

William Blake

(1757 -1827)



Assigned Poems

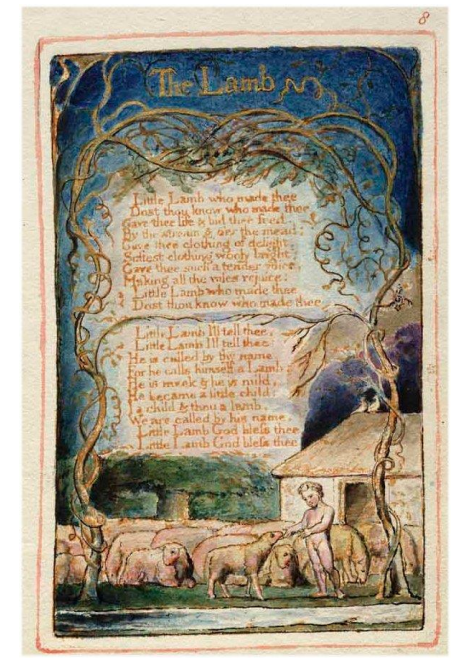
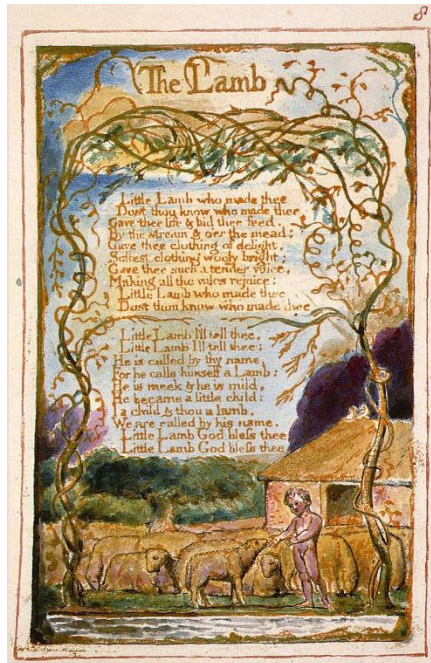
- “The Lamb” from the *Songs of Innocence*
- “The Tyger” from the *Songs of Experience*

Illuminated Printing

The illuminated books were not products of the letter-press, but of a process of hand-etching designs onto copper plates, using these plates to ink-print pages that were then *individually* hand-colored and hand-bound into volumes.

So labor-intensive a method was not adaptable to any production of quantity: there are, for instance, only 27 known copies of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

Plates of "The Lamb" (*Innocence*)



Songs of Innocence and of Experience

- *Songs of Innocence* (1789); *Songs of Experience* (1794)
- Subtitle: “Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul”

Songs of Innocence and of Experience

- Innocence and Experience are not simple oppositions.
- Childhood is a time and a state of protected “innocence,” but it is a qualified innocence, not immune to the fallen world and its institutions.
- This world impinges on childhood itself, and becomes known through “experience,” a state of being marked by the loss of childhood vitality, by fear and inhibition, and by social and political corruptions.

Songs of Innocence and of Experience

- The values of Innocence and Experience are themselves complex. At times, an innocent state of soul reflects an untainted vitality of imagination; at other times, Blake implicates innocence with dangerous ignorance and vulnerability to oppression.
- Blake's point is not that children are pure and adults fallen. Contrary possibilities coexist, with different plays and shades of emphasis in different poems.

“The Lamb”

- The child’s idea makes a three-way unity of child, lamb and God.
- The child’s question is important. He looks at the world around him, and deduces a concept of God from what he sees.
- The child sees a soft, woolly and happy lamb, well provided-for and refreshed by “mead” and “stream,” and deduces that God is soft, woolly and meek. God, then, is just like “me and my friend.”

“The Lamb”

- The child’s approach to understanding God raises questions in our minds:

Can we decipher the deity by looking at the world around us?
What if the child saw a world of drudgery and ugliness?

“The Tyger”: Stanza 1

- The contrary poem in Experience, “The Tyger,” underlines our point by starting with same question the child of “The Lamb” asks; but this time it is directed at a frightening beast.
- The question seems to attempt an understanding of the Creator in the same way as the child in “The Lamb”: deduce God from his creation, the tyger.

trochee (*adj.* trochaic)

A metrical foot in poetry that consists of one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable.

