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## Toward a Definition of Hopkins' *Inscape*

by Rev. Adrian J. McCarthy, S. M., Ph. D.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) once expressed his conviction that "every true poet . . . must be original . . . so that each poet is like a species in nature . . . and can never recur."<sup>1</sup> If there is one charge to which Hopkins is least vulnerable, it is the lack of originality. However, his very obvious distinctiveness often makes him difficult to understand. He was not unaware of the fact: "No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness . . . Now it is the virtue of design, pattern or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. The vice I cannot have escaped."<sup>2</sup>

Hopkins has left us the clue to his originality and the *apologia* for his difficult poetry; it is summed up in the term "inscape," with which this paper will deal. To Robert Bridges he revealed his chief concern as a poet: "But as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music, and design in painting, so design, pattern, or what I am in the habit of calling inscape is what I above all aim at in poetry."<sup>3</sup> Noting, for the moment, that he gave as his objective a term so distinctive that he had to coin it, let us be assured that his statement to Bridges is supported by further evidence.

In his *Journal*, where the term "inscape" occurs nearly fifty times, we find Hopkins defining poetry as follows: "Poetry is . . . speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning. Some matter and meaning is essential to it but only as an element necessary to support and employ the shape which is contemplated for its own sake. Poetry is in fact speech . . . for the inscape's sake — and therefore the inscape must be dwelt on."<sup>4</sup>

If "inscape" was the aim of his own poetry, Hopkins did not hesitate to judge other poets by the same criterion. To Coventry Patmore he wrote, concerning a minor poet, Samuel Ferguson, that he had many virtues of a good artist, "but the essential and only

<sup>1</sup> *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. C. C. Abbott (London, 1938), p. 222. Hereafter cited as *Letters III*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. C. C. Abbott (London, 1935), p. 66. Hereafter cited as *Letters I*.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters I*, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> *The Notebooks and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphrey House (London and New York, 1937), p. 149. Hereafter cited as *Notebooks*.

lasting thing left out — what I call inscape.”<sup>5</sup> And not only in poetry is inscape essential; it is, he told his friend and critic, Richard Watson Dixon, “the very soul of art.”<sup>6</sup> This explains his reaction to what he saw one day at the National Gallery: “Especial notice . . . of two new Michael Angelos not seen before: touches of hammer-realism in the Entombment (also a touch of imperfection or archaism) and masterly inscape of drapery in the other — but Mantegna’s inscaping of drapery (in the grisaille Triumph of Scipio and the Madonna with saints by a scarlet canopy) is, I think, unequalled, it goes so deep.”<sup>7</sup>

Hopkins, then, is an artist seeking inscape. With that term we must deal for any correct interpretation of his efforts and achievements. We shall attempt to define the term and to discover the philosophical basis for it.

What is inscape? It is significant that Hopkins, who used the term so frequently in his *Journal* and occasionally in his letters, has not given us any formal definition of it. The student of Hopkins must arrive at a definition by induction, as his biographers and critics have.

We have an approach to a definition in the letter to Patmore already quoted. There the poet spoke of “inscape, that is species of individually distinctive beauty.”<sup>8</sup> We may couple this with his use of “design, pattern”<sup>9</sup> as synonyms for inscape. It should be remarked that inscape is closely related to beauty and pattern, but always considered under a particular aspect, at least in its objective reality. Hopkins, in his references to inscape, usually relates it to the term “distinctiveness.” Arthur Mizener, in his essay on “Victorian Hopkins,” brings this out: “The very essence of reality was for him the unique individual quality of things, the inner pattern of being which he called ‘inscape,’ and he was as much concerned with this aspect of himself, this pattern of personality, as he was with this aspect of things outside himself.”<sup>10</sup>

It is from Hopkins’ numerous jottings in his personal notes that we get the most help in understanding the term. Here the poet was striving to express for himself the inscape of things he observed in nature; he was attempting a verbal equation of the singular aspect of objects. These notes stand halfway between the perception of inscape and its expression in poetry.

