

Reread prayer before birth by louis macneice essay sample

[Health & Medicine](#), [Pregnancy](#)



In prayer before birth, Louis Macneice uses a baby to convey his thoughts and emotions on the current state of the world. Macneice wishes to emphasize how harsh and ruthless the world is, and how it can strip away a young unborn baby of its innocence. By cleverly combining uses of structure, rhyme scheme and rhetorical techniques Macneice effectively conveys the pain and suffering which occurs in society today.

The poem is set out like an appeal, a cry for help. The title itself, using the word "prayer" shows that the baby is trying to get help for something which troubles him- which raises a question; why would a soon-to-be born fetus that has its whole life strewn in front of it be despairing? Shouldn't it be preparing to enjoy that experience?

The first line reveals what the fetus is afraid of:

"O hear me. Let not the bloodsucking bat or the rat of the stoat or the club-footed ghoul come near me"

The use of "O hear me." and "Let not" seem to be a demand, emphasizing the fetus prayers- it is pleading to be protected from the threats of the bat, rat, stoat and ghoul. These creatures don't seem to be meant in literal form- creatures such as these do not pose a major threat to today's children.

Rather, they seem to be used figuratively, as these creatures are associated with disease. They are also frequently the subject of children's nightmares.

The use of "club-footed ghoul" especially is a strong use of imagery, as the word ghoul implies a diseased, flesh-eating and dismembered monster. Also, the internal rhyme used by rat, bat and stoat emphasizes these dangers-

they become more apparent. This first stanza shows that the fetus believes the world to be full of disease and suffering.

The poem then proceeds in a much similar technique- each stanza devotes itself to a particular danger the fetus wishes itself to be protected against in the world. Stanza two talks about the how humans themselves can use torture, imprisonment and manipulation. Stanza three, the only positive paragraph in the poem talks about freedom and conscience, and that in these times. Four discusses the sin that the fetus will eventually make as he grows up which the world forces him to, and five compares life to a tragic play. All of these together, ask for forgiveness and protection against the eventual crimes that will be committed against and by the fetus in its life, in the brutal and corrupting world.

The sixth stanza is particularly strong, though short:

“ Let not the man who is beast or who thinks he is God
come near me”

The importance of the stanza is shown by its length. It is obvious Macneice wishes us to focus on this particular section- he may consider this the most dangerous and threatening force against the fetus. The use of “ beast” is very strong, considering that Macneice is talking about a human being here- the suggestion of a human combined with a beast brings up an image of the devil. Thus, Macneice warns us of human beings with evil intent

The second part, “ who thinks he is God” may have double meaning- Firstly, this may have meant genetic engineering, how scientist who play god with genetics could possibly dehumanize people- however, considering that Macneice lived in the early twentieth century this was probably not his intention. More likely he would have meant tyrants, dictators such as Hitler or Stalin who ruled like gods over their respective populations. Macneice reinforces the image by using “ God” as a religious notion- especially to tell us how corrupt this world is, as shown by how these dictators were worshipped instead of proper religion such as Christianity.

The final stanza offers another chilling introspective at the fetus’ fears:

“ Let them not make a stone and let them not spill me.

Otherwise kill me”

Macneice tries to convince the audience to protect the baby, and concludes so in a plea to protect the baby against the two main dangers posed in the poem. “ stone” is used as a image for monotony, describing the fear of not becoming a unique person and forced to become just another “ cog in a machine”. The use of “ spill me” is used metaphorically as a image for the destruction of the mind, and how it is a fragile thing that can easily be damaged or wasted by the brutality of the world.

The last line is the most resounding in the poem. “ Kill” by itself is a very strong word to use, and its consonance adds to its harshness. But what’s especially significant is that the fetus itself is asking to be killed if it is not

protected from harm's way. Macneice wants us to think how brutal and corrupt the world is by showing that an unborn baby is willing to be killed if it is not protected from outside forces.

What can be noticed clearly is the structure of the poem. Stanzas are irregular, generally increasing in length but sometimes suddenly shortened. These shorter stanzas are made to be more empathetic and focused, and thus Macneice has made them to be the most important factors which the fetus needs to be protected against.

However, the structure may run deeper than that. The poem seemingly resembles the fetus' speech: His prayer of protection gradually increases in confidence as the stanzas become longer, but stumbles somewhat during those shorter lines. It shows how the fetus is devoted to his cause and quest against the brutality of the world.

Thus we can see that Macneice conveys the brutality and corruption of the world through several methods, but most importantly through an unborn baby. Macneice wants us to think about the world- he has systematically listed some of the events and things that are bad with the world. Macneice wants us to ask ourselves this striking question: If we cannot guarantee the safety and well-being of our next generation, should we kill them?