

# The Tyger



## POEM TEXT

- 1 Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
- 2 In the forests of the night;
- 3 What immortal hand or eye,
- 4 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
  
- 5 In what distant deeps or skies.
- 6 Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
- 7 On what wings dare he aspire?
- 8 What the hand, dare seize the fire?
  
- 9 And what shoulder, & what art,
- 10 Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
- 11 And when thy heart began to beat,
- 12 What dread hand? & what dread feet?
  
- 13 What the hammer? what the chain,
- 14 In what furnace was thy brain?
- 15 What the anvil? what dread grasp,
- 16 Dare its deadly terrors clasp!
  
- 17 When the stars threw down their spears
- 18 And water'd heaven with their tears:
- 19 Did he smile his work to see?
- 20 Did he who made the Lamb make thee?
  
- 21 Tyger Tyger burning bright,
- 22 In the forests of the night:
- 23 What immortal hand or eye,
- 24 Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?



## SUMMARY

The speaker directly addresses a tiger, imagining its bright flashes of color in the dark night-time forest. The speaker asks which immortal being could possibly have created the tiger's fearsome beauty.

The speaker wonders in which far-off depths or skies the tiger's fiery eyes were made. Did the tiger's creator have wings, and whose hand would be daring enough to create the tiger?

The speaker imagines the kind of effort and skill that must have gone into creating the tiger, wondering who would be strong enough to build the tiger's muscular body. Whose hands and

feet were the ones that made the tiger's heart start beating?

The speaker wonders about the tools the tiger's creator must have used, imagining that the tiger's brain was created in a forge. What terrifying being would be so daring as to create the tiger?

The speaker mentions a time when the stars gave up their weapons and rained their tears on heaven. At this time, wonders the speaker, did the creator look at the tiger and smile at his accomplishment? And was the tiger made by the same creator who made the lamb?

The speaker addresses the tiger again, this time wondering not just who *could* create this fearsome beast—but who would *dare*.



## THEMES



### THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL

Like its sister poem, "[The Lamb](#)," "The Tyger" expresses awe at the marvels of God's creation, represented here by a tiger. But the tiger poses a problem: everything about it seems to embody fear, danger, and terror. In a series of questions, the speaker of "The Tyger" wonders whether this creature was really created by the same God who made the world's gentle and joyful creatures. And if the tiger was created by God, why did God choose to create such a fearsome animal? Through the example of the tiger, the poem examines the existence of evil in the world, asking the same question in many ways: if God created everything and is all-powerful, why does evil exist?

The speaker tries to reconcile the tiger's frightening nature with the idea of a loving God, but this attempt leads only to a series of seemingly unanswerable questions. The tiger is presented as an impressive figure and seems to be part of God's design for the world. It "burns brightly" and has a "symmetry," a quality which Blake often associates with beauty and purposeful intent on God's part. But that "symmetry" is also "fearful." The tiger seems designed to kill and inflict pain. In other words, the tiger behaves in a way that seems counter to God's laws and ethics. The tiger's association with fire ("burning brightly," for example) underscores this point—it's visually impressive but dangerous to get close to.

The poem then meditates on the specific moment of the tiger's creation ("when thy heart began to beat"). It questions God's motivations in making the tiger, even considering the possibility that it *wasn't* actually God who made the tiger. The speaker struggles to understand how a God that made the small, vulnerable lamb could also choose to make a being that would

surely eat the lamb given half a chance. In other words, the speaker struggles to understand why God would create something that seems to have destruction as its very purpose.

The poem leaves this line of questioning unanswered, though the questions are themselves made very clear and stark. They are, essentially, handed over to the reader to consider; the speaker doesn't *know* for sure why God has created something that seems evil. However, by detailing the tiger's fearsomeness and by directly comparing it to the innocent and gentle lamb, the poem hints that perhaps *both* creatures are necessary parts of God's creation. That is, perhaps the majesty of God's work *requires* these kinds of oppositional forces. By giving the tiger the same kind of consideration as the lamb, the speaker suggests that without fear and danger, there could be no love and joy.

Opposites run throughout Blake's work—innocence and experience, the city and nature, childhood and adulthood—and so the tiger and the lamb can be seen as part of this pattern. In order for God to fully express his divinity, he has to create elements of the world that go beyond the understanding of humanity. God proves its power precisely *because* He acts in ways that humanity cannot fully comprehend.

The poem, then, is a deeply complex set of questions that have no easy answers. There is no doubt, though, that the poem wants its reader to consider the way in which the world seems to contain both good and evil—to acknowledge these contradictory forces and question why they exist, even though the answers may never be clear.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 3-4
- Lines 7-8
- Lines 9-12
- Lines 13-16
- Lines 19-20
- Lines 23-24
- Line 24



### CREATIVITY

Though "The Tyger" is specifically about how the nature of God's creation can be reconciled with the existence of the fearsome tiger, it's also about creativity more generally. Everything about the creation of the tiger suggests effort, skill, artistry, and imagination on the creator's part, suggesting that these qualities are necessary to create anything as frighteningly beautiful as the tiger. What's more, the speaker also hints that good creation—in art, for example—needs to incorporate this more dangerous and intimidating side of the world. Without that complexity, the poem suggests, a work of art won't be fully honest and authentic.

The poem is itself, of course, the product of intense creativity. Blake revised and revised this poem, trying to pin it down to the exact form that best embodies its complicated questions. This artistry is mirrored by some of the word choices made throughout. For example, the "framing" of "symmetry" (lines 4 and 24) suggests a visual artist or engraver (like Blake himself) making sure the proportions of a project are correct. This type of language, which characterizes creativity as both effort *and* skill, is also found in the third and fourth stanzas. The fourth stanza in particular describes a metal workshop, where beautiful things are made under intensely hot and pressured conditions.

Along these lines, it's also important to note the way in which the creation of the tiger is consistently linked with fire. Indeed, the tiger itself is a kind of fiery creature, testament to the intense imagination with which it was created. Imagination itself is characterized as a kind of fire from which things can be created, if the creator is brave, strong, and skilled enough. There may even be an [allusion](#) to the Greek myth of Prometheus here, who tricked the gods, stealing fire and giving it to humanity. However, Prometheus was not rewarded for his ingenuity; instead, he was condemned to eternal punishment.

