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Parental Love and Personal Anxieties and William Butler Yeast's *A Prayer for My Daughter*

Dr. Sarfraz Ahamed

Associate Professor of English, CNR Government First Grade College Sriramanagar, Dist : Koppal, Karnataka State

ABSTRACT

The poem 'A Prayer for my Daughter' portrays the love and anxiety of a father who has been blessed with a daughter. Poem is about a father's hopes and concerns for his child. Yeats hopes that his daughter will grow and flourish with virtue and modesty. This poem is filled with anxiety as to how to shelter his baby from the wave of terrible times ahead. The poem is midpoint on paternal anxiety and spiritual protection, expressing a father's plea for his infant son's safety. Yeats's paternal anxieties reflect his unfulfilled love for Maud Gonne and shape his aspirations for his daughter.

Keywords: love, prayers, graciousness, courtesy, beauty and fertility

INTRODUCTION

William Butler Yeats is among the greatest poets of twentieth century. Born in Dublin of Anglo- Irish parents, Yeats decided early in his life to build a literary career, and also re-create a specifically Irish Literature. He was Irish and he played a great part in the Irish Cultural revival. He began his poetic career as writer of romantic lyrics and soon evolved into a poet with a noble vision of life that he expressed I symbols and image of enduring beauty. He was senator of the Irish Free State and He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923. He continued to write poetry until he died. To this period belong Among *School Children, The Second Coming, The tower* and *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*. Yeats life was paralleled his poetic achievement.

A Prayer for My Daughter, Yeats wrote this poem in 1919 soon after the birth of his daughter Anne. While describing his hope for his child, he also provides us image of the ideal life. Shortly, after Yeats's daughter, Anne's birth. It is marked by a strong personal tone and experiences the bitterness that Yeats felt towards Maud Gonne, his beautiful Irish friend and revolutionary, who refused to marry him, choosing instead John MacBride. "He argues that the complexity of Yeats's verse follows patterns of its "metremes", or rhymical motifs, rather than common metrical devices" (Einarsson 26)

However, the poem rises above the purely personal level and lists all the poet's prayers for his daughter that also gives us a glimpse of Yeats's image of ideal womanhood.

A Prayer for My Daughter is in many ways a very personal poem. Much of the bitterness that is expressed in the poem is directed towards Maud Gonne. She was a beautiful woman friend who was actively involved in Irish politics and in the Irish revolutionary movement. "The poem reflects Yeats's complicated views on Irish Nationalism and sexuality, and is considered an important work of Modernist poetry" (Ferrall 32-33) Yeats was hopelessly in love with her but she refused to marry him and instead married John MacBride who was executed for treason in 1916. Yeats, now 51, proposed to Maud Gonne for the second time but was rejected once again. He married Georgie Hyde-Lees in 1917. There are many references to Maud Gonne in the poem—her cruel beauty, her arrogance and her marriage to one whom Yeats considered a fool. These references to Yeats' personal life however form only an interesting background to the poem. The ideas expressed in the poem go far beyond the merely personal. The poet speaks as a father anxious for the well being of his daughter, an anxiety that is shared by fathers all over a world torn by war and greed. Yeats also speaks for decency and courtesy in human behavior. He seems to say that graciousness in social behavious belongs very largely to woman. A society which allows arrogant, opinionated women to rule it is a society that has lost its propriety.

Aphrodite, Greek Venus and goddess of love, beauty and fertility, born as Hesiod says, out of the froth of the sea. The name is supposed to derive from Aphros , meaning foam but this is uncertain. Homer calls her 'the Cyprian. Aeschylus, Lucretius and some Greek poets exalt her as the cosmic generative force pervading all nature. Born of the sea, she is 'fatherless'. Hephaestus, the fire was the husband of Aphrodite. Yeats is constantly alluding to his unsuccessful wooing of

Maud Gonne. He prays that his child may prove more responsive to love. Courtesy, self possession and style in the arts, Jeffares says, were to Yeats the result of deliberate shaping of all things.

Yeats felt himself blest in his marriage and praises his wife as a perfect wife, kind, wise and unselfish in a letter to Lady Gregory. Yeats wishes the failure his daughter to be not merely an angel of goodness but a source of ineffably joyous speech. Yeats laments the failure of his dearly beloved Maud Gonne's life and love and consequent drying up of his own sensibility. He feels however that this sense of frustration should not intensify into hatred as that would indeed be a grievous misfortune. Maud Gonne and countess Markierwicz whom Yeats adored, returned to Ireland in 1918 and suffered imprisonment.

Yeats says in his Diary that women finding that the major event of their lives, marriage involved a giving of themselves to another developed a tendency to play with their lives. He suggests that such play should not survive childhood and that any such play, later on breeds' hatred. Avoidance of malice and hatred will ensure unalloyed happiness. Arrogance and hatred are the wares peddled in thoroughfares, in the market-place of the world while 'custom and ceremony' will breed lasting joy and peace.

