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Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

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Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in the Graduate
School of the University of
Richmond.

by

Helen Berkowitz, B. A.

The University of Richmond

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All things therefore are charged with love,
are charged with God and if we know how to
touch them give off sparks and take fire,
yield drops and flow, ring and tell of him.¹

¹Humphry House, ed., The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London, 1937), p. 342. (Hereafter referred to as Note-Books.)

Chapter I

Biographical Sketch

Gerard Manley Hopkins' reputation as a poet has been almost wholly posthumous. He did not "arrive" in a critical way until the 1930's when interest seemed to be centered more on the religious implications of his work than on the poetic. Today we are beginning to accept Hopkins as a major poet and to assess his virtues and limitations somewhat more objectively.

The questions which critics first asked about Hopkins, though controversial, were neither answerable nor pertinent. They inquired if Hopkins accepted the disciplines of his faith. Did Hopkins' life as a Jesuit, they demanded, destroy the poet or enrich the poetry? C. Day Lewis, writing in the New Republic, 1935, said of him, "His religious vocation puts a wall between his life and ours only reminiscent of the wall of a madhouse."² The fol-

²John Pick, "Gerard Manley Hopkins," in The Victorian Poets, Frederic E. Faverty, ed. (Cambridge, 1956), p. 215.

lowing year, John Gould Fletcher wrote, "To an artist of Hopkins' sort, dogmatic theology, though it may be of assistance in

first orientating and disciplining his mind, always ends by finally destroying it. Art, and perhaps more particularly poetry, is a heresy which ends in being more valuable to a man than any orthodoxy whatsoever. . . . 3

³Ibid.

These views were opposed by G. W. Stonier and F. R. Leavis. "Religion," Stonier wrote, "did not stifle the poet in Hopkins for without religion he would hardly have written many of his best poems."⁴

⁴Ibid.

And Leavis, one of the Kenyon critics, writing for publication during the centennial anniversary of Hopkins' birth, calls him,

the devotional poet of a dogmatic Christianity. His religious interests are bound up with the presence in his poetry of a vigour of mind that puts him in another poetic world from the other Victorians. It is a vitality of thought, a vigour of the thinking intelligence, that is at the same time a vitality of concreteness. The relation between this kind of poetic life and his religion manifests itself plainly in his addiction to Duns Scotus, whom . . . he significantly embraced as his own philosopher.⁵

⁵F. R. Leavis, "Metaphysical Isolation," in Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. by the Kenyon Critics (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1944), p. 121.

Today we are more interested in Hopkins the poet than in Hopkins the Jesuit, and as a poet he is almost as elusive as his poetry. Outwardly he lived a quiet and peaceful life in England and Ireland, where he died at the age of forty-five virtually unknown to

his generation as a writer. His journal and his letters provide us with a picture of an intense inner life which goes far to explain his poetic achievement.

He was born into a cultivated and artistic middle-class family of Anglicans. His father, Manley Hopkins, acted as consul general in London for the Hawaiian Islands during his son's childhood years, and later was chief of a London firm of average adjusters. He was also an amateur poet and author of several books, one on Hawaii, the others on marine insurance and other technical matters.⁶ His mother,

⁶Eleanor Ruggles, Gerard Manley Hopkins (New York, 1944), pp. 15-18.

Catherine Hopkins, a highly educated woman for her day, was interested in German philosophy, politics, and music. She was the daughter of a London surgeon, a fellow student and friend of Keats.⁷ Of his three

⁷Claude Colleer Abbott, ed., The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges (London, 1935), p. 51.

sisters, one sketched, one played the piano, and one became an Anglican nun. Three of his four brothers were artists; two drew professionally for Punch.⁸

⁸Austin Warren, "Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)" in Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. by The Kenyon Critics (Connecticut, 1944), pp. 1-2.

From the time he was a youngster, Hopkins was a curious mixture of aesthete and ascetic. As a child he practiced self-imposed tests of will power by denying himself such things as salt or all liquids for

varying lengths of time. He continued these practices as a nineteen-year-old undergraduate at Oxford. At times he forbade himself all puddings, tea, the comfort of armchairs. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, though never of robust health, he permitted himself only bread and water. During Passion Week and on Fridays he wrote no verse.⁹

⁹Ruggles, p. 75.

While at Oxford, Hopkins met and was influenced by Jowett, Walter Pater, Ruskin, William Morris, and two leaders of the Anglo-Catholic movement, Pusey and H. P. Liddon. During this time he started to keep two diaries, one a secular and the other a spiritual record. Many of Hopkins' contemporaries were centrally concerned with religion, and three of his friends were received into the Catholic Church just before Hopkins had his interview with Newman. In October, 1866, Hopkins followed them.¹⁰ Although he was firm in his convictions, the following

¹⁰Warren, "Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)," pp. 2-4.

letter to the Reverend Dr. John H. Newman, dated October 15, 1866, reveals part of the emotional cost.

Very Reverend Father—I have been up at Oxford just long enough to have heard fr. my father and mother in return for my letter announcing my conversion. Their answers are terrible. I cannot read them twice. If you will pray for them and me just now i shall be deeply thankful.¹¹

¹¹Pick, A Hopkins Reader (New York, 1953), p. 266.

The next year, 1867, Hopkins left Oxford after achieving a

Double First in Greats (Humanities) and Jowett's esteem as one of the University's finest Greek scholars. In a letter to Alexander Baillie dated February 12, 1863, Hopkins reveals his future plans:

I am expecting to take orders and soon, but wish it to be secret till it comes about. Besides that it is the happiest and best way it practically is the only one. You know I once wanted to be a painter. But even if I could I wd. not I think, now, for the fact is that the higher and more attractive parts of the art put a strain upon the passions which I shd. think it unsafe to encounter. I want to write still and as a priest I very likely can do that too, not so freely as I shd. have liked, e. g. nothing or little in the verse way, but no doubt what wd. best serve the cause of my religion.¹²

¹²Ibid., p. 222.

In September of the same year, Hopkins entered the Jesuit novitiate at Manresa House in Roshampton, just outside London, to begin nine years of training. His first two years as a novice were given over to spiritual training, especially through the use of the Spiritual Exercises. These Exercises, formulated by St. Ignatius, were to influence all Hopkins experienced, thought, and wrote. They influenced, too, his reactions to nature and beauty. The Exercises are preceded by an introduction which states the basic principles of the spiritual life to which Hopkins devoted himself and which had a profound effect on him and on his art.¹³

¹³Pick, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Priest and Poet (London, 1942), pp. 26-27.

Man was created to praise, reverence, and serve God, our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.

And the other things on the face of the earth were created for man's sake, and in order to aid him in the prosecution of the end for which he was created.

Whence it follows, that man ought to make use of them just so far as they help him to attain his end, and ought to withdraw himself from them just so far as they hinder him.

It is therefore necessary that we should make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is left to the liberty of our free will, and is not forbidden; in such sort that we do not for our own part wish for health rather than sickness, for wealth rather than poverty, for honour rather than dishonour, for a long life rather than a short one, and so in all other things, desiring and choosing only that which may lead us more directly to the end for which we were created.¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., p. 28.

On these principles, Hopkins ordered his life from 1868, when he entered the Jesuit novitiate, until 1889, when he died.

Unfortunately, from the period in which he entered the Society until the early months of 1877, only half a dozen letters written to Robert Bridges are available. His correspondence with R. W. Dixon and with Coventry Patmore had not yet begun. Neither are there poems to mark this crucial period, for during the summer before his entrance into Manresa, Hopkins voluntarily burned all that he had written.¹⁵

¹⁵Ibid., p. 30.

However, from his journal, or secular diary, we learn that in 1870 after taking his first vows, Hopkins started three years of philosophical studies at Stonyhurst, in the English Midlands. His description of

the countryside shows not only a keen observation of detail, but also a well-developed sense of humor.

I will tell you something about this place. Perpetual winter smiles. In the first place we have the highest rainguage sic in England, I believe. . . . Early in the year they told me there wd. be no spring such as we understood it in the south. When I asked about May they told me they had hail in May. Of June they told me it had one year been so cold that the procession could not be held on Corpus Christi. The country is also very bare and bleak. . . . But nevertheless it is fine scenery, great hills and 'fells' with noble outlines often, subject to charming effects of light (though I am bound to say that total obscuration is the commonest effect of all), and three beautiful rivers. The clouds in particular are more interesting than in any other place I have seen. But they must be full of soot, for the fleeces of the sheep are quite black with it. We also see the northern lights to advantage at times. There is good fishing for those who do not see that after bad fishing the next worst thing is good fishing.¹⁶

¹⁶Pick, A Hopkins Reader, pp. 223-224.

In the same year, 1871, Hopkins wrote a letter to Bridges which aroused much passion in America during the thirties, but which has since come to be regarded as the expression of a person sensitive to the economic facts of life rather than as a political document.

I must tell you I am always thinking of the Communist future. The too intelligent artisan is master of the situation I believe. . . . However I am afraid some great revolution is not far off. Horrible to say, in a manner I am a Communist. Their idea, bating some things, is nobler than that professed by any secular statesman I know of. . . . Besides it is just. --I do not mean the means of getting to it are. But it is a dreadful thing for the greatest and most necessary part of a rich nation to live a hard life without dignity, knowledge,

comforts, delight or hopes in the midst of plenty-- which plenty they make. The profess that they do not care what they wreck and burn, the old civilisation and order must be destroyed. This is a dreadful lookout but what has the old civilisation done for them? As it at present stands in England it is itself in great measure founded on wrecking. But they got none of the spoils, they came in for nothing but harm from it then and thereafter. England has grown hugely wealthy but this wealth has not reached the working classes; I expect it has made their condition worse. . . . The more I look the more black and deservedly black the future looks. . . .¹⁷

¹⁷Abbott, The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, pp. 27-28.

After completing his studies at Stonyhurst, Hopkins returned to Manresa House to teach classics for a year and then was sent to St. Beuno's College in North Wales for an additional three years of theological studies. While at St. Beuno's, Hopkins mentions in a letter to Bridges that he has tried to learn a little Welsh, but that it is one of the hardest of languages. It is here, too, that Hopkins started to write poetry once more. In 1877 he was ordained and for four years served as a parish priest and preacher at Chesterfield; at the Farm Street Church in London; at Oxford; at Bedford Leigh, a mill town and coal-mining center near Manchester; at Liverpool; and at Glasgow.¹⁸

¹⁸Warren, "Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)," p. 5.

During this period Hopkins, who had always been concerned with Bridges' neglect of religion, offered some advice to his friend which gives us some measure of his own spiritual qualities and moral judgments.

January, 1879

You understand of course that I desire to see you a Catholic, or, if not that, a Christian or, if not that, at least a believer in the true God. . . . But I have another counsel open to no objection and yet I think it will be unexpected. I lay great stress on it. It is to give alms. It may be either in money or in other shapes, the objects for which, with your knowledge of several hospitals, can never be wanting. I daresay indeed you do give alms, still I should say give more: I should be bold to say give, up to the point of sensible inconvenience. . . . The difference of mind and being between the man who finds comfort all round him unbroken unless by constraints which are none of his own seeking and the man who is pinched by his own charity is too great for forecasting, it must be felt: I do not say the difference between being pinched and being at one's ease, that one may easily conceive and most people know, willynilly, by experience, but the difference between paying heavily for a virtue and not paying at all. It changes the whole man, if anything can; not his mind only but the will and everything. . . . I am now talking pure sense, as you must see. Now you may have done much good, but yet it may not be enough: I will say, it is not enough. I say this, you understand, on general grounds; I am not judging from particular knowledge, which I have no means to do and it would be very wrong and indiscreet.

Jan 23—I feel it is very bold, as it is uncalled for, of me to have written the above. Still, if we care for fine verses how much more for a noble life!¹⁹

¹⁹Abbott, The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, p. 60.

It is at this time, too, in response to Bridges, who desired to see his work published, that Hopkins explains his attitude toward his poetry. The growing conflict between the priest and the poet is evident.

If some one in authority knew of my having some poems printable and suggested my doing it I shd. not refuse, I should be partly, though not altogether, glad. But this is very unlikely. All

therefore that I think of doing is to keep my verses together in one place. . . . that, if anyone shd. like, they might be published after my death. . . . I cannot in conscience spend time on poetry, neither have I the inducements and inspirations that make others compose.²⁰

1879

²⁰Ibid., p. 66.

To Dixon, in 1881, he enlarges on this theme after re-entering Manresa House for his ninth and final year of training.

This I say: my vocation puts before me a standard so high that a higher can be found nowhere else. The question then for me is not whether I am willing (if I may guess what is in your mind) to make a sacrifice of hopes of fame (let us suppose), but whether I am not to undergo a severe judgement from God for the lothness I have shewn in making it, for the reserves I may have in my heart made, for the backward glances I have given with my hand upon the plough, for the waste of time the very compositions you admire may have caused and their preoccupation of the mind which belonged to more sacred or more binding duties, for the disquiet and the thoughts of vainglory they have given to. A purpose may look smooth and perfect from without but be frayed and faltering from within. I have never wavered in my vocation, but I have not lived up to it. I destroyed the verse I had written when I entered the Society and meant to write no more; the Deutschland I began after a long interval at the chance suggestion of my superior, but that being done it is a question whether I did well to write anything else. However I shall, in my present mind, continue to compose, as occasion shall fairly allow, which I am afraid will be seldom and indeed for some years past has been scarcely ever, and let what I produce wait and take its chance. . . . And to be sure if I chose to look at things on one side and not the other I could of course regret this bitterly. But there is more peace and it the holier lot to be unknown than to be known.²¹

²¹Abbott, The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon (London, 1935), p. 88.

Hopkins returned again to the subject of poverty, which depressed him and weighed on his conscience. To Dixon he writes:

My Liverpool and Glasgow experience laid upon my mind a conviction, a truly crushing conviction, of the misery of town life to the poor and more than to the poor, of the misery of the poor in general, of the degradation even of our race, of the hollowness of this century's civilisation: it made even life a burden to me to have daily thrust upon me the things I saw.²²

²²Ibid., p. 97.

After his Second Novitiate, his superiors evidently decided that Hopkins' future usefulness to the Order lay in teaching. After two years as instructor in Latin and Greek at Stonyhurst, he was appointed in 1884 to the chair of classics at University College, Dublin. This position as Fellow required Hopkins to make out, correct, and grade semiannual examinations in Greek for all degree candidates. The effort to be scrupulously just placed too great a strain on Hopkins and led to his physical and psychological deterioration. In 1889 he died of typhoid fever.²³

²³Warren, "Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)," p. 8.

