Flight as Form and Faith:
Birds in Gerard Manley Hopkins's Sonnets

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> "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, *and* not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."
> – Isaiah 40:31
> "Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?"
> – Luke 12:24

Introduction

Birds regularly make an appearance in the Scriptures, literally and figuratively, to exhibit God's might and providence. They are harbingers of hope, as the dove after the Flood, and sacrificial offerings for atonement in the Hebrew Bible. At the same time, they symbolize the faithful, who in the New Testament receive the dove-like Holy Spirit. Within the Christian tradition, the birds' abilities of song and flight that distinguish them from all other animals become the ideal expression of devout Christians who yearn to praise and glorify God as well as ascend to the heavens. These characteristics are perhaps some of the reasons Gerard Manley Hopkins uses bird imagery in his poems as emblems of faith

and the faithful. Specifically, in his sonnets, birds are used in ways that illuminate his attention to form and faith, as influenced by the predominant religious movement of the Victorian era, the Oxford Movement.

Similar to how the Oxford Movement, otherwise known as the Tractarian Movement, sought to transform the spiritual form and direction of Anglicanism, Hopkins aimed to alter the literal form, especially with his sonnets. His diverse experimentations with the sonnet form testify to his poetic ambition to overcome the strict boundaries of the rhyme, meter, and line length that the sonnet required of the poet. Instead of following the conventions created and passed down by his literary predecessors, Hopkins introduces a new formal element, sprung rhythm, to free the sonnet from artificial language and produce a more natural rhythm. He molds the bird imagery within this new form, as the bird becomes symbolic of the physical, representing the faithful members of the Church; the abstract, portraying it as God; and a combination of the physical and abstract through Faith embodied. The organic movement of the meter then mimics a bird's flight, as the regularity and position of the stressed syllables suggest ascents and descents.

This essay aims to demonstrate how Hopkins utilizes the form of the bird and its flight as a symbol of the dynamics of faith. I will first show how the Tractarian Movement's commitment to religious form parallels Hopkins's attention to poetic form. In this section, the poetics of analogy and reserve as advocated by John Keble, one of the leaders of the Tractarian Movement, will be assessed in relation to Hopkins's poetics. Hopkins had inherited the poetics that Keble and the Tractarians crafted, having attended Oxford University in the decades shortly after the Tractarians. This direct connection with the Tractarians would guide Hopkins both in his spiritual enlightenment and writing of poetry. After tracing the foundation of Hopkins's poetics, I will closely examine Hopkins's sonnets that depict birds to present their various meanings:

I argue that "Let me be to Thee" and "The Sea and the Skylark" portray the bird as a believer; "The Windhover," "God's Grandeur," and "Peace" paint the bird as God; and "The Caged Skylark" presents the bird as a representation of faith that encompasses both the physical and the abstract. By reassessing bird imagery in Hopkins's poetry, I seek to trace its connection to the Tractarian poetics of analogy and identify its different interpretations of Christian faith.

1. The Poetics of Tractarian Reserve and Analogy

Before assessing his poetry, it is necessary to assess the influence of the Tractarian Movement on Hopkins. As stated above, the Tractarians re-shaped the religious sentiments of the Victorian era, through a series of tracts, *Tracts for the Times,* which voiced concerns about the Church of England and its doctrines and practices. Tractarian leaders advocated for ritualism and a turn to "form." Kirstie Blair asserts that they sought to uphold "liturgical forms, set practices of worship associated with the Book of Common Prayer, including the sacraments, the daily services, and the specific words spoken within each service" (22). These rituals would validate one's faith as the Tractarians found interest in externalizing faith, even endorsing "particular kinds of art, architecture, church furnishing, clothing, 'and other decorations'" (Blair 22). According to Emma Mason, the interest in forms extended to poetry, for "[t]he best, most oblique and sacred manner of expression available to the believer, according to its adherents, was poetry" (1). While poetry as expressing faith was no new idea, as poets such as George Herbert and John Donne had produced exemplary devotional poetry centuries before, the Tractarians reassessed the connection between faith and poetry, believing in "the supernatural, sacramental element within poetry as a spontaneous overflow of spiritual feeling" (Mason 2). It makes sense, therefore, that

John Keble's volume of poetry, *The Christian Year* (1827), gained popularity as it reflected the zeal for ceremonial worship in its attention to the different occasions and religious customs.

