Chapter 2

The Aesthetics of Hopkins and Indian Poetics

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a great religious and nature poet, was influenced by the ideas of the aesthetic movements prevalent during the Victorian times. The main exponents of aestheticism during that period were John Ruskin, Walter Pater, William Morris and Oscar Wilde. But Hopkins’s aestheticism was different from that of the Victorians as it was a poetic principle which gradually developed into religious aesthetics.

Hopkins was a keen observer of natural objects from his younger days and was fascinated by the structural beauty of objects. This is very evident from his prose and poetical works. His remarkable essay “On the Origin of Beauty: A Platonic Dialogue” prefigures his interest in the deep lying aesthetic reasons for the beauty of objects. A structural analysis of his aesthetic theory reveals that he was always looking for the individuality and beauty of the form and pattern of objects in the world around him. In the Journals and Papers he explicitly states, “all the world is full of inscape” (230). As Miller says in “The Univocal Chiming,” “Hopkins’s celebrated terms ‘inscape’ and ‘instress,’ seem, when they apply to natural things at least, to refer, respectively, to the individual pattern of a thing and to the inner energy which upholds that pattern” (98).

Marco Graziosi in his essay “G. M. Hopkins’s Aesthetic Theory” has remarked that “Hopkins’s early essays in poetics, although often
referred to, have not received much attention from literary critics” (71).

“On the Origin of Beauty” is a remarkable early essay that traces the origin of Hopkins’s aesthetic theory, which in its developed form, is expressed as “inscape” and “instress.” In his mature poetry, Hopkins transcends the structural principles of “inscape” and moves into a dynamic principle called “instress.”

According to Marco Graziosi, Hopkins believed that the characteristics of beauty occurred “not in an abstract sense, but rather in a material one” (72). He observes that Hopkins’s aesthetic theory “does not simply neglect fundamental questions about the nature of beauty, but offers an explanation of how certain observable (‘technical’) facts can produce an aesthetic effect” (72). The origin of aesthetic study in Hopkins can be traced only by thoroughly exploring his undergraduate essay “On the Origin of Beauty: A Platonic Dialogue.” A close study of this essay will reveal the importance of form and pattern in his aesthetic principle.

The discussion of art and beauty is as old as philosophy. However, for a long time, art and beauty were treated separately. They were discussed in other philosophical issues in which they played only a subordinate role. Philosophically, beauty was treated in the context of metaphysics. Beauty is a concept that has been studied almost continually from antiquity to the present. Aesthetics has always been the most influential approach in the study of beauty.
A Brief History of Indian Aesthetics and Poetics

Indian aesthetics has an early history of development when compared to Western aesthetics. Even though many individual philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle dealt with aesthetics in the West, there was no unified discipline of aesthetics until the 18th century. Baumgarten coined the word “aesthetics” only in 1735. Only at this stage did Westerners recognize that the system of “fine arts” such as music, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture and literature has anything at all in common and can be subjected to unified philosophical study.

A clear understanding of the terms “aesthetics” and “poetics” is very essential in a comparative study. Aesthetics is a term wider in meaning than poetics. According to Kanti Chandra Pandey, the word “aesthetics” stands for the “Science and Philosophy of Fine Arts” (1: Introduction ix). It is commonly understood as the study of sensory and emotional values, sometimes called judgement of sentiment and taste. Some scholars in the field deny it as a “critical reflection on art, culture and nature.” Even though the term aesthetics can be applied to all fine arts, Indian aesthetics as a branch is mainly concerned with poetry. In the West, aesthetics is concerned with understanding beauty, particularly as it is manifested in art, and with its evaluation. For years, philosophers and critics have sought to determine the most effective way of dealing with this problem. According to Myers, the word “poetics” indicates “theories dealing with the nature,
composition and criticism of poetry” (237). In the West, poets and critics for at least twenty-three centuries have been setting forth principles, theories, rules and technical studies extolling their various views. There followed a discussion of theories on the study and writing of poetry which includes writers from former periods of Greek literature, from a plethora of aesthetic stances and movements (Myers 237).

The history of Sanskrit literature starts from the time of the Vedas. They are the earliest literary productions preserved in any branch of Indo-European family. They are considered as sacred in origin. The poetic quality of the Vedas was not given much importance, as a full-fledged poetic tradition did not exist then. But lyric poetry attained a high stage of development even in the very early periods of Vedic literature. Major portions of the Vedas are mostly Rgs, mantras, which are to be recited during various sacrifices. The Upaniṣads are mainly related to theological and philosophical speculations and they mark the last stage in the development of Vedic literature.

Vedic literature is followed by Epic literature, which is secular in origin. The authorship of the great epics called the Rāmāyaṇa and the Māhabhārata is assigned to Vālmīki and Vyāsa respectively. Even though there were many other similar works in that period, only the Rāmāyaṇa is recognized as a great poem and Vālmīki as the first poet. All other works
of the period are classified as *Itihāsa* and *Purāṇa* according to their subject matter.

Traditionally the whole subject matter of Sanskrit poetics has been divided into ten *kāvyāngas* (constituents) of poetry. The nature of poetics is described as *kāvyā-svarūpa* (nature of poetry), *śabdaśakti* (the significance of a word), *dhvani-kāvyā* (suggestive poetry), *guṇībhūta-vyangya-kāvyā*, a piece of poetry where suggested sense is secondary to primary sense, *rasa* (poetic relish), *guṇa* (excellence in poetic expression), *rīti* (style of poetry), *alankāra* (figurative beauty of poetry), *doṣa* (blemishes in poetic expression) and *nātya-vidhāna* (dramaturgy) (Choudhary 6).

The principles and doctrines about poetics went on developing through discussions among the ācāryas from Bharata onwards for centuries till the time of Mammaṭa when they got established into ten forms. These are listed in *kāvyaprakāśa* by Mammaṭa. The notable result of all this was that the whole of the philosophy of poetics and aesthetics was categorized into five schools namely, *rasa*-school, *alankāra*-school, *rīti*-school, *dhvani*-school, and *vakrokti*-school. Apart from these, the *aucitya*-school is considered as the sixth one, though not accepted as such by all. Among the above, *rīti* and *vakrokti* were founded by Vāmana, and Kuntaka respectively, and *rasa* by Bharata, *alankāra* by Bhāmaha, and *dhvani* by Ānandavardhana (Choudhary 8).
According to some scholars, serious discussions of poetics excluding drama began in Sanskrit only in the sixth century A.D. During this period, the major figures were Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin. Their important works are Kāvyālankāra and Kāvyādarśa. Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin deliberately avoid discussions on drama, taking for granted that Bharata has dealt with it in detail in his work. According to K. Krishnamoorthy, Bharata, the celebrated author of Nātyaśāstra, has been ranked as a hoary sage by posterity and his authority is undisputed in later discussions about drama, poetry and fine arts. Though his encyclopaediac (sic) work is singularly free from metaphysical subtleties, later commentators belonging to different philosophical traditions have vied with one another in interpreting the cryptic aphorism of Bharata on Rasa to yield a full-fledged system of aesthetic thought. (Dhvanyāloka and Its Critics 4)

From the sixth century onwards, there emerged a branch of Sanskrit poetics that gave not much attention to drama. It may be because of Bharata’s exhaustive treatment of drama in his work. However, according to Sethuraman, what the ancients thought about the name and nature of poetry may be had from the rgs of the Vedas and the texts of the Upaniṣads. Kavi was the term employed to describe the poet and he was
considered as a god or one “who attains the nature and status of a God” (Sethuraman, Introduction viii).