<sup>5</sup> *Letters III*, p. 225.

<sup>6</sup> *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, ed. C. C. Abbott (London, 1935), p. 135. Hereafter cited as *Letters II*.

<sup>7</sup> *Notebooks*, p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> *Letters III*, p. 115; cf. *Notebooks*, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> *Letters I*, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> A. Mizener, “Victorian Hopkins,” *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, The Kenyon Critics (Norfolk, Conn., 1945), p. 99. Hereafter cited as *Kenyon Critics*.

"The bluebells in your hand," he recorded, "baffle you with their inscape, made to every sense; if you draw your fingers through them they are lodged and struggle with a shock of wet heads; the long stalks rub and click . . . then there is the faint honey smell and in the mouth the sweet gum when you bite them. But this is easy, it is the eye they baffle. They give one a fancy of panpipes and of some wind instrument with stops — a trombone, perhaps."<sup>11</sup>

And on the inscape of a tree: "There is one notable dead tree . . . the inscape markedly holding its most simple and beautiful oneness up from the ground through a graceful swerve below (I think) the spring of branches up to the tops of the timber."<sup>12</sup>

In the following note, Hopkins uses the term "inscape" as a verb; this is not unusual with him. It has the force of "discovering the inscape of an object"; in this case, the sunset: "Before, I had always taken the sunset and the sun as quite out of gauge with each other, as indeed physically they are, for the eye after looking at the sun is blunted to everything else and if you look at the rest of the sunset you must cover the sun, but today I inscaped them together and made the sun the true eye and ace of the whole, as it is. It was all active and tossing out light and started as strongly forward from the field as a long stone or a boss in the knop of the chalice-stem; it is indeed by stalling it so that it falls into scape with the sky."<sup>13</sup>

From these few samples, we begin to surmise that the inscape of an object is some intriguing secret challenging the observer to discover it, and promising to disclose the mystery of the object's beauty. In the first of these three quotations we see Hopkins enlisting all his senses in order to know the individualized charm of the flower. We find him trying for a synthesis of the features. He implies that the inscape (a singular thing, yet "made to every sense") is a unifying principle that controls the unfolding of the distinctive but manifold beauty that is this bluebell.

Innumerable passages from Hopkins' notes show his preoccupation with the inscapes of things he observed in nature. From these notes he drew the material of many images in his later poetry; and if that poetry has a characteristic preciseness of imagery, it is because he had long since trained himself to discover the distinct individuality of each phenomenon, and not to rest until he had expressed it in the most exact word or comparison.

His concern for precise imagery is evident in the following notes on cloud formations, jotted down at intervals over a period of about fifteen years: "herds of towering pillow clouds, one great stack in particular over Pendle was knopped all over in fine snowy tufts . . . bright woolpacks that pelt before a gale in a clear sky are in the tuft . . .

<sup>11</sup> *Notebooks*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>13</sup> *Notebooks*, p. 139.



tall tossed clouds . . . clouds in march behind Pendle . . . marching across the sky in regular rank . . . silky lingering clouds.”<sup>14</sup>

Inscape, if we are to suppose that the poet was trying to convey it in these precise descriptions, evidently calls for a painstaking “reading” of nature. Hopkins records it in the words: “Another night from the gallery window I saw a brindled heaven, the moon just marked by a blue spot pushing its way through the darker cloud, underneath and on the skirts of the rock bold, long white flakes whitened and swaled like feathers, below the garden with the heads of trees and shrubs furry grey: I read a broad careless inscape flowing throughout.”<sup>15</sup>

Another verb expressing the perception of inscape is the word “catch” — a most significant term, with an implication of intuition. The poet used it when he wrote that “All the world is full of inscape, and chance left free to act falls into an order as well as purpose; looking out of my window I caught it in the random clods . . .”<sup>16</sup> Later, this term was to open Hopkins’ most successful sonnet: “I caught this morning morning’s minion . . .”<sup>17</sup>

