
UNIT 19 GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

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19.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Talk about Gerard Manley Hopkins the poet, his life and work.
- Appreciate Hopkins' poem 'Pied Beauty'
- Analyze the thematic as well as technical aspects of 'The Windhover'

19.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, which is said to occupy two worlds. Hopkins was a poet who lived during the latter half of the Victorian period, but whose poetry was published only in 1918, posthumously. He is considered to be a herald of modernist poetry, because of his daring innovations and experimentations in poetic language, technique, and style. Subject wise, he is predominantly the product of his times. He praises the beauty and grandeur of God's creations, explores his spiritual tensions and investigates his relationship with God.

Hopkins uses unusual prosody, compound words, archaic words and complex images in his poems. He also bases his poems on a personal philosophy he had evolved as a part of his religious vocation. The radical nature of his poetry makes it a bit difficult to understand him at a single reading. We have to get introduced to the special features and intricacies of this writer. But once the shell is broken, the kernel is sweet and tasty. Effort has been made in this unit to help you appreciate such intricate poetry.

We have included additional notes which would give you an idea about Hopkins' practice of sprung rhythm and his concepts of inscape and instress. Knowledge of this is a prerequisite in understanding and appreciating Hopkins.

The first poem 'Pied Beauty' which was written in 1887 is a curial sonnet, which means it is shorter than the traditional sonnet. The poem glorifies God who has created 'Pied Beauty': natural beauty with spots, blotches, dots and speckles. Hopkins is different from the rest of the Nature poets as one who loves things for their unusual quirks, personal oddities and individual qualities.

The second poem 'The Windhover' is another sonnet, but in the traditional mould. The poem gives a magnificent word picture of a falcon or a kestrel in midflight, before it swoops down majestically. Like in most of his poems, Hopkins moves from the creature to the creator, wondering how much more glorious would be God's beauty.

We have adopted different strategies in examining the poems which have been selected for detailed study. The analysis provided along with the first poem in 19.4 will serve as a guide to help you analyse poems on your own during examination. In 19.5 we have adopted a different method which will help you comprehend the text better and learn to appreciate Hopkins' poetry for its technical skill and beauty of images. Read through the unit section by section and do the exercises as you read. Hope you enjoy your journey of discovering Hopkins.

19.2 GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

(b. 28 July, 1844 Essex, England – d. 8 June, 1889 Dublin, Ireland)



Gerard Manley Hopkins

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born at Stratford, Essex, England, as the eldest of nine children to Manley Hopkins and Catherine Smith, a prosperous and artistic couple. His father was by turn, the proprietor of a marine insurance firm, the British Consul General in Hawaii, Church Warden, and a published writer and reviewer. His mother was greatly fond of music and reading. They were deeply religious High Church Anglicans and Hopkins was inclined towards asceticism from his boyhood.

Hopkins' maternal aunt Maria Smith Giberne taught him to sketch. His talent was promoted by many and his first ambition was to be a painter. His early

training in visual arts later helped him when Hopkins became a poet. While he was studying at the Highgate boarding school, he composed his first poem, 'The Escorial', at the age of ten, inspired by John Keats.

Hopkins attended the Balliol College, Oxford, where he studied Classics. He won a 'Double First' in the subject and was awarded the title, 'The Star of Balliol'. He forged a lifelong friendship with Robert Bridges at Balliol, which later resulted in Hopkins' posthumous fame. At Balliol, Hopkins was greatly impressed by the work of Christina Rossetti, befriended writer and critic Walter Pater and became a follower of Edward Pusey, member of the Oxford Movement – all these proved to be seminal influences.

In 1864 he first read John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* [A Defence of My Life] which is the classic defense by Newman of his religious views and his conversion to Catholicism. Cardinal Newman was a prominent figure in the Oxford Movement which had led to the establishment of Anglo-Catholicism. Two years later in 1866, Hopkins was received into the Catholic Church and within a short while he resolved to join priesthood. His conversion estranged him from his family. As the first step towards his religious life, Hopkins burnt all his poems because he felt that poetry would prevent him from total devotion to his faith. He later reconciled to the idea of a poetic vocation for a priest, on reading the philosophy of Duns Scotus, the medieval theologian. Hopkins joined the Society of Jesus to become a Jesuit father.

