Pied Beauty Study Guide

Pied Beauty by Gerard Manley Hopkins

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Introduction

The British poet Gerard Manley Hopkins is often described as an early modern poet ahead of his Victorian time. This is perhaps why, while he wrote “Pied Beauty” in 1877, in common with most of his other poetry, it was first published twenty-nine years after his death. It appeared in the first collected edition of his poems, *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Robert Bridges (1918). The poem subsequently appeared in the second complete edition of Hopkins’s poetry, published in 1930. As of 2006, “Pied Beauty” was available in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, edited by Catherine Phillips (1986).

“Pied Beauty” is one of the first poems that Hopkins wrote in the so-called sprung rhythm that he evolved, based on the rhythms of Anglo-Saxon and ancient Welsh poetry. His aim was to approximate the rhythms and style of normal speech, albeit speech infused with a religious ecstasy and enthusiasm that are characteristics of his poetry. The poem also embodies Hopkins’s innovative use of condensed syntax and alliteration. It is written in the form of a curtal or shortened sonnet, another of Hopkins’s stylistic inventions. Thematically, the poem is a simple hymn of praise to God for the “dappled things” of creation. God is seen as being beyond change but as generating all the variety and opposites that manifest in the ever-changing world. Hopkins is best known as a nature poet and a religious poet, and “Pied Beauty” perfectly exemplifies both these aspects of his work.

Author Biography

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born on July 28, 1844, in Stratford, Essex, England, to Manley Hopkins, a marine insurance adjuster, and Catherine (Smith) Hopkins. He was the first of their nine children. His parents were devout High Church Anglicans. The family had a lively interest in religion and the creative arts. Manley published a volume of his poetry the year before Hopkins's birth and frequently reviewed poetry; Catherine was a keen reader, and the young Hopkins and his siblings involved themselves in literature, music, and painting.

Stratford was becoming industrialized during Hopkins's boyhood, and in 1852, the family moved to the then more rural area of Hampstead, north of the city of London, in the belief that it would provide a healthier environment.

Hopkins attended Highgate Grammar School from 1854 until 1863. He won the poetry prize and a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford, where he studied from 1863 to 1867. At Oxford, he was strongly influenced by the aesthetic theories of the essayist and literary critic Walter Pater, who was one of his tutors, and of the art critic and social commentator John Ruskin. Literary influences included the Anglican poets George Herbert and Christina Rossetti. It was during his Oxford years that Hopkins began to question the religion in which he had been brought up. He came under the influence of John Henry Newman (later Cardinal Newman), one of the founders of the Oxford movement (also called Tractarianism), which aimed to bring the Anglican Church back to its Catholic roots. In 1845, Newman had converted from the Anglican faith to Roman Catholicism. In 1866, Hopkins, to the consternation of his parents, also converted to Catholicism and was received into the Catholic Church by Cardinal Newman himself. The following year, Hopkins graduated with a first-class degree in classics.

In 1868, Hopkins joined the Society of Jesus, often called the Jesuits, with the aim of becoming a Jesuit priest. He gave up writing poetry and burned his poems, believing that they had no place in the life of someone who was committed to God. Only when he read the writings of the theologian Duns Scotus (1265–1308) in 1872 did he decide that poetry might be compatible with his religious vocation. He was also encouraged to return to writing poetry by his mentors in the Society of Jesus. In 1874, while Hopkins was studying theology in North Wales, he learned Welsh. He began to adapt the rhythms of Welsh poetry to his own poetry, evolving a metrical system that he called sprung rhythm. He put his metrical theories into practice in a radically innovative poem, "The Wreck of the Deutschland," about the 1876 sinking of a ship that carried five Franciscan nuns, exiles from Germany. Over the next year, Hopkins continued to use sprung rhythm in some of his most famous sonnets, including "God's Grandeur" and "Pied Beauty" (both written in 1877).

After he was ordained as a priest in 1877 and until 1881, Hopkins did parish work in Sheffield, Oxford, and London, and then in the slums of the three industrialized cities, Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow. He followed this work with three years of teaching Latin and Greek at Stonyhurst College, Lancashire. In 1884, he was appointed

professor of Greek and Latin at University College, Dublin. This period of his life was marked by depression, precipitated partly by his overly conscientious marking of hundreds of student examination papers. He suffered a period of religious doubt, which led to his writing a series of sonnets characterized by spiritual despair, including “Carrion Comfort” and “No Worst, There is None” (both c. 1885). Hopkins died of typhoid fever in Dublin on June 8, 1889. He appears to have overcome his low spirits before he died, and according to W. H. Gardner in *Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889): A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition*, his last words were reported to be, “I am so happy.”

