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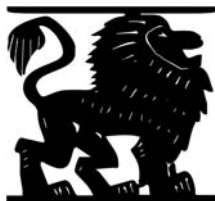
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Blake and Rousseau on Children's Reading, Pleasure, and Imagination

Dennis M. Welch

Perhaps one of the most significant scenes of reading instruction in English art comes from the title page (fig. 1) of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789). The scene foregrounds literacy in the lower left margin with a governess holding a book on her lap, as a young boy and girl peer into the text. All seems as it should: an adult imparting knowledge and literacy skills to youth standing attentively at her knees. But in this otherwise serene and proper scene troublesome signs lurk. The tree on the right, with its fruits resembling apples in most copies of the title page and with a vine snaking around the trunk, recalls the Tree of Knowledge in Genesis.¹ The little boy and girl face away from the Tree—perhaps suggesting their youthful naiveté—whereas the governess faces toward the Tree—presumably the source of her authority. Moreover, the onset of day or night, implied in the light and dark portions of sky in several copies of this design, may suggest that Experience will inevitably intrude upon Innocence.² And the branches that nearly encircle in all copies the word “*Innocence*,” visually separating the children from it, seem to suggest its tentative status. Fortunately, a piper plays as he leans on the cursive “I” of “*Innocence*” and a bird soars above his head and another above “*Songs*”—all perhaps implying the joy and spirit that *Innocence* can still inspire.

As this title page suggests, Blake took a critical interest in education, especially in literacy, even though he himself had little formal schooling—except in the arts of engraving and painting. Indeed, his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790) parodied contemporary reading primers, which had become veritable mosaics of pictures, poetry, proverbs, and stories (see Taylor) and which (though “appealing” like other children’s books) “trend[ed] towards a . . . moralistic, rational view of education and reading” (Arizpe and Styles 65; see Clarke 94).³ Blake’s knowledge of primers and other tools for literacy training derived, no doubt, from his familiarity

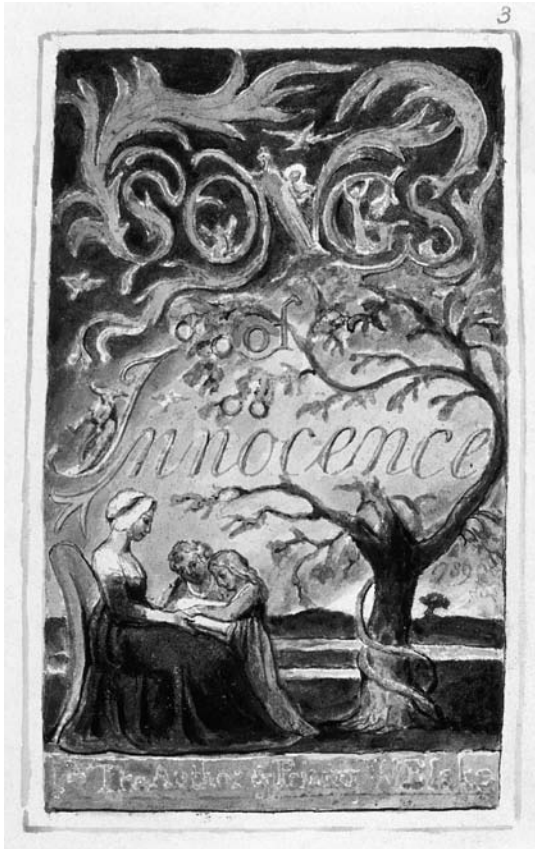


Figure 1. Title page of *Songs of Innocence* (copy Z).
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with the flourishing market in London for children's literature. This market influenced his production of not only *Songs of Innocence* but also *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (1793) and the combined *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794–95). Children's books were a lucrative market for Joseph Johnson, the liberal publisher, who often commissioned Blake to engrave designs for various books in the 1780s and 1790s and whose circle of writers and intellectuals (with whom the poet probably had some association) included such educators as Joseph Priestley, David Williams, and Mary Wollstonecraft. For Wollstonecraft's instructive *Original Stories from Real Life* (1791) and her translation of C. G. Salzmann's equally instructive

Elements of Morality, for the Use of Children (1791–92), Blake produced several perceptive, if not openly critical, engravings.⁴ His association with the coterie of Reverend and Mrs. A. S. Matthew probably introduced him to other educators and writers such as Mrs. Chapone, Hannah More, and Anna Letitia Barbauld. For Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781), he was commissioned to engrave designs as well as for *The Speaker* (c. 1780), an anthology of stories, moral tales, and poems "to facilitate the Improvement of Youth in Reading and Speaking" (see Lincoln 14).

Playing an important role—along with primers, stories, and poems—for literacy education was the fable, which "throughout the eighteenth century," says Thomas Noel, "was highly regarded as either a literary genre with educational utility or an educational tool with the inherent attractiveness of literature" (12). Regarding this genre Blake's views were quite mixed, however. In his Notebook poem "To Venetian Artists," he associated a fable of his own with merriment or pleasure in lampooning these artists for their emphasis (in his view) on color, which he equated to illusion, over outline, which he equated to clarity and distinctness.⁵ His perspective on fables in general took a more serious turn in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810), where he differentiates "Vision" from "Fable or Allegory," which (he asserts) is "totally . . . inferior" (554). What makes fable inferior is its foundation in memory, which links it to moral and social codes and their transmission from generation to generation, whereas vision emanates from imagination, which being "Surrounded by the daughters of Inspiration" can envision possibilities beyond the dull rounds of time and nature. In addition, whereas vision confirms identity because "Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists. Really & Unchangeably," hence making "Each Identity . . . Eternal" (554, 556), fable apparently does not. But, Blake does backpedal here, for "Fable or Allegory is Seldom without some Vision" (554). Moreover, "the Greek Fables originated in Spiritual Mystery & . . . Real Visions Which are [now] lost & clouded in . . . Allegory" (555). Given that Blake did favor fables (albeit critically) and that he considered his best poetry "Sublime Allegory," which he defined in 1803 as "Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding" (730), it is not surprising that elements common to fable often appear in his work, including *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* (1794–95). (It's not surprising either that in the interim between *Innocence* and *Experience*, he engraved twelve designs for a luxurious edition [1793] of John Gay's *Fables*.) These elements include compressed narration, animal and flower personification, multiple voicing and exempla as well as explicit and implicit messaging. According to Thomas Keenan, the messaging in fables usually involves "an address or call to the other" (56). Far less interested than his late eighteenth-

century contemporaries in moralization and the teaching of social codes, Blake includes in his *Songs* subtle calls to active and *imaginative* participation by readers and listeners (of all ages)—calls that invite naming and identity as well as risk and possibility in and through knowledge of the Other.

