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**Full of Grace and Grandeur: Theological Mystery in
the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins**

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Dedication

Indebted in love and gratitude to my Mother.

Epigraph

Now burn, new born to the world,
Double-naturèd name,
The heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden-furled
Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame¹

“Gerard Hopkins was the only orthodox, and as far I could see, saintly man in whom religion had absolutely no narrowing effect upon his general opinions and sympathies.”²

¹ Hopkins, Gerard Manley, “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” ll.265-268.

² Coventry Patmore to Robert Bridges, in *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Vol. 1: Correspondence 1852-1881 and Vol. 2: Correspondence 1881-1889*, Oxford University Press, 2013, edited by Catherine Phillips and R.K.R. Thornton, 1014.

Full of Grace and Grandeur: Theological Mystery in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins

Introduction: Poetry as Theology

Part 1: Why Hopkins?

Gerard Manley Hopkins gives voice to mysteries of faith through poetry. His poetic mediation of supernatural mysteries in verse holds theology as something much greater than mere speculation or dialectic. His verse exposes and enlivens his Catholic faith; through poetic provocation of religious mystery, he unobtrusively invites readers to contemplate the deeper, at times spiritual, nature of reality. For instance, he writes, “look, look” in the “The Starlight Night,” pointing his reader to encounter and ponder “Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows” (ll. 2, 14). Although religious in scope, his poetry is not forceful or overtly didactic. Rather, it subtly showcases Hopkins’s experience of mystery manifest in man and matter.

Hopkins is certainly relevant for a Christian audience; however, his appeal stretches far beyond his poetic pieties. His verse innovates. His sound and style are distinctive; his soundscapes are haunting: “No worst, there is none. *Pitched past pitch* of grief. / *More pangs* will, schooled at fore*pangs*, wilder wring” (“No worst,” ll.1-2, emphasis added). The “p’s” please the ear, giving sound the emotion, the depravity dwelling in the poet’s heart. Readers hear and imagine his use of *sprung rhythm*, a meter that departs from common Victorian poetic conventions and further isolates his work as uncharacteristic. Punctuated with sharp sounds, repetitive phrasing, and syllabic variations, the poet’s prowess is latent in unique soundscapes. Consider the sprung rhythm of “The Wreck of the Deutschland:” “Never ask if

meaning it, wanting it, warned of it—men go” (l.64). This rhythm demands that readers truly *listen* to his verse, evidenced by the poet’s correspondence: “Poetry was originally meant for either singing or reciting...it must be spoken; till it is spoken it is not performed. Sprung rhythm gives back to poetry its true soul and self” (*Collected Works Volume II*: 748, hereafter cited as *CW2*).³ What is the “true soul and self” of his oeuvre? This paper concerns itself with the “true soul and self” of Hopkins’s life and work—which readily forces a reconciliation with the supernatural scope, the soul-scape, of poetry.

This should inspire us to consider the relationship between Hopkins’s poetry and theology. To read and study Hopkins, we cannot help but avail ourselves to the “truth” of his soul and self—that is, his life and supernatural life as both poet and priest. Readers of Hopkins cannot avoid confronting the supernatural. If anything, theological issues within Hopkins, when approached as mysteries invested in verse, as opposed to dogmas or abstractions, become all the more necessary to engage with in order to understand both the poet’s heart alongside the heart of his poetry. This is necessary because his theology not only inspires his poetry but his theology primarily exists *in*, and more importantly, *as* poetry.⁴ Consequently, the poetic form presents the confrontations of his theological ideals within practical, existential realities. We must understand, then, that for Hopkins, faith is relevant for far more than just his priesthood: it is manifest in and central to his entire life, and that includes his poetry. The novelty and appeal of Hopkins for us as his readers is this: poetry does not exist as a medium for theological exhibitionism, for “puffing in the process” or

³ References to Hopkins’s correspondence will be cited from *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Vol. 1: Correspondence 1852-1881* and *Vol. 2: Correspondence 1881-1889*, Oxford University Press, 2013, edited by Catherine Phillips and R.K.R. Thornton. These two volumes will be cited as *CW1* and *CW2* respectively.

⁴ Mindful of Hopkins’s conversion to Catholicism in 1866, this implies that he can be read as a Protestant poet post-conversion and eventually, for the majority of his work, a Catholic poet. This will be touched on in Part 2.

“pride in the success”, but rather, it stands as an intellectual space for theological discovery (CW2, 813).⁵

In a modern world split by an emotively charged evangelism and a rigidly secular scientism, the balance struck by Hopkins is both precious and precise; the hope of this text is to wonder and ponder how he does it so well. His poems do not simply recast theological mysteries, but rather they provoke confrontations with an encroaching model of modernity that seems to negate the sacred by constructing meaning and purpose exclusively in “immanent frame.”⁶ Instead of locking the supernatural within or without the immanent, Hopkins understands how matter manifests mystery, given his belief that God has manifested in matter, incarnate as Christ. His poetry, then, showcases this search for, these encounters with, the transcendent within the immanent. These encounters, he believes, are possible since “the whole world” has been “affected, marked, as a great seal” by the mystery of the incarnation (*Sermon and Devotional Writings*, 263).⁷ Therefore, Hopkins’s work exemplifies where mystery arrives at and departs from the world; for example, he espouses an “Incarnational awareness,” which more readily disposes him to portray “transcendent truth made manifest in the material reality of the world” (O’Donnell 338-339). And this is fitting

⁵Philip Ballinger’s thesis in *Poem as Sacrament* aligns quite well with my own reading of the poet. However, Ballinger writes that in Hopkins “poetry becomes more than a theological or religious medium. It becomes a, as an *effective mediation* of the Word, sacramental” (125). Although I seem to follow Ballinger’s argument, I tend to disagree with him. Reflecting on Hopkins’s work as a sacrament tends to draw our focus away from the actual work itself, tending more towards the reader’s own engagement with the poem, as opposed to what the poem stands for in and of itself. Therefore, I’m more interested in examining the substantive presence and power latent in Hopkins’s verse, as opposed to the effective mediation by which a reader can come to activate or engage with the theological mystery, perhaps even grace, embedded in the verse.

⁶ Put simply: immanence identifies “our sense of reality and our sense of the good within the world around us; transcendence gives us a sense of something beyond” (Calhoun).

⁷ References from Hopkins’s *Sermons and Devotional Writings*, edited by Christopher Devlin, Oxford University Press, 1959, will hereafter be referenced as *SDW*.

since Hopkins believes that this “material reality,” must be the crux of any serious art: the “touchstone of the highest or most living art is seriousness; not gravity but being in earnest with your subject—reality” (CW2, 782).

“Reality” is Hopkins’s touchstone, the bedrock of his poetry; he does not fantasize or extrapolate from unreal experiences. He writes about his *real* experiences of a real faith in action: his “reality” manifests itself as a voice crying out, “Thou mastering me God!” (“The Wreck of the Deutschland,” 1.1)⁸ and a voice exclaiming “Ah! Bright wings!” in “God’s Grandeur.” His reality manifests as a suffering voice in lamentation: “Comforter, where, where is your comforting” (“No worst,” 1.3). This is Hopkins’s kenosis, the self-emptying of his “real,” lived, religious faith in verse. Ballinger describes this “kenosis” as not only a “moral paradigm for his priestly vocation” but an “artistic license.” This licensure does not signify Hopkins’s self-indulgence as an artist, rather it marks his overcoming of selfhood and taking on of Christ’s self—his artistic license grapples with the Christian reality of self-emptying perfected on the cross. Naturally, this kenosis marks Hopkins and his poetry as entirely dependent upon a close reading of his faithfulness to the theological undercurrents driving his poetics. Through this kenotic lens, we will see that Hopkins is doing something differently; he seeks to see with a deeper vision—one unlike anything Victorian and Christian poetry had yet to use, perhaps even see.⁹

⁸ Each poem cited comes from the following edition: Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, edited by Catherine Phillips, Oxford University Press, 2002. Citations from this volume will be now marked with *HMW*. If a poem is being cited, the in-text citation will list the poem title and line number.

⁹ And when it comes to Christian or devotional poets like Milton, John Donne, George Herbert or William Wordsworth, they are writing from a remarkably different Protestant, non-Catholic imagination. This is more relevant given Hopkins conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism, a thread to be tightened throughout the next part of the introduction.

Although at times inscrutable, Hopkins's theology or religious inclination shouldn't dissuade us from reading or studying him; instead, we should commit ourselves to a deeper analysis of his work, in accordance with Hopkins's precept that "True poetry must be studied" (CW2, 784). He does not exempt himself from this stipulation. If anything, the poet's theology must be prioritized. However, I must admit that Hopkins's theology or religious faith is *not* what qualifies him as a remarkable poet and as worthy of sustained study. Christian poets have often sought to "justify the ways of God to men" (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1.26), so why should Hopkins be interpreted as noteworthy? Hopkins is relevant because his work flies in the face of Victorian assumptions. Moreover, it cannot be denied that his religious faith is inextricably linked to his poetic vision. His theo-poetics¹⁰ challenge the middlebrow notions of his literary contemporaries, like Robert Browning and Lord Alfred Tennyson, two poetic giants of the era. Notwithstanding the depth and brilliancy of their work, Hopkins's writings give us a different vocation, voice and vision.

If we consider Hopkins alongside his contemporaries, we will be given reason enough to consider his life and work as not simply uncharacteristic, but groundbreaking. On Tennyson, for example, Hopkins has much to say: "His opinions too are not original, often not independent even, and they sink into vulgarity..." (CWI, 346-347). At first glance, to call Tennyson "vulgar" seems out of place; the poet wrote well within the social expectations of Victorian society and literary culture. But perhaps this is precisely what Hopkins deems as vulgar—not so much a deviation from social decorum, but rather a "vulgarity" which arises from questions that concern the ultimate calling, the purpose of poetry. Where Tennyson chooses to focus on societal norms, Hopkins tends toward the metaphysical, the

¹⁰ Instead of denying Hopkins theology, many have argued, as I concur, that his theology is an inextricable consideration when examining his verse. McDevitt writes that Hopkins's "theology is not something to be extracted from or ignored in a discussion of Hopkins's poetics—the two are inextricably bound together" (33).

eschatological—the final ends of man. Despite his persistent admiration for Tennyson (he is “one of our greatest poets”) (*CWI*, 326), Hopkins persists in this critique: “I have begun to doubt Tennyson;” a doubt, which I’d suggest, arises from concerns of *from where, from what source*, Tennyson writes.

Much of Hopkins’s distaste for parts of Tennyson comes from his own understanding of poetic inspiration. Hopkins believes that there are three primary sources for poetic inspiration; he divides the “language of verse” into three categories. “The first and highest is poetry proper, the language of inspiration.” This first type of poetry arises from a writer’s response to “mental acuteness,” which is either “energetic or receptive,” active or passive (passive defined as “struck” into the brain “unasked”). This differs from the second form, often Tennyson’s form: the “Parnassian” style. This does not require a “mood of mind” like the former; instead, “it is spoken on and from the level of a poet’s mind.” In contrast with the poetry of inspiration where “the gift of genius” in a poet “raises him above himself,” Parnassian poetry is predictable. One could read a poem, like Tennyson’s “Enoch Arden,” and say, “I could see myself writing that” (*CWI*, 67-71). Therefore, Hopkins’s dissatisfaction with Tennyson arises as he questions: where does the best poetry come from? This question invites us, in contrast, to consider where Hopkins’s poetry comes from, to ask: what, then, makes our poet so special? What, then, are the sources and ends of his poetry; wherefrom and wherefore does Hopkins write poetry at all?

Unlike Tennyson, Hopkins does not write for market or for a popular audience. “Feeling, love in particular, is the great moving power and spring of verse...” and this loves “aims” to manifest as or reveal a “pattern,” “design” or an inscape¹¹ (*CWI*, 333-334). If love

¹¹ Many scholars have attempted to define and re-define what he means by “inscape” or “instress.” Quite generally, inscape is a statement of distinction, an identification of a “design, pattern;” whereas “instress” can

is the moving force of Hopkins, and this love is something that comes from beyond himself, I'd argue that Hopkins's belief in a God who is love¹² sources the very wellspring of his poetry. As a result, the source and sustenance of this love, and therefore his verse, is primarily his Catholic faith. His faith implicitly shape how he sees, writes, and lives in the world. It comes as no surprise that his poetry isn't self-serving, but is entirely connected to end things, issues of ontology or eschatology. For instance, he writes two expansive poems on shipwrecks—the main subjects of which are the perishing/perished souls. Here, he is motivated by a curiosity at how, and perhaps if, “prayer shall fetch pity eternal” (“Loss of the Eurydice,” l.120). Additionally, moving forward from these grave concerns, his poetry incites action: “Buy then! bid then!—What?—Prayer, patience, alms, vows. / Look, look... (“The Starlight Night,” l.9), echoing a spiritual authority and urgency all-to-prevalent in his *Sermon and Devotional Writings*: “Make him your hero now!” (SDW, 38). This urgency follows for us too: we must entertain the poet's faith in order to see how it forms his verse.

This paper will not force this dialogue with theological issues. Hopkins does not do this, and neither should his readers. Rather, this dialogue is inevitable, as it is exercised as the primary source of tension within some of Hopkins's poetry, especially “The Wreck of the Deutschland.” In “The Wreck,” Hopkins broaches the issue of how reality meets his religious mode of existence, his spiritual way of seeing the world. As a result, theology serves as more than a commentary; rather, theological inquiry reveals the inevitable, at times implicit, confrontation of Hopkins's Catholic Christian model of belief and practice with that of

be understood as the act that carries the inscape into the mind of the observer or beholder. Bernadette Ward seems to put forth the most comprehensive analysis of these terms in *World as Word*. She articulates that Hopkins's “inscape,” his ultimate aim in poetry, refers to the search for “layers of meaning, of perceptible structure, in the individual things of the world.” Poetry, then, works to “reveal the inscape of language itself” (Ward 3-5).

¹² Consider 1 John 4. Every reference from the Bible will use the 1889 Vulgate Translation of the Douay-Rheims, accessed on www.Biblegateway.com.

modernity. Poetry, then, mediates a union of theology and reality. As a result, Hopkins's poetry has something *very* specific to express and articulate. Given that his poetry aims after inscapes to describe, patterns to be portrayed from within his intrinsically theological worldview, then as a poet Hopkins wants to help his reader, Bridges in most cases, to see the world through *his* eyes—eyes of faith.

This sets a distinctive Christian artistic standard, where the artist is tasked with the exposition of the union of the mysterious and the material, the divine and the human. This matches with his own understanding of the task of a Christian artist: “Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works (say, of art) and glorify your Father in heaven” (CW2, 813). Herein lies another point of divergence from Tennyson. Hopkins regards some of the Victorian legend's work as an “ungentlemanly row... To be sure this gives him vogue, popularity, but not that sort of ascendancy,” as if Tennyson only cared about writing to “please the mob” (CWI, 346-347). Tennyson may tend to pick the wrong fight, or “row,” within his work; this explains why Hopkins could understand him as “ungentlemanly,” or out-of-line, distasteful: not *in* taste precisely because he is writing *to be in* taste. Moreover, in Tennyson, there is no concern with God's glory here, simply the glory of man—incited by presenting “ungentlemanly” subjects in a combative or provocative style to appease a mob mentality or marketplace.

Hopkins writes for true “ascendancy,” to revel in and to manifest God's glory; quite simply, he writes to praise God. Hopkins desires ascendancy that isn't simply mortal, but rather, immortal. For instance, in in one of Hopkins's late sonnets, “To what serves Mortal Beauty?,” Hopkins challenges the efficacy and utility of mortal beauty, of fleeting things such as vanity, wealth, success. Mortal beauties, are not ends in and of themselves, but are

ultimately purposed, the poet deems to “God’s better beauty, grace” (l.14). This exemplifies how Hopkins does not seek to serve mortal man or mortal beauty but an immortal God—and in that, he seeks to receive God’s better beauty, which he deems as grace¹³—not popularity, not money, but the gift of supernatural life. This gift, grace, orients humanity to “the end of its being:” “self-sacrifice to God and its salvation.” This manifests itself as Hopkins’s desire to live for Christ—to self-sacrifice by joining to the sacrifice of Jesus—so to ultimately live and be in Christ. This is the truth that Hopkins strives to articulate throughout his verse; his “non-Victorian” Victorian poetry is victorious in moving beyond what he deems as vulgar in favor of making known the truth of his faith: “There’s none but truth can stead you. Christ is truth” (“On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People,” l.20). That Hopkins makes these claims in an era where objectivity seemed out of fashion and relativity the encroaching Christian norm is, I think, all the more relevant now, for contemporary Christianity.¹⁴

In the following section, I will explore Hopkins’s conversion, a key context through which we must consider Hopkins’s work that will help us understand the relationship between Hopkins’s poetry and theology. It is evident that once Hopkins enters the Catholic Church and begins unpacking this new sacramental theology, his poetry changes. Nuances and novelties in his own style and subject matter, as well as his own departure from writing poetry, illustrate how intimately linked the poet’s own faith is with his poetics. The second

¹³ Hopkins provides a very clear definition of grace for us: “For grace is any action, activity, on God’s part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries the creature to or towards the end of its being, which is its self-sacrifice to God and its salvation” (*SDW*, 154).

¹⁴ “We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires. We, however, have a different goal: the Son of God, the true man. He is the measure of true humanism. An "adult" faith is not a faith that follows the trends of fashion and the latest novelty; a mature adult faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ. It is this friendship that opens us up to all that is good and gives us a criterion by which to distinguish the true from the false, and deceit from truth” (Ratzinger, “Homily of His Eminence Card,” April 2005, http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html).

section of this introduction will relate Hopkins's conversion and his poetry. For instance, a Catholic economy of grace encourages a very different way of being in and seeing the world. Understanding where Hopkins operates from, we can then begin to look at how this theology is exercised.¹⁵ His poems do not re-state or pronounce his theology; they showcase it—and if we were to neglect these beliefs or practices, we would miss the intellectual work holding his poetry together, which ought to define him as unprecedented.

The next section begins with a consideration of how Hopkins's conversion compelled him to rethink poetry, especially its overall legitimacy and purpose within a Christ-centered worldview. The first and second chapters will look at “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” arguing that Hopkins's spiritual life and worldview is indeed entirely Christocentric; this means that his faith is dependent on the prevalence of grace made real by the sacrifice of Christ. The final chapter, then, must look to Mary, seeing as all graces come from God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus to man through Mary.¹⁶ The poet's Marian poetry illustrate this belief and mystery; he writes in “The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe” that Mary “mothers each new grace / that does now reach our race—“ (ll.22-23). Each of these chapters justifies why Hopkins's theology must be considered in our readings. Furthermore, they might even define the poet as a prophet, not in a *purely* biblical vein, but as one set aside, in exile, unlike his literary or Christian contemporaries: truly, a voice crying out in the wilderness.¹⁷

¹⁵ Perhaps even how his old tendencies are *exorcised*, radically replaced and substituted.

¹⁶ Mary is likened to a “heavenly stream through which the flow of all grace and favours reach the soul of every wretched mortal” in Papal Bull *Gloriosae Dominae* (1748).

¹⁷ John 1:23

Part 2: The Poetics of Conversion

Theology frames and fuels the poet's aesthetics; his conversion instigates an inevitable turning point in his poetry. Hopkins's conversion to Catholicism and his entry into the Jesuit order reorient his worldview and vocation as poet. For example, in Hopkins's earliest pieces he did not write with much theological concern or stylistic innovation. Present, however, is a subtle longing for something sublime. The young poet is on a quest, longing to see in "I must hunt down the prize" (1864). He "must see the waters roll" (l.5). The poet yearns for an encounter with something "render'd in mists" (l.3). Some elusive, yet longed-for prize, something towards which his "heart lists," or desires (l.2). This motif of striving to see continues to preoccupy the young poet. Specifically, in "Il Mystico" (1862) the poet marvels at all that can "be discover'd to my sight" noting "sapphire light" and "tresses dipp'd in rainbow fire" (ll.17-18, 14). Here he senses that there is a "veil that covers mysteries," a subtle boundary "'twixt real hue and phantasy" (ll.36, 122). These "jewell'd harmonies" can arguably be portrayed as Hopkins's desire for the sublime, something within, maybe even beyond nature; his poetic persona strives to reach this, to "drink that ecstasy" (ll.138, 141). All the more, in "A Vision of Mermaids" (1863) we see one who has "gazed unhinder'd" with "mazed eyes" (ll.33-4). Evidently, the young Hopkins seeks in earnest, hungry, unsatisfied, left in longing for a deeper vision.

Yet as a young poet, Hopkins is verbose and meandering in both "Il Mystico" and "A Vision of Mermaids." His refined style and form develop much later. Early Hopkins tends towards the "Parnassian," mirroring the Romantics in his earliest writings. This is evident if we consider Hopkins alongside a poet like John Keats. Both are consumed by the fluctuations of visual experience and its capacity for either enriching or rupturing the

beholder's sense of self or moral integrity. In "To Hope," Keats, observing a star notes the "half veil'd face of heaven afar" (ll.43-5). Keats, too, in Book I of "Endymion" thirsts for "an endless fountain of immortal drink" (l.23). The poem continues, with almost decadent over-emphasis (and, as yet, none of the "fine excess" that Keats would prize later on), by detailing "the self-same fixed trance" watching natural phenomenon in the midst of "morning incense" hanging in the air (ll.403, 470). Clearly Hopkins diction seems to echo, if not actually derive itself, from the poetry of Keats. (We can think of Hopkins's "Il Mystico" when he calls upon "incense to "hang upon the room" or the shared trances, veils, drinks, gazes from afar etc. (l.19)). This is not to suggest that Hopkins is expressly imitative of Keats; rather, Hopkins writing his way into his own voice cannot help but draw on the traditions of his predecessors. Keats's "Endymion" carries on for four books, and within each book, his lines and stanzas roll on profusely, if also at times a bit mechanically. Even Hopkins's earliest work, like that of "Il Mystico" and "A Vision of Mermaids," tends toward an overindulgent style.

In these early works, Hopkins has not yet found his voice but, instead, undergoes a gradual stylistic and generic conversion from his merely imitative, one might say "Parnassian,"¹⁸ tendency. We needn't look too far to see find Hopkins's own opinion on this matter. He tells us that "Il Mystico" serves as an imitation of Milton's "Il Penseroso." Keats's own work begins quite similarly, with an "Imitation of Spenser." With this in mind, *when* does he find his voice, and how? We should note that in Keats there are little to no intimations of the divine. Although early Hopkins may be read as searching for the metaphysical, he does not seem to seek Christ yet; rather, he longs for the ephemeral sublime. Hopkins has yet to uncover his "inspiration;" therefore, the development of his

¹⁸ Recall Hopkins's discussion of the three types of poetry. Parnassian is secondary to the poetry of inspiration. It is imitative, replicable.

incomparable creativity must develop sometime before or around 1875, the same year he produced “The Wreck.” Hopkins undergoes some stark development, a transition—conversion might not be too strong a word—that readily brings about not simply new life or a new vision, but a new sense of the world embodied in his poetics. It must be that these developments, his refinements, are entirely connected to his religious conversion, theological studies and spiritual devotions.

Hopkins’s conversion, as well as his entry into the Jesuit order and his lived experience as a Catholic entirely reorients his poetry as it reorients his worldview, his Christian imagination, tending from the symbolic to the sacramental. This transition can be sensed prior to Hopkins’s conversion and entry into the Catholic Church in October of 1866. On September 4th 1866, Hopkins acknowledges that a “silent conviction” has been haunting him: writing to Revd. Edward William Urquhart, he says that “the silent conviction that I was to become Catholic has been present to me for a year perhaps, as strongly, in spite of my resistance to it when it formed itself into words, as if I had already determined it” (*CWI*, 102). This suggests that within Hopkins’s poetry written *at least* a year prior to September 1866, we may be able to stumble upon indications of his eventual conversion. Throughout his poems, a greater interiority comes alive. Examining Hopkins’s “conversion” poetry (the poems which span the year before and after 1866) provokes an elucidation of these subtle nuances. From this, one cannot help but realize that his poetry becomes the site of his reflection upon religious experience. Even though these earlier poems are somewhat “non-canonical” for Hopkins’s studies, they are of interest in order to consider why Hopkins did not join the Church even though he held his own “silent conviction.”¹⁹

¹⁹It is important to contextualize the silence surrounding this conviction. Silence should not suggest shame, but rather fear and anxiety in Hopkins’s predominantly Protestant world (family, school, etc.).

Hopkins's poetry functions as an outlet, a place of exploration and exploitation, as he navigates the complexities of his newfound catholicity. The silent conviction, once set, does not recede but, instead, consumes the poet's mind as an ongoing intellectual and theological realignment. Like St. Thecla, "by Christ's only charity," Hopkins has become "charmed and chained" ("St.Thecla," 1.12). In "St. Thecla," usually dated around 1864-1865, "Young Thecla" encounters Paul of Tarsus, the apostle and missionary. She hears him, "the words came from a court across the way" as he "spoke of God the Father and His son, of world made, marred, and mended, lost and won..." (ll.23, 25-26). The poem paints the image of Paul teaching three times, each with the "earnest-hearted maiden" attending from afar and listening (l.32). When Thecla encounters this zealous preaching of Paul, her spirit is stirred, she is physically moved, and eventually spiritually moved to her own conversion.

This woman, her change of heart, evidently resonates with Hopkins, especially if "The court across the way" is understood as the Catholic Church. The Catholic "side," that Hopkins has been exposed to, involves the Tractarian movement at Oxford, including key figures like John Henry Newman—former leader of the Oxford Movement and convert to the Catholic Church. Newman, in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), which involves the explanation and defense of his religious opinions and conversion, uses the language of "sides:" "Anglicanism is the halfway house on the one side, and Liberalism is the halfway house on the other side" (Newman, 295). Hopkins not only picks up this diction, aware of both this controversy and Newman's experience, but he is deeply moved by it. We can consider his reference to Newman in his poem, "The Half-way House" (1865), where he writes: "Love I was shewn upon the mountain-*side*" (l.1, emphasis added). Driven and moved by the witness of others, both Thecla and Hopkins appear temporarily immobilized,

nearly stunned by the force of their silent, haunting convictions. Thecla's poem continues: "Called to come at mealtime she would not" until "forced" from the spot (ll.33-34). It's no stretch of the imagination to read this mealtime as the Eucharistic sacrifice—present also in "The Half-way House," where Hopkins meditates on Real Presence: "He is with you in the breaking of the bread" (l.18). Thecla will not leave for "mealtime" until forced; Hopkins, too, after his inward conviction, refuses to attend his Anglican services (*CWI*, 116-117). This tension, living as a covert Catholic in his Anglican environment, does not leave him; instead, these spiritual anxieties are clarified and left behind in his poetry.

