

ZÁPADOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V PLZNI

FAKULTA PEDAGOGICKÁ

KATEDRA ANGLICKÉHO JAZYKA

**DĚTSTVÍ V ROMANTICKÉ POEZII**

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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*Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělání*

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**Plzeň, 2017**

UNIVERSITY OF WEST BOHEMIA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

**CHILDHOOD IN ROMANTIC POETRY**

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

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*English Language in Education*

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**Pilsen, 2017**

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

Plzeň, 25. června 2017

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vlastnoruční podpis

## Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my supervisor PhDr. Magdalena Potočňáková, Ph.D. for her patient guidance and for all the valuable advice and time spent on supervision of the thesis. My special words of thanks go to my family and friends for their support and help in time of my studies.

### Abstract

The object of this undergraduate thesis is to analyse the position of a child in society during the period from the pre-romantic era, its change during the romantic movement and its reflection in poetry of William Blake, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The main body of this work consists of a detailed study of a selection of these romantic poets works with the aim of exploring their views on childhood and the position children held in the World.

The final chapter will comprise of a comparison between the views the discussed poets held on the concept of childhood and will include my comments with regards to the phenomenon of the Romantic Child.

*Key words:* Romanticism, poetry, child, childhood, poem, nature, innocence, society, infant, purity, criticism.

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### Introduction

The Post-classical history, Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period were not in any way conducive to childhood development. The continuous risk of diseases, malnutrition and injuries resulted in an extremely high percentage of children failing to reach adolescence (Bennett, 2006; Pešek, 2012). The artwork and literature from these periods depicts almost no reference to children which is a likely indication of the period's opinion of their usefulness (Newman, n.d.). According to historical literature, the phenomenon of 'childhood' did not appear until the early sixties (Pešek, 2012, p. 10). Philippe Aries stated in the 1962 publication *Centuries of Childhood. A Social History of Family Life*, that children were considered as "small adults" during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. Aries stated that childhood was merely viewed as a separate stage of human development and essentially did not exist (Pešek, 2012, p. 10).

The following paper observes the work of the Romantic poets William Blake, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Through the exploration of a selection of their poems I hope to identify and define their opinions of children. The first chapter initially provides a brief overview of the position of children in society throughout history up to the era of Romanticism. Following this overview, the remainder of the chapter focuses on "discovering the child". In this respect I will refer to the ideas of Lock and Rousseau, who brought new perspectives in relation to children and childhood which had significant influence on the Romantics.

The second chapter concentrates on the poet William Blake. For this I have selected poems from the collection of *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* which deal with children and childhood. The subsequent chapter focuses on William Wordsworth who, in his famous *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, formulated the principles of Romanticism. The fourth chapter provides an analysis of the poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Through

the analysis of these poems I aim to define how these poets perceived children, their visions of childhood and how they viewed the position of children in the world.

The final chapters compare the view of the child and childhood of individual poets and provides a summary and conclusion to the thesis.



### **Childhood in the Pre-Romantic Era**

#### **Role of Children in the Society**

Today's reverence of the child could not have occurred without historical continuity. Children are an integral part of the family, the existence of children is necessary for the further existence of each society. The position of the child in society is constantly changing, both in the field of economics and sociology. In earlier times, the child was a means of economically securing parents in old age. Children have always been valued as good working forces, and as our descendants and to continue the bloodline.

The children of the primeval times lived together with their community and were equal members of society. From pieces of anthropological evidence we know that children in the culture of hunters and gatherers educated themselves through their own games and exploring (Gray, 2008).

Things began to change with the commencement of agriculture and later with industry. Children were forced to begin work while games and exploring were suppressed. Wilfulness, which has always been the virtue of children, became a negative attribute of personality and children would be beaten in order to rectify this trait. According to Gray (2008), the lives of children gradually changed from a carefree existence into one where more and more time was spent working in order to serve and contribute to their families (Gray, 2008).

With the increase of industry and of the new bourgeois class feudalism gradually declined, however, the lives of most children did not improve immediately. Businessmen and landowners required significant numbers of cheap labourers and therefore utilised children to fulfil these requirements. The resulting exploitation of children is widely known and still exists in many parts of the world today. The majority of people, including

children, worked for the most of the day, seven days a week in deplorable conditions just to survive. Child labour was moved from the fields, where they at least had the benefit of sunshine and fresh air, into dark, crowded, dirty factories without clean air to breathe. In England, those responsible for the poor would often move child beggars in the factories where they were treated as slaves. Thousands of children died each year from starvation, exhaustion or a variety of diseases (Gray, 2008).

It wasn't until the nineteenth century that England enacted the restriction of child labour. An example of this would be the law passed in 1833 which forbade the textile manufacturers to employ children under the age of nine and limited the maximum weekly working time to 48 hours for children between the ages of 10 to 12 years, and 69 hours for children between 13 to 17 years. According to Griffin (2014):

The campaign against child labour culminated with two important pieces of legislation – the Factory Act (1833) and the Mines Act (1842). The Factory Act prohibited the employment of children younger than nine years of age and limited the number of hours that children between 9 and 13 could work whilst the Mines Act raised the starting age of colliery workers to 10 years. In effect, these two Acts brought the industrial districts into line with the rest of the country and brought an end to the systematic employment of young children (Griffin, 2014).

### **Discovering the Child**

Until the seventeenth century children were considered as small adults. Philippe Aries, a French medievalist and historian of the family and the childhood situation in the traditional society, stated:

There was no childhood in the medieval society; it does not mean that the children have been neglected or abused or abandoned in some way. This idea must not be confused

with the relation to childhood: it corresponds to the awareness of the special nature of childhood, it separates children from adults, but in medieval society this awareness was missing (Aries, 1962, 128).

This situation remained virtually unchanged until the seventeenth century when people's attitude towards children began to change.(Rowland 2012). However, the most dramatic changes occurred during the Romantic era, i.e. at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the book *Romanticism and Childhood* (Rowland, 2012) we can read that childhood was viewed from a wider perspective in the context of the peculiarities of the given age. During this time there were attempts to understand the issue of childhood personality and to penetrate further into the specifics of its thinking, interests and abilities.

The 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> century, the period of the Enlightenment, brought a new view of the child and childhood. Pioneers of these alternate views included John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. John Locke (1632-1704), who lived during a time when education did not respect children's nature but rather suppressed it, wrote the book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). The first part of the book is about the education of small children and points to the need for more balance with regards to children's freedom. Contrary to the attitude of society at that time, Locke stated that this is to be developed from the earliest age on the basis of the individual child's own experience gained from its surroundings, through play, example and teaching. In order to educate children on the basic areas of education, Locke was a supporter of a physical, mental and intellectual upbringing and his underlying views were the underestimation of an emotional upbringing. According to Locke, he played a partial role in forming the moral profile of an individual (Rowland, 2012).

According to Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a prominent French intellectual, only the upbringing of children of the higher classes could change the ruling class, which

in turn would be able to bring about the restoration of society as a whole. Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education* (1762) is often considered to be the beginning of a new stage in the concept of a child. Within this work Rousseau explains his belief that the inherent goodness of man can be developed provided his model of education is followed meticulously, a model that was widely different from the typical educational models of the time. Rousseau saw the foundation of education in personal experience. He advocated an educational method that corresponded with the child's phase of human development and an important feature of his pedagogy was a sensitive relationship to the child, an element consistently reflected in modern pedagogical thinking, advocating protection of the child's personality and rights (Rowland, 2012).

According to Rowland (2012), various historical branches of the studies which recognised the notion of childhood have been discovered in a certain historical periods. Typically these studies occurred when the coexistence of various social and cultural factors allowed a greater focus on children and on childhood. (Rowland, 2012, p.6) In her book *Romanticism and Childhood*, Rowland states that "the discovery of childhood not only entails the emergence of the idea that childhood is an important stage of life, but also the idea that childhood is its *own* stage of life, a time separate from adulthood with its own unique qualities and experiences (7).

