In Praise of Creation

SUMMARY

That particular bird, that particular star, that particular sparkle in the tiger's eye all simply state their own natures, undramatically providing proof.

They provide proof of order and governance: the way the birds have a regular season for mating and a regular season for migrating, and the way the moon goes through its phases.

And the tiger, trapped in its own skin, watches the rest of the world and waits for its blood to move more quickly, for the drums of nature to start beating, until the female tiger's shadow throws a passionate darkness over him.

The world keeps on spinning, the seasons refining the earth to its essential form, and living creatures' blood pulses, past human understanding.

Then everything's quiet and the birds resting. The moon in its dark phase is waiting to be seen from earth. The seasons rest in satisfaction, and human beings below look on with their minds open.

THEMES

THE DIVINITY OF NATURE

The speaker of "In Praise of Creation" sees God's hand in the movements of the natural world. The rhythmic lives of birds, stars, and tigers are all evidence of the guiding hand of a creator. The natural order of the world, the poem argues, is a proof of something divine that goes "beyond reason," asserting the presence of God in a way that doesn't need explanation. To be at rest in this world, the poem finally suggests, is to find one's mind "ajar"—open to all that it sees and able to absorb a knowing deeper than thought.

The speaker begins by looking at individual entities—at specific sparks of creation that fit into a larger pattern. By singling out "That one bird, that one star, / The one flash of the tiger's eye," the speaker draws attention to smaller pieces of larger patterns. Each of these beings and moments, the poem implies, is simply one among many.

The beauty of these isolated creatures and moments then reminds the speaker to look outward and upward. Each of these individual beings has its unique identity, but its movements are part of a grand pattern that "testif[ies] to order, to rule"—to a plan much bigger than any one of them. And as the poem's scope widens to the behavior of birds, the night sky, and tigers, it also interlocks these entities: the sky is "full of birds," the tiger rests in darkness.

It's not only these creatures' regular patterns of life and behavior that connect them to a cosmic order, but also their interconnection with each other. Everything seems to be part of a massive, complex web in the poem, one that shows the hand of God at work.

The tiger, in particular, provides an image of the creature woven into the world: it seems to have a bit of Godlike vision in it as it "watches over creation," but also follows for the rhythmic "drums" of natural order as they spur it to mate and reproduce. Its life is a demonstration of how every individual creature is a part of God's pattern. And all of these interwoven patterns of life touch humans at a place "beyond reason"—that is, at the level of faith.

The poem then ends with "satisfied things"—all creatures, including questioning humans, at rest in the great rhythmic order of life. To be such a "satisfied thing" as a human being is to let one's mind be "ajar," open to feeling, responding to, and sensing order, rather than trying to think it all out. Faith, in this poem's view, is not to do with thought, but with luxuriating in the natural patterns people can feel around them all the time.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

That one bird, ...
... Without ceremony testify.

"In Praise of Creation" starts with some small, specific sparks of the creation it praises. The speaker begins with a list of beings that are paradoxically united by their difference:

> That one bird, one star,
> The one flash of the tiger's eye

The anaphora here, shaping each clause similarly so that each of these distinct beings is that "one", brings together all these distinct creatures under the umbrella of creation, but it also sets them apart. Everything the speaker lists is one among a zillion: think of all the birds in the world, all the stars in the sky, and all the uncountable times a tiger's eye might flash over the course of its life. And yet, here, each of these beings is singled out as unique, with its own identity.

They "[p]urely assert what they are": they speak of their own individuality simply by being. By placing the solid "bird" and

"star" next to the fleeting "flash of the tiger's eye," the speaker also suggests that all of these things aren't just things, but *moments*. Birds, stars, and tiger-eyes are all part of nature, but also of time.

Think back to the title of the poem. These introductory images are meant to be "In Praise of Creation"—and the word "creation" fits right in with this idea of creatures as solid and specific, and as moments in time. "Creation" can mean "everything in the whole world," but also "the process of making things." The speaker will be dealing with both of these kinds of creation: what's solidly here, and what's always in the process of being made.

