

# To the Evening Star



## POEM TEXT

- 1 Thou fair-hair'd angel of the evening,
- 2 Now, whilst the sun rests on the mountains, light
- 3 Thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown
- 4 Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!
- 5 Smile on our loves; and, while thou drawest the
- 6 Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew
- 7 On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes
- 8 In timely sleep. Let thy west wind sleep on
- 9 The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,
- 10 And wash the dusk with silver. Soon, full soon,
- 11 Dost thou withdraw; then the wolf rages wide,
- 12 And the lion glares thro' the dun forest:
- 13 The fleeces of our flocks are cover'd with
- 14 Thy sacred dew: protect them with thine influence.

suggests that peace and happiness need divine protection from the world's darker, more dangerous forces.

When the "evening star" appears in the heavens, the speaker feels, she heralds a time of blissful peace and innocent pleasure. Her "bright torch of love" benevolently illuminates everyone's "evening bed," and she "smile[s] on our loves," blessing humanity's bedtime snuggling (and presumably their other loving nocturnal activities—sex, for instance). This celestial "angel" makes the whole world peaceful, calm, and happy.

When the divine star fades from the sky, though, the world looks very different. No sooner has the goddess "withdraw[n]," the speaker warns, than the "wolf rages" and the "lion glares": that is, the world's toothier forces come out to play.

Threatening the "flocks" (that is, the sheep, common symbols of innocence and purity), these predatory animals might symbolize humanity's less innocent impulses and appetites—representing, for instance, beastly lust instead of sacred love, or bloodthirstiness instead of peace.

The difference between a world of holy, peaceful love and a world of animalistic bloodshed, then, is the presence of a sacred light. The speaker's prayer that the evening star will "protect" the world suggests that, without divine guidance, the wolves and lions of greed, cruelty, and lust might well run wild.

### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14



## SUMMARY

Oh, pale-haired angel of twilight! Now that the sun has sunk low enough to touch the mountaintops, light your beacon of love; put on your shining crown, and smile down on us as we go to bed. Smile on us as we make love. And, as you draw the sky's blue bedcurtains, sprinkle silvery dew on all the flowers as they go to sleep. Allow your servant, the west wind, to come to a rest on the waters of the lake; with a glance of your shining eyes, decree that all should be silent, and fill the darkening air with silvery light. All too soon, you'll disappear—and then, wolves will roam free, and lions' eyes will gleam menacingly in the dark forest. Our sheep's wool is beaded with your silvery dew: please keep our flocks safe with your gentle power.



## THEMES



### INNOCENCE AND DIVINE PROTECTION

In "To the Evening Star," the speaker calls on the divine to protect the world against all the perils of the dark. Praying to the "evening star"—that is, Venus, here [personified](#) as the love goddess for whom that planet was named—the speaker asks her not just to beautify the twilight landscape, but to hold the night's prowling wolves at bay. By contrasting a sleepy bedtime world of innocent "love" and "silver dew" with the dreadful "glare" of predators, the poem



### THE BEAUTY AND DANGER OF NATURE

In "To the Evening Star," the natural world is as lovely and gentle as it is perilous and wild. As night falls, the poem's speaker addresses the "evening star"—that is, the planet Venus, the first "star" to appear in the night sky at dusk—as a gentle, protective goddess putting the world to bed. When she leaves the sky, though, ravenous animals prowl the landscape and menace the livestock. Nature, in this poem, is at once beautiful and threatening—but either way, it's full of wonder.

The sight of the "evening star" fills this poem's speaker with love, gratitude, and awe. Addressing the star as a kind of goddess, the speaker prays that she'll bring the day to a safe close, "draw[ing] the / Blue curtains of the sky" as if she were tucking the world into bed and "wash[ing] the dusk with silver," casting soft light into the darkness. The speaker's wonder-struck description of the landscape gently touched by starlight suggests that the natural world can be so beautiful that it feels actively loving and benevolent.

