The Lamb

POEM TEXT

Little Lamb who made thee
    Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice!
    Little Lamb who made thee
    Dost thou know who made thee

    Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
    Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child:
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
    Little Lamb God bless thee.
    Little Lamb God bless thee.

SUMMARY

The speaker directly addresses a lamb, asking it if it knows who created it, who gave it life and invited it to eat. The lamb is then described in its natural environment, frolicking beside streams and running through fields. Whoever made the lamb also gave it its coat, which is made out of soft white wool. The lamb's gentle noises, according to the speaker, make the surrounding valleys happy. The speaker then asks again: Who made the lamb?

In the second stanza, the speaker excitedly offers to tell the lamb the answer. The creator has the same name as the lamb, and indeed calls himself "Lamb." This creator is gentle and kind, and he was once a small child. The speaker, too, is a child, and both the speaker and the lamb share the name of their creator. The speaker then asks God twice to bless the lamb.

THEMES

GOD AND CREATION

"The Lamb" is a religious poem that marvels at the wonders of God's creation. In the poem, a child addresses a lamb, wondering how it came to exist, before affirming that all existence comes from God. In the humble, gentle figure of the lamb, the speaker sees the beautiful evidence of God's work. Furthermore, the lamb is not just made by God—it's an *expression* of God, as is the speaker. Through the example of the lamb, the speaker suggests that the entire world is in fact an expression of God.

The poem is directly addressed to the lamb. Though the lamb of course cannot respond, its very existence is answer enough to the question of "who made" it. The speaker is clearly awed by the lamb. Though the Christian God is often associated with power and might—and even, at times, violence—the lamb is none of these things. It is small, fragile, and innocent. By existing, it proves the delicate beauty of God's creation, which is why it makes the speaker so joyful.

The poem rhetorically asks, "who made thee," but everything that follows is presented as evidence that God is the maker. The first stanza depicts the lamb in its natural habitat, a beautiful pastoral scene in which the lamb is free to run around. All that the lamb needs is provided for it, making the lamb a symbol of freedom and uncomplicated joy. This, argues the poem, is God's intention for all His creatures: that they live happy, joyful lives.

As the first stanza asks the question about the lamb's existence, the second gives the clear reply. Here, the poem picks up on the symbolism of the lamb. In John 1:29 in the Bible, Jesus Christ is given the title "Lamb of God." So the poem is not just marveling at the lamb itself, but also at the way in which the lamb *is* God, just as the Bible describes Jesus himself to be God. Both the lamb and the speaker, who is a child, are "called by his name." That is, in addition to being called "lamb" and whatever the speaker's name may be, they are both also called "God." That's because, ultimately, everything that exists was created by God and nothing is separate from its creator. The poem thus expresses deep trust and faith in God's work, suggesting that both the child and the lamb are safe in God's hands. And to emphasize this sense of blissful comfort, the poem ends with the speaker blessing the lamb. By extension, the poem thus blesses *all* of God's creation, both praising it and expressing thanks for its existence.

"The Lamb," taken from the "Innocence" section of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, is a kind of hymn to God's creation.

In the figure of the lamb, the poem sees a symbol for all of God's works. The poem is an expression of the purity of God's creation, untarnished by the kind of negative influences that Blake introduces in other poems.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-3
- Line 4
- Lines 5-10
- Lines 11-20

NATURE

The poem presents an idyllic pastoral scene, painting a vivid picture of the lamb frolicking in its countryside environment. The urban world is notable for its absence. Implicitly, then, the poem seeks to highlight the beauty of nature *and* to portray it as a powerful source of happiness and freedom.

The lamb itself is one part of nature, but it's also a symbol of the freedom and happiness associated with the natural world more generally, which the poem implies can't be found in the modern urban environment. The first stanza expresses this deep connection between nature and joy. The lamb lives among streams and meadows. These are places where nature is allowed to grow, and they in turn give the lamb a beautiful and free environment to live in. That's why the lamb's coat isn't just "clothing," but "clothing of delight." Nature allows the lamb to be fully itself, without restriction. That idea is also behind the association of the lamb's coat with "brightness"—this is a positive environment without any of the misery of the city (the kind that can be found in Blake's famous poem "London").

The lamb in turn has a positive effect on its natural environment—its "tender voice" makes the "vales" (valleys) "rejoice." The lamb and nature, then, are in symbiosis—a balanced and nurturing relationship that benefits them both. This balance, in turn, makes the speaker happy and joyful. In the lamb's freedom and nature's beauty, the child speaker sees an idyllic way of life. The child feels close to the lamb and its environment, implying that this is an instinctive relationship between humans and nature too. That is, it's the natural world that makes people joyful and free—not the restrictive, dangerous city.

Implicitly, then, the poem calls on its readers to value the relationship between humanity and nature. It asks its readers to nourish and nurture that relationship in the same way that the unspoiled natural environment allows the lamb to live happily.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 4-8

CHILDHOOD AND INNOCENCE

Blake famously believed that humans are born with everything they need to live lives of joy, freedom, and closeness with God. By making the speaker in this poem a child, Blake argues that people need to hold onto the values childhood represents—not unlearn and reject them through the fears and worries of adulthood. All of the poem's joyful appreciation of the lamb, nature, and God is tied to the speaker's childhood perspective. Childhood, then, is not a state of ignorance, but one of innate understanding.

