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Little Boy Crying

By

Mervyn MORRIS

Introduction:

Mervyn Morris' four-stanza *free verse poem*, 'Little Boy Crying,' presents with vivid (visual, auditory and tactile) imagery the emotional conflict that a father suffers after disciplining his three-year-old son. The poem opens with the boy crying as he reacts to being '*struck*' by his father, his perception of his father, and his unsophisticated revenge plots. It continues with his father's conflicted response to his son's tears and concludes with a one-line stanza about the reason why the boy was slapped. The poem exposes the thoughts of the father and son and also reveals that they hold different ideas about discipline. A vital lesson of the poem is that disciplining a child requires strong will and the acceptance that as a parent, your children may momentarily dislike you and think of you as a monster.

Stanza 1;

Line 1: 'Your mouth contorting in brief spite and'

The poem begins with a father addressing his son with the *second-person possessive pronoun*: 'Your,' which suggests that he is speaking directly to him. Continuing, he reveals, using *visual imagery*, that the boy is '*contorting*' his '*mouth*.' His use of '*contorting*' provides the image of the boy making a sad face by distorting his mouth as he cries. The boy's action portrays a visible display of his sadness the way most children do when they are about to cry or when they are crying. It also highlights that the mouth is an essential body part that children use to express their sadness because it is easy to twist/manipulate.

'brief spite and'

Morris continues the line by describing the boy's sad disposition as '*brief*.' His use of '*brief*' waters down the seriousness of the boy's feelings. It suggests that he believes that the boy is only putting up a show and will soon return to being his old self. His use of '*brief*' also suggests that he knows with experience that the boy does not hold a grudge for too long, so the boy will soon forget the experience and return to normal. This idea holds because most children do not hold a grudge for too long; they make it easy for those who have offended them to appease them quickly or just put the unpleasant experience behind them and continue with their lives.

However, Morris confesses that the boy feels '*spite*.' His use of '*spite*' to describe the boy's feelings suggests that the boy displayed visible signs that he wants to harm him, presumably by the hateful looks he directed at Morris. He concludes the line with '*and*,' which signals that he will mention another point.

Stanza 1;

Line 2: '*Hurt, your laughter metamorphosed into howls,*'

The second line of the stanza begins with '*Hurt,*' highlighting that the boy feels a pair of emotions: '*spite*' and '*Hurt.*' '*Hurt*' indicates that the man realises that the boy feels physical and emotional pain.

Morris again addresses the boy as '*your*' for the second time, which indicates that he is still speaking directly to him. He then shifts to the change in the sound that the boy makes, characterising it as '*metamorphosed*' from '*laughter*' to '*howls.*' His use of '*metamorphosed*' indicates that the sound made by the boy changed totally. This detail suggests that something drastic must have occurred to change the boy's demeanour instantly.

This idea of a metamorphosis in the boy's disposition is powerfully presented by Morris' use of the onomatopoeia, '*laughter*' and '*howls,*' in his characterisation of the sounds. His use of the onomatopoeia '*laughter*' to '*howls*' allows the reader to hear the sharp contrast in the sound made by the boy, which enriches their experience of the unfolding scene. The poet's words also reveal that the boy was dispelling soft, happy sounds only moments ago, but now, he is emitting loud, vicious cries. '*Howls*' also indicate that, unlike the boy's '*laughter*' which was continuous and uniform, his '*howls,*' plural, were multiple and distinct. This suggests that the boy released spasms of multiple high-pitched sounds as he cried. '*Howls*' also presents the sounds that the boy made as animalistic and revolting to the hearers. Additionally, the side-by-side placement of the words allows the reader to contrast the sounds and realise their polar opposite nature.

Explanation of the enjambment of lines 1 and 2:

The poet fuses line one to line two using *enjambment*, allowing him to continue without a line break. The use of enjambment also enables him to present the complete emotion that the boy expressed without pausing, just as his son felt '*hurt*' and '*spite*' simultaneously.