The attention to form is inherent in Keble's poems, as he externalizes devotion in fixed forms that can be repeated by believers. The structured aspect of poetry embodies "God's law and order at work" (Blair 37), for the poet adheres to rhythm and meter as a believer would obey and follow God's order. This willingness to submit to form is an important aspect in Tractarian poetics, as it ties in with the idea of reserve. According to Blair, reserve depends on God's will and the believer's obedience:

> Reserve applied to God, in that he would only gradually reveal truths to those who were worthy; and to the worshipper, who should show his or her respect for sacred things and religious feelings by being discreet and withdrawn on these subjects. (28)

This form of worship reflects the Tractarian concern for external displays of faith as well as a passive-active form of obedience: the inclination to wait for God's will to be revealed and the performance of worship that proves one's love and trust in God. The faithful believed that God would reveal his plan and purpose only to those who obeyed and professed their devotion. To reach this state of "submissive calmness" (42), they could rely on forms to prove their worth. Reserve helps them submit to God and engage in his order and regularity as they believed that these displays and performances of faith drew them nearer to God.

The Tractarians also upheld the poetics of analogy, where certain objects represent natural and divine truths (Tennyson 93). According to G. B. Tennyson, God speaks through analogy by delivering truths through the external world of nature (67). It is through nature poetry, then, that the religious poet locates "the imprint of God" (67) in nature and extols its Creator. Nature becomes the "handmaiden to divine truth" (101) and

helps the believer understand the magnificence and holiness of God. To put it simply, earthly matter becomes the type of heavenly matter (Wheeler 18). Along with reserve, analogy directs the poet to praise God by reflecting on the creation and its resemblance with the nature of God. What is required of the poet, then, is to utilize both analogy and reserve in the poetry to make sure that "the expression will be veiled, indirect, subdued and self-effacing" (Tennyson 106) so that only the faithful will recognize the hidden signs of God and receive divine truth within the apparent patterns and shapes of nature. The Tractarian poet would employ natural objects to convey holy truth for those familiar with the forms to understand.

2. Imprint, Inscape, and Instress

Tractarian poetics and their depiction of nature as the imprint of God had a profound influence on Hopkins whose poetry boasts "stylistic and intellectual traits which belong in the tradition of Keble and of Newman" (Groves 105). It is important to note, however, that Hopkins did not write during the peak of the Tractarian Movement. As Peter Groves points out, "Tractarianism proper . . . was long gone by the time Hopkins arrived in Oxford, but religious warfare within the Church of England and outside raged as wildly as ever" (109). With the understanding that John Newman, a leader of the Movement, converted to Catholicism as did Hopkins later, Groves asserts that these conversions do not retract the influences of Tractarian theology on Hopkins. He highlights that much of Tractarianism "was held to be 'catholic'" and stresses the difficulty in ascertaining "Tractarian traits" (109) because of its similarities to Catholicism. It is clear that while Hopkins does not identify himself as a Tractarian, he was nonetheless influenced by the movement, even at its decline.

In particular, his theory of "inscape" and "instress" can be correlated with Tractarian poetics, especially in its connection with the concept of nature as the imprint of God. Although many scholars have associated Hopkins's poetics with medieval philosopher Duns Scotus and his idea of *haecceitas*, Martin Dubois argues that Scotus had "a marginal presence" and that the two terms appeared in his writing "before Hopkins had likely heard of Scotus" (552). Scotus' writing may have influenced Hopkins to an extent, but it is in Hopkins's private notes that he contemplates and outlines the two terms. Harmon and Holman define inscape as "the essence of a natural object, which, being perceived through the moment of illumination—an epiphany—reveals the unity of all creation" (258). Instress and inscape work together, for instress is "the force, ultimately *divine*, which creates the inscape of an object or an event and impresses that distinctive inner structure of the object on the mind of the beholder, who can perceive it and embody it in a work of art" (258; emphasis added). Through his theories, Hopkins asserts that each natural object is unique as well as similar: all have an individual essence that differentiates them from others but has likeness as members of creation. Moreover, the believers' unified motive is to glorify God in their distinct, individual manner. The poet affirms the "inscape" within poetry, his "work of art," but it is only through "instress" that he or she can find the means to do so. He can capture an aspect of God's divine force in nature and create poetry for believers to discover "inscape" in creation. Poetry for Hopkins then is a visualization as well as an experience of "instress" creating "inscape." Following the Tractarian poetics of reserve, it is only the faithful who can recognize these forces to praise God individually as well as in unison.

