

ROMANTIC AGE

Unit Two

Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience by William Blake

Songs of Innocence

The Lamb by William Blake

‘The Lamb’ by William Blake was included in *The Songs of Innocence* published in 1789. It is regarded “as one of the great lyrics of English Literature.” In the form of a dialogue between the child and the lamb, the poem is an amalgam of the Christian script and pastoral tradition.

The lamb is a universal symbol of selfless innocence, Jesus the Lamb is the gentle imagination, the Divine Humanity. The Lamb identifies with Christ to form a Trinity of child, Lamb, and Redeemer.

The poem presents the ideal of charity substantiating Christian compassion and Caritas or caring, the ideals of the Lamb of God. However, the Christian connotations also contain the implications of sacrifice, death, and tragedy; Christ the human sacrifice who look upon himself the savior of the world.”

Summary of The Lamb

‘The Lamb’ by William Blake is a warm and curious poem that uses the lamb as a symbol for Christ, innocence, and the nature of God’s creation.

Throughout the two stanzas of this poem, the poet speaks to the lamb, asking it if it knows who was responsible for creating it. He goes into vague detail about Christ, his nature, while using repetition to emphasize these features.

Themes in The Lamb

In ‘The Lamb’ Blake explores themes of religion, innocence, and morality. Throughout the lines, he, or his speaker, expresses his appreciation for God and what he represents. The “lamb,” or Christ, should be a source of celebration for all who see or hear him. Its innocence is one of the most important features. All people should strive for the image of the lamb.

Structure of The Lamb

‘The Lamb’ by William Blake consists of two stanzas, each with five rhymed couplets. Repetition in the first and last couplet of each stanza turns these lines into a refrain and helps in providing the poem its song-like quality. The flowing l’s and soft vowel sounds also make a contribution to this effect, and also bring forth the bleating of a lamb or the lisping character of a child’s chant.

Literary Devices in The Lamb

In ‘The Lamb’ Blake makes use of several literary devices. These include but are not limited to alliteration, enjambment, and repetition. The latter, repetition, can be seen through the use and reuse of lines. For example, “Little Lamb I’ll tell thee” in the second stanza. This increases the nursery rhyme-like sound of the verse. Enjambment is another technique that helps with the flow of this particular poem. For example, the transitions between lines one and two of the first stanza.

Alliteration is a very helpful technique that poets can use to put added emphasis on particular phrases or increase the rhyme and rhythm of the poem. Take for example the words “Little Lamb” in line one of the first stanza and “meek” and “mild” in line five of the second stanza.

Analysis of The Lamb

Stanza One

Little Lamb who made thee

Dost thou know who made thee

Gave thee life & bid thee feed.

By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice!
Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee

The Lamb is a didactic poem. In this poem, the poet pays a tribute to Lord Christ who was innocent and pure like a child and meek and mild like a lamb. The little child asks the lamb if he knows who has created it, who has blessed it with life, and with the capacity to feed by the stream and over the meadow. The child asks him if the lamb knows who has given it bright and soft wool, which serves as its clothing, who has given it a tender voice that fills the valley with joy.

In the first stanza of ten lines of William Blake's poem The Lamb, the child who is supposed to be speaking to the lamb, gives a brief description of the little animal as he sees it. The lamb has been blessed with life and with the capacity to feed by the stream and over the meadow; it has been endowed with bright and soft wool which serves as its clothing; it has a tender voice which fills the valley with joy.

The readers here are provided with a true portrait of a lamb. In the poem, the child of innocence repeatedly asks the lamb as to who made him. Does he know who created him (the lamb)? The same question has been put repeatedly all through the first lines of the poem. The child addresses Little Lamb to ask him who made him and wants to ascertain whether he knows who made him. The child wants to know who gave the Lamb his life, who fed him while living along the river on the other side of the meadow. He also wants to know from the Lamb who supplied him with pleasant body-cover (clothing) which is softest, full of wool and shining.

The Lamb is also asked by the child who gave him such a delicate bleating voice, which resounds a happy note in the surrounding valleys. The stanza is marked by the child's innocence which is the first stage in Blake's journey to the truth. "The Child of Innocence lives by intuition enjoys a spontaneous communion with nature and sees the divine in all things."

Stanza Two

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 & he is mild,

He became a little child:

I a child & thou a lamb,

We are called by his name.

Little Lamb God bless thee.

Little Lamb God bless thee.

In the second stanza of the poem, there is an identification of the lamb, Christ, and the child. Christ has another name, that is, Lamb, because Christ is meek and mild like lamb. Christ was also a child when he first appeared on this earth as the Son of God. Hence the appropriateness of the following lines: “He became a little child:/I a child & thou a lamb,/We are called by his name.” The child in this poem speaks to the lamb as if the lamb were another child and could respond to what is being said. The child shows his deep joy in the company of the lamb who is just like him, meek, and mild. The poem conveys the spirit of childhood – the purity, the innocence, the tenderness of childhood, and the affection that a child feels for little creatures.

A religious note is introduced in the poem because of the image of Christ as a child. The Lamb is a pastoral poem. The pastoral poem note in Blake is another symbol of joy and innocence. In the next ten lines of the second stanza from William Blake’s poem *The Lamb*, the child himself proceeds to answer the questions he has asked the Lamb in the first stanza. The child says that the person, who has created the Lamb and has given many gifts described in the first stanza, is himself by the name of the Lamb.

It is Jesus Christ who calls himself a Lamb. Jesus the Lamb is meek (submissive) and mild (soft-natured), and he became a child for the sake of mankind. The narrator (I) is a child, he is Lamb and they both are called by Jesus’s name. The Lamb identifies with Christ to form a Trinity of Child, Lamb, and Redeemer (Jesus).

Personal Comments to *The Lamb*

The Lamb by William Blake has been written in the form of question and answer. Where its first stanza is descriptive and rural, the second concentrates on abstract spiritual matters and consists of analogy and explanation. The question of the child is both profound and naïve, and the apostrophic form of the poem makes a contribution to the effect of naiveté since the situation of a child in discourse with an animal is a convincing one and not just a literary contrivance. Still, by giving answers to his own question, the child succeeds in converting it into a rhetorical one, as a result countering the initial spontaneous sense of the poem. The answer is depicted as a riddle or a puzzle, and even though it’s an easy one—child’s play—this also helps in contributing to an essential sense of sardonic knowingness or artifice in the poem. However, the child’s answer discloses his self-reliance in his simple Christian faith and his innocent acceptance of its teachings.

Songs of Experience

The Tyger by William Blake

William Blake’s literary masterpiece, ‘*The Tyger*’ has been scrutinized from literal and metaphorical point of views as he revisits his preferred dilemmas of innocence vs. experience. As for God, his creations are just beautiful and transcend the notions of good-evil. As is the case with his earlier poems, ‘*The Tyger*’ gives no visible answers except offering more questions.

