

The stolen child essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The aim of this essay is to analyse W. B Yeats's poem, 'The Stolen Child', by concentrating on his use of literary devices. By carefully analysing the features of language he has used to create the poem I aim to discover how their effects contribute to the overall meaning. The literary devices I will be concentrating on the most shall be metaphor, metonymy and sound patterning. Metaphor ; Metonymy W. B Yeats has used an abundance of figurative language throughout the poem.

The most prominent is his use of both metaphor and metonymy in the refrain that is repeated four times at the end of each stanza (changing slightly in the final stanza). The refrain consists of four lines but it is in the fourth line, written in iambic heptameter, that contains the most significant figurative language of the entire poem. "The world's more full of weeping than you can understand" Here 'the world' metonymically stands for the child's reality, his society and life, not the literal meaning of soil, gases and water that make up the earth's core.

This use of metonymy is used by Yeats to aid the reader/listener to visualize an abstract idea. The speaker of the poem, an enticing faery, refers to the entire world when pointing out its troubles to the child. The effect of this generalization is to increase the impact of the issues, to show the child that within his reality there is no escaping such troubles. This adds considerable weight to the faeries persuasive tone that he has adopted in this poem. The faery is clearly attempting to entice the child from one world to another by denouncing the world that the child occupies.

To assist this persuasive argument in this particular line in the refrain Yeats has used more metonymy. The lexis 'weeping' is used here to associate weeping with sorrow, hurt and upset. It carries many connotations but to a child weeping is the most prominent verb that is associated to unhappiness. It is a verb that all children are accustomed to, as it is their main way of expressing disdain at something that causes them upset or misery from the moment they are born. The effect of this line is also enhanced by the use of alliteration.

The close repetition of the 'w' sound on the onset of both 'world' and 'weeping' is used here to highlight the faeries denouncement of the world and the repetition of the 'w' is used to make the words remain at the front of the child's mind. When the faery refers to its own world Yeats has again used figurative language. This time it is said in a more positive way in comparison to how he spoke about the child's reality. For example, in the first stanza the faery speaks of a 'leafy island' (line three). We know that this is a metaphor because the tenor (literal term) is the island whereas the vehicle 'leafy' is a metaphorical term.

Islands cannot be made from leaves alone therefore the ground of this metaphor is the similarities we draw from 'leafy' and 'island' to conclude that this particular island is lush and fertile. This creates a very positive image for the child as it reflects that the island would be able to provide him with food, shelter and comfort. A far cry from the 'weeping world' he currently inhabits. A world where poverty and deprivation are most likely to be the main factors of its sorrow. This metaphor and its rich connotations are

mirrored throughout stanza one. Yeats has used parallelism here to build upon the faeries argument.

In lines seven and eight it speaks of the richness of the islands fertility. He does this by using hyperbolic language to describe the fruits that this island produces. " Full of berries" and " And the reddest stolen cherries" Here the faery is also being rather clever and quite sinister in his persuasive tone. It knows exactly how to entice a child by drawing his attention to the gains and pleasures of its world and lifestyle. Yeats use of parallelism throughout this stanza is a device used to build up the faeries argument to a climax, which is the refrain.

If we look again at the refrain more figurative language and parallelism can be found. For example, in its second line, " To the waters and the wild", the ' waters' metonymically stand for the faeries world through its association with its description. By ambiguously calling it ' the waters' the faery creates a fantastic image of fun for the child as children have a fascination with water. To them it connotes playing, swimming, exploring and none of the dangers adults associate with it. This is also where I detect a hint of being sinister in the faeries tone.

The parallelism to assist this line and the faeries argument can be found in lines twenty eight and thirty where ' the waters' are further described as ' gushing' and ' pools among the rushes'. The connotations that these phrases help continue the theme of fun that is to be found in the faeries world. The metonymy in line two of the refrain continues with the phrase ' the wild'. This is obviously an association of the faeries lifestyle. The lexis ' wild' hold

many connotations but within this context it refers to the lack of rules that the child's reality would contain.

Basically the faery is promising the child total freedom as well as the pleasure, fun and abundance of ripe fruits from the land. From this we can clearly see how the effects of Yeats use of figurative language and parallelism build up the faeries enticement technique to tempt the child from his world. It isn't until the final stanza and after the child's allegiance has been secured that the faery reveals some positive aspects of the child's world. This is how Yeats has managed to depict the faery as a tempter to mankind. It confirms our suspicions that were drawn from previous stanzas through the faeries ambiguity.

