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Gerard Manley Hopkins: Marian Poems

Poezja maryjna Gerarda Manleya Hopkinsa

The unique achievement of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89) has long been recognized. One of the most outstanding English poets of the late nineteenth century, he made poetry read like a prayer, offering a profound insight into the world of the spirit, into the mystery of the Word "instressed" and "stressed" by word. For years now the critics have been concerned with exploring numerous aspects of the poet's dogmatic Christianity¹, yet although they often emphasize the Christocentric character of his work, only a few seem to realize how crucial, and in fact indispensable, for his poetry is Hopkins's preoccupation with the Marian theme, represented in every major phase of his poetic life. Hence, this article is an attempt to look at those poems by Hopkins which, fully or in part, extol the manifold virtues of the Blessed Virgin, and to show how they too, reveal a story of the poet's spiritual development: from the early 1870s marked by the celebration of *Rosa Mystica* and the joy of discovering the Plenitude of Grace she represents for the Catholics to *No worst, there is none* (henceforth *No worst*), this outcry of the Dublin night, a voice of despair at having somehow lost the Dear Mother, his *Janua coeli* — the heavenly gate — a more sheltered and guided way to salvation.

¹ Hopkins was described as a "devotional writer of dogmatic Christianity" by Frank R. Leavis. See "Gerard Manley Hopkins" in *Scrutiny*, xii, Spring 1944, p. 85.

Never present in Hopkins's Anglican poems, Mary made her first appearance in his Stonyhurst works, when, already a member of the Catholic Church and the Jesuit, his poetic vocation not yet fully awakened by the wreck of the *Deutschland*, he was studying for his philosophy at St. Mary's Hall. The two "presentation pieces" created in this period of his artistic development are *Rosa Mystica* and *Ad Mariam* — Hopkins's versified explications of the truths about Mary, the wisdom imparted to him through his new faith and through the rigorous discipline of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Opening the Marian 'group', which roughly speaking consists of twelve poems in English and two Latin ones², *Ad Mariam*, initially a paean upon the beauty of Spring's sweet child, May, gradually turns into a hymn about Mary, whose portrait is drawn from an extended comparison between the two uniquely fair maidens. Like "Spring's one daughter" who has liberated the world from the "ruinous reign" of winter darkness, a "maid in David's house" has restored the world to Light and Peace: she gave birth to the King, becoming thus the world's Queen and Mother, a sign of "joy for today and hope for tomorrow", a relief "From all the pain of the past's unrest", and a comfort for those shedding "the tears of the hours".

Cherished by light, Young May immediately makes one think of the one woman so adored by Light that it has chosen to become one with her, inherent even in her many commonly-used names such as *Stella matutina*, *Stella maris*, *the Light of Gabaon*, *Consurgens aurora*, or *Arcus aetheris*³. Bound to Light, which, by analogy to May, is physically resting also on Mary's face, the Virgin is shown in her role of *Sponsa Dei*, the one world the Lord has reserved all for himself, the *Terra sancta*, intimately involved in the whole economy of salvation⁴. Thus, predestined to become a vessel of light, Mary turns out to be "fairer" than May, the victory sealed by the preciousness of her everlasting, unsurpassed gifts for the world.

Even if in the moment of rapture, "At the touch of her (May's) wandering

² This includes both the poems entirely dedicated to the Blessed Virgin (*Ad Mariam*, *Rosa Mystica*, *The May Magnificat*, *The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air We Breathe*, *Ad Matrem Virginem*, *May Lines*) and the ones in which Mary occupies the space of some two stanzas (*The Wreck*), a couple of lines or is simply mentioned (*Duns Scotus Oxford*, *The Starlight Night*, *The Loss of the Eurydice*, *Spring*, *Saint Thecla*, *Margaret Clitheroe*, *Andromeda*, and *No worst*).

³ See Ks. A. Tronina, *Zawitaj Pani świata. Obrazy i symbole biblijne w Godzinkach*, Wydawnictwo Ojców Franciszkanów, Niepokalanów 1995. Father Tronina explicates the numerous names attached to the Virgin Mary: *Stella matutina* (morning star) pp. 20–22; *Arca aetheris* (rainbow) pp. 40–41; the *Light of Gabaon* pp. 80–83; *Consurgens aurora* (golden dawn) *Luna* pp. 83; *Stella maris* pp. 96–97.

⁴ See Paul J. Barry, S. M., *Mary in Hopkins' Writings and Life*, Pontificia Studiorum Universitas as. Thoma A.Q. in Urbe, Roma 1970, p. 11.

wondering breath / Warm on his brow" man may disbelieve that there exists "another/ Fairer than this one to brighten our day"⁵, he will soon stand corrected by the speaker and be made to realize that the promise of Summer within Mary's breast is "the gladdest thing that our eyes have seen". Having thus established Mary's superiority beyond doubt, the speaker can now reverently address the Living Paradox, the Virgin Mother, saluting the "maid month's Queen" also on behalf of other worshippers:

O thou, proud mother and much proud maiden --
 Maid, yet mother as May has been --
 To thee we tender the beauties all
 Of the month by men called virginal,
 And, where thou dwellest in deep-groved Aidenn,
 Salute thee, mother, the maid month's Queen. [37-8]

This humble moment of adoration reveals not only the speaker's familiarity with such aspects of the Marian doctrine as the Immaculate Conception and Assumption, but also his recognition of the Virgin's royal status. To Mary, ever-living in the groves of Paradise, he offers all the beauties of May, thus expressing his preference for the Divine rather than the natural and earthly.

