

“Did he who made the Lamb make the... Tyger”?

BY ELIZA BORKOWSKA

ELIZA BORKOWSKA (eborkowska@swps.edu.pl) is assistant professor of English at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw. She is the author of *But He Talked of the Temple of Man's Body. Blake's Revelation Un-Locked* (2009), which studies Blake's idiom against rationalist philosophy of language. She is currently working on her contribution to *The Reception of William Blake in Europe*, writing her second book (*The Presence of the Absence: Wordsworth's Discourses on God*), and co-translating Blake's *Jerusalem* into Polish.

- 1 **N**ONE of the “duets” Blake included in his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* contains more questions than the pair of lyrics that will be the focus of this essay, “The Lamb” and “The Tyger.” And none of these questions provokes more critical speculation than the experienced speaker’s “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” It is just one of the unanswered queries of “The Tyger,” but it catches the eye and inflames the pen the most.¹ Though other questions precede and follow it, critical intuition or simply sensitivity to sense and structure suggests that this is the climax of the poem’s (or indeed the poems’) questioning.
- 2 In fact, sensitivity to the structure of “The Tyger” should suggest one response to this question, which, though seemingly obvious, is seldom, if ever, given. Immediately after “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” comes the famous repetition—the lines that constitute the beginning of the poem, that open “The Tyger.” By repeating the lines

1. For example, Damon pays attention to the question in his monumental *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (277-78), and Paley, in his splendid survey of criticism of “The Tyger” (chapter 2, “Tyger of Wrath,” of his *Energy and the Imagination*), responds to Damon’s analysis (39) and then refers to the question again in his discussions of “the sublime of terror” and of Los’s furnaces. Chapter 16 (“The Tyger”) of Raine opens and closes with this question; Wagenknecht quotes it near the beginning of his chapter “The Lamb and The Tyger” (80) and then comes back to it repeatedly. Peterfreund, on the other hand, concludes his “Power Tropes” by considering “the status of [this] question.”

Blake actually identifies the question’s “thee” and indicates its addressee: it is not *a tyger* or, worse, a *tiger*,² but “Tyger Tyger burning bright, / In the forests of the night.” In other words, he emphasizes his experienced poem’s self-referential character and, in effect, suggests the answer (or at least an answer) to its climactic question. Did he who made “The Lamb” also make “Tyger Tyger burning bright”? Of course he did, because there is one and the same maker behind the two works—William Blake, who was perfectly aware of the provocation his work offered and who made it part of his artistic program aimed at “rouz[ing] the faculties to act.”³ Without doubt the self-referential element of “The Tyger” is Blake’s way to add more fuel to the fires of experience to let them burn all the brighter. However, this self-referential turn is not an independent act but a part of the program as a whole, and it cannot be effectively performed before an unprepared audience, on an unprepared stage. Let me therefore return to it later, at a more mature stage of this reflection, after I explain how I understand the idea of this performance.

- 3 Indeed, just like its self-referential turn, “The Tyger” as a whole cannot be treated as an independent act either. Its climactic question, by referring explicitly to “the Lamb,” suggests that “The Tyger” itself constitutes only part of this program. In other words, the poem of *Experience* should not be discussed in isolation from the poem of *Innocence*, which is likewise implied by the manner in which Blake published the two works.⁴ They are programmed to form a whole, and only as parts of this whole, through the interaction into which they enter while combined, do they reveal

2. The “beasts of prey” that appear in chapter 2 of Paley (30-60) are thoroughly symbolic, but those that haunt chapter 16 of Raine (2: 3-31) are not, nor is Peterfreund’s “tiger,” which is reified as the speaker of experience “buys into Newtonian metonymic logic of natural theology” (134; see 134-38). Neither is the “tiger” that inspires Hernadi’s question “What are the social and political implications of Blake’s contrast between the domesticated lamb grazing on English pastures and the fierce tiger, chiefly roaming in untamed India?,” which he asks to illustrate the way that “new avenues of interpretation keep opening up” in our “post-colonial age” (69n11).

3. Adapted from Blake’s letter to Dr. Trusler of 23 August 1799. Roused by Trusler’s objections concerning the obscurity of his work, Blake replied: “You say that I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act” (E 702).

4. It is well known that the *Songs of Innocence* were published separately in 1789 and then, in 1794, incorporated into the combined volume of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. This is to say, “The Tyger” should not be discussed separately from “The Lamb,” a connection that is often ignored in critical practice; as Wagenknecht puts it, “most critics have used the cryptic simplicity of ‘The Lamb’ as a pretext for saying nothing about it” (80).

their potential to provoke, stimulate, rouse. They throw light and shadow upon each other. They satirize⁵ and, simultaneously, illumine each other; they mock themselves and, at the same time, give an enthusiastic license to the attitudes they promote—when seen in this shade and this light. Such a shadowy reading of the illuminated pair has of course been attempted, yet none of the analyses gives a full account of the poems' dynamic nature, their shifts of perspective, and the range of attitudes inscribed in them by their provocative author, he who made both "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," the tyger and the lamb.

4 To return to the theatrical metaphor, which will to some extent organize the first stage of this discussion: the most vital element of the preparation of the audience is to redirect their attention. They come to the theatre with certain expectations: they are obviously familiar with the songs they are about to hear, and hence redirecting their attention consists largely in drawing it slightly away from ontological/metaphysical exploration itself and focusing it more upon the *form* that this exploration takes. As I mentioned, none of the duets Blake included in his *Songs* asks more questions than these two lyrics. That is to say, Blake himself makes an effort to draw our attention to questions, possibly because of their ambiguity. A question may be asked when the answer is genuinely sought, which means that it is not known. While betraying the questioner's ignorance, such a question simultaneously reveals his/her knowledge: s/he *knows* that s/he does not know the answer (and that is why s/he asks the question); s/he has enough knowledge to formulate the query. Then again, some questions, like those asked rhetorically, may imply that the questioner knows the answer very well (or, sometimes, that s/he knows very well that there is no answer). In brief, questions provoke questions concerning their status, and Blake seems to rely upon the ambiguity they entail for the effect he wants to achieve—for the stimulation, for rousing the audience's faculties to act.

