The development of Gerard Manley Hopkins poetry

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List of Symbols

RB	The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, ed. C.C. Abbott, London, 1955.
C	The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, ed. C.C. Abbott, London, 1955.
FL	Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. C.C. Abbott, 2nd edn., London, 1956.
J	The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Humphry House completed by Graham Storey, London, 1959.
S	The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Christopher Devlin, London, 1959.
Poems	Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 4th edn., ed. W.H. Gardner and N.H. MacKenzie, London, 1967.

INTRODUCTION

> The most inveterate fault of critics is the tendency to cramp and hedge in by rules the free movements of genius . . . 1
>
> Hopkins

The process by which a writer's comments come to be regarded as categories which govern his work is well-illustrated in the way Hopkins' letters have influenced the discussion of his poems. His correspondence is full of references both to metrical theory and to the constraints which he felt being a Jesuit put upon him as a poet: accordingly one is encouraged to think of him as a technician, or as a religious who grudged himself verse. Hopkins' remarks about himself and his poetry are generally explicit and forceful; they offer the reader security when approaching the work of such a difficult writer, and ultimately, unless we are careful, they become the frame into which his poems must be made to fit.

Thus we have tended to think of Hopkins as he thought of himself. When he says that he is a blackguard, [2] we suppose that to be true and, finding no obvious evidence for it, we reason further that he must have had guilty secrets (his poems become the place to look for them). When he - unwillingly - concedes his oddness, [3] we suppose that to be a fundamental truth as well, and emphasize his idiosyncracies at the expense of his wisdom and his sense of humour. Yet to take Hopkins' own comments as the final guide to his poetry is inadequate. It is obvious that, no matter how intricate a theory of

1 FL p.204, September 6th, 1863, to W.M. Baillie.

2 e.g. RB p.139, October 22nd, 1881.

3 e.g. RB p.126, April 27th, 1881, & RB p.66, February 15th, 1879.

metrics Hopkins proposed, it would receive scant attention if his poetry were poor. If, then, his poetry is good it is not of great consequence for it that that theory be found wanting - it has been by some writers. [1] (Of course, practice and theory are connected, but in the same way that an action is with a declaration of intent.) Similarly, if Hopkins' poetry is not about a conflict between his art and his priesthood, anything one discerned in the letters about such a conflict could have only marginal significance. There are respects in which Hopkins' letters can lead us astray.

Moreover, if it is true that what Hopkins says in his letters is open to misapplication, it is also true that a misunderstanding of what Hopkins says there can result in even worse treatment of the poems. Hopkins has sometimes suffered because a misunderstanding of the letters has then been misapplied. Donald Davie's essay, 'Hopkins as a Decadent Critic', provides an example of this. He says in the last sentences of his final paragraph:

> Hopkins' theory and his practice point in one direction. Put together such recurrent terms as 'inscape', 'sublime', 'distinctiveness', 'masculinity', 'character', and one is forced to the conclusion that it was just this, Milton's egotism, individualism and arrogance, which made him, for Hopkins, the model poet. His own poetry and his own criticism proceed from the single assumption that the function of poetry is to express a human individuality in its most wilfully uncompromising and provocative form. His is the poetry and the criticism of the egotistical sublime. Dixon answered the contention, that poetry was incompatible with membership of the Society of Jesus, by saying he could not see how one vocation could clash with the other. It was true, so long as the poet's vocation was conceived of as Dixon conceived of it. But Hopkins knew better, and he was right too. He conceived of poetry as self-expression at its most relentless, as a vehicle for the individual will to impose itself on time. Between that and any sort of Christian calling there could be no compromise at all. [2]

1 e.g. Elizabeth W. Schneider, The Dragon in the Gate: Studies in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968, chaps. 1-5.

2 Donald Davie,'Hopkins as a Decadent Critic', in Purity of Diction in English Verse, London, 1952, p.182.

As a reading of what Hopkins says and implies in his letters this is open to objection at several points. The use to which Professor Davie puts what he finds is also suspect.

Davie acknowledges on an earlier page in his essay that 'On Milton the man as distinct from the poet, there is only one comment among all the letters,' [1] (a comment in which Hopkins says that Milton 'was a very bad man' [2]). Thus, Professor Davie's conclusion that 'egotism, individualism and arrogance' (that view of Milton is itself debatable) made Milton the model poet for Hopkins is reached because Hopkins thought so highly of Milton's poetic abilities. In fact the qualities which Hopkins' statements explicitly associate with Milton as a poet are seriousness, [3] balance, [4] 'plainness and severity', [5] and largeness of style. [6] Milton, for Hopkins, is 'the great standard in the use of counterpoint', [7] 'the great master of the sequence of phrase', [8] and his art is 'incomparable' [9] - 'His verse as one reads it seems something necessary and eternal.' [10] In short Milton is a very great craftsman; his work transcends the simply personal to touch some kind of absolute. However Milton's name does

1 Davie, op. cit., p.181

2 RB p.39, April 3rd, 1877.

3 RB p.225, June 1st, 1866.

4 RB p.66, February 15th, 1879.

5 RB p.87, August 14th, 1879.

6 RB p.113, October 26th, 1880.

7 C p.15, October 5th, 1878.

8 C p.8, June 13th, 1878.

9 C p.13, October 5th, 1878.

10 C p.13.

not stand alone in Hopkins' admiration; it is also coupled with Shakespeare's, in a way which partly weakens Professor Davie's conclusion (unless Shakespeare, too, is to be distinguished by his 'egotism, individualism and arrogance'). When Hopkins thinks of 'mastery of phrase, of the rhetoric of verse', he thinks of 'the tradition of Shakespeare and Milton', [1] but, when he needs a genius against which to measure the genius of Keats, it is Shakespeare who provides the standard, not Milton. [2] Thus Professor Davie produces an idea of why Hopkins valued Milton which is greatly at odds with Hopkins' own statements. Furthermore, the view that, among English poets, Shakespeare and Milton should be specially honoured is hardly a surprising one: Hopkins was not being eccentric in holding it.

Hopkins' interchange with Dixon is also misrepresented by Professor Davie. Hopkins did not say that poetry was 'incompatible with membership of the Society of Jesus'; he said that he would not publish his poetry because, 'it is the holier lot to be unknown than to be known.' [3] Dixon did not so much 'answer the contention' as say, 'I ought also to feel the same.' [4] Certainly there was disagreement between them about Hopkins' publishing his work, but it was of a very quiet and comprehensible kind. Dixon wanted to see something good made public; wisely, Hopkins worried about the spiritual dangers of fame. Dixon's view that, 'Surely one vocation cannot destroy another,' [5] is as much an expression of hope that the Society of

1 RB p.93, October 8th, 1879.

2 C p.6, June 13th, 1878.

3 C p.89, October 29th, 1881.

4 C p.90, November 4th, 1881, R.W.D. to G.M.H.

5 C p.90.

Jesus will encourage Hopkins as a poet as that Hopkins himself will go on writing. Hopkins' reply to this, that encouragement is not to be expected for 'Brilliancy does not suit us', [1] includes as well the acknowledgement that 'it may be that the time will come for my verses.' [2] Professor Davie distorts and oversimplifies, then, and this is brought to a head in his idea of 'no compromise' between Hopkins' poetry and his priesthood: in fact Hopkins went on writing poetry - it was entirely consistent of him to do so. The models Hopkins chose (in a letter) from his Society's history (in art, oratory and theology as well as poetry) [3] show that it is not 'self-expression which is in question but individual fame as against the example set by a tradition of obscurity.

Davie's view that Hopkins, 'conceived of poetry as self-expression at its most relentless,' and that, for Hopkins, 'the function of poetry is to express a human individuality in its most wilfully uncompromising and provocative form,' is best answered later in this study where Hopkins' actual position is described: the evidence does not bear Professor Davie's estimate out.

By referring to Hopkins' letters, then, Professor Davie presents a mistaken view of Hopkins' ideas about poetry. This he misapplies to Hopkins' own work. All the evidence used in Professor Davie's essay is taken from Hopkins' prose but it is used ultimately to support a hostile view of Hopkins' poetry (from which Davie quotes not a single line): his real target is not 'Hopkins as a decadent critic' but Hopkins as a decadent poet and a decadent man:

1 C p.95, December 1st, 1881.

2 C p.95.

3 C pp.94-6.

> He has no respect for the language, but gives it Sandow-exercises until it is a muscle-bound monstrosity. It is the Keatsian luxury carried one stage further, luxuriating in the kinetic and muscular as well as the sensuous. Word is piled on word, and stress on stress, to crush the odours and dispense a more exquisite tang, more exquisite than the life. To have no respect for language is to have none for life; both life and language have to be heightened and intensified before Hopkins can approve them. 1

One would scarcely believe that Professor Davie is writing about the poet who said, 'There lives the dearest freshness deep down things,' or, 'Nothing is so beautiful as Spring,' or,

> Lovely the woods, waters, meadows, combes, vales,
> All the air things wear that build this world of Wales;

but then, in Professor Davie's essay, Hopkins' poetry has never seriously been in view; the damning evidence is his correspondence, systematised and misconstrued.

Two other views - much more widely canvassed than Professor Davie's - have interfered with a proper understanding of Hopkins' poetry, though only one of them derives primarily from Hopkins' letters (the second makes use of more general facts of biography). The first of these, chiefly promoted by Dr. I.A. Richards [2] and Professor William Empson, [3] is that Hopkins' life shows, in the words of Professor W.H. Gardner, 'the tragic conflict of a man torn between two vocations - the religious and the artistic-creative.' [4] The second which, in print at least, may perhaps claim to have more

1 Davie, op. cit., p.175.

2 I.A. Richards, 'Gerard Hopkins', in Dial, No. 131 (1926), pp. 195-203.

3 William Empson, in Seven Types of Ambiguity, Harmondsworth, 1961, pp. 224-226.

4 W.H. Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncracy in Relation to Poetic Tradition, London, 1961, vol. 1, pp. 1-2.

currency at the moment, [1] is, in the words of Father Alfred Thomas, that 'the priest blended with the poet; the one no less than the other the product of the years of training.' [2] Both standpoints (they are plainly mutually exclusive) are in my view mistaken. Both account for Hopkins' work in terms which have the effect of disvaluing him as an individual, of making him primarily or entirely the product of his Jesuit background (so that, in one view, the direct consequence of his becoming a Jesuit was that he suffered anguish as an artist; in the other, the direct result of his joining the Jesuits was artistic fulfilment). Hopkins' membership of an organisation is thus allowed, in one way or another, to diminish the significance of the other patterns in his life: they are subsumed under the heads of 'priest' and 'poet'.

Both those who see Hopkins as a victim of a conflict between his art and his faith and those who see his art as the product of his Jesuit training are, as I hope to show in this study, mistaken. For the moment it is to be noted that neither standpoint has made much allowance for development or change in Hopkins' life. Thus Professor Empson, following the idea that Hopkins' mind was in turmoil, offers a reading of 'The Windhover' (1877) which makes use of Hopkins' burning of his verse in 1868 as if nothing had altered in the man's thinking in the intervening nine years. On the other side, David Downes' reading of the (late) terrible sonnets is essentially a reading of Hopkins'

1 see e.g. Alison Sulloway, Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper, London, 1972, p.64, 'Hopkins' critics have often remarked, and rightly so, that without the Exercises of St. Ignatius, the poems would not be what they are, but something entirely different.'

2 Alfred Thomas, Hopkins the Jesuit: the Years of Training, London, 1969, p.210.

early years. He says,

> We know from the beginning the artist and the ascetic were in contention, and that under the psychological structure of the Spiritual Exercises the artist more often seemed to Hopkins to be so unrelated to the purposes of his vocation that, at times, the artistic desires of his nature were a violation of his conscience, contrary to his solemn vows. [1]

As I shall attempt to show later this contains some misunderstanding of Hopkins' life. On this misunderstanding, on the fact of something supposed to be true 'from the beginning', Downes bases his interpretation of the last poems: 'We are not forced to speculate to any inordinate degree that this was the source of the trouble.' [2]

Writers who go beyond sympathy for, and actually champion, the Society of Jesus have found the problem of change in Hopkins almost insuperable; for to claim that the Society was centrally responsible for what Hopkins became is not only to claim the credit for producing a great poet but also to admit liability for his misery in Ireland. Thus John Pick in a book written with the view that, 'The story of Gerard Manley Hopkins from 1868, when he entered the Jesuit novitiate, till 1889 when he died is largely the story of the pervasive influence of the Spiritual Exercises upon him,' [3] is in difficulties when he comes to the terrible sonnets and to the fact that in his last years Hopkins' inspiration was failing him. Misery becomes acceptable as 'spiritual desolation' and the sonnets 'a magnificent expression of it'; [4] and of the failing inspiration Dr. Pick says, 'However much we

1 David A. Downes, Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of his Ignatian Spirit, London, 1959, p.129.

2 ibid., p.129.

3 John Pick, Gerard Manley Hopkins: Priest and Poet, London, 1966, p.30. The idea of 'pervasive influence' is not quite the same as the 'integral collaboration of the priest and the poet' of which Dr. Pick writes in the preface to the second edition of his book (p.xii).

4 ibid., p.132.

may be inclined to regret his thinning stream of poetry, we must transcend the values of mere art and bring in the infinite.' [1] This side-steps the problem of reconciling Hopkins' misery and failing inspiration with the supposedly central and benign influence of the Society of Jesus; the issue is avoided by the phrase 'mere art', a derogatory expression which Hopkins himself would never have used.

The problem shows too in David Downes' book. His view that, 'Hopkins' poetic experience originated primarily from his learning and living the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola,' [2] results in self-contradiction. In one place he claims that 'the spirit of Ignatius provided the vision and the spirit which allowed him to fulfil both his religious and artistic natures to the degree he wished.' [3] However, in Ireland this plainly is not true, and, when Mr. Downes comes to Hopkins' last poems, this fact has to be recognised: 'He denied the poet in him all his life contrary to both his intellectual and spiritual guides, the inevitable result of this being frustration, tension, sterility, and finally desolation.' [4] This is inconsistent in two ways: firstly, 'frustration' and 'fulfilment' are opposites, and, secondly, whereas in the first quotation Hopkins is seen as following Ignatius, in the second, 'all his life' Hopkins is seen as going contrary to him. (Mr. Downes adds, 'He does not seem to have applied prudently Ignatius' directive regarding "the proper use of creatures".' [5]) By these contradictions the central thesis of the

1 Pick, op. cit., p.137.

2 Downes, op. cit., p.10.

3 ibid., p.78.

4 ibid., p.136.

5 ibid., p.136.

book is considerably weakened.

I have so far outlined three views which seem to me mistaken:- that Hopkins had no respect for life or language; that he was torn between two vocations; and that, as a poet, he was transformed by his Jesuit training. Aside from their particular weaknesses these views have the effect both of ignoring the fluctuations in Hopkins' life and also of giving it a fairly static kind of coherence: they do not take sufficient account of either his evolution as a poet, or of the effect of circumstance upon him. In this study I have attempted to trace both these interwoven elements and to show the logic behind his art and life.

There is no dark enigma about the relation between the two. In his Jesuit years his poetry and his duties interconnect in a way that is perfectly rational. The happiness which shows in the poems written at St. Beuno's is evident too in letters about his life there (as a student of theology): he did not want to leave Wales. [1] In contrast the hard, depressing city-parish work of Liverpool and Glasgow leaves him tired but at least possessed of the sense that he is being used in his calling; as one might expect, poetry comes but fitfully from someone so taxed ('There is merit in it but little Muse' [2]), but when it does come it is not anguished. However, in Ireland he is unhappy that his vocation takes him away from his native country and dissatisfied that someone who has offered himself in the service of religion should be put to marking examination papers: [3] in his poems the unhappiness and the frustration show.

This, of course, is too simple a sketch, but it is correct in

1 RB p.43, August 10th, 1877.

2 C p.33, May 14th, 1880.

3 see, e.g., RB p.250, FL p.63 to Newman, & S pp.261-3.

essentials and may serve to emphasise the basic normality of Hopkins' response - a normality which claim and counter-claim about the effect of his being a Jesuit would seem to deny. According to temperament, a soldier might be happy with the army in West Germany but miserable if posted to Cyprus. Similarly a member of the Society of Jesus (whose discipline, Humphry House reminds us, is military rather than monastic [1]) might be happy with one position but not another; in which case his feelings would not be about the Society as such but about his current posting. If the analogy with the army breaks down (because, for example, the Jesuit is not ultimately in the service of temporal power, because his commitment is an act of conscience, and because his life encourages considerable introspection) it may yet act as a corrective to the supposition that all Hopkins' experiences must be examined on a spiritual plane quite remote from the experiences of people who are neither priests, nor even Catholics or Christians.

To maintain that Hopkins' feelings as a religious and as a poet are thus comprehensible is an important first step towards saying that the problems at the core of his poetry are not the merely personal, idiosyncratic ones of a man with a fussy conscience. In reading Hopkins' work we encounter a sense of the precariousness of life. This sense is explicitly developed by him in his poems about transience, but we see it elsewhere too in his consciousness of his own active role as a perceiver, in his awareness of the limits of the mind's control. It is a precariousness which expresses itself in manifold ways through discord and contradiction: how should it be that a man breathes life one moment and is no more than inert matter the next? how is it that

1 Humphry House, 'A Note on Hopkins's Religious Life', in New Verse, No. 14 (April 1935), p.3.

what is lovely is vulnerable to what is insensitive? how may Beauty be reconciled with Power? what recognisable order is there in a world which contains both the bluebell and the scorpion? In Hopkins' poems these are sensed threats not asked questions - he is, after all, not a sceptic but the priest of a dogmatic religion - but they are difficulties which beset virtually his every celebration of natural beauty. God's grandeur is trampled on and smeared, poplars are hacked down, the juice of spring sours with sinning, darkness ends the spark of life, we barely cling to the 'cliffs of fall'.

The decadent way out of these problems is to cherish pain as if it were a form of beauty; for the religious, the answer may be to assert that God's ways are mysterious and pass man's understanding. Thus stated, both are unsatisfying answers, but, in Hopkins' earlier years as a poet, both had some slight attraction for him. As he grows older, however, the problems become more and more insistent until, in Ireland, he is caught up in them and fearful of losing his sanity - a fear which is the ultimate precariousness. Hopkins' strong sense of the world having forms through which God's meaning is discoverable (the development of which I describe in my opening chapters) is scarcely evident in Ireland as he becomes involved in a complex dialectic between suffering and justice.

Chapter One

OXFORD AND PATER

> . . . one must hold ideas loosely in the relative spirit . . . not disquiet oneself about the absolute. 1
>
> Walter Pater

Aside from the intrinsic merit of some pieces, the interest of Hopkins' university poems and prose lies in what they show of him before his life was subject to the claims of the Society of Jesus. Since, in Hopkins' undergraduate years (and in the two following terms he spent as a schoolmaster), the influence of the Jesuits may be discounted, we may use this period in his life to help us gauge the effect which the Society had on him and his work after he joined it: the university period provides a useful point of comparison and, as such, it illuminates parts of his later life. It has a direct bearing, for example, on our understanding of Hopkins' misery in Ireland: it is part of the relevant evidence.

Much more light would be given, of course, if Hopkins had not destroyed a portion of his Oxford poems when he became a priest (if we had even a record of how much he burnt we should know to what extent our picture was incomplete) but, even so, what is left shows a lot about his temperament, his interests and limitations at this time. We can thus see that Hopkins' concern with individual identity and his anxiety about failing to produce were not simply a consequence of later circumstance: though in less intense forms, they were present at

1 Walter Pater, 'Coleridge's Writings', in Westminster Review, January 1866; reprinted in English Critical Essays (Nineteenth Century), ed. Edmund D. Jones, London, 1950, p.427.

Oxford. His university work thus anticipates much that, when it shows in his Irish poems, seems entirely new. The contrary is true of his religious interests: if we compare his Oxford devotional verse with his mature poetry, the earlier work shows as a course almost entirely abandoned, a road seldom taken in later life. It has much in it that is churchy, and, conspicuously, little to do with nature - about which Hopkins has no major claim to make in these early years. Yet already Hopkins is acutely aware of the transience of experience and fitfully occupied with the problem of what may be recoverable from it - an occupation which involves his sense of his own participation as an observer, and which gives him an affinity with one of his Oxford tutors, Walter Pater, whose connection with Hopkins is discussed in the second part of this chapter.

I begin with the question of individual identity. Though the similarity between some of Hopkins' Oxford poems and ones he wrote later - particularly in Ireland - has been noted by others,[1] it extends beyond the immediate circumstance of religious crisis (at Oxford, the crisis of leaving the Anglican Church for the Roman; in Ireland, that of feeling that his Christian service is worthless). Take, for example, this fragment of 1864:

> - I am like a slip of comet,
> Scarce worth discovery, in some corner seen
> Bridging the slender difference of two stars,
> Come out of space, or suddenly engender'd
> By heady elements, for no man knows:
> But when she sights the sun she grows and sizes
> And spins her skirts out, while her central star
> Shakes its cocooning mists; and so she comes
> To fields of light; millions of travelling rays
> Pierce her; she hangs upon the flame-cased sun,

1 cf., e.g., Norman H. MacKenzie, Hopkins, London, 1968, pp.9,11. Professor MacKenzie makes the comparison between the Oxford and the Irish poems in respect of the 'spiritual gloom' which gives them an 'affinity in tone'.

And sucks the light as full as Gideon's fleece:
But then her tether calls her; she falls off,
And as she dwindles shreds her smock of gold
Amidst the sistering planets, till she comes
To single Saturn, last and solitary;
And then goes out into the cavernous dark.
So I go out: my little sweet is done:
I have drawn heat from this contagious sun:
To not ungentle death now forth I run.

This is expressive of an existence which is brief, lonely, mysterious, and inconsequential - tiny by comparison with 'the cavernous dark' into which it disappears. It is interesting to compare this fragment[1] with 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection' (1888): the parallels are strong. In the later poem man is not a comet but a spark or star 'drowned' in an 'enormous dark'; his singular existence 'death blots black out', and time and space obliterate all remains. We have exactly the same sense of isolation and inconsequence as in the earlier poem, though here generalised as a truth about all mankind and then set aside by 'the comfort of the Resurrection'. Similarly, in the Welsh 'The Lantern out of Doors' (1877) men move through the poet's experience as lights through oppressive darkness, then night takes over and 'Death or distance soon consumes them'. Again, in 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' (1885), 'Our evening is over us; our night whelms, whelms, and will end us.'

Man's presence is precarious in these poems, but only in the mature work is this a cause for melancholy. In 'I am like a slip of comet', passing away to 'not ungentle death' is reason for peace and contentment, and a similar absence of tension shows in another

1 It may be, as Hopkins' editors note (Poems, p.304), that this fragment could have been a speech for the scarcely-commenced play Floris in Italy, but the similarities with 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' are strong enough to suggest that the theme was much more than the mouth-work of a minor character.

fragment (this time, from 1866), 'The earth and heaven, so little known'. There the poet's wish is not for death as such but for a sort of insensible transmutation. It is one of Hopkins' most interesting early pieces, for it records gracefully and without strain that wish for the dissolution of his very being which is implicit in, for example, 'No worst there is none' and 'I wake and feel the fell of dark' (1885). The poet is confined by his own consciousness, and, uniquely, the fixed centre of a changing world:

> The earth and heaven, so little known,
> Are measured outwards from my breast.
> I am the midst of every zone
> And justify the East and West;
>
> The unchanging register of change
> My all-accepting fixed eye,
> While all things else may stir and range
> All else may whirl or dive or fly.

The poet is fixed in what he describes in a subsequent stanza as 'the solid world'; and in the course of the poem we have him looking enviously at the movements of a swallow, which is outside - so he fancies - the limits imposed by weight and pain. Then it becomes clear in the last three stanzas (which I now give) that what Hopkins has envied is not the bird's physical freedom but a sort of absence of identity which its movement between sky and earth seems to express:

> There is a vapour stands in the wind;
> It shapes itself in taper skeins:
> You look again and cannot find,
> Save in the body of the rains.
>
> And these are spent and ended quite;
> The sky is blue, and the winds pull
> Their clouds with breathing edges white
> Beyond the world; the streams are full
>
> And millbrook-slips with pretty pace
> Gallop along the meadow grass. -
> O lovely ease in change of place!
> I have desired, desired to pass . . .

Vapour becomes cloud, cloud rain, and the vapour is no more; it is

stream water rushing through meadows, in constant motion, in perpetual flux.

What the poet seeks here is to be part of that flux; but there is also another feeling in the poem, a sense that this constant change will take him, with the clouds, 'Beyond the world'. He has 'desired, desired to pass', and this other-worldly impulse merges easily with the religious 'I have desired to go' theme of 'Heaven-Haven'; indeed the merging of personal inclination with religious pattern is shown in the history of that work.

The first draft of 'Heaven-Haven' was simply called 'Rest'.[1] It described, as the body of the final version does, an unlocalised longing for freedom from strife (a longing which the oblivion of a grave might answer). In the final version the title gives a direction to that longing by providing a social and religious context in which it can express itself: there is now an action (the taking the veil) which subtly alters the nature of the poem, so that it becomes not a withdrawal but a commitment. However, without this engrafted meaning, the poem is consonant with 'The earth and heaven, so little known' in wishing for release.[2]

A part of Hopkins' later work describes the awesomeness of a huge and changing universe, and, as we have seen, this theme is prefigured in his Oxford days. Its aspect in the mature work is often threatening, but change can also mean busy occupation and fulfilment

1 J p.33.

2 Arguably, the companion piece to 'Rest', 'I must hunt down the prize' (Poems, 88), which expresses a questing spirit unusual in Hopkins, serves to show that both poems were experimental. But it is interesting that 'Rest' went through three revisions (cf. J p.33 and Poems, p.248), whereas the other, although complete in its only draft, is untitled and unpolished, with two alternatives for its last stanza: the mood it expressed no longer had Hopkins' interest.

(as in 'Thou art indeed just, Lord') and this is evident (in default) in the early 'The Alchemist in the City'. It is the speaker's unhappy lot to be denied reward. He makes no progress, he remains as he was, and the poem thus introduces Hopkins' anxiety about failing to create anything. When the nun goes to her haven, when the comet is extinguished, when the vapour forms and reforms, these processes are self-sufficient, inevitable; it would scarcely be possible, for example, to question the nun's motive in taking her vows - the poem is her motive. By contrast the Alchemist stands in judgement on his whole life, a lonely and frustrated man; the poem is indeed Hopkins' first major act of self-criticism. It begins the line which leads to 'Thou art indeed just, Lord' with its remonstrations against failure; to the feeling of sterility in 'To R.B.'; to the isolation of 'To seem the stranger'; to the 'ruins of wrecked past purpose' in 'Patience, hard thing!'; and to the self-loathing of 'I wake and feel the fell of dark'. It points the way to his last retreat notes:

> All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch. I wish then for death: yet if I died now I should die imperfect, no master of myself, and that is the worst failure of all. [1]

The Alchemist is symbolic of all who try for the magnificent and risk failing even in the ordinary. His recondite practice acts equally well as an image for artistic creation as for laborious scholarship, but it seems to me mistaken to argue that either of these is specifically in question in the poem. It is diminished if it is read as an allegory. [2] It is not the nature of his endeavour but

1 Retreat notes for January 1st, 1889, S p.262.

2 Contrast MacKenzie, Hopkins, p.9: '"The Alchemist in the City" seems to be an allegory of an Oxford man's efforts to find spiritual wealth through his laborious classical study, and of the fated futility of his search.' These assumptions plainly

the Alchemist's temperament which is at the core of the poem (I give the first five stanzas):

> My window shows the travelling clouds,
> Leaves spent, new seasons, alter'd sky,
> The making and the melting crowds:
> The whole world passes; I stand by.
>
> They do not waste their meted hours,
> But men and masters plan and build:
> I see the crowning of their towers,
> And happy promises fulfill'd.
>
> And I - perhaps if my intent
> Could count on prediluvian age,
> The labours I should then have spent
> Might so attain their heritage,
>
> But now before the pot can glow
> With not to be discover'd gold,
> At length the bellows shall not blow,
> The furnace shall at last be cold.
>
> Yet it is now too late to heal
> The incapable and cumbrous shame
> Which makes me when with men I deal
> More powerless than the blind or lame.

'Waste', 'shame'; 'I am ashamed of the little I have done, of my waste of time': [1] nearly a quarter-century separates these utterances of Hopkins' but the agreement of youth with middle-age is striking - the more striking because the Alchemist whose identity the youthful poet has adopted is a man who has had his life, or at least, the best part of it. He has written off what future is left to him; 'it is now too late'. Looking at the 'alter'd sky' he has very powerfully the sense that, with him, things will stay as they have been and as they are. Others bring their plans to fruition (just as

derive from the fact that Hopkins was reading Latin and Greek at the time and was much involved in religious matters; but there is no reason to regard 'gold' as representative of <u>spiritual</u> wealth, nor does the poem give any support for the idea that 'that lore/ That holds no promise of success' is anything but alchemy.

1 Retreat notes, January 1st, 1889, S p.262.

in 1889 'birds build - but not I build' [1]) but he is incapable of achievement; and his self-confessed gaucheness here brings to mind accounts of Hopkins' later embarrassments as preacher and lecturer. [2] The Alchemist thus shuns the city, as Hopkins later shunned publicity, and not because it brings spiritual dangers but because he has a horror of it. [3] Although the poet uses a persona here, there is no irony to suggest any emotional distance between himself and his spokesman; we are justified in seeing Hopkins as the Alchemist, and the poem is thus very illuminating. It shows a pessimism and a melancholy which are ominous in someone twenty years old, and it reveals that the cause of this melancholy is in the temperament of the writer (the process is circular: the Alchemist has condemned himself even before his work has actually failed beyond all hope; his work must therefore fail, and the condemnation be justified). The image of the cooling furnace anticipates both the short-lived 'blowpipe flame' of inspiration in 'To R.B.' (1889) and also a comment in a letter of 1888:

> It is now years that I have had no inspiration of longer jet than makes a sonnet, except only that fortnight in Wales: it is what, far more than direct want of time, I find most against poetry and production in the life I lead. [4]

'The Alchemist in the City' is the product of a creative mind, fearful about the thwarting of its own processes.

