GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS:
A STUDY IN THE POETRY OF DIVINE ECOLOGY

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This essay attempts in a general way to view critically the major, complete poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins. The text is that of W. H. Gardner and N. H. Mackenzie. Many thanks are owed to John A. Lester, Jr. and Alfred W. Satterthwaite of the Department of English of Haverford College. Their advice and criticism have been most helpful. But I owe the greatest debt of gratitude to Philip D. Church of the Department of English of Kenyon College. Through him I first met Hopkins, and with him I learned the most about how a poem means.
Poet and priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins has perhaps the most unique and compelling voice in the poetry of his age. Although the corpus of his works is small, the distinctive qualities of his verse give him a prominence at once recognizable, for he writes with the devotion of a true theologian and the passion of an accomplished artist. But theology and art must be grounded on more than themselves if they are to be universally significant and revealing. Hopkins' poetry communicates a comprehensive vision of life in which all forms of existence relate with a divinely ordered purpose. The human, the natural, and the supernatural compose an experience which singularly affects the poet, and his poems mediate that experience. Their more important function, however, is to awaken the reader to peculiar ideas, responses, and sensibilities of the poet's thoughts and emotions. The transcription of one man's experience succeeds when it nourishes others in a different age, revitalizing their conceptions and feelings about the world around and within them. Assured by his faith and quickened by his artistic sensitivities, Hopkins reacts creatively to his total condition. Through his poetry we share with him a sense of divine ecology, the study of the relations between organisms and their environment,
guided by the constant awareness of the godhead and its sacramental forms as they are expressed in the spiritual and corporeal worlds.

It would be rash to propose that this approach offers a complete view of Hopkins' achievement. It purports merely to suggest the wholeness of the poetic experience in which we emotionally encounter religious principles, philosophical notions, aesthetic ideals, social criticism, and, of course, an eminent poetic artistry. A proper literary critique requires consideration of individual poems, and fortunately Hopkins authorizes many of his dominant themes and poetic devices in a number of major poems, thus permitting us to use them as outlines for the rest. The spirit of the works varies in tone and color, projecting a multitude of moods, intents, and insights, but the vision of life they produce commends their interdependence. Close to them is a great mass of biographical material, the journals and letters, tempting the critic to extrapolate needlessly in an attempt to interpret the poems from the events of the poet's life. Such criticism does injustice to their intrinsic worth as poetry. Apart from several esoteric terms which must be explained by the poet's own commentaries, the poems stand by themselves. Their composition, meaning, and effect merit detached analysis and response.

II

Hopkins' early poems display nothing extraordinary. The daring of the mature works, their inimitable prosody and style, is nowhere evident. The poet is learning his art, experimenting with conservative ease; he is also gaining a solid faith. The poems range from
sensuous, visionary odes, reminiscent of Keats but lacking that perfect balance of spirit and sense characteristic of the greatest poems of both Keats and Hopkins, to meticulously fashioned celebrations of Roman Catholic tenets and sacraments. Sonnets, imaginative dramatizations of scripture, meditations, and nature poems prologue later triumphs. Yet the germinal spirit of the best verse presides. The sense of natural beauty, the growing faith, and the spiritually functional position of man weave throughout. Little of the later dynamism is present, but the critical awareness of the interrelationship of all things shapes several of the group's best poems. The sonnet "Let me be to Thee as the circling bird" predicts things to come.

Let me be to Thee as the circling bird,  
Or bat with tender and air-crisping wings  
That shapes in half-light his departing rings,  
From both of whom a changeless note is heard.  
I have found my music in a common work,  
Trying each pleasurable throat that sings  
And every praised sequence of sweet strings,  
And know infallibly which I preferred.  
The authentic cadence was discovered late  
Which ends those only strains that I approve,  
And other science all gone out of date  
And minor sweetness scarce made mention of:  
I have found the dominant of my range and state —  
Love, O my God, to call Thee Love and Love.

The word of God is written in the phenomena of the natural world; its constant perfection renders all human accomplishment trivial by comparison. Realizing this, man must love his creator and find his love in the harmony and beauty of nature, for the love of God, from within and without, is the ultimate principle of existence. The nature of God resembles, as the poem stresses, the melodious consistency of music, but only through

the veil of nature and in his own heart does man apprehend God, responding with the supreme praise of love, the divine capacity of his human nature. A theological scheme, a view of nature, and a theory of human action are all implied, but the poetic craft is unexceptional. None of the artistry of the later poems lifts the reader's response to the high pitch of "The Windhover", nor do the poem's elements contribute significantly to a richer experience of its meaning. The work, of course, is not intended to arouse the vigor of its more famous successors; its creator maintains a contemplative mood in accordance with his technical reserve. The true artist within him has yet to mould his feelings into a form which realizes the vibrance of life itself, stating his religious, aesthetic, and social views. The coherence of ripe vision waits in the future when, like the alchemist in "The Alchemist in the City", Hopkins must quit conventional appearances and "find in the horizon round/ One spot and hunger to be there."2

III

Hopkins' close friend, Robert Bridges, has aptly called "The Wreck of the Deutschland" a dragon lying before the gates. In contrast to the poems that follow it, the work is long; its purpose is large. Attempting to explain theologically the events surrounding a natural catastrophe, the poet depicts a definite world scheme. Nature, man, and God dramatize the unifying sacramental themes of Christ's incarnation and resurrection. The poetic imagery is developed accordingly, and the music of the poem accommodates the mood: the electric excitement

2. Ibid. P. 25, lines 31-32.
of the storm is conveyed masterfully by the simple, brisk vocabulary, the scuttling alliterations, and the sprung rhythms. However, certain difficulties must be surmounted. Hopkins' metrics require a highly stylized, often inverted phrasing which makes the reading more than a casual affair. We are never allowed to skim over the poem. Rather we must study it carefully to ascertain its general meaning, and because of its length, the process occasionally becomes tedious. But once grappled, the beast looses a spirit of considerable power, beauty, and ingenuity—in fact public voice for a public unknown.

"The Wreck of the Deutschland" is the first poem in the body of Hopkins' mature works. Dedicated to the memory of five Franciscan nuns lost in the Thames estuary, it is both a dramatic elegy and a zealous statement of the condition of Christian life. In two parts, it records the fundamental principles of the poet's world view, his faith, and poetic techniques. The manifold relations between the individual, external nature, human society, and the divine resolve into the purity of poetic vision, while image, sound, and rhythm sustain a tone of epic grandeur and lyric subtlety. Part I portrays the poet alone.

PART THE FIRST

1

Thou mastering me
God! giver of breath and bread;
World's strand, sway of the sea;
Lord of Living and dead;
Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
And after it almost unmade, what with dread
Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee. 3

3. Ibid. p. 58.
The primary nature of God is here expressed. He is all, beginning and
end; his omnipresence brings terror and dread to the feeble human crea-
ture. As the second and third stanzas explain, the terror of Christ
causes an inner tempest, but between man and God is the human heart, the
final bond of relation and the means of awareness. God touches man, like
a finger, and man responds by the total affirmation of his psyche. Cast
between Hell and a stern master, he obeys. More than the emotions forces
the poet to assert the awful majesty of his creator and preserver; it is
the ecstatic obedience of the spirit to the author of divine grace, mani-
fest in the heart's terror and the drama of lightning. And the conse-
quence is the elevation of the human spirit from hollow fear to beatific
communion. The system of revelation and assent grows first from the
nature of man.

4

I am soft sift
In an hourglass--at the wall
Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift
And it crowds and it combs to the fall;
I steady as a water in a well, to a poise, to a pane,
But roped with, always, all the way down from the tall
Fells or flanks of the voel, a vein
Of the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift.

