

A HARD FROST - CD LEWIS

Summary

This poem is describing the beautiful scene the poet saw one day he woke up in winter morning – the appearance of hard frost that had formed overnight and the changed appearance of the world. The most prominent imagery used is the frost and snow, likening them to brilliant white diamonds, which shine and reflect in the sunlight. These are used to portray a beautiful scene of white snow spreading all over the forest.

Usually the forest in Winter gave people a sense of cruelty, harshness and lifeless, but after having a white frost coating on the dead trees, mountains, everything seemed to become glamorous and attractive. Besides portraying the stunning scenery, the poet also relates the transformation in nature to human life cycle which lies beneath the cold and snow.

The poem is structured into two stanzas – the first describes the scene and the second reveals the speaker's views about this description.

The Title

hard – suggests that the frost was cold-hearted, merciless.

Stanza 1

Line 1

A frost came in the night and stole my world

Frost- symbolises the arrival of winter. It is a thin layer of ice that forms when the air becomes cold.

came in the night – change happened suddenly. This creates an image of a thief who takes whilst the occupants are sleeping at night

stole my world – Tone – accusatory. He accuses the frost of theft as it has stolen the expected scene and replaced it with a fake. The frost is given magical, mystical powers in its ability to accomplish this transformation. He has been robbed of something that he cherished, something that was valuable (*my world*).

my world – emphasises that he was having difficulty adjusting to the change. His “world” has been transformed or “stolen” by the frost and is no longer the same.

Lines 2-3

And left this changeling for it - a precocious

Image of spring, too brilliant to be true:

He comments on how the world's appearance has been radically altered by the layer of frost, and in such a way that suddenly the surroundings seem almost spring-like. The glittering and sparkling of the reflected frost creates a bright image but, as the speaker admits, this is '*too brilliant to be true*' (line 3).

changeling – something secretly exchanged for something else/ A baby that is secretly left to replace another baby.

Tone – dissatisfaction.

precocious – developed pre-maturely. A child that has certain attributes of an adult at a very early age

Image of spring –the day is sunny and bright and looks like it may be spring.

too brilliant to be true –the ice has covered everything and the light of the sun makes it sparkle. Despite the glittering beauty, the speaker points out that this appearance is deceiving. He elaborates on the deception in the next few lines.

Lines 4-5

White lilac on the window-pane, each grass-blade

Furred like a catkin, maydrift loading the hedge.

The imagery suggests spring flowers and the freshness of new growth. This is a false image of spring because it is winter.

white lilac on the window-pane – An extended metaphor is used to compare the ice patterns on the windows to white lilacs (type of flower). Lilacs are frequently herald the arrival of spring. White lilacs represent youthful innocence.

... each grass-blade/Furred like a catkin – Simile – the frost-covered grass is compared to catkins, a long, thin cluster of tiny, petal-less flowers growing on oaks, poplars, and other trees. This emphasises that everything was covered by the frost, including every blade of grass.

maydrift – another flower associated with spring.

Lines 6-9

The elms behind the house are elms no longer

But blossomers in crystal, stems of the mist

That hangs yet in the valley below, amorphous

As the blind tissue whence creation formed.

are elms no longer – even the elm trees are different. This emphasises the extent of the transformation. They look totally different.

blossomers in crystal – metaphor – the frost on the elm trees look like flowers made out of ice.

... stems of the mist/ That hangs yet in the valley below – Double deception: the elm trees look like stems of a flower growing out of the mist. Mist is also associated with early spring.

... the mist/That hangs yet in the valley below – there is no mist except in the valley. All other traces of it have disappeared.

amorphous - without a specific form, like the mist

... amorphous/As the blind tissue whence creation formed. – Simile – the mist is compared to how life is created.

Stanza 2

Lines 10-14

*The sun looks out and the fields blaze with diamonds
Mockery spring, to lend this bridal gear
For a few hours to a raw country maid,
Then leave her all disconsolate with old fairings
Of aconite and snowdrop! ...*

The sun looks out – personification – sunrise is compared to a person

the fields blaze with diamonds – metaphor the droplets of water, that form as the frost melts, reflect the light of the sun. This is compared to the way a diamond reflects light. The reflection of the sun on the ice looks like a field of sparkling diamonds.

blaze – figurative - emphasises intensity of the bright light of the reflected sun.

Mockery spring – the reflected light creates a false sense of spring. He regards this as an absurd imitation because nothing grows in winter.

bridal gear . . . country maid – Metaphor – compares the way the ice beautifies the country to a wedding dress that is being lent to a country maid for a few hours. The frost is “new clothing” for the fields and it makes the plain country look like a newly adorned bride for a while until it melts.

Then leave her all disconsolate with old fairings – The metaphor is continued. She will be left terribly sad when she has to return the bridal dress and resume her usual, boring appearance.

raw – she is not very good looking/plain

The contrast of *aconite* (a beautiful but poisonous flower, similar to a buttercup) to *snowdrop* (drooping white flower) emphasises the transformation that has taken place.

Lines 14-15

... No, not here

Amid this flounce and filigree of death

... No, not here – Introduces a change. Double negatives (*No, not*) emphasises the change in the point of view of the speaker.

flounce – an exaggerated action intended to express annoyance or impatience

filigree – ornamental work of fine (typically gold or silver). This is an apt description of the frost as it melts.

Amid this flounce and filigree of death – Winter is associated with death, a sense of cruelty and harshness. The poet is emphasising that the frost was exaggerated and ornamental. It was more for show than of real substance as it melted when the sun rose. All the beauty and ornamentation of the ice, frost and snow is really meaningless.

Lines 16-20

*Is the real transformation scene in progress,
But deep below where frost
Worrying the stiff clods unclenches their
Grip on the seed and lets
the future breathe.*

The real change is not the frost that is melting above the ground. Rather, it is below the ground.

... where frost . . . the future breathe – as the frost melts, the water loosens the soil and the seeds.

The personification creates an image of a contest of strength taking place beneath the ground where the earth is surrendering its frozen hold to the power of spring. This allows the seeds the chance to sprout, grow and break out of the soil to promise future life and growth. The real “work” of regeneration and procreation is happening under the frost and soil in the ground as the seedlings prepare for the summer.

THEMES

- The power of nature / The cycle of life – the transformation from death to life that takes place with the arrival of spring.
- The transient beauty of the countryside after the frost at night / the brilliance of the beauty of the scene transformed by frost.
- Throughout the poem, besides portraying how beautiful the hard frost coating on the forest was, the poet also wanted to show us that after Winter, seeds will grow and life is restored. Applied it to humans: illnesses and deaths caused unhappiness, but after these hard times, there will be new hope and joy.

TONE

- accusatory
- admiration
- admonition
- pity

QUESTIONS

1. Identify the how the tone and mood of this poem changes? Substantiate with reference to diction and imagery. (3 x 3)
2. Discuss the poet’s feelings towards the morning frost? Substantiate with reference to diction and imagery. (4)
3. Is the image of the bride suitable? Substantiate your answer. (3)
4. Discuss how the last five lines of the poem convey the central idea of the poem. (3)