**The Politics of Childhood: Wordsworth, Blake, and Catechistic Method**

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# THE POLITICS OF CHILDHOOD: WORDSWORTH, BLAKE, AND CATECHISTIC METHOD

BY ALAN RICHARDSON

It is not coincidental that the authors of the eighteenth century's two most influential educational treatises—Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and Rousseau's *Emile*—were also the major political theorists of their age. The interrelation between political and educational discourses—the constitution of the state and the construction of its citizens—runs back at least to Plato's *Republic*, which Rousseau called "the most beautiful educational treatise ever written," but during the modern era in Europe, with formal schooling less and less confined to an elite and with the informal spread of literacy among an increasingly mobile population, education and indeed childhood itself were politicized as never before.[1] The ongoing debate on the uses and dangers of literacy and popular (if not yet mass) education became during the later eighteenth century what Raymond Williams has called the most "central" issue "in the history of our culture."[2] And as the concept of childhood became defined (if not in fact produced) by education, the new children's literature and literary representations of childhood, including Romantic idealizations of the child, reflected no less than did contemporary education theory the politics of literacy.[3]

As education broadened in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, its methods and function shifted significantly. The Renaissance emphasis on dialectical argument, related to the rise of an entrepreneurial class requiring intellectual flexibility, yielded to the mechanical production of set answers, obedient behavior within the educational setting, and (for the lower classes) passive literacy.[4] Catechism replaced dialectic as the exemplary mode of a process which Michel Foucault describes as the "disciplining" of society, as the school became a "machine for learning" analogous in its functions of regulating and observation to the prison and the factory.[5] While this shift affected even schooling for the elite—eighteenth-century grammar schools, for example, emphasized "formal training by drill and repetition," and the oral

examinations at Oxford University had degenerated into a routinized exchange of set questions and answers—catechism played a much greater role in the disciplining of the middle and especially the lower classes for an increasingly industrialized society, what Frederic Jameson, speaking of the "bourgeois cultural revolution" in modern Europe, calls the "collective re-education of a whole population whose mentalities and habits were formed in the previous mode of production, feudalism or the *ancien régime.*"[6]

We tend to think of literacy in terms of democratization or even "empowerment," but, as Lawrence Stone has pointed out, this is a fairly recent conception.[7] Levi-Strauss argues on the contrary that literacy as a social institution has generally "favoured the exploitation of human beings rather than their enlightenment," as yet another tool for maintaining hierarchical relations of power.[8] Stone qualifies Levi-Strauss, however, in stressing the possibility that, if not strictly controlled, education may indeed move beyond its traditional function of "reinforcing class distinctions" to help facilitate the enfranchisement of the newly educated group (71). The ruling interests felt threatened by just such a possibility in the late eighteenth century, during what Richard Altick has called the literacy "crisis" of the 1790s in England, when a large group of new, informally educated middle and lower class readers established a vogue for the radical pamphlet literature exemplified by Paine's *Rights of Man.*[9] Many in positions of power advocated the curtailment of popular education, like the bishop of Rochester who excoriated Charity schools and Sunday schools alike as "schools of Jacobinical rebellion" (Stone, 86). Others, however, saw a remedy for popular discontent in these same institutions.

For the latter, the catechistic method came to be viewed as a prime means of containing the new literacy. Sarah Trimmer, for example, laments in the first number of *The Guardian of Education* (1802) the passing of an education dominated by (if not limited to) catechism, and identifies a "*conspiracy against* CHRISTIANITY *and all* SOCIAL ORDER," led by Rousseau and his English interpreters, "endeavoring to infect the minds of the rising generation, through the medium of *Books of Education* and *Children's Books.*" Her answer is both to police the distribution of reading matter for "the *lower orders of people*, and for *children*" and to reassert the role of catechism in education, a project she had begun in the mid 1780s with her involvement in the Sunday school movement.[10] Trimmer's *Sunday-School Catechist* (1788) makes clear her goal

that literacy remain a means of maintaining class distinctions rather than facilitating social mobility: the upper-class "visitor" is to begin her first Sunday school lecture with the warning, "It is no uncommon thing to see persons who can read setting themselves up *above the station in life it hath pleased* GOD *to place them* . . . I hope this will not be the case with any of *you.*" An early question in the following catechism reinforces this message: "Should people who can read grow *proud,* and be above going to *cart* and to *plough* and *common services*?"[11] If literacy gave the "lower orders" some measure of power, Trimmer's "catechetical method" was designed to teach them not to use it.