**William Blake**

Images of childhood hold a significant position in Blake's poetry. Blake's most famous collection of poetry, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, comprises not only of poems regarding children, but also of images of children in a world in which people are exploited. There are many contradictions between these two collections. In *Innocence* there is a child piper and in *Experience* here is a bard. In opposition to a smiling child there is the mother Earth bound by the chain, the lamb, soft and fair against the tiger with the blazing eyes in the middle of the dark night. *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are not only in opposition but complement and form a balanced whole. The main verses in opposition include the following; the two "Chimney-Sweeper" poems, the two "Nurse's Songs", the two "Holy Thursdays", "The Lamb" and "The Tiger", "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found", "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found", "Infant Joy" and "Infant Sorrow".

Blake skilfully combined his literary and graphic work which is displayed by the beautiful illustration at the beginning of *The Songs of Innocence*. Blake utilised an original artistic technique, which he called "illuminated printing", which complements and accentuates his poetry. Adjacent to the title (See Appendix, Figure 1) we see a mother with her children looking through a book in a beautiful, sun-drenched landscape and we can speculate that this is Blake's vision of innocence. The picture is cheerful, clear, filled with laughter and children. The poems in *Innocence* are written in simple verse, reminiscent of nursery rhymes. This is contrasted in *The Songs of Experience* where some of the images directly portray sadness and despair whilst also being more complicated. The motive of the child is quite clear in "The Chimney Sweeper".

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue

Could scarcely cry "Weep! weep! weep! weep!"

So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

In the first stanza we learn some information about a speaker and his fate. Then questions and doubts come: How old was he when he was sold? Is the word "Weep" an interjection or is it just a mispronounced word "Sweep" in infantile language? These questions maintain the reader's attention and desire for answers. However, the verse also elucidates the appalling lives led by some children at the time. The shocking statement in the second line: "My father sold me" inevitably results in the reader asking themselves what kind of a father could sell his own child and what kind of person could make the purchase. In addition, we find ourselves questioning the immoral world that would allow these circumstances to occur. It is fair to assume that these words had a similar effect on many readers at the time and people might have begun to question how England, a supposedly modern society at the top of industrial expansion, could allow the sale of its own children as if they were a sack of flour or just a piece of meat. Although slavery was still tolerated at that time, one can wonder how the people at the time tolerated similar circumstances for their own children, children of England, as for the slaves that had been 'rescued' from barbarous coasts. The explanation for this behaviour is that the custom was for English children to be sold as apprentices for a period of seven years (Ackroyd, 2000, p.116-119).

The final line of the stanza provides another disturbing image, particularly the words "in soot I sleep". These words evoke other uneasy thoughts in the reader and forces our minds to think about conditions of the lives of the children who clean "our" (readers) chimneys. Within a few brief lines thought provoking questions, such as do they have their own beds and where do the children actually sleep, are brought to our minds.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,  
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved; so I said,  
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for, when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.

Another child is introduced to the reader, little Tom, whose head had to be shaved. Although one can assume this may evoke sorrowful thoughts in the reader, the logic behind the action is clear here and therefore 'reasonable'.

And so he was quiet, and that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!—  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,  
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.

Those "coffins of black" might have been a discomfoting image for readers in connection with the first stanza and the high number of boys that were sold, shaved, who slept in soot and were locked in coffins. Is it possible that readers could make the connection between this image and the boys who finished their seventh year of apprenticeship exhausted, ill, or deformed? (Ackroyd, 2000, p.118).

And by came an angel, who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins, and let them all free;  
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing, they run,  
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

This stanza leaves the reader with the positive feeling that all the harm caused has been remedied. However, the feeling that something is not well continues to linger.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind;

And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father, and never want joy.

The Catechism taught that if people obey the rules and do their duty they will be welcomed by God and Angels in Heaven. The explanation of the reader's doubtful feeling from previous stanza is now brought to the fore and allows us to identify what is wrong - the child protagonist has to die in order to become happy. This is clearly not a positive outcome and these ambiguous feelings make reader feel very uncomfortable. Did the readers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century feel the same?

And so Tom awoke, and we rose in the dark,  
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.  
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm:  
So, if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

The reader may assume there is a point of irony in this poem. It suggests a substantial disagreement between society and the policy of the Church. One can feel uneasy after reading this poem. It highlights an issue which many people wished not to acknowledge and even today many people do not like to be told they are doing something incorrectly. Martin (2013) in his *Voice in William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience* assumed that Blake was fully aware of the situation with regards to chimney sweepers, including the danger they undertook on the daily basis and the controversy which this topic created (Martin, 2013, p. 3). Professor Emma Griffin (2014) gives us an insight into the dangerous and exhausting work of children in factories and mines. From her work *Child labour* we learn about the conditions of the children working in factories and mines experienced and about the legislation which should have protect them, as mentioned above (see chapter *Role of Children in the Society*).



From Griffin's work (2014) we learn that chimney sweepers had no childhood. The child who told the story was sold by his father. Ackroyd (2000) provides an overview of a chimney sweepers life, how they were sold by parents or taken from orphanages, how they were forced to climb the small and narrow spaces and of the sexual connotation their work arouse. This was known to Blake and we can see from his illustration around the poem that he sympathised with their heavy fate (See Appendix, Figure 2). It is possible for the reader to agree with Ackroyd (2000) who wrote that a poem dramatises and expresses the attitude of society, which is reinforced by the hypocritical faith, that duty and acceptance of fate is the only correct path to union with God and salvation. It expresses the innocence and naivety of the speaker which is "destructive and ignorant" because "he is actively undergoing the horrors of chimney-sweepers crafts and the society mindlessly accepts that" (118-119). There is another poem called "The Chimney Sweeper" in *The Songs of Experience*.

A little black thing among the snow,  
 Crying! 'weep! weep!' in notes of woe!  
 'Where are thy father and mother? Say!'—  
 'They are both gone up to the church to pray.

The very first thing reader notices here is the word "thing". The difference between these two poems is significant, similar to the difference between a dream or an illusion (*SoI*) and that of reality (*SoE*). The chimney sweeper from this poem does not seek an explanation for his fate in religion.

'Because I was happy upon the heath,  
 And smiled among the winter's snow,  
 They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
 And taught me to sing the notes of woe.'

'And because I am happy and dance and sing,  
They think they have done me no injury,  
And are gone to praise God and His priest and king,  
Who made up a heaven of our misery.'

This poem evokes a stronger feeling of irony in the reader than the previous poem in *Songs of Innocence*. The condemnation society is clearly more emphasised in this poem. Initially the child was happy. His parents put him to work and because he does not complain the parents continue to believe that that their child is happy and without harm so they praise God. Ackroyd (2000) wrote that Blake expressed his indignation and that this poem can be viewed from two levels, "there are two realms of Blake's poetry, two worlds; one world on earth, where we live and one the world of eternity." (119). According to Ackroyd (2000) the poem can be related to all mankind and to our plight as we are captured in mortal bodies and long for freedom (119). It gives the impression that there is a strong disagreement with the behaviour of society and its actions towards our own children by pushing their children to do hard work and by at best excusing it with noble sentiments of duty and God, and at worst pretending that these children are inanimate and are not humans at all.

Blake's poems are dramatizations of different states of mind and different attitudes to life (Ackroyd, 2000). Where the "Chimney Sweeper" in *Innocence* values faith in God and has the desire to be a good Christian in order to achieve the gift of eternal life, the protagonist in *Experience* provides an opposing view of faith by interpreting religion as an instrument of dominance and control.

