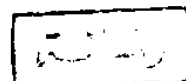




Ain Shams University
Women's College for Arts,
Science & Education



**A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS
THROUGH
AN ANALYSIS OF HIS TECHNIQUE AND STYLE**

*A thesis
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PREFACE

This thesis deals with one of the great English poets whose style and technique have contributed to the richness of the English language. It deals with Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose poetry was not published till nearly twenty-nine years after his death; however his fame now is world-wide and his poetry is read wherever English literature is studied. Chronologically, Hopkins is considered a Victorian and the Victorian Age, with its cultural and literary interests, no doubt, played a significant part in forming his character as a man and a poet. It is also true that some of Hopkins's poetry deals with Victorian themes and that some of it is traditional. Yet his poetic techniques, especially those employed in his mature poems of the middle and later periods are original and highly modern. This thesis attempts to reveal Hopkins's modernity, using a chronological method so that the reader may observe the poet's developing techniques from his early traditional poems, which he wrote while he was yet a school boy, to his later "Terrible Sonnets" that reflect his mature vision of life and his unique modern techniques.

As Hopkins was born and brought up as a Victorian, one cannot deny the direct influences of this literary era upon him. Hence this thesis begins by considering the poet

within the framework of his age. Thus, in Chapter One, one sees him in relation to the social, cultural, and literary background of this period. Here, Hopkins is shown as a born poet as well as a poet who worked hard to develop his talents by learning and practising his art.

Chapter Two introduces Hopkins's traditional style which was influenced by the Romantics (especially John Keats) and the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Walter Pater and John Ruskin. It also presents the influence of Duns Scotus, the medieval philosopher, upon him; when Hopkins read this philosopher, he discovered that Scotus's philosophy was appropriate to his own vision of life in general and to his theory of diction in particular; Hopkins believed in the individuation of things as well as the individuation of words. That is why he tended to coin new compound words such as the two terms "Inscape" and "Instress" which express the essence of his philosophy. These new coined words show Hopkins's unique quality as a poet who has his own new theory of diction.

Yet, Hopkins's originality is emphasized in his new techniques of sound and his revolutionary style manifested in his mature poetry, beginning with The Wreck of the Deutschland. Hence, Chapter Three deals with this point: the poet's originality as an innovator. His new techniques

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are embodied in his "Sprung Rhythm" as a new measure, while his sound devices such as his unconventional alliteration, "Voweling" and unfamiliar rhymes, all which play a prominent part in building up clusters of images, sounds and rhythms within the poem. Thus when one reads a Hopkinsian poem, one cannot but see it as an organic whole where sound devices as well as structure contribute to make it an organic unity. This notion supports Hopkins's own claim that his poetry should be "read with the eye as well as the ear".

As for Chapter Four, it deals with Hopkins's more mature poems which reflect his more sophisticated style and his developing vision of life. This is represented in his so-called "Terrible Sonnets" which reflect the growth of his mind and mark one of the most significant developments in the use of the sonnet-form since the seventeenth century. As comparison saves a world of argument, Hopkins's so-called "Curtal Sonnets" and his "Tailed Sonnets" are compared to the traditional sonnet-form of Shakespeare and Milton. And although themes of despair and disappointment are suggested in his later poems, yet the themes of hope and acceptance of the will of God are also implied in his imagery. This acceptance is seen in the reconciliation of opposed images too. Thus, Hopkins's inner conflicts, during this period, are finally crowned by such an acceptance of life as a whole.

In the Conclusion, an attempt is made to evaluate Hopkins as one of the great poets whose modernity is evinced in his original techniques. These techniques are shown in his personal Symbolism, his complex Imagism, his use of free verse, his unconventional syntax, his new rhythm and his rhymes, his frequent use of colloquial and dialect words, his new coined words, his ambiguity, his irreducible poems and finally his influence on modern writers. These characteristics are dealt with in the final chapter.

CHAPTER ONE

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Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose life was short (1844-1889), was not a writer of his period; only two or three of his poems were inspired by events which were peculiar to his age, the nineteenth century. Although Hopkins was a Victorian poet, none of the great Victorians had heard of him: "he was entirely unknown as a poet, except to two or three friends".¹ His poetry was published by a poet-friend, Robert Bridges, in a volume in 1918, about twenty-nine years after his death. Yet few readers or writers of English poetry today can fail to have felt the influence of this great Victorian poet. His poetry is unique; it has a timeless quality. Therefore some critics today "accord great importance to Hopkins, whose The Wreck of the Deutschland, is a revolutionary poem, but of course it was known at the time to only a handful of readers".² However, in order to acquire a clear image of Hopkins the traditionalist and the innovator, the Victorian and the

¹Rex Warner, ed., Gerard Manley Hopkins: "Look Up at the Skies" (London: Bodley Head, 1972), p. 5.

²Bernard Richards, English Poetry of the Victorian Period (London and New York: Longman, 1988), p. 8.

modern, the man and the poet, and to come to a clear understanding of the ultimate meaning and value of his poetry, one should first see him in relation to his social, political, and cultural background.

The small society in which Hopkins was brought up played a great part in the formation of his personality and in the creation of his work: his early artistic tastes were formed by the aid of his relations; he was born in a prosperous and cultivated home near London. His versatile father and contemplative mother, assisted by gifted aunts and uncles, helped Hopkins to be an artist. With the encouragement of such civilized family members, he became a keen student of history, politics and philosophy.