However, nature also presents its dangers in the poem. When

the evening star finishes her gentle bedtime rituals and fades from the sky, the speaker warns, wild animals go on the prowl: "the wolf rages" and "the lion glares." All those roaming carnivores threaten the speaker's "flocks" of sheep, endangering the very creatures whose "fleece" was only moments ago beautified by the "sacred dew" the star scattered over the landscape. Nature isn't *just* a place of sparkling light and gentle benevolence, then: it's also full of blood and guts. Praying to nature's kindly face for protection from its bitey one, then, the speaker suggests that the natural world is both beautiful and dangerous—and that, either way, it has a mysterious power that goes far beyond human limits.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14



## LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

### LINES 1-5

*Thou fair-hair'd angel of the evening,  
Now, whilst the sun rests on the mountains, light  
Thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown  
Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!  
Smile on our loves;*

"To the Evening Star" begins with a rapturous [apostrophe](#) to a [personified](#) star-turned-goddess. As the "sun rests on the mountains" and the day comes to an end, the speaker begs the "fair-hair'd angel of the evening" to light her "bright torch of love," don her "radiant crown," and offer her blessing to everyone getting ready to go to their "evening bed."

The speaker's [metaphors](#) of "torch" and "crown" paint a picture both of a real star's glinting light (which might indeed suggest the sharp points of a tiara or the fiery brightness of a torch) and a goddess decked out in her queenly regalia. If this is the "evening star"—another name for the planet Venus, the first "star" to appear in the sunset sky—then perhaps this "angel" has something in common with Venus herself, the Roman goddess of love, beauty, and sex.

In a moment of reverent [anaphora](#), the speaker provides another hint that this goddess might preside over sacred love:

[...] smile upon our evening bed!  
Smile on our loves; [...]

The speaker's prayer that this "angel" will "smile" on both beds and love suggests that she offers a blessing to *lovers* in particular.

In these first lines, then, the poem paints a picture of a world making its gentle way toward sex and sleep. The "evening star"

hangs over it all, a protective, regal force who smiles on everything that happens beneath her.

These images of peace and balance, though, are a little at odds with the poem's form:

- At first glance, readers might expect this poem to be a [sonnet](#): it's 14 lines long, and seems to be written in [iambic pentameter](#) (that is, lines of five iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm: "Put on, | and smile | upon | our eve- | ning bed!").
- But there's no sonnet [rhyme scheme](#) here. Even more disorientingly, what seems at first to be [blank verse](#) (unrhymed iambic pentameter) will soon veer off course into all sorts of unexpected rhythms.

As readers will soon see, this tension between order and unpredictability will turn up in the poem's world, not just its form.

### LINES 5-8

*and, while thou drawest the  
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew  
On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes  
In timely sleep.*

The benevolent evening star-goddess isn't only responsible for blessing lovers as they go to bed. She also takes care of the whole landscape, bringing soft night to a sleepy world.

She begins by "draw[ing] the / Blue curtains of the sky"—a [metaphor](#) that vividly evokes the twilight drawing closed over the last light of sunset. Readers in Blake's time might also have seen this image as cozy and protective: the star might be imagined drawing the world's bedcurtains (drapes around one's bed, which people once believed kept out the dangerous night air). This queenly goddess here seems maternal.

Once those curtains are drawn, the star has more work to do. Not only humanity, but a whole landscape full of [personified](#) flowers has to be put to bed. As these flowers "shut [their] sweet eyes," the star beautifies them with "silver dew."

All of these lines are still in the form of an [apostrophe](#): the speaker keeps praying to the star, asking her to do all these gentle tasks. Readers might reflect that this speaker's prayer isn't asking for anything too special! In asking for the sun to set, twilight to fall, and the dew to come out on the flowers, the speaker is just praying that the night will do what it always does. But the poem's vision of a world full of spirits, from the personified star to the personified flowers, suggests that even an ordinary night has something mystical about it.

### LINES 8-10

*Let thy west wind sleep on  
The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,  
And wash the dusk with silver.*

In these lines, the speaker closes the first part of the [apostrophe](#) to the evening star by evoking, not just her gentleness, but her power. Asking her to "let **thy** west wind sleep," the speaker presents her as the mistress of the winds as well as the heavens. Asking her to "speak silence with thy glimmering eyes," the speaker presents her as a figure so powerful that she can quiet the world with a glance: she doesn't even need to break the "silence" she commands by speaking aloud.

