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The Impact of Newspapers on William Blake's *The French Revolution* and "Tyger"[1]

William Blake'in *Fransız Devrimi* ve "Kaplan" Adlı Şiirlerine Gazetelerin Etkisi

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of newspapers on William Blake's perception of the French Revolution in the light of archival documents. The Revolution is indeed one of the defining events that deeply influenced the poetry of Blake. However, how the poet learned about the course of the events in France and what his sources were have been a matter of debate. Various studies indicated that the poet followed the turbulent events of the Revolution closely through several sources ranging from the political statements of the politicians to the dinner conversations at Joseph Jonson's, from newspapers to the sophisticated political works of Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke. Among these sources, the newspapers appear to be the most influential source for Blake due to their accessibility and ability to provide a constant flow of information about the events of the Revolution. Accordingly, focusing on Blake's *The French Revolution* (1791) and "Tyger" (1792-93) in the light of the original newspaper documents from British archives, this study hypothesises that the impact of the early phases of the French Revolution on William Blake's poetry was shaped by the newspapers of the period. Furthermore, the newspapers' representation of the Revolution as an embracing, liberating and pacifist force had direct impact on Blake's poetry. After 1793, the Revolution entered into a new bloody phase, also known as The Reign of Terror Period, during which many people, including the members of the monarchy, were executed. This new phase posed threat for the British monarchy; therefore, the newspapers of the period started to employ counter-revolutionary discourse. During this period, Blake continued to use newspapers as a source, however, instead of using the content of the columns directly, he subverted the news by attributing positive connotations to the monstrous image of revolution and revolutionaries.
Keywords: William Blake, Romanticism, French Revolution, Tyger; newspapers, poetry.

Öz

Bu çalışma, William Blake'in Fransız Devrimi algısına gazetelerin etkisini arşiv belgeleri ışığında araştırmaktadır. Söz konusu devrim, Blake'in şiirini derinden etkileyen en önemli olaylardan biridir. Lakin, şairin devrimin olaylarından nasıl haberdar olduğu ve kaynaklarının neler olduğu ciddi bir tartışma konusudur. Çeşitli akademik çalışmalar, şairin devrimin çalkantılı olaylarını politikacıların açıklamalarından Joseph Jonson'ın akşam yemeği sohbetlerine, gazetelerden Thomas Paine ve Edmund Burke'ün siyasi yazılarına kadar birçok kaynak aracılığıyla yakından takip ettiğini ortaya koymuştur. Bu kaynaklar arasında Blake için en önemli olanı, erişilebilirliği ve devrim hakkında sürekli

[1] This article is an abridged and revised version of the introduction and first chapter of my unpublished MA thesis entitled "The Impact of the French Revolution on William Blake's Poetry and Painting: The Changing Phases of Evil."

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bilgi akışı sağlaması nedeniyle gazetelerdir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, Blake'in *Fransız Devrimi* (1791) ve "Tyger" (1792-93) şiirlerine gazete arşivleri ışığında odaklanarak erken dönem Fransız Devrimi'nin William Blake'e etkisinin dönemin gazeteleriyle şekillendiğini iddia etmektedir. Dahası, gazetelerin erken dönem Fransız Devrimi'ni kucaklayıcı, özgürleştirici ve bunların ötesinde barışçı bir kuvvet olarak göstermesi Blake'i etkilemiş ve bu söylem şiirlerine doğrudan yansımıştır. Terör Dönemi olarak da bilinen, devrimin en kanlı olaylarının yaşanmaya başladığı 1793 yılı itibariyle, devrimin İngiliz monarşisine tehdit oluşturması sebebiyle gazeteler devrim karşıtı söylem kullanmaya başlamıştır. Bu dönemde Blake, gazeteleri kullanmaya devam etmiş lakin artık haberlerin içeriklerini direkt kullanmaktansa devrimi ve devrimcileri canavarca gösteren olumsuz haberlerdeki imgeleri, onlara olumlu anlamlar yükleyerek kullanmıştır.
Anahtar sözcükler: William Blake, Romantizm, Fransız Devrimi, Kaplan; gazete, şiir.

Introduction

The French Revolution is indeed one of the most influential events that influenced William Blake's life and poetry. Blake followed the turbulent events of the Revolution closely through several sources ranging from the political statements of the politicians to the dinner conversations at Joseph Jonson's, from newspapers to the sophisticated political works of Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke. The newspapers were the sources of information at cheap price that every Londoner could obtain, making them ideal sources on the events of the Revolution for common people living in England. Macleod (2007) draws attention to the fact that the newspaper press held a significant position during the period since it took "advantage of the British public's voracious appetite for a constant flow of information about the Revolution" (p. 700). The representation of the events in the column of the newspapers were extremely influential in determining the opinion of the public (Barker, 2000, p. 176). This article hypothesises that the impact of the early phases of the French Revolution on William Blake's poetry was deeply characterized by the newspapers of the period through focusing on Blake's *The French Revolution* (1791) and "Tyger" (1792-93) in analogy with the events of the period and in the light of the original newspaper documents from British archives.