In the first stanza, the child worships the lamb. The child feels drawn to the small creature, perhaps sensing in the lamb a kind of symbol of himself: innocent, vulnerable, and joyful. The child's ability to appreciate and understand the lamb brings up the question of whether this is something that adults can do in the same way. Adulthood, with all its troubles, can keep people from appreciating the world. In contrast, the child speaker hasn't yet had to encounter the perils of the adult world and is therefore able to look at the "little lamb" in this uncomplicated light. But Blake suggests that this is not a naïve perspective. Rather, it's a kind of enlightenment. The second stanza makes this point clearer.

Though the child expresses wonder at the lamb's existence, the child is nonetheless able to intuitively understand "who made" the lamb. That is, the child instinctively understands that the lamb is an expression of God's design—and that the child, too, is a part of this design. The child refers to Jesus, pointing out that he—the savior of humankind—was *also* born into the world with all the innocence, vulnerability, and curiosity of a child. Jesus was God himself, showing that childhood is, in fact, something sacred. To underline this link between the lamb, the child, and God, the speaker states that "we are called by his name." That is, they are unified because they are all a part of God.

Childhood, then, is not presented as something to grow out of in the way that people often think of it now. Instead, it is an enlightened way of seeing the world that the poem implores its readers to retain—in doing so, it argues, they will see the joy and beauty that surround them.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 13-18

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

Little Lamb who made thee

Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.

The poem introduces its main theme right at the start. From the first line onward, the poem focuses on the nature of creation (and, indeed, the creation of nature). The first three lines—and the rest of the stanza—set up a question that the second stanza will answer. While the poem specifically discusses the lamb, the lamb is also a kind of representative of the entirety of God's creation.

Behind the poem's opening question is a sense of marvel at the world God has made. The speaker uses apostrophe to address the lamb and ask it whether it has any understanding of its own existence. The lamb is a delicate and vulnerable figure, represented by the sweetness of the alliteration "little lamb." In fact, the first three lines are very euphonic, balancing delicate consonants with assonant /e/ and /o/ sounds that are pleasing to the ear. From the beginning, then, a link is drawn between beauty, nature, and God. The poem is in part a hymn to the majesty of God's creation, and so the sounds throughout are appropriately beautiful.

There is also a kind of personification at play here. The speaker addresses the lamb as if it might understand the question and even offer a response. However, it's more nuanced than pretending that lambs can speak. *Because* the lamb is an expression of God (as outlined in the second stanza) and his creation, the lamb's mere existence is already a part of the conversation. That is, the lamb *can* provide an answer without being able to speak, and the implied personification underscores this point.

Finally, the mention of "giving life" and "bidding" the lamb to "feed" (which essentially means inviting or encouraging the lamb to eat) highlights the idea that God is the great designer of the universe—it exists because of his will and guidance. This is an expression of what is called the teleological theory of God, which argues that the universe was made by God with a particular design in mind.

LINES 4-8

By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice!

Lines 4 to 8 are essentially like a miniature pastoral. A pastoral is a type of poem which aims to paint a beautiful countryside scene and demonstrate the majesty of nature. These lines are the poem's way of adding more detail to the lamb's life, showing it to be a joyful and free creature nourished and nurtured by its natural habitat (and, by extension, its creator).

Line 4 shows the lamb bounding through nature, with the monosyllabic words evoking the young creature's freedom to roam around. It's also interesting that the lamb as a grammatical subject isn't actually in this line (though it's obvious what the speaker is talking about). This creates the impression of the lamb excitedly exploring its environment, not staying still for long enough to actually appear in the poetic line.

Lines 5 and 6 then move the poem's focus onto the lamb's physical appearance. Its wooly coat is not just "clothing," but "clothing of delight." That is, by being so fully itself in its natural environment, the lamb becomes an expression of happiness—the lamb itself is happy, but it's also a model for how humans could be happy too. The implication is that humans need to be in their *natural* environment, living the kind of free and joyful lives that God intended for them—not cooped up in stressful, dangerous cities. These lines have a beautifully delicate euphony about them, with soft consonants (the /f/ and /th/ sounds) bringing the lamb to life as a sweet and gentle creature. Line 5 and 7 employ diacope in their use of "thee." This helps the reader get a sense of the speaker's attitude, which is one of sheer marvel and astonishment at the lamb. The speaker almost can't believe the lamb's existence, which is why the speaker keeps stating it out loud through the pronoun "thee."

Lines 7 and 8 concentrate on the lamb's "tender voice." The lamb expresses its happiness through sound, just as the speaker does in this poem through euphony. The lamb's voice doesn't just make the speaker happy, but it actually has a positive effect on the natural environment too—it makes the "vales" (valleys) "rejoice." There is, then, a symbiosis—a balanced give and take relationship—between the lamb and its environment. More broadly, the speaker implies that this symbiosis exists between God and earth's creatures as well.

LINES 9-12

Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee!

