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# Blake's Romantic Discourse and the "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence* as a Megametaphor

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The present paper offers an interdisciplinary (literary and text-linguistic based) study of the "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence* (1794) which is regarded as crucial to an understanding of Blake's larger poetic vision. Ever since the book was first issued in 1794 by the author himself, literary critics have debated the question whether in this poem Blake intended to present his own commentary on the process of poetic creation, or simply to express in verse different visions of the state of innocence as either untainted by experience, or already penetrated by it. Our analysis is focused on the multilayered reading of the "Introduction" which helps to reassess its thematic and motif structure. We consider the poem under study as one "large" metaphor, i.e., a megametaphor, expressing in a rather compressed way the metatheme of Blake's cycles *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794) in its complexity. We try to show how the central themes of the cycles—the theme of "innocence" connected with the stage of childhood, and the theme of "experience" associated with adulthood—are interconnected in the "Introduction" via fundamental values and symbols of Christianity, as well as exact and expressive imagery reflecting the experience Blake has undergone in composing the songs which follow. It is just this kind of mediate relationship of these two central themes that creates the wholeness of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and enables us to speak about the existence of their multilayered metatheme in the "Introduction".

**Keywords:** megametaphor, metatext, metatheme, romantic discourse, cohesion, imagination

## Introduction

The aim of the present paper is to study the "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence* (1794) via interdisciplinary methodology and reveal its significant role in understanding Blake's poetic vision. The poem has attracted scholars' attention since it became known to the public. There are two interpretations of the text under study. For instance, Joseph H. Wicksteed (1928), William Bowden (1953), Robert F. Gleckner (1959), and Eric Donald Hirsch Jr. (1964) read the "Introduction" as a Blakean commentary upon the process of artistic creation claiming that the poem represents a symbolic account of the way Blake was inspired to compose the *Songs of Innocence*. Others, among them Northrop Frye (1947), Howard Justin (1952), and Zachary Leader (1981), concentrate on children and childhood as two components of Blake's conception of innocence.



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