

Naming the Tiger in the Early Modern World

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The English word tiger has an uncertain etymology and a curious history of use. Probably first seen in Europe in the fourth century BCE, the tiger, by the early modern age, had acquired a long history of folkloric associations. This article examines early modern uses of the word tiger in the context of the period's linguistic debates about natural and conventional meaning. It seeks to present a history in which the word, through use, develops closer (if not necessarily natural) associations with the qualities of its referent.

INTRODUCTION

IN HIS CELEBRATED William Matthews lectures of 1992, J. H. Prynne, arguing against the pure arbitrariness of linguistic signs, gave a virtuosic close reading of Blake's "The Tyger." The creature's terrible power, Prynne suggested, was not conjured out of the poem's diction alone, but emanated too from the poetic interplay of letters, syllables, and sounds not routinely credited as capable of entertaining meaning. Prynne applied the theory, in extended form, to his reading of Blake:

The burden of the tiger poem is set out in a first line which commences the enquiry into symmetry: one shape reflecting or reflected in another so that about some median point or axis they display inverse formal matching, a figural chiasmus. The match here in the first line is not exact: but I allow myself to notice that the letters required to make the first syllable are all present in the last. The <tig> of "tiger" is within the letters of "bright"; if the /r/ of "bright" is permitted to stand in its transferred context as a vocalic /r/, then the whole of "tiger" in acoustic form can be recombined from the letters of "bright," within the space of the line's first letter being the match for its last. What joins these outer elements is the median word "burning": in one direction the action of this verb tends to "bright," and in the other it tends out from, or back, to "tiger": the fearsome creature is at least half-created by a back-formation, across the axis of symmetry, from "bright."¹

¹ Prynne, 25.

From these analyses, Prynne concluded, “Blake’s production of the word ‘tiger,’ and from the word the full portrait of the creature’s powerful challenge to our idea of benevolent creation . . . works by moves and counter-moves which are all part of the language process in its largest sense, and of the world to which it is connected.”² It was precisely because of the existence of possibilities for generating meaning using supposedly arbitrary elements of words, Prynne felt, that Blake was able to imbue his tiger with its full strength, intensity, and terror.

Prynne’s belief was that “the form of words can designate and specify some part of their sense,” and that, if this is so, “the sign is not arbitrary: it is said to be *motivated*, implying that the nature of the idea or meaning expressed has affected the form of the word in such a way that the form can be ‘read back’ to reveal at least some part of the idea or the meaning which motivated it.”³ My purpose in this essay is not to defend or attack this position but to supplement it, presenting evidence of a term over time accruing meanings by convention that also affect the relationship between word and referent. Prynne believed that Blake was able to use the interplay of letters and syllables to generate and intensify meaning in his tiger poem: his concern in those lectures is with arbitrariness in the synchronic Saussurean sense of the word. My concern here is with conventional meaning, which, though arbitrary in origin, is diachronic: I will tell the strange story of the semantic development of *tiger* before Blake began the strategic invocation of the term that Prynne relates. This early modern history of the word *tiger* will suggest that the alterations and expansions in meaning the term underwent in some examples appear to run counter to the period’s prevailing intellectual assumptions in which images are increasingly separated from objects and words generally thought not to stand in natural connection to their referents. The word *tiger*, I will argue, came to Blake already steeped in folkloric meanings, some of which eased and others of which seemed to intensify the relationship between the term and the beast it described.

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, questions concerning the origins of linguistic meaning and the proper use of language continued to attract discussion. Marie-Luce Demonet makes the case for an increasing disassociation of religious signs from divinity accompanying the Protestant reforms and the rising popularity of Calvinist theology, while Nigel Smith analyzes a contrasting tendency among mid-seventeenth-century English radicals to attempt to capture the immediacy of divine revelation in language.⁴ The matter

² *Ibid.*, 35.

³ *Ibid.*, 2. All italicized words in quotations are found in the originals.

⁴ Demonet, 1993, 90; Smith.

of the early modern relationship between words and their referents appears to have been settled in 1992 by Demonet's door-stopping *Les Voix du Signe* (The voices of the sign). Demonet argued concertedly and exhaustively that an overwhelming majority of linguistic thinkers adhered to a strand of Aristotelianism that rejected natural meaning. Aristotle's maxim, "Words spoken are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken," is for Demonet "the catechism of Renaissance linguistic theory."⁵

But the question of meaning was not solely a theoretical, linguistic concern. In spite of Demonet's and Margareta De Grazia's arguments for an early modern rejection of the idea that language originated with God, the matter was inextricable from theological controversy.⁶ The naming of the animals in Genesis 2:19–20 continued to be much debated: Adam gave the creatures of Eden names befitting their qualities, but questions as to how far he had leeway to select the names he gave and what exactly he was doing in so choosing remained open to debate. Naming animals according to their qualities suggests a Cratyllic correspondence between words and their referents, but the evidence is not so straightforward. Two years before the publication of *Les Voix du Signe*, John Leonard's *Naming in Paradise* defended the possibility (though not necessarily the dominance) of a middle position between linguistic arbitrariness and natural meaning.⁷ For Leonard, Richard Mulcaster (1531/32–1611), the headmaster of Merchant Taylors' School, offers an example of such a position in his *Elementarie* (1582), part 2 of an unfinished grand study of educational principles:

We nede not to proue by *Platoes Cratylus*, or *Aristotles* proposition as by best authorities, (tho men be sufficient to proue their own inuentions) that words be voluntarie, and appointed vpon cause, seing we haue better warrant. For euen God himself, who brought the creatures, which he had made, vnto that first man, whom he had also made, that he might name them, according to their properties, doth planelie declare by his so doing, what a cunning thing it is to giue right names, and how necessarie it is, to know their forces, which be allredie giuen, bycause the word being knowen, which implyeth the propertie the thing is half known, whose propertie is employed.⁸

⁵ Aristotle, 115; Demonet, 1992, 88: "le catéchisme de la théorie du langage à la Renaissance."

⁶ See Demonet 1992, 474; De Grazia, 324.

⁷ Anderson, 11, notes that many early modern thinkers espouse neither arbitrariness nor naturalness exclusively. For a range of views on meaning in the sixteenth century, see Salmon.

⁸ Mulcaster, 167–69.

Adam's names for the animals were, indeed, in Mulcaster's view, given "according to their properties," but the words Adam chose were "voluntarie"; his naming exercise had to be performed by "cunning."

Stressing "the possibility of Adamic choice" in the naming of Eden's creatures, Leonard contrasts this position to the uncompromising stance John Webster (1610–82) would later take in his *Academiarum examen* (1654). For Webster, "anything but an 'absolute congruency' is a 'lye,'" whereas "Mulcaster's Adam speaks in answerable style, but the style is his."⁹ Mulcaster certainly allows Adam the luxury of stylistic choice, but it is a cunning thing to "giue right names" precisely because it requires knowledge of "forces, which be allredie giuen." So Adam's choice was limited. It was also, in Mulcaster's view, highly judicious, "because the word being knowen, which implyeth the propertie the thing is half known, whose propertie is emplied." The relationship between word and meaning is halfway between natural and conventional; knowledge of the word affords half knowledge of the object. Mulcaster does not address the problem of his contemporary European languages being apparently corrupt products of the confusion of tongues; he simply believes that the study of English by native speakers lags behind that of other languages, and that, if "English wits . . . wold do so much for our tung, as these and the like haue don for theirs . . . we should then know what we both write and speak: we should then discern the depth of their conceits, which either coined our own words, or incorporated the foren."¹⁰ To study words, in Mulcaster's view, entailed studying ancient knowledge, though he offers no opinion as to whether the conceits of those who coined English words stemmed from inherent understanding of the properties of things or their intellectual interpretation of those properties. In either case, the importance Mulcaster attaches to word history offers further support to Hannah Crawforth's claim for the excavation of etymologies (underpinned by the fundamental question, "what, and how, do words mean?") as an activity central to early modern English writing.¹¹

Mulcaster's view demonstrates the importance of word use and word history to meaning in this period. If the intentions of the coiners of words could be discerned through the study of language, the folkloric history of a word like *tiger* is very likely to have relevance for its meaning. As I will show, the etymology of *tiger* was not certain, but the beast was associated in various contexts with cruelty, savagery, narcissism, and the maternal instinct; one curious example even entertains the possibility of meaning inhering in the creature's name. That some lexicographers of the period incorporated the folklore of tigers into their defini-

⁹ Leonard, 11. Leonard's quotation is from Webster, 30.