Listen to the way the poem uses sound to evoke the sleeping landscape the star leaves in her wake:

[...] Let thy west wind sleep on  
The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,  
And wash the dusk with silver. [...]

The [alliterative](#) /w/ of "west wind" sounds rather like that wind's last breath blowing over the "lake" before it falls silent. And the [sibilant](#) /s/ and /sh/ sounds that run all through these lines evokes the hush of "dusk."

As this passage of the poem comes to a close, the speaker has painted a sleeping blue-and-silver landscape presided over by a bright goddess. But this landscape won't remain so lovely or so peaceful for long.

## LINES 10-12

*Soon, full soon,  
Dost thou withdraw; then the wolf rages wide,  
And the lion glares thro' the dun forest:*

The star-goddess the speaker described in the poem's first 10 lines, it turns out, isn't always present. "Soon, full soon," the speaker warns, she "withdraw[s]," fading from the sky. Without her light, a new and more dangerous nighttime world appears. Where gentle flowers once fell asleep scattered with "silver dew," now the "wolf rages wide" and the "lion glares."

The whole world changes around these roaming carnivores. Take a look at the [imagery](#) here:

And the lion glares thro' the **dun forest**:

If the forest is "dun," then it's full of murky, brownish shadow—a far cry from the sparkling silver and blue of the star's domain. The "lion" and the "wolf" bring a different kind of darkness with them, ugly and threatening where the star's darkness was glimmering and soft.

Even the [meter](#) changes to reflect this perilous new world. Listen to that line again:

And the li- | on glares | thro' the dun | forest:

Where there was once swinging, gentle [iambic](#) pentameter,

there's now an irregular four-beat tetrameter line studded with [anapests](#) (feet with a da-da-DUM rhythm) and [trochees](#) (feet with a DUM-da rhythm).

All this uneasy change might lead readers to see these wild beasts [symbolically](#) and to read the star herself in a new light. The celestial star, who blesses earthly love and makes the world beautiful, now seems like a higher power (literally!)—an influence from the heavens, a figure who represents ideals and virtues. The dangerous, earthy beasts, meanwhile, might suggest humanity's lower nature: lust versus the star's blessed love, violence versus the star's peace.

The specific choice of a "wolf" and a "lion" here makes that reading even more likely: Blake might be [alluding](#) to the opening pages of Dante's [Inferno](#), in which those same beasts represent selfish appetite and violence.

In other words, this poem's landscape starts to seem like a dreamworld: the best and worst things about people take on physical form here.

## LINES 13-14

*The fleeces of our flocks are cover'd with  
Thy sacred dew: protect them with thine influence.*

The thought of roving, toothy predators makes the speaker think nervously of the "flocks"—that is, the sheep, asleep in their pen. Sheep are a common [symbol](#) of innocence; threatened by that terrible "wolf" and "lion," they seem like an image of sweet purity endangered by violent passions.

The sheep's "fleece," though, is still spangled with the star's "sacred dew," just as the flowers were. The speaker thus concludes the poem with another appeal to that guardian star, asking her to "protect them with thine influence." Perhaps the traces that star has left behind her will provide some protection, even if she's not there.

This dreamlike poem might thus be read as an inner drama. People's inner lives, the poem's [imagery](#) suggests, can be gentle and mysterious like a silvery-blue night, or eerie and grim as a "dun forest" full of roving predators. The difference lies with a guiding "star"—a loving, virtuous, and divine presence that can turn lust into love and darkness into beauty.

On the other hand, Blake might be working toward a more complex idea here, one that he'd explore more deeply in his later poetry: that animal impulses might just be part of people's inner ecosystems, to be accepted and embraced. The "star" of higher purpose and sacred protection can't shine all the time, and [innocence](#) must always develop into [experience](#).



## SYMBOLS



## PREDATORY ANIMALS

The poem's dreadful "lion" and "wolf" can be read as [symbols](#) of humankind's dangerous instincts and urges.

