

# Literature and Catholicism in the 19th and 20th Centuries



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Edited by

David Torevell

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# FOREWORD

DAVID TOREVELL

If Nicholas Boyle is right, then literature is the employment of engaging language, free of instrumental purpose, which seeks to tell the truth. It shows us the significance and beauty of life and has an undeniable association with Being. In other words, it is revelatory. As Boyle (2004) writes, ‘*our* truth is being told to us and we look each other in the eyes and know that our truth is everyone else’s’ (2004, 130). The revelation communicated to us is that life *matters*. This insight is allied to a sense of vital enjoyment which comes about because all creation is important – even the sparrows on the window ledge. Such a recognition reflects a *Genesis* trope – ‘God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good’ (1, 31). Literature sustains this endeavour by the memorable and innovative acts of representation of those things which are of worth to God. Whether low or high life, comic or serious, consoling or tragic, a Catholic approach to literature always conveys the worthwhileness of living and dying. Representation becomes another act of creation or, more precisely *recreation*, as it encourages those who receive it to be reformed in a shared response towards those things which are true and life-giving. There is a life embedded in literature which we recognise in conjunction with our own lives, primarily through our shared humanity and the relationships we form; there is also the wasting of it.

The Catholic literary revival in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, discussed in this book, illustrates and celebrates this positive philosophy of life. It draws attention to how an impressive corpus of literature during this period reflects deeply Catholic themes and trajectories – for example, sacramentality, self-sacrifice, ritual, beauty and many others. Some of these writers were ‘cradle Catholics’, many were converts, and one, Thomas Mann, was neither, though you may be surprised to read about his Catholic sensibilities. Drawing from the autobiographical novelist Antonia White’s observation that Catholicism exhibits a creative paradox of the supernatural and otherworldly with the human and ordinary, a large percentage of the book reflect this convergence. The contributors deal with how their chosen

authors reveal a paradoxical truth about life, a claim which admits there is no significant division at all between human life and supernatural life as one cuts deeply into the other, so as to make them inseparable. Enjoyment of the things of God is made possible simply by being alive and remaining open to the wonder and sadness of everyday life and what they teach us about our universe, ourselves and others.

In his discussion of the modern Catholic literary landscape, Joseph Pearce (2014) suggests Catholicism - although no longer illegal as it was in Campion's and Southwell's Reformation days - is still considered 'illegitimate'. Perhaps 'irrelevant' is a better word, judging by those critics who airbrush out its significance and the role it plays in numerous artistic endeavours during (post)modernism. As the literary theorist, Terry Eagleton astutely puts it, the present western age regards religion, interiority and a stable self as nothing more than 'a clapped out metaphysics', but as he warns, 'to eradicate them is to abolish God by rooting out the underground places where He has been concealing himself' (2015, 186-7). More broadly, David Jasper argues that the discussion between literature and theology continues to be a crucial one, for it introduces us to the deep traditions by which we have been formed; we forget, to our peril, the nature of theology and 'the place of humanity within the span of its history and *sub specie aeternitatis*' (2016, 10).

My opening chapter discusses the way in which beauty and vocation are inextricably linked in the poetry and prose of the Victorian Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Living a holy existence by means of a 'heart right' was the goal he sought, but he came to realize that this was always associated with his vocation as a poet and priest, along with his appreciation of Christ's beauty witnessed in humanity and in nature. *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola*, in which he took part, reminded him of this association and the need to offer a 'sigh of consent', even if - and because - it entailed hardship and suffering. During the long retreat he made in December 1881 as part of his ongoing formation as a Jesuit, he took to heart the message of *Philippians, 2 5-11* about the sacrificial *kenosis* of his Saviour, something he sought to echo in his own life as a priest and as a poet.

The next discussion by Professor Adam Schwartz (Christendom College, USA) sets the scene for our journey into the Catholic literary imagination in the twentieth century. He suggests that in the face of a 'confident agnosticism' during modernism, it was hardly surprising that a group of leading literary intellectuals would challenge such bold positions and begin



to articulate a spiritually based countercultural attack. This might be summarised as a rebellion against secularism, individualism, belief in Progress and cultural fragmentation, in favour of the supernatural, tradition, authority and what he refers to as ‘civilizational integration.’ If left unchecked, the very grain of Being would be trampled upon and the door pushed wide open to a flagrant and destructive will-to-power. In its place, Catholicism offered an anthropology rooted in the inalienable dignity of each person, a religious meaning to human existence and the stirrings of a moral imagination which would prevent people from collapsing too readily into avarice and the pursuit of selfish power. Catholic authors harnessed their literary skills and with their religious acumen and insight, formed a countervailing tradition in engaging and persuasive ways, a dynamic outlined throughout the book.

Two further contributions discuss Chesterton’s vision of a Catholic life and what it might entail. His 1904 novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is drawn on by Dr. Daniel Frampton to demonstrate how the author offers a creative ‘theology of participation’, epitomised by the author’s phrase ‘gazing with rapt attention at the row of little shops’, demonstrating how ordinary, localised things are more important than extraordinary, far off things, since they reflect divine creation. Adam Wayne is absorbed far more by Notting Hill than by world-shattering affairs. The streets themselves are starry and revelatory and point, like nothing else, to God and His wondrous work. The novel should not be seen primarily as Chesterton’s treatise on anti-imperialism, but on a theological truth – the embeddedness of transcendence within immanence. In other words, it forms an imaginary account of where we are most likely to discover God while on earth.

Professor David Deavel (University of St. Thomas, USA) homes in on this theme too, suggesting that Chesterton’s 1912 novel *Manalive*, through his portrait of Innocent Smith, captures a capacious and fully Catholic imagination. He relates this to the tradition of the *holy fool*, a trope identified within the broader Catholic intellectual tradition. This religious eccentric indulges in peculiar acts of poverty and charity, becomes an enigma to those closest to her and divorces herself from ordinary life. A biblical precedent for this is St. Paul’s teaching about imitating the suffering Christ in our endeavours - ‘we are fools for Christ, but you are wise in Christ ... we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless’ (Cor 4 10-11).

