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Ignatian Inscap and Instress in Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Pied Beauty," "God's Grandeur," "The Starlight Night," and "The Windhover": Hopkins's Movement toward Ignatius by Way of Walter Pater

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Abstract: This essay discusses Gerard Manley Hopkins's notions of inscape and instress, examining their early expressions during Hopkins's time as a student at and recent alumnus of Balliol College, Oxford, their subsequent development amid Hopkins's career as a Jesuit novice and priest, and their manifestation in four sonnets composed in 1877. Attention is paid throughout to the likely influence of Hopkins's Balliol tutor, Walter Pater, as well as the influence of Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises upon Hopkins's presentation of inscape and instress in his poems.

Keywords: Gerard Manley Hopkins; inscape; instress; Walter Pater; Ignatius of Loyola; *The Renaissance*; Conclusion; "Pied Beauty"; "God's Grandeur"; "The Starlight Night"; "The Windhover"

It is perhaps commonly known among his devotees that the Jesuit priest-poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) was, while an undergraduate at Balliol College, Oxford, tutored for the spring 1866 term by the essayist, critic, and agnostic devotee to aestheticism Walter Pater (1839–1894). The two men differed tremendously in their religious views, with Hopkins on May 31, 1866 complaining in his journal of "Pater talking two hours agst. [against] Xtianity" (Hopkins 2015, p. 363).¹ Pater's broader influence upon Hopkins's art remains the subject of occasional critical examination and speculation.² Although the present essay is not primarily devoted to matters of Pater's influence upon Hopkins, I will address what I argue to be Pater's likely influence upon Hopkins's notions of inscape and instress, an influence that is evident in Hopkins's youthful writings and which also manifests itself—both in what Hopkins embraces and what he rejects of Pater's aestheticism—within some of his most celebrated poetry. In examining this topic, we may consider how Pater's influence fits into the development of Hopkins's theologically grounded aesthetic ideas. Particularly striking is the degree to which these beliefs were already formulated before Hopkins entered the Jesuit order and studied intently the

¹ Earlier that month, on 2 May, Hopkins, alluding disapprovingly to the rationalistic theology of Pater's German idealism, referred to Pater as "'Bleak-faced Neology in cap and gown': No cap and gown but very bleak" (Hopkins 2015, p. 352). See (Starčević 2016, pp. 86–88) for more discussion of the religious tension between Hopkins and Pater. (Earnest 1978, p. 10) notes that "Hopkins' conversion to Catholicism in October 1866 caused Pater to break of relations with his wayward student," but the two were reconciled, and in a 17 June 1868 journal entry Hopkins records meeting Pater for lunch (Hopkins 2015, p. 428). Their friendship continued after Hopkins's ordination into the priesthood, and in a brief 20 May 1879 letter to Hopkins, Pater writes, "It will give me great pleasure to accept your kind invitation to dinner on Thursday at 5:30" (Pater 1970, p. 36).

² See especially (Earnest 1978; Higgins 2012; Starčević 2016). More famously, chapter 5 of (Miller 1985, pp. 229–66) offers a dubious attempt, in the words of (Ward 2002, pp. 176–77), to link Pater's "rarified hedonism" to Hopkins's worldview and poetry and to "graft[] Hopkins's art onto the Hegelian roots of Pater's [essay] 'Aesthetic Poetry,'" a claim (Ward 2002, pp. 177–80) goes on to refute.

writings of Ignatius of Loyola and John Duns Scotus, writings which further shaped Hopkins's views concerning art, nature, and spirituality. By examining this trajectory, we may better understand how Hopkins's involvement with both his Oxford and his later Jesuit communities affected his mature poetic achievements. This essay shall begin by suggesting Pater's possible connections to Hopkins's notions of inscape and instress; this will be followed by some explanation of how these notions were molded into a specifically Christian vision through Hopkins's Jesuit experience, and then move into a reading of four of Hopkins's 1877 sonnets—"Pied Beauty," "God's Grandeur," "The Starlight Night," and "The Windhover"—in which inscape and instress figure most prominently. In the course of this essay, we will consider the manner in which the works of Ignatius and Scotus influence Hopkins's poetic vision, and we will also examine how Hopkins depicts the manner in which the individual may respond to the supernatural manifestations of inscape that appear throughout the natural world that Hopkins describes. Amid this investigation, we shall also pay attention to the way in which Pater's likely influence continues to manifest itself in the aforementioned poems, even as they also reflect Hopkins's rejection of Pater's humanistic antagonism toward Christianity.

