

USE OF NATURE IN GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS’ POEMS

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Abstract: The purpose of the paper is to discuss the use of nature in Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poems. Nature plays important role in his poems; either it is simple poem i.e. in praise of nature or complex poem i.e. terrible sonnets. Through his nature poetry, Hopkins, by expressing his concept of the beauty of nature, allows the reader to share his vision of beauty with him. The nature imagery is closely connected with his poetic theories of inscape and instress. He considered that the essence of the object is to be found in its individual distinctiveness. To Hopkins, all nature is a manifestation, an “utterance” of God; each separate object “utters” God in its own individual way. This sacramental view of nature was the result of Hopkins’ unique ability to see things at once on both a natural and supernatural level.

Key Words: Nature, instress, inscape, individual distinctiveness, Sacramental view, Supernatural level.

INTRODUCTION

Every human being is a part of nature. At least once in a life time, everyone usually sits under a tree and smell the fragrance of the flower and smells and feel the fresh rain and feel the greenery of the field etc. Many poets include these sort of descriptions are there in their poems. Most of the Romantic and sensuous poets are in the vein. Rationally, they exaggerate the nature but sensually they portrait their inner consciousness of their sensuousness. They simply not only show the reader what they see around but they try to make the reader understand how they feel. They try to connect the nature with the life. But in Hopkins’ case he tries to unite the nature with god. He sees nature as it is and feel nature is the manifestation of god so god present in nature. For this reason, he wrote poem upon the nature whether it is happy poem or terrible sonnet, nature is the predominate picture in his poems.

AS A NATURE POET

As a passionate lover of nature, even from his childhood days, his inquiring mind taught him much about the nature that is surrounded by him, he loved nature because he extract some ecstasy from nature, he knows how to enjoy the ordinary things in nature that is a clouds, a little waterfall, a star filled sky, a sunset, all had for him its own fascinating and absorbing beauty. He loved it all because he learned to write of nature intimately, confidently and wholehearted lovingly. The great quality of Hopkins was that he was as sensuous as Keats in his early poems. There is a Keatsian strain in his earlier poems; His first poem “Escorial” is an attempt to combine nature and art. In “God’s Grandeur” he exclaims with happiness.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things: (9-10)

The poet is filled with delight as in “Spring” he says:

Nothing is so beautiful as spring. (1)

On natural level the sensuous beauty of the world around him appealed so deeply to him. So that his heart thrilled to all the surrounding of him that was good and beautiful. Not even his early poems; in his mature poems also nature was to be more important to Hopkins. Through his Ignatius discipline he developed a sacramental view of nature; for him nature was sacred thing and consecrated one.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATURE

Hopkins’ attitude towards the nature is that all beings are created by the god is to glorify Him; all natural beauty is to be classed as a part of the creation, performing the function that it was created. He saw god in all natural beauty that was created by Him. He was able to subordinate the sensuous beauty to god’s beauty because he could shift admiration of natural beauty of the object to intellectual to its moral beauty. For Hopkins, every natural objects, and every art of work has its own individuality or ‘thisness.’ This individuality differentiated from every other one of its species and it is that which is particular and to make every object what it is. He coined two terms that is “instress” and “inscape”. There exists a definite relationship between instress and inscape. While inscape belongs to the object, instress conveys the distinctiveness of the object to the perceiver. Inscape can be described in terms of impression of the soul.

Hopkins made use of every technical skill that he possessed with to express the individual distinctiveness of natural object. He wished to express everything clearly that we would realize the inscape of every individual and made to feel the impact that inscape produced. The desire to express the inscape of an object through words in his poem are called his “oddities” - his peculiar use of words i.e. his coinage, sound based words, peculiar order of the words into sentences etc. The persistent source of inspiration to Hopkins is the actual beauty of nature. While reading his poetry, it conveys his level of complete knowledge and understanding of what he was describing and that he was anxious to pass on its inscape to his reader. He wrote from experience that allows him to absorb the beauty of every object he contemplated.