Hopkins went to learn theology at St. Beuno's Jesuit House in North Wales, which had a lasting influence on his creativity. There he came across Welsh poetry from which he fashioned his unique 'sprung rhythm'. At the encouragement of his superior Hopkins broke his silence of seven years to write 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' which praised the heroic self sacrifice of a group of Franciscan nuns whose ship sank in a storm. Though conventional in theme, the poem was daringly experimental, where he realized "the echo of a new rhythm" which he named "sprung rhythm".

The frown of his face
 Before me, the hurtle of hell
 Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?
 I whirled out wings that spell
 And fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host.
 My heart, but you were dovewinged, I can tell,
 Carrier-witted, I am bold to boast,
 To flash from the flame to the flame then, tower from the grace to the grace
 Stanza 3 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'

You will notice the uneven lines, rhythmic and verbal effects and unusual word combinations. However, the poem was not published, as it was rejected by the Jesuit magazine.

He continued to write poetry but these were read only in manuscript form by his friends. After working as a parish priest, teacher and preacher in several churches and institutions, Hopkins was appointed Professor of Greek Literature at University College, Dublin. He found the environment uncongenial and he was unhappy and overworked. In 1885, he started writing a series of sonnets

beginning with “Carrion Comfort” that mirror his anguish, desolation and frustration and are known as “terrible sonnets”. They showcase the great dilemma he felt in reconciling his immense fascination for the sensuous world and the equally powerful devotion to religious vocation.

Hopkins died of typhoid fever in 1889 with the last words on his lips, “I am happy, so happy” and is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin. In 1918, Robert Bridges, his friend who was the poet laureate of Britain at the time, published a collection of his poems. These original, subtle and vibrant verses, with rich aural patterning, displaying imaginative and intellectual depths had a marked influence on the major 20th century poets like T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Dylan Thomas and many others.

Do you find Hopkins’ life interesting? If you wish to know more about his life which has inspired a great deal of critical research, which has whetted curiosity about his great self-denial and his friendships, so much so that some have found evidences of homo-eroticism, you can either refer to the Encyclopaedia or browse online for scholarly articles.

Now try out these questions in Exercise I and find out how well you have followed the biographical note.

Self-check Exercise I

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Check your answers with the answer key provided in [19.7] after doing the exercise.

- 1) Which was the poem written by Hopkins under the influence of John Keats? At what age did he write it?

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- 2) Who was John Henry Newman? What work is he known for?

.....

- 3) What was the immediate reason for the writing of the Wreck of the Deutschland?

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19.3 NOTES

19.3.1 A Note on Sprung Rhythm

To enjoy and appreciate Hopkins, it is necessary to understand the concept of sprung rhythm. ‘Sprung rhythm’ is the term coined by Hopkins to denote a complex system of metrics which he derived partly from his knowledge of Welsh poetry. Hopkins was inspired by the Welsh prosodic feature called ‘*cynganedd*’ [Pron. k??°haneð] which uses a concept of sound arrangement within one line, using stress, alliteration and rhyme.

Sprung rhythm is opposed specifically to ‘running’ or ‘common’ rhythm, such as the iambic meter, and provides for feet of varying lengths. In running/regular rhythm, stressed and unstressed syllables will alternate in pattern. In sprung rhythm, stressed syllables will occur at regular intervals but the unstressed or slack syllables may vary from one to four.

For instance, in the following line, which is written in iambic meter, you will notice that the first word in each foot is unstressed or slack while the second one is stressed or accented.

[Each foot is separated with the ‘slash’ [/] sign. The unstressed syllables are indicated in normal font while **stressed** ones are denoted marking them in **bold and underlining** them.]

The cur/few tolls/ the knell/ of part/ing day [From Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’]

Whereas this example of sprung rhythm given beneath will give you an idea how slack syllables vary in number:

Margaret are you/ grieving

Over Goldengrove/ unleaving [From Hopkins’ poem ‘Spring and Fall’]

Sprung rhythm gave Hopkins’ poetry a masculine vigour which renders it muscular, flexible, vibrant and organic. It reflects the dynamic quality and variations of common speech and creates more acoustic possibilities. Sprung rhythm in many ways anticipates free verse [*vers libre*] of modern times.

Other features of Hopkins’ poetry:

Hopkins energized language greatly. He dug up archaic and dialectal words and also coined new words. Hopkins was influenced by not only Welsh but also Anglo-Saxon or Old English poetry. Alliterations and Compound terms were features of Anglo Saxon Poetry. Hopkins uses these liberally in his poems.

- 1) **Alliteration** [repetition of initial consonant sounds in near lying words]:
e.g.: “king/dom of daylight’s dauphin/dapple-dawn-drawn falcon...”; “hear
in hiding” etc],
- 2) **Assonance** [repetition of vowel sounds to create internal rhyming]:
e.g.: rose-moles, finches wings, wimpling wing etc
- 3) **Compound words** e.g.: ‘couple-colour’, ‘dapple-dawn-drawn’ ‘blue-bleak’
etc.

19.3.2 A Note on Inscape

Hopkins believed that all phenomena in the world possess a unique quality or design. This design is a dynamic one. Thus a tree differed from another tree, a stone from a stone, and a blade of grass from another. This special individualizing quality which he perceived in every single thing, he calls **Inscape**. Hopkins was influenced by the philosophical concepts of the medieval schoolman, the theologian Duns Scotus. Duns Scotus has used a Latin term '*haecceitas*' which denotes the discrete qualities that make it a particular thing – which Hopkins translates as '*thisness*'. It is 'thisness' which is prevalent in everything that gives it its special quiddity or essence. The recognition of this inscape in other things is termed **Instress**. It can be defined as the apprehension of an object in an intense thrust of energy which enables one to realize its specific distinctiveness. Hopkins tries to capture this inscape in his poems. Thus he shows us how “Kingfishers catch fire and dragonflies draw flame”: through their special vibrant colours that nature has endowed them, kingfishers and dragon flies enthrall us with their swift movements, and it impresses upon our mind in an instant. Our receipt of their unique quality or inscape into our minds is the instress that occurs in this case. Anybody who has eaten a plum knows how the juice flows into the mouth, at the instant of biting it, suffusing the whole mouth and being with sweetness or sourness. The perception of inscape is just like that! Hopkins' inscape is very much like Wordsworth's 'spots of time,' Emerson's 'moments,' and James Joyce's concept of the 'Epiphany', though Hopkins' concept is fundamentally religious.

Hope you have understood these very important concepts. Now shall we try answering a few questions to see whether you have grasped the 'inscape' of Hopkins' ideas?

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Write down briefly about the features of sprung rhythm.

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- 2) “As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
 As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
 Stones ring”

Identify alliteration and assonance in the above mentioned lines.

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- 3) Who is the medieval philosopher who influenced Hopkins in his concept of Inscape? What was the term that he used to signify the distinct quality in each being?

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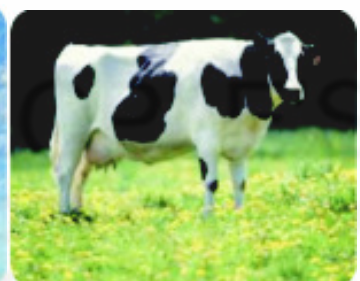
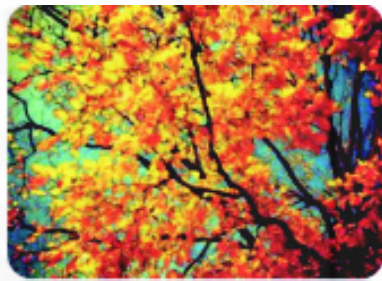
(You may now cross check your answers with those in 19.7)

19.4 PIED BEAUTY (1877)

19.4.1 Introduction

Beauty is of all sorts. Some may see beauty in the curve of a lady's brow, in the innocence of a baby's face, in the red, red rose that blooms on a thorny plant, in placid lakes or mountain slopes. Hopkins sees beauty in spots, speckles, dots and blotches. In a world where we spend lots of money and time to remove spots from our faces, Hopkins' vision emerges as one of a kind, and helps us see beauty even in motley!

Hopkins wrote this poem in 1877, the year he was ordained as a Jesuit priest. It is a curial sonnet, which means that it is shorter than the usual sonnet, which as you know is 14 lines long. 'Pied Beauty' is 11 lines, the last line, but a stub. Did you know that Shakespeare too has written curial sonnets? But Hopkins's curial sonnets follow a specific pattern based on the Petrarchan sonnet. The octave which is usually eight lines is truncated to six [two tercets each, rhyming ABC] and the sestet is shortened from six lines to a quatrain [four line stanza] and an additional tail piece. This alteration of the sonnet form is quite fitting for a poem advocating originality and contrariness. Let us read the poem and find out what it means. First read the poem aloud that you get a feel of it. Then go through the poem again, slowly this time, reading with the help of the glossary. Don't get intimidated. The analysis will help you to discover the beauty and sense of 'Pied Beauty'.