It shares, in this sense, a common theme with a striking fragment from later that year (1865) (of which I give the first

1 'Thou art indeed just, Lord'.

2 cf. Eleanor Ruggles, Gerard Manley Hopkins: a life, New York, 1947, pp.148-9, 192; and S pp.3-12.

3 On this theme cf. Chap. 2.

4 RB p.270, January 12th, 1888.

four lines):

> Trees by their yield
> Are known; but I—
> My sap is sealed,
> My root is dry.

'The Alchemist in the City' ends in passivity with the poet alone in a 'free and kind' natural wilderness, looking at the sunset and waiting for death. In this fragment - as in the last plea of 'Thou art indeed just, Lord' ('send my roots rain') - the pattern of natural growth is used to express both the direction of his whole being and the sense that that direction is being frustrated. He has done nothing; he has gained no merit. 'I can see no grounded prospect,' Hopkins was to write from Stonyhurst in 1883, 'of my ever doing much not only in poetry but in anything at all.' [1] The feeling was to be repeated three-and-a-half years after that in Ireland: 'It is so doubtful, so very doubtful, that I shall be able to pursue any study except the needs of the day . . . I have tried and failed so often.' [2] As this fragment shows, the same was true - fitfully - in Oxford, for the undergraduate.

Persistently Hopkins had difficulty in completing work of any length, and only in Wales was he to find writing poetry easy (a feature which partly accounts for the tour de force of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'). The energy and exuberance of some of his correspondence is misleading on this score. Take, for example, an excited letter to W.M. Baillie in 1864 which tumbles out his latest schemes:

> I have written a lot of my Pilate. I am thinking of a Judas but such a subject is beyond me at present. I have added several stanzas to Floris in Italy but it gets on very slowly.

1 C pp.108-9, June 25th.

2 FL pp.275-6, February 20th, to W.M. Baillie.

> I have nearly finished an answer to Miss Rossetti's Convent Threshold . . . I have written three religious poems which however you would not at all enter into, they being of a very Catholic character. Also The Lover's Stars (a trifle in something like Coventry Patmore's style), and a thing which I hope you will like, a soliloquy of one of the spies left in the wilderness, and the beginning of a story to be called Richard, and some other fragments. So though I finish nothing, I am not idle . . . I have now a more rational hope than before of doing something - in poetry and painting. [1]

Hopkins is buoyant, but how easily that mood might change is evident here: 'but it gets on very slowly', 'though I finish nothing' - the only poems which we know Hopkins completed on the list were the ones he already mentions as being written when he sent the letter. The others, excepting 'Judas', exist as fragments.

Hopkins' felt lack of fulfilment as a poet was not, then, a consequence of his commitment to the Society of Jesus. The litter of fragments he left in his Oxford notebooks points to the fact that he could sustain a long creative effort only with difficulty, that a question of temperament was involved in his failure to produce (though this is open to the objection that the poems which he destroyed when he became a priest may have included finished versions of work that now only survives in part): when we recall his own early poetic expressions of frustration considered above this view is re-enforced.

When we come to the question of Hopkins' religious interests before he became a Jesuit it is difficult to embark on a discussion of these without encountering almost immediately the entangled question of his attitude to physical suffering and bodily beauty. Hopkins has been supposed by some to have been homosexual [2] (he has,

1 FL pp.213-14, July 20th, 1864, to W.M. Baillie. Cp. FL pp.13-14, Sept. 3rd, 1862, to E.H. Coleridge, on 'numbers of descriptions' done in 'scraps of time'.

2 Gardner, Study, vol.II, p.85, has a short discussion of this where he rejects the charge.

for example, a reference to Walt Whitman's mind - that of an acknowledged homosexual - as being more like his own than any other man's was [1]) and by others [2] to have a masochistic interest in pain. Neither of these views seems to me to result in much light being thrown on Hopkins' poetry. They are matters of biographical speculation, but they do derive from a sense of oddness which some people experience in reading Hopkins. At times he alienates himself from wider sympathies.

His religion is at the core of this alienation, but the cause is not Christianity in itself but his method of apprehending it. In some religious matters he was literal and dogmatic. Christianity, so taken, has much in it to offend and, where offence is taken at Hopkins' treatment of it, the objection may well be not against something which is a personal idiosyncracy but against an outlook Hopkins shared then - and still does - with others. Throughout his life he believed in transubstantiation, he held that he had 'light from heaven' about some he had known who were dead, [3] he believed in miracles ('I have just witnessed a case of remarkable and remarkably rapid recovery from typhus in a little lad whom I annointed. It was no doubt due to the sacrament' [4]), and he placed a special value on martyrdom. Nonetheless in his poetry these limiting elements in him are less and less evident as he grows older.

More often than not what alienates is some special attachment of emotion - the arcane emotion of ritual - in which many readers

1 RB p.155, October 18th, 1882.

2 Schneider, Dragon in the Gate, p.9 et passim.

3 cf. e.g. FL p.148, October 9th, 1878 (to his mother) about his grandfather's dying on the day of the Feast of the Holy Rosary.

4 RB pp.123-4, January 26th, 1881.

cannot share. We have this in an 1879 Bedford Leigh sermon of Hopkins when he says, 'For myself I make no secret I look forward with eager desire to seeing the matchless beauty of Christ's body in the heavenly light.' [1] It shows too when Hopkins is writing, assertively, to his father about his decision to become a Catholic:

> I shall hold as a Catholic what I have long held as an Anglican, that literal truth of our Lord's words by which I learn that the least fragment of the consecrated elements in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is the whole Body of Christ born of the Blessed Virgin, before which the whole host of saints and angels as it lies on the altar trembles with adoration. [2]

For someone who does not hold this doctrine the attachment of 'adoration' to what will be, for him, no more than bread and wine will feel strange, and the idea that a body lying on an altar should be venerated will be distasteful.

When veneration seems to involve some affection for physical suffering as it is endured for religious ends this problem of sympathy becomes extreme. We meet it in Hopkins' schoolboy poem 'The Escorial'. Throughout his life Hopkins had a regard for those who had been put to death for their faith. In 1864 he wrote 'For a Picture of Dorothea' (Dorothea was martyred c.303), later he wrote on 'St. Thecla' and, in 1876, he bestowed a kind of martyrdom on the five nuns in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' (whose death at the behest of 'Thou martyr-master' is an indirect consequence of religious intolerance). From his time in Wales we have a short piece on St. Winefred (later her story was the theme of an unfinished play) and subsequently he began a poem on Margaret Clitheroe who was pressed to death in York in 1586 for sheltering Catholic priests. He projected an ode on Edmund Campion to be finished for 1st December,

1 S p.36, November 23rd, 1879.

2 FL p.92, October 16th, 1866, to his father.

1881, the three hundredth anniversary of his martyrdom [1] - though this he never managed. In 'The Escorial' Hopkins writes, in part, about St. Lawrence, the martyr whose death is remembered by the erection of the building.

Hopkins' treatment has brought criticism. Elizabeth Schneider sees the poem as 'marked by an inclination to dwell upon physical torture, cruelty and martyrdom,' [2] and comments, 'Already. . there were signs of emotion deflected into unusual and, to many readers perhaps, somewhat repellant channels.' [3] The description of the martyrdom is indeed horrible (chiefly because of the second line here):

> For that staunch saint still prais'd his Master's name
> While his crack'd flesh lay hissing on the grate;
> Then fail'd the tongue; the poor collapsing frame
> Hung like a wreck that flames not billows beat -

and one's instinctive defence - that these, after all, are lines by a fifteen-year-old in whom mature balance might not be reasonably expected yet - must be set aside in the light of some of Hopkins' Oxford poems. When he was nineteen he produced the uncompleted 'Pilate' where Christ's judge plans his own crucifixion, trying mentally to resolve the technical problems of killing himself - and this in details which serve, it would seem, no larger purpose:

> I'll take in hand the blady stone
> And to my palm the point apply,
> And press it down, on either side the bone
> With hope, with shut eyes, fixedly;
> Thus crucified as I did crucify.

This is morbid; so, it may be argued, is 'Easter Communion' (which I shall come to in a moment) but Miss Schneider's 'Already . . . there

1 RB p.135, September 16th, 1881.

2 Schneider, Dragon in the Gate, p.5.

3 ibid., p.4.

were signs' implies that this morbid element in Hopkins became more pronounced. In fact it is less and less in evidence in his work. The development in his poetry is away from this element, not towards it.

He had, at the outset, we may be sure, a view of suffering which is odd to someone not sharing his religious convictions - and perhaps unsatisfyingly simple to someone who does - (a view which we shall meet again in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland') but one logically consistent with the faith of one who believed that God is, 'throned behind / Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides.' [1] It showed characteristically when Robert Bridges' brother-in-law and young baby had been brutally murdered and Bridges' sister (Mrs. Plow) - herself wounded in the same attack - died of grief a year later. [2] Hopkins wrote in sympathy (it is the last sentence of the quotation which is significant; I give the earlier ones to set the context fairly):

> My dear Bridges, - It is nearly a fortnight since my mother gave me the sad news of Mrs. Plow's death but I have not till today had an opportunity of writing to you, as I wished to do. I cannot help thinking that perhaps for her own sake she could not have wished to live longer with such dreadful grief upon her memory . . . No doubt her health never really recovered the first shock. What suffering she had! Even during Mr. Plow's life she had troubles, you told me, and it appeared in her face. But sufferings falling upon such a person as your sister was are to be looked on as the marks of God's particular love and this is truer the more exceptional they are. [3]

The idea that inflicted suffering is a sign of love is difficult to take.

These sufferings are not, of course, to be confused with the

1 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', stanza 32.

2 see J p.381 n.63:1.

3 RB p.25, April 29th, 1869.

self-inflicted ones of 'Pilate', or of 'Easter Communion' (in which poem there is a sense that physical discomfort has earned a release which is spiritual and sensuous at the same time). Much of the luxuriousness in 'The Escorial' is evident in Hopkins' descriptions of what the building is not (it is not, for example, a 'classic temple' 'brilliant hued / With golden fillets and rich blazonry') and in 'Easter Communion', as in 'The Habit of Perfection', there is a similar tendency towards compensation, as if the austerity of the subject had to be met in its strength by some correspondent yet ultimately conflicting richness in the manner of its treatment. The miserable discomfort of wearing a hairshirt is treated in 'Easter Communion' in this fashion: God will,

> for sackcloth and frieze
> And the ever-fretting shirt of punishment
> Give myrrhy-threaded golden folds of ease.

By such means are those who come 'striped in secret with breath-taking whips' given the approval of ritual: in the terms of the poem their practice does not exist to be judged outside the context of the religious service. The faith thus displayed is involuted. (Contrast 'Easter' ?1866.)

The connection between the sensuousness I have been speaking of and the renunciations of 'The Habit of Perfection' is harder to discern but present nonetheless. In that poem the choice is made for an inner life to which the exterior world is a distraction:

> This rack and reel which you remark
> Coils, keeps, and teases simple sight.

But after this the character of the poem begins to change. In part, the power of such lines as 'Palate, the hutch of tasty lust' and 'feel-of-primrose hands' suggests something going counter to the poem's apparent asceticism, but Hopkins is hardly in the position of the censor who enjoys reading the books he condemns. What has

happened, rather, is that he is no longer talking paradoxes. Instead of singing silence, eloquent dumbness, and eyes seeing in total dark, the senses are offered alternative experiences - but they are sense-experiences nonetheless: Hopkins is enjoying the ritual of worship,

> What relish shall the censers send
> Along the sanctuary side!

This is good poetry but it is ecclesiastical poetry for all that. If the path thus marked were followed unerringly the young man at Oxford with 'a growing love for asceticism and high ritual' [1] must, one supposes, have ended as a minor poet.

Nature, in Hopkins' university days, offered no way to any larger prospect. It is a most singular fact that, while at Oxford, he had not made that synthesis of the spiritual and the physical which his mature poems represent. His poem 'Nondum' (1866) is not representative of his pre-Catholic work (it is so gloomy) but one of its lines serves to mark out the limit of development in Hopkins' thought: at no time after 1876 could he have written that, 'Vacant creation's lamps appal.' The path which the religious poems so far mentioned (and one can add to them 'A Soliloquy of One of the Spies left in the Wilderness', 'Barnfloor and Winepress', 'He hath abolished the old drouth', and the slightly later, pre-1876 Marian pieces 'Ad Mariam' and 'Rosa Mystica') mark out is away from those regions where Hopkins' greatness lies. Before his seven-year silence we can see his verse entering a cul-de-sac as he risks becoming a devotional poet, drawing only on doctrinal sympathies. Religion and the natural world do not fuse in his early poems which are too often of the Testament text, the church and the cloister.

1 FL p.343, Appendix IV, a comment by G.M.H.'s father in a letter to Rev. H.P. Liddon, October 15th, 1866.

At this time his nature poetry (we have it chiefly in fragments) consists of discrete observations as if he were compiling accurate notes so that the real art-work could be made elsewhere, for example, in water-colours or oil:

> The sky minted with golden sequins
> Stars like gold tufts.
> Stars like golden bees.
> Stars like golden rowels.
> Sky peak'd with tiny flames. 1

or, from 'Winter with the Gulf Stream',

> I see long reefs of violets
> In beryl-covered fens so dim,
> A gold-water Pactolus frets
>
> Its brindled wharves and yellow brim,
> The waxen colours weep and run,
> And slendering to his burning rim
>
> Into the flat blue mist the sun
> Drops out and all our day is done.

There are, it is true, sufficient small correspondences between early and mature poems to suggest a linking process of growth but always Hopkins is building from fragments. We may notice, for example, that more than eleven years before he was to write 'The Starlight Night' with its 'piece-bright paling' he recorded,

> The stars were packed so close that night
> They seemed to press and stare
> And gather in like hurdles bright
> The liberties of air. 2

Again, the idea in 'The Sea and the Skylark' (1877) that a bird unwinds music to earth beneath is prefigured in a fragment which fancies, 'that the concording stars / Had let such music down'. 3 The image of collapsing embers which closes 'The Windhover' was one

1 Poems, p.138.

2 Poems, 98.

3 Poems, 122.

which Hopkins had used - with a different connotation - in 1864:

> Death's bones fell in with sudden clank
> As wrecks of mined embers will. [1]

In 'A Soliloquy of One of the Spies left in the Wilderness' there is the same transferred epithet ('they who crush the oil') as in 'God's Grandeur' ('the ooze of oil / Crushed'). The idea of a bird in flight is present in the early work where Hopkins asks of God, 'Let me be to thee as the circling bird', or sees his friends when compared with himself as 'Eye-greeting doves bright-counter to the rook'. [2] Bird-flight clearly fascinated him, for 'The Windhover' and 'The Caged Skylark' have it as their explicit theme; the distinctiveness of Henry Purcell's music is described under the figure of 'some great stormfowl' spreading its plumage (1879), and 'Peace' is a 'wild wooddove' that the poet must persuade to settle.

The connections between later poems and Hopkins' early and detailed observation of nature may be more amply illustrated from his Journal but still, in his time at Oxford (some of the following references come after he left university), there is no synthesis of faith and nature. Professor W.H. Gardner has shown [3] how 'Hurrahing in Harvest' and 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' make use of details set down many years earlier. The same is true for other poems. Probably unconsciously, Hopkins quarried his own early notes; and the difficulties in his later work are sometimes illuminated when the reader refers back. In 1865 Hopkins described clouds in the way he was later to describe Harry Ploughman's

1 Poems, 92.

2 Poems, 16.

3 Gardner, Study, vol.I, pp.164-5.

muscles: they were 'comparable to barrows, arranged of course in parallels'. [1] In 1866 he noted, 'Drops of rain hanging on rails etc seen with only the lower rim lighted like nails (of fingers) . . . Vermilion look of the hand held against a candle with the darker parts as the middles of the fingers and especially the knuckles covered with ash.' [2] This gave him later, 'The moon, dwindled and thinned to the fringe of a fingernail held to the candle' ('Moonrise' 1876). In May 1866 he noted the 'Beautiful blackness and definition of elm tree branches in evening light (from behind)', [3] and in the following year that elm-leaves 'chip the sky', [4] and that he had seen 'isles of leaf all ricked and beaked' [5] - experiences which are built into 'the beakleaved boughs dragonish damask the tool-smooth bleak light' of 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves'. The 'folded rank' of trees in 'Binsey Poplars' had something in common with those in Richmond Park which were 'in distinctly projected, crisp, and almost hard, rows of loaves, their edges, especially at the top, being a little fixed and shaped with shadow', [6] or with the yews along the approach to Manresa House which appeared as 'bright flat pieces like wings in a theatre . . . each shaped by its own sharp-cut shadow falling on the yew tree next behind it.' [7] The fellsides of the Isle of Man were 'plotted and painted with the squares of the

1 J p.66.

2 J p.72.

3 J p.137.

4 J p.152, July 6th, 1867.

5 J p.153, August 27th, 1867.

6 J p.189, October 21st, 1868.

7 J p.192, September, 1869.

fields', [1] as the 'Landscape plotted and pieced' of 'Pied Beauty' (1877), and the idea of 'The Starlight Night' (1877) that the stars shut 'home' Christ is clearly developing three years earlier in Devon:

> 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. [2]

Even earlier still (1864) he had noted in a diary, 'The fields of heaven covered with eye-brights. - White-diapered with stars,' [3] which, by its comparison of the skies with the ground, anticipates 'the grey lawns cold' of the 1877 poem. Hopkins' habit (till 1875) of keeping detailed notes helped sustain him later as a poet and was indeed in itself a creative activity.

There is promise of development, too, in Hopkins' very awareness of the observing process which begins to show in the early 'A Vision of the Mermaids'. He says of sunset,

> (Where the eye fix'd, fled the encrimsoning spot,
> And gathering, floated where the gaze was not;)

This, in itself, is of little consequence but the awareness shown here that vision is not a simple mechanical process has become something more complex by the time he writes a fragment about a rainbow (August 1864):

> It was a hard thing to undo this knot.
> The rainbow shines, but only in the thought
> Of him that looks. Yet not in that alone,
> For who makes rainbows by invention?
> And many standing round a waterfall
> See one bow each, yet not the same to all,
> But each a hand's breadth further than the next.

1 J p.222, August 8th, 1872.

2 J p.254, August 17th, 1874.

3 J. p.17.

> The sun on falling waters writes the text
> Which yet is in the eye or in the thought.
> It was a hard thing to undo this knot.

This piece evidences Hopkins' intense curiosity about the real nature of visible things and a recognition that perception contains an intellectual component crucial to the experience of seeing. Seeing was to become for him a way of realising the security of absolute truths in a world subject to change. It is sufficient for the moment to see Hopkins trying to grasp intellectually what he has seen. Thus, four years later (1868), he writes in his Journal of fir and beech woods in Switzerland, 'the spraying was baffling and beautiful,' [1] and, in 1871, 'The bluebells in your hand baffle you with their inscape, made to every sense.' [2] (This awareness of himself as an active agent of perception - for, 'Unless you refresh the mind from time to time you cannot always remember or believe how deep the inscape in things is', [3] - was to be brought to its highest pitch in 'The Windhover'.)

The foregoing comments indicate considerable continuity between the way Hopkins reacted to life in his Oxford days and the way he responded after he left. The major and crucial exception lies, of course, in the absence from his Oxford prose and poetry of any vital connection between his faith and his love of natural beauty. Thus far, then, the evidence points to the conclusion that the Society of Jesus was central in enabling him to make the fusion which is at the core of so much of his mature work, that, far from being the cause of friction between his religion and his love of

1 J p.171, July 10th, 1868.

2 J p.209, May 9th & 11th, 1871.

3 J p.205, March, 1871.

natural beauty, the Society in some way linked these two major elements in him. As I understand its place in Hopkins' life, the Society presented no obstacle to such a link, but the intellectual possibility for such a connection is opened up in Hopkins not by the teachings of St. Ignatius but by a philosophy of form which Hopkins was developing even before he left Oxford. The seed was sown before he joined the Jesuits.

The man who may have been responsible was one of Hopkins' Oxford tutors, Walter Pater; but Hopkins' debt to Pater may be sensed rather than computed. Its extent is hard to determine - just as the extent to which one person is enriched by another in conversation is also difficult to judge; and, in this case, the difficulty is compounded because Hopkins so plainly rejected much that Pater stood for. My aim, then, is to indicate areas of similarity and disagreement, rather than specific obligation.

It would seem inconceivable that a man with Hopkins' interest in art and feeling for religion could be taught by Pater for a term and yet go uninfluenced by him; but Hopkins makes no acknowledgement to Pater. Indeed his silence about his tutor is remarkable by comparison with his early pronouncements on other major figures of the time: Carlyle was 'morally an imposter', 'a false prophet', [1] Matthew Arnold 'a rare genius and a great critic', [2] Ruskin had 'the insight of a dozen critics' [3] but often went astray, [4] Newman's prose style was 'the flower of the best Oxford life' but still

1 C p.75, October 12th, 1881.

2 RB p.172, January 28th, 1883.

3 FL p.314, September 28th, 1883, to Patmore.

4 FL p.204, September 6th, 1863, to Baillie.

mistaken, [1] Dickens seemed to have no real control of pathos, [2] Gladstone - Hopkins intemperately agreed - ought to be beheaded. [3] And Pater? In 1867 Hopkins had been expecting an invitation from him to spend time at Sidmouth but this had not arrived. [4] In 1868, when he briefly returned to Oxford, he had lunch with him. [5] It was flattering, in 1878, to hear that Pater remembered him and still took an interest in him; [6] and, when Hopkins went back to Oxford later that year to assist with a parish, 'Pater was one of the men I saw most of.' [7] But about his philosophy Hopkins' Journal baldly records, 'Pater talking two hours against Xtianity': [8] there is no further comment.

To construe this silence as disinterest would, for reasons to be enlarged on in a moment, be mistaken. Rather is it a sign of awe; for - one supposes - Hopkins had felt Pater's strength in an area where he himself was acutely sensitive, namely in the relation between art and religion - he had felt it, and known that it supported a view profoundly at odds with his own. Of Hopkins' awe there is little doubt. It shows when he is countering Bridges' charge that the priest has been trying to make his friend endure suffering for its own sake (Hopkins had previously written [9] urging

1 FL p.380, October 20th, 1887, to Patmore.

2 C p.73, October 12th, 1881.

3 FL p.257, April 24th, 1885, to Baillie.

4 FL p.38&p.40, to E.W. Urquhart.

5 J p.167, June 17th, 1868.

6 RB p.48, April 2nd, 1878.

7 FL p.246, to Baillie.

8 J p.138, May 31st, 1866.

9 RB p.60, January 19th, 1879.

Bridges to give money to the needy to the point where it 'pinched', for this in itself was a sort of commitment to Christianity). Pater is the man Hopkins chooses as an example of his respect of persons' beliefs:

> Can you suppose I should send Pater a discipline wrapped up in a sonnet 'with my best love'? Would it not be mad? And it is much the same to burst upon you with an exhortation to mortification (under the name of 'sensible inconvenience') - which mortification too would be in your case aimless. [1]

Hopkins' sense of Pater's strength must remain conjectural, but on the extent of his antipathy to Pater's philosophy the evidence is clear. It is to be found in Hopkins' undergraduate essay, 'On the probable future of metaphysics'; but, before discussing this, it will be well to give a short account of Pater's thinking to show how the two writers connect.

Pater's habit of re-writing his work again and again was but one sign of the continuous development in his thought. However it is the early work which concerns us here and the most important sources for his ideas are his review entitled Coleridge's Writings (1866) and his book The Renaissance (1873). [2] (His later Marius the Epicurean also throws light on this period and his earlier (1864) paper, Diaphaneité - not referred to here - foreshadows some of the ideas present in the works now discussed.)

Implicit in Pater's work is the idea that, because our physical life is continually altering, some corresponding dissolution of moral ideas must take place as well. He says in the Conclusion to The Renaissance,

> What is the whole physical life in that moment [the moment

1 RB p.62, January 29th, 1879.

2 I shall refer also to his essay on 'The School of Giorgione' not published until 1877 (in The Fortnightly Review and The Renaissance, 2nd edition).

> when someone plunges into water on a hot summer's day] but a combination of natural elements to which science gives their names? But those elements, phosphorus and lime and delicate fibres, are present not in the human body alone: we detect them in places remote from it. Our physical life is a perpetual motion of them - the passage of the blood, the waste and repairing of the lenses of the eye, the modification of the tissues of the brain under every ray of light and sound - processes which science reduces to simpler and more elementary forces. Like the elements of which we are composed, the action of these forces extends beyond us: it rusts iron and ripens corn . . . and birth and gesture and death and the springing of violets from the grave are but a few out of ten thousand resultant combinations. That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours, under which we group them - a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it. [1]

'Perpetual motion', 'ten thousand . . combinations' - in short, instability and complexity; but, having invoked the physical sciences so as to reveal this, Pater does not then go on to call on physical laws to return order to the scene. Instead he makes the observer the source of such order as there is, and this in such a way that that order is circumscribed and contingent. In the 'image of ours' 'threads' pass beyond the view of the observer.

The same sequence of thought is to be observed in his review, Coleridge's Writings. 'To the modern spirit,' Pater says, 'nothing is, or can be rightly known except relatively under conditions.' [2] (To digress, the qualifying 'rightly' turns what seems to have the strength of an axiom into a mere point of view; it also makes Pater impregnable, for, though he needs them to establish his own propositions, axioms are, in effect, under his attack.) This is demonstrable from the physical sciences which 'reveal types of life evanescing into each other by inexpressible refinements of change.' [3]

1 Walter Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, with an introduction by Kenneth Clark, London, 1961, pp.220-1.

2 Pater, Coleridge, p.422.

3 ibid., p.422.

It follows, for Pater, that if our physical world is continually altering, so must our moral one be, for, 'The moral world is ever in contact with the physical; the relative spirit has invaded moral philosophy from the ground of the inductive science.' [1] Experience is our touchstone, and, since experience itself is continually altering, it must therefore deny categories not equally subtle and shifting, deny 'every formula less living and flexible than life itself.' [2] (By this logic, 'Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end.' [3]) Thus of the complex relations between man and the world he lives in Pater says:

> The truth of these relations experience gives us; not the truth of eternal outlines effected once for all, but a world of fine graduations and subtly linked conditions, shifting intricately as we ourselves change; and bids us by constant clearing of the organs of observation and perfecting analysis to make what we can of these. 4

We arrive - as in the Conclusion to The Renaissance - at the observer, the individual as the source of order.

From this ground Pater launches his attack on Coleridge. He says:

> The literary life of Coleridge was a disinterested struggle against the application of the relative spirit to moral and religious questions. Everywhere he is restlessly scheming to apprehend the absolute; to affirm it effectively; to get it acknowledged. 5

Pater's feeling of the unworthiness of Coleridge's attempt is given here in that word 'scheming' which suggests, in this context, not simply duplicity but a fundamental untruth to life, an untruth which comes because Coleridge had a 'passion for the absolute, for

1 Pater, Coleridge, p.422.

2 ibid., p.456.

3 Pater, Renaissance, p.222.

4 Pater, Coleridge, p.423.

5 ibid., pp.423-4.

something fixed where all is moving.' [1]

To return now to Hopkins' undergraduate essay, Though Pater is not named by Hopkins it is Pater's philosophy which is chiefly under attack. Before giving 'The probable future of metaphysics' Hopkins characterises contemporary thinking in a way which plainly includes Pater in its scope. He speaks of 'the ideas so rife now of a continuity without fixed points, not to say saltus or breaks, of development in one chain of necessity, of species having no absolute types.' [2] He predicts that there will be a return to Platonism or 'more correctly Realism', and speculates that this will challenge 'the prevalent philosophy of continuity or flux' on three major points:

> The first is that of type or species . . . The new Realism will maintain that in musical strings the roots of chords, to use technical wording are mathematically fixed and give a standard by which to fix all the notes of the appropriate scale . . . so also there are certain forms which have a great hold on the mind and are always reappearing and seem imperishable, such as the designs of Greek vases and lyres, the cone upon Indian shawls, the fleur-de-lys, . . . and some pictures we may long look at and never grasp or hold together, while the composition of others strikes the mind with a conception of unity which is never dislodged: and these things are inexplicable on the theory of pure chromatism or continuity - the forms have in some sense or other an absolute existence. [3]

It was this absoluteness which Pater denied; it is not the permanence of fixed patterns but the transcience of experience which strikes him. Instead of Hopkins' belief that there are 'certain forms which . . . seem imperishable' we have his conviction that,

> those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also;

1 Pater, Coleridge, p.457.

2 J p.120 (1867).

3 J p.120.

> all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. [1]

Pater's is an evanescent world made of fragments, and these fragments hold no meaning outside themselves for they are, in endless sequence, only aggregations of experience just as complex. Against this infinite divisibility the undergraduate opposes his second point; we begin with the whole (here, in the form of Platonic Idealism):

> A second point at issue may be the prevalent principle that knowledge is from the birth upwards, is a history of growth, and mounts from the part to the whole. Realism will undoubtedly once more maintain that the idea is only given . . . from the whole downwards to the parts. [2]

Such a dissemination from the centre gives reality an order and meaning outside that imposed by the individual.

