William Blake (1757-1827)

Poet, Painter, & Printer

A radical thinker (called insane by some) with a strong interest in religion, albeit not orthodox religion.
• Published together in 1794.

• The *Songs of Experience* are darker, and often echo the *Songs of Innocence* in contrast. For example, *Songs of Innocence* contains “The Lamb” & *Songs of Experience* includes “The Tyger.”

• The work reflects the period’s interest in childhood, nostalgia, and transformation (going from one state of being to another). It also shows some attention to those suffering in the midst of the industrial revolution.
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 sieze the fire?

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?

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 water'd 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?
A few thoughts Blake’s Tyger brings to mind:

- People view things from their own perspective.
- What people say (and how they say it) often says more about themselves than what they mean to say.
- When faced with a void of information (the unknown), people often project their own anxieties.

- What does the poem suggest about the speaker?
- What do you think of the image of the Tyger?
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.

--from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1.254-55)
The Four Zoas is one of Blake’s complex works—in it he creates his own mythology, in which characters are made up of other characters—their spectres and emmanations (their own inner spirits and demons). It’s like Paradise Lost occurring inside of each individual—so it’s very difficult to read and likely why some thought Blake mad. The work is religious, mythological, grand, complex, & dramatic and passionate to the extreme.

What have I done! said Enion accursed wretch! What deed. Is this a deed of Love I know what I have done. I know Too late now to repent. Love is changd to deadly Hate A [Il] life is blotted out & I alone remain possessd with Fears I see the Shadow of the dead within my Soul wandering In darkness & solitude forming Seas of Doubt & rocks of Repentance Already are my Eyes reverted. all that I behold Within my Soul has lost its splendor & a brooding Fear Shadows me oer & drives me outward to a world of woe So waild she trembling before her own Created Phantasm

--from The Four Zoas (1.94-104)
Blake’s unconventional religious views:

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods Geniuses calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could percieve [sic]. And particularly they studied the genius of each city country, placing it under its mental deity. Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood. Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales. And at length they pronounced that the Gods had orderd such things. Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.

--*The Marriage of Heaven & Hell*, Plate 11 (in NA 115)
LONDON
I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse
London by Gustave Dore—Victorian Illustrator & Engraver