5 As for the preparation of the stage upon which the performance is given, three critical decisions will serve the purpose. The first is to remove everything that could disturb or distract; in the case of Blake's *Songs* (or any performance based on Blake), this means in particular sweeping up very carefully the cobwebs of morality. The second element is to push backwards metaphysical inquiries, so that they do not

5. The "double-edged irony" of the *Songs* was most memorably emphasized by Frye: "The *Songs of Experience* are satires, but one of the things that they satirize is the state of innocence. They show us the butcher's knife which is waiting for the unconscious lamb. Conversely, the *Songs of Innocence* satirize the state of experience, as the contrast which they present to it makes its hypocrisies more obviously shameful" (237).

form a curtain that obscures the performance but are hung at the rear of the stage, mainly as a backdrop. And the third critical decision is to place the speakers of the lyrics at the front of the stage and adjust the spotlights so that sometimes one of these speakers is more visible, sometimes the other, and at other times both stand in focus.

6 The beginning of the performance is simple. It starts with the spotlight focused solely on the speaker of innocence, with the speaker of "The Tyger" invisible; in other words, it begins with "The Lamb" as part of the separately published *Songs of Innocence*. Read in this way, the lyric presents itself, indisputably, as an exposition of innocence, which gets defined as the poem's questions find their confident answers. The speaker is a child; his identity does not need to be inferred but is revealed as directly as could be wished ("I a child"); even his sex is indicated in the illustration provided by the author. The speaker's identity is also reflected on the level of sounds: the poem's easily pronounceable "Little Lamb who made thee"; its smooth "Gave thee clothing of delight"; its rhymes, which make the whole easy to remember, like a nursery rhyme. In this mood, the poem's repetitions acquire a childlike tinge as well: the repeated questions and answers sound like the way children are taught or teach themselves about the world. The same is manifest in the poem's vocabulary: its "meek & ... mild" adjectives, which refer largely to qualities that depend upon the senses—the touch ("softest"), the sight ("bright"), the hearing ("tender voice")—and its nouns, which stand for concrete objects—the "stream," the "mead," the "vales," the "child," and the "lamb" are all names for what falls within the experience of a child of nature. In this light, the "Lamb," He who made the world, seems to be incorporated within this range of the speaker's experience as well; He is "meek" like the lamb, "mild" like its "tender" voice, which is echoed by—and spreads onto—the valleys that He made to sustain its life. This is probably why the questions about creation ("who made thee"), the sustenance of life ("bid thee feed"), and its aesthetic side in the first stanza find such an unimpeded answer. These are essentially the same questions as those that will be asked by the speaker of "The Tyger," but here they seem and sound easy because of the ease with which the answer is given. As I said above, seen on its own, "The Lamb" defines the abstraction it represents and makes it as concrete as itself. Innocence emerges from such a reading as possessed of the most fundamental *knowledge* and as an embodiment of the highest *wisdom*, because only wisdom is able to answer the most essential questions without hesitation or doubt.

7 But this outlook on innocence (and *Innocence*) is possible only as long as "The Lamb" remains locked within the confines of the state (and the collection) it represents, that is, only when it is seen on its own, without any tygers on the



"The Lamb." *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* copy F (1789, 1794). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. B1978.43.1556.

horizon. The moment the other speaker steps into the spotlight, which is to say, the moment the poem is read along with the counterpart its maker provided in *Songs of Experience*, hesitation and doubt appear concerning the nature and definition of innocence. Most explicitly, by asking his climactic question, the speaker of “The Tyger” makes it clear that he knows about tigers *as well as* lambs. This does not seem to apply to the speaker of innocence. As far as the creation goes, he knows only (about) the lamb, and the doubt that appears at this point concerns precisely what he would say if he found himself in a different valley; how would he answer if he knew more? He also knows about the Lamb. But, doubt prompts us to ask, how much does he know? Is he aware that the meek and mild nature of the Lamb, which he emphasizes, makes it a perfect sacrificial animal? In other words, is he aware of the implications of what he is saying? And another doubt follows: how is it that he actually knows about the Lamb? Would a child really come up with the argument that this child provides in his answer? Would a child generate such an entirely language-based equation (“I a child & thou a lamb, / We are called by his name”)?⁶ Is the child’s answer, which stresses the unity of the creator (the Lamb who became a little child) and the created (the lamb and the child himself), really intuitive? Is it indeed based on the child’s experience? (Let us remember, “The Lamb” is not a poem of *Experience*.) The answer stanza, which is based on linguistic association, sounds largely disconnected from the question stanza; it seems completely abstracted from the sensual details of delight, from the valley in which the questions are asked. So perhaps in the answer stanza, as in the other parts of this utterance, the child is simply repeating—this time not himself, but those who taught him the smooth equation, who teach by repeating and asking the child to repeat. In short, the foundations upon which the speaker of *Innocence* builds his certainty seem uncertain. No longer confined to the limits of *Innocence*, but seen in the light, or indeed the shadow, that *Experience* sheds upon it, the knowledge of the spokesman of innocence seems restricted; “The Lamb” no longer sounds like another romantic poem about the wisdom of children, about the child as “father of the man.” Completely unaware of the complications and implications, asking questions only in order to repeat the ready answers, questioning but not inquisitive enough, innocence, when viewed in the shade of experience, emerges as an exhibition of *ignorance*.