Trimmer's approach to education is representative of a broad tendency which went well beyond the Sunday school movement. The Charity Schools supported by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge were originally described by their founders as "Catecheticall schools," and remained "in essence, catechetical schools established to give instruction in reading the Bible and catechism" throughout the eighteenth century.[12] The Charity school movement, like the Sunday school movement, held a mandate to buttress rather than facilitate the relaxation of class distinctions: an 1801 *Account* of the S.P.C.K. happily noted that "as early as the Year 1712" the Society had "particularly recommended, 'That however these Children are disposed of, it will be very necessary before-hand to teach them that great Lesson of *true Humility* . . . lest the Advantages they receive from a pious Education, should incline them to put too great a Value upon themselves; and therefore that the Masters be often put in Mind of guarding the children under their Care, as much as possible, against such dangerous Conceits; and in order thereunto, to instruct them very carefully in the Duties of Servants, and Submission to Superiors.' "[13] Robert Raikes, the principal founder of the Sunday School movement, described his purpose as taking "little heathens" off the street to be instructed in "reading, and in the Church catechism"; writing, however, was often banned from the Sunday school curriculum.[14] Early in the nineteenth century the new monitorial schools combined the catechistic method with the organization and discipline of the factory; Sydney Smith in the *Edinburgh Review* defended the Lancastrian system (which Trimmer had attacked on account of Lancaster's nonconformity) with the argument that "a child is not very likely to put any questions at all to a catechizing master, and still less likely to lead him into subtle and profound disquisition."[15]

The catechistic method was also used throughout the new children's literature, secular as well as religious, and in grammar books addressed to the "ignorant"; nor was the distinction between religious and secular always clear, as "even the simplest hornbook alphabets and primers" usually included a catechism.[16] Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781), a fairly progressive example of the newly emergent literature for small children, features such passages as:

> But who is the shepherd's shepherd? who taketh care for him? who guideth him in the path he should go? and if he wander, who shall bring him back?
>
> God is the shepherd's shepherd. He is the Shepherd over all; he taketh care for all; the whole world is his fold.[17]

The secularization of the catechistic method made part of a widespread program of popular re-education which held a double mandate. It was aimed primarily at supplanting traditional "plebian forms of entertainment and belief" with a mechanical, regularized, and directly supervised program of moral "improvement," while simultaneously countering the incipient "intellectual vernacular" form of political discourse inaugurated by Paine with indoctrination in political and religious orthodoxy.[18] These two objectives could be pursued by means of a single method: to adapt M. M. Bakhtin's terms, catechistic instruction aimed at replacing the "joyful relativity" of an oral carnival-folkloric culture with "that one-sided and gloomy official seriousness . . . which seeks to absolutize a given condition of existence or a given social order," imposing a monologic, hegemonizing master discourse as the price of literacy.[19] Ironically, the strength of the catechistic method lay precisely in its mimicry of an authentic dialogic process; as Isaac Watts wrote earlier in the eighteenth century in his *Catechisms* (1730), "This way of teaching hath something familiar and delightful in it, because it looks more like Conversation and Dialogue."[20]

For Rousseau, who in *Emile* (1762) imagined a pedagogy founded on establishing the child's independent thinking before all else, catechism represented the antithesis to genuine education: "If I had to depict sorry stupidity, I would depict a pedant teaching the catechism to children. If I wanted to make a child go mad, I would oblige him to explain what he says in saying his catechism" (257). Rousseau's critique of catechism was taken up in England by Romantic poets who were equally suspicious of disciplinary modes of

education, and who (much more than Rousseau) tended to resist the politicization of childhood. Byron, for example, satirizes contemporary modes of education in *Don Juan* by depicting Juan "shut . . . up to learn his catechism alone" with Donna Inez, herself a walking abstract of "Mrs. Trimmer's books on education."[21] Shelley, in his bitter lines "To the Lord Chancellor," curses Lord Eldon (who had deprived him of custody of two of his children) "by those unpractised accents of young speech" which will be trained to orthodoxy "under a hireling's care":