The theory of *rasa* is the lifeblood of the entire Sanskrit aesthetics and literary criticism. Though there are references to *rasa* in the Vedas, in Vālmīki, and in the Upaniṣads, these are not exactly to aesthetics. In Sanskrit aesthetics, the term was first employed in the context of drama and was later extended to poetry. From the time of Bharata onwards, the term signified aesthetic pleasure or thrill that the audience experienced while witnessing the enactment of a drama. It also included the pleasure that poetry accorded to readers or listeners. *Rasa* experience is viewed in different lights by many aestheticians. Princy Sunil in his article, “*Rasa* in Sanskrit Drama” says, “‘Rasa’ is one of those words in Sanskrit whose precise significance is as indefinite as its usage is widespread. In the history of Sanskrit poetics, perhaps no other concept has given rise to so much controversy.”

*Rasa* as a doctrine emerged in Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* indicating the emotional effects of drama. Bharata considered the evolution of *rasa* as an important purpose of dramatic creation. He analyses the process and method of *rasa*-evolution in his famous sutra, “*vibhāvānubhāva-vyabhicāri samyogād rasanispattiḥ.*” *Rasa* comes from a combination or commingling of *vibhāvas* (causes), *anubhāvas* (effects) and *vybhicāris*
Bharata coined the term *rasa* for aesthetic relish because it can be tasted – *āsvādyatvāt* (*NS* I 105).

Bharata’s view of *rasa* was later elaborated and commented on by various aestheticians down the centuries. Bhaṭṭalollata held the view that a *sthāyībhāva* (stable emotion) when intensified by poetic description becomes *rasa*. He observes that *rasa* primarily resides in the original characters like Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta, because they were the first who experienced emotions like love, grief, etc. in the play. According to his explanation, through *anusandhāna*, that is imagination, the actor attributes to himself or super-imposes on himself the role of the original character and thus experiences *rasa*. Bhaṭṭalollata leaves out the poet and the audience in his analysis of the process of *rasa*-experience. According to Kuntaka ‘*vakrokti*’ or deviant utterance is the essence of poetry. He proposed this theory in his famous work *Vakroktijīvita* (Choudhary 53). In the *Vakroktijīvita*, Kuntaka denied the independent existence of *dhvani* and included it under *vakrokti* or “a striking mode of speech.” According to Kujunni Raja, Śankuka’s *vakrokti* is all-pervading and is almost analogous to *dhvani* itself (300).

In Śankuka’s explanation of the *rasa*-experience, the spectators were included in the aesthetic experience. According to him, during a performance the audience gets so involved that it is forgotten that what is represented on stage is only an imitation. He introduces the similitude of
painting to explain the emergence of aesthetic emotion. A picture-horse is taken as a horse since it successfully imitates a horse, but one knows fully well that it is some lines of colour on a canvas. Śankuka’s conclusion is that the actor imitates the state of mind of the characters that he is portraying and the spectator perceives this imitated state of mind in the form of *rasa*.

According to Bhaṭṭatauta, the aesthetic experience of the hero, the poet, and the aesthetician is essentially the same. He says that aesthetic experience arises from poetry only when the aesthete directly visualizes it through the mind’s eye. Mammaṭa, an aesthetician of the eleventh century, in his work *Kāvyaprakāśa*, deals with all the topics of poetics except dramaturgy. Much of Mammaṭa’s discussions are based on the works of his predecessors like Bhāmaha, Vāmana, Rudraṭa, Udbhata, Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta. He claims that suggestive poetry is the best type of poetry and *rasa* (aesthetic relish) is the most appealing and the most desirable element of poetry.

Ānandavardhana considered the poet as the true and sole creator of *rasa*. According to him, the poet was a seer or *Ṛṣi*. He extended the theory of *rasa* to the poet or the creator. He believed that the poet also experienced *rasa* or aesthetic relish during the time of poetic creation. According to him, *rasa*, the aesthetic state of consciousness, belongs to the poet alone, and it is only his “generalized consciousness.”
Ānandavardhana, though accepting dhvani to be the soul of poetry, declared rasa as the best variety of dhvani as compared to its other varieties. The poet should be concerned only with rasa-dhvani. With high esteem for rasa, he says that a composition expresses the desirable sense in various forms but it becomes splendid when it is infused with rasa (Choudhary 58).

Bhaṭṭanāyaka and Abhinavagupta imposed on rasa a system of theology and philosophy. From their time onwards, rasa became a subjective entity directly experienced by the spectator, the reader, or the critic. These two aestheticians hold the view that rasa experience is not a mere pleasure but an abiding bliss where the spectator’s own self becomes one with the absolute soul, Paramātma. The theories of Bhaṭṭalollaṭa and Śankuka were violently criticized by Bhaṭṭanāyaka. He states his view of rasa in his book Hṛdayadarpaṇa. He rejects the theory of suggestion of rasa advocated by Ānandavardhana. According to him, rasa realization can be explained on the basis of the role of universalization or sādhāranīkaraṇa, which is the master-key to unlock the riddle of rasa experience. The spectator should not be conscious of any personal or private involvements while enjoying a piece of art. The spectator should actively participate in the situation and should not be indifferent to it. The sādhāranīkaraṇa is brought about by a special function of poetry or drama, which is called bhāvakatva and bhāvanā. Poetic language has three
functions: 1. *abhidhā* which gives the literal meaning including the secondary figurative meaning, 2. *bhāvanā* which effects the universalization by the introduction of *guṇās* and *alankāras* in the case of poetry and through four types of *abhinaya* in drama, and 3. *bhojakatva*, the power of making the spectator enjoy the *rasa* revealed by *bhāvanāvyāpāra*.

Abhinavagupta was a profound philosopher and poet and his explanation of *rasa* is based upon Kashmir Śaivism. He used technical terms like *samvid* and *parāmarśa* from Śaiva philosophy in his analysis of the theory of *rasa*. Apart from that, he linked *rasa* to the theory of *dhvani* propounded by Ānandavardhana. He discarded the two functions, *bhāvakatva* and *bhojakatva* of Bhatṭanāyaka, since they were recognized in the philosophical system that was based on the *sphoṭavāda* of the grammarians like Bharṭṛhari. According to him, *rasa* experience is a break in the web of relationships of which every day life, *saṃsāra*, is woven.

Abhinavagupta, following Ānandavardhana, argues that *rasa*, being the experience of emotions, cannot be communicated by the method of direct statement. Hence, there is need for a function exclusively operative in poetry, and he calls it *vyanjanā*. *Rasa* is never expressed and it is always suggested. So *rasa* is conveyed through the *vyanjanā* and is always *vyangya*. Abhinavagupta, therefore, on the basis of *dhvani*, interprets the term *samyogāt* as the relation between the “suggestor” and the suggested
and nispatti as manifestation (abhivyakti), and his theory is designated as 
abhivyaktivāda.

The impact of Abhinavagupta on the interpretations of Bharata’s 
rasasūtra was so powerful that everyone fell in line with him. Following 
Bharata, there have been numerous philosophical explanations of the term 
nispatti. Śankuka’s explanation of rasasūtra is said to be based on nyāya, 
Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s on sāmkhya and Ahinanava’s on Śaivism.

We find many similarities in the aesthetic thinking of Hopkins and 
Indian poetics. Hopkins could see the beauty of God in very ordinary 
objects of nature. Only very few people can attain this perception verging 
on mystical insight. Those who are not able to see the presence of God in 
nature should first seek him through artistic perception, where the poet 
helps him to see the truth. As an old Vedantic verse says, “It is only when 
man has overcome selfishness and realized the highest truth, he will be in 
rapt ecstasy wherever he may turn, for he sees the glory of Being 
everywhere. Till then, therefore, he can have an experience of complete 
beauty only in art” (Hiriyanna 163).

A Brief History of Western Aesthetics

The word “aesthetic” is derived from the Greek word “aisthesis,” which means things perceptible by the senses, things material. Though 
aesthetics originated in philosophy, it was later recognized as a special 
field and acquired its name. It was only in the eighteenth century, when
the questions regarding art’s epistemological and practical values were discussed, that aesthetics began to be known as an independent philosophical discipline. Before that time, the term “aesthetics” referred to only the philosophical theory of sense perception.