When the poem's "star" fades from the sky, predatory animals come out of hiding and menace the speaker's "flocks" of sheep (themselves a common symbol of innocence). The roving lion and wolf thus suggest greed, lust, and violence—as opposed to the sacred world of love and peace that the star rules over. Without the protection and guidance of heaven, the poem suggests, humanity's animal nature might run wild.

## Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 11-12:** "then the wolf rages wide, / And the lion glares thro' the dun forest."



## POETIC DEVICES

## PERSONIFICATION

[Personification](#) transforms this poem's nighttime countryside into a magical, spirit-haunted landscape.

The central moment of personification here turns the "evening star" (that is, the planet Venus, the first light to show up in the sky at sunset) into a goddess. Of course, Venus was *already* a goddess—the Roman goddess of love, beauty, and sex—and a number of the images the speaker uses here [allude](#) to that mythology. This "fair-hair'd angel" carries a "bright torch of love," and she "smile[s] on our loves" and "our evening bed" for good measure. Besides putting the world to sleep with her "glimmering eyes" and her scatterings of "silver dew," then, the personified evening star also seems to quietly preside over a world of sacred love and sex.

The world around her is personified, too. The "west wind," for instance, can "sleep on / The lake," and the "flowers" can close their "sweet eyes" as the dew falls on them. By imbuing winds and flowers with personalities, the poem suggests that the whole natural world is full of sacred life and energy (a very Blakean idea: he would later write that "[everything that lives is Holy](#)"). It also makes the poem's picture of the whole world going to sleep feel that much dreamier.

## Where Personification appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-11
- Line 14

## APOSTROPHE

The speaker's fervent [apostrophe](#) to the evening star suggests just how much humanity needs reassuring lights in the darkness.

In its first lines, this poem sounds like a gentle prayer. The speaker directly addresses the "fair-hair'd angel of the evening" (that is, the evening star, Venus, [personified](#) as a goddess), singing the praises of her "bright torch of love" and her "radiant crown" and asking her to "smile" on all the sleepy people in the world below her. To this speaker, the star seems to be in charge of the whole twilight world: she "scatter[s her] silver dew" on the flowers and "speak[s] silence with [her] glittering eyes," putting everything to bed.

By addressing this star directly in prayer, the speaker suggests that the kind of peaceful, blissful night she brings is only one possibility. When this star fades from the sky, the speaker anxiously observes, "the wolf rages wide" and the "lion glares" in the dark forests: in other words, the star's benevolent presence keeps toothy danger at bay.

The speaker's apostrophe thus suggests that nighttime tranquility isn't a given! It takes the evening star's watchful presence to keep the speaker (and all sleepers) safe from peril; the speaker must ask directly for her protection, or brave the [forests of the night](#) unguarded.

## Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-10
- Lines 13-14

## IMAGERY

The poem's [imagery](#) brings an enchanted nighttime landscape to life.

In the twilight world ruled by the "evening star," everything is a shade of silver or blue. Under the "blue curtains" of the darkening sky, the star first "scatter[s ...] silver dew" over the sleeping flowers, then "wash[es] the dusk" with a spill of silvery light.

Against these gentle, shimmery images, the star herself stands out as a sharper, brighter presence. "Fair-hair'd," she carries a "bright torch" and wears a "radiant crown." Any reader who has watched night falling will recognize the contrast: the sharp clarity of the stars versus the shadowy softness of the world below.

By linking the dusky silver-blue landscape with the crystalline brightness of the goddess who presides over it, the poem suggests that the sleepy world has a watchful, unblinking guardian.

That guardian, however, must "withdraw" from the sky eventually; then, a different kind of darkness takes over. When the speaker describes a lion "glar[ing] thro' the dun forest," the

word "dun" suggests a brownish murk—the kind of sinister darkness that might always be about to erupt with toothy beasts.

The imagery's movement from starlight to woody dimness thus suggests magic, danger, and dangerous magic.

#### Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Thou fair-hair'd angel of the evening;"
- **Lines 2-4:** "light / Thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown / Put on"
- **Lines 5-6:** "the / Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew"
- **Lines 9-10:** "thy glimmering eyes, / And wash the dusk with silver"
- **Line 12:** "And the lion glares thro' the dun forest."

