If subject-matter is of utmost importance in literature, and if, to respond adequately to a poem one must know to some extent at least, what the poet is talking about, it would seem to follow that in certain circumstances, it is almost impossible to respond adequately to certain poets. Herein lies the difficulty and the danger. The differences of intellectual and emotional habits of mind between the poet and the reader may be so great that the reader just cannot comprehend what the poet is saying or spontaneously feels quite differently about it from the way in which the author feels. Hopkins is a religious poet, and a religious poet of a special kind; but many of his readers are not religious, or
are religious people of a different kind. Hence, can a poet, whose subject-matter is controlled, informed and inspired by a distinct set of religious beliefs, communicate what he has in mind to a reader who is not totally familiar with those beliefs?

As an Indian, and a Hindu at that, it is in such a situation that one finds oneself, in confronting the distinctive Christian nucleus that forms the focal point of Hopkins's work. I cannot pretend to a completely thorough grasp of the tenets of the Christian creed, and it must be admitted that working in a remote corner of India, where material on Hopkins has not at all been readily accessible has been extremely difficult. I am sure I have missed some recent publication deserving attention, and I can only apologise for the inevitable lapse.

We may, however, be certain of the fact that Hopkins the priest and Hopkins the poet are one. His poetry is inspired by Christian beliefs which, entering into the very texture of his mind, give their 'selfbeing to his feelings. Hopkins's own unique signature is written over everything that he thought, said or did. It emerges very clearly that if any
man ever gave himself wholeheartedly and without any reserves to the life that he had chose, it was Father G. M. Hopkins, S.J. The life that he had chosen, not without its accompanying obstacles, was the life of a Roman Catholic and Jesuit priest - and this is a life, not a profession: it was not for him a job for certain working hours of the day, but a life lived with his entire self and all the astonishing endowment of his natural faculties. In all of his poetic work there is a unity of pattern and inspiration, and the essence of this unity lies in his spiritual, intellectual and emotional life as a Jesuit priest?

In a letter written to Robert Bridges in 1889, the year of Hopkins's death, he spoke of God as "the only person I am in love with". That love, despite periods of doubt and frustration, lasted life-long; and now it is his we may be sure for eternity. Out of this love for God sprang both his relationship with nature and his relationship with man. What is of fundamental importance to us, as readers of Hopkins, is his intuition that he recognized in nature the footsteps of God. And if we are to ask, how a member of the
Society of Jesus, one who is specially warned against the dangers of inordinate attachment to any creature, how he could break out in passion at the created glory, the sensuous and the particular, the answer would be precisely that "The world is charged with the grandeur of God". Hopkins's vision, his gift of analogous description, his terse, alliterative language shock the reader into a new apprehension of nature's glory, and into a new apprehension, too, of nature as an image of divine realities. The poet who writes of the inscape of nature is the same person who sees Christ play "in ten thousand places"; for Hopkins, nature and Christ are inseparable.

On the other hand, towards the end of Hopkins's life, there were periods of grave frustration and despair bordering on madness, regarding the relation between the poet-priest and his God. Of the battle waging within him, Gardner has written that Hopkins "may be almost said to struggle with the Holy Ghost as with an incubus: the pangs of surrender are physical no less than spiritual; his midriff is astrain, his whole being laced with the terrific 'stress' of Pentecostal fire. Compared with Hopkins, John Donne, even, is almost languid". Speaking of his Jesuit vocation, "This life", he wrote, "though
it is hard, is God's will for me as I most intimately know'. Thus, as part of that will, he accepts his frustration and suffering "for the kingdom of heaven's sake. Eventually, his experience of the redeeming grace of the Passion and the Resurrection, lived out in his obedience to vocation, brings him a wholly creative experience:

It is in the light of premises such as these that we must view Hopkins, his religion and his poetry, and how for he was able to overcome the cleavages, if any, existing between 'nature' and 'spirit': The glory of God in nature — Hopkins partakes of that. Joy and delight in the world of the senses — Hopkins shares in that. Frustration, pain and darkness — Hopkins is fully aware of and sensitive to that too. Born to write poetry, he chose "elected silence". But if an adequate summing-up of Hopkins has to be provided, there would hardly be any better than his own expression, "immortal diamond."
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