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Gerard Manley Hopkins: the struggle for poetic vision

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INTRODUCTION

I undertook to study Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry hoping to find a common thread running through the poems, or a relationship of all of their themes and meanings to one another; I wanted, in short, to uncover and delineate a common spirit at the center of the poetry, in order to clarify and amplify the meaning of some individual poems, and thereby to determine the nature of his poetic vision as a whole.

The development of Hopkins' poetic vision had everything to do with his spiritual life; he wrote poetry to narrate and explore his and the world's relationship to God. In studying that poetry closely I have realized that the impetus behind his poetry is also the force in his life that drew him to his religious outlook and commitment. Much of the literary world has accepted Hopkins' poetry as the by-product of a conflict between aesthetic and ascetic (religious) attitudes in Hopkins which have been perceived as polar opposites. I am convinced of the presence and importance of both of these attitudes in Hopkins' poetry, but I believe that the relationship between them is not chiefly competitive, but dynamic. The dynamism created by these two attitudes working simultaneously is the origin of both Hopkins' artistic energy and enthusiasm, and his religious dedication. This dynamic relationship is fueled by Hopkins' own nature; he was naturally assiduous, and

was prone to self-scrutiny in a continual quest for integrity of motives. He was as energetic in his creation of poetry as he was in his pursuit of spiritual wholeness, because both of these activities he conducted in the same spirit, out of his faith in an immanent God who is eternally present and active in Creation.

The unifying element of the seemingly opposite priestly and poetic pursuits was Hopkins' desire to arrive at, and live according to, a vision of God that was consistent with this intuitive perception of an immanent God. Hopkins grew up loving beauty. What he came to believe that substantiated his love was that all beauty is ultimately God, and is only beauty because it is God-made and God-endorsed. All of the major life decisions that Hopkins made were moves in the direction of this God-in-the-world vision: his early commitment to religious principles began the process; his conversion to Roman Catholicism furnished him with the tools of sacramentality; his decision to become a priest confirmed his religious life direction; his choice of Jesuitism gave him Ignatian theories about the goodness of worldly things upon which to anchor his faith.

Still, there was a constant tension present in Hopkins, a constant questioning and examination of the harmony of his life. Although he reached a time of clarity when he seemed to have arrived at the vision of God he had always sought, the clarity would not remain. It seems that the very self-monitoring, the very awareness which had brought him to his vision would not

allow him to stay there; he came to worry and fear that the vision of God he had finally reached had come to be more self-focused than God-focused.

The development (and clouding) of Hopkins' vision of God is the subject, meaning and common thread running through his poetry, and thus, with the help of some biographical data, we can use the poetry to trace, or illustrate the progress of that vision. What careful study of Hopkins' poems reveals in the context of his biography, is that it was not aestheticism and asceticism which were at odds in Hopkins' life; rather, his struggle issued from the conflict of faith with self, the struggle to let his vision of an immanent, personal God not be confounded by his excessive moral scrupulosity, which made him heed too much the limits of conventional, Victorian Christian standards.

In this study, I will trace the development and history of Hopkins' struggle to realize and live by a vision of an immanent God, using as the gauge of his progress the poems, which are the clearest expressions of Hopkins' heart. I will illustrate the chronological progression of this vision in the poetry, and discuss specific poems in terms of their places in the history of Hopkins' life as a poet and a priest. I will also pay some degree of attention to linguistic innovations in the poetry, since these are manifestations of Hopkins' liberation from certain formal constraints made by the conventions of prosody in his time.

PUBLICATION HISTORY[1]

The circumstances out of which Gerard Manley Hopkins emerged as a significant literary figure are somewhat unusual, and some general information regarding the history of his published works will aid the reader in understanding Hopkins' literary reputation.

Hopkins died in 1889, and until 1918 virtually no one in the literary world had heard of him, except his long-time friend and confidant Robert Bridges, who had become Poet Laureate of Great Britain in 1913. In 1918, Bridges compiled an edition of Hopkins' poetry from original manuscripts of poems which Hopkins had sent to Bridges throughout his lifetime. Bridges selected for the First Edition poems which Bridges believed Hopkins would have been most likely to approve for publication. The poems in this edition came chiefly from the group now known as the "mature poems" (pieces written after 1876), though Bridges included a few early fragments. This First Edition was published in a small quantity (750 copies), which took ten years to sell: "Many reviewers," W.H. Gardner observes, "regarded the book as a gracious though rather costly monument to the unfulfilled talent of the Poet Laureate's pious and ingenious friend" (Gardner, Poems xiii). Slowly, however, critics began to recognize Hopkins' work as valuable in its own right, and by 1930 enough interest in Hopkins had arisen

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[1] The source for all publication history information is The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 4th ed., edited by W.H. Gardner, pp. xiii-xvii.

to warrant the publication of an expanded collection of his poems. Charles Williams was the editor of this Second Edition, which added sixteen of the earlier poems to the Bridges edition; Williams chose these additional pieces in consultation with Bridges.

In 1948, W.H. Gardner published the Third Edition of poems. Gardner had been invited to do so (presumably by the publisher of the earlier editions) upon the grounds that the earlier editions were too limited to serve the growing general and critical interest in Hopkins. This interest had been sparked by the 1930 edition, and had resulted in the publication of three volumes of Hopkins' letters and a volume of his journals and notes. Humphrey House, the editor of the journals and notes, had also published a selection of Hopkins's early unfinished poems (which Bridges had chosen to exclude from the first two editions) in 1937. Gardner had been asked (also presumably by the publisher) to include in the Third Edition "as many of the unfinished poems and verse-fragments as seemed, at that stage, worthy of collective presentation" (Gardner, Poems, 4th ed. xiv). In the preface to the Fourth Edition, Gardner notes his initial hesitation about including the fragments in the Third Edition:

> Although I was at first reluctant to see the comparatively few finished or unfinished poems of Hopkins's maturity submerged in a mass of less significant fragments, I decided that the intrinsic merit or biographical interest of much of the unrevised verse did in fact warrant our admitting a considerable portion of it (but by no means all) into the Poems.
>
> (xiv)

Following the publication of the Third Edititon in 1948, interest in Hopkins continued to spread. The Fourth Edition (1963) was published to answer the desire of critics and students to read everything that Hopkins had ever written. It includes every bit of verse that can be attributed with reasonable certainty to Hopkins.[2] W.H. Gardner edited the Fourth Edition, with the assistance of N.H. MacKenzie, who had done voluminous research in the poetry of Hopkins, using the original manuscripts to detect textual errors which had found their way into the first three editions.

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND[3]

The central foci of this study of Gerard Manley Hopkins are first, his life as a poet, and second, his life as a man of Christian faith, to the extent to which this contributed to his life as as poet. Both of these foci are informed by the issue of his strong faith in conflict with his scrupulosity. It is important to substantiate an examination of the purely literary aspects of Hopkins with whatever biographical information is relevant to this major issue. Although the main body of the paper focuses

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[2] The Fourth Edition has come to be accepted as the definitive edition of Hopkins' poetry, owing to its completeness. Therefore all citations of the poetry will be made by page number only, and taken from this edition unless otherwise noted.

[3] In compiling biographical information about Hopkins, I have discovered that often various accounts of events in his life are mutually corroborating. Where I have included information which is without dispute among Hopkins scholars, no note indicating source will be provided. I will only indicate sources for information which is exclusive to a particular biographer.

upon the poetry and Hopkins' life at the time he wrote it, some early biography may help to show the context of his poetic and spiritual growth. The background provided below documents the normality of Hopkins' childhood surroundings, but it also helps to establish that his family at least provided him with the basis for both his artistic awareness and his interest in Christian faith.

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born at Stratford in Essex on July 28, 1844, the first child of Kate and Manley Hopkins. Hopkins' family was a conventional Victorian one, and reasonably well off. Manley Hopkins, Gerard's father, was a successful businessman who ran a marine insurance firm, and also held the position of Consul-General for Hawaii. Manley Hopkins was also interested in literature and history, and wrote several works for publication, among them a history of Hawaii and several volumes of verse. His verse collections were apparently well-meaning but mediocre: they "showed sensibility without much originality or capacity for development" (Bergonzi 1). Humphrey House was reported to observe of them that they showed "what happens to a man who cultivates poetry without the necessary leaven of originality" (Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins, 2:7). Gerard Manley Hopkins' mother, Kate Hopkins, was not a writer but was well-educated in literature and music, and in later years took an active interest in her son's poetry (Bergonzi 2). Manley Hopkins's sister Annie was also an aesthetic influence upon the family; she was an amateur archeologist and an accomplished painter and musician.

