

CHAPTER 1

Politics

“The Tyger” is one of two or three poems by William Blake that everyone knows, or, at least, knows about. The familiarity of the poem is evidently linked with its obscurity, for those who know about the poem may not necessarily know what the poem is about. The unwritten rules of interpretation dictate that because “The Tyger” is a poem it cannot be about a tiger: the beast in the jungle must therefore be a symbol of something else, or something Other. Surely the thing that burns in the night is not a tiger, but desire: “Tyger Tyger, burning bright / In the forests of the night” (*SE* 42.1–2). Or perhaps the tiger is the evil evidence of an impossible theological conundrum in which innocence is forever locked into a relationship with its contrary: “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” (*SE* 42.20). It may be, also, that the poem is about poetry—a self-referential exercise in which Blake claims that only a human being could command the creative energy to make something as complex and contradictory as “The Tyger”: “What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?” (*SE* 42.3–4). The implicit answer is that no immortal could, but a mortal artist might, because Blake did. Another meaning may be that the tiger which burns so brightly represents the fires of revolution lighting up the night of continental tyranny, an interpretation consistent with the flames of Orc that burn away mystery and empire elsewhere in Blake’s poetry. But this last interpretation begs an obvious question: Why would an English poet choose an image from India to represent a revolution in France? In fact, just about any interpretation leads the reader to wonder why an English poet would be thinking about an Indian tiger anyway.

Because trade with India had been a fact of British life since the early seventeenth century, we should not be surprised to learn that there were tigers in London during Blake’s lifetime. Two were kept at the Tower of London, and Blake could have seen one exhibited at Leicester House near Green Street where the poet resided after his marriage to Catherine in 1782.¹ “The Tyger” was written ten years later, and it is tempting to think that Blake’s symbolic beast was inspired by one of two real tigers, either the one he saw around the corner from his home in Green Street or another one in India that he never saw but would certainly have heard

about in the same year he wrote the poem. In December 1792 the only son of a British general named Sir Hector Munro died after he was attacked and mauled by a tiger in western India. General Munro had earlier defeated the notorious Muslim leader Tipu Sultan in a battle in the same region where his son was killed, so there was a certain awful irony about the younger Munro's death in the wake of his father's victory—a fearful symmetry, you might say. Blake would have known about the attacks—both the British general's upon the Indian prince and the Indian tiger's upon the English youth—because news from India was not hard to come by in 1790s London. Indeed, the tiger attack was such a sensational event that it immediately took hold in the public imagination and gained a secure place in English popular culture when it was commemorated in the form of the cheap domestic artware known as chimney ornaments.² Whether Blake's poem also commemorates the tiger attack is hard to say, but there is no denying the emblematic value of tigers in Great Britain (whether literal or symbolic) to show the involvement of India in the English empire.

How might this information affect interpretation of this famous poem? For one thing, it helps to explain the strange dualism of poem and picture: the tiger in the text is a fearful, mysterious beast that prompts the poet to ask how so much power could ever have been given form at all; by contrast, the image of the tiger that accompanies the poem represents the creature as rather tame, sheepish even. Many critics think this tiger looks more like a lamb,³ and it could very well correspond to the caged beast that Blake saw at Leicester House as a young newlywed, while the barely imaginable tiger of the text suggests the animal in India that killed the General's son. Certainly the creation of this kind of unbound energy has its risks—what immortal would dare to do such a thing?—and if the tiger is an emblem of India then perhaps the creation of a colonial empire has its risks as well, all the more so because the hands and eyes of the Englishmen in India were merely mortal. More than one British general must have looked into the forests of the Indian night and wondered where the tiger Tipu lay concealed.

"The Tyger" may be a rather oblique reference to the English presence in India, but elsewhere Blake is more direct in suggesting relationships between Great Britain and its Indian empire. We have already noted that *The Song of Los* is a mythographically complex comparison of world religions in the context of state authority, with Blake describing some primordial moment when original vision gives way to religious system. But the poet may also be using this mythographic moment to describe his own age as well. The historical allegory that makes Blake's mythic figure Rintrah the agent of British authority (usu-

ally understood as William Pitt) squares with reality.⁴ Thus the poet's meaning may also include a contemporary reference to the use of imperial authority to impose British political and religious systems on a native Indian population. Rintrah really did give "Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East" (*SL* 3.11). By 1795, when *The Song of Los* was written, England was well on its way to consolidating its empire in the East, and any number of Englishmen in India were already enjoying the kind of commercial despotism that led a later writer to say that they had become "Sultanized."⁵

But for all the Sultanized Englishmen in India, there were a few who had become "Brahmanized" instead. Some members of the Asiatic Society in Bengal were so receptive to and respectful of native traditions that they were, in effect, culturally colonized by the very society they had been sent by "Rintrah" to regulate and, to some extent, put aside their own "Abstract Philosophy" for "Brama." This generous reading of British imperialism is, to be sure, limited to only a few enlightened scholars, but certainly the interests of William Jones and Charles Wilkins went beyond the purely commercial concerns of most members of the East India Company. Jones, after all, used his position as a jurist to help establish a system whereby legal disputes in India would be adjudicated by Indian laws, and Charles Wilkins used his skills as a printer to fabricate the first movable Devanagari typeface to make the printing and distribution of Sanskrit texts possible. Blake's own sense that Wilkins had "gone native" is suggested by that part of his 1809 catalog description of his drawing of *The Bramins* where he admits to some confusion about Indian garb: "I understand that my Costume is incorrect, but in this I plead the authority of the ancients, who often deviated from the Habits, to preserve the Manners, as in the instance of Laocoon, who, though a priest, is represented naked" (*E* 548). The drawing, in other words, probably represented Wilkins in some kind of Indian costume that accorded with Blake's idea of the "manner" of a Brahmin, even though he had no sense of what such a costume would actually look like.