The first world war writings of three soldiers – Thomas Kettle, Patrick MacGill and David Jones -- form the subject of a chapter by Dr. Terry Phillips (Honorary Research Fellow, Liverpool Hope University, UK). Her

analysis situates their moving accounts within Christ's sacrifice and their identification with His saving mission. She contends that the figure of Christ provided a helpful parallel for those who believed the war was both 'holy' and 'just'. Kettle's writings show a strong feeling for the morality of war, coupled with a keen sense of national duty to fight; however, his view did not constitute an inclusive theology of redemption, since the children of Cain and the killers at the foot of the cross, were deemed unworthy of salvation. MacGill's work counters Kettle's theology by insisting that there is a shared Christianity between friend and foe, exhibited largely through the manner in which he emphasizes 'Christ as fellow-sufferer', rather than simply as redeemer. Jones' work might be said to be even more daring, as he emphasizes the sacredness of all human life and collapses all social divisions into one, witnessed most starkly in times of war, when pain and killing have no regard for rank. Published in 1937, *In Parenthesis*, highlights how the demonisation of the enemy was not shared by the ordinary soldier at all, and that all human beings, not just the allies, possessed a shared humanity with Christ.

Rev. Professor Dr. Michael Kirwan, S.J. (Loyola Institute, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland) deals with how literary modernism in the novels of Thomas Mann, reflects distinctly religious and in particular, Catholic themes. However, he argues that a 'special pleading' is required with regard to this German author because he is sometimes thought to be not only non-Christian, but also anti-Christian. However, Kirwan argues strongly that there is a powerful religious sensibility in his publications drawing from two of his works to outline this strand – *The Magic Mountain* and *Joseph*. In Mann's portraits of Hans Castorp (*The Magic Mountain*) and Joseph, we see a 'seriousness of ethical but also religious purpose'. The way into understanding this dynamic is by exposing Mann's 'ironical' style and his search for '*bürgerliche* (bourgeois) man'). Kirwan suggests that each of these themes has a theological ring to them, elucidating this claim with the assistance of Erich Heller who identifies a 'theology of irony' in the novelist and Johann Baptist Metz, who offers a critique of *bürgerliche* Christianity in light of the holocaust.

Dr. Emilio Castaño (Shandong University, China) examines the work of the early twentieth century poet and dramatist Manuel Benitez Carrasco, with particular reference to his play *Castillo de Dios* written in 1945. He argues this work was part of the revival of the *auto sacramentales* in Spanish theatre. The play is written in verse, has three acts and the plot traces salvation history from the Old to the New Testament. Reflecting the author's personal religious beliefs, the work was written only six years after

the end of the Spanish civil war and during the year the second world war ended. Fittingly, the chapter shows how the text might be read as a reminder and critique of the devastating effects of tyrannical power.

The contribution by Rev. Dr. Mark Bosco, S.J. (Georgetown University, USA) centres on a comparison between the sixteenth century Italian artist Caravaggio and Flannery O'Connor to illuminate how the writer explores the crisis of meaning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while at the same time embracing a Catholic medieval vision of life. He claims that her success is partly due to her skill in showing how the human and divine collide. He defends the view that O'Connor and Caravaggio have something essential in common in their countering of the cultural norms of their times. For Caravaggio, this was the Protestant distrust of art and any possible alignment with the propagandist intentions of his Catholic patrons, while for O'Connor this entailed challenging the secular assumptions of her time and the pietistic leanings of a misplaced, proud American culture. In their shared exposition of the grotesque and sometimes violent epiphanies of life, both might be said to have excavated 'the contours of a Catholic baroque aesthetic'.

Dr Michael Murphy (Loyola University, Chicago, USA) offers a chapter on two writers with same surname: O'Connor. He pinpoints the theme of revelatory moments in the experiences of child characters, expressed in Flannery O'Connor's 1953 *A Temple of the Holy Ghost* and Frank O'Connor's *The Face of Evil* (1954.) Murphy shows that in both writers childhood is presented not so much as an era, but as a geographical place – 'a location with scents and sights' linked to the notion of nostalgia and humanity's embarking on a journey of *exitus* and *reditus*, the procession from and return to God; this is associated with the mystery of place and space. In more theological terms, it is a lived experience of the incarnational and the sacramental. Murphy extends these notions by suggesting that Flannery's aesthetics is largely epistemological, a distinctive way of coming to know things, best summarised as a mode of Christian realism. He notes that Frank O'Connor asks his readers what might constitute a good Catholic? One answer lies in the battle against pride and narcissism, as well as the rejection of what he calls 'bourgeois' prescriptions of sanctity. Murphy's final section explores the notion of community and solidarity, key constituents in both writers and central strands in any understanding of Catholic living.

An important African-American perspective is given by Professor Carolyn Medine (University of Georgia, USA) in her discussion of Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved* (1987). The two central trajectories she explores are

moments of revelation during the exigencies of ordinary life and key rites of passage that transform and re-create human beings and situations. The chapter begins by recalling how Morrison's confirmation name is Anthony, the patron saint of lost things. Medine relates this to our amnesia about African-American life, particularly the life of enslaved women. She reads her novel through the lens of the Catholic imagination and a distinctly Black Catholic perspective. The chapter exposes how Morrison's text reveals not only the inherent goodness of the world, but also how this is frequently shot through with moments of revelatory significance either through a radical insight by one of the characters, or by means of a divine power slicing into the drama of ordinary life – in other words, *Kairos* moments. Healing brought about by ritual also reveals something distinctive about a Catholic way of life and it is this feature which Medine discusses at some length.

I hope you enjoy reading this Catholic vision of life.

## References

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I was sixteen years old and in the lower sixth of my Catholic grammar school in Blackburn, I decided to read during the Christmas holidays my first big novel – Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *The First Circle*. It had such an impact on me that I decided I wanted to read English Literature at University. This decision was endorsed by my inspiring ‘A’ level English teacher, Brian Donaldson, who revealed to me the wonders of Shakespeare and much else in the literary canon. As it happened, I ended up completing a combined degree in Religion and English Literature and I’m glad I did; it was an enriching experience.

This interdisciplinary interest continued after graduation and is reflected now in this book. It includes contributors who, like me, have a passion for great writing which deals imaginatively and subtly with theological ideas. I am deeply grateful to all the American, Irish, Spanish and British academics for their time, efficiency, warmth and generosity of spirit as well as their undoubted competence, as I compiled this text during the global pandemic. I would also like to pay tribute to the following individuals who have sustained me both personally and professionally, over a number of years: Michael Ford, Patrice Haynes, Elizabeth Harris, Richard Hooper, Clive Palmer, David Phinnemore, Damian Norton, Mike Thompson, Paul Rowan and Gordon Abbs. And to my close family for their love and support.



# THE CALL OF STRANGE BEAUTY IN THE POETRY AND PROSE OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

DAVID TOREVELL

‘Ah! There was a *heart right!*  
There was a single eye!  
Read the unshapeable shock night  
And knew the who and the why’  
(Hopkins: *The Wreck of the Deutschland* – st., 29).

