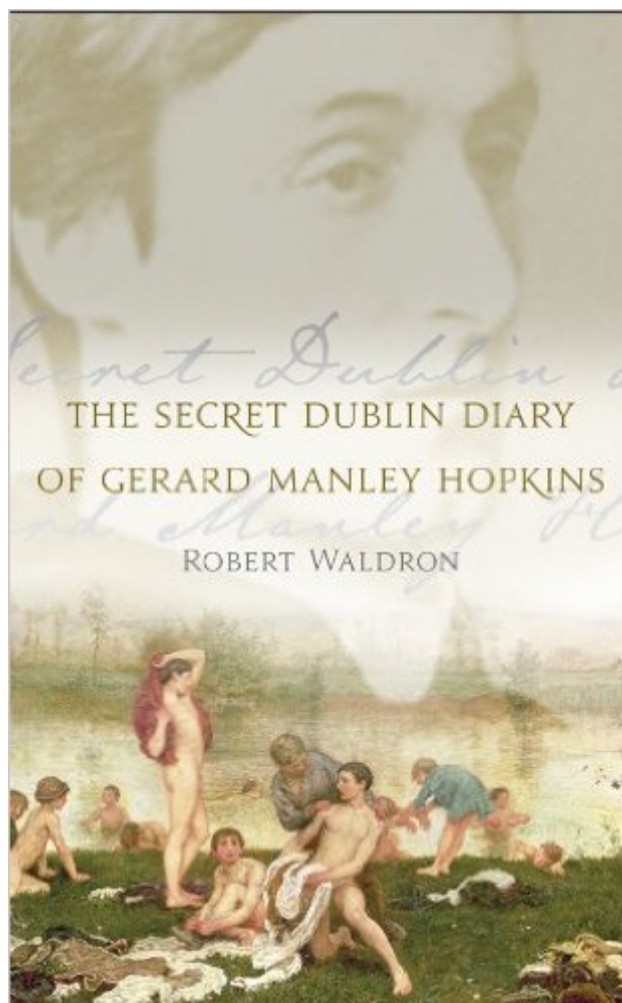


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The Secret Dublin Diary Of Gerard Manley Hopkins



Synopsis

A bold exploration in fiction of the years Gerard Manley Hopkins, one of England's foremost Victorian poets, spent in Ireland - of his torments, his ecstasies, his fears, and his loves. The last sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins, fraught as they are with despair, have long intrigued readers and critics alike. In this fascinating and challenging novella, we discover that the poet's inner agony is the result of his homosexual inclinations, which he was compelled to hide from his fellow Jesuits. This is the story of a man who loves greatly, but because of the life he has chosen, he must always dissemble. ""Paints a brilliant and haunting portrait of a complicated man caught in the conflict between the spiritual and the sensual.""The Gay and Lesbian Review

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Customer Reviews

Robert Waldron's novella, *The Secret Dublin Diary of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, paints a brilliant and haunting portrait of a complicated man who is caught in the chasm bridging the spiritual and the sensual. Hopkins grew up in a family that was comfortable by today's standards. He was very bright, thin and small of stature. He disliked games and did not measure up to the Victorian ideal of manliness. Instead, he loved to sketch, write poetry and was drawn to nature. He was fascinated by beauty and was especially aware of male beauty. He was considered odd, felt that he never quite fit in, yet was able to gain acceptance from his peers who recognized his innate goodness and gentle kindness. Hopkins studied at and graduated from Oxford. While there he continued writing verse. At times he felt attractions to male friends, which he both sentimentalized and spiritualized. He was attracted to his friend Robert Bridges yet never dared give voice to this feeling. Later he met

Bridges' cousin, the precocious seventeen-year-old Digby Mackworth Dolben and fell head over heels in love with him. This friendship was short-lived because Dolben drowned while teaching a friend's son how to swim. Hopkins was haunted by this loss for the rest of his days. While at Oxford he turned from the Anglicanism of his family and converted to Roman Catholicism. John Henry Newman received him into the Church. His conversion was a blow to his family and led to a temporary estrangement from them. Hopkins believed that he was risking his very soul unless he did convert. Eventually after more consultations with Newman, Hopkins joined the Society of Jesus, continued his studies and was ordained as a Jesuit priest.

For over fifty years, I have had the collected journals of Gerard Manley Hopkins on my shelves, along with his poems and sermons. The journals, however, stop in 1875, well before he was posted to Dublin in 1884 to live out the last five years of his short life. What remains of the poet's last years are six searing sonnets, a bunch of poetic fragments never put into final form, and a lot of other material which Robert Bridges, his literary executor, referred to variously as "practically worthless," things "which ought never to have been sent," and "very private," committing most of them to the bonfire. Robert Waldron, in this searching novella, imagines that Hopkins continued his journals to the end, but used them to deal with matters of such sensitivity that Bridges could not allow them to see the light of day. The sonnets are all that remain to illuminate the darkness of his mind in those years: O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap May who ne'er hung there. Waldron suggests that, besides disliking Dublin and his job teaching Latin, Greek, and Shakespeare to indifferent students, Hopkins' torment sprang from his homosexual attraction to younger men and his inability to express it. In this he follows Robert Martin's controversial biography GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, A VERY PRIVATE LIFE (1991), though Martin's theories are by no means universally accepted. Waldron shows a Hopkins tormented by anonymous letters from a fellow priest denouncing his particular friendships.

Having read some of Hopkin's poetry and being captivated by its metrical freedom and the beauty of its compound adjectives, and other unique poetic devices, and being particularly moved by "Epithalmion" and its OVERT homoeroticism (very unusual for its day, when such references were usual coded), I then went on to research his life: he seemed to be tormented by something. I read parts of Martin's sympathetic biography, where Hopkins' homosexual affect is made clear; but there was still something missing. Then I came across, serendipitously, this PEARL of a book, which REDEEMS (in the spiritual sense) Hopkins beautifully (might I say beatifically?!), almost as if he lives

FOREVER in Waldron's (partial) re-envisioning of him in his last austere Dublin years. It is poignantly ironic, and novelistically and spiritually effective, that a "fictionalisation" of these years of Hopkins' life make the poet more REAL, three-dimensional than any of the other, heterosexist putative biographies, because it is VERY obvious, even from the more homoerotically covert poems, that, to Hopkins, love of God, Christ as the physical embodiment of God, Nature AND male beauty, were all interlinked. Waldron manages successfully to interlink them in this book; hence the redemption, because, posthumously (which is indescribably tragic and moving) Hopkins is given a completer, more fulfilled life than he probably ever achieved in his "actual" life (though we can not ever fully tell, because he burnt a lot of his early diaries; and, for different reasons, the glowing whatness of the poems achieve, be it a somewhat sublimated, fulfilment in their sheer voluptuousness and sensuality). So, in fiction here we have a more real Hopkins than in many of the biographies/"biographies".

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