‘*Songs of Innocence*’ and ‘*Songs of Experience*’ juxtapose opposing sides of human nature, comparing and contrasting innocence with corruption. ‘*The Tyger*’ is an extension of the same theme, representing two diverse perspectives of the human world. William Blake doesn’t take either side, but paints an opposing worldview for his readers. He also seems opposed to 3-fold controlling forces of religion, despotic rule and sexual repression.

Summary of *The Tyger*

‘*The Tyger*’ by William Blake is not a simplistic poem as it yields many interpretations. However, its strong, resonating rhyming drives the key concept in the reader’s mind efficiently.

‘*The Tyger*’ by William Blake slowly and gradually leads to asking some troubling questions. ‘*The Tyger*’ in essence is a poem where the poet asks the tiger about its creator and his traits. Each stanza poses certain questions with a vague subject (Tyger) in consideration. The poem largely questions the existence of god and its metaphysical attributes referring to Tyger’s multiple corporeal characteristics as purely a work of art. The poet wonders how the creator would have felt after completing his creation. Is he also the creator of the lamb?

William Blake engages with the idea that all living entities must reflect its creator in some mannerism in 'The Tyger.' The opening verses slowly leads to the primary objective of the poem: contemplating God in the heavens above. In essence, the tiger is a beautifully enigmatic creature, yet lethal at the same time. This also reflects the nature of God as he contemplates that a God could be just as loving and just as lethal when needed be. Religion is one of the primary themes of the poem. As a result, what kind of being can be both violent and so magnificent simultaneously? The poem explores the moral dilemma of the poet largely concerned with the metaphysical entity. It becomes a symbolic allegory to God in hindsight.

As the poet contends, that such a powerfully destructive living entity can be a creation of a purely, artful God. The poet precludes the notion of tiger's creation in any way accidental or haphazard. He feels that this tiger is allotted immense physical strength as it can wield its command over weaker animals.

The final allusion to the lamb can connote his reference to the poem, 'The Lamb' as he compares the timid living animal to that of a tiger. God created the tiger as a dominant creature while the lamb is simply a weakling compared to the tiger. On the whole, 'The Tyger' consists of unanswered questions, the poet leaves his readers pondering the will of the creator, his limitless power and awe of his creation, a three-fold subject. In conclusion, the poet ends his poem with perspectives of innocence and experience, both a subject of great interest to him.

Historical Context of The Tyger

After publishing Songs of Innocence, Songs of Experience was published in 1794. The aim of the poet was to demonstrate the contrarian nature of the soul and human thought. The poem 'The Tyger' was published in his collection of poems known as Songs of Experience. It became an instant literary classic amongst all-time classic poems of the modern era.

'Songs of Experience' was written in opposition to 'Songs of Innocence', key components in Blake's thought process, being a radical thinker of his time. 'The Tyger' was the pinnacle of heresy for William Blake, pitching humans bearing the onus for their actions.

Structure and Form of The Tyger

'The Tyger' by William Blake consists of 6-stanzas with each stanza consisting of 4-lines each. The poem flows with a rhythmic synchronization with a regular meter, the hammering is relevant to blacksmith herein. It has been written in a neat, regular structure with neat proportions. The poem slowly points out to the final question therein. The first and last stanzas are similar to the word 'could' and 'dare' interchanged. The poem at times is all about questions to the divine with at least 13-different questions asked in the poem's entirety. The poet seems worried as to how the creator shaped up such a magnificent creature, but more so, how is the creator himself?

Literary Devices in The Tyger

Blake makes use of several literary devices in 'The Tyger.' These include but are not limited to alliteration, enjambment, and allusion. The latter is one of the most important as Blake alludes to the major question at the heart of the poem, if God created the tiger, what kind of creator is he? Throughout the piece, by referring to the tiger's fearsome nature, Blake is in turn referring to the darker sides of life itself.

Alliteration is a common type of repetition that's concerned with the use and reuse of the same consonant sounds at the beginning of words. For example, "burning bright" in line one and "frame and "fearful" in line four of the first stanza. This kind of repetition, in addition to the broader refrain that's used in 'The Tyger,' helps create a memorable rhythm.

Enjambment is a formal device that appears when the poet cuts off a line before its natural stopping point. For example, the transition between lines one and two of the second stanza as well as lines three and four of the fourth stanza.

Analysis of The Tyger

Stanza One

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright

In the forests of the night

What immortal hand or eye

Could frame thy fearful symmetry

The initial verse refers to tyger, imploring about its beauty and creator. As the poem leads on gradually, the poem clearly makes it a point to discuss God as an entity as opposed to the tyger. William Blake champions metaphors as the first one is 'burning bright', which refers to the tyger's bright yellow fur, as it roams freely in the forest night. The central question as the reader slowly realizes pertains existence of God.

Slowly, William Blake attacks the Christian God as he asks whether a divine entity is capable of creating such a mesmerizing creature with perfection definitions and extraordinary beauty. Whether he deems God impotent of creating such a four-legged creature is left open-ended to the reader.

Fearful symmetry is a nuanced trait that has dual allusions, one for the tyger and the other referring to divine deity. As apparent, the sublime characteristic refers to an entity extremely big and powerful yet mysterious. As a result, the poet starts off with poetic allusions, entirely open-ended for the reader to perceive as he pleases. He slowly arrives at the question as to how would God be when he hath created such a scary creature walking freely in the jungle.

Stanza Two

In what distant deep or skies

Burnt the fire of thine eyes?

On what wings dare he aspire?

What the hand dare seize the fire?

The poet's fascination with Tyger ever increases as he seems mesmerized with his fiery eyes. He feels that the fire in his eyes came from a distant heavenly body such as hell/ heaven. The poet adds to the fiery image of Tyger by using the metaphor of burning from the first verse. The third line throws the reader off track. William Blake is slowly coming to the point of his argument, God.

The poet resonates with the point that 'Tyger' reflects its creator. The poet furthermore creates a more supernatural image using the words of 'hand', 'wings', and fire, relating to the divine being. These words have been reiterated from above. The term 'daring' is introduced which is reverberated in the latter stanza.

Stanza Three

And what shoulder, and what art

Could twist the sinews of thy heart?

And when they heart began to beat,

What dead hand? And what dread feet?

The poet in this stanza discusses the physical characteristics of the almighty creator, contemplating his various physical features. The lines are lost in translation as the poet wonders in-depth about God's physical attributes which could also be an allegory to tyger's characteristics.

Stanza Four

What the hammer? What's the chain?

In what furnace was thy brain?