## Introduction

The poetry and prose of the English Jesuit priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89), continue to inspire readers, academics and students alike, who regard him as one of the greatest of all late 19<sup>th</sup> century European poets (Brett, 1965; Ellsberg, 2017; Gardner, 1971; MacKenzie, 1970; Mariani, 2018; Robson, 2018).<sup>1</sup> In the light of western secularization and de-traditionalization, this is an intriguing phenomenon. This chapter focuses on two dimensions which assist appreciation of his work – *vocation and beauty*. While I expound these two categories as distinct facets of investigation, I

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<sup>1</sup> It was not until 1918 that Hopkins’ friend, Robert Bridges, sought to get Hopkins’ poetry published. 750 copies of his work were made available, but it took ten years to sell that number. The Jesuits themselves were never fully convinced of the beauty and significance of his poetry, and it was not until the 1930s that a number of leading poets in Oxford, including W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender, recognised his genius (Mariani, 2018). The American poet, Robert Lowell, admired Hopkins for his ‘heroic sanctity’ and understood him as living an exemplary Jesuitical life - ‘a soldier’s life, close to the physical Incarnation, in some ways rather footloose; it seems to flower most in furious activity, as in the case of the Canadian martyrs’ (1944, 583-84). Lowell converted to Catholicism largely due to Hopkins’ influence. The American poets, John Berryman and Hart Crane, were also deeply affected by his work, as was Denise Levertov. His extraordinary appeal continues worldwide today.

present an argument which suggests their inseparability. The ‘call’ and corresponding ‘sigh’ that Hopkins felt to write poetry *and* to become a priest were never wrenched from his experience and appreciation of beauty. In particular, the beauty of Christ, as reflected in humanity and nature, was the overriding influence and driving force of his life, even though this became challenging for him on a daily basis. The ‘great sacrifice’ of Christ was to become so embedded in his consciousness that it became impossible for him to regulate his life without recourse to its theological dynamic. Despite feelings of ‘strangeness’, unrest, alienation, loneliness, ill-health and depression during his relatively short life, his work and priesthood are testimony to this ‘sacrifice’, offered for the sake of others, for whom he wished his endeavours to be ‘as the circling bird’, bringing order, harmony and ‘Love, O my God’ (*Let me be to Thee as the circling bird*).

### Vocation

Living a holy existence by means of a ‘heart right’ (*The Wreck of the Deutschland*, stanza 29), was always what Hopkins sought, but as his life progressed, he realised this would inevitably entail disappointment and suffering. During a retreat in Beaumont in September 1883, he wrote, ‘In meditating on the Crucifixion, I saw how my asking to be raised to a higher degree of grace was asking also to be lifted on a higher cross’ (Hopkins, 1959a, 254). Like Newman, he understood failure as success, epitomised by the paschal mystery of Christ and taught how the good cannot conquer, except by suffering (Nixon, 1989, Ker, 2007; Schlatter, 2008). The annihilation of the self was a necessary step to take before a higher stage of spiritual awareness could take place. *Carrion Comfort* relates how avoidance of such mortification *is* one possibility; he ‘Can something hope, wish day come, not choose not to be’. On the surface, this act of free-will seems a defiant declaration of resilience in the face of depression, but for Hopkins it amounted to a selfish example of disobeying his Creator. As Wolfe comments, ‘... in not choosing not to be, he is pitting himself against the Almighty. Taking pride in the invincible human spirit, Hopkins is coming close to denying man’s essential dependence on God’ (1968, 91). This tension between Hopkins’ own will and God’s will is witnessed throughout his life and poetry, becoming a constant struggle for him as a Jesuit ‘Soldier of Christ’. In *The Soldier*, he admires the one ‘who served his soldiering through...’ and he asks why do we look up to such a person? His answer: because his selfless calling and action are ‘manly’ and the reward is great, because Christ out of gratefulness and love for the soldier will ‘lean forth’ and ‘kiss’ his endeavours, crying ‘O Christ-done deed!’ The



conflict is essentially about what one is called to do and whether one can answer that invitation. During his retreats, Hopkins reflected prayerfully on St Ignatius' *The Spiritual Exercises* and would have been familiar with the words '... if someone did not answer his call, he would be scorned and upbraided by everyone and accounted as an unworthy knight' (Ignatius of Loyola, 1991, 146). In light of such quotations, he deliberated throughout his life on whether or not his vocation as a priest could be reconciled with his yearning to be a poet. At one stage, he burned all the poems he had written.

Hopkins sees in the figure of the martyr a supreme model of answering Christ's demanding call and refers to 'The Christ-ed beauty' of St Margaret Clitheroe's 'mind'. In his sermon at St Joseph's Church, Leigh, Lancashire, in December 1879, he tells the congregation that she was 'so marvellously cheerful and happy' (Hopkins, 1959a, 48) on her final journey to painful death in York in 1586 and suggests to parishioners that they should react in a similar spirit during their own tribulations. He also wrote a 'great ode' on the Jesuit St Edmund Campion who was hanged, drawn and quartered for treason at Tyburn in 1581, but this has not survived (Dubois, 2017, 114). In *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, he equates the death of the 'tall nun' due to her banishment, with Christ's passion; she becomes a 'martyr-master' (st. 21). Any such attainment of a Christ-like persona in relation to a divine call dominated Hopkins' thinking. In one of his *Sermons* he describes how St Joseph travelled to Bethlehem because of the Roman census, which was 'inconvenient and painful' but was necessary to serve the divine plan (1959a, 263). What makes a person who he really is - and free - is partly a decisive willingness to obey a transcendent call. As Sobolev comments, '... what matters is not only the deed, but the choice, the action of the free will (of the *arbitrium* in his scholastic terms), which is the direct continuation of the self in the realm of inner spiritual freedom' (2001, 308). The gradual perfection of a person comes about by the cumulative choices he makes and by committing himself to a sense of duty, even though Hopkins acknowledges this is testing when 'work goes on in a great system and machinery which even drags me on with collar round my neck though I could and do neglect my duty ...' (1959a, 263).

