

# A prayer for my daughter

[Science](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

This poem was written soon after the birth of Ann Butter Yeats in 1919. It shows his awareness of the changing times and his anxiety regarding his daughter's future. The poem opens with a physical storm but it soon becomes a social and political disturbance that threatens the future of his child. His worry causes him to imagine that the future years have already come.

These years are frenzied and violent. The present is calm but the calmness is deceptive like the 'murderous innocence of the sea'. He says that the social and political winds of change are about to sweep Ireland and the only protection his daughter has is 'Gregory's wood and one bare hill.' Yeats believed that only aristocracy as represented by people like the Gregorys can effectively withstand the violent winds of change and protect traditional values and culture. The wind wants to level all things and Yeats was against such equalisation in society. He believed that this led to a loss of culture. The father prays that his daughter should be beautiful but not so beautiful as to cause distraction to herself or others.

If she is too beautiful she will consider beauty to be a sufficient goal in life. She will become vain and lose all natural kindness. She will never be intimate with anybody or choose a good friend or husband. He gives the example of the most beautiful women in the world, Helen and Venus. Venus was fatherless and free to choose her own husband, yet she married Vulcan, a lame blacksmith. Helen, though beautiful and rich caused sorrow to many with the Trojan war. These two women were beautiful and blessed with good fortune.

In fact you could say that they were born with 'The Horn of Plenty' or cornucopia i. . the traditional symbol of prosperity. However they could not enjoy these benefits because of their beauty. Yeats says that beautiful women lead strange lives , ' It is certain that fine women eat/ A crazy salad with their meat'. Yeats considers courtesy the chief of all virtues . It wins hearts even when there is not much beauty.

He says a man may be made a fool by beauty but calm goodness makes him wise. A man may roam about looking for love, he may believe foolishly that he has found it but finally it is goodness of heart that settles and calms him. These lines refer to his own unsuccessful attempts to woo Maud Gonne, a fiery nationalist and to his marriage to Georgie Hyde Lees. His marriage made his life serene and full of order. ' The poet wishes his daughter to be successful but modest, ' the flourishing hidden tree. ' It also symbolises the stability he wishes for. He wants her to be like a linnet and provide sweetmusic to all around her.

He would like her to begin a debate or an argument only in fun. He says she should pursue everything light- heartedly. He doesn't want her to be intense about anything. Yeats wants his daughter to flourish in a stable environment to be rooted to ' a dear perpetual place', a place dear to her and dear to others because of her. The next two stanzas have an intensely personal tone. His own experience with Maud Gonne and his opinion about her are shown here. He has loved and admired her but she has not done well in life.

Due to this, his mind has become dry. He says that the worst thing that can happen to a person is for his heart to be choked with hate. If his daughter has no hatred towards anyone she will be safe and will be loved by all. Whatever sweeping changes occur in society, the linnet will not be blown off the tree by the wind, i. e. , she will be able to retain her position in an aristocratic household, in spite of political upheaval. Yeats next refers to Maud Gonne's intellectual hatred (hatred based on ideology rather than emotion).

He feels opinions are a curse, and have led Maud Gonne into marriage with a worthless man whom he calls contemptuously, ' an old bellows full of angry wind. ' She gives away all her beauty and fortune including the love of Yeats. The poet was hurt by Maud Gonne's marriage to John Mac Bride, another revolutionary. Here he says that Maud Gonne has given away something valuable (his love) but his quiet and good natured wife values it. Yeats now states his belief that when hatred is removed from the soul, it recovers its original innocence. Then the person realises that only the soul can please itself and delight in itself. The soul is dependent on itself for its joy and sorrow.

One needs fear only oneself. Heaven's will is also the will of the soul. Yeats wants his daughter to realise all this so that she can be happy and peaceful. There may be hostility all around and revolutions may come and go and people may frown at her but she will be happy. He wishes his daughter to be married into an aristocratic household where tradition and culture are preserved. He feels that in the thoroughfares or streets where common

people live, only arrogance and hatred can be found. On the other hand, a traditional and aristocratic household is rich in qualities of mind and heart.

Such places are the workplace of beauty and innocence; he means the beauty and innocence of the mind and the heart. Yeats says that ceremony is another name for tradition which he symbolises in the spreading laurel tree. Through this prayer for his daughter, Yeats tells us what he values in life a peaceful, cultured and aristocratic lifestyle. By this period of his life, Yeats had understood the value of aristocracy. The prayer also tells us about his personal experiences and what he has learned from them. He wants his daughter to be showered with all the riches of the world.