Although Britain's demeanour towards the Revolution varies throughout the years, it is known that it was welcomed and embraced during the early period. Mori (2016) states that "Britain's initial response to the French Revolution was positive across the intellectual spectrum from 1787 to 1791" (p. 31). The fundamental reason for that was firstly the perception that the people of France were following the footsteps of the Americans who revolted against the unfair taxation system. Secondly, and more importantly, the Revolution was also seen as a belated attempt by the French to mimic the establishment of a constitutional monarchy like that of England's Glorious Revolution of 1688 (Jarrells, 2012, pp. 39-40). Hence, the Revolution was perceived as a liberal force that was to end the financial injustices suffered by the people and the authoritarian rule of the monarchy.

The news of the revolution in France was received positively in the newspapers: "In every province of this great kingdom the flame of liberty has burst forth" reported *The London Chronicle* in 1790 (p. 2). *The English Chronicle*, in a sensational report full of exclamation marks, declared that "thus has the hand of JUSTICE been brought upon France" (p. 2) and praised the men who had brought about the "great and glorious REVOLUTION" (p. 2). In *The World*, dated Monday, July 20, 1789, the repercussion of the revolution is reported as follows:

> A NATIONAL REVOLUTION, brought about in a period so short, has had no parallel in the History of the World: and though fatal to some, the lives that have been lost in this great accomplishment, are, in point of numbers, inconsiderable. (p. 2)

The Revolution, though it is also indicated that it caused casualties, is presented as an "accomplishment," reflecting the reigning tone: embracement. The news, then, follows a report on the Bastille Rush as: "Here Friends long lost again met each other! Here Captivity regained its freedom – DESPAIR found instant consolation!" (p. 2) The takeover of the Bastille prison, here, is reported as a force that liberated the people who were imprisoned due to the political orientations. The positive attitude is

notably explicit with the presentation of the alteration; "Captivity" turning into "freedom," "Despair" into "consolation" (p. 2). In this regard, revolution is presented as a pacifist dynamic force rather than a devouring one.

Hence, it is palpable that pro-revolutionary discourse and presentation of the revolution as a pacifist force appear as the two main features that dominated the newspapers of the period. Thus was the image of the revolution in the air in England during the period when Blake wrote *The French Revolution* (1791). Therefore, reading the texts within the context of such discourses aired at the time will be beneficial to comprehend Blake's political demeanour more clearly and how influential the news was in shaping Blake's perception of the events.

The Positive Image of the French Revolution in Newspapers and Its Impact on *The French Revolution*

The French Revolution (1791), intended to be the first of a series of seven books, is Blake's only work that has got closer to be published during his lifetime yet eventually failed, which was probably related to the dramatic oppression to the dissenters by the state. Although the exact impetus that caused the failure of the publication is unknown, its impact on Blake and his literary career was dramatic[2]. This long poem depicts the events in the French Revolution from June 27 to July 15 1789, which ultimately led to the Storming of Bastille; and all the prominent revolutionary ideas, ideals and counter-revolutionary dynamics are personified into either actual figures or fictitious characters to present the catastrophic event within a level of understanding that a casual Londoner in that period could perceive easily. Major figures of the poem are: "The Duke of Burgundy, the nobility hostile to the people, Sieyes, the People itself; the Archbishop of Paris represents the privileged Clergy; the Duke of Orleans, the liberal party among Nobles; La Fayette the Nation in arms" (Berger, 2012, pp. 333). Blake employs the theme of peace versus war through these characters: the Duke of Burgundy and Archbishop of Paris support violence against the revolutionary forces and promote war while the revolutionary forces, Sieyes, the Duke of Orleans and Necker, defend pacifist methods. In the formation of these characters, especially the figures from the revolutionary force, Blake borrowed a lot from the contents of the columns of the contemporary newspapers.

