reversed: in his poetry he used durst twenty-one times and dared (as past participle) only twice. Seeing, then, that there is nothing startling about a poet's using one preterite form frequently and another infrequently, we should not be unduly suspicious when a preterite dare (which is well-attested in the practice of some writers) occurs, say, in Tennyson's poetry but once as against seventeen dared's, or in Blake's but four times in the same poem as against four dared's elsewhere.

Professor Grant has raised further questions about other comments in my discussion. Whereas I, for example, surmised that preterite dare in "The Tyger" probably represents a more or less conscious selection (for euphonic or perhaps dictional reasons) from among the various available preterite forms in Blake's time, Professor Grant inclines toward the view that preterite dare was "carelessly used." As evidence for this he cites the fact that some of my quotations (PMLA, LXXIX, 667–668) show dare preterite being used repeatedly by the same writer or group of writers (while others show it being used only occasionally by various individual writers). I do not follow the logic of the argument here, for if both consistent usage and random usage are evidence of "careless" usage, then what would constitute evidence for conscious, deliberate usage? I also disagree with Professor Grant's idea that since "un schooled Blake" never attended a university or performed grammatical exercises he would not have questioned the precise tenses of his own verbs. Unerring recognition of the tense of a verb is not, in my opinion, something a native speaker learns from university exercises nor, as far as I know, does modern linguistic science support such a view. But it would seem to be unnecessary to pursue such points as these further, for whatever misgivings Professor Grant may have about the evidence I presented or my manner of presenting it, none of his doubts have been grave enough to dissuade him from accepting the major conclusion to which my arguments led.

18 "Verb Tense," p. 669.
Professor Grant also takes issue with my suggestion in a closing footnote to my paper that the verb twist in the third stanza implies a spinning image. I have read with interest his own interpretation—a revision, as he explains, of his former view—but notice that his new analysis still leaves us without a wholly satisfactory answer to the question of what part the feet play in the act of forging the heart—a problem which my interpretation, I believe, resolves. Moreover, the very interesting twist passages from Blake's writings which Professor Grant cites in his tenth footnote seem to me to provide stronger evidence for the reading I had advanced than for his own. But perhaps the best course now would be to let the reader scrutinize the semantic possibilities for twist (and the evidence for its precise meaning in "The Tyger") which I presented in my footnote, study the relevant passages in Blake's writings which Professor Grant has brought to light, and judge the arguments from an impartial position.

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III

Insisting on unconditional surrender is not a civilized policy but the time has arrived to ask several blunt questions. First, I must insist that Professor Robinson declare what he thinks is the tense of dare in Blake's "The Tyger." How durst he shrug off my contention that dare is best understood as a past potential subjunctive as though this were equivalent to his assertion that the word is a preterite? If he believed that the tense of the verb was worth arguing about in the first place and also felt competent to judge that dare is not a present subjunctive, as I originally suggested, he is not now free to withdraw from the controversy and leave it to other critics to decide which of us is right.

Or am I to understand that the second and third paragraphs of his "Reply" indirectly argue that the word dare must be a preterite (indicative) as he originally claimed—not a past potential subjunctive? Carefully considered, the arguments in his second paragraph are analogical rather than substantive because neither in Blake nor in those of his contemporaries (Wordsworth and Coleridge) whom Robinson mentions are there any indubitable cases of the preterite dare. If, as he asserts to be the case in Tennyson, there were a single clear-cut case among these writers there would be some basis for arguing that this questionable case might also be the same tense. As it is, we have only the evidence provided by Professor Robinson's original article and discussed in my criticism. Moreover, he misuses the evidence to imply that the four problematic cases, all in "The Tyger," can be given equal weight with Blake's unquestionable preterites. The evidence remains five to nothing against a dare preterite in Blake's writing.

