David Aers
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David Punter

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Introduction

David Aers, Jonathan Cook, David Punter

The primary purpose of this book is to serve as an introduction to writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is thus not a work of research, but an educative and political contribution to literary study. We are very much aware that the key terms in the title, 'romanticism' and 'ideology', are problematic ones: that 'romanticism' is an ill-fitting label, whether we consider it in relation to genre or period, and that the relations between ideology and literature are the focus of more than one important and complex current debate.

If among literary historians and critics the period is classified as the 'romantic period', from other perspectives it is known quite differently: as 'the early industrial revolution', as a key stage in 'the making of the English working class'. We hope that this work will offer some connections with these other perspectives, in such a way as to show some of the relevant relations between literature and other forms of discourse, political, cultural and theoretical.

To be more specific, our aim is not to offer a survey of the decisive developments in English society and culture in the period, nor to offer a survey of those of its major authors who are canonized in our 'O' and 'A' level syllabuses and in the syllabuses for degrees in English literature. We have tried to adjust our critical task to the backdrop which already exists: the apparently unassailable hierarchization of writers which determines that 'romanticism' means, to most students, a unitary shadowy phenomenon which can be extrapolated as forming a middle ground bounded by six poets: Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats and Shelley. Therefore we have indeed discussed four of these poets: but we have also deliberately introduced writers (Jane Austen, Hazlitt, Burke) who are usually studied in a different context; and genres (fiction, political writing) which are often cut off from the central body of poetry. But the body of accepted work is very large; and the attempt to redefine marginality and centrality in the period can only here - we think for reasons intimately connected with the nature of cultural hegemony - be glimpsed interstitially in the relations between the essays. This could be put another way. The nature of the history of literature, and of the history of institutions of literary education, is such that although students may - and even this

is rare - be able to take on for themselves sufficient authority to defend the judgment, 'I do not like Wordsworth's poetry', it is not possible for them to form the alternative judgment, 'Wordsworth is a bad poet'. This, of course, is to make no comment about Wordsworth's poetic power: but merely to point out that the balance of this book is an attempt to steer a middle ground between the recognizability which can only be achieved by location within the canon and the renovation of critical tradition which depends on interrogating that canon. Thus our relation to the canon is tangential, but we acknowledge the necessity of working on the basis of the cultural history we have.

We wish to concentrate on the understanding of texts as part of a complex nexus of dynamic relations between literature, society and available ideologies, taking ideology here in a simplified general sense: 'a system of concepts and images which are a way of seeing and grasping things, and of interpreting what is seen or heard or read... *[*and of locating*]* the phenomena we perceive in a network of causality, a given interpretative and evaluative framework'. (1) We certainly do not intend to perpetuate the increasingly common approach which goes under the general banner of 'literature and its background'. This habitually erects a static dualism in which a fixed general 'background' is sketched in as a constant which is allegedly relevant for shaping our perceptions of what writers in the period must have been saying ('the medieval mind', 'the seventeenth-century reader'). Often the two terms 'literature' and 'background' are left as autonomous units arbitrarily juxtaposed. Our perspective is rather that writing is a social activity necessarily immersed in a diversity of contemporary practices, ideological forms and problems: its minute particulars articulate forms of life and outlook, imaging and displaying the writers' attitudes towards received ideology and existing circumstances, but also performing concrete work on that ideology and those circumstances by virtue of the very process of writing. The 'text' and 'background' approach seems to us worth commenting on because, as a critical orthodoxy, it has to a large extent replaced the notion of the transcendental autonomy of the 'verbal icon' as a controlling academic myth.

Forms of language, ideology and socio-political relations are the given basis on which the very possibility of any individual growing up as a recognizable human being depends. As Aristotle observed, 'man is naturally a political animal ... that a city then precedes an individual is plain ... he that is incapable of society, or so complete in himself as not to want it, makes no part of a city, as a beast or a god'. (2) But within the given historical circumstances, with the received forms of ideology and current conflicts, individuals and collectives make their own history, and an essential aspect of this making is the construction of meaning according to their own aspirations, experience and practice. In this process some writers may simply try to follow and apply the received and dominant ideologies to contemporary circumstances as they perceive them in the terms of such ideologies. But other writers produce works which come out of a more critical relation with dominant ideologies and given circumstances, and out of at least some imaginative and intellectual engagement with current

ideological alternatives, be they overtly utopian or, at least on the surface, committed to empirical analysis and the historically 'possible'. This is clearly a particularly important issue in the period we are studying, both because it represents a significant stage in the development of historical thinking, and because we have a culturally significant problem to deal with in the way the very different types of engagement which we can see in the 'romantics' have been assimilated to a false unitary model. Even within their own works, writers in general and certainly the writers with whom we deal will not, of course, be consistent: it is possible to negate currently dominant ideology and the state of affairs which it legitimates while nevertheless preserving an affirmative and reconciliatory strand of meaning. (3)