The King, Louis XVI is portrayed by William Blake as a figure who initially supports the pacifist attitude towards the Revolution. The Duke of Burgundy and the Archbishop of Paris try to persuade him to declare war on the revolutionaries by using both aristocratic and religious doctrines. Instead of responding to the Revolution with instantaneous violence, he initially chooses to stay calm. The King is also aware of his previous actions; and feels guilty: "Our flesh is corrupted, and we wear away" (*F.R*, p. 76). He further cries:

> Sick the mountains! and all their vineyards weep, in the eyes of the kingly mourner; Pale is the morning cloud in his visage. Rise, Necker! the ancient dawn calls us
> To awake from slumbers of five thousand years. I awake, but my soul is in dreams; From my window I see the old mountains of France, like agèd men, fading away. (*F.R*, pp. 6-9)

The King is aware of the vehement change that is taking place in France caused by the "Revolutionary upheaval," which ultimately, "unsettles the human framework supporting the traditional heavens, themselves imagined as the head of a body politic" (Aers, 1987, p. 249). The word, "[h]ide," is repeated three times, reflecting the King's response to the upheaval very clearly. Retaliation, exhorted by the Archbishop as; "send forth thy Generals," (*F.R*, p. 153) blurs the mind of the King, reflecting the fact that Blake's King is weak and easy to be manipulated by others. Additionally, Blake's King is domineered by utmost pacifism, resulting from fear.

Right after the King's speech, Blake presents the anti-revolutionary Duke of Burgundy, the personification of the French nobility, who states:

[2] Jacob Bronowski (1972) argues that the poem is significant to perceive "how Blake's manner might have grown, had Joseph Johnson printed the book a year earlier [and] had it found the readers whom it might then have found" (p. 78).

> Shall this marble built heaven become a clay cottage
> […]
> And shall Necker, the hind of Geneva, stretch out his crook'd sickle o'er fertile France
> Till our purple and crimson is faded to russet, and the kingdoms of earth bound in sheaves,
> And the ancient forests of chivalry hewn, and the joys of the combat burnt for fuel. (*F.R*, pp. 90-94)

For French nobility, France is a "marble built heaven." The word, "marble," is highly significant since it had been used as a luxurious building material for sculpture throughout the ages. France, therefore, is presented as a heavenly place built out of marble, representing the sublime of the heavenly aesthetics. For the nobility, the revolution is a perilous act of altering this heaven into "a clay cottage," a suggestion of the lower class, reflecting their views of perceiving it as a calamity on the nation. Burgundy symbolizes the war in Blake's theme of peace versus war; therefore, he tries to persuade the King to declare war against the revolutionaries instead of yielding to peace. Blake uses Burgundy to explain the reason of the actual event of July 11 in which Louis the XVI ordered the mercenaries to take Paris and Versailles.

Through the King and Duke of Burgundy, Blake vividly portrays the historical accounts of series of events in the Revolution, reflecting the impetuses and actors that initiated these events. However; different from actual events, Blake, attributes too much significance to one specific figure: Necker. Duke of Burgundy presents him as an enemy of his class, the aristocracy: "[S]hall Necker, the hind of Geneva, stretch out his crook'd sickle o'er fertile France?" (p. 91). It is palpable that for the Duke, Necker is a foreigner posing threat towards "fertile France" and "the ancient forests of chivalry" (p. 94), which according to Erdman is "Blake's term for the feudal aristocracy" (Erdman, 1954, p. 153), indicating how the Duke sees Necker as an enemy of his class.

> Deeply moved by the speech of Duke of Burgundy, the King orders Necker to leave the country:
> "Necker rise! leave the kingdom, thy life is surrounded with snares
> […]
> Depart! answer not! for the tempest must fall, as in years that are passèd away. (*F.R*, pp. 113-119).

Here, Blake portrays the events that paved the way to the famous Bastille Storm in 14 July 1789. It was indeed a fact that dismissal of Necker was one of the crucial dynamics that ultimately gave momentum to people attacking Bastille Prison; however, after realizing his mistake, Louis XVI recalled Necker to his post a week later (Johnson 2013: 67-69), which indicates that the King regretted his decision and tried to restore his mistake. In Blake's version, however, the King appears to be quite conscious of his actions and deliberately chooses to declare war against the people by dismissing Necker. Blake even further exaggerates Necker's leave from France upon the King's order and presents him as a figure apotheosised by the people:

> Dropping a tear the old man [Necker] his place left, and when he was gone out
> He set his face toward Geneva to flee; and the women and children of the city
> Kneel'd round him and kissèd his garments and wept: he stood a short space in the street,
> Then fled; and the whole city knew he was fled to Geneva, and the Senate heard it. (*F.R*, pp. 120-24)

It is quite palpable that Blake's Necker is very much loved by the common people. The example of women and children kneeling around him and kissing his garments reinforces this idea. It is also indicated that the decision that ultimately led to the dismissal of Necker was induced by Duke of Burgundy, the enemy of common people, which further promotes the image of Necker on the side of the common people.