The imagination, the poem ultimately suggests, is the location of a miraculous but dangerous kind of creative strength. That's why it takes bravery—the willingness to "dare," as the poem would put it—to create anything of any worth out of the "fire" of creativity. This interpretation of creativity certainly rings true with the story of Blake's life: for all his commitment, effort, and genius, he was thought of more as a madman than a visionary during his lifetime.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Lines 7-8
- Lines 9-10
- Lines 15-16
- Lines 17-19
- Lines 21-24



### LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

#### LINES 1-4

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

The first stanza sets up the poem's main thematic questions: Who created the tiger, how, and why? The speaker in this poem's sister poem, "[The Lamb](#)," is able to identify God as the creator of the lamb because the small creature seems to

represent joy, love, and freedom—but the tiger is an entirely different figure altogether. The poem does imply that God created the tiger too, but in the tiger's threat of violence and capacity for killing, it's harder for human beings to understand God's motivations for creating it. Essentially, the main aim of the poem is to flesh out this mystery, and to hint at possible answers.

The poem begins with an instance of [epizeuxis](#), with the immediate repetition of "Tyger," which signals to the reader that the tiger is the central figure throughout. And like "The Lamb," "The Tyger" directly addresses the central figure with [apostrophe](#) throughout. Indeed, the poem is a kind of awed and fearful meditation on the fact of the tiger's existence. The [alliterative](#) "burning bright" creates the visual image of a flash of impressive color moving through the "forests of the night"—which is both a beautiful sight and a terrifying one. Though the poem predates the theories of psychoanalysis put forward by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, the "forests" can be interpreted both as the tiger's literal habitat and as a symbol of the human subconscious/unconscious. As this is a poem in part about creativity, the dark and mysterious atmosphere of the forest hints at the mysteries of creation—both in the human and the godly realms.

Lines 3 and 4 introduce the speaker's preoccupation with the creative act. To the speaker, the tiger is too majestic and well-designed a figure to have come into existence by accident. Some "immortal" being must have deliberately created the tiger. Of course, the preoccupation isn't just about tigers. The poem's narrator is really asking why God, as an all-powerful creator with a master plan, decided to create the more fearsome parts of existence as well as the more obviously joyful ones (such as the lamb). Consider the evil that humans inflict on each other, for example—why did God even create that capacity in humankind?

But rather than suggesting God was wrong to create things that seem evil, the poem seems to indicate that elements of God's design for the world are simply beyond the limits of human understanding. People can see evidence of God's divine will, and worship it, but they should never claim to know and understand it fully. Life is full of these mysteries, which is why the rest of the poem consists entirely of [rhetorical questions](#). The poem seeks to illuminate the parts of existence that humans cannot fully comprehend, not in order to explain them away, but rather to marvel cautiously at their presence.

### LINES 5-8

*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?*

The second stanza begins by asking *where* the tiger was created. The speaker pictures this place to be almost

unimaginable, its intense strangeness emphasized by the [alliterative](#) "distant deeps." The mention of "deeps or skies" could also be a reference to hell and heaven, suggesting a sense of uncertainty about where exactly the tiger comes from—God's domain, or the devil's.

As in the first stanza, the tiger is again linked to fire in line 6. The fire in the tiger's eyes is suggestive of the creature's fearsome power and, further, its natural skill at hunting and killing. Line 7 seems to make reference to angels by mentioning "wings," but this reference could be either to the virtuous angels of heaven or those that have fallen, like Satan himself (indeed, the fifth stanza later seems to support this idea). Either way, the narrator is pointing towards a causal chain of events that brought the tiger into being. That is, God created heaven, hell, and earth; he granted the world a capacity for evil as well as good; and some of his own creatures took on evil identities. So whether the tiger was created by angels, devils, or God himself, it *all* ultimately leads back to God. The thing that puzzles the narrator is why God wouldn't just populate the world with goodness; the narrator wants to know why fear, violence, and evil need to exist in the first place.

Line 8 pushes this conundrum further, with another [rhetorical question](#) characterizing the tiger's creator as "daring." (Indeed, eagle-eyed readers might spot that the word "dare" is the only difference between the first and last stanzas). In other words, the speaker wants to know which creator would be brave enough to introduce the tiger into the world—and why.

A possible answer lies in this idea of bravery itself, and in Blake's overall project. Across his work, Blake doesn't argue for some kind of sanitized world in which everything is nice and safe—the collection from which this poem is called not just *Innocence*, but *Innocence and Experience*. In Blake's view, all living creatures are the expression of God's divine will—everything is a part of God. Creatures as different as the lamb and the tiger, then, are both part of the full expression of God's will. And in the case of this poem, the suggestion is that these contrary states—bravery and fear, for example—cannot exist without one another. Without something to fear, there would be no courage—and perhaps this explains the presence of evil in the world. The tiger, of course, is not an inherently evil creature, but it is suggestive of evil in that it poses a dangerous and fearsome threat to other creatures.

### LINES 9-12

*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?*

The third stanza continues the poem's established pattern of [rhetorical questioning](#), here considering the tiger's creation and imagining the physical strength (and creative skill) of its creator. As with much of the poem, there is a kind of paradox at

play. The tiger is such a strong and "dread" creature that only a being *more* strong and dread would have the capacity to create it.

For most of this stanza, the poem discusses physical effort. The tiger is such a powerful, muscular creature that the narrator wonders "what shoulder" could create it. These words conjure an image of the sheer force of the tiger's creator, whose "shoulder" is strong enough to "twist the sinews" of the tiger—in other words, to give it life. But "heart," of course, can relate to more than just the tiger's physical form; it can also relate to the tiger's way of perceiving and experiencing the world. When people talk about something being "close to their heart," they are talking about something important and central to their existence. The activities close to the tiger's heart, in this sense, are finding prey, killing it, and eating it. The creator, then, also had to have a kind of bravery, a mental strength and skill (the "art" of line 9), to bring this kind of fearsomeness into the world.

The second half of the stanza foregrounds this power on the creator's part, specifically characterizing the creator as "dread"—because the creator would have to be, in order to make a creature so threatening and powerful. Line 11 describes the moment the tiger actually comes to life, no longer part of the creator's imagination but now a living, breathing being in its own right. The metrical regularity of line 11, which is one of the poem's few lines in simple [iambic tetrameter](#), suggests the rhythm of the tiger's heart:

And when | thy heart | began | to beat,

Though this moment is characterized by "dread," there is still an atmosphere of awe in the lines that speaks to the astounding marvels of God's creation—and of creativity more generally. Just because God creates something that is frightening, that doesn't make it any less miraculous.

### LINES 13-16

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

The fourth stanza continues with the second's in-depth consideration of the moment of the tiger's creation. But there is an important shift here. While the second stanza looked at this moment abstractly and the third discussed the power of the creator, the fourth stanza speaks more specifically to craftsmanship and artistry.

