

# Reading Yeats's 'A Prayer for My Daughter' in Light of Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning

Nisreen T. Yousef

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Middle East University, P.O. Box-283, Amman 11831, Jordan

Mohammed I. Mahameed\*

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Middle East University, P.O. Box-283, Amman 11831, Jordan

**Abstract**—In this research paper, the authors discuss W. B. Yeats's poem 'A Prayer for My Daughter' through the sociocultural theory of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. The Vygotskian approach in the fields of education and psychology emphasises the interdependence of social and cognitive processes in child development and education. Utilising a few of the main concepts of the Vygotskian sociological framework such as mediation, scaffolding, the zone of proximal development, and internalization, the paper critically examines Yeats's 'A Prayer', with the objective of shedding new light on its meaning and interpretation. The paper argues that there are notable parallels and similarities between the main concepts in Vygotsky's theory and the implicit notions and precepts of child learning and development inherent in Yeats's poem, which provides a common ground between the theorist and the poet.

**Index Terms**—Yeats, 'A Prayer', Vygotsky, sociocultural theory, zone of proximal development

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sociocultural theory has gained popularity in recent years, particularly in educational settings. The main argument of this paper is that there are parallels between the notions of child education embedded in Yeats's 'A prayer for My Daughter' (henceforward 'A Prayer') and child education concepts postulated in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning which was originally systematized in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s. Shah and Rashid (2017) argue on his death in 1934, Vygotsky's work was not released for 20 years, but it became accessible to the Western world in the 1960s. From a Vygotskian perspective, human cognitive activities take place in cultural contexts; the individual's relationships to others define his/her subjective life inside society. Besides focusing on social interaction with other individuals who may be peers or individuals more advanced than the child, Vygotsky's views are also pertinent to the interaction that may occur between parents and children. Though Vygotsky focused on the development of children from birth through adolescence, some of his central concepts have also been extended and applied to adult learning as well. Similarly, Yeats's poem traces the development of his daughter from infancy through childhood and young adulthood. Among the principal concepts of Vygotsky's theory are: 'mediation', 'scaffolding', 'the zone of proximal development', and 'internalization'. Similar counterparts or equivalents of these concepts can be found throughout Yeats's 'A Prayer' though in an implied, suggested or indirect form.

## II. DISCUSSION

'A Prayer for my Daughter' (written in 1919 and published in 1921) reflects, among other things, Yeats's complicated views on child education, a theme that has been largely neglected by the studies dealing with this poem. The first stanza of the poem underlines the contrast between the peaceful sleep of Yeats's innocent and beautiful daughter and the raging and violent storm outside: 'Once more the storm is howling, and half hid/Under this cradlehood and coverlid/My child sleeps on' (Yeats, p.1-3). The overall poem reflects Yeats's conception of a happy life which he grounds in a close connection between the internal and the external world. This linking of the outer and the inner world is reminiscent of Vygotsky's view of the interconnection between the outside and the inside elements of a child's development. An important concept in Vygotsky's theory is mediation, which is the way in which humans establish a relationship between their mental representations and the outside world. In Vygotsky's theory, children's development is viewed as the outcome of adult mediation through which adults engage children in a certain activity and, in consequence, promote the development in children of a new skill, and teach them new tools of thinking, problem-

---

\* Corresponding Author: [mmahameed67@yahoo.com](mailto:mmahameed67@yahoo.com)

solving, and self-regulation. As a result, children outgrow their current leading activity and move on to a new one (Vygotsky, 1978). Mediation, whether symbolic/material (tools, or signs) or human/psychological (adults, peers) enables the child to resolve a problem or achieve a target by (Kozulin, 1988) 'transforming the natural human abilities and skills into higher mental functions' (xxv). Mediation, then, is instrumental in the context of social activities leading to certain patterns of behavior which relate every individual both to the community and to himself/herself.