But even such odds are not decisive. Each poem is a special case and each great poet is theoretically free to transcend his own idiolect and draw from the totality of the language whenever he has need to do so. In endorsing the OED's judgement that the dare preterite is "careless" I understood this to mean merely that the form is "substandard" or not in accord with polite usage. I certainly did not mean that the author of "The Tyger" was a slovenly poet, as Professor Robinson implies in his third paragraph. Unquestionably Blake used dare partly "for euphonic or perhaps dictional reasons"; I suspect, indeed, that a decisive dictional reason was that dare—a word he never used elsewhere in this way—felt different from dared, Blake's customary preterite, because it had the exact hypothetical overtones that the other form lacked. In short, Blake discovered that a past potential subjunctive was the perfect word. But I also suspect (though the Concordance will not settle this question) that Blake never worried about the name of the form of the verb dare in this poem: he may well never have heard of it. If Professor Robinson would like to argue that in Blake's time college boys and those headed for college also did not study grammar, let him say so. Whether or not they did, all the evidence is that Blake did not and that he was impatient of systems not his own.

Another question I must insist on is what "very interesting" evidence in my tenth footnote seems to Professor Robinson to subvert my argument and support his discovery of a spinning image in the word twist. Though it is tedious work to sort out such involved material in public, once one has volunteered for the task he is not at liberty to leave it half done. I agreed in my criticism that the spinning image would help to justify the mention of feet in the creation of the Tyger but showed that it does so at the expense of dislocating the word shoulder and thus results in no net gain. I would add now that other considerations may justify the word feet better than Professor Robinson's theory. For one thing smithies sometimes had foot-operated machinery—bellows and what not; moreover, the fact that a smith stands on his feet is not insignificantly related to his success in producing his product. Another consideration of a different sort has been put forward by Beaty and Matchett in their sensitive reading of the poem, which appeared during the year since I completed my criticism of Professor Robinson's article. They comment: "In lines 11 to 16 the questions are incomplete, spasmodic, as though they flooded in upon the speaker too rapidly for formulation. What? What? What? What is implied by the Tiger?"1

Such dramatically justified incoherence does not satisfy us in every mood, however, and it is true that Blake himself altered the line in one copy, P, of the Songs. In my original article I discussed this version, "What dread hand formd thy dread feet," and also the version published by Malkin in 1806, "... forged thy," and concluded that they do not improve the poem.2 Damon, however, is convinced that the Malkin

2 In Discussions of William Blake, ed. John E. Grant (Boston, 1961), p. 70.
version is the best of all.\textsuperscript{3} In my article I incautiously attempted to dismiss Malkin's version because it seemed to introduce the blacksmith imagery too soon, but, as I explained in my initial criticism, Adams' arguments have now persuaded me that this imagery actually begins even sooner, in the second stanza. While this fact invalidates my objections, I continue to believe that my judgment was sound and neither of the emendations is a real improvement. In addition to what I originally said about the awkwardness of emphasizing the word \textit{feet}, as both alterations do, they are also unfortunate because they indicate that the creator got around to making the \textit{feet} of the Tyger only after he had constructed the beast's heart and started it beating. While somebody might wish to argue that such an image lends grandeur to the creator's sublimely inorganic way of proceeding, most readers would recognize this to be a sophistical argument comparable to the special pleading necessary to defend Kilmer's absurdly mixed metaphors in "Trees." Such reasoning would be quite unworthy of Blake's great poem, and we must suppose that the artist's judgment was equal to his genius, since he refused to alter any of the eleven later copies of \textit{Songs} with either emendation. The fact that he did alter the one copy, on the other hand, does destroy the old supposition that Blake's plates were unalterable and that they completely locked in his texts even if he subsequently thought better of them. The further fact that most of the later copies were executed with even greater care than was employed in copy \textit{P} in which the alteration occurs indicates that Blake would certainly have troubled to make the textual change if he had thought it was justified. It must be admitted that Blake was sometimes a careless or inept workman and that some copies of the \textit{Songs} probably executed by him were evidently put together in haste. But even the Blake Trust facsimile of the \textit{Songs} does not give a reliable impression of how refined and precise Blake's best work could be.