Man is the object of divine subjection. He is impelled, drained, filled,
and fulfilled by the pressure, gift, and principle which constitute
Christ's incarnation in human beings. The images of the fourth stanza
effectively describe this idea of human nature, and as often in Hopkins'
poetry, they arrest our attention, causing us to reconsider them as a
result of their cadence, expression, and obscurity. Hopkins is fond of

4. Ibid. p. 52.
archaic and otherwise unfamiliar words such as "voel" and "fell", and they are the source of initial exasperation but ultimate delight, once their meaning is realized.

A composite portrait of man emerges. His being is manipulated but miraculously endowed by Christ who, directing the motion of human existence through time like sand in an hourglass, completes life like the water which courses from thickly planted hillsides to supply a well. The fourth stanza tells us that a vein and tension of awareness must be present between God and man, and Christ's incarnation serves that end. But as the fifth and sixth stanzas explain, God also reveals himself through nature, and man's relation to external nature is crucial.

5

I kiss my hand
To the stars, lovely-asunder
Starlight, wafting him out of it; and
Glow, glory in thunder;
Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west:
Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder,
His mystery must be instressed, stressed;
For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand.

6

Not out of his bliss
Springs the stress felt
Nor first from heaven (and few know this)
Swings the stroke delt--
Stroke and a stress that stars and storms deliver,
That guilt is hushed by, hearts are flushed by and melt--
But it rides time like riding a river
(And here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss). 5

5. Ibid. p. 53
As a statement of the ecological position of man, these two stanzas are preeminent. God's omnipresent operation in nature, his mystery, informs man of Himself, and man must always be primed to feel the revelation, to instress. Obedience and patience are exigent human virtues, for the heart must endure without doubt or question. The perceptive faculties, the senses and the heart, discover the glory of God in a peculiar fashion. Two terms, instress and inscape, relate the individual's apprehension of the divine presence as it exerts itself through external nature and within human nature. Hopkins' aesthetic relies upon these two notions. Instress, as stanzas 5 and 6 tell us, refers to the inner zeal to feel God as His stress is sensed by one's own perceptions of external nature. Natural forms impinge upon the human consciousness to communicate the perfection of God. The stars, thunder, lightning, and all else, gentle or rough, participate in a cosmic drama to make man experience his creator, again to feel God's finger touch him and raise his apprehensive heart in ecstacy. Instress is inconstant; it blazes periodically. When it occurs, God's perfect nature may be confirmed by the individual nature of any of His created forms. Hopkins calls this phenomenon inscape. In a letter to Coventry Patmore, he defines his coinage, saying "what I call inscape, that is species of individually-distinctive beauty of style." A passage from his journal clarifies the relation between the divine and the natural, which is reflected by his conception of in-

scape and instress.

I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our lord by it. Its inscape is mixed of strength and grace, like an ash tree.\(^7\)

The unique form, style, and composition of a finite flower, its inner landscape, makes known divine qualities, and man again finds God. He instresses God's mysterious actuality with his feelings and his senses. And so the commerce between God and man continues; the heart flies to God Who meets man in nature. It is a deeply personal, spiritual relationship which gives meaning to human action, purpose, and thought. But God's mystery cannot be understood, only felt. The artist imitates God, bringing to his works a resemblance of nature, the divine handiwork. And the mystery of creation haunts art just as it fills nature. Hopkins' poems affect us, yet we may not fully comprehend their meaning. Poetry exceeds metaphysics in that respect. Man can produce inscape; he can cause instress. Inscape is the very soul of art, writes Hopkins to Dixon.\(^8\) It places art in right relation to all of created existence. God creates nature, and man creates art. Between God, man, and nature, an active spiritual bond exists, for as the final stanzas of Part I proclaim, all rest upon Christ and His sacraments.

Dante writes that every interpretation of scripture (and hence religious poetry in general) must have meaning in terms of the life

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of Christ. Hopkins agrees. Christ's life, sacrifice, resurrection, and incarnation are central to "The Wreck of the Deutschland", and the final four stanzas of Part I hail Christ as the root of life. It is God's greatest mystery that through Christ all else gains importance. Nature is not simply a referent of divine action; it is an instrument of God Himself. Since the advent of Christ, the holy spirit has been incarnate. For man, the phenomena of nature, both spiritual and sensual, constitute the living proof of God's infinite love, which rouses the greatest response of the human spirit with the promise of salvation. God's mystery is instressed, never understood. Adoration is the prime function of man; the unfurling of his heart to God is the necessary action of his life, and when his heart is hard pressed, he knows Christ's passion best. Through God in Christ man enjoys the highest spiritual beauty and awareness attainable on earth. And Christ's revelation is mysterious and paradoxical. Lightning and love, starlight and thunder, winter and warm, subsist in Christ. He steals upon man's heart like Spring, and also crashes in upon human life like a hammer on an anvil. He is most merciful when He darkly descends. What of Christ nature unfolds to man forms a multitude of sensual events which point toward a single spiritual reality. Christ inhabits human nature, as all else, and He charges man with the purest passion, the ecstasy of the heart submerged in the divine will, beyond the scope of earthly rationality.

Part I of the poem resembles a prayer. A detailed statement of single man's conception of his god and the relation he bears him, the ten stanzas exhibit the invocation, explanation, and confirmation of divinity. And a theological system has evolved, giving a dynamic perspec-
tive of God, man, and nature. This first part seems both a general assertion of principles and an overture to the second part of the poem in which the mood changes. The poet retires from personal reflection and praise to assume the stance of a preacher. He applies his doctrine to the events of the sea wreck, as he artistically reconstructs them. Our attention shifts. Whereas we have heard only a single voice in Part I, the second part portrays dramatic action. Hopkins' skill as a narrator is often outstanding; however, at times, his imagery may disquiet the non-Roman Catholic reader. Of course, we must not doubt the sincerity of his faith, and consequently we must view some of the images with the sensibility to appreciate their function, although they may limit the universal appeal of the poem. Like Crashaw and Southwell before him, Hopkins' poetic and religious sentiments are closely fused in his works, and we should never ignore one in preference for the other.

The inevitability of death introduces the second part of the poem. A sour scythe, a blear share, death shears the flower of life. The Deutschland sails and impales herself on a sandbar. Two hundred souls hang in the fearful balance of storm. Hopkins' poetic art shines magnificently as he envisions the scene.

One stirred from the rigging to save The wild woman-kind below, With a rope's end round the man, handy and brave— He was pitched to his death at a blow, For all his dreadnought breast and braids of thew: They could tell him for hours, dangled the to and fro Through the cobbled foam-fleece. What could he do With the burl of the fountains of air, buck and the flood of the wave?
They fought with God's cold--
And they could not and fell to the deck
(Crushed them) or water (and drowned them) or Rolled
With the sea-romp over the wreck.
Night roared, with the heart-break hearing a heart-broke rabble,
The woman's wailing, the crying of child without check--
Till a lioness arose breasting the babble,
A prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told. 9

The heroic sailor dies in the attempt to save the stranded women below,
and the chilling spectacle of his tethered corpse evokes all the terror
of the tempest wracked night. The helpless affliction of the cold suf-
ferers, the roaring sea, and the women's cries produce a piteous resonance
until the nun rises up. A line worthy of Dante describes the heroic pre-
sence of the central figure of the poem. A lioness, a prophetess, and a
virgin, she reacts to the calamity with inalterable resolve. The poet
himself is affected by a strange, exultant sense of joy instead of tears.
The tragedy at hand beckons not distress but again implodes the notion
of God. In stanza 19 the tall nun braves watery destruction and calls
out in solitary grandeur, moved by her greater holy calling.

Sister, a sister calling
A master, her master and mine!-
And the inboard seas run swirling and hawling;
The rash smart sloggering brine
Blinds her; but she that weather sees one thing, one;
Has one fetch in her: she rears herself to divine
Ears, and the call of the tall nun
To the men in the tops and the tackle rode over the storm's
brawling.