About four years before he defined “Sublime Allegory” as “hidden from the Corporeal Understanding,” he suggested such calling as part of both his implicit artistic strategy and his bold visionary aim when he told Reverend John Trusler that “The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act. I name Moses Solomon Esop Homer Plato” (702; August 23, 1799). As Hegel was eventually to say regarding Aesopian fables, “Aesop does not dare to recite his doctrines openly, but can only make them understood hidden, as it were, in a riddle . . .” (1:387). Like Aesop and Hegel, Blake thought that any injunction or instruction, calculated explicitly to impose truth on readers, will actually subvert them as well as the truth itself. But, despite his own profound subtlety, he felt confident that his “Visions” are both “delight[ed] in” and “Elucidated by Children” as well as by “a Great Majority of [other] Fellow Mortals” (703). With such confidence in children’s capacities to understand, he wrote on his manuscript of *The Four Zoas* that “Innocence dwells with Wisdom but never with Ignorance” (697). Given the bewilderment that his work has caused generations of scholars, it is fair to ask why Blake felt so confident about children’s comprehension. His answer to this question was that his visions are “addressed to the Imagination” and that children, who are imaginative, can delight in them just as they and adults can in “the Bible [which is] more *Entertaining & Instructive* than any other book”: “Neither Youth nor Childhood is Folly or Incapacity[.] Some Children are Fools & so are some Old Men. But There is a vast Majority on the side of Imagination . . .” (703, 702–03; italics added).

In a seminal study titled *Le Récit est un piège*, Louis Marin says of the fable that its “power . . . is to offer . . . the imaginary satisfaction of a desire, the benefaction of a pleasure.” And just what is this desire? “That of knowledge . . . desire of truth . . . that the possible world be the real world, but the poet takes good care *not* to indicate . . . a path in this aporia” (31–32, italics added).⁶ Not only does such care compare to Blake’s artistic strategy, but the possibility that Marin refers to resembles the possibility that Blake defended in response to a rebuke from Reverend Trusler concerning visionary art: “You certainly Mistake when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not [to] be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination . . .” (702). As these remarks indicate, Blake found great pleasure—not to mention “firm perswasion” (38)—in the imagination’s capacities for idealization, fabulation, and realization within this world.

In contrast, however, to Blake’s overall perspective on the fable and his

regard for children's imaginations and understanding, Jean-Jacques Rousseau held quite different views. Admittedly, as Allan Bloom points out, because the *philosophe* wanted to use the imagination to find meaning in nature, he suggested "a new poetic imagination motivated by love rather than the harsher passions" (21). But, in the words of John Lyons, most of what Rousseau actually said about this mental power was "vehemently negative" (193; see 204)—even in his novel of education, *Émile*. Thus, *Émile*'s tutor deplors books and reading precisely because, as Bloom observes, "They excite the imagination, increasing thereby the desires, the hopes, and the fears beyond the realm of the necessary" (7). "The real world has its limits; the imaginary world is infinite. Unable to enlarge the one, let us [says the tutor] restrict the other, for it is from the difference between the two alone that are born all the pains which make us truly unhappy" (*Émile* 81). For Rousseau, according to Jean Starobinski, "The imagination is one of those admirable but deadly powers that foment dissatisfaction. . . . Hence . . . in *Émile* . . . [he] frequently suggests that the imagination be stifled as long as possible. . ." (40). In light of the differences suggested above between Rousseau and Blake, this essay argues that unlike the *philosophe*, who detected in the ways children read fables a troubling gap between pleasure and understanding—a gap he attributed to their imaginations and to serious problems involving vanity, equality, and identity, Blake saw no such gap. Instead, he found among the interactions of imagination, pleasure, and understanding a mutually reinforcing relationship that calls forth and opens up new possibilities of naming, identity, and community "in This World." While Blake no doubt dismissed, as Zachary Leader observes, Rousseau's concern about children losing control of their imaginations, Leader contends nonetheless that "in Blake's eyes at least" *Émile* offered "a welcome change" educationally and that, like the novel, the *Songs* implicitly rejects books as vehicles of learning (25, 26). While Leader, Stewart Crehan, and Nicholas Williams acknowledge Blake's late assault—in Chapter 3 of *Jerusalem* (201, 202)—against Rousseau's deism, they all consider the poet fundamentally Rousseauvian in the effort to liberate education and children (see Crehan 110, 120; Williams 37). But regarding the significant interactions of reading, imagination, pleasure, and learning, none of these scholars, nor any other, analyzes Blake's relation to Rousseau. On these interactions and this relation, the present essay seeks to provide illumination.

During England's literacy crisis in the late eighteenth century (see Altick 67–77, R. Williams 158), "children . . . became subject to . . . efforts . . .

to contain the [sociopolitical] threat of a reading public” (Richardson 65). Rousseau’s ideas played a significant role in this crisis because, as one of the “most important . . . educational theorists then,” he “galvanized the debate over the sorts of books children should read” (Leader 22). By the 1780s significant changes in English education were occurring as a result largely of influences not only from John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* but also from the 1763 English translation of Rousseau’s *Émile*. In general, these works helped relax some of the rigidities and severities of Puritanism’s educational legacy by making children’s talents, inclinations, and dispositions more or less central to the learning process. But whereas Locke considered reason and example primary means of educating children, Rousseau considered nature and necessity primary. (As one of Rousseau’s many English followers, Thomas Day, put it in *Sanford and Merton*, “children [need to] speak and behave according to the order of nature” [qtd. in Darton 147].) While Locke thought that teaching literacy and imparting knowledge could be made pleasing with Aesop’s *Fables* and with games (256, 257), Rousseau considered education a difficult—even painful—process. Granted, Locke could appear quite stern when he advised a plain diet and cold footbaths for children in order to strengthen them since anyone with a “Sound Mind in a sound Body . . . has little more to wish for” (83). But, in alluding to the myth of Thetis, who immersed the infant Achilles in order to inure him to pain and suffering, Rousseau advised much more sternly than Locke about children that adults “Steep them in the water of the Styx.” In other words, adults should harden children “against the intemperance of season, climates, elements; against hunger, thirst, fatigue” (*Émile* 47). How different such advice is from Blake’s in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where in respect for both the body and the pleasures of learning he inscribed this proverb: “Dip him in the river who loves water” (35).

Seeking steadfastly to naturalize the education of children, Rousseau presents in *Émile* a tutor who is indifferent to his pupil’s illiteracy—even at the age of fifteen (117)! Because children naturally possess undeveloped understandings, they cannot grasp most of what they read anyway. This includes, says Rousseau, stories, the Bible, and also the popular text for teaching literacy at the time in France—La Fontaine’s equivalent to Aesop’s *Fables*.⁷ Thus, “Reading is the plague of childhood” and fables “contain nothing intelligible or useful for children” (*Émile* 116, 113). The delightful poetry that makes fables easy to remember makes them all the more difficult for the child to understand, “so that one buys delight at the expense of clarity” (113).⁸ Moreover, because children enjoy fables so much, they are too easily flattered by them, vainly desiring to be in on their jokes and gaining the knowledge that seems to separate the foolish from the wise in them (see Ferguson 76).⁹