3. Inheriting Keble's Bird

As a member of the faithful yearning to utilize poetry as praise, Hopkins follows the example of John Keble, whose collection of poetry, *The Christian Year,* also sought to glorify God on all occasions. In one of his poems, "First Sunday After Epiphany," Keble utilizes a powerful image of the bird to connect poetry with worship. At the end of the poem, Keble hears the song of the nightingales in hiding and comments on their "modest ways" (55) and "ceaseless praise" (56). It is no coincidence that Keble borrows the traditional image of the nightingale as a poet. What distinguishes his use of the bird from his literary predecessors is his envelopment of the creature with the Tractarian poetics of reserve. The nightingales who sing with "joyous cheer" (46) in the "greenest darkest trees" (50) reflect the longings of the poet to praise God. The nightingale does not function as a symbol of transcendence that the Romantic poets, the generation before the Tractarians, championed. While the nightingale in John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" flees by the end of the poem, leaving only traces of its secular song, the nightingales in Keble's poem continue in their praise for God even at the close of the poem. They do not "fleet aloof" (54) but remain hidden in a reserved state, content in their joyful glorification of God. Like the believers who place their trust in God with passive-active obedience, the birds place trust in their Creator as they find solace and peace in their song. Blair notes that the nightingales represent "the Christian poet [who] can only justify his 'song' as a modest attempt to participate in the ongoing harmonies of nature" (43). In comparison, Keats's nightingale functions as a sort of muse, similar to Shelley's skylark in "To a Skylark" who also represents the poet, soaring "[h]igher still and higher" (6) to the heavens. Situated between earth and sky, Keble's bird is a type standing for both the poet

and believer who discover meaning through worship, whether in the form of a song or verse. Writing poetry does not serve to uplift the poet, who, like the bird, is withdrawn, but rather elevates the creator whose creation unveils his divine law and order. As Tennyson asserts, it is the desire for God that moves the poet to artistic expression (60).

This desire moves Hopkins to utilize the same image, the bird, as a symbol of the poet and believer, especially in his early work, "Let Me Be to Thee." According to Catherine Phillips, the sonnet was written in October 1865 in his diary, following his copy of J. H. Newman's "Lead Kindly Light" (188). In this famous hymn, Newman asks the light to lead him amid the "encircling gloom" (1). In contrast, Hopkins's poem is less melancholic as he describes the flight of "the circling bird" (1) or "bat" (2). While Newman's poem directs a plea for light's guidance, Hopkins's poem is more confident as he reflects his yearning "to be to Thee as the circling bird" (1). Wendell Stacy Johnson states that the poem identifies "the poet's own aspiration [in] the form of a bird's flight, and most importantly a bird's song" (80). Indeed, the sestet of the sonnet affirms Johnson's observation about the desire of a bird's song to praise:

> The authentic cadence was discovered late
> Which ends those only strains that I approve,
> And other science all gone out of date
> And minor sweetness scarce made mention of:
> I have found the dominant of my range and state —
> Love, O my God, to call thee Love and Love. (9-14)

The words "authentic cadence" (9), "strains" (10), and "range" (13) validate Hopkins's desire to praise God in a similar manner to Keble's nightingales when he declares God as the sole object of his song.

In the octave, however, the poem starts not with the bird's song but with its flight. Hopkins also introduces the bat, looking at its "tender

