

INVERSNAID BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS - COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

CONTEXT

- Gerard Manley Hopkins' Inversnaid is a poem celebrating the beauty of a wild Scottish stream (or "burn") near the village of Inversnaid, and it reflects Hopkins' fascination with nature's untamed, unpolished qualities. The poem portrays the rushing stream as both beautiful and fierce, using rich, alliterative language and vivid imagery to capture its dynamism and raw energy. Hopkins ends the poem with a passionate plea for the preservation of nature, arguing that the "wet" and "wildness" of the world are vital to its beauty and should be left untouched. The poem expresses his deep admiration for nature's wild, untainted state and his concern over humanity's tendency to diminish it.



STANZA BY STANZA ANALYSIS



STANZA I (LINES 1-4)

- "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." The poem begins by describing the stream, or "burn," in vivid, dynamic imagery. The phrase "darksome burn" establishes the wild, shadowy character of the stream, while "horseback brown" suggests the color and movement of the water, reminiscent of a galloping horse. The stream is "roaring down" a rocky path, its foam likened to "fleece," a metaphor that softens the raw power of the water with a gentle, pastoral image. The use of alliteration in "rollrock" and "roaring" emphasizes the sound and energy of the water's movement, while the final line suggests a calming descent as the stream flows "home" to the lake, evoking both a sense of movement and destination.

STANZA 2 (LINES 5-8)

- "A windpuff-bonnet of fáawn-fróth / Turns and twindles over the broth / Of a pool so pitchblack, féll-frówning, / It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning." In this stanza, Hopkins introduces more detailed imagery of the stream's surface and the pool it forms. The "windpuff-bonnet of fawn-froth" describes the swirling foam atop the water, with the words "turns and twindles" evoking a delicate, spiraling movement. The contrast between the light "fawn-froth" and the "pitchblack" pool creates a striking visual juxtaposition. The pool is "fell-frowning," a grim and foreboding description that personifies the water as something almost alive and brooding. The phrase "rounds and rounds Despair to drowning" implies a cyclical, suffocating feeling, as if the black pool represents a dark, despairing force pulling one under.

STANZA 3 (LINES 9-12)

- "Degged with dew, dappled with dew, / Are the groins of the braes that the brook treads through, / Wiry heathpacks, flitches of fern, / And the beadbunny ash that sits over the burn." The third stanza turns to the natural landscape surrounding the stream. The "groins of the braes" refer to the slopes or hills ("braes") that the brook flows through, which are "degged" and "dappled" with dew, emphasizing their fresh, moist beauty. Hopkins continues with detailed descriptions of the flora—"wiry heathpacks" and "flitches of fern" evoke the rugged, untamed quality of the vegetation, while the "beadbunny ash" tree stands out as a delicate, decorative feature over the stream. The imagery here captures the texture and diversity of the natural environment, with Hopkins' use of alliteration and unusual compound words enhancing the sense of wildness and beauty.

STANZA 4 (LINES 13-16)

- "What would the world be, once bereft / Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left, / O let them be left, wildness and wet; / Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet." In the final stanza, Hopkins shifts from description to a direct plea for the preservation of nature. He asks, "What would the world be, once bereft / Of wet and of wildness?"—a rhetorical question that implies the world would be diminished and impoverished without these elements. His repeated calls to "let them be left" underscore his urgency in protecting these natural forces, which he sees as essential to the world's beauty and vitality. The final line, "Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet," is a defiant declaration of his belief in the importance of preserving untamed nature, with "weeds" representing the overlooked, wild aspects of the natural world that are often dismissed or destroyed by human activity.

KEY THEMES

THE BEAUTY OF WILDNESS AND UNTAMED NATURE

- Hopkins' poem celebrates the untamed beauty of nature, particularly the wildness of the Scottish stream and the surrounding landscape. Through his detailed and rich descriptions, he captures the energy, movement, and raw power of nature, suggesting that its wildness is an essential part of its beauty. Quotes:
 - "This darksome burn, horseback brown, / His rollrock highroad roaring down;" These lines emphasize the dynamic, powerful beauty of the stream, with its dark, rushing water evoking a sense of wild energy.
 - "Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet." Hopkins ends the poem with a call to preserve the "weeds" and "wilderness," asserting that these wild, unpolished elements are vital to the world's natural beauty.