If the dialogue between Professor Robinson and me concerning "The Tyger" is to be of any lasting significance it must be conducted in the various light of continuing debate about the over-all significance of the work. No essentially new positions on the poem have emerged since my original criticism was written a year ago, but the literature about "The Tyger" has grown bulkier and several points have been clarified as a result. For example, some progress was made toward providing an accurate description of the beast depicted by Blake in his design for the poem. Hagstrum surprisingly continued an old misleading tradition by declaring categorically that "The Tyger" is "unworthily illustrated by a simpering animal."\textsuperscript{4} On the other hand, Hirsch, in a book with which I have serious disagreements on other scores, correctly points out that such claims must be the result of having "consulted only the earlier issues or reproductions of them. In the opaqueky colored later issues Blake's tiger is quite ferocious."\textsuperscript{5} While this is not invariably true either, as for example in Blake's final issue, copy AA, anyone who has seen copy U would never make the mistake of claiming that Blake neglected to paint the Tyger as a savage beast. And the tiger head drawn in Blake's notebook should serve as a reminder that Blake made deliberate pictorial studies in tigerish ferocity. As so often in the \textit{Songs} the only sound principle of interpretation is to understand that every time the character of the picture changes significantly the meaning of the whole design changes. Literary people, who are quick to seize on verbal alterations such as the tinkering around with the twelfth line in copy \textit{P} and in Malkin's text, have been curiously insensitive to much more radical alterations in the pictorial renderings of the beast. Even my original essay, which discusses the picture in considerable detail, does not pay sufficient attention to the variations in this extraordinary design. About the interpretation of such a work all Blake's strictures against assuming the grandeur of generality have an especial force.

In order to keep the reader posted on the progress of "Tyger" studies I shall note several other recent discussions that have come to my attention.\textsuperscript{6} While each of these contributes something to a complete understanding of Blake's work, none is as diverting as the following excerpt from a report of a lecture by Robert Graves which appeared in \textit{The New York Times} of 19 February 1965: "After reading Blake's poem that begins 'Tiger, tiger, burning bright,' Mr. Graves said regretfully, 'All is not well here.' He said there were changes in the verbs and words introduced for the purpose of rhyme. If a poet believes in what he is writing, he added, 'the right words will leap up to the place' where needed. This poem could be made right by omission of the middle part, he said, and demonstrated his point with a second reading." Unfortunately the report in \textit{The Times} is not full enough to reveal exactly what Graves was up to, but the wording of his lecture must give controversialists like Professor Robinson and me pause. Could the Professor of Poetry at Oxford have been prompted to think about the tense of the verbs in the poem by the error in my original essay or did he perhaps happen to notice Professor Robinson's piece in December when he was trying to think of something arresting to say in February?\textsuperscript{7}

Could he have been led to abridge "The Tyger" by studying Blake's own revisions since Blake did apparently consider at one point whether five stanzas might not suffice? Probably, however, Graves's only purpose was to entertain and provoke since he also declared that both Gray's "ode" ("Elegy") and Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" are similarly in need of improvement or trimming. By the time Professor Robinson and I are done we should have eliminated some of the remaining hazards for interpreters.

JOHN E. GRANT

IV

The opening sentence of Professor Grant's "Rejoinder" could mislead some readers as to the main course of our dialogue up to now, and therefore it may be useful if I rehearse briefly its history. In his original publications on "The Tyger" in 1960 and 1961, Professor Grant alluded to a shift from past to present tense in the verb dare in "The Tyger." In my note in PMLA, LXXIX (1964), 666-669, I advanced evidence to show that in Blake's time dare could be a past as well as a present tense form, and that therefore the supposed tense-shift is an illusory complication, that in fact there is no tense-shift in the poem, and that recognition of this fact simplifies interpretation of the poem, Professor Grant, in his initial answer (printed above) to my note, responds to my arguments by conceding that he "may well have erred," adding, "I now agree that this kind of alternation between past and present does not take place in 'The Tyger.'" He further states, "When dare is recognized as a kind of preterite . . . interpretation of the poem is somewhat simplified and clarified." Finally, at the close of his second communication printed above, he refers to his original interpretation of dare, which I had disputed, as "the error in my original essay." Whatever else he may have to say about "The Tyger," Professor Grant has, in the words quoted above, recorded explicitly his concession to the arguments I presented in my note. In light of this concession, it is hard to understand just what he is alluding to when he says that he is now "insisting on unconditional surrender."