and air-crisping wings" (2) and noticing its "departing rings" (3). Like the "circling bird," the bat also "shapes" its flight in "rings" (3), continuing the circular imagery. Because the bat is departing, it is highly likely that the rings will get smaller as it gets higher, calling forth an image of church spires. This circular flight evokes images of ascension through visual imagery and materiality. It is during their flight when their "changeless note" (4) is heard, suggesting a likeness between the bat and the bird despite their distinctive shape and form. The bat governs the night, while the bird is more active during the day; however, their unified song and flight suggest inscape: both retain their individual forms but are united by the similar motive of singing praise. Their song becomes a model for the speaker to emulate, but it seems that although he has tried "each pleasurable throat that sings / and every praised sequence of sweet strings" (6-7), they are not "authentic" (9). These songs may be seen as referents to Hopkins's earlier poems that strove for aesthetic pleasure and secular content. In his study of Hopkins's poetic style, Joseph J. Feeney differentiates Hopkins's "Early" poems from the "Welsh" poems, highlighting how he had written secular and highly ambitious poems when imitating "Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Shelley, and Keats, involving word choice and such forms as rhyming couplets, Spenserian stanzas, and terza rima" (57). During his early years, however, Hopkins did write religious poems, but "his secular and religious poems mix together from 1864 to 1867" (Feeney 62). In this context, the lines "authentic cadence . . . discovered late" (9) and "other science all gone out of date" (11) may signal Hopkins's regret for having followed the secular examples of artistic expressions. The true source of his song lies in the last line of the poem: "Love, O, my God, to call Thee Love and Love" (14). Within one line, he repeats the word "love" three times to emphasize his love for his God, claiming that it is an act of love to call God his love and proclaiming that he will continue to love. Writing in

the sonnet form, a form closely associated with secular love, Hopkins revises the love song to direct his devotion towards God.

This declaration cannot exist solely in song but must be accompanied by movement as the bird and bat articulate. The ascending flight of both bird and bat denotes a nearness to God that only winged creatures can portray. The wish to become like these creatures overlaps with the desire to understand one's inscape and find unity with other natural objects and ultimately with God. By analyzing the winged creatures, Hopkins discovers the "instress" and struggles to capture it in his poem; he succeeds in discovering the creatures' flight patterns that physically express their ascension to the heavens. In order for the flight to be circular, there must be ongoing and repetitive action, especially to elevate higher. Although the poet cannot physically reach the heavens, his love poem provides a way for him to be closer to his God. Only love can help the believer love and declare his love for God. Like the winged creatures, he must utilize his poem, his version of song, as a confession of his love and as a focal point for his ascension. This confession, while personal and discreet, can also be extended to other believers who wish to praise and worship God.

Like Keble's bird, Hopkins's bird represents the faithful who yearn to worship God and love Him. In doing so, they want to be in close proximity with God and envision ascension through the bird's flight. Hopkins's attention to flight is also depicted in his poem, "The Woodlark," when he includes the woodlark's song:

> I am the little woodlark.
> Today the sky is two and two
> With white strokes and strains of the blue
>
> Round a ring, around a ring
> And while I sail (must listen) I sing (11-15)

The circular flight accompanying its song echoes the bird's flight and song in "Let Me Be to Thee." While it is the bird who is "talking," its speech incorporates the perspective of the poet who envisions the sky "with white strokes and strains of the blue," as if depicting a painting. Like the speaker in "Let me be to Thee" talking about the "strains that [he] approve[s]" (10), the speaker in "The Woodlark" points out the "strains" that make up the sky. While this utterance is through the perspective of the bird, Hopkins infuses his artistic voice within its observations and thoughts; in other words, the bird is not only a part of the sky, and therefore nature, but is also the mouthpiece for the poet. They are unified in their motive to glorify God as they realize their "inscape."

In the poem, the woodlark is conscious of its inscape and follows it:

> . . . when the cry within
> Says Go on then I go on
> Till the longing is less and the good gone
>
> But down drop, if it says Stop
> To the all-a-leaf of the treetop
> And after that off the bough (18-23)

The "cry within" commands the bird to "Go" or "Stop," and the bird obeys. The obedience of these commands follows biblical examples, such as "the Faith of the Centurion" described in Luke 7 where the centurion declares that Jesus' word will heal his servant. The centurion reassures Jesus not to follow him in verse 8, "For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." Jesus compliments the centurion for his faith, saying that he has "not found such great faith even in Israel" (Luke 7:9). Great faith is demonstrated not simply through testimony but by obedience, which

the centurion exemplifies in the passage. The bird, too, listens to the inner voice that commands his flight, whether it is to move onwards or to rest momentarily before leaving "the bough." This obedience to a higher power is a reminder that it is God who is in control of all creatures.