Here, the narrator tries to imagine the kind of tools a creator would need to make a creature as fearsome and powerful as the tiger. The tools described are linked to a particularly industrial kind of craftsmanship, specifically relating to metalwork. The stanza conjures the image of a noisy industrial

workshop, with the loud and bright [assonant](#) vowel sounds helping the poem to turn up its volume: hammer, chain, furnace, brain. Perhaps these images came readily to mind for Blake because of his own work as an engraver, which was a physically demanding process. But perhaps they also relate to the Industrial Revolution through which Blake was living. London was brimming with new factories and employees, and the streets were full of the cacophonous sound of metalwork. This change in society was something that Blake criticized, feeling that it was separating humankind from its natural habitat and ways of life. But just as the existence of the tiger suggests power almost beyond imagining, so too does the kind of industry described here create a sense of awesome creative power.

What's more, the use of "furnace" in line 14 suggests a great, fiery heat that perhaps in turn relates to hell. There is a sense in which the tiger seems to be forged under the same kind of pressure and heat that brought the universe itself—including hell—into being. Again, the narrator is in awe of the creator's capacity to make a creature so genuinely terrifying. The notion of being daring comes up again (as it does in the second stanza and will again in the last), characterizing the creator as someone who is not just *able* to create terrifying and fearsome beings but someone who *dares* to. God is certainly all-powerful, the speaker seems to say, but is God really bold enough to create something so "deadly"?

Thinking again about the way Blake often shows two "contrary states" side by side, there is a sense here that the daringness to create something fearful is, in a way, the reason that bravery exists. Without terror and fear, bravery and courage would have nothing to define themselves against. In other words, being brave only happens in situations that *are* terrifying and fearful. Following that logic, perhaps the juxtaposition of fear and daring in this stanza is intended as an answer to the poem's central question of why evil exists.

### LINES 17-20

*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?*

The fifth stanza is the poem's most notoriously ambiguous section. Though Blake was a devout Christian, he had his own very distinctive ideas about religion, myth, and cosmology. Indeed, he essentially constructed his own mythology that took an idiosyncratic understanding of Christianity as its building blocks.

The most likely intention behind lines 17 and 18 is that they are a reference to the rebellion of angels, led by Satan, against God. Blake was heavily influenced by the poet John Milton, and there is certainly some overlap here with Milton's [Paradise Lost](#). In *Paradise Lost*, the rebellious angels admit defeat in the face of

God's awesome power—they "throw down their spears." It's strongly hinted that this moment of retreat or surrender coincides with the creation of the tiger—so perhaps the existence of the tiger is such clear evidence of God's strength that the rebels have to admit defeat. Nonetheless, these fallen angels water "heaven" with their tears, showing how evil and suffering are now an integral part of *all* existence—there is no going back.

Lines 19 and 20 pose one of the poem's central paradoxes: Was God happy ("Did he smile") to have made the tiger? And, by extension, is God glad to have brought evil into existence? Or, if evil is man-made, is God happy to have created a world in which humankind could create evil? The poem makes use of [anaphora](#) through the repeated "Did he" at the start of these two [rhetorical questions](#). The repetition helps mark this as the poem's key moment. Essentially, the narrator marvels at the question of whether the same creator could possibly make the lamb *and* the tiger. They are such different creatures that if a single creator did make them both, then it's very hard to understand that creator's motivations.

Indeed, it is here that the poem makes its link with another of Blake's poems, "[The Lamb](#)," explicitly obvious. Whereas the speaker in that poem is joyous and assured, utterly certain that only God could have created a creature like the lamb, the speaker in this poem is more doubtful. The speaker isn't doubtful that God made the tiger, exactly, but doubtful about God's motivations. The speaker senses the limits of the speaker's own understanding, which hints towards the limits of human understanding more generally.

## LINES 21-24

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

The final stanza is a [refrain](#) of the first. The first stanza posed the poem's central question—who could possibly create the fearsome tiger?—and the following stanzas deepened this question, asking not just who, but also why, how, and under what conditions and motivations the tiger came to be. The use of refrain here packs all of those other questions back into the first question—it seems that understanding the identity of the tiger's creator somehow explains *all* the other questions. In other words, God created the tiger—and that's the only answer that the speaker can provide. In this conclusion, the poem suggests that humans cannot hope to fully comprehend the way in which God's divine will actually works. They can only marvel at it and live in accordance with God's will.

There is one key difference between the first and final stanzas (apart from the subtle changes in punctuation). In line 4, the narrator asks which "immortal" being "could" create such terrifying animals as tigers (or, indeed, anything that seems

evil). In other words, the question in the first stanza was: Who has the capacity and ability to create such works? Here, though, that question is subtly but importantly reframed. The narrator, having carefully imagined the tiger's moment of creation, now asks who would *dare* to create the tiger. The question is no longer about ability, but about daring.

This shift speaks in part to the poem's broader theme of creation and art generally—creators need to be daring if they want their creations to be powerful. Blake himself embodies this attitude quite clearly; his art was so bold that he was generally considered a madman during his own time. What's more, this stanza's pointed use of the word "dare" suggests that there is something inherently brave about bringing the tiger (and other terrifying things) into existence. God created a world that wasn't just a nice, safe, and happy place, but rather one that contains the full range of possible experiences. Indeed, the poem suggests that bravery can only exist if there is something to fear. Finally, the tiger also represents the part of God that is beyond the limits of human understanding. Humans shouldn't pretend to know everything about existence, the poem seems to say, but should instead "dare" to explore the world through experiences—even (or especially) frightening ones.



## SYMBOLS



### THE TIGER

Like the lamb in Blake's [poem of the same name](#), the tiger represents an aspect of God. Whereas the lamb seems to suggest that God is loving and tender, in line with the idea of a fatherly God overseeing his flock, the tiger speaks to another side of God's character.

The poem gently suggests that God created the tiger, but it also allows for the possibility that it was Satan who did so (as one of the fallen angels that line 17 might be describing). Either way, God is ultimately responsible, since (in the Christian tradition) God created heaven, earth, *and* hell. The tiger is therefore symbolic of God's ability to be violent and frightening, traits which seem to be at odds with the creator who made the small and vulnerable lamb. The tiger, then, also represents the unknowability of God: humankind can love God and be in awe of his creations, but it can never hope to fully comprehend the way that God operates within and conceives of the world.

"The Tyger" is ultimately less about actual tigers (or other specific frightening things) and more about all the large concepts that humanity finds it difficult to comprehend. God created the world, but the world is full of suffering, pain, hatred and violence. The tiger thus symbols those parts of God (and the world) that humans struggle to reconcile with their idea of God.

**Where this symbol appears in the poem:**

- **Line 1:** "Tyger Tyger"
- **Line 21:** "Tyger Tyger"

**FIRE**

The poem picks up on the visual appearance of the tiger—its bright orange striped coat—and associates this with fire. This helps to characterize the tiger as dangerous and destructive, and to generally create a tense atmosphere throughout the poem.