My own understanding of Pater's influence upon Hopkins builds upon John Robinson's suggestion that Hopkins's ideal of inscape can be seen both as he reacts against and adaptation of Pater's beliefs concerning the physical world, art, and the individual's relation to them (Robinson 1978, pp. 24–33).³ Although Robinson admits the conjecture involved in his theory, he notes that Pater's early writings display his conviction that the individual observer is the source of whatever order can be imposed upon the continually changing physical world that the observer sees before him or herself. In the oft-quoted Conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873)—an essay that originally appeared within Pater's unsigned October 1868 review of William Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* published in the *Westminster Review*⁴—Pater writes of physical life's "perpetual motion" and his belief that "That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an *image of ours*, under which *we group them*—a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it" (Pater 1990, p. 150, italics mine).⁵ Here, Pater denies any notion of absoluteness of forms within observed matter itself even as he asserts the individual's role in establishing order upon the observed matter. Earlier, in "Coleridge's Writings" (1866), Pater outlines a similar belief concerning the lack of fixed truths in the physical and moral realm and the consequent need for the individual observer to construct order. Pater states the following about the intricate relations between man and the physical world he inhabits:

It is the truth of these relations that experience gives us, not the truth of eternal outlines ascertained once for all, but a world of fine gradations and subtly linked conditions, shifting intricately as we ourselves change—and bids us, by a constant clearing of the organs of observation and perfecting of analysis, to make what we can of these. (Qtd. in (Robinson 1978, p. 27))

The undergraduate Hopkins reacted acutely against what he called "the prevalent philosophy of continuity and flux" so strongly represented by Pater (Hopkins 2006, p. 289).⁶ This reaction is evident in Hopkins's Balliol essay "The Probable Future of Metaphysics," a paper written in winter 1867 which also demonstrates an early expression of Hopkins's ideal of inscape. In contrast to Pater's belief in the "perpetual motion" of the physical world, Hopkins writes of

certain forms wh.[which] have a great hold on the mind and are always reappearing and seem imperishable . . . while the composition of others strikes the mind with a conception of unity wh.[which] is never dislodged: and these things are inexplicable on the theory of

³ Robinson offers no discussion of Pater with relation to Hopkins's poetry.

⁴ See (Inman 1981) for a deeper discussion of Pater's influences during the essay's original composition.

⁵ See also (Robinson 1978, p. 26).

⁶ See also (Robinson 1978, pp. 27–28).

pure chromatism or continuity—the forms have in some sense or other absolute existence.⁷ (Hopkins 2006, p. 290)

It is Hopkins's remark concerning "unity" which alerts us to the notion of inscape, a concept that Jerome Bump describes as "the distinctively *unifying* design, the 'returning' or recurrent pattern, the internal 'network' of structural relationships which clearly and unmistakably integrates or *scapes* an object or set of objects, and thus reveals the presence of integrating laws throughout nature and a divine unifying force or 'stress' in this world" (Bump 1982, p. 19). From this early essay, we may see that the young Hopkins's articulation of his convictions regarding the permanence of forms and the absoluteness of unity perceived amid distinctly individual objects, so essential to his ideal of inscape, very probably was stimulated by Hopkins's repudiation of the relativistic philosophy espoused by Pater and others at Oxford during that period.

Clearly, Hopkins at an early age exhibits his disagreement with Pater's notion of the individual observer's function as the one who gives form and order to the physical world one lives in. Despite this, Hopkins does believe that the individual plays an invaluable role in his or her reception and recognition of the given forms he or she sees. This belief is evident in Hopkins's idea of instress, described as the act in which the individual "recognizes the inscape in other beings," and is ultimately led to Christ by means of "at once recognizing God's creation and enacting his or her own God-given identity within it" (Greenblatt 2012, p. 1547).⁸ Moving beyond Robinson's conjectures, I myself suggest that Hopkins's notion of instress may be seen developing amid his own application of Pater's ideal of "form penetrating matter," a concept articulated in Pater's "The School of Giorgione."⁹ Hopkins's notes on Greek philosophy from 9 February 1868 asserts that "the deeper the form [in art] penetrates . . . the more effort will be required in apprehension, the more power of comparison, the more capacity for receiving that synthesis of . . . impressions wh.[which] gives us the unity with the prepossession conveyed by it" (Hopkins 2006, pp. 307–8).¹⁰ This passage may well anticipate Hopkins's later Christocentric notion of instress, in that the entry describes the activity that occurs in the individual's reception of the observed forms and the accompanying effort that takes place as the observer seeks to comprehend the observed form's ultimate connection with the "unity of the whole," the contemplation of which brings about "full enjoyment" of many forms of art (Hopkins 2006, p. 307). The degree to which we may connect Hopkins's notions of inscape and instress to Hopkins's interaction with Pater remains speculative, but our examination of Hopkins's early writings does reveal that his formulation of these most essential artistic ideals was already developing before he became a Jesuit novice in September 1868.

While Hopkins's decision to enter into the Jesuit order signifies his repudiation of the "philosophy of flux" championed by his former tutor Pater, Hopkins's resolution was applauded by John Henry Newman, the former leader of the Oxford Tractarian movement whose influence still lingered significantly about the university despite his departure from Oxford upon his conversion to Roman Catholicism more than two decades earlier. Newman, who had received Hopkins into the Roman Catholic Church on 21 October 1866, responded to news of Hopkins's decision with a May 1868 letter which told Hopkins: "I am both surprised and glad at your news . . . I think it is the very thing for you . . . Don't call 'the Jesuit discipline' hard; it will bring you to heaven" (Pick 1943, pp. 22–23). To be sure, the Society's effect upon Hopkins's spirituality was tremendous. We may also agree that Hopkins's involvement with the Jesuits helped him connect, in his poetry, his religion with his "love of natural

⁷ See also (Robinson 1978, p. 28).