"The Lamb" is another poem that reflects religion, the trust in God and the beauty of God's creation. When reading "The Lamb" we feel the amusement and joy of life and from creation itself. The innocence in the poem is clear as a lamb has the connotation of

innocence given to us through the Bible and by Catechism. The text suggests that there is a connection to children in the name of the poem itself. A Lamb is a sheep in its first year and the initial line in this poem emphasizes this with the word "little". "Little lamb, who made thee?" However, we can also view the scene as the child playing the catechist, with the lamb as the satirical image of the catechist method. In connection with poems like "The Chimney Sweeper" and "The Little Black Boy", which also contain a child resistant to indoctrination, it may in some way act like a parody (Richardson, 1989, p. 861).

"The Little Black Boy" is another poem with children as its subject matter. This poem is narrated from the point of a black child and tells the story of how he came to know his own identity and to know God. "My mother bore me in the southern wild." The boy who was born in Africa first explains that though his skin is black his soul is as white as that of an English child. "And I am black, but O my soul is white! / White as an angel is the English child,"

This poem deals with the love of God, which takes no account of any obstacles or race. The voice that is heard from this poem is the voice of an African child who comes to terms with his own dark skin. The poem highlights how light and dark represented good and evil in Western European society and makes the association with the colour of the skin. The boy explains to his white friend that they are equals, but that neither will be truly free until they are released from the limits of the physical world. He imagines himself shading his friend from the brightness of God's love until the white boy can become accustomed to it.

I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear  
To lean in joy upon our Father's knee;  
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,  
And be like him, and he will then love me.

This statement indicates that the black boy might be better prepared for heaven than the white boy, perhaps because during his earthly life he has had to bear the heavy burden of his dark skin. He was taught by his mother to be proud rather than ashamed of his suffering as it will bring him the love of the God. Blake here also points to the English slave trade (Ackroyd, 2000, p. 113-114).

The reader may be surprised by the boy's attitude towards his white companion. He seems to ignore the racism and abuse, and even accepts the hardship and cruelty he must endure. But the question remains whether the child is servile and self-demeaning or is an example of Christian love. The poem itself suggests that they could be the same. According to Martin (2013), as "Chimney Sweep" does not see the irony of his words about duty, "Little Black Boy" does not realize that racism can be overcome simply by accepting the fact that God's love makes no difference. In this statement, Blake indirectly focuses on his adult readers, whom he suggests for them to rethink their views on people who differ in some way.

The Little Black Boy—from his perception of the world in a state of innocence—doesn't grasp this fundamental fact, and so he awaits a time when earthly wrongs will be redressed by a merciful God in a heavenly kingdom that awaits all mankind after our lives on earth have run their course (Martin, 2013, p. 5).

"Infant Joy" and "Infant Sorrow" are poems which also feature children. "Infant Joy" is another poem which produces an uneasy feeling that something dark is hidden behind the curtain. As with all poems within *Songs of Innocence*, "Infant Joy" has the shadow of experience within it. This may be due to the constant repetition of the word "joy" in the poem or because of the word "while" in the last stanza. "Thou dost smile, / I sing the while; / Sweet joy befall thee!" One may feel uneasy about this poem, because experience warns that the time of happiness and innocence lasts only "a while" before the

time of responsibility arrives. The line "Sweet Joy befall thee" does not sound like hope alone, but may be a longing for the child to experience joy, with the unspoken knowledge that other emotions will "befall" the child also. However, in this infant state the child is still innocent and pure.

Readers may consider their own experience of innocence through the poem and "Infant Joy" may merely be an explanation of the relationship between a mother and her child shortly after birth. Alternatively, it might express Blake's longing for child he never had. The poem emphasises the innocence of a new born, however, for some, it may also contrast with what is brought later in life through experience. The contrast between this poem and the "Infant Sorrow" is significant.

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

After reading the first line we know that "Infant Sorrow" is a poem of the despair and rejection at the birth of an unwanted child. The world only offers a bleak and dark existence that shall last a lifetime. These poems show two alternate arrivals into the world. One displays peace and purity – "Infant Joy", and the second is a revelation of depression and rejection – "Infant Sorrow".

Struggling in my father's hands,  
Striving against my swaddling bands,  
Bound and weary, I thought best  
To sulk upon my mother's breast.

Tightly wrapping babies in swaddling blankets was standard practice in Blake's Day as a mean of giving a sense of security to children and it was believed that it helped limbs to grow straight. Here, Blake uses it as an image of parental oppression, against which stands the struggle for individuality. However, the child will figuratively remain bound for its whole life to fulfil its parents restrictions and society's expectations (Ackroyd, 2000). The poems portray children as beautiful and unique creatures full of beauty and innocence and the world around them as a tightening loop of restrictions, duties and societal expectations that destroy their innocence and joy. The poem "A Cradle Song" evokes similar feelings in the reader.

Sleep, sleep, happy child!  
All creation slept and smiled.  
Sleep, sleep, happy sleep,  
While o'er thee thy mother weep.

The motive of religion, of faith in God and the innocence of children, who are given to us from God and therefore have God within them, is repeated in this poem. "Sweet babe, in thy face / Holy image I can trace;" The poem ends with a parallel between the Child Christ and the baby in the mother's arms.

Smiles on thee, on me, on all,  
Who became an infant small;  
Infant smiles are His own smiles;  
Heaven and earth to peace beguiles.

The poems "Little Girl Lost" and "Little Girl Found" belong to *The Songs of Experience* and follow one another. From the poems we learn that Lyca was seven years old. "Seven summers old / Lovely Lyca told." In the previous stanza we can read: "Never

fades away, / Lovely Lyca lay." Those words sound definite. Never fades can be assumed by readers to mean that she will never grow up and age. This could be construed by the reader that Lyca had died. What the reader may assume from the poem is that a little girl is lost in a desert, her parents are desperate to find her, but the lion found her sooner. The lion is the representation of Jesus Christ. The innocent child is taken from her earthly suffering by death, given comfort and rests for eternity.

The second poem concentrates on her parents, how they search for their daughter and their dedication to find her and are similarly rewarded. However, the poem is reticent on the details and does not explain if they stop fearing because they are in paradise, or simply because they are dead. Either way, the portrayal of God as the Lion which ends their suffering is a more dangerous vision of God than that is often presented in the Christianity of Blake's day. However, when we consider about Blake's fascination with the tiger, the representation of God as a Lion becomes more understandable.

The constant repetition of words the "sleep" and "asleep" gives many of the rhymes a dream like quality to the poem. The child dies and is united with nature and her parents are provided with the same privilege. Can we assume from this that their world was too cruel, too bad for an innocent child?

Another poem with the same title, "A little Girl Lost", has a completely different topic to the poem discussed above. According to Thomas E. Connolly (1989) the explanation of this poem is as follows:

The girl, Lyca, without guide or protector, successfully undergoes the experience of sexual maturation, despite her parent's fears, and then serves as a model to rid them of their sexual guilt, and to introduce them to a state of innocence that they had never before experienced (Connolly, 1989, p. 148).

This poem provides the reader with the revelation that Lyca, who was either not lost or was found before she entered paradise, had grown up and matured and this is the continuation of her life. Another simpler conclusion could be that it is an entirely different Lyca, but then we must ask why Blake chose to use the same name. The text suggests that Blake liked Lyca, maybe she was the dream or image of the child he never had and created a parallel to the first poem where Lyca is still alive.

In opposition to the former "Lost Girls" are the poems "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found" in *The Songs of Innocence*. The message found in the first poem is clear - the boy cannot keep up with his father, so he cries out to him to slow down or speak to him so the boy can find his way. When no one answers, and it gets darker and darker, the boy begins to weep. It might represent the human soul or spirit, seeking God the Father in a profane world that seeks to obliterate the signs of His presence. In the first of the two poems, the boy calls out to his earthly father, but is left behind. This may show Blake's doubts and discrepancy with the religious doctrine. In the second poem the real God comes to little boy and shows him a way home. Both poems speak about children, but more than that it seems they express the view on religion and faith in God and the doubts that Blake had.

However, there is one more "The Little Boy Lost" in *The Songs of Experience*. Here Blake's disapproval with Church's doctrine is clear. A little boy has his own thoughts about his feelings and beliefs and he presents an honest search for understanding.