But fire also represents the imagination, both of the ultimate creator—God—and of more humble human artists and craftspeople. The imagined creator in the poem literally draws the tiger from the fire, which is presented as the kind of necessarily harsh and pressurized environment from which something as majestic and fearsome as the tiger could be made. The implication here is that true creation requires bravery—that is, a willingness to put a hand into the fires of the imagination and make something. The symbol of fire shows that the poem holds the creative act in high regard.

Finally, fire may also symbolize a connection to hell ("distant deeps," line 5) or Satan in the poem. The speaker suggests that God created the tiger, while also leaving open the possibility (particularly in line 17) that Satan was the one responsible for the tiger—and perhaps for evil more generally. Notably, however, this fire isn't presented as a wholly bad thing, even if it does come from hell; instead, it's shown to be a necessary part of creating something as darkly wondrous as the tiger. Through the images of fire as a productive force, the speaker suggests that even if evil forces like hell and Satan *do* play a part in shaping the world, they're still components of God's larger plan for creation.

**Where this symbol appears in the poem:**

- **Line 1:** "burning bright,"
- **Line 6:** "fire"
- **Line 8:** "fire?"
- **Line 14:** "furnace"
- **Line 21:** "burning bright"

**INDUSTRIAL TOOLS**

The fourth stanza is the only one in which the speaker imagines the tiger's creator using tools. The ones described are all industrial tools, which allows the stanza to build the noisy and fiery atmosphere of a metal workshop. These tools symbolize a certain type of creativity, in which skill and vision alone are not enough. Rather, the creator also needs willpower and bravery in order to build meaningful creations.

Additionally, the "hammer," "chain," "furnace," and "anvil" are all distinctly industrial (as opposed to, say, paintbrushes and canvas). This choice of symbols evokes the Industrial Revolution, which was at full pace during Blake's lifetime. If the tiger does represent a kind of evil, then perhaps this moral judgment extends to the practices of industry too. However, the poem resists such conclusive interpretations. Rather, this symbol seems to showcase the way that artistry, ugliness, and danger all exist in close proximity.

**Where this symbol appears in the poem:**

- **Line 13:** "hammer," "chain"
- **Line 14:** "furnace"
- **Line 15:** "anvil"

**POETIC DEVICES****ALLITERATION**

[Alliteration](#) occurs frequently throughout "The Tyger," usually as a way of representing the poem's events and settings through sound. For example, in line 1 (and in its repeat in line 21), the repeated /b/ sound of "burning bright" makes the phrase more colorful and vivid. That is, the close repetition of the sound creates a kind of intensity that is meant to conjure the intense bright light emitted by a fire. The effect is both aural and visual.

In line 4 (and again in line 24), an /f/ sound repeats in "frame" and "fearful." Here, the narrator is expressing a cautious sense of awe at the abilities and powers of whoever created the tiger. The use of "frame" relates to artistry and craftsmanship, and the deliberate placement of the alliteration creates a sense of meticulousness, skill, and attention to detail. In other words, the creation of the tiger, though difficult to understand, is undoubtedly deliberate.

Line 5 uses two /d/ sounds in "distant deeps" to create a sense of depth that perhaps relates to the idea of hell as an underground place. The following stanzas describe the tiger being created in an atmosphere of high pressure and heat, and the use of alliteration here helps to foreshadow that atmosphere. It is as though the poem itself is under a similar pressure, causing a chemical reaction in the words that makes them take on matching forms—and sound alike.

Later, line 11's alliteration brings the idea of a heart beating to sonic life, with the two /b/ sounds in "began" and "beat" creating a pulsating, rhythmic sound.

The alliteration of line 16 links "daringness" and "deadliness" together conceptually (and also recalls the /d/ sounds in line 5). This instance of alliteration underscores a key part of the poem's argument: humans should not reject the tiger outright as a fearsome creature, but rather appreciate the bravery of

the creator for bringing it into being.

#### Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "T," "T," "b," "b"
- **Line 4:** "f," "f"
- **Line 5:** "d," "d"
- **Line 7:** "wh," "w"
- **Line 11:** "b," "b"
- **Line 15:** "d"
- **Line 16:** "D," "d"
- **Line 17:** "s," "s"
- **Line 19:** "s," "s"
- **Line 20:** "h," "wh," "m," "th," "m," "th"
- **Line 21:** "T," "T," "b," "b"
- **Line 24:** "f," "f"

#### APOSTROPHE

The speaker addresses the tiger using [apostrophe](#) throughout the poem. It has an interesting effect, because it brings the reader near to the tiger while the poem simultaneously describes the tiger's moment of creation (a distant event). Addressing the tiger directly means that the poem is constantly acknowledging its existence, even though it seems to be far away.

In a way, then, the tiger is a kind of threat stalking through the poem's lines. It never quite appears, but its presence is very real and a source of awe, wonder, and fear for the speaker. Because the tiger is also a symbol of other frightening things, its constant presence highlights how inescapable terror is; the poem suggests that being alive *always* comes with a degree of fear, no matter how far away the frightening thing may be. But the same goes for beauty and wonder—by speaking directly to the awe-inspiring tiger, the speaker also shows how the marvels of creation are always within reach.

The apostrophe also sets the poem up as a mirror of Blake's other poem, "[The Lamb](#)," which uses the same technique by addressing the lamb directly. This correspondence helps create a symmetry between the two poems, which is important because Blake considered symmetry to be a way of representing God's intelligent design for the universe.

#### Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Tyger Tyger"
- **Line 4:** "thy"
- **Line 6:** "thine"
- **Line 10:** "thy"
- **Line 11:** "thy"
- **Line 14:** "thy"
- **Line 20:** "thee"
- **Line 21:** "Tyger Tyger"
- **Line 24:** "thy"

#### ANAPHORA

Many of the lines in "The Tyger" are constructed around a simple kind of question: "What?" This makes a number of them [anaphoric](#). The overall effect is to make the poem sound like an interrogation, almost as though God is being interviewed by the speaker. Of course, God doesn't answer these human questions in words—instead, it is up to the speaker (and the poem's readers) to perceive the answers to these questions by looking at God's work directly.

However, though the narrator's line of questioning does hint towards answers, there is no conclusive solution to the mysteries presented by the poem. With that in mind, the anaphora starts to ring like an echo, creating a cavernous atmosphere of not-knowing around the narrator's eager and persistent questioning. Each moment of anaphora seems to deepen the sense that humankind can't possibly fully know God's motivations or reasoning—these are beyond the limits of human understanding.