But sometimes the discovery of an inscape demands patient waiting: “[one] should like to stay there [at Edinburgh] long enough to let the fine inscape of the Castle rock . . . grow on one.”<sup>18</sup>

Hopkins was too sensitive to the value of inscape not to regret the blindness of others: “I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it and it could be called out everywhere again.”<sup>19</sup> Obviously, the experience of inscape was, for Hopkins, too enriching and moving to be lightly foregone. His sensitive nature was actually wounded by the sight of ash trees being cut down: “. . . there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not to see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more.”<sup>20</sup>

At this point it may serve our purpose to examine the definitions of the term “inscape” given in the biographies and critical works on Hopkins. While all his commentators

<sup>14</sup> *Notebooks*, pp. 136, 140, 181, 145, 143.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>16</sup> *Notebooks*, pp. 173-174.

<sup>17</sup> *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. R. Bridges and W. H. Gardner, 3rd ed. (New York and London, 1948), No. 36. Hereafter cited in text as *Poems*.

<sup>18</sup> *Notebooks*, p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

take notice of this basic concept, few venture as far into its explanation as we could wish. However, we shall select the most representative definitions, observing their agreements or differences.

We have already noted that one of the "Kenyon Critics," Arthur Mizener, defines inscape as "the unique individual quality of things, the inner pattern of being. . . ."<sup>21</sup>

Eleanor Ruggles, remarking that the poet permits himself a certain freedom in using the term, sums up her understanding of it as the action of the divine, creative principle in the object "in playing upon and revealing itself through outward matter; the utterance by the object of a selfhood which it has from and in God and which is its spiritual motive for life."<sup>22</sup> We are introduced here to the religious orientation of inscape.

In his biography of Hopkins, John Pick develops the "self-expression" theme. Noting that the poet uses the term with "some flexibility," Pick takes it as usually meaning "the *essential individuality and particularity* or 'selfhood' of a thing working itself out and expressing itself in design or pattern."<sup>23</sup>

Two more definitions may be taken from the "Kenyon Critics." Herbert Marshall McLuhan, for whom inscape is "the crux of Hopkins' sensibility," explains it as "the 'fineness, proportion of feature' mastering the recalcitrance of matter which he saw everywhere in the world. It is the ontological secret."<sup>24</sup> Austin Warren sees it as "any kind of formed or focussed view, and pattern discerned in the natural world."<sup>25</sup> We notice in Warren's explanation a tendency to the subjective, rather than the objective concept of inscape.

Father Raymond V. Schoder, S.J., draws our attention to a distinction Hopkins made between what he called "scape" and "inscape." The point of the distinction is brought out in an entry in the *Notebooks*; Hopkins is criticizing the painting, "Vintage Festival," by Alma Tadema: ". . . a master of scaping rather than of inscape. For vigorous rhetorical but realistic and unaffected scaping holds everything but no arch-inscape is thought of."<sup>26</sup> Here the poet seems to have been separating an inert, photographic representation ("scape") from the true work of art, which breathes a message and a meaning ("inscape"). It is the authentic artist rebelling against what Herbert Ellsworth Cory terms "a senile naturalism miscalled realism, a servile, 'photographic' imitation . . . ."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Kenyon Critics*, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> E. Ruggles, *Gerard Manley Hopkins, A Life* (New York, 1944), pp. 138-139.

<sup>23</sup> J. Pick, *Gerard Manley Hopkins, Priest and Poet* (London, 1942), p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> *Kenyon Critics*, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> *Notebooks*, p. 194.

<sup>27</sup> Herbert E. Cory, *The Significance of Beauty in Nature and Art* (Milwaukee, 1947), p. 93.