Stanza 1;

Line 3: '*Your frame so recently relaxed now tight*'

In the third line of the stanza, the poet again begins with the *anaphora* '*Your.*' His use of '*Your*' emphasises that he continues to speak pointedly at the boy. He adds that there has been another noticeable change in the boy's body which he refers to as '*frame.*' His use of '*frame*' creates the impression that the boy had become unmoving and rigid. Continuing, he adds that this change happened '*recently*' and quickly. He explains that the boy's posture, which was '*relaxed,*' has suddenly become '*tight*' due to '*three-year-old frustration.*' His use of '*relaxed*' presents the boy's muscles as free of stress and un-flexed, while '*tight*' gives the impression that they are now stressed and flexed. His characterisation of the boy's figure this way provides *visual imagery* of the quick change that occurred on his body and appearance. It also offers *visual imagery* of the boy readying for a physical confrontation

by making himself more physically imposing (described as *deimatic* behaviour, animals use this method to make themselves appear frightening to ward off predators).

Stanza 1;

Lines 4 and 5:

4 'With three-year-old frustration, your bright eyes

5 Swimming tears, splashing your bare feet,'

Again using *enjambment*, Morris continues that the boy was burdened 'With three-year-old frustration.' This detail reveals that the boy was only a child and innocent. 'Frustration' suggests that the boy showed visible signs that he was upset by his father's actions. Also, the characterisation of the boy's 'frustration' as that of a 'three-year-old' presents it as infantile and small. It also suggests that it should not be taken to heart because it is immature and unthreatening.

In the second half of the fourth line, Morris repeats 'your' for the fourth time before adding 'bright eyes.' He again employs *enjambment* seen in him dropping to the fifth line before continuing, 'Swimming tears'. 'Bright eyes' presents the boy as adorable/innocent/full of life. It also highlights his inexperience and provides *visual imagery* of the clarity of the boy's eyes. 'Swimming tears' shows that his eyes had become glossy and full of tears. 'Swimming tears' also provides *visual imagery* of his eyes drowning in an overwhelming sea of tears. It also offers visual imagery that the boy's eyes whirled in the sea-like tears until they were dispelled from his eyes, 'splashing' his 'bare feet.' The use of 'splashing' creates the effect that the 'tears' struck the boy's shoeless 'feet,' described as 'bare' indiscriminately and forcefully. 'Swimming tears' and 'splashing tears' are hyperboles that suggest that the little boy is exaggerating his feelings of sorrow. Morris' language means that he does not want the reader to sympathise with the boy because he appears cartoonish when he cries. He wants the reader to realise that, like cartoons, children cry profusely with little effort, so their tears should not be taken seriously.

Stanza 1;

Lines 6 and 7:

6 'You stand there angling for a moment's hint

7 Of guilt or sorrow for the quick slap struck.'

In the sixth line of the stanza, the poet reports, 'You stand there angling.' This expression presents the boy as tactful/shrewd/cunning who is shifting his body to an angle that will allow him to observe his father correctly in order to make the most of the situation. The use of 'angling' creates the impression that he stood in a way that would allow him to properly accentuate his vulnerability and sadness and elicit a show of repentance from his father. Taking such a position is brilliant because it will enable the boy to observe his father's feelings when he sees his tears. Morris describes the boy's ability to quickly unravel his father's actual reaction to his tears as, 'a moment's hint.'

Mervyn Morris adds that his son wants him to show '*guilt or sorrow*.' '*Guilt*' suggests that the boy desires to see him crestfallen and displaying signs that he has come to realise that what he did was wrong, while '*sorrow*' indicates that he wants his father to express remorse and clear signs of repentance. Simply put, the boy wants his father to show that he is sorry for his action: '*for the quick slap struck*.' The final five words of the stanza reveal the speed: '*quick*,' and the reason for the boy's tears: being slapped by his father. '*Quick*' also suggests that the slap came without warning, like a flash, so the boy could not dodge it while '*struck*' creates the effect that the slap was loud and caused the boy intense pain.

