

God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from 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.

[5]

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.

[10]

Annotations

[1] **charged:** suggests the charge of an electrical current

[2] **grandeur:** splendour, majesty

[2] **foil:** very thin sheets of metal

[3-4] **oil/ crushed:** suggests the crushing of olives to produce olive oil

[4] **reck:** acknowledge, recognise, pay heed to

[6] **seared:** parched, dry

[6] **trade:** commercial and industrial activity

[6] **bleared:** blurred, reddened

[6] **smeared:** soiled, tarnished

[8] **shod:** fitted or wearing shoes

[9] **spent:** exhausted, used up, expended

[12] **brink:** edge, precipice

[14] **broods:** suggests how birds sit on eggs to warm them and encourage them to hatch

Tease It Out

- The opening lines describe how God's 'grandeur' emanates from the world to be enjoyed by human beings:
 - It flames from the world like light reflected from a metallic surface. What phrase indicates this?
 - True or false:** God's grandeur oozes from the world like oil from an olive press.
 - There are times, Hopkins says, when God's grandeur 'gathers to a greatness'. Can you think of one or two natural sights where different aspects of creation combine to create something truly grand?
- The poet refers to a 'rod' that is wielded by God:
 - What kind of rod do you visualise: a shepherd's crook, a sceptre of authority or a stick of punishment? Give a reason for your answer.
 - Would you agree that the rod is an effective symbol of God's authority? Give a reason for your answer.
 - According to Hopkins, do people nowadays respect God's authority? Did people do so in the past?
 - Class Discussion:** This seems to both surprise and distress the poet. Based on your reading of the first four lines, suggest a reason for his horrified reaction.
- Hopkins focuses on the environmental effects of industry and commerce:
 - Is this destructive behaviour a new phenomenon or has it been going on for a long time?
 - Group Discussion:** What aspect of human industry might leave the environment 'seared'? What industrial activity might leave it 'bleared'? What might leave it 'smeared'?
- Hopkins laments that much of the earth's 'soil/ Is bare now'. Mention three activities that might have left the soil exposed.
 - Why do you think the poet repeats the phrase 'have trod' in line 5? What effect does this repetition have?
- Hopkins laments the fact that human beings now wear shoes. Why does he lament this fact? Rank the following in order of plausibility:
 - Bare feet provide physical contact with the earth and therefore greater empathy with the natural world.
 - Wearing shoes is bad for one's posture.
 - Shoes symbolise the unnatural and artificial nature of our industrial age.
- Group Discussion:** Hopkins refers to a 'dearest freshness' that exists within 'things':
 - Where does this 'freshness' reside?
 - Who or what might have put it there?
 - Is this 'freshness' to be found in every aspect of the natural world, or only in certain aspects?
 - According to line 7, what impact does this 'freshness' have on the natural world?
- How does the poet describe the presence of the Holy Ghost in the world? What does the word 'brood' call to mind?

Exam Prep

- Personal Response:** Consider Hopkins' depiction of the sunrise:
 - What are the 'last lights' referred to by Hopkins in line 11?
 - What colour, according to Hopkins, is the sky just as dawn is about to break?
 - 'For Hopkins, the endless cycle of sunset and sunrise symbolises nature's ability to renew itself'. Write a paragraph in response to this statement.
- Class Discussion:** The poem was written around the time of the industrial revolution, when cities were growing and many factories were being built. Do you think that the way the poet characterises man's relationship with the world is still relevant today? Do you think that this can be read as an environmentalist poem before its time?
- Theme Talk:** The poem presents two different aspects of God: the Father and the Holy Ghost. With what symbols or images is each aspect associated? Which aspect is presented as most benevolent in your opinion?