What is more, as one of his spiritual Queen's debtors, he also offers her another gift, a prayer of thanks and a declaration of love and loyalty:

Wherefore we love thee, wherefore we sing to thee,
 We, all we, through the length of our days,
 The praise of the lips and the hearts of us bring to thee,
 Thee, oh maiden, most worthy of praise;
 For lips and hearts they belong to thee
 Who to us are as dew to grass and tree,
 For the fallen rise and the stricken spring to thee,
 Thee May-hope of our darkened ways! [38]

In this 'magnificat' he seems to "magnify" Mary's incredible transforming potential, the power capable of making the "fallen rise" and the stricken rejoice. Interestingly, in their relationship with Mary men are viewed as but lips and hearts, the fragmentariness indicative of men's imperfection, resulting perhaps from "our darkened days". This, also the speaker's, incompleteness more than anything else betrays men's vulnerability and susceptibility to sin which may be

⁵ All quotations from G. M. Hopkins's poems with the page number in brackets come from W. H. Gardner, *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, fourth ed., revised and enlarged by W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie, OUP, Oxford 1970, p. 253.

overcome through the praise of the lips and entrusting the hearts to Mary's care. This is the attitude of hope for those who by their mother's side can be granted the grace of a new beginning.

Whereas *Ad Mariam* is expressive of rather general beliefs about Mary, narrated from the "we" point of view, *Rosa Mystica*⁶ contains another portrait of the Virgin, a more individualized perception of the speaker who, determined to penetrate the mystery behind the Latin title, exposes his feelings towards her. The personal tone corresponds well with the structure of the poem in which every attempt at solving the enigma of the Mystical Rose (a question and answer paradigm which demonstrates the working of the speaker's scholarly-oriented mind) finds its conclusion in ensuing, consecutive prayers. Addressed to Mary, and hence indicative of her intercessory power, each of these acts of faith unveils the secrets of the speaker's own heart, teaching him the truth also about himself.

Armed with a subtle instrument to help him fathom the profundity of the Rose, the compass of man's heart which "guesses easily" and "well... knows", the speaker begins to explore the mysteries connected with the mystical prerogatives of Mary. "Made of earth's mould", the Rose

went from men's eyes
And its place is a secret, and shut in the skies. [38]

Though somehow desecrated through the deliberate use of the depersonalizing "it/its" pronoun, the Rose is nevertheless considered worthy to live "In the Gardens of God", where "the daylight divine", as if enhancing its unique fertility, allows Mary to exercise her function of the Mother of man. In this Rose, directly approached and encountered through prayer, the speaker eventually recognizes his own mother and the illumination resulting from this helps a somewhat confused son to sense the power of her love. What is more, in the presence of the mystical light she seems to emanate, he sees enough to put together a story which will unequivocally explain the identity of the Rose.

Capable now of relating the foreign-sounding name to a very concrete person, the speaker retells the events which took place two thousand years ago in Galilee. There, "at God's will" the Rose grew and "broke into bloom". Upon Nazareth Hill, in the "spot / That was blest", "Mary, that Rose, Mary, the Tree" gave life to the Blossom, "her Rose" which

could be but One:
Christ Jesus, our Lord -- her God and her Son. [39]

⁶ The Mystical Rose, with its unique lack of thorns is, as N. H. MacKenzie states, symbolic of "man's innocence before fall, or of a state of grace." N. H. MacKenzie, *A Reader's Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Thames and Hudson Ltd., London 1981, p. 27.

This revelation of the heart, strategically placed in the central stanza of the poem, logically builds up to Mary's role as *Stabat Mater*, following her son on the Way of the Cross. The immaculate white of the Conception which has turned to the "wild flush" of the Passion points to the union between the Mother and Son, which, mystical as it is, is at the same time very physical. Organically bound to the Bud she tendered at its birth, in "its bloom and its breathing its last", the Virgin lives on, a symbol of Christ's wounds represented by her five leaves. As these "multiply, multiply, who can tell how", the mystery of the Rose continues, surprising the believers with yet another of her many meanings: the wondrous tree of faith, a new Arc of the covenant between man and God.

The 'finishing touch' to the portrait of the Rose is the speaker's mention of her sweet fragrance, the smell of grace not only immersing people in charity and love but also bathing "great heaven above". To this generous Mediatrix of graces the speaker turns for spiritual guidance, praying to be granted a place by her side and promising to "come home" to her, where, transformed into one of the leaves, together with her he would worship Christ's wounds. Mary, like a spiritual compass, mysteriously steers the heart, showing the way to God, drawing the children to the mystical tree, always a place of encounter of the human and the divine.

A very different depiction of the Blessed Virgin is found in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (henceforth *The Wreck*), "the first great poem of Hopkins's maturity"⁷, marking the artist's departure from the mode of explicit descriptiveness and its characteristic didactic streak. Defying sentimental, lifting verse, its song-like rhythms and easy rhymes, Hopkins turns to in-scaping, determined to show the uniqueness of Mary through the daring metaphors and highly unconventional imagery. The unique balance struck between the personal and the impersonal enables the poet not only to reproduce Mary's 'dogmatic' life, but, more importantly, to make her a very special linguistic creation, borne out of "the driven Passion" for words, exploding in their meanings.

Exploring possible ways of encounter between man and God, through prayer and storms of life, the ode describes the spiritual birth of the poet's persona whose newly rediscovered childhood is viewed through the prism of Galilee and a far more divine infancy of Christ himself. It is in this God-created context that Mary appears, anonymous yet so familiar, maid and mother, her amazing complexity well reflected in the following lines:

Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey;
Manger, maiden's knee;

⁷ M. Sprinker, *A Counterpoint of Dissonance; The Aesthetics and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1980, p. 96.