Like the nightingales in Keble's poem, the bird ends the poem with a song:

> Through the velvety wind V-winged
> To the nest's nook I balance and buoy
> With a sweet joy of a sweet joy
> Sweet, of a sweet, of a sweet joy
> Of a sweet—a sweet—sweet—joy. (38-42)

While Keble's nightingales sing unhidden within the trees, Hopkins's bird is portrayed in flight, "balance[d] and buoy[ed]" in the sky. His final destination is the nest where he will finally rest, and until he arrives, he will sing songs of "sweet joy." Like in "Let Me Be to Thee," the poem ends with birdsong. Through repetition of the words "sweet joy," the speaker replicates the tweets of the bird whose song gradually slows down. The stress of the words, especially through the word "sweet," replicates the rising and falling tune of the bird's song. Not only does the bird's song intend to praise God, but it also portrays the poet who discovers the bird's instress and delivers it through his poem. Hopkins utilizes poetic stress and rhythm to communicate the woodlark's instress, materializing inscape through song and flight.

Cousin to the woodlark, the skylark makes an appearance in the sonnet, "The Sea and the Skylark." Hopkins directs his attention first to the sounds of the waves approaching the shore, pointing out the "low lull-off or all roar" (3). With alliteration, he demonstrates the smoothness of the "lull-off" and the harshness of the waves with the onomatopoetic word, "roar." These "noises" (1) complement the movement of the waves, as the

poet directs attention to “a flood or a fall” (3), noting the surge and fall of the waters. Accompanying the sound and movement of the sea is the lark’s ascension:

> Left hand, off land, I hear the lark ascend,
> His rash-fresh re-winded new-skeined score
> In crisps of curl off wild winch whirl, and pour
> And pelt music, till none’s to spill nor spend. (5-8)

As in the previous poem, the bird’s ascension is signaled by its sound when the poet “hears” the lark in flight. In his description of the bird, Hopkins adds materiality when describing the circular movements through alliteration, such as “crisps of curl” and “winch whirl.” This dynamic movement works with the bird’s passionate song which accompanies the sound and motion of the sea.

In contrast to these vibrant objects of nature, explored in the octave, the poet turns to the “shallow and frail town” (9) in the sestet. Nothing stirs nor makes a sound, highlighting its difference to the bird’s animated energy. The poet articulates humankind’s descent:

> How ring right out our sordid turbid time,
> Being pure! We, life’s pride and cared-for crown,
>
> Have lost that cheer and charm of earth’s past prime:
> Our make and making break, are breaking, down
> To man’s last dust, drain fast towards man’s first slime. (10-14)

Utilizing internal rhyme, he states how humankind lives in “sordid turbid time,” which contrasts to the “pure[ness]” of the sea and skylark. He also blames humankind for valuing “life’s pride and cared-for crown,” leading to their loss of “cheer and charm of earth’s past prime.” The words “earth’s past prime” refer to the state before the Fall, when

Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were expelled from Eden. This loss of purity contrasts with nature, as humankind whose "make and making break" does not reflect signs of inscape. A desire to know one's "inscape" is not found in humankind, whose pride and sin cause them to "drain fast towards" their death. Hopkins utilizes the caesuras in line 13 to depict the falling apart and disintegration of the once-whole humankind. They cannot find unity with other natural creatures whose essence focuses on glorifying God. While humans try to emulate the Creator in their "mak[ing] and making break," they cannot ascend, having failed to obey the inner voice, or cry within. Instead, they belong "down" on the ground, returning to "dust." Through the juxtaposition between nature and humankind, Hopkins admonishes humankind for failing to find their inscape. If they are to rise, they will need to ascend like the skylark and find their essence that seeks to praise God.

4. The Bird as God

While "Let Me Be to Thee" and "The Sea and the Skylark" depict the bird as an ideal believer, aware of its inscape and intent on moving closer to God, other sonnets portray the bird as God, whether as the Son or the Holy Spirit. In the acclaimed poem, "The Windhover," dedicated "to Christ our Lord," Hopkins focuses on the kestrel's flight. As in "The Sea and the Skylark," the speaker observes the bird, but it is not its song that catches his attention; rather, it is its flight that overcomes the "big wind" (7). The description of the hovering bird highlights all of its external features and portrays him as a crown prince:

> I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
> dom 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. (1-8)

The bird belongs to the morning, "drawn" to "dawn," and floats rather gracefully in the air. The lines in the octave all rhyme with one another, revealing the bird's movement and the speaker's perspective. The speaker "in hiding" confesses his awe and fascination of the bird's inscape. This bird who rides the wind, as a dauphin or prince would ride a horse, is mesmerizing. Although its song is not mentioned by the speaker, the bird's flight reflects the magnificence of ascension.

