

## THE WINDHOVER Gerard Manley Hopkins

To Christ our Lord

I CAUGHT this morning morning's minion, king-  
 dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding

Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding

High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
 In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,

As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding  
 Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
 Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of; the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here  
 Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion

The dedication to Christ is important because address Him directly and makes him part of the poem.

This morning I saw (**I caught** - Hopkins doesn't say "I saw" but he uses a more important verb to describe how the poet saw one of these birds in its hovering) the servant (**minion**: is a term for favourites or protégés, especially those of a monarch or prince at a royal court) of the morning, [who is] the dauphin, or crown-prince of the Kingdom of Daylight (**king-dom...dauphin** - these two words give a sense of royalty: "dauphin" is related with the French court, literally is the title of the eldest son of the King of France), a falcon drawn by the dappled colors (**dapple** /screziato) of dawn (**dapple-dawn-drawn**: letteralmente = screziato-alba-disegnato; this is a Modernist element, an artificially made adjective).

**I CAUGHT this morning morning's minion**: this line presents the alliteration of m/n, that gives the impression of movement repeated (which recalls the movement of the bird's flight);

The Falcon is riding across the rolling level, with **steady air** (aria ferma) beneath him, between him and the ground.

High up in the sky (**High there**/in alto nel cielo), in his ecstasy he halted with his wings as if he were pulling back on a horse's reins (**how...wing**/come volteggiava sulla redine dell'ala increspata - wimpling = rippling). Then, he would launch himself again **on swing** (in bilico); the exclamation mark is a Modernist element.

[In the same way that] a skater's heel smoothly sweeps around a curve [when skating figures] (**As...bow-bend**/come la lama del pattino descrive dolcemente una curva), the bird's hurling itself (**hurl**/slancio) against the wind and then **gliding** (planata) with it, **rebuffed** the force of the wind (respinse il vento). My heart (the poet's heart), which had been **in hiding** (then, having described the riding and swing of the bird in the wind, the poet returns to himself), stirred itself - became excited for the bird's achievement (**achieve**(ment)/perfezione: here the poet uses a verb as a noun; is an other Modernist element) and power, for its **mastery** (padronanza) of natural forces.

The transition between octave and sestet comes with the statement in lines 9-11 that the natural ("brute") beauty of the bird in flight is but a spark in comparison with the glory of Christ, whose grandeur and spiritual power are "a billion times told lovelier, more dangerous."

**Brute beauty**: is an assonance. It means not "brutal", except in the most literal sense: beauty of a creature. The brute force of the hawk becomes brute beauty.

**Buckle**/si uniscono: The critics gave this verb various

Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion  
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillio.

possible meaning; the most important is probably "join together", suggesting that all the qualities of the previous line buckle together in the hawk. Buckle is a crucial word, at the beginning of the line. The emphasis is increased also because it is in the present tense (until there all the verbs were in the past tense).

And (**AND**: it is in capitals, as if this normally insignificant word becomes important. The reader has to pause, to give it emphasis. In fact he emphasizes the "AND" to draw attention from the admiration of the bird and to the sense of Christ behind it which that admiration brings. The use of capitals is another Modernist element) the fire is a billion times lovely and more dangerous, oh my **chevalier**/Christ (a traditional Medieval image of Christ as a knight on horseback - We can relate this word to the dedication).

We should not surprise, because nature abounds of this higher principle: simple plodding work (**shéer plód**/pura e semplice fatica), of the ploughman (zappaterra), makes the plough (aratro) shine from its polishing against the cut earth and also makes the **sillion** (solco/the ridge between two furrows of a plowed field. Hopkins uses this archaic word perhaps to suggest an overtone from "silica"-the mineral which in the form of gleaming particles of quartz often makes dull rocks shine) shine (the suggestion is that there is a glittering, luminous core to every individual, which a concerted religious life can expose), and [similarly] bleak-looking **embers**/braci [in a stove or fireplace], ah my dear [Christ], when they fall and hurt themselves (**gall themselves**/ si riattizzano) also break open (**gash**/si squarciano) **and** the gashes reveal the beauty of red and gold (Hopkins words this image so as to relate the concept to the Crucifixion: The verb "gash" suggests the wounding of Christ's body and the shedding of his "gold-vermilion" blood).

**Theme:** Hopkins wrote this sonnet in 1887 and he said that it was: "The best thing I ever wrote" (Letters). The windhover is a bird (a kestrel) with the rare ability to hover in the air, head to wind. The ecstatic flying of the bird stirs the poet's heart. In the combination of beauty, strength, and glory which the poet sees in the bird, he sees an emblem of the beauty, strength, and glory of Christ. It is a poem of meeting God, Christ, in the flight of the bird. And then, at the end, reflecting on more ordinary beauties which occur in the created world (in the last sestet, the plough and the embers).

**Form:** This sonnet is composed by an octave and a sestet. The rhyme scheme is: ABBACDCDCD. This poem shows the skilful innovations which were to have considerable influence on later modern poetry. The confusing grammatical structures and sentence order in this sonnet contribute to its difficulty, but they also represent a masterful use of language. Hopkins blends and confuses adjectives, verbs, and subjects in order to echo his theme of smooth merging. Very important is the "-ing" ending to the poem's rhyme scheme; it occurs in verbs, adjectives, and nouns, linking the different parts of the sentences together in an intense unity. The Windhover is written in "sprung rhythm," a meter in which the number of accents in a line are counted but the number of syllables does not matter. This technique allows Hopkins to vary the speed of his lines so as to capture the bird's pausing and racing. The poem slows abruptly at the end, pausing in awe to reflect on Christ.