Pied Beauty

POEM TEXT

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

SUMMARY

Thank you God for creating things that are spotty and varied in color, for skies filled with as many colors as appear in the subtle variations in the coat of a patchy brown cow; for the pinkish dots on a trout's skin as it swims through the water; for hot coals and fallen chestnuts; for birds' wings; for the way the land is broken into patterns as people work on it, partitioning it for sheep to graze, letting it rest to regain fertility, or ploughing it to plant crops; for all different kinds of human work, whatever varied equipment it may use.

Everything that seems contradictory, new, singular, or weird; things that are prone to change, or covered in freckles—who created them? With quickness and slowness, sweet and sour tastes, bright and dull light; God is the father of all these things, though he himself never changes. Praise God.

THEMES

THE MAJESTY OF GOD

As with a number of poems by Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Pied Beauty" is a kind of song of praise to God. It takes a beautifully detailed look at the world in all its variety, and sees in this variation and abundance the glory of God's creation. In particular, the poem admires God's capacity for creating opposites. The poem celebrates God's work and invites the reader to do the same.

"Pied" means having two or more colours, and it is this quality of variety that the speaker most admires about God's work. This is primarily expressed through a close look at the natural world, but the poem also sees it in the "trades" of humankind *and* in more abstract categories. The first stanza, which opens with a prayer to God that praises "dappled things" (another way of saying pied), is mostly about the natural world. The speaker marvels at nature, seeing in it God's majestic *teleological* design (which just means that God made the world as it is with intent and purpose). The speaker lists some of these more visual examples of "piedness": skies of two colors (specifically the appearance of a gathering storm), the spotty pattern on fish, the contrast of chestnuts with their green coating, the coloring on birds' wings. *All* of these are part of God's design and deserving of attention and praise.

But it's not just the natural world that shows God's glory—it's also human activity. Pied beauty can be found in the way that people work the land—think of green turf contrasted with the color of brown soil—as well as within the labors of humanity more generally. Here the poem sees the sheer variety of human work as a type of pied beauty. It's not possible to say for sure what "gear and tackle and trim" represent, but whether they relate specifically to farm-based labor or more varied "trades" like fishing and cloth-making, they are certainly meant to build this sense of beauty in variety.

Indeed, part of the poem's aim is to argue that beautiful evidence of God's design is everywhere—not just in the natural world. The second stanza makes this point with forceful persuasion, by shifting the focus from concrete examples of "pied" beauty to a more abstract list of opposites: "swift" and "slow," "sweet" and "sour," light and dark. In other words, it's not just the obviously beautiful things in the world that showcase God's majesty—it's also the world's limitless variety, the way in which contradictory categories can exist in complete harmony. In this, the speaker sees God's paternal love for the world (his "fathering-forth").

Beginning and ending with "glory" and "praise," "Pied Beauty" is a poem that strives to turn the reader's attention to the beauty of the world—and to see in that beauty the intelligence and benevolence of the Christian God. *All* of existence, according to the poem, stands as a testament to God's capacity for creation; the variety of the world is an often undervalued, but no less powerful, aspect of its beauty.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-11

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINE 1

Glory be to God for dappled things –

The first line of "Pied Beauty" states the poem's main aim: to praise God, in particular for "dappled things." These "dappled things" are the instances of "pied beauty" to which the title refers. Most of the first stanza is taken up with providing examples of this particular kind of beauty, which essentially describes things that have a pattern of two or more colors (think of a white cow with black spots, for example). These "things" show variety and/or opposites (like black and white).

Hopkins is certainly not the first writer to link "glory" with the idea of "God," but the alliteration (of the /g/ sound) in this moment does signal the poet's virtuosic use of the device to come later in the poem. It also ties glory and God together conceptually—which is, in essence, the point that the poem is trying to prove (i.e. that God's work is glorious). With the poem's premise firmly established, the dash at the end of line 1—which end-stops the line—shows the reader that what will immediately follow is *evidence* of God's glory, and that specific glory found in "dappled things."

It's also worth noting that the poem's beginning is the same as its ending—a bold statement of God's majesty. This perhaps relates to the way in which pupils trained in the Jesuit school (a subsection of Catholicism of which Hopkins was a member) were instructed to write two mottos praising God at the start and end of every written exercise.

LINES 2-4

For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

With the poem's hymn-like purpose established in the first line, it's up to lines 2, 3, and 4 to provide examples of "dappled things" in the world.