Presumably the intellectual atmosphere of the Hopkins household was a lively one: most of Hopkins' eight siblings demonstrated active interest in aesthetic pursuits; two of his brothers became well-known commercial artists, and one of his sisters was an exceptionally talented musician (Bergonzi 2). Hopkins himself was accomplished in drawing and music; in both of these disciplines he was tutored at home in the years before he was sent to school at age ten. All of the Hopkins children grew up with literature, music and art as a way of life. Manley Hopkins' bent for poetry was certainly a direct influence upon his son Gerard, and father and son are known to have talked often about poetic and artistic subjects; Manley Hopkins continued to send his poems to Gerard for comment into Gerard's adulthood (Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins, 2:6).

Gerard Hopkins was sent to Highgate School, a few miles from the Hopkins home, to become a boarding student, in 1854. The young Hopkins was slightly built and somewhat frail, but was well-liked by his classmates (Bergonzi 3), and possessed a generally easy-going temperament. He was clever and precocious, but still sociable and popular; he was competent at sports but showed no great love of them. He was not particularly pious in his youth, but while at school he had read from the New Testament every night, in fulfillment of a promise he had made to his mother.

The Hopkins' were moderate High Church Anglicans, and Manley Hopkins was conventional in his religious observance. He was

involved in church matters (he taught Sunday school), without being overzealous. Kate Hopkins was a devout contemplative Christian, and seems to have been the chief source of her children's religious interests, while Manley Hopkins was the source of their artistic ones (Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins, 2:2). Gerard Manley Hopkins was not the only member of the family to choose a religious vocation; his sister Milicent became an Anglican nun.

During the years of his primary schooling, Gerard Hopkins was a very good student and the frequent recipient of academic awards. He had an early attraction to rigorous self-discipline, and even resolved to abstain from liquids for a week at some point in his teens, in order to test his endurance. It was at Highgate that Hopkins first met R.W. Dixon, who would later become his chief spiritual counselor and longtime correspondent. Dixon was a seminarian during Hopkins's Highgate years, and spent some time there as junior master. Although their friendship did not begin until some years later, Dixon remembered the young Hopkins as "a pale young boy, very light and active, with a very meditative and intellectual face ..." (Bergonzi 5).

In 1863 Hopkins left Highgate to begin his education at Balliol, Oxford. His goal was the acquisition of sound scholarshi which would prepare him for a career in either art or religion. Much of his activity at Oxford centered around religion, possibly because he was feeling a dissatisfaction with his position as a member of the Anglican Church. Since he had been reared in a

High Anglican atmosphere, Hopkins had a predilection for the ritualistic and aesthetic aspects of the Church, and made most of his Oxford friends through his involvement in Anglo-Catholic societies at the university. The repercussions of the Oxford Movement which had arisen in the 1830's were still very strongly felt at Oxford. Hopkins was influenced by people who had been directly involved in that movement, mainly E.B. Pusey, who was an original Oxford Movement figure still at the university when Hopkins began there.

Hopkins's diaries for 1863-66 show that he had many interests other than religious ones. The entries reveal his fascination with words and linguistic constructions. They often contain lists of families of words, along with speculative notes about their possible derivations. These diaries also contain drafts of his early poems, and a very occasional note about his state of mind or spiritual health. After 1866, Hopkins seems to have decided to change his method of diary-keeping: virtually all references to his 'inner' spiritual life disappear from his journal.[4] According to researchers,[5] about this time he began to keep spiritual notes in a separate volume, to which he seems

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[4] All references to the 'diaries' denote Hopkins's early diaries from his schooldays and Oxford, before 1866. Personal records which he kept after 1866 are referred to as the 'journals'.

[5] For a complete account of the ultimate whereabouts of Hopkins' diaries and journals, see Journals and Papers, pp. xiv-xxv. The extant diaries and journals contain no passages that specifically address matters of his personal spirituality.

to be referring when he speaks of 'my meditation papers' or the 'spiritual diary.' Hopkins may have destroyed this volume himself (House and Storey, xiv). The most valuable contribution the early diaries make to the picture of Hopkins as a young adult, aside from the early poems themselves, is the repeated evidence of Hopkins' keen bent for observation and detail, and his incredibly curious mind.

It is difficult to estimate how early Hopkins began entertaining thoughts of conversion to Roman Catholicism, and even more difficult to determine his exact reasons for doing so, because of the scarcity of comments on the matter in his diaries. His first recorded observance of the Sacrament of Confession was in March of 1865, and at that time he had not yet officially converted to Roman Catholicism.

THE POEMS

EARLY POEMS TO 1868

Gerard Manley Hopkins converted to Roman Catholicism in 1866, and the poems he wrote before he entered the order of the Society of Jesus are concerned primarily with the issue of his conversion and his growing desire to live a life completely dedicated to the service of God. In the early poems, Hopkins narrates and explores the implications of living a vowed life within the realm of Christian orthodoxy. In his Oxford years, Hopkins had aligned himself with the Tractarians, who approached Christianity dogmatically, emphasizing the literal or factual truth of the Scriptures. The Tractarians' initial cause had been to define the historical and theological basis for Christianity (Fulweiler 96), and this intellectual approach to faith was attractive to Hopkins. In addition, the Tractarian focus on the origin of Christian faith may have appealed to Hopkins' constant desire to get to the deepest roots of matters.

Hopkins chose to convert to Roman Catholicism not for aesthetic reasons but for sacramental ones.[6] The concept of sacrament provides a unique approach to Christianity because sacraments, in Catholicism, are outward manifestations of an inner presence of

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[6] Hopkins himself disclaimed the aesthetic attractiveness of Roman Catholicism in a letter to his father: "I am surprised you shd. say fancy and aesthetic tastes have led me to my present state of mind; these wd. be better satisfied in the Church of England, for bad taste is always meeting one in the accessories of Catholicism" (Abbot, Further Letters 93).

God. The conventional, celebrated sacraments of Catholicism may not have been overtly much different from Anglican sacraments, but in true Tractarian fashion, Hopkins sought the authentic source of sacramentality, and found it in Roman Catholicism. Hopkins' mature theological outlook would extend the traditional concept of sacrament, that of God especially present in some earthly sign or symbol, until he came to believe and profess a theologically-based vision of God present in all things.

Many of the early poems reveal Hopkins' discomfort with the concept of a transcendent God which, according to Fulweiler, was predominant in Victorian Christianity. In Letters From the Darkling Plain, he suggests that the historical influence of the Enlightenment caused a trend in theology which removed God from the daily workings of His creation:

> If [in post-seventeenth-century thought] reality was "out there," independent of human formulation, it followed that God also was "out there" or "up there," remote and independent of covenantal relations with His people. He became the gifted Artisan who constructed the intricate machinery of the universe. He was no more a part of the inner life of His creation than a jeweler was a part of a clock he had designed.
>
> (Fulweiler 92)

If God is perceived as distant, then man's role may be perceived as passive, for if there is no hand of God acting in the world, there is no call made to man, and hence no need for man to make an active response to God's presence. "Heaven-Haven," a poem begun during Hopkins' Oxford days, is a powerful reflection

upon the dichotomy between the passive, detached approach to faith and the engaged, involved one:

Heaven-Haven

A nun takes the veil

I have desired to go
Where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be
Where no storms come,
Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
And out of the swing of the sea.

(Poems 19)

The only syntactical ambiguities present in this poem occur in the last line, where it is unclear whether 'out of the swing of the sea' modifies 'the green swell' or 'I' which occurs at the beginning of the second stanza. The more likely of the two alternatives is the former, by virtue of the closer proximity of the last line to 'green swell' than to 'I.' Even assuming this, the phrase 'out of' in the last line could mean 'issuing forth from' as easily as 'away from:' hence, there is an unresolved ambiguity in the poem's closing which depends on the meaning of the metaphor of the sea. Since the imagery up to the last line is earth-related (the mention of lilies in l. 4 tends to suggest a meadow or pasture, e.g., 'the lilies of the field'), it seems more likely that the 'green swell' in stanza 2 is earth green rather than sea green. On this basis it can be asserted that 'the swing of the sea' represents a chaos which is contrary to

the speaker's wish for solace, and thus the 'green swell' he desires is a grassy hill which is not near the sound of the sea's roar.