These distinct flashes of existence, the speaker says, "testify," provide proof. But what might they testify to?

LINES 5-8

Testify to order, ...
... sometimes cut thinly.

The testimony of the bird, the star, and the tiger's eye, the speaker goes on to say, speaks "to order, to rule"—that is, not just to Creation itself, but to a *Creator* who governs the world, giving it shape and identity. And the way the creatures provide this testimony is through movement and action.

In this stanza, the speaker looks more closely at rhythms and patterns of time, beginning to unite the images of the first stanza. Here, the starry sky and the birds come together

> [...] the sky is, for a certain time, full
> Of birds [...]

The distinct individuals from the first stanza form a group, and it's their collective actions in time that suggest "order" and "rule" to the speaker. Birds' patterns of migration and the moon's phases have a rhythmic, paradoxical order: these natural *changes* are always the *same*, always happening at "a certain time."

The speaker's diacope on the word "time" brings these points home. In the beauty and harmony of these rhythms, the speaker sees the guiding, ruling hand of God.

The speaker's *own* time-keeping is somewhat less orderly than God's. The meter here is irregular, using no consistent pattern of stresses or metrical feet. But all that difference is contained within a predictable framework: each of the poem's stanzas is a quatrain, and each rhymes ABAB (though often, as here, the rhymes are slant). The poem's shape thus seems to reflect its ideas. There's a lot of variation and wildness within the regular stanza form here, just as creation contains myriad distinct creatures and moments within regular patterns.

LINES 9-13

And the tiger ...
... passion, a scent,

The speaker united the night sky and the birds in the second stanza. Here, the poem returns to the tiger whose eye flashed in the first stanza, and finds another kind of union: between the creation and its creator.

This tiger seems to have qualities of both the animal and the divine. He's "wrapped in the cage of his skin," trapped in mortal flesh. But he's also "[w]atchful over creation"—just like the God who orders the movements of birds, stars, and tigers.

This tiger thus sets up yet an image of the creator and the creation inhabiting the same space, living through the same body. There's even a sense here that the *real* tiger is something more than its body—and the question of else what might be imprisoned in "the cage of his skin."

Here, as before, the poem's shape works to surprise the reader. Take a look at what the poem does with enjambment in lines 10-11:

> Watchful over creation, rests
> For the blood to pound, the drums to begin [...]

The reader, like the tiger, is likely to expect a rest at the end of line 10. But then that enjambment comes, and it turns out that "rests" is being used here to mean something like "waits." When the reader moves to the next line, they, like the tiger, might feel startled into action again as the "drums [...] begin."

And what are those drums? Placing them next to pounding blood, the speaker seems to suggest that the "drums" are a heartbeat—and something more. Again, they're part of the rhythm of the world. They seem to be related not just to external patterns like migration or moon phases, but the internal cycles of mating and reproduction. It's the *tigress* who starts up that pounding blood in the tiger, stalking past and throwing "[a] darkness over him, a passion, a scent." The sibilant /s/ sounds in these lines evoke the whisper of her fur through the leaves as she makes her way. The irresistible patterns of creation make their own music.

LINES 14-16

The world goes ...
... beats beyond reason.

From the tiger and the tigress, the speaker zooms out wide again to see the whole world "turning, turning." That epizeuxis evokes continuity, life eternally in progress: the world is *always* turning, always in the process of motion.

Just as the tiger took on some godly qualities in the previous stanza, the season itself is personified in the process of a curious action: it "[s]ieves earth to its one sure element." This is a vivid image of *concentration*, in two senses. One can imagine the intent focus of a personified season at work with its sieve, refining and refining the earth. And that refinement is itself a

kind of concentration, a sifting-out of the "one sure element."

What element is that? This strange image might make the reader think back to the "one bird, one star" of the first line: the "one sure element" seems to be something to do with exactness, with the earth being exactly how it is and no other way.

All this motion and order and change and exactness takes the speaker "beyond reason." Creation, in both its mind-boggling specificity and its awe-inspiring rhythm, isn't something that one thinks out. Rather, it's something that one *feels* and *senses* with one's body.

