

An in-depth look at "the world is a beautiful place" essay



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An In-Depth Look at "The World is a Beautiful Place" Lawrence Ferlingetti's
The World is a Beautiful Place is a prime example of literature influenced by world events during the mid-1900s.

The distinct style of the poem gives one a sense of desperation under the guise of hopeful rationalization, but as the poem draws closer to the last few lines, the mood gets lighter and lighter until the final twist that brings the reader back down to reality. The poem is clear enough on the offset - despite everything, the world IS a beautiful place. The mantra all throughout the poem is best represented in the first two lines: "The world is a beautiful place / to be born into[1]," although a corollary is at once posited in the first clause of the next line. This is repeated throughout the entire text, as if the persona is attempting to convince himself of his very own thesis. In an attempt to expound on how the imperfection of living in the world, in fact, the persona compares living in the world to life in heaven, because "... even in heaven / they don't sing / all the time...[2]" In the second stanza, the persona becomes more specific with what makes the world imperfect. He begins to describe how "...some people [are] dying / all the time...[3]" and how people are "...starving / some of the time / which isn't half bad / if it isn't you[4]." The last line of this stanza is especially evocative of the situational relativity of how wonderful the world is - that is, the world is a pretty decent place despite the abundance of death and starvation all around, and that both of these are okay so long as it isn't happening to you.

While this may seem self-serving, it reflects a very human reaction to the hardships present in the world. Take starvation. Whereas the spots in the world where starvation is a stark and painful reality are few and far between

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(when compared with cities that enjoy a steady supply of food), the standard reaction of your average individual to its presence is greeted with nonchalance. The reality is that people don't mind being surrounded by desperation so long as it isn't happening to them – as a matter of fact, a twisted sense of schaudenfreude lends individuals the ability to obtain pleasure in the misfortune of others. From the stoicism of the second stanza, the reader is brought to the deadpan cynicism of the third stanza. This is a longer bit of text, and it dives headfirst into the critical analysis of the ills of society. The persona continuously slams everything from government to consumerism to religion in an endless diatribe that insists that the world is still a beautiful place despite everything. One would do well to remember that the United States was during the second stage of the Cold war, and that the world was still reeling from the aftershocks of World War II in 1955 (when this poem was first published), and this is prominently evident in the third stanza.

Starting with a critique of men in position (a few dead minds / in the higher places[5]) and the race to develop an armory in order to protect oneself (or a bomb or two / now and then / in your upturned faces[6]), the persona starts to dissect present-day society in general. This is where he gets less specific and becomes more or less a wild gun firing out at any and all available targets that in one way or another affect the situation of a person living today. At the end of the stanza, he attributes all these negatives to one thing: the human being. Then in the fourth stanza, the persona begins to point out the redeeming qualities of an earthly life. Considering how much negative energy he used in the first three stanzas to drive home the point

that living was plagued by a variety of disenchanting factors, this stanza is surprisingly chipper and positive.

The persona proceeds to enumerate the variety of things that make life worth living, focusing mainly on the simple things that are unassumingly exquisite; such things as love and having fun, art and expression, kissing and plain interacting with people are all included in this stanza. The hook, however, comes in the end where the presence of a more infinite end is made clear: "...but then right in the middle of it / comes the smiling / mortician[7]." This last bit of gimmickry from the persona sets reverberations throughout the poem. Throughout the poem, the constant battlecry of the persona is " The world is a beautiful place despite . . ." while in the end, he changes his tune to " The world is beautiful because .

. . BUT .

. ." It is that " but" in the end that serves as a hook - no wonder how beautiful or how hard living on the planet can be, there is always one thing that nobody can escape, that no sense of rationalization will alter: the arrival of that " smiling mortician" without warning. In effect, this reinforces the desperate qualities depicted by the persona throughout the poem. This wan desperation is reflected in the structure of the poem itself.

The meter-less free verse used throughout the body of the poem is rambling, with uneven syllabication that gives one the impression that he is talking from his mouth, with very little mental thought. This is emphasized in the sparse use of complex metaphors throughout the body of the poem.

However, the poem itself serves as a hyperbolic account of the irony of living.

You can be sure that he feels secure in his belief that life is worth living, but ends up grasping for straws when trying to come up with reasons in why this is so. His reasoning is brought to a halt when the realization that no matter how good your life is, you will have to die one of these days. Ferlinghetti's poem is rather straight-forward, and while there exists plenty of possible ways to read this selection, *The World is a Beautiful Place* will always serve as a stoic reminder of three basic facts of living: we will suffer, we will enjoy ourselves, and sooner or later, we will all have to pass away.

Works Cited
Ferlinghetti, Lawrence. " Pictures of the Gone World (City Lights Pocket Poets Series)." City Lights Publishers, 2001.[1] Line 1, Stanza 1[2] Line 9, Stanza 1[3] Line 3, Stanza 2[4] Line 5, Stanza 2[5] Line 4, Stanza 3[6] Line 6, Stanza 3[7] Line 22, Stanza 4