

**AN ARCHETYPAL STUDY OF THE JOURNEY MOTIF  
IN GERARD MANLEY HOPKIN'S WRECK OF THE DEUTSCHLAND**

**BY**

**JEANETTE HICKMAN WHITE**



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GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS' WRECK OF THE DEUTSCHLAND

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A Research Paper  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in Education

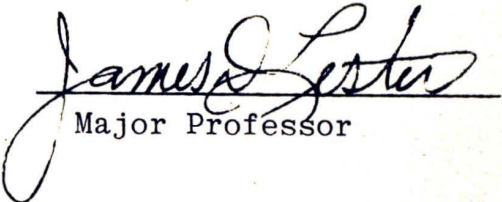
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by  
Jeanette Hickman White

August, 1977

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Jeanette Hickman White entitled "An Archetypal Study of the Journey Motif in Gerard Manley Hopkins' Wreck of the Deutschland." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master Arts, with a major in Education.

  
Major Professor

Accepted for the  
Graduate Council:

  
Dean of the Graduate School

The Wreck of the Deutschland, based on an actual historical situation, broke a seven year period of literary silence for Gerard Manley Hopkins. He freely admits to Robert Bridges, future Laureate, that the poem is "difficult" to read.<sup>1</sup> One critic, John Pick, believes that the difficulty with reading Hopkins is brought about by the fact that so few of us are really "Christians" and we are not spiritually prepared for the intensity of Hopkins' work--especially The Wreck of the Deutschland. His advice is to "meditate first for a fortnight on the Passion of our Lord, read the poem, then read it again."<sup>2</sup>

The poetic value of the poem has long been praised by some of the major critics of the nineteenth century, although little agreement has been reached as to its exact place in Victorian literature. Upon the first reading Robert Bridges stated that it was "bilge-water, vulgar, mudbottom, and common sewage."<sup>3</sup> (He later modified his harsh view.) Other critics such as W. H. Gardner believe the poem to be filled

<sup>1</sup>Robert Bridges, A Critical Memoir, in "Poets Of the Century" (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1893), p. 179.

<sup>2</sup>John Pick, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Priest and Poet, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>Bridges, p. 181.

with luxuriant, sensual, metaphysical, paradoxical, and dynamic imagery which, however complex and difficult to understand upon the first reading, makes it one of the finest poems in English literature. Gardner contends that Hopkins' poem has been misunderstood, unwisely depreciated, and too frequently denied the rank and importance it deserves.<sup>4</sup> Gardner traces the ambiguity of critical response to Hopkins' different levels of understanding. There is in his verse, on the one hand, a primitive quality, a certain primary poetic meaning which is understood at once. On the other hand, his subtle overtones and obliquities, his richly varied rhythms and his elaborately poeticized theology and philosophy produce a deep sensory and intellectual experience for the reader.<sup>5</sup> It is this writer's contention that some of the critics have failed to note the strongly archetypal nature of Hopkins' work.

The traditions of literature embrace the use of archetypes to represent characters or themes with whom readers are intimately familiar. For example, Plato believed that the use of archetypes aided the reader to a better understanding of the writer and his work by helping the human mind

<sup>4</sup>W. H. Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. iv.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. iv.



to form its judgments.<sup>6</sup> Jung concurs with Plato's theory and states that the poet, as seer, is an organism so refined that he is capable of perceiving characters or ideas and categorizing them for the reader.<sup>7</sup>

On the relation of analytical psychology to poetic art, Jung hypothesizes in regard to the psychological significance of poetry. He specifies that special emotional significance possessed by certain poems--a significance going beyond any definite meaning conveyed--attributes to the stirring in the reader's mind, within or beneath his conscious response of unconscious forces which he terms "primordial images," or archetypes. These archetypes are described as being "psysic residue of numberless experiences of the same type, experiences which have happened not to the individual but to his ancestors, and of which the results are inherited in the structure of the brain, a priori determinants of individual experience."<sup>8</sup> Within Hopkins' broad use of religious symbolism there runs a thread of archetypal, psychological imagery.

The purpose of this research paper is to examine Gerard

<sup>6</sup>Sven Armens, Archetypes of the Family in Literature (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 2.