For Hopkins, genuine 'self-consciousness' is about discovering the uniqueness of one's own personhood and destiny, without which human fulfilment and happiness are not possible. By reading Duns Scotus's lectures given in Oxford in 1298, he learnt the importance of God-given individuality and of appreciating that one is not like any other being. One of the medieval theologian's disputed questions is: '*Utrum substantia materialis per aliquid*

*positivum intrinsecum sit de se individua*' - whether material substance is of itself individual through some positive intrinsic thing' - (Duns Scotus, 1987, *Ordinatio*, Distinction 3, Q.2.) In his *Comments on the Spiritual Exercises*, he echoes the theologian's claim: 'Nothing else in nature comes near to this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own' (Hopkins, 1989, 309). However, the 'self' cannot bestow 'self' upon 'oneself' alone - it must come from without: 'to be determined and distinctive is a perfection, either self-bestowed or bestowed from without' (McKenzie, 1989, 312). Like Jacob wrestling with the angel, Hopkins battled against any Pelagian self-determination, telling himself not 'to feast on thee' (*Carrion Comfort*). This is not to suggest that he does not see individuality as a good in itself, but it must be related to the grace-filled harmony of all things, exemplified in the beauty of the chestnut which is both original and part of a universal species. *Haecceitas* ('thisness') is the key to understanding *humanitas* but is only made sense of in relation to losing the self to something greater. Purcell's music 'is the rehearsal/Of abrupt self there so thrusts on, so throngs the ear' but is only so (as he adds in his introductory rubric to the poem) because 'he has uttered in notes the very make and species of man ... and in all men generally' (*Henry Purcell*).

## Perfecting the Self

Perfectionism was a driving motivation and incentive for Hopkins. As a workaholic, he strove to the point of obsession for the very best he could do, and this applied to his spiritual life too. Following a strong Ignatian lead, he knew that humanity was 'made to give to God glory and to mean to give it; to praise God freely, willingly to reverence him, gladly to serve him' (Hopkins, 1959a, 239). Deeply influenced by St Paul's 'hymn' in Philippians 2.1-11, Hopkins loved Christ because he 'annihilated himself, taking the form of servant ... he emptied himself' (Hopkins, 1959, 108). He pledged to do likewise, even though he knew this would entail an intense struggle with the God he loved. In *Carrion Comfort* God is 'lion-limb' with 'devouring eyes' and that is why, at times, the poet is 'frantic to avoid' and 'flee'. He was frequently agonised with the question: 'Can I face and act on who Christ wishes me to become, as He Himself did?' As a Jesuit, he would have practised the *Particular Examen* in the *Spiritual Exercises*, which involved a daily self-scrutiny to encourage and sustain the desire to live like Christ. The text makes a distinction between 'consolation' and 'desolation' within the spiritual life, the former being characterised by joy when attracted to heavenly things and 'desolation' when there is loss of hope, a darkening of the soul and a troubling of mind, a movement to base and worldly things

(Ignatius, 1991). The struggle which Hopkins, like all Jesuits faced, was to align oneself to ‘consolation’ by relentlessly following God’s directive of service, not one’s own.

However, as von Balthasar notes, there is a more central question: ‘What is the human self, the person, in the face of God’s gracious election in Christ?’ (1986, 377). It is to this matter that I now turn. Hopkins’ attempt to address this dilemma is given primarily in three prose pieces: *Homo creatus est* (1880), *On Creation and Redemption: The Great Sacrifice* (November, 1881) and *On Personality, Grace and Free Will* (December, 1881), the latter two written during his nine month tertianship (his Long Retreat) at Roehampton. The first, written on 20<sup>th</sup> August in Liverpool when he was 36 years old, is his account of what he considers to be the foundational principles of the *Spiritual Exercises*. His understanding of personhood and vocation come into view here: ‘I find myself both as man and as myself something most determined and distinctive, at pitch, more distinctive and higher pitched than anything else I see’ (Hopkins, 1958, 122). He acknowledges that his life is exactly aimed at something, like an arrow that hits the bull’s-eye, set on its course, marked out, harmonised, picked out, elected. The source of this pitch is the One who is Himself ‘of finer and higher pitch’ and who is able to ‘force forward the starting and stubborn elements to the one pitch required’ (notice here the trope of ‘movement’ and any possible resistance to this). This determination is felt in one’s sensuousness, the feeling one has of oneself: ‘that taste of myself, of *I* and *me*, above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnut leaf or camphor, and is uncommunicable by any means to another man ... to me there is no resemblance: searching nature I taste *self*’ but at one tankard, that of my own being’ (Hopkins, 1959a, 123). However, clearly, Hopkins *did* try in poetry to transmit this inalienable ‘taste’ of self and individuality in both human beings and nature.

A person is able to choose from his ‘freedom of field’ what he wishes to achieve in his life. This becomes perfected over time, as the individual integrates himself with the distinctive taste and sound of his own being, preconceived and destined by God from eternity. St. Ignatius explains how God trains the human will to choose what God has *already* chosen for him from eternity (St. Ignatius, 1991, 135). It is necessary to ‘ask in what kind of life or in what state his Divine Majesty wishes to make use of us?’ (St. Ignatius, 1991, 35). This requires a disciplining of the mind, so that it can choose in keeping with the mind of Christ (de Mello, 2010). If there is no internalised personal philosophy in keeping with the Christ’s way of seeing

things, a person is unlikely to make the correct decision. Hopkins took seriously the *videre personas* and *videre locum* of Ignatian contemplation: ‘As all places are at some point of the compass and we may face to them: so every real person living or dead or to come has his quarter in the round of being, is lodged somewhere and not anywhere, and the mind has a real direction toward him’ (Hopkins, 1959a, 186). However, because there is a selfish reluctance to choose this direction as a result of sin, it can become a refusal to opt for the archetype of the self, conceived and chosen by God and, logically, for it to develop into the murder of God, from where sin ‘receives its meaning and structure, and to which it is in fact related to the Cross of Christ’ (von Balthasar, 1986, 378). Hopkins’ understanding of grace is crucial to this estimation of personal choice (*arbitrium*), for this is how a person is able to determine himself in relation to the supernatural plan. Prevenient (forestalling) grace moves us naturally towards the good – ‘it *rehearses* in us our consent beforehand’ (Hopkins, 1959a, 150). As it penetrates, movement starts to occur, a new ‘strain’ for the exercise of freedom, a new ‘cleave’ associated with a ‘shift’ occurs. Then, an emerging consenting self starts to occur, and at this stage the personal *arbitrium* begins to travel along the road to a higher self, accompanied by grace ‘in a decision that man can achieve only inchoately, only in a “sighing of consent”’ (Balthasar, 1986, 379). Hopkins writes that this decision is ‘found to be no more than the mere wish, discernible by God’s eyes, that it might do as he wishes, might correspond, might say Yes to him... and this last sigh of desire, this one aspiration, is the life and spirit of a man ...’ (Hopkins, 1959a, 155). This ‘sigh’ is ‘in fact prayer’, an ‘aspiration or stirring of the spirit toward God is a *forestall* of the thing to be done’ and once this is acted upon, the decision made becomes ‘the bridge across the gulf between humanity and God’. The future is open to change now since ‘The sigh of correspondence links the present ... to the future ... *it begins* to link it, it is the first infinitesimal link in the chain or step of the road’ (Hopkins, 1959a, 158). At the height of this free positive response to God’s calling, one experiences ‘God’s finger touching the very vein of personality ... and man can respond to... by bare acknowledgement only, the counter stress which God alone can feel...’ (Hopkins, 1959a, 158). Humanity is still free to discard this future, as Hopkins was free to do throughout his life, and to abandon his priesthood and return to being a poet or another occupation as his primary calling.

