

William blake's
chimney sweeper
poems analysis
essay sample



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Both of William Blake's poems reflect on the heart wrenching and unfortunate things young boys in the late 1700s were forced to do as chimney sweepers, yet their point of views and tones are quite different. Whereas in the first poem, Blake uses an innocent and undeserving young boy as the speaker to project a tone of naiveté while in the second poem he creates a speaker that is an all knowing adult and reveals the hypocrisy in the way society, the church in particular, allows these boys to live, producing a cynical tone.

The first poem is told from the point of view of a sweet and innocent young boy. The boy states that his father sold him before he could even speak with ease and as if it were nothing unusual. He reflects on having his head shaved as more of a blessing than a misfortune because without his snowy white hair on his head it cannot be tainted by the darkness of the soot. He brings peace to Tom Dacre by telling him about his dream of a beautiful and glorious land that they are promised by having God as their father. All they have to do is obey and do as they are told and when the time comes, they will be able to live freely and happily in that land. The poem ends by describing the cold day the young boy is faced with as he awakens before the sun even comes up to set out for work. Despite these horrible circumstances, he is happy, warm, and full of hope inside as he awaits the day when he gets to live in the exciting land of his dreams. The young boy's inability to recognize the unfairness and terrible situation he has been put in is made so much more horrible by the fact that, through his innocence, he is oblivious to the pain and torture he is faced with daily.

The second poem is told from the point of view of a realistic adult. This adult speaker fully understands the hardships that the young children are faced with as chimney sweepers. In the very beginning, the speaker notes the “ little black thing among the snow.” The speaker proceeds to inquire about the whereabouts of the little boy's parents.

The writer uses the rest of the poem to fully explain the boy's answer, proceeding to tell the readers that his parents are in church “ praising God and his Priest and King.” The nonchalant reply of the boy to the adult's question clearly shows his lack of awareness of the sad situation he is in and the unbelievable way the trusted adults in his life such as his parents and those over the church have clearly ignored the requirements of his healthy well-being. This poem was used mainly as a statement of truth against the wrongdoing and ignorance of the church as they praise God but knowingly and without regard to moral decency subject their young to harmful and unjust working conditions.

The young boy as the speaker of the first poem clearly displays a tone of pure innocence. The conditions of working in a chimney are absolutely awful. They are hazardous to not only the boy's physical condition and health, but also his mental well-being as he has to wake up early for work and is not getting the proper amount of sleep. His father sold him into the chimney sweep profession when he was very young and subsequently signed him up for an early death. He has been virtually abandoned and neglected. The young boy's hopeful outlook on life despite the terrible conditions he is faced with daily shows his innocence and inability to recognize the true harm in the

work he does daily because he sees the good in everyone and trusts that God would not put him in a dangerous situation.

The second poem has a tone of anger and crucial critical review of the religious system of the society in the late 1700s. The adult speaker completely understands the harsh conditions in the life of a chimney sweeper and the fact that children are allowed to be put in these situations by the trusting adults in their life. In his conversation with the young boy, the boy reveals that his parents are away at church worshipping and praising the leaders of the church, God, and their King. The adult speaker blames these entities for the poor lives that the children are forced to lead. Since the child in this poem blames his parents for his life, unlike the child in the first poem who is oblivious to his situation, the tone is bitter and judgmental of a social and religious system that fails to scrutinize its members for abandoning their children and responsibilities.

William Blake's Chimney Sweeper poems were taboo for his day. He called attention to the truth that many during his time were aware of but too scared to scrutinize. The church and the government were virtually inseparable in the late 1700s. Both allowed young children to be put in harsh and harmful situations without any regard to the well-being of the children. Though the first poem is more reflective of the actual conditions the children are faced with, the second poem focuses more on the condemning of the entities that allow children to be placed in such awful conditions. Without regard to the purpose, point of view, or tone of each of the poems, both were powerful and iconic.