Here, it's actually "the blood" that "beats beyond reason." Hear how those insistent alliterative /b/ sounds mimic a pounding heartbeat? That "blood" seems to belong not just to the tiger or the speaker, but to the world itself, with its always-beating "drums."

LINES 17-18

Then quiet and ...
... stared at here,

After all that heated energy and pounding blood, something else comes along. There's no rhythm without the silences between the beats, and here the speaker visits one of those still places between motions and actions. Here, there's "quiet and birds folding their wings" and the patient moon. The soft assonance on /oo/ and /ee/ sounds in "[t]he new moon waiting for years to be stared at here" gives the reader a sense of peace and harmony.

The moon—personified, like the "season" before it—hearkens back to its earlier appearance in line 8, where it is "sometimes cut thinly." Over the course of the poem, the moon has moved from a thin crescent to its new phase, when it's invisible from the earth. And like the tiger, it's able to wait patiently for its next stage, when it will be "stared at here."

Again, it's as if the moon has a reciprocal relationship with its creator, and with another piece of creation: humanity, which will stare up at it when it's visible again. Everything is at once distinct and connected.

The recurring images of the birds and the moon here create a vivid, atmospheric night-world, but they also fit in thematically. The birds and the moon go away and come back across the poem, just as they go away and come back in real life. Divine rhythm is thus built right into the poem's shape.

LINES 19-20

The season sinks ...
... his mind ajar.

With the birds and the moon settled and resting, the "season sinks to satisfied things." The soft sibilance here evokes quiet breath; the way the season "sinks" might be read as an exhalation, the chest falling before it rises again. In the poem's rhythms of in and out, up and down, action and rest, the whole world seems to become one big body made of many different bodies.

Where does this all leave humanity? The speaker finally comes to people in the poem's closing line: "Man with his mind ajar."

These last words suggest that to be a "satisfied thing" as a human is to be *open*. The speaker's "Praise of Creation" is to do with embracing and inhabiting the beautiful rhythms of nature—and to feel, beyond them, the presence of a guiding divine hand, the presence of God.

But this isn't the sort of thing that one can reason out with one's mind. The alliteration and consonance in the final line suggest that maybe humans find it a little difficult to keep their minds "ajar" sometimes: "man" and his "mind" feel pretty closely linked, and when that's true, one might sometimes find it hard to go "beyond reason." But the human mind, too, is part of creation. To praise creation, in this speaker's vision, is to immerse oneself in it, both as a world full of distinct and beautiful creatures and as an ongoing, rhythmic, natural process.

SYMBOLS

THE MOON AND STARS

The moon and stars, with their regular movements, have long been a symbol of time and change in literature. They certainly play that role in this poem: here, they represent the beautiful order of creation, with all its rhythms and its mysteries.

The speaker often speaks of the moon in its role as a marker of seasons and time in the poem, observing how it is "sometimes cut thinly," or, when new and invisible, "waiting to be stared at." In that "waiting," the moon is also personified—and in its personification, it perhaps acts as an image of how God's consciousness permeates the natural world, of how divinity is waiting to be seen.

The "one star" of the poem's first line also plays a symbolic role as a *guide*. That "one star" could be read as a polestar, leading the watching speaker towards the God they believe orders and shapes the universe.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "one star,"
- **Line 8:** "the moon sometimes cut thinly."
- **Line 18:** "The new moon waiting for years to be stared at here,"

THE TIGER

Tigers are an old symbol of power and passion. (The reader might glance back at William Blake's "The Tyger" for a very famous example.) The tiger here seems to represent not only those qualities, but also the way those qualities suggest the presence of God in nature.

The tigers here are creatures of pulsing blood, animal scents, and passions; the male tiger is said to wait in the darkness for the female tiger to arrive and begin the cycle of reproduction. But within these physical, beastly qualities, there's also a touch of the divine: the tiger is "watchful over creation," itself a bit like God.

