

WORLD'S CLASSICS

A portrait of Gerard Manley Hopkins, a young man with light brown hair, looking slightly to the left. He is wearing a dark, high-collared garment over a white shirt. The background is a textured, dark blue or purple.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

SELECTED POETRY

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS



GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

*Selected Poetry*



*Edited with an Introduction and Notes by*  
CATHERINE PHILLIPS

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## Abbreviations

- EDD English Dialect Dictionary
- J. *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House and Graham Storey (London, 1959)
- L. I *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. C. C. Abbott (London, 1935, 1955)
- L. II *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, ed. C. C. Abbott (London, 1935, 1955)
- L. III *The Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. C. C. Abbott (London, 2nd edn., 1956)
- Poems *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (4th edn., Oxford, 1967, 1982)
- OET *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Norman H. MacKenzie (Oxford English Texts; Oxford, 1990)
- S. *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Christopher Devlin, SJ (London, 1959)

For details of critical books mentioned, see Further Reading, pp. 252–5.

## Introduction

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS was born at Stratford near London on 28 July 1844, the first of eight children of Manley and Catherine Hopkins (a ninth died in infancy). Manley was a self-made man, born into a family whose decline in material fortunes meant that he was unable to fulfil his ambition of going to university. He worked as an average adjustor, establishing insurance claims arising from marine disasters, and went on to write the standard handbook on the subject and establish his own successful firm of adjustors into which Cyril, one of his younger sons, entered. There is only one published photograph of Manley and his appearance in it does not suggest his drive, nor the range of his interests. He wrote poetry, a significant amount of which was published in two volumes, and in the journal *Once a Week* under the pseudonym Berni. In many of the poems it is possible to see traits that shaped Gerard's sensibility. There is the protective love of nature, braced by a more scientifically accurate observation than in much nature poetry of the day; there are, too, religious concerns and an amateur's interest in the operation of the mind. Gerard (and his sister Grace) also followed Manley in writing music.

Catherine's strong and pious personality deeply affected Gerard, too. Her handwriting is strikingly aggressive for a woman, with vigorous cross-strokes and scything up-strokes. It was she who often wrote out poems for Gerard's commonplace book, who I think transcribed his prize-winning poem at school, 'The Escorial', and who drafted the incomplete letter of protest at his conversion ending, 'Gerard, my darling boy, are you indeed gone from me.' It was his mother's feelings that Gerard records hurting most often during the difficult period of 1864-6, when he was breaking away from his closely bonded family to go down a religious path whose consequences they dreaded for him. But Gerard Manley Hopkins did not have a personality to which the easy way appealed. He was independent in his thinking from a surprisingly early age, and, as a boy, clever with a tendency to condescension and unkind mimicry, but also gifted with an extraordinary sensitivity to beauty in nature and man. So intense was his appreciation of colour, for example, that he told his friend Richard Watson Dixon that certain shades of blue and red had once been

sights to draw tears from him. His special responsiveness to visual and aural impressions prompted him to think at one time that he might make a career as a poet–artist, as Dante Gabriel Rossetti had done. Gerard's brothers Everard and Arthur both made their careers as illustrators and artists and his sister Kate was also artistically talented.

Gerard was sent to Highgate School, where his love of the classics was fostered along with a resentment of its bullying headmaster, the Revd Dr J. B. Dyne. From success there Gerard won a place, although not a college scholarship, at Balliol College, Oxford, where he thrived. The university was in the midst of a number of intellectual movements, among them the rise of science—the famous debate between Bishop Wilberforce and Thomas Huxley had taken place in the new Oxford Museum [of science] just three years before Hopkins became an undergraduate. He was caught up in the second wave of conversions to Roman Catholicism inspired by John Henry Newman and the criticisms of the Anglican Church made by such influential members of the Oxford Movement as Edward Pusey and Henry Parry Liddon, both of whom were Gerard's confessors and counsellors. Poems written while he was an undergraduate show Hopkins working through not only his religious convictions but the philosophical problems of how man's experience of the world is shaped by internal as well as external forces. They show too a self-discontent in his struggle to control his sexual impulses and the rougher edges of his personality. The general stylistic influence of Keats, Tennyson, Spenser, and Christina Rossetti is evident, as well as echoes of Shakespeare and Milton. It was during his undergraduate years, largely through his growing dissatisfaction with Tennyson's poetry, that Hopkins formulated his ideas on poetic quality, distinguishing 'poetry proper', written in an inspired mood by accomplished poets, from 'Parnassian' (poetry written by the accomplished but with less imaginative fire). He applied a third term, 'Delphic', to verse that has the form of poetry rather than prose but has none of the intensity Hopkins associated with poetry proper. Matthew Arnold, Professor of Poetry at Oxford while Hopkins was an undergraduate, was to make similar distinctions.