This short poem is the latest of three versions of a poem whose first version, entitled "Rest," appears in Hopkins's early diary of July 1864 (House and Storey 33). The subtitle, like the title of the other extant version ("Fair Havens - The Nunnery"), more than suggests Hopkins's leanings toward a religious vocation. In this poem we see Hopkins entertaining a vision of rest that he identifies with the taking of religious vows.

Although a desire for a place of pastoral, natural ease and quiet refuge was characteristic of Hopkins, his awareness of 'duty' was also a strong facet of his character, and at times in conflict with the desire for peace.

On the surface, this poem appears to be only a few lines of musing, the speaker's momentary lapse into a dream of peace and safety. The peace Hopkins desires in this poem is wholly passive: but his distrust of the validity of such a state remained an issue throughout his life (See "Peace", in Poems 85: in this "mature" poem Hopkins has acquired the knowledge that "when Peace here does house/He comes with work to do, he does not come to coo ...").

The second half of "Rest" (the first version of "Heaven-Haven") presents the sense of duty, or need for engagement, which opposes the speaker's initial wish for rest and passivity:

I must hunt down the prize
Where my heart lists.
Must see the eagle's bulk, render'd in mists,
Hang of a treble size.

Must see the waters roll
Where the seas set
Towards wastes where round the ice-blocks tilt and fret
Not so far from the pole.

or

Must see the green seas roll
Where waters set
Towards those wastes where the ice-blocks tilt and fret
Not so far from the pole.

1864
(Poems 128)

The parallel imagery of the two halves of this poem serves to accentuate the dichotomy presented here: by describing the passive and the active approaches to spirituality in similar images, Hopkins emphasizes the contrast between the two attitudes. The recurrence of the adjective `green,' this time describing the sea, sets up an opposition between the meadow and the sea, representing the speaker's conflicting desires for rest and for action.

Although Hopkins wrote "Heaven-Haven" long before his decision to enter religious life, the poem suggests some of Hopkins' thoughts about such a decision. Although it is only God who provides the peace he desires, and it is only by complete dedication to God that he can align himself with that peace, such a vocation will require also that he face the turbulence of living and the paradox his vocation implies by its demand that he live in society,

though it be "where the ice-blocks tilt and fret." That is, in "hunting down the prize," Hopkins realizes that he is likely to encounter issues that trouble him, including perhaps his own sinfulness and imperfection, the insensitivity of the world to the workings of God, and other worldly weaknesses. There seems to be a note of assurance in this poem, however, that Hopkins will be able to "hunt down the prize" as long as he remains "Not so far from the pole," close to the center of things, close to God.

The significance of the image of the 'eagle's bulk' in the fragment is not entirely clear. The eagle is perhaps a symbol for Christ (Hopkins' later poem "The Windhover" presents Christ in a similar image: see Gardner, Poems 69). Christ's being 'render'd in mists' suggests the difficulty that one might have in trying to remain focused upon Him in the course of one's daily life, a task Hopkins anticipates as part of his calling. His vision of the place outside of the 'haven of heaven' as a frigid wasteland in stanza 4 completes his formation of the image opposite the green meadow of "Heaven-Haven".

"Heaven-Haven," in the early form presented above, sets up an important opposition that is an issue in Hopkins' early adulthood: he associates peace and beauty with a religious vocation, but at the same time he is aware that living out that vocation in the world involves struggle. Hopkins would later find an answer to this difficulty by learning how to see all beauty as a manifestation of the Incarnate Lord, and all struggles as originating from his

as originating from his own inability to keep the idea of God present in all things foremost in his mind.

In this period, before Hopkins began making the all-important decisions that directed his poetic vision toward the liberation provided by a belief in an immanent God, he entertained ideas about his own growing religious vocation which were squarely within the perameters of conventional Christian dedication. "The Habit of Perfection" is a poem in which Hopkins invites self-sacrifice as a means to piety.

The Habit of Perfection

Elected Silence, sing to me
And beat upon my whorled ear,
Pipe me to pastures still and be
The music that I care to hear.

Shape nothing, lips; be lovely-dumb:
It is the shut, the curfew sent
From there where all surrenders come
Which only makes you eloquent.

Be shelled, eyes, with double dark
And find the uncreated light:
This ruck and reel which you remark
Coils, keeps, and teases simple sight.

Palate, the hutch of tasty lust,
Desire not to be rinsed with wine:
The can must be so sweet, the crust
So fresh that come in fasts divine!

Nostrils, your careless breath that spend
Upon the stir and keep of pride,
What relish shall the censers send
Along the sanctuary side!

O feel-of-primrose hands, O feet
That want the yield of plushy sward,
But you shall walk the golden street
And you unhouse and house the Lord.

And, Poverty, be thou the bride
And now the marriage feast begun,
And lily-coloured clothes provide
Your spouse not labored-at nor spun.

January, 1866
(Poems 31-2)

The conflict in this poem is between its ostensible statements and the language in which those statements are expressed. The language itself is lushly sensual (e.g., "What relish shall the censers send/Along the sanctuary side!", phrases like "plushy sward" and "not to be rinsed with wine"), but Hopkins uses it to describe the denial of his own senses. He claims to be desiring higher things than sensual indulgence; he is in word striving for that which is greater than "the yield of plushy sward" or "tasty lust," but he indulges his senses in the very act of denying them, by using such evocative diction.

In this poem, Hopkins is confident that the call to his vocation is genuine, and he expresses his desire to fulfill that call in the most enthusiastic of terms. But it is clear that at this early stage, the sensuality of the material world, which his is so sure he is denying in this poem, is a force from which he cannot escape, and probably one which he would rather not deny completely. Although this poem marks Hopkins' approach to his religious vocation, it also demonstrates the beginning of the tension created by his need to reconcile the values of aestheticism and asceticism within himself. Here, in his youth, he appears triumphantly sure of his ability to leave the world of worldly

beauty behind. Later he would find that this confidence was quite naive.

In an untitled poem written in the year before "The Habit of Perfection," Hopkins expresses in less sacramental imagery the same confidence which appears in "The Habit of Perfection." Hopkins wrote this earlier poem, 'Let me be to Thee as the circling bird,' in October 1865, evidently as a private reflection on his decision to convert to Roman Catholicism, and probably as a prelude to his decision to join the Jesuits as well.

> Let me be to Thee as the circling bird,
> Or bat with tender and air-crisping wings
> That shapes in half-light his departing rings,
> From both of whom a changeless note is heard.
> I have found my music in a common word,
> Trying each pleasurable throat that sings
> And every praised sequence of sweet strings,
> And know infallibly which I preferred.
> The authentic cadence was discovered late
> Which ends those only strains that I approve,
> And other science all gone out of date
> And minor sweetness scarce made mention of:
> I have found the dominant of my range and state--
> Love, O my God, to call Thee Love and Love.
>
> October 1865
> (Poems 28)

Most of the difficulty which arises in sorting out the meaning of this sonnet is associated with Hopkins' use of technical musical terms in his system of imagery. The tone of the poem is positive, and Hopkins' purpose in writing it was to express his confidence and faith that his decision to convert was right.

This poem contains none of the references to conventional church ritual and practice (fasts, censers, housing the Lord, etc.)

found in "The Habit of Perfection." Instead Hopkins uses an extended musical metaphor to express his conviction that God, `the dominant of my range and state,' is at the center of his life. Here Hopkins is glad that he has `found his music in a common word'. The `common word' he has found is Love, and he has found his purpose, which is to name his God Love, or to recognize as God all things that are Love.