The dense and the driven Passion, and frightful sweat:
 Thence the discharge of it, there its swelling to be,
 Though felt before, though in high flood yet – –
 What none would have known of it, only the heart, being hard
 at bay,
 Is out with it! [7-8/pp. 53-4]

Image upon image almost attacks the reader, forcing him to trudge through words which, once this exacting pilgrimage is over, meanings decoded and understood, will allow him to grasp the pure essence of the experience: the story of salvation. Rendered through four key images, and thus exposing a strictly linguistic dimension of the economy of salvation, the story demonstrates Hopkins's expertise at condensation, yet simultaneous maximalization of meaning; also his artistry in projecting a narrator, a type of Everyman, involved in the actual — word by word — formation of his relationship with God. What follows is that Mary, a crucial aspect of this relationship, cannot simply be taken for granted, treated like a ready-made picture to be reproduced and translated into a poem. Instead, she also has to be perceived afresh, "re-hearsed", in the creative process which resembles building a mosaic, piece upon piece of image: "warm", "grave", "womb", and "grey".

The centre of Mary's inscape is her womb, the vessel of life and death, comprising and at the same time defining what is perhaps the greatest paradox of the divine. The first prerogative of the womb is its warmth, enriched later with the softness of possibly the dove "grey", a symbol of the "feathery delicacy" of the Holy Spirit. These 'pro-life' attributes extend into the image of the "maiden's knee", the image of warmth externalized, inviting one to visualize a caressed, fondled child in the woman's lap.

The dark side of Mary's divine maternity has its core in the word "grave", referring not only to the Incarnation as Christ's death to the heavenly bliss, but also to the constriction and slavery of the body which could be liberated only through the Crucifixion. Signalled above are merely the most obvious meanings inherent in Hopkins's perception of the womb and these indicate that Mary can eventually be treated as both a logical and spatial beginning of the Cross, and as an actual embodiment of the Passion. Progressing through the images of "frightful sweat", "swelling" and finally being "out with it", this Passion seems to render the story of Mary's pregnancy which ends with an actual moment of the Incarnation — the discharge of the Divine into the life of man on earth. Another meaning of the discharge communicated through Mary's womb is that of the ancientness of God's plans concerning the Virgin who is herself

an externalization of the holy stress, the masterpiece of creation uttered at the beginning of time⁸.

Once more, as in *Rosa Mystica*, this Marian mystery can be felt by the heart whose "throee" — this unique mark, stress of God's closeness provides the speaker's heart with the exclusive knowledge of the womb. Thus the "heart knows" "What none would have known", the darkness of the discharge, the liberation, through Mary's womb, to Life and Truth.

To this inspired perception of Madonna with infant Jesus, another picture is added in stanza 29, showing Mary with her already mature Son, God prayed to, yet still united with his Mother in the feast of the Immaculate Conception: the ceremony which carefully prepared for the passengers of the *Deutschland*, reenacts, though outside the womb, the cycle of life through death.

Jesu, heart's light
 Jesu, maid's son
 What was the feast followed the night
 Thou hadst glory of this nun?
 Feast of the one woman without stain,
 For so conceived, so to conceive thee is done;
 But here was heart throee, birth of a brain,
 Word, that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright. [61]

This time Mary is merely a witness of the miraculous birth, a godmother of Christ born anew but out of "the tense and the driven Passion" of the tall nun. Having been conceived in the heart "that heard and kept thee", the Word is finally "done", borne through the urgency of the sister's call. Uttered to become again a concrete, physical presence, Christ arrives "to cure the extremity" (28) of his new mother and to receive her into heavenly glory.

Through Jesus's rebirth, Mary is also re-created, her crucial characteristics reflected in the nun's "virginal tongue" (17), in her motherhood of and sacrifice

⁸ This meaning, in complete accordance with the Marian doctrine finds its roots in the Bible. In the Book of Proverbs 8, 22–26 we read:

The Lord created me at the beginning of his works,
 before all else that he made, long ago.
 Alone, I was fashioned in times long past,
 at the beginning, long before earth itself.
 When there was yet no ocean I was born,
 no springs brimming with water.
 Before the mountains were settled in their place,
 long before the hills I was born,
 when as yet he had made neither land nor lake
 nor the first clod of earth.

Also Ecclesiasticus 24, 5 confirms Mary's ancientness. See *The New English Bible*, The University Press, Oxford 1976, p. 476.

to the Word (17, 19, 24), in her Assumption-like reception into sainthood (23), and, finally, in her intercessory power, evident when the speaker prays to her:

Dame, at our door
 Drowned, and among our shoals,
 Remember us in the roads, the heaven-haven of the
 reward:
 Our King back. Oh, upon English souls!
 Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us,
 be a crimson-cressed east,
 More brightening her, rare-dear Britain, as his reign rolls,
 Pride, rose, prince, hero of us, high priest,
 Our hearts' charity's hearth's fire, our thoughts' chivalry's
 throng's Lord. [35/p.63]

When in the same context of the prayer Mary's name appears, it once more stresses the indissoluble bond between Mother and Son whom she so complexly helps to define as

new born to the world
 Double-natured name,
 The heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden-furled
 Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame,
 Mid-numberéd he in three of the thunder throne! [34/p.62]

This word-sculptured "double-naturedness" of Christ would simply be impossible without Mary's human body — the foundation of his throne, and of his presence on earth; the presence which, turning the Virgin into a representation of heaven⁹, transforms her into the first living temple of Christ and as such into the first worshipper of the "heart-fleshed", "furled" mystery her sacred womb contains. Emphasizing the paradox of the "Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame", the adjectival compounds demonstrate how, despite the unity wrought out by the Holy Spirit (flame), there must always exist — even if only a hyphen-wide distance between man and God, a (pre-determined?) breach which, with time, might be seen as a reason for the wreck of the Deutschland, God's chance of interference in the man's world.

Exploring the profound mystery of *The Wreck* — the mystery in fact inexhaustible due to the symbolic and mystical import of the ode — Hopkins found that which would become the fundamental issue of his poetry: giving glory to the

⁹ See *Słownik Teologii Biblijnej*, ed. Xavier Leon-Dufor, translated from the French by Bp K. Romaniuk, Pallotinum, Poznań-Warszawa 1985, p. 538–539. Under the entry "heaven" one reads that heaven is a place inhabited by God (538) and that in Jesus Christ heaven is present on earth (539).

manifold presence of God in the world. Hence due to an increasing concern with the beauty of creation and with the power of the Word Incarnate, Mary's portrayal would naturally become more and more fragmentary. However, despite the loss of centrality, restored in but four May pieces solely devoted to the Heavenly Queen (*The May Magnificat*, *May Lines*, *The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe*, *Ad Matrem Virginem*) Mary makes her way into Hopkins's works — a faithful companion of her Son and a teacher of her prerogatives deriving from her divine maternity.