We have already seen that Pater's order is locked in the mind of the observer; so his Marius 'was to continue all through life, something of an idealist, constructing the world for himself, in great measure from within, by the exercise of meditative power.' [3] The image of the individual's confinement recurs in Pater's work. In The Renaissance each mind keeps 'as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.' [4] Marius reasons 'that we are never to get beyond the walls of this closely shut cell of one's own personality.' [5] Again Hopkins resists the idea of individual dominance by invoking the principle of a central unity in reality:

> A form of atomism like a stiffness or sprain seems to hang upon and hamper our speculation: it is an over-powering, a

1 Pater, Renaissance, pp.221-2.

2 J p.120.

3 Walter Pater, Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas, London, 1970, p.35.

4 Pater, Renaissance, p.221.

5 Pater, Marius, p.104.

> disproportioned sense of personality . . . The new school of metaphysics will probably encounter this atomism of personality with some shape of the Platonic Ideas. 1

Instead of arbitrariness, fixity; instead of the fragmentary, the organic; instead of the personal, the absolute - this seems to be a clear and final rebuttal of what Pater stood for. In fact, Hopkins' attitude was ambivalent.

By virtue of the adherence to fixed principles which religious belief entails, one would hardly expect an ardent High Anglican (Hopkins in 1865) or intending Catholic (in 1866) to be in sympathy with Pater's rejection of the absolute in life; and, on this account, the tenor of Hopkins' essay on metaphysics is understandable. If Pater in 1866 was saying privately to Hopkins what he was publishing in the same year the undergraduate's antipathy must certainly have been marked on this account:

> The Catholic church and humanity are two powers that divide the intellect and spirit of man. On the Catholic side is faith, rigidly logical as Ultramontanism, with a proportion of the facts of life, that is, all that is despairing in life coming naturally under its formula. On the side of humanity is all that is desirable in the world, all that is sympathetic with its laws, and succeeds through that sympathy. 2

Religion, which is, in this passage from Coleridge's Writings, a 'formula' to satisfy the despairing, has in Pater's essay on Winckelmann (1867) a base in a care for 'charms and talismans' [3] (by which phrase he makes faith not simply a mistaken alternative to his philosophy of flux but discreditable as well). In 1866 Hopkins became a Catholic, so he was plainly beyond the reach of any discouragement Pater might have offered; but his subsequent ideas

1 J pp.120-1.

2 Pater, Coleridge, p.433.

3 Pater, Renaissance, p.196.

about form in art show a remarkable affinity with Pater's. It is their kinship on this subject which suggests a larger inter-action than Hopkins' explicit references to Pater indicate.

Pater's view of the relation between form and content in his essay on 'The School of Giorgione' (1877) is of a kind which preserves the autonomy of a work of art, setting it outside the reach of system or dogma. It receives its most eloquent expression in this famous passage:

> All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For a while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it. That the mere matter of a poem, for instance, its subject, namely, its given incidents or situation - that the mere matter of a picture, the actual circumstances of an event, the actual topography of a landscape - should be nothing without the form, the spirit, of the handling, that this form, this mode of handling, should become an end in itself, should penetrate every part of the matter: this is what all art constantly strives after, and achieves in different degrees. [1]

Now compare Hopkins, writing in February 1868, and giving - already giving, as early as this - his own distinctive formulation of the same idea:

> The further in anything, as in a work of art, the organisation is carried out, the deeper the form penetrates, the prepossession flushes the matter, the more effort will be required in apprehension, the more power of comparison, the more capacity for receiving that synthesis of (either successive or spatially distinct) impressions which gives us the unity with the prepossession conveyed by it. [2]

Not a line of the poetry he had written to this date and which is extant would be generally acknowledged to present readers with the difficulties of his mature work, and yet the theory behind and the defence for the difficulty is already formulated: 'the deeper the form penetrates . . . the more effort will be required in

1 Pater, Renaissance, p.129.

2 J p.126.

apprehansion.'

Form penetrating matter - the wording is exactly Pater's, as we can see, though Hopkins' use antedates Pater's Giorgione essay by nine years. The co-incidence of view is remarkable: one feels - with no stronger evidence than this circumstantial kind - that Hopkins must have owed something to his tutor. Yet the differences between their views are notable as well. Where Pater talks about 'the spirit of the handling', Hopkins writes about 'the organisation' being 'carried out'. Thus what Pater traces - as we shall see a little later - to its source in the individual artistic consciousness, Hopkins tends to locate in technical accomplishment. Furthermore Hopkins does not confine himself to art in his comments; they may be true of 'anything'.

Indeed Hopkins' confidence in form did not confine itself to art, and this was the crucial distinction between the two men. Pater was surrounded by a world full of beautiful creations with no meaning outside themselves; Hopkins was part of a beautiful Creation. For him the 'form' of art was to be found in nature. Thus he notes in his Journal, 'A budded lime against the field wall: turn, pose and counterpoint in the twigs and buds - the form speaking,' [1] and (in 1874), 'I looked at some delicate flying, shafted ashes - there was one especially of single sonnet-like inscape.' [2] In the unhindered natural world form penetrates matter with its own deep meaning and Hopkins was to say (1873) in perhaps his most important single comment on the relation between visible beauty and moral truth, 'All the world is full of inscape and chance left free to act falls

1 J p.163, April 6th, 1868.

2 J p.259, September 10th, 1874.

into an order as well as purpose.' [1]

This divergence from Pater is fundamental but in very many other respects the two men are in accord. What is valuable in the life of the senses is hidden and apparently difficult of access. Thus Hopkins says, 'Unless you refresh the mind from time to time you cannot always remember or believe how deep the inscape in things is.' [2] Again, looking in a barn, 'I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it. . .' [3] Similarly, in Marius the Epicurean, Pater speaks of 'that poetic and as it were moral significance, which surely belongs to all the means of daily life, could we but break through the veil of our familiarity with things by no means vulgar in themselves.' [4] But his idea of 'the hiddenness of perfect things' [5] (Marius) must, of course, take account of his general awareness of flux; so that, whereas Hopkins says, 'bluebells baffle you with their inscape' [6] and the spraying of beech woods 'was baffling and beautiful', [7] as if nature presented him with problems to solve, Pater cherishes the mysteries of life as mysteries. He loves the esoteric. Leonardo da Vinci is thus described:

> Poring over his crucibles, making experiments with colour, trying, by a strange variation of the alchemist's dream, to discover the secret, not of an elixir to make man's natural life

1 J p.230, February 24th, 1873.

2 J p.205, March, 1871.

3 J p.221, July 19th, 1872.

4 Pater, Marius, p.27.

5 ibid., p.72.

6 J p.209, May 11th, 1871.

7 J p.171, July 10th, 1868.

> immortal, but of giving immortality to the subtlest and most delicate effects of painting, he seemed to them rather the sorcerer or the magician, possessed of curious secrets and a hidden knowledge, living in a world of which he alone possessed the key. [1]

'Strange', 'secret', 'subtle', 'curious', 'hidden' - these are some of Pater's favourite words because they are a continual acknowledgement of the elusiveness of life; but for Hopkins the appearance holds a reality which is there to be grasped. Note the energy and purposefulness in these passages: firstly, of a river, Hopkins says, 'by watching hard the banks began to sail upstream, the scaping unfolded;' [2] - the pattern of the water yields up its mystery to the diligent observer; and in his Journal for the beginning of April 1871, he notes,

> This is the time to study inscape in the spraying of trees, for the swelling buds carry them to a pitch the eye could not else gather. [3]

Because Hopkins was - chronologically - in the wake of the Romantic movement we often ignore the fact that his attitude to nature was more closely aligned with that of the naturalist than of Wordsworth, for example. Because the Romantics' Nature is finally unknowable, the word 'explored' in this extract from a letter to Baillie (1863) separates Hopkins from them:

> I think I have told you that I have particular periods of admiration for particular things in Nature; for a certain time I am astonished at the beauty of a tree, shape, effect etc, then when the passion, so to speak, has subsided, it is consigned to my treasury of explored beauty, and acknowledged with admiration and interest ever after, while something new takes its place in my enthusiasm. [4]

1 Pater, Renaissance, p.109.

2 J p.200.

3 J p.205.

4 FL p.202, July 10th, 1863.

Pater finds insoluble mystery in what he sees, whereas Hopkins wishes to master its puzzles (as a student tries to master a subject); both emphasise, in art, the uniqueness of the artist.

> Every true poet . . . must be original and originality a condition of poetic genius; so that each poet is like a species in nature (not an individuum genericum or specificum) and can never recur, [1]

Hopkins was to write in 1886, but Hopkins' individuality was nothing capricious or affected; it was linked with that consciousness of form which I have already said connects him with Pater. Thus in an earlier defence of his oddness Hopkins summons the idea that as an artist it is his purpose to be distinctive,

> as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling 'inscape' is what I above all aim at in poetry. [2]

Indeed, as we can see in his sonnet 'To Henry Purcell', distinctiveness becomes the sign for Hopkins of artistic success:

> It is the forged feature finds me; it is the rehearsal
> Of own, of abrupt self there so thrusts on, so throngs the ear.

This is similar to Pater where, for example, he writes of 'that peculiar pictorial temperament or constitution' [3] from which is projected the design in a painting ('The School of Giorgione') or of Leonardo da Vinci bringing his art-works 'out of the secret places of a unique temperament.' [4]

Pater would have encouraged Hopkins, then, to value

1 FL p.370, October 6th, 1886, to Coventry Patmore. See also RB p.291, '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.'

2 RB p.66, February 15th, 1879.

3 Pater, Renaissance, p.127.

4 ibid., p.117.

individuality; to expect that truth is hidden; to believe that life is fleeting; to hold that art and Christianity are opposed; to trust in form; and some of these encouragements one can see Hopkins accepting. The direct disagreement, I have said, comes when Pater urges that the artist must 'hold ideas in the relative spirit' not be searching for the absolute. Obvicusly, Hopkins' whole life was lived in flat contradiction of this: the daily claims of the Society of Jesus presented to him the absolute in life.

It must seem, in view of this opposition, that it is Hopkins who is circumscribed and Pater who lives in a spacious and fruitful world. Hopkins would seem to be imprisoned by his fixed religious beliefs ('bundles of invested emotional capital' in I.A. Richards' derisive phrase [1]), Pater to have the free range of unbridled intellect. In fact, and against probability, something more nearly the contrary is true. It is Hopkins' world which is dynamic and alive; and despite Pater's attractive occupation with spiritual freedom, with novelty and change, it is he who finally denies these qualities.

To show how this comes about I begin with a passage from Edward Thomas's book. [2] Thomas is speaking of Pater's ideal - the life of contemplation:

> It is impossible not to regard this aim, as Pater expressed it, as a kind of higher philately or connoisseurship. He speaks like a collector of the great and beautiful . . . Thus he tends to conventionalise the strange, to turn all things great and small into a coldly pathetic strain of music. He refines upon the artists who have refined upon the Lord of lords.

1 I.A. Richards, 'Gerard Hopkins', in Dial, no.131 (1926) pp.195-203.

2 This is dismissed by Ruth Child (The Aesthetic of Walter Pater, Darby, P.A., 1969, p.3) as 'obviously superficial' but Thomas's criticism seems to me to hold.

> Shakespeare's Claudio is a 'flowerlike young man' set in 'the horrible blackness of prison'; Isabella is 'clear, detached, columnar,' or, with the Duke as friar, 'like some grey monastic picture'. He is very glad of those who do not make 'impassioned contemplation' their end. For they are the chief contrivers of the spectacles which he is looking at, with appropriate emotions; and but for them, contemplation could hardly be of 'supreme importance' in the conduct of life, since all would be contemplative, and there would be little to contemplate save the artist Death, 'blanching the features of youth and spoiling its goodly hair.' [1]

Thomas describes Pater's dependant position, and the consequent flaw in his philosophy: the passive watcher of art cannot logically exalt his own passivity to pre-eminence when it depends for its worth on the activity of others, the artists. The corollary which follows from this situation is that the watcher of art is necessarily fixed inasmuch as he is retrospective, he looks on what has been. To argue against this that (the physical conditions for survival being allowed) art is immortal - so that what has been is also what is and, in large measure, what will be - merely serves to emphasise the objection. Instead of living in a world of newness and change, the art-critic is living in a world which is little altered. When the art-critic looks at art of the past he is looking at a large part of his future world too.

Pater's stricture on Coleridge might be repeated at this point: he had a 'passion for the absolute, for something fixed where all is moving.' So did Pater; except that Pater disguises the fact from himself. He separates art and life - in such a manner that, while life moves, art provides a sanctuary from its turbulence. Artistic genius puts 'a happy world of its own creation in place of the meaner world of our common days' [2] (note the prescription that

1 Edward Thomas, Walter Pater: a critical study, London, 1913, p.96.

2 Pater, Renaissance, p.205.

the world be 'happy', and the words 'in place of' - Pater is not speaking simply of the autonomy of art). Modern art can 'give the spirit an equivalent for the sense of freedom', [1] which freedom the revelations of modern science (from whose inductive base Pater has already attacked Coleridge) have deprived us of for ever, 'That naive, rough sense of freedom, which supposes man's will to be limited, if at all, only by a will stronger than his.' [2] How remarkable this is! Pater is almost regretting the passing of belief in the Divine Will, because in its place has come something much more insidious and confining:

> For us, necessity is not, as of old, a sort of mythological personage without us, with whom we can do warfare. It is rather a magic web woven through us, like that magnetic system of which modern science speaks, penetrating us with a network, subtler than our subtlest nerves, yet bearing in it the central forces of the world. Can art represent men and women in these bewildering toils so as to give the spirit at least an equivalent for the sense of freedom? [3]

For Hopkins, 'warfare', if he chose, was still a possibility; he was not caught helplessly in Pater's web. But Pater himself is so bewildered and constricted that he must escape into art. At the end of his essay on Winckelmann the passivity of the art-watcher - Pater's refusal to acknowledge that the creative artist is essentially active and engaged with life - is at its most extreme. Life is not dynamic and full, it is derivative in its greatness, justified by art: 'Who, if he saw through all,' asks Pater writing in connection with the achievements of contemporary art, 'would fret against the chain of circumstance which endows one at the end with

1 Pater, Renaissance, p.208.

2 ibid., p.218.

3 ibid., p.218.

those great experiences?' [1]

Pater's work opposes life and art, then, and shows signs of disengagement and withdrawal into what is 'fixed where all is moving'. He deals in his own kind of immortality (Mona Lisa has 'a perpetual life' [2]) and in a manner which disvalues present and particular experiences. These 'morsels of actual life' must be 'refined upon or idealised', [3] and a great picture is a play of sunlight and shadow 'but refined upon, and dealt with more subtly and exquisitely than by nature itself.' For all his concessions to nature at its best [4] Pater celebrates not life but life as it has already been celebrated. The flight of a falcon, or thick clusters of stars, one is led to believe, could be important to him only in art or poetry.

Plainly Hopkins did not follow him in this; but religion as well as art offers its own kind of detachment from life, and to answer the question 'why did Hopkins' becoming a religious not finish him as a poet?' there is a need to reach outside the teachings and practice of the Society of Jesus. While at Oxford Hopkins acquired (whether from Pater we cannot be sure) a doctrine of form central to his subsequent view of nature and to the development of his own poetry. He showed already the anguish of thwarted creativity that was to be so evident in his later years; but the critical connection of the mature poems between natural beauty and religious faith had not been evident as yet in either Journal entry or poem, though there

1 Pater, Renaissance, p.219.

2 ibid., p.123.

3 ibid., p.134.

4 ibid., p.128.

was no intellectual obstacle to it. On all these important facts the Society of Jesus can be held to have no bearing. The part it played in Hopkins' subsequent development as a poet - a part often distorted or exaggerated - is a major question in considering his years of silence.

Chapter Two

THE FALLOW YEARS

'The only just judge, the only just literary critic, is Christ.' [1]

Before becoming a Jesuit Hopkins burnt all the poetry which he had not passed on to friends and, for seven years, 'wrote nothing but two or three presentation pieces which occasion called for.' [2] At the end of this period he produced 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'. The apparent contradiction between this sudden-seeming achievement and the destruction which preceded it seven years earlier has given to Hopkins' life an unwarranted ambiguity. He has been seen as a Jekyll and Hyde; [3] guilty priest, thwarted poet.

The truth is very different, and it may be helpful to put two questions to bring it into focus: what in general was Hopkins' relation with the public world (the world where a poet would normally expect to be read)? and, what happened to his art at the time when the line of its development seemed to be severed? I begin with the first.

We should take Hopkins' burning of his poems as a renunciation of all hopes of that public world in which he might expect an audience. It marked a re-orientation in his life which was, in the event, an affirmation of his own individuality, for to acknowledge, as Hopkins

1 C p.8, June 13th, 1878.

2 C p.14, October 5th, 1878.

3 q.v., V. de Sola Pinto, Crisis in English Poetry, London, 1951, p.72, 'Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde can be taken as a symbol of this poet. Dr. Jekyll was the model Victorian, the favourite pupil of Jowett, the friend of Newman and the saintly Catholic priest; Mr. Hyde was the savage and sensual artist . . . and the "communist" . . . ' Hopkins himself used the 'symbol' (Oct. 1886 RB p.238) but that does not justify these remarks.

was to do in 1878, that Christ is the only just judge is effectively to disregard the pressing claims of others. However, if this were the effect of the burning, it certainly was not its purpose, which was rather in the nature of a demonstration to himself of where his sympathies lay, a token.

Hopkins was inclined to fix his life by self-made resolutions, and these have - as the burning has - a note of finality which subsequent events belie. Thus he wrote to an Oxford friend in July 1867:

> I had not forgotten I had promised to copy you out a thing of mine, but first I had to make some alterations which I cd. not settle to my satisfaction in that preoccupied time of reading for the schools, during which I had a rule - with a partial exception in the case of this piece - to have nothing to do with versemaking. [1]

The rule was made but almost immediately qualified. There is even more weightiness about this diary entry of 6th November, 1865:

> On this day by God's grace I resolved to give up all beauty until I had his leave for it. [2]

Giving up was plainly with Hopkins a means of self-discipline, but he did not 'give up' beauty (whatever exactly that means) in any notable way for any great length of time. The heaviness of the wording here - and the fact that it is now perpetuated in print - gives to the daily fluctuations of a scrupulous conscience an unjustified rigidity. Hopkins out-grew his own restrictions.

This is obvious in the case of Welsh. His Journal entry for 6th September 1874 (shortly after going to Wales for training) has this in it:

> Indeed in coming here I began to feel a desire to do something for the conversion of Wales. I began to learn Welsh too but not with very pure intentions perhaps. However on consulting the

1 FL p.38, July 7th, 1867, to E.W. Urquhart.

2 J p.71, November 6th, 1865.

> 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. [1]

There is a deal of 'giving up' here, but in fact Hopkins went on to become reasonably competent in Welsh and there is no further expression of qualms on the subject. The casual reader risks making more of this entry than Hopkins did himself.

Burning poems was obviously more important for Hopkins than deciding whether or not to learn Welsh, but the same is true of that too. It was a token act, and Professor MacKenzie seems to me to give its sense exactly when he says, 'he resolved to burn his poems as a symbolic act, very much as St. Francis of Assisi stripped himself of his worldly clothes at the start of his new life.' [2] It was not Hopkins' commitment to the priesthood but the even more rigorous dedication to a religious order which prompted his abandonment of verse - a fact which needs to be distinguished. The organisation and nature of the Society of Jesus is such that it would be difficult to find an exact parallel, but some slight indication of the distinction between 'priest' and 'religious' might be given by suggesting that ordination and entry to a monastery would not normally be confused. Contrast Hopkins' letter to Baillie of February 1868 -

> I want to write still and as a priest I very likely can do that too, not so freely as I should have liked, e.g. nothing or little in the verse way, but no doubt what would best serve the cause of my religion, [3]

- with the severity of the utterances which came after his May

1 J p.258, September 6th, 1874.

2 MacKenzie, Hopkins, p.13.

3 FL p.231.

resolution when he felt that his poems 'would interfere with my state and vocation' [1] and, 'what I had written I burnt before I became a Jesuit and resolved to write no more.' [2]

I have suggested that the burning had primarily a symbolic significance for Hopkins. Some support for this view is given by the way he writes to Bridges in 1868, a little more than two months after the probable date (May 11th [3]) on which he burnt his poems. He says, 'I kept however corrected copies of some things which you have and will send them . . .' [4] - the gesture (the burning) has been made; however, this is not allowed to interfere with artistic pride, with the scrupulously careful last touch. Similarly, the token burning does not stop Hopkins hoping to raise money for a holiday in Switzerland by writing an article on William Morris and 'the medieval school of poets'. This, he says, will be his swan-song - if it ever gets written. [5]

1 RB p.24, August 7th, 1868.

2 C p.14, October 5th, 1878.

3 q.v., J pp.537-9 where Humphry House discusses Hopkins' J entry 'Slaughter of the Innocents' and points to the way in which Hopkins clearly linked three dates (23rd August 1867, 2nd May 1868, and 11th May) the first two of which relate to a decision in the making, the third to an act consequent upon it. He rejects W.H. Gardner's suggestion that the decision concerned was to remain celibate (on the grounds that this interpretation disregards Hopkins' careful cross-referencing) and notes that the words which occur in the Journal - 'I resolved' - occur also in a reference to the burning of the poems (letter to Dixon): the decision in both cases was 'formally considered'. The poems had been destroyed by 7th August, 1868 (letter to RB) and there is no other J entry relating to their burning. 'The conclusion seems inescapable that the slaughtered innocents were his poems, the children of his creation.' If House's arguments are accepted, much might, of course, be made of the fact that Hopkins called his poems 'Innocents'.

4 RB p.24, August 7th, 1868.

5 FL p.54, July 2nd, 1868, to Fr. Ignatius Ryder.

Until he wrote 'To R.B.' (1889) in which he speaks of 'hand at work now never wrong', his attitude to poetry remained constant: verse-making was not one of the duties of a religious and, since the duties of a religious should occupy most of his life, there could only be a small place for poetry - it was something to be fitted in as time allowed. When his duties altered and allowed him more free time he was depressed by the little he could produce, but not until his priestly life became completely unsatisfying (late on in Ireland) did 'poetry and production' [1] become the main aspirations in his daily life. Thus in 1877 he scruples about writing a letter on rhythm because it is an 'unprofessional matter'. [2] By contrast, in 1882, the commentary he is writing on Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises is 'very professional'. [3] Indeed the question of professionalism is recurrent in his letters. He tells Dixon that for seven years he wrote nothing 'as not belonging to my profession', [4] and it is this sense we should bear in mind when Hopkins writes in 1884, while still relatively new to Ireland, that 'it always seems to me that poetry is unprofessional.' [5] His single-mindedness shows again when, in 1881, he worries to Dixon about '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.' [6] Thus, when Patmore does what Hopkins himself did years before and burns some of

1 RB p.270, January 12th, 1888.

2 RB p.41, June 13th, 1877.

3 RB p.150, September 26th, 1882.

4 C p.14, October 5th, 1878.

5 RB p.197, August 21st, 1884.

6 C p.88, November 2nd, 1881.

his work, the Jesuit's comment is that, 'When we take a step like this we are forced to condemn ourselves: either our work should never have been done or never undone, and either way our time and our toil are wasted.' [1] This is Hopkins' mature judgement on his own action and it is quite consistent with his other statements; poetry may well mean wasted hours, he 'cannot in conscience spend time' [2] on it.

Unfortunately this view is easily confused with another which supposes that dark and subconscious forces were at work in Hopkins' choice, and to misunderstand Hopkins' burning of his poems is to begin to misunderstand his later life. Conversely, if that decision is properly understood, one will tend to resist views such as the one Father Devlin proposes on this (he is here discussing Hopkins' appointment to teach Classics at Stonyhurst College in September 1882):

> Confronted with the perfect neatness of the Provincial's mind, with his massive and smoothly-moving deliberation, a wave of diffidence amounting almost to despair seeped up in Hopkins. It was borne in upon him that he must look on his poetic genius as an amiable weakness which a hard-working Jesuit might indulge for an hour or two occasionally. And he grasped, half-consciously but once and for all, that the secret 'wildness' of his inspiration could never be channelled in that manner. [3]

Hopkins' mind had been made up long before this; and his inspiration was never 'wildness' (it was 'enthusiasm', [4] sensible movement, [5] 'rapture' [6] even, but never marked by the lawlessness and indiscipline which 'wildness' connotes) nor was it 'secret', if secret be supposed

1 FL p.385, May 6th, 1888.

2 RB p.66, February 15th, 1879.

3 S p.215.

4 RB p.56, July 16th 1878, 'The Hurrahing Sonnet was the outcome of half an hour of extreme enthusiasm.'

5 RB p.66, February 15th, 1879, 'The only person I am in love with seldom . . . stirs my heart sensibly . . .'

6 'To R.B.' 'the one rapture of an inspiration'.

to have connotations of furtiveness. Furthermore there is nothing in the relevant September letter to suggest that Hopkins was obliged to see his interest in poetry as a 'weakness'. (Within a fortnight he had finished and was pleased with 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo', begun the previous year.)

It would be mistaken then to suggest that the Society of Jesus as such suppressed his creative impulse. 'I am always jaded, I cannot tell why, and my vein shows no signs of ever flowing again,' [1] Hopkins wrote while still based at Stonyhurst in March of the following year; and this is hardly the language of someone who feels he should not be doing what he is so obviously failing to do anyway.

It is Father Devlin's use of the phrase 'half-consciously' which is particularly misleading because it introduces the possibility of fierce inner tensions of which the poet himself was scarcely aware (a possibility which, I hope to show later, has produced distorted readings - notably of 'The Windhover'). Thus Father Devlin can subsequently say of Hopkins' move to Ireland:

> There are indications in the notes how his outraged nature (that is, his poetic genius) wreaked its revenge. It curled itself around his beloved country, 'England . . . wife to my creating thought', and enlisted his patriotism and sense of justice against his vow of obedience. It entangled itself demonstratively in the endless labyrinth of examination papers, emphasizing the slavery to which it was being subjected. [2]

This clearly suggests that in Ireland Hopkins was in the grip of some titanic force quite outside his control and quite beyond his understanding (whose power it had usurped). By making it appear that Hopkins was finding excuses for himself this takes the justice out of the complaints he made in his letters and, in that way, makes him

1 RB p.178, March 27th, 1883.

2 S p.218.

culpable for the misery he was often in. How far this situation is from the truth I hope to show in my final chapter; for the present, it should be seen that this misreading derives initially from a misconception of the reasons for Hopkins' failing inspiration, a misconception which would not arise if sufficient inportance were attached both to the signs given in his undergraduate poetry and to his reasons for the token burning of his verse.

Hopkins went back on his decision not to write (he felt that his superior's wish that someone would write on the Deutschland was a sufficient reason) but his attitude to poetry remained consistent. In his attitude to publication there is more fluctuation.

He is certainly alert to the risks involved in fame. It 'gives them "itching ears" and makes them live on public breath,' [1] he says. It is not poetry but publication (with its 'thoughts of vainglory' [2]) which constitutes the real problem for the spiritual life: 'Genius attracts fame and individual fame St. Ignatius looked on as the most dangerous and dazzling of all attractions,' [3] he tells Dixon. Hopkins (in 1881) will thus be entirely passive in the matter of publication, resigning himself to the possibility of continuing obscurity:

> When a man has given himself to God's service, when he has denied himself and followed Christ, he has fitted himself to receive and does receive from God a special guidance, a more particular providence. This guidance is conveyed partly by the action of other men, as his appointed superiors, and partly by direct lights and inspirations. If I wait for such guidance, through whatever channel conveyed, about anything, about my poetry for instance, I do more wisely in every way than if I try to serve my own seeming interests in the matter. Now if you [Dixon] value what I write, if I do myself, much more does our Lord. And if he chooses to avail himself of what I leave at his disposal he can do

1 C p.6, June 13th, 1878.

2 C p.88, November 2nd, 1881.

3 C pp.93-4, December 1st, 1881.

> so with a felicity and with a success which I could never command. And if he does not, then two things follow; one that the reward I shall nevertheless receive from him will be all the greater; the other that then I shall know how much a thing contrary to his will and even to my own best interests I should have done if I had taken things into my own hands and forced on publication. This is my principle and this in the main has been my practice. [1]

However, Hopkins' motives for not publishing were ambiguous. Publication would mean not only fame and vainglory but also exposure. This he feared throughout his life. We recall the 'cumbrous shame' which makes the Alchemist leave the city; and a year earlier (1864) Hopkins had written to Baillie about his habit 'to conceal what I write except from you' [2] (a habit he certainly broke later by, for example, giving copies of poems to Urquahart [3] and Bridges [4]).

The fear of criticism or opposition extended to his work as a priest in Oxford, 'I used indeed to fear when I went up about this time last year that people would repeat against me what they remembered to my disadvantage.' [5] It entered into his feelings about publishing his poetry. Perhaps it shows in his instruction to his mother when there is some possibility of The Month accepting 'The Wreck of the Deutschland': 'You must never say that the poem is mine.' [6] Certainly it is present in his anxious order to Canon Dixon when his former schoolmaster is on the point of sending poems of his to the Carlisle newspapers (in 1879):

> Pray do not send the piece to the paper: I cannot consent to, I forbid its publication. You must see that to publish my manu-

1 C p.93.

2 FL p.214, July 20th, 1864.

3 FL p.38, July 7th, 1867.

4 cf. RB p.24, April 29th, 1868.