⁸ For an intricately developed discussion of Hopkins and instress, see chapter 8 of (Ward 2002, pp. 198–240).

⁹ "The School of the Giorgione," which was written in 1877 and appears in later editions of *The Renaissance*, contends that "form . . . should become an end in itself, should penetrate every part of the matter: this is what art constantly strives after, and achieves in different degrees" (Pater 1990, p. 87); see also (Robinson 1978, p. 30). Although Hopkins's note-book entry precedes Pater's essay by nine years, Robinson maintains that the wording regarding form penetrating matter is clearly Pater's.

¹⁰ See also (Robinson 1978, p. 30).

beauty” (Robinson 1978, p. 22). Furthermore, clearly Hopkins’s exposure as a member of the Society of Jesus to the writings of the order’s founder, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), as well as those of John Duns Scotus (ca. 1266–1308), significantly molded Hopkins’s perceptions of inscape and instress.

Ignatius’s and Scotus’s influences upon Hopkins’s artistic ideals is far too complex to address fully in a study of this length.¹¹ It is sufficient for our purposes to note that a foundational point of Ignatius’s intricate religious discipline in his *Spiritual Exercises* is that a proper view of God’s creation should lead the viewer back to the Creator (Downes 1959, p. 38).¹² In addition, we should note that in Scotus’s writings, Christ is shown as the ultimate “personification of nature,” with nature itself seen as “a real being which originated in the mind of God as an idea, a prior existence to God’s willing individual existence.” An equivalent of Hopkins’s inscape can be seen in Scotus’s belief in “an intimation of common nature, a kind of visionary sense experience by means of which insights could be had into the very fixed ideas in the order of nature before their individualization or selfing” (Downes 1959, p. 32). Moreover, Hopkins’s notion of instress is evident in Scotus’s notion that the above ideal of “inscape”

afforded a glimpse into the created nature of Christ wherein all the types in common nature sought completion. This seeking or straining after the prototypic idea was a kind of creative stress from God which, when instressed by man, afforded human awareness of God behind the idea behind the real existent . . . Finally . . . Christ could be put down as Divine Inscape, the Archetype of all created nature, whose stress was everywhere, and properly stressed, afforded a vision of Immortal Beauty. (Downes 1959, pp. 32–33)

Whatever notions of inscape and instress Hopkins was formulating during or just after his time at Balliol would come to a Christocentric fulfillment during his years as a Jesuit. His ideas of the unity and absolute existence of forms would be based upon a Creator who brought all such forms into being as an expression of his own glory; Hopkins’s ideas concerning the activity of the mind which identifies the unity of the various forms that the individual observes would now focus on the act of identifying amid all nature Christ—to whom, according to Ignatius and Scotus, all nature ultimately points.

The increasing degree of spirituality that Hopkins as a Jesuit associated with inscape is evident in his journals even before he resumed writing poetry in 1875. Perhaps the best known of such entries appears on 18 May 1870; Hopkins writes, “I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of the Lord by it. Its <inscape> is <mixed of> strength and grace” (Hopkins 2015, p. 489). Significantly enough, we may also see in another entry that Hopkins’s ideas concerning inscape and an individual’s ability to recognize it or willfully turn away from it reflect the Jesuit tenet of free will which he strongly affirmed

¹¹ For a more complete account of the influence of Hopkins’s Jesuit training on his poetry, see (Downes 1959), which I cite throughout this essay, and (Downes 1990). On Hopkins and Scotus, see (Ward 1990; 2002, *passim*).

¹² My own examination of (Ignatius 1973), reveals three significant passages regarding the desired effect of the creation upon the individual, which I quote:

I will enjoy the light and the pleasure appropriate to the season, in the warmer months the coolness of the shade, and in the winter the warmth of the sun or of a fire, according as I am led to believe this will help me share the joy of my Creator and Redeemer. (p. 78)

See God living in His creatures:
in matter, giving it existence,
in plants, giving them life,
in animals, giving them consciousness,
in men, giving them intelligence. (p. 80)

Think of God energizing, as though He were actually at work, in every created reality, in the sky, in matter, plants and fruits, herds and the like:
It is He who creates them and keeps them in being, He who confers them life or consciousness, and so on. (p. 80)

(Downes 1959, p. 48). On 19 July 1872, Hopkins writes, “I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it” (Hopkins 2015, p. 530). Here, Hopkins equates such blindness with the individual’s decision not to see; his sonnet “God’s Grandeur,” in which those who ignore the divine inscape in creation are the same people who choose to disobey God’s law, demonstrates further his conviction on this matter, as we shall discuss presently.

