

Hopkins

Spring

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What Might You Be Asked?

Themes

- Grandeur and magnificence of God's creation
- God's presence in nature
- The purpose of life - living as God intended
- Mental suffering, despair, separation from God
- Sin and redemption



What Might You Be Asked?

Style

- Unconventional language
- Imagery of nature
- Strict poetic forms



Spring

- Hopkins wrote 'Spring' in May 1877, after walking in the Welsh countryside.
- Beauty of nature
- The presence of God - nature as God's creation
- Sin and redemption - perfection tainted with knowledge of innocence 'soured with sinning'
- Petrarchan sonnet, divided into an octave (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines).
- Brevity of the sonnet form forces Hopkins to compress his enthusiasm and powerful emotions into a mere fourteen lines.
- Every line is packed with emotion

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring –

When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;

Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush

Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring

The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;

The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush

The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush

With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

* Opens with the powerful, hyperbolic statement: 'Nothing is so beautiful as spring'. Perfectly captures Hopkins' ecstasy at the beauty and energy of spring.

* Following lines are full of life and movement as Hopkins extols the wonder of nature coming to life.

* Alliteration, assonance and the broad vowel sounds in the second line - 'When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush' – add greatly to the musical quality of the poem and emphasise the richness of nature exploding into growth.

* The verb 'shoot' is another example of hyperbole: plants do not grow at such a speed. However, the impression created is the same as that in time-lapse photography and it is easy to imagine the scene as the bleakness of winter gives way to the greenness and growth of spring.

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Thrush's eggs, which are speckled blue, are compared to 'little low heavens'.

Hopkins connects nature to God

Blue of sky dotted with clouds is linked to the colour of the bird's eggs: reminds us that the beauty of nature is God's creation.

Richness and intensity of the language perfectly reflects the lushness and the flurry of activity of spring growth.

The 'racing lambs' gambol in this paradise - like Garden of Eden
Dynamic, energetic verbs: 'shoot', 'rinse', 'wring', 'strikes', 'sing', 'rush' etc.

* Beauty of spring is just a ‘strain’ or echo of heavenly perfection before the garden of Eden was marred by man’s sin.

* All our lives are ‘sour with sinning’ - Hopkins entreats Christ to save the innocent youth from this fate.

* The positivity of the octet has been replaced by negativity, as can be clearly seen in the words ‘cloy’, ‘cloud’ and ‘sour’.

* The poet’s desire for the freshness and innocence of spring’s perfection to be preserved is shown in the urgency of the imperatives ‘Have’ and ‘get’.

*The young people are the ‘Most’, which in this context means the ‘best’ and they are ‘choice’ or the pick of the crop. They are worth the efforts it would take Christ to win them and preserve their innocence forever.

* Christ is addressed as ‘maid’s child’ as he was born of the Virgin Mary, and the ‘Mayday’ in every girl and boy is a reference to Mary, as May is the month associated with her.

What is all this juice and all this joy?

A strain of the earth’s sweet being in the beginning

In Eden garden. – Have, get, before it cloy,

Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,

Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,

Most, O maid’s child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

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* Sestet - change in tone and imagery.

* Switch from beauty of nature to a reflection on religion.

* Sprung rhythm is used to great effect in this poem.

* Hopkins packs stressed syllables together - focuses our attention on the point and adds to the sense of heightened emotion at this point in the poem. 'What is all this juice and all this joy?'

* Great emotional power and intensity in this seemingly simple question - emphasised by the sprung rhythm.

Seamus Heaney said of Hopkins that his poetry is 'rammed with life' but that he also believed such energy should be 'kept leashed'. 'Spring' is a perfect example of Heaney's description of Hopkins' work.

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