The term “aesthetics” first appeared in Western writings in 1735 in the *Reflections of Poetry* by Alexander Baumgarten, a follower of the Rationalistic school of philosophy. Drawing upon the Greek word for perception “aisthesis,” Baumgarten coined the word “aesthetics” for the science of perceptual cognition. Baumgarten’s work is important in the history of aesthetics because it marks the beginning of aesthetics as a special field of investigation. His use of the word “aesthetics” found popular acceptance and appeared in English after 1830. Aesthetics was traditionally regarded as a branch of philosophy, concerned with the understanding of beauty and its manifestations in art and nature. But in the twentieth century, there developed a tendency to treat aesthetics as an independent science concerned with investigating the phenomena of art and their place in human life (“Aesthetics”).

One of the oldest types of aesthetic theory is that of “formism,” more popularly known as “imitation theory.” It begins with the idea that the artist’s aim is to make a copy in some medium such as marble, bronze, paint, or action and words as in a drama, of existent objects and events in the environment. Numerous conceptions of aesthetic theory developed
under the influence of various philosophical ideas. The prefiguring of aesthetic ideas can be seen in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Plato presented his theory of imitation in *The Republic*. He considered an artistic creation as only an imitation of an imitation which is twice removed from reality. Having described the artist in these terms, Plato promptly degraded him as a socially superfluous person. Many scholars cannot believe that Plato was quite serious in this remark.

Aristotle soon followed Plato and gave the imitation theory a new twist, which was developed and carried along through the succeeding centuries. He suggested that the artist might imitate the universal form or essence of things rather than physical particulars. He has made many other observations and his complete aesthetic theory should not be identified with any one of them. The classical work on the aesthetics of formism, however, is his *Poetics*. He carefully analyzed the art of tragedy by studying the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides by giving more importance to form.

The Hedonistic pleasure theory is the simplest and the most liberal in aesthetics. This theory gives importance to the psychological process in aesthetic enjoyment. George Santayana, a Spanish-born Harvard naturalist, in his book *The Sense of Beauty* (1896), speaks about the materials of beauty, form, and expression. He gives great importance to form in aesthetic enjoyment. Aesthetic form comes when aesthetic
pleasure arises from a combination of elements that individually have little or no value. The Gestalt psychological movement is also a hedonistic aesthetic theory that gives importance to the mental patterns that arise from the perception of material objects. A group of German psychologists inaugurated this movement. “Gestalt” is, in fact, the German term for pattern, and this term has been retained to distinguish the non-associative patterns discovered by this school.

Psychologically inclined aestheticians conducted work in laboratories and accumulated a large amount of factual material, which helped in the systematization of the science of aesthetics. Thomas Munro, ever since the publication of his book *Scientific Method in Aesthetics* (1928), argued that aesthetics should be treated as a science and not as something opposed to science.

German aesthetics, which emerged as a philosophical discipline in the middle of the eighteenth century, was very influential with regard to the development of this discipline in other countries. Philosophical aesthetics was a unique German development because German writers did not look for ideas outside Germany. Thus it was a branch of study thoroughly grounded in Germany. Aesthetics was considered as a part of rationalistic metaphysics until Baumgarten. It was Baumgarten’s attempt to consolidate rationalism that made Aestheticism more and more independent. In 1735 Baumgarten published *Meditationes philosophicae*
de nonullis ad poema pertinentibus (“Philosophical meditations on some requirements of the poem”). The aesthetics of Baumgarten is an attempt to understand the epistemological relevance of sensual perception.

Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz based his philosophical system of theology on the assumption of the world as a creation of God. He viewed the world as a well-ordered unity and the structures of reality as laws of rationality. This view exists in logic, physics, and mathematics. Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), states that the aesthetic pleasure is a very special sort of pleasure. He distinguishes the aesthetic pleasure as superior to all of the common pleasures of sensuous enjoyment or carnal indulgences. For him an aesthetic judgement is not exclusively about art but about beauty in natural objects. He showed some interest in the relation of art and morality, but for him the faculty of cognition is of lesser importance. He advanced the notion that art has no relation to truth. It is in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* that the term “aesthetics” acquired the meaning that it has today. He separated aesthetic judgement from rational judgement. For him a work of art or a beautiful object of nature does not have an end outside itself.

Friedrich Schiller takes Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* as the starting point for his philosophical investigations of beauty and art. He wanted to discover the objective principle of art that can overcome Kant’s subjectivism. He argues that only human beings can achieve the transition
from the sensual to the rational and moral state by means of the aesthetic intermediary. Because of his insistence on the aesthetic appearance of reality, he created a rift between art and truth. He gives art a position as the product of human spirit that reveals a kind of truth that is different from scientific truth.

Arthur Schopenhauer is one of the philosophers who had the greatest influence on artists. According to him, “the adequate objectification of the will by means of a spatial phenomenon is beauty in the objective sense” (Hammermeister 115). Soren Kierkegaard’s aesthetic ideas are central to his philosophy. His thinking centres around the notion of existence that for him denoted the act of living considered as a unity of thought and feeling, desire and action. He understands aesthetics as an attitude to life. Ernst Cassirer argues that art together with myth, religion, language, and science is a basic phenomenon of human life and culture. György Lukács wrote a large number of articles and books dealing with aesthetics in general. His works are written mostly from a Marxist-Leninist perspective. He ascribed aesthetic transformative power only to a work of art and argued against any relevant aesthetic experience that would originate in nature.

Martin Heidegger’s writings on art renew the romantic paradigm in the philosophy of art in the twentieth century. His most important contribution to the philosophy of art is his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art.” Philosophical analysis of art and questions of aesthetics are very
much at the centre of Theodor Adorno’s work. His theory of art is based on an analysis of society and art after the eighteenth century. For him, art can be valued according to its effort to escape the totality of form. His idea is that the less a work aims at unity, the more it allows the disparate elements to remain unorganized, and the greater is the work. His conception of form as an interplay of constructive synthesis and fragmentation is derived from his analysis of modernist work. Adorno’s favouring of modernist art gradually emerged. He declared that representative painting is impossible. In his words, the rule of art is “the freedom of artworks, in which their self-consciousness glories and without which these works would not exist, is the rule of art’s own reason” (Adorno 6).

Mystical aesthetics is a branch that gives great importance to emotion. This theory of art is based on mystical experience as the immediate experience of God or the Ultimate Being. The theories of aesthetics based on emotions were transformed into a new branch known as Linguistic art movement. There are many facets of this movement and they are centred on the question of meaning and language. They focus also on the question of what is involved in an aesthetic judgement.

The influence of Oriental aesthetics is also seminal in the growth of aesthetics as a special discipline. Many terms such as “zen,” “moribana,” “yoga,” and “rasa” along with the ideas they expressed laid the foundation
for an international aesthetic language. The influence of religion on the artists in the Orient is varied and extensive. In ancient Greece and India arts tended to develop partly for magical and religious purposes.

**The Difference between “Aesthetics” and “Aestheticism”**

The distinction between the terms “aesthetics” and “aestheticism” is necessary to understand the cultural relevance of these terms in England. “Aesthetics” is a term which signifies devotion to beauty as found in the arts and in whatever is attractive in the world around us. The word “aestheticism” first appeared in the nineteenth century and it denoted something new and not merely a devotion to beauty. In England it became recognizable in the middle to late Victorian period and in France somewhat earlier. Aestheticism was not an exclusively literary phenomenon, though “aesthetic,” ideas were expounded mainly in literature. It had its implications in graphic arts as well as in music. There was also an attempt to bring literature to a condition of “pure art” which music was already believed to have achieved.