Manley Hopkins' The Wreck of the Deutschland, based on an historical event--the wreck of the German ship, the Deutschland. This poem on one level is a study of an archetypal journey, one that is both physical and spiritual. In this poem Hopkins uses archetypal images extensively as he reveals how his Anglican background, internal struggle, and conversion to Catholicism constitute the archetype of a Soldier-Saint whose battles are fought within his soul in his quest for sainthood. Also, Hopkins portrays the Franciscan Mother Superior as being the archetypal Virgin-Goddess who provides leadership for the other nuns and refugees on board the Deutschland in their search for religious freedom in America.<sup>9</sup> She gathers the passengers to her bosom to be comforted in the face of death on the beaches of the English coast although she, too, will die. Finally, we see the journey of the nuns from physical life to death, their descent into Hell, and their resurrection into eternal life. Therefore, Hopkins' archetypal journey as portrayed in this poem is an autobiographical as well as a poetic description of the physical, emotional, and largely spiritual odyssey of those who were aboard the Deutschland.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Graves, The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth (New York: Creative Age Press, 1948), pp. 352-61.

There can be no doubt that The Wreck of the Deutschland is an autobiographical accounting of Hopkins' conversion. W.S. Johnson notes that the poem is an extended personal lyric. The first person singular pronoun in its various forms such as "I, me, and my," occurs outside quotation marks nearly thirty times--mostly, but not entirely in the first part of the poem.<sup>10</sup> Hopkins' journey begins when God's creation of man is reiterated, "Thou has bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh" (1.5).<sup>11</sup> The archetypal image here is of the creation in Eden, although paradoxically, man is not only created by God, he is also bound by Him. He has been inscaped by the Creator who has "touched" him. This omnipresent God accompanies those who have accepted Him throughout each step of his journey from the beginning on earth through the beginning of eternal life in God's bosom. Whenever man reaches out he "Feels thy finger and finds Thee " (1.8). Before the infinite creator stands his finite creation--man in his quest for eventual union with God. Hopkins is keenly aware of God's omnipotence as he speaks,

<sup>10</sup>Wendell Stacy Johnson, Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Poet as Victorian (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 146.

<sup>11</sup>Gerard Manley Hopkins, The Wreck of the Deutschland (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1970). All line references to the poem are to this edition.



"Thou mastering me/ God! giver of breath and bread, / World's strand, sway of the sea;/ Lord of living and dead " (Stanza 1).

It was difficult for Hopkins to reconcile the battle he was waging within himself concerning his desire to join the Catholic Church. His early poem, "Nondum," meaning "not yet" asks God to lead him by the hand until he is strong enough to endure the opposition he would face from his family, friends, and his own sense of what was right for him. <sup>12</sup>

Oh! til Thou givest that sense beyond,  
To shew Thee that Thou are, and near,  
Let patience with her chastening wand  
Dispel the doubt and dry the tear:  
And lead me child-like by the hand  
If still in darkness not in fear. (Stanza 8)

Philip Martin notes that the struggle in Hopkins' own life is revived in his memory by the wreck of the Deutschland. The soul is caught between the inexorable, demanding love of God and the negation and "hurtle of hell." The speaker asks if there is any place that the soul can go to escape. His answer is that the soul can go home to Christ who is the source of all grace. There is in every human soul a homing instinct towards God. Here, in its extremity, the soul is "carrier-witted," endowed with the instinct of a carrier pigeon to fly unerringly to its proper home; it "flies," "flashes," "towers," "from the grace to the grace"-- that is to say from the grace of God's finger searing it into aware-

<sup>12</sup>  
Ibid., p. 2.

ness, to the grace of strength and life in the Blessed Sacrament. <sup>13</sup>

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.  
 My heart, but you were dovewinged, I can tell,  
     carrier-witted, I am bold to boast,  
 To flash from the flame to the flame then,  
     Tower from the grace to the grace. (Stanza 3)

Home, then, in "the heart of the Host," is the haven where the soul is quiet and sustained, feeding and resting upon Christ. After the wrestling and the terror, it learns where its true life lies--in the grace of God and the source of that grace.

The speaker believes that the journey to the deepest spiritual knowledge is gained through personal suffering, through sympathizing with God's suffering, and then through entering into His passion. The people who know God best are those who suffer most since they can understand where joy and beauty originate. Paul Mariani notes that God's stress rides time like "riding" (going with the current, but also ruling) a river. The Christocentric nature of history is clear to only a few; the faithless misinterpret it altogether, and even the faithful waver in accepting the full implications

<sup>13</sup>Philip M. Martin, Mastery and Mercy: A Study of Two Religious Poems (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 32.