The first of these is the sky itself. It's a logical place to start, given the strong link between humanity's perception of the sky and God/the heavens. Christianity tends to conceive of heaven and goodness as being above human beings and evil (e.g. the devil/Hell) below. The particular type of sky that Hopkins is talking about is "couple-coloured," which is just an alliterative and innovative way of saying "two-colored." The alliteration and assonance means that the phrase, which is a compound because it joins two words together, is comprised of two dominant sounds: /co/ and /l/. In other words, the phrase *itself* is literally "couple-coloured," embodying the very concept that it represents (and proving why it's worth paying close, forensic attention to Hopkins's choice of language).

This "dappled" sky is likened through simile to a "brinded cow," which relates to a coat with varying dark colors. Indeed, the simile works well because the brinded cow is itself an example of "pied beauty." And the cow is an important animal when it comes to humanity, and is mentioned several times in the Bible. Cows are associated with agriculture, and as such the mention of a cow in line 2 pre-empts line 5's praise of people working the land.

Line 3 offers up the next example of God's glory as shown by "dappled things." This time, it's the way light falls on swimming trout. The line describes the rose-colored dots found on the trout's skin, which are said to be "stippled"—stippling is an artistic technique that uses many spots or small dots. Again, the language here brings the image beautifully to life. The round, assonant /o/ sounds in "rose-moles" (another compound word) are like circular spots, and the consonant /p/ sounds in "stipple upon" sound like the bit-by-bit process of painting dots on a page.

The start of line 4 brings with it not one but two compound phrases, the first adjectival and the second a noun. The effect of Hopkins's innovations through compounds is this: as a poet, he is seeking to find the *precise* words that create the effect he is looking for. The need to invent new phrases speaks to the limitless potential of the language to be varied, and this mirrors the poem's admiration for God's capacity for variation. The line is talking about the way that a chestnut has one color on the outside and another on the interior—which is likened to the way that the black exterior of burning coal might conceal its glowing innards. The alliterative /f/ sounds in this line ("fresh-firecoal," "falls," "finches") creates the sense that the line itself is too hot to handle (think of someone blowing on something to cool it down, making a similar sound). The caesura after "chestnut-falls" then creates a space for the introduction of the "finches' wing," a bird whose wings are "pied."

LINES 5-6

Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

Though still part of the sestet, lines 5 and 6 mark a shift in the poem. Now, the focus is not solely on things associated with the natural world (skies, fish, trees, and birds). These lines gently introduce humankind into the picture as well.

Line 5 specifically refers to agriculture. The "landscape" is "plotted and pieced" through being divided into different farms and fields for the development of crops. This could also refer to the digging up of turf. Either way, there is a "pied beauty" in the varying shades of the fields (as seen from above when flying into England) and the different tones of grass and soil.

In a more figurative way, the "piedness" here also relates to the symbiosis—the balanced relationship—between humankind and nature. There is no sense here of environmental catastrophe or exploitation; rather, this scene is portrayed as being just a natural as the skies, fish, trees, and birds earlier in

the stanza. The alliterative /p/ sounds ("plotted," "pieced," "plough") are deliberately and methodically placed throughout the line, evoking the way that land is assigned to different crops.

The caesura then introduces specific detail to the way in which "landscape" (that is, the countryside) is "plotted and pieced." Each of "fold, fallow, and plough" represents a deliberate attempt by humankind to make good use of the land on which it lives. A fold is an area for sheep, a fallow is a field left alone to regain its fertility, and a plough is a tool used for digging up topsoil so that crops can be planted. The alliteration of /f/ sounds combined with the consonance of /l/ sounds and the assonant /o/ sounds makes the entire line feel as though it has been worked through by human hands, the sounds planted meticulously so that they may grow through the reader's experience of the poem.

Line 6 expands this focus on agricultural activity to praise "áll trádes"—that is, all the work that humankind does. The accents on these two shows that Hopkins wanted them to be metrically stressed, making the line read as follows:

> And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

This is a good example of Hopkins' *sprung rhythm*, which was one of his techniques for manipulating meter. Essentially, it is a scheme that allows for a high degree of variation ("pied beauty") by varying the placement of stresses and the number of unstressed syllables that surround them. The visual insistence on the stress of "all" emphasizes that the poem conceives of "pied beauty" as commonplace, if people just take the time to look for it. In doing so, they will see God's majesty.