What the anvil? What dead grasp

Dare its deadly terrors clasp

This stanza questions the steps involved in the creation of the all-mighty jungle creature, the tyger. An allegorical reference to a blacksmith, he hypothesizes some intelligent creator developing his creation akin to a blacksmith as he cuts, hammers and forms metal after considerable toil. The stanza is steeped in rhythmic poetry, adding flair and color. As apparent, the poet is getting impatient and embarks on questioning the faith and its overalls.

Stanza Five

When the stars threw down their spears,

And watered heaven with their tears,

Did he smile his work to see?

Did he who made the lamb make thee?

These are the 'Christian' verses of the poem. The first line clearly indicates the demotion of God's arch-angel 'Satan' as a sign of rebellion against God's will. It's also a veiled reference to John Milton's poem 'Paradise Lost'. He refers to the all-

mighty creator looking with reverence at his finalized creation. This stanza is purely Christian by all means. The lamb can dually mean 'the lamb of god' or lamb from his poem 'The Lamb'. The former is an open reference to Jesus Christ (the Lamb of God), sent by God on earth to atone for the sins of mankind.

Stanza Six

Tyger Tyger, burning bright

In the forests of the night,

What immortal hand or eye

Dare frame thy fearful symmetry

The last stanza is the repetition of the first as a chorus. Albeit, the word 'could' has been replaced by 'dare' by the poet. The poet in this section attempts to question the creator's ability. The poet embarks on challenging the ability of his creator to creating this mighty creature.

Songs of Innocence

'Holy Thursday'

'Holy Thursday' describes a procession of orphan children into St Paul's to celebrate the charity of God. In the opening stanza an unnamed speaker, one whose character and identity have aroused considerable debate,⁷⁴ remarks upon the 'innocent faces clean' of the children. Cleanliness, an important virtue in both 'Good Godly' and 'humanist' or post-Lockean juvenile literature, is mentioned nowhere else in Innocence, and its easy association with the word 'innocent' in line 1 is but the first of a series of troubling details which gradually distance us from the speaker. 'The children's faces,' writes Bloom, 'have been scrubbed clean, and are innocent, in a debased sense - because they ought to appear brutalized, which they are, and yet do not.' This the speaker is either unwilling or unable to see, despite the fact that charity school abuses were so common in Blake's age that one social reformer, writing in 1786, could describe as 'well-known' the fact 'that apprentices for labour of either sex seldom turn out well, whether bound by the parish or a charity school.'

In the second line our attention is drawn to the orderliness of the procession, its careful regimentation underlined by the regularity of the meter. Though the speaker notes the colors of the children's uniforms, he is attracted less to their brightness than to the fact that each is neatly coupled with its own kind: 'two and two in red and blue and green.' The beadles who lead the procession are wholly colorless, their grey hair and 'wands as white as snow' suggesting a frozen, lifeless contrast to the children who flow into St Paul's like the life-bearing waters (not here 'charter'd') of the Thames. 'Wands' are probably ceremonial staffs, but they also call to mind the switches used to

enforce discipline in charity schools. Their 'touch,' like that of a magician's, transforms the children, freezing life, movement, and energy into strict order and obedience. Though none of this the speaker consciously understands, his imagery hints at a deeper and more complex reaction than that of simple, sentimental approval. Throughout the poem, what he intends is consistently undermined by the language he uses, so that the reader begins to sense in him an internal conflict.' The speaker would like to feel that processions of this sort are 'pleasing both to God and Man.' His conscious or explicit reaction conforms startlingly to Mandeville's ironic description of a comparable scene in the famous 'Essay on Charity and Charity Schools' (1723):

there is a natural Beauty in Uniformity which most People delight in. It is diverting to the Eye to see children well match'd, either Boys or Girls, march two and two in good order; and to have them all whole and tight in the same Clothes and Trimming must add to the comeliness of the sight; and what makes it still more generally entertaining is the imaginary share which even Servants and the meanest of the Parish have in it, to whom it costs nothing; Our Parish Church, Our Charity Children. In all this there is a shadow of Property that tickles every body that has a Right to make use of the Words, but more especially those who actually contribute and had a great Hand in advancing the pious work.

R. F. Gleckner, in comparing this passage to 'Holy Thursday,' argues that 'Blake's *method* of attack upon charity is similar to Mandeville's: both men reveal that the schools were based not on kindness, altruism, and Christian charity, but upon the self-love and what Mandeville called the "private vices" of their sponsors. But 'Holy Thursday' is a more complex and sympathetic work than Mandeville's 'Essay.' Its speaker is genuinely moved by children, unconsciously attracted to those very qualities - energy, life, movement, and creativity which set them apart from their adult supervisors. Nor is he unaware that the supposedly 'wise guardians' are in fact oppressors. Though, he is frightened, for the virtues

of the true innocent fly in the face of all that he has been taught to value. How he copes with his fears in the lines that follow.

Stanza 2 opens with the speaker inside St Paul's. The sheer numbers of the children awe him. Though still regimented ('seated in companies') their 'multitudes' take on 'a radiance all their own,' one that sets them apart from the surrounding cathedral, the beadles who arrange their seating, and the speaker himself. Theirs is the radiance of things which live and grow. Hence the fifth line's reference to 'flowers of London town,' which picks up the colors of the uniforms mentioned in line 2. The noise the children make is 'a hum of multitudes ... but multitudes of lambs,' with the second clause delicately hinting at the speaker's unacknowledged fears. 'Multitudes' is a word rich in Biblical association, and though it appears in both positive and neutral Scriptural contexts, others which come to mind are of suffering and oppression grimly, often apocalyptically, redressed, as in Isaiah 13:4: 'The noise of a multitude in the mountains like that of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: The Lord of hosts mustereth the host of the battle.'

When the speaker of 'Holy Thursday' reminds us that the multitudes before him are 'multitudes of lambs,' he may well be trying to force out of his mind a vague but troubling sense that danger cannot but attend so great a gathering of grievances. That he fears the children is also suggested in line 8, where 'hum of multitudes' is replaced by a vision of thousands of children raising their hands all at the same time. The power of the gesture alarms the speaker, which accounts for his reassuring reminder that these are 'little' boys and girls, and that the hands they raise are 'innocent.' The effect of the line, even to a reader who finds little irony in the poem, 'is simultaneously one of simple, rather helpless gracefulness, and of grandeur. Without realizing it, the speaker, in his fear, diminishes the power of the children's gesture. Their helplessness is, of course, a fact, but recalling it in this context is a form of self-protection, one which allies the

speaker to the beadles whose function is that of order and control.