A second, distinct instance of anaphora also comes up in the poem's second-to-last stanza. At the starts of lines 19 and 20, the speaker repeats the words "Did he," asking the poem's two most pointed questions: Did the creator of the tiger feel happy when the tiger was complete? And was that creator the same one who created the lamb? In many ways, these two questions sum up all of the other questions posed throughout the poem. The new use of anaphora highlights the significance of this moment and sets these two questions apart as particularly crucial to the poem's argument.

#### Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "What"
- **Line 5:** "what"
- **Line 7:** "what"
- **Line 8:** "What"
- **Line 9:** "what," "what"
- **Line 12:** "What," "what"
- **Line 13:** "What," "what"
- **Line 14:** "what"
- **Line 15:** "What," "what"
- **Line 19:** "Did he"
- **Line 20:** "Did he"
- **Line 23:** "What"

#### ASSONANCE

[Assonance](#) occurs often throughout the poem, with some instances carrying more weight than others. For example, line 10 uses /l/ sounds to brilliant effect, through "twist" and "sinews." The stanza imagines the physical effort required on the part of the creator in order to make the tiger, especially the tough "sinews" of the tiger's heart. The use of assonance here brings that physicality to sonic life, with the lines twisting under

the pressure of their own creator (the poet himself).

A number of /a/ sounds are found across lines 13, 14, 15, and 16. Some of these are clearly assonant—what, was, furnace—through others bear only visual resemblance and produce a sort of slant assonance: hammer, chain, brain, anvil, grasp, dare, and clasp. Altogether, though, there is a clear repetition of /a/ and adjacent sounds. The stanza describes the imaginary workshop in which a creature as fearsome as the tiger might be produced. The fact that these /a/ sounds aren't all exactly the same and they sometimes clash, creating the impression of a bold, noisy industrial environment (the kind Blake could see all around him in 18th century London). Like the /l/ sounds above, they create a sense of exertion and physical effort. But the effort is also mental, with the assonant sounds demonstrating one way in which the act of creation requires focus and precision from the creator.

There is a contrasting moment of assonance in line 20, where the softer /a/ sounds of made, lamb, and make (plus the long /e/ of he and thee), suggest the gentleness of the lamb itself. The sound of this line is a brief reminder of the way that so much of God's creation is nothing like the tiger; that is, the world is full of frightful things, but it can also be soft and gentle.

Line 24 is an almost exact repeat of line 4, but it adds the word "dare" in the place of "could." This change creates an instance of assonance with "frame" and harks back to the fourth stanza, reminding the reader of the sheer effort and skill of the tiger's creator.

#### Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "y," "e," "y," "e," "i"
- **Line 2:** "i"
- **Line 3:** "o," "o," "eye"
- **Line 4:** "y"
- **Line 5:** "ie"
- **Line 6:** "i," "i," "eye"
- **Line 10:** "i," "i"
- **Line 11:** "e," "ea"
- **Line 13:** "a," "a"
- **Line 14:** "a," "a," "a"
- **Line 15:** "a," "a"
- **Line 16:** "ea," "e"
- **Line 19:** "e," "ee"
- **Line 20:** "e," "a," "a," "a," "ee"
- **Line 21:** "y," "e," "y," "e," "i"
- **Line 22:** "i"
- **Line 23:** "eye"
- **Line 24:** "a," "a," "y"

## CONSONANCE

[Consonance](#) occurs in nearly every line of "The Tyger." One of the main functions of the consonance generally is to create a

sense of meticulous artistry. This poem focuses on creation—and on looking at the tiger as a product of creation, the kind of creation that only God could do. Accordingly, the consonance throughout makes the poem feel like the product of similarly powerful skill and artistry. For example, the /m/ sounds in lines 3 and 4 ("immortal," "frame," "symmetry") are subtly beautiful, showcasing the poet's skill as a kind of mirror to the skill of whoever made the tiger. The /n/ sounds in line 6 have a similar function ("burnt" and "thine").

In lines 10 and 11, the consonance has the further effect of calling to mind physical exertion and the gristliness of what is being described (the creation of the tiger's heart). The /w/ sounds in "twist" and "sinews" and the /t/ sounds in "twist," "heart," and "beat" have a kind of toughness that brings the image to life.

Later, lines 13, 14, and 15 return to the /n/ sound. Here, the poem imagines the kind of intense heat and high pressure under which the tiger might have been created. The abundance of /n/ sounds almost seem to mirror some kind of chemical reaction, as though the lines themselves are being placed under the same pressured conditions and being forged into one unit.

Lines 17 and 18 have /n/ sounds too, but they also show consonance between "stars," "threw," "spears," "water'd," and "tears"—all of these showcase prominent /r/ sounds, and several ring together on /w/ and /s/ as well. These sounds have a long, almost weeping quality, which brings to life this scene of the stars (most likely angels) retreating from war and shedding tears. The abundance of consonance here also underscores how important this moment is to the poem's overall argument; it is the most dramatic example of just how powerful the tiger's creator is.

Line 20 is filled with /m/, /th/, and /h/ (or /wh/) sounds. These are soft, pleasant sounds that, as mentioned in our discussion of [alliteration](#) and [assonance](#), create a sense of gentleness and beauty that reflects the nature of the lamb itself. These sounds also notably contrast sharply with the sharp /t/ and hard /g/ sounds of "Tyger."

Finally, lines 23 and 24 repeat the consonance of the opening stanza, making the poem end on a similar note that again foregrounds artistry, skill, and creativity.

#### Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "T," "T," "b," "b," "t"
- **Line 2:** "f," "f"
- **Line 3:** "mm"
- **Line 4:** "f," "m," "f," "f," "mm"
- **Line 5:** "d," "d"
- **Line 6:** "n," "n"
- **Line 7:** "wh," "w"
- **Line 8:** "d," "d"
- **Line 9:** "wh," "wh," "t," "t"

- **Line 10:** "t," "w," "t," "w," "t"
- **Line 11:** "n," "t," "b," "n," "t," "b," "t"
- **Line 12:** "d," "d," "d," "d," "d"
- **Line 13:** "n"
- **Line 14:** "n," "n"
- **Line 15:** "n," "d," "r," "d," "r"
- **Line 16:** "D," "d," "d"
- **Line 17:** "Wh," "n," "s," "r," "s," "r," "w," "w," "n," "s," "r," "s"
- **Line 18:** "nd," "w," "r," "n," "w," "r," "s"
- **Line 19:** "D," "d," "s," "m," "s"
- **Line 20:** "D," "d," "h," "wh," "m," "d," "th," "m," "m," "th"
- **Line 21:** "T," "T," "b," "b," "t"
- **Line 22:** "f," "f"
- **Line 23:** "mm"
- **Line 24:** "f," "m," "f," "f," "mm"

## EPIZEUXIS

[Epizeuxis](#) occurs twice in "The Tyger," and the instances are identical to one another. They appear in line 1 and line 21. Both lines repeat the word "tyger" immediately after it first appears. Though this repetition helps with the metrical regularity of the poem, meter is not likely the primary reason for the words' immediate repetition. Instead, the two "tygers" seem to intensify the tiger's presence as the heart of the poem, the center around which all of the speaker's questions revolve. There is also an intensity to the repetition that ties in with the intensity of the creative effort imagined in stanzas 2, 3, and 4.