'Nought loves another as itself,

Nor venerates another so,

Nor is it possible to thought

A greater than itself to know.'



'And, father, how can I love you  
Or any of my brothers more?  
I love you like the little bird  
That picks up crumbs around the door.'

The Church does not allow such heretic thoughts and the boy's sincere inquiry and humble recognition of his own limitations are taken by a nearby priest as blasphemy. In a cruel and almost unthinkable act the priest burns the poor boy, ignoring his parents' cries for mercy.

The weeping child could not be heard,  
The weeping parents wept in vain:  
They stripped him to his little shirt,  
And bound him in an iron chain,  
  
And burned him in a holy place  
Where many had been burned before;  
The weeping parents wept in vain.  
Are such things done on Albion's shore?

It is obvious that Blake did not mean that heretics would be burned in the literal sense, but it is likely that he witnessed the abuse of innocence by those with religious authority as he works with this topic in poems such as "The Garden of Love", "The Little Vagabond", and "The Human Abstract". Blake questions a religious system that would denounce human reason as inadequate for apprehending spiritual truth and lack the free spirit of children in rules and doctrines.

In the *Songs of Experience* Blake also turned to the working residents of London and their lifestyle. His poem "London" has many explanations and they correspond with

the conclusion that neither adult or child are spared from oppression. This poem is not directly about children and the innocence of childhood but it is more political and shows Blake's fear of the potential dangers of a mass society in which individuals (and children too) were increasingly controlled by system of organisation.

The poem "Little Vagabond" consists of the same connotation, in addition a strong criticism of Church and its clergy can also be seen. The poem itself is very cynical with the little vagabond beginning with comments on what is wrong with the Church of Blake's day and concludes with a statement of the way things should be. The innocent voice of a little boy comments on the weary world of Experience.

Dear mother, dear mother, the Church is cold;  
But the Alehouse is healthy, and pleasant, and warm.  
Besides, I can tell where I am used well;  
Such usage in heaven will never do well.

The little vagabond states that if the church would be more like an alehouse, with a more cheerful atmosphere, then God the Father would see His people as happy and would no longer find issue with "the Devil or the Barrel". It would therefore deeply reduce the sin of drunkenness, and would have the advantage of reducing the sins made by people.

But, if at the Church they would give us some ale,  
And a pleasant fire our souls to regale,  
We'd sing and we'd pray all the livelong day,  
Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray.

Then the Parson might preach, and drink, and sing,  
And we'd be as happy as birds in the spring;  
And modest Dame Lurch, who is always at church,  
Would not have bandy children, nor fasting, nor birch.

Blake, through the voice of an innocent child, is trying to point out that the Church is misbehaving and that things are not the way they should be. He also indirectly tells us that the Parson and the Dame are not "as happy as birds in spring" because they see doing God's work as a duty rather than something they want to do. The point the child is trying to make is that worship should be a pleasure not a trial. It once again points at the position of children in society where the Church and its Priests held the authority over how a "good" child should be raised and the doctrine and rules were a heavy burden for them.

Blake's *Songs of Innocence* celebrate childhood innocence, purity and simple things. Blake characterizes the state of childhood as a state of innocence. The children in his poems do not perceive that evil exists in the world, on the contrary his *Songs of Experience* link the verse composition of clarity with life experience.

Terms of opposites are clear in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. "Without Contraries is no Progression " wrote Blake citing the book of Isaiah (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, p.7). A major opposition in his poetry is the contrast between the order of the eighteenth century and the sense of liberation brought by revolutions as the new century approached. To be able to perceive the world clearly there is a need for both innocence on one hand and experience on the other. A person who can achieve that lives in harmony not only with himself but also in harmony with the world surrounding him.

From Blake's poems we can clearly decipher his belief in the innocence and purity of children, for example, in the poems "Infant Joy" or "The Cradle Song". But children are born into our world for which Blake has strong reservations. His criticism of the Church

and the abuse of catechism for the benefit of an individual can be unravelled in poems such as all three "Lost Boy" poems where his critique progresses in every poem to point to dogmatism and fanaticism in the third. "Little Vagabond" directs the Church's criticism to its members and their hypocrisy. According to Williams (2012):

At the core of William Blake's work lies the tension created by a subversive redefinition of good and evil which amounts to a fundamental rejection of orthodox Christian teaching in the Established Church of his time. Blake believed that the political Establishment of England had appropriated and corrupted the Christian faith, a process that had been accelerated by the Enlightenment, and that was taking his country to the edge of an apocalyptic crisis marked by the spread of revolutionary fervour from the eastern seaboard of North America to France (155).

The voices of innocent and pure children also criticize the society at that time as in "The Infant Sorrow" where the child is rejected at birth, but the reason is unclear to reader, or in the poem "The Chimney Sweeper" where critics head to widespread tolerance of the hard work of children. Labour of the poor and its inevitability limiting the personal freedom of a child as an individual is also a subject of criticism. The time of industrialisation was full of inhuman exploitation by capitalists, unsparing even small children and young girls or boys. These thoughts Blake transformed into his poems. Blake thoughts on personal independence are clearly seen in many other poems, particularly the personal freedom, in the poem "Little Black Boy" where Blake indirectly criticizes the slave trade.

Blake also offers the possibility of remedy whether in being responsive and non-judging to the entire unknown ("Little Black Boy"), or replacing the function of society and people with the power of nature, as in the poems "Lost Girls".

Blake believed in God and that children are given to us by God and His presence can be found in them, but our society, rules and expectations destroy that and we have to seek this state of innocence and purity, for which we have to struggle for all life, to find our way to God and to eternity.

### William Wordsworth

In the work of William Wordsworth we often encounter not only the theme of nature, which is very significant in his work, but also the motive of childhood, children and the importance of the environment in which the child grows up. Both of his parents died before he reached the age of 15 and he and his four siblings were each left in the care of different relatives. This separation also influenced his view of childhood as he emphasised the role of a close family which he lacked in his childhood. These feelings have been translated into poems such as his autobiographical narrative '*The Prelude*' in which he confesses his feelings and thoughts. *The Prelude* is Wordsworth's expression of how his childhood experience influenced the formation of his manhood and his desire to become a poet. The creation of a work of art, according to him, requires the restoration of his mind which had been suppressed by the art of society.

Fair seed time had my soul, and I grew up

Fostered alike by beauty and by fear (301-302).

Wordsworth attempted to capture his experiences of childhood and youth and tried to recollect his lost connection with nature, which can be preserved only in memory.

The reflection of childhood on adulthood is also very expressive in his "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" It is a statement about the effect of childhood memories of nature upon the adult mind. It connects the childhood with immortality of mind and with nature. Wordsworth in this poem consciously puts his narrator in contradiction with the positive atmosphere of the joyful nature all around him. The poem's atmosphere shifts from a joyful childhood to a melancholy adulthood. The narrator later realizes that his unhappiness stems from his inability to enjoy this May morning as he would in his childhood.

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Apparell'd in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
It is not now as it hath been of yore;— (1-6).

In this, Wordsworth is trying to remember his childhood emotions, but is only able to find true happiness when he realizes that only in his "philosophical mind" he has the ability to deeply understand nature in profound, more human terms, as a source of metaphors and guidance for human life.

We will grieve not, rather find  
Strength in what remains behind;  
In the primal sympathy  
Which having been must ever be;  
In the soothing thoughts that spring  
Out of human suffering;  
In the faith that looks through death,  
In years that bring the philosophic mind (184-191)

This poem has some revolutionary thoughts about children and their personalities. Wordsworth states that in birth a child emerges from a state of glory that immediately starts to fade with the child forgetting the magnificent visions of his earlier existence. However, the child remains a "Natural Priest" up until the point of adult. Childhood memories and the layers of a child's mind were of great interest to Wordsworth. Rowland (2012) stated that "the cultural paradigm that dominates literary culture in this period gives the child a critical mediating role between individual memory and development on the one hand and

cultural history on the other” (224). According to Rowland (2012), Wordsworth often recorded and discussed the “uneven” and “peculiar” feature of a child's memory that preserves sounds, images, words, but not ideas or fixed meaning, especially in his *Prelude* – Chapter 6 (187).

