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## Hopkins' Theory of the Perception of Natural Beauty

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HOPKINS' THEORY OF THE PERCEPTION  
OF NATURAL BEAUTY.

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY.

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## VITA AUCTORIS

Robert Alfred White, S. J., was born in Brooklyn, New York, May 5, 1921. He received his elementary-school education at St. Malachy's Parochial School in Brooklyn. In June, 1939, he graduated from St. Francis Xavier High School in New York City. He entered Fordham University in September of that same year, and for two years pursued the Bachelor of Arts course in that University.

In July, 1941, he entered the Society of Jesus at St. Andrew-on-Hudson Poughkeepsie, New York, where he spent the next three years. In the Fall of 1944, he began his three-year course in Philosophy at West Baden College and enrolled in Loyola University where he took his Bachelor of Arts degree the following June. He began his graduate work in Loyola University in the Summer of 1945.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION.

The Notebooks<sup>1</sup> of Gerard Manley Hopkins have been aptly called a "poetic laboratory"<sup>2</sup> in which genius may be seen at work. This expression might well be borrowed to explain the scope of the present thesis, which will be an investigation of Hopkins' "poetical laboratory" in order to study the artist's experiments with beauty.

Hopkins was a poet who delighted in the beauties of nature and who was thrilled by the delicate loveliness of clouds, sunsets, trees and birds. In the Notebooks he tried to register his keen observations with the greatest exactness. So accurate are the descriptions, that his prose has been described as "prose which almost seizes the intangible by itself becoming intangible."<sup>3</sup> It is these detailed descriptions of nature's beauty that give the Notebooks their "laboratory" effect. The ultimate purpose of this careful observation of detail was to determine the nature of beauty,

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<sup>1</sup> The Note-books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Humphry House, ed., Oxford U. Press, London, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Blanche M. Kelly, "Review of the Notebooks of Gerard Manley Hopkins", The Catholic World, cvl, 1937, 750.

<sup>3</sup> George N. Shuster, The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature, Macmillan Co., New York, 1928, 120.

for he was curious to know what made a beautiful object beautiful. The present thesis will be concerned both with Hopkins' theory of beauty as presented in the Early Notebooks, as well as the actual working out of this theory in his exact descriptions of nature as found in the Journal.

The first chapter of this study will present Hopkins' theory of the perception of beauty. This theory was developed in 1865, while he was a student at Oxford. At this time he composed a Platonic Dialogue entitled, "On the Origin of Beauty". Whether it was written for Walter Pater, who was one of his tutors at Oxford, is not certain, but at least "it seems likely...that the dialogue is closely connected with things Hopkins discussed with him."<sup>4</sup> From this dialogue Hopkins' notions regarding the nature of beauty may be learned. A second source for this investigation of his aesthetics will be found in a fragment of the Early Notebooks dated February 9, 1868, in which the poet discussed the activity of the mind as it beholds beauty. A remark by Humphry House indicating the value of the Early Diaries, is equally applicable to the two notebooks which will be used as sources of Hopkins' theory. With

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<sup>4</sup> Notebooks, xxiv.

regard to the Early Diaries, Mr. House commented: The habits of mind shown in the poems and later journal are already far developed. He has the same way of looking at clouds, sunsets, trees, streams, and birds."<sup>5</sup>

Since Hopkins distinguished between the "inward beauty" and "outward beauty"<sup>6</sup> of objects, it will help clarify the exact scope of the present examination to determine the relation between these two realities. Inward beauty concerns the metaphysical composition of bodies. This philosophical aspect of Hopkins' aesthetics has already been studied by J. M. Fraunces, S. J., in a thesis entitled, "The meaning and Use of Inscapē".<sup>7</sup> The inner beauty is the result of what scholastic philosophers call the "form" or activating principle of an object, which principle is a reality that cannot be perceived by the senses. Hopkins aptly described the activity of this philosophical "form" when he said:

"Fineness, proportion of feature comes from a moulding force which succeeds in asserting itself over the resistance of cumbersome or restraining matter...The moulding force, the life, is the form in the philosophic sense."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>6</sup> Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Claude C. Abbott, ed., Oxford U. Press, London, 1938, 158.

<sup>7</sup> John M. Fraunces, S. J., The Meaning and Use of Inscapē, M. A. Thesis, Loyola University, 1940.

<sup>8</sup> Further Letters, 158.



Thus the external symmetry of an object is due to the activity of its inner form. From this consideration comes the conclusion that Hopkins himself enunciated, "that in nature outward beauty is the proof of inward beauty."<sup>9</sup> This conclusion is remarkably similar to the traditional scholastic explanation of beauty as splendor formae, for the "schoolmen had called beauty 'the splendour of form shining on the proportioned parts of matter'."<sup>10</sup>

This study will be concerned with the perception of external beauty. From the foregoing explanation it is clear that Hopkins considered this to be the expression of inner beauty. However, it is not the burden of this thesis to demonstrate how this comes about. What it will try to do is to present his theory of the process by which this external beauty is perceived, and to demonstrate this theory in actual operation in Hopkins' prose.

Such a procedure means that we will be concerned with a specific use of Hopkins' term, "inscape". Since he said,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 158

<sup>10</sup> John Pick, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Priest and Poet, Oxford U. Press, London, 1943, 33. A clear presentation of the scholastic explanation of beauty will be found in Beauty, A Study in Philosophy, by Aloysius Rother, S. J., St. Louis, B. Herder Co., 1917.

"All the world is full of inscape"<sup>11</sup> it is important to understand precisely what he understood by this word. The fact that he used the expression in a variety of meanings makes it rather difficult to define it exactly. However, a general notion of its meaning is expressed by the poet in a letter to Robert Bridges when Hopkins speaks of "design, pattern, or what I am in the habit of calling 'inscape'."<sup>12</sup> From this remark it may be seen that, broadly speaking, inscape means pattern or design.

But "inscape" had a deeper meaning than this. As one author notes: "But that 'inscape' meant much more than external design or pattern is clear from passages in which the expression is connected with the inner kernel of being."<sup>13</sup> This observation is confirmed by Austen Warren, who remarks that the expression "moved through some range of meaning: from sense-perceived pattern to inner form."<sup>14</sup> Mr. Pick briefly and adequately summarizes the various connotations in which the term was used:

<sup>11</sup> Notebooks, 173.

<sup>12</sup> The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, Claude C. Abbott, ed., Oxford U. Press, London, 1935, I, 66.

<sup>13</sup> Pick, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Kenyon Critics, Gerard Manley Hopkins, New Directions Norfolk, Connecticut, 77.

While the term, therefore, was used with some flexibility the variations in its application are largely a matter of emphasis; sometimes he stresses 'inscape' as configuration, design, shape, pattern, and contour—the 'outer form' of a thing; sometimes he stresses 'inscape' as the ontological secret behind a thing, as the 'inner form'. But usually he employs the word to indicate the essential individuality and particularity or 'selfhood' of a thing working itself out and expressing itself in design and pattern. This he then calls beauty.<sup>15</sup>

We will be concerned primarily with the use of "inscape" which refers to the "outer form" or external pattern of objects. That this external design is the expression of the philosophical form of the object, has already been seen, but this is not the concern of the present study. Nor do we propose to consider merely the sense perception of this pattern. Our intention is rather to study the sensitive, intellectual and emotional operations involved when the beauty of this pattern is apprehended.