That he was corrected in his pictorial representation of Indian costume implies that Blake was in contact with someone who knew how the costume should have appeared. Whoever this person was, he (or, less likely, she) would have been able to impart additional information about India to Blake. The possibility exists that the informant might have been Wilkins himself, who had returned to England in 1786 and was active in circles very close to Blake. In the same year that Blake advertised his drawing of *The Bramins* Wilkins was in contact with one Moses Haughton, who was doing a series of engravings for Edward Moor's *The Hindu Pantheon*, published in 1810. The Blake connection is the

poet's friend and fellow artist Henry Fuseli, who employed Haughton on a regular basis to engrave many of his own compositions.⁶ Haughton, in turn, had Wilkins supply the names of the Hindu deities written in Sanskrit using the new Devanagari fonts. This daisy chain linking Blake to Wilkins in the year 1809 does not identify Blake's informant on the correct mode of Hindu costume definitively, but it is one more piece of suggestive evidence—together with the drawing of Wilkins itself—that can be used to justify the claim that Blake had some understanding of Hindu mythology by the time he was working on *Jerusalem*.

But Blake would not have had to wait until 1809 for India to enter his consciousness. Over the last quarter of the eighteenth century Indian affairs were a constant concern of the King's ministers and the statesmen in Parliament.⁷ The London *Times* published regular reports in columns devoted exclusively to news from India, and quite a few British periodicals reviewed and summarized new books about India at some length. Blake would not have been able to avoid the talk about India in the 1790s among the dissenters and republicans he saw from time to time, especially toward the end of the decade, when republicanism reached into India itself in the person of that same Tipu Sultan whom General Munro had defeated in 1792. The tiger attack on the General's son, however sensational, was only a small part of the meaning of India for English radicals in the late eighteenth century. Those who supported the Revolution in France, as Blake did, would have understood the importance of India to the engine of empire and the exercise of imperial power, both at home and abroad. Blake's knowledge of India would have come to him first in the form of political controversy surrounding the East India Company and by way of reports in the radical press of the Hindu literature that was reaching London around the same time. The argument of this chapter, then, is that Blake's understanding of mythology was inextricably linked with revolutionary enthusiasm because the myths of India could only have been communicated to him in a republican context.

I

The East India Company was formally incorporated on 31 December 1600 after a group of London merchants had raised £30,000 capital and petitioned Queen Elizabeth for a charter. Between 1601 and 1613 the Company undertook twelve voyages for the purpose of securing a British-controlled source of spices (to flavor salt-cured meat) in the face of rising prices from Dutch and Portuguese suppliers. The earliest

voyages were made to the spice islands of the East Indies, trade being established with India proper only after the destruction of the Portuguese fleet in 1612. After Elizabeth, James I renewed the Company's charter indefinitely. Royal sponsorship abated temporarily with the overthrow of Charles I, Oliver Cromwell's initial inclination being to end the Company's monopoly privileges altogether. He was persuaded otherwise, however, and the Company's enterprises in India actually expanded during the Protectorate. With the Restoration came even greater privileges and more territory. Charles II had married the daughter of the king of Portugal and received the island of Bombay as part of her dowry. When Bombay proved unprofitable as a royalist possession, the king handed it over to the Company for use as a new port for English ships, formerly docked at Surat. He also granted the Company extraordinary political powers through a series of new charters, including the power to make governmental appointments and administer justice; to wage war and negotiate peace with the native princes; and to acquire new territories and defend existing ones against rival colonial adventurers.⁸ Nevertheless, the Company's exclusive privileges in India were not always honored. In 1698 a *second* British East India Company was given royal sanction when the crown required fresh funds to restore a depleted war chest. Queen Anne consolidated the two companies in 1709, and the newly unified East India Company once again held an exclusive charter to do business in the East (Robert, 76).

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, then, the Company's unusual position as a commercial entity with monopoly privileges and independent powers of government over a native population was firmly established. England had superseded Holland and Portugal as a colonial force in India, with trading posts secured in Surat, Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. But new threats emerged from the French and from the native Indian princes. In 1746 Joseph François Dupleix, Governor-General of French India, successfully attacked the British fort at Madras, where an unassuming twenty-year-old clerk named Robert Clive was stationed. Clive escaped to Cuddalore, site of another English settlement, and joined up with Major Stringer Lawrence; together they launched a counterattack on the French settlement at Pondicherry. The British and French negotiated their way out of continued hostilities at this time, and Madras was returned to English control, but the episode was the harbinger of numerous military engagements to come between England and France in India over the second half of the eighteenth century. No less than the Caribbean Islands, India was to be the colonial staging ground for conflicts between the two countries, especially during the Seven Years War and, later, throughout the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era.