Here, then, the tiger is a symbol of the divine *within* the natural, both guiding the animal and expressing *through* the animal. The tiger's ferocity, beauty, and power mirror aspects of God.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "The one flash of the tiger's eye"
- **Lines 9-13:** "And the tiger wrapped in the cage of his skin, / Watchful over creation, rests / For the blood to pound, the drums to begin, / Till the tigress' shadow casts / A darkness over him, a passion, a scent,"

BIRDS

Because they can fly, birds often appear in literature as a symbol of freedom. They're also sometimes used as images of the soul (or even the Holy Spirit, often presented as a dove). Here, that symbolism is complicated by the predictable shape of God's natural law. In this poem's view, creation is a place where *freedom* exists within (and because of) a vast, beautiful *structure*. Birds, with their regular patterns of mating and migration, thus suggest the way that every individual responds to the overarching pattern of nature; they represent that combination of freedom and order. The speaker begins the poem pointing out "[t]hat one bird," a distinct, vivid individual. Then, all through the rest of the poem, the birds appear in a group, mating, flocking, or resting according to the time of year. Every bird, like every soul, is unique; every bird, like every soul, participates in the same pattern.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "one bird"
- **Lines 6-8:** "How the birds mate at one time only, / How the sky is, for a certain time, full / Of birds,"
- **Line 17:** "birds folding their wings,"

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

The moments of alliteration in "In Praise of Creation" are evocative and atmospheric, helping the sounds of the poem's words to mirror what they describe.

There's strong alliteration in the poem's fourth stanza, where the speaker describes the eternal rhythms of nature. They've already evoked drumbeats and pounding blood in the third stanza; here, they return to that imagery with the words, "the blood beats beyond reason." That alliteration on a blunt, rounded /b/ sounds just like what it's describing: a drumming heartbeat.

The alliteration in the final stanza gets gentler. Here, the reader finds alliteration on softer sounds: whispery /s/ sounds in "the season sinks to satisfied things" (which are also sibilant—take a look at the dedicated "Sibilance" entry here for more details) and murmured /m/ sounds in the final line, "Man with his mind ajar." This last stanza deals with the rest that comes after all the energy of mating or migration, and it makes sense that its repeated sounds should be gentler.

But the alliteration here also connects "man" with his "mind," suggesting that humans might have a special place in the poem's natural landscape. "Man," unique among the animals, has a "mind" that can reflect on all it sees—a mind that needs to open up in order to read the divine in the natural world.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "Testify to," "to"
- **Line 12:** "Till," "tigress"
- **Lines 14-15:** "season / Sieves"
- **Line 16:** "blood beats beyond"
- **Line 19:** "season sinks," "satisfied"
- **Line 20:** "Man," "mind"

ALLUSION

The speaker puts a tiger at the center of their poem—and it's tough to put a tiger in one's poem without raising the ghost of an earlier Tyger. "The Tyger" by William Blake is one of the best-known poems in the world, and its ideas are so closely related to what the speaker is doing here that there's almost certainly an allusion intended.

In Blake's poem, the titular "Tyger" is a source of awe, fear, and wonder. Those feelings lead that poem's speaker to a central, repeated question: "What immortal hand or eye / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" In other words: what must the god be like, who would dare to create a being of such terrifying power and beauty?

The speaker of "In Praise of Creation" also sees God in the tiger. Their tiger is "[w]atchful over creation," just as God might

be, but also "wrapped in the cage of his skin," enclosed in a single mortal body. The tiger here thus echoes the earlier Tyger thematically. In both of these cases, the tiger is an awe-inspiring force that leads its human viewer to think of the even more awe-inspiring force that created it.

In reaching back to the earlier Tyger, the speaker here also inserts themselves into a different kind of structure: the history of poetry. They're part of a rhythm of human art-making, just as they're a part of the rhythm of nature.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "the tiger's eye"
- **Lines 9-13:** "And the tiger wrapped in the cage of his skin, / Watchful over creation, rests / For the blood to pound, the drums to begin, / Till the tigress' shadow casts / A darkness over him, a passion, a scent,"

ASSONANCE

The musicality of assonance often just makes a poem sound good. Here, that pleasant sound also fits in thematically: this is, after all, a poem about *harmony*, about the lovely rhythms of life and nature.

