

Or who will exchange his new born child
For the dog at the wintry door?²⁴

On the 21st of August La Fayette with twenty-two false captains
crossed the border and fled to the Austrians. The fact that the
Emperor had him clapped into a dungeon is one of those ironic
illustrations of the blindness of emperors of the Tiriel type. To
Leopold, Fayette was still a dangerous equalitarian.

3

The harvest shall flourish in wintry weather
When two virginites meet together
The King & the Priest must be tied in a tether
Before two virgins can meet together

For on no other ground
Can I sow my seed
Without tearing up
Some stinking weed

— Notebook 106, 111

By the summer of 1792 it was plain that old Noboddaddy was not
going to expire voluntarily. "Precisely while the Prussian batteries
were playing their bliskest at Longwi in the Northeast," says
Carlyle, priest-benighted La Vendre in the Southwest was explod-
ing *against* the Revolution—"a simple people, blown into flame
and fury by theological and seigniorial bellows!"²⁵ In Paris the
royalists grew bolder, the people more desperate, as invading armies

²⁴ Damon, p. 289, glosses: "The wintry seas: symbolic of the upsurge of
materialism and cruelty preceding and during the French Revolution." But
Blake is alluding here to the counterrevolution, to the cruelty of those who
out of pity for the plumage of chivalry would reinstate the roar and winter
of war and feudal oppression. An "Angelic" misreading persists (1969) which
overlooks Blake's vision of revolution as a new-born child or newly mature
youth seizing a moment to sing and laugh; it is counterrevolution that roars
in fear or terror—e.g. Bromion, the Prince of Albion in dragon form, and
(in *M.H.H.*) Runtrah. The just man is driven ultimately to wrath, not
to roaring.
²⁵ Carlyle, p. 481.

approached. There would be no *wise* innocence and no peace; it
seemed, until both king and priest were tethered with a shorter
rope than the veto-suspended Constitution. Before France could
hope to sow and harvest the wheat of Liberty, every stinking weed
of the old system would have to be cleared away.

This is the language of some fragmentary verses in Blake's note-
book. They lack the explicit historical allusions of *Fayette*, but
we know from that ballad that Blake felt he could understand
such summary wielding of the destructive sword against aristocrats
and royalist priests as took place in the "September Massacres":

But the bloodthirsty people across the water
Will not submit to the gibbet & halter²⁶

In his published work of this period, Blake's allusions to counter-
revolutionary threats, the people's patriot wrath, and the birth of
the new republic in clouds of war are indirect, symbolic, and often
blended with more direct allusions to the American Revolution.
Yet a familiarity with the metaphors of *Fayette* and *The French
Revolution* and the simplest reconstruction of the historical con-
text will restore the contemporary allusions and implications. In
the present chapter we shall read three short and more or less
cryptic poems against the background of the coming into being
of the French Republic. The lyric "Argument" of *The Marriage of
Heaven and Hell*, probably written in late 1790 or early 1791, de-
picts in Biblical imagery the meek driven to wrath; the psalmodic
Song of Liberty, a later appendage to *The Marriage*, is an
epithalamium of the new republic; and apocalyptic in its im-
plications is the great revolutionary lyric, *The Tyger*, written before
Fayette in 1792 or early 1793.²⁷

The spirit of *The Marriage* is one of sunny confidence, but
the "Argument," bracketed in an ominous refrain, suggests the
darker context of war and rumors of war:

²⁶ N 99: E779/K.185. The "September Massacres" were precipitated by
a cane-blow delivered on a citizen's skull by an angry priest, one of thirty
royalist suspects being moved from one prison to another. These priests
were the first victims; others were recent prisoners seized by crowds who
stormed the jails. Improvised tribunals sifted out and saved as many as
the intent crowd would allow. Altogether about a thousand were slain—
a figure multiplied many times in reports reaching England.
²⁷ The relative positions of *Fayette* and *The Tyger* in N. make clear that
The Tyger was earlier in composition. The "Argument" was mistakenly
treated, in my first edition footnote, as a late part of *M.H.H.*

Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burdend air;
Hungry clouds swag on the deep.

