

### William Blake (1757-1827)-The Tyger

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

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

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

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

When the stars threw down their spears,  
And water'd heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

William Blake, English poet, printmaker, and painter, is known now as one of the most prominent figures of the Romantic Age for his poetry and visual arts. Fairly unknown during his lifetime, Blake has now become an iconic figure.

The Tiger is one of Blake's best known and rich songs. This poem is included in Blake's "Songs of Experiences".

It has two levels of understanding:

- 1-On the surface, it portrays an image of a tiger which is compared to a fire burning at night.
  - 2-But on a deeper level, the tiger here is an embodiment of God's creative ability.
- The poem is more about the creator of the tiger than it is about the tiger itself.

In contemplating the terrible ferocity and awesome symmetry of the tiger, the speaker is at a loss to explain how the same God who made the lamb could make the tiger. Hence, this theme: humans are incapable of fully understanding the mind of God and the mystery of his handiwork.

.....“The Tiger” presents a question that embodies the central theme: Who created the tiger? Was it the kind and loving God who made the lamb? Or was it Satan? Blake presents his question in Lines 3 and 4:

What immortal hand or eye

Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

Blake realizes, of course, that God made all the creatures on earth.

However, to express his bewilderment that the God who created the gentle lamb also created the terrifying tiger, he includes Satan as a possible creator while raising his

**rhetorical questions, notably the one he asks in Lines 5 and 6:**

In what distant deeps or skies

Burnt the fire of thy eyes?

*Deeps* appears to refer to hell and *skies* to heaven. In either case, there would be fire--the fire of hell or the fire of the stars.

The tiger is the exact opposite of the "little lamb". The lamb is a young and innocent creature; where the tiger is full of experience. Those two animals are polar opposites; however, both are animals that Blake felt could reflect human history and thought. Blake's belief in the Christian God is seemingly unarguable.

The tiger is an image of the wrath of life and God. The tiger kills for food and is untamable; where the lamb is gentle and innocent, however if it is led astray or let walk alone, it will be left to wander alone until its Shepherd comes to call on it. The creator, God in this case, created both the Lamb and the Tiger. This creation allowed the natural order of balance in the world that the romantics came to know and worship.

"The Tyger" contains only six stanzas, and each stanza is four lines long. The first and last stanzas are the same, except for one word change: "could" becomes "dare."

"The Tyger" is a poem made of questions. There are no less than thirteen question marks and only one full sentence that ends with a period instead of a question mark.

Addressing "The Tyger," the speaker questions it as to its creation – essentially: "Who made you Mr. Tyger?" "How were you made? Where? Why? What was the person or thing like that made you

" The first stanza opens the central question: "What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" Blake wonders who had made the immaculate symmetry of the tiger's body. The creation of the tiger's eyes is described next. The poet questions where deep below the earth or high in the heavens did the wild fire which is now contained in the tiger's eyes used to burn.

The next two stanzas describe the creation of the heart and then the brain of the tiger. Blake is intimidated by the strength and art which must have been required to build the muscles of the tiger's hard heart. It is now that the tiger comes to life after its heart is placed within its frame and the poet feels awe at the agile hands and feet of the tiger. The fourth stanza compares god to a blacksmith, who used a hammer, a chain and an anvil to furnish the brain of the tiger. After the brain was given shape the poet imagines that it was cooked in a blasting furnace which counts for the ferocity and ruthlessness of the tiger.

The last two lines of the fifth stanza are enough to summarize the entire central idea of the poem. The poet wonders whether the same creator who created the meek and docile lamb, was the one to create the ferocious and deadly tiger.

The sixth and last stanza is a repetition of the first, with the exception of one crucial word. Where before Blake had been wondering who could create such a being, he now questions who dares to do so. . In addition, ending the poem this way leaves the reader in astonishment, wondering and speculating.

Another interpretation of the poem could be the focus on the balance in the universe. If there is good, there is also bad; if there is life, there is also death; if there is light, there is also darkness. This is the dichotomy of creation; God has created the world in such a way that it balances itself, as can be gleaned from his creation of the tiger to balance the docile lamb.

### Form

The poem is comprised of six quatrains (stanzas), each of four lines. The rhyme scheme is aabb.

The repeated use of questions throughout the poem stresses the poet's surprise and wonder at the amazingly skilful creation of the tiger.

### Examples of Figures of Speech and Allusions

Alliteration: Tiger, tiger, burning bright (line 1); frame thy fearful symmetry? (line 4)

**Metaphor:** Comparison of the tiger and his eyes to fire.

**Anaphora:** Repetition of *what* at the beginning of sentences or clauses. Example: *What dread hand and what dread feet? / What the hammer? what the chain?*

**Allusion:** *Immortal hand or eye:* God or Satan

**Allusion:** *Distant deeps or skies:* hell or heaven

### Model Questions

1-The poem "The Tyger" consists of .....

- A- two stanzas
- B- three stanzas
- C- four stanzas
- D- six stanzas

The correct answer is (D)

2- The Tiger" presents a question that embodies the central theme:

- A- who killed the tiger?
- B- who bought the tiger?
- C- who created the tiger?
- D- who hunted the tiger?

The correct answer is (c).