Hopkins's circle of friends included Robert Bridges, with whom he was later to develop an important correspondence, and William Mowbray Baillie, with whom he exchanged ideas on art and literature and, later, philology. Both were to remain his friends

through most of his life. More influential during his undergraduate days were probably the friendships with others who were attracted to Catholicism, such as William Addis, and Digby Mackworth Dolben, a relative of Bridges. Dolben and Hopkins met during a visit Dolben paid to Oxford in February 1865. They discovered that they had much in common—interests in writing poetry, religious inclinations, and probably a certain sexual attraction. Dolben failed to reply to letters Hopkins sent him, and Hopkins's feelings for him seem quite quickly to have grown less intense, so that, when Dolben was drowned in 1867, Hopkins wrote to Bridges: 'I looked forward to meeting Dolben and his being a Catholic more than to anything. At the same time from never having met him but once I find it difficult to realise his death or feel as if it were anything to me' (*L.* I 16).

The most important decision that Hopkins made while he was at Oxford occurred, he said, 'all in a minute': the decision of July 1866 to become a Roman Catholic. Although the actual turning-point may have been sudden and impelled in part by that of a number of his friends, who were all received within a few weeks of each other, the thought leading up to it was careful. Hopkins's diaries show that for some eighteen months he patiently examined what he could of the claims made by Catholicism and the Anglican Church to be the 'true' church. At the time of his conversion Hopkins wrote that not belonging to the true church would lead to eternal damnation, although he later investigated ways in which such a sentence might be averted for people whom he loved and who were not Catholic (see *L.* III 147–8 to his mother, 'Henry Purcell'). But the change of religious affiliation also had worldly consequences. The Catholic hierarchy—its structure of parishes, dioceses, and so on—had been set in place only in 1850 and fear of Catholics, linked to fear of such Catholic countries as France and Spain, was still widespread and adversely affected the professional advancement of many Catholics. Those working within the Catholic hierarchy, on the other hand, worked within a system at full stretch to cover the demands on it from parishes, schools, and seminaries.

Hopkins left Oxford having achieved firsts in Moderations and Greats. He then took a temporary post as a teacher at the Oratory school for Catholic boys in Birmingham, an institution established and then still led by John Henry Newman, who had admitted Hopkins to the Catholic Church. But Hopkins missed the intellectual excitement of his university days, which he had further

enhanced by attending art exhibitions in London, reading contemporary literature, and taking advantage of opportunities of meeting such celebrities as the Rossettis and William Butterfield, whose architecture he greatly admired. School teaching, by contrast, he found somewhat dreary and demanding.

The next large decision that he took was to join a religious order. After some hesitation, he chose the Society of Jesus, which he entered on 7 September 1868. The struggle to control his own nature, his keen awareness of how difficult it was to lead a life that followed Christian tenets undeviatingly, would have been strong motives in seeking an outer structure to assist him. He was also caught between strongly individual and independent thought and a desire for the safety of well-established precedent. It was in the novitiate that he began to practise the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, whose pervasive influence on his life can be seen in his constant awareness of the potential religious significance and symbolism of much that he saw and experienced. This systematically Christocentric approach to the world suffuses his mature poetry, setting it apart from the writing of such other close and imaginative observers of nature as John Clare and Francis Kilvert.

