**Blake, William**

**Blake, William** (b. Nov. 28, 1757, London--d. Aug. 12, 1827, London)

English poet, painter, engraver; one of the earliest and greatest figures of Romanticism. The most famous of Blake's lyrical poems is Auguries of Innocence, with its memorable opening stanza:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand

And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand

And Eternity in an hour.

"I do not behold the outward creation... it is a hindrance and not action." Thus William Blake--painter, engraver, and poet--explained why his work was filled with religious visions rather than with subjects from everyday life. Few people in his time realized that Blake expressed these visions with a talent that approached genius. He lived in near poverty and died unrecognized. Today, however, Blake is acclaimed one of England's great figures of art and literature and one of the most inspired and original painters of his time.

Blake was born on Nov. 28, 1757, in London. His father ran a hosiery shop. William, the third of five children, went to school only long enough to learn to read and write, and then he worked in the shop until he was 14. When he saw the boy's talent for drawing, Blake's father apprenticed him to an engraver.

At 25 Blake married Catherine Boucher. He taught her to read and write and to help him in his work. They had no children. They worked together to produce an edition of Blake's poems and drawings, called Songs of Innocence. Blake engraved both words and pictures on copper printing plates. Catherine made the printing impressions, hand-colored the pictures, and bound the books. The books sold slowly, for a few shillings each. Today a single copy is worth many thousands of dollars.

Blake's fame as an artist and engraver rests largely on a set of 21 copperplate etchings to illustrate the Book of Job in the Old Testament. However, he did much work for which other artists and engravers got the credit. Blake was a poor businessman, and he preferred to work on subjects of his own choice rather than on those that publishers assigned him.

A follower of Emanuel Swedenborg, who offered a gentle and mystic interpretation of Christianity, Blake wrote poetry that largely reflects Swedenborgian views. Songs of Innocence (1789) shows life as it seems to innocent children. Songs of Experience (1794) tells of a mature person's realization of pain and terror in the universe. This book contains his famous `Tiger! Tiger! Burning Bright'. Milton (1804-08) and Jerusalem (1804-20) are longer and more obscure works. Blake died on Aug. 12, 1827.