"St. Thecla" prepares us for a broad survey of poems (each written within the year 1865 and presented chronologically) that continue to stage Hopkins's "hunger" for "love's proper food," for his conversion ("The Half-way House," ll.9-10). "The Beginning of the End" (1865) describes precisely this—Hopkins has reached the beginning of the end of his Anglicanism: "My love is lessened and must soon be past" (l.i1). He continues, "I must feed Fancy"—fancy is none other than his curiosity, his longing for that which sits beyond the other side (l.ii1). Yet even despite this curiosity, his poetry acknowledges an acute sense of confusion and disappointment. He is at "passion's end," carrying with him a "bankrupt heart" (ll.iii1, 4). This is a truly groundbreaking paradigm shift, not simply theologically or intellectually. As far as Hopkins is concerned, his conversion changes everything. Pre-conversion, the poet becomes passive, unable to take the next necessary steps for the so sought-after change: "The whole world passes, I stand by" (l.4). He is no better than the speaker in the "Alchemist in the City;" the showman, a quasi-magician, misunderstood, who endeavors upon a "thankless lore," a fantasy, in the rush of it all (l.22). He is "more powerless than the blind or lame" (l.20). The "poet on stand by" does not know what to do;

more so, he cannot ascertain what is asked of him in this turmoil. He asks, “But what indeed is ask’d of me?” He feels the weight of this “burden” of his own resistance and irresolution (“But what indeed,” ll.1, 11). The poet’s frustration and lament continues, “Myself unholy, from myself unholy to the sweet living of my friends I look—.” Hopkins looks from his own experience and sees his friends persisting in “unquestion’d readings of a blotless book” (l.6). This only heightens his desire for conversion: “my trust confused, struck, and shook” (l.7). These brief excerpts do little but paint a portrait of Hopkins’s poetics as a place of religious exploration, an exploration that manifests his desire to enter the Church.²⁰

This pre-conversion poetry inevitably foregrounds Hopkins’s voice, aesthetics and approach for his post-conversion poetry. Specific attention will be given to “The Habit of Perfection” and “Nondum,” two poems also written in 1865. These pieces most acutely isolate Hopkins in a state of transition—despairing yet hopeful, in want yet hesitant. These are almost naively spiritual and meditative, foregrounding Hopkins’s pre-conversion asceticism and theological interests. “The Habit of Perfection” especially provides insight into Hopkins’s lived religious experience as one that is deeply sensual. The five senses are presented and dismissed along the way of spiritual perfection. “Elected silence” sings to the ear; eyes are called to “be shelled” to find “uncreated light;” sweet tastes comes from “fasts divine;” humble nostrils spend “careless breath” “upon the stir and keep of pride;” and “primrose hands” are imagined to “unhouse and house” the Lord (ll.1, 9-10, 16, 17-18, 24). Mackenzie regards this spirituality as a “sensuous dismissal of the senses” (MacKenzie 26). Hopkins seeks eloquence in surrender, in silence: lips are to “shape nothing” but be “lovely-dumb” (l.5) In this state, “the shut” lips are from where “all surrenders come which only

²⁰ This lock and step relationship between religious experience and Hopkins’s poetry resurfaces later in life with the “Terrible Sonnets.” For instance, in “To seem the stranger,” the poet laments feeling his “Christ not near / and he my peace / my parting, sword and strife” (ll.3-4).

makes you eloquent” (ll.6-8). Yet poet does not indulge in merely a dismissal of the senses. Instead, his neglect of the senses promises a heightened spiritual sense. Tight, wound up, pent up, tensions are released: one is detached; “Poverty” is the poet’s bride (l.25). And what a wonderful bride she must be for Gerard, bringing along a heavenly inheritance, well aware that the poor in spirit are to be blessed by the Lord (Matthew 5:3):

In “The Habit of Perfection” the poet is longing for intimacy through sacrifice, for a sense of fullness while being emptied. This poem is an early exposé of Hopkins’s longing for kenosis, self-emptying—a self-emptying that will become much more Christocentric as he matures as a Jesuit. This sense of kenosis is highlighted by his proclivity for neither laboring nor spinning. The final verse of the poem alludes to Matthew 6.28: “And for raiment why are you solicitous? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they labour not, neither do they spin.” The poet need not work for “raiment;” no anxiety, no amount of labor or work can spin the “lily-coloured” garment of perfection, of Christ (ll.27-28). Here, Hopkins reconciles a certain level of his own powerlessness and dependency. Why be solicitous? The poet desires to deny in order to accept, to receive. The marriage feast with his bride, Poverty, is made ready through this negative affirmation of the senses, where desire and longing are no longer his primary approach; instead “elected silence” is the disposition for his own “habit of perfection.” What seems to be ascetic and passive is actually quite sensitive and active. Hopkins paints himself as one who longs to be poor in spirit, dependent upon God through self-sacrifice. For Hopkins, God is a God, who is personal, interactive and accessible to man through the senses—even if it means a counter-intuitive purgation of the senses.

Many of these threads and themes identified are fleshed out in “Nondum,” where the poet struggles more directly with the prolonged pain of his ascetic, penitent patience

experienced within his habits of perfection. Hopkins calls upon God with an epithet from Isaiah that expresses faith-filled frustration: “Verify thou art a God that hidest thyself.” God seems hidden and Hopkins calls upon the poetic medium to be the very means of smoking out the divine, of uncovering, more so understanding, this God who is present—not absent—in hiding. That which was once “Elected silence” now seems dubious: “no answering voice replies” the prayers of the “trembling sinner,” and the petitions seem to die in the “desert ways,” the emptiness of the “vast silence” (ll.1-6). Yet amazingly, the poet does not defer to denying the presence of God. God is present even in his hiding, in so far as “we see the glories of the earth” (l.7). The glories are seen, “but not the hand that wrought them all” (l.8). The poet demands verification like the prophet Isaiah, a knowing of God’s presence not simply by God’s handiwork but by his hand, by his word, as he calls, “Speak! whisper to my watching heart” (l.49). The silence seems too much to bear, as the poet longs to “behold Thee as Thou art,” as he longs for an encounter with a living God (l.53).

Hopkins’s desire for an encounter in “Nondum” arises out exasperation with the setting up of shadows “in Thy seat” (l.16). The third stanza carries forth this motif of guessing at the divine, clothing the unseen, “each in his own imagining” (l.15). The poet does not know how to bring his gifts to this throne, how to seek the seemingly unseekable. Unable to ascertain truth, “we guess” (l.12). Hopkins’s own approximation of religious experience has reached a breaking point. The “unbroken silence broods” and the “abyss infinite surround the peak from which we gaze” (ll.19, 27). These images depict utter despondency. The poet strives for the light of God, to see God, but sight is only set “on being’s dread and vacant maze” (l.31). Yet even in these near cries of desperation, the poet does not lose heart; he keeps the faith—knowing that “life’s first germs from death had won” (l.24). Even from the

abyss, life flows forth. However, this poem exhibits Hopkins's own reconciliation with the silence of the divine in the midst of a world that "contends" its creeds, "hosts" "flags unfurled," where "zeal is flushed and pity bleeds," and where "truth is heard with, tears impearled" (ll.32-36). These iterations—"And... And... And..." echo the "moaning voice among the reeds" (l.37). There is such an evident need, a gaping void that the poet acknowledges in his own "desponding sob" (l.33). More so, the Latin title, "Nondum," prophesizes the status of Hopkins's heart: "*not yet*" does he experience intimacy with God.

"Nondum," "Not Yet," is an exploration of the inner tensions experienced by Hopkins prior to his entry into the Church. He moves "along life's tomb-decked way" hoping for "that sense beyond," a sense that would simply decipher if "Thou art, and near" (l.39, 43-44). He begs for "patience with her chastening wand" (l.45). He knows that he is along the way to his own conversion, his own entry—but he still remains crippled by doubt and inactivity. He must be led, "child-like," nearly forced forward, not because he fears the way, but because he is in darkness, unsure of where to go, what to say, how to *be* in the world (l.47). "Nondum" taps upon the quiver of his longing for intimacy with God—for consolation while on the cusp of conversion. "Speak! whisper to my watching heart..." (l.49). His heart sits like a sentry, watching, even if for "one word," some sign of the break of "morn eternal" (l.50, 54).

This euphoria of the eternal morn breaking through analogizes Hopkins's conversion. This breakthrough is likened to the opening of spring, as he wrote in June of 1865, "See how spring opens with such disabling cold...how bitter, and learnt how late, the truth!" This is the paradox of both "The Habit of Perfection" and "Nondum:" despite the perception of such "disabling cold," spring *has* sprung. This disabling cold should be read as Hopkins's own resistance and hesitancy. For instance, consider how he approaches John Henry Newman, the

very man who will deliver Hopkins into the Church: “I address you with great hesitation...I am anxious to become a Catholic...” additionally, he describes how he has been put into a “painful confusion of mind” about his “immediate duty and circumstances” (CWI, 93). With such earnest sincerity, Hopkins feels the urgency and necessity of conversion. He now wavers between expectation and devastation; this lived tension of painful confusion is exactly what we read in “The Habit and Perfection” and “Nondum.” These less canonical poems show us how Hopkins’s religious experience and theology not only motivates, but is articulated *in* and *as* poetry.

Chapter 1: The Prevalence of Grace

Introduction: Avoiding the Wreckage of Faith

Hopkins conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism does not simply change his religious practice and belief; it redirects the purpose and direction of his poetry. This conversion creates space for his poetry to function as an articulation of certitude and purpose. His intent is more refined than proselytization (unless we consider the case of his correspondent Bridges, who he intended to convert), Hopkins poetic purpose strikes as evangelical, in a etymological sense, as a witness to how his “good news” infuses that which is quite ostensibly horrific—as in the case of the wreck of the *SS Deutschland*. “The Wreck” in particular wonders at how God can be present *and* loving in the midst of such misery. Therefore, Hopkins conversion places him within a tradition that is animated by a much more immediate ontological concern for the presence of God in the midst of “dappled things” (“Pied Beauty,” l.1). Through the lens of his faith, Hopkins *must* see God at work even in the face of destruction. “The world is charged with the grandeur of God:” creation is responsible, charged, with not simply seeing God in the midst of creation, but also making Him known, giving glory to God (“God’s Grandeur”). This, then, is the poet’s intent: man is made to glorify and be glorified. As Hopkins writes: “He was created to give God glory and by doing so to win himself glory” (*SDW*, 59). Needless to say, Hopkins purpose as poet changes once he becomes a Jesuit, a religious community whose intent and motto fortifies and develops this worldview: “For the greater glory of God.”

Hopkins’s Catholic faith socially and, at times, emotionally, isolates him from his Protestant contemporaries, classmates, and family as it further defines him as a divergent thinker, intellectually and theologically. It is important to note that Hopkins is not

theologically divergent or schismatic; the only rather “unusual” or atypical theological interest of his arises from his own fascination with Duns Scotus²¹—as opposed to the epistemology of Thomas Aquinas. This is to say that Hopkins not only remained within the Church teaching and her doctrines, but as Christopher Devlin articulates quite finely, Hopkins places himself “*inside* the doctrines of the Church” by how he lived out and thought through his Catholic faith. Hopkins’s faith, or his “true devotion,” is dedicated to that of the “perception of Christ adoring the Father,” “the central mysteries of the Trinity and the incarnation,” and I would add, a deep devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. These elements, although essential pieces of the Catholic faith, were instrumental in Hopkins own devotional life, stirring him to stress and emphasize the Mass, the doctrine of the Real Presence, the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Conception. This surfaces, as Devlin describes, as if the poet experienced a profound “integration of the liturgy with one’s personal life,” a direction towards which the Catholic Church has tended; a direction that one could argue Hopkins life deeply intended (*SDW*, 114).

This integration of theory and practice comes across quite noticeably in “The Wreck of the Deutschland.” In this piece Hopkins draws upon an abysmal reality and integrates it with the hope promised by his faith, showcasing the depths of his vibrant, lived theology. “The Wreck” remarkably realizes Devlin’s conception of Hopkins as living and writing “inside” of the Church teachings. For example, the poem illustrates the poet’s wrestling with and his understanding of grace, the complexities of suffering and salvation, or in his precise terms, the mastery and mercy of a sovereign God. As a result, Hopkins’s poetry exemplifies a

²¹ ²¹ I will only take up Scotus and Hopkins briefly and cautiously. Many scholars have attempted to understand how these two thinkers could and should relate. Although additional insight may be gained here, doing so is beyond the scope of this paper and, more so, my credentials.

God who is clearly not presented as an idea or a distant deity but as an incarnate reality in the person of Jesus Christ.

It comes as no surprise, then, that “The Wreck of the Deutschland” is deeply theological. In it Hopkins exposes the heart and intellect of his “true devotion” to his Catholic faith in order to push back against the rising tide of secularism, marked by controversial political actors, meliorist conceptions of religion as strictly a social welfare program, or utter unbelief. For instance, Victorian intellectuals, like George Eliot or John Stuart Mill, qualify religious faith as meaningful and useful in so far as it helps structure and maintain a social order. Following Mill’s thought, religion derives its “apparent social utility” from its “inculcation of a widely accepted moral code;” supernatural belief “is no longer needed and may be detrimental” (Macleod). Along these lines, religion becomes a means of social control and moral education. But Hopkins’s believes in something much grander than a social faith. Moreover, his true devotion is an ostensible rejection of the conventions of some strands Christianity within Victorian society. However, it is not sufficient to simply state that as a Christian Hopkins deviates from Victorian religious norms. Hopkins exists, like the nuns within his poem, as a marginalized Christian in England because of his Catholic faith. One could argue that Hopkins is living in a kind of exile for most of life—converting from Anglicanism to Catholicism while at Oxford, deviating from his own family and cultural tradition. Evident through his poetry and spiritual writings, Hopkins—compared to the general trend of his Victorian Christian contemporaries—subverts and challenges common assumptions of a Christian religious, and even a secular, imagination. “The Wreck of the Deutschland” exemplifies this critique.

One primary aspect of Hopkins's belief that should be distinguished from his Protestant contemporaries is his theology of grace. Grace is a central idea explicitly outlined and exhibited in the first part of "The Wreck," foregrounding his overall socio-political and religious critique. The primary "theological issue" that drives the content of the poem is the question of how God is both sovereign (mastering) and merciful, especially in the face of human and natural disaster. This is to say: not just how does God's grace work, but how is it present, in the face of destruction? Hopkins's line of argumentation, although coded poetically, is quite linear.

Considering the first part of the poem, the poet examines the issue of mercy and mastery by isolating a series of secondary theological concerns. First, Hopkins wonders at grace—what is it, how does it work among men, in men. After detailing this, Hopkins turns to a human imposed obstacle to God's grace: sin. Once these two concepts are identified, the poet goes on to examine how they interact and co-exist. But sin and grace are not equal and opposite forces; Hopkins affirms how God's grace triumphs through the sacrifice and saving action of Jesus Christ. So the third theological issue he explores concerns the primacy of Christ, his action, his incarnation—that is, the mystery surrounding the life of the second person of the Trinity. This then gives way to the fourth and final theological issue at stake: how does man, although caught in sin, respond to God's grace present and provided for in Christ? Hopkins explores these four areas of grace, sin, Christology, and man's free will response in order to provide a larger framework through which we can appreciate and understand the subversive consequences of his work and understand how exactly God's grace, in the merciful presence of Jesus, meets humanity in its own misery.

Part 1: An Enemy Within

During Hopkins's Jesuit formation, a growing wave of enmity and hostility was fomenting against the Catholic Church in Europe. The declaration and promulgation of papal infallibility in 1870 stirred much "liberal anticlerical sentiment," and consequently, an anti-Catholic sentiment, that came to a head as a struggle between the church and state known as the *Kulturkampf*, or the cultural war (Blackbourn 86). This "war" began in 1870, following the Prussian victory over France, which not only solidified the "basis for the German empire," but also illumined a "lack of social unity" amidst the governing party and the Catholic populace (77). Tensions only heightened in 1873 when the German economy crashed and a period of depression followed. This economic downturn not only coincided with but also encouraged Bismarck's "domestic preventive war" against the Catholic Church. The *Kulturkampf* included a series of state-sponsored, anti-Catholic measures, most notably: the expulsion of the Society of Jesus in 1872, the 'May Laws' of 1873, "which sought to establish firm state control over the education and appointment of clergy," and most drastically, in 1874-5 legislation was passed allowing authorities to commandeer church property, expel incumbents, and remove state subsidies from anyone who denied the government's intervention. Blackbourn remarks: "This period contained the most nakedly repressive episodes in the *Kulturkampf*, as priests were on the run, clergy were imprisoned and expelled...1800 priests had been gaoled or exiled and 16 million marks of church property seized" (86). Bismarck looked upon Catholics as the "enemy within," whom he meant to drive out.

This historical precedent is an essential consideration when regarding Hopkins's poem, "The Wreck of the Deutschland." The poem recounts the tragic progress and narrative

of the Wreck of the *SS Deutschland* on the Kentish Knock on the evening of December 6th, 1875, where many perished. Yet while acknowledging the sheer number of those suffering souls, the poet is particularly interested in a series of five German political exiles, “five Franciscan nuns,” arguably “martyrs” of the Church. The poem is dedicated to the “happy memory” of these drowned exiles. So although the poem is evidently written in response to the tragic wreck, Hopkins’s motivations are much more nuanced. His argument is political—in so far as the political (i.e. the persecution and social misunderstanding of the Catholic faith) clarifies the theological issues (grace, mercy and mastery) at hand.

Beyond this political context, Hopkins was profoundly moved by the incident; in fact, it made such a deep impression on him, “more than any other wreck or accident” ever had before (*CWI*, 248). But we must wonder: why this wreck? Hopkins’ father worked as a marine insurance adjuster and his family was well aware of the frequency and severity of nautical tragedies. Almost needless to say, Hopkins feels for the “drowned” “exiles,” driven from their home for “political” reasons and placed on a ship whose “goal was a shoal” (l. 94). It’s as if their exile was their death sentence, predestined for doom from the start. Where is God’s sovereignty in the face of governmental sovereignty that can exile nuns to their drowning? How could God permit such a tragedy against those who had dedicated their life to His service? Is this the portrait of a God who is love, who is merciful? I imagine that these questions haunted Hopkins, stirring his heart to pen and page. It is there where he writes something greater than an elegy honoring the victims of the tragic disaster that had unfolded off the Kentish knocks; rather it is an ode, celebrating a heroic martyrdom—political and religious—all to the end of giving glory to God (*HMW*, xxv).

At the core of the poem's theological argument is the question of how God can be both sovereign and merciful. It considers how God's mastery, the brute and sudden reality of disaster and death, can be rendered as just, triumphant. Hopkins's approach to this issue is complex; but he uniquely grounds his own argument upon the witness of a "tall nun," "the chief sister." This is the same nun which *The Times* reported as standing, towering aboard the ship during its downfall calling out, "O Christ, come quickly!" and "My God, My God, make haste!" compelled the poet—so much so that this "prophetess" is the central figure in the ode, the very paradigm through which the tragedy is then redeemed (*HMW*, 338). Clearly this poem does more than recount a tragic wreck; it reminds us of the natural and supernatural forces beyond man's control, recalling images "of what men choose to forget."²² The thin veneer of technological prowess and the safety it promises is stripped away. Man is vulnerable, entirely weak, to the sea, to the finger of God. It is here where Hopkins uncovers mercy in the midst of such mastery. The tall nun becomes the very means of mercy, the very mouthpiece of the Word of God, proclaiming the name of "Christ," the anointed one, the Word made flesh. As a result, Hopkins does not wonder *whether or not* God was present or working towards the sanctification of the lost souls on the ship. No, of that he is assured. Instead, through the figure of the nun, the poet reflects on grace, on how grace works, not just in the midst of but also positively *through* disaster and death.

Part 2: Gazing upon Grace

Hopkins is "bold to boast" of how the perishing souls "tower from the grace to the grace" (l.24). God's "grace," and man's response to this grace, is the primary focal point for

²² The "strong brown" river god of T.S. Eliot's "The Four Quartets" recalls man's apathy toward nature's dominance and God's mastery presented in *The Wreck*.

the first part of the poem (the first 10 stanzas). But before entering into the text, it is worthwhile to consider the following question: what exactly is grace and how does Hopkins understand it? The poet seems to follow a traditional Thomist perspective on this issue. Aquinas distinguishes between two primary types of grace: habitual and “*auxilium*.” The former permits man, a natural being, to enter into “the supernatural level.” This means that God provides the natural creature with grace to enhance their capacity to for habitual virtue. This habitual grace inclines man to “supernatural action.” The latter, *auxilium*, refers to when God moves “people to actions in accord with habitual grace.” This grace “inaugurates the process of conversion as “God moves the person who lacks grace into the state of grace.” These graces then complement each other in order to both elevate and heal the soul, all in preparation for the full restoration of the soul’s entry into the beatific vision, or entrance into the life of the Trinity (Wawrykow 194). Hopkins closely follows this line of thought; he writes, “For grace is any action, activity, on God’s part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries the creature to or towards the end of its being, which is its self-sacrifice to God and its salvation” (*SDW*, 154). God’s grace, then, is that which sustains man’s ability to persevere in living in Christ. If we recall “As kingsfishers catch fire,” Hopkins writes that man “keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces; / acts in God’s eye what in God’s eye he is—/ Christ” (ll. 10-12). Grace affects man’s actions and summarily affects how God sees man. God’s grace is God’s initiated act of “carrying” humanity into the self-perfection of Christ; God keeps this going, man does not. Man simply is a respondent to God’s action.

The aforementioned citation from “As kingsfishers catch fire” merits a further distinction since there seem to be different types of grace, one that man first keeps, and one that continues to sanctify within. Aquinas distinguishes this nuanced as he defines *auxilium*

as either operative or cooperative. Operative grace refers to when God is active and man is passive. God acts and the person is “simply moved.” Cooperative grace, on the other hand, features the action, the response of the person to the action of God (Wawrykow 193-197). That is to say: God wills human beings to will their free response to his activity (his grace) in their lives. Hopkins remarks on this distinction, noting that man ought to be entirely directed towards “the end of its being:” *being* with God. Therefore Hopkins understands God’s “activity,” the “carrying of the creature,” as something that always moves towards union. The creature is prompted by the Creator to return to a state of grace, which therein enables the creature to enter into the divine life of God.

Hopkins seems to extrapolate from this Thomist standard when considering the self and the fullness of self-realization as it pertains to God’s grace. The self of man is sustained and unchanging; but his self-expression—the living and acting out of that self, “the orientation of the self,” adjusts (Miller 345). Hopkins imagines this nuance in terms of “pitch” and “shift.” A change in orientation or self-expression, movement incurred by grace, is called a “shift,” or a change in the “pitch” of one’s “selfbeing” (assuming that the self maintains a variety of pitches at which it can sound off at). Therefore, grace enables a shift, a movement in “pitch,” which is understood as distinctive determining energies of the self,²³ in so far as man is willing to say yes to God’s *auxilium*. Each person uniquely carries the potential to sound off at a variety of pitches. This potential could be likened to habitual grace, or the capacity for man to share in the divine life. It follows then, that the Christian ideal “sounding-off” would be humanity’s sharing in the very life of Christ. That is, as Hopkins writes, “Christ *being me* and me being Christ” (*SDW*, 154). Bernadette Ward describes this

²³ “God then can shift the self that lies in one to a higher, that is/ better, pitch of itself; that is/to a pitch or determination of itself on the side of good.” (*SDW*, 148) The ultimate pitch is Christ.

succinctly: the “proper pitching of the self is to the tone of Christ” (222). Moreover, as Hopkins describes, the Christian who is spurred on by the Holy Spirit acts in Christ and Christ in the man, to the end of making “every Christian another Christ, an AfterChrist” (*SDW*, 99). Grace works to this end; it is, as Wawrykow notes, working to the end of “self-realization” in Christ: “Jesus marks the highest realization of what it means to be human, precisely because he consistently responded to God’s gracious promptings throughout his life, culminating in his death on the cross” (210). To shift, therefore, to the ultimate end of being an “AfterChrist,” necessitates God’s grace, divine “gracious promptings.” It is this interaction, which in turn permits man to interact with and enter into the very life of God by radically reorienting, shifting the self. These considerations of “grace,” then, reveal the depth, prowess, and unorthodox orthodoxy of Hopkins’s Christocentric theology.²⁴ He is unorthodox in his own expressiveness and creativity, which comes alive, quite vividly in his poetry. It is as Miller writes, “All things rhyme in Christ” (313). Quite uniquely, Hopkins expresses his theology in poetry. Whether or not this was his intent, there is merit in examining his theology because it progresses the poem as the poem in and of itself frames and en-fleshes his theology.

Therefore, grace presents as an intellectual and a thematic paradigm through which “The Wreck of the Deutschland” must be read. This comes across quite noticeably as the poem begins with an awareness of God’s “mastering” action, his grace among men: “Thou mastering me God!” (*HMW*, 110-119, l. 1). God is recognized as master, as the one from whom all sustenance comes—“Giver of breath and bread” (2). God’s sovereignty is

²⁴ Scotus understands Jesus Christ as the beginning and end point of creation and the universe.

strikingly intimate; God is identified as “Thou.”²⁵ God as “Thou” “masters” man as “me.” As Sobolev remarks, this God is “no distant clockmaker of the deists” but one who is a felt and a known presence (80). This draws us to an important stylistic choice that should not be evaded: Hopkins’s presence within the poem. God is mastering him—“me;” the poet is not only present, but the poem itself now inevitably involves Hopkins’s own biography. Why does he begin with his voice? Why “me” (1.1)? Why “I” (1.9)? The gravity of this introduction, as something both entirely personal and universal is altogether appropriate for the issue at hand. Not only the grace of God—but also the mere and sheer force and presence of this divine being. God is both immanent (mastering *me*) and transcendent (*mastering me*). And grace, I’d argue, is the very concept through which Hopkins comes to understand how he can not only relate but enter into this divine life of God.

