

## [PAPER –I\ UNIT –II]

**The Tiger**" is a poem by the English poet [William Blake](#), published in 1794 as part of his [Songs of Experience](#) collection and rising to prominence in the [romantic period](#). The poem is one of the most anthologised in the [English literary canon](#),<sup>[1]</sup> and has been the subject of both literary criticism and many adaptations, including various musical versions.<sup>[2]</sup> The poem explores and questions [Christian religious paradigms](#) prevalent in late 18th century and early 19th century England, discussing God's intention and motivation for creating both [the "Lamb"](#) and the eponymous "Tyger."<sup>[3]</sup>

### ***The Songs of Experience***

The *Songs of Experience* was published in 1794 as a follow-up to Blake's 1789 [Songs of Innocence](#).<sup>[4]</sup> The two books were published together under the merged title *Songs of Innocence and of Experience, showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul: the author and printer, W. Blake*<sup>[4]</sup> featuring 54 illustrated plates. In some copies, plates are arranged differently and a number of poems are moved from *Songs of Innocence* to *Songs of Experience*. Blake printed the work throughout his life.<sup>[5]</sup> Of the copies of the original collection, only 28 published during his life are known to exist, with an additional 16 published posthumously.<sup>[6]</sup> Only five of the poems from *Songs of Experience* appeared individually before 1839.<sup>[7]</sup>

### **Poem**

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?<sup>[8][9]</sup>

## Structure

"The Tyger" is six [stanzas](#) in length with each stanza containing four lines. The meter of the poem is largely [trochaic tetrameter](#). A number of lines, such as line four in the first stanza, fall into [iambic tetrameter](#).<sup>[10]</sup>

The poem is structured around questions that the speaker poses concerning the "Tyger," including the phrase "Who made thee?" These questions often repeat instances of [alliteration](#) ("frame" and "fearful") and [imagery](#) (burning, fire, eyes) to frame the arc of the poem.

The first stanza opens the poem with a central line of questioning, stating "What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?". This direct address to the creature serves as a foundation for the poem's contemplative style as the "Tyger" cannot provide the speaker with a satisfactory answer. The second stanza questions the "Tyger" about where it was created, while the third stanza sees the focus move from the "Tyger" to its creator.<sup>[11]</sup> The fourth stanza questions what tools were used in the "Tyger's" creation. In the fifth stanza, the speaker wonders how the creator reacted to its "Tyger" and questions the identity of the creator themselves. Finally, the sixth stanza is identical to the poem's first stanza but rephrases the last line, altering its meaning: rather than question who or what "could" create the "Tyger", the speaker wonders who would "dare," effectively modifying the tone of the stanza to present as more of a confrontation than a query.

## Themes and critical analysis

"The Tyger" is the sister poem to "[The Lamb](#)" (from "[Songs of Innocence](#)"), a reflection of similar ideas from a different perspective. In "The Tyger", there is a duality between beauty and ferocity, through which Blake suggests that understanding one requires an understanding of the other.

"The Tyger," as a work within the "[Songs of Experience](#)," was written as antithetical to its counterpart from the "[Songs of Innocence](#)" ("[The Lamb](#)") – a recurring theme in Blake's philosophy and work. Blake argues that humankind's struggles have their origin in the contrasting nature of concepts. His poetry argues that truth lies in comprehending the contradictions between innocence and experience. To Blake, experience is not the face of evil, but rather a natural component of existence. Rather than believing in war between good and evil or heaven and hell, Blake believed that each man must first see

and then resolve the contraries of existence and life.<sup>[11]</sup> Therefore, the questions posed by the speaker within "The Tyger" are intentionally rhetorical; they are meant to be answered individually by readers instead of brought to a general consensus.<sup>[12]</sup>

Colin Pedley and others have argued that Blake may have been influenced in selecting the animal by the death of a son of [Sir Hector Munro](#) by a tiger in December 1792.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Musical versions

Blake's original tunes for his poems have been lost in time, but many artists have tried to create their own versions of the tunes.<sup>[14]</sup>

- [Rebecca Clarke](#) – "The Tiger" (1929–33)
- [Benjamin Britten](#), in his [song cycle \*Songs and Proverbs of William Blake\*](#) (1965)
- [Marianne Faithfull](#), in her song "Eye Communication" (1981) from the [Dangerous Acquaintances](#) album.
- [Howard Frazin](#), in his song "The Tiger" for soprano and piano (2008), later expanded into an overture for orchestra, "In the Forests of the Night" (2009) commissioned by the [Boston Classical Orchestra](#).<sup>[15]</sup>
- [Duran Duran](#) – "Tiger Tiger" (1983)
- [Greg Brown](#), on the album [Songs of Innocence and of Experience](#) (1986)
- [John Tavener](#) – "The Tyger" (1987)<sup>[16]</sup>
- [Tangerine Dream](#) – the album [Tyger](#) (1987)
- [Jah Wobble](#) – "Tyger Tyger" (1996)
- [Lauren Bernofsky](#) – "The Tiger" (2002)
- [Kenneth Fuchs](#) – *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Four Poems by William Blake for Baritone, Flute, Oboe, Cello, and Harp* (completed 2006)
- [Herbst in Peking](#) – "The Tyger and The Fly" (2014)
- [Qntal](#) – "Tyger" (2014)
- [Mephisto Walz](#) – "The Tyger"

[Bob Dylan](#) refers to Blake's poem in "[Roll on John](#)" (2012).<sup>[17]</sup>

[Five Iron Frenzy](#) uses two lines of the poem in "Every New Day" on [Our Newest Album Ever!](#) (1997).

[Joni Mitchell](#) uses two lines in her song about the music industry, the title track of her 1998 album [Taming the Tiger](#).<sup>[18]</sup>