Stroke and a stress that stars and storms deliver,  
 That guilt is hushed by, hearts are flushed by and melt—  
 But it rides time like riding a river  
 (And here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss).  
 (Stanza 6)

Hopkins' earthly journey-battle nears its destination after he became seriously ill with typhoid fever. Rather than being frightened, his attitude was one of ecstasy. He was encompassed with the desire to end his transitory life.<sup>15</sup> As he spoke to the priest who had administered the last rites of the Church to him, he repeated "I am so very happy, so very happy."

### III

The Mother Superior serves as the traditional Virgin-Goddess in all her purity and goodness. As Robert Graves notes, she must be innocent, untarnished and inaccessible except by rape.<sup>16</sup> Hopkins describes her as being a "lioness arising breasting the babble/ a prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told" (l.36). Death for the nuns as well as for the majority of the passengers is personified

<sup>14</sup>Paul L. Mariani, A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 52.

<sup>15</sup>Gardner, p. 172.

<sup>16</sup>Graves, p. 362.

in the second section of the poem. The journey takes the reader to the doorstep of Death, then forces him to confront his host and realize that all men are mortal and must eventually die whether it be by "sword," "flame," or "flood." On the journey to Death, it is easy to look at the flowers of the meadow and for an instant believe that one's mortal life will never end; however, Hopkins dispells this thought with his interjection of the image of the scythe which literally cuts the flowers as well as one's life.

Some find me a sword; some  
The flange and the fail; flame,  
Fang, or flood' goes Death on drum,  
And storms bugle his fame.  
But we dream we are rooted in earth—Dust!  
Flesh falls within sight of us, we thought our flower the same,  
Wave with the meadow, forget that there must  
The sour scythe cringe, and the blear share come. (Stanza 11)

The ship journeys through the stormy weather, its passengers bound ironically by a common destiny--Hell. The image then changes drastically from the hopelessness of death to the mercy of God, or his representative, the Mother Superior, who will surely "reeve" even them in.

#### IV

The final part of the journey occurs as the five nuns willingly accept their deaths as being necessary for the entrance into Heaven: "Dame, at our door/ Drowned, and among our shoals,/ Remember us in the roads, the Heaven-haven of the Reward (Stanza 35). The archetypal journey continues



as the poet reminds the reader once again that without the death of the Messiah, His birth would have no meaning. "His going out in Galilee/ Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey/ Manger, maiden's knee"(Stanza 7). No sooner is the preparation for the birth accomplished than the reader must prepare for something more intense, more mysterious, more demanding--the Passion and death of Christ. God's fullest and most demanding revelations to man are not found in the beauties of disasters of nature, but are found in Christ's suffering and death. This death is perpetual in time, through the human sufferings of those who compose His mystical body on earth. This is the framework that allows one to interpret the sufferings of the nuns on the ship. The reader is confronted with both a miraculous birth juxtaposed with the agony of the crucifixion. Paradoxically, God has descended on man in darkness in order to bring him out of the darkness. He must experience a journey into "Hell" in order to escape from it.

The journey to the cross is made only after one has given his answer of acceptance or rejection to God. Mariani contends that the cross is the goal of all men since some go there early, others late in life. They go to the foot of the cross, to Christ, the hero of Calvary because they are compelled to go although they may not be entirely willing. He believes that all men admire the heroism of Jesus whether

or not they accept the significance of His sacrifice. <sup>17</sup>

It is inevitable that all men must confront death. Here, God is seen as the inscaper moving into the individual who now becomes instressed. He can now look at the death of the nuns and the disaster of the shipwreck since he has already made his journey to the foot of the cross.

Peter Milward notes that death is seen under the corrective adjustment of God's infinite power. <sup>18</sup> The dark side of the bay is like a net sweeping the people in, while God hovers over them in their anguish. The description of the destruction aboard the Deutschland is made more vivid by the poet's similar spiritual experiences prior to his conversion. He notes that the storm raged as the five nuns aboard the ill-fated ship suffered. They were refugees from everything mortal and they belonged only to God. Expelled by their motherland, they find themselves in the depths of death; they are engulfed by waves of ice which are described as being "widow-making," "unchildling," and "unfathering"--yet the storm changes into the beauty of flower petals in their eyes since they have no fear of physical death.

<sup>17</sup> Mariani, p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Milward, A Commentary on G.M. Hopkins' The Wreck of the Deutschland (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1968), p. 55.