The musical references in the poem are plays on words, and they set the optimistic tone for the poem. Hopkins uses the term `authentic cadence' to refer to his liberating discovery of truth in Roman Catholicism; in music, an authentic cadence is the most commonly-used cadence for the end of a passage or movement. It consists of a chord progression ending with a tonic chord, immediately preceded by the dominant chord of the same key. Such a progression always alerts the Western ear to the finishing of a section, and it characteristically evokes a pleasant sensation of closure or resolution. In using that term, Hopkins indicates the satisfaction he feels at the time he is writing this piece. His decision to use the term also gives him an opportunity to play on the literal, non-musical meaning of the adjective `authentic,' which calls to mind the claims of Catholicism to be the one, true, authentic Church.

Similarly, in `the dominant of my range and state,' `dominant' refers musically to the chord which, along with the tonic chord after it, comprises the authentic cadence; the non-musical meaning

of 'dominant' metaphorically implies a role of strength and importance. In this case the literal, non-musical meaning of the word strengthens and corroborates the meaning that the musical image sets up; 'dominant' works equally well in its musical and non-musical applications.

In the evolution of Hopkins' thinking about the role of conventional Christianity in his life, this poem shows a very young Hopkins who is sure of his calling but has not yet considered its implications. Although it is very likely that Hopkins felt at this time that the "sequence of sweet strings" that he "knew infallibly" that he preferred was to be an orthodox form of faith, the language and tone of this poem show his innovative spirit and natural sense of freedom: he daringly uses musical imagery in a far more technical way than might be acceptable, and he has already begun to invent linguistic constructs (e.g., the compound "air-crisping" in l. 2). This poem is stylistically reminiscent of his later, mature writing and exhibits the same spirit of familiarity with God's worldly manifestations (i.e., music) as the later poetry of his mature vision.

Although the years directly preceding Hopkins' conversion and religious vocation were essentially a time of reaching conviction about his faith, he was naturally prone to self-doubt even early in his adulthood. In 1865 Hopkins had not yet solidified his vision of an immanent God, and he was therefore vulnerable t

self-doubts and recrimination when they occurred. This is evident in the following poem:

> See how Spring opens with disabling cold,
> And hunting winds and the long-lying snow.
> Is it a wonder if the buds are slow?
> Or where is strength to make the leaf unfold?
> Chilling remembrance of my days of old
> Afflicts no less, what yet I hope may blow,
> That seed which the good sower once did sow,
> So loading with obstruction that threshold
> Which should ere now have led my feet to the field.
> It is the waste done in unreticent youth
> Which makes so small the promise of that yield
> That I may win with late-learnt skill uncouth
> From furrows of the poor and stinting weald.
> Therefore how bitter, and learnt how late, the truth!
>
> June 1865
> (Poems 26-7)

This poem expresses the feeling of desolation and impotence that besets Hopkins when he reflects upon the time he has wasted not living an active life of faith. In tone it is similar to the "terrible sonnets" of Hopkins' last years; late in his life Hopkins would return to the issue confronted here, which is his personal inability, at times, to find God in his world. He asks the tormented question, 'Where is the strength to make the leaf unfold?' (l. 4). It is only Hopkins' reflection upon his wasteful youth which causes the 'good sower's' seed to be 'afflicted.' This poem marks a time when Hopkins was confronting the issue of his own sinfulness, which he sees in his inability to find God. The guilt he feels about his 'late-learnt skill uncouth' really only arises from his inability to forgive himself for past short-

comings. But this guilt is devastating to him, as is evident in the poem he wrote after this one, which begins as follows:

> My prayers must meet a brazen heaven
> And fail or scatter all away.
> Unclean and seeming unforgiven
> My prayers I scarcely call to pray.
> I cannot buoy my heart above;
> Above it cannot entrance win.
> I reckon precedents of love,
> But feel the long success of sin.
>
> (Poems 27)

Hopkins' inability to forgive himself results in a growing fear that his prayers are no longer valid. This desolation has a potentially devastating effect on Hopkins' vision of an immanent God. In a poem written in Lent, 1866, his fear of not finding God has expanded to a universal proportion, and his emphasis has shifted from 'I' to 'we':

> God, though to Thee our psalm we raise
> No answering voice comes from the skies;
> To Thee the trembling sinner prays
> But no forgiving voice replies;
> Our prayer seems lost in desert ways,
> Our hymn in the vast silence dies.
>
> (Poems 32)

These desolate early poems are the result of Hopkins' earliest struggle with his own over-awareness of his imperfections. In another poem of the same period, 'Myself unholy, from myself unholy,' Hopkins confronts the same issue, but is able to remind himself that even in his desolation, his salvation is Christ:

Myself unholy, from myself unholy
To the sweet living of my friends I look--
Eye-greeting doves bright-counter to the rook,
Fresh brooks to salt sand-teasing waters shoaly:--
And they are purer, but alas! not solely
The unquestion'd readings of a blotless book.
And so my trust, confused, struck, and shook
Yields to the sultry siege of melancholy.
He has a sin of mine, he its near brother;
Knowing them well I can but see the fall.
This fault in one I found, that in another:
And so, though each have one while I have all,
No better serves me now, save best; no other
Save Christ: to Christ I look, on Christ I call.

June 1865
(Poems 26)

Hopkins is beset with "the sultry siege of melancholy" if he submits to his inclination to compare the degree of his sinfulness with that of his friends, although his tone in the end reveals at least a degree of optimism in his recollection of the complete, all-encompassing mercy of Christ. Still, Hopkins' unrelenting self-examination is evident here, although this is often seen as the result of his later Jesuit training. This poem shows that habit of self-accusation to be a part of Hopkins that he could not abandon, even though it caused him his greatest struggle. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was attracted to a dogmatically-oriented faith and a religious order that demanded self-denial. His later life was governed by the rules of these institutions, but the rigourous internal demands with which he lived resulted from his own inclinations, which were often perfectionist to a fault.

POEMS OF THE MIDDLE PERIOD

Hopkins entered the Society of Jesus, on the way to becoming a Jesuit priest, in 1868, at the age of twenty-four. His conversion to Catholicism two years prior had caused estrangement from his family, and it is unlikely that they took well to his decision to further commit himself to a lifestyle that was not Anglican. The process for becoming a priest in the Jesuit order was (and is) a long one, beginning with a thirty-day silent retreat according to the guidelines of Saint Ignatius Loyola, its founder, and marked by various milestones and the taking of vows. In Victorian England, Jesuits always took their final vows at age 33, in commemoration of the beginning of Christ's public life.

When Hopkins entered the Society of Jesus, he decided to give up poetry-writing completely, thinking that it was incompatible with the requirements and demands of life as a priest. For seven years, he was true to that vow, and wrote nothing other than what he called "two or three little presentation pieces" (Bergonzi 81). During this time he was engaged in the usual course of study for a Jesuit, which he began with a two-year Novitiate period, designed to acqaint the candidate with the ways of the Society, and make sure that he is suited to the lifestyle. At the end of the Novitiate period, in August 1870, Hopkins took the solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience that officially qualified him as a Jesuit. For the next several years, during his time as a 'scholastic' (the period of Jesuit training in which the candidate

engages in the public aspects of ministry), Hopkins spent time in different Jesuit houses throughout England in study and prayer, with occasional holidays.

Hopkins kept a journal during his years of Jesuit preparation, and though he no longer thought of himself as a poet, his poetic sensibilities refused to lie dormant. His journal contains observations of natural beauty which go beyond pure detail of the Ruskinian variety; he saw a sacramental value in all natural beauty (Bergonzi 63). It was during this time that Hopkins first coined and began to use the term "inscape," and its accompanying term "instress," to describe the nature of beauty in the world. Hopkins later refered to inscape as "the very soul of art" (Abbot 2: 135). The concept is one that Hopkins adapted from Duns Scotus, the 14th-century English philosopher, of whose theories Hopkins was very fond. Both Scotus and Hopkins sought to define things in terms of their form. Scotus had distinguished between general nature and particular nature, expressing the unique particulars of a thing by the term haeccitas, meaning "thisness" (Bergonzi, 70). When Hopkins read Scotus, he found his own theories regarding the form of things and the contribution of uniqueness to beauty corroborated. Hopkins wrote in his journal in 1870:

> 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. Its inscape is mixed of strength and grace, like an ash tree.
>
> (House & Storey 199)

This concept is the beginning of Hopkins' sacramental view of nature: "The artist was recording [here] more than his experience of the beauty or "inscape" of the bluebell; he was also signalizing a religious experience in which the apprehension of "inscape" played a part" (Pick 35). Pick further explains Hopkins' concept of inscape:

> Individual "inscape," forms splendidly shining on matter, are images, similitudes, representations, analogues of Divine Ideas. The experience of the beauties of the world, of its "inscape," then, leads to Beauty, to God.
>
> (Pick 36)

This sacramental view of the world is something that Hopkins must have found very well supported by the theological perspective of St. Ignatius: in "Principle and Foundation," the tract in which Ignatius sets the tenets for the Society of Jesus, he says, "If everything is directed towards God, everything is prayer" (Pick 36). "Instress" is the term Hopkins adopted to describe the effect of his apprehension of inscape; it is "the intensity of feeling and associations which something beautiful brought to him" (Pick 32).