Some instances of assonance here are assonant because they're also using repetitive diacope and polyptoton. For instance, the second stanza repeats "time" and "sometimes," and their long /i/ vowels connect to the long /i/ of "sky." Those sounds connect the *ideas* of the sky and time, too, linking up the physical reality of the sky with the more abstract idea of nature's rhythm, and thus to the poem's ideas about how the behavior of natural things reveals a divine pattern.

There's also a lot of assonance in the speaker's description of the tiger as it waits in the shadows for the tigress to appear. Here, /uh/ sounds link "blood" and "drums," and /ah/ sounds link the "shadow" the tigress "casts" with the "passion" that she brings. These tightly-woven sounds help to evoke the similarly tight weave of the tigers' cycles of mating and reproduction.

Similar patterns of connection turn up all through the poem: the /i/ of the "tiger's eye," the round /oo/ of the "new moon," and the /ee/ sounds of "the blood beats beyond reason." All these linked sounds support the poem's feeling that all nature's creatures are linked in a divinely-guided dance.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "tiger's eye"
- **Line 3:** "Purely assert"
- **Line 6:** "time"
- **Line 7:** "sky," "time"
- **Line 8:** "sometimes"
- **Line 11:** "blood," "drums"
- **Line 12:** "shadow casts"
- **Line 13:** "passion"
- **Lines 14-15:** "season / Sieves"
- **Line 15:** "earth," "sure"
- **Line 16:** "beats beyond reason"
- **Line 18:** "new moon," "years," "here"
- **Line 19:** "sinks," "things"

ASYNDETON

The lavish asyndeton in this poem supports the back-and-forth rhythm, its push and pull of individuality and togetherness. Because asyndeton makes the individual parts of sentences feel separate from each other, it creates a feeling that each of those individual parts is important and stands alone. Here, that pattern often fits in with the *meaning* of the lines, too. For a perfect example, take a look at the first two lines of the poem:

> That one bird, one star,
> The one flash of the tiger's eye

Speaking of "one bird" and "one star" and "one flash," and refusing to connect them with conjunctions, the speaker isolates these entities and brings them together at the same time. All these unique individual pieces of nature, the poem will go on to insist, take part in a bigger pattern—but they're also very much themselves.

Asyndeton helps to create the feeling that the dance of nature is made of individual steps. For instance, in the final stanza, different parts of nature fall into place one by one, connected by proximity rather than conjunctions:

> Then quiet and birds folding their wings,
> The new moon waiting for years to be stared at here,
> The season sinks to satisfied things –

This list brings separate things together, evoking what the speaker sees as God's design: myriad individual pieces becoming part of a whole. This is also an instance of parataxis: each of the items in this list has an equal weight and importance.

Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-2
- Line 5
- Lines 6-8
- Line 11
- Line 13
- Lines 14-15
- Line 17
- Lines 18-19

REPETITION

"In Praise of Creation" sings of the divinity of natural cycles—so it makes sense that it should itself run through cycles. The repetitions here fit right in with the poem's vision of nature as a cyclical piece of divine artistry.

There are a few distinct kinds of repetition here. One of them is right up front: the anaphora of "That one bird, one star / The one flash of the tiger's eye" in the first lines of the poem. Here, anaphora works with asyndeton to suggest that all of these entities are both unique and distinct. Because of the repeating "one" at the beginning of each of the clauses, all of these different things feel like they belong to the same family, even as they stand all alone in being "[t]hat one." The repetitions here communicate the speaker's belief that everything on earth is at once very much itself and part of the same vast pattern.

A moment of epizeuxis similarly speaks to the way the speaker interprets the world. In line 14, where "[t]he world goes turning, turning," that quick repetition of "turning" suggests not just a motion, but an *eternal* motion: the globe is always in the process of turn*ing*, it's never done. And the speedy anadiplosis of "Without ceremony testify. // Testify to order, to rule" feels grand and commanding, just like the "order" and "rule."