However; that is not the actual case for Necker in history. Jacques Necker (1732-1804) was a Swiss banker, well-known for his reforms in pre-revolutionary France: he was appointed as director-general of finance in 1778 and initiated reforms to improve the socio-economic condition of the common people,

ultimately leading him to be loved by the common people (Neely 2008, pp. 42-44). However; he is not only known for his reforms but also for salon parties that he, together with his wife and daughter, hosted for the French aristocracy; he was also closely tied with the French royal government since his wealth grew thanks to the loans provided by them (Swanson and Trout, 1990, p. 424). His dismissal from his position was not because he sided with the people but rather because his political enemies, who were also from aristocracy, manipulated the King for his dismissal (Neely, 2008, pp. 68-69). In this respect, here arises a historical inconsistency on Blake's part. Why Blake distorts the actual events and puts Necker in a central position in a way that his dismissal and exile by the order of the King marks the beginning of the Revolution altering into a new phase of bloodshed?

It is directly related to the representation of Necker in the newspapers of the period: In *The Times*, dated 04 August 1789, it is stated that "Mr. Necker's return to Versailles to reassume his former situation as Minister of the counter, has changed the general aspect of affairs from the most profound sorrow to a universal joy, such as was never before known in France" (p. 2). This indicates that for a common Londoner, under the influence of the newspapers, Necker was a leading figure welcomed and embraced by the French common people. In *The Times*, 08 July 1789, it is reported that "the rejoicing at Versailles and Paris […] have been universal […] and The heavens, in the language of Dryden, could hear no other names but those of Baily and Necker" (p. 2), which reflects that Necker is apotheosised by the papers just like Blake presents him in the poem. In the next day's issue of the same paper on 9 July 1789, it is stated: "It is certain, that the King is extremely dissatisfied with Mr. Necker […] The King likewise blames Mr. Necker very highly for taking so active a part in favour of the Commons" (p. 2). In the news above, Necker is presented as the beloved of the common people and as standing up for their rights which ultimately indicates that Necker sided with the people not the aristocracy.

Necker was indeed a significant figure in the Revolution; yet, Blake places him in such a central position that his dismissal marks the King's choice of war over peace and aristocracy over people. His exaggeration is in line with the portrayal of Necker in the newspapers of the period. Hence, the name of Necker was quite common in the newspapers during the period; and the portrayal of Necker, as seen in the examples above, is positive and pro-third-estate, the commoners. Blake's portrayal of Necker in *The French Revolution* appears to be in accordance with the news. The line "[t]he women and children kneel'd round him [Necker] and kissed his garments and wept" (*F.R*, p. 123) indicates that Blake portrays Necker as the beloved figure embraced by the common people in much the same as in the issue of *The Times*, dated 9 July 1789, Necker working "in favour of the Commons" (p. 2). Hence, it is quite visible that Blake's Necker is in line with the Necker portrayed in the columns of the newspapers rather than the actual historical Swiss banker.

Another significant figure whose demeanour and actions in the poem echo the columns of the newspapers is Orleans who represents peace in the theme of war versus peace. Orleans embodies the pacifist characteristic more than anyone in the whole poem. The character, d'Orleans, before whom even the Archbishop "changed into pale," (*F.R*, p. 176) takes the scene and bolts his speech: "Fear not dreams, fear not visions, nor be you dismay'd with sorrows which flee at the morning! / Can the fires of Nobility ever be quench'd, or stars by a stormy night?" (*F.R*, pp. 180-181) The most significant aspect of this character and his speech is the fact that it harbours Blake's foresight from the future of the Revolution, in which the "dream" and the "vision" of the Revolution will not be perilous for the people, but rather will be heavenly for every single citizen, including all three estates of the nation. Just like "a stormy night" cannot quench the light of the "stars," "[t]he fires" of the "nobility," according to Blake, will not be "quenched" by the Revolution. Orleans furthers his argument as follows:

> Is the body diseas'd when the members are healthful? can the man be bound in sorrow
> Whose ev'ry function is fill'd with its fiery desire?
> […]
> And can Nobles be bound when the people are free, or God weep when his children are happy?
> (*F.R*, pp. 183-186)

Through Orleans, Blake portrays the revolution not as a destructive force but rather as a restorative one that will give momentum to the healing of the nation, which is of course directly linked to the eighteenth century's concept of the revolution that harbours restoration within itself[3]. The revolution Blake foresees shelters benefits for the people and nothing malicious for the nobility, which is especially underlined by the quotation above. The line "[is] the body diseas'd when the members are healthful?" indicates that when the members, which in this case is the people, are "healthful," the body, "nobility," will not be "diseas'd," signifying Blake's sheer trust in the Revolution's pacificist future.

