

**“O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed”¹**
The Wordscapes of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “Terrible Sonnets”

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As a student at Oxford University, the young Gerard Manley Hopkins used his notes on Greek philosophy to explore what was to become part of his philosophy of words. In February 1868, he wrote that “the word is the expression, *uttering* of the idea in mind,”² and this notion underlay his struggle to “utter” the energy of the word and the Word, or thought and Being, throughout his poetic life.

Much has been written about Hopkins’ elaborate wordplay, in which punning, neologism, and convoluted and contracted syntax, frequently based in his interest in Anglo-Saxon purism, among other techniques, distill the “scape” of the word and the Word. Joseph Feeney, for example, has provided a detailed examination of Hopkins’ poetry in terms of the what he calls Hopkins’ linguistic playfulness.³ It is more difficult, however, to trace such “play-as-fun” in what have been called the “Terrible Sonnets,” those six untitled poems most likely composed in 1885 and 1886 in which Hopkins expresses his sense of isolation from both his poetic gift and the Church.

This paper proposes that in the sonnets “To Seem the Stranger,” “I Wake and Feel,” “No Worst, There is None,” “Carrion Comfort,” “Patience, Hard Thing,” and “My Own Heart,” Hopkins employs his unique wordplay to “utter” the landscape of the mind and that his distancing of his words from those of “normal” speech echo the distance that he himself was experiencing.

¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, “No worst, there is none.”

² *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Vol. IV: Oxford Essays and Notes*, ed. Lesley Higgins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 307.

³ Joseph J. Feeney, *The Playfulness of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).