

HOPKINS, YEATS, ELIOT: THE PRE-RAPHAELITE
HERITAGE

A good example of late Victorian Pre-Raphaelitism (considered as naturalism which expresses a spiritual meaning through a co-ordination of concrete particulars) is G. M. Hopkins' "The Windhover". This poem did not just happen but was the fruit of a careful aesthetic preparation, expanded and given metaphysical scope by a spiritual ardour. For examples of Hopkins' meticulous appreciation of nature, let us leaf through his notebooks. Everywhere we encounter admirable passages of minute and lucid natural observation. In an early diary (April, 1864), he writes (Poems and Prose, 92-93):

Moonlight hanging or dropping on treetops like blue cobweb.

Also the upper sides of little grotted waves turned to the sky have soft pale-coloured cobwebs on them, the underside green.

Note that the beaded oar, dripping, powders or sows the smooth with dry silver drops.

He notes in the same diary in 1866 (Ibid., 93):

Drops of rain hanging on rails etc. seen with only the lower rim lighted like nails (of fingers). Screws of brooks and twines. Soft chalky look with more shadowy middles of the globes of cloud on a night with a moon faint or concealed. Mealy clouds with a not brilliant moon. Blunt buds of the ash. Pencil buds of the beech. Lobes of the trees. Cups of the eyes. Gathering back the lightly hinged eye-lids. Bows of the eyelids. Pencil of eyelashes. Juices of the eyeball. Eyelids like leaves, petals, caps, tufted hats, handkerchiefs, sleeves, gloves. Also of the bones sleeved in flesh. Juices of the sunrise. Joins and veins of the same. Vermilion look of the hand held against a candle with the darker parts as the middles of the fingers and especially the knuckles covered with ash.

In his Journal (186601875), we read this entry for May 9, 1871 (Poems and Prose, 125-126):

The bluebells in your hand baffle you with their inscape, made to every sense: if you draw your fingers through