The situation in India was further complicated by the decline of the old Mogul dynasty in Delhi, which was no longer able to exercise authority over native princes. To protect their own interests the princes began to alternate allegiances with the rival East India Companies of the French and the English, often playing one off against the other. The ensuing vacuum of political power was eventually filled by the British under the spectacular military leadership of Clive that made him a national hero when news of his exploits reached London. Clive had secured the mercantile empire in India by force, but his strengths as a military leader were not well-suited to the peaceful administration of the Company's concerns. That task fell to Warren Hastings, who had impressed Clive during the fighting in Bengal and was appointed to the Calcutta Council in 1761 (Robert, 78–79, 85). Here is the point where the story of the East India Company begins to intersect with the career of William Blake, since it was Hastings who encouraged Charles Wilkins to translate the *Bhagavad Gita*. Of equal importance, however, is the role Hastings played—unwillingly, to be sure—in helping to keep India in the foreground of the political consciousness of English radicals in the 1790s.

In 1772 Warren Hastings was named Governor-General of Bengal, a title that was changed to Governor-General of India the next year (Robert, 85). The change of title was mandated by the Regulating Act of 1773 that brought India more directly under parliamentary control but stopped short of full regulation: the Company still enjoyed a considerable measure of independence, which the traders and administrators took full advantage of to amass enormous private fortunes at the expense of the native population. The process of regulation was completed only in 1784 with the passage of Pitt's India Bill, which placed clear limitations on the Company's governmental and economic powers. The India Bill provided for a Board of Control that made the Company fully accountable to Parliament, a development that did not jibe with the autocratic nature of Hastings, who was caught in the middle of the transition and was not really prepared for such a sweeping change in the administration of the Company's commercial interests. All of the changes were mandated by recent events of considerable importance to the Crown. The loss of the American colonies with the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781 shifted the focus of British imperial power eastward and made clarification of the relationship between England and the East India Company a serious political concern.⁹ The India Bill also served a more immediate political purpose by giving George III's supporters an opportunity to undermine a ministry that the King disliked and wanted overthrown (Sutherland, 366). The power struggle

did not completely end with the formation of a new ministry acceptable to the King and passage of the East India Bill in 1784.

The animus against an earlier administration out of favor with the King had a kind of afterlife in the impeachment of Warren Hastings that began in February of 1788. The attack against Hastings was mainly conducted by Edmund Burke in the form of humanitarian outrage against the treatment of Indians during Hastings's tenure as Governor-General. Basically, Burke made Hastings the scapegoat for all the disorder and exploitation that had occurred during his direction of the Company. Prior to the passage of the 1784 bill, officials of the Company were free to plunder villages and overtax the local princes, abuses that Hastings himself had pointed out as damaging to British interests.¹⁰ On some occasions Hastings had behaved with gross disregard for the lives of Indians, as when he had Nand Kumar, a member of the Brahmin caste, hanged for the minor offense of forgery (Robert, 87). He had also wounded Burke's friend Philip Francis in a duel in 1780, so seriously that he had to return to England, where he supplied Burke with information to use against Hastings. Although Hastings had resigned as Governor-General and had returned to England in 1785, he still maintained a position of importance in the Company, and so Burke led the effort to impeach him three years later. Burke's humanitarian rhetoric, however moving, seems to have been uttered mainly for party purposes, since "he showed far more interest in exposing abuses and attacking individuals than in working out a constructive policy of reform" (Sutherland, 367–68). Burke also viewed Indian society through the lens of his own ideology of natural law, understanding the caste system in India, for example, "as a noteworthy example of the natural order of things under God" (Bearce, 16). The prosecution of Hastings, then, was a way of defending the stable institutions of society, whether in England or in India: "In Asia as well as in Europe," Burke averred, "the same law of nations prevails, the same principles are continually resorted to, and the same maxims held and strenuously maintained. . . . India is enlightened in that respect as well as Europe" (quoted by Bearce, 17). The proceedings against Hastings dragged on until 1795, when he was finally acquitted of the charges against him. Clearly, Hastings was no angel, but his vindication in 1795 could be seen as a failure of the Crown. At the very least, Hastings had not always been a willing instrument of empire, and he did take a strong interest in Indian culture by encouraging the formation of the Asiatic Society and by taking concrete steps to ensure that Islamic and Hindu laws were administered in India.¹¹

Whatever else he was, Hastings was no puppet of Church and State, and it is easy to see how English radicals who took an interest in

Indian affairs would have preferred him to the governors-general who succeeded him. Moreover, the shamelessly partisan involvement of Edmund Burke assured that Hastings would find support among English Jacobins and also among more moderate factions. In the radical press Burke was criticized both for his opposition to the French Revolution and for his dogged attempt to impeach Hastings. A pamphlet in support of the French published by an anonymous “Member of the Revolution Society” in 1790, for example, focuses more on Burke’s efforts to impeach Hastings than on his indictment of the Revolution. *A Letter to the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, in Reply to his “Reflections on the Revolution in France”* is noteworthy for its linkage of religious dissent, revolutionary sentiment, and support of Warren Hastings. The *Analytical Review* comments that the author of the pamphlet, “[t]hrough himself a Churchman, . . . pays a handsome compliment to the Dissenters; and attributes Mr. B.’s [i.e., Burke’s] dislike to that body to personal motives. He questions the truth of Mr. Burke’s statement respecting the affairs of France, which he suspects to be as much overcharged as his representations on Indian affairs” (AR 8 [Sept.–Dec. 1790]: 415). The reviewer follows this comment with a quote from the pamphlet itself:

Since the publication [of Burke’s *Reflections*], it was the subject of conversation between two gentlemen of considerable talents—the one had been in France during the summer; the other for many years in India.—The first declared, that he should pay no credit to what you had said of Mr. Hastings, because he could convict you of many errors in your French accounts—the other expressed equal distrust of the facts mentioned in your book, because he knew your ignorance of a country he himself had long resided in. (AR 8: 415)

The argument is hardly elegant, but the point is clear: Burke’s ignorance of France is matched by his ignorance of India. Also clear is the writer’s sense of a radical relationship between revolution on the Continent and support of Hastings, which the *Analytical Review* considers to be weighted too heavily in favor of the former Governor-General: “The author is led to a vindication of Mr. Hastings, which indeed would have been a better title for the pamphlet than that which it now bears” (AR 8: 415). That this vindication also included “a handsome compliment to the Dissenters” shows that interest in India was interconnected with political liberty and religious freedom in the radical press during the 1790s.