The writers we have chosen represent different positions within a spectrum from revolt to counter-revolutionary affirmation of dominant ideologies and the 'status quo'. We have tried, further, to practise and thus advocate ways of reading which bring out the comprehensiveness or partiality of a work in relation to what existed and to what did not exist but was imaginable, its relation to the 'status quo' in a class-divided society and to the current conflicts between its defenders and its varied opponents. We have not adopted, or attempted to adopt, a single method in relation to our writers or texts, for we do not believe that the Marxist and sociological ways of thinking in which our work is grounded enjoin, or even permit, such satisfying homogeneity: instead, we have tried to perform a variety of kinds of critical work, and it is in keeping with the educative function of the book that it should be possible succinctly to describe these kinds of work.

Blake: 'Active Evil' and 'Passive Good' picks out the theme of labour in Blake's work, and traces it through various incarnations in order to demonstrate the kind of social concreteness the poet's work possesses. 'Blake: sex, society and ideology' is less simply thematic, in that here the cognitive and imaginative advances that Blake made in a specific sphere of thought, concerning the problems of sexuality, are brought into relation with the ways in which his work is none the less conditioned by the dominant ideology. In 'Romantic literature and childhood', contrasting attitudes towards childhood are used to initiate an investigation of conservative and radical formations within the 'romantic', focused on Wordsworth and again on Blake. 'Wordsworth's model of man in 'The Prelude'' is a close interrogation of Wordsworth's poetic language and an attempt to disclose some of the implicit arguments beneath the seriously encrusted surface of 'The Prelude'. It needs, perhaps, to be said at this point that the lengthy concentration on Blake and Wordsworth is intentional; that it is our belief that many of the most significant contradictions within the heavily striated reality of 'romanticism' can be extrapolated from a proper apprehension of the relation between Blake and Wordsworth, from, one might say, a discrimination between vision and 'vision'.

The essay on Coleridge is an exercise in de-fragmentation, an attempt to put the romantic Humpty Dumpty back together again, in however miniaturized a form, in order to demonstrate connections between poetic theory and historical understanding. 'Social relations

of the Gothic' takes up an important set of fictions of the period, and demonstrates how their apparently escapist surface can be probed to reveal both social comment and also a set of narrative forms relevant to contemporary society. 'Community and morality: towards reading Jane Austen' argues that the significance of Austen's art and morality is far other than the 'universal' one still attributed to her work in literary history and criticism. 'Hazlitt: criticism and ideology' on the one hand seeks to reassert the value of a neglected figure of the period and on the other reconstructs an important political dialogue. 'Shelley: poetry and politics' questions traditional judgments on Shelley's involvement with practice and tries to offer a more specific version.

This diversity of approaches and concerns, however, can, like any other group of phenomena, be classed for convenience under a single heading. Our methods of reading try to grasp the complex ways in which ideology is at work within literary texts, without reducing the specific linguistic and aesthetic forms in question to some other realm of discourse: it is in the specific forms that we trace the role of ideology and the pressures of contemporary social life. Thus we follow a movement between detailed analysis of the language of texts and the relevant social, ideological and personal contexts mediated in them.

'Romantic language' is in itself a topic which could bear considerable elaboration. Much of the language which we criticize in this book has a heavily mystificatory function, often connected directly with the discharge of real or imaginary political duty. Thus, as we have written the book, we have sensed a number of tasks beginning to meet. The understanding of an ideologically charged language like that of Burke or Wordsworth is not a task remote from everyday concerns. The myths of the state and of personal creativity for which Burke and Wordsworth were largely responsible are still with us: in, for instance, the inflated, archaic and profoundly reactionary forms of parliamentary language, in the inflated, archaic and profoundly reactionary emphasis in literary education on falsely developed categories of personal taste, subjective response, isolated work. It would be difficult to deny that our acquiescence in the latter plays a part, however small, in sustaining the hegemony of the former. In the period which we discuss, specific changes occur in the relations between the realms of the public and the private, and they have substantially contributed to changes in the structure of real political power. Demystifying romantic language is thus a political task which goes hand in hand with more general educational tasks. The attempt to restore or achieve a proper intimacy with the literary text is not an exercise in naturalization, but a move towards the renewal of suppressed conflicts.

This brings us to a further point, which concerns our relation to Marxist criticism and interpretation of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature. There have been various signs of a 'rapprochement' between Marxism and romanticism, partly stimulated by the still increasing influence of the '1844 Manuscripts' on our version of Marx, partly by the Marxist critique of Stalinism which encouraged Marxists to recover the 'romantic' and humanistic components of Marxism, and partly by more general

social and cultural developments which we have no room to discuss here. One of the most distinguished representatives of this 'rapprochement' in England is E. P. Thompson who has sought out the continuing relevance of romantic writing to radical politics in his revised study of William Morris, in his essays on Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge and in passing uses of these writers throughout his work. (4)

Our own work casts some doubt on the attempt of Marxists to celebrate the romantic art of Wordsworth and Coleridge, as well as that of Blake, as an important critique of the contemporary capitalist social formation and ideology, as an anti-bourgeois alternative to existing forms of social domination. We have already noted the presence of highly contradictory moments of rebellion and reconciliation with dominant powers as a theoretical possibility within structures of writing, and we shall illustrate such tendencies; but we also want to say that our work on the most traditionally celebrated romantics, Wordsworth and Coleridge, shows a pervasive tendency on their part, even in their most overtly radical periods, to dissolve the social and political dimension of individual life and to lead the reader towards affirmative and reconciliatory attitudes to current modes of social control.

The mention of E.P. Thompson raises another set of arguments, summarized in the contemporary debate about the 'poverty of theory'. We have no explicit comment to make on this debate, but that very fact implies, as does this book as a whole, a minimal implicit comment. This is that, whatever the complexities of the relation between the development of theory and the concrete study of social, political and literary formations, there is none the less a role for a kind of work which, while focusing on specific intellectual problems, does not accept as a necessity a task of simultaneous theorization. It was Shelley, in his 'Defence of Poetry', who claimed that 'we have more moral, political, and historical wisdom, than we know how to reduce into practice; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies'. (5) As far as Shelley was concerned, it was poetry to which one had to turn in order to achieve those crucial elements of 'just distribution' and 'practice', but then, for Shelley, of course, poetry was a primary means of education. Now it is not, but the imagery of indigestion which succeeds Shelley's remarks may be none the less relevant. We do not believe for a moment that a useful literary criticism can proceed without benefit of theory, but we are also aware of the danger presented by the form in which some recent theoretical work has appeared - the danger, that is, of a discourse so arcane that to the uninitiated reader critical knowledge can be made to seem at best remote and at worst simply irrelevant. One point of our work is that questions of function are of primary importance and we believe that Marxism has an educative function to perform. If theoretical work is not to be divorced from this educative function, then it needs to be complemented by the kind of detailed attention to particular authors and works which we attempt.

We have written this book collaboratively: that is, we have engaged in continuing discussions of the work, and we have applied

this discussion both to questions of organization and to the substantive content of our individual essays. This is not the highest conceivable level of collaboration, and it may be that what has emerged is less an indivisible harmony than a discordant polyphony; but, in view of the constraints of academic production, this would not distress us too much, provided the voices themselves are audible and clear.

Blake: 'Active Evil' and 'Passive Good'

David Punter

In his 'Public Address' (c.1810), Blake comments: 'I am really sorry to see my Countrymen trouble themselves about Politics' (p.18), (1) and by doing so he sets a critical problem which has absorbed students of Blake for many years. (2) It can be variously formulated, but centrally it has to do with Blake's concept of the relations between the individual and society. In so far as his texts are polemical - which they certainly were in the earlier years and which, I would contend, they substantially remained to the end of his life - what is the essential site of that polemic? Do the texts advocate a process of individual liberation, or one of revolutionary social action? If both are advocated simultaneously, what are the mechanisms by means of which the dialectical thrust of the argument is maintained?

This is a vast subject, and this essay can obviously provide only a small contribution to it. A useful gloss on Blake's use of the word 'Politics' is provided in Rousseau's 'Emile' (1757-60), where we find the statement that 'society must be studied in the individual and the individual in society; those who desire to treat politics and morals apart from one another will never understand either'. (3) The widely accepted separation between the concepts of individual and society was an object of profound suspicion to many writers of the romantic period, and this suspicion in turn rests upon another emphasis within romanticism, which we can find expressed by Coleridge: (4)

> It is at once the distinctive and constitutive basis of my philosophy that I place the ground and genesis of my system, not, as others, in a fact impressed, much less in a generalisation from facts collectively, least of all in an abstraction embodied in a hypothesis, in which the pretended solution is most often but a repetition of the problem in disguise. In contradiction to this, I place my principle in an *act* - in the language of grammarians I begin with the verb - but the act involves its reality.

