

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in 1844 in Essex, England. He studied Classics at Balliol College, Oxford, between the years 1863-7, where he struck up a significant life-long friendship with Robert Bridges (the eventual Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom). He held a regular correspondence with Bridges throughout his lifetime in which the two friends discussed Hopkins' poetry in great detail.

Influences

Hopkins was deeply impressed with the work of Christina Rossetti and she became one of his greatest contemporary influences, with the pair eventually meeting in 1864. During his years at Oxford he studied with the prestigious critic Walter Pater, who first tutored him in 1866 and who remained a friend of Hopkins until he left Oxford in September 1879.

Hopkins was a committed Christian, and began his novitiate in the Society of Jesus at Manresa House in Roehampton, September 1868. Two years later he moved to St. Mary's Hall, Stonyhurst, taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Despite his love for writing and poetry, Hopkins vowed to 'write no more...unless it were by the wish of my superiors'. He burnt all of the poetry he had written thus far, and would not write any poems again until 1875.

After nine years in training, Hopkins was ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1877, spending the next seven years working in London, Oxford, Liverpool, and Glasgow. In 1884 he became professor of Greek and Latin at University College Dublin. His English heritage and his disagreement with the Irish politics of the time, increased his sense of isolation in Ireland. This deepened his feelings of depression, and the poems written during this period, such as 'I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark', reflected this sadness. The poems Hopkins wrote during his time in Dublin came to be known as the 'terrible sonnets' as they capture the feelings of exile and melancholy which plagued the later part of his life.

Poetic Style

Hopkins' poetry was radically different from his contemporaries, experimenting with new forms of rhythm and new words he had invented himself - factors which contributed to his work remaining unpublished during his lifetime. His poems were often in praise of God or the natural world. He believed that by contemplating nature in his poetry, he was in turn contemplating and celebrating God's power and greatness.

In 1874, whilst studying theology in North Wales, he learned Welsh, and later adapted the rhythms of Welsh poetry to create what he called 'sprung rhythm'. This was a concept Hopkins invented to describe verse in which only the stresses are counted. He marked his verse with foot divisions, accents, and loops, to illustrate where the accent should fall. When examining the original manuscripts of Hopkins' poetry, it is possible to see his use of loops and accents to enhance the sound and stress of each poem.

In a letter Hopkins sent to Robert Bridges discussing his poem 'The Eurydice', he declared: 'You must not

slovenly read it with the eyes but with the ears(?) Stress is the life of it.' Similarly, in a separate letter to Coventry Patmore, Hopkins again placed much emphasis on the importance of stress and sound in poetry, claiming that stress 'is the making of a thing more, or making it markedly, what it already is; it is the bringing out its nature'.

These affirmations reveal Hopkins' belief in what he called 'instress'. Instress was the creative experience that occurred when the essential, inner quality of things were examined to reveal the Divine in nature. The use of instress was designed to create a poetic form which mirrored the overt richness and complexity of nature. Hopkins called the unique, essential quality of things found in the experience of instress 'inscape'.

In 1889, just five years after being appointed professor of Classics at UCD, Hopkins died from typhoid. After his death, Robert Bridges helped to publish and promote his friend's work, editing a volume of Hopkins' *Poems* that first appeared in 1918.

List of Selected Poems

- The Wreck of the Deutschland
- The May Magnificat
- Moonrise
- Spring
- God's Grandeur
- The Caged Skylark
- Hurraing in Harvest
- As Kingfishers Catch Fire
- In the Valley of the Elwy
- Pied Beauty
- Carrion Comfort
- The Windhover: To Christ our Lord
- Inversnaid
- I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark

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