Time and again, Warren Hastings is held up as a model governor whose political behavior provides the basis for judging that of his adversaries, Burke and Pitt. A notice in the *Analytical Review* of a pamphlet published in 1794 typifies the radical attitude that understood Hast-

ings's handling of Indian affairs to be vastly superior to Pitt's ministry of British concerns. *The Merits of Mr. Pitt and Mr. Hastings, as Ministers in War and Peace, impartially stated* has nothing but praise for Hastings's tenure as Governor-General:

England sent out a powerful fleet, and as many British troops as she could spare, from the pressing demands made upon her from other quarters. But she left Mr. Hastings to *find resources as he could, for supporting seventy thousand men in the field*. He did find resources, and he concluded a separate peace with Madagee Sindia, which was signed and ratified in october, 1781. The Maratta peace was concluded in may, 1782, and ratified the january following. The peace in Europe was proclaimed in India in june, 1783, and the peace with Tippoo Sul-taun was signed in march, 1784. Mr. Hastings quitted India in february, 1785, leaving that great continent universally in peace; the provinces under his own immediate government, in the highest state of prosperity, and the general resources increased from *three millions* sterling a year to *five*. (AR 18 [Jan.–April 1794]: 212)

Against Hastings's record of peace and prosperity the author contrasts the record of Pitt "as a war minister" and "affirm[s] that all [his] great designs . . . have miscarried" (AR 18: 213). The author also claims of Hastings (rather improbably) that "[n]ot one of the millions, *in whose name he was so solemnly impeached*, has preferred a single complaint against him." The absence of Indian complaint against Hastings is attributed to a high moral sense thoroughly lacking in Mr. Pitt. The kind of morality exhibited by Hastings and "so admirably laid down for India, is by no means calculated for a *more northern latitude*," as Pitt's wartime policies show. The reviewer editorializes over this last point in the kind of bold language that was soon to become impossible in the British press: "Mr. P. bullies Denmark, Florence, and Genoa, neutral and independent nations, without murmur, and almost without remark" (AR 18: 213). The author of the pamphlet offers one backhanded compliment to Pitt when he says that the minister's Indian policies were at their best when Burke opposed them: "[I]t is a very curious circumstance, that as long as Mr. Pitt was exposed to the almost daily invectives of Mr. B., *success attended him*. India flourished under that system which Mr. B. calls 'most corrupt and oppressive.' . . . But from the time that Mr. B. became the *panegyrist* of Mr. Pitt, the minister has been *unfortunate* in every important measure of his administration" (AR 18: 214). In other words, so long as Hastings was allowed to govern Bengal without interference from Parliament, Pitt's policy in India was successful. Burke's character assassination of Hastings and his praise of Pitt are

interconnected—to the detriment of British interests in India, not to mention the Indians themselves. By way of conclusion the writer for the *Analytical Review* opines that “Mr. Burke’s conduct is deemed justly obnoxious” (AR 18: 214). Examples of this sort could be multiplied to show how Hastings was idealized as a model governor in the radical press.¹² The major reason for this political idealization is, no doubt, the political reality of the governors-general who succeeded Hastings.

From 1786 to 1793, and again briefly in 1805, the Governor-General of the East India Company in Bengal was that same Lord Cornwallis who had so recently failed to defend the British empire in America. To say that England found the empire in India that it had lost in America may be oversimple, but strictly speaking there was no British empire in India until Cornwallis established it, because it was not until 1786 that the full intent of Pitt’s India Bill began to be felt. Prior to Cornwallis, the governors-general in India had been agents of a state-chartered commercial monopoly, but they had not been officers of the state itself. Newly empowered as a state official, Cornwallis went to India for the purpose of making administrative reforms, but he did not attempt the preservation of traditional Indian institutions (as Hastings, despite Burke’s arguments to the contrary, had tried to do). Rather, Cornwallis encouraged the formation of British institutions based on British principles. For example, he established a system of land tenures and revenues in the hope of creating an aristocratic, landowning class of Indian gentry: “Cornwallis believed that a British-type landlordism would ensure general prosperity. If the upper classes were prosperous, then, he felt, the whole population of merchants, artisans, and peasants would benefit” (Bearce, 45). Cornwallis also began the dismantlement of the legal system based on the Indian laws that Hastings had instituted and replaced it with a system that followed British practices in law enforcement and adjudication. Although Cornwallis was under strict orders from Pitt’s lieutenant Henry Dundas not to become involved in military affairs in India, he could not resist the temptation to return to military command when in 1790 the forces of Tipu Sultan threatened the area of Travancore, territory under the Company’s control, in the name of Indian independence.¹³