Blake had used a similar image in *Gerin*:

The Heav'ns are shook with roaring war,
And dust ascends the skies!

In both cases the theme is counterrevolution. The swagging (lowering) clouds are doubtless war clouds hungry for blood. The roaring and the deep suggest the stormy roar and wintry seas of counterrevolution in *Fayette*. "Rintrah" plays no further part after this roaring in the prologue and so must remain unidentified, though in later poems he will emerge as Wrath and sometimes as William Pitt, British leader of the crusade against France. Even in 1790 Pitt pushed a chance of war with Spain; in the spring of 1791 he threatened the use of force against Russian expansion and was dissuaded partly (according to Coleridge) by English popular opinion.²⁸

In his *French Revolution* (55, 225f.) Blake had imagined the commons planting "beauty in the desert craving abyss" and had hoped that the priest would "No more in deadly black" compel the millions to "howl in law blasted wastes." In the first prose page of *The Marriage* he announces "the return of Adam into Paradise." The "Argument" begins with a recapitulation of the hopeful first stage of the revolution (when, according to *F.R.* 221-229, the meek peasant came out of the feudal shadow of death and was free to "woo in pleasant gardens" and plant a fair harvest):

Once meek, and in a perilous path,
The just man kept his course along
The vale of death.
[Now] Roses are planted where thorns grow,
And on the barren heath
Sing the honey bees.²⁹

²⁸ Public meetings "tended to terminate the American, and to prevent a Russian war," argued Coleridge in December 1795 in his *Answer to "A Letter to Edward Long Fox, M.D."*, Bristol.

²⁹ *M.H.2*: The soldier singing on the heath is a frequent image of war in *N. Here* "honey bees" in place of soldiers (drones) suggest life and peace.

As oppression gave way to peace, "the perilous path was planted" and man was reborn in Eden.³⁰ But then came the conspiracy of aristocrats and priests, as the concluding stanzas indicate. The "villain" or "sneaking serpent," i.e. the priest or any pious hypocrite opposing freedom (compare the "crawling villain" in *America*, line 128), agitated for counterrevolution and plotted to drive the righteous into the wilderness once more.

As early as the publication of Burke's *Reflections* in October 1790, the ideological issue was joined. During the next two years, as Blake worked over the revision and amplification of his "infernal" vision of history, the clouds enlarged and darkened in both France and England.

Two components of the Antijacobin spirit in the summer of 1792 are relevant. On the borders of France the army of the French Princes, mounted on English horses, was mustering under the July Manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick in which their imperial and royal majesties of Austria and Prussia threatened to exterminate "the town of Paris and all its inhabitants without distinction" unless they would submit at once to their king. "Deserts are preferable to people in revolt," the leagued kings declared.³¹ In London the *émigré* priests, conspicuous in their robes as symbols of the ancient heavens, went about with increasing confidence, as English politicians anxious to secure the mark of Antijacobinism made a great show of sympathy in their support.³² The future had promised to be "a pleasant bank beside a river by moonlight." But now, realizing Blake's "Argument,"

. . . the villain left the paths of ease,
To walk in perilous paths, and drive
The just man into barren climes.

Leaving their pre-revolutionary indolence, the priests were inciting kings to take the path of war and counterrevolution:

³⁰ "Red clay brought forth," i.e. Adam was reborn, a new cycle of history. See Damon, p. 316.

³¹ Note Blake's image when he expresses fear that the Watch Friends may find the ciadel of Liberty in his works and "lay its Heavens & their inhabitants in blood of punishment." *J* 37/4/1:20.

³² W. L. Mathieson, *England in Transition*, London, 1920, p. 70.

Now the sneaking serpent walks
 In mild humility.
 And the just man rages in the wilds
 Where lions roam.