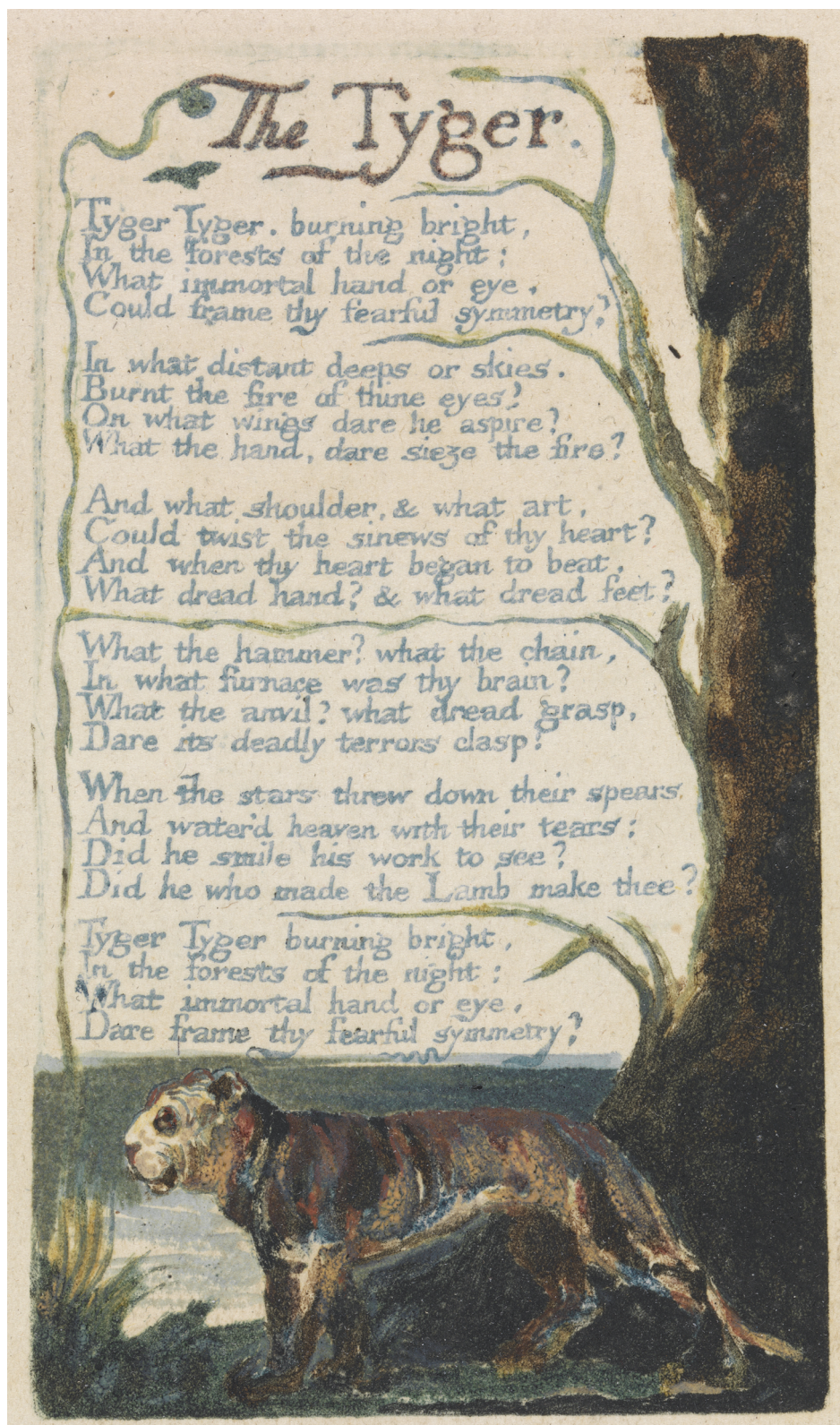
6. The illustration for “The Lamb,” particularly in its depiction of the child, is again remarkable in this context. Discussing him along with other details of the etching, Wagenknecht draws attention to “the slightly stiff *unchildlike* gesture of the infant” (81; emphasis mine).

8 On the other hand, read in this dim light, or indeed in the shade of innocence’s ignorance, experience manifests itself as *knowledge*. As I pointed out above, its speaker knows about tigers as well as lambs, possibly all types of lambs—the bleating lambs, the bleeding lambs, the bleeding Lamb. And he knows much more—in fact, he asks so many questions because he knows so much. Unlike the speaker of innocence, the speaker of experience does not unveil his face; no matter how sharp the spotlight, it will never fully reveal his features,⁷ because in the state of experience nothing is given without effort on the part of the receiver, nothing is handed on a plate. The experienced voice only implies the identity of its source, and the ear that listens to this voice must work to infer whom it is listening to on the basis of what the speaker says and how it is said.

9 From the very beginning, this voice attacks the listener with the harshness of the sounds it utters, with the vigor of its rhythms and rhymes. Indeed, heard after the previous speaker’s performance, “The Tyger” sounds like an advanced exercise in the art (the word used in line 9) of rhyming. It is patterned through its six stanzas into flawless couplets,⁸ whereas the speaker of “The Lamb” seemed unable to sustain the consistency of the rhyming scheme through two simple stanzas. Another striking thing is the extent to which the innocent speaker’s rhyming relied on repetition—at the beginning of each stanza (“thee”–“thee”), at the end (“thee”–“thee”), and in the middle of the second stanza (“name”–“Lamb”, “lamb”–“name”)—as if he ran out of rhymes because his word stock was too poor. By contrast, the speaker of experience has plenty to draw from. His words are by no means limited to what the eye can see or the hand can touch. The first stanza’s adjective “immortal” or its abstract noun “symmetry” make this point visible, indeed glaring, burning bright: the poem’s fluency is impressive when read against the concrete vocabulary of the first stanza of its innocent counterpart. Again, when the experienced speaker uses verbs, they are much more refined than the verbs of innocence (compare the second stanza’s “aspire” to “is”–“became” in the second stanza of “The Lamb”). He can go for the less obvious synonym

7. In fact, we cannot even be sure of the speaker’s sex. My reliance on gender-specific language, fully justifiable in the case of the speaker of innocence, is, in the case of the speaker of experience, motivated mainly by convenience.