As the poem progresses the speaker's attitude to the children shades delicately, almost imperceptibly, from simple, unthreatened admiration in the opening lines, to awe in the second stanza, and then, in stanza three, when they begin to sing, to fear. In the end, frightened as much by his own powerful feelings as by the vital energy of the children themselves, the speaker unconsciously retreats to the last line's comfortable but limiting platitude. He can follow the children, and the imaginative energies they release in him, only so far: from the ominously disquieting 'hum of multitudes,' to a vision of thousands 'raising' their hands, to voices surging 'like a mighty wind,' to the very 'thunderings' of heaven itself. Finally, though, as if dizzied by imaginative flight, he forces himself back down into the company of 'aged men.' In real life, 'wise guardians' bring high-flying children 'down to earth.' So too, in this poem, the wise guardian or 'aged man' within the speaker - that part of him which needs and values order and control - reasserts itself in line 11, quickly returning us to the beadles seated 'Beneath' the children. The speaker is neither hypocritical nor 'usurous' as Mandeville or the experienced 'Holy Thursday' would have us believe. Nor is he really 'obtuse, since the imagery he uses suggests that he sees through to the true meaning of the procession and to the support his approval lends to it. Somewhere inside him he knows and is troubled by what his fears have done to his own vital energies and to those of the children, and this is why we cannot treat him harshly.

Songs of Experience

'Holy Thursday'

'Holy Thursday' provides us with another, though slightly different, example of the Bard's tendency to simplify and distort. Its unnamed speaker sees through the hypocrisy of its celebration right from the start. How, he asks in the poem's opening line, can we call a procession of this sort 'a holy thing to see'? The children's true condition must be our concern, and neither their brightly colored uniforms nor their 'innocent faces clean' must be allowed to obscure it. What the speaker sees when he looks at the children is the reality of their everyday lives, and his outrage at the evils of their condition is, no doubt, only fanned by their present appearance.

His outrage, though, as we quickly discover, is born out of abstract sympathy. Though the speaker cries out for the redress of shameful wrongs, he does so in a manner which suggests that he has lost touch with their particular or individual victims. He never really focuses on what upsets him. *We* have to set the scene, reminding ourselves that he is reacting to a specific event, a procession of children into St Paul's. Though his opinions and attitudes, sparked by meditation on the scene, are laudable, they are also remote and generalized. We react to them as we do to those of many speakers in *Experience*: by agreeing, while at the same time noting a disquieting tendency towards exaggeration and self-righteousness. We also note a disturbing affinity between this speaker's imagery and that of the Bard in 'Introduction.'

The word 'Babes' in the third line of the poem strikes the first unsettling note. These, obviously, are the charity-school children of the innocent poem, the 'boys and girls' whom the earlier speaker referred to as 'flowers of London town,' and whom the Piper depicted above and below the text. That they are 'babes' here rather than 'boys and girls' may simply signal the intensity of the speaker's sympathy and concern. But it might also suggest a kind of emotional calculation, a playing upon feelings, both our own and those of the speaker himself, especially in view of several subtle but affecting exaggerations in the lines that follow.

The 'cold and usurous hand' which reduces the babes to misery is that of the 'wise guardians' society employs to feed

them. It is 'cold,' a word which reminds us of the earlier poem's 'wands as white as snow,' because it feeds without affection; 'usurous' because, in M. G. Jones's words, those who ran the charity schools 'lined their pockets with money saved from the children's rations'; or, as Gillham suggests, because caring for poor children was thought of as a means of keeping them from crime, and hence as a 'good investment': 'The hand that feeds the child is usurous because the hope of a return is the only effective incentive to charity that can be at work in a wintry world. The line 'Fed with cold and usurous hand' shows the Bard, or the Bard through his speaker, at his best.

The speaker of the innocent 'Holy Thursday' describes the sounds of the singing children as a 'hum of multitudes,' 'a mighty wind,' 'Harmonious thunderings.' His experienced counterpart hears only 'a trembling cry.' Both speakers half create what they hear. The guilt of the innocent speaker accounts for the ominous echoes of retribution in his imagery. The experienced speaker's insistence that we look more deeply into the truth of the children's condition accounts for the enfeebling of their song. 'One should be hard-headed with a hard-headed poem,' Hirsch rightly insists, 'several thousand voices, even of deprived children, do not produce a trembling cry.' The experienced speaker 'falsifies by exaggeration what was true in the earlier conception. The source of this exaggeration is the speaker's powerful sense of the brutalities visited upon the children. His indignation, like that of the speaker in the opening lines of 'The Chimney Sweeper,' is genuine, but it is also generalized - and abstract as well. Children so brutalized, reasons the speaker, simply cannot sing a song of joy; so it is not a song of joy they are singing. To an activist such as the speaker, tactics determine reality:

Is that trembling cry a song?

Can it be a song of joy?

And so many children poor?

It is a land of poverty!

Line 7, 'And so many children poor,' is rhetorical sleight of hand. The speaker means us to think of it as 'proof' of the suspicions of lines 5 and 6.

We must never, insists the speaker, lose sight of the children's suffering. Our silence only lends tacit support to their continued impoverishment. Not to hear their song as a 'trembling cry' is to do them an injury. The speaker, in short, is a polemicist, a prophetic activist prepared to sacrifice the truth of some present reality for a greater good. His exaggeration is a distortion, a calculated appeal, whether conscious or unconscious, to the emotions. Through it the speaker hopes to rouse a 'rich and fruitful land' to much-needed reform. The reform, we acknowledge, *is* much-needed; yet still, and this is what makes complaint so difficult, we are made to feel like the Angel of plates 17 to 20 of the *Marriage-*, imposed upon.

In stanza 3 the speaker loses sight of the present scene completely. His concern now is with that 'land of poverty' mentioned at the end of the previous stanza. 'Land of poverty' refers, of course, not only to the children's material state, but to the spiritual and emotional impoverishment of society as a whole. It is a land without sun, with wintry fields 'bleak and bare,' and ways 'fill'd with thorns.' No rose can withstand the rigors of a climate of this sort. Without sun there can be no growth and blossoming. Hence line 12, 'It is eternal winter there,' the finality of which reminds us of line 8. The difference between this line and line 8, though, is that the latter is clearly a response to a present reality: to the 'holy thing' of line 1. Line 12, on the other hand, comes right out of the speaker's head; it is a product of reason and reflection, a necessary conclusion drawn in the abstract. Given such poverty in a rich and fruitful land, the speaker seems to be saying, this world must necessarily be one of 'eternal winter.' The conclusion is inevitable, and no first-hand knowledge of the poor need lie behind it. That it is not strictly true does not bother the speaker (though it bothers us); its ultimate effect - that of rousing a rich and fruitful land - is all that counts for him.

The Utopian vision of the final stanza follows from line 12. The speaker posits a world warmed by the sun, its fields fed by rain. The fruit of the fields alleviates the babe's literal hunger, while the sun's beams, and the life-giving rain provide symbolic nourishment in the form of love (see ['The Little Black Boy'](#)) and spiritual energy. The 'mind' which is 'appalled' (so whitened

and pallid that the world seems a perpetual winter, 'bleak and bare', as if bleached of color; or shrouded, like the winter sky) by the poverty of the last line, can be either the babe's or the wise guardian's. It can also, of course, refer to the guiltless speaker and his audience, outraged by the anomaly of needless suffering in a rich and fruitful land.