19.4.2 The Text

PIED BEAUTY

Glory be to God for dappled things —
 For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
 For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
 Landscape plotted and pieced — fold, fallow, and plough;
 And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
 He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
 Praise him.

Glossary

dappled	: spotted, speckled, pied, multi-coloured
couple-colour	: two colours
brinded	: also brindled; brownish yellow or gray coat with spots or streaks of darker colour
rose-moles	: reddish spots on the skin
stipple	: pattern of spots; a device in painting which marks a surface with numerous dots or specks
trout	: a fish related to salmon



finch	: a small bird
fallow	: uncultivated land
tackle	: equipment or gear for fishing
trim	: equipment
“counter, original, spare or strange”	: things which are unconventional and strange
adazzle	: dazzling (Hopkins’ coinage)
fathers-forth	: creates, begets

19.4.3 Analysis of the Poem

‘Pied Beauty’ which is one of Hopkins’ happy poems, is a hymn of creation that praises the creator by praising the created world. It glorifies all the things on this earth that are either ‘pied’ or spotted. The poet thinks that it is a manifestation of God’s creativity. With the eye of a painter, Hopkins vividly sketches in kaleidoscopic variety, all the objects and patterns which provide an example of this kind of beauty.

Hopkins starts with a eulogy of Lord the creator: “Glory be to God for dappled things”. This is followed by an inventory of things which are dappled or spotted. He includes in this list, the sky that is dappled at dawn, with blotches of blue colour splashed against pale white, the contrast described as ‘couple-colour’ by Hopkins. It reminds him of “brinded cow” or ‘brindled’ or ‘piebald’ cow, whose

hide is again a contrast of brown against white. Then he describes the trout fish which swims, that has its body painted [stippled] with rose coloured moles. The next image, a complex one, is of a chestnut, the meaty interior cradled within its hard shell falling out, hiding its smouldering brilliance like coals in a fire, black on the outside, but glowing within as it splits and falls. The tiny birds, finches, are multicoloured usually with specks on their wings; and the landscape of a farmland, enclosed in patches, forms a pattern according to the way in which it is cultivated or left fallow or freshly ploughed. The last example in the octave is taken from the world of man, where the tools and equipments of his trade, make a dappled pattern in their variety. Hopkins places man in his context – he is only a part of the extensive natural world. And even human achievements such as trade, gear, tackle and trim, can be seen only as a part of the larger scheme of things.

In the final five lines, Hopkins goes beyond the physical characteristics of the things he has described, and delves into their natures or moral qualities. Thus all things, highly original, unconventional and strange, whether they are freckled or fickle, with all their attributes of swiftness or slowness, sweetness or sourness, brightness or dimness, come from him, the creator. In their multiplicity, the creatures affirm the permanence and immutability of God the father, and inspire the world to “Praise Him.”

Hopkins follows the adulatory style of the Psalmist in the Old Testament in the opening line. Interestingly, he also ends on a note of veneration: “Praise him!” These opening and closing lines with their parallelism, rework the mottoes of Jesuits, “to the greater Glory of God” and “praise to God always”, making the poem akin to a ritual observance, thus giving it a traditional flavour. This tempers the unorthodoxy of the appreciation – the poets’ fascination for dappled or spotted things. The parallelism in the first and the last lines, correspond to the larger symmetry of the poem: the octave, starting with praise, moves on to a laudatory inventory of creatures; the sestet, starts with a description of the characteristics of creatures and ends by praising the creator.

The poem runs on like an extended sentence, the long **predicate** that resembles a list, at last yields to a striking **verb** of creation in the penultimate sentence – “fathers-forth” – which is the *volta** of the sonnet, leading the reader to acknowledge the ultimate **subject**, God the creator. It takes the theological position that the great variety in the created world is a testimony to the infinite power of the Creator. It also takes a polemic/political stance against the uniformity and standardization which was a feature of Victorian society, by appreciating differences summed up in “fickle, freckled”. Neither is Hopkins’ appreciation merely an aesthetic one. By juxtaposing ‘fickle’ with ‘freckled’, Hopkins introduces a moral tenor, which imbues a mere physical description with a deeper and denser significance. It calls for an acceptance of unsightly and quirky things as beautiful creations of God. That their particular individualizing attributes are of mysterious derivation is brought to attention by Hopkins in the parenthetical musing: “(who knows how?)”, hinting at its divine origin. Thus Hopkins deviates from conventional romanticism which sees beauty only in conventionally beautiful things.

