

Don Paterson's Parenting Poems and Family Ethics in " Landing Light "

Haoran Chen

College English Department
Capital Normal University
Beijing, China 100048

Abstract—As a famous poet of the contemporary British literary world, Don Paterson excels at applying Twa-in-yin to his creative skills, making his poems quickly gained wide acceptance. Taking *Landing Lights* as an example, Paterson has mingled various traditions, as they are represented by the metaphorical thread, Dante's *Inferno* and Plath's suicide, with his parenting experiences. Paterson brilliantly combines the reality of educating twin sons with the literary tradition in the deeper level, reflecting a positive family education ethics. The analysis of parenting poems in this work not only adds reading interest to readers, but also enhances the social function of poetry from the perspective of parenting.

Keywords: *Twa-in-yin, Landing Lights, Dante, Plath, family ethics*

I. INTRODUCTION

From the collection of poems published by Don Paterson and the rewards he received, it is no exaggeration to call him a highly influential poet in contemporary Britain. He first won the TS Eliot Award for his poem collection "Nil Nil" (1993) and subsequently published "God's Gift to Women" (1997), "The Eyes"(1999), "Landing Light" (2003), "Orpheus" (2006), "Rain" (2009), and "40 Sonnets" (2015), etc. He became the only poet in history to win two Eliot Awards, and had received individual awards in various categories in the authoritative poetry pioneer award, including the best poetry collection, the best first collection of poetry, and the best poetry award. It seems that these are not enough to cover all the honors that Paterson has received. In 2009, he was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal of Poetry. "Thanks to the efforts of a more mature generation of poets, Paterson's creative writing flourished in the 1990s and is now internationally recognized." (Stafford 232) In all the poems of Paterson, the importance of "Landing Light" is particularly prominent. The poet has won both the Eliot Award and the Whitbread Award by this work.

According to previous studies of Paterson in the academic circles, the Scotland identity of poet is usually the focus that cannot be avoided. As the Chinese scholar He Ning pointed out: "Paterson connects contemporary social development with the British poetry tradition, thereby establishing a more extensive contemporary Scottish poetry tradition." (He Ning, 2014, 21) He Ning believed that poetry

has a prominent contradictory feature. On the one hand, Paterson attempted to return to the Scottish poetry tradition, and then established the national identity of his poetry; however, he still cannot abandon his personal style originally independent of the contemporary Scottish poetry tradition.

Poems that break free of narrow nationality are more likely to reach the public's perspective. This article affirms the characteristics of Paterson's poetry that are independent of national identity. It is the common emotions and universal experiences that make Paterson's poetry truly enter the reader's field of vision. Among these emotions, parenting poetry can capture the reader's attention the most. By analyzing the parenting poems in "Landing Light", it can be found that the poet used the "Twa-in-yin" creative technique to write into the poems the characteristics of "family ties" and "warning of spoiling" around the growth of young children. There are both serious sermons and Playful word game. Mining the works in these two aspects can not only enhance the reading interest, but also shape a healthy family ethical relationship.

II. TWA-IN-YIN: PATERSON'S CREATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

In a lecture at the South Bank Center in October 2004, Paterson delivered a lecture entitled "The Dark Art of Poetry." Gupta believes that this "authoritative voice is beyond doubt". (Gupta, 2011, 1) This lecture defines the characteristics of "Twa-in-yin" in Paterson's poetry. When referring to this Scottish dialect in the lecture, Paterson actually called for a new union in one language: "These are two unconnected and composed loves: two words, two ideas, two phrases, two images, or words and images, phrases and new surroundings, and so on." (T.S. Eliot Lecture) This "Twa-in-yin" is quite unfamiliar. Paterson advocated that combining two previously alienated or irrelevant things will produce a unified mind driven by production resistance, so that to summon and stimulate the deep connection between the two themes beyond the ordinary and narrow imagination. Under the call of this creative concept, many poetic works in "Landing Light" reflect this poetic duality.