Neither as teacher nor as parish priest could Hopkins be called successful. As a classical lecturer he was unsuccessful in drawing or holding an audience. As a priest, Hopkins was given the opportunity to find himself in the fashionable Farm Street Church, in intellectual Oxford, in industrial Liverpool, and in Glasgow. Though more at ease with his working-class parishioners, he was not able to

reach that degree of rapport with people, necessary to his calling. To some extent Felix Randall and Harry Ploughman are idealized and imaginative re-creations of workmen he had known, but they are far from any type known in Victorian England.

But teacher and parish priest were only two of Hopkins' lives. He was also a scholar, a student of music, and a poet. As a scholar, he embarked on a study of Welsh while at St. Beuno's, but only after much soul-searching and a certain spiritual adjustment, since it was for his own philological pleasure rather than for the glory of the Church. He also started, but did not complete, various technical papers, including a commentary on St. Ignatius, a treatise on the Sacrifice, a new edition of St. Patrick's Confessions, and a paper on Dorian and Aeolian measures or rhythms. His concern with music was curious and characteristic. Although he had only the sketchiest training in violin and had never learned to play the piano properly, in his Dublin days under the most severe pressures he began to teach himself harmony and counterpoint, and he began to compose in earnest.²⁴

²⁴Ibid., pp. 8-10.

It is, however, as a poet, that we are most concerned with Hopkins. While still a schoolboy at Highgate, Hopkins wrote some talented poems after the manner of Keats. The most notable of these was his "A Vision of the Mermaids." At Oxford he felt the influence of the Rossettis and the Pre-Raphaelites. In 1875, when Hopkins began to write again, it was apparent that his poetry was utterly original in

style, in rhythm, and in diction. In 1877 he began to send his poems to his old Oxford friend, Robert Bridges, and the following year he initiated a correspondence with the Anglican priest, church historian and poet, R. W. Dixon. His letters to these men and to Coventry Patmore help to clarify his work.

The "terrible sonnets" are the source of many of the questions concerning Hopkins' spiritual life. These sonnets, received by Bridges after Hopkins' death, describe the mental suffering and spiritual breakdown of a man torn by doubt. Whether they are the revelation of atheistic doubt, cries of despair during a period of spiritual dryness, or a sign of physical and mental debilitation may become clearer during a study of the poems in question. Austin Warren concludes that Hopkins' constant tension, the conflict between his desire to be an artist and his desire to be a saint, was necessary to his achievement as a poet. Neither Catholicism nor the Jesuit order crippled Hopkins. The Jesuits did not ask him to burn his poetry, nor did they forbid him to write or publish. These were part of Hopkins' own personal pattern of denial. Undoubtedly his Dublin years, with their periods of ill health, mental fatigue, depression, and heavy work amid uncongenial surroundings were immediately responsible for his mental and physical breakdown, but on Hopkins' own nature, with its awful blend of the sensuous and the austere, one must put the ultimate responsibility for the final disintegration of the man and poet.²⁵

²⁵Ibid., pp. 11-14.

Chapter II

Publication

Robert Bridges, Richard Watson Dixon, and Coventry Patmore were the chief critics of Hopkins' poetry during his lifetime. To these three friends, Hopkins sent his poetry for criticism, encouragement, and understanding. Dixon read his poems with "delight, astonishment, and admiration."¹ He went so far as to assert that "The Wreck of the

¹Pick, "Gerard Manley Hopkins," p. 201.

Deutschland" was a test for all other poems. Patmore chose as best those poems which were the least typical of Hopkins, but which were the most nearly ordinary and usual. Robert Bridges, the most important of the three, was extremely discouraging. He felt that the sprung rhythm of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" was "presumptuous [sic] jugglery."²

²Ibid.

This poem and "The Loss of the Eurydice," which were sent by Hopkins to the Jesuit publication, The Month, were rejected. Later efforts at publication by Dixon failed. Finally in 1893 Bridges was able to persuade

A. H. Miles to include Hopkins in an anthology Poets and Poetry of the XIXth Century, and he himself wrote the introduction to the eleven poems printed. Although Abbott considers that the selection gives a fair idea of the poet's range and worth, only two of the poems, "The Habit of Perfection" and "The Starlight Night" are usually found in anthologies today. Father Joseph Keating wrote a favorable account of the poet in a series he did for The Month which was printed in July, August, and September, 1909, and entitled, "Impressions of Father Gerard Hopkins, S. J." In 1915 Bridges printed seven pieces in his Spirit of Man, including the first stanza of "The Wreck of the Deutschland." The success and sale of this anthology, both in England and America, led him in 1918 to publish his friend's work. Only 750 copies were printed; 50 were given away; 180 sold in the first year; 240 in the second year; then an average of 30 a year for six years, until 1927, when 90 copies were sold. The last four copies were sold in 1928, ten years after publication.³

³Abbott, The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, pp. xix-xx.

In his preface to the small volume, Bridges, who was then poet laureate, disclosed his opinion of his friend's poetry. He hoped that readers would search out the "rare masterly beauties that distinguish his work."⁴ The word "rare," it might be noted, is ambiguous as it is

⁴Pick, "Gerard Manley Hopkins," p. 203.

used here, perhaps deliberately so, for then Bridges proceeded to

enumerate the many faults he found in the poetry. Under faults of taste, he listed "affectation in metaphor," "perversion of human feeling," or the effort to force emotions into theological channels, and the presence of sensualism and asceticism in a poem such as "Golden Echo."⁵

⁵Ibid.

Bridges also deplored the rude shocks of Hopkins' purely "artistic wantonness." These shocks included "oddity and obscurity," which were due to the habitual omission of necessary words, and to the ambiguity resulting from condensation of thought. Bridges did not hesitate to call the rhymes "repellant," "appalling," and "freaks."⁶

⁶Ibid., pp. 203-204.

Hopkins had written to Bridges concerning his poetry, "If you do not like it, it is because there is something you have not seen and I see . . . and if the whole world agreed to condemn it or see nothing in it I should only tell them to take a generation and come to me again."⁷

⁷Ibid., p. 104.

After the first edition was printed, it was the imagists and writers of free verse who were among the few that welcomed the new poetry. The reviews of those days were mixed: critics praised and blamed Bridges for his part in the publication. Some felt the poetry was too theological; some, that life was too short to try to understand sprung rhythm, that the metrical effects were unrewarding, and that they

"produced the effect almost of idiocy."⁸ Others were as vehement in

⁸Ibid., p. 206.

its defense, calling the poetry "most sensitive" and the poet "without equal as a metrist."⁹

⁹Ibid.

During the 1920's, some of the poetry was reprinted in anthologies of contemporary poetry. The most important and influential criticism of Hopkins started with an article in 1926 by I. A. Richards in Dial and with the publication of Seven Types of Ambiguity, by William Empson, in 1930. Richards initiated a close study and critical examination of the poems, while Empson opened up fertile territory for ambiguity seekers, symbolists, and amateur psychiatrists.

During the 1930's a second edition of poems came out, along with a study of Hopkins and his art. The second edition, which went through a dozen printings, contained an enthusiastic and sympathetic preface by Charles Williams. It is the one used for this paper. The Times Literary Supplement called Hopkins "a true genius," "one of the major poets," and "the most original of the poets of the nineteenth century."¹⁰ Sir

¹⁰Ibid., p. 208.

Herbert Read in 1933 wrote that "nothing could have made Hopkins' poetry popular in his day: it was necessary that it should first be absorbed by the sensibility of a new generation of poets . . . no

influence whatsoever is so potent for the future of English poetry."¹¹

¹¹Ibid., p. 210.

In America, Malcolm Cowley said, "He has more to teach the poets of today than either Tennyson or Browning."¹² And F. R. Leavis, in defending

¹²Ibid., p. 208.

Hopkins' style calls him "one of the most remarkable technical inventors who ever wrote, and he was a major poet. . . . He is likely to prove, for our time and the future, the only influential poet of the Victorian age and he seems to me the greatest. . . . What Dr. Bridges calls 'blemishes' are essential to Hopkins' aim and achievement."¹³ Leavis

¹³Ibid., p. 211.

considered Hopkins a master in exploiting the resources and potentialities of English as a living language. C. Day Lewis calls sprung rhythm "one of the best gifts to posterity" and Hopkins "a true revolutionary poet."¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., p. 212.

The 1930's also saw the publication of the correspondence of Hopkins with Bridges, Watson, and Patmore, and the publication of The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins edited by Humphry House. In addition to many articles of praise, these publications helped to increase Hopkins' reputation considerably by their honesty and intensity of conviction. They offered, too, adequate explanations of his prosody,

literary methods, and insight into the character and diversity of interests of the author.

During the 1940's F. O. Matthiessen compared the work of Hopkins and Whitman. The issue of communism, which his correspondence with Bridges revealed, was more fully explored, as well as certain Freudian symptoms of a religious and sexual nature. The centenary year of Hopkins' birth was celebrated with the appearance of nearly a hundred articles and reviews in the major periodicals. It also brought forth a work by W. H. Gardner entitled Gerard Manley Hopkins (1884-1889): A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition. Volume I appeared in 1944 in England, and in 1948 in America; Volume II appeared in both countries in 1949. It is considered the definitive work on Hopkins' basic contribution to poetry.

Since World War II, translations and criticisms of the poetry have appeared in many foreign countries including France, Germany, Spain, and India.¹⁵

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 216-227.

Since the first publication in 1918 of Hopkins' work, contemporary readers expect, as a matter of course, to find the poems included in any complete anthology of Victorian poetry. It is a tribute to Hopkins that his poetry is found in anthologies of modern poetry just as often.

Chapter III

Sprung Rhythm

The disparate and conflicting elements of Hopkins' personality are everywhere apparent in his poetry. On the one hand he describes the simple beauties of nature; on the other, he chooses a rigidly disciplined, highly intellectual -- one might almost say mathematical -- system of expression. When he tries to explain his poetry, he is often contradictory, obscure, and unsound.

The phrase "sprung rhythm" is at first particularly puzzling. Hopkins explains it in his preface to his poems, in letters to Bridges and Dixon, and in his notebooks.

Sprung Rhythm . . . is measured by feet of from one to four syllables, regularly, and for particular effects on any number of weak or slack syllables may be used. It has one stress, which falls on the only syllable, if there is only one, or, if there are more, then scanning as above, on the first, and so gives rise to four sorts of feet, a monosyllable and the so-called accentual Trochee, Dactyl, and the First Paean.¹

¹Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Author's Preface" in Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Robert Bridges (London, 1931), pp. 3-4.

Concerning the nature and history of sprung rhythm, Hopkins

goes on to say:

Sprung Rhythm is the most natural of things. For (1) it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them. (2) It is the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music, so that in the words of choruses and refrains and in songs written closely to music it arises. (3) It is found in nursery rhymes, weather saws, and so on. . . . (4) It arises in common verse when reversed or counterpointed, for the same reason.

But nevertheless in spite of all this and though Greek and Latin lyric verse . . . and the old English verse seen in *Pierce Ploughman* are in sprung rhythm, it has in fact ceased to be used since the Elizabethan age, Greene being the last writer who can be said to have recognized it.²

²Ibid., pp. 5-6.

It may help to clarify what Hopkins is getting at, to quote from two of his letters to Dixon, who also had trouble understanding this new method.

Oct. 5, 1878

I had long had haunting my ear the echo of a new rhythm which now I realised on paper. To speak shortly, it consists in scanning by accents or stresses alone, without any account of the number of syllables, so that a foot may be one strong syllable or it may be many light and one strong. I do not say the idea is altogether new; there are hints of it in music, in nursery rhymes and popular jingles, in the poets themselves, and since then, I have seen it talked about as a thing possible in critics. Here are instances—'Ding, dong, bell; Pussy's in the well; Who put her in? Little Johnny Thin. Who pulled her out? Little Johnny Stout.'¹ For if each line has three stresses or three feet it follows that some of the feet are of

one syllable only. So too 'O¹ne, tw^o, Búckle my sh^oe' passim.³

³Abbott, The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, p. 14.

Jan. 14, 1880

The new prosody, Sprung Rhythm, is really quite a simple matter and as strict as the other rhythm. Bridges treats it in theory and practice as something informal and variable without any limit but ear and taste, but this is not how I look at it. . . . Its principle is that all rhythm and all verse consists of feet and each foot must contain one stress or verse-accent . . . even one stressed syllable make a foot and consequently two or more stresses may come running, which in common rhythm can . . . never happen. . . . And also scan always as for rising rhythm . . . in which the slack comes first, as in iambs and anapaests.⁴

⁴Ibid., pp. 39-40.

In connection with sprung rhythm, Hopkins uses two other terms which require a brief explanation. The first term, "abrupt" rhythm, he defines for Dixon in 1879.

I shd. add that the word Sprung which I use for this rhythm means something like abrupt and applies by rights only where one stress follows another running, without syllables between.⁵

⁵Ibid., p. 23.

The second term, which he calls "hangers" or "outrides," he explains in his preface.

Two licences are natural to Sprung Rhythm. The one is rests, as in music. . . . The other

is . . . outrides, that is one, two, or three slack syllables added to a foot and not counting in the nominal scanning.⁶

⁶Hopkins, "Author's Preface," pp. 4-5.

To help his readers, Hopkins also included with his poetry an elaborate system of notation, which he discusses in his preface.

These outriding half feet or hangers are marked by a loop underneath them. . . .

The other marks are easily understood, namely accents, where the reader might be in doubt which syllable should have the stress; slurs, that is loops over syllables, to tie them together into the time of one; little loops at the end of a line to shew that the rhyme goes on to the first letter of the next line; what in music are called pauses \cap , to shew that the syllable should be dwelt on; and twirls \sim , to mark reversed or counter-pointed rhythm.⁷

⁷Ibid., p. 5.

In a letter to Bridges, who was evidently unhappy about this new system, Hopkins defends his style:

Aug. 21, 1877

Why do I employ sprung rhythm at all? Because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms.⁸

⁸Abbott, The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, p. 46.

To sum up, the distinguishing features of sprung rhythm, then, are these: (1) Stresses may occur together without intermediate

unstressed syllables. (2) The rhythm is to be measured in feet of one to four syllables, though the unstressed syllables may be unlimited. (3) The stress falls on the only syllable of a one-syllable word, or on the first syllable of a polysyllabic word. (4) Any seeming inequality of rhythm may be offset by a pause or by added stress. (5) The scansion of sprung rhythm runs on from the beginning of a stanza to the end. (6) Also, permitted to sprung rhythm are rests, as in music, and out-rides, which are weak syllables added to a foot at the end of a line and not counted in the scansion.

