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A Critical Study of the poem, "The Tyger"

Included in *Songs of Experience*, "The Tyger" is the most impressive and most striking of Blake's poem. At simplest reading the poem is contemplation of the fact that, besides peacefulness and gentleness, the world includes fierce strength terrifying in its possibilities of destructiveness but also impressive and admirable, a stupendous part of creation, and seemingly a challenge to the idea of a benign Creator. The poem has a supreme human importance. It focuses sharply on psychological conflict in individual minds and of unending philosophical discussion. Standing at the heart of the *Experience*, 'tiger' symbolizes the dreadful forces in the world just as 'lamb' symbolized gentleness, vulnerability and innocence in the circle of *Innocence*. In combining tones of terror and awe at a being that could create the tiger as well as the lamb, the poet here in this poem "celebrates the divinity and beauty of the creation and its transcendence of human good and evil without relinquishing the Keatsian awareness that 'the miseries of the world Are misery'".

Blake's spelling of the *Tyger* is worth noting 'for it seems to emphasize the symbolic quality of the animal'. In the opening stanza, we are told by the speaker that the tiger is not just any animal, but one that is "burning bright". This image draws our attention to the majestic creature as a reference to the intense power. The tiger is known for its bright and fiery fur that adds to its majesty. A lonesome creature, it walks "in the forest of the night" fearlessly. To some, the forest is 'the world of Experience, where the many sterile errors (dead trees) conceal the path and dim the light'. The speaker is awestruck by its beauty, its immense strength immediately wondering in awe again:

What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

This question becomes the central concern of the entire poem: the creator and his creation. Invoking the hand and eye in these lines also make the idea of the hand and sight of the creator involved in the creation of such a majestic creature like the tiger. "Fearful symmetry" is another interesting image. Art is generally characterized by aesthetic beauty owing to its symmetry. By drawing attention to a fearful symmetry, the speaker emphasizes how its beauty is combined with its ability to wreak havoc as a

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predator on its prey. The sublime nature of the Tiger – its appearance of beauty and fear – is at once characteristic of this creation.

The second stanza asks the question of where the tiger was created. The following stanza exhibits the powerful creature that the tiger is; this is done by invoking powerful images of fire. The speaker wonders in which space of depth the fire in the tiger's eyes was conceived. The lines "In what distant deeps or skies/Burnt the fire of thine eyes?" bring to our mind the space of a blacksmith, moulding and shaping the creation in the midst of fire and heavy tools. Obviously for Blake, a creature like the tiger was not created in this world, but in both hell as well as heaven respectively. One of the conventional readings of the tiger has been that it symbolizes Lucifer, the fallen angel. This is also emphasized by the reference to the wings in the line:

"On what wings dare he aspire?"

The recurrent invocation of fire-images emphasizes how Blake is drawing a picture of Hell, invoked also by the image "forests of the night". Harold Blooms remarks: "Like Lucifer, the tiger works alone and inspires thoughts of death; it also is strong and beautiful, as the Bible portrays the fallen angel". One of the fundamental questions that seizes Blake's imagination is not just the creation, but also the sublimity of its creator.

By beginning to wonder about the creator, the speaker now asks if the tiger of such brute force has been created, what about the strength of the creator himself? This is evident in the lines,

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

We are then taken to the workplace of a blacksmith hard at his art work. In this stanza the questions are much shorter and gain more pace. More number of questions begins to be asked. The speaker turns to the creation again and wonders what would happen to the ones held by the tiger's deadly clasp.

The brute strength of the tiger is so immense that the speaker observes how even the stars give up their move to dominate the skies. The 'stars' are the rebel angels and the

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tiger is related with Satan. The speaker then wonders what the creator Himself must have thought about this creation:

Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?"

Both lamb and tiger are visibly the parts of God's creation. God created the tiger, the aggressor and the lamb, the prey. The co-existence of fierceness represented by the tiger and the gentleness represented by the lamb is a mystery, a mystery of contrariness. The fierce strength terrifying in its possibilities of destructiveness is seemingly an open challenge to the idea of a benign Creator. But the last line unravels the mystery of creation associated with the concept of tiger. There is equal space for the meek as well as the mighty in god's creation. Harmony is the key to survival.

It is pertinent to recall what Prof C. D. Narasimhaiah stated about the tiger and this poem of Blake. He strongly felt that the Tiger is an 'udhbhava murthy'[that which sprang to life] than an 'uthsava murthy'[idols taken in procession during temple rituals]. Hence, the abiding charm of the poem which pulsates with rhyme, rhythm and vitality! In Indian context emergence of the Narasimhavrata to end menace of wicked demon Hiranyakasipu also may be mentioned, to illustrate how God manifests himself in myriad forms to establish reign of peace and dharma on earth, protecting the meek and the faithful and punishing the evil doers.

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