The use of '*quick slap struck*' is a blend of *consonance* and *sibilance*. *Consonance* can be seen in the repetition of the 'k' sounds in '*quick*' and '*struck*' while *sibilance* is evidenced in the repetition of the 's' sounds in '*slap struck*.' Together, both *poetic devices provide auditory imagery* of the loud and painful slap that the father dealt the boy. This detail makes the reader feel sympathy for the little boy.

Stanza 2;

Line 1: '*The ogre towers above you, that grim giant*,'

In the second stanza, the poet shifts the poem's focus to how the boy sees him as a father. Here, he uses a blend of *allusions* and *metaphors* to provide a rounded and striking picture for the reader. Additionally, like in the first stanza, he uses *enjambment*, which allows him to flow without interruption from one line to the next as he reveals the interaction between the pair of them.

The poet concludes that his son sees him as '*The ogre*,' a *metaphor* and *direct allusion* to the mythical man-eating creature. '*The ogre*' suggests that the boy is referring to a specific one that most people know, while '*ogre*' confers the poet with the ability to eat humans and suggests that his son views him as a monster and a threat. He continues with another metaphor by stating that he '*towers above you*.' His use of '*towers*' presents him as standing threateningly over the boy. '*Towers*' highlights the massive height difference between the two; the father is a man of enormous height while his son is a speckle that is about to be crushed. '*Towers*' also suggests that the man is preparing to '*fall on*' the boy and destroy him. It also highlights the man's superiority of the man over the boy in stature, intellect, maturity, wisdom etc.

He adds that his son also sees him as a '*grim giant*.' This characterisation, another *metaphor*, especially the word '*grim*,' presents the man as an unsmiling, mountain-of-a-man who has a fearsome presence and as someone that his son cannot reason with. His use of '*giant*' reinforces the considerable difference in size between the pair. The alliteration of the 'g' sound in '*grim giant*' provides *auditory imagery* of the fearful and violent noises that the boy hears when his father speaks and walks.

Stanza 2;

Line 2: *'Empty of feeling, a colossal cruel,'*

He continues that the boy also sees him as someone who is *'Empty of feeling.'* His revelation about the boy's perception of him indicates that he considers him as someone with no empathy or sympathy. In fact, for the boy, he imagines that no matter how badly he hurts, his father will not share/alleviate his pain. It also suggests that when the boy hears him speak, all he hears are threats of violence, so although he is *'empty'* of feelings like compassion and sympathy, he is full of violence and threats.

He ends the second line of the stanza by stating that the boy also sees him as a *'colossal cruel.'* The word *'colossal'* again reminds the reader of the father's enormous stature compared to the boy's smallness. Furthermore, the use of *'cruel'* presents the man as someone who gains satisfaction when torturing small creatures like his son. Here as well, the alliteration of the 'c' sound in *'colossal cruel'* produces auditory imagery of a strong 'kk' sound, which creates the impression that the father goes into very loud fits of laughter when he sees his son suffering.

Stanza 2;

Line 3: *'Soon victim of the tale's conclusion, dead'*

Continuing, Morris adds that his son is in a rush to exact revenge, so he is plotting feverishly to see that it happens *'Soon.'* His use of *'soon'* shows that the boy cannot wait and is impatient to act. He continues that the boy is so confident that his mission has already been accomplished or was going to be successful, so he labelled Morris *'victim.'* His use of *'victim'* shows that he is confident that his father will fall for his plot. It also presents his father as being helpless to change the course of events. He continues that this will happen at *'the tale's conclusion.'* His use of *'tales'* shows that the boy sees his experience as a story with a *'conclusion,'* so he is definite that his plans will come to fruition. The use of *'tales'* is apt because children mostly think of their lives as them playing a role in a movie or as fiction. This idea makes the boy sure that everything will come to an end with his father *'dead At last.'* The conclusion that the boy aims for is quite intense because it shows that the boy reasons that his father's action can only be made up for when the man pays the ultimate price: death. The boy's desire is not altogether strange because children cannot correctly gauge the punishment for perceived wrongs, so they usually overreact. In this instance, the persona cannot comprehend the consequence/effects of his father's death.

