

Poetry comparison the poems of william blake

Literature



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Poetry Comparison The poems of William Blake that are contained in his books *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* have often been seen as existing in opposition to each other. Although Blake himself did not define these poems as opposites, his technique of approaching a subject from the perspective of pure innocence on the one hand and from cynical worldly experience on the other tended to have the effect of presenting completely different views on the subjects involved. Despite this, poems such as “*Infant Joy*” in *Songs of Innocence* and “*Infant Sorrow*” in *Songs of Experience* can be seen to share many characteristics despite their vastly different perceptions.

The two poems share many characteristics beginning with their subject matter. In each poem, Blake is expressing the impressions surrounding a very young infant – two days old in the first poem and presumably just born in the second. The language in each poem is kept deliberately simple and straightforward, eliminating the use of metaphors, similes and other such conventions in favor of the innocence and wonder of a newborn infant with few to no real world experiences upon which to base such language. Since each infant is given speech in the poem, this is an important consideration in the success of conveying both innocence and experience for the infants.

While the infant in “*Infant Joy*” is repeating and reveling in his/her experience with an adult, the infant in “*Infant Sorrow*” is relating, on his/her own terms, the experiences it has had with adults at the time of its delivery.

Metrically speaking, each poem takes on the sing-song meter of a song in the form of traditional hymns in the first and in the form of primarily iambic tetrameter in the second. However, in both poems, these generalized metrical descriptions do not fit the entire poem, nor is either poem reflective

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of a simple structure.

Like the various ways in which the poems break out of their rhythmic rules, though, each poem can be seen to stand almost in opposition to each other. The first poem involves a conversation between the infant and an adult of some kind, although the identity of that adult is never fully explained. The child is reveling in the feelings of joy and goodwill that are currently surrounding him/her, and remains innocent of the many dangerous things that the world will inflict upon him/her. This child is so out of touch with the real world, using such grammar as ' I happy am', that it has been questioned with the child is speaking from the viewpoint of two days following its birth or two days following its conception. The adult, on the other hand, seems to be aware of the eventuality of evil and maturity, and seeks to label the child before any of this has a chance to happen. The second poem, on the other hand, contains only the experience and exposition of the infant as he/she explains the experience of birth as a traumatic and painful event. Describing his mother's groans, his father's weeping and himself as a fiend hidden in a cloud, the poem is laced with words that denote negative impressions and a hostile world in sharp contrast to the enveloping warmth and comfort conveyed by the first poem.

While the two poems contain obvious differences that instantly establish them as representing opposite viewpoints on the world experienced, there remain several similarities between them that, when examined, remove this oppositional nature. Rather than showing two infants at the same point in life, one poem injects a sense of ambiguity regarding the child's true age despite the assertion of being ' but two days old' while the other makes it evident from the experiences related that it has just been born. Instead of

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being seen as opposites, therefore, these two poems should be seen as insightful examinations into the various experiences that can befall someone even as small and new as an infant, bringing into question whether true innocence can ever be achieved and when that innocence might break into the world of experience.