

Pedagogical Stylistics as a Tool in the Classroom: An Investigation of EFL Undergraduate Students' Ability in Analyzing Poetic Language

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Abstract

This research paper draws on applying the tools of pedagogical stylistics in teaching literature in particular poetry to English as a foreign language (EFL) undergraduate Iraqi students. The language of literature is rich with social context, exquisite deviant forms, and vocabulary. This paper aims at examining to what extent pedagogical stylistics can be helpful in increasing students' literary awareness. In addition, to examine how it can help them to interpret and analyze selected poems that have been chosen for them to achieve this goal. For the purpose of gathering the required data a pre-test and a post-test are conducted. Verdonk's (2013) approach is adopted in teaching stylistic tools to the students. The participants were (40) second-year students of the academic year 2018-2017 from University of Baghdad, Iraq. Moreover, a questionnaire is distributed to know students' opinions about studying stylistics. The final results proved that (1-) pedagogical stylistics tools are of great significance to pay heed to the language of poetry or literary language in general, (2-)the questionnaire shows that most agreed on studying stylistics in the classroom. Thus, this study highly recommends that teachers of literary subjects should focus on stylistic tools in teaching literary texts.

Keywords: EFL Iraqi students, literary awareness, pedagogical stylistics, poetry

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1. Introduction

The present study presents a technique for teachers of the English language, especially those who teach English literature. Teachers should be empowered with tools and methods in order to teach literary works to foreign learners. Integrating stylistics in the classroom is one of the contemporary movements in the field of stylistics. It is worth noting that creating literary awareness to understand and interpret literature requires knowing certain stylistic skills.

Zyngier and Fialho (2010) demonstrate that most teachers assume that learning literature cannot be tested, it is sufficient for a student to learn literature theoretically. Moreover, teachers tend to look into text irrespective to its context or participants. Some stylisticians were aware of this assumption and try to put a systematic way to equip students with stylistic tools that help them to improve their experimental skills in learning literature and this can be achieved by developing classroom activities(p.14).

2. Aims of the Study

The study aims at teaching students stylistic techniques to enable them to analyze and interpret poetry as one genre of literature. It also aims at enhancing students' awareness of stylistics as a helpful tool for understanding their literary texts, especially poetic language.

3. Limitation of the Study

The study is limited to second-year students of intermediate level in the department of English /College of Education for women/ University of Baghdad/ Iraq during the academic year 2017/2018. Forty students were selected to be the participants of the present study.

4. Pedagogical Stylistics and Past Relevant Work

According to Clark (2007), pedagogical stylistics is a new trend that is concerned with teaching stylistics in the classroom. It is used to enhance the students' awareness of the language used in their texts. The students are taught to analyze the text at three levels; the first level is concerned with analyzing the formal properties of the text which include analyzing phonology, vocabulary and the syntax of phrases and clauses and also analyzing the relationships between sentences, paragraphs. Secondly, stylistics goes beyond the formal features of the text. It concentrates on the text contact between a text, other texts, and the reader. Students are taught that meaning is not stable, it depends mainly on how the text is interpreted by the reader. In this sense, stylistics has an interactive function. Thirdly, stylistics concerned itself with the socio-cultural context within which reading and writing take place. Contextual factors such as the cultural background of the reader and the situation in which a text is read must be taken into consideration when analyzing a text(p.60).

It is worth noting that stylistics is a very controversial discipline according to many scholars. It is assumed that defining the term is unattainable. Scholars do not agree whether to put stylistics under the linguistic study or literary criticism. (Widdowson, 1992), as cited in Zyngier (2001) states that:

Perhaps it would be easier to accept the fact that the area is too fuzzy to be dealt with, but that we just cannot do without it because stylistics offers a method of systematizing what has been called the "elusive" element in literature (p. 367).

Hence, stylistics is a strong tool that can be used in the classroom in the teaching of the text. Zyngier (2001) is one of the scholars who has a great interest in this area. In her study "Towards a Cultural Approach to Stylistics," she provides a theoretical model to help students understand the text within the context (p. 366-380).