Apart from a few uncharacteristic poems that appeared in periodicals, Hopkins did not publish his poetry during his lifetime. His friend, the poet Robert Bridges (1844–1930), whom Hopkins met at Oxford, arranged the publication of the first volume of his poetry in 1918.

Plot Summary

Stanza 1, lines 1–2; stanza 2, line 11

“Pied Beauty” opens and closes with variants of the two mottoes of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), of which Hopkins was a member. As cited by Peter Milward in *A Commentary on the Sonnets of G. M. Hopkins*, the two mottoes are: “Ad majorem Dei gloriam (To the greater glory of God) and Laus Deo semper (Praise be to God always).” Milward points out that it is customary for pupils in Jesuit schools to write an abbreviated form of the former motto, A. M. D. G., at the beginning of each written exercise, and the latter motto, L. D. S., at the end. Thus Hopkins appears to be treating his poem as an exercise in the Jesuit tradition.

Line 1 begins a hymn of praise to God for creating “dappled things” that embody the “Pied Beauty” of the title. These are things of mottled or variegated hue that display variety and pairs of opposites (such as light and dark). The whole of stanza 1, the sestet of the curtal sonnet, consists of a number of such things. Line 2 gives two examples of dappled things. In a simile, the poet likens “skies of couple-colour” to a “brinded” or striped cow, since both are of two contrasting colors.

Stanza 1, lines 3–4

The poet turns his attention to the river, where trout swim, their skins showing rose-colored markings “all in stipple,” meaning spots such as an artist might create by using small touches of the brush, a technique known as stippling. Then the poet draws attention to the windfalls from chestnut trees. When chestnuts hit the ground, their dull brown shells break open to reveal reddish-brown nuts within, which the poet likens in a metaphor to coals that break open in a fire and glow red. He notes the wings of finches, which are of varied colors.

Stanza 1, lines 5–6

The poet broadens his vision to take in the landscape. This is not an untouched, virgin landscape, but a landscape worked and shaped by man: it is “plotted and pieced,” meaning divided into sections or plots. A “fold” is an enclosure for sheep; “fallow” refers to a field left for a period of rest between crops; and “plough” refers to a field tilled in preparation for crop planting. All these references include, by implication, man’s intervention in the natural landscape. In line 6, the poet draws more direct attention to man, this time in the form of his trades and the clothes and tools associated with them. The trades are spoken of in terms of their neatness and orderliness: “gear and tackle and trim,” with “trim” perhaps suggesting the sailboats of fishermen.

Stanza 2, lines 7–8

In the quatrain of the curtal sonnet, the poet leaves behind the concrete examples of dappled things of stanza 1. He turns his attention inward, to his reflections on the abstract qualities he admires in “dappled things.” He appreciates their oddness, uniqueness, and rarity, all of which contribute to their preciousness. His use of the words “fickle” and “frecklèd” to describe these things is noteworthy, as these are both qualities that were neither admired nor appreciated in the Victorian age. “Fickle” was most often applied to inconstant lovers (more frequently women) and unstable and capricious people. Many ladies with freckled complexions employed poisons and potions to try to remove the marks and attain the uniformly pale color that was fashionable. The poet’s description of these things as “counter,” as well as meaning contrary to expectation and therefore unusual, suggests an opposition to the mainstream of opinion. The interjection of “who knows how?” adds an element of wonder and mystery.

Stanza 2, lines 9–11

The poet describes the way in which the dappled things are “fickle, frecklèd”: they embody pairs of opposite or contrasting abstract qualities. Those mentioned are swiftness and slowness, sweet and sour, and brightness and dimness. In conclusion, the poet returns to the theme he introduced in the first line: the creator of all this variety, change, and contrast is God, “whose beauty is past change.” He ends with a simple half-line consisting only of the exhortation, “Praise him.”

Themes

“Pied Beauty” is a hymn of praise to the variety of God’s creation, which is contrasted with the unity and non-changing nature of God. This variety is embodied in the “dappled things” of nature, as detailed in the sestet of the curtal sonnet. The significance of these things lies in the union of contrasting or opposite qualities in one being or aspect of creation. Thus bi-colored skies and streaked cows display contrasting hues; the “rose-moles” on the trout stand out against the background color of the skin; finches’ wings have bars of contrasting colors; broken-open chestnuts show a bright color inside against their dull-colored outside; and the worked landscape consists of divisions that separate one part from another.

