

# The second coming and a prayer for my daughter essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



William Butler Yeats was a 20th Century poet. Poets at that time focused on the background of man and war, and how war has taken away the youth and deterioration of man and humanity. These poems also show how man has been reduced to a meaningless cause and how he has lost all the qualities of goodness and superiority. There are many other writers and poets that concentrate on war.

One such writer that I have found is 'Ernest Hemmingway' who was a soldier in the Second World War and he presented his experience in the novel which he titled 'Farewell to Arms'. The novel presents the horrors of war and humans inability to lead a normal and meaningful life. Other such writers and poets which deal with the various elements which have contributed in making mankind dignified are John Osborne, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Elliott and so on. Coming back to these poems, the author William Butler Yeats married late in life, in 1917, when he was 52 years old.

His marriage marked a crucial turn in his life, not so much because he had married the woman of his dreams - that was Maud Gonne, and she had rejected him enough times by 1917 that he knew he would never achieve his dream of marrying her - but more because the marriage brought Yeats into a different relation to the world: he now was a man of family, and when his first child, a daughter, was born to him in 1919 he knew that his sense of himself and his role in the world had altered forever. At this stage William Butler Yeats was already consumed with the greatest fear a parent can feel which is the fear of a child's death.

From research I found that Lady Gregory who was his dearest friend, had in 1918, learned that her only son, Robert, had been killed in World War I. The fear of being unable to protect one's own child haunted him when his own daughter, Anne, was born in 1919, and that's why he wrote " A Prayer for My Daughter. " The poem basically is dedicated to the birth of the poet's daughter in 1919. The poem also helps to recognize the irony of the child's birth at a time when civilization had come close to negating everything that is good.

The poems, contains simplicity of style which marks the genuine feeling of the poet. " The Second Coming" is another poem written by William Butler Yeats in 1921. The poems holds a number of basic themes which can help to compare with ' A Prayer form my Daughter. ' Which contains just a few. The themes of this poem bring out man's distance from God, materialism, man going the wrong direction, man trying to appeal to the conscience, disintegration of society and also man moving away from God by turning his back on him as well as other indirect themes.

In this poem though Yeats does not refer to the war in the poem, the imagery and the time of writing, which was in 1919, invites such a reading. At a more general level Yeats is also expressing his feelings about the fate of modern civilization. The poem expresses the sense that the war was somehow almost apocalyptic, such was its horror and destructiveness. This poem depicts the world as a turning and turning gyre, which is represented in the very first few lines of the poem. The turn is catalyzed by anarchy and the worst, and is turned from the innocence and the best.

The poem uses a lot of allusion and metaphor to show that the ending of one good thing supposes the beginning of another good thing, and the new era will come soon from the ground up. The poem also uses a lot of repetition to show the author's optimistic tone toward the change. However, I feel that the concepts in the poem are too abstract and have not been explained explicitly and haven't been brought out very realistically. For example, what is the turning, what is the old era, and what is the new era the speaker is looking for, etc. They leave a question mark in the minds of the readers.

Overall all the methods used in the poem can only provide some hint for it. As the poem 'A Prayer for My Daughter,' is focused on Yeats' daughter basically, the first stanza - 'Once more... is in my mind' - brings out the feeling that Yeats is expressing great anxiety over the frail protection, the mere "cradle-hood and coverlid," that can only half-hide his frail infant. After that message conveyed we come across the howling wind that comes from the sea itself threatens her security, and the poet has paced and prayed into the night for some protection for her.

Yeats also mentions the word gloom, which I feel implies the storm of chaos, disappointment, and the failure to achieve goals and relationships. This is a clear example that he had the fear inside of him, about the fact of losing his only child and also contributing to the melancholic feeling in the poem, which in turn adds to the interest building up inside of the reader. Through the first few lines of the second stanza we see Yeats anxiety continuing to flow thus creating a link.