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;  
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
 Hath had elsewhere its setting  
 And cometh from afar;  
 Not in entire forgetfulness,  
 And not in utter nakedness,  
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
 From God, who is our home:  
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy! (59-67)

“The Ode” shifts from one idea to another. Although the poem attempts to keep close to the central scene throughout, it frequently makes surprising moves, for example, when the narrator begins to address the "Mighty Prophet" in the eighth stanza - only to reveal midway through the poem that the mighty prophet is a six-year-old boy. However, this is Wordsworth's vision, he believes that a child is blessed as children retain a sense of immortality.

Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!  
 On whom those truths rest (115-116)

Thou little child, yet glorious in the might  
 Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height, (126-127)



Even though in many places the speaker is grieving, the main theme of the poem is to offer blissful images of nature which are frequently represented. For example, as the lambs dance to the tabor, the moon looks about in the sky. Once the writer attains the "philosophic mind" and his fullest realization of memory and imagination, he begins to use far more delicate descriptions of nature. The view of a May feast of cowherds evokes in Wordsworth not only a chain of memories of his own childhood, but also a masculine strength that retains child's emotional purity and a premonition of human immortality. The poem highlights the changing relationship to nature in connection with the age which declines with each passing year. (Cook, 1981, p. 62)

One of the outstanding poems in *Lyrical Ballads* is "We are seven". This poem is written in ballad form and its language is unpretentious and uncomplicated. It asks important questions about life and death as while death is certain in all of our lives, how we consider death is not the same and there are likely to be many differing points of views regarding death. The poem tells the story of a man talking to a young girl about her family.

I met a little cottage Girl:

She was eight years old, she said; (6-7)

"Sisters and brothers, little Maid,

How many may you be?"

"How many? Seven in all," she said

And wondering looked at me. (13-16)

Though two of the protagonist's siblings are dead, it is likely that four are still alive. In the 4<sup>th</sup> line the girl claims that two are "at the sea", insisting over the protests of the man that she and her brothers and sisters "are seven" in total. The child does not distinguish between life and death. Her dead siblings are as present to her as the living ones

contradicting the rationale of the adult who tries to convince the girl to the contrary. The poem emphasizes the rationality of adulthood in opposition to a child's happy irrationality when girl does not distinguish between her living and dead siblings as they are all still present in her mind.

"How many are you then," said I,

"If they two are in Heaven?"

The little Maiden did reply,

"O Master! we are seven."

"But they are dead; those two are dead!

"Their spirits are in heaven!"

'Twas throwing words away; for still

The little Maid would have her will,

And said, "Nay, we are seven!" (61-69)

This poem introduces different perspectives on mortality, the most interesting thing about the poem is that it focuses not so much on what happens to us when we die, but on how death affects those who are still living. How should we think about our lost loved ones? What kind of presence do they have in our lives after death? And another question raised here is, do children know more than adults? Does their purity and nature hold some secrets which we lose during growing up? Very similar idea also echoes in the "Ode" as I wrote before.

A significant statement regarding children was made in a poem that has different titles in different editions. In some publications it is called "The Rainbow" (*The Oxford Book of English Verse*), in others it is "My Heart Leaps Up" (*The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*) and in some it appears without a name at all (no 4 in part *Moods of my own Mind* in *Poems In Two Volumes, Vol. 2*).

The Rainbow

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man;

So be it when I shall grow old,

Or let me die!

The Child is father of the Man;

I could wish my days to be

Bound each to each by natural piety.

The dominant idea here is, of course, "The Child is father of the Man". It has its roots in the books of J.J. Rousseau who had an interest in being natural. One of Rousseau's revolutionary thoughts was that we are not burdened with the original sin. He claimed that we are inherently good, but become aggravated by the crimes of society. Through participation in nature we are more likely to live the life of virtue.

We are born capable of sensation and from birth are affected in diverse ways by the objects around us. As soon as we become conscious of our sensations we are inclined to seek or to avoid the objects which produce them: at first, because they are agreeable or disagreeable to us, later because we discover that they suit or do not suit us, and ultimately because of the judgements we pass on them by reference

to the idea of happiness of perfection we get from reason. These inclinations extend and strengthen with the growth of sensibility and intelligence, but under the pressure of habit they are changed to some extent with our opinions. The inclinations before this change are what I call our nature. In my view everything ought to be in conformity with these original inclinations. (Émile, Book 1 – translation by Boyd 1956, p. 13).

Wordsworth beliefs agreed with these thoughts and this simple poem conveys much about Wordsworth's view of a childhood and the world around him.

Whilst observing a rainbow the speaker, an adult, has the same feeling of excitement as when he was a child. We understand that the speaker is reflecting as an adult, however, in reality he feels like a child at heart. The speaker is confident that when he becomes an adult, he will still get excited at the sight of a rainbow. For him, life without the ability to appreciate nature's beauty would not be worth living. He is saying here that his childhood formed who he is as an adult. It seems the speaker treasures the fact that he still has a childlike feeling for wonder. The capitalization of the words "Child" and "Man" is a way to draw attention to the general truth of the line. It is meant to have a wider meaning than just in the speaker's life. The feelings and emotions connected to rainbows expose the child in all of us.

The last two lines refer to "natural piety". Piety is connected with religion and worshipping God, here however its meaning is shifted towards nature so we might interpret "natural piety" as a religion that is natural or not forced. The Rainbow, which excites the speaker throughout his life, is an example of a form of natural piety. He hopes to experience this enthusiasm for the rest of his life. The speaker is deeply spiritual about being in nature. It's a kind of religious experience for him and one that he traces back to his earliest years. For him, childhood is not something we can leave behind and forget. It is a

source of vitality and peace. It is a religious experience for him and one that he follows until his earliest years. Wordsworth was obviously a pantheist who worshipped nature. According to the *English Oxford Dictionary* the definition of pantheism is “A doctrine which identifies God with the universe, or regards the universe as a manifestation of God”. This is specified further by Luke Mastin (n.d.) in *The Basics of Philosophy* as “the view that God is equivalent to Nature or the physical universe - that they are essentially the same thing - or that everything is of an all-encompassing immanent abstract God. Thus, each individual human, being part of the universe or nature, is part of God.”

This attitude can be seen the most in the "Tintern Abbey" of lines 93-99, when he sees God in nature and eventually everywhere. God, or "presence," is described as an abode in the air, sky, sun, ocean and man.

And I have felt  
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 And the round ocean and the living air,  
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man. (93-99)

He believed nature to be the source of inspiration, imagination, wisdom and joy. Also, the children in his work are surrounded by nature, connected with it and should derive knowledge and experience from it. All this can be found in his poems, which are a celebration of nature and its power.

The relationship between nature and a human is represented by the character Lucy in the poem "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower". Nature is personified and finds pleasure in Lucy, who is three years old. It decides that it will make Lucy a part of itself.

Three years she grew in sun and shower,  
Then Nature said, "A lovelier flower  
On earth was never sown;  
This Child I to myself will take,  
She shall be mine, and I will make  
A Lady of my own. (1-6)

It is perhaps because Lucy radiates natural energy, purity and innocence that Nature chose her. Although this is not unusual in Wordsworth's poems, what is striking about this particular one is the slight diversion from Wordsworth's perfect and pure Nature. This is the Nature that destroys and takes life. In the poem Nature calmly decides to wait until the girl reaches maturity and then devours her, regardless of who cares or grieves for her.

And vital feelings of delight  
Shall rear her form to stately height,  
Her virgin bosom swell,  
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give  
While she and I together live  
Here in this happy dell.