The Jesuit commentator derives, rather laboriously, four connotations of the term “inscape.” However, only two of these seem applicable; the others are attributable to the less exact use of the word by Hopkins, already noted in previous definitions. Father Schoder gives as the poet’s first meaning: “The intrinsic *form* or activating principle of an object, whether native, as in natural bodies like bluebells or trees, or intellectually superimposed by artistic arrangement of parts in an art-work like speech, a poem, or a painting; i.e., the philosophers’ ‘*forma informans*,’ the ‘soul’ or form actuating particular matter and giving it distinct individual existence outside the mind. In an artifact, this means the essential unifying form or design worked into the material by the artist to produce a *new thing* (*poiema*) which will be distinctive and a perfect expression of his thought and mood.”<sup>28</sup>

The second — “the most common meaning” — given by this commentator is “the *intrinsic beauty* of a thing, the shining forth or effulgence of its form . . . the glory of its translucent being or self-being.”<sup>29</sup> However, we should be cautious about accepting the statement that this is the most common meaning of inscape in Hopkins, for he made a distinction between inscape and beauty: “But if it [verse] has a meaning and is meant to be heard for its own sake it will be poetry if you take poetry to be a kind of composition and not the virtue or excellence of that kind, as eloquence is the virtue of oratory and not oratory only and beauty the *virtue* of inscape and not inscape only.”<sup>30</sup>

Hopkins saw beauty as the pleasingly ordered variety in an object; as he expressed it, beauty lies in the “relation between the parts to each other and of the parts to the whole.”<sup>31</sup> Beauty, it would seem, presupposes inscape and is its *effect*. It is precisely in probing to the *cause* of beauty that Hopkins comes close to a definition of inscape: “It is certain that in nature outward beauty is the proof of inward beauty, outward good of inward good. Fineness, proportion of feature *comes from a moulding force* which succeeds in asserting itself over the resistance of cumbersome or restraining matter . . . The moulding force, the life, is the *form* in the philosophical sense.”<sup>32</sup> (Italics mine.)

As we have already seen — and as we shall develop more fully later — Hopkins was a poet who, for better or worse, had a philosophic bent. In view of his own distinction between inscape and beauty, the proper meaning of inscape is closer to Father Schoder’s first definition, the “*forma informans*” of the philosophers.

W. H. Gardner agrees with many of the definitions of inscape already quoted. Speaking of the *Notebooks*, he says: “With the eye of a Ruskin, and the same power of using

<sup>28</sup> R. V. Schoder, “An Interpretive Glossary of Difficult Words in the Poems,” *Immortal Diamond*, ed. N. Weyand and R. V. Schoder (New York, 1949), pp. 217-218.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>30</sup> *Notebooks*, p. 250.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>32</sup> *Letters III*, pp. 158-159.



words as pigments, he [Hopkins] glances from heaven to earth, noting the varied forms and changing moods of nature and recording every significant detail. The artist, moreover, is merged in the metaphysician. In the vagaries of shape and color presented by hills, clouds, glaciers and trees he discerns a recondite pattern — 'species or individually distinctive beauty' — for which he coins the name 'inscape' . . .<sup>33</sup>

A Jesuit critic, Dr. W. A. M. Peters, formulates and defends the following definition of inscape: ". . . the unified complex of those sensible qualities of an object that strike us as inseparably belonging to and most typical of that object, so that through the knowledge of this unified complex of sense-data we may gain an insight into the individual essence of the object."<sup>34</sup>

Dr. Peters arrives at this definition by considering the force of the suffix "scape" in such terms as "landscape" and "seascape." For him, the suffix "posits the presence of a unifying principle which enables us to consider part of the countryside . . . as a unit and as an individual, but so that this part is perceived to carry the typical properties of the actually undivided whole."<sup>35</sup> He quotes some unpublished notes in which Hopkins used "scape" in the sense of the scholastic "species," the impression or reflection made by an object in our senses and ultimately in the intellect, activating our power to know the object with a sensitive and, subsequently, an intellectual knowledge. Thus: "After death the soul is left to its own resources, with only the scapes and species of its past life."<sup>36</sup> But *inscape* suggests a representation of, not merely the object's superficial appearance, but its individual essence. Therefore Hopkins rejected "design" or "pattern" for the more exact word, "inscape." The apparent synonyms of inscape have the weakness of all synonyms: there is that shade of difference which demands the new word. The unity and order that are suggested by "design" or "pattern" may be imposed from without. Hopkins wanted a word to signify unity and order springing from within, controlled from within. His word must imply the discovery of the very *nature* of the thing — understanding "nature" as the principle of activity or operation. It was to emphasize the perception of that inner, distinct and positive reality underlying the "sense-data" that Hopkins chose to coin the word "inscape." This seems to be what Dr. Peters means when he reduces his definition to the words: ". . . the outward manifestation of this intrinsic principle of unity."<sup>37</sup>