The “Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls” seems to open up a moral and personal aspect to the theme of variety. The idea of the broken-open chestnuts revealing a shining hidden glory within symbolically suggests that a humble, unremarkable, or flawed exterior can conceal a beautiful, divinely inspired soul. This suggestion is picked up by the ambiguous adjectives “fickle, frecklèd,” which are commonly used to describe things of which the Victorian mainstream did not approve, such as inconstant lovers and less-than-flawless complexions. From the point of view of the visual arts (Hopkins was a keen painter), these elements represent asymmetry, or broken symmetry. Whereas an even-colored object or being displays symmetry, a dappled object or being displays asymmetry. In the visual arts, the power of a painting, drawing, or sculpture comes from the interplay between symmetry and broken symmetry. In terms of poetry, this might be expressed in terms of regular rhythm (symmetry) and broken rhythm (asymmetry). In giving thanks to God for “All things counter, original, spare, strange,” Hopkins includes in his hymn of praise people and other beings who are different, unusual, and (figuratively speaking) swimming against the mainstream. It can be no accident that such words were repeatedly applied to Hopkins’s poetry, which was stylistically and thematically so far ahead of its time that readers found it odd, difficult, and even incomprehensible. Hopkins was aware of this, writing in a letter of February 15, 1879, to Robert Bridges (reproduced in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*), “No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness.” In “Pied Beauty,” oddness and contrariness are brought into the fold of God’s diverse creation.

Man and his environment are also unified. The landscape is not one of untouched nature, but one that is formed and shaped by man, to such an extent that it is defined by the activities of man within it: the sheepfold, the land that man has ploughed, and the land that he has left to rest between crops. At a time when the Industrial Revolution was prompting many writers and thinkers to lament the growing gap between man and the countryside, and the consequent destruction of the countryside by the manufacturing activities of man, this poem is a celebration of the oneness between rural man and his land. Hopkins portrays man as just another organic part of God’s creation, enfolded into the landscape, not a force that is destroying that creation. The “trades” that he mentions are not the searing, smearing, and blearing trades of that other poem of 1877, “God’s Grandeur,” but trades that bring man into a cooperative and order-creating relationship with creation, embodied in the neatness of the image, “their gear and tackled and trim.”

Piedness or variety is unified and embodied by each being named in the poem. Thus, though the cow is bi-colored, it is a single being and thereby represents a unity of contrasting elements. There is unity in diversity too in the poet's juxtaposition of contrasting beings or elements. Thus the solid, familiar form of the cow is set against the unbounded, infinite skies or heavens, just as the various, finite, and ever-changing forms of creation are set against the oneness, infinity, and constancy of God. In the second stanza, the theme is broadened to include abstract qualities that are opposite or contrasting in the same way in which, in the concrete examples of the first stanza, the colors on the cow and the trout are opposite or contrasting. To unify such abstract opposites as swift and slow, bright and dark, is a greater imaginative stretch than envisaging contrasting colors on an object, but such is the momentum of the poem that nothing could seem more natural. The poem concludes with the ultimate expression of piedness: God and his creation, the one and the many. The one and the many, however, are ultimately one, the God that is praised in the extremely simple, disyllabic final line before the poem drops into the silence of contemplation.

Style

Sprung Rhythm

Hopkins based his sprung rhythm on the metrical systems of Anglo-Saxon and traditional Welsh poetry, and he used this rhythm for much of his poetry. Sprung rhythm is based on the number of stressed syllables in a line and permits any number of unstressed syllables. Each foot consists of a first strongly stressed syllable, which either stands alone or is followed by unstressed syllables. Generally there are between one and four syllables per foot. An example from “Pied Beauty” is line 1, which can be scanned thus: “Glory | be to | God for | dappled | things,” with four strong stresses falling on “Glo-” in the first foot, “God” in the third foot, “da-” in the fourth foot, and “things” in the fifth foot. The strong stresses in all feet except the second fall on the first syllable of the foot; even in the second foot, the stress is stronger on the first syllable than the second. Most lines of this poem have four or five strong stresses.

An additional feature of sprung rhythm is the free use of juxtaposed stresses without intermediate unstressed syllables. Examples from “Pied Beauty” include “all trades,” “swift, slow,” and “Praise him.” In the last two of these examples, Hopkins has signaled to the reader that both syllables should have strong stresses by marking them with his customary acute accent. In the first example, he has marked “all” with a strong stress, and if the reader takes account of the sense, he or she must also stress the next word, “trades.”

Compound Words

In his poetry, Hopkins uses an extraordinarily high number of compound words in order to convey meaning in a graphic and condensed form. Sometimes, it is difficult to work out whether these are adjectives, nouns, or verbs, which creates ambiguity and complexity. Examples from “Pied Beauty” are “couple-colour,” “rose-moles,” “Fresh-firecoal,” and “chestnut-falls.” Hopkins’s use of compound words is a deliberate borrowing from the Anglo-Saxon and Welsh poetic traditions.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in neighboring words. An example from “Pied Beauty” is “fickle, freck frecklèd,” where the initial consonant alliterates. Sometimes, the alliterated sound falls inside a word, but it must begin a stressed syllable, such as “adazzle, dim,” where the *d* is the repeated sound. Alliteration is one of Hopkins’s most characteristic poetic techniques and his heavy reliance upon it is another borrowing from the Anglo-Saxon and Welsh verse traditions. In the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, for example, each line is divided into two half-lines, and the first stressed word of the second half-line must alliterate with at least one of the stressed syllables in the first half-line. Other words may alliterate as well.

Curtal Sonnet

“Pied Beauty” is one of Hopkins’s three curtal or shortened sonnets, the others being “Peace” and “Ash Boughs.” It differs from the standard Petrarchan sonnet (named after Petrarch, the fourteenth-century Italian poet) in that while the Petrarchan form is divided into an octave (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines), in the curtal sonnet, the octave becomes a sestet and the sestet becomes a quatrain (four lines), followed by a half-line tail-piece. In the traditional Petrarchan sonnet, the octave sets up a proposition or problem, while the sestet provides the resolution. “Pied Beauty” does not follow this pattern, but the sonnet form is still used to create a turnabout in focus. The first stanza or sestet ranges from God, then the heavens (in the Biblical account of creation in Genesis, God’s first act was to create the heavens), and then the individual beings of creation. The progression is from the vast and infinite to the small and particular. The second stanza or quatrain reverses this process, ranging from the particular and varied “All things,” to the more abstract qualities such as swiftness and slowness, thence to God’s act of creation (“He fathers-forth,”) and ultimately, to the unchanging nature of God himself.

Rhyme Scheme

The standard rhyme scheme of the octave of a Petrarchan sonnet is a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a. For the sestet the commonest rhyme schemes are c-d-e-c-d-e or c-d-c-c-d-c, though other variants are to be found. The rhyme scheme of “Pied Beauty” is a-b-c-a-b-c for the sestet, and d-b-c-d-c for the quatrain and tail-piece. It can be seen that Hopkins brings over two of his rhymes from the sestet into the quatrain and tail-piece. This creates a continuity that unifies the two stanzas and reinforces the sense of resolution and completeness at the poem’s end. The poem’s regular rhyme scheme adds to the chiming effect created by the sprung rhythm and alliteration. The rhymes in the poem are masculine, meaning that the rhyme falls on a stressed syllable. This has a stronger, more emphatic effect than feminine rhymes, where the rhyme falls on an unstressed syllable.

Historical Context

The Society of Jesus (Jesuits)

St. Ignatius of Loyola (born Iñigo López de Loyola, 1491–1556) founded the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, as they are commonly known, in 1534. The Jesuits are a religious order of Catholics who profess direct loyalty and service to the pope. They are often called “Soldiers of Christ” and “Footsoldiers of the pope,” partly because St. Ignatius was a soldier before he became a priest. St. Ignatius emphasized the importance of love for God and believed that man was created to praise and serve him (as, for instance, the poet of “Pied Beauty” does, while exhorting his readers to do likewise). In the process, he will save his own soul. Unusual among Christian teachers, St. Ignatius believed that emotions were important and taught that a person should be sensitive to the emotions that shaped him (a factor that may well have appealed to the emotionally sensitive Hopkins). At the same time, he taught that a person should be indifferent to the comfort or discomfort of his circumstances, to whether he was enjoying his activity or not, and to cultivate a state of serene acceptance. In addition, St. Ignatius taught that God is present in all things, so there is no division between the sacred and profane. This idea would accord well with Hopkins’s ecstatic love and appreciation for the natural world and mankind, which are expressed in “Pied Beauty.” Possibly as a result of this aspect of St. Ignatius’s philosophy, Jesuits have been prominent in the arts and sciences.

As of 2006, Jesuit ministries were established worldwide and focused on education, missionary work, and ministry in human rights and social justice. Hopkins began training to be a Jesuit priest in 1868 and was ordained as a priest in 1877, the year in which he wrote “Pied Beauty.” The poem begins and ends with variations of the Jesuit mottoes and thereby takes on the flavor of a Jesuit devotional exercise.

Duns Scotus, Nature, Inscape, and Instress

Blessed John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) was an English theologian and philosopher. Gardner, in *Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889): A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition*, believes that it is most likely that it was the work of Scotus, which Hopkins began to read in 1872, that influenced Hopkins to arrive at a metaphysical fusion of God and nature. Scotus was of the Franciscan tradition, which emphasized the importance of love of nature, God’s creation, as a means of loving and praising God. Gardner comments: “Scotus taught that God the Son ‘personifies’ nature; yet a pantheistic heresy [a belief that identifies God with the universe] is carefully avoided, since although He is *in* the world, He is not *of* it.” Gardner cites a journal entry by Hopkins as expressing this notion: “I do not think that I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. *I know the beauty of our Lord by it*.”

