

Hopkins and Early English Riddling: Solving *The Windhover*?

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Recently, James Finn Cotter suggested an intertextuality between three of Hopkins's poems (*The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1875), *The Windhover* (1877), and *The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe* (1883)), and the three Anglo-Saxon poems known in the nineteenth century as *Christ* which begin the *Exeter Book*.¹ While I take issue with some aspects of Cotter's argument, I will build on his valuable fundamental points: that there is a common sensibility between early English literature and Hopkins's poetry and that this is produced by a direct intertextuality. The present article is concerned with *The Windhover* alone, a sonnet which was written during Hopkins's time in Wales and consequently more often read in terms of Hopkins's interest in Welsh poetry. However, though Hopkins was intrigued by Welsh poetics (especially its rhythm and rhyme) during this period, it was not, as Cotter demonstrates, the only influence upon his work. In the form, strategies, and purpose of *The Windhover*, the influence of early English poetry is visible. I will show that an intertextual reading of the poem—viewing it through the lens of the genre of the Anglo-Saxon riddle—has the capacity to shed light on this endlessly complex poem.

Despite the many intriguing insights of Cotter's article, his elaborate central proposition, that Hopkins planned and executed a literary triptych designed to mirror *Christ*, is hard to demonstrate. It relies on a similarity of imagery and ideas; a similarity which could as easily be attributed to the authors' common religious beliefs. Moreover, in order to suggest that each

poem corresponds to one of the constituent poems of *Christ*, a level of authorial intention on Hopkins's part in terms of conceiving of the poems as a sequence needs to be established, a feat Cotter does not attempt. The three poems have never been linked in any way let alone thought to be part of a series. Cotter's reading requires Hopkins to have designed a rather grand schema for what would be a very long-term poetic project and yet there is no mention of it anywhere in either his diaries or his letters. This seems unlikely given that Hopkins's writings are full of notes concerning his poetic ideas, inspirations and projects. Moreover, one of the three poems, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, was begun when Hopkins heard news of the shipwreck, an inception which does not suggest he had a series in mind. Rather, the poems which are written over a period of nearly a decade seem to reflect Hopkins's particular interests at the time of composition and not an ongoing project.

However, Cotter's suggestion that Hopkins's work betrays the influence of the *Exeter Book* bears further examination. Of the three poems considered by Cotter, it is *The Windhover* which seems to me to display the greatest intertextuality with early English poetry. Like Cotter, I argue for the influence of the *Exeter Book* on *The Windhover*, but where Cotter draws a parallel with *Christ* I feel there is a stronger case to be made for the influence of another part of the *Exeter Book*, the riddles. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, *The Windhover* belongs to a specific Anglo-Saxon riddle type, the second of the two identified by Williamson, known as the "Ic seah" type.² Moreover, where Cotter attempts to argue for direct intertextuality with a specific poem (*Christ*), this article suggests that *The Windhover* is influenced, not by a particular riddle from the *Exeter Book* but by the riddle genre, a genre which enjoyed remarkable popularity in early England.

The Germanic fondness for riddling, fuelled by the dissemination of the late antique riddle collection, the *Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata*, created a vogue for riddling. Collections of riddles were written by poets, scholars, clergymen, and saints, including some of the most important and influential cultural figures of the period. Saint Boniface, Alcuin, Tawine, Eusebius, and, most famously, Saint Aldhelm all wrote riddles in Latin. In fact, during Hopkins's lifetime, it was thought that Saint Bede had also authored a collection though the attribution is now questioned. These riddle collections inspired the group of anonymous vernacular riddles found in the tenth-century *Exeter Book*.³ Quinn has established that Hopkins was familiar with these texts through Lingard's *The History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church*.⁴ Lingard's work, which discusses riddling somewhat disparagingly, was required reading at St. Mary's Hall, Stonyhurst, during his philosophy (1870–1873). One of Lingard's criticisms is that, unlike Classical