> By the false cant, which on their innocent lips,
> Must hang like poison on an opening bloom,
> By the dark creeds which cover with eclipse
> Their pathway from the cradle to the tomb.[22]

Blake and Wordsworth, writing contemporaneously with Trimmer, more directly engage the irony behind Watts' praise of catechism: the attempt to impose a monologic discourse through a travesty of dialogue. But their poetic representations of catechism in poems like "Anecdote for Fathers," "We Are Seven," and "The Lamb" differ significantly, in ways which reveal something of the politics of both poets as well as the politics of literacy and education in the Romantic period.

"We Are Seven" was originally published immediately following "Anecdote for Fathers" in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).[23] Both lyrics portray an adult doggedly, earnestly attempting to catechize a child, and the child resisting, in the first poem through lying, in the second through an obstinate "will" equal to if not greater than the adult's. "Anecdote for Fathers, Shewing How the Art of Lying May Be Taught" underscores the automatic quality of the adult's catechistic approach to the child, in a period when methods of social discipline enter increasingly into familial relations. In a moment of "idleness," without entirely knowing the answer himself, the adult insists on grilling his child on an apparently meaningless issue:

> "My little boy, which like you more,"
> I said and took him by the arm—
> "Our home by Kilve's delightful shore,
> "Or here at Liswyn farm?" (61)

When the child guesses and dutifully produces the desired answer (Kilve), the father, still questioning his own regret for Kilve, presses the child "five times" (in later versions softened to "three times")

for a reason. The father has unintentionally but, given their radically unequal discursive relation, inevitably trapped the child in a painfully ambiguous rhetorical position. His demand for a reason—" 'Why? Edward, tell me why?' "—implies a cognitive response, but the coercive form of the question—"I said and took him by the arm"—seems to demand instead the performative response of catechism: rehearsing the answer which the adult expects. Although Edward can initially read his father's cues well enough to answer "Kilve," at this point there is no answer for him to intuit, as the father has none in mind.

Edward's dilemma in "Anecdote" can be taken as an extreme version of that of Mrs. Trimmer's catechist. For Trimmer it is crucial that the child's responses in catechism not take the form of "rote" answers, but manifest instead a degree of thoughtfulness and understanding: "When I question you, do not answer *hastily* and *carelessly* 'YES,' or 'NO,' as you are apt to do, but *think* before you *speak*" (xxi, 41). But while the child's answers should seem to reflect thinking, they must simultaneously fit within the narrow parameters of official doctrine and demonstrate as well, in their tone and physical performance, the child's docility. The adult "Visitor" prefaces her injunction to the child to "think" by underscoring her monopoly on a "truth" guaranteed by revelation: "We shall tell you nothing but the truth, as revealed in the Scriptures, for we have your happiness sincerely at heart; therefore I beg of you to give your earnest attention" (41). The child's rhetorical stance is ultimately an untenable one, which can be met only by hypocritically reproducing the instructor's "truth" with the *appearance* of thinking. As Rousseau had argued in *Emile*, the catechistic relation can only produce hypocrisy or lying on the child's part: "All the answers of the catechism are misconceived . . . In the mouths of children these answers are really lies, since the children expound what they do not understand and affirm what they are not in a position to believe" (378). Edward, in Wordsworth's "Anecdote," can similarly be released from a speech situation which "looks more like Conversation and Dialogue" but is decidedly coercive and one-sided, only by lying, as he catches sight of a weather-vane and desperately improvises, "At Kilve there was no weather-cock, / And that's the reason why." As a representation of the catechistic relation of adult and child, "Anecdote for Fathers" is doubly ironic. Not only, as Wordsworth's subtitle stresses, does a monologic discourse disguised as dialogue teach primarily the "art of lying," but in this case

it is the adult rather than the child who is portrayed as mindlessly repeating himself, in his effort to produce a "truth" which does not exist.

