

Investigate! Hopkins: *That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection*

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❖ **Setting the scene:**

- On first reading the poem, could you make out something of what Hopkins was saying?
- What were your first impressions of the sonnet? Did it seem
 - as if it were an important one?
 - that Hopkins was saying something significant?
- As a preliminary exercise gather together:
 - all the references to fire and to destruction
 - all the references to water and wetness
- Read the account of creation in the Bible, Genesis 1:1-31
 - Does that suggest fire or water?

❖ **Going deeper:**

- Work out the descriptions of human beings in l.23.
 - How are they so opposite from the diamond image?
- Why does Hopkins exclaim 'O pity and indignation'?
- What is your own worldview here?
 - Do you see an end to the universe?
 - Is there also a complete end to humans when they die?
- Can you get in touch with Hopkins' beliefs in the light of your own worldview?
 - Is his poetry sufficiently strong to bridge the gap?

❖ **Themes:**

- What words and images best convey the hope Hopkins feels?
- Do you get the sense that Hopkins is well beyond his 'Dark Night', or that it is still hovering on his emotional horizon?
 - What parts of the poem do you see as evidence?

❖ **Imagery and symbolism:**

- Compare the ideas suggested by 'bonfire' and 'wildfire' to those suggested by 'spark' and 'beam'.

- Pick out two images for each of the four elements.
 - How original and dramatic do they seem to you?
- What in each element causes change and flux, as expressed in the poem?
- Explain 'squadroned masks' and 'squandering ooze'.
- Why is the Resurrection a 'heart's-clarion'?
- Which images stand out to you most?

❖ **Language and tone:**

- Can you locate other significant patterns of alliteration?
- What is the force of 'endeavour'?

❖ **Structure and versification:**

- Scan ll. 1,17.
 - How many feet?
 - Can you discern the metre?
 - What about alliterative patterns?
- How would you read l.7?
 - Where would you put breaks, pauses and emphases?
 - Do you see any plays on words or sounds that you would like to comment on?
- What would you say about the enjambement?
- The caesuras are marked, but do they actually represent mid-line breaks (or pauses)?
 - Can you find lines where the pause comes differently to where the caesura is positioned?
 - If so, what is the point of marking the caesuras in?
- In the light of your answers above, do you feel confident enough to comment on the counterpointing that is set up?
- Overall, what would you say is significant about this sonnet?
- Do you think Hopkins has succeeded in making 'This Jack, joke' significant enough to be someone worthy of resurrection?