Hopkins's poetry, including "Pied Beauty," shows an exquisite sensitivity to, and sharp observation of, nature. His is not a generalized vision but a particular one that identifies, for example, the exact pattern and color of a trout's skin, and this habit of particularity, too, may have been influenced by Scotus. Scotus used the term *haecceitas* (this-ness) to express the individuation of natural being and object as it comes into manifestation. This has some similarity with Hopkins's concepts of *inscape* and *instress*, terms that he coined to express his perception of nature. While the exact definitions of these terms were probably only known to Hopkins, inscape may be defined as the unified group of characteristics that give each thing its uniqueness. Instress is defined variously (depending on context) as the force of being that holds the inscape together or the impulse from the inscape which carries it whole into the mind of the beholder. Hopkins acknowledged his debt to Scotus in forming these concepts in a journal entry, cited by Gardner: "when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus."

The Industrial Revolution and Nature

The Industrial Revolution began in England in the late eighteenth century and from there, spread around the world. By the time Hopkins wrote "Pied Beauty" in 1877, it was in full flow and had radically and permanently changed the landscape and social organization of Britain. Hopkins's own family relocated in order to escape the rapidly industrializing environment of their hometown, Stratford in Essex. Hundreds of thousands of rural people migrated to the industrialized towns in search of work, including those in which Hopkins worked as a priest: Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow. Many found jobs in factories, but the work followed the fluctuations of markets, and poverty, disease, and hardship were widespread. For the first time, a large sector of the population lost access to land to grow food, leading to problems of hunger. Meanwhile, rural areas fell into decline as the center of the economy shifted to the towns.

Writers such as the poet William Blake (1757–1827), the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865), and the social and art critic John Ruskin (1819–1900) wrote at length about the social problems caused by the Industrial Revolution. In parallel, there grew among romantic and other writers an appreciation of the beauty of nature (which was under threat due to the sprawl and pollution of industrialization) and of fast-disappearing rural skills and trades (which were viewed as tying man to nature, unlike dehumanizing factory work). Hopkins showed a keen awareness of the problems, as is clear from his poem "God's Grandeur" (published in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*), which contains the line, "all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil." The trades mentioned in "Pied Beauty," with their "gear and tackle and trim," do not appear to be tainted with industrial associations; they are the rural trades that tie man to the "plotted and pieced" landscape and enable him to bring order to it.

Critical Overview

With a few exceptions of uncharacteristic poems appearing in minor periodicals, Hopkins's poems were not published during his lifetime and were read only by friends and fellow poets. Hopkins resisted the entreaties of his friends to publish. His reluctance was probably due to his anticipation of responses such as that of the poet and critic Coventry Patmore after wrestling with a number of Hopkins's poems. Patmore, cited in Paul L. Mariani's *A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, complained that the poems required "the whole attention to apprehend and digest them." He added that Hopkins's poetry was "arduous" enough without the added difficulty of "*several* entirely novel and simultaneous experiments in versification and construction," together with an "altogether unprecedented system of alliteration and compound words."

Patmore was perhaps vindicated in his view by the slow sales of the 1918 publication of the first collected edition of Hopkins's poems, *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Robert Bridges, in which "Pied Beauty" was included. The English poet A. E. Housman gave his opinion of the collection in a letter of 1918 to Robert Bridges, cited in the University of Glasgow website article "Paper 17. Literature 1830–1914 (Victorian)." Housman dismisses Hopkins's attempts at sprung rhythm as being less competent than "many a humble scribbler of words for music-hall songs" has written. He accuses Hopkins of doing more "violence" to the English language than even the poet John Keats, and of trying to "compensate by strangeness for the lack of pure merit."

"Pied Beauty" subsequently appeared in the second complete edition of Hopkins's poetry, published in 1930. This time, popular taste had begun to catch up with Hopkins's innovative style. The edition met with considerable critical and public acclaim and established Hopkins's influence on twentieth-century poets. Not everyone was wholly impressed, however. T. S. Eliot (in his 1934 essay "After Strange Gods," as cited in the University of Glasgow website article "Paper 17. Literature 1830–1914 (Victorian)") noted that while Hopkins's innovations were good, "like the mind of their author, they operate only within a narrow range." Eliot wrote that they sometimes come close to being "purely *verbal*, in that a whole poem will give us more of the same thing, an accumulation, rather than a real development of thought or feeling."