Roman poetry, Latin riddles from this period employ rhyme, a feature of some of Hopkins's subsequent Latin verse, like *Ad Matrem Virginem* or the so-called *May Lines*. From this we may assume that Hopkins did not necessarily accept Lingard's criticisms; on the contrary, he may well have emulated the genre. Moreover, we have other examples of Hopkins imitating, consciously and directly, various archaic genres, including the folk ballad, a genre influenced by early English riddles.⁵

In this article I will demonstrate that *The Windhover* has strong formal similarities with early English riddling. This genre, which has very little in common with modern riddles, has a range of distinctive formal conventions which, I argue, are also present in *The Windhover*, including an "entitled solution," "kennings" and the use of formulae. More fundamentally, it exhibits two predominant riddle strategies: linguistic ambiguity and the description of an animal subject in anthropomorphic terms. Most fundamentally of all, the poem shares with early English riddling its riddle-subject (what the Anglo-Saxon riddle writers sometimes call the *wiht wundorlice*,⁶ the miraculous creature), its conception of that subject, and ultimately its "purpose."

The notion that a poem as profound as *The Windhover* might take inspiration from riddles may seem surprising since, although Hopkins's predilection for riddling has been noted, it is seen as an expression of the flip-pant or even trivial.⁷ In large measure this is due to the influence of Freud who classes riddles with jokes.⁸ His pervasive analysis has also led to the association of riddling and sexuality.⁹ At the other end of the critical spectrum, Wittgenstein dismisses the form, claiming that riddles do not exist at all.¹⁰ But riddles have not always been regarded in this way. In ancient and medieval times, it was believed that "riddles and *ænigmata* pointed to the paradox and mystery inherent in humble things."¹¹ Medieval riddles embody the principle that by comprehending the minutiae of the world mortals may approach the divine. Such riddles take ordinary, familiar or unconsidered things and describe them in the most exulted terms. These terms render the subject, the "miraculous creature," at first unrecognisable; at first it seems that only a mythical creature could fulfil all the riddle's claims and yet, inevitably, when the riddle is solved the miraculous creature is identified as an ordinary creature, well known to the riddle's audience. Such riddles lead their audience through a process which reveals the miraculous in the ordinary, the world "charged with the grandeur of God."¹² Here, every aspect of Creation—the highest and the lowest—is shown to reflect the majesty of God in expressing its true nature; a conception which finds strong parallel in Hopkins' notion of *inscape*.¹³

This understanding of the riddle genre, which underpins all early English riddling, has a long history in the Christian tradition and is found, per-

haps most notably, in Saint Paul, who does not say (as is commonly believed) that we see God “through a glass, darkly” (1Cor. 13:12) but rather that we see Him “εν αινιγματι”: by means of, or in, riddles.¹⁴ In *De Trinitate* Augustine makes this passage the centre of his discussion of the riddle as a trope through which we may approach the divine,¹⁵ and this understanding becomes an important tenet of early Christian thinking. It is present in the work of Donatus, Isidore of Seville, Bede, and Aldhelm,¹⁶ where it is not merely that we can only approach God through enigmata, but rather that enigmata *allow* us to approach God: “A riddle is an obscure analogy through which one is warned to sharpen wits and turn to those inner things which are to be grasped.”¹⁷ Given Hopkins’s familiarity with the wider Christian tradition and fondness for Augustine in particular,¹⁸ it is not surprising that this conception might inform Hopkins’s work too.¹⁹