After two years spent at Manresa House, the Jesuit novitiate in London, Hopkins was sent to St Mary's Hall at Stonyhurst, Lancashire. It was while he was studying philosophy here that he came across the *Oxford Commentary* on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard by Duns Scotus. In his Journal Hopkins wrote of the find that he 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' (J. 221). What Hopkins valued in Scotus was in part the authority he gave to what was probably the central experience of Hopkins's life. This experience was of feeling God's presence in nature so that perceiving the essence or 'inscape' of a thing was to perceive some part of God and even to feel at times that it was possible to communicate directly with him through nature (see 'Hurrahing in Harvest'). The idea allowed Hopkins to fuse his intense appreciation of natural beauty with his religious worship. In addition to 'inscape', he invented a second, related term—'instress'—to indicate the force that held the thing or individual together or described a momentary flash of communication between an observer and the thing observed (see 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', stanza 5).



Hopkins's training was interrupted for almost a year from September 1873, when he was sent back to Manresa House to prepare Juniors for examinations in Classics and English for the University of London. Writing his lectures called for the investigation of basic ideas about rhythm and rhyme, an important stage in his technical development as a poet. Although he had made his first experiments in what he later called 'sprung rhythm' while he was an undergraduate (see notes to 'St. Dorothea'), he produced the first of his mature poems in the metre in Wales when he resumed his training. This was 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' (1876), the longest of his complete poems and an ode in which he set out to explain the wreck of a steamer in terms of God's providence. Into it Hopkins poured natural observation, intense religious experience, and doctrinal zeal. The poem was not published during his life but freed him from scruples about spending time on poetry, so that in 1877 he wrote a number of remarkable sonnets, including 'The Windhover' and 'God's Grandeur'. In them, in his efforts to express his emotions and observations, he experimented constantly with rhythm, and rhyme influenced by Greek and Welsh patterns.

During the next six years Hopkins fulfilled a number of roles as priest, preacher, and school teacher within various Catholic communities in mainland Britain from London and Oxford to Liverpool and Glasgow. He was appalled by the poverty of the working classes, by the misery caused by drunkenness, and by the poor physique resulting from urban squalor. His letters to Bridges and Dixon speak of fatigue and suggest the oppression of spirit he felt in trying to fulfil roles that did not come easily to him, though 'Felix Randal' shows the compassion and self-awareness he was capable of in relating to his parishioners. He was generally happier during the year's respite of his tertianship from October 1881, a year of contemplation away from the demands of the everyday industrial world of nineteenth-century Britain.

Then in 1883 he was sent to Dublin to be Professor of Greek and Latin Literature at University College. He wrote to Bridges that, when he thought of the six examinations he would have to mark each year, each with hundreds of candidates, he felt that enough gold to cover Stephen's Green, the ample park over which University College looked, would not pay for it. But examining was not the worst bane of Hopkins's existence during the last five years of his life. He found that in Ireland, although he was surrounded by

Catholics, he was attached to an academically poor institution and was inextricably part of a movement actively working to throw the English out of Ireland. An English patriot at heart, he lamented that his efforts were 'like prisoners made to serve the enemies' gunners'. It may have been for reasons of nationality that Hopkins withdrew from many of the social opportunities available to him in University College. Whatever the reason, loneliness became increasingly evident in his letters and poetry. The Sonnets of Desolation, probably written in 1885-6, contain much of the material mentioned in his letters of the period: feelings of a lack of worldly success, of having wasted his talents, of a loneliness and corrosive self-loathing. Yet these poems are skilfully shaped, suggesting a greater objectivity and control over the emotions they express than their intensity might lead one to expect. There were happier times, too, spent with a colleague Robert Curtis, minor successes in his writing of music, and periods of a serene religious certainty evident in such poems as 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection'.