Paterson middle-aged got a pair of twins Russell and Jamie Paterson, which made him cherish this hard-earned affection, so "Landing Light" often revolves around the

theme of father and son. As the title of the poem collection states, "The light on landing illuminates the dark world of sleeping children, providing them with guidance and directional light." (George. 2014, 107) Even so, in expressing fatherly love, seeming like many euphemistic fathers, Paterson was always unable to express this feeling smoothly because of reasons such as self-esteem, so he fell into a crisis of expression. In the face of this crisis, Paterson urgently needed to find a creative approach to create a new field between family education and myth and literary tradition.

III. PARENTING POETRY OF "TWA-IN-YIN"

In two typical poems, "The Thread" and "The Forest of the Suicides", it can be seen that the poet confided his heart to his sons as a twin father, On the other hand, he followed the temptation to integrate these educational essences into the cultural essence.

A. "The thread": family ties

For newborn babies, mothers often appreciate the bitterness and gains. However, few male poets record their childbirth experience and express their complex mood as a father or a father who gets his children in his middle age. The main focus of the sonnet "The Thread" also revolves around the relationship between Paterson and his son Jamie. In the poem, "thread" is used to combine memory with the two pairs of status quo, image and abstract image For One "": Jamie made his landing in the world / so hard he ploughed straight back into the earth. / They caught him by the thread of his one breath / and pulled him up. They don't know how it held / And so today I thank what higher will / brought us to here, to you and me and Russ, / the great twin-engined swaying wingspan of us / roaring down the back of Kirrie Hill / and your two-year-old lungs somehow out-revving / every engine in the universe. / All that trouble just to turn up dead / was all I thought that long week. Now the thread / is holding all of us: look at our tiny house, / son, the white dot of your mother waving. (Paterson. 2004, 6)

Paterson traveled through time. When describing the specific "thread" of the past, the poet also mapped the abstract "ties" relationship in family life. In the first four lines, the poet recalled the experience of Jamie when he was born. The boy almost died at the time. However, the medical team rescued the dystocia on the front line of life and death, and this made the poet full of appreciation. Here, the "thread" in the "thread of his one breath" (3) is a suture in fertility surgery, or it may be the "trajectory" of life and death on the heart detector. After turning to reality, it can be found that the growing-up boys are like "engines in the universe" (10) in a noisy manner. This is in sharp contrast to the fragile Jamie at birth. At this time, the "thread" which changes from a weak image to a close and strong tie, "is holding all of us" (13), maintaining the family relationship.

At the same time, the actual "tie" is also a metaphorical "flying line". Paterson also cleverly incorporated the image of the bomber when talking about daily life: the original production scene reminded the reader of an airplane about to

crash on the ground — "straight back into the earth" (2); after the children grow up, the father is holding two sons running on Mount Kirimur. The two sons sandwiched around him are like the engines of an airplane, dragging a long flight line in flight. It can be seen that father and sons can form a powerful plane together, and the mother also plays an important role: "son, the white dot of your mother waving" (14). Compared with the dangerous crash of Jamie at birth, Paterson saw her as a light and guide who can lead them home safely.

B. "Suicide": arrogant and wilful behavior

In a journey across history, "The Forest of the Suicides" is a rewrite of the thirteenth chapter of Dante's "Inferno XIII" and a tribute to the American poet Sylvia Plath. Plath's father echoed de Vineas's monarch, and readers familiar with Plath's poetry and biography would immediately realize that Caesar was actually the prototype of Plath's father. It can be seen vaguely from Paterson's poems that this tragedy is difficult to disassociate from her father's spoiling. Plath lost her father when she was eight years old, which hit her tremendously. Plath's love and hatred towards his father is particularly evident in the poem "Daddy": At the beginning of the poem, the daughter resents because her father died prematurely. "Daddy, I have had to kill you. You died before I had time —" (Plath 1965 222: 6-7). The daughter of deep love and hatred, like de Vineas, is suffering from the wounds of his elders. She cannot get out of this melancholic state for a long time, and finally went to the suicide no return path. The beginning of this poem quotes Plath's questioning of the "la Pietà" in "Winter Woods", which naturally reminds readers of the story between the woman and the forest shown by Plath in "Winter Woods". Plath's question, who is the Holy Ghost, has never been answered. One year before the suicide, Plath, who was living in Devon at the time, wrote the poem "Winter Woods" (1962). It was during this time that Plath discovered the extramarital affairs of her husband Hughes, so the desolate and dreary scenery in winter showed a kind of despair and trauma.