As a windhover, the bird utilizes its wings to steady himself from the wind's turbulence; while this movement appears serene, the bird requires mastery to counter the strong force. In other words, it requires dynamic movement even in its "stillness." Despite its stillness, the bird is in control, reflecting an aspect of God's nature. Johnson asserts that the contradiction of "rolling" and "level" in line three reveals "sustaining nature constantly in flux" (89). Like the ebb and flow of the tides in "The Sea and the Skylark," the bird moves with the shifting wind, moving its wings to the patterns of the sky. Johnson argues that there is a "shift from ascending flight in an arc, with curling to a gliding swoop, wings steady, describing a bow in the sky as a skate's heel would on ice" (90). Rather than being overcome by the wind, the bird perseveres by shifting his wings with a curl. In contrast to the circular flight of the birds in the previous sections, the curling flight lets the bird remain in the sky without repetitive and ongoing wing movement. Remarking the bird's resilience against uncontrollable energy, the speaker then praises its "brute beauty and valour and act" (9).

The energy that the bird emanates is described as "fire that breaks" (10), as the speaker claims that its beauty is "a billion / times told

lovelier, more dangerous" (10-11). Many scholars have disputed on the meaning of "Buckle" (10), claiming that it can mean to "apply one's energy" (Johnson 93), to command the bird "to buckle on as a belt of armor all the qualities named," or to combine the qualities "together and flash forth" (92). Johnson claims that the word can mean to "warp or bend under stress," especially when the bird "feels pressure that is instress" (93). In response, the pressure bends pride and air, so that the bird can reflect "his grace, his inscape, in a flash" (93). Although Johnson's interpretation does offer a more detailed analysis of the relationship between inscape and instress, it fails to explain the "fire" emitting from the bird and the "blue-bleak embers" (13). Just as the skate's heel is figurative, fire is also a metaphor that reveals the transformation of the bird. The "buckle" represents a moment of falling, where "air, pride, plume" all fall down. If "plume" is a metonym for the bird, then its falling implies a death that resembles Christ's death on the cross. Because Christ's death leads to resurrection, the bird transforms like a phoenix in flames, reborn and immortal. While it no longer succumbs to death, it still has scars of its rebirth, similar to Jesus, who shows the scars from his crucifixion to his disciples. Only those who are his disciples can recognize the scars, which connect with the Tractarian idea that only those worthy truly recognize and encounter God. The speaker envisages the "blue-bleak embers" (13), representing death as well as life for the phoenix, that make the bird "gash gold-vermillion" (14). Moreover, the poem asserts the speaker's ability to recognize and reciprocate instress through the windhover by depicting it as the sign of Christ in his death and resurrection. In other words, the windhover is a symbol of the crucified and resurrected Christ, whom the speaker rejoices and praises for its majesty, resilience, and might.

If the bird represents God as Christ in "The Windhover," it represents the Holy Spirit in "God's Grandeur" and "Peace." Within each poem,

however, Hopkins depicts different inscapes of the Holy Spirit: the warm embrace of the Holy Spirit and the fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit, respectively. In "God's Grandeur," the poet utilizes the fire imagery again to emphasize the "grandeur of God" (1). Contrasting this light is human presence and toil, signaling humanity's failure to recognize inscape. As in the town in "The Sea and the Skylark," humans do not understand their purpose and fail to move according to their inscapes. Instead, they disobey God's "rod" (4), choosing instead to follow the paths of previous generations. Hopkins reflects how humankind has lost God's imprint, choosing rather to impress their "smudge" and "smell" (7) on their surroundings. They fall because of their attempts to become the creator, "sear[ing] [their mark] with trade" (6), another anthropocentric byproduct. Despite humankind's fall and estrangement from the divine, God proves to be merciful as he sends the Holy Ghost:

> Oh *morning*, at the brown brink eastwards, springs—
> Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
> World *broods* with *warm* breast and with ah! *Bright wings*. (12-14; emphasis added)

Similar to the windhover, which reigns over the morning, the Holy Spirit beckons the morning when it "broods" over the world with its "warm breast" and "[b]right wings." Images of the Holy Spirit as a dove that first settles on Jesus after his baptism and settles over believers after Jesus' ascension are called forth. Although humankind attempts to remove God's imprint, nature reminds the world of its eternity as it is "never spent" (9). Hopkins emphasizes inscape: "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things" (10). Nature's "freshness" reminds humankind of God, while the Holy Spirit seeks to comfort the care-driven world.