8. Including the seemingly irregular “eye”–“symmetry,” which in the mouth of Blake’s speaker did rhyme (see Bentley 116-17), like “Fly”–“enmity” or “Eye”–“Eternity” in “Auguries of Innocence” (lines 33-34, 67-68, E 490-91) or “family”–“die” in pl. 27 of *Jerusalem* (E 173). Similarly, see Wordsworth’s “high”–“sanctity” and “sky”–“mortality,” both from one stanza/paragraph of canto 7 (lines 1846-47 and 1852-53, H 416) of *The White Doe of Rylstone*, or the triplet “sky”–“imagery”–“eye” from “Elegiac Musings” (lines 19-21, H 583).



"The Tyger." *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* copy F (1789, 1794). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. B1978.43.1573.

(compare the first stanza's "frame" with "made" in the first stanza of "The Lamb"). More than that, he can actually multiply synonyms: "sieve," "grasp," "clasp." Also, when it comes to concrete nouns, the experienced speaker is not limited to the surface, to what covers the skin (the "clothing woolly bright"), but he knows what is hidden under it ("the sinews of [the] heart"). He does not rely upon what is general (compare the forms of "make," which are used five times within the first stanza of "The Lamb"), but knows enough to be specific, to enumerate the concrete tools required in the process of making: "hammer," "chain," "furnace," "anvil."

10 All the more strikingly, the speaker of experience knows enough to talk in a way that refers the audience to what they know. While trying to envision the artisan/the maker whose art could twist those sinews and whose hand or shoulder, or eye, could/dared handle these tools in whatever "deeps or skies," he speaks a language that evokes associations with, for example, the fires of Vulcan/Hephaestus as much as with Prometheus's gift (or theft) of fire: "What the hand, dare sieze the fire?" The preceding question, "On what wings dare he aspire?," placed immediately before an allusion to Prometheus, brings to mind yet another ancient myth and prompts us to ask, were the wings of him who made the tyger like those of Daedalus or like those of Icarus? In other words, did he control the course of his flight? While making the tyger, did the maker know what he was doing? Is the tyger an element of a plan? Or, perhaps, is it an accident resulting from the fact that the maker lost himself, got carried away?

11 The speaker of experience uses language that justifies even Raine's references to (in order of appearance) Boehme, Paracelsus, Heraclitus, Berkeley, Mosheim, Lardner, Priestley, Cerinthus, Fludd, Agrippa, Hermes Trismegistus, the alchemists and the Gnostics, and their "ambiguous" demiurge (Raine 2: 3-31). His words validate these and many other references because they are handled in a way that seems to be a deliberate, conscious evocation. The speaker is intelligent, and he is a poet (we could even risk using Bloom's phrase "the *Bard of Experience*");⁹ he knows how to be maximally concise and maximally suggestive at the same time. Most importantly in our context, the speaker is knowledgeable; while thinking of the implications of what he says, the audience, Blake's readers or critics, do not seem to be in danger of knowing more than he knows. The innocent speaker's words (for example, "he calls himself a Lamb") refer the audience to what the speaker seems not to

9. Bloom 137; emphasis mine. The phrase seems quite relevant in this context, though the construct itself that Bloom arrives at is best characterized by Paley as "entirely read into the poem" (Paley 40).

know (for example, the sacrificial implications of the Lamb). The experienced speaker, on the other hand, by the way he picks words and by the images he selects, suggests that he knows the whole range of myths and religions that critics have brought up in a century and a half of critical interpretation of "The Tyger."¹⁰

12 All these details considered, experience seems to communicate *knowledge*. And yet, although the spokesman of experience can generalize and look under the skin, though he is aware of implications and complications and, as Wagenknecht puts it, has "access ... to technical insights" (91), he is unable to handle the essentials. Indeed, experience is unable to answer the fundamental question—who/what immortal hand or eye made thee?—that innocence answers without hesitation or doubt. In other words, experience is underlaid by the most elementary *ignorance*. It does not even know the most basic thing: how to make itself useful. Having asked "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?," the speaker of experience reverts to the questions he asked at the beginning. All the energy put into the formulation of the intermediate questions has been wasted, the whole exertion—of the speaker's brain and heart—futile.

13 Or, perhaps, even worse than futile, if we look at the detail that tends to attract a lot of critical attention,¹¹ the disparity between the first stanza's more neutral "could" and the last stanza's awe-inspiring "dare." Employing his entire knowledge to envision the creature and the maker all the more precisely, the speaker progresses from seeing "fearful symmetry" (line 4) to perceiving "deadly terrors" (line 16); what in line 8 was "the hand" of the maker by line 12 has become a "dread hand" possessed of a "dread grasp" (line 15). No words of the speaker suggest that any change whatsoever has taken place in the maker or the tyger; it seems that they are as they were before all these intermediate questions have been asked. Thus, the change seems to have occurred not in what is being described but entirely in the mind of the subject who produces the description. Perhaps he did start by asking questions about the tyger and its maker, but he evidently ends up inquiring about the

10. Following Paley (37), I regard Swinburne's *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (1868)—"both a critical biography and a manifesto of radical poetics" (Kuduk 253)—as the starting point of the long history of critics' endeavors to determine the poem's implications. For a survey of criticism followed by a list of 113 books, book chapters, and articles, see Borowsky. His list could obviously be expanded by texts that appeared after it was created; for more recent contributions, see G. E. Bentley, Jr.'s "William Blake and His Circle," published annually in *Blake*.

11. See, for example, Nurmi (680), Grant (75), Wagenknecht (85-86), and Peterfreund (137).

constructs of his own mind.¹² Somewhere along the way the act of describing got detached from the object of the description. This is clearly visible in the tiger Blake drew under the poem, which is not “ferocious”¹³ enough; to borrow Pagliaro’s memorable phrase, it looks like “a cat with a human face” (87) and is completely incompatible with the last line’s awesome “dare.” Let me repeat that such an application, indeed misapplication, of energy and exertion is not just futile. It is an intellectual error resulting from the speaker’s most elementary ignorance: he simply does not know what he is talking about. In brief, experience, which seemed to imply knowledge, compromises itself. It knows only how to ask questions, but does not know how to answer them, because its questions, fed by its “knowledge,” take it further and further away from the object of reflection.