C. D. Lewis pointed out that readers find Hopkins obscure for two reasons: First, “The world which Hopkins saw in such vivid detail is a world of which the modern metropolitan reader is becoming growingly ignorant.” The second reason is his concentrated method of writing which makes it difficult to follow “his lightning dashes from image to image.” Hopkins uses Nature as a catalyst for other ideas. There are certain recurring themes of which the most prominent themes are of water, the seasons, day and night, heaven, flowers, trees and birds.

WATER IMAGERY

In Hopkins’ poem, the usage of water imagery is varied. The light and graceful “Penmaen Pool” is a courtesy poem, a thank you note written “For the Visitor’s Book at the Inn” is a direct simple nature poem. In this poem, Hopkins has taught for the beauty of the mountain stream and added its particular beauty-its inscape- to the world’s “treasury of beauty.” “Inversmaid” is about the little Scotch stream. The scene that explained the best suited to Hopkins’ descriptive powers, for it is nature in motion. The first two lines are a complete picture of the tumultuous dark brown stream sweeping down the side of the mountain

and carrying even small pebbles with it. As the forth turns and “twindles” over the broth of the pool “So pitchblack, fell frowning” that seems to drown even despair. The water flashes down the side of the mountain where “degged with dew, dappled with dew/Are the groins of the braces that the brook treads through.” As it flows, the stream sprinkles drops of water on the heather, the fern, and the ash. The last stanza shows the true Hopkinsian plea that all this beauty may not be lost:

..., Let them be left,

O let them be left, wildness and wet:

Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet. (14-16)

“The Wreck of the Deutschland”, “The Loss of Eurydice” pictures the sea vividly. Apart from these poems “Winter with the Gulf Stream”, “The Sea and the Skylark”, “As Kingfisher Catch Fire”, “Epithalamion” and some of the “Terrible Sonnets” Hopkins sees water as a source of imagery.

SEASONS

Reference to seasons is frequent in Hopkins writings. The sonnet “Spring” embodies the whole spirit of the springtime. The minute description of the spring season - the weeds in wheels, the blue eggs of the thrush, the playful lambs - makes the scene attractive. In other poems, he makes short, but vivid references to spring. In “The Wreck of the Deutschland” he speaks of “pied and peeled May.” The Eurydice sails “on a blue March day” when the bright sun “lanced fire in the heavenly bay.” “Hurrahing in Harvest” may be considered a companion poem to “Spring”. Just as Hopkins sees spring as the time for joy because of the rebirth of all nature, so he finds autumn a time for “hurrahing” because nature has reached its fulfillment.

NATURAL SCENERY

Another recurring theme in Hopkins’ poetry is day and night, the moonrise, the clouds and the sunset. In “The Starlight Night” poem Hopkins makes use of two techniques in building his vivid picture of the sky at night: The emphatic repetition of the word “look,” which catches the reader’s attention immediately: and the use of a series of fanciful comparisons. The stars are “fire-folk sitting in the air,” “boroughs,” “circle-citadels,” “diamond delves,” “elves’-eyes,” “May-mess on an orchard bough.” (10) The effect of these accumulated comparisons is an impression of beauty of a distinctly fairly like quality. The stars in the sky are like diamond shining in the dark pit of the sky, the star filled sky is like the “wind-beat whitebeam” or like “airy abeles.” The stars clustered in the dark heaven, resemble “flake-doves,” or doves as small as snowflakes which hover and float in the air.

While reading “Moonrise” a fragment we can visualize the moonrise as Hopkins visualizes. Hopkins rising “in the white and the walk of the morning,” (1): was arrested the sight when he looked out of his window - the sudden sight of the waning moon that, “dwindle and shinned to the fringe of a fingernail,” appeared as if it had stepped from the stool and drawn back from the barrow of dark Maenefa, the mountain. The moon, seemingly caught on the edge of the mountain, since a “cusp still clasped him, a flute yet fanged him,” appeared too paused over the mountain, shedding a light which, though not too bright, completely awakened the poet.