5 RB p.97, October 22nd, 1879.

6 FL p.139, June 26th, 1876.

> script, against my expressed wish is a breach of trust . . .
> . . . what is not near enough for public fame may be more than enough for private notoriety, which is what I dread. 1

It is not the spiritual danger of fame that Hopkins is worried about here, but the censure of his colleagues. Seven years later when Dixon dedicates a 'Bible Birthday Book' anthology of texts and poems to Hopkins, and asks that one of his stanzas should be included, the same anxiety shows in reply:

> The dedication: this is a great honour, which on the one hand I do not like to decline but which nevertheless I have some dread of, for I do not want my name to be before the public. It is true your poems do not command a large public, unhappily; but then the small one might contain enemies, so to call people, of mine. So do which you think best: if you dedicate I am flattered, if you do not I am reassured.
> I think there could be no objection to my lines appearing in the Birthday Book, especially anonymously (as I should wish) . .2

This extraordinary reference to 'enemies' is repeated in Hopkins' retreat notes for 1883. Hopkins shows in the notes that he is afraid, not of any spiritual risk which his poems might entail but of the way they make him vulnerable:

> Also in some med. today I earnestly asked our Lord to watch over my compositions, not to preserve them from being lost or coming to nothing, for I am very willing they should be, but they might not do me harm through the enmity or imprudence of any man or my own; that he should have them as his own and employ or not employ them as he should see fit. 3

Yet with the fear of vulnerability there is mingled in Hopkins a deep hunger for acceptance. In 1881 Dixon had made an attempt to get something by Hopkins published in Hall Caine's sonnet-anthology and Hopkins co-operated readily, without expressing misgivings. [4] Caine's subsequent rejection of his poetry as not conforming with the

1 C pp.30-31, October 31st, 1879.

2 C p.132, June 30th, 1886.

3 S pp.253-4.

4 q.v., C pp.46-7, March 28th & April 6th, 1881.

purpose of his anthology - to 'demonstrate the impossibility of improving upon the acknowledged structure whether as to rhyme-scheme or measure' [1] - together with his decision 'to refute me in a special paragraph' [2] may well have been in Hopkins' mind when he gave his so-reluctant reply to Dixon - as might Coventry Patmore's more recent and very adverse letter of March 20th, 1884. [3] Moreover there is in his later utterances a growing wistfulness for wider recognition, 'What I want there, to be more intelligible, smoother, and less singular, is an audience.' [4] 'I would have you and Canon Dixon and all true poets remember that fame, the being known, though in itself one of the most dangerous things to man, is nevertheless the true and appointed air, element, and setting of genius and its works.' [5] (Ironically it was only three months earlier in 1886 that he had expressed reservations to Dixon about the dedication.) Again, to Bridges he says, 'What you say about the run of people not liking nor knowing what to make of your writing and this giving you satisfaction opens out a wide vein of to me saddening thoughts.' [6] His pronouncements waver, then, between desire for recognition and fear of what public scrutiny might bring.

'. . . I have some dread . . ., enemies of mine . . .; anonymously (as I should wish)' - Christopher Devlin's observation is apt: 'In Hopkins' reply to Dixon it is not easy to distinguish between

1 RB p.128, May 1st, 1881.

2 RB p.128.

3 FL pp.352-3.

4 RB p.291, September 25th, 1888.

5 RB p.231, October 13th, 1886.

6 RB p.123, February 7th, 1881.

his spiritual desire to be unknown and his sensitive horror of ridicule.' [1] Yet the fact that we can make such a distinction is evidence that Hopkins' life-long obscurity gave him a much-desired measure of security. He had an acute sense of the distinctiveness of his own talent, and obscurity afforded him protection against slights and mockery.

As a poet Hopkins' first judge is always Christ and only in Ireland does he acknowledge that the absence of an audience has affected him adversely. Before this it is scarcely conceivable that a poet could be harsher on his potential readers. The public are 'random, reckless, incompetent, and unjust'. [2] Their judgement is limiting, so that 'The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe' is 'partly a compromise with popular taste', [3] and 'The May Magnificat' and 'The Silver Jubilee' 'are "popular" pieces, in which I feel myself to come short.' [4] When he fails to get the early 'Beyond the Cloister' accepted (1867) he says to Urquahart, 'I need not alter what I cannot publish', [5] and, ten years later, he makes an almost identical comment to Bridges about 'The Wreck of the Deutschland':

> I cannot think of altering anything. Why should I? I do not write for the public. You are my public and I hope to convert you. [6]

If this belligerent independence - the independence of 'Write no bilge-water about it' [7] - softened as the years passed ('one ought to be

1 S pp.119-120.

2 C p.8, June 13th, 1878.

3 RB p.179, May 11th, 1883.

4 RB pp.77-8, April 8th, 1879.

5 FL p.36, January 16th, 1867.

6 RB p.46, August 21st, 1877.

7 RB p.50, May 21st, 1878.

independent but not unimpressionable' [1]) Hopkins' sense that poetic talent is Christ-given and to be employed by him remained unaltered. Here in his Lord is the literary critic who prizes 'more than any man . . . the gifts of his own making.' [2]

Thus the obscurity Hopkins had as a religious answered, in the main, his felt needs as a poet; and his dedication to Christ effectively buttressed his own individuality - the public he could disregard, just as (in general) he wished to. The writer does not live in a vacuum, though, simply because he is secluded, and I turn now to the question of what was happening to Hopkins' art in the specific period of the years of silence.

The most obvious answer to this question - that it was being shaped by his Jesuit training - needs to be resisted, not as being without foundation but because it ignores what was already happening to Hopkins' thought before he joined the Jesuits and sets aside more important influences operating on him after his membership.

The claim for the central importance of Jesuit training in Hopkins' development as a poet is advanced in two ways. The first is to say (I quote from David Downes' book) that '. . . the methods of Ignatian meditation are very much akin to the creative processes of the imagination, and this being so, had considerable artistic influence on Hopkins.' [3] The second is to argue that 'the Ignatian discipline had transformed him', and that Hopkins' 'poetic experience originated primarily from his learning and living the Spiritual Exercises of St.

1 RB p.80, April 22nd, 1879.

2 C p.8, June 13th, 1878.

3 Downes, op.cit., p.166.

Ignatius Loyola.' [1]

As far as the first argument is concerned Ignatian meditation makes use of 'the creative processes of the imagination'; it is not akin to them (Ignatius speaks of seeing 'with the eye of the imagination the corporeal place where the object I wish to contemplate is found' [2]). It can thus be said to encourage the workings of the imagination but only by directing them toward a pre-determined end. (the process is shown in chapter three of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man where Father Arnall conducts a retreat). With this in mind, it would be fair to claim that, for example, stanza three of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' with its immediate sense of 'the hurtle of hell / Behind' seems to owe something to Ignatius' Fifth Exercise of the First Week (envisioning hell [3]). Further, Ignatius makes extensive use of the colloquy, [4] of direct address to God, and one can see Hopkins - as Donne did - employing that method, for example, in the opening stanza of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' which comes immediately after the period of Hopkins' life now under discussion. It is possible that he would not have made use of the colloquy - or such distinguished use of it - if he had not been accustomed to it by retreats, though this is open to debate.

1 Downes, op.cit., p.10.

2 The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola, trans. W.H. Longridge, London, 1919, p.53.

3 e.g. 'To see with the eyes of the imagination the length, breadth, and depth of hell', ibid., p.66 ff.

4 'The colloquy is made, properly speaking, as a friend speaks to a friend, or a servant to his master, asking at one time for some grace, at another accusing oneself of some evil committed, at another making known one's affairs, and seeking counsel concerning them.' ibid., p.58.

However, very little of Hopkins' poetry is about the particular concerns of the Spiritual Exercises insofar as they focus on specific events and places (the rebellion in heaven, Christ's crucifixion, hell, the nativity, etc.). Thus the second argument - that Hopkins' experience derives from his living the Spiritual Exercises - is advanced on the line that Hopkins' poems are imbued with a spirit which is distinctively Ignatian. (The Spiritual Exercises, which are primarily a method, could not be expected to provide much of the substance of Hopkins' poems.) Here the claim for the decisive influence of Hopkins' Jesuit training breaks down. It does so because, aside from the militarism of Ignatius, the attempt to define Ignatian spirit leaves it too general. To the question, 'What is meant, then, by Ignatian?' Mr. Downes says:

> Ignatius stressed a triune God of action in the Exercises: God, the Father (in the Principle and Foundation, and the First Week) who created, punished and disinherited man; Christ, the Son (Second, Third and Fourth Weeks) Who became man and redeemed mankind, who continues to send his aid to man, and asks other men to help Him in His labors; the Holy Spirit (Contemplation for obtaining Love) Who infuses into men knowledge and love of the Divine Being. Another notable aspect of the Exercises is that Christ is the central figure. For Ignatius, Christ is the supreme event in mankind's history, for through Him man's destiny is again made divine. These characteristics make up what I have called the Ignatian vision: Ignatius' world view. They represent his particular view of Christianity. [1]

However, there is nothing in this description which does not apply equally to St. Paul, or to John Wesley: it does not adequately delimit. This is not a fault for which the writer is exclusively responsible, for the problem of defining 'Ignatian' derives primarily from the nature of the Spiritual Exercises themselves. They propose a system, a technique; they do not constitute a distinctive body of doctrine. Accordingly it is virtually impossible to decide that a

1 Downes, op.cit., p.74.

particular writer, if he is anyway Christian, has been decisively influenced by them except insofar as he has employed an Ignatian procedure (e.g. the colloquy). The further argument for Ignatian influence that, 'the Ignatian man uses all things in so far as they lead him back to God,' [1] depends on but a small part of the Exercises (Ignatius' directions on the proper use of creatures [2]) and applies with greater force to St. Francis (whom, as patron of the drowned nuns, Hopkins revered in stanza twenty-three of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'). It is perhaps in Ignatius' second point in his 'Contemplation for obtaining Love' that he comes closest to some quality one can identify as being in Hopkins. Ignatius' instruction is, 'to consider how God dwells in the creatures in the elements, giving them being; in plants, giving them growth; in the animals, giving them sensation; in men, giving them understanding; and so in me . . .' [3] However, here again the direction is too general to be regarded as decisive.

The unfortunate effect of looking for St. Ignatius in Hopkins has been to make the poetry follow in attendance, so that Mr. Downes can talk of Hopkins' using his art to 'embellish'; [4] and can describe 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' as 'a good example of the triple structure of the Ignatian exercise poeticized.' [5] This is simply categorisation, mistaken and unilluminating.

Both in abandoning verse and in choosing subsequently to write as he did Hopkins went in his own way (albeit a Christian one)

1 Downes, op. cit., pp.74-5.

2 Ignatius, Exercises, p.26, Principle and Foundation.

3 ibid., p.157.

4 Downes, op. cit., p.79.

5 ibid., p.153.

and not in one that the Society of Jesus laid down for him. It remains to say how his progress in that way was made in the years of silence.

Two areas of development may be distinguished (both theoretical, since, of course, Hopkins wrote nothing during the fallow years in which they might show). These are in technical innovation and in the world-view which is to be found in his mature work (i.e. in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and after). His sense of form, already acutely developed before he joined the Jesuits, is central to both.

There is some difficulty about calling his world-view a 'philosophy' - the term may suggest something too coldly cerebral - but, given the caveat that Hopkins' world-view is a sensed awareness, 'philosophy' is nonetheless a convenient word to use: Hopkins' sensuousness has a coherent and logical base. Indeed it was his constant wish to make that base scientific [1] and this had been the main purpose behind his Oxford Platonic dialogue 'On the Origin of Beauty' (1865). Hanbury, a scholar, puts his problem to the newly appointed Professor of Aesthetics:

> '. . . judgements depend on laws, on established laws. Now taste has few rules, and those not scientific and easily disputed, and I might add, often disputed. Am I right?'
> 'At least, go on,' said the Professor.
> 'If a man disputes your judgement in taste, how can you prove he is wrong? If a man thinks beautiful what you think bad, you must believe he is sincere when he tells you so; and if he is educated how are you to say that his judgement is worse than yours?' [2]

The way the Professor, who speaks for Hopkins, unravels the problem lays the foundation for Hopkins' later philosophy.

1 Hopkins was to write in 1887, 'I believe that I can now set metre and music both of them on a scientific footing which will be final like the law of gravitation.' FL p.377, to Patmore.

2 J p.86.

Beauty comes from order. Thus in Hopkins' dialogue the professor says, 'Now you remember I wished beauty to be considered as regularity or likeness tempered by irregularity or difference: the chestnut-fan was one of my instances,' [1] and elsewhere a visit to the theatre prompts a similar observation. Hopkins sees in the repeated pattern of black coats and white shirt-fronts, of heads looking one way, 'the visible law'. If one confined one's attention to one person this would disappear ('looked at in any one instance it flies') but as it is, 'I could find a sort of beauty in this . . . but in fact that is almost synonymous with finding order anywhere.' [2] Aurally, order shows in a balance of similarity and dissimilarity and, 'All beauty may by a metaphor be called rhyme.' [3]

In the fallow years Hopkins comes to take the discovery of order - essentially an aesthetic experience - to be visible evidence of a moral purpose working in the universe. Hence his famous, '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.' [4] The discovery of order is - at Oxford - 'almost synonymous' with the discovery of beauty (later the connection appears to become absolute for Hopkins [5]); it afterwards becomes synonymous, too, with a discovery of divine will, and hence moral truth. 'Inscape' is the word Hopkins comes to employ to express his sense of the deep purposiveness in beauty: 'All the world is full of inscape and chance left

1 J p.101, from notebook dated May 12th, 1865.

2 J p.139, entry for June 13th, 1866.

3 J p.102 (Platonic dialogue).

4 J p.199, May, 1870.

5 cf., FL p.373 to Patmore, November 7th, 1886, '<u>Inscape</u>, that is species or individually distinctive beauty of style.'

free to act falls into an order as well as purpose,' [1] and we remember that one of the things which separated Hopkins from Pater was his recognition of form in nature as well as in art. 'Inscape' is the word which Hopkins applies to both.

Since the word first occurs in the place where 'instress' is also first used, it is convenient to consider the two terms together. In Hopkins' notes on Parmenides (in a notebook dated Feb. 9th, 1868) we have this comment on the Greek philosopher:

> His feeling for instress, for the flush and foredrawn, and for inscape is most striking and from this one can understand Plato's reverence for him as the great father of Realism. [2]

In the same notes Hopkins speaks subsequently of feeling 'the depth of an instress' and of feeling 'how fast the inscape holds a thing'. [3] These terms can thus be defined by deducing their meaning from context and from parenthesis. Immediately before Hopkins' first mention of 'instress' he makes the comment that Parmenides' fragments are difficult to translate satisfactorily either 'in a subjective or in a wholly outward sense'. I take it that Hopkins' parenthesis 'the flush and foredrawn' preserves this fusion of an inner activity (in the observer) with an external reality. 'Flush' seems to have the sense of a rush of feeling or vigour, and we are helped with 'foredrawn' by Hopkins' subsequent mention of 'the mind's grasp - the foredrawing act': [4] in other words 'instress' is a rush of feeling which comes in the making contact with external reality - as if in deep recognition of something out there which is capable of causing

1 J p.230, February 24th, 1873.

2 J p.127.

3 J p.230.

4 J p.129.

such feeling.

Hopkins seems to have coined the word 'instress' only at that date for the notes immediately prior to those on Parmenides seem to show him in need of such a term. He speaks there of the mind having two sorts of energy; one is a transitional kind, where one thought follows another in the reasoning process, and the other is 'an abiding kind for which I remember no name, in which the mind is absorbed (as far as that may be), taken up by, dwells upon, enjoys, a single thought.' [1] (Though Hopkins tries to match the word 'contemplation' to this second kind of energy he is evidently dissatisfied with this.) The origin of the word 'instress' seems, then, to owe something to Hopkins' feelings about art, for he continues in the same notes, 'Art exacts this energy of contemplation'. [2] The same may also be claimed for 'inscape' which, inasmuch as it 'holds a thing' fast, seems to be foreshadowed in his comments on organisation being carried out in a work of art and on form penetrating matter.

Whether this is true or not, Hopkins freely applies the word 'inscape' to both art and nature. From the time of his visit to Switzerland (July 1868) onwards it is in frequent use in his Journal in connection with, for example, plants, trees, mountains, clouds, flowers and horses. It is also used of architecture and then, in May 1874, employed in connection with an art exhibition where he speaks, for example, of 'inscape of composition'. [3] In his 'Lecture notes: Rhetoric', which may be dated between September 1873 and July 1874 [4]

1 J pp.125-6.

2 J p.126.

3 J p.248.

4 see Preface J p.xxvii.

(and, logically, in the earlier part of this period, since Hopkins would have obviously made them in advance of his lectures), Hopkins describes poetry as speech 'employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape's sake'. [1] Thus we have quite firmly established in the years of silence the view which Hopkins was later to repeat in his letters - to Bridges in 1879, 'design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling 'inscape' is what I above all aim at in poetry'. [2]; to Dixon in 1886, 'inscape' is 'the very soul of art.' [3] Moreover Hopkins looks in art for just that quality which is also to be found in nature and which, as it is found in nature, teaches him the beauty of God. [4]

Indeed, it is Hopkins' very sense of the unity in things which seems to have obliged him to make up the new compound. David Downes makes a strong case for the probable reasoning behind this:

> . . . it is clear that the prefix "in" of "inscape" denotes that "scape" is the outer fixed shape of the intrinsic form of a thing. For that reason Hopkins was not satisfied with the terms design and pattern as the unqualified designation of the intrinsic order of being. These terms indicate an order impressed from without, an extrinsic principle of unity. [5]

As an alternative the word 'form' does not suggest something imposed, but even this word is inadequate, for form may be casually apprehended as the outer shell of a thing: 'inscape' was the term Hopkins had to

1 J p.289.

2 RB p.66, February 15th, 1879.

3 C p.135, June 30th, 1886.

4 It is a little surprising in view of this to find Hopkins saying in his lecture notes on rhetoric that beauty is 'the virtue of inscape and not inscape only' - he wishes to distinguish the two terms. However his usage varies, and in a letter to Patmore (1886), referred to in an earlier footnote, he clearly equates inscape with beauty: he speaks of 'what I call inscape, that is species or individually-distinctive beauty of style' (FL p.373, November 7th 1886). Moreover it is quite characteristic of Hopkins to speak of a flower being 'all beautiful in inscape' (J p.220, June 29th, 1872).

5 Downes, op.cit., p.28.

have.

Hopkins' affection for the medieval philosopher John Duns Scotus is well shown in the poems - he is 'Of realty the rarest-veined unraveller' ('Duns Scotus's Oxford'). It is an affection established on first reading in 1872, not because Scotus marked some radical new departure for him but because he confirmed Hopkins in a vision essentially private up to this time (its privacy being evidenced in the neologism Hopkins felt obliged to make to express it). Hopkins is 'flush with a new stroke of enthusiasm' on reading Scotus; he explicitly connects the philosopher with his own vision of 'inscape':

> It may come to nothing or it may be a mercy from God. But just then when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus. [1]

Scotus directed Hopkins to a confidence in his own senses and encouraged him to see the physical world around him as a manifestation of God. Aquinas taught that the intellect can have no direct knowledge of individual objects because they are of matter and the intellect is immaterial, [2] and the consequence of this teaching is a separation of mind and body. In the words of S.J. Day,

> the sensitive and rational faculties of men are separated by an unbridgeable gulf. The sensitive faculties are material, operating by means of corporeal organs; their proper objects are material particulars. The intellect, on the other hand, is immaterial and its proper objects are universal and immaterial forms. [3]

Scotus closed this gulf by teaching that 'Our concepts are formed in dependence on sense-perception and represent immediately material

1 J p.221, August 3rd. 1872.

2 q.v., Sebastian J. Day, Intuitive Cognition: a key to the significance of the later Scholastics, New York, 1947, p.9.

3 ibid., p.11.

quiddities or essences' [1] (Coplestone). Furthermore he held that sensation was a spiritual quality; [2] and reading Scotus can only have confirmed Hopkins in his preoccupation with distinctive pattern. C.R.S. Harris says of the schoolman,

> The determining factor in the Scotist conception of substance is the notion of form. It constitutes the bridge between the ideal and the real, the subjective and the objective world. For it is at once the ground of intelligibility and the ground of being of the real. As universal essence or quiddity it is 'abstracted' by the mind from its concrete existence, and 'informs' it in the act of understanding. As the ideal plan or law in the divine mind it is the archetype of creation. 3

This is no static world that Scotus has described, however, and, particularly when one remembers Hopkins' fascination with 'doing' and 'acting' in 'As Kingfishers catch fire', it is interesting to set what Harris has to say by the side of Christopher Devlin's very valuable comments:

> Scotus says that by dwelling on the act rather than on the content of the act we can get an insight into the source of our power of knowing; to be aware that the mind is co-operating with God's creative mind is to see things, in some sort of way . . . in the process of being created. 4

Scotus' theory of perception is given special significance by his theological views. He held that the Incarnation would have occurred even if man had not sinned [5] because Christ's coming into existence on earth was part of God's creative purpose. [6] Moreover, in Scotus' teaching, Christ's humanity was God's first design [7] so

1 Frederick Coplestone, A History of Philosophy, London, 1966, vol. II, p.501.

2 S p.288.

3 C.R.S. Harris, Duns Scotus, Oxford, 1927, vol. II, p.99.

4 S p.288 n.136:2.

5 S p.290 note 138:1.

6 S p.109.

7 S p.109.

that the rest of creation is dependent upon it, not the other way round. [1] Christ's being is involved with the material world. In Father Devlin's words,

> Christ's human nature is what Scotus calls atoma or in atomo: the unbroken pattern . . .
> Each human nature, other than Christ's, is seen in God's mind as an image of his Essence, but an imperfect image; not merely imperfect because it is finite, but imperfect because it is fragmentary . . . But Christ's human nature is the perfect finite image of the Divine Essence, the whole expression of the idea in God's mind. [2]

Father Devlin follows through this train of thought and adds,

> From this it would seem to follow that all the multitudinous degrees of perfection in created things combine like some mathematical formula to express the intrinsic degree of Christ's created perfection. [3]

Clearly, given this knowledge, lines such as 'he is under the world's splendour and wonder' [4] ('The Wreck of the Deutschland', stanza 5) are given clearer definition, and Hopkins is enabled, especially in his early nature sonnets, to claim a direct involvement of God in the physical world.

Finally, 'Scotus's somewhat obscure theory of individuation' [5] (Coplestone), with its idea that what finally makes something unique is the mysterious quality of haecceitas [6] or 'thisness', helped Hopkins not only in his sense of the distinctiveness of things but also in his consciousness of his own individuality. 'Searching nature I taste self but at one tankard, that of my own being,' [7] said Hopkins.

1 S p.109.

2 S pp.350-1.

3 S p.351.

4 Devlin's example, S p.290, note 138:1.

5 Coplestone, Philosophy, vol. II, p.516.

6 ibid., pp.516 ff.

7 S p.123, August 20th, 1880.

Scotus offered a philosophical system which accorded a place to that sense of uniqueness.

Thus Hopkins' Oxford attraction to form expressed itself in the years after he left university in the idea of inscape and he is encouraged in this by his reading of Scotus. 'Inscape' is to be found in nature and in works of art: how does it connect with the technical developments which mark Hopkins' poetic theory in the years when he is silent as a poet (namely, the influence of Welsh and his idea of Sprung Rhythm)?

The answer is that both major technical developments are connected with sound pattern (i.e. with aural form) and in Hopkins' lecture notes on rhetoric (already referred to) we see him advancing definitions which make such form the raison d'etre of poetry:

> Verse is speech having a marked figure, order / of sounds independent of meaning and such as can be shifted from one word or words to others without changing. It is <u>figure of spoken sound</u>. [1]

> Poetry is speech framed for contemplation of the mind by the way of hearing or speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning. Some matter and meaning is essential to it but only as an element necessary to support and employ the shape which is contemplated for its own sake. (Poetry is in fact speech only employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape's sake . . . [2]

(Hopkins says that the term 'poetry' either signifies excellence or, alternatively, that what is being heard is being heard for its own sake; verse, on the other hand, can be used for a purpose, e.g. as an aid to memory.) The above definitions seem to describe something which is no more important than a jingle, but we should remember that Hopkins is not denying the importance of matter but insisting on that

1 J p.267, 'Rhythm and the other structural parts of rhetoric - verse'.

2 J p.289, 'Poetry and verse'.

which gives poetry its essential nature, that element which cannot be paraphrased. Hopkins' own practice is sufficient to show his serious intent. Furthermore the idea of poetry carrying 'the inscape of speech' suggests a fundamental connection between poetry and everyday language. Poetry is special because of its sound, not because of its vocabulary or its sentiments.

This connection between everyday speech and poetry is established in Hopkins' principle of Sprung Rhythm which he was to justify to Bridges in 1877 on the ground that it was closest of all rhythms to the natural rhythm of speech:

> Why do I employ sprung rhythm at all? Because it is 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, combining opposite, and one would have thought incompatible excellences, markedness of rhythm - that is rhythm's self - and naturalness of expression - for why, if it is forcible in prose to say 'lashed : rod', am I obliged to weaken this in verse, which ought to be stronger, not weaker, into 'lashed birch-rod' or something? [1]

The principle of Sprung Rhythm is lucidly described by Hopkins himself: '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.' [2] To this one may add another comment to Canon Dixon in a subsequent letter: 'the word Sprung which I use for this rhythm means something like <u>abrupt</u> and applies by rights only where one stress follows another running, without syllable between.' [3] Before I advance a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this theory it is interesting to trace its development.

1 RB p.46, August 21st, 1877.

2 C p.14, October 5th, 1878.

3 C p.23, February 27th, 1879.

When Hopkins wrote to Dixon in 1878 about the composition of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' he told him, 'I had long had haunting my ear the echo of a new rhythm which now I realised on paper.' [1] The 'new rhythm' had in fact haunted his ear for seven years; his first attempt in it was not 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' but the experimental 'Lines for a Picture of St. Dorothea', a re-working of his earlier 'For a Picture of St. Dorothea' (1864) and the last poem he sent to Bridges before becoming a Jesuit. We have seen that, strictly, Sprung Rhythm is characterised by two stresses following each other with no intervening slack syllable. Individual lines in the St. Dorothea poem have this feature (the stresses are Hopkins' own):

(e.g.) I am só light and fair
Quínces, look, when not one
But they came from the south,
Which is it, star or dew?

However, the conclusive evidence lies in the continuity between the examples used in Hopkins' postscript to Bridges and those he subsequently used to explain Sprung Rhythm:

> P.S. I hope you will master the peculiar beat I have introduced into St. Dorothea. The development is mine but the beat is in Shakespeare - e.g.
> Why should this desert be? - and
> Thou for whom Jove would swear - where the rest of the lines are eight syllabled or seven syllabled. [2]

The same examples occur in Hopkins' lecture notes entitled 'Rhythm and the other structural parts of Rhetoric - verse' (1873-4) mentioned earlier in this chapter. The relevant section reads:

1 C p.14.

2 RB p.24, August 7th, 1868.

> This beat-rhythm allows of development as much as time-rhythm whenever the ear or mind is true enough to take in the essential principle of it, that beat is measured by stress or strength, not number, so that one strong may be equal not only to two weak but to less or more. In English great masters of rhythm have acted on this:
>
> Shakespeare - Toad that under cold stone
>
> and - Sleep thou first i' the charmed pot
>
> and - Why should this desert be?
>
> and - Thou for whom Jove would swear - [1]

'The peculiar beat' has now become 'this beat-rhythm' but the illustrations used are identical. In 1877 'this beat-rhythm' has a name, and Hopkins' reference to 'lecturing' seems to point back to his notes of 1873-4:

> I do not of course claim to have invented sprung rhythms but only sprung rhythm; I mean that single lines and single instances of it are not uncommon in English and I have pointed them out in lecturing - e.g. 'why should : this desert be? . . . [2]

(The list of examples which follows includes Campbell's 'As ye sweep through the deep,' which also occurs in the 1873-4 lecture notes.) We thus have clear evidence of continuity in Hopkins' thought on metrics: what is in its formative stages in 1868 is to be seen as an acknowledged principle in 1873-4 and established poetically in 1875-6 in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'. By appointing him to lecture at Roehampton (1873-4) the Society of Jesus unknowingly provided Hopkins with the opportunity of developing his own metrical theories,[3] though some might argue that the Society slowed down his development of the idea of sprung rhythm in that he normally had other matters to

1 J p.278

2 RB p.45, August 21st, 1877.

3 see C p.14 where Hopkins says he 'collected' Milton's later rhythms 'when I had to lecture on rhetoric some years since.'

occupy him; either way it did not alter his course.

Hopkins' idea of Sprung Rhythm has been assailed on a number of grounds (some of them justifiable) but, before I attempt what must be a brief examination of the criticisms - brief, since proper discussion of this subject alone involves something like the kind of book-length study offered by Miss Schneider [1] - it needs to be said that the final evidence for Hopkins' conception and practice of the theory is lacking. We have no record of him speaking his own poetry (as we shall see shortly, even this could not be adequate) and must accordingly judge on the metrical marks which Hopkins gave his poems, and on comments in his letters. The evidence is thus written evidence; and part of a long newly-published letter to his brother Everard makes it clear how partial this is in Hopkins' view:

> Poetry was originally meant for either singing or reciting; a record was kept of it; the record could be, was, read, and that in time by one reader, alone, to himself, with the eyes only. This reacted on the art: what was to be performed under these conditions [,] for these conditions ought to be and was composed and calculated. Sound-effects were intended, wonderful combinations even; but they bear the marks of having been meant for the whispered, not even whispered, merely mental performance of the closet, the study and so on. You follow, Edward Joseph? You do: then we are there. This is not the true nature of poetry, the darling child of speech, of lips and spoken utterance: it must be spoken; till it is spoken it is not performed, it does not perform, it is not itself. Sprung rhythm gives back to poetry its true soul and self. As poetry is emphatically speech, speech purged of dross like gold in the furnace, so it must have emphatically the essential elements of speech. Now emphasis itself, stress, is one of these: sprung rhythm makes verse stressy; it purges it to an emphasis as much brighter, livelier, more lustrous than the regular but commonplace emphasis of common rhythm as poetry in general is brighter than common speech. [2]

Subsequently in the same letter Hopkins laments the absence of an

1 Schneider, Dragon in the Gate. See especially chapters 1-5.

2 cf. Antony Bischoff, S.J., 'Hopkins' letters to his brother', Times Literary Supplement, December 8th, 1972, p.1511, letter dated November 5th, 1885, written from Clongowes Wood College, Naas, Ireland, to Everard Hopkins.

inherited speaking tradition:

> . . . perhaps the inflections and intonations of the speaking voice may give effects more beautiful than any attainable by the fixed pitches of music. I look on this as an infinite field & very little worked. It has this great difficulty, that the art depends entirely on living tradition. The phonograph may give us one, but hitherto there could be no record of fine spoken utterance. [1]

Thus, when Miss Schneider says of Hopkins, 'I suspect that his own reading of his poems, if it could have been recorded . . . might appal our modern taste,' [2] one is left sharing Hopkins' lament. Perhaps, one reasons, such a recording might resolve the difficulties Hopkins' markings have left behind, for his markings cannot give the subtle relation between stress and time which seems to be so important to Hopkins.