- 14 Viewed—or indeed reviewed—from this shadowy perspective where experience betrays its *ignorance*, innocence reestablishes itself as *wisdom*. It can ask and answer without exertion, with ease. It resolves the tension of a question by a prompt answer in a way that is as natural as exhaling after inhaling. Children of innocence answer with the simple “Yea, yea; Nay, nay” (Matthew 5.37), which is also how grown-ups of experience should answer (after all, the Lamb’s sermon on the mount was addressed to adults, to those who know of tygers, who have heard them roar). A little later in his gospel, Matthew records how Jesus “called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of [his disciples], And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye . . . become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18.2-3). Again, to assume the attitude of a child is certainly not a task for children: it is adults of experience who must train themselves in the wisdom of innocence—trust, rely on the word/Word rather than demonstration (“blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed”),¹⁴ learn what they have been taught, repeat and have faith in what they have been told. However much the tygers along the way have managed to roar the “tender voice” down, adults of experience must teach themselves again how to breathe, how to answer fundamental questions (“who made thee”) without hesitation or doubt.

12. In this context, it is good to remember Raine’s reminder that, in *The Four Zoas*, “the tigers . . . are created by Urizen” (2: 4).

13. The word has been borrowed from Ferber; commenting on the reproduction of “The Tyger” in Phillips (*William Blake: The Creation of the Songs: From Manuscript to Illuminated Printing* [2000]), he writes parenthetically: “The ‘Tyger’ is the same as the one from Copy T in the Blake Trust/Princeton edition; it is, alas, no more ferocious than in other copies . . .” (492).

14. Jesus’s words to doubting Thomas (John 20.29).

- 15 Paley is right to insist that Blake’s innocence is not an “illusion” (31). It never loses its validity. It has the power to reassert itself, no matter how many ironies experience heaps upon it. A good example is the innocent trust in “Mercy Pity Peace and Love” (“The Divine Image”). Experience, making a pretense of being a perceptive response to innocence’s naiveties, can ridicule it: “Mercy no more could be, / If all were as happy as we” (“The Human Abstract”). But the viewpoint offered by Blake’s mythology supports the innocent, not the experienced, attitude. Mercy, being the forgiveness of sins, is confirmed as the first attribute of God (“the Divine Mercy / . . . Redeems Man in the Body of Jesus Amen,” *Jerusalem* 32[36].54-55, E 179); love, mercy, pity, and peace emerge from *Jerusalem* as the genuine features of the Divine Image.¹⁵ In other words, while trying to compromise innocence, experience compromises itself. It operates through deceit. It defaces the Divine Image and perverts the divine sense of “Mercy Pity Peace and Love” by artfully replacing the keywords of innocence, the virtues of delight, with their homonyms, the social corruptions (generated by experience itself) of the divine attributes: “mercy” that subsists on someone’s misery, “pity” that lives on someone’s poverty, etc. While heaping ironies on innocence, experience heaps ironies on itself. It seems to communicate discernment and maturity, but in reality its perceptiveness is fake, its ripeness rotten.

- 16 “The Lamb” and “The Tyger,” as part of the same collection of poems and of the same poetic program to “rouze the faculties to act,” operate in much the same way as “The Divine Image” and “The Human Abstract.” But here the “complex awareness which Blake’s double perspective creates” (Paley 31) is even more complex than in the case of that pair, or “The Chimney Sweeper,” “Holy Thursday,” or “I heard an Angel singing,”¹⁶ all of which Paley considers in *Energy and the Imagination* (32, 51-52). The *wisdom* of “The Lamb,” perceived as *ignorance* in the light of the “learning” of “The Tyger,” establishes itself again as *wisdom* in the shade of the futility and elementary ignorance that “The Tyger” uncovers and satirizes. However, the rigor of this particular performance requires that the audience recognize that experience is not an illusion either. The fearful *symmetry* of this pair demands that experience also has the means and the power to reassert itself.

- 17 Partly it reasserts itself without the help of innocence. This is particularly visible in the poem’s repetitions. As I noted

15. See the subchapter “Love-Mercy-Pity-Peace: Man as a Temple of God” (219-21) in my *But He Talked of the Temple of Man’s Body*.

16. “A Notebook poem contemporary with *Songs of Experience*” (Paley 52n1) that sounds like a combination of “The Divine Image” and “The Human Abstract”; see E 470-71.

above, they are completely unlike the repetitions in “The Lamb,” which sound like the way children are taught or teach themselves. The experienced speaker’s repetitions have nothing to do with learning or teaching; they are rather an exposition of the futility of acquiring knowledge. The disparity between the first stanza’s “could” and the last stanza’s “dare,” on the other hand, shows that the knowledge acquired in experience leads to an intellectual error, because the person relying upon such knowledge goes further and further away from what he would desire to know (“Did he who made the Lamb make the... Tyger?”). And yet, groping in the forests of the night, the speaker of experience seems aware of the fact that he actually trips over the obstacles he has put in his own way. Peterfreund claims that the speaker makes the error of “reason[ing] back from the tiger as created effect to an understanding of his creative first cause” (127). But the point is that the speaker of experience is wise enough to know it. Rationalists, natural scientists/theologians—Newton himself (whose version of metonymic logic presented in *Principia* is the focal point of Peterfreund’s essay), Robert Boyle and William Paley (whom Peterfreund quotes on p. 129), as well as Bacon and Locke (who, along with Newton, form the false trinity that Blake criticized for worshipping Urizen)—all made the error that Peterfreund identifies. They attributed “the causes of natural things’ to a divine first and final cause” (Peterfreund 128-29) and tried to understand the “creative [transcendent] first cause” by studying the “created effects.” As a result, they ended up worshipping the image of the creator that was the effect of their reasoning: God as a “Work-master,” “the all-wise Architect,” “the infinite wise Contriver of us and all things about us.”¹⁷ But the speaker of experience seems more conscious of his own predicament than Peterfreund is ready to acknowledge. He does not need to be informed or reminded that there is an intellectual error in his reasoning, that his acts are “deluded” (Peterfreund 135), that his questions are “metonymic” and their logic “circular” (127), that questions asked in this way will not lead to any valid answers. The object he is trying to grasp/clasp is evading him, and he shows he knows it by concluding with doubt rather than with certainty, by repeating the initial question rather than attempting to answer it. In short, the “Bard of Experience” is not “in mental darkness” (Bloom 137) at all. By the way he picks words, by the images he selects and, as it turns out, by the rhetorical devices he relies upon, the experienced speaker suggests that he knows as much as the critics who comment upon his words.