10. Ibid., p. 57.
Impervious to the blinding storm, she looks beyond what seems to be a most cruel veil of tears. This passage is as fine as any in the poem. It communicates the atmosphere, meaning, and feeling of the whole work. The theological relationship between man and God, the purpose of nature, and the position of other men are suggested. Natural danger presents no threat to the sanctified nun, for she comprehends a greater force than the storm. Her voice falls on divine ears, not the pathetic men who hang in the rigging above, helpless to save her. Her call rises above them and above the storm. More than human assistance awaits her and her companions. Her direction, her fetch, is determined. Hopkins now digresses to give the background of the nuns. Four stanzas stress their divine nature which seems to necessitate a glorious martyrdom.

Again, in stanzas 20–23, the inscrutable mystery of God appears. The holy nun and Luther are flowers of the same soil, and Cain and Abel are of one mother. Beast and lily flourish on the same earth, for as stanza 21 declares, the earth supports both the flawed and the perfect. Since the Fall men have denied God, and evil has spawned. The nuns have been exiled from their German home; their destination, should it be England, would ruin them. Nature itself seems hostile. Yet above all is Christ, and in all He lives. Within a select few, like the nuns and their patron St. Francis, Christ grows more purely. And so their sacrifice is not a disaster but an act of divine grace. The phenomenal world itself moves with a holy intention. The tumultuous sea brings not simply a painful death but a shower of lilies; the nuns themselves correspond to Christ's five wounds, and the mystery of incarnation is enacted once more. The poetic effect tends to be rather cloying unless one sympathizes with Hopkins'
Roman Catholicism. Storm flakes are literally scroll-leaved flowers, and lily showers to the nun and the poet. The blood of Christ pours from the stigmata wounds, not an emblematic equivalent. It is an admirable quality of his vision that Hopkins conceives earthly life as a Christian metaphor.\textsuperscript{11} Natural events are Christ incarnate, for He is their author and master. In man Christ lives, revealing His divinity more ardently in some than others. So animate a metaphor transforms the reality of natural experience into the cosmic poetry of God. All that is inexplicable, mysterious, and ambiguous remains the creation of an intuition impenetrable to the human intelligence. Like the nun, man can only trust valiantly in a greater purpose as God discloses His will in the living symbols of Christ, His spirit incarnate in corporal form. More skeptical readers may, however, be less courageous.

Hopkins now turns temporarily to contrast his own placid situation with the nun's plight. While he rests far away in the safety of Wales, the gales rage about the tall nun who calls Christ to her, imploring Him to come quickly. The poet reflects upon her, and he wonders at her majestic stature. He ponders why she should call for her death and willingly offer herself as a sacrifice. Is it an act of love comparable to Christ's death? Is it with the expectation of heavenly comfort after combative strife that she bids Christ come? After contemplating how the heart rejoices in the earthly beauties of nature, Hopkins asks the nun "What by your measure is the heaven of desire,/ The treasure

\textsuperscript{11} For a long but somewhat restrictive study of this idea, see Robert Boyle, S.J., \textit{Metaphor in Hopkins}, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961).
never eyesight got, nor was ever guessed what for the hearing?" He concludes that not in the earth's sensual beauty is her heart fixed. Christ's passion lies more tenderly in the sanctum of prayer, amid the fury of the sea. The nun's heroism is lodged in Christ, and He in her heart.

29

Ah! there was a heart right!
There was single eye!
Read the unshapeable shock night
And knew the who and the why;
Wording it how but by him that present and past,
Heaven and earth are word of, worded by?
The Simon Peter of a soul! to the blast
Tarpeian-fast, but a blown beacon of light.

30

Jesu, heart's light,
Jesu, maid's son,
What was the feast followed the night
Thou hadst glory of this nun?--
Feast of the one woman without stain,
For so conceived, so to conceive thee is done;
But here was heart-throe, birth of a brain,
Word, that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright. 13

Her doom is her triumph, the fulfillment of an immaculate passion. Coincidentally, the feast of the Immaculate Conception followed the night of the storm, mysteriously relating the nuns' death to the perfection of the Virgin. The tall nun becomes Christ's bride, for she alone is aware of His presence behind the very human fear of death. Intuitively she feels His love in the savagery of storm. Impregnated by His glory, her mortal being, heart and brain, accedes to the calling of His Word written in the storm; she answers with her call for the spiritual union promised by death. What Christ enjoys in the nun can be no carnal delight, but the fusion of

13. Ibid., p. 61.
Himself in Himself. God's act of love for man can only be His love for Himself; His glory is Himself, for He is all that truly exists. All else is illusion, an expedient created to illuminate the only actuality, God Himself. And therefore the nun's death is not to be pitied but praised. The endurance of temporal pain and the maintenance of spiritual patience, her earthly virtues, speed her to heaven's treasure, the blessing of Christ's resurrection. For the rest, there is pity and the comfort of salvation, for inspiration flows from the nun. Her perfection is stressed. Guided by the finger of God, the holy force which sparked the poet, she shepherds mankind as a bell startles wayward sheep to the fold. Her example lauds human faith, confirms the sacrament inscaped in all men. And perhaps the shipwreck carries the supreme reward rather than the final loss.

The climax of the poem has passed; the nun's heroic death has been justified. Hopkins now acclaims God as the poem draws to a close.

32

I admire thee, master of the tides,
Of the Yore-flood, of the year's fall;
The recurb and the recovery of the gulf's sides,
The girth of it and the wharf of it and the wall;
Stanching, quenching ocean of a motionable mind;
Ground of being, and granite of it; past all
Grasp God, throned behind
Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides, bodes but abides;

We finish where we began, in God, the ground of all being, the sovereign spirit. He circumscribes all existence; he mysteriously penetrates all

with a love which makes death the servant of immortality. He mercifully generates Christ to save man, and in the storm and the silence, Christ's passion fetches forth the human spirit. Christ is the chivalrous giant of the phenomenal world and the receptacle of silent prayer. He pervades the hearts of all, and He lives in every heart to be summoned by the revelation of Himself in the whole of nature. And His manifestations can be terrible. The poet calls upon Mary, the agent of divine mercy, to make His second coming "A released shower, let flash to the shire, not a lighting of fire/ hard-hurled."15 The poem ends with a prayer to the tall nun, an analogue of Mary. Hopkins asks that the English regain their former Roman Catholic faith, and he hopes that Christ will "easter" in men, to redefine their lives with His sacraments. For temporal man, Christ remains the only reality, His sacrifice the foremost event of history through which all things are comprehensible. Christ confronts man not as a passive principle but as the dynamic force of creation to shock recognition of Himself into the hearts of all. That men respond to Him witnesses their sense of the religious in life, for He is truly that which binds together the elements of the universe.

In the years following the composition of "The Wreck of the Deutschland", Hopkins' poetic capabilities reach apogee. His best poems constellate against a natural landscape, both corporeal and spiritual, which effects the most felicitous elucidation of his vision and displays his finest poetic skills. As if to preface his achievement, He gives us "God's Grandeur." One of the most famous and no doubt one of the

15. Ibid., p. 62.
best of his works, the poem contains the foundations of many of the better poems. It captures the general ecological perspective of God, nature, and man while retaining an inner harmony of expression which distinguishes Hopkins' best poems. Each word possesses the emotional potential to make the poem's most prosaic observation a passionately evocative experience comparable to such vigorously imaginative works as "Pied Beauty" and "The Windhover." Its simplicity of style, stability of tone, and clarity of viewpoint allow it to frame this segment of Hopkins' poetry without the risk of over-simplification. The poems to be considered fall between two longer works commemorating shipwrecks, "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and "The Loss of Eurydice" dated 1875 and 1878 respectively.

The initial premise of "God's Grandeur" demonstrates that electric potency in the diction of a seemingly straightforward statement of God's relation to the world.