Grace is the apparent link through which Hopkins comes to experience the transcendent power of God in his own being. God’s transcendence or mastery is remarked as broad as the “World’s strand,” or the border, like the shore of the world, encompassing all of creation (1.3). Yet this same God “hast bound bones” and “fastened me flesh” (1.5). All is subject to “thy doing,” especially the making and unmaking of man (1.7). God’s work is entirely universal—affecting the world; it is entirely personal, making and unmaking the person. A concept of grace not only helps fuse these divine characteristics, but they also remind us that Hopkins is not entirely focused on the physical. For example, the creating and mastering of God is not a strictly physical endeavor or sensation. If it was, then it should strike us as no surprise that God is strictly a sovereign and cruel deity. Consider “The Caged Skylark” (1877), where the poet reminds us that man is composed of both flesh and spirit:

²⁵ Catherine Phillips notes that the original text of the poem read “God mastering me” (336). This edit emphasizes the specificity of Hopkins’ poetic vision regarding God’s immanence.

“Man’s spirit will be flesh-bound, when found at best, / but uncumbered” (ll.12-13). Man is not just fastened in flesh, but is also alive, and called to live all the more in spirit (Romans 8:1-11). Although the flesh is bound in its mortal existence, there is an “un-encumbering” or a taking on of a new body, of a different “glory” after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:40). In these opening lines of “The Wreck,” then, Hopkins admits the persistence and weight of the flesh, the woes of his earthly life, but he is all the more enamored by God’s presence as Spirit; he is startled, encountering again the presence of God, the prevalence of grace, asking, “Dost thou touch me afresh?” The poet feels the very presence of God: “over again I feel thy finger and find thee” (ll.7-8). Hopkins *feels* God, feels the very finger of God: he is singled out; he is seen by God—not by some abstract idea or deity, but by the finger of his fathering force. And this is not a finger to touch the flesh, but a finger that touches the un-encumbered spirit. Moreover, this is not a touch that begets destruction; it compels intimacy. The finite human being shares a graced encounter with the transcendent source to which he owes his very being. Touched “afresh,” “over again,” God appears as intimate, friendly; this “touching” God is something much more nuanced than a distant master-giver-destroyer. It is a graced encounter with a giver of life—of breath and bread.

It is through this proper theology of grace that God can be understood as a merciful master. The finger of God, the intimate touch—the grace—that moves the heart of the poet, portrays God’s actions as more nuanced than overtly merciful or masterful. Reading God as singularly masterful, as Dennis Sobolev tends to do, is liable to give rise to a misapprehension and misapplication of Hopkins’s theory of grace. Sobolev regards the feeling of the finger of God as one that is both “destructive and painful.” The poet is a “passive recipient” of God’s action; he “is left in pain” in response to this almost

“involuntary act of sensory recognition” (80-1). Although God is capable of destruction, to make and unmake, Hopkins doesn’t dwell on this. Whereas Sobolev’s reading seems to overlook Hopkins’s intense awareness of God’s presence, Hopkins sees God and then sees himself in a new light. After interacting with God, Hopkins registers his own vulnerability, his human frailty next to the touch of the master, at being “almost unmade” and not utterly unmade (l.6). Sobolev seems to disregard any warmth in the poet’s “Thou,” as if the poet had written that he had been unmade, undone by the divine sovereign. For now, let us simply note that Sobolev follows a Voluntarist model that conceives of God as an Absolute Power that, formally speaking, must not be constrained by Reason or intellect (*logos*). Sobolev’s argument holds that the “God is whatever God wills,” as opposed to the Thomist view according to which “God must will whatever is (determined by nature) as good;” the former imagines God as power that, to be sure, may be incidentally aligned with but is never actually bound by Reason, any motive of love, justice, or goodness since what God does is just because God does it. This suggests that God is “capable of changing his mind at any moment” (Pfau 161-167). Therefore, the mastery of God, through this Voluntarist lens is justified even if it is destructive, painful or seemingly arbitrary. But God’s touch is creative, encouraging, and personal. This comes across in its clemency, as the finger of God finds the poet “afresh,” time and time again. The finger of God is not a haunting presence, but an inviting presence that does indeed stir about the poet’s “yes” (l.9).

God’s action is not isolated or arbitrary; with this “yes,” the poet emphasizes that God acts upon and with man. The following stanza of the poem highlights the relevance of man’s response to grace: “I did say yes...” Feeling the finger of God and finding God is an act of will, it is a cooperation to that which has been put in operation by God’s divine will. Hopkins

considers that this act of saying “yes” to God’s grace is the “seconding of God’s designs,” the “taking part in their own creation, the creation of their best selves” (*SDW*, 195). This comes across as the poet recounts when “thou heardest me” confess (l.11). This confession is an admission of “thy terror, O Christ, O God” (l.12). It is interesting to note that God is not first known as God; God is first seen by the terror of his action, “O at lightning and lashed rod” (l.10). This recognition of God’s action as opposed to a sensation of God’s immediate presence or personality reoccurs in “God’s Grandeur.” The world that is “charged” with the grandeur of God “will flame out, like shining from shook foil” (l.1-2). Certainly a storm is a foreboding image, but this parallel application suggests that Hopkins intends to emphasize that God’s magnificence is overbearing—overwhelming, flashing forth like lightning—and man has an obligation to see. And even within this seeing, man must strain to witness what lies behind the lightning, something that is ephemeral although utterly powerful and all illuminating. So if one were to simply stop at this line, at the gravity of God’s infinite power and its destructive consequence, there remains an obvious temptation to see God through the “Voluntarist” lens. But beyond God’s terror there is a recognition and confession of God’s presence. God is more than his Absolute Power or divine action. Rather, the divine action is ordered so that man can come to acknowledge “the dearest freshness deep down things” (l.10). This suggests that even behind the terror, there exists an order, a purpose—a “fire of stress,” a grace, which is felt by man. Although this “terror” confronts and crashes down, “hard down with a horror of height,” man is capable of experiencing a direct and emotional encounter with the “terror” that is “laced with the fire of stress” (l.15-16). God is distinct from the terror; although the terror is noted and felt, man is capable of discerning the divine reason behind these actions.

God's separation from the terror is important to note since the reader's interpretation of the God-figure in the poem can influence our entire understanding of the text. For example, Sobolev imagines that the "fire of stress" recalls "destructive fire" from the Old Testament. He imagines God as inciting Hopkins to say yes out of fear, in response to the promptings of "thy terror" (Sobolev 81-2). Grace would then be understood as God's coercive force, essentially eliminating man's free response to cooperate to the divine will. This simply does not align with Hopkins's own worldview or understanding of God. In stark contrast to Sobolev, J. Hillis Miller reads the "fire of stress" as the tongues of fire that descended upon the apostles and Mary during Pentecost—fire that did not destroy, but that which shone "both of grace and the power to speak" (318). This is a more appropriate reading, as it emphasizes man's ability to receive the fire of God's Spirit and to respond, to speak out. Yet these two divergent readings beg the question: is God vengeful or merciful? Sobolev seems to tend towards the former; if so, he is wrong. God's actions only reveal part of his heart; the effects of terror from God's actions do not imply that God is terrible or wicked. God is "compassionate and merciful: longsuffering and plenteous in mercy" (Psalm 103:8). Yet, more importantly, the grandeur and transcendence of God does indeed incite terror;²⁶ he is not to be seen as an object of fear, but rather as one who induces reverent, filial fear—a sense of wonder and awe, a "fear of the Lord." This is all to say: God is not a terror nor is God terrible; although his actions ought to be experienced as powerful and terrifying, God is altogether to be seen as love. Albeit this love may be felt as a purifying or destructive fire, the flame simply burns to prepare man's entry into divine life. So we should read the

²⁶ Here we can consider the scene of the Transfiguration. Jesus appears, "transfigured before them" and the voice of God cries out from the clouds, "This is my beloved Son..." The disciples react fearfully: "And the disciples hearing, fell upon their face, and were very much afraid" Yet Jesus came and "touched them," saying "Arise, and fear not (Matthew 17: 1-7).

speaker as terrified of the grandeur of God, motivated by his awareness of his own insufficiencies and unworthiness. Consider the “swoon of a heart” as he recounts this divine intervention during his meditation (staged, literally, by “the walls, altar and hour and night”); should it not then follow that the fire of stress felt by the poet is positive, non-condemnatory (l.14)? This question should be understood as the same question which inevitably follows at the start of the 3rd stanza: “The frown of his face before me, the hurtle of hell behind, where, where was a, where was a place?” (ll.17-19).

This fire of stress should be compared closely to God’s grace, a grace that is to be “stirred up” to encourage and invite surrender in faith to the fire of God’s love (2 Timothy 1:6). But this surrender, in the face of a frown and the hurtle of hell, necessitates a “place,” some sort of physical grounded-ness. The poet is forced to confront either the frown of God or the hurtle of hell. Breathless, he asks: where was a place to which he could go to find some sort of consolation, to feel, if you will, love? And it is directly to love, to God, that he goes: “and fled with the fling of the heart to the heart of the Host” (l.21). This flight of heart can and should be taken as a moment of prayer and surrender, not as an act of physical fleeing. This ecstatic abandonment occurs again in Hopkins’s sonnet, “Hurrahing in Harvest:” “the heart rears wings bold and bolder / and hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet” (ll.13-14). This movement of the heart is an act of prayer, a humble recognition of God’s presence, as marked by the poet lifting up his heart, his eyes to “glean our Savior” (ll.5-6). It follows, then, that Hopkins intends the act of “hurling” to be intimately related to “hurrahing:” the sacrifice of self, the hurl of self to God, is a “hurrah,” praise pointed to God. More pointedly, in “The Wreck,” this hurling is directed to a specific end: the Host, or the Eucharist. Paul Mariani comments that the poet does not flee “from” but

runs “into” the heart of Host; this movement he regards as “the total surrender of self as Christ surrendered himself” (ll. 48-9). This prayer is directed to the “heart of the Host,” to the Eucharist, to the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.²⁷

The object of the poet’s religious love, of his post-conversion worship is the Blessed Sacrament. No longer does he feel simply the “fire of stress” as a condemning or destructive fire. He has experienced the “flash” from “the flame to the flame” which then becomes, “towers from,” “grace to the grace” (l.24). Flame is now grace: the fire of God is the very grace of God. Miller, unlike Sobolev, clearly picks up on this, noting that the stress is likened to tongues of fire issuing forth, as grace descending from God. Mariani, too, suggests that the poet has moved from the hellfire latent within the “torment of separation” “to the flame of Love itself” (149). Surely, the fire imagery is multivalent, yet the poet’s purpose is more focused. Hopkins details an actual spiritual adjustment from fright to faith, moved by grace; now, the fire of faith is stoked.

Part 3: Sin and Grace (“The Hurtle of Hell”)

Much of the intellectual and spiritual tension that arises in “The Wreck” surfaces due to an antagonistic force that opposes the aforementioned adjustment (the move from the fright of the frown and the hurtle of hell to faith fueled by God’s grace). This antagonistic force, an opposing spiritual energy to grace, is sin. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines sin as “an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods...It has been

²⁷ This recalls his own words to Ernst Hartley Coleridge: “The great aid to belief and object of belief is the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Religion without that is somber, dangerous, illogical, with that it is—not to speak of its grand consistency and certainty—loveable.” (CWI, 61-2).

defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law."²⁸ Simply put, sin is an "offense against God," an act of disobedience that manifests an avoidance and denial of the grace of God. Although obviously preceding Hopkins, this definition cites both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, two foundational thinkers for Hopkins theological formation. Hopkins is entirely aware of the relationship between sin and grace. This complex and deceptive interplay is described in his spiritual writings as an equivocal nighttime: "This life is night, it is night and not day...One man is in God's grace, another is in sin, but they look alike, for life is night and all things are alike in the dark" (*SDW*, 38). "Darkness and light are intermingled" in this age, as man anticipates the revelation of reality—of the heavenly things to come (*The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Ratzinger 54). Yet for now, sin and grace appear comparable in the night and evidently, they that are closely related, demanding that they must then be distinguished with conscious perceptivity.

Sin comes into the poem most clearly in the fourth stanza, driving home Hopkins's vision of the equivocal night. The poet identifies as the sand as he says, "I am soft sift." The sand is understood as the self, composed of many individual components. And the issue at hand in this stanza is the force that gives being, which composes the person: is one held together by sin or grace? The sand of the self, once soft sift, move from its state of sinfulness, recollecting into a state of grace. The sieve of the soul, the ritual act of "sifting," would be an examination of conscience—that is, with this practice man explores his own particular defects, soft sifting through his thoughts and actions, down to the most particular unit, like grains of sand. It is "at the wall" of consciousness, that is, what is visible beyond the hourglass, where one see how the sand "crowds" and "combs to the fall" (ll.26-27). This

²⁸*Catechism of the Catholic Church* paragraph 1849-1850:
http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a8.htm

process of recollection and repentance, of reflecting on one's faults is a habit Hopkins would have performed daily as a Jesuit. For instance, St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus and author of *The Spiritual Exercises*, quite methodologically delineated a means of containing one's own sin, through a "particular and daily examen." This examen constantly challenges one to bring to mind any "particular sin or defect" that one wants "to correct or amend," occurring at least three times during the day.²⁹ A habit like this trains one like Hopkins to think (perhaps almost neurotically given his youthful proclivity to harsh penances) constantly upon the issue of sin and the necessity for grace.

This act of crowding and collecting the sands of one's sinful being eventually collapses and is re-ordered by grace. That which was once crowded, combs to a new unity. Man cannot be held together in sin, understanding that a state of sin nearly pulls him apart. Man must be brought to "sacrifice himself," to die to the flesh as Paul would ascribe, and enter into "an image of Christ," in spirit (Miller 340; Romans 8:13). This life in the Spirit, this combing and coming "to a poise, to a pane" can only be realized by the very intervention of God, by a steadying divine grace (1.29). Grace is that which holds man together as one, steadied "as water in a well." Grace flows unseen, constantly filling, is "roped with," the poised pane, as if the water gently flows from the flanks of a "voel," a hillsides, falling through the very "vein / of the gospel proffer," the word of God (1.31). This is not simply felt as a "principle" or an idea, rather, it is lived practically; it is felt as "pressure" (1.32). This grace, as Miller articulates, is a "perpetually renewed gift," suggesting that the self is constantly being created (340-1). The very grace of God, "Christ's gift," is loaded and pressurized and all the while it is freely to man (1.32). Man is not enslaved to succumb to the

²⁹ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, <http://www.companionofjesus.com/se-mullan.pdf>

soft sifted-ness of human weakness or concupiscence; no, man is “roped with, always” the gift of Christ. As Mariani writes, “What is this, if not an image of God’s grace flowing on and on, without end, there for the asking?” (135). Grace is the steadying force, a free and fortifying gift given by poet’s very real Prince, his purveyor of peace and purpose.

Therefore, the only resolution to equivocal darkness that muddles both sin and grace is “thou Orion of light,” the light of Christ (165). The mysterious gift of Jesus Christ is quite simply the gift of himself, the mystery of God’s own self-giving: “The first intention then of God outside himself or, as they say, *ad extra*, outwards, the first outstress of God’s power was Christ:” Jesus the Christ is the very gift of God made present to man (*SDW*, 195). This “outstress” is a release, a sending forth of pent up energies; Hopkins describes the verb as if he imagines a body is excreting fluids or sweating. With this in mind, man is then endowed with the capacity to know God, to enter into this mystery. That which is “ou stressed” resides within man. Mariani articulates that the theology of this section motions towards “the Incarnational insight,” or the fact that “stressed in upon the poet” is an awareness of the mystery of the “renewal of Christ’s emptying of himself for his beloved, wounded human creatures” (ll.149-50). This is “his mystery,” which “must be instressed, stressed” (1.39).

Following, then in this fifth stanza is a more precise description of how grace works, more so how man comes to share in this Incarnational insight. The “splendour and wonder” of the physical world, of creation, must be encountered by a fit, receptive disposition (1.38). One cannot simply see the trees and claim to see Christ. In order to understand Mariani’s claim, we must consider Hopkins’s own active formulation: “I kiss my hand... glow, glory in thunder” (ll.33-36). These lines exemplify his discovery of mystery in matter, of God in nature. Here we can also consider “The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe”

where the poet gazes skyward in admiration of creation, lifting his hand, marveling at how the “air azure” of the sky richly “laps / Round the four fingergaps” (ll.77-78). The poet believes in man’s capacity to encounter God in nature, that the finger of man finds the ever-present finger of God. J. Hillis Miller considers that the kiss and greeting describe “the mental process from memory through understanding to will” (322). The “instress” of the scene is to “greet;” the “kissing the hand is the simple apprehension in answer to the stress felt.” One must be in a proper state of mind, disposed to receive, accept, an “impression;” that is to say, to “stress” an “instress” (*HMW*, 337). From this, Miller continues, there is an affirmation, an attaching of the will to Christ: “this awareness leads to understanding, ratified by an act of will going out, in desire, toward Christ in nature” (322). To “greet him the days I meet him” and “bless when I understand” is to instress and stress the mystery of Christ *and* encounter that mystery in matter (l.40). Christ, then, is accessible to man in so far as man avails and wills himself to receive that which is out-stressed from God.

The gift of Jesus, the Son of God, is an “outstress” of God’s own divine life, given over to man for their “self-sacrifice to God” and “salvation” (*SDW*, 154). Christ enables man to participate in the grace of God. This grace is depicted as “stroke and a stress” and is delivered by stars and storms; “guilt is hushed by, hearts are flushed by and melt—” by the very presence of God, by his grace (ll.43-46). This grace becomes so abundant, almost too present, that “it rides time like riding a river” (l.47). This unyielding flow of the river speaks of the unfading abundance of “God’s infinite stress” (Miller 150). Following the image, this stress becomes so natural, present within such ordinary things, becoming such a part of man’s experience that its actual passing and flow slips man’s very notice. The poet writes, “The faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss” (l.48). Something changes, is made new,

perhaps even renewed, when man corresponds, sees, acts with the divine will of God. This is to say that in receiving and in stressing the mystery of Christ, man changes by changing the course of his very life; man is created anew “in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17). This, Hopkins writes, is a central means to salvation: “we are to suffer with Christ suffering, keep sight of the godhead hiding, repay if we can the price of our redemption” (*SDW*, 187). To share in the suffering of Christ is to share in his very life. To be “in Christ” is to enter into a deep understanding of what it means to share in that “splendid kenotic gesture of his suffering,” begins to not only unravel the nuances of Hopkins’s theology, but also the very means by which the wreck can be read as redemptive (Mariani 149). This explains why Hopkins, in one of his meditations, prays for a “higher degree of grace” fully knowing that this means he is to suffer more, “to be lifted on a higher cross” (*SDW*, 254). Grace does not diminish suffering; if anything, it might increase it. All the while this grace counteracts the deterioration enabled by sin and translates suffering as bearable, mindful at least, of a Christian’s desire and destiny for immortal life.

The poet attempts to translate this theology (the interplay between sin and grace, the relation behind suffering and salvation, and the mystery of Christ’s sacrifice) by emphasizing the humanity of Jesus through the mystery of his incarnation. “It,” that is, the grace of God “dates from day of his going in Galilee,” or Jesus’s birth and early childhood (ll.49-50). Here, in the 7th stanza, readers are reminded of Jesus as a historical human person, not as some lofty, dis-embodied concept. His earthly life, the “warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey,” is mapped and measured from “Manger” to the “maiden’s knee” (ll.51-52). The former image motions towards the scene of The Nativity (Luke 2:7), of Jesus’s birth by the Blessed Virgin Mary in a manger. This is the moment of the visible realization of the

Incarnation—the act of God taking on the flesh in the person of Jesus. What began in the manger ends upon the maiden’s, Mary’s, knee at the moment of the crucifixion: Christ is taken down from the cross and laid in the arms of his mother. Therefore, this seventh stanza directly links “the dense and driven passion” with the Incarnation (l.53). The birth and the death of Christ are essential to his mission as “Christ” or as the anointed one, the Savior. Jesus is the one proclaimed to be the merit for all grace, the “lamb of God,” “who taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The presence of God in the person of Jesus permits for “the discharge of it,” the very sending forth of the grace, God’s own divine life forward from the heavens unto earth (l.54). This release is “the frightful sweat,” recalling the very out-stress of God; it is the grace released and given to man (l.53). It is also, as Hopkins writes, “the stress of selving” from God that aforementioned outstress of Christ, which “had forced drops of sweat or blood, which drops are the world” (*SDW*, 197).³⁰ The very coming of Christ and the outpour of the sweat and blood of the crucifixion merit all grace for creation. Therefore, the Incarnation marks the epochal arrival of God’s grace unto the world in the very person of Jesus Christ.

Through the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus, man is granted the grace to no longer perish but to enter into eternal life (John 3:16). We must understand that as a priest and believer, Hopkins knows the gravity and reality of what this implies. The verse from John 3:16 is not some biblical platitude or religious pick-me-up, but it is the content of the very faith he lives. Considering the context of the salvific lens through which he reads what follows in “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” he unveils his own reading of the apparent tragedy. Because of the incarnation, “what none would have known of it” is no longer kept

³⁰ Hopkins uses the image of a pomegranate that has fallen; separating into cleaves, pieces, as a companion to the concept of this individuation or “selving:” the act of becoming distinct, or uniquely pitched as “that taste of myself, of *I* and *me*” (*SDW*, 123).

at bay; the “heart” of it has been made manifest—“Is out with it!” (ll.56-57). Essentially, theology grounds Hopkins’s argument: the heart of his faith is exposed—*is out with it*—and at work in the poem. So enters the next stanza, full of exclamation and energy. “Gush!—flush the man, the being with it, sour or sweet, brim in a flash, full!” (ll.61-62). There is no hiding, for the poet, all has been revealed; the full premise of his excitement lies in the fact that he is fired by the assurance by faith of the overwhelming victory of God’s love (Romans 8:38-39; 1 Corinthians 15:55). What none would have known of God’s mercy, let alone his very love, is finally out with it by the life and sacrifice of Jesus. The rush of water imagery, gushing, bursting, brimming, is full of meaning; given the context of the poem, where so many will die by drowning. The rushing onslaught and flow of God’s grace, God’s mercy (the flow of blood and water seen in John 19: 34), is so over-abundant that it covers both the sour and the sweet. Man is capable of responding in contrition or revulsion, in gratitude or apathy. “Hither then” come the “last or first, to hero of Calvary, Christ’s feet” (l.63). The passengers are brought forward to the Crucified Christ, as was John the Beloved, the very disciple who not only witnessed but also recorded the outpouring of the blood and water from the side of Jesus. (Whether or not Hopkins makes this Johannine jump intentionally, it can and should be seen as a relevant interpretative principle given both John and Hopkins own interest in the lashing of the “Word last!”). It is from this point where all men are gathered and all “men go” (l.64). They are not asked if they mean it, want it, nor are they warned of it; all are consumed by the very love of God put forth in the life, death and resurrection of the Christ. Hopkins knows this, writing that all things are “affected, marked, as a great seal” by the Incarnation, “more than any other event.” It is this same mystery, Hopkins writes, from which all action leads, and that his whole life “is determined by the

Incarnation of most of the details of the day” (*SDW*, 263). The incarnation, then, is the mystery underlying Hopkins’ theological position in “The Wreck of the Deutschland” and nearly all of his subsequent poetry, representing the very moment where Christ makes himself “adorable,” “loveable,” among men.

Conclusion: Man-made Reply/Man Made to Glorify

It is through the adoration and loving of Christ (that is, man’s response to a God who so humbled as to be both adored and loved in flesh and sacrament) that man responds to God’s invitation to share and enter into salvation. This explains why Hopkins would begin with an exhortation, a prayer: “Be adored among men, God, three-numbered form” (l.65). The Incarnation enables man to praise and adore God in a new way: “among” men, in the company of humanity where God works and can be known. Hopkins outcry is a call to true worship, which is an indelible component of living the Christian life. Worship anticipates “heaven’s mode of existence,” it sets the believer’s eyes and heart on “the world of God,” allowing “light to fall from that divine world into ours” (*The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Ratzinger, 20). Worship, then is essential, as it is “Man’s response to the God who is good to him is love, and loving God means worshipping him” (l.26). Therefore, man’s adoring and loving of the Christ—man’s worship—is the earthly vehicle by which the divine life is anticipated. Even so, Hopkins exposes the stubbornness of man “dogged in den, and “full of malice, that must be wrung by action” (ll.67-68). Humanity can be all talk at time, “beyond saying sweet, past telling of tongue;” more than knowing and reading the word, man must worship (69). It is not enough to speak of God; God must be experienced. It is, as Ratzinger continues, ultimately the unity of God and man toward which a believer ought to strive. This does not

mean the “destruction” of man or “non-being,” but rather, it is “a way of being” realized through “the surrender of all things to God” (28).

Through sacrifice, losing one’s self, carrying the cross (Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23), man comes to find himself by finding God; and in “The Wreck,” through Hopkins’s Catholic theology of sacrifice, he comes to understand God as a merciful-master. The poet proclaims, “Thou art lightning and love,” a “winter and warm” (l.70). These aspects seem contradictory, suggesting that God is bipolar and temperamental. Miller comments that this God does indeed appear of a “double nature,” highlighting a “mystery of similarity and dissimilarity” (325). This would be true if the poet were describing lightning or love, winter or warm; but rather, both are included, and both experiences end with the positive, in love, in warmth. As Phillips writes, it seems almost necessary for “harsh experience” to befall man in order for one to know the need for mercy (*HMW*, 337). Balancing the mercy and mastery of God, it becomes clear then, in the light of an eternal vision by which Hopkins certainly sees the world, when “thy dark descending” God is “most merciful then” (l.72). The next image develops this nuance; God is ultimately “Father and fondler of heart” (l.71). This visceral act of fondling one’s heart requires intimacy. However, this intimacy could be easily misconstrued. How is the fondling felt? The poet ascribes this as a not so positive “wringing” (l.71). This dissonance is the feeling of the pain, the wringing of man moving away from where God intends to move man. This claim can be further justified if we look at “In the Valley of the Elwy” (1877) where Hopkins writes that God, “being mighty a master” completes “thy creature” “where it fails.” Here, as in “The Wreck,” God is described as “being a father and a fond” (ll.12-14). The significance and precision of Hopkins’s diction follows: God is “father” and “a fond,” loving and chiding in order to fulfill the shortcomings

of man. God does not abuse his intimacy with man by fondling and wringing. Instead, if we note the verb tense in “The Wreck:” God is a fondler of the heart that God “hast” “wring.” God evidently is both father and fondler; God’s mercy is what masters. Man is not vanquished, but wrung dry in order to be filled once more. One could argue that once one is subject to a master that which would’ve been “wringing” is actually felt for what it is: an intimate, fathering love. God is a merciful-master; mercy eclipses a well-intentioned mastery.

