



## GOD MYSTICISM OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO “GOD’S GRANDEUR”

**S. Jerald Sagaya Nathan**

*Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, St. Joseph’s College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli.*

Reverend Father Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. (28<sup>th</sup> July 1844 – 8<sup>th</sup> June 1889) is a Victorian poet (19<sup>th</sup> Century) English poet. He is a Roman Catholic convert. He won fame posthumously. He is popular for his powerful use of imagery. He is known for his formal experimentation with Prosody. He is daring innovator. He is credited with the introduction and employment of concepts like “inscape” and “instress.”

The concept of “inscape” and “instress” are used by Gerard Manley Hopkins to refer to the essential individuality of a thing, but with a focus not on its particularity or uniqueness, but rather on the unifying design that gives a thing its distinctive characteristics and relates it to its context. He was interested in the exquisite interrelation of the individual thing and the recurring pattern. He saw the world as a kind of network integrated by divine law and design.

Gerard Manley Hopkins is also the innovator of a new metrical form, called “sprung rhythm.” In “sprung rhythm” Hopkins counts the number of accented syllables in the line, but places no limit on the total number of syllables, as opposed to syllabic meters (such as the iambic), which count both stresses and syllables. This new form allows greater freedom in the position and proportion of stresses. Whereas, English verse has traditionally alternated stressed and unstressed syllables with occasional variation. Sprung Rhythm gave Hopkins the freedom to place multiple stressed syllables one after another, or to run a large number of unstressed syllables together. This gives Hopkins great control over the speed of his lines and their dramatic effects.

Gerard Manley Hopkins is basically a mystic poet who derived inspiration from William Blakes. Like William Blakes, he was a poet with a mystical bent of mind. He saw God in Nature. According to Hopkins the world is like a book written by God. God manifests himself in Nature. God expresses himself completely through the world, and it is by reading the world that humans can approach God and learn about Him.

Victorian Era is considered to be Golden period in the history of England. It is an age of exploration, colonization, scientific innovations, scientific temper, industrial explosion and environmental crisis. Hopkins sees the environmental crisis of the Victorian period as vitally linked to that era’s spiritual crisis. His poems mourn man’s indifference to the destruction of sacred natural and religious order.

Hopkins wrote most frequently in the sonnet form. He preferred the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet, which consists of an octave (8 Lines) followed by a sestet (6 Lines), with a turn in argument or change in tone occurring in the second part known as Volta.

Hopkins typically uses the octave to present some account of personal or sensory experience and the sestet for philosophical reflection. The poem “God’s Grandeur” is a fine exposition of the God Mysticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins, his experimentation with prosody and his mastery of natural symbolisms to drive home his theme.

*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. 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 soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.*

*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.*



Hopkins begins “God’s Grandeur,” with the assertion that the world as a whole has this inscape: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God”. The First Quatrain of the octave describes a natural world in which God is present. God’s presence in the world is asserted through powerful visual imageries (language that creates powerful images in the mind). The visual imageries employed in the poem are the imagery of an electrical current and the imagery of rich oil that wells up “to a greatness” when tapped with a certain kind of patient pressure. Giving these as clear and strong proofs for God’s presence in the world, G. M. Hopkins asks how it is that humans fail to heed (“reck”) His divine authority (“his rod”).

The imagery of an electrical charge suggests the Pentecostal tongue of flame (Holy Spirit) (and the imagery of blinding light, is a biblical image associated with God (“like the shining of shook foil”). The phrase “reck his rod” is a very powerful imagery showing the audacity of human beings in ignoring the authority of God. The word “Rod” mainly refers to the scepter, which is symbolic of power to judge, and an instrument of punishment. In the poem the word “Reck” is used with the meaning ‘to regard’ or ‘care for’ It is also related to words such as “recognize” and “reckoning”.

The Second Quatrain within the octave describes the state of contemporary human life—the blind repetitiveness of human labor, and the sordidness and stain of “toil” and “trade”. The landscape in its natural state reflects God as its creator; but industry and the prioritization of the economic over the spiritual have transformed the landscape, and robbed humans of their sensitivity to the those few beauties of nature still left.

The sestet (the final six lines of the sonnet, enacting a turn or shift in argument) asserts that, in spite of the degradation of Hopkins’s contemporary Victorian world, nature does not cease offering up its spiritual indices. A deep “freshness” permeates the world and testifies the continual renewing power of God’s creation. The power of renewal is seen in the way morning always waits on the other side of dark night. The source of this constant regeneration is the grace of a God who “broods” over a seemingly lifeless world with the patient nurture of a mother hen. The final imagery in the poem is one of God guarding the potential of the world and containing within Himself the power and promise of rebirth.

With the final exclamation (“ah! bright wings”) Hopkins suggests both an awed intuition of the beauty of God’s grace, and the joyful suddenness of a hatchling bird emerging out of God’s loving incubation.

The poem is a fine exposition of Natural Theology. It is the study of how a Creator might be seen through his Creation. In Hopkins’ time, there were debates about whether the existence of God could be proved through evidence from nature. Darwin’s theory of evolution, which seemed to stress chance and impersonal principles, greatly upset many who thought God could be proved in this way. Hopkins’ own position is reflected in his poems, and could be summarised as seeing Nature as God’s book. The whole matter of inscape and instress is about the ability to get an intuition or insight of God in the beauty of his world.

The ugliness of modern life is another theme in the poem. Hopkins suggests, that the cause of the destruction of Nature, is because ‘men do not reckon his rod’ (fear God’s punishment). The expression “reck his rod” might sound like punishment, but rod can also mean a scepter, metonymy for sovereignty. Psalm 23:4 says: “thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” which refers to the way in which a shepherd safely guides his flock. This implies that people have lost touch with both God as Creator and his Creation. The idea is carried further in the following line: “the soil is bare now; nor can foot feel, being shod.”

The earth’s covering has been scraped off and people have no sense of the ‘touch’ of the earth.

Conservation and renewal of nature is yet another theme found in the poem. The theme of the conservation and renewal of nature reflects that God is not out of control of the situation, but renewing nature through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Bible suggests the Spirit was at work in Creation, as in Genesis 1:2: “The Spirit of God ‘was hovering’ (NIV); “brooding” (Living Bible), which is the very word Hopkins had used some hundred years before that particular translation. Since, in Christian thought, the Holy Spirit is still active, it makes sense to see the Spirit still at work in creating - or re-creating, as needs be. The image of the wings and breast may come from the episode in the New Testament where Jesus is baptised, and ‘the Spirit of God descended like a dove’ (Matthew 3:16, Luke 3:22)

Thus “God’s Grandeur” is representative poem that speaks of the God Mysticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins, his experimentation with prosody and his mastery of natural symbolisms to drive home the theme of God’s presence in the world and the intimate connection that exists between the Creator and the created being - Nature.

#### Works Cited

Gardner, W. H. *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1953. Print.