This artful multiplicity of meanings reinforces the innocent truths of mutuality and inter-dependence. It also hints at a dominant theme of *Experience*: the blighting effect victimization has on victimizers as well as victims. Why, then, do stanzas 3 and 4 leave us vaguely troubled and unsure? Because, in Hirsch's words, they

imply that the social arrangement that has produced charity schools and usurious hands has gone wrong because it has gone against nature. It is unnatural for the sun never to shine and for winter to persist forever. ... What makes this poem ... more vulnerable than its predecessor is its failure to recognize that if 'eternal winter' is unnatural, so is 'eternal spring.'

Songs of Innocence

Chimney Sweeper'

As 'The Chimney Sweeper' opens, an older and more

experienced sweep, the speaker, comforts a younger sweep ('little' Tom Dacre) against the pain of a newly encountered experience. Little Tom has just had his head shaven, a ritual initiation and subjugation 'like those given in prison or the army. Its ostensible purpose was to reduce the risk of hair catching fire from pockets of smoldering soot. Tom has but newly entered his apprenticeship and cries for the loss of his curly white hair (an echo of 'softest clothing woolly bright' in 'The Lamb').

The speaker's instinctive sympathy and fellow-feeling has a profound effect on young Tom. So, too, his thoughts on 'duty.' Tom's dream ends with an admonition from the liberating angel identical in spirit to that of the poem's last line, and equally disturbing:

And the Angel told Tom if He'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father and never want joy.

In this case, being a good boy entails doing what one's told, and doing it without complaint. Tom may have picked up such 'advice' from any of several sources: the father who sold him; the master who exploits him; perhaps a priest of the sort we encounter in 'A Little Boy Lost,' or one of the 'Wise guardians of the poor' in the innocent 'Holy Thursday.' But he is also likely to have picked it up from the older sweep, whose experience has no doubt taught him the painful consequences of disobedience. That Tom dreams of the eventual salvation not just of himself but of 'thousands of sweepers Dick, Joe, Ned and Jack,' suggests that he has also caught something of the speaker's spirit of compassion.

The very existence of the dream seems to owe something to the older sweep's influence. 'It is not for nothing,' writes Wicksteed, 'that the child's vision follows immediately after his being given the idea that his "white hair" is potentially "there" just as much when it is shaved off as before. Like his friend the speaker, Tom builds an imaginary ideal out of the bleakest and most depressing of realities. The 'coffin of black' is an obvious example. 'To wash in a river and shine in the sun,' sporting 'naked and white' in the landscape of innocence, is another. As Martin Nurmi writes:

Nakedness is not here merely a symbol of innocence. In dreaming of it Tom is making a connection between his dream imagery and his ordinary life. For sweeps often went up chimneys naked. ... Naked immersion in soot, therefore, is Tom's normal state now, and white naked cleanliness is its natural opposite.

The sweeps' trust in the justice and benevolence of the very world that has injured them is terribly pathetic. We see all too clearly the price they must pay for their few moments of warmth and happiness. Though they still retain some sparks of imaginative life, much has already been lost. Tom learns to submit to the loss of his hair with all the docility of a sheep; the cheerless anapests of the older sweep's matter-of-fact tone, especially in the first stanza, sound only the faintest echoes of the more energetic speech of children in other Songs. The off-hand manner in which he recounts the cruelties of his life ('His mother's death he puts in a dependent clause ... his being sold by his father ... he emphasizes less than the fact that he was very young') suggests a spirit numbed by suffering. Only when recounting the imaginary joys of Tom's dream does the speaker recapture the animated rhythms of childhood. The cold, dark mornings must soon, we sense, take their inevitable toll.

The poem concludes with what Bloom calls 'a new fierceness for Blake. The sweep lacks sufficient strength or security to question what he has been taught, and his call to duty is without conscious irony. The last line is a brutal indictment of the sorts of traditional pieties we encounter again and again in 'Good Godly' books, or in Watts's *Divine Songs* or Mrs Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose*. Yet the poem belongs in *Innocence* because, unlike its experienced counterpart, it inspires neither outrage nor indignation. Our attention is almost wholly absorbed in the sweeps' last few glimmers of imagination and fellow-feeling.

Songs of Experience

'Chimney Sweeper'

To Rossetti, 'there can be no comparison between the first "Chimney Sweeper," which touches with such perfect simplicity the true pathetic chord of its subject, and the second, tinged somewhat with the commonplaces, if also with the truth, of social discontents. The 'truth' Rossetti refers to at the end of this passage is not that of the sweeps' sufferings (something the innocent version amply documents, for all its stress on the minimal comforts and self-sustainings of imaginative fellow feeling). Rather it concerns the context in which that suffering is placed, the 'use' to which the activist Bard puts it. Our sense that the Bard is using his speaker, and that the poem has a palpable design upon us, is communicated in two ways. First in the manner of the sweep's introduction:

A little black thing among the snow:

Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!

Where are thy father and mother? say?

What bothers us about this opening is the unnamed speaker's obliviousness to the feelings of the actual child in front of him. The phrase, 'A little black thing among the snow,' is hardly calculated to do the child, to whom it seems to be addressed, much good. The speaker's pity for the sweep is generalized, offers no immediate sustenance. Similarly, when the speaker asks the sweep where his parents are, we feel that his concern is less to return the child to them, than to elicit precisely the sort of answer he receives. 'Say,' says the speaker, as if priming the child for a set response. There is something contrived about the opening of this Song. The misery of the child's situation, we feel, is being shown off to us. The speaker treats it and him as a kind of example - an example of some larger 'social discontent.' We think back to the easy commerce between Piper and floating child in the innocent 'Introduction,' and try to imagine the former asking a similar question in a similar way. Whereas the Piper's encounter with the child struck us as sensitive and spontaneous, this speaker's strikes us as calculated and manipulative - both of the child and of us. It reminds us of pictures of concerned politicians talking with ghetto children.

That the sweep himself is no more genuine or spontaneous only increases our sense of design or contrivance. His reaction to his situation is hardly what we would expect from a child, even from a stylized Blakean child. Instead of confusion, fearful anger, or fatigued indifference - all believably child-like reactions to the miseries of a sweep's lot - we find reasoned analysis and understanding, not just of parents (compare the dispirited blankness of the innocent sweep's 'When my mother died I was very young,/And my father sold me ...') but of

society as a whole. What the child says is, of course, absolutely right. The social injustice he condemns is real, and so too is his perception of 'God and his Priest and King' as the true enemy. But his combination of child-like artlessness ('They are both gone up to the Church to pray') and analytical sophistication and self-awareness (note the syntax of the following stanzas, their formal register) strikes us as false:

Because I was happy upon the heath
And smil'd among the winter's snow:
They cloth'd me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe
And because I am happy, and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury.