Since abstract theories are more understandable when seen in actual operation, it would be advisable to make an immediate application of Hopkins' notions of the perception of beauty to his descriptions of the beauties of nature.

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<sup>15</sup> Pick, 33.

These descriptions are found in the Journal kept during the years from 1868, just before he entered the Jesuit novitiate, until 1875, when he was studying theology at St. Bueno's in Wales. The order to be followed in examining these entries will be based on the nature of the object portrayed, so that separate chapters will treat the descriptions of inanimate nature, plant life and animal life.

Because it was principally his poetry that brought Hopkins to the attention of the literary world, it might be asked: what relation has this thesis to his poems? As has been said before, in the Notebooks he was experimenting with beauty. There he was trying to express in words the beauty that his eyes and mind beheld in the wonders of nature. The poems represent the finished products of his experiments, and the final achievement of the artist. Therefore occasional quotations from his poems will be introduced to show how the studies of the Notebooks culminated in works of art. Viewing his poems against the background of the Notebooks should also lead to a fuller understanding and deeper appreciation of the poetry of this lover of nature.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PERCEPTION OF BEAUTY, IN THEORY.

The first step to be taken in arriving at Hopkins' theory of the perception of beauty is to examine his concept of beauty. What properties are inherent in an object which induce men to call it beautiful? A flaming golden sunset stirs deep admiration in the beholder who is sensitive to its loveliness, and Hopkins was enraptured when beholding such scenes. But unlike the majority of men, he was not content to merely exclaim, "How beautiful it is!" He was eager to discover why it was so.

In a separate note-book, dated May 12, 1865, Hopkins wrote a Platonic Dialogue in which he presented the answer to his own question. One of the characters in this dialogue, "On the Origin of Beauty", is a young Oxford student named Hanbury. He is trying to discover whether there are any objective norms by which a person may have solid reasons to support his judgment in matters of taste. If a man sincerely thinks a particular sunset is beautiful, how can he prove to someone else that his judgment is true? The young student poses his question to the Professor of the

chair of Aesthetics, and, in the ensuing conversation, we are given an insight into Hopkins' concept of beauty.

In brief, the definition formulated is this: "beauty... is a mixture of regularity and irregularity."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, a beautiful object has both of these elements. What at first sight appears paradoxical will, in the light of Hopkins' explanation, seem quite logical. As an example, he makes use of a chestnut-fan. The ordinary chestnut-fan consists of seven leaves of which the largest is in the middle, while the others are gradually smaller, so that those nearest the stalk are smallest. Some chestnut-fans, however, have only six leaves. The question arises, which of the two types is to be preferred? In the dialogue, Hopkins, through Hanbury the student concluded: "Well, I daresay the six-leaved one may improve the foliage by variety, but in themselves the seven-leaved one is the handsomer."<sup>2</sup> The reason he gave for his preference is: "Well, I suppose because to have the greatest leaf in the middle is the handsomer way."<sup>3</sup> Thus, despite the fact that the six-leaved fan, with three leaves on either side of the stalk, is the

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<sup>1</sup> Notebooks, 59.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 56.

more symmetrical of the two specimens, Hopkins maintained that the seven-leaved one is the handsomer. In this way he arrived at the element of irregularity which a beautiful object must possess. The conclusion was confirmed by the example of a chestnut tree, which is more beautiful as it exists in nature with its branches unevenly distant from one another, than it would be if the boughs started from the trunk "at the same height on opposite sides, symmetrically pair and pair."<sup>4</sup> The example of the coloring of the sky served as a further confirmation, for the variety which is found in the gradual change of color from the bright blue directly overhead, through the pale "indescribable" hue to the red of the sundown, is more beautiful than if the whole sky were of one uniform rich red, or if the red and blue ended sharply with a straight line without any gradual change of hue.

Regularity too, is an essential element of beauty, for a mere shapeless mass is not attractive. Although the oak is an unsymmetrical tree, Hopkins observed its definite arc shape and thus detected an element of regularity in it. He remarked:

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 57.

Now have you ever noticed that when the oak has grown to its full stature uninfluenced, the outline of its head is drawn by a long curve, I should think it would be that of a parabola, which, if you look at the tree from a little way off, is of almost mathematical correctness?<sup>5</sup>

When he proceeded to define regularity, Hopkins called it, "consistency or agreement or likeness, either of a thing to itself or of several things to each other."<sup>6</sup> Again an example clarified the poet's meaning:

I mean that although a leaf might have an outline on one side so irregular that no law could be traced in it, yet if the other side exactly agreed with it, you would say there was law or regularity about the leaf to make one side like the other.<sup>7</sup>

Another illustration of this idea may be seen in the tree whose leaves individually are entirely different from those of any other tree, yet if all the leaves have the same irregularity so that they resemble one another, they may be said to possess a likeness or agreement.

The relation between these elements of "likeness" and "difference" was formulated into the following principle: "It is not the excellence of any two things (or more) in themselves, but those things as viewed by the light of each other, that makes beauty."<sup>8</sup> Using the leaves of the fan to

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 58

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 64



exemplify this principle, Hopkins noted that the beauty of the fan is not "the likeness of the leaves, but their likeness as thrown up by their difference in size...Nor their inequality, but the inequality as tempered by their regular diminishing."<sup>9</sup> Thus it may be said that

...the beauty of the oak and the chestnut-fan and the sky is a mixture of likeness and difference or agreement and disagreement or consistency and variety or symmetry and change.<sup>10</sup>

Thus far, merely the objective aspect of beauty has been considered. Yet Hopkins also affirmed that there is a subjective element, a part contributed by the senses and mind of the beholder. What this subjective element is, may be seen in the remark: "Beauty therefore is a relation, and the apprehension of it a comparison. The sense of beauty in fact is a comparison".<sup>11</sup> This subjective element is a very important part of Hopkins' theory because it indicates that the intellect must be active in the perception of beauty. The ability to see relations and to institute comparisons is an operation which requires a supra-sensible faculty. Our eyes reveal the external shape, patterns and colors of the object beheld. The shape of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 63

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 65

chestnut-fans and the varying colors of the sky are beheld by men and animals alike, but the mere sense perception of these objects is not sufficient for appreciating the beauty in them. The similarity of the chestnut leaves must be considered in the light of the dissimilarity of their sizes and their inequality must be considered as modified by their regular diminishing. Parts must be related to the whole, and the perception of these relations of likeness and difference of things is one of the operations of the intellect. Hopkins expressed this quite clearly:

The more intellectual, less physical, the spell of contemplation the more complex must be the object, the more close and elaborate must be the comparison the mind has to keep making between the whole and the parts, the parts and the whole. For this reference or comparison is what the sense of unity means; mere sense that such a thing is one and not two has no interest or value except accidentally.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, for the complete notion of beauty there are two requirements; objectively, the object must have a mixture of likeness and difference, and subjectively, the senses and intellect must co-operate in perceiving it. The former must be alive to the details of the object be-

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 96

held, while the latter should be aware of the relationship between these details.