The presence of the dove-like Holy Spirit is requested by the speaker in “Peace,” who asks whether Peace would finally abide with him. The poet displays a certain passivity that follows the Tractarian poetics of reserve, in trusting God to fulfill his will. As its name suggests, the bird represents peace not only for the world but also for the speaker who bemoans having experienced only “poor peace” (5). Although he worries over “alarms of wars, the daunting wars, the death of it” (6), he is sure that the “Lord should leave in lieu / Some good” (7-8), imagining Peace coming down to “brood and sit” (11). Just as the Holy Spirit broods over the world in “God’s Grandeur,” it broods over the speaker, demanding change and the yielding of fruit. The presence of Patience foreshadows the coming of Peace, which the speaker anticipates. In a sense, the bird signals the second coming of Christ, known to be the Prince of Peace as stated in Isaiah 9: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. . . and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” If the bird is understood to represent the Trinity, “brooding and sitting” implies judgment as depicted in Revelations. This explains why it “does not come to coo” (10), for its coming may bring eternal peace or damnation to all. It also suggests presence and the possibility of bringing forth new life and change, especially for the faithful, who eagerly wait for his presence.

The bird representing the Holy Spirit and Christ in the two poems signals hope for humankind who has “fallen” from God. Its wings display energy and warmth as it covers the sin-filled world. To those who have lost their inscape, the bird reminds them of their loss and calls forth their atonement. Hopkins’s bird, therefore, represents God’s instress that leads to the discovery of inscape. Its ultimate function is to remind the faithful and sinner alike of God’s imprint on humankind.

5. Bird as Faith Embodied

The bird as an analogy of the believer and of God is free and magnificent, often in flight or hidden from view. In "The Caged Skylark," however, the bird is no longer "dare-gale" but "scanted in a dull cage" (1). Although this bird has wings, it is unable to fly, as Hopkins compares this caged bird to "man's mounting spirit" (2) who lives "in drudgery, day-labouring-out life's age" (4). The image of man's wear and toil in "God's Grandeur" is brought up again, for the day-labourer labors on, bound to the earth. As the title suggests, the bird is trapped within an enclosure barricading it from its flight upwards. Theologically, the human spirit is also understood as dwelling in his "bone-house" (2), confined to the flesh. In the second quatrain, Hopkins portrays both the human soul and bird "aloft on turf or perch or poor low stage" (5) singing, highlighting their mortality and vulnerability. This enchainment to the earth brings deadly results: "both droop deadly sometimes in their cells / or wring their barriers in bursts of fear or rage" (7-8). The two quatrains present the conditions of both the human spirit and the skylark, who have no hope in transcendence. In the sestet, however, the speaker offers a glimpse of hope when he points out the bird's return to nature, dropping to his "own nest" (11).

This dropping down motion signals death, which ironically represents the new life that frees the bird from its old encaged state. The "wild nest" is "no prison" (11), placing no confines or binds on its wings. Like the free bird, the human spirit/soul in heaven is also "uncumbered" (13), although it is "flesh-bound" (12). Despite its imprisonment to the body, the spirit can experience transcendence in death after "his bones [has] risen" (14). This gesture to resurrection indicates that, in order for one to experience true freedom, rebirth is necessary. However, it is only

when the Judgment Day arrives that the physical body, the bones, can experience transformation.

Although the human spirit lay imprisoned in its "mean house" (2), death provides another scene free from any obstructions. The "meadow-down" (13) is similar to the "wild nest" of the bird, as both are open and in nature. The "rainbow footing" (14) alludes to the rainbow after the flood of Genesis, where all inhabitants of the ark are released from the prison-like death and given new life. The ark represents faith embodied, as Noah and his family trusted God and entered the ark before any visible signs of the flood. They willingly placed themselves inside the enclosure with faith that God's will would be fulfilled. In doing so, this prison-like ark becomes a means of new life, one that escapes persecution and death. Likewise, man's spirit is bound to its body, "its ark," but in trusting God, he will experience "his bones risen" (14).

