

# Blake and The Child

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**I**n "The Lamb," from Songs of Innocence, William Blake captured the sensitive imaginativeness, the knowledge, and the awareness of childhood in a filigree of delicate language, verse form, and understanding. He lifted the veil of childhood and revealed that period of life in which imagination, not yet restricted, gives the child a pure understanding of God and his relations to Him and to the world about him. Blake knew that the child sees the world through his imagin-

ation and that this very imagination gives him his knowledge. The child, because of his unrestricted sight, receives countless sensations and feelings, and he believes in them. His simplicity enables him to see and to understand their true meaning. He is unaware of this, but there are a few persons who are able to recapture the understanding of childhood. As the following lines show, Blake was such a person.

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  
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;  
Gave thee such a tender voice,  
Making all the vales rejoice?  
Little Lamb, who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?  
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, and thou a lamb,  
We are called by his name.  
Little Lamb, God bless thee.  
Little Lamb, God bless thee.

The beginning stanza illustrates Blake's idea of the child's imagination and understanding. The first two lines serve only as an introduction; the next two give the common idea of the God as the giver of life. It is the following line, "Gave thee clothing of delight," which pictures the child's awareness of God not only as the giver of life but also as the giver of those spiritual qualities that bring happiness. The emphasis falls upon the word "delight" with its connotations of comfort, gladness, enjoyment, and blessing. Through this word, the line assumes a doubly important meaning. It presents the idea of God's giving His blessing through His gifts. The next line, "Softest clothing, woolly, bright," conveys through the word "bright," a picture of the splendor, radiance, and immaculateness of God's gift and shows the child's understanding of the beauty of all things. Finally, in the lines, "Gave thee such a tender voice, Making all the vales rejoice," the word "tender" suggests not only the softness of the Lamb's voice but also its compassion and love. The child is cognizant of the fact that God has given the Lamb a voice of benevolence

and affection in order, as the next line shows, to make all things "rejoice." When this term is given its fullest meaning, it carries the idea of the child's knowledge that God has given these gifts in order that all things may exult. Here, Blake has shown that the child, through his imagination, realizes that the bond or relationship between all things in the world comes through God.

The second stanza develops and amplifies this relationship. "He is called by thy name, For he calls himself a Lamb." The Lamb now becomes identified with Christ. "He is meek and he is mild; He became a little child." The terms "meek" and "mild" suggest the qualities of gentleness and humility. Since the next line, "I a child, and thou a lamb, We are called by his name," identifies the child with the Lamb and with Christ, these ideas apply to him as well, and through this line, the relationship is strengthened. The poem ends with the benediction, "Little Lamb, God bless thee." The picture is now complete. The child, perceiving that his kinship with the lamb and with all of nature comes through Christ, gives his God-like blessing to the lamb.

Blake has achieved his purpose not only through the ideas that he has expressed but also in the words and manner of expression. First, he has used the artless, simple diction of the very young. It has a rhythmical beauty, but more than that, it appeals to the senses, primarily to the sense of sight. Blake knew that children are attracted to things through their eyes, and, therefore, he used words that appeal to the eye and paint a picture rather than words that appeal to the intellect. Secondly, the form of the poem carries out his purpose. The short line verses and sentence structure are like the speech of the child. The short sentences give the poem the quick, flowing tone of a young person's speech. Finally, the use of many vowels give the poem a rich, liquid tone. The words are woven together to form a gossamer web that holds the heart of childhood.

## The Designer

Frances King

If I thought I could bargain  
Or bribe or make even trade  
And return to your graces,  
Your small lighted room. . . .  
If I brought an apron of violets,  
Of miniature white flowers,  
Would I gain entrance?  
Would they give me a glance  
Through the door?