Thus Nature spake—The work was done—  
How soon my Lucy's race was run!  
She died and left to me  
This heath, this calm and quiet scene,  
The memory of what has been,  
And never more will be. (31-42)

Although Nature promises that Lucy will become part of her and that they will share all their secrets together, in this poem Wordsworth points towards the huge power of Nature, which is not only positive and growing, but can be also negative and destructive. Looking at this poem from other point of view we can say that Wordsworth sees the point of living in connecting to nature. He thinks that this is what we should strive for, to become a part of nature and the Nature sees the perfection in children.

Another poem demonstrating the power of nature, the perfection of children and becoming a part of nature is "Lucy Gray". She was a small girl of poor parents, growing up aside society in nature. The narrator of the story states that Lucy did not have any friends, that she was just "solitary".

Oft I had heard of Lucy Gray:

And, when I crossed the wild,

I chanced to see at break of day

The solitary child.

No mate, no comrade Lucy knew;

She dwelt on a wide moor,

--The sweetest thing that ever grew

Beside a human door! (1-8)

One winter day, Lucy's father sends her to go with a lantern to town to join her mother on the way back home with the light through the darkness. Lucy sets off but gets lost in the winter storm. Her parents sought her for the whole night but found just only her footprints disappearing in the middle of the wooden bridge. It is not clear from the poem if her body was ever found, but in the last two stanzas the narrator claims that Lucy, or rather her spirit, is still alive. She became interconnected with nature, so she can be seen in the wild or her "solitary song" can be heard in the wind.

--Yet some maintain that to this day

She is a living child;

Lucy Gray

Upon the lonesome wild.

O'er rough and smooth she trips along,

And never looks behind;

And sings a solitary song

That whistles in the wind. (57-64)

Bennet (2006), in his *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* wrote: "Wordsworth's poetry presents us with one of the most disturbing paradoxes of survival." (95) According to him "for Wordsworth survival necessitates the transfer of human qualities into that which is both permanent and material". In that sense, Lucy Gray survives in the nature where she grew up and played.

Wordsworth's poems are full of natural images and connections between people and nature. According to Phillips (2010) "Wordsworth's poetry is a poetry of places. It invokes and names places because their concreteness is necessary to its burden of the imaginative unity of mind and world" (Phillips, 2010, p. 627). This is depicted in most of his poems



including "Ode" where he can fully enjoy the beauty of nature through his childhood memories. He saw children as the single and most important source of wisdom and truth, and nature as the protector of the heart and the soul, the law of morality and the source of creativity which we should seek around us every day.

One of his most significant thoughts remains that children learn from adults, adults also learn from children as they retain traces of divine world that they came from. He illustrated this in his poems „We are seven“ or „The Rainbow“ with its famous line that "Child is father of the Man".

Wordsworth attempted to look at the world through a direct and fresh view, not affected by false deposition of an ancient philosophical and aesthetic learning. Therefore, he sought an instinctive wisdom not only in villagers, but also in children, who in his opinion stood closest to the elementary sources of life.

### Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge belongs along with Wordsworth, to the so called 'Lake Poets'. His poetry deals mostly with the themes of nature, man's relationship with nature, dreams and imagination and supernatural. However, there are some of Coleridge's poems that mention childhood. He or the speaker of the poem reflects on childhood memories within the poems "Frost at Midnight" and "Sonnet: To the River Otter", or discusses and expresses hopes for his son in "The Nightingale". Coleridge's focus on childhood revolves around an idealization of the cheerful nature and innocence of childhood.

"Frost at Midnight" is addressed to his son Hartley. The story of the poem is set late into the night when Coleridge was sitting next to his son's cradle. Silence and peace are all around with the exception of the frost from outside which "performs its secret ministry". Coleridge uses his solitude to reflect on his love for nature and his relationship with his son.

The Frost performs its secret ministry,  
Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry  
Came loud—and hark, again! loud as before.  
The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,  
Have left me to that solitude, which suits  
Abstruser musings: save that at my side  
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.  
'Tis calm indeed! so calm that it disturbs  
And vexes meditation with its strange  
And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood, (1-10)

For Coleridge, childhood and how we experience it is the foreshadowing of an adult destiny. He finds that his own upbringing was influenced by a life in the city. He was one

of nine sons of a vicar and schoolmaster in Devon. Due to his introspective nature, he was fond of solitude. This may explain why he was longed for friendship and love so deeply and felt that his life was not as complete as he believed it should be. When his father died he was taken from his home in the countryside and sent to school in a town. To his introverted character this was very unpleasant and he hoped to create a better connection between his son and the spirit of nature by raising his own child in the countryside. (Christie, 2006) Childhood innocence and free-spiritedness was inaccessible to Coleridge as an adult, he therefore wished to prolong and deepen this experience for his son.

My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart  
With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,  
And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,  
And in far other scenes! For I was reared  
In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,  
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.  
But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze  
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags (48-55)

This poem also portrays a father's fascination with his child and his concerns over whether he can fulfil the role of fatherhood adequately.

"The Nightingale" is another reflection of infants that demonstrates Coleridge's understanding of the inaccessible state of infancy as the origin of human language and culture (Rowland, 2012). In this poem the speaker is amused by the voice of a nightingale. However, "The Nightingale" is in fact a 'father's tale' as he called it in the last stanza, where he as a father hopes to secure his child with life in nature.

It is a father's tale: But if that Heaven  
Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up  
Familiar with these songs, that with the night (106-108)

We do not know the speaker's name, age, or even gender. However, it is generally assumed to be Coleridge himself and we know that the speaker cares very deeply about nature. It is during an evening walk with his friend and friend's sister when the voice of a nightingale is heard. This musing leads to a lengthier discussion on enjoying nature and youth. He reveals that he is raising his son to appreciate the night sky and hopes that others will teach him to do so too. He is thrilled about his son and every movement he makes. The poem is an example of an openly declared paternal love.

My dear babe,  
Who, capable of no articulate sound,  
Mars all things with his imitative lisp,  
How he would place his hand beside his ear,  
His little hand, the small forefinger up (91-95)

Coleridge was the son of an Anglican vicar and although he had his objections and reservations with regards to religion he remained supportive of prayers. Praying is repeatedly referred to in his poems. He once informed the novelist Thomas de Quincey that prayer demanded such a deep contemplation that it was the one of the hardest actions of which human hearts were capable (Bennett, 2006, p.118). "A child's evening prayer" is merely about a young innocent child praying for his beloved ones and for the favour of God.

Ere on my bed my limbs I lay,  
God grant me grace my prayers to say:

O God! preserve my mother dear  
In strength and health for many a year;  
And, O! preserve my father too,  
And may I pay him reverence due;  
And may I my best thoughts employ  
To be my parents' hope and joy;  
And O! preserve my brothers both  
From evil doings and from sloth,  
And may we always love each other  
Our friends, our father, and our mother:  
And still, O Lord, to me impart  
An innocent and grateful heart,  
That after my great sleep I may  
Awake to thy eternal day! *Amen.*

This simple child's prayer shows the power of innocence and the purity of the child's mind - the child in his/her prayer does not think of himself but of his loved ones. The last part of this poem is striking, the child talks about the great sleep and of waking up into the "eternal day". This final line leaves readers with mixed feelings about whether this prayer is the child's last and he/she knows whether or not the child will wake into this world again. In many of his works Coleridge discussed religion and prayers. The prayers in his poems have different ways and methods but what connects them is their individual form.

Coleridge's poems reflect on universal issues such as the relationship between parents and children. They are intimate and openly express paternal love and captivation with one's own child. What fascinated Coleridge was "the mystery whereby every manifestation of life is at once united and diverse – always exciting in a separate identity,

yet always linked inseparably to, and assimilating itself with, all other life-forms" (Coleridge, 2000, p. xxxvii). He became attracted by the conception of the "Nature's child" after observing his own son showing the first signs of awakening intelligence (Coleridge, 2000).