In order to insure the success of his particular metrical system, Hopkins found that the use of alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, and word repetition were essential, not as decorative elements to be employed to please or to surprise, but as integral, essential elements of the new prosody. For example, alliteration is essential to his poetry as one way of immediately indicating the right metrical accentuation. It is functional rather than ornamental, and it is used to stress the stronger accentual beats. In the last two lines of the poem "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," its use makes the correct reading automatic.

Where, selfwring, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, thoughts
against thoughts in groans grind.¹⁰

¹⁰Robert Bridges, ed., Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London, 1931), Second Edition, p. 51.

The same is true of the use of alliteration in this line from "The Windhover."

Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.¹¹

¹¹Ibid., p. 29.

Hopkins, like most scholars of his age, had no clear understanding of Greek and Latin rhythmic usages.¹² Although he believed

¹²Walter J. Ong, S. J., "Hopkins' Sprung Rhythm and the Life of English Poetry," in Immortal Diamond: Studies in Gerard Manley Hopkins, Norman Weyand, S. J., ed. (New York, 1949), p. 103.

that there were strong similarities between sprung rhythm and the rhythms of Greek choruses, it is almost impossible to say when Hopkins perceived these relationships. Bonn points out that the "Deutschland" (1876) preceded his statement of 1878 that he had discovered "new metrical effects" in Greek choruses. In 1882, Hopkins mentioned that sprung rhythm was in the Greek manner, but it was not until 1886 that he began his researches on the theory of Dorian rhythm. And then in 1887, he proclaimed his discovery of a scientific basis of meter and music.¹³

¹³John Louis Bonn, S. J., "Greco-Roman Verse Theory and Gerard Manley Hopkins," in Immortal Diamond, pp. 73-74.

Though Hopkins was untrustworthy on the Greek metric system, Bonn asserts that he did make a major contribution to English metrics. His acute ear heard subtle changes of cadence in Pindar and the Greek dramatists, and these shifts in rhythm and modulation, he incorporated into his verse.¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., p. 78.

Hopkins also recognized his debt to Old English verse, but it is uncertain whether he used it as a model for sprung rhythm. Four years after he wrote the "Deutschland," Hopkins confessed that he was not sure if sprung rhythm occurred in Anglo-Saxon verse. A month later, he wrote to Bridges that he was only then beginning a study of Anglo-Saxon. Ong observes that Eduard Sievers published his definitive work on the structural principles of Old English poetry in 1885, almost ten years after the poem was written.¹⁵

¹⁵Ong, pp. 95-96.

Piers Plowman, to which Hopkins referred, is also a questionable source. In 1882 he wrote to Bridges, "I am reading that famous poem and am coming to the conclusion that it is not worth reading."¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid., p. 97.

Hopkins' stock with Bridges was never very high. More likely than not, by citing eminent authorities, Hopkins hoped to convince his friend that sprung rhythm was firmly rooted in English tradition and classical literature.

Frequently Hopkins cannot make up his mind whether or not more recent authors used sprung rhythm. The rhythm of Milton's Samson Agonistes confused him. In a letter to Bridges (April 3, 1877), Hopkins writes that the choruses are "intermediate between counterpointed and

sprung rhythm." Later he adds, "In reality they are sprung." By October 6, 1878, he has decided that Milton did not use sprung rhythm, but was instead a master "in the use of counterpoint."¹⁷

¹⁷Ibid., p. 98.

The most promising source for the new rhythm, which Hopkins claims had long been haunting his ear, is to be found in his statement that sprung rhythm is the rhythm of everyday speech. Consciously or unconsciously, and long before he named it, Hopkins was hearing it. But where the new rhythm came from and what it implied were not clear to the poet. Only after he used it, first in "St. Dorothea" and then in the "Deutschland," did Hopkins try to construct a theory to fit it.¹⁸

¹⁸Ibid., p. 110.

Sense-stress rhythm in the English literary tradition did not disappear with the Norman conquest. It persisted within the later running rhythm along with the use of alliteration and the old English half-line, not merely in such isolated poems as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight whose opening stanza contains these lines:

And far o'er the French flood fortunate Brutus
With happiness Britain on hillsides full broad
Doth found.

War, waste, and wonder there
Have dwelt within its bound:

but also in the poetry of Chaucer. Skelton's half-lines from "Philip Sparrow" are largely sense-stress:

It was so pretty a fool,
It would sit on a stool . . .

For to keep his cut,
With, Philip, keep your out!

And an analysis of Surrey's "The frailty and hurtfulness of beauty" shows a marked sense-stress pattern, alliteration and all, overlaying the running rhythm:

Brittle beauty, that nature made so frail,
Whereof the gift is small, and short the season,
Flow'ring to-day, to-morrow apt, to fail,
Tickle treasure, abhorred of reason

Renaissance literature, the drama particularly gave full play to the sense-stress pattern. Hopkins recognized it in Shakespeare and in Greene, but the same is true of Fletcher, Webster, and the rest. The plays of Shakespeare abound in examples rich with alliteration, assonance, consonance, and the echoes of old English versification. From Act I, scene 2, ll. 185-190, of The Winter's Tale comes this passage as Ong interprets it.

Gone already!

Inch-thick, knee-deep o'er head and ears a fork'd one!
Go, play, boy, play: thy mother plays, and I
Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue
Will hiss me to my grave: contempt and clamour
Will be my knell. Go, play, boy, play . . .¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., p. 155.

Donne, Ben Jonson, and Herrick also, sought for the natural speech rhythm, and in their poetry, perhaps without being fully aware of it, fell into the sense-stress patterns of their predecessors. Compare Hopkins' stanza 9 from Part I of The Wrack of the Deutschland with Donne's Holy sonnet:

Be adored among men,

God, three-numbered form;
Wring thy rebel, dogged in den,
Man's malice, with wrecking and storm.
Beyond saying sweet, past telling of tongue,
Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm;
Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung:
Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then.

From Donne:

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for You
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new. . . .

It is not a coincidence that sprung rhythm and abrupt rhythm are most noticeable in poems which are conversational. Jonson's "To Dr. Donne" or his "To My Book-seller" or Herrick's "Corinna's Going a-Maying" fall easily into a sense-stress pattern. Pope, who advised in An Essay on Criticism:

Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

even Pope, unlike his contemporaries, utilized the old variegated speech rhythms in the opening lines of Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot:

"Shut, shut the door, good John!" fatigued, I said;
"Tie up the knocker; say I'm sick, I'm dead."

The eighteenth century, after Pope, was almost destitute of sense-stress rhythms until Robert Burns revived the sense-stress counterpoint in his declamatory verse. Here is the first stanza of "To a Mouse":

Wee, sleekit, cowrin, timrous beastie,
Oh, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle!
I was bé laith to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murdering pattle!

Burns is followed by Blake who in "The Fairy," uses the old

English half-line in verse similar to Skelton's.

So a Fairy sung.
From the leaves I sprung;
He leap'd from the spray
To flee away;
But in my hat caught,
He soon shall be taught.²⁰

²⁰Ibid., p. 164.

There are some stirrings in Southey, Shelley, and Byron, but it was Keats whom Hopkins first consciously imitated. The opening lines in the "Ode on Melancholy" have a kind of counterpoint rhythm, and Ong divides the lines to expose the old English antiphonal pattern:

No, no, go not to Leith, neither twist
Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine:

and the last line

And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.²¹

²¹Ibid., p. 165.

Heavy counterpoint is apparent in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn":

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.²²

²²Ibid.

The whole nineteenth century moved generally toward this more natural verse, culminating perhaps in Browning. The song of the little silk-weaver in Pippa Passes uses the English half-line. "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" and "My Last Duchess," both dramatic monologues, are heavily counterpointed.

Certain lines in "The Ring and the Book" are halved by Ong as four stress lines;

Flung with a flourish! But repentance, too.
But pure and simple sorrow for law's breach
Rather than blunderer's-ineptitude?²³

²³Ibid.

Hopkins says in a letter to Bridges of September 17, 1881, that while he admires Browning's touches and details, the general effect offends him and he concludes that the poetry is repulsive.

Although many possible influences on Hopkins can be cited, it is doubtful that Hopkins was really receptive to them. He seemed to have preferred the role of a discoverer, an innovator, an original. His approach to the poetry of Coleridge is curious indeed. To the objective observer, the two men and their poetry have much in common. Both experimented with metrical systems; both employed and often coined new words and double epithets; both kept remarkably similar journals and illustrated them; both suffered from ill health, a sense of isolation, a thwarting of the creative impulse. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and the "Deutschland" describe essentially similar spiritual voyages as well as physical ones.²⁴ And modern texts agree that in "Christabel,"

²⁴Humphry House, Coleridge: The Clark Lectures 1951-52 (London, 1953), p. 139.

Coleridge used sprung rhythm, as he did in other of his poems.

In the preface to "Christabel," Coleridge writes:

I have only to add that the metre of

Christabel is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four.²⁵

²⁵Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Preface to Christabel" in The College Survey of English Literature, ed. Alexander M. Witherspoon (New York, 1951), p. 742.

Like Hopkins, Coleridge also uses repetition, antitheses, alliteration; he asks questions; and like Hopkins, he too omits verbs. For example, in "The Ancient Mariner":

Alone, alone, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea . . .

and in "Christabel":

Is the night chilly and dark?
The night is chilly, but not dark.

and

The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky.

Hopkins, however, did not acknowledge Coleridge's influence.

On the contrary, in a letter to Dixon of January 10, 1879, he wrote:

Is that anything of the sort that Coleridge meant by his distinction between accent and quantity? You no doubt know of his making that distinction, and giving it out as a discovery; saying that Christabel was written in accent, not quantity, or something like that.²⁶

²⁶Abbott, The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, p. 18.

On February 27, 1879, Hopkins followed this up with a note saying that Coleridge was drawing a distinction between two systems of scanning, one opposed to sprung rhythm; the other, capable of being developed into it.²⁷ And that was that!

²⁷Ibid., p. 21.

Sprung rhythm has given rise to a variety of explanations. Harold Whitehall contends that the new rhythm went against the trend of English verse from about 1300 with "its increasing emphasis of the sense pattern rather than the sound pattern and its gradual adjustment to the printed rather than the spoken word."²⁸ While it is true that

²⁸Harold Whitehall, "Sprung Rhythm" in Gerard Manley Hopkins, Kenyon Critics, eds., p. 30.

Hopkins asked for an oral interpretive reading of his works to justify his new rhythm, Ong states definitely that sprung rhythm emphasizes the sense stress rather than syllabic stress.²⁹

²⁹Ong, p. 119.

Just as normal pronunciation of prose allows minor adjustments in accentuation and timing, and the same phrase may be stressed in different ways for meaning and emphasis, so scanning Hopkins' poems requires accommodation to a marked rhythm without loss of natural timing, and without loss of the interior rhythm and stresses of individual words. But the scansion of sprung rhythm runs on from the beginning of a stanza to the end, and it is the sense that influences the

rhythm. Hopkins' use of rhyme lends weight to Ong's contention. The end rhymes are no more important, really, than the interior rhymes. They add to the sound effect, but they are not used to emphasize the sense.

For example, Alexander Pope in An Essay on Criticism uses rhyme to reinforce his meaning:

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence:
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.

In show-business language, we might call the first and third lines "set-ups" and the second and fourth "clinchers." The use of rhyme while ornamental is also functional.

"The Bugler's First Communion" is perhaps an exaggerated example of Hopkins' use of rhyme, but it does point up the difference in technique.

A bugler boy from barrack (it is over the hill
There)—boy bugler, born, he tells me, of Irish
Mother to an English sire, (he
Shares their best gifts surely, fall how things will),
This very very day came down to us after a boon he on
My late being there begged of me, overflowing
Boon in my bestowing,
Came, I say, this day to it—to a First Communion.

This is the rhythm, surely, of everyday speech, heightened and dramatized. Rhyme is an embellishment only, a delight to the ear. It is not always readily apparent to the casual reader: "Irish—sire he / Sh(ares)" and "boon he on"—"Communion." The run-on lines, too, serve to inhibit the emphatic quality of rhyme. In Pope's poem the mind soon becomes attuned to a definitely rhymed sense pattern; in Hopkins' poetry

it is the rhythm, the sprung rhythm, which produces a sense pattern.

In "Binsey Poplars" notice Hopkins' use of interior rhyme:

My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,
Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,
All felled, felled, are all felled;
 Of a fresh and following folded rank
 Not spared, not one
 That dandled a sandalled
Shadow that swam or sank
On meadow and river and wind-wandering weed-winding bank.

The juxtaposition of "dandled" and "sandalled" might be called counterpointed rhymes. The eye and the voice have a tendency to bring the two words together, but the proper reading for sense would put a pause after "dandled" and combine "a sandalled / Shadow" into a fast-running phrase. Because of this counterpointed rhyme, the reader must rely mainly on rhythm and on alliteration as guides to sense, and then "a sandalled / Shadow" like "wind-wandering weed-winding bank" carries the poet's meaning home.

Although sprung rhythm is concerned with sense stresses, and running rhythm is concerned with syllabic stresses, neither rhythm necessarily excludes the other. Often the two rhythms meet, and for a short time run on together, as instanced by the second line in "Spring and Fall: to a young child":

Margaret, are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leaves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?

When the two rhythms do meet, the line should be read with the stress heavy and accented as contrast to the rest of the poem.

Counterpoint, or variations on running rhythm, is not possible in sprung rhythm. Running rhythm, although it never runs counter to a

sense stress, admits of variations and reversals because its pattern is regular. Since sprung rhythm has no fixed and regular pattern, but absorbs all variations, it cannot be counterpointed effectively. It is the occasional meeting of the three rhythms that has caused so much of the confusion regarding sprung rhythm. The point to remember is that metre in sprung rhythm is always regular; metre in running rhythm and counterpoint rhythm is not always regular.

Chapter IV

Inscape and Instress

"Inscape" and "instress" are words found frequently in Hopkins' writings. They reveal his preoccupation with the essence, the uniqueness, the individuality of things. Each object is contemplated separately for its own individuating characteristics. He considers the impression an object makes as emanating from its own being, without any sharing in the awareness or sensibility of the viewer. Consequently objects have not only a physical life of their own for Hopkins, but also an emotional and spiritual life of their own; not only an objective appearance, but an inner life capable of exerting an influence on others. This attitude may explain in part many instances of personification in Hopkins' poetry. It also explains, according to Peters, the lack of imagination with which Hopkins deals with objects, since he believes them to have their own serious and purposeful life.¹

¹W. A. M. Peters, S. J., Gerard Manley Hopkins (London, 1948), pp. 20-21.