These effects, Rousseau argues, are particularly the case with the fable of the fox and the crow, which children read in ways that reenforce not only vanity but also a sense of superiority over others. This fable's maxim, "*Learn that every flatterer / Lives at the expense of the one who listens to him*" (*Émile* 115), seems to warn against both flatterers (for thinking they are superior to others) and those who listen to them (for reasons of vanity). But, Rousseau adds, because young readers focus on their *amour de soi-même* (i.e., their self-interests), they identify with the story's winner. (As Keenan notes, fables present examples that call in complex ways for "something like imitation or identification" [46].) Just as the fox flatters and beguiles the crow into dropping a piece of cheese so that the fox can take it and thereby show his superiority of wit, so La Fontaine's *Fables* appears to con children into a sense of superior awareness and action (112; see DeJean 91). By beguiling them, fables lead children to exaggerate their appropriate self-interest (*amour de soi-même*) into pride that is based on a sense of what others admire (*amour-propre*).¹⁰ Hence, according to Rousseau, children's pleasure in reading fables undermines comprehension, subverting the maxims and inclining young people not toward worthwhile learning, but instead toward dominion over others rather than equality and community. In essence, the interpretation of this fable that most teachers and other adults assume on the part of children—namely that flattery can be harmful—turns out ironically to be too simple because it does not take human nature or human self-interest into account. No wonder Blake felt that, even though "Rousseau thought Men Good by Nature . . . he found them Evil & found no friend" (201). While the "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence* is certainly no fable, it is worth noting that it is a child's response to "songs of happy cheer" sung by a piper that, in fact, *de-simplifies* them with contrary vision, for "he *wept* with joy to hear" (7). A little child, whom Rousseau would consider too self-centered and too naïve to understand "pleasant" songs, intuitively within them undertones of sadness and sorrow and yet he also enjoys their "glee."

As in Rousseau's critique of the fable of the fox and the crow, vanity and self-interest constitute the main issues in the interactions between the boy and his priest in Blake's song "A Little Boy Lost" (from *Experience*). But concerning these issues the poet contrasts sharply the candid perspective of a child and the severe actions of his cleric and teacher, thereby showing where the vanity and self-interest actually lie and, despite their cruelty and harm, what can arise beyond them. In this song the boy's simile for his fellowship with the priest and other people ("my brothers")—"I love you

like the little bird / That picks up crumbs around the door” (28)—picks up (so to speak) where the crow’s dropped cheese leaves off. Associated with particulars of immediate self-interest and pleasure, such as food, the boy’s perspective conflicts openly with that of his spiritual “Father,” who considers him “a fiend” for contradicting the apparently mysterious nature of Christian fellowship—for daring vainly, in other words, to set “reason [i.e., rational self-interest] up for judge / Of our most holy Mystery” (29). No doubt, in the priest’s view, the boy has misread his catechism and his Bible. The kind of fellowship to which the priest refers, Blake defined perhaps most clearly through the personified voice of “a little Clod of Clay” in “The Clod & the Pebble”: “Love seeketh not Itself to please, / Nor for itself hath any care . . .” (19). Whereas “itself,” or rather oneself, is not supposed to be one’s focus in Christian love, it is in *amour de soi-même*, as Blake seems to indicate through the little boy’s words:

Nought loves another as itself
 Nor venerates another so.
 Nor is it possible to Thought
 A greater than itself to know. . . . (28)

In contrast to the boy’s self-love, which resembles the perspective in *Émile* that “A child’s first sentiment is to love himself” (213), the priest exercises some apparently selfless pastoral “care” (28). His care turns out to be cruelly tyrannical, however, because he is incensed more than anything else by the boy’s lack of veneration for clerical authority. Zealously, this spiritual father seizes the child in the presence of a submissive congregation and has him bound “in an iron chain” and burned “in a holy place, / Where many had been burn’d before” (29). Given that the priest’s reaction may remind us of the famous hyperbole beginning Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, “Man was born free, and is everywhere in chains” (49), the boy’s perspective—“Nor is it possible to Thought / A greater than itself to know”—hardly warrants such inhumanity. For, indeed, it is the priest’s vanity and self-interest that deserve to be restrained. And yet, even though the little boy combines the word “possible” with the negative clause “Nor is it,” the word itself raises multiple questions of possibility here. Is thought really so limited, so confined, that it cannot know something other than itself? Is not the one who binds the boy the one who is really bound? And, most importantly, does not the tragic song of “A Little Boy Lost” raise the possibility of other ways of thinking and reacting than the priest’s and his compliant congregants’?

While this song does not conform to a traditional fable, which usually features personified animals or plants, it does feature important animal imagery, to which the boy compares himself, implying both his vulnerability

(like that of a “little bird”) and his need (which “picks up crumbs around the door”). This significant comparison serves not to present a child of vain selfishness, with whom child-readers might mistakenly identify. Instead, it presents a child of needful and honest self-love in contrast to the priest's power, which derives from the *amour-propre* rooted in his proud perception of how “all admir'd” his “Priestly care” (28). Because names and naming influence behavior and relationships so much, it is worth noting that, even though the boy refers to his priest as “Father,” the priest never refers to the boy as a “son.” Were he to do so, would it be *possible* to treat him so savagely—to reject his fellowship by stripping, binding, and burning him? The title of this song is tragically ironic because only the boy ventures risk and, intentionally or not, functions as an exemplum, raising new possibilities of thinking and interacting with others, whereas the adults who judge and try to control him are lost.

Because in Rousseau's view *amour de soi-même* functions as the foundation of all human activity, it is appropriate that such self-love leads children, as they read, to consider each act of naming an instance of their own involvement in naming themselves (see Ferguson 77–78, de Man 146). The child reads himself, Rousseau asserts, into every story so that, for example, “In all the fables where the lion is one of the personages, since he is ordinarily the most brilliant, the child does not fail to make himself a lion” (*Émile* 115). The main problem, of course, with this way of reading lies not only in children identifying with fictional or unreal characters, and in overrating their own powers, but also in an illusory fellowship between children and adults. Moreover, because fables “are continually read as separating the sheep from the goats” (Ferguson 78), any effort to end inequality by means of unreal fellowship becomes futile. And just as the literary language of fables fosters in children the false pleasure of thinking that they read admirably on the side of the sheep (i.e., with intelligent and virtuous adults), so too does it encourage among adults a similar pleasure in thinking that they have found an enjoyable way to cultivate morality and community when their interpretations are shared by children. For Rousseau, all this pleasure shows that fables not only “thematize vanity but also generate it by appealing to *amour-propre*” (Ferguson 78). While presuming to understand from children's perspectives the fable of the fox and crow, Rousseau did admit nevertheless that no teacher can put himself fully in his students' place and predict their readerly difficulties and responses. Just as he found a gap between the understanding and pleasure of child-readers, so also did he between adults' and children's overall viewpoints. As he acknowledged without self-conscious irony, “None of us [adults] is philosophic enough to know how to put himself in a child's place” (*Émile*

115). Yet put he does as the tutor in *Émile* insists that his own interpretation of La Fontaine's fable is shared by child-readers. As Joan DeJean points out, the tutor's "Teaching becomes the instrument of . . . repression, the means by which . . . nascent powers are cut short" (139; see Lyons 204).