¹⁰ Mulcaster, 169.

¹¹ Crawforth, vii.

tions of the term supports a case for the importance of studying popular beliefs about the creature when attending to the word's early modern meanings.

Finally, of contextual importance is the rapid expansion of the English lexicon in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Charles Barber speaks of the "great vocabulary expansion in the later sixteenth century," noting that "the history of the dictionary is mainly one of expansion: Robert Cawdrey's dictionary of 1604 contained about 2,500 words, while Elisha Coles's in 1674 contained about 25,000."¹² Terttu Nevalainen describes "the fastest vocabulary growth in the history of English in proportion to the vocabulary size of the time," reaching its peak in the years between 1570 and 1630 and continuing at more modest pace until the mid-eighteenth century.¹³ One source of English's expanded vocabulary was words borrowed or neologisms coined from other European languages, especially Latin. As well as expanding their native languages, Europeans were broadening their geographical horizons. As they "explored, conquered and colonized so many parts of the world," writes Peter Burke, "they were forced to become much more aware of the number and variety of human languages."¹⁴ And with the increased interest in lands previously unknown came an increased need to call on existing vocabulary to describe the flora and fauna of these exotic territories. As a crude indication of this, an EEBO-TCP search for the word *tiger* (variant spellings included) returns 91 hits in 38 records between 1473 and 1572, but 1,651 hits in 882 records between 1573 and 1672. Even adjusting for the seventeenth century's huge expansion in printing, this represents a substantial increase.¹⁵ Similar statistics for other animal names show that *lion*, *wolf*, and *bear* received significantly smaller upturns in use, with only the words *leopard* and *panther* (neither of which have an etymology or prehistory as strange as that I will trace for *tiger*) gaining frequency at a rate comparable to that of *tiger*. *Leopard* is the only of these animal names to have exceeded the increased prevalence *tiger* enjoyed, but that word has a straightforward etymology and lacks the curious folklore attached to the name *tiger*.

¹² Barber, 76.

¹³ Nevalainen, 336.

¹⁴ Burke, 25–26. Bray, 303, remarks, "In the New World, Europeans found plants and animals, peoples and customs, that would not fit into the Biblical and Classical scheme of things. Scholars therefore had to develop new observational and descriptive skills, and also a new intellectual framework for discussing natural and cultural phenomena for which no vocabulary existed."

¹⁵ The English Short Title Catalogue lists 8,268 texts printed between 1473 and 1572 as opposed to 76,987 between 1573 and 1672, an increase slightly below tenfold. The increase in the use of the word *tiger* for the corresponding periods is slightly above eighteenfold.

In these contexts, *tiger* appears to have linguistic significance. Its increasing use in English in the early modern period coupled with the creature's folkloric history fostered developments in its meanings, leading to its being called on by seventeenth-century English speakers as an insult leveled against political or theological opponents. In these cases, additional meanings gain association with the tiger by convention. On the other hand, popular belief was in an etymology of *tiger* that suggested the beast had been named after one of its qualities, in similar fashion perhaps to that in which Genesis claimed Adam had given the animals their Hebrew names. Further, at least one reference to the tiger made in a report back to Britain from one of its colonial outposts offers a scrap of evidence for continuing belief in the term as having natural meaning.

ETYMOLOGY

The dominant belief in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was that *tiger* derived from the Middle Persian *tigr* (arrow) and that the names of the tiger and the river Tigris, both notable for their speed, had a lexical connection to one another.¹⁶ Although the notion is questionable, it enjoyed centuries of popularity.¹⁷ Belief in the Tigris having been named for its speed appears to have found early expression in the third century BCE through Eratosthenes's *Geography*, and in the first century CE the claim was rehearsed by Strabo, Pliny the Elder, and Quintus Curtius Rufus.¹⁸ The earliest evidence I have found for an etymological connection between tigers and the Tigris comes from Marcus Terentius Varro in the first century BCE. Though Europeans in his age knew little of the beast, Varro believed he had command of the name's origins: "The *tigris* 'tiger,' which is as it were a striped lion, which as yet they have not been able to take alive, has its name from the Armenian language, for in Armenia both an arrow and a very swift river are named *Tigris*."¹⁹

In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville shored up the connection's standing as linguistic knowledge by including it in his *Etymologies*: "The tiger (*tigris*) is so

¹⁶ In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) believes *tiger* to have entered English as a Middle English word derived from Latin *tigrem*, from which also came variants in Old French, German, Danish, Swedish, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. These all stem from the Greek $\tau\acute{\iota}\gamma\tau\iota\varsigma$, which the *OED* believes has its origin in "a foreign word, evidently oriental, introduced when the beast became known." *OED*, s.v. "tiger," *n*.

¹⁷ The *OED* notes that "some have conjectured connection with Avestan *tighri* arrow, *tighra* sharp, pointed, in reference to the celerity of its spring; but no application of either word, or any derivative, to the tiger is known in Avestan." *OED*, s.v. "tiger," *n*.

¹⁸ Eratosthenes, 191; Strabo, 5:329 (11.14.8); Pliny, 2:75 (6.31); Rufus, 1:240.

¹⁹ Varro, 1:95.

called because of its rapid flight, for this is what the Persians and Medes call an arrow. It is a beast distinguished by varied markings, amazing in its strength and speed. The river Tigris is called after the name of the animal, because it is the most rapid of all rivers.”²⁰ Isidore’s etymologies are often, in the word of his most recent editors, “tenuous” (often given not out of belief in a word’s true origin, but as an aide-mémoire for students of Latin).²¹ But, in this case, blame cannot be laid at his door. As I have shown, Isidore was not the inventor of the tiger-Tigris-arrow connection, but was repeating the ascriptions of others. Perhaps, however, he was responsible for popularizing this etymology. Propositions repeated from Isidore’s pen were influential: according to his editors, nearly a thousand manuscript copies of the *Etymologies* survive and, even before 1500, it had appeared in almost a dozen printed editions.

