

# Decline in Nature: an Intertextual Study

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**Abstract:** Human and nature had been living side by side and help each other since ancient times. However, the current condition of nature had pushed other humans to be aware that this ‘side by side living’ had not only been advantageous but also exploited. This is recorded by humans through literacy; starting from poems. However, these records did not only contain history but also expressions of poets and authors alike; their perspective of nature they see in their existence and or, perhaps, their hope or view of the future of nature. To find whether a work conveys life through nature or whether it conveys nature from different aspects of life, a study is needed. This writing aims to interpret the nature represented in William Blake’s *The Tyger* and Gordon J. L. Ramel’s *Tiger, Tiger Revisited*. The method used is library research and the approach used in intertextuality by focusing on the human-wildlife relationship over the years both poems were written. The results show that these poems are similar in their nature as poems. However, their idea of nature contradicts each other in the use of the figure of speech. Nature had changed drastically over the years these poems are made, and those changes are conveyed within the two poems.

**Index Terms:** contemporary poems, human nature, literary devices, nature, representation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nature has been one of the common objects of interest in literacy. However, despite its common appearance in the literature world, the frequently changing conditions of its realistic counterpart had fueled poets, authors, and artists alike to convey nature into their works. The ever-changing conditions of nature had driven poets since Homeric eras to use it to convey different meanings in life from different aspects; whether it is about love, friendship, dispute, loss, and others. In reverse, poets and authors alike likes to use these aspects to convey nature as well; they represent nature more implicitly.

Knowing that these representations are conveyed in literacy, people from the future generations of these poets tend to seek the meaning of poems to sate their knowledge of the past. Either they are trying to find the ideology slipped in the poem or some kind of criticism. It is always necessary to study literature to broaden one's knowledge. This is also the purpose of this study; and by using the two poems that discuss nature from a different perspective, the writer aims to reveal the relation between the nature in the present era and the past era.

The poems used to find this changes in nature representation are “The Tyger” (1794) by William Blake and “Tiger, Tiger, Revisited” (2011) by Gordon J. L. Ramel. Blake’s “The

Tyger” was included in *Songs of Experience*, the collection of Blake’s earlier poems, and is considered as one of Blake’s best work along with its counterpart, “The Lamb” (1789), that is included in *Songs of Innocence*, which is also one of Blake’s collection of poems, that was written nine years prior. This is also the reason why this poem is chosen as the object for this article. The second poem, entitled “Tiger, Tiger, Revisited”, was written by Ramel and was meant to be a serious parody of Blake’s “The Tyger”. It may not have its prestigious as Blake’s poem, however, it was written by the ecologist Ramel, who also has an account on the website All Poetry and is viewed by 6.2K times. It also participated in a Parody Contest on the same web and became one of the winners, also reaching the auto rank number 1 according to how professional the poem is.

One of Ramel’s poems, “Mankind does not Agree”, which was included in the Kindle collection of poems *The Human Disease*, was also studied by Biswas (2016). Biswas interpreted the poem as the controller of all, that one should not only accept that the world does not consist of humans only, who can behave obstinately or might scar other creatures, but also appreciate and accept that environment is also a part of the world and needs to be preserved. Biswas’s study offers another perspective in analyzing poems; all sides need to be reconsidered although the poem does

seem to criticize one side only, in this case, the human race. However, although Biswas offered these two perspectives, it is still not enough to explain the traits the poem has. Aside from Biswas, there is no other poem by Ramel that is studied. These are the reasons why the writer chose this poem to be analyzed, besides, the poem is contemporary and had already been published and in Kindle collection of poems entitled *The Human Disease*.

## II. METHOD

This article uses library research as the method of the study and intertextual as the approach. The library research method includes close reading to find the symbols in the poems, such as the figure of speech or metaphors. Then, the intertextuality used by the writer is according to Julia Kristeva's foundation. As noted by Kristeva, that a text is composed of many other previous texts, in other words, the predecessor texts. As intertextual developed over the years after Kristeva's founding, Michael Riffaterre's offered the terms of hypogram and transformation to sign the differences between texts. However, the writer does not use these terms to analyze the poems.

Intertextuality is used to analyze the two poems because its principals focuses on: (1) a text, in its essence, is consisted of many other texts composing it; (2) intertextual study analyzes the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the text; (3) intertextual study provides balance between intrinsic and extrinsic elements which is made to suit the text's function in the society; (4) in its relation with the author, or in this case, the poet, the composition of a text is accumulated from other texts; and lastly, (5) the meaning of a text is not only interpreted from literacy, but also include every single aspects of the text, which included the language (Endraswara 2003).