In 1874, Hopkins finished the scholastic stage of his training and entered the last phase, known as the "Theologate" (Bergonzi 77). For this he was sent to a house in North Wales, and immediately he undertook to learn Welsh. He was inspired to do so by his love of linguistics and languages, but suffered guilt feelings about his desire, thinking it was selfish:

> I began to learn Welsh too but not with very pure intentions perhaps. However on consulting the Rector on this, the first day of the retreat, he discouraged it unless it were purely for the sake of labouring among the Welsh. Now it was not and so I saw I must give it up. . . . I had no sooner given up the Welsh than my desire seemed to be for the conversion of Wales and I had it in mind to give up everything else for that; nevertheless weighing this by St. Ignatius' rules of election I decided not to do so.
>
> (House & Storey 258)

From this and other accounts it is evident that Hopkins began to find the denial of his linguistic, poetic nature difficult; still, it is unlikely that he would have returned to poetry, had circumstances not unfolded as they did. Hopkins began writing again in December, 1875, on the particular occasion of the loss of a German immigrant ship in a snowstorm in the mouth of the Thames. This disaster, which received much attention in the papers, affected Hopkins profoundly, and when he mentioned his reaction to the rector of the house where he was living, his superior intimated that a poetic commemoration of the disaster would be appropriate (Bergonzi 81). In response to this suggestion, Hopkins undertook the writing of what would be his longest and most difficult poem, "The Wreck of the Deutschland."

Hopkins' own account of his inspiration for "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is as follows:

> . . . when in the winter of '75 the Deutschland was wrecked in the mouth of the Thames and five Franciscan nuns, exiles from Germany by the Falck Laws [a part of Bismarck's Kulturkampf], aboard of her were drowned, I was affected by the account and, happening to say so to my rector, he said that he wished someone would write a poem on the subject. On this hint I set to work, and though my hand was out at first, produced one. I had

> long had haunting my ear the echo of a new rhythm which I now realized on paper.
>
> (Pick 40, from Letters to Dixon 14)

The writing of this poem broke a seven-year poetic silence in Hopkins' life, and when he took up his pen to write again in 1875, his vision had changed, matured, and focused; he had found, at least for that time, a working vision of an immanent Creator.

Hopkins began the poem as a straightforward account of the tragedy, with what is now the twelfth stanza of the poem (Bergonzi 81). The eleven stanzas which precede this account in the poem's final version are a 'profession of faith' in the immanent God he has discovered. The first ten stanzas are a powerfully positive statement about the presence of God in the world, as exemplified by the opening stanza:

> 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.
>
> (Poems 51)

In the course of the seven years' silence and his growth into a life where God is all, Hopkins' vision of the world in relationship to God seems to have become confident and positive, and he charges the opening of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" with a new, powerful, and rollicking rhythm to convey the wonder of God's

mastery in the world. In this frame of mind, Hopkins could state without doubt that it is God who directs his life 'over again' by 'touching him afresh.'

In the second stanza Hopkins describes the process by which he has been 'touched.'

> 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.
>
> (Gardner, Poems 52)

There is probably an allusion to an actual religious experience he had here: in a letter to Robert Bridges which accompanied the copy of "The Wreck" Hopkins sent to him, he said, "What refers to myself in the poem is all strictly and literally true and did all occur; nothing is added for poetical padding" (Abbot, Letters to Bridges 47). Stanza 2 is Hopkins' affirmation of the mastery of God. Although he owns that the might of God is terrible, Hopkins has accepted, and even welcomed, that discovery, and he has endured 'The swoon of a heart' that has accompanied God's presence.

In Stanza 4, Hopkins develops another facet of God's complete mastery, in his exploration of the impermanence of human life, and in his realization of his own inability to achieve immortality apart from God:

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.

(Poems 52)

Here an opposition is set up between one vision of man as mutable and drifting, and another of man as 'steady as a water in a well'; in the second of these images Hopkins expresses the grace by which man achieves immutability, or eternity. The word "roped" seems ambiguous, but was explained by Robert Bridges as meaning "that the well is fed by trickles of water within the flanks of the mountains [voels]" (My brackets) (Gardner, Notes to Poems 258). Those trickles of water which feed the 'well' of man are 'the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift,' which is grace.

Stanza 5 is an exultant celebration of the glories found in the world because of God's mastery, and prefigures in diction and tone many of Hopkins' later poems:

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.

(Poems 53)

(See 'It will flame out, like shining from shook foil' in "God's Grandeur", p. 66: 'Glory be to God for dappled things' in "Pied Beauty", p. 69: 'dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon' in "The Windhover", p. 69, all from Poems.) Hopkins insists that God's mystery 'must be instressed, stressed', and that it is for this reason that he worships the beauty of the evening skies; God's mystery being 'instressed, stressed' makes him notice and praise God's works for their beauty, their unique form, their "inscape," and thereby discover, and praise, God himself.

Stanzas 6 and 7 are important to Hopkins' vision of God's glory at this time, because in them he professes that the 'stress' of the presence of God in nature is only possible because of the Incarnation:

> Not out of his bliss
> Springs the stress felt
> Nor first from heaven (and few know this)
> Swings the stroke dealt--
> Stroke and a stress that stars and storms deliver,
> That guilt is hushed by, hears are flushed by and melt--
> But it rides time like riding a river
> (And here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss).
>
> It dates from day
> Of his going in Galilee;
> Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey;
> Manger, maiden's knee;
> The dense and the driven Passion, and frightful sweat:
> Thence the discharge of it, there its swelling to be,
> Though felt before, though in high flood yet--
> What none would have known of it, only the heart, being hard at bay,

(Poems 53)

It is 'not out of his bliss', 'nor first from heaven' that the 'instressed, stressed' beauty of nature comes, but from the life

of Christ, and from the way of the Cross, which can only be realized in human lives in the heart, for 'only the heart, being hard at bay,' 'Is out with it!' (Stanza 8, l. 1). Only the heart can contain the truth of Christ's Passion, and therefore see the 'stress' that his Incarnation has injected into the world.

In the last stanzas of this opening section of "The Wreck," Hopkins presents his achieved vision of the nature of his God by professing that he is both masterful and merciful:

> Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm;
> Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung:
>
> (Poems 54:9)

> 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.
>
> (Poems 54)

Hopkins' final entreaty, and the context in which he presents the tragedy of the drowning of the nuns, is for God to permeate the life of man, to 'melt him but master him still.' And his final conviction is that in all circumstances, the Incarnate God is to be praised, to 'be adored, but be adored King.'

The second part of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" begins with an account, still in the same intense, rolling, sea-like rhythm as the first part, of the wreck of the ship, the crew's efforts to save the passengers, and the drowning of the nuns.

After several stanzas of pure descriptive account, Hopkins interjects a stanza to describe the extent of the tragedy's effect on himself and his vision:

> 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!--mother of being in me, heart.
> O unteachably after evil, but uttering truth,
> Why, tears! is it? tears; such a melting, a madrigal start!
> Never-eldering revel and river of youth,
> What can it be, this glee? the good you have there of your own?
>
> (Poems 57)

Here, by addressing his own heart as the place in which to register the effect of the tragedy, Hopkins makes a connection with the 'instressed, stressed' presence of God in the world from Part One of the poem. The same heart that grasps the truth of Christ's Passion grasps the moving experience of the nun's faith in the face of death in a later stanza, which is likened to her living the Passion again, in the inspiration that comes from Christ himself.

