

Infant Sorrow

BY WILLIAM BLAKE

Infant Sorrow was published in *Songs of Experience* in 1794. Its companion piece *'Infant Joy'* was published several years earlier in 1789. This poem deals with the darker, less pleasant sides of bringing a new life into the world opposing ideas of childbirth and new life.

Stanza 1:

**My mother groand! my
father wept.**

**Into the dangerous world
I leapt:**

**Helpless, naked, piping
loud;**

Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

The child says that his mother groaned and his father wept when he leapt into the dangerous world. The word **groaned** means making sound with miserable tone. The child says that as soon as he **leapt** i.e. jumped into the dangerous world, his parents started crying in grief and despair. Here we have 2 important things to take into consideration. First, the child considers world 'dangerous' though he has just come into it. Thus he is mature, experienced and well aware of the upcoming dangers right from his birth. Second, he says that his parents are weeping because of his birth which

on contrary to the what happens usually. The are sorrowful because they know well, how their child will be the part of suffering. He will have to work day and night in the factories.

The child called himself **helpless and naked**.

These two words symbolise how vulnerable the child is and his parents are helpless in protecting him from the dangers that await him. He is **piping loud** i.e. crying loudly.

In the fourth line, the child says that he is **like a fiend hid in a cloud**. Fiend means a monster or a cruel person. Cloud may be the protection of his parents which is vulnerable and very limited. Now he calls him fiend not

because he is going to be a demon but because he will soon be a cruel person when he will be working in the harsh conditions. Thus the word fiend is not used in negative way but to show how poverty makes a man cruel and the people who are born poor are cruel right from their childhood.

Stanza 2:
Struggling in my fathers
hands:
Striving against my
swaddling bands:
Bound and weary I
thought best
To sulk upon my mothers
breast.

In the second stanza, the child says that when his

father (while weeping) takes him into his hand, he starts **struggling** and resisting as he does not want to be comforted by his father. In the second line, he says that when his father tries to put him in the **swaddling bands**, he started resisting again. In these two lines, we find that the child is resisting the care given by his father. There can two reasons – either the parents are not been able to provide him proper care and irritating him or because he, as a mature child doesn't want to get used to the comforts.

In the third line, he feels himself to be **bound and weary** and 'sulks' upon the breasts of his mother. He is bound in the swaddling

bands which makes him tired and weary. Note that the word weary is usually used for matured people. Hence he is mature and experienced enough.

In the end, he **sulks upon his mother's breasts**. Sulk refers to being irritated. The child has no love or compassion starts sucking the breasts of his mother to survive. The line symbolises a lack of emotions and compassion among the working class family.

Structure and Form

'Infant Sorrow' by William Blake is a two-stanza poem divided into sets of four lines, known as quatrains.

These quatrains follow a [rhyme scheme](#) of AABB. Blake makes use of several literary devices in '*Infant Sorrow*.' These include [alliteration](#), caesurae, [similes](#), and [enjambment](#).

Alliteration is a common literary device that refers to words that start with the same consonant sound. For instance, "bands" and "best" in the last two lines of the poem and "lept" and "loud" in lines two and three of the first stanza.

Caesurae are moments in poems in which the poet inserts [a pause](#) in the middle of a line. For example, the first line of the poem reads: "My mother groand! my father wept".

There is a good example of a **simile** in '*Infant Sorrow*.' It can be found in line four of the first stanza where Blake's speaker compares themselves to "a fiend hid in a cloud."

Enjambment is the continuation of a sentence or phrase from one line of poetry to the next- without interruption.i.e

**Bound and weary I
thought best
To sulk upon my mothers
breast.**