Erdman (1954) argues that "Blake's Orleans is reversing the rhetoric with which the Archbishop justified a political hierarchy of head, heart, and servile members" (p. 155). The destruction of the hierarchy, therefore, is not the annihilation of the system that brings order; but rather an initiation of a new order through which body, the political system, will be restored (Connolly, 2002, pp. 75-76). Blake continues this argument by focusing on the clash between nobility and the common people: "[C]an Nobles be bound when the people are free, or God weep when his children are happy?" The rhetorical question, here, signifies Blake's utter and sheer trust in the Revolution and confidence over pacifist future of the Revolution. Blake's pacifist attitude especially glitters in the character of Orleans, since Philippe d'Orleans, an actual figure of the Revolution, was, for Blake, the living proof that the nobility can peacefully find a new place in the new order of France. Erdman also draws attention to Blake's absolute trust in the pacifist future of the Revolution, and states that Blake "in early days had entertained the hope that the French King and Dukes and Archbishop might put off terror and contempt and resist the temptation to put on the girdle of counterrevolutionary war" (p. 159).

Blake's Orleans is directly inspired by Louis Philippe Joseph d'Orleans, who despite being a member of the royal house of Bourbon, the ruling French dynasty, and cousin of Louis XVI, actively supported the Revolution and later took the surname of "Egalite," one of the three mottos of the French Revolution along with "Liberte" and "Fraternite" (Kelly, 1979, pp. 667-668). What is quite striking and dazzling is the fact that actual d'Orleans's role in the Revolution was not as pacifist as Blake portrayed. He always supported the constitutional monarchy over absolute monarchy, that was present at France; and it has been argued that he funded the riots, specifically the Women's March on Versailles in October 1789, which was one of the early and most significant events of the Revolution in which the women of Paris marched to Palace of Versailles, where the monarchy lived, due to the high price and scarcity of bread and the revolutionaries joined them seeking for constitutional monarchy and political reforms (Lefebvre, p. 132). The event ended with the death of many guards and moving of the seat of government in Versailles to Paris, which marked the transition of political authority. Hibbert (1982) argues that it was Orleans who planned the riot over the scarcity of bread and canalised the revolutionaries who supported the constitutional monarchy like himself to join them and advance the constitutionalist agenda (p. 87). Orleans saw himself as an alternative King, both eligible through his lineage and liberal thoughts; hence, his funding of the march and the constitutionalist agenda aimed to dethrone his cousin, which can further be seen in the chants during the march: "Long Live King Orleans! Long Live our father" (Erickson, 2004, pp. 209). Though Orleans's funding of the march is a matter of debate, it is indeed known that he later voted for the execution of the Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, which ultimately indicates that he was not really on the side of pacifist methods as Blake portrayed.

What drives Blake to portray Orleans as a pacifist figure is embedded in the political discourses and representation of Orleans aired in the newspapers. In a newspaper, *The World*, dated Monday July 20 1789, it is reported that "the popularity of Duke of Orleans increases more and more" after the fall of the Bastille (p. 1). In another London newspaper, *The Bath Chronicle*, dated October 14, 1790, the name of Orleans appears with Mirabeau, one of the key figures of the French Revolution, and it is reported that "The National Assembly of France have acquitted [...] Louis-Philippe d'Orleans of the charges brought against" (2), related to the accusations of funding Versailles March. However, the columnist prefers not to state that Orleans was

[3] Robert Darnton (1989) states that "[n]o one was ready for a revolution in 1789 [...] the idea itself did not exist […] if you look up revolution in standard dictionaries from the eighteenth century, you find definitions that derive from the verb *revolve*, such as the return of a planet or a star to some point from which it parted (p. 2).

also sent to exile after the events in Versailles took place. The fundamental reason why Orleans appeared so positively in the newspapers was directly related to his close ties with the English monarchy. In *The Times,* dated 29 October 1789, right after the events in Versailles, it is reported that "the Duke of Orleans was introduced to the King by the Duke of Leeds, and had a private audience of his Majesty till three o'clock" (p. 1) and in the same newspaper's issue of 04 January 1790, it is reported that "his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Orleans, accompanied by the Earl of Derby, several other Nobility, &c. took the diversion of stag hunting" (p. 2), all of which indicate how Orleans was closely linked to the English monarchy. It is true that the English public initially welcomed the Revolution and therefore reigning pro-revolutionary discourse; however, the case of Orleans is distinctive for Orleans's domineering positive image in the newspapers was deeply linked with his association with the monarchy.

The Changing Image of the French Revolution in Newspapers and Its Impact on "Tyger"

The image of the Revolution in England's newspapers, beginning from 1792, changed entirely after the course of the Revolution altered into bloodshed. The pro-revolutionary discourse that had been once employed to manifest the pacifism of the Revolution was replaced by the counter-revolutionary discourses that cursed the Revolution and revolutionaries. The change of the discourses within the newspapers is directly related to the change in the course of events in France and its reception in England. Beginning from 1792, the revolutionary France imprisoned the royal family and declared war on Prussia and Austria which made the revolutionary France a threat for Britain now. Britain began preparations for military action in 1792 and declared that war is the only option if the Revolutionary France continued its conquest (Lecky, 1887, pp. 121-123). Britain expelled the French ambassador following the execution of Louis XVI, and on 1 February France responded by declaring war on Great Britain (Lefebvre, pp. 19).