As we now turn to Hopkins’s 1877 poems—written, significantly, while Hopkins studied theology at St. Bueno’s in North Wales—we may see in his curtail sonnet “Pied Beauty” a fairly straightforward illustration both of Hopkins’s concept of nature’s beauty leading the observer to Christ and of his belief in the ultimate unity inherent in a rightly perceived vision of the physical world. The recognition that nature inspires worship is set forth in the very first line: “Glory be to God for dappled things—”¹³—a line that echoes the motto given by Ignatius to the members of the Society of Jesus: *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, translated “To the greater glory of God” (Milward 1975, p. 42). Throughout the poem we see the Jesuit Hopkins demonstrate the Ignatian notion of the “proper use of creatures” as he lists specific “dappled things” which evoke praise of God, such as “skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow” and “rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;/ Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches wings” (ll. 2–4). The examples Hopkins lists are not simply easily categorized nouns, but highly individualized manifestations of their common genus. Such unique appearances within the physical world are, in and of themselves, sufficient reasons to worship God. The complexity of Hopkins’s illustration of inscape, however, goes beyond a vision of creation’s specific entities, whatever beauty they possess in themselves. It soon becomes apparent that Hopkins is applying these noticeably particular examples to a much more unified vision of creation. By the time Hopkins includes in his list “All things counter, original, spare, strange;/ Whatever is fickle, frecklèd” (ll. 7–8), it is clear that all of nature acts to glorify its Creator, at once both as individual entities within creation and as a wondrous totality in which, in Paul Contino’s words, “flesh and spirit converge” (Contino 2016, p. 9). As Jerome Bump points out, Hopkins expresses the oneness of his natural picture by including both earth (“Landscape plotted and pieced”) and sky, as well as the four traditional elements of earth, water, air and fire (Bump 1990, p. 81). Such oneness, of course, is the result of God himself, who as the Creator of all nature does by his very essence bestow unity on the whole of his separate works. Indeed, Hopkins’s poem itself displays such God-ordained unity, for “it is pied, ordered and beautiful, and is an imitation of the creative act of God written to praise him in the form of a poem-prayer” (Heller 2001, p. 191).

If the poem’s scene displays unity, however, it also proclaims permanence, once again by virtue of the essence of the Creator himself. Hopkins writes, “He fathers-forth whose beauty is pàst change” (l. 10). Obviously, the natural scene itself is not past change, for Hopkins takes pains in “Pied Beauty” to depict the created order in constant flux. Hopkins’s celebration of this flux, as well as the poem’s rhythmic and syntactical adventurousness, is, according to Lesley Higgins, “strangely and wholly Paterian” (Higgins 2012, p. 85). More accurately, we may state that Hopkins’s lines reveal Pater’s influence without being *wholly* Paterian. The paradox that Hopkins celebrates is that the immutable Deity is continually creating a physical world of variety and change (Bump 1990, p. 81). We see a further paradox in that this world of ostensible mutability ultimately points to the unchanging God who “fathers [it] forth.” Similar to Pater’s Conclusion to *The Renaissance*, Hopkins’s vision of the physical world in “Pied Beauty” is indeed one of “perpetual motion.” For Hopkins, however, the

¹³ (Hopkins 1986), here and throughout for all poetry, with line numbers cited parenthetically.

responsibility of establishing and maintaining order within the physical world does not lie with the individual observer as Pater would maintain, but rather with the eternal Creator himself.¹⁴

The poem's paradoxical dynamic between the flux of nature and the permanence of God has been emphasized recently by Erin Lafford, who notes that "Pied Beauty" invites "the reader to attend simultaneously to the fixed and stable 'glory' of God and also to the moving, irregular imperfections of 'dappled things'" (Lafford 2011, p. 254). Consequently, Hopkins anticipates that the final response of the individual, should he or she have "eyes to see," will be to recognize the Origin of creation's unity and inscape and, as the single final line of the poem succinctly proclaims, to "Praise him" (l. 11). Similar to Pater's famous affirmation in *The Renaissance*, Hopkins recognizes that whatever an observer sees in nature is largely dependent on the viewer's frame of mind and aesthetic consciousness. For Pater, however, whatever order is evident in one's view of nature is imposed by the viewer him or herself. For Hopkins, the ordering of nature's various discordant elements is dependent on God alone, even as the viewer must attain a proper state of spiritual maturity to recognize and rejoice in the multifaceted layers of diversity within the unity of God's creation. The words of worship that conclude "Pied Beauty" do not merely bring the poem full circle back to its beginning; the praise of these last words expresses more than the excited, albeit reverent reaction to nature's beauty that characterizes the poem's first line. It is, rather, the culmination of an instress which has recognized the individualized wonder throughout creation, the unified splendor of the created whole, and the immutable glory of the ever-creating God.

Hopkins's depiction in "Pied Beauty" of the brilliant physical world and the resulting worship by the ideal observer who almost instinctively recognizes God's handiwork is contrasted in "God's Grandeur" by Hopkins's portrayal of humanity's constant abuse of the natural environment. Even as "God's Grandeur" calls attention to humanity's failures, however, the poem's final message is a proclamation of God's permanent creative power, a power that manifests itself continually in the physical world. In the poem's opening line, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God"—a variant of Psalm 71's proclamation "The whole earth shall be filled with his majesty" (Milward 1975, p. 35) that also anticipates an 1881 passage from Hopkins's commentary on Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*¹⁵—Hopkins articulates powerfully his conviction that creation itself proclaims the glory of the Creator. The following lines demonstrate the varied manners in which God may reveal his grandeur to mankind. Hopkins writes, "It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;/It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil/Crushed" (ll. 2–4). In this passage, God's grandeur is being displayed "in terms of light and density" (Mariani 1970, p. 94). The shook foil image demonstrates the "lightning rapidity" with which God may demonstrate his glory, (Mariani 1970, p. 94), a future ("will") flaming grandeur that points to "an eschatological sign of Judgment" (Hart 2005, p. 277).¹⁶ Or, God may choose to reveal himself slowly, by increasing spiritual pressure—"like the ooze of oil crushed"—that finally leads the right-minded individual to acknowledge God's greatness. Once again, we may liken Hopkins's imagery of nature to Pater's idea of the "perpetual motion" of physical life. But once again, Hopkins shapes this idea of perpetual motion into a distinctly Christian theological and artistic formulation. Elizabeth Villeponteaux notes how these lines capture God's unchanging glory in