Although "Anecdote for Fathers" and "We Are Seven" have been grouped together as "dialogic" works, Wordsworth's "Anecdote" is most attuned to the contemporary politics of education in its demonstration of how formally dialogical exchanges between adults and children inexorably take on the monologic, disciplinary character of catechism.[24] Much the same process occurs throughout the adult-child "dialogues" frequently represented in children's books of the period. In Eleanor Fenn's *Cobwebs to Catch Flies; or, Dialogues in Short Sentences, Adapted to Children From the Age of Three to Eight Years* (1783), for example, what purports to be a conversational exchange between "Mr Steady" and a boy playing hooky from school abruptly grinds to a halt when the child thinks to ask why he should go to school at all: "Good children ask for no reasons—a wise child knows that his parents can best judge what is proper; and unless they choose to explain the reasons of their orders, he trusts that they have a good one; and he obeys without inquiry." "Little Steady," who acts in this dialogue as a kind of chorus to his father, chimes in with the superfluous remark, "I will not say Why, again, when I am told what to do; but I will always do as I am bid directly.—Pray, sir, tell us the story of Miss Wilful."[25] The main point of this dialogue has less to do with attending or not attending school (as though that could really be in question) as with establishing the child's and adult's unequal positions in the dialogue itself, teaching the child that his place is to obey, echo, and request further instruction rather than to question. Bakhtin's description of the degeneration of the Socratic dialogue from a discursive method for apprehending truth as "born *between people* . . . in the process of their dialogic interaction" to yet another vehicle for "*official* monologism, which pretends to posses *a ready-made truth*" provides a historical parallel to the fate of the pedagogical dialogue in the later eighteenth century: "When the genre of the Socratic dialogue entered the service of the established, dogmatic worldviews of various philosophical schools and religious doctrines, it lost all connection with a carnival sense of the world and was transformed into a simple form for expounding already found, ready-made irrefutable truth; ultimately, it degenerated completely into a question-and-answer form for training neophytes (catechism)" (110).

In "We Are Seven" catechism is addressed more directly and in terms of a more familiar moral purpose, although here too the catechistic method is exposed as a fundamentally closed travesty of discursive exchange. Wordsworth tells us that he began the poem with the last stanza, which stresses the adult's repetitive questioning (here also he has rephrased his question five times) and the child's countervailing will:

> "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." (65)

Although the child has duly received some measure of religious instruction ("Till God released her of her pain"), she fails to give her questioner the doctrinal response his question regarding death anticipates. Her refusal to distinguish between dead and living siblings strikes the adult as paganistic; his repeated questions attempt to elicit a more orthodox Christian recognition of mortality. (One of Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose* begins by addressing its young reader as "Child of mortality" and concludes, "all that is born, must die" [77–82].) To his insistence that "two are in the church-yard laid" she counters with what Bakhtin would term a typically "ambivalent" carnival image (126), emphasizing yard over church—"Their graves are green, they may be seen"—and portraying her siblings as both dead *and* living:

> "My stockings there I often knit,
> "My 'kerchief there I hem;
> "And there upon the ground I sit—
> "I sit and sing to them." (65)

These lyrics have been read by Mary Jacobus as confronting the adult's "misplaced didacticism" with the child's "inspired obstinacy at odds with adult preconceptions" and similarly by Heather Glen as the "irritating insistence of the rationalizing adult . . . met and defeated by the child's refusal to accept his categories."[26] But in a more subtle manner adult preconceptions and categories are affirmed in these poems. Rather than more fundamentally addressing the question of authority in the relation of adult and child these lyrics instead displace that authority, ultimately reversing the roles of adult and child but maintaining the hierarchical structure of their relation:

O dearest, dearest boy! my heart
For better lore would seldom yearn,
Could I but teach the hundredth part
Of what from thee I learn. (61)

