

English Subsidiary, U.G. - I

Poem: The Tyger

Poet: William Blake [1757 - 1827]

Topic: The Tyger: Summary

"The Tyger" was first published in William Blake's 1794 volume

"Songs of Experience", which contains many of his most celebrated poems.

The Songs of Experience is a contrast to the earlier collection, Songs of Innocence (1789). In fact, these two volumes deal with two contrary states of mind.

The world of Songs of Experience is dominated by the experience of adulthood.

Corruption, moral disorder and sexual crimes flourish in this world. The question of 'poetic justice' seems to be impossible in this world.

The Tyger (1794) begins with

the speaker asking a fearsome tiger
what kind of divine being could
have created it:

"What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?"

Each subsequent stanza contains further questions, all of which reemphasize this first one. From what part of the cosmos could the tiger's fiery eyes have come, and who would have dared to handle that fire? What sort of physical presence, and what kind of dark craftsmanship, would have been required to "twist the sinews" of the tiger's heart? The speaker wonders how, once that horrible heart "began to beat", its creator would have had the courage to continue the job. Comparing the creator to a blacksmith, he ponders about the anvil and the furnace that the project would have required and the smith who could have wielded them. And when the job was done, the speaker wonders, how would the creator have felt? "Did he smile his work to see?" Could this possibly be the same being who made the lamb?

=