Stanza 2;

Line 4: *'At last. You hate him, you imagine'*

'At last' suggests that although it may take a while for this to happen, he believes that it surely will. *'At last'* also carries a sense of a delayed expectation that has finally been fulfilled for the boy. The appearance of *'At last'* in the succeeding line also displays a sense of

triumph and excitement in the boy's voice. It suggests that the boy will feel a boundless sense of exhilaration at the demise of his arch-nemesis.

He also reveals that the little boy he again addresses as 'You' strongly dislikes him, revealing that the boy feels '*hate*' for '*him*,' his father. The boy feeling '*hate*' for his father is also common with children when they are being disciplined. They usually voice their '*hate*' for everyone at the slightest provocation. He shows that as an *omniscient narrator*, he knows his son's thoughts with the words, his use of '*you imagine*' shows the father's superiority, and experience in life because he too has been a child before so he knows how children think and act. It also suggests that the father knows the son very well so he can predict his actions. Also, '*imagine*' creates the impression that the boy's plots are premeditated and well-thought-through but are exposed to him, his father. Additionally, his use of 'you imagine' at the tail-end of the line seems to downplay the boy's plans and creates the effect that the boy is not certain about what he is doing because his plans are just fanciful imaginings. It also shows that when children are very young, unbeknownst to them, their parents can pretty much predict their thoughts because their actions tend to betray them.

Stanza 2;

Line 5: '*Chopping clean the tree he's scrambling down*'

He continues by revealing details of the boy's first plot, which is, '*Chopping clean the tree he's scrambling down*' from. His ploy to kill his father this way is an *allusion* to how 'Jack' killed the giant in the children's story, '*Jack and the Beanstalk*.' Like Jack, the little boy wants to cut down the tree that his father, whom he imagines is an '*ogre*' and a '*giant*,' like the giant in the story, is '*scrambling down*' from so that he will fall to his death. His use of '*Chopping clean*' suggests that the boy does not want to make any mistakes. It also indicates that the boy has trained himself to carry out the task quickly and efficiently. The *alliteration* of the '*c*' sound in '*chopping clean*' provides *auditory imagery* of the sound of the tree as the boy cuts it. It also alludes to the sound of the man as he scrambles down the tree. The '*tree*' is a *metaphor* for the link between the poet and his son, so the boy's action of chopping is to cut any ties/relationship/link between his father and him.

Additionally, the use of '*chopping*,' the present continuous form of '*chop*,' conjures the image of the boy cutting down the tree in real-time. For the reader, it appears that the boy's plot is amateurish and easy to detect and foil. Morris seems to have a contrary view to the reader, so he refers to the object of the boy's plot in the third person as '*him*' and '*he's*.' His use of '*him*' and '*he's*' shows that he is somewhat affected by what the boy feels about him, so he tries to distance himself from the plot.

So, for Morris, his son's plot is directed at the '*monster*,' inside his three-year-old head, not to him. Finally, '*scrambling down*' provides visual imagery of Morris descending speedily

down the tree so he can reach his son and do him harm. This boy's action shows that the boy's action of cutting down the tree was an act of self-defence for him.

Stanza 2;

Line 6: '*Or plotting deeper pits to trap him in.*'

To make sure that he successfully carries out his mission of revenge, Morris continues that the boy devised a second plot which he highlights using 'Or.' 'Or' creates the effect that the boy is weighing his options with both hands. He adds that the boy is '*plotting deeper pits to trap him in.*' Like the first plot, this plot is also an allusion to Jack's method to kill a second giant. The use of '*plotting*' creates the effect that the boy is emotionally vested in the plan, so he is feverishly engaging in it as the poet speaks. '*Deeper*' creates the impression that the boy wants the hole he has dug to be so deep that unlike the '*pits*' he has dug in the past, this pit will '*trap*' his father. The boy's decision to dig '*pits*' indicates that he reasoned that having multiple '*pits*' will increase his chances of success. If his father avoids one pit, he is likely to fall into the next. Additionally, the boy's decision to dig a hole also reveals that he is tactful. When his father falls into it, it will remove the difference in height between them and make his father an easier target.