The tears of his heart which he repeatedly mentions in this stanza are cleansing tears, which help him to recognize the promise of eternity that the nuns find fulfilled in their death: the heart-tears are 'Never-eldering revel and river of youth.' And though they begin as sorrow, the truth of God's presence turns them into unexpected joy: 'What can it be, this glee?' Hopkins offers an answer that he knows to be false, and therefore makes it a question: 'the good you have there of your own?' He thus implies, "The glee that comes to my heart cannot be good

that my own heart has made, for it is only God who turns sorrow to joy."

In Stanza 19 Hopkins turns to the nuns' deaths, and reflects on the grace and wonder of their willingness to die in the assurance of their salvation. He describes the tall nun calling to Christ over the tumult of the storm ('Sister, a sister calling/A master, her master and mine!--' (Poems 57)).

In the remainder of the poem, Hopkins praises the faith of the nuns, and the faith of all those who can see the mastery and believe in the mercy of the Creator. The tall nun invited death knowing that Christ was her salvation: [the nun] "Was calling 'O Christ, Christ, come quickly':/The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best" (Poems 59). In calling upon herself the way of the Cross, the nun turns her peril into 'Best,' which is salvation.

Hopkins ends his ode with a prayer to the drowned nun which is an expression of his chief desire, that we allow God to 'easter in us:'

> 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.
>
> (Poems 63)

In this final stanza, Hopkins brings closure to his statement about the mercy and mastery of his immanent God, and also reveals the change that his vision has undergone in reaching this conception of his Creator. By employing the phrase 'heaven-haven' at the close of this poem which is about responding to the presence of God, Hopkins dismisses (at least for the time being) his earlier yearning for passive rest, expressed in "Heaven-Haven." Here in "The Wreck of the Deutschland," Hopkins' 'heaven-haven' is a place 'in the roads,' amid the workings of the world, and not away from them. Hopkins entreats the martyred nun to bless 'English souls' in the business of their travels through life, not in their sheltered rest as in the earlier poem.

The nun in "Heaven-Haven" wishes to be protected from the 'sharp and sided hail,' but we find the nun of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" in the midst of a blinding storm, courageously professing her faith in her God (Bergonzi 82). Hopkins prays that he and the world may be able to have the same courage in the daily progress of their lives, in ordinary England. These two poems reveal the opposition between passivity and engagement, doubt and faith, and despair and salvation that Hopkins so often found himself confronting in his lifetime. It is significant that "The Wreck of the Deutschland," the poem which ushered in the years of Hopkins' poetic vocation, also marked the beginning of clarity, a period in which Hopkins was relatively free of internal conflict

over these issues and was able to live as a being whose "work [was] to name and praise" his God.

Although 1875, the year of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" marks Hopkins' return to poetry writing, his most productive period did not really begin until 1877. He wrote a few poems in 1876, but it has been suggested that the effort of writing "The Wreck" may have sapped his energy for a time (Pick 52). By the time of Hopkins' ordination into the priesthood, which was in September, 1877, he had reached the maturity of his spiritual vision; in the time before and just after the ordination he produced ten poems that are among his most celebratory and best-known works.

These poems contain the same clear vision of an immanent God as "The Wreck," but they express it with more compression, and without the narrative framework present in "The Wreck." They spring from the same spirit as "The Wreck;" in them Hopkins celebrates the beauty of God's creation, which he sees as sacrament, as proof and presence, as "word, expression, news, of God."

Along with this matured sacramental view of the world, these poems express Hopkins' concern about man's role in creation, and the ways in which man falls short of his vocation, which is to express the greatness of the living God. These two elements, joyous praise of God's creation and sorrow at man's exploitation of it, are best articulated in an 1877 poem, "God's Grandeur:"

God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
 It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
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.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs--
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

March 1877
(Poems 66)

Hopkins' concern with man's exploitation of God's creation was for man's sake; in the early years of his priesthood he committed himself to the task of showing people that their duty, like his, was to give praise to their Creator. In an address he prepared centered upon Ignatius' "Principle and Foundation," Hopkins gave his explanation of the role of man in God's creation:

> The sun and stars shining glorify God. they stand where he placed them, they move where he bid them. "The heavens declare the glory of God."
>
> They glorify God, but they do not know it. The birds sing to him, the thunder speaks of his terror, the lion is like his greatness, the honey like his sweetness ... This then is poor praise, faint reverence, slight service, dull glory. Nevertheless what they can they always do.
> But amidst them all is man, man and the angels: we will speak of man. Man was created. Like the rest then to praise, reverence, and serve God; to give him glory. He does so, even by his being, beyond all visible creatures: . . . . But man can know God, can mean to give him glory. This then was why he was made, to give God glory and to mean to give it; to praise God freely, willingly to reverence him, gladly to serve him. Man was made to give, and mean to give, God glory.

(Pick 60-61)

Hopkins' concern in "God's Grandeur" is not only that man's presence in the world is in itself destructive, but that his unawareness of his vocation to reverence Creation causes him to forget the blessings of the world and to abuse nature: 'And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;/And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell.'

The powerful, final image in this poem, however, is one of hope; at this period in his life Hopkins does not despair at man's failure to praise God, because he feels so strongly that the brilliant God of Creation is also a God of compassion, who protects man in his ignorance. 'For all this, nature is never spent', because the love that God bears for the world is never spent.

Hopkins' vision of an ever-present, ever-loving God resolved for a time the tension he felt between his religious duty and his artistic talent, because in his liberated vision of God there was room, license, invitation for each creature of God to live just according to how it was created. This freedom of creatures to be unique is the subject of an untitled poem probably written after 1877:

> As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
> As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
> Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
> Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
> Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
> Selves--goes itself; <u>myself</u> it speaks and spells,
> Crying <u>What I do is me</u>: <u>for that I came</u>.

I say more: the just man justices;
  Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is--
  Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
  To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Undated
(Poems 90)

Hopkins' bent for sensualism found its most apt outlet in the religious poems of his middle period, because they always celebrated beauty, and to Hopkins, beauty was always God.

In this sonnet, centered on the Scotist theme of individual nature, (Notes to Poems 281), Hopkins used complex and unconventional syntax to reflect the freedom he has found all creatures to possess, which comes from their living as reflections of the God in them. His prosodic style had also become freed by this time; here as in "God's Grandeur," we can see the results of Hopkins' rhetorical and linguistic interests and experiments during his pre-ordination years. In both poems Hopkins uses abundant alliteration, and so loads the lines with rich, evocative images that their sonnet form is barely noticable. This is typical of Hopkins' mature writing, and is a prosodic manifestation of his 'internal' liberation from the constraints of orthodox forms of both poetry and faith.

A note in the manuscript for "God's Grandeur" directs that it is "To be read . . . slowly, strongly marking the rhythms and fetching out the syllables" (Notes to Poems 263). It is typical of Hopkins' mature poetry that much of its merit and meaning is

invested in its aural quality; Hopkins spent much effort on the rhythmic arrangement of words, and the effect they have on the ear, and the beauty of these poems is evidence of this musical approach to poetry. In 'As kingfishers catch fire' Hopkins uses such effects to an even greater extent than in "God's Grandeur," where he wishes to illustrate that the song of creation springs from the impulse in everything to give God praise. As 'each hung bell's/Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name,' Hopkins 'finds tongue' to express his own praise through the poem's alliterative, internally rhyming style. He creates internal rhyme here by the repetition of words within a line ('thing' in l. 5; 'Selves'/'itself'/'myself' in l. 7; 'just'/'justices' in l. 9, etc.), as well as through legitimate internal rhyme ('ring'/'string' in l. 3; 'tells'/'bell's' in l. 3; 'swung'/'tongue' in l. 4; 'string'/'fling'/'thing' in ll. 3-5, etc.). Hopkins extended Scotus' concept of individuality, or "inscape," by attributing individuality of all things to the grace of God; it is chiefly this that this sonnet expresses.

Although Hopkins retained the unique, innovative and expressive prosodic techniques that he had gained throughout his years of study, prayer and writing, he did not sustain the unqualified spirit of praise that he had found in the mid-1870's. "Peace," a poem of 1879, rich in Hopkinsian diction, metaphor and device, shows the beginnings of Hopkins' return to struggle with the dichotomy of passivity vs. engagement:

Peace

When will you ever, Peace, wild wooddove, shy wings shut,
Your round me roaming end, and under be my boughs?
When, when, Peace, will you, Peace?--I'll not play hypocrite

To own my heart: I yield you do come sometimes: but
That piecemeal peace is poor peace. What pure peace allows
Alarms of wars, the daunting wars, the death of it?