For Rousseau the divisions, then, between pleasure and understanding and between children and adults proved difficult to reconcile. The significance of these divisions cannot be overestimated because, as William Touponce notes, "If we want to understand pleasure" for children when they read, "we need to look at . . . the problematization that . . . [writers and thinkers] have brought to pleasure . . ." (179). No doubt, Rousseau's problematization of pleasure accounted for at least some of Blake's mixed views about him. In contrast to the *philosophe's* cautious endeavor to balance pleasure, desire, and power ("True happiness consists in decreasing the difference between our desires and our powers" [*Émile* 80]), Blake imagined infinite possibility: "The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite" (3). But just as Rousseau thought that children should not be required to labor over books, so also did Blake. In fact, at times, Blake expressed considerable disquiet about book learning. In the "Printing house" allegory, for example, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he tells how "knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation"—only to be "reciev'd by Men" in "the forms of books . . . arranged in libraries" (40). If we can assume that he was using the word "generation" literally, then he was implying in this parody of primers the native (instead of bookish) wisdom of children as it is passed on from them to adults, rather than vice versa as Rousseau emphasized (yet sometimes lamented). If Blake was indeed implying this reversal in the transmission of knowledge, he was being consistent both with his remarks to Reverend Trusler (see 703) and, as we shall see, with "The Lamb." It is a tragic loss, however, that children's wisdom is received by adults merely to be bound in books that sit more on library shelves than in readers' hands.

Among Blake's songs, perhaps the one closest in spirit to Rousseau's views on the dangers of premature literacy and conventional education is "The School Boy." But, whereas Rousseau detected a problematic gap between pleasure and early literacy, Blake suggests that education unconfined by the classroom, which "drives all joy away" (31) as Rousseau himself had complained in *Émile*, unites enjoyment and reading with understanding. For outside the dreary classroom and in the pleasurable "sweet company" of nature and its many fabled creatures, the boy-speaker "in . . . [his school] book . . . take[s] delight" and in that sweet company finds blessing as "the sky-lark sings with" him and as he himself resembles a "bird . . . born for joy"—much as the bird-boy is portrayed reading at the top of the vine in the right margin of the song's design. According to Rousseau, in conventional classroom education children do not really learn but instead, as Blake's school boy complains,

they “forget” (31) the most important lessons of all: to learn who they are and what they were born for. In contrast, however, to a Rousseauvian education through nature, which is supposed to steady children through autonomous yet civilized strength, Blake’s school boy sees chiefly in the differences between classroom and countryside what not only he but also his fellow students are deprived of. Confined to their benches, “The little ones spend the day, / In sighing and dismay.” Reading himself pleasurably, furthermore, within the book of nature and its community of creatures, he understands the Other—these little ones—with empathy and concern. Moreover, as the repetition of the word “if” suggests in the song’s penultimate stanza—“if buds are nip’d, / . . . / And if the tender plants are strip’d”—education and literacy do not have to prune children’s lives. There are other possibilities as shown by the school boy’s example. Unfortunately, with only the letter of education and not the spirit that may be implied in the angelic figure depicted at the left of the fourth stanza, the boy’s “love” of “summer morn” could turn into the long-term mourning of a life confined to fruitless and futile selfhood with nothing in store “When the blasts of winter appear.” Indeed, all that may grow from within is blighted by classroom reading and training. If such schooling were to relax or at least moderate, however, “O! what sweet company” would the school boy and his fellow students and fellow creatures enjoy as they gain knowledge and understanding amid “learnings bower.” At the very least, this risk-taking truant to conventional study, thought, and action exemplifies better ways of perusing, learning, and interacting in the world.

As “The School Boy” suggests, having originally appeared in *Innocence* but being moved to and from *Experience* (see Viscomi 274), Blake’s mixed views of Rousseau occur perceptively in songs where disregard for children’s wonder and pleasure—as if they subvert understanding—is countered in ways that expand rather than contract their possibilities. In essence, whereas Rousseau considered children’s imaginations a barrier, Blake considered them an open gate, which later in his career he associated with “the Gate of Los”—the Imagination itself (*M* 136; *J* 156, 186, 240). Hence, in “The Lamb,” Blake only *appears* to agree with Rousseau about the conflict between understanding and pleasure. No doubt, this song was written for very young children to hear and enjoy on their own and in company with others. The song’s exemplary, good-natured speaker imaginatively addresses a lamb in the second person (“thee”), personifying it as if it were also a child and then identifying it with himself and also with the song’s young audience. As the speaker says, “I a child & thou a lamb, / We are called by his name”—“his” referring to the lamb’s, the speaker’s, and every child’s creator (9). The speaker’s kindly manner and childlike identification with the lamb are designed to give comfort and pleasure to the audience. And the gifts of the creator to the lamb—food, a beautiful world of “stream &

. . . mead,” “Softest clothing wooly bright,” and “a tender voice” (like the speaker’s)—constitute pleasures that any child would enjoy reading about and experiencing.

But underlying all the providential comfort and joy for lambs and youth is a question that most children do not understand. Acknowledging this puzzlement, the speaker, who as an exemplum is wiser than most, asks and answers the fundamental question of creation: “Little Lamb who made thee / . . . / Little Lamb I’ll tell thee!” The absence of punctuation after the phrases “Little Lamb” literally instantiates not only the identifications already mentioned but also a most amazing (and perhaps shocking) fellowship in the song’s era:¹¹ the fellowship of creature and creator, of lamb-child-and-God—imagined and gently taught (or shared like spiritual food) by the young speaker.¹² Lest this speaker seem a budding disciple of Émile’s tutor, however, we find that, unlike the pedagogical challenges imposed by the latter, another—not associated with civic virtue and civic religion—is instead meekly implied in the speaker’s words: “We are called by his name.” This calling, if answered as Blake suggests, turns challenge into both possibility and pleasure more comforting than any implied thus far. Indeed, to the lamb’s and any child’s greatest pleasure, the calling is to the greatest blessing, which the speaker repeats at the end of the poem twice, again instantiating in words the fellowship already expressed: “Little Lamb God bless thee. / Little Lamb God bless thee.”

Just as animal imagery, fairy tales, and fables were used to teach literacy to children, so also were they used to convey religion and morality. And just as in “The Lamb,” so also in “The Little Black Boy” there is an apparent gap between understanding and pleasure. According to the quite conventional and preachy mother in this song, God gives to her son and all creation “comfort” and “joy” (9). But just as this “mother bore” him laboriously “in the southern wild,” so—it seems with Blake’s wordplay—do her spiritual and moral lessons bore him wearily “underneath a tree” of the fallen world, where God’s gifts of “light” and “heat” are bestowed on flowers, beasts, men, and the boy himself. Paying perhaps too much attention to these gifts and too little to her and thus missing the underlying implications of her words, the boy does not comprehend in them the fundamental problem—the problem of evil—the problem of theodicy, about which she speaks too naively. From her perspective (as well as from that of many in the eighteenth century), the divine gifts of light and heat are precisely what have “bereav’d” little black boys of fair skin and, apparently also, of a sense of personal identity.¹³ Never does it occur to her boy, however, to ask how and why the very same gifts have not bereaved others. Likewise, the question of divine justice, which calls into question divine “love & care” and foregrounds the problem of

evil, never occurs to the boy or to his mother. Is this not because she tries to teach him to bear with his body his bereavement as if the body and such bereavement are merely a transient "cloud" and "shady grove"? If the boy learns the essence of her preaching—namely, "to bear the beams of [divine] love"—his body will eventually "vanish" like a cloud or shadow, only to be transformed thereafter into an even more vulnerable (yet apparently happy) creature, a lamb. Like *Émile's* tutor, this mother and her God seem all too willing to allow children, in particular an African child, to suffer temporary pains in order to gain some projected condition of reward.