On the basis of written evidence Miss Schneider presents a forceful and persuasive case. Many of her particular judgements are open to question but on some points what she has to say seems unanswerable. Her general case is that Sprung Rhythm has 'the distinctive advantages of strongly marked emphasis, naturalness, and flexibility in the placing of accents', [3] but that it lacks subtlety because of the absence of any suggested secondary rhythm - Sprung Rhythm cannot be counterpointed because it is not regular. Hopkins often overcame this difficulty, she says, by returning to conventional metres (hence her specific charge against 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' is that, 'the great majority of lines in the poem are metrically conventional' [4]). Hopkins handled the relation between sense and

1 TLS, Dec. 8th, 1972, p.1511.

2 Schneider, Dragon in the Gate, p.104.

3 ibid., p.72.

4 ibid., p.72.

metre arbitrarily [1] and did not seem to understand what seems to Miss Schneider an unbreakable law of Sprung Rhythm, namely that 'the sense stress always determines the metrical stress' because there is nothing else which can. [2]

While it is not completely true that sense stress is the only way of determining metrical stress in Sprung Rhythm (alliterating syllables and rhymed words in close proximity also attract stress) her point about Hopkins' arbitrary handling of the relation between sense and metre seems to hold - at least for some lines. Among others she gives as examples of eccentric marking by Hopkins, 'self in self steeped and pashed - quite', 'thoughts against thoughts in groans grind' ('Spelt from Sibyl's leaves'), 'I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes' (MS B 'Hurrahing in Harvest'), [3] and - most singular of all - 'Their ransom, their rescue, and first, fast, last friend' ('The Lantern out of Doors'). [4] I do not think her judgement on these lines is open to dispute, though one possible defence for Hopkins' stressing of unimportant words is that he may have been thinking musically about his poetry, and song often stresses syllables which are unmeaning in speech - a possibility which Miss Schneider herself briefly acknowledges. [5] What is notable is that none of these examples jars if the stress marks are ignored and the poems are managed by a twentieth-century reader: the argument is really about the way Hopkins himself would have liked them spoken, and about this

1 Schneider, op.cit., p.85.

2 ibid., p.89.

3 ibid., p.89.

4 ibid., p.87.

5 ibid., p.92.

last consideration we cannot be sure. We ought to remember here Hopkins' own acknowledgement of his limitations. Having told his brother Everard to 'perform' the Eurydice, he says,

> I must however add that to perform it quite satisfactorily is not at all easy, I do not say I could do it; but this is nothing against the truth of the principle maintained. A composer need not be able to play his violin music or sing his songs. Indeed the higher wrought the art, clearly the wider severance between the parts of the author and performer. [1]

Hence Miss Schneider's discussion, though of great interest, is not central to the issue of whether the poetry is great poetry, or of what it is about.

Miss Schneider's point that Sprung Rhythm lacks subtlety (and that this 'Hopkins never fully acknowledged' [2]) is again addressed to Hopkins' theory rather than his practice (she herself acknowledges [3] that Hopkins' poetry often overcomes this inherent weakness). The charge loses some of its force because of Hopkins' comments to Dixon which implicitly recognise the importance of a secondary rhythm:

> Sprung rhythm does not properly require or allow of counterpoint. It does not require it, because its great variety amounts to a counterpointing, and it scarcely allows of it, because you have scarcely got in that conventionally fixed form which you can mentally supply at the time when you are actually reading another one . . . However by means of 'outrides' or looped half-feet you will find in some of my sonnets and elsewhere a strong effect of double rhythm . . . [4]

If perhaps half of Hopkins' mature poems involve some use of Sprung Rhythm, many of the remainder involve counterpoint somewhere: a secondary rhythm playing off against the main one seems to have been a constant aim for him. Moreover it is a little disingenuous to claim

1 TLS, Dec. 8th, 1972, p.1511.

2 Schneider, op. cit., p.72.

3 ibid., p.72.

4 C pp.40-1, December 22nd, 1880.

of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' that most of its lines are 'Metrically conventional' and then concede that 'the general rhythmical effect of the poem is new beyond doubt':[1] Hopkins is being criticised for doing what he set out to do by means which are anyway allowed for by the principle of Sprung Rhythm. Stanza five of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' shows how in some places there may emerge a regular (here, in the case of lines four and five, anapaestic) pattern:

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.

One stress makes one foot, even if the number of attached slack syllables is the same for a number of feet running. When one remembers that by 'metrically conventional' Miss Schneider means, in the case of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', anapaestic; and, further, that by anapaestic she means, 'that logaoedic iambic-anapestic which constitutes nearly all successful verse that goes by the name of anapest,'[2] the argument has become one of terminology. What she calls by a phrase which allows for the employment of no less than four different sorts of metric foot, Hopkins' calls Sprung Rhythm - either way, 'conventional' seems a misleading word to apply to it.

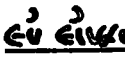
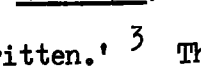
The absence of any recorded performance by Hopkins of his own poetry (which, he maintained emphatically, was for performance) seems to make any discussion of his practice not so much unfair as remote.

1 Schneider, op. cit., p.73.

2 ibid., p.26.

Words on a page give but the merest indication of the time to be taken over a syllable or a line, and time is vital in Hopkins' theory. Here Miss Schneider describes the situation very fairly:

> He had evidently thought the matter over with care and knew that his metrical feet could not be described accurately as a succession of equally timed beats. Yet he clearly felt the necessity of some sort of equality of measure and therefore seized upon the possibly vague notion of "strength" as a second principle when "length" would not do. 1

Miss Schneider is right about the vagueness. Hopkins' theory limps after his practice in an almost hopeless attempt to catch up with something so adroit. He tells Bridges that, 'Since the syllables in sprung rhythm are not counted, time or equality in strength is of more importance than in common counted rhythm,' [2] and affirms to Dixon that this sense of 'equality' is what makes the difference between, 'its  and its  , the writing it somehow and the writing it as it should be written.' [3] Then Hopkins tries to explain:

> We must distinguish strength (or gravity) and length. About length there is little difficulty: plainly bidst is longer than bids and bids than bid. But it is not recognized by everybody that bid, with a flat dental, is graver or stronger than bit, with a sharp. The strongest and, other things being alike, the longest syllables are those with the circumflex, like fire. Any syllable ending in ng, though ng is only a single sound, may be made as long as you like by prolonging the nasal. So too n may be prolonged after a long vowel or before a consonant, as in soon or and . . . I have put these down at random as samples. 4

Hopkins sets out to make a distinction between his two alternative ways of measuring equality ('strength', and time) and ends up instead by conflating the two: 'the strongest and [my italics] . . . the longest syllables are those . . . like fire'. This dual formula is

1 Schneider, op. cit., pp.65-6.

2 RB p.81, May 26th, 1879.

3 C p.39, December 22nd, 1880.

4 C p.41.

repeated in the claim for one poem (probably 'The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo') that 'everything is weighed and timed'.[1] But how shall we measure the weight and how judge the time when some syllables may be made 'as long as you like'? As if Hopkins had taken Pater's figure literally, his art really does begin, in the poet's eyes, to approach the condition of music. 'Thou art indeed just, Lord' 'must be read adagio molto and with great stress',[2] and 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' should be performed with

> . . . loud, leisurely, poetical (not rhetorical) recitation, with long rests, long dwells on the rhyme and other marked syllables, and so on. This sonnet shd. be almost sung: it is most carefully timed in tempo rubato.[3]

But we have no record of performance; we take the claim on trust - or reject it - and return to the written poem.

Thus, to recapitulate, Sprung Rhythm shows once more Hopkins' interest in form. Its development began before Hopkins joined the Society of Jesus and it is but part - though a large part - of his attempt to capture 'the inscape of speech', an attempt which makes use also of 'time' and 'strength' and which we can judge only inadequately because we have only the written word and Hopkins' ambiguous or imprecise instructions to proceed with. (Hopkins increasingly thought of his poems as 'the record of speech'[4] and having written rough versions found it 'repulsive' to copy them out.[5])

1 RB p.157, October 18th, 1882.

2 RB p.303, April 29th, 1889.

3 RB p.246, December 11th, 1886.

4 RB p.265, November 6th, 1887.

5 RB p.304, April 29th, 1889.

The important fact to recognise is that there is an integral connection between Hopkins' metrical principles and his attack on any language which is not living language being used in poetry. Both the words spoken and the rhythm with which they are spoken are, in Hopkins' ears, parts of the inscape of speech. His theory was a response to a felt need, it was not a technical idiosyncracy; nor yet is it something to be slavishly copied without understanding the end which he had in view. Sprung rhythm had been used before (though admittedly, on either side of a caesura), as Hopkins was to realise [1] when, late in his life, he began to learn Anglo-Saxon. [2] This, however, is beside the point - as is Miss Schneider's very interesting exploration of metrical similarities between Hopkins and Swinburne: [3] what matters is that, in the wholeness of his attempt to use the full technical resources of poetry, he put it in touch with the language people speak. [4]

It is this idea of poetry as carrying the inscape of living speech which constitutes the reply to Professor Davie's charge (referred to in my Introduction [5]) that Hopkins thought, 'the function of poetry is to express a human individuality in its most wilfully uncompromising and provocative form.' Certainly Hopkins thought that each poet was unique - and should be so - in his attempt at the inscape of speech, but we can see that Hopkins also felt that an external obligation rests on the poet. The idea of 'self-expression' (with the overtone of

1 RB p.156, October 18th, 1882.

2 RB p.163, November 26th, 1882.

3 Schneider, op. cit., chap.3.

4 William Barnes consistently did the same, hence Hopkins' affection for him (see Appendix).

5 see Introduction p.5.

self-indulgence that it acquires in Professor Davie's usage) gives a very misleading view of Hopkins' poetic theory. Moreover, wilfulness and provocation are scarcely desiderata for Hopkins - they are the critic's inventions.

Before I refer to the other major development in Hopkins during the years of silence - his learning of Welsh 'lettering';this point about the current, spoken language is worth developing to show the kind of opposition which Hopkins' secluded position protected him from, the opposition, for example, of Matthew Arnold.

When he read Bridges' Ulysses Hopkins warned his friend off having anything to do with the Greek gods, and along with his tart comments ('What did Athene do after leaving Ulysses? Lounged back to Olympus to afternoon nectar') [1] he coupled an attack on the words Bridges used. He objected to 'the archaism of the language',finding in it the 'same defect, of unreality', and protesting 'we do not speak that way.' [2] If the poet uses the patterns of spoken language in his craft, it follows that the words he employs must be those still used by his fellow men. Language becomes an indicator of a basic honesty-to-life in a poem, and, if a poet uses archaic language, 'he is not serious, he is at something else than the seeming matter in hand.' [3] The words chosen, the ways they are structured, are responsible for fidelity to life, so,

> I cut myself off f om the use of ere, o'er, wellnigh, what time, say not (for do not say), because, though dignified, they neither belong to nor ever could arise from, or be the elevation of, ordinary modern speech. For it seems to me that the poetical language of an age shd. be the current language heightened, to any degree heightened, and unlike itself, but not (I mean

1 RB p.217, May 17th, 1885.

2 RB p.218.

3 RB p.218.

> normally: passing freaks and graces are another thing) an obsolete one. [1]

In a letter to Dixon he repeats the same prescription: 'a perfect style must be of its age.' [2]

What would Arnold, the foremost critic of that particular age, have said to this? He would have flatly disagreed. Arnold and Hopkins developed conflicting theories of poetry and the conflict between them is most clearly seen when dealing with the question of language, particularly as it touches the Augustans. In Hopkins' Oxford dialogue on beauty he had said that 'Dryden . . . seems to take thoughts that are not by nature poetical . . . but under a kind of living force like fire they are powerfully changed and incandescent.' [3] Twenty-two years later he was still praising him, for 'his style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of all our literature on the naked thew and sinew of the English language.' [4] For Arnold, however, Dryden is no poet but a classic of our prose. [5] Hopkins was indignant at the idea: not to think Dryden a poet was one of 'the loutish falls and hideous vagaries of the human mind.' [6] But it was entirely consistent of Arnold to dismiss Dryden as he did. Poetry, the poetry which will one day replace 'most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy', [7] had to have the loftiest of

1 RB p.99, August 14th, 1879.

2 C p.99, December 1st, 1881.

3 J p.112.

4 RB pp.267-8, November 6th, 1887.

5 Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism, 2nd series, London, 1960, p.25.

6 RB p.280, August 18th, 1888.

7 Arnold, Essays, p.2.

spiritual homes if it was to make good this claim, had to be extra-ordinary, had to be remote from prose. Now in Dryden's time 'A fit prose was a necessity; but it was impossible that a fit prose should establish itself amongst us without some touch of frost to the imaginative life of the soul.' [1] For Arnold the interests of prose and those of verse are antithetic and it is this antithesis which is behind his indictment of Pope and Dryden,

> The needful qualities for a fit prose are regularity, uniformity, precision, balance . . . But an almost exclusive attention to these qualities involves some repression and silencing of poetry. [2]

It was because Thomas Gray was born in an age when such attention was the norm that his own production was so scanty: he was unlucky. Nonetheless Gray was a poet and Dryden was not and - most tellingly, when one bears Hopkins' ideas in mind - Arnold quotes with approval Gray's observations on poetry,

> 'As to matter of style, I have this to say: the language of the age is never the language of poetry; . . . Our poetry . . . has a language peculiar to itself, to which almost every one that has written has added something.' [3]

What does Arnold think of this? 'It is impossible for a poet to lay down the rules of his own art with more insight, soundness, and certainty.' [4] Writing in his Preface to Poems: 1853 he says that those who look to the classics to provide them with models are 'more truly than others under the empire of facts, and more independent of the language current among those with whom they live.' [5] For Arnold

1 Arnold, Essays, p.23.

2 ibid., p.23.

3 ibid., p.47.

4 ibid., p.47.

5 reprinted, The Poems of Matthew Arnold, ed. C.B. Tinker and H.F. Lowry, London, 1961, p.xxviii.

then, 'the language of the age is never the language of poetry', the two are necessarily separate: for Hopkins, 'the poetical language of an age should be the current language heightened'. [1]

It is in the 'heightening', of course, that Hopkins' language becomes so distinctive and, as with Sprung Rhythm so with the other patterning in his verse, the years of silence are the time of major development.

On 28th August, 1874, as part of his training for the priesthood, Hopkins moved to St. Beuno's College in North Wales. The following day he wrote to his father that he had 'half a mind to get up a little Welsh'. [2] This he did [3] but 'not with very pure [i.e. priestly] intentions perhaps' [4] so that he gave it up soon after starting. However he resumed his study, [5] and two years later when a Silver Jubilee album is being compiled for the Bishop of Shrewsbury Hopkins says, 'For the Welsh they had to come to me, for sad to say, no one else in the house knows anything about it.' [6] Thus although he wrote to Baillie in January, 1877 that he could make little way with Welsh poetry [7] he had already written a poem in Welsh, a Cywydd, which indicates some grasp of the principles on which Welsh verse was

1 RB p.89. This opposition apart, Hopkins thought Arnold 'a rare genius and a great critic.' (RB p.172)

2 FL p.124.

3 cf. FL p.126, September 1st, 1874, to his mother.

4 J p.258, September 6th, 1874.

5 See RB p.31, February 20th, 1875, 'I have tried to learn a little Welsh, in reality one of the hardest of languages'; FL p.142, September 23rd, 1876 to his mother, refers to 'the good woman who did teach me Welsh'; & FL p.146, April 20th, 1877, to his mother, about a visit to Caernarvon, 'It was for my Welsh I went.'

6 FL p.140, August 6th, 1876, to his father.

7 FL p.241.

founded. This is confirmed by his mention to Dixon that 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' had 'certain chimes suggested by the Welsh poetry I had been reading (what they call cynghanedd),' [1] and by his comment of 1882 on 'The Sea and the Skylark' that 'It was written in my Welsh days, in my salad days, when I was fascinated with cynghanedd or consonant-chime.' [2]

Though Hopkins' comment suggests that the fascination was something later outgrown, the influence of Welsh poetry is discernible in his work right up to the time of his death. Indeed it is interesting to look at Hopkins' work in the light of the following outline:

> The style is exclamatory rather than predicative; such minor but useful parts of speech as articles, prepositions, pronouns, and the copula are freely dispensed with, and even the finite verb is used sparingly, its place being taken by the verb-noun. Constant use is made of compound words, both nouns and adjectives . . . and such verbal devices as cynghanedd, rhyme, assonance, and alliteration . . . [3]

A fair description, one would think, of the technical features of Hopkins' mature verse; but in fact these words are from H.I. Bell's The Development of Welsh Poetry and apply not to Hopkins' characteristics but to the Welsh bardic traditions of the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. This sketch gives some idea of the striking similarities between the verse of the man who was to style himself 'Brân Manaefa'[4] and the bardic poetry he studied, and these have been explored in detail in a very valuable article by Gweneth Lilly.[5] Her conclusion is that Hopkins' reading of Welsh poetry was a stimulus to his experimentation rather than its first cause, but we are left in little doubt by what she has to say that Hopkins learnt important parts of

1 C p.15, October 5th, 1878.

2 RB p.163, November 26th, 1882.

3 H.I. Bell, The Development of Welsh Poetry, Oxford, 1936, p.42.

4 Hopkins' adopted bardic signature. See Poems p.254 & p.326.

5 Gweneth Lilly, 'The Welsh Influence in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins', in The Modern Language Review, vol.xxxviii, 1943.

his craft from the bards. What follows is essentially a short summary of Miss Lilly's excellent essay.

The idea of cynghanedd seems to have been Hopkins' chief debt to the bards. He was particularly fond of cynghanedd sain, a device involving three divisions in the line, of which the first two have syllables which rhyme and the last two have syllables which alliterate. These are examples (asterisks mark alliteration, italics mark rhyme):

our sordid *turbid *time ('The Sea and the Skylark')

left hand, off *land, I hear the *lark ('The Sea and the Skylark')

'I awoke in the Midsummer not-to-call night, in the *white and the *walk of the morning ('Moonrise')

Plainly this chiming of consonants need not be kept to this strict pattern to be effective. Miss Lilly gives

And wears man's *smudge and shares man's *smell

as an example in Hopkins of the easier cynghanedd sain godwynog. Other variations are possible. In

*Banned by the land of their *birth ('The Wreck of the Deutschland')

he makes the first and third units alliterate instead of the second and third. Other combinations of rhyme and alliteration used by Hopkins are not traditional in Welsh. Thus

All the air things *wear that build this *world of *Wales ('In the Valley of the Elwy')

Fall, *gall themselves, and *gash *gold-vermilion ('The Windhover')

are his own developments, and in

'that toil that *coil since (seems) I *kissed

the cynghanedd pattern is interrupted by an independent alliterative one. In

warm laid grave of a womb-life grey ('The Wreck of the Deutschland')

wind-wandering, weed-winding ('Binsey Poplars')

the pattern of consonants used in the first phrase is used in the second.

Miss Lilly finds precedents in Welsh for Hopkins' use of the verb noun ('soft sift', 'a lonely began'), for tmesis ('wind-lilyocks-laced', 'brim, in a flash, full'), for his interruption of a sentence by an exclamation ('hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him', 'Where we, even where we mean To mend her') and for his alliteration of two pairs of initial consonants (e.g. 'grave' and 'grey'). But, despite these and other similarities, she points out that Hopkins' early verse with its compounds such as 'pansy-dark', 'dainty-delicate', 'plum-purple' ('A Vision of Mermaids') and its separation of adjective and noun (as in 'The Habit of Perfection' -

> And lily-coloured clothes provide
> Your spouse not laboured-at nor spun)

already shows Hopkins moving in the direction later encouraged by his reading of Welsh. [1] If one were looking for the chief technical influence on Hopkins one would turn to Welsh poetry rather than, for example, Anglo-Saxon verse (with which it has 'a superficial resemblance' [2]) but one would turn with caution, as her conclusion makes clear:

> The internal evidence of Hopkins' poems, which is confirmed by the letters, proves fairly conclusively that the Welsh is the predominant source of his characteristic rhymes and 'consonant-chimes'. There is reason to believe that, even if Hopkins had never gone to St. Beuno's, had never studied Welsh poetry, his mature work would have contained instances of internal rhyme, half-rhyme, and alliteration, but they would not have been found in the same profusion, or in such a variety of patterns. [3]

1 It is worth indicating that Hopkins' first recorded interest in Welsh was a very early one - he copied a Welsh verse in 1864 - but this hardly detracts from Miss Lilly's conclusions which are based on the fact that his first systematic study of the language was at St. Beuno's. See J p.34 and p.316.

2 Lilly, M.L.R. (1943) p.196.

3 ibid., p.203.

It is perhaps worth noting that Sprung Rhythm which allows for a freer disposition of words within a line than a regular rhythm (hence, I suspect, Hopkins' choice of three variables - stress, time-length and 'strength' - in balancing his metric feet) would enable a poet to cope more easily with one of the difficulties caused by employing some of the strict devices of Welsh poetry, namely the distortion of ordinary syntax. (Incidentally, Sprung Rhythm also allows the line to be lengthened much beyond its pentameter norm and thus makes the sonnet a bigger unit - Hopkins thought that, 'The English sonnet is in comparison with the Italian short, light, tripping and trifling.' [1]) Even so some manipulation of usual sentence structure is inevitable, and this is the root cause of much obscurity in Hopkins. Once we grasp the idea that the obscurity follows on from Hopkins' aim to get the inscape of speech in his poetry (Welsh lettering, we remember, related to this aim as a means of patterning sound), we shall not see him as perversely loving obscurity for its own sake. His own often-quoted defence is relevant here:

> Plainly if it is possible to express a subtle and recondite thought on a subtle and recondite subject in a subtle and recondite way and with great felicity and perfection, in the end, something must be sacrificed with so trying a task, in the process, and this may be the being at once, nay perhaps even the being without explanation at all, intelligible. [2]

Moreover, to acknowledge the practical difficulties involved in Hopkins' attempt to make language live through formal pattern is at once to counter the view that the difficulties in Hopkins derive from his imitation of classical models (to counter by providing more

1 C p.86, October 29th, 1881.

2 RB pp.265-6, November 6th, 1887.

coherent and powerful reasons). The case has been advanced thus:

> Why did Hopkins feel compelled to distort normal grammar and syntax? Is it possible that his study of the classics could have encouraged him to do so? Is there any precedent for his practice in the literature he knew most thoroughly? [1]

The answer to the first question is in the whole nature of Hopkins' attempt with language - in his own words, in 'so trying a task'. [2] The second question implies that Hopkins wished to distort grammar for the sake of distortion, whereas - as I have tried to show - he had a more worthwhile reason for risking it. The third question does not, in isolation from the other two, argue any causal connection. (Elsewhere Mr. Bender's case is difficult to answer because of the assumptions made: one cannot reply to the view that, ' the study of Greek lyric odes may have reinforced a fundamental proclivity toward a non-logical structure in his poetry,' [3] if one does not accept the existence of such a proclivity in the first place.)

In summary, Hopkins' renunciation of hopes of public acclaim is in exact accord with what we know of him before he joined the Society of Jesus. It gave him the freedom to develop in a way he chose as an artist and also removed him from the risk of public hostility - a hostility which Hopkins so feared. Though he wrote nothing of his choice during the seven years before 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' he did develop as an artist, but the manner of his development was not utter transformation at the hands of Jesuit preceptors. On the contrary he evolved in these seven years in a way which was a natural continuation of what had gone before. At the core

1 Todd K. Bender, Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Classical Background and Critical Reception of His Work, Baltimore, Maryland, 1966, p.97.

2 RB p.265, November 6th, 1887.

3 Bender, op. cit., p.96.

of his development was his sense of form, expressed in the word 'inscape', encouraged by the philosophy of John Duns Scotus and applied, as a theory of spoken language, to poetry. Hopkins' idea of Sprung Rhythm - already inchoate before he joined the Jesuits - and his new knowledge of Welsh lettering were the major developments in his technical resources, and part of his main attempt to make his poetry give the essential strength of heard speech.

It was a controlled world that Hopkins had recognised, however, for there was no reality stronger to him at this time than the one pattern expressed, and pattern he looked for everywhere. Though there were discordant sounds and ugly sights in the world, ultimately it had the beauty and purpose of order, discoverable in the forms which went to its making. The many struggles of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' introduce a counter-motif to this beauty-theme, so I delay discussion of that poem and turn instead to the natural issue of most that has been said in this chapter, Hopkins' proclamation of the grandeur of God.

Chapter Three

THE GRANDEUR OF GOD

> 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]
>
> Hopkins

I have so far traced the development in Hopkins' prose of a view of the world which holds that natural beauty expresses some deeper reality than that of casual appearance, and that this deeper reality is to be apprehended through form. For Hopkins, form is not exclusive to the object (it needs a discerning eye to see it, and thus depends on the observer) nor yet to the perceiver (for it exists in the world outside his mind); the perception of form is thus a co-operative activity, linking the observer with fixed and external realities. Form depends on matter for its existence, but is not the same as matter (thus, writing in 1870 after a heavy fall of snow, Hopkins says, 'Looking at the elms from underneath you saw every wave in every twig . . . and to the hangers and flying sprays it restored, to the eye, the inscapes they had lost' [2]), and it gives access to the immaterial. Thus we have seen Hopkins, with the encouragement of Duns Scotus, claiming knowledge of Christ, because he has seen the beauty of a bluebell; and Scotus' view is that this beauty is summed up with the rest of nature in Christ. Christ is the consummation of created nature, including in his being all its being.

This world view of Hopkins' is sufficiently coherent and forcefully held to be described as a doctrine and, as such, it has

1 S p.195, commentary on Spiritual Exercises.

2 J p.196, March 12th, 1870.

some of the strengths and also the imperfections of doctrine; among its weaknesses, for example, it is exclusive and it resists development (aspects considered later in this chapter). However, disunity is not one of its faults. The notion of discord between the beauty of nature and the beauty of God which is evident in some readings of 'The Windhover' is thus entirely misplaced. The unity of Hopkins' doctrine of nature - with its limitations - is the central theme of this chapter.

It should be made clear at this point that that unity includes man who shares, for Hopkins, common origin with trees and streams and skylarks in the hand of God. This fact needs emphasis because, in Hopkins' poems, man is so often at odds with the rest of nature and because, in this study, it results in a grouping which may at first sight appear merely eccentric: in a sense 'Harry Ploughman' is a nature poem; so are 'The Bugler's First Communion' and 'The Soldier' and 'Felix Randal'. They are poems about men who 'In mould or mind or what not else' [1] have some beauty in them which is integrally related to the other beauties of the natural world. Aside from these poems themselves there is ample warranty in Hopkins' other work for taking this view and thus for including them later in this chapter. 'Earth's eye, tongue or heart' is 'dear and dogged man' ('Ribblesdale'); he is nature's 'clearest selvèd spark' ('That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire'), 'World's loveliest' ('To what serves Mortal Beauty') and 'life's pride and cared-for crown' ('The Sea and the Skylark'). His place in nature with its two contrasted aspects is given in 'God's Grandeur' and 'As Kingfishers catch fire', but, since that place is inseparable from other concerns, it is appropriate to

1 'The Lantern out of Doors'.

delay discussion of the second poem and begin with 'God's Grandeur'.

In August 1874 Hopkins went for three years to St. Beuno's College in North Wales, after spending the previous year lecturing in rhetoric at Manresa House, Roehampton. As the opportunity those lectures gave him had assisted the development of his metrical theories ('I have paid a good deal of attention to Milton's versification and collected his later rhythms: I did it when I had to lecture on rhetoric some years since' [1]), so the inspiration he had from being in Wales also helped his poetry to prosper. The Society of Jesus unknowingly gave him four continuous years in which his poetry could benefit - as, later, in Ireland, it - also unknowingly - caused him misery. Wales for Hopkins was 'the loveable west', [2] 'the true Arcadia of wild beauty', [3] 'always to me a mother of Muses'. [4] He looked back on his time there and (borrowing a phrase from Antony and Cleopatra) spoke of a poem written 'in my Welsh days, in my salad days'. [5] When he spent a holiday there in 1886 as a brief respite from the strains of his work in Ireland he swiftly recovered his happiness and his excitement. 'If you have not seen Pont Aberglaslyn in sunlight,' he told Bridges, 'you have something to live for.' [6]

The scope of this chapter extends well outside the period he spent at St. Beuno's to take in poems written at Oxford when he was a missioner, in Lancashire, and in Ireland, but it was in Wales that

1 C pp.13-14, October 5th, 1878.

2 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', stanza 24.

