

Words: the poet's tools to life

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Words- The Poet's Tools to Life Words are powerful tools that inspire and connect people. Words challenge and inspire a poet's audience by allowing the author to convey different messages to the reader. Utilizing these tools, the poet can take readers to faraway places, lend understanding, and evoke strong emotions. Writers string them together in the hope of communicating new ideas that expose their deepest fears, desires, and truths. In " The Chimney Sweeper, " William Blake utilizes literary devices of irony, diction, and rhythm throughout the poem. One literary tool Blake effectively uses is irony. Throughout, " The Chimney Sweeper, " Blake uses different forms of irony to focus and control the reader's attention. Dramatic irony is present because Blake allows, even demands, his audience to have a deeper understanding of the harshness of the chimney sweeper's situation than the child is able to recognize himself. The first few lines of the poem demonstrate the speaker's nonchalant view of his difficult life: " When my mother died I was very young, /And my father sold me while yet my tongue /Could scarcely cry "'weep!'weep!'weep!'weep! " (Blake 1-3). From these lines, the audience learns that the child's loss of his mother and the betrayal of his father lead to his enslavement as a chimney sweeper. Despite being abandoned by his parents, the child is too naive to feel sorry for himself, or to blame anyone else for his situation. In line 3, the child's inability to say the word " sweep" creates a powerful example of repetition that signifies the child's unhappiness. His mispronunciation of the word leads to the sound " weep!' weep!' weep!' weep! " resembles the sound of a crying child. This line simultaneously represents both the child's young age and his sadness. The final line of the first stanza continues to play with the dramatic

irony of the poem: " So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep, " implies that the speaker simply accepts his duty as a chimney sweeper in a matter-of-fact tone, by the use of the word " so" at the beginning of the line. This line is powerful because it reveals the innocence of the child through his blindness toward the brutal realities of his own world. He recognizes that he sleeps in soot, but he mentions the fact as if it is simply a normal way of life. Also, the importance of this line is demonstrated through its internal rhyme using the words " sweep" and " sleep, " Blake juxtaposes the ideas of sweeping and sleeping, suggesting that sleeping is an escape from the exhausting work the chimney sweepers must do. The word " your" is important because it implicates the reader, which involves the audience in the action of the poem. As the poem progresses to the second stanza, the audience's attention is shifted to Tom Dacre, a young, inexperienced chimneysweeper: " There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head, /That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved: so I said, /" Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare, /You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair" (Blake 5-8). Beginning with the description of Tom Dacre, the speaker's diction becomes important because the careful choice of words reveal a deeper meaning within the poem. For example, the simile comparing Tom's hair to the curled wool on a lamb's back is significant because of the religious reference to the lamb. In the Bible, Christ is referred to as the Lamb of God. In the same sense, little Tom Dacre is a child of God who is being prepared for sacrifice. Another important example is the " white hair" of Tom Dacre. The word " white" signifies innocence and a holy light about the sacrificial child. The powerful diction continues into the next stanza, Tom

Dacre has a vision of hope, when Blake writes, " And so he was quiet, and that very night, /As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight! /That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack, /Were all of them locked up in coffins of black (9-12). The black coffins are significant because they represent the chimneys that confine the dark, lifeless young children of the sweeps. Blake demonstrates the loss of childhood as the bodies that have become their lives are the only part left of the overworked children. This idea of escaping their lives as chimneysweepers through death continues in the next two stanzas: " And by came an angel, who had a bright key, /And he opened the coffins, and let them all free; /Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing, they run, /And wash in a river, and shine in the sun. /Then naked and white, all their bags left behind, They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind; /And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy, /He'd have God for his father, and never want joy" (13-20). In these two stanzas, the words " Angel, " " Sun, " and " God" are each capitalized to represent positive powers in the lives of the chimney sweeps. The adjective " bright" creates a heavenly image of the key that the Angel uses to unlock the coffins in order to set the boys free. The Angel's promise to the children is the loving fatherhood of God and the motherhood of Nature, apparent in the descriptions of " the green plain, " " the river, " " the clouds, " and " the wind. "When promised to a group of young orphans in return for obedience and hard work, the ideas of reaching heaven and being loved are appealing to innocent children, but the children have the price of death they must pay in order to achieve any of the warmth or happiness. The dramatic irony and diction are powerful in " The Chimney Sweeper, " but the rhythm of the poem is particularly unique

because it causes a serious subject child abuse to be approached in a childlike, innocent manner. The end rhyme pattern of the poem is couplets in AA, BB throughout the entire poem. Because of this pattern, the poem sounds like a nursery rhyme; it has an apparent singsong nature to it as it is being read aloud. The importance of the rhythm in this poem is its ability to emphasize the innocence of the children. Although Blake is writing about a serious social problem, he approaches it in such a way that he is able to reveal the harsh realities through a child's perspective. The innocence of the chimney sweeps makes them naive about the cruelties of the world and indicts the reader, who is possibly not so innocent. The children do not know any other way of life, so they simply accept theirs, even if it is horrific. The rhythm of the poem highlights William Blake's genius and ability to capture the harsh truths of the world through poetry. The final stanza of the poem is worth examining because it demonstrates Blake's use of diction, rhythm, and irony simultaneously in the conclusion of the poem, " And so Tom awoke, and we rose in the dark, /And got with our bags and our brushes to work. /Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm: /So, if all do their duty, they need not fear harm" (21-24). The diction in this stanza is particularly important because the slant rhymes at the end of the lines contrast the ideas that the words represent. In other words, attention is drawn to the words " dark" and " work, " and also to the words " warm" and " harm" because they do not rhyme exactly. Blake writes that " Tom was happy and warm, " but he contrasts the word warm" with " harm" so that it appears Tom's life is in danger. The rhythm of the poem continues to be lively throughout the final stanza, still resembling the voice of a child. Irony

is presented in the final stanza of the poem when Tom awakes from his dream, ready to fulfill his duties as a chimneysweeper. The beauty of Tom's innocence is that he is naive enough to believe that virtue will be rewarded in the world. Even if his faith is not rewarded in worldly conditions, there is a bizarre comfort in knowing that his faith is strong enough to transcend the harsh realities of his world and carry him into a brighter place. The beauty of "The Chimney Sweeper" lies in William Blake's ability to demonstrate the exploitation and loss of innocence of abused children by utilizing different literary devices. Blake utilizes his powerful words to inspire and connect people to the harsh realities that young chimney sweepers were forced to face during the Industrial Age. Blake does a wonderful job of challenging his audience to open their eyes to the horrors of child trafficking. Using his different literary devices Blake forces his readers to lend their compassionate understanding and evoke their strong emotions. William Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper" utilizes literary devices of irony, diction, and rhythm throughout the poem to expose the horrible truths of the Industrial Age.