

William Blake's the tyger: Blake's conception of God and creation



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Blake's "The Tyger" begins with the speaker asking a tiger what kind of divine being could have created it: "What immortal hand or eye / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" There is an air of questioning throughout the poem. Each subsequent stanza contains more questions, all of which refine this first, fundamental question. From what part of the universe could the tiger's fiery eyes have come? What sort of craftsmanship would have been required to "twist the sinews" of the tiger's heart? The speaker wonders how, once that heart "began to beat," its creator had the courage to continue. With the image of a blacksmith, the speaker thinks of the "anvil" and the "furnace" that creation would have required. Finally, the speaker wonders how the creator felt upon the tiger's completion. The question at hand is this: what is the underlying meaning of the poem in relation to creation and to God? Firstly, the poem is comprised of six quatrains in rhymed couplets. The meter is rhythmic and regular, and its repetitive hammering is suggestive of the blacksmith's labors while creating the tiger that stands as the poem's central image. The alliteration of the hard consonant sounds also captures the reader's attention, as the "Tyger, Tyger", "burning bright" and hard "d" sounds throughout the poem focus the readers on the substantive matter of the poetry, which suggests a harsh underlying interpretation of the truth about creation. The simplicity and neatness of the poem's regular form perfectly suit its uniform structure, in which all the questions contribute to the articulation of a single central idea. The opening question develops the drama of the poem, and each subsequent stanza elaborates: Blake builds on the conventional idea that nature, like art, must in some way contain a reflection of its creator. The tiger is naturally beautiful and simultaneously horrific in its violent

<https://assignbuster.com/william-blakes-the-tyger-blakes-conception-of-god-and-creation/>

inclinations. What kind of a God or Creator could or would design such a “contradictory” beast? In more general terms, what does the undeniable existence of evil and violence in the world tell us about the nature of God, and what does it mean when a living creature can at once contain both beauty and horror? This is perhaps the key to understanding the poem fully: that it is an exploration of the age-old and common philosophical “problem of evil”. The tiger initially appears as an exciting and sensuous image, but as the poem progresses it takes on a symbolic character, embodying the spiritual and moral problem which the poem explores: beautiful yet destructive, the tiger becomes the symbol for an investigation into the presence of evil in the world. Since the tiger exists both in “physical” and “moral” terms, the speaker’s questions about its origins must also encompass both those physical and moral dimensions. The poem’s questions repeatedly ask what sort of physical creative being could create that “fearful symmetry” of a tiger; presumably only a very strong, powerful being could be capable of such a beautiful yet terrible creation. There appears superficially to be a key theme of fire in the poem. “The Tyger” is “burning bright” – a first and obvious reference to fire that is a constant recurring theme in the poem. “Burnt the fire of thine eyes” suggests the image of fire once again. Perhaps that can be regarded as an interesting reference to Heaven and Hell and a continuation of the doubts raised regarding the creation of such a beast from the question posed in the first stanza. More than simple speculation, the fire is needed for the poem in order to suggest a forging of the tiger, with all its concomitant imagery. The “forging” of the tiger suggests a physical, laborious and deliberate kind of creation; it emphasizes the awesome physical build and nature of the tiger, and <https://assignbuster.com/william-blakes-the-tyger-blakes-conception-of-god-and-creation/>

therefore precludes the idea that such a creation could have been accidentally or haphazardly produced. Clearly Blake was not a supporter of evolutionary theory, as his idea smacks of creationism and intelligent design. The forging of the creature comes with the imagery of fire, with its own simultaneous connotations of creation in fire, purification with fire, and destruction due to fire. The speaker stands in awe of the tiger as a physical and aesthetic achievement, as he also recoils in possible horror from the moral implications of such a creation; the poem addresses the moral question of who could make such a creature. In the third stanza, one observes the parallelism of "shoulder" and "art" as well as the fact that it is not just the body but also the metaphorical and literal "heart" of the tiger that is being forged, suggesting that the creator was indeed responsible for the tiger's vicious and terrible nature. The repeated word "dare" to replace the "could" of the first stanza introduces an important element of aspiration, willingness and wilfulness into the creative act. An alternative view may also be suggested. "What the hand, dare seize the fire" suggests a shift in the poem from a willful God who created an awesome yet fear-inducing creature - thus the shift to the courage of creation is another possible interpretation. In other words, God is courageous for having created the tiger. The creation metaphor completes its passage because all the elements of creation in the forge have been contemplated: the "furnace", the tools, the hammer, the chain and the "anvil" all reflect and augment the physical strength and courage of the smith. In the line "Dare its deadly terrors clasp", the word "dare" reappears, and perhaps the idea of a courageous, rather than simply a capable, Creator is developed. Perhaps there is further depth than simply the creation of evil by God as Creator. Indeed, the poem reaches the heart of the <https://assignbuster.com/william-blakes-the-tyger-blakes-conception-of-god-and-creation/>

most troubling issue for theologians and philosophers alike. How can a benevolent God allow, for example, the death of an innocent child through famine or malnutrition or war? Clearly the idea of the "problem of evil" is central to the poem, no matter the interpretation of the lines. The change in the poem from simply a capable creator to a brave creator possibly suggests that Blake saw a necessity for balance in the world. In addition, the reference to the lamb in the second-to-last stanza reminds the reader that both the tiger and the lamb were created by the very same God, and raises questions about the implications of this "fact". "The Tyger" consists entirely of unanswered questions, unlike "The Lamb", where the answers are clear and rather dogmatic-sounding, and the speaker leaves us here to stare at the complexity of creation, the magnitude of God's power, and the inscrutability of His will. This poem involves an acknowledgment of what is unexplainable in the universe, presenting evil as something that cannot be denied. The open awe of "The Tyger" contrasts with the easy confidence and facile answers in "The Lamb", of a child's innocent faith in a benevolent and omnipotent Creator. In conclusion, there can be no easy answers when reading this poem. It is easy to imagine that Blake was thinking of the "problem of evil" and the apparent contradiction of a God who can create both beauty and horror in one creature, but this poem is far more complex philosophically, beyond words in its recognition of contradictions.

Bibliography Blake, William, David Erdman and Harold Bloom. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. California: University of California Press 1982.