The aesthetic ideas gained popularity in the Victorian England through Ruskin, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde. The slogan “art for art’s sake” is usually associated with the Victorian age. The currency of the term both in France (*l’art pour l’art*) and in England shows that many of the nineteenth century people were seriously concerned with the value and nature of art, and with the relation of art to life (Adorno 6). Aestheticism
in England was not a simple phenomenon but a group of related phenomena, which all reflected the conviction that enjoyment of beauty can be the value and meaning of life.

Art for Ruskin had a distinctively moral and religious value. However, his influential book *Modern Painters* contributed much to the growth of aesthetic ideas in England. He became Slade Professor of Fine Arts at Oxford and his lectures impressed Oscar Wilde, who later borrowed many ideas from him. Wilde was considered as a representative of aestheticism in literature and became notorious for practicing these ideas in his life also. Walter Pater was a leading figure of aestheticism in England. Though he wrote only five books, his *Renaissance* and *Marius the Epicurean* were the most influential writings of the late Victorian period.

**The Uniqueness of Hopkins’s Aesthetics and Poetics**

The aesthetic theory developed by the Victorian poet Hopkins has much in common with the aesthetic theories of ancient times. But his aestheticism has a Victorian temper. At the same time, it was a radical break from it because it culminated in religious aesthetics. Almost everything that Hopkins created and recorded in the first surges of his enthusiasm at Oxford owed something to Ruskin. But his influence went far beyond Hopkins’s sketches.

Walter Pater taught Hopkins as an undergraduate in 1866 and their acquaintance continued for twelve years. The barrier that separated them
was Pater’s anti-Christian ideas. Hopkins wrote about this in his *Journals*: “Pater talking two hours against Xtianity” (*JP* 138). However, there is no further comment. Pater in *The Renaissance*, a collection of essays on art and literature first published in one volume in 1873, says that in order to pursue aesthetic life one must cultivate awareness, sharpened intelligence, sense perception, and power of introspection. There is skepticism throughout Pater’s writings, and he refuses to believe in an enduring reality. His belief was that “truth” was unattainable and art added more to our experience. Pater influenced Hopkins only in his attitude to aesthetic ideas that he maintained in spite of his religious commitment. However, it is difficult to assess the influence because of Pater’s rejection of Christianity. In the words of R. M. Seiler, “. . . his writings seemed to suggest the separation of art and morals” (4). It is an irony that a man like Hopkins who had great faith in his religious convictions was attracted to the ideas of Pater. For Pater, the knowledge of beauty was the supreme end of life and he believed that it could be attained only through art (Storey 60). Pater’s ideas about aestheticism differed widely from that of Hopkins. According to John Robinson, “Pater was surrounded by a world full of beautiful creations with no significance outside themselves; Hopkins was part of a beautiful Creation. For him ‘form’ of art was to be found in nature” (31).
Most of the researchers of Hopkins’s aesthetics confine themselves to the study of the final phase of its development as found in his unique theories of “inscape” and “instress.” But an attempt is made to prove that Hopkins’s poetic structure originated from his concern for the beauty of form and pattern as demonstrated in his *Journals and Papers*, especially in the essay, “On the Origin of Beauty: A Platonic Dialogue.” Any comprehensive study of Hopkins’s aesthetic theory should begin with a thorough exploration of this essay. The beginning of his aesthetic concerns can be traced back to this undergraduate essay. This essay first appeared in print in *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* edited by Humphry House in 1937. It was later republished in *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* edited by Humphry House and Graham Storey in 1959. The essay is in the form of a Platonic dialogue. The arguments are presented in a masterly and logical manner. To trace the development of the poet and aesthete in Hopkins we must turn first to this essay and the *Journals* rather than to his early poems, as they contributed more in shaping the poet in him.

One of the reasons why Victorian critics did not pay much attention to Hopkins was that he gave great importance to the technical aspects of poetry. The aesthetic ideas of Hopkins were fundamentally Victorian, but the undeniable distance from the leading ideas of his age, however, is clearly dramatized in the dialogue on beauty in the characters of the
Professor, Hanbury, a scholar, and the Pre-Raphaelite sketcher, Middleton in the essay “On the Origin of Beauty.”

In spite being a Jesuit, Hopkins encountered difficulties in accepting Jesuit theology because of his passion for aesthetics. According to him, nature is the direct manifestation of the perfection of God, whereas according to the official theological standpoint of the Jesuit order, nature is an eloquent manifestation of the separation between the perfection of God and the imperfection of nature. This school of Christian theology lays emphasis on the fallenness and sinfulness of nature in order to stress the redeeming grace of Christ. What Hopkins is trying to do is to reconcile the fallen aspect with the sacramental aspect of nature. He finds the beauty of Christ even in a potsherd or the ugliest objects in nature. We can find here a revolutionary way of reconciling the fallen nature with the manifestation of God in nature.

The Jesuits were antagonistic to Duns Scotus, the subtle Franciscan philosopher, and his view of nature. According to Francis of Assisi the phenomena of nature becomes the manifestation of God through human beings. It appeared quite natural for him to call the sun, Brother Sun, a ferocious wolf, Brother Wolf, and an illness, Sister Illness. Hopkins, with his affinity to the Franciscan view of life, tried to reconcile the Ignation theology with Franciscan mysticism in his poetic practice. But, unfortunately, the contemporaries of Hopkins failed to see the
reconciliation of the Franciscan and Ignatian elements in Hopkinsian aesthetics. As Maurice B. McNamee puts it:

Hopkins was deeply aware of this divine communication in the multitudinous variety of visible creation. The two most profound influences on his thought and character, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius and the philosophy of Scotus, both tended to deepen his appreciation of nature as the channel of divine communication, and to sharpen his interest in the particular, individualized aspects of nature through which that communication is realized. (226)

In the official standpoint of the Jesuit order, nature is viewed as existing in alienation with God. The crouching down of Hopkins on the pathway incident is an illustration of his interest in perceiving the beauty of God even in a pebble. According to many Jesuits of that time, beauty is dangerous even in harmless objects such as flowers, pebbles, trees, and other things in nature. Hopkins’s extraordinary interest in perceiving the beauty of God even in insignificant objects of nature evoked strange reactions from his fellow Jesuits.

The excitement of Hopkins on discovering Scotus and the outbursts of his poetry after that incident is to be understood in the light of conflicts in his mind. In his Journal entry on 3 August 1872 he wrote:
After the examinations we went for our holiday out to Douglas in the Isle of Man Aug. 3. 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. (JP 221)

Hopkins found a way to resolve his conflict regarding the enjoyment of mortal beauty and the need to avoid that enjoyment for spiritual perfection according to his understanding of Ignatian theology of his age. According to Franciscan view of life, beauty is not a distraction for the pious soul; on the other hand, beauty reveals the secret of being. The spiritual insight that the poet gains through the theory of “inscape” and the perception of God in the individuality of finite objects is beautifully brought out in the poem “That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and the Comfort of the Resurrection”:

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond. (Poems 106)
The change that Hopkins speaks of in this poem is the spiritual transformation of an ordinary man into the image of Christ. Nature itself bears testimony to a similar transformation in its seasonal changes. The emphasis on movement and transformation characteristic of the Eastern mystical traditions is found in the world-view of mystics throughout the ages. In ancient Greece, Heraclitus taught that “everything flows,” and compared the world “to an ever-living fire” (Capra 175-76). Hopkins as a mystic finds the relevance of transformation within the limits of Christian ideas. In Hopkins, “Impersonation was the natural result of his having inscaped an object, of his perceiving the object as changed with God” (qtd. in Peters 12). It was difficult for his contemporaries to accept the profound religious vision and commitment implicit in Hopkins’s work. They could not understand the intricacies of his thought, nor his distinctive use of language and the complexity of “inscape.”