Hopkins tries to gauge whether the emerging self can be compared to the self in other things. He rejects chance but offers that maybe some universal spirit of nature or the world (in the Hegelian sense), is ‘enselfed in my self.’ However, this does not seem to be the case, since ‘self tastes different to

him than to me' (Hopkins, 1959a, 129). It is God, says von Balthasar in his summary of Hopkins' position, who 'as the highest self may indwell all created persons in virtue of his uniqueness and transcendence, but only because he has singled out these selves ... and set them in being' (1986, 376). In one of his 1882 sermons, Hopkins takes up Bonaventure's theology of 'utterance' carried forward by Scotus: 'God's utterance of himself in himself is God the Word, outside of himself in this world. The world, then, is word, expression, news of God. Therefore, its end, its purport, its meaning, is God and its life or work to name and praise him' (Hopkins, 1959a, 129). His laudatory poem about nature *Pied Beauty* starts with 'Glory be to God for dappled things' and ends with the exhortation 'Praise him'. And *Harry Ploughman* tells of the dignity of manual labour out of a sense of 'selving' and service to others: 'And features, in flesh, what deed he each must do -/His sinew-service where do'.

Hopkins developed his ideas about the person during a Long Retreat he undertook in December 1881 and it centres around the 'great sacrifice' of Christ. Following Philippians 2:5-11, he writes that Christ 'annihilated himself... taking the form of servant; that is, he could not but see what he was, God, but he would see it as if he did not see it ... he emptied or exhausted himself so far as that was possible.... It is this holding back of himself ... seems to me the root of all his holiness and the imitation of this is the root of all moral good in other men' (Hopkins, 1959a, 108). The eternal, universal, temporal and spatial instantiation of God in Christ is seen in the emptying and sacrifice of Himself in the created order. Hopkins realised how this theme was the key to unlocking the Christological history of the universe and his own life. He did not believe that Christ became incarnate due to humanity's sinfulness but saw creation as dependent upon the incarnation. He believed it as an act of love which would have taken place in one form or another, even if there had not been any sin. Again, influenced by Scotus, he saw that the world of angels and humanity were fields for Christ where He was able to offer his joyful adoration of the Father. He became increasingly interested not only in how Christ is the 'inscape' of creation, but also how humanity could work out God's design for themselves and the world, through their own sacrificial choices and actions. After reading Marie Lataste's work in 1878, he began to formulate how there were two 'strains' or intentions by which God acts on the world. There is the creative strain which moves things according to their nature and there is the sacrificial strain which depends upon the personal choices of free agents. The latter is rooted in the sacrifice of Christ, and 'is a consequence and shadow of the procession of the Trinity, from which mystery sacrifice takes its rise. ... It is as if the blissful agony or stress of

selving in God had forced out drops of sweat or blood, which drops were the world' (Hopkins, 1959a, 110). Both as a priest and poet, he wished to imitate the 'Great Sacrifice' and believed that Lucifer's sin was an excessive, narcissistic dwelling on his own nature as likeness to God, so much so that when newer images of God presented themselves, he averted his will from them. The exemplar to be imitated is Christ at Gethsemane, who kept his own free will balanced as he learnt to follow the divine will. Hopkins derives the distinction between the elective will (*voluntas ut arbitrium*) and the 'affective will' (*voluntas ut natura*) from St Ignatius and sought to live out the non-separation of desire and choice, epitomised in the marriage union. In *'As kingfishers catch fire'*, he writes that 'Each mortal thing does one thing ... Crying *What I do is me: for that I came*', showing how doing and being are interconnected and, as in St Augustine of Hippo's writings, demonstrating how humanity is free to choose the objects of their love which, in turn, may lead to a flight to the divine. As he sets forth in *Love preparing to fly*: 'He play'd his wings as though for flight ... In eddies of the wind he went/At last up the blue element'.

There are times when Hopkins clearly cannot keep desire and choice in union, when the recalcitrant will struggles against all that is most attractive to its higher nature. What becomes clear in Hopkins' life, poems and prose, is that this 'natural' tendency to choose the desirable was a fraught one for him to sustain. His own struggles with his sexual feelings and his constant sense of alienation, made the inseparability difficult at times. In *Carrion Comfort*, he experiences the divine as 'terrible' and questions why God would 'rude on me /Thy wring-world right foot rock? 'Is it to bring about 'joy' within God or within himself or both? Whichever it is, like Jacob, the poet lay 'wrestling with (my God!) my God'. The sheer number of heart-felt questions in the poem is testimony to Hopkins' inability to answer them definitively in his own life.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sobolev puts forward the thesis that there is a severe split in Hopkins between faith and human existence. He refers to how during a retreat in 1988 he indicates how the earthly life can be compared to a person who is dazzled by a spark or star in the darkness. Sobolev argues that there is an ontological dichotomy between human existence and faith. Unlike Aquinas who sees this division is metaphysically overcome by recognising the goodness of the world, Hopkins acknowledges a real discrepancy between the natural world and human living, although he does see the possibility of redemption when the two realms come side by side. But he suggests that this remains only a possibility – it is part of a *colloquy*, a wish, a summons. Even in *God's Grandeur*, which is regarded as one of Hopkins' most positive poems, the discrepancy between nature and human existence is great. Although the *volta* marks

## A Christic Form

Hopkins believes that the creation of the world is an implication of the Incarnation; thus, it follows, that the cosmos manifests as a whole, a Christological form, if seen with a spiritual eye. Even in the most challenging occurrences, Christ is witnessed and 'admired'. In the storm and devastation of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, he is able to 'admire thee, master of the tides/Of the yore-flood, of the year's fall; The recurb and recovery of the gulf's sides/'(st. 32). Through Christ's descent into hell and a person's imitative spiritual death of himself, a victory will occur. Conversely, those who live simply for themselves, can never ascend through descent, just as the murderer in *St. Winefred's Well* only has 'thoughts sour as blood' and in refusing to yield to Christ, no longer hopes or prays and ends in 'despair'. Hopkins wishes for the brother and sister in his 1886 unfinished poem, *On the Portrait of Two Beautiful, Young People*, a life of 'selfless self of self' which is 'most strange, most still', in other words, one devoted to following Christ's ways. And in '*As kingfishers catch fire*', he records that Christ is able to be 'enselved' in each person, if he works with God's grace, to the extent that He '...plays in ten thousand places,/Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his', a metaphor reiterated in *On Personality, Grace and Free Will* : 'That is Christ playing at me and me playing at Christ, only that it is no play but truth; That is Christ *being me* and me being Christ' (Hopkins, 1959a,154).