'I could observe, in little pieces, as it were,' said David Copperfield of his child self, 'but as to making a net of a number of these pieces, and catching anybody in it, that was, as yet, beyond me. Where, we wonder, did the sweep gain the strength and sophistication to make such connections, to see through his parents' self-deceptions? The design depicts as woebegone a 'little black thing' as the poem's opening, so it won't do to talk of this sweep as older or more mature than his innocent counterparts. The answer is simply that the Bard has sacrificed or distorted a particular, individual truth in order to register a larger 'truth of social discontent.'

His reasons for doing so are made clear in stanzas 2 and 3, the aim of which is to point out the dangerous consequences of those very moments of imaginative fellow-feeling celebrated in the earlier version. Singing and dancing on the heath (perhaps in the traditional May Day dance of sweeps and milkmaids in London, in which case the poem comments on the innocent 'Holy Thursday' as well), can, warns the speaker, lead parents or onlookers into thinking their children 'uninjured.' But this, of course, is something we already know: it is precisely what gives such power to the line 'So if all do their duty they need not fear harm' in the earlier poem. Why make the point again, and so directly? Because the Piper has become a Bard, and no longer trusts the poetic indirection of piped song. There must be no mistake about these rationalizations and self-deceptions, the experienced 'Chimney Sweeper' seems to insist, nor about the

network of institutions which make them possible. And so we get the false, or rather generalized, pity of the opening lines, and the implausible knowingness of the lines' prophetic urgency and directness victimize even as they seek to save.

Songs of Innocence

'Nurse's Song'

begin with a moment of complete harmony and interrelation, Though the nurse refers to an objective reality 'out there' on the green and the hill, we can trace its contours in the description she gives of her own state of mind. When she says that 'everything else is still,' she may be referring either to the landscape (silent now save for the children's voices and laughter) or to her own 'heart' (or 'mind') which, though it hears the children, is also 'at rest.' The nurse, like the world around her, is 'at rest' and 'silent' because the day is ending, but also because the joyful sounds of her children assure her they are safe and happy. That the children's merriment is 'heard' not 'seen' hints at the nurse's calm. The guardian is as free of care as the guarded, and both seem to unite with all creation. In 'A Cradle Song,' a similar impression of unity and inter-relation was accented by the rhythms and repetitions of lullaby. Here the

rhythms are more child-like. We are reminded of nursery rhymes such as 'Jack and Jill' or, more appropriately, 'Boys and girls come out to play,/The moon does shine as bright as day.

But the moment lasts only for a single stanza. The nurse is soon beset by anxieties that destroy the intense sympathy and peace she feels. In the stillness of line 4 and the space between stanzas she seems to have 'lapsed' into adult reflection. The sun is going down, she thinks to herself, and the 'dews of night' will soon be here with their threat of chill. (We are reminded of the dangers faced by the little boy lost as he wanders 'wet with dew' through fen and marsh.) Her sense of time past and time future blinds her to the reality of the present moment and causes her to impose her fears upon it. When she tells the children that 'the sun is gone down/And the dews of night arise,' she is no longer in touch with the world. Though birds fly above her and sheep cover the surrounding hills, she does not see them. Anxiety, not night, has blocked them out.

'Self-will,' writes Susannah Wesley, 'is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever cherishes this in children insures their after-wretchedness and irreligion; whatever checks and mortifies it promotes their future happiness and piety. Blake's attack on views of this sort begins with careful observation. Though there may be a touch of child-like egotism and calculation in the children's initial response to the nurse ('No no let us play' gently mocks 'Come come leave off play'), it would be wrong to call them wilful. They 'cannot [not will not] go to sleep because their energy and delight are still very much alive. We see this in their language. The directness and vivid clarity of a line like 'Besides in the sky the little birds fly' reminds us of 'Spring,' perhaps the most high-spirited of the Songs. The children are at one with what is being described, as in the lines 'Lark in sky' and 'Birds delight' from 'Spring.' Unhampered by anxieties born of the adult's reflective tendencies (darkness will bring dew and dew will bring chill), the children know (by being fully in touch with themselves and the world around them) that 'it is yet day.' They feel the daytime still within them ('we cannot go to sleep') and the arguments they adduce in support of their instincts - the birds are still in the sky and the sheep on the hills - do themselves demonstrate how awake they are. Hazlitt too has noticed this quality in children, in his essay 'On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth': 'Like a clown at a fair,' he writes, of being a child, 'we are full of amazement and rapture, and have

no thoughts of going home, or that it will soon be night. We know our existence only from external objects, and we measure it by them.

The nurse's response to the children's request is delicate and complex. She allows them to stay out and play, giving way, in Hirsch's words, 'both to the arguments of the children and their trust. Once roused from anxious reflection she looks about her and realizes that the light has not yet faded away and that the dews of night pose no immediate threat. In giving in, the nurse acknowledges that she has lost touch with the present moment. But the tone of her acquiescence is calm and distanced: 'Well well go and play till the light fades away/And then go home to bed.' The note of quiet resignation in these lines is disturbing, however. The nurse cannot forget that the trust the children are now expressing will someday be tested by experience. Her tone points to a time to come in which, as Bloom puts it, 'the voices of children are no longer heard on the green, and the heart ceases to rest in their laughter

Though the children have taught her to see again, returned her to the present moment, the nurse remains apart. The vision she attained in stanza I returns for a flash in the poem's penultimate line, only to fade away again. Her description of the children - they are ecstatic because allowed to stay out a little later - participates in their delight. There is the same sharp, vivid clarity and energy in 'The little ones leaped and shouted and laughed' as we noted in the lines spoken by the children in the previous stanza. And the word 'echoed' in the poem's concluding line also seems to suggest the nurse's return to vision. It does itself echo, and, like the word 'still' in line 4, it identifies the nurse with 'all creation' by making the children's sounds echo in her mind as they echo from off the surrounding hills. But the final impression it makes is hardly one of contented harmony and inter-relation. Its three syllables seem to recede, suggesting that the nurse is moving away from present joys. Perhaps, like the old folk in 'The Echoing Green,' she hears an echo of her own lost innocence in the joy of the children. Our sense that the echoes are dying out is meant to suggest both the nurse's lapse into memory and reflection, and the coming of night. The two are equated, which makes the loss of vision seem inevitable - the nurse having no more power to prolong a moment of insight than she has over the sun's setting.

Songs of Experience

Nurse's Song

Synopsis of Nurse's Song

Nurse's Song (E)

The nurse is considering her reaction to hearing the children playing on the green and their whispers in the valley – it is as though the children have secret sources of fun. These make her recall her own childhood. Instead of making her feel warm and indulgent to the children, it rouses her jealousy. So she calls the children in from play. They are wasting their time, both now in their youth by playing and in their old age by masking their true nature and feelings.