Repeating the word "tyger" also works with the poem's use of [apostrophe](#) to enhance the sense that the tiger is everywhere in the poem—and in the world more broadly. In other words, the epizeuxis is a way of reminding the reader that the "fearful" side of God's creation can't be avoided, no matter how frightening or confusing it may be. The speaker subtly suggests that humans should face things like the tiger directly, with the goal of better understanding and appreciating *all* the complexities of life—not just the pleasant parts.

### Where Epizeuxis appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Tyger Tyger"
- **Line 21:** "Tyger Tyger"

## END-STOPPED LINE

"The Tyger" is a heavily [end-stopped](#) poem. Especially when contrasted with its sister poem, "[The Lamb](#)," in which a number of lines are [enjambéd](#), the effect is to make the poem feel somewhat uncertain of itself. Indeed, "The Tyger" is about the expression of doubt and mystery, as the narrator considers whether it's possible that the same God created both the lamb and the tiger. In order to better express this doubt, the poem consists entirely of questions—and the end-stops (which

mostly use question marks) make the poem feel like a kind of interview in which the interviewee is not present. Even when the punctuation at the end of the line *isn't* a question mark, the lines are still questions.

The consistent end-stops mean that the poem is never allowed much space to grow or expand. That is, the end-stops prevent the poem from becoming flowingly beautiful (even though Blake completed many revisions of this poem and could certainly have made it more beautiful if he chose to). Just as much of the poem tries to imagine the kind of intense pressure under which such a beast as the tiger might be created, the constant stop-start rhythm of the end-stops makes the poem itself feel like it is under similarly intense pressure. Indeed, this sense of grueling effort may make a wider point about creativity more generally—that the best works come from a willingness to push through frequent obstacles.

Do note that we shouldn't rely solely on punctuation to mark end-stop and enjambment, since this doesn't always reflect the actual content or grammatical feel of the line (and, even more practically, is sometimes tweaked by editors after the poem's original publication). In this poem, a couple of the lines' questions overflow from one line to the next, creating at least a single moment of enjambment in each stanza. The effect of these enjambments is not felt nearly as strongly as the consistent, question-based end-stops, however.

### Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "night;"
- **Line 4:** "symmetry?"
- **Line 6:** "eyes?"
- **Line 7:** "aspire?"
- **Line 8:** "fire?"
- **Line 10:** "heart?"
- **Line 12:** "feet?"
- **Line 13:** "chain,"
- **Line 14:** "brain?"
- **Line 16:** "clasp!"
- **Line 18:** "tears:"
- **Line 19:** "see?"
- **Line 20:** "thee?"
- **Line 22:** "night:"
- **Line 24:** "symmetry?"

## RHETORICAL QUESTION

"The Tyger" is full of [rhetorical questions](#). In fact, the poem's twenty-four lines contain no fewer than fourteen rhetorical questions. This is particularly significant because the poem could have been easily formulated as a series of statements, or as a mixture of statements and questions, rather than *entirely* questions. For example, lines 3 and 4 could read: "I wonder what immortal hand or eye / could frame thy fearful symmetry."

But though they're not crucial to the poem's literal meaning, the rhetorical questions bring the speaker's inquisitiveness and doubtful to life. The bombardment of questions makes the poem feel far more urgent than it might otherwise, doubling down on the inherent mystery of a world that contains such seemingly contradictory beings as lambs and tigers. The relentless questioning seems to create a kind of echo, each question answered only by a further question—never by the voice of the tiger (or the creator) to whom the questions are posed.

However, the point isn't necessarily that these questions are unanswerable. Instead, the poem seems to suggest that the answers are contained within the world itself, but that they may lie beyond the reaches of human understanding. Indeed, the poem ends on a question, leaving its core concerns appropriately unresolved.

#### Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- Line 3
- Line 4
- Line 5
- Line 6
- Line 7
- Line 8
- Lines 9-12
- Lines 13-16
- Lines 19-20
- Lines 23-24

## PERSONIFICATION

There are two key instances of [personification](#) in "The Tyger." First, though, it's worth noting that, though the speaker addresses it directly, the tiger is not really personified because the poem never implies that the fearsome creature is actually capable of replying (in a way other than simply existing).

The main personification throughout is of the tiger's creator itself: God. The creator is referred to as "he" throughout, which ties in with the generally paternalistic (father-like) presentation of God within the Christian tradition. This personification also helps evoke a sense of the physical effort involved in the tiger's creation, by allowing the speaker to equate the creator's efforts with those of a human being—whether through the intense physicality of stanza three or the industrial symbolism of stanza four. Finally, this personification contributes to the sense of the creator as a skilled and daring artisan, a singular talent capable of creating such an incredible being as the tiger (and the lamb).

The other personification is in line 17, when the stars are said to relinquish their weapons and to cry tears that water heaven. This is one of the poem's most famously ambiguous lines, but it may relate to the battle between some of God's angels and God himself, which resulted in Satan being banished from heaven.

Here, the personification creates a sense of heightened, almost theatrical drama that feeds the tense and threatening atmosphere surrounding the tiger's existence.

#### Where Personification appears in the poem:

- Line 3
- Line 4
- Line 8
- Line 9
- Line 12
- Lines 13-16
- Lines 17-18
- Lines 19-20
- Lines 23-24

## PARADOX

[Paradox](#) is a central component of "The Tyger." Essentially, it stems from the speaker's difficulty reconciling the tiger and all it seems to represent with the idea of an all-powerful, loving God. The speaker wonders if the tiger—and its deadly powers—must have been created by some other being. But that would diminish God's power, and therefore God *must* have made the tiger. Or, perhaps, something that God made in turn created the tiger. Either way, the source of creation is the same, and the speaker is forced to accept that somehow, God has allowed "fearful" beings like the tiger to exist. This paradox then suggests that there are limits to human understanding, and that people shouldn't expect to understand everything about the way God and his creation operate—instead, they should respect and worship God's work, including the tiger.

The paradox is stated most clearly in line 20, when the speaker wonders whether the same creator that made the lamb could also have made the tiger. The lamb's existence makes intuitive sense with the idea of a benevolent, fatherly creator: it is vulnerable, receptive to love, and wants to live joyfully without harming other creatures. The tiger, however, is independent, fearsome, and an expert killer. The speaker sees the existence of these two creatures as inherently paradoxical and contradictory.

#### Where Paradox appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?"
- **Line 20:** "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?"
- **Lines 23-24:** "What immortal hand or eye, / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?"

## REFRAIN

There is one [refrain](#) in "The Tyger." The final stanza is an almost exact replica of the first. This means that the poem is literally framed by the root question from which all the poem's other

questions stem: What kind of God would create the tiger—and, by extension, fear and evil more generally?

The use of refrain creates a symmetry to the poem which is integral to its discussion of the tiger's creation. The tiger is, in a sense, the product of artistry, skill, and imagination. Its aesthetic beauty—its symmetry—reflects this careful design, and the poem's own use of symmetry brings its perfect form to life. Symmetry was an important concept to Blake, and he often used it to represent the deep logic of God's creation. Indeed, "[The Lamb](#)," which is the sister poem of "The Tyger," also follows a somewhat symmetrical structure.

Additionally, the refrain allows for one subtle but key difference between the poem's start and its end. In the final stanza, it is no longer about who "could" create the tiger, but rather about who would "dare" to do so. The refrain thus allows the poem to move from the question of who has the *ability* to create something so fearsome to who has the *bravery* to do so. This change highlights the crucial importance of bravery to creative work—whether that work is God's or humanity's.

#### Where Refrain appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-4:** "Tyger Tyger, burning bright, / In the forests of the night; / What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?"
- **Lines 21-24:** "Tyger Tyger burning bright, / In the forests of the night: / What immortal hand or eye, / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?"

devices that might be found or made in the kind of industrial environment that the stanza describes.

**Thee** (Line 20) - An archaic form of "you."



## FORM, METER, & RHYME

### FORM

"The Tyger" consists of six [quatrains](#). The first and last quatrains are almost identical, with subtle differences in their punctuation and the change of the word "could" to "dare." This is important because the four stanzas in between characterize the creator that made the tiger as being daring—that is, the tiger is a fearsome creature and its creator must have been brave to make it. Assuming the creator to be God, the one-word change between the first and last stanzas speaks to the fact that God was not just *able* to make the tiger, but *willing*. In other words, the speaker of the poem sees God as *wanting* to introduce fear and danger into the world—and the motivation for that desire is one of the poem's central mysteries.

The similarity between the first and final stanzas also gives the poem its own "symmetry," showcasing the kind of artistry and skill that the poem itself discusses as key parts of the act of creation. The form of the poem is itself "framed" symmetrically, just like the tiger.

The other important aspect of the form to consider is that the poem consists entirely of questions. This choice speaks to the fact that the poem has doubt and mystery at its heart. These are questions to which there are no clear available answers, but to the speaker, they nonetheless seem to confirm God's power.

### METER

"The Tyger" has a strong sense of meter throughout, which is part of the reason it is one of the most widely memorized poems in the English language.

But although the meter *sounds* simple, it is technically quite complex. It *feels* [trochaic](#), but it doesn't quite fit a trochaic scheme because none of the lines finishes with an unstressed syllable. If the first line were truly trochaic, for example, it would need another syllable:

Tyger | Tyger, | burning | brightly

This would be a line of pure trochaic [tetrameter](#), but the real line has what is called a [catalectic](#) final foot. This just means that it is missing an unstressed syllable at the end of the line. This trochaic catalectic meter—found in every line but lines 4, 10, 11, 18, and 24—creates a sense of pressure throughout the poem, as if the meter is reflecting the intense, fiery conditions under which the speaker imagines the tiger was created.

There are times, however, where the meter is more [iambic](#) than



## VOCABULARY

**Thy** (Line 4, Line 10, Line 11, Line 14, Line 24) - Thy is an archaic form of "your."

**Symmetry** (Line 4, Line 24) - Symmetry refers to harmonious proportions, gesturing towards the tiger's aesthetic beauty and the pattern of its stripes.

**Deeps** (Line 5) - This is another word for "depths," possibly relating to hell and/or the oceans.

**Thine** (Line 6) - An archaic form of "your."

**Aspire** (Line 7) - This means to rise high, rather than to hope.

**Art** (Line 9) - This relates more to skill and craftsmanship than fine arts such as painting or drawing, but both meanings are present.

**Sinews** (Line 10) - A sinew is a tough piece of tissue that connects muscle to bone. It also means "power."

**Anvil** (Line 15) - An anvil is a tool in metalwork. It is a flat block of metal on top of which something else can be struck.

**Clasp** (Line 16) - The literal meaning here is the same as the previous end-word, to "grasp." But clasps are also small metal

trochaic. Lines 4, 10, 11, 18 and 24 fit an iambic scheme. The poem *could* be characterized, then, as iambic tetrameter with a number of catalectic first feet. The iambic meter that appears in line 11 is an interesting variation, with the regularity of the stresses making the line sound like the beating heart it describes:

And when | thy heart | began | to beat,

The important thing, though, is how the meter makes the poem feel and how it affects the reader's experience—not pinning it down in technical terminology. Throughout, the meter feels propulsive and engaging, and it helps draw the reader into the speaker's vivid imagery and moral argument.

## RHYME SCHEME

"The Tyger" is written in rhyming [couplets](#) throughout, using the form:

AABB

Each stanza has its own pair of rhymes following that same scheme. This steady rhyme pattern gives the poem a sense of forward propulsion—anything else would probably make the poem feel too disrupted, given that it already consists of abrupt [rhetorical questions](#). The couplets also make the poem highly memorable, perhaps explaining why it occupies such a prominent position in English literature.

The couplet format is also important because it creates symmetry, an idea that is important to Blake throughout his poetry and that he often relates to God's intelligent design for the world. That is, the heavily patterned lines of the poem reflect the poem's argument that there is a God and that this God has a plan—even if that plan isn't completely comprehensible to humans.



## SPEAKER

The speaker in the poem is unspecified and is never uses the first person. The anonymous speaker is clearly in awe of both the tiger *and* the incredible powers of whatever creator made such a fearsome creature. Accordingly, the speaker is restless and doubtful, probing into the mysteries of the universe through a relentless series of [rhetorical questions](#). The speaker is both intimidated and amazed to think about the "dread" and "daringness" of whoever it was that made the tiger. The speaker's key question is whether the same creator that made the tiger could be the one that made the lamb as well, since the lamb is a creature almost entirely opposite to the tiger.