There is a certain amount of characteristically Coleridgean verbiage here, but the central distinction is clear: 'fact' and

'act', noun and verb, stasis and process. Elsewhere Coleridge writes that 'thinking can go but *half* way. To know the whole truth, we must likewise *Act*: and he alone acts, who *makes* - and this can no man do, estranged from Nature'. (5) This reminds us of Marx's analysis of alienation in his 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844', (6) but more significant for our purposes is Coleridge's identification of activity and 'making': the kinds of act which he is thinking of, and which he is claiming to be the major constitutive factor in 'human-ness', in man's species-being, are forms of making, forms of work, even though any sense of agency is obliterated in the abstractness of his formulation. The link between Blake and this general emphasis within romanticism is provided by Hegel: 'What man is, is his deed, is the series of his deeds, is that into which he has made himself. Thus the spirit is essentially energy and one cannot, in regard to it, abstract from appearance'. (7) What is particularly interesting here is Hegel's use in this context of the Blakean term 'energy': the human spirit, to Hegel, is not static but active, exuberant, continually in movement and flux.

If we see activity or energy - rather than reason, or any other abstract faculty of mind - as the basis of the human, then the question about relations between individual and society becomes transformed. There are no 'mere' individuals, existing in isolation, and there is, on the other hand, no 'society' in an abstract sense: what we have instead is a continuous process of activity and transformation, within which people work in relation to each other and in relation to the natural world. The study of these processes of work is too broad a matter to be confined within a concept like 'politics'; thus in Blake we find, alongside the apparent rejection of the political category as such, an intense and continuing attention to areas of human life which are heavily politically charged: questions of social relations, of sexual behaviour, of the organization and role of the state and commerce. Although there may seem to be a contradiction here, it is by no means a confusion in Blake's mind: rather, Blake is choosing precisely to point to the inadequacy of conventionally accepted categories in order to advance an argument about the eventual imaginative unity of human life and, in doing so, to draw attention to the malevolent social purposes which are served by separating the realm of politics from other areas of social activity.

What I want to examine, then, in this essay is a number of aspects of Blake's attention to work. (8) Both as a London tradesman, and as a hater of rigid rationalist philosophy, Blake had every reason to be concerned with the everyday processes by which men transform nature, rather than with the ways in which they seek to explain the world abstractly to themselves; or perhaps more accurately, he was concerned with the distinctions and connections between those levels. I shall start by considering some of the early work, leading up to some comments on the well-known 'Tyger' poem from the 'Songs of Experience' (1789-94); I shall then look at one of the short early prophecies, 'The Song of Los' (1795), in which Blake's analysis of the relations between work and social organization deepens; then at 'The Mental Traveller', a lengthy ballad known to us from the Pickering

Manuscript, probably written around 1803, in which is inserted a full-scale description and diagnosis of the history of industrialization and its social effects; and finally at several passages from 'Jerusalem' (1804-20), in which we can see in miniature the more complex vision which informs the late works.

The whole philosophical effort of Blake's early work, not only the poetry but also the various annotations and the tracts, is directed towards a central opposition between passivity and activity. 'Active Evil is better than Passive Good' (409), he writes in the margin of his copy of Lavater's rather saccharine 'Aphorisms' (1788); and again, in more detail: (9)

> Accident is the omission of act in self & the hindering of act in another, This is Vice but all Act is Virtue. To hinder another is not an act it is the contrary it is a restraint on action both in ourselves & in the person hinderd. for he who hinders another omits his own duty. at the time (pp.226-7)

The problem Blake found with the thinkers of the eighteenth century was that they assumed, first, that the nature of man was static, and thus, as a consequence, that all actions carried the same existential weight. What men did was merely to be considered as an accompaniment to what they centrally were. This, to Blake, was nonsense; one could paraphrase his opinion by saying that there is no way to know whether a person is good unless he or she, at least occasionally, does something which could substantiate that view. In Plate 4 of 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' (c.1790-3), he discusses the role which religion has played in perverting what should be an obvious sense of connection between being and act, and claims that:

> 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. calld Evil. is alone from the Body. & that Reason. calld Good. is alone from the Soul.
> 3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

In other words, religion has outlawed the body, and in doing so has in fact cut off the mind from the real source of its energies: 'Energy', writes Blake, in the statements which the Devil's Voice immediately puts forward as 'Contraries' to these religious 'Errors', 'is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.'