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "That one bird, one star, / The one flash"
- **Line 4:** "testify"
- **Line 5:** "Testify"
- **Line 6:** "birds," "time"
- **Line 7:** "time"
- **Line 8:** "birds," "moon," "sometimes"
- **Line 14:** "The world goes turning, turning,"
- **Line 17:** "birds"
- **Line 18:** "moon"

ENJAMBMENT

The enjambments of "In Praise of Creation" help to create a strange, slippery sense of surprise.

The way that enjambments carry a thought over a line break often catch the reader off guard here. For instance, there's something breathless about the enjambment of lines 9-11:

> And the tiger wrapped in the cage of his skin,
> Watchful over creation, rests
> For the blood to pound [...]

This enjambment might throw the reader off in a few ways. The phrasing here is intentionally strange: where in everyday speech one might say that the tiger *waits* for the blood to pound, here the speaker says that it "rests / for the blood to pound." Because that "rests" comes at the end of the line, the reader is tempted to rest with it: "the tiger, watchful over creation, rests" would be a perfectly complete thought on its own. So when the enjambment comes along, it's a surprise, and it startles the reader just as the tiger might startle into new action when it's time for "the blood to pound."

Similarly, lines 14-15 seem to start off meaning one thing until enjambment reconfigures them:

> The world goes turning, turning, the season
> Sieves earth to its one sure element

Here, the reader might easily think that "the season" is also part of what "goes turning, turning." But the enjambment launches "the season" into a whole new role in which it "[s]ieves earth to its one sure element"—a strange idea that a reader might at first be more likely to appreciate for its musical sound than to completely understand.

Enjambment, in short, helps to keep things from feeling too simple in this poem. While the speaker certainly perceives God's hand in the rhythms of nature, they're far from believing they completely understand what's going on. The surprise leaps and lurches of the enjambment mirror the speaker's surprise at the divine order.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "the tiger's eye / Purely assert"
- **Lines 7-8:** "full / Of birds"
- **Lines 10-11:** "rests / For the blood to pound"
- **Lines 14-15:** "the season / Sieves earth"

PERSONIFICATION

The personification in "In Praise of Creation" fits with the speaker's ideas of divine order. The natural world, in being animated by God, also takes on the godly quality of personality.

Some of the personification here seems almost to put creatures in their creator's shoes. For instance, the "tiger" is said to be "[w]atchful over creation," rather like an omniscient deity. (Of course, he's also "wrapped in the cage of his skin," trapped in living, mortal flesh.) Similarly, "the season" has its own creative power over the earth, which it "[s]ieves [...] to its one sure element," reducing it back to what's essential to it: God's presence, in this speaker's view the surest element there is.

Even the moon has a personality. When it's "new"—that is, invisible in the earth's shadow—it becomes patient, "waiting for years to be stared at here." Here, the moon doesn't just have a human trait, it interacts with humans, waiting for their gaze.

Personification thus links the divine and the natural. In this poem, there's a touch of consciousness in all the universe, even those parts of it that are as insensible as a space rock, or ungraspable as a season. This personification allows for a back-and-forth between God and God's creatures.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-10:** "the tiger wrapped in the cage of his skin, / Watchful over creation,"
- **Lines 10-13:** " rests / For the blood to pound, the drums to begin, / Till the tigress' shadow casts / A darkness over him, a passion, a scent,"
- **Lines 14-15:** "the season / Sieves earth to its one sure element"
- **Line 18:** "The new moon waiting for years to be stared at here,"

SIBILANCE

The hushed sounds of sibilance often evoke mystery, magic, or secrecy. Sibilance plays all these roles in "In Praise of Creation."

Subtle sibilance first appears with the mysterious "tigress," whose "shadow casts / A darkness [...] a passion, a scent" over the tiger. Those swishing /s/ and /sh/ sounds mimic the motion of this tigress as she makes her way through the forest toward her mate. They're almost onomatopoeic, suggesting the brush of fur against leaves. They also link the tigress to "the season" as it "[s]ieves earth to its one sure element"; the tigers and the seasons they inhabit are closely connected, and their connection is a whispered mystery.