Professor Grant's next statement ("I must insist that Professor Robinson declare what he thinks is the tense of dare in Blake's 'The Tyger'") is surprising. My stated purpose in the PMLA note which we are now discussing was to demonstrate "the unvarying past tense form of the verbs" in "The Tyger" (p. 669, italics added here), and in my reply (above) to Professor Grant's first communication I not only maintain this view but even suggest that his own observations in his criticism vindicate the degree of confidence with which I originally stated my position. I do not see how my view could have been stated and reaffirmed more emphatically, and it is difficult to believe that Professor Grant is really in any uncertainty as to what I think is the tense of dare in Blake's "The Tyger."1

Next, Professor Grant raises the question of the mood of the verb. He feels that I have attempted to "shrug off" his label "past potential subjunctive." The fact is, Professor Grant himself impatiently dismissed this term immediately after he introduced it, saying, "But this label does not help very much in understanding the real linguistic problems raised by the poem" (see paragraph five of his first communication above). Having thus denied the usefulness of his own term instead of defining and applying it, he can hardly be surprised if I did not consider it seriously in my reply. The one definite point which I do descry in his comments, however, is that although he admits that the tense of the verb is preterite, he prefers to see the mood of the verb as subjunctive rather than as indicative. He gives no evidence for dare being subjunctive in the poem; he merely asserts that it and could "must both be" in this mood, although he also admits that they are in fact ambiguous in form (and can therefore equally well be in the same mood as all the other verbs in the poem, as one would normally expect). His suggestion about the mood of dare is, then, nothing more than an asserted preference, and all one can in courtesy say about an asserted preference is that it merits the attention of interested scholars. This is precisely what I said in the first paragraph of my above reply (adding, generously, I thought, that the evidence in my note suggested that a subjunctive mood was not impossible—though it requires, of course, that the verbs in question be isolated from their context). Having said this, I then proceeded, as Professor Grant observes, to reaffirm my own original interpretation of dare in every particular. If Professor Grant should in the future...

1 It may seem ungenerous of me to quote so copiously Professor Grant's gracious concessions to my own arguments, but my intention is to preserve the exact phrasing of these comments as they stood at the time I was answering his critics. After receiving my reply to his first criticism, Professor Grant revised that criticism, introducing, among other things, thirteen verbal alterations. While his changes cannot have been substantial (according to the PMLA rules for controversial exchanges), it is a fact that the version printed above is not precisely the same one to which I responded in my "Reply" (also printed above). What modifications of tone or emphasis his verbal changes may have introduced, I cannot say. I no longer have access to his statement in its original form.

2 I had considered at one point that his question might have arisen from some misunderstanding as to the meaning of preterite, but this cannot be the case, for he uses the terms preterite and past interchangeably, as do I. See the sentences quoted in my first paragraph here.

Possibly Professor Grant intends that my quotation from Crabbe constitutes evidence for his preference for the subjunctive mood, for Crabbe, a contemporary of Blake, is among the handful of instances of a preterite subjunctive dare which I cited. But my list of examples, which was drawn up only to illustrate the past tense function of dare before, during, and after Blake's era, cannot be thus used as if it were an exhaustive list (in which case each quotation could be taken as representative of all usage in the time for which it was reported). It is, then, very important to observe that in my original paper I introduced my list as a “selection of examples” (p. 667). Professor Grant failed to observe this, as is shown by his perplexity (in footnote five of his original criticism) over the fact that I did not include the OED's quotations from Kingsley in my list of preterite dare's. Had he understood the nature of my list, as I explained it in my PMLA note, he would not have been puzzled about this point.
convert his preference into a working hypothesis and then proceed to verify and document this hypothesis, citing evidence, for example, that preterite dare in Blake’s time “must” be subjunctive in mood, even when there are no other unambiguous subjunctives in the context, then he will have established a compelling alternative to my interpretation. Meanwhile, I shall continue to think that the tense and also the mood of dare in “The Tyger” are the same as that of all the other verb forms in the poem which are unambiguous as to tense and mood——began, burnt, did, etc.—and that we cannot simply ignore the evidence of these forms in interpreting dare.4

Turning to another detail in my reply, Professor Grant says that he “must insist” that I explain fully why I felt that his own citations of Blake’s uses of the word twist support rather than weaken my interpretation of Blake’s “twist the sinews of thy heart.” (I had pointed out in a footnote that twist in Blake’s day could mean “to form [a cord] by spinning” and hence the image Blake intended could be that of the creator spinning the massive cords out of which the Tyger’s heart is to be made, rather than simply bending iron rods or bands which then serve as the heart’s sinews. The virtue of this interpretation, as Professor Grant says, is that it “would help to justify the mention of feet in the creation of the Tyger.”)5) I feel that Professor Grant’s quotations, which he obtained from the unpublished concordance materials, support my reading because these quotations justify the following three statements favoring my interpretation:

(1) Not only did the word twist have the technical meaning “to form (a thread or cord) by spinning . . . ,” as the OED shows, but Blake himself actually used the word in something like this sense elsewhere in his poetry.