Among early modern lexicographers, belief in the Persian route of *tiger* became the orthodoxy. In the mid-sixteenth century, its derivation from *tigr* was rehearsed by Peter Martyr d’Anghiera (1457–1526) and John Maplet (d. 1592).²² In 1607, Edward Topsell (bap. 1572–1625) gave a fuller account, his much-reprinted *Historie of foure-footed beastes* claiming that *tigros* was derived from Hebrew. Topsell also noted (as does the *Oxford English Dictionary*) the Septuagint’s translation of the Hebrew *lāyīš* as *myrmeleon*, while the Vulgate had *tigris*; the Anglican clergyman came across a further variant on the name, reporting, “The Iewes call the same beast *Phoradei*, which the Graecians call Tigris.” But he was satisfied that the norm among European peoples was to “call it after the Greeke name, as the Italians *Tigre*, the French *Vn Tigre*, and the Germanes *Tigerhier*.”²³ Topsell too was acquainted with the connection between tiger the animal and the river Tigris. On this matter he cited various sources:

Some of the poets doe deriue the name of the riuier *Tigris* from this *Tiger* the wilde beast, whereupon these Histories are told. They say, that when *Bacchus* was distracted & put out of his wits by *Iuno*, as he wandered too and fro in the world, he came to the riuier *Pylax* (which was the first name of this water) and being there desirous to passe ouer, but founde no means to accomplish it, *Iupiter* in commiseration of his estate did send vnto him a *Tiger*, who did willingly take him vpon his backe, and carry him ouer; Afterwarde *Bacchus* called that swift riuier by the name of that swift beast, *Tiger*. Others do report the tale thus. When *Dionisius* fell in loue with the Nymph *Alphesiboea* whom by no means either by promises, intreaties, or rewards he could allure vnto

²⁰ Isidore, 251.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²² D’Anghiera, 206; Maplet, 105–06.

²³ Topsell, 706. *Lāyīš* translates as “mature lion” or “old lion.”

him, at last he turned himselfe into a Tiger, and so oppressing the Nymph through feare, did carry her ouer that riuer, and there begot vpon her his sonne *Medus*, who when he came to age, remembering the fact of his father and mother, called the name of the riuer *Tigris*, because of his Fathers transformation.²⁴

Swiftness dominates, but these Dionysian versions of the tale add a mythological dimension to the tiger's name that sits comfortably with the descriptions of tigerish history and behavior I will present. The tale of Dionysus is the more conventional, the tiger being the magical agent of the union with Alpheisiboea. The case of Bacchus is less so, being a tale of cooperation between the tiger and a Roman god that diverges from the fables of disharmony between man and beast that will follow. For the time being, the point is that Topsell, though well read in the tiger's naming history, was unable to determine "whether the riuer was called after the name of the beast, or the beast after the name of the riuer, or rather both of them after the name of the dart or swift Arrow."²⁵ No consensus was reached. Although this etymology was much rehearsed, three years later another clergyman, Andrew Willet (1561/62–1621), was insisting that, whatever the origins of the tiger's name, the river Tigris did not share them.²⁶

I will come to dictionary definitions after exploring some of the folklore surrounding the tiger. At this point, however, it should be observed that, although the etymology of *tiger* is frequently recounted in early modern geographical and natural-philosophical writings, it is much less prevalent in dictionaries of the period. Explanations of the etymology of the terms they listed were by no means a consistent feature of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century word lists and dictionaries, but curiously, among those that did offer such information, the swiftness definition was far more likely to be given in relation to the Tigris than to the tiger. Thomas Elyot (1490–1546) was one of very few to acknowledge that *tiger* and *tigris* were Latin homonyms, his Latin dictionary defining *tigris* as "a beaste of a wonderfull swyftenes, it is also one of the foure ryuers, whiche commeth out of Paradyse."²⁷ The Persian etymology of *tigris* was repeated in a 1558 English translation of Herodian's *History of the Roman Empire*, suffixed by a table offering an "exposytion of many woordes," which explained, "Tigris is a Riuer, which hath his beginnyng in the Royallme of Armenie the great. At the first he runneth slowly, and where he beginneth to be swifte, he is called Tigris, for so do the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 706–07. Topsell acknowledges the source for this material as Plutarch, 5:507–08.

²⁵ Topsell, 707.

²⁶ Willet, 375.

²⁷ Elyot, s.v. "Tigris."

Medes call an Arowe.”²⁸ After that, this account of the word’s origin was largely absent from dictionaries until the end of the seventeenth century, with Richard Hogarth (1663/64–1718) in 1689 describing the Arrow as “a River in the County of Warwick, as Tigris, that in the Persian Tongue signifieth an Arrow, so called for its swiftness.”²⁹ In 1693, Edmund Bohun (1645–99) gave “Tigris” as “One of the most rapid Rivers in the World, from whence it has this Name.”³⁰ Other lexicographers noted speed as inherent to the definition if not the etymology of both *tiger* and *tigris*, but in the case of the tiger, speed was not particularly more called on than any of the beast’s other fabled qualities.

PREHISTORY

As I have said, the flora and fauna of distant lands inevitably became more common features of early modern discourse, but the tiger was hardly a quantity unknown to English texts. The sharp increase in references to the beast that I noted above came after a long history of legend and anecdote, on which early modern characterizations of the tiger frequently drew.

Imported to the West around the time of Alexander the Great,³¹ the tiger’s folkloric qualities began to be established during the Roman Empire. To Virgil, the creature symbolized inhuman cruelty. Famously, in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, Dido charges Aeneas:

False as thou art, and more than false, forsworn;
Not sprung from Noble Blood, nor Goddess-born,
But hewn from hardned Entrails of a Rock;
And rough *Hyrceanian* Tygers gave thee suck.³²

And, on seeing his brother Bitias murdered in book 9, Pandarus reacts violently, “Like a fierce Tyger pent amid the Fold.”³³ Plutarch stressed the female tiger’s dedication to its young (up to a point), a detail that would receive much early modern repetition and embellishment: “It is reported also of the tiger, that if a kid be thrown to her, she will not eat in two days; but growing almost famished the third day, if she be not supplied with another, she will tear down the cage

²⁸ Herodian, s.v. “Tigris.”

²⁹ Hogarth, s.v. “Arrow.”

³⁰ Bohun, 408.

³¹ See Athenaeus 3:941–42 (13.57); Jennison, 24.

³² Virgil, 312 (*Aeneid* 4.366–69).

³³ *Ibid.*, 493 (*Aeneid* 9.730).

that holds her, if she have strength enough; yet all this while she will not meddle with the first kid, as being her companion and fellow-housekeeper.”³⁴ On a similar theme, Pliny relates the story that, in one version or another, would be much retold in later centuries:

They are seized by the hunter, who lies in wait for them, being provided with the fleetest horse he can possibly obtain, and which he frequently changes for a fresh one. As soon as the female finds her lair empty—for the male takes no care whatever of his offspring—headlong she darts forth, and traces them by the smell. Her approach is made known by her cries, upon which the hunter throws down one of the whelps; this she snatches up with her teeth, and more swift, even, under the weight, returns to her lair, and then again sets out in pursuit; and this she continues to do, until the hunter has reached his vessel, while the animal vainly vents her fury upon the shore.³⁵

Pliny’s version received elaboration from numerous hands. Solinus casts the tiger as a ferocious beast, tragically defeated:

But most of all they show what they are able to doo, when they haue littered, and when they pursue them that haue stolne away their whelps. For though poste horses be layd by the way, and that they worke neuer so subtiltie to goe cléere away with theyr bootie, yet if the Sea are not at hand to rescue them, all their endeouour is in vaine. And it is noted in them oftentimes, that if perchance they see the stealers that haue carryed away their welppes sayling away againe: after they haue raged in vaine, they cast themselues headlong into the Sea, as it were to punish their owne slownesse by wyful drowning themselues, and yet of all their whelps (which are manie in number) scarcely may one be conueied awaie.³⁶

In Saint Ambrose’s *Hexameron*, the tale again was of big cats hunted for their cubs, but a lioness—not a tiger—was the quarry. Ambrose records a detail that had significance for later treatments of the tiger: “When he perceives that he [the hunter] is being overtaken, he lets fall a glass ball. The lioness is deceived by her reflection, thinking that she sees there her young. After being retarded by the deceitful image, she once more expends all her strength in her effort to seize the horseman.”³⁷ By the thirteenth century, the Franciscan scholar Bartholo-

³⁴ Plutarch, 5:192.