Banned by the land of their birth,  
 Rhine refused them, Thames would ruin them;  
 . . . Thou martyr-master: in thy sight  
 Storm flakes were scroll-leafed flowers, lily showers—  
 Sweet heaven was astrew in them. (Stanza 21)

Robert Andreach contends that the Mother Superior's experience is meant to be a paradigm. She "sees one thing, one;/ Has one fetch in her: she rears herself to divine/ Ears." <sup>19</sup> She willingly accepts pain and suffering as her journey to God is nearly completed. She is beginning her climb out of Hell back toward Paradise. Although blinded by the storm, she is able to see, to perceive truth. She calls, "O Christ, Christ, come quickly/ The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best" (Stanza 24).

In his study, Donald McChesney notes that the "poising palms" (1.6) refers to God's hands, bringing good out of evil, measuring the worth of the nuns' sufferings. The image of the beauty of the flowers and lily showers expresses a tranquility which overcomes the violent elements of the nuns' sufferings which were already transmuted in Heaven into things of joy and beauty. <sup>20</sup> The nuns' sacrifice is for the "Master/ Ipse, the only one, Christ, King, Head" (1.4). Their reward is union

<sup>19</sup>Robert J. Andreach, Studies in Structure (Fordham University Press, 1964), p. 27.

<sup>20</sup>Donald McChesney, A Hopkins Commentary: An Explanatory Commentary on the Main Poems, 1876-89 (New York University Press, 1968), p. 33.

with Christ and eternal salvation.

The speaker recalls how one man stirred from the rigging above to attempt to save some of the screaming women on the decks below. He was strong, handy, brave; however, all that he could do by himself was worthless. Just man cannot repair nature alone, he needs God's assistance in order to grow spiritually. The way to the masterful and merciful God is through the journey of spiritual life, through the way of prayer and penance, pain and suffering, through the way of sacrifice and invitation of Christ. The sailor's attempt at helping the women ended with the grotesque picture of his headless body swinging from a rope. There is added terror in the gay, boistrous indifference of the "cobbled foam-fleece" playing with its gruesome burden.

The journey of the people aboard the Deutschland carried them to their deaths, not upon the rocks, but ironically upon a sandy beach. Approximately fifty people aboard the ship perished; however, that does not mean that God did not care for them. Even in the middle of the horror of death the protecting hand of God was still overshadowing them while directing their journey. Hopkins emphasizes that the approach of a disaster does not mean that God departs from or deserts man. In fact, for one who has begun to perceive the meaning of Christ's passion, the extremity itself may be the means of a special nearness or journey to God. It is often in the



deepest darkness that Christ's presence shines most clearly.

The nuns are sealed into Christ's death, not by the five wounds, but by being "bathed" in dark waters. This is their baptism--which is death--but it is also birth into eternal life.

Downes, in his discussion of the influence of the Ignatian philosophy upon Hopkins, contends that the jeopardy of the wreck was the vehicle whereby God placed men in such dire stress that they were forced to choose quickly to offer their lives to Him, again renewing the Passion and death of Christ, made rich in its eternal value by virtue of this commemoration. Downes also believes that the Ignatian quality explains the type of service to Christ that the five nuns offered. They did give themselves over completely and irrevocably in the middle of the most frightening circumstances. Hopkins stresses the facts that they are heroic, chivalric, and knightly in their actions. The Ignatian philosophy expounds that the "greatest sacrifice in the greatest danger is made with the greatest generosity." <sup>21</sup>

Milward believes that Hopkins attempts to explain that men do not seek greater suffering when they are actually confronted with imminent destruction. It is rather being day after day yoked like a work horse to the galling, chafing

<sup>21</sup>David A. Downes, Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of His Ignatian Spirit (New York: Bookman Associates, 1959), p. 68.



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work that makes the heart so heavy that one seeks an escape. It is then that one dreams of heaven's ease. It is through prepared meditations that Christ's suffering appeals to us. 22

The journey of those aboard the Deutschland has taken the people from banishment on the Rhine into peril at sea where they are confronted with the birth, Passion, and crucifixion of Christ. It then leads them into death on the Thames and the descent into Hell. The journey is ended with the vision of the resurrection or "eastering" in them. The final affirmation of the poet shows his contention that the disaster was a brief and local visit by God, who although "kind" has firmly called His own ones to Him.

In conclusion, Hopkins has shown himself and the Mother Superior to be archetypal figures devoted to the service of God and to the love of mankind which will eventually bring them to the culmination of their journey and to their ultimate goal--that of union with Christ. The death of the nuns reiterates the Christian belief that eternal life may only be gained through physical death. Hopkins' journey has become another of God's paradoxical dark mercies.

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