

WILLIAM BLAKE

LIFE (1757 - 1827)

William Blake was born in London into a family of a tradesman. When he was twenty-one, he entered the Royal Academy of Arts. Then he left. In 1789 he himself published the illustrated volume *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Blake also worked on the “prophetic” poems. In these works he developed a personal mythology and used a set of symbols to criticize Christianity and to show man torn between the forces of nature and the power of imagination. He died in 1827.

ACHIEVEMENT

Blake was a contemporary of the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. This is the reason why Blake devoted himself to the principles of liberty, justice and equality. Blake’s most important work is *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and some individual lyric poems from these collections, like *The Lamb*, *The Tyger* are among the best-known in the language.

SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE

Unlike the writers of the first half of the 18th century who relied on reason to understand reality, Blake relies on imagination and vision. It is only through imagination that one understands the injustices of the world and can rebel against them. Blake’s work rejects both the role of reason as a way to knowledge and the poetic ruled of classicists to follow his original style.

His simple language is based on biblical sources and on the English tradition of nursery rhymes. Blake’s first work of importance was a collection of poems: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*.

Innocence corresponds to the world of childhood and represents the compassion, love and sympathy. **Experience** corresponds to the world of adulthood: it’s in the world of experience that we encounter tyranny and injustice. Innocence and experience are states of mind that coexist, showing that human nature is both innocent and corrupt.

THE LAMB AND THE TYGER

The Lamb and *The Tyger* are both about the problem of **Creation** and the identity of the Creator. The two poems may seem to evoke two real animals, each with its own features and set in its natural habitat. But it’s clear that the lamb and the tiger are symbols. The lamb may represent the innocence of childhood, while the tiger symbolized the evil that comes from experience.

In the poem *The Tyger* the symbolism becomes more complex. For example the word “burning” may evoke the image of the animal’s eyes burning with violence, but the addition of “bright” turns the tiger into something shining, which may symbolize the light of the genius overcoming the error and the ignorance represented by “the forest of the night”. The tiger is so beautiful and powerful that it could only have been created by God.

If the lamb partakes of the nature of God, the tiger also represents a quality of the divinity. And if the lamb represents the sweetness and meekness of Christ, the tiger represents the “other” Christ, who descended among men offering them a revolutionary and violent message of love.