The rest of line 6 relates to specific trades, but it can't be definitively said which ones. The "gear" could mean equipment more generally, while "tackle" probably relates to fishing and "trim" could either be cloth-making or work that requires humans to sail boats. Either way, these words do not evoke particularly industrial ideas of work (i.e. factory work), and thus align with the more natural world that has been presented in the poem so far.

LINES 7-9

> *All things counter, original, spare, strange;*
> *Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)*
> *With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;*

Line 7 is the beginning of the poem's quintet (a five line stanza), which functions like the turn (that is, the point where the argument of the poem shifts) in a traditional sonnet (this is one of Hopkins' *curtal* sonnets, a shorter form that he devised himself). It moves the poem from concrete examples of "dappled things" and "pied beauty" to more abstract categories to which those examples relate.

Line 7 is a list of adjectives, all of which map onto this idea of God's majesty showing itself through the variety and abundance in the world. This kind of beauty is "counter, original, spare, strange," because it is not representative of what people *normally* find beautiful. This is the poem basically saying, "look, beauty isn't only found in the typical places—instead it's everywhere around you, even places you might not think to look." Line of 7 also possibly alludes to the church hymn, "All Things Bright and Beautiful"—this would make sense, given that the poem is trying to broaden the reader's sense of beauty in the world.

Line 8 adds even more adjectives to the list started in line 7, this time including "fickle" and "freckled." The alliteration of the /f/ and consonance of the /k/ and /l/ sounds echoes the spottiness of line 3, continuing the poem's effort to *sound* "dappled." "Freckled" is an interesting addition because, during the Victorian era, to be freckly was considered highly undesirable. The poem here seems to be saying that people should cast off their limited notions of what is beautiful, and see God's majesty in everything. The rhetorical question at the end of the line has an answer implied by the rest of the poem: if the question asks who made such a varied world, the answer is, of course, God.

Line 9 lists a series of opposites as yet further evidence of the world's variety. These opposites are based on speed, taste, and brightness. The poem deploys these adjectives quickly, with each clause of line 9 weighing one adjective against the other and seeing a beauty in their contrast. Again, the poem implies that this curious beauty is part of God's design.

LINES 10-11

> *He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:*
> *Praise him.*

Having shown the variety that courses throughout the world—within nature, human activity, and more abstract categories—the poem now makes clear to whom this variety is owed: God.

Through the alliterative phrase "fathers-forth" (which also contains consonance with the /th/ sound), God is portrayed as the paternal figure at the helm of the world, responsible for the creation of abundant and various beauty. Yet here the poem introduces an important contrast: though the world is in a constant state of flux—and, indeed, this is a vital part of its beauty—God's *own* beauty is "past change." That is, the world God created may change, but God himself is constant. This trait of God is known as *immutability*. This separates God from his creation, and underscores God as a solid reference point from which all beauty may flow.

Line 11 (which Hopkins conceived of as a half-line) restates the poem's purpose in its most compressed form yet. The poem implores its reader to praise God, because the world provides evidence that God is worthy of that praise. In other words, the

variety and abundance of the world *prove* God's existence because they must have been created by an all-powerful and intelligent being. The last line, then, means that the poem ends in the same way that it begins: praising God.

SYMBOLS

THE CHESTNUT

The chestnuts in line 4 are compared visually to "fresh-firecoal." The image here relates to coal that might look dark on the outside, but in its interior is glowing red. Chestnuts, similarly, have a greenish, spiky outer coating hides the smooth, brown nut within. This symbol primarily urges the reader to see the majesty of creation in even the smallest of objects. The chestnut—not a traditionally *poetic* element of nature—contains a kind of magic power within its interior. Additionally, it's possible that through this image the poem is attempting to draw the reader's attention to God's *immanence*, which is the idea that the divine is manifested in the material world. The chestnut is, in its way, a part of God; that's why it seems to be burning so intensely with the flame of creation. Rather ironically, this humble chestnut may thus represent the immensity of God's power.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls"

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Alliteration is a trademark device of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and here appears in almost every line. Altogether, the many varied instances of alliteration add to the beauty of the poem's language—reflecting, on a linguistic level, the "pied beauty" that the poem celebrates thematically.