From the foregoing definitions of inscape, and from Hopkins' own words, I conclude that there is an ambiguity in the term, a dual significance which may well explain

<sup>33</sup> W. H. Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition*, Vol. I (New Haven, 1948), p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> W. A. M. Peters, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Essay towards the Understanding of his Poetry* (London, 1948), p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Peters, p. 3.



why the poet never essayed a formal definition of it. What Hopkins was trying to express was an intuition: he would take all the individualizing features of an object and attempt to wrest from them the secret of its identity. Inscape thus came to mean both the individuating notes and the metaphysical reality lurking beneath them. And what drove him on in his quest for inscape was his insatiable thirst for beauty, for the ideal, for perfection. Beauty, "the virtue of inscape and not inscape only," was his goal.<sup>38</sup> Inscape is the sacrament of beauty — the outward sign of invisible grace, taking grace in a non-theological sense.

Hopkins has left us a clue to the mystery of his dedication to inscape. It leads us again into his philosophical convictions and it explains why so few commentators have been able to penetrate very deeply into the meaning of inscape. For it leads us to a philosopher whose genius has not been sufficiently appreciated even within the Church that produced him and employed his talents — one who was known in Christian philosophy's golden age as the *Doctor Subtilis*, Duns Scotus.

Readers of Hopkins' poems cannot fail to be struck by the flowing tribute he pays to the Franciscan philosopher in his sonnet, *Duns Scotus' Oxford*. There he singles out Scotus as the one "who of all men most sways my spirits to peace;/ Of reality the rarest-veined unraveller . . ." (*Poems*, No. 44). As a Jesuit student he had his first contact with the works of Scotus; this he recorded with evident enthusiasm: "At this time I had first begun to get hold of the copy of Scotus on the Sentences in the Baddely library and was flush with a new stroke of enthusiasm. It may come to nothing or it may be a mercy from God. But just then when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus."<sup>39</sup>

Why did the young Jesuit give such a welcome to the philosophical doctrines of Scotus? Outstanding commentators agree that it was because Hopkins had at last found a philosophical justification for his theory of inscape and a moral justification for his absorbing interest in the inscapes that thronged his senses.<sup>40</sup> Above all, there was the Franciscan's "intuitionism," which Dr. Pick calls an "artist's theory of knowledge."<sup>41</sup> Here the future poet discovered the epistemology required by the experience of inscape, for: ". . . an experience of 'inscape' would have to be a knowledge of a thing in its entirety; it would have to be individual, not general; concrete, not abstract; real, not conceptual. For aesthetic experience is concerned with the individuated 'inner form' expressing itself in 'outer form.' It differs from rational knowledge in as much as the 'inner form' is not

<sup>38</sup> *Notebooks*, p. 250.

<sup>39</sup> *Notebooks*, p. 161.

<sup>40</sup> Gardner, I, pp. 21-30; Pick, pp. 157-160; also Christopher Devlin, "Hopkins and Duns Scotus," *New Verse*, No. 14 (April 1935), pp. 12-17.

<sup>41</sup> Pick, p. 158.

abstracted from its sensible manifestation, but it is an experience of that 'inner form' expressed in its sensible manifestation."<sup>42</sup>

For a brief explanation of "intuitionism" we may refer to the *History of Medieval Philosophy* by de Wulf, who states: "Careful to secure for the understanding the immediate perception of individual reality, Scotus allows, in addition to the abstract and universal knowledge which is *distinct*, a preliminary intuitive knowledge representing a concrete and singular thing in a confused manner (*species specialissima*). This concept of the singular arises at the first contact of the intelligence with that outside it, and is formed simultaneously with the sense knowledge of an object."<sup>43</sup>

However, Christopher Devlin, in his essay, "The Image and the Word," cautions us about the correct understanding of the critical term, *species specialissima*, in relation to inscape: "If there is any Scotist equivalent for Hopkins' inscape, it is the *species specialissima*; but Augustine's theory of Evolution and Plato's Ideas are necessary in order to understand the connection. 'Plato's opinion,' says Scotus, referring to the ideal humanity that exists on its own, 'cannot be rejected out-of-hand, for there seems no reason why nature-as-such should not attain its own individuality.'"<sup>44</sup>

Devlin's study of the question in the light of Scotus' Platonism leads him to the position that the "... *species specialissima* does not represent any particular individual, a woman, a horse, or a mulberry tree, as it is afterwards known by abstraction and secondary images; no more does inscape. It represents the Ideal Person to whom universal nature tends . . . ."<sup>45</sup> Having given us this new insight into the concept of inscape with its Scotist orientation, Devlin proceeds to supply us with the following pertinent observations:

There is a sentence of Scotus which opens up an even more difficult question, but which, by itself, may throw light on what I have called the blend of Platonic idealism and Franciscan realism, in both Scotus and Hopkins. 'God's knowing is life, creative life. The creature as He knows it here and now, is the Ideal.'

In 'inscape,' as I understand it, there is a momentary contact between the Creative Agent who *causes* habitual knowing in me, and the created individual who *terminates* it in my actual insight. And the medium of this contact, if I am correct, is the *species specialissima*, the dynamic image of nature being created. In easier language: the poet, if the original motion of his mind is un-

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>43</sup> Maurice de Wulf, *History of Medieval Philosophy* (London and New York, 1938), Vol. II, p. 309.

<sup>44</sup> Christopher Devlin, "The Image and the Word," *Month*, CLXXXIX (March, 1950), 197.

<sup>45</sup> *Loc. cit.*

impeded, does perhaps see things for a moment as God sees them, and he experiences the creative thrill . . . .<sup>46</sup>

It will be profitable to add a final word from this author, who has traced inscape back to Scotus more thoroughly than any other. He is convinced that a careful study of Hopkins' poem, *Henry Purcell*, will show in what sense inscape is to be identified with the *species specialissima*:

The foreword to the poem makes it clear that it is not the lonely, incommunicable self — what Scotus calls the *ultima solitudo* — that he is after, but the richer self, which is part of an ideal pattern. For what he praises above all in the musician is that he has 'uttered in notes the very make and species of man as created both in him and in all men generally.' . . . 'The species as created both in him and in all men generally, suggests the *species specialissima*. But what Hopkins praised above all in a work of art was 'inscape.' Therefore, there is a *prima facie* case for identifying inscape with the *species specialissima*. Indeed, understood in this sense, it is what we all praise as superlative . . . .<sup>47</sup>

From the Devlin study we may conclude that in the moment when Hopkins was aware of inscape, he experienced something like perfection. In one of his poems — *To what serves Mortal Beauty?* — he asserts that the function of beauty is this: ". . . it keeps warm/Men's wits to the things that are; what good means . . ." (*Poems*, No. 61). And in the closing lines, having asked, "What do then? how meet beauty?" he replies: "Merely meet it; own,/Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift . . ." Now, it seems obvious that the phrases "what good means" and "Home at heart" support Devlin's interpretation of inscape as representative of the Ideal. "Good" is one of the universals; yet, where is it known except in the particular? What Devlin says is that the Scotist *species specialissima* is the most specific image, not of the object but of Good, Beauty, the Ideal. While inscape (which is synonymous with *species specialissima*) is a complex of individuating notes that must be carefully discovered, its actual achievement is the revelation of the Ideal. Man's innate receptivity for beauty is surely described in the striking inversion of Hopkins: ". . . Home at heart . . ." And it is inscape that establishes *rapport* between objective beauty and predisposed man. Only the Scotist intuitionism would allow for the description of beauty's being ". . . Home at heart . . ."

