

'Prayer before Birth'

Protection from animals / ghosts

I am not yet born; O hear me.
Let not the bloodsucking bat or the rat or the stoat or the club-footed ghou come near me.

Protection from man and the tortures he has

I am not yet born, console me.
I fear that the human race may with tall walls wall me, with strong drugs dope me, with wise lies lure me, on black racks rack me, in blood-baths roll me.

Feeling that the speaker is not in control – these actions which should be his are not

I am not yet born; provide me
With water to dandle me, grass to grow for me, trees to talk to me, sky to sing to me, birds and a white light in the back of my mind to guide me.

Now the previously positive actions done to the baby are negative

I am not yet born; forgive me
For the sins that in me the world shall commit, my words when they speak me, my thoughts when they think me, my treason engendered by traitors beyond me, my life when they murder by means of my hands, my death when they live me.

Protection from man who is like an animal and too powerful

I am not yet born; rehearse me
In the parts I must play and the cues I must take when old men lecture me, bureaucrats hector me, mountains frown at me, lovers laugh at me, the white waves call me to folly and the desert calls me to doom and the beggar refuses my gift and my children curse me.

Here the child is praying to be an individual and not controlled by others as above in verse 4

I am not yet born; O hear me,
Let not the man who is beast or who thinks he is God come near me.

I am not yet born; O fill me
With strength against those who would freeze my humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton, would make me a cog in a machine, a thing with one face, a thing, and against all those who would dissipate my entirety, would blow me like thistledown hither and thither or hither and thither like water held in the hands would spill me.

Let them not make me a stone and let them not spill me.
Otherwise kill me.

Louis MacNeice

Comment [K1]: Obvious repetition – interesting perspective – universal, innocent and unprejudiced

Comment [K2]: Obviously bad – however pay attention to the /t/ alliteration and the /b/ and /d/ sounds – sinister, harsh.

Comment [K3]: Repetition of me – shows the speaker is under threat – almost increasing to hysterical pitch

Comment [K4]: Repetition of walls – suggests the building up process – also the /all/ vowel sound suggest height and size.

Comment [K5]: Notice the premodifiers – most make the object seem more sinister. Also carry a lot of the internal rhyme

Comment [K6]: Repetition of blood – suggests violence – along with torture racks

Comment [K7]: Positive natural images of contrast – hope for the baby. Notice no premodifiers and less strong rhyme / alliteration. Notice also the actions are positive

Comment [K8]: Nasals sound dull and deadly – also a threatening rhythm – increasing in tempo

Comment [K9]: Sinister 'they' – present as a threat – making him do things he doesn't want to and unknown

Comment [K10]: Again a suggestion that he is not in control – or perhaps he means the best way to deal with

Comment [K11]: Punctuation suggests list again of increasing tempo

Comment [K12]: Previously positive actions done by nature have become negative

Comment [K13]: Interesting description showing that man thinks he is too powerful

Comment [K14]: Images suggesting a lack of freedom and control by others

Comment [K15]: New depersonalized pronoun

Comment [K16]: Reappearance of the negative words

Comment [K17]: Image of the child as fragile – easily spilt

Comment [K18]: Increasing verse size suggests increasing fear and tension – until th... [1]

Comment [K19]: The child's final wish is to be killed if he cannot live a free and se... [2]

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Increasing verse size suggests increasing fear and tension – until the ultimatum in the last verse

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The child's final wish is to be killed if he cannot live a free and self determinate life