## III. ANALYSIS

As was said that intertextual in a text came from other texts existing before it, and it focuses on the language aspect of texts. In this study, the writer focuses on the figure of speech in the stanzas. Both poems consisted of 6 stanzas, with a rhyme scheme of aabb ccdd eeff, with the rest of the other three stanzas following similar rhyme.

In the first line of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> (last) stanza, the entity of the tiger is repeatedly mentioned. It is an allegory to Blake's poem, in which the first line of its 1st and 6th line also mentioned the entity "tiger".

(1, 6) *Tyger Tyger, burning bright*, — (Blake 1794)

(1, 6) *Tiger tiger fading fast* — (G. J. Ramel 2011)

However, Ramel counters Blake's poem by mentioning that the tiger is fading, rather than burning such as in Blake's. The reason of this contrast is the difference between the tiger population.

In the 1970s, there were many projects on conserving the tigers. The starting point was from the Indian Government in 1973 and the International ban on trades in tiger and tiger parts in 1975. In Tiger Population Weebly, there were around 30,000 - 35,000 tigers at that time that still existed, with the note that Caspian Tigers had become extinct. These data shows that ever since before Blake's poem "The Tyger" was written, the tiger's population had faced a decline. Blake's poem beautifies the tiger figure, emphasizing that it is ferocious yet beautiful at the same time, which could mean as an action to remind the people of the tiger's existence in the world, or also about their possible extinction. This possibility does not decrease each decade. On the contrary, it continued to increase until it reaches under 5000 population in 2010—which is two years before Ramel's poem was written. Although the gap is two years, the decline of the population of tiger over the decades had intrigued Ramel and being an ecologist; Ramel could not be unmoved.

In the eyes of nature, the human had risen uncontrollably and reduced the right that nature supposedly has. This idea is represented by the third line of the 1st stanza of each poem.

(3) *What immortal hand or eye*, — (Blake 1794)

(3) *what brave law or business deal* — (G. J. Ramel 2011)

In Ramel, there is the phrase 'brave law', which is a metaphor for a law that is impregnable. No matter which country or state, the law is supposed to be followed. It may be changed under some circumstances, however, it would undergo a problematic process in which the officials of the country need to hold continuous meetings to decide the outcome. Also, there are fewer cases of the previous law being changed completely, which leads to the interpretation of law becoming a very strong entity.

On the other hand, Blake's poem used 'immortal hand', which is also a metaphor, which refers to a very strong power or force. The 'immortal' word stands for 'strong', because immortal is different from mortal that is vulnerable—immortal could lead to the meaning of invulnerable, which is in synonym with very strong. Then, the word 'hand'

signifies the force, because almost every human action is done by our hand(s). Both phrases lead to one similar meaning: a very strong entity.

However, the contrast is shown in its respective words *brave law* and *immortal hand*, emphasize 'law' and 'hand'. Law is established by humans, while a hand is a universal term that could count for anything else. There may be a popular phrase called 'the law of the jungle', but even the idea of this 'law' is invented by humans and exists first in the human population. It is different from 'hand', which could stand for any anatomical body parts that have the same function as hand. Moreover, a hand is more visible than the law because it has a more visible 'appearance'. In contrast, the law is not very visible in terms of appearance because it is an abstract subject. However, this abstract subject called law is more powerful than the visible hand. The reason it is powerful is that it is made by humans. Humans created the concept, it came from the human's mind that is also able to think other complicated concepts that nature could not possibly do. Human's mind is also undoubtedly assumed to have higher power. This is the difference between human and nature: having the mind to think, cognition.

Humans and tiger are further put in a larger distance from each other. The former who was once unable to fight back is now able to act against the latter. The phrase 'act against' is used because in Ramel's poem, tigers are not only killed but had also become a commodity. This idea is reflected in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> line of the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza.

*And what shoulder, & what art,*

*Could twist the sinews in thy heart? —*

(Blake 1794)

*In what sulfurous cauldron groans*

*The mind that lives to sell your bones; —*

(G. J. Ramel 2011)

In Blake's poem, the word 'shoulder' could stand for any physical encounter, while the word 'art' could stand for any abstract subject; because art has many forms including painting, songs, dances, and others. The word 'art' could also stand for psychological means because to make art, one must have an idea to make the base and idea is produced within the human mind. Those two lines represent how humans were at that time, still inferior to tigers. Blake tried to show us that there is nothing that could break the figure of tiger both physically or mentally.

In contrast, Ramel tried showing that the idea of a tiger being a superior being does not exist in this period, because the reality does not show as such. The 2<sup>nd</sup> line of the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza in Ramel's poem is a literal meaning to the act of

poaching. This is not only an exaggeration by Ramel, because it is also a known history that tiger parts are sold for various means. Although most are for symbolic purposes, such as status, to show that the person owning the object comes from a prestigious family or is a prestigious individual; besides, the tiger's part mostly sought is the skin. Poaching is very dangerous for the survival of species all over the world, not only the tiger. The act of poaching had occurred since before Blake's poem "The Tyger" was written. However, the rate is still lower than decades afterward, as it is shown through Blake's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> line.

Although Ramel had seriously pointed out that humans are the cause of tigers declining, he does not exclude the idea of a tiger as a beautiful being. This is exclusively seen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> line of the 4<sup>th</sup> stanza, and the last line of the last stanza of the poem.

*What science or machine*

*where beauty such as yours is seen? — (G.*

*J. Ramel 2011, 4)*

*so quickly still thy majesty? — (G. J. Ramel*

*2011, 4)*

Ramel uses the word 'science' and 'machine' as a contrast to sign how much science and technology had greatly affect humans life over the years. Both lines could also signify that science and technology had taken a role in the extinction or the conservation of tigers. Experimenting tigers could be beneficial to raise the possibility of saving them through chemical re-creation, while filming the tigers could produce videos available for different purposes such as education and conservation plans or campaigns.

However, although these acts are positive responses, Ramel also signifies that these are not enough to show how beautiful tigers are. Tigers' beauty could not be enclosed by simply recreating them, or, by filming their good looks from a few meters close-up. This is also the case for nature which is majestic, beautiful, and uncomparable to both science and technology that had taken a primary role in the development of human race.

The appreciation for the tiger is also shown in the last line of the last stanza in which Ramel wrote the word 'majesty'. This last line is quite confusing because Ramel wrote the word 'still' instead of 'steal'. However, this particular word is a part of the parody by Ramel which means that it is intentional. The usage of 'still' would mean that the interpretation would be that humanity cannot be compared to the majestic figure of tigers. The 3<sup>rd</sup> line of the last stanza which says: */how can mere humanity/* followed by the last line */so quickly still thy majesty/*

linguistically, judging from standard criteria of a good sentence, the last line does not form a good sentence. This is because the word 'still' should have been followed or follow the word 'be' to form a standard phrase. Below are the paraphrases of the line which both stand for the same interpretation.

(1) *so quickly still* (and still) *thy majesty?*

Or,

(2) *so quickly* (still, and) *still thy majesty?*

Both paraphrases stand for the idea that despite humanity's rise over the years, human's 'nature' does not change. People exploited nature, in this case, the tigers, for their necessity and selfish purposes without caring for how it would affect future generations' mindset. However, the majestic figure of the tiger also does not change from those exploitations. Tiger stands beautifully and that beauty could not be compared to anything else.

These differences put human above nature, and in this case, nature is represented by tigers. Having a mind to think of every possible way to deal with tigers, added by the ability to act by using their hands and feet, humans can top over tigers. In contrast, tigers do not, as they only have their hands and feet to defend or run. In Blake's poem, the tigers are mentioned of their greatness. However, following the decline of a tiger over the years, the greatness has likely disappeared and replaced by human's, as proven by the poem made by Ramel.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The similarities and differences in both poems proved that there are significant changes in the tiger population from the year Blake's and Ramel's poem was written. The change is shown in how Ramel uses 'law' to counter the 'hand'. Hand has its power in dealing with things. However, in this world, silent thoughts are more powerful than physical prowess, which is considered as one of the things considered as powerful (because of the war). From this explanation, it could be seen that nature, which is represented by the tiger in both poems, had experienced a decline and it affects not just nature, but the literal tiger population, also the human itself. The effect in the human side is shown by Ramel's poem, in the entirety of the poem itself, which implies that the decline of nature over the years had brought impact to humanity and that the human is the source of the decline of nature.

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