Yeats speaks about praying for his daughter indicating his concern and love as a father which he like other parents possess. But here it seems that the poet begins to shift into a new way as he says ' Imagining in excited reverie' to conceive of his daughter, and perhaps a way to help shield her from the dangers of life as at the end of the stanza he uses harsh words - ' murderous innocence. ' These two words are harsh and prove his anxiety that is continuity from the first stanza. The poet was more concerned about the dangers, not having to be physical.

He seems to be in a state of gloom. The last three lines of the stanza imply that his future may not be so good and the storm views are very symbolically displayed as we feel that his future maybe rough. From the last line we get the symbol of death, as the word murderous is mentioned followed by innocence - (Out of the murderous innocence of the sea) - thus showing that his future holds many obstacles, which have to be faced bravely. This is the conflict between evil and good that seems quite well developed.

The Second Coming,' poem uses a lot of allusion to illustrate the author's explanation of the world. The background is concentrated on the failing morality. The first stanza brings out the falling of man, his doom, how society is moving towards deterioration and other implied meanings such as the Nazi ideology of Germany which was controlled by Hitler and fascism which was brought about by the Italian Mussolini. The first line ' Turning and turning in the widening gyre,' could lead to a number of references though.

Firstly, it could have a reference to the world is like a cycle that changes in a regular pattern and that the falcon is represented circling in a “ widening gyre” until it is lost to the falconer. This could present the image as that of disintegration and loss of form or structure of man. This line could also refer to the Christ as I feel that Yeats imagines the rebirth of Christ as the start of the new cycle, and the revolution at hand in the rebirth of the human race. The second line is very symbolic as the image of the falcon could have two references.

Firstly, it is the image of a hunting hawk - man falling apart, pulling away. Another reference could also be made, keeping in mind the World Wars II and I. The line hints at technology progressing beyond mankind’s ability to control it showing that he is deteriorating. Yeats shows his concern that technology has advanced to the point where mankind can do a great deal of harm with relative ease. The world had never seen destruction of the likes of World War I, and most people were shocked at the extensive loss of human life during the war.

This contributes to the failing element in the poem - the fall of mankind. The fifth and sixth lines - ‘ The blood-dimmed... is drowned’ - implies the ending of a cycle of the world history. Another interpretation is that a tidal wave is stained with blood. Coming back to ‘ A Prayer for My Daughter,’ the third stanza we see that Yeats hopes for beauty in his daughter-but not too much beauty! There is also a warning here - a warning that is particularly relevant for a poet who had been entranced by his wife Maud Gonne.

Here we see that Yeats knows that an excess of beauty is destructive and she maybe threatened in society not through her fault, but through the fault of men who value woman's beauty too greatly. He also knows that beauty doesn't make a person complete. Here Yeats asks that his daughter be spared a beauty that may come between her and "natural kindness," ("Lose natural kindness and maybe the heart-revealing intimacy") that might prevent her from finding "heart-revealing intimacy" and a true friend. There is also a word in the stanza 'distraught,' and this shows that his mind was troubled by these factors.

The next stanza has references to the god and goddesses of love. It starts with Helen and she was famous because of her beauty and secondly Paris abducted her. As he says 'Helen being chosen found life flat and dull and later had much trouble from a fool' I think that from this line he is trying to tell us about Helen of Troy who was a very beautiful person. Her beauty caused political unrest which in turn caused a war thus proving that too much beauty could cause hatred, enmity, individualism and so on and so he is trying to reflect this idea in the poem.

But beauty is a gift from God and therefore must be used well. I feel that here Yeats is also trying to tell us that Gods given talent could certainly change the thinking of people in many ways indicating the power of one and how just one individual could mould society in many different ways. The stanza also has a reference to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, who chose for her spouse the cripple, Hephaestus. This shows that as Aphrodite suffered

from “ being fatherless,” hence without a father to guide her, we understand that Yeats intended to be a guiding father to his young daughter.

He wants to be a role model to her. Another phrase in the stanza ‘ Horn of Plenty’ was actually what the infant Zeus gave, which was a horn, to his nurse. The horn flowed with nectar and ambrosia, which was the food and drink of the Gods. By using this phrase, I think that Yeats is trying to tell us that fine woman are born possessing everything, but choose to destroy themselves through their own actions. This phrase has a connection with the other poem “ Second Coming,” as here we see that women choose to destroy themselves and in that poem we see the deterioration and the failing of man.