Even the first word of the first line is alliterative. The hard /g/ sound that links "glory" to "God" is a common association—not one that has been invented here. It speaks to the belief that God made the world, that the world is full of God's majesty, and that God is therefore deserving of praise.

In line 2, alliteration combines with consonance (of /l/ sounds) and assonance (of short /u/ sounds) to create the fresh phrase, "couple-colour." This, essentially, just means "two-colored." But the deliberate deployment of similar sounds means that the word *itself* feels like it has two colors, one which is based on the alliterative /c/ and the other which is constructed around the /l/ sounds of the second syllables of each word. The phrase also chimes alliteratively with "cow" at the end of the line, which not coincidentally is the image that the poem is using to describe the kind of skies it's talking about.

Later, in line 4, four words out of six begin with an /f/ sound: "fresh," "firecoal," "falls," and "finches." This very subtly evokes the noises people make when handling or blowing on something hot, and also creates a sense of abundant beauty (which, indeed, is one of the poem's main aims).

This /f/ sound continues into the second half of line 5, which also introduces an alliterative /p/ with "plotted," "pieced," and "plough." This /p/ sound is further linked via consonance to "stipple" in line 3, which is a word that describes a visual dot effect; the many instances of this percussive /p/ sound is perhaps an *auditory* reflection of the *visual* nature of "stippling." The /p/ and /f/ sounds in line 5 also represent the way in which humans work the land through agriculture, the line itself sounding as if these sounds have been planted there to grow.

Lines 8 and 10 continue with this /f/ sound, with line 10 providing the key phrase "fathers-forth." The /f/ is linked to the idea of a paternalistic God, making all the other instances of /f/ seem like evidence of God's design for the world.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "G," "G"
- **Line 2:** "k," "c," "c," "c"
- **Line 4:** "F," "f," "f," "f"
- **Line 5:** "p," "p," "f," "f," "p"
- **Line 6:** "t," "t," "t"
- **Line 7:** "s," "s"
- **Line 8:** "f," "f," "wh," "h"
- **Line 9:** "s," "s," "s," "s"
- **Line 10:** "f," "f," "p"
- **Line 11:** "P"

ALLUSION

"Pied Beauty" is like a song of praise, drawing the reader's attention to the majesty of God's creation. It begins and ends with an explicit statement of that praise. This, perhaps, is an allusion to Hopkins's own particular branch of the Christian faith: the Jesuits. In Jesuit schooling, pupils would begin and end writing exercises with a similar mention of God. Furthermore, part of the Jesuit daily ritual is to offer thanks to God—precisely what this poem is doing.

There's another possible allusion in line 7. Here, perhaps Hopkins echoes the hymn "All Things Bright and Beautiful," the lyrics of which include:

> All things bright and beautiful,
> All creatures great and small,
> All things wise and wonderful,
> The Lord God made them all.

This hymn, written in 1848, is *itself* an elaboration on the Apostles' Creed, an ancient statement of Christian belief. Some have also interpreted the hymn as alluding to Psalm 104:24-25—

> How many are your works, Lord!
> In wisdom you made them all;
> the earth is full of your creatures.
> There is the sea, vast and spacious,
> teeming with creatures beyond number—
> living things both large and small.

—or even to poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous 1798 poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which includes the lines:

> He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.

The hymn—and Hopkins's poem—could be pointing to any one of these outside works. While it's arguable whether or not these are actually specific allusions in the poem, it's clear that the poem is at least on the same page as sources that praise the bright, beautiful, wise, and wonderful aspects of the world. "Pied Beauty" then strives to show the reader that God's majesty is found in *all* of existence.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Glory be to God"
- **Line 7:** "All things"
- **Line 11:** "Praise him."

ASSONANCE

"Pied Beauty" is a remarkably beautiful sounding poem. Part of the way it achieves this effect is through skillful use of assonance.

In the first line, "glory" and "God" chime together with /o/ sounds, the wide vowel expressing a sense of wonderment which continues with the /o/ sound in "coloured" and "cow." Not all of these words are truly assonant, as there is variation in the exact nature of the /o/ sound, but they are so similar that they all contribute to the sonic openness of these lines. The *truest* assonance here, however, is really between the identical short /u/ sound in the first and third syllable of the phrase "couple-coloured" (recall that words need not contain the exact same letters to be assonant, so long as they *sound* the same).