When there was a question of observing the minutest details of nature, Hopkins' senses were very keen. As Arthur Mizener, one of the Kenyon Critics, has noted: "Hopkins' life was filled...with the minute and loving observation of nature."<sup>13</sup> The same critic compared the poet's sensuous awareness of the beauties of nature to that of Keats, when he said: "Like Keats he had a most intense sensuous awareness of it to support this admirable objective and painstaking observation of nature."<sup>14</sup>

Yet, as noted, mere sense perception is not sufficient. The mind also must be active in the apprehension of beauty. In a fragment dated February 9, 1868, Hopkins described the activity of the mind in beholding beauty. Although his remarks refer directly to the energy exacted by the perception of the beauty of art, it may be logically inferred that the mental process is the same in the perception of the beauty of nature. In his treatment of the kinds of mental energy, Hopkins distinguished two types:

A transitional kind, when one thought  
or sensation follows another, which is

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<sup>13</sup> Kenyon Critics, 96.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 97.

to reason, whether actively as in deliberation, criticism, or passively, so to call it, as in reading etc; (ii) an abiding kind for which I remember no name, in which the mind is absorbed (as far as that may be), taken up by, dwells upon, enjoys, a single thought: we may call it contemplation...<sup>15</sup>

Which type of energy does the mind use when it beholds beauty? As might naturally be expected from the description of objective beauty, Hopkins maintained that both types of energy are used in the perception. By means of the "transitional" type of energy, the mind makes the comparisons between the parts and the whole, the likenesses and differences of the object, by which the unity of the composite is perceived, "For this reference or comparison is what the sense of unity means..."<sup>16</sup> By means of the "contemplative energy", the mind enjoys the oneness of the whole.

Some objects are more complex than others and have a more complicated organization. To grasp the unity of these, more effort and a greater mental capacity are required. From this the conclusion emerges that the varying abilities of individuals to perceive beauty are well accounted

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<sup>15</sup> Notebooks, 96.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 96

for in this theory, both on the sense and intellectual plane. If a person's senses are sharper and more alert, he will be able to note small differences and variations in objects that an ordinary man would overlook. In this way, his senses would offer more data to his intellect with which it could institute the comparisons necessary for the perception of beauty. On the other hand, if the complexity of the object requires close and elaborate comparisons between the parts and the whole in order that the oneness be grasped by the mind, only those of higher intellectual ability will be able to apprehend this unity. The individual who is gifted with both keenness of sense perception and sharpness of intellect will have a deeper perception of beauty.

Although Hopkins went into such detail regarding the mental process involved in perceiving beauty, he never lost sight of the objective element. Even in this fragment where he described the kinds of mental energy, he added the warning: "The saner moreover is the act of contemplation as contemplating that which really is expressed in the object."<sup>17</sup> However, he also admitted that the sense of beauty

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 97

arising from the perception of unity in the object may be enhanced by the background of knowledge in the mind of the observer. This idea was formulated into the principle that "almost all works of art imply knowledge of things external to themselves in the mind of the critic...in fact all do..."<sup>18</sup> Thus the beauty beheld in a particular sunset may be enhanced by the remembrance of other delightful sunsets.

One more element in Hopkins' theory of the perception of beauty, which, though not specifically mentioned in the dialogue or fragment, is frequently mentioned in his other writings, must be included in this discussion. This added element concerns the sensitivity of feeling by which a person is sensibly affected by the perception of the pattern or inscape he beholds in objects. Hopkins referred to this quality as, "instress", a word which he "never decisively defines."<sup>19</sup> From his use of the word, however, we may arrive at his understanding of it. It is "a word he attached to the intensity of feeling and associations which something beautiful brought to him."<sup>20</sup> From this it is clear that, in Hopkins' theory, the perception of inscape is not a cold,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 68

<sup>19</sup> Eleanor Ruggles, Gerard Manley Hopkins, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1944, 138.

<sup>20</sup> Pick, 32.

unemotional process but, on the contrary, arouses deep feelings in the beholder.

A brief summary of this discussion will present a view of Hopkins' notions as a unified system. According to his theory, beauty is a relation between the regular and irregular features of an object. The perception of this relation involves the co-operation of sense and intellect. The senses perceive the external features of the object and the mind apprehends the relation between the differences. In completing its operation, the intellect uses a twofold energy, a transitional kind by which it makes comparisons between the different qualities of the object beheld, and a contemplative variety, by which it enjoys the unity of the pattern. The perception of this unity in variety of the object arouses feelings of admiration or awe in the beholder, which reaction is called "instress".

## CHAPTER III

### BEAUTY OF INANIMATE OBJECTS.

The intangible beauties of nature are strangely fascinating to most men. The multicolored hues of the sky, the restless motion of the sea and the gracefulness of a rippling stream appeal strongly. Inspired by these charms of nature, artists have tried to give them expression through the medium of their art. Gerard Manley Hopkins tried to express nature's beauty in words. His attempts are jotted in a diary of observations he kept during the years from 1868 to 1875. His editor explains that Hopkins "normally made rough notes of what he saw at the time of seeing it, and wrote the 'Journal' some time later from these notes."<sup>1</sup> In order to see if the poet's perception of beauty is in accord with his own theory, a number of entries from this Journal will be analyzed. The descriptions of the sky in its various aspects from dawn to sunset will be examined first.

The number of shades of color and varieties of pattern that Hopkins beheld in the sky is amazing. An entry in the Journal for April 21, 1871, has the following description

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<sup>1</sup> Notebooks, xxvi.



...the sky a beautiful grained blue, silky lingering clouds in flat-bottomed loaves, others a little browner in ropes or in burly-shouldered ridges swanny and lustrous, more in the Zenith stray packs of a sort of violet paleness.<sup>2</sup>

The passage goes on to describe the subtle differences his keen observation detected:

White-rose cloud formed fast, not in the same density some caked and swimming in a wan whiteness, the rest soaked with the blue and like the leaf of a flower held against the light and diapered out by the worm or veining of deeper blue between rosette and rosette.<sup>3</sup>

To appreciate this description more fully, it will help to picture the setting in which Hopkins observed the sight. On a bright afternoon in late April, Hopkins, then a young man of twenty-six years, gazed at the blue sky and admired its beauty. As he watched, he beheld a new cloud forming. Struck by the beauty of the scene, he tried to describe it. His first recorded observation involves the "beautiful grained blue" of the sky. This description reveals that in the apparently solid color, he discovered a slight variety of shades which gave the impression of a set of fibres or "grains". This provided an element of irregularity to relieve the monotony that would have resulted

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 143.

from a mass of undifferentiated blueness. Against this background of the graduated blue sky, he perceived clouds of different colors. One group was light and "silky", while those of the second set were "a little browner", and in the third collection he noted a "sort of violet paleness". The formations of the clouds had variety too. The first group seemed to be "lingering" in a formation that resembled a "loaf" of bread, flat on the bottom and rolled on top. Another set was extended in "ropes" or "ridges" which were not narrow but "burly-shouldered". In the "zenith" directly overhead, the clouds were scattered in "stray packs". The gracefulness and brightness of the clouds are emphasized by the adjectives "swanny and lustrous". In the cloud formation that assembled as he watched, he also detected such various colors as; "white-rose...soaked with blue... deeper blue between rosette and rosette".

In addition to the irregular features, however, there were elements of regularity in the scene, so that it was not merely a shapeless mass. In the individual groups of clouds some definite formation could be traced, such as that of "flat-bottomed loaves" or "ropes" or "burly-shouldered ridges". Furthermore the basic similarity of color in the clouds comprising each group added another feature of agreement. Therefore, in this picture of sky and clouds

that Hopkins presents, we may discover the requirement of "regularity marked by irregularity" that was called for by his theory.

