

Twelve River RIPPLES

Favourite Poem



Pied Beauty

by Gerard Manley Hopkins

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.

I was introduced to this poem in my teens by an inspirational English teacher. I had been reading, writing and performing poetry for several years by then through studying Speech and Drama out of school but this poem opened up so many possibilities of what you could do with language, with assonance and alliteration, with accent and rhythm. I loved the portmanteau words: *couple-colour*, *rose-moles*, *Fresh-firecoal*, *fathers-forth*, and the additional layers of meaning created. I liked the unusual words, like *brinded* and *adazzle*. The poem suggested that rules could be broken, or at least bent, to conjure a more vivid picture.

The poem hinted at the older forms of Anglo Saxon poetry that used different patterns within the lines, making new kinds of word music, while actually using a very simple but demanding rhyme scheme. I have always admired poets who can use a strict rhyme scheme without it becoming obtrusive or twisting the word order into uncomfortable shapes. There is nothing remarkable in the rhymes used, and that is the point.

Above all, it was such a joyous celebration of life in all its contradictions and paradoxes. I particularly like that it celebrated not just the natural world but recognised the beauty in things like tools. Coming from a long line of artisans, I revelled in that. The poem, for me, gave permissions: permissions to play with language, to see the world in unexpected ways, to explore.

Beth Soule