Examples of individuals who were mastered into God’s mercy illustrate that once man enters into the life of God, the sacrifice of the cross pales in comparison to the light of new life. This encourages the poet to call out, “Melt him but master him still” in the final stanza of Part 1 (l.76). In this case, the melting seems to be the painful act, whereas “to master” implies a positive, beneficial action. To make this point, Hopkins references both Paul and Augustine (“Austin”), men who also underwent conversion, who felt the intense melting mastery of God and yet persevered into the beatific vision as saints of the Church (ll.77-78). “At a crash” Paul encountered the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-30). For Augustine, over a series of years, as portrayed in *The Confessions*, he underwent a “lingering-out sweet skill” in his conversion to Christianity (l.78). It seems as if God can arrive in a crash, wringing the heart or overtime, slowly fondling the heart of the believer. But one thing is certain: God does not simply melt and smite man, he masters; he overwhelms not to destroy, but to restore. Regardless, it is important to note, that these are moments of grace—God’s activity in the life of man. Hopkins elaborates on this divine agency with the image of the smithy. The job of the master, of the ironsmith is to forge, to make. And this is exactly what Hopkins prays: “Make mercy in all of us, out of us all” (l.79). Hopkins’s words call for a continued forgery, a continued conversion that is both internal and

external—in man and outside of man. But he does not simply stop with the renewal of the man. Man is mastered, restored, refined, all made with “an anvil-ding,” for the greater glory of God (1.73). This restoration and refinement, the mastery of God upon man, can indeed be felt as painful. But this is of no surprise for the Christian poet, whose God was put to death on the cross. The Kingship of Christ makes the experience of the very merciful-mastery of God visible and accessible to man; grace flows forth once Christ is crowned victorious on the cross through the Resurrection. Christ’s suffering then, his demise on the cross, enables a painful man to share in a mastery of the flesh, human suffering that is redemptive. “Mastery but be adored, but be adored King” (l. 80). Death is not the end of the story; eternal life is. So although mastery and the anvil-ding can be felt and brutal, God’s reign and his sovereignty overcome the palpable force of death and destruction. Christianity without the Cross, and the Resurrection that follows, as Ratzinger writes, “Christian worship is null and void” and all of this talk for Hopkins would be an “empty game” (55). These themes will carry over into the second part of the poem; yet for now, it suffices to say that the life Hopkins hopes in, for himself and for those who perished on the *SS Deutschland*, is eternal.

Chapter 2: The Primacy of Christ

Introduction: Approaching the “Other”

Hopkins provides readers with an ideology, a theological foundation, within the first part of his poem, which the second part of “The Wreck of the Deutschland” then fulfills.³¹ Linking our reading with Hopkins own understanding of grace helps us see how and where Hopkins imagines God’s presence and activity among mankind. And grace is particularly in question because theory meets reality at the site of the terrible and terrifying reality wreckage portrayed in the narrative of Part 2. Hopkins applies his theology through a series of personas and characters. He begins the poem with Death, emphasizing human mortality, the inescapable end of man’s earthly life. If death is the prophet of doom, then the poet counters this character with a prophet of hope—the tall nun. The primary action and the heart of Hopkins’s argument centralizes around the character of the tall nun, as she calls for faith in place of despair, summoning Christ to come quickly upon the waters. This invites the final “character,” the “Other,” who overwhelmingly opposes and conquers death; that is Jesus, who Hopkins knows as “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Although the poet does not seem to intentionally sequence his piece around this proposed trinity, these three characters help structure the body of the second part. Furthermore, moving from death to life, this development permits space for Hopkins to challenge an outsider’s interpretation of the scene. Who is in control? What is at stake? How does one woman’s faith—if it can—affect this disaster? These questions naturally set Hopkins in conversation, for the most part in opposition, with his contemporaries, further emphasizing his nature as a poet-priest, misunderstood, and written into a time before his own.

³¹ One could gesture that the second part of the poem is concealed in the first; the first part of the poem revealed in the second.

Part 1: Dust and Death

Part two of the poem immediately beckons the first new speaker: death. Death speaks of where it is usually found, in the sword, the flange and rail—railway accidents—in “flame, fang or flood” (ll.81-82). Death is entirely prevalent; it is welcome, bugled and foreshadowed by storms; reminders of man’s mortality surround him in the very flesh or fading flowers of the field. And these reminders tempt despair: “But we dream we are rooted in earth—Dust!” (l.85). This first stanza is a bleak reminder of “the bleak share come,” the fall of the “sour scythe,” which comes to harvest all (l.87). This is a far cry from the hopeful earnestness and theological resolve put forth in the last part of the poem. What does one do in the face of such bleakness? Is this hope, all of that theology, just an idealization? Hopkins provides a poetic response to this in “O Death, Death.” In this poem, “He,” Death, “is come” (l.1). The grounds of Hell make room for another soul; despair creeps forward as doom seems to prevail. However, Death is not sovereign. The poem closes with a confirmation of the Kingship of Christ: “The King of Glory will come in” (l.10). Life follows death; Resurrection follows the destruction of the body. It is important to note that this Resurrection does not diminish Christ’s experience of suffering, or man’s suffering; it simply places Jesus’s it in its proper perspective, and makes man’s bearable. For Hopkins, death is a means to life, no longer an abysmal end.

This eschatological prelude should remind readers that they cannot ignore Hopkins’s Catholic theology and his faith because doing so brings about a complete misunderstanding of his poetry. If despair simply overshadows Hopkins’s faith and theology, then Denis Sobolev’s argument in *The Split World of Gerard Manley Hopkins: An Essay in Semiotic Phenomenology* would hold brilliantly. He claims that there is a “central dichotomy”

between the intellectual idealism of Hopkins's Catholicism and his existential reality of his faith. Sobolev grounds his argument on the idea that Hopkins's "experience never matched the redemptive theology" he upheld, causing a split in not only the life, but also the work of the poet (manifest in the seemingly contradictory voices present in the Visionary Sonnets and the Terrible Sonnets) (Sobolev 12-14). With death made present in Part 2, Hopkins seemingly preempts Sobolev's thesis. Religious idealization is just as much an unreality as nihilistic submission to the violence of death. However, Hopkins does not feel a pull between these two extremes. He strikes me as someone who is much more grounded and practical. Clearly, for the poet sin is a lived reality, not simply an intellectual fancy or ideological impurity. Hopkins, then, is not a living a "split life;" he is not a man divided. Rather he is a man aware of the split, the divide that is constitutive of all human life: a life defined by the split between sin and grace. Sobolev's costly ignorance of Hopkins's nuanced and particular theological bearings has taken its toll on his argumentation. One must reconcile the mastery and mercy of God; that is the overall thrust of the poem. A thorough reading of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* will reclaim Hopkins as intellectually and spiritually coherent in the face of the evident incoherencies of both his contemporaries and some of his latter-day critics.

It is important to emphasize here that many of Hopkins contemporaries would shy away from Hopkins staunch supernatural conviction. George Eliot, for instance, sympathizing with the aesthetic appeals of religion as an art form, wrote that she would rather make "ideas incarnate first in the flesh and not in the spirit" (Perkin 137). This pseudo-naturalism evidences and exemplifies John Stuart Mill's own perspective as well. Like Eliot, Mill dismissed the necessity of the supernatural; its appeal, he writes, becomes not only irrelevant but also detrimental, arguing that that belief in the supernatural it hinders "the

development not only of our intellectual but also our moral nature” (Macleod). Not only does Hopkins hold firm to both theology and dogma as intellectual paradigms, but he lives them out as experiential realities as well. The supernatural is indeed a given for the poet.

Furthermore, this not only segments him from these thinkers, but it also places him in conversation with another trending popular assumption: that poetry serves the same function as religion. Mill claims that both religion and poetry are fueled “by the imagination” and tap into “the realm of the unknown;” they capture what seems to be an inherent “human need for some sort of ideal that transcends us” (Macleod). Not only are religion and poetry assumed to be substitutable, during the later half of the nineteenth century, the two forms continue to tend towards personal experience as opposed to communal, marked by individuation and isolation. This “inward turn” supposes that poetry and religion “flourish in self-cultivation” but “lose authenticity when introduced into public controversy and collective political action.” The case has been made—and will be further justified—that Hopkins does not turn away from, but rather, leans into public controversy as he directs the epigram of his poem to the five Franciscan nuns, labeled as “exiles.” Furthermore, the effectiveness of Hopkins’s work is not in his fusion of poetry of religion, and certainly not in his replacement of either for either; instead, his perspicacity arises from his ability to use poetic forms to manifest theological mysteries. Arnold suggested that the “bible and Christian worship” would be retained as poetry—however Hopkins is evidence that both scripture and praise of God are not the end of poetic practice, but actually fuel and fodder for a more searching and engaging piece—as evidenced by his flight to the heart of the host, previously cited (Knight). Hopkins, true to his devotions, especially in light of his contemporaries, strives to unite the intellectual and the spiritual paradigms of his existence.

With this in mind, Hopkins's poem does not tell a disparaging narrative of this shipwreck; rather, he tends to hope, towards an emphasis on God's goodness in the face of despair—a hope, founded on a supernatural conviction, re-presented, not replaced, by poetic form. Despair is foregrounded even at the beginning of the ship's journey: "the goal was a shoal, of a fourth doomed to drowned" (l.94). Hopkins's does not dismiss this premonition of doom to a fair-weathered faithfulness. As Mariani writes in his commentary, "Death's terror is not compromised but it is seen under the corrective adjustment of God's infinite power" (58). Hopkins stares in the face of the destruction, the paradox of ambiguity, of doubt; his poetry fights to see through eyes of faith where God is and what God is doing in the midst of the ship's progress. It is not that the argument is difficult to make; his theology is sound and the response is somewhat straightforward. It seems as if the difficulty lies within the maintenance of faith, as suggested in the question of whether or not God's mercy would reeve them in (l.96). This arises from Hopkins's inability to know the status of these individuals' lives after death. This concern with the question of eternal repose, salvation or condemnation, comes up as he refers to the passengers as souls, "two hundred souls in the round" (l.92). Hopkins reads the scene beyond the bodily, the physical, and tends towards the spiritual state of the passengers. He reminds readers that this is not simply a matter of the mortal body, but the immortal soul—an important, although somewhat redundant, preface for the tale he continues to recount. He then asks a question already raised before, "O Father, not under thy feathers.../ ... did the dark side of the bay of thy blessing / not vault them, the million of round of thy mercy not reeve them / in?" (ll.95-96). Did the "dark side" the terror of death faced by the "fourth doomed to be drowned" actually serve as a "blessing"? Were the deceased "vaulted," covered, protected or treasured? Did the abundance, the "million of

round” of the mercy of God meet them and “reeve” or fasten them “in”? Hopkins cannot answer by fact; however, the reference to God as a bird, as a Father with feather, is his response by faith. The reference recalls Psalm 91:4: “He shall cover thee with his feather, and under his wings shalt thou trust.” Here Hopkins’s faith speaks: God has vaulted them in; a moment not occasioned by grace, but suffering, has become occasioned by grace by the very grace of God. God’s mercy is one in which “we are wound” caught up, tied “with mercy round and round / as if with air” (ll.34-36). The mercy of God abounds and wounds about man—God’s grace goes forth, and the poet prophesies: it is an infinite hope in final moments.

Notwithstanding the mercy of God in which Hopkins hopes, the terror of the incident remains all too real. The following stanzas strike upon this theme: the haven is hurled behind as the ship moves into the “unkind” “infinite air” (l.100). This is not without its biblical precedent, either: “And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that the ship was filled. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, sleeping upon a pillow; and they awake him, and say to him: Master, doth it not concern thee that we perish?” (Mark 4:37-8). God who is infinite is seemingly replaced by the cruelty of nature, the omnipresent, infinite air. Yet if we must juxtapose this “infinite air” with the air the binds us in mercy, cited previously. “O live air / of patience, penance, prayer: world-mothering air, air wild / ... fast fold thy child” (“The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe,” ll.122-126). This “air” isn’t the same as the unkind “infinite air;” this air is an extended metaphor, in the previously referenced poem, for The Blessed Virgin. Within “The Wreck,” then, Hopkins signifies that man has a claim to hope or to despair based upon the air that he breathes in.

Man, in essence, is a child of his own mothering atmosphere.³² However, regardless of one's faith or lack thereof, the terror of the storm is enough to unsettle/sway even the followers of Christ on the sea. This suggests that fear *is* a warranted feeling. For even the ocean is relentless, it is described as an abysmal destroyer of families: "the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps" (1.104). But the question remains, what does one do in response to this feeling? Does one fall into "patience, penance, prayer" or is one disposed to indignation, or perhaps worse, resignation?

"The Wreck" delivers a clear message on the relationship between faith and doubt: faith is not meant to ignore, neglect, or stay doubt as induced by human suffering; if anything, it simply serves to hold it in its proper light. Doubt is an essential component to one who has faith. Joseph Ratzinger, former Pope Benedict XVI, writes in his *Introduction to Christianity*, that the "believer does not live immune to doubt but is always threatened by the plunge into the void." No one can escape unbelief, but simultaneously no one can escape belief: both the believer and the unbeliever share in doubt and faith: in the former, "faith is present against doubt;" for the latter, "*through* doubt and in the *form* of doubt" (Ratzinger 43, 47). Yet doubt is *not* unbelief. Rather doubt is a component of one's faithfulness which is unavoidable—as defined by the very nature of faith, which sees "through a glass in a dark manner" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Faith is tested, tried and forged by questioning; it is as Herbert McCabe posits: "Faith will exclude doubt altogether only when it ceases to be faith and becomes the *vision* of the eternal love which is God" (McCabe 40). With this in mind, we should recall Sobolev's overarching thesis, that Hopkins is maintains a split consciousness due to his existential reality and religious idealism. Evidently, Sobolev is not

³² Hopkins intense, affectionate Marian devotion does indeed set him apart from many of his Christian, even some of his Catholic contemporaries. Chapter 3 will explore this in more detail.

only wrong, but he seems to have misconstrued the fundamentals of Christian belief. The spiritual ideals and lived reality of the Christian will always be, to some extent, out of synch. Such dissonance is the very source and warrant for having faith, of seeing that which is unseen; that is, faith subsists “of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith exists in the face of doubt, not in a space beyond or independent of it.

Faith is forged in challenge; it exists to be exercised, put to the test, especially as doubt builds in the face of accumulating suffering and despair. This dynamic is explored as the *Deutschland* follows its moribund course. “She drove into the dark to leeward, she struck...dead to the Kentish Knock;” beating the “bank down with bows” and “the whorl and the wheel” the pulse of the storm, “these she endured” (ll.105-108). The ship is a living vestige of faith in the face of doubt, of motion forward even in the midst of imminent doom. “She,” the ship, is personified and animated; readers are not only to sympathize but also agonize over this scene (l.105). Hope has “grown grey hairs” wearing “mourning,” “trenched with tears, carved with cares / Hope was twelve hours gone” (ll.112-115). Hope has passed; none can help but see despair seethe as “lives at last were washing away” (l.118). It is as if the poet senses and knows the resignation felt by the ship, as standing in for the crew and passengers barreling into the Knock, knowing that death is inevitable. They “shook in the hurling and horrible airs,” and in this time of mourning, there is no mention of mercy (l.120). The scene truly is horrible. Their mortal fates are sealed. No human heroism can offer salvation. The one who comes “from the rigging to save” ends up being “pitched to his death at a blow,” then dead, “dandled to and fro” for hours (ll.121-124). “What could he do” against “the flood of the wave” (ll.127-128)? Nothing. There is no resisting the power of

nature; there is no countering the utter devastation that comes. No mere man offers salvation; no human project can save these souls.

Hopkins affirms the absolute centrality and certainty of death. It is an absolute precondition for salvation. No man can resist or stay the forces of death. Salvation does not come from man—of this, Hopkins is sure. However, some of his contemporaries would beg to differ. Matthew Arnold is cited as encouraging his audience to fend for “a future on earth, not up in the sky” (Knight). However, Hopkins sees absolutely no future on earth! Hopkins is firm: there is no hope until the supernatural enters the scene. But for his contemporaries, even this seems questionable. So the poet briefly concedes to this skepticism, in order to prepare for the arrival of the tall nun. There is no visible guarantee that God is on these souls’ sides: “They fought with God’s cold—” This line teems with ambiguity: are they facing the cold weather as a force of God or are they experiencing the coldness as evidence of God’s absence or indifference (l.129)? The next line suggests the former, where they “could not and fell to the deck” (l.130). Man could not fight back, man could not resist God’s will—even be it something physically cold and interiorly cold. What follows is just as jarring: “(Crushed them) or water (and drowned them)” (l.131). The parentheticals speak of the unspoken; they give words to the real effects of the storm. “Night roars,” like Satan, a devouring lion on the prowl (1 Peter 5:8: “...adversary the devil, as a roaring lion...seeking whom he may devour”). This recalls Hopkins’s image of the world in darkness—a world where sin and grace are in shadows and eerily similar, where the weeds are among the wheat, waiting until the end of time for the separation of the harvest (Matthew 13: 24-30). The darkness of this night is important because it shows Hopkins’s trust that God is present in the midst of a live battle. God is present; though challenged and obscured, God’s grace remains, even though it

cannot be readily seen. This stalemate holds until someone emerges who is capable of discerning the darkness from the light.

Part 2: A Voice Crying Out

“The woman's wailing, the crying of child without check—
Till A lioness arose breasting the babble,
A prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told” (ll.144-146).

Another lion emerges—a lioness, calling out in spite of the roar of the sea. Hopkins recognizes this lion, the tall nun, as the mouthpiece of salvation, the one through whom hope is voiced in a wilderness of near-death despair. Part 2 builds up until the turn of this moment—the main character of this section appears, the tall nun, the lioness, and the prophetess. Hopkins has charged this “virginal tongue” with the weight of redemption, and the imagery surrounding this character exemplifies her mighty task. The nun appears “breasting the babble.” This virgin prophesies for all, as she rises against the “wailing, the crying” of the perishing to simply unite all the voices, the shouts unto one name, one word: Christ. Genesis 11 is clearly inflected here—God’s people attempt to make a city and a tower to reach heaven in order to make their name famous “before being scattered abroad into all lands.” Mariani suggests that she is “the prophetic tower” that cannot help but prophesy once she finds “markedness, meaning, inscape, in the general catastrophe” (*A Commentary* 60). This prophetess “towered in the tumult:” she has become the quasi-Marian presence at which all of the lost tongues, the lost souls can gather. It is through her call, under her wings, that the perishing souls may return to rest since Christ, the inscape and meaning still present in the terror, is the centripetal, the gathering force behind this woman’s voice. The boldness of the naval technology, the architecture of man, embodied by the *SS Deutschland*, is the new Babble, finding itself in put to battle against “God’s cold.” This is the moment of mastery

since man has neglected the forces of nature, and the omnipotence of the supernatural, in forgoing their mortality by simply charging ahead in the storm in the hope of joining to one new land in the United States. The allusion is not full proof, but it exemplifies the nature of the tall nun. Although God is seen to be mastering in the cold and chaos un-foretold, the tall nun cries out for mercy. She calls out among the noise to reprimand the people for their bold insensitivity and indifference to the forces of nature beyond themselves. This is the turning point—a baptism of repentance pools at the feet of the nun, calling out in the wilderness.

This scene from the eighteenth stanza clearly marks itself as a significant turning point in the narrative. The text follows:

Ah, touched in your bower of bone
Are you! turned for an exquisite smart,
Have you! make words break me from me here all alone,
Do you!—mother of being in me, heart.
O unteachably after evil, but uttering truth,
Why, tears? is it? tears; such a melting, a madrigal start!
Never-eldering revel and river of youth,
What can it be, this glee? the good you have there of your own? (ll.137-144).

At first glance, it is quite easy to misunderstand what exactly Hopkins is after here.

Transitioning from the previous stanza where a “virginal tongue told,” this stanza moves into the next with a “Sister, a sister calling.” With the nun’s action as a frame, from the preceding and into the proceeding stanza, it is easy to imagine that this intermediate section should at least expand upon the telling tongue of the calling sister (ll.136, 145). However, the intermediate stanza does not focus on the crying nun. This stanza captures Hopkins, enthralled and exclaiming, speaking to *his own* heart. Mariani comments that this represents the “heart of the poem,” since it is a “confessional moment” where “the meaning of the nun’s cry” is made clear to the poet (l.151). This section, although isolating the meaning of the nun’s vocalization, is entirely about Hopkins and the movement of his heart, the “mother of

being in me” (l.140). This moment must not be overlooked; this line, “Do you! —mother of being in me, heart,” is exactly at the center of the poem. This biographical moment, where Hopkins once more presents us with his own voice, illustrates how moved the poet is by the nun’s story. This not only illustrates the poet’s own inspiration, but it also resonates with the larger discussion of God’s activity and grace amongst men.

The confessional moment of this stanza exemplifies the spiritual reality that God’s grace *can* work, but it doesn’t *have to* work. This stanza is the turning point in the poem because it represents Hopkins’s own personal epiphany that God’s grace, his very presence, is active in the heart of the nun calling out for Christ in the midst of the wreck. Like his own heart, within the nun’s bower, where her inmost self is anchored, in a sense, she, too, has been touched by the grace of God. This act, the touch of God’s finger is what first stirred Hopkins in the beginning of the poem, recalling the beginning of Part 1, linking the moment of mastery (Thou mastering me God!) with this moment of mercy. This is marked by Hopkins confession, his emotional response, to the witness of what the nun “is,” “has,” and “does” (Are you! Have you! Do you!) (ll.138-140). He is rendered speechless, no words can come forth from him; tears stream down his face: “Why, tears! is it? tears; such a melting, madrigal start!” (l.142). But the crucial component for us to consider here is not so much God’s agency or the presence of his grace (which Hopkins would argue is ever-present), but rather, the nun’s response to grace. This then acknowledges how some readily reject the grace and mercy of God; mercy is no inevitability. Hopkins makes this altogether clear at the onset: he, like the nun, like Mary, “did say yes” (l.9). This wreck which *is* destructive becomes re-purposed by the grace of God toward a greater good; that which is “unteachably evil” becomes a moment that “utters truth” because of the one who uttered truth (l.141). This

does not remove the crisis from the cries; rather it's Hopkins joyful exclamation that the wreck did not have to end, eternally, in desolation. This utterance of truth stirs about a melting which is not necessarily destructive; it is joyful, a "never-eldering revel and river of youth" (l.143). The experience of this sound is likened to eternity, a never-ending river of youth. And all of this revelry is sourced from and ends in Christ: a word that strikes the "mother of being in me," the depths of the human heart (l.140). And it is this Word through which Hopkins perfects the plight of the prophetess. Christ's promise of mercy has entered the scene—"the good you have there of your own" is that very image and likeness of Christ in man, an inscape that is altogether worthy of the grace of redemption (l.143).

The sourcing of this immortal hope in Christ, the "inscape" of man, is revealed in the following stanza. The exclamations and "glee" consummate as we uncover that she is calling for: "a master, her master and mine!" (ll.144-145). It is important to note that as the woman calls for her master, she is calling for her savior. That is, she is not calling to be mastered, as in defeated; rather, she is calling to be mastered in Christ, that is, saved—brought to the fullness of eternal life, free from the suffering she faces. She not only calls upon her master, but is, herself, "a master." This sister comes forth as the re-presentation of Christ to those perishing aboard the ship. She "sees one thing, one; / has one fetch in her: she rears herself to divine / Ears" (ll.149-151). This "fetch" could be far-reaching effort, as Phillips reads; yet it could also be an indication of a more interior, spiritual fetch—her "fetch" as in her doppelgänger: Christ. Hopkins motions to this kinship here; her words hallow God's "Ears," highlighting her mediatory role, as she beckons: "My God, my God, make haste, make haste" (*HMW*, 338). She casts her eyes to God yet nevertheless she acknowledges the darkness of the storm. She is calling, the storm is "brawling." It is not the interplay between God and the

woman that is at hand; instead, the poet emphasizes the shouting match between the woman and the sea. Here Hopkins elucidates the power of her testimony, of seeking God in the midst of disaster. She has taken on the role of Christ, calling to God from what should be understood as her cross. We can compare this to what Hopkins wrote: “Christ called to us from his cross more than we call to him there” (*SDW*, 49). Yet the nun calls to Christ on the cross from her cross; she seeks her master even in the face of disaster. This is faithfulness, true perseverance in the darkness, even during what feels like abandonment.

Hopkins’s faithfulness should be regarded as some garden-variety brand; rather it is firm, uncompromising and demanding. His convictions startle and complicate a more conventional, middle-class Victorian notion of religion and spirituality. For example, if we briefly consider George Eliot’s classic *Middlemarch* (1871), we see a few different perspectives on how religion is portrayed and lived out. In the text, religion, for some, operates strictly as a means of social or behavioral control: “...all men needed the bridle of religion, which properly speaking, was the dread of a Hereafter” (Eliot, Chapter II). In Eliot’s novel, her characters liken religion to a restraining force. In certain moments, it is also described as “support,” particularly for the elderly; overall, however, it is construed as a series of norms around which society can structure and govern itself (Chapter XII). At best, then, religion becomes an “outward requirement,” like “marriage,” “erudition” or “authorship,” something man-made that serves as a marker of dignity, respect (Chapter XXIX). Created and caricatured by man, like a novel or a relationship, it is entirely distinct from a Creator, let alone any supernatural force. Eliot’s appraisal of religion in *Middlemarch* basically refers to “not what you know” (or who you know, or don’t know), but “the belief that helps you most” (Chapter XXXIX). Religion, then, isn’t grounded on truth, a universal

reality or systematic means of knowing the world, but a rudimentary self-help program: what is best for my cause and me. All of this is to say that in the town of Middlemarch, perhaps all the more in the Victorian religious imagination, religion has become sentimental and subjective. However, within Hopkins, characterized by the outcry of the nun, religion is still very much a lived reality, tested and tried on the extremities of human destruction. It is all consuming and communal. Religious experience is public and personal as Hopkins, the nun, and the perishing souls share the same “master.” From this reality of faith, that the nun musters the confidence to call out to Christ on behalf of the others, who like her are yoked to an imminent death while yoked to the universality of Christ’s redemptive act.

