

Poem commentary: constantly risking absurdity by lawrence ferlinghetti essay samp...

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Constantly risking absurdity is a poem by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The poem is an extended metaphor comparing writing poetry to performing dangerous acrobatics. It has a very original layout and complicated structure. The poem is not very long, but it is precise and clear, it does so through great use of imagery and diction. It is the harsh truth of poetry writing, and really of all creative writing: if the public does not grasp the work, it will fall and most likely never rise again.

The Poem is about the similarities between a poet and an acrobat. One can first notice this in line 6 when it says “ the poet like and acrobat”. This is of course also the theme of the poem. But another subtler theme of the poem is the survival or death of the poem, which is compared to the life or death of and acrobat, as we will see later on, these depend on the one who “ catches” it, in the case of the poem the public and in the case of the acrobat the other acrobat. The poem uses metaphors and similes to compare the poet and the acrobat; it portrays the poet as creating a “ high wire of his own”(line 8). The poet, like the acrobat, uses “ slight-of-foot tricks and other high theatrics”(lines 14-15) to impress the audience. The metaphor used in lines 25 to 27 which portrays the acrobats assistant jumping into air, is used to portray the poem being released to the public.

The reader is told in line 27 that she is “ to start her (the acrobat) death-defying leap,” for the acrobat it is being caught by the other acrobat, for the poem it is to be caught by the public. In lines 28 to 33, the reader is left untold if “ Beauty” (another subtle comparison: the assistant is called beauty, such as the beauty of a poem) was caught in mid air or not, this

compares the poem to being appreciated by the readers and enters the hall of great poems, or if it just left to rot and waste. If (the) “ Beauty” is caught then the poem and the acrobat will live on, if not, they will fall and keep on falling, the acrobat shall die along with the poem who will lie forgotten and wasted.

The first thing one notices when one reads this poem is the layout. It is set out in short lines in a sort of diagonal, like stairs, but only of a couple of steps. This is already the first link with acrobatics. The way it’s laid out poses the reader quite a challenge and straight away suggests some sort of acrobatic act. There is no specific rhyme pattern, just a few consecutive lines here and there that rhyme with each other. This makes it all more complicated to read the poem, as one does not know what to expect next. There is no use of punctuation. The poem is just a series of short lines.

This lack of punctuation makes the reading all the more complicated, as the reader is not sure where to take a breath. The layout doesn’t help in the reading either. When a new series of “ steps” starts, which could be thought of as a new paragraph, it doesn’t help in the reading, as this isn’t either the place to breathe. At this point the lines often follow each other and when a pause is taken here it ruins the flow of the poem. The reading itself of the poem can be compared to an acrobatic act as it is a very complicated poem to read aloud or even to oneself. It jumps about and doesn’t have a clear structure, making it all more powerful.

The poem uses lots of imagery to compare writing poetry to acrobatics. It portrays poetry as a dangerous affair. The risk taken when writing it is shown as the same risk when you walk on a high wire or perform high-risk acrobatics. The reader can imagine the poet like an acrobat, their life dependent on the swing of the moment. The powerful image used to describe acrobatics walking is very effective and the reader can easily create links to acrobatics. The comparisons are very subtle and very unusual. The comparisons the author uses makes it seem that writing poetry is somehow pretending, it's a game of who will win and fail were all pretend and hope to win.

The voice of the poem seems to come from the author. It is as if Lawrence Ferlinghetti was expressing his frustration but also compensation of writing poetry through this poem. He tries to show the reader that writing poetry is a complicated act and that it must not be taken lightly as it can have "death-defying" (line 27) consequences. He makes it seem that taking the wrong step when writing poetry will have the same effect as falling off a high wire or not being caught whilst in mid air. This is exaggerated, as it is impossible for poetry to kill us. But if an author is really frustrated it can have serious consequences on their psyche as they can become depressive and then in consequence die. This is of course very unlikely and will most probably never happen, but it is often heard of authors being frustrated and completely shattered after a failure of some sort in their writing.

Constantly risking absurdity by Lawrence Ferlinghetti portrays the truth of creative writing. It sums up in 33 lines the risks of any creative act, be it

writing poetry or performing dangerous. The consequences in the two cases are different but in the end they add up to failure, the failure for the poem or person to survive. Many people hold themselves back from creative writing due to the fear of failure. It is a nice poem that makes one think twice about the simplicity of writing poems. It clarifies one's mind, and corrects one thought: writing poetry and a complex and dangerous act, it is not just making a few words rhyme.