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright

“The Tyger”: Stanza 3

*And **what shoulder**, & **what art**,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & **what dread feet?***

- The first and last lines describe the extraordinary strength the tyger’s creator must have.
- Virtually every sound hits hard.

“The Tyger”: Stanza 4

- Much of the making of the tyger is likened to heavy industrial work, particularly metalwork: “fire,” “hammer,” “chain,” “furnace” and “anvil” all contribute to this.
- We receive an impression of a smith’s great strength, the extreme heat of the furnace, and the unforgiving hardness of metal.

“The Tyger”: Stanza 6

- The final stanza is a repeat of the first, with only one word changed: “Dare” in place of “Could.” What does the change signify?
- First, the change places emphasis on the courage of the Creator: the tyger is such a strong and fearsome beast that the stronger “dare” is an appropriate question to ask of its creator.
- Other interpretations?

Blake's illustrations

- Blake's poems offer the perfect opportunity to analyze poetry as a multimedia event. They are intimately connected to his painting and etching.
- The illustrations create a dialogue with the poetry that might be surprising.

"The Lamb"

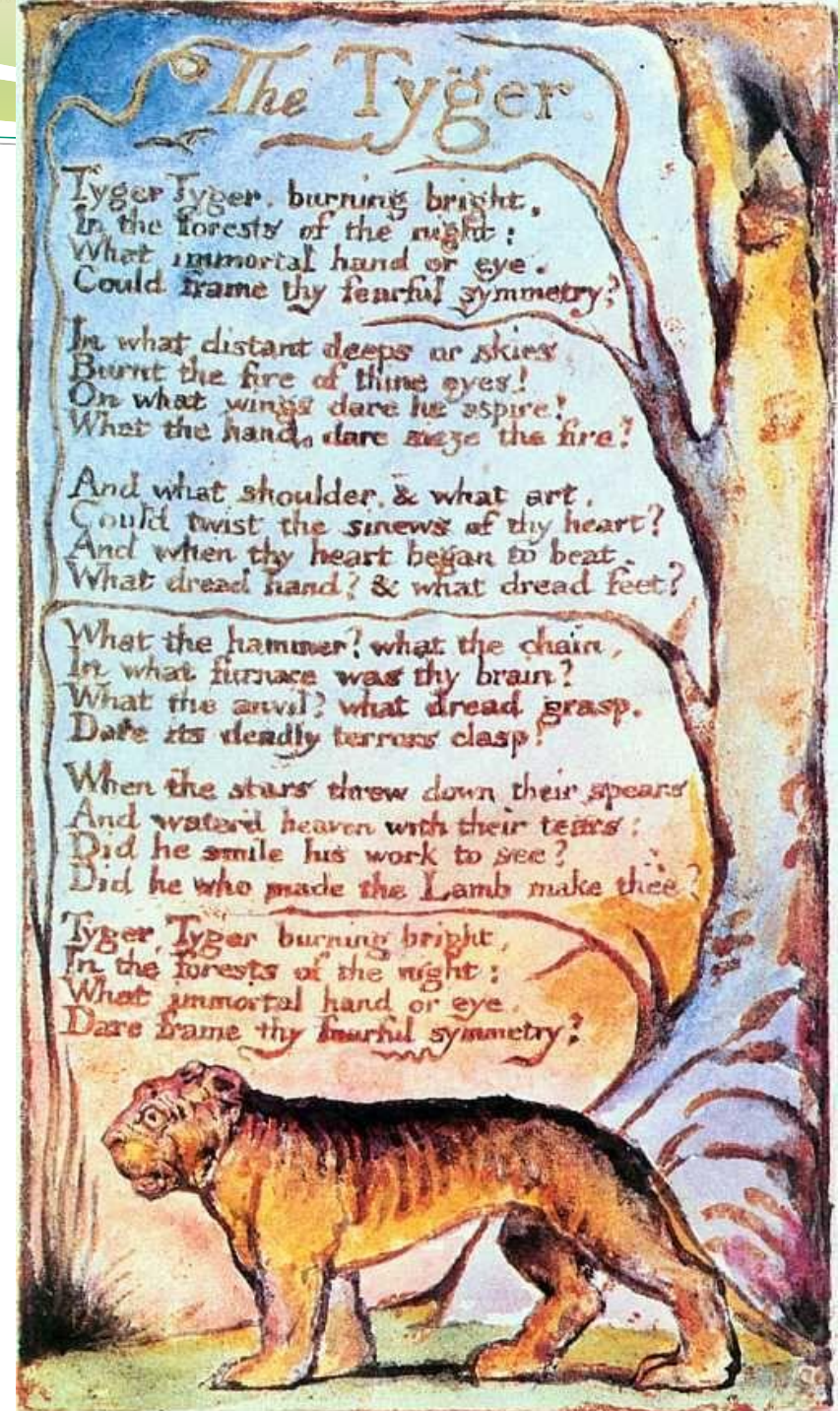


The Lamb

Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing woolly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice:
Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child:
A child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb God bless thee,
Little Lamb God bless thee

"The Tyger"



The Tyger.

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

In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

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

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

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

In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could trust the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

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

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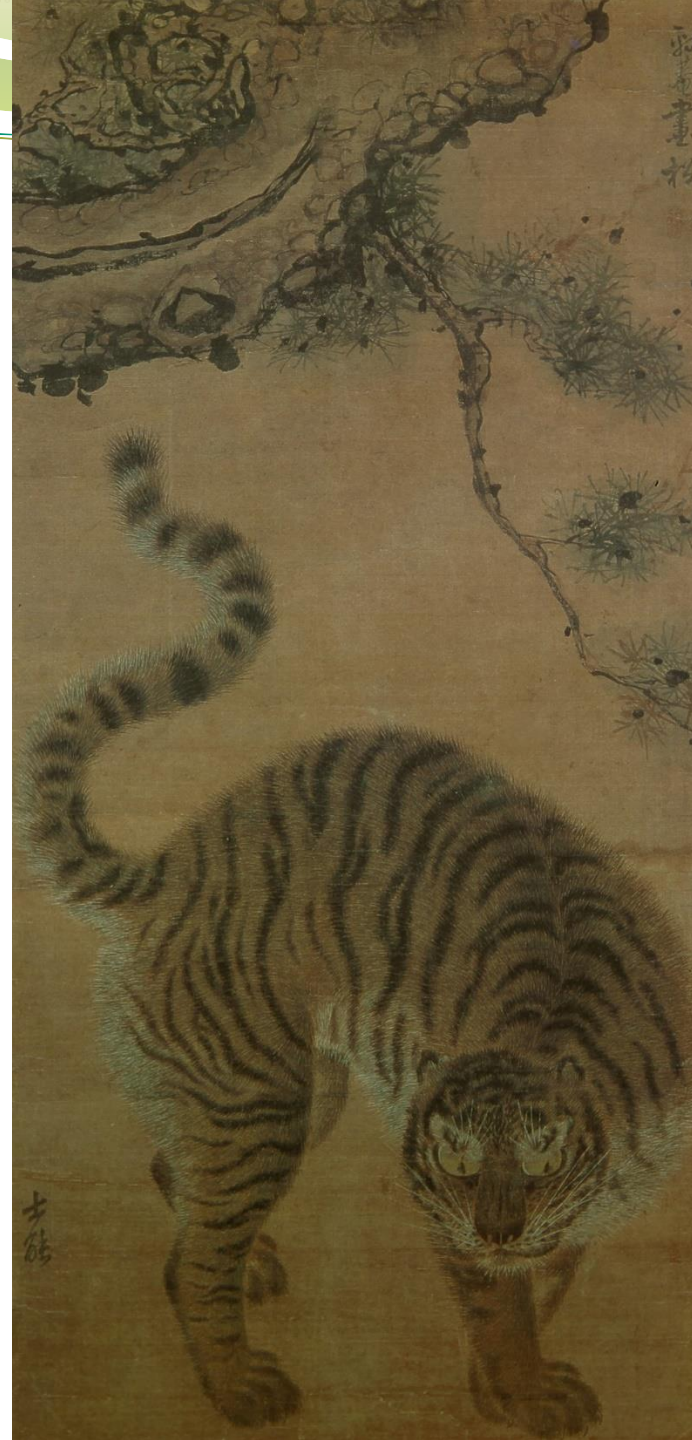
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Sources

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