The riddling in *The Windhover* begins with the title itself. The use of “windhover” for “falcon” acts as a kenning²⁰ which, like *hildenædre* (literally “battle adder,” meaning “arrow”) or *merehengest* (literally “sea-horse,” meaning “ship”), is a “riddle in embryo.”²¹ Kennings are perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the influence of Old English poetics on Hopkins during this period; his use of “bone-house” (*The Caged Sky-Lark*, l.2) for “body” seems to be a translation of the Old English kenning *banhus* (literally “bone-house” and also used to signify “body”). Hopkins’s title-kenning is important because in the poem’s opening lines the majestic creature which captivates Hopkins’s first-person narrator is introduced to the audience solely through the enigmatic epithets, “morning’s minion” and “kingdom of daylight’s dauphin” (ll.1—2). It is only at the end of the second line that we come to the name of the creature itself: “dapple-dawn-drawn falcon” (l.2). If it were not for the poem’s title, we should not know the identity of the creature until this moment. All the imagery thus far has been of light and morning. So far there has been nothing to suggest flight or the sky or anything else which might prompt us to guess the identity of the poem’s subject; it is the poem’s title which ensures that on first reading the riddlic description of the bird the reader knows what is being described.

In this Hopkins mirrors a characteristic and distinctive convention of early English riddling. Following Symphosius, Anglo-Latin riddle-writers supply the answer to each riddle in its own title, just as we might say that Hopkins’s “riddle” is answered (though perhaps not *solved* as we shall see below) by his title, “The Windhover.”²² Moreover, especially in Latin riddling, it is not unusual for the riddle-writer to explicitly name the miraculous creature somewhere in the text of the riddle itself, especially if the title is punning or enigmatic in some way.²³ This curious convention, incongruous to those familiar only with modern ideas of riddling, is explained if we consider

that the purpose of early English riddling is not to challenge us to a guessing game but rather to open our eyes to the miraculous in the ordinary, a feat some riddle writers achieved by simultaneously obscuring and identifying the miraculous creature. On the one hand, the miraculous creature is being disguised by the poet's enigmatic description of it built around strange metaphors, and on the other, it is clearly named and identified in the title and then the body of the poem. In this way we are forced to assess continuously the claims made for the creature against our original perception of it—just as we do reading *The Windhover*.

Just as the poem's title is typical of the riddle genre, so *The Windhover* employs the genre's formulaic opening gambit. Hopkins's introductory "I caught" (l. 1) echoes the generic *Exeter Book* riddles beginning, "*lc seah*"²⁴ ("I see"). Here "caught"—a word Hopkins often uses idiosyncratically and often in relation to *inscape*²⁵—encompasses the meaning of *seah* but its semantic reach is greater and more complex. It suggests that the narrator is in the process of transformation, of gaining the perception of the world "charged with the grandeur of God" which is engendered by riddling. Similarly, when Hopkins speaks of "catching" an *inscape* in his journals the word "caught" conveys that the *inscape*, or at least the perception or recognition of it, is elusive. The energy, potential violence, and utter involvement implicit in the verb "caught" also convey something of the power of the *inscape* that it must be sought with such force. When Hopkins caught these mesmerising *inscapes* they had equally caught him and it seems that it is in this sense that the word is used at the beginning of the poem since the bird itself is uncatchable. It is the bird, a bird of prey, which is the catcher and the first-person speaker who is caught, transfixed by this new perception of the miraculous in the familiar, a perception which, for the narrator and then the audience itself, becomes overwhelming. Despite the speaker's emphatic beginning, "*I caught*" (my emphasis)—the narrator could not more emphatically assert his presence than by beginning the poem with the pronoun which refers to him—the first person voice is immediately effaced by the majesty of the windhover. The following lines are so entirely devoted to the description of the bird that the narrator is forgotten. The narrator only emerges again in the penultimate line of the octave and only then to emphasise the bird's captivating presence with the exclamation "my heart in hiding" (l.7). The narrator's language demonstrates an increasing identification with the bird as the poem's metrics enact the bird's flight until the speaker forgets himself in his admiration for the bird, and the reader forgets him as well.²⁶