Both "The Nightingale" and "Frost at Midnight" start according to Rowland (2012) with "the human forms and meanings man places on non-human figures" but head to the figure of an infant. Rowland (2012) states that is because "the child is understood as the inheritor of a new natural lore and as the object of his father's pedagogical attentions" (119). "Frost at Midnight" shows how influenced Coleridge was by his childhood and expresses his desire to enable his son to have a better experience. The only way he sees able to accomplish this is by raising his son with a close connection to nature. He is as fascinated with the beauty and diversity of nature, which he depicts in "The Nightingale", as he is fascinated and enchanted by his son. Although the theme of childhood is not as dominant in Coleridge's poetry as it is in Wordsworth's, these poems are unique in reflecting his own parental love and fascination with his own son. Attracted by the concept of the Child of Nature after observing his son showing the first signs of awakening intelligence, he expressed paternal emotions in a way uncommon in previous times.

### **A Comparison of Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge**

The concept of the child and childhood is very significant in Romantic literature and appears in many different forms. Historical development, the advancement of education and the revolutionary ideas at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century together enabled children to come out from the edge of society's interest to the forefront. They became one of the themes of the creation of romantic poets, who undoubtedly belong among the greats of their time, although the significance of some was appreciated much later (Blake).

In previous chapters of this paper, I have been concerned with individual perspectives on the child and of childhood held by William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Each of them, due to their own childhood and life experiences, perceived this concept differently. They incorporated those ideas into their work and, together with their contemporaries, have given rise to the phenomenon of the Romantic child. According to Ambühl (2007):

In the works of Romantic poets like Hölderlin, Novalis, Blake, Wordsworth, and their contemporaries, we often find the image of the poetic child, which, because of its closeness to nature or paradise, is able to tap the sources of creative imagination directly. On the other hand, the grown-up poet, who has been alienated from his childhood, can only recover his poetic inspiration if he succeeds in returning to that lost state of grace (Ambühl, 2007, p. 378).

This is significant for William Wordsworth, who in many poems expresses sadness that his adult perception is not as bright and intense as when he was little. According to him, the childhood period is irreplaceable because only in childhood are we closely associated with nature. An adult who already perceives the connexions and the traps of the world can only hope to come closer to this state. Wordsworth's poems are full of

descriptions of nature and of natural beauty. The children he portrays in his poems are real children from his surroundings, children who have an identity and are set in a certain environment. To the contrary, the children of Blake's poems, which are anonymous and act as symbols for criticism of society.

Blake also admired children, but through their voices and stories he strongly criticised society, its rules, humanity and religion. The children in his poems are, on one hand exploited, lost or unhappy and on the other represent an unattainable ideal. As stated by Richardson (1989):

Blake's attitudes toward childhood and education and those of a more idealizing, nostalgic poet like Wordsworth or of a contemporary didactic writer like Trimmer. In several of the Songs, moreover, the devices of parody and satire not only facilitate social criticism, but become, in the mouths of Blake's child speakers, means in themselves for pursuing a less coercive and one-sided social discourse this side of utopia. Blake's songs for and of children most directly engage the politics of the age less in imaging forth a visionary or utopian alternative, than when they parody, dismantle, and subvert a hegemonic discourse designed to impart a knowledge always purchased with the loss of power (Richardson, 1989, p.866).

Blake is not just a critic, but in many poems he also offers alternatives and options on how to deal with evil in society. His view was that if we were to cease being selfish and malicious, observe the world around without prejudices we could create a better society. Perhaps because of this, his poetry retains the power of testimony to this day.

The vision of an ideal world and the disillusion with society is also found in the poems of S.T. Coleridge. Coleridge blamed society for ruining his childhood. His movement from the heart of the countryside to the city was a crucial factor for him. In contrary to Blake who in nature saw God and admired it as a fantastic work of God's



creation, Wordsworth and Coleridge both adored and praised the beauty of nature. Through Coleridge's poems dedicated to his son it can often be heard his longing for lost time. One of his main thoughts was that one's childhood influences who we become as adults and he therefore wished to provide his son with Coleridge's vision of an ideal childhood. Rowland (2012) wrote that:

These poems ("Frost at Midnight" and "The Nightingale") become fathers' tales because ultimately they interrogate the meaning and uses to which the father puts his infant son, whether imagining and education and childhood for his son that satisfies the failures and longings of his own, or imagining his child's pure and joyful existence in the natural world as an alternative to his own estrangements (120).

He was thrilled with his infant son and he expressed his fascination in his poems and hopes that he could be a good father to him, however, the poems primarily expressed Coleridge's own longings and insecurity. Their ideas transferred to paper influenced society's thinking and gave rise to a phenomenon called the Romantic Child, which we can characterize as idealized and with a close connection to nature. As written by Rowland (2012) "by innocence, imagination, nature and primitivism" (Rowland, 2012 p. 9). According to her:

the idea of the "Romantic child" does more than refer back to and embody ideas of childhood developed over the course of the eighteenth century; it also gestures ahead to the ideas of childhood that will dominate Western culture well into the twentieth century. (Rowland, 2012 p. 9).

Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge each had different views on children and the concept of childhood. Where Blake saw the possibility of criticizing the society and

outlining a possible remedy symbolized by the innocent voice of the child; Coleridge was looking for his lost childhood and the opportunity to pass this on to his son. Wordsworth on the other hand glorified their innocence and connection to nature. The combination of their visions and visions of their contemporaries united in idea of the Romantic child.

### Summary and Conclusion

Romantic poets saw childhood as a period of joy, peace and security. They saw it as a state of mind rather than an ephemeral period in an individual's lifetime and they believed that it was desirable to carry the simplicity and capability of imagination of childhood into the powers of manhood.

The idea of the Romantic child was developed further over the course of the eighteenth century with thoughts of J. Locke and J.J. Rousseau. They were influenced by how the children of poor working class families were moved to factories and mines to exist in deplorable conditions in order to further the industrial revolution. This resulted in their revolutionary ideas of inequality found in their works which opened the door to a new perspective of the child and childhood.

The children of William Blake and his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* speak with innocent voices about the horrendous conditions in which they lived in and about the injustice done to them by society. Blake admired children, he believed they were given to us by God and disagreed with their exploitation. His criticism of society is communicated to the world by the voices of innocent children which remain poignant to this day. What differentiates Blake is that he not only that he criticized society but also that he offered solutions to these issues.

William Wordsworth held a different view of children and childhood. He celebrated their purity and innocence and believed that the child is closely interconnected with nature. He was aware that childhood forms adulthood and is therefore an important stage in life. The child comes to us from God and thus brings to the world the higher knowledge that is lost during maturing. The connection of nature and child is therefore crucial for Wordsworth.

The poems of S.T. Coleridge are lured by the enthusiasm over his son and the desire to indulge him with the happy childhood which he (Coleridge) was denied by being moved to the city. According to Coleridge, childhood and innocence are closely related to nature and he therefore wanted his son to grow up amongst nature. Coleridge then hoped that through his son he would experience his childhood again.

In conclusion, although each of the poets discussed in this thesis perceived the child and childhood a slightly differently, they together allowed the phenomenon of the Romantic Child to emerge.

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## Czech Summary

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat postavení dítěte ve společnosti v období pre romantismu do počátku 19. století, tedy do období romantismu, a jeho odraz v poezii. Zabývám se názorem romantických básníků Williama Blakea, Williama Wordswortha a Samuela Taylora Coleridge na dětství, a jaké okolnosti vedly k jejich novým vizím a v co oni sami věřili.

V závěru práce se snažím o konfrontaci a porovnání jejich názorů, které společně s jejich současníky vedly k definici vize Romantického dítěte, která v naší společnosti přetrvává až do dnešních dnů

Klíčová slova: Romantismus, poezie, dítě, dětství, báseň, příroda,  
nevinnost, společnost, nemluvně, ryzost, kritika.