The outside perils and turbulent conditions depicted in the opening section of the poem are gradually linked to an internal, cherished state of stillness and tranquility. In the third stanza, Yeats draws some historical allusions to warn his daughter about the perils of being beautiful. Playing a role similar to that of mediator in Vygotsky's theory, Yeats warns his child and readers in general that excess beauty in women sometimes brings disasters, and some of these women will have a difficult time choosing the right life partner, and would (Yeats 'A Prayer for My Daughter'), 'never find a friend' (p.24). He exemplifies this argument with several references to Greek mythology. For instance, Helen, who was a woman of incomparable and exquisite beauty, was made so vain by her beauty that she found her life with her husband Menelaus to be unsatisfactory and consequently paved the way for a destructive and prolonged war. Similarly, the goddess of love and beauty Aphrodite, driven by instinct, got married to the lame god Hephaestus and had an illicit affair with another god. Yeats claims that some women, blessed with the 'Horn of Plenty' (natural gifts), choose to have a 'crazy salad' [an inferior spouse] with their meat'' and as a result lose their chance of having a happy life (p.30-32). Yeats hopes that his daughter will have beauty, but not enough to make her vain: 'May she be granted beauty and yet not/Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught, /Or hers before a looking-glass' (Yeats, p.17-19). Yeats is obviously drawing upon his long experience with his first love Maud Gonne, considered to be excessively beautiful but nevertheless lost kindness and intimacy and failed to choose the right husband. Yeats wants his daughter to learn from historical/cultural examples and consequently avoid repeating the same errors of judgement committed by some impulsive, opinionated and arrogant women. From a Vygotskian viewpoint, mediation, whether cultural or human, functions as a way of helping the learner in achieving a task. Accordingly, Yeats here serves as the human mediator between the learner and the knowledge to be acquired, while history and myth become the cultural mediation which can provide another source of guidance or protection.

The harmonization between the inner and the outer dimensions of human existence is further achieved in the fifth stanza where the virtue of courtesy is viewed as the essence of happiness and good life and the bridge that connects the external and internal dimensions of life: 'In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned' (Yeats, p.33). In this stanza, we see a clear move from the 'howling' wind and the 'frenzied drum' of external forces to the inner tranquility of human courtesy. More specifically, the poet-speaker is here making a clear interaction between his young daughter and her male peers: 'Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned' (Yeats, p.34). Through this communion, Yeats wants his daughter to continue the process of learning to be compassionate and kind. He maintains that many times, men who believed they loved beautiful women and thought they were loved by them faced disappointment, compared to those who found love in the modest and courteous women. He adds that kind and courteous women attract hearts more than beautiful women do. So, he wants his daughter to be an agreeable young woman rather than an arrogant beauty. Moreover, the poet-speaker is again playing the role of mediator by imploring his daughter to learn to be courteous as a strategy of helping her improve and upgrade her development along an arduous process that requires the mediation of a more experienced person. Apparently, this act of learning is not a solitary activity but rather a kind of interactive engagement in which peers, in addition to parents, can participate in an interactive learning process. This brings to mind Vygotsky, who actually placed strong emphasis on this kind of peer or small group activities, arguing that the roots of higher mental processes lie in the interaction between peers. Vygotsky (1978) states that the child should be assisted by an adult guidance or more capable peers collaboration in achieving a task he/she could not do alone. Hence, the Vygotskian notion that the specific developmental structures and processes revealed by individuals should be traced to their interactions with others (ibid: p.30).

Cross-cultural tropes such as the tree and the linnet are also invoked to create further interconnection between the child and her surroundings: 'May she become a flourishing hidden tree/That all her thoughts may like the linnet be' (Yeats, p.41-42). Through depicting these tropes and symbols drawn from nature, Yeats hopes that his daughter's thoughts will be like the linnet's song, a 'glad kindness' (Yeats, p.40) dispensed freely for making people happy and firm like a 'green laurel /Rooted in one dear perpetual place' (Yeats, p.47-48). The linnet is here pictured as a symbol of freedom, innocence, and self-delights, while the laurel is presented as an emblem of constancy and immortality. Keeping his daughter's future in mind, the poet posits the linnet's cheerful and magnanimous song against the 'howling' of the storm and the prophetic 'frenzied drum' of future misfortunes, expressing thereby a genuine tenderness towards her. He wishes that her life should be like the linnet's, clustered around happy and pure thoughts and pleads that her soul should flourish and reach self-fulfillment like a flourishing tree.