The sonnet's formulaic introduction also acts to locate it within the second of Williamson's Anglo-Saxon riddle types, an identification con-

firmed by the presence of a narrator and by Hopkins's anthropomorphic metaphors. According to Williamson, in this riddle type a textual narrator implicitly challenges the audience to guess the "miraculous identity of the riddic creature" which he usually "describe[s] in human terms."²⁷ This technique underlines "the achieve of, the mastery of the thing" (l. 8)—to borrow a phrase from Hopkins himself—since the actions and abilities of the miraculous creature are usually beyond humans. Thus, when the windhover's flight is compared to human activities, riding and skating, it makes a pointed comparison—a repetition of Hopkins's technique in his use of "caught." Both activities demonstrate a physical inadequacy in humans who are only able to move with such speed and over such terrain by means external to them: by riding other animals or the use of technology (ice skates). Just as the use of "caught" paradoxically asserts the bird's freedom, so the anthropomorphism emphasises (when the miraculous creature is identified) that the bird *is* in his natural element, the "steady air" (l.3). The force of this contrast leads the narrator and his audience to see the familiar spectacle of a bird in flight as the miracle it is.

Ultimately, it is Hopkins's anthropomorphic metaphors which reveal the "solution" to *The Windhover*. Throughout the poem the bird is explicitly described in terms usually associated with the culture of medieval chivalry, knighthood, and kingship. (We may note in passing that of all the types of human to which Old English riddle subjects are compared, the warrior is the most common, so this too is a point of similarity.) The windhover is praised for his valour and pride. He is imagined on horseback (riding) and is called both "dauphin" and "my chevalier." Perhaps most intriguingly of all, if we accept that Hopkins's division of the word "kingdom" in the first line has a more significant purpose than merely enabling a rhyme, then it follows that the windhover is given the title "king" since the line may be read "I caught this morning, morning's minion, king." For a first-time reader there is a split-second before it becomes obvious that the sentence, and indeed the word, has not yet finished.²⁸ Both meanings co-exist—there is no conflict between them—and this double meaning resonates through the poem. As a bird the windhover is readily identified with the Holy Spirit; in fact, Hopkins figures the Holy Spirit as a bird in *God's Grandeur* (ll. 13–4), so by breaking "kingdom" in this way, Hopkins's bird is figured as all three persons of the Trinity: the Father (king), the Son (dauphin) and the Holy Spirit. The bird embodies the central Christian mystery, the paradox of the three in one, the riddle of the Triune God.²⁹

If the poem is indeed playing its syntax off against its metrics, then the next line presents us with another double meaning, once again around the idea of trinities. The line "daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in

his riding” (l.2) when it is read without the explanatory “of the rolling level” (l. 3) in the next line leads us to interpret “riding” as a noun (indicating a political jurisdiction), rather than a verb. This is a continuation of the poem’s vocabulary of technical political terms and imagery of terrestrial power.³⁰ The regal creature, analogue to Christ our Lord, surveys his riding which encompasses the whole world. The notion of the Trinity is implicit here too in that the political sense of the word “riding” comes from the Old Norse *priðjungr* meaning “a third part.”³¹ In this complex web of polyglot puns (also a marked characteristic of early English riddling),³² is the second half of “kingdom,” namely the Old English element “dom” which begins line 2. As a suffix it may mean “dominion” and so forms a frame with the pun at the other end of line 2 on “riding,” which, as we have seen, may also signify “dominion.” On its own “dom” may mean “judgment” and is the origin of the modern English word “doom.” Since birds of prey figure in Revelation as agents of God’s Judgment (Rev 19:17), the pun is an apt one for *The Windhover*. It resonates with notions of both the terrestrial judgment of a feudal lord and the divine judgment of Christ. As ever, Hopkins chooses words which implode in the text with myriad meanings, all interacting and adding complexity, for “dom” has yet another meaning: authority, supremacy, majesty, power, might, dignity, glory, honour, and splendour.³³ It is a perfect pun for the windhover and encapsulates all the ideas surrounding the bird.