Donald Davie, in his 1952 book *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (cited in the University of Glasgow website article, "Paper 17. Literature 1830–1914 (Victorian)"), lambasts Hopkins for his "self-regarding ingenuity," which "may be called decadent." Hopkins, Davie writes, is the greatest poet of a decadent age, "because he cultivates his hysteria and pushes his sickness to the limit." Part of Hopkins's decadence, Davie added, lies in "the refinement and manipulation of sensuous appetite": his work tries to restore "to a jaded palate the capacity for enjoyment." Davie, like Housman, objects to what he sees as Hopkins's lack of respect for the English language and his forcing it into "a muscle-bound monstrosity."

Over the decades, readers and critics have become used to many of the poetic innovations that were once considered so strange and difficult in Hopkins's poetry, allowing his strengths to come to the fore. His work gained particular admiration from many adherents of the New Criticism that dominated the study of English literature in Britain and the United States from the 1920s until the 1960s. The New Critics' emphasis on close reading of the text led them to appreciate Hopkins's short and condensed poetry, to such an extent that in 1952, the critic F. R. Leavis was able to begin his essay on Hopkins, "Metaphysical Isolation" (published in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Symposium*) with the bold statement, "That Hopkins has a permanent place among the English poets may now be taken as established beyond challenge: academic scholarship has canonized him." "Pied Beauty" is among the most frequently anthologized of Hopkins's poems, and it is widely taught in schools and colleges. Kevin Heller, in his article for *Explicator* (2001) entitled "Hopkins's 'Pied Beauty,'" surely expresses the views of many modern critics and readers when he praises the poem for its "creativity and brilliance."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Claire Robinson has an M.A. in English. She is a writer and editor and a former teacher of English literature and creative writing. In the following essay, she examines how Hopkins uses the poetic techniques of the oral traditions of Anglo-Saxon and traditional Welsh poetry to express his meaning in "Pied Beauty."

Gerard Manley Hopkins's experimentation with the poetic techniques of Anglo-Saxon and Welsh poetry was entirely geared to his intention that his poems be read aloud with the ear, not on the page with the eye. In a letter of August 21, 1877 to Robert Bridges (cited in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*), he writes, "My verse is less to be read than heard . . . it is oratorical, that is the rhythm is so." In another letter to Bridges in 1886 (cited by Paul L. Mariani in *A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*), enclosing his sonnet, "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," he writes:

Regular rhythm tends to soothe and lull readers with its incantatory effect, whereas irregular rhythm such as Hopkins uses wakes them up and shocks them into something approaching a state of astonishment, awe, or wonder.Of this long sonnet above all remember what applies to all my verse, that it is, as living art should be, made for performance and that its performance is not reading with the eye but loud, leisurely, poetical (not rhetorical) recitation, with long rests, long dwells on the rhyme and other marked syllables, and so on.

One of the tools that Hopkins took from the Anglo-Saxon and Welsh oral traditions was alliteration, the repetition of initial consonant sounds in neighboring words, sometimes called consonant-chiming. For example, every line of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* contains three alliterations. The Welsh-language poetic genre called *cynghanedd* (meaning harmony), a traditional form dating from ancient times and continuing into the present day, relies heavily on alliteration and internal rhyme (in which two or more words in the same line rhyme). Hopkins was studying the Welsh language and literature in the years prior to writing "Pied Beauty."

In "Pied Beauty," Hopkins includes such alliterative phrases as "skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow," where the initial letter "c" is repeated three times, and "Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls," where the alliteration lies in the letter "f." The effect of alliteration is similar to rhyme in that it sets up an expectation of repetition that is later satisfied, thereby carrying the listener through the poem. (For one who recites, the alliteration is an aid to memory.) It also has a musical, incantatory effect similar to that of metrical rhythm, due to the repetition of sounds. Often, Hopkins reinforces the chiming effect of the alliteration by making the alliterations fall on strongly stressed syllables, in the Anglo-Saxon style. This point is illustrated in all the above examples.

Hopkins's use of compound words is another conscious borrowing from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. *Beowulf* is laden with such constructions, called *kennings* (literally, knowings). A king is called a ring-giver (a king rewards his warriors with gifts of rings), a burial mound is an earth-hall, and a ship is a sea-rider. Such descriptions lend a concrete and picturesque quality to the object described; they pull it from the realm of the abstract into the more directly felt world of the senses, turning an idea into an object. For example, Hopkins's "couple-colour" conjures up a concrete image of a pair, perhaps a pair of people, while the word *two* and the prefix *bi-*, which have the same meaning, completely fail to stir the senses. The expression "Fresh-firecoal" invokes the familiar image of a burning coal breaking open and glowing red, but it is lent a new twist by the addition of "Fresh-," an adjective that connotes both newness and vitality.