³⁵ Pliny, 2:275 (8.25).

³⁶ Solinus, N3^v–O1^r.

³⁷ Ambrose, 240.

maeus Anglicus (before 1203–72) had restored the tiger as the principal character and incorporated the mirror into Pliny's version of events:

And Pliny saith that they be beasts of dreadful swiftness, and that is namely known when he is taken, for the whelp is all glimy and sinewy; and the hunter lieth in await, and taketh away the whelps, and fleeth soon away on the most swift horse that he may have. And when the wild beast cometh and findeth the den void, and the whelps away, then he reseth headlong, and taketh the fore of him that beareth the whelps away, and followeth him by smell, and when the hunter heareth the grutching of that beast that runneth after him, he throweth down one of the whelps; and the mother taketh the whelp in her mouth, and beareth him into her den and layeth him therein, and runneth again after the hunter. But in the meantime the hunter taketh a ship, and hath with him the other whelps, and scapeth in that wise; and so she is beguiled and her fierceness standeth in no stead, and the male taketh no wood rese after. For the male recketh not of the whelps, and he that will bear away the whelps, leaveth in the way great mirrors, and the mother followeth and findeth the mirrors in the way, and looketh on them and seeth her own shadow and image therein, and weeneth that she seeth her children therein, and is long occupied therefore to deliver her children out of the glass, and so the hunter hath time and space for to scape, and so she is beguiled with her own shadow, and she followeth no farther after the hunter to deliver her children.³⁸

Preternatural speed, fierceness, maternal protectiveness, and delusion by mirrors all established, during the medieval period the tiger principally came to be known through the illustrated manuscript bestiaries popular between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Erica Fudge has argued for closer links between these texts and the new philosophy of the seventeenth century than is normally credited. The fable of the tiger and the mirror was much rehearsed in bestiaries as a cautionary tale against pride and narcissism.³⁹ And, whether

³⁸ Anglicus, 168–69.

³⁹ See Fudge, 94–97. Examples of bestiaries offering illustrated presentations of the tale include Aberdeen University Library MS 24; Bibliothèque Municipale de Douai, MS 711; Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1511; Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 764; British Library, Additional MS 11283; British Library, Harley MS 4751; British Library, Royal MS 2 B. vii; British Library Royal MS 12 C; Kongelige Bibliotek, Gl. kgl. S. 1633 4^o; and Morgan Library, MS M.81. For a discussion of the story of the tiger and the mirror in medieval bestiaries, see Brown.

or not Fudge's arguments are accepted, the folkloric history portrayed here is the same as that in which early modern references to the tiger came steeped.

TIGER IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH USE

In 1567, the natural historian John Maplet (d. 1592) quoted Pliny observing that the male tiger "hath no regard of his yong," and, following Bartholomaeus, claimed that Pliny had said "that there is another way that some huntsmen beguile hir with, as so bestrew & spréede in the way Glasse, by ye which she comming and espying there hir owne shadowe represented, wereth through such sight, that there were of hir yong and whilst she here thus tacieth long time, deceiuing hir selfe, the Huntzman hieth him away & so escapeth."⁴⁰ Topsell too rehearsed the tale. Evidently drawing on Pliny, he took additional pains to stress the tiger's extraordinary speed, observing that "the enterprise is vnder-taken in vaine vpon the swiftest Horses in the World, except the Waters come betwixt the hunter and the Tiger."⁴¹ Topsell remained faithful, however, to Pliny's characterization of the tiger's sense of maternal obligation: "And the maner of this beast is, when she seeth that her young ones are shipped away, and shee for euer depriued of seeing or hauing them againe, she maketh so great lamentation vpon the Sea shoare howling, braying, and rancking, that many times she dyeth in the same place, but if shee recouer all her young ones againe from the hunters, shee departeth with vnspeakeable ioy, without taking any reuenge for their offered iniury."⁴² In this telling of the tale, man and beast are natural antagonists but (perhaps anthropomorphically) the female tiger is credited with some emotional sophistication: her instinct for vengeance is quelled by reunion with her cubs. Challenges to Pliny and ancient authors were also issued. In 1657, the *Historiae Naturalis de Quadripedibus* by the Polish scholar John Jonston (1603–75) appeared, with an English translation, *A description of the nature of four-footed beasts*, following in 1678. Jonston gave the detail of hunters casting off tiger cubs to distract the pursuing mother, but also questioned Pliny, issuing the caveat: "This is the opinion of the Ancients, but the Modern report the contrary; that the Tiger is heavy-paced, that a man (much more other wild) can out-runne them."⁴³

For the purposes of this word history, the important point is that the tiger increasingly began to stand in for (seldom admirable) human qualities, and

⁴⁰ Maplet, 106.

⁴¹ Topsell, 709.

⁴² Ibid., 710.

⁴³ Jonstonus, 67.

was marshaled as artillery into theological or political disputes. The French Jesuit scholar Nicolas Caussin (1583–1651) took up the mirror parable in *La Cour Sainte* (The holy court, 1624) as a warning against unthinking submission to “the rule of vulgar opinions.”⁴⁴ In the 1650 English translation, hunters leave mirrors in the tiger’s way, inducing the response described by Bartholomaeus, which Caussin rendered in slightly more dramatic terms: “The Tigers forthwith most affectionately stay, thinking they shall draw their little captives from the reflection of this mirrour, and set them at liberty; in the end they strike it till it is broken, loosing together both their young ones, and the instrument of their deception.”⁴⁵ This warning against succumbing to the “torrent of the false Maximes of the world” encouraged readers to break their “fettters” by putting themselves “into the assured haven of the liberty of the Children of God.”⁴⁶ At the opposite end of the theological spectrum, the Puritan John Waite (fl. 1645–66) drew on the German scholar Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmographia* to argue for creatures being “subject to vanity, by reason of the sinne of man.”⁴⁷ Both Pliny’s version of the tale and the mirror detail are incorporated into Waite’s account.⁴⁸ Here the revenge impulse is implacable: indeed, there were a great many animals that “God hath often armed with vengeance to punish man, whose sinne occasioned the bringing of them within the common course of corruption.”⁴⁹ If interpretations of the Fall as having fundamentally corrupted man’s relationship to animals, setting one against the other, were common, Waite perhaps stretches the point further than was conventional.⁵⁰

Pliny was not the only classical authority absorbed into early modern perceptions of the tiger. Virgil’s “Hyrcean tiger” became much beloved of poets and dramatists. Marlowe’s *Dido Queene of Carthage* had Dido give a closely matched rendition of the speech:

Thy mother was no Goddessse periurd man,
Nor *Dardanus* the author of thy stocke:
But thou art sprung from *Scythian Caucasus*,
And Tygers of *Hircania* gaue thee sucke.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Caussin, 39.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Waite, 93.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 101–02.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 93.

⁵⁰ See Fudge, esp. 34–63.

⁵¹ Marlowe, F4^{r-v}.

