

(B.A. English subsidiary, Part-1,Paper-1)

Show your acquaintance with the sonnet “God’s Grandeur” by Gerard M. Hopkins.

The sonnet “**God's Grandeur**”by Gerard Manley Hopkins stresses the immanence of God. The whole universe is an expression of God’s greatness, but man fails to recognize it. Though the soil is bare and smeared with man’s toil, there is a constant renewal or natural beauty because God continues to 'brood' over the world.

In this sonnet, Hopkins praises the magnificence and glory of God in the world, blending accurate observation with lofty imagination. The world is filled with the greatness of God. God’s glory expresses itself in two ways. Sometimes it flames out with sudden brightness when a gold foil is shaken. At other times, the poet thinks of an olive press, with the oil oozing (flowing out) from the pressed fruit. It oozes from every part of the press in a fine film and then the trickles gathers together to form

a jar of oil. In the same way, the grandeur of God is found everywhere, trickling from every simple thing in a created universe and accumulating to form greatness. The poet wonders why people do not care about God's rod. People pursue their worldly activities without any thought of God's will and without the fear of god's anger.

Generations of human beings have followed the same worldly path and have become so habituated to it that they don't know its uselessness. It has become monotonous due to lack of the divine will. The world has been degraded and made ugly by commercial activity and by hard work aimed at worldly gains. The world bears the marks of man's dirt and gives out man's bad smells. The beauty of nature is spoiled by man's industrial activity and the sweet smell of nature has been drowned in the bad smells that come from machines. The earth is now bare, having lost all living beauty. Man is insensitive to this bareness. Because of the shoes, he can't feel whether the earth is soft or hard.

In spite of man's activities tending to destroy the beauty of Nature, it is inexhaustible. At the bottom of the world there is freshness. This freshness never disappears. When spring comes nature renews itself and thus shows underlying freshness. And although the sun goes down

the western sky and the earth is plunged in darkness, the next day will dawn and the sun will be rising again in the eastern sky. Just as a dove with its warm breast broods over its young ones in its nest, so the Holy Ghost broods protectively over the world which is bent in sleep and forgetfulness.

The repetition of the words 'have trod' captures the mechanical forces in verse because of their heavy accents. What is sometimes called the 'daily grind' is the repetitive thump in which the feet of generation march on; and the 'trod... trod... trod' sets up the three beat rhythm of the next line: 'seared... bleared... smeared!' 'Seared' means 'dried up' or it can mean 'rendered incapable of feeling'. 'Bleared' means 'blurred with inflammation of the eyes' and 'smeared' means 'rubbed over with dirt'. They suggest that there is no delicacy of feeling or perception in the world. The whole world has been degraded and made ugly by commercial activity and by toil aimed at monetary gains.

The poet says that people's love for money has left an ugly mark on everything in the world. The beauty of Nature has been defaced by human toil. The dirt and smell of human selfishness has infected the whole world of Nature. The earth is now bare, having lost all living

beauty. Man is insensitive to this bareness: his feet feel neither the hardness nor the softness of the earth.

The poet's religious faith rises above this pessimistic picture of human life. The poet is able to look from darkness to light, from night to day, from winter to spring. In the depths of Nature, there is a never-falling source of freshness, with which the earth is renewed every time when spring comes. It is the continued brooding of the Holy Ghost over the "bent" world, which brings forth renewed life from generation to generation. The Holy Ghost looks after mankind with the same protective care as a dove looks after its young ones.

This poem is a bright example of the poems about our Mother Nature. It starts with a speaker's claim that our planet is vital and full of special power. This power comes, of course, from our Creator, God. However, what troubles the protagonist is that the Earth is temporary while God is eternal. One day, our planet is bound to reach its peak and collapse.

The main idea that the author carries through the poem is that God and nature are inseparable. The speaker wonders, why people fail to take care of their environment. Although, God is powerful and eternal, it has been proven that irresponsible human behaviour can

cause great danger and the consequences of it may be fatal.

The protagonist is fed up with people and their irresponsible deeds. He says that people have been around way too long, endlessly trudging through, and now the surface is callous and the natural resources are heavily used up. It is impossible to imagine our planet without people, yet the absence of human beings would certainly do it justice. Nowadays, everything is invaded by people, everything smells like people and people's influence is unbearable.

In this industrialized world, a man has lost its vital connection with nature. One no longer walks the fields barefoot; everybody is forced to wear shoes, which makes a human being distant from Mother Nature.

Although the world has been inevitably changed by men, hope has not yet vanished. The speaker assures the readers that God is still watching over his creation. That is why the sun continues to set and rise; that is why seasons change and after a cold and tiring winter, spring comes full of hope and new beginnings.

What is also fascinating about this poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins is its meter and rhythm. The author

follows the form of Italian sonnet, which has fourteen lines. Hopkins separates his poem into two stanzas; one eight lines and the other one – six. This division compares the stanzas and makes a clearer contrast between them. What concerns the rhythm of the poem, Hopkins wrote it in so-called “sprung rhythm”, which he became famous for. The relations of stressed and unstressed vowels are more complicated in sprung rhythm, than in regular speech. This gives the poem a unique flavour as, on the one hand, its meter is that of traditional Italian sonnet, but the rhythm is rather innovative. Thus, the author uses his creativity and combines tradition and innovation in his memorable poem.

The poem deals with Nature and God. It begins with excitement and urgency. The first line has the organ-like declaratory simplicity of a litany: indeed, it recalls the nineteenth Psalm: “The heavens declare the glory of God”. The words that follow “It will flame out” add the personal urgency, and the precise simile “like shining from shook foil” exacts a careful look at the world of objects.

The main idea of the poem is mentioned in the very first line when the poet says: “The world is charged with the

grandeur of God.” As the poem proceeds, it contrasts the devitalizing and smearing effect produced by man on the face of the earth, with the ever-springing freshness of the life of Nature. It was a theme frequently dwelt upon by Hopkins in letters and sermons, as well as in such poems as *The Sea* and *the Skylark* and *Ribblesdale*.

While the first line of the poem is an awestruck outcry of joy at the omnipresent grandeur of God, the next seven lines of the octave present a pessimistic picture of the world. In the sestet, however, the feeling of joy reasserts itself, and the innate glory of all beings and the loving presence of the Holy Ghost are mentioned in an emphatic manner.

This second assertion is even more insistent and powerful than the earlier one, because it is made in the face of the honest recognition that men in general have not responded to the love and beauty implicit in the universe. The octave presents a dilemma, while the sestet breaks out of the dilemma by the power of its statement of religious belief. There is sincere conviction behind the sestet.

The poem explores the relationship between the divine world and the world of nature. It illustrates how divine

presence infuses its spirit and refreshes the world,
despite the attempts of mankind to destroy its real fabric
through materialism. The popularity of the poem lies in
the fact that it praises God for the role He plays to
restore the world destroyed by human greed and love for
materialism. Sogengmnak.

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