What follows from this is a revaluation of the physical, and of those forces which affect physical well-being. (10) The problems of philosophy become inseparable from social justice, for philosophy is conceived, not as dealing with an abstract, disembodied model of man, but as related to man himself, in all his complexity, body and soul, energy and reason, delusion and potential. It is therefore not surprising that, even in his early period when, on the whole, the issues at the centre of Blake's mind were largely to do with religion, philosophy and

literary tradition, we none the less find him paying attention to those social phenomena which ideology most centrally sanctions, the processes of work. We find, for instance, the disturbing ironies of the first 'Chimney Sweeper' lyric, from the 'Songs of Innocence' (1789); here the child sweep, Tom Dacre, dreams about his own freedom from drudgery and ascent to heaven:

> And so Tom awoke and we rose in the dark
> And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
> Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm,
> So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

This final stanza opens up an enormous range of doubts in the reader: what exactly are we supposed to think of the apparent happiness which Tom has achieved? Is it merely an internalization of repression? Or is there something in religious promises which is genuinely satisfying? Or is Blake regarding religion cynically as at least a momentary panacea for social evil? Or, in fact, are we supposed to be laughing, very non-innocently, at Tom Dacre all the way through? Ironically, the interpretative problems raised by a so-called Song of Innocence are considerably resolved by the companion poem in the 'Songs of Experience', with its uncompromising final stanza which appears to lay the blame for misery squarely at the feet of the controllers of ideological repression:

> And because I am happy, & dance & sing,
> They think they have done me no injury:
> And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King
> Who make up a heaven of our misery.

But even this leaves us with a distinct problem, about whether we can justify our trust in the experienced voice. It might be, after all, that the sweeping attribution of causation in this stanza is the sign of paranoia, an indicator of a loss of trust so extreme that every manifestation of the social world appears as part of a perverted and threatening order.

Blake's attitude towards state involvement in institutional cruelty is bitter, and it is sometimes accompanied by an equally sarcastic emphasis on the superiority of practical philanthropy to intellectual speculation, as, for instance, in one of the songs included in the satirical 'Island in the Moon' (c.1784-5) (pp.12-13). The song is sung by the character called Obtuse Angle:

> To be or not to be
> Of great capacity
> Like Sir Isaac Newton
> Or Locke or Doctor South
> Or Sherlock upon death
> Id rather be Sutton
>
> For he did build a house
> For aged men & youth
> With walls of brick & stone
> He furnishd it within

With whatever he could win
And all his own

The poem goes on to describe in more detail Sutton's house, and concludes with the question:

Was not this a good man
Whose life was but a span
Whose name was Sutton
As Locke or Doctor South
Or Sherlock upon Death
Or Sir Isaac Newton

Here different kinds of work are being very squarely contrasted: the abstract, intellectualized labour represented by the baleful geometrical rationalism of Newton, Locke and their deadly acolytes, and the work represented by Richard Sutton, philanthropist and builder of charity schools. Obtuse Angle is a character with only partial perception, and we are not meant to take Sutton's rather grim buildings as perfect; but we are meant to see that there is a case to be made for the practical man, and, more importantly than this, that work is of different kinds, and that according to the work which he undertakes, so can man be judged. Sutton is represented as possessive, narrow-minded and mercenary; nevertheless, he is a man able to work on what comes to hand, rather than one who seeks salvation through purely mental activity.

But the most important locus for our purposes in Blake's early poetry is a poem which has been all too widely considered in other contexts, (11) 'The Tyger' from 'Songs of Experience', which is, among many other things, a poem about work, about 'artifice' in the widest sense. Blake's major concern is with the tiger as product:

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

The tiger is clearly in one sense a natural phenomenon, but the whole poem brings this fact into question, brings it face to face with the problems of work. For there are no answers given to the many questions asked in the poem: one might begin by assuming that the obvious solution is God, but the whole drift of the poem is towards undermining that possibility, towards asserting that God could not have had the strength, the courage to make the tiger:

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare sieze the fire?