Zyngier (2001) argues that a text cannot be detached from other necessary participants in a literary system such as production, mediation, reception, and post-processing. The writer is responsible for the production, the reception is carried out by the reader, post-processing is the job of critics and finally, a mediation which is carried out by more than one person or institution, in our study, teachers, schools and educational system are all responsible of mediation (p. 373).

At the end of her discussion, Zyngier (2001) offers some theoretical guidelines to a contextually-oriented stylistics. For example, sensing the meaning or the impact of other's work is enough for providing any criticism. Also, stylistic analysis shapes new patterns. These patterns are perceived by the reader as evocative linguistic patterns. Furthermore, students should know that dealing with these stylistic patterns is part of their work as critics. When students know that there are a variety of patterns which provoke a different response, they can enhance their understanding of some patterns that have not been encountered before. Relevant to this point, learning to control

It is also necessary to emphasize that students need to process texts as discourse.

By the time the students become well experienced in stylistics, their responses will be more automatic and complicated. Examining the literary language is the first step in the way of literary experience. Not forgetting to mention that any reader's personal and social context must be taken into consideration when carrying any stylistic method (p.277- 278).

Likewise, Hall (2014) along the same line summarizes some crucial advantages and applications of stylistics. These include; first, literature can be taught by applying stylistic tools and techniques. It enables to understand and appreciate the creativity of the language of literary works. Second, stylistics is beneficial in the field of education, whether teaching first, second language or foreign language. Finally, teaching language use and language awareness for learners is also one of the key values of stylistics (p. 240).

Hall (2014) continues to explain that studying foregrounding, deviant forms, irregular structures and peculiarities of the literary language helps to unravel meaning and finding a correct interpretation.

Hall (2014) demonstrates that pedagogical stylistics basically starts when Widdowson publishes his book *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* (1975) followed by Carter, Short and others in the beginning of 1980s (p. 244).

Hall (2014) proceeds to outline the difference in points of views between Widdowson and Carter. According to the former, a literary work is a unique form of language differs from the daily language. Widdowson believed that individual readers are the key factors in the process of interpretation.

Another influential study concerning analyzing some stylistic aspects such as genre, narrative structure, point of view and characterization of a text is carried by Clark, (2007, p.60-75). In this study, she introduces these stylistic aspects to undergraduate students who encounter stylistics for the first time. The students are asked to analyze two novels on detective fiction. The detective fiction is chosen as a genre for the analysis because it sheds the light on the social, cultural and psychological background in which a certain novel is written (Clark & Zyngier, 1998).

Clark (2007) designs lectures and workshops for four weeks to help students in their work. She organizes a module of two parts: in the first part, the students are introduced to different stylistic methods through weekly lectures, seminars, and workshops. Then the students are asked to apply each of the stylistic aspects that are mentioned above in the analysis of the two novels. In this way, the students are taught the different aspects acquired for their analysis within the context of their application to a particular genre of fiction (p.63).

The lectures are followed by a workshop in which the students are arranged into pairs and asked to answer a set of questions concerning their lectures. The questions are designed to examine the students' understanding of the lectures (Clark, 2007,p.67).

The study shows that the adopted approach has a pedagogical advantage in the sense that students apply the concept outlined in the lecture to the analysis of the chosen texts. This enhances the students' chances of success (Clark,2007, p. 65).

By comparing two different novels from two different periods, the students get good knowledge about the social and cultural changes that have taken place in writing novels. Moreover, this comparison opens new horizons for other studies, like analyzing the same aspects through comparing two novels written by the same author, or by comparing a novel tackles a female detective with one that tackles a male detective (Clark, 2007, p. 75).

Furthermore, in one of the crucial studies conducted by Carter (2010) in which he summarizes the main historical developments in pedagogical stylistics. He explains that certain writers enrich the field with their works. For example, Widdowson (1975, 1990), Short (1989) and Watson and Zyngier (2006) is a recent publication that exhibits both theory and practice in the field (p. 115).

Carter (2010) notably remarks that pedagogical stylistics does not aim at imposing a fixed and uninformed interpretation of a single text, but rather emphasizing the necessity that encourages readers to have the freedom in using their extended knowledge to analyze a certain literary work. He also ascertains that there is no 'universal' methodology to interpret a text. In fact, readers should not act in a passive way; they should enrich meaning through their own cultural and linguistic experiences (p. 117).