In 1866 Hopkins was received into the Roman Catholic church and he decided to become a priest. He entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1868 and burned his youthful verses, and resolved to write no more, as not belonging to his profession. Hopkins broke his poetic silence of seven years with the poem “The Wreck of Deutschland.” Robert Bridges, when he first published Hopkins’s complete poems in 1918, twenty nine years after his death, described the poem thus: “the poem stands logically as well as chronologically in front of his book, like a great dragon folded in the gate
to forbid all entrance, and confident in his strength from past success” (106). It was in January 1918 that Bridges brought out the first edition of Hopkins’s poems with an introduction and notes, and it happened to be the right moment for a new poet to make an impact. As critics point out, by the end of the First World War, poetry had stagnated and people were looking for a new voice to give poetry direction and purpose. Hopkins was hailed as the authentic voice and inspiration of the twentieth century. In spite of the modernity of his poetry and the comparative seclusion of his chosen life, he was at heart a Victorian who lived in the Victorian world. As a poet his appeal to modern readers lies in his dynamic observation and interpretation of life, particularly of nature, and in his choice of universal themes.

Hopkins’s concepts of “inscape” and “instress” are his unique contributions. He uses “inscape” to describe the beauty of pattern, which expresses the inner or essential form of things. He uses “instress” in two ways: firstly as the energy or stress that “upholds” an object’s “inscape,” that which gives it its being, and secondly as the force which the “inscape” exerts on the mind or feelings of the perceiver.

Hopkins from his younger days was a keen observer of form in nature and this has much to do with the poetic theory of “inscape.” The aesthetics of Hopkins’s poems rests on this principle. He was influenced by the ideas of the aesthetic movements prevalent during the Victorian
times. Writers important in the development of English Aesthetic movement were indebted to continental writers like Baudelaire and Gautier in France, and Hegel in Germany. As we have seen, the main exponents of Aestheticism in Victorian England were John Ruskin, Walter Pater, William Morris and Oscar Wilde. However, Hopkins’s aestheticism was different from that of the Victorians, as it was a poetic principle which gradually developed into religious aesthetics. Hopkins was a keen observer of natural objects from his younger days and was fascinated by the structural beauty of objects. This is very evident from his prose and poetic writings.

“On the Origin of Beauty: A Platonic Dialogue” is a remarkable early essay which prefigures Hopkins’s interest in the deep-lying aesthetic reasons for the beauty of objects. Marco Graziosi in his essay “G. M. Hopkins’ Aesthetic Theory” says, “Hopkins’ early essays in poetics, although often referred to, have not received much attention from literary critics” (71). Though many studies have appeared on Hopkins’s aesthetic theory, no much attention has been paid to this aspect of his undergraduate essay “On the Origin of Beauty.” The poetic principle outlined in this essay in its developed form contains his theory of “inscape.” In his mature poetry, Hopkins transcends the structural principles of “inscape” and moves into the indeterminate principle called “instress.”
Hopkins always looked for the individuality and beauty of form and pattern of objects in the world around him. In *The Journals and Papers*, he says explicitly that “All the world is full of inscape . . .” (230). As Miller says in “The Univocal Chiming,” “Hopkins’s celebrated terms ‘inscape’ and ‘instress,’ “seem when they apply to natural things at least, to refer, respectively, to the individual pattern of a thing and to the inner energy which upholds that pattern” (98). The concern for form and pattern helped him to a great extent in shaping his aesthetic theories that find expression in his major poems. “Form” and “pattern” are essential elements in the perception of “inscape.” His artistic sensibility helped him to a great extent in shaping his aesthetic theory. The artist in him had received an early training that enabled him to have artistic perception of things:

Gerard himself, after his sixth year, received lessons in music and drawing from an aunt who was both musician and portrait-painter. As a draughtsman he made rapid progress, and by his twentieth year had developed a strength and delicacy of line, together with a feeling for internal pattern, which very few mere amateurs can ever achieve. (Gardner 2: 3-4)

Critics interpret “inscape” differently. According to Robinson, if it is taken as “form” it will imply only something that is outside; whereas it is more than an external form for Hopkins (35). Etymologically, “inscape” is “the object on which one fixes the eye” and as a verb, it is a command to
“mark,” “look and see” (Cotter 271). In David Downes’ view, “the prefix ‘in’ of ‘inscape’ denoted the ‘scape’ of the outer fixed shape of the intrinsic form of a thing” (qtd. in Robinson 35). According to him, Hopkins was not satisfied with the terms design and pattern as “these terms indicate an order impressed from without, an extrinsic principle of unity” (qtd. in Robinson 35). According to John Pick, the word “inscape” appears nearly fifty times in the *Journals* which Hopkins kept from 1868 to 1875 (32). He adds that the term “inscape” is applied to all varieties of natural beauty which is distinctive and patterned (32). In a famous letter to Bridges, Hopkins applied the term to his own poetry:

No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness. . . . 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. Now it is the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped. *(LB 66)*

“Form” or “inscape,” according to Robinson, “permanently holds out the possibility of an insight into the unity of things” (36). In his essay “The Univocal Chiming” Miller says that “‘inscape’ and ‘instress’ seem, when they apply to natural things at least, to refer, respectively, to the individual pattern of a thing and to the inner energy which upholds that
pattern” (98). James Finn Cotter in his book *Inscape: The Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* says, “*Instress* is man’s *yes* in response to Being felt and known; *inscape*, the *is* that marks not individuality but Being itself: it “holds” each object whole within the plentitude of IS” (13).

A clear understanding of the terms “inscape” and “instress” is unavoidable in any study of his poetry. These terms occur in his poetic as well as prose writings. It is because of the variety of contexts in which they occur that it is difficult to define them (Robinson 33). We have seen his acknowledgement that “inscape” is the very aim of his poetry, which he calls “the very soul of art” (qtd. in Peters 1).

Hopkins saw that “inscape” existed in objects in different degrees. He looked at objects with a fixed determination to catch what was individually distinctive in them so that he might have some insight into their essence. To express these individuating characteristics he coined the term “inscape.” The word occurs several times in his *Letters, Journals and Papers, Sermons and Devotional Writings* and in his poems. Nevertheless, he has nowhere clearly defined the term. Among all the interpretations, “inscape as individuality” is considered to be the most accepted. *The Journals and Papers* is a clear illustration of Hopkins’s attempt to capture the uniqueness of pattern and form. His poems also show an attempt to get at the individuality of things using words.
Hopkins looked at things with intense concentration and this helped him to perceive the “inscape” of things. He deeply valued the perception of “inscape.” He regretted that very often the “inscapes” of things went unnoticed. He says that they “go without notice, go unwitnessed” (qtd. in Peters 5). He felt deep pain whenever he saw the individuality of objects destroyed. With intense agony he writes, “The ashtree growing in the corner of the garden was felled. It was lopped first: I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed . . . . I wished to die and not to see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more” (JP 230). In the poem “Henry Purcell” Hopkins expresses the individuality of a musician whose distinctive qualities can be perceived from his musical compositions. In a letter to Robert Bridges Hopkins speaks of Purcell in these terms: “I am looking out meanwhile for his specific, his individual markings and mottlings, ‘the sakes of him’” (LB 170).

According to Cotter, Hopkins comes to the formulation of “inscape” through his appreciation of the philosophy of being of Parmenides. Hopkins translated the Greek philosophical poem of Parmenides into English. It is in this translation that his favourite terms “inscape” and “instress” occur for the first time. The intense longing in Hopkins for the “inscape” of objects leads him to its spiritual significance. It was this spiritual outlook on the world that made “inscape” very precious to him. The “inscape” of an object was the “word of God” that reminded him of
the Creator. This is well illustrated in the famous bluebell passage where he says, “One day when the bluebells were in bloom I wrote the following. I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it” (JP 199). The spiritual significance that “inscape” held for Hopkins is very evident in these lines. He has written in another place that in the “inscapes” that he perceived, he saw the “sparks that rang of God” (qtd. in Peters 7).