In *St. Thecla* (1876), for instance, concentrating on the redemptive and salvatory power of Mary's virginity, Hopkins would show it continuing in another woman. In the Iconium of the "first golden age of Gospel times", a young, beautiful convert, Thecla built her life upon St. Paul's words that the "world was saved by virgins". Though forgotten in Hopkins's "times of guilt", in her own she was such a diligent follower of the Virgin — famous also for the miraculous deliverance from many fierce persecutions — that her name was "next whitest after Mary's own". The saint's sacrifice is stressed also in *Margaret Clitheroe* (1876–7) where, "Great Thecla, the plumed passionflower", / "Next Mary mother of maid and nun", appears to reaffirm the Mother's role as a patroness and protectress of Christian virgins and martyrs. The two maidens join "every saint of bloody hour" in their vigil over Margaret, tortured and finally crushed to death for her faith. Thus represented, "Heaven turned its eyes below", to the Protestant murder which to all the witnesses above was another act of glory of Christ "stored" in Margaret, another reflection of Mary's love and sacrificial will.

The Starlight Night (Feb. 1877) introduces a very different portrait of Our Lady, uniquely depicted at home, with her heavenly family, this time for a happy occasion, to celebrate a completion of the harvest. Hence, the twinkling joy of the starlight sky, changing (also in the perception of the speaker) from "May-mess, like on orchard boughs!" to its calmer version of "March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow shallows!" Watching this half-real, half-imagined spectacle, this feast of light, the speaker realizes that he in fact sees

the barn; withindoors house
The shocks. This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse
Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows. [67]

In the homely atmosphere of the scene, Mary, important mainly in her role of the Mother, takes part in the ceremony uniting Christ the bridegroom ("the spouse")¹⁰ with all his saints and with his Church. Gardens of God with their divine daylight (*Rosa Mystica*) become replaced with a "withindoor" projection of the speaker,

¹⁰ N. H. MacKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

who, having paid his poetic share of "Prayer, patience, alms, vows", lets himself in as a new member of the Congregation. He can thus take part in his communion of "shocks", an equivalent to the New Testament Mass (Matt. 25:10) to which everybody has been invited¹¹. Although as in many works before, here, Mary also stays in the shadow of her Son, she is the first in the chain of all other "hallows", deserving to be made a leader of their church and the hostess of this starry Kana where grain turns into sanctified souls.

In *Spring* (May 1877), recreating the gardens of Eden, the poet despairs over the beauties which must "cloud" and "sour with sinning". The innocence of "mind and Mayday" in man has been preserved only in the Immaculate Virgin and her boy Christ. Hence, their presence in the sonnet is the sign of hope for the Paradise which, already inherent in them, can, through the "maid's child" and His most worthy and winning choice, restore Eden also for others.

A year later, *The May Magnificat* (May 1878) would still explore the symbolism of Spring who offered the "universal bliss" of nature's motherhood to the far more powerful Mother of God. In this joyful act of homage, the multi-voiced *Laudatum Dominae*, nature honours Mary — the Queen of the Blessed Growth:

Flesh and fleece, fur and feather,
Grass and greenworld all together;
[...]
Their magnifying of each its kind
With delight call to mind
 How she did in her stored
Magnify the Lord.
[...]
This ecstasy all through mothering earth
Tells Mary her mirth till Christ's birth
 To remember and exultation
 In God who was her salvation. [77-8]

Nature's magnificat is also an exposition of God's glory through the glory of colour. Nature sings through the ecstasy of apple and silver-cherry orchards, the 'starriness' and the strawberry hues of the throstle and her "bugle blue eggs". To these tones of colour "greybells azuring over" add their own, to be finally mixed with this priceless "drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple", the core of all fruition. Also shapes and sizes join in: thicket and thorp, sod, shell and sheath — each species and form of life rejoicing in Mary's storing in her the Life which triumphs over death.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Although a parallel between Mary and May is a frequent motif in Marian poems, this one most remarkably brings to the fore Mary's human tenderness, her sympathy, her all-loving kindness and, finally, the unimaginable joy evident in her desire to relive the Magnificat despite her knowledge of the Cross. Impregnated with this joy, and reenacting the Virgin's story of the miraculous growth, "mothering earth" is given her glimpse of heaven.

When in April 1878 Hopkins wrote his other shipwreck poem, *The Loss of the Eurydice* (henceforth *The Loss*), it was not as in *The Wreck* to emphasize Mary's involvement in the salvation of man and his reception into sainthood. Instead, true to its title, the poem communicates the tragic waste — through man's deliberate rejection — of the Virgin's protection. This sole portrait of the Unwanted Goddess is built round Mary's homelessness. The shrines once entrusted to her are now either devastated or too cold to make her home. Now, deprived of her kingdom, she is all the more vulnerable since affected by the human curse: that of "robbery's hand" or "hoar-hallowed shrines unvisited". This sad faith of the dethroned Queen rendered through the ruin of her church seems to reflect the place of the Blessed Virgin in the Protestant-turned England of Hopkins's times. What is more, it is viewed as the *signum temporis* which, predicted in the Book of Proverbs, explains the reasons for the "fast foundering" of the nation:

'Now my sons, listen to me,
listen to instruction to grow wise, do not
reject it.
Happy is the man who keeps to my ways,
happy the man who listens to me,
watching daily at my threshold
with his eyes on the doorway;
for he who finds me finds life
and wins favour with the Lord,
and he who finds me not, hurts himself,
and all who hate me are in love with
death.'¹²

The bitter awareness of his compatriots turning into "daredeaths in Unchrist" is somewhat relieved by a vignette from the past: a pilgrimage to Walsingham, with the men's way brightly illuminated by the stars of the "marvellous Milk".