The term "inscape" is described in a letter to Dixon as "the very soul of art."² In a letter to Bridges, Hopkins is more specific:

²Abbott, The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, p. 135.

"design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling 'inscape' is what I above all aim at in poetry."³ But Hopkins uses the term also as the

³Abbott, The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, p. 66.

"ontological secret" behind the object, the inner form of the object. He also uses it to express relationship. The bond created between an object, the viewer, and God results in an inscape. Perhaps a better understanding of the term can be gained by referring to Duns Scotus, who seemed to validate and confirm for Hopkins his own thoughts on nature.

Scotus took a sacramental view of the world, contending that God created the world so that man might look upon the visible beauties of the universe and act as a bridge between the finite and the infinite. He also believed that by the exercise of will, man's nature is perfected, and by a voluntary "act of love" his experience of beauty may be directed Godwards to become a meritorious act. He also wrote that each individual has a distinctive form, a haecceitas, or thisness, as well as a generic quidditas, or whatness, both of which serve to individuate natural things. Although Hopkins had been using the word "inscape" for several years before he read Scotus, he recognized in him a spiritual kinship and a justification for some of his dearest beliefs.⁴

⁴Pick, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Priest and Poet, pp. 32-38.

"Inscape" seems to be modeled on the word, landscape, and appears to imply a contrary, or outerscape. The "inscape" is not mechanically present in an object, but requires a deep, personal attention, a physical, mental, and spiritual act on the part of the viewer so that he may observe the distinctive qualities of an object and relate them to God's grace.

From Hopkins' journal, these lines written in 1870 illustrate not only his use of the word, but also the quality of his aesthetic life.

I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it.⁵

⁵Note-Books, pp. 133-134.

The following year, he added this observation:

The bluebells in your hand baffle you with their inscape, made to every sense: if you draw your fingers through them they are lodged and struggle with a shock of wet heads. . . .⁶

⁶Ibid., p. 145.

Each of the passages quoted above continues with a long, meticulously detailed description of the flower, its shades, shape, its joining of the parts, and sometimes the descriptions include small drawings sketched for the sake of greater clarity.

Again Hopkins writes, "This skeleton inscape of a spray-end of ash . . . is worth noticing for the suggested globe. . . ."⁷ Later he

⁷Ibid., p. 134.

notes in his journal: "As we drove home the stars came out thick: I leant back to look at them and my heart opening more than usual praised our Lord to and in whom all that beauty comes home."⁸ One might think

⁸Ibid., p. 205.

that Hopkins' association of beauty and God would have given him great joy and peace. But in 1869 this entry is found in his papers, "But a penance which I was doing from Jan. 25, to July 25 prevented my seeing much that half-year."⁹ The tragedy of the man is implicit in those lines.

⁹Ibid., p. 121.

"Instress" is used less frequently than "inscape," and is nowhere explicitly clarified, but it does appear in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" in stanza 5, and in the prose writings. The starting point in trying to arrive at its meaning is the word "stress" which in Hopkins' philosophical writing stands for the perfection of being. "Instress" apparently means the intrinsic force necessary to the perfection of being; or, when used as a verb, to realize or to bring to realization. "Instress" is that stress or energy of being by which all things are upheld and strive after continued existence, according to Peters.¹⁰

¹⁰Peters, p. 13.

Throughout his journal, Hopkins sees and describes "inscape,"

but "instress" seems to produce an indescribable emotional reaction. Essentially "instress" is a straining, striving toward perfection, or toward God. It is used in the following instances in his journal: "Looking all round but most in looking far up the valley I felt an instress and charm of Wales:"¹¹ and "Take a few primroses in a glass

¹¹Note-Books, p. 210.

and the instress of . . . so simple a flower . . . is remarkable."¹²

¹²Ibid., pp. 142-143.

These two terms are basic to Hopkins' way of thinking, rather than to his actual poetic work. They exerted an influence over everything he wrote and thought and did.

Chapter V

His Poetry

As a poet, Hopkins was both a traditionalist and a revolutionary. He revived, in his poetry, the ancient traditions of Christianity, of language, and of technique and gave them new life and new meaning. Many of his sonnets which seem strange are only, according to the author, approximations in English of the original Petrarchan sonnet.¹

¹Pick, A Hopkins Reader, p. xii.

The early poetry of Hopkins, the poetry which survived burning, shows the influence of Keats and of the Pre-Raphaelites. One finds vestiges of the earlier decorative diction, the frequent use of such words as "beauty," "lovely," "dear," and "sweet."² The most characteristic

²Josephine Miles, "The Sweet and Lovely Language," in Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. by The Kenyon Critics, (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1945), pp. 55-63.

of his school poems, "A Vision of the Mermaids," written in heroic couplets after the manner of Keats, shows a taste for richness and color as well as a delight in the appeals to his senses:

in gusts of scented wind
Swirling out bloom till all the air is blind
With rosy foam and pelting blossom and mists
Of driving vermillion rain. . . .³

³Pick, Gerard Manley Hopkins, pp. 2-3.

Another of his early poems, written January 22, 1866, and untouched as yet by religious or personal denial, is reminiscent of Emily Dickinson.

The stars were packed so close that night
They seemed to press and stare
And gather in like hurdles bright
The liberties of air.⁴

⁴House, p. 53.

The next group of poems, also among his earliest, begin to show not only Hopkins' religious inclination, but also that characteristic of his of prohibiting to himself those things which delight him. The conflict between the dreamer on the one hand and the churchman on the other becomes increasingly apparent.

Trees by their yield
Are known; but I—
My sap is sealed,
My root is dry.
If life within
I none can shew
(Except for sin),
Nor fruit above,—
It must be so—
I do not love.
Will no one show
I argued ill?
Because, although
Self-sentenced, still
I keep my trust.
If He would prove
And search me through

Would he not find
(What yet there must
Be hid behind)⁵

(September, 1865)

⁵Ibid., p. 51.

One might easily guess from this poem, written just a few years before his conversion to Catholicism, the direction which Hopkins must take. "Self-sentenced" says the poet—and leaves the critics to ponder whether to life or to death.

In "The Habit of Perfection," ostensibly a rebuke to the powers of the senses, the author seems to linger over such phrases as "palate, the hutch of tasty lust," and "feel-of-primrose hands."⁶ And though

⁶Robert Bridges, ed., Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London, 1931), Second Edition, pp. 8-9. Unless specially noted, all quotations from Hopkins' poetry will come from this second edition.

shape, color, texture, sound, and smell are renounced for poverty and lily-coloured clothes, the author does not as yet wear the new habit with ease.

The poem "Heaven-Haven" appears in Hopkins' notebook under the title "Rest." Just when he or Bridges added the subheading "A nun takes the veil" is not clear. But it fits Hopkins' own desires so well that it might easily be taken as an autobiographical incident. There is an interesting resemblance between "Heaven-Haven" and "A Prospect of Heaven Makes Death Easy" by Isaac Watts (1674-1748), also a religious poet and innovator in versification. Probably both poems are part of the same religious and literary tradition which includes the works of Donne,

Herbert, Crashaw, Traherne, and Vaughan.

In "St. Dorothea" Hopkins experiments for the first time with stresses. In the hands of a schoolboy, however, the poem seems closer to doggerel than to poetry, although Hopkins wrote to Bridges that he had borrowed the beat from Shakespeare.⁷ To obviate the tendency toward

⁷W. H. Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), (New Haven, 1948), p. 38.

poetic degeneration is one of the reasons why Hopkins uses the collateral techniques accompanying sprung rhythm.

After seven years of priestly training and meditation, Hopkins at the age of thirty-one broke his self-imposed silence, and at the request of a superior at St. Bueno's, he wrote his major work. "The Wreck of the Deutschland" commemorates the death of five Franciscan nuns, exiles from Germany under the Falk decree, who perished aboard the Deutschland when the ship went aground on the Kentish coast during a snowstorm.⁸ But the poem is more than just a simple narrative concerning

⁸Eleanor Ruggles, Gerard Manley Hopkins, (New York, 1944), p. 145.

a tragic event; it is in reality two stories, one of which is autobiographical. As Hopkins wrote to Bridges,

I may add for your greater interest and edification that what refers to myself in the poem is all strictly and literally true and did all occur; nothing is added for poetical padding.⁹

⁹Abbott, The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, pp. 46-47.

The two stories touch at the spiritual level and describe the engulfment of the heart and spirit in horror and dread, and the ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

"The Wreck of the Deutschland" opened new channels of prosody. It was in every way a mature piece of work embodying the full range of Hopkins' metrical and linguistic technique. It is also the very epitome of the Spiritual Exercises. The entire poem is in sprung rhythm and employs eight-line stanzas. Part I (stanzas 1-10), maintains regularly the following number of stresses by lines, 2-3-4-3-5-5-4-6; and these lines are indicated by the indentation. In Part II the first line of every stanza has three stresses.¹⁰

¹⁰Gardner, pp. 44-47.

The opening lines of Part the First,

Thou mastering me
God! giver of breath and bread;
World's strand, sway of the sea;
Lord of living and dead;
Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.¹¹

¹¹Bridges, p. 11.

are a reiteration of the meaning of Catholicism. God, master of the universe, has created man and made Himself known to him. But he has

done more; He has touched man and raised him by Divine Grace to participate again in the life of Christ by re-enacting the sacrifice on the Cross. Or, as Hopkins himself put it in his comments written in 1880, on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, the uplifting action of supernatural grace, or elevating, "which lifts the receiver from one cleave of being to another and to a vital act in Christ: this is truly God's finger touching the very vein of personality."¹²

¹² Note-Books, p. 337.

The next stanza describes the choice which man is permitted to make freely. Though Hopkins says yes to God, He recognizes the difficulty of that decision,

I did say yes
O at lightning and lashed rod;
Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess
Thy terror, O Christ, O God;
Thou knowest the walls, altar and hour and night:
The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee trod
Hard down with a horror of height:
And the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress.

In stanza 3 the reason for the choice is apparent. Lucifer surrounds him. Where does safety lie?

The frown of his face
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.

The fourth stanza deals with the temporal nature of the poet as he is consumed by time, but just as a well is replenished by mountain

springs, so he too is nourished by faith, Christ's gift to man.

I am soft sift
In an hourglass-at the wall
Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift,
And it crowds and it combs to the fall;
I steady as a water in a well, to a poise, to a pane,
But roped with, always, all the way down from the tall
Fells or flanks of the voel, a vein
Of the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift.

In the above stanza the word voel means "bare hill" in Welsh, and the literal meaning of the sixth and seventh lines is that a well is fed by the trickles of water within the flanks of surrounding mountains.¹³

¹³Bridges, p. 104.

The two metaphors are beautifully juxtaposed. Sand—temporal time, encased in walls of glass—flows downwards swiftly, relentlessly to annihilation. Sand—arid, hot, dry—a desert from which all life has been sucked, is another image conjured up by the word. But the well, with its cool, upward thrust of everflowing water which refreshes and brings forth the bounty of nature and God, creates a picture of life everlasting. These metaphors express for Hopkins the revelation and they build up to a climax of feeling in stanza five in which God, man, and nature meet; and God's mystery stressed, and instressed, is brought to realized fulfillment by being felt, rather than known.

I kiss my hand
To the stars, lovely-asunder
Starlight, wafting him out of it; and
Glow, glory in thunder;
Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west;
Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder,
His mystery must be instressed, stressed;
For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand.

In this stanza, God's mastery, which stems from the Incarnation, the result of His assumption of human form, is proof of the Divine spirit in all that is natural and finite.

The next two stanzas are largely doctrinal. The sixth describes man's intuitive knowledge of God, and his original fall from Grace. The seventh tells of the Passion and of man's redemption through Jesus Christ. It leads directly into the eighth stanza, in which all men are brought to Christ through his Incarnation and Passion. The Grace He sends to men is the privilege to imitate Him.

Hither, then, last or first,
To hero of Galvary, Christ's feet—
Never ask if meaning it, wanting it, warned of it—men go.

One might expect, after this rush of the physical, emotional, and spiritual forces of man toward Christ, that the last two stanzas of Part I, stanzas nine and ten, would be peaceful, hushed, drained, and exhausted; but this is not so. Hopkins, the priest, the Jesuit, the saint, found no rest, not even after he found his way to home and Father.

Be adored among men,
God, three-numbered form;
Wring thy rebel, dogged in den,
Man's malice, with wrecking and storm.
Beyond saying sweet, past telling of tongue,
Thou art lightning, and love, I found it, a winter and warm;
Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung:
Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then.

With an anvil-ding
And with fire in him forge thy will
Or rather, rather then, stealing as Spring
Through him, melt him but master him still:
Whether at once, as once at a crash Paul,
Or as Austin, a lingering-out sweet skill,
Make mercy in all of us, out of us all
Mastery, but be adored, but be adored King.

For Hopkins, the heart and the spirit are willing, but man's malice, his reason, offers combat. Let God master him with force! let God master him with love! but let God master him! This poem, which Canon Dixon found "enormously powerful," also contained, in his opinion, "elements of deep distress" and of "terrible pathos." There seems to be a question as to whether the poem is an expression of contrition, fear, and submission, or an expression of love of God freely given.¹⁴

¹⁴Abbott, The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, pp. 32-33.

In his comments on the Spiritual Exercises, Hopkins is concerned with his own identity and with his position in relation to the Universal Will or Mind, or Spirit. He writes,

The universal mind being identified not only with me but also with all other minds cannot be the means of communicating what is individual in me to them nor in them to me. I have and every other has, as said above, my own knowledge and powers, pleasures, pains, merit, guilt, shame, dangers, fortunes, fates; we are not chargeable for one another.¹⁵

¹⁵Note-Books, p. 313.

But further on, Hopkins questions this conclusion:

. . . a being so intimately present as God is to other things would be identified with them were it not for God's infinity or were it not for God's infinity he could not be so intimately present to things.¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid., p. 316.

The problem of guilt, of universal guilt, of the sharing in one

another's guilt and of redemption is the major theme of the second part of "The Wreck of the Deutschland." But whether the problem is resolved in the poem, or if it is ever resolved by Hopkins is debatable. In the poem Hopkins visualizes his struggle as a part of the universal struggle. The nun's spiritual test is a test of Hopkins and a test of all men who share in Christ.