According to Donald McChesney,

Hopkins like many mystics, ascetics and visionaries, was given intermittent access to this world so described; a world in which forms shine by their own light, where colours glow from within and where all things fall into inexpressibly significant pattern.

(203)

It was in the summer of 1872 that Hopkins began to read the lengthy *Opus Oxoniense* by the medieval philosopher John Duns Scotus (Robinson 36). In his Journal entry of 3 August 1872, he remarks: “just then when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus” (JP 221). The discovery of Scotus helped Hopkins to give a religious dimension to his aesthetic theory and he acknowledges this in his poem “Duns Scotus’s Oxford”: “He . . . most sways my spirit to peace” (Poems 79). Scotus provided him with a philosophical basis for his theory. More than the theory of knowledge it was the theory of the individuating principle that
made Hopkins turn eagerly to Scotus. Hopkins’s term “inscape” has something in common with what Scotus called *haecceitas* or “this-ness.” According to Gardner, “Physical attributes are subordinate aspects of the total *haecceitas*, which in rational beings is the spring of all action and is therefore identified with the Will” (“A Note on Hopkins” 63). Scotus says that both “matter” and “form” can individuate. Gardner adds, “His own nature had led him to attach great importance to individuality of things, to personality in men, and this predilection had been intensified by Scotus” (2: 25). This is how one of the Kenyon critics, Austen Warren, explains the influence of Scotus on Hopkins:

Scotus the Franciscan critic of the Dominican Thomas Aquinas was centrally dear to Hopkins by virtue of his philosophical validation of the individual. St. Thomas held that, in the relation of the individual to his species, the “matter” individuates, while the “form” is generic: that is, that the individuals of a species reproductively multiply their common originative pattern. Scotus insisted that each individual has a distinctive “form” as well: a *haecceitas*, or thisness, as well as generic *quidditas*, or whatness. (76)

Hopkins studied the philosophy of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas with great interest. However, it was the philosophical ideas of Duns Scotus that proved to be the most helpful to him. In the words of Peters, “For
Aristotle and St. Thomas the first and proper object of our knowledge is the essence of things, abstraction made of its individuality. According to the theory of knowledge of Scotus, the first object of all human knowledge is the individual as it here and now presents itself to our senses” (22). In the philosophy of Aristotle and Thomas, there is no separate entity that limits the universal; but there is such an entity in the theory of Scotus. In the words of Gardner, Hopkins saw in Scotus a noble tribute to the dignity of man:

Contrary to St. Thomas Aquinas (the official theologian and philosopher of the Jesuits), Scotus asserts that ‘individuality’ or *haecceitas* (thisness) is the ‘final perfection’ of any creature; that the ‘individual’ is immediately knowable by the intellect in union with the senses; and that in man the Will, as the active principle of ‘thisness,’ has primacy over the Intellect. Such ideas, based on intuitive experience rather than cold deduction, tallied so well with the ontological, aesthetic, and moral significance of inscape and instress (instress being ultimately the stress of God’s Will in and through all things) . . . . (Introduction, *Poems* xxi)

The spiritual insight that the poet gains through the perception of individuality can be illustrated with the help of the poem “That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and the comfort of the Resurrection”:

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and

This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,

Is immortal diamond. (Poems 106)

The change that Hopkins speaks of in this poem is the spiritual transformation of an ordinary man into the image of Christ. Nature itself bears testimony for this resurrection as revealed through its own seasonal change. This emphasis on movement and flow is characteristic of the Eastern mystical tradition, which is also found in the worldview of mystics throughout the ages. In ancient Greece, Heraclites taught that “everything flows” and compared the world to an ever-living fire (Capra 175-76). Here we see Hopkins as a mystic who finds the relevance of transformation within the limits of Christian ideas. W. A. M. Peters observes that “impersonation was the natural result of having inscaped an object, of his perceiving the object as changed with God” (12).

The term “instress” is more difficult to explain than the term “inscape.” It also occurs in many places in his writings. He has used the noun “stress” in his philosophical writings to indicate the perfection of being proper to a thing. This Saxon word stands for the force that keeps a thing in existence and its strain after continued existence. The noun “instress” adds little to this meaning of “stress” except in so far as the prefix emphasizes that this force is intrinsic to a thing. The original
meaning of the term “instress” is the “stress or energy of being by which ‘all things are upheld’ ” (Peters 14). However, Hopkins does not always employ it with a well-defined meaning or accuracy. In the words of Gardner, the word is used in a bewildering variety of contexts (Gardner 2: 12). Peters says that “instress” can be understood as the force that holds the “inscape” together (14).

The term “instress” in Hopkins’s view can be a “cause” or an “effect.” The philosophical sense in which he employs the word cannot be easily deciphered; but if we understand it in a non-philosophical way, then it becomes the sensation aroused by the “inscape.” Robinson in his book *In Extremity: A Study of Gerard Manley Hopkins* speaks about Hopkins’s use of the term “instress” in these words: “The origin of the word ‘instress’ seems, then, to owe something to Hopkins’ feelings about art” (34). In the closing pages of his diary written in 1875, Hopkins writes, “Looking all around but most in looking far up the valley I felt an instress and charm of Wales” (*JP* 258). Elizabeth Jennings says that “‘inscape’ for Hopkins meant the unique individuality of every living thing, while ‘instress’ was the power, namely that of God, which keeps that individuality in being” (“The Unity of Incarnation” 188). This interpretation of “instress” is very useful in understanding the line from the poem “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” “Since, tho’ he is under the world’s splendour and wonder, / His mystery must be instressed, stressed” (*Poems* 53).
The contemplation of individuality gave Hopkins an insight into the being and existence of things. He writes: “I have often felt when I have been in this mood and felt the depth of an instress or how fast the inscape holds a thing that nothing is so pregnant and straightforward to the truth as simple yes and is” (JP 127). As his insight into existence is within the framework of individuality, it leads him to a synthesis. He was acutely aware of his self and this has left a mark on his poetry. He often wondered at the mystery of self whether finite or infinite. Gardner remarks that “the perception of inscape is marked simultaneously, as a rule, by a flow of instress, as though the individual beholder becomes mystically one with the Whole” (2: 12).

Hopkins’s love of self and individuality produced intense inner conflict, which prompted him to seek synthesis with the Ultimate Being. This process culminates in his Christo-centric vision of reality. According to Gardner, “inscape was something more than a delightful sensory impression: it was an insight, by Divine grace, into the ultimate reality” (Gardner 2: 27). John Pick in his book *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Priest and Poet* remarks that “a Jesuit like Hopkins can be at the same time a priest true to heaven and a poet true to earth” (56). When he entered the religious order, “he resolved to burn his poems as a symbolic act, very much as Francis of Assisi stripped himself of his worldly clothes at the start of his new life” (MacKenzie 13). Though the concept of synthesis
attracted Hopkins from his student days, it culminated in a union with God only with his religious training. It is illuminating to refer to John Robinson’s remark: “it should be noted that always Hopkins is building from the fragments when the essential synthesis was still to come” (19).

The burning of the poems before entering the Jesuit order did not extinguish the poet in him. Though he did not write poems for seven years, his *Journals and Papers* of this period are full of poetic passages, which were later transformed into beautiful poems. But the sensuous apprehension of nature that remained even after the entry into the Jesuit order created intense conflict in him.