Actually, the symbolic laurel image has elicited different critical interpretations. Adopting a harshly critical reaction of a feminist reader, Oates (1983; italics in the original) writes sarcastically: 'This celebrated poet would have his daughter an object of nature for others' --which is to say male-- delectation. ... The poet's daughter is to be brainless and voiceless, *rooted*'. By contrast, in her article on 'A Prayer for My Daughter', Vanita (2015) elaborates on the laurel trope and notes: 'The laurel is a symbol of creativity and knowledge, hence the crowning of poets with laurel wreaths. Also ... the laurel stands for healing, rejuvenation and immortality'(p.119). My view is that Yeats would like his

daughter to live like a laurel tree deeply rooted in a particular place, that is, to be entrenched in the inherent tradition in order to preserve a highly cherished lifestyle of stability and constancy, a motif that also recurs in the concluding stanza as we shall see later. Expressed in Vygotskian terms, Yeats wishes to expand his daughter's current zone of development to what she can or what he would like her to achieve in the future, i.e. her potential level of development.

Yeats's comparison of his daughter to a tree requires a bit of elaboration, given his repeated depiction of her as 'a flourishing hidden tree' (Yeats, p.41), a 'green laurel' (Yeats, p.47), and 'the spreading laurel tree' (Yeats, p.80). Obviously, a botanical metaphor is used here to mark the growth, development, and maturity of the child. In this context, it is interesting to note that Vygotsky draws attention to a common tradition among nineteenth century psychologists who often represented the child's development in the metaphor of a growing tree. He writes, (Vygotsky, 1978): 'Karl Stumpf, a prominent German psychologist in the early years of the twentieth century ... compared the study of children to the study of botany' (p.143). Vygotsky's remark may as well lead us to speculate on the likelihood that the tree metaphor used to describe the growth of children was a common practice in both scientific and literary representations of the child in the era in which Yeats wrote his poem and that he himself was perhaps familiar with this tradition in his times.

The linnet metaphor also has some symbolic significance in exploring the relationship between the two factors in human development: nature and culture. Surveying the linnet metaphor in English poetry, Vanita (2015) notes that 'the linnet, a spontaneous songster, represents the superiority of nature to art' as indicated in Wordsworth's poem 'The Tables Turned':

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:  
How sweet his music! on my life,  
Come, hear the woodland linnet,

There's more of wisdom in it. (qtd. in Vanita, 2015, p. 79)

As for Wordsworth, so too for Yeats, the linnet, in its self-sufficient gladness, seems to mark a similar view of the superiority of nature to culture. Having said that, it is also equally true to argue that there is enough evidence in the poem which suggests the overall superiority of culture to nature, as indicated first, by the trope of the heart: 'Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned/ By those that are not entirely beautiful' (Yeats, p.34-35) and second, by the rhetorical question: 'How but in custom and in ceremony/Are innocence and beauty born?' (Yeats, p.77-78). In the heart metaphor, Yeats seems to be exploring the role of both one's cultural background and personal activity in achieving cherished objectives, and evidently, with special importance given to the former. For Yeats, love is not inspired by mere physical beauty; rather, it is earned by good efforts, 'by those who are not entirely beautiful' but who are courteous, compassionate and helpful. Therefore, for the purpose of winning a heart, Yeats's daughter is in need for feminine innocence and human courtesy, for love cannot come unconditionally and freely. In other words, the daughter should not depend on her natural gifts but on her ability and her efforts to actively engage in and creatively interact with her culture and society, a view that is paralleled in Vygotsky's theory of child development.