Lines 9 and 10 are the same as lines 1 and 2, restating the opening questions through the use of refrain. This helps remind the reader that as much as the poem is about the lamb, it's also about "who made" it. The use of enjambment makes the questions feel more urgent, as though there isn't time for a question mark or other punctuation. The speaker is desperate to know who created the lamb—but, of course, knows the answer. In reality, then, the speaker is most concerned with *acknowledging* who made the lamb—which is, in a big way, the whole point of the poem. The speaker asks the question about creation in order to joyously give the answer.

The end of line 10 is an especially notable use of enjambment. It literally leaves the question hanging, because of the stanza break that follows. If the poem were to end there, it would be entirely different—the change would make the poem a

meditation on the mysteries of creation, not on the majesty of God. But, of course, the emphatic answer arrives in lines 11 and 12. The speaker *does* know who made the lamb, and indeed who made all of the world's creatures: God. The use of epizeuxis—the repetition of the same phrase in lines 11 and 12—demonstrates the speaker's sheer enthusiasm about the answer. This enthusiasm is in part based on the speaker's religious conviction, but it is also an expression of marvel and astonishment at the wonders of nature, and how that nature was created by God. The world around the speaker seems to pulsate with beauty, demonstrating again and again the power and grace of God's design.

Overall, these lines are integral to the form of the poem. They make it clear that the first stanza was intended to create a question—and that the second stanza will provide the appropriate answer.

LINES 13-15

He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,

Lines 13 to 15 fulfill the speaker's promise in lines 11 and 12 to tell the lamb who created it—and, of course, to tell the reader as well. These lines connect the dots between the lamb, the speaker, the world itself, and God.

Line 13 reveals that "He" created the lamb and, by extension, the rest of the world. This "He" is, of course, God. Here, the poem makes use of allusion to suggest why Blake picked the figure of the lamb as opposed to, say, a piglet or a kitten. The lamb is a reference to the Biblical *Agnus Dei*, which means "lamb of God." In John 1:29, John the Baptist sees Jesus and exclaims: "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" Jesus is both God's son and God himself—and since Jesus is "the Lamb," the speaker is right to say that the lamb's creator is "called by" the lamb's name. Here, the speaker delights in drawing out the symmetry in God's work, which is further evidence of intelligent design for the world. Symmetry is a key concept in Blake's overall presentation of his religious beliefs, and it is discussed in this poem's companion poem, "The Tyger."

Line 15 reveals more information about the lamb's creator, drawing further connections between the lamb, Jesus, and God. The anaphora of the repeated "He is" creates a strong emphasis on this ecstatic revelation of the creator's identity, foregrounding the speaker's strong belief in both God and his divine will (his plan for the world). The reference to Jesus/God as "meek" and "mild" is another allusion to the Bible, this time recalling Matthew 5:5—"the meek shall inherit the earth." While the modern day meaning of "meekness" is close to "weakness," the original meaning of this phrase was that people should see themselves as the expression of God's will and live their lives accordingly. Just as the lamb, in its natural environment, expresses its "lamb-ness," people should live free and joyful lives in communion with God—not live self-obsessed, cynical, and greedy lives in anonymous cities.

LINES 16-20

He became a little child:
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb God bless thee.
Little Lamb God bless thee.

Lines 16 to 20 bring the poem to its conclusion, with the speaker making clear the connections between the speaker, the lamb, Jesus, and God.

Line 16 picks up on the allusion to the *Agnus Dei* (the Biblical reference to Jesus as the "lamb of God") in line 14. This line makes it obvious that the poem is referring to Jesus, who "became a little child" (that is, he was born as a human baby) in order to live on earth and sacrifice himself for the greater good of humanity. In Blake's writing, childhood is often associated not with ignorance but with a kind of blissful enlightenment, an intuitive way of understanding the world that is tragically lost as people become adults. The importance of childhood becomes clear here when the speaker is revealed to be "a child" too. The speaker is able to point the reader towards the marvels of God's creation precisely *because* the speaker has not lost the ability to see the beauty and joy in the world, and to see God's work in the humble, delicate figure of the lamb.

This moment also draws a link between the speaker and the infant Jesus, implying that Jesus's childhood is perhaps as important as the more widely-known actions of his adulthood. Indeed, it's implied that Jesus's ability to understand the world—and to alleviate the suffering of humankind—is linked not just to his being the son of God, but also to his ability to see the world through the visionary perspective of childhood. Interestingly, the only actual mention of Jesus's childhood in the Bible seems to support this idea: "And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40). Through this allusion, the poem again argues that childhood is a time of wisdom and understanding, not a state of ignorance awaiting the knowledge of adulthood. What's more, the speaker is also a "child" by virtue of being a part of humankind, in the sense that humans are said to be God's children.

Line 18 then reverses the proposition in line 13—not only is God called by the lamb's name (through Jesus as the *Agnus Dei*), but the lamb is called by God's name too. In fact, the speaker is "called by his name" as well. That is, the lamb, the speaker, and God are all, in fact, God. That's because the entire world is an expression of God's design. Though the speaker is named "child" and his fluffy companion is named "lamb," these categories of identity ultimately break down because they are all part of a unified whole: God.