O surely, reaving Peace, my Lord should leave in lieu
Some good! And so he does leave Patience exquisite,
That plumes to Peace thereafter. And when Peace here does
house
He comes with work to do, he does not come to coo,
He comes to brood and sit.

October 1879
(Poems 85)

In this poem, Hopkins personifies peace in the traditional image of the dove, which also symbolizes the Holy Spirit. In his appeal to ever-elusive Peace, Hopkins finds himself to have become impatient with his world, which never offers him permanent, 'pure' peace. His supplication to Peace is plaintive and urgent: his question is 'When, when, Peace, will you, Peace?' It is obvious that by this time Hopkins' exultant joy in the beauty of nature had tempered itself, had become darkened somehow, for although Hopkins' descriptive language still paid tribute to beauty, as in the description of the dove in the first line of "Peace," Hopkins here presents disturbing, unanswerable questions about the continued turbulence of his inner life.

Hopkins may have become disturbed by the suspicion that his vision of God in all things as the justification for his artistic rendering of them may have caused him to become too attached to

the beauties of the world. Fulweiler suggests that Hopkins' growing doubt about the worth of his poetic endeavors sprung indirectly from his unfailing overscrupulosity: the Principle of Ignatius Loyola, which had been the starting place for Hopkins' liberation into his vision of an immanent God went further, and insisted that since all created things existed "for man to help him in attaining the end for which he was created" (138), which is praise of God, man must "make himself indifferent to all created things" (138) beyond their use to that end (138-140). In other words, the thing to be avoided was any sort of dependence or placing of value upon created things for their own sake. And Hopkins, with his strong sense of duty and moral propriety, began to fear that he no longer celebrated the beauty of created things as an act of praise, but instead had become attached to beauty for its own sake.

In 1879, when Hopkins wrote "Peace", he had not yet become completely taken up with this concern; in fact, this poem only really hints at the unrest in Hopkins which would later grow into the desolation which Ignatius termed "the darkness of the soul" (Pick 145). "Peace" seems an attempt to work out the reason for his inability to ever feel completely at rest. This poem returns to the theme found in "Heaven-Haven," but in "Peace" the naivete that could have caused Hopkins to entertain realistic hopes of 'rest' is gone, Here, Hopkins accepts as truth the impermanence of peace, but also accepts an alternative to the peace he so desires:

God offers Patience as the staying force, the power that enables him to maintain hope that Peace will continue to return, if only for short times. Still, this poem is evidence of the beginnings of a different state of mind, and it serves as a prelude to the despair found in his last poems.

In 1882, Hopkins wrote another transitional poem, "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo," but in this poem he seems to regain his resolve about the rightness of created beauty as the product and possession of God. In the poem, the Leaden Echo speaks first, in the voice of despair which insists that there is no force which can keep beauty from disappearing:

> How to keep--is there any any, is there none such, nowhere known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace, latch or catch or key to keep
> Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty,...from vanishing away?
>
> (Poems 91, ll. 1-2)

This is the question posed by despair, and despair's own answer is, ". . . No, there's none, there's none, O no there's none,/Nor can you long be, what you now are, called fair, . . ." (91, ll. 5-6). The only thing that replaces beauty, according to the Leaden Echo, is inevitable old age and death, ". . . Ruck and wrinkle, drooping, dying, death's worst, winding sheets, tombs and worms and tumbling to decay; . . ." (l. 12).

When the Golden Echo replies to this claim, it does so in the voice of a hopeful Hopkins; this voice resolves that there is one way for beauty to be eternal, and that is when it is given

back to the God who created it. The Golden Echo entreats the asker of the original question to remember the origin of beauty, and to resign it to the Creator in order that its purpose be fulfilled:

> Come then, your ways and airs and looks, locks, maidengear, gallantry and gaiety and grace,
> Winning ways, airs innocent, maiden manners, sweet looks, loose locks, long locks, lovelocks, gaygear, going gallant, girlgrace--
> Resign them, sign them, seal them, send them, motion them with breath, .. .
> Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver.
>
> (Poems 92, ll. 13-15, 18)

In "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo," Hopkins seems to have confronted his own question about the acceptability of his appreciation of beauty, and to reaffirm the rightness of poetic expression by his compressed use of many sensual images. Near the end of the poem, however, Hopkins asks another question without giving an answer:

> O then, weary then why should we tread? O why are we so haggard at the heart, so care-coiled, care-killed, so fagged, so fashed, so cogged, so cumbered,
> 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.--What high as that! We follow, now we follow.--
> Yonder, yes yonder, yonder.
> Yonder.
>
> (Poems 93, ll. 25-31)

Hopkins asks here why one ever needs to despair in the loss of beauty, since beauty lost to man is kept by God. But shortly

after the writing of this poem, Hopkins began to find himself increasingly 'haggard at the heart,' and eventually desolation overtook him.

LATE POEMS, 1884-1889

Hopkins moved from his post as parish priest in Stonyhurst, England to Dublin in 1884. He had been appointed to a teaching position at the Royal University of Ireland, and although the position was prestigious (Hopkins became Fellow of the University and Professor of Greek at the University College, Dublin), Hopkins found his work there taxing, and the atmosphere of the place to have adverse effects on his already poor health. In an 1884 letter he observed:

> I am writing from where I never thought to be, in a University for Catholic Ireland . . . . In the events which have brought me here I recognise the hand of providence, but nevertheless have felt and feel an unfitness which led me at first to try to decline the offer made me and now does not yet allow my spirits to rise to the level of the position and its duties. But perhaps the things of most promise with God begin with weakness and fear.
>
> (Abbot, Further Letters 63)

There are many theories about the reasons for Hopkins' growing depression during his Dublin years, and for the desolation of his late poems, four of which have been labeled the "terrible sonnets." Hopkins' assiduousness is evident in the monitoring of his own spirituality, but this characteristic extended to his priestly duties as well. In addition, the instability of the University contributed to the difficulty of his work there. The Royal University of Ireland had been established by Archbishop Newman as part of his effort to establish a Catholic university in Dublin, but after Newman resigned his post as rector in 1858,

the University lost whatever stability it had had as an educational institution (Pick 106). The buildings at the University were not properly maintained after Newman's resignation (Bergonzi 125), and the University became a sore issue with the British government, which was unwilling to support a "sectarian" university (Bergonzi 125). Although Hopkins was not quite aboard a sinking ship at the University, he was aboard one which was just staying afloat, and this probably contributed to the pressure he felt in keeping abreast of his work.

Hopkins' duties as Professor of Greek consisted of administering examinations and lecturing. The examination task was overwhelming in volume; several times a year Hopkins had to grade examination papers in batches of up to five hundred at a time (Bergonzi 126). Hopkins' natural physical frailty undoubtedly made it difficult for him to keep up with his professorial duties, but much of the strain of the position he brought on by his meticulous care in grading the examinations. In his letters from Dublin, Hopkins makes frequent references to his unhappiness and ill health:

> I must say that I am very anxious to get away from this place. I have become very weak in health and do not seem to recover myself here or likely to do so. Teaching is very burdensome, especially when you have much of it: I have. I have not much time and almost no energy--for I am always tired--to do anything on my own account.
>
> (Abbot, Further Letters 84)

Hopkins' physical weakness was accompanied by melancholy which increased in severity during his stay at Dublin, and his mental state seems to have deteriorated into chronic depression. He

made frequent requests for vacations and holidays, always thinking that the cure for his state was change (Pick 111), but he was inclined to feel guilty about leaving his work behind, and his guilt significantly reduced the value of his holidays.

