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D. G. Gillham
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I

INNOCENT JOY

The reader, seriously studying the *Songs* for the first time, soon becomes aware that, when read together, the poems make an impression unlike that received from examples scattered in anthologies. Each poem makes good sense on its own, but one feels also that there is a purpose in their being brought together and, as the sense of the individual poems is more thoroughly explored, the unifying purpose is gradually made clear. The first intimation of this larger intention usually comes with the observation that many of the poems are explicitly paired. There are, for instance, two *Holy Thursdays*, one in *Songs of Innocence* and one in *Songs of Experience*. It is a short step to discover that nearly all the poems have their counterparts – that *The Sick Rose* of Experience may be read with *The Blossom* of Innocence, *The Tyger* with *The Lamb*, and so on. At first, the reader resists the connexion – he knows that poems must be granted their autonomy if they are to be read successfully; he has been warned not to import irrelevant information or speculation not disciplined by the work in hand. Soon, however, he realizes that Blake's contrasts are helpful, not because the one poem adds to the other, but because the reader's mind, in possession of both poems, is better able to discern what each contains. In studying *Infant Sorrow*, for example, one's speculations are more likely to take the relevant direction if the innocent counterpart, *Infant Joy*, is borne in mind.

INFANT SORROW

My mother ground! my father wept.
Into the dangerous world I leapt:
Helpless. naked. piping loud:
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

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Struggling in my fathers hands:
 Striving against my swadling bands:
 Bound and weary I thought best
 To sulk upon my mothers breast.

INFANT JOY

I have no name
 I am but two days old –
 What shall I call thee?
 I happy am
 Joy is my name. –
 Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy!
 Sweet joy but two days old.
 Sweet joy I call thee:
 Thou dost smile.
 I sing the while
 Sweet joy befall thee.

Confronted by either of these poems singly, one's reaction might be to say: 'How true a representation of babyhood!' Reading them together, one is forced to add: 'How different the representations are!' *Infant Sorrow* is spoken in the first person, and it is his own entry to the world that the speaker describes. He draws on his observations of the behaviour of infants and interprets their gestures to show that the baby is aware of the hostility he must encounter in the world, and the resistance he must make in one form or another. The birth is a dire struggle for both mother and child and, once free, the infant, alarmed and blindly assertive, is ready to do battle – he 'leaps' into the world as though already alarmed, and strains against the opposition of his 'fathers hands' and the 'swadling bands' imposed upon him by a world that is 'dangerous'. He is 'a fiend hid in a cloud' – beneath the soft, rounded exterior of the babe not as yet formed and individual, is a tense, fiendishly obstinate will to oppose, so the convulsive movements of the child and his persistent cries are seen as ineffective attempts to have his

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own way and as utterances of unyielding protest. Even when resting, the baby has merely changed his tactics or is biding his time until his strength is greater. The child quietly feeding at his mother's breast is seen as temporarily beaten, 'bound and weary', but able to 'think best' to his own advantage, realizing that he is powerless at the moment. The pouting, frowning expression of the sucking child is interpreted, in the last line, as indicative of the frustration and resentment he feels while deliberately assuming a passive rôle.

Babies have various moods, we view them differently as our own moods vary, and different persons have different ideas of babyhood. For all these reasons, perhaps, *Infant Joy* presents another picture of the infant. The speaker, most probably the mother, does not conduct an introspective monologue, as in *Infant Sorrow*, but companionably makes up an imaginary conversation with her child, providing the responses herself, and probably touching his cheek in order to cause him to 'smile'. She projects her own contentment in interpreting the conduct of the babe, causes him to name himself 'Joy', describes him as happy in his own being ('I happy am') and as a source of joy to herself. The experienced speaker found no joy in his babe and predicted none for the future, but the innocent mother is convinced of the joyous nature of her child and blesses it at the end of each stanza with the hope that the future will be joyous too. 'Sweet joy befall thee' is the refrain to her song, though in giving this benediction the mother does not regard joy as inevitable, only as a possibility she wishes for her child. In expressing herself in this way she shows herself less dogmatic than the speaker in *Infant Sorrow*, who sees life only as a tense struggle against opposition.

There are other ways in which the innocent mother shows herself to be less dogmatic than the experienced speaker. The latter cannot possibly recall the event he describes, but he can draw on his generalizations to interpret the actions of any baby, even unknown ones. Put another way: the sight of any baby is an occasion for the reassertion of a settled conviction that life is a battle. All situations, no doubt, afford the speaker evidence that he is right in holding this view. The innocent mother also projects herself

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into the baby; she cannot know his inner feelings, and it is unlikely that a two-day-old infant feels anything that an adult could recognize. But she has more freedom than the experienced speaker, for the feeling she projects is the outcome of an immediate situation and her attitude towards the child is conceived in relation to him as an individual close to her. She is so immersed in the present circumstance that she has forgotten her pains experienced only two days ago (line 2), while the experienced speaker, concerned with a theoretical situation, insists on the groans he cannot have been aware of (line 1).

