

The Tyger

'The Tyger' is one of the best known and most analysed poems of the *Songs of Experience* by William Blake. According to *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake* (2003), it is 'the most anthologized poem in English'.

The poem begins with the amazement of the sight of a tiger 'burning bright' in the 'forests of the night'. The sight leads the speaker in the poem to an assumption of the mystery of its Creator, for the Creator is best understood in terms of the thing made:

What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

Each subsequent stanza elaborates on the conception of this first question. Blake builds on the idea that nature, like a work of art, must in some way contain a reflection of its Creator. The tiger is strikingly beautiful, and yet horrific in its capacity for violence. What kind of a God, then, could design such a 'fearful symmetry'?

The tiger initially appears as a strikingly sensuous image. However, as the poem progresses, it takes on a symbolic character. It comes to embody the spiritual and moral problem that the poem explores: perfectly beautiful and yet potentially destructive. Since the tiger's astonishing nature exists both in physical and moral terms, the speaker feels that its origin must also encompass both physical and moral dimensions.

The speaker stands in awe of the tiger as a sheer physical and aesthetic achievement. But, at the same time, he recoils in horror from the moral implications of such a creation. Thus, the poem addresses not only the question of who could make such a creature as the tiger, but who would perform this act. This is a question of both creative capacity and will.

The reference to the lamb in the last but one stanza reminds the reader that both the tiger and the lamb are created by the same God, and raises questions about the implications of this. It also invites a contrast between the perspectives of 'experience' and 'innocence' represented in this poem and in the poem 'The Lamb'.

'The Tyger' leaves us to awe at the complexity of creation, the sheer magnitude of God's power, and the inscrutability of divine will. The perspective of experience in this poem involves a subtle acknowledgment of what is unexplainable in the universe. It presents evil as the prime example of something that may not just be denied, but may also not be explained easily. The open awe of 'The Tyger' contrasts with the easy confidence, in 'The Lamb', of a child's innocent faith in a benevolent universe.