## JUXTAPOSITION

By [juxtaposing](#) images of light and darkness, innocence and danger, the poem hints at the speaker's worries that an unprotected world might easily fall into beastly chaos.

The poem's nighttime world is protected by the evening star, a "fair-hair'd angel of the evening." She's a benevolent presence who "smiles" on everything happening in the world beneath her as twilight falls, and gives a special blessing to people's "evening bed[s]" and their "loves"—words that suggest she might be a love goddess, not just the guardian of the night. Under her influence, all the world's gentle things, from "flowers" to "flocks" (of sheep, that is), are safe.

When this "angel" withdraws, though, the more dangerous creatures of the night come out to play. As the star fades from the sky, the "wolf rages" and the "lion glares": predatory animals stalk through the "dun forest," hungry for the very "flocks" the star just blessed with "sacred dew."

This juxtaposition of the innocent and sacred with the vicious and hungry might be read as an image of the different forces *inside* people—for instance, sacred sexual love versus rampaging animal lust, or harmonious peace versus selfish greed. The speaker's prayer that the star will protect the innocent sheepy "flocks" even after she's left the sky suggests that people might need some celestial help to keep the lions of their animal impulses at bay.

On the other hand, Blake was a big proponent of animal impulse; in later works like *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he'd forcefully argue that people must embrace their dangerous instincts, not chain them up. This early work might merely be a more conventional take on the holy versus the divine—or it might be a step toward Blake's later ideas, suggesting that the celestial and the animal are all part of the same complex inner ecosystem.

#### Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Lines 10-14

## METAPHOR

[Metaphors](#) support the poem's vision of a twilight landscape presided over by a benevolent star.

When the personified evening star comes to put the world to bed, she draws the "blue curtains of the sky"—an image that vividly evokes the sight of blue twilight closing in on the last light of sunset. This moment would have felt especially cozy in Blake's era, when most people slept in beds with curtains. These were meant to keep out the night air, which people once believed carried dangerous illnesses. In sweeping the "blue curtains of the sky" shut, then, the star isn't just bringing the day to an end, but protecting the sleeping world.

The star might bring comforting, protective darkness, but she also brings light. Her "bright torch of love" and her "radiant crown" both evoke a star's brilliant twinkle (or, indeed, a planet's—the "evening star" isn't actually a star, but the planet Venus!). By transforming the star's light into a fiery torch and a shining crown, the poem suggests that the star is a queenly, powerful figure. She might usher the night in, but she also keeps it from being *too* dark. It's when that "bright torch" can no longer be seen, after all, that the wolves come out.

#### Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-4:** "light / Thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown / Put on"
- **Lines 5-6:** "the / Blue curtains of the sky"

## ALLITERATION

[Alliteration](#) gives the poem some quiet music and evokes the nighttime world it describes.

For instance, listen to the way that [sibilant](#) alliteration conjures up the hush of dusk in these lines:

[...] while thou drawest the  
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew  
On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes  
In timely sleep. [...]

The delicate /sc/ sounds of "sky" and "scatter" sound like dew drops landing on petals; the interplay of pure /s/ and /sh/ sounds, meanwhile, makes it feel as if the evening star is whispering "shhhh" to all those drowsy flowers.

When the star leaves the sky, though, a different sound prevails:

[...] Soon, full soon,  
Dost thou **withdraw**; then the **wolf** rages **wide**,

That repeated /w/ sound directly links the "wolf" to the star's "withdraw[al]": the beasties can't come out until the star is gone! And when the /w/ comes back again in "wide," it begins to sound rather like a menacing *awooo* out in the woods.

Alliteration is similarly atmospheric in line 13, where the speaker describe the "fleeces of our flocks." That thick, soft /f/ sound feels just as dense and woolly as the sheepskins it describes.

#### Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "light"
- **Line 3:** "love"
- **Line 6:** "sky," "scatter," "silver"
- **Line 7:** "shuts," "sweet"
- **Line 8:** "sleep," "west wind," "sleep"
- **Line 9:** "speak silence"
- **Line 10:** "silver. Soon"
- **Line 11:** "withdraw," "wolf," "wide"
- **Line 13:** "fleeces," "flocks"



## VOCABULARY

**Thou, Thy, Thine** (Line 1, Line 3, Line 5, Line 6, Line 8, Line 9, Line 11, Line 14) - These are all old-fashioned ways of saying "you" (thou) or "your" (thy, thine).