The fact that his eye detected the slight dissimilarities indicates both the keenness of his perception and the activity of the senses in beholding natural beauty. However, his theory also called for a twofold energy of mind to contribute a share in the process. By means of the first species of energy, the "transitional" type, the mind perceived the relations between the differences of color and pattern in the scene. Then with the second type, the "contemplative" mental energy, it dwelt upon and enjoyed the oneness thus established.

The theory's final principle involves the emotional reaction to apprehended beauty, or the "instress" of feeling which accompanies the perception of a beautiful sight. This is exemplified in Hopkins' entry in the Journal for April 22, the day after he beheld the scene just analyzed. In this next entry, the poet remarked: "But such a lovely damasking in the sky as today I never felt before. The blue was charged with a simple instress, the higher, zenith sky earnest and frowning, lower more light and sweet."<sup>4</sup> The fact that he "felt" the damasking in the sky

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 143

implies that the perception involved emotional activity as well as the operations of sense and intellect. The whole man was taken up with the experience. The appearance of the sky overhead and the lower sky stirred different emotional reactions since the one seemed "frowning" while the other was "more light and sweet", so that Hopkins' feelings varied accordingly.

Now that all the components of Hopkins' theory have been illustrated from the two successive passages in the Journal, we may proceed to investigate various other entries which also concern the beauty of the sky, to see how elements of his theory are further illustrated. For instance, the objective "likeness-difference" pattern of things and Hopkins' concern for it may be seen very clearly in another description. He had observed some clouds which he referred to by the term, "rack", which is defined as: "clouds, or a mass of cloud, driven before the wind in the upper air."<sup>5</sup> Hopkins' entry in the Journal for May 24, 1871, noted that he had made out the pattern of the rack. He said: "At sunset and later a strongly marked moulded rack. I made out the make of it, thus--crosshatching in fact...see April

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<sup>5</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1933.

21 and what is said there."<sup>6</sup> The term he used to describe the pattern, "cross-hatching", is a term taken from drawing. It is defined as "the process of marking with crossing sets of parallel lines; the effect so produced."<sup>7</sup> In other words, Hopkins had observed a series of flying or broken clouds that were spotted and decidedly patterned. The pattern consisted of a series of diagonally crossed lines, as is indicated by a diagram accompanying the entry. The reference to April 21st in this entry, is to a day when he had beheld the same type of clouds, and the May 24th account adds: "Since that day and since this (May 24) I have noticed this kind of cloud: its brindled and hatched scaping though difficult to catch is remarkable when seen."<sup>8</sup> "Brindled and hatched" refer to the streaked appearance and the diagonally-crossed lines he detected in the clouds, again demonstrating the external pattern or "scape" possessed by objects. Two other points are confirmed by this entry; first, that the pattern of objects is not always immediately evident, and secondly, that when the scape or pattern is caught by the observer, he perceives the beauty of the object.

<sup>6</sup> Notebooks, 147

<sup>7</sup> Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>8</sup> Notebooks, 147.

Another point also clarified by this May 24th entry is that Hopkins spent much time in allowing the contemplative energy of his mind to look into the object, for after he had described a rainbow-like phenomenon that he beheld, he remarked: "It lasted as long as I looked without change--I do not know how long but between five minutes and a quarter of an hour perhaps."<sup>9</sup>

Hopkins' theory, we have seen, admits that "almost all works of art imply knowledge of things external to themselves in the mind of the critic--in fact all do..."<sup>10</sup> A fine example of this occurs in a description of clouds in July, 1871. Hopkins was recording his perception of the greatest stack of cloud he had ever seen. The entry again includes the activities of his senses, intellect and emotions which co-operated in the experience. He remarked:

Singled by the eye and taken up by itself  
it was shining white but taken with the  
sky, which was a strong hard blue, it was  
anointed with warm brassy shadow. The in-  
stress of its size came from comparison  
not with what was visible but with the  
remembrance of other clouds.<sup>11</sup>

In this case the knowledge of things external had a direct influence on the instress of feeling which the perception of this particular cloud aroused.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 148

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 150.

A final example from his descriptions of clouds gives added insight into the theory and into the meanings of his special words, "scape" and "inscape". He was describing his perception of one long "loop-shaped" cloud:

I looked long up at it till the tall height and the beauty of the scaping - regularly curled knots springing if I remember from fine stems, like foliation in wood or stone - had strongly grown on me. It changed beautiful changes, growing more into ribs and one stretch of running into branching like coral. Unless you refresh the mind from time to time you cannot always remember or believe how deep the inscape in things is.<sup>12</sup>

Although the meanings of the terms vary, "scape" generally refers to the pattern of the object, as it does in this passage, and "inscape" to the pattern or "scape" as intellectually apprehended by the observer.

The analyses have indicated that Hopkins' actual perception of the beauty of clouds is quite in agreement with his theoretical remarks. It has also been suggested that the poet had a deep interest in the beauties of the sky and clouds. Therefore it is only natural that this interest and enthusiasm should find their way into his poetry. Due to the nature of poetry, however, descriptions cannot be

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 140.

so lengthy or detailed, and as noted before, in the Note-books he was experimenting, while in the poems his finished products are represented. Having examined his deep insight into the beauty of these objects, we are prepared for a fuller appreciation of references to the sky or clouds in his poetry. In the poems Hopkins does make brief references to the multicolored aspect of the sky, and speaks of "skies of couple-color as a brinded cow..."<sup>13</sup> and the "dappled-with-damson west..."<sup>14</sup> He also mentions "sheep-flock clouds like worlds of wool",<sup>15</sup> and comments on the lovely behaviour or "silk-sack clouds."<sup>16</sup> His minute observation and exuberant enthusiasm are given eloquent expression in the opening lines of the poem, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire..."

Cloud-Puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows '  
 flaunt forth, then chevy on an air -  
 built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in  
 gay-gangs ' they throng; they  
 glitter in marches.<sup>17</sup>

Our knowledge of the Journal's fuller descriptions of sky and clouds deepens our appreciation of these brief references to their beauty in the poems.

<sup>13</sup> Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert Bridges, ed., second edition, Oxford U. Press, London, 1941, 30, #13, "Pied Beauty".

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 13, #4, "The Wreck of the Deutschland".

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 24, #5, "Penmaen Pool".

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 30, #14, "Hurrahing in Harvest".

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 67, #48, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire...".



The wonders of the ever-changing sky were not the only aspect of inanimate nature that stirred Hopkins' admiration and curiosity. Rolling sea waves, crystal-clear lakes and dancing streams were also a delightful attraction to his nature-loving soul. The Journal abounds with descriptions of them, and an analysis of his observations of this type of natural beauty will provide another demonstration of his theory in actual practice.