In these stanzas the faery repeats (in the refrain) the troubles of the world but never confronts them directly. It never clearly states what these 'troubles' actually are instead he uses figurative language, playing on the connotations that the child would draw from them. In the final stanza the faeries tone shifts from persuasive to smugness. His prize has now been secured and he gloats over his victory. Yeats has shown this in many ways, one of them being the shift from the faery addressing the child, 'come away o human child' (line 38) to 'for he comes, the human child' (line 50).

And also by more use of metaphorical language. On lines forty-six and forty-seven we have the metaphor, "or the kettle on the hob sing peace into his breast". Here the faery finally speaks positively and clearly about the child's world but its not directed at the child, instead the faery is gloating about the things that the child will now miss through his agreement to follow the faery.

This particular metaphor strongly depicts all the comforts of home life, the life the child has with his family.

By fusing together the image of the kettle singing and the satisfying comfort its song brings to the child Yeats has managed to express just how sinister and ruthless this faery actually is by showing it's pleasure in taking the child away from this world. Sound patterning Yeats uses a variety of sound patterns throughout the poem. One of these literary devices is rhythm. The sounds and swing of his language help to get the tone across to the reader. For example, in the refrain the cadence of the clause, ' hand in hand' emphasises the faeries persuasive tone and eagerness to entice the child.

The rise and fall of the syllables makes the pace quicken and reflects his effort to entice. The simple emphatic rhythm also emphasises the theme of unity that this faery has adopted in its ploy and this theme is highlighted through both repetition and rhythm. This is but one way in which sound can be seen to have an effect beyond that of the meaning. The pace of these words echo the pace of thought, hence our understanding of this thought is strengthened. Rhythm is also used by Yeats to build up the faeries persuasive argument until it reaches a rhythmic climax in each refrain.

To illustrate this I will analyse stanza one to show how this works. The first four lines are written in perfect iambic feet alternating between seven and six syllables in each line that start with an unstressed syllable. These four lines are the opening of the faeries plan of enticement. The fifth line is then different as it is in iambic trimeter. This indicates that the faery has elevated its argument to a new level. Lines six, seven and eight have then had a

trochee placed at the beginning of the iambic feet. This change helps to highlight the fruitfulness of the faeries world (as discussed earlier) and leads us into the refrain.

The first three lines of the refrain now all begin with a stressed syllable. This effect makes the faeries words stand out more. These apparent irregularities all indicate different levels of persuasiveness that explodes in the refrain as the stanza reaches its rhythmic climax, which is to be found in the final line of the refrain. This is the longest line of the whole stanza and poem overall as it is written in iambic heptameter. The rhythmic climax of stanza one is aided by a definite rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme of this particular stanza is ABABCCDDEEFF.

This rhyme scheme compliments the irregular rhythm within this stanza, which highlights the different sections, or build up of the faeries argument. As the rhyme scheme shows, lines one to four have the same pattern of alternating rhymes, highland/lake and island/wake. Then rhyming couplets are used to complete the stanza, rats/lats, cherries/berries and so on. All of the end rhymes used are masculine rhymes. They are mainly made up of single syllable words where the nucleus and coda contain identical sounds. These strong rhymes reflect the strength and determination of the persuasive tone.

This rhyme scheme also connects a pair of ideas together on a conflicting relationship with each other, similar to heroic couplets. A good example of how this works to create effect is in the second stanza. On lines twenty-one and twenty-two we find the end rhymes, ' bubbles' and ' troubles'. The

couplet here clearly shows the faeries comparisons between the child's reality (troubles) and the faeries home (bubbles). Each end rhyme contains strong connotations. Bubbles extend the idea of the faeries world being full of fun and nice things while the child's world is simply full of troubles.

More literary devices have been used in this poem to compliment and create effects like the ones already discussed. They all aid the poet to express his intended meaning. One of these devices is onomatopoeia. On line thirty-three the lexis 'whispering' is a word that sounds like the action. The inclusion of onomatopoeia helps create vivid imagery as the strong sound of the word immediately depicts a clear image of what is being described. Alliteration has also been used throughout the poem. For example, 'wandering water' and 'seek for slumbering trout'.

This effect aids the imagery and the repetition of the consonants on the onset position makes the poem sound pleasurable, which also makes the faeries tone appeal to the child, hence assisting the temptation. In conclusion by analysing use of metaphor, metonymy and sound patterning in this poem by W. B Yeats I have discovered how each literary device assists the other to highlight key points in the faeries enticement plan. On their own they each create imagery and connotations for the reader/listener but together they express the meaning that the poet intended to show.