Similarly in "We Are Seven" the child is mother to the man, her "utter inability to admit" the notion of death validating the poet's own childhood intimations of immortality.[27] And what is equally important, in the anti-didactic lyrics as in the Ode, the child's authority rests on an idealized notion of childhood. Both the boy (who is five) and the girl (who is eight) are presented as naturals, primitives: Edward "graceful in his rustic dress" and the "little cottage girl" "wildly clad" with a "rustic, woodland air." These noble savages are naturally resistant to the adults' attempt to form (or deform) them; their mentalities are rooted in a transcendental nature rather than culturally produced. Wordsworth protests against the ideological construction of childhood by envisioning an ideology-proof, organic sensibility; a move which, while it attests to his profound dissatisfaction with contemporary educational methods (expressed at greater length in Book Five of *The Prelude*), tends to leave the child unsocialized and frozen in a state of eternal innocence (one reason why Wordsworthian children of nature like Lucy Gray or the Boy of Winander must die so early). Wordsworth's idealized representations of childhood tend to close in upon themselves rather than opening into a critique of the child's dilemma at a time when a "natural" education such as the one Wordsworth himself claimed to have enjoyed was less and less available, and the increasing politicization of childhood demanded a more complex response than an imagined transcendence, however powerfully expressed.

Blake's "The Lamb" also portrays a scene of thwarted instruction, but in this case it is the child who plays catechist, with a lamb as his unresponsive though docile enough pupil. It begins innocently enough:

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.

The song has been read by critics like E. D. Hirsch and Zachary Leader as a "joyous and mild" portrayal of religious instruction, the child mimicking the "gentle" and "affecting sincerity and simplicity" of his parents; other readers (like Harold Bloom) have emphasized instead its "profound" emphasis on creation and the parallels with Blake's "Tyger" in *Songs of Experience*.[28] What has gone unnoticed, however, is that the question concerning creation and the representation of catechism are crucially related.

The child's catechism typically began with just this question. John Cotton's *Milk for Babes* (1646), for example, begins: "*What hath God done for you*?" with the answer, "God hath made me, He keepeth me, and He can save me."[29] Isaac Watts begins his popular *Young Child's Catechism* (1730), recommended by Trimmer, "Can you tell me, Child, who made you?" (79). In Cotton and Watts, this line of questioning is not particularly "mild" or "gentle"; rather, it leads the child to a confession of moral depravity and of having deserved "the Wrath and Curse of the Almighty God who made me."[30] In Trimmer's *The Teacher's Assistant: Consisting of Lectures in the Catechetical Form* (2nd ed. 1800), the same question begins the first secularized catechism: "Who made all things that are? [*Ans.* GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY]"; and soon is extended to the lamb's "clothing of delight": "Where does wool come from? [*Ans.* Sheep.] Who made the sheep, and caused so much wool to grow upon them? [*Ans.* God.]" Trimmer leads the "Children of the Poor" towards a confession of social abasement which secularizes the Calvinism of Cotton and Watts:

> Have working people time to make themselves quite clean on working days? [*Ans.* No.] Is not a day of rest very comfortable after six working days? [*Ans.* Yes.] What should you return to God for appointing the Sabbath day? [*Ans.* Thanks.] How should you spend it? [*Ans.* In learning your duty.][31]

That the "duty" of the poor begins in a passive acceptance of the class system, ordained by the same God that created them, is clear in Trimmer's *Sunday-School Catechist*: "Who made all mankind? Who made some rich and some poor?"; "We should consider that it is the wish of GOD that there should be different ranks among mankind, *high* and *low, rich* and *poor*, and that all the good things in this world are dealt out by His providence as He sees best for His

creatures" (207, 208). For Trimmer, the Sunday schools and Charity schools with their secularized catechisms were institutions not only for fighting apostasy but equally for controlling the lower classes from *within* literacy, from within a reconstructed subjectivity. Encouraging "The Ladies" to act as visitors for their local schools in her significantly entitled *The Oeconomy of Charity* (1787), she begins: "God only knows what the lower orders of people will become if Sunday-schools are suffered to drop"; and once more moves to ground class distinctions in an appeal to God's creation: "In appointing different ranks among mankind, our all-wise and beneficent CREATOR undoubtedly intended the good of the whole." Young ladies in particular would be well-advised, Trimmer argues, to support an institution that would lead to better servants and a more docile underclass: "The rising generation of poor is instructed by us, that our children may be better served than their parents have been . . . and travel the road free from the painful apprehension of being molested by the daring highwayman."[32]