Language Lab

- Read the poem aloud. Would you agree that lines 11 and 12 create an unusual rhythmic effect? Does this 'sprung rhythm' create a pleasant or unpleasant verbal music in the opinion of the class?
- Class Discussion:** Hopkins is fond of using words with several different meanings. Discuss the different meanings of the word 'charged'. Which meaning, according to the class, is most relevant to line 1?
- Hopkins has a tendency to use nouns as verbs and verbs as nouns. Can you identify an instance of this in line 2?
- Can you complete the following statements by filling in the gaps? The Holy Spirit, in an inventive metaphor, is compared to a _____. The _____ is compared to an unhatched egg. The _____ protects and preserves the _____, just as a hen protects the egg she broods over.

Translation

for the reburial of the Magdalenes

The soil frayed and sifted evens the score –
There are women here from every county,
Just as there were in the laundry.

White light blinded and bleached out
The high relief of a glance, where steam danced [5]
Around stone drains and giggled and slipped across water.

Assist them now, ridges under the veil, shifting,
Searching for their parents, their names,
The edges of words grinding against nature,

As if, when water sank between the rotten teeth [10]
Of soap, and every grasp seemed melted, one voice
Had begun, rising above the shuffle and hum

Until every pocket in her skull blared with the note –
Allow us now to hear it, sharp as an infant's cry
While the grass takes root, while the steam rises: [15]

Washed clean of idiom • the baked crust
Of words that made my temporary name •
A parasite that grew in me • that spell
Lifted • I lie in earth sifted to dust •
Let the bunched keys I bore slacken and fall • [20]
I rise and forget • a cloud over my time.

Annotations

Translation: changing from one language to another, altering or transforming, transfer remains from one grave to another.

Magdalenes: inmates of asylums run by the Catholic Church for so-called 'fallen' women. These operated throughout Ireland in the 19th and 20th centuries. Inmates were required to work in the laundries attached to the asylums for no pay. The asylums initially focused on reforming prostitutes. However, their remit gradually expanded to include women and girls who were sexually promiscuous, who became pregnant before marriage or who simply proved troublesome to their parents. Such women were confined to the asylums against their will. The last Magdalene laundry closed in 1996.

reburial: In 1993, builders discovered a mass grave containing the bodies of 155 inmates in the grounds of a Dublin convent. These remains were cremated and reburied in Glasnevin cemetery. This poem was written for and read out at the reburial cemetery.

[1] **frayed:** the soil has been loosened or pulled apart

[1] **sifted:** the soil has sieved or sifted

[1] **evens the score:** smoothes out marks and indentations; restores justice and balance

[16] **idiom:** a person's unique and individual manner of speaking; a person's and community's natural manner of speaking or expression

[18] **parasite:** a creature that lives inside another creature, usually at its host's expense

[20] **slacken:** loosen

Tease It Out

- The poet depicts the scene in Glasnevin cemetery:
 - What phrase indicates that the gravediggers have been busy?
 - True or false:** Only women from the Dublin area were committed to this particular laundry.
 - Consider the term ‘score’ in line 1. Would you agree that more than one meaning of this term might be relevant here?
- The poet describes the laundry where the inmates worked:
 - Class Discussion:** Consider the phrase ‘high relief of a glance’. What feature of the laundry is the poet referring to here?
 - What happened to this image over a number of years?
 - What other physical feature of the laundry is mentioned?
 - What poetic device is used to describe the behaviour of steam in the laundry room? (Hint: it starts with a ‘p’!)
 - In stanza four, what indications are we given of the harsh conditions that existed in the laundry?
 - What metaphor is used to describe the worn bars of soap with which the Magdalenes laboured?
- The poet focuses on the reburied inmates:
 - They are described as ‘ridges under the veil’. Under what veil do they now reside?
 - The poet describes how their remains go ‘shifting’ through the soil of the cemetery. What are they searching for?
 - In what sense might these women have been deprived of their names? Is there more than one sense in which this might be true?
- Consider the phrase ‘As if ... one voice/ Had begun’:
 - What does the poet imagine happening in the laundry all those years ago?
 - ‘Allow us now to hear it’. What does the poet imagine her audience hearing? Does she mean this in a literal or in a metaphorical sense?
 - What phrase indicates that the Magdalene felt liberated and empowered by her outburst?
 - What does the poet imagine issuing from the Magdalenes’ freshly dug grave? Is this image realistic or fantastical?
- The poem's last six lines seem to be spoken by one of the inmates:
 - In line 16 the Magdalene mentions the language that was used to control and diminish her. What three metaphors are used to describe this oppressive language?
 - Class Discussion:** The inmate describes how she was given a ‘temporary name’. What does this suggest about life in the laundry?
 - The Magdalene claims that now she has been ‘washed clean’ of this oppressive language. How might this have happened?
 - ‘I rise and forget’. Is the poet referring to the afterlife here, to the Magdalene’s soul or spirit? Or can we interpret this phrase in a broader sense?
 - What image suggests that Ireland will be haunted by this scandal for a long time to come?