31

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. 16

The suggestion of magnetic energy transmuted into the host of ideas associated with grandeur intensifies the metaphorical conception of the presence of divinity. Beauty, magnificence, greatness and the other abstractions inherent in grandeur become startling revelant. A reflection upon not only God, nature, and the world commences, but contemplation concerning the abstract and the concrete, the spiritual and the sensual, begins. And

16. Ibid., p. 66, lines 1-4.
the poet satisfies this inquiry by two particularly effective descriptions of the grandeur of God. The first deals with a personal, blazing revelation recalling the passage about stress and instress in "The Wreck of the Deutschland." God's grandeur, vibrantly present in nature, streams periodically into human consciousness like a rapid, flickering glare of metal foil shaken in the light. The communication of the divine existence in the external world illuminates the finite human mind and spirit with a dramatic awareness of a universal spiritual basis of life coexistent with the ordinary reality of sensual experience. The second simile depicts the result of this awareness. Once apprehended, God's grandeur congeals like oil crushed from olives or other similar fruit. The human spirit coalesces with the divine, and all tensions between the notion of being and the idea of grandeur dissolve. Feelings have supplanted reason; instress and stress are one. The spiritual abstraction of grandeur becomes a primary actuality when we realize the position of God in relation to phenomena. He is the vital principle, the dynamo of existence; his omnipresent nature envelops all distinctions. The natural world serves a mediating function between God and man; it is an agent of revelation uniting human nature with the cosmos and its creator. Man must rejoice in nature as does Hopkins in several joyful poems, especially "Pied Beauty."

37

Pied Beauty

Glory be to God for dappled things--
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced--fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle trim.
All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.  

The artistic excellence of Hopkins' verse forms an insep- 
erable complement to the tenets of his theology and other cares. In poems  
like "Pied Beauty" his art raises the tone of the works from sheer emo- 
tional exuberance to the splendid gladness of a hymn. The richness of  
natural imagery shaped by an extraordinary ear and eye, the bold use of  
alliteration, and the exquisite sense of harmonic balance personalize Hop- 
kins' view of the natural environment. The simple assertions of the first  
and last lines affirm the poet's sense of theological purpose: they state  
the essential idea of the poem, but their juxtaposition with the complex,  
intermediary images vivifies the central contract between God and nature,  
and it portrays the ways of artistic sensibility. God is immutable, past  
change; his natural progeny are minute reflections of his eternal beauty,  
and their flux magnifies his constancy. Variety and contrast, distinction  
and difference, all the elements of the changeable, organic universe indi- 
cate the sublime unity of God. Each inscape directs the heart and intel- 
lect to that conclusion. And man possesses the divinely given ability to  
reproduce natural beauty, transforming the perceived experience into a  
spiritually evocative form capable of expressing the silent mentors of  
consciousness, the human feelings. Hopkins' delight with the dappled qua-

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situation by words used in a unique way. He verbally inscapes his poem just as he finds inscape in nature; he recasts the rapid, dazzling, transient, dappled style of things which have a single holy purpose and relationship. The poet relates to his environment by opening his heart, allowing his spirit to gather to a greatness of revelatory feeling; the natural world gathers in the service of heavenly praise. Both point to God, and together in art, inscape of nature converted into words by instress of spirit, they catch for eternity the ephemeral moment of holy communion. And we reciprocate when we permit the poem to broaden our vista of the world and perhaps to make us feel something of the mystery of God's grandeur.

Other poems share the ecstasy of "Fied Beauty." "The Starlight Night" and "Spring" emphasize the saturation of nature by the holy spirit, waiting only for men to open their eyes and hearts to discover it. But most human sensibilities are less well tuned than the poet's, and God is passed by. Much of the gloom in Hopkins' poetry derives from his recognition of men's indifference to their creator. He laments in "God's Grandeur."

Why do men then now not reck 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 sail
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod. 18

A new dimension has entered Hopkins' poetry. He has assumed the poet's role as the social conscience of his age; his concerns run farther than the personal experience of man in relation to nature and religion. The

18. Ibid., p. 66, lines 4-8.
condition of humanity obstructs his sensitive eye and arouses a sense of urgency within him. "The Wreck of Deutschland" briefly refers to the astringent environment of human life, but the notion is left undeveloped, being only a counterpoint to the heroism of the nun and the purpose of nature. The longer poem is primarily a Christian allegory, and therefore its concentration remains strongly theological. The shorter poems are more balanced. Their theological content is tempered by other cares; their scope becomes subsequently more universal. Hopkins' poetic vision is most lucid when, as in "God's Grandeur", an interplay of many ideas exists. It is evidence of his maturity as a poet that he can manipulate a variety of themes in sympathy with his fundamental religious views. That at the same time he creates a distinct poetic form assures his greatness as a literary figure. Hopkins is at his best when he writes with a full ecological perspective, and the nature of man, whether in the individual's experience or the condition of a society, holds the main focus of his attention.

In our age of concern with the ecologic condition of the land, Hopkins' words should quickly attract attention, regardless of their religious implication. The waste of the natural environment and the corresponding corruption of the human spirit represent the severest afflictions. How persuasive a conservationist is Hopkins, for he tries to save the purity of the spirit by preserving the natural world. God speaks through nature, and if man heeds, recks His rod, the human spirit can attain its greatest mortal fulfillment. Yet when the factory and the mine pollute nature's beauty to provide the artificial beauty and power of secular wealth, when the heart longs for less than divine communion, man
is lost. His life as a complete human being deteriorates; he becomes an anomaly in the scheme of things. A stanza from "In the Valley of the Elwy" expresses the sentiment.

Lovely the woods, waters, meadows, combes, vales,  
All the air things wear that build this world of Wales  
Only the inmate does not correspond:  

The industrial rape of physical nature can only be matched by man's callous disinterest in natural things. Like Henry David Thoreau several decades earlier—and an ocean apart, Hopkins deplores the social condition of the men about him. He castigates their values which blind their senses to the ultimate realities of life, distort their understanding of true beauty and greatness, and deprive their lives of the religious ecstasy of God's permanent revelation in nature. Trade obsesses the minds of all; it sears not only human sensitivities but scars the land itself. And toil, the Victorian path to progress and success, disfigures the soul and mars the earth with the sooty vanity of a singularly human honor. Man's sensibilities have been monstrously contorted. The naked soil no longer communicates the grandeur of its creator, for it lacks its primal beauty, and like his shod feet, man's heart can no longer feel. "The Sea and the Skylark" dramatizes his pathetic alienation.

The Sea and the Skylark

On ear and ear two noises too old to end  
Trench—right, the tide that ramps against the shore;  
With a flood or a fall, low lull-off or all roar,  
Frequenting there while moon shall wear and wend.

19. Ibid., p. 68, lines 9-12.
Left, off land, I hear the lark ascend,
His rash-flesh re-winded new-skeined score
In cries of curl off wild winch whirl, and pour
And pelt music, till none's to spill nor spend.

How these two shame this shallow and frail town!
How ring right out our sord turbid time,
Being pure! We, life's pride and cared-for crown,

Have lost that cheer and charm of earth's past prime:
Our make and making break, are breaking, down
To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's first slime.

Art follows nature as Hopkins' repetitious sounds capture the precise constancy of the activity of the sea and the bird. And when their noises part, the blank separation of sensations is deftly recreated by the word "trench." The monotonous rhythm of the sea beats with tonal majesty while the music of the ascending lark spills with the snapping rapidity of a rope peeling from a winch. Under the moon's constraint the sea operates within the harmonic frame of the cosmos, and in flight the bird sings with the energy of undefiled nature. No dull generations trod with them. A note of ironic disillusionment taints the poet's voice as he makes the self-evident contrast between the purity of the ancient natural order and the imperfection of man, nature's most illustrious creature. Nostalgia for the pristine past and distaste for the mechanistic present seal his dreary conclusion. Man's current creative ingenuity, "Our make and making break," reduces his spiritual stature to that of his primordial, slime born ancestors. The earth's prime is past as Hopkins remarks in "Spring," after he has described the celestial beauty of Spring. The origin of joy, like the origin of grief, is in the Garden of Eden. Human failure is but a scion of Eve's fall from grace. Having lost immortality on earth, he has also

20. Ibid., p. 68.
lost the sense of nature's immortal beauty. He arrogantly presumes upon nature with the same blind pride that brought about the fall. Again man and nature reenact scriptural truth. God's imprint never stays unfelt.