The nature of the windhover which is expressed and mirrored in the poem’s word play is also matched in its structure, which enacts Christ’s movement in his descent to hell and ascension to heaven on the third day, a reference to the Biblical prefiguring of the Last Judgment. The sonnet’s octave treats the bird’s soaring, while the sestet is marked by the earth-bound imagery of harrowing. A similar juxtaposition is characteristic of all (known) Old English riddles on creation. Let us briefly consider here the best known of these, *Riddle 66*, which, although not an ‘*lc seah*’ type riddle, has parallels with *The Windhover*:

lc eom mare þonne þes middangeard
 læsse þonne hondwurm, leohtra þonne mona,
 swiftre þonne sunne. Sæs me sind ealle
 flodas on fæðmum ond þes foldan bearm,
 grene wongas. Grundum ic hrine,
 helle underhnige, heofonas oferstige,
 wuldres eþel, wide ræce
 ofer engla eard, eorþan gefylle,
 ealne middangeard ond merestreamas

side mid me sylfum. Saga hwæt ic hatte.³⁴

(I am greater than this middle-earth, less than a hand-worm, lighter than the moon, swifter than the sun. All the seas' tides are in my embraces and the earthen breast, the green fields. I touch the foundations, I sink under hell, I soar over the heavens, the glorious realm; I reach wide over the homeland of angels; I fill the earth abundantly, the entire world and the streams of the oceans with myself. Say what I am called.)

The imagery of this riddle is framed around a series of oppositions. In fact, the great riddle scholar, Archer Taylor, claims that it is one of the tendencies of riddle language to unite contraries³⁵ and, in part, this is what makes the riddle a genre through which to consider the divine: God contains all the contraries of His creation within Himself yet also stands outside them. The riddle begins by juxtaposing the expanse of creation with the insignificant smallness of a worm, before contrasting the celestial (the sun and the moon) with the terrestrial (the fields and the seas). *The Windhover* too is framed in terms of nature imagery, structured around the opposition between the celestial and the terrestrial. The sky against which the windhover is silhouetted is in contrast with the frozen lake implied in the image of skating, just as it is in contrast with the image of the earth, implied in the image of horse-riding, or later, in the image of tilling. Hopkins's poetics are such that united contraries are often found within a single image, for example the "steady air" (l.3) or the "blue-bleak embers" (l.13). Perhaps, the most important of these contrasts is to be found in the description of the windhover himself as "dapple-dawn drawn." Here, the bird is delineated in terms of both light and dark, both lit and silhouetted by the morning. Moreover, the image of dappled light, of light and dark mixed, is an essential aspect of Hopkins's notion of the Divine. *Pied Beauty*, a poem from the same period as *The Windhover*, explores this idea, beginning with the doxology "Glory be to God for dappled things" (*Pied Beauty*, l.1). (Interestingly, the two poems also share the images of the hot coals and the ploughed earth (ll.4–5) suggesting both that they were of importance in Hopkins's *Imaginary* at the time.)

The uniting of contraries is expressed even in the movement of the windhover (and we might say, of the poem itself), which first soars gloriously, then "buckles" and plunges earthward. Indeed, because "to buckle" may mean either "to break" or "to join," it expresses this juxtaposition in microcosm. Since the speaker in the poem is so entranced by what he sees that he forgets himself, he, and the audience and indeed the poem itself,

imaginatively rise and fall with the bird in their captivation. This movement of the poem at first follows the falcon's plunge. But when the bird seizes its prey and (presumably) swoops up, instead of following it, the poem follows the downward momentum of the ploughshare into the earth. Such movement, though flying the other way, is also to be found in *Riddle 66* when it says "helle underhnige, hefonas oferstige" ("I sink under hell, I soar over the heavens").³⁶ Indeed, in Aldhelm's creation riddle (the model for *Riddle 66*) all the contraries, including an Hopkinsian juxtaposition of the eagle and the earthworm, are imagined as high versus low with the movement from the high to the low, just as it is in *The Windhover*.