¹⁴ Hopkins's orthodox Christian emphasis on the eternal Creator, consistently affirming Christian doctrine and often expressed through Trinitarian and/or Christocentric imagery, have consistently been affirmed in critical analysis of his poems. See, for example, (Montag 1965; White 1966; Cotter 1972, pp. 168–72; 1978; Cervo 1981; Lichtmann 1991; Ballinger 2000, pp. 85–97; Villeponteaux 2002, pp. 201–8; Ward 2002, pp. 214–17; Hart 2005, pp. 271–80). Dissenting views are offered by (Miller 1985, pp. 248–66), who, arguing that Hopkins's use of poetic language deconstructs his ostensible orthodox theology, asserts that "Hopkins's linguistic underthought undoes his Christian overthought" (p. 265); and (Farley 2016, p. 7), who suggests, "For Hopkins, it would seem that pantheism is the orthodox understanding of Christian creation." A thorough response to Miller's skepticism is offered by (Ward 1990) and (Ward 2002, pp. 158–97, particularly pp. 176–84).

¹⁵ "All things therefore are charged with love, are charged with God and if we know how to touch them give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring and tell of him" (Hopkins 1953, p. 303).

¹⁶ (Ward 2002, p. 153) highlights how the sound and syntax of the opening four lines highlight "the dignity of God and the danger of disregarding it" and present God as "very threatening."

its perpetual variety as expressed to humanity throughout the ages: “Though the Christian God is unchangeable, it is inherent in the concept of a communicative God that we may, both individually and collectively, experience him differently over time and space” (Villeponteaux 2002, p. 205). And Mirko Starčević states that these lines celebrate “The singular credence of God’s wondrous emanation” by means of what Hopkins experiences and “identifies in the unmitigated contact of his senses with the incarnate ripeness and purity of God’s glory” (Starčević 2016).

But despite God’s manifold manifestations of his grandeur, humanity has not responded properly to the invitation God continually lays before it, much to the dismay of the poem’s perplexed speaker:

Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell . . . (ll. 4–7)

Here, the Ignatian notion of free will and the individual’s ability to reject God’s grace is displayed through humanity’s desecration of the natural world, a destructive disposition that coincides with their choice to turn blindly away from the miraculous inscape about them. And, while Hopkins’s imagery calls to mind the intense urban pollution of the Victorian era,¹⁷ it is clear from his reference to men’s disobedience “then [and] now,” as well as his notion of the continuing “treading” of “generations,” that such disregard and hardness has existed throughout history.¹⁸ In any event, humanity’s irreverence toward God’s creation reflects a similar attitude toward his law. The unspiritual individual, who pays no attention to God’s grandeur, will also not obey his law—“not reckon his rod”—and will in fact abuse the glorious nature whose purpose was to lead the individual to salvation, a salvific connection suggested by, in the words of Kevin Hart, the “etymological association” Hopkins offers between “rod” and “rood” (Hart 2005, p. 274). And according to Roger Slakey, those who ignore “The manifestations of God’s grandeur [that] are all around them” practice the same self-willed spiritual obtuseness of those whom Saint Paul writes “‘worshipped and served the creature’ rather than the Creator. That is, they turn[] on themselves and on the projections of their imaginations . . . they can sense only projections of themselves. For they have imprisoned themselves in self, but in a false self” (Slakey 1996, pp. 80, 78, 81).¹⁹ We may easily apply such criticism to Pater’s implicitly atheistic perception of the world as articulated in the Conclusion of *The Renaissance*, a perception that ascribes one’s vision of nature to being, ultimately, “but an image of ours.”²⁰

Hopkins’s vision of God and his creative power, as well as the inscape which continues to manifest itself within the creation, however, is not dependent upon humanity’s response. Hopkins writes:

And, for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings. (ll. 9–14)

This sestet shows how God’s continuing glory outshines all of humanity’s abuses, emphasizing that “God remains immanent in the world whether human beings regard him or not” (Ward 2002, p. 157).

¹⁷ In an 8–16 October 1879 letter to Robert Bridges, Hopkins stated his own intense dislike for industrial pollution: “I was yesterday at St. Helen’s, probably the most repulsive place in Lancashire or out of the Black Country. The stench of sulphuretted hydrogen rolls in the air and fills of the same gas form on railing and pavement” (Hopkins 2013, p. 367).