Tipu Sultan of Mysore had allied himself with France well before resumption of Anglo-French hostilities in 1793. During the war of 1778–83, Charles Bussy, the French representative in India, had enlisted Tipu’s support against the British, and even though the Indian leader had signed a treaty with the English in 1784, he continued to cooperate with Bussy’s secret intrigues against British power in India (Misra, 6, 8). In 1787 Tipu wrote to the French governor of Pondicherry, urging him to

maintain a state of military readiness in case an opportunity for revenge against the British presented itself. The next year he communicated directly with the court of Louis XVI to solidify the alliance between France and Mysore, with the ultimate aim of removing the English from India. With the outbreak of revolution in France, Tipu no longer felt the need to coordinate his actions with those of local French authorities and so initiated hostilities himself (Misra, 17, 20–23). Cornwallis succeeded in putting down the threat in 1792 by securing the region of Mysore, where Tipu had ruled since 1782, and by capturing Tipu's two young sons and holding them hostage. Cornwallis wrote to Dundas that he had been forced into action by "the ungovernable ambition and violence of [Tipu's] character," but assured his superior that the Indian leader would be incapable "for many years to come" of causing "any material disturbance to the British possessions in India" (quoted by Gardner, 134). In this he was mistaken.

After Cornwallis left India in 1793, events in France that same year inspired Tipu to emulate the revolution there. He began calling himself "Citizen Tipu" and hired French mercenaries to help him train his army for another attack against the English (Gardner, 138–39). Tipu's preparations for war were not impeded by the governorship of Sir John Shore, Cornwallis's successor, who faithfully obeyed orders from England to follow a policy of non-interference in Indian affairs. When Shore failed to put down the mutiny of his own military officers, who understood Tipu's activities as a threat to British interests, the Company recalled Shore to London and sent Lord Wellesley to India to replace him.¹⁴ By 1798 Tipu had devoted considerable efforts to enlist the support of French republicans to fight for Mysore, but without great success (Misra, 35, 37). Nonetheless, Wellesley felt that the threat posed by Tipu was serious, largely because of Napoléon's plans to sweep through Persia and into India after his expected conquest of Egypt. Indeed, a letter from Bonaparte written to Tipu in 1799 said as much and showed that British concerns about a Napoleonic "liberation" of India were well-founded (Misra, 41). The threat ended when Tipu was killed by the British East India force, led by Wellesley, in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore war of 1799 (Gardner, 146).

These events show that anyone who supported the revolution in France would be likely to oppose British imperialism in India. Indeed, one of the problems Wellesley faced during his tenure as Governor-General was the support registered for the French in Indian newspapers edited by English Jacobins, which created the need for a campaign of censorship. At least one editor was ordered out of India altogether because of his republican sentiments (Misra, 43). The war against

France and the exploitation of India were related in a real way because revenues from the East India Company, now controlled by Parliament, could be used to finance the war. Although the East India Company was not a profitable enterprise when Parliament took control of its operations in 1784, several reforms made the Company much more solvent and stable in succeeding years. Cornwallis reduced corruption by ending the privilege that the Company's agents had long enjoyed of conducting private trade within India. Pitt's Commutation Act of 1784 resulted in enormous increases in the Company's trade in tea from China, financed by the sale of Indian cotton in Canton (Nightingale, 6, 9, 23). By April 1793 Henry Dundas, President of the Company's Board of Control, was claiming vast revenues from the India trade as an argument for renewal of the Company's charter (AR 17 [Sept.–Dec. 1793]: 210). When war with France was declared earlier in 1793 Dundas had been made Minister-in-Charge of the War Department, a position that complemented his role with the East India Company. As G. S. Misra explains, "Dundas was completely engrossed in the war with France, and committed himself whole-heartedly to the adoption of measures to preserve British power and trade in the east" (Misra, 35). Misra also observes that the interests of the East India Company were well served when the articles of peace were ratified at Amiens in 1801, since Lord Cornwallis was party to the negotiations and "was fully conversant with all the leading points respecting British interests in India" (Misra, 50). There is no question, then, that the development of the Indian empire and the war against France were deeply related.

These political circumstances require emphasis here because they provide the context in which the first translations of Sanskrit texts and the mythographic analysis of Hindu religion based on them appeared in London during the 1790s. The chances are quite good that Blake came into contact with the work of Wilkins and Jones at this time; if so, he would most likely have responded to it sympathetically through a radical political perspective. We can gain some sense of what this perspective would have been like by examining the pages of the *Analytical Review*, published by Blake's friend and sometime employer Joseph Johnson.¹⁵ This is not to say that Blake's attitudes toward India would have been identical to those expressed in the *Analytical Review*; however, Johnson's sympathy with religious dissent, his support of the French Revolution, his criticism of Pitt's ministry, and his antagonism to the Crown itself chime with Blake's antinomianism and republicanism. Johnson was genteel in comparison with the eccentric Blake, but the two men did share certain ideological assumptions. The sentiments expressed in the *Analytical Review*, then, can be read as an approximation of

Blake's radical attitudes, albeit conveyed in a different register. And because Indian affairs received extensive coverage in the *Analytical Review*, Blake's relationship with Johnson means that the political controversies surrounding the East India Company and the cultural discoveries of the Asiatic Society would likely have been known to him. This connection between Blake and Brahma is quite significant because it occurred at the same time that the poet began to form his mythic system. Around 1789 or 1790, Hindu mythology was not exactly in the air of all of republican London, but it was in the neighborhood where Blake made his living. In fact, in Blake's case the chances are that the literature of Hindostan was not only in the air—it was in his hands, fresh from Johnson's press.