With these lines, the question of creation gets an emphatic answer, and the poem's work is done. The speaker has shown who created the lamb (and the speaker), and expressed joy and wonderment at this creation. All that is left is for the speaker to bless the lamb, and in blessing the lamb express thanks for the entirety of creation. The epizeuxis in lines 19 and 20 underlines the conviction of the speaker's beliefs, and it also gives the lines the sound of a kind of prayer. Hinting at the way that a congregation might echo back the words of their priest, this ending makes it clear that poem is in part a hymn to God and the beauty of his work.

SYMBOLS

THE LAMB

As well as being the star of the poem, the lamb is also an important symbol. In part, the lamb represents God's divine creation. For the speaker, there is something so innately wonderful about the lamb that its very existence seems to celebrate God's powers. Furthermore, the lamb showcases God's capacity for tenderness and gentleness, two traits which easily link to the idea of the Lord as a loving father. Because the lamb is vulnerable, God is shown to be vulnerable too.

But the lamb has a long history of playing an important symbolic role in Christianity. In fact, Jesus himself is described in the Bible as the "Lamb of God" (the *Agnus dei*). So the lamb is not just a lamb, but Jesus/God too. Again, this reinforces the above idea of God's capacity for kindness and vulnerability—both of which are an important part of Jesus's message.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Alliteration occurs throughout the poem. Most of these instances are in the same phrase, "Little Lamb." The /l/ sounds at the start of both words are gentle and delicate, reflecting the way that the lamb is vulnerable and small. Interestingly, this is not the only poem/song to make the alliterative association between these two words—the nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb" does so too. Though the latter was probably written after Blake's poem, it does perhaps suggest that the lamb easily brings the word "little" to mind. This association also suggests that the alliterative phrase has something child-like about it—it is almost "cutesy," like the lamb itself. This connection helps support the poem's overall argument that childhood is an important state in and of itself, not just a passage to adulthood. This point is especially important because the lamb here is also a symbol for Jesus.

The other example of alliteration comes in line 15, with /m/ sounds linking "meek" and "mild" together. Like repeated alliteration on the /l/ sound, this is intended to evoke tenderness and gentleness in keeping with the figure of the lamb. This line is also an allusion to Matthew 5:5 from the Bible: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "L," "L"
- **Line 9:** "L," "L"
- **Line 11:** " L," "L"
- **Line 12:** "L," "L"
- **Line 15:** "m," "m"
- **Line 19:** "L," "L"
- **Line 20:** "L," "L"

ALLUSION

As is revealed in the second stanza, the figure of the lamb itself is an allusion to Jesus Christ. The "Lamb of God"—a.k.a the *Agnus Dei*—is a title for Jesus first used in John 1:29 in the Bible. Lambs have been a traditional animal of sacrifice for many centuries, and this in part explains why Jesus was called "lamb" too—he sacrificed his earthly life for the greater good of humanity. The lamb also seems to embody gentleness, which clearly relates to the Christian virtues of kindness and selflessness. Indeed, these are traits that Jesus himself advocated for strongly.

The second allusion is in line 15, with the mention of "meek." This alludes to Jesus's words in the Book of Matthew, when he says: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Meekness in this context has to do with being gentle, tender, and understanding of God's will, rather than being weak.

To that end, line 15 is *also* possibly an allusion to a hymn by prominent English Methodist Charles Wesley, the first verse of which is similarly interested in childhood, gentleness, and godliness:

> "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
> Look upon a little child;
> Pity my simplicity,
> Suffer me to come to Thee."

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Lamb"
- **Line 9:** "Lamb"
- **Line 11:** "Lamb"
- **Line 12:** "Lamb"

- **Lines 13-14:** "He is called by thy name, / For he calls himself a Lamb:"
- **Line 15:** "He is meek & he is mild,"
- **Line 17:** "lamb"
- **Line 19:** "Lamb"
- **Line 20:** "Lamb"

ASSONANCE

"The Lamb" is a poem full of delicately beautiful sounds. It lacks harsh consonantal sounds, instead using soft consonants and harmonious vowels to create a sense of euphony, which expresses the poem's overall delight and joy in God's creation.

The use of assonance plays an important role in creating this beautiful sound. In line 4, for example, the /e/ vowel sounds pick up on the poem's repeated use of "thee" (technically called diacope), giving the poem a sing-song quality as though it is a kind of hymn to God. The assonance of the long /i/ in lines 16 and 17 also connect the speaker ("I") to the word "child," and thus, in turn, to God—who "became" a "little child" as well. The reappearance of the /ee/ sound in line 15, meanwhile, sonically connects God ("he") to meekness, or gentleness.

In line 6, the /o/ sounds have a warm and open quality that helps conjure the idea of the lamb wrapped up in its "softest clothing wooly bright." There are of course also many /o/ or /oo/ sounds in line 2 and 10: "Dost though know who made thee." While the sounds aren't exactly the same here, they are still all quite round and open, lending this repeated line a sense of gentle cohesion. Here, and elsewhere in the poem, the vowels do not necessarily link together as *precise* assonance, but they generally sound good together nonetheless. There aren't any harsh or sudden shifts, and this is in keeping with the poem's positive and harmonious take on the world.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "o," "ou," "o," "o"
- **Line 3:** "ee," "ee," "ee"
- **Line 4:** "e," "a," "e," "a"
- **Line 6:** "o," "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 8:** "a," "a"
- **Line 10:** "o," "ou," "o," "o"
- **Line 13:** "y," "y"
- **Line 15:** "e," "ee," "e"
- **Line 16:** "e," "e," "i"
- **Line 17:** "l," "i"

APOSTROPHE

In "The Lamb," the speaker addresses a lamb that, of course, cannot give a spoken response. But the direct appeal to the lamb is important, because it makes the lamb the focal point of the poem, helping to build an argument in praise of God's creation.