An excellent example of his enthusiastic desire to perceive the pattern of objects is presented in the account of a brook seen on August 12, 1873. He was speaking of the round holes that are "scooped" in the rocks by the tiny falls:

I saw and sketched as well as in the rain  
I could one of them that was in the making:  
a blade of water played on it and shaping  
to it spun off making a bold big white bow  
coiling its edge over and splaying into  
ribs. But from the position it is not easy  
to see how the water could in this way have  
scooped all of them. I jumped into one of the  
pools above knee deep and it was raining  
besides...<sup>18</sup>

His close observation revealed to him that the rushing "blade" of water first received its shape from the round hole scooped

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<sup>18</sup> Notebooks., 180.

in the rock, and then formed itself into a big arc or "bow" shape. In addition to this, his keen eye detected further design in the arc itself, and he noted that its edge was rounded or "coiled" and formed into veins or "ribs". Amid all the seeming confusion and onrush of the water, the objective element of regularity demanded for beauty had been ferreted out by this diligent enthusiast.

The difficulty in perceiving the definite pattern in waves is noted in an entry for August 10, 1872, where he was describing high waves and breakers. After describing the formation of breakers at some length, he remarked that the regularity he had detected, "surprised and charmed the eye;" But he had not satisfied his intense curiosity, and noted:

About all the turns of the scaping from the break and flooding of the wave to its run out again I have not yet satisfied myself. The shores are swimming and the eyes have before them a region of milky surf but it is hard for them to unpack the huddling and gnarls of the water and law out the shapes and the sequence of the running:<sup>19</sup>

In this account he mentioned the difficulty the "eyes" had in detecting the regular shapes. That the mind would

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 164

have a similar difficulty and require much "transitional energy" is clear, because when the organization of an object is more complicated, greater mental effort is expended in making comparisons between the parts and in fusing the diverse elements into a unified whole. But the breaking of the wave did not remain an unsolved mystery to Hopkins. Proof of this is given in an entry for August 13, 1874, just two years after he had mentioned that he had not satisfied himself on this precise point. His analysis is evidently the fruit of long hours of careful observation:

The wave breaks in this order--the crest of the barrel 'doubling' (that, a boatman said, is the word to use) is broken into a bush of foam, which, if you search it, is a lace and tangle of jumping sprays; then breaking down these grow to a sort of shaggy quilt tumbling up the beach; thirdly this unfolds into a sheet of clear foam and running forward in leaves and laps the wave reaches its greatest height upon the shore and at the same time its greatest clearness and simplicity.<sup>20</sup>

The perception of various patterns, however, is only a step on the path to beauty. For complete apprehension, the "contemplative energy" of the mind must enjoy the object's unity. Despite his preoccupation with the parts, Hopkins never lost sight of this larger element, for after

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 201

noting the shapes he had fathomed in waves, he once remarked: "In watching the sea one should be alive to the oneness which all its motion and tumult receives from its perpetual balance and falling this way and that to its level."<sup>21</sup>

The emotional response or "instress" which Hopkins experienced in beholding the beauties of bodies of water is evidenced in the exclamation: "Laus Deo - the river today and yesterday"<sup>22</sup>, which introduces one entry. Further insight into the concentration required in order that the emotional reaction be felt, is given in a remark made in 1872, when he noted that "with a companion the eye and ear are for the most part shut and instress cannot come."<sup>23</sup>

The descriptions which have been examined verify the theory that a beautiful object must contain a mixture of regularity and irregularity. The varied shapes were detected by a keeneye and an alert mind that synthesized them into a unity, which it then enjoyed. The delight was emotional as well as intellectual, so that all the elements

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 167

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 171.

of Hopkins' theory were actually in operation when he looked deeply into the wonders of lifeless nature and beheld the "dearest freshness deep down things..."<sup>24</sup> Instances could be multiplied because the Journal is a treasure-house of vivid descriptions. However, since it has been amply shown that his theory is illustrated in the perception of inanimate nature, it seems better to pass on to his perception of beauty in trees and flowers.

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<sup>24</sup> Poems, 26, #7, "God's Grandeur".

## CHAPTER IV

### BEAUTY OF OBJECTS POSSESSING VEGETATIVE LIFE.

The splendor of lifeless nature thrilled Hopkins. Yet when he turned his attention to the wonders of plant life, he found a new world of inscape to explore and enjoy. The realization that others did not share his enjoyment in catching this beauty of inscape, grieved him. The beauty that lay in the most simple objects remained unknown to men because they failed to observe it. How few ever noticed the loveliness of the ordinary little bluebell! Yet this tiny flower evoked from Hopkins the affirmation: "I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at."<sup>1</sup> Its strength and grace so captivated his attention that he went into great detail trying to describe it. These descriptions, when analyzed, will provide another illustration of his theory of the perception of beauty.

One entry dealing with bluebells occurs in 1870, and reveals Hopkins' concern with the varied shapes and colors. He wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Notebooks., 133.

The head is strongly drawn over (backwards) and arched down like a cutwater (drawing itself back from the line of the keel). The lines of the bells strike and overlie this, rayed but not symmetrically, some lie parallel.<sup>2</sup>

Here the general outline of the flower's appearance is noted. The poet had observed the arc-like bend in the stem and described it by using the nautical term "cutwater", which is, "the knee of the head of a ship, etc., which serves to divide the water before it reaches the bow..."<sup>3</sup> He also detected a radiation-like pattern caused by the lines of the bells running counter to and "striking" this arc. The array of these latter lines, however, was not perfectly symmetrical.

The variations of color were noted in the continuation of the description:

They look steely against (the) paper, the shades lying between the bells and behind the cockled petal-ends and nursing up the precision of their distinctness, the petal-ends themselves being delicately lit.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the relation between the regularity and irregularity in the bells was observed:

Then there is the straightness of the trumpets in the bells softened by the

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>3</sup> Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>4</sup> Notebooks, 134

slight entasis and (by) the square splay of the mouth.<sup>5</sup>

The word "entasis" may cause a little difficulty until it be remembered that it is a term used in describing architecture to denote "a delicate and almost imperceptible swelling of the shaft of a column."<sup>6</sup> Thus, it is apparent that Hopkins beheld a relation between three shapes in each of the tiny bells: the "straightness" of the cup or "trumpet", the almost imperceptible swelling or "entasis" and finally, the squareness of the sloping or "splay" of the mouth.

All the elements required for Hopkins' theory of beauty are illustrated in the foregoing passage. Objectively, the bluebell contained the "mixture of likeness and difference" that was demanded, for its stem was not merely bent over, but was bent in the shape of an arc, giving a note of symmetry to its general outline. Another element of regularity was noted in the "straightness" of the cups. But there was irregularity as well, for the lines of the bells that "struck" the stem were not perfectly symmetrical, and the "straightness" of the trumpets of the bells was "softened by the slight entasis". In addition to this there were varying shades of color in the diverse parts of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 134

<sup>6</sup> Oxford English Dictionary



flower.

The senses had to be very active to perceive these variations of color and pattern. More important, however, than the operation of the eyes in perceiving the shapes, is the activity of the intellect revealed in the description. Hopkins noted that the swelling or "entasis" of the bells "softened" the rigidity of their appearance. This indicates that the mind instituted a comparison between the straightness and the swelling, detected the relation and synthesized them into a unit. This is necessarily an intellectual operation because the senses are not capable of perceiving relations. Hopkins used the term "transitional energy" to explain this activity. The fact that he considered mere sense perception of differences insufficient to give the full apprehension of beauty is demonstrated in the remark: "For this reference or comparison is what the sense of unity means; mere sense that such a thing is one and not two has no interest or value except accidentally."<sup>7</sup>

The "contemplative energy" of Hopkins' mind enjoyed the unity of the whole flower. This is clear from his open-

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<sup>7</sup> Notebooks, 96.

ing remark: "I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at." He was not merely beholding an arched stem or a straight bell, but his mind had so co-ordinated the parts that he thrilled at the beauty of the bluebell as a living unit.