While French priests were walking about London like upright serpents, the French people were "raging . . . in forests" to confront the lions of the royal armies. "The priest promotes war," Blake wrote in his notebook.²³ The threat to turn flourishing cities into deserts was compelling patriots to become warlike men.

The *Song of Liberty* at the other end of *The Marriage* celebrates the casting out of French monarchy and the rout, less than two months after his roaring manifesto, of Brunswick's starry hosts, who were forced into a dismal and muddy retreat from Valmy even as the new Republic was being announced in Paris, at the end of September. The climactic cry, "*Empire is no more!*" is applied retrospectively to America and prophetically to the Spanish and Papal empires, to the commercial imperialism of the London slave trade, and to London's god, Urizen. But the inspiring fact is that Republicanism in France, "the son of fire in his eastern cloud" born in "the American meadows," has come through fire-baptism, has braved the war clouds "written with curses" (an allusion perhaps to the manifesto),²⁴ and has simultaneously dethroned French monarchy and hurled back the lion of Austria and the wolf of Prussia from the wintry door. A "Chorus" admonishes royalist priests whose "accepted brethren" are tyrants to take heed and cease cursing the sons of freedom ("sons of joy"): "For every thing that lives is Holy."²⁵

The British tyrant, scarcely recovered from the military and moral reverses of the American War (recapitulated in verse 15), is most vividly reminded of those reverses by the September events in France. Glancing "his beamy eyelids over the deep," he is filled with "dark dismay" at what he sees across the Channel where "the morning plumes her golden breast." There is a prophecy of

²³ N.107; see 109; E719, 718/K174, 171. "God made Man happy & Rich," says Blake in his defense of Paine against the "sneaking" Bishop of Landaff (E601-602/K384-385), "but the Subtil made the innocent Poor."

²⁴ Cf. Wordsworth's allusion to the manifesto as written on the "dire cloud" of the armies led by Brunswick. *Prelude* x.9-20. Both the London Corresponding Society and the S.C.I. made a great clamor about the manifesto and it must have loomed large in Blake's awareness.

the demise of his own Empire in the proclamation of a Republic so close to London. Blake makes the prophecy more explicit in a declaration at the end of *America*, of which this *Song of Liberty* is a preliminary sketch (or later summary) and to which we shall come in our next chapter.

A drawing that precedes *A Song of Liberty*, worked up subsequently into a striking color print (Plate VIIb), depicts the archetypal emperor, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, fallen and crawling naked and woebegone in desert exile.²⁶ In France a king has been dethroned, and the true nature of monarchy as a "bound and outward circumference" too narrow for the infinite desires of humanity, is now revealed. Every "jealous king" who limits the horizons of others, every "Urizen" who drives the just into barren climes, does so because he understands deserts better than people and because his own vision is so limited that a correct portrait shows him on hands and knees in that pre-human state described hypothetically by Rousseau: "his long nails [are] crooked talons; . . . his whole body, like that of a bear, [is] covered with hair." If man ever lived as such an animal, Rousseau observed, "the nature and limits of his ideas" would be indicated by "the fact that he walked upon all fours, with his look . . . confined to a horizon of a few paces."²⁶

Blake's identification of fallen Reason with Nebuchadnezzar is a striking instance of his creative and complexly ironic use of traditional material. The pictorial details, the body, the talon-nails, the impossibly hairy back and thighs, derive from his admired Mortimer's drawing of *Nebuchadnezzar recovering his Reason*, the 1781 etching of which was doubtless in Blake's print collection.²⁷ And the association of this bestial man with Reason is

²⁶ A first sketch appears in N.44. In *M.H.H.* a spiked crown is added. The crown is lacking in the color print of ca. 1795 entitled *Nebuchadnezzar* (Plate VIIb) but reappears in the *Visionary Head of Nebuchadnezzar*, 1819.

²⁷ Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," *The Social Contract and Discourses*, Everyman edn., 1927, p. 177. Hereafter referred to as *Discourse*. Italics mine.

²⁸ Behind Blake's creeping monarch, and behind Mortimer, Jean Hagstrum (pp. 66-67) sees "the wild and powerful nude men that Hendrick Goltzius places in his caves and on his rocks." Nebuchadnezzar's further degeneration, to a state of shaggy bestiality in which his mouth crops the grass and his functionless eyes are pressed against the ground, may be seen in Blake's drawing (no. 399) for p. 27 of *Night VII of Young's Night Thoughts*. His

suggested by Mortimer's title. But Blake, shifting the subject to Nebuchadnezzar's fall, proceeds to draw the ironic emblem of Reason losing his reason.

The creeping Urizen is supplied with a long soliloquy in a passage in *Night V of The Four Zoas* which is worth taking up here for the light it casts back upon *The Marriage* and *A Song of Liberty*—and *The Tyger*. The fatal error of the jealous king is that his fixing of the horizon ultimately limits himself more than it does the energy of the people. Royalty can keep its crimson robes, Orleans warned, only if it stops trying to measure for each man "the circle that he shall run" (*F.R.* 191). Soliloquizing as he crawls in the den or narrow circle of his own ideas, the fallen Urizen of *Night V* laments too late his imperial mistakes: his choice of war instead of peace, his failure to accept the opportunity to be an enlightened despot when the "mild & holy voice" of divine freedom said, "O light, spring up & shine" and "gave to me a silver scepter & crown'd me with a golden crown" to "Go forth & guide" the people. "I went not forth," he laments; "I hid myself in black clouds of my wrath.[.] I call'd the stars around my feet in the night of councils dark" (*F.Z.v.6:* 21-26). Thus George assembled his council in 1774; thus Louis prepared his "starry hosts" in 1789 and let the spark of humanity in his bosom be "quench'd in clouds" by "the Nobles of France, and dark mists."²⁸ Each time, in the event, at Yorktown and again at Valmy, "The stars throw down their spears & fled naked away. We fell." Too late Urizen is sorry he refused the use of his "Steeds of Light" (*v.6:* 27; *65:* 6).

The language of this soliloquy is doubly revealing. On the level of practice it is clear that "The stars threw down their spears" means: the armies of counterrevolution were defeated. On the level of theory it is clear that Reason, when it refuses to assist but attempts to hinder Energy, is overthrown. Denied the peaceful accommodation of the Steeds of Light, the just man seizes the Tigers metamorphosis into the 7-headed Beast who is the Whore's mount and who eats people may be seen in Blake's 1809 water color, *The Whore of Babylon*. The hairy back and the talon-like nails are still the same, and one head still wears a crown. The variant in which several of the Beast's heads are crowned, e.g. /59, suggests a confederacy of kings.

as *A. pl. b:* *E57/K304*; *F.R.6:* 68, 119[108]. In *A.* the connection is specific: the "hall of counsel" of "George the third" beside the Thames is the hall "built . . . In that dread night when Urizen call'd the stars round his feet."

of Wrath. Vetoed by a stubborn monarch, the French people became, as the *London Times* of January 7, 1792, put it, "loose from all restraints, and, in many instances, more ferocious than wolves and tigers." As Blake put it in *Feyette*, the French grew blood-thirsty and would "not submit to the gibbet & halter."

If we take the tiger and horse as symbols of untamed Energy and domesticated Reason, then it is obvious which of these contraries is the more vital in days of revolution. In Hell it is proverbial that "the tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction," and the devil Isaiah assures Blake "that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God."²⁹ Yet when revolt tears up one social contract, it must establish a new "free" one, based on an active marriage of Reason and Energy. The revolution "stamps the stony law to dust" as the last act of wrath against reason, but in so doing it hooses "the eternal horses from the dens of night, crying *Empire is no more! and now the lion & wolf shall cease.*" This cry at the end of *A Song of Liberty* and at the climax of the Declaration of Independence as rendered in true Jerusalem. Voltaire and Rousseau are still the guiding fire and cloud. The era of the beasts of prey gives way to the era of the untethered horses of intellect, who are of the order of Swift's Houyhnhnms. On this 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.