As will be seen in the study of the poems, Hopkins was an incurable "idealist," in the sense that he idealized almost every natural phenomenon or person he wrote about. So idealistic are his tributes to schoolboys, soldiers and sailors, workers, and his England, that he is charged with "naivety" by F. R. Leavis.<sup>48</sup> But behind all this may we not see

<sup>46</sup> Devlin, p. 197.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>48</sup> *Kenyon Critics*, p. 128.



repeated proof of Devlin's interpretation of inscape as the representation, not merely of the particular individual, but more properly of the Ideal? Actually, the key to Hopkins' power is earnestness of purpose and vividness of expression; and both of these qualities were born of the conviction that ". . . all things are charged with love, are charged with God and if we know how to touch them give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring and tell of him."<sup>49</sup> That he found more than a surface pattern in inscapes is well exemplified in a stanza from his first great work, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*:

I kiss my hand  
To the stars, lovely-asunder  
Starlight, wafting him out of it; and  
Glow, glory in thunder;  
Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west:  
Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and  
wonder,  
His mystery must be instressed, stressed;  
For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I  
understand.

(*Poems*, No. 28, st. 5)

The inscapes of *things* were precious to Hopkins; but it was in *man* that he found the most intriguing inscape of all. Far greater than the individuality in things is the personality in man. All thoughtful men have pondered this. Hopkins' self-analysis was due partly to an introspective bent and partly to his religious profession. In any case, it was unusually profound, as can be gathered from the following philosophical note:

I find myself both as a man and as myself something most determined and distinctive, at pitch, more distinctive and higher pitched than anything else I see . . . . And this is much more true when I consider my self-being, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnut-leaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man . . . . Nothing else in nature comes near to this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this self-being of my own.<sup>50</sup>

It was Duns Scotus again who satisfied Hopkins in his search for the secret of his own inscape and that of other men. In the Franciscan's championing of the will with its

<sup>49</sup> *Notebooks*, p. 342.

<sup>50</sup> *Notebooks*, p. 328.



freedom, the poet found a doctrine that emphasized the dramatic meaning of human acts. Two of the unfinished poems yield evidence of Hopkins' Scotist, rather than Thomistic, appreciation of personality. The first, *On a Piece of Music*, shows that man's distinct selfhood depends on his use of free will:

What makes the man and what  
The man within that makes:  
Ask whom he serves or not  
Serves and what side he takes.

(*Poems*, No. 110)

It is personal choice that "makes the man" and reveals, or is, the "man within."

The second evidence is more forceful. In his *On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People*, Hopkins expresses his concern about their future lot, and he confronts the mystery of human freedom and personal responsibility:

Man lives that list, that leaning in the will  
No wisdom can forecast by gauge or guess,  
The selfless self of self, most strange, most still,  
Fast furled and all foredrawn to No or Yes.

(*Poems*, No. 119)

There is a haunting echo for the student of Hopkins in the word "strange." He will soon remember a line from one of the poet's earlier sonnets, *Pied Beauty*, where Hopkins speaks of "All things counter, original, spare, strange . . ." (*Poems*, No. 37). The beauty of nature is distinct, strange; but in free man abides an even stranger secret, and it is rooted in his inviolable will. In Hopkins' poems on man there is a constant concern with decision and action. There is a kind of apostolic preoccupation with the salvation of his characters; this might be expected in a priest-poet, but Hopkins makes of Christian Hope a theme. And what he hopes for them is perfection: the complete harmony of their wills with the will of God, through the mysterious indwelling of Christ in them. This is the burden of his key sonnet, in which, after several concrete examples of specific act in things, he reveals the doctrine of inscape:

. . . Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells;  
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*  
  
I say more: the just man justices;  
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —  
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

(*Poems*, No. 57)

The importance of this sonnet cannot be over-emphasized, for it reveals the direction of Hopkins' thinking, the heart of his doctrine. Most significant is the fact that the analogy seems deliberately to omit what is known in Catholic theology as the "natural man." Inscap is concerned with the Ideal; this Ideal is imaged forth, in humanity, by the "just man." The omission of the purely "natural man" implies either that he has no identity "in God's eye" or his personality is as yet unfulfilled.