The unsophisticated nature of the boy's plots reveals his innocence and indicates that his plots are copied from the children's stories that he has read.

Stanza 3;

In the third stanza, Morris pushes the curtain and reveals to the reader how he feels about how his son sees him. He intimates that he is conflicted about how to react to his son's tears.

Stanza 3;

Line 1: '*You cannot understand, not yet,*'

He begins by emphatically stating that his son, whom he continues to refer to as '*You,*' which creates the impression that he is pointing to him or speaking directly to him, '*cannot understand,*' at least '*not yet.*' '*Cannot understand*' suggests that his son does not yet have the mental ability to understand why he was violent to him. '*Not yet*' indicates that he is confident that his son will come to accept that his actions are right, honourable and carried out in his best interest with time. Morris's view of time in this manner suggests that he sees it as a vital component and as something that will change his son's opinion of him as a father and help alleviate the burdens he bears as a father.

Stanza 3;

Line 2: '*The hurt your easy tears can scald him with,*'

Continuing, using *enjambment*, Morris adds: '*The hurt your easy tears can scald him with.*' '*The hurt*' suggests that he is pained by the sight of his son's tears and what the boy thinks

of him. His use of 'easy' to describe the boy's 'tears' suggests that he has observed that crying comes without much effort to him. 'Easy' also indicates that the boy's tears are superficial/not genuine/insincere and does not come from a place of deep pain, so no one should not make a fuss about it or show any concern for the boy. For Morris, the boy crying is only play-acting.

Although Morris holds this view about the boy's tears, he comments that they still 'scald.' 'Scald' creates vivid *visual imagery* of droplets of hot liquid being dropped on Morris' skin and *tactile imagery* of him feeling the slow burn of each hot droplet searing his skin as they fall from his son's eyes. His use of 'scald him with' presents his son's action as deliberate. It creates the effect that his son stands over him and secrets his hot tears on him. 'Him' also creates the effect that Morris is speaking about himself in the *third person* to dissociate himself from the pains he is experiencing. The use of him also presents Morris as being in so much pain that he goes into denial. 'Scald him with' also creates the impression that his son was leaving burn marks on his skin the same way people branded slaves and their properties with a hot iron. This powerful description shows that seeing his son cry had an untold negative emotional effect on him.

Morris' assertion is quite strange for the reader because he believes that striking his son had a worse effect on him than on his son. Interestingly, he does not make this argument because he felt pain after hitting his son. Instead, it seems that he considers himself the more aggrieved party because he feels more emotional tumult as against what he considers as his son's superficial tears. Thus, he seems to be saying that his son's action gave him no choice but to act the way he did.

Stanza 3;

Line 3: 'Nor guess the wavering hidden behind that mask.'

He continues, 'Nor guess the wavering hidden behind that mask.' His use of 'nor' shows that this is a second thing that his son does not realise or has not considered, so he cannot even 'guess.' 'Guess' reveals that even in the boy's wildest imaginations, he has never thought that his father is also enduring a lot. This detail is particularly striking because it reveals that a child never assumes that being punished is in their best interest in most father-child relationships. It also highlights that parents also experience some emotional stress after they discipline their children.

His use of 'the wavering' indicates that he was in a dilemma after he struck the boy and saw that the boy was crying. He was unsure about whether he should cuddle the boy or remain stern to him. He continues that his true feelings were 'hidden,' revealing that he deliberately hid his true feelings by transforming his face into 'that mask.' His use of 'that' presents him as speaking about his face in the *third person* and suggests that his facial expression at the time did not reflect his true nature. 'Mask' is also a *metaphor* for the made-up facial

expression that he used to conceal his true feelings. His 'mask' would probably have manifested as a frown or scowl, which would have made him appear austere and frightening to his son.

