



## **No Second Troy – William Butler Yeats (1910)**

WHY should I blame her that she filled my days  
With misery, or that she would of late  
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,  
Or hurled the little streets upon the great.  
Had they but courage equal to desire?  
What could have made her peaceful with a mind  
That nobleness made simple as a fire,  
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind  
That is not natural in an age like this,  
Being high and solitary and most stern?  
Why, what could she have done, being what she is?  
Was there another Troy for her to burn?





## VOCABULARY

- **blame** (*verb*) - to hold responsible for something negative.
- **misery** (*noun*) - intense suffering or unhappiness.
- **of late** - recently
- **violent** (*adjective*) - using physical force to cause harm or damage.
- **hurled** (*verb*) - thrown with force.
- **desire** (*noun/verb*) - a strong feeling of wanting something (*noun*); to wish for or long for (*verb*).
- **nobleness** (*noun*) - the quality of being morally or intellectually admirable.
- **simple as a fire** (*phrase/metaphor*) - a metaphor suggesting purity and intensity.
- **tightened bow** (*phrase/metaphor*) - a metaphor for tension and potential action.
- **solitary** (*adjective*) - alone or existing independently.
- **stern** (*adjective*) - serious, strict, and unyielding.
- **Troy** (*proper noun*) - an ancient city famously destroyed in war caused by a legendary conflict in Greek mythology between the **Akhaians (Greeks)** and **Trojans**, fought over **Helen of Sparta**, the most beautiful woman on earth, who was taken by **Paris of Troy**, leading to a decade-long siege and the eventual destruction of Troy.
- **burn** (*verb*) - to set something on fire, symbolizing destruction or change

## GRAMMAR TOPICS

### Past Modals of Deduction:

- "she would (of late) have taught"
- "What could have made her peaceful?"

### Inversion:

- "Had they but courage equal to desire?"

### Gerund:

- "Being high and solitary and most stern"



## A Short Analysis

The poem is deeply tied to Yeats' unrequited love for **Maud Gonne**, an Irish revolutionary. Gonne was a fierce advocate for Irish independence, and Yeats often struggled with her political fervor. The poem reflects his frustration, questioning whether her passionate nature could have led to anything other than turmoil. The reference to **Troy** alludes to the legendary city destroyed in war, drawing a parallel between Gonne and **Helen of Troy**, whose beauty led to destruction.

Semiotically speaking, the **"tightened bow"** symbolizes tension and potential energy, suggesting Gonne's readiness for action. The **"fire"** represents both purity and destruction, reinforcing the idea that her nobility is both admirable and dangerous. The **contrast between "little streets" and "the great"** signifies class struggle, hinting at her influence in stirring political unrest.

Yeats employs **rhetorical questions** to emphasize inevitability, making it clear that Gonne's nature could not have been different. The poem is structured in **iambic pentameter**, lending it a rhythmic, dramatic quality. The **allusion to Troy** connects personal heartbreak to grand historical tragedy, elevating Gonne's impact to mythic proportions. The poem also reflects Yeats' **modernist** tendencies, blending personal emotion with political commentary.

### **"Had they but courage equal to desire?" (Irish Revolutionaries)**

This line critiques the Irish revolutionaries of Yeats' time. Maud Gonne, a fervent nationalist, inspired many to rise against British rule, but Yeats suggests that while they had **desire** for change, they lacked the **courage** to fully commit to the struggle. The phrase implies frustration—perhaps Yeats believed that the Irish rebels were driven by passion but lacked the strategic strength or unity to achieve their goals. This reflects Yeats' complex relationship with Irish nationalism; though he supported independence, he often questioned the effectiveness of violent rebellion.



"With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind That is not natural in an age like this" -  
(Classicism vs. Modernity)

Here, Yeats contrasts **classical ideals** with the **modern world**. The **tightened bow** symbolizes tension, readiness, and potential energy—suggesting that Maud Gonne's beauty is not passive but **charged with purpose**. In classical literature, beauty was often linked to **heroism and destiny**, as seen in figures like Helen of Troy. However, Yeats argues that such beauty is **unnatural in the modern age**, where society values pragmatism over grandeur. This reflects his belief that the contemporary world lacked the **epic scale** of classical civilizations, making Gonne an anachronism—too grand, too fierce, too extraordinary for her time.



William Butler Yeats and Maud Gonne