Additionally, Carter (2010) lists briefly the main developments of pedagogical stylistics as follows:

1. Transformational analysis: this process involves transforming a selected text to a different genre, for example, a poem to a short story. This demands, as Carter (2010), illustrates

"rewriting, transformation and registration". This also invites readers to depend on close reading of a text. Readers should be aware of this kind of text manipulation. Thus, they have to be active in the process of interpretation.

2. New Rhetoric: this refers to the connection with the "classical traditional rhetoric". Simply getting benefit from the theories of rhetoric.
3. Internet-based Classrooms or "Cyberspace Classrooms"
Getting benefit from technology in teaching and learning shows that stylistics is no more confined itself to written data. Relevant to this point, there can be a focus on a new media such as spoken language which can be stored on a computer for the sake of interpretation and analysis. Moreover, within such a class the occurrence of internet communication and verbal interaction(Carter, 2010,p. 120).

In another study, Gavins and Hodson (2007) use pedagogical stylistics in a different way. They are not satisfied with teaching stylistics in the classroom only, but they go to the extent that they want to inspect the transferability of stylistic skills. They believe that most college students are introduced to stylistics as a minor or secondary subject. This idea is sponsored by a staff at the University of Sheffield. The staff designed a program for undergraduate students. The program focuses on the student's role in teaching stylistics. The teachers responsible for the program endeavor to train students to come up on stylistics from their first year in the college (p.27). The aim of the program is to widen students' horizon on practicing stylistic analysis. They want the students to feel that they are "real practicing stylisticians" not only memorizers of some theoretical issues concerning stylistics(p. 30).

At the first level, the students are equipped with the essential tools of stylistic analysis depending on the available textbooks such as (Short,1996: Simpson,1997and 2004 and others). In their second year, the students are given a historical background about the development of discourse from ancient Greece to the present(Gavins &Hodson, 2007, p.29).

When the students reach the third level and final year of study, they start to transfer their analytical skills to other students in different contexts. The programmers divided the students into small groups and distributed them to teach the first year students. The third-year students design worksheets and seminars; they present various sessions and the first year students find these sessions very interesting. The experience is assessed by the teachers as successful. Moreover, it provides a good chance of success to the third year students (Gavins &Hodson,2007, p.31-32).

Gavins and Hodson (2007) further demonstrate that the experience is successful in three ways. First, the third year students became self-confident and began to feel their accomplishment and abilities in designing worksheets and teaching. Second, the exercise engaged the students with the advanced works practically rather than only reading them as they used to do before the experiment. They began to comment and criticize these works in a scientific way. Third, The learning experience given to the students offered them a strong ownership of their old materials which they used to deal with as passive readers only (p,34-36).

5. Poetry in Education

What is the importance of teaching poetry to language learners? What is the main purpose of including poetry in the educational curriculum? And what is unique about poetic language? These questions are posed in order to bring attention to the significance of poetry as a special form of language in the processes of teaching and learning.

In this regard, Widdowson(1992) confirms that poetry can be effective in bringing language awareness. It has great pedagogical values (p.75-85).

One of the techniques suggested by him to teach poetry is to encourage the students to read a poem and give their first impressions. In this way, they can identify what is the main idea or the theme of the poem. After that, their first impressions can be discussed, then, teachers can instruct them to locate textual evidence from the text to prove their views (p. 89-90).

Widdowson (1992) further proposes a tactic of "assemble poetry". This method demands students to work in groups. They can be given 14 lines in random order of a poem and they have to form a poem of 6 lines. In another way, they can be asked to put the lines in the correct order. To increase the difficulty of the task, teachers can also give distractor lines from a different poem. These activities can help to bring the students' attention to the grammatical and lexical cohesiveness of the text. In learning how to arrange the dismantled lines of a poem they can reach to a linguistic and literary appreciation of the poem(p. 101)

Relevant to what is previously mentioned, Akyel (1995) states that the unusual features of the language of poetry make many students and even teachers uninterested in using poetry in the classroom. However, this does not mean that we stop at this point; teachers can enhance students' awareness of poetic language by making the language of the poem the center of attention in the classroom. This can be achieved by making use of stylistic tools starting with analyzing what is uncommon or unique features in the poem, then continue to handle the poem at all levels (p.63).

