

Analytical Essay on the Poem *Wasted*

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Wasted

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I'm a demon and I'm a saint
with traces of last night
still running through my veins
("you'll always be my little princess...")

plastic heroes and synthetic gods
all we want is to fill that hole
with something just a bit sweeter
than reality
("so innocent, so pure...just spin around for me...")

but little princess
oh, I see the truth...
even with the syringe
shoved in my arm
("look at my baby...so beautiful...come to Daddy...")

every bitter drop
pushing me further
into utter oblivion—
I never knew
addiction
could be so freeing
("no, don't cry...you just...you just look so beautiful...")

shutting down
every thought
every memory
creating a picture
of perfect happiness
("you smell so good...Daddy loves his princess...I'll show you...")

and with every new high
a new piece to the picture

develops--
a perfect family
a perfect little princess
showing what could've been
but never was
("SHUT UP! Please...Daddy's just having a little fun...")

and still,
I find myself
trapped inside that costume
in my father's eyes
and I will never be
anything more
than what he said I was
("good girl...I'll always love you...you'll always be my little princess...")

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Abstract

Written by an unknown online writer, *Wasted* is a reflective poem by a victim of child sexual abuse. 'Wasted' is the title and the abstract idea permeating this emotive piece, referring to an undesired result of an action and being weak or emaciated of the body of a person (Wasted, n.d.). Interwoven into the tragic storyline and scenes lie several important messages. To reveal the embedded themes, the reader has to first understand the inner thoughts and emotions of the protagonists – the victim and the offender.

Overview

In flashbacks to the rape incident (stanza 1), the daughter figures out the 'truth' (stanza 3) of having been raped and subsequently wants to fall into 'utter oblivion' (stanza 4) with the help of 'the syringe' (stanza 3). The girl tries to paralyze herself with drugs, imagination and sex to reach 'perfect happiness' (stanza 5). Unfortunately, 'the picture' (stanza 6) is never perfect (stanzas 6 and 7). The use of the labels her father frequently uses to address her, such as 'little princess' and 'good girl', declares the authority of the man both as her father but also as her rapist and induces fear, reminding her of how to 'behave properly'. The girl is thus physically torn and mentally exhausted. She has low self-esteem, particularly in relation to her father, for whom she 'will never be anything more than what he said I was' (stanza 7).

Perspectives of the Victim and the Offender

While the relationship between the rapist and the victim remains ambiguous, there are hints in the poem that help reveal their roles. This father and daughter relationship is first suggested in the last line of stanza 3 when the rapist addresses the victim as 'my baby' and

himself as 'Daddy'. However, for the reader, the reality is still just a suspicion because that may simply be sweet talk between a couple. Their relationship is later confirmed by the girl referring to the man as 'my father' (stanza 7). The theme of role is further elaborated in the discussion of relationship. In a healthy father-daughter relationship, there should be no involvement of intercourse or violence. Even though being a blissful little princess is the girl's projected dream, the love of the father to his daughter is not true filial love. According to both Western and Eastern schools of philosophy and seen in the teachings of Confucius (Waley, 1938), relationship is always bilateral, interactive and must be solidified by trust. Without mutual understanding and agreement, the roles of the two parties in a relationship cannot be executed effectively. It is very important for those who are in the relationship to uphold the rights of the other and carry out their responsibilities appropriately.

In addition to roles and relationships, the poet has cleverly embedded several other themes in this piece. Each stanza is composed of a few-line reflection from the victim in the aftermath of what happened and followed by phrases uttered by the offender before and during the process. This pathological relationship is reflected through different number of lines for the daughter and the father in each stanza, symbolizing the struggles of the girl versus the direct abusive thoughts of the father. The girl struggles between obeying and disobeying her father, not resisting fiercely because she still sees the rapist as her father. Hence, the concept of 'the wasted trust of a daughter' is expressed through 'the wasted body of a daughter' following the abuse. In contrast, the father has a sick mindset and displays clearly inappropriate behaviour. His train of thought is projected through lines of simple monologue in each stanza which reflect the rapist's point of view. There is no struggle of 'to-act-or-not-to-act' in him. His tone in each

utterance gradually intensifies with more commands, such as shouting ‘SHUT UP’ (stanza 6) at her. At the beginning, he seems like any other loving father (stanzas 1 to 3). Later, the unscrupulous father turns into a beast with increasingly filthy words (stanzas 4 to 6) and scurrilous name-calling to cunningly manipulate his daughter’s innocence. Clearly, the man continuously cajoles the girl into his trap and shows no guilt for his actions. Despite the poet’s simple and direct way of expression, these two distinctive but intertwining perspectives increase the complexity of content and the density of emotions, revealing the different values upheld by the father and the daughter.