* *Volta*: In sonnets, the *volta*, or turn, is a rhetorical shift or dramatic change in thought and/or emotion.

Hopkins' sprung rhythm adds vitality and vigour to the poem, which races down the list of dappled things. Alliteration sprinkled abundantly in lines such as "Glory be to God", "Fresh firecoal chestnut-falls, finches' wings", "plotted and pieced", "fold, fallow", "tackle and trim", "fickle, freckled" "swift, slow, sweet, sour", and assonance resonating within expressions like "rose-moles", and "finches' wings", impart a great aural felicity to the poem. The poet's boldness in coining new compound expressions like "couple-colour", "fresh-firecoal", adds vividness to the verbal pictures. Hopkins' linguistic experimentations are not mere embellishments. They go beyond their decorative capacity to structurally augment the thematic elements of the poem. Hopkins effectively conveys the inscape of dappled and spotted things through these rich and dense expressions.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) What are various dappled things that Hopkins describes in the first stanza of his poem?

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- 2) Which is the verb used by Hopkins on which the meaning of the whole poem hinges?

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- 3) Write down two examples each of a) alliteration b) assonance c) compound terms that are used in the poem.

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- 4) Look up a dictionary or an encyclopaedia for the meaning of 'parallelism' and record it below.

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19.5 THE WINDHOVER (1877)

19.5.1 Introduction

Have you seen an eagle or a falcon soaring high up in the sky? It is a majestic sight. What differentiates the bird of this family is its capacity to stay immobile in the air for a while without moving its wings, before it suddenly swoops down on to the earth, may be, to catch its prey! It is the hovering of the bird in midair that caught Hopkins' attention which came out as this much anthologized magnificent poem.

The Windhover was written on 30 May, 1877, the same year as 'Pied Beauty', but published only 1918. On rising early one morning, Hopkins happened to see a common kestrel which is also called Windhover because of its tendency to hover. Struck by the majesty of the bird, Hopkins was inspired to write a poem. But as is usual with Hopkins, the creature is but a pretext to perceive the majesty of the creator. Hopkins has used the subtitle *To Christ, Our Lord*, by which he wishes to call our attention to the greater splendour of God.

Like 'Pied Beauty', 'The Windhover' apotheosizes the glory of creation. If there is a list of images in the first poem, the latter one has a single image of a falcon or a kestrel. But Hopkins presents two facets of this bird, in *statis* and *kinesis*, i.e. in stationary position and movement. Written in the Petrarchan mode, the sonnet describes the bird in the octave and then moves on to compare the bird with the greater majesty of Christ, the Lord, in the sestet. Hopkins' devotion to God pours out in passionate words which culminate in two vivid images of self-effacement and self-sacrifice in the last tercet of the sestet.

Hopkins considered 'The Windhover', "the best thing [he] ever wrote". Hopkins avoids the 'same and tame' cadence of conventional poetry which he calls, Parnassian poetry*, and writes in sprung rhythm making his poem come fierce and alive. The poem with its vivid and condensed images, its words twisted out of present day meanings, to accommodate archaic ones, lends itself to several interpretations. We will read more about them when we discuss the poem in detail.

Eagles have fascinated poets before. Here is a short poem by Alfred Tennyson, another Victorian poet, titled 'The Eagle'.

"He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls."

It would be good for you to read it and compare it with Hopkins' poem 'The Windhover', after you have read the poem, which is given below. Read the poem carefully, not once but two or three times, with the help of the glossary given beneath.

* Competent Poetry written without much inspiration. As from the heights of Parnassus, mountain sacred to the Muses according to Greek mythology

THE WINDHOVER

To Christ our Lord

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!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
 Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
 Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer plód makes plough down sillion
 Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
 Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

Glossary

- minion** : darling, favourite
- dauphin** : [pron: /d??fæn/] crown prince or heir to the throne of France
- Falcon** : is a raptor [bird of prey], belonging to the family of *falco*, with sharp talons and curved beak. The kestrel which belongs to this family has brown coloured plumage. Falcons are used for the hunting game called falconry [pron: /f?k?nr?/] with the help of a trained bird of prey. There is a covert reference to the game in the poem.
- wimpling** : with folds, like in a wimple [a gathered headdress for nuns]
- buckle** : 1) to fasten; 2) to give way under strain
- chevalier** : a knight; a chivalrous man; a cavalier
- sillion** : furrow; soil turned over by a plough; “sillion” is a medieval term for the small strip of land granted to monasteries to farm.
- vermillion** : a brilliant scarlet red colour

Synopsis: [A synopsis is included here to help you read the poem and understand it better.]