The answer to these questions seems to be less God than man: not that man has made the literal 'tiger', but that it is a feature of human work that it enables, for better or worse, men to produce

artefacts that are stronger or more dangerous than themselves. And this interpretation is backed up by the industrial imagery of the fourth stanza:

> What the hammer? what the chain,
> In what furnace was thy brain?
> What the anvil? what dread grasp,
> Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

The point here relates to Blake's well-known and irritating comment that 'Natural Objects always did & now do Weaken deaden & obliterate Imagination in Me' (Annotations to Wordsworth's 'Poems', p.44), which has often been read as an extravagant aberration. Yet surely what is implicit in this comment, especially when we note that it occurs in the context of remarks on Wordsworth, is principally a far more sophisticated concept of nature than was common among the English romantics. It would be possible to claim that while the tiger is a 'real', 'natural' beast, the images and myths with which we, as people and as artists, surround it are man-made, the fruits of imagination. It is this kind of dualism which Blake will not stand: for him the tiger is simultaneously the beast in the depths of the jungle and the beast in the depths of our minds: to think of the tiger is to perform an activity, to work on the given, to elaborate what may indeed be a 'natural' basis - although very possibly a forever unknowable one - into a fully-fledged act of human imaginative perception. The first stanza runs, as everybody knows:

> Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
> In the forests of the night;
> What immortal hand or eye,
> Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

One interesting feature here is the word 'could': not 'did', which would reduce the poem to a simple pondering on creation, but 'could', which immediately confuses the time-scale of the poem. In the last stanza the word 'could' is replaced by 'dare'; here the problems of production are projected decisively into the future, and Blake simultaneously issues a challenge: the tiger is not a fully achieved, given being, on which it is humanity's duty merely to reflect, but half-formed, the site of future 'industry'. And to take up the implicit industrial metaphor again, what, the poem asks, are we going to do about our capacity for manufacture? 'When the stars threw down their spears/And water'd heaven with their tears', are we going to adopt a similarly hopeless attitude towards the dangers of industrial development, or are we going to take up the challenge of 'framing' this 'fearful symmetry' - providing it with a purposive context, such that the tiger can continue to 'burn' without scorching us irreparably with its terrible fires? 'The Tyger', of course, is a poem about art in the narrow sense, about the adequacy of words and painting confronted with the irruption of the violent: but as such, it necessarily follows from Blake's philosophical premises that it is simultaneously a poem about human perception and general human

practice, in which the concept of a given, static nature is dissolved in the flux of activity and projected as a problem not of apprehension but of transformation. (12)

And in case this view of Blake's way of connecting problems seems rather far from 'The Tyger', we need only turn to the shorter prophetic books, which were being written at substantially the same time, and particularly to 'The Song of Los'. It is a brief work, divided into two parts headed 'Africa' and 'Asia', which alerts us to the fact that it continues Blake's treatment of the issues raised in 'America' (1793) and 'Europe' (1794), which essentially concern the conditions for the liberation of revolutionary energy and its fate. It starts conventionally for this period in Blake's development:

> Adam stood in the garden of Eden:
> And Noah on the mountains of Ararat;
> They saw Urizen give his Laws to the Nations
> By the hands of the children of Los.
>
> Adam shudderd! Noah faded! black grew the sunny
> African
> When Rintrah gave Abstract Philosophy to Brama in
> the East:
>
> (SL, 3.6-11)

Essentially this describes the cessation of a golden age: Adam and Noah are symbols of innocence, an innocence which is ruined when Urizen, the god of reason, steps in and imposes moral codes and rules of behaviour. It is puzzling that this should be at 'the hands of the children of Los', since Los is the figure of prophecy who stands against Urizenic domination, but, as has been pointed out by other critics, (13) during the Urizenic stage of history no force is powerful enough to resist, and even Los is tainted. Blake may well also mean an irony, that men are gullible enough to present themselves with the very rules which will do them harm and cut them off from their destiny, as God could only impose the Ten Commandments through the collaboration of Moses. This primal event of repression spreads through the world, apparently through the agency of Rintrah, who elsewhere represents anger, and here perhaps imperial violence and domination, until:

> The human race began to wither, for the healthy built
> Secluded places, fearing the joys of Love
> And the disease'd only propagated:
> So Antamon call'd up Leutha from her valleys of delight:
> And to Mahomet a loose Bible gave.
> But in the North, to Odin, Sotha gave a Code of War,
> Because of Diralada thinking to reclaim his joy.
>
> These were the Churches: Hospitals: Castles: Palaces:
> Like nets & gins & traps to catch the joys of Eternity
> And all the rest a desart;
> Till like a dream Eternity was obliterated & erased.
>
> (SL, 3.25-4.4)