II

Joseph Johnson began publication of the *Analytical Review* in 1788. The journal's origins were due largely to Johnson's support of religious dissent and his close association with Joseph Priestley, whose Unitarian tracts and theological studies Johnson published on a regular basis. The title of the journal signals its Unitarian origins: unlike the more enthusiastic sects of dissenters, the Unitarians were rationalists who sought to investigate scripture on "the *analytic* plan of interpretation."¹⁶ Thus the journal made religious enquiry part of its purpose, but it also reviewed books and pamphlets published outside of England, as Paul Henry Maty had done in *A New Review*, which ceased publication in 1786. The same year saw the cessation of Priestley's *Theological Repository*, a journal meant as "a *theatre of religious controversy*" and "free enquiry" (*AR* 2 [Sept.–Dec. 1788]: 304). The *Analytical Review*, then, took up the agendas of both these earlier journals, but it was clearly more than the sum of the two. The dissenting background of the publication and the Continental perspective taken over from *A New Review* were important ideological biases that only intensified as the government of Burke and Pitt became more reactionary and repressive. By the end of 1793, with Pitt committed to war against France and liberty on the wane in England, the tone of the *Analytical Review* was marked less by religious dissent than by political radicalism, and its perspective was not only Continental but also international.

The journal chronicled discoveries and discussions at the Asiatic Society on a regular basis at a time when cultural curiosity about India was interwoven with political anxiety over empire. Support of French republicanism was sometimes explicitly linked to criticism of Indian

affairs, as in the review, quoted above, of a reply to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in which Burke's prosecution of Warren Hastings is cited in a roundabout way as evidence of his mistaken political attitudes. The endorsement of Hastings appeared in the *Analytical Review* in the last issue of 1790; in that same issue Johnson printed a review of a French publication titled *De l'Inde, &c.*, translated as *On India; or Thoughts on the Means which France ought to employ with Respect to its Possessions in Asia*. Significantly, the author of this work counsels against empire "and advises"—in the words of the reviewer—"that France be not desirous of territorial acquisitions." The review closes with a quotation in which the French author urges removal of the English, not so that France can assume the imperial role in its place, but to restore India to the Indians:

How should the princes of India interest themselves in our success, if we drive out the English only to put ourselves in their place? The true conquerors of that wealthy part of the world will be they, who, having taken from their rivals the dominions they have usurped, shall restore them to the princes who ought to possess them, under no conditions but that of stipulating a trade in their favor. (AR 8 [Sept.–Dec. 1790]: 358)

Here, the argument is based not on republican principles but on commercial concerns, which was precisely the argument used three years later by the Foxite Whigs against Pitt's petition to renew the East India Company's charter in 1793.

The *Analytical Review* paid close attention to the parliamentary debates over the East India Company's application for a twenty-three-year renewal of its charter. In April 1793 Henry Dundas argued on Pitt's behalf in favor of continuing the Company's "exclusive privilege" of trade with India, even though he acknowledged that "no writer on commercial economy" would agree in principle with limitations on free trade, just as "no writer upon political economy . . . has as yet supposed that an extensive empire can be administered by a commercial association" (AR 17 [Sept.–Dec. 1793]: 210). Even though he acknowledged the economic and political irregularities of the East India Company, Dundas urged renewal of the charter on the basis of the immense economic benefits involved. He noted, for example, that the ships of the East India Company employed some 7,000 men, and that "raw materials imported from India, for the use of the home manufactures" were a source of even more employment. In addition, "various articles of British produce and manufacture annually exported to India and China, in the company's ships, amounted to upwards of a million and

a half sterling.” The private fortunes accumulated in India, Dundas went on, and “remitted home through the medium of private trade . . . formed an addition to the capital of the nation” estimated at “a million per annum,” at least (AR 17: 210). He concluded the speech by making a direct link between the commercial interests of the East India Company and the imperial interests of Great Britain: “A British legislature have to reflect, that our commercial revenues are immense, that whatever can preserve them, is preserving and adding to the greatness of empire” (AR 17: 212).

The *Analytical Review*'s account of Dundas's speech seems fairly straightforward, with little criticism of the government's position on the value of empire. What follows, however, is a report of the reply to Dundas made by Philip Francis, also on April 23, in which Francis protests against “the proposed continuance of the government in the hands of a company of merchants” (AR 17: 213), arguing that commercial and governmental interests had best be kept separate. Francis denied one of the principal claims made by the supporters of the East India Company, that the condition of the indigenous population had improved under the Company's administration, asserting instead that “provinces . . . still under the control of the native princes” are better governed: “[D]o you think you can stand a comparison with any of the Indian governments, which are real and effective?” There can be no doubt that the *Analytical Review* seconds this assessment, as the anonymous reviewer editorializes over the Francis pamphlet: “[I]t affords but a melancholy prospect to every man who has the welfare of his fellow-creatures at heart, as it conveys an idea, that our conquests and acquisitions tend but to add to the sum of human misery” (AR 17: 214). The reports on the East India charter controversy are followed immediately by a lengthy review of *Les Préjugés Detruits (Prejudices Destroyed)* by J. M. Lequinio, a member of the National Convention of France and a self-proclaimed “Citizen of the Globe.” Lequinio, we are told, “has always distinguished himself by a fervid attachment to the cause of liberty.” Readers of the *Analytical Review* would surely have made some kind of connection between the republican cause in France and British imperialism in India, and some of Johnson's more enthusiastic readers could well have applied to India the ringing admonition quoted from Lequinio's republican diatribe: “Men, dare to think! nations, arise! tyrants, disappear!” (AR 17: 215).