That the boy does not clearly comprehend the transformation in the hereafter—in other words, that Rousseau may have been right about children's inadequate understanding—can be seen in the way the boy envisions himself at "the tent of God" in eternity. Referring to his own body, he says of the "little English boy": "I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear, / To lean in joy upon our fathers knee." But how could the black child say this after his mother has associated his embodiment with "a cloud" and a "shady grove" and told him that his body "will vanish" when he has "learn'd the [divine] heat to bear"? And why would he feel the need or the desire to protect the English boy as "round the tent of God like lambs" they *both* will "joy"? Has the black child been so "bore[d]" or benumbed by his mother's lessons that he misses crucial aspects about his own body and about the significant differences between the fallen world and the hereafter? Does he lack the capacity to understand the implications in his mother's images and metaphors, as Rousseau would argue (114)? Or is the boy so distracted by his pleasure in them that he cannot grasp their meaning? Is there a gap between pleasure and understanding here, such that the boy feels sufficiently—not to mention justly—superior to the English boy that he would "shade him" and "stroke his silver hair"?

This feeling the black boy appears soon to preclude by wishing to "be like" the English child and thereby win his "love." And yet the boy does imagine something far deeper than his mother's platitudinous lessons and far deeper than most, including Rousseau as well as his English admirers, would expect from a child (see *Émile* 52). For his is an imagination that does, in fact, go to the very heart of theodicy and the problem of evil—namely, to the heart of divine justice checked and fulfilled by love and community. The black boy imagines that, even as he and his friend will "rejoice" in God's presence, divine "heat" will still affect the English boy. But, having born such heat already in the world of time, the little black child will give *his* own gift—the gift of "shade . . . from the heat till he [the English boy] can bear" that heat also. Such generosity would complement divine justice and thereby enable both children to "lean in joy upon our fathers knee." In light of these possibilities,

it is little wonder that Blake wrote on the manuscript of *The Four Zoas* that “Innocence dwells with Wisdom . . .” (697). And if, as he wrote elsewhere, “Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have . . . governd their Passions . . . but because they have Cultivated their Understandings” (564), then surely—by transforming resentment over life’s injustice into love for another human being—the little black boy has cultivated beyond all measure both his own understanding and his own identity.

Instead of imitating children’s voices as in “The School Boy,” “The Lamb,” and “The Little Black Boy,” Blake presents in “The Blossom” a maternal, speaking flower—a creature that would delight most children. Although a “Robin” sobs in this song—probably out of envy toward a “Sparrow,” which with its speed and aim readily sits “cradle[d]” near the blossom’s “Bosom”—the Robin itself remains “Pretty,” the Sparrow “Merry,” and the Blossom “happy” (10). While a generic blend of fable and emblem,¹⁴ this song includes no generalization or maxim. What then is it that children can obtain from such a generically composite work besides the pleasure they derive in reading its poetry and viewing its wonderful illumination? This question is not to imply that their pleasure would be insufficient to meaning, for if Perry Nodelman (118) is right illustrations in children’s literature have significance largely because they appeal to their pleasure. Perhaps this is why, in his letter to Reverend Trusler on August 23, 1799, Blake was happy to say that “Children . . . have taken a greater delight in contemplating my Pictures than I even hoped” (703). And if they read and see attentively, there is much they can learn imaginatively. Indeed, they can understand that the Blossom remains happy with the merry Sparrow and despite the sobbing Robin. Would this imply to children that the flower is cold and spiteful? Not if they hear the phrase “your cradle” in reference to the Sparrow’s place near the flower’s bosom. Because no analogous phrase so immediate and affecting to young readers includes the Robin, they can infer that he is jealous not because he is treated unequally by the Blossom but because he is possessive, desiring what is someone (or, rather, something) else’s—just as the fox seeks the crow’s cheese. By learning this distinction young readers can begin to understand one of the main differences between Innocence—as exemplified by the community of the merry Sparrow and happy Blossom—and Experience—as exemplified by the Robin’s lonely sorrow, envy, and self-pity.

Moreover, if *repetitio est mater scientiae*, then children can detect in the contrast between the excessive quadruple repetition of “Pretty” involving the Robin and the more moderate double repetition of “Merry” involving the Sparrow that joy or pleasure is better than beauty, especially in light of beauty’s usual associations with vanity. Without saying explicitly, Blake indicates that such joy is innocently physical. Visually, however, “The Blossom” is quite explicit, presenting in the right margin a flaming and rather phallic

flourish of vegetation and above the title a cycle of erotic growth—from solitary and readerly childhood to dancing youthfulness and to embracing procreation, then back again. With this song's illustration, Blake seems to be countering Rousseau's insistence on the restraint of sexuality and the fortification of virtue in children and adolescents (see *Émile* 216, 219, 220, 230–31). But as with the song's words, Blake leaves feeling, intuition, and interpretation about the design to the spectator and hence to difference and ambiguity—except in a point common to overly supervised children. For, as David Wagenknecht indicates, the maternal figure that hovers over a baby above the song's title faces “against the direction of the circular progress” (59), implying the problematic solicitude of many parents (and perhaps of some teachers) who wish to protect children from risking what they can and must do. And that is to grow up. On this matter, Blake and Rousseau differed in manner but not in principle.

If “The Lamb” and “The Little Black Boy” present children disrupting with pleasure conventional religious education and if “The Blossom” encourages young readers to disrupt with joy conventional views of beauty and embodiment, then “A Dream” models new education and understanding through the sorrows and ultimately the hopes of wandering and wondering. Recognizing that children have bad dreams, Blake begins this fable-like song reassuringly by speaking again in the voice of a child: “Once a dream did weave a shade, / O'er my Angel-guarded bed” (16). If readers of this song have already taken delight in the little black boy's generous “shade,” they know that shades and shadows can be good, even protective, like angels. Adding to such reassurance, the song narrates a magical dream about a wandering maternal ant (an “Emmet”) that in a rhetorically “wilderd” mix of ambiguous participles and fantastic dream voices (the emmet's and a glowworm's as well as the speaker's) becomes lost but is eventually found in identity with the dream speaker himself. The song's narrative depicts, then, not only the risk of getting lost, which children would fear, but also how to resolve the risk by imaginatively looking and listening to nature's guides. Furthermore, whereas the speaker's dream remains partly cautionary, it also inspires—to new possibilities—through the powers of dreaming and wondering. As Grant Holly notes, “In this [song's] dream within a dream the . . . lines seem to say, there is always yet another dream” (30).

The lost emmet's heartbreak, which grammatically appears to be the dreamer's also, leads not to despair but to sympathy and pity—not unlike the School Boy's. Just as the emmet worries for herself, her children, and her mate, who likewise “weep for” her, so the dreamer worries for her, them, and himself. Blake skillfully identifies these creatures and their mutual concerns through the magic of dream and through rhetorically ambiguous verbals:

an Emmet lost its way
Where on grass methought I lay.

Troubled wilderd and folorn
Dark benighted travel-worn,
Over many a tangled spray
All heart-broke I heard her say.

