



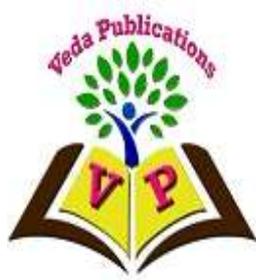
THE MANIFESTATION OF DEVOTIONAL ELEMENTS IN THE POETRY OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

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ABSTRACT



Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) was held to be a priestly metaphor of Victorian Poetry and a syntactical simile of Modern Poetry. He had prophetically been in search of the “authentic cadence” that paved the way for his spiritual fulfillment. Hopkins motivation is to know God; therefore, he crafts his poems in forms. For Hopkins, everyone is, in a small way, the image of God. By nature, Hopkins is a deeply religious man who has been an ardent believer in God and in the divinity of Christ. From his childhood, Hopkins has a very powerful ascetic strain in his temperament, Whereas the people of his age take pleasure in the facilities provided by the scientific discoveries. Hopkins wants to engage himself in his own solitude. The verbalized and mystic perception of God is metamorphosed into the utter poetic silence, chosen by Hopkins himself. Believing that the writing of poetry is self-indulgence for one who has decided to dedicate his life to God, Hopkins does not practise his hand on poetry for seven years. He engages himself in his self –chosen, austere devotion towards God by observing Jesuit orders, meditations, study of theology, noviceship and spiritual exercises. This paper deals with Hopkins’s constant awareness of the divine presence in the universe as well as his poetic attempt to achieve spiritual fulfillment.

Keywords: *God, Divine, Self-Indulgence, Noviceship, Spiritual Exercises.*

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Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) was held to be a priestly metaphor of Victorian Poetry and a syntactical simile of Modern Poetry. He had prophetically been in search of the "authentic cadence" that paved the way for his spiritual fulfillment. Hopkins motivation is to know God; therefore, he crafts his poems in forms. For Hopkins, everyone is, in a small way, the image of God. The essence of Christian devotion is the total submission to the Will of God who, infinitely perfect and blessed in Himself, created man out of His free will and make him share His own blessed life. As a Jesuit, Hopkins was bound by the Jesuit order to follow his mission. G. M. Hopkins is a poet who uses his craft as a means to relate to God. He sees God everywhere;

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God"
(*God's Grandeur*, 1)

Hopkins motivation is to discern God; therefore, he crafts his poems in forms. After all, God is manifested in forms -the forms of an insect, the form of a flower, a fish, a bird, a planet or a human being. For Hopkins, everyone is, in a small way, the image of God. He noted in his notebook of 1882;

"God's utterance of himself in himself, is God the word, outside himself is this world. This world then is word, expression, news of God. Therefore its end, its purpose, its purport its meaning is God and its life or work to name and praise him."

This is reiterated in his poem, *As kingfishers catch Fire...*

"Christ- for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
lovely in Limbs and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's
faces"(12-14)

Thus, for Hopkins, God is the expression for all the forces and powers that exist in the world.

By nature, Hopkins is a deeply religious man who has been an ardent believer in God and in the divinity of Christ. From his childhood, Hopkins has a very powerful ascetic strain in his temperament. Whereas the people of his age take pleasure in the facilities provided by the scientific discoveries,

Hopkins wants to engage himself in his own solitude. Whereas the whole world is brought closer together by the scientific achievements, Hopkins wants to take shelter in another word;

"I HAVE desired to go
Where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow." (*Heaven – Haven*, 1-4)

This fundamental feature of sainthood- the detachment from materialism - has developed in Hopkins from the very initial stage of his poetic course.

Keeping this in mind, Hopkins faithfully practices the Easter communion and asserts:

"God shall strengthen all the feeble
knees." (*Easter communion*, 14)

In this way, in the due course of his spiritual practices, Hopkins has a glimpse of God in the form of love. He acknowledges;

"The authentic cadence was discovered late
which ends those only stains that I approve

Love, O my God, to call thee Love and
Love." (Poem: 16, 9, 10,14)

In this context, Virginia Ridley Ellis remarks:

"Hopkins's "authentic cadence" is the voice of his particular faith in those large "no man fathomed" mysteries of God that could not be limited or contained in language but were to him so certain that they could be sacramentally expressed by it. 'Mounted in the scarlet' he saw the world and worded it in his poems, never blurring its hard actuality, but never debasing to mere actuality its ultimately mysterious news of God. As an "incomprehensible certainty" he revered God, and in his best works every aspect of poetic language incarnates without limiting that inscrutable yet intensely distinct mystery that formed the center of his life and faith."

Thus, from the very initial stage of his poetic journey Hopkins has searched out the authentic cadence of life that is, Love is God, and God is Love. Thereafter,



this biblical cadence - "God is Love (cfJN 3.16) - nurtures Hopkins' thoughts and emotions throughout his life. He exclaims with delight;

"Love I was shewn upon the mountain side
And bid to catch Him ere the drop of day
See, Love, I creep and thou on wings dost ride;
Love, it is evening now and thou away;
Love, it grows darker here and thou art above;
Love, come down to me if thy name be love"¹³
(Poem: 17, 1-6) (*The Half way House*)

In order to devote his being towards the divinity, Hopkins commences such spiritual practices prescribed in Catholicism. It is practically evident in his poem *The Habit of perfection* (1866), composed just before his conversion. In order to perceive God's creative energy in a catholic way, Hopkins urges his eyes to shut themselves to the confusing picture which worldly activities offer to the beholder. He recites:

"Be shelled eyes, with double dark
And find the uncreated light:
This ruck and reel which you
remark coils, keeps and teases
simple sight." (9-12)

In order to follow such spiritual exercises, Hopkins admonishes each of his senses to shut out the material world He prefers silence because he has ears only for the songs in praise of God.