The nature/culture dichotomy which features prominently in Yeats's 'A Prayer' is further paralleled by a similar reference to it in one of Vygotsky's works. In their 'Introduction' to Vygotsky's *Mind in society*, Cole and Scribner (1978) maintain that 'Vygotsky was the first modern psychologist to suggest the mechanisms by which culture becomes a part of each person's nature'. However, they also point out that for Vygotsky, (Cole and Scribner, 1978) argue that 'the mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture'. (p.39). In the metaphor of the linnet and the tree, the child's development is not described as the outcome of a natural growth of thoughts individually originated from the foliage of a tree but rather as the song of a linnet interlinked to the boughs of a tree in a combinative/contiguous rather than inherent/organic relationship. In other words, her development is predominantly the outcome of cultural rather than natural development. Moreover, both Yeats and Vygotsky see this binary relationship as complementary and inextricable. At the same time that culture is influencing the individual, the individual is also creating culture.

In his article 'The Problem of the Cultural Development of the Child', Vygotsky (1994) envisions two main lines of psychological development: the natural and the cultural. Recognizing the inextricable relationship between nature and culture in child development, Vygotsky observes:

We must, therefore, distinguish the main lines in the development of the child's behaviour. First, there is the line of natural development of behaviour which is closely bound up with the processes of general organic growth and the maturation of the child. Second, there is the line of cultural improvement of the psychological functions, the working out of new methods of reasoning, the mastering of the cultural methods of behaviour. (Vygotsky, p.57).

In other words, a combination of cultural influences and genetics creates one's personality by first interacting with the social traditions and the surrounding culture, and second by developing his or her own personal aptitude in the future. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1994) outlines his conception of the type of interrelation between the two lines: 'Usually the two lines of psychological development (the natural and the cultural) merge into each other in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish them' (p.63). He goes on to explain the impact of the cultural factor on the natural factor: 'Culture, generally speaking, does not produce anything new apart from that which is given by nature. But it transforms nature to suit the ends of man' (p.67). Thus, although culture cannot produce anything new by itself, it can re-direct

nature for some specific purposes, as long as it conforms to the laws of nature. As Vygotsky (1994) illustrates: 'We can transform outward nature and make it serve our ends only in conformance with the laws of nature' (p.73). Accordingly, there is a mutual confluence or convergence of the two factors which take part in the development of the child, namely the biological/natural and the social/cultural. Put more simply, the natural and the cultural factors are simultaneously intertwined in a competitive and complementary relationship that ultimately affects the processes of human learning and cognition, with culture gaining ascendance over nature in the end but without replacing it.

As a matter of fact, contemporary writings on Vygotsky have not given adequate attention to natural factors in the child's cognitive development. As (Moll, 1994, p.96) rightly observes: 'An adequate representation of Vygotsky's theory should, therefore, ground the social construction of cognition in a fundamental recognition of natural and biological possibility', (p.96). By the same token, Yeats's representation of child development as a whole has also been largely ignored by previous researchers and scholars and the mutual relationship between nature and culture in 'A Prayer' has consequently not received due attention either. By contrast, the analogous nature vs. art dichotomy in Yeats's poems particularly 'Sailing to Byzantium' has been covered by the bulk of Yeat's scholarship.

In his writings, (Vygotsky, 1978) tends to view the cultural development of the child as a twofold process, first on the social level (interpsychological) and then on the individual level (intrapsychological). For Vygotsky, development occurs as a child learns general concepts and principles that can be applied to new tasks and problems. Through interaction within the sociocultural environment, the child acquires new skills which are later developed into more sophisticated mental processes or higher cognitive functions. According to (Vygotsky, 1978), this intervention would help the child move towards his/her zone of proximal development which is 'the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (p.18). Put more simply, Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development is the difference between what a person can do independently and what he/she can do with the help or guidance of an expert or a more experienced person. The same concept suggests that there is a big difference in the development of the child when he/she is acting alone and when he/she is performing in the company of a more knowledgeable other.

That said, it can be stated that Vygotsky's conception of the cognitive and emotional development of the child as primarily determined by the values of the surrounding culture mediated by the guidance and help of an experienced adult seems to be analogous to the basic precepts implicitly suggested in Yeats's vision of child development. Yeats's undeclared idea of child development includes almost all of the basic constituents of Vygotsky's theory such as mediation, scaffolding, zone of proximal development, and internalization. As in Vygotsky's theory, child development in Yeats's 'A Prayer' is also viewed as the emergence of new knowledge and skills that were not in existence in previous stages but which can be accomplished and ultimately internalized through the guidance and support of a more experienced other. Like Vygotsky, Yeats appears to have recognized the congruent and complementary roles of nature and culture in child education and, like him too, he seems to have ultimately prioritized the role of culture in the interaction between the two sides of this perennial binary.