Along with the ambiguous participles here, the imagery and metaphor serve to identify the emmet—“lost” and therefore “Troubled wilderd and folorn”—with the speaker, who in his “Dark benighted” dream thought he lay “on grass” where “many a tangled spray” likewise lay. While Blake includes with the personal pronoun “I” every reader in the grief of being lost, he also tries to calm us by having the emmet express the shared sorrow of her family: because her family grieves, they “look abroad” to find her. And even though she is lost, she in turn weeps for their grief. But again in this song’s dreams magical identifications and transformations occur, for it is not only possible but likely that the beginning of its penultimate stanza expresses the emmet’s grief *and* the speaker’s. No doubt, Blake intended this ambiguity in order to show that sympathetic identifications in the imagination can inspire new possibilities instead of fear and caution: namely, the possibilities of a society—the emmet is a hymenopterous insect, known for its social networks and support systems—in which the individual and the Other not only interact but also interconnect.

Instead of ending “A Dream” on a negative or unpleasant note, Blake introduces a playful yet instructive glowworm, whose voice mildly chides the emmet and speaker for their “wailing . . . / Calls.” After all, this “watchman of the night” remains “near,” where it shines amid darkness; and we can follow its light. Reminding the emmet and speaker that glowworms “light the ground [or pathway], / While the beetle goes his round,” this benign watchman instructs his listeners to “Follow now the beetles hum.” In a world of mutual concern and caring action, where families (of any species) look for lost members and where mere glowworms light pathways, the signs and supports of aid and comfort are all around. By looking and listening, every “Little wanderer [will] hie thee home”—to the place where Blake’s young readers usually feel most secure and happy. Though wandering in imaginary and real worlds can be risky, it need not be. Gently, skillfully, and beautifully, Blake teaches to delight and delights to teach, inspiring youthful readers to open-ended possibilities. Such possibilities appear also in the song’s illustration, which humanizes the glowworm as a “watchman of the night,” lighting a path out of its darkness. Whereas Louis Marin finds in fable no clear or certain paths in its aporia, Blake suggests one—this time—in “A Dream,” where the glowworm’s path remains open and ready to be trod.

Unlike Rousseau (255–56) and other educators who doubt that children can comprehend notions of the invisible and supernatural, Blake thinks otherwise. In his song titled “Night,” for example, an abundance of pleasing images helps young readers understand and even engage with the imperceptible and supposedly unknowable. From Rousseau’s perspective, however, the dark and unknowable strike fear in both children and adults. This, he says, occurs especially at night when the imagination makes every dim sight and every dull sound a terror, so that “The vigilance inspired in me . . . for my preservation [i.e., *amour de soi-même*] gives me grounds for fear” (*Émile* 134). Because “only by the fire of the imagination are the passions [such as fear and self-love] kindled,” this educator recommends “night games” for children in order to habituate them to darkness instead of fear of the unknown (135). Rousseau’s advice seeks, particularly in the young, to “forestall imaginative mental creations” (Lyons 194) since “In everything habit kills imagination” (*Émile* 135).

In contrast to the *philosophe*’s apprehensions and concerns on behalf of children, Blake’s “Night” celebrates that time most often feared by them, for here it is brightened by “The evening star” and made comforting by “The moon like a flower, / In heavens high bower” (13). Recognizing as he does in “A Dream” the ease and security of home, especially for children, the poet reassures them by having the speaker of “Night” acknowledge its importance—“I must seek for mine”—just as other creatures of fable do at the end of day. Not until the last stanza of “Night” do readers discover that they have been listening to the voice of a visionary and peaceful lion, whose home derives undoubtedly from Isaiah’s famous vision of the messiah’s homecoming (Isa. 11.6; see 35.1–2, 6–7, 10) and whose words present to young readers new and imaginative possibilities of being that unite the visible and invisible, the temporal and eternal.

Just as at night adults protect their children, animals, and other creatures, so (this voice assures) do invisible beings such as angels. Amid the darkness, wherever

lambs have nibbled, silent moves
The feet of angels bright;
Unseen they pour blessing,
And joy without ceasing,
On each bud and blossom,
And each sleeping bosom. (13–14)

Countering Rousseau’s doubts about children in relation to the supernatural, Blake naturalizes it here by personifying or, more accurately, anthropomorphizing the angels and then describing them as “bright” even though they are

“Unseen.” Wherever fear and sleeplessness occur, these spirits of the night bring peace and rest. For, lovingly, “They look in” on the nests of birds and “visit [the] caves of every beast, / To keep them all from harm” (14).

In the fourth stanza, however, the speaker acknowledges the sudden intrusion of grave threat by “wolves and tigers howl[ing] for prey” (14). While it may seem unusual and *unreassuring*, the guardian angels of the preceding stanza (quoted above) do not confront and conquer these predators in order to protect the vulnerable and frightened. Instead, the angels appear altogether passive, if not self-contradictory, “Seeking to drive” predatory “thirst away” and keep defenseless sheep safe by merely “pitying stand[ing] and weep[ing].” In response to their passivity, Zachary Leader says that “there are times when the weariness night induces is simply overpowered by . . . beasts’ hunger. ‘Night’ makes no attempt to explain away or deny suffering” (123). Whereas Rousseau would probably judge young readers of this song as vainly and therefore foolishly reliant on angelic aid, Blake takes a different perspective. As Leader’s words suggest, the visionary poet and the speaker know that Experience presents grave risks. But, as poet and speaker soon show, it also calls humanity, including children, to other possibilities—to possibilities that only the imagination can envision. At this point in “Night,” Blake adopts a largely *un-Rousseauvian* maneuver. He chooses not to fill the heads of child-readers with false hopes about supernaturally protective powers, but instead to depict the angels—and, by implication, anyone who imagines them—as vigilant and other centric, unresponsive to *amour de soi-même* and therefore neither intrusive nor violent like the wolves and tigers. If these predators have their way and “rush dreadful,” as the speaker says calmly, then the angels will take heed but not direct action. For it is “each mild spirit”—each child-like creature—that they are most concerned with, receiving and welcoming them, if fatally harmed, into “New worlds” and new possibilities.

To these worlds the speaker introduces young readers not by portraying robed angels, haloed in bright light, singing solemn hymns of praise and glory to the divine, but instead by using images that most appeal to children—images of personified animals, gentle tears, sweet tenderness, and both abundance and security. Perhaps most importantly, the speaker connects by way of a personalizing yet unobtrusive oxymoron—“our immortal day” (14)—the imaginations of children with both the here-and-now and the new worlds of eternity. And what possibilities do these worlds offer that young minds and hearts can understand and appreciate? Whereas nighttime presents an unsettling mix of protectors and predators that can cause children to weep and can keep them from sleep, in eternity what was once a threat in this world becomes a protective, compassionate, and beautiful lion with a bright golden mane. Like the “new heavens and a new earth” in Isaiah’s prophecy

(65.17–18), “our immortal day” includes this lion as it “lie[s] down” with a lamb in community and peace—all “wrath” and “sickness” now dispelled and this former instrument of might, fright, and judgment (see Amos 3.8; Hosea 11.10; 1 Kings 13.24–26, 20.35–36; 2 Kings 17.24–26) now a princely and sympathetic lion that “guard[s] o’er the fold.” Whereas in the darkness of time “weeping” (or grief) precludes “sleeping” (or peace), in the daylight of immortality, they can coexist:

And now beside thee bleating lamb,
I [the lion] can lie down and sleep,
Or think on him who bore thy name,
Graze after thee and weep.