It is against this background that Blake's portrayal of catechism in "The Lamb" takes on a new significance. The child speaker of "The Lamb" can be seen as an ordinarily passive victim of the catechistic method who here attempts to reassert some measure of power through playfully, even parodically catechizing a figure still more naive and helpless than himself. That the lamb cannot possibly answer is both pathetic (as a comment on the child's own passive position) and comic (as a reflection of the child's retaliatory urge to satirize his masters). While the child's repetitive questioning brings out the mechanistic quality of catechism addressed by Wordsworth in "Anecdote for Fathers," Blake goes beyond Wordsworth's hint at a compensatory creative response (Edward's "lying") by having the child articulate a counterstatement that directly addresses the "one-sided and gloomy official seriousness" of the adult world. His answer to his own question is subversive rather than doctrinal, implicitly confronting the authority claimed by his pastors, masters and parents with an image of the creator not as the Almighty Father but as himself childlike:

> 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.

In the catechisms of Blake's time this would hardly have been an acceptable answer. Rather than confessing his own abasement and accepting his place, however humble, in God's benevolent scheme (a lamb to the slaughter?), the child has creatively supplemented the catechism with his knowledge of the Christmas story and the Psalms to subvert the structure of authority on which the catechism is based. In naming his creator as God the Child rather than God the Father, the speaker of "The Lamb" disrupts at its source the traditional associative chain of authority which leads, as in Trimmer's *Sunday-School Catechist*, from "The Duty of Loving God" to "Honouring the King" ("to love him as the father of his country, and to submit peacably to the laws of the land, not to suffer ourselves to be persuaded to join in any riots or cabals") and finally to "Submitting to Teachers, Spiritual Pastors, and Masters" ("It is part of your duty to your neighbor to order yourselves lowly and reverently to all your betters . . . your parents, governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters . . . All rich and great people are also to be considered your betters on this account" [137, 147]). In revising the catechism, the child both frees himself from a coercive discourse and simultaneously throws the terms of that discourse into question.

Although Blake's *Songs of Innocence* has been read against the background of contemporary education theory and the tradition of religious children's poetry represented by Watts, Smart and Barbauld, it is usually considered not as a children's book proper but rather as a "children's book for adults."[33] Those who, on the other hand, do read the *Songs* as a children's text tend to deny its satirical force, sometimes quite harshly: "To read the book thus [as satire] and classify it as children's literature removes Blake himself from decency of manners . . . Blake did not address *children* in veiled and sardonic satire."[34] Either the child reader is dismissed in order, as Harold Bloom puts it, to rescue the "perilous ambiguity" of a text like "The Lamb" from "namby-pamby," or an "innocent" child reader is posited along with a text uncomplicated by ambiguity, as in Martha Winburn England's assertion that Blake "meant every namby-pamby word."[35] Recent work in the narrative theory of children's literature suggests, however, the option of approaching Blake's *Songs* as an "ambivalent text," addressed not to one but "two . . . implied readers," child *and* adult.[36] "The Lamb" offers the adult reader a satirical portrayal of the catechistic method rather along the lines of "We Are Seven," and Heather Glen in fact reads

it as such: "His answer to the lamb is not a series of dogmatic assertions; rather, it innocently emphasizes the extraneousness of such assertions, their distance from the reality they purport to define."[37] Along with such related lyrics as "The Chimney Sweeper" and "The Little Black Boy," which also feature a child resisting indoctrination through imitatively instructing a still more helpless figure ("little Tom Dacre," the "little English boy"), "The Lamb" offers its child reader a model for evading adult coercion by means of parody.