(2) Moreover, there is elsewhere in Blake’s poetry an instance of his fusing this imagery of “twisting cords” with metal-working imagery, suggesting the vision of a titanic creator capable of twisting or interweaving iron as easily as a mortal manipulates strands or fibers.

(3) Finally, Blake even describes the heart elsewhere in his poetry as an organ composed primarily of fibers or strand-like matter, such as veins.

Following are Professor Grant’s citations, quoted in full and numbered to correspond with the preceding statements which they seem to support:

(1) The threads are spun & the cords twisted & drawn out . . .

Vala ii.157.

None could break the Web, no wings of fire,
So twisted the cords, & so knotted
The meshes . . .

The First Book of Urizen xxv.19-21.

The Daughters Weave their Work in loud cries over the Rock
Of Horeb, still eyeing Albion’s Cliffs, eagerly seizing & twisting
The threads of Vala & Jerusalem . . .

(2) Horrible hooks & nets he form’d, twisting the cords of iron
And brass, . . .

Vala viii.92-93.

(3) She saw . . . where the fibrous roots
Of every heart on earth fixes deep its restless twists.

Tatl vi.3-4.

She ties the knot of bloody veins into a red hot heart!

Milton xix.56.

Although the fully published concordance will probably reveal a good many more usages of this kind, I do not see how any of them could be more suited to my own case than these instances which Professor Grant has already brought to light.

In closing I must point out that Professor Grant has, in both of his above communications, devoted a considerable portion of his commentary to matters not directly related to the issues which he and I are debating here. Thus in the closing paragraphs of his first communication he expounds his ideas on certain allusions in the fifth stanza of “The Tyger,” while in his latest statement a large part of his comment is devoted to a survey of recent Blake scholarship, to an account of his disagreements with other scholars on various matters, and to such questions as the quality of Blake’s illustrations. These are all interesting topics, and in limiting my responses to only those points in Professor Grant’s communications which bear on the matters at issue between us, I intend no disparage of his interesting excursuses; but neither do I wish it to appear that I am silently ignoring relevant questions.

FRID C. ROBINSON

4 In his discussion of the statistics on dare occurrences in Blake (paragraph two of his latest communication), Professor Grant says, “If, as [Robinson] asserts to be the case in Ten- nysen, there were a single clear-cut case [of dare preterite] . . . etc. In this instance I was not merely ‘asserting’ that Ten- nysen used a dare preterite; I was referring to the explicit occurrence of dare preterite in Tennyson’s ‘Dora’ which I cited in my own PMLA paper, p. 667. As for Professor Grant’s charge that I have ‘misused the evidence to imply . . .’ etc., I would point out that he himself accepted the argument which I support with this evidence. And in any case, the statements of both of us are available for scrutiny above, and any misuse of evidence can easily be detected by our readers. Concerning his latest clarification of his views on Blake’s allegedly careless usage, I would point out that the word careless in the OED does not mean “substandard,” a datum which Professor Grant can verify by looking up the word careless in the OED. Finally, I said nothing whatever about English universities teaching or not teaching elementary grammar. Professor Grant has misread my sentence beginning “Unerring recognition of the tense . . .”; the meaning of the sentence is that recognition of tense differences is not something a native speaker learns through formal instruction in grammar. (Rather he learns it as he learns all the other elements of his language’s structure—through spontaneous imitation of those whom he hears speaking the language around him when he is a child.)

5 He does not, of course, accept my solution as adequate, his main objection being that my interpretation falls to account for “the kind of energetic heave of the (masculine) shoulder” which he feels is implied somewhere in the poem. But the poem says nothing about an “energetic heave”; the poem says simply “And what shoulder, and what art, / Could twist the sinews of thy heart?”