The image of the French Revolution within newspapers, therefore, changed from positive to negative. This change can be observed in the following examples from newspapers of the period. In *The London Times*, dated Monday, 10 September 1792, an account of Mr. Lindsay, an eyewitness of the Revolution, is reported:

> The city had been a scene of bloodshed and violence without intermission since Sunday noon, and although it is difficult and indeed impossible to ascertain with any precision the number that had fallen victims to the fury of the mob during these three days, we believe the account will not be exaggerated when we state it at TWELVE THOUSAND PERSONS—(We state it as a fact, which we derive from the best information, that during the Massacre on the 2d instant, from SIX to EIGHT THOUSAND Persons perished). (p. 1)

The Revolution and the revolutionaries began to be portrayed as vehement monsters in the newspapers following the atrocious events in France. In another issue of the same paper, dated 12 September 1792, the very opening line draws the line between the pro and anti-revolutionaries in England; "As those who are most likely to give a just relation of the late horrid transactions in France, dare not write;—and those, who do write, make it their business to conceal the circumstances as much as possible" (p. 3). It is evidently clear that the news started to attack not only the revolutionaries in France but also the English dissenters that supported the Revolution. As a result, many political and philosophical figures were forced to flee the country to save their lives. The dissenters, who are thought to be pro-revolutionary, were accused of treason. The same news then follows a report regarding the ferociousness of the revolutionaries:

> When anybody is assassinated, his body is directly stripped by the people, and sometimes they fight for the spoil; and then the weakest party is always killed, as being thieves. I saw four executed in this manner by nine others, with whom they refused to partake of some stolen Assignats which they found on some Priests they had assassinated. These nine were afterwards attacked by 20 other Brigands, who hanged them as thieves, and went to a wine merchant and bought wine with the money. This is one of the many examples of the probity of the French mob, so much talked of, which certainly is not greater than their humanity, and it is in this manner. that the generous French Nation administer justice to thieves. (p. 2)

The expressions such as "thieves" and "murderer of priests" referred to the common images of the revolutionaries, that echoed in the newspapers in 1792.

The counter-revolutionary discourse, however, reached an extreme level in 1793. The Reign of Terror period (1793-94), in which many famous figures, including Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and even well-known and influential revolutionaries like Georges Danton and Camille Desmoulins, were executed, showed the violent face of the Revolution. The perception of the pacifist revolution that England was familiar with through the Glorious Revolution was no more: the Revolution in France was now destructive rather than restorative. Britain has taken extreme measures against revolutionary France and the very idea of the revolution, resulting merely from two reasons: the threat of revolutionary France on British nation and the threat of the flourishing of such idea, the revolution, that could cause the same events in their home. *The London Times'*s issue of 25 January 1793 indicates evidently the first reason and Britain's stance;

> The vengeance of Europe will now rapidly fall on them; and, in process of time, make them the veriest wretches on the face of the earth. The name of Frenchman will be considered as the appellation of savage, and their presence shunned as a poison, deadly destructive to the peace and happiness of Mankind. (p. 1)

The date of the report, January 25, 1793, is highly significant since it was published exactly four days after the executions of Louis XVI. The news was quick to cover the events taking place in France, reflecting the fact that British media closely followed the French Revolution.

Here, it is significant to first touch upon Blake's position and reception of the bloody events in France before elaborating on his approach towards the changing discourse in the newspapers. It should be noted here that it is a matter of debate whether Blake lost faith in French Revolution after the bloody events in 1792 and the executions of royal family and revolutionaries in 1793 or saw these atrocities as necessary for the revolution. Chesterton and Prickett argue that Blake was disillusioned with the French Revolution after the Terror Period (p. 37, p. 62) while Erdman argues that Blake's stance towards the Revolution remained the same until Napoleon started his military conquest.