Although the final element of "instress" is not specifically mentioned in this entry, the enthusiasm of Hopkins' praise would be one indication that he not only perceived, but actually felt and was charmed by the beauty. It will be seen that even this element was explicitly included in another description.

The arched stem of bluebells so fascinated him that a year after he had compared it to the "cutwater" of a vessel, Hopkins jotted down other comparisons in which he likened the arc to "a staff with a simple crook", "waves riding through a whip that is being smacked" and "knights at chess".<sup>8</sup> His preoccupation with this flower was evidently renewed every spring, for in 1873, two years after the series of comparisons just noted, he recorded another entry about them.

Bluebells at Hodder wood, all hanging  
their heads one way. I caught as well

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 146.

as I could while my companions talked the Greek rightness of their beauty, the lovely/ what people call/ 'gracious' bidding one to another or all one way, the level or stage or shire of colour they make hanging in the air a foot above the grass, and a notable glare the eye may abstract and sever from the blue colour/ of light beating up from so many glassy heads, which like water is good to float their deeper instress in upon the mind.<sup>9</sup>

This last remark proves that even the element of "instress" was present when Hopkins gazed at his favorite flower. Consequently his whole theory of the co-operation of senses, intellect and emotion in the perception of the inscape of objects was verified when he beheld the flower that was more beautiful than anything he had ever seen.

Pretty as bluebells were, however, they did not entirely monopolize the poet's attention or blind him to the wonders of numerous other varieties of flowers. He found great delight in such flowers as violets, daffodils and primroses. In these too, he was well aware of the selfhood revealing itself in external pattern. This wide scope of interest is indicated in an observation he made about some daffodils he once found:

Found some daffodils wild but fading.  
You see the squareness of the scaping

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 174.

well when you have several in your hand. The bright yellow corolla is seeded with very fine spangles (like carnations etc.) which give it a glister and lie on a ribbing which makes it like cloth of gold!<sup>10</sup>

The details enumerated indicate that he had also studied this type of flower quite carefully.

An interesting point comes to light in the final example to be taken from flowers. Hopkins is at a loss for words in trying to describe the instress received from primroses. That he made intense efforts to express his thoughts in the most apt words, can be gathered from the technical terms he resorted to in delineating various contours, such as "entasis", with regard to the bluebell. He was not trying to be obscure. On the contrary, he was striving to be most accurate. Yet here is an instance when he was unable to find words to express the feelings he experienced: "Take a few primroses in a glass and the instress of - brilliancy, sort of starriness: I have not the right word - so simple a flower gives is remarkable."<sup>11</sup>

Where the beauty of trees was concerned, Hopkins was incredibly sensitive. A person not acquainted with his affectionate admiration of nature might think that the poet

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 145

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 142.

was insincere when he recorded in his Journal:

The ashtree growing in the corner of the garden was felled. It was lopped first: I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not to see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more.<sup>12</sup>

Greater sensitivity than this can hardly be imagined, and even though few may share the intense "pang" experienced by the poet at the felling of a tree, all may understand that here was a man to whom beauty was a tremendous reality. Hopkins believed that the perception of a beautiful object was accompanied by an emotional thrill. Here the process is seen in reverse, for seeing beauty destroyed the alert nature-lover suffered deeply. This little incident offers a fine revelation of the poet's feeling of intimacy with nature, and hence is a very appropriate introduction to the examination of his descriptions of the loveliness of trees.

This enthusiasm for trees was not a vague sentimentality. It was founded on intense "study", for that is the only word that explains his perception of inscapes. He used this term in an entry which explains that some seasons are better than others for perceiving the "inscape" of trees.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 174.

End of March and beginning of April - This is the time to study inscape in the spraying of trees, for the swelling buds carry them to a pitch which the eye could not else gather...in these sprays at all events there is a new world of inscape.<sup>13</sup>

After making this observation, he proceeded to describe the patterns his eye uncovered in the beloved ash tree. First the formation of the branches is set forth.

The male ashes are very boldly jotted with the heads of the bloom which tuft the outer ends of the branches. The staff of each of these branches is closely knotted with the places where buds are or have been, so that it is something like a finger which has been tied up with string and keeps the marks.<sup>14</sup>

If these knots were arranged without any regular pattern, it would be difficult to see how they could be beautiful. Such is not the case, however, for nature has placed them in a very definite order, which Hopkins observed and recorded:

They are in knots of a pair, one on each side, and the knots are set alternately, at crosses with the knots above and the knots below, the bud or course is a short smoke-black pointed nail-head or beak pieced of four lids or nippers.<sup>15</sup>

Further pattern and mixture of "likeness and difference" is detected in the part of the branch immediately below the bud:

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 141

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 142

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 142.

Below it, like the hollow below the eye or the piece between the knuckle and the root of the nail, is a half-moon-shaped sill as if one chipped from the wood and this gives the twig its quaining in the outline.<sup>16</sup>

The word "quaining" is another instance in which his effort at preciseness induced Hopkins to employ an uncommon term. It is an unusual spelling of "quoining", and "quoin" is an architectural expression denoting "an external angle of a wall or building".<sup>17</sup> Taken in the context it has when applied to the ash branch, it refers to the wedge-shaped angle of the "sill" below the bud.

Strangely enough, it was the curved knots which contributed to both the irregularity and to the symmetry of the branches, for while their presence tempered the rigidity which perfectly straight branches would have given, their arrangement in pairs, "one on each side" and at crosses with those above and below, added proportion to the branch.

In the passage Hopkins has verbally dissected the ash tree. Yet the description of each part contained no element which could not be perceived by the eye alone, for the eye can behold the general outline of the branch as well

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 142

<sup>17</sup> Oxford English Dictionary.

as the arrangement of "knots" and the "sill" below the bud. Should this lead to the conclusion that the mind was not necessarily operative in perceiving the beauty? Evidently not, even though it must be admitted that no definite mention of mental activity is included in the account. The reason why mental activity must be included is that if mere dis-parates are beheld by the senses, no beauty is beheld, for "beauty is a relation". Mental action is required to compare the diversities with one another so that the consistency modifies the irregularity and the elements of difference temper the uniformity of the object. Therefore, if Hopkins was merely enumerating isolated elements his eye had detected in the tree, without any consideration of their relation to one another, then this entry would be valuable as a catalogue of sense data obtained by a scientific diagnosis. It would not be a description of beauty. If, on the contrary, he was describing part by part a unified object whose beauty he had beheld, then the mind must have been active to grasp the oneness.

In actual practice, it is impossible for a man to say: "My eyes see that tree, but my mind is absolutely inactive." Sense data is transformed into thought so rapidly that it is most difficult to know when sensation ends and cognition begins. Man acts as an organic unit, not as a mechanical



robot, so that senses and mind are in action simultaneously. It is very important that this truth be remembered in all the analyses of this study, which is attempting to illustrate the diverse activities and necessarily considers them as though they were independent parts. Yet even though it is not possible to realize when the intellect begins its operation when actually beholding a beautiful scene, there is a negative norm of judgment. There are certain operations which a mere sense faculty cannot perform, such as the perception of relations. An animal, endowed with sensitive life but lacking intellect, can perceive diverse colors and shapes in an object. It cannot, however, make a comparison between the differences and perceive the relation by which one quality modifies another. This consideration will help obviate a difficulty which might arise with respect to Hopkins' descriptions of trees.