The minds of the innocent and experienced speakers take different directions and we can see this more clearly when we contrast them. The style of speaking in each poem also helps emphasize the difference – *Infant Sorrow* is a monologue and is metrically more formal to suit the fixed ideas that underlie the description, while *Infant Joy* is a dialogue in form, and has short irregular lines and a simple unaffectedly repetitive diction to suit the spontaneity of a momentary feeling. The experienced speaker gives a most forceful description of the ineffectual vigour of the child, whose ‘piping loud’ is both weak and insistent; who can ‘struggle’ though small enough to be contained in the hands of his adversary (line 5), and ‘strive’ when bound tight prisoner. But, however fine his description, the intelligence of the narrator is turned inward – his description fits his theory, and only if we accept his theory can we regard the description as altogether true. The intelligence of the mother is turned outward because she is making a spontaneous reaction to a real circumstance. The delight which colours her description is properly a part of the occasion described and we can accept the description without qualification. The two poems present us with two conceptions of the truth about babies. The experienced poem is primarily concerned with babyhood in the abstract, also with the expression of a settled idea of the human condition, and it brings these abstruse notions very vigorously to light in the particular description it gives. We might label the speaker’s description of the infant as ‘fanciful’ because it gives expression to his habits of mind. The innocent mother is concerned with her baby at a particular moment and she, too, ‘makes up’ a

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rôle for her child. But what she ‘makes up’ is a consequence of her present delight and the affection induced by the presence of her baby. Her settled notions of babyhood, whatever they may be, are not given expression, and we might say that her description of the child is ‘imaginative’ because her mind and her circumstance affect each other in determining what she perceives.

Infant Joy and *Infant Sorrow* are vigorous expressions of the human mind exercised in distinct ways, and Blake deepens our appreciation of this distinction as we explore contrary poems. A very similar contrast is found between *The Tyger* from *Songs of Experience* and *The Lamb* from *Songs of Innocence* which explore, each in its own way, our notions of the Deity. Blake knew that God can come to men only as they are capable of receiving him, and so the speakers in the two poems have quite different notions of the divine nature.

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?

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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?

The Lamb

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

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

The shock experienced in the presence of the Tyger causes the speaker to look farther than the world he knows – to the ‘distant deeps or skies’ beyond comprehensible space. The beast is part of the creation, but its beauty and ferocity have overwhelmed the

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mind; there is no possibility of accepting the creature in the comfortable manner made possible by habit, and its appearance makes the accustomed world take on mysterious and frightening dimensions. The Tyger is 'burning bright', a clearly distinguished, vigorous and dangerous presence, vividly itself in a place that is vast, gloomy and mysterious, the unexpected strangeness of the fierce animal having caused the universe it inhabits to become an incomprehensible place where the secrets of nature are hidden in a silent gloom of 'night' and 'forest'. The mind of the speaker is forced to explore a realm where his senses cannot assist him. He asks questions, though he cannot hope for any answers and cannot know, even, if his questions are the relevant ones. The overwhelming fact of the Tyger causes him to probe ultimate things though he can only conceive of the creator dimly, in human terms, and of the creation as the performance of an artisan of wonderful skill and strength. He knows that he cannot know – that he can only guess – and so extends his imagination to picture the process in the most lively way he can, though that picture must leave the mystery unsolved. Even the stars, first of all created things, having knowledge that must be superhuman – even they are struck with grief and horror when they first view this new creature; they 'water heaven with their tears' and, unable to understand the purpose of the creator, 'throw down their spears' in astonishment and despair. If the creator smiled (and the speaker can only wonder if he did) it cannot be known why. Perhaps it was because the devouring Tyger satisfied his cruel nature, perhaps because in his greater wisdom he saw a place for the Tyger in his creation. The speaker does not know, even, if the same great being made both the Lamb and the Tyger, and there is a possibility, suggested in the second stanza, that the maker might be a subordinate being using materials taken with great daring from remote and dangerous parts of an already existent universe.

The creator cannot even be described. He has 'wings' and 'hands' and 'feet', but we never see him, only his operative members as the spectator's sight is held in fascinated attention by the details of the immense process being carried forward. We see the 'shoulder' exerting its strength, the 'hand' in control of its

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materials and the 'feet' of the craftsman as he moves about his work, but are too spell-bound to take in the scene as a whole. The Tyger is 'twisted' and forged into being under great force, appropriate to so fierce and implacable an animal, and as the beast takes shape the tension becomes greater, the questions are broken off in mid-sentence and the questioner speaks in breathless gasps of wonder until the process is complete at the end of the fourth stanza.

The description of the maker at work is a reflection of the effect of the Tyger on the speaker. The strength and the terrifying beauty of the animal are transferred to the description of its creation. We never lose awareness of the animal, though in the course of the poem there is a slight shift in perspective away from the beast and towards the mystery of its creator. In the first stanza the speaker asks:

What immortal hand or eye,
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

The ability of the maker must be wonderful because his creature is so wonderful. It has 'symmetry' – a form we see as being right, though we cannot explain why it should be just so. In the last stanza the speaker wonders what god could 'Dare frame' the fearful symmetry. We are still aware of the terrible beauty of the animal but are more concerned than before with the inexplicable mystery of the mind and purpose of the creator himself, if the word 'mind' can adequately indicate an attribute of his being.

The Tyger is cast in the form of a series of unanswerable questions, while *The Lamb* gives confident answers. Even the questions in the first stanza are put rhetorically by the child, who speaks in order that he may make the replies he is sure are correct. It is, perhaps, because the speaker is a child that he is not concerned with distant or ultimate things. He knows who the maker is but does not think of the mystery of creation or the ineffable mind of the creator. Life has been given and he is concerned with the gift he knows, emphasizing the generosity of God by repeating the word 'gave'. His mind is occupied with the present actuality of the Lamb and with the actualities of his own protected existence.

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He knows only the benign aspect of life – is familiar with the gentle Lamb, but not with the Tyger which destroys, and knows the creator as a loving being who is fully understandable by men because he ‘became a little child’ and lived as a man. Christ is called by the name of the Lamb, and Lamb and child are called by his name, because the names all connote the meek and mild gentleness, the ‘Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love’ known to all three beings. What the child has been told makes sense to him and he accepts that God is in sympathy with his creation, and takes on man’s nature. The mystery of the creation is not considered and God’s present love is implicitly accepted.

Blake’s two poems present us with two different states of mind: that of the adult who is aware of the beauty and terror of the Tyger and of the imponderable questions suggested by its existence, and that of the child, serene in his simple appreciation and knowledge. The reader is tempted to say of the child that he can adopt the attitude he does because the knowledge he has is incomplete – children are not aware of the ‘realities’ of life, and so are able to accept naïve explanations of existence, whereas the adult must confront the harsh ‘realities’ of a world where weaker forms of life are devoured by the stronger. But both the child of *The Lamb* and the adult of *The Tyger* are realists in their own way. The child’s experience may be limited, but he does not attempt to go beyond that experience to explain his world, and he has accepted the story of a gentle Jesus because it is consistent with the care and affection he knows. The adult would like to know more. His God is incomprehensible, but *The Tyger*, while it asserts this, cannot help making an attempt to reduce him to comprehensible form. Theologically, *The Tyger* is a reflection of the bafflement of the speaker, though it must be added that the bafflement is grounded on a real and vivid experience – the shock of encountering the Tyger itself. The child is aware only in terms of his protected existence, but the adult speaker is aware, for the moment, only of exposure in a world where bewilderment is checked by wonder. Both poems show reverence, each in its own way, the reverence being based, in each case, on the realities of the speaker’s life.

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In *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* Blake contrasts a child's simple faith with the perplexed speculations of an adult, but it would be a mistake to assume that the tenor of the songs is to differentiate between the mind that is childishy incomplete and the mature one that is aware of complex problems. Blake's innocents are not always children and his children are not always innocent. The songs which may be paired as contrasts generally present speakers in the same condition of life and the juxtaposition of child and adult is unusual. It is unusual, also, for the experienced and innocent minds both to be presented sympathetically, as they are in *The Lamb* and *The Tyger*. More commonly, Blake's attitude towards Experience seems to be that the state is inevitable but not admirable, and in subsequent chapters we will examine his criticism of the state. In *The Tyger* as in *Infant Sorrow*, however, the perceptions of the speaker are vigorous and there are other *Songs of Experience* where this is so. In *The Sick Rose*, for instance, the speaker seems to be limited by an experienced, horrified view of all things sexual, especially when we contrast the poem with the purity and tenderness expressed in *The Blossom* of the *Songs of Innocence*. The experienced speaker, however, is not really limited by his experienced repugnance, as would at first appear.

THE SICK ROSE

O Rose thou art sick.
 The invisible worm.
 That flies in the night
 In the howling storm:
 Has found out thy bed
 Of crimson joy:
 And his dark secret love
 Does thy life destroy.

THE BLOSSOM

Merry Merry Sparrow
 Under leaves so green