

A Prayer for My Daughter Literary Devices

Writer: William Butler Yeats | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Figures of Speech

Metaphor

- **Definition:** A Metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two different things by saying that one thing is the other (without using “like” or “as”).
- **Example:** “*May she become a flourishing hidden tree.*”
- **Explanation:** The poet compares his daughter to a “*hidden tree.*” It means Yeats wants his daughter to grow strong, peaceful, and rooted in good values. He wishes her to be safe from the storms of life, like a strong tree.

Simile

- **Definition:** A Simile is a figure of speech that compares two different things using the words “like” or “as.”
- **Example:** “*O may she live **like** some green laurel.*”
- **Explanation:** The poet compares his daughter to a green laurel tree. He wants her life to be pure, fresh, and peaceful, just like a green tree growing in one safe place.

Rhetorical Question

- **Definition:** A rhetorical question is a figure of speech in which a question is asked for a reason or effect, not to get an answer.
- **Example:** “*How but in custom and in ceremony*

Are innocence and beauty born?”

- **Explanation:** Here, the poet is not really asking a question. He means that real beauty and innocence can grow only through good manners, tradition, and moral values.

Alliteration

- **Definition:** Alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning of nearby words.

- **Example:** *"Once more the storm is **h**owling, and **h**alf **h**id."*
- **Explanation:** The /h/ sound is repeated in this line. It gives a sharp, stormy sound that matches the violent wind outside.

Allusion

- **Definition:** An Allusion is a reference to a famous person, story, or event from history, literature, or mythology. Poets use it to express deeper meaning in a short way.
- **Example 1:** *"Helen being chosen found life flat and dull."*
- **Explanation:** Here, Yeats alludes to Helen of Troy from Greek mythology, who was said to be the most beautiful woman in the world. Her beauty caused the Trojan War. Yeats uses this story to show that too much beauty can bring unhappiness and trouble in life.
- **Example 2:** *"That great Queen, that rose out of the spray."*
- **Explanation:** This line refers to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty, who was born from sea foam. Yeats mentions her to show that beauty without wisdom is meaningless. Even the goddess of beauty married a lame husband. It shows that beauty alone cannot bring true happiness.
- **Example 3:** *"Horn of Plenty."*
- **Explanation:** This is an allusion to the Cornucopia or "Horn of Plenty," a symbol from Greek mythology. It means abundance, success, and blessings. Yeats uses it to say that pride and foolish opinions can destroy the happiness and richness of life.

Symbols

- **The Storm:** The storm in the poem stands for the troubles and violence of the world. While the storm rages outside, Yeats worries about his daughter's future. It shows the dangers and confusion that she may face when she grows up.
- **The Laurel Tree:** The laurel tree is a symbol of peace, strength, and tradition. Yeats wants his daughter to live like a green laurel, as calm, steady, and rooted in one place. It means a happy, simple life with love and goodness.
- **The Horn of Plenty:** The Horn of Plenty, or Cornucopia, is a symbol of blessings, joy, and richness. Yeats uses it to show a life full of goodness and abundance. He prays that his daughter's life will be filled with peace and blessings.