Exam Prep

- Personal Response:** Words can harm us just as badly as violence or confinement’. Write three paragraphs discussing ‘Translation’ in light of this statement.
- Class Discussion:** Ní Chuilleanáin suggests that we can somehow ‘hear’ the Magdalenes and calls on us to ‘Assist them now’. But how is this possible? What does the poem call on us to do in this regard?
- Theme Talk:** ‘Ní Chuilleanáin is a poet who often proceeds by way of image rather than through story or argument.’ Compare and contrast ‘Translation’ with ‘Following’ in light of this statement.
- Exam Prep:** ‘Ní Chuilleanáin tells fascinating stories, often examining themes that are relevant to contemporary Ireland, in a style that is both beautiful and mysterious.’ Write a short essay in response to this statement, making reference to ‘Translation’ and three other poems.

Language Lab

- Look up the word ‘Translation’ in your dictionary. What different meanings does it have? Is ‘Translation’ an appropriate title for this poem? Consider the various references to language in the poem before you answer.
- This poem uses many images associated with laundry and with washing. Identify as many as you can. Choose the one you consider most memorable or effective and explain your choice.
- Imagine you were present during the recomittal ceremony for which Ní Chuilleanáin wrote the poem. Write a diary entry recording your experiences.

The Searchers

after the film by John Ford

He wants to kill her for surviving,
For the language she spits,
The way she runs, clutching
Her skirt as if life pools there.

Instead he grabs her, puts her [5]
On his saddle, rides back
Into town where faces
She barely remembers

Smile into her fear [10]
With questions and the wish,
The impossible wish, to forget.
What does living do to any of us?

An why do we grip it, hang on [15]
As if it's the ribs of a horse
Past commanding? A beast
That big could wreck us easily,

Could rise up on two legs, [20]
Or kick its back end up
And send us soaring.
We might land, any moment,

Like cheap toys. There's always
A chimney burning in the mind,
A porch where the rocker still rocks,
Though empty. Why

Do we insist our lives are ours? [25]
Look at the frontier. It didn't resist.
Gave anyone the chance
To plant shrubs, dig wells.

Watched, not really concerned [30]
With whether it belonged
To him or to him. Either way
The land went on living,

Dying. What else could it choose?

Annotations

The Searchers: *The Searchers* is a famous 1956 U.S. Western film directed by John Ford in which Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) a middle-aged veteran of the American Civil War, spends years looking for his abducted niece, Debbie, who has been abducted by a raiding party of warriors from the Comanche tribe.

[1] *He wants to kill her for surviving:* When Ethan finds Debbie, she tells him that she is now a Comanche and wants to stay with her tribe. Ethan has to be restrained from shooting her. At the end of the film, there is some concern that Ethan may try again to kill Debbie. Instead, he brings her home and then heads off on his own.

[23] *the rocker still rocks:* A rocking chair features prominently in the film's more domestic scenes. The simple-minded Mose Harper, a friend of the Edwards family who took part in the early searches for Debbie, is especially fond of it.