Hence we can understand that Gods gifts that he has given us are taken for granted. The following stanza is very significant in finding out what Yeats planned for his daughter. Yeats describes the quality that he came to see as at the very heart of civilized life - courtesy. By courtesy we see that he understands a means of being in the world that would preserve the best of human dignity, art, and emotion, without giving in to the tempests of passion and destruction that were ravaging the world during the very time he was writing this poem.

Such is his prayer for his daughter: that she learns to survive with grace and dignity in a world turning horrific. He also expresses his views when he says that the heart should be earned. This shows that beauty isn’t everything. Through the word Love, Yeats is trying to suggest that it comes not to the “



entirely beautiful," but to those who can "charm" with "a glad kindness." Through the next stanza, Yeats asks for his daughter to flourish, but in hiding, and to be merry, but to contain her merriment within a particular place.

The simultaneous wish that his daughter live life with joy and magnanimity, but also that her life be sheltered and protected in "one dear perpetual place" an evocation of the ideal of home" is powerful in these lines. He also refers to a 'green laurel' implying that his daughter led a clean life and not the cause of the unpleasantness. The stanza that follows, we see that Yeats turns towards himself, and acknowledges that his life has of late become dry, desiccated, as if he is withering in the face of the world he now beholds.

But he asserts that hatred is the worst response one can have to the world, and cautions that hatred will doom the one whom hates. The effect of hatred is brought out when he uses the word choked, showing that the hatred has reached the brim. The poet then cautions against the worst of hatreds - "an intellectual hatred," in a stanza that may sound suspiciously like a wish that his daughter is bright, but not too bright. His wish in this poem was especially for his daughter but in general he is also cautioning mankind and the modern reader about the troubles and temptations in today's world.

In this stanza, he refers to Maud Gonne flattering her by saying, "Have I not seen the loveliest woman born." He also speaks about the Plenty's Horn. Yeats offers a new image in that stanza, "Plenty's horn," to stand for the source of the rich gifts he hopes will be bestowed on his young daughter.

Although Maud Gonne wasted those gifts, his daughter, he prays, will use them well and wisely. Here again he is cautioning the reader saying that the gifts we receive should not be abused but used “ wisely. ” This is again linked to “ The Second Coming,” where we see that man is being destroyed, as he isn’t using the given gifts by God well.

He faults her primarily by saying “ her opinionated mind,” and these lines show that one cannot help but wonder if her opinion that Yeats was not the man for her leads the poet to the judgment that too strong an opinion is a harmful thing in a woman. In the next stanza, his daughter almost becomes an incarnation of Maud Gonne, of the woman who has squandered her virtues, and Yeats provides a prescription for how to regain what has been lost. Yeats then goes on to comment on the way, or the method, for the soul to “ recover radical innocence” is to drive out the tendency toward hatred, which is what he actually, means.

This stanza also proves that Yeats believes hatred to be the root of all evil and it is the opposite of what Yeats means by “ courtesy,” which was mentioned earlier by him. In this stanza Yeats not only suggests what one woman ought to do to heal herself of hatred, nor what one young girl ought to do to avoid hatred; he also suggests what the world needs to heal itself from the divisions and dangers that threaten it like the wake of the worst World War the world had ever.

The second till the fifth line seems that he is making an agreement with God and this shows how much he cares about life. The last three lines show that

he has the confidence that his daughter will survive. Coming back to 'The Second Coming,' He talks about 'revelation,' and this immediately tells the reader that it deals with the coming of Christ at the end of the world to judge his people - the judgment day. There is repetition to remind us that the Second Coming of God isn't far away and we should be ready for it. The next line tells us about important beliefs Christians have.