George Eliot’s sentimental portrait of religion as a personal self-help program squirms in front of the altar of Hopkins’s devotional approach. The poet realizes that true religious faith guarantees the greatest help for one’s soul—and this “help” is almost always accompanied by hurt, that is, the cross. For example, Hopkins does not limit the extent to which he understands this nun’s suffering. Making even more of an example out of her witness, Hopkins likens this nun and her fellow sisters to martyrs of the Church. This not only ties her closer to Christ, as a recipient of persecution—an exile from Germany—but it also lodges a social and political critique within the text. This critique comes forth in the “double a desperate name!” of the *Deutschland* (l.155). This recalls Eisleben, the home of the Franciscan women, recollecting memories of “Christ’s lily and the beast of the waster wood:” Saint Gertrude and Martin Luther (l.157). These polarizing forces, Gertrude, a Catholic mystic known for her purity, and Luther, the face of the Protestant reformation, are at battle in this stanza. On a larger scale, Hopkins draws out these characters to represent once more how grace and sin, more so, good and evil mingle; “Abel is Cain’s brother and

breasts they have suckled the same” (l.160). Hopkins marvels at the interrelations between the darkness and the light—between what he sees as religious purity and religious persecution. The “beast” recalls Psalm 79:14, which reads: “The boar out of the wood hath laid it waste: and a singular wild beast hath devoured it.” Calling Luther the beast of the wood motions to the systematic devastation of the Catholic Church that Hopkins sees as a by-product of the Reformation. This would then be connected to the *Kulturkampf*, which “banned” the “coifed sisterhood” from the “land of their birth” (ll.153-154, 162). Now not only are they “coifed”—as in dressed in their habits—but they are also coifed by their nation, covered, hidden, and cast away: “Rhine refused them, Thames would ruin them” (l.163). Herein lies an altogether essential component of Hopkins argument: since the nuns are cast out by their faith, inherently as a result, they are not simply political-religious exiles, but martyrs. They are denied Rhine and the Thames, given over to “surf, snow, river and earth / Gnashed” (ll. 164-165). Nature’s wrath reflects a disordered cosmos, for which Luther was an early catalyst, consummated in Bismarck’s anti-Catholic legislation. The nun, then, voices a critique and condemnation against her homeland, one that, despite its riches has and is tending toward darkness and evil, a “world wide of its good”— prophetic, in light of the coming crises of world wars.

It should not be taken lightly that Hopkins considers these women martyrs. Muller writes that as Hopkins argues in favor of “divine intervention in the life of an anonymous Franciscan nun” he summarily “defies German persecution and British indifference” (64). This point highlights the edge by which his poem sharpens its argument. It also emphasizes the vested interest of Hopkins religious faith. He is not “indifferent,” and motivating his concern and interest is his belief that God is not indifferent either. This then assumes that

God is no clockmaker, setting a scene into motion, casting humans to their whims and wiles. Instead, Hopkins is convinced of man's living in response to God's grace, or his living presence among men. Therefore, to call these nuns martyrs is a deliberately controversial decision on the poet's part and a decision that further isolates him from his contemporaries. A martyr is essentially someone who dies refusing to deny his or her faith. If these nuns are martyrs, then Hopkins is claiming that they are rejecting political power and social influence in favor of divine authority. That is, they—and Hopkins—seem to believe that by trusting in God's mercy, God will be proven to be sovereign all the more. They refuse to denounce their Catholic faith in the face of *Kulturkampf*. Hopkins not only sanctifies and elevates these women, then, but he places the price of their blood on Bismarck and his governance. In order to see these women as true martyrs, Hopkins describes the storm and sea as the means of execution: "Storm flakes" as "scroll-leaved flower, lily shower" (l.168). The storm flakes, the onslaught of the snow, through eyes of faith, appears like the downfall of the gospel, of the prophetic word of God, the scroll which purifies and does not condemn these women. Many Catholics in Europe, like Hopkins, believed these nuns to be martyrs (*HMW*, 339). This is evidenced in the poetry, as God casts away the evident darkness of the world, more so as God "unchannels" these women to the world as heroic saints (ll.165-166). A "chancel" is a screen that would traditionally separate cloistered nuns from the outside world; God, then, is the unchancellor, the one who removes the means of separating the nun from the world. The "martyr-master" reveals his very martyrs in these nuns; those weighed as worthy, the ones who have "sweet heaven" "astrew in them" (ll.167-169). This storm, then, is not a hindrance to, but deliverance into salvation—a salvation denied, as Hopkins reminds, by the state, yet one entirely perpetuated by God, the true master.

Part 3: The Cipher, the Christ

Once these women are elevated as martyrs, Hopkins not only sharpens “The Wreck’s” political edge but he also deepens and develops the poem’s theological thrust. Specifically, the poem’s Christology heightens dramatically once these socio-political stakes are set. The “Five!” are seen as a “cipher of suffering Christ” (ll.169-170). The number is of notice because tradition associates Christ as having been marked with five wounds; Hopkins nominally links this with the number of nuns, as if to claim a prophetic, revelatory resonance. In “Rosa Mystica” (1878) Hopkins “I shall worship His wounds with Thee, mother of mine” (l. 36). Not only do the wounds serve as a symbolic pivot point for the poet, but they also represent sites of worship. Hopkins, in worshipping the wounds of Jesus, suggests that these nuns not be worshipped, but rather, venerated in so far as they are seen as sharing in the suffering and salvation of Jesus. Furthermore, these wounds also signify and reassure the sovereignty of God. Although the marks of Christ are “of man’s make,” the “word of it Sacrificed,” Hopkins acknowledges that God oversaw and enabled the suffering of his Son (ll.171-172). The cup of the passion does indeed pass Christ’s lips; his wounds have been consecrated, set aside, marked and known by God for the salvation of the world (Matthew 26:39). This predestination, in a sense, is also argued by Hopkins; he seems to claim that although the exile was man-made, these nuns, like Christ, must have been “Before-time-taken,” scored in “scarlet,” “dearest prized and priced”—called to a death like this (l.174). This idea and language explicitly recalls 1 Peter 1:18-21:

Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but manifested for you Who through him are faithful in God, who raised him up from the dead, and hath given him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.

All of this is to say: the death of these nuns is seen as not only reflective of, but as redeemed in Christ's sacrifice. In faith, they enter into Christ's death; in Christ, they can now do more than just give God glory; they can hope to eternally "be in God" by their very passion.

This gives way to a concept realized in another of Hopkins's poems, "Margaret Clitheroe" (1876-1877), Margaret, officially venerated as a saint and martyr of the Catholic Church, after being "pressed to death," represents another example of Hopkins's intense and intimate Christology (l.4). It is "Christ" who "lived in Margaret Clitheroe;" she, like the tall nun, had a "Christ-ed beauty of her mind" (ll.28, 15). She is "just like Jesus crucified," marked as sharing intimately in the sufferings of Christ, like the nuns (l.50). This serves to expose Hopkins's fascination not only with sanctity, but sanctity as it pertains to suffering. Furthermore, this poem, taken alongside the story of the nuns in "The Wreck" reveals the profundity of Hopkins own Christ-centered faith. He writes that all men are called to live as an "AfterChrist;" but he does not stop there, he goes on to suggest that man is made to take on "the simple presence of God's design or inscape (that is, Christ)" (Devlin, *SDW*, 109). Therefore, in "The Wreck" as Hopkins references "stigma, signal, cinquefoil token / for the lettering of the lamb's fleece, ruddying of the rose-flake" he merges scripture and tradition, recalling both the imagery and language of the verse from 1 Peter, alongside the lives of the saints, to reiterate this sacrificial and redemptive resonance: Christ's sacrifice, the inscape of his being, is alive and at work in the shared sacrifice of the women (ll.175-176). This Christological paradigm continues as readers are reminded of the nuns' spiritual father, Francis of Assisi. He too shared intimately in the sufferings of Christ when he was marked with the stigmata—the fives aforementioned wounds—when he experienced a vision of Jesus as a crucified seraph. Hopkins clearly weaves these women into Church history as he binds

their story and suffering to Jesus, the “Lovescape crucified” (l.180). They are “sisterly sealed in wild waters,” marked as martyrs by the poet, “to bathe in his fall-gold mercies, to breathe in his all-fire glances” (ll.183-184). This mystical image recalls the Book of Revelation that reads: “...his eyes were as a flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass, as in a burning furnace. And his voice as the sound of many waters... (1:14-15). The “wild waters” are wild in mercy; so immersed are these women in Christ (as Hopkins imagines) that they know no other intimacy other than that of their God. The misery of death is mastered by martyrdom; God’s mercy reigns even as the nuns are lost in wild waters, which are not a closed tomb but a seal for eternal life.

In reference to the stigmata, Mary, and the lives of the saints, we can identify another robust and unique aspect of Hopkins’s religious fervor. Hopkins did not disdain the miraculous; instead, his piety tended towards an appreciation and veneration of mystery. Mystery, as defined by the poet himself, refers to an “incomprehensible certainty;” this, he argues, is a Catholic understanding of mystery as opposed to an object of fancy, or an “interesting uncertainty” (CW2, 619). Hopkins sees the unknowable, and responds with child-like wonder and awe—not with a cutting skepticism that denies possibility on grounds of empirical incredulity. This juxtaposes the poet-priest with many of his Protestant contemporaries. In particular, if we consider Charles Kingsley’s robust inquisition of John Henry Newman titled, “*What, Then, Does Dr. Newman Mean?*,” we can consider much of the suspicion directed towards Catholicism and popular Catholic piety. This letter, Kingsley’s attempt at “baiting” Newman’s theological and denominational loyalties,³³ prompted Newman’s own autobiography and defense of his religious opinions, and naturally

³³ For instance, Kingsley asks if Newman meant, “To insinuate that a Church which had sacramental confession and a celibate clergy was the only true Church?” as if he did not already presume the answer in crafting his direct dictum.

following his conversion, the Catholic faith titled, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Kingsley's skepticism is quite ostensible: in response to Newman's commentary on the miracles in the life of St. Walburga, he writes that his interlocutor comes across as "more materialist than the dreams of any bone-worshipping Buddhist." A bit later in the letter, discussing Newman on St. Sturme, he writes that "There is no hint of a miracle," Sturme and his companions were simply smelling a "horde of dirty savages," and the saint could not possibly smell the state of the "savages'" souls, as the story so claimed. Kingsley hostility holds a bright light to Hopkins radical devotion to mystery and miracles. Where outsiders would imagine Hopkins to be a bone-worshipper or a materialist, he remains steadfast all the more to what he sees in the lives of the saints, like Margaret Clitheroe or the tall nun, a faith that shares so intimately in the life of Christ that it is no longer they who live, but Christ who lives in them (Galatians 2:20). Hopkins's poem, then, given the assumptions and supernatural assumptions upon which it operates, is a bold testament in the face of an incredulous public attempting to unmask the immensity of religion's mysterious essence.

Hopkins develops his theology by confronting the reality of death, not by neglecting it, but by examining it in light of the mysterious and miraculous. He does not idealize but, instead, allows his own personal voice, his "I," to enter into the scene ("I was under a roof here...") (l.188). Hopkins as poet then recalls when he first met the tall nun. Reading her story while "on a pastoral forehead of Wales" (187), he hears her calling out, near death. This personal reflection is important because it emphasizes how Hopkins does not avoid any of his own experience, his doubt or emotion that would ensue, but he faces it, and then directs to further enter into the experience of those outside of his self. Private, personal faith, then, is portrayed, once more, as something altogether linked to the Church, or a shared body of

belief. Needless to say, Hopkins identifies with the fallen nun as a sister in Christ, as a member of the same body (Romans 12). Hopkins's own self-reflection reminds us that he, unlike many of his contemporaries, does not see faith as something meant to be subjective and personal, but something that inherently joins one more intimately with the world. He refuses the inward turn postulated and preferred by many thinkers like Arnold. For instance, this same stanza goes on to describe how the nun called out, as prophet, acting in Christ as one who "christens:" "The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wildworst Best" (l.192). This act of christening captures an evangelical impulse, a sharing of and witness to faith in Christ. The "wildworst" is bested by the voice calling out, "O Christ, O Christ, come quickly" (l.191). This supplication is the act that fights back against the force of the storm. For the poet and the prophetess, Jesus, the Christ, is the salvific confrontation and conquering force of death's inevitability for all who hear, repent, and believe.

This salvific confrontation seems to represent Hopkins's understanding of the nun's bold proclamation. However, the question does not fade: "The majesty! what did she mean?" (l.193). Hopkins does not pose this question in order to get at the content of the nun's call—of that he seems altogether certain. He must be wondering, then: what did she want? What did she desire, long for, envision in crying out as she did for Christ to come quickly? Stanzas 25-28 explore these questions of the nun's desire, since Hopkins's certainty of her desire is untenable, formless. There would be no way for him to know her heart other than by the nuance of her words, the witness of others, but primarily, through the wisdom of God. So he does not relent to Hopkins call on the Holy Spirit, "Breathe, arch and original Breath" (l.194). This image of Spirit as original breath recalls the formless abyss in Genesis 1 that is given life and order by God's breath. God has been seen to bring forth light from the

darkness, for the souls on the ship, as well as for Hopkins own darkened understanding of what had actually happened on the *Deutschland* and in the nun's heart. He wonders: "is it love in her of the being as her lover had been?" What moves her to cry out? Does she, like the disciples in the night who are terrified by the storm, call out "else-minded," seeking only to save herself from "perishing in the weather" (cf. Matthew 8:23-27) (ll.195-198)? These questions stir the poet's heart—these questions, evidently, are the very driving forces behind the creative thrust of Hopkins's theological argument poem.

If we take the questions the poet asks of the nun's desires, we quickly understand that she simply hungers for one thing, a person. It is not "love in her of the being as her lover had been;" she does not long for love or to be loved. She does not desire "the crown" of imperishable glory, of heavenly sanctity (l.199; 1 Corinthians 9:25). She does not want "comfort" or a stay to the terror (l.200); neither does she desire any other treasure, seen or unseen (ll.207-208). No, instead, she calls out, embodying "the appealing of the Passion," the "tenderer in prayer apart"—the desire, the supplication, most intimate to her heart—longing for "Other" (ll.214-215). This "Other" is a person; this "Other" is a living God: it is Jesus. The fragmentary style of the 28th stanza frames the nun's feelings of exile and longing: "But how shall I...make me room there:" (l.217). She is not only alienated from Christ, truly now the Other, but she is powerless to do anything about her exile. What can she do anything other than cry out for him? How shall she even make this desire known other than by calling his name, and calling for him to come quickly? Hopkins emphasizes the woman's desire for Christ as he articulates the agency of God. The nun asks Jesus to "make me room," to "reach me," to "cure the extremity" of her exile, and to ultimately "Do, deal lord it" (ll.217-219, ll.222-223). She is powerless and she calls for Christ. She longs for him, as the poem reads,

“Let him ride” (l.224). And ride is an especially crucial and revealing verb. Jesus rides over the terror of the tides (consider Matthew 14); God’s bliss, from stanza 6, “rides time like riding a river,” and if we are ignorant of God’s grace, of his mercy, which “hushes guilt.” Hopkins seems to insinuate in his parenthetical, “(and here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss)” (ll.42-48). The nun’s cry is a petition for Christ, for a fully realized eschatological moment where mastery meets mercy, as God vanquishes death and reigns victorious, with those salvaged souls, in triumph.

Hopkins’s poetic thesis depends upon his reading of the tall nun and her desire for Christ, the “Other,” because she is the vessel and byproduct of God’s merciful mastery, the exposition of a Christian example (literally, an example of Christ) for the perishing to follow into salvation. With this in mind, it is not surprising that the poet sees the heart of the nun as “right” or righteous (l.225); she is regarded as pure of heart, as single-mindedly, with a “single eye” set on Christ (l.226). All of this implies that she may actually “see” God (Matthew 5:8). His formulation of this woman’s faith is then unassailable. Therefore, when she reads the “unshapeable shock night” and knows “the who and the why” that is “wording it” all, she is not mistaken (ll.227-229). However, Sobolev reads the “unshapeability” of the night as an irreconcilable contradiction between “understanding and its impossibility”—as if there were no way to make shape of something so morbid as the tragic death of these souls and the mercy of God (Sobolev 321). Yet Hopkins sees this reconciliation as mediated by such pure faith, which the nun exemplifies as she calls out Christ’s name. Hopkins takes this a step further, exalting the nun by linking her witness to that of Peter. She stands, witnessing to the salvific, messianic mission of Jesus like Simon Peter in Matthew 16, as he proclaims, “Thou art Christ, the Son of the Living God...” She is the “Simon Peter of a Soul” calling

not only people to God but to the Catholic Church, “to the blast Tarpein-fast,” recalling the Tarpeian Rock of the Roman Empire (ll.231-232). Likened to the first pope of the Catholic Church, she, then, is a foundress on the seas—one that “heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright” (l.240). This escalates the stakes of Hopkins’s politico-religious *Kulturkampf*, where the nun is held fast to the true, non-reformed Church, the Catholic faith, upon which the “gates of hell shall not prevail.” This unassailability of the Church is lodged within the witness of the nun, as she too stands firm against the consequences of European powers that sought to persecute her faith.

Hopkins takes this argument a step further, and affirms and sanctifies this nun by making another reference to Mary, particularly Mary the Immaculate Conception, and the liturgical celebration upon which the ship was wrecked. The feast that followed “this night” was that “of the one woman without stain.” As if this had all been cosmologically conceived, “for so conceived, so to conceive thee is done,” Hopkins has conceived the tall nun not only as a Petrine figure, but once more, as a quasi-Marian presence, as one who utters the word of God, Jesus Christ to the world (ll.237-239). These examples are simply Christian precedents for what would then be the ultimate honor and goal. In his eyes, by being like Peter and Mary, she is likened to Jesus, as a shepherd going after the lost sheep. She can “startle the poor sheep back.” The “shipwreck then a harvest”—an abundant harvest—where there is hope even for the “uncomforted” and “unconfessed” because of “lovely-felicitous Providence,” a lovely mercy, even in the face of mastery (l.247). This goes to illustrate how theology is an embodied and participatory reality. The poem does not simply make an ideological argument; it shows how one is lived by Hopkins’s esteemed rendering of the nun’s Christian example.

Conclusion: Merciful in Mastery

In full, this work ultimately serves as Hopkins's confession of faith: "I admire thee, master of the tides" (l.249). Despite the terror of the scene—"the girth of it and the wharf of it and the wall," in spite of all of these limitations and restrictions, the "ground of being, and granite of it," the cornerstone of his faith, of his thesis is Christ (ll.251-253). God is behind all of these workings, even if he is shaded or the viewer is jaded. God is "Past all;" one must "Grasp God, throned behind" (ll.253-254). One must act, correspond with grace in order to fully acknowledge and worship the God that is throned, sovereign as master, reigning over doom conquered in the cross of Christ. God "heeds but hides, bodes but abides;" (l.255). The poet has not necessarily dispelled doubt; no, but by faith he has founded and poeticized how to confront apparent human uncertainties. He recognizes the ominous boding nature of God's grandeur and has seen it tempered, polished in God's abiding love. Masterful in mercy, present while hiding, Hopkins hears God, a voiced in the silence of the storm.

As mentioned previously, the poet's confession of faith is one that abides and endures even in the face of doubt. This perseverance is actually embodied by the poem as the 32nd stanza ends with a semicolon ("...abides;" l.256). Not only does the word abide connote this act of remaining, but the poem endures, tolerates, and bears with its own uncertainties, "with a mercy that outrides / the all of water, an ark" (ll.257-258). God's mercy moves beyond the wreck of this "ark" just as the poet's faith moves through doubt; this merits a further parallel: although the *Deutschland* falls, God's sovereign power does not fail. And Hopkins affirms, "for the listener; for the linger with a love glides / lower than death and the dark" (ll.268-269). "God's sovereign power" is love. Therefore, it is God's power that glides beyond death and darkness, harrowing souls from the suffering of Hell. This is to say that Hopkins sees

God as capable of moving beyond the despair of the suffering of the scene. This love is the vein by which the “past-prayer, pent in prison” forgotten, cast away souls can still find and experience “the uttermost mark” of mercy even upon their “last-breath” exhalation (ll.261-262). The nun, the “passion-plunged giant risen,” has called upon her fetch, Christ, and brought about the strides of God’s mercy (l.263). These strides of God’s mercy are described in the following line: “The Christ of the Father compassionate, fetched in the storm of his / strides” (l.264). Mercy *outrides*, abides and overcomes, according to God’s *strides*. The poet not only sonically links these words (at the last words of the first and last lines of the 34th stanza) because they are functionally linked too. God outrides in mercy as he strides forth in majesty and mastery. All formal constraints, all-human constraints are lifted, as both poet and prophet abide in their trust in the goodness of God.

This trust in the goodness of God is ultimately a trust in the hope of the Resurrection, of new life in Christ. If these nuns, and those perishing souls, share in the resurrection then they are indeed not dead, but “new born to the world” (l.265). Hopkins culminates his poem with a full vision of life that proceeds and vanquishes the sovereignty of death. This vision is Christ, and Hopkins now looks to him, calling upon him, “Now burn”—he is the “Double-natured name,” the one who has lived as both fully human and fully divine (ll.265-266). No longer is the ship duplicitous in nature or name, but Christ is: he has become the new vessel. He has been flung from heaven, given heart incarnate, and was “furled,” rolled up, contained as an infant, woven in the Virgin womb of Mary (l.267). Hopkins looks to Christ, the “Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame,” he is “mid-numbered” of the Holy Trinity, King of the universe, hailing from the “thunder-throne” and out-stressed into the life of man (ll.268-269). Hopkins worships, he sings the praise of his God. Through this worship, his experience of

Jesus is “not a dooms-day dazzle,” a time of confusion or of sadness; rather he sees Christ as coming in kindness and kingship, “royally reclaiming his own” (ll.270-271). God’s mastery is one that does not dismiss, but one that reclaims the lost. This is merciful; the King does not dispatch the dazzle of doomsday, but yet another means of reconciliation. This echoes the parable of Matthew 25:31: “And when the Son of man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the seat of his majesty.” Jesus speaks of his own return. He will collect his flock, his sheep, “reclaiming his own,” separating the sheep from the goats. The Christ does not will “a lightning of fire / hard hurled” like James and John desire upon the Samaritans (Luke 9:54). Instead, he releases a shower—recalling the “lily shower—sweet heaven” of stanza 21. Hopkins emphasizes, once more, that God is merciful. Fire is not hard-hurled as destructive, but fire is live-giving because the Spirit is incarnate in Mary, and through Mary, made present to man, since Jesus is the “Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame,” conceived by the Spirit (l.268). Jesus, the “maiden-furled,” is the “hard-hurled,” God from God, God to man, made manifest in a sacrifice, a Lovescape Crucified, a magnet of mercy.

The close of the poem is solidified in a final Christological vision of God, of Christ as Lord who is enthroned as master, ruling in mercy. Hopkins first draws the poem to this Christ-centered conclusion by asking for the intercession of the fallen nun: “Dame, at our door... Remember us on the roads, the heaven-haven of the Reward” (ll.273-275). He prays for rebirth, a spiritual renewal “Oh, upon English souls!” (l.276). He intends the poem, this prayer, to stir the strayed and the straying Englishmen back to not only Christ, but also to the true Church of Christ. His politico-religious message comes here, since Christ is King. He is sovereign, not the anti-Catholic social forces, and, as Hopkins sees it, God’s sovereignty

overrides the reformed wilderness permitted by Luther. Hopkins looks “directly to Christ,” who is “the rising sun, source of renewal and resurrection,” on behalf of those in “rare-dear Britain” (Mariani, *Commentary*, 72; 1.278). His prayer longs for Jesus to “easter in us;” it is a petition to share in the Easter life of the resurrected Christ (1.277). This “eastered” life is marked and made by mastery, by sovereignty, as “his reign rolls,” fired by God’s merciful love, or “our heart’s charity’s hearth’s fire” (1.278). This hearth fire of love in our hearts is the aforementioned “fire of stress,” now understood and re-presented as “the fire of Christ’s charity spreading in the hearts of all” (Mariani 72). This love is shared and owned by those who enter into it: “our hearts’ ...”our thoughts’ ...Lord” (1.280). In Christ, the human heart is imbued with the fire of God’s love, with the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is the “sacred body and sacred heart” of Jesus which Hopkins claimed “seemed waiting for an opportunity of discharging themselves” and their discharge is that of merciful love, here imagined as fire (*SDW*, 254). Needless to say, this is no destructive fire. Rather, it is restorative, intimate, and illuminating like the warmth and light of a hearth. Hopkins closes as he began, then, with his eyes on God. Yet now he sees Christ: “Pride, rose, prince, here of us, high-priest” (1.279). He calls upon Christ, the one who “rose” from the dead; he sees him as the one “here of us,” of mankind, amongst humanity in the flesh through the incarnation. “Thou” is made manifest, personal in Christ. Christ is vindicated as King, as the master reigning in mercy. This realizes Hopkins’s primary motive: the wreck of the ship, the wreck of the world, is salvaged under the kingship of Christ.

Chapter 3: The Privileges of Mary

Introduction: Conceiving Hopkins's Marian Heart

Hopkins scholarship seems to be silent on Mary, the mother of Jesus. Few authors attempt to unpack the depth and breadth of his Marian poetry, let alone his private Marian devotion. Reading Hopkins, we cannot help but stumble upon Mary's presence and influence. Even outside of Hopkins's spiritual writings, his Marian devotion comes alive in his poetry. Scholars often disregard or neglect these poems as "less familiar" but they are inevitably present in his canon (McDevitt 31). If and when an author considers these poems or Hopkins's Marian devotion, it is often, as it should be at first, text-immanent. For example, Walter Ong (a Jesuit priest) refines the reading of the tall nun from "The Wreck of the Deutschland" by considering her "yes" to Christ in the storm alongside that of Mary's yes at the Annunciation from Luke's gospel (52). However, Mary's role is much more than a thematic, ideological, or theological intrigue for Hopkins. She holds a certain "presence, power" that is more than metaphorical figure or icon ("The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe," 1.26). Mary is likened to air, a fundamental force of sustenance for Hopkins's faith in Christ. This is to say that his Marian piety is an unmistakable marker and qualifier of his lived Catholic faith, which comes across quite notably in his Marian poetry and spiritual writings.