The "rose-moles" of the third line continue with an /o/ sound, which here is identically long and intended to evoke the "stippling" on the trout's skin. That is, the /o/ sound evokes the presence of a spots/dots, which is exactly the visual effect that the line is describing. This is pushed further by the close similarity to the words "upon" and "trout."

Line 4 is assonant too, but is constructed around the /i/ sounds of "finches wings." This phrase has a delicate sound to it, helping the poem zoom in on the way God's majesty is expressed even in the patterning of these tiny birds.

Line 5 returns to the /o/ sound, combining it with the alliteration of /p/ and the consonances of /l/. Here, the line is describing a picture of people working the land that they live on. The /o/ sound, once again, is not *exactly* the same each time, and as such is not necessarily true assonance; even so, these sounds are so similar (on both an auditory and visual level) and so methodically planted throughout the line that, taken together, they evoke the idea of purposeful agriculture, one that speaks to a close relationship between people and their environment.

There is generally less assonance in the second stanza, partly because it is the first stanza that has to provide evidence of "dappled things." That is, the first stanza works as a kind of proof that God is deserving of glory—and, indeed, that God bestows glory on the world—and so accordingly the sound of the lines has to bring this to life. The second stanza is more abstract, and accordingly less overtly patterned through sound.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "o," "o"
- **Line 2:** "o," "o," "o," "ou," "o"
- **Line 3:** "o," "o," "o," "o," "ou"
- **Line 4:** "i," "i"
- **Line 5:** "o," "o," "o," "ou"
- **Line 6:** "A," "á," "á," "ei," "ea," "a," "a," "a"
- **Line 7:** "a," "a"
- **Line 8:** "i," "i," "o"
- **Line 9:** "i," "i," "o"
- **Line 10:** "a"
- **Line 11:** "ai"

JUXTAPOSITION

In a way, the whole poem is concerned with juxtaposition: it sees "dappled things" (which have one or more different characteristics, for instance being black and white) as evidence of God's majesty. In essence, the variety of the world, and the way in which this variety exists in harmony, is proof of God's existence and of humanity's need to praise him. So, in general, it is God's capacity for creating juxtapositions that is in part what the speaker finds so glorious.

This focus on juxtaposition is made more prominent and, indeed, more abstract in the second stanza. In line 9, adjective categories are weight against their counterparts—quickness and slowness, sweetness and sourness, brightness and dimness—as evidence of the *range* of God's majesty. He is

portrayed as the creator of things that are seemingly at odds with one another, but in reality co-exist and in their differences—which can be called *individuation*—prove the majesty of God. Indeed, on a wider level they are not really opposites at all, but unified in being parts of God's created whole.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Line 9:** "swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;"

CAESURA

Caesura is common throughout the poem, and, like the poem's use of end-stop, contributes to a steady, contemplative pace. Readers can't simply rush through a line that repeatedly forces them to stop, and in this way the caesura allows for careful consideration of all the different "dappled things" being listed off.

In line 4, for example, the caesura allows the line to pack in two examples of "dappled things" (the previous lines had one each). The pause between the chestnuts and the finches creates a breath, a brief moment of reflection before moving on; both of these very different things exemplify God's majesty and as such both deserve their own space.

The caesura in line 5 is a little different, however, in that it allows for a deepening of detail. The first clause of the sentence introduces the idea of human agriculture, whereas the second specifies the types of uses humans make of fields. The caesura in line 6 serves a similar function, adding to the depth of the images meant to prove the beauty of God's creation.

The other caesuras, all of which come in the second stanza, help create the sense of a list. The speaker is listing ways of categorizing the world, and again implying that each of them is beautiful in its own way. The caesuras lay each seemingly contradictory characteristic side-by-side with its opposite, showing that they exist together harmoniously.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** ";"
- **Line 5:** "–"
- **Line 6:** ","
- **Line 7:** "," "," "," ";"
- **Line 8:** ","
- **Line 9:** "," ";" "," ";" ","

CONSONANCE

Consonance is an integral part of the poem's use of sound. It is deployed beautifully and consistently throughout, these many echoing letters living up to the poem's promise to provide proof of "dappled things." The speaker is able to describe abundant variety using a very limited number of sounds, and these repeated sounds create a sort of link between the many different "dappled things" being mentioned. In a sense, the sounds that echo again and again throughout the poem are like God himself, present in "all things" that the speaker lists off.