THE THREAT OF HUMAN INTERFERENCE

- Though not explicitly mentioned, the poem implies that human activity threatens the wildness of nature. Hopkins' plea to "let them be left" suggests a fear that industrialisation or human encroachment will destroy the untamed beauty of the natural world. His rhetorical question about the world "bereft of wet and wildness" points to the fragility of these natural forces in the face of human progress. Quotes:
 - "What would the world be, once bereft / Of wet and of wildness?" This rhetorical question highlights Hopkins' concern that the world would be diminished if its wild, natural elements were lost.
 - "O let them be left, wildness and wet;" Hopkins' repetition of "let them be left" reinforces his urgent plea for the preservation of nature, implying that these elements are at risk.

NATURE AS A SYMBOL OF SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL DEPTH

- Throughout the poem, Hopkins' descriptions of the stream and landscape suggest that nature carries a deeper, spiritual significance. The "pitchblack" pool that "rounds and rounds Despair to drowning" evokes a sense of emotional or spiritual struggle, while the wildness of the landscape becomes a symbol of untamed, unspoiled life that offers a contrast to the bleakness of human industrialisation. Quotes:
 - "A pool so pitchblack, féll-frówning, / It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning." This dark, foreboding image of the pool suggests a metaphorical depth, as if nature itself contains elements of despair and emotional turmoil.
 - "The beadbony ash that sits over the burn." This image of the ash tree over the stream suggests a sense of peace and beauty in nature, contrasting with the darkness of the pool and offering a moment of respite.

MOOD OF THE POEM

- The mood of Inversnaid is both celebratory and urgent. Hopkins revels in the beauty and wildness of the natural world, capturing the energy and dynamism of the stream and the landscape around it. However, the poem also carries a tone of urgency and concern, as Hopkins expresses his fear that this wild beauty might be lost if it is not protected. The final stanza is both a plea and a declaration, conveying a sense of defiance and hope that the "weeds and the wilderness" will continue to thrive.

LITERARY DEVICES

ALLITERATION

- "This darksome burn, horseback brown, / His rollrock highroad roaring down;"
The alliteration in "burn, horseback brown" and "rollrock roaring" emphasizes the dynamic movement of the stream, creating a rhythmic flow that mirrors the natural motion of the water.

PERSONIFICATION

- "A pool so pitchblack, féll-frówning." The pool is personified as "frowning," giving it a sense of foreboding and emotional depth, as if the natural world itself is capable of expressing mood and feeling.

IMAGERY

- "Wiry heathpacks, flitches of fern, / And the beadbunny ash that sits over the burn." Hopkins' vivid descriptions of the landscape—"wiry heathpacks," "flitches of fern," and the "beadbunny ash"—create a rich visual image of the untamed natural world, emphasizing its beauty and diversity.

RHETORICAL QUESTION

- "What would the world be, once bereft / Of wet and of wildness?" Hopkins uses this rhetorical question to engage the reader and to emphasize the value of nature's "wet" and "wild" elements, suggesting that without them, the world would be diminished.

CONCLUSION

- Inversnaid is a celebration of the wild, untamed beauty of nature, as well as a passionate plea for its preservation. Gerard Manley Hopkins uses rich imagery and dynamic language to capture the raw power of a Scottish stream and the surrounding landscape, emphasizing the importance of "wet" and "wildness" in the world. Through his vivid descriptions and urgent tone, Hopkins expresses both his deep admiration for nature and his fear that it may be destroyed by human interference. The poem ultimately stands as a testament to the value of preserving the natural world in its wild, unspoiled state, reminding readers of the spiritual and emotional significance of the wilderness.