Though the technological horrors of his age burden the human spirit, Hopkins does not forbid its regeneration. "God's Grandeur" concludes:

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.22

Nature provides for its loss, and human nature experiences a recrudescence of its spiritual purity—a perfect instress. The electric current of God's presence sustains the organic grandeur of life; should it depart, all would drift into darkness. Nature's transience, the passage of light into dark, the dappled and the pied, poses no uncertainties; the renewal of natural being, like the rising of the sun, guarantees the interest of the creator in his masterwork. Man can cast off despair. The resurrection of Christ and the unfailing attention of the holy spirit stand by as eternal guardians. In "The Lantern out of Doors" Hopkins compares the life of man to a lantern passing through the darkness. Its glow eventually disappears from human eyes as men vanish in death from life and mortal scry. Man cannot fathom his life once it has ceased in nature, but Christ can and He cares to do more than understand.

Death or distance soon consumes them: wind
What most I may I eye after, be in at the end
I cannot, and out of sight is out of mind.

22. Ibid., p. 66, lines 9-14.
Christ minds: Christ's interest, what to avow or amend
There, eyes them, heart wants, care haunts, foot follows kind,
Their ransom, their rescue, and first, fast, last friend. 23

Christ is man's ultimate refuge; his resurrection is man's perfection.
And Hopkins' pun upon "minds" intends no docile sarcasm but marks a critical difference between the human and the divine. God through Christ cherishes man, assuring his salvation from savage, self-imposed affliction.
The spiritless drudgery of life encumbers him, and makes him less divine in nature. "The Caged Skylark" links the listless existence of an imprisoned skylark to the incarceration of man's mounting spirit when he lives without Christ. In nature, the bird lives in right relation to all else; its life is then pure and complete, for the creature finds its natural peace. Man's peace is Christ's redemption of him. His natural form, spirit and flesh, persists without the foul incrustations of sordid human indifference.

Of all of Hopkins' poems, "The Windhover" is the most famous and, indeed, the best—so pleased with it was the poet that he dedicated it to Christ. It illustrates his vision with faultless precision.

God, nature, man, and art, the forces of Hopkins' spiritual life, unite magnificently in its form, meaning, and effect. Unlike "God's Grandeur", it views a single event, the activity of a bird, but its universal implications embrace all that its predecessor delineates.

23. Ibid., p. 71, lines 9-14.
The Windhover

To Christ our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimp ling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes, plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

The first stanza explains the nature of the bird and the poet's response to it. It is the companion of the morning, the royal first son of daylight, and its appearance has Hopkins' beloved dappled quality. Its action shows mastery of the winds, the ecstatic dominance of natural power. And the grandeur of its performance stirs the poet's heart. He responds with the primary power of his being. How then does the natural correspond to the divine? Both in presence and activity, the bird resembles Christ; it is dramatic analogue, a witness of Christ's mighty incarnation in nature. Again nature metaphorically represents supernatural qualities, and the poet, being human, shares in the spirit of both. The concentric theological scheme of God, nature, and man stands before us, but the praise Hopkins raises to Christ is born in his heart not in the abstraction of his mind or ours. He senses the divine by responding to the natural

24. Ibid., p. 69
phenomenon which itself praises its creator. Christ's beauty, his strength, and his passion can all be found in the bird, just as they existed in the bluebell and the roaring sea. An inscape of nature, the bird flying in the morning sky restresses the awareness of Christ's perfection. A hierarchy of communication is established in a single moment of personal revelation. In the artistic transmutation of the experience, the poet attempts to portray the natural situation and the feelings it stimulated. The protracted sounds of the initial lines majestically recreate the bird in steady flight; its sweeping movements produce the abrupt alliterative pace that follows. The imagery of royal chivalry suggests the bird's commanding function and, of course, makes the analogy between God and the daylight, Christ and the bird. The simile of the skate heel pleasantly contrasts the great and the ordinary as both meet in the bird's perfect motion. And to complete the total ecological perspective, Hopkins participates; his heart bounds forth in ecstasy, the finest mortal activity. It is the action, the achievement of, and not the sedate conception which he celebrates. A verb replaces the expected noun as Hopkins exercises his own poetic sensibility. Another poem, "Hurrahing in Harvest", recounts a similar ecstasy. A barbarously beautiful day at summer's end draws out the poet's heart and brings Christ, man, and nature into relation.

I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes,
Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour;
And eyes, heart, what looks, what lips yet gave you a
Rapturous love's greeting of realer, of rounder replies? 25

All of nature, like the bird, attest to the conclusion of "God's Grandeur."

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25. Ibid., p. 70, lines 5-8.
Divinity lovingly sustains nature. Its revelation occurs either by feeling of the comprehensive unity of all things or by the flashing penetration of consciousness by an individual aspect of the natural environment—or both may happen together. Both constitute an act of love. Mortal blood strains toward its divine source; the sacrament of the incarnation again bonds man to God through Christ. A union of the holy spirit, in both human and external nature, consummates the being and the function of all natural things. Hopkins disdains neither; he rejoices in both unencumbered in the service of a higher spiritual reality. When man, nature, and God greet each other, all earthly life briefly regains pre-lapsarian grace.

Suddenly the bird turns abruptly or plummets, and the second stanza begins. The crux of the poem centers upon the interpretation of the word "buckle." W. H. Gardner has wisely provided alternate meanings of the word.26 It means to prepare for action, to come to grips, or to engage an adversary; more conventionally it means to bend, collapse, or crumple; and finally, to tie on. In the literal context all apply. The bird's altered motion shows a disconnection from earlier, grand movements; its action, valorous and proud, momentarily breaks, and its general bearing commends the heroism expressed in the first interpretation. The third meaning fits well with the tone of the first stanza. The windhover binds together the chevalric qualities of its natural activity. And in the darker sense, the spiritual activity the bird inscapes not simply refers to Christ's crucification but to all creatures which emulate his nobility. The tall nun displays all the courage suggested by the bird; like

Christ both fall in the service of God, buckle and burst. The bird's flight is broken; the nun discards all care for mortal safety. Christ possesses strength and brilliance; nature replicates both. The sun flashing, dappled plumage of the bird streaks like fire; the fire of Christ's passion begun on Calvary burns in the poet's heart and the tall nun's prayer. Danger ignites the natural and the spiritual as well. A dangerous plunge toward earth tells of the risk of faith, that ultimate investment of human purpose, founded upon the certain yet perilous impulse of the heart.

The progression of personal events from detached observation to total enthralment ends with a sententious reflection. The bird's activity is not miraculous; the animal acts according to its natural and consequently divine purpose. Man, earthbound below, functions with equal dignity: his plow gleams as it upturns the shiny moist soil. What Hopkins means by the phrase "plough down sillion/ shine," is subject to debate. Either image of brightness, the plow or the soil, suffices to praise the organic freshness of the earth and the worth of labor on the earth. Lowly embers, like the humblest human beings, even contain inner brilliance which flares out in praise of Christ and the world he lovingly supports.

Hopkins has gathered a comprehensive world picture, both spiritual and physical. He glorifies the order of creation by reproducing its nature in verse. His action and his art directly relates his own nature to the nature of his creator. The holy spirit activates the universe, and the human spirit reacts creatively. Changing perspectives, the poem measures the flux of the spirit as it moves in response to corporal phenomena. An ethical system grounded upon Christian theology,

27. Ibid., p. 69, lines 12-13.
a philosophy of nature, and a theory of art construct an aesthetic experience that explicates the poet's sense of beauty. He defines beauty in his "Fragments of Floris in Italy", iii, (Poem 102).