Among the nature poem, one of the most beautiful poem is “Spelt from the Sibyl’s Leaves”, in which Hopkins pictures evening deepening into night. The leaves, pointed against the sky, “black, white,” reminded Hopkins of the leaves on which Sibyl wrote her prophecies. Earth lays aside her variegated

colors, as “Evening” - “Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable,/caulity, voluminous --- stupendous--- Strains to be time’s vast/womb-of-all, hearse-of-all night”

HOPKINS’ BIRD POEMS

The final group of nature poems is, Hopkins writes of birds. To Hopkins, the sight of the birds on the wing must have been a thing of beauty. The songs of birds attracted Hopkins even more than did their appearance. Hopkins’ birds are seldom at rest when they sing. The flight of the bird, soaring high in the heavens in happy abandon, must have seemed to Hopkins the symbol of that freedom of spirit and carefree abandon for which he himself so longed.

Hopkins wrote two poems on skylark: “The Sea and the Skylark” and “The Caged Skylark”. In “The Sea and the Skylark” he describes the skylark’s song as headlong, exciting snatches of song, “forever old yet new,” descending to the earth in “skeins” or “coils” and forever vying with sound of the sea. He contrasts the song of the skylark with the sound of the sea. Even now the skylark, “scanted in a dull cage” has been a “dare-gale” skylark. In its freedom, the “sweet-fowl” had need of no rest but “babbles as it drops down to its nest.”

Hopkins has peculiar ability to see the nature on two distinct levels - the natural and the supernatural. He sees skylark as a part of the natural world as well as the supernatural world. To Hopkins, nature remains nature but it is a revelation, an utterance of its creator. He can enjoy and admire the skylark for its physical beauty for its actual song and at the same time contemplate the god fashioned it. Besides the skylark poems, “The Windhover” and “Pied Beauty” are the simple nature poetry describes the movement of the Falcon bird and the beauty of the nature. “The Windhover” is a poem of exaltation and praise with all its terms from chivalry to falconry. “Pied Beauty” has the characteristics freshness in Hopkins’ nature poetry. It is also an expression of Hopkins’ theory of the individual distinctive quality of each object. He cultivates a habit of portraying minute detail of each object in the nature becomes individual distinct from every other object of the same species. He not only sees the object in its physical beauty, it is the outward shell which encloses the inner core of spiritual beauty. Spiritual values are present in all Hopkins’ nature poetry; in many poems, these values express the purpose of his writing.

SACRAMENTAL VISION OF NATURE

Most of his nature poem has sacramental quality in which sensuous appeal of natural beauty becomes the beginning and further moves to look deeper into its being to realize the inscape and instress of it. Intensity of thought and feeling make him most accurate in the technical aspects of his writing, so that his work received a form perfectly suited to his thoughts. Thomas Merton, in his work “Seeds of Contemplation,” summed up the whole theory of Hopkins, inscape and instress: together with his sacramental vision of nature. He proceeds by explaining even a tree has its own individuality. It has its own instress and inscape. It is created by god it derived both its life and form from its creator. Therefore it may be said to partake of the nature of god. The nearer it attains perfection; the prefect will be its “utterance” of god. This quality constitutes its sacramental property which is closely dependents on its individuality, and is closely related to both inscape and instress.

CONCLUSION

Hopkins believes that poetry should have an “Under thought” as well as “Over thought”. The direct meaning of the poem constitute “the over thought”, “the under thought” results from analogy, which is found in most of his poem which suggests a secondary meaning. To Hopkins each object of the visible

world has potentially capable of revealing by the under thought suggested to the mind, the ideal type for which each object stood. For Hopkins the identification of “the under though” with “the over thought” was an immediate association.

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