Closely connected with the zone of proximal development is the concept of scaffolding which has become popular not only in cognitive psychology but also in teaching in general. In Vygotsky's theory, the scaffolding metaphor is used to refer to the tentative supporting role of tutors, teachers and parents in the learning process of children similar to the way scaffolds are temporarily used to construct buildings. Scaffolding enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which is beyond their unassisted efforts. Through instructional scaffolding, the learners can accomplish certain tasks or acquire new skills they would not be able to achieve on their own. In this process, a dynamic relationship is established between the tutor and the learner as he/she acquires more capability in the task at hand.

As Vygotsky's theory is substantially concerned with child learning and development, so is Yeats's 'A Prayer'. Viewed from a sociocultural perspective, the poem seems to be a monologic speech about child development wherein the poet-speaker seems to be playing the role of an active teacher, mentor, or guardian rather than that of a passive well-wisher. This role is further complicated by the fact that the knowledge that the educator/poet wants to impart to his child is grounded in the poet's own personal love experience as above mentioned. Apparently playing the role of educator or guide, the speaker intends to introduce the child/learner to new concepts and understandings and to help her walk through this new knowledge until she appropriates it. In stanza seven, Yeats considers the 'drought' that his mind is suffering from as being a result of the forces of hate that rage through his personal life and perhaps the whole community. However, Yeats maintains that if the mind is hate-free, it survives such assaults. For the speaker, a mind that has gone dry can revive like a tree that revives from its roots even after its branches have withered. Apparently, Yeats is keen on conveying the same message to his daughter whom he believes would be able to expand her current horizon to move to a more advanced level of developmental and intellectual expectations. Referring to his daughter, Yeats claims that destructive forces cannot destroy those who do not hate, no matter how fragile they are, for their minds are clear, calm and free. Just as the storm outside cannot tear the linnet from the sturdy trees, turmoil and perils cannot affect the life of a strong woman:

If there's no hatred in a mind  
Assault and battery of the wind

Can never tear the linnet from the leaf. (Yeats's, p.54-56)

Instructional scaffolding is here provided by the parent to enable his daughter to increase her current knowledge to a higher level of understanding. At her tender age, the child is not expected to fully appreciate the mature and sophisticated viewpoint of the experienced father. Nevertheless, the currently immature child can eventually complete this task which she cannot achieve without the guidance of the expert father. Obviously, the father's scaffolding comes into play to facilitate the progress of the child and improve her current knowledge progressively forward toward a final, cherished goal. By providing individualized support through imparting his personal experience, the father intends to move the daughter towards a new understanding of hatred so that she can avoid falling a victim to this kind of destructive human practice.

In the eighth stanza, Yeats continues to talk about intellectual hatred and to warn against the worst kind of hatred: 'An intellectual hatred is the worst/So let her think opinions are accursed' (Yeats's, p.57-58). Here, the poet provides further help and guidance to his daughter, imploring her to shun reckless passion and wild feelings that he considers the weakness of beautiful women. In his opinion, hatred, especially intellectual hatred, destroys people and makes them do cruel things. Evidently, the speaker is drawing upon his own experience to reflect on his emotional state when the woman he loved rejected him to marry another man. As previous commentators have remarked, Yeats implicitly refers to Maud Gonne and criticizes her primarily for 'her opinionated mind', stating that too strong an opinion is a harmful thing in a woman. Though Gonne was one of the loveliest women and was born to a high and refined family, her wild thoughts dominated her nature and led her to exchange 'the horn of plenty' (Yeats) with a mere wind bag (her current husband). Grounding his advice in his personal knowledge, itself part of traditional wisdom and public culture, Yeats wants his daughter to experience neither his disappointment nor Gonne's hatred, hoping that his daughter would consider strong opinions as accursed or doomed:

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 bellows full of angry wind? (Yeats's, p.59-64)

In the ninth stanza, Yeats continues to talk about self-contented women, asserting that traditionally rooted women are incorruptible and can feel perfectly happy. Again, he considers hatred to be the cause of all evil and prays that his daughter be left out of that evil. He also believes that a soul free from hatred will preserve its innocence and purity:

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,  
The soul recovers radical innocence  
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,  
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,

And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will. (Yeats's, p.65-69)

Once hatred is driven out, the soul could recover its primal innocence and purity. According to the poet, the hatred-free woman can be happy and can make other people happy and comfortable, despite all the storms of misfortune that may beset her life. In the new restored or rejuvenated state, she can act as a stronghold for the people around her and, even more, her will would be that of Heaven. The point here is that if the heart is void of all detestation and if the mind is clear and transparent, the soul will be reinstated to its original form of virtue and transparency and will ultimately learn that it is 'self-delighting, /Self-appeasing, self-affrighting.' (Yeats's, p.67-68) and will be identified with that of Heaven. Having achieved this goal, no external force or opinion can prevent her from leading a life of sustainable blessing:

She can, though every face should scowl  
And every windy quarter howl  
Or every bellows burst, be happy still. (Yeats's, p.70-72)

Speaking from a Vygotskian angle, it can be said that once the child has learnt some skills from the more knowledgeable adult through such processes as mediation, scaffolding, and the zone of proximal development, the next step for the child is to internalize these skills. Internalization, therefore, is the process through which learners appropriate social tools of mediation and cultural artifacts and utilize them to upgrade and regulate their cognitive activity. Vygotsky also states that internalization as a concept recognizes that human minds owe their existence to and are inextricably intertwined with social, historical, cultural, and material processes. He (1978) further proposes that any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an inter-psychological category, and then within the child as an intra-psychological category.

Internalization further signifies that social interaction creates zones of proximal development to promote skills that initially work effectively only within collaborative activities, but are gradually internalized as self-regulatory processes. Vygotsky centered child development in the sociocultural domain where the child develops in the company of parent, mentor, or teacher and then he/she becomes independent or self-regulatory. Yeats's representation of his daughter's social and cognitive development appears to be running parallel to Vygotsky's model of internalization. Initially, she is

supposed to be learning certain behavioural skills or human principles/precepts (such as courtesy and avoidance of hatred) from her father's invocation but ultimately, she is expected to incorporate these skills into her own cognitive development and become capable to act on her own.

The concluding stanza of the poem brings together all the essential processes of learning and development explicitly outlined in Vygotsky's theory (mediation, scaffolding, the zone of proximal development, internalization) and implicitly embedded in Yeats's unstated theoretical educational framework. Of particular significance in this stanza is the concept of internalization. Yeats wants his daughter's bridegroom to bring her to a house where 'custom' and 'ceremony' will lend their life constancy, stability, and well-being: 'And may her bridegroom bring her to a house/ Where all's accustomed, ceremonious' (Yeats, p.73-74). As in Vygotsky's theoretical formulation, so in Yeats's poem, skills or concepts would be found first in the interaction between the expert and the novice and later in the novice's independent activity. In this stanza, it is clear that the novice daughter initially lacks the knowledge or the expertise of the bridegroom for facing future problems on her own. Yeats foresees that as a married woman, his daughter would only develop through embracing what he calls custom and ceremony, a goal that can be better achieved with the help and support of her husband, who is presumably more experienced or knowledgeable than her. A clear sign of the imagined bride's cognitive development is her realization that 'arrogance and hatred are the wares/Peddled in the thoroughfares' (Yeats, p.75-76), that is, arrogance and hatred are the traits of the vulgar masses, and traditional manners and courtesies are the character traits of refined and cultured people. By this realization, the would-be bride can be said to have internalized the concepts that she has learned from her society and culture with the help of first, her father and second, her bridegroom. Emphasizing the role of the social milieu and peers, Vygotsky writes:

Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers.... Learning is not development; however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 139)

Assuming that what Vygotsky says about child and peer learning is applicable to adult learning, the imaginary wife in the final stanza is expected to learn from her husband and the surrounding cultural and social milieu. However, this prospect has been faced with strong opposition by feminist critics such as (Oates, 1983) and (Maddox, 1999) for its alleged patriarchal depiction of the daughter being handed over to a protective husband in a conservative or aristocratic family. Even (Toker, 1999), who otherwise disagrees with these feminist critiques, concurs with their approach: 'The only place in the poem that is, indeed, a clear expression of an obsolete patriarchal attitude is the culture-bound belatedly Victorian reference to the bridegroom who is expected to prepare a ready-made form of well-being for the bride' (p.103). Generally speaking, feminists use the term 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women and to highlight the issue of women's subordination by giving absolute priority to men and limiting women's human rights. In feminist discourse, patriarchy is considered responsible for the inferior status of women in society (Lerner, 1986). Thus, patriarchy tries to make certain that men always have the dominant roles and women always have the subordinate ones (Millet, 1977).

Looking at the issue in light of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, I do not find Yeats's idea of a bridegroom ushering his bride into a refined and aristocratic home (p.73-74) necessarily patriarchal. Rather, it suggests a father who is genuinely concerned about his daughter's ultimate intellectual and emotional independence. In Vygotskian terms, the role of the husband will be that of a more knowledgeable guide who would help a presumably less experienced young wife to learn new skills and to interact with her cultural surroundings in a more positive manner. Yeats's treatment of this issue appears to be culture-bound, for he is drawing upon the then current culture which would instate the husband as the responsible and respectable head of the family and whose job is protecting the wife from some evil social practices. The husband's role in this situation is not one of sheer dominance as much as it is one of deep benevolence. It is therefore more likely that the planting of the self in a specific cultural tradition will be done by the self rather than the other. By and large, Yeats does not seem to be ready to accept everything found in the culture. His renunciation of 'opinion' or 'intellectual hatred' and arrogance reflects his opposition to some social malpractices sponsored by a dominant culture that suppresses individuality instead of promoting its growth. Consequently, the husband-wife relationship should not be seen from the perspective of a dominant male, considering himself superior to a subordinate female as some feminist critiques would represent it.

For Yeats, the instabilities of the outside world are to be compensated for by 'rootedness in 'custom' and 'ceremony': 'How but in custom and ceremony/Are innocence and beauty born?' (Yeats, p.77-78). The speaker-poet wonders how innocence, courtesy, and spiritual/moral beauty can ever grow without being deeply ingrained in society's cultural traditions and social values. Thus, it becomes evident that the role of the husband-to-be is to usher his wife into a house rich with cultural norms and traditional values that are capable of preserving a life of happiness and constancy and free of hatred or arrogance. Like a laurel tree with which she was earlier compared, the wife will be rooted in spiritual values and sound cultural traditions: 'Ceremony's a name for the rich horn, /And custom for the spreading laurel tree' (Yeats, p.79-80). In this ritualistic atmosphere of custom and ceremony, real beauty and innocence can take place and flourish like a laurel tree and Yeats's daughter, Anne (she never got married but became a successful stage designer) can lead a happy life and no external tribulations or opinions can deter her from happiness.

To recapitulate, in 'A Prayer', the child's behaviour is determined by her family values and expectations as well as her cultural and social background. In the educational choices of the father, there are some kinds of behaviour which are desired and approved as they are bolstered by society's moral norms or mores such as courtesy, and others which cannot be reinforced such as arrogance and hatred. Apparently, both the psychologist and the poet couch their concepts in material rather than religious terminology, a fact that indicates yet another point of similarity between their ideologies or worldviews. For both, the mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture, and so, psychological functioning becomes regulated by the voluntary control of the person concerned. In light of this assertion, it can be concluded that Yeats does not want his daughter to be dependent on him or any other mentor or helper and that what he aspires to is intellectual and emotional independence for his daughter. Ultimately, he wants her to grow into a decent, independent, and self-regulated individual.