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a dividing line allowing the poet to return to nature once again in the sestet, the theodicean question at the end of the first quatrain remains unanswered. The sonnet implies that human existence does not correspond to nature, not only due to sin but 'gives birth to metaphysical questions that the poem has to leave unanswered' (2011, 119). However, he does concede that for Hopkins the poetic space can become both the mirror and the symbolic alternative to his existential situation.

I am in part agreement with Sobolev's thesis and while I acknowledge Hopkins is disappointed with humanity's failures and sin and gives no easy answers to the apparent meaninglessness of human existence, his poetry as a whole, gives testimony to the redemptive power of human suffering and alienation and there is a strong sense in some of Hopkin's poetry that once the beauty of Christ's theophany is recognised, human life itself becomes transformed. The fact that Hopkins felt alienation, anxiety and depression for some of his life, does not mean he experienced a severe split between nature and life in the manner in which Sobelov suggests. Christian living does not give surety, but, as Hopkins discovered throughout his life, the possibility of aligning oneself to Trinitarian life and sensing that all will not end in despair.

Hopkins' understanding of the *theosis* of the self drew partly on Aristotle's metaphysics, in particular his writings on potentiality and actuality. In his 1867 undergraduate essay 'The Probable Future of Metaphysics', he outlines how from Heraclitus to Hegel, Not-Being, Being and Becoming have been set forth as the three most important stages in any understanding of Reality and correspond to notions of the potential, the actual and the passing over of one to the other (Hopkins, 1974). This attention given to 'becoming' assists us in understanding Hopkins' attitude to spiritual growth. For example, he uses the word 'hollow' to indicate the receptivity and ongoing development of humanity to receive the divine presence. In 1881 he claimed 'God rests in human 'as in a place, a *locus*, bed, vessel, expressly made to receive him as a jewel in a case hollowed to fit it, as the hand in the glove or the milk in the breast' (Hopkins, 1959a, 195). As Dau comments in her fine analysis of love in Hopkins' poetry, 'his 'synecdoches signal our capacity to receive and contain God; the bed suggests the intimacy of that reception' (2013, 70). He uses the simile of lettering on a sail which 'are best seen when it fills' and compares humanity's reception of Christ into its heart, to Mary's carrying of Christ in her womb. The undated Latin hymn to Mary, *Ad Matrem Virginem* contains the following lines: 'He creeps in, O Mary/In the Eucharist. He Himself wishes to enter: I cannot deny myself to Him'. A person's true nature is only realised when it becomes filled with Christ.

Persuaded by his reading of Parmenides (Brown, 1997, 168-191), Hopkins shows that his metaphysics rests on a distinctive notion of Being and Becoming. All inscapes are grounded in Being and this is why difference does not hold any difficulty for the poet, since any individuality is part of a larger whole and rooted in God's Being. The words of his 1877 poem *Pied Beauty* echoes this philosophy: 'All things counter, original, spare, strange' are a reflection of God whose 'beauty is past change'. Every person has the potential to be immortal, because he holds the inner capacity to be one with Christ: 'I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am' he writes in *That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection*. As Brown notes, this belief is shown in the language and metre of the poem: 'Change and its fluctuous word patterns are finally banished by this tautology (and pedantically perfect rhyme), which pivots about the copula, the simple assertion of *being*: 'immortal diamond,/Is immortal diamond' (2004, 77). The 'aspiration' to change and become Christ-like depends upon a person being inspired to respond to the Holy Spirit: 'Even the sigh or aspiration itself is in answer to an inspiration of God's spirit and is followed by the continuance and expiration of that same breath which lifts it ...to do or be what God wishes his creature to do or be' (Hopkins, 1959a, 156).



Poetry itself is a reply, a giving back to God, an utterance He helps us to give by his incarnational ‘utterance’. Between May 1868 and December 1875, he found a growing reconciliation between his dual vocations as priest and poet which is why he had no qualms about writing *The Wreck of the Deutschland* when invited to compose a piece by his superior at St. Beuno’s in honour of nuns drowned in the mouth of the Thames. His sprung rhythm, with its carefully placed stresses and emphases, was to become in Hopkins’ mind another method of ministry, a creative way of acknowledging and proclaiming Being: ‘each word is one way of acknowledging Being’ he wrote (Hopkins, 1959b, 129). He also began insisting that his poetry was to be read out loud, a spiritual exercise of inhaling and exhaling, as the reader negotiates his breath throughout the delivery of a poem. Any such ‘utterance’ is exhalation, a natural response to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is why Hopkins uses the expression ‘ah!’ numerous times in his poetry to signal, on the one hand, the breath of God and humanity and, on the other, to express astonishment that poetry is able to be an ‘aspiration’ to God’s ‘inspiration’ (Hopkins, 1959a, 158).

Conversely, a refusal to answer the call and ‘pitch’ results in a person becoming ‘To his own self-bent so bound...’ (*Ribblesdale*). This is diametrically opposite to St Margaret Clitheroe’s calling whose ‘will was bent at God’s’ (*Margaret Clitheroe*). Paradoxically, by her silent submission to death, she was able to echo the divine voice of the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit: ‘The Utterer, Uttered, Uttering.’ The martyr ‘caught’ (a word Hopkins uses frequently to indicate a brief, sensate glimpse of beauty) the Trinitarian ‘eternal ring’ when she heard the ‘crying of those Three’, as God mourned for her death. Akin to a bell tolling, she tells ‘His name times-over three’, just as in *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*, stones ‘ring’ out ‘broad’ God’s ‘name’. The Word becomes ‘uttered’, in poetry, bringing about the fleshing of God, as in the incarnation.