6. Empirical Study

First, the study aims at registering undergraduate students' awareness of reading literary texts; here selected poems are chosen to achieve the demanded goal. Poetry can distinctively test and examine students' literary awareness and stylistic competence. Poems are usually short in comparison to fiction and drama. In addition, poetry exhibits a variety of stylistic devices.

In this regard, Viana and Zyngier (2017) explain that literary awareness can take many levels: Absence of awareness, index of awareness and existing of literary awareness(p. 5).

They illustrate, as cited in Tompkins(1980), a valuable remark about reading poems:

A poem cannot be understood apart from its results. Its "effects" – psychological and otherwise – are essential to any accurate description of its meaning, since that meaning has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of a reader (Tompkins, 1980, p. ix).

6.1. Participants and the Procedure

The participants are forty students from the second-year intermediate level of proficiency in the English language. In fact, there is a nuisance discrepancy in their levels. The procedure adopted by the researchers has been divided into steps:

The first step is giving the students' a short poem and asking them to interpret and analyze it to check their literary awareness. In this way, they depend only on their background knowledge and experience. The next step is to teach them the main stylistic devices (e.g. Figures of speech, parallelism, foregrounding, deviation) in poetry and what is the role of stylistics in understanding literary works and to check to what extent they focus on the language of poetry to reach to the rightful interpretation. The last step is to distribute a questionnaire to investigate the usefulness of stylistics according to the students' points of view.

As a matter of fact, the students at the University of Baghdad department of English do not study stylistics since it is not included in their syllabus. Thus, this study aims at applying pre-test before lecturing about the tools of stylistics. As well as a post-test which can be set after introducing the main methods and techniques of stylistics to the students.

6.2. Pre-test

Forty answers are collected by the researchers for the initial examination of the ability of students to analyze and interpret selected lines from a short poem by William Wordsworth "daffodils"(see: Appendix A). It is quite obvious that the students have difficulty in reading and analyzing this poem. At the time of the test, they were perplexed. They did not know how to analyze this rather simple poem which is suitable for intermediate level students.

The primary results of the pre-test showed that all students have no idea about what a stylistic analysis is; It has been noted that students carried a literary criticism 'as they used to do in their lectures' rather than a stylistic analysis. Some students failed completely to grasp the main idea of the poem; they did not even understand the original meaning of the poem, for example, five students thought that the poet in *line 3* talked about a crowd of people that looked like a host of flowers which is completely opposite to what the poet meant. Other students explained the literal meaning of the word; they only gave synonymies to some difficult words in the poem (see figure (1)).

Finally, no student came across the rhyme and rhythm of the poem, nor they refer to the figures of speech, linguistic features and the images used in the poem.