Shakespeare too made use of the passage. As Marguerite Tassi has observed, Lavinia's exclamation to Tamora's sons in *Titus Andronicus*, "When did the Tigers young-one teach the dam?," is redolent of Dido's to Aeneas,⁵² and, in *3 Henry VI*, Shakespeare had York tell Northumberland, "But you are more inhumane, more inexorable, / Oh, tenne times more then Tygers of Hyrcania."⁵³ The seventeenth century was not short of editions of Virgil: the English Short Title Catalogue lists twenty-one versions in English or Latin of either the complete *Aenied* or its fourth book, some receiving multiple reprintings.⁵⁴ And the Hyrcanian tiger fired literary imaginations: reference to the beast as a symbol of savage cruelty or to cruel people being the offspring of tigers can be read in poems and plays by Thomas Preston, Gervase Markham, Francis Beaumont, Robert Baron, and Aston Cokain. Peter Heylyn believed the phrase derived from observation of tigers in their natural habitat, observing, "The whole prouince is full of thicke Forrests, which giue lurking holes to infinite numbers of Tigers, celebrated in all writers for their horrible feircenes; whence it grew to a common adage concerning cruell men, that they had sucked a Hircanian Tiger."⁵⁵

Given the popularity of Virgil and accounts of tigers being symbolic of a type of cruelty opposed by Christian piety, it was perhaps inevitable that the term should come to be deployed as an insult. While Heylyn noted that having "sucked a Hircanian Tiger" had become a common by-phrase for cruelty, the epithetical meanings of *tiger* developed beyond that use. Religious polemicists of various affiliations gave the word extensive use. A rhetorical struggle ensued in which authors were apparently as much concerned with leveling the insult at others as with cleansing themselves of its taint. In a Calvinist onslaught against the Church of Rome, John Vicars (1580–1652) fulminated against "the most insatiable rage and mercilesse matchlesse, accursed cruelty of the bloud-sucking *Wolfe, Tyger, Monster* (what can I fitly call her) of *Rome*, and her inhumane, roaring, raging and all ruining sons and nurssings."⁵⁶ John Bastwick (1593–1654) meanwhile put the term to more localized use in the Civil War feud between Presbyterians and Independents, complaining that the Presbyterian side was routinely slandered by its detractors: "Yet, when they write most mildly against the Presbyterians, they call them *Lyons, Beares, Wolves, Tygers*, and in their ordinary language in towne and countrey, they never see almost any Minister passe by them, but they call them *Baals Priests, the lims of Antichrist, the Antichristian*

⁵² Tassi, 119; Shakespeare, 38.

⁵³ Shakespeare, 152.

⁵⁴ On seventeenth-century translations of Virgil, see Proudfoot.

⁵⁵ Heylyn, 1621, 333.

⁵⁶ Vicars, 22.

*brood, the Devils Ministers, Presbytyrants.*⁵⁷ From the orthodox wing of Anglicanism, Roger L'Estrange (1616–1704) quoted this passage in his collection showing up the sedition of Dissenters' maxims.⁵⁸ In 1686, John Dryden's (1631–1700) translation of *Histoire de la Ligue* (*The history of the League*) by the French Jesuit Louis Maimbourg (1610–86) conceived to expose similarities between rebellious tendencies that instigated the English and French civil wars, asking readers to "Witness the harshness with which the Holy Fathers have treated [Christians loyal to their Kings and emperors] in their Writings; where they call them Wolves, Dogs, Serpents, Tygers, Dragons, Lyons, and Antichrists, in conformity to the Gospel, which wills, that he who is revolted from the Church, should be held and treated like a Pagan."⁵⁹

As Maimbourg's list indicates, early modern English offered numerous alternative animal names to level as insults against intellectual opponents. References to antagonists as lions, bears, and wolves, for example, come with similar frequency to comparisons between adversaries and tigers. Nor do the human qualities these insults disparage seem much to differ with the animal used: generally lions, bears, wolves, and tigers are all invoked to indicate fierceness, rage, cruelty, and the like. Where the use of *tiger* does differ from that of these other animals, however, is in the back story I have described here, which is often deliberately and explicitly deployed in the insult's formulation. The Hyrcanian tiger is the obvious example of this, reference to which appeared in popular dramatic texts by Marlowe and Shakespeare, while a later edition of Heylyn connected the insult's proverbial use in early modern English to Virgil.⁶⁰

The Hyrcanian tiger thus became a byword for cruelty with relatively straightforward literary provenance. More specific were insults that developed from tales of the tiger's fierceness at separation from its cubs. In his translation of Martial's epigram against Ligurinus, Thomas May (1594/95–1650) wrote, "No Tiger robb'd of whelps by us / So much is fear'd,"⁶¹ while Arthur Brooke's (d. 1563) English translation from the Italian of Matteo Bandello's *Giulietta e Romeo*, the *Tragicall historye of Romeus and Iuliet* (1562), described Juliet's mother discovering the death of her daughter:

Now out alas (the mother cryde)
and as a Tyger wilde,
Whose whelps whilst she is gonne
out of her denne to pray,

⁵⁷ Bastwick, 361.

⁵⁸ L'Estrange, 18.

⁵⁹ Maimbourg, 886.

⁶⁰ Heylyn, 1652, 173.

⁶¹ May, E6r.

The hunter gredy of his game,
doth kill or cary away:
So, rageing forth she ranne,
vnto her Iuliets bed,
And there she found her derling, and
her onely comfort ded.⁶²

Similarly, George Buchanan (1506–82), whose texts continued to be reprinted throughout the seventeenth century, in his play *Baptistes* (1642) referred to “the Queen enraged, much like a Tyger of her Whelps bereft.”⁶³

The tiger’s rage in separation from her cubs was much more taken up in polemical writing than was the tale of female tigers distracted from pursuit of hunters by their own reflection. Even so, both the Jesuit Caussin and the Anglican Christopher Sutton (ca. 1565–1629) co-opted the tiger-and-mirror fable to a polemical purpose. Caussin, whose text sought to correct the passions of its readers, deployed the tale in an argument against desire, observing, “For it [desire] seeth nothing but in the future, and sees many Chymeras and illusions, after which it is tormented, As Tygers who beholding the looking-glasse which hunters have set in Forrests, imagine it to be a creature of their own kind shut up in a prison of glasse, and so long they scratch it, till they break it and deface their desire.”⁶⁴ Sutton, meanwhile, drew an analogy between the tiger’s vulnerability to deception by mirrors and the human tendency to neglect piety for frivolity:

The Hunter when he seeketh to take the Tygers young (which is onely one) is said, to set vp looking glasses, where the Tyger should passe a longe, in seekinge this younge, which shee doth sometimes by straying abroad, loose; finding in the glasse, a resemblance of herselfe, leaues the pursuite, and looseth her younge. This olde hunter perceiuing mans industry, in the conseruation of that which is one, and onely one, his deere Soule; would by many goodly shewes, make vs neglect this religious care, and stay our selues, vpon euery triuolous delighte, so longe, that wee cleane forget, whereabout wee goe, and so hazarde that, which the Prophet calleth, most precious, euen the Redemption of our Soules.⁶⁵

In these examples, the tiger-and-the-mirror detail is not simply used as an insult against an opponent. The tiger is still held up as exemplary of the types of im-

⁶² Brooke, 68^r.

⁶³ Buchanan, 18.

⁶⁴ Caussin, 40.

⁶⁵ Sutton, 81.

piety each writer wished to disparage, but both Caussin and Sutton use the story of the beast and the mirror to prescribe the future behavior of their readers: it is used not only as an insult calculated to land a blow against an opponent, but also as an educational tool, designed to effect a correction of a rival's behavior.

DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS

Reflecting the ability of early modern uses of the word *tiger* to absorb the beast's folkloric prehistory and apply the fabled properties of the animal to human qualities, several lexicographers incorporated that history into the term's definition. John Bullokar (bap. 1574–1627) gave, "A fierce wild beast in India & Hyrcania. This beast is the swiftest of all other, wherefore they are taken very young in the dams absence, and carried away by men on horseback; who hearing the cry of the old Tiger following swiftly after them, doe of purpose let fall one of the young whelpes, that while she beareth that back, they in the meane time may escape safe with the other to the ship."⁶⁶ Seven years later, Henry Cockeram (fl. 1623–58) offered a definition with Pliny's tale at its center, but which also nodded to Virgil: "a truculent beast, and the swiftest of all other beasts: wherefore they are taken very young in the dams absence, and carried away by them on horseback: who hearing the crie of the olde Tyger following after them, doe of purpose let fall one of the whelpes, that while shee beareth that backe, they in the meane time may escape safe with the other to the ship: but of all, the Hircan Tyger is the most cruelst."⁶⁷

If dictionary definitions that took up such stories in their entirety were relatively scarce, it was common for lexicographers to place the animal's qualities at the center of the word's meaning. Swiftness dominated: Thomas Cooper (1517–94) and Thomas Thomas (1553–88) both defined *Tigris* by quotation from Pliny as "a beast of a wonderfull swiftnes," and John Florio (1553–1625) offered "a Tiger, a most swift beast" to account for the French *tigre*.⁶⁸ In other texts, cruelty crept into the account. In his Anglo-French dictionary, Randle Cotgrave (fl. 1587–1630) gave, "Of a Tiger; like a Tiger; cruell, fierce, violent, swift" as its English definition of *Tigrin*, and "Tiger-like; fierce, cruell, violent, swift, sauage" for *Tigresque*.⁶⁹ In 1679, Guy Miège defined *Tigresque* as "Tiger-like, fierce, cruel, swift, savage," while the phrase *Accoustré à la Tigresque* was glossed as "horribly scratched or beaten, cruelly handled."⁷⁰ The raft of related

⁶⁶ Bullokar, s.v. "Tiger."

⁶⁷ Cockeram, s.v. "Tyger."

⁶⁸ Cooper, s.v. "Tigris"; Thomas, s.v. "Tigris"; Florio, s.v. "Tigre."

⁶⁹ Cotgrave, s.v. "Tigresque."

⁷⁰ Miège, s.v. "Tigresque."

terms offered under the heading “Tiger” by Joshua Poole (ca. 1615–ca. 1656) in his poetic thesaurus, *The English Parnassus* (1657), was also suggestive: “Fierce, cruel, savage, furious, impetuous, bloody, ruthlesse, merclesse, unpyting, grim, grinning, Lybian, Hircanian, Midian, sported, ravenous, speedy, swift-footed, hungry, tusked, foaming, enraged, ireful, Affrican, Indian, speckled, poudred, Armenian, streaked.”⁷¹ From the reverse perspective, John Baret (d. 1578), in a trilingual dictionary of 1574 (for which Mulcaster, among others, composed prefatory verse), offered Pliny’s phrase, “The tiger cruell towards all beastes. Tigris feris cunctis truculenta,” as an exemplar of cruelty.⁷² Cooper used the same quotation to illustrate the adjective *truculentus*, and Poole also offered tigerish terminology, including *tyger-footed*, under his heading “Rage.”⁷³

It is worth dwelling on the types of text in which these definitions appear. Both of the dictionaries that incorporated Pliny’s fable into their definition belonged to the early modern tradition of handlists offering definitions of “hard words.” With the English language’s increased borrowing of words from other European languages, Bullokar’s *English expositor* (which went through sixteen editions between its first printing in 1616 and the end of the century) sought to “open the signification of such words, to the capacitie of the ignorant,” noting that frequently “our speech is not sufficiently furnished with apt termes to expresse all meanings.”⁷⁴ Cockeram, meanwhile, believed his text had achieved a degree of authority previous lexicons lacked, proclaiming immodestly that, “without appropriating to my owne comfort any interest of glory, the vnderstanding Readers will not, the ignorant cannot, and the malicious dare not, but acknowledge that what any before me in this kinde haue begun, I haue not onely fully finished, but throughly perfected.”⁷⁵

Cockeram believed he was speaking with authority on the meanings of English words, and both he and Bullokar offered definitions of *tiger* that featured ancient stories about the beast’s characteristics as constituent parts. Of course these entries go beyond what might naturally be expected of a dictionary definition, and it may be countered that other texts did not feel the need to offer such elaboration. Neither Edward Phillips nor Elisha Coles thought *tiger* a sufficiently “hard word” to be worth entering, but both defined *tigrine* straightforwardly: “belonging to, or like a Tiger” in Phillips’s rendering, “like a Tiger” in

⁷¹ Poole, s.v. “Tiger.”

⁷² Baret, s.v. “Cruell death.”

⁷³ Cooper, s.v. “Truculentus”; Poole, s.v. “Rage.”

⁷⁴ Bullokar, A3^r–A4^v. On English borrowing words from other languages, see Barber, 219–26.

⁷⁵ Cockeram, A4^{r-v}.

Coles's.⁷⁶ In 1702 John Kersey defined *tiger* simply as “a wild beast.”⁷⁷ But it is important to consider definitions of the type offered by Bullokar and Cockeram in the contexts of both Reformed Protestantism's emphasis on words and their meanings, and the pervasive influence of humanist education with its basis in the explication of classical texts. Ian Green demonstrates the enduring popularity of Cooper's *Thesaurus*, which continued to be used in schools until the end of the seventeenth century.⁷⁸ Definitions of *tiger* that invoked the beast's behavior, then, received wide circulation and were integrated into orthodox education. If the word was an arbitrary signifier, it was one that by convention was acquiring meanings and associations that expanded its definitions, allowing them to exceed literal, taxonomical descriptions of its referent and implicate the beast's history of associations in the word's meaning.

ANIMALS AND THEIR NAMES

So far an assumption of the word *tiger* as indicating the beast it describes predominantly by convention underlies the majority of the examples I have presented. But the tiger's animal status and the lingering belief that it had been named for its qualities in Eden merit further reflection. As I described in introducing this essay, the debate as to whether Adam's names in Genesis were natural or arbitrary (and whether a middle position between these categories was possible) continued well into the seventeenth century. Of course, I am interested here in the English use of *tiger*, and, while several surviving languages were put forward as descendants of the original Adamic language (with Hebrew the most common), the view that English and its related tongues might be originary languages belonged to a minority.⁷⁹ Even the assumed place of Hebrew as a divine language, Demonet shows, was becoming destabilized, though she also is careful to note that the language's value as essential to the study of the sacred text was maintained, even by Protestants most active in challenging its divine status.⁸⁰ And the argument that (in the words of Andrew Willet) “the Hebrew tongue was the common language of all the world” continued to be made throughout the seventeenth century. Willet noted that “many words also are used in our

⁷⁶ Phillips, s.v. “Tigrine”; Coles, s.v. “Tigrine.”

⁷⁷ Kersey, s.v. “Tiger.”

⁷⁸ Green, 1–3.

⁷⁹ Richard Verstegan was a notable proponent of the view, derived from Johannes Goropius Becanus, that “the Teutonic tongue” was “the first and most ancient language of the world; yea the same that *Adam* spake in *Paradise*”: Verstegan, 189–90. Ben Jonson later lampooned Verstegan in *The Alchemist*. See Almond, 133; Crawforth, 82–87.

⁸⁰ Demonet, 1992, 474.

English tongue, derived from the Hebrew,”⁸¹ and, as I have already mentioned, Topsell hinted that this was the case for the word *tiger*. While it was not popularly taken up, Topsell’s view does merit mention as a suggestion in an enduring text (published in 1607 and reissued in 1658, some twenty-three years after Topsell’s death) that the term’s origins may lie closer to Eden than is typically assumed. According to Topsell, “The word *Tigris* is an *Armenian* word, which signifieth both a swift Arrow, and a great River, and it should seem that the name of the River *Tigris* was therefore so called, because of the swiftnesse thereof; and it seemeth to be derived from the *Hebrew* word *Gir* and *Griera*, which signifie a Dart.”⁸² Although the theory seems to have received precious little favor among Topsell’s contemporaries, it found proponents in later eras. Robert Ainsworth (1660–1743), in a Latin dictionary that first appeared in 1736, associated *tiger* with a Hebrew root and, in 1824, Thomas Martin’s *Philological Grammar of the English Language* repeated Ainsworth’s claim.⁸³ Most English writers who conjured with the word’s origin, however, did not believe that *tiger* was of Hebrew descent and therefore a possible fragment of the originary language.

Even so, Topsell’s eagerness to establish the Hebrew root of *tiger* reflects an early modern mania for names and naming. In a much-quoted passage, Bacon, justifying his methodology for natural philosophy, claimed “it is a restitution and reinvesting (in great part) of man to the sovereignty and power (for whensoever he shall be able to call the creatures by their true names he shall again command them) which he had in his first state of creation.”⁸⁴ So it was that investigations into the names of animals like Topsell’s and others quoted above were contributions to a program to restore the natural order, the dominion of man over animals, that had been dismantled with the Fall.

Names and their origins, then, came to occupy a position of central importance to the understanding and improvement of man’s position in the fallen world. Figures from various theological and philosophical positions wished to assert the natural connection between true names and their referents, and the power correct naming could wield. Some went as far as to claim a magical relationship between words and their objects. In a text issued in a new English translation in 1651, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535) claimed, “Magicians say, that proper names of things are certain rayes of things, every where present at all times, keeping the power of things, as the essence of the thing signified, rules, and is discerned in them, and know the things by them, as by proper,

⁸¹ Willet, 110.

⁸² Topsell, 706.

⁸³ Martin, 302; Ainsworth.

⁸⁴ Bacon, 6:34.

and living Images.”⁸⁵ But away from the territory of the occult, orthodox theories of natural meaning continued to circulate in interpretations of Adam’s naming the animals.⁸⁶ Even so, it is also important to recognize, as has been pointed out, that the view was also declining. Robert Boyle (1627–91) saw no reason to believe “that the Hebrew names of animals mentioned in the beginning of *Genesis*, argued a (much) clearer insight in to their natures, than did the names of the same of some animals in Greek, or other languages.”⁸⁷

So far the Aristotelian thesis has been overwhelmingly borne out in the case of *tiger*. Its obscure etymology and exotic nature appear to have lent the word a range of meanings (associated with maternal pride, narcissism, fierceness, and savagery) that accrued to it by convention. As Demonet shows, the Aristotelian position dominated for two centuries even before Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1690 dealt what was apparently the knockout blow to Cratyllic belief.⁸⁸ The general assumption, then, has to be of a movement in cultural history away from natural meaning and toward the conventional. But I have also produced evidence of arguments that natural and conventional meaning need not be taken for binary opposites. At the basic level of individual words, it is perhaps possible to conceive of the degree of association between a word and its referent being adjusted as the word’s meaning shifts. In some exceptional instances, maybe it is even possible to imagine that adjustments in the degree of a word’s association with the object it describes might flow against the prevailing historical current, with the connection between word and referent tightening. A small but significant group of early modern references to tigers supports these suppositions. Word reached Britain from the Indian travels of the Jesuit scholar Nicolaus Pimenta (1546–1614) that a community in Bengal was so terrorized by tigers that a decree had been passed that the beast be renamed. As Pimenta had it, “It cannot be said how greatly the Bengali people fear the tiger; and, on account of fear, they require various names, lest by using its own name they should allow themselves to be torn apart.”⁸⁹ The Bengali people specifically believed the natural (perhaps even magical) connection between the name of the tiger and the beast itself.

⁸⁵ Agrippa, 153.

⁸⁶ Luther, 117–18, believed that “by one single word [Adam] was able to compel lions, bears, boars, tigers, and whatever else there is among the more outstanding animals to carry out whatever suited their nature.”

⁸⁷ Boyle, 4:46. See Almond, 116; Bono, 57–64.

⁸⁸ Locke, 189.

⁸⁹ Pimenta, 78–79: “Bengalenses, dici nequit quantopere tigres reformident, & ob metum variis nominibus indignant, ne si propriam illi nomenclaturam tribuant, continuo dilacerentur.”

Published in Rome in 1602, Pimenta's story was clearly known to a number of English writers but, whatever its linguistic implications, they were little taken up. Those who rehearsed the tale did so chiefly to draw an unfavorable comparison with intellectual rivals. The Kentish clergyman John Boys (1571–1625) used it to disparage Puritan modernizers anxious about Anglican ministers offering absolution for sins confessed. With the Reformers seeking at the Hampton Court conference of 1604 to have absolution replaced with "a more milde terme called, Remission of sins," Boys scoffed that they resembled "the people of *Bengala*, who are so much afraid of Tygers, as that they dare not call them Tygers, but giue them other gentle names."⁹⁰ As the seventeenth century wore on, the snippet's principal use was as an insult against religious or intellectual opponents. William Morice (1602–76), in his plea for unity in the Anglican movement, applied it to "*Apologists*" who were "so consciuous of Schisme, or fearfull to be blasted with it, that they decline the mention of this, and passing over the description he makes of Schisme, they only barely and without any distinct explication tell us of a negative and positive separation."⁹¹ For Heylyn, meanwhile, it was a piece of sophistry at the general assembly of the church at Perth that brought "into my minde the fancy of some people in the Desarts of *Affrick*, who having been terribly wasted with Tygers, and not able otherwise to destroy them, passed a Decree that none should thenceforth call them Tygers; and then all was well."⁹²

Joseph Wybarne (fl. 1609), while still disparaging, recognized the significance of the story for the theory of naming. He took up the argument of Boys:

All these tumults in religion come by imposture of names: the Pagan takes Diuels for gods, therefore in America they worship the Diuell, least he should hurt them: the Turke dreames of Mahomet as of a Prophet, not as a Cousener: as an ignorant husband oftentimes entertaines the Adulterer, that pretends kindred, in stead of kindnesse intended to his wife: the Jew fancies a Messias, in the letter for one in the spirite, like him that saide, *Pilate* was a Saint, because he was put in the Creed: The Greeke will haue pictures instead of Images, not vnlike our men that would not haue it called the Absolution but the Remission, in the booke of common Prayer, which desire one compared to that of the men of *Bengala*, which are so afraide of Tygers, that they dare not call them by that name, but by some more gentle, least otherwise happily they might bee torn in peeces by them.⁹³

⁹⁰ Boys, 2.

⁹¹ Morice, 235.

⁹² Heylyn, 1670, 209.

⁹³ Wybarne, 131.

From Wybarne's pen, Bengali belief in the power of the tiger's name is uncompromisingly categorized with (indeed, as exemplary of) idolatrous beliefs the world over. His is what Patricia Canning describes as the "Reformed response to images and all cultic objects," engaging "in a systematic process of iconoclastic destruction, the aims of which were to obliterate the material form and to re-establish a return to the purity of the unadorned Scriptural word"; idolatry, she says, was conceived of as "an inability to separate the (material) sign for the (spiritual) thing signified by it."⁹⁴ The reaction of Wybarne and those like him undoubtedly adds weight to Demonet's thesis of linguistic arbitrariness dominant in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe—indeed, arbitrariness of meaning, linguistic and scriptural, as fundamental to early modern Protestant belief.