"But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
Where the haystack- and roof leveling wind" (Yeats, p, 14)

He poet hears the storm that is howling outside while inside he can see his child sleeping undisturbed in her cradle. There is nothing to stop the progress of the storm which the poet describes as 'haystack-and roof-leveling'. It is certainly a strong of the verse makes it clear that the storm the poet describes is more than just a physical, natural disturbance. The poet has been anxious about his child and has been praying for her. The prayer itself begins with first stanza.

A Local and well-known landmark in Ireland wind completely demolishes or lays flat roofs and haystacks, it is suggested that immense power

"Bread on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind" ((Yeats, p, 14)

It is aroused the Atlantic Ocean stopped and great despair, sorrow and anxiety. The repetition used to reflect the deep anxiety and suggests fervent prayer. The poet expressed a feeling of impending doom. The Frenzied drum- it is a transferred epithet referring to the widely excited and uncontrolled beating of a drum. The storm is described in greater detail. Notice how the use of specific landmarks like 'Gregory's wood' 'the tower' and 'the elms above the flooded stream' make the storm feel like a real one. But it extends the storm into a metaphor. It becomes the symbol for future doom, for the terrible Day of Judgment when the created world will collapse. Notice the contradiction in the term 'murderous innocence'. The sea might look beautiful and calm but it is actually very dangerous. The poet also refers here to the vision in the Book of Revelation in the Bible. Which describes a monster creature is coming out of the sea and which is evil and speaks against God. The adjectives 'excited' and 'frenzied' add to the panic in the tone of these lines. These words also stand in contrast to the words 'courtesy, 'custom' and 'ceremony' that come up frequently in the rest of the poem.

"Imagining I excited reverie
That the future years had come,
Dancing to a frenzied drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea" (Yeats, p, 14)

Yeats imagines the future year of terror and violence to be born of the dangerous sea that appears deceptively harmless. That the storm as metaphor for the approaches of a dark and dreadful future. it is coming of ruin upon civilization preoccupied Yeats. But this poem shows the flexibility he was achieving. It can move through description of the place we are beginning to recognize , the tower; it can freely describe the poet' s mood of gloom and then move to the idea of beauty in women, from there to symbols of great love found disappointment, to Helen, Aphrodite and by implication Maud Gone. There is a praise of courtesy, charm, wisdom and the glad kindness as well as a hope for merriment. Then comes terrible denunciation of intellectual hatred and of Maud Gonne, the novelist woman born, whose opinionated mind is a savagely attack.

" May she be granted beauty and yet not
Beauty to make a stranger's eyes distraught,

O hers before a looking-glass, for such,
Being made beautiful overmuch,
Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and may be
The heart-revealing intimacy
That choose right, and never find a friend" (Yeats, p, 14)

The poet wants his daughter to be blessed with beauty that will not infatuate men and make her lose her head. No doubt the poet has in mind the voluptuous beauty of Maud Gonne which was ruinous to her. Excessive beauty is often a curse to a woman. She who possesses such beauty regards it as an end in itself and gives up all nature affection for others. She has therefore to remain friendless. In the excess of her beauty she may be capable of the closest intimacy and yet never find a friend.

It is possibly the reason why extraordinary beautiful woman are often lonely; apparently a reference to Maud Gonne who, Yeats felt, lacked kindness of heart.

"Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool
While that great queen that rose out of the spray
Being fatherless could have her way" (Yeats, p, 14)

Helen of troy, who was supposed to be the most beautiful woman in the world, married King Menelaus of Sparta but later eloped with King Paris of the Troy. Her thoughtless, unkind act led to the Trojan War and long years of suffering. Yeats refers to Paris as a fool not simply on account of his rash decision to make Helen his wife; he had, on an earlier occasion, made an unwise choice when asked to judge three goddess for their beauty. Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love who rose from the sea and was hence without a father to keep an eye on her. Aphrodite married bow-legged Haphaestus, the blacksmith of the gods; another illustration used by the poet to prove his point that beautiful woman who does not have a warm, caring soul often faces great misfortunes.

The poem was completed at Thoor Ballylee where the scene is located.. Gragary's wood, it is Cool Park, and also called Lady Gregory's estate, near Yeats's residence, Thoor Ballylee. The word 'Second coming'- the blood dimmed tide is loosed everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned, Yeats has a frightful foreboding of dread events ahead. "The poem also may be read to consist of straightforward iambic verse that relies on common metrical devices such as elision, cephalous lines, promotion, and metrical inversion" (Steele, Timothy 1999).

