

CHILDHOOD

Introduction:

Childhood is a recurring theme in literature, captivating writers and readers alike with its multifaceted nature. Authors throughout history have explored the innocence, wonder, and vulnerability of childhood, as well as its darker aspects such as fear, trauma, and loss. By delving into the world of childhood, literature offers insights into human development and the complexities of the human psyche.

New Concept of Children according to Freud:

Sigmund Freud, a pioneering figure in psychology, revolutionized our understanding of childhood through his psychoanalytic theory. Contrary to the prevailing notion of children as pure and innocent beings, Freud proposed that they were driven by innate desires and unconscious conflicts. He argued that childhood experiences, particularly those in early infancy, shape the individual's personality and behavior in adulthood. Freud's ideas challenged traditional views of childhood and paved the way for a deeper exploration of the inner world of children in literature.

Certainly, here are the excerpts from William Blake's poems "Infant Joy" and "Infant Sorrow" along with the expanded analysis:

Infant Joy:

I have no name
I am but two days old.
What shall I call thee?
I happy am
Joy is my name,—
Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy!
Sweet joy but two days old,
Sweet joy I call thee;
Thou dost smile.
I sing the while
Sweet joy befall thee.

Infant Sorrow:

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

Struggling in my fathers hands:
Striving against my swaddling bands:
Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mothers breast.

Expanded Analysis:

William Blake's exploration of childhood extends beyond the realm of struggle and sorrow, as seen in his poem "Infant Joy." In this companion piece to "Infant Sorrow," Blake presents a contrasting perspective on the newborn's arrival into the world, offering a glimpse of joy and innocence amidst the complexities of existence.

"**Infant Joy**" portrays a tender and intimate moment between mother and child, celebrating the miracle of birth and the bond between parent and infant. The poem radiates with a sense of warmth and affection, as the mother rejoices in the presence of her newborn child. Through simple yet evocative language, Blake captures the purity and beauty of the infant's arrival, presenting it as a moment of profound joy and fulfillment.

From a perspective which corresponds with the later theories of Freud and Bowlby, "Infant Joy" can be interpreted as an expression of the child's early experiences of love and attachment, which both considered essential for healthy psychological development. The poem highlights the significance of the mother-child relationship in shaping the infant's sense of security and emotional well-being, echoing Freud's emphasis on the role of early childhood experiences in shaping personality.

“Infant Sorrow” by William Blake delves deeply into the tumultuous journey of birth and the harsh realities of existence. The poem opens with the haunting lines, *"My mother groaned, my father wept, / Into the dangerous world I leapt,"* immediately setting a tone of struggle and anguish. These lines vividly depict the pain and emotional turmoil experienced by both the infant and the parents during childbirth. The use of the word "leapt" suggests an abrupt and involuntary entrance into life, devoid of choice or agency, reinforcing the idea of the infant's vulnerability and helplessness.

The subsequent lines, *"Helpless, naked, piping loud, / Like a fiend hid in a cloud,"* further emphasize the infant's state of vulnerability and exposure. The imagery of the infant as "helpless" and "naked" underscores the fragility of life and the starkness of the human condition. The comparison to a "fiend hid in a cloud" adds a layer of complexity, suggesting a sense of alienation or otherness that accompanies the newborn's arrival. This juxtaposition of innocence and darkness serves to highlight the conflicting emotions inherent in the human experience.

As the poem progresses, Blake continues to explore the infant's struggle for existence, portraying it as a primal and instinctual battle against the forces of adversity. The lines, *"Struggling in my father's hands, / Striving against my swaddling bands,"* depict the infant's physical and metaphorical struggle against the confines of society and the limitations imposed upon them from birth. The image of "struggling" and "striving" conveys a sense of defiance and resistance, suggesting a primal instinct for survival and autonomy.

Throughout the poem, Blake employs rich and evocative language to evoke the rawness of the infant's experience, inviting readers to confront the harsh realities of life from a perspective of innocence and vulnerability. The repetition of the word "infant" throughout the poem serves to emphasize the protagonist's youth and innocence, while also reinforcing the overarching theme of childhood as a time of profound vulnerability and discovery.

"Infant Sorrow," with its vivid portrayal of the newborn's struggle upon entering the world, echoes the sentiments of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of the social contract. Rousseau posited that individuals, upon entering society, are bound by an implicit agreement that shapes their behavior and interactions. Similarly, in Blake's poem, the infant's entrance into the "dangerous world" can be seen as a metaphorical initiation into the societal constructs and constraints that await them. The image of the infant crying out amidst the darkness encapsulates the vulnerability and disorientation of the individual confronted with the demands and expectations of society.

In the context of Blake's body of work, "Infant Joy" complements "Infant Sorrow" by offering a more nuanced portrayal of childhood, encompassing both its struggles and its moments of bliss. Together, these two poems form a rich tapestry that captures the complexity of human existence from infancy to adulthood, inviting readers to contemplate the profound mysteries of life and the enduring power of love.

In conclusion, William Blake's exploration of childhood in "Infant Joy" and "Infant Sorrow" offers a multifaceted perspective on the human experience, ranging from the depths of sorrow to the heights of joy. Through these poems, Blake invites readers to reflect on the complexities of existence and the transformative power of love, highlighting the profound impact of early childhood experiences on the individual's journey through life. In the broader context of literature, Blake's work serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring significance of childhood in shaping the human condition and our understanding of the world around us.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the exploration of childhood in literature provides us with a rich tapestry of themes, characters, and narratives that reflect the human experience in all its complexity. From the innocence of infancy to the tumultuous journey of adolescence, literature offers a mirror through which we can better understand ourselves and the world around us. Through the lens of Freudian psychology, we gain new insights into the inner workings of childhood and the profound impact it has on our lives. As we continue to engage with literature, we deepen our appreciation for the transformative power of storytelling and its ability to illuminate the depths of the human soul.