[26] *the frontier:* the outermost limit of 'settled' territory in the United States at the time when the film was set (the late 1860s and the first five years of the 1870s).

Tease It Out

1. Smith begins by evoking the closing scene of the film from which her poem takes its title. The poem opens with the alarming thought that ‘he’ (the film’s Ethan) wants to kill ‘her’ (Debbie). Read over the first verse and explain why Ethan might want to kill Debbie.
2. What does Ethan do instead? Where does he bring Debbie?
3. Looking at the first three verses, how do you think Debbie feels as she is brought back to a life she no longer remembers clearly?
4. How do the townspeople treat Debbie? Describe their attitude to her.
5. How do you think Debbie now regards the people she is being reunited with after many years living among the Comanche?
6. At this point, Smith uses Debbie’s strange situation to make a point about the lives we all live. What does the poet think that life does to us?
7. To what does she compare the lives to which we desperately cling on?
8. What related images does Smith then use to symbolise the dangers that come with living?
9. Smith uses the image of Debbie’s return to a once familiar but now strange parlour to suggest something about how we all relate to our pasts. What do you think Smith might be suggesting?
10. The poem then asks why we ‘insist our lives are ours’. This seems a rather odd question. In what sense, though, might our lives and pasts cease to be our own?
11. In a strikingly original metaphor, life is then compared to the American frontier, which is personified. How does Smith characterise the frontier’s ‘attitude’ to the people who settled it? Is the frontier:
 - Very enthusiastic and welcoming?
 - Hostile and fearful?
 - Largely indifferent?
 - Worried about who owns which plot of land?Give reasons for your answer.
12. Having answered the previous question, explain what the frontier’s ‘attitude’ to life and death might tell us about how we look at our own pasts from the frontier of the present day.

Exam Prep

1. **Personal Response:** Smith has obviously thought a lot about John Ford’s film *The Searchers* and has used it to address some issues about which she feels deeply. Choose a film that made you think about important ideas and issues. Write a brief essay about your response to this film.
2. **Class Discussion:** Like many of Smith’s poems, this one seems to rely on information that is given to us indirectly. To understand ‘The Searchers’, we need to know that the title refers to a famous film and then to learn a little about what happens in that film. Do you think the poem should just tell us everything we need to know, or can it be a good thing when a poet puzzles us a bit and makes us think?
3. **Exam Prep:** ‘The poetry of Tracy K. Smith shows that popular culture can be used to make lasting and moving poetry that addresses important themes.’ Write a short essay in response to this statement, making reference to ‘The Searchers’, ‘Don’t You Wonder, Sometimes?’, ‘The Museum of Obsolescence’.

Language Lab

1. Smith gives us two particularly striking metaphors for our lives and how we are shaped by them. The first is a strong and potentially uncontrollable horse; the second is the American frontier. Write a few paragraphs in which you use your own words to say what each of these metaphors is saying about life. Then say whether you find each one convincing and effective. Give reasons for your answer.
2. Had you ever heard of the great Western film on which this poem is based? What do you know about it? How successfully does Smith use the film’s conclusion and some of its imagery to reflect on questions of personal identity and memory?
3. ‘Smith’s poetry uses startling imagery to reflect on the strangeness, risks and possibilities of living.’ Write a short essay in response to this statement.



Nikki Giovanni

Nikki Giovanni is an American poet, writer and activist. She was born in 1943 in Knoxville, Tennessee. She attended Fisk University in Knoxville, graduating in 1967. At around that time, she began writing, initially as a response to the death of her grandmother. In the late 1960s, she became involved with the civil rights movement and the Black Arts Movement, which aimed to foster and promote African American creativity. Her poems and essays quickly won fame for their unique take on race, social injustice and the African American experience. Since 1987, Giovanni has taught writing and literature at Virginia Tech. She has won most of America's major literary awards and was named as one of Oprah Winfrey's 25 'Living Legends'.