Whereas Blake alludes here to Isaiah’s famous prophecy in order to call children to imagine its possibilities, he alludes here also to Rousseau in order to counter educators like him. Even though the *philosophe* claimed critically that “in all the fables where the lion is one of the personages, . . . the child does not fail to make *himself* [vainly] a lion” (italics added), Blake shows in this fable-like song that through imaginative perception and visionary prophecy the child and the lion can become fellow companions, equals, rather than respective embodiments of weakness and power. Just as the allusion to Isaiah constitutes an implicit call to children’s imaginations, so also does the imagery of the brightly maned lion as he contemplates the “bleating” (and bleeding) Lamb and “graze[s] after” it. For the phrase “graze after” means here not only to feed upon and become spiritually nourished but also to feed (or put out for grazing) and even to imitate—that is, to “graze *after*.” Blake believed that, by responding to this implicit call, young readers can discover the invisible within the visible, the supernatural within the natural. They can do, in other words, what Rousseau claimed they cannot. As in “The Lamb” and other songs, the child—not the master—discovers, instructs, and inspires. In the words of Isaiah to his people, “a little child shall lead them” (11.6).

Despite its frequent associations with isolation, threat and harm, night’s possibilities for transitioning to and realizing “our immortal day” appear most clearly and reassuringly in illustrations (figs. 2 and 3) of the song’s late copies. Instead of emphasizing ambiguities, contrasts, and division between the natural and supernatural in the illustrations, as Leader tends to (126, 127), Blake draws these two realms in close connection through color, line, and form. For example, the golds and greens that largely pervade copies Z and AA reenforce the song’s key unifying figure “our immortal day.” In particular, the union between the ethereal and eternal—the golden world—and the vegetative and transient—the green world—is depicted in these copies by golden angelic forms that emanate or grow from the branching tree in the



Figure 2. Plate 1 of “Night” in *Songs of Innocence* (copy Z). Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright (c) 2011 William Blake Archive. Used with permission.

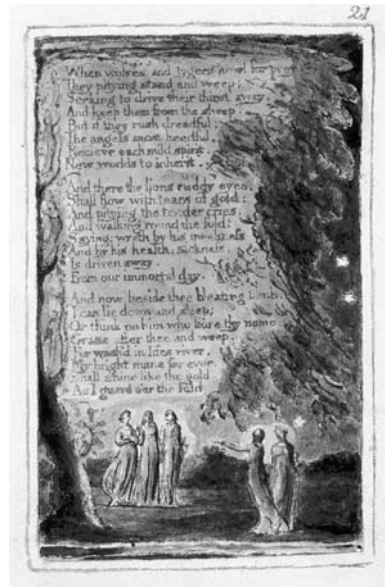


Figure 3. Plate 2 of “Night” in *Songs of Innocence* (copy Z). Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright (c) 2011 William Blake Archive. Used with permission.

upper right border of the song’s first plate, by the greenish cave that protects the golden lion in the lower right border of the same plate, and by the vegetation that gently encircles and cradles what appears to be a huge golden moon with the title “Night” flourishing over it. This moon’s aerial brilliance glows throughout the first plate, illuminating the text so that children can perceive transcendent light even in earthly night. In the same plate the quiet upward thrust of the slender tree and vine in the right margin parallels the upward reaching and ascendant lines of the angels in the left margin. Similar connections are depicted in the song’s second plate, where along its left border there are three human forms, clad (like the angels of the first plate) in light golden garb, two of them (like the same angels) with arms reaching upward as they stand on or stem from a tree that extends protectively up, beside, over, behind, and largely around the text. Just as in the first plate moonlight from “heavens high bower” protectively “smiles on the night” and just as a cozy green cave surrounds and comforts the golden lion, so in the second

plate do a grand tree above and a hedge below safely surround five apparently human forms, clad also in gold garments, as they stroll leisurely across a green. Golden and green worlds converge here. Like the two forms on the right, which are haloed together by a rising moon, three of the five figures are haloed together by a large setting sun—again a uniting of the supernatural and natural but also a circling that implies unity, oneness, or community even at night when creatures usually separate and “seek for” their own abodes.

In *Émile* when Rousseau talks about nighttime, he admits that its darkness, quiet, and mystery “Compelled . . . [him] to set . . . imagination in motion” and “no longer [be] its master” (134). Rousseau’s concern for mastery and control permeates his novel and his educational theory—even at times ironically, as when he tries to warn about imagination’s mastery over others, especially children. For example, regarding the smell of the crow’s cheese in La Fontaine’s fable, the tutor himself imagines that it must be “quite an odor to be smelled by the fox in a copse or in his hole,” neither of which the fable mentions at all (*Émile* 114). Moreover, when the crow “open[s] his big beak, [and] lets fall his prey” (his cheese), *Émile*’s master says that he “see[s] a big ugly beak opened” and “hear[s] the cheese falling through the branches” (114) even though neither of these details appears in the fable either. Given his own inconsistencies and difficulties with the imagination and his fears about it in children, the *philosophe* proposed educational practices to shape the young through sensory stimuli and thereby divert them from imaginative activity. In doing so, he tried to make the imaginations of children passive, subject to the sensory impressions managed by their teachers. To assure that enough of these impressions would foster sympathy for others and hence a more civil society, Rousseau emphasized that children be made to witness suffering repeatedly though not excessively (231). The aims of his pedagogical strategies were to promote in the young habits of pity and also of submission to experience and its necessities rather than imagining alternatives to them.

Not only do several of the songs constitute perceptive responses to Rousseau’s views, but so do Blake’s tractate *There Is No Natural Religion* (1788) and his drawings for Wollstonecraft’s *Original Stories from Real Life*. As the title of the tractate indicates, he rejected what he considered the materialistic and faithless deism (the “natural religion”) of such cultural icons as Rousseau, Voltaire, Newton, and Locke. Even more dangerous from his prophetic point of view were the epistemological foundations of such religion and their assault on imagination and human possibility. Beginning his tractate in apparent agreement with such educators as Locke and Rousseau, Blake says that “Man has no notion of moral fitness but from Education” (2). Quickly,

however, he upends this view by attacking its foundations: “None could have other than natural or organic thoughts if he had none but organic perceptions”; thus, “The desires & perceptions of man untaught by any thing but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense” (2).

Limited mostly to sensory perceptions and desires, the children in *Original Stories*, which presents in their governess (Mrs. Mason) a female version of Émile’s tutor, learn chiefly from experience.¹⁵ And that experience, which the governess always arranges and usually oversees, involves exposure to “real life” suffering and loss among the poor and among abused animals. Interestingly, of the ten drawings that Blake did for Wollstonecraft’s volume, he chose to focus eight on misery, decrepitude, and death. Granted, scholarly views of Mrs. Mason and *Original Stories* range widely from those that see in them “repellent . . . English Rousseauism” (Townsend 26) to those that find them “benevolent . . . helpful and high-minded” (Clarke 96). According to Mitzi Myers, Mason “converts everyday situations into her instructional medium.” But, Myers acknowledges also that Mason’s “values are austere” (“Impeccable” 46, 48). From Blake’s perspective as creator of the *Songs of Innocence*, her values and pedagogical strategies would have seemed as overbearing to children and as stifling to their imaginations as Rousseau’s educator, converting everyday life into lesson after lesson unremittingly.¹⁶