For Hopkins and the Anglo-Saxon riddle writers, this movement expresses both the notion that God is all-encompassing and that his creation should be understood as a dynamic force; an action constantly taking place as well as an *opus*. In *The Windhover* the bird becomes a metaphor for God, but in its majesty it is more than a metaphor: it is a manifestation of God as the creative principle. Williamson regards this idea as the very heart of Anglo-Saxon riddling. For him the *Exeter Book* riddles, and especially the creation riddles, "celebrate what the Anglo-Saxons called 'forðgesceaft,' 'creation-bodying-forth,' or the divine and discernible spirit infused in all things."³⁷ He adds "Gerard Manley Hopkins, himself a medievalist of sorts, called this *inscape*."³⁸ Certainly, this definition of *forðgesceaft* is reminiscent of both Hopkins's poetic language and the notion of the creative principle exemplified in it: "He fathers-forth whose beauty is pást cháng:e:/ Praise hím" (*God's Grandeur*, ll.10—11). As Williamson notes, "for Hopkins, as for the riddler I think, this shining forth is ... the supreme embodiment of God."³⁹

Yet, the most important moment in *The Windhover* and the one which draws the poem most strongly into comparison with early English riddles is also one of the most understated. Here, having described the bird in its shining magnificence, Hopkins begins his final sentence, "No wonder of it" (l.12). Like a riddle, this appears to be—but is not—a paradox. Hopkins, like early riddle writers, imagines the good God in the detail, in the quiet and frequently unnoticed wonder of the ordinary. The purpose of Anglo-Saxon riddles to reveal the miraculous to the guesser who is made to reconsider the familiar, even mundane, aspects of creation and see their true wonder through guessing the riddle and thus recognising all the attributes of the *wiht wundorlice*. This, I argue, is also the purpose in Hopkins's poem. Here, the speaking consciousness, the "I" at the beginning of *The Windhover*, is transformed, and with him, the reader. For the newly-acquired perception of the divine in the world, engendered by watching the bird in its flight more crucially causes us to recognise that there is equal majesty in all

aspects of creation, in ploughed earth or dying embers. If we are to read the poem as a riddle, we must *solve* the bird, this *wiht wundorlice*, miraculous creature, as God in Trinity, but ultimately, the poem concludes that God is in all of His creation: the same solution to which the early English riddle-writers came.

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NOTES

¹ J. Cotter, "Hopkins and Cynewulf," *Victorian Poetry*, 43, no 1 (2005) pp. 19–32. All citations of Hopkins are from *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. N. MacKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

² C. Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill, NC.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1977), 25–6.

³ While his literary sensibility has often provoked comparisons with Anglo-Saxon literature, Hopkins apparently did not begin learning Old English until late in 1882 (*The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. C. C. Abbott (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1935), p. 163) five years after he wrote *The Windhover*. Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that he had developed some informal understanding of the language already. Indeed, it would be surprising if someone with his preference for non-Latinate words in his own poetry and considerable interest in etymology had not. See, M. Ellsberg, *Created to Praise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 59. Cotter suggests that, regardless of whether Hopkins was reading the *Exeter Book* in the original Old English, he would have been familiar with it in translation. See, J. Cotter, "Hopkins and Cynewulf," *Victorian Poetry*, 43, no 1 (2005), 19–32, 19.

⁴ For Hopkins's reading at St. Mary's, see A. Thomas, *Hopkins the Jesuit: The Years of Training* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). For Lingard on early English riddling, see J. Lingard, *The History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church: Containing an Account of its Origins, Government, Doctrines, Worship, Revenues and Clerical and Monastic Institutions*, 2 vols, 3rd rev. ed. (London: C. Dolman, 1845), pp. 160–5, and W. Quinn, "Hopkins' Anglo-Saxon" in *The Hopkins Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1981), 27.

⁵ There is a connection between the folk ballads and early English riddling, since versions of those riddles often found their way into the ballads. Hopkins's "The Queen's Crowning," which is closely based on the "Two Brothers" narrative type, is an example of his interest in imitating old poetic forms as are his attempts to render Welsh metrics in English verse.

