

Songs of Innocence and Experience

In 1789, William Blake wrote *Songs of Innocence*, a book of poetry that could be enjoyed by both children and adults. It was designed to show what was good in the world.

A few years later, he released a second book, *Songs of Experience*. These poems explored the sadder, more dangerous side of life. By putting the two books together, he seemed imply that we are happier when we are children ('innocent') than when we are adults ('experienced').

In *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the 'innocent' poems are echoed by poems telling the other side of the story. For example, each part of the book has a poem called *Nurse's Song*, but in *Innocence*, the poem celebrates the joys of childhood, while in *Experience*, the nurse is sad about getting old.

The following two poems are the most famous pairing in the book. Note the old-fashioned spelling of *tiger*.

The Lamb

*Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed,
By the stream and 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, and He is mild;
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are called by His name.
Little Lamb, God bless thee!
Little Lamb, God bless thee!*

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, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? and 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 watered 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
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?*



The Tyger by William Blake ©The British Museum

Discussion Points

Both of the poems contain questions. What does the poet ask?

- Do you think he wants us to answer these questions?
- If so, what is the answer?
- Is the answer the same in both poems?