Unlike in other poems where Mary's presence was invariably evoked by the use of her traditional names, *The Loss*, working mainly through the implied reference to Walsingham with its Our Lady's Shrine (whose name, however, is not used in the text of the poem) and the situation of shrines in general, seems

¹² The Book of Proverbs 8, 32–36; *The New English Bible*, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

to emphasize Mary's namelessness. This anonymity not only highlights men's ignorance of the Virgin's importance, but, more sadly, her loss of the old place in their country, their church, and their hearts.

Depicted in the glories of heaven, amidst the beauties of nature, or else in the stormy seas, Mary would occasionally make her appearance in specific towns. After Thecla's Iconium (*St. Thecla*) and Margaret's London (*Margaret Clitheroe*), or the pilgrims' Walsingham, Hopkins 'bound' Mary to Medieval Oxford. There, as suggested by *Duns Scotus's Oxford*, the Subtle Doctor, famous for his "not rivalled insight", began his struggle for a recognition of "Mary without spot", won after almost 300 years when the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was finally introduced in 1854.

In spite of the fact that *Morning, Midday, and Evening Sacrifice* contains neither direct nor indirect reference to the Blessed Virgin, it represents what might be called a Marian attitude: one of offering everything to God, and making one's life a never-ceasing 'fiat' of praise; living God, with God and for God:

The dapple die-away
 Check and whimpled lip,
 The gold-wisp, the airy-grey
 Eye, all in fellowship --
 This, all this beauty blooming
 This, all this freshness fuming,
 Give God while worth consuming.

Both thought and thew now bolder
 And told by Nature; Tower;
 Head, heart, hand, heel, and shoulder
 That beat and breathe in power --
 This pride of prime enjoyment
 Take as for tool, not toy meant
 And hold at Christ's employment.

The vault and scope and schooling
 And mastery in the mind,
 In silk-ash kept from cooling,
 And ripest under rind --
 And what life half lifts the latch of,
 What hell stalks towards the snatch of,
 Your offering, with despatch of! [84]

The sacrificial attitude reaches its peak in Hopkins's *Andromeda*, a living tool, "held" as the sonnet (*Andromeda*, 1879) makes clear, "at Christ's employment". According to MacKenzie, *Andromeda* is both "[...] the mysterious woman in the Apocalypse (12-17) against whom and whose seed the dragon waged war [...]"

and "[...] a picture of the Virgin Mary without, however, contradicting her other traditional identification of Church on earth."¹³ This God-planned, virginal church of unsurpassable beauty which, "Time past... has been attempted and pursued / By many blows and banes" is now "doomed", threatened in "her flower, her piece of being". Mary-Andromeda awaits the approach of the beast, armed but with her patience and her then perhaps still unrecognized hope in "Her Perseus", Christ about to rescue His Church-Bride. "His thoughts on her, forsaken that she seems", God descends to put her, and through her the whole of mankind, out of her misery. Owing to this divine intervention, Mary, "Time's Andromeda" is the first Christ's church ever, shown, once her test of faith is passed, rising to her glory, mounted perhaps as high as her Assumption.

Composed possibly at Christmas 1881, during Hopkins's Tertianship, is a Latin hymn to the greater glory of God — *Ad Matrem Virginem*¹⁴ (henceforth *Ad Matrem*). Praying to the Virgin Mother at the Feast of the Nativity, the speaker shares with her the precious moment of the Eucharist, which allowed him to experience the birth of "the small sweet God" in his own heart. This 'double' Christmas, as never before, has brought him so close to Mary that for once he feels free to ask about the most intimate thoughts and feelings concerning her Son. Moved with Mary's devotion to Christ still within her womb¹⁵, he so entreats his mother:

[...] teach me about Him, the small sweet God.

How much did you love Him whom you conceived, who did not have to be conceived as a fearful Lord, but as the Word made flesh brought into smaller compass in you? [...]

Tell me — so that He may be loved more — what manner of being He seemed when He lay hidden in your womb and had not yet appeared to sight, when your voice made Elizabeth happy, a mother made happy through a mother, a boy cousin made happy through a boy cousin. [...]

Just how did you feel when you saw at long last, in full view, the Lord himself as a little baby on the hay, beheld Him trembling who fixes firmly the universe, and rolled in swaddling clothes Him who, when not yet born of you, unrolled in serenity the everlasting years? What did you say then, and what did you hear? [337]

Despite the gradually built sense of warmth and closeness towards "Mother of my Jesus" ("Mater Jesu mei"), turning her into the speaker's old familiar,

¹³ N. H. Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

¹⁴ The analyses of both *Ad Matrem* and another Latin piece by Hopkins, *May Lines*, have been based on their translations provided by W. H. Gardner in his fourth edition of Hopkins's *Poems*. See W. H. Gardner, *op. cit.*, pp. 337–8.

¹⁵ Hopkins's fascination with, as Barry puts it, Mary's tense and tender love for her unborn Child seems to have first appeared during his stay at Newman's Birmingham Oratory (Sept. 1867–April 1868), where, his English translation of Father Condren's prayer *Jesu vivens in Maria (Jesu that dost in Mary dwell)* marks the very beginning of his poeticized thought about the Mother as Living Christ.