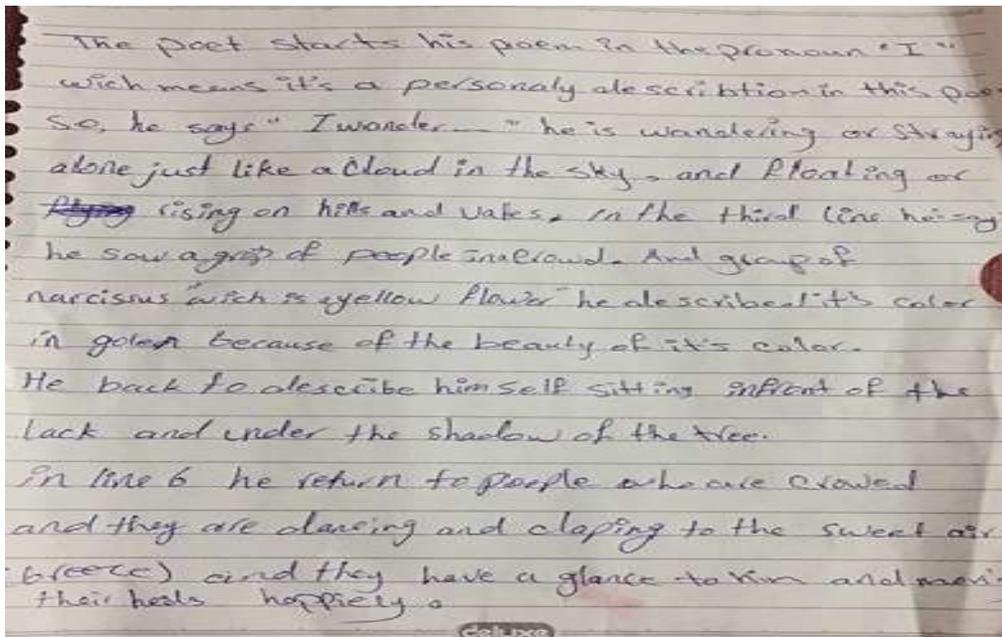


Figure (1) A Sample of The Pre-Test by One of the Students

6.3. Post-test

Before exposing the students to the post-test. It is essential to elucidate and give them a clear idea about the nature of poetic language. Though the poems are short in comparison to the other genera, e.g. (drama, fiction) it is considered as a unique form of artistic usage of the language.

To achieve this goal the researchers adopt Verdonk's (2013) approach which is proposed in his "poetic artifice from the poet's and the readers' perspective". In this work, he tries to analyze a poem "London" (see: Appendix B) and proposed a methodology which intends to locate five elements in the poem. These include: semantics, syntax, lexis, phonology, and graphology (p. 12.)

In his past work, Verdonk (2002) shows exactly what these elements focus on, for example, at the graphological level, there is a focus on typographical characteristics. The phonological level refers to rhyme, meter and other figures of speech based on sounds. While the lexical level refers to vocabulary (words) and figures of speech based on meaning, such as (similes, metaphors, hyperboles etc.). The syntactic level, in short, refers to the grammatical structures (p. 58).

Verdonk (2013) emphasizes that stylistics is an interdisciplinary field connects both linguistics and literature. In order to analyze a single poem, we must focus on form and content (linguistic features and literary features)(p.11-12).

He further assumes by studying these levels of language" readers will be able to interpret and understand the meaning. Verdonk illustrates that poets aim at forming unconventional poetic language to attract readers' attention to the poem. They deliberately foreground the language to form what is called "poetry artifice". The reason for selecting this methodology; it is easy to be followed and quite suitable for intermediate level students (Verdonk, 2013, p.12).

It is worth noting that, students are also asked to apply the theory of foreground and pay attention to the aesthetic forms of language. Needless to say, they should not neglect their personal intuitions to interpret poetry.

As Verdonk (2013) emphasizes that: "...stylistics should never be reduced to some mechanical ticking off of the linguistic features of a text, but that, on the contrary, intuition and personal judgment (based on observable textual features) are of paramount importance" (p. 57).

While reviewing the students' achievements in the post-test, the researchers have noted that the students' awareness of using stylistic tools has been improved. Most students tackle the poem "London" from a stylistic viewpoint rather than a literary one as they did in the pre-test. They analyze the poem according to the levels that have been introduced to them. They concentrate on lexical, graphological, grammatical, phonological levels, detecting most unusual uses and forms of the language, most notably, the deviation at these levels.

In addition to what has been mentioned before; more than one positive indicator have been detected in the answers of the students: first, the students' responses highly to the experiment trying to prove their ability in stylistic analysis. Second, most students concentrate on the same levels of analysis which means that they analyze the poem systematically, providing the necessary evidence from the text itself(see figure 2).

One more point to be mentioned here is that; nearly all students didn't refer to figures of speech such as: simile, metaphor, and images, and this is very promising because the selected poem does not contain these concepts.