Part the Second of the "Deutschland" begins with a comment on Death.

'Some find me a sword; some
The flange and the rail; 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, though our flower the same
Wave with the meadow, forget that there must
The sour scythe cringe, and the blear share come.

Interestingly enough, Wells sees in the first stanza a marked resemblance to Beowulf, with which Hopkins was familiar in the original. Using Gummere's translation of lines 1761-1768, he quotes:

The flower of thy might
lasts now a while: but ere long it shall be
that sickness or sword thy strength shall diminish,
or fang of fire, or flooding billow,
or bite of blade, or brandished spear,
or odious age; or the eyes' clear beam
wax dull and darken: Death even thee
in haste shall o'erwhelm, thou hero of war!¹⁷

¹⁷Henry W. Wells, New Poets from Old (New York, 1940), pp. 38-40.

The metaphor of the flower which appears first in Beowulf very briefly is elaborated on by Hopkins at the end of the stanza. In writing of Death both use the words, fang, flood, and sword.

Stanza 12 plunges into the narrative of the actual wreck, following

closely newspaper accounts of the disaster. The thirteenth stanza brings the scene vividly to the mind, to the eye, and indeed the cold seems to penetrate our very bones:

Into the snows she sweeps
Hurling the haven behind,
The Deutschland, on Sunday; and so the sky keeps,
For the infinite air is unkind,
And the sea flint-flake, black-backed in the regular blow,
Sitting Eastnortheast, in cursed quarter, the wind;
Wiry and white-fiery and whirlwind-swivelled snow
Spins to the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps.

Here, surely, is evidence of Hopkins' love of elaborate rhyme, his profuse use of nature imagery, and the deft handling of a sweep of alliterative and compound words.

The next five stanzas describe the wreck and tell of a death of a sailor as he tries to rescue some of the women on deck. In the nineteenth stanza the heroine of this narrative appears. A Franciscan nun reads in the world about her the message of Christ calling her to the Cross. Suffering with her, sharing her pain, joining her in Christ's sacrifice is the poet himself.

Sister, a sister calling
A master, her master and mine!—
And the inboard seas run swirling and hawling;
The rash smart slogging brine
Blinds her; but she that weather sees one thing, one;
Has one fetch in her: she rears herself to divine
Ears, and the call of the tall nun
To the men in the tops and the tackle rode over the storm's
brawling.

In this stanza, the word "fetch" is a dialect word meaning a deep painful breath or inspiration.¹⁸

¹⁸Pick, Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 46.

After describing the nun and her companions, their trials and suffering, the author brilliantly blends, in stanza 21, the horrors of the shipwreck and beauty of suffering when it is done for the sake of Christ and man. Throughout the storm Christ waits in heaven for the nun to respond to His grace, for her to find and come to Him. The contrast of the fourth line in which the fury of the elements is destroying life, and the last two lines, which describe an emotional reaction to the elements after Christ is found, is powerfully moving.

Loathed for a love men knew in them,
Banned by the land of their birth,
Rhine refused them. Thames would ruin them;
Surf, snow, river and earth
Gnashed: but thou art above, thou Orion of light;
Thy unchallenging poisoning palms were weighing the worth,
Thou martyr-master: in thy sight
Storm flakes were scroll-leaved flowers, lily showers—sweet
heaven was astrew in them.

The next stanzas remark on the resemblance between the five nuns and the wounds of Christ. As a badge of His love, His chosen ones, the five nuns, are permitted to re-enact the Redemption. They are compared, too, to St. Francis, who bore on his body the stigmata. In stanza 22 the cinquefoil token refers to a five-leaved plant or figure; in stanza 23 lovescape crucified may be translated as Love-in-its-essence is here crucified.¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., p. 47.

Stanza 24 again unites the poet and nuns. Never for more than a moment does Hopkins allow the reader to forget that he, like all Christians, is part of the eternal drama.

Away in the loveable west,
On a pastoral forehead of Wales,
I was under a roof here, I was at rest,
And they the prey of the gales;
She to the black-about air, to the breaker, the thickly
Falling flakes, to the throng that catches and quails
Was calling 'O Christ, Christ, come quickly':
The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst
Best.

The next stanzas proclaim the glory of the Lord and the perfect self-sacrifice of the nun, and her fulfillment in Christ. They lead up to stanza 28 which is the climax of the poem. Writing in his "Comment on the Spiritual Exercises," Hopkins expresses in prose the meaning of his poetry. For him the world is an expression of God. "Therefore its end, its purpose, its purport, its meaning, is God, and its life or work to name and praise him."²⁰ And for the Jesuit, the greatest praise

²⁰Ibid., p. 49.

is to re-enact the Incarnation and Redemption, to be at one with Christ.

But how shall I . . . make me room there:
Reach me a . . . Fancy, come faster—
Strike you the sight of it? Look at it loom there,
Thing that she . . . there then! the Master,
Ipsē, the only one, Christ, King, Head:
He was to cure the extremity where he had cast her;
Do, deal, lord it with living and dead;
Let him ride, her pride, in his triumph, despatch and have done
with his doom there.

The last two stanzas, 34 and 35, not only reconcile the ways of God to man, but show man glorying in those ways, however difficult they may be. The stanzas have a sweep and an accelerating tempo, as though all pain has passed, and the sun now shines once more on Hopkins, on England, on mankind, and in heaven.

Now burn, new born to the world,
Doubled-natured name,
The heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden-furled
Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame,
Mid-numbered He in three of the thunder-throne!
Not a dooms-day dazzle in his coming nor dark as he came;
Kind, but royally reclaiming his own;
A released shower, let flash to the shire, not a lightning of fire
hard-hurled.

Dame, at our door
Drowned, and among our shoals,
Remember us in the roads, the heaven-haven of the
Reward:
Our King back, oh, upon English souls!
Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us,
be a crimson-cresseted east,
More brightening her, rare-dear Britain, as his reign rolls,
Pride, rose, prince, hero of us, high-priest,
Our hearts' charity's hearth's fire, our thoughts' chivalry's
throng's Lord.

The paradox of evil, dealt with from the opening lines of the poem to its completion, is the basis for conflict in Hopkins, himself. How he reconciles the power of an all-loving, all-embracing God to create evil as well as beauty and goodness, is the major theme of "The Wreck of the Deutschland." The storm is both an event and a symbol as it arouses and finally subdues the inner conflict. As the nun's heart and spirit rise up to meet the catastrophe, the storm ceases to inflict pain; it becomes the path to glory. Man, then, has the choice of meeting evil with faith and love and wonder, or he may be mastered by it and at the last be forced to acquiesce to its majesty. Although an external event supplied the initial inspiration and the motif and broad outline of the work, the poet's own religious fervour, his mysticism, his instress, supplied the emotional tone and imagery.

This poem, which Bridges was later to call in his preface, "a

great dragon folded in the gate to forbid all entrance,"²¹ was sent to

²¹Abbott, The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, p. 42.

him by Hopkins with this note, dated August 8, 1877:

My Dearest Bridges,—My bag turned up last night, I therefore send the Deutschland herewith; please return it as soon as you conveniently can. . . . It seems that triolats and rondels and rondeaus and chants royal and what not and anything but serving God are all the fashion.²²

²²Ibid., pp. 42-43.

Two weeks later Hopkins dispatched another letter to his friend. After explaining the principle of sprung rhythm, he writes,

My verse is less to be read than heard, as I have told you before; it is oratorical, that is the rhythm is so. I think if you will study what I have here said you will be much more pleased with it and may I say? converted to it.

You ask may you call it 'presumptuous jugglery'. No, but only for this reason, that presumptuous is not English.

I cannot think of altering anything. Why shd. I? I do not write for the public. You are my public and I hope to convert you.

You say you wd. not for any money read my poem again. Nevertheless I beg you will. Besides money, you know, there is love. If it is obscure do not bother yourself with the meaning but pay attention to the best and most intelligible stanzas, as the two last of each part and the narrative of the wreck.²³

²³Ibid., p. 46.

The following year, in April, Hopkins is still explaining "The Wreck" to Bridges:

The Deutschland would be more generally interesting if there were more wreck and less discourse, I know, but still it is an ode and not primarily a narrative.

From notices in the Athenaeum it would appear that Gosse, Dobson, and Co. are still fumbling with triolets, villanelles, and what not.²⁴

²⁴Ibid., p. 49.

Having failed to convert Bridges to an understanding and appreciation of his poetry, Hopkins turned to his new friend, R. W. Dixon. From St. Giles's, Oxford, this first, rather humble admonition is sent in March, 1879.

Very Reverend and Dear Sir,—I now send my pieces; please return them when done with, as I have no other copies. It is best to read the Eurydice first, which is in plain sprung rhythm and will possess you with the run of it. The Deutschland, earlier written, has more variety but less mastery of the rhythm and some of the sonnets are much bolder and more licentious. . . .

I hope you will like them.²⁵

²⁵Abbott, The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, p. 26.

The response was gratifying. A week later Hopkins received the following reply:

Reverend and Most Dear Sir—I have your Poems and have read them I cannot say with what delight, astonishment, and admiration. They are among the most extraordinary I have read and amazingly original. . . .

It seems to me that they ought to be published. Can I do anything? . . . I could very well give an abrupt footnote about your poems, if you thought good. . . . You may think it

odd for me to propose to introduce you into the year 1540, but I know how to do it. My object would be to awaken public interest and expectation in your as yet unpublished poems. . . .²⁶

²⁶Ibid., pp. 26-27.

In response, Hopkins discusses publication.

It was of course a very great pleasure to have so high an opinion expressed of my poems and by you.

But for what concerns the notice you kindly offer to make of me in your forthcoming volume, it would not at all suit me. For this there are several reasons, any one sufficient; but it is enough to say now that (1) I have no thought of publishing until all circumstances favour, which I do not know that they ever will, and it seems that one of them shd. be that the suggestion to publish shd. come from one of our own people; (2) to allow such a notice would be on my part a sort of insubordination to or doubledealing with my superiors. . . .

The life I lead is liable to many mortifications but the want of fame as a poet is the least of them. I could wish, I allow, that my pieces could at some time become known in some spontaneous way, so to speak, and without my forcing.²⁷

²⁷Ibid., p. 28.

It is sufficient to say that the poem was not published in its entirety until 1918. Before leaving it, I would like to point out some of the qualities which make it effective, though somewhat difficult at first sight.

Since sprung rhythm has already been discussed, it will suffice to scan one stanza for the beat. Notice that the first line of the opening stanza is "rove over," or continuing, so that the words

"mastering" of the first line and "God" of the next line carry almost as much emphasis as the syllables which mark the rhythm.

Thou mastering me
God! giver of breath and bread;
World's strand, sway of the sea;
Lord of living and dead;
Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.²⁸

²⁸Gardner, p. 45.

An extreme example of monosyllabic feet is the last line of stanza 11:

"The sour|scythe|cringe,| and the blear|share|come."

If the rhythm sounds odd, compare it to this line from Milton as scanned by Bridges:

"Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens and shades of death."²⁹

²⁹Ibid., p. 93.

Notice too, the interior rhyme and use of assonance in: caves, lakes, shades; fens, dens, death; and rock, bogs, in Milton's verse.

When Hopkins writes a polysyllabic line, he applies the principles of both stress and strength. He explains the following line from stanza 31 in this manner:

“Finger of a tender of, O of a feathery delicacy, the breast
of the”

The first two beats are very strong and the more the voice dwells on them the more it fetches out the strength of the syllables they rest upon; the next two beats are very light and escaping, and the last, as well as those which follow in the next line, are of a mean strength, such as suits narrative. And so throughout let the stress be made to fetch out both the strength of the syllables and the meaning and feeling of the words.³⁰

³⁰Ibid., p. 47.

The use of sprung rhythm is hardly more unusual than the new ways in which Hopkins employed language. All the attributes of Anglo-Saxon poets appear conspicuously in his poetry, and all contribute to the heightened, ecstatic, and passionate feeling. His poetic diction avoided many of the pitfalls of the Victorian era, and in spite of its oddities and intricacies, it is vigorous, if sometimes obscure. While avoiding Latin words, which are rare in his poetry, Hopkins leaned heavily on such words as "hie" instead of "haste," "ghost" instead of "spirit," "lade" instead of "load," and "brine" instead of "sea." "Fettle," "pash," "rive," "wend," and "bole" though good Saxon words, were no longer part of the vocabulary of his contemporaries. The prevalence of imaginative compounds, also a feature of Anglo-Saxon poetry, is to be found frequently in Hopkins' poetry. Stanza 34 has no less than nine compounds; Doubled-natured, heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden-furled, Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame, mid-numbered, thunder-throne, dooms-day, hard-hurled.³¹

31peters, pp. 63-67.

Alliteration, assonance, partial assonance, interior rhyme, and consonance add to the complex rhythm. Their use intensifies and enriches the poetry just as it adds precision to its reading. The first stanza of Part II is particularly expressive because of the subtlety and variety of Hopkins' verbal orchestration.

"The Wreck of the Deutschland" is notable, too, for the ways in which emotion and passion are expressed. The use of oh's, ah's, and O's is frequent. Stanza 2 begins:

I did say yes
O at lightning and lashed rod;
Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess
Thy terror, O Christ, O God;

and further examples may be found in stanzas 8, 12, 18, 20, 24, 29, and 31.

The exclamatory phrase is also used for its affective value. In stanza 1, there is the question, "and dost thou touch me afresh?" In stanza 18,

Ah, touched in your bower of bone
Are you! turned for an exquisite smart,
Have you! make words break from me here all alone,
Do you!

in stanza 20,

(O Deutschland, double a desperate name!
O world wide of its good!

and as a last example, stanza 25 starts,

The majesty! what did she mean?

Many questions are asked by the poet; many have no answers.

Stanza 3 asks, "Where, where was a, where was a place?" The poet asks, in stanza 25, "The majesty! what did she mean?" And then, "Is it love in her of the being as her lover had been?" Or is it, "The keener to come at the comfort for feeling the combating keen?" In general, it seems to make little difference to Hopkins whether he addresses his questions to himself, to another, to God, or to a personified object or abstraction; whichever form he uses serves to heighten the emotional impact of his language.

For added effect there are noticeable such techniques as extreme condensation of thought by means of ellipses and by means of punctuation instead of connectives. Stanza 14 contains examples of both.