Appendix

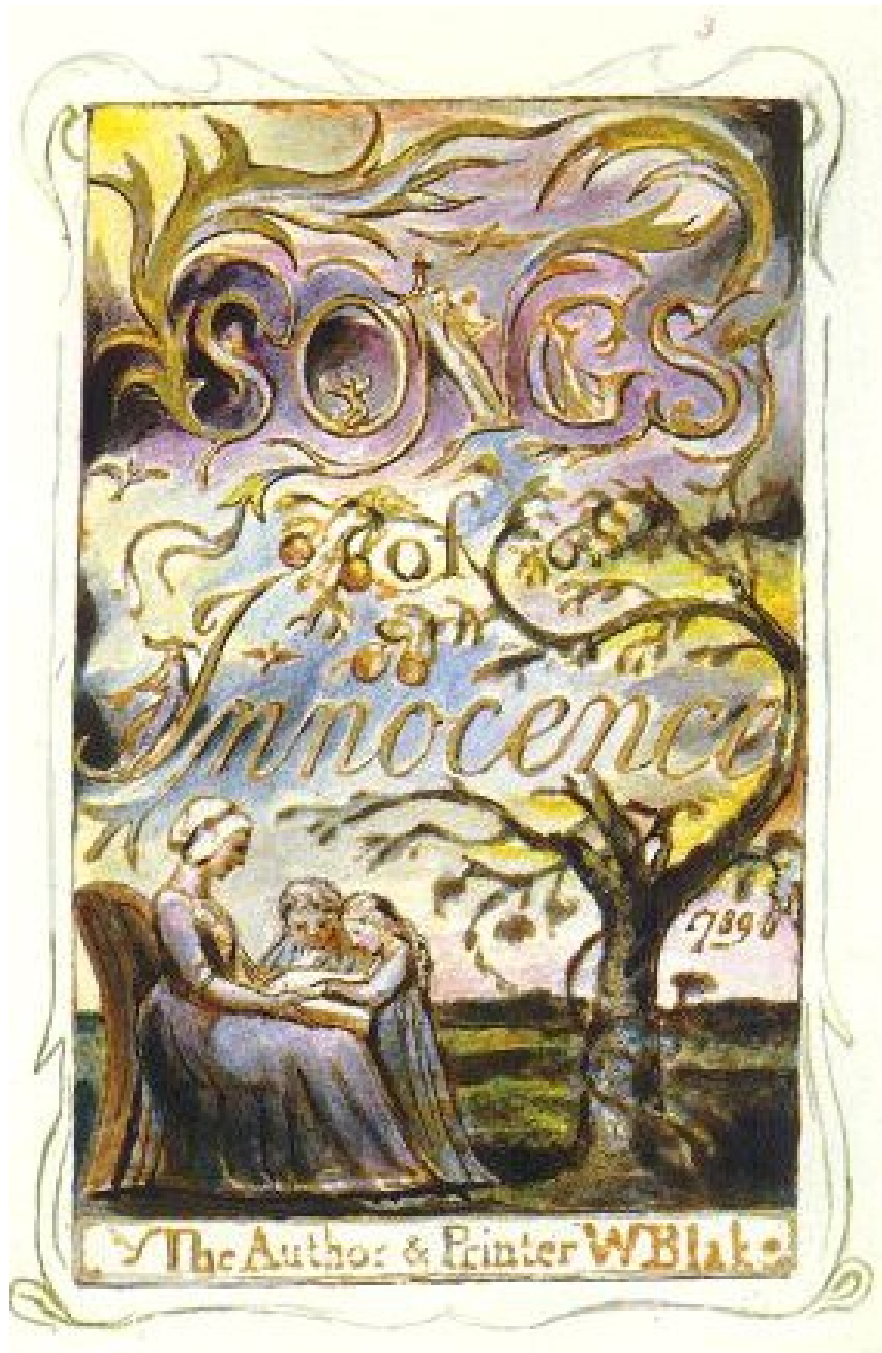


Figure 1: Songs of Innocence – Front page

Available from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1107439>





Figure 2: Songs of Innocence – The Chimney Sweeper

Available from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1090489>

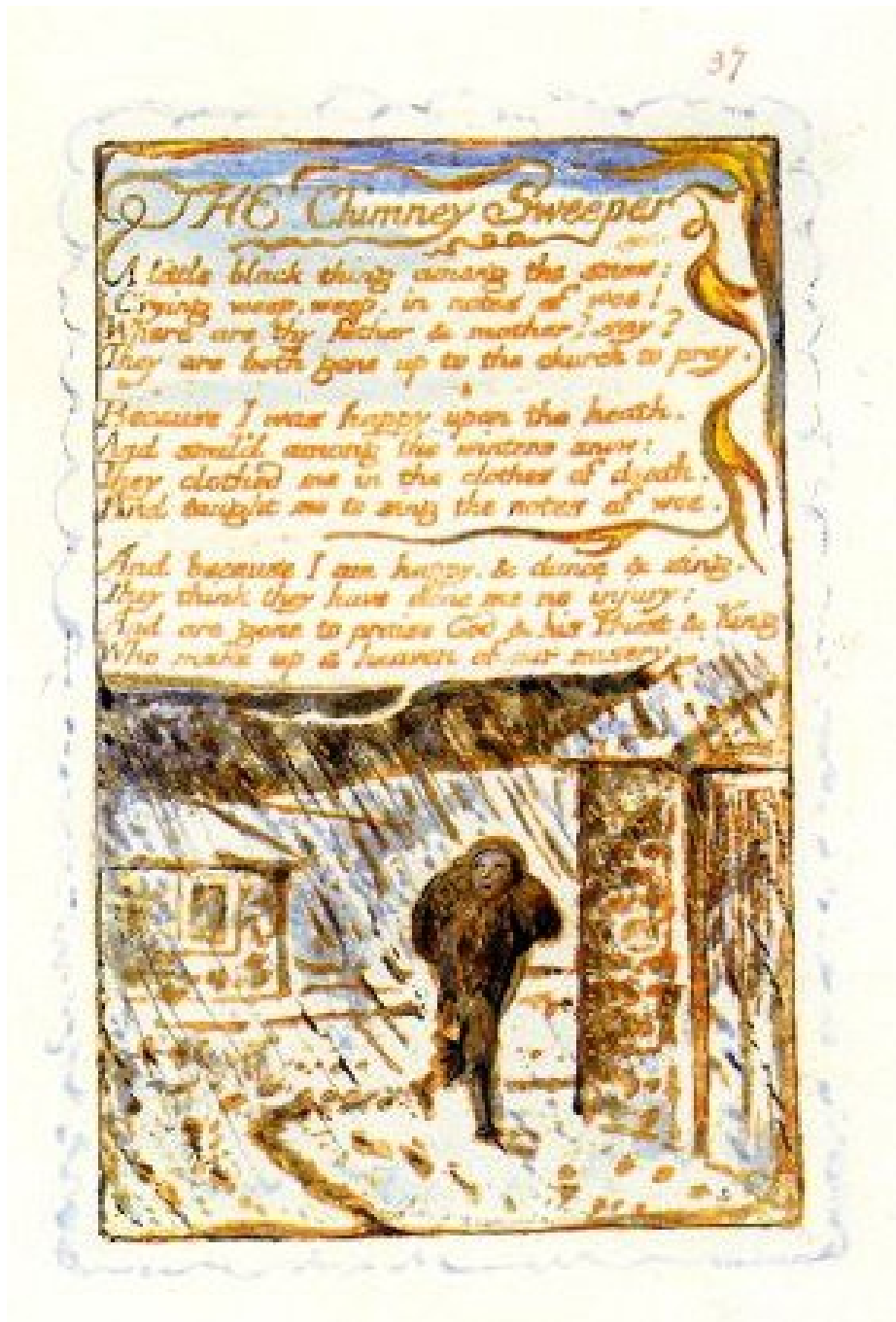


Figure 3: Songs of Experience – The Chimney Sweeper

Available from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1110309>