

<p><b>College of Education</b></p> <p><b>Department of English</b></p> <p><b>Third Stage (Morning)</b></p> <p><b>Lecture 8</b></p>		<p><b>Instructor: Dr.Mugdad</b></p> <p><b>Subject: Poetry</b></p>
--	---	---

***Songs of Innocence and Experience* is a collection of poems by William Blake that was first published in 1789.**

- 
- **“The Lamb”**
- **“Holy Thursday (Songs of Innocence)”**
- **“The Divine Image”**
- **“The Little Black Boy”**
- **“The Nurse’s Song”**
- **“The Tyger”**
- **“Holy Thursday (Songs of Experience)”**
- **“The Human Abstract”**
- **“London”**
- **“The Sick Rose”**

**“The Little Black Boy”**

Summary “The Little Black Boy”

*My mother bore me in the southern wild,  
And I am black, but O! my soul is white;  
White as an angel is the English child:  
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.*

*My mother taught me underneath a tree  
And sitting down before the heat of day,  
She took me on her lap and kissed me,  
And pointing to the east began to say.*

## Summary

A black child tells the story of how he came to know his own identity and to know God. The boy, who was born in “the southern wild” of Africa, first explains that though his skin is black his soul is as white as that of an English child. He relates how his loving mother taught him about God who lives in the East, who gives light and life to all creation and comfort and joy to men. “We are put on earth,” his mother says, to learn to accept God’s love. He is told that his black skin “is but a cloud” that will be dissipated when his soul meets God in heaven. The black boy passes on this lesson to an English child, explaining that his white skin is likewise a cloud. He vows that when they are both free of their bodies and delighting in the presence of God, he will shade his white friend until he, too, learns to bear the heat of God’s love. Then, the black boy says, he will be like the English boy, and the English boy will love him.

This poem centers on a spiritual awakening to a divine love that transcends race. The speaker is an African child who has to come to terms with his own blackness. Blake builds the poem on clear imagery of light and dark. The contrast in the first stanza between the child’s black skin and his belief in the whiteness of his soul lends poignancy to his particular problem of self-understanding. In a culture in which black and white connote bad and good, respectively, the child’s developing sense of self requires him to perform some fairly elaborate symbolic gymnastics with these images of color. His statement that he is “black as if bereav’d of light” underscores the gravity of the problem. The gesture of his song will be to counteract this “as if” in a way that shows him to be as capable and deserving of perfect love as a white person is.

The child's mother symbolizes a natural and selfless love that becomes the poem's ideal. She shows a tender concern for her child's self-esteem, as well as a strong desire that he know the comfort of God. She persuades him, according to conventional Christian doctrine, that earthly life is but a preparation for the rewards of heaven. In this context, their dark skin is similarly but a temporary appearance, with no bearing on their eternal essence: skin, which is a factor only in this earthly life, becomes irrelevant from the perspective of heaven. Body and soul, black and white, and earth and heaven are all aligned in a rhetorical gesture that basically confirms the stance of Christian resignation: the theology of the poem is one that counsels forbearance in the present and promises a recompense for suffering in the hereafter.

The black boy internalizes his mother's lesson and applies it in his relations with the outer world;

Questions and answers

1. 1

**How do Blake's views of God presented in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* differ from and complement one another?**

In *Songs of Innocence*, Blake leans toward the traditional view of God as benevolent father over a glorious creation. However, even in these "Innocent" poems, Blake hints at a flawed world that has remade God in its own image, and for its own ends. In *Songs of Experience*, Blake's critiques become more direct as he questions the goodness of God and his place in a world filled with crime, violence, and exploitation. In both books, Blake wishes to point the reader to a view of God that goes beyond mere human understanding and the popular conceptions of him as aloof and impersonal.

## **2. What is the place of nature in the works of William Blake?**

Nature is the near-perfect state of the world and the closest human beings may get to the sinless state of innocence of the Garden of Eden. From the natural world, one may learn the attributes of God, both through the gentle lamb and the ferocious tiger, and find the freedom all human souls long for. In opposition to nature is the urban society of such population centers as London, where human life is bought and sold, and restrictions are placed upon the natural desires of humanity.

## **3. How did the plight of children in urban London affect Blake?**

Blake seems to have been particularly concerned about the exploitation of children by the culture of his time. He dedicated two separate poems to the dangerous profession of chimney sweeping, which encouraged parents to sell their small children into an often-fatal service. He opposed the exploitation of impoverished children by their would-be benefactors in two poems about the Holy Thursday spectacle, and he regularly refers to lost boys and girls who have been abandoned by their parents and driven into wandering by a harsh world system.

In all these cases, Blake either implies or states that the solution to the problem is to reform the social system that holds the lives of children so cheap.

## **4. What is Blake's concept of "free love"?**

While never unfaithful to his wife Catherine Boucher, Blake often writes on the topic of "free love" in his works. In *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, the concept is mostly hinted at, although the Earth offers free love as the key to unshackling her from captivity in "Earth's Answer." Blake's free love is more a rejection of religious and civil authority of the time, and he is quite clear in his

disdain for both in such poems as "Holy Thursay" and "The Little Vagabond." Marriage as an institution, to Blake's mind, was yet another repression of the natural instincts forced upon mankind by those who would abuse their authority for their own ends.

**5. How does the view of the nurse change from the "Nurse's Song" in *Songs of Innocence* to the "Nurse's Song" in *Songs of Experience*?**

In *Songs of Innocence*, the Nurse expresses her desire to care for the children who have been playing all day by getting them home before sunset. When the children ask to play as long as there is light, she indulges them and turns her mind back to her own pleasurable childhood with joy in her heart. In *Songs of Experience*, the Nurse is instead inspired to dread by the children, probably adolescents, who have gone off to "play" and are whispering as they are further away. She returns to memories of her own youth, but in this case she is sickened by memories of mistakes made and sorrows gained; she urges the children to return home quickly and not indulge their curiosities, lest they too make the same mistakes.