**Radiant** (Line 3) - Shining, glowing.

**Timely** (Line 8) - Fitting for the time: it's "timely" for the flowers to shut their eyes at bedtime!

**Full** (Line 10) - Very.

**Dost** (Line 11) - An old-fashioned way of saying "do," pronounced *dust*. To paraphrase, then, this line says: "Soon, very soon, do you disappear."

**Wide** (Line 11) - Far afield (as in "far and wide").

**Thro'** (Line 12) - Through.

**Dun** (Line 12) - Dark, dim, dusky.

unrhymed [blank verse](#).

Like a lot of Blake's works, then, this poem is deceptively simple. What looks like a gentle sonnet at first glance ends up being a roving, wild creation of Blake's own design—just as what looks like a blissfully peaceful starry night transforms into a jungle full of wolves and lions.

## METER

"To the Evening Star" is written [blank verse](#)—mostly. Setting out in this conventional form, the poem soon wanders far beyond its [metrical](#) boundaries.

First off, an explanation of the rules the poem will break! Blank verse is poetry written in unrhymed [iambic](#) pentameter. That is, every line is built from five iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm. Here's how that sounds in line 10:

And wash | the dusk | with sil- | ver. Soon, | full soon

One reason that poets choose this meter is its flexibility. A lot of spoken English falls naturally into an iambic rhythm, and there's also plenty of room to vary the meter a little while keeping to the basic five-beat pace. But this poem takes so many liberties with its blank verse that it sometimes falls out of pentameter altogether. Listen to what happens in line 12, for instance:

And the li- | on glares | thro' the dun | forest:

Not only has this line lost one of its five beats, switching to tetrameter (only four strong stresses), it throws in some [anapests](#) (feet with a da-da-DUM rhythm) and a [trochee](#) (DUM-da) for good measure. The overall effect is as wild, roving, and unpredictable as the glaring lion these words describe.

## RHYME SCHEME

This [blank verse](#) poem doesn't use a [rhyme scheme](#). The poem's lack of rhyme (and the impressionistic, free-flowing, often surprising [meter](#)) makes it feel gentle and conversational: the speaker's address to the "fair-hair'd angel of the evening" sounds more like a quiet greeting to an old friend than a hymn to a mighty deity.



## FORM, METER, & RHYME

### FORM

"To the Evening Star" is written in a single stanza of 14 lines, like a [sonnet](#)—though it isn't one. While the poem uses some sonnet conventions, like [iambic](#) pentameter (lines with five da-DUM feet: "And wash | the dusk | with sil- | ver. Soon, | full soon"), it also breaks from those conventions in important ways. Its meter doesn't stay steady, and it's written in



## SPEAKER

The poem's speaker is more a watchful, worshipful eye than a distinct character. Addressing the personified "evening star," this speaker marvels at her gentle beauty and begs her to watch over the sleepy landscape below, painting a picture of the world slowing down beneath the "blue curtains of the sky." But this speaker also has a sense of danger. Without the star's protection, the speaker nervously observes, the "wolf rages wide" and the "lion glares."

This vision of benevolent stars and dreadful beasts suggests a very Romantic speaker: a person who believes that the natural world is full of mystery, as perilous as it is beautiful.



## SETTING

"To the Evening Star" is set in an idyllic pastoral landscape—in other words, in an idealized countryside full of flowers, starlight, and sleeping sheep. This peaceful dreamland isn't without a nightmare side, though; when the evening star who watches over the world like a goddess fades from the sky, the "wolf rages wide" and the "lion glares" in the darkness.

The combination of perfect beauty and slinking, predatory danger here makes this poem's world feel more like a dream than a picture of any real place. Like a lot of dreams, it's a revealing one. The [juxtaposition](#) of innocent "love" with wolfish "rage" suggests that the speaker worries about what happens when the divine "fair-hair'd angel" of love isn't around to keep people's darker and more selfish urges in check.



