



Blake's "Book of Thel" And the Stimulus Barrier

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Abstract

The Book of Thel concerns an adolescent girl, whose voyage to adulthood is cut short by a flood of new sensations that sends her fleeing back to a protected world. This article studies her experience in the light of Freud's stimulus barrier, its revisions by Mahler, Shapiro and Stern, Esman, and Anzieu, and such ideas as the parental supplement of the stimulus barrier, stimulus-seeking in the neonate, the screening rather than blocking of stimuli, and the psychic envelope, as well as Winnicott's "holding mother." Thel's trauma at the end of her voyage shows the delayed impact of a trauma at the poem's beginning that prompts her search for some helping authority, but she finds no functioning parental supplement and develops no psychic envelope within which she might pursue a quest beyond childhood that did not end with a panicked return into the kind of neonate's stimulus barrier that Freud described.

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