This use of apostrophe also allows the speaker to answer the question of who created the lamb. The first stanza directly asks the lamb "who made thee," and the second is devoted to the speaker's answer. This means the poem is less about the world's mystery than it is about God's majesty. And though the lamb obviously can't speak, it *can* answer the speaker's question in another way. That is, by simply existing, the lamb provides proof of God's intelligent design for the world. Furthermore, the lamb's gentleness and vulnerability—which mirror that of the child speaker—hint at the poem's overall message in favor of being "meek" and "mild" (kind and respectful).

Finally, the child's choice to speak directly to the lamb indicates how the child intuitively understands humanity's connection to nature—and to God. That is, God isn't far away from humans; he's close enough that a child like the speaker can talk to him directly. Through apostrophe, then, the poem argues that humans should view themselves as closely and directly connected to God, particularly through the natural world.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Little Lamb," "thee"
- **Line 2:** "Dost thou know," "thee"
- **Line 3:** "thee," "thee"
- **Line 5:** "thee"
- **Line 7:** "thee"
- **Line 9:** " Little Lamb," "thee"
- **Line 10:** "Dost thou know," "thee"
- **Line 11:** " Little Lamb," " I'll tell thee,"
- **Line 12:** " Little Lamb ," "I'll tell thee!"
- **Line 13:** "thy"
- **Line 17:** "thou a lamb"
- **Line 19:** " Little Lamb," " God bless thee."
- **Line 20:** " Little Lamb," " God bless thee."

ANAPHORA

Anaphora occurs in two sets of lines in "The Lamb: first across 3, 5 and 7, and then in 13, 15 and 16. In the first instance of anaphora, the lines repeat the phrase "gave thee." They describe God's design, how he provided the lamb with its existence, *and* the natural environment which it so enjoys. The emphasis here, then, is on God's gift of life through the act of creation—all joy, wonder, and freedom can be traced to God's design for the world. The other effect of anaphora here is to demonstrate the lamb's vulnerability; it survives through *receiving*, unable to fend for itself alone. This allows the poem to stress its central message of love, kindness, and one-ness with God. Without God, the lamb would not be able to live its life, and so it represents a part of God's creation.

The second instance of anaphora (lines 13, 15, and 16) repeats

"He" at the beginnings of the lines. This stanza is essentially the answer to the question posed by the first stanza—God is the one who created the lamb. The anaphora allows the speaker to make this point forcefully and joyfully, as though the speaker is brimming with enthusiasm for the beauty of God's creation.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "Gave thee"
- **Line 5:** "Gave thee"
- **Line 7:** "Gave thee"
- **Line 13:** "He is"
- **Line 15:** "He is"
- **Line 16:** "He "

DIACOPE

Diacope occurs throughout "The Lamb" through one key word: "thee." The use of "thee" places the poem's emphasis on the lamb itself. The speaker is in awe of the small and vulnerable beauty that the lamb represents, and the diacope gives the reader a sense of this child-like enthusiasm for the splendor of one of God's creatures. The speaker seems unable to look away from the lamb, just as—the poem suggests—all humans should remain focused on God's creations. It also helps the speaker demonstrate the respect that the speaker feels for the lamb; the child doesn't talk about the lamb impersonally as an "it", but rather repeatedly addresses the lamb as though it were a creature capable of responding.

The use of diacope also helps create the poem's song-like sound. Indeed, it is part of the overall euphony. The poem intentionally sounds beautiful, as though it is taking joy in what it is perceiving—which is exactly the speaker's attitude towards the lamb. The word "thee" is like a musical note to which the poem's melody keeps returning.

Where Diacope appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "thee"
- **Line 2:** "thee"
- **Line 3:** "thee," "thee"
- **Line 7:** "thee"
- **Line 9:** "thee"
- **Line 10:** "thee"
- **Line 11:** "thee,"
- **Line 12:** "thee!"
- **Line 19:** "thee."
- **Line 20:** "thee."

EPIZEUXIS

Epizeuxis occurs twice in "The Lamb," first in lines 11 and 12 and then again in lines 19 and 20. Lines 11 and 12 begin the second stanza, which provides the answer to the question posed by the first stanza: Who made the lamb? The speaker, of course, knows that the answer is God, because God created everything. Marveling at the lamb's gentle beauty and how it demonstrates God's majesty, the child speaker is overcome with joyful enthusiasm at this knowledge. So much so that the speaker's eager statement to the lamb—"I'll tell thee"—is repeated and, indeed, intensified with the use of the exclamation mark. Such is the speaker's enthusiasm for the world itself that the speaker is eager to share this revelation with the little lamb, because the speaker senses that the two of them are both expressions of God's power.

