

Comparison of William Blake's 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger'

In William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience, he creates a series of poems that contrast one another such as 'The Lamb' which describes an innocent, child-like view of the world and 'The Tyger' which describes a more mature world-view. In Blake's poem 'The Lamb', he has an innocent child speaking to a lamb about God and the wondrous gift of life that the lamb has received and how the Son of God is also called a Lamb. Blake uses this innocent and joyous conversation to portray the infinite goodness of God as seen through the worshipful eyes of a child. In contrast, Blake's poem entitled 'The Tyger' is questioning why the God, who made the gentle lamb, would also make such a ferocious creature as the Tyger. The differences in William Blake's 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger' are shown by the innocent child speaker in 'The Lamb' and the more mature speaker in 'The Tyger' in which contrasting techniques are used to juxtapose the two poems: the simpler sentence structure used in 'The Lamb' and the more complicated rhetorical questions used in "The Tyger"; the ingenuous word choices in 'The Lamb' and the more sophisticated ones in 'The Tyger'; and the literal assurance of the child in 'The Lamb' that God is the Creator and the lack of an answer for a creator in 'The Tyger'. 'The Lamb' is indeed a Song of Innocence, while 'The Tyger' is a Song of Experience.

In Blake's 'The Lamb', there is simplicity in how the child speaks. The child is speaking to an actual lamb asking it in the beginning if the lamb knows how it came to be made: "Little Lamb, who made thee? / Dost thou know who made thee?" The use of the literary device called apostrophe adds to the tone that this poem is being spoken by a child since the child seems to feel no embarrassment in talking to an animal or that there is something slightly ridiculous in speaking to one either as perhaps an older person might feel. The simplistic sentence structure also utilizes repetition in the first and second couplets of each of the two stanzas which lend the poem a sense of a child's "sing-song" type of rhythm. In contrast, "The Tyger" uses the more sophisticated literary device of the rhetorical question as in the introductory lines:

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
 In the forest of the night,
 What immortal hand or eye

Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

The speaker is still using the device called apostrophe, but not in such a simplistic way as the child in 'The Lamb'. The tone is more introspective as if the speaker is speaking out-loud to himself rather than to the actual Tyger. The speaker seems to view the Tyger as something to be feared because the line "the fire of thine eyes?" indicates that the speaker would not be in too close a proximity with the animal as the child seemed to be in 'The Lamb'.

The word choices made by William Blake in 'The Lamb' lends a feeling of child-like innocence and the ones made by him in 'The Tyger' gives one the impression of a more experienced speaker. In 'The Lamb' the child tells the lamb that God gave it life, food, water and clothing, and thus providing it with all its basic needs:

Gave thee life & bid thee feed,
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;

The simplistic nature of the words "life" and "feed" by Blake give the reader an immediate feeling that the speaker is a child and not a teenager or an adult. However, in 'The Tyger' the word choices are much more complex as when the speaker asks:

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

The imagery of this stanza is one of a smith in his ford. If the second line had said, "Did someone create you from fire?", it would have sounded more naïve and the speaker would not have sounded as sophisticated as he does. The last word in the poem 'The Tyger' is "symmetry" which a child would not use at all. A child would have said "same" or perhaps "alike." There is none of the plainness of word choice in 'The Tyger' as is present in 'The Lamb', which supports the feeling of innocence in 'The Lamb' and that of experience in 'The Tyger'.

William Blake offers the lamb an answer for its existence by the child, but he offers no such assurances in 'The Tyger'. In 'The Lamb' the child very plainly tells the lamb that he (the

child) will tell the lamb who his creator is:

He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb;

The child has no doubts about who the creator is or the fact that His son resides in all living creatures – him and the lamb specifically. He trusts that this is the truth and he expects that the lamb will believe it too. There is no such assurance in the questioning in ‘The Tyger’. No explicit conclusion is drawn about the creator of the Tyger other than to ask “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?”. No answer for the question is provided at all. It is totally left in ambiguity. The speaker is old enough to realize that answers to certain theological questions are not clear, but left to an infinite number of inquiries instead. Instead of the “black and white” portrayed in ‘The Lamb’ that God is the ultimate Creator of all things, ‘The Tyger’ shows a more experienced philosophical outlook of all the “shades of grey” that adults tend to view about the idea of a creator. The speaker in ‘The Tyger’ goes on to ask “What immortal hand or eye / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?” as if to question the wondrous God that the child venerated in ‘The Lamb’.

William Blake tackles a difficult subject in ‘The Lamb’ and ‘The Tyger’ in his works the **Songs of Innocence** and the **Songs of Experience**: ‘who is God?’ He uses an innocent child in ‘The Lamb’ to state unequivocally that God is the Creator, but uses a more mature speaker in ‘The Tyger’ to question who the creator may be and why he would create evil as well as good. The ways in which he contrasts these two poems and their opposing points-of-view are done by using simple sentence structure, unpretentious word choices, and giving the child complete assurance in its belief in God in ‘The Lamb’, and by using more complicated rhetorical questions, more detailed and sophisticated word choices, and lack of concrete belief in a creator in ‘The Tyger’.