Mary is treated as befits the "Shining Example" ("Candens exemplare"); the man's reverence manifest in the litany which constitutes the structural heart of his hymn:

Doce me gaudere,	Teach me to rejoice
Rosa, tuo vere,	O rose, in your spring,
Virga, tuo flore,	O branch, in your flower,
Vellus, tuo rore,	O fleece, in your dew,
Arca, tua lege,	O arc, in your law,
Thronus, tuo rege,	O throne, in your king,
Acies, tuo duce,	O army, in your commander,
Luna, tua luce,	O moon in your light,
Stella, tuo sole,	O star, in your rays,
Parens, tua prole. [220]	O mother, in your child. [337]

Emphasizing Mary's unique knowledge and her numerous virtues, the speaker perceives her as an ideal teacher of Christ and Love, indispensable for the sinful like himself, who can but rely on the power of the Virgin's intercession. Resorting to her help, he pleads:

Allow me to embrace Him, grant me a little of love given to you, and kisses meant for your mouth. He who wants to give himself for me, to speak to me although He cannot yet use words, to dwell with me,

— O grant that I may gaze upon Him, O Mother of mighty God, Mother of my Jesus.
'Glory to God for ever.' [338]

Assigned to "the period of 1882–4, 'when Hopkins was a priest and had read for his theology'"¹⁶ is another Latin piece fully dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, *May Lines*, the only poem among Hopkins's works in which Mary is heard to speak per se, in the voice and words of Wisdom from Ecclesiasticus:

'I was created from the beginning and
before the ages, and I shall not cease
even unto the age that is to be.' [xxiv, 14]

Introduced in this opening epigraph is the theme of predestination, elaborated upon in the poem proper, which therefore emerges as a subtle, theological hymn to Mary's "two-fold glory". Adopting Scotus's view that "the Word would have become Incarnate . . . independently of redemption"¹⁷, simply for the merits of the Lord, Hopkins eventually voices Mary's double predestination. As "Praedestinata bis", she became "the Mother of Christ" "Post praevisa merita / Innocentis", "after the foreseeing of the merits of the Innocent One", her second predestination taking

¹⁶ W. H. Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

effect when the Virgin became God's mother (deiparam) after the sins of our race "Iterum post scelera / Nostra gentis".

Belying the deceptive easiness suggested by the title, *May Lines* turns out to be a creation of a serious, theologically-oriented mind — possibly of some priest persona, 'betrayed' by his command of Latin, his doctrinal competence and the knowledge of specific terms he uses to present his case. His intellectual rather than spontaneous response to the words of "the one who is, among all mankind, for ever unsullied", results in a somewhat distancing effect of emotional dryness. And yet, despite his evident need for precision and logic, the speaker has not quite lost his ability to "marvel" at God's mother and to delight in the unique spiritual sustenance she provides. Subtle as the poem is in its theological message, it demonstrates that "the highest subjects are not those on which it is easy to reach one's highest." Writing so in his letter to Bridges¹⁸, Hopkins expressed his personal opinion about *The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air We Breathe* (henceforth *The Blessed Virgin*), his work of May 1883, today indisputably his greatest, "most doctrinal"¹⁹ and "the most penetrating and beautiful Marian poem in our language"²⁰. Father Lahey considers this work to be a "miracle of artistic simplicity" whose mystic import makes it "an achievement in Marian poetry almost unrivalled and never surpassed except perhaps by the sublime prose-poems in the writings of St. Bernard"²¹.

Being the last full-length Marian work of Hopkins, *The Blessed Virgin* should be seen as both the poetic culmination, and simultaneously, recapitulation of various aspects of the profound mystery of the Catholic religion, of which, as Boyle asserts, this poem is expressive, and not like many before, merely explanatory²². Effectively combining metaphysical and meditative tradition, the work is structured round "an extended and carefully developed analogy between the physical characteristics of air and the prerogatives, privileges, and the spiritual role of the Blessed Virgin"²³.

Listing various attributes of air, the speaker exposes the specificity of Mary's motherhood — "her fundamental role as the Mother of God [...] from which all

¹⁸ See Hopkins's (May 11, 1883) letter to Bridges. Catherine Philips (ed.), *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Letters*, Oxford, New York, OUP, 1991, p. 184.

¹⁹ Paul J. Barry, S. M., *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁰ Maurice B. McNamee, S. J., "Hopkins, Poet of Nature and of the Supernatural" in Weyand, N., S. J., ed., *Immortal Diamond*, New York, Sheed and Ward 1949, p. 146.

²¹ G. F. Lahey, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, New York, Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1969 (reprint), pp. 115–16.

²² See Robert Boyle, *Metaphor in Hopkins*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1960. On pages 58–59 Boyle writes that Hopkins's "images express it (mystery), but they do not explain it; like mirrors, they reflect, but they do not justify".

²³ P. J. Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

the others are derived"²⁴. Transcending the concept of traditional family, Mary's maternity embraces the whole world in a "wild web" of "never spent" caring tenderness. Her free consent to welcome in her womb "God's infinity" turned her into "the first source of our divine life"²⁵, and henceforth, into that indispensable sustenance of all life which makes her so much more than man's "meat and drink": a mother of each new grace Life produces. Grateful for this motherly care the man can so "breathe its praise":

Wild air, world-mothering air, / Nestling me everywhere
 [...]

 My more than meat and drink, / My meal at every wink;
 This air, which, by life's law, / My lung must draw and draw
 Now but to breathe its praise, / Minds me in many ways
 Of her who not only / Gave God's infinity
 Dwindled to infancy / Welcome in womb and breast,
 Birth, milk, and all the rest / But mothers each new grace
 That does now reach our race -- / Mary Immaculate,
 Merely a woman, yet / Whose presence, power is
 Was deemed, dreamed; who / This one work has to do --
 Let all God's glory through, / Through her and from her flow
 Off, and no way but so. [93-4]

The mother of God and Grace is then characterized as Mercy. Her "wondrous robe" envelops the world, "mantles" its guilt for which she offers herself as alms ("the sweet alms' self is hers"). Dispenser of God's providence, she works towards man's "ghostly good", praying for the redemption of man lost in sin ("Laying... the deathdance in his blood"). More importantly, however, supervising — through grace — man's spiritual transformation, she guides man towards Christ, rejoicing, when becoming another Christ, the spirit can expand and progress in time and space²⁶.