I found that Spiritus Mundi is a medieval text for Christians, to inform them what they need to do to die in the grace of God. It is essentially "the art of dying well." Spiritus Mundi brings an image of the sphinx and we see that the sphinx rising up to bring forth the end of the world. The sphinx slept in a world of nightmares for 2000 years. The nightmares were caused by the turmoil of the human race, which also refers to line 20. The indignant desert birds, which is spoken about in line 17 try to stop the sphinx, which could mean the end of the world, but their task is impossible.

Here Yeats sight is also troubled and I think this means that it frightens him as he realizes that he cannot save his beloved people from their eminent doom and for the first time in his life, he will really be a failure at something. Reading on we see that "The darkness drops again, but now I know/that twenty centuries of stony sleep/were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle." This line is interpreted to refer to the last part of the realization, may have come to the conclusion that because of the missionaries things will never revert to the way that they had been before.

The last three lines bring out the feeling of impending destruction. The word "beast" ("That twenty centuries of stony sleep were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle, And what rough beast, its hour come round at last") scares the reader in the sense that, the beast will come to devour and destroy. I feel this is a warning to the reader interpreting that the end is near and we should be ready for what is going to come in the future. Man isn't using God's gifts well which is leading to his deterioration and end.

The last line, ("Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?") leaves the reader with an unanswered question so that he/she can look back and reflect the current issues on themselves. Bethlehem was also the place Jesus was born indicating that this poem is relating to the coming of Christ. Through the last stanza of 'A Prayer for My Daughter,' Yeats provides in the concluding stanza his vision for the comic ending he desires to his daughter's story in the classic sense, a story that will conclude in the rituals of the marriage, as he talks about bride groom and so on.

This is his wish which he is expressing showing exactly what parents wish for their children when they grow up. The question which follows makes the reader look back at their own lives and makes them pause for a moment thinking of what all goes on in the world today again having a link to the "Second Coming." At the end of it all Yeats returns to the image of the horn, now not as a treasure that is wasted, but as the very source of these nurturing and enriching values that he hopes will restore the world, again expressing his care and concern for society.

The poems very carefully bring out the elements that affect our world today. Though relations made to the war aren't clear, the style through which it is written in brings out this effect. Both also imply the deterioration of man quite clearly. 'The Second Coming,' has many references such as the deterioration of man, the second coming of Christ to judge the people and is also portrayed by using images such as nature and it is also a heavily symbolic poem.

Though 'A Prayer for my Daughter' is dedicated to the poet's daughter, societies problems and the falling elements of man aren't left out. Though the title is again related to his daughter, it is actually a prayer for all of mankind. The poet is also related to his love, Maud Gonne. Though "A Prayer for my Daughter," is quite lengthy, its message for man is clearly portrayed as he is using his daughter as the character to emphasize and bring out the understanding that man is destroying Gods gift to him. Yeats in "The Second Coming," just brings out the message clearly.

We seem to get a better understanding of what the world may come to as people today are just abusing Gods gifts. He uses the nature to tell us how beautiful our surroundings are and that we aren't taking care of it. The line, which tells us about the hunting hawk, "The falcon cannot hear the falconer" make us understand that we are just ignoring Gods word and this scene can be interpreted as we being the falcon and God the falconer. The same is related in "A Prayer for my Daughter," where Yeats (generally) speaks about the gloom and negative things.

So both the poems are connected in sum way where “ A Prayer form my daughter” has a main character where as “ The Second Coming,” is portrayed in such a way which is concentrated on warning the modern day reader about the failing of mankind. To conclude, both the poems share a wide range of ideas to convey to the reader a sense of fright and tension, and it also causes us to reflect situations like these in our own lives. The poems make us aware of the destruction going on in the world and the falling of man in society. We are able to understand more about what is happening in the world.

I prefer “ The Second Coming,” as I feel that it has hit its target in warning and cautioning us. Reading “ A Prayer form my Daughter,” though did make me bored at first but by analyzing the poem I was able to understand the hidden meanings the poem had lying within making it more exciting while reminding the reader about mans deterioration. Overall the poems are very informative and bring out the reader’s emotions and feelings. The poem has made me aware of some of the hidden elements of life and so, I end by saying that the poems are very unique and are one of a kind.