17. The first term comes from Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning* (2.14.9); the other two are from Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (2.23.12).

18 But experience reasserts itself also when viewed against innocence, not, interestingly, because there is another shadow that makes innocence dark, but because the light of innocence seems dim when compared with the fires of experience. Innocence is like the lamb’s clothing, “wooly bright”; experience is like the tyger, “burning bright.” The brightness of innocence pertains to the surface (the clothing) and depends on the brightness around: the lamb’s clothing will not look “wooly bright” in the night. The fires of experience, which do not emanate from our sun but come from “distant deeps or skies,” are part of the internal makeup of the tyger. They break through its eyes and skin (the golden stripes on its fur look like flames of fire) and, “burning bright, / In the forests of the night,” are able to illumine the darkness around.

19 To make use of these metaphors and see how the wisdom of experience reasserts itself against the wisdom of innocence, it is crucial to look at the climactic stanza of “The Tyger,” which contains the question that this discussion has revolved around. In particular, it is time to consider the two lines that open the stanza, “When the stars threw down their spears / And water’d heaven with their tears.” These lines give trouble to those whose acquaintance with Blake is limited to the *Songs*, and they give scholars an opportunity to refer to Blake’s later writings, specifically “Night the Fifth” of *The Four Zoas*, where the stars’ throwing down their spears is associated with the fall of Urizen.¹⁸ If we apply the light of Blake’s prophecy to his lyric, it transpires that the climax of the experienced speaker’s confrontation with the tyger and his attempt at a confrontation with its maker is the disarming of the rational power. The stars dissolve in powerless tears. Reason gives up, as it can no longer explain, systematize, rationalize, methodize. The questioner comes to a standstill; his reasoning process collapses in his repetition (and the awesome variation within his repetition: “dare” instead of “could”). And it is exactly in this repetition that the highest *wisdom* of experience is contained. Indeed, seen against the uncontrollable fires of experience, which come from “distant deeps or skies” and are a gift from without, the brightness of innocence appears to depend too much upon our sun. In fact, seen against the uncertainties of “The Tyger,” the certainties of “The Lamb” seem to derive too much from the rational power itself: this manifests itself through the poem’s puns, through the second stanza’s equation, which constructs the image of God

18. To quote Urizen, “I call’d the stars around my feet in the night of councils dark / The stars threw down their spears & fled naked away / We fell” (p. 64, E 344). Since Erdman’s *Blake: Prophet against Empire* (194), these lines have regularly been cited in criticism of “The Tyger”: see, for example, Nurmi (672-74), Gleckner (283), Adams (“Reading Blake’s Lyrics” 58), Raine (2: 29), Wagenknecht (94), and Paley (54).

on the basis of the study of language, and through the mathematical proportion of the answer it provides (He a Lamb, He a child, "I a child & thou a lamb"). The fearful symmetry of the tyger (and "The Tyger") will not be resolved by such formulas. The repetition of the poem's last stanza contains the ultimate wisdom of experience: that dumb amazement, the wonder expressed in a question mark, may be as near an *experience* of the divine as the finality of the full stop.

20 In short, Blake's experience asserts itself again as *wisdom*, exactly like innocence. The crucial thing is to see that Blake does not oppose a "better" wisdom against a "worse" wisdom; he simply juxtaposes the wisdom of knowing the answer against the wisdom of allowing oneself not to know. "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" form a symmetry that is indeed fearful: no imbalance in this pair will justify simple solutions, in particular a recourse to the distorting categories of "good" and "evil." In principle, critics remember that such categories are not to be employed in Blake criticism, though some of them forget the principle when it comes to analyzing Blake's provocative *Songs*.¹⁹ But this troubling collection, as much as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* or Blake's later prophecies, is part of his poetic program, which was meant to rouse the faculties to act and not to put them to sleep by feeding them on compromised morality. And this is exactly what the *Songs*, including "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," do: they activate, stimulate, and provoke, very much unlike the work of Blake's rationalist predecessors, who mainly wanted to instruct. They are a dialogical work, a dramatic performance. Indeed, they are *songs*, which means that they are meant to be sung, thereby turning a listener into a performer who takes attitudes, abandons them, then embraces them again, depending on whether the stage upon which the singing is done is lit by the rays of innocence or the fires of experience. The lyrics throw both light and shadow upon each other, satirize each other, and mock themselves. They give the lie to the fictions their counterparts seem to propagate. At the same time, they give an enthusiastic license to the attitudes they pro-

19. Raine, for example, opens chapter 16 of *Blake and Tradition* with the claim that "the question of good and evil" is "the inspiration of 'The Tyger'" (2: 3), and she relies on categories of good and evil throughout her discussion: "If we may call [the creator of the tyger] good, must we also call him evil?" (2: 3); "Much evidence might also be brought to prove that the Tyger is indeed an emblem of evil" (2: 4), etc. But of course the most notable and telling document in this respect is Paley's long note (39-40n2), which is introduced with a sentence that reads "Since the time of these pioneer critics, writers on the poem have continued to disagree about whether the Tyger is 'good,' created by the Lamb's creator; ambiguous, its creator unknown and the question of the poem unanswerable; or 'evil,' created by some maleficent force." The note classifies commentators on Blake's lyric according to the position they took in this good-ambiguous-evil debate.

