

**Songs of Innocence and Songs of  
Experience: “Shewing the Two Contrary  
States of the Human Soul.” (1794)**

**Blake’s *The Lamb* and *The Tyger***

**Third Stage**

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## Symbolism

**Symbolism:** in literature is a technique where objects, characters, actions, or events represent abstract ideas or themes beyond their literal meaning. It allows writers to convey deeper meanings and evoke emotions, enriching the narrative with layers of complexity. Symbolism often invites readers to interpret the text more broadly and connect with universal themes.

### Charles Baudelaire:

Often regarded as a precursor to the Symbolist movement, Baudelaire emphasized the power of correspondences, where nature, art, and emotions intertwine to create meaning. His poem *Correspondances* from *Les Fleurs du Mal* is foundational in Symbolist theory.

### T.S. Eliot:

In his essay "*The Symbolist Movement in Poetry*", Eliot discussed the influence of French Symbolists (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine) on modern literature. He highlighted their use of imagery and indirect suggestion to create complex emotional and intellectual responses.

## Types of Symbols

### Universal (Archetypal) Symbols:

Recognizable across cultures and time periods.

- Examples:
  - **Light:** Often represents knowledge, truth, or hope.
  - **Darkness:** Frequently symbolizes ignorance, evil, or despair.
  - **Water:** Can represent life, renewal, or purification.

### Contextual Symbols:

Specific to a particular work of literature and gain meaning within that context.

- Example: **The green light** in *The Great Gatsby* represents Gatsby's dreams and unattainable desires.

## **Theoretical Definitions**

C.G. Jung (Psychology and Symbolism): Carl Jung defined symbols as representations of unconscious ideas or archetypes, giving them psychological and universal significance in literature. He wrote in *Man and His Symbols*: “A symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning.”

**William Blake’s *The Lamb* (Songs of Innocence) 1789**

**William Blake’s *The Tyger* (Songs of Experience) 1794**

**Introduction:** In the poems of *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, Blake contrasts how the human spirit blossoms when allowed its own free movement, which he calls a state of “innocence,” and how it turns in on itself after it has been suppressed and forced to conform to rules, systems, and doctrines, which he calls a state of “experience.” The two states recall one of the principal events in the Judeo-Christian story, the fall from innocence caused by Adam and Eve when they eat fruit from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden. The poison tree of Blake’s poem suggests that biblical tree. Thus Blake reflects the literary group to which he belongs in his exploration of death. Yet in many ways Blake’s poetry is unlike the work of his contemporaries. Some critics see Blake not as much of the romantic period as anticipating it. These readers may see *Songs of Innocence* and *Experience* as more like late eighteenth-century children’s poetry than the lyrical ballads Wordsworth wrote. Others emphasize Blake’s uniqueness, stressing his dissimilarity to other artists of his time. Indeed, Blake asserted the importance of originality, of not being trapped by someone else’s system of thought or artistic expression. Nonetheless, for most readers, Blake represents romanticism in its purest form. His visions and prophecies, his use of heightened states of emotion, his opposition to social oppression and to the hypocrisy of church and state, and his focus on ordinary low-class people and their experience, all of these align Blake with what literary scholars later called romanticism.

## **Songs of Innocence:**

### ***The Lamb***

#### **Summary of *The Lamb*:**

The poem begins with the question, “Little Lamb, who made thee?” The speaker, a child, asks the lamb about its origins: how it came into being, how it acquired its particular manner of feeding, its “clothing” of wool, its “tender voice.” In the next stanza, the speaker attempts a riddling answer to his own question: the lamb was made by one who “calls himself a Lamb,” one who resembles in his gentleness both the child and the lamb. The poem ends with the child bestowing a blessing on the lamb.

### ***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, 5  
Softest clothing, wooly, bright;  
Gave thee such a tender voice  
Making all the vales rejoice?  
Little Lamb, who made thee?**

The poem is a child’s song, in the form of a question and answer. The first stanza is rural and descriptive, while the second focuses on abstract spiritual matters and contains explanation and analogy. The child’s question is both naive and profound. The question (“who made thee?”) is a simple one, and yet the child is also tapping into the deep and timeless questions that all human beings have, about their own origins and the nature of creation. The poem’s apostrophic form contributes to the effect of naiveté, since the situation of a child talking to an animal is a believable one, and not simply a literary contrivance. Yet by answering his own question, the child converts it into a rhetorical one, thus counteracting the initial spontaneous sense of the poem. The answer is presented as a puzzle or riddle, and even though

it is an easy one—child’s play—this also contributes to an underlying sense of ironic knowingness or artifice in the poem. The child’s answer, however, reveals his confidence in his simple Christian faith and his innocent acceptance of its teachings.