Sibilance's softness also plays an important role at the very end of the poem, where "[t]he season sinks to satisfied things." After lines describing birds roosting and the moon waiting patiently, that sibilant line feels quiet and hushed: this is a night for sleep after the more passionate night of the tigress. The quiet sounds here also set off the poem's final line, "Man with his mind ajar." The wider vowel sounds of those final words ring even clearer against a hushed backdrop.

The quiet of sibilance thus plays into some of the poem's bigger counterpoint rhythms. Just as bolder sounds play off hushed ones, the certain is juxtaposed with the mysterious.

Where Sibilance appears in the poem:

- **Line 12:** "tigress' shadow casts"
- **Line 13:** "darkness," "passion," "scent"
- **Lines 14-15:** "season / Sieves"
- **Line 15:** "its," "sure"
- **Line 19:** "season sinks," "satisfied"

VOCABULARY

Assert (Lines 3-3, Line 3) - Forcefully declare.

Testify (Lines 4-4, Line 4, Line 5) - Serve as proof or evidence of something.

Sieves (Lines 14-15, Line 15) - Finely sorts (as a kitchen sieve might separate smaller and larger pieces of something).

New moon (Lines 18-18, Line 18) - The first phase of the moon, during whivh it's not visible to the naked eye.

Ajar (Lines 20-20, Line 20) - Wide open, like a door.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"In Praise of Creation," a poem about divine order, matches its form to its themes. The poem uses five regular quatrains (four-line stanzas)with a steady ABAB rhyme scheme (though that rhyme scheme sometimes plays a trick or two—see the Rhyme Scheme section for more on this). A poem "in praise of" anything might be called an ode or a eulogy—that is, a song of worship or admiration (though eulogies are typically reserved for the recently deceased). This praise-poem shows its love for natural beauty in imitating the steady natural rhythms it describes.

The five-stanza shape here also means that the poem has a *middle*. In that middle stanza ("And the tiger [...] shadow casts"), the reader finds a paradoxical tiger, who seems at once to have a Godlike view of the world, "watchful over creation," and to be a prisoner of his own body, "wrapped in the cage of his skin." A feeling of nature's rhythms as evidence of the hand of God in the world is thus right at the heart of the poem both thematically and structurally.

METER

The meter of "In Praise of Creation" is more complex than it might look at first. While the poem is built in a traditional shape, using rhymed quatrains, its meter is all over the place. There's no standard pattern of metrical feet here, and while the lines usually use either three or four stressed beats, they don't do so predictably.

The unpredictability here means the speaker can stress words in a naturalistic way. For a good example, take a look at the first lines:

> That one bird, one star
> The one flash of the tiger's eye

Here, the stresses fall as they might in everyday speech, and they land hard on those repeating, emphatic "one[s]", reinforcing the speaker's point about the individuality of all these beings.

Why might this poem make these choices? Consider what it's about. The idea of a lot of metrical difference contained within a pretty strict pattern of stanzas and rhymes mirrors the natural order the speaker describes. In this poem's world, there's a lot of wild variability between creatures who all follow the same rhythms; difference and sameness make a harmonious pattern.

RHYME SCHEME

The rhyme scheme of "In Praise of Creation" is, in one sense, very regular: an ABAB pattern runs throughout, like this:

That one bird, one star, A
The one flash of the tiger's *eye B*
Purely assert what they are, A
Without ceremony *testify*. *B*

This steady pattern of alternating rhymes fits in with the poems ideas about the way the natural world reflects divine order: like the birds and the tigers, the rhymes here follow a pattern.

But within all that order, there's also some wildness. A number of the rhymes here are slant rhymes, which only partly match—"only" and "thinly" in the second stanza, "rests" and "casts" in the third stanza, and "here" and "ajar" in the last stanza. These slight irregularities reflect the poem's philosophy. The world, in this poem's view, isn't just a piece of perfectly standardized clockwork: the rhythm of difference and similarity, individuality and collectivity, is part of the divine order.