This is a companion poem to the Nurse's Song (I). It looks at another aspect of the repressive use of parental (or quasi-parental) authority. The Nurse's reaction provides a human example of the 'love' that is represented by the pebble in *The Clod and the Pebble*.

Commentary

The apparent joy and innocence of the first three lines is undercut by the reversal of expectation in the fourth. It becomes clear that these are the reflections of a 'sick' mind rather than a benevolent one. This pattern is repeated in the second stanza, where the first two lines (featured in Nurse's Song (I)) are exposed by the second two.

In the same way, what is presented as the nurse's love and care for the children – calling them home to rest and away from the dangers of getting chilled by the dew – is revealed as jealousy and cruelty. The nurse loves only herself. Because her youthful pleasures are past, she wishes to deny the children theirs. She binds them to herself in possessiveness. Further, she wishes on them the same dried-up old age as her own, where emotions like jealousy must be made to appear as good. She wants the children to perpetuate her life-denying behaviour and response.

Unlike the companion poem in the *Songs of Innocence*, this poem takes place entirely in the nurse's mind. The response isn't to an actual event, but is a continual reaction – 'when[ever]' she hears children 'then' her response is to call them home.

This suggests the Nurse's self-created isolation. She does not respond to real children but to what they evoke in her own mind.

Songs of Innocence

The Divine Image by William Blake

The Divine Image is part of Songs of Innocence. Songs of Innocence was first published in 1789 followed by the publication of Songs of Experience in 1794. William Blake mostly wrote romantic poetry and prophetic works. The Divine Image portrays an ideal world. The poem presents four traditional Christian virtues (Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love), which exist in the human heart and connect it with God. Later, William Blake wrote another poem, The Human Abstract from Songs of Experience, to contrast with The Divine Image. In fact, the original title of The Human Abstract was The Human Image. Notice the clear contrast between these two titles.

Summary of The Divine Image

The Divine Image describes four divine virtues (Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love) that men can achieve.

The title of the poem suggests the importance of the image of God and, later through the stanzas, how it can be reflected in mankind. The lyrical voice personifies these virtues (Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love), as they represent God. And, then, explains how these are also characteristics of men: “For Mercy has a human heart, /Pity a human face,/And Love, the human form divine,/And Peace, the human dress”. Then, prayers are made to God but also to “the human form divine”.

Form and Tone of The Divine Image

The poem has five stanzas in a ballad form. This means that stanzas are quatrains that have an alternation of four and three beats. The rhyme scheme is ABCB accompanied by simple syntax, diction, and structure. This generates a natural and regular pace, which is commonly used in songs and hymns, and it combines harmoniously with the ideas that are being presented. The tone of The Divine Image is didactic and remains constant throughout the stanzas.

Themes of The Divine Image

One of the main themes of The Divine Image is humankind's relationship with God. The lyrical voice praises both divinity and humanity and links them together. Thus, the virtues that are presented by the lyrical voice carry within them a divine side, but also a human aspect. God and Man become inseparable and, because of that, mankind also turns into something worthy of praise: “And all must love the human form,/In heathen, Turk, or Jew;/Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell/There God is dwelling too”.

Historical Context of The Divine Image

William Blake wrote The Divine Image just a few years before the Romantic era (ca. 1800-1890). William Blake is a pre-romantic poet, as he portrays and conveys a lot of ideas and themes which are crucial to Romanticism. This artistic movement highlights emotion and glorifies nature and the past.

The Divine Image was originally published in Songs of Innocence, but it is later and most commonly found in Songs of Innocence and Experience, a volume that contains both Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience. Moreover, The Divine Image is similar in some aspects to other poems written by William Blake. It has a similar theme to A Cradle Song, which also explores the relationship between God and Man, and, likewise, it has a similar message to The Little Black Boy, emphasizing the need to praise all kinds of the human form.

Analysis of The Divine Image

Stanza One

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

All pray in their distress;

And to these virtues of delight

Return their thankfulness.

The first stanza of The Divine Image presents four virtues: Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love. These virtues are capitalized as they are personified (“To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love/All pray in their distress”). This personification reflects the

relationship between divinity and humanity. Moreover, these virtues become objects of prayer in case of distress and should be cherished and praised (“All pray in their distress”, “Return their thankfulness”). Notice how the style of this stanza and the following ones in *The Divine Image* have a clear and simple language that focuses on the images portrayed rather than on the language itself.

Stanza Two

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

Is God, our father dear,

And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

Is Man, his child and care.

The second stanza links the virtues to God and to man. The lyrical voice references the virtues again and they are directly related to God: “For Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love/Is God, our father dear”. After that, these same virtues are related to man: “And Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love/Is Man, his child, and care”. Notice the repetition of the virtues and how they form a unity between divinity and humanity. This relation between God and man is emphasized by the father/child relationship established after the mention of the two words. The bond between divinity and humanity is, thus, presented strongly.

Stanza Three

For Mercy has a human heart,

Pity a human face,

And Love, the human form divine,

And Peace, the human dress.

The third stanza of *The Divine Image* focuses on describing each of the virtues and how they relate to mankind. Notice that this is the first stanza where the virtues appear separated. The lyrical voice will list the virtues and assign them to a human form: “Mercy has a human heart”, “Pity a human face”, “Love, the human form divine” and “Peace, the human dress”. This change in the message of the poem emphasizes the characteristics of each virtue and their relation to man. Moreover, there are many repetitions of the words “human” that focus on their link to the virtues and to their personification.

Stanza Four

Then every man, of every clime,

That prays in his distress,

Prays to the human form divine,

Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

The fourth stanza furthers on the link between the virtues and humanity. According to the lyrical voice, these virtues are always in “every man, of every clime” in their prayers. Again, this furthers the human aspect of these virtues and continues building a strong relationship between humanity and divinity. This can be seen, especially, when the lyrical voice says that all prayers are “to the human form divine”. Notice how the quatrain ends by repenting the virtues together as mentioned in the previous stanzas of *The Divine Image*.

Stanza Five

And all must love the human form,

In heathen, Turk, or Jew;

Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell

There God is dwelling too.

The final stanza of *The Divine Image* explains how all forms of humanity should be cherished. The lyrical voice mentions that “all must love the human form/In heathen, Turk or Jew”. This is because all forms of humanity are linked to divinity and, consequently, they are all important. Finally, the lyrical voice finished the poem by saying that three of these virtues (Mercy, Love, and Pity) coexist with God together: “Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell/There God is dwelling too”. This highlights this idea of inseparability between God and man, presented in the previous quatrains.