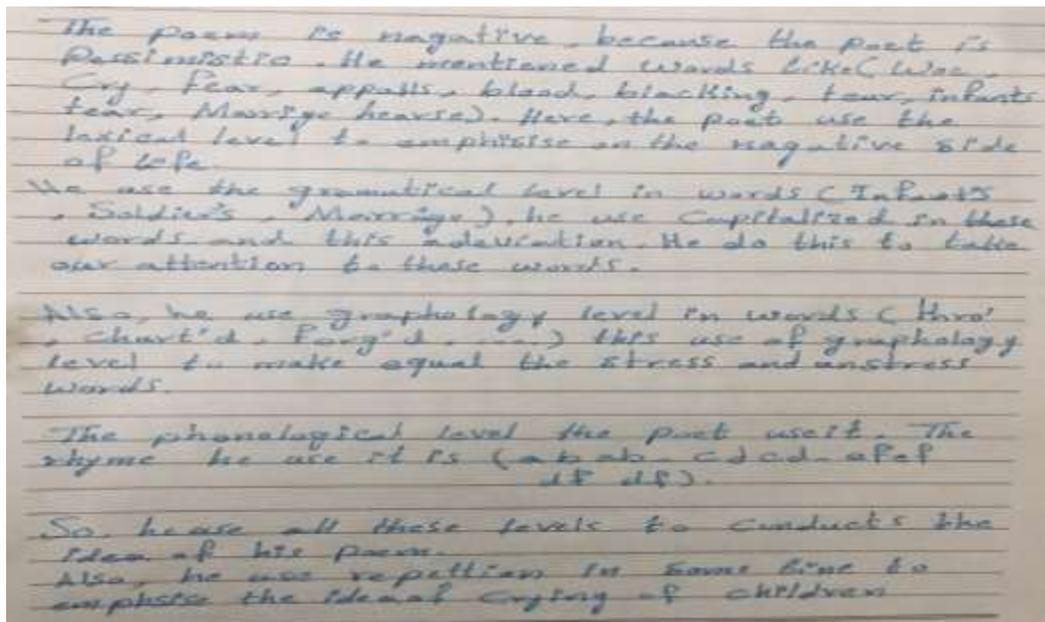


Figure (2) A Sample of One of the Students' Analysis in the Post-test

7. Questionnaire

In addition to what have been done, a questionnaire was distributed to the same forty students in order to see the impact of teaching some stylistic techniques on the way of analyzing and interpreting poetry. Results revealed that most of the students agree that pedagogical stylistics helped them to overcome problems related to meaning and enabled them to focus more on figurative language and understanding the unfamiliar combination of words by knowing the concept of foregrounding. The results also revealed that before introducing students to these concepts they depend on merely the literal meaning of words without paying attention to the poetic creativity and aesthetic elements of the language.

The questionnaire which was distributed to the students contains the following questions about stylistics:

- i. Stylistics helps to interpret and analyze poems.
- ii. Stylistics is difficult and misleading, it does not help to analyze poems.
- iii. It makes no difference.

Table 1. The Results of the Questionnaire.

Questions	Percentage of 40 Students' Choices	
	Number	%
Stylistics helps to interpret and analyze poems.	37	%92,5
Stylistics is difficult and misleading, it does not help to analyze poems.	0	%0
It makes no difference.	3	%7,5

8. Conclusions

This study introduced the techniques of pedagogical stylistics to the students and proved to be of a noticeable importance in terms of bringing the students' attention to crucial elements of the literary language especially poetry. Based on the results collected from pre-test and post-test, it is quite obvious that students' analyses contain aspects of both aesthetic language and their literary intuition. Finally, most of the students agreed that stylistics is helpful in studying literature. Pedagogical stylistics enabled the students to analyze poems in a systematic way based on textual evidences.

9. Recommendations

According to the obtained results, the following points are recommended:

- 1- Teachers of literature are encouraged to use stylistic techniques in teaching literary works. English language and literature teachers are invited to work together to help students to reach a better comprehension of the literary language.
- 2- There is also an invitation for the syllabus developers and the minister of higher education to incorporate stylistics as one of the subjects in undergraduate studies.
- 3- For researchers to conduct a similar research on other genres such as short stories.
- 4- Arranging workshops to train both linguistics and literature teachers and expose them to the major concepts of stylistics.

5. Another research can be conducted for the fourth year Iraqi students as part of their teaching practice to examine their ability in teaching poems stylistically. Also, to train them how to teach poems to students using pedagogical stylistics.

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Appendices

Appendix A

William Wordsworth 1807

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

Appendix B

London

William Blake, 1757 - 1827

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackning Church appalls;
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.