Beauty it may be is the meet of lines,
Or careful-spaced sequences of sound,
These rather are the arc where beauty shines,
The temper'd soil where only her flower is found.
Allow at least it has one term and part
Beyond, and one within the looker's eye;
And I must have the centre in my heart
To spread the compass on the all-starr'd sky:  

The natural landscape, the composition of phenomenal relationships, and the human heart form the experience of earthly beauty. By apprehension and response, inscape and instress, beauty flowers. As Hopkins' poetry demonstrates, beauty can be manufactured. But the sense of beauty is never an end in itself; the poet's art serves more than an aesthetic purpose. Mortal beauty can be dangerous, for it distracts the heart, and the love it engenders may exult less than the purest goal of man's life. Beauty must always be understood in a religious frame of awareness. The final stanza of "To What serves Mortal Beauty?", a later poem, counsels discretion.

What do then? how meet beauty? Merely meet it; own
Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift; then leave, let that alone.
Yea, wish that though, wish all, God's better beauty, grace.  

The world of "God's Grandeur", "Pied Beauty", and "The Windhover" bestows heaven's sweet gift but only for an instant. During the ephemeral revela-

28. For a melodious statement of the nature of beauty, see "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo." (Poem 59).
29. Ibid., p. 146, lines 1-8.
30. Ibid., p. 98, lines 11-14.
tion, man, nature, and God hold a common spiritual relationship born of
divine love, sealing all experience in eternal beauty, God's grace. And
when ecstasy ceases, and the embers lie cold, despair should not dampen
the heart, for the proof of God's love has already been given.

After the joyously creative period of 1877, Hopkins' poetic abilities are firmly established. The subsequent poems display a widening technical competence although the subject matter remains much the same as the earlier works. Two longer poems written in quatrains, "The Loss of Eurydice" and "The May Magnificat" stress the theological explanation of natural events. The first deals with a shipwreck but in a far less complex manner than its long predecessor. Hopkins arouses considerable pathos as he laments the plight of the drowning sailors and their kinsmen's grief. He is particularly successful when he visualizes the wreck, and his conclusion again dramatizes the spiritual decay of his generation and the militant image of Christ thundering through nature. "The May Magnificat" refreshes our memory of Hopkins' joy in nature's growth and procreation, the Virgin Mary's animation and the reminder of her holy function as the mother of man's salvation and her own. Consternation with human abuse of nature and the consequent destruction of personal sensibility reaffirm the poet's social conscience in "Binsey Poplars" and "Duns Scotus's Oxford." Yet he retains a spirited zeal as he lauds Scotus as his constant inspiration. The highly individual, highly selved view of the universe, Scotus's view, appears in Hopkins' praise of Purcell.

Not mood in him nor meaning, proud fire or sacred fear,
Or love or pity or all that sweet notes not his might nursle:
It is the gorged feature finds me; it is the rehearsal
Of own, of abrupt self there so thrusts on, so throngs the ear.
Let him oh! with his air of angels then life me, lay me! only I'll
Have an eye to the sakes of him, quaint moonmarks, to his
pelted plumage under
Wings: so some great stormfowl, whenever he has walked his
while

The thunder-purple seabeach plumed purple-of-thunder,
If a wuthering of his palmy snow-pinions scatter a colossal
smile
Off him, but meaning motion fans fresh our wits with wonder.

With the grandeur of the windhover, the great stormfowl, analogue of
Purcell's art and spirit, moves the individual heart like a smile of mys-
terious and wondrous affection—--that distinctive, evocative experience
caused by art—--which Hopkins himself often produces in his reader. The
action of the heart, the personal feelings mould the nature of the human
soul. "The Candle Indoors" examines the condition of the heart.

46
The Candle Indoors

Some candle clear burns somewhere I come by.
I must at how its being puts blissful back
With yellowy moisture mild might's blear-all black,
Or to-fro tender trambeams truckle at the eye.

By that window what task what fingers ply,
I plod wondering, a-wanting, just for lack
Of answer the eagerer a-wanting Jessy or Jack
There/ God to aggrandise, God to glorify.--

Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire
Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault:
You there are master, do your own desire;

What hinders? Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault
In a neighbour deft-handed? are that liar
And, cast by conscience out, spendsavour salt?

31. Ibid., p. 80, lines 5-14.
32. Ibid., p. 81.
The journey from the outer world to the inner, from night's darkness to the blackness of the soul will occupy much of Hopkins later feelings. A simple analogy between the heart and a candle gathers the conflicting powers of his religious feelings. Without the light of God, burning in the heart's vault, all human activity is palled without truth or substance. God must be aggrandized and glorified by the personal human conscience. Faith lights the candle indoors, but few men allow it to guide them. Instead blindness to the final purpose of life makes their tasks fraudulent and transient as incense. A dreary sonnet, "The Candle Indoors" nevertheless reflects Hopkins' concern with man, and it typifies his poetic style. The unusual vocabulary, the thorough use of alliteration, the rhythm, and the homely images of the candle and the deft-handed activity present the aspect of a sensitively perceptive, solitary individual striving to reconcile in verse the tensions between his heart's faith and his external human surroundings.

And the human heart redeems indifference. Hopkins can rejoice in man. He writes of the heart in "The Handsome Heart: at a Gracious Answer."

What the heart is! which, like carriers let fly--
Doff darkness, homing nature knows the rest--
To its own fine function, wild and self-instressed,
Falls light as ten years long taught how to and why.

Mannerly-hearted! more than handsome face--
Beauty's bearing or muse of mountaing vein,
All, in this case, bathed in high hallowing grace...

33. Ibid., pp. 81-82, lines 5-12.
And a young burgier, taking his first communion, encourages the priest, inspires the poet. His heart carries him properly, bears him well.

How it does my heart good, visiting at that bleak hill,
When limber liquid youth, that to all I teach
Yields tender as a pushed peach,
Hies headstrong to its wellbeing of a self-wise self-will!

Then though I should tread tufts of consolation
Days after, so I in a sort deserve to
And do serve God to serve to
Just such slips of soldiery Christ's royal ration. 34

Guided by his heart, the true center of his human world, he is vigilant, a soldier of Christ. Time's Andromeda, the victim in his allegorical sonnet "Andromeda", hears "A wilder beast from the West than all were, more/ Rife in her wrongs, more lawless, and more lewd." 35 Whether England is Andromeda, the beast her rapid fall from grace, and her Perseus distant, remains to be judged, but Hopkins' concern for the human spiritual condition, his own and others, stands fast by. A sonnet entitled "Peace" expresses his discontent with the state of human affairs. Men's wars upset him and challenge his faith. Consistent with his poetic vision, peace seems an industrious, wild wooddove which broods not coos, for such is the nature of human peace and heaven's being. Patience first, then dutiful service to God make for personal human peace. Such is the tall nun's example. And Hopkins performs his duty. "Felix Randal", one of his best poems, recollects the priest's holy duties and states most movingly the artist's sensibilities and capabilities.

34. Ibid., p. 83, lines 21-28.

35. Ibid., p. 85, lines 7-8.
Felix Randal

Felix Randal the farrier, O is he dead then? my duty all ended,
Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy handsome
Pining, pining till time when reason rambled in it and some
Fatal four disorders, flesht there, all contended?

Sickness broke him. Impatient, he cursed at first, but mended
Being anointed and all; though a heavenlier heart began some
Months earlier, since I had our sweet reprieve and ransom
Tendered to him. Ah well, God rest him all road ever he offended!

This seeing the sick endears them to us, us to it endears.
My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears,
Thy tears that touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal;

How far from then forethought of, all they more boisterous years,
When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amidst peers,
Didst fettle for the great grey drayhorse in his bright and battering sandal!

