

As with all the poems in William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, *The Tyger* (c.1794)<sup>1</sup> is written in a style intended to evoke nursery rhymes.

Despite its apparent simplicity as a 'little' poem, *The Tyger* is particularly open to interpretation. But in combining the satanic with the industrial it is redolent of Blake's disgust with the effects of the Industrial Revolution. 'The ambiguous feelings of the piece might be seen among other things as an allegory of that revolution's internal contradictions - how it is both enslaving and emancipating, a sublime liberation of energy and a brutally dehumanising process.'<sup>2</sup>

The repetition of 'what' in the central stanzas of the poem acts as the stroke of the hammer evoked by the 'hammering trochees and spondees'<sup>3</sup> The industrial imagery is very apparent through 'hammer', 'chain', 'furnace' and 'anvil'.

The tyger itself is a malevolent, but ambiguous presence. The multiple uses of 'dread' is unmistakably ominous, whilst the repetition of 'fire' and 'burning' is redolent of both the industrial and the hellish. "'Tyger'" is God's wrath, the energy embodied in Creation, personified Evil, the baneful influence of reason and order.'<sup>4</sup>

The nursery rhyme effect of the poem is created by the four balanced beats in the majority of the lines. "'Tyger Tyger, burning bright"...conveys the idea of "symmetry" and the mood of ritual incantation.'<sup>5</sup> But Blake finds time for variation with the first instance coming, ironically, from the line 'Could frame thy fearful symmetry.' (l. 4)

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<sup>1</sup> Blake, W. *The Tyger* from Keegan, P. (ed.) *The Penguin Book of English Verse*. Second Edn. London, Penguin Classics. 2004, p.539-540.

<sup>2</sup> Eagleton, T. *How to Read a Poem*. Oxford, Blackwell. 2007, p.163.

<sup>3</sup> Ostriker, A. *Vision and Verse in William Blake*. Madison, Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin Press. 1965, p.76.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p.87.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p.88.

Any reading of the poem must take into account the clear debate with its readership. It poses thirteen questions in the space of just twenty-four lines. 'While "The Lamb" answers the questions it poses, "The Tyger" consists entirely of unanswered questions.'<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the lack of answers implies that there are none. But I would argue that the lack of answers points to Blake posing his reader the question and requiring them to find an answer.

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<sup>6</sup> Hirsch, E. D. *Innocence and Experience : An Introduction to Blake*. London, Yale University Press. 1964, p.244.