

The Poetry Corner

Two readers, inspired by exciting developments in the biological and physical sciences (Random Samples, 28 Feb., p. 1271; L. Spruch, "Long-range (Casimir) interactions," 7 June 1996, p. 1452), offer the following verse based on William Blake's "The Lamb" and Wallace Stevens' "The Snow Man," respectively.

"For Dolly" (with apologies to William Blake)

Little lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life and bid thee feed,
By the stream and o'er the mead;

I know who made me,
I know who made me,
She is called by my name,
For she is me and I the same.
We are one but she is two,
I a lamb and she a ewe.

She is meek and I am mild;
She became a little child.
I a child and she a lamb,
Go forth together to rule the land.

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"The Nothing That Is" (with apologies to Wallace Stevens)


Max and Werner once opined
That zero had to be defined
As slightly more than naught,
A point a little fraught
With just a modicum of heat
To make the vacuum beat
Like tireless jungle drums,
A telegraph that hums
With messages in empty space
Carried by photons that race
About but aren't really there
(They're virtual, I swear),
Yet can exert a force
A zillionth of a horse,
Which can be measured I expect,
It's called the Casimir effect,
He's the one who was the wiz
Who measured the nothing that is.

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The data are consistent with, but do not demonstrate, a preference for *fru* mutant males to court other males. In fact, it is commonly observed that wild-type male flies will initiate courtship behavior with both males and females and desist if the courtship object does not respond positively. The mutant *fru* data cannot be a basis for inferring that *fru* influences choice per se rather than presence of preference or the inability to perceive rejection.

Alteration of the ability to choose also does not necessitate choice as bimodal in *Drosophila*, and to conclude that it is bimodal in human beings is premature. Many social scientists and behaviorists suggest that sexual preference in humans is best understood as culturally and historically contingent, rather than as a discrete, biological phenomenon. Sexual behavior is difficult to measure because of the unreliability of personal accounts, as well as other methodological problems (3).

It is possible that a human gene with extensive sequence similarity to *Drosophila fru* will be found. It may also have similar molecular functions and even be alternatively spliced to result in sex-specific products. But, in light of the phylogenetic relationship of *Drosophila* and *Homo sapiens*, it is unlikely that such a gene will be a gene for mating preference or mating behavior.



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"Not being a protein chemist, I just want to clone the gene, express it, isolate the protein and move on," says Malcolm Zellars, who's working on his post-doc at Tufts University Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, USA.