Nevertheless, according to the Devil at least, the roaring of lions and the howling of wolves "are portions of eternity," even though "too great for the eye of man" and perhaps too great for the mind of man (*M.H.8*). Blake's famous Song of Experience, *The Tyger*, raises the cosmic question: How can the tiger of experience and the lamb of innocence be grasped as the contraries of a single "fearful symmetry"? The answer, suggested in question form, is that the very process of the creation of the tiger brings about the condition of freedom in which his enemies (his prey) become his friends, as angels become devils in *The Marriage*. The tiger in Blake's illustration of this poem is notoriously lacking in ferocity, and critics have sometimes concluded that Blake was unable to "seize the fire" required to draw a fearful tiger. He could at least have tried, but he is showing us the final tiger, who has ac-

²⁸ *M.H.9*, 12: E96, 98/K152, 153.

completed his mission, has even, perhaps, attained a state of organized 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.⁴⁰

The creative blacksmith who seizes the molten stuff of terror and shapes it into living form on the cosmic anvil must employ dread power as well as daring and art, but the dread, Blake hopes, will be sufficient unto the day. The climax of the forging is a mighty hammering which drives out the impurities in a shower of sparks, like the falling stars children call angels' tears. At this point in *The Tyger* Blake employs the symbols which in his political writing signify the day of repentance when the king's "starry hosts" shall "throw down . . . sword and musket," the nobles and priests "shall weep, and put off . . . war," and the "wild raging millions, that wander in forests" shall become "mild peaceable nations" walking "in bliss" (*F.R.* 220-237):

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?

The creator must have smiled at Yorktown and at Valmy, not because his people were warlike, but because they seemed ready to coexist with the Lamb, the wrath of the Tiger having done its work. The question, "Did he smile his work to see?" is perhaps as rhetorical as the corresponding query of Orleans: "And can Nobles be bound when the people are free, or God weep when his children are happy?"⁴¹

This is not to imply that *The Tyger* is a political allegory but to point out that the fire in which the tiger is forged can be

⁴⁰ *Ez2/K.115*. Blake had no difficulty drawing a fearful werewolf (see *N.15-17*) or for that matter a fearful *fléa*. But his tiger is not even baring fangs. It is argued that in at least one copy the tiger looks solemn—not, on that evidence, the effect usually intended.

⁴¹ *F.R.* 186; *Ez91/K.142*. Orleans' speech citing "Fayette's forehead," "Mirabeau's eyes," "the shoulders of Target," "Baillly the strong foot of France," and "Clermont the terrible voice" as parts of the Revolution which terrify only the unsympathetic beholder, anticipates the dread hand, shoulder, feet, and daring of the blacksmith who forges the tiger and clasps its "deadly terror."

recognized as a general form of the fires that "inwrap the earthly globe" in the first year of the French Republic.⁴² The tiger burning in the forests of the night is a vision in the same mind that saw in Necker a hind threatening to burn down "the ancient forests of chivalry," that saw portions of eternity wherever men were struggling to be free—"a Serpent in Canada . . . In Mexico an Eagle, and a Lion in Peru; . . . a Whale in the South-sea"—and that would set, in another year, wrathful lions and bloodthirsty tigers in "the vineyards of red France."⁴³

⁴² For the forest fire that destroys oppressors, see Jeremiah 21:12-14: "Deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire . . . because of the evil of your doings . . . But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the Lord: and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it."

⁴³ *F.R.* 90-93; *A. Prelude* III; *E.15:2*. Note Wordsworth's description of Jacobin Paris at night as a place "Delencless as a wood where tigers roam." *Prelude* x.82.