Lines 19 and 20 are a blessing uttered by the speaker. Again, these show the strength of the speaker's feeling towards the lamb. But in the echo there's also a hint of the lamb's vulnerability. This poem is from Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, which rarely mentions the threats or dangers of the real world that are described in *Songs of Experience*. Readers may sense that the idyllic scenario portrayed by "The Lamb" is not guaranteed; indeed, the lamb will need protection from God to survive. So even though the literal content of these lines is part of the speaker's joy and enthusiasm, they also contain a subtle hint of the big wide—dangerous—world beyond this pastoral paradise.

Where Epizeuxis appears in the poem:

- **Lines 11-12:** " Little Lamb I'll tell thee, / Little Lamb I'll tell thee!"
- **Lines 19-20:** " Little Lamb God bless thee. / Little Lamb God bless thee."

ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment occurs just four times in "The Lamb." It is formally important in that it helps frame the poem's overall structure as a question posed and then answered. The first three lines are enjambed, which immediately indicates the urgency of the speaker's question. "Who made" the lamb is not just some idle musing—it is a question of incredible importance. The speed leant by the enjambment to the lines helps make the question feel like it *must* be answered. The enjambment between lines 10 and 11 joins the two stanzas together, as though the answer was always contained within the question—this close connection suggests that people only need to look at the beauty of the world in order to understand who made it.

Indeed, the speaker has an answer all along—God made the lamb. This emphatic response is notably marked by end-stop in line 12, the speaker seemingly unable to contain his or her joy and excitement at the thought of revealing that God made the lamb. The end-stop of lines 19 and 20, in the form of full stops, is similarly firm—concluding the poem on a note of certainty in the blessings of God, which is made all the stronger for its contrast with the poem's initial moments of enjambment.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “thee”
- **Line 2:** “ Dost,” “thee”
- **Line 3:** “Gave”
- **Line 9:** “thee”
- **Line 10:** “ Dost ,” “thee”
- **Line 11:** “ Little”

REFRAIN

Of the poem's twenty short lines, eight of them employ refrain. These are lines 1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 19 and 20. All of these begin with the lamb as the grammatical subject and end with the archaic second-person pronoun "thee." Indeed, these refrains literally frame the entire poem, beginning and ending both stanzas.

The refrain serves a number of functions. In part, it contributes to the poem's euphony. The poem has a pleasant-sounding musical quality, with the beauty of the poem's sound helping to bring the speaker's perceived beauty of God's creation to linguistic life. The refrain also helps keep the lamb front and center throughout the poem, which is important because it is, in a sense, the inspiration behind the speaker's desire to praise God.

Finally, the particular placement of the refrain—at the beginning and end of both stanzas—creates literal symmetry, which to Blake is an important idea that is linked to God's design for the universe (and is mentioned in "The Tyger," the companion poem of "The Lamb"). To Blake, symmetry implies intelligent planning on God's part. In essence, the beauty of the world is expressed in its patterns—and the symmetry in the poem helps to subtly reinforce this idea.

Where Refrain appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** “Little Lamb who made thee / Dost thou know who made thee”
- **Lines 9-10:** “ Little Lamb who made thee / Dost thou know who made thee”
- **Lines 11-12:** “ Little Lamb I'll tell thee, / Little Lamb I'll tell thee!”
- **Lines 19-20:** “ Little Lamb God bless thee. / Little Lamb God bless thee.”

EUPHONY

"The Lamb" is an undoubtedly beautiful-sounding poem. But this isn't some kind of abstract goal on the poet's part—rather, making the poem beautiful actively expresses the point that the poem is trying to make, which is that the world itself is full of beauty. Furthermore, the poem argues that this beauty is no accident—it is part of God's plan for the world. By sounding beautiful, the poem brings the world's beauty into life during the reader's experience.

This euphony is achieved in a number of ways. In part, it comes from the formal symmetry and neatness of the poem, which is equal parts question and answer, represented by the two stanzas and the frequent refrains. The rhyming couplets also create a song-like quality that runs throughout the poem. But primarily, the euphony is achieved through Blake's careful selection of individual sounds. There are no harsh moments whatsoever, and the consonants and vowels hold together harmoniously. The gentle assonance of lines 5 and 6, for example, creates a sense of the warmth and softness of the lamb's coat. The alliteration and consonance throughout support this euphony as well, with the abundance of gentle /l/, /d/, and /th/ sounds (plus the assonance of long /ee/ sounds). For instance, take line 10:

> Gave thee life and bid thee feed

These sounds reappear throughout the poem and contribute to its soft, pleasing musicality.

Where Euphony appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20

EPISTROPHE

This is a poem filled with repetition—in the form of diacope, epizeuxis, refrain, and, as we'll now discuss, epistrophe. As with the other repetitive devices in the poem, the epistrophe of lines 1, 2, 9, and 10 emphasizes the speaker's religious passion as well as the omnipresence of God. This is because the repeated "who made thee" is an implicit reference to God. As becomes clear in the poem's second stanza, the speaker knows very well that God made the lamb. As such, the repetition of the phrase "who made thee" is a way to evoke God without mentioning him at all. "God" *is* the "who" in these lines, meaning they could just as well read:

> Little Lamb God made thee
> Dost though know God made thee

In a sense, then, the epistrophe it's a subtle gesture toward the fact that God created, and as such is present, in everything at all times; God's presence infuses the first stanza before any specific reference to him appears.