The narrative persona, 'I', captures the image of a falcon in his eye/mind, who is the darling of morning, the crown prince of the kingdom of daylight, who is intensely drawn towards dappled dawn [early morning with streaks of red in the sky], as he rides the air. He looks as if he is riding the thermal* [rolling air], by pulling his wimpling [folding] wings back, like a horseback rider reins in his horse by pulling at it. And then, from his static position, he suddenly swoops down smoothly, gliding like a skater skating in a rink, manoeuvring a curve, hurling himself against the big wind. The heart of the persona, hidden within him, yearned to be like the bird, to achieve its mastery over the elements.

The bird which encapsulates brute beauty, bravery and action with its air [manner], pride, plume [feather], buckles [fastens itself to the greater beauty of God /or/ gives away before the greater beauty of God]. The poet tells Christ, whom he addresses as chevalier, that the fire that breaks at this act of buckling, is a million times lovelier and more dangerous. For, Christ's supreme sacrifice on the cross for the whole of humanity is definitely more glorious than the hunting bird's terrestrial exploits.

But that is not a matter to wonder. For, sheer hard work makes the ploughshare dragged within the sillion [furrows in the farm] shine brightly. Or it may be that even the furrows shine when the plow turns up the dull clods of earth and the new earth glints with minerals. And ash covered embers [blue-bleak], when they break open, they reveal in the gash, their heart of smouldering fire [gold-vermilion].

19.5.3 Discussion

Now that you have read the poem carefully, try to answer the following questions, so that we can discuss the poem.

- a) Record briefly the images that suggest the majesty and grandeur of the Windhover.

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[Read the octave: The sight of the kestrel in the mid air, which is majestic like the dauphin, rides like an accomplished horseman, which shows tremendous mastery of movement and fights the big wind, like a cavalier. Then it swoops down in a majestic sweeping motion, showing its mastery over the air.]

*Thermal: an upward current of warm air, used by gliders, balloonists, and birds to gain height.

b) How does the poet establish the supremacy of Christ over the kestrel?

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[Kestrel is a majestic bird. In stasis and movement, it shows its majesty and command. The creature is magnificent indeed. But the beauty of the creator is a million times told lovelier. The kestrel is a bird of prey, a raptor, hence dangerous. In its bright plumage, in its command of the situation, in its haughty demeanour, it wins the hearts of the onlookers, who aspire to be like it. But the beauty of Christ is multi-fold, when compared to the kestrel. Christ, who died on the cross, comes across as more dangerous and lovelier through his sacrifice for the whole of mankind. His bravery is one of a kind. Not the physical bravery of the bird, but spiritual bravery, which wins over the soul. If the bird is like a cavalier soldier, fighting the wind, Christ is the chevalier of human hearts.]

3) Do you think that the sonnet form has helped Hopkins to convey his ideas better?

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[The sonnet form of the poem is the perfect vehicle for thoughts. The poet is able to convey ideas and paint word pictures in a condensed manner. The structural virtuosity of the Petrarchan mode with its octave and the sestet, works perfectly to convey the images of the Windhover and Christ. The movement from the kestrel to Christ is beautifully executed, with the Volta coming in the sestet. The tercets in the sestet too balance the image of Christ with the two metaphorical images revelatory of his sacrifice.]

19.5.4 Comments

- The ‘I’ mentioned in the poem can be the poet himself, or the persona of the poet.
- The poem is mimetic and visual. The poet tries to capture the movement of the falcon through a series of verbal shots – montages*.
- The word ‘caught’ is extremely significant. The poet does not use tame words like ‘saw’ or ‘beheld’. ‘Caught’ is in keeping with the image of falcon, which catches the prey. It is an epiphanic moment, when the inscape of the bird is ‘caught’ in the mind of the writer, with all its permutations, in a split second.

* Montage is a cinematic term; it is a device in editing, which combines different shots to create a scene.