## Beauty

In 1865 as an Oxford University undergraduate, Hopkins wrote his essay *On the Origins of Beauty. A Platonic Dialogue* where he imagines a conversation on the nature of beauty between a newly appointed Professor of Aesthetics and a student. The core of the dialogue concerns how beauty is characterised by irregularity, variety and strangeness, as much as by conformity, unity and harmony; regularity and irregularity co-exist. The chestnut-fan with six leaves illustrates this idea well because it is similar to and yet different from one with seven leaves. Such an emphasis on

uniqueness within uniformity is fundamental to Hopkins' metaphysics, upon which much of his life, poetry and prose rests. In his 1881 letter to his friend, Bridges, eight years before his death, he admitted that 'You give me a long jobation about eccentricities. Alas I have heard so much about and suffered so much for and in fact been so completely ruined for life by my alleged singularities that they are a sore subject' (Hopkins, 1935, 126).

His final years in Dublin were characterised by an acute sense of isolation and alienation which became the springboard for his 'dark' or 'terrible' sonnets. In 1885, he was able to combine his own sense of difference with that in nature as a whole: *To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life* epitomises this feeling which pervaded his entire life. And yet, paradoxically, the creation of beauty emerges from difference, for God 'fathers-forth' ... 'All things counter, original, spare, strange' (*Pied Beauty*). As early as 1863 in a letter to Baillie from the Isle of Wight (a location he liked visiting for its beauty), he recorded: 'I think I have told you that I have particular periods of admiration for particular things. ... The present fury is the ash, and perhaps barley and two shapes of growth in leaves and one on tree boughs and also a conformation of fine-weather cloud' (Hopkins, 1970, 202). Hopkins' early drawings, which he hoped would be seen from a 'Ruskinian point of view', capture both the peculiarities of a scene, as well as its organic unity (Ward, 2002, 56-75). About his sketch of waves from Freshwater Bay on the Isle of Wight in 1863, he said he was able to 'catch' both the individuality and the form of the sea - that 'network' which he tried to 'law out'. The skilled eye and other senses, are capable of discovering the 'inscape' in things - the distinctive quality of 'the dearest freshness deep down things' as he puts it in *God's Grandeur*, besides the overall pattern and symmetry of the scene. This passage indicates why he moved from painting to poetry as his preferred art. Enraptured by the touch 'huddle', sound 'clocked' and movement 'the backwater runs over' more than the mere sight 'network', of the waves, Gardner's observation that 'painting's very stillness and dumbness would have oppressed him... and 'he would have been plagued by all the nightingales of nature and art', is a judicious one I think (1948, 15). What really captivated Hopkins was the beauty of the sound, of words, carefully spaced to maximise their rhythmic patterns and hues, which he often compared to music. Like colours in nature, he was fascinated with the sound of nature and he refers to 'the chord of colour' of a lily (Hopkins, 1959b, 237, Brown 29). While Professor of Rhetoric at Manresa House between September 1973 and July, 1974, he wrote *Poetry and Verse* in which he comments: 'Verse is speech having a marked figure, order of sounds independent of meaning' (1959b, 276). The visceral, Anglo-Saxon intensity and 'primitive', guttural, tone of his verse compels a democratic

audience of listeners primarily through their rhythm and sound. The uneducated can be drawn into Hopkins' verse, just as much as the educated, akin to the plays of Shakespeare, which draw all kinds of audiences into their musical folds.

### The 'heart right'

Hopkins' poetry is characterised by how the heart is lifted in admiration for the wonder and beauty of Being. In *The Windhover* dedicated 'To Christ our Lord', the poet discloses: 'My heart in hiding/Stirred for a bird ...' as he becomes caught up by its 'Brute beauty', 'the mastery of the thing', the kestrel's surging flight and speed of movement, its individuality, its self-confident 'pride', its uniqueness. Such language reflects an intimate reciprocity between the *looker* and the *looked at*: 'When you look hard at a thing, it seems to look hard at you' he observes in 1863. (Hopkins, 1989, 140).

Like a great painter, Hopkins was able to see things which other eyes could not, and his love of Van Gogh's work influenced his own contemplative ability to see the unique beauty of things, such as 'skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow' or 'Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls' (*Pied Beauty*). While he lived at Stonyhurst College, Lancashire, a gardener was amazed to notice how he kept looking intently at stones; and, in May 1870, Hopkins exclaims: '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' (Hopkins, 1989, 134). This attention to the natural world is due to his capacity to appreciate, like Whistler (one of his favourite painters), 'what I call inscape (the very soul of art...)'. His own joyful engagement with the particularity in nature is, he believed, available to everyone. But in 1872 he reflects: 'I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it and it could be called out everywhere again' (Hopkins, 1959a, 221; 1989, 161).

Hopkins' own confident ability to discern the beauty of Christ in everything was derived from his reading of Scotus. On the subject of encountering him in the Baddeley library on the Isle of Man in 1872, he reflected: 'At this time I had first begun to get hold of the copy of Scotus on the *Sentences* ... and was flush with anew stroke of enthusiasm. It may come to nothing or it may be a mercy of God. But just then when I took in inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus' (Hopkins, 1989, 161). The word *haecceitas* or 'thisness' in Scotus is often linked to Hopkins' use of the word 'inscape', although his use of this word is contested. Persuasively, Sobolev rejects this

association because he believes he uses the word as a general guiding principle for his work; Ward, too, is sceptical and suggests that Scotus' concept of *formalitates* is a far better way to describe Hopkins' use of the word 'inscape', since it involves how the imagination is able to be shaped and moulded by the senses, organising these by a method of *formalitates*, a strategy for separating out the particularities of a thing, without destroying its inseparability from the whole (Ward, 2002, 187-191; 194-197). As Baker (undated) contends in her phenomenological reading of Hopkins, his enthusiasm for Scotus was likely due to the fact that he saw in him an avenue for epistemology, a basis for knowledge through *feeling and sensing* the divine within nature and humanity which all people could experience. This analysis resonates with the poet's reading of and correspondence with John Henry Newman, in particular his notion of the illative sense which encourages a confidence in the 'felt sense' of truth. Hopkins read *Grammar of Assent* in 1873, three years after its publication and referred to the work as 'heavy reading' but 'The justice and candour and gravity and rightness of mind is what is so *beautiful* in all he writes ...' (Hopkins, 1970, 58).