### III. CONCLUSION

This research has tried to establish some similarities between Vygotsky's theory and Yeats's poem in terms of their view of the interrelationship between the child's social, cultural development on one hand and his/her cognitive development on the other. As the theory envisions a better learning opportunities for the child based on the norms and values of society with the help of a more knowledgeable other, the poem expects the daughter to resort to society's well-established traditions in order to grow and develop along the higher levels of cognitive knowledge. Both Yeats and Vygotsky see a concomitantly competitive and complementary relationship between nature and culture, and both of them tend to prioritize culture in the overall human developmental process. Similar to Vygotsky's concepts of mediation, scaffolding, zone of proximal development, and internalization, Yeats's representation of his child's development seems to follow analogous strategies but in an implicit manner. Both the scientist and the poet conceive similar stages of human learning and development as an infant, a child, and a young adult. Each of them also views the act of learning as a social process and recognizes the role played by interacting with peers, culture, society, or with a more advanced other, including parents. Thus, for both the psychologist and the poet, learning is the outcome of the convergence of individual cognition with culturally created values and mediational artifacts.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Bloom, H. (1970). *Yeats*. New York: Oxford university press.
- [2] Cole, M. and, S. Sylvia. (1978). Introduction. In L. S. Vygotsky: *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard university press.
- [3] Kozulin, A. (1988). Vygotsky in context. In L. S. Vygotsky: *Thought and language*. Cambridge: The MIT press.
- [4] Lerner, G. (1986). *The Creation of patriarchy*. New York and Oxford: Oxford university press.
- [5] Maddox, B. (1999). *Yeats's ghosts: The secret life W. B. Yeats*. New York: Harper Collins.
- [6] Millett, K. (1977). *Sexual politics*. London: Virago.
- [7] Moll, I. (1994). Reclaiming the natural line in Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development. *Human Development* 37: 333-342.
- [8] Oates, J. C. (1983). 'At least I have made a woman of her': Images of women in twentieth-century literature. *The Georgia Review* 37 (1): 7-30.
- [9] Shah, T. A. and R. Saddaf. (2017). Applying Vygotsky to adult learning. *Journal of Social Sciences* 8:1-20. Available at file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/ApplyingVygotskytoAdultLearning%20(12).pdf. (accessed 21-2-2021).
- [10] Toker, L. (1999). W B. Yeats's 'A prayer for my daughter': The ironies of the patriarchal stance. *Connotations: Journal for Critical Debate* 9 (1):100-110.
- [11] Vanita, R. (2015). Self-delighting soul: A reading of Yeats's 'A prayer for my daughter' in the light of Indian philosophy'. *Connotations* 24 (2): 239-257. Available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322517416\\_Applying\\_Vygotsky\\_to\\_Adult\\_Learning](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322517416_Applying_Vygotsky_to_Adult_Learning).(accessed 15-11-2020).
- [12] Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Ed. C. Michael, et al. Cambridge, MA: Harvard university press.
- [13] Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language*. Ed. A. Kozulin. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT press,
- [14] Vygotsky, L. (1994). The problem of the cultural development of the child. In *The Vygotsky reader*. Leiden: Blackwell: 57-72. First published (1929). *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 36: 415-432. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/reader/p057.pdf>. (accessed 13-1-2021). (accessed 3-1-2021).
- [15] Yeats, W. B. (1921). 'A prayer for my daughter'. University of Toronto libraries. Available at <https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/prayer-my-daughter>. (accessed 14-2-2021).

**Nisreen T. Yousef** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Middle East University, Jordan, where she teaches a variety of courses in English Literature. Dr. Yousef is currently the director of Language and Translation Centre at MEU. Her research interest focuses on postcolonial and historical literature. She was awarded her Ph.D from the University of Leicester, in 2017.

**Mohammed I. Mahameed** is an Associate Professor at the Department of English language and literature, Middle East University, Jordan, where he teaches a variety of courses in English Literature. His research interests are mainly concerned with the cultural studies subjects of British Literature. He has published multiple articles in reputed journals. He was awarded his Ph.D. from Mumbai University, in 1999.