**Dost thou know who made thee? 10**

**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 & thou a lamb,**

**We are called by his name.**

**Little Lamb God bless thee.**

**Little Lamb God bless thee.**

the lamb symbolizes innocence, purity, and the gentle aspect of creation. The image of the child is also associated with Jesus: These are also the characteristics from which the child speaker approaches the ideas of nature and of God. This poem, like many of the Songs of Innocence, accepts what Blake saw as the more positive aspects of conventional Christian belief. But it does not provide a completely adequate doctrine, because it fails to account for the presence of suffering and evil in the world.

**Q/ In accordance with the symbolism, what type of symbols has been used in Blake’s *The Lamb*? Why?**

## Songs of Experience

### *The Tyger*

#### **Summary of *The Tyger*:**

The Tyger by William Blake is taken from The Songs of Experience. The tiger itself is a symbol for the fierce forces in the soul that are necessary to break the bonds of experience. The tiger also stands for a divine spirit that will not be subdued by restrictions, but will arise against established rules and conventions. The Tyger is a highly symbolic poem based on Blake's personal philosophy of spiritual and intellectual revolution by individuals.

Analysis of the poem

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

The opening question enacts what will be the single dramatic gesture of the poem, and each subsequent stanza elaborates on this conception. Blake is building on the conventional idea that nature, like a work of art, must in some way contain a reflection of its creator. The tiger is strikingly beautiful yet also horrific in its capacity for violence. What kind of a God, then, could or would design such a terrifying beast as the tiger? In more general terms, what does the undeniable existence of evil and violence in the world tell us about the nature of God, and what does it mean to live in a world where a being can at once contain both beauty and horror?

**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?**

The tiger initially appears as a strikingly sensuous image. However, as the poem progresses, it takes on a symbolic character, and comes to embody the spiritual and

moral problem the poem explores: perfectly beautiful and yet perfectly destructive, Blake's tiger becomes the symbolic center for an investigation into the presence of evil in the world. Since the tiger's remarkable nature exists both in physical and moral terms, the speaker's questions about its origin must also encompass both physical and moral dimensions. The poem's series of questions repeatedly ask what sort of physical creative capacity the "fearful symmetry" of the tiger bespeaks; assumedly only a very strong and powerful being could be capable of such a creation.

**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 smithy represents a traditional image of artistic creation; here Blake applies it to the divine creation of the natural world. The "forging" of the tiger suggests a very physical, laborious, and deliberate kind of making; it emphasizes the awesome physical presence of the tiger and precludes the idea that such a creation could have been in any way accidentally or haphazardly produced. It also continues from the first description of the tiger the imagery of fire with its simultaneous connotations of creation, purification, and destruction. The speaker stands in awe of the tiger as a sheer physical and aesthetic achievement, even as he recoils in horror from the moral implications of such a creation.

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

The repeated use of word the "dare" to replace the "could" of the first stanza introduces a dimension of aspiration and willfulness into the sheer might of the creative act.

**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?**

The reference to the lamb in the penultimate stanza reminds the reader that a tiger and a lamb have been created by the same God, and raises questions about the implications of this. It also invites a contrast between the perspectives of “experience” and “innocence” represented here and in the poem “The Lamb.” “The Tyger” consists entirely of unanswered questions, and the poet leaves us to awe at the complexity of creation, the sheer magnitude of God’s power, and the inscrutability of divine will.

**Tyger Tyger burning bright,**

**In the forests of the night:**

**What immortal hand or eye,**

**Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?**

The perspective of experience in this poem involves a sophisticated acknowledgment of what is unexplainable in the universe, presenting evil as the prime example of something that cannot be denied, but will not withstand facile explanation, either. The open awe of “The Tyger” contrasts with the easy confidence, in “The Lamb,” of a child’s innocent faith in a benevolent universe. Q/

**In accordance with the symbolism, what type of symbols has been used in Blake’s *The Tyger*? Why?**

# Blake's Vision of Creation – The Lamb and The Tyger

The dual nature of creation and the human soul  
Innocence and Experience are two necessary states of existence

## The Lamb

Symbol of Innocence



*Songs of Innocence*

- Purity
- Gentleness
- Simplicity
- Faith and trust
- Divine love and kindness

### Poetic Focus

Child's voice asking and answering questions with confidence: God is kind, loving, and approachable  
"He is meek and He is mild"

### Spiritual Meaning

Christ as the Lamb of God  
Innocence reveals the good and tender side of creation



## Balance and Unity

Both the Lamb, and The Tyger are created by the same God

Innocence and experience are not enemies

Complete each other.

The world requires both gentleness and strength, light and darkness, love and awe

## The Tyger

Symbol of Experience



*Songs of Experience*

- Power and strength
- Mystery and fear
- Passion and energy
- Awareness of evil and suffering
- Beauty mixed with danger

### Poetic Focus

The adult or experienced voice filled with wonder and doubt. God's awe-inspiring, per avne artirile  
"Did he who made the Lamb make thee?"

### Spiritual Meaning

The darker, more complex side of God's creation