Throughout his adult life Hopkins expressed guilt over the writing of his poetry, since it did not bring about the conversions to Catholicism that he had hoped and had cost him time and energy which might have been better spent in other ways. However, in retreat notes made in January 1889, he consciously left his poetry to God's care, putting aside frustrations at his lack of worldly recognition and trusting that work so evidently personal would not be used against his name. The note represents at least a temporary truce in the internal debate Hopkins had waged with himself since his undergraduate days over the relation of his vocation and artistic impulses. A few weeks later he contracted typhoid, from which he died on 8 June. His poetry was not published in an edition until 1918 and only slowly met with widespread appreciation.

Although Hopkins bemoaned his fragmentary and slim productivity, his poems have greater originality, intellectual and emotional creativity than can be found in many more prolific writers. Numerous poets have tried to imitate aspects of his work with results that are always ventriloquial, but the experience of studying so exacting a writer has subsequently helped to strengthen the mature work of such poets as David Jones, Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Seamus Heaney. For the general reader it is probably the music of Hopkins's poetry and his honesty and intelligence that have so much to do with his current and continuing popularity.

## Chronology

- 1844 28 July, born at Stratford, Essex. Gerard was the first of eight children. His father, Manley Hopkins, was a marine adjuster and Consul-General for Hawaii in London.
- 1854-62 Gerard attends Highgate School. He does well academically, winning five prizes, among them the School Poetry Prize for 'The Escorial' (1860), the Governors' Gold Medal for Latin Verse, and a school Exhibition.
- 1862 Wins an exhibition to Balliol College, Oxford.
- 1863 Apr., enters Balliol.
- 1866 July, decides to join Catholic Church.  
21 Oct., received by Newman into the Catholic communion.
- 1867 June, graduates with first-class degree.  
Sept.-Apr. 1868, teaches at the Oratory, Birmingham.
- 1868 2 May, decides to become a priest, although unsure whether to join the Benedictines or the Jesuits.  
11 May, burns copies of his poems, indicating his new, vocational goal.  
3 July-1 Aug., walking holiday in Switzerland with Edward Bond.  
7 Sept., enters the Jesuit novitiate at Manresa House, Roehampton (London).
- 1870 9 Sept., begins three years of philosophy at St Mary's Hall, Stonyhurst, Lancashire.
- 1872 Reads the *Oxford Commentary* of Duns Scotus on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.
- 1873 From September teaches rhetoric at Roehampton.
- 1874 Aug., begins three years of theology at St Beuno's, Wales.
- 1875 Dec., begins to write 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'.
- 1876 Writes 'Silver Jubilee', 'Ad Episcopum', 'Cywydd', and 'Penmaen Pool'.
- 1877 Feb.-Sept., writes 'God's Grandeur', 'The Starlight Night', 'As kingfishers catch fire', 'Spring', 'The Sea and the Skylark', 'In the Valley of the Elwy', 'The Windhover', 'Pied Beauty', 'Hurrahing in Harvest', and 'The Lantern out of Doors'.  
23 Sept., ordained.

- Oct., sent to Mount St Mary's College, Chesterfield, where a classical scholar was required as teacher.
- 1878 Apr., moved to Stonyhurst to prepare students for the University of London examinations. 'The Loss of the Eurydice' and 'The May Magnificat' written here.  
July–Nov., acting curate at Mount Street, London.  
Dec., becomes curate at St Aloysius' church, Oxford.
- 1879 Feb.–Oct., writes nine complete poems ('Duns Scotus's Oxford', 'Binsey Poplars', 'Henry Purcell', 'The Candle Indoors', 'The Handsome Heart', 'The Bugler's First Communion', 'Andromeda', 'Morning, Midday, and Evening Sacrifice', and 'Peace') and a number of fragments, and begins to compose music.  
Oct.–Dec., curate at St Joseph's, Bedford Leigh, where he writes 'At the Wedding March'.  
30 Dec., becomes Select Preacher at St Francis Xavier's, Liverpool.
- 1880 Writes 'Felix Randal' and 'Spring and Fall'.
- 1881 Sept., becomes assistant in Glasgow. Visits Loch Lomond and there writes 'Inversnaid'.  
Oct., starts tertianship at Roehampton; composes no extant poetry during the year but writes notes towards a commentary on the Spiritual Exercises.
- 1882 Sept., sent to Stonyhurst College to teach classics. There he completes 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' and writes 'Ribblesdale'.
- 1883 Bridges begins his second collection of Hopkins's poems (MS B).  
Hopkins writes 'The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe'.  
Aug., meets Coventry Patmore.
- 1884 Feb., moves to Dublin as Fellow in Classics and Professor of Greek and Latin Literature at the newly formed University College. His duties at first were as examiner in Greek.  
Oct.–Apr. 1885, writes most of the extant passages of *St. Winifred's Well*.
- 1885 May well have written most of the poems called 'The Sonnets of Desolation' as well as 'To what serves Mortal Beauty?', 'The Soldier', 'To his Watch', and 'The times are nightfall'.
- 1886 May, meets Bridges while on holiday in England.  
Completes 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves', writes 'On the Portrait