Morris' tactic of presenting a stern exterior is quite effective because it threw his son off about the nature of his father's true feelings. But the reader knows that it was only a front that makes it impossible for his son to '*guess the wavering hidden behind that mask*'. His tactic makes the reader realise that parents have to cultivate multiple personalities that would sometimes mean that they appear stern outwardly while remaining inwardly loving so that they can effectively discipline their children without appearing to be weak.

Stanza 3;

Lines 4 and 5:

4 '*This fierce man longs to lift you, curb your sadness*

5 *With piggy-back or bull-fight, anything,*'

Borrowing from how his son sees him, he describes himself as, '*This fierce man*.' His use of '*this fierce man*' creates the effect that he points to himself and speaks about himself in the third person. '*Fierce man*' implies that he understands the boy's pain and the boy's has views him as a monster because of how he appears. He, however, reveals his true feelings by confessing that he '*longs to lift*' his son. His use of '*fierce man*' to describe himself and '*lift you*' to describe what he wants to do with the boy reveals that even if the boy does not change how he sees him, they can still have a meaningful and loving interaction. '*Longs*' also suggests that he is so desperate to interact and touch the boy that he can hardly control himself. '*Lifts*' shows that he wants to carry the boy up to bridge the difference in their heights and possibly make his son taller than him. '*Lifts*' also suggests that he is willing to lift the boy to his level of understanding. He concludes the line by stating directly to the boy that he wants to '*curb your sadness*.' '*Curb your sadness*' conjures the image of him putting a restraining force over the source of his son's sorrow. Also, it presents him as willing to make an effort to make his son happy.

He reveals multiple ways by which he can put the '*curb*' in place. The first is '*with piggy-back*.' '*Piggy-back*' conjures an image of him carrying the boy on his back with the boy's hand around his neck or carrying the boy on his shoulders as they frolic together. Lifting the boy in '*piggy-back*' also means that the boy will become taller than him. A piggy-back ride would also display the strong bond between him and his son. The ride would also mean that the boy will not face any danger because he will be safely behind his father. In a way, the ride will momentarily make the boy his father's master. '*Piggy-bank*' also signifies protection, trust and strong bond.

Morris continues by using '*or,*' which presents an alternative action. He reveals that he could also engage in a '*bull-fight*' with his son. Engaging in a '*bull-fight*' means that he is willing

to play-act the role of a bull while his son plays that of a matador. This game will allow the boy to display his finesse and skill but reduce the father to the role of a helpless lowly 'bull.'

Morris concludes the line with '*anything*.' '*Anything*' suggests that he does not mind giving up his self-respect, debase himself, or engage in any childish activity if it will return his son to happiness. The word also suggests that he is willing to carry out the basest actions to make his son happy. Morris' decision to dedicate an entire line to his revelation of what he is willing to do to make his son happy shows that he is very committed to their relationship.

Stanza 3;

Line 6: '*But dare not ruin the lessons you should learn.*'

In the last line of the stanza, he makes a U-turn and confesses, '*But dare not ruin the lessons you should learn.*' His use of '*But*' shows that he is willing to take a completely different action from what he has stated earlier. '*Dare not ruin*' shows that he has made up his mind to not do anything that would affect his son's ability to '*learn*' that his actions have consequences. '*Ruin*' also presents him as believing that one wrong move from him will cause irreparable damage to his son's life. Morris' words shows that he realises that if he is unable to control his desire to be his son's playmate, he will fail to fulfil his primary role as a father and instructor.

His use of the plural '*lessons*' creates the effect that the boy's life is made of multiple 'open classroom experiences' from which the boy will '*learn*' how and why he should behave acceptably. '*Lessons*' and '*learn*' also highlights the boy's immaturity or lack of knowledge, so he needs someone to teach him. Finally, both words also highlight that the key value of life is learning, understanding, then putting what you have learnt into action.

Morris' concluding thought is very compelling; it shows that even while parents discipline their children, they are dying inwardly to appease them. It also shows that a relationship between a father and son should focus more on instilling good manners, teaching and correcting than on fun and games. The line also reveals that a parent has to put up a stern demeanour of although they inwardly want to cuddle their child in order to instil good manners because doing otherwise could cost them the chance to teach their child the essential lessons of life. Finally, it shows that every interaction between a parent and a child can be a learning opportunity.