She drove in the dark to leeward,
She struck—not a reef or a rock
But the combs of a smother of sand: night drew her
Dead to the Kentish Knock.

In all, Peters mentions that in the "Deutschland" he has counted twenty-one colons and twenty-four dashes plus numerous exclamation marks.³²

³²Ibid., p. 81.

Any words, which, in the poet's mind, impede the onrush of action, thought, or feeling, are omitted. The conjunction "that" is almost never used, and other conjunctions are extremely rare. Prepositions are often lacking, and frequently even a verb is either not expressed at all, or not repeated.³³ One example of compression in which the verb may be considered

³³Ibid., pp. 90-93.

lacking, or at least not repeated in different form, is found in these

lines from stanza 24,

I was under a roof here, I was at rest,
And they the prey of the gales.

In the above lines the meaning is quite clear. The next example offers a choice of meanings:

Let him ride, her pride, in his triumph, despatch and have done
with his doom there.

These lines from stanza 28 seem to say, "Let Christ trample or override the nun's pride." But they can also mean, "Let Christ ride in his triumph, that is the nun's pride in Him, that He has the power to despatch and have done with his doom." Both meanings are valid; both are to be understood, not one or the other, and both are to be grasped at the same time. The reason for this is that Hopkins, because of his tight construction expected full value for every word or phrase he used, and the more meanings he could squeeze into his verse, the greater the impact.

In connection with double-duty words and phrases, one notes the English love of play on words, almost puns sometimes, in Hopkins' poetry. Reminding us that there were five nuns on the Deutschland, Stanza 22 begins,

Five! the finding and sake
And cipher of suffering Christ.
Mark, the mark is of man's make
And the word of it Sacrificed. . . .

The two meanings of the word "mark" are obvious; used as a verb, the first Mark means "observe"; used as a noun, the second mark means "a visible sign." But are these the only meanings that strike the reader's mind? What of Saint Mark, of John Mark, reputed author of the second

book of the New Testament which tells of Jesus' life? What of the nautical meaning of the word: one of the knots, bits of leather, or colored cloth placed at intervals on a sounding line to indicate depths in fathoms? Can one ignore these possibilities? In stanza 3 one finds a similar problem in these lines,

I whirled out wings that spell
And fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host.

Hopkins often uses the word "spell" in place of "time," but is that all he is doing here? "Spell" also means magical power or irresistible influence, to enchant. In Anglo-Saxon "spel" or "spell" is a saying, a tale. Is Hopkins so "enchanted" that "time" that he must "tell," "spill," or sing the praises of the Lord? And what of "whirled" for "world"?

Stanza 17 is particularly interesting because of an implied musical pun. The last line reads,

A prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told.
For a man who was a musician as well as a poet, for a man who lived to sing the praises of God, it is natural, perhaps, to use the word "virginal" and think of the old musical instrument, and it is not too far-fetched to substitute the word "toll" for "told," particularly when the word "towered" is near by to suggest a belfry.

One last example contains a multiple-duty invented word. It comes from the last line in stanza 31

Maiden could obey so, be a bell to, ring of it, and
Startle the poor sheep back! is the shipwreck then a harvest,
does tempest carry the grain for thee?

"Shipwreck" of course suggests "shipwreck" which brings a harvest of

souls to God. But "shipwrack" also suggests a ship wracked with pain and suffering. A rack is also the framework which holds a harvest such as hay, and certainly the ship is a container of a rich harvest. Another meaning, equally applicable, comes from the Old Norse in which "rack" or "wreck" means to be blown by the wind. The last meaning is "to draw off from the dregs," as in the making of cider. Surely the souls of the nuns were drawn to God leaving only the dregs, or the husks.

Although there is much more to be said of "The Wreck of the Deutschland," I believe that a study of some of the later and shorter poems will be more profitable. In my opinion, "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is not entirely successful. In many stanzas the meanings are forced and obscure, and the alliteration and word play are exasperating. I do agree with Hopkins, however, that the more one reads the poem, the more fascinating and intense it becomes.

From 1875, when the "Deutschland" was written, until the end of 1878, Hopkins completed some sixteen poems. In them the same sacramental view of nature is expressed, and the same view upheld that God must win his creatures to Him. The same technical devices are developed and elaborated. A religious experience of beauty is the central motif of the poems--all beauty leads to God. All the senses are directed to an appreciation of His beauty. During this period, the poetry of Hopkins seems to indicate a personality in balance and in harmony with the world.


In 1877 many of Hopkins' best known poems were written. Many of them seem to be no more than a series of inscapes, but a closer

reading discloses Hopkins' concern with his fellow man and the social structure of his day. The "communist" letters find their counterpart in one of his most beautiful poems, "God's Grandeur." The world, which "is charged with the grandeur of God" goes almost unnoticed because

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with
toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell:
the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

The squalor and misery accompanying material progress results in the loss of vital sensation--foot cannot feel, "being shod." But there is hope, for nature is never spent; and

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah!
bright wings.

This sonnet reveals many examples of the poet's technique. In developing the sonnet form, he was always trying new methods, shifting the emphasis, lengthening or shortening the line, expanding or tightening the musical and semantic phrase, and experimenting with new rhythmic devices. "God's Grandeur," though in standard rhythm, is counterpointed; that is, accent beats are reversed in two feet running. Hopkins marked the following lines with twirls, , for clarification:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God. . . .

and,

 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod. . . .34

34 Gardner, p. 87.

Hopkins produced many of his surprising effects with his use

of rests, or pauses, and he did not hesitate to break the rhythm of a line at its most sensitive position. In this sonnet we have the lines

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

We can recognize, too, many of the mannerisms of the "Deutschland": alliteration in the seventh line, "smudge," "shares," "smell," and "soil"; repetition of the word "trod"; the question in line 4; the use of the colon to replace a conjunction in line 7; and the interjection "ah!" in the last line. Present too, are the interior rhymes, the assonance, the verbal shifts—all enhancing the brilliant imagery.

"The Starlight Night," "Spring," "The Lantern out of Doors," "Pied Beauty," and "Hurrahing in Harvest" were all written in the same year, and all sing the beauty of God, of nature. At the same time man's spirit is probed; his being is laid bare; his soul is sent searching.

Of all the poems written in 1877, Hopkins selected "The Windhover" as his best, and he dedicated it to Christ. It tells of the unseen war in the breast of a humble servant of God; it describes Hopkins' spiritual conflict and his reconciliation in Christ. Although its appeal is immediate, great effort is required for an appreciation of its profound significance. There are two major interpretations of this poem: one by Gardner, the other by William Empson. Since I feel that Gardner's is the more plausible, I shall offer it first.

In the sestet, Hopkins, according to Gardner, holds up for critical judgment two conflicting sets of values. One is symbolized

by the "kingdom of daylight's dauphin," the windhover. The other is represented by the Kingdom of Heaven's "chevalier," Christ. The reconciliation of discordant tendencies in his own personality, the reconciliation between the claims of this life and the claims of the next, between the value and danger of beauty, between the desire for freedom and the desire for subjugation, is resolved in "The Windhover."

"Mastery" and the "achieve of" may elicit admiration, but failure has its own success as exemplified by Christ's life. The word "buckle" as used in the poem, is crucial to its meaning. Gardner suggests three possibilities, (1) buckle within, meaning discipline, (2) buckle to, meaning to labor, (3) buckle under, meaning to sacrifice. A fourth meaning which would give aid and comfort to Empson is disregarded: buckle, to bend, warp, or crumple. At any rate, the result of the first three meanings of the word is a "lovelier," "more dangerous" life. Juxtaposed are the life of spiritual activity and the life of physical activity, and to both the poet responds. But though Hopkins might have been the poet-knight of chivalry, by an act of will he chooses to be the plodding, humble, servant and soldier of Christ. The life of a swooping windhover, beautiful and terrible in action, cannot compare to the disciplined life of the spirit, which is more dangerous since it must fight the powers of evil, and which is more beautiful in its moral purpose. And the "blue-bleak embers," the remains of youth and youthful vigor, when they

Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

The crown of gold and the martyr's blood, images of the crucifixion

suggested by the last words, are the reward for which Hopkins makes the sacrifice.³⁵

³⁵Ibid., pp. 180-184.

Empson, one of the psychological critics, uses "The Windhover" as an example of ambiguity because he feels it reflects a state of indecision on the part of its author, rather than a reconciliation of conflicting desires.

He points out first that the "fire" referred to in the poem may be a reversion to the fire in which Hopkins burnt his early work before becoming a Jesuit. Confronted by the active physical beauty of the bird, Hopkins recognizes that it is the opposite of his life of patient spiritual renunciation. The poet cannot decisively judge which life is superior. According to Empson, the phrase "My heart in hiding" implies that the life of the Windhover is more dangerous, but the last three lines insist that the life of renunciation should be the more lively. Empson admits two meanings of the word "buckle." Buckle may be a military belt buckle which readies the wearer for heroic action, and it may signify the buckling of a bicycle wheel which becomes useless, distorted, and incapable of action. "Chevalier" personifies either physical or spiritual activity. For Empson this is a clear case of the Freudian use of opposites, where two incompatible, but intensely desired modes of life, are spoken of simultaneously in words applying to both. The last line of the poem sums up the poet's conflict, and Empson's case. The "gold" used for the halos of saints stands in opposition to the "gash" and "gall" of their self-tortures as they bleed, "vermillion."³⁶

³⁶William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity (London, 1949), pp. 225-226.

In all fairness to Hopkins, Peters points out that the poem was not dedicated to Christ until some six years after it was composed, and then for the reason that it was Hopkins' finest achievement. Consequently Peters has no sympathy for those who seek hidden meanings in it; he believes it to be simply a reaction to the majestic splendor of the bird in motion.³⁷

³⁷Peters, pp. 85-86.

"The Windhover," written in a rhythm described as "falling paeonic, sprung and outriding," is scamed by Gardner as follows:³⁸

³⁸Gardner, pp. 98-99.

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon,
in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and
striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl
and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding

Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!
Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a
billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!
No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

Hopkins resorts to a curious expedient when he capitalizes the word "AND." In the scansion it is considered a slack syllable, but when read aloud it must be pronounced with speed and stress. By this means, Hopkins enabled a six-stress line to masquerade as a pentameter.³⁹

³⁹Ibid., pp. 99-100.

This poem is notable for its swift succession of independent images which are related primarily only by the poet's habit of thought. The grace and the sovereignty of the falcon are described in terms of "minion," "dauphin," "falcon," and "chevalier," which are words derived from the language of the medieval French courts and from the practice of the chivalric code. In contrast are the words "sillion," "sheer," "plod," and "plough" which exploit a rich country-English vocabulary. The fusion of these two sets of words, the blending of the abstract and the actual, the combination of thought and feeling, all contribute to what is surely an artistic triumph.

Between 1879 and the time Hopkins entered his Tertianship in 1881, he composed sixteen additional poems. These are not centrally

concerned with a sacramental view of nature, nor do they chant the praises of the Lord as freely. This group of poems is concerned primarily with man and with Hopkins' experience as a priest. A greater awareness and tenderness is apparent in such poems as "Felix Randal," "Brothers," "Spring and Fall," and "At the Wedding March." Many of the poems deal with the transience of life, the passing of beauty, and the poet's dedication to God. Included in this group, too, is a poem entitled "Duns Scotus's Oxford" and one dedicated to the musician "Henry Purcell." But the most self-revealing of all the poems is "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo." Unlike "The Windhover," it is a long poem; and two voices, the voice of despair and the voice of hope, are quite clear and separate. The fusion achieved in the earlier poem has been forgone, perhaps lost, and the Golden Echo asks,

. . . O why are we so
haggard at the heart, so care-coiled, care-killed, so fagged,
so fashed, so cogged, so cumbered,

as it seems to reflect Hopkins' own mood of the time. The answer to despair is still God, but a greater effort is required before it can be given.

Between 1882 and 1884 Hopkins wrote a few occasional pieces, mainly to honor the statue of the Virgin at Stonyhurst, and to appeal to popular taste, but they lack the quality of his earlier work.

"Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," written in 1884, foreshadows the "terrible" sonnets of Hopkins' Dublin period. In this poem the fading of the dappled daytime world into night becomes the symbol of the time when one is faced with two inescapable categories: "black, white; right,

wrong." And the poet warns,

. . . ware of a world where but these two tell, each
off the other; of a rack
Where, selfwring, selfstrung, sheathe-and shelterless, thoughts
against thoughts in groans grind.

The poems born out of Hopkins' suffering and desolation are closely associated with his ill health, uncongenial surroundings, and heavy duties, and with a period of mental depression and spiritual aridity. "Written in blood," the "terrible sonnets" include the following poems as they were numbered by Bridges: 40, 41, 44, 45, 46, 47, 50, 51, 69.

The poem to which Bridges gave the title, "Carrion Comfort," Number 40, is one of the most moving and most interesting of Hopkins' sonnets, and is typical of this group. The opening lines are a cry of despair,

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
In me or, most weary, cry I can no more. I can;

But there is one thing left still—hope. He believes that he is suffering for a reason.

Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer
and clear.

And as the poet and the priest assesses his life, he is reminded of what his service to God has meant.

Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed
the rod,
Hand rather, my heart lol lapped strength, stole joy,
would laugh, cheer.

But his service to God was achieved at great cost, and Hopkins asks,

Cheer whom though? the hero whose heaven-handling
flung me, foot trod
Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each

one? That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my
God!) my God.

How expressive are the two uses of the same phrase, "my God," and what tonal values they allow!

The poem numbered 41 offers no hope at all, but death. Beginning

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,

it concludes,

. . . all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

The third of the "terrible sonnets" describes not only the poet's spiritual loneliness, but also the loneliness he feels in Ireland away from his beloved England.

The ninth and tenth line of the forty-fifth sonnet are truly agonizing.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me. . . .

The forty-sixth sonnet asks for,

Patience, hard thing! the hard thing but to pray,
But bid for, Patience is!

In sonnet 47, Hopkins cries out,

My own heart let me more have pity on; let
Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
Charitable; not live this tormented mind
With this tormented mind tormenting yet.

Sonnet 50 is reminiscent of the plea of Job.

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.
Why do simmers' ways prosper? and why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?

Once more the poet takes measure of his life, and ends the poem,

See, banks and brakes
Now, leaved how thick! laced they are again
with fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
them; birds build—but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

Sonnet 51, dedicated to Robert Bridges, is Hopkins' attempt to explain to his friend his lack of poetic output.