¹⁸ The observation by (Ward 2002, p. 154) that “the alliteration on ‘s’” in lines 6 and 7 reveals “an undercurrent of snakelike hissing” may be used to argue that Hopkins here uses this repeated “s” sound to highlight how human misuse of nature has existed since the fall of humanity in Eden.

¹⁹ Slakey quotes Romans 1:25.

²⁰ In her chapter “Metaphysics: Pater’s Failed Atheism,” (Hext 2013, pp. 64–82) argues that Pater was never able to fully embrace the materialism of the Conclusion to *The Renaissance*.

Nature is “never spent” not simply because it is created by God, but because the Spirit of God himself is perpetually active throughout the world he has created (Milward 1975, p. 39). The stanza also shows Christ’s ever-renewing presence within nature in its image of the sun which rises each new day; in his resurrected new life, God the Son watches over the life of the physical world he has created (Cotter 1972, pp. 171–72), even as he sustains it through the Spirit whom he has sent. Whatever the negative reaction of the average person, the inscape of Christ may be seen clearly amid the horizon. Those who would look to it will share the jubilant instress of the poem’s speaker in the concluding lines. Furthermore, such celebration will not come about simply by the recognition of Christ and the Spirit in creation, but also from the individual’s realization that his or her own life was given and is nourished by the same divinity that he or she now worships. The thoroughgoing celebration of God’s grandeur that Hopkins presents in these lines is simultaneously a rejection of Pater’s aforementioned atheistic vision of perception even as Hopkins recognizes that proper human perception is utterly dependent on one’s mental and spiritual perspective.

If Christ’s inscape is seen within the rising sun in “God’s Grandeur,” it is recognized just as clearly amid the stars in Hopkins’s “The Starlight Night,” a poem Paul Mariani calls “sheer celebration and gratitude” (Mariani 2008, p. 164). The poem itself is anticipated by a journal entry of 17 August 1874, in which Hopkins writes, “As we drove home [from a park] the stars came out thick: I leant back to look at them and my heart opening more than usual praised our Lord to and in whom all that beauty comes home” (Hopkins 2015, p. 592).²¹ In these words, we witness Hopkins’s own experience of instress as he perceives God’s inscape in the stars. The entry’s description of the observed inscape and the consequent instress is a simple, or at least a compressed one; the way to Christ, even amid nature’s grandeur, is more complex within “The Starlight Night.” And such complexity is the proper reaction to the night’s brilliance which the speaker describes.²² The scene itself is without question a magnificent one, as the speaker spends the better part of the first stanza proclaiming:

Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!
 O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!
 The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!
 Down in dim woods the diamond delves! the elves’-eyes!
 The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies!
 Wind-beat whitebeam! airy abeles set on a flare!
 Flake-doves sent floating forth at a farmyard scare! (ll. 1–7)

Certainly there is no shortage of beauty in the above scene, nor of “perceptual excitement” (White 1992, p. 268) on the speaker’s part. Despite this call to recognize nature’s inscape, Christ is not acknowledged immediately amid the night’s radiance as he is in Hopkins’s 1874 entry, except indirectly in the stanza’s final line, where the speaker observes, “Ah well! It is all a purchase, all is a prize” (l. 8). Within this statement is an implied recognition of the purchase that Christ has made, by means of his death, for the beauty that the speaker now sees before him.²³ Consequently, it is not money that shall buy such brilliance for the speaker, but rather a reverent devotion that acknowledges and responds to Christ’s own purchase (Mariani 1970, p. 99): “Prayer, patience, alms, vows” (l. 9).

These four words suggest that the degree to which an individual may discern Christ’s inscape within nature is contingent upon the degree to which one has prepared him or herself spiritually through pious acts and an obedient attitude toward God that can serve to awaken a person’s sensitivity to the spiritual throughout creation. Such a notion complements the principle in “God’s Grandeur” that

²¹ See also (McChesney 1968, p. 57).

²² (Ward 2002, p. 126) writes that the “multilayered complexity” of the poem “displays Hopkins’s faith that all sorts of interrelationships are important because they are ‘relations of things’ and part of our encounter with God’s intended order in the world.”

²³ (Cotter 1978, p. 302) observes at this point that “The starlight night then is transmuted by Christ’s alchemy for those who know how to bid for it.”

an individual's failure to recognize divine inscape in the physical world coincides with a corresponding recalcitrance toward God's laws, a recalcitrance that reminds us of Hopkins's rebuke in "God's Grandeur" of those—including, implicitly, Pater himself—who do not "reck his rod." We also can detect an Ignatian mindset pervading Hopkins's ideas of proper devotion's connection with one's ability to experience instress. Indeed, the portions of the *Spiritual Exercises* that speak of the creation leading one to God are placed amid numerous instructions concerning matters such as the "Prayer, patience, alms, vows" that "The Starlight Night" extols. Significantly, the Ignatian spiritual discipline to which Hopkins submitted himself seems at first thought to be the antithesis of the convictions of Pater, who in his Conclusion to *The Renaissance* specifically denounces any "theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of" the seemingly hedonistic "experience" he extols earlier in the Conclusion (Pater 1990, p. 153). Nonetheless, we must recognize not only that the exuberant spiritual experiences Hopkins describes in "The Starlight Night" and other poems seem to parallel the aesthetically based "ecstasy" and "passion" Pater celebrates in his famous essay, but also that Pater, despite his stated antipathy toward "habit," does in his Conclusion call for his own form of discipline—"a life of constant and eager observation"—that is necessary for one to "maintain this ecstasy" (Pater 1990, p. 152).