But that is not to say exceptions were impossible. Some were willing at least to report Pimenta's tale in plain terms. Samuel Purchas, in his compendium of English travel narratives, quoted Pimenta: "The Bengalans doe not feare them, that superstitiously they giue diuers names vnto them, thinking if they should call them by the right name, they should be deuoured of them."⁹⁵ Jonston gave the item similar treatment: "It cannot be said how those of Bengala, dread the Tigers rage; whence they call him by sundry names, fearing, that, if they should call him by his owne name, they might be torne in pieces."⁹⁶ Purchas, however, did not report the tale entirely free from inflection or judgment. Not only does he refer to the story of the change to the tiger's name as superstitious, but the preface to his book makes clear that he does not assent to all of the claims made in his material. At times, Purchas says, he will present material he believes idolatrous, his defense being "sufficient example in the Scriptures, *which were written for our learning to the ends of the World*, and yet depaint vnto vs the vgly face of Idolatry in so many Countries of the Heathens, with the Apostasies, Sects, and Heresies of the Iewes."⁹⁷

His purpose is both evangelical and natural historical:

And what indeede doth more set forth the glory of Gods grace, then in pardoning; his power, then in reforming; his justice, then in giuing men vp to such delusions? Are not these the Trophees and glorious victories of THE CROSSE OF CHRIST, that hath subuerted the Temples, Oracles, Sacrifices, and Seruices of the Deuill? And maist not thou see herein, what *Man* is, and thou thy selfe maist bee, if God leaue thee to thy selfe? Read therefore, with prayes vnto GOD, the *Father of thy light*; and prayers for these Heathens,

⁹⁴ Canning, 3, 5.

⁹⁵ Purchas, 564.

⁹⁶ Jonstonus, 68.

⁹⁷ Purchas, unpaginated preface "To the Reader."

that GOD may bring them out of the *snare of the Deuill*, & that *Christ* may be *his saluation to the ends of the World*.⁹⁸

Amid Purchas's argument for his text as exalting God's powers of forgiveness and renewal, his anthropological interests persist. His demand "maist not thou see herein, what *Man* is," implies a natural-philosophical desire to understand the nature of the species that is not quite extinguished by his additional claim to be showing his readers what "thou thy selfe maist bee, if God leaue thee to thy selfe?" But still Purchas felt it necessary to issue these prefatory disclaimers, justifying his pious intentions. Jonston (who elsewhere indicated his willingness to challenge the authority of his sources) had an interest in animals that was predominantly taxonomical, his work conceived solely to give an "account of the Name, the Parts, Place, Food, Growth, Generation, Life, Animal actions, Use and Differences" of four-footed beasts.⁹⁹ God is mentioned in virtually every paragraph of Purchas's text, but only a handful of times throughout Jonston's. It was no concern of his that belief in the terrible power of the tiger's name was thought in some contexts idolatrous; the detail was offered as a matter of fact.

CONCLUSIONS

I have presented evidence for a divorce of images from objects, words from their referents, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I have shown the strong prevalence of belief in linguistic signs as arbitrary and, in spite of the advancement of some arguments less clear cut, the momentum this view gathered, culminating in Locke's *Essay*. At the same time I have also argued for English undergoing vast expansion and rapid change, in part aided by the broadening of linguistic horizons that is the inevitable consequence of colonial expansion. In the case of *tiger*, I have shown the word—etymologically uncertain, but of ancient origin—accruing meanings as the centuries wore on, used to symbolize the fierceness of maternal protection, narcissism, and, in an increasingly common use, cruelty or savagery, even tending to the supernatural and diabolical. I have advanced evidence of *tiger*, taken up as an insult, mostly religious, leveled against intellectual opponents. In this sense, the trajectory of the early modern English usage of *tiger* shows an increasing divorce from the beast to which it refers, with the word increasingly made to serve human purposes.

But this is only one perspective on the development the word *tiger* experienced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Considered from another, the picture looks somewhat different. With the post-Reformation divorce of words

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Jonstonus, *3'.

from images and the fascination with words and meaning that accompanied that separation, a decline might be expected in the relevance of the fables depicted in the medieval bestiaries for the meaning of *tiger*. An iconoclastic dismantling of the significance of *tiger* as a sign of anything beyond the beast and perhaps its natural properties might be predicted. But, on the contrary, I have shown lexicographers incorporating not only the creature's animal qualities into their definitions of *tiger*, but also the human qualities (maternal pride, narcissism, cruelty) that Pliny and others had always used the beast to depict. This period may have seen a decline in belief in natural meaning, but it is one of my main contentions that the word history of *tiger* suggests that the loss of natural meaning does not necessarily entail the total divorce of a word from its referent. On the contrary: if anything, I have shown various meanings attaching to the word by convention that leave it not simply a descriptor of the beast as taxonomic entity, but bound up with the tiger's behavior and the history of tiger-human relations. Mulcaster believed that by studying words people could "know what we both write and speak: we should then discern the depth of their conceits, which either coined our own words, or incorporated the foren."¹⁰⁰ He was not alone in this view: the Italian theologian Pietro Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) had tackled the problem in the mid-sixteenth century, though his work did not appear in English until a year after Mulcaster's. Vermigli believed words "partlie are naturall, and partlie are giuen after the mind of them which first named them"; while words "might not expresse the whole nature of the thing, and all the properties thereof, yet that they should be able at the least wise, to shew some one propertie more notable and knowne."¹⁰¹ The case study of *tiger* that I have presented bears out this view. The popular etymology had it that the tiger's speed was inherent to the origin of its name, while the folklore surrounding the beast was never shaken off by those who composed definitions.

Additionally, that *tiger* is the name of an animal places the beast as a product of creation in Genesis—a creature once named according to its nature and, more significantly, made an antagonist of man by the Fall of Adam and Eve. The name's association throughout its history of usage with the type of cruelty and savagery to which man would not ideally sink is an inevitable outcome of the disharmony of man and beast created by the Fall. That disharmony was also part of the backdrop against which European readers learning of Bengali communities persecuted by tigers might interpret the relationship between man and the animal. Pimenta's detail about the substitution of alternative names for the tiger, lest incanting its true name might bring harm upon those who used it, hardly shakes the foundations of the prevailing linguistic orthodoxy. It does, however, demonstrate the possibility of alternatives. Several Protestants took up

¹⁰⁰ Mulcaster, 169.

¹⁰¹ Vermigli, 590–91.

this example precisely for its absurdity, but the anthropological curiosity of Jonston especially shows that not everyone felt obliged to pour scorn on such beliefs. However little the view was credited, the evidence presented in this essay has shown an example of a term whose use saw it accruing meanings that appeared to narrow the gap between word and referent. Though these meanings are conventional, they nonetheless foster among language communities associations between the word *tiger* and the nature of the beast. Of course, not all uses of *tiger* draw it in this direction: some, including its use as an insult leveled against political and religious opponents, appear to increase the distance between the linguistic sign and the big cat. Even so, some connection between the word and tigerish qualities—speed, ferocity, etc.—appeared to gain currency in the early modern period and endure beyond it. Prynne's reading of Blake's tiger drew out meanings produced by concatenations of sounds and letters; but, equally, Blake's word could not but come to him steeped in a long and contentious pre-history of theological, natural-historical, and polemical use.

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