- The first line is an **enjambment** – a run on line – which spills over from the first to the second.
- The soundscapes of Hopkins’ poem help us to ‘catch’ the inscape of the bird.
- Notice the alliterative repetition of /d/ sounds in the second line, they sound like a drum roll, accompanying the entry of a king, in this case, the dauphin.
- Also notice the repetition of sibilants in the line: “off forth on swing /As a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend”. Can you hear the sound of the skates cutting through the ice, as it glides over it?
- The bird by rebuffing the wind achieves or masters something in his successful negotiation. It is this act that fascinates the poet, whose heart comes out of hiding. But stepping out of one’s ego and inhabiting another creature, as the poet does here, grants one sacramental joy of being alive.
- Hopkins uses synaesthetic images. The **visual**, **auditory** and **tactile** images are very effectively evoked. We can **see**, **hear**, and **touch** very vividly and clearly.
- The poem captures in detail, words and images of **medieval chivalric culture**: minion, dauphin, dappled, falcon, wimple, chevalier and sillion.
- Wimple – folded cloth – is part of a nun’s headdress, which presses against her temples and keeps her hair back. In other words, the bird is exulting not only in the freedom of the air, but also in the resistance or the friction offered by it.
- In the line: “Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume”, in order to make sense, you have to connect ‘brute beauty’ to ‘plume’ [the reddish-brown plumage of kestrel which conveys its brute beauty; ‘valour’ to ‘air’ [air of bravery] and ‘act’ to ‘pride’[proud act].
- The sonnet is in the Petrarchan mode. Though the sprung rhythm and enjambments used make it appear rather alien to us. The octave presents the bird’s flight. The sestet is an open avowal of the greater majesty of Christ, the chevalier.
- The rhyme scheme is strange and unusual – the octave has one only one rhyme – ‘A’ – since each line ends in ‘-ing’. Though these are not gerund in all the instances [as in ‘king-’, thing etc], the stanza gives us a feeling of continued action. The sestet which consists of two tercets rhymes ‘BCB-CBC’, interlocking the latter idea with the previous one.
- The Volta [turn] of the poem comes with the word “Buckle”.
- The poem is thematically, structurally and syntactically very challenging to the reader. But rewarding too.

Self-check Exercise IV

- 1) Identify the words taken from medieval chivalric culture used in the poem.

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- 2) What are the terms used by Hopkins to describe the Windhover?

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- 3) Which are the two images used at the end of the poem, to denote self-effacement and sacrifice?

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19.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have been introduced to the life of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and examined two poems written by him. Both the poems are sonnets, but the first one is a curtal sonnet, while the second is written in the Petrarchan mode. We hope that you will be able to distinguish the features of both. You have also learnt about Hopkins' innovation in prosody, the sprung rhythm. It would be good to analyse the advantages of using sprung rhythm instead of conventional English meters like the iambic. You have also come into touch with Hopkins' concept of Inscape, which we are sure, will make you look at the objects around in a different light, which is the ultimate goal of learning literature: it widens the horizons of the mind.

We also hope that reading these poems has whetted your curiosity and appetite for more of Hopkins' poems. You will find them in anthologies or collections of poems or you can browse the net to read them as they are all available online.

19.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) The Escorial; at the age of ten.
- 2) Cardinal Newman, one of the major figures of the Oxford movement or the Tractarianism, which resulted in the rise of Anglo-Catholicism; *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*
- 3) The sinking of the ship Deutschland, which resulted in the martyrdom Five Franciscan Nuns, who sacrificed their lives to save others; and the urging of Hopkins' superior to write a poem to commemorate the event.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) See the Note on Sprung rhythm; second Para, third sentence.
- 2) Alliteration: **kingfishers catch** [/k/ sound repeated]
dragonflies draw
rim in roundy wells
Assonance: dragonflies draw; tumbled over rim in roundy...; stones ring;
- 3) Duns Scotus; 'Haecceitas' or thisness

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) Read Stanza 1 of the poem; Check paragraph 2 in the Analysis of the poem
- 2) Fathers-forth
- 3) Any of the examples in the last paragraph of the Analysis.

Self-check Exercise IV

- 1) Minion, dauphin, falcon, wimpling, chevalier, sillion
- 2) Morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn falcon
- 3) The ploughshare which shines due to friction when it cuts deep into the sillion; the ash-covered ember that glows gold-vermilion when it falls and breaks.