Stanza 4;

Single-line stanza: '*You must not make a plaything of the rain.*'

In the poem's fourth stanza, the poet reveals why he slapped the boy in a single line. Additionally, the single-line stanza (*monostich*) makes the reason for the slap stand out.

The line reads: 'You must not make a plaything of the rain.' The use of 'You' indicates that the poetic voice is still speaking directly to the boy. It also suggests that he is still pointing piercingly at him. His use of 'must not' displays his strong disapproval for the boy's action and his unchanging stance that he should not consider repeating the act in future. 'Make a plaything of the rain' reveals that for the boy, running in the pouring 'rain' was a fun activity that gave him much joy and happiness. However, his father holds an alternative view because he knows that running in the rain exposes the boy to catching a cold or developing pneumonia. Morris might have also struck the boy because playing in the rain exposes him to the possibility of being struck by lightning or being swept away in a deluge of water.

The contrary views held by the father-son pair is quite striking because it certifies that adults and children view a singular activity differently. An activity that a child views as fun because they are inexperienced and hold a simple view of life can be assessed as teeming with a range of dangerous consequences by a parent. This variance highlights the unquantifiable understanding gap in the parent-child relationship.

Conclusion:

All in all, Mervyn Morris' strikingly presents the single interaction between the poetic voice and the persona. His words vividly expose the boy's reaction and his simple plots to harm his father, the man's feelings for the persona, and why he hit the boy. Their interaction reveals that a parent-child relationship is a contest, and a parent must necessarily develop multiple personalities to be able to teach their children.

Some points to consider:

Morris thinks of the feelings he experiences after he slapped his son as long term trauma and the physical pain that his son feels as fleeting and exaggerated.

The poem also highlights the inability of fathers to expose their true feelings to their children with words. They usually feel that violence and a show of masculinity are more potent than communication, but this poem reveals that they resort to violence because it is easier.

Elements of literature in 'Little Boy Crying':

Themes:

The difficulty of parental discipline / A child's conception of corporal punishment / Father-son relationship / Childhood / Parenting / The opposing or contrary views of a father and son pair to discipline and what constitutes fun / A child's view of his father / Innocence

Summary:

The poem exposes a three-year boy's angry and frustrated reaction he is slapped by his father; his plots to exact revenge; his father's deep longing to placate him, and the reason why his father hit him.

Point of view: Second-person and third-person points of view

The poem is told in the second-person point of view, evidenced by the use of 'your' and 'you.' These words suggest that the poet spoke pointedly and directly to the boy. In the first stanza, the poetic voice vividly exposes the boy's reaction to a slap. He presents the boy's view of him and his revenge plots and his struggles with seeing his son's tears in the second and third stanzas, respectively. In the final stanza, he reveals what the boy did that provoked him to strike the boy.

There is a sense that the entire poem occurs in Morris' head. In the first stanza, his words present him as holding an unseen mirror up to the boy to show him how quick but choreographed his tears are. In the second stanza, he seems to be telling the boy inaudibly that 'I know how you see me and what your plans are for me.' In the third stanza, he confesses in his head that he is willing to do anything to cheer his son up but remarks that the boy cannot 'guess the wavering hidden behind that mask.' Finally, in the final stanza, he concludes that the boy should never again consider playing in the rain.

Morris' actions suggests that the pair's entire interaction took place in his head outside the prying gaze of his son. It strengthens the point that there are aspects of him that he hides from the boy. It is also likely that because their entire interaction took place in Morris's head, he could not verbally express his disapproval of his son's action, so he just struck the boy as a sign that he disapproves of his actions. The absence of speech marks at the end of the fourth line gives credence to this idea.