Chesterton and Prickett's argument may appear to be plausible when Blake's pacifist expectations in *The French Revolution* are taken into consideration. In his *The French Revolution* (1791), he envisages a pacifist future for the Revolution in which the revolutionaries and the King solve the problems between them through dialogue, not violence; and eventually peace is ensured in France. The calamitous events in France proved Blake to be utterly wrong. Philippe d'Orleans, whom Blake used in his poem as the living proof of the pacifist order that was to be established after the Revolution in the poem, voted for the executions of many revolutionaries and even his own royal blood, Louis XVI, during the Terror period (Mills, p. 68). This incident also reflects that Blake failed to foresee the future of the King too, for the poem anticipates a future in which the King survived the Revolution and found a new place in the new order of France. The failure of Blake's foresight of the Revolution's future is most obvious with the character, Orleans, who glittered with the beams of peace and pacifism. During the early stages of the Revolution till 1792, Orleans was one of the most promising members of the National Assembly. Yet, contrary to Blake's expectations, he later rejected the very ideals of the Revolution and became the executioner of the revolutionaries (Mills, pp. 68). Hence, it is palpable that Blake's envisagement of a pacific revolution was

proven to be wrong by The Reign of Terror in France which might have eventually led Blake to be disillusioned with the French Revolution (Chesterton, p. 37, Prickett p. 62).

Contrary to Chesterton and Prickett, Erdman argues that Blake's stance towards the Revolution remained the same until Napoleon started his military conquest. Erdman underlines that from 1792 onwards, the counter-revolutionary forces were gaining high ground in France; and Blake believed that the royalists and war-mongering priests were growing bolder as the counter-revolutionary armies approached to France (p. 173). Hence, for Blake the Revolution was in danger. Erdman then reminds fragmentary verses from Blake's notebook written about 1793:

> For on no other ground
> Can I sow my seed
> Without tearing up
> Some stinking weed. (Keynes, p. 168)

These verses, according to Erdman, indicate Blake's idea that "[b]efore France could hope to sow and harvest the wheat of Liberty, every stinking weed of the old system would have to be cleared away" (p. 173). Here, "stinking weed" is a metaphor for the counter-revolutionary forces including the French royalty, the war-mongering priests and the French aristocracy. Hence, Blake sees the annihilation of these counter-revolutionary forces necessary for the survival and success of the Revolution. Erdman's reading also indicates that the fundamental reason that paved the way for the executions in 1793 is nothing but the counter-revolutionary forces themselves since they posed danger for the revolution. Blake's acknowledgement of violence can also be observed in another verse in the same notebook: "But the bloodthirsty people across the water / Will not submit to the gibbet & halter" (Keynes, p. 60). These lines, Erdman argues, indicate 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[4]" (p. 173). It is palpable that the verses in Blake's notebook indicate that Blake's perception of pacifist revolution extant in *The French Revolution* (1791) is no longer valid in 1792 for he now regards violence as a necessary means for the Revolution to defend itself and flourish. Paulson comments on this as follows: "If Burke saw the Revolution as the sublime of terror and Paine saw it as a beautiful pastoral, Blake, by bringing together the two interpretations, the sublime and the beautiful, emphasized the incongruous and unnatural juxtaposition" (p. 170). So, it is palpable that Blake updated his perception of revolution in light of the new socio-political events of 1792. Hence, Erdman's reading of Blake's stance towards the bloody events in France appears to better capture Blake's perception of revolution than Chesterton and Prickett.

In this turbulent period of 1792 and 1793, although the newspapers were dominated by the counter-revolutionary discourses, Blake still used the columns as a source for his poetry. Blake used the counter-revolutionary content of the columns in such a subverted way that he initiated a new revolutionary meaning out of counter-revolutionary language, which can be seen in one of his most famous poems, "Tyger."

Though the "Tyger" has various interpretations, reading the poem in parallelism with the counter-revolutionary discourse of the period mirrors Blake's desire to place the word "tiger" in its 1792 and 1793 socio-political context. In his *Representations of Revolution*, Paulson argues that the Blake's "Tyger" is deeply influenced by the newspapers of the period. *The London Times* of January 7, 1792 tells us that French people are now "loose from all restraints, and, in many instances, more vicious than wolves and tigers" (qtd. in Paulson, 1983, p. 123). Of Marat, one of the key revolutionary figures of the French Revolution, *The Times* reports: "His eyes resembled those of *tiger* cat, and there was a kind of ferociousness in his looks that corresponded with the savage fierceness of that animal" (qtd. in Paulson 1983, p. 123). John Wilkes, a radical journalist, after his initial support of the Revolution, spoke of "this nation of monkeys and tigers," conflating the double caricature of French fashion and French savagery, and Sir Samuel Romilly,

[4] September Massacres, also known as First Terror, is a milestone event that took place in France from September 2 to September 6 in 1792. It is marked by the executions of many political prisoners affliated with counterrevolutionary plot.

another disillusioned supporter, wrote in 1792: "One might as well think of establishing a republic of tigers in some forest in Africa, as of maintaining a free government among such monsters" (Paulson, 1983, pp. 123-124).