In the second line, the /l/ sounds of "couple-colour" combine with assonance and alliteration to make the phrase sound as though it is itself made out of two different colors or sounds (one based on the hard /c/ and /o/, and the other constructed around /l/). Consonance also ties this phrase to both "skies" and "cow," sonically connecting the subjects of the simile being presented here. This shared sound hints that the "skies," which are often equated with the "heavens," and this "cow," an animal very much of the earth, are not so distant or different after all; they are both evidence of God's work.

Line 5 is especially filled with consonance, with the strong repetition of /p/, /d/,/f/, and /l/ creating a sense of cohesion and unity even as the line lists off different features of human labor. Line 9 is similarly filled with consonance, here of /w/, /s/, and /d/ sounds, as the speaker lists more abstract qualities of God's creation. In both instances, the many repeated sounds serve to sonically underscore the beauty of *and* connection between very different "dappled things."

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "G," "G," "d," "d," "ppl," "d"
- **Line 2:** "k," "c," "p," "l," "c," "l," "c"
- **Line 3:** "l," "ll ," "pp," "l," "p," "t," "t," "t"
- **Line 4:** "F," "f," "l," "f," "ll," "f"
- **Line 5:** "p," "p," "l," "d," "d," "p," "d," "f," "ld," "f," "ll," "w," "p," "l," "gh"
- **Line 6:** "t," "r," "r," "r," "t," "tr"
- **Line 7:** "g," "s," "s," "g"
- **Line 8:** "f," "ck," "l," "f," "ck," "l," "wh," "k," "w," "w"
- **Line 9:** "W," "sw," "s," "w," "sw," "s," "d," "d"
- **Line 10:** "f," "th," "f," "th," "p"
- **Line 11:** "P"

END-STOPPED LINE

Every line in "Pied Beauty" is end-stopped. This consistent end-stopping helps the poem feel like it unfolds as a logical argument might, with the first line making a statement for which the rest of the lines present assertive supporting evidence. The end-stops indicate a clear pause at the end of each line, encouraging the reader to stop and appreciate all the "pied beauty" that is being presented to them rather than barreling on ahead to the next line. Every single line is worthy of unique consideration, the speaker seems to be saying through these end-stops, just as "all things" have been carefully considered by God. In this way, the form of the entire poem itself reflects its thematic argument.

The end-stopping also makes the poem feel sure-footed. In

other words, there is no element of doubt in the speaker's mind that the existence of "dappled things" in the world is full of proof of God's majesty. The methodical and deliberate way in which the poem unfolds has a confident and joyous air about it that reflects the speaker's unshakable belief in the "glory" of God.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "–"
- **Line 2:** ";"
- **Line 3:** ";"
- **Line 4:** ";"
- **Line 5:** ";"
- **Line 6:** "."
- **Line 7:** ";"
- **Line 8:** "?)"
- **Line 9:** ";"
- **Line 10:** ":"
- **Line 11:** "."

SIMILE

There is one simile in "Pied Beauty," which comes in line 2. Here, the "couple-colour" sky is compared to the coating of a "brinded cow." "Brinded" relates to having grey or brown patches, which fits right in with the idea of "dappled" that the poem explores. Essentially, the line is praising the beauty of skies that aren't obviously beautiful. That is, while most people tend to appreciate a clear blue sky, the poem here affirms that God's majesty is just as evident in a sky that is overcast or cloudy. Variety is beautiful, and this variety is proof of God's work.

The simile also allows for the "glory" of God to be associated early on in the poem with both heavenly and earthly things. The sky is commonly associated with the heavens, while the cow is clearly rooted to the natural world. Furthermore, the reference to the cow hints at the appearance of human agricultural activity that will come up in lines 5 and 6. By linking these two images—the sky and the cow—together with a simile, the speaker argues that they express different, but connected, aspects of God's majesty.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow"

RHETORICAL QUESTION

There is one rhetorical question in "Pied Beauty," which is found at the end of line 8. Having listed both concrete examples *and* abstract adjectives that relate to the world's variety and abundance of beauty, the speaker now asks "who knows how?" That is, how did all of these variations and beauty come to be?