To counter Rousseauvian control like Mrs. Mason’s over children’s education, Blake presents in such works as *There Is No Natural Religion*, the drawings for *Original Stories*, and several of his songs subtle but nonetheless critical responses that honor children’s lives, identities, and reading and their pleasures, imaginations, and understanding. In various ways his regard for children appears in each of the songs examined earlier, particularly “The Lamb” and “The School Boy,” in which young voices teach—or at least try to—instead of being taught. And unlike Émile’s tutor, adults in several songs can also teach and guide in ways that respect and liberate those in their trust. “The Shepherd” and “Nurse’s Song” (in *Innocence*) both model good teaching or, more importantly, reciprocal learning. For the Shepherd “follow[s] his sheep” and gives them “praise” while remaining “watchful,” protective, and ever “nigh” (7). Similarly, the nurse listens to the desires of her students and lets them continue playing—even until nighttime. And the result? Joy and harmony, as “The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh’d / And all the hills ecchoed” (15). In contrast to Mrs. Mason and Émile’s tutor, this flexible and kindly governess succeeds as a teacher because her pupils have learned through her open-minded, gentle, and caring treatment not only to stand up for their hopes and wishes but also how to argue for them directly and concisely. Within just four verses they mount three distinct but related and (for children) imaginative arguments in order to continue playing:

No no let us play, for it is yet day
And we cannot go to sleep
Besides in the sky, the little birds fly
And the hills are all coverd with sheep [.] (15)

If education can foster liberty, as teachers like Rousseau had hoped, then here it is in action—along with imagination and pleasure, community and self-assertion.

This article is dedicated to the memory of John Daniel (J. D.) Stahl, an editor of Crosscurrents of Children Literature (2006), a respected expert in the field, and a beloved colleague in my department.

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Notes

¹ *The William Blake Archive* suggests that the tree and fruit are apples in both of its copies of *Innocence* (B and U) and in all of its copies of the combined *Songs* (A, B, C, E, F, L, R, T, V, Y, Z, and AA).

² See the following copies of the combined *Songs* in *The William Blake Archive*: B, L, Y, and especially T, V, Z, and AA.

³ For more on the appealing educational uses of primers and other children's literature, especially in the Georgian era, see Meyers, "Romancing the Moral Tale."

⁴ For a study of Blake's engravings in *Original Stories* and of relationships among the engravings, Wollstonecraft's volume, and *Songs of Experience*, see Welch.

⁵ *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, rev. ed. D. V. Erdman, 515. All subsequent citations to Blake's writing are by page number from Erdman's edition. For major illuminated works, the standard abbreviations (such as *M* for *Milton* and *J* for *Jerusalem*) are used.

⁶ The English translation here of Marin comes from Gelley 151–52. In words more straightforward than Marin's, Lerer says that fables "constitute . . . a world through which the child may re-imagine . . . everyday experiences. And in the course of . . . that imagining, we may recover not just children's notions of the world but our own adult fantasies of what the world might be" (36–37).

⁷Rousseau's assault on literacy training for children included La Fontaine's *Fables* not only because it was an overtly didactic tool that educators used to emphasize rote memorization and recitation (112), which he despised as Blake did, but also because the *Fables* represented French Classical literature's educational function, which he considered domineering, unnatural, impractical, and in need of reform (see DeJean 79–80).

⁸Concerning the supposed difficulty of understanding fables, William Godwin seemed to agree. Even though a stone carving of Aesop was placed above the entrance at 41 Skinner Street, to which Godwin and his spouse (Mary Jane) moved their juvenile library in 1807 (Marshall 273–74), he himself had written in *The Enquirer* (1797) that “Nothing is more futile, than the formal and regular moral frequently annexed to Aesop's fables of animals. Examine the fable impartially, and you will find that the lesson set down . . . is one of the last inferences that would have occurred to you” (132–33). Concerning literacy and imagination in children, however, Godwin differed from Rousseau by arguing that the youth who “loves reading, has every thing within reach” and that children should *not* be introduced “late” to reading (*Enquirer* 31, 34). According to Marshall, in children Godwin “placed great stress on the growth of the imagination, without which he felt there could be no genuine morality” (267).

⁹Given the division (in Rousseau's view) between delight and instruction for children in reading, it appears that he did not ascribe to the increasing effort of his contemporaries to combine pleasure and education in children's literature. This combination is said to reflect much of the standard history of the literature at least since the time of John Newbery's motto for his first and best-known children's book, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744): “Delectando monemus: *Instruction with Delight*” (52). For standard histories of the literature, see Darton, Thwaite, and also Demers and Moyles. For perspectives that question and complicate the standard history, see Myers, Clarke, Arizpe and Styles, and Grenby.

¹⁰In book 4 of the novel, however, when Émile is an adolescent old enough to benefit from La Fontaine's fables and similar tales, he is encouraged to read them as vicarious and painless means of correcting his *amour-propre*.

¹¹The absence of punctuation after the phrase “Little Lamb” occurs in copies B and U of *Innocence* and copies A, B, C, E, F, L, R, T, V, Y, Z, and AA of the combined *Songs* in *The William Blake Archive*.

¹²In more secular terms regarding the role of fellowship or community in fables, Blanchot says that “It is the other who exposes me [and us] to `unity’” (13). Reading “The Lamb” as both a parody of catechetical, question-and-answer instruction and a satire of its authoritarian roles in the eighteenth century, Richardson mentions something else about the young speaker's voice—something that Rousseau largely neglected in children—namely, a communal sense of humor among them: children “who had been catechized weekly if not daily . . . could hardly fail to be amused by a child

speaker addressing this very adult question to a lamb, and then inventing an answer that would shock most eighteenth-century parents and Sunday School "visitors" (76). The shock value of the child's humor indicates his potential for alternative—if not revolutionary—thinking, which Richardson valorizes but which Rousseau did not regard regarding children and their imaginations.

¹³ For details about the relationships between theories of climate and race in the eighteenth century, see Wheeler.

¹⁴ For details on Blake's educational uses of emblem, see Wardle.

¹⁵ According to Thwaite, Mrs. Mason is a "female counterpart" to Rousseau's educator (73). The subtitle of *Original Stories* suggests Rousseauian elements also: "with Conversations, Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness" (Wollstonecraft, *Works* 4: 355). The fact that Blake engraved forty-five plates for Wollstonecraft's translation of Salzmann's *Elements of Morality* is relevant too because her "Introductory Address to Parents" who purchased the *Elements* emphasizes consistent and solicitous supervision of the young and lays out several rules to govern what and how they read (*Works* 2: 9).

¹⁶ As DeJean says of the pedagogy in *Emile*, it is "always teaching a lesson" (159). None of the comments here about *Original Stories* and Mrs. Mason is meant to suggest, however, that Wollstonecraft herself reflected all of the values and educational approaches therein. Indeed, remarks in her own voice as well as her husband's indicate that "in all her intercourse with children, it was kindness and sympathy alone that prompted her conduct" (Godwin, *Memoirs* 43). (See her "Lessons," *Works* 4: 467, 469, 474.) Regarding the reading that Wollstonecraft encouraged among female children, she was more open-minded than Godwin and especially Rousseau, recognizing that young girls "are mostly fond of stories, and [that] proper ones would improve them even while they are amused. . . . fables and tales may be culled out for them as would / excite their curiosity" (*Works* 4:10, 11).

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