In the light of Ronald Paulson's ideas, it is quite clear that the negative image of tiger representing French revolutionaries was quite common in 1792. However, Blake uses exactly the same word, "tyger," with an entirely different meaning, attributing positive characteristics to it. This can be based on two grounds: Blake's altering perception of revolution in light of the socio-political context of 1792 and Blake's own dialectic. As I have discussed above, the counter-revolutionary activities in 1792 led Blake to change his perception of pacifist revolution as he saw violence as a necessary means for the French Revolution. Hence, the image of tiger used in the newspapers to portray the ferocious and violent aspects of the revolutionaries, thus their negativity, is actually embraced by Blake to be positive since he believes their violence is necessary. Blake's dialectic is also visible here, for the tiger-lamb contrary is presented in an unorthodox way in which the tiger, which is generally associated with negative connotations, appears as the will of God. "Did he who made the Lamb made thee?" (p. 20) is a rhetorical question to indicate what we consider "good" or "evil" are equal creations of God. Since, in his dialectic, Blake situates both counter-parts of the contraries equally important for progression, the tiger, here, indicates the vitality of the negative counter-part that is neglected. Blake's reading is based on his dialectic and cycle theory, in which both counter-parts of contraries act in cycles for progression.

It is also significant to underline Blake's use of forests in the poem:

> Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
> In the forests of the night;
> What immortal hand or eye,
> Could frame thy fearful symmetry? (p. 172)

In *The French Revolution*, Blake uses the forest, "the ancient forests of chivalry" (p. 94) as a way to refer to aristocracy of France; and, if we accept Paulson's reading of tiger as an allegory of French revolutionaries true, then it is plausible to argue that "forests of the night" here is a continuation of Blake's earlier use of forest to refer the aristocracy of France. Foster Damon (2013) also states that Blake's "forest […] symbolises the complicated rooted errors either of the social order or of the dogmatic mind" (p. 141). In this respect, reading Blake's use of "forests of the nights" as a way to refer to French aristocracy further supports Paulson's analogical reading of tigers as French revolutionaries. Hence, it is safe to argue that the bright burning tigers, which in this case are the revolutionaries in France, illuminate "the forests of the nights," the darkness initiated by the French aristocracy, with their revolutionary fire. It is significant to underline here that the fire can illuminate the forests yet can also burn them down. This may be interpreted as Blake's acknowledgement of the fact that the revolutionaries can be threatening for the French aristocracy; yet, this very threat is necessary to illuminate the darkness, or to restore the grave conditions caused by the aristocracy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reading William Blake's early revolution-themed poems, *The French Revolution* and "Tyger," in analogy with the newspapers of the period indicates that Blake's rhetoric related to the Revolution is under the influence of the newspapers of the period; however, this influence alters from early revolutionary period in France (1789-1791) to The Reign of Terror Period (1793-1794). While in the initial phase of the Revolution, the newspapers had direct impact on Blake's poetry, in the latter phase, Blake used the contents of the columns in a subverted way. *The French Revolution* carries the domineering pro-revolutionary discourse and most significantly the pacifist image of revolutionaries that can be observed in the newspapers of the period. Blake's distorted representations of Necker and Orleans are in line with the representations of these figures in the newspapers. Necker was indeed a significant figure in the Revolution; yet, Blake places him in such a central position that his dismissal marks the King's choice of war over peace

and aristocracy over people. Blake's exaggeration is in line with the portrayal of Necker in the newspapers of the period. The case of Orleans is also the same. Blake presents him as the embodiment of the pacifist ideals and supporter of peace; yet in reality, he is actually a Jacobin who paved the way to the execution of the monarchy members and revolutionaries. So, the case of Necker and Orleans are two good examples to observe how influential the newspapers were on the poetry of Blake. During the initial phases of the Revolution, Blake's pro-revolutionary demeanour towards the Revolution was not different from the newspapers which ultimately lead him to trust them. However; beginning from 1792 and the initiation of Reign of Terror period in France in 1793, the newspapers employed counter-revolutionary discourse against the Revolution. Blake saw the bloody events in France as natural consequences of counter-revolutionary activities. He no longer imagined a pacifist revolution since the revolution had no choice but to be destructive in order to survive the threat of counter-revolutionary plot. Therefore, his perception of revolution now also harbored violence if necessary. During the atrocious events, he continued to borrow the content of the newspapers yet used it differently: instead of presenting the content as it is, as seen with the examples of Necker and Orleans, this time he presented the contents in a subverted way. "Tyger" poem is a very good example of this since the French revolutionaries, who are degraded in the English newspapers as ferocious and violent "tigers" attacking their own people, appear in Blake's "Tyger" quite positively, which results from his changing perception of the Revolution. The cases of *The French Revolution* and "Tyger" indicate that there is a transition in Blake's use of the contents of the newspapers: from writing in accordance with the contents to the subversion of them. Hence, though Blake's use of content of the papers alters within time, the newspapers were invaluable sources that deeply influenced Blake's revolutionary verses.

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