

**“Why do you find these okay stories good?”**

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*Abstract.* As an answer to the title question, some stories you can “operate” on and then get something good. I explain why I find a story about a tiger attack good, because of this reason, “courageously” presenting what I take to be something good.

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*I doubt the men you admire*

*You would hire*

“Why do you find these okay stories good?” I fear someone will ask. Some stories in a broadly realistic tradition that I value are maybe just okay, if you focus on surface qualities; but they have this quality of you can quite easily “operate” on them and get something good, or at least I think so. Less metaphorically, you can edit the stories or build new stories on the basis of them and the result is something good.

Recall William Blake’s legendary poem *The Tyger*. The poem’s opening verse (or stanza!) is:

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night;  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

I learnt this verse in wintry England, if I remember correctly. Now consider R.K. Narayan’s story “*The Tiger’s Claw*”. It is (mostly) set at night in a station in South India near forests with lots of

tigers. The main character tells of how he protected himself from a tiger while staying there, using furniture. The story ends with some troubling information about forest tribes, who cut off tiger claws for a talisman if they find a cub. Anyway, I think there is something funny about the poem being evaluated in this context, where tigers are normal, a furniture frame is used to protect against tigers, and probably you don't count as a grown man or woman in a nearby tribe if you can't handle a tiger.

We can easily construct an amusing sketch. Imagine a British colonialist educator proudly presenting the poem to tribe members, changing the pronunciation of "symmetry" even.<sup>1</sup> "But Mum framed a tiger's symmetry the other day," one of the tribe's children says. (Eventually a cult develops around Mum with the colonialist as a leader?)

**Appendix.** "In the first paragraph, you distinguish between surface qualities and other qualities, but can you clarify that distinction?" The following is an attempt! (While waiting for another and more elegant definition?) Consider a person who can read and understand this story but does not make any connections you do not spell out and their imagination is not stimulated beyond obvious ways. The qualities of the story they detect are the surface qualities. They imagine the struggle with the tiger! I don't wish to insult such a person, by the way. Their evaluation matters. And "everyone" is like this sometimes, right?

**References.** Blake, W. 1795. The Tyger.

Available at: <https://www.themorgan.org/collection/William-Blakes-World/201#>

Narayan, R.K. 1984. The Tiger's Claw. In *Malgudi Days*. London: Penguin Books.

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<sup>1</sup> An English schoolmate of mine used to do this, by the way.