The Anglo-Saxon language abounds in words describing the concrete and tangible world, as opposed to the often more abstract and cerebral Latin- and Greek-derived words that entered the English language with the Norman conquest of 1066. Anglo-Saxon-derived words are also usually shorter than Latin- or Greek-derived words, creating a more forceful sound effect. Hopkins's poetry is laden with words with Anglo-Saxon roots, which he prefers to those with Latin or Greek roots. Everyday speech has far more Anglo-Saxon-derived words than does formal speech or writing, and Hopkins wanted to approximate normal speech in his poetry. He also used many dialect and archaic words that hark back to the Anglo-Saxon past. An example from "Pied Beauty" is "brinded," an archaic and dialect word meaning striped or streaked, which is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *bernen* or *brinnen*, to burn.

The most important influence of Anglo-Saxon verse on Hopkins's poetry lay in its metrical system. Hopkins's sprung rhythm is based on a metrical style that was common in Anglo-Saxon poetry such as *Beowulf* and William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. This metrical style has a set number of strong stresses per line. Each line is divided into two half-lines; there are two strong stresses per half-line and alliteration only occurs on stressed syllables. Each line can contain any number of syllables. "Pied Beauty" has four or five strong stresses per line, and many of the strong stresses alliterate also. For example, in the line, "Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches wings," three of the four strong stresses fall on the syllables beginning with the letter "f" the other strong stress falls on "chest-."

The Anglo-Saxon and sprung meters are different from the traditional meter of English verse written after the Norman invasion of 1066. The Norman style, which became the traditional English style, counts both stresses and syllables, rather than just stresses. It contains a regular number of syllables per foot, with the stress generally falling in the same place within each foot except when the rhythm is deliberately changed for emphasis. In his "Author's Preface" to the 1918 edition of his poetry, reproduced in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, Hopkins called such traditional meter "Running Rhythm." He noted that while he himself made use of it, if strictly adhered to, it made verse become "same and tame."

Hopkins favored sprung rhythm because he believed it was the rhythm of common speech. It may be added that this rhythm is uniquely well-suited to Hopkins's

declamatory, ecstatic, and enthusiastic style in general, and to the hymn of praise “Pied Beauty” in particular. Hopkins noted in a letter of April 2, 1877, to Robert Bridges (cited in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*) that sprung rhythm was “the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms.” Robert Lowell, in his essay “Hopkins’ Sanctity,” in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Symposium by the Kenyon Critics*, notes the perfect correspondence between Hopkins’s rhythmical style and his personality: “Hopkins’ rhythms even when he is not writing sprung-rhythm have the effect of a hyperthyroid injection. As we know from the letters and personal anecdotes, he lived in a state of exhilaration.”

Hopkins’s sprung rhythm draws its power from the tension between the regular rhythms of poetry, which were usual in the poetry of his time, and his deliberately disturbed rhythms, which he called counterpointed rhythm. Regular rhythm tends to soothe and lull readers with its incantatory effect, whereas irregular rhythm such as Hopkins uses wakes them up and shocks them into something approaching a state of astonishment, awe, or wonder. An example is the first stanza of “Pied Beauty,” in which Hopkins employs emphatic and sometimes staccato rhythms that load each line with a sense of exhilaration. In the second stanza, the shift in focus from outward creation to inward reflection is reflected in a slowing down of the rhythm and tempo. This is reinforced by the longer vowel sounds of line 7; it is impossible to read it as quickly as the first stanza. Line 9, with its list of opposite qualities, speeds up, as is usual with a list, but then the tempo slows markedly in the momentous lines 10 and 11: “He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: / Praise him.” The combination of a number of strongly stressed long vowel sounds and the four consecutive strong stresses falling on the final four words forces the reader to slow down.

The changes in rhythm and tempo between the lively first stanza and the more ponderous second perfectly reflect the meaning. The first stanza is quick and lively and expresses the variety of God’s creation; the second is slower and more reflective and expresses both the poet’s wondering introspection. The final one-and-a-half lines are slowest and grandest of all, and express the unchanging nature of God.

Hopkins never used innovative poetic techniques for their own sake. Rather, he used them to express and deepen the meaning of his poems. His theories of sprung rhythm and his study of the Anglo-Saxon and Welsh traditions have proved taxing for students of literature to research and understand. What matters is the end result: verse that shimmers with a sensual passion for life and its creator. This can only be fully realized by reading his poetry aloud, which is where the study of Hopkins’s verse should begin and end.

Source: Claire Robinson, Critical Essay on “Pied Beauty,” in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Topics for Further Study

• Write an essay in which you compare and contrast “Pied Beauty” with John Keats’s poem “Ode to a Nightingale” or Dylan Thomas’s poem “The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower.” What does each poem reveal about the relationship between man, God, and nature?