mote and, by doing so, illustrate the ultimate truth about contraries: that they are "necessary to Human existence."²⁰ It is vital to know the answer to the question "who made thee," to learn the definition provided by the biblical revelation (He a child, He a Lamb) and be able—when someone asks, or when something asks within us—to produce it on demand. And it is equally vital to know that to define Him best is to tremble with awe and astonishment, to be amazed, "terrified with admiration."²¹

21 I am returning here to the metaphors I used at the very beginning of this discussion, and I can likewise return to the idea with which these reflections opened, the self-referentiality of "The Tyger," which can be viewed as yet another way in which the wisdom of experience, its self-awareness, manifests itself in the concluding stanzas of the poem. To rehearse the major point, immediately after the climactic question comes the repetition; "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" asks the speaker, who then starts reciting "The Tyger" as if he wanted to specify what "Tyger," what "Lamb," and what maker he is in fact asking about. Given the long history of criticism of "The Tyger," this claim about the poem's self-referential character may sound like a provocation. But the provocation is not in the claim; it is in the material that inspires it. It will be helpful to remember that the poem was written around the time of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, whose provocation is readily apparent and derives, partly at least, precisely from its self-referential character: "the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid" (*Marriage* 14, E 39). Another detail to consider is that no matter how "the Lamb" in the climactic question of "The Tyger" is understood (as the lamb, or "The Lamb"—Blake's erratic spelling and punctuation open up such doubts), the question does contain an allusion to the poem of *Innocence*. And it comes at the end of a largely self-referential stanza that leaves the reader in the dark unless s/he considers its symbols in the light of Blake's later prophecies, particularly *The Four Zoas*.²²

20. The dictum from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* pl. 3, quite understandably regularly quoted in criticism of the *Songs*.

21. Seen against the light of the wisdom of innocence, the attitude of the experienced speaker is most accurately captured by this powerful phrase from *Jerusalem* (12.22, E 155); the speaker is not "hypnotized by fear and awe" (Wagenknecht 86), but, precisely, "terrified with admiration." Probably the most expressive response to "the sublime of terror" in criticism of "The Tyger" is Paley's "Tyger of Wrath" chapter in *Energy and the Imagination* (30-60).

22. For an extensive discussion of the relationship between "The Tyger" and *The Four Zoas*, see in particular chapter 15 of Gleckner (275-87).

22 The speaker of experience wonders at the “hand or eye” that dared reach out, “sieve the fire,” and make the fire burn in the tyger’s eyes, so that the tyger (and “The Tyger”) are “burning bright, / In the forests of the night.” He wonders at the shoulder that could handle the chain and the hammer, at the labor performed at the anvil and in the furnace. These accessories of a blacksmith appear in the final version of the stanza that precedes the climactic one,²³ and they, like the “stars” and their forsaken “spears,” are also allusive. Of course they bring to mind the workshop of Los,²⁴ who, according to Damon, “is Poetry, the expression in this world of the Creative Imagination” (*A Blake Dictionary* 246) and who, as “the expression of the Imagination, is the creator of all that we see” (247): a poet translating perception or experience into poetry. As Damon reminds us, in *Milton* (22[24].12, E 117) “Los ... descends and becomes one with Blake” (*A Blake Dictionary* 251). In *Jerusalem*, on the other hand,

Los may be taken as Blake himself, the poet developing his own philosophy and warring against the spiritual evils that afflict his nation. His great task is “To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination” (5:18). (*A Blake Dictionary* 251)

23 In summary, the questions of “The Tyger” are arranged in such a way that, beginning with the break after the third stanza (where the axis of this poem’s symmetry lies), they start drawing attention more and more forcefully to Blake’s

23. To quote Erdman, “After line 12 several starts were made on a 4th stanza, first: ‘Could fetch it from the furnace deep / And in [thy] <the> horrid ribs dare steep’ then: ‘In the well of sanguine woe’ then: ‘In what clay & in what mould / Were thy eyes of fury rolled’” (E 794). Ackroyd’s reconstruction of Blake’s thought process in composing this stanza (144) has provoked criticism for his “tone of authoritative certainty about something as elusive as the creative process” (Benton 86), much as Nurmi’s earlier attempt to reconstruct the probable movements of Blake’s mind on the basis of the study of the manuscript revisions (“Blake’s Revisions of ‘The Tyger’”) was criticized by Grant as “unaccountably erroneous” (64). Nevertheless, if we are to draw conclusions concerning the creative process on the basis of the created effect, it seems legitimate to insist that it is only when Blake came up with the entire range of allusions to a blacksmith’s workshop that he accepted stanza 4 as part of his work in progress. As Erdman adds, in the course of the lyric’s composition this stanza was further “experimented with,” but, it appears, the “experiment” did not involve these allusions (see E 794-95).

24. The association between the allusions to a blacksmith’s tools and the workshop of Los is emphasized by practically every critic who views “The Tyger” in the light of Blake’s later prophetic books; see, for example, Gleckner (284-85), Miner (67-68), Raine (2: 18, 23), Paley (57-59), and Wagenknecht (91-92).

other work,²⁵ to his labor as a poet, to him as a maker, and to this particular poem as a product of his art, the work of his “hand” and “eye.” In other words, on one level, the poem is an expression of awe and amazement at the maker who fashioned it in his furnace,²⁶ whose hammer beat its rhythm, whose chain could frame a tiger within the fearful symmetry of “The Tyger”: “Did he who made the Lamb make thee? / Tyger Tyger burning bright” If Wordsworth, for example, asked a similar question implying surprise at his own achievement and amazed admiration for his own work, it would sound egocentric, indeed narcissistic (though of course he would not ask such a question; there are hardly any memorable tigers in his work, as he mainly wrote of lambs).²⁷ But when Blake/Blake’s lyrical “I” asks the question, it expresses the most fundamental guideline of his philosophy, his most sacred conviction about (the nature of) art.