SPEAKER

This poem's speaker is a passionate and serious soul, deeply invested in the beauty of nature and the awesomeness of God (in the older sense of the word "awesome"—not just "cool," but awe-inspiring!). They're also a *reader*: they interpret the world symbolically, seeing passion in the tiger and patience in the moon. To this speaker, the whole world itself could be seen as a poem, the creation of God the artist; reading the world, like reading a poem, demands a kind of artistic openness. The speaker perhaps sees a bit of God's hand in their own work, just as they see a bit of God's watchfulness in the tiger.

Above all, though, the speaker is anonymous—keeping the poem's focus on "Creation" as a whole rather than an individual person.

SETTING

One could read the setting of this poem as nature itself, the whole wide world of birth, growth, and death. But more specifically, there's a feeling here of a nighttime world, a moonlit place of stars and shadows. The poem's imagery of darkness, quiet, and waiting evokes the kind of mind the speaker believes one needs to understand creation: a watchful openness. Though the speaker themselves never appears in the poem, the setting might give the reader the sense of a watcher standing in awe under a huge night sky. The lack of further specifics regarding the poem's setting helps it feel universal, like it could take place anywhere—which is part of the point; the poem is about all of "Creation" itself.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Elizabeth Jennings (1926-2001) was an English poet of passionate spiritual conviction. Born in the north of England, she moved to Oxford as a child, and spent the rest of her life there—following in the footsteps of one of her greatest influences, fellow Oxford poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. Like Hopkins, Jennings was a devout Catholic, and she shared the earlier poet's deeply-felt sense of nature's holiness (for a comparison, look to Hopkins's "The Windhover," which similarly finds divinity in the natural world). She even titled one of her books, *The Mind Has Mountains*, after a line from his "No worst, there is none," a poem about spiritual desolation. Jennings perhaps shared some fellow-feeling with Hopkins because both suffered from serious mental illness over the courses of their lives, enduring deep depressions.

Hopkins was a Victorian poet, of course, dead thirty years before Jennings was born; her style and interests were always a little out of step with contemporary poetic movements. Jennings wrote much of her poetry in the years when writers like Allen Ginsberg were doing wild experiments with poetic form and subject, but Jennings preferred a more traditional path, favoring sonnets over free-form Beat poetry.

This poem was first published in 1987, but its thematic ideas hearken all the way back to Romanticism in its awe in the face of nature's grandeur. Jennings's poem specifically alludes to Romantic poet William Blake's "The Tyger," while a more recent poem that similarly finds evidence of divinity in nature is Ruth Pitter's 1934 poem "Stormcock in Elder."

Jennings was a quietly successful poet during her lifetime, and was made a CBE in 1992.

Historical Context

Elizabeth Jennings' life took in all the chaos of the mid-20th century. Born in 1926, she lived through World War II (when her native England was regularly bombed by German airplanes). Her most productive years as a poet took in all the uproar and change of the '60s and '70s. England in those decades was a place of energy, idealism, and enthusiasm, and a hub of style and innovation. Beatlemania kicked off the "British Invasion," in which British pop music took the world by storm. Television came into its own as an art form, and soon-to-be-classic shows like The Avengers and Monty Python's Flying Circus debuted.

All this creative energy was set against a changeable political landscape. In Britain as in the US, freedom movements for feminism, civil rights, and denuclearization clashed with old-guard politicians, and the British economy was unstable.

Against this backdrop of chaotic change, Jennings was one of many who sought constancy in older artistic and religious traditions.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- A Brief Biography of the Poet — Learn more about Jennings at the Poetry Archive, which includes readings of some of her other poems. (https://poetryarchive.org/poet/elizabeth-jennings/)
- A Reading of Another of Jennings's Poems — Dr. Iain McGilchrist reads "Answers," another poem by Jennings—with similar themes! (https://youtu.be/ZSBb9rw5I0I)
- The Elizabeth Jennings Project — A scholarly website about Jennings, with more information on her life and work. (https://web.archive.org/web/20120321152114/http://www.elizabethjennings.org/index.php)
- Another "Tyger" — An image of William Blake's "Tyger," an earlier poem. How might this tiger have inspired the tiger in Jennings's poem? (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tyger)
- More of Jennings's Work — Links to a few more poems by Jennings. (http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/elizabeth_jennings/poems)

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