• Write a poem on any topic using sprung rhythm and alliteration. You may use any number of syllables per line, but you must keep to a set number of strong stresses per line (as in Hopkins’s “Pied Beauty,” you may vary the number by one only). You may use rhyme or not, as you wish. Write a short separate paragraph on how the techniques of sprung rhythm and alliteration helped or hindered the meaning of the poem. Finally, perform your poem and read your paragraph to a group.

• Hopkins’s poems often move between a personal, sensual experience to a philosophical reflection. Write an essay discussing this movement with relation to at least three of his poems.

• Identify some images that recur in Hopkins’s poems, and write an essay on how they relate to the themes of the poems.

• Read about Hopkins’s religious life and views, and create a class presentation in which you relate your findings to his poetry.

Compare and Contrast

- **1870s:** Hopkins's innovative use of sprung rhythm, alliteration, compound words, and condensed syntax, in part borrowed from Anglo-Saxon and Welsh poetic techniques, is considered radical, strange, and shocking.

- **Today:** Poetic techniques pioneered by Hopkins have entered the mainstream of literature, having influenced such poets as T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Dylan Thomas, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis, and Ted Hughes. Modern poets use a variety of regular and irregular metrical styles, alliteration, and compound words to express their meaning.

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- **1870s:** The Industrial Revolution reaches its height in Britain, prompting writers to comment on the profound social, environmental, and economic changes it brings in its wake. It also brings a renewed interest in the beauty and sacredness of nature, expressed in keenly observed detail in Hopkins's poetry.

- **Today:** Environmentalists and social commentators continue to draw attention to the effects of industrialization on man and nature, and the topic continues to inspire writers. Governments have taken some measures, such as creating national parks, to protect certain areas from industrial development.

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- **1870s:** Following the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from the Catholic European nations and their colonies in the latter half of the eighteenth century (this was a secular act prompted by resentment of the Jesuits' intervention in governmental policies such as slavery), in the early 1800s, the Jesuits are restored in most countries. Throughout the nineteenth century, the society expands and sets up many colleges and universities in Britain, the United States, and other countries.

- **Today:** Jesuits are free to practice their faith and, in most places in the world, to work in their ministries. In the second half of the twentieth century, following a trend in the Catholic priesthood in general, the numbers of members of the Society of Jesus decline. However, according to the official website of the British Province of the Society of Jesus (www.jesuit.org.uk), as of 2006, the society has around 20,000 members worldwide, engaged in a variety of ministries.

What Do I Read Next?

- All of Hopkins's poems, along with extracts from his journals and letters, and some of his sermons and devotional writings, are collected in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works* (1986), edited by Catherine Phillips. Readers new to his poetry may enjoy "The Windhover," "God's Grandeur," and "As Kingfishers Catch Fire." For an example of his so-called terrible sonnets, "No Worst" may be of interest.

- *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (1991), by Robert Bernard Martin, is an interesting biography that argues that Hopkins projected his suppressed homoerotic impulses onto God and nature, producing some of the most sensually ecstatic religious poetry in English literature. Martin gained unprecedented and unrestricted access to Hopkins's notebooks to write this biography.

- *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (2005), by Eugene H. Peterson, is a popular book written for the general reader in which the author explores the meaning of Biblical texts through the beauty of creation and the tragedies of history. Peterson, a pastor and professor, argues that spirituality is a sensual process.

- Readers who enjoy Hopkins's poetry may also appreciate that of the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poet John Donne. Most of his poems, including his love poetry and religious poems and writings, are collected in *John Donne: The Major Works, including Songs and Sonnets and Sermons* (2000).

Further Study

Brown, Daniel, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Northcote House Publishers, 2002.

This book provides an accessible introduction to Hopkins's poetry in the light of his prose writings, which are used to illuminate Hopkins's thinking on nature, prosody, language, philosophy, science, and theology, as well as his ideas on *inscape* and sprung rhythm.

Heaney, Seamus, ed., *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, W. W. Norton, 2001.

In his translation of the epic Anglo-Saxon poem, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney has preserved the alliterative and rhythmical patterns and the profusion of kennings that characterized the original. The poem tells the story of the warrior Beowulf and his battles with three monsters.

Muller, Jill, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and Victorian Catholicism: A Heart in Hiding*, Routledge, 2003.

Muller examines Hopkins's life, writings, and spirituality in the context of a newly industrialized, anti-Catholic, and increasingly secular England. She shows how the preoccupations and disappointments of Hopkins's career reflect the deflation of Catholic hopes during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Sheehan, Sean, *Student Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Greenwich Exchange, 2005.

This critical study explores the relationship between Hopkins's poetry and his philosophy. Sheehan shows the intimate relationship between Hopkins's perceptions, his poetic expression, and his idea of *inscape*.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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