Mary provides a fundamental paradigm through which we will reconsider and read Hopkins life and work. This approach ought to be taken given three key considerations. First, the larger cultural context surrounding devotion to Mary within Catholic communities in Europe in the 19th century provides an interesting interlocutor for Hopkins work and thought, as well as a foundation for understanding how Hopkins would come to view and understand

Mary and devotion to Mary. Hopkins's Marian poetry ponders Mary as Immaculate, as virgin, and as mother, expressing Hopkins's evident affection, interest, and devotion to the Mother of God.³⁴ This devotion will be extrapolated and related to his poetry as I reference Hopkins's sermons and devotional writings throughout a discussion of his poetry. These excerpts articulate and define his particular devotion to Jesus through Mary, and will help shed another critical light on Hopkins's Mariology.

One could argue that Hopkins's devotional pieces have been avoided because they are too sentimental. For example, the poet himself seems to chide his own "Marian masterpiece" when he says that it is a "compromise with popular taste" to Robert Bridges. Mary, who Hopkins there does deem the "highest subject," allegedly is not treated with the foremost of poetic reverence: "the highest subjects are not those on which it is easy to reach one's highest." When Hopkins tells Bridges that it is not "convenient or desirable" to send "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe," does he condemn his own work (*CW2*, 576)? Does he deride his own Marian devotion? Perhaps we could chalk this exchange to humility. But we shouldn't assume that "popular taste" is the preferable taste for the poet. Hopkins audience is small: the only public for whom he writes is the editors of the *Month*, his family, Robert Bridges, Canon Dixon, and Coventry Patmore (*CW2*, 681). I'd suggest reading Hopkins's own words as a "harsh self-assessment;" his poem actually does reach and define new bounds, breaking from popular taste, which McDevitt rightly understands as a "maudlin spirituality," or a sentimental religiosity. Hopkins, instead, offers both "artistic and theological maturity" in his very Marian poem—a poem which he is understandably cautious

³⁴ The canon of Hopkins poems in which Marian motifs dominate consists of "Oratio Patris Condren: O Jesu vivens in Maria," "To the Greater Glory of God: A Communion Hymn to the Virgin Mother at the Feast of the Nativity," "May Lines," "Ad Mariam," "Rosa Mystica," "The May Magnificat," "Angelus Ad Virginem," and most remarkably "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe." This neglects the poetry where Mary is referenced, like "No worst" and "The Wreck," so by no means is this list exhaustive, but it is a starting point.

to share with Bridges who may not fully know or care to know of Mary as a spiritual presence and power, especially in the life of his best friend (31). Overall, then, Mary will be seen as a crucible, a *spiritual and physical* forge not simply for Hopkins's poetry, but for the priest's very life. The depth of his poetry is scored by the fact that he sought to practice a very real and practical form of devotion to his Blessed Mother. These Marian poems further define Hopkins as an outsider to his contemporaries, to the popular "maudlin" spirit. His poetry does not singularly rely on religious zeal or pious feeling, but his theological breadth, as it forms his practical life, informs and forms his poetic content.

Part 1: "I am the Immaculate Conception:" Marian Mysteries

The rose in a mystery, where is it found? / Is it anything true? Does it grow upon ground?—/ It was made of earth's mould but it went from men's eyes /And its place is a secret and shut in the skies. / Refrain— / *In the gardens of God, in the daylight divine / Find me a place by thee, mother of mine.* ("Rosa Mystica," ll.1-7)

Hopkins picks Mary; he plucks and poeticizes her as "the rose in a mystery" (l.1). She is a figure shrouded in uncertainty, ambiguity, and evident rose-like beauty. The barrage of rhetorical questions in these opening lines are not stumbling blocks, but rather, they are entry points into the mystery of the rose. What exactly does the poet marvel at? He wonders at the flesh of Mary: "where is it found?" Did she grow upon ground? He wonders: "but where was it formerly?" (l.8). That is, he asks about the Immaculate Conception, where and how Mary was held free from sin. He wonders: "Who can her rose be?" (l.28). Her rose is "Christ Jesus," but who else, how else, is Mary the mother of other spiritual children (l.29)? Although these mysteries aren't exhaustive, they begin to provoke Hopkins own fascination with Mary and her relationship to the incarnation, Jesus, her son, and humanity.

Each stanza of the "Rosa Mystica" features a direct address from Hopkins to Mary. He calls her "mother of mine," illustrating that one of the most central Marian mysteries for

Hopkins is her universal maternity. The poet marvels at his spiritual mother wondering where she can be found, if she can even be found, shrouded in mystery as she is. This causes him to wonder, what can be proven true about her life (1.7)? In order to begin unpacking this mystery, Hopkins emphasizes the reality, the flesh of Mary. “It is Galilee’s growth: it grew at God’s will” (1.10). Hopkins settles upon her human nature, that she was “made of earth’s mould,” something which, theologically speaking, must be true, given that Jesus is the word made flesh, God incarnate, through the incarnation realized in Mary (1.3). Therefore this woman is both seen and unseen—like the rose, Mary “went from men’s eyes,” in regards to the mystery of the Assumption (1.3). Very tenuously, we can see how Hopkins poetry pivots from material creation to mystery, from the seen to the unseen, illustrating the very nature of his incarnational poetics, where the theological and the material commune.³⁵

In “Rosa Mystica” (1878) Hopkins’s devotion to Mary bleeds upon the page. This devotion should be marked as not simply orthodox, but all the more affectionate. The poet titles the poem “Rosa Mystica,” or mystical rose, one of the titles given Mary in the Litany of Loreto.³⁶ Moreover, as the poet affirms Mary as mother, he also addresses this poem as a prayer to Mary. Clearly, Mary functions, or at least is assumed by Hopkins, to function as an intercessor. If we consider the refrain, each is a prayer, marked with a demand for Mary or a promise of the poet (place me; I shall look; I shall keep; I shall worship; make me; draw me). Of greatest interest here is the demands he makes upon Mary: “Find me a place by thee...” (1.7). Hopkins asks Mary, only in the seventh line of the poem, to find him a place next to

³⁵ Maria R. Litchmann discusses the “incarnational aesthetic” of Hopkins as something that mirrors his own experience of finding Christ “incarnate in matter,” primarily in the Eucharist. This framework certainly holds. However, this then provokes a point of contention that many scholars, like Ballinger or J. Hillis Miller, take up: to what extent is Christ “inscaped” within Hopkins own poetry (Litchmann 41,43)? This question, reaches beyond the scope of this discussion; however it appropriately incites the following question: what role does Mary—the first tabernacle of Jesus’s body, the Eucharist, play—practically, poetically?

³⁶ See <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/maryd6f.htm>

her! That is, Hopkins asks Mary to make him a saint! To be among the chosen elect, among Mary, the angels and saints in Heaven who stand besides the throne of Christ the King, in adoration and praise. This emphasizes the fact that for our poet Mary is present as a mediator (the Mediatrix) that intercedes to “shew me thy son” (l.30). This poem illustrates how Hopkins understands Mary as an advocate, one who acts on behalf of man’s cause to know, serve, love, and to ultimately be with God; more son, to *be in* God’s divine life. The rose is *in* a mystery, is caught up in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. This image recalls Dante’s *Paradiso*: “Here is the rose, wherein the word divine was made incarnate...” (Canto XXII.73-74). Not only is Mary the rose within which the mysterious presence and reality of Jesus is incarnate, but Mary is crowned as queen of “an immense white rose” within which “Dante sees the blessed systematically arranged.”³⁷ Mary is the very rose that is within the mystery of the rose which represents that “holy place,” the Kingdom of God (“Rosa Mystica,” l.43). Hopkins, then, should be read as calling out to be engulfed in this same mystery of God through the maternal intercession of Mary.

“Rosa Mystica” showcases the allure of the mystery of Mary for Hopkins. His Marian devotion begins and ends in mystery: “she is the mystery, she is that rose” (l.22). Not only is Mary consumed and alive in the mysterious exchange of love³⁸ which is the Holy Trinity, Hopkins recognizes all the more that because of this grace, “in grace that is charity, grace that is love,” she herself is a mystery (l.46). This notion of “mystery” and the

³⁷ “Empyrean 10, White Rose” *Danteworlds*.
<http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu/paradiso/10empyrean.html#rose>

³⁸ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 221: “God’s very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: *God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, and he has destined us to share in that exchange” (italics mine). Mary’s privilege, then, is her precession of man in this destined exchanged.

mysterious is an essential paradigm that came up in the previous chapter—we recall that Hopkins uses the term to refer to an “incomprehensible certainty.” His devotion to Mary is certain. The direction of his Marian piety is grounded—albeit incomprehensible at times—he states, “I shall keep with thee, mother of mine” (l.18). It is important to note that Hopkins recognizes two important distinctions in his own relation to Mary. Not only is Mary enveloped in mystery; she is a mystery in and of herself. This identification of Mary as a mystery actually resonates with many of the popular devotions that began to propagate around the Blessed Mother in the 19th century. This illustrates that Hopkins’s devotion isn’t a singular spiritual practice carried out by the poet. But rather, he is an instrument in a symphony of voices testifying to an invigorated, not new or unknown spiritual presence.

Hopkins’s spiritual practice and outlook on the figure of Mary is all the more interesting as we consider the widespread Catholic revival of the 19th century. In Europe, before and during Hopkins’s life, there existed a growing cult of Marian piety. Much of this devotion to Mary was inspired by a series of apparitions, or alleged miraculous visions of Marian appearances, which set the stage and tenor for Catholic piety in the 19th century: “Marian apparitions were among the great collective drama of the nineteenth-century Europe” (Blackbourn 4). This “collective drama” of Mary kicks up in the 1830s in Rue de Bac, Paris, when Catherine Laboure (1803-1876), a novice in the Daughters of Charity, claimed to have received three visions of Mary. Catherine described part of the visions as follows: “...I saw the Most Blessed Virgin... She was of medium height, but of such extraordinary beauty that it is utterly impossible for me to describe her.³⁹” During the apparition, Catherine also claims to have seen an “oval frame” around the miraculous

³⁹ See <http://missionimmaculata.com/index.php/miraculous-medal/the-miraculous-medal>

woman, with the following words inscribed in gold: “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.” Catherine, moved by this mystical encounter, goes on to forge her vision of Mary standing on the globe, with all of its additional nuance and detail, on a medal, according to another purported request of the woman (“Have a medal struck according to this model...”). This medal, known as the “Miraculous Medal,” is circumscribed with the words, which appeared in the oval frame. They testify to the mystery upon which Catholic devotion, particular the Church’s Marian piety and teaching develops in the following decades: the Immaculate Conception; that is, Mary’s conception without the stain of original sin. Evidently, then, the collective drama of the Marian apparitions is more precisely articulated as the drama of the Immaculate Conception.

This “drama” heightens as the “mystery” blooms in the coming years. In 1846 Mary is believed to have appeared to two poor shepherd children in La Salette and in 1858 to another poor child in Lourdes. The latter, the apparition of Mary to Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879), resonates with that of Catherine Laboure. In Lourdes, Mary identified herself as a mystery, when she tells Bernadette, “I am the Immaculate Conception.” Translating the alleged statement, Mary basically says: I am, I exist as, a theological mystery. Yet there is another historical and spiritual figure, evidently more pertinent to Hopkins who must briefly be considered here as well: Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824). Sister Emmerich was an English mystic, stigmatic (that is, one who is believed to have born the *physical* stigmata, the wounds of Christ in her own flesh), and visionary. This later is especially relevant: Jill Muller writes that the woman, “claimed to have shared Christ’s passion and witnessed the main events of his life in a series of visions,” which were recorded in *The Dolorous Passion*

of Our Lord (1833). This book, the life and witness of this woman, had a profound impact on Hopkins. The poet describes this experience firsthand in his journals:

One day in the Long retreat...they were reading in the refectory Sister Emmerich's account of the Agony in the Garden and I suddenly began to cry and sob and could not stop... I stood in a manner wondering at myself, not seeing in my reason the traces of an adequate cause for such strong emotion—the traces of it I say because of course the cause in itself is adequate for the sorrows of a lifetime. (*CW3*, 482).

Isolating this text allows us to understand the profound identification Hopkins has with Christian mysticism. Consideration and contemplation of mystery—particularly, the sorrowful mysteries of Christ's life was a common practice for the poet—one that I would argue inevitably was sourced from, as well as sustained, his own personal devotion to Mary. For example we can read records of his meditation on "Our Lady's Sorrows" (*SDW*, 255). Emmerich is noteworthy here because she sheds light on cults of devotion to Jesus and his passion through Mary. Some of her visions specifically concerned the Blessed Mother, which were also recorded and compiled in a book titled *The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary from the Visions of Anna Catherine Emmerich* (1852). I am not suggesting that Hopkins had any access or knowledge to this text, but rather by pointing to the presence and influence of Emmerich, we can begin to see that this conversation surrounding Hopkins and his Marian devotion and poetry is all the more relevant.

The relevance and "resonance" of these mystics, mysteries, and apparitions, coincide with "the remarkable Catholic revival in nineteenth century Europe," which stares in the face of the rise and progress of "modern science" (Blackbourn 27). On the surface of it all, the tension is evident between these supernatural mysteries an increasing tide of economic and class interest, secularization, religious skepticism, and naturalism marked, for example, by Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1848), David Strauss' *The Life of Jesus, Critically*

Examined (1846), or even Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). These apparitions, then, in the midst of these cultural upheavals "proclaimed the message that the "materialist" spirit of the age was fundamentally misguided" (Heimann 73). Marina Warner further this argument, pointing to the fact that almost all of the reported apparitions of Mary portray "a rearguard action against the forces of 'progress' or 'reason' that deny God and religion" and summarily affirm "the embattled Church's legitimacy" (Warner 312-313). This defense of the ecclesial and metaphysical becomes all the more evident if we briefly consider Hopkins as an interlocutor. Part of the argument in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is that man has grossly overestimated technological progress and prowess, and has done so at the expense of faith in the supernatural, sovereign power of God. This "cult of the Virgin Mary," the rising tide of devotion to and perceived intervention from the Mother of God, "changed the tenor of Catholic devotions" and spiritual practice in the nineteenth century. A few of these changes are noted as follows: Marian pilgrimages to new sacred sites, a celebration of May as Mary's month, more frequent or fervent recitation of the rosary, the thrice-daily recitation of the Angelus, devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and a more intense devotion to the real presence in the Blessed Sacrament (Heimann 71).

I am pointing to these devotions, to their prowess, presence, and purported power in Hopkins's Catholic world because to outsiders looking in, Mary all too often is sequestered as an adornment, accompaniment, or even quite severely, as an idol.⁴⁰ For example, one

⁴⁰ Consider Newman's "Anglican Misconceptions and Catholic Excesses in Devotion to the Blessed Virgin." He writes, "When strangers are so unfavourably impressed with us, because they see Images of our Lady in our churches, and crowds flocking about her, they forget that there is a *Presence within the sacred walls*, infinitely more awful, which claims and obtains from us a worship transcendently different from any devotion we pay to her. That devotion to her *might indeed tend to idolatry*, if it were encouraged in Protestant churches, where there is nothing higher than it to attract the worshipper: but all the images that a Catholic church ever contained, all the Crucifixes at its Altars brought together, do not so affect its frequenters, as the lamp which *betokens the presence or absence there of the Blessed Sacrament*." (italics mine). Marian devotion is clearly misunderstood—a tender topic at best—but one that could have been arguably avoided in order to stay away

might imagine scholars like Paul Mariani to drill down on these nuances of Hopkins's spiritual life and poetry, given that he approaches Hopkins's life, faith, and poetry as inextricable domains. However, his literary biography of the poet's life keeps the question of Hopkins's Marian devotion on the side, shrouding it in mystery. Imagining the rhythm of the Jesuit novitiate, he writes: "Rosaries—beads—are recited weekly while walking" (*A Life*, 86). A nice touch, but so what? What does this *mean* for the poet? Fortunately, Hopkins provides us with enough ground to respond.

Hopkins is both a product and a propagator of Marian devotion. Consider when he preaches on "Rosary Sunday" about this Marian prayer tradition and about the Blessed Virgin, who is "in fact *universal mother*..." (*SDW*, 29). The rosary is an essential part of this conversation because it is a ritual prayer that invites one to contemplate the mysteries of the life of Jesus and the life of Jesus in Mary—just like Hopkins's poetry can seem to attempt. Moreover, this recapitulates that devotion to Mary singularly points to Jesus; Hopkins writes: "Though a devotion in honour of B.V., all the mysteries but two to do with our Lord and the sorrowful Mysteries exclusively so" (*SDW*, 29). This "mother of mine" is not simply some poetic fancy, but quite practically, a live and lived intermediary in the poet's faith life. However, it must be said that within his own writings, Hopkins's Marian piety does not seem to be connected with the Marian apparitions of the 19th century. Rather, his approach is doctrinal, grounded in Church teaching and his Jesuit lifestyle. Yet this does not exclude Hopkins from being informed by these mysteries. In the midst of this "collective drama" the popular piety of these Marian mystics influence and illuminate the Church's doctrine; and vice versa, the authority of the Church reinforces the experiences of these small-town French

from Protestant-Catholic conversation about "presence or absence," Jesus and the Blessed Sacrament. See: <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/anglicans/volume2/pusey/section5.html>

“mystics.” Therefore, even if Hopkins did not directly engage the apparitions, his devotion to Mary is indirectly affected by and sourced from these prevalent mystics.

Before digging into Hopkins’s own understanding of and engagement with the Immaculate Conception and Mary as the Immaculate Conception, it is important to note the point of encounter between Hopkins and the visionaries. This union, as previously described, delineates how, where, and when theology and popular piety are mutually informed. This juncture is the papal promulgation of the Immaculate Conception. In December of 1854, Pope Pius IX wrote “Ineffabilis Deus,” which proclaimed the Immaculate Conception as an ordinary teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. This “truth” had become “so generally accepted and put into practice by the faithful” of the Church, that their own popular piety has “zealously” testified to formation and propagation of this “doctrine.” Here, the popular piety most clearly meets the theology; the certification of this teaching emphasizes how this definition and ownership of a Marian tradition and devotion also functions as a bulwark for the teaching authority of the Church. This teaching then authorizes the popular belief and practice of the people, and establishes further grounds for an increase in devotion to Mary. Pius writes, “Let them fly with utter confidence to this most sweet Mother of mercy and grace in all dangers, difficulties, needs, doubts and fears.” Greater recourse is not simply permitted, but recommended as Mary is called patron, guide and protector. She is “Mediatrice and Conciliatrice,” “Queen of Heaven and Earth,” and constant intercessor who “presents our petitions in a most efficacious manner;” “What she asks, she obtains. Her pleas can never be unheard.” Pius builds upon and reiterates the tradition of the Church, acclaiming Mary with these titles and functions, as the Mother of God, existing and living “at the right hand of her

only-begotten Son.”⁴¹ From this text, though, Mary’s identity as mother, her maternal responsibility to the faithful is unambiguous.

Mary’s motherhood anchors the primary argument of the text: in order for Mary to be the Mother of God she must have been kept from the stain of original sin. This theme of maternity is an essential consideration in the life of Mary, and Pius holds to this thread, considering not only Mary’s spiritual motherhood, but also the ecclesial motherhood of the Church as an institution. Pius emphasizes that the “Roman Church” is the “mother and teacher of all Churches,” and that early predecessors of the seat of Peter had “definitely and clearly taught” and honored this feast. The Catholic Church is re-defined as the mother of the faith: “our Holy Mother the Catholic Church...” This move serves as precursor to the definition of papal infallibility during the First Vatican Council in 1870 (that the Pope can speak no errors on matter of faith when speaking “ex cathedra”). Pius articulates the importance of childlike obedience, in faith, to the maternal (instructive, parental) teaching of the Church. And this claim is only meant to be secondary to, and reinforced by the call for obedience and reverence to the Mother of God, and by definition, the Church’s own spiritual Mother, Mary: “Hence, if anyone shall dare—which God forbid! —to think otherwise than has been defined by us...he has suffered shipwreck in the faith.” It follows, then, that Mary, as the ark of the new covenant, as the Star of the Sea, guides the Church of Christ along the seas of this world. She is salvation from the “shipwreck of faith” in this life, pointing to *the* salvation won by her Jesus, her son. Therefore, faith in the authority of the Church, following this teaching, further demands if not necessitates trust in Mary’s role as Mother, as intercessor and mediator, all which is bestowed upon would indeed “redound to the Son.”

⁴¹ Pius IX, Bl. Pope. “Ineffabilis Deus: The Immaculate Conception.” 1854. See <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm> for full text.

This line of argumentation highlights an important point: as Pius IX articulates how Mary is not only embodied in the Church, but as the Church, he is attempting to strengthen the tie between popular Catholic culture and piety with the Church authority, representing an attempt to unify the Church while also fortifying its members during a time of rapid secularization.⁴²

Pius IX dwells upon the nature and meaning of Church in relationship to the mystery of Mary's maternity—how she could be so privileged as to be *theotokos* (the Mother of God)—because her maternity entirely depends upon her Immaculate Conception, her preservation from sin. Christ merits Mary's sinless nature—she is immaculately conceived—so that Jesus can be incarnate, born of woman, marking Mary's primary identity as Mother, more so, Mother of God. If anything, this does not detract from the primacy of Christ, but it actually accentuates it: “The absence of sin in Mary does not diminish mediation, the sacrifice of Christ, but rather exalts it because prevention is preferable to cure” (Papetti 179). This connection is made explicitly in the language of the text. Mary is called mother 38 times. Pius sees Mary's maternity in relationship to that of Jesus, and in natural consequence, to that of the Church. Upheld as the “Mother of God, conceived without original sin,” she in her “truly motherly affection” is “solicitous about the whole human race.” Deemed and defended as mother, Mary cannot help but then be seen as mediatrix, as intercessor, pleading on behalf of her children, all for the sake of her son, Jesus. In summary, the definition and the mystery of the Immaculate Conception is not simply isolated to the principle of Mary's conception without sin; rather, as Pius' articulation of the dogma—and even the message of the alleged apparitions put forth—Mary is identified as the Immaculate Conception, by the

⁴² It is useful here to consider Bruce D. Marshall's reflections on Mary's relationship to the Church: the “Faith of the Church depends upon the faith of Mary...our faithfulness is a participation in hers...” (Southern Methodist University, Lehman Chair Inaugural Lecture)

nature of her eternal motherhood, her perpetual virginity, and her intercession and mediation on behalf of man.

Part 2: Hopkins's Marian Poetry

In the preceding section, it was noted how the doctrinal definition of the Immaculate Conception identified Mary as Mother and virgin, as intercessor and as mediator. These descriptions and roles of Mary, rooted in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, contrive much of Hopkins's Marian poetry. His poetry is not so much an investigation of Marian mystery, but rather a marveling at Mary and the wonders of her particular human life. Hopkins marvels at Mary's fruitful virginity, her immaculate conception, her role(s) in or experience(s) of the incarnation, and her own relationship to the Church, including the poet himself. Each of these considerations is foregrounded in Hopkins' affirmation that Mary is "merely a woman:" not a goddess, but a human, a simple woman of Nazareth, living as more than a woman by the grace of God (Boyle 51). Hopkins' interest in the mystery of Mary focuses on this her ordinary nature, which mixes with her "more than" nature, her super-nature in Christ. His poems explore Mary as a source of life: earthly life, and a "real source of divine life" in a way that is entirely inferior and dependent on God, the true source of that life (Boyle 56-67). These poems will demonstrate how poetry is the essential vehicle for theological exploration and exhibition, especially exhibition of the realities of faith: a means of not only portraying the poet's heart, alongside his heart for Mary, but also a means of developing a more consistent framework for how theological mystery and theological reality can be made most manifest in verse.

The mystery of the incarnation has already been cited as a central point of interest for Hopkins. However, we have yet to consider how Hopkins understands Mary in relationship

to this mystery of the word made flesh. In the English translation of the Latin verse “May Lines” (1878) Mary is called “O doubly predestined.” She is the one “who from all eternity have been the mother of Christ, (predestined) after foreseeing of the merits of the Innocent One, a second time after the sins of our race...” Hopkins, writing this in 1873, has already unraveled the writings of Duns Scotus, and expresses his theological fascination with the Subtle Doctor as he hints at Christ’s two moments of incarnation: the aeonian (outside of time) and the historical (within time) taking of the flesh. The first, Ballinger describes, is what Hopkins calls the “*ensarkosis*” or the word becoming flesh—the word is sealed, marked off in Mary as “matter in a sacramental sense.” The second moment of incarnation would be defined as the “*enanthropesis*” or the word becoming man, the “emptying” of the Word of God into matter (Ballinger 121). “May Lines” takes up this mystery as Hopkins states that he ought to focus on Mary’s majesty as *theotokos*: “I should simply marvel at you as God’s mother;” more so, he writes that she should even be acclaimed for the fact that she is “virgin made mother” (a mystery to be revisited). But instead, Hopkins’s primary point of admiration in this text is Mary’s “two-fold glory,” that is her double-predestined nature, doubly predestined because of the two-fold resonance of Christ’s incarnation—one that was made incarnate for the “redeemed sins of mankind,” and the other, based on “the foreseen merits of the Innocent One.”

May Lines serves as a great reminder that Hopkins’s devotion to Mary is entirely grounded upon his devotion to Christ. The poem begins with an epigraph from Ecclesiastes 24:14: “From the beginning and before the world, was I created, and unto the world to come I shall not cease to be.” This gets at the primacy of Christ in creation. Ong writes that for Scotus, “Christ is more so the center of the cosmos...Christ is antecedent to history...all

history is in Christ” (Ong 108-109). Hopkins not only argues for the primacy and centrality of Christ (as articulated in the previous chapter), but he acknowledges that the primacy of Christ necessitates the double predestination and preservation of Mary. Her Immaculate Conception must be conceived then; with Christ already at the center of the cosmos, May Lines illustrates how Hopkins holds Mary close to her son. The poem, following close to Scotus’s own theology, marks the predestination of Christ in Mary as a precedent that anticipates Jesus’s taking on of *real* flesh from Mary at the moment of the historical incarnation. Mary should not be understood as the end of Hopkins’s devotion, but she mediates the “Innocent One” for man. For Hopkins does not revel in the “two-fold glory” of Mary as something of her own merits; rather, he pays reverence to Mary, wholly aware of the glory and merits of Jesus, the source and end of all Marian devotion.