When talking about suicide, Paterson, while imitating Plath's creative style, also brought the female poet into the story and became a suicide in place of Peter Devina in Dante's works. "The Forest of the Suicides" superficially use Plathreplaces to replace Petrus de Vineas, who committed suicide in "Inferno XIII". But what is the motivation behind this rewriting?

In fact, the children's "suicide" behavior is a nightmare for parents, and it is a topic that Paterson, a father who got his sons in his middle age, would not like to talk about, but had to mention. Therefore, instead of translating Dante's work creatively, as Eliza said, it is better to say that Paterson has been focusing on the motif of father and sons behind the so-called creative writing. From this perspective, digging deeply into the consequences of excessive spoiling in "The Forest of the Suicides" helps to understand Paterson's feelings about parenting: When I was small, I held both keys / that fitted my father's heart; which I unlocked / and locked again with such a delicate ease / he felt no turning, and he

heard no click. / He desired no other confidence but mine; / nor would I permit one. I was so bound / to my splendid office that, when he resigned, / I followed. They had to dig me from the ground. (Lines 57-64) Judging from the experience of de Vineas and Plath, excessive spoiling can lead to death. The narrator of this poem, de Vineas, was originally a loyal minister of the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Frederick II. He enjoyed privileges in the emperor's court, which caused many people to be jealous. These people slandered him for treason and he was cruelly abused in prison for theft, leading to his final suicide in prison. Just as de Vineas held the king's key, Plath in this poem controlled the key that opens the door of his father's heart when she was young, and can be operated arbitrarily: "unlocked / and locked again with such a delicate ease" (57-59). He smoothly "came to interview for his successor" (66) due to his father's excessive spoiling. Similarly, like de Vineas, Plath also encountered "green-eyed courtesan" (70), and eventually "steeped me in her sullen arts" (72). This experience made Plath's words extremely sharp, casting her anger on "Caesar II" (74), which undoubtedly turned the reader's attention to Plath's husband Ted Hughes. This poetic marriage, which was supposed to be happy, eventually ended with the spoiled Plath.

In the face of suicide, Paterson clearly stated in this poem "It was bad advice" (84). De Vineas's monarch and Plath's father indirectly caused suicide. Paterson adhered to the creative concept of "Twa-in-yin". Through rewriting Dante's "Interfo XIII", the story of Plath is interspersed in different time and space of illusory and reality, history and contemporary. The tragedy of suicide stems from the spoiling of the elders. This is the motto that the poet has erected for himself, and it also sounds the alarm for readers.

IV. CONCLUSION

Paterson's poem creation relies on the outstanding "Twa-in-yin" concept, combining complex life emotions and solid traditional skills, which is like fresh water in many discourses. Paterson is the modern T.S. Eliot, and his use of tradition seems to have resonance with Eliot. In "Tradition and Personal Talent", Eliot pointed out that tradition is full of special and complex characters: "Tradition means eternity, but also temporary, and sometimes a combination of the two." (Eliot 44) In Paterson's poems, whether it is Dante's classic works or the classic Plath suicide, they have become the materials of self-creation in the form of western tradition.

From the collection of "Landing Lights", although the poet carried the purpose of imparting educational concepts to twins in the role of the father, almost every poem does not monotonically explain and preach as father. Instead, the poet hid himself in both concrete and abstract images, or disappeared in the metaphors of past legends and reality, so that readers can explore the passwords hidden in poetry, family education and literature in tradition.

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