of Two Beautiful Young People', translates 'Songs from Shakespeare'.

- 1887 Aug., holiday in England.  
Writes 'Harry Ploughman', 'Tom's Garland', and, perhaps, 'Ashboughs'.
- 1888 Begins 'Epithalamion', writes 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire . . .', 'What shall I do for the land that bred me', and 'St. Alphonsus Rodriguez'.  
Aug., holiday in Scotland.
- 1889 Jan., retreat at Tullabeg. Writes 'Thou art indeed just, Lord', 'The shepherd's brow', and 'To R. B.'.   
8 June, dies of typhoid; buried at Glasnevin, Dublin.

## *Note on the Text*

WHEN, shortly after Hopkins's death, Robert Bridges started to edit his friend's poems, it was the second time that he had contemplated an edition of them. His first attempt to print Hopkins's poetry was with that of four other poets and was begun in 1880. The attempt faltered because the chosen publisher, a friend of Bridges's later to publish a number of volumes of his poetry, was just starting his press and was not confident of being able to carry through the project. Jean-Georges Ritz speculates that Hopkins also raised objections himself. In 1889 the plan failed, in part because Bridges at that time considered a lengthy biographical introduction necessary and he was too upset by Hopkins's depression and his own feeling that his friend's life had been wasted to write it, and partly because he did not consider contemporary poetic taste ready to accept such rhythms and diction.

Between 1889, and 1918, when Bridges prepared the first edition of Hopkins's verse, he published sixteen of Hopkins's poems or parts of them in various collections. In his edition he was less concerned to present an accurate version of the poems as Hopkins had left them than to win acceptance for the poetry. Consequently, he chose those versions or combinations of them that he thought most appealing, even when, as in the case of 'The Handsome Heart', Hopkins had himself cancelled the copy. The introduction was made editorial rather than biographical; in it Bridges was critical of sources of ambiguity, such as the omission of the subjective relative pronoun, 'that', and the use of homophones in grammatically uncertain positions. He also condemned what he saw as faults of taste in rhyme and metaphor which today few people would find objectionable.

The edition of 750 copies sold slowly and it was not until 1930 that Charles Williams, a poet himself and house-editor at Oxford University Press, was asked to produce an enlarged second edition. W. H. Gardner then carried this work further in 1948 and 1956, adding also a biographical introduction. Much of the editing of the early poems was done by Humphry House and published in *The Notebooks and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1937). The fourth edition of the poems, edited jointly by W. H. Gardner and N. H.

MacKenzie in 1967, and reprinted with corrections by N. H. MacKenzie a number of times since, caught numerous errors that had crept into the text and restored many of Hopkins's readings in place of those of Bridges.

This selection follows my Oxford Authors edition in discarding the subsections in which the poems had previously been placed and presents them in chronological order. Absolute chronology cannot be achieved. The dates Hopkins assigned were normally those of the poem's inception, but he revised his work and left many of his poems without dates. It is hoped that, despite the imperfections, a rough chronology will give a fuller idea of Hopkins's poetic interests at each stage. The order used here is one to which a number of other critics have also contributed, among them Humphry House and Graham Storey, W. H. Gardner, and, most of all, N. H. MacKenzie. There are, however, disagreements as to the most likely sequence.