Yeats has a wholesome who set an excessive value on beauty and disregard the more important human obligation, natural compassion and kindly response to an offer of love, Helen of Troy caused a war and troubled the ancient world, the story of which is told in Homer's Iliad. Here the reference is to Maud Gonne who had rejected Yeats's offers of love, married a fool and made herself needlessly unhappy. The marriage was to Major John McBride. Maud Gonne got divorced within two years.

Helen of Troy was supposed to have been the most beautiful woman in the world. She was the daughter of Leda and Zeus (the king of the Gods). She was so lovely that all the noblemen in Greece wanted to marry her. Helen married King Menelaus of Sparta. But did not stay long as his wife because when Paris of Troy visited Sparta, he fell in love with her and she fled with him to Troy. Yeats refers to Paris had earlier been asked to judge three goddesses for their beauty—Hera, Athena and Aphrodite. Hera had promised him rule in Asia, Athena had offered him fame in war but Paris chose Aphrodite as the most beautiful of the three because she promised him as his wife the loveliest of all women. The elopement of Helen with Paris was one of the causes of the seven year Trojan War which caused so many deaths and so much sorrow. Yeats blames Helen's unkindness and thoughtlessness for the war. Helen's character as Yeats was it has already been described in the stanza two

" It is certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat
In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned
Hearts are not had as gift but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful" (Yeats, p, 15)

The poet abruptly moves on to his second prayer for his daughter which is that she may grow up to be good-mannered. It is often quoted lines showing great insight; the thought that men are most often won by graciousness and courtesy rather than beauty is elaborated. The Great Queen is Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love who rose from the sea and was therefore 'fatherless'. (In Roman legend she is called Venus). Aphrodite married Hephaestus (the Roman 'Vulcan') who was the blacksmith of the gods. He was considered a superb artist in metals but he had weak legs, probably because his work helped develop his arms, not his legs. Aphrodite was an unfaithful wife, as was Helen. It is curious statements to make. It seems as if Yeats is hinting that fathers of daughters are very strict as to whom their daughters marry. Is that how he himself will be?

Yeats is sure that fine women are in some ways foolish—they choose something nourishing like meat to eat but combine it with a 'crazy salad' thus undoing its goodness.

" Yet many, that have played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,
Loved and thought himself beloved
From glad kindness cannot take his eyes
May she becomes a flouring hidden tree
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be," (Yeats, p, 15)

The charming manner of al plain woman have made wise many of fool led away by mere physical beauty. Glad kindnesses and charming manners more important for a woman than beauty of face and figure. Yeats refers to his marriage. He wrote to Lady Gregory soon after his marriage' My wife is a perfect wife, kind, wised, and unselfish I think your were such another young girl once, she has made my life serene and full of order. A symbol of growth and harmony is the image of the spreading laurel tree reinforced by the image of the singing linnet in following lines. Yeats daughter should combine in herself the qualities of harmonious growth and unalloyed happiness. The poet's prayer is that she should have the qualities of the spreading green tree and the trilling linnet. He desires her to contribute to the happiness of people by her high-minded thoughts and deeds.

The Horn of Plenty is again a reference to Greek legend. When Zeus, the king of the gods was born, his father Kronos would have swallowed him up because Kronos had been told that he would be killed by his own son. However Zeus' mother Rhea gave Kronos a stone to swallow and Zeus was brought up in cave by Amalthea, a goat. As a reward for bringing him up. Zeus placed Amalthea among the stars as Capricon while one of her horns became the Horn of Plenty or Cornucopia. The Horn of Plenty is therefore a symbol of never ending prosperity. Here, Horne of Plenty stands for the richness and abundance that Helen and Aphrodite could have chosen from but, according to Yeats, beautiful women are capable of undoing even the Horn of Plenty. Such women bring about destruction and sadness.

"And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
Nor but in merriment a quarrel
O my she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place" (Yeats, p, 15)

The line contains the poet's prayer that his daughter be blessed with a cheerful, happy temperament that would allow her to spread joy all around her. Yeats wants that his daughter be courteous and well-mannered. In Yeats's Ghosts, Brenda Maddox suggests that the poem is "designed deliberately to offend women and labels it as offensive. Maddox argues that Yeats, in the poem, condemns his daughter to adhere to 19th-century ideals of womanhood, as he focuses on her need for a husband and a "Big House" with a private income" (Maddox 142-143) He feels that men may get fooled by beauty but in the end, choose women who may not be entirely beautiful but are kind and gracious. Yeats had a horror of the harshness and rudeness of the modern day world, so he stresses on courtesy, good manners and graciousness.

May mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
Yet knows that to be choked with hate
May well be of all evil chances chief
If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf" (Yeats, p, 15)

The beautiful Maud Gonne was also a fiery Irish revolutionary. After the 1916 the relationship between Yeats and Maud Gonne become strained because of political and personal differences. The reference here may be to her political imprisonment. The tree is an important symbol for Yeats. He gives it qualities of goodness, good health and prosperity. It is also a symbol of growth and since it shelters birds and can give fruit; it also stands for kindness. Yeats adds a further dimension to this by specifying the tree. The laurel tree is of special significance to the ancient Greeks. Its leaves were used to crown poets and heroes. In Greek legend laurel is associated with Daphne, the daughter of a river god with whom Apollo fell in love. When he chased her, she cried for help and was changed into a laurel tree, which became the favorite tree of Apollo. If the hatred is driven out mind, the assault of misfortunes will be powerless to hurt us.

In the context of Yeats' poem the laurel tree carries with it over tones of feminine shyness and purity. It also links it with the 'chase'. Yeats uses yet another image in the verse that of the little linnet. The post wishes that his daughter would be as merry as this song bird and spread such merriness around her generously. Notice that the poet combines two rather contradictory virtues—the merry movements of the linnet with the standing rootedness of the tree.

Laurel is an evergreen shrub or tree with dark green glossy leaves worn by ancient Greek as crown of victory. It an illusion to Apollo chasing the daughter of a river god, Daphne, and changing her into a laurel tree; suggests being and well-rooted and it also an illusion to his unrequited love for Maud Gonne as well as the tragic end to her marriage; here, suggests that his experiences have left the poet unfeeling and cold. The worst of all unfortunate are condition or circumstances.

"An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born?
Out of the mouth of plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellow full of angry wind?" (Yeats, p, 16)

Yeats diary entry of 1910: women because the main event to their lives has been a giving of themselves to an opinion as if were a stone doll. Woman should have their play with dolls finished in childhood for; if they play with ideas again it is amid hatred and malice. In intellectual hatred turned Maud Gonne into a jailed propagandist. Yeats the horn of plenty stands for courtesy, aristocracy and ceremony. Maud Gonne barter the horn for pair of old bellows full of angry wind which is an ambiguous reference both to the futility of her angry politics and to a worthless husband with whom she saddled herself. "A Prayer for My Daughter is that of female sexual choice. But, she also argues that to read the poem without the political context surrounding the Irish Revolution robs the text of a deeper meaning that goes beyond the relationship between Yeats and the female sex" (Howes 116-117)

Considering that, all hatred driven hence, the line explores again an indirect reference to Maud Gonne who, in spite of being beautiful and wealthy destroyed herself because she willfully married an Irish revolutionary, John MacBride who was later executed. The line is also linked with the earlier image of Aphrodite and her blacksmith husband. Notice how the line could also be used to describe a bluster that MacBride was perhaps in Yeats opinion. It is not requiring anyone else to please, calm or brighten itself into doing what is right. Though there is anger, hatred or violence around.

"And learn at last that it is self-delighting
Self-appeasing, self –affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
Or every bellow burst, be happy still" (Yeats, p, 16)

The poet talks of his own mind having dried up because the kind of minds he loved have not prospered. But he is also sure that the biggest of all evils is to be choked with hate. The mind that is without hate cannot be harmed. Such a mind is safe from all attack just like the linnet who cannot be pushed away from the leaf by the fury of the wind. In Oates' opinion, "Yeats wishes his daughter to become like a "vegetable:immobile, unthinking, and placid" (Oates. 7-30) The worst hatred is that of the mind which comes from being arrogant. Yeats refers again to Maud Gonne who, though blessed with good looks and wealth, has lost it all because of her obstinate self-will. According to Yeats, she has exchanged the Horn of Plenty for an ugly bellows that is full of angry wind, Notice how these two images link up with the rest of the poem. Bellows are generally used by blacksmiths to blow air into a fire, so the connection with Helen and her blacksmith husband can be immediately understood.

"For arrogance and hatred are the waves
Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree" (Yeats, p, 16)

The mind that drives out hatred recovers its innocence; such a mind lives for itself and does not need anyone else to calm it, delight it or frighten it into being good. Such a mind has a will that corresponds with the will of heaven itself. A woman with such a mind would be happy whatever violence happened around her. The last stresses again on ceremony and custom. He hopes his daughter's bridegroom will value courtesy. Arrogance and hatred are goods sold in the streets, they are without value. It is ceremony that makes for prosperity and it is custom that gives shelter.

CONCLUSION

A final antithesis established between hatred and arrogance on the one hand, and courtesy; custom and ceremony on other. Notice the deliberate use of the expressions 'waves' and peddled in through fares' to suggest worthless. It is the practice of ceremony and custom that leads to prosperity and well-being. If his daughter succeeds in banishing hatred from her mind, the world 'scowl or outbursts of anger cannot disturb the equanimity of her soul. Yeats expresses a preference of ritual, ceremony and the values of aristocracy over those of the bourgeoisie. Ceremony is the cornucopia of radical innocence. If through custom, the innocence is recovered, then the poet's daughter will be happy in a trouble world. It is through ceremony the soul protects it integrity against the vulgarities of life.

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