



God's Grandeur

The two [similes](#) that are used in the first four lines of '*God's Grandeur*' are rather unusual, and the first of these is difficult to understand because of its distance from everyday experience. The expression of the pessimistic view in the first part of the poem is as forceful as that of the optimistic view in the opening line and in the second part of the poem. The [repetition](#) "have trod", and such internal rhymes as "seared", "bleared", and "smeared" are devices for achieving an assertive effect.

The alliterative phrasing – "shining" and "shook", "smudge" and "small" – is another such device. The [sestet](#) contains two vivid images of a comforting kind – a Natureimage of sunset and sunrise, and "a Biblical image of the Holy Ghost brooding over the earth. Robert Bridges called this image, with its ecstatic, adoring "ah", "a perversion of human feeling and an example of Hopkins's attempts to force emotion into theological or sectarian channels'.

The last line unites the bright wings of exultation and discovery with the brooding and protective wings of a dove, and connects the poem with several others which bear witness to the author's keen and sympathetic observation of birds. To take only one

example; The Windhover is based on the mastery of the bird's flight.

God's Grandeur Analysis

Stanza One

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

In the poem, '*God's Grandeur*' by Gerard Manley Hopkins, the poet says that the world is filled to the brim with God's glory and splendour. God's glory manifests itself in two ways. At times, it flames out with sudden brilliance, as when a silver foil is shaken and it

gives out glints of light. At other times, this glory becomes apparent over a period of time, as when the oil crushed from olive



es slowly oozes out and gathers into a thick pool. It is this second way which here arrests the poet's attention. It is noteworthy in connection with God's grandeur, which is the [subject](#) of this [sonnet](#), that Hopkins had made a special and exhaustive study of St. Ignatius Loyola's book, *The Spiritual Exercises*, in which occurs the following passage: See God living in his creatures, in matter, giving it existence; in plants, giving them life; in animals, giving them consciousness; in men, giving them intelligence.

Think of God energizing, as though. He was actually at work, in every created reality, in the sky, in matter, plants and fruits, herds and the like; it is He who creates them and keeps them in being, He who confers life or consciousness, and so on.

Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

Through these lines, the poet asks why people no longer heed God's rod or recognize the just punishment of God. The divine rod both smites the sinner and heals him. The reason, for people's heedlessness is that they have become fatalistic towards their misfortunes. People's senses have grown dull both to pain and to its cause. Life has become a monotonous and weary routine for them.

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil; And

wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil is

bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

In these lines of '*God's Grandeur*', 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.



Stanza Two

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

In the above six lines of *'God's Grandeur*, 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-failing 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.

Critical Appreciation

The poem, 'God's Grandeur', by [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#), is a sonnet of the Italian variety, with an [octave](#) and a sestet. The basic rhythm, in this poem, is that of the [iambic pentameter](#) but it is constantly varied and adapted where the emphasis seems to require it. 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 shinning 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 a sincere conviction behind the sestet.