

Comment on the symbols used in Hopkins' poems

Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Comment on the symbols used in Hopkins' poems.

Symbols are objects or ideas that represent deeper meanings. G. M. Hopkins (1844-189) used many symbols in his poems to connect nature and religion in his poems. He turns everyday things like birds, leaves, or tools into messages about God, faith, and human life. Here we will take a closer look at Hopkins' symbols in his major poems.

The Windhover (Falcon) - Strength and Christ's Power: In "The Windhover" (1887), Hopkins describes a falcon flying high in the sky. The falcon is the central symbol in this poem. The bird is strong, fast, and full of energy. The poet describes the bird as the **"kingdom of daylight's dauphin"** (prince of the day).

The falcon symbolizes Jesus Christ. Its powerful flight represents Christ's glory and strength. But when the bird suddenly dives, it becomes a symbol of sacrifice. Hopkins compares the falcon's dive to Jesus dying on the cross—a humble act that shows God's love. The falcon is not just an ordinary bird—it represents something much greater: the divine power and the beauty of God's creation.

The Chestnut - Hidden Beauty and God's Presence: In "Pied Beauty," written in 1877, Hopkins talks about a chestnut and compares it to hot coal. When a chestnut is inside its shell, it looks rough and plain. But when it is opened, it shines like fire. The poet says:

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls;

This chestnut is a symbol of God's presence in all things. This symbol teaches us that even ordinary things can have deep and divine meaning.

Falling Leaves - The Cycle of Life and Death: In "Spring and Fall," published posthumously in 1918, a little girl named Margaret cries when she sees leaves falling from the trees. The falling leaves are a symbol of change, loss, and death. At first, Margaret is sad only because she sees the leaves dying. However, Hopkins suggests—

It is Margaret you mourn for,

This means her tears are not really about the leaves—they are about human mortality—the fact that everyone dies.

The falling leaves symbolize the cycle of life. Just like leaves die every year, humans grow old and die. But Hopkins hints at a religious idea: just as spring brings new leaves, Christians believe in life after death.

Horseshoes - Strength and Life's Journey: In “Felix Randal” (1880), Hopkins writes about a blacksmith who makes horseshoes. These horseshoes represent strength, hard work, and life’s journey. Horses use these shoes to travel long distances, just as people go through different stages in life. The strong and bright horseshoes also remind us of Felix Randal’s power when he was healthy. However, Felix Randal dies untimely because of illness—

Sickness broke him.

Just as the horseshoes (iron) wear down over time, human strength also fades. This symbol points to the religious idea that death is inevitable for every creature.

Fire - Divine Power: Hopkins often uses fire as a symbol of both destruction and beauty. In “The Windhover,” he talks about “**fire that breaks from thee.**” It means the power of Christ. Fire can burn and destroy, but it also gives warmth and light. This symbol helps us understand Christ’s suffering and how it brings hope to people.

In conclusion, symbols are like secret messages from God in Hopkins’ poems. Birds, leaves, and tools become ways to talk about big ideas like faith, sacrifice, and hope. His message is simple: Nature is a holy book, and if we pay attention, even a falling leaf can teach us about life’s deepest truths.