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William Blake
The Lamb
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William Blake is a poet who touched a variety of subjects. In “The Lamb,” innocence—and its creation—represent an important subject, which is portrayed through the image of a lamb. While reading this simple poem, with words that can be understood even by a child, the readers are unclear at first about the real meaning of the word lamb, or the direction in which the narrator is going. This ambiguity is conferred by the fact that no one can address a lamb, and therefore there must be more to this word than meets the eye.

Because Blake uses parallelism, mainly accomplished through repetition, this simple structure clues the readers that the lamb is simply a personification of a child, or the innocence of childhood: “Little Lamb, who make thee?/ Dost thou know who make thee?” (728). The simple structure of his poem also tells the readers that Blake’s target audience must have been the many other young children who are interested in the same subject as the child in the poem. Unlike the innocent lamb, the narrator knows more about maturity and the loss of innocence. This subject is a very delicate one, especially when addressing an innocent child. For a second, there’s a moment of suspense; the readers are curious on how the narrator will handle the explanation of such a complex and delicate subject. It becomes clear that Blake’s poem is about childhood and a child’s curiosity towards the secrets of life. Through an almost unprecedented simplicity, Blake successfully addresses this curiosity, and in only two stanzas he succeeds to develop, address, and conclude his subject.

As previously discussed, in the first stanza, the readers are under the impression that the narrator addresses a child. He is asking the child if he knows where he came from, along with all of his material belongings. Although Blake uses simple words, he successfully paints picturesque images that allow the readers to imagine the lamb's happy and sheltered life: "...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!" (728-729). It feels like the narrator will soon explain to the innocent child how his parents gave him birth—which he does so in the second stanza. But to the readers' surprise, this simple poem addresses a totally different subject—the creator of life, God. Suddenly, the simple poem, becomes a lesson about religion and how God created the world, including the lamb—the child. The narrator also states that the lamb's creator is the lamb itself, because God is often described by the Bible as a lamb: "He is meek and he is mild, / He became a little child: / I a child & though a lamb, / We are called by his name" (729). In these verses, it also becomes clear for the little child that, in God's eye, everybody is his child, including the mature narrator. God is great and loving; and because of his sacrifice to save the world, the narrator feels blessed to be one of God's children—"I a child" (729).

In his very short poem, Blake succeeds to address the secret of life, as well as to preserve the innocence—and peace of mind—of his audience. It's obvious that only a great talent can do so much, in such a confined space. Although he uses simple words, he explicates a very complex subject—and what a wonderful job he does by using just the right combination of rhyme, rhythm, and symbolism! He is indeed a great poet.

Works Cited

Blake, William. "The Lamb." *Literature: An Introduction to Writing*. Roberts, Edgar V. and Jacobs, Henry E. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001. 728-729.