Most of the members of Hopkins's family, on both sides, were interested in the fine arts: they were painters and musicians. For example, Arthur and Everard, two of his brothers, were to become professional artists and they achieved a competent success in the field of magazine and book-illustration. His second sister, Kate, had a vivid sense of humour and almost all his brothers were humourists.¹ Moreover, the father, Manley Hopkins, "was loving and humourist".² He wrote poetry and also made an

¹R. K. R. Thornton, Gerald Manley Hopkins: The Poems (London: The Camelot Press, 1973), p. 9.

²Paddy Kitchen, Gerald Manley Hopkins: A Life (Exeter: Carcanet Press, 1989), p. 19.

unsuccessful attempt at a novel which was rejected. In 1843, before Hopkins's birth, Manley Hopkins published his first volume of verse, A Philosopher's Stone and Other Poems. This book was dedicated to Thomas Hood, one of his acquaintances who stimulated his interest in puns and word-play, an interest later shared with Hopkins, the young poet. Thomas Hood's influence on the father can be recognized in the Hopkins nursery verses quoted by Paddy Kitchen:

Ben Battle was a soldier bold,
And used to war's alarms:
But a cannon-ball took off his legs,
So he laid down his arms!¹

While young Hopkins was in residence at Balliol College (from 1863 to 1867), he kept a notebook in which he copied poems by R. W. Emerson, Miss Smidley, Rossetti, his friends Challis and Coles and others. Eleven pieces among these poems were signed "M. H.", the initials of his father, Manley Hopkins. Thus, the discovery of Hopkins's notebook and his father's A Philosopher's Stone, was evidence of the father's literary influence upon the son. The son could have learned from the father many of the traditional graces of verse-writing. Undoubtedly, Manley Hopkins played a prominent part in the making of a significant poet, his gifted son.

¹Ibid., p. 20.

Unquestionably, Wordsworth's influence on Hopkins's father, as it is evident in A Philosopher's Stone, paved the way for his son's interest in the Romantics in general and in John Keats in particular. The father's "To a Beautiful Child", for instance, touches on the concept of nature as an educative power:

thy book
Is cliff, and wood, and foaming waterfall;
Thy playmates-the wild sheep and birds that call
Hoarse to the storm;- thy sport is with the storm
To wrestle; and thy piety to stand
Musing on things create, and their Creator's hand! ¹

It is thought that that beautiful child could have been Hopkins himself. The notion of "wrestling with the storm" is a symbol. It is prophetic of Hopkins's spiritual stress that made him compose his "Terrible Sonnets". Moreover, the phrase "and birds that call/ Hoarse to the storm" reminds one of Hopkins's images of the windhover rebuffing the big wind in his sonnet "The Windhover" and the great stormfowl at the conclusion of "Henry Purcell":

As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend:
the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. ²
("The Windhover", p. 69)

¹Jerome Bump, Gerard Manley Hopkins (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p 8.

²All Hopkins's poems which I refer to throughout this thesis are from The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 4th edn., ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. Mackenzie (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), hereafter referred to as The Poems, unless otherwise indicated.

Let him oh! with his air of angels then lift 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
 ("Henry Purcell", p. 80)

Also, in his father's "The Nursery Window" occurs a motif which the son develops with originality in his "Spring". In the father's verses one reads:

Peace to thee, infancy!- Dear prime
 Only of innocence the time.¹

And in Hopkins's one reads:

Before it cloud, Christ, Lord, and sour with
 sinning,
 Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
 Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the
 winning.
 ("Spring", p. 67)

Moreover, the influence of Keats on the father is evinced in one of his poems entitled "Sonnet", in which there was a thought that was probably a matter of speculation for the young Hopkins:

We ask away the poesy of flowers,
 And steal by science from skies, rocks and birds
 The magic that once pleased our simple sires,-
 And to light wisdom's light, we oft quench fancy's
 fires.²

¹W. H. Gardner, A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to poetic Tradition, Vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 4.

²Jerome Bump, Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 7. The same verses are quoted by W. H. Gardner in his A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy, Vol. II, p. 4.

Here, Manley Hopkins expresses a Keatsian dismay over the threat of science to a magical or imaginative response to nature which became one of Hopkins's favourite subjects as well. In another poem, "The Fairest Flower of Spring", the beauty of the "Lily of the Vale" is suggested with a delicate Keatsian fancy:

Haply to insect ears of audience fine
Those silver bells make music as they swing.¹

Some of Hopkins's mature poems include a certain genetic relationship to his father's verses. "Hurrahing in Harvest" and the "Heraclitean Fire", for instance, bear that genuine feeling for the natural phenomenon that one finds in the father's "Clouds".² Yet, the most significant example that shows the influence of the father upon his son is the poem "To a Bird Singing in a Narrow Street", which contains a sentiment that Hopkins developed in one of his sonnets of 1877.³ In "To a Bird", one reads:

Bold-hearted captive! who thy song canst trill
So blithely in thy darksome cage,- and fill
The throbbing air round
With such mellifluous sound,
Making our bosoms to thy cadence thrill!
Hast thou forgot

¹W. H. Gardner, A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition, Vol. II, p. 4.

²Ibid., p. 5.

³This sonnet is "The Caged Skylark". It is one of the sonnets in which Hopkins uses his own variations of rhyme.