Because the speaker is anonymous and expresses such universal concerns, it seems almost as though the speaker could stand in for humanity as a whole. After all, most people do wonder about the same kinds of existential questions that the

speaker brings up, and so the speaker could even be interpreted as humankind rather than a single individual.



## SETTING

The setting of the poem is unspecified. In part, the poem's opening situates the reader in the tiger's natural habitat—the dark murky forest or jungle. In that sense, the poem opens with a vague sense of threat and danger, as though the reader has wandered into a setting in which they are suddenly prey rather than predator.

But then, the rest of the poem takes the reader on a journey through worlds that seem to be both abstract and concrete. The second stanza tries to imagine *where* the tiger was created, while the third tries to imagine the physical form of its creator. The fourth stanza is more like an industrial workshop, with loud [assonance](#) helping to create a sonic atmosphere that implies heat and pressure.

The fifth stanza seems to be more mythical, wondering about the heavens themselves and perhaps relating to the war between God and some of his angels that is described in John Milton's [Paradise Lost](#). The final stanza returns to the setting of the first, underlining that the poem's core questions can never truly be answered (at least in ways that human beings can comprehend).

As the poem consists entirely of questions that strike at the heart of the meaning and nature of existence, the overall setting is also the speaker's mind—and perhaps, by extension, the mind of any human who wonders about similar questions.



## CONTEXT

### LITERARY CONTEXT

"The Tyger" was published as part of the *Experience* section of William Blake's best-known work, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (first published in 1794, though *Innocence* was published individually a few years prior). This book of poems is essentially a didactic work of moralizing through poetry, though Blake resists oversimplifying difficult situations. Innocence and experience relate closely to the Biblical ideas of the Garden of Eden and the Fall, and Blake's work is generally full of such opposites: childhood vs. adulthood, life vs. death, freedom vs. imprisonment. In the same way, "The Tyger" is intended as a companion poem to "[The Lamb](#)," which appears in the *Innocence* section of the book. The contrast between the two is important: whereas the child speaker of "The Lamb" sees evidence of a loving God everywhere, the speaker of "The Tyger" wonders about all the fear and mystery that life actually brings. In other words, it adds experience to innocence. While this poem still seems to be an argument in favor of God's existence and his

plan for the universe, it makes this case with much less certainty than its companion poem.

A key poetic influence on Blake was John Milton, whose [Paradise Lost](#) and [Paradise Regained](#) also creatively examined humankind's relationship to God. Indeed, the possibility that a creature with "wings" created the tiger (line 7) is possibly a reference to the war between God and Satan as outlined in Milton's epic poem. Blake was also a wide reader of religious scholarship, which undoubtedly played a formative role in his poetry. For example, the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish Lutheran theologian, can be seen in the way Blake consistently depicts the fundamental spirituality of humanity.

Blake was not well-known as a poet in his time, and many of his contemporaries considered him to be a madman. He worked primarily as a painter, printmaker, and engraver, and he felt that his poetry was misunderstood in his era. He did not enjoy the success of some of the other poets associated with the same time period, such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge. This sense of isolation gives Blake's poetry a radical and prophetic quality; his poems often seem like small acts of rebellion against the status quo of the day. Also important to his work is the idea of the visionary—there are many accounts of Blake witnessing angels or other spiritual ephemera, and this plays into the prophetic quality of his writing. Indeed, the speaker here seems to have a visionary ability to see through space and time into the moment of the tiger's creation—though the speaker is still unable to comprehend the full meaning of this moment.

Blake is often grouped together with the Romantic poets, and his work does share certain common ground with the Romantic ideals that dominated the late 17th and early 18th centuries. These ideals include the importance of childhood, the imagination, and the power of nature. However, his life and writings are distinct enough that it may make more sense to regard him as a singular entity in English literature, rather than as a solely Romantic poet.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Blake was a deeply religious man, but he was highly critical of the Church of England, and of organized religion more generally. He was born to a family of Dissenters, a group of English Protestants who broke away from and rebelled against the Church of England. Questioning the religious status quo was therefore instilled in Blake from a very young age. He saw top-down religious structures as restrictions on individual liberties, and as obstacles to the direct relationship between humankind and God. Blake's rebellious streak owed something to the American and French revolutions, which gave thinkers opportunities to dream of better forms of society. Indeed, rebellion is hinted at throughout the poem, both in the danger and violence that the tiger represents and in lines 17 and 18, which seem to relate to some kind of heavenly battle (perhaps

between God and Satan).

Blake was also writing during the accelerating Industrial Revolution, and he saw its economic, social, and environmental changes as threats to humankind. For Blake, the factories of the Industrial Revolution represented a form of physical and mental enslavement—the "mind-forg'd manacles" mentioned in his poem "[London](#)." "The Tyger" touches on the frightening nature of industry in stanza four, where the speaker describes the loud, fiery metalwork shop that may have created the tiger. Indeed, if the tiger is taken to represent evil, the poem may even be implying that evil comes from industry.

As for tigers, they were certainly not a common sight in 18th century London. But Blake would have seen illustrations of tigers and, most likely, have seen live tigers in traveling shows. Most people find the illustration that often accompanies this poem quite comical, in that it doesn't seem particularly fearsome, but if it was based on a traveling menagerie, it's quite possible that what Blake saw was actually a tiger cub.



## MORE RESOURCES

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [Blake's Visions](#) — An excerpt from a documentary in which writer Iain Sinclair discusses Blake's religious visions. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8hcQ\\_jPIZA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8hcQ_jPIZA))
- [A Reading by Ian Richardson](#) — A chillingly beautiful rendition of the poem by actor Ian Richardson. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4sz2ICKg-U>)
- [Illustrations and Other Poems](#) — A resource from the Tate organization, which holds a large collection of Blake originals. (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-blake-39/blakes-songs-innocence-experience>)
- [Full Text of Songs of Innocence and Experience](#) — Various formats for the full text in which "The Tyger" is collected. (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1934/1934-h/1934-h.htm>)
- [Illustration and Discussion](#) — A resource from the British Library that shows Blake's illustrations for the poem and discusses it in depth. (<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-the-tyger>)
- [Blake's Radicalism](#) — An excerpt from a documentary in which writer Iain Sinclair discusses Blake's radicalism. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fI0yBrI24XM&t=1s>)

### LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM BLAKE POEMS

- [A Poison Tree](#)
- [London](#)
- [The Chimney Sweeper \(Songs of Experience\)](#)
- [The Chimney Sweeper \(Songs of Innocence\)](#)
- [The Garden of Love](#)

- [The Lamb](#)



## HOW TO CITE

### MLA

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### CHICAGO MANUAL

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