The bird resembles the believer who experiences transformation after judgment. However, it can also represent Faith embodied, especially in its failure to achieve freedom in its encaged state. The poet does not detail who has placed the bird in the cage, but it is clear that God has placed humankind in "his bone-house" (2). Despite struggles within the "mean house," humankind can only rely on God for salvation; this salvation cannot be predicted, as shown by the sudden freedom that the bird experiences in the sestet. The faith that relies on God's grace and will is epitomized by the bird's song and flight to his nest. As the speaker in "Peace" demonstrates, patience is required by faith, so that the faithful will be ready when there is "work" to be done. Hopkins may have been thinking of the Parable of the Vineyard, which suggests that those who are faithful must labor until the day they will be compensated for their hard work. Hopkins portrays this attainment of peace and resurrection through the return of the bird to his home. Likewise, the faithful may return back to their paradisical state, a new Eden, after their death.

Physical death leads to ascension, which in turn brings the faithful back to God.

Conclusion

It is not surprising that Hopkins incorporates birds in his poetry since their song and flight are ideal models of worship. This essay has suggested that he engaged with Keble's bird and modified its function to produce his own birds of song and flight to demonstrate beauty in ascension. Their song and flight become the form by which Hopkins reflects the inscapes that unite in praising God and revealing his divine power. All of Hopkins's poems with bird imagery reflect his poetics of inscape that tie in with the Tractarian poetics of reserve and analogy. Although the birds are more dynamic than humans, one even transforming into a phoenix, they nonetheless reflect Hopkins's idea that they exemplify God's imprint on nature and humankind, which confirms God's instress.

Unlike the people portrayed in the poems, the birds' ability to fly indicates the hope of ascension; the anticipation of rebirth and resurrection is felt by believers who wish to emulate the singing and flying birds. Portraying birds as analogues of Christ and the Holy Spirit validates Hopkins's idea of instress and capability of recognizing the divine force that moves all objects of natural objects. Lastly, the bird as an embodiment of faith is a confession of the difficulties of adhering to faith, for the transformation only occurs in God's time. The bird's frail body parallels the spirit of man who cannot escape the confines of flesh and bones. Ascension can only be achieved through God's will, and the faithful can only wait, finding consolation in God's promise of rebirth.

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ABSTRACT

Flight as Form and Faith:
Birds in Gerard Manley Hopkins's Sonnets

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Gerard Manley Hopkins's poems can be singled out by their inventive syntax, fast-paced rhythm and rhyme. While "The Windhover" and "God's Grandeur" are just two of Hopkins's widely known sonnets that are studied for his originality and poetic skill, his poems' connection with his spirituality has often been neglected. This paper aims to reconsider the influence of the Tractarian Movement on Hopkins as he sought to illustrate, through the symbol of the bird, his desire to express his faith. In particular, his sonnets with bird imagery are assessed as a testament to Hopkins's desire not only to express poetic ambition but also profess his devotion to God. Rather than embrace the birds of the Romantic poets, such as Keats's nightingale or Shelley's skylark, he inherits John Keble's nightingales in "First Sunday After Epiphany" whose song is a direct praise to their Maker. Following the Tractarian poetics of reserve and analogy, Hopkins utilizes the bird and its flight to visualize spiritual faith. In "Let Me Be to Thee" and "The Sea and the Skylark," the bird represents a symbol of an ideal believer who understands the purpose and inscape of worship—to achieve unity with God—and yearns to ascend. Other poems, like "The Windhover" and "God's Grandeur," portray the bird as a member of the Trinity, which the speaker observes and praises. Lastly, in "The Caged Skylark," the bird is a representation of Faith embodied, as the speaker makes an analogy of the

bird in its cage with the spirit within the physical body. By illustrating the lows of faith, the speaker acknowledges the fears of mortality and physical decay even for the faithful. Despite this desolate state of both bird and spirit, the speaker hints at the attainment of salvation and the return to a new Eden. The concurrent physical descent and spiritual ascent captured by this poem reveal the ironies that faith sometimes requires of believers: passively waiting for God's will while actively obeying and worshipping him. By utilizing the bird and its flight, Hopkins's sonnets confess to his love and worship of God and depict his desire for ascension.

Key Words Gerard Manley Hopkins; Tractarian Movement; John Keble; sonnet; bird; flight, form; religion