The efficacy of the aforementioned "purchase" that the individual obtains by means of the appropriate good works is evident in the poem's second call to recognize inscape: "Look, look: a May-mess, like on orchard boughs!/Look! March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows!" (ll. 10–11). Here, the resplendent, dense clusters of stars which resemble bunches of blossoms and flowers upon blooming trees also allude to the May Mass of Mary's month (May-mess) and the fastings of lent (March-bloom) which, if faithfully carried out, will serve as gold currency ("mealed-with-yellow") with which to buy clear sight of the divine (Mariani 1970, p. 99). Ultimately, the stars are merely the covering of Christ and his holy companions:

These indeed are the barn; withindoors house
The shocks. This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse
Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows. (ll. 12–14)

The recognition of Christ within and beyond the brilliant starlight that concludes the poem constitutes the supreme experience of instress and reflects Scotus's assertion of Christ as the "Archetype of all created nature." However, as the speaker has made clear throughout, one may gain such clarity of spiritual vision only through steadfast devotion to prescribed forms of Christian practice. In this, Hopkins articulates that his Jesuit discipline strengthens greatly his own ability to discern Christ's inscape in the given scenario.

Hopkins's Jesuit influence can be seen even more profoundly in "The Windhover," the poem that he described in 1879 as "the best thing I ever wrote," and which has also been called his "supreme illustration" of inscape and instress (Milward 1975, p. 47). "The Windhover," to which Hopkins gave the subtitle "To Christ Our Lord" six years after its 1877 composition, displays the Ignatian practice of mediating upon Christ as a royal, heroic knight, which Hopkins, in calling the poem's bird "my chevalier"—a term taken from French medieval chivalry—reveals that he is doing in the poem (McChesney 1968, p. 66).²⁴ The foundation of Jesuit spirituality upon which the poem builds

²⁴ (Ward 2002, p. 97) notes that in writing "o my chevalier!" "Hopkins address Christ and the bird at once." Discussing the poem, (McChesney 1968, p. 66) quotes from Hopkins's November 23, 1879 sermon at Bedford Leigh:

But Christ he is the hero. He too is the hero of a book or books of the divine Gospels. He is a warrior and a conqueror . . . He is a king, Jesus of Nazareth king of the Jews . . . He is an orator and poet as in his eloquent words and parables appears. He is the world's hero, the desire of nations . . . He is the true love and the bridegroom of men's souls; the virgins follow him wherever he goes; the martyrs follow him through a sea of blood. (Hopkins 1959, p. 34)

affords “The Windhover” a kind of elitism regarding the degree to which the average individual, however religious in the general Christian sense, may share in the intense instress that the speaker experiences in the poem’s sestet. If “The Starlight Night” outlines a rather systematic devotion that is a prerequisite to the recognition of Christ’s inscape within nature, it seems that the ecstatic spirituality of “The Windhover”—an ecstasy as pronounced as that celebrated by Pater in the Conclusion of *The Renaissance*²⁵—is made possible by a commitment to the Ignatian discipline which does in fact view Christ as the divine chevalier that the poem’s speaker proclaims.

“The Windhover” opens with the phrase “I caught this morning morning’s minion” (1), and the words “I caught” are of particular import to Hopkins in relation to the inscape that is seen throughout the poem. As Robinson points out, the idea of “catching” sight of a particular thing is, for Hopkins, not a casual glimpse, but rather a “purposeful effort” to focus on the form of the given object (Robinson 1978, p. 47). His journals reveal this in a number of places, and of special interest are those times when he “catches” the inscape in something, such as this entry from 24 February 1873: “All the world is full of inscape . . . looking out my window I caught it in the random clods and broken heaps of snow” (Hopkins 2015, p. 549). The inscape the speaker “catches” in “The Windhover” is of the loftiest sort: the bird points to the paradoxical glory of the Incarnate Christ. In the words of James Finn Cotter, “Hopkins dedicated the sonnet ‘to Christ our Lord’ because he ‘caught’ in the ‘dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon’ an inscape of the God-man’s abiding presence and activity in the world and, in turn, in his own loving and awe-struck heart” (Cotter 2005, p. 29). The octet’s picture of the soaring falcon displays the speaker’s adoration of Christ’s beautiful majesty: “My heart in hiding/Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!” (ll. 7–8).²⁶ It is significant to note the importance of the speaker’s heart being “in hiding.” Although this displays a legitimate admittance of his unworthiness before his Lord, it also displays a certain detachment from Christ, one that prevents the fullest degree of instress because the speaker cannot bring himself to acknowledge his “God-given identity” within the glorious inscape he sees before him. Whatever joy the speaker may experience as he delights in Christ’s “Brute beauty and valor and act, oh, air, pride, plume” (l. 9), the speaker cannot experience true unity with Christ apart from his ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