⁶ There are endless variations on this phrase in the *Exeter Book*. Orchard notes that

it is particularly common in the “*lc Seah*” riddles. See A. Orchard, “Enigma Variations: The Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Tradition” in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge, I*, M. Lapidge, K. O’Brien O’Keeffe, A. Orchard, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 284–304, 289.

⁷ J. Feeney, *The Playfulness of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008).

⁸ S. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, J. Carey, ed. and J. Crick, trans. (Harmondsworth, 2003), fn. 46. So much so that some scholars have even resorted to sexual imagery and metaphor in their analyses of the genre; Abrahams describes the riddle as participating in a kind of “epistemological foreplay” while Tiffany argues that the form itself is “a verbal striptease.” R. Abrahams, “The Literary Study of the Riddle,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 14 (1972) pp. 177–197, and D. Tiffany, “Lyric Substance: On Riddles, Materialism, and Poetic Obscurity,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2001), 72–98, 79.

⁹ C. Lees and G. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 54.

¹⁰ L. Wittgenstien, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, C. Ogden, trans. (London: Routledge, 1922) 6.5.

”Zu einer Antwort, die man nicht aussprechen kann, kann man auch die Frage nicht aussprechen.

Das Rätsel gibt es nicht.

Wenn sich eine Frage überhaupt stellen läßt, so kann sie auch beantwortet werden.“

[“For an answer which cannot be expressed the question too cannot be expressed.

The riddle does not exist.

If a question can be put at all, then it can also be answered.”]

¹¹ V. Law, *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), p. 24.

¹² *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, C. Phillips, ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 128.

¹³ Anglo-Saxonist Craig Williamson actually draws a parallel between the two in his commentary on the creation riddles. C. Williamson, *A Feast of Creatures* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 187.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own. Although it has been uniformly excluded from English Bible translations—a reflection of the decline of the genre in our culture—Jerome accurately preserves Paul’s thought in the Vulgate where 1 Corinthians 13:12 is translated “per speculum in enigmatē” (“through a mirror, in riddles”). This in turn derives from the Old Testament conception of riddles as the means by which God communicates with mortals. This is most clearly articulated in Numbers 12:8, the passage upon which Paul draws in Corinthians. However, it is also present in Ezekiel 17:2. Elsewhere, speaking in riddles and understanding them is the mark of a prophet or wise man. See Ps. 49:4, 78:2, Pr. 1:6 and Dan. 8:23.

