

Theme via Technique: Fear of the Human World as Reflected in the Poetic Techniques Used in Louis MacNeice's 'Prayer before Birth'

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Abstract

Can a poet convey his themes and ideas through the technical devices he uses? The main aim of this paper is to seek an answer to this question and show how the poetic techniques which Louis MacNeice employs in his poem, 'Prayer before Birth', help develop his thoughts and feelings. In fact, MacNeice resorts to a variety of poetic techniques that enrich his poem such as diction, anaphora, enjambment, alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, metaphor, personification, paradox, irony and many others. 'Prayer before Birth' is set out like a plea, a cry for help from an unborn baby who prays to God to protect him from a harsh and ruthless world he is going to enter. The poem reveals the speaker's depression and hopelessness expressing the thought that the world would not correct itself, but continue in its evils. Consequently, the unborn baby is worried about losing the unity and wholeness of character; there is also a fear of being made incomplete through the process of socialization, of being indifferently driven away by the pitiless world. The unborn speaker hopes to do without the humans and their wicked, corrupt world. Thus, he asks God to provide him with all those things which no longer exist in this deformed world, things which remain pure and unaltered by human hands, like the pure water, the green grass, the beautiful trees, the unconquered sky, the singing birds and the clear conscience or the guiding insight that can instinctively show him the right path. Finally, the unborn speaker makes it clear that it is better for him to be denied life than to be denied a real protection against all those who will try to nullify his humanity. Brilliantly, all these ideas and feelings can be interpreted by the poetic techniques that MacNeice employs in 'Prayer before birth'.

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