The words immediately following—“here/Buckle!” (ll. 9–10)—mark the turning point of the poem, for the windhover’s soaring beauty is transformed into its violent descent. The bird’s downward swoop parallels Christ’s decision to humble himself as he submitted to crucifixion, and calls to mind “the V-shape collapse of his out-pinned arms, when his body buckled under its own weight” (Mariani 1970, p. 112). As Walter J. Ong observes, the poem’s “bursting exuberance . . . achieves its maximum intensity in and around the figure of Christ” (Ong 1974, p. 61). As the falcon descends, the speaker notices that the sunlight shining beyond the bird—“the fire that breaks from thee then”—is “a billion/Times told lovelier, more dangerous” (ll. 10–11). At this point, the beauty of the natural scene increases a billion-fold, for while Christ in his living comeliness merited adoration, Christ on the cross confers eternal life to innumerable souls, extending the radiance of his salvation to all who would receive it, and in turn enabling the receivers of Christ’s grace to imitate his holiness. The splendor of the crucified Christ is “a billion times told lovelier” because the beauty of his purity now shines in all who believe; it is a billion times “more dangerous” because the knight Christ has called an army of

²⁵ See (Tsui 2010) for a discussion of the ecstatic in the poem.

²⁶ Hopkins’s Bedford Leigh sermon calls attention to Christ’s physical beauty:

In his body he was most beautiful. This is known first by the tradition in the Church that it was so and by holy writers agreeing to suit those words to him/Thou art beautiful in mould above the sons of men [Psalm 44:3]: we even have accounts of him written in early times. They tell us he was moderately tall, well built and tender in frame, his features straight and beautiful . . . for myself I make no secret I look forward with eager desire to seeing the matchless beauty of Christ’s body in the heavenly light. (Hopkins 1959, pp. 35–36)

followers who are empowered by his spirit and obedient to his command.²⁷ The sensation of instress here is truly overwhelming, for the speaker recognizes in this scene not only the inscape of Christ, but the reality of his own unity with Christ as one whom Christ has drawn to himself in the act of crucifixion. As the tercet ends, the assumedly Jesuit speaker may rightly proclaim “O my chevalier!” (l. 11; emphasis added), for he sees that Christ the beautiful knight has indeed become the speaker’s own beloved. Christ, by virtue of his sacrifice on the cross, has made the speaker part of his own body, the church, whom Christ presents to himself as his beloved bride (Ephesians 5:25–27).

The poem’s concluding lines tell how the natural order proclaims Christ’s redemptive power:

No wónder of it: shéer plód makes plóugh down síllion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gáll themselves, and gásh góld-vermílion. (ll. 12–14)

Just as one who diligently plows a field brings produces a rich crop, so too does one who perseveres, however wearily, in religious obedience achieve a radiant holiness that reflects the glow of Christ the sun; just as the embers that fall to the group shoot forth a brilliant glow, so too does Christ in his crucifixion shine even brighter than in his time of greatest ostensible majesty, for the vermilion-colored blood that his wounds (gashes) have produced is truly “gold” by which he has redeemed the world (McChesney 1968, p. 69). As Phillip A. Ballinger observes, the natural details described in this final tercet “not only point to Christ for Hopkins, they mediate Christ” (Ballinger 2000, p. 95). The light we see in this final line is another manifestation of the sun which burns “a billion times told lovelier” because Christ, stripped of his outward splendor, died for humanity. This vision of Christ in his dying glory upon the cross was echoed two years later in a sermon at Bedford Leigh, where Hopkins proclaimed, “Poor was his station, laborious his life, bitter his ending: through poverty, through labour, through crucifixion his majesty of nature more shines” (Hopkins 1959, p. 37).

A study of these four sonnets reveals a vision of inscape and instress that is progressively Jesuit in its presentation. If, in fact, Hopkins’s ideas concerning inscape and instress were originally conceived during or just after Hopkins’s time at Balliol, revealing a likely influence from his tutor Pater, his 1877 poems display inscape and instress in a manner that is significantly more pronounced not only in its spirituality but also in its intensity. To be sure, all four of the poems discussed here reflect Ignatius’s general ideal of the creation leading one to the creator, but “The Starlight Night” and “The Windhover” bring with them an understanding of the inextricable relationship between rigorous spiritual exercise and the ability to perceive the divine in the inscape, an exercise which combines the Paterian admonition to “a life of constant and eager observation” with the discipline of Ignatian religious practice. In light of this relationship, one might also aver that Hopkins’s association with the Society of Jesus and its strict religious training did in fact specifically enable him to compose poetry of the rare, compact power that these poems of inscape and instress exhibit. And, if such notions are correct, then Newman’s admonition to the young novice-to-be in 1868—“Don’t call ‘the Jesuit discipline’ hard; it will bring you to heaven”—amount to, both in terms of Hopkins’s spirituality and his art, nothing short of a fulfilled prophecy.

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²⁷ An alternative but not contradictory reading is offered by (Ward 2002, p. 98): “the windhover is itself dangerous, but so is the recognition of Christ in the world, because the recognition of the God who sacrifices himself is a preemptory invitation to join in the sacrifice: to imitate the divine victim and experience death to oneself.”

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