
- **“The Windhover” Summary**

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- This morning I was lucky enough to see a flying falcon, which seemed to me to be the morning's favorite creature, a prince of daylight with speckled feathers. He was riding the rolling air currents way up high. He seemed full of pure joy as he controlled the wind like a horse-rider does a horse. After hovering almost motionless, the bird suddenly dove in a smooth arc, like that of a skater's heel cleaning sweeping across the ice. The way the bird dove and glided revealed its authority over the strong wind. Watching the bird moved me profoundly—the bird's flight evidence of its sheer mastery and achievement!

All these different attributes meet together in this bird—beauty, honor, action, air and feathers all in one! But your fire, Christ, burns even more brightly, powerfully, and beautifully. Oh Christ, my knight in shining armor!

The bird was nothing special when you really think about it—even hard and boring work like plowing a field makes the upturned soil glitter and shine beautifully. And hot coals, fallen from a fire my lord, break open to reveal their beautiful red and golden colors.

- **“The Windhover” Themes**

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- **The Majesty of God and Nature**

“The Windhover” is a celebration—even, perhaps, a kind of joyous prayer—that marvels at the wonders of the natural world and, in turn, at the majesty of God’s creation. The poem strives to show that these two aspects of the world—nature and God—are not

really separate: the beauty of nature is both evidence of and a way of experiencing God's sublime divinity.

The poem uses one small part of the nature—a falcon (specifically a kestrel)—to explore this relationship, with “the achieve of [and] the mastery” of the bird representing one small but undeniable proof of God's power. The first chunk of the poem brings nature to life on the page, while the latter half then develops the way that natural beauty relates to God.

In the octet (the poem's first eight lines) the poem's speaker is almost overcome by the beauty of the falcon. The poem's language is fittingly full of its own dazzling beauty here (through poetic techniques like [alliteration](#)), as the speaker tries breathlessly to capture the experience of the falcon. Indeed, the emotional impact of this encounter is clear from the start: “I caught this morning morning's minion,” the speaker says. If part of the speaker's wonder at the falcon is its sheer and beautiful physical efficiency, the notion of “catching” it in flight shows that this is a rare—and profound—experience.

The speaker then marvels at different features of the falcon, each one of them majestic in its own way. The falcon's “dapple[d]” feathers, its ability to smoothly hover in the strong air currents, the way it swiftly turns and dives (presumably to catch prey)—all of these affect the speaker profoundly. This emotional reaction comes about because the speaker sees in the falcon—in its incredible *falcon-ness* (that is, the way it perfectly inhabits *being* a falcon)—as proof of God's existence, beauty, and power.

In other words, the falcon doesn't just exist for the sake of it—it exists to *express* God's will. The falcon's incredible aerial ability and seemingly perfect (divine) design stands in for God's masterful achievement in creating the world and all the beauty contained within it.

With the first part of the poem having proved the beauty of the falcon, the sestet (the final six lines of the [sonnet](#)) places the bird in a wider and arguably more mysterious

context. The speaker admires the falcon's "brute beauty and valour and act" (its fearlessness and physical abilities), but importantly sees these as proof of a type of metaphorical "fire" that also "breaks" from Christ, to whom the poem is dedicated. This fire is God's creation. Think about it as a kind of molten lava flowing underneath the surface of all (seemingly individual) things—and making them part of one perfect whole. The fire, according to the speaker, is the source of all existence and is stunningly beautiful.

And it's here the speaker makes the poem's final but crucial point. This "fire" isn't just perceptible in things that are obviously beautiful and impressive (like the bird, or, perhaps, a spectacular view); the fire of creation burns brightly within *all* things. Like embers fallen from a fire, even unremarkable surroundings can contain intense, "gold-vermillion" beauty. As an example, the speaker mentions the mundane and repetitive task of plowing the soil, which brings the reward of food and sustenance. A secondary, less literal meaning of this "sheer plod" could be the way that human beings serve God by staying true to their spiritual development. That is, even if the rewards of doing so don't seem immediately obvious, or if the spiritual path seems fraught with difficulty, sheer effort forms an important part of the expression of God's creation. Like the falcon's full-hearted expression of *falcon-ness*, humans serve God through seeking him.