Of course, the first and last lines of the poem make the poem's answer to this question confidently obvious: it was God who made the world, and therefore its beauty is part of his *teleological*—intelligent—design. God "fathers-forth," allowing the beauty of the world to express itself in all different ways. The speaker knows the answer to the question being posed here, and as such isn't presenting this question as a means to seriously interrogate the poem's praise of God for creating "dappled things." Instead, the rhetorical question is a way to emphasize what the speaker has already asserted. The reader *already* understands that the speaker believes God to be the "how" referenced in this moment.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "who knows how?"

VOCABULARY

Dappled (Line 1) - An adjective meaning that something is marked with spots or patches.

Couple-colour (Line 2) - An inventive term for "two-colored."

Brinded (Line 2) - A visual pattern of brown or grey streaks.

Rose-moles (Line 3) - Small pinkish dots.

Stipple (Line 3) - A spotty pattern made of dots.

Finches (Line 4) - A small bird. Some finches have spotty marks on their wings.

Plotted and Pieced (Line 5) - The phrase "plotted and pieced" refers to land that has been separated into various plots, creating a kind of irregular checkerboard of different sorts of crops and other types of land.

Fold, Fallow, and Plough (Line 5) - This phrase is another way to describe the different characters of the different plots of land. A "fold" refers to land that sheep graze on, "fallow" refers to land left to grow wild to replenish itself after having been farmed, while "plough" refers to active farmland that has been ploughed.

Trádes, Gear, Tackle, and Trim (Line 6) - Hopkins uses "trádes" to refer to all the different sorts of work that people do, while "gear and tackle and trim" refer to all the different tools that people use to perform that work.

Counter (Line 7) - In the context of the poem, "counter" is used in the sense of being "against" or "different." Hopkins in the poem is referring to beauty that exists in all things, not just the traditionally beautiful things.

Fickle (Line 8) - The common definition of "fickle" is being changeable, in loyalty or inclination. The poem seems to be using the word slightly differently, and more in the sense of the previous word "counter." With "fickle" Hopkins is again pointing

to the beauty in things not traditionally thought of as being beautiful.

Fathers-forth (Line 10) - Creates or gives rise to, as a father sires children.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Pied Beauty" is a sonnet, but a very particular type of sonnet. Along with "Peace" and "Ash Bough," this poem is something called a *curtal sonnet*—Hopkins's own innovation of the form. "Curtal" means shortened, and these three poems are 3/4 the size of a usual sonnet. Instead of an octave (eight lines) and sestet (six lines), "Pied Beauty" has a sestet followed by a quintet (though Hopkins actually considered the last line here to really be a half-line).

In terms of the relationship between the two stanzas, the poem should be understood as both a hymn of praise to God *and* an argument of proof. The poem begins and ends with an expression of loyalty to God, but the first stanza deals more with *concrete* examples of "pied beauty" and the second focuses on making a *conclusion* based on those examples. The contrast between the two stanzas can, in its way, be interpreted as a kind of "pied beauty" itself. They're very different in content, but they serve the same ultimate purpose: praise of God's majesty.

METER

Hopkins is using something in this poem called *sprung rhythm*, which is meant to sound like natural speech. Like the form of the curtal sonnet, sprung rhythm is also something of Hopkins's own invention.

In essence, sprung rhythm is an irregular form of meter, in which each foot (the basic unit of meter) contains an initial stressed syllable followed by any number of unstressed syllables; in total, each foot usually contains one to four syllables (compared to two, and sometimes three, in a more structured meter like iambic pentameter). The stressed syllables are also often grouped *together* in sprung rhythm—you'll frequently see a few stresses in a row, creating a burst of energy, a sort of spring in the step of the poem. Hopkins' skillful—virtuosic, even—use of meter makes for a musical and joyful read, and allows for a lot of flexibility (the feet are "pied," maybe).

The first line is the most stately-sounding, which is definitely appropriate for a mention of God. In fact, this could even be scanned as a more traditional iambic line (one with an unstressed-stressed syllable pattern) with a dactyl (stressed-unstressed-unstressed) in the first foot:

Glory be | to God | for dapp- | led things –

What's more important here than a specific scanning is the actual sound and feel of the line. Beginning on the stressed syllable of "glory" opens the poem emphatically, with a clear call to the reader to listen up and do what the speaker says.