Another important observation can be made in reading this poem: man expresses his inner loveliness through the body: "limbs, . . . eyes." This is axiomatic with Hopkins; when considering the inscapes of man in his poetry we shall note how carefully and how successfully he portrays man's expression of himself in bodily motion.

Above all, let it be remarked that the sonnet was obviously intended to express poetically the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, by which Hopkins believed that Christ lives and acts in all the "just," uniting all in one mystical reality so intimately that the beauty of the "just man's" act is at once Christ's and his own. Like certain Fathers of the Church who had been prepared for this doctrine by their earlier adherence to Plato, Hopkins honored it to a degree unequalled by his fellow-Catholic poets. The proof is in the sonnet under discussion, revealing as it does the Christo-centric orientation of inscape. For this poet, the final word that beauty speaks is Christ. This is what gives meaning to life, in Hopkins' eyes: "I think the trivialness of life is, and personally to each one, ought to be seen to be, done away with by the Incarnation."<sup>51</sup>

Admitting the Platonic implication of inscape, as Devlin traces it through Duns Scotus, it seems to me that the elusive term of our study must be understood as the *particularized, or "individually distinctive" image of perfection*. I am convinced that the concept cannot be understood without relating it to Hopkins' sacramental view of the *cosmos*: "God's utterance of Himself in Himself is God the Word, outside Himself is this world. This world, then, is word, expression, news of God. Therefore its end, its purpose, its purport, its *meaning* and its *life* and *work* is to name and praise him." (Italics mine.)<sup>52</sup> It must be obvious that, if " , , each mortal thing does one thing and the same . . . /Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells; . . . " (*Poems*, No. 57) and if, at the same time, everything in the world is "word, expression, news of God . . .", there can be no question of the necessity of understanding inscape in the sense I have indicated. Inscap is a concept that reconciles individual distinction with cosmic unity. It is essentially a Christian concept conveying the intriguing paradox that the more a creature is its inviolable self, the more it tells of God.<sup>53</sup> Perfection dwells in the identity of the Individual, for in that divinely conceived and created identity is the particular expression of the inexhaustible idea of God, ". . . beauty's self and beauty's giver" (*Poems*, No. 59).

<sup>51</sup> *Letters III*, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Unpublished note quoted in Peters, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 175.

<sup>53</sup> See the use of "inscape" in Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (Norfolk, Conn., 1949), pp. 8-10.

It is necessary, before concluding this inquiry into the definition of inscape, to sound a final caution. The “perfection” or the “Ideal” to which Hopkins attains in inscape is definitely a created reality, and not divine. This is to say that his Catholic theology precluded any pantheistic interpretation of inscape. We have his own statement for this: “Neither do I deny that God is so deeply present to everything . . . that it would be impossible for him but for his infinity not to be identified with them or, from the other side, impossible but for his infinity so to be present to them.”<sup>54</sup> He preserved this respect for the transcendency of God, and at the same time accepted *on faith* the mystery of a Christo-centric universe. That is why, in his most forthright expression of an inscape’s meaning to him, he acknowledges it as “mystery”: “. . . Since, tho’ he is under the world’s splendour and wonder,/His mystery must be instressed, stressed; . . .” (*Poems*, No. 28, st. 5).

Inscape has its limits, and they are the limits of created beauty as found in nature and in man. The mystery of the Infinite still remains, but more challenging for every inscape experienced.

<sup>54</sup> *Notebooks*, p. 316.