The important consideration of my argumentation is not that Hopkins’s wrote deeply theological poetry about Mary, or even that he held a profound Marian devotion, although all of these things appear to be true and noteworthy. Looking closely at his poetry, I want to emphasize that his Marian devotion is not an adornment; for the poet, it serves a very specific purpose. Mary provides a means by which Hopkins understands himself as a disciple, a Christian, as both priest and poet. The Mother of God provides the framework—ideologically and even practically—for how one ought to not only manifest Christ in all things, but how one can come to know Christ through her intercessory presence. This concept of manifestation is particularly present in “May Magnificat” (1878), where Hopkins illustrates not only how Mary magnifies Jesus, but also how the month of May, the springtime of rebirth and renewal, manifests the Blessed Mother. “The “May Magnificat” continues the close relationship of connotation between “nature’ motherhood” and the divine motherhood:

May magnifies Mary” (Papetti 188). Therefore, these readings of Hopkins’s Marian poetry provide a lens through which we can consider *how* Hopkins came to know and follow Jesus in his life; this “how” is Mary.

“May Magnificat” begins: “May is Mary’s month, and I / Muse at that and wonder why” (ll.1-2). The declaration is simple. May belongs to Mary; the poet’s response is to “muse” to wonder at, to marvel. Hopkins’s own marveling at the mystery of Mary’s feast days comes from the conviction that “her feasts follow reason,” that there must exist some sort of purpose or intention behind matters of the faith (l. 3). The poem pokes at this question: “Why fasten that upon her, / with a feasting in her honour?” (ll. 7-8). This serves as another example of Hopkins use of poetry as a medium for extending the scope of theological exploration beyond discursive and propositional language. Thus, this act of poetic questioning cannot be reduced to a strictly intellectual venture, to something either rendered true or false, present or absent. Hopkins ponders this mystery in faith—turning to Mary directly, asking for her intercession. “Ask of her, the mighty mother: / Her reply puts this other this other / Question: What is Spring?” (ll.13-15). Not only does Hopkins turn to Mary for a mighty, motherly mediation; he also assumes and posits her response! This response is Hopkins’s poetic pivot point. However, readers are not given the content of reply. Instead, readers are left to marvel at the mystery of it all, based upon another question posed by the poet. This question and response dynamic presupposes Mary’s role as an intercessor, as one who hears and responds. And this response, that spring is “growth in everything” (l. 16), pushes the reader further into the unfolding mystery.

Hopkins sees embodied in spring, more so in Mary, his call to magnify, to manifest—in life, as a priest, and in deed, as a poet. For example, Hopkins focuses on spring, as “growth

in everything;” this exemplify Mary’s role as one who “forms and warms the life within” in order to magnify, exemplify or *stress* that very life (l. 22). Hopkins watches Mary, and knows that it is her example he must follow, for she was the first and foremost follower of Jesus. He records Mary as, “watching all he did,” aware and attuned to the “hidden life” of Christ (*SDW*, 176). And Mary represents the one who has seen and also giver of this life: “Here look on our Lady as the bestower of the Blessed Sacrament” (*SDW*, 256).⁴³ Therefore, we shouldn’t be surprised at Hopkins’s reference to “flesh and fleece, fur and feather” in the “May Magnificat” (l.17). This imagery recalls Christ and the incarnation: Christ taking on the flesh, and summarily, in Christ, man putting on the fleece of the Lamb of God.⁴⁴ Hopkins also uses this peculiar word in his communion hymn to the Mary: “O fleece, in your dew...” (“Ad Matrem Virginem”). Mary does not simply carry the Lamb of God—Hopkins esteems her as the very *fleece* which enfleshes the lamb and then “bestows” the hallowed sacrament, the Eucharist. This emphasis on the incarnation is then considered alongside its implications on nature, with the fur and the feather. Here Hopkins establishes that through the incarnation, with Mary as the site of the incarnation, the supernatural is vested and invested in the natural. These avian images are clear symbols of spring for the poet, recalling the “Nature Sonnets” (“As kingfishers catch fire,” “The Windhover” or even the “bright wings” of the dovelike Holy Ghost in “God’s Grandeur”). This natural growth, of “grass and greenworld” or of the “bird and blossom swell,” is so magnificent because of “Nature’s motherhood” has come to share in Mary’s motherhood (l.18, 23, 28). That is, in Christ,

⁴³ There is certainly much more that ought to be said, about Hopkins and the Eucharist. This is another mystery for further studies, especially in light of these Marian poems.

⁴⁴ Judges 6:37, “I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor.” Moreover, we know that Hopkins has already considered the relationship between Christ and the threshing floor, in “Barnfloor and Winepress,” as he recalls Jesus “scourged upon the threshing floor.”

through Mary's role, nature has come to magnify the Lord. Hopkins's exhibition of Mary's role as magnifier and Mediatrix and I'd suggest this simultaneously characterizes his position as poet, mediating on behalf of man and Mary.

The overwhelming presence of nature, of the birds and blossoms, "their magnifying of each its kind," Hopkins sees as "Mary sees, sympathizing," as she recalls "how she did in her stored / Magnify the Lord" (l.29, 31-32).⁴⁵ Mary's "sympathy" connotes a sense of shared experience, a harmony with nature. Yet if Mary sees the magnification of God in nature, how much more then would she be assumed to see the magnification of God in man? Mary, through her role in the incarnation, her role as a magnifier, is both universal mother and mediator, paralleling "Spring's universal bliss" (l.34). But what is the content of this bliss? Mary is given the month of May, and this poem emphasizes how the bliss of springtime embodies the bliss of Mary. Marina Warner suggests that this poem "captured the bursting joy of spring and its promise of fruitfulness in lines so rich and beautiful they stand for all that is best and happiest in the cult of the Virgin" (Warner 281). This poem, then, should be seen as emblematic of many of the Marian movements in the 19th century. It highlights the proclamation of May as Mary's month. Not only this, but the poem illustrates how the bliss of spring is like the bliss, or consolation offered to those who seek Christ through Mary. For example, in the poem, within this bliss, there is "much," "much to say" in "offering Mary May" (ll.34, 35-36). Much needs to be said in order to justify the offering, sure, but certainly much *is* said in respect to what Mary provides to those who provide this offering of joy and renewal to God through her hands. In particular, this bliss, this offering of nature re-offered to God, is the "drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple;" this brings to mind Christ's sacrifice on the

⁴⁵ And Hopkins too, receiving the Eucharist, does store and magnify the Lord. And, even as some have argued, if poetry *is* sacrament, then this too must store and magnify the Lord.

cross, his own dappled body, drained of blood and water. Recall Hopkins Christology: “the first intention of God’s power was Christ” he writes, “the next was the Blessed Virgin.” The evidence of Hopkins’s devotion and reverence to Mary is remarkably apparent if she was the second intention of God’s power. But this aside, the poet continues writing: “the blissful agony or stress of selving in God has forced drops of sweat or blood, which drops were the world...” (*SDW*, 197). I’d suggest that the “drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple” precisely indicates this selving of God, the forcing of sweat (foam understood here as relating entirely to water) and blood—blood and water—at the moment of the crucifixion. These drops, Hopkins claims, are the very foundation of the created world. All nature, then, once in Christ, possible and perfected on the cross, magnifies Christ. The “cult of the Virgin” then, the life and newness of Mary in May or May for Mary, moves to articulate the power and presence of Jesus’s redemptive sacrifice.

Looking back toward the “May Magnificat,” a proper devotion to and understanding of Mary “Caps, clears and clinches all—” in so far as it points one back to Christ (l.44). It is certain that Mary, sees and sympathizes with the nature “selved” by her son, as she “mothering earth” tells of “her mirth until Christ’s birth” and causes her to remember and exult “in God who was her salvation” (ll.45-48). This poem clearly stages Mary as one who contemplates Christ in nature. This, then, should also be set aside as the purpose of Hopkins’s Marian poetry: to contemplate how through Mary, the poet contemplates Christ, in order to provoke readers to do the same. This would be especially true for Hopkins’s “The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe;” Hopkins wrote to Dixon, mentioning that he was “asked to write something in honour of the Blessed Virgin” (1883), since it was May (Mary’s month)—something Hopkins must have done before, at least more intimately, with

“May Lines” and “May Magnificat” in 1878 (*CW2*, 581). Hopkins, then, turns to Mary since Mary represents the example for how to know, love, and serve Christ. “She sympathizes for all of us” as if she, representing the Church, stands in for us all, standing before God on our behalf without sin, without blemish; and because of this sympathy, “...heart cannot think her greatness, tongue cannot tell her praises (*SDW*, 30). Hopkins, then, while considering Mary’s sympathy for man in “May Magnificat,” certainly imagines the implications for man’s relationship to Mary. This is evident in his re-purposing of the Magnificat from Luke’s gospel. Instead of telling the story of *Mary’s* Magnificat, where Hopkins easily could have considered how believers are also called to say “yes,” like Mary did, he gives us *May’s* Magnificat, where nature speaks of Mary. Pointing to how nature speaks of Mary, as opposed to the angel Gabriel speaks of and to Mary, Hopkins provides readers a means through which they too can come to see the manifestation of Mary in spring, of Christ in Mary. Recall that for the poet, nature praises Christ; it gives glory to God, sharing through the sympathy and Spirit of God in Mary but “does not know it.” This poses the question, if man is “made to give” and can “mean to give” God glory, how much more then, like the spring, should man mean to give God glory through Mary (*SDW*, 239)?

Hopkins readily acknowledges that reverence can and should be given to God through Mary. If we look closely at “Ad Matrem Virginem” (1870, the extended title, translated from Latin to English is “To the Greater Glory of God: A Communion Hymn to the Virgin Mother at the Feast of the Nativity”) the depth of this devotion is evident. He begins: “Mother of my Jesus, Mother of mighty God, teach me about him...” Hopkins petitions Mary so that she may “teach me about Him.” He continues to consider Mary as a means to more intimately “embrace Him. At this point it’s important to pause and consider: why devotion to Jesus

through Mary? How does Mary provide a more intimate means of “embracing” Jesus? Theologically, Hopkins’s understanding of grace provides one clear response. He holds, with St. Bernard, that “all grace is given through Mary” (*SDW*, 29). This he marks quite rightly as a mystery. We’ve already begun to explore Hopkins’s own understanding of grace within “The Wreck,” but now we must relate this with his devotion to Mary. God promotes humankind to holiness through the graces he provides indirectly through Mary, his chosen vessel, “as if stooping and drawing it from her vessel.” The mystery lies in how these gifts of God’s divine life are “some way laid up in her” (*SDW*, 29-30). Boyle reminds us that a Catholic perspective on grace is essential within any reading of Hopkins work. He notes that Protestant reformers imagined that “divine grace was no longer a sharing in the divine life as an added principle of human activity” (Boyle 56). If grace were not a sharing in the divine life of God, but a principle of human action, than Mary is not to be held in such high esteem. Man could perhaps merit this divine favor through holding fast to the Word of God. However, Mary in the Catholic Church, and within Hopkins’s poems, is a “real source of divine life,” a true depository and Mediatrix of God’s graces (Boyle 57). Mary “mothers each new grace,” and this grace⁴⁶ is that which encourages and enables man to his or her ultimate end: Christ (“The B.V. compared to the Air we Breathe,” l.22.) Hopkins cannot help but seek Jesus through Mary’s intercession because, as he believes and the Church holds true, the grace necessitated to come to know God and share in the divine life of God has been dispensed through Mary’s *fiat*, her participation in the grace of the incarnation.

It follows that, for Hopkins, devotion to Jesus through Mary, his Marian piety, is not optional; it is essential to truly know and follow Christ. He writes: “she gladdens the

⁴⁶ Recall Hopkins’s definition of grace: “For grace is any action, activity, on God’s part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries the creature to or towards the end of its being, which is its self-sacrifice to God and its salvation” (*SDW*, 154).

Catholic's heaven and when she is brightest so is the sun her son: he that sees no blue sees no sun either, so with Protestants" (*SDW*, 29-30). Mary is the blue of the sky; Jesus is the sun—the purveyor of light, the one by whom the sky has its blue hue. However, if the blue is removed—if Mary's fiat is forgotten, there is no human son. Without Mary, there is no incarnation. There is no flesh from which Christ takes on the flesh. That is, without Mary, there is no Christianity: "Christianity turns on the Incarnation of God, which requires the *fiat* of Mary..." (Hart 230). And Hopkins knows this to be true, especially since his most regarded (critically, at least) Marian poem, "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe" brings this argument home. Her one work is to "Let all God's glory through, / God's glory which would go / Through her and from her flow / Off, and no way but so" (ll.30-33). Hopkins articulates his belief that God has so willed to pour forth and exude his glory through Mary, and "no way but so." The glory of God comes to man through Mary; her function is that of a medium, "like air not be looked at in itself, but to bring the light through and to diffuse it so that 'every colour glows, / Each shape and shadow shows'" (Boyle 66). This devotion is not only essential, but it is preferable, since Mary does not diminish the light and presence of Jesus; rather, she magnifies it: "Through her we may see him / Made sweeter not dim" (ll.109-110). In comparing Mary to the air we breathe, he has staked her as *the* essential source of divine life. Air is that "unseen" but still an "essential element" and "is nothing less than a reminder of the reality" of the supernatural, "a defense, if you will, of the metaphysical, of grace, of mysteries." It is "life-giving, essential, necessary to being," put forth by Hopkins as an image that interprets the "actual manifestation of God's grace" (McDevitt 34).

Mary is privileged as a grace-giving, life-giving figure in the Christian's life because she brings forth the life of Christ. Mary also exemplifies how Hopkins derives poetic purpose from theological mystery. He attempts to articulate how Mary makes "New Nazareths in us, / Where she shall yet conceive / Him... / New Bethlems, and he born" (ll.60-63). Hopkins emphasizes that "men are meant to share / Her life as life does air" (ll.44-45). As mankind shares in the life of Mary, they conceive, bear, and bring forth Jesus unto the world. Man is made not only to marvel at, but also to share in the mystery of Mary. Here, metaphor becomes the vehicle through which the mysterious might be made known. This aligns quite well with Robert Boyle's thesis *Metaphor in Hopkins*, where he suggests that the "imagery of many of Hopkins poems is expressive of a profound mystery of the Catholic religion;" that his imagery is "expressive" and not "explanatory" (50).⁴⁷ In particular, in this poem, the poet points to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. Mary is "Wild air, world-mothering air" (l.1). Wild should not be read as raucous or untamed, but instead as pure, undefiled, wild as in uncontained and left untainted.⁴⁸ Boyle writes that this "wild" nature means Mary is "totally good," which is further reinforced by Hopkins reference to her as "Mary Immaculate" in line 24 (Boyle 57). And what is most remarkable about Hopkins's devotion to the mystery of Mary, to Christ in Mary, is that he lodges it within a metaphor of the natural world. That is, Hopkins searches for an entirely physical means of relating to the metaphysical. The "incarnational aesthetic" of Hopkins illustrates his trust that by the very grace of God nature, "the world," "carries the divine" (Litchmann 41). A world so charged,

⁴⁷ This recalls the overarching premise given in the introduction: in Hopkins, religious experience and theology are often articulated in and as poetry.

⁴⁸ Hopkins's landscapes also maintain this "wild" nature. Consider "Hurrahing in Harvest:" "And the azurous hung hills are his world-wielding shoulder / Majestic..." (ll.9-10). One cannot help but wonder how the azure of the hung hills is also suggestive of Mary, who is compared to the "azure" air we breathe: "How air is azured;" ("The Blessed Virgin..." l.74).

commanded to see, infused with, the grandeur and immensity of God, requires a lens, a paradigm, through which the presence of God, the inscape of Christ can be seen.

Conclusion: Pondering a “Fleshy” Body

Hopkins Marian poetry promises that Mary, the site of the incarnation is where “God’s infinity / dwindled to infancy,” and where man can come to not only contemplate the Virgin made mother, but the God made man (ll.18-19). Direct contemplation of Mary, all the more so of Christ in Mary, demands a reconsideration of Hopkins’s own understanding of the Virgin. Mary is not just a typological figure; she is more than a feminine ideal or a symbol to be imagined. Viola Papetti remarks that many Christian poets tend to “disincarnate” Mary, depicting her symbolically as a vase, a flower, a landscape, or a garden. Not that these images promote an injustice towards Mary—the Early Church Fathers regarded her as the “enclosed garden” of the Song of Solomon. Moreover, though, these patrons of the early Church considered it “anathema” if the faithful refuse to believe “that Emmanuel is God in truth, and therefore that the holy virgin is the mother of God (for she bore in a fleshly way the Word of God become flesh.”⁴⁹ The importance of bearing Jesus in “a fleshly way,” affirms that consideration of Mary as a figure or stylized ideal neglects the fullness of her flesh—and therefore, the fullness of Christ’s earthly existence. Mary as the site of the incarnation *is* and *must be* seen and contemplated as a human person. Papetti argues “Hopkins will try boldly to reconstitute the relation with the epiphany of the image, to capture its sense of apparition, its ‘inscape’” (Papetti 182-183). Hopkins reconstitutes the human face of Mary, in order to articulate all the more the primacy of the incarnation, of Christ. Since “In Christ, we see the fullest possible revelation of God in this world, and

⁴⁹ Council Fathers. “The Council of Ephesus.” 431 A.D. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum03.htm>

Christ comes to us through Mary” (Boyle 51). Hopkins illustrates that the “inscape” of Mary, her appearance, is her “ens,” or her being, is Christ. In this, Mary takes on the “gesture, profile, and identity” of Christ (Papetti 184); and from this, in Christ, she becomes the “prototype” and “model” of the “members of the Body of Christ.” And Hopkins recognizes that “in being like her, we become more Christ-like and hence *more* ourselves” (McDevitt 41). So reclamation of the privilege of Mary’s immaculate flesh, is not only a claiming of a mystery, but a claiming of the privileged manifestation of that mystery: her “wild” nature not only preserves her from sin, it prepares the world for the incarnation, further illuminating the primacy of Christ.

Hopkins emphasis on the incarnation, guided by the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, brings Mary’s flesh into focus. The Blessed Mother’s fleshiness is of paramount importance. For Hopkins, she is not “treated as a product of the imagination,” as Robert Bridges would seem to desire; the poet instead takes Mary “with total and complete seriousness” (Boyle 51). This impulse provides a lens into Hopkins own resistance to the growing influence of historicist studies of the bible. In his era, this was epitomized in Ernest Renan’s *La Vie de Jesus* (1863).⁵⁰ In “On the Inspiration of Scripture,” Newman contends that there can be no case for this sort of historical study which humanizes that which one ought to believe is divinely inspired and primarily and definitively appraised by the authority of the Church. Hopkins’s Catholic faith, then, evidently represents a point of departure from

⁵⁰ Consider John Henry Newman as an interlocutor on behalf of Hopkins, engaging here specifically with the author in question: “...I asked what obligation of duty lay upon the Catholic scholar or man of science as regards *his critical treatment of the text and the matter of Holy Scripture*. And now I say that it is his duty, first, never to forget that what he is handling is the Word of God, which, by reason of the difficulty of *always drawing the line between what is human and what is divine, cannot be put on the level of other books, as it is now the fashion to do, but has the nature of a Sacrament, which is outward and inward, and a channel of supernatural grace*; and secondly, that, in what he writes upon it or its separate books, he is bound to submit himself internally, and to profess to submit himself, in all that relates to faith and morals, to the *definite teachings of Holy Church*.” (italics mine) <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/miscellaneous/scripture.html>

“popular” trends in Christian poetry. Boyle examines Hopkins Marian poetry alongside the works of Wordsworth, Yeats, and Milton. These writers tend to see Mary as “an ideal, a symbol” or “a product of the human imagination” (Boyle 54). Quite clearly in Yeats’s “The Mother of God,” Mary’s annunciation is imagined and she is characterized: she wonders, “What is this flesh I purchases with my pains...” (“The Mother of God,” 1.11). Although this places Mary in a quasi-scriptural moment, the poet, as Boyle argues, “points to the universe he himself constructs out of the materials at hand” (Boyle 55). Hopkins does not seek to diminish the mystery of Mary, rather he marvels in it. In his writings he emphasizes the particularity of Mary to drive home the particularity, the humanity of Jesus. Recall, “Mary Immaculate / Merely a woman, yet / Whose presence, power / is Great as no goddesses” (ll.24-28). Mary is woman, she is not divine; she is not a goddess, an idol, or an essence. She shares in the divine nature of God by grace, but she is not a divinity nor deity. In this, Hopkins enters as an ostensibly Catholic interlocutor, conversing and confronting poets who “at least implicitly” reject or confuse the Catholic position on Mary’s role in the life of the faithful (Boyle 54). Rainer Maria Rilke’s “The Life of Mary” (1915) helps reinforce Hopkins’s avoidance of a dis-incarnate or disenchanting historical view of Mary. In “The Presentation of Mary in the Temple,” he writes: “To understand what she was like then, / you have to imagine yourself in a place,” the place in history; and Rilke’s poetry does do this, but like Hopkins, it does not stop there. Their Marian poems see Mary as more than a historical figure, but as a human steeped in mystery, motioning towards the “final togetherness,” the mystical unity of Christ and his mother.⁵¹ Therefore, Hopkins’s active contemplation of Mary

⁵¹ Rainer Maria Rilke’s “The Life of Mary:” <https://polemically.wordpress.com/2007/03/21/rainer-maria-rilke-the-life-of-mary/>

participates in a tradition where this consideration of the Virgin as Mother and Mediator brings one closer to Jesus while all the while particularizing the humanity of Christ.

The flesh of Mary is seen in almost all of Hopkins Marian poems. In the Eucharistic hymn, Hopkins imagines Jesus receiving “kisses from your mouth,” from the mouth of Mary. In “May Lines” Mary is recalled as the “virgin made mother”—a chaste yet fruitful body. In “Ad Mariam” Mary carries within her “the gladdest thing that our eyes have seen” as she too is the “gladdest thing” as bearer of the God-child. In “Rosa Mystica” Mary is “of earth’s mould,” made of the flesh (l.3). And in “The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe,” Hopkins points once more to the incarnation that, “of her flesh he took flesh” (l.56). In the English translation of the Latin “In S. Winefridam,” the poet describes how “maidenly grace” is mixed with “honest dirt,” that the grace of God would come to man in the midst of humble humanity. The “May Magnificat” wonders at “how she did in her stored,” Christ, and in that did “Magnify the Lord” (ll.31-32). And within “Angelus Ad Virginem” the poet marvels at how “lost mankind shall be bought” by she who was although under nature, lived “out of nature’s law.” Mary is no image or symbol; she is fleshed and Hopkins wants us to fasten our eyes upon this. Recalling his comparison of Mary to the air we breathe, McDevitt notes that our physical bodies are entirely dependent upon air. The poem, arguably all of his Marian poems, points us back to the incarnation, to see “Mary’s reality, her corporeality, her motherhood. Here is no etherealized or sentimentalized Mary, no goddess of myth, no mere symbol of some female life principle, but Mary of Galilee, a woman of flesh and blood, an individual who moulds “Those limbs like ours” in her womb...” (McDevitt 39-40). We can even consider Hopkins spiritual writings where he sees “the body suckled at the Blessed Virgin’s breasts” or his contemplation of the development

of Christ in “one little infant frame in her womb” (*SDW*, 38; 33). Mary’s privileged flesh enfleshes Christ and becomes the very object of contemplation that brings about a deeper entry into the metaphysical mysteries that most concern the poet.

These Marian poems isolate a larger trend within Hopkins: the concretion of the metaphysical or the reality of divine natures. Kevin Hart writes that an emphasis on the lived existence of Mary and Joseph⁵² “saves us, if you like, from the intellectual seduction of an abstract Christ whose purely supernatural existence would have distanced him from us while making him more acceptable to the educated human mind” (Hart, 230). I suggest that Hopkins especially retaliates against housing Christianity, or Jesus Christ, as an idea; and this summarily is tied with his resistance to the abstraction of Mary. Hart articulates that Hopkins own theory of inscape is an “incarnational principle,” one that pivots upon and derives meaning from the flesh, by pointing to “how immanence is the way given to discern the meaning of transcendence,” that the transcendent is not “abolished but now fleshed out” in full (Hart 15). For example, in the opening lines of “The Wreck” the poet is found by Thou, an intimate God: “Thou mastering me / God!” (ll.1-2). God acts upon man and man responds. God gives “breath” and “bread” and man receives (l.2). Moreover, as Hart references, if we consider “God’s Grandeur,” Hopkins again writes about “the dread of the terror of being placed in the hands of a living God:” the flaming out, the “shining from shook foil,” the crush and diffusion of the “ooze of oil” (ll.1-3.) From this, Hart argues, that “the deity for Hopkins in his poetry is not some abstract explanation of reality;” no, not at all—this deity is embodied in Christ as “a leader, a hero,” a “bosom friend” and a “lover,” the very one who

⁵² Hopkins when “suffering in mind” petitions Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus who is “the patron of the hidden life” (*SDW*, 256). These particular people are experienced as particular intercessors, saints through whom Hopkins seeks consolation. For him, I’d suggest, they are companions, not concepts.

“called to us form the cross more than we call to him there” (*SDW*, 49). Devlin, then, does not speak in jest or metaphor when he claims that Hopkins made “friends at once” with “the central mysteries” of the faith: The Trinity⁵³ and as I’ve argued of second most importance, the privileged Blessed Virgin Mary. Jesus “moved in a true and not a phantom human body;” Jesus’s human flesh, as Hopkins asserts, points us back to the incarnation, its reality, and the manifestation of this sacramental mystery in man, Mary, and matter (*SDW*, 37).

At best, this chapter serves as an introduction and provocation for further inquiries into Hopkins’s Marian devotion and poetry. The theological perspicacity of Hopkins’s Marian poetry is noteworthy in his age where secularism and skepticism were substitutes for orthodoxy. For example, consider Maximilian Kolbe’s letter to a German District Officer in the 1930s, preceding his imprisonment and martyrdom in Auschwitz: “The Most Holy Virgin Mary is not a fairy tale or a legend, but a living being who loves each one of us.”⁵⁴ Of this, like Kolbe, Hopkins seems altogether certain, as his Marian poetry pushes at the reality of the Blessed Mother of God as both a figure and fact of faith. McDevitt comments on this, noting how Hopkins “combines a rich Mariology with his sacramental vision and poetics while avoiding a certain nineteenth-century maudlin spirituality” (31). This is to suggest that although Hopkins’s Marian poems are highly affectionate, they are intellectually searching, evocative of a devotional life that is sourced from and sustained by the poet’s theological backings. Reading Hopkins’s work through this Marian paradigm resurfaces many of the methodological perspectives already discussed; for instance, that Hopkins poetry is the place

⁵³ Living a life “balancing whether they have three heavenly friends or one” in a Trinitarian God (*CW2*, 619).