Two long letters that Hopkins wrote to Canon Dixon review and summarize his attitude to art and priesthood. In one letter he asserts, “surely one vocation cannot destroy another” (qtd in Pick 120). The religious conviction helped him in resolving the paradoxes in his mind. John Pick speaks about his religious life thus:

For Twenty-one years Hopkins dedicated himself to the Society of Jesus; for twenty-one years he studied, meditated, and practised the *Spiritual Exercises*. They became a part of his life and attitude. They gave direction to all he experienced, thought, and wrote. They influenced his most exuberant and joyous poems; they were part of his sufferings and desolation (25).
It is in his *Journals and Papers* that Hopkins speaks about the experience of earthly beauty in relation to religious experience more explicitly. As John Pick pointed out, the association of the experience of beauty with religious experience became more and more important in Hopkins as years went by. In his opinion, if we compare the qualities of Hopkins’s High-gate or Oxford verse with the poetry he wrote as a priest, we find that “his spiritual life as a Jesuit gave to his poetry the very qualities which are its greatness” (Pick 128). Hopkins applied the term “inscape” to things that could be distinctly marked and later he saw them as marks of Christ; and this spiritual transformation is not abrupt but gradual. As Pick says, for Hopkins the term “inscape” meant much more than external design or pattern. The term is used in his works with some flexibility:

- He stresses “inscape” as configuration, design, shape, pattern, and contour - the “outer form” of a thing; sometimes he stressed “inscape” as the ontological secret behind a thing, as the “inner form.” But usually he employs the word to indicate the essential individuality and particularity or “selfhood” of a thing working itself out and expressing itself in design and pattern. This he then calls beauty. (Pick 33)

Hopkins was aware of the paradoxes in nature. All throughout his life he experienced a feeling of despair at the multiplicity of phenomena
unexplained and unconnected. Being a Jesuit, he made heroic efforts to understand the divine synthesis in the entire antithesis he saw around him. He once told his parishioners that God himself brings together things through opposite and incompatible qualities. In all these he was able to see the beauty of the Creator. He wrote in his *Journals*: “As we drove home the stars came out thick: I leant back to look at them and my heart opening more than usual praised our Lord to and in whom all the beauty comes home” (*JP* 254). He loves the flower bluebell because he is able to see the beauty of Christ in it. He remarks, “One day when the bluebells were in bloom I wrote the following. I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it” (*JP* 199). Ballinger speaks about the influence of Ruskin on Hopkins thus:

Hopkins came to the Society of Jesus in 1868 with strong “Ruskinian tendencies.” John Ruskin, the pre-eminent Victorian aesthete and social critic, held that nature, especially in the aspect of individuality, was God’s holy book, a place of revelation. Beauty, as a reflection of the divine, was the artistic target and praise was the artist’s purpose. (69)

The universal paradoxes create more problems for an artist than an ordinary person because the artist must condemn evil, and at the same time reproduce things as they are. Ruskin dwelt at considerable length on the
perilous balance between truth and beauty, and truth and ugliness. He praised the famous men in art and literature who had provided the world with honest distinctions. Hopkins adopted Ruskinian techniques in his struggles to resolve the problem of universal paradoxes. His deep interest in the beauty of dappled things could be seen as his effort to synthesize the multiplicity in nature. In “The Windhover,” he speaks about the “dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon.” In the “Pied Beauty,” he gives glory to God for dappled things. The skies are said to be “couple-colour as a brinded cow.” The freshness, variety, and individuality of things in this world are brought alive in the poem:

GLORY be to God for dappled things—

For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;

And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim. (Poems 69)

Hopkins captures the beauty of rose-moles on the trout that swim and the fresh firecoal of chestnut falls. The landscape is said to be plotted and pieced and all things are counter, original, spare and strange. Whatever is fickled is freckled; whatever is swift is put along with slow; sweet with sour, and adazzle with dim. God who “fathers-forth” the variety and beauty of pied things is praised for piedness:
All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)

With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:

Praise him. (Poems 70)

According to Miller, the rhyme-like relation of “pied beauty” is seen in all cows, skies, trout and so on, but only groups of dappled things have visibly the relation of likeness and difference which makes them echo and chime; and therefore the poem says: “Glory be to God for dappled things” (Miller 99-100).

Eastern mystics often stress the oneness of things in nature; but this does not mean that they consider all things to be without individuality. While recognizing the individuality of things, they are also acutely aware that all differences and contrasts are relative within an all-embracing unity. But in our ordinary state of consciousness, this unity of all contrasting features, especially, the unity of opposites is extremely hard to accept. This is one of the most puzzling features of Eastern philosophy (Capra 130). This problem is resolved to some extent in the poem “Pied Beauty.”

We find here the flowering of the ideas of aesthetics developed by Hopkins in his essay “On the Origin of Beauty.” In the words of Carl Woodring, Hopkins would seek echoes and correspondences, likenesses and variations, that not only form the basis of beauty (as he developed
the idea in a dialogue written at Oxford, “On the Origin of Beauty”) but bespeak the unifying presence of God behind the manifold world of phenomena (as he would write in ‘Pied Beauty’). (470)

The search for the aesthetics of similarity and difference finds its crowning glory in the perception of divine beauty in the individuality and variety as well as unity of dappled things. The poet gets the insight into the glory of God because of the innumerable variety of pied things in nature. Since all the objects in the universe give glory to God, there must also be unity in them. Miller says that “God and the universe have the relation of pied beauty. The eternity, changelessness, and unity of God are set against temporality, spatiality, self-division, and changefulness of the world” (103). He further adds, “the creator and the creation rhyme” (103).

Hopkins imitated these paradoxes in his poems with the employment of various technical devices. Sprung rhythm, as he once wrote to Bridges, also served this purpose. He informed Bridges that he used sprung rhythm,

. . . because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms, combining, as it seems to me, opposite and, one wd. (sic) have thought incompatible excellences, markedness of rhythm - that is
rhythm’s self - and naturalness of expression. (SL 91)

According to Gardner, “Hopkins was not satisfied with a poetry that rested in the senses and the emotions alone; he desired intellectual satisfaction as well - that unity and completeness which for him theism alone could provide” (2: 20). A study of the poem “To what serves Mortal Beauty?” is helpful in understanding Hopkins’s concern for immortal beauty, which, in other words, is a manifestation of the Ultimate. The poet asserts that mortal beauty calls our attention to God’s beauty:

To what serves mortal beauty—dangerous; does set dancing blood—the O-seal-that-so feature, flung prouder form
Than Purcell tune lets tread to? See: it does this: keeps warm
Men’s wits to the things that are; what good means—where a glance
Master more may than gaze, gaze out of countenance.

(Poems 98)

In this poem Hopkins speaks about the danger of mortal beauty which can drown the attention of a person. It can set the blood dancing and keep our wits warm. Probably he is referring here to the beauty of human body. The “inscape” of mortal beauty can draw our attention away, so the priest in him recognizes that we should love the worthiest objects of love. Human selves are the loveliest objects in the world. But beyond that, there is the better beauty of God. We should only “meet” mortal
beauty and then leave it alone. As a priest-poet, his supreme aim is to seek immortal beauty in mortal beauty:

World’s loveliest—men’s selves. Self flashes off frame and face.

What do then? How meet beauty? Merely meet it; own, Home at heart, heaven’s sweet gift; then leave, let that alone. Yea, wish that though, wish all, God’s better beauty, grace.