For Bakhtin, parody subverts monologic discourse by representing it and implicating an antithetical voice within that representation: "The second voice, once having made its home in the other's discourse, clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims" (193). In Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, "official" adult discourse is regularly invaded by the child's comically distorting voice, giving the child reader an opportunity for less than innocent laughter at the disciplinary strategies of the adult world. Although the humor may elude us now, a child who had been catechized weekly if not daily beginning with "Child, who made you?" could hardly fail to be amused by a child speaker addressing this very adult question to a lamb, and then inventing an answer that would shock most eighteenth-century parents and Sunday school "visitors." Not only are two readers, child and adult, implied in the *Songs*, but Blake's child-narrators speak in a double register, at once innocent and experienced, putting the subject positions of child and adult into a dialogical relation that critically undermines the catechistic relation prescribed by Trimmer and not so much subverted as inverted by Wordsworth.

David V. Erdman has argued that in reading the *Songs of Innocence* as satire we miss Blake's "larger" "social purpose": "To construct one of the foundations of an imaginatively organized and truly happy prosperity."[38] But the utopian element of Blake's songs need not be sought in their pastoral imagery and evocations. In his reading of Blake's "A Poison Tree," John Brenkman argues on the contrary that the utopian "does not . . . reside in the semantic storehouse of images of happiness and freedom," but rather in "a poetic speaking which manifests the struggle between the social conditions of the poet's speech and the latent possibilities of speech."[39] My own reading of *The Songs of Innocence* follows Brenkman in locating its social purpose not in its pastoral elements, but by looking instead towards what he terms the "*promise* of uncoerced mu-

tual understanding and mutual recognition" in an "ideal speech situation" not yet realizable.[39] My interpretation of "The Lamb" proposes in addition, however, that Blake, in his implicit critique of the catechistic method, addresses "social conditions of . . . speech" much more directly and more locally than Brenkman's account suggests, enabling us to trace in greater detail the differences between 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.

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NOTES

[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, tr. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 40. Further references will appear in the text. For a recent and important discussion of the confluence of politics and education in Locke and Rousseau, see Frances Ferguson, "Reading Morals: Locke and Rousseau on Education and Inequality," *Representations* 6 (1984): 66–84.

[2] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution: An Analysis of the Democratic, Industrial, and Cultural Changes Transforming Our Society* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1961), 158.

[3] See Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, tr. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage, 1962).

[4] For the Renaissance emphasis on dialectical method, see Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Improvisation and Power" in *Literature and Society*, ed. Edward W. Said (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986), 64–5.

[5] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), 165.

[6] John Lawson and Harold Silver, *The Social History of Education in England* (London: Methuen, 1973), 176; Charles Edward Mallet, *A History of the University of Oxford*, 3 vols. (London: Methuen, 1927) 3: 163–66; Frederic Jameson, "The Realist Floor-Plan," in *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985), 373–74.

[7] Lawrence Stone, "Literacy and Education in England 1640–1900," *Past and Present* 42 (1969): 89. Further references will appear in the text.

[8] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, tr. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Washington Square Press, 1977), 337.

[9] Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1957), 67–77.

[10] Sarah Trimmer, *The Guardian of Education* 1 (1802): 2–4, 245.

[11] Trimmer, *The Sunday-School Catechist: Consisting of Familiar Lectures with Questions, For the Use of Visitors and Teachers* (London: Longman, 1788), 2, 4. Further references will appear in the text.

[12] W. O. B. Allen and Edmund McClure, *Two Hundred Years: The History of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 1698–1898* (1898; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 135; M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement: A Study of Eighteenth Century Puritanism in Action* (1938; rpt. Hamden: Archon, 1964), 5.

[13] *An Account of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*, appended to Thomas Lewis, *A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, London: On Thursday, May 21, 1801* (London: Rivington, 1801), 96.

[14] Raikes's letter on Sunday schools to the *Gentleman's Magazine* 54 (1784), rpt. in J. M. Goldstrom, ed., *Education: Elementary Education 1780–1900* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972), 17. Raikes did not discourage the teaching of writing in the Sunday schools, but others such as Hannah More ("I allow of no writing") and the Wesleyan Methodists did: see Stone, (note 7), 89 and Jones (note 12) 159–60. On passive literacy, cf. Williams, (note 2) 135–37.