3 FL p.370, October 6th, 1886, to Patmore.

4 RB p.227, October 2nd, 1886.

5 RB pp.163-4, November 26th, 1882. Cp. Antony and Cleopatra, I v 73.

6 RB p.228, October 2nd, 1886.

Hopkins' doctrine of nature received its first and finest expression. It is characteristic of Hopkins to associate beauty with moral innocence. Man is sinful but the natural world of which he is part, inasmuch as it is unspoiled by him, is a sign of the gulf which exists between what he is and what he might have been. In the language of Biblical myth, he is a sinner who still lives in Eden (Spring is 'a strain of earth's sweet being in the beginning') - though his senses are so atrophied that he cannot see this. In 'God's Grandeur' particularly, Hopkins' sense of failed possibilities is localised in the contrast between man's mean existence and the beauties of a nature which is careless of him, absorbed, unconscious in its goodness.

Whereas the poems which follow it begin in some specific sense experience, 'God's Grandeur' is a synthesis of such experiences, a proclamation about them. Written in an age of 'half-believers' [1] its confidence is startling; it is unequivocal, presenting religious belief as empirical fact:

> 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.

The opening lines have the cumulative force which comes from these three unqualified assertions and from the sensuously detailed way they are presented. 'Shook foil' does indeed 'flame out'; when (e.g.) nuts are 'crushed' (the transferred epithet shows well Hopkins' ability to dispense with what is superfluous, to focus attention minutely), oil does indeed ooze, and gather to greatness; but the particular skill of these lines lies in the way they issue from the superb first image. God's grandeur is metaphorically akin to electric current, which also has the quality of existing in a way that is

1 Arnold's 'The Scholar-Gipsy'.

invisible yet accessible to the senses, a source of enormous power. This idea is further extended in the second line in the simile of light reflected off metal foil as it is shaken. But 'charged' carries another sense of being brim-full and it is this meaning which the third line develops. What the two similes conceal is the ambiguity of 'grandeur'; they would seem to suggest that this is a poem about God's visible glory (the tactile quality of 'ooze' not being denied) but it becomes clear from what follows that some loftiness of being which is not sensuous is also meant. Such is the force of the opening lines that the sequence of logic, the sequence picked out by 'then', may easily pass notice: 'Why do men then now not reck his rod?' 'Grandeur' is made the justifying factor in man's obedience; why has he not taken notice? No division has been made in this grandeur into sensuous, spiritual, aesthetic and religious, and this integrity is preserved in the explanation Hopkins offers,

> the soil
> Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod,

where the largeness of 'feel' is sufficient to cover the totality of an undivided human experience. Remarkably, a brutalised sensibility which shows in an inability to sense the physical world, and in the industrious, unfeeling commercialism which ruins its beauty, is here made a sign of man's apostasy.

> 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 spoiling of nature and the hardness of heart which this betokens is the explanation for religious disobedience, is both cause and effect. (Already the complexity of experience is such that the word 'religious' seems to pick out too fragmented, too narrow a part; to apply it is to be conscious at the same time that the poem is an assault on such narrowness.) Man's insensitivity is mimicked in the

heavy footfalls of 'have trod, have trod, have trod', and reinforced in the internal rhymes 'seared, bleared, smeared', and in the alliterative pattern which emphasises 'smudge' and 'smell'. It is an insensitivity powerless, however, to cancel the 'dearest freshness deep down things', or to touch the brooding presence of the Holy Ghost in the on-goingness of life ('brown brink' as a description of sunrise shows the skill with which Hopkins both avoids the cliché and hints the excitement of some new experience).

'In the Valley of the Elwy' preserves the same generalised sense of complaint as 'God's Grandeur':

> Lovely the woods, waters, meadows, combes, vales,
> All the air things wear that build this world of Wales;
> Only the inmate does not correspond:

The precise failure in 'correspondence' is not given, the idea is sufficiently defined by the 'lovely' countryside with which man is contrasted but the way in which man has failed to be lovely is not specified even in the final appeal to God:

> Complete thy creature dear O where it fails.

However, vagueness is a fault in this poem. What 'God's Grandeur' demonstrates powerfully and subtly in its sound pattern and concrete imagery, 'In the Valley of the Elwy' only refers to. We are not <u>shown</u> why the inmate does not correspond, and the idea comes unexpectedly in a poem about 'a house where all were good / To me' - the verse tends to dogmatise.

The dogma is essentially the same in 'The Sea and the Skylark', but the immediate situation is realised more forcefully, and fallen man with his unattractive towns is there in the poem. This is Hopkins' 'Dover Beach', with the moon and the roar of the sea, except that, whereas Arnold is confused, Hopkins knows exactly what is amiss. While the moon makes its course ('wear' - as of a boat) across the sky the

poet hears 'On ear and ear two noises too old to end'. Their age gives these sounds a degree of permanence which establishes the norm, a norm which is not an aesthetic nor a moral one but both - the attack here is not on what man has done to nature but on what he is. The sea and the skylark are, in a way which is not defined, 'pure'; by contrast

> How these two shame this shallow and frail town!
> How ring right out our sordid turbid time.

Man is 'shallow', 'frail', the present generation 'sordid', 'turbid', but again in ways not precise. The words apply to the whole of the human condition, and their strength lies in their breadth:

> We, life's pride and cared for crown
>
> Have lost that cheer and charm of earth's past prime:
> Our make and making break, are breaking, down
> To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's first slime.

The poetry will not confine itself to specific malady and the last lines indicate that something beyond merely urban living is in question; the diagnosis is a spiritual one, communicated sensuously in the images of fragmentation and decay. The spiritual decline is as real as physical decomposition; what is left, only a residue.

At first glance these poems are about nature as the nature-lover would conceive it; it may even appear to some readers to have that undefined numinous quality present in Wordsworth's nature. However, Hopkins would not have thought of nature as 'the guide, the guardian of my heart' for this supposes some kind of separable will in nature. For Hopkins, nature is a fact rather than a force; its workings are of infinite variety but fixed, and identifiable; nature is there to be investigated. Hence his comment of August 1873, 'I saw the waves to seaward frosted with light silver surf but did not find out much', [1] and, a year later, 'Indeed all nature is mechanical, but then it is not

1 J p.234, August 9th, 1873.

seen that mechanics contain that which is beyond mechanics.' [1] Hence, too, his description of his sketches as being in 'a Ruskinese point of view': [2] Ruskin's Modern Painters had been on his reading list for 1865 [3] and there Hopkins would have read of 'the necessity, as well as the dignity, of an earnest, faithful, loving study of nature as she is' [4] - 'study' primarily connects Ruskin and Hopkins.

These facts are easily forgotten when reading Hopkins' poetry because of the connection everywhere made between beauty and innocence, as if beauty were in itself the moral force. 'Spring' provides an illustration of this process of connection (there is, incidentally, a direct continuity between this poem and 'The Bugler's First Communion' with its 'fresh youth fretted in a bloomfall'). The beauty of spring is a vestige of the total beauty of God's first Creation, and the poem moves easily from rural to Biblical scene. The 'Eden garden' provides one link, but the dominant image of the last part distills the 'richness' of the first stanza into a 'juice' which may 'cloud' and 'sour' - not if the physical beauty of nature is spoiled, but 'with sinning'. Vernal beauty easily becomes, 'Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy', and the associations of spring and innocence are preserved in the phrase 'maid's child' (we have been given the Biblical teaching of the Virgin Birth and it comes with no strain on the fabric of the poem). The closing tercets are finer than the preceding eight lines and part of the reason lies in the Christian tradition which informs each movement in them, the movement of reason operating through the

1 J p.252, August 13th, 1874.

2 FL p.202, July 13th, 1863, to Baillie.

3 J p.56.

4 John Ruskin, Modern Painters, London, 1873, Vol.I, p.xxxix.

images. In the octave there is no such argument, only illustrations of the first statement. T.S. Eliot's criticism of Hopkins comes to mind, 'a whole poem will give us more of the same thing, an accumulation rather than a real development of thought or feeling'. [1] His observation does not suit the poem as a whole, but it is pertinent there. The last three lines of the octave show Hopkins producing something like a book of nature notes,

> The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
> The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
> With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

This is something of a list. One has the sense of additions being made.

It would be entirely logical, of course, for a nature-lover living after the inception of the Industrial Revolution to look backward in time and wish for things to be as they were before wastage and exploitation. As I have suggested, for Hopkins in 'Spring' this inherent conservatism has a deeper impulse working within it; time gone is not merely time before the smoke-stacks and factories but time of the age of innocence. For Hopkins the growth of civilisation is growth away from the truth, not towards it. His persistent theme is a calling back of mankind to anterior truth, never a vision of some future wholly different from present or past. We ought to leave out of account, here, the fitful sympathy of Hopkins' 'Red letter' on the Communist future: [2] he was deeply conservative, fearful of change and apprehensive about 'the Revolution'. [3] Thus in 'Duns Scotus's Oxford'

1 T.S. Eliot, <u>After Strange Gods</u>, London, 1934, p.47.

2 cf. RB pp.27-8, August 2nd, 1871 (e.g., 'I am afraid some great revolution is not far off. Horrible to say, in a manner I am a Communist.')

3 cf. J p.213, August 6th, 1871, for his 'fear of the Revolution'.

the special affection which Hopkins feels for this Schoolman, 'the rarest-veined unraveller' of what is real, is subsumed in the larger attraction which Scotus' period has. In the sestet of this sonnet, the 'base and brickish skirt' of nineteenth-century Oxford is no longer in view; the 'neighbour-nature' of 'folk, flocks, and flowers' and the undisturbed 'these weeds and waters, these walls' are so powerfully present that it is almost impossible to dislodge the feeling that one is in the medieval city. Hopkins shares in this poem in the deep nostalgia of William Morris for an untroubled society, expressing its stability by leaving the country unblemished (- a wistfulness which takes no account of the Black Death).

'Duns Scotus's Oxford' shows the extent to which after the first ecstatic announcements of his nature doctrine Hopkins moved away from the explicitly religious theme (the last line of the Oxford sonnet on the Immaculate Conception - 'Who fired France for Mary without spot' - is but a small concession in this direction). However in Wales the idea of Christ's presence in nature was a continuing concern and the weaknesses in poems he wrote after 'God's Grandeur' serve only to show how formidable his achievement is in that sonnet.

In 'The Starlight Night', for example, his failure to fuse his excitement at the stars and his sense of Christ's presence shows as a tendency to append a moral - a tendency which Yvor Winters attacks [1] and which Hopkins himself seems to have been aware of (Harry Ploughman was 'a direct picture of a ploughman, without afterthought'). [2] 'The Starlight Night' moves from ecstatic responses to sky and stars to an

1 Yvor Winters, 'The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins', in Hudson Review, 1949; reprinted in The Function of Criticism, Denver, 1957; and in Hopkins: a collection of critical essays, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman, Englewood Cliffs, 1966, p.48.

2 RB p.262, September 28th, 1887.

affirmation that these enclose Christ and his Church ('the spouse Christ' I take to mean this, since the Church is, Biblically, the bride of Christ). The first stanza works with all the power of a child's imagination - a strength, if a limiting one - and communicates its sense of wonder by taking us out of the real world. This is a fairyland with 'fire-folk sitting in the air', 'circle-citadels', 'elves-eyes' and diamond mines [1] - a traditionally elfin labour. The stanza becomes less fanciful, seizing on analogies from nature. The sky, in places made grey by the profusion of dimmer stars and where one or two stand out more brightly ('gold'), is like lawns on a clear frosty night, 'grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies'.

There has been some dispute about whether 'grey lawns cold' refers to earth or to skies. Thus Miss Elizabeth Schneider says 'the poem seems less fanciful and more imaginative' [2] if we suppose that

> Down in dim woods the diamond delves! the elves'-eyes!
> The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies!

and the rest of the octave refers to the ground. However the only reason we might have for dropping our gaze (we are looking 'up' at the stars) is the single word 'Down'. This did not appear in an earlier version Hopkins sent to his mother [3] which read,

1 Professor Daiches reads 'delves' as a verb and has the diamonds 'digging into the darkness of the woods to illuminate them'. As he says, diamonds do not normally dig, and there is no good reason why they should do so here. Moreover his reading would make 'diamond' a singular noun and this would apply strangely to many stars. The possibility that Hopkins is using one for many is virtually excluded because 'the diamond delves' occurs in the middle of a list of plurals, 'fire-folk', 'boroughs', 'citadels', 'eyes', 'lawns' and is paralleled by 'elves'-eyes'. Furthermore, an earlier draft of the poem had 'The dim woods quick with diamond wells' which seems to confirm that 'diamond' is used adjectivally. cf. David Daiches, A Critical History of English Literature, vol.iv, London, 1960, p.1044 and MS.A.

2 Schneider, op.cit., p.122.

3 cf.FLp.145, March 3rd, 1877.

Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!
O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!
The bright boroughs, the glimmering citadels there!
Look, the elf-rings! look at the out-round earnest eyes
The grey lawns cold where quaking gold-dew lies!
Wind-beat white-beam, airy abeles all on flare!
Flake doves sent floating out at a farmyard scare!
Ah well! it is a purchase and a prize.

The 'grey lawns' are there but one would not think of trying to make sense of them in any context other than the skies; only in the final version is there any possibility of ambiguity.

This does not conclusively demonstrate that 'grey lawns' refers to part of the sky (Hopkins might have changed his mind between versions) but it does give the weight of probability to this reading. Moreover the last three lines of the octave make the poem more coherent if they are taken figuratively rather than literally. (If Hopkins is looking at the ground now they need to be taken literally because gold lying down would otherwise be being likened - oddly - to 'floating' doves.) The compound 'quickgold' with its associations of quicksilver leads Hopkins on to the wildness of the stars. They are like the undersides of whitebeam leaves caught by the breeze, like the wind-blown leaves of tall poplars, or doves scattering in fear.

After the first seven lines the poem is severely strained. There are two sorts of difficulty. The first consists of an accumulation of a number of purely local awkwardnesses. In 'it is all a purchase, all is a prize' he muddles the imagery. It is possible to find a way in which this scene is both a purchase (bought by exchange) and a prize (won by skill) but the commercial overtones of the one word assort ill with the competitive ones of the other. In the second stanza the commercial one dominates and, as Professor Daiches aptly points out, [1] we are at an auction with the auctioneer extolling the

1 Daiches, History, p.1044.

merits of the items for sale (and, incidentally, picking up the cry of the first stanza) in new images from nature,

> "Look, look: a May-mess, like on orchard boughs
> Look! March-bloom, like on mealed - with-yellow sallows!"

The fault is not so much in the new situation as in the awkwardness of the transition. Presumably Hopkins intended 'Ah well!' to mean something like 'Ah! It is good' but the two words come as a sigh at loss, as an expression of resignation. Apparently he is sad that all this 'is a purchase', (an impression which is strengthened by the fact that the last line of the first stanza is the only one there which does not end with an exuberant exclamation mark) yet no reason is offered for sadness and the mood never again intrudes in the poem. The ambiguity of this stanza's last line is a weakness; so is the labour of the opening line of the next. The conflicting notions of 'purchase' and 'prize' have already been introduced but 'bid, then' brings in a third. The idea has to be explained and Hopkins recognises this, for he interrupts the enthusiasm sustained in the first stanza with 'What?' When he has explained what is to be bid, it becomes clear that the underlying thought is strained. How one 'bids' patience or vows or alms or prayers it is difficult to know. The poem has been wrenched to subserve religious faith. It is further weakened by the change in imagery which follows. We move from auction to harvest. The 'indeed' and the definite article of, 'These are indeed the barn', shows that in the experience of the stars Hopkins is recovering the truth of an old teaching, the parable of the wheat and the tares, [1] but again the verse is laboured. We are not adequately prepared for the change in direction, and the similarity between pinpricks of starlight and

1 cf. Matt. 13:30.

regular, upright stakes which is claimed in 'This piece-bright paling' is far from obvious: clearly the heavens are conceived of as the outer limit of 'nature' and nature is Christ's 'home' but this does not make the image any more telling.

The second difficulty is, it seems to me, more serious than these. The poem begins with us looking up through fanciful eyes at a distant world which is mysterious and inaccessible; this is make-believe but it comes with all the power and wonder of innocence. At the end of the poem we are shut up ('This piece-bright paling shuts') in a barn, confined 'within doors'. The withdrawal is not for reasons of comfort or security (there was no threat in that child-like world) so it becomes a retreat from wonder. The poem began in open spaces; it ends in a closed building, and the limitation is a consequence of trying to fuse all the protective associations of the traditional Christian image of the barn (where necessarily there must be an 'outside') with those of the natural world where the stars <u>are</u> the 'outside' and where no such protection is felt to be needed.

The last line of the octave, 'Ah well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize!' is simply not convincing in the context of the poem. It is as though these claims are trying to bring under control what has been so freely, so spontaneously offered in the earlier lines by introducing the idea that someone may be left out. However there is nothing else in the poem to justify this. The rest of the octave is a magnificent demonstration of what he had already written in a letter to his mother,

> No-one is ever so poor that he is not (without prejudice to all the rest of the world) owner of the skies and stars and everything wild that is to be found on the earth. [1]

1 FL p.111, March 1st, 1870.

In his poem Hopkins seeks to qualify this ownership and to impose a meaning on it.

To say that stars are a barn or a palisade is to work, as it were, only doctrinally: there is no other warrant for it. [1] This is not so with the superb 'charged' image of 'God's Grandeur' where the actual nature of the physical object is not denied by the way Hopkins describes the presence of God in it. However a similar weakness to the one in the sestet of 'The Starlight Night' occurs in 'Hurrahing in Harvest', again in the sestet. Hopkins says,

> And the azurous hung hills are his world-wielding shoulder
> Majestic - as a stallion stalwart, very-violet-sweet! -

The metaphor of mountains as the shoulder of Christ does not interfere with our sense of them also as huge formations of rock, though it does suggest - crudely, I think, as far as the meaning of the poem is concerned - the idea of some sleeping giant. However, the further 'as a stallion stalwart' does displace our sense of what hills actually are: mountains are not like stallions, this is bad poetry. [2] Nor are stallions like violets, in respect of sweetness or anything else. Hopkins is trying to suggest his sense of the presence of Christ in nature but by using metaphors which upset our sense of what nature is actually like.

In 'Hurrahing in Harvest' this inaptness of metaphor takes on a special interest, however, for, in my view, the poem was Hopkins' second attempt to do what he had done so finely scarcely three months earlier in 'The Windhover' (both poems were written in Wales in the

1 The images do not explain - and hence justify - themselves in the way that Hopkins' 1866 image does. See p.29, and Poems, p.139, No.98 (xxix).

2 I do not think that the possible - but anyway implicit - transitional thought, 'shoulder of hill / shoulder of stallion', redeems it: we have still lost the sense of what mountains are.

summer of 1877): namely to show the active moment when some part of nature is sensed not only in its usual, public form but also, simultaneously and privately, as the actual presence of Christ. I now give the whole sestet of 'Hurrahing in Harvest' to show how, despite its basic inaptness, Hopkins makes use of the stallion image:

> And the azurous hung hills are his world-wielding shoulder
> Majestic - as a stallion stalwart, very-violet-sweet! -
> These things, these things were here and but the beholder
> Wanting; which two when they once meet,
> The heart rears wings bold and bolder
> And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet.

The claim made in the opening metaphor about the scene before the poet is, of course, a claim about his own experience of the scene. He becomes pre-occupied with this, so that the idea of 'stallion' follows easily from shoulder but - as we have seen - neglects the actual physical presence of the hills. The scene before him, Hopkins goes on to say, was here before he came along, and then perceived and perceiver meet; 'The heart rears wings'. The image of a stallion, now rearing up like winged Pegasus, becomes a way of expressing his delight at what he sees. It has been transposed from scene to perceiver and one can detect the change. What happens in the sestet of 'The Windhover' (and in the greatest of the terrible sonnets - 'No worst there is none' and 'Carrion Comfort') is that this transposition is no longer evident: the connection between what is perceived and the way it is perceived becomes absolute.

'The Windhover' has proved contentious. Some critics have found a conflict in it between the poet's religion and his love of beauty and claimed that he failed to resolve it. Others have admitted the existence of a conflict but claimed success for Hopkins. A third group, with whom I am in agreement in this, has denied the existence of any conflict, and this last view is entirely consistent with the

development of Hopkins' poetry as I have so far described it.

The Windhover: to Christ our Lord

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.

Two mistaken, if usually unspoken, assumptions have spoiled readings of 'The Windhover'. These are: firstly, that the experience described in the poem was involuntary, that Hopkins was presented with the sight of a bird hovering and had to come to terms with its effect on him; and, secondly, that the special experience of seeing the falcon was made such because it was a rare, if not unique, event for Hopkins. Thus the usual assumption made by commentators is that at the outset the initiative is with the bird not the poet whom it is held to have surprised. We have, for example, William Empson's 'Confronted suddenly with the active physical beauty of the bird, he conceives of it as the opposite of his patient spiritual renunciation,' [1] and Father Schoder's description of 'the sudden vision of a hawk', [2] or less conspicuously, Dr. John Pick's 'the poet is in an

1 Empson, op. cit., p.225.

2 Raymond V. Schoder, 'What does The Windhover mean?', in Immortal Diamond, ed. Norman Weyand, London, 1949, p.284.

ecstasy of amazement at the mastery and brilliant success of the windhover.' [1] Professor W.H. Gardner says, 'By an act of will, the poet has turned from the ruthless freedom and joy of the kestrel to the compassionate servitude of Christ ("O my chevalier!"),' [2] implying that the windhover's appearance poses a challenge which the poet must then resist. So occasional a thing is the windhover's flight for Elizabeth Schneider that she regards the bird as 'a momentary analogue for the duration of the poem - indeed, perhaps not even quite that but simply a foreshadowing image and, in its primary natural sense, the originating factor in the experience of the poem.' [3] Despite her reaching conclusions opposed to Professor Gardner's she has common ground in making the falcon at the outset the prime mover.

The second of the two assumptions (that the sighting is rare or unique) is the more simply refuted of the two so I take that first. Hopkins was no stranger in 1877 to the sight of flying falcons. In 1872 on holiday in the Isle of Man he records in his Journal, 'a big hawk flew down chasing a little shrieking bird close beside us.' [4] In the same month, August, he has the note, 'We saw hawks and a heron, I think.' [5] The following year he returned to the Isle of Man again, and, returning from Snae Fell, 'We saw eight or perhaps ten hawks together.' [6] In the summer of 1874 he was in Devon and saw 'a hawk

1 Pick, op. cit., p.71.

2 Gardner, Study, vol.I, p.183.

3 Schneider, op. cit., p.152.

4 J p.221, August 7th, 1872.

5 J p.225, August 14th, 1872.

6 J p.234, August 5th, 1873.

also was hanging on the hover', [1] and when, in September of that year, he went to St. Beuno's to study theology, one of his first entries reads:

> For the first time to the Rock. The Rock is a great resort of hawks and owls. [2]

One may fairly infer from this that, in Wales, he could see falcons virtually any time he wished, and that this was so is, I think, confirmed by a very wistful remark in a letter to his father just before he left St. Beuno's:

> No sooner were we among the Welsh hills than I saw the hawks flying and other pleasant sights soon to be seen no more. [3]

Seeing a falcon in 1877 would not then, of itself, have been a special event for Hopkins, yet 'The Windhover' plainly deals with a remarkable experience: what was it?

The answer lies in the words 'I caught' which open the poem, and these, properly understood, oppose the second mistaken assumption which I identified above - that the initiative is with the bird. However these words are usually neglected or misunderstood. For example, F.N. Lees says that 'I caught' suggests 'the difficulty of observing a bird without alarming it, which gives the primary reference of "in hiding".' [4] The windhover is already in the air; it would be extremely difficult to alarm it. Moreover there is no need to hide to watch a falcon hover. More recently Professor Alison Sulloway remarks:

> He does not say 'I saw', which would have been a pallid response unfitting for a Ruskinian artist; he says 'I caught' - 'I committed an action imitating the vigour of what I saw.' [5]

1 J p.252, August 14th, 1874.

2 J p.257, September 3rd, 1874.

3 FL p.146, August 15th, 1877.

4 Francis Noel Lees, 'The Windhover', in Scrutiny, vol.xvii, No.1 (Spring 1950), p.36.

5 Sulloway, Hopkins and the Victorian Temper, p.109.

She recognises that 'I caught' involves something more than passive observation, but then supposes - wrongly, I believe - that the verb is imitative. The more usual - and mistaken - tendency would be to suppose that 'I caught' really means 'I caught sight of'.

I have already shown that Hopkins was familiar with the sight of flying falcons. When this fact is connected with other Journal entries, it becomes evident that the experience of 'The Windhover' is not the product of a casual glimpse but of purposeful effort on the poet's part. 'I caught' signifies the desired grasp of something recondite, and Hopkins' use of 'catch' and 'caught' with this sense is well established before 1877. In 1871 he writes in his Journal about clouds:

> May 24 - At sunset and later a strongly marked moulded rack. I made out the make of it, thus [there is a small sketch in the Journal] - cross hatching in fact . . . Since that day and since this (May 24) I have noticed this kind of cloud: its brindled and hatched scaping though difficult to catch is remarkable when seen . . . - Today (July 7) there has been much of this cloud and its make easily read. [1]

Hopkins is not talking here about immediate appearances. His references to the difficulty of catching 'its scaping' and to the fact that he 'made out the make of it' show that he is trying to uncover the essential pattern (characteristically, as an artist, he reproduces it - in a sketch which has no immediate likeness to a cloud formation [2]). In 1872, in an entry about wave movements, 'catch' is used again, and in a context which likewise suggests the grasping of something elusive after long study:

> About all the turns of the scaping from the break and flooding of wave to its run out again I have not yet satisfied myself. The shores are swimming and the eyes have before them a region of

1 J p.210.

2 J p.210.

> milky surf but it is hard for them to unpack the huddling and gnarls of the water and law out the shapes and sequence of the running: I catch however the looped or forked wisp made by every big pebble the backwater runs over . . . 1

Hopkins' effort is to 'law out' shapes and distinguish their order in time, and this he fails in; but he does 'catch' the pattern made when wave-water runs over a stone back to the body of the sea.

1873 gives us two more examples. In February, writing at Stonyhurst about inscape and the way, if chance is free to act, the world always has order, Hopkins says:

> Looking out of my window I caught it in the random clods and broken heaps of snow made by the broom. The same of the path trenched by footsteps in ankledeep snow across the fields leading to Hodder wood through which we went to see the river. 2

Later in the year, of bluebells in that same wood, he was to write:

> I caught as well as I could while my companions talked the Greek rightness of their beauty, the lovely / what people call / 'gracious' bidding one to another . . . and a notable glare the eye may abstract and sever from the blue colour / of light beating up from so many glassy heads, which like water is good to float their deeper instress in upon the mind. 3

Not only is there present here the same sense of difficulty in apprehension (Hopkins' companions are a distraction to him) but also, as with his comments on waves, a strong awareness of his own activity as an observer. 'The eye may abstract', and, in this instance, the mind's involvement is deeper if it does.

Two further instances may be taken as confirming the idea that Hopkins' use of 'caught' is quite distinctive when it is related to the act of seeing, and also as suggesting a close involvement of 'catching' with the process of artistic creation. Firstly, from 1874

1 J p.223, August 10th, 1872.

2 J p.230, February 24th.

3 J p.231, May 11th.

(Hopkins was at the time teaching rhetoric at Roehampton, near London):

> April 6 - Sham fight on the Common, 7000 men, chiefly volunteers. Went up in the morning to get an impression but it was too soon, however got this - caught that inscape in the horse that you see in the pediment especially and other basreliefs of the Parthenon and even which Sophocles had felt and expresses in two choruses of the Oedipus Coloneus, running on the likeness of a horse to a breaker, a wave of the sea curling over. I looked at the groin or the flank and saw how the set of the hair symmetrically flowed outwards from it to all parts of the body, so that, following that one may inscape the whole beast very simply. [1]

Here a connection is established between the thing in nature and what artists have made of it. In 1872, looking where grass had been cut in swathes on one side of a deep-set stream Hopkins brings into sharp focus the connection between the distinctive kind of perception shown in the Journal entries above and artistic creation: he says, 'I caught an inscape as flowing and well-marked almost as the frosting on glass and slabs; but I could not reproduce it afterwards with a pencil.' [2]

These entries should prevent us blurring 'I caught' in 'The Windhover' and making it mean no more than 'I glimpsed'. The meaning the Journal suggests - 'I succeeded in capturing the essential quality' - is certainly not unique to Hopkins (though we usually apply it to finished works of art; e.g. we say of a portrait, 'he's caught her shrewdness well'). In my view this purposeful meaning of 'I caught' dominates the sense of the poem.

In the octave Hopkins' understanding of the windhover's flight takes the form of a sustained exclamation. The bird's 'striding / High there' is being realised in the mind's eye (in language sufficient to establish the knightly qualities in him - he is a 'dauphin' who rides the air on his wings). The recent memory of what happened 'this

1 J pp.241-2.

2 J p.227, September 17th, 1872.

morning' returns but the 'I' which caught the windhover in flight and 'the heart' which stirred are plainly in the past.

The sestet, however, deals with the continuous present. Abstract qualities such as 'valour' and 'pride' are compressed ('buckle' suggests being pressed together, as in the palm of a hand when the fist is clenched) in the apprehension ('here') of the windhover. 'Air' I take to mean 'character' as in 'All the air things wear that build this world of Wales' ('In the Valley of the Elwy') and in, 'As air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling "inscape" is what I above all aim at in poetry,' [1] and 'his air of angels' ('Henry Purcell'). The rival sense for air, 'element we breathe', is less in place because - as with 'air' in my reading - all the other qualities mentioned actually belong to the bird, whereas the 'steady air' is the medium it flies through. 'Plume' is ambivalent. The sense 'feather' reinforces its primary meaning of 'to swell up to, as with pride; to aspire' (in 'Peace' Patience 'plumes to Peace thereafter').