24 Commenting specifically on a statement by Wordsworth in the preface to the *Poems* of 1815—“The powers requisite for the production of poetry are, first, those of observation and description ...” (*Poems by William Wordsworth* 1: viii)—Blake writes: “One Power alone makes a Poet.—Imagination The Divine Vision” (E 665).²⁸ As he says in *Milton* (3.3-4, E 96) and then reiterates in *Jerusalem*,²⁹ imagination is “the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus.” And the same persuasion is expressed and expanded in *The Laocoön*: “The

25. Wagenknecht says that “there is hardly the tiniest echo of the poem in the larger prophetic poems which has not been recorded, amplified, and meditated” (80); quite significantly, he makes this comment after quoting the poem’s climactic fifth stanza. Quoting the stanza again on p. 92, he comments upon its references to other poems in the *Songs*, as well as *The French Revolution*, *Milton*, *The Four Zoas*, *The Book of Urizen*, and *Europe* (92-99).

26. Blake’s symbol of the imagination; see Paley (58-59), who supports the meaning of the furnace as the imagination with images from the Bible, Paracelsus, and Boehme.

27. Perfectly natural ones, let us add, as in “The Last of the Flock” (H 114-16) or his sonnet “Composed on a May Morning, 1838,” which begins “Life with yon Lambs, like day, is just begun” (H 278). His best tigers function merely as metaphors, though they may be strikingly powerful, as in *The Prelude*, where revolutionary Paris is “a place of fear / Unfit for the repose of night, / Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam” (*The Prelude* [1805] 10.80-82). Intriguingly, according to Bateson (133), this passage was written a year or two after Wordsworth copied Blake’s “The Tyger” into his commonplace-book (see also Paley 36). Jonathan Wordsworth claims, however, that “Blake poems, including ‘The Divine Image’ and ‘The Tyger,’ [were] copied by Wordsworth into his commonplace-book” in spring 1807, and that the first part of book 10 of *The Prelude*, including the passage in question, was written before summer 1804 (see *The Prelude. The Four Texts* xvi, xvii).

28. For an extensive discussion of Blake’s annotations to Wordsworth, see chapter 9 (160-76) of Adams, *Blake’s Margins*.

29. See *Jerusalem* 5.58-59 (E 148), 24.23 (E 169), 60.57 (E 211), and 74.13 (E 229).

Eternal Body of Man is The IMAGINATION. / that is God himself / The Divine Body / JESUS" (E 273). *Jerusalem's* formulation of Los's "great task," quoted above, also contains the same conviction: "the Human Imagination" is "in the Bosom of God" (5.20). The rhymed verse in the preface "To the Public," which comes shortly before this formulation of Los's (and Blake's) poetic program, addresses the reader as "[lover] of books! [lover] of heaven, / And of that God from whom [all books are given]" (E 145); under it, Blake writes: "When this Verse was first dictated to me . . ." Books—as much as individual poems—are not written, they are *dictated*, because "We who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves, every thing is conducted by Spirits" (E 145). Every creative impulse comes from "distant deeps or skies." And if the "deeps" are indeed "hell," as Raine seems to believe (2: 19), it is important to remember that in *The Marriage* (which, Raine stresses repeatedly, was "written about the same time" as "The Tyger"),³⁰ the printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, is likewise carried out in "Hell."

- 25 For all these reasons, "The Tyger," Blake's supreme act as a lyricist, which, on one level, is a tribute to what imagination can perform "when the stars thr[o]w down their spears,"³¹ is not narcissistic. It is an expression of man's surprise, awe, and amazement at something that does not in fact come from or pertain to man, that cannot be seen as man's achievement, because it was given: it is a gift.³² The poem captures a human being as he trembles, feeling a stirring of the Spirit that works through him. As suggested above, the poem's self-referential character may be seen as yet another element of the provocation melted into the tissue of "The Tyger." But on deeper reflection, or, more precisely, on reflection illumined by Blake's later writings, this self-reflective character of experience only sounds like a provocation but is in fact an expression of the highest *wisdom* concerning the imagination and the fundamental unity of the human and the divine. To refer to the *Blake Dictionary* for the last time, imagination, "the basis of all art," was in Blake's opinion "the central faculty of both God

30. Raine is particularly emphatic on this point. The full opening sentence of her chapter 16, quoted in part in note 19 above, reads: "The question of good and evil, which forms the theme of *The Marriage*, was likewise the inspiration of 'The Tyger,' written about the same time" (2: 3), and she repeats the information that "The Tyger" and *The Marriage* were "written about the same time" on p. 31.

31. As Paley notes (supporting his argument with quotations from Boehme and Paracelsus), "the defeat of the stars," apart from the disarmament of reason, "signifies the casting off of both cosmic and internal constraint, *freeing man to realize his potentially divine nature*" (55; emphasis mine); then, however, Paley reduces the meaning of this image to revolutionary and social implications (56).

32. To quote Damon again, imagination "is the gift of the Holy Ghost" (*A Blake Dictionary* 195).

and Man"; as Damon sums it up, "indeed, here *the two* [God and Man] *become indistinguishable*" (195; emphasis mine). In fact, "The Lamb" expresses the same wisdom. But it only *talks* about the unity of the human and the divine: He a child, I a child. "The Tyger," on the other hand, does not assert but *executes* this unity.³³ The poem shows how this unity works. Most essentially, it demonstrates *that* it works. And it forces Blake's audiences, his readers and his critics, "lover[s] of books! lover[s] of heaven," to accept the power of this demonstration and engage actively in the same execution (which, by the way, suggests that he could not but "smile [such] work to see"). The author who made "The Tyger" and "The Lamb" asks "Did he who made the Lamb make thee? / Tyger Tyger burning bright . . ." and his readers and critics, trying to answer this question, regularly think, speculate, and write about God.

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33. Much like the "Introduction" to *Experience*, which, according to Raine, accomplishes a similar identification through its "ambiguous syntax" and "erratic punctuation" (2: 27-28): "The voice of the Bard is the voice of imagination; the voice of imagination is the voice of the Holy Word . . ."

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