

COLLEGE GUILD
PO Box 6448, Brunswick ME 04011

POETRY CLUB-2, UNIT 5

WALTER DE LA MARE AND GERALD MANLEY HOPKINS

Walter de la Mare (1873-1956) is an English poet, short story writer and novelist. He is known for his romantic imaginative writing about dreams, death, rare states of mind and the fantasy world of childhood – a time he felt a person was closest to the spiritual world.

He thought the external world frightens the imagination of many children causing it to return “like a shocked snail into its shell.” The young adult then becomes intellectual -- analytical, logical, referenced by the external. (They know beauty is truth.)

Those who are able to retain their “child-like” imagination write from a visionary and intuitive source within themselves with creative vitality. (They reveal beauty as truth.) Be thinking about which category you most identify with as you read de la Mares’ poems. What is the difference between knowing beauty as truth and revealing beauty as truth?

THE LISTENERS

‘Is there anybody there?’ said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door,
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest’s ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller’s head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time,
‘Is there anybody there?’ he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
Where he stood perplexed and still,
But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,

Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken
 By the lonely Traveller's call.
 And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
 Their stillness answering his cry,
 While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
 'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
 For he suddenly smote on the door, even
 Louder, and lifted his head:-
 'Tell them I came, and no one answered,
 That I kept my word,' he said.
 Never the least stir made the listeners,
 Though every word he spake
 Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
 From the one man left awake.
 Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
 And the sound of iron on stone
 And how the silence surged softy backwards
 When the plunging hoofs were gone.

This poem was written in 1947. Walter de la Mare spells "traveler" differently and uses the word "spake" for the word "spoke". It has an air of mystery, magic and the supernatural. (This is a particularly fun poem to read aloud!)

- 1. Notice de la Mare evokes the sense of hearing which is an effective way of bringing a reader into the poem with concrete details. List three places where he writes about sounds.**
- 2. The well-known British poet T.S. Eliot called this poem an "inexplicable mystery." Do you agree it's a mystery? Just for fun, give your interpretation of the poem.**
- 3. Write a poem about a real life scene or a fantasy that evokes all five senses: auditory (sounds, noises, music); olfactory (odors, scents, smells); gustatory (flavors, tastes); tactile (physical textures, touch), visual (sight).**

SILVER

Slowly, silently, now the moon
 Walks the night in her silver shoon*
 This way, and that, she peers and sees
 Silver fruit upon silver trees;
 One by one the casements** catch
 Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;***
 Crouched in his kennel, like a log

With paws of silver sleeps the dog;
 From their shadowy cote**** the white breasts peep
 Of doves in silver feathers sleep
 A harvest mouse goes scampering by,
 With silver claws, and silver eyes
 And moveless fish in water gleam
 By silver reeds in a silver stream.

(*shoes, ** window sash, ***straw used for roofs, ****coop or shed)

- 4. List six things de la Mare has described as silver in this poem.**
- 5. How would you describe the mood in this poem? What lines or words makes it feel that way?**
- 6. Is this descriptive or imaginative writing? Explain.**

SLIM CUNNING HANDS

Slim cunning hands at rest, and cozening* eyes—
 Under this stone one loved too wildly lies;
 How false she was, no granite could declare;
 Nor all earth's flowers, how fair.

(*to act with willful deceit)

- 7. What is de la Mare saying about the dead woman whose grave he is visiting?**
- 8. Everyone has both good and not so good traits, i.e. everyone is human. Write a poem showing both the good and the bad in a person, a situation, or an object.**

Gerard Manley Hopkins, an English Jesuit priest (1844-1889,) ranks as the seventh most frequently reprinted poet in the English language. He is considered one of the world's greatest poets. His innovative poems changed the course of modern poetry, yet he considered his life a failure. Hopkins died at 44 of typhoid fever.

PIED* BEAUTY

Glory be to God for dappled things—
 For skies of couple-colour** as a brindled** cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
 Fresh-firecoal, chestnut-galls; finches' wings;
 Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
 And all trades, 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.

*(*of two or more colors in blotches)*

*(** dark streaks or flecks on a tawny background)*

*(**contrary)*

In this poem Hopkins captures the beauty and grandeur of creation with great enthusiasm. This poem may be difficult to read and understand. We urge you stay with it to get the feel, the rhythm, of it, rather than just understanding it in your head. You will be well rewarded for your efforts.

9. Make a list other things in the poem, besides the cow, that are speckled.
10. Notice and list several places in the poem where Hopkins used words in a sequence that begin with the same letter. This is called alliteration. Do you think this contributes to the effectiveness of the poem? Why or why not?
11. What is new to you in the poem's use of language?
12. Explain what you like and/or dislike about the poem.
13. Write a poem experimenting with alliteration.

TO HIM WHO EVER THOUGHT

To him who ever thought with love of me
 Or ever did for my sake some good deed
 I will appear, looking for such charity
 And kind compassion, at his life's last need
 That he will out of hand and heartily
 Repent he sinned and all his sins be freed.

14. Considering Hopkins was a priest, he prayed for people and thought the last need of a person would be to have sins forgiven. Do you think this is important? What would be most important to you?

15. Write a poem about someone who “thought with love” of you and include what last wish you would have for that person.

THE CAGED SKYLARK

As a dare-gale skylark scanted* in a dull cage
 Man’s mounting spirit in his bone-house, mean house, dwells –
 That bird beyond the remembering his free fells**;
 This in drudgery, day-laboring-out life’s age.
 Though aloft on turf or perch or poor low stage
 Both sing sometimes the sweetest, sweet spells
 Yet both droop deadly sometimes in their cells
 Or wring their barriers in bursts of fear or rage.

Not that the sweet-fowl, song-fowl needs no rest –
 Why, hear him, hear him babble & drop down to his nest,
 But his own nest, wild nest, no prison.

Man’s spirit will be flesh-bound, when found at best
 But unencumbered: meadow-down is not distressed
 For a rainbow footing it nor he for his bones risen.

(*provide with a meager, inadequate, barely sufficient portion, i.e. scanty –
 meager)

(**past of falls)

16. Why do you think Hopkins chose a skylark as the subject of this poem?

17. Can man be in a cage even though he is not behind bars? What is Hopkins saying about man’s spirit?

18. Write a poem about freedom in Hopkins’ style. Take some risks – big ones!! It is a way to loosen up and break out of your usual way of writing poems.

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes