ABSTRACT

DAVID JOSHUA PRUITT. *Songs of Innocence and Experience*: William Blake’s Poems of Trauma. (Under the direction of Professor John Morillo)

William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* has a number of poems that are directly connected to his *Songs of Experience* released five years later. These companion poems show a much darker, terrifying, and traumatic vision of England at the end of the eighteenth century. Both volumes of poetry were written for children and were eventually combined into a single volume that put the traumatic shift on clear display. By applying Bruno Bettelheim’s theories on child psychology as it relates to the necessity of fairy tales and Kenneth Kidd’s theories on children’s trauma literature as a form a literary theory to the companion poems in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* I argue that the *Songs* fill the role of both psychologically formative fairy tales and trauma literature for the children of Blake’s England and reflect his own traumatic world view. In situating the companion poems of the *Songs* into the conversation of children’s trauma literature this essay delves into an underexplored aspect of Blake’s poetry, giving a new perspective to the *Songs of Innocence and Experience.*