When flesh fails, the spirit trembles in direst anticipation. Happy (as
his name tells us) great Felix Randal, broken in body reluctantly sought
the sweet reprieve of his spirit, and the priest gave it. Compassion,
however, warms the middle stanza. The sight of the mortally frail, the
sick and the dying man, causes a sympathetic reevaluation of human kind
in others and ourselves. The poem's pivotal line, "This seeing the sick
endears them to us, us to it endears," artfully reminds us of our common
humanity. Though spiritual consolation may allay tears, tears themselves
touch the heart of the poet. The work forms not so much an ironic comment
upon the mutability of human wishes which accompanies the debility of hu-

36. Ibid., pp. 86-87.

37. Ibid., p. 87, line 9.
man strength, but relates man's natural sensibility of the human. That in his boisterous years, at the forge with his equine counterpart, Felix Randal could not have conceived his deathbed conversion (or last rites as the case may be), a reliance upon something other than himself, is secondary to the poet's own acknowledgement of a positive feeling for mankind, which may even supercede his divine cares, the priestly duties and the comfort they create. His poem "Brothers" ends with a very humane thought.

Ah Nature, framed in fault,
There's comfort the, there's salt;
Nature, bad, base, and blind,
Dearly thou canst be kind;
There dearly then, dearly,
Dearly thou canst be kind.

Nature, in man and elsewhere, brings forth care, but always for the care of the supernatural. "Spring and Fall: to a young child" beautifully portrays man, nature, and the linkage of their divine heritage.

Spring and Fall:
to a young child

Margaret, are you grieving
Over Godengrove unleaving?
Leaves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! as the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sorrow's springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

38. Ibid., p. 88, lines 38-43.
39. Ibid., pp. 88-89.
To the young nature seems the highest beauty and its decay a mournful thing. Shed leaves are only indications of universal natural impediment begun with the original fall. With experience man learns that he can grieve only for himself, because he is imperfect by nature. And sorrow's spring, the heart's sorrow, begins when natural things decline like the fall season. The chronic sense of mortal failure restresses the religious condition of man, rationally without certain explanation or understanding, for even science cannot give man freedom from age and death. A poem can communicate feeling, and this poem does precisely that. The poet manipulates words and symbols, develops a sequence of thought, and draws a conclusion. But the beauty lies not in the meaning of the poem but in its emotional effect. Its whole form, the relations of words and their suggestions, produce an inner expression of feeling, most profound to the poet himself but extant in his readers as well. Intellectually, we have gained little new; emotionally we may reform our sensibilities of nature, age, and sorrow. Our conception of the natural world is altered only in the way we respond to it. Nature and change are sempiternal; our feelings fluctuate according to the condition of our natures, the temper of our hearts. If we can connect our natures with the natural world in the recognition of a greater spiritual principle, like Hopkins we have grounded our total awareness, mind and heart, on something more than ourselves. Our ecological sense of the present and the past expands beyond scientific observation, and yet it is contained by the infallibility of holy scripture. Nature, man, and art exist to reveal God's own written truth. And for those who cannot accept such terms, Hopkins' poems provide an intimation, without personal dependence, of spiritual life. A personal feeling and perhaps an awareness
of the way things are may flame in the heart. Poetry does more than science or theology although it may serve both.

The earthly landscape and its relation to God and man feed Hopkins' imagination. "Inversnaid", "Ribblesdale", and others hail the holy diffusion of God's spirit in nature; they mourn man's brutal destruction of natural beauty. Two poems, "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe" and "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" contrast the poles of the poet's vision. The first joyfully exults the Virgin's existence by comparing her eternal spiritual presence to the omnipresent air; the second depicts the nature of human life without the mothering comfort of a Christian faith. Both are highly atmospheric poems. Their language and imagery soak them with emotion. One deals with the glorious richness and vitality of life; the other dwells upon the cold, impersonal aspect of human isolation from nature and God. The tone of the first is jubilantly thankful; the second austere and self possessed. A portion of "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe" declares Hopkins' energetic sense of Mary's universal grace.

60

The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe

Wild air, world-mothering air,
Nestling me everywhere,
That each eyelash or hair
Girdles; goes home betwixt
The fleeciest, frailest-flaxed
Snowflake; that's fairly mixed
With, riddles, and is rife
In every least thing's life;
The needful, never spent,
And nursing element;
My more than meat and drink,
My meal at every wink;
This air, which, by life's law,
My lung must draw and draw
Now but to breathe its praise,
Minds me in many ways
Of her who not only
Gave God's infinity
Dwindled to infancy
Welcome in womb and breast,
Birth, mild, and all the rest
But mothers each new grace
That does now reach our race--
Mary Immaculate,
Merely a woman, yet
Whose presence, power is
Great as no goddess's
Was deemed, dreamed; who
This one work has to do--
Let all God's glory through,
God's glory which would go
Through her and from her flow
Off, and no way but so.

She permeates all in spirit, giving salvation to all through Christ; her
mercy infinite; her grace is God's beauty; her sweetness inhabits all
things. The freshness of nature mentioned in "God Grandeur" represents
her nature. Compare her warmth to the cold, pagan indifference of "Spelt
from Sibyl's Leaves."

61

Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, vaulty, voluminous,
...stupendous
Evening strains to be time's vast, womb-of-all, home-of-all,
hearse-of-all night.
Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the west, her wild
hollow hoarlight hung to the height
Waste; her earliest stars, earlstars, stars principal overbend
us,
Fire-featuring heaven. For earth her being has unbound; her
dapple is at an end, as-
tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; self in self
steeped and pashed--quite

40. Ibid., pp. 93-94, lines 1-33.
Disremembering, dismembering all now. Heart, you round me right
With: Our evening is over us; our night whelms, whelms,
and will end us.
Only the beakleaved boughs dragonish damask the tool-smooth bleak light; black,
Ever so black on it. Our tale, Our oracle! Let life, waned
ah let life wind
Off her once skeined stained veined variety upon, all on two spools; part, pen, pack
Now her all in two flocks, two folds--black, white; right,
wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind
But these two; ware of a world where but these two tall, each off the other; of a rack
Where, selfwrung, selfstrung, sheate-and shelterless, thoughts against thoughts in groans grind.

Here we find none of the ecological balance of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" or "Pied Beauty." All is disjoined, intellectual, and dark. The lovely dapple of nature fades into eternal night; nowhere are the beautiful contrasts that stimulate our sense of God's grandeur. Allegorically all becomes diametrically reduced. Human kind divides into two flocks, one black, one white; one good, one evil, and between them the mind is torn. No unity of awareness is possible, only abrasive alternatives.
Such is life without Christian faith. The Virgin's mercy, the sense of hope and beauty she inspires through nature, vanishes in the convoluted darkness of the solitary intellect. With the disappearance of the sensual world, a spiritual deficiency occurs. And yet Hopkins does more than prophesy grimly. The select language, the expert choice of metaphor, and the droaning sound patterns of the verse transform the poem's rational ideas into an enfolding tissue of emotion to intensify our sense of solitude and loss. When God, nature, and man relate, an earthly paradise glimmers briefly, but when the heart is without the stress of the holy spirit, infernal darkness like the cavernous night sweeps over all.

41. Ibid., pp. 97-98.
Hopkins' poetic oracle rightly anticipates his mood to come. His infamous dark sonnets are born on "a rack/ Where, selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, thoughts/ against thoughts in groans grind."42

Before he plunges into despair, Hopkins again salutes Christ in the poem called "(The Soldier)." Like a common soldier, Christ's manly spirit moves his heroic purpose; his militancy protects man's soul, binds his heart in bliss. But the heart lies open to attack, and Christ's protection can be assaulted, as "(Carrion Comfort)", the first of the seven darkest sonnets proclaims. The fibers of Hopkins' faith are unraveling quickly; his hope slackens against his will, and he must, like a jackal, feast on despair, carrion comfort. It comes at him like a devouring lion, leaving him spiritually frantic, and he wonders why.

Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.
Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
Hand rather, my heart lol lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, cheer.
Cheer whom though? The hero whose heaven-handling flung me foot trod
Me? or me that fought him? O which? is it each one?
That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!)
My God.