Consequently, having accepted Roman Catholicism, Hopkins's verbal expressions are transfigured in Jesuit utterance:

"Christ Jesus our Lord -her God and her son.
In the Gardens of God, in the daylight divine
Show me thy son, Mother, Mother of Mine."
(*Rosa Mystica*, 28-30)

However, this verbalized and mystic perception of God is metamorphosed into the utter poetic silence, chosen by Hopkins himself. Believing that the writing of poetry is a self indulgence for one who has decided to dedicate his life to God, Hopkins does not practice his hand on poetry for the next seven years He engages himself in his self –chosen, austere devotion towards God by observing such Jesuit orders, meditations, study of theology, noviceship and spiritual exercises.

But this self imposed poetic-silence is broken by the suggestion of the superior of the Jesuit order in the context of the disaster of the wreck of the Deutschland. This titanic disaster of the drowning of the five Franciscan nuns, along with two hundred people, in the mouth of the Thomas induces Hopkins to utter his theological poetic outburst. Consequently, through the poem, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1875), Hopkins speaks of the abstract idea of God in concrete terms;

"Thou art lightning and love. I
found it, a winter and warm;
Father and fondler of heart
thou hast wrung; Hast thy dark
descending and most art
merciful then" (stanza -9, 6-8)

The love of God, according to Hopkins, which "rides time like riding a river" demands suffering and submission both from us and from Christ. It should, however, be noted that Hopkins is not denying the valid mystical experience to all those visionaries who lived before the coming of Christ. On the contrary, he states definitely;

"Though felt before, though in high flood yet-
What none would have known of it, only
the heart, being hard at bay." (Stanza -7, 7-8)

To Hopkins, it seems that the glory of God seen in Nature has to be proclaimed by human beings. But the fullest revelation of God to man as in Christ's suffering is perpetuated in time through the sufferings of human beings. The number of nuns is identical with the number of wounds which Christ received at the time of his crucifixion.

Thereby Hopkins metaphysically upholds that God is beyond the comprehension of human beings. He is the omnipotent ruler and the sovereign power behind death. He is aware of all things but remains invisible. He knows what will happen but does not prevent the free action of human beings. Hopkins propounds his catholic faith by articulating that Christ is the medium through whom prayer can be directed to God for those who themselves are past prayer;

"The Christ of the Father compassionate,
fetched in the storm of his strides."

(Stanza -33, 8)



The most noteworthy point is that Hopkins brings off the poem to its denouement with an implication that the disaster of the shipwreck is a brief and localized event representing Christ's visit to mankind.

Proceeding further, Hopkins conceptualizes the grandeur of God by employing the surprising metaphor of an electric force through his poem *God grandeur*, he proclaims;

"The world is charged with the grandeur of
God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to greatness, like the ooze of oil
crushed." (1-3)

There is warmth here in his depiction of God that doesn't surface in all his religious poems. He exclaims enthusiastically that the world is full of the glory of God. He says reflectively that this glory will burst out like the foil of gold and gather greatness like the oil crushed from olives. He further explains that just as oil becomes useful only when crushed out of seeds, likewise, man partakes of God's glory, only after religious devotion. It seems that Hopkins carefully chooses these complex images to link the secular and scientific to mystery, divinity and religious tradition. Electricity was an area of much scientific interest during Hopkins's day. It is an example of a phenomenon that has long been taken as an indication of divine power but which is here explained in naturalistic and rational terms.

Thus, being dazzled by the glory of God, Hopkins sings a hymn in praise of God through his poem *Pied Beauty*. The Poem begins with "Glory to God for dappled things" and ends with "He father forth whose beauty is past change; Praise him". So, the two parts of the poem are like mirror - images of each other. The parallelism of the beginning and the end correspond to a larger symmetry within the poem. The first part begins with God and then moves to praise his creation. The last four lines reverse this movement, beginning with the characteristics of things in the world and then tracing them back to a final affirmation of God. Thus, for Hopkins, God is the beginning and end of everything.

Thus, by the virtue of his poem *Pied beauty*, Hopkins expresses the theological position that the great variety in the natural world is a testimony to

the perfect unity of God and the infinitude of His creative power.

Similarly, for Hopkins, the glory of God is visible in a sudden flash in the riding of the falcon or windhover. Initially, Hopkins beholds the falcon as "morning's minion kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple -dawn- drawn", But at once, realizing that his own heart is "in hiding" or not fully committed to its own purpose, Hopkins draws inspiration from the bird's perfectly self-contained self reflecting action. Just as the hovering is the action most distinctive and self-defining for the windhover, so for Hopkins, striving is man's most essential aspect. Hopkins depicts the windhover's motion with the horse -and - rider metaphor and embellishes it with the phrase "My chevalier!" which is a traditional medieval image of Christ as a Knight on horseback. Therefore the poem is subtitled as *To Christ our Lord* which gives the reader a clue to the divinity of Christ. He says;

"No wonder of it; sheer plod makes plough
down sillion Shine and blue - bleak embers ah
my dear,
Fall, gall themselves and gash gold-vermillion"
(*The windhover*, 12-14)

Whereas, through the medium of kingfishers and dragonflies, Hopkins sings the uniqueness of each created things in the theological terms he faithfully believes that everything in the whole scale of creation strives in its own way to assert its identity or unique selfhood and by doing that it gives glory to God. He says:

"I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace; that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is -
Christ." (*As kingfishers catch fire...*, 9-11)

Thus, Hopkins synthesizes the theological idea of God's immanence in the world with the Christian belief that Christ dwells within the hearts of men. He adds that it is by the grace of God that human beings are what they are and asserts that it was through divine grace that Christ came to redeem men from sin.

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