

Discussion Questions for Week Two: William Blake

Please visit The William Blake Archive (blakearchive.org) and view Blake's poem-paintings as you read and think about the poems for today.

(1) Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* were originally two separate volumes of poems, later combined into one contrasting collection. *Songs of Innocence* were written in 1789 and *Songs of Experience* in 1794 (before and after The Terror and the failure of the French Revolution). So, one useful way to read these poems is in pairs: the two "Introductions," the two "Chimney Sweepers," "The Lamb" and "The Tyger." Pick any pair listed here and explain how the poems create a contrast or binary opposition. How do the poems show the "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul," as the subtitle to the collection states?

(2) As the title of the collection suggests, Blake considered his poems to be songs. How are these poems songs? What is the difference between a song and a poem?

(3) What is the relationship between image and text in Blake's poems? Do you read the poems differently with/out the images?