

A poem for Friday, February 19.

GOD'S GRANDEUR

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining like shook foil
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
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.

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.

I carry this one around in my head and call it out often when trying to pray. It often works. Not completely sure why. I love the rhythms and the sounds. I love the alliterations : “deep down things” “last lights off the black west went.”

His protest of the despoiling of nature, coming from the middle of the 19th century, is piercing and very contemporary. The last chapter of Sallie McFague's book on climate change is a commentary and application of this Hopkins poem.

I am moved by the bold images of the poem, especially that of a mother bird with warm breast and bright wings. No rationally sanitized deity here – no ground of being or first cause or unmoved mover. Of course, the image comes from the tradition, but this poet revivifies it for me.

Collins Kilburn

Saturday after Ash Wednesday, February 20, 2021

Maybe you, too, grew up in a Southern Baptist church where Lent didn't happen. Lent still seems unnatural to me, but an Episcopal friend tells me it is unnatural. (That's an anecdote.)

I invite you to consider a poem by Wallace Stevens, *Anecdote of the Jar*. The poem proposes that an I (?) placed an artifact (a jar) in a wilderness (Tennessee). The image of the jar: round, tall, gray, bare. The image of the wilderness: slovenly, the wild gone out of it. To me the poem hinges on the word *dominion*. Feel that; experience the tension; take it personally.

Well, that's where I am in Lent today, and I'd love to hear how this Anecdote strikes you. Email me at tfewel@gmail.com.

Anecdote of the Jar

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

— Wallace Stevens

Poem for Sunday, Feb. 21.

With its dedication, "To Christ, Our Lord," "The Windhover" is an exaltation of life in this world that never specifically mentions the Lord. Hopkins leaves it to the reader to make the connection. His powerful combinations of alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, and word choice embody the vision of the bird's triumphant display. I'm tremendously moved at the end: Is "ah my dear" Christ or me or the evocatively named windhover, or maybe all of us together?

To help you negotiate and appreciate: minion=favored one or servant; dauphin=a prince; wimpling=rippling; chevalier (pr. shev-a-leer)=a knight or champion; sillion=upturned soil; gall=break open, among other things.

Tim West

The Windhover:
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
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

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

by Gerard Manley Hopkins

A Poem for Monday, February 22

Lent could be thought of as a 40-day ‘Come to Jesus’ meeting—time for reflection and realignment with our Teacher and Guide. The 12-Step Program is one fine spiritual practice for this intention. Though I’ve never been in the program, I have many times benefited from their steps. Imagine my surprise a few years ago when I wrote mystical poems based on the Psalms, and came to #32, to sense a profound parallel.

Psalm 32

Blessed are you to acknowledge your humanness.

Blessed are you to know your need for a Higher Power.

Blessed are you to surrender your life to that Higher Power,

not stubborn like a horse or mule.

Blessed are you to face yourself in the mirror.

Blessed are you to find your flaws.

Blessed are you to find forgiveness.

Blessed are you to release your past.

Blessed are you to realize whom you have harmed.

Blessed are you to amend wrongdoings to others.

Blessed are you to walk a path of integrity.

Blessed are you to be conscious of Spirit each day.

Blessed are you to pass on these steps of healing when they can be of help.

Sharon Blessum, *Songs of the Beloved*

Poem for Tuesday, Feb. 23

I chose this poem because it spoke to me about what we went through earlier this month and where our country is now. May we find a way to strengthen and save our democracy. Marge Miles

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action—

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

From *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore

A Poem for Wednesday, February 24 (Adams Wofford)

I like this poem because it speaks to the miraculous in day-to-day life. We are surrounded by miracles whether birds or stones or a bowl of noodles or a truck bearing a load. Every day is new and we must be open to the seeing in every day.

Welcome Morning
by Anne Sexton

There is joy
in all:

in the hair I brush each morning,
in the Cannon towel, newly washed,
that I rub my body with each morning,
in the chapel of eggs I cook
each morning,
in the outcry from the kettle
that heats my coffee
each morning,
in the spoon and the chair
that cry "hello there, Anne"
each morning,
in the godhead of the table
that I set my silver, plate, cup upon
each morning.

All this is God,
right here in my pea-green house
each morning
and I mean,
though often forget,
to give thanks,
to faint down by the kitchen table
in a prayer of rejoicing
as the holy birds at the kitchen window
peck into their marriage of seeds.

So while I think of it,
let me paint a thank-you on my palm
for this God, this laughter of the morning,
lest it go unspoken.

The Joy that isn't shared, I've heard,
dies young.

A Poem for Thursday, February 25

I heard Li-Young Lee read his poetry at Earlham College in the early 2000s. I was struck by his natural mystical qualities and his faithfulness to his complicated immigrant past. This poem is a beautiful tribute to love that must be offered with pain—from father to son, from husband to wife. Such connects me to Lent and the inherent cost of love.

The Gift

BY LI-YOUNG LEE

To pull the metal splinter from my palm
my father recited a story in a low voice.
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
Before the story ended, he'd removed
the iron sliver I thought I'd die from.

I can't remember the tale,
but hear his voice still, a well
of dark water, a prayer.
And I recall his hands,
two measures of tenderness
he laid against my face,
the flames of discipline
he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon
you would have thought you saw a man
planting something in a boy's palm,
a silver tear, a tiny flame.
Had you followed that boy
you would have arrived here,
where I bend over my wife's right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down
so carefully she feels no pain.
Watch as I lift the splinter out.
I was seven when my father

took my hand like this,
and I did not hold that shard
between my fingers and think,
Metal that will bury me,
christen it Little Assassin,
Ore Going Deep for My Heart.
And I did not lift up my wound and cry,
Death visited here!
I did what a child does
when he's given something to keep.
I kissed my father.