Johnson's reviewers never adopted the rhetoric of a Lequinio, but always maintained the analytical tone. Nonetheless, the criticism of the empire in India was complete, and often more pointed than that of principled parliamentarians like William Fox. In *The East India Charter considered*, Fox points out the advantages of free private trade over state

monopoly: “Mr. Dundas well knows that experience will warrant no intercourse between nations, but the intercourse of fair and legitimate commerce. . . . He knows that private adventurers offered to *treble* the *exports* of the company” and to supply the government with certain commodities “much under the company’s price” (AR 17 [Sept.–Dec. 1793]: 335). Fox’s comments are prefaced by a paragraph that makes the *Analytical Review*’s position on commercial monopoly and political empire remarkably clear:

The caustic is as necessary in some cases of political, as of animal disease. Few seem to require it more, than the exhausted excrescences of chartered monopoly. And we know few political surgeons better capable of administering it, than the spirited and intelligent writer of this pamphlet. In a bold vein of sarcasm, he expresses his admiration of the facility with which a British council gives laws to distant regions; of the munificence, with which immense asiatic nations are conveyed by royal charter to certain men, women, and children, of various nations, called the *honourable* the East-India company; and of the wisdom so seasonably exerted to secure this extraordinary dominion, at a time when it has been found, by experience, that distant dominions stand on a very slippery foundation. (AR 17: 334)

Such passages show how intensely felt the political and moral implications of the East India Company charter were among London radicals in 1793.

The argument that Blake’s “London” refers indirectly to the debate over the charter is strengthened when we know how important that debate was to Johnson and his colleagues at the *Analytical Review*. Early drafts of the poem show that Blake canceled the rather ordinary word *dirty* and replaced it with *charter’d* (E 796) in the first quatrain:

I wander thro’ each charter’d street,
Near where the charter’d Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

(SE 46.1–4)

Given the political atmosphere surrounding the debate over the East India Company, Blake could easily have thought of the streets of London as “charter’d” in the same sense that the streets of Calcutta were.¹⁷ In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake had already signaled his opposition to empire in vaguely allegorical but still forceful terms: “Empire is no more! and now the lion & wolf shall cease” (MHH.27.Prose). Already in “Lon-

don” the republican energy is beginning to wane, and it is not too much to say that Blake understood his own experiences as somehow similar to those of fellow victims of empire in the distant dominions ruled by the Crown.

In “London,” Blake comes as close as he ever does to making a direct public protest, albeit in poetic form, against Pitt’s government. Likewise, Joseph Johnson through the medium of the *Analytical Review* circa 1793 is quite fearless in his criticism of some of the ministry’s policies—in all areas, not just in those concerning India. After 1795, Blake fell silent for many years, and even though he continued until the end of his life to claim that he was a practitioner of “Republican Art” (E 783), his politics became so thoroughly interwoven with his obscure mythology that the poet’s career as a radical author—such as it was—was effectively over after the Lambeth prophecies. The *Analytical Review*, also, became politically muted after 1795, and it is instructive to contrast the tone of the journal’s intense criticism of Indian affairs toward the end of 1793 with the cautious concern of, say, 1796. In the October issue of that year, the *Analytical Review* commented on the East India Company’s treatment of “the *Nawab Visier’s* dominions” in fairly non-committal terms: “[T]wo . . . questions remain to be answered, anterior to any interference on our part: 1. Have we the right to take the *entire* government of his country from the vizier? and 2. Would the inhabitants be less oppressed, and less plundered, under our own management?” (AR 24 [July–Dec. 1796]: 425).

The same attenuated tone sounds through in another review, also from 1796, of a fictitious *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* by Eliza Hamilton. The reviewer politely disagrees with the author’s opinion “respecting the happy change which the long-suffering hindoos have experienced under the dominion of Great Britain.” The reviewer also hedges on the subject of Hamilton’s attitude toward the recently acquitted Hastings, saying that the compliments that are paid to the former Governor-General “will be adjudged by the reader, either as just, or the grateful language of private obligation or friendship, according to his own preconceived opinions on the subject.” Despite this kind of caution, the writer still manages to convey some opposition to empire, making the radical attitude evident if not urgent:

Many, it may be, will be rather inclined to believe, that, however mitigated in some respects by the tolerant principles of the british legislature, on the subjects of law and religion; these injured people have merely *changed masters*, and one species of oppression for another. The interference of foreign states in the internal government of nations is generally equivocal in its motives, and always mischievous in its tendency. (AR 24 [July–Dec. 1796]: 429)

However attenuated the radical voice of the *Analytical Review* had become later in the decade, two key facts remain. First, all or most of the information about India that appeared in the pages of Johnson's journal appeared alongside—and often within—a thoroughly republican perspective. Second, the *Analytical Review* made that information accessible and available to Blake.

These facts overturn two mistaken assumptions that have dominated discussions of Blake's relationship to Hindu mythology: one, that the India of Blake's time was already then what it is to many people today—a fount of mysticism; two, that Blake somehow had free access to some of the rarest and most obscure books ever published. The truth is that the *Analytical Review* was one of the few—perhaps the only—places where Blake could have come across material about Hindu mythology at precisely that point in his poetic career when he began to formulate his own mythology. Moreover, the India that Blake encountered was fraught with political controversy. The political conditions under which Hindu mythology arrived in England immediately valorized that mythology as “republican,” as least for a radical reader like Blake. In the early 1790s, the mythology of Brahma was politicized even before it was understood, and something similar might be said of Blake: that his poetry is political because it takes mythological form.