- ¹⁵ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15. 9. 15.
- ¹⁶ Donatus, *De Tropis* 17; Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1. 37. 22. 26; *De schematibus et tropis*, C. Kendall, ed. and trans. (Saarbrücken, 1991), 194.
- ¹⁷ “enigma enim est obscura similitudo, per quam monetur homo ut cor suum acuat, et ad interiora intelligenda confugiat” (Isidore of Seville quoted in V. Law, 123).
- ¹⁸ J. Cotter, “Augustine’s *Confessions* and *The Wreck of the Deutschland*” in *Saving Beauty: Further Studies in Hopkins*, M. Allsopp and D. Downes, ed. (New York: Garland, 1994), and “Augustine and Hopkins” in *Victorian Poetry* 39.1 (2001), pp. 69–82. Cotter draws a line from “Paul to Augustine to Hopkins” on several points; perhaps it may be drawn in relation to this conception of riddles as well. J. Cotter, “Augustine and Hopkins” in *Victorian Poetry* 39.1 (2001), 69–82, 69.
- ¹⁹ In fact, the connection between riddling and Christianity takes many forms in Hopkins’s work, only one of which is explored in the present article. Indeed, as Higgins has demonstrated in an article named after one of the most famous Biblical riddle contests, “throughout Hopkins’ writings, questions work to summon speaker and auditor/reader alike to participate in epistemological, aesthetic, and religious dialogues.” L. Higgins, “‘To Prove Him with Hard Questions’: Answerability in Hopkins’ Writing” in *Victorian Poetry* 39.1 (2001), 37–68, 38.
- ²⁰ A kenning is a formulaic poetic expression for an everyday thing, common throughout early Germanic and Anglo-Saxon literature. The coinage “windhover” not only acts as a kenning, it displays a common sensibility with the Anglo-Saxon fondness for compound words. Hopkins, who insisted “no beauty in a language can make up for want of purity” (Abbott, ed., 163), is consistent in his love for the more archaic and Anglo-Saxon aspects of English. This includes the importance of compound words and in his letter to Bridges of 1 December 1882 Hopkins defends both their elegance and aptness (Abbott, 165–6).
- ²¹ *Bright’s Old English Grammar and Reader*, F. Cassidy and R. Ringler, eds. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).
- ²² N. Howe, “Aldhelm’s *Enigmata* and Isidorian Etymology” in *Anglo-Saxon England* 14 (Cambridge; Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 37. This feature originates with Symphosius, who may have copied it from the titles given to epigrams of Martial’s *Xenia*. The *Exeter Book* riddles, on the other hand, are without entitled solutions, and as a consequence, the solutions are a constant topic of scholarly debate.
- ²³ A. Orchard, 289.
- ²⁴ C. Williamson, 25–6.
- ²⁵ D. Brown, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Homidon, Devon: Northcote House, 2004), 51.
- ²⁶ D. Brown, 52.
- ²⁷ C. Williamson, 25–6.
- ²⁸ The delaying of meaning is a favoured technique of Classical Latin. The tendency to place the verb at the end of its clause acts to keep the audience in suspense. Since Hopkins composed in Latin and was interested in attempting to mimic in English poetic effects from the poetic traditions of other languages, this is particularly relevant.

²⁹ The conception has great antiquity. As early as the 4th century the Triune God is considered in terms of a riddle by Ausonius in the *Griphus Ternarii Numeri* and, as Irving points out, the Anglo-Saxons also consider God's nature and especially the incarnation as a riddle. See R. P. Green, *The Works of Ausonius* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 445, and E. Irving, "The Advent of Poetry: Christ I," in *Anglo-Saxon England 25* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 123.

³⁰ This is not the only occasion on which Hopkins uses such a strategy. Hopkins makes a similar play when he writes: "Í remember a house where all were good / To me, God knows, deserving no such thing" (*In the Valley of the Elwy*, ll.1–2).

On first reading the first line appears to be an absolute statement of the goodness of the house's inhabitants. The second line makes us reconsider the first. The sense of the lines representing different thoughts, though they are apparently part of the same sentence, is augmented by the fact that "me" must stop acting as the indirect object of the first line ("all were good / To me") and become the subject of the next ("me, God knows, deserving no such thing") in order for the second line to make sense. Otherwise, the participle must refer to "all," the subject of the first line and apparently of the whole sentence. This dislocation is strange, yet effective. Not only are both meanings important in the poem (as they are in the example considered in this article), but the dislocation of the sentence seems to express the slightly disorganised thoughts of the poem's protagonist who marks himself as being in such need of "goodness."

³¹ The term comes from the three districts in Yorkshire.

³² Old English riddles often involve runic clues, while the Anglo-Latin puns often rely on bilingual Greek-Latin puns.

³³ See, J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1960).

³⁴ B. Muir, ed. *Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006).

³⁵ A. Taylor, "The Riddle" *Californian Folklore Quarterly* 2 (1943), 130.

³⁶ Indeed this "movement" is also to be found in later English riddles. A riddle found in a ballad included in Francis James Child's late nineteenth-century collection, *English and Scottish Ballads*, asks "What ys hyer þan is þe tre? / What ys dypper þan ys the see?" and answers "Hewene ys heyer than ys the tre / Helle ys dypper þan ys the see" (Child 1). The comparison is interesting, since, as has been noted already, Hopkins, like many of the Romantics, was interested in the ballad tradition.

³⁷ Williamson, 187.

³⁸ Williamson, 187.

³⁹ Williamson, 187–8.