⁵⁴ “Saint Maximilian Kolbe was a Conventual Franciscan priest who spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary through printing and radio in Japan and his native Poland. He was martyred in Auschwitz.” <https://aleteia.org/daily-prayer/monday-august-14/daily-meditation-1/>

of theological investigation and exhibition—perhaps even that his poetry houses his theology. Zaniello posits this relationship well: “With metaphors Hopkins worked to resolved some of the most pressing theological problems...” (139). Perhaps Mary did once prove to be a theological problem for the once Anglican poet; but if anything, it should be all the more evident that following Hopkins conversion and practical life as a Jesuit, Mary is not a theological problem, nor a theological muse: she is mother, meditator, the one who “More makes, when all is done / Both God’s and Mary’s Son” (“The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe,” ll.71-72).

Conclusion: Full of Grace

Part 1: Why Hopkins? Why Now?

At the outset of my thesis, I addressed the question: why study Hopkins? For my conclusion, I'd like to take this question a step further: why study Hopkins today? Given Hopkins's supernatural convictions, what does he offer to readers in a non-Christian world (or perhaps even more tellingly, what does he offer readers in a "*non-Christian-Christian*" world)? I've already referenced Christopher Devlin's assessment of Hopkins as prophetic, motioning towards more-contemporary developments within the Church (from popular piety, to developments in the liturgy). However, Hopkins brings us more than just an innovative and creative lens on Catholic belief, practice, and poetry. His life and work place an unmistakable importance on the real manifestations and practical implications of theology and poetry.

To affirm this much inevitably exposes a glaring tension within Hopkins scholarship. For as one approaches the poet-priest, the question invariably arises: how are modern, critical readers to respond to the supernatural, the theological, the faith-based articles of his life and his work? Although my approach has attempted to engage the mystery of the supernatural directly, doing so *need not* be the only means of studying and understanding the poet's life and work. Making everything about his faith would be short-sighted—one only need read his correspondence and to see that Hopkins was also, always, a flesh-and-blood human being, prone to elation and melancholy, doubt and irritability, and keen to talk about poetry, family life, work, and friendship no less than about spiritual matters. However, it is formidable, nearly implausible, to attempt to unravel or appreciate any of Hopkins's poetry in full without undertaking his theology. As Robert Orsi, a scholar of religious studies suggests, one

mustn't forget about the "gods," the supernatural in their scholarship, (let alone day-to-day life); for us, as readers of Hopkins, this entails that we cannot forego considering the poet's faith. Here Hopkins's relevance manifests: his work demands the need for scholarship that takes the presence of the supernatural, of "the gods" *very* seriously. Hopkins believed in, and lived with, God fully present to him,⁵⁵ even though this faith seemed to collide with a deepening sense of futility, especially during the trial of his Dublin years. We must not dispel the supernatural to "a theoretical underworld," reincarnating deities as "symbols, signs, metaphors, functions, and abstractions;" but we must approach the supernatural as our subjects do, *as our subject did*, with God fully present to him, more so, to us (Orsi 4, 8).

With spiritual beings fully present to Hopkins, we realize that there is a "real" manifestation of his theology made present in his poetry. I've already argued that this reality is grace:⁵⁶ God's action, God's gift to and presence amidst the world. Having explored Hopkins's understanding of grace (Chapter 1), his Christology (Chapter 2), and Mary's privileged role as the vessel by which this grace is made known to man (Chapter 3), it now remains to explore and define once more Hopkins's certitude of belief in the prevalence of God's grace and how it shapes his poetic vision. This should be understood as something remarkably divergent from his Protestant—even lukewarm Catholic—contemporaries.

Robert Boyle highlights this point of distinction in *Metaphor in Hopkins*:

For the Reformers and especially for their successors, divine grace was no longer a sharing in the divine life as an added principle of human activity. This belief, absolutely central to Catholicism, held by the Church not as something understood but as a mystery revealed by God, is the first thing to disappear when the authority of the Church is rejected... (56).

⁵⁵ Catholic belief in Real presence begets nothing more, nothing less.

⁵⁶ Once again it may serve to reiterate Hopkins's definition: "For grace is any action, activity, on God's part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries the creature to or towards the end of its being, which is its self-sacrifice to God and its salvation" (*SDW*, 154).

Hopkins is faithful to this Catholic teaching; he is certain of the reality of divine grace. This grace holds that man is called to share in the very divine life of God; this principle of deification inherently affects man's ultimate beatitude, "the end of its being," indeed his or her ultimate state. But, as Boyle points out, this theology of grace seems to "disappear" once the Catholic Church is "rejected" by reformers, or even rejected by dissidents (or worse, diffidents) from within. This has dire implication for one's religious experience, and consequently, religious poetry. Needless to say, readers of Hopkins cannot take the implications of his religious faith sparingly. To do so would impose a glaring omission.

Given the poet's conversion, the stakes and nature of this conversation is already provided for us; a question consequently follows: what, more broadly, changes in Hopkins's worldview following his conversion? One way to begin this conversation is to consider the adjustment in the poet's imagination. For example, many scholars have attempted to define and distinguish what constitutes a "Catholic imagination" or worldview as opposed to a "Protestant imagination." The general idea within this binary is the assumption that one's theology affects how one not only believes, but also sees the world and participates in a cosmic order. These concepts emerge from David Tracy's *Analogical Imagination*, where he propounded a vocabulary that defines an "analogical," Catholic, vision as distinct from a "dialectical," Protestant, vision. This distinction was further by Catholic sociologist Andrew Greeley in *Catholic Imagination*: following Tracy, Greeley writes that Catholics tend to "accentuate the immanence of God, Protestants the transcendence;" from this, he argues, that Protestant theologian tend to dwell upon the "absence" of God, God's distance whereas Catholic theologian would tend to dwell on real presence, "the presence of God in the world"

(Greely 5, O'Donnell 3).⁵⁷ O'Donnell, then, follows this critical paradigm in "Seeing Catholicly," where she defines, through readings of Emily Dickinson and Hopkins, a distinctively Catholic way of writing and reading poetry. She writes:

"Catholic poetry reflects and embodies a particular disposition towards the world. It is corporeal, perhaps even bloody-minded, in its insistence upon an embodied, incarnate faith; it is grim in its acknowledgment of the presence and power of real evil in the world; and it is ultimately hopeful in its assertion of the meaning of suffering and in its persistent search for God even when God seems to be absent" (6).

Hopkins certainly embodies this disposition of embodiment. It is his "incarnational awareness," his "incarnational aesthetic," his sacramental worldview—it is his Catholic lens of seeing and being in the world. Although O'Donnell does not position her essay to contest with other religious worldviews (she offers this Catholic vision as a "counterpoint to the predominantly secular worldview" 4), Greely is a different subject. He certainly discusses the work of the Christian imagination on a binary, contrasting the Catholic worldview and Protestant worldview as two sides of a spectrum marked by transcendence and immanence. Orsi remarks that this is the historical temptation, given reformation debates regarding "the nature of the divine body in the Host" which devolved into the "stark dichotomy between presence and absence"—to the point where "Catholics=presence" and "Protestants=absence" (249). This "Metric of Presence," has become the lens through which we understand our religious worlds, our religions, "the gods," and unsurprisingly, our artists and art.

It seems as if one cannot avoid conversations about absence and presence, just as much as one cannot neglect Hopkins's "Catholic imagination." However, our readings of Hopkins will be particularly narrow if we confine ourselves to these dichotomies. As useful as a "metric of presence" can be, it neglects to consider *how* that present manifests or hides

⁵⁷ I pull this framework from Angela Alaimo O'Donnell's an essay within *The Catholic Studies Reader*, a pioneering text attempting to set aside space for critical scholarship uniquely concerned with Catholic content or artists.

itself, all the while displacing conversations surrounding the God that would make or take this presence in the first place.⁵⁸ In place of this metric of presence, it is more profitable, perhaps even all the more scandalous, to consider a metric of grace. Presence or absence means nothing without a systematic understanding of what supernatural grace is and how it can—or cannot—manifest Christian theologies, and in some cases, Christ. Within a metric of grace God’s initiative the prevalence and presence of grace is a given. This provides space for us to focus on the respondent, as either individual or as Church, and the absence or presence of their “yes” to grace.

This “yes” recalls once more Stanza 2 of “The Wreck” (“I did say yes...” 1.9) and affirms the necessity of a response to God’s initiative of love. This response is presented in 1 John 4:10: “In this is charity: not as though we had loved God, but because he hath first loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.” Man, then, is able to respond to God’s initiative of love; man’s response is a call to love in return: “if God hath so loved us; we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11). We can imagine that when Hopkins says that the world is “charged” with the grandeur of God, the cosmos is charged, responsible to love (“God’s Grandeur,” 1.1). This means that man, present in the cosmic order, can choose to respond to God’ free gift of life and love. Hopkins understands this, as he articulates humanity’s call to love as a call to obediently respond to God’s grace: “Duty is love. There is nothing higher than duty in creatures or in God” (*SDW*, 53). This notion of duty implies that true love springs forth from a response to God’s grace, his prevenient love, as manifest in

⁵⁸ Orsi’s argument is not to depart from, considerations of absence or presence, but rather, to warn scholar not to “miss the empirical reality of religion,” the empirical reality of presence as a given in religious cultures, especially Catholic cultures (252).

Christ.⁵⁹ Duty represents a commitment, a life given in service of and fidelity to God. Within a metric of grace, then, a metric of presence is no longer clunky or obsolete; rather, it becomes all the more relevant, especially for Christians who seek and follow Jesus, God made personal, present, “lovable” in word and sacrament, by a very real metric of supernatural grace (*CWI*, 62).

Returning once again to Hopkins’s definition of grace, as the very action of God, which moves man along to the end of it’s being, it is clear that the urgency regarding this theological point is pressing. Hopkins is aware of this eschatological urgency; part of the reason why his poetry is so vibrant and striking is because he of his concern with the ultimate end of man, suffering, life and death. If we recall our discussion of Hopkins and Tennyson from the Introduction, Hopkins does not write for vogue, for popularity, but for an ascendancy that is eternal, joined to the Ascension of Christ. For instance, this eternal ascendancy is one of the main features of “The Wreck of the Deutschland.” This two-part piece represents “Hopkins’s most creative attempt to express his ideas about nature and grace” (Brittain 10-11). Chapters 1 and 2 have quite exhaustively considered this poem and these concerns, especially exploring how grace builds upon, perfects human nature—even in the midst of such despair and suffering. However, as we ponder Hopkins’s relevance for our era, we should consider the following: without a theology of grace, can we understand “The Wreck of the Deutschland” at all?

Without God’s grace, without the mercy of Christ, the depths of the sea are truly “widow-making unchilding unfathering;” the “infinite air” is unmistakably unkind: it is no longer azure, no longer wild-mothering with the compassion of Mary (ll.104, 100). Hope not

⁵⁹ In John 3:16, one can consider how it is that God so loved the world through Christ, in Christ.

only had “grown grey hairs” and had “mourning on” but hope eventually disparages, ultimately perishes (ll.113-114). One could say the world of the poem is colored grey. This is no surprise, since if we remove all supernatural grace, all intimations of God’s mastering, merciful presence (that is, his activity on behalf of man) then we remain in an immanent frame without a vocabulary of grace, vastly increasing the explanatory burden of sin and evil. A world ruled by sin and destruction, is indeed a world of grey. “We dream we are rooted in earth—Dust” (l.85). Like the souls on the *SS Deutschland*, Hopkins imagines us as hopeless, moribund: “dead to the Kentish Knock” (l.108). Hopkins imposes that mortal man, composed of dust returning to dust, has no chance; fatalism, nihilism, is forced when the mastering hands of God have been robbed of grace. This implies that man has no affect on the cosmic order. Man can no longer be a second cause, aligned with the will of God, considered “the first cause.” Christian prayer, then, independent from grace, loses its purpose. It becomes a lament—a far-off cry to a far-off God, too high to be reached, too unknowable to be seen. Moreover, a theology of grace—what I will now call a metric of grace—completely determines the necessity, privilege, and presence of Mary. If Mary is a mediator of God’s grace, depriving one’s worldview or theology of supernatural grace depletes the necessity of Mary’s mothering. Needless to say, a theology of grace, or lack thereof, changes everything.

Hopkins is relevant to us now because he reminds an overwhelming secular and sometimes militantly atheistic West of the necessity and reality of the metaphysical and supernatural. This seems an impasse for a non-theistic audience. However, readers of Hopkins need not understand or appreciate his theology since the poet intuitively broaches theological mysteries by focusing upon inscaped natural phenomena. Often, like in “As Kingsfishers Catch Fire” or “Spring,” grace and the supernatural are the subject of the sestet

that concludes his sonnets, whereas the opening octet tends to focus on these natural phenomena through which the poet instresses God's presence. Hopkins not only looks to God, but at times he describes and depicts how exactly he finds and encounters God in nature, or even, the nature of God—a merciful master. Therefore, any atheists or non-Christian readers aren't precluded from engagement with the texts at hand. There is no need for secret knowledge or a dogmatic codex to fully see *how* Hopkins comes to encounter theological mystery manifest in matter. (Now, how we see *how* he sees, more so *why* he sees, is a point for a different discussion.) However, a refusal to contemplate Hopkins's penchant for the divine sets aside the metaphysically astute aspects of his poetry; reductionism and naturalism are then imposed upon the poet, which completely misconstrues his subjective experience of an objectively fixed, natural order.

Modern readers of Hopkins, especially "The Wreck," must reconsider their response to the inevitable reality of disaster and death. If we remove God, we remove grace; life seems an unintelligible failure. Without any divine presence in "The Wreck," death reigns supreme (recall the beginning of Part 2 of the poem). Robbed of the supernatural, the poem loses its buoyancy; it falls flat in the face of inevitable destruction. The world without grace is colored grey (like the grey hair of hope in l.113); it is dismal, marked by the futility of man, society, and technology, which can do *nothing* to stay the storm, the ship's moribund course. Without grace, without God, there is no salvation from the sinister abyss of the seas, let alone any sense of need for salvation. With the removal of grace, humanity is immersed into a world of grey, where man merely lurches from one disaster to another. The supernatural subsides, and natural outcomes are inevitably the end of the story—a story that ends in destruction and failure. And Hopkins knows this "world of grey" all too well. Look at his "Terrible Sonnets,"

those that detail the darkness and despair of his life after St. Beuno's. It seems as if he lived the final years of his life in a "grey world;" for example, he writes in 1885, "The melancholy I have all my life been subject to has become of late years not indeed more intense in its fits but rather more distributed, constant, and crippling" (CW2, 731). This crippling melancholy is symptomatic of his pressing schedule as a teacher and the grim reality of his life and time living in Dublin. Notwithstanding the poet's evident and well remarked upon trials and sufferings, he does not accept this world of grey as the final verdict. For Hopkins, a notion of grace repurposes all things.

The status of contemporary disbelief, even unbelief, cuts further: atheistic belief denies any need to even engage in this discourse. Hopkins would then be regarded as nothing more than a troubled, unfortunate case study. More so his "world of grey" would be taken as a misfortunate "given."⁶⁰ Man's response, then, to the "given" tragedy of "The Wreck," would inevitably be anthropomorphic, centered on man, made by man. Human concepts, perhaps even human technological constructs, are then devised to battle back against the destruction as man attempts to master his reality. Yet so often even this is a broad assumption; for some "intellectual gnostics," "nothing is a given." This means that humanity is "infinitely plastic:" and it follows that "coercion," or man's mastery over man, is the "highest" human ideal (Weigel 101-102). However, Hopkins—in his work and even his life—demonstrates that there is no such thing as perfect human control or mastery. God is the one who must master, who must order life: "Thou *mastering*..." mastering who? What? "Me," man. If not, then, humanity masters man. And when has this anthropomorphic rendering ever really worked out? The closest modern society seems to have to come to this

⁶⁰ And this point definitively matters: what do we take as a "given" and how do we understand those givens? George Weigel in *Letters to a Young Catholic* writes that a Catholic "sacramental imagination teaches us that the *givens* in this world have meaning—including the final givenness, which is death" (102).

is totalitarianism, the regimes of Stalin or Hitler, which also mark our closest encounters with the utter extremity of terror and man-made evil.

In response to the tragedy of the *SS Deutschland*, if we take an atheistic vision of the cosmos there is no such “good or provident power behind a world in which there is so much suffering;” in response to “the predicaments of finite existence,” it may indeed be “plausible,” then, that God is simply an idea and man must arise to master it all. However, from this extremity of unbelief, one embraces a metaphysically bankrupt world without any Higher Power, meaning that there is no “ontologically contingent reality,” which “depends upon an absolute and transcendent source of existence” (Hart, David Bentley 294).

Therefore, to deprive the poem of God, the source of this contingency, assumes that life is in the hands of feeble men or is set atop a spinning gyre, random, chanced, perhaps ominously patterned or drastically Darwinian. Poetry, at best, then, is a shallow shout in an echo chamber of meaningless voices, sounding off from the extremity of selfishness, and ultimately self-neglect. Hart rejects the atheistic position so staunchly because it neglects first causes, shrugs at end times, and sees the self as a beginning and end—in and of, for and from itself—simply put: an ontological impossibility.

Poetry, truly can, then, give life back to the soul. Hopkins’s poetry especially restores meaning to that which appears disparaging or meaningless. His attention to details—mundane, tragic, or awe-inspiring—takes in the natural world and sees the supernatural as vested within it. Hopkins is able to derive such a “loyalty to the world, to the open-ended givenness of things,” from his Catholic faith; through his faith, he is able to read the cosmos as “created, redeemed, and sanctified by God:” the world, even death itself, is utterly “transformed” in Christ’s life, death, and Resurrection (Weigel 103-105). Therefore any

dialectic which attempts to see life in contention with death, or grace in contention to nature, is fragmented by Hopkins's theo-vision; his metric of grace overwhelmingly asserts that the Catholic faith permits for an analogical vision (a "both/and"), which then makes way for his transcendent, beatific vision (what I would call a "more than" approach). Christ is the "beauty wrecked," the "majesty beaten down," who is at once "now all the *more than* restored" (*SDW*, 37, emphasis mine). This notion of being broken yet prepared and restored all the more for salvation is the theological lynchpin that enables Hopkins to persevere— personally, poetically—in the face of such physical atrocity or spiritual adversity. Following Hopkins, man is made for *more than* the meaning he can master, see, or rationalize; man is made for something greater than, more than, "the cross," the world of grey.

Although Hopkins's metaphysics are tellingly jarring for an agnostic, or for a theologically uneducated audience, his poetry also serves to challenge the imagination of his Christian readers. For example, his emphasis on grace pushes at the boundaries of Christian belief and the legitimacy of this belief made manifest in day-to-day life. Hopkins's metric of grace illustrates how real, how effective, how present, the grace of the incarnation must be. Since a metric of presence presupposes a metric of grace, at stake for Christian readers of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is this: how present, how *real* is Jesus? Since grace proceeds from Christ, an absence of grace, naturally assumes an absence of efficacy found in and flowing from Christ's sacrifice. From the mystery of the incarnation, Christ's life and death, "we share his grace because he shared our humanity. We become what he is because he became what we are. This is the meaning of being "grafted on His wood" (Brittain 44). For Hopkins, we'd be mistaken to see Christ as anything other than entirely real, abundantly—sacramentally—present. This, he affirms, is all due to Jesus's "Eucharistic

sacrifice.” This sacrifice, Hopkins maintains, “was the great purpose” of Christ’s life, “his own chosen redemption” for man (*SDW*, 162). Hopkins’s theology of grace, then, is non-negotiable, since it is through grace that God invites man to share in the redemptive act of the cross—a redemption which altogether allows man to hope in “the heaven-haven of the reward” despite the tragedy of sin and evil (“The Wreck,” 1.275). In Christ, by sacramental grace, man is given “mercy that outrides”—a mercy that is truly *more than* any human shortcoming (1.257). Read with *and* without religious experience, Hopkins’s poem demands reconciliation between the metaphysics and material realities of humanity: *this*, truly, is “the mastery of the thing,” of the poem in and as mystery (“The Windhover,” 1.8).

Although our reading and understanding of Hopkins inevitably incites and isolates non-believers of the secular era, his poetry continues to scandalize a skeptical Christian imagination. This skepticism isn’t so much a skepticism of the supernatural—more so it is a skepticism of anything other than the fundamental, the literal, the ascertainable, a thread no less pervasive in American fundamentalist Christian, Word-based systems of belief than in scientific positivism. To take the Bible literally, as “some sort of objective” and “consistent digest of historical data” is “a strange and pathetic attempt” of Christians “raised without intellectual or imaginative resources of a living religious civilization, to imitate the evidentiary methods of modern empirical science” (Hart, David Bentley 24-25). Fundamentalism resists the mysterious, the sacramental, and especially the Marian manifestations of belief that must be imagined (in most cases, these things go unseen or are seen under other—sacramental non-symbolic—appearances)⁶¹ and experienced not in spite of

⁶¹And this does indeed demand faith, assuming *true* faith in the biblical basis of belief: “But, as it is written: That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9

the Word, but through the real and living power of the Word when pressed upon the human tongue. Even for “believers,” Hopkins’s work and witness offers critique and clarification.

Hopkins is all the more relevant for these reasons since so much of his work emphasizes the importance of devotion to Jesus through Mary, a practice many non-Catholic Christians consider anathema. Yet for Hopkins, this approach and devotion is entirely necessary and justified. As he considers the presence of grace, the presence of Christ, he inevitably provokes this third, telling question: how present, how real, is Mary? Orsi, in *History and Presence*, raises this same question about Marian apparitions: “Is Mary really present *there* or *here*?” (Orsi 52). How do we make sense of the space where Mary was—perhaps is—present and presented again and again amidst popular devotions or pilgrimage sites? These inquiries into existence and presence, into the grace that holds these conceptions together and the manifestations of said grace flow forth from within our poet’s prose, verse, and more importantly, from his own heart. And this heart is not free from doubt—Hopkins has a “thirst” within his “tormenting mind tormenting yet in “My own heart” (ll.4, 7). Unsatisfied, he thirsts for the consolation of presence, like in “No worst,” where he appeals for the comfort of the Holy Spirit, “the Comforter” or the grace of “relief” given through “Mary, mother of us” (ll.3-4). These brief excerpts from Hopkins’s heart illustrate the lived relevance of “occasions of a distinctly Catholic mimesis of presence” (Orsi 49). Presence is real; and it is, at times, felt as absence; but absence should not assume negation, or non-existence, but a departure from a graced encounter that perhaps is as scandalous as it is real.

Certain Christian insight must indeed be out of sight, and in need of adjustment: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” 1 Corinthians 13:12

Aside from the theological considerations, Hopkins's relevance reminds us how to proceed as readers of poetry. For Hopkins, since poetry functions as theology, theology as poetry, the poetic medium mediates a real encounter with God's grace. This demands that the reader contemplate, ponder the written word or the sight of the "the sweet especial scene" ("Binsey Poplars," 1.22). This stilled, silenced, contemplation (the listening to the song of "elected silence") is necessary not only so that one may truly *hear* the poem, but so that one may *experience* the inscape; this recalls man's agency in "The Wreck," where the poet kisses his hand, in order to "glow" to give "glory in thunder," where one must actively instress the inscape of both natural, and especially verbal,⁶² presence (ll.33-36). This mediation happens in so far as one is *willing*, willing to stop, willing to ponder, to listen, and ponder once more. Pondering, we are left with a Marian paradigm that will help articulate the role of a reader, of a poetic audience. As I'm sure Hopkins would inevitably profess, no diamond is forged overnight. During the nativity of Jesus, after the visit and adoration of the shepherds, Mary is said to have "kept all these words, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Mary ponders the mystery of all that she heard, and she "wondered" (Luke 2:18). She not only ponders what was told and done by the shepherds, but she ultimately ponders the Christ, *the Word* of God. We must read, we must ponder poetry like Mary ponders the mystery of the Word. To ponder is to study poetry; to read with intention, question, and direction—recalling Hopkins's precept: "true poetry must be studied" (CW2, 748).

To study Hopkins's poetry we must knowingly approach "incomprehensible certainties;" being judicious about comprehension of Christian mystery only stints engagement with the content of his work. If we approach his poetry with a desire to

⁶² One needn't look far beyond the history of the Catholic Church and its monastic/religious traditions and their dedication to pondering, "contemplating," the Word through "Lectio Divina," or Divine Reading.

comprehend the incomprehensible, we are like Bridges, in earnest pursuit of fancies, of “curiosities,” of fading mortal beauties. Our reading persists until this “curiosity” is “satisfied, the trick found out (to be a little profane), the answer heard, it vanishes at once” (CW2, 619). To translate certainties as mere curiosities vacates the mystery. “The gods” depart. Grace is gone, the Spirit quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19). A living faith, a living God, is relegated as a porcelain statue, a Christmas card, or a pop song lyric. But for Hopkins, God is much more than a commodity or an abstract deity; rather incarnate as Christ, God is personal. Jesus is *more than* an idea; as cornerstone, head of the Church, he is Hopkins’s touchstone, a true reality: a living God. There is no other center, no “Other” source, nor alternative end for his poetry, which profoundly testifies to an altogether Catholic way of being in and seeing the world. Both writing and reading—means of training and expression this worldview—manifest as a real duty of a real love mediated from and on behalf of a real lover; a love and a lover that Hopkins deems eternal. His own conviction about mystery, “incomprehensible certainties,” about man’s eternal state, his ultimate concerns need not concern us as his readers. Yet a reverent disposition, one of skeptical faith, as opposed to faithful skepticism, as readers of Hopkins would allow us to truly understand the depth of his poetic vision. Perhaps then we could truly see all that is supposed to sit behind the veil, the “landscape plotted and pieced,” and cry out, in faith to the “Other” who “fathers-forth” a “beauty” “past change:” “Praise him” (“Pied Beauty,” ll.5, 10-11).

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