In some of Hopkins' poems a sense of beauty and inscape is associated with the movement and extension of the human body, as it goes about its work *Harry Ploughman* records how he 'leans to it, Harry bends, look. Back, elbow, and liquid waist/In him, all quail to the wallowing o' the plough' suggesting a mouldable aspect to his form, looked at from a distance by the poet, who shares a common, if different corporeality. In *Felix Randall*, there is again an emphasis on physicality, movement and employment, 'When thus.../Didst fettle for the great grey horse his bright and battering sandal!' But there is a closeness between them both here, since as priest he comes near to him with the last sacramental rites. Felix's sickness and mortality draws him beside the poet who regrets the decaying of the once strong body, as he approaches death. In *Epithalamion*, written in 1888, he conjures up the beauty of a pastoral scene, as healthy boys with 'bellbright bodies' swim 'waterworld thorough hurled' in a river while a 'listless stranger' does the same in a nearby pool.

However, without doubt, the central dynamic in Hopkins' estimation of beauty is the figure of Christ. Beauty is Christ's own gift to humanity and nature, and what becomes possible by this, is a mutual act of exchange. He encourages readers of *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo* to 'Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver'. And in *To What Serves Mortal Beauty?* Hopkins is keen to acknowledge the Source of beauty, as well as a warning against its ability to entrap by its sensual power. It can be 'dangerous', because it has the

potential to lead to lust; keeping ‘warm’ and alive ‘Men’s wits’ to ‘the things that are’ is not the full story. The priest gave up looking at things closely for six months of his life due to this ‘danger’. However, Hopkins does want to emphasize that beauty can often lead to Christian action and refers to how Pope Gregory caught a sight of beautiful English boys in the slave market in Rome which encouraged him to act and send out missionaries to that country. Human beauty, too, is to be cherished, because it prevents us from worshipping ‘block or barren stone’ and has the potential to lead to a higher spiritual beauty, ‘God’s better beauty, grace’. Hopkins makes an important distinction between a ‘glance’ which signals a response of *ascesis* and a ‘gaze’ which effects lust. Saville suggests that the sestet presents the most difficult conundrum which faced Hopkins during his entire life - ‘if we are to love the “selves” of men, their pitch, *haecceitas*, or thisness, and if stalling on the inscape or patterns of physical form leads us to appreciate that *haecceitas*, are we not justified in gazing on the body of the beautiful ... through which we may glimpse the beauty of the soul?’ (2000, 180). The Hopkinsian response is clear: one may look only long enough to catch the divine sublimity of such beauty: ‘Merely meet it; own/Home at heart, heaven’s sweet gift; then leave, let that alone’. Thus, it is beneficial to remember that times of renunciation and brief moments of pleasure, give way to the experience of more lasting spiritual grace. The beauty captured in the transient flying of a bird, for example, is also able to be at the same time, an experience of Christ’s beauty.

During his years of pastoral activity Hopkins came to see human beings as sacramental forms of God. He ‘could hardly bear the pollution of innocent souls. ... and on the other, men and women, in their homecoming, as sinners, to God...’ (1989, 398) suggests von Balthasar. In a letter to E. H. Coleridge on January 22, 1866, he writes ‘It is one adorable point of the incredible condescension of the Incarnation (the greatness of which no saint can ever have hoped to realize) that our Lord submitted not only to the pains of life ...but also to the mean and trivial accidents of humanity ...it is not surprising that our reception or non-reception of its benefits shd. be also amidst trivialities’ (1970, 19). As Mariani comments in his analysis of *Felix Randall*, ‘Hopkins’ ‘vision is to have seen in the daily shoeing of horses by a common blacksmith, without “forethought of” its special significance, the abiding presence of Christ’ (1970, 172). ‘The metamorphosis of the “great grey drayhorses” into light, supple, Pegasean steed with “bright and battering sandal” is an exact parallel of Felix Randall’s spiritual transformation’ (1970, 171). Hopkins sees himself as an agent of change secured by the dying man’s receiving of the viaticum, assisting his soul’s final journey to

death, just as the horse on its ongoing life's journey is made strong by the 'sandal' (Mariani, 1970, 171- 40).

The beauty of Christ has the ability to 'capture' Hopkins' imagination and spiritual aspirations. Although in one of his letters to Bridges in February 1879 he regrets that his love for Christ is only occasionally felt: 'the only person that I am in love with seldom, especially now, stirs my heart sensibly' (1935, 66), some of his best poems illustrate his passionate love for Christ. In *The Windhover*, the poet flies upwards like the bird, just as in Plato's *Pheadrus* the soul in love, regenerates its wings and returns to its original home. In relation to the description of *eros* in Plato and the dove in the *Song of Songs* (both texts known well by Hopkins), we read in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* that the 'heart in flight embodies the heart of the one who has fallen in love with Christ' (Duc, 2013, 65; Saville, 2000, 3). However, this movement of expansiveness, and the freeing of the heart, in a sudden outburst of emotion is often in tension with Hopkins' Jesuitical ascetic training which encouraged self-denial and obscurity; the phrase 'my heart in hiding' reflecting this disciplined ideal. As Dubois suggests: 'The Windhover' tussles across its *volta* with how much admiration for nature's vigour can be reconciled with the seclusion demanded by religious vocation' (2017, 104). And Saville notes that Hopkins 'draws from a long-standing devotional rhetoric that uses erotic imagery to convey spiritual thoughts' (2000, 22). Even though he is disappointed that much of God's creation has been 'wrecked', he longs, in compensation, for the day 'with eager desire to seeing the matchless beauty of Christ's body in the heavenly light' (Hopkins, 1959, 36). He is also reassured that God knows the deeply felt tension in humanity between the temporary and the eternal. Indeed, God looks on the beauty of His own creation and hears its yearning cries, or as von Balthasar puts it: 'He hears 'man's inchoate sigh of assent...' (1989, 386). God sees behind the surface a person's struggles and assists him with grace to start again when he falls: 'Complete thy creature dear O where it fails,/Being mighty a master, being a father and fond' (*In the Valley of the Elwy*). It is Christ who is the 'inress' which is felt within all created things and grace operates as 'mouthed to flesh-burst/Gush! – flush the man, the being with it, sour or sweet/Brim, in a flash, full! –' (st. 8, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*). Due to the consoling, beautiful cross which is imprinted on humanity in all their endeavours, Hopkins is able to say, in a sermon at Leigh on December 14th 1879 to his working-class congregation: 'We must put a stress on ourselves and make ourselves find comfort where we know the comfort is to be found. It *is* a comfort that in spite of all, God loves us ... We have only to force ourselves to see it, to dwell on it and at last to feel that it is so' (Hopkins, 1959a, 47-48). It was such comfort which allowed