Fulweiler explains Hopkins' crisis as a movement away from his belief in an immanent God which was precipitated by his fear that he was not living according to the Ignatian principles of detachment from material things. Ignatius' "Principle and Foundation," which had earlier seemed to support a vision of God present in all things, now struck him in a different way as he began to listen more closely to his over-active conscience. The "Principle and Foundation" states:

> Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.
>
> The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created.
>
> Hence, man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him.
>
> Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things.
>
> Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.
>
> (Fulweiler 138)

Fulweiler suggests that Hopkins' overscrupulous nature overwhelmed his intense belief in an immanent God, and that once Hopkins had begun to take himself to task on the issue of his

self-perceived nonconformity to Ignatian Principle, he could not conscientiously remain with such a materially based vision of God (139-40). It is certainly true that Jesuits take the "Principle and Foundation" seriously; it is in fact the entire basis of their approach to spirituality. It is also true that Hopkins would take such a clearly delineated rule especially seriously, owing to his assiduous nature. But it seems not to have been true that Hopkins was able to leave his former vision, which had been so clear and intense, completely behind. Perhaps it was this final dilemma, his inability to sacrifice his Ignatian-inspired vision of a God immanent in material beauty for an apparently Ignatian-required relinquishing of that beauty, which broke his spirit.

Hopkins' physical and spiritual conditions worsened steadily after 1885, seemingly undermined by the physical and emotional hardships of his life, until he died of a contagious fever in 1889. In his last years Hopkins was able to retain a memory of his earlier vision of God, and in most of his late poetry there is a visible contrast between his personal misery and lack of clarity and the memories of a vision, in which he still objectively believes, but can no longer see.

Hopkins' poetry of this period expresses a desolation so intense that it approaches madness. Even in his state of spiritual and mental anguish, however, his poetic luciditiy remains, and although he felt himself to be helpless and sterile in God's

cause, he remained capable of powerful verbal expression--his most powerful, some readers think. Tortured though it is, his late poetry has the same penetrating poignancy and the same trademark diction as the earlier poetry. He acknowledges the existence of God in these poems, although he cannot see Him. This is evident in "Carrion Comfort:"

Carrion Comfort

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;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.

But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me? scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones? and fan,
O in turns of tempest, me Heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee?

Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.
Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, cheer.
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.

1885
(Poems 99-100)

"Carrion Comfort" is not classified among the "terrible sonnets," although it is most likely the one to which Hopkins himself referred in his journal as the sonnet "written in blood" (Gardner, Notes to Poems 287). Hopkins here insists upon the presence of

God, although he is tortured by his inability to distinguish God from Despair, which is the "carrion comfort" he addresses in the poem. His earlier, positive vision of God was based on an assurance that God is eternally present: that vision is no more than a spark in this poem, but it is the spark that causes him to fight back, to be unwilling to let go of God completely, and to express that unwillingness in the poem. Late in life, Hopkins has lost the ability to see his own poems as "news" of God, but not the ability to write them.

Hopkins has had to lie 'wrestling' with his God because he cannot understand why God would cause him to struggle so. He offers himself a reason why he might be so bitterly challenged: 'Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.' He even remembers that challenges once enlivened him: 'my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, cheer.' But now something has convinced him that the joy he once found had never been rightfully his; his heart 'lapped' strength, and 'stole' joy. Hopkins now doubts the origin of his earlier joy. Was it authentically God-inspired, or only a product of his working against God's will? "[My heart] would laugh, cheer./Cheer whom though? The hero whose heaven-handling flung me, foot trod /Me? or me that fought him?" He is unable to discern which being, himself or God, is responsible for his despair.

His lack of faith both torments and surprises him. In the last line of the poem, when he finds himself ready to admit that

it is God with whom he struggles, he interjects his horrified surprise that this is the case: "I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God."

In another poem written at the same time as "Carrion Comfort," Hopkins again expresses the agony of his doubt:

> No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
> More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
> Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
> Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
> My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief-
> woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing--
> Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No ling-
> ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief'.
> O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
> Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
> May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
> Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
> Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
> Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.
>
> 1885
> (Poems 100)

This untitled poem is Hopkins' first expression of complete desolation as Ignatius defined it:

> a darkening of the soul, trouble of mind, movement to base and earthly things, restlessness of various agitations and temptations, moving to distrust, loss of hope, loss of love; when the soul feels herself thoroughly apathetic, sad, and as it were separated from her Creator and Lord" (Spiritual Exercises, First Week, 'Discernment of Spirits').
>
> (Gardner, Notes to Poems 287)

In this poem, Hopkins seems to try to understand the psychology of his despair: 'the mind, mind has mountains . . . .' Although his despair is unremitting, and although 'each day dies with sleep,' he is aware that his grief is 'world-sorrow.' And although

he cannot feel the comfort of the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) and the relief of Mary, he has not stopped asking and therefore cannot have stopped believing. He is aware that his agony is contained in himself, and does not attribute it to God.

By 1889, the year of his death, Hopkins no longer confines the blame for his agony to himself. He had written very little poetry in his four years in Dublin, and had found it increasingly difficult to remain focused upon any one intellectual project long enough to see it to its conclusion (Bergonzi 145). Hopkins' health was steadily deteriorating by 1888, and when he wrote 'Thou art indeed just, Lord,' he had reached the depth of his despair. This poem illustrates the basis for this despair, which is the conflict between two opposing forces in himself. He wants to accept as right the ruined state of his life; he still believes that all things are of God, and that although he cannot understand it, there is a reason for his barrenness. But he cannot accept this, and therefore questions God's justice in allowing his suffering:

> Justus quidem tu es, Domine, si disputem tecum; verumtamen justa loquar ad te: Quare via impiorum prosperatur? &c.[7]
>
> Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
> With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.
> Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must
> Disappointment all I endeavor end?

---

[7] 'Lord, I know well that right is on thy side, if I plead against thee, yet remonstrate with thee I must; why is it that the affairs of the wicked prosper; . . .' (Gardner, Notes to Poems, 295).

Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,

Sir, life upon thy cause. 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.

1889
(Poems 106-07)

This poem shows Hopkins in the depth of his despair, and narrates his experience of the spiritual desolation, the dark night of his soul. He believes that he has become useless and ineffective in all of his endeavors: "birds build--but not I build; no, but strain,/Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes." It is clear that by this time Hopkins had lost his grasp on spiritual wholeness, and was experiencing the agony of doubting his own Creator. The crowning irony and tragedy of Hopkins' fading vision, however, is that he thought himself to be poetically as well as spiritually barren, when, in fact, he was poetically most fertile in these late, desolate years, and created his most powerful poetic expressions out of this intense struggle.

The poems of this period are few, possibly because Hopkins thought them to be inferior and unsuccessful works. These poems, 'Thou art indeed just' especially, are certainly evidence of Hopkins' spiritual desolation, but they are also expressions of his most refined poetic sensibilities. They are ranked among his

greatest works (Bergonzi 147), probably because the strong tension between the poet and God is so clearly and poignantly expressed in them. They contain the same skillful use of imagery as his earlier ones, and even seem occasionally to hearken back to his earlier, clearer vision. In 'Thou art indeed just,' Hopkins returns to a description of natural beauty, and remembers in a moment of lucidity how life is still contained there: 'See, banks and brakes/Now, leaved how thick! laced they are again/With fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes/Them . . . .' This recalling of his earlier style is evidence of the fact that Hopkins was not ending his life as 'Time's eunuch;' he only thought he was. He was still a poet, and in many ways a better one for his struggle.

Hopkins' last poem, written just a few months before his death, is a final testimony to Hopkins' poetic excellence, and a final proof for the argument that Hopkins' desolation was tragic because it was unnecessary. This sonnet he wrote to his oldest friend Robert Bridges, on the very subject of his lost vision:

To R.B.

> The fine delight that fathers thought; the strong
> Spur, live and lancing like the blowpipe flame,
> Breathes once and, quenched faster than it came,
> Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song.
>
> Nine months she then, nay years, nine years long
> Within her wears, bears, cares and combs the same:
> The widow of an insight lost she lives, with aim
> Now known and hand at work now never wrong.

Sweet fire the sire of muse, my soul needs this;
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.

April 1889
(Poems 108)

In a gesture so characteristic of his desire to make himself clear, Hopkins attempts to explain, and apologize for, the loss of an inspiration which we can see only too well is not really lost. This poem conspicuously lacks the knotty syntactical complexity of most of Hopkins' poetry, but it contains as much beauty in its simplicity as his earlier, richly-laden works. Although he was dying and thought himself already dead, this poem is evidence that he remained alive as a poet until the very end. He remained very much alive, indeed.

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