Further indication that the mind was active is given when Hopkins recorded his enjoyment of a very beautiful day in April, 1874. He had been struck by the "sense of green" thrown up by the tufts of grass and noted: "I marked this down on a slip of paper at the time, because the eye for colour, rather than zest in the mind, seems to weaken with years."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Notebooks, 190

It was not only in the wide open countryside that Hopkins discovered beautiful inscapes. In the autumn of 1869 he caught a definite scaping of leaves growing in "allies and avenues". The leaves of an elm tree and of lime trees served as his models as he noticed:

They fall from the two sides of the branch or spray in two marked planes which meet at a right angle or more. This comes from the endeavour to catch the light on either side, which falls left and right but not all round. Thus each branch is thatched with a double blade or eave of leaves which run up to a coping like the roofcrest all along its stem, and seen from some places these lie across one another all in chequers and X's.<sup>19</sup>

At another time elms were again the object of his study as he remarked how a heavy fall of snow "crisped" them:

Looking at the elms from underneath you saw every wave in every twig (become by this the wire-like stem to a finger of snow) and to the hangers and flying sprays it restores, to the eye, the inscapes they had lost. They were beautifully brought out against the sky, which was on one side dead blue, on the other washed with gold.<sup>20</sup>

The passage presents an instance in which "inscape" is used in connection with mere ocular perception of contour. The last sentence, however, shows that the mind entered into the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 130.

apprehension of the scene's beauty by perceiving the relation between the tree and the sky.

Hopkins' emotions too, were stirred when he enjoyed the splendour of trees. His deep feeling for them is shown in the "pang" he experienced when witnessing the destruction of the ash tree. A less vivid example occurs in 1874 when he entered a catalogue of brief, pointed notations which included: "Tall larches on slope of a hill near the lake and mill, also a wychelm, also a beech, both of these with ivory-white bark pied with green moss: there was an instress about this spot..."<sup>21</sup>

Once again his fondness found utterance in poetry. One poem from 1879 "Binsey Poplars", emphasizes the emotion already remarked in the incident of the felling of the ash tree, although the poem refers to the destruction of different trees. The first stanza is indicative of the tone of the whole poem:

My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,  
 Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,  
 All felled, felled, are all felled;  
     Of a fresh and following folded rank  
         Not spared, not one  
             That dandled a sandalled  
 Shadow that swan or sank  
 On meadow and river and wind-wandering week-  
 winding bank.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 204

<sup>22</sup> Poems, 39, #19, "Binsey Poplars".

His enthusiasm is reflected in another poem, which though never completed, was tentatively entitled "Ash-boughs", and is included among the fragments in the edition of his Poems. It will confirm the impression of devoted attachment to trees that the survey of his Journal formed:

Not of all my eyes see, wandering on the world,  
 Is anything a milk to the mind so, so sighs deep  
 Poetry to it, as a tree whose boughs break in  
     the sky.  
 Say it is ash-boughs: whether on a December  
     day and furl'd  
 Fast or they in clammyish lashtender combs  
     creep  
 Apart wide and new-nestle at heaven most  
     high.  
 They touch heaven, tabour on it; how their  
     talons sweep  
 The smouldering enormous winter welkin: May  
 Mells blue and snow white through them, a  
     fringe and fray  
 Of greenery: it is old earth's groping  
     towards the steep Heaven whom she  
     childs us by.<sup>23</sup>

His Journal has revealed that in both tiny flowers and huge trees Hopkins discovered amazing designs, which delighted him with their beauty, although it took acute observation and careful study to unlock the complicated patterns. In the word-pictures he gives of the beauty he caught, the principles of his theory of the perception of beauty may be seen in action. Finally, the Journal unveils

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 73, #56, "(Ash-boughs)".

the refined tenderness he felt for plant life, so that we might address to Hopkins the question he asks the child, Margaret, in his poem, "Spring and Fall".

Leaves, like the things of man, you  
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?<sup>24</sup>

The answer would be an affirmative.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 50, #31, "Spring and Fall".

## CHAPTER V

### BEAUTY OF OBJECTS POSSESSING SENSITIVE LIFE.

The entries in the Journal which deal with animal life are relatively few, as compared with those concerning the other types of natural beauty which have been studied in the previous chapters. Furthermore, not all of the accounts of animals and birds are descriptions of their beauty, for some merely relate little incidents that happened to strike Hopkins' fancy. A few of these latter, however, are valuable for the insight they afford into the temperament of the poet, such as the account of his rescuing a kitten which had been stranded on the sill of a window and was afraid to jump down:

I heard her mew a piteous long time till  
I could bear it no longer; but I made a  
note of it because of her gratitude after  
I had taken her down, which made her fol-  
low me about and at each turn of the  
stairs as I went down leading her to the  
kitchen run back a few steps and try to  
get up to lick me through the banisters  
from the flight above.<sup>1</sup>

Hopkins was interested in the beauty of the inscape of animals. This truth comes to light in a passage dealing with his attendance at field maneuvers put on by the

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<sup>1</sup> Notebooks, 156.

Volunteer Rifle Corps on Wimbledon Common in 1874. The maneuvers took the form of a sham battle, but the first detail that Hopkins recorded of the event is something that probably no one of the one hundred thousand other spectators had even noticed:

Went up in the morning to get an impression but it was too soon, however got this - caught that inscape in the horse that you see in the pediment especially and other basreliefs of the Parthenon and even which Sophocles had felt and expresses in two choruses of the Oedipus Coloneus, running of the likeness of a horse to a breaker, a wave of the sea curling over. I looked at the groin or the flank and saw how the set of the hair symmetrically flowed outwards from it to all the parts of the body, so that, following that one may inscape the whole beast very simply.<sup>2</sup>

Of all the possible sights that might have attracted his attention in the mock battle, Hopkins' first recorded impression of the affair is that he caught an inscape. More striking proof of his concern for patterns could hardly be presented.

The account also affords another exemplification of his theory of beauty. Although the object, in this instance a horse, is composed of diverse parts, the proportion and symmetry of the parts is perceived. It was like a puzzle that

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 189.

had to be solved and the clue to the complex pattern was found in the set of hair which flowed symmetrically from the horses flank. Once again it was an experience involving the whole man, for the eyes perceived the diverse parts and the mind noted the relation between them. The fact that the oneness was caught, is implied in the remark "following that one may inscape the whole beast very simply." Perceiving this, Hopkins was reminded of the occasions when other artists had observed the same design and had likened it to "a breaker, a wave of the sea curling over." The emotion he felt is not explicitly mentioned, but his delight may be inferred from the fact that he recorded this observation before any of the day's other proceedings.