'AND', strikingly in capitals, is an attempt by Hopkins to telescope language, for the fire which breaks from 'thee' is simultaneous with the buckling, and yet is a direct consequence of it. (Hopkins shows that the one thing involves the other by using 'then'.) 'AND' shows us that 'Buckle' governs the 'fire' as well as the air and pride; the fire is 'buckled' in with the other qualities in the apprehension Hopkins is describing. Through the windhover 'Christ our Lord' is sensed (just as Hopkins knew 'the beauty of our Lord' by that of a bluebell); the word 'chevalier' holds both Christ and the falcon together. 'A bird', 'the thing' - the general type from the world of

1 RB p.66, February 15th, 1879.

inaccessible objects - becomes by this fusion 'my chevalier'; and the falcon, thus seen, is a 'billion Times told lovelier' because it carries the beauty of Christ. Similarly, Christ apprehended in the windhover is 'more dangerous' than he was before the bird's inscape was understood because his immanence in the world is now recognised. I follow Robert Boyle [1] and James Milroy in giving to 'dangerous' at least in part the sense of 'powerful, mastering, dominating'. Mr. Milroy puts his case for this very succinctly. He says, if we take 'dangerous' to mean injurious, 'Why should the fire of Christ be described as "more dangerous" than something which has not been described as "dangerous" at all?' [2] I dissent from this in that it seems to me that Hopkins is not comparing Christ with the bird but the time when Christ is apprehended in the bird with the time before this happened. Christ can bring terror (as in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', stanza two) but, in 'The Windhover' it is because of the closeness of his power that this happens.

In the last tercet Hopkins says that it is not remarkable that the fire of Christ should flash from the bird-flight into the mind of a beholder when the world is such that even dull movement ('sheer plod') makes the metal of a plough shine, and the destruction of even apparently dull matter brings a moment of beauty (embers 'gash gold-vermilion' as they fall in the grate). He also implies that the Crucifixion of Christ was the beautiful issue of an unremarkable earthly life but, before saying why I arrive at this reading, it is in place to return to the octave for a moment, to the words 'My heart in hiding'.

1 Robert Boyle, Metaphor in Hopkins, Chapel Hill, 1961, p.90.

2 James Milroy, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins: Etymology and "Current Language"' in The Critical Survey, Winter 1971, vol.5, no.3, p.213.

The temptation this phrase has offered critics is to interpret the whole poem as a commentary on Hopkins' own life. Professor Empson reads the words as meaning 'the life of renunciation' [1] (i.e. the Jesuit's life) and, on the face of things, there is strong reason for following him in this and agreeing also that Professor Gardner's editorial note [2] is an apt one when he refers us to Hopkins' remark that 'the hidden life at Nazareth is the great help to faith for us who must live more or less an obscure, constrained, and unsuccessful life,' [3] (1881). In 1885 we have a similar feeling in a meditation on St. Joseph: 'He is the patron of the hidden life; of those, I should think, suffering in mind and as I do. Therefore I will ask his help.' [4] In a letter to Dixon, late in 1881, Hopkins again uses the key phrase: St. Ignatius 'lived in Rome so ordinary, so hidden a life'. [5] If we collate these references we can see that 'the hidden life' is ordinary and obscure, constrained and seemingly unsuccessful, and perhaps also involves mental suffering. It is a life unremarkable if seen from the outside. There is thus a problem in equating 'My heart in hiding' with 'the hidden life': if Hopkins' heart were hiding from anything in the sense the above quotations imply it would be from public gaze, certainly not from the windhover, for the bird cannot affect his obscurity.

It is much more probable that when Hopkins writes 'My heart in hiding /Stirred for a bird' he is thinking of the intuitive movement

1 Empson, Seven Types, p.225.

2 Poems, p.267.

3 S p.176.

4 S p.260.

5 C p.95, December 1st, 1881.

of something previously unresponsive. We have a sense very close to this in a letter to Bridges a little more than a year and a half after Hopkins had written 'The Windhover': 'Feeling, love in particular, is the great moving power and spring of verse and the only person I am in love with seldom, especially now, stirs my heart sensibly . . . ' [1] Moreover, Hopkins' use of 'heart' in his poems is very distinctive - and frequent. His heart is 'carrier-witted' ('The Wreck of the Deutschland', stanza three), 'mother of being in me', 'Unteachably after evil, but uttering truth' (ibid., stanza 18), and open also to a sort of observation ('Ah, touched in your bower of bone /Are you!' [ibid., stanza 18] 'My heart, but you were dovewinged' [ibid., stanza 3]), or order ('Heart, go and bleed' [ibid., stanza 31]), or consultation ('Heart, you round me right. . .' ['Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves'] 'what sights you, heart, saw' ['I wake and feel']). This idea of instinctive movement in something which has a life of its own is in accord with a view which does not make 'heart in hiding' a comment on the poet's life as a Jesuit.

It is important that the meaning of 'My heart in hiding' be clarified because all kinds of false trails are started if the phrase is read as a description of Hopkins' own obscurity. If it were that, Hopkins' approval of the Jesuit life would be opposed to the natural life of the bird which had 'stirred' him from his religious duty. An entirely false opposition between God and nature - and one unique in Hopkins to this poem - would be set up. Moreover the meaning of the last tercet would be subtly distorted. The distortion shows in the very interesting comments which Mr. Lees makes on these lines:

> The 'ah my dear', with its store of meaning from George Herbert, sufficiently obviously infuses into the lines the

1 RB p.66, February 15th, 1879.

> personal regret and the grouping of himself with plough and embers, together with the sympathy with Christ (who, too, was broken and died), which carry the reconciliation of the speaker to the lack of obvious joyous mastery in himself, a man, in comparison with that of the Falcon. [1]

In my view Hopkins does indeed group himself with plough and embers and Christ but he does not contrast himself with the Falcon nor does he feel regret of any kind. The 'gash' of the Crucifixion is not being mourned; it is being celebrated. The editorial references [2] for the last two lines are very apt: in a sermon Hopkins says of Christ that 'through poverty, through labour, through crucifixion his majesty of nature more shines'; [3] in a letter, 'he was doomed to succeed by failure'. [4] Christ's life in this last tercet is the paradox of the dull coal suddenly made bright in destruction.

For the sake of clarity I have so far assumed Christ's involvement in the poem as something which needs no argument: it merits further discussion. Pointing to the fact that Hopkins added 'To Christ our Lord' some six and a half years after he first wrote the poem, Father W.A.M. Peters argued that this was by way of formal dedication: Hopkins once described this as 'the best thing I ever wrote' [5] and it was logical that he should wish to offer it to his Lord. [6] Professor N.H. MacKenzie offers a different explanation (which receives fuller attention below), which suggests that the dedication came in consequence

1 Lees, Scrutiny, Spring 1950, p.35.

2 Poems, p.268.

3 S p.37, November 23rd, 1879.

4 C p.138, July 3rd, 1886.

5 RB p.85.

6 W.A.M. Peters, Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Essay towards the Understanding of his Poetry, London, 1948, pp.85-6.

of changes made to the first line. [1] The earlier critic believes that Christ has no place in the poem, the later that he is present as a rival to the falcon. [2]

There can be little doubt that Christ is present. The dedication is not a pendant as it is in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', it forms part of the title. In the same way we have 'The Silver Jubilee: to James First Bishop of Shrewsbury, etc.' and 'Spring and Fall: to a young child.' Moreover the modes of address which are employed in the course of the poem show changing attitudes to the kestrel. In the octet the windhover is 'minion', 'dauphin', 'falcon', but then as Lees points out, [3] the terms grow more remote and impersonal. Hopkins speaks of 'he', 'the hurl', 'a bird' and 'the thing', and, finally, in the sestet, of 'Brute beauty' ('Brute' is a strange word to apply to a dauphin). The admiration of 'O my chevalier' and the affection of 'ah my dear' are in plain contrast with the momentarily distanced 'thing'. Furthermore the windhover is not harmed in the poem; but 'ah my dear' which interrupts the sequence of 'blue-bleak embers . . . fall' seems to insist that the one there addressed is destroyed - as Christ was on the cross.

The nature of Christ's presence is less easy to describe. Mr. Lees says, 'We begin then, I would submit, with the strong possibility that Hopkins is speaking to Christ throughout.' [4] One fact he

1 MacKenzie, op. cit., pp.56-59 (A view he shares in part with Eugene R. August, 'The Growth of the Windhover', PMLA October 1967, pp.465-8).

2 ibid., p.59, 'The sonnet is addressed to the King himself, whose splendour transcends the utmost which His creation can offer.'

3 Lees, Scrutiny, Spring 1950, pp.33-4.

4 ibid., p.33.

uses to support this is that, 'The second person used in the poem is the second person singular "thee", commonly employed by others for vaguely elevating and "poetic" purposes but by the mature Hopkins rarely except as referring to God (and then without the customary capital initial).' [1] The question of capital letters is of some importance, for it is surely strange that the Falcon should be given one when none is warranted by convention, and that 'chevalier' and 'my dear' - in Lees' reading, exclusively Christ - should not. (The close of 'The Loss of the Eurydice' with the prayer 'Save my hero, O Hero savest' serves as a contrast.) The explanation is that Christ is in special relation to the Falcon, a relation in part indicated by the initial capital and in part by the position the poem establishes for the windhover. The bird is dauphin to the kingdom of daylight; eldest son. So is Christ, Son of the Father, and possessed in Hopkins' eyes of all those knightly qualities which are associated with the bird of chivalry. The Falcon's mastery of the air is Christ's for Hopkins applauds not only the bird's achievement but the fact of the bird's existence, that there should be a thing to so-master the air, that such a thing should have been achieved. This is the double statement of 'the achieve of, the mastery of the thing'. We see the bird riding, address the chevalier, but after that point in the poem the image separates out. The poet has identified Christ and the Falcon, in the last three lines the identification is of himself and his lord.

Professor William Empson's discussion of 'The Windhover' in Seven Types of Ambiguity has had a considerable influence on subsequent critics [2] and most importantly, this may be discerned in the work of

1 Lees, Scrutiny, Spring 1950, p.38.

2 Though W.A.M. Peters strenuously opposed Empson's view. qv. Peters, Essay, p.86.

Hopkins' most prominent commentator, his editor Professor W.H. Gardner, and perhaps too in the work of Professor N.H. MacKenzie. Although they dissent from Empson's hostile viewpoint (for him 'The Windhover' provides 'perhaps, the only disagreeable case in the book' [1]), they share common ground with him in supposing some kind of friction between the two elements in the poem's title. Gardner says,

> The truth is that in the sestet Hopkins holds up to a passionate but critical judgement two conflicting sets of values, one represented by 'the kingdom of daylight's dauphin' - the windhover, the other by the Kingdom of Heaven's 'chevalier' - Christ. As the psychological critics have shown, and as the poet himself was aware, the sonnet embodies a spiritual conflict. [2]

Professor MacKenzie says that the sestet 'contrasts the flashing plumage and flaming courage of the brute bird with the billion times greater radiance of the sunrise and the King of Daylight.' [3] When Hopkins speaks of the fire 'a billion Times told lovelier' he cannot be speaking to the kestrel because 'the language is surely extravagant' for that. 'The sonnet is addressed to the King himself, whose splendour transcends the utmost which His creation can offer.' [4] MacKenzie tactitly admits discord and sees Hopkins overcoming it by giving preeminence to Christ. Both accounts thus differ from my own in admitting this dualism in the poem but since Empson preceded them in this - and he makes damaging use of it - to offer arguments against his conclusions will be in some measure a way of explaining why I differ from the ones they advance.

Empson's case is that 'Confronted suddenly with the active physical beauty of the bird, he [Hopkins] conceives of it as the

1 Empson, Seven Types, p.226, n.1.

2 Gardner, op. cit., vol.1, p.181.

3 MacKenzie, op. cit., p.57.

4 ibid., p.59.

opposite of his patient spiritual renunciation.' [1] The suddenness of the occasion I have already disputed; the opposition Empson sees depends finally on what he makes of 'Buckle!' (it is, for him, 'the test' [2]). He has it that it may be either imperative or indicative and mean either 'buckle like a military belt, for the discipline of heroic action' or 'buckle like a bicycle wheel', 'make useless, distorted, and incapable of its natural motion.' [3] By putting the tense of the verb in doubt Empson thus has Hopkins both wishing for something and saying that he already has it (clearly a suspect state of mind); the poet is further compromised because the something is both 'heroic' and 'distorted'.

But 'Buckle!' can only be taken as imperative by unnecessarily straining the poem at two points. An imperative verb normally comes at the start of a sentence (its subject being assumed) or, if the subject is stated, immediately after it - it does not come at the close. Thus we have 'Come you indoors, come home' ('The Candle Indoors'), 'ware of a world when but these two tell' ('Spelt from Sibly's Leaves') and 'Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots' ('Thou art indeed just, Lord'). Hopkins might on this occasion have inverted the normal 'buckle here!' but this would have weakened its imperative force. Moreover there is an event consequent on the buckling and this is in the present; brute beauty buckles and then fire breaks from the bird. An imperative is not normally followed by the present, for the simple reason that the action commanded has not yet taken place. (We say, 'Pick up your case and we'll catch a bus', not 'and we catch a

1 Empson, Seven Types, p.225.

2 ibid., p.226, n.1.

3 ibid., p.225.

bus'). It would be strange if an imperative verb were so followed here. Might 'Buckle' be an imperative applying to the whole of the second stanza? This would give two injunctions 'Brute beauty (etc.) Buckle!' and 'The fire which breaks (Buckle) as well!' but this possibility is set aside by the last stanza. Whatever has happened in the second stanza, is referred to in the last lines as an accomplished fact. To regard 'buckle!' as an imperative would be to put the event still some way in the future: it must be indicative.

On the question of meaning, 'buckle' may mean both 'bend' and 'join' - in my reading, does mean both - but the conclusion that these meanings are irreconcilable and expressive of 'open conflict' between 'two systems of judgement' is not to be deduced from that. 'Useless, distorted, and incapable' - the value-judgements which run counter to Hopkins' joy are introduced by Empson himself. Admit their introduction and the 'AND' at its centre is certainly as gross as he says it is, [1] the poem a severely flawed piece of work rather than what it really is - an ecstatic celebration of the act of perception.

'Hurrahing in Harvest', I have suggested, was an attempt to repeat, in a different context, the achievement of 'The Windhover', but the fusion which is at the core of the earlier poem is missing here. The poet says,

> I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes,
> Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour;

he 'reaps' the skies to collect Christ. But we are always in the poem told about this, never shown it. The ambivalent language of 'The Windhover', the collapsing of old categories which is essential to new perception, is not managed in 'Hurrahing in Harvest': hills are either hills or they are Christ's shoulder, clouds are either clouds

1 Empson, Seven Types, p.226, it 'affects one rather like shouting in an actor.'

or the glory of 'our Saviour' - they are never, simultaneously, both.

There is indeed something final about the comment Hopkins made to Bridges two years after his first draft of 'The Windhover'. He said the poem was 'the best thing I ever wrote'.[1] His estimation is not of great importance now (he was to write for another ten years, so the judgement is not a review of a lifetime's work), but what a pessimistic comment to come from a poet still in practice! The pessimism was unwarranted, but one ought to acknowledge some truth in T.S. Eliot's remark that Hopkins' mind operated 'only within a narrow range'. Hopkins' nature doctrine was a limitation in that it disposed of heterogenous material as matter unworthy or irrelevant to poetry. In this sense it simplified life.

> God gave things a forward and perpetual motion; the Devil, that is /thrower of things off the track, upsetter, mischiefmaker, clashing one with another brought in the law of decay and consumption in inanimate nature, death in the vegetable and animal world, moral death and original sin in the world of man. [2]

- when he wrote retreat notes in November 1881, this was the way Hopkins accounted for what was disagreeable to him; and a nature poet who stays within the terms of this view has very little room in which to develop. Indeed Hopkins risked being repetitious, and we can see this if we compare 'Ribblesdale' (1881) with 'God's Grandeur'. 'Ribblesdale' is a poorer poem, and in part because it gives the same essential theme as 'God's Grandeur' but more crudely. There are similarities between the two poems in both their language and their ideas: in 1881 man has 'reaved' 'our rich round world bare' (in 1877 'the soil is bare now', made so by toil, the shape of the world is 'bent'); man does not 'reck of world after' (in 1877, 'Why do men

1 Eliot, <u>After Strange Gods</u>, p.33.

2 S p.199.

then now not reck his rod?'); earth, in response, shows 'care and dear concern' (in 1877 there is 'the dearest freshness deep down things' and the Holy Ghost 'broods' over the world). The dynamic unanswerable force of 'God's Grandeur' has become in 'Ribblesdale' a sort of ineffectual maternalism. The proclamation of a nature doctrine as such was a constriction on Hopkins, though, as we shall see in the next chapter, he effectively avoided this limitation because of his lament at the transience of living things. There is discord - and hence development - even though the discord is inadequately accounted for in his prose and, in a sense, unofficial.

In Hopkins' poems about men however the limits are firmly in place. The strengths and, to me, considerable weaknesses of this part of his work derive from his treatment of men as if they were, like the windhover, God's beautiful creatures. With the notable exception of 'Felix Randal' they exist in his poems only in that dimension, and, until we come to 'The Shepherd's Brow', 'things rank and gross in nature' have no place in Hopkins' poems because all nature's ills are essentially a perversion of God's purpose. The poems, if they do not actually celebrate the beauty of man, call him back to his true concern, his heavenly purpose; and 'As kingfishers catch fire', written some years after Hopkins left Wales, makes man's ideal role very clear. This poem is to Hopkins' poems about men what 'God's Grandeur' is to his other poems about nature: an embodiment of the doctrine which elsewhere receives partial treatment. I give the sestet (Hopkins has just described individuality in terms of distinctive activity, he now goes on to say how such individuality is unified by being summed up in Christ):

> I say more: the just man justices;
> Keeps grace: that keeps 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.

Each man is a partial expression of the whole truth which is Christ, an inadequate enactment of that which in its truest form is Ideal.

In practice what the loveliness of the limbs means is that Hopkins describes men's bodies with a Pre-Raphaelite eye for detail but their faces, their personalities, barely come into his work. He is pre-occupied with his own experience of them, and poems such as 'The Soldier' or 'Tom's Garland' reveal more about the observer than they do of the subject. If Hopkins corrects his idealised view of men it is by going to the other extreme, allowing an abrupt claim by the intellect on the fancy which serves only to distort in a different way. This is so in 'The Soldier'. The poem begins in the meditative tones of a thoughtful conversation, already well-advanced. 'Yes. Why do we all seeing of a soldier, bless him?' But we do not all 'bless' soldiers. Some of us may fear, some despise, some admire them; only a few will 'bless'. The poet's question is thus from the outset a very personal one; the picture-book language he uses ('Our redcoats, our tars') puts even severer limits on the experience. Then he states the problem,

Both these being, the greater part,
But frail clay, nay but foul clay.

The rational assessment that these words seem to convey (the poet has reflected on his feeling and comes up with the objection to it) is as extreme in the other direction. The problem, for the reader, is not that Hopkins blesses 'foul clay' but that he calls it 'our redcoats, our tars'. Moreover, the lines which follow come so soon and with such dogmatic certainty after the opening enquiry that one feels that the serious involvement with the problem which the opening lines hint at is feigned: the poet will be happier with a firm answer than with

any deeper self-questioning - 'Here it is:' Hopkins blesses soldiers because he believes that that profession is manly and 'makes believe the men must be no less' - in the same way that one shapes one's impression of an artist from what one knows of his work. Hopkins would dearly love to judge by appearances ('fain will find as sterling all as all is smart') and find that in the scarlet of the uniform there is a clear sign ('there express') of 'the spirit of war'. He was no jingoist but he was 'a very great patriot' [1] and this adulation of war is entirely consistent with that patriotism. What follows is insupportable:

> Mark, Christ our King. He knows war, served this soldiering through;
> He of all can reeve a rope best.

It is strange to hear these things about the Prince of Peace and when Hopkins has to describe what it is he is talking about, he avoids the contradiction: Christ does not praise the fighting soldier, involved in bloodshed, he praises when he sees 'somewhere some man do all that man can do'.

What has happened here is that Hopkins has tried to explain his admiration for a soldier but has found that it depends on a 'guess', that he only 'hopes' or 'makes believe'. He then transfers his admiration to Christ-as-soldier still attempting to justify the original blessing and insisting at the same time on the masculinity of his own religious faith; Christ 'of all can reeve a rope best'. He confuses the spiritual conflict which Christ engaged in with the physical battles which the soldier fights (and which may be used <u>figuratively</u> to describe Christ's struggle against evil). [2]

1 RB p.131, June 16th, 1881.

2 By the same logic, the metaphors of the Church Militant and the Jesuit as soldier of Christ do not support Hopkins' literal statement.

If in 'The Soldier' Hopkins shows himself as patriot and priest trying to find justifications for his own irrationality, in 'Tom's Garland' Hopkins is conspicuous as the man of intellect. The tortured syntax of much of the poem needs little comment; Hopkins himself recognised that it was a work, 'of infinite, of over great contrivance, I am afraid, to the annulling in the end of the right effect.' [1] It is worth indicating however that the inappropriateness of the title metaphor (a garland is a wreath for the head and ill-describes bootnails) is part of the poem's tendency to idealise manual labour. Neither here nor in 'Harry Ploughman' are there aches or weariness or worries; Tom is 'seldom sick, Seldomer heartsore', he 'swings' 'his low lot' 'lustily'. More significantly, he is proof against 'thoughts', he does not have to suffer the 'tormented mind tormenting yet' ('My own heart'). This is the only poem in which Hopkins comes anywhere near offering a comment on the urban communities in which he lived, and even here it is oblique. Tom is not specifically an urban worker, his job is to dig in the open air, not to toil in a factory (there are no factory-workers in Hopkins' poems: in this respect he follows his contemporaries [2]). The poem balances for a moment on a restrained sense of injustice, Tom's supposed contentment being set against the knowledge that there are those who have neither strength nor intelligence and thus no place in the 'commonweal', then the poem swings to an implicit condemnation in the powerful last lines,

> This, by Despair, bred Hangdog dull; by Rage
> Manwolf, worse; and their packs infest the age.

1 C o.153, December 22nd, 1887.

2 As far as I am aware Tennyson is alone among Hopkins' major contemporaries in describing an industrial scene (in cancelled lines of 'The Princess'; qv. Poems, ed. Christopher Ricks, London, 1969, p.754) though the art of the period occasionally deals with the subject.

The sympathy for the deprived which Hopkins had shown in his 'red' letter [1] is virtually cancelled by the sentiment he had expressed in another, 'And the drunkards go on drinking, the filthy, as the scripture says, are filthy still: human nature is so inveterate. Would that I had seen the last of it.' [2]

Tom's lot is idealised, and the idealisation amounts almost to a wistfulness for simplicity, to a type of sentimentality. Out of this sentimentality comes the poem's close and the feeling, perhaps, that the poor ought to be content because there are possibilities of happiness for them which are denied to the prosperous. Is Hopkins' 'their packs infest the age' an attack on the unemployed or on their condition? Is there not something uncertain in a poem 'upon the Unemployed' which concentrates instead on a healthy labourer with a job?

Hopkins could not tolerate the ugly or offensive and this set limits on his sympathies. His distaste led him close to a confusion of godliness with cleanliness, and physical loathing might become moral condemnation. He writes,

> While I admired the handsome horses I remarked for the thousandth time with sorrow and loathing the base and bespotted figures and features of the Liverpool crowd. When I see the fine and manly Norwegians that flock hither to embark for America walk our streets and look about them it fills me with shame and wretchedness. I am told Sheffield is worse though. We have been shamefully beaten by the Boers (at Majuba it was simply that our troops funked and ran), but this is not the worst that is to be. 3

What we have in his poetry is the reverse side of this antipathy to urban communities so often iterated in the letters. 'In serious poetry the standard and aim is strict beauty,' [4] so clearly

1 qv. RB pp.27-8, 'I am always thinking of the Communist future', etc. August 2nd, 1871 and RB p.29.

2 RB p.110, October 26th, 1880.

3 RB pp.127-8, May 1st, 1881.

4 RB p.133, June 28th, 1881.

ugliness has no place there. In this respect, Hopkins was entirely conventional, for the backward glances which Tennyson and Arnold and Browning gave to other societies (real and supposed), and which Morris [1] turned into a persistent gaze, find a place in his verse too. It is a small place, but his fondness for Duns Scotus's Oxford - medieval Oxford - and his description of Harry Ploughman are reminders of their nostalgia. 'Harry Ploughman' with its feeling of 'Churls-grace' might be a description of a feudal labourer as much as of a Victorian one. The only detail we are given about his clothing is that he is shod with 'bluff hide' and neither that nor anything else keeps him in the nineteenth century. Hopkins' feeling of the 'hollowness of this century's civilisation' [2] shows in his poetry as it shows in that of his contemporaries - in absence.

One of the effects of this in his poems about men is a sense of unreality. Whereas Dickens fixed his characters by describing accurately their often grimy work-places Hopkins' verse, though detailed, has no place for the mundane as such, it is transmuted into something else. In 'Felix Randal' the untroubled opening line ('O is he dead then?') leads to a history of the illness of this 'hardy-handsome farrier' and, incidentally, to an explanation for the poet's easy acceptance of his death - Felix is already 'ransomed', it was the farrier's suffering which so moved the priest. The farrier fusses, becomes incoherent, loses patience, curses and presents himself for once in Hopkins' verse as something other than a fine-featured hero or an obdurate wrecker of God's world. Then the poem closes with Hopkins

1 cf. his poetry and <u>News from Nowhere</u>.

2 C p.97, December 1st, 1881.

imagining him at work.[1] It is 'boisterous', 'grim', 'powerful' - anything but ordinary - and the horse he 'fettles' is surely taken from mythology, for his is not a horse-shoe but a 'bright and battering sandal'.[2]

Hopkins' treatment of the horse-shoe is one detail, but in 'The Bugler's First Communion' - also a poem about pastoral care - we have more. The poem begins in an easy conversational style, its subject a

> boy bugler, born he tells me of Irish
> Mother to an English sire,

but already with 'sire' there is an eccentricity, a want of taste and proportion. This becomes extreme when Hopkins speaks of the Eucharist. Christ is 'fetched' from a 'cupboard' and the Elements are described as a 'treat' for the 'youngster'. But then contrast,

> Frowning and forefending angel-warder
> Squander the hell-rock ranks sally to molest him;
> March, kind comrade, abreast him;
> Dress his days to a dextrous and starlight order.

The images are of warfare in the skies more reminiscent of Paradise Lost than of the life of a boy-soldier. The reason for this (it is the reason of 'As kingfishers catch fire') is in Hopkins' desire to see men as Ideal Man and in his conception of the heroic life which that involves. He one day hopes to see the bugler 'An our day's God's own Galahad'.

There is a similar idealisation in 'The Loss of the Eurydice' where Hopkins seizes on the wreck with its destruction of physical

1 Research done by Father Alfred Thomas shows almost conclusively that the real subject of Hopkins' poem was a blacksmith named Felix Spencer. His home was in a poor part of Liverpool - Birchfield Street - and his smithy may have been an urban one as well, though there is no sense of this in Hopkins' poem. qv. 'Hopkins' "Felix Randal": the man and the poem', Times Literary Supplement, March 19, 1971.

2 It was a Roman practice to put sandals on horses' hooves (cf. Morris Bishop, The Penguin Book of the Middle Ages, Harmondsworth, 1971, p.43).

beauty as a parable of the spiritual state of the nation also fast moving to destruction.

> They say who saw one sea-corpse cold
> He was all of lovely manly mould,
> Every inch a tar,
> Of the best we boast our sailors are.

This man 'strained to beauty' was 'but one like thousands more' - yet beauty marks them out. The sweetheart's prayer really displays Hopkins' tendency to categorise men at its plainest, 'Save my hero, O Hero savest'. It is naive to make a seaman a hero because he is a man in distress; and to imply that this supposed heroism has any place in the anxiety which prompts the prayer or to suggest that wives, mothers and sweethearts see their men firstly - or indeed, at all - as heroes is to show very little insight into love.

'The Candle Indoors', a companion piece to 'The Lantern out of Doors' (discussed in my next chapter), marks an attempt by Hopkins to deal with this tendency to judge men religiously, to exercise some kind of evangelical claim on them which limits his sympathy for what they are. Hopkins himself was dissatisfied with its haphazard evolvement. He wrote to Bridges from Oxford, where the poem was written in 1879,

> I enclose you two sonnets, capable of further finish. I am afraid they are not very good all through. One is a companion to the Lantern, not at first meant to be though, but it fell in. [1]

It has good lines but only superficial coherence. A light burning in a window arouses Hopkins' curiosity about the person working there and his ignorance of their identity makes him,

> the eagerer a-wanting Jessy or Jack
> There / God to aggrandise, God to glorify.

He claims them for his religion but immediately rebukes himself for

1 RB p.84, June 22nd, 1879.

his own unworthiness. Instead of being curious about others' faith, he must attend to his own soul, 'vital candle in close heart's vault'. But this fine image is isolated from the logic of the first situation; it works only locally. The candle which first attracted Hopkins' attention did only that; after taking notice of it his curiosity turns to 'Jessy or Jack'. The way the candle burns has nothing to do with their faith or lack of it so that when Hopkins goes on to talk about the candle which burns inside him the image is fortuitous. This becomes more obvious by contrast with 'The Lantern out of Doors'. There the man distinguished by'beauty' is the lantern which Hopkins first sees; the poem is built on that metaphoric strength. The images of 'The Candle Indoors' are frequently of an occasional kind; they relate to sight, but the nature of these relationships varies. Having talked of the soul as a 'vital candle' (i.e. something visible) it makes no sense to speak of being 'beam-blind': the moral point of the Rabbinic exaggeration [1] is still there but it has been robbed of its sensuous strength (the poet obviously is not blind). Furthermore the poem is unresolved. The question 'What hinders?' introduces the idea that there is a difficulty about attending to the 'vital candle' but the poem does not come to rest conclusively on the charge made.

> Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault
> In a neighbour deft-handed? Are you that liar
> And, cast by conscience out, spendsavour salt?

Hopkins does not say whether he is culpable or not, and even had he done so the poem would still be structurally weak, the last lines still an addition.

A short digression may be in place here. In this poem, an attempt is made to fuse two experiences on a verbal level when there

1 cf. Matt. v 13-16.

is no connection except in the language. This shows in his use of 'candle' which I have already commented on; it shows in the images which - without order - relate to sight; it shows in the way he says, 'Come you indoors, come home' when 'indoors' brings to mind the title of the poem - and thus the initial situation - but without significance. This tendency for denotation and connotation to subsist separately shows elsewhere in the poem, and in discussing it, it is relevant to note the criticism of Hopkins which Dr. F.R. Leavis considers. Leavis will not,

> endorse Lord David Cecil's view that Hopkins is difficult because of his difficult way of saying simple things. It is relevant, but hardly necessary, to remark that for Hopkins his use of words is not a matter of saying things with them; he is preoccupied with what seems to him the poetic use of them, and that is a matter of making them do and be. [1]

The admonition is in place, yet on the following page of the same fine essay we read,

> It is as if his intensity, for lack of adequately answering substance, expressed itself in a kind of hypertrophy of technique, and in an excessive imputation of significance to formal pattern. [2]

Dr. Leavis's charge is based on a different, a profounder conception of the nature of poetry, but something of Lord David Cecil's disquiet finds a place there. 'Difficult way of saying'/'hypertrophy of technique', 'simple things'/'lack of adequately answering substance' [my italics] - there is a remarkable parallelism here and if we return to 'The Candle Indoors' the cause is not hard to understand.

In the line, 'Or to-fro tender trambeams truckle at the eye', individual words, because of their associations, do not carry the meaning which, on closer scrutiny, is there behind them. 'Silk threads used for the weft of the best silk goods are called "trams"',[3]

1 F.R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit, Harmondsworth, 1962, p.51.

2 ibid., p.52.

3 Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 4th ed. ed. W.H. Gardner and N.H. MacKenzie, London, 1967, p.274.

Hopkins' editors explain; 'beams', we know, mean 'rays of light', and 'truckle' 'to be servile'. What Hopkins is saying, then, is that fine rays of light as delicate as threads of silk meet the eye, depending on its response for perception. However, unless there is a strong specialist familiarity with the word 'tram', the sense one has on first acquaintance with the line is very different. A 'tram' is a very bulky trundling vehicle; a 'trambeam', one supposes (fully aware that beam ought in this context to mean a 'ray of light') must be very heavy timber. In short, the dominant impression is of bulk and weight not of the fineness one later discerns. Hopkins must have chosen the words because of his feeling of the rigidity of light-rays (one reasons) and in that case 'tender trambeam' is contradictory and grotesque. This initial impression persists, and persists more powerfully than a later reading of the line can endure. What happens, then, is that the reader must either react adversely to the line or he must make a willed attempt to shed the associations which his non-poetic experience of language has given him, and to share the privacy of Hopkins' more recondite phrase.

'His manner,' said Yeats, was 'a last development of poetical diction.' [1] It was not; but this charge carries most force when it is applied to lines such as the one quoted. However it should not be allowed to stand, because it encourages the notion that Hopkins was wilfully esoteric and that one should treasure him for this (or else reject the whole corpus of his work). It is arguable that any reading of poetry involves clarification in the reader's understanding and hence the shedding of false impressions, but this is not the same as denying any ordinary experience of language. Hopkins failed lament-

1 W.B. Yeats, Introduction, The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, Oxford, 1936. p.xxxix.

ably on one or two occasions to make himself understood, and those occasions do not become less lamentable when his letters provide the necessary gloss. We have such a case with 'sakes' in the ugly

only I'll
Have an eye to the sakes of him,

from 'Henry Purcell'. Hopkins said of 'sake', 'I mean by it the being a thing has outside itself, as a voice by its echo, a face by its reflection, a body by its shadow, a man by his name, fame or memory..!'[1] but knowing that does not improve the poetry. Without the gloss the word does not communicate at all in that context; with it, one still feels that the poet has failed,[2] as he has with 'Commonweal /Little I reck ho!' or 'gold go garlanded /With, perilous, O no'.

Hopkins could, of course, be recondite, but where he uses the obscure word successfully it has, often, in Eliot's way, begun to communicate before it is properly understood. Such a word is 'slogger-ing' in 'The rash smart sloggering brine' of 'The Wreck of the Deutsch-land'. It means, Professor N.H. MacKenzie points out, 'the action of a prize-fighter raining blows on his opponent; behind it lies the dialect "slog: to strike with great force".'[3] Something of its meaning, might, in fact, be deduced from its poetic context.

To return to the issue of Hopkins' treatment of men. He confronted the question directly in 'To what serves Mortal Beauty',

1 RB p.83, May 26th, 1879.

2 The failure is largely due to the denial of ordinary meaning which Hopkins' use of 'sakes' involves. We normally use the singular (e.g. 'for his sake') because we wish to express something essential to someone's well-being or best interest. Hopkins' plural 'sakes' has the effect of cancelling this sense, rather than developing it (as 'his souls' would deny the meaning in 'his soul'). Moreover Hopkins' gloss makes 'sakes' into qualities attendant on someone's being rather than essential to it.

3 MacKenzie, Hopkins, pp.119-20.

but instead of finding some new solution the poem merely shows up his failure to develop, it repeats old answers. Mortal beauty is dangerous - it 'does set dancing blood' - and the danger is such that no fuller development of the threat is given. The poem follows closely the pattern of 'The Soldier' and the answer to the question - a hasty answer - comes at exactly the same place in the third line, 'See: it does this'. One of the effects of this speed is to distract attention from what the question has already assumed, namely that Mortal Beauty does serve any end. Pater, Swinburne, Rossetti would probably have been puzzled by the question (to them it would have been like asking 'what is the purpose of happiness?'). What Hopkins premises in the question is indeed as important as what he says in his answer which tends to become an abstract iteration of what he has already shown more powerfully and subtly in his nature poetry.

> See: it does this: keeps warm
> Men's wits to the things that are; what good means - where a glance
> Master more may than gaze, gaze out of countenance.

Beauty shows the nature of goodness: that, essentially, is the theme of the poems discussed in this chapter but, while this view gives unity to a poet's work, it does not give variety, or answer the difficulties which the power of evil or the presence of ugliness pose. Only when the equanimity of Hopkins' nature doctrine was threatened did he grow as a poet; and this equanimity <u>was</u> threatened, in two ways. Firstly, he had an acute and anguished sense of the transience of life and, secondly, he had an awareness of the precariousness of his own grasp on the order he so ardently felt to be part of the world:

> In fact being unwell I was quite downcast: nature in all her parcels and faculties gaped and fell apart, <u>fatiscebat</u>, like a clod cleaving and holding only by strings of root. But this must often be. [1]

1 J p.236, August 16th, 1873.

It was not until he was moved to Ireland that the second-mentioned threat became acute and his hold did slip. However his sense of transience is recurrent throughout his work, even - as I have suggested - at university. It runs in his mature poetry as a counter-theme to the confident assertion that all things 'are charged with God' and, because it involves him in a personal struggle to reconcile his love of living things with the certain fact of their ending, it anticipates Hopkins' later withdrawal from the outer world to the inner struggles of the mind. Among the presages for this change it is proper to set 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'.

Chapter Four

THE IDEA OF THE WRECK

> Well! we are all condamnés, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve . . . [1]
>
> Walter Pater

'The Wreck of the Deutschland' is, of course, Hopkins' longest poem on the idea of the wreck, and, as such, has an important place in this chapter; but, as I use the heading, it has a wider application than reference to this one poem might suggest. Narrowly the phrase does refer to shipwreck, and thus 'The Loss of the Eurydice' is on the same theme (as is the early 'The Nightingale' which has Frances fearing for the safety of Luke in the very moment that he is being washed from the deck of his ship). However the specific instance of shipwreck is but one sign in Hopkins of a larger concern with the transience of all forms of life and it is with this wider sense of 'the idea of the wreck' that I am concerned in this chapter. Shipwreck is a symbol of the end of things (Hopkins uses it thus in 'my foundering deck' ('That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire') and this brings to mind Pater's 'the inevitable shipwreck', [2] death.

Thus the poems described in this chapter draw their essential strength from a deeply felt lament at the transience of life. In his sense of the brevity and precariousness of all cherished moments Hopkins has a temperamental affinity with Pater; but, for Pater, recognising that things will pass gives a cool and restrained pathos

1 Pater, Renaissance, p.223.

2 ibid., p.196.

to life, for Hopkins it brings a nervous anguish from which comes some of his greatest poetry. Certainly this is occasionally checked by some conventional sentiment ('Give beauty . . . back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver') but the anguish is usually as strong, if not stronger than the religious bounds which may be set on it. In a Journal entry we see it unbridled:

> The ashtree growing in the corner of the garden was felled. It was lopped first: I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more. [1]

This reference is relatively early (1873). When we link it with the still earlier Oxford poems on the theme of transience [2] we can see how lifelong was Hopkins' concern: it was not a phase he went through. However there is a development in his treatment of the brevity of existence, he is not static. The storm-snow which takes the lives of passengers on the Deutschland is 'in thy sight . . . scroll-leaved flowers, lily-showers'; but, in 'The Loss of the Eurydice' (written at Chesterfield, 1878) instead of this easy acceptance, the tone is harsher - a 'liar' of a day brings 'wolfsnow' to end the lives of three hundred sailors. In 'Spring and Fall' (Lancashire, 1880) death is described as 'the blight man was born for' and, in Ireland, this is cause for 'indignation' ('That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire') - a sentiment entirely lacking in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' - and ultimately for that feeling of futility which is voiced as 'The shepherd's brow'. It is this development which I trace now.

In the opening stanza of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' which,

1 J p.230, April 8th, 1873.

2 See Chap.1.

as J.E. Keating points out, draws on the book of Job [1] (and gives us thus an added sense of dealing with an Old Testament God of Power) we have the recognition that he who makes has also by that fact the power to destroy:

> 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.

The creator, tier of the 'subtile knot', [2] is unraveller as well and, while in this poem (it is 'The Wreck of the Deutschland's chief concern) Hopkins is able to accept this as part of a larger design, towards the close of his life the acceptance was incomplete, protesting. The power and purposefulness of 'binding' and 'fastening' has become the flimsiness of

> But man - we, scaffold of score brittle bones;
> Who breathe, from groundlong babyhood to hoary
> Age gasp; whose breath is our memento mori -
> What bass is our viol for tragic tones?
>
> ('The shepherd's brow')

We carry about with us as part of our making the fact of our ending. The precariousness of 'all my world is scaffolding' [3] is the precariousness acknowledged in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'. It results in a discord which sets Hopkins' finest poetry outside the confines of the philosophy of beauty which I have described in my previous chapter. The world he writes about in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'

1 J.E. Keating, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland': an Essay and Commentary, Kent State University bulletin (Research series 6), 1963, p.55. See Job 10 v.8, 'Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me. v.11, 'Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews.'

2 John Donne, 'The Extasie'.

3 RB p.229, October 2nd, 1886.

is the one he was to describe most eloquently in a sermon for 1880:

> Therefore all the things we see are made and provided for us, the sun, moon, and other heavenly bodies to light us, warm us, and be measures to us of time; coal and rock oil for artificial light and heat; animals and vegetables for our food and clothing; rain, wind and snow again to make these bear and yield their tribute to us; water and the juices of plants for our drink; air for our breathing; stone and timber for our lodging; metal for our tools and traffic; the songs of birds, flowers and their smells and colours, fruits and their taste for our enjoyment. And so on : search the whole world and you will find it a million-million fold contrivance of providence planned for our use and patterned for our admiration.
>
> But yet this providence is imperfect, plainly imperfect. The sun shines too long and withers the harvest, the rain is too heavy and rots it or in floods spreading washes it away; the air and water carry in their currents the poison of disease; there are poison plants, venomous snakes and scorpions; the beasts our subjects rebel, not only the bloodthirsty tiger that slaughters yearly its thousands, but even the bull will gore and the stallion bite and strike; at night the moon sometimes has no light to give, at others the clouds darken her; she measures time most strangely and gives us reckonings most difficult to make and never exact enough; the coalpits and oilwells are full of explosions, fires, and outbreaks of sudden death, the sea of storms and wrecks, the snow has avalanches, the earth landslips; we contend with cold, want, weakness, hunger, disease, death, and often we fight a losing battle, never a triumphant one; everything is full of fault, flaw, imperfection, shortcoming; as many marks as there are of God's wisdom in providing for us so many marks there may be set against them of more being needed still, of something having made of this very providence a shattered frame and a broken web. [1]

But, in public address, Hopkins will take this line no further to enquire 'why this should be'. This sum of small vexation and great disaster does, however, go far beyond the sense of spoiling which we get in the nature poems, and which - there - is attributable entirely to man. Something is amiss.

So it is in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', but less obviously so, for the poem is not an elegy but a celebration. Hopkins' lament for the lost voyagers is overwhelmed by his determination to read the disastrous storm as a lesson for us all. We see this didacticism in the superb eleventh stanza, the first one he wrote after his seven

1 .S p.90, October 25th, 1880.

years' inactivity. It is like the morality Everyman in its treatment of sudden ending. The part of Death is taken, as it were, by a medieval mummer. Death himself is hidden, and indeed it is his anonymity which makes him so menacing. He is only to be uncovered ('found') once and may come by violence, machine, fire, wild beasts or flood.

> '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.

Man's folly is in neglecting the fact that he is, like the flower of the field, bound for destruction, and in believing that the firm earth he lives on is anything but the dust of which he himself is made. This is why 'the wreck' held Hopkins' attention. It involved the abrupt dislocation of life as we know it, surprised by sudden death a complacent confidence in the senses.

Of the emigrants' ship, the Deutschland itself, there is little sign in the poem. Out of the thirty-five stanzas only six[1] are involved in a localised way with the maritime disaster, for the foundering was the occasion for Hopkins' poem rather than its central theme, of which, essentially, the wreck is an illustration. Two aspects of the disaster struck The Times but both of these distinguishing features Hopkins virtually ignores in his poem; they are not relevant to his purpose. The aspects I refer to are the delay in providing rescue for survivors and the subsequent pillaging of dead bodies by local seamen. Of the first The Times said:

> It is indisputable that there was no lifeboat at Harwich; that the Deutschland lay beaten by the waves on the Kentish Knock

1 i.e. stanzas 12-17.

> for thirty hours without receiving assistance in any shape, and that for one half that time, at least, the signals of distress were seen and recognised by the Harwich seamen. Can any severity of invective carry more condemnation than is involved in these shameful certainties? 1

In the same edition (Monday, December 13, 1875) a reporter writes:

> Twenty bodies have now been brought into Harwich by the steam-tug. Mr. Guy, the inspector of police here, tells me that, with one exception, not a single valuable was found on the persons of the unfortunate people, and that it was clear their pockets had been turned out and rifled. There were ring-marks on the fingers of women, and of at least one gentleman. The rings themselves had disappeared. 2

These passages may serve to show how different Hopkins' Wreck is in emphasis. The response of five nuns suddenly confronted by the power of their Lord manifested in storm is technically the core of the poem, but the parallel experience which Hopkins describes in Part the First makes it clear that what the poem really deals with is his own confrontation with God. He interprets the nuns' actions as expressions of the same experience. 3

The experience was, finally, a happy one - though it involved fear and horror - and his joy is evinced not simply in the dedication ('to the happy memory of five Franciscan nuns') but in the injunction with which the first part draws to a close:

> Be adored among men,
> God, three-numbered form;

1 The Times, Monday, December 13th, 1875, page 9, column 4 reprinted Immortal Diamond: Studies in Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Norman Weyand, London, 1949, p.369.

2 ibid., p.372.

3 This answers the problem which Father Thomas raises, namely the question of why Hopkins should have chosen to write about this wreck when, scarcely more than a month earlier, the Pacific had foundered with much heavier loss of life, and on the day the Deutschland was lost there was a coal-mining disaster in Yorkshire which caused 150 deaths (Thomas, Hopkins the Jesuit, p.168). The distinctive feature in the foundering of the Deutschland is the presence of five Catholic nuns who meet their God in storm.

Wring thy rebel, dogged in den,
Man's malice, with wrecking and storm.

This is a prayer answered in the wreck described in Part the Second, the wreck which is God touching Hopkins afresh (stanza one), a touch which for the poet is clearly something other than the softening emotion that this word normally means. 'Over again I feel thy finger' - God's involvement in the world is as physical as that. He is the 'World's strand', that is, the skein or being of which the world is made but also its beach, [1] the place of safety, and he is 'the sway of the sea', the motion of tide and waves and the cause of that motion. He is, in this poem, not Beauty but Power.

If the power almost destroys 'what with dread' (the construction is colloquial, as in 'I'm tired out what with all this walking') it prompts, too, the poet's eager obedience, an emphatic confirmation that he has indeed submitted, 'I did say yes' (which may be contrasted with the confusions of the later 'Carrion Comfort'). Though the verse speaks of 'the walls, altar and hour and night,' of the 'midriff astrain' with hours of kneeling prayer, the fear so occupies the centre of the poet's attention that we begin to lose any sense of the external world. What is happening is preternatural, apocalyptic; God, a physical adversary of enormous size and speed, knowing as well as the poet knows,

The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl
of thee trod
Hard down with a horror of height.

The similarities with the terrible sonnets in stanzas two and three are marked. [2] The poet is caught by his opponent above a great drop,

1 as in 'Sir Patrick Spens was walking on the strand'.

2 especially 'Carrion Comfort' and 'No worst there is none'.

desperate (and the broken syntax breathlessly shows the desperation) for a place of security,

> The frown of his face
> Before me, the hurtle of hell
> Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?

At that time [1] ('that spell') he turned instinctively, 'carrier-witted', to the Eucharist, central to his faith.

'Flame' and 'grace' in stanza three relate to a spiritual experience but, as I suggested at the start of this chapter, in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' Hopkins is occupied with the problem of death and destruction; and the occupation shows in stanza four. In his own bodily existence the poet is part of the flux of time, changing and waning even as he appears the same. Some critics have read the first part of the stanza as a strictly religious metaphor. Thus Professor Brett says of it,

> It begins with the comparison of the poet and an hour-glass. Like the sand in an hour-glass, the poet's thoughts and feelings lack stability; his faith is likely to crumble and run out. But as the hour-glass is fixed to the wall, so is the poet held fast to God's being. [2]

1 The time when Hopkins 'did say yes' may refer to (i) his conversion to Catholicism, (ii) his decision to become a Jesuit, (iii) some experience in his early Jesuit months. Downes (op.cit., p.177, n.54:7) argues for this last, and I follow him here, but the evidence seems inadequate to support conclusively any of the three possibilities.

Some clues to the exact time in question are given in stanza 2 (there was lightning, Hopkins used the 'lashed rod' of physical chastisement, and the experience took place at night in a religious place) and stanza 10 (there is again mention of lightning and Hopkins speaks of 'a winter and warm' - a phrase which could be describing the paradox of God's love but which may alternatively be a literal description of the weather at the time in question) but these seem to point to the period of Hopkins' early months as a Jesuit rather than one specific moment. His first Long Retreat at Roehampton was marked by two thunderstorms (J p.189, September 18th and 27th, 1868) and the next year has J entries commenting on the mildness of the (winter) weather (J p.189, January 4th, 1869, and J p.190, January 24th): these details may suggest that stanzas 2 and 3 of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' are a conflation of several months' experiences, but this is by no means certain.

2 R.L. Brett, An Introduction to English Studies, London, 1965, p.25.

Professor MacKenzie sees the lines as part of 'the contrast between the haven and the high seas, between the boat tied to the sea wall and the ocean-ravaged Deutschland'. He says,

> God's providence rules paradoxically over the 'unchilding unfathering deeps' just as fully as in the gentle tidal swell which lifts the moored ship (the Christian or priest), 'at the wall fast' . . . if we find the surge of ecstasy is followed by the wane, if the spiritual flood 'crowds and it combs to the fall', if the believer's faith may drift to the very limits of its moorings, it is still secured to the granite pier. [1]

It seems to me that this is set on the wrong course because MacKenzie has given too much weight to the original draft of the poem which had '<u>under</u> the wall Fast' [2] and I find Professor Gardner's description of the lines as a 'reflection on the steady dissolution of the physical life' [3] much more accurate. The lines in question open with a finely expressive consonance:

> I am soft sift
> In an hour-glass - at the wall
> Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift
> And it crowds and it combs to the fall.

What they emphasise is insecurity: the poet is both the 'soft sift' (the loose stuff which trickles through the hourglass) and he is also 'gently sifted' - such is the ambiguous character of his expression; he is 'mined', crowding and gathering like a wave ('combs') to 'the fall'. The force of 'at the wall Fast' is cancelled by 'but' and there is no qualification; whatever is happening is happening now, 'It crowds and combs to the fall.' This is against Brett's reading which makes the insecurity potential not actual, and something which is finally set aside by 'God's being'. It is also against MacKenzie's reading which, like Brett's, denies the insecurity: 'the believer's

1 MacKenzie, p.45.

2 MS A.

3 Gardner, <u>Study</u>, vol.I, p.55.

faith . . . it still secured to the granite pier.' The context in which the image occurs does offer some inducement to suppose that it is for a religious state (Hopkins has just talked of submission to God, and stanza four ends by speaking of 'Christ's gift') but the way the image works in the stanza is conclusive.

The poet is as the sand in an hour-glass. The sand closest to the wall of the glass does not move - it is 'fast'; motion is always towards and through the centre of the funnel which the sand occupies. So, although the sand in the funnel seems to be firm, it is in fact undermined, moving inevitably 'to the fall'. (The 'wall' of Hopkins' image is that of the hour-glass; there is no need to introduce any other.) So it is with the poet. Although he seems to be secure in his earthly life he is all the while in decline, what he is as a physical being is undermined by the fact of his mortality.[1] As the hour-glass only runs its appointed time, so it is for the poet whose life hastens always towards death.

The hour-glass with its 'soft-sift' is an image for mutability and temporality; its trickling sands easily suggest the idea of liquid motion, and Hopkins uses water to show that this physical dissolution is, for him, a movement not toward emptiness but equipoise:

> 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.

Motion ceases 'but' the poet is nonetheless linked to Christ as wells

1 A similar view is advanced by Father Peter Milward, but he is puzzled by 'the wall': 'The body, as the vessel holding the life of man, may be compared to an hourglass holding the sands of time; but it is not clear why it should be fixed to the wall.' (A commentary on G.M. Hopkins' 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', Tokyo, 1968, p.31). The explanation I offer gets rid of this difficulty.

are linked to streams.[1]

He is linked 'always' and the fifth stanza shows how this is so. God is in the world, as he is in the nature poems which follow 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', but his involvement in it is mysterious, 'I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand,' and the enigma is discussed in the stanzas which follow, stanzas six and seven.

They are more esoteric than they appear. The conflation of Christ's Nativity and Passion is not hard to grasp: the sweat of childbirth is also the sweat of his death agony, 'Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey'. The idea of Christ in some way riding time 'like riding a river' is also accessible, but what is harder to comprehend is why the conflation occurs, why it is that, 'here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss'. Professor Gardner recognises the problem (these stanzas are 'in some respects the most difficult . . . . in the whole poem'[2]) but his reading seems to me to have serious weaknesses.

1 Two small points may be added by way of clarification. (i) The idea of 'roped with . . . a vein' is prefigured in a grisly Journal entry (J p.230) which describes the bloody ooze from the nostril of a dying ram as 'coiling and roping its way down'. (ii) Of the line, 'I steady as a water in a well, to a poise, to a pane', Professor Brett says

> Here the comparison is with the water in a well, which is kept at a constant level by the pressure of the springs that feed it. A pane is a lock in an irrigation system that holds the waters steady. The water that is fed into the well through this system comes from the surrounding hills . . . (Brett, Introduction, p.25)

But a pane is more commonly a sheet of window glass, absolutely smooth and transparent and very apt for Hopkins' cumulative image. The water in the well is 'a poise' (between forces), is 'a pane' (as of glass); and it is distinct from the streams which feed the well and which are referred to only after 'But . . .'

2 Gardner, Study, vol.I, p.57.

> In the case of The Deutschland, the poet is shaken with horror and admiration - suppressed, bewildered resentment against the Power which could permit such apparent injustice, and gratitude to that same Power for the noble virtues evoked. Hence he instinctively relates the victim's experience to that of Christ. Like the theologian, he is unable to explain contingent evil on purely rational grounds; he therefore follows the 'list' of his emotions, and recovers his mental equilibrium by adopting the faith that God's purpose in Man can be fulfilled only by a continuous process of suffering and redemption:
>
> [quotes first four lines stanza 6]
>
> Is it not natural, then, that 'here the faithful (that is, some of the faithful) waver,' and that the 'faithless' who, in spite of Plato, seek to explain ultimate realities by ratiocination only, should 'fable and miss'? 1

In trying to make sense of pain it would be natural for any Christian to relate it to the sufferings of Christ but it seems to me that the connection Hopkins is establishing is not simply an emotional one. I find no sign in the poem of the 'suppressed resentment' which Professor Gardner sees there, nor any indication that Hopkins regarded the wreck in any way as 'injustice'. (On the contrary, I have argued that stanza eleven shows Hopkins fastening on the violence and suddenness of the wreck as evidence of every man's insecurity.) Moreover the idea of Hopkins following the 'list' of his emotions alters the tone of the passage where Hopkins talks of what people may 'know' as opposed to what they have merely speculated ('fable') is the truth: Hopkins is very decided in this stanza; he is not groping. Finally - and this is crucial - Professor Gardner's 'some of the faithful' reverses the emphasis which Hopkins has given.

The subject Hopkins is dealing with is recondite. This much is explicit, for 'few know this'. Not only does the stress of God's beauty in nature (which he has written about in stanza five) not come from God's pleasure, but God's chastisement does not come from heaven either (the beauty and chastisement, that is, 'that stars and storms

1 Gardner, Study, vol.I, p.58.

deliver,' which awes guilt into silence and warms hearts with wonder) instead 'it rides time like riding a river.' In other words it is present in the temporal world though it does not share that world's limitations. This is where the faithful hesitate in their misunderstanding and those without religious belief misunderstand altogether. As the next stanza shows, Hopkins is here talking about the revelation of God in Christ. Birth and death are conflated because although apparently contradictory they are part of God's purpose. Christ's life is considered as one act, as one moment when God entered time. He has been 'felt before' and is 'in high flood yet' but, to put a date on it, one refers to 'his going in Galilee.' This much can be regarded as traditional Christian theology; properly understood, it is not, but it has that appearance and only Hopkins' warnings that 'few know this' save one from blurring the final line of stanza seven, 'What none would have known of it, only the heart, being hard at bay'.

Christ's life has for Hopkins a special significance and it is this which these stanzas are concerned with (not 'it' - the life - but 'of it'). The significance lies, I believe, in Hopkins' affection for Duns Scotus whose ideas Hopkins was later (1878) to connect with those of the nineteenth century French visionary Marie Lataste. Father Devlin summarises the way Hopkins was to connect the two (it is Scotus who teaches that the Incarnation was ordained independently of Original Sin, Marie Lataste who describes the creative and redemptive strains in nature),

> Had there been no sin of angels or of men, the coming of Christ would have been the efflorescence or natural consummation of the creative strain; men's minds and wills would have risen spontaneously and harmoniously from creatures to God. But, as a result of sin, natural values went astray and Christ had to perform a violent readjustment of them by his redemptive suffering. The redemptive strain still continues the creative strain. [1]

1 S p.190, n.138:1.

Inasmuch as Hopkins had not read Marie Lataste when he wrote 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' her contribution is not relevant here but what she had to say simply tended to confirm what Scotus had already encouraged in Hopkins, namely the view that God's first purpose is a creative one. As I hope to show a little later, it is Hopkins' attempt to find that creative purpose in the destruction caused by the wreck which spoils the later stanzas of this poem. At the moment it only needs to be said that in stanzas six and seven Hopkins is preparing for that attempt by writing about Christ as the finest expression of God's creativity, and it can be seen how easily the theological explanation follows on from stanza five where Christ is in the stars and the thunder and the sunset. Thus, in stanza eight, men feel intuitively what Hopkins has just been speaking about. They worship Christ as the truth of creative nature, 'Never ask if meaning it, wanting it, warned of it - men go.'

This then is the ground for the paradoxes of stanza nine for, if Christ is in nature, he is in the storm as well as the stars, is working creatively and redemptively in the wreck.

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

Hopkins can say from his own experience that, when God's dark descends, he is 'most . . . merciful then'. His conviction that, whatever appearances, nothing which happens in the natural world can ultimately be wrong shows throughout the second part of the poem. It shows in the question (with its implied 'yes') which closes stanza twelve, about those outside the Catholic faith,

> Yet did the dark side of the bay of thy blessing
> Not vault them, the million of rounds of thy mercy not reeve
> even them in?

It shows in the reversal of normal values which we find in stanza twenty-one, where God is approved as a hunter, and where the snowstorm

becomes, as it were, a sort of baroque art-work or a bounty of petals.

> but thou art above, thou Orion of light;
> Thy unchancelling poising 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.

It is present most obviously of all in the idea that the wreck is a harvest (stanza thirty-one). Those non-Catholics who died in the storm were 'not uncomforted' because the cry of the tall nun ('O Christ, Christ, come quickly') is as a bell which can ring the news of 'lovely-felicitous Providence' and

> