

**WILLIAM BLAKE'S ANIMAL SYMBOLS: TENSIONS AND
INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN SCIENCE AND ALLEGORY IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ATTITUDES TOWARDS
ANIMALS**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the tensions and intersections between science, allegory, and related eighteenth-century attitudes towards animals in William Blake's poetry through detailed analysis of individual animal symbols and tropes. It will focus specifically on the period between 1794 and 1820, to coincide with the dates of Blake's major works.

Chapter One outlines Blake's key philosophies, concentrating on his particular approach to symbolism. By rejecting certain Enlightenment ideals and beliefs surrounding allegory, Blake created his own form of the literary tradition, and the subjects and symbols of his poetry clearly demonstrate shifting allegorical frames. The chapter also explains why he argued for the recognition, and even valorisation, of the imaginative faculty, or "*Poetic Genius*", in an era which accepted reason and rational thinking as one of the main means of apprehending the world.

Chapter Two considers the significance of Blake's use of predatory animals in the *SONGS Of INNOCENCE and Of EXPERIENCE*. In focussing on symbolic animals, the chapter assesses whether the 'real' animals (with all their scientific associations) are alluded to, and the extent to which they influence their symbolic counterparts. In choosing these symbols to represent key themes throughout his oeuvre, Blake drew on some familiar associations and contemporary attitudes towards animals, but offered no critique of society's attitudes to animals.

Chapter Three identifies and analyses the "fragments of Eternity" represented in the contraries of "Good" and "Evil", and "Energy" and "Reason" embodied by the animals in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*. The symbols' division between "Reason" and "Energy" develops an understanding of the complex attitudes towards animals, both in Blake's mind, and in that of the eighteenth-century British public.

Chapter Four is concerned with Blake's depictions of the Worm and Serpent in his poetry, and how his conception of "Beulah" provides more insight into these symbols and their functions. It also grapples with Rod Preece's argument that the poet recognised the sanctity and divinity in all forms of life, and sought to endorse these beliefs through his animal symbols.

As the thesis illustrates, though, Blake is not arguing for the sanctity of all life to be upheld, nor does he see any divinity in the beings and objects found in nature. Sanctity and divinity are constructs of the imagination, and it is through exercising the imaginative faculty – the "*Poetic Genius*" – along with our senses and instincts, that we are able to make sense of the world.

The study thus concludes by considering the extent to which 'real' animals intrude upon Blake's oeuvre, and attempts to determine the value of reading the symbols through an "animal studies" paradigm. It also argues that 'real' animals are inseparable from their cultural and symbolic representations, because these are the only means of interpretation we have.

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Note on References and Abbreviations

I have followed the MLA guide to referencing in this thesis, and full versions of all references can be found in the Bibliography.

The full title of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* has been abbreviated to *SONGS Of INNOCENCE and Of EXPERIENCE* or simply to *SONGS*.

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Introduction

The primary aim of this thesis is to explore the tensions and intersections between science, allegory, and related eighteenth-century attitudes towards animals in William Blake's poetry through detailed analysis of individual animal symbols and tropes. It will focus specifically on the period between 1794 and 1820 (to coincide with the dates of Blake's major works), and contextualises attitudes towards animals while interrogating the complexities of animal symbolism in Blake's mythological and imaginative cosmos. Central to the study is the extent to which 'real' animals (with all their scientific associations) intrude upon, and influence, Blake's symbolic representations. As the chapters which follow illustrate, though, Blake is not simply arguing for the sanctity of all life to be upheld, nor does he necessarily recognise any divinity in natural organisms and objects. For him, the notions of "sanctity" and "divinity" are often conceived of as creative constructs, and it is through the employment of the imaginative faculty – or what he terms the "*Poetic Genius*" – in conjunction with our senses and instincts, that we are able to make sense of the world. In order to understand Blake's often shifting perspectives on humankind's relationship with the natural world and the animals which inhabit it, the thesis draws on an "animal studies" lens, with specific focus on what has been termed "zoocriticism".

The medieval legacy of animal symbols

The biblical account of creation has undoubtedly shaped perceptions about animals in much of the western world, and for some medieval theologians, the account of creation as related in Genesis indicated that humankind had been created in the image of God and was therefore absolutely separate from animals. One of the assumptions which followed positioned humanity as creation's crown and the rulers of nature. In turn, these perspectives seem to have influenced the manner in which medieval writers expressed ideas about animals in three significant ways: firstly, in the descriptions and assessments of animal form and behaviour; secondly in the analogies of, and contrasts to, human nature; and thirdly, in the sources of simile or metaphor that demonstrated significant phases of human life and experience (Ansell 13).

Another of the most significant ideas promulgated during the period was that humanity was measured by its distance from both animalkind and animal nature. Perfect humanity meant completely distancing oneself from the animal. Ambiguities were already present, however. Despite the fact that medieval learned tradition tended to view animals as inferior to humans, a clear distinction existed between the general view of the animal kingdom and the ways in which individual animals were perceived (Cohen 62). In the *Physiologus* – an early Christian collection of naturalistic and allegorical descriptions – and the bestiary tradition, animals possessed moral and symbolic qualities which were linked to their physical attributes, but not limited to them. Although the bestiaries originated from the learned tradition, they also incorporated elements of popular lore, which avoided imbuing animals with spirituality, even while human qualities continued to be ascribed to them. Indeed, it appears that humans attributed to animals the qualities and impulse they feared most in themselves, including gluttony, ferocity, and sexuality (Thomas 41). Animals therefore came to symbolise specific types of human being: a tradition typified in the beast epics – an anthropomorphic institution common to the Indo-European world – where animals stood in for humans (Cohen 63-64). Significantly, it was not animals familiar to the everyday life of peasants (the pig, dog, and hare) but rather those that existed outside the domestic sphere (specifically the lion, camel, fox, and wolf) which were typically used in the beast epics. The fact that these animals were less familiar to popular audiences made them easier to imbue with symbolic meaning and human traits (ibid 64).

Eighteenth-century attitudes to animals: the historical and social context

During the period between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, human relationships with animals were influenced by a variety of factors which stemmed from religious, philosophical and social sources – many of which drew on the fraught perspectives inherited from medieval traditions and belief systems. In the eighteenth century, the belief in a God-given right to use animals however humans saw fit began to emerge more frequently in the works of some Protestant clergymen and philosophers (Holger 81). The prevailing view of such theorists accepted that animals were inferior to humans because they lacked souls and thus a spiritual connection to the divine. It was also believed by some that animals had no divine authority or dominion over the creatures they consumed and that domestication provided a means for sheep

and cattle to increase their numbers and become ‘civilised’ without being left to the mercy of wild predators (Thomas 20). That they were butchered for human consumption was therefore relatively inconsequential for individuals who held these views, particularly because it was argued that the animals’ despatch was quick and spared them the sufferings of old age, and also because it was thought that the sole reason for their existence in the first place was to provide humans with food (ibid 20). These arguments thus condoned and even trivialised the consumption of animal flesh.

This ‘practical’ view of animals, which saw them as means to very specific ends, also extended to the study of zoology, where some scientists and philosophers held that animals were a point of interest only if they were of any advantage to humankind – as food or otherwise. If they were deemed useful, further ways to exploit and expand those uses were encouraged. On a broader scale, new methods of acquiring and applying knowledge meant that many people in Europe felt they were no longer at the mercy of natural forces and nature itself, because scientific advances began to make nature more vulnerable to human control and animals even more so (Ritvo 3). Technological and scientific advances in the latter part of the eighteenth century meant that the domestication processes of livestock accelerated, and demonstrated two significant consequences: most livestock animals became more objectified and thus more distanced from human emotional investment, while certain privileged groups of animals – pets in particular – enjoyed quasi-human subject status (Raber 73).

The ambiguities in the attitudes towards animals were reflected other ways too. Even though many eighteenth-century theological, humanist, scientific, and legal writings consistently portrayed the animal as the antithesis of the human, writers and theorists inadvertently gave animals a status, thereby undermining a clear distinction between species (Fudge *Perceiving Animals* 4). That is, in the very acts of discussing and comparing animals to humans in order to argue the supremacy of humankind, commentators revealed just how frail this construction was (ibid 4). Indeed, regardless of many disparaging perspectives, the interest in animals grew significantly and began to emerge in the literature of the period. This was evident particularly in the natural history titles published between 1730 and 1749, when all major English publishers produced two per year – a figure which quadrupled during the last two decades of the eighteenth century (Ritvo 8).

For some eighteenth-century theorists, though, humans and animals could be divided absolutely based on whether or not they were able to reason. Although it was generally accepted that humans were animals, they were separated from other animals and animal nature by the fact that they were rational beings. While humans had the ability to make choices and exert their own free will, animals were prisoners of their instincts. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, attempts to reiterate and magnify the differences between humans and animals were propounded in religious, philosophic, and scientific circles. The revelations in natural science were mirrored in physics, chemistry and medical science, and increasingly many philosophers and scientists began to view rational thought and the ability to reason as a characteristic of humankind.

In the seventeenth century René Descartes had asserted ‘*cogito ergo sum*’ or ‘I think, therefore I am’, consequently introducing the notion that would come to be known as ‘Cartesian doubt’ – that is: anything that could be doubted must be dismissed (Thomas 97). As a result, animals were seen by some as beings with no interests: having no preferences, wants, or desires because they were incapable of thought (Francione 3). However, Descartes’s views about animals were not as uncompromising as some commentators have argued. Although he conceded that animals were capable of complex behaviour, Descartes believed them incapable of reason and held that only human beings were able to combine material substance and intellectual capabilities (Thomas 33). In addition, he recognised two features which separated humans from animals: the faculty of speech and humankind’s rational, immaterial, and imperishable souls (Holger 86). Despite these beliefs, Descartes did not accept that animals could feel no pain, and two of his followers – Nicholas Malebranche and Antoine Arnauld – were in fact responsible for propagating this view (ibid 87). Indeed, Rod Preece’s study *Brute Souls, Happy Beasts, and Evolution: The Historical Status of Animals* has shown (149-152) that the notion of animals as automata was actually a minority view in the seventeenth century and would probably have been rejected by many thinkers of the period and society in general.

Certainly, some seventeenth century intellectuals granted animals a simple form of reason, but qualified it by emphasising that it was inferior to that of human beings. Although these thinkers conceded that animals possessed some forms of imagination, sensibility, and memory, they were thought to be incapable of reflection. As John Locke observes in *An Essay*

Concerning Human Understanding, all animals possess “some small dull perception whereby they are distinguished from perfect insensibility” (146). He goes on to explain that:

perception is the first step and degree towards knowledge, and the inlet of all the materials of it, the fewer senses any man, as well as any other creature, hath; and the fewer and duller the impressions are, that are made by them; and the duller the faculties are, that are employed about them, the more remote are they from that knowledge, which is to be found in some men. But this being in great variety of degrees ... cannot certainly be discovered in the several species of animals, much less in their particular individuals.

(147)

Locke’s views proved influential, and by the mid-eighteenth century David Hume had granted animals ‘experimental reasoning’. In *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, he argues that animals, along with humans, “learn many things from experience, and infer, that the same events will always follow from the same causes” (76). Hume goes on to state that:

... the animal infers some fact beyond what immediately strikes his senses; and that this inference is altogether founded on past experience, while the creature expects from the present object the same consequences, which it has always found in its observation to result from similar objects. [However,] it is impossible that this inference of the animal can be founded on any process of argument or reasoning, by which he concludes, that like events must follow like objects, and that the course of nature will always be regular in its operations. ... Animals, therefore, are not guided in these inferences by reasoning.

(77)

Of course, other philosophers disagreed with both Locke and Hume. Some believed that animal instincts could not be improved since they were completely different from reason. Others held that animal instinct and human reason were the same quality and differed only in degree – humans were superior because they had accumulated a greater number of instincts (Thomas 126).

Ordinary people did not necessarily share the views advanced by the period’s intellectuals, though. Undoubtedly, various forms of animal abuse did exist and some acts of cruelty against animals were influenced by unfavourable views and attitudes towards “brute creation”. As a result, some animals were viewed quite unsentimentally and were either to be

used for work, to be eaten¹, or sometimes both. Despite this though, relations with domestic animals were generally quite intimate, since the animals lived in close proximity to their owners and were far less segregated, which often led to the development of close bonds between the species. Dairy cows were sometimes given affectionate individual names, adorned with ribbons and bells, and were also spoken to since their owners never believed them incapable of understanding human speech (Thomas 96). Dogs and horses were also believed to understand what their owners said, and these working animals attracted a much wider vocabulary. Indeed, they were among the most favoured of animals during the period, along with the hawk. Not only were dogs invaluable as a means of protecting property, but they also served practical functions during the seventeenth century as shepherds and drovers.

The eighteenth century also saw significant improvements in terms of animal welfare and husbandry. It was argued that animals should be slaughtered as quickly and painlessly as possible, domestic animals should receive adequate food and care, beasts of burden should not be subjected to over-exertion, and that harmless animals which were unable to be utilised should be left alone. It was believed that by treating animals kindly a more compassionate society could be created since the Christian ideals of stewardship could be modelled and implemented (Holger 85).

It was during the Enlightenment too that new knowledge about animals was increasingly based on scientific observation rather than on popular mythology and tales from traditional bestiaries. As a result, attitudes towards animals began to change in other ways. Perhaps the greatest revelation derived from comparative anatomy, which illustrated just how closely that of animals mirrored that of humans. The discovery of the great apes in South East Asia and Africa led many theorists to question the links between humans and animals, resulting in one of the most significant debates of the period (which would continue into the nineteenth century). Scientific classification thus became increasingly important, for not only did it signify an interest in natural history, but it also epitomised a belief in a rational form of science, opposing rational

¹ Slaughtering methods were sometimes brutal: in order to make the meat of calves and lambs white, the animals were stuck in the neck until their blood had all but run out. The wound was then stopped and the animal was left to live for another day before it was slaughtered. Male animals intended for food were castrated, but ungelded bulls could be eaten if they were baited by dogs first as it was believed that this would thin the blood and make the flesh more tender. Battery farming existed during the seventeenth century, and though it was on a much smaller scale than it is today, the cruelty associated with this practice was evident: game birds and poultry were confined and fattened in darkness, and were sometimes blinded as well.

empires to irrational beasts (Cloete 315). Consequently, even while links between the human and natural worlds were being discovered, the dichotomy between human and animal was increasingly emphasised – proving useful in justifying a range of beliefs that could be adapted to suit morally contentious issues.

While some thinkers sought to exploit animals, others sought to narrow the gap between human and animal and emphasise how humans had links to the natural world, and even how quickly we could revert to a ‘natural’ state. It was therefore no coincidence that in the eighteenth century, feral children, and in particular the “Wild Boys”² that were discovered from time to time living in complete isolation from any form of human society and incapable of speech, were seized upon as examples of how quickly humankind could lapse into an animal-like state. Indeed, in his *Systema Naturae* (first published in 1735), Linnaeus actually classified humans as part of the animal kingdom, placing us in the same order (*primates*) as apes and bats, and in the same genus (*homo*) as the orang-outang. Of course, many contemporary scientists resisted his classification and the inclusion of humans among animals, but in 1774 Scottish scientist Monboddo asserted that orang-outangs were not animals, but rather a race of people who had not yet learned speech. This was not, however, a novel idea as Jean-Jacques Rousseau had argued some years earlier that orang-outangs were persons in a perpetual state of arrested development (Thomas 130).

It was during the eighteenth century too, critics such as Aaron Garret and Christine Kenyon-Jones have argued, that there was an increased ‘sentimental’ caring for animals and the ushering in of theories of animal ‘rights’. This fed increasingly into Romantic expressions of human-animal relations, where writers and artists reacted against many of the ideas and philosophies propounded by their Enlightenment predecessors. Indeed, the dominance of “reason” during the Enlightenment was undermined by Romantic theorists, who argued that, when divorced from the imaginative faculty, “reason” was an inadequate means of understanding the mysteries of the world.

² Discussed further in Chapter Two.

Understanding the “animal studies” approach to literature

“Animal studies” is an interdisciplinary field which draws on a variety of strands located within the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. One of these encompasses the ethical concerns about our treatment and use of animals, another the extent to which humans and animals are related evolutionarily or psychologically, whilst others explore the impact of the environment on human/animal interaction and the varying attitudes in different human cultures toward animals (Gordon 331). John Miller points out further manifestations:

While critical animal studies is determined in its commitment to animal liberation, animality studies (as laid out by Michael Lundblad) distances itself from direct animal advocacy to ‘prioritize questions of human politics’ (a central theme, of course, of postcolonial studies [...]). Zoocriticism, a coinage of Huggan and Tiffin’s, designates the specifically literary aspect of animal studies and forms a closer counterpart to ecocriticism than the broader disciplinary sweep of the other terms allows. (6)

Since this study is concerned with the literary aspect of “animal studies”, ‘zoocriticism’ is the term which best applies to the approach adopted. However, as Mario Ortiz Robles argues, literature is “neither a natural habitat for animals,” nor “a repository of reliable knowledge about the anatomy, physiology, and perhaps even ethology of animals, it has nevertheless had more to say about our relation to animals over time than any other discourse (x).” I have avoided using the more recently coined “zoopoetics” because, although the term has gained currency over the last few years, it is ill-suited to this study. Not only does it have a “relatively brief history of use” (Moe 10), but it is fraught with problems: the most significant of which include conflation with terms such as “zoosemiotics” and “animal orthography”. Moe settles on the following definition: “the process of discovering innovative breakthroughs in form through an attentiveness to another species’ bodily *poiesis*” (10). One of the crucial aspects of zoopoetics, he explains, is understanding gestures (Moe 12), and though he claims to draw on Blake’s works to demonstrate this early on in his study (ibid 12), he seems to have forgotten about this by its conclusion.

In her essay “Literary Animal Agents”, Susan McHugh contends that although animals abound in literature across all ages and cultures, they only really emerge as significant figures in English literature as metaphors (487-488). She emphasises that although recent studies challenge the operations of these metaphors, they do not interrogate their value: in her view the

metaphorical animals of the British Romantics serve only literary purposes even while they illustrate and model ways of thinking outside literary forms (488). Her arguments certainly reflect the beliefs present in earlier texts dealing with the historical representation of animals, including Keith Thomas's seminal work *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (first published in 1984) and Harriet Ritvo's *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (published in 1987). These texts accept that 'literary' animals are not reflections of the 'real' beings, and thus largely ignore literature in favour of "interpretations based primarily on texts produced by people who dealt with real animals – the records of organisations concerned with breeding, veterinary medicine, agriculture, natural history, and the like" (Ritvo 4).

Drawing on some appropriate contemporary theory and views, this study contextualises Blake's distinctive use of animal symbols and presences within and against broad social and historical changes in attitudes towards animals in the eighteenth century. It is located between what Erica Fudge terms "intellectual" and "humane" histories (8) in her seminal essay "A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals." "Intellectual history", in Fudge's terms, is concerned with offering novel ways in which to read canonical works so that a deeper understanding of intellectual debates about them can emerge. "Humane history" focuses on the assessment of the lived relation between humans and animals and thus moves away from the intellectual realm. The materiality of the animal is fundamental here, because it is the animal-human lived reality which reveals new things about humans. Humane history is thus also concerned with looking at animals as they are depicted by humans – whether in literary documents or artwork – and it is these works which reveal the attitudes towards animals, but also reveal something of the humans themselves (Fudge "A Left-Handed Blow" 8-9).

In positioning this thesis between Fudge's intellectual and humane histories the need for a convincing historical perspective is foregrounded. To ensure that this is addressed, the study will employ a New Historicist approach, the premise of which, according to critic Michael Warner, is: "the text is historical, and history is textual" (Guerin 283). One of the primary goals of New Historicism is that it seeks to reveal opposing historical tensions in a text (ibid 283). An historical perspective complements the central assumptions of the thesis because it "undermines the notion of a constant 'scientific' approach to the natural world, and highlights the great

difference between Romantic-period conceptions of science and those of today” (Kenyon-Jones *Kindred Brutes* 7).

Since, on even a superficial reading, Blake’s animal symbols appear to carry a more allegorical than realistic weight or feeling, the thesis will also focus on trans-historical symbols, allegory, and archetypal tropes that will speak to and clarify the role of these symbols within his works.³ To this end, the study will examine the archetypes and symbols in Blake’s poetry by examining not only his own philosophical writings, but also employing the works of such Blake critics as Jonathan Mee, E P Thompson, Northrop Frye, and Foster Damon. Underlying this, though, is the understanding that the representational, symbolic, and rhetorical ways in which animals are employed (this includes transcultural representations and understandings) are conceptually as significant as the ‘real’ animal (Baker 10). It is equally important that we acknowledge that, in representing animals, we engage in appropriating the non-human experience as an index of humanness (Simons 87). The problem with this, however, lies in the fact that the representation of animals cannot be separated from the cultural and political ideas typical of particular historical periods (Cloete 317). As Steve Baker has pointed out, “culture does not allow us unmediated access to animals themselves. Our attitudes, our prejudices, and indeed our sympathies are all filtered through or clogged up in this thick but transparent mesh (or mess) of history, culture, public opinion, [and] received ideas” (10).

Reading Blake’s animals through an “animal studies” lens

Blake’s use of animal symbols is of a highly individualistic order, even as he engaged with the rationalist views of ‘New Science’. He infused his oeuvre with a complex and original mesh of symbolism to represent and express his belief that “without Contraries is no progression”. As Christine Kenyon-Jones has observed in her study “British Romanticism and Animals”, Blake does not express a particular sympathy towards individual species but rather creates his own original symbols within an original symbolic agenda (46). However, this is further complicated by Blake’s own views on nature, which, like his notions of metaphor and allegory, do not remain static. Indeed, as Kevin Hutchings has pointed out, Northrop Frye’s interpretation of Blake as

³ I have not taken a fuller account of the relations between Blake’s poetry and his designs because I am not an art historian but, where possible, I attempt to draw relevant parallels between his poetry and designs.

“nature’s Romantic adversary” (Hutchings 36) seems to have been accepted in Blake scholarship because of the poet’s “insistent focus on the divine human form” (ibid 36).

For all the originality that Blake’s animal symbols come to represent within his mythological cosmos though, they are still located within, and informed by, the complex cultural and historical matrix of eighteenth-century views on animals, and older, medieval, traditions of the ‘emblem’. The central concern of this thesis then, is the determination of the following questions: to what extent do Blake’s views about animals differ from those of his contemporaries (in both scientific and philosophical schools of thought), and why? Are his attitudes really radically different, or are there as many similarities between his views and representations of animals as those of some more obviously anthropocentric thinkers? Where are the tensions between Blake’s animal symbols, science, and general eighteenth-century attitudes towards animals located? What are the precise intersections between Blake’s views and more anthropocentric attitudes towards animals to be found? Perhaps the most important question of all is: how and why do individual Blakean animal symbols either reflect or reject the norms, attitudes, and prejudices of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English society, while also fulfilling a pivotal role in Blake’s own poetical matrix which was so concerned with the *human* spirit and imagination?

Over the last ten years animal studies scholars (including Christine Kenyon-Jones, Onno Oerlemans, Ivan Kreilkamp, Frank Palmeri, Stephanie Rowe, Lisbeth Chapin, and Jonathan Lamb) have drawn attention to later Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Keats, Clare, Lamb and Coleridge and their animal symbols, metaphors, and philosophical beliefs about animal welfare and animal rights, but not much attention has been paid to Blake’s animals. Although there have been a number of studies which examine individual Blakean animal symbols exhaustively from political, socio-economic and religious viewpoints by critics such as Northrop Frye, E P Thompson and Heather Glen, there have been relatively few comprehensive or detailed studies exploring Blake’s animals within the context of an historical study, or a combination of New Historicism and the burgeoning field of “animal studies”. Arguably the best-known of work in relation to these symbols is David Punter’s “Blake: His Shadowy Animals”. This essay rather unconvincingly attempts to argue that the poet’s animals are symbols which remind humans of their animal-like nature, and Punter bases his theory on anachronistic and puzzling references to Jungian psychology.

This study attempts to decipher Blake's animal symbols and examine their main tropes by combining the approaches of New Historicism and "zoocriticism". It focuses on some of the major symbols apparent across Blake's oeuvre within specific contexts rather than attempting a comprehensive survey of all Blake's animals. Indeed, the symbols discussed have been selected because they play significant roles in shaping an understanding of Blake's contrary states and imaginative levels (which will be discussed later). The chapters have been structured to reflect these main themes and symbols accordingly: Chapter One outlines the lineaments of Blake's philosophy, concentrating on his particular approach to symbolism and what he understood by the conflict between "Reason" and the imagination. Chapter Two attempts an interpretation of the predatory animals in the *SONGS Of INNOCENCE and Of EXPERIENCE*, and focuses on the symbols of the Lion, the Wolf, and the Tyger. Chapter Three examines how, and why, both domestic and wild animals are often represented as contraries in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, and examines several of the major animal symbols present in the poem, including the Lion, the Tyger, the Horse, the Eagle, and monkeys and apes. Chapter Four considers the Worm and the Serpent, and what these two symbols reveal about Blake's conception of "Beulah" with particular reference to *THE BOOK of THEL* and *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*.

Chapter One

Blake's philosophy and symbolism: a brief overview

In her seminal study *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake*, Kathleen Raine asserts that “from his first writings to his last Blake was totally consistent. His thought is at all times based on the clear realization that ‘All Things Exist in the Human Imagination’” (8). However, although Blake’s “great task” was “... 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” (*Jerusalem* 1:5:18-20) (623), the poet’s thought and writings are much more nuanced than Raine allows. Indeed, the vehicles of his thought and writings, his symbols, do not remain consistent in their usage. This chapter examines the parameters of Blake’s symbolism and philosophy in an attempt to identify the tensions and intersections between allegory and science apparent in his animal symbols, which will be discussed at length in the chapters which follow.

Blake's reaction to science and religion

Perhaps the most extensive (albeit extremely compact) explanations of Blake’s views of science are articulated in two manifestoes: *ALL RELIGIONS are ONE* and *THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION*, both of which were etched around 1788. In *ALL RELIGIONS are ONE* (98), Blake reacted to scientific knowledge based on Isaac Newton’s theory of the universe¹ and its premise that physical laws explain all movement of bodies in space with mathematical regularity and predictability. Although numerous scientific theories circulated during the Enlightenment, Newtonian thought was particularly influential because it effectively diminished what were sometimes interpreted as the miracles of God from the world humans inhabited (Kitson 40). Blake rejected Newton’s theories in their entirety, not on any scientific basis but because this framework had its own inherent limitations due to its mechanistic nature – which he saw as partial and inadequate.

¹ Formulated during the 1680s, specifically in his *Philosophiae naturalis* (1687). The mechanical laws were only one aspect of Newton’s thought: Blake comprehensively ignores his alchemical work.

Even though he may have focussed on the particular world-view offered by Newtonian science, Blake was reacting as much to the rational, deductive, and what he considered extremely limited theories put forward by other prominent Enlightenment thinkers and scientists. There were, however, two specific individuals whose theories about the imagination and perception Blake reacted against: John Locke and Francis Bacon. Together with Newton, they formed his unholy trinity. In his *Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral* (first published in 1625), Bacon's views of the imagination and poetry are made clear:

Doth any man doubt that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves? One of the Fathers, in great severity, called poesy 'vinum daemonum' because it filleth the imagination; and yet is but with the shadow of a lie. But it is not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh in and settleth in it, that doth the hurt (341).

Thus, Bacon suggests, if the imagination and poetry deceive the human mind and constitute dangerous untruths, they have very little effect upon the functioning of human society. In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* written over a hundred years later, David Hume attacked the imagination and poetry in similar fashion. He believed that the imagination was merely able to "mimic or copy the perceptions of the senses ... but never can entirely reach the force and vivacity of the original sentiment" (14). For Hume, "all the colours of poetry, however splendid, can never paint natural objects in such a manner as to make the description be taken for a real landskip. The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation" (ibid 14). Both thinkers thus saw perception as an adequate means to understand the world and believed that it constituted one of our most important faculties. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (published in 1689), John Locke also endorsed this notion. For Locke, perception is "the first operation of all our intellectual faculties" as well as "the first step and degree towards knowledge, and the inlet of all the materials of it" (147). Thus, when perception is paired with logical, rational thought, the second-rate understanding afforded by the imagination is unnecessary.

Blake reacted against these limited interpretations because they allowed no scope for the imagination: for him, "Poor Spiritual Knowledge is not worth a button" (*THE EVERLASTING*

GOSPEL 752). In *Jerusalem*, he observes that this kind of “Brooding Abstract Philosophy” destroys “Imagination, the Divine Humanity” (3:70: 19-20) (Blake 709), and this is emphasised again in his Annotations to Sir Joshua Reynolds’s Discourses, where he states that “Bacon’s Philosophy has Destroy’d Art & Science. The Man who says that the Genius is not Born, but Taught – Is a Knave” (Blake 470). Worse still, the limited views of the philosophers advocated a vehement denial of the imagination by legitimising what Blake considered inferior forms of knowledge that are destructive to the human spirit. Indeed, the “argument” of *ALL RELIGIONS are ONE* states that “As the true method of knowledge is experiment, the true faculty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences” (Blake 98), which in turn refers to the imagination – Blake’s term for which is the “*Poetic Genius*”. In “Principle 2nd”, he states that “[a]s all men are alike in outward form, [s]o (and with the same infinite variety) all are alike in the Poetic Genius” (Blake 98). The implication here is that the “*Poetic Genius*” is an inherent and fundamental essence not exclusive to the practising poet or artist, but within every human being. This is made explicit in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* (etched between 1790 and 1793), where the poet-speaker declares that “[a]ll deities reside in the human breast” (153). It seems that the poet never deviated from these views, and in a letter to George Cumberland written in 1827, Blake argued that “Spirit & Life” are inextricably bound up in “The Real Man The Imagination which Liveth for Ever” (878).

In “Principle 4th” of *ALL RELIGIONS are ONE*, Blake argues that “[a]s none by travelling over known lands can find out the unknown, [s]o from already acquired knowledge Man could not acquire more: therefore an universal Poetic Genius exists” (98), which implies that ‘finding out the unknown’ requires exercising the imaginative faculty. He emphasises this again in his Annotations to Reynolds, where he asserts that “Man Brings All that he has or can have Into the World with him. Man is Born Like a Garden ready Planted & Sown” (Blake 471). Thus, the imagination is the sovereign faculty, and enables us to move beyond a circumscribed reality to attain new knowledge. This idea is more fully explored in *A VISION OF THE LAST JUDGEMENT*:

This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of Imagination is Infinite & Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite & [for a small moment] Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination, who appear’d to Me as

Coming to Judgment among his Saints and throwing off the Temporal that the Eternal might be Establish'd ... (605-606).

Moreover, Blake believed that the senses as well as the imagination need to be involved in the way in which we engage with the world, because “[i]f the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite” (*THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*) (Blake 154).

These ideas were not unique to Blake, though, and were expressed earlier by Immanuel Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Judgement* which was first published in 1781, Kant argued that all knowledge is derived from experience but is also dependent on “transcendental structures” which exist in the mind (504). He goes on to argue that the representation of an object in the human mind signifies that which is knowable, while the ‘pure’ or ‘original’ object – what he terms the “thing in itself” (504) – represents the unknowable. The unknowable can only be made sense of if we exercise our imaginative faculty, and “the mental powers whose combination (in a certain relation) constitutes *genius* are imagination and understanding” (Kant 533). Genius, on the other hand “actually consists in the happy relation – one that no science can teach and that cannot be learned by any diligence” (533). Thus, the attraction of Kant’s philosophy to Blake lies in his assertion that the imagination actively and creatively assists in human knowledge and understanding (Kitson 39). Blake’s presentation of the ‘spiritual’, his allegorical manner, as well as his embodied notion of the ‘transcendental’, are, however, quite distinct from Kant’s.

Indeed, Blake’s adoption of these views extended into his interpretation of the Bible: “The Whole Bible is fill’d with Imagination & Visions from End to End & not with Moral Virtues ... The Moral Virtues are continual Accusers of Sin & Promote Eternal Wars & Dominency over others” (Annotations to Berkley 774). As Jon Mee explains:

Blake’s ambivalent attitude to the Bible moves between a disgust at a corrupted document ... and the celebration of a text which was still available to be read as poetry. ... Blake’s faith in a redemptive reading of the Bible differentiates his work from that of Volney and Paine, who offered instead the prospect of demolishing its influence and replacing it with the transparent truth of Reason.

(177)

Blake's views on religion

Throughout his oeuvre, Blake reacted to the narrow, unimaginative practices of the Established Church which he saw as cold, judgemental, unaccommodating, and promoting a morality which imposed constraints on the "*Poetic Genius*". Indeed, "it [was] only in Blake's own time that the cult of reason and nature [had] been precipitated from Christianity and made into a dogmatic system with all loopholes for the imagination sealed off" (Frye 53). He rejected orthodox Christianity's dualism and its separation of body and soul, as he believed it was wrong to see the body as inherently sinful and the soul as something transcendent. His primary concern was locating the divine in humanity by arguing for a reverence for the "*Poetic Genius*" within the human body. Ultimately then, we are responsible for our own spiritual and imaginative well-being and growth, and all things conceived of by the "*Poetic Genius*" can possibly offer liberation from the constraints of artificial social and religious structures for both the individual and society. As Harold Bloom argues, "if the divine is the human released from every limitation that impedes desire, then Blake is a believer in the divine reality" (5). For Blake then, "Man can have no idea of any thing greater than Man, as a cup cannot contain more than its capaciousness. But God is a man, not because he is so perciev'd by man, but because he is the creator of man" (Annotations to Swedenborg's *Divine Love*; Blake 90).

In the "First Series" of *THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION*, Blake argues in "Principle 2nd" that "[m]an by his reasoning power can only compare & judge of what he has already perciev'd [sic]" (97), and that since "[m]an's desires are limited by his perceptions, none can desire what he has not perciev'd [sic]" ("Principle 5th") (97). These principles imply that we are limited by our five senses for, although they provide the means by which we attempt to understand our world, they are inadequate if they are not used in conjunction with the "*Poetic Genius*". It is here that Blake offers both his critique of and solution to the aggrandizement of perception offered in the writings of Bacon, Locke, and Hume. The fact that the five senses are inadequate when divorced from the "*Poetic Genius*" is explicitly stated in the "Conclusion" of the "First Series": "[i]f it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again" (97). That is, without the divine spark of inspiration the "*Poetic Genius*" affords, we would not be able to engage with the world in any creative or novel way.

This can be explained in part by Blake's recognition, and perhaps even fear, of the infiltration of Newtonian science at a popular level (Lussier 187).

It is, after all "the Reasoning Spectre" which "Stands between the Vegetative Man & his Immortal Imagination" (*Jerusalem* 36:23-24) (Blake 663). Hence, since the imagination is the sovereign faculty, it follows that any form of knowledge derived without it is partial and limited. Blake did not, however, simply eschew reason, but rather argued that reason and rational discourse cannot supplant the creative faculty of humanity, for it is the imagination which can explore possibilities for liberation from the constraints of orthodox religion and society:

Reason and Newton, they are quite two things;
...
Reason says "Miracle": Newton says "Doubt."
Aye, that's the way to make all Nature out.
"Doubt, Doubt, & don't believe without experiment":
That is the very thing that Jesus meant,
When he said, "Only Believe! Believe & Try!
Try, Try, & never mind the Reason why." (Blake *MS Note-book 1808-11* 536)

Since "God possesses no powers that differ in kind from the highest human gifts" (Bloom 6) it follows that the failure to attain, or attempt to attain, this state of existence is the consequence of the distortion of human potential resulting from our own "mind-forg'd manacles" ("London" 8) (Blake 216) and the repression of the "*Poetic Genius*". In the "application" of the "Second Series" of *THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION*, Blake postulates that "[h]e who sees the Infinite in all things, sees God. He who sees the Ratio only, sees himself only. Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be what he is" (98). Foster Damon argues that the last point describes the "Incarnation" (402), but this is not aligned with Blake's religious ideas, at least not in the traditional Christian understanding of the term. As the manifesto's "application" posits, divinity is attainable because it is not transcendental, but exists within the human frame. In his Annotations to Berkeley, Blake makes this quite clear: "Forms must be apprehended by Sense or the Eye of Imagination. Man is All Imagination. God is Man & exists in us & we in him" (775).

Blake's attack on any belief system which accepts God as a transcendent and supreme being is evident in many of his writings. In the poem "To Nobodaddy"² he criticises an impersonal God who is described as the "Father of Jealousy", who is both "silent & invisible"

² Part of the collection *Poems and Fragments from the Note-Book*, written about 1793.

(1-2), and whose “words & laws” are shrouded in “darkness & obscurity” (5-6) (Blake 171). It seems that he was also reacting to Francis Bacon’s assertion that “the true God ... is a ‘jealous God’; and therefore his worship and religion will endure no mixture nor partner” (Bacon 344). The salvation offered by this God has many conditions attached to it and is not guaranteed. Hence, the only true salvation exists within humanity and those who are able to fully realise the potential of the “*Poetic Genius*”. There is no ‘window period’ for this salvation as it is a process which is eternal and constantly occurring (Damon 402). As Northrop Frye asserts,

the visionary expresses something latent in all [humans]; and just as it is only in themselves that the latter find God, so it is only in the visionary that they can see him found. ... [T]hose who cut their imagination down as far as they can, deny, as far as they can, their own [humanity] and their divinity which is that [humanity]. They will therefore turn their backs on the genius who greatly acts and greatly perceives; but they retain the power to enter into kinship with [it] (30-31).

Art vs Science: examining symbolism, mythology, and allegory in Blake’s works

In *THE LAOCOÖN*, the poet-speaker states that “Art is the tree of Life [and] Science is the Tree of Death” (Blake 777). Although these two concepts appear to be contradictory, the distinction is not as clear as it seems. Even though there are obvious parallels with the tree of eternal life and the tree of good and evil in orthodox Christian tradition, merely equating Art with positive associations and Science with purely negative ones would mean severely distorting and misreading Blake’s point here. In addition to the Christian symbolism Blake draws upon, the line also alludes to Eve’s account of the tree of knowledge (the tree of good and evil) in *Paradise Lost*:

This tree is not as we are told, a tree
Of danger tasted, nor to evil unknown
Opening the way, but of divine effect
To open eyes, and make them gods who taste (IX: 863-866) (Milton 544)

Eve also acknowledges a power within the “sciential sap” (37), which has effectively enabled her to be awakened to a new world of understanding. Indeed, this would have made perfect sense to Blake, who may well have interpreted “the power / That dwelt within” (35-36) (Milton *Paradise Lost* 544) to mean the “*Poetic Genius*”.

While Blake's views on the imagination remained constant throughout his oeuvre, his opinions of "science" are not as easy to interpret. As Mark Lussier points out, "tracing Blake's response to science in his art is often like chasing a specter" (189). During the eighteenth century, the term "science" encompassed many varied fields of study, including mathematics, physics, natural history, geology, and natural philosophy. As discussed previously, Blake did not reject these fields of study due to any flaws in terms of the knowledge they advanced, in consequence of the methods which were used to obtain that knowledge. His "unfavourable comments on science always relate to certain metaphysical assumptions underlying science" (Frye 28). As he explains in one of his Annotations to Reynolds: "All that is Valuable in Knowledge is Superior to Demonstrative Science, such as is Weighed or Measured" (475). He thus remains steadfast in his rejection of "a monological universe defined by absolute certainties and forced unities and articulates a heterological multiverse defined by complementarities, complexities, and relativities" (Lussier 188). This is emphasised in the figure of Urizen, who represents the dangers inherent in the Newtonian concept of "science", and who:

... form'd a line & a plummet
To divide the Abyss beneath;
He form'd a dividing rule;
He formed scales to weigh,
He formed massy weights;
He formed a brazen quadrant;
He formed golden compasses,
And began to explore the Abyss

(*THE FIRST BOOK of URIZEN* 7:33-41) (Blake 233-234)

Therefore, for Blake, "True Science is eternal and essential, but it turns bad when it is cut loose from Humanity and runs wild, abstracting, generalizing, and domineering" (Damon 359).

As mentioned previously, Blake was not simply rejecting scientific thought in favour of art. He was aware of the fact that art is, after all, artifice – it approximates reality but it is not reality. To make sense of reality the imaginative faculty needs to be employed in order to offer a convincing counter to the mundane practice of deductive reasoning – the endless "dull round" of Newtonian science. The place of art in Blake's mythological cosmos is made clear in *THE*

LAOCOÖN: “The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination, that is, God himself ... It manifests itself in his Works of Art (In Eternity All is Vision)” (Blake 776).

Blake chooses to express his views and philosophy through a complex use of symbolism which, while linked to traditional Christian symbolism, refashions it. As Stephen Prickett and Christopher Strathman argue “Blake ... tried to construct from those basic building blocks of [the Bible] a new and complementary (or even rival) mythology of his own (109). In his Annotations to Watson, he makes the distinction between the Bible as history and the Bible as poetry clear:

I cannot conceive the Divinity of the books in the Bible to consist either in who they were written by, or at what time, or in the historical evidence which may be all false in the eyes of one man & true in the eyes of another, but in the Sentiments & Examples, which, whether true or Parabolic are Equally useful as Examples given to us of the perverseness of some & its consequent evil & the honesty of others & its consequent good. This sense of the Bible is equally true to all & equally plain to all. None can doubt the impression which he receives from a book of Examples. (Blake 393)

His symbols were not limited to Christian influences and inferences, though. Indeed, inasmuch as Blake valued the Bible as poetic myth, his “creative revisions of the Bible in his poetry and designs are in part to be seen as an attempt to re-create the ‘Inspiration’ of the Hebrew popular antiquities suppressed in the perverted Bible of state religion” (Mee 167). He also drew on a wide range of classical and Eastern religious symbols. He was particularly interested in Thomas Taylor’s teachings which advanced the notion that the Ancients hid the Divine Mysteries under symbols.

In order to discuss the concepts of symbols and allegory more fully, they need to be defined both within the context of Blakean thought and the historical period. During the late eighteenth century, theories of myth saw the natural world as their subject matter, and their function as either a literal or symbolic explanation of that world – the ultimate effect of which meant that myth constituted a ‘primitive’ but grossly inadequate and simplified counterpart to science, which was becoming revered as a vehicle of truth and rational thinking and reasoning. (Segal 11). Blake’s German contemporaries FWJ Schelling and Friedrich Schlegel reacted to these theories by proposing that the development of great literature was dependent on poets and authors creating a new and unifying mythology which combined and integrated hereditary historical myths with the new discoveries and proposals of both philosophy and science (Abrams

179). Blake seems to have accepted and adopted elements of Schelling's and Schlegel's propositions, but essentially managed to achieve what Rudolf Bultmann would term the "demythologizing of myth". That is, in making use of some of the conventions of myth but also by deconstructing, reinventing, and subverting those very conventions, Blake was able to move myth away from representing the natural world and instead demonstrated that it is about the human experience of the world. In this way, it "ceases to be an explanation at all and becomes an expression of what it 'feels' like to live in the world. ... It ceases to be false and becomes true. It depicts the human condition" (Segal 55).

The Enlightenment also saw the development of the logical empiricist approach to language. This approach posits that the language of science is literal, factual, and precise, for science, it was believed, presents facts, realities, and objectivity in all that it purports to describe or explain (Avis 44). Conversely, figurative language was viewed not only as a counter to everything upheld in the language of science, but it was also viewed in a reductionist sense and regarded as "lightweight, frivolous, and lacking in moral *gravitas*" (ibid 37). To proponents of this view, figurative language could never reveal the truth or the true meaning of experiences for its formulations were only ever false expressions and empty ciphers. The Romantics, and Blake³ in particular, rejected this and actively opted to emphasise the flaws in this kind of thinking through their writings. For them, perception was not only a core tenet of creativity: the mind could also shape the individual's reality through the imaginative and creative faculties (ibid 96).

Thus, the mythology Blake attempted to create was also evident in the manner in which he employed language. In attempting to react against the language of science, and also the platitudinous moral and rational discourse that characterised many educational and religious writings of the eighteenth century, Blake seems to have accepted that language is contingent on the social institutions and practices of the period. He reconfigured language through complex and often ironic language play, demonstrating that language was a primary subject within his own mythology (Esterhammer 69). The "Introduction" to the *SONGS of Innocence* (Blake 111), sets the tone for language play and ambiguity throughout the *SONGS Of INNOCENCE and Of Experience* (and indeed throughout his oeuvre). It appears that Blake believed that there is no single version, or vision, towards which writing gestures: instead, he was concerned with tracing

³ Although I categorise Blake as a Romantic poet, I am aware that his work has its place in several eighteenth-century poetic traditions as well.

the clash of contraries and subverting the tendency to settle into fixed oppositions (Mitchell 144). Attaining the kind of liberation that is presented to us through the “*Poetic Genius*” may afford humankind some form of redemption or salvation, but precisely how this is attained is unclear. What is made clear, however, is that in not employing our “*Poetic Genius*” we perpetuate a cycle of misery that has far-reaching consequences for all members of society.

Blake’s mythological cosmos consisted of a number of complex devices that resembled traditional ones but which were, in fact, very different. To state that Blake used symbols and allegory to sketch and support his mythology is true, but only partially so – for his use of these devices is often novel and departs from their more accepted conventions. For Abrams, a ‘symbol’ can be “applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or suggests a range of reference beyond itself” (320). By extension, the employment of, and response to, a symbol is a creative exercise and in acknowledging and comprehending the symbol we begin to find meaning in life and in doing so, we also make sense of the world (Avis 310). This is precisely what Blake wished to achieve and this resulted in the complex structure of those symbols that he developed and employed. Thus, not only was Blake demonstrating that symbols and figurative language were far more complex and nuanced than Enlightenment thought allowed, but, in creating his symbols, he also illustrated how they were a legitimate means for making sense of existence.

The complexity and diversity that constitute Blake’s symbols is also matched in his allegorical references and creations. The fact that Blake chose to use allegory is in itself remarkable. As critics such as Theresa Kelley, Anne Mellor, and Angela Esterhammer have demonstrated, in their rejection of Enlightenment ideals, systems of belief, and the valorisation of reason, the Romantics also rejected allegory. However, as Nicholas Halmi has pointed out, the Romantics’ hostility to allegory should not be exaggerated because they were, in fact, reacting specifically to the ways in which it was defined and employed during the Enlightenment (13). For them, allegory was regarded as mechanical, predictable, simplistic (A equals B), and static (Tambling 73).

In short, “allegory” as conceived of during the Enlightenment was not considered dynamic or even complex enough for the aims of Romantic poetry. Indeed, in the traditional sense, allegory can be defined as a narrative “in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make sense on the ‘literal’, or primary, level of

signification” (Abrams 5). In his rejection of Enlightenment ideals and beliefs surrounding allegory, Blake created his own form of the literary tradition, and it is certainly true that the subjects and symbols of Blake’s poetry inhabit and demonstrate shifting allegorical frames (Kelley 213). Specific examples of the manner in which Blake employs allegory and also how it intersects with science in his animal symbols will be discussed in the chapters which follow.

This chapter has provided a brief outline of some of the seminal works and influences that contributed to the development of Blake’s philosophy and symbolism, and has attempted to explain some of the most important concepts that are required for any reading of his poetry. The purpose was to reveal the complex nature of Blake’s symbolism and philosophy, while also demonstrating the dexterity with which he created his own mythological cosmos. His reverence for the imagination was unwavering as he attempted to carve out a significant space for it against the backdrop of the Age of Reason. Despite his resistance to certain ideals and scientifically-based theories that circulated during the period, Blake remained surprisingly conservative in his approach to animals, and the manner in which he employed them in his poetry. Blake seems to apply a number of prejudicial and even derogatory perceptions to them that were current during the eighteenth century and even before then, and because of the shifting allegorical frames and language-play, his animal symbols have shifting meanings and implications. Undoubtedly, Blake’s primary concern was the human spirit and imagination, but his use of animal symbols does, in many ways, reflect some of the prevailing contemporary attitudes towards animals. This will be explored more fully in the chapters which follow.

Chapter Two

Interpreting the “wolvish howl” and “lions’ growl”: predatory animals in the *SONGS Of INNOCENCE and Of EXPERIENCE*

The previous chapter presented an overview of Blake’s primary philosophies and aims. It also discussed his symbolism and contextualised it within Blake’s frames of reference. This chapter will discuss his animal symbols, with a particular focus on allegory and the ways in which it influences the depiction and interpretation of the predatory animals of the *SONGS Of INNOCENCE and Of EXPERIENCE*. In focussing on symbolic animals, the chapter will also assess whether the ‘real’ animals (with all their scientific associations) are really alluded to, and the extent to which they influenced Blake’s portrayal of the animals in his poetry. Although predatory animals abound in the *SONGS*, there has been no systematic analysis of why they play such significant roles in Blake’s oeuvre. The one exception is the tyger, but even here only speculative and scarce reference is made to the actual animal and its possible influence on what David Erdman refers to as Blake’s “mentalized beast” (192). Some of the *SONGS*’ more innocuous animals, birds, and insects have been discussed at length by critics who locate them within the pastoral tradition, see them as Christian symbols, or even treat them as symptoms of Romantic sentimentalism influenced by the songs and stories for children which seemed everywhere apparent during the late eighteenth century. The predatory animals, on the other hand, have generally been accepted as peripheral and often merely sinister shadows representing the menacing and sometimes even possibly apocalyptic aspects involved in the descent into “Experience”. They are often seen to represent the dark part of the human psyche and are apparently not really worth mentioning beyond that. Yet would Blake, who chose his symbols and his words so painstakingly, ever resign them to such vague and even inconsequential ends?

Since a number of themes are dealt with in this chapter, it has been divided into sections for ease of reference. The first section deals with the sources of Blake’s symbols and attempts to explain why these sources are significant; the second briefly examines the context of the *SONGS Of INNOCENCE and Of EXPERIENCE*; the third focusses on contemporary attitudes towards animals and how their influences may have shaped Blake’s animal symbols; the fourth is concerned with the ways in which Blake’s animals resemble real animals according to both anthropomorphic and scientific interpretations; the fifth discusses Blake’s animals as allegories

and emblems; and the sixth and final section offers a close reading of the four poems which deal with predatory animals in the *SONGS*.

Blake's sources

Even though many recent studies have identified and explored the complexity of Blake's symbolism, the sources of inspiration for his poetry and artwork remain a bone of contention for most critics. It has been widely assumed that he was well acquainted with a variety of both western and eastern traditions, philosophies, and mythologies. It was only in the twentieth century, though, that E P Thompson was able emphatically to declare that the contents of Blake's library had never been established. His research led the way for other critics who began to question the validity of past claims. Through his findings, Thompson was able to deconstruct two centuries' worth of speculation about Blake's sources by examining precisely how the Moravians, Baptists, Philadelphians and particularly the Swedenborgians influenced both the man and his works. More importantly, though, Thompson's study exploded many myths surrounding these sources by illustrating 1) that Blake did not draw his inspiration primarily from one source – the Bible – and 2) that he was in fact “an omnivorous reader in an extraordinarily diverse (and often obscure) range of classical, neo-Platonist, Kabbalistic, hermetic and Behmenist sources” (33).

There are, of course, obvious references in Blake's works that can be ascribed to Arthurian, Eddic, and Welsh and Scandinavian myths, and even some contributions from Persia and India are fairly easily detected (Frye 172-173). Jon Mee names Volney's *Ruins* as one of the texts which may have influenced Blake's thoughts on religious hypocrisy, specifically with regard to an isolated and brooding Creator evident in the cosmogony of the ancient Egyptians (179), and what he saw as the proliferation of pagan motifs within Christian circles (188). In a letter to Dr Trusler dated 23 August 1799, Blake named a few of his sources whilst explaining that “That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of Ancients consider'd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction, because it rouzes the faculties to act. I name Moses, Solomon, Esop, Homer, Plato” (793). Thus, although it seems that he had read and admired certain texts which were later claimed to be his most obvious sources, it is also apparent that his wish was not simply to emulate them. With his vision and purpose being made

quite clear, it was obvious to Thompson too that Blake's constantly shifting meanings and symbols were often contextual only in a very specific set of circumstances, and these themselves were never static. As Bronowski had argued decades earlier, "no symbol in Blake is single and fixed: for Blake looks at none in a fixed way" (135). What is key, then, is the *context* of the poems and paintings and the symbols contained therein. As noted in Chapter One, as a result of the shifting allegorical frames and language-play in Blake's poetry, his animal symbols also prove to have shifting meanings and implications.

The context of the *SONGS Of INNOCENCE* and *SONGS Of EXPERIENCE*

Blake's manifesto *ALL RELIGIONS are ONE* is prefaced with the epigraph "The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness" (98). This phrase appears in each of the four New Testament gospels: Matthew, 3:3; Mark, 1:3; Luke, 3:4; and John 1:23, where it is used by Isaiah to describe John the Baptist. Its significance within Blake's oeuvre is reiterated many times and demonstrates that Blake saw his own messages and aims – his prophecies – as akin to those of John in that they too were responses to false prophecies, particularly within the realm of scientific thought. As Winifred Guerin has pointed out: "poets have from earliest times been the historians, the interpreters of contemporary culture, and the prophets of their people. Many of [William Blake's] best poems can be read meaningfully only in terms of Blake's England" (52-53). As discussed in the previous chapter, Blake certainly embodied the ethos of the poet and in doing so created the complex mesh of symbolism characteristic of his poetry.

One of the most consistently used terms in Blake's oeuvre is "visionary". A visionary is someone who is in possession of "*Poetic Genius*", and who "creates, or dwells in, a higher spiritual world in which the objects of perception ... have become transfigured and charged with a new intensity of symbolism" (Frye 8). Bearing this in mind, perhaps the best starting point for discussing Blake's particular brand of symbols and symbolic meaning is his *SONGS of INNOCENCE and Of EXPERIENCE* (which were first published jointly in 1794). The *SONGS of Innocence* illustrate that the state of "Innocence" embodied by children offers adults a way of altering the manner in which they engage with the world through imagination. At the same time, the *SONGS* offer us the consequences of stifling the imaginative faculty in both children and adults. In many of the *SONGS* children are presented as having "pure perception" because their

“*Poetic Genius*” has not been corrupted and limited by experiences within narrow parameters which are often accepted and endorsed unquestioningly by the adult. Of course, despite the fact that the poems supposedly show the “Two Contrary States of the Human Soul” as the full title of the *SONGS* reads, they do not simply bewail the corruption of “Innocence” through “Experience”. As Plate 3 of *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* reads, “[w]ithout Contraries is no progression” (Blake 149). Thus, although there is an implied opposition in the title, Blake would have rejected this kind of easy formulation and hence it is more appropriate to think of the two states as engaging in dialogue (Wu 170).

Indeed, as many of the *SONGS* demonstrate, there has to be a descent into “Experience” for any growth of the “*Poetic Genius*” to take place. Many critics have argued otherwise, however. For Foster Damon,

[“Innocence” and “Experience”], as the full title of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* indicates, are the “Two Contrary States of the Human Soul,” ecstasy and misery, or heaven and hell.

“Innocence” was the standard term for man before his Fall; Blake extended the meaning to the state of childhood, into which we are all born, a state of free imagination and spontaneous joy.

“Experience” is Blake’s term for the contrary of Innocence; it is man’s state when disaster has destroyed the initial bliss.

(197)

This definition is too simplistic, because while “Experience” can entail cynicism, brutality, hypocrisy, the oppression of self and the suppression of others, it also entails an awareness of the consequences of mindless conformity to societal and religious norms and regulations. In addition, repression of the “*Poetic Genius*”, submission to authority that is not designed to advance humanity, and the distortion of human potential, can, it seems, result in the extinction of divinity within humanity. Blake’s representation of the state of “Experience” also highlights the fact that the denial and repression of elements of humanity that are destructive may be more damaging to the individual than their expression. Furthermore, “Innocence” is not purely positive, as it involves naivety and delusion, against which Blake cautions as perpetuating vulnerability to exploitation. As Jean Hagstrum contends, “[e]xperience is not primarily a state of nature. It is psychological, political, social – a condition of [humankind] and [its] institutions, not of the universe. . . . Experience is the work of the church, state, and [humankind] in society”

(530). It is not, however, necessarily 'evil' and Blake does not attach moral values to either state. The *Songs of Experience* do not speak in an identical voice about the same themes and neither do they depict only negative characteristics of human nature. Instead, they offer different ways of dealing with its contradictory elements – thereby indicating that “Innocence” and “Experience” are not mutually exclusive states but conditions that can co-exist in human consciousness. In order to understand this better in terms of the Blake’s own work, it needs to be remembered that for him the dichotomy between good and evil and “Innocence” and “Experience” was everywhere apparent, even within humankind itself. In his Annotations to Lavater’s Aphorisms on Man, Blake states that “Man is a twofold being, one part capable of evil & the other capable of good; that which is capable of good is not also capable of evil, but that which is capable of evil is also capable of good” (Blake 80).

The transition from “Innocence” to “Experience” often involves the internalisation of rules, regulations, and conventions. Thus, for adults in the realm of “Experience”,

[c]ontact with innocents can afford us flashes of insight in which the distinctions between subject and object, self and other fall away, and in which [humanity’s] creative powers are revealed as divine. But moments of this sort are hard to retain or prolong. They quickly dissolve with the return of adult or experienced habits of mind that obscure any sense of unity of inter-relation, and restrict our imaginative capacities.

(Leader 92)

As is evident in many of the *SONGS*, language and word-play are vital in the creation of meaning, often in unique or unconventional ways. The ambiguity present in the poems is not necessarily used negatively, however, for words which seem ironic and cynical in one context can be transformed by speakers who possess “Innocence” and who, through imaginative vision, are able to recreate meaning and offer new possibilities for moral and social models.

In a note written on a page of *THE FOUR ZOAS*, Blake states: “*Unorganiz’d Innocence: An Impossibility*. Innocence dwells with Wisdom, but never with Ignorance” (Blake 380). It appears that through this statement, Blake was suggesting that there could indeed be some kind of synthesis of “Innocence” and “Experience”. Harold Bloom explains the synthesis thus:

[t]here is a double irony in play between Innocence and Experience as states of being. You progress, both organically and imaginatively, in moving from

Innocence and Experience, and yet you fall back as well, again both naturalistically and creatively. Blake resolves the paradox by positing two modes of Innocence: “unorganized,” which is merely ignorance, and “organized,” which can withstand the test of Experience.

(33-34)

For Robert Gleckner, “organized Innocence” suggests that there is a third state which incorporates both “Innocence” and “Experience”, and is the ultimate realisation of human imaginative potential, characterised by a Christ-like “higher Innocence” (9). The notion of a Christ-like “Innocence” is, however, problematic, for Blake did not view Christ as a person who is or was divine, but used him to symbolise the manifestation of the divine mind in human form (Raine *Blake and Tradition: Volume II* 189). Blake does not offer an explanation for how the individual could possibly attain a synthesis between the states in practical terms, but he clearly identifies and emphasises the need to understand the states so that one does not dominate the other. Although the *Songs of Experience* are satires in and among themselves, they also satirise the state of “Innocence” – and the *SONGS of Innocence* in turn reveal the shameful hypocrisies so apparent in the state of “Experience” (Frye 237). For Blake, ultimately the most desirable state is that in which the artist is able to use their visionary power to create, and this state is called Eden (Bloom 34). This state is espoused by the visionary in full possession of a consciousness whose “imaginative activity is prophecy and whose perception produces art” (ibid 59).

Even though the *SONGS* are presented as two seemingly neat and coherent halves, or even wholes, these collections were never stagnant or static, and they too experienced a kind of evolution over Blake’s lifetime. The poems were printed on Blake’s own press in the form of illuminated books. Due to the fact that each collection was handmade, no two copies resembled each other exactly, either in terms of colouring or the ordering of plates. In the three decades after the joint *SONGS* were printed together, the poems continued to evolve both as individual pieces and as collections, with Blake issuing versions of *Innocence* and *Experience* both separately and together. As Sarah Haggarty and Jon Mee explain:

some readers ... read one and not the other, and those who owned both *Innocence* and *Experience* could and did have them bound together, or have the combined *Songs* separated. Readers ... could encounter Blake’s poems and designs in other ways too ... individual lyrics or groups of lyrics from *Songs* were hived off, copied out by hand and circulated, excerpted and published in reviews and

miscellanies, even sung and heard. Here we see Blake's illuminated book, a distinct, etched, hand-printed, and often hand-coloured artefact, turned to a variety of forms and uses. (Songs of Innocence and of Experience: *A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* 6)

This kind of fluidity of interpretation, whether intentional or incidental, certainly seems to be aligned with the manner in which Blake treated his poetry and art, as well as his symbolism in general. Just as the states of "Innocence" and "Experience" are fluid and diverse, so are the myriad interpretations of the *SONGS* contained therein – and accordingly the interpretations of the animal presences.

Contemporary attitudes towards animals and how they shaped Blake's animal symbols

As determined in the "Introduction", by the mid-eighteenth century, knowledge about animals and nature had been rapidly accumulated due to the efforts of individuals working in several disciplines. Natural history had emerged as a prestigious Enlightenment discipline by this time, resulting in the publication of several volumes dedicated to its discussion. Arguably, the most influential of these was the Comte de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* in 1749. Numerous English translations were produced and widely circulated. In 1774, Oliver Goldsmith's *History of the Earth and Animated Nature* was published in eight volumes. One of the characteristics of this type of literature is that it was often written by pioneering naturalists, who wished "to participate, personally or vicariously, in an exciting exercise of human prowess" (Ritvo 11). Natural history was thus often presented as a human struggle against the manifold dangers of nature (ibid 11). It is likely that Blake was among the consumers of this literature, for recreational reading publications extended beyond the borders of the middle-class as clubs and non-circulating libraries ensured that many more readers had access to books (ibid 9).

Both the fictional and non-fictional literature of the period generally saw 'traditional' virtues assigned to animals – the lion was brave (though the tiger cruel), the elephant wise, the dog faithful, the lamb gentle – and the admirable ones were often invidiously compared with humankind (Perkins 932). The lower classes were sometimes associated with sheep and cattle, which seemed to validate the authority exercised by their 'social superiors'. They were also represented by dangerous wild animals, and this similarly reinforced the notion that their

‘masters’ needed to exercise strict discipline and guard against rebelliousness. These kind of associations meant that the language used to describe certain animals was informed by these views, and this in turn influenced the various value systems that, directly or indirectly, shaped the moral judgments pronounced upon each species (Ritvo 16).

Moral judgements about individual species had of course also been passed long before this, and they extended to both domestic and wild animals. These judgements also influenced the ways in which animals were categorised and viewed in a number of ways. Arguably, one of the most important of these was the manner in which species were categorised by the much resented Game Laws. The laws, first written in 1671, effectively prohibited the hunting of game animals by anyone other than landowners. It seemed that they had two main functions: to preserve game for the wealthy to hunt and to keep guns out of the hands of the lower classes (Oerlemans “The Meanest Thing that Feels” 3). Game animals were frequently categorised according to how they were hunted. Beasts of the chase often included the buck, doe, fox, marten, and roe; beasts for hunting were the hare, hart, wolf, and wild boar (Ritvo 13). Badgers, otters, and foxes were considered vermin. The laws also solidified the notion that land could and would be ‘owned’ – that is, for the first time soil, trees, and even rivers and streams became the property of the wealthy landowners who could purchase them, and they automatically owned the animals that lived on, or passed through, their properties. Up until these laws were introduced, the prevailing belief was that animals and the fruits of nature belonged to all – they were understood to be ‘public’ property to be hunted or used by anyone (Oerlemans “The Meanest Thing that Feels” 3).

There were also several other shifts that influenced thinking about animals, and it was during this period that major innovations in agricultural practices were foregrounded, while experimentation in animal husbandry, including stock breeding and breed specialisation, occurred. National and local agricultural societies were formed to advance these improvements. Advances in biology, anatomy, and pet breeding also occurred. As the relations between animals and humans became more complex, so too did the nature of their interactions. This is particularly true of domestic animals, as the period saw the “gradual invasion of individual bodies by the scientific gaze, by quantification, by systems of knowledge [which in turn] permits the assimilation of the individual animal body into an aggregate, a totalised entity that translates into the abstraction of numbers, prices, [and] pounds per acre” (Raber 86). Thus, as agriculture became more commercialised, the ways in which animals were viewed began to change to suit

the needs large-scale farming operations ushered in. This is particularly evident in the manner in which attitudes to Britain's most important national beast – the lowly sheep – had altered since the previous century. Up until the eighteenth century, the sheep had provided both meat and wool, and because it was such a prominent feature in both the English countryside and in literature, it had also formed the basis for an entire symbolic order in the pastoral tradition (ibid 79). Instead of the bony and slow-maturing animal of previous generations, the breeding experiments of the eighteenth century and the introduction of such practices as “floating” meadows had produced a fast-maturing and altogether denser specimen (ibid 79). These animals were ultimately bred for slaughter, and the individual care and attention that had characterised the relationship between the shepherd and his flock was replaced by a more impersonal approach of the farmer concerned with breeding livestock merely for commercial gain.

Although individuals in the agricultural sector were increasingly concerned with generating profits through the production of thousands of pounds of ‘meat-on-the-hoof’, more general societal attitudes to animals began to change in light of both scientific discoveries and philosophical debates. The discovery of the great apes had seemed to suggest that surprisingly close links could exist between the human and animal kingdoms, and some domestic animals too were prized for what were considered human-like characteristics. So-called “learned” domestic animals showcased human-like intelligence¹, whilst animals like the dog and horse exhibited pleasing traits such as fidelity and loyalty while simultaneously submitting to human will and domination. Inasmuch as these animals demonstrated their likeness to humankind, they simultaneously indicated the distance between the human and animal. Animals could only ever attempt to demonstrate human-like behaviours – they could never truly emulate them because they lacked the key human faculty of reason, and this reinforced both the limitations inherent to ‘brute creation’ and the supposed superiority of humankind.

The other half of ‘brute creation’, wild animals, were generally viewed far less favourably than their domestic counterparts. Whilst domestic animals were seen as increasingly valuable to humankind for a variety of reasons, it was apparent that the wild animals which preyed on them or competed with them for food or other resources were to be controlled or exterminated. Carnivores in particular, it seemed, challenged the supremacy of humans in rather

¹ In one of the epigrams found in his *Manuscript Notebook*, which would have been written between 1808 and 1811, Blake makes mention of a “Learned Pig” and a “Hare playing on a Tabor” (548).

the same way that alien or socially excluded human groups challenged or rejected the authority of their superiors (Ritvo 25). Thus, eighteenth century discourse began to be informed by a dichotomy between domesticated and wild animals, which was compared to that between ‘civilised’ and ‘savage’ human societies. Exotic animal displays were a common sight in London, beginning in the late seventeenth century, and exhibitors regularly travelled around the country². Advertisements often emphasised the unique and unusual aspects of these collections, focussing on their more sensational and intriguing exhibits and thereby perpetuating the belief that although much of nature was untamed and potentially threatening, it could be controlled and moulded by humankind.

It thus seems that during this period the most admirable of animals were those that displayed qualities of docility, industriousness, and a willingness to serve the needs of humankind. The worst kinds of animals were those which declined to serve and which dared to challenge the supremacy of humans (Ritvo 17). Beasts of prey proved disturbing to contemplate, while animals such as the elephant, horse and dog were considered gratifying for their servitude. Even though the qualities humans and animals purportedly shared were pointed out regularly by eighteenth century thinkers, and although philosophers and scientists alike began to question how humanity should behave towards animals, particularly those which were closest to them, the perceived inherent superiority of humanity (which was believed to be ordained by God) was never seriously questioned.

This relationship was also complicated by religious beliefs which perpetuated the idea that humankind had dominion over animals. This idea was mostly inherited from interpretations of the Old Testament where it seemed that Adam was granted dominion over all animals, both domestic and wild. After the flood in the Old Testament, God is said to have made a covenant with all animals (Genesis 9: 8-17). However, the Hebrews were asked to be most concerned about the animals which depended on them, and upon which they were dependent (Webb 23). This tradition appears to continue throughout the Bible, with docile and amenable animals generally treated with more kindness. Sheep in particular are held in high esteem, with the weak and defenceless animal often symbolising the same qualities in human beings. Like sheep, people need to be tended to and protected, and as a result, God is often associated with a shepherd. What becomes increasingly clear in the New Testament then, is the notion that animals

² The monkeys and apes which often formed integral parts of these collections will be discussed in the next chapter.

worthy of compassion are those that are meek, defenceless, and in need of human stewardship (ibid 24). The New Testament also tends to portray animals in more symbolic ways – two such examples include the fact that God descends twice as a dove, and that Jesus is often portrayed as the Lamb of God. What this means essentially is that “Christian scripture follows the Jewish precedent in its realism toward nature: animals are not totemic codes for divine messages or tropes for the unknown” (Webb 25).

Children’s books too reflected contemporary attitudes towards animals, and increasingly came to depict cruelty towards animals as evidence of a bad character as the eighteenth century progressed. Books like Isaac Watts’s *Divine and Moral Songs for Children*, first published in 1715, advocated kindness toward ‘brute creation’, and the numerous publications which followed seemed to take up the campaign for kindness to animals that regularly formed the subjects of the sermons, pamphlets, poems, and novels which circulated during the period – partly due to an ethos perpetuated by middle class intellectuals (Perkins 932-933). Blake would have been aware of this emerging trend in children’s literature, as he was familiar with Watts’s publication – having written many of the *SONGS Of INNOCENCE and Of EXPERIENCE* in response to them. He had also illustrated Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Original Stories from Real Life* (first published in 1788), the first three chapters of which were dedicated to the proper treatment of animals – and which were in themselves were strongly inter-textual and referential (Kenyon-Jones *Kindred Brutes* 54).

This brief survey of the prevailing attitudes towards animals in the eighteenth century serves to illustrate the complexities of humanity’s relationship with animals during this period. Those highlighted above demonstrate that, in choosing animal symbols to represent key themes throughout his oeuvre, Blake would have been drawing on some familiar associations and contemporary attitudes towards animals. Ultimately, though, his aim in employing these symbols was not to offer a critique of society’s attitudes to animals. This chapter and the next illustrate how animals come to represent various conflicts in Blake’s own mythology and also, more broadly, represent the conflict between the ideals of the Enlightenment and those of the burgeoning Romantic movement.

Blake's animals as animals

How then can the symbolic animals in the *SONGS* be related to the real, and are the 'real' animals really crucial to understanding the poems? In order to understand the complexities inherent in the problem of representation, it is imperative that we first determine the relationship, if any, that exists between 'real' animals and their symbolic or allegorical contexts and also any associated departures. To do so, the interpretations of the 'symbolic' and 'real' animal must be understood within the current animal studies paradigm (those which are directly relevant to the analysis of Blake's poetry are outlined below). In her study "A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals", Erica Fudge points out that, "a symbolic animal is only a symbol (and therefore to be understood within the study of iconography, poetics) unless it is related to the real" (7). In addition, there is also the problem of representing the animal in the first place: Elsie Cloete has argued that animals "cannot be divorced from the cultural and political imaginations of historical periods" (317). In choosing to use animals as symbols Blake would have had to rely on some association with the animal's characteristics as they were conceived of in popular culture of the eighteenth century – whether or not these perceptions were factually correct. As Onno Oerlemans has pointed out in his recent essay "The Animal in Allegory: From Chaucer to Grey":

The actual world, including actual animals, does continue to reveal something of itself. Presumably, any kind of allegorical use of an animal ... still relies to some degree on an awareness of the animal and its kind or species. ... The animal chosen to represent some aspect of human behaviour is not an arbitrary choice.
(298)

He believes that allegory's doubleness is best able to reflect the deep conflict inherent in human-animal relations because animals can be, and have been, regarded as ciphers to fill with our meaning, thereby reinforcing anthropocentrism. Allegory is, however, also able to express likeness and may reflect qualities we share with them. He elucidates:

Allegory and the representation of animals in literature are deeply connected because it is the dominant mode through which animals enter literature, and it becomes the mode through which they are read. Moreover, the difficulty of allegory is also the difficulty of teasing the animal out from behind our

representations of it. ... [A]llegory suggests a deliberately artificial representation, a way of simplifying and making clear, using seemingly arbitrary signifiers. This mode of allegory suggests the existence of a wall or gap, an uncrossable boundary, between signifier and signified (i.e. between the animal and what it means).

(Oerlemans "The Animal in Allegory: From Chaucer to Grey" 299)

While these points and perspectives may undoubtedly have proven valid for many of Blake's contemporaries, and although some may apply to Blake, we need to bear in mind the complicated nature of his relationship to, and treatment of, allegory, particularly because the poems discussed in this chapter have been viewed by many critics as purely allegorical. Even though Blake recognised that allegory was seldom without some kind of vision, he also made clear in *A VISION OF THE LAST JUDGEMENT* that "Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct & inferior kind of Poetry. Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists, Really & Unchangeably" (Blake 604).

To add to the complexity of this matter, it must be recalled that Blake did not revere nature in the way that many of his Romantic counterparts did. The pantheistic beliefs held by many Romantics did not hold true for Blake. Frye explains Blake's views of nature as follows:

Nature is there for us to transform; it is neither a separate creation of God nor an objective counterpart of ourselves. Blake criticized Wordsworth sharply for ascribing to nature what he should have ascribed to his own mind and for believing in the correspondence of human and natural orders. ... Nature is miserably cruel, wasteful, purposeless, chaotic and half dead. It has no intelligence, no kindness, no love and no innocence. (39)

Indeed, Blake's own views on nature are made clear in his letter to Dr Trusler:

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; and Some Scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself (793).

What Blake is articulating here is the fact that for him, nature comes alive only to, and by means of, the visionary. He sees the beauty of nature, but believes that that source of beauty stems only from a visionary consciousness.

Since the particular focus of this chapter is the predatory animals which are so abundantly present in the *SONGS*, it is important to recognise that the ways in which the animals are depicted throughout Blake's poetry illustrate a mirroring of our anthropocentric gaze. The attitudes towards animals, and the poet's attitudes towards these subjects, have largely been ignored. As a result, readers of Blake's poems have unwittingly inherited and accepted the attitudes towards animals that were apparent in the eighteenth century. It should be recalled that during this period, the writers and thinkers of the Enlightenment saw themselves as casting off the inherited 'darkness' and ignorance of preceding centuries and forging ahead into a new age that was characterised by the dominance of reason, science, and respect for humanity (Kitson 35). It was during the Enlightenment too that the great endeavour to collect and systematise all knowledge culminated in the project of the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772) which allowed for the codification and systematization of nature (ibid 35).

As we have seen, the views about Blake's animal symbols which were perpetuated by twentieth century critics remained unchallenged until the advent of recent studies which have approached literary works from a multitude of 'animal studies' perspectives. These new shifts in thinking have in turn facilitated a shift in the manner in which animals are viewed, but just like any other literary perspective; they too are limited because their ambitions often supersede the framework around which their theories are built.

As discussed, Blake did not look to nature to find spiritual communion with God or even with higher "Innocence". His treatment of nature, and indeed, of animals, seems to deal only with the relationship between humans and nature in a peripheral way – and the relationship seems to be a fundamentally complex and even troubled one. Rod Preece contends that in order to determine the 'proper' human relationship to nature we need look no further than the individualistic and communitarian messages we find in Blake's poetry (*Brute Souls, Happy Beasts and Evolution* 275). He uses the following example from *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* to illustrate this point:

“And trees & birds & beasts & men behold their eternal joy.
“Arise, you little glancing wings, and sing your infant joy!
“Arise and drink your bliss, for every thing that lives is holy!” (8:8-10)
(Blake 195)

What Preece ignores though is that these utterances are in fact part of Oothoon's lament. She is ignored by Theotormon and the only ones who hear her are the Daughters of Albion, who are merely able to "eccho back her sighs" (13). Preece also quotes the following line from *THE BOOK of THEL* to support his argument: "Every thing that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself" (3:26-27) (Blake 129). It seems that he ignores the fact that, for Thel, this assurance by the cloud is proved false by the end of the poem. Using these two examples as a base for his argument, Preece concludes that "the most significant part of Blake's message is that animals and humans alike are a part of the same fellowship of life. If animals are not entirely ends in themselves, neither are humans" (288). Preece's argument is fundamentally flawed, and his reading of these poems demonstrates precisely the dangers of extracting meaning from Blake's poetry without understanding either the context of his poetry or the context of his symbolism. The section which follows attempts to ensure that these contexts are acknowledged and accounted for.

Blake's animals as allegories and emblems

As discussed in the second section of this chapter, there has been much debate about the states of "Innocence" and of "Experience" and what they mean for particular individuals – whether adults or children – and society in general, but there has been no systematic consideration of the animals that abound in the *SONGS*, except of course for the Lamb and Tyger. Even though "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" have attracted the attention of critics for decades, there has been little sustained focus on what these particular animals may represent within Blake's symbolism as a whole; the general practice instead seems to involve attributing to these two symbols profound spiritual implications and nuances without ever really examining the animals themselves. In reading Blake's "animal" poems in the *SONGS*, many (particularly twentieth-century) critics have tended to define them as pure allegories of human emotions, states of being, or as a means of understanding the divine and/or the divine nature of God. More recent studies have, however, demonstrated a significant shift away from these traditional understandings of the poems. Despite the new interest in Blake's "animal" poems, those critics who have touched on animals have not adequately contextualised them within Blake's driving ideas. While they recognise that his conceptions of animals differed significantly from those of his contemporaries, they often fail

to account for why this is. Though critics regularly allude to Blake's use of allegory and fable, they generally fail to examine Blake's peculiar definitions and usage of them.

In order to illustrate the differing views on Blake's animal poems, the arguments of two critics in particular need to be discussed. Firstly, David Punter's essay, "Blake: His Shadowy Animals", first published in 1997, attempts a substantial discussion of animals as major subjects in Blake's poetry. Prior to this, many critics viewed animals as peripheral subjects in his poems that were specific means to human ends. They were thus merely seen as representative of human concerns and not autonomous beings with their own particular concerns. Onno Oerlemans, though, seems to accept that Blake's poetical and philosophical agendas presented animals both as autonomous beings and objects of pity:

Blake's "Auguries of Innocence", "The Lamb", and "The Tyger" ... depend on reader sympathy for actual animals for their allegorical potential – that is, unlike traditional fables, these poems are literally about concern for or interest in animals, so that their hidden allegorical meanings (about matters of class or spirituality) depend on the reader seeing through or beyond a seemingly trivial interest in an animal. That these poems also reflect real concern for actual animals is so obvious that it ought to be surprising that the "sur-text" of animal sympathy has been ignored by criticism for so long ... these poems show the end of a strict formal opposition of human and animal, that concern for the animal isn't allegorical for some other kind of concern, but symbolic of it, an example of a kind of imagination that reaches out for other beings.

(*"The Animal in Allegory: From Chaucer to Grey"* 313)

Both critics' readings are severely limited and divorce the symbols from both their poetical and historical contexts in order to fit their own arguments. As the section which follows demonstrates, these contexts are integral to understanding the symbols.

As discussed in the previous chapter, allegory can be described as a narrative in which an author creates actions, agents and even settings that translate to a literal or primary level of signification (Abrams 5). However, Blake's conceptions of allegory were anything but favourable. Indeed, his understanding of both allegory and fable is particularly significant as it foregrounds the fact that in his mind these two concepts were very clearly defined, as were their parameters.

Criticism, both past and present, relating to animals in poetry has often culminated in drawing substantially on allegorical readings, and often places much emphasis on the traditions of fables and bestiaries. Of course, while these parallels cannot be denied, Blake's constructions

and symbolism both had very specific ends, with agendas that did not relate directly to any one particular tradition or ideology. Blake was also aware of the traditions pertaining to emblems. Emblems presented allegories as forms in which either an image needed textual supplementation or where the word and image each “modifies, pluralizes or contradicts the other’s message. In emblem books, motto, picture and subscript do not necessarily unify in giving a single meaning” (Tambling 62). Emblematic images usually consisted of animals, plants, humans or gods, and were characteristically both didactic and secret or riddling – so much so that without a context the picture was almost invariably meaningless (ibid 62). Emblems thus contained no universal or unchanging meanings: they were by their very nature artificial and virtually uninterpretable out of context. Blake was aware of the emblem tradition from Bunyan and crafted his book *FOR CHILDREN: THE GATES OF PARADISE* in similar fashion, even though he saw the tradition as anything but visionary for, as discussed in Chapter One, Blake saw allegory as falsifying, reliant on memory and embodying constraining and often contradictory moral virtues (ibid 73-74).

Blake would also have been aware of the contemporary tradition that saw animals used in various forms of political prose to represent disenfranchised people – in both their angry and destructive character as well as their passive, oppressed one (Kenyon Jones *Kindred Brutes* 46). The use of the tiger as an example of a politicised emblem was acutely apparent in the British newspaper reports of the French Revolution. The London *Times* of 7 January 1792 reported that the French people were “loose from all restraints, and, in many instances, more vicious than wolves and tigers.” The British diplomatic dispatch continued to associate the *san-culottes* with the ferociousness of tigers during the Terror of 1792-1793, with the September massacres organised by “tribunals of tigers.” Another infamous example is that of Jean-Paul Marat, whose eyes were said to have “resembled those of the tyger cat” ... with “a kind of ferociousness in his looks that correspond with the savage fierceness of that animal” (ibid 46)

Thus, attempts to examine Blake’s symbols in isolation nearly always misrepresent his purpose and the co-existent multiplicity of possible interpretations. David Punter, for example, argues that the *SONGS* are:

... places inhabited by animals: by, perhaps, a world of animals particular to innocence – the lamb, the emmet, the glow-worm, the beetle, the wild birds, the sparrow, the robin, the skylark and thrush ... and also a world of animals particular to experience – the invisible worm, the tyger, the caterpillar and fly, the

raven. There are also animals who appear more strangely located – in the realm of innocence there are beasts of prey, the lion, leopards, tygers again, the lioness; the realm of experience has its own transmutation of the fly, its own curious transformation of the horned but humble sheep.

(227)

In merely listing the animal symbols that appear in the *SONGS*, Punter does not achieve much. He offers no explanation of why those particular symbols were chosen nor does he attempt to contextualise them within Blake's oeuvre. In attempting to determine why Blake utilised these particular animals as the chosen vehicles for symbolic meaning within the *SONGS*, it is also imperative that the parallels and differences in his other poems be examined. To this end too, the key facets outlined in Chapter One need to be recalled, namely: 1) for Blake, the imagination is the sovereign faculty, and one that enables us to move beyond a circumscribed reality in order to attain new knowledge, so his use of symbols and symbolism is unique and not bound by tradition; 2) Blake believed that all of the senses as well as the imagination need to be actively involved in the way in which we engage with the world, and this is reflected in the way he shapes his symbols and imbues them with particular significance or meaning; and 3) Blake believed that in order to revolutionise the institutions and practices of orthodox Christianity, there had to be a recovery of the imaginative, spiritual, and mystical dimensions of religion by locating the divine within humanity by arguing for a reverence of the "*Poetic Genius*" within the human body.

In his attempt to explain Blake's animal symbols, Punter is correct in asserting that "Blake is not a poet who *describes* animals; rather, animals... are 'invoked', conjured up as icons, with their supposed attributes ready-made" (227). As pointed out in Chapter One, though, in order to create his own brand of symbolism and symbolic meaning, Blake sometimes borrowed traditional symbols – both popular and religious – and altered or recreated them to fit his own poetical agendas. Furthermore, Blake chose his symbols in accordance with whatever meaning he meant to establish at the time. He did, however, frequently change their meanings as the reasons for their particular relevance changed. The interpretations of Blake's poetry which aim to fix their symbols steadily and singly have often failed to take into account the fact that his symbols "shift only within a well-marked framework: nevertheless they do shift, and they shift in order to remain apt to whatever actual Blake then had in mind" (Bronowski 35). These shifts are

discussed in more detail in the close-readings of the poems that appear in this chapter and the next.

“The Little Girl Lost”, “The Little Girl Found”, “Night”, and “The Tyger”

The poems selected for discussion here have been grouped together in terms of their animal presences because they deal with the major predators apparent in the *SONGS*: the lion, the wolf, and the tyger. Since “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found” are a set and are logically read together, they are discussed in a separate sub-section below. The other two poems follow in a manner that link and assimilate the discussion of their key themes.

“The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found”

Although “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found” have been interpreted in a multiplicity of ways by critics, and include readings which emphasise allegorical, mythological, and archetypal approaches, they seem to defy a clear and definitive explanation. Nelson Hilton argues that:

[t]he two poems seem obviously allegorical, but of what? The absence of compelling interpretations – invocations of the soul’s journey, the myth of Persephone, and female adolescence notwithstanding – suggests that the text may be a failure of obscurity.

(107)

Any one interpretation seems to be limited, for Blake appears to be utilising several mythological archetypes in conjunction with his own symbolism. The myths of Persephone and Psyche probably inform the two poems, as do notions of sexual maturation and spiritual initiation. Taking these interpretations into account, I attempt to locate and explain the poems within Blake’s symbolism and religious attitudes.

The framing vision, which forms the subject of the first two stanzas of “The Little Girl Lost” (Blake 112), opens with “the earth” (3). Although “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found” were originally included in the *SONGS of Innocence*, they were later transferred to the *Songs of Experience*, which seems to suggest that the poems may share a common theme

with the “Introduction” and “Earth’s Answer” (*Songs of Experience*) (Blake 210-211). This raises several questions: firstly, is Lyca’s mother “the earth”? Secondly, is this the same earth portrayed in the “Introduction” and “Earth’s Answer” and, if so, is Lyca’s father the “[s]elfish father of men” described in “Earth’s Answer” (11)? If he is, is this why the lion is entrusted with Lyca and why she is separated from her parents by the beasts of prey? Does the prophecy about the earth in “The Little Girl Lost” foreshadow Lyca’s spiritual journey and her potential to synthesise the states of “Innocence and “Experience” so that she can enter a spiritual Eden – the “garden mild” (8) named in the vision? There are no easy answers to these questions, and in considering them it is imperative to separate Lyca’s perception from that of the obviously “experienced” speaker, and the speaker’s perception of Lyca’s situation needs to be scrutinised. As was pointed out earlier, the perception of “experienced” speakers is frequently limited, uncritical, and lacking in awareness. In the case of “The Little Girl Lost”, though, the speaker’s view of Lyca’s parents seems to be corroborated by Lyca.

In “The Little Girl Lost”, Lyca acknowledges that she is “[l]ost in desert wild” (21) but is less distressed by the prospect of being alone in a hostile environment than she is by the thought of her weeping parents. Her parents have not come to terms with her disappearance and continue to search for a child who, it seems, is beyond their reach, both physically and spiritually. The parents’ distress thus has to be understood in terms of their limited vision (Chayes 74). Their incessant worry is itself the “[f]rowning, frowning night” (29) (Blake 113) that prevents Lyca from finding her way. One possible allusion here is to the Desert Fathers and their sojourns into the wilderness to honour the time Jesus spent there. The aim of these ascetics was to battle the temptations of the devil and establish a peaceful world – a sharp contrast to the urban environment they had escaped (Webb 30). These individuals were supposedly fed by birds and animals, thus mirroring Elijah following God’s command to flee into the wilderness and being fed by ravens. The Desert Fathers’ ability to tame and coexist with nature purportedly demonstrated a unique type of holiness (ibid 31). Lyca, it seems, embodies all the qualities most valued by the ascetics – not only has she managed to tame the animals which surround her, and thus establish an abiding peaceful truce, but she also journeys into the wilds in order to cast off her old identity and enter into some kind of spiritual union – whether with some divine being or merely with the two states of being or consciousness that appear at odds within her.

What is made clear, though, is that one of the aspects tying Lyca to the physical realm is her relationship with her parents, so that their attachment to her, and her attachment to them and to the physical world become temptations from which she must escape. The reference to herself in the third person in stanzas five to seven suggests that there has been a division between the “little child” (22) (Blake 112) Lyca’s parents conceive her as, and which she is attempting to cast off and lose in the “desart”, and the new state of being which she attempts to initiate into the “garden mild” (8). Lyca is arrested in the transitional phase of a metamorphosis but what precisely constitutes the new state of being is unclear. The transition from “Innocence” to “Experience” may be a possibility, but the mythological and prophetic aspects of the poem render this kind of reading too simplistic. Whatever the nature of this transition, it seems that Lyca has entered the “desart” because she is aware of the need to be initiated into a new state of being, but she is “lost” at this critical juncture because of her parents’ insistent worry, and not because she has doubts and fears of her own. In Lyca’s case it seems that her becoming “lost” is equated with some form of doubt, if not guilt, about leaving her parents and her previous state of existence behind. The period of doubt passes, and in her succumbing to sleep, Lyca’s metamorphosis begins.

The expected transition is initiated when “the beasts of prey” emerge from their “caverns” (34-35) to convey Lyca to the caves where her transformation will apparently take place. The acts of these beasts accentuate a sensual dimension of the poem: the lion licks her “bosom” (45) and the lioness loosens her “slender dress” (50), so that she is conveyed to the caves naked. This highlights a sense of vulnerability on Lyca’s part, especially since the intentions of the animals are unknown. The vulnerable and compromising situation Lyca finds herself in has led critics like D.G. Gillham and Stanley Gardner to argue that the poem is primarily an allegorical account of the transition from childhood to puberty and the subsequent separation of the child from her parents as she moves into the realm of awakened sexuality. Gillham argues that the animals in the poems represent ‘the passions’ and claims that “we may make of them what we like, and Blake awards them dignity, simplicity and a touching readiness to be compassionate” (145). This reading is, however, rather limited. Indeed, the focus on sexuality distracts from the spiritual dimension of the poem – and this sort of separation of body and soul was exactly what Blake argued against throughout his oeuvre. The animals cannot be simply equated with passions for their purposes in these two poems are complex, varied, and

nuanced. They need to be examined in relation not only to Blake's poems, but in the context of how eighteenth-century conceptions of animals influenced Blake.

Although the intentions of the animals are unknown when they are introduced in stanza nine, it soon becomes apparent that the lion is a benevolent and protective paternal and God-like figure, for he is described as "kingly" (37) and presides over "hallow'd ground" (40). This draws on the lion's reputation for clemency and magnanimity in keeping with the beliefs inherited from the bestiary tradition³. The lion is often portrayed as the protector of the lamb, and the figure in the Lyca poems shares many of the qualities embodied by the lion in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, where Una's companion and protector is a similarly noble and courageous beast⁴.

Despite the fact that the figure has the potential for ferocity, Blake's lion, like that of Spenser, is usually portrayed in a protective role, especially with regard to children. Indeed, the combination of ferocity and gentleness is also evident in *THE FOUR ZOAS*, where:

...from his mountains high
The lion of terror shall come down, & bending his bright mane
And couching at their side, shall eat from the curl'd boy's white lap
His golden food, and in the evening sleep before the door.
(ix: 705-708) (Blake 376)

The lion also came to be associated with the figure of Christ, and in both heraldry and Christian art the lion appeared at the feet of martyrs. In "The Little Girl Lost" the lion's God-like nature is emphasised by allusions to Christ: his "ruby tears" (48) are symbolic of Christ's blood and sacrifice. The lion in this poem also appears to be linked to the lion in "Night" (Blake 118-119), who is a protector of "new worlds" (32), as well as the guard of the "lamb" (41). In "The Little Girl Lost" the lion's tears also allude to the possibility that he empathises with the sleeping child (who could represent some sort of martyr figure). The lion's function, and that of the lioness, is the adoption of a parental role or guardianship in lieu of Lyca's human parents, who are unable to induct her into the realm of the spiritual and physical "wilderness" she finds herself in.

³ Once again, though, this symbol does not remain static throughout Blake's oeuvre: in "Gwin, King of Norway", we learn that like tigers and wolves, lions too roar abroad as they seek "their nightly food" (19-20) (Blake 11) and in *MILTON*, Satan howls like "a lion round his prey" (Book II, 39: 21) (Blake 531).

⁴ Indeed, Blake himself seems to have shared a favourable view of the animal, for, in a letter to William Haley, dated 25 April 1805, he identifies the lion as one of "the most eminent among animals" (859).

The implementation of the Game Laws, the privatisation of land, and urban expansion meant that the concept of the “wilderness” was becoming something foreign to thousands of British people who had migrated from the countryside into the ever-expanding towns. By the eighteenth century, Great Britain had seen the mass extinction of several species that had once been prevalent, including the bear, beaver, boar, and wolf. The advancements in agriculture had begun to take their toll on the natural environment, and the extinction of nearly all of Britain’s major predators meant that livestock could occupy vast tracts of land. Truly “wild” places were becoming rare. Blake may have been alluding to these factors when he wrote about the “wilderness”, but he would also have been alluding to those of the Biblical tradition and, more specifically, to that of the sojourn. After the Fall, humankind was set adrift in a spiritual wilderness where no real form of kinship with animals under a merciful God existed. Lyca’s journey into both the spiritual and physical “wilderness”, as well as that of her parents’, mirror those of the prophets, the Desert Fathers, and even Christ himself in various ways. Perhaps most importantly though, we need to consider Blake’s own view of the “wilderness”: whilst it is an important motif in his poetry, he does not derive the same sense of sanctity from it that many of his Romantic counterparts would later claim to. Instead of nature representing the sublime which fed the imagination, the reverse was true for Blake – who saw the Imagination as Sublime and nature as its product.

In effect, the child has to be lost to her parents in order to be found by the benevolent lions that are able to introduce her to a new state of being. Northrop Frye argues that, for Blake, the biblical account of the Fall actually represented a metaphorical fall in humanity’s mental and imaginative faculties and therefore saw a diminishment in their intrinsically divine nature (41). Since Blake saw all reality as mental, he believed that the fall and the creation of the physical world coincided and constituted the same event. Therefore, Blake’s view of the Last Judgement seems to indicate that “the birth and resurrection of Christ are not the equal and opposite exhalations of the theosophists but progressive stages in the life of man” (Erdman 178), a notion which appears to be made explicit in *THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL*:

If thou humblest thyself, thou humblest me:
Thou also dwelst in Eternity.
Thou art a Man, God is no more,
Thine own Humanity learn to Adore

And thy Revenge Abroad display
In terrors at the Last Judgment day.

(copy c 39-44) (Blake 751)

Irene Chayes argues that the lion and other beasts of prey also represent part of the violence of the Last Judgment and are a “last manifestation of ... power, including the human passions, that is also the first manifestation of divine power and is indispensable to a return to the state of Eden” (70). This kind of reading suggests that animals can possibly represent on-going psychological impulses rather than allegorical states or entities. Indeed, in *Jerusalem*, we see “Living Creatures” (iv, 98:42), including the Lion and Tyger “Humanize / In the Forgiveness of Sins” (iv, 98: 44-45) (Blake 746).

In “The Little Girl Lost”, the concept of Lyca undergoing a transition which may very well lead to a return to the state of Eden is supported by images of “caverns” (35) and “caves” (52), which are symbolic of rebirth as there are parallels between the symbols of cave and womb. The child is brought to the caves so that she can undergo the process of transition from one state of being to another, and is protected by benevolent spiritual forces embodied in the animals. In “Night” (Blake 118-119) we are told that “angels bright” (12) “visit caves of every beast” (19) and a similar idea seems to be presented in “The Little Girl Found” where the lion is transformed into a “[s]pirit arm’d in gold” (36).

In “The Little Girl Found” the state of being lost as envisaged by Lyca’s parents reflects their fears about their daughter as well as their states of being: as adults in the realm of “Experience”, their fear for their child is linked to their desire to control her. The parental wish to control the direction of their child’s emotions is understandable, but if they succeed in maintaining their hold on her, it would only inhibit her (Gillham *Blake’s Contrary States* 146). Lyca’s parents imagine that she is unprotected and bereft in what they perceive to be a dangerous environment, and “dream they see their child / [s]tarv’d in desert wild” (11-12) (Blake 114). This “fancied image” (14) proves to be as misleading as the will-o’-the-wisp in “The Little Boy Lost”, and as they imagine that Lyca is “[f]amished, weeping, [and] weak” (15), they are led into a state of what they perceive to be deeper “lostness”.

It is the parents’ encounter with the lion and his subsequent transformation into a “[s]pirit arm’d in gold” (36) that finally convince them that their child is safe. Thus, it is only when the parents alter their perception by looking beyond “Experience” and applying the perception that

the “*Poetic Genius*” affords that their initial vision of the lion is transformed. Although the divine nature of this ethereal vision is difficult to decipher, the point here seems to be that the parents have to see and understand what the lion represents on their own terms, so that their inner vision creates the qualities of the lion.

These two poems are thus grounded in positive assumptions about individual choice (Cox 106). In changing their perspectives of what Lyca’s state of “lostness” entails, her parents are restored not to a state of child-like “Innocence”, but to a kind of state that incorporates both “Innocence” and “Experience” in some kind of balance, and in this there seems to be the suggestion that this is a possibility for all humans. By the end of the second poem there is a sense that the vision of the “desart wild” (7) becoming a “garden mild” (8) envisaged in the first poem has become a reality, and that Lyca’s parents are able to harmonise their existence in the “lonely dell” (50) with the predatory animals that inhabit it. The kind of harmony apparent here is not a universal truth: had Lyca’s parents resembled the tyrannical father in “A Little Girl Lost” whose “loving look” (27) “all her tender limbs with terror shook” (29), the consequences for Lyca may have resulted in those more closely aligned to Hela’s experience in *Tiriel*: “The howling maiden led her father, where wild beasts resort, / Hoping to end her woes; but from her cries the tygers fled” (16-17) (Blake 109).

It is therefore imperative that we recognise that the imagery of the last stanza of “The Little Girl Lost” is ambiguous. We hear only the speaker’s version of events, and, as mentioned previously, speakers who inhabit the world of “Experience” sometimes offer uncritical perspectives; hence, perhaps, the poem’s ending is more ominous than the speaker realises. The speaker unquestioningly accepts that “the vision” (46) that leads the parents to Lyca has not harmed her and that she is indeed asleep and not dead. S/he tells us that the parents find “their sleeping child / Among tygers wild” (47-48) a fact which, according to Blake’s symbolism, is particularly significant for “tygers” are frequently represented as symbols of wrath, destruction, and potentially dangerous revolutionary energies. As demonstrated in the previous section, these potentially dangerous and revolutionary energies included those of the French Revolution. However, the eighteenth century saw various other types of revolutionary energies erupt all over England too. EP Thompson and Jonathan Mee have identified and catalogued the numerous movements that sprang up in response to what was viewed as Enlightenment ideals. Indeed, in the 1780s and 1790s “there was something like an explosion of anti-rationalism, taking the forms

of illuminism, masonic rituals, animal magnetism, millenarian speculation, astrology (and even a small revival in alchemy), and of mystic and Swedenborgian circles” (Thompson xviii-xix).

The “tygers” are also described as “wild” and thus offer a stark contrast to the tame lion. This is not to say though, that the lion is not capable of, or complicit in, violence. In *THE FOUR ZOAS* we are told that “the Lion mocks & thirsts for blood” (i: 403) (Blake 275), and in *Europe*, the figure appears to be part of the French Revolution’s wrath and bloodshed, and is accompanied by its oft-cited ferocious counterpart, the tiger:

The sun glow’d fiery red!
The furious terrors flew around
On golden chariots raging with red wheels dropping with blood!
The Lions lash their wrathful tails!
The Tigers couch upon the prey & suck the ruddy tide.

(15: 3-7) (Blake 245)

In “The Little Girl Lost”, though, the lion is depicted as sympathetic and gentle, and his potential for ferocity does not seem apparent here. It is significant too that the leopards and tygers are presented as playful, and could also possibly be standing guard with the lion whilst Lyca sleeps:

Sleeping Lyca lay
While the beasts of prey,
Come from caverns deep,
View’d the maid asleep.

The kingly lion stood
And the virgin view’d,
Then he gambol’d round
O’er the hallow’d ground.

Leopards, tygers play
Round her as she lay,
While the lion old
Bow’d his mane of gold.

(32-44) (Blake 113)

The role of the lion in these stanzas seems to indicate that he is Lyca’s protector, and his presence here appears to support the notion that lions could tame leopards – a belief that had been held in medieval times. Indeed, according to the traditions of the beast epics, the lion was

the only one of the big cats to be viewed in such a favourable way – with the tiger generally regarded as the personification of ferocity and cruelty (this will be examined more closely when “The Tyger” is discussed later in the chapter). The leopard and jaguar were also frequently viewed negatively, and portrayed as stealthy and skilled killers. In Christian art, the leopard was representative of perseverance in evil. The animals chosen in the poem are also symbolic when considered in relation to Dante’s *Inferno*, for there a lion, wolf, and leopard prevent the pilgrim from passing by them and force him onto another path – a path of fruitful trial, as it were, en route to spiritual enlightenment.

These points certainly appear to apply to Lyca’s parents, as we see them struggle to come to terms with their daughter and her induction into what may be some sort of spiritual enlightenment that is beyond their reach since they have closed themselves off from it. This could perhaps account for the fact that the dell where the parents are eventually left to dwell in is “lonely” (50). Since we are given only the speaker’s positive version of events, we are left to assume the dell is lonely because only a few individuals ever achieve the synthesis of “Innocence” and “Experience” that Lyca and her parents apparently have. Gillham argues that the contentment the parents find amongst the beasts signals that they have come to terms with the “animal” or “instinctive” part of themselves, and presumably, of their daughter (*Blake’s Contrary States* 143). This interpretation is limited because it does not allow for the complexity of Blake’s symbolism. As evinced in the preceding discussion, the animals in his poetry serve as heraldic ciphers and do not only represent the “instinctive”, animalistic tendencies of humanity. These ciphers often represent or illustrate various forms of vigour, vitality, energy (latent or active and creative or destructive), sanctity, and wrath. Of particular relevance to these two poems are two of the “PROVERBS of HELL” in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, which approach Blake’s subversive rearticulation of the predator images: “The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity, too great for the eye of man” (7) (Plate 8) (Blake 151) and “The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction” (5) (Plate 9) (Blake 152).

There may, however, be some credibility to Gillham’s interpretation, if one considers the possible connotations suggested by Lyca’s name. As many critics have pointed out, “Lyca” is Greek for “wolf”. This is often mentioned as a particularly cryptic piece of the puzzle that is characteristic of these poems, but no really compelling interpretation of why this name was

chosen exists. One possible explanation could lie in the fact that during the Middle Ages, there was a purported spike in cases of a ‘disease’ which was termed “lycanthropy” – which apparently imbued persons with the power to transform themselves into wolves and other animals. Under this delusion, people were said to wander the through forests and deserts – much like wild wolves. Another possible association that could be applied here is that of Fenris, the bound wolf in Norse mythology⁵ who, at the end of the world, would break free and devour the sun (Chayes 70). Since we are never told what becomes of Lyca, we could possibly conclude that in some way she too devours the world she and her parents used to inhabit.

The allusions to myth and mythological archetypes seem to suggest a didactic dimension to these poems, and the underlying message appears to be that

[t]o the extent that a [human] has imagination [they] are alive, and therefore the development of the imagination is an increaser of life. It follows that restricting the imagination by turning from instead of passing through perception is a reduction of life. (Frye 55)

It can certainly be said that the benign lion’s care of the child seems to echo the psycho-mythological archetype of the orphan child abandoned in the wilderness and left to fend for herself/himself with the aid of wild animals (Chayes 67). Although Blake may well have intended to allude to this particular archetype, it is likely that he was also influenced to some degree by the reports of feral children which were widely circulated in the eighteenth century. It was during this period too that an acute interest developed in what would later be termed the “consanguinity” of humans and animals, and the supposed connections, or relatedness, between humans and animals came to be realised in the discovery of the so-called “wild boys”, the most famous of which was Peter. The discovery of “Peter the Wild Boy” near Hanover in 1726 attracted much attention in the pamphlets that circulated London. For some contemporary observers, Peter was “an animal-machine, devoid of words, divorced from acts of naming, and

⁵ Wolves were extinct in Great Britain by 1680. As determined in the first section of this chapter, Blake’s precise sources have never been identified so we do not know for certain how familiar he was with Norse mythology. However, he did illustrate some of Thomas Gray’s poems, including “The Descent of Odin. An Ode”, and in his annotations to Watson, Blake states: “Read the Edda of Iceland, the Songs of Fingal, the accounts of North American Savages (as they are call’d)” (389). Along with possible Eddic allusions to the wolf, Blake also seems to have incorporated some of those associated with the raven in his poetry. Indeed, the raven in “The Human Abstract” seems to be associated with Huginn (‘Thought’) and Muninn (‘Memory’ or ‘Mind’) – the pair of ravens who were said to be sent out at dawn to gather information about the world and whisper it to Odin. The association with Norse mythology appears to be strengthened in “A Song of Liberty” – where the poet-speaker refers to the “Priests of the Raven of dawn” (160).

accordingly without ideas. The wild boy remained locked into an unrealized state in which his essential humanity had not emerged, because of the lack of beneficial shaping influences over his raw soul” (Kemp 38). Lyca, it seems, could also be caught in a similar kind of limbo as it can be argued that, like Peter, her “essential humanity” had not yet emerged, and the “beneficial shaping influences” in her life were in fact not her parents but the animals which induct her into a new state of being.

Furthermore, the development of Lyca’s imagination, her “*Poetic Genius*”, enhances her ability to interact with the world in a creative way, allowing her to engage with life in a way that her parents cannot. It is not because they intrinsically lack imagination that the parents are restricted, but because they have repressed their “*Poetic Genius*”. Thus, what seems to be suggested is that in order to qualify for paradise, represented by the “garden mild” in the “The Little Girl Lost”, “we must perfect ourselves, transforming the desert we inhabit into a fruitful garden” (Gillham *Blake’s Contrary States* 143). That is, we must incorporate the “*Poetic Genius*” into the way in which we engage with the world and attain a balance between the states of “Experience” and “Innocence”. The possibility of this kind of balance appears to be illustrated in Lyca, for

[t]he reaffirmed prophecy, the strange actions of the animals, Lyca’s serene and confident acceptance which her parents come to share, all suggest that she has advanced further than any of the other “children” in these songs toward a resolution of the problem of “the two contrary states of the human soul.” (Chayes 69)

It can be argued that the two contrary states of “Innocence” and “Experience” are represented by the lion and wolf respectively. The lion symbolises a higher “Innocence” while the wolf embodies a ruthless, primordial state of “Experience”. It is only once some kind of symbiosis is apparent between these two states that the harmony we are led to believe is real in “The Little Girl Found” can exist. The parents have to follow the child into a state of being lost and that is where they remain, but with the new understanding that the “wolvish howl” (51) and “lion’s growl” (52) are not to be feared. Indeed, it is fear which could potentially render this Eden void, and in *King Edward the Third* it is apparent just how destructive fear is – even to those possessing “noble souls” (123) like the lion, and in this case, the wolf too: “The Wolf is hunted down by causeless fear; / The Lion flees, and fear usurps his heart” (113-114). The results

are made clear a few lines on: “If at this moment of their idle fear / The Dog doth seize the Wolf, the Forester the Lion... undone by flight / They tame submit (119-122) (Blake 24). What is apparent here is the fact that even those in possession of the state of Eden, or “organized Innocence”, can be made to submit to the limited world of “Experience”, with all its fears and doubts – and in the process they return to the cycle of the Fallen world.

“Night”

This Fallen world is apparent in “Night”, where the lion and wolf return to enmity. In the first three stanzas of the poem though, we observe only a seemingly idyllic world which supports peaceful inhabitants and harmonious relations between them. It is watched over by benevolent angels who wish to protect the beasts and birds from harm. All this dissolves in the fourth stanza, though, when destructive and malignant forces represented by the “wolves and tygers” who “howl for prey” (25) (Blake 119) are introduced. These predators appear to be particularly bloodthirsty, for even the angels are unable to “drive their thirst away” (27) and can merely “pitying stand and weep” (26). Once the wolves and tygers have destroyed the “mild” spirits, the angels then deliver them into “new worlds”, where it seems the lion of the Lyca poems waits to induct them:

And there the lion’s ruddy eyes
Shall flow with tears of gold,
And pitying the tender cries,
And walking round the fold,
Saying “Wrath, by his meekness,
“And by his health, sickness
“Is driven away
“From our immortal day. (33-40)

For Leader:

[the lion’s tears] are hard to account for. Perhaps they are attributable to the terrible fate suffered by the ‘mild spirits’ in the previous stanza? Or to the lion’s sense of shame over his own participation in their savaging? If he can only weep ‘there,’ he must have behaved quite differently on earth. (123)

He seems to have misunderstood the fact that the lion belongs only to the world into which the spirits have escaped to, and not to the world inhabited by the wolves and tygers.

Despite this potentially ominous suggestion, the lion of “Night” appears to be a protector of “Innocence” and a representative of a Christ-like, higher “Innocence” just as he was in “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found”. Indeed, his “ruddy eyes” (33) recall the “eyes of flame” and “ruby tears” (46-47) mentioned in the Lyca poems. In “Night” though, his tears are gold (34). His mane is also said to “shine like the gold” (47). The use of this colour is indicative of a divine nature and kingship; thereby cementing the notion of the lion as the king of beasts, while also connecting him to Christ as embodying the glory of God. Gold was given to Jesus to symbolize that he was the king of kings. Of particular significance in this poem is the fact that gold was also believed to be a symbol of health, for the lion explains that through his health, Jesus is able to drive sickness away (38-40).

Jesus is also able to drive away wrath “by his meekness” (37). It should be noted here that the lion has also long been associated with wrath, and in heraldic art he existed in a chronic state of dignified rage (Phipson 23). When depicted walking with his face turned towards the spectator, he was known as *lion-leopardé* – illustrating that his wrathfulness was partially subdued. In terms of Blake’s poetry though, there are many positive uses of wrath as fiery creativity or revolutionary energy. Indeed, as Plate 8 of *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* states, “[t]he wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God” (Blake 151). Thus, in “Night” the lion is certainly moved by the plight of the spirits savaged by the wolves and tygers and there is a sense that his wrath is directed at them, though like the *lion-leopardé* it is subdued for, like the wrath of the predatory animals, even his wrath is driven away by Christ’s meekness, seemingly epitomised in the “bleating lamb” (41-43). His role here is similar to the one he assumes in the Lyca poems, where he represents a benevolent and compassionate protector. Having been “wash’d in life’s river” (45), his purpose is to “guard o’er the fold” (48), thus linking him to Christ the shepherd, who also guards the “fold” (36).

In all three of the poems examined thus far, we have seen the traditional conceptions of the lion in many instances upheld by Blake (though by no means all). His reputation as the king of beasts according to the bestiary tradition has largely remained intact, as has the reverence for a stately and generous temper. Other beliefs that seem to have infiltrated Blake’s poetry include the notion that the lion never killed more than it was capable of consuming, that it did not kill for

‘sport’, and that it did not cruelly torture its prey (Ritvo 26). However, Blake’s representations extend much further than those that circulated popularly at the time. Although the influences of traditional and popular views are evident, we also see how Blake equates Christ and the Lion in unique ways so that they resemble traditional symbols but are extended into his own usages too. All three poems illustrate how they act as both conduits of Christ’s spirit and reminders of his presence and legacy in the world, illustrating that it is available to those who do not stifle their “*Poetic Genius*”.

“*The Tyger*”

The tiger, or in Blake’s spelling, ‘tyger’, enjoyed a very different reputation to that of the lion. Believed to be both threatening and dangerous, the tiger often came to symbolise all that humankind feared most in nature: savageness, cruelty, and destructiveness (Ritvo 28). The tiger’s reputation for ferocity was supported by the reports of the man-eaters in Ceylon and India, which horrified the British public (ibid 28). The consequence of eating human flesh was that the tiger came to be associated with a rebellious nature because it assumed a particularly attractive and radical reversal of roles between master and servant as an intrinsic part of its nature (ibid 29). This kind of interpretation has led critics like Christine Kenyon-Jones to contend that the poem is “poised between celebrating the energy and dreading the destructiveness of an animal that does not need to fear anything from Man...” (46).

Kenyon-Jones does, however, separate the ‘real’ animal from the symbolic or allegorical one by arguing that the French Revolution and its consequences influenced the various drafts of the poem and that this in turn influenced Blake’s illustrative representations of the tyger – which reflected alternating images of either ferocious or benign beasts. Blake’s illustrative depictions of the animal reflect a notoriously toy-like and comical specimen, seemingly diametrically opposed to the beast of his imaginings. His motives behind this kind of depiction must surely have been ironic, especially if we consider the fact that during his lifetime Blake was known primarily as a visual artist and an artisan who made his living through commercial book illustration (Haggarty and Mee *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: A Reader’s Guide to Essential Criticism* 16). The fact that the tyger’s representations shifted in response to various influences seems to indicate that the symbolic tyger was open to a number of interpretations, which never remained static. Indeed, as David Erdman argues, the illustrative renderings of the

tyger which portray a beast notoriously lacking in ferocity could demonstrate that Blake is actually “showing us the final tiger, who has accomplished his mission, [and] has even, perhaps, attained a state of organised innocence as have the adjacent lions and tigers of *The Little Girl Lost* and *The Little Girl Found* who demonstrate that “wolvish howl” and “lions’ growl” and “tygers wild” are not to be feared” (195-196).

On the whole though, the generally negative views of the tiger and its symbol dominate earlier critical responses to the poem, where most readings have assumed that the animal represents all that is dangerous, destructive, and rebellious in human nature, with the figure embodying all the qualities diametrically opposed to those evident in the Lamb. For Foster Damon, “[t]he whole poem is an extended query. Could the all-loving father be responsible for these horrors without Mercy or even Justice? Of course not. The Tyger is not the contrary of the Lamb but its negation” (414). Gillham argues that through the Lamb we see a creator who is “in sympathy with his creation, and takes on man’s nature. The mystery of the creation is not considered and God’s present love is implicitly accepted” (9). He goes on to argue that “The Tyger” and “The Lamb” ultimately present us with two different states of mind: the experienced adult and the innocent child respectively. Summerfield concludes that innocents like the Lamb are able to survive hardship and oppression (embodied in the figures of the Tyger and Wolf) because of an “intense consciousness of heavenly good and a dim consciousness of the earthly evil that this good thwarts” (57). He contends that the descent into “Experience” also recognises “God’s provision for turning evil ultimately to good” (57).

In order to gain a better understanding of the poems, though, it is essential that we consider the greater significance of the symbols in the *SONGS* as a whole. In reading these poems, it should be recalled that Blake did not attach moral values or particular significance to either of the two states of being. He did, however, recognise that the states were satires upon one another, as “Experience” illustrates the precarious naivety of “Innocence”, and “Innocence” criticises “Experience’s” various deceptions (Bloom 34). The preceding arguments all fail to take this into account and it is only really Harold Bloom’s interpretation which comes close to providing a well-rounded reading of these symbols:

The lamb is emblematic of both reality and deception in the ambiguities of merely natural innocence. In the world of Experience within *The Tyger* he would be an

object of pity. Read properly, *The Tyger* will reveal a state of being beyond either Innocence or Experience, a state where the lamb can lie down with the tiger. (35)

“The Tyger” presents the reader with a set of fourteen rhetorical questions. The speaker’s conviction also seems to grow as the poem progresses. What the speaker demonstrates in her/his false certainty, are all the limitations inherent to “Experience”. As Bloom explains: “the questioner who speaks the poem becomes more and more sure of the answer, and concurrently further and further away from the true answer. This questioner is of course not Blake; he is merely the Bard of Experience and is trapped by the limitations of Experience. But Blake is not, and the purpose of his poem is to liberate us from such limitations” (35-36). For Gillham:

The mind of the speaker is forced to explore a realm where his senses cannot assist him. He asks questions, though he cannot hope for any answers and cannot know, even, if his questions are the relevant ones. The overwhelming fact of the Tyger causes him to probe ultimate things though he can only conceive of the creator dimly, in human terms, and of the creation as the performance of an artisan of wonderful skill and strength. He knows that he cannot know – that he can only guess – and so extends his imagination to picture the process in the most lively way he can, though that picture must leave the mystery unsolved. (7)

What is made clear is that fact that this beast in all its ferocity and savageness is still part of the creation. Gillham argues that this tyger is “a clearly distinguished, vigorous and dangerous presence, vividly itself in a place that is vast, gloomy and mysterious...” (7). The wilderness represented by the forest and night represents the unimaginable and mysterious. It can be argued too that wrathfulness is demonstrated in the manner in which the tyger is created: he is “twisted” and “forged into being” (Gillham 8). The poem also examines the question of good and evil in the world as depicted in the Book of Job, with the Tyger representing Blake’s version of Behemoth and Leviathan – which Bloom refers to as “emblems of the sanctified tyranny of nature over man” (137).

Indeed, Blake’s treatment of the tyger throughout his oeuvre never deviates from its association with wrath, ferocity, darkness, and fire. In the first draft of “The Tyger”, his are “eyes of fury” (17) (Blake 172), and in the second, they reveal a “cruel fire” (6). Indeed, his wrath is also apparent in the “wild furies” from his brain (*THE FOUR ZOAS* ix: 236) (Blake

363). He is described as “glowing” (5) in the *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, and is aligned with other creatures of the night and darkness – the bat, the owl, and the “king of night” (8:5) (Blake 195). In *THE BOOK of AHANIA*, we see tygers associated with Fuzon – the last born son of Urizen, who is portrayed as the embodiment of wrath. Once he looses his tygers, it seems that he becomes an angry God, who is ultimately undone by the same wrath which allowed for his victory over his father. He is shot down by the moral law and returned to the realm of the tyger – “the edge of the forest” (44) – a “deform’d” (43) shadow of himself (Blake 251). His wrath, it seems, exceeds even that of the tyger, and his consequent crucifixion serves as a warning that unregulated wrath is ultimately destructive.

Still, the kind of blind wrath exhibited by Fuzon, if harnessed and used correctly, can serve the individual and society better than the cold, smouldering, impotent wrath embodied by Urizen, who transforms the flaming tyger into one which roams “in redounding smoke / In forests of affliction” (*THE FOUR ZOAS* vii: 9-10). Indeed, it is the restrained form of Orc that echoes the power and energy of “The Tyger” of “Experience”: he is described as an “Image of dread” (44) whose “fierce fires” (45) and “terrible wrath” (47) no other living thing can abide (Blake 321). It seems that Urizen’s tygers are those he has made cold and woeful through the moral law – the “burning rock” – Orc rages against in the deep (71) (Blake 322).

In the final draft of “The Tyger” the animal is described as “burning bright” (1) and is an obviously fearsome figure – his “symmetry” is described as “fearful” in lines 4 and 24, “deadly” in line 16, and the last line of the poem questions who “dare” frame the beast (Blake 214). There are of course obvious allusions here to Icarus: “On what wings dare he aspire?” (7), Prometheus “What the hand dare sieze [sic] the fire?” (8), and Lucifer “When the stars threw down their spears, / And water’d heaven with their tears, / Did he smile his work to see? / Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” (17-20). Gillham views the image of the stars negatively:

Even the stars, first of all created things, having knowledge that must be superhuman – even they are struck with grief and horror when they first view this new creature; they ‘water heaven with their tears’ and, unable to understand the purpose of the creator, ‘throw down their spears’ in astonishment and despair. (7)

These lines should be compared to Urizen’s lament in *THE FOUR ZOAS*: “The stars threw down their spears and fled naked away / We fell” (v, 64: 27-28), which allude to the apocalyptic fall of the stars in Revelation 6:13 :“and the stars of the sky fell to the earth”, Revelation 12:4: “[the

red dragon's] tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth", and Daniel 8:10, which refers to Daniel's vision of the ram and goat: the horn he sees grows "up to the host of heaven and [causes] some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it [tramples] them down."

The allusions to the figures of Prometheus, Icarus, and Lucifer could possibly indicate that, like them, an imminent fall from grace is likely for the tyger. Another possible interpretation is that for all his revolutionary and dangerous energy, the tyger's hubris means that his domain is, and always will be, the "forests of the night" – a vast, mysterious, and perhaps even liminal space. There are also many allusions to Hephaestus: his characteristic "hammer", "chain", (13) "furnace" (14) and "anvil" (15) are all present in the poem, as is an allusion to his being hurled from Olympus – an incident which echoes Milton's description in *Paradise Lost*: "Sheer o'er the crystal battlements; from morn / To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve, / A summer's day; and with the setting sun / Dropped from the zenith like a falling star" (1: 742-745) (Milton 374).

For David Punter:

To become tyger is to become shape and shadow, stripe and striation; to sense, with senses which may themselves not be human, that all this business of differentiation, which is in the end built upon the human desire for individuation, is suspect; that at the crucial moment it may be that we dissolve into the not-human, the less-than-human which is also more-than-human; just as the notions of progression or narrative in this poem are dissolved against a background of stasis, a sense of what has always been there, what will always be there, at the limits of perception, the tyger stalking out of or along the borders of the forest, our "self" seeking to de-merge with the shadow, seeking to deny its oneness with shadow, its stripedness.

(Blake's Shadowy Animals 234)

What this limited perspective fails to take into account is that Blake was not concerned with becoming, or espousing any of the characteristics of, the tyger. He was concerned with human potential and the potential for divinity within humanity – to Blake, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, there is nothing "more" than human. The tyger is thus a cipher for the revolutionary and potentially destructive energies that reside in both the individual and society. In addition, Blake's understanding of the senses was very specific, and he believed that they need to be actively

engaged with the imagination to be truly useful methods of comprehending the world. For him, it was imperative that we do not deny or repress any part of ourselves – and this is plainly stated in the PROVERBS of HELL, where the poet-speaker declares “sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires” (*THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* 10:7) (Blake 152). The poem’s progression is amply demonstrated by the manner in which the tyger’s description develops – his image is increasingly powerfully evoked, with a possible suggestively sinister undertone, as the narrative unfolds.

Of course, there are limits to the kind of impassioned and violent wrath the tyger represents. The energy and promise of revolution that is so often associated with the figure are undoubtedly useful, and often necessary to bring about change, but they ultimately need to be replaced by a more moderate and sustainable form of spiritual wrath. The tyger does not, and apparently cannot, “burn bright” if the lion, the embodiment of spiritual wrath, rages in flames, and he remains in “redounding smoke” instead (*THE FOUR ZOAS* viii (b): 110-111) (Blake 335) – his role in war and revolution seemingly fulfilled. The lion, like Christ, will then make war in righteousness (Revelation 19:11).

Although the aforementioned allusions to the tyger are all negative ones, there are some positive allusions too. Frye established that Blake was “among the first of European idealists able to link his own tradition of thought with the Bhagavadgita” (173). This influence is certainly apparent in the poem. Fire in this tradition is not destructive but sacred – the brāhmanas attained heaven by offering animals to the sacred fire. The sacrificed animal was then granted a human life immediately without having to endure a gradual advancement through the cycle of reincarnation. Thus, if the intended association here is with sacred fire, then we see the tyger in a kind of liminal state between one world, or state, and the next – a being that is to undergo a metamorphosis similar to Lyca’s.

It is in the *Bhagavad-Gita* too that we see Lord Krishna insist that the sacred seat for meditation is upon a tiger skin – which in turn ensured that one was positioned firmly in the seat controlling the mind and the activities of the senses thus ensuring complete focus. Indeed, in *Milton*, we see the “sons & daughters of Luvah being laid on “skins of Tygers & of the spotted Leopard & the Wild Ass / Till they revive” (i 27:3-6) (Blake 513). In Hindu scripture, meditating upon a tiger skin allowed the mind to be purified and allowed for the unification of the individual consciousness and the Ultimate Consciousness. In Blake’s terms this could be translated into the

doorway of the five senses leading to the consciousness of the visionary who is in complete possession of the “*Poetic Genius*”. The concepts of the individual and universal imaginative or creative fire, which is also sacred, are thus introduced. As Frye explains, “fire destroys the solid form of nature, and those who have believed nature to be solid will find themselves in a lake of fire at the Dies Irae. But the imagination cannot be consumed by fire, for it is fire; the burning bush of God which never exhausts its material. It is fire that ‘delights in its form’” (196).

What this means essentially, is that, for Blake, the “*Poetic Genius*” provides the ultimate link with divinity, and this link is accessible to humankind. As we are constantly engaged with, and confronted by, the Last Judgement and the passage between the states of “Innocence” and “Experience”, our understanding of that divinity shifts in response to our perceptions. This is precisely why Nelson Hilton argues that “in *The Tyger*, if we answer, we become like God” (110), because the tiger effectively becomes a conduit through which we view and assess our own humanity and divinity. In choosing animal symbols to represent key themes throughout his oeuvre, Blake drew on some familiar associations and contemporary attitudes towards animals, but ultimately, his aim in employing these symbols was not to offer a critique of society’s attitudes to animals. Animals thus come to represent various conflicts in Blake’s own mythology and also, more broadly, represent the conflict between the ideals of the Enlightenment and those of the burgeoning Romantic movement but do not reflect his poetical agenda. The predatory animals of the *SONGS* are, therefore, not reflections of “real” animals, but rather heraldic ciphers which fulfil a multitude of shifting roles within his oeuvre. Indeed, as Jonathan Mee expands: “Blake’s poetry in the 1790s insists on the possibility of a renewal of prophetic inspiration whether in individuals or communities. His belief that ‘Every Honest man is a Prophet’ implies that fragments of Eternity remain universally available.” (*Dangerous Enthusiasm* 183). These “fragments of Eternity” are represented by the predators in the *SONGS*, and the complex dichotomies played out by Blake’s animal symbols are further explored in another of his poems written in the 1790s: *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*. The next chapter thus aims to identify and analyse the “fragments of Eternity” represented by the contraries of “Good” and “Evil” and “Energy” and “Reason” embodied by the poem’s animal symbols.

Chapter Three

“Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.”

Animals as representatives of ‘Energy’ and ‘Reason’ in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*

This chapter examines how, and why, animals are often represented as contraries in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*. More specifically, the groupings of animal symbols according to Blake’s contraries of “Energy” and “Reason” will be explored. The poem demonstrates his careful selection and employment of symbols through the establishment of dualisms, as well as pairings at appropriate points of intersection. Whilst Blake frequently employs symbols in unique ways, he may have been influenced by a broader social influence. As Christine Kenyon-Jones explains:

The Romantic era [saw] a new emphasis on nature, [and debates were] intensely articulated both about animals’ difference from human beings and also about their similarity. In the late-eighteenth century, animals came to be seen as different in that they exist as independent entities from humankind, rather than its mere tools or adjuncts; but they were also perceived as similar, in so far as they have the ability to behave, to feel and perhaps to think like human beings.

(*Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-Period Writing* 2).

Before these notions are discussed further, the context of the poem needs to be considered.

The context of *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*

The opposition between “Energy” and “Reason” is present in one way or another throughout Blake’s oeuvre, but is most clearly articulated in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, which was commenced in 1790. Written against a backdrop of war and revolution, it is here that we see Blake’s frustration with society and religion expressed in his satirical attack on the established authority of church and state. A suspicion of certain facets of natural science and philosophy is also evident throughout the poem.

The parodic target of *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* is Emanuel Swedenborg’s visionary writing, particularly *Heaven and Hell*, first published in English in 1784. This treatise divides the concepts of “good” and “evil” into opposed worlds, where their balance is regulated only by God. Blake rejected this notion and created a universe

where “good” and “evil” are artificial signifiers containing no moral significance. In particular, he was reacting to what he perceived as the priestly oppressiveness and increasing conservatism, both theological and political, of Swedenborg’s New Jerusalem Church, which were propped up by conventional conceptions of “good” and “evil” (Schock 45). In response, Blake reconceptualised this limited and limiting universe by offering one where imagination, or “Energy”, was a legitimate contender for interpreting the world. Blake’s dichotomy sees Heaven, the “good”, and its angelic emissaries as allied to both the Established and New Jerusalem Churches and their principles. Hell, representative of “evil” and populated by devils, represents originality, revolution, and a rejection of orthodoxy. Indeed, in Plate 22, the poet attacks Swedenborg, who “has written all the old falshoods”, because “He conversed with Angels who are all religious, & conversed not with Devils who all hate religion” (*THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* Blake 157). As Jon Mee expands: “Swedenborg is effectively impugned here for closing himself off from the collision of mind with mind. The attempt to limit Swedenborgian heterodoxy into the institutionalised orthodoxy of the New Jerusalem Church may well have contributed to the disillusionment expressed in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*” (“A Little Less Conversation, A Little More Action” 126).

Thus, many of the views expressed in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* are a continuation of those in the earlier manifestoes, *ALL RELIGIONS are ONE* and *THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION*. However, the poem contains a more sustained and detailed criticism of religion and its constraining and prohibitive dualisms. Although Blake recognised that duality was a necessary part of human existence, he reiterates that the notion of attaching moral values to dualisms is fundamentally flawed. In Plate 3, the poet-speaker declares that:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
 From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil.
 Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.
 Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.

(*THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* Blake 149)

What the poet is rejecting here is the notion that an absolute divide exists between the body and the soul: a notion that was generally accepted and expounded in the teachings of the Established Church. Blake believed that unless our senses are actively engaged in the perception of the world, and also used in conjunction with the “*Poetic Genius*”, they are both

limited and limiting. In the context of *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, “Energy” appears to be the product of the “*Poetic Genius*” used in conjunction with the senses, or what Martin Nurmi refers to as “spiritual sensation” – which forms one of its main themes, along with the “doctrine of contraries” (544). The poet-speaker expands on this in Plate 4, “The voice of the Devil”, where he argues the following:

All bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors:

1. That Man has two real existing principles: Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body; & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True:

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
3. Energy is Eternal Delight (Blake 149).

Allusions to Blake's antinomian Christian commitment are also evident. Critics such as E P Thompson, A L Morton, and Robert Rix have documented a number of antinomian beliefs which may have influenced him, namely: the notion that those destined to be saved could be guided by conscience rather than by the moral law; a belief in the universality of divine mercy (and thus a perceived light-heartedness towards sin); and the juxtaposition between the gospel of Christ and the moral law (the law of Moses contained in the Ten Commandments). Essentially, “[t]he Ten Commandments and the Gospel of Jesus are directly opposed to each other: the first is a code of repression and prohibition, the second a gospel of forgiveness and love” (Thompson 14). Blake certainly adopts this juxtaposition in his own work and the opposition between the Moral Law and the Gospel of Jesus is made explicit in “A Memorable Fancy” of Plates 22-24, where the Devil declares that “no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse not from rules” (Blake 158).

Indeed, the “doctrine of contraries” (Nurmi 544) demonstrates that each contrary needs to be scrutinised, and that, in order to recognise “Energy”, we need to look beyond the “bound or outward circumference” of “Reason” (Blake 149). Blake thus inverts the dualisms present in *Heaven and Hell* by identifying hell with the body and the inner world of spiritual energy, while heaven is associated with the sterile outward bound of reason (Schock 47). The traditionally accepted concepts of “heaven”, “hell”, “good”, and “evil” are thus turned on

their heads and satirised, critiqued, and presented as artificial and arbitrary signifiers in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*. Inasmuch as an unthinking society influenced by the stale teachings of Swedenborg and the Established Church is criticised in the poem, language is also ridiculed for perpetuating ideals that are ultimately destructive to the “*Poetic Genius*”. As Northrop Frye points out, the term ‘hell’ has two meanings, one which is real, and the other ironic: for Blake, the real hell exists in the human mind and “exists because it is part of ‘necessity’. The more degenerate the society, the more obvious this alliance of moral good and evil against the power of genius becomes” (198).

In *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, “Reason” and “Energy”, signify the desire for order and the desire for creation respectively, but “Reason” also indicates an ideal form of the concept which attempts to supply the order raw, unregulated energy lacks (Nurmi 557). In “A Memorable Fancy” of plates 6-7, the poet-speaker is “delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity” (Blake 150). The angels here are envoys of “Reason”, and represent the regulating force attempting to curb the exuberance “Energy” is afforded by the “*Poetic Genius*”. Their limited vision, and by extension, the limited vision of “heaven”, is also highlighted: instead of seeing “the enjoyments of Genius” they see only “torment and insanity” (ibid 150). To counter this, the poet-speaker records the “PROVERBS of HELL” which “show the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments” (ibid 150). Overall, it is by employing the imaginative and transformative powers of the “*Poetic Genius*” that the contraries act upon each other in a complementary manner (Nurmi 557), since the ultimate goal in the marriage of contraries is progression. For Harold Bloom, that progression involves becoming more human, with the ultimate product being the marriage of all contraries without any form of reconciliation (66). Haggarty and Mee have another interpretation, however:

The kind of conflict that Blake celebrates can be only precariously sustained. Contraries carry with them the risk of irreconcilable difference, and might threaten not just to disrupt progression, but also to prevent transaction of any kind. Progression, to fuel its forward march, might call for contrariness to be smoothed over or transcended, or even for differences coercively to be cancelled out (2).

The validity of this assessment cannot be ignored, for, as evinced throughout Blake’s oeuvre, any kind of simplistic, circumscribed reality needs to be transcended in order to attain new knowledge.

Blake would have recognised the precarious nature of the contraries he paired in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, and it is evident in the animal symbols employed. They represent not only the contraries themselves, but also their various conflicts, disruptions, and parallels. Even though animal symbols are abundantly used throughout the poem, critics have skirted the possible interpretations they offer. A case in point is Harold Bloom's analysis:

The Proverbs resolve themselves into four overlapping groups, defined by dominant patterns of imagery. One is apocalyptic and largely sexual in emphasis, and includes images of ploughing and harvest, water and wine, prayer and praise, baptism and intercourse. Another deals with excess and frustration, and includes proverbs dealing with strength and weakness, desire and restraint, body and soul, wisdom and foolishness. A third group, more overtly antinomian, emphasizes animal powers, and organizes itself about the volumes of violence, revenge, law, and religion. The fourth and largest category is dominated by images of perception, and finds its subject matter in problems of time and eternity, space and form, art and nature, cycles and divisions, and in comparisons between the elements and man's body. (Bloom 68-69)

This superficial attempt to categorise the symbols without exploring their possible meanings is typical in Blake criticism and no comprehensive study of how, and why, these symbols should be considered in their own right exists. This chapter attempts to explain the significance of the most prominent animal symbols and advance reasons for their repeated use in the poem whilst contextualising them both within Blake's oeuvre and the broader context of eighteenth-century attitudes towards animals.

'Spiritual Life' vs 'Natural Life': the imagination's ability to transform the natural world

In *THE GHOST of ABEL*, etched in 1822, Blake offered his views on Nature and the Imagination: "Nature has no Outline, but Imagination has. Nature has no Tune, but Imagination has. Nature has no Supernatural & dissolves: Imagination is Eternity" (Blake 779). As Chapter One explains, the universe of the mind needs to engage with the senses as well as with the "*Poetic Genius*" in order to transcend the limitations of society, religion, and "Reason". Blake's conception of this universe contains three elements: "heaven", "hell", and "nature" (Damon 262), that is: "Reason", "Energy", and our perception of the natural world. As the preceding chapters demonstrate, Blake does not deviate from the belief that "Where man is not, nature is barren" (Blake 152). Similarly, he indicates that stagnation in society

stems from the stunting of the individual mind by religious indoctrination, and that this is mirrored in nature: without the “*Poetic Genius*” to invigorate our perception of the world we are constantly limiting ourselves. Nature represents matter and the material, and its meaning can therefore only be determined by the extent to which the imagination is employed. In his annotations to Boyd’s Dante, recorded in 1800, Blake states that “Nature Teaches nothing of Spiritual Life but only of Natural Life” (412). In a letter written to Dr Trusler a year earlier, he had made the relationship between nature and the imagination even clearer:

Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & Some Scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers. You certainly Mistake, when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination, & I feel Flatter’d when I am told so (Blake 793-794).

Therefore, without the “*Poetic Genius*”, nature remains a signifier, devoid of meaning outside its own “natural life”. The letter is particularly significant when read in light of broader eighteenth-century thought. Vision as cognition is a prominent feature in many works of the Enlightenment (including those of Bacon and Hume), and is frequently used as a central metaphor for reason (Senior 3). Human vision is not infallible, though, as its inaccuracies in observation and judgement mean it offers an approximation rather than an exact measure. However, when vision is coupled with the imagination, it is able to transcend its inherently limited perception.

This is made clear in *A VISION OF THE LAST JUDGMENT*, where Blake notes the following:

The Nature of Visionary Fancy, or Imagination, is very little Known, & the Eternal nature & permanence of its ever Existent Images is consider’d as less permanent than the things of Vegetative & Generative Nature; yet the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce, but Its Eternal Image & Individuality never dies, but renews by its seed; just so the Imaginative Image returns by the seed of Contemplative Thought; the Writings of the Prophets illustrate these conceptions of the Visionary Fancy by their various sublime & Divine Images as seen in the Worlds of Vision (605).

The point he seems to be making here is that “form, and being itself, [is] an open-ended process of becoming; hence his interest not only in living forms but in form as the expression of life. For Blake, it is not form that defines life, it is life that defines form – and goes on

defining it” (Makdisi 278). The extract also highlights one of the key facets expressed in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*: the ability of spiritual perception to transform objects imaginatively, effectively morphing them into symbolic forms which reveal their significance to humankind (Nurmi 555). Essentially, everything in nature is a reflection or an expression of the human mind and, by extension, the imagination, which is in turn presented through art (Frye 123). As Frye explains, “this vision of character, or total form, is something of course much more inclusive than the words given, which express only aspects of that character, can suggest” (123).

Just as the union of “Innocence” and “Experience” would ostensibly produce “organiz’d innocence” in the *SONGS*, the marriage of “Energy” and “Reason” in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* would presumably result in “Eternal Delight”. Therefore, although it seems that the two concepts are fundamentally at odds, they are actually extremes on the same spectrum. Blake accepted that one could not exist without the other and that there was value in each regulating its opposite. Indeed, without regulation, even the positive effects and associations of “Energy” can be cancelled out. If the ultimate goal of the marriage of contraries is progression, the limitations of both “Energy” and “Reason” must be acknowledged. This is made clear in plates 15-17:

... one portion of being is the Prolific, the other the Devouring: to the devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains; but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole. But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer, as a sea, recieved [sic] the excess of his delights.

Some will say “Is not God alone the Prolific?” I answer: “God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men” (Blake 155).

The portion of being which is represented by the “Prolific” appears to be another term for “Energy”, whilst the “Devouring” portion seems to be equated with “Reason”, and the extract makes clear that both contraries need to exist in order for them not to be erased. Each contributes to the other’s existence, and any attempt to contain them within one figure, like that of God, is futile – a fact made clear earlier in the poem, where it is revealed that “All deities reside in the human breast” (Blake 11:153).

Thus, if our perception of the natural world is determined by the imagination, so too are the beings that inhabit it. Spiritual perception is therefore able to transform the animals in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* from mere symbols of natural life into forms which represent the products of “heaven”, “hell” and, by implication, various aspects of the “*Poetic Genius*”. Of course, as much as Blake adopted animal symbols to create a mythology which

fit his philosophies in novel ways, he was also influenced by contemporary attitudes towards animals. The section which follows highlights those most likely to have directed the dichotomies evident in the poem.

The animals' "doctrine of contraries" in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*

As with the other symbols he employed, Blake draws on familiar and traditional associations, stereotypes, and accepted beliefs in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* whilst simultaneously recreating and infusing the symbols with original, and often ironic, connections. Many characteristics associated with the medieval beast epics are present in the poem, and Blake makes use of symbols like the eagle, wolf, and lion which would have been far less familiar to his readers than their domestic counterparts. However, he also deviated from this tradition by making use of domestic animals, which were seldom used in the beast epics, to assist in setting up the oppositions he desired. Blake's contraries may therefore have been influenced by contemporary attitudes towards animals too, for, in the eighteenth century, animals were divided into two distinct groups: they were either wild or tame. This idea could be traced back to Aristotelian philosophy, and stemmed from a principally religious, rather than scientific, view of the world. The Judeo-Christian account of creation and the Fall of Man accepted that, since the Fall, the animal kingdom had experienced a separation from the human world. Animals were divided according to their natural service or hostility to humankind, and this in turn determined the nature and boundaries of both the physical and metaphysical spaces they were permitted to occupy. Whereas tame animals enjoyed human protection and were permitted to share the same spaces, wild animals were deemed hostile and left to eke out an existence on the peripheries of the human world. However, their exile was not a natural condition, because, as some religious theorists argued, it represented a state of rebellion against the divinely conferred dominion of man. These commentators asserted that in the prelapsarian world, animals and humans had lived in harmony, but Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden had created a state of war in nature, and the lions, tigers, wolves, and other predators were destined to become humankind's enemies as part of God's curse.

The divide between docile and obedient tame animals and their ferocious and unpredictable wild counterparts ensured the latter gained the status of rebellious outcasts and bandits. Inhabitants of inhospitable strongholds, far from the "civilising" influence of

humankind, the predators' relationship to humankind was thought to mirror the divide between Satan and his devils in Hell and God and his angels in Heaven. In *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, domestic animals are usually associated with a limited and limiting perspective, representative of those who follow "Reason" blindly and whose "Poetic Genius" is stunted by their lack of imagination. Generally, wild animals tend to represent different forms of "Energy": both creative and destructive. There are, of course, exceptions. The discussion of symbols which follows considers those which recur throughout the poem and form important tropes. They are separated for ease of reference but are not discussed according to any ranking system.

The Lion

The lion in Blake's poetry is often presented as a benevolent, protective, and Christ-like figure to which the qualities of compassion, clemency, and magnanimity are attributed. His inherently noble and kingly nature appears to be derived from a combination of influences, which include the beast epics, heraldry, and Christian art. These associations, along with various examples of the lion's long-standing connections with gold are discussed in Chapter Two with particular reference to the *SONGS*, and although they are alluded to in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, other alchemical references, particularly those of metamorphosis and transformation, are also discernible.

According to Blake's mythology, the four symbolic metals include gold, silver, iron and brass¹, and in the printing house in hell "Lions of flaming fire ... [rage] around & [melt] the metals into living fluids" (Plates 15-17) (Blake 155). The lions' ability to transform these metals from their solid (and, by extension, unrelenting or inflexible) forms into liquid states described as "living fluids" indicates several possible allusions. The most obvious of these can be ascribed to the fact that lions were among Swedenborg's fixed 'Correspondences' for 'Lusts'. Blake's infernal 'cave', with its various 'departments', resembles Swedenborg's description of a house in Hell where copyists are 'collecting and transcribing' from Scripture

¹ In Chapter 1 of *Jerusalem*, the fourfold South Gate of Golgonooza has :

four Lions terrible, living:
That toward Generation, four, of iron carv'd wondrous:
That toward Ulro, four, clay bak'd, laborious workmanship:
That toward Eden, four, immortal gold, silver, brass & iron.
(Plate 13, 2-5) (Blake 663)

‘Proofs in Favour of Justification by Faith Alone’ (Rix 132). Indeed, in referring to “living fluids”, Blake may also have been alluding to the Holy Spirit’s “living water” (John 7:37–39). Summerfield asserts that Blake’s lions of energy “melt down the fixed patterns of tradition into flexible material of new art, which is stored in books for future generations” (77): the suggestion being that “Energy”, and the spiritual wrath it sometimes represents, is able to alter the inflexible and dogmatic into the fluid and flexible through the aid of the “*Poetic Genius*”.

The concept of creating “new art”, and preserving a tradition which valorises creative and imaginative thought would certainly have appealed to Blake, and may have influenced his use of the lion’s alchemical associations in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* in other ways too. Since the poem is, after all, a satirical attack on Enlightenment ideals and the works of several of its prominent theorists, Blake could have been responding to Isaac Newton’s supposed interest in the “Green Lion²” and the scientist’s attempt to ‘solve’ alchemy empirically. The lions in the printing house in Hell seem to possess some of the Green Lion’s abilities: the most important of which was the production of a liquid known as *aqua regia* (royal water) purportedly able to dissolve even gold. Indeed, the Green Lion devouring the sun is an alchemical symbol depicted in many seventeenth-century manuscripts and engravings, (the most famous of which probably being the *Rosarium Philosophorum*), and is thought to represent *aqua regia* dissolving solar gold.

In addition to the alchemical associations, the poem demonstrates a correlation between the lion and spiritual wrath throughout. This is made explicit in the “PROVERBS of HELL”, where it is stated that “The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God” (Plate 8, line 4) (Blake 151). The association is also present in the poem’s opening lines, where the “just man” is found raging in the wilds “Where lions roam” (Plate 2, lines 19-20). The wilderness is both physical and spiritual, and seems to be presided over by beings embodying the spiritual wrath of Christ, as well as the somewhat threatening and unknown aspects of the natural world³. The parallels offered here between the “just man”, Lyca, and Lyca’s parents, also point to the biblical parable of Daniel in the lions’ den. Like Daniel, they too are at the mercy of lions, but their salvation comes from the understanding that divinity is inherent, and not something that exists outside of the human form. Indeed, in medieval iconography the

² During the late seventeenth century, Newton produced extensive notes about an alchemical poem called “The Hunting of the Greene Lyon.” Newton’s interest lay not in alchemy itself, but rather in using proven chemical processes to attack what he saw as the false principles offered by alchemical philosophies/theories (Dobbs 1-2). For Newton, and some of his contemporaries, the “Green Lion” of alchemical tradition was synonymous with antimony ore.

³ The Green Lion was sometimes associated with nature and with vegetative matter.

head and upper part of lion's body symbolised Christ's divine nature, and the posterior part human nature. For Blake, these two aspects reside within humanity and possibly represent the concept of "organiz'd innocence".

The liberation offered by the "*Poetic Genius*" is, however, not automatic. Individuals whose imagination is stifled by dogmatic practices and beliefs may never be redeemed. The invigorating and revolutionary energy of "Spiritual Life" (Blake 412) embodied by the lion is juxtaposed with the unthinking, drudging, and impotent ox which represents the spiritually and imaginatively paralysed human. The poet-speaker expands on the relationship between those who possess and utilise the "*Poetic Genius*" and those who choose to stifle and reject this element of their humanity in A MEMORABLE FANCY of Plates 15-17:

These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies:
whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence.

Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two.

Note: Jesus Christ did not wish to unite, but to separate them, as in the Parable of sheep and goats! & he says: "I came not to send Peace, but a Sword" (Blake 155).

The ideals the lion represents are also juxtaposed with the negative qualities of other animals in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* and are examined in more detail in the sub-sections which follow.

i) *The lion and the fox*

The lion and the fox are frequently paired in the poem, and the fox's associations with cunning and trickery remain intact in Blake's mythology, and was probably inherited from the biblical and bestiary traditions, as well as several other tales derived from European and Indo-Chinese mythologies. Indeed, the animal's cunning is often noted in the Bible, where the word "fox" is applied to false prophets (Ezekiel 13:4), and to the hypocrisy of Herod Antipas (Luke 13:32).

The first time the fox is introduced in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* is in the "PROVERBS of HELL", where it is asserted that "The fox condemns the trap, not himself" (Plate 8, line 8) (Blake 151). The implication here is that limited vision not only

perpetuates more of the same, but that the “trap” it presents cannot easily⁴ be transcended. This is expanded on in Plates 15-17 where it is revealed that “chains are the cunning of weak and tame minds which have power to resist energy ... the weak in courage is strong in cunning” (Blake 155). Thus, it seems, the weak-minded are easily controlled because they can exist in the circumscribed reality presented by “Reason”. It is here, at the “bound or outward circumference of Energy” (Blake 149), that we see how “the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again” (Blake *THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION* 97). Animals associated with this kind of blind “Reason” are thus juxtaposed with those representative of “Energy”: “[t]he rat, the mouse, the fox, the rabbit watch the roots; the lion, the tyger, the horse, the elephant watch the fruits” (14) (ibid 151). The limited perspectives of those trapped by the “same dull round” (i.e. the rat, mouse, fox, and rabbit) mean their understanding of the world remains limited – and this is why they do not examine anything more than the roots. Those able to access “Energy” in its various forms (represented by the lion, tyger, horse, and elephant), on the other hand, are able to transcend these limitations and actively engage with new perspectives that the “fruits” of the “*Poetic Genius*” provide.

However, the proverb could also be valorising the individual’s right to be true to inner nature, and not compelled by external systems to be something they are not. Indeed, the other two proverbs which deal with the lion and fox seem to support this. “The fox provides for himself, but God provides for the lion” (Plate 9:1) (Blake 152), and “If the lion was advised by the fox, he would be cunning” (Plate 10:5) (Blake 152) demonstrate that, as long as individuals are true their own nature, there is no conflict between “Energy” and “Reason” because some sort of equilibrium can be established, and neither contrary is a better or more morally correct option than the other.

ii) *The lion and the wolf*

The dangers of submitting to external systems or forces are demonstrated in *KING EDWARD THE THIRD*:

The Wolf is hunted down by causeless fear;
The Lion flees, and fear usurps his heart,

⁴ The individual has primacy, and does not bear self-blaming ‘original sin’; the problem is the system – which can be transcended by the “*Poetic Genius*”.

Startled, astonish'd, at the clam'rous Cock;
 The Eagle, that doth gaze upon the sun,
 Fears the small fire that plays about the fen;
 If, at this moment of their idle fear,
 The Dog doth seize the Wolf, the Forester the Lion,
 The Negro in the crevice of the rock
 Doth seize the soaring Eagle; undone by flight,
 They tame submit: such the effect flight has
 On noble souls. (3: 113-123) (Blake 24)

Here the lion, eagle, and wolf (all symbols of “Energy” in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*) are portrayed as victims hunted down by their own “causeless fear” (113) until their “noble souls” (123) “tame submit” (122) (Blake 24). Interestingly, this is one of the few instances in Blake’s oeuvre where the wolf is positively portrayed. Chapter Two emphasised the negative associations which usually characterise the animal’s portrayal, and these are continued in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*. However, inasmuch as some of the “noble” qualities of the wolf are alluded to, some negative associations with the lion are also present: indicating again that symbolic meaning can, and does, shift in Blake’s poetry. Indeed, the lion and cock pairing here could possibly allude to the English lion and later, the British lion, as a representation of victories over the French (represented by the Cock): symbolism which was used with relatively original effect in eighteenth-century sculpture and visual art. In Aesop’s fable of The Ass, The Cock, and The Lion, the lion flees the cockerel’s crow in fear much as he does in *KING EDWARD THE THIRD*, and in Blake’s mythological cosmos, the lion’s singular aversion to the sound could allude to some of the figure’s biblical associations with the Devil⁵, with the Cock symbolising Christ’s passion and resurrection.

The lion and wolf frequently appear as contraries throughout Blake’s works, with the lion often presented as the benign protector of the flock, and the wolf as a destructive and violent predator which preys on the innocent and defenceless. Although both are depicted as forms of “Energy”, they indicate two different aspects: one able to access a higher state of being, and one that represents Energy’s unchecked and destructive capacity. In medieval times it was believed that the lion was a noble beast which killed no more than he needed to consume, and this association is present throughout much of Blake’s oeuvre. Conversely, the wolf is usually associated with bloodlust and devastation, echoing sentiments that circulated

⁵ Psalm 90:13 associates the lion with the Devil, as when Christ is said to “tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet”. The parables of Daniel (6:16-28) and Samson (Judges 14:5-9) also portray the lion as an instrument of evil.

England, and much of Europe, in the eighteenth century, during which entire populations of the animal were decimated. The wolf's alleged predilection for domesticated animals, particularly those as defenceless and vulnerable as humans, often made its predatory habits more disturbing because our own vulnerability to the forces of nature was highlighted – a fact made apparent in *SAMSON*: “O Lord, thy flock is scattered on the hills! The wolf teareth them ... The echoes of slaughter reach from hill to hill” (Blake 40). Wolves were particularly reviled because it was believed that they could destroy an entire flock of sheep in a bloody feeding frenzy, and this is alluded to in *KING EDWARD THE THIRD*, where the French warships are compared to “ravening wolves...devouring all / Our burden'd vessels, spoiling our naval flocks” (2:66-68) (Blake 20). In addition, the wolf's method of killing was considered both cowardly and cruel: eviscerating an animal whilst it was still alive was seen as abomination against God.

Although some of the negative views of the wolf influenced Blake's portrayal of the figure in his poetry, he recognised that even the potentially threatening and destructive form of “Energy” it represents is essential to existence. After all, the figure represents a contrary which supports another, and this is evident in Plate 8 of *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*: “the roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity, too great for the eye of man” (7) (Blake 151), and in *THE FOUR ZOAS* Enion explains the significance of the contraries when she describes the manner in which Man is connected to the rest of creation: “In pain he sighs, in pain he labours in his universe, / Screaming in birds over the deep, & howling in the wolf / Over the slain, & moaning in the cattle, & in the winds (VIII:576-578) (Blake 355).

Blake was, however, not entirely unsympathetic to the animal's plight. The fact that the wolf is hunted due to “causeless fear” (113) (Blake 24) in *KING EDWARD THE THIRD* indicates that he may have thought the slaughtering of wolves senseless. Indeed, later on in the poem the Prince declares: “I know the wolf / Is dangerous to fight, not good for food, / Nor is the hide a comely vestment” (3:265-267) (Blake 27), and this may well have been a rebuke against those who mercilessly pursued the animal because of largely unsubstantiated fears about its savageness, ignorance bred from centuries-old bias influenced by culturally accepted negative attitudes, and the sanctioning of its wholesale execution for the purpose of sport. Other sympathetic renderings are evident in the *Auguries of Innocence*, where “Every Wolf's & Lion's howl / Raises from Hell a Human Soul” (Blake 431); and in his Letter to Thomas Butts dated 2 October 1800 Blake recounts a vision where “On the Mountains around / The roarings resound / Of the lion & wolf” (805) – with the figures described as

“guards” of the fold. Blake may have been alluding to the tale of the wolf of Gubbio in some of these instances, hinting at the fact that despite the damage such a powerful animal can inflict, it still plays an important role. Like St. Francis of Assisi, he could have been arguing that the wolf should be protected as a fellow creature since “Opposition is true Friendship” (*THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* Blake 157).

In order to understand the contraries of the lion and wolf, then, the imaginative faculty needs to be employed to comprehend the multiple significances in everything. Once this is achieved, we, like Lyca and her parents, will have nothing to fear from “the wolvisch howl / Nor the lions’ growl” (“The Little Girl Found” 51-52) (Blake 115). Until then, however, the opposing forces represented by each animal prevail, and exist in what appears to be constant enmity in Blake’s mythology. In the *Poetical Sketches*, “To the Evening Star” sees the wolf “[raging] wide,/And the lion [glaring] thro’ the dun forest” (11-13) (Blake 3), indicating that they are both poised to release their various forms of wrath upon the world, as is prophesied in the poem. The prophecy is fulfilled in “Night”, where the hope that the flocks would be protected by the evening star proves futile: we see the wolves “howl for prey” (25) and “rush dreadful” (29) (Blake 119) upon the sheep. In *AMERICA*, the revolutionary energies presented by both lion and wolf are similarly emphasised: “Loud howls the eternal Wolf! the eternal Lion lashes his tail!” (Blake 199),

Despite their enmity, the contraries represented by the lion and wolf are the only two in Blake’s oeuvre which seem to be definitively resolved in some way. This occurs in “A Song of Liberty”, where the destruction of the “stony law” (20), representative of the “ten commands” (18), sees this resolution take place: “EMPIRE IS NO MORE! AND NOW THE LION & WOLF SHALL CEASE” (Blake 160), and the same line is repeated in *America* (Blake 198). The “stony law” could also possibly refer to the Newtonian laws which diminished the mysteries of the world to mere principles of mathematics and science, and which left no room for the imaginative faculty. Thus, the rejection and destruction of prohibitive religious and scientific doctrines that limit the senses, and consequently the “*Poetic Genius*”, results in the liberation of humankind. This liberation is also expressed in the ultimate cancellation of all conflict, including that represented by the symbols of the lion and wolf.

The Tyger

Chapter Two has shown how the tyger's associations with wrath and fire are maintained throughout the *SONGS*, and this is continued in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*. Like the wolf, the tiger had accrued a long-standing notoriety for both cruelty and destruction in the eighteenth century. This reputation was inherited, in part, from the bestiary tradition, but was also increasingly derived from reports of marauding man-eaters in the Asian colonies, which circulated in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England. These reports found their way into both natural history volumes and newspapers, thereby influencing the manner in which the animal was portrayed in a variety of ways. The tiger's taste for both domestic animals and human flesh meant that it was a fearsome reminder of the dangers of untamed nature, and this apparent physical threat is picked up on by Blake, who extends it into a metaphorical one too.

The existence of man-eaters also demonstrated that some animals did not hold an intrinsic fear of humankind, nor were they necessarily amenable to human dominion. Dangerous animals which refused to submit to human will symbolised for some religious commentators that the world inhabited by humanity was a fallen one where animals' enmity was keenly felt. These kinds of anthropomorphic views permeated all levels of society, and were also present in various intellectual disciplines and debates. Although the classification of animals was increasingly the domain of scientific concern and not one left to the popular imagination of various writers, some traditionally held beliefs about animals prevailed. Although "natural science" was moving away from "natural philosophy" and becoming a discipline in its own right, Blake would still have inherited interpretations influenced by centuries' worth of anthropomorphism. The discipline that was to become "natural science" resembled "natural philosophy" rather than "science" as it is conceived of in twenty-first century terms. Thus, traditional metaphors associated with animals still held currency, and animals presented a convenient 'other' against which humanity could measure itself and its advances.

This would have influenced the metaphorical analogies of the tiger which appeared in eighteenth century political pamphlets, with specific reference to the French Revolution, and how religion, allegory, and "scientific" conclusions could still be combined to create the kind of mythology Blake employed in his poetry. Like the lion and wolf, the tyger is also a symbol of "Energy", and although his is a destructive and potentially dangerous form, it is also one which offers the possibility of revolution and the escape from a stagnant, mundane, and

circumscribed reality. In *THE FOUR ZOAS*, the figures of the lion, tyger, and wolf are united in their warmongering and revolutionary fervour, and are transformed into human form:

They humanize in the fierce battle, where in direful pain
Troop by troop the bestial droves rend one another, sounding loud
The instruments of sound; & troop by troop, in human forms, they urge
The dire confusion till the battle faints; those that remain
Return in pangs & horrible convulsions to their bestial state;
For the monsters of the Elements, Lions or Tygers or Wolves,
Sound loud the howling music Inspir'd by Los & Enitharmon,
sounding loud; terrific men
They seem to one another, laughing terrible among the banners.
(viii: 115-122) (Blake 344)

However, once the battles end, and their revolutionary energies are no longer required, the animals lapse into a state reminiscent of figures represented in heraldic art and sculpture, like the *lion-leopardé*:

And when, the revolution of their day of battles over,
Relapsing in dire torment they return to forms of woe,
To moping visages returning, inanimate tho' furious,
No more erect, tho' strong, drawn out in length they ravin
For senseless gratification, & their visages thrust forth,
Flatten above & beneath & stretch out into bestial length.

Weaken'd they stretch beyond their power in dire droves till war begins.
(viii: 123-130) (Blake 344)

The figures are thus suspended in a chronic state of rage until “war begins” again.

Blake’s portrayal of the tyger was also probably influenced by Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), which categorises the tiger, Leviathan, the bull, and wild ass as “sublime” creatures. In *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* the tyger is directly associated with Leviathan. When the poet-speaker and angel behold the “infinite Abyss” in which they encounter the creature, Leviathan’s eyes are described as “two globes of crimson fire”, and his raw “Energy” is evident:

his forehead was divided into streaks of green & purple like those on a tyger’s forehead: soon we saw his mouth & red gills hang just above the raging foam, tinging the black deep with beams of blood, advancing toward us with all the fury of a spiritual existence (ibid 156).

Another link between Leviathan and the tyger is suggested by the fact that he is sighted in the east: the compass point of the tyger. In asserting that the creature advances “with all the fury of a spiritual existence” (Blake 156), the poet-speaker indicates that although Leviathan, like the tyger, represents the potentially destructive and wrathful aspect of “Energy”, he is still infused with the “spiritual life” of the “*Poetic Genius*”. Thus, the various forms of wrath embodied in each of these representatives of “Energy” illustrate that, whether their capacities are creative or destructive, they are still essential “portions of eternity” (Blake 151) which fuel the march toward progression. Indeed, the fact that the angel, one of the representatives of “Reason”, flees from the vision of Leviathan demonstrates how limited the perspective of this contrary can be. Being of the “Devil’s party” (Blake 150), the poet-speaker is able to recognise that the terrifying nature of Leviathan is an illusion created by the weak-minded and fearful, and that the angel’s perception resembles that of the “devourer” who “takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole” (Blake 155). In the same way, it is the angel’s vision which dominates Plates 17-20 of “A Memorable Fancy” where there are “vast spiders, crawling after their prey which flew, or rather swum, in the infinite deep, in the most terrific shapes of animals sprung from corruption; & the air was full of them, & seem’d composed of them” (Blake 156). An analogous description is apparent in *THE FIRST BOOK of URIZEN*, where

[Urizen] strove in battles dire,
 In unseen conflictions with shapes
 Bred from his forsaken wilderness
 Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element,
 Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud. (I:13-17) (Blake 222)

This intellectual muddle of fantastical ideas results in a theory of life “bred” from “battles dire” that lists living forms composed of “terrific shapes ... sprung from corruption” alongside inert geological elements (Gilpin 41). These visions, the harper explains, are the limiting consequences of “Reason”, which has been cut off from the imaginative “Energy” of the “*Poetic Genius*” so that “the man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind” (*THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* Blake 156). The poet-speaker confirms this for the angel when he explains “All that we saw was owing to your metaphysics; for when you ran away, I found myself on a bank by moonlight, hearing a harper” (Blake 156).

Blake may also have been alluding to Burke's notion that the sublime does not draw its force simply by opposition to the beautiful, but also occurs when one form of its forms is overpowered by another. That is, in Burke's description of the mechanics of sublime affects, the 'ability to hurt' was only one part – that of getting hurt was the other. In Burke's logic, the sublime presupposes a force like the tyger or Leviathan able to cause physical injury, but, also assumes a subject like the angel (and even the poet-speaker) exposed to the experience of terror and pain. The ambiguities inherent in the viewer's experience of the sublime, as Burke defines them, are therefore apparent. The angel, therefore, resembles a threatened creature shaken, injured, and overwhelmed by dangerous forces that exceed his ability to control. Burke, drawing on radical medical theories of the time, presented this threatened and vulnerable state of hazard and physical precariousness as health-enhancing and empowering: "when danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful" (Burke 550), and Blake may have had similar intentions.

Thus, without the creative and revolutionary "Energy" embodied in the tyger, progression would not be possible. Indeed, in Hell it is proverbial that "the tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction," and if we accept the tiger and horse as symbols of untamed "Energy" and domesticated "Reason" respectively, it is obvious that the former is the more vital in days of revolution. Robert Rix explains that the proverb possibly draws on Swedenborg's explication of 'Horses' which represent religious doctrines (with their 'riders' being the theologians) and tigers which represent the 'Lusts' or 'Diabolic Love' of men – thereby allowing for it to be read as an antinomian provocation against religious instruction (132). However, it is likely that the proverb was also a general attack on all 'codes' of religion, or philosophy, proscribing humankind and its energies (Rix 132). Thus, when revolt or religious tyranny enable one contrary to dominate the other, revolution – based on an active marriage of "Reason" and "Energy" – must be effected to restore equilibrium. For David Erdman:

...revolution "stamps the stony law to dust" as the last act of wrath against reason, but in so doing it looses "the eternal horses from the dens of night, crying Empire is no more! and now the lion & wolf shall cease." ... The era of the beasts of prey gives way to the era of the untethered horses of intellect [and] on [the] closing page of *A Song of Liberty* the text is illuminated with dashing and prancing horses. One bears a rider, but with no reins or saddle. We see no more of lion, wolf, or tiger (195).

While Erdman accepts a positive outcome where the contraries of “Reason” and “Energy” are finally reconciled in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, *THE FOUR ZOAS* presents a vision which highlights the dangers of valorising one contrary over the other and the damaging effects this has on the “*Poetic Genius*”:

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

(II: 35-38) (Blake 281)

The close of *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* may well be more sinister than Erdman allows for, then, and could suggest that that the horses of intellect and orthodox religion have triumphed over the revolutionary and creative energies represented by the beasts of prey, ensuring that the age of Urizen is ushered in while the world Lyca and her parents inhabit simply cease.

The Horse

The horse was one of the domestic animals which symbolised appropriate and inappropriate relations between masters and servants during the eighteenth century. Dogs and horses were usually trained using systems which combined positive and negative reinforcement, ensuring that their behaviour either elicited a reward from their human ‘master’ to indicate they had performed a task or action satisfactorily, or a punishment for wrong-doing. Since these systems were underpinned by the belief that animals understood the concept of reward and punishment, it assumed dogs and horses had some kind of moral sense. In some ways, then, these animals were regarded as extended, and even honorary, members of the human community, because the relationship between the species was mutually beneficial. Even though horses were sometimes notoriously badly treated in England, they were important draught animals upon which many farmers relied, even when some of them were replaced with machinery as the industrial revolution advanced. Land-based transport in eighteenth century England consisted of horse-drawn wagons, coaches, and carriages. Horses were used for personal transportation while oxen and mules pulled wagons and carts loaded with goods and personal property from one destination to another. The aristocracy’s highly valued thoroughbred horses were used for both racing and the popular pastime of hunting.

Categorised as "Equus" in the 1771 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the horse was considered a prized possession and faithful companion and was much-loved by all classes of the British public for its amenable nature and willingness to work closely with humankind.

This kind of allegiance with humankind is not looked on fondly in Blake's works, however. Indeed, while the figure retains some of its traditional associations with the sun⁶, Blake's horse is tailored to fit his mythological cosmos and is highly individualised. For Foster Damon, though, the animal is purely a symbol of "Reason" (189), and he argues that some proverbs in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* support this. Indeed, "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction" (Plate 9:5) (Blake 152) can be interpreted through this lens if one accepts a reading concerned only with the opposition between "Energy" and "Reason". That is, although the revolutionary form of "Energy" represented by the tyger is usually destructive, the horse's need for guidance from external 'masters' limits it, because, like the weak mind, it can be controlled or instructed. The tyger, on the other hand, answers to no one, nor does he adhere to structures which are limiting and prohibitive: "What immortal hand or eye/Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" However, it is more likely that Blake intended to valorise the individual's choice to be true to inner nature rather than passively accepting influences exerted by external systems or forces – a concept which appears to be supported in another proverb: "The apple tree never asks the beech how he shall grow; nor the lion, the horse, how he shall take his prey" (Plate 9:11) (Blake 152), and which is also highlighted in *THE FOUR ZOAS*: "The Horse is of more value than the Man. The Tyger fierce / Laughs at the Human form; the Lion mocks & thirsts for blood" (I: 402-403) (Blake 275).

Blake's symbols offer more complicated interpretations than such neat compartmentalisations and explanations suggest. Although he would have been influenced by prevailing eighteenth century attitudes towards animals, Blake's depictions of the animals in both his poetry and visual art was also stimulated by the works of his fellow artists, with some critics suggesting that "The Tyger" was in part inspired by George Stubbs's *Portrait of the Royal Tiger* (c.1770). Although Blake was considerably younger, he was indeed familiar

⁶ Many of the symbol's associations seem to have been derived from the *hippoi athanatoi* – the immortal horses of the Greek gods. The majority of these divine animals were offspring of the four Wind-Gods who themselves draw Zeus's chariot in the shape of horses. Some of the horses alluded to include the four immortal horses of the sun-god Helios, the fire-breathing steeds of Ares (the god of war), and those of the dawn-goddess, Eos. In "To Summer" which forms part of the *Poetical Sketches*: "O thou, who passest thro' our vallies in / Thy strength, curb thy fierce steeds, allay the heat / That flames from their large nostrils!" (1-3) (Blake 1). The poet may also have been alluding to Biblical references, for the cavalry and chariots of the Chaldeans are mentioned a number of times, including Jeremiah 4:29; Jeremiah 6:23; Ezekiel 23:23, 24.

with the work of Stubbs – who he met through his connections in the London art world – and whose paintings of wild animals he admired. He was also interested in Stubbs’s comparative anatomy projects, especially his magnificent treatise on *The Anatomy of the Horse: including a particular description of the bones, cartilages, muscles, fascias, ligaments, nerves, arteries, veins, and glands*, first published in 1766. Stubbs revolutionised animal portraiture by turning from sporting art to agricultural scenes, and specifically to studies of violent nature and narrative pieces drawn from mythology and books. Horses feature in almost all of these, and often resonate with Burke’s description of the horse in its natural state as a creature through which “the terrible and the sublime blaze out together” with “fierceness and rage”, while in its domesticated, subjugated and “useful” existence, the horse “has nothing of the sublime” (550). The animal’s dual identity, in turn aggressive and submissive, frightening and affrighted, seems to have influenced Blake’s depictions too.

Perhaps the most visceral visual representation of this is apparent in Blake’s watercolour *Death on a Pale Horse*, which he worked on at approximately the same time as *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*. The drawing was one of a large series of Bible illustrations he produced for his patron Thomas Butts, and depicts the Revelation of St John in a terrifying vision of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The figures of the two horses are striking: the crowned figure of Death rides a frenzied white horse and is accompanied by another rider on what appears to a fire-breathing black steed spreading famine or disease. The animals’ rendering appears to illustrate both the terrible and the sublime, and negates Damon’s attempt to link the horse only to “Reason” in Blake’s oeuvre. Indeed, the equation of the horse purely with “Reason” does not hold in several other instances in Blake’s oeuvre⁷, and the animal is sometimes associated with Urizen’s inveterate enemy – Luvah – who is representative of different forms of “Energy”. In *THE FOUR ZOAS* he conspires with Urizen to establish dominion over Man. Whilst Urizen wishes to control and direct the imagination, Luvah aims to control humankind’s reasoning ability. Ultimately, though, Luvah refuses to aid Urizen: he seizes “the Horses of Light” and rises “into the Chariot of Day”⁸ (*THE FOUR*

⁷ In *GWIN, KING OF NORWAY*, the horse is similarly a symbol of revolutionary energy: “The trampling horse, and clanging arms / Like rushing mighty floods!” (Blake 11), and in the *PROLOGUE TO KING JOHN* “the chariots and the horses, the noise of shout, and dreadful thunder of the battle [are] heard afar!” (Blake 34). In *THE FRENCH REVOLUTION*, “the horse [neighs] to the drum and trumpet, and the trumpet and war shout reply” (102) (Blake 138).

⁸ In *THE BOOK of THEL*, The Cloud enquires of the eponymous heroine: “O virgin, know’st thou not our steeds drink of the golden springs / Where Luvah doth renew his horses?” (3:7-8) (Blake 128) – signalling that these symbols of revolution are representatives of imaginative “Energy” in this poem too.

ZOAS I: 264) (Blake 271). The animals become terrible forms of “Energy” which resemble the horses of the apocalypse in *Death on a Pale Horse*, and the warning God gives Judah about a coming threat from the north, “Behold, he comes up like clouds; his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles – woe to us, for we are ruined” (Jeremiah 4:13), also seem to be suggested:

How rag'd the golden horses of Urizen, compell'd to the chariot of love!
Compell'd to leave the plow to the ox, to snuff up the winds of desolation,
To trample the corn fields in boastful neighings; this is no gentle harp,
This is no warbling brook, nor shadow of a mirtle tree.
But blood and wounds and dismal cries and shadows of the oak,
And hearts laid open to the light by the broad grizly sword,
And bowels, hid in hammer'd steel, rip'd quivering on the ground.
Call forth thy smiles of soft deceit: call forth thy cloudy tears.
We hear thy sighs in trumpets shrill when morn shall blood renew.
(*Jerusalem* 3:65:47-55) (Blake 700-701)

Habakkuk describes the coming enemy in much the same terms: “Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves⁹; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour” (Habakkuk 1:8). Similarly, when Urizen descends to the Caves of Orc (the lower form of Luvah associated with raw emotion) in *THE FOUR ZOAS*, he sees his horses, lions, and tygers transformed into figures of furious flaming “Energy”:

... the horses of Urizen
Here bound to fiery mangers, furious dash their golden hoofs,
Striking fierce sparkles from their brazen fetters; fierce his lions
Howl in the burning dens; his tygers roam ill the redounding smoke
In forests of affliction...
(VII: 6-15) (Blake 320)

The Eagle

During Blake’s lifetime, both Golden and White-tailed eagles inhabited the British Isles. Both species are large, with wing spans of over two metres, and although the birds had no natural predators, their main threat was humankind. They were persecuted almost to extinction as

⁹ Blake’s description of the wolves in “Night” may have been inspired by the belief that when, having had no food all day, the animals’ appetites are especially keen in the evening, and when they meet with their prey, fall upon it with greater eagerness and fierceness.

farmers and hunters killed them for flying over grouse moors and farmland. In addition to being shot and poisoned, habitat destruction, resulting from both the agricultural and industrial revolutions, meant that adult breeding pairs only rarely bred successfully. This, coupled with the fact that eagles take several years to reach maturity and normally do not start breeding until they are four to five years old, made it all the more difficult for the birds to survive. Like the wolf, their predilection for domestic animals – particularly lambs, chickens, and game birds – meant that they were also viewed as pests.

Despite these unfavourable attitudes towards the real animals, the eagle was depicted positively in both art and sculpture of the eighteenth century. Indeed, the long-standing associations of the eagle with nobility, resurrection, and imperial might were frequently presented in heraldic art and the eagle's association with Christ's ascension was often shown on baptismal fonts. The eagle as a symbol of the Resurrection in Christian tradition was also evident in the bestiaries, where the bird renewed its plumage and youthful vigour by flying near the sun¹⁰ and then plunging into the water, an interpretation which could allude to Psalm 103:5: "thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." In the Bible, Moses associates it with strength in Exodus 19:4: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself". Isaiah also saw the symbolic strength of God reflected in the eagle: "but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31). Blake alludes to this tradition in *KING EDWARD THE THIRD*, along with the belief that the eagle was a generous bird which, no matter how great its hunger, always left half its prey to the birds that followed, and its ability to bear up eaglets on its pinions, when Brutus describes how the future generation will "rule the empire of the sea" (6:42) (Blake 32):

Their mighty wings shall stretch from east to west,
Their nest is in the sea; but they shall roam
Like eagles for the prey; nor shall the young
Crave or be heard; for plenty shall bring forth¹¹. (6:43-46) (Blake 33)

¹⁰ This tradition, as well as the eagle's purported ability to stare at the sun, is alluded to in *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*: "ask...the wing'd eagle why he loves the sun" (3:12) (Blake 191).

¹¹ Blake could have been alluding to the eagle symbolising God's protective nature as described in Psalm 91:1-4 "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust. For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler."

The eagle is also sometimes portrayed as a symbol of God's wrath, particularly in relation to a variety of punishments visited upon Israel. One such instance occurs in relation to the nation persisting in idolatry and refusing to repent even after being warned: "The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle" (Deuteronomy 28:49). These pursuers were believed to have been "swifter than the eagles in the heavens [and] lay in wait ... in the wilderness" (Lamentations 4:19).

In addition to Christian associations, Blake follows Spenserian tradition by alluding to the bird's classical and medieval representations, and in "AN IMITATION OF SPENSER" the eagle is presented as Zeus's bird:

As the wing'd eagle scorns the tow'ry fence
Of Alpine hills round his high aery,
And searches thro' the corners of the sky,
Sports in the clouds to hear the thunder's sound,
And see the winged lightnings as they fly,
Then, bosom'd in an amber cloud, around
Plumes his wide wings, and seeks Sol's palace high. (Blake 15)

The eagle's classical associations emphasise both the bird's prowess as a hunter and its regal nature: "the Eagle returns / From nightly prey and lifts his golden beak to the pure east, / Shaking the dust from his immortal pinions to awake / The sun that sleeps too long" (*VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* 2:25-28) (Blake 190-191). This is also evident in its long-standing association as Prometheus's tormentor, which is alluded to, and adapted in, *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* where Theotormon's Eagles, the "Kings of the sounding air", prey upon Thel's flesh in a brutal manner: "The Eagles ... descend & rend their bleeding prey¹²" (2:17) (Blake 190). Thus, like the lion and horse, the eagle also has a dual nature. Despite his associations with the divine and with spiritual wrath which align him to "Energy", the bird is also associated with "Reason". In *THE FOUR ZOAS* the bird's dual nature is evident in "Night the Second":

While far into the vast unknown the strong wing'd Eagles bend
Their venturous flight in Human forms distinct; thro' darkness deep
They bear the woven draperies; on golden hooks they hang abroad
The universal curtains & spread out from Sun to Sun

¹² Occasionally the Bible depicts the eagle as a bird of prey, and aligns it to the demon who ravishes souls, or to the sins of pride and worldly power.

The vehicles of light, they separate the furious particles¹³
Into mild currents as the water mingles with the wine.

While thus the Spirits of strongest wing enlighten the dark deep,
The threads are spun & the cords twisted & drawn out; then the weak
Begin their work, & many a net is netted, many a net
Spread, & many a Spirit caught; innumerable the nets,
Innumerable the gins & traps, & many a soothing flute
Is form'd & many a corded lyre outspread over the immense.
In cruel delight they trap the listeners, & in cruel delight
Bind them, condensing the strong energies into little compass.

(150-163) (Blake 284)

Here the eagle is linked to several symbols representing “Reason” within Blake’s mythological cosmos: “the universal curtains” they hang are also curtains of the mind, which are set up by the spirits representative of Urizen, and his false enlightenment (symbolised by both the false suns and the “vehicles of light”) in “the dark deep” where the various nets and traps ensnare unsuspecting individuals in “cruel delight” until their “strong energies” are bound and condensed into the Newtonian compass. Since the eagle is symbolic of St. John the Evangelist, a figure firmly established in the intellectual realm, the bird comes to symbolise the height of intellectual activity; however, it can also represent the degrading, consuming intellect, which causes humans not to be ruled by the mind but the body, and which Blake opposed so vociferously in his oeuvre. Yet Blake was not simply advocating that “Energy” be used to counter “Reason”. Indeed, the fact that the eagles carry “woven draperies” could suggest that the depictions of the bird as Adam in the Christian iconography applied to heraldic art and medieval bestiaries were meant to be considered too – primarily because, like Adam, who originally dwelt close to heaven, the bird must leave the intellectual realm and return to Earth in order to hunt and satisfy his carnal needs. However, in returning to the intellectual realm, humankind, like the eagle, can return to an existence between Heaven and Earth.

Like the wolf, tyger, and lion, then, the eagle is a figure which is also associated with “Energy”, and is associated with the “*Poetic Genius*”. In *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, this association is first introduced, and made explicit, in the “PROVERBS OF HELL”: “[w]hen thou seest an Eagle, though seest a portion of Genius; lift up thy head” (15) (Blake 152). This proverb could indicate the contemplation of the divine nature of the “*Poetic Genius*”. In “A Memorable Fancy” of plates 15-17, the poet-speaker observes “the method in

¹³ A possible reference to the eagle’s association with alchemy, where it is emblematic of the element of air and is associated with the process of sublimation, wherein the volatile principal is heated until it flies up to heaven.

which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation” in a printing house in hell. In the third chamber he sees “an Eagle with wings and feathers of air: he caused the inside of the cave to be infinite”. This seems to indicate that the “Spiritual Life” the eagle represents is infinite because it is part of the imagination. The image of the cavern is also significant because it alludes to the Platonic cave, where people were thought to be imprisoned by their perception: that is, they see only the shadows of models of real objects and mistake them for reality (Summerfield 71). Since the cave inhabited by the eagle is infinite because of his enhanced perception, the figure seems to embody the infinite liberation afforded by the “*Poetic Genius*”. It is, after all, the representation of “Genius” (Blake 152). In doing so, he illustrates what the poet-speaker’s attempts to point out in the preceding plate, where he declares that “if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up and sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern” (Blake 154). In the accompanying design, an eagle carries a serpent, and this could very well illustrate the power to elevate restrictive reasonings with visions of eternity.

Monkeys and apes

As pointed out elsewhere in this thesis, the discovery of the great apes helped to influence and shape certain beliefs about the manner in which humanity was linked to the natural world and its inhabitants. The physical resemblances between humans, apes, and monkeys saw the development of scientific enquiries into how and why these similarities occurred and what the implications could be. The fascination with apes and monkeys meant that specimens were brought into England in an attempt to discover more about them. As Hermione de Almeida points out:

Over one hundred East India Company ships plied the seas between Britain and Asia annually by the start of the nineteenth century, a tenfold increase over the ten ships sent to India and China each year in the early eighteenth century. Cargo lists of the period itemize not just edenic and peculiar fruits and plants, but songbirds and hummingbirds, big cats and tiny simians, mongoose pups and bandicoots – some alive in cages, others preserved or stuffed – and an unassorted diversity of skin, fur, teeth, skeletons and fossils from southeast Asia, south America, China and north Africa. (126)

The manners in which they were displayed were distinctly different to other animals though, and apes in particular were “exhibited in ways that emphasised their likeness to

people. They ate with table utensils, sipped tea from tea cups, and slept under blankets” (Ritvo 31). These kinds of attitudes were symptomatic of changes happening on a broader scale. Laura Brown explains them thus:

The intersection of human and animal was felt widely and variously in the intellectual movements of the eighteenth century. Influential social ideas about progress and improvement – extensions of philosophical optimism – drew concrete credibility from the suggestion that animals might be able to better themselves: that apes could learn to speak, and other animals could attain parallel advantages (227).

Indeed, it was not only the wealthy and educated who wished to see these animals: the pricing policies of exhibitions and large-scale travelling menageries made provision for every class, including servants. Indeed, public menageries flourished in London in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, and into the early nineteenth century. From the 1760s animal exhibitions centred on Piccadilly, the Strand and St. James’s. Early collections ranged in size from the smaller merchants such as Edmond’s Menagerie on Piccadilly, which stocked mainly song birds and small mammals from North America, to those with a larger assortment of animals such as the City Menagerie, which housed monkeys, tigers, opossums and camels. Possibly the most famous menagerie in London was that established by Gilbert Pidcock at the Exeter Exchange in 1773. George Wombwell’s travelling menagerie (established in 1805) also boasted many exotic animals – including monkeys. By 1812 the Exeter Exchange menagerie included a Bengal tiger, a hyena, a lion, a jaguar, a sloth, a camel, monkeys, a hippopotamus, a rhinoceros, an elephant, an ostrich, a cassowary, a pelican, emus, cranes, an eagle, cockatoos, elks, kangaroos and antelope.

Even though apes and monkeys were believed to approach a level of intelligence that raised them above the rest of the animal world, the fact remained that their level of intelligence would never emulate or surpass that of humankind. Because they had been taught to respond to, and mimic, human behaviours indicated that the capacity for reason was not present. This is precisely what separated them from humanity, as their level of consciousness could never match the superior kind humans possessed. Primates were thus associated with a kind of slavish imitiveness.

The imitative behaviours promulgated by restrictive religious, social, and legal doctrines derived from what Blake perceived as an eighteenth-century preoccupation with “Reason”, are often critiqued in his works. This is demonstrated in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* in particular through the poet-speaker’s attack on Swedenborg and his teachings: “a man carried a monkey about for a shew, & because he was a little wiser than the

monkey, grew vain, and conceiv'd [sic] himself as much wiser than seven men" (Blake 157). Thus, although Swendenborg initially presented himself as one of the "Devil's party" by attempting to interpret the teachings of the Established Church with some creative spirit, he ultimately revealed that his knowledge was derived from what Blake believed to be a very narrow set of ideals and interpretations, effectively aping those of the Church.

Thus, the foolishness associated with emulating behaviours one does not understand seems to be criticised harshly by Blake in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*. For him, it seems, to be schooled in "Reason" with no awareness of the nuances and numerous possibilities offered by "Energy" and the "*Poetic Genius*" is not just folly, for it results in the worse forms of debasement, and ultimately leads to destruction. In medieval art the ape depicts malice, and later comes to represent both mockery and trickiness. When the poet-speaker shows the angel (one of the representatives of "Reason") his eternal lot, both he and the angel descend into the void between "Saturn & the fixed stars" and then into the Bible, which appears as a "deep pit" (Blake 157). This pit is the trap of orthodox religion, and one of the signifiers of "Reason". It could, however, also represent the pit of Hell, presided over by the ape-devil¹⁴, that is, what some Christian traditions refer to as *figura diaboli*. One of the seven houses the poet-speaker and angel encounter there contain "a number of monkeys, baboons, & all of that species, chain'd by the middle, grinning and snatching at one another, but withheld by the shortness of their chains" (ibid 157).

Lee argues that the ape comes to represent the unconscious prisoner of vice (72). This disturbing image is elaborated on further, and presents the animals as depraved and ruthless:

I saw that they sometimes grew numerous, and then the weak were caught by the strong, and with a grinning aspect, first coupled with, & then devour'd, by plucking off first one limb and then then another, till the body was left a helpless trunk; this, after grinning & kissing it with seeming fondness, they devour'd too; and here & there I saw one savourily picking the flesh off of his own tail (Blake 157).

It is not coincidental that the animals are chained and imprisoned¹⁵, for Blake may have been referring to the disturbing images of slavery he was familiar with, having engraved a series of 16 illustrations for John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. Indeed, two of the engravings for the series, "The Mecoo & Kishee Kishee Monkeys", and "The Quato and Saccawinkee Monkeys", stand apart. It is

¹⁴ Perhaps also a reference to Dante's Devil in the *Inferno*, who is described as "hairy as an ape".

¹⁵ Blake is also expressing some disgust at the actual treatment of the creatures, and not using them merely as symbols.

possible that Blake included them as natural history drawings along with similar depictions of plants and animals in the same work, but the majority take the activities of the slave population as their subject. He may also have intended the monkeys to have satirical intent by offering an interpretive lens for the entire set (Lee 157). He may have anticipated that the images be used to interpret contemporary English society's treatment of monkeys¹⁶ too, with particular reference to the slavery on England's own shores: displays of monkeys in the streets were common, especially since some of the creatures were kept as exotic pets before they succumbed to the cold. On a more practical level too, it seems that Blake was alluding to the manner in which the physical domination and confinement of other species was the first stage in taming the animals' wild nature. As Harriet Ritvo expands:

From this perspective the ultimate goal was domestication – ostensibly so that they could serve pragmatic human ends, but actually as a crowning metaphorical demonstration of human ascendancy. Most of those involved in organized efforts to domesticate exotic animals were either scientists with a professional interest in illustrating the power of human intellect over nature, or magnates and officials with a social or political interest in emphasizing their dominion over other people¹⁷. (234)

Indeed, Debbie Lee argues that there are four complementary threads of lore which inform Blake's depictions of the animal in his visual art and poetry, namely: the rapist-ape or monkey lover, the monkey as sinner or devil, the ape artist, and the classification of the monkey in "race science" (72).

Even though these threads may have influenced Blake's portrayal of the symbol, his use of it in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* is much more complex. Indeed, it comes to represent the slavish imitateness of "Reason" and the false logic that can derive from an unquestioning adherence to that logic. Indeed, the Angel responds to the vision of the ape-house with horror: "thy phantasy has imposed upon me, & thou oughtest to be ashamed"

¹⁶ The treatment of monkeys was a concern prevalent in visual art of the period. The often disturbing way in which the animals were treated features in a number of paintings. Stubbs's *The Green Monkey* (c.1774-5) presents a monkey's wide-eyed observation of himself in a mirror, suggesting that the painting itself is a mirror of society's views about animals. In Plate II of William Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress*, a monkey presents a pitiful plaything, and John Gay's *Fables* (1793), which contains 12 plates by Blake, features, in Fable XIV, "The Monkey who has seen the World". This engraving by Gerard Vandergucht, after a drawing by John Wootton, depicts a fashionably attired pigtailed monkey taking snuff, and effectively criticising society for its anthropocentric concerns.

¹⁷ Apes were the subjects of race debates as scientists compared them to both Africans and Europeans. Comparative anatomy valorised the European physiognomy. It suited racist writers and scientists to promulgate theories of male primates' predilection for human women, as Buffon's *Natural History* had begun the trend of defining species according to whether they could inter-breed and sustain progeny. If apes mated with black women it would support the theory that Africans were a separate species.

(Blake 157). The poet-speaker answers thus: “we impose on one another, & it is but lost time to converse with you whose works are only Analytics” (Blake 157). “Analytics” in this context refers both to the capacity to reason and to Aristotle’s *Analytics*, which emphasised, and argued for, a more logic-driven world. The same tome is encountered in the mill and described as “the skeleton of a body” (Blake 157). Thus, in order to shake off the chains of “Reason” in the angel’s mind, the poet-speaker uses the imagination – “his phantasy” – to show him what folly an unrelenting subscription to “Reason” is, and how destructive it can be to the human spirit. “Vision” is a cognitive word, and unlike the concept of “perception”, already has religious connotations, because it points to a transcendent object (Prickett & Strathman 124).

In analysing “Reason” and “Energy” through the animals symbols located in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, several points need to be noted: whilst Blake may have been influenced by contemporary attitudes towards animals and may have chosen to apply some of the more popular to the symbols he employed, he often used them in novel ways to illustrate important points about morality, society, and the possible dangers of becoming or remaining mired in the daily drudgery of a life divorced from any kind of creative spirit or awareness. He was arguing for a richer reading of the world, and one which married, rather than separated, the concepts of “Reason” and “Energy”. He viewed progression as an outcome that resulted when imaginative interpretations of the world are combined with those derived from knowledge and logic. In creating the notion of contraries, in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* and throughout his oeuvre, Blake indicated that any concept perceived by, or known to, humanity would benefit from perspectives which were neither restricted nor restrictive. There is room for the imagination in our apprehension of the world, and, without it, we fall into the traps of mindless conformity which breed ‘public strife’.

In attempting to look for the tensions and intersections between science and allegory in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* and its animal symbols, it should be recalled that these two concepts were generally not perceived to be anything other than complex by Blake. This relationship is further complicated by the various associations attached to both wild and domestic animals and how they portray and embody these contraries in varying ways. They cannot simply be divided into neat categories which show that they exemplify only one type of contrary, indeed, they seem to be able to combine these contraries’ conflicts within themselves, thereby illustrating that although they are ciphers, they are not ones which represent the occasionally fluid formulations afforded by allegorical traditions. On one point

though, Blake is completely clear: without the transforming power of the human imagination Nature is dead.

Thus, in analysing the animal symbols of *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, various factors would have influenced the contraries they represented. The division of these symbols between “Reason” and “Energy” seems to offer the best interpretation of their various conflicts and confluences and also aid in developing an understanding just how complex attitudes towards animals were both in Blake’s mind and in that of the eighteenth-century British public.

Chapter Four

“What have I to do with thee?”

The serpent, the worm, and the concept of ‘Beulah’ in *THE BOOK of THEL* and *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*

In a note on *A VISION OF THE LAST JUDGMENT*, Blake declares that he does not consider “either the Just or the Wicked to be in a Supreme State, but to be every one of them States of the Sleep which the Soul may fall into in its deadly dreams of Good & Evil when it leaves Paradise following the Serpent” (614). To fully understand the implication of this statement, several aspects of Blake’s imaginative and mythological cosmos need to be understood. Firstly, he does not attach moral values to the states of being, which is why he refers to the concepts of “Good” and “Evil” as false and misguided social and religious constructs: the “deadly dreams” the soul is distracted by. Secondly, the notion that we leave paradise to follow the serpent is an example of Blake reconfiguring the understanding of the Fall as espoused in the teachings of the Established Church, which saw Adam and Eve cast out of the garden as a punishment after being deceived by the serpent. Instead of emphasising that humankind was cast out of paradise, Blake seems to see it as an elected exit, and, in choosing to “follow” the serpent, we move through a potentially oscillatory pattern that, for him, is the true Fall of humankind. This continual process sees us progress through the states of being with the aid of the imagination until we reach a full realisation of the “*Poetic Genius*”, and true paradise. In order to understand what this paradise entails, however, we need to understand what Blake meant by his conception of “the Sleep which the Soul may fall into”, or “Beulah”.

The states of being identified by Blake, whether represented by “Good” and “Evil”, “Reason” and “Energy”, or “Innocence” and “Experience”, are to be passed both through and beyond (606). This can only be achieved, it seems, through the use of our imaginative faculty, or “*Poetic Genius*”. This chapter focuses on one of the “three levels of imagination” (Frye 48): “Beulah”, which appears to represent the “Innocence” of the postlapsarian world, and two of its integral animal symbols: the Worm and Serpent. It focuses on two poems: *THE BOOK of THEL* and *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, which show the dangers and ambiguities inherent to this imaginative realm.

In selecting these two poems for discussion, this chapter returns to points made in Chapter Two, where it was pointed out that, for Rod Preece, the determination of the ‘proper’

human relationship to nature hinges on two examples which link to each other, one of which is located within *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*:

“And trees & birds & beasts & men behold their eternal joy.
“Arise, you little glancing wings, and sing your infant joy!
“Arise and drink your bliss, for every thing that lives is holy!”
(8:8-10) (Blake 195)

The second is extracted from *THE BOOK of THEL*: “Every thing that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself” (3:26-27) (Blake 129). Interpreting Blake’s poetry without first determining, and then understanding, the context of his symbols can lead to gross misreadings of the highly individual interpretations they offer. This often results in an understanding of the dynamic exchange and the various shifts that exist within individual symbols, and within groupings of these symbols, being lost. Narrative point of view needs to be considered too, and the words spoken by Oothoon in the extract above cannot, and should not, be glibly equated with Blake’s own views: indeed, the poem is based on the *visions* of the daughters of Albion, and the emphasis on this term in Blake’s poetry is used with varying effect.

Preece’s interpretation demonstrates the dangers of reading Blake’s animal symbols through an animal studies lens without engaging with his mythology and philosophies. That is, we cannot seize upon what seems to be the most likely interpretation of Blake’s views about a particular animal, or about what he conceived to be the relationship between humankind, the natural world, and its inhabitants, because these perspectives change constantly: sometimes even within a single poem. Thus, in examining the figures of the Worm and Serpent,¹ the notions that “every thing that lives is holy” and that “Every thing that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself” within *THE BOOK of THEL* and *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* will also be explored to critically interrogate the state of Higher Innocence Beulah affords, and to determine whether these statements ring true in the broader sense of Blake’s oeuvre.

¹ The chapter deals with the treatment of the figures in *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* and *THE BOOK of THEL*, and only relevant cross-references have been incorporated to avoid losing focus on the significance of the animals in relation to “Beulah”. In the case of the worm, cross-references appear in the *SONGS Of INNOCENCE and Of EXPERIENCE*, *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL, FOR CHILDREN THE GATES OF PARADISE*, *EUROPE a PROPHECY*, *THE FIRST BOOK of URIZEN*, *THE FOUR ZOAS*, *MILTON, Jerusalem*, and *FOR THE SEXES: THE GATES OF PARADISE*. Cross-references to the serpent appear in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, *AMERICA a PROPHECY*, *EUROPE a PROPHECY*, *THE FIRST BOOK of URIZEN*, *THE SONG of LOS*, *THE BOOK of AHANIA*, *THE BOOK OF LOS*, *THE FOUR ZOAS*, *MILTON, Jerusalem*, *FOR THE SEXES: THE GATES OF PARADISE*, *THE GHOST of ABEL*, and *THE LAOCOÖN*.

Understanding Blake's "Beulah"

Before an exploration of the key concepts of Beulah can commence, a few points need to be noted as regards the interpretation of this term and its employment in this chapter. Critics such as Foster Damon (44), Harold Bloom (20-31), and Zachary Leader (93-97) identify "Beulah", as well as "Ulro" and "Generation", as states of being in and of themselves rather than levels of the imagination. Northrop Frye, on the other hand, divides the levels of the imagination into at least three parts. The first, "Ulro", represents the lowest level of the imagination and "the isolated individual reflecting on his memories of perception and evolving generalisations and abstract ideas. This world is single, for the distinction of subject and object is lost and we have only a brooding subject left" (Frye 48). The second, "Generation", is the world we inhabit as adults, and which is "a double world of subject and object, of organisms and environment ... no living thing is completely adjusted to this world except the plants, hence Blake usually speaks of it as vegetable" (ibid 49). The third, the imaginative realm, is divided into two parts: "an upper and a lower part, so that the three worlds expand into four" (ibid 49). "Beulah" forms the lower part, and offers a limited, and limiting, paradise which is associated with love, wonder, sleep, and dreams. There is, however, no creative or imaginative vision in this lower realm. Although an imaginative receptivity or capacity exists there, it is a world of earthly "Innocence", the kind typified in the *SONGS of Innocence*. Higher, or "organiz'd", Innocence dwells in the uppermost realm of the imagination, or "Eden". It is here that the "*Poetic Genius*" is fully realised, and where humanity's inherent divinity is accepted. We are all capable of attaining "Eden", but are limited and hindered by various self-denying, societal, and religious bonds. Frye's interpretation has been adopted because it most closely resembles Blake's fullest description of "Beulah", which is provided in *MILTON*.

Indeed, in Blake's view, one's passage through all levels is dependent on how successfully, or unsuccessfully, one employs one's imagination and forms a potentially oscillatory pattern rather than a linear progression because "Eden" is not a given, and even if it is attained, the individual is still capable of losing the imaginative vision afforded by the "*Poetic Genius*". This is why Blake considered the traditional conception of the Fall a myth, and accepted instead the notion of a continuous process that occurs as we pass through various states of being, and through the different levels or stages of the imagination.

In *MILTON* (written between 1804 and 1808), "Beulah" is described as a place of "terror & mild moony lustre in soft sexual delusions / Of varied beauty, to delight the

wanderer and repose / His burning thirst & freezing hunger” (I, 2:3-5). It is also “a pleasant lovely Shadow / Where no dispute can come, Because of those who Sleep” (II, 30:2-3) (518). This “Sexual” paradise is, however, “threefold”² (I, 4:5), and it is only the “Human” paradise or “Eden” which is “Fourfold” (I, 4:5) (Blake 483). This had been made clear by Blake some years earlier, when he had described the various levels of the imagination in similar terms in a Letter to Thomas Butts in 1802. It is here he affirms that “double the vision my Eyes do see, / And a double vision is always with me” (27-28) (817). He elucidates further:

... a fourfold vision is given to me;
 ‘Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
 And threefold in soft Beulah’s night
 And twofold Always. May God us keep
 From Single vision & Newton’s sleep!

(84-88) (Blake 818)

Beulah is “threefold” because it is a place where “Contrarieties are equally True” (*MILTON* II, 30:1) – indicating, perhaps, that equalising contraries instead of seeing them as manichaeian opponents can create a ‘third space’ or level.

It thus seems that, just as Bunyan’s Pilgrim³ was not to tarry in Beulah for more than a season, so too are the sleepers in Blake’s Beulah not to solace themselves indefinitely, for it is Eden that they ultimately seek. This is made clear in “The Land of Dreams”, where the little boy questions:

Father, O Father! What do we here
 In this Land of unbelief & fear?
 The Land of Dreams is better far,
 Above the light of the Morning Star.

(16-20) (Blake 427)

Indeed, it is the “light of the Morning Star” (20) that awakens, and represents, our own divinity, but if we remain too long in the embrace of Beulah, our fate may resemble that of

² In 1735, Linnaeus had declared that “He may call himself a naturalist ... who well distinguishes the parts of natural bodies by sight and describes and names all these rightly in agreement with the threefold division” (19). This division referred to what he conceived of as the “three kingdoms of nature”: namely mineral, vegetable, and animal. By referring to the “threefold vision” of Beulah, Blake may have been alluding to this kind of scientifically-sanctioned division and responding to it with his own division of the imaginative realms. He could also have been alluding to occult references pertaining to the number three, particularly the associations of trinities in the Classical, Biblical, and Hindu traditions.

³ In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, “Beulah” is John Bunyan’s earthly paradise: a place where pilgrims wait before they cross the River of Death. Beulah is not, however, their ultimate destination. The term originates in the Book of Isaiah, and has been translated into the “married land”. In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and throughout Blake’s oeuvre, it signals a mystical land resembling paradise, but which is not true paradise.

the little boy in “The Little Boy found” who is misled by a “wand’ring light” (2), and who is ultimately found by what he conceives of as “God” (3) (121). Even though this figure is portrayed as benign, we are reminded that it cannot advance or enhance our divinity in the *Auguries of Innocence*:

God Appears & God is Light
To those poor Souls who dwell in Night,
But does a Human Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of day.

(129-132) (Blake 434)

We therefore advance toward divinity through our own efforts, and this divinity is available to all, even those who sleep in the “pleasant Shadow” of Beulah (*MILTON II*, 31:1) (519), but only if they are willing to progress towards the “Realms of day” that exist in Eden:

...every Man⁴ return’d & went still going forward thro’
The Bosom of the Father in Eternity on Eternity,
Neither did any lack or fall into Error without
A Shadow to repose in all the Days of happy Eternity.

(*MILTON II*, 31:4-7) (519)

The “The Little Boy found” arguably presents a best case scenario of tarrying too long in Beulah, and because he is an emblem of “Innocence” we can assume that “Experience” will teach him the value of his own humanity. There are, however, more alarming dangers for those who have passed through the various states of existence, and who become trapped in Beulah⁵:

I see the Four-fold Man, The Humanity in deadly sleep
And its fallen Emanation, The Spectre & its cruel Shadow.
I see the Past, Present & Future existing all at once
Before me. O Divine Spirit, sustain me on thy wings,
That I may awake Albion from his long & cold repose;
For Bacon & Newton, sheath’d in dismal steel, their terrors hang
Like iron scourges over Albion: Reasonings like vast Serpents
Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations.

(*Jerusalem 1*, 15:6-13) (Blake 635)

⁴ An allusion to *The Somyng of Everyman*, which deals with the question of divine salvation and its requirements. Another example of Blake appropriating familiar symbolic/allegorical meaning while reinventing it.

⁵ Blake’s “Beulah” may have also been influenced by Dante’s Limbo in the *Inferno*. Limbo represented the outermost region of Hell to which condemned souls who are not sinful, but lack the proper faith to enter Paradise, reside. It is a place where souls are deprived of the vision of God, but not of terrestrial delights.

Thus, although Beulah is the place where “The Eternal Great Humanity Divine planted his Paradise” (*MILTON* I, 2:8) (481), it cannot sustain Humanity indefinitely. Its “long & cold repose” (10) eventually becomes a “deadly sleep” (6) (635), which results in an inability to resist, or counter, the “Reasonings” and their associated “mind-forg’d manacles”⁶ (represented by the figures of Bacon and Newton) which are ultimately destructive to the “*Poetic Genius*” figured in the “Four-fold Man”. The image of serpents associated with the constrictions of “Reason”, and their related implications will be discussed later in the chapter, but there is an obvious allusion here to Orc, his reptilisation, and the destructiveness he represents when he transforms into a serpent. The sections which follow also expand on how the ambiguous nature of Beulah is reflected in the ambiguous use of animal symbolisms, which may in turn mirror that found in human beings. Orc is, after all, the first human being in Blake’s mythology, and his experiences represent those of the human race.

Conceptions of real snakes and worms in the eighteenth century

Kindness towards animals was a staple concern of eighteenth century children’s literature. Although many tracts argued for a universal benevolence that extended to all animal lifeforms, practising kindness towards certain animals was not necessarily readily accepted or endorsed by all members of society. Animals considered repulsive, or those regarded pests or as vermin, were not always objects of pity. While various ‘miracles of nature’ were championed in both children’s books and annals of natural history, and the intricate and seemingly infinite designs which appeared to reflect God’s creative powers seemed everywhere apparent in various animal forms, some of them, like the worm and snake, were still very much vilified.

The snake’s negative depictions and associations in many Western cultures⁷ generally stemmed from its role in the Fall of humankind as portrayed in the Bible, and it continued to be associated with deception, cowardice, and enduring evil in the eighteenth century. Indeed, even its scientific classification seemed to echo its relegation to one of the lowest rungs of God’s creation, just as it had been in the Great Chain of Being since medieval times. In the eighteenth century, Linnaeus classified the snake as part of the class *Amphibia*, along with what were considered other lowly and poisonous creatures such as the toad and newt.

⁶ From “LONDON” in the *Songs of Experience* (8) (Blake 216).

⁷ Instances of snake-worship had, however, been recorded in the Nordic countries as well as Ancient Greece and Rome, and were also documented in the ancient Near East since the Bronze Age.

Despite the fact that only one species of snake in England was venomous, and its bite seldom fatal, the discovery of large and deadly snakes in the colonies seemed to confirm the animal's negative reputation. Tales of constrictors large enough to consume livestock were documented in the anecdotes of hunters and travellers.⁸ In Australia and Latin America, various poisonous specimens were responsible for the deaths of unsuspecting explorers, cementing for many the notion that the animals were engaged in constant enmity with humankind, just as they had been since the Fall.

Although the snake is usually presented as an agent of evil and/or Satan in the Bible, there are some positive associations too: in Numbers 21:8-9, Moses is instructed by God to create a bronze serpent⁹ which heals all those bitten by snakes, and, in Matthew 10:16, Christ warns his disciples to prepare for persecution: "Behold, I send you out as sheep amongst wolves, be ye therefore as wise as serpents and innocent as doves". During the eighteenth century, various accounts from the colonies highlighted that the snake was not universally vilified, and was viewed positively by a number of cultures. Indeed, the notion of snake-worship seemed a wide-spread phenomenon: serpent deities were recorded in both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and some indigenous peoples of North and South America held a similar reverence for the animals. It was during the early eighteenth century too, that William Stukeley advanced his theory that Stonehenge had been a serpent temple in ancient times. As Kathleen Raine points out, Blake was well acquainted with Stukeley's work, and followed him in referring to the "Druid" stone circles as "serpent-temples" (236). Indeed, as plate 100 of *Jerusalem* shows, Blake may also have been inspired by Stukeley's reconstruction of the serpent-temple of Avebury.

Like the snake, the worm was also viewed as a repulsive creature, but proved to be a subject of fascination for many naturalists and observers of the period. The animal's characteristics often presented a dilemma, though, as it appeared to combine properties common to both the animal and plant kingdoms: largely stemming from its ability to reproduce by budding and regenerate from cuttings (Schwartz 2-3). This was compounded by its appearance as a notoriously multifarious organism which occupied a variety of

⁸ Blake was aware of John Stedman's account of such an animal, having drawn *The Skinning of the Aboma Snake shot by Captain Stedman* (c. 1796) – another of his illustrations for the *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, which depicts a black slave climbing up a huge boa constrictor in order to begin skinning it.

⁹ Blake's design *Moses Erecting the Brazen Serpent* (c.1801-1803) forms part of his Bible illustrations and depicts his interpretation of Numbers 22:6-9. The iconography in the design presents the serpent on a T-shaped cross: a tradition with which Blake would have been familiar with from older paintings (like those of Nicolas Flamel), together with its implicit parallel with the Crucifixion (the 16th century German *thaler* (silver coin) employs the crucifixion on one side and a snake on a cross on the other).

geographical and/or anatomical locations (ibid 9). Indeed, it seemed that the term “worm” could be applied to a number of creatures, ranging from earthworms to caterpillars, grubs, maggots, intestinal parasites, and freshwater polyps. As Janelle Schwartz expands:

What we identify today as particularly nematode, annelid, or coelenterate and cnidarian organisms, which live and generate in virtually all of nature’s recesses, were collectively categorized under the general label of ‘worms’ throughout the eighteenth century. And worms were generally understood in the class of insects. Indicative of a chaos of life, worms and insects encapsulate something much larger and virtually uncontained in that century than they do today. (15)

It was only in 1809 that Lamarck definitively categorised invertebrates into the genera we understand today, and succeeded in separating worms from insects: a process that Linnaeus had begun in the eighteenth century (ibid 15).

Both snakes and worms, and worms in particular, were central features in debates about the history of life on earth and the numerous theories put forward to account for it.¹⁰ However, those offering explanations for the succession of life forms in the eighteenth century see “expressions such as transformism, metamorphosis, parallelism, transmutation, progression, development and perfectability reflect the richness of pre-Darwinian hypothesizing on this subject and also the lack of consensus ... about the *mechanism* by which species changed and became extinct” (Kenyon-Jones 167).

Indeed, in a period where “each new discovery seemed to dislodge previously set categories and frustrate attempts to comprehend life as a whole through its parts” (Schwartz 9), we see the emergence of theories which many nineteenth century thinkers built upon. Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoonomia; or the Laws of Organic Life* was published in England in 1794, and advanced the theory of the succession of life forms through a series of adaptations. It was during this period too, that the concept of a “recapitulation theory” was first applied to developing field of biology by the German Natural Philosophers, and adopted as a viable biological law by some theorists. The theory effectively advanced the notion that, pre-birth, organisms succeed through a variety of developmental stages where they resemble mature forms of other species.

In his *Flight on the Genealogy of the Earth and on the Dynamic Constitution of Organisation*, published in Jena in 1805, Giuseppe Gauseri, a pupil of Schelling, drew on some of these theories when he entered the debate on parasitic worms, which had been an

¹⁰ To avoid anachronisms, I have deliberately refrained from using the term “evolution”.

area of medical concern since the 1600s (Corsi 79). Gauieteri's study accepted that many parasitic worms could be generated through eggs, or what was referred to as reproductive 'germs', and built on the theory that all animals were originally derived from various forms of matter (ibid 79). Many species then "learned" to reproduce themselves, including the parasitic worm (ibid 79). This kind of hypothesis came to influence Lamarck, who argued that vertebrates, including humans, were probably descended from intestinal worms which had spontaneously generated in an environment that forced them to adopt a longitudinal symmetry (ibid 80).

Publications like Gauieteri's and Lamarck's were widely circulated during the eighteenth century, mainly in the form of pamphlets, and the figures of Urizen and Orc in particular reflect that Blake was aware of the most influential theories surrounding the succession of life forms. For example, in *THE FIRST BOOK of URIZEN*, he draws on concepts such as "recapitulation", adaptation, and the notion of reproductive 'germs':

For he strove in battles dire,
In unseen conflictions with shapes
Bred from his forsaken wilderness
Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element,
Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud.

(I:13-17) (Blake 222)

Indeed, though Frye asserts that the creation of Orc reflects a "remarkable piece of embryology" (257), he offers no explanation for where Blake may have attained this knowledge. In his study *The Neoplatonism of William Blake*, George Harper argues that it may have been derived from Plato's *Timaeus*, but, even though some parallels exist, this theory does not allow for the complexity evident in Blake's depictions. Since Blake was acquainted with George Stubbs's comparative anatomy illustrations these may have influenced his theories on the succession of lifeforms. The poet was familiar with the work of English surgeon John Hunter, another comparative anatomist, and his seventeenth-century predecessor, William Harvey¹¹ (Kreiter 112-116).

Inasmuch as emerging scientific theories often disrupted previously accepted knowledge about the origins of species, the same uncertainty is apparent in Blake's poetry. The conflation of the Serpent and Worm, which, although influenced by their etymological and symbolic links, also reflects an acquaintance with theories which accepted the figures'

¹¹ Blake may have read Harvey's pioneering works in embryology: *An Anatomical Disquisition of the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals* (1638) and *On Animal Generation* (1651).

shared familial links, with the snake having progressed in physical form and structure from a worm-like ancestor. The manner in which Urizen comes into being also illustrates that Blake was aware of the distinction between vertebrates like the snake, and invertebrates like the worm. Although initially formed from what seem to be the reproductive ‘germs’ characteristic of parasitic worms, Urizen is subsequently endowed with a spine, ribs, and even a nervous system:

A vast Spine writh'd in torment
Upon the winds, shooting pain'd
Ribs, like a bending cavern;
And bones of solidness Froze
Over all his nerves of joy.

(iv [b] 37-41) (Blake 228)

However, Blake also makes clear distinctions between the two species. In *THE FOUR ZOAS*, he notes that the Worm is both “slimy” (vi: 118), “ribb’d” (vi: 119) (Blake 373), and “jointed” (ix: 603) (Blake 373), whilst the Serpent is “scaled” (vi: 120) (Blake 314). As part of Orc’s reptilisation, he acknowledges the snake’s ability to cast off its scales, slough off its skin, and effectively emerge as a being renewed both physically and metaphorically. Blake also recognises that, unlike the worm, the snake has the capacity for sight. While the worm is frequently described as “silent”, he acknowledges the serpent’s ability to hiss. However, even though he was aware of many of the serpent’s physical characteristics, there is very little of the “real” animal that emerges in his poetry. Rather, it is the symbolic nature of the creature which is much more apparent.

Blake’s treatment of the worm differs significantly as frequent reference to the “real” animal is made. His use of the term is, however, not restricted to just the earthworm, for he also includes the caterpillar and various other larvae in his depictions. In “The SICK ROSE”, Blake’s reference to “the invisible worm / That flies in the night” (2-3) (Blake 213), could possibly allude to one of several types of parasitic larvae which feed on plants,¹² or perhaps even to an adult beetle. Despite this, he does seem to have been aware of the differences between the species. For example, when referring to the earthworm, Blake emphasises that the animal is an integral part of the natural lifecycle since it facilitates decomposition. He also

¹² In “Proverbs of Hell”, he mentions “the catterpillar” which “chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on” (Plate 9:16) (Blake 152). However, this example also serves to illustrate that Blake may not have been aware of the fact that the caterpillar is the larval form of the butterfly. Though Blake never refers to this metamorphosis, it was a common enough trope, and he surely would have read it in Swedenborg, who uses it as a spiritual metaphor.

acknowledges that it is capable of constructing vast subterranean labyrinths, and is adapted to a life below the ground: he mentions that the animal is sightless, deaf, mute, and appears to be aware of its photosensitivity as well as its need for a moist environment. The earthworm's associations with night, and the fact that it often surfaces after dark, could indicate that Blake was aware that the animal rapidly desiccates if exposed to an environment in which high levels of evaporation exist.

In *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, the proverb “The cut worm forgives the plough” (Plate 7:6) (Blake 151), shows that the poet understood that the animal was able to regenerate from cuttings. However, the earthworm, which is cut in two by the plough, serves as an important indicator of Blake's thoughts about agricultural processes too. Foster Damon argues that, on a symbolic level, the proverb explains that there is no instinct of revenge in Nature¹³ (Damon 329). However, it also demonstrates that Blake was aware of the impact that agricultural revolution was having in the fields around him. The Game Laws, which resulted in the removal of common property rights to land, as well as several other improvements in terms of livestock breeding and arable farming, meant that English agriculture transformed from a largely peasant subsistence economy to a thriving capitalist agricultural system able to meet the demand for food in the developing industrial cities. Effectively, the intensification of agricultural production meant that a low-intensity agricultural system, based on fishing and fowling, was replaced by a high-intensity one based on arable crops. Increasingly, this saw the need for land reclamation, which in turn resulted in the clearing of woodland and the destruction of the natural environment. Thus, when read in conjunction with Damon's interpretation of the possible symbolic significance of the proverb, a more literal association emerges, with Blake making a connection between the manner in which the agricultural revolution facilitated, and accelerated, the destruction of the natural world, its resources, and inhabitants. However, since Blake's poetry was not directly concerned with, and connected to, nature in the sense that would later come to be associated with Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats, it does not mean that he did not comment on it, and on the injustices that befall it due to human greed and avarice. Indeed, the *Auguries of Innocence* catalogues a number of injustices associated with the agricultural revolution:

¹³ The concepts of mutual forgiveness and compassion extend between animals and humans and vice versa – in the *Auguries of Innocence*, the poet-speaker asserts:

The Catterpillar on the Leaf
Repeats to thee thy Mother's grief.
Kill not the Moth nor Butterfly,
For the Last Judgment draweth nigh. (37-40) (Blake 432)

Throughout all these Human Lands
Tools were made, & Born were hands,
Every Farmer Understands.

(64-66) (Blake 432)

...
The Bleat, the Bark, Bellow, & Roar
Are Waves that Beat on Heaven's Shore.

(71-72) (Blake 432)

...
One Mite wrung from the Labrer's hands
Shall buy & sell the Miser's Lands:
Or, if protected from on high,
Does that whole Nation sell & buy.

(81-84) (Blake 432-433)

Thus, Damon's is only half an explanation of this aphorism, because Blake seems to recognise the value of agriculture too. As the excerpts above illustrate, he laments the loss of rural crafts and pursuits by comparison with rampant industrialisation elsewhere in his poetry. As elsewhere then, the worm ambivalently signifies both vulnerability and regeneration, both death and life.

The Serpent and Worm as symbols in Blake's poetry: an overview

Like most of Blake's animal symbols, the Serpent and Worm are open to a number of different, and often inter-related, interpretations. There are, however, several points which need to be outlined before a more specific examination of these symbols commences. Firstly, Blake's portrayal of the Serpent and Worm both adopts and adapts traditional Christian associations, and also draws upon several other literary and mythological archetypes. Secondly, it seems that Blake was aware of the derivation of the term "worm" – linked to the Old Norse *orm* and the Anglo-Saxon *wyrm* – which refer to both "serpent" and "dragon" and their various associations.¹⁴ Thirdly, the terms "worm" and "dragon" were considered synonymous up until the seventeenth century, with the serpent generally equated with the worm, and as well as a host of other legless creatures which moved along on their bellies¹⁵.

¹⁴ Henry VII adopted the Red Dragon as one of the supporters of the English arms after his victory at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 and it remained there until the accession of James I. Although there is considerable variation in the depictions of the figure in heraldic art, most portray an animal with the head of a wolf, the body of a serpent, four taloned feet, bat-like wings, and a forked tongue and tail.

¹⁵ In *A Dictionary of the English Language*, first published in 1755, Samuel Johnson drew a distinction between worms and dragons, but retained the term "serpent" in his definition of the worm. This is probably a result of the

Lastly, Luciferian myth and moral allegory sees the terms “worm”, “serpent”, and “dragon” regularly conflated and used interchangeably. Blake’s understanding of these traditions extends beyond the biblical associations and can be traced to the work of two poets he was intimately acquainted with: Dante and Milton. Having provided numerous illustrations for, and extensive commentary on, both poets’ works, Blake draws on, and contrasts, their views with his own, subsequently working them into both his poetry and visual art. In Canto IV of the *Inferno*, Dante refers to Cerberus as *il gran vermo*, “the Great Worm”, alluding to several biblical references including that of the serpent in *Genesis* and the apocalyptic dragon in *Revelation*.¹⁶ There is also the suggestion that the reptilian nature of the dragon is derogated by Dante, who scornfully reduces it to the form of a helpless earthworm. In similar vein, Milton refers to Satan as “that false worm”¹⁷ (ix: 1068) (549) in *Paradise Lost*.

As much as the Worm is an emblem of humanity, though, it exists quite apart from the human world: “The man shall rage, bound with his chain, the worm in silence creep” (*THE FOUR ZOAS* vii: 143) (Blake 323). Often represented as a silent and unseen observer which exists on the fringes of humanity’s life stages and states of being, it is, in the end, impartial to humanity’s fate: “In the tower named Bloody, a skeleton yellow remained in its chains on its couch / Of stone, once a man who refus’d to sign abhorrence; the eternal worm / Crept in the skeleton” (*THE FRENCH REVOLUTION* 33-35) (Blake 135). The Worm thus reminds us of our own fragility and mortality, ultimately representing the perpetual cycles of birth and death, renewal and decay, both physical and spiritual.

terms “snake”, “serpent”, “adder”, and “worm” being used indiscriminately during, and prior to, this period – with little systematic attempt to divide or identify the various species having taken place (with perhaps the exception of Aristotle, whose taxonomy dominated much of the medieval period and even later).

¹⁶ There are also allusions to Dante’s dragonish Geryon, the three-headed shade in the *Inferno* (circle 7, cantos 16-17), and the spiralling serpent in Blake’s illustrations of Dante.

¹⁷ Blake’s illustration “Eve Tempted by the Serpent” (c. 1799-1800) also depicts a spiraling serpent. Similar images are found in several of his paintings and engravings (including *Satan Exulting over Eve*, *Moses Erecting the Brazen Serpent*, *Satan Watching the Caresses of Adam and Eve*, *The Six-Footed Serpent attacking Agnello Brunelleschi*, and *Job’s Evil Dreams*), and can be traced back to his apprenticeship to James Basire. One of the illustrations for Jacob Bryant’s *A New System, or, An Analysis of Ancient Mythology*, published in 1774, is that of the *ovum mundanum* – the World Egg – with the *Ophis* (a serpent) wrapped around it. Blake may have also been inspired by the Hellenistic sculpture of Laocoön and his two sons beset by serpents winding around them, a clay replica of which was housed at the Royal Academy in London. Indeed, Laocoön’s predicament, a metaphor for the soul’s imprisonment within a material body, seems to have intrigued Blake. In 1815 he made a drawing of the sculpture, which he later turned into an engraving, and annotated with several aphorisms.

The Serpent

Blake's portrayal of the serpent is multifaceted and offers a variety of possible interpretations, almost all of which are negative. There are, of course, obvious parallels between Blake's symbol and that of the Established Church, which viewed the serpent as Eve's tempter and the agent responsible for humanity's fallen state. The serpent is punished for its role in the Fall, a fact made explicit in Genesis 3:15 where God, addressing it, declares: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel." A parallel is drawn in *KING EDWARD THE THIRD*, where we see the "shining snake" (126) "turn, and bite the padding foot"¹⁸ (129) (Blake 24). Blake's rendering of the serpent thus combines the associations of the Established Church with those of other traditions, all the while populating the symbol with his own inflections.

Indeed, in *Witness Against the Beast*, E P Thompson has traced the influence upon the Muggletonian version of Genesis in Blake's work, which is particularly evident in his portrayal of the serpent. According to this version, Satan manifested in the form of a serpent which copulated with Eve. The offspring of this union was Cain, whereas Abel and Seth were derived from the same divine principle in which God had created Adam (Thompson 73). From the moment of the Fall, however, Satan vanished from the cosmos (having perpetuated himself in Cain and Cain's seed) and, as a result, two contrary principles, one diabolic and the other divine,¹⁹ were implanted within the human race (ibid 73). The transmutation of the serpent into flesh and blood is made explicit in *THE FIRST BOOK of URIZEN*: "Coil'd within Enitharmon's womb / The serpent grew, casting its scales" (VI, 29-30), until "an Infant form"²⁰ is brought forth (vi, 35) (Blake 232).

Some Gnostic traditions recognise the Serpent as the liberator of humankind, because it raises us beyond good and evil, beyond the vengeful God portrayed in the Old Testament, and becomes our collaborator. Humankind appreciates vitality, intelligence, and freedom because we have experienced misery, bitterness, and suffering, and this is expressed in *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, where Jesus is prompted to "Awake, arise to spiritual strife" (78 copy d) (Blake 753). Thus, humankind must sin in order to become God: we must know

¹⁸ Blake may also have been alluding to Prudentius's *Cathemerinon liber*, where it is recounted that the first woman's descendants will crush the three-tongued throat (*colla trilinguia calce*) of the serpent with their heel.

¹⁹ This is probably an expansion of the idea that humankind persists in their errors after the Fall, building up a world by collecting together virtue and sin alike. Blake recognised similar dualisms in both human nature and within the individual consciousness, but did not attach moral values to them.

²⁰ This is also paralleled in worm images, perhaps more in vulnerability than in potential evil.

both good and evil. Blake seems to allude to these traditions in both his visual art and poetry. In his painting *Elohim creating Adam* (c.1805), God, and what appears to be a serpent, are present during Adam's creation. Although the head of the animal is not visible, its coils are wrapped around Adam's torso in a manner reminiscent of the serpent in *Job's Evil Dreams*, and in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* the poet-speaker declares that "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it" (Plates 5-6) (Blake 150).

Along with Biblical and Muggletonian influences, those of Eastern religious texts and figures seem apparent.²¹ More specifically, there appear to be several allusions to the *Nāgas* mentioned in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (which we know Blake read), whose multiple heads are crested – resembling the spread hoods of the cobra. One such instance appears in *THEN SHE BORE PALE DESIRE*: where we are told that "envy hath a serpent's head of fearful bulk, hissing with hundred tongues" (Blake 41). The reptilisation of Orc invites comparisons between the serpent he becomes and Shesha, the king of the *Nāgas*. As one of the primary representatives of the imagination and the imaginative capacity in Blake's oeuvre, Orc, like Shesha, is also one of the primal beings of creation.²² However, these figures simultaneously represent a reciprocal capacity for destruction: when Shesha uncoils, time moves forward and creation takes place, but if his coils move backwards, the universe will cease to exist.

Similarly, Orc has the power to destroy what he creates. In *THE SONG of LOS*, we see Orc arise "like a pillar of fire above the Alps / Like a serpent of fiery flame!" (7:27-28) (Blake 248). In this instance, he is associated with the creative "thick-flaming, thought-creating" fires that are "Energy" itself (6:6) (Blake 247). This is contrasted with his depiction in *THE FOUR ZOAS*:

The books of Urizen unroll with dreadful noise; the folding Serpent
Of Orc began to Consume in fierce raving fire; his fierce flames
Issu'd on all sides, gathering strength in animating volumes,
Roaming abroad on all the winds, raging intense, reddening
Into resistless pillars of fire rolling round & round, gathering
Strength from the Earths consumed & heavens & all hidden abysses.
(ix: 33-38) (Blake 358)

²¹ Hindu religious texts, in particular, share with Gnostic and certain Christian mystical treatises the notion that the divine essence is present within human nature in addition to being present outside of it.

²² Blake could also have been referring to Ovid's mysterious *quis quis deorum* in the *Metamorphoses*, the shaper of matter, but not its creator, who mixes together portions of all things to form the world.

Orc is no longer “like a serpent of fiery flame” (*THE SONG of LOS* 7:27-28) (Blake 248), but actually becomes a serpent driven by Urizen’s fires: the fires of “Reason”, which gather strength from the destruction of earths, heavens, and abysses – the places formerly associated with symbols of “Energy”. Some critics, most notably David Erdman (p. 294), consider the Orc-serpent political allegory as an initially beneficent force for rebellion, but which, after a time, consumes itself (as was the case with the French Revolution).

i) The serpent as religious hypocrite

In the second series of *THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION*, Blake advances the notion that “if any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot. The desire of Man being Infinite, the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite” (Blake 97). The religious hypocrite in his oeuvre, however, typically rejects this in favour of the “same dull round”, which is actually “loathed by its possessor” (ibid 97). This smothering hypocrisy is frequently presented in the figure of the serpent. In *TIRIEL*, we see the tragedy of a youth “compell’d to pray repugnant & to humble the immortal spirit / Till [he was] subtil as a serpent in a paradise, / Consuming all, both flowers & fruits, insects and warbling birds” (8: 36-38) (Blake 110). Har and Heva do nothing to stop Tiriél’s demise, and a form of punishment is meted out for them in *THE SONG of LOS* when they are transformed into serpents “Creeping in reptile flesh upon / The bosom of the ground” (4: 9-10) (246). The serpent is thus associated with the material body, but this is the part embedded in Ulro: it is one-dimensional, in a form of stasis, and bound up in coil after coil of repetition. This form of selfhood is encircling, poisonous, earth-bound, and constricting. Caught up in this material body, Har and Heva come to represent a corrupted form of the ‘natural man’, a fate to which they had also assigned their son.

Indeed, Ijim identifies his brother as a “hypocrite” (50) with a “pois’nous soul” (58) who would “creep like a bright serpent”, and “twine” himself around his neck (57) (Blake 105). A similar kind of hypocrisy is identified in the priest, who is also frequently represented as a serpent. In *THE FRENCH REVOLUTION*, the Archbishop of Paris arises “In the rushing of scales and hissing of flames and rolling of sulphurous smoke” (127) (140). In *THE FOUR ZOAS*:

... The Prester Serpent runs
Along the ranks, crying, “Listen to the Priest of God ye warriors;

This cowl upon my head he plac'd in times of Everlasting,
 And said, 'Go forth & guide my battles; like the jointed spine
 Of Man I made thee when I blotted Man from life & light.
 Take thou the Seven Diseases of Man; store them for times to come
 In store houses, in secret places that I will tell thee of,
 To be my great & awful curses at the time appointed.' ”

(vii [b] 113-120) (335-336)

For Blake, the priest's hypocrisy is symptomatic of the hypocritical God of the Established Church, who traps humankind into believing that divinity is external to us. This is a God who “blotted Man from life & light” (*THE FOUR ZOAS* vii [b] 117) (336), and whose “great & awful curses” (120), “the Seven Diseases of Man” (118), punish us for questioning his laws and principles: his “holy Mystery”. He is the Nobodaddy who ensures that “none dare eat the fruit but from / The wily serpents jaws” (7-8) (171). The same Nobodaddy issues “words & laws” (6) of “darkness & obscurity” (5) (171) which are translated into the hissings of religious hypocrites: in *THE FRENCH REVOLUTION*, the Archbishop of Paris's “voice issued harsh grating; instead of words, harsh hissings” (177) (142). They are reminiscent of the “thirsty hissings” (41) of Tiriël, whose “paradise is fall'n” (40), and whose dying words are a curse on his father. In *THE FOUR ZOAS*, “the serpent of the woods / And of the waters ... irritate / With harsh songs every living soul” (111-113) (vii [b] 117) (335).

Essentially then, the priest is equated with the serpent in “I saw a chapel all of gold”. His doctrines are responsible for the many “weeping, mourning, worshipping” (4) (163) people who seem to be barred from entering this formidable and unaccommodating place of worship – where the words “thou shalt not”²³ are inscribed above the door. Their fear stems from the false doctrines “forc'd & forc'd & forc'd” upon them (7) in much the same way as they were upon Tiriël. The priest, who comes to preside over this already cold and sterile chapel²⁴ with its “altar white” (13), is guilty of “vomiting his poison out / On the bread & on the wine” (14-15) (163), thereby epitomising the manner in which the Church “appalls” the minds it enslaves. The poem thus demonstrates how the priest, like Orc, has lost all semblance of his humanity. The curious re-use of the conventional associations of church doctrine against the church itself is used to parodic effect in much the same way it is in *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, with the same underlying message: the rejection of

²³ “I saw a chapel all of gold” draws on imagery apparent in what appears to be its “companion” poem: “The Garden of Love”.

²⁴ Blake may also have been alluding to the Swedenborg's New Church. The “chapel all of gold” resembles Swedenborg's description of the temple he saw on one of his visionary journeys. It signified the New Church, which was to be established in the minds of spiritually regenerated men (Rix 133).

one's own humanity is also the rejection of one's inherent divinity. As the speaker of *THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL* expands: "Thou also dwell'st in Eternity. / Thou art a Man: God is no more / Thy own Humanity learn to adore (74-76 copy *d*) (Blake 752).

ii) The serpent as the degenerate human form

Foster Damon argues that the longest analysis of the degeneration of the human form is exemplified in the figure of Orc (365), who is compelled by Urizen to assume the form of a serpent and climb the Tree of Mystery: "He knew that weakness stretches out in breadth & length, he knew / That wisdom reaches high & deep; & therefore he made Orc, / In serpent form compell'd, stretch out & up the mysterious tree" (*THE FOUR ZOAS* vii: 161-165) (Blake 324). This corrupted form of Orc offers a stark contrast to his original, positively revolutionary humanity: "No more remain'd of Orc but the Serpent round the tree of Mystery.²⁵ / The form of Orc was gone; he rear'd his serpent bulk among / The stars of Urizen in Power, rending the form of life / Into a formless indefinite & strewing her on the Abyss / Like clouds upon the winter sky, broken with winds & thunders" (*THE FOUR ZOAS* vii [b]: 214-218) (Blake 338). In effect, Orc has descended into "that State call'd Satan" (*THE FOUR ZOAS* viii: 383) (351). The horror implicit in what he has become is evident in the "trembling" (81) Enitharmon's fearful reaction: "I put not any trust in thee, nor in thy glitt'ring scales; / Thy eyelids are a terror to me; & the flaming of thy crest, / The rushing of thy scales confound me, thy hoarse rushing scales" (*THE FOUR ZOAS* vii [b]: 82-84) (335).

Orc goes on to encircle Man with the twenty seven folds of the false heavens or churches (*THE FOUR ZOAS* ix: 69) (338), thus emphasising his associations with the constrictions, and restrictions, of "Reason". The poem therefore outlines the process which sees Orc, the avowed enemy of religion, become his own opposite (Damon 365). Indeed, in *AMERICA*, he proclaims that "The fiery joy that Urizen perverted to ten commands, / What night he led the starry hosts thro' the wide wilderness, / That stony law I stamp to dust; and scatter religion abroad" (8: 3-5) (Blake 198). The change in Orc's characterisation may have been shaped, in part, by events taking place in France during the period over which the poem was written (between 1795 and 1804). Indeed, David Erdman argues that the various revisions of *THE FOUR ZOAS* may have been directly influenced by the French Revolution,

²⁵ A subversion of the Tree of Knowledge described in Genesis, the Tree of Mystery (sometimes referred to as the "Tree of Life"), represents the "Moral Virtues": limiting mental constructs which are damaging to the human spirit and the "Poetic Genius". In one of the supplementary passages to *THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL*, these false "virtues" are listed as "Good & Evil & Misery / And Death & Hell" (41-42) (Blake 759).

and more specifically, the 18th Brumaire, which saw Napoleon overthrow the Directory and take up the mantle of Chief Consul, “rending to shreds the Constitution of the French Republic[.] ... Bonaparte had strewn Liberty, Equality, Fraternity upon the winds and reared his head among the dynasts in his bid for imperial Power” (Erdman 316). However, the change in Orc’s characterisation can also be read in terms of Blake’s conception of the Fall, and the progression from one state of being to another. Thus, inasmuch as the serpent he becomes represents constriction, restraint, “Reason”, destruction, and repetitiveness, the figure also presents the possibilities of progression, regeneration, and even rebirth. Unrestrained “Energy” is as destructive as an unquestioning allegiance to “Reason”: and neither of these can be sustained indefinitely without damage to either the individual or to society.

The figure of Orc, then, seems to demonstrate both the “Just [and] Wicked States of the Sleep which the Soul may fall into” (Blake 614), and acts as a reminder of what the poet-speaker in the *GATES of PARADISE* refers to as the “Serpent Reasonings” which entice us into believing as ultimate or immutable the concepts of “Good & Evil, Virtue & Vice”²⁶ (ibid 770). Indeed, as Kathleen Raine argues, the snake in Blake’s cosmos is of double aspect, and drawing on both Swedenborg and Stukeley when writing on the union of the divine and satanic natures in Jesus, he combined them in the figure of the serpent (236). That is, the serpent is the representative of “the type of sin and of the human nature that Jesus ‘took on’ in order to carry human sin. It is for this reason that the brazen serpent of Moses has always been considered as the type of Christ crucified”²⁷ (Raine 236).

²⁶ Blake did not reject reason altogether, only the notion that it should not be the sole arbiter, and should be marked by an “outward circumference” (*THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* Plate 4) (Blake 149).

²⁷ A reference supported by John 3:14: “And as Moses did lift up the serpent in the wilderness, so it behoveth the Son of Man to be lifted up.”

iii) The serpent as “the vast form of Nature”

Blake believed that nature comes alive to, and by means of, a visionary consciousness. For him, there is no pantheistic connection linking the human and natural worlds, and these were two distinct concepts in his philosophy and mythological cosmos. This is made explicit in his annotations to Boyd’s *Dante*: “Nature Teaches nothing of Spiritual Life but only of Natural Life” (412), and is expanded further in *MILTON*:

The Natural power continually seeks & tends to Destruction,
Ending in Death, which would of itself be Eternal Death.
And all are Class’d by Spiritual & not by Natural power.

And every Natural Effect has a Spiritual Cause, and Not
A Natural; for a Natural Cause only seems: it is a Delusion
Of Ulro & a ratio of the perishing Vegetable Memory.

(I, 26: 41-46) (Blake 513)

In both *THE FOUR ZOAS* (iii: 97,101) (Blake 294) and *Jerusalem* (29:76,80) (ibid 655), “the vast form of Nature” is “like a Serpent”. For Thompson, the animal is thus a representative of imprisoning selfhood and a symbol of constraining matter or Nature (98). However, if the ‘nature of Nature’ is a matter of how we perceive it, Nature is not in itself deceptive, only our perception is faulty. Certainly, just as Nature’s double aspect is evident in the symbolism employed, so too is that of the serpent, for as much as the animal represents restraint and constraint, it also has the potential for liberation and renewal. That is, if “every Natural Effect has a Spiritual Cause”, then the snake sloughing off its skin, its imprisoning selfhood, is of particular symbolic significance. The animal’s natural function of shedding the old to emerge renewed is a fitting emblem for Christ’s resurrection from the dead and his return to an immortal life, and a parallel seems to be drawn in *THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL*:

Then Roll’d the shadowy Man away
From the Limbs of Jesus, to make them his prey,
An Ever devouring appetite
Glittering with festering Venoms bright.

(copy e 81-84) (Blake 755)

The “shadowy Man”, it seems, is the natural body that Jesus sheds off to emerge renewed in Divine Humanity (Raine 237), and the “festering Venoms” are the sins of man, which are

consumed by his “Ever devouring appetite” in order to remove “this cause of distress” (copy *e* 85) (Blake 755).

iv) **The serpent as representative of material wealth**

Foster Damon argues that Nature “offers us the seduction of material wealth” (366), and a similar connection is evident in the figure of the serpent, which is most often associated with gold and precious stones. In *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, the second chamber of the “Printing house in Hell” is occupied by a “Viper folding round the rock & the cave, and others adorning it with gold, silver and precious stones” (Plates 15-17) (Blake 154).

Summerfield argues that the animal represents “Reason” and “makes patterns with the restrictive beauties of tradition” (77). In *MILTON*, Leutha “form’d the Serpent / Of precious stones & gold [and] turn’d poisons on the sultry wastes” (I 12: 29-30) (Blake 493), and in his annotations to Wordsworth’s poems, Blake rejects this kind of materialistic seduction:

“Natural Objects always did & now do weaken, deaden & obliterate Imagination in Me” (ibid 783). He elucidates further in his letter to Thomas Butts, dated 10 January 1802: “Naked we came here, naked of Natural things, & naked we shall return; but while cloth’d with the Divine Mercy, we are richly cloth’d in Spiritual & suffer all the rest gladly” (ibid 813).

Unlike the gold associated with the lion and with Christ, which is tied to the alchemical properties of healing and representative of the elixir of life, the serpent’s association with the element often represents greed and material wealth, offering only deception and the false promise of earthly pleasures. In “I saw a chapel all of gold,” the chapel itself is representative of a false, stifling, and deceptive form of religion. Its “pavement sweet” (10) lined with “pearls & rubies bright” (11) are symptomatic of the serpent’s greed and corruption, evident in how “his slimy length” (12) is drawn upon all of it. Indeed, it seems that the ruby tears of the lion in “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found”, which represent the blood of Christ (“The Real Man The Imagination which Liveth for Ever”), are inverted and corrupted in the degenerating form of Orc, whose scales “shine with gold and rubies” (*THE FOUR ZOAS* vii: 136) (Blake 323).

Thus, in attempting to unite the “*Poetic Genius*” with the seductions of material wealth, Orc, the original representative of the Imagination, demonstrates precisely how and why it is impossible. His reptilisation destroys his soul until no semblance of his humanity, and the divine principle of the “*Poetic Genius*” that is inherent to it, remains. In examining the figure of the Serpent in Blake’s poetry, then, it is apparent that the animal is primarily

symbolic and hardly refers to the real creature at all. Although Blake seems to have been aware of many of the animal's physical characteristics, they are rarely mentioned.

The Worm

Like the Serpent, the figure of the Worm is a multifaceted one in Blake's poetry. They both occupy a space on the border of our perceptions, and their associations are mainly negative: they are silent, unseen, and repellent: one threatens death and the other feeds²⁸ on it. The Worm's feebleness and vulnerability is sometimes equated with that of humankind, alluding to Biblical associations, including Bildad's declaration:

Dominion and fear are with him, he maketh peace in his high places.
Is there any number of his armies? and upon whom doth not his light arise?
How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born
of a woman?
Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his
sight.
How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?
(Job 25: 2-6)

Several other parallels between humanity and the Worm are also alluded to, including Psalm 22:6, which sees Jesus equated with the figure: "But I *am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." Another example is in Isaiah 41:14, where God addresses Jacob and the people of Israel: "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, *and* ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." The Worm thus represents some of the best and worst characteristics of humankind: our weak, flawed, and sinful mortality, as well as our humility and potential for salvation.

Although these allusions are present in one form or another in Blake's poetry, they are also complicated in his mythological cosmos. Indeed, they are reworked to reflect that the Worm's various depictions and associations are ultimately determined by our perceptions and

²⁸ In *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, Oothoon observes, "Sweetest the fruit that the worm feeds on, & the soul prey'd on by woe" (3:17) (Blake 191). This serves as an example of what Blake saw as a certain vindictiveness in predators of all kinds. The naturalistic observation that they wait for the ripest, sweetest, most vulnerable stages in the prey or fruit's existence can be found in various instances throughout his oeuvre. In *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, "the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on" (Plate 10) (Blake 152), and in "The Human Abstract" the "caterpillar" feeds on the fruit of the Tree of Mystery (13-18) (Blake 217).

imaginative receptivity, in much the same way that our own humanity is. This is made clear in *Jerusalem*: “Let the Human Organs be kept in their integrity, at will Contracting into Worms or Expanding into Gods” (III:55:36-37) (Blake 686). Our perceptions and imaginative receptivity vary, of course, according to our progression through the various states of being. If we are unable to move beyond “Experience” and an unquestioning allegiance to “Reason”, we risk falling into the state embodied by Ulro, characterised by our senses and creativity becoming weakened and one-dimensional. This in turn results in the “*Poetic Genius*” being stifled, thus enabling a potential initiation into the laws and doctrines of the “God & his Priest & King / Who make up a heaven of our misery”²⁹ (Blake 212).

Thus, Blake’s depiction of the worm is not wholly negative. In his Annotations to Lavater, he states that “God is in the lowest effects as well as in the highest causes; for he is become a worm that may nourish the weak. For let it be remember’d that creation is God descending according to the weakness of man, for our Lord is the word of God & every thing on earth is the word of God & in its essence is God” (87). Thus, it is evident that there is some divine substance in this lowly figure: in *Jerusalem*, God makes a “Mutual Covenant Divine... with Living Creatures... Lion, Tyger, Horse, Elephant, Eagle, Dove, Fly, [and] Worm”³⁰ (98:41-43) (Blake 746).

The Worm is also viewed positively in both *THE BOOK of THEL* and the *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*. It is worth reiterating that the worm (and animal presences generally) are perfunctorily treated, even in studies devoted to these poems. Mark Bracher emphasises Blake’s pursuit of the “sovereignty of the individual” (164), but concentrates on the metaphysics of empiricism versus idealism, with little reference to animal images; while Kevin Hutchings, in a loosely ecocritical exploration of “Pastoral, Ideology and Nature” in *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, offers only brief comments on animal presences. He does note, however, drawing on Nancy Moore Goslee’s influential essay, the antithesis in Blake between the horror-laden association of the worm with graveyards and death, and as the bearer of “an exuberant, life-affirming imperative a doubly ‘sweet’ prophecy,” related by Oothoon, “focusing on and affirming the earthly here and now” (Hutchings 17). Goslee offers a more detailed reading of the worm image, but focuses on gender enslavement.

²⁹ From: “The Chimney Sweeper”, *SONGS Of EXPERIENCE*.

³⁰ This seems like a direct riposte to the disparaging of animals in Leviticus 11.

i) The Worm as a symbol of mortality

The Worm's associations with death, mortality, and decay usually highlight the vulnerability of the human body, and sometimes the human mind. At the conclusion of the eponymous poem, Tiriell understands that the broken, hapless, and helpless kind of humanity he comes to represent is "bound beneath the heavens in a reptile form, / A worm of sixty winters creeping on the dusky ground" (8:23-24) (Blake 110), in a place where "one law is given to the lion and the patient Ox" (8: 10) (Blake 109). Not only has he transformed into a degenerate human form, but he has also perpetuated the cycle of Har, becoming himself a "weak mistaken father of a lawless race" (8:8) (Blake 109).

Indeed, the figure of the Worm acts as a reminder that all mortals must meet a fate in which we are united: in *THE FRENCH REVOLUTION*, we see "The priest rot in his surplice by the lawless lover, the holy beside the accursed, / The King, frowning in purple, beside the grey ploughman, and their worms embrace together" (149-150) (Blake 141). However, unlike the creeping worm, the human has the power of perception, and the divine vision and guiding principles of the "*Poetic Genius*". In *THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION* (Second Series), two of the principles set us apart from the vegetable world of nature: the first is that "Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception; he perceives [sic] more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover", and the second is that "The desire of Man being Infinite, the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite" (Blake 97).

If the role the "*Poetic Genius*" plays in our mortality is ignored, we may succumb to the fate laid out for us by despots such as the Kings of Asia in *THE SONG of LOS*, who aim to:

... turn man from his path,
To restrain the child from the womb, (6:23-24)

To cut off the bread from the city,
That the remnant may learn to obey,

That the pride of the heart may fail,
That the lust of the eyes may be quench'd,
That the delicate ear in its infancy
May be dull'd, and the nostrils clos'd up,
To teach mortal worms the path
That leads from the gates of the Grave

(7:1-8) (Blake 247)

This systematic, deliberate attempt to dull the organs of perception is key to teaching the “mortal worms”³¹ the lesson of “Thou shalt not”, enshrined in both the Garden of Love and the chapel of gold, from their infancy. Hence, the “multitudes of lambs”³² (Blake 122) are transformed into the “many ... weeping, mourning, worshipping”³³ (Blake 163) perpetually tied to a lot similar to Tiriél’s:

The young bosom is cold for lack of mother’s nourishment, & milk
Is cut off from the weeping mouth: with difficulty & pain
The little lids are lifted & the little nostrils open’d:
The father forms a whip to rouse the sluggish senses to act
And scourges off all youthful fancies from the new-born man.
Then walks the weak infant in sorrow, compell’d to number footsteps
Upon the sand...

(27-33) (Blake 110)

Thus, the “path / That leads from the gates of the Grave” (7:7-8 *THE SONG of LOS*) (Blake 247) is littered with:

... the forms of tygers & of Lions, dishumaniz’d men.
Many in serpents & in worms, stretched out enormous length
Over the sullen mould & slimy tracks...
Drawn out from deep to deep, woven by ribb’d
And scaled monsters or arm’d in iron shell, or shell of brass.
Or gold; a glittering torment shining & hissing in eternal pain;
Some, columns of fire or water, sometimes stretch’d out in height,
Sometimes in length, sometimes englobing, wandering in vain seeking for ease.

(*THE FOUR ZOAS* vi: 116-123) (Blake 314)

Ultimately, the resulting destruction of the human spirit and body (facilitated by unquestioningly accepting the values of “Reason”), is unconscionable, horrific, and seemingly irreversible.³⁴ This is made clear in *THE FOUR ZOAS*, where we see Urizen realise just how destructive his unbending principles and philosophies are, and how they contribute to creating this race of “dishumaniz’d men”:

[Urizen’s] voice to them was but an inarticulate thunder, for their Ears
Were heavy & dull, & their eyes & nostrils closed up.

(vi: 124-125) (Blake 315)

³¹ An allusion to Bildad’s declaration that man is a worm: Job 25:6.

³² From “HOLY THURSDAY”.

³³ From “I saw a chapel all of gold”.

³⁴ This dehumanising is, in Blake’s view, the result of an unholy alliance between monarchical tyranny, the church priesthood, and parental ‘education’.

...
He saw them curs'd beyond his Curse: his soul melted with fear.
 He could not take their fetters off, for they grew from the soul,
 Nor could he quench the fires, for they flam'd out from the heart,
 Nor could he calm the Elements, because himself was subject;
 So he threw his flight in terror & pain, & in repentant tears.
 (vi: 141-146) (Blake 315)

It thus seems that the false doctrine of Enitharmon has become a reality for the corrupted individuals who believe that “an Eternal life awaits the worms of sixty winters / In an allegorical abode where existence hath never come” (*EUROPE* 5:6-7) (Blake 240). They are, therefore, examples of the manner in which Satan:

wither'd up the Human Form
 By laws of sacrifice for sin,³⁵
 Till it became a Mortal Worm,
 But O! translucent all within.³⁶
 (*Jerusalem* 27:53-56) (Blake 651)

Indeed, like Orc, these individuals have descended into “that State call'd Satan” (*THE FOUR ZOAS* viii: 383) (351). Satan's form is “terrible”: it is “dishumaniz'd, monstrous” (viii: 252) (347). To descend means that one becomes both serpentine and worm-like:

A male without a female counterpart, a howling fiend
 Forlorn of Eden & repugnant to the forms of life,
 ...
 Abhor'd, accursed, ever dying an Eternal death,
 Being multitudes of tyrant Men in union blasphemous
 Against the Divine image, Congregated assemblies of wicked men.
 (viii: 253-258) (347)

This in turn affirms that, given the right conditions, the human form, even with the potential offered by the “*Poetic Genius*,” is capable of reverting to that of the “Mortal Worm” if that potential remains unheeded and unused. The helplessness embodied in the “Mortal Worm” is not that of “Innocence”, but represents instead the despair and corruption (both real and imagined) which spring from mindless conformation to the destructive principles espoused in

³⁵ The turn from paradise to ruin seems an allusion to the beautiful grove of *Metamorphoses* 3, where Cadmus's men are devoured by the serpent of Mars, lurking in a seemingly harmless garden, and leading ultimately to a race of men born of the dragon, who are fratricides from birth.

³⁶ Blake may be referring naturalistically to the fact that in earthworms one can often see the inner organs, which may in turn symbolically signify an even greater sense of vulnerability, and almost a loss of selfhood.

both “Experience” and “Reason”. Subscription to these damaging and limiting perspectives means that the individual is constricted until they become an empty vessel: a form “translucent all within”, effectively rendering them a sightless alimentary tube mired in the trappings of Ulro.

ii) The Worm as part of the succession of lifeforms

As noted earlier, a number of theories circulated in the eighteenth century with regard to the succession of lifeforms. In Blake’s poetry, a number of instances reveal some knowledge of these theories, and the potential for progression that exists between lifeforms is evident in the figures of the Worm and Serpent. With particular reference to these two figures, there are instances where the two species’ defining attributes become indistinct and seem to merge, and even combine with that of other lifeforms.

Indeed, despite its paltriness, the Worm, like Orc, represents both the potential for creation, and the potential for destruction; it represents the capacity for both advancement and reversion. In *THE FIRST BOOK of URIZEN*, we witness Orc’s development in Enitharmon’s womb, where he is first represented as a Worm:

... Enitharmon, sick,
Felt a Worm within her womb.

Yet helpless it lay like a Worm
In the trembling womb
To be moulded into existence.
All day the worm lay on her bosom;
All night within her womb
The worm lay till it grew to a serpent,
With dolorous hissings & poisons
Round Enitharmon’s loins folding.

Coil’d within Enitharmon’s womb
The serpent grew, casting its scales;
With sharp pangs the hissings began
To change to a grating cry:
Many sorrows and dismal throes,
Many forms of fish, bird & beast
Brought forth an Infant form
Where was a worm before.

(vi: 19-36) (Blake 232)

Thus, even though the “helpless” Worm waits “to be moulded into existence”, the figure is capable of moulding existence too: it grows into the Serpent, and then, through “Many forms of fish, bird & beast”, it brings forth “an Infant form”.³⁷ This is similarly evident in *THE FOUR ZOAS* where Luvah highlights the Worm’s progression first to a Serpent form, and then to Dragon form, but also recounts her destructiveness:

When I call’d forth the Earth-worm from the cold & dark obscure
 I nurtur’d her, I fed her with my rains & dews; she grew
 A scaled Serpent, yet I fed her tho’ she hated me;
 Day after day she fed upon the mountains in Luvah’s sight,
 I brought her thro’ the Wilderness, a dry & thirsty land,
 And I commanded springs to rise for her in the black desart,
 Till she became a Dragon, winged, bright & poisonous.
(ii: 83-89) (Blake 282)

Luvah’s words, however, represent “Reasoning from the loins in the unreal forms of Ulro’s night” (ii:112) (Blake 283). As Damon has pointed out, the loins in Blake’s poetry “form a trinity with the Head and the Heart in the threefold materialised body” (244). When separated from the other two constituents of this trinity, though, they represent the limited and limiting perspective of “Single vision & Newton’s sleep” (Blake 818): the “unreal forms of Ulro’s night” (Blake 283).

As Luvah is increasingly influenced by this form of reasoning, he becomes trapped in the “black desart” that is Ulro’s night: a place which sees his human form degenerate, first into Orc, and then into the Serpent.³⁸ The single vision of Ulro is upheld by Urizen, and forced upon Orc:

Curse thy Cold hypocrisy! already round thy tree
 In scales that shine with gold & rubies, thou beginnest to weaken
 My divided Spirit. Like a worm I rise in peace, unbound
 From wrath. Now when I rage, my fetters bind me more.
 O torment! O torment! A Worm compell’d! Am I a worm?
 Is it in strong deceit that man is born? In strong deceit
 Thou dost restrain my fury that the worm may fold the tree.
(vii:135-141) (Blake 323)

³⁷ This may allude to the visual fact that embryos, regardless of species, all look worm-like initially, but also that the human foetus (some scientists suggested) progresses through the “chain” of other “lower” species’ characteristics on the way to becoming fully human. Though this “recapitulation” theory was formalised by Ernst Haeckel in the 1870s as “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”, it was current amongst Natural Philosophers in the 1790s. Blake was thus probably aware of and intrigued by it, using it to symbolic effect as is the case here.

³⁸ In Blake’s mythological cosmos, growth *is* degeneration, but, antithetically, the Fall *is* Creation.

Like Tiriël, Orc is “bound beneath the heavens in a reptile form, / A worm ... creeping on the dusky ground” (*TIRIEL* 8:23-24) (Blake 110). He comes to be a representative of the race of “dishumaniz’d men”, and, like them, his fetters will grow “from the soul” and his fires will become the cold fires of Urizen, ultimately unquenchable because they flame out “from the heart” (*THE FOUR ZOAS* vi: 142-143) (Blake 315). The Worm and Serpent thus form two parts of Orc’s “divided Spirit”: he admits that if he is “unbound / From wrath” he rises “in peace” in the form of the Worm, but instead of recognising that the form offers the possibility of rebirth and regeneration, he views it as a form of oppression, because he is “A Worm compell’d”. He also recognises that the worm represents his mortality, but his humanity is part of his division, effectively presenting the sort of dualism that Blake was arguing against. There should be no division between head and heart, body and spirit, but in choosing to rage against the fetters that bind him, Orc is compelled to “fold the tree” in the form of the Serpent, a form bound to Urizen.

iii) The Worm’s sexual symbolism

Critics such as Frye (138-144), Damon (452), Gillham (9-13), Bloom (44-51), and Ostriker (222) have acknowledged the sexual imagery associated with the figure of the Worm, but their readings have mostly examined it through the lens of “The SICK ROSE” (Blake 213), and emphasise its phallic symbolism and the violation and/or invasion of the female form. However, the figure’s capacity for both destruction and creation is evident in its various sexual associations, which need to be read within the broader context of Blake’s poetry. Indeed, as Goslee points out, “the worm ambiguously represents generation – phallic or embryonic life – or death, and it builds its ‘palace of eternity in the jaws of the hungry grave’” (*VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* 6:1) (121).

Indeed, the desire to destroy, create, and possess love seem to be central themes tied to the sexual representations of the Worm, which are often linked to both infancy and helplessness. In *Jerusalem*, we see Gwendolen attempting to possess her warrior-lover, Hyle, and transform him into an “infant Love” (4:82:37) (Blake 725).

Her desire to completely alter Hyle into a dependent state effectively renders him a form degenerated beyond her intention. Instead of a helpless infant, she finds a helpless worm:

Hyle [was] a winding Worm beneath *her loom upon the scales*
Hyle was become a winding Worm & not a weeping Infant
Trembling & pitying she scream'd & fled upon the wind.
Hyle was a winding Worm and herself in beauty.

(*Jerusalem* 4:82:47-50) (Blake 726)

Hyle thus becomes a representative of the Mortal Worm, the phallic worm, and the worm of the grave. He has reverted to a state of helplessness beyond infancy: one that acts as a reminder of mortality, and that shows Gwendolen that the “winding Worm” is also “herself in beauty”, which is enough to set her “trembling & pitying” and send her fleeing “upon the wind”.

The notion that the Worm is present at all stages of the human lifecycle, from birth to death is also reinforced in *THE GATES of PARADISE*:

The Door of Death I open found
And the Worm Weaving in the Ground:
Thou'rt my Mother from the Womb,
Wife, Sister, Daughter, to the Tomb,
Weaving to Dreams the Sexual strife
And Weeping over the Web of Life.

(43-48) (Blake 771)

The apparent inter-relatedness that exists between the Worm and the human form should not, however, be read superficially, for Blake's conception of the human lifecycle was not limited solely to the passage from birth to death. Indeed, the lines quoted above demonstrate how the worm is also an integral part of the passage through the various states of being. A distinctly female presence in this instance, it is a daughter of both Beulah and Albion, of both “Innocence” and “Experience”, but without the understanding afforded by the “organized Innocence” of the “*Poetic Genius*”. In fact, there seems relatively little to attach the worm to the phallus outside “The SICK ROSE”; Blake's concerns seem much more with the dynamics of relationship.

The Serpent and the Worm in Beulah: *THE BOOK of THEL* and *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*

Although Blake was probably influenced by scientific discoveries and contemporary conceptions of these animals, his highly individualised treatment and portrayal of them as symbols within his poetry illustrate that the reader cannot simply assume that they are assigned fixed meanings.³⁹ Their possible interpretations shift, sometimes even within a single poem, and are symptomatic of a constantly altering, and complex, mythological and ideological cosmos. Contemporary social, cultural, and religious symbols, along with established literary symbols, collide and combine with those in Blake's narratives: firstly in the lyric poems, and later in the great epics, indicating that just as his philosophies evolved and became more nuanced, so did his symbols.

Thus, in approaching this study from an animal studies perspective, it is imperative that the various elements which produce the "meaning" behind Blake's symbols and his poetry are identified and explored in order to offer a broader perspective of both. To do so successfully, however, any perfunctory and generalised statements which attempt to compartmentalise Blake's philosophies must be rejected. Therefore, Rod Preece's assumption that Blake's poetry offers "individualistic and communitarian" (*Brute Souls, Happy Beasts and Evolution* 275) messages that determine the 'proper' relationship between human and animals is not only a complete misreading of Blake's poetical agenda, but demonstrates how merely extracting a few lines from *THE BOOK of THEL* and *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* trivialises not only these poems, but Blake's entire oeuvre. If the animal studies paradigm is to be successfully employed in reading literary works, one cannot simply append a set of beliefs or opinions to the central tenets of the paradigm and expect them to hold true. In claiming that the central "messages"⁴⁰ of these poems hinge on the belief that "every thing that lives is holy" and that "Every thing that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself", Preece oversimplifies Blake's philosophies and imaginative cosmos.

³⁹ Many references, including those to the worm, are often recapitulations or clarified renditions of earlier instances, indicating that there seems to have been little 'development' of thinking between 1794 and 1820.

⁴⁰ Indeed, these views are not necessarily equatable with Blake himself, as they are more idealistic rather than realistic, but they do foreshadow the generous integration and acceptance of all animals into the eternal, including the worm, with which Blake closes *Jerusalem*.

Among the most significant of these philosophies is the poet's refutation of some of Swedenborg's key beliefs concerning the nature of God. In order to understand why no pantheistic, communitarian, or individualistic "messages" are inscribed in his poetry, one need only turn to Blake's annotations to Swedenborg's *Divine Love*:

- 1) He who Loves feels love descend into him & if he has wisdom may percieve [sic] it is from the Poetic Genius, which is the Lord.
- 2) Man can have no idea of any thing greater than Man, as a cup cannot contain more than its capaciousness. But God is a man, not because he is so perciev'd by man, but because he is the creator of man.
- 3) Essence is not Identity, but from Essence proceeds Identity & from one Essence may proceed many Identities...

That there is but one Omnipotent, Uncreate & God I agree, but that there is but one Infinite I do not; for if all but God is not Infinite, they shall come to an End, which God forbid.

If the Essence was the same as the Identity, there could be but one Identity, which is false. Heaven would upon this plan be but a Clock; but one & the same Essence is therefore Essence & not Identity.

(Blake 90-91)

It is therefore apparent that, for Blake, the "*Poetic Genius*" is God, and that man's perception of God derives from the "*Poetic Genius*". "Essence" and "Identity" are not synonymous. Even though the one Essence is God, the various Identities which arise from this Essence are still individual and individuated products of creation (Summerfield 50).

THE BOOK of THEL and the Worm in Beulah

Various critics have argued that *THE BOOK of THEL* is representative of the state of Innocence. Indeed, the poem is contemporaneous with the *SONGS of Innocence*, and is concerned with many of the same themes. Thel's world is that of "Innocence": it is the garden of Beulah, the earthly paradise in which the imagination, or "*Poetic Genius*", sleeps before it either progresses to Eden or regresses to Generation. Beulah is, however, a realm of the imagination fraught with ambiguity: "its innocence dwells dangerously near to ignorance, its creativity is allied to destructiveness, [and] its beauty to terror" (Bloom 25).

In the figure of Thel we see a young woman who wishes to understand what lies beyond this realm, but who is also frozen by fear, unlike Lyca (and Ona in the *Songs of Experience*), she is unwilling to leave the safety of "Innocence" and progress to

“Experience”. Indeed, her assumptions are grounded in the limited views of “Innocence” and are tied to her conception of mortality. She assumes that her existence will be futile, fleeting, and soon-forgotten:

Ah! Thel is like a wat'ry bow, and like a parting cloud;
Like a reflection in a glass; like shadows in the water;
Like dreams of infants, like a smile upon an infant's face;
Like the dove's voice; like transient day; like music in the air.
(1:8-11) (Blake 127)

In her successive encounters with the Lilly of the valley, the Cloud, and the Clod of Clay, Thel remains unconvinced about the value of her life, particularly because she sees herself “born but to smile and Fall” (1:7) (Blake 127), and fears that she will become the “food of worms” (3:23) (Blake 129).

However, in order to move into the next state of being, Thel must accept that she is part of a temporal progression in much the same way that the Lilly, Cloud, Worm, and Clod of Clay are. Their introduction to the state of “Experience” is as gentle as she could hope for, and their roles resemble that of the Lion in “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found”: there is none of the force or oppression that Ona is subjected to in “Experience”. In claiming that “Every thing that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself”, the Cloud is echoing the assurance of the speaker in “The Little Girl Found”: there is no reason to “fear the wolfish howl / Nor the lions' growl” if one is willing to move into “Experience”, and beyond it into the Higher Innocence afforded by Eden. Thus, the figure of Worm represents the Mortal Worm, the phallic worm, and the worm of the grave. This is made apparent in the exchange between Thel and the Cloud, and her address to the figure:

The Cloud reclin'd upon his airy throne and answer'd thus:
Then if thou art the food of worms, O virgin of the skies,
How great thy use, how great thy blessing! Every thing that lives
Lives not alone nor for itself. Fear not, and I will call
The weak worm from its lowly bed, and thou shalt hear its voice.
Come forth, worm of the silent valley, to thy pensive queen.
The helpless worm arose, and sat upon the Lilly's leaf.
(3:24-30) (Blake 129)

In much the same way that Thel must pass through, and beyond, the various states of being, so too is the Worm subject to them, as has been demonstrated in *THE GATES OF*

PARADISE. Its form in Beulah is that of the “infant Love” Gwendolen wishes so much to possess in *Jerusalem*: helpless, pathetic, and pitiable.

... Thel astonish'd view'd the Worm on its dewy bed.
Art thou a Worm? Image of weakness, art thou but a Worm?
I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lilly's leaf.
Ah! weep not, little voice, thou canst not speak, but thou canst weep.
Is this a Worm? I see thee lay helpless & naked, weeping,
And none to answer, none to cherish thee with mother's smiles.

The Clod of Clay heard the Worm's voice & rais'd her pitying head:
She bow'd over the weeping infant, and her life exhal'd
In milky fondness: then on Thel she fix'd her humble eyes.

O beauty of the vales of Har! we live not for ourselves.
(4:1-10) (Blake 129)

The Clod of Clay reiterates the sentiments of the Cloud, and attempts to evoke a sense of duty in Thel by herself demonstrating the importance of nurturing the Worm “in milky fondness”. Thel is thus briefly comforted when she realises that even a creature as lowly as the Worm is cherished by God:

That God would love a Worm I knew, and punish the evil foot
That wilful bruis'd its helpless form; but that he cherished it
With milk and oil I never knew, and therefore did I weep;
And I complain'd in the mild air, because I fade away.
(5: 9-12) (Blake 130)

However, although she feels sympathy for the creature, and seems to realise that some of her initial perceptions were mistaken, she cannot forget that the Worm is still a part of the devouring grave she so fears, for it is, after all, also the emblem of death and decay: the master of this “land unknown” (6:2) (Blake 30). Her initial fears seem both magnified and confirmed with the preview of “Experience” she experiences in the Clod of Clay's house:

She saw the couches of the dead, & where the fibrous roots
Of every heart on earth infixes deep its restless twists:
A land of sorrows & of tears where never smile was seen.

She wander'd in the land of clouds thro' valleys dark, list'ning
Dolours & lamentations; waiting oft beside a dewy grave
She stood in silence, list'ning to the voices of the ground.
(6:3-8) (Blake 130)

Ultimately, though, it is Thel's own projected fears which convince her that, in perpetually occupying the state of "Innocence", she can avoid an inevitable descent into what she envisions as the cruel, dangerous, and terrifying realm implied by "Experience". In imagining her own grave plot, and the "voice of sorrow" (6:10) (Blake 130) that emanates from it, Thel demonstrates that the Innocent child is too limited to fully perceive the "*Poetic Genius*" yet, for she has inhabited only one imaginative state, and lacks the wisdom and understanding that "Experience" can afford. Thel's fear of the unknown results in her creating a "future" self, a self that does not exist, which confirms this fear. Indeed, there is a constant emphasis throughout the poem on the ability to hear and to listen, and in plates five and six Thel is increasingly drawn to what appear to be the voices of Generation, "the voices of the ground" (6:8) (Blake 130), located "where the fibrous roots / Of every heart on earth infixes deep its restless twists" (6:3-4) (Blake 130). She never hears these voices speak, however. Even the Cloud's assurance that she shall hear the Worm's voice proves to be false, for the figure that emerges from the "silent valley" (3:29) "canst not speak" (4:4), and is capable only of weeping.

Thel's naivety sees her "voice of sorrow" wish for a fate which resembles that of Urizen's race of "dishumaniz'd men" in *THE FOUR ZOAS*. The limited vision of "Innocence" is thus exposed in the hopeless lament:

Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?
 Or the glist'ning Eye to the poison of a smile?
 Why are the Eyelids stor'd with arrows ready drawn,
 Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie?
 Or an Eye of gifts & graces show'ring fruits & coined gold?
 Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
 Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in?
 Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror, trembling, & affright?
(6:11-18) (Blake 130)

Thus, even though the Worm, the phallic emblem of Generation, possesses the double efficacy of creation and destruction there, it is rendered pathetic and helpless in Beulah (Summerfield 51). Thel sees the figure as an object of pity and attempts to treat it kindly, but there is no sense of a communitarian and/or pantheistic world-view in the poem. Indeed, she believes that, like the Worm, she is also part of a lifecycle that must eventually result in destruction and degradation, and finds neither peace nor comfort in that. She imagines instead a world dominated by the wolves and tygers of "Night", but sees no redemption offered by a benevolent lion.

To reject humanity's divinity is to become encumbered in what Enion refers to as the "Dreams of Death" in *THE FOUR ZOAS*, which see "the human form dissolving" (ix: 595) (Blake 373). These are, after all, Thel's dreams: she resides in Beulah, while her fears are projected into a "future" form of herself. The implication here is that if we accept and nourish the idea that the human form fades away, and becomes ensnared in the "Dreams of Death" inhabited by "beasts & worms & creeping things, & darkness & despair" (*THE FOUR ZOAS* ix: 595-596) (Blake 373), we destroy the divinity afforded by the "*Poetic Genius*". The human thus becomes a helpless Worm, rendered "senseless" and forced to "repeat the same dull round" of "Mortal Life":

Thou Mother of my Mortal part,
 With cruelty didst mould my Heart,
 And with false self-decieving [sic] tears
 Didst bind my Nostrils, Eyes, & Ears:

Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay,⁴¹
 And me to Mortal Life betray.
 The Death of Jesus set me free:
 Then what have I to do with thee?

("To Tirzah" 9-16) (Blake 220)

This voice of "Experience" echoes the sentiments expressed by Tiriel, and refutes Thel's fears, which are revealed as false, cruel, and ultimately destructive. In attempting to preserve herself in "Innocence", Thel wishes to close herself off from her senses and refuses to participate in the progression which is the Fall of humankind, and the journey towards an Eden which exists beyond Beulah. She has effectively fallen prey to "the False Tongue" that is "vegetated"⁴² (*MILTON I*, 2:10) beneath Beulah, and which tells of "its sacrifices and / Its

⁴¹ In *THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL*, Jesus "devours the Body of Clay; / For dust & Clay is the Serpent's meat, / Which never was made for Man to Eat" (copy e 94-96) (Blake 755)

⁴² In *Jerusalem*, the "Vegetated Tongue" is the "Devouring Tongue", and comprises the threefold region of the false brain, heart and bowels, which together constitute the "False Tongue" in Generation:

[Los] views the Cherub at the Tree of Life, also the Serpent
 Orc, the first born, coil'd in the south, the Dragon Urizen,
 Tharmas the Vegetated Tongue, even the Devouring Tongue,
 A threefold region, a false brain, a false heart
 And false bowels, altogether composing the False Tongue,
 Beneath Beulah as a wat'ry flame revolving every way,
 And as dark roots and stems, a Forest of affliction, growing
 In seas of sorrow. (I,14:2-9) (Blake 634)

Like the Tree of Life and the Dragon Urizen, the Vegetated Tongue represents false philosophies and principles. Cut off from the "*Poetic Genius*", sensory perception and the physical body represented by the tongue, brain,

offerings (I, 2:10-11) (Blake 481). Such is the fate of the “*Spectrous*” form of Enion in the Void (*THE FOUR ZOAS* ii: 423) (Blake 291). Like Thel, she comes to inhabit Beulah, where she must “sink / And on the bed of silence sleep” (ii: 377-378) (Blake 290), until she is awoken. However, the dangers of the limited and misguided vision she brings with her from Generation are clear:

I have planted a false oath in the earth; it has brought forth a poison tree.
I have chosen the serpent for a councillor, & the dog
For a schoolmaster to my children.⁴³
I have blotted out from light & living the dove & nightingale,
And I have caused the earth worm to beg from door to door.
(ii: 388-392) (Blake 290)

This is probably a fate shared by Thel. In rejecting “Experience”, and the progression towards “Higher Innocence” and Eden, she too chooses the “False tongue” of the serpent for her counsellor, and the earth worm becomes a pitiful representative of her own mortality: helpless, mute and unable to progress beyond Beulah.

THE BOOK of THEL does not simply serve as a bleak and cautionary tale, however. Indeed, the poem’s final plate seems to emphasise that the individual has the capacity to transcend this state and progress toward Eden if they employ their “*Poetic Genius*”, hinting that, had Thel been able to maintain herself in Experience, she may have discovered the Higher Innocence Lyca does. The image of the serpent guided by three children who ride upon him suggests that this final emblem of sexual Generation is ultimately tamed by the vision afforded by Higher Innocence (Summerfield 53).

“Every thing that lives is holy”: reading the Worm and Serpent within the context of
the *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*

The preceding sections have focussed on poems which see either the Serpent or the Worm as an active agent or presence. In the *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, however, the symbols act as peripheral ciphers woven into a narrative. Their presence is not to be dismissed, though. As mentioned previously, Rod Preece has argued that the *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* demonstrates “the sacredness of each individual life” (288). He goes on

heart, and bowels amount to dullness and numbness: their functions reduced to a state which equates them with those of plants.

⁴³ In *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, Oothoon demands of Urizen “... wilt thou take the ape / For thy councillor, or the dog for a schoolmaster to thy children?” (5:8-9) (Blake 192)

to assert that “The most important part of the Blake message is that animals and humans alike are a part of the same fellowship of life. If animals are not entirely ends in themselves, neither are humans” (Preece *Brute Souls, Happy Beasts and Evolution* 288). This limited view of Blake’s poetry illustrates both a misunderstanding of his philosophies and a misreading of his animal symbols. Indeed, in one of his annotations to Reynolds, Blake emphasises that it is the “*Poetic Genius*” which sets humans apart not only from each other, but also from animals: “Man varies from Man more than Animal from Animal of Different Species” (Blake 470). Thus, what follows is an attempt to explain Oothoon’s statement that “Every thing that lives is holy” by reading it within the context of Blake’s philosophical and poetic agenda.

Critics such as Summerfield, Ostriker, and Lee have argued that *THE BOOK of THEL* and the *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* should be read as companion poems, with many of Thel’s delusions dispelled by Oothoon. Their interpretations assume that Thel embodies the typical traits of earthly Innocence, and that her naivety, hesitance, and fearfulness ultimately result in her remaining in “the vales of Har” (6:4:22) (Blake 130). However, vision is essential in Experience, the passage through and beyond which potentially leads to Higher Innocence. In the *Auguries of Innocence* it is the profundity of this “true vision”, stemming from the “*Poetic Genius*”, which is emphasised:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

(*Auguries of Innocence* 1-4) (Blake 431)

In *Jerusalem* it is equated with Oothoon’s:

There is a Grain of Sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find,
Nor can his Watch Fiends find it; ‘tis translucent & has many Angles,
But he who finds it will find Oothoon’s palace; for within
Opening into Beulah, every angle is a lovely heaven.

(2:41:15-18) (Blake 668)

Thus, Higher Innocence, with its “many Angles” each containing “a lovely heaven”, scorns the limited knowledge of Innocence, because, as the conclusion of the first series of *THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION* explains, “If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again” (Blake 97). Similarly, the epitaph to

VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion, “the Eye sees more than the Heart knows”⁴⁴ (Blake 189), suggests the slowness of emotion to catch up to the knowledge gained by perception (Goslee 105). The lines also emphasise that imaginative vision derived from the “*Poetic Genius*” is infinitely more valuable than the limited knowledge of Innocence, particularly when it originates in the baseless fear Thel falls prey to.

In *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, Oothoon represents a Lyca-like figure who embodies Higher Innocence. Although defiled in Theotormon’s eyes, her spiritual purity is made clear. She understands that neither the “wolvish howl / Nor the lions’ growl” (“The Little Girl Found” 50-51) (Blake 115) is to be feared, and her observations are those of a prophetess. Hers is also a voice “crying in the Wilderness” (*ALL RELIGIONS ARE ONE* Blake 98), with none but “The Daughters of Albion [to] hear her woes, & eccho back her sighs” (8:13) (Blake 195), and Bromion, Urizen’s devotee, to respond to, and counter, her beliefs. Thus, when Oothoon declares that “every thing that lives is holy” (*VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, 8:10), she rejects the empiricism represented by the “five senses” (2:31) that “inclos’d [her] infinite brain into a narrow circle. / And sunk [her] heart into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning / Till all from life [she] was obliterated & erased” (2:32-34) (Blake 191). She refutes John Locke’s assertion that perception is “the first operation of all our intellectual faculties” as well as “the first step and degree towards knowledge, and the inlet of all the materials of it” (147).⁴⁵ She counters it by cataloguing how animals respond to stimuli according to their instincts and senses:

With what sense is it that the chicken shuns the ravenous hawk?
 With what sense does the tame pigeon measure out the expanse?
 With what sense does the bee form cells? have not the mouse & frog
 Eyes and ears and sense of touch? ...
 Ask the wild ass why he refuses burdens, and the meek camel
 Why he loves man: is it because of eye, ear, mouth, or skin,
 Or breathing nostrils? No, for those these the wolf and tyger have.
 Ask the blind worm the secrets of the grave, and why her spires
 Love to curl round the bones of death; and ask the rav’ nous snake
 Where she gets poison, & the wing’d eagle why he loves the sun...
(3:2-12) (Blake 191)

⁴⁴ For Debbie Lee (66), the lines are also a reference to slavery. As discussed in the previous chapter, Blake was intimately acquainted with Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. The treatise concludes: “I must have hurt both the Eye and the heart of the Feeling reader”, and Blake’s series of engravings for the work show the kind of interpretive quandary bringing slavery to the British eye as mock-mimicry presents, where the eye sees only when the heart tears itself away from what it conventionally knows (Lee 70).

⁴⁵ From *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (first published in 1689).

For Oothoon, the animals' "habitations / And their pursuits [are] as different as their forms and as their joys" (3:5-6) (Blake 191). Henry Summerfield argues that this "combines Thel's imaginative achievement of seeing the spiritual essence in the natural object, [with] an essence [which] survives though its temporary embodiment perishes" (83). However, he fails to recognise that Oothoon is, on one hand, denouncing the one-dimensional realm in which the "cold flood of abstractions" and "forests of solitude" (5:19) (Blake 193) of Lockean philosophy and Newtonian science reside, while also emphasising that Nature represents matter and the material, nothing more, and that its "meaning" can only be determined through the employment of the "*Poetic Genius*".

For Oothoon, then, "Nature Teaches nothing of Spiritual Life but only of Natural Life" (Blake 412). She rejects Bromion's beliefs that "[there is] one law for both the lion and the ox / And ... eternal fire and eternal chains / To bind the phantoms of existence from eternal life" (4:22-24) (Blake 192) on the grounds that they deny the "*Poetic Genius*" and its inherent divinity:

Why is one law given to the lion & the patient Ox?
 Dost thou not see that men cannot be formed all alike,
 Some nostril'd wide, breathing out blood. Some close shut up
 In silent deceit, poisons inhaling from the morning rose,
 With daggers hid beneath their lips & poison in their tongue;
 Or eyed with little sparks of Hell, or with infernal brands
 Flinging flames of discontent & plagues of dark despair;
 Or those whose mouths are graves, whose teeth are gates of eternal death.
(TIRIEL 8:10-17) (Blake 109)

Oothoon's counter to these myopic views stems from her understanding that "the Poetic Genius is the true Man, and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius. Likewise that the forms of all things are derived from their Genius" (Principle 1st, *ALL RELIGIONS ARE ONE*) (Blake 98). The limited outlook of Ulro is thus transformed by the vision afforded by Higher Innocence:

Does not the worm erect a pillar⁴⁶ in the mouldering church yard
 And a palace of eternity in the jaws of the hungry grave?

⁴⁶ Perhaps a reference to an actual earthworm mound, but also a suggestion that the worm is creating its own home from the materials of death. It could also be a call of *carpe diem*, urging us to take pleasure in life before we die.

Over his porch these words are written:⁴⁷ 'Take thy bliss, O Man!
And sweet shall be thy taste, & sweet thy infant joys renew!
(*VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* 5:41, 6:1-3) (Blake 193)

This extract also has important implications from an animal studies perspective for several reasons. Firstly, it discounts Preece's argument that Blake's poetry demonstrates "a notion of the appropriate relationship between humans and animals as one that is at least quasi mutually symbiotic (up to a point), satisfying both each individual as an end and the relationship between individual animals while also allowing for the fulfilment of each species as an end in itself" (*Brute Souls, Happy Beasts and Evolution* 292). Secondly, since it has already been established that animals' "pursuits [are] as different as their forms and as their joys" (*VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* 3:5-6) (Blake 191), the implication here is that they share no communitarian links, as they are derived from their own unique "Genius". Thirdly, the figure of the Worm illustrates how the natural world and its inhabitants find expression, and interpretation, only through the "*Poetic Genius*" in Blake's mythological cosmos. Thus, even whilst the lines above allude to the real animal's role in the process of decomposition, the focus here is on its symbolic interpretation: specifically its urging us to engage the "*Poetic Genius*" to renew our "infant joys". It therefore performs a function similar to the animals of the beast epics and those in heraldic art: it reminds humanity that our fate is determined by our actions and choices, and prompts us to act accordingly. As Goslee expands:

Although the motif of imaginative vision continues through Oothoon's speech, her premise of an innocent "infant joy" offers a kind of utopian perspective very different from the affirmation of vision achieved through suffering [.]. Infant joy need not exclude the insight gained through suffering and perhaps is the basis for the ability of that insight to survive; certainly the motto inscribed on the worm's porch suggests a connection (122).

In *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, the Serpent appears twice. In the first instance, the figure is described as "rav'nous" (3:11) (Blake 191) and venomous, alluding to contagion, malignancy, and even death. The Serpent's second appearance occurs in the poem's last plate. Here we are presented with "The wild snake [which takes] the pestilence to adorn [himself] with gems and gold" (8:7) (Blake 195). Gold and precious stones are

⁴⁷ Interestingly, the worm accomplishes what it could not in the state of "Innocence": speech (linking it to the lion in the Lyca poems, and thus to Higher Innocence), and the ability to express itself through the written word.

commonly associated with the Serpent throughout Blake's oeuvre, and are linked to greed attributed to material wealth. Indeed, among the many pests that flourish around Los's wine-press is "the Serpent cloth'd in gems & gold" (*MILTON I: 27:22*) (Blake 513), and when the Covering Cherub eventually marches against Jesus in *Jerusalem*, Albion beholds "the Visions of [his] deadly Sleep of Six Thousand Years / Dazling around thy skirts like a Serpent of precious stones & gold" and recognises it as himself (4:96:11) (Blake 743). However, even though the visions beheld by Albion are confirmed in Plate 14 of *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*, the final outcome sees creation improved rather than destroyed:

the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years... For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at tree of life; and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite & corrupt (Blake 154).

Once again, the dual nature of the serpent, and that of Blake's symbolism overall, needs to be considered in order to understand the significance of what the terms "infinite and holy" mean within the context of his mythology. Indeed, the serpent's associations with the finite and corrupt are emphasised in *THE FOUR ZOAS*, where Urizen's reptilisation presents a frightening spectacle of a "terrible existence" ruled by "Reason", where even the forms of "Energy" are petrified:

Scales cover'd over a cold forehead & a neck outstretch'd
 Into the deep to sieze the shadow; scales his neck & bosom
 Cover'd & scales his hands & feet; upon his belly falling
 Outstretch'd thro' the immense, his mouth wide opening, tongueless,
 His teeth a triple⁴⁸ row, he strove to sieze the shadow in vain,
 And his immense tail lash'd the Abyss ...
 No longer now Erect, the King of Light outstretch'd in fury
 Lashes his tail in the wild deep; his eyelids, like the Sun
 Arising in his pride, enlighten all the Grizly deeps,
 His scales transparent give forth light like windows of the morning,
 His neck flames with wrath & majesty, he lashes the Abyss,
 Beating the desarts & the rocks; the desarts feel his power,
 They shake their slumbers off, they wave in awful fear
 Calling the Lion & the Tyger, the horse & the wild stag,
 The Elephant, the wolf, the Bear, the Lamia, the Satyr.

⁴⁸ The reference to the number three is significant in terms of its allusion to occult traditions. Blake may have been influenced by Thomas Taylor's Neoplatonic *Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* (1792), which traces some significant occult symbols in relation to animals, with particular reference to classical texts. Indeed, Urizen's triple row of teeth may allude to the serpent of Ares (or Mars), but, unlike the mythological three-tongued serpent, Urizen is "tongueless".

His Eyelids give their light around; his folding tail aspires
 Among the stars; the Earth & all the Abysses feel his fury
 When as the snow covers the mountains, oft petrific hardness
 Covers the deeps, at his vast fury moving in his rock,
 Hardens the Lion & the Bear, trembling in the solid mountain
 They view the light & wonder; crying out in terrible existence,
 Up bound the wild stag & the horse: behold the King of Pride!
 (THE FOUR ZOAS viii: 423-453) (Blake 352)

However, the fearful animal host gathered under the tyrannical rule of a reptilian Urizen, are juxtaposed with that presented at the close of *Jerusalem*, when an apparently heavenly ecosystem, including the “wondrous serpent” appear with spiritualised humanity:

The Four Living Creatures, Chariots of Humanity Divine Incomprehensible,
 In beautiful Paradises expand. These are the Four Rivers of Paradise
 And the Four Faces of Humanity, fronting the Four Cardinal Points
 Of Heaven, going forward, forward irresistible from Eternity to Eternity.
 And they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright
 Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions
 In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect,
 Creating Space, Creating Time, according to the wonders Divine
 Of Human Imagination throughout all the Three Regions immense
 Of Childhood, Manhood & Old Age; & the all tremendous unfathomable Non Ens
 Of Death was seen in regenerations terrific or complacent, varying
 According to the subject of discourse; & every Word & every Character
 Was Human according to the Expansion or Contraction, the Translucence or
 Opakeness of Nervous fibres: such was the variation of Time & Space
 Which vary according as the Organs of Perception vary; & they walked
 To & fro in Eternity as One Man, reflecting each in each & clearly seen
 And seeing, according to fitness & order. And I heard Jehovah speak
 Terrific from his Holy Place, & saw the Words of the Mutual Covenant Divine
 On Chariots of gold & jewels, with Living Creatures, starry & flaming
 With every Colour, Lion, Tyger, Horse, Elephant, Eagle, Dove, Fly, Worm
 And the all wondrous Serpent clothed in gems & rich array, Humanize
 In the Forgiveness of Sins according to thy Covent, Jehovah[.]
 (4:98:24-45) (Blake 745-746)

Similarly, in the *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, it is the snake adorning himself with gems and gold which acts as a catalyst for the “trees & birds & beasts & men” to “behold their eternal joy” (8:7-8) (Blake 195). Thus, both poems conclude with the same message: it is the human imagination, expressed through the “*Poetic Genius*”, which enables us to comprehend the world. The Living Creatures, vegetation, and all other matter which make up Generation are ultimately expressions of the human consciousness and its imaginings. Thus,

when Oothoon, the representative of Higher Innocence and Eden, declares “every thing that lives is holy”, she is really gesturing towards what is expressed at the end of *Jerusalem*:

All Human Forms identified, even Tree, Metal, Earth & Stone: all
Human Forms identified, living, going forth & returning wearied
Into the Planetary lives of Years, Months, Days & Hours; reposing,
And then Awakening into ... the Life of Immortality. (4:99:1-4) (Blake 747)

These lines therefore summarise the progression through the various states of being for every creature and object in Blake’s mythological cosmos. The “deadly dreams of Good & Evil” the Soul is distracted by “when it leaves Paradise following the Serpent” (*A VISION OF THE LAST JUDGMENT* 614), is part of this progression, as is the repose it must experience before “Awaking into ... the Life of Immortality” (*Jerusalem* 4:99:1-4) (Blake 747). Although each life form is guided by its own “Genius”, it is ultimately the human imagination which is best equipped to interpret existence. The figures of the Worm and Serpent (and indeed all other animals) are transformed into human form upon entering the state of Eden, their associations in Beulah effectively cast off.⁴⁹ Sanctity and divinity are constructs of the imagination, and it is through exercising the imaginative faculty, the “*Poetic Genius*”, along with our senses and instincts, that we are able to make sense of the world. This is made clear in *A VISION OF THE LAST JUDGMENT*:

This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of Imagination is Infinite & Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite & Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination. (Blake 606)

For Blake, then, every creature born into the world exists in the state represented by Generation, a realm in which being and appearing coincide, and every living thing depends upon this “vegetable” world for its existence:

I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination, Imagination, the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, & in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more. (*Jerusalem* 3:77) (Blake 716-717)

⁴⁹ The lion in “The Little Girl Found” undergoes a similar transformation when he becomes “A Spirit arm’d in gold” (36) (Blake 114).

Conclusion

In exploring the tensions and intersections between science, allegory, and related eighteenth-century attitudes towards animals in Blake's poetry, this study has relied on a number of different contexts to explain the significance of his individual animal symbols. Positioned between what Erica Fudge terms "intellectual" and "humane" histories (8), and a New Historicist approach to Blake's works, the thesis has demonstrated how ideas about animals, both scientific and popular, contributed to a complex mesh of accepted associations which came to influence the portrayal of animals in the poet's mythological cosmos. However, the materiality of the animal, along with its scientific classification and description, and the animal-human lived reality is not a major concern of Blake's. Indeed, it is his reverence for the imagination, or the "*Poetic Genius*", and his attempt to carve out a significant space for it against the backdrop of the Age of Reason, which forms the basis of his poetical agenda. As Chapter One explains, for Blake, the imagination is the sovereign faculty, and enables us to move beyond a circumscribed reality to attain new knowledge, so his use of symbols and symbolism is unique and not bound by tradition. In addition, he believed that in order to revolutionise the institutions and practices of orthodox Christianity, there had to be a recovery of the imaginative, spiritual, and mystical dimensions of religion by locating the divine within humanity and arguing for a reverence of the "*Poetic Genius*" within the human body.

Despite his resistance to certain ideals and scientifically-based theories that circulated during the Enlightenment, Blake remained surprisingly conservative in his approach to animals, and the manner in which he employed them in his poetry. As Chapters Two, Three, and Four have demonstrated, he made use of some prejudicial and even derogatory perceptions about animals to demonstrate particular ideas. Indeed, to create his own brand of symbolism and symbolic meaning, Blake sometimes 'borrowed' traditional symbols: both popular and religious, and altered or recreated them to fit his own poetical agendas. Thus, he chose his symbols in accordance with whatever meaning he intended to establish at the time. He did, however, frequently change their meanings as the reasons for their particular relevance changed, and it is because of the shifting allegorical frames and language-play that his animal symbols also have shifting meanings and implications.

These shifting meanings are further complicated by Blake's belief that, without the transforming power of the human imagination, Nature is dead. That is, in his mythological

cosmos, Nature comes alive only to, and by means of, a visionary consciousness. The “*Poetic Genius*” grants one access to this consciousness, and allows one to navigate Blake’s “contrary states”, whether represented by “Innocence”, “Experience”, “Reason” or “Energy”, in order to progress towards Eden. Blake envisages the states as always existent, always potentially operative, so one can ‘fall back’ (like Urizen) or move ‘higher’ (like Los or the early Orc), depending on how one perceives the world and oneself in it. We are continually subject to the impulses of the various states, both contracting and expanding: “We are not Individuals but States, Combinations of Individuals” (*MILTON* II, 32:10) (Blake 521). According to Blake, both the “Fall of Man” and the “Final Judgement” are thus neither temporal progressions nor predetermined cycles, but states of being happening within the psyche and society all the time: “States Change, but Individual Identities never change nor cease. / You cannot go to Eternal Death in that which can never Die” (*MILTON* II, 32: 23-24) (Blake 521).

In the “application” to *THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION*, Blake states that “God becomes as we are that we may be as he is” (98), and this fundamental belief forms the basis of his mythology, for, if one ignores the divinity within oneself, the “*Poetic Genius*” is stunted and diminished. As Chapter Four demonstrates, the dual natures of both Christ and the Serpent are apparent within humankind and outside it, and this follows a well-known tradition in radical dissent which sees Christ’s Resurrection not only as an historical event, but also as a model for every human’s potential for eternal life in the spirit. Thus, just as it is possible for the believer to be raised to new life *in Christo*, as Jesus was raised from death, so too can the individual be renewed and invigorated through the “*Poetic Genius*”. Of course, the reverse is also true, for just as the individual has the potential to progress through various imaginative states, so too is reversion to a former state possible.

Blake’s contrary states are thus held together in a tenuous balance, and just as he would have recognised the precarious nature of the contraries he paired, a similar precariousness is also evident in the animal symbols he employed. They represent not only the contraries of “Innocence” and “Experience”, “Energy” and “Reason”, and “Good” and “Evil” themselves, but also their various conflicts, disruptions, and parallels. Thus, if our perception of the natural world is determined by the imagination, so too are the beings that inhabit it. All beings in Blake’s cosmos are subject to the “doctrine of contraries” in one way or another, and demonstrate the complexity of his mythological and symbolic matrix by frequently combining seemingly conflicting forces within themselves (as in the case of the Serpent and the Tyger), and presenting a variety of shifting interpretations (apparent in the figures of the Lion, Horse, Eagle, and even Wolf).

It is the passage through the states of being and through the various levels of imagination which ensures humankind progresses. The animals which inhabit Blake's cosmos are thus nothing more than heraldic ciphers which reflect our own experiences, and sometimes specific components of our humanity, but which do not contain any semblance to 'real' animals. These ciphers are representative of the many dualities that exist in both Blake's "contrary states" and within humanity's breast, just as Orc (representative of the imagination energies) and Urizen (representative of "Reason") do:

That Man should Labour & sorrow & learn & forget & return
To the dark valley whence he came to begin his labours anew
In pain he sighs in pain he labours in his universe
Screaming in birds over the deep & howling in the Wolf
Over the slain & moaning in the cattle & in the winds
And weeping over Orc & Urizen in clouds & flaming fires
(*THE FOUR ZOAS* viii: 574-579) (Blake 355)

Indeed, one's passage through all levels of the imagination, and states of being, is dependent on how successfully, or how unsuccessfully, one employs the imagination. It forms a potentially oscillatory pattern rather than a linear progression because "Eden" is not a given, and even if it is attained, the individual is still capable of losing the imaginative vision afforded by the "*Poetic Genius*". Thus, many individuals are caught up in the vegetable realm of "Generation", and are governed by the instincts, in much the same way as plants and animals. Although some make it through to the imaginative awakening afforded by "Beulah", others find themselves in the self-reflective and brooding world of "Ulro". According to Blake's understanding of the "Fall", then, in electing to follow the serpent out of paradise, Adam and Eve leave the realm of 'dead' Nature (represented by "Generation") in order to grow imaginatively (and therefore spiritually), by opting to pass through the states of being, despite their various trials.

Thus, in reading Blake's animal symbols through an "animal studies" lens, we cannot seize upon what seems to be the most likely interpretation of his views about a particular animal, or about what he conceived to be the relationship between humankind, the natural world, and its inhabitants, because these perspectives change constantly: sometimes even within a single poem. In addition to Blake's animal symbols' shifting meanings and implications, the study navigated the various perspectives present within the "animal studies" paradigm. Having adopted an approach aligned most closely to "zoocriticism", the thesis recognises that there is undoubtedly value in the creation of a cultural history which includes

literary animals, but also that, whether ‘real’ or symbolic, “the animal is necessarily a construction, a representation, and not an accessible essence or reality” (Baker 5). Indeed, since animals can only be understood through our perceptions and deductions, we rely as much on our imaginative faculties as we do on our rational ones. Thus, the variety of perspectives evident in this emerging field, whether influenced by ‘scientific’ thought or derived from trying to imagine the world as an animal, have modelled novel ways of thinking about animals. Unfortunately though, the insertion of personal and political agendas to the interpretations of animals offered by some scholars has meant that the field sometimes fails to “strike a balance that corresponds with historical reality” (Preece 6).

In Blake’s case, this has meant that critics attempting to interpret his animal symbols (like David Punter and Onno Oerlemans) have also failed to strike a balance that corresponds with his poetical agenda. Although Preece himself appeals for animals, whether ‘real’ or ‘symbolic’, to be interpreted in a balanced way between historical ‘truth’ and popular (though often false) cultural and social representations, his own reading of Blake’s poetry does not locate the animal symbols within their literary context. As a result, not only does he fail to understand Blake’s views about the natural world and its inhabitants, but he is also guilty of inserting misguided personal interpretations of the poet’s works to fit his argument. Attempting to understand Blake’s animal symbols without first contextualising them within his mythological matrix and understanding his poetical agenda leads to gross misinterpretations and an oversimplification of his aims. Indeed, the notions that “every thing that lives is holy” and that “Every thing that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself” within *THE BOOK of THEL* and *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion* cannot be divorced from the notion that “Man looks out in tree & herb & fish & bird & beast / Collecting up the scatter’d portions of his immortal body / Into the Elemental forms of every thing that grows” in *THE FOUR ZOAS*: (viii: 561-563) (Blake 355).

Effectively, reading Blake’s animals means selecting the correct approach is crucial. The “animal studies” paradigm offers a useful interpretive lens and opens up Blake’s works to a scrutiny that leads to a richer understanding of his aims. Indeed, the study has not explored all of the animal symbols that can be investigated through the paradigm, and has merely focussed on some of the most prevalent of animals in Blake’s oeuvre through specific themes and groupings. Whilst predatory mammals have taken precedence in Chapters Two and Three, and the predatory aspects of the serpent were explored in Chapter Four, other predatory animals and insects abound in Blake’s poetry. Indeed, it is not just predators which are in abundance, but other creatures too. Whilst Chapter Three examined the opposition

between some wild and domestic animals, the list is by no means exhaustive. Another group of animals which can be explored are the mythical beasts present in both Blake's poetry and visual art, and the examples of transformism between different animal forms, and between humans and animals may lead to more meaningful readings in Blake studies as a whole. The "animal studies" approach will certainly lend useful perspectives to all these aspects, and may very well open up more of them as the field expands.

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