(Poems 98)

The perception of individual objects that helps him to see their “inscapes” is regarded as incomplete. Mortal beauty of objects is only a reflection of the immortal beauty of God. In the words of Gardner, Hopkins faces the danger of over indulgence, and asks: ‘What do they? how meet beauty?’ The answer is an attempt to bridge the gap between the transient and the permanent, to reconcile the poet with his impulse of acceptance and the priest with his doctrine of detachment. (1: 19)

The transformation of the self into something immortal in the spiritual union with God is well illustrated in the poem “That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection”:

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,

I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal
diamond,

Is immortal diamond. (Poems 106)

The transformation into “immortal diamond” is not accomplished by the human will alone; it is a grace of God, a gift. Man’s effort to attain individuality may lead to conflict, or even despair; it is the grace that helps a person to attain the glory of transformation into the likeness of God. This process of preparing a person to obtain the likeness of God produces conflict, suffering, and sacrifice. This is present in Hopkins’s life also. When he entered the Jesuit order, he burned his poems and went into a self-imposed poetic silence for seven years. This is poignantly recaptured in his words, “the slaughter of innocents.” The “immortal” poem, “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” was written after the seven years of self-imposed silence. It stresses the glory of self-surrender to the will of God:

Joy fall to thee, father Francis,

Drawn to the Life that died;

With the gnarls of the nails in thee, niche of the lance,

his

Lovescape crucified

And seal of his seraph-arrival! And these thy daughters

And five-lived and leaved favour and pride,

Are sisterly sealed in wild waters,

To bathe in his fall-gold mercies, to breathe in his all-fire
glances. (*Poems* 59)

The final verse reminds us of the famous expression of ultimate glory in “The Windhover”:

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion. (*Poems* 69)

In his under-graduate notebooks, one finds a detailed discussion of the philosophy of Parmenides. This pre-Socratic philosopher stressed the importance of the unity of being. Hopkins notes in his *Journals*:

“. . . absence cannot break off Being from its hold on Being: it is not a thing to scatter here, there, and everywhere through all the world nor to come together from here, there and everywhere” (*JP* 128). The development from Parmenides’ philosophy to Scotus was harmonious. It then flowers in the Christo-centric poems like “The Windhover” and “The Wreck.”

The acquaintance with Scotus’ philosophy helped Hopkins in the attempt to develop a synthesis between the ascetic and aesthetic aspects of his nature. According to W. A. M. Peters,

He had been acutely aware, since his study of Scotus especially, of his dependence on God’s grace on the one hand and on the other of the war within between the spirit and the flesh, between the bare self and the self raised by grace. (27)
It can be said that Scotus swayed his spirits to peace. The synthesis that Hopkins sought all his life came only with the discovery of Scotus. Maurice B. McNamee observes, “In Scotism he found philosophic justification for his longstanding preoccupation with ‘inscape’ or pattern, and with the sharply individualized features of things” (228). The very multiplicity of individuality in the created universe was a proof of God’s infinity (Gardner, “A Note on Hopkins” 65). In the vivid description of a sunset in the Journals, we can find a poignant attempt to achieve a synthesis of his love for beauty and the favour of divine grace, a synthesis that he sought throughout his life. As it was a crucial moment in the development of his theological aesthetics of “inscape,” the passage is worth quoting in its entirety:

A fine sunset: the higher sky dead clear blue bridged by a broad slant causeway rising from right to left of wisped or grass cloud, the wisps lying across; the sundown yellow, moist with light but ending at the top in a foam of delicate white pearling and spotted with big tufts of cloud in colour russet between brown and purple but edged with brassy light. But what I note it all for is this: 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 in 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. (JP 196)

The idea of capturing the glory of God in the individuality of objects
in nature is beautifully expressed in many poems of Hopkins, especially in
the sonnet, “As kingfishers catch fire.” From the outset of the poem, he
uses illustrations from the world of nature to bring out the “instress.” He
perceives the “inscapes” of the kingfisher diving to catch the fish, the
dragonflies skimming over the surface of water, the stones that are pushed
over the “rim” of round wells, etc. and says that each mortal thing
proclaims its individuality through its characteristic action:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;

As tumbled over rim in roundy wells

Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell’s

Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:

Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; (Poems 90)

The poem concludes with the realization that “Christ plays in ten thousand
places”: 

I say more: the just man justices;

   Keeps gráce: thát 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 90)

Hopkins finds a unity in the disparity in nature and this is attained only with the help of his spiritual outlook. It is relevant here to refer to Gardner’s observation that “an inscape was something more than a delightful sensory impression; it was an insight, by divine grace, into the ultimate spiritual reality” (“A Note on Hopkins” 65).

Peters says that “it was his spiritual outlook on this world that made inscape so precious to Hopkins; the inscape of an object was, so to speak, more ‘word of God,’ reminded him more of the Creator, than a superficial impression could have done” (6). He was able to sense the presence of God even in the moments of despair and destruction as evident in the poem “The Wreck of the Deutschland”:

The frown of his face

Before me, the hurtle of hell

Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?

I whirled out wings that spell
And fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host.

(Poems 52)

The poignancy and beauty of Hopkins’s poems derive their strength from the underlying spiritual ideas. Maurice B. MacNamee observes:

With his remarkable sensitivity to all variety and distinctive beauty of visible creation, and his fresh realization of the function of nature as the channel of God’s natural revelation of Himself, it is not surprising that Hopkins made this natural revelation of God’s beauty the frequent theme of his poetry.

(229)

Hopkins was intensely aware of the actual presence of God in each individual thing. He found “inscapes” in every facet of created reality. He sought in everything the divine maker’s mind. The perception of “inscape” of objects often required intense and patient contemplation of form and pattern. The habit of meticulous observation sometimes tempted him to dwell on the sensuous beauty of objects. The only penance he received during his training period for priesthood was the one to keep the custody of eyes (JP 190). In the “terrible sonnets” he tries to overcome this horror and accepts the supernatural destiny for which he was created. From his writings, we can understand that he was searching for this unity. Finding beauty, Hopkins noted, “is almost synonymous with finding order, anywhere” (JP 139).
The perception of external reality is unique for each person. The impression that the external things exerted on Hopkins must have been very different from the experience of other persons. He was more conscious of the individuality of objects and their effect upon human beings. Most other poets give more importance to their own emotional reaction to objects, and they do not give credit to any independent activity on the part of the object. Peters remarks that “the emotional activity ascribed to an object by Hopkins is real to him and not fancied, as real as its inscape” (20).

Hopkins’s intense perception of things gave him an insight into the “inscape” of things, which at times was like a visionary experience. He saw God’s presence in the energy, beauty, and hidden pattern of things in the world. He reproduced the particular “inscaped” vision of nature in his poems. The “inscape” is created at the level of the sound-patterns as well.

The paradoxes which exist in nature and the conflict that they arouse in him are resolved in the Christo-centric culmination of his aesthetic theory. He is able to see the beauty of Christ reflected in “The Windhover.” In the opening lines of the poem, the poet is moved by the glorious flight of the windhover. He is full of admiration for the achievement and mastery of the thing. The beautiful flight of the bird is sharply drawn against the dappled-dawn. The “inscape” moved the poet for a moment and his heart in hiding stirred for the bird:
I CAUGHT this morning morning’s minion, king-

dom of daylight’s dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in

his riding

Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding

High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing

In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on swing,

As a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and

gliding

Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding

Stirred for a bird, — the achieve of, mastery of the thing!

(Poems 69)

The surrendering of the earthly beauty to attain the immortal beauty

is dramatically brought out in the poem. The word “buckle” is the point at

which the transformation begins. In a spirit of great sacrificial courage, he

almost commands and later wishes the brute beauty and valour to buckle.

When the earthly beauty has been surrendered, there takes place a

mysterious transformation, and in the heat of surrender, there breaks forth

a fire which is a billion times told lovelier. This sacrifice of the earthly

beauty reminds the poet of the great sacrifice of Christ:

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here

Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion

Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!
No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

(*Poems 69*)

In a letter to Bridges, Hopkins described the poem as “the best thing
I ever wrote” (*LB* 85). This is a widely discussed poem of Hopkins and
almost all the readers agree on its greatness. The poem is the best
illustration of the culmination of Hopkins’s aesthetic theory in his religious
aesthetics. The word “buckle” can be understood as a command for self-
surrender, and it is the surrender of the finite beauty and glory to be
transformed into Christo-centric aesthetics. According to Catherine
Phillips, “the poet has a sudden vision combining the beauty, courage, and
skill of the bird into a perception of its essential nature (*inscape*) and,
beyond that, envisages Christ, who is a billion times lovelier and mightier”
(*SL* 352). The perception of “*inscape*” of the objects was the result of his
concern for form and pattern, which finally turns into something ecstatic
and mysterious in this poem. The poem is a fine illustration of the
synthesis between ascetic and religious tendencies in Hopkins.