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A Hard Frost

Cecil Day-Lewis (1904 – 1972)

Romantic/Modern

Describes the appearance of a hard frost that formed overnight. Patterns of frost form on glass + how it sparkles in morning sunlight

Glossary

Changeling — something exchanged secretly
Precocious — developed earlier than usual
Catkin — spiky flower
Maydrift — remnant
Elms — remnant
Amorphous — w/o a form
Mockery — absurd imitation
Disconsolate — w/o comfort/unhappily
Aconite — flower similar to buttercup
Snowdrop — drooping white flower
Flounce — impatient movement
Filigree — ornamental + delicate
Clods — lumps of earth
Unclenches — loosens

Theme:

Focuses on the tension between appearance + reality

Form:

2 stanzas—similar length
 No traditional rhyme scheme + lines + stanza arrangement set up to support content

Sound Devices

No overt reference to sound.

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
 Whimsical

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
 Mesmerising

1st Stanza—describes the scene

1 A frost came in the night and stole my world

2 And left this changeling for it - a precocious

3 Image of spring, too brilliant to be true:

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

5 Furred like a catkin, maydrift loading the hedge.

6 The elms behind the house are elms no longer

7 But blossomers in crystal, stems of the mist

8 That hangs yet in the valley below, amorphous

9 As the blind tissue whence creation formed.

10 The sun looks out and the fields blaze with diamonds

11 Mockery spring, to lend this bridal gear

12 For a few hours to a raw country maid,

13 Then leave her all disconsolate with old fairings

14 Of aconite and snowdrop! No, not here

15 Amid this flounce and filigree of death

16 Is the real transformation scene in progress,

17 But deep below where frost

18 Worrying the stiff clods unclenches their

19 Grip on the seed and lets

20 the future breathe.

2nd Stanza—comments on the scene + exposes the truth of the 1st stanza

Speaker comments on how the world's appearance has been altered by a layer of frost—so sudden it almost seems spring-like (opposite in fact)

Glitter + sparkle of reflected frost creates a bright image but the speaker admits this is too 'brilliant to be true'.

Extended metaphor: compare the image of frost on a window to different features of spring.

Imagery suggests spring flowers + freshness of new growth 'maydrift'.

L7 despite the glittering beauty the appearance is deceiving. Accuses the frost of theft—stolen away expected scene + replace it with fake ... frost-given magical mystical powers in its ability to accomplish this transformation.

Oppose to this fake appearance of spring the 'real' spring is beginning to make itself felt unnoticeably underground

The heavy coating of frost would blanket the world in sharp silence + the brittle crispiness of this is implied in the mention of 'crystal' 'diamonds' L7+10

Metaphor: comparing the white frost blanket to a wedding dress. contains quite a disapproving tone.

The wedding dress is being lent to a country maid for a few hours but she will be left terribly sad when she has to return it + resume her usual boring appearance.

Alliteration: suggests the disapproving tone of the speaker.

Personification: 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 and break out of the soil to promise future life to go.