In his eyes, the girl is no longer his daughter but rather his property when he addresses the girl as his ‘little princess’, which he does three times, every time adding a possessive pronoun (stanzas 1, 5 and 7) to emphasise his ownership of his daughter, commodifying her as ‘his property’. Not only does the father violate the girl’s body, but he also neglects his duties and abuses his rights as a father at the same time. On the other hand, the girl associates ‘little princess’ with the happy family life she yearns for, which is ‘what could’ve been but never was’ (stanza 6). She thinks of it twice to respond to her father’s ‘little princess’. The first time she responds one stanza later (“but little princess oh I see the truth...” in stanza 3), signifies the shock and wonder which may be the cause of her drug addiction and the psychological trauma (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974). For the second time, she is ‘loved’ inappropriately (“Daddy loves his princess” in stanza 5) and is sorrowfully forced to grow up to see the dark side of her father and to realize she is no longer a princess. She is too desperate to draw herself out of the imaginary world of the ‘perfect picture’ (stanza 6) or to directly confront the problems underpinning this relationship.

Conflicts in an Asymmetric Relationship

What accompanies the designated roles are the rights and responsibilities which are always the core of a healthy relationship. The two characters in this poem have put different degrees of emphasis on the importance of executing and practicing their rights and responsibilities respectively. The father focuses on his 'commanding' rights over the girl and the daughter focuses on her 'obeying' responsibility. Yet, as noted above, intercourse and violence should not exist in a healthy father-daughter relationship. When one side is not acting appropriately, the relationship is poisoned. Hence, the relationship needs to be ended and the girl has no obligation to listen to the orders given by her father. In this case, the father no longer has the right to order the girl and the daughter has no responsibility to do as she is told. He neglects his own responsibilities as a father, but forces the girl to realize that of the 'obedient' her. The father's offensive behaviours have eroded the daughter's trust in him and he no longer deserves to be seen as her 'hero'.

'Plastic heroes' and 'synthetic gods' (stanza 2) contrast with the once-existing fatherly love and the poet interprets them in several ways. First, no matter what these 'heroes' and 'gods' appear to be, they are still material toys. The owner has played with them, and the toys cannot say 'no' to how they are treated. This is a portrayal of herself because she is also being treated as a 'sex toy' by her father, who has power over her. Second, these toys are 'plastic' and 'synthetic', meaning they are artificial, fake and will never come alive and it is fanciful for her to dream that they can save her from her agony. She has to bear alone all the humiliation from a person she previously respected and loved. Third, there is a contrast between negativity and positivity in the collocation of 'plastic' and 'synthetic' versus 'heroes' and 'gods' respectively.

This hints that the goodness of the surface is a candy coating around a rotten core. Fourth, the victim sees herself as one of the toys because, like them, her spirit has been destroyed by the wrongdoings of her father. What is left is hollowness because she realizes the father has betrayed her trust in him. The fulfilled duties of the daughter, which are the obedient behaviours, contrast ironically with the unfulfilled duties of the father. These all point to the fact that the fatherly love for a daughter exists no more, and it is only out of fear that the girl remains loyal in fulfilling the daughter's role of obedience.

The girl's dilemma is clearly stated by the end of the poem. Despite his behaviour, she is still confined within the role of his daughter. In the last stanza, she reflects, 'I find myself trapped inside that costume ['little princess'] "in my father's eyes' (stanza 7). Even though the girl may have doubts and fears, she knows at the bottom of her heart that it is difficult for her to escape; even when her trust in her father is destroyed, the role is just too deep in her blood, and she has developed complete dependence on this man. Since she realizes the man is not trustworthy, she searches for another object to replace this former 'trusted target'. In her despair, she turns to drugs (stanzas 3 to 6) because they will always give her 'perfect happiness' (stanza 5) and never disappoint her. In her tears, the man also notices her struggle and tries to make full use of it. His filthy words are consciously coercive. In stanza 7, the father warns the daughter to be a 'good girl' who should be obedient to her parents. Unlike her, the man does not treasure his paternal role and being a father is not his primary identity. As a result, the man does not respect his role as a father and thus does not act the way he should.

Conclusion

Wasted is the girl's body; wasted is a daughter's trust. Should the girl be more determined,

she might have more courage to fight against the odds. The poet has explored the victim from a new psychological angle. The unequal devotion to this relationship by both parties makes them unable to act out their roles appropriately. Mutuality unquestionably plays an essential part in healthy relationships. Whenever a role is taken up, there must be the trust; that is an indispensable element in a relationship.

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