

## Inversnaid by Gerard Manley Hopkins

THIS darksome burn, horseback brown,  
His rollrock highroad roaring down,  
In coop and in comb the fleece of his foam  
Flutes and low to the lake falls home.

A windpuff-bonnet of fáwn-fróth            5  
Turns and twindles over the broth  
Of a pool so pitchblack, féll-frówning,  
It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning.

Degged with dew, dappled with dew  
Are the groins of the braes that the brook treads through,            10  
Wiry heathpacks, fitches of fern,  
And the beadbonny ash that sits over the burn.

What would the world be, once bereft -----  
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,  
O let them be left, wildness and wet;            15  
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

**Note:** Underlined sections are my suggestions for quotes you should learn.  
Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list...



## **Glossary**

Inversnaid: an remote part of the Scottish Highlands, on the east bank of Loch Lomond

darksome: dark and gloomy

burn: a stream

coop: In his notebook, Hopkins described a coop as an ‘enclosed hollow’

comb: water rippling or running freely

flutes: to make a shape like the flute or stem of a long-stemmed glass; to make the whistling sound of the musical instrument of the same name

windpuff bonnet: froth which sits on top of the water like a lady’s hat, or part of a sail

fawn-froth: fawn-coloured foam created by running water in streams

twindles: twists, turns and dwindles

fell-frowning: frowning fiercely, but also reflecting the hill or stretch of high moorland

degged: from the Scots dialect; a word meaning ‘sprinkled’

groins: sides

braes: hills

brook: stream

heathpacks: clumps of heather

fitches: patches or streaks

beadbonny: made beautiful – ‘bonny’ – by being beaded with berries

ash: a type of tree

bereft: deprived



## Notes

Hopkins spent some time as a priest in Glasgow and probably visited the area around Loch Lomond in 1881.

'Inversnaid' comprises four four-line stanzas. The first three stanzas are single sentences but the last contains two sentences.

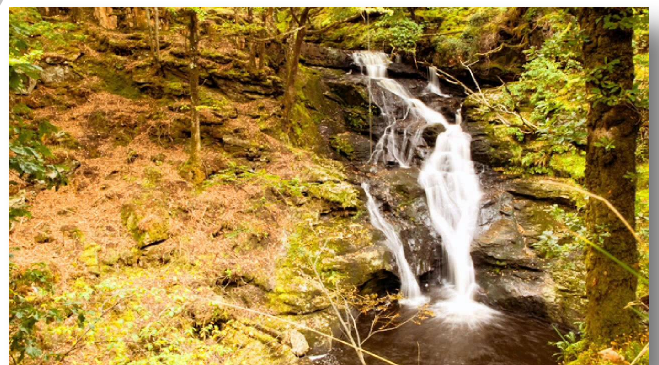
## First Stanza

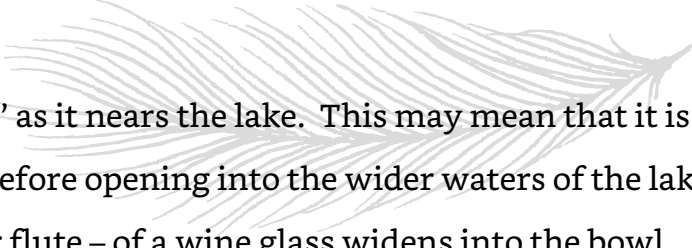
The first stanza describes the stream tumbling over rocks as it rushes downhill towards a lake. The poem is divided into rhyming couplets, each of which conveys the movement of the running water they describe.

The language is dramatic: Hopkins likens the stream to a galloping horse – 'horseback brown' – as it roars down the 'highroad' of rocks. Whether it is confined by surrounding rocks in a

'coop' or running freely – 'comb' – the water is described in energetic, dramatic language. Hopkins loved to play with language and invented new words when he felt there was nothing in the dictionary exact enough for his purposes. Compound words such as

'rollrock' are Hopkins' own but they make complete sense in the context of the poem. 'Rollrock', with its repeated 'r' and 'o' sounds perfectly captures the movement of the water as it swirls and tumbles around the rocks in the waterfall, sometimes carrying them with it in its rush to the lake waters below.





The water ‘flutes’ as it nears the lake. This may mean that it is confined to a narrow stretch before opening into the wider waters of the lake, much as the narrow stem – or flute – of a wine glass widens into the bowl.

### **Second Stanza**

As in the first stanza, Hopkins presents us with a wonderfully sensual metaphor. In this case, he likens the froth that gathers on top of the water in a little pool to a fawn-coloured ‘windpuff-bonnet’. He uses a portmanteau word (a word which blends the sounds and meaning of two or more other words) ‘twindles’ to describe the froth twisting, turning and dwindling as it nears the whirling centre of the pool.

Now the light-hearted tone changes as Hopkins looks into the ‘pitchblack, fell-frowning’ whirlpool and feels pulled down by despair, just as anything caught in the black waters of the whirlpool is drawn down and drowned. Although Hopkins celebrates the vigour and beauty of the natural world, there is still a sense that darkness and depression are ever present. The onomatopoeic ‘rounds and rounds’ with its broad, long vowel sounds adds to the gloomy feeling of these lines.

### **Third Stanza**

The language of the poem becomes gentler and the tone more positive in the third stanza. Hopkins’ focus shifts slightly as he describes the landscape around the stream. The hills at either side of the stream are ‘Degged with dew, dappled with dew’. (Hopkins uses dialect words such as ‘Degged’ and ‘braes’ throughout the poem, making the language more colloquial than formal, which is appropriate for a poem about a remote, rural part of the



Scottish Highlands.) There are clumps of heather, patches of fern and an ash tree covered in berries.

#### **Fourth stanza**

Hopkins moves now from description of the burn to a general reflection on natural wilderness. He says that without places the world would be 'bereft' – a strong word more commonly associated with the loss of a loved one. As in 'Spring', when Hopkins celebrated the 'weeds, in wheels, [that] shoot long and lovely and lush', there is a sense here that what is natural is what is best. These ordinary plants belong in their environment and such places should be left untouched and unchanged by man.

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