The poet also refers to himself with determiners and third-person pronouns like: 'The,' 'that,' 'a,' 'him' (x3), 'he's' and 'this.' These words create the impression that he was speaking about himself in the third person. He does this to dissociate himself from the image of the monster that his son holds about him and distance himself from the cruel things that would befall the giant.

Tone:

Conflicted /Serious/ Sympathetic

Mood:

Conflicted/Pity/Sorry/Empathy/Sympathetic

Figures of speech:

Anaphora:

'Your' – lines 1 and 3

Hyperbole:

'Swimming tears, splashing your feet'

Repetition:

'you' and 'your'

Onomatopoeia:

'... your laughter metamorphosed into howls.'

Metaphor:

'The ogre towers above you.'

'That grim giant'

'hidden behind that mask.'

Alliteration:

'slap struck'.

'grim giant'.

'colossal cruel'.

'Chopping clean'.

Consonance:

'quick slap struck.'

Poetic devices:

Enjambment:

Words flow from line to line to highlight the intertwined nature of the father-son relationship and the constancy of their interactions. It also highlights the ease with which children cry and their parent's almost unabated responsibility of making sure that they protect them from danger and are also free to explore the world around them.

Free Verse:

The poem does not have a rhyme scheme. The absence of a rhyme scheme mimics the sweat and sour nature of the relationship between the man and the persona and the unpredictable nature of their interaction.

Verse Paragraph:

The poem is a verse paragraph seen in the unequal nature of the number of lines in each stanza. The structure highlights the unequal nature of the power dynamic between the pair. It also highlights the gap in their view of the world and how parenting and discipline work.

Language (diction):

The poet employs complex words/strong adjectives in the first and third stanzas when he describes the change in the boy's demeanour and how he feels about seeing him cry. His use of words like: 'contorting,' 'spite,' 'howls,' 'metamorphosed,' 'frame,' 'angling,' 'moment's

hint,' struck,' scald,' wavering,' fierce,' long,' and curb' presents the complex nature of their relationship, his feelings and his son's inability to 'understand.'

On the other hand, when he speaks about the boy's plans and thoughts, he uses words associated with children like *'ogre,' 'giant,' 'tale,' and 'hate'* to reduce the boy's feelings to the babblings of an infantile mind.

Structure:

The four stanza poem has twenty lines in total. The use of the twenty lines to present just one interaction between a father and son suggests that their relationship is extremely long and does not have a set standard. The first stanza has seven lines, the second and third stanzas each have six lines, and the fourth is a single-line stanza. The unequal nature of the lines in the stanzas reveals that the poem is a *verse paragraph*.

Stanza one is the stanza with the most lines. The fact that it has the most lines presents how the cries of a child tends to diminish other aspects of parent-child interaction. Their tears make observers imagine that their parents are always cruel to them. Children tend to act with shouts and drama, so this reaction usually makes every other action non-visible.

Stanzas two and three both have six lines. This same line length in both stanzas suggests that the interpretation given to an event by a child or a parent appears equal but contrary. Morris and the boy held contrary views of how they should continue their relationship.

The single-line concluding stanza highlights why the poet has disciplined the boy, making it difficult for the reader to miss—providing the reason why the boy was struck as the final line-stanza creates the impression that he wants to have the last word.

The unequal stanza lengths and the use of free verse (lack of rhyme scheme) mimic the feistiness of a father-son relationship. Additionally, it also suggests that a father-son relationship (parent-child relationship) does not have a single pattern and is unpredictable.

Types of imagery in 'Little Boy Crying':

Visual Imagery:

'Your mouth contorting'

'Your frame so recently relaxed now tight'

'your bright eyes Swimming tears, splashing your bare feet,'

'You stand there angling'

'The ogre towers above you, that grim giant,'

'Chopping clean the tree he's scrambling down'

'deeper pits to trap him in.'

'that mask'

'Piggy-back or bull-fight'

Tactile Imagery:

'Your frame so recently relaxed now tight'

'slap struck.'

'The hurt your easy tears can scald him with.'

Auditory Imagery:

'your laughter metamorphosed into howls.'

'slap struck.'

'Chopping clean the tree'