Of her (Mary's) flesh he (the Saviour) took flesh:
 He does take fresh and fresh, / Though much the mystery how,
 Not flesh but spirit now / And makes, O marvellous!
 New Nazareths in us, / Where any can conceive
 Him, morning, noon, and eve; / New Bethlems, and he born
 There, evening, noon, and morn -- / Bethlem or Nazareth,
 Men here may draw like breath / More Christ and baffle death;
 Who, born so, comes to be / New self and nobler me

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁶ See P. J. Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

In each one and each one / More makes, when all is done,
Both God's and Mary's Son. [95]

By the miracle of divine grace, the never-ending mystery of flesh turning into spirit shows Mary in her role of the Mother of the Mystical Body, growing and incorporating ever newer Nazareths and Bethlems. This actually makes her a mother of all God-fathered human sons²⁷ each of whom is a unique incarnation, a creation of the spiritual world, enclothed in human body. This is how, bringing forth life, Mary's actions can remedy the havoc wrought by Eve²⁸ in the human soul.

Another mystery of Mary's mothering is her "azure" transparency which, even if charged with a "sapphire shot", will not stain light of the steeped sky. Like air, she "does no prejudice", transmitting the colour "Perfect", without any alternation.

Or if there does some soft, / On things aloof, aloft,
Bloom breathe, that one breath more / Earth is the fairer for.

Not only does Mary ennoble earth, but she also protects it from the sun-God, whose "glory bare" would simply blind man and easily destroy his world. Thanks to the flow of her mercy, "This bath of blue and slake", man, his mind "won", can perceive sweetness, not dimness, of God's creation, and can thus see that which can give him hope of forgiveness. Adjusting the divine light to suit man's eyes, Mary lets "God's glory through", the "daystar" which, shining with the light of her Son, not only helps man realize the greatness he reflects but at the same time shows him a reason to make Christ "Much dearer to mankind".

"In the final lines the poem is imperceptibly transformed into prayer. In filial supplication Hopkins asks that Mary be his spiritual atmosphere, his happy world, where protected from sin and schooled in patience, penance, and prayer he may finally enjoy the security of heaven . . . Having extolled Mary's mediatorial role as a channel of life and as a loving protectress, and having reverently analyzed her prerogatives, it is only logical that now he turn to her in loving colloquy. He thus gives the poem its final unity and begins to live his own instruction"²⁹:

Be thou the, O thou dear / Mother, my atmosphere;
My happier world, wherein / To wend and meet no sin;
Above me, round me lie / Fronting my forward eye
With sweet and scarless sky; / Stir in my ears, speak there

²⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8.

Of God's love, O live air, / Of patience, penance, prayer:
 World-mothering air, air wild, / Wound with thee, in thee isled,
 Fold home, fast fold thy child. [96–7]

Demonstrating both intellectual and doctrinal capabilities of the speaker, the poem characterizes him also as a person, "a new self", "a nobler me" illuminated by the divine light filtered, "sifted", through Mary's loving hand. His reverent closeness to Mary seems to rest also on her paradoxical — virgin-mother — femininity, the ideal of which she represents. Though "merely a woman", "her presence, power is / Great as no goddess's / Was deemed, dreamed", her "high motherhood" further enhanced by such salient qualities as gentleness, natural goodness, delicacy, and serenity. Addressing the woman who, being the mother for all, is also very much his own, he observes her superiority. As befits her "child", he may occasionally call her "dear mother", "Mary", or "she", but most of the time he refers to her in a formal way, his respect noticeable then in numerous hyperboles and peryphrases, always expressive of her inexhaustible mystery.

After this peak of Hopkins's Marian thought, his only other remaining poem in English to be discussed here is a Dublin sonnet *No worst*, whose speaker, experiencing extreme spiritual emptiness, dramatically asserts:

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
 More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
 Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
 Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
 My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief –
 Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing – –
 Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked "No ling –
 Ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief" [100]

Going through the experience of the spiritual night, the cleansing darkness which, though God-sent, deprives man of any sense of God's closeness, the speaker naturally rebels against the torment of his loneliness, the more so that it mercilessly reveals his true nature. Pained, he calls for help, however, no remedy, even if effective earlier, can help now. Not even the Holy Spirit answers the man's pleas, yet, it is the absence of Mary — this cushion of tenderness — that he feels most bitterly, almost like a betrayal. Having had so much: God's and Mary's comfort, now it seems, he has lost all: his home and this "nursing element" of all that God's providence can grant one: mercy, grace and love. Can he still hope to ever become a New Nazareth?

Capturing the man's self-grief and frustration of his failed hope, the words: "Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?" express also the intense drama of

his vulnerability. Entrapped in his impotent anger, he merely blocks grace — thus distancing himself from this only cure that could help him find relief and deliver him safely through the horror of inner darkness back to Light. It is in this unanswered question that the Marian mystery explodes again, revealing another layer of the complexity of the Virgin who, though she never deserted her God, must, for her love of her human sons, leave them all alone.

In view of the works discussed above, Mary's presence emerges as that element of Hopkins's Christocentric universe without which one could hardly arrive at the true and deep understanding³⁰ of the mysteries of God's creation. Although the portrayal of the Virgin, like the development of the Marian thought itself, is not very systematic, it expands with time, laying the foundations for a coherent dogma-based and poetry-rendered Mariology. Shaped by and built round Hopkins's ever-newer priestly and poetic experiences, his works concerned with Mary not only reveal the poet's fascination with the subtleties of the doctrine, but they also reflect the development of his talent, his artistic progression from the explanatory to the expressive.

Preeminently equipped as priest for a thorough understanding of Mary's prerogatives, Hopkins — poetically — links them to such pivotal Mariological issues as the Predestination, the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, and the Divine and Spiritual Maternity³¹ and it is in these pillars of the doctrine that all the functions and roles ascribed to the Virgin in Hopkins's works as well as the names she is given there have their origin.

