

SPRING BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS - COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

CONTEXT:

- Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem Spring is a celebration of the beauty and vibrancy of the natural world during the season of renewal. Hopkins uses his characteristic vivid, sensory language and intricate imagery to convey the vitality of spring. The poem is filled with Christian symbolism, linking the natural beauty of spring to the idea of Eden, a state of innocence, and the spiritual promise of redemption through Christ. Hopkins also captures the tension between the joy of this moment and the awareness that it is fleeting, ultimately turning the poem into a meditation on the connection between the natural world, innocence, and divine grace.

STANZA BY STANZA ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

- "Nothing is so beautiful as Spring – / When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;"
- The poem begins with a clear declaration: nothing can compare to the beauty of spring. The alliterative "long and lovely and lush" highlights the richness and vitality of the season, while the mention of "weeds" draws attention to even the seemingly insignificant parts of nature. The image of "wheels" suggests the cyclical nature of growth and renewal in spring.

LINES 3-5

- "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;"
- Here, Hopkins introduces the thrush, whose eggs are compared to "little low heavens," a metaphor that suggests the divine beauty and purity found in nature. The thrush's song is described with a powerful auditory image: it "strikes like lightnings," a simile that emphasises the sharp, almost electrifying impact of the bird's song. The verbs "rinse and wring" evoke a cleansing and purifying effect, reinforcing the spiritual undertones of the poem.

LINES 6-8

- "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."
- The imagery of the "glassy peartree" evokes a crystalline clarity, while the "descending blue" refers to the sky, which seems to touch the earth with its "richness." Hopkins uses dynamic, playful imagery here, with "racing lambs" symbolising the exuberance of spring and the joy of youth. The word "fling" suggests a carefree vitality that is central to the mood of the poem.

LINES 9-10

- "What is all this juice and all this joy? / A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning / In Eden garden."
- In the second stanza, Hopkins shifts from description to reflection. The question, "What is all this juice and all this joy?" captures his amazement at the overflowing vitality of spring. He answers his own question by referencing the biblical Eden, suggesting that the joy and energy of spring are remnants of the innocence and perfection of the Garden of Eden, before the fall of man.

LINES 11-12

- "– Have, get, before it cloy, / Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,"
- Hopkins now introduces a warning: the beauty and innocence of spring, like the Edenic state, are fleeting. He urges the reader to "have" and "get" this joy while it is still pure, before it becomes spoiled ("cloy") or darkened by sin. This introduces a spiritual dimension to the poem, where the natural beauty of the world is connected to moral and spiritual purity.

LINES 13-14

- "Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy, / Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning."
- The final lines reinforce the theme of innocence, referring to the "innocent mind" of youth, symbolised by the springtime "Mayday." Hopkins then turns to a prayer to Christ, the "maid's child" (referring to the Virgin Mary), asking that innocence be preserved. The phrase "thy choice and worthy the winning" suggests that Christ's sacrifice offers a chance for redemption, making the preservation of innocence a valuable and worthy pursuit.

KEY THEMES

THE BEAUTY AND VITALITY OF NATURE

- Hopkins vividly celebrates the beauty of spring, using sensory imagery to capture its energy, joy, and richness. The natural world is presented as a source of wonder, and even mundane aspects like weeds are infused with beauty. The poem emphasises the abundance and dynamic energy of spring, filled with growth and life.
- Quotes:
 - • "Nothing is so beautiful as Spring – / When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;"
 - This line declares the unmatched beauty of spring, highlighting the growth and vitality present even in weeds.
 - • "The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush / The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush / With richness;"
 - These lines evoke the rich visual beauty of spring, where the clarity of the "glassy" leaves and the "richness" of the blue sky combine to create a vivid, almost overwhelming sense of life.

INNOCENCE AND EDENIC IMAGERY

- The poem links the beauty of spring to the idea of innocence and the Garden of Eden. Hopkins suggests that the joy and energy of spring are a reflection of the original purity of the world before it was corrupted by sin. There is a deep connection between nature's beauty and spiritual innocence, and this innocence is seen as fragile and fleeting.
- Quotes:
 - • "A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning / In Eden garden."
 - This reference to Eden suggests that the beauty of spring is a reminder of the original innocence of the world, an echo of the perfect creation.
 - • "Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,"
 - This line connects the natural renewal of spring to human innocence, particularly in youth, further reinforcing the Edenic themes of purity and new beginnings.

THE FLEETING NATURE OF JOY AND BEAUTY

- Hopkins reflects on the transience of the beauty of spring, warning that it will not last. He suggests that this moment of joy and innocence should be cherished before it is "soured with sinning." This theme of impermanence runs through the poem, as Hopkins acknowledges the inevitable passage of time and the loss of innocence.
- Quotes:
 - • "Have, get, before it cloy, / Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,"
 - These lines serve as a warning to appreciate the beauty of spring (and the innocence it symbolises) before it is corrupted or fades away.
 - • "What is all this juice and all this joy?"
 - This rhetorical question reflects Hopkins' amazement at the vitality of spring but also hints at the fleeting nature of this joy, which is momentary and bound to fade.

MOOD OF THE POEM

- The mood of Spring is joyful and celebratory, as Hopkins marvels at the beauty and vitality of the natural world. There is a sense of wonder at the abundance of life, coupled with an underlying urgency, as the speaker realises that this beauty and joy are fleeting. The mood becomes more contemplative in the second stanza, where Hopkins reflects on the spiritual significance of spring and the inevitable loss of innocence, adding a layer of melancholy to the poem's overall tone.



LITERARY DEVICES



ALLITERATION

- "When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;"
- The use of alliteration here emphasises the lushness and beauty of spring, creating a musical quality that mirrors the vibrancy of the season.

SIMILE

- "Thrush's eggs look little low heavens"
- This simile compares the small, blue eggs of the thrush to "little low heavens," elevating a simple natural detail to something divine, suggesting the presence of heaven in nature.

IMAGERY

- "The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush / The descending blue;"
- Hopkins uses vivid, sensory imagery to evoke the beauty of the peartree leaves against the blue sky, creating a visual image of spring's abundance and vitality.

RELIGIOUS ALLUSION

- "A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning / In Eden garden."
- Hopkins alludes to the Garden of Eden, connecting the natural beauty of spring to the idea of innocence and divine creation, suggesting that the joy of spring is a reflection of the original paradise.

CONCLUSION

- Gerard Manley Hopkins' *Spring* is a vibrant celebration of the beauty and vitality of the natural world, filled with rich sensory imagery and a deep spiritual undertone. Hopkins marvels at the abundance of life in spring, linking it to the innocence of the Garden of Eden and the promise of redemption through Christ. However, the poem also carries a note of urgency, as Hopkins warns that this beauty and innocence are fleeting, and must be appreciated before they are lost to time and sin. *Spring* is ultimately a meditation on the connection between nature, innocence, and divine grace, inviting the reader to find spiritual meaning in the beauty of the natural world.