[15] Sydney Smith, rev. of Sarah Trimmer's *A Comparative View of the New Plan of Education as Promulgated by Mr. Joseph Lancaster, Edinburgh Review* 9 (1805); rpt. in Goldstrom (note 14), 42.

[16] John Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730–80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 141; Zachary Leader, *Reading Blake's Songs* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 35.

[17] Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Hymns in Prose for Children*, ed. Miriam Kramnick (New York: Garland, 1977), 13–14. Further references will appear in the text. For a discussion of the "progressive" "middle-class ideology" behind the new children's literature of Barbauld and her circle, see Isaac Kramnick, "Children's Literature and Bourgeois Ideology: Observations on Culture and Industrial Capitalism in the Later Eighteenth Century," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 12 (1983): 11–44.

[18] Heather Glen, *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 55; Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791–1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 35. These issues are interestingly discussed in relation to popular literature by Susan Pedersen in "Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies* 25 (1986): 84–113.

[19] M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, ed. and tr. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 160. Further references will appear in the text.

[20] Isaac Watts, *Catechisms* (London: E. Matthews, 1730), 16. Further references will appear in the text.

[21] *Don Juan* in *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–86), vol. 5, 1.16, 52.

[22] Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 10 vols. (London: Benn and New York: Scribner, 1927), 3: 159.

[23] My text for *Lyrical Ballads* is W. J. B. Owen, ed., *Lyrical Ballads 1798*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

[24] Don H. Bialostosky, *Making Tales: The Poetics of Wordsworth's Narrative Experiments* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), 107.

[25] I quote from Fenn's *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* as excerpted in *From Instruction to Delight: An Anthology of Children's Literature to 1850*, ed. Patricia Demers and Gordon Moyles (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), 135–6.

[26] Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 102–3; Glen (note 18), 43.

[27] I.F. note, quoted in Owen, *Lyrical Ballads*, 137.

[28] My text for "The Lamb" is William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, ed. Sir Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Orion Press, 1967), plate 8. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), 177; Leader (note 16), 88; Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971), 35–39.

[29] John Cotton, *Milk for Babes, Drawn Out of the Breast of Both Testaments*, in Demers and Moyles (note 25), 24.

[30] Watts (note 20), 98; cf. Cotton, "I was conceived in sinne, and born in iniquity" (24).

[31] Trimmer, *The Teacher's Assistant: Consisting of Lectures in the Catechetical Form: Being Part of a Plan of Appropriate Instruction for the Children of the Poor*, 7th ed. (London: Rivington, 1812), 3, 4, 18. *The Teacher's Assistant* was designed for use in the Charity schools and was distributed by the S.P.C.K. A second edition, "with considerable additions and improvements," was brought out in 1800 (London: T. Bensley); I have been unable to determine the date of the first edition.

[32] Trimmer, *The Oeconomy of Charity; or, an Address to the Ladies Concerning Sunday Schools* (London: Longman, 1787), 2, 7, 26.

[33] Leader (note 16), 1–37 (the quotation is from 32); Glen (note 18), 8–32; Glen describes the *Songs* as written for parents rather than children (8–9). A number of earlier studies dealing with Blake's relation to contemporary education theory, eighteenth-century children's books, and the tradition of religious poetry for children are cited by both Leader and Glen; see also Geoffrey Summerfield, *Fantasy and Reason: Children's Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1984), esp. 208–40.

[34] Martha Winburn England, "Wesley's Hymns for Children and Blake's *Songs*," in England and John Sparrow, *Hymns Unbidden: Donne, Herbert, Blake, Emily Dickinson and the Hymnographers* (New York: New York Public Library, 1966), 53.

[35] Bloom (note 28), 35; England (note 34), 54.

[36] Zohar Shavit, *Poetics of Children's Literature* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1986), 63; U.C. Knoepflmacher, "The Balancing of Child and Adult: An Approach to Victorian Fantasies for Children," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37 (1983): 500.

[37] Glen (note 18), 25.

[38] David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 3rd edition (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), 126–27.

[39] John Brenkman, *Culture and Domination* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987), 117, 231.