I want the one rapture of an inspiration.
O then if in my lagging lines you miss
The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation,
My winter world, that scarcely breathes that bliss
Now, yields, you, with some sighs, our explanation.

In the last of the "terrible sonnets," Hopkins writes,

And I that die these deaths, that feed this flame,
That . . . in smooth spoons spy life's masque mirrored:
tame
My tempests there, my fire and fever fussy.

Perhaps these sonnets may help to answer the question asked at the beginning of this paper: Did Hopkins' life as a Jesuit destroy the poet or enrich the poetry? After the sonnets, Hopkins wrote few poems. In 1886 he wrote only one, and in 1887 he wrote two, "Tom's Garland" and "Harry Ploughman." A few additional poems and fragments round out Hopkins' works, with the exception of one of his last and greatest poems, written during the last year of his life, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection." This poem must enter into any final judgment of his work. In his notes at the end of the 2nd edition of Hopkins' poetry, Bridges quotes from one of Hopkins' letters to him, dated September 25, 1888.

Lately I sent you a sonnet on the Heraclitean Fire, in which a great deal of early Greek philosophical thought was distilled; but the liquor of the distillation did not

taste very greek, did it? The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise. So it must be on every original artist to some degree, on me to a marked degree. Perhaps then more reading would only refine my singularity, which is not what you want. Note, that the sonnet has three codas, not two.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Bridges, ed., pp. 117-118.

The sonnet is also in sprung rhythm, with many outrides and hurried feet. Because the poem is both a culmination of Hopkins' technique and a summing-up of his life, I offer it in its entirety as a conclusion to this chapter.

Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows flaunt forth, then
chevy on an air-
built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs they throng;
they glitter in marches.
Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, wherever an elm
arches,
Shivelights and shadowtackle in long lashes lace, lance, and pair.
Delightfully the bright wind boisterous ropes, wrestles, beats
earth bare
Of yestertempest's creases; in pool and rut peel parches
Squandering ooze to squeezed dough, crust, dust; stances,
starches
Squadroned masks and manmarks treadmire toil there
Footfretted in it. Million-fueled, nature's bonfire burns on.
But quench her bonniest, dearest to her, her clearest-selved spark
Man, how fast his firedint, his mark on mind, is gone!
Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark
Drowned. O pity and indignation! Manshape, that shone
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots black out; nor mark
Is any of him at all so stark
But vastness blurs and time beats level. Enough! the Resur-
rection,
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping, joyless days, dejection.
Across my foundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam. Flesh fade, and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire, leave but ash:
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and

This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal
diamond,

Is immortal diamond.

Chapter VI

His Influence on Modern Poetry

In his love of God, England, and natural beauty, Hopkins was as Victorian as any poet of his generation. But because of his technical originality, because he has so much to offer modern poets, he is equally at home in the twentieth century. Hailed at first by the imagists, he has continued to grow in stature. The extent of his influence may be gauged by examining the work of his contemporaries and those who followed him.

The lyrical poetry of Robert Bridges is distinguished for its delicacy and for the subtleties of its rhythms. Robert Hillyer, in his study of Bridges' poetry, wrote:

Both those who admire and those who dislike the poetry of Bridges agree on one point: that technically he was one of the masters of English verse. His experiments within the tradition are bolder and more informed than most of those outside it. . . . Starting early with Gerard Manley Hopkins and other friends a systematic study of what could be done in English meters without breaking down the instrument, he explored possibilities which, though not so obviously startling as Hopkins' "sprung rhythm" were subtly quite as adventurous. His main impulse came from classical prosody, and his early adaptations of quantity to English metrics have never been

equaled. In his later work, notable in the 'loose Alexandrines' of The Testament of Beauty, he combined with this strong quantitative influence an element wholly derived from our own ancient verse; that is, great liberty in the number of syllables within the single line.¹

¹Louis Untermeyer, ed., Modern British Poetry, (New York, 1950), pp. 47-48.

It is not surprising that the close association of Hopkins and Bridges should have led to similar experimentations. While it may be true that the tradition of old English verse is the ultimate source of their inspiration, yet the correspondence of Hopkins and Bridges indicates that in the matter of rhythm, Hopkins was the leading spirit, Bridges, the somewhat unwilling follower; Hopkins, the bold adventurer, and Bridges, the cautious, doubting, careful refiner. In the following examples, the vigor, vitality, and urgency of Hopkins' poetry is lacking, but the handling of the new rhythm is deft, the strangeness and shocking oddities are eliminated, and what they lack in impact, they make up in lucidity and genteel, old-fashioned charm. That is, if one has never read Hopkins with pleasure.

A Passer-by

Wither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,
That fearest nor sea rising nor sky clouding,
Wither away, fair rover, and what thy Quest?
Ah! soon, when Winter has all our vales opprest,
When skies are cold and misty, and hail is hurling,
Wilt thou glide on the blue Pacific, or rest
In a summer haven asleep, thy white sails furling. . . .

London Snow

When men were all asleep the snow came flying,
In large white flakes falling on the city brown,

Stealthily and perpetually settling and loosely lying,
Hushing the latest traffic of the drowsy town;
Deadening, muffling, stifling its murmurs falling;
Lazily and incessantly floating down and down;
Silently sifting and veiling road, roof and railing;
Hiding difference, making unevenness even,
Into angles and crevices softly drifting and sailing.
All night it fell, and when full inches seven
It lay in the depth of its uncompacted lightness,
The clouds blew off from a high and frosty heaven;
And all woke earlier for the unaccustomed brightness
Of the winter dawning, the strange unheavenly glare:
The eye marveled—marveled at the dazzling whiteness;
The ear hearkened to the stillness of the solemn air;
No sound of wheel rumbling nor of foot falling,
And the busy morning cries came thin and spare.
Then boys I heard, as they went to school, calling;
They gathered up the crystal manna to freeze
Their tongues with tasting, their hands with snow-balling;
Or rioted in a drift, plunging up to the knees;
Or peering up from under the white-mossed wonder,
"O look at the trees!" they cried. "O look at the trees!"
With lessened load, a few carts creak and blunder,
Following along the white deserted way,
A country company long dispersed asunder:
When now already the sun, in pale display
Standing by Paul's high dome, spread forth below
His sparkling beams, and awoke the stir of the day.
For now doors open, and war is waged with the snow;
And trains of somber men, past tale of number,
Tread long brown paths, as toward their toil they go:
But even for them awhile no cares encumber
Their minds diverted; the daily word is unspoken,
The daily thoughts of labor and sorrow slumber
At the sight of the beauty that greets them, for the charm
they have broken.

Hopkins' reaction to these poems is explained in letters to his friend. On February 22, 1879, Hopkins wrote to Bridges concerning "A Passer-by."

The pieces in sprung rhythm—do not quite satisfy me. They do read tentative, experimental; I cannot well say where the thought is distorted by the measure, but that it is distorted I feel. . . . The Passer-by in particular reads not so much like sprung rhythm as that logaedic dignified-doggerel one Tennyson has employed in Maud and since.²

²Abbott, The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges,
p. 71.

His criticism of the second poem is more specific.

October 26, 1880

London Snow is a most beautiful and successful piece. It is charmingly fresh, I do not know what is like it. The rhythm, as I told you, is not quite perfect. . . . You are certainly less at your ease in sprung rhythm. In the snow-piece this has not been a hindrance however, but perhaps has helped it, by making it more original in diction. Truth compels, and modesty does not forbid, me here to say that this volume has at least three real echos . . . of me: I do not wish them away, but they are there. The 'snow-mossed wonder' line recalls 'For though he is under' in the Deutschland, 'O look at the trees' the first line of the Starlight sonnet, and 'throned behind' again comes from the Deutschland. . . . It is easy to see why this is: that is the longest piece extant in sprung rhythm and could not help haunting your memory.³

³Ibid., pp. 111-112.

Although the influence of Hopkins on his contemporaries was limited, the influence of Bridges, one of the oldest members of the 'Georgians', was not. It is most probable that Bridges' experimentations were the ones echoed in Walter de la Mare's The Listeners (1912).

"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;

and in Laurence Binyon's The Airman:

Now at last voyaging a fabulous dominion
Surpassing all the measures of his kind,
He, a free rider of the undulating silences,
Has in himself begotten a new mind;
Made him a companion of the winds of Heaven, travelling
Unpaven streets of cloudy golden snows. . . .⁴

⁴Gardner, p. 248.

Between the publication of Bridges' Shorter Poems (1890) and Hopkins' Poems in 1918, the imagists formulated new poetic goals. 'Free verse', developed naturally from the work of Whitman, seemed to F. S. Flint and Ezra Pound, two of the original members of the Imagist school, the best means of producing new rhythms to express new moods. But there were important differences between vers libre and sprung rhythm as used by Hopkins. Hopkins' rhythm is metre: the lines are measured and the verse patterns are regular. In fact, Louis MacNeice criticized Hopkins for "tying his sprung rhythm to an arbitrary numerical frame," so that every line had a specific number of feet.⁵ The tendency

⁵Ibid., p. 258.

of both rhythms to fall into prose was counteracted by internal and end rhyme, assonance, alliteration, and 'sprung' syntax.

Ezra Pound, whose first poetry appeared in 1909, believed that not enough attention was given to the rhythmic quality of poetry. In The Townsman, July, 1938, he wrote,

In fact I am tempted to put it as a brace of axioms for all poetry: When the metre is bad, the language is apt to be poor. When the metre is good enough it will almost drive out all other defects of language.⁶

⁶Hugh Kenner, The Poetry of Ezra Pound (Norfolk, Conn, n.d.), pp. 109-110.

As one who helped in the revival of old English alliterative verse, Pound experiments with sprung rhythm in his "Seafarer," from Ripostes (1912).

Bitter breast-cares have I abided,
Known on my keel many a care's hold,
And dire sea-surge, and there I oft, spent
Narrow nightwatch nigh the ship's head. . . .⁷

⁷Ezra Pound, Personae (New York, 1926), p. 64.

With time, however, his rhythmic experiments have far outdistanced those of most of his contemporaries. The following lines from "The Return" indicate the subtleties of cadence and beat which he achieved, but which remain within the compass of sprung rhythm:

See, they return; ah, see the tentative
Movements, and the slow feet
The trouble in the pace and the uncertain
Wavering!

and from "The Alchemist":

Midonz, with the gold of the sun, the leaf of the
poplar, by the light of the amber,
Midonz, daughter of the sun, shaft of the tree,
silver of the leaf, light of the yellow of the
amber,
Midonz, gift of the God, gift of the light, gift of
the amber of the sun,
Give light to the metal.⁸

⁸Ibid., pp. 74-75.

This poetry is so different from Hopkins' that at first any resemblance seems forced. But the same influences which shaped Hopkins' verse, were at work on Pound's, so that the similarities are striking, though the mood is quite different. In the first example, the accent is on

the words, "see" and "return" in the first half of the sentence, and on "see" and "tentative" in the second half. The alliteration of the accented syllables is in the Hopkins-old English tradition. The first line and the first word of the second are spoken relatively quickly and are somewhat jerky and unsure in contrast to the last part of the sentence which is slow and liquid.

The second stanza from "The Alchemist" is an example of the quantitative beat, use of repetition, alliteration, assonance and consonance: Midonz, gold, gift; and light, leaf, tree; and the subtlety of yellow, silver, metal; and amber, and daughter. If Pound seems to have gone too far in the intricacies of rhythm, it is because, as he says,

I believe in an absolute rhythm. I believe that every emotion and every phase of emotion has some toneless phrase, some rhythm-phrase to express it. . . . This belief leads to vers libre and to experiments in quantitative verse.⁹

⁹Kanner, p. 112.

It also leads, as in the case of Hopkins, to music. Pound, too, was interested in music, attempted to write it, and his poetry shows its effects.

In all fairness one should consider Pound's techniques, though later in date, collateral with Hopkins' rather than derivative. Both worked from the same sources: Greek choral poetry and old English verse. Pound, however, is a lyric poet; Hopkins, a dramatic poet. T. S. Eliot, on the other hand, indebted as he was to Pound, is far closer to Hopkins in that he too is essentially a dramatic poet. Even their thinking is

closely related. Hopkins stated that he detected sprung rhythm, the rhythm of everyday speech, in Shakespeare. Eliot expands this idea. Shakespeare, he wrote,

was slowly adapting his form to colloquial speech: so that by the time he wrote *Anthony and Cleopatra* he had devised a medium in which everything that any dramatic character might have to say, . . . could be said with naturalness and beauty.¹⁰

¹⁰Sir Herbert Read, The True Voice of Feeling (New York, 1953), p. 140.

He noted that the later plays moved from simplicity towards elaboration, and that Shakespeare experimented "to see how elaborate, how complicated, the music could be made without his characters ceasing to be human beings."¹¹ Eliot, too, experimented in the same way. Murder in the

¹¹Ibid., pp. 140-141.

Cathedral, his first attempt, was new primarily in the use of alliteration and occasional unexpected rhyme. The Family Reunion advanced a further step. Eliot remarked that he hoped "to find a rhythm close to contemporary speech, in which the stresses could be made to come wherever we should naturally put them, in uttering the particular phrase on the particular occasion."¹² What Eliot worked out and what he employed was,

¹²Ibid., p. 143.

as he himself put it:

. . . a line of varying length and varying number of syllables, with a caesura and

three stresses. The caesura and the stresses may come at different places, almost anywhere in the line; the stresses may be close together or well separated by light syllables; the only rule being that there must be one stress on one side of the caesura and two on the other.¹³

¹³Ibid.

The difference, and perhaps the only one, to be noted between Hopkins' sprung rhythm and what Eliot worked out was in the use of the caesura. The caesura is one of the devices used by Hopkins and others to avoid monotony of rhythm. In his Notebook, Hopkins observed that "The more marked the rhythm, whether by quantity or beat the more need of a caesura to break it."¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., p. 114.

In his pageant play, The Rock, it is not surprising that Eliot could turn out the following lines, lines that might easily be attributed to his predecessor.

Moon light and star light, owl and moth light
Glow-worm glowlight on a grassblade.¹⁵

¹⁵Gardner, p. 269.

