

Hopkins as a Religious Poet/as a Priest Poet/Conflict between Religiosity and Poetry in Hopkins' Poetry

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Even when Hopkins writes as a poet of natural poetry, his nature never stands alone. It is suffused with the presence of God. Indeed, if even natural beauty was in conflict with the strictly priestly vocation of a Jesuit, he would repudiate all such beauty. This consciousness, that appreciation of natural might be harmful for a priest led him to once actually destroy all his early secular poems. He decided to give up all beauty until he had "God's leave for it." It was much later, when he realised that nature's beauty might only be an outward manifestation of God's glory that he started writing poetry again. He knows 'the beauty of the Lord' when he is in the presence of beautiful blue bells. Thus in his poetry the relation between poetic beauty and his deity is not one of conflict or contrast but of concurrence and coalescence.

Hopkins usually depicts nature with the exquisite colour and contours of a painter's brush, sometime almost vying with keeps. Like the Pre-Raphaelites he delicately draws natural beauty such as the "dapple-dawn-drawn falcon". Yet he is acutely conscious that God is "under the world's splendour and wonder/his majesty must in stressed, stressed." This presence of God in all aspects of natural beauty is evident in his line in *Pied Beauty*:

‘Glory be to God far dappled things-’

In *The Windhover* although there is no overt relation to God one is left in little doubt about the ‘inscape’ and ‘instress’ which register the force of God. The subtitle *To Christ Our Lord* gives away Hopkins propensity for visualising the Christian Messiah in nature. The beauty of the kestrel would gain significance only when it dissociates itself from secular beauty:

‘Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here

Buckle!...’

The forceful word ‘buckle’ may mean ‘joining together’ all the qualities of a Kestrel. On the other hand it might mean the putting on of armour. It might also mean to ‘yield under the pressure of a stronger force.’ Whatever be the meaning, it certainly indicates that the natural beauty buckles beneath a greater supernatural beauty. But the relation between the natural beauty and the supernatural force need not necessarily be one of conflict. Buckle might also imply ‘fusions’, a union of the various natural qualities for a supernatural purpose. The words “fall, gall and gash gold vermilion” are suggestive of Christ’s crucifixion.

Hopkins’ poem about a person “Felix Randal”, too, is a poem which celebrates God through man. He believes that man’s normal everyday activities such as “setting an anvil”, “sawing a beam”, “driving horses” etc. all give God some glory if it is done as one’s duty. Felix is a farrier who forges horse shoes. Even this powerful man was once broken and melancholic when he was sick. But he was rejuvenated later when he was anointed by the poet. Thus in his poem there are two activities which give God glory. The first is Felix’s fulfilling his responsibilities as a farrier, the second is the act of sacrament which gives the dejected man new life.

But Hopkins's religiosity occasionally involves another kind of feeling. This is the feeling not of the splendour of nature but of human despondency. Some of Hopkins' sonnets are concerned either with his personal failure to achieve God's grace or with his dissatisfaction with the lot of such men as him. "I Wake and Feel" is one such poem; the intense agony of the poet breathes through a every phase and none s left in any uncertainty about the poet's sincerity. The tone of intense about anxiety, rightly led diction calls these poems to be "written in blood". Thus Hopkins' poems are all concerned, whether obviously or implicitly with the Christian God. But there is little evidence between the priestly and the poetic vocations. Indeed, Hopkins' is a rare blending of the sensuous and the spiritual, the fleshy and the religious.