III

The mythology of India was most likely conveyed to Blake through the medium of the *Analytical Review*. Indeed, Johnson's journal was one of the most important sources of information about the new scholarship on Indian culture produced by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. That Society was formed early in 1784 on the model of the learned societies of Europe, with the crucial difference that its field of inquiry would be confined to “the geographical limits of Asia.”¹⁸ Warren Hastings encouraged the formation of the Society but declined the invitation to serve as its first president, a title conferred on Sir William Jones instead. Jones is best known today as one of the founders of the modern science of comparative linguistics because of his observation, made in 1786, that Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin share so many linguistic features that all three must “have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists.”¹⁹ Already a master of classical languages and a noted translator of Persian when he arrived in India in 1783 to serve as a jurist, Jones soon realized the necessity of knowing Sanskrit in order to adjudicate cases based on Hindu laws (in accordance with Governor-General

Hastings's wishes). At first, Jones had hoped to rely on Charles Wilkins for scholarly investigations involving Sanskrit and on learned Indian pundits for translations of the Hindu laws. When he realized that the pundits were providing unreliable translations and manipulating the law for personal gain, Jones began to study Sanskrit himself and soon became so expert in the language that he claimed to "jabber" in it "every day with the *pundits*."²⁰ Jones's knowledge of Sanskrit and his enlightened attitude toward Hinduism made reasonably reliable information about Indic culture available in English for the first time, and the Asiatic Society he helped to found provided a forum for the dissemination of that information.

The importance of Jones and the other members of the Asiatic Society becomes evident when their activities are compared to earlier attempts at making Indian culture known to the West. The Jesuit missionary Roberto de Nobili (1577–1658) mastered Sanskrit well before Jones and Wilkins, but he used his considerable linguistic abilities and his reputation as the "Brahman Jesuit" to promote an "original" version of the Vedas that echoed Christian beliefs. The French translation of this work, known as *L'Ezour Vedam*, succeeded in duping even so acerbic a skeptic as Voltaire into thinking the spurious text authentic.²¹ In the case of honest efforts to understand Hindu literature, such as John Marshall's translation of the *Bhagavat Purana* (completed in 1677), no forum existed to bring the knowledge to wider notice. Marshall was an employee of the East India Company whose interest in Indian studies was not tainted by Christian bias, but his work was known only in manuscript, if at all (Kejariwal, 18). The separate instances of de Nobili and Marshall help to show how special the set of circumstances was that arose for the first time at the end of the eighteenth century with the founding of the Asiatic Society: a knowledge of Sanskrit, an enlightened perspective on religion, a community of sympathetic scholars, and a learned society where this knowledgeable, enlightened community could meet and exchange ideas.

These conditions allowed for the production of new knowledge about the culture of India, but they did not, by any means, assure that the knowledge would reach the shores of England. In his first discourse to the Asiatic Society in 1784 William Jones had proposed that the papers read at the meetings of the Society be printed in the form of an "Asiatick miscellany" for the benefit of "the literary world" (Jones, *Asiatick Researches* 1: xv). This plan was not realized until 1788 with the publication of the first volume of the *Asiatick Researches*. By that time Jones's original title for a publication of the proceedings of the Society had been usurped by Francis Gladwin, who published two volumes of

the *Asiatic Miscellany* privately in Calcutta in 1785 and 1786. Even though Gladwin was a founding member of the Asiatic Society, Jones distanced himself from the *Asiatic Miscellany*, calling the book a collection of “scraps” and “mere translations” (quoted by Kejariwal, 54). Despite its unofficial status, Gladwin’s *Asiatic Miscellany* does mark the initial publication of several influential works by William Jones, including “A Hymn to Narayena,” which provides an account of a Hindu creation myth possibly of some importance to Blake (see chapter 3). It seems unlikely, however, that Blake could have gotten his hands on a copy of the *Asiatic Miscellany* at the time of its publication, even if he had been interested in doing so.

The early volumes of the *Asiatick Researches* were also scarce: only seven hundred copies of the first volume were sent to England, many for private circulation among officials of the East India Company (Kejariwal, 54). Such a book—or, at least, the information in it—would never have found its way into the hands of a tradesman like Blake without the fortunate intercession of Joseph Johnson. Blake’s employer printed many long excerpts from the volumes of the *Asiatick Researches* shortly after they were published in book form. He also felt that the new knowledge arriving from the East was of sufficient importance to merit reviews of second editions and compilations of previously published material. An example of the latter practice is a notice from a 1794 issue of the *Analytical Review* announcing the publication of a compilation of selections from the first two volumes of the *Asiatick Researches*, titled *Dissertations and miscellaneous Pieces relating to the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia* (1792). The reviewer comments on the need for such a volume: “Although a great many interesting articles . . . are of course omitted in the present compilation, yet, as but few persons, from the scarcity and high price of the originals, can obtain them, it must be acceptable to the public” (AR 18 [Jan.–April 1794]: 112). This comment helps to show that even though the original books may have been scarce, the appeal of the Indian material in the *Asiatick Researches* to the British literary sensibility in Blake’s time was considerable. If the interest in India is manifested more clearly in Coleridge and Shelley than in Blake, this may be due, in part, to the greater availability of the *Asiatick Researches* later on in less expensive, more accessible editions. For example, pirated versions began to be published in 1798 (Kejariwal, 54), an event that might stand alongside the appearance of *Lyrical Ballads* in a re-written account of British literary history. In any case, the publications of the Asiatic Society were not immediately available in their original form to most English readers, let alone to someone like Blake at the lower strata of the tradesman class.