Has his toil for spiritual perfection been the will of Christ Who shook him in ecstasy and terror? Or has he merely indulged himself in a selfish illusion? In any event, Hopkins' sense of religious purpose is uncertain. Christ seems an adversary rather than a savior, Hopkins an antagonist rather than a glad servant. His personal stature degenerates in his own eyes. Instead of praise for the grandeur of God, he offers only the

42. Ibid., p. 98, lines 13-14.
43. Ibid., p. 100, lines 9-14.
misery of his heart. Poem 65 tells us that his spiritual desolation is pitched past the pitch of grief, his mind is full of steep mountains, and Mary's invigorating relief is nowhere. The poem's imagery admirably communicates a mood of complete hopelessness. Like sheep his lamentations bleat pathetically of his helpless sorrow; they rise and fall like a hammer's voice on an anvil. His mind's fury drives his spirit sadly onward. With characteristic ambiguity he begs "Let me be fell: force I must be brief."44 Fell can mean a mountain pasture, a pelt, to be cruel or to be knocked down. All interpretations are appropriate. The pelt and the pasture man refer to the image of herds and to his own need for nourishment; the cruelty and the collapse may describe his spiritual actuality, the briefness of his heart's expression. Before him rise inaccessible mountains of doubt and thoughts of despair where no true Christian visits. Scorned by Mary's fecund mercy and vagrant as a lost sheep, he can only keep himself fed on himself. The ecological landscape provides no pasture for his heart. And so his endurance fails; his wretched self must creep away from the tempest of his mind, like Lear's poor forked animal, and in sleep, day's death, find a temporary mortal peace. God's peace is denied him, for his heart cannot rest in God's will. He struggles to entrust his whole spirit to something he cannot justify, and his relation to the natural world, God's agent of revelation, ceases.

Part of the reason for Hopkins' loss of faith is his estrangement from England and his family as sonnet 66 explains. He is in Ireland, "at a third/ Remove."45 His loneliness consumes him. England

44. Ibid., p. 100, line 8.
45. Ibid., p. 101, lines 9-10.
is the wife of his creative thought; in Ireland he lives between heaven
and hell. His heart feels unheard by heaven or mortal friends. Poem 67
continues his lament. His heart is shrouded by darkness, and he can only
dissect himself, alone without the spiritual yeast of Christ. Whereas Mochab
Hope man dead sleep, Hopkins merely reads it.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The loss are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse. 46

This spiritual masochism abates gradually. Adam's curse becomes more bear-
able. As Poem 68 advises, man must have patience in spite of his worldly
imperfection. His will must accommodate God Whose patience is infinite,
(Considering his weaknesses.) John Milton also discovered patience
and man must trust in God's providence. The task is hard, but from the
rubble of humanity, in the sour heart and the shabby streets, he can build
some hope. Poem 69, perhaps the most beautiful of these finely turned son-
ets, dilutes some of the pessimism of the rest.

69

My own heart let me more have pity on; let
Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
Charitable; not live this tormented mind
With this tormented mind tormenting yet.

I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless, than blind
Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet.

Soul, self; come poor Jackself, I do advise
You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile
Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size

46. Ibid., p. 101, lines 9-14.
At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile
's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather—as skies
Between pie mountains—lights a lovely mile.

In contrast to man's comfortless spiritual inadequacy, God's spirit glows
like the high sky vault. Man must wait until God smiles, through wind-
hover and stormfowl; until he reanimates the heart with joy and the mind
with preternatural vision. Alone man gropes absurdly, as the poignant
images of the second stanza explain. The grief of the isolated self is at
best convoluted and vain. Self-torment achieves nothing whereas trust in
God promises eventual consolation and fulfillment. From the introspective
darkness of the previous sonnets, Hopkins emerges not unchanged. His view
of the world is somewhat more severely detached; his attention centers less
enthusiastically upon the multiple relationships of God, man, and nature.
His ecological perspective becomes more human and less divine. His poetry
retains its distinctive style, but its spirit seems less exuberant. In
the few poems left complete we perceive the regeneration of his faith,
and we feel the tensions of his conscience as they find release in his art.

Hopkins' final interest in human matters takes the form of
a critical yet caring realism. He shows no more bile than is present in
God's Grandeur." Absent, however, is the ecstatic response to the divinely
charged presence of external nature. The plight of man's life nurses the
poet's discontent. "Tom's Garland: upon the Unemployed" reveals a compas-
sionate loathing of humanity. To fill the belly instead of the heart, to
live shod from the earth, to honor the nation but not the Savior, are the
cares of man. Mother earth is forgotten, and Hopkins despairs. He cannot

47. Ibid., pp. 102-103.
conform to the conventional man's environment. His thorny, intricate verse conveys his disenchantment. The naturalistic portrait of Tom, his coarse appetites and values, stand counter to the poet's own fine sensibilities. No windhovers break radiant beauty before him; only packs of ravening wolves havoc in the cheerless, sordid grime of the age. But humanity is not all wracked. "Harry Ploughman" makes a fitting companion piece to "Tom's Garland." With the anatomical precision of Walt Whitman, for whom he felt a professional affinity, Hopkins observes poetically the physical constituents of simple ploughman, unencumbered at his labor. The language, imagery, and sound sense celebrate the poet's mature sensibilities, and the poem's tone reminds us that his humanism has not condensed into cynicism. Similarly, his view of nature and man in "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection" remains loyal to the ultimate principle of his faith, and his art evinces the constraint of his malaise. Nature, however, seems less animate; Hopkins treats it more philosophically. A multitude of images describes the impermanent quality of all natural things, and the poet ends the work with theological certainty.

Enough! the Resurrection,
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping, joyless days, dejection.

Across my floundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam. Flesh fade, and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire, leave but ash:
In a flash, a trumpet crash,
I am all at one what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond.

48. Ibid., pp. 105-106, lines 16-23.
mond of existence. These are the elements of Hopkins' world view. They lack the organic continuity of his earlier vision, but they stress essentially the same awareness. Christ sustains man, allowing him to view himself objectively, to discard with subjective terror of doubt and self-condemnation. He comforts man with the promise of an immortal spiritual life, and man's mortal function is to praise that act which assures the fulfillment of the promise.

Hopkins' last four sonnets appropriately restate many of the sentiments which motivate him as both poet and priest. Poem 73 honors St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, a Jesuit laybrother, whose watchful, patient activities make him as exemplary as any of Christ's soldiers. The penultimate dip in the graph of Hopkins' poetic spirit derives greatly, as he tells us, from a lack of patience with God, man, and most of all himself. Poem 74 reconciles him with his God, but speaks of his doubts about mankind and himself. Again, in contrast to man, nature's operation returns in the activity of birds who build and create. Hopkins' unproductive "Time's eunuch," calls for rain to revive his roots. His spiritual and creative sterility settles in only after the composition of two last poems. The first, Poem 75, scorchingly examines man in all his gross simplicity and cools the poet's feverish heart. His final sonnet, "To R. B.", hails poetry, the necessary offspring of his soul.

To R. B.

The fine delight that fathers thought; the strong Spur, live and lancing like the blowpipe flame, Breathes once and, quenched faster than it came, Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song.

49. Ibid., p. 107, line 13.
Nine months then, nay years, nine years she long
Within her wears, bears, cares and combs the same:
The widow of an insight lost she lives, with aim
Now known and hand at work now never wrong.

Sweet fire the sire of muse, my soul needs this;
I want the one rapture of an inspiration.
O then if in my lagging lines you miss

The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation,
My winter world, that scarcely breathes that bliss
Now, yields you, with some sighs, our explanation.

Hopkins, the priest, the critic, the conscience, and the aesthete is always and foremost the poet. His ecological view of life, his verbal craft, and his faith meet in the common ground of his heart; together they join in verse. The communication of his feelings to us shapes an extraordinary experience. It should make us reconsider the natural world; it may cause us to discover the supernatural. But regardless of its permanent effect, we are affected momentarily by the intensity of the poet's voice, his feelings made articulate by the imaginative use of language. Sound, phrase, and metaphor, the tools of Hopkins' art, force us to open ourselves and admit something of his world.  

Ibid., p. 108.
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