## CONTEXT

### LITERARY CONTEXT

William Blake (1757-1827) was a poet unlike any other. Often considered one of the earliest of the English Romantics, he also stands apart from any movement as a unique philosopher, prophet, and artist.

Blake didn't just *write* poetry: he also designed, engraved, printed, painted, and published illuminated manuscripts using a technique he called the "infernal method." Blake painted his poems and pictures on copper plates with a resilient ink, then burned away the excess copper in a bath of acid—the opposite of the process most engravers used. But Blake often did the opposite of what other people did, believing that it was his role to "reveal the infinite that was hid" by custom and falsehood.

Even among the often countercultural Romantics, then, Blake was an outlier. Samuel Taylor Coleridge himself—no stranger to a [wild vision](#)—once remarked that he was "in the very mire of common-place common-sense compared with Mr. Blake."

"To the Evening Star," however, appears in one of Blake's more conventional works: his very first collection of poetry, *Poetical Sketches* (1783). *Poetical Sketches* was never widely published; Blake only printed a handful of copies to share with friends. Its poems, while not as innovative as Blake's mature works, open a window on his early interests, his inspirations, and his artistic development.

While Blake was never widely known during his lifetime, he has become one of the most famous and beloved of poets since his death, and writers from [Allen Ginsberg](#) to [Olga Tokarczuk](#) to [Philip Pullman](#) claim him as a major influence.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"To the Evening Star," with its dreamy vision of a star coming to life as the goddess Venus, fits right in with a very Romantic fondness for old myths—and for a vision of the natural world as a transcendent, beautiful, and mysterious place. Many Romantic poets and philosophers believed that nature could, in the words of [Wordsworth](#), teach people more "than all the sages can."

This idea was in part a reaction to the Enlightenment, an 18th-century period of scientific and philosophical advancement. The Enlightenment valued order and reason; for instance, this was the period in which the scientist Carl Linnaeus developed a formal taxonomy for classifying plants and animals.

That kind of razor-sharp clarity was all well and good, the Romantics felt, but too much of it and one risked missing out on mystery and humility. The vastness and power of nature, in their eyes, had a way of putting people in their right place, reminding them that they didn't know everything and couldn't control everything.

The Romantic love of nature was also spurred by the Industrial Revolution, which was gathering steam (literally!) when Blake wrote this poem in the late 18th century. An increasingly mechanized and factory-driven society made thinkers like Blake worry that people were losing touch with their place in the natural order—and thus with their humanity.



## MORE RESOURCES

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [The Poem's First Appearance](#) — Visit the Blake Archive to see images of this poem as Blake first published it in his 1783 collection *Poetical Sketches*. (<http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/bb128.c?desclid=bb128.c.te.01>)
- [The Poem Aloud](#) — Listen to a reading of the poem. (<https://youtu.be/OpjqE1KaOCs>)
- [A Brief Biography](#) — Visit the British Library's website to learn more about Blake's life and work. (<https://www.bl.uk/people/william-blake>)
- [Blake's Legacy](#) — Read an interview with author Philip Pullman in which he discusses Blake's influence on his work. (<https://www.npr.org/2017/10/19/557189779/philip-pullmans-realm-of-poetry-and-inspiration>)
- [The Blake Society](#) — Visit the Blake Society's website to learn more about what modern scholars and students are thinking about Blake. (<https://www.blakesociety.org/>)

### LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM BLAKE POEMS

- [A Dream](#)

- [Ah! Sun-flower](#)
- [A Poison Tree](#)
- [Holy Thursday \(Songs of Innocence\)](#)
- [London](#)
- [The Chimney Sweeper \(Songs of Experience\)](#)
- [The Chimney Sweeper \(Songs of Innocence\)](#)
- [The Clod and the Pebble](#)
- [The Divine Image](#)
- [The Ecchoing Green](#)
- [The Garden of Love](#)
- [The Lamb](#)
- [The Little Black Boy](#)
- [The Sick Rose](#)
- [The Tyger](#)
- [To Autumn](#)



## HOW TO CITE

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