Herbert Read makes an interesting observation when he points out the similarity of Hopkins and James Joyce in their use of contracted similes or metaphors and in the new combinations they made of existing words.¹⁶ He might also have added that both extracted parallel meanings

¹⁶Ibid., p. 263.

from words, particularly homophones. Both employed archaic words such as "inwit," in place of conscience. Both enjoyed puns and word games. Both men were musicians, and in Joyce's "Anna Livia Plurabelle" from Finnegan's Wake the intricate musical harmonies of alliteration, assonance, and internal rhymes are a counterpart of Hopkins' own verse. One observes, too, sentences ending with the preposition "of," the abrupt punctuation, the poetic stresses and accents. Both poets, too, wrote for the ear, rather than the eye.

Can't hear with the waters of. The chittering
waters of. Flittering bats, fieldmice bawk
talk. Ho! . . . Who were Shem and Shaun the
living sons or daughters of? Night now. Tell
me, tell me, tell me, elm! Telmetale of stem
or stone. Beside the rivering waters of
hitherandthithering waters of. Night!¹⁷

¹⁷James Joyce, Finnegans Wake (New York, 1939), pp. 215-216.

Gardner notices that Gertrude Stein, too, has something in common with Hopkins in her use of repetition, sound relations, and the chance connections of sense brought out of homophones. Two pairs of lines are offered for comparison. The first example in each pair is by Gertrude Stein, the second by Hopkins.

Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea
Susie Asado,
Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea
Susie Asado.
Susie Asado which is a told tray sure.
A lean on the shoe this means slips slips hers. . . .¹⁸

¹⁸Gardner, p. 267.

And from "The Woodlark":

With a sweet joy of a sweet joy,
Sweet, of a sweet, of a sweet joy
Of a sweet—a sweet—sweet—joy.¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid.

In the second pair of lines, the almost hypnotic fascination of a repetitive thought and tone pattern is explored. From Miss Stein we have,

They do say look at it.
To look at it. They will look at it. They will say look
at it.²⁰

²⁰Ibid., p. 268.

In "The Golden Echo" we find,

When the thing we freely forfeit is kept with fonder a care,
Fonder a care kept than we could have kept it, kept
Far with fonder a care (and we, we should have lost it)
finer, fonder
A care kept.—Where kept? Do but tell us where kept,
where.—
Yonder.—²¹

²¹Ibid.

T. S. Eliot uses the same device in "Ash Wednesday," (1930) where it is eloquent of spiritual desolation and indecision in the manner of a chant or dirge.

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope. . . .²²

²²Ibid., p. 269.

During the 30's, Hopkins was "rediscovered," but as a fighter in the struggle of the proletariat. The bird-image, taken from "The Windhover" made a deep impression on many poets and was adopted by Auden and C. Day Lewis as a Communistic symbol of revolutionary idealism. Auden used it in "The Strings' Excitement" and Lewis wrote in "The Magnetic Mountain":

Now to be with you, elate, unshared
My kestrel joy, O hoverer in the wind
Over the quarry furiously at rest
Chaired on shoulders of shouting wind.²³

²³Ibid., p. 276.

In time, Auden's political ideas and his poetic abilities matured. "Look, Stranger," a dramatic monologue, owes more than a little to Hopkins in its rhythm, alliteration, and its half-rhymes. The first stanza is fully illustrative:

Look, stranger, at this island now
The leaping light for your delight discovers,
Stand stable here
And silent be,
That through the channels of the ear
May wander like a river
The swaying sound of the sea.²⁴

²⁴Untermeyer, ed., p. 438.

"Look, Stranger" shows an advance over earlier work which was more frankly imitative:

Me, March, you do with your movements master and rock
With wing-whirl, whale-wallow, silent budding of cell:²⁵

²⁵Gardner, p. 274.

Stephen Spender, whose work was published simultaneously in this country with Auden's, pays tribute to "The Windhover" in "He Will Watch the Hawk" and, like his friend, is drawn to the new rhythms. The opening lines of his poem "The Express" are scanned by Gardner as follows:

After the first powerful plain manifesto,
The black statement of pistons, without more fuss
But gliding like a queen she leaves the station.²⁶

²⁶Ibid., p. 249.

Ronald Bottrall, whose debt is mainly to Pound and Eliot was peculiarly susceptible to the influence of Hopkins in his poem Festivals of Fire, published in 1934:

then how unlace, trace
The flying blaze, maze of hither
Thither, come go? Trumpet dazzles
Raze the path to the castle gate . . . 27

²⁷Ibid., p. 275.

Donald Stauffer, who examined the various versions of "Timberline" by W. W. Gibson, author of Kestrel Edge (1924) and other works, discusses the creation of the lines:

rock peace, rock peace, to grow
red thrifts of lichen rust . . . 28

²⁸Donald A. Stauffer, "Genesis, or The Poet as Maker," in Poets at Work (New York, 1948), p. 58.

in which Hopkins' technique of compression is borrowed with telling effect. The words "rock peace" suggest not only the Rocky Mountains, but also the peace found in their height and isolation; they suggest

piece of rock, or rock formations; and the word "rock" suggests motion, the soothing, tranquil motion of a child rocked in protective arms. Stauffer lists the variants which led to the final lines with their "simultaneous suggestions of emotion, life and death, struggle and peace, the hard cold penury of the timberline."²⁹

²⁹Ibid.

- (1) Here is a rock peace in snow
 . . . for crows / and conies to nest.
- (2) Here is a rock peace that grows dead lichens.
- (3) . . . thrifts of lichen on flint.
- (4) red thrifts of lichen and flint.
- (5) rust thrifts of lichen, dead.

And finally: red thrifts of lichen rust.³⁰ Clearly, Gibson is thoroughly

³⁰Ibid., pp. 58-59.

familiar with both the timberline of the Rockies and with Hopkins.

In 1932 Monk Gibbon published Seventeen Sonnets with the following dedication:

To the Memory
of
Gerard Manley Hopkins

The influence of whose work
will be seen in some if not all.³¹

³¹Gardner, p. 276.

The first sonnet, called "The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins," opens thus:

Incomparable treasure, heart's blood spilt
Out of heart's anguish, high heart, all-hoping heart,
Child-innocent, clean heart, of guile or guilt,
But heart storm-ried, fire-purged, heaven-chastened . . . 32

³²Ibid.

Another devotee of Hopkins was Elizabeth Madox Roberts. The second stanza of I, Adam (1939) has a familiar sound:

"What is it?" God said, and he set a thing on a stone.
Hooked-beak, have-take, swoop-snatch, and swift talk
Of a short, crooked claw, and I said,
"It is the hawk."³³

³³Arthur MacGillivray, "Hopkins and Creative Writing," in Immortal Diamond, p. 54.

It is not possible to capture every echo of Hopkins, but any list would have to include the following poems which span the thirties, forties and fifties:

"The Falconer of God" by William Rose Benet (1914)
"The Poor Man's Pig" by Edmund Blunden (1920)
"High Falcon" by Leonie Adams (1929)
"Before the Sea" by Randall Swingler (1933)
"A Dray Horse" by T. H. White (1933)
"Before the Brave" by Kenneth Patchen (1936)
"These Things" by Francis Maguire (1937)
"Poems for my Daughter" and "Valediction to my Contemporaries"
by Horace Gregory (1930-1940)
"Stormy Day" by W. R. Rodgers (1941)
"Seagulls" by Clive Sansom (1943)
"Modification of Landscape" by Robert Penn Warren (1954-1956)
"Pilots, Man your Planes" by Randall Jarrell (1955)

To bring this list more nearly up to date, I shall quote from three poems written in 1959. The first is by Delmore Schwartz, entitled "A Little Morning Music," and it was published in The New Yorker on April 18, 1959. The third stanza begins:

The darkened ones turn slightly in the faint light of the
small morning,
Grow gray or glow green—
They are gray and green at once
In the pale cool of blue light;

And the poem ends with this line:

Gazing and blazing, blessing and possessing all vividness
and all darkness.

Poetry (November, 1959) published "Battle Piece" by Ben Belitt. This
excerpt is from Part V.

One, with a trident, in the ammoniac
Dung of the stable, waits for the bluefly's epiphany; One
Turns from a burnish of water, the millennial
Barrow that honors a monster,
And enters a labyrinth; one, in a havoc of horses,
Harrows the world's rage with his lance's point
For a chapel, a chalice, the cannibal kiss of a brother.

The title poem of Babette Deutsch's book, Coming of Age supplies these
lines:

From that close cave, kicking away its riches,
Who, fighting toward air, who, crying, comes?
Coming, daring it, who abruptly pitches
Into a dazzle that chills, a gulf that drums?

Hopkins' influence is a continuing one, and not only in poetry.

In 1959 Spinster, a novel by Sylvia Ashton-Warner, was published. Each
chapter of the novel is headed by a direct quotation from Hopkins, and
it is evident that her prose style borrows in its abruptness and its
use of ellipses from the work of the poet.

Edith Sitwell, poet and critic and one of the major voices in
poetry today, came under the influence of Yeats, Hopkins, Wilfred Owen
and T. S. Eliot. From each she borrowed. She chooses her words not
merely for their meaning but also for the emotional effect of their sound.
Metrically, she has on the whole been traditional avoiding the sort of

free verse which uses prose rhythm. Until recently she has used traditional four-stress or five-stress lines of standard English poetry. Since 1940 Miss Sitwell has taken to using sprung rhythm, as in the poem called "Tears":

The rocks of great diamonds in the midst of the clear wave . . . 34

³⁴Arthur Waley, "A Note on Edith Sitwell's Poetry" in A Celebration for Edith Sitwell, ed. Jose Garcia Villa (New Jersey, 1948), p. 85.

and in "Most Lovely Shade":

Deep in the dark secret of the rose . . . 35

³⁵Ibid.

and in "Green Song":

With the bird-notes of Doom in the egg, and Fate in the
bud that is flushed with the world's fever.³⁶

³⁶Ibid., p. 84.

Although Miss Sitwell uses sprung rhythm, she is well aware of the dangers of blind imitation. Commenting on the influence of Hopkins on younger poets, she writes:

They produce exterior and therefore unliving rhythms, instead of rhythms which live in, under, and over, the lines. Imitations of them have resulted, too, in a complete loss of melody, arising from falsified, clumsy, or two thick vowel-schemes, clumsy and huddled-up assonance-patterns, useless alliterations, and a meaningless accumulation of knotted consonants.³⁷

³⁷Peters, pp. xii-xiii.

Louis MacNeice, whose own poetry was influenced by Hopkins, maintains that

Hopkins' influence on younger poets today has often been unfortunate. A close imitation of his manner is dangerous because both his rhythms and his syntax were peculiarly appropriate to his own unusual circumstances and his own tortured but vital personality.³⁸

³⁸Ibid., p. xiii.

There is no doubt that in the hands of inexperienced writers a close imitation of Hopkins is disastrous. But the same thing might be said about a slavish imitation of any well-known artist. At the same time, it is not far from the truth to say that every professional poet writing in English today is familiar with Hopkins, is influenced by him either in a positive way or in a negative way— that is, as Hopkins was influenced by others: he read them and did otherwise! T. S. Eliot wrote that Hopkins was easily imitated, but not easily adaptable.³⁹ This state-

³⁹T. S. Eliot, "After Strange Gods," Nation, March 23, 1946, pp. 347-348.

ment may have been true in 1946, but it is not true today. Sprung rhythm is named, recognized, and in current use. It is standard technique for such poets as Marianne Moore, Muriel Rukeyser, Archibald MacLeish, Stephen Spender, Auden, and even T. S. Eliot. In fact it is peculiarly adaptable to the nervous rhythm of twentieth century living with its wars, machines, and space missiles. In its timing, its abruptness, its violent intensity, its pauses and elisions, and in its repetition, sprung rhythm has its counterpart in modern musical compositions and in "rock and roll."

Chapter VII

Evaluation

There are many objections to the poetry of Hopkins. Many believe that the Kenyon critics overestimated his work. In general his critics say that his range was too narrow, that his poems were more of the same rather than something new, that there was no development. They point out that Hopkins was verbose and self-indulgent in his use of images. They refer to the peculiarities of some of his rhymes. He is said to have put too much dependence on sound for sound's sake. He is charged with substituting description to justify emotion, rather than using action. His originality is challenged; his sources are questioned. Even as a religious poet he is open to criticism. Eliot considers him inferior to Villon and Baudelaire, although the Jesuits who have written about Hopkins have come to his defence insofar as religious doctrine or Hopkins' religious sincerity is open to question.

In his long poem, Essay on Rime, Karl Shapiro writes:

Hopkins' influence, on the other hand
Is actually small, in metric as in belief.
Except for such devices as his end-rime,
Which hints at the phonology of Greek,
His impress is not great. The dissonant vowels
Have caught us, but is it not fortuitous

That Hopkins and not Emily Dickinson
Is credited with this invention? The chief
Value of Hopkins' prosody to our rime
Lies in a prophecy. He foresaw a break
In rising rhythm, and stamped the count of ear
With unmistakable boldness on our minds.¹

¹Karl Shapiro, Essay on Rime (New York, 1945), p. 350.

That there are glaring faults in Hopkins' technique and manner is obvious to every reader. Bridges was the first to point out some of them. First, the use of ellipses is eccentric in such lines as "guess the beauty (that has) been" and "comfort (that) serves in a whirlwind." Second, inversion as a device to allow for end rhymes is both old-fashioned and cumbersome. "Fair thy fling," "thy creature dear," "mighty a master," and the lines of "Spring and Fall,"

Leaves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?

are examples of inversion misused. Third, Hopkins' forced rhymes disturb and distract the reader: "communion--boon he on," "eternal--burn all," "England--mingle and," "Irish--sire he / Shares" and "overbend us--end, as/-tray."

Hopkins' faults must, however, be balanced by his virtues. His use of alliteration was masterful: "Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh," "feel thy finger and find thee," "drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple" and in poem 63:

And the sunlight sidled, like dewdrops, like dandled
diamonds
Through the sieve of the straw of the plait.

The critic T. C. Wilson, commenting on poetic diction, praises

Hopkins for his precision of phrase, his extension of the functions and subject matter of verse to include images from contemporary life, and for his use of the rhythms of everyday speech.²

²MacGillivray, in Immortal Diamond, p. 70.

Helen C. White adds:

He may try to say too many things at once, he may demand a wider span of application than the usual reader is accustomed to give, but he has the gift of projecting his state of mind to the point where it stirs all the sensibilities of his reader.³

³Ibid.

The emotional intensity aroused in the Hopkins controversy on the part of those who praise him and those who blame him in itself testifies to Hopkins' power as a major poet. And when all the critics have had their say, the poetry remains; it cannot be ignored, forgotten, or destroyed. It enriches the world we live in and it will continue to do so as long as poetry is written and read.

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