Where Epistrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “who made thee”
- **Line 2:** “who made thee”
- **Line 9:** “who made thee”
- **Line 10:** “who made thee”

VOCABULARY

Thee (Line 1, Line 2, Line 3, Line 9, Line 10, Line 11, Line 12, Line 19, Line 20) - An archaic form of "you."

Dost (Line 2, Line 10) - An archaic form of "do."

Thou (Line 2, Line 17) - An archaic form of "you."

O'er (Line 4) - O'er is a contraction of "over," done to fit the poem's metrical scheme.

Mead (Line 4) - A mead is a meadow or a small field.

Vale (Line 8) - Vale is another word for valley.

Meek (Line 15) - Meek means gentle and can also mean weak, or being easily dominated. But in the sense it's used here, it means being mindful of and obedient to God's plan for the world.

Mild (Line 15) - Mild here means gentle and kind.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Lamb" has a deceptively simple form, consisting of two ten-line stanzas. This structure frames the poem as a question in the first stanza and an answer in the second.

The first stanza poses the question to the lamb and to the poem's reader: Who made the lamb? In other words, who created the world and all the beauty it contains?

The second stanza gives the emphatic answer: God created the lamb and the world. This stanza presents an idea of oneness, suggesting that the lamb, the child speaker, Jesus, God, and indeed the entire world are *all* part of God's creation and thereby an expression of God himself. In essence, the poem argues in favor of what's called the teleological theory of God, which is that the beauty and complexity of the world demonstrate that there is an intelligent designer behind it all.

To further hint at this idea of intelligent design, the form of the poem is also symmetrical. Lines 1,2, 9, 10, 19 and 20 are all similar addresses directly to the lamb, functioning as the start and end of each stanza. The six lines in the middle of each stanza give evidence of God's existence and divine will. The symmetrical structure of the poem is intended to represent the beauty and purposefulness of God's creation.

METER

The meter of "The Lamb" is extremely regular, which helps the poem feel simple and purposeful. It's worth remembering here that Blake initially intended this poem and the others in *Songs of Innocence* to, as the name suggests, be sung. The meter thus has a lyric quality that is similar to many of the church hymns of Blake's day.

In essence, the meter can be described as trochaic, but most lines have a catalectic final foot (catalexis just means one of the syllables has been taken away). This meter is steady throughout, with the lines that make up the refrain—the direct addresses to the lamb—being purely trochaic trimeter. For example, lines 1 and 2 read:

> Little | Lamb who | made thee
> Dost thou | know who | made thee

Lines 3 to 8 and 13 to 18—the middle sections of each stanza—have an extra stressed syllable at the end of each line (without the corresponding weak syllable, which is why they are catalectic). This pattern very much lends itself well to being sung, and to rhyming as well. Take line 7 and 8, for example, which could be classified as catalectic trochaic tetrameter:

> Gave thee | such a | tender | voice,
> Making | all the | vales re- | -joice!

Overall, the steady (and symmetrical) meter lends the poem its emphatic quality, which is important for getting across the speaker's enthusiasm for the lamb and, more generally, God's creation.

RHYME SCHEME

The rhyme scheme is very simple in "The Lamb," with the lines falling into rhyming couplets throughout. Each stanza follows its own series of rhymes in the form:

AABBCCDDEE

This simplicity reflects the simplicity of the poem's central message. Look around, the poem seems to say, and marvel in the majesty of God's creation. The couplets also have a unifying sound, with the togetherness of the rhymes mirroring the affinity that the speaker feels with the lamb *and* the way that the entire world is portrayed as interconnected because of God's divine will. The couplets also sound like they could be song lyrics, which helps to make the poem feel even more joyful—it's as though the speaker cannot contain a sense of happiness when looking at the lamb and bursts into song to express this joy.

SPEAKER

The speaker in "The Lamb" is someone in awe of God's creation. In the small and vulnerable figure of the lamb, the speaker sees evidence of God's majesty. This makes the speaker joyous, and the whole poem can be interpreted as the speaker's hymn of praise to God.

In line 17, the reader learns a bit more about who the speaker actually is. Here, the speaker claims to be a child. This

revelation that the insightful speaker is actually a child helps make the case that childhood is not a state of ignorance—instead, it is a time of wisdom, in which the child is able to perceive the interconnectedness of God's creation and understand how it is all an expression of God's will.

In another sense, this reference that the speaker makes to being a child can also be read as stating that, as a human being, the speaker is a child of God. Perhaps, then, the speaker is not a literal child, but rather someone who believes in God and has managed to maintain a child's insightful perspective as a result. Either way, the speaker believes that all living creatures are part of God, and so the speaker is, in a way, God as well.

SETTING

The poem doesn't define its setting too clearly—the lines could ultimately be spoken anywhere. However, the first stanza conjures an idyllic pastoral scene, describing the lamb in its ideal natural habitat. This is a countryside of streams and fields, sunshine and valleys. By implication, it is categorically *not* the industrial urban environment that Blake critiques elsewhere (particularly in his poem "London"). The lamb's natural environment is therefore intimately linked to its happiness *and* the happiness that the speaker feels in observing, contemplating, and talking to the lamb.