But line four, for example, is completely different. Though there is no definitive way to scan all of the lines in "Pied Beauty," line four can be read as having three stresses within the first four syllables alone:

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Again, the frequent grouping of stresses creates a sense of enthusiasm and energy as the speaker details the glory of God's creation. Later, in line 9, the intensity of the stresses—combined with heavy alliteration—underscores the equal beauty of the qualities being listed:

With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

The point of this poetic music is to honor the idea of God's majestic creation, expressing joy, wonder, and enthusiasm through the patterning of sound. Indeed, Hopkins is so committed to meter as a form of expression that he places his own stresses on words to instruct readers on where the stresses ought to fall (e.g. line 6).

RHYME SCHEME

"Pied Beauty" is a meticulously and methodically rhymed poem, in keeping with its take on the sonnet form. However, because this is a "curtal" (shortened) sonnet, the rhyme scheme deviates from the traditional pattern—and this is closest to the Petrarchan sonnet—and reads:

ABCABC DBCDC

All of the rhymes in "Pied Beauty" are full and clear—perfect rhymes—making the poem sound purposeful and forceful in its organization. This, of course, is the exact claim the poem is making about God and the world. In other words, the careful organization of the rhymes speaks to God's divine will—his intelligent design of the universe.

SPEAKER

The speaker in "Pied Beauty" is unspecified and given no gender, but most critics tend to equate the speaker with Hopkins himself. Hopkins was a devout Christian and the poem is a surefooted and joyful expression of belief in God and God's creation. The speaker seeks to praise God and addresses god at both the beginning and end of the poem. Essentially, the speaker is making an argument to the reader, advocating for both God's existence *and* his teleological (intelligent) design for the universe. The speaker is saying, "look around and behold

the majesty of God's work."

SETTING

"Pied Beauty" doesn't have an explicit setting, and this creates a sense that the poem could be happening anywhere. This, in turn, supports the poem's praise of God's majesty: God created *all* things, so this poem in praise of that creation takes place *everywhere*.

If you want to get more specific, the speaker does list specific examples of nature's "pied beauty" as proof of God's majesty. This suggests that the setting is, broadly, the Earth. Lines 5 and 6 introduce people into the scene by mentioning agriculture and human labor. The poem thus doesn't just reference the natural world, but also people's place within it. Overall, the vague yet expansive setting is part of the poem's demonstration of the range of God's majesty.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Though Hopkins is considered one of the Victorian poets (poets writing during the reign of Queen Victory during the second half of the 19th century), his singular sound and style set him apart from his contemporaries. Hopkins' poetry intersects two main traditions: religious poetry and nature poetry. On the religious side, Hopkins has early precursors in George Herbert and John Donne (see Donne's poems: "The Flea," "The Sun Rising"). With nature, Hopkins follows on—but in his own way—from the late-18th/early-19th century Romantic poets who questioned the industrial revolution's effects on both nature and humankind's relationship to nature (see: William Wordsworth's "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" and William Blake's "London").

The Victorian era has its literary stars, of course—writers like Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, and Lord Alfred Tennyson. But Hopkins barely found publication in his lifetime, let alone literary success. Literature owes a debt of gratitude to Hopkins' friend, poet Robert Bridges, for the survival of his poetry. Though Bridges didn't see eye-to-eye with Hopkins on all of his poetic practices, he sensed the value of Hopkins' poetry and was determined to preserve his friend's small collection of poems for posterity.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Gerard Manley Hopkins was a British poet active during the Victorian era. The Victorian era was characterized by the rapid and wide extension of the British Empire, technological advances, and the birth and spread of a variety of social movements. This was also the time of the Second Industrial Revolution, which fundamentally restructured society around capital, commerce, and manufactured goods.

Another important aspect of Hopkins' historical context is his religion. Hopkins was a Jesuit priest, taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. His belief in the *immanence* of God—the idea that God is manifested in the material world—is key to understanding his poetry. In essence, his poems argue that the world itself provides abundant evidence of God's intelligence and majesty.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- How Hopkins Was Ahead of His Time — An interesting article about Hopkins in the British magazine the New Statesman. (https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2018/08/century-poetry-gerard-manley-hopkins-still-ahead-times)
- An Actor's Reading — A reading of the poem by actor Michael Graves. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=indfDULWPPU)
- More Poems by Hopkins — Some of Hopkins's other significant works. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/gerard-manley-hopkins)
- The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins — A collection of Hopkins's correspondence. (https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.182404/2015.182404.The-Letters-Of-Gerard-Manley-Hopkins_djvu.txt)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS POEMS

- God's Grandeur
- The Caged Skylark

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