Mary's most commonly explored role/name is the Mother of God/Christ (*Ad Mariam*, *The May Magnificat*, *Ad Matrem*, *May Lines*, *Rosa Mystica*, *The Wreck*, *The Starlight Night* and *The Blessed Virgin*). In this same capacity she appears as the Mother of the Word in *Ad Mariam* or the Queen of the Blessed Growth in *The May Magnificat*, whereas such poems as *Andromeda*, *The Starlight Night* and *The Loss* stress her being the Mother of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ and His Living Temple. Apart from these, she is known as *Rosa Mystica* (*Rosa Mystica*), the Mother of the Redemption (*The Blessed Virgin*), or as Mary Immaculate, Mary "without spot" whose 'stainlessness' is referred to in *The Wreck* and *Duns Scotus's Oxford*. The Virgin's enigma would sometimes be enclosed in the simplicity of her, after all, ordinary name, or her equally common role as mother. But sometimes, Hopkins's inscaping talent would have him create the whole 'mini-sermons' on Mary's nature which only in *The Blessed Virgin* are delivered through such definitions as "my atmosphere", "air", the "wild web"

³⁰ See Edward Schillebeck, O. P., *Mary, Mother of the Redemption*, London, Scheed and Ward, 1964, p. 1.

³¹ See P. J. Barry, *op. cit.*, p. x.

or the "wondrous robe". This paradoxical "Virgin Mother" (*Rosa Mystica, Ad Mariam, The Wreck*), "merely a woman" yet greater than a goddess (*The Blessed Virgin*), is at the same time the hostess of the feast of soul-harvest (*The Wreck, The Starlight Night*), the "Hope of our darkened days" (*Ad Mariam*) and, last but not least, the Mediatrix of graces, her "world-mothering" reflected in the care this "mother of mine" (*Rosa Mystica*), "of us" (*No worst*), "of maid and nun" (*Margaret Clitheroe*) takes of man.

However, sometimes giving full reign to the literary imagination, Hopkins demonstrates those aspects of motherhood which transcend the strictly dogmatic or doctrinal characteristics of Mary. For instance, exposing the Virgin's human tenderness, he depicts her musing about her still unborn child (*Ad Matrem*). In *The Loss* he captures the Mother's homelessness resulting from her own children's rejection of her. He further develops this 'Stabat Mater' motif in *No worst* where, deprived of the chance of defence — she is but an unspeaking absence in the sonnet— she is accused of the denial of comfort when her withdrawal from her child is just an expression of her love. Besides, he would also emphasize Mary's role as spiritual co-creator/begetter of ever-newer Christs in the human soul (*The Blessed Virgin, The Wreck*). Interestingly, the Virgin, too, is given a chance of rebirth, her miraculous 're-creation' possible either through sacrifice (*The Wreck, St. Thecla*) or as is the case with *Margaret Clitheroe*, through 'storing' Christ. Finally, a follower of Scotus, Hopkins not only enriches the concept of the Predestination he deals with in a number of works, but, more importantly, creates a whole new system of poetic expression allowing the artist to, occasionally at least, communicate that which is the essence of the inexpressible.

While each of Mary's descriptions leaves out some part of her mystery, they all consist of the same basic ingredients: Love, Life, Hope, Mercy, and Grace, the five petals of the Rose which, even when unfolded, merely reveal the inexhaustible depth of God's providence.

Even though going through Hopkins's greatest poems portraying the Virgin one cannot but admire the intellectual depth of the presentation, Mary's presence there can hardly be seen as the decisive factor for their artistic achievement. Yet, despite all their formal weaknesses and shortcomings, the six poems exclusively devoted to Mary form a class of their own: far superior than mere devotional works, they, nevertheless, are not distanced and refined enough to belong to a family of masterpieces of religious poetry. With their spontaneous, sometimes almost casual expression of the poet's deep faith and love, these works do more than capture the precious moments of his encounter with the Divine. They are in fact not only concrete means to and an encounter itself, but simultaneously, a record of this encounter; a meeting during which poetry and prayer mingle in order to reach, grasp, and finally to communicate the truth of the spiritual

experience. And this is the dimension of Hopkins's Marian poems which cannot be disregarded — their actual power to help man — through Mary's intercession and guidance — to ascend to God; the power of sharing that which many jealously keep to themselves: the precious gift of knowing and living God.

STRESZCZENIE

W teocentrycznie zorientowanym świecie poezji G. M. Hopkinsa nie mogło zabraknąć Maryi, matki Słowa. „Zaproszona” wierszem *Rosa Mystica*, Maryja nawiedzała ten świat aż do 1885 r., kiedy to w *No worst* Hopkins zwrócił się do niej po raz ostatni. Owocem tych nawiedzeń trwających, choć z różną regularnością i natężeniem, dobrych dziesięć lat, jest swoista wierszowana Mariologia, na którą składa się 15 utworów, w całości bądź we fragmentach poświęconych Matce Bożej. O tej właśnie poezji maryjnej — najchętniej przez krytyków pomijanej — traktuje niniejszy artykuł, w którym chronologiczny układ analizowanych wierszy pozwala na prześledzenie etapów duchowego (zbliżanie się i odchodzenie od Boga) i artystycznego rozwoju poety, coraz bardziej zafascynowanego nie tyle wyjaśnianiem, co wyrażaniem *Sacrum*. Poszczególne utwory pokazują nie tylko tradycyjnie najważniejsze z teologicznych ról Maryi (matka Boga i człowieka, pośredniczka między Bogiem a człowiekiem, Szafarka Łask, matka Kościoła, Miłosierdzia *etc.*), ale też i postawy człowieka wobec *Sacrum*, których charakterystyka oparta jest na analizie relacji podmiotu mówiącego względem Maryi.



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