Songs of Experience

The Human Abstract by William Blake

The Human Abstract is part of Songs of Experience. Songs of Experience was first published in 1794 after the publication of Songs of Innocence in 1789. The Human Abstract is an example of William Blake's metaphysical poetry. William Blake is known for his romantic poetry and his prophetic works. The Human Abstract portrays the tension between humanity and divinity by analyzing different virtues (e.g. Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love). William Blake wrote this poem to contrast with The Divine Image, a poem from Songs of Innocence. In fact, the original title of The Human Abstract was The Human Image. Notice how these two titles are clear opposites and they present the aforementioned contrast.

Summary

The Human Abstract criticizes traditional Christian virtues and human reason. The poem analyses how virtues are tied necessarily to suffering.

Pity would not exist without poverty, Mercy presumes unhappiness and the origin of Peace is fear. Other virtues also come from sin like Cruelty, Humility, and Deceit. According to the [lyrical](#) voice, all these negative or false values grow and spread "in the Human Brain" in contrast with what happens in Nature ("The Gods of the earth and sea, /Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree").

Form and Tone of *The Human Abstract*

The Human Abstract has six [quatrains](#), stanzas of four lines, and a total of twenty-four lines. The rhyme follows an AABB pattern. This simple rhyme scheme recreates innocent sonority which emphasizes the meaning of the words. The fourth stanza breaks the rhyme pattern to gain the reader's attention into "Mystery". The last two quatrains also have an AABB rhyme scheme. Moreover, the [tone](#) of *The Human Abstract* is didactic throughout the six stanzas and it conveys its message in a universal manner. Mostly, the poem focuses on addressing the reader as if in a lesson, but through a critical perspective.

Themes of *The Human Abstract*

There are two main themes in *The Human Abstract*. These are related to the contrast between humanity, divinity, and nature. The first one is virtue and religion as a human construct. The first stanzas present a critical outlook towards virtues that are traditionally associated with Christianity. These are conceived ultimately as false because they are not entirely good (e.g. Pity exists thanks to poverty), as they are biased by human reasoning. Moreover, the final stanzas present the second theme which is the imprisonment of humanity. Notice how humanity can't escape these negative aspects of their "virtues" and they end up surrounded by more "false" virtues, such as Humility and Deceit.

Historical Context of *The Human Abstract*

The Human Abstract was written just a few years before the Romantic era (ca. 1800-1890). William Blake is considered to be a pre-romantic poet, as he portrays and conveys a lot of ideas and themes which are crucial to Romanticism. This artistic movement highlights emotion and glorifies nature and the past. *The Human Abstract* was originally published in *Songs of Experience*, but it is later and most commonly found in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, a volume that contains both *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* and has illustrations.

Analysis of *The Human Abstract*

Stanza One

Pity would be no more,

If we did not make somebody Poor:

And Mercy no more could be,

If all were as happy as we;

The first stanza of *The Human Abstract* talks about two virtues –Pity and Mercy. The lyrical voice starts by referencing Pity. Notice how in this case and in the case of Mercy, both nouns are capitalized as they are [personified](#) and they become the center elements of the stanza. Both Pity and Mercy, which are first-hand considered virtuous, are analyzed by the lyrical voice to find that they presuppose negative things. Namely, Pity needs poverty ("Pity would be no more,/If we did not make somebody Poor") and Mercy needs unhappiness ("And Mercy no more could be,/If all were as happy as we"). The two virtues, thus, have negative sides which are inseparable to their positive aspect.

Stanza Two

And mutual fear brings peace;

Till the selfish loves increase.

Then Cruelty knits a snare,
And spreads his baits with care.

The second stanza furthers the criticism of the previous quatrain. The lyrical voice continues to talk about these false virtues, as peace can only occur if there is fear (“And mutual fear brings peace”). Moreover, the lyrical voice of *The Human Abstract* focuses on Cruelty, which is also capitalized as in the previous stanza. Cruelty increases thanks to “selfish loves” and finds a way to grow and extend: “Then Cruelty knits a snare,/And spreads his baits with care”. Notice the hunting **imagery** that the lyrical voice uses to talk about cruelty (“knits a snare” and “spreads his baits”). Thus, the personification of the capital letter (“Cruelty”) is maximized by the actions associated with the word (“knits a snare” and “spreads his baits”).

Stanza Three

He sits down with holy fears,
And waters the ground with tears:
Then Humility takes its root
Underneath his foot.

The third stanza of *The Human Abstract* continues working on the image of Cruelty and also mentions Humility. The quatrain starts by saying “He”, which is referring to Cruelty. Cruelty then “sits down with holy fears” and “waters the ground with tears”. In this manner, Cruelty is still personified as it carries out two actions which are also accompanied by sentiment. Then, another false virtue emerges, as Humility appears right in the feet of Cruelty. Humility arises from Cruelty – “Then Humility takes its root/Underneath his foot”. Once again, Humility is another virtue that is personified.

Stanza Four

Soon spreads the dismal shade
Of Mystery over his head;
And the Caterpillar and Fly,
Feed on the Mystery.

The fourth stanza is similar to the third since it completes the image of the false virtue presented on the previous one and presents a new one. Note how from the second quatrain onwards the stanzas have a narrative that develops throughout the lines while using the same personification device and with a constant sonority due to its structure and rhyme. Humility spreads “the dismal shade/shade of Mystery” and two insects (“the Caterpillar and Fly”) feed on Mystery. Notice how the lyrical voice of *The Human Abstract* uses natural elements in the final lines to present another false virtue.

Stanza Five

And it bears the fruit of Deceit,
Ruddy and sweet to eat;
And the Raven his nest has made
In its thickest shade.

The fifth stanza of *The Human Abstract* develops more images related to nature. Mystery, which appears in the previous quatrain, “bears the fruit of Deceit” that is presented as “Ruddy and sweet to eat”. Thus, this fruit grows from the tree that has emerged from the other false virtues. This enumeration of false virtues is, then, a consequent addition that builds an imitation of nature with negative connotation which encounters a final image: “his nest has made/In its thickest shade”. Notice how “Raven”, as “Caterpillar and Fly” in the fourth stanza, is also capitalized, again, within a personification device.

Stanza Six

The Gods of the earth and sea,
Sought thro’ Nature to find this Tree
But their search was all in vain:
There grows one in the Human Brain

The sixth stanza is a conclusion of the progression of the five quatrains. The lyrical voice explains that the “Gods of the earth and sea” looked for the tree that was described previously but that it can’t be found in nature (“Sought thro’ Nature to find this Tree/But their search was all in vain”). Remember that the enumeration of false virtues, from the second to the fifth stanza, consisted of images that described a tree. Yet, this tree only grows “in the Human Brain”. Hence, all these false

virtues are human notions and perceptions, which don't resemble those found in nature. That is why all the negative aspects of these false virtues are purely human.