This volume takes as text that of my Oxford Authors edition, which was prepared from the manuscripts, with improvements made by N. H. MacKenzie in his Oxford English Texts edition. There remain some differences in our interpretation of the manuscripts. Many of Hopkins's early poems are contained in two tiny diaries, *C I* and *C II*, where pencil drafts are fragmented by prose entries. These, and a number of poems written on loose leaves, are housed in Campion Hall, Oxford. Most of the later manuscripts are in the Bodleian Library. The majority of these belong to the four collections described by Robert Bridges:

*A* is my own collection, a MS. book made up of autographs—by which word I denote poems in the author's handwriting—pasted into it as they were received from him, and also of contemporary copies of other poems. These autographs and copies date from '67 to '89, the year of his death . . .

*B* is a MS. book into which, in '83, I copied from *A* certain poems of which the author had kept no copy. He was remiss in making fair copies of his work, and his autograph of *The Deutschland* having been (seemingly) lost, I copied that poem and others from *A* at his request. After that date he entered more poems in this book as he completed them, and he also made both corrections of copy and emendations of the poems which had been copied into it by me. Thus, if a poem occur in both *A* and *B*, then *B* is [generally] the later, and, except for overlooked errors of copyist, the better authority . . .

*D* is a collection of the author's letters to Canon Dixon . . . they contain autographs of a few poems with late corrections.

*H* is the bundle of posthumous papers that came into my hands at the author's death. These were at the time examined, sorted, and indexed; and the more important pieces—of which copies were taken—were inserted into a scrap-book. That collection is the source of a series of his most mature sonnets, and of almost all the unfinished poems and fragments. Among these papers were also some early drafts.

Some of these poems have subsequently been bound in other volumes by the staff of the Bodleian; among these are MS *C*, an important and miscellaneous collection of Hopkins's poems, and *F*, a few pages taken from letters to his mother.

There are, in addition, a couple of manuscripts in the British Library and some in private hands.

In general the version which I believe to be that last written has been taken for text. This policy has been followed because Hopkins's poetic powers were far from spent when he died and although questions of the influence of Bridges and Dixon arise, it is clear that Hopkins did not simply follow their advice but considered it and, even when conceding their objections, normally found his own solutions to them.

Editorial intervention could have been still further reduced by showing all uncanceled variants in the text but it has been felt that while this is appropriate for scholars (and has been done by N. H. MacKenzie in the Oxford English Texts edition) it is unnecessary in an introduction to the poetry. Some of the variants can be found in the notes, and in poems where extensive changes have resulted from choosing the final version as text, as for example in 'The Handsome Heart', and 'St. Alphonsus Rodriguez', the earlier but better-known versions are also printed complete. I have not included the poems in Latin, Greek, and Welsh, and have omitted the shorter poetic fragments.

Throughout the edition layout of poems and marks of punctuation have been changed as a result of scrutiny of the manuscripts. In MS *B*, many pages of which contain writing by both Bridges and Hopkins, slight differences in ink-colour and magnification of pen-tracks suggest that some punctuation marks thought in the past to have been introduced by Bridges were in fact made by Hopkins. As in the fourth edition, layout has generally been taken from MS *A* since that used in MS *B* was chosen by Bridges.

The metrical marks that appear in this volume are all Hopkins's own and come for the most part from MS *B*, which was Hopkins's compromise between the more prolific markings of MS *A* and the



absence of any guidance. Cost and editorial opinion at Oxford University Press have restricted metrical marks in the text to simple stresses. In some poems written out after 1881 Hopkins introduced a scheme differentiating stress. The full system is marked in the notes but in the text single stresses have been used to show the heaviest accents. The only exception is 'Tom's Garland', where the one double stress marked in MS *B* has been incorporated into the text.