The second stanza is more abstract in its setting, dealing philosophically with the relationship between the lamb, the speaker, the world, and God. In this sense, the setting can also be interpreted as the entirety of God's creation—because, in the poem's view, everything in the world is connected by God's design.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"The Lamb" was published as part of the *Innocence* section of William Blake's best-known work, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (first published in 1794, though *Innocence* was published individually a few years prior). This book of poems is essentially a didactic designed to express specific morals, though Blake resists oversimplifying difficult situations. His themes of innocence and experience relate closely to the Biblical ideas of the Garden of Eden and the Fall, and Blake's work is generally full of such opposites: childhood vs. adulthood, life vs. death, freedom vs. imprisonment. This poem exemplifies that trend through its focus on joy and love vs. oppression and rigidity.

A key poetic influence on Blake was John Milton, whose *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* also creatively examined humankind's relationship to God. But Blake was also a wide reader of religious scholarship, which undoubtedly played a formative role in his poetry. For example, the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish Lutheran theologian, can be seen in the way Blake depicts the fundamental spirituality of humanity.

Blake was not well-known as a poet in his time, and many of his contemporaries considered him to be a madman. He worked primarily as a painter, printmaker, and engraver, and he felt that his poetry was misunderstood in his era. He did not enjoy the success of some of the other poets associated with the same time period, such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge. This sense of isolation gives Blake's poetry a radical and prophetic quality; his poems often seem like small acts of rebellion against the status quo of the day.

Also important to Blake's work is the idea of the visionary—there are many accounts of Blake witnessing angels or other spiritual phenomena, and these experiences play into the prophetic quality of his writing. He is often grouped together with the Romantic poets and his work does share certain common ground with the Romantic ideals that dominated the late 17th and early 18th centuries. These ideals include the importance of childhood, the imagination, and the power of nature. However, his life and writings are distinct enough that it may make more sense to regard him as a singular entity in English literature, rather than as a solely Romantic poet.

Finally, "The Lamb" is a kind of song of praise, and the meter is very close in sound to some of the popular hymns of Blake's day. In the poem's allusions to the Bible's description of Jesus as the Lamb of God (the *Agnus Dei*) and Jesus's own words—that the "meek shall inherit the earth"—the Bible itself is an integral part of the literary context of the poem.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

William Blake was a deeply religious man, but he was highly critical of the Church of England, and of organized religion more generally. He was born to a family of Dissenters, a group of English Protestants who broke away from and rebelled against the Church of England. Questioning the religious status quo was therefore instilled in Blake from a very young age. He saw top-down religious structures as restrictions on individual liberties, and as obstacles to the direct relationship between humankind and God.

It's notable that in this deeply religious poem there is no mention of the official church. Instead, the reader is presented with a close communion between nature, humanity, and God—which is how Blake felt religion *should* be. Blake's rebellious streak also owed something to the American and French revolutions, which gave thinkers opportunities to dream of better forms of society (though the revolutions didn't necessarily fulfill those promises).

Blake was also writing during the accelerating Industrial

Revolution, and he saw its economic, social, and environmental changes as threats to humankind. For Blake, the factories of the Industrial Revolution represented a form of physical and mental enslavement—the "mind-forg'd manacles" mentioned in his poem "London." Indeed, "The Lamb" implicitly argues that mankind has lost touch with nature. The poem doesn't mention the urban environment at all, but in its idyllic country setting, everyone and everything is joyful and free.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Blake's Radicalism — An excerpt from a documentary in which writer Iain Sinclair discusses Blake's radicalism. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fl0yBrI24XM&t=1s)
- Illustrations and Other Poems — A resource from the Tate organization, which holds a large collection of Blake originals. (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-blake-39/blakes-songs-innocence-experience)
- Full Text of Songs of Innocence and Experience — Various formats for the full text in which "The Garden of Love" is collected. (http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1934/1934-h/1934-h.htm)
- "The Lamb" Set to Music — A choral setting of "The Lamb" by John Tavener, performed by the choir Tenebrae. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-mSmEfLmZc)
- Pavarotti Sings the Agnus Dei — A version of the Agnus Dei (set to music by Georges Bizet), sung by Luciano Pavarotti. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwXy-J0j-j4)
- A Reading by Sir Ralph Richardson — The poem read by prominent 20th century theater actor Sir Ralph Richardson. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izZWdqvEoKA)
- Blake's Visions — An excerpt from a documentary in which writer Iain Sinclair discusses Blake's religious visions. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8hcQ_jPIZA)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM BLAKE POEMS

- A Poison Tree
- London
- The Chimney Sweeper (Songs of Experience)
- The Chimney Sweeper (Songs of Innocence)
- The Garden of Love
- The Tyger

HOW TO CITE

MLA

Howard, James. "*The Lamb.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 8 May 2019. Web. 22 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Howard, James. "*The Lamb.*" LitCharts LLC, May 8, 2019. Retrieved April 22, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/william-blake/the-lamb.