Hopkins' references to birds may prove disappointing to one who has enjoyed his remarkable poem, "The Windhover", and who has been able to grasp the vivid picture of the poise and majesty of the falcon in the first stanza. Such a reader might have been lead to expect numerous descriptions of the beauty of birds, yet no entry in the Journal can equal that of "The Windhover", even though Hopkins did perceive the patterns of this species of animal life. In 1873, he recorded a description of some pigeons he had observed:



The two young ones are all white and the pins of the folded wings, quill pleated over quill, are like crisp and shapely cuttleshells found on the shore. The others are dull thundercolour or black-grape-colour except in the white pieings, the quills and the tail, and in the shot of the neck. I saw one up on the eaves of the roof: as it moved its head a crush of satin green came and went, a wet or soft flaming of the light.<sup>3</sup>

From this we may see that just as he had perceived unity marked by variety in the skies and flowers, so too did he discover it in these pigeons. In each of the two "young ones", there was a oneness of color and a regular pattern of "quill pleated over quill" in the wings. The regularity was not sheer, unrelieved straightness, however, for the wings were curved in the shape of "cuttleshells" and thus varied in width, even though there was a certain symmetry to the contour. Moreover, the "black-grape-colour" of the others was relieved by spots of white, which introduced further variety into their design. The beauty pictured in the phrases "a crush of satin green" and "a wet or soft flaming of the light", seems to transfer itself to Hopkins' prose so that it too becomes delicately beautiful as it strives to catch the variation of color stirred by the head motion of the pigeon. Once again it was the intellect

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 175

which enabled him to fuse all the shapes and colors into a pattern, the loveliness of which it then enjoyed. Furthermore, a certain delightful feeling must have accompanied his observation of these birds, to prompt the remark:

"There is some charm about a thing such as these pigeons..."<sup>4</sup>

These same principles are verified in an entry in which the colorful train of a peacock is carefully studied by Hopkins. Since the source of much of the train's attractiveness lies in the beautifully colored, eye-like spots which dot it, he gave special attention to these, and described both the over-all pattern made by the combination of "eyes" as well as the design of each individual one:

The eyes, which lie alternately when the train is shut, like scales or gadroons, fall into irregular rows when it is opened, and then it thins and darkens against the light, it loses the moistness and satin it has when in the pack but takes another/ grave and expressive splendour, and the outermost eyes, detached and singled, give with their corner fringes the suggestion of that inscape of the flowing cusped trefoil which is often effective in art.<sup>5</sup>

Is it possible to discover the elements of beauty in the details of this description also? Examining it, the objective foundation of "likeness and difference" may be

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 146

found, for the different colored spots or "eyes" that mark the train lie in a definite order when the feathers are not spread. The pattern they form reminds Hopkins of the "scales" of a fish or "gadroons", which are sets of "convex curves or arcs joined at their extremities to form a decorative pattern"<sup>6</sup> and are used in architectural ornamentation. Furthermore, the glossy appearance of the feathers when bunched in the pack adds a certain oneness which Hopkins expresses by the terms "moistness and satin". Although this lustre is lost when the train is spread open, there is still an "expressive splendour" to their appearance, and although the spots "fall into irregular rows" when the peacock spreads his train, there is some uniformity due to the fact that the "eyes" resemble one another in their pointed, three-lobed shape which is akin to the "cusped trefoil".

Thus far two of the requirements for beauty have been fulfilled, namely the objective pattern and the subjective sensitive perception. Yet one point that has been stressed throughout this study is that the apprehension of beauty is an aesthetic experience in which senses and intellect act simultaneously, for in Hopkins' theory, "beauty is a relation, and the apprehension of it a comparison"<sup>7</sup> which is

<sup>6</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary.  
<sup>7</sup> Notebooks, 65.

an intellectual operation. The wording of the entry under consideration suggests the mental activity that occurred in this instance. After the presentation of the pattern of the "eyes" taken together, there follows the description of the design of some of these colored spots "detached and singled". This indicates a change from the perception of the whole to an examination of the individual parts of that composite. However, the very fact that the components were first fused into a unit is proof that the mind was at work, for Hopkins remarked in the Fragment:

The more intellectual, less physical, the spell of contemplation the more complex must be the object, the more close and elaborate must be the comparison the mind has to keep making between the whole and the parts, the parts and the whole. For this reference or comparison is what the sense of unity means; mere sense that such a thing is one and not two has no interest or value except accidentally.<sup>8</sup>

Thus the mind had to make use of its twofold energy in perceiving and enjoying the oneness in the design of the colored spots.

Further oneness was perceived in the splash of colors that resulted when the peacock "shivered" his train. This too is described:

He shivers it when he first rears it and then again at intervals and when this happens the rest blurs and the eyes start forward - I have thought it looks

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 96.

like a tray or green basket of fresh-cut willow hurdle set all over with Paradise fruits cut through first through a beard of golden fibre and then through wet flesh greener than greengages or purpler than grapes - or say that the knife had caught a tatter or flag of the skin and laid it flat across the flesh and then within all a sluggish corner drop of black or purple oil.<sup>9</sup>

The "instress" of feeling that Hopkins experienced when perceiving the fusion of the green, golden and purple colors is not explicitly stated in the account. Whether he felt the beauty in this instance is a matter of conjecture. There is, however, a fine example of his emotional reaction in his splendid poem, "The Windhover". The poet had observed a falcon riding the wind currents, and was struck by its graceful and majestic flight. The first stanza presents a picture of the bird in flight and closes with the revelation of the poet's emotional reaction:

I caught this morning morning's minion,  
 kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-  
 drawn Falcon, in his riding  
 Of the rolling level underneath him steady  
 air, and striding  
 High there, how he rung upon the rein of a  
 wimpling wing  
 In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing  
 As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-  
 bend: the hurl and gliding  
 Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
 Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of, the  
 mastery of the thing!

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 146.

The foregoing poem illustrates Hopkins' deep admiration for the particular falcon he observed sweeping through the air. It may also serve to confirm all the impressions left by the analyses of this and the previous chapters of our study, for it reveals the poet's ardent love of nature. The universality of this love has been indicated by the descriptions of minute details of all varieties of natural objects, from tiny leaves to the vast expanse of the sky at sundown. In the poem's accurate description of the bird's movements, we are reminded of Hopkins' characteristic act of searching for patterns in the objects he beheld and of recording the discoveries precisely. The poem also suggests the glowing yet quiet enthusiasm with which he jotted down the beautiful patterns he found in such complex and diverse objects as lifeless, "silk-sack" clouds, the "delicately lit" petals of bluebells and charging horses.

The most remarkable conclusion to be drawn from this study of the artist's experiments, however, is the fact that Hopkins was not only keenly alive to the beauty that lay about him, but had even formulated a theory of the perception of beauty that has been proven to be in agreement with the process involved when he actually observed a beautiful scene. His theory showed how all beauti-

ful objects are composed of elements of "regularity and irregularity", so that his explanation is similar to the traditional scholastic explanation of beauty as "unity amid variety". Moreover, he accounted for the parts contributed by the senses, intellect and emotions of the observer who beholds an object possessing the objective requirements for beauty. In brief, his Notebooks have revealed that in Hopkins the sensuous awareness of a Keats was blended with the intellectual keenness of a philosopher to produce a remarkable artist.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by **Robert A. White, S.J.**  
has been read and approved by three members of the  
Department of **English.**

The final copies have been examined by the director  
of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies  
the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated,  
and that the thesis is now given final approval with refer-  
ence to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

January 24, 1950  
Date

John B. Conroy, S.J.  
Signature of Adviser