

Introduction: The Tyger

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Published in 1794 as one of the Songs of Experience, Blake's "The Tyger" is a poem about the nature of creation, much as is his earlier poem from the Songs of Innocence, "The Lamb." However, this poem takes on the darker side of creation, when its benefits are less obvious than simple joys. Blake's simplicity in language and construction contradicts the complexity of his ideas. This poem is meant to be interpreted in comparison and contrast to "The Lamb," showing the "two contrary states of the human soul" with respect to creation. It has been said many times that Blake believed that a person had to pass through an innocent state of being, like that of the lamb, and also absorb the contrasting conditions of experience, like those of the tiger, in order to reach a higher level of consciousness. In any case, Blake's vision of a creative force in the universe making a balance of innocence and experience is at the heart of this poem.

The poem's speaker is never defined, and so may be more closely aligned with Blake himself than in his other poems. One interpretation could be that it is the Bard from the Introduction to the Songs of Experience walking through the *ancient* forest and encountering the beast within himself, or within the material world. The poem reflects primarily the speaker's response to the tiger, rather than the tiger's response to the world.

It is important to remember that Blake lived in a time that had never heard of popular psychology as we understand it today. He wrote the mass of his work before the Romantic movement in English literature. He lived in a world that was in the opening stages of the Industrial Revolution, and in the midst of political revolutions all over Europe and in America. As we look at his work we must in some way forget many of the ideas about creativity, artists, and human nature that we take for granted today, and reimagine them for the first time as, perhaps, Blake did himself. It is in this way that Blake's poetry has the power to astound us with his insight.

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