Nikki Rosa

childhood remembrances are always a drag
if you're Black
you always remember things like living in Woodlawn
with no inside toilet
and if you become famous or something [5]
they never talk about how happy you were to have
your mother
all to yourself and
how good the water felt when you got your bath
from one of those [10]
big tubs that folk in Chicago barbecue in
and somehow when you talk about home
it never gets across how much you
understood their feelings
as the whole family attended meetings about Hollydale [15]
and even though you remember
your biographers never understand
your father's pain as he sells his stock
and another dream goes
And though you're poor it isn't poverty that [20]
concerns you
and though they fought a lot
it isn't your father's drinking that makes any difference
but only that everybody is together and you
and your sister have happy birthdays and very good [25]
Christmases
and I really hope no white person ever has cause
to write about me
because they never understand
Black love is Black wealth and they'll [30]
probably talk about my hard childhood
and never understand that
all the while I was quite happy

Annotations

Nikki Rosa: the poet adopts the surname of Rosa Parks (1913-2005), who helped initiate the civil rights movement in the United States when she refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955.

[3] **Woodlawn:** a suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio, where the Giovanni family lived for a short while

[15] **Hollydale:** an all-black housing development in Cincinnati. The poet's father had invested money in this development and had expected to set up home there. Due to financial complications, the father was forced to sell his stock in the development.

Tease It Out

- The poet remembers a period during which her family lived in a development called 'Woodlawn'. How do you learn that this was a far-from-luxurious development?
- Suggest why the poet might have had her mother all to herself during this time. How did she feel about this at the time?
- The poet recalls how she was bathed in a big tub:
 - Do you imagine this happening inside or outside? Give a reason for your answer.
 - Did the young poet enjoy these bathtimes?
 - To what other uses were such tubs put?
- The poet's father, along with a number of other ordinary Africans, invested in a project called 'Hollydale':
 - What feelings might the older members of the family have experienced in relation to this project?
 - True or false:** The young Nikki didn't understand these feelings.
 - How did the father feel when he had to pull out of the investment?
- The poet describes her family life:
 - True or false:** The poet's family were moderately wealthy.
 - True or false:** The poet's parents had a blissfully happy marriage.
 - True or false:** The father had substance-abuse problems.
 - True or false:** These problems were outweighed by the good times that the family enjoyed.
- The poet imagines a white critic writing about her life and work:
 - What aspect of her childhood does she think such a critic would overlook?
 - What aspect of Black society would such an author probably be unaware of?
 - Would Giovanni prefer to be written about by a white person or a fellow black person?

Exam Prep

- Class Discussion:** 'This poem provides a rounded picture of a difficult childhood, illustrating both its highs and lows'. Discuss this statement as a class.
- Theme Talk:** This poem also highlights the problems that occur when one culture writes about another.
 - Suggest why white critics tend to focus on the negative aspects of Black childhoods.
 - Is this an example of stereotyping?
 - Suggest why Giovanni might find such a focus frustrating.
 - Is Irish culture ever misunderstood or misrepresented like this by non-Irish critics and audiences?
- Exam Prep:** Imagine you have been asked to suggest a poem for a new collection entitled Family Love. Explain why you would choose the poem, 'Nikki Rosa' as part of the collection.

Language Lab

- '[C]hildhood remembrances are always a drag'. Is this how Black writers and artists actually remember things, or is it how their 'remembrances' are presented by white critics?
- Consider the poem's title, which draws a contrast between the poet herself and Rosa Parks.
 - Is the poet suggesting that her childhood was harder or easier than that of Rosa Parks'?
 - In what sense does the title fit with the blinkered views of white critics when they write about Black lives?
- 'Giovanni's loose, informal lines generate a sense of intimacy. We feel we are listening in on a private conversation or even to the poet's own thoughts'. Write a paragraph in response to this statement.
- Consider the phrase 'Black love is Black wealth'. What does it suggest about the values of the community in which Giovanni was raised? What does it suggest about the strategies adopted by underprivileged communities in order to survive?