

Review

The motherhood in Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt's selected poems

V. Selvam* and S. Jeyachandra

Department of English, Karunya University, Coimbatore.114, India.

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Sarah Piatt wrote immense poems on all position, in spite of other themes which would also bring name and fame to her; themes such as civil war, slavery, political subversion, north and south identification and socialist concepts and religious themes etc. Domestic nature, civil war, slavery system, political issues, the impact of reading news, being between belief and faith in basic sense of Godliness in time of adversities were some of the components of comprehensible, impressionistic and influencing factors of her writings. In this article 'Motherhood' is the focus of selected poems.

Key words: motherhood, selected poems, civil war.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to substantiate the concept of marginalization of Sarah and her writings from the main stream of known and famous American writers, with the reasons 'if not, she then who would' sense of admiration for her social and thematic inclusions. After dealing with transitions of Sarah from the stage of beloved to wife and to motherhood on her wide awaken sense, the difficulties on understanding her poems, provocative ideologies in her writings, the reason for the 'complexity' for being unrewarded in the main stream will be given for the critical study or justification.

Despite vast marginalized body of women writers of the 19th century American literature, critics and scholars make study on the recovery process of the forgotten writer and poet like Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt, after almost a century back. From sheer impressing themes, this chapter includes the very personality of woman of 19th century conventional era. On transition, Sarah Piatt's roles, as a beloved, a wife and a mother are to be discussed from the social realistic outlook on studying her related poems to the themes. In this article the 'Motherhood' experience is given focus in selected poems.

By Sarah Piatt, immense poems were written on those

stages in all position, in spite of the other themes which would also bring name and fame to her; themes such as poetry on civil war, slavery, political subversion, north and south identification and socialist concepts, and religious themes etc. The domestic nature, civil war, slavery system, political issues, the impact of reading news, being between belief and faith in basic sense of Godliness in time of adversities were some of the components factors of comprehensible, impressionistic and influencing of her writings. To be expressive about her writings, it is studied and understood that she was under the influence of contemporary social issues including the nature and role of women in all aspects, including the writer too. Hence, poems of any thematic inclusion, carry the pivotal aspects like diction and notion very cohesively with all the other ingredients of poem like rhyme, rhythm, meter, figurative languages, etc. In the following discussion, Sarah Piatt is given the 'light of perfection' to give good reason for the roles of her, as being a woman and as a writer, all the more.

Sarah Piatt's speakers on motherhood spare their selfless identification and being deviated from the basic qualities such as to be 'shut up' in homes rather than to express individual aspirations in relation to social and

*Corresponding author. E-mail: farewelldreams.dewan@gmail.com.

political aspects too. Most of her poems were means of expressing the subjectivity of the middle-class and working class women's domestic and pious nature, except in poems like "Angel in the House" in which Sarah Piatt might have tried to deconstruct the theory of belief of nineteenth century women's ordinary qualities, such as child care functions.

MOTHERHOOD: 'THE WITCH IN THE GLASS'

In 'The Witch in the Glass' Piatt's speaker played roles of a child and her mother. The first stanza opens with the child's opinion of what her mother said to her, if she wants to stand in front of the mirror, which would reflect her exactly to have self admiration. Because, in the second stanza as the speaker her mother responded as something would happen in the form of a boy who may offer her a rose as the symbol of love – which she should not come across according to the mother. The first stanza was beautified with imageries like 'the mirror', 'the witch' and 'red – red mouth' which could be taken as something not existing in the physical world, but in dream and in fairy tales or in the utopian world. The imagery 'red red mouth' could be seen literally to equal or correlate with the sense of expression of the mother in the second stanza in terms of 'love' through the 'rose' offered by a boy as token of his love-proposal. That kind of normal offering might have corrupted her mother's (speaker's) life by experience; and, that could be the reason why the speaker did not want her daughter to be caught by such phenomena in front of her own conscious eyes.

'My mother says I must not pass
Too near that glass;
She is afraid that I will see
A little witch that looks like me,
With a red, red mouth, to whisper low
The very thing I should not know!"

A lack for your entire mother's care!
A bird of the air,
A wistful mind, or (I suppose
Sent by some hapless boy) a rose,
With breath too sweet, will whisper low,
The very thing you should not know!
(Bennet 104)

To be very common in sharing the thought over this poetry, the child who was getting maturity physically with age related feeling; the reason of her mother's denial or fear to allow her child to be in front of the mirror; and mother's aspiration's shadow was revealed there as, who would be that unlucky boy who could offer rose, as symbol of love. The mother worried that, even that would be offered by a hapless boy, the rose would be sweet and its fragrance would be sweeter – which would bring

that boy's lowerly whispered phrases of love-proposal that very thing should not happen to her daughter. How long a bloomed flower could be veiled with a cover, and on the mirror too not to look on; rather that would be unveiled to the eyes of sun and light to be admired as such denied / expected changes to happen through such a hapless boy. This poem reveals how the love of mother gets another from of protecting her child from the eyes of any common without the knowledge and acknowledgment of the mother. This sense of concern and consciousness shows that exactitudeness of the conventional and culturally bracketed life of the middle class woman of Victorian sense. Here, the speaker, mother plays the role as it was seen in most of her poems, as the preserver of nineteenth century conventional practices of social norms, being a mother of bourgeois, and the working class.

In relation to this sense, Piatt, in her 'If I Had made the world' lets the mother speaker's responses to her child's questions about what she could have done if she were God, the creator of the world. The mother's effort for getting the child's concentration or the attention to her caring and explanation was visibly complex while it seems like the child is trying to pronounce the word 'Shakespeare'. The mother spells out the name 'Shakespeare' who she wanted to create if she were the God, the creator. The subject of the poems is revealed in this child-mother conversation;

'I would have made one Poet too---
Has God made more? --- Yes, I forgot,
There is no need of asking you;
You know as little as I do
A poet is ---well, who knows what

And yet a poet is, my dear
A man who writes a book like this,
(There never was but one, I hear ;)
----- Yes, it is hard to spell S-h-a-k-e-s-p-e-a-r-e.
So, now, Good-night, --- and here's a kiss.
(Bennet 104)

The conversation of child sometimes seems provocative to examine the mother's status too. And, in some places the funny questions of the child would get some philosophical responses from her mother; such as in 'The Palace Burner':

'Would I? Go your play. Would I, indeed?
I? Does the boy not know my soul to be!
Languid and worldly, with a dainty need
For light and music? Yet he questions me (SMB Piatt, 1874).

Also,

'Oh Mother, look-We all are gone,
Our house is swimming in the sea.

It will not stop. It keeps right on.
 How far away love all must be!
 The wind has blown it from the Clift.
 It rocks us like a skiff.
 We all will drown but Baby. He
 Is in his pretty grave so far.
 He has to sleep till judgment. We
 Must sink where al the sailors are,
 Who used to die, when storms would come,
 Away off from their home' (SMB Piatt, 1894).

The first stanza comes as the words spoken by the child about the danger in flood, which seized their home, most likely. And, out of fear of drowning, the child tried to get her mother's attention for help. In responding to that situation, the mother had revealed the nature as something critical through her philosophical expression in the second stanza. The mother's moral support was expressed in her words to her child.

Being in such close and lovable 'nearness' with the children, Piatt out of fond, she had also been forced to be a little deviated from the faith of the regulation of religion and faith in God. After the death of her dearly loved child, in the poem entitled 'No Help', she refused to accept the regulation of religious faith, as if the creations are the belongings of the creator, including her child. She questions faith in these following lines from the third stanza:

'Is he not with his Father? So I trust.
 Is he not His? Was he not also mine?
 His mother's empty arms yearn toward the dust.
 Heaven lies too high, the soul is too divine.
 I wake at night and miss him from my breast,
 And – human words can never say the rest. (PB Bennet (2001): 84).

Mary McCartain (2006) said in her subjection and subversion in Sarah Piatt's maternal Poetics, that,

In fact, Piatt recognized the political and cultural currency of the maternal, finding in motherhood the critical intersection of women's private and public lives. Beginning in post revolutionary America and coming to fruition in the mid nineteenth century, the role of the 'Republican Mother' as Lind K. Kerber aptly names it, become virtually the only authentic means for American women to enact their citizenship. Keenly aware of the *de facto* political nature of motherhood, Piatt uses maternity as the fulcrum of her cultural critique. Resisting society's conservative, sentimental, constructions, Piatt initiates an alternative discourse of motherhood that explores the maternal role as a potential site of both subjection and subversion.

'The Palace Burner' and the 'Beatrice Cenci', the poems on political themes reveal that apart from the stemming in essential qualities of womanhood and motherhood, Sarah Piatt, being a sentimental maternal

figure, steeply rooted in the belief of nineteenth century American cultural *de facto* and conventional aspects of religion too, used (her) children's voice for the social events (which were haunting the contemporary political events and strategies) without flowing out from the realities, and her motherhood was seen as the prominence, women's moral authority and cultural prestige which were significant in women's maternal roles.

The 'Double Quatrains' is of ten in number. Each double-quatrain carries different themes. The final one entitled 'For Another's sake' carries the wonder on motherhood. No other poems of Sarah Piatt would serve with much intensity of motherhood than this one would. Especially, last a couple of lines in the second stanza would get even a male's heart to be feminine for the discomfort feel of the mother, the one lost her child and the grief of (the speaker) Sarah Piatt for being unavailable to comfort that mother for her loss of child in the infancy stage itself. The stanzas are:

"Sweet, sweet? My child, some sweeter word than sweet,
 Some lovelier word than love, I want for you.
 Who says the world is bitter, while your feet
 Are left among the lilies and the dew?"

...Ah? So some other has, this night, to fold
 Such hands as his, and drop some precious head
 From off her breast as full of baby-gold?
 I, for her grief, will not be comforted" (SMB Piatt (1894): 121).

Being in another mother's state of being in grief-haunted stage for the loss of child, who would have just been in the breast of her or his mother for milk, Sarah Piatt had drawn the sympathetic over tone of the reader for her empathetic feeling as 'pro-mother' to another woman's child.

CONCLUSION

Motherhood, as expressed by the critics of Sarah Piatt, is a genteel quality of a woman. Sarah Piatt allowed her women speakers of most of her motherhood poems to play and express the genteel natures of women which seemed to be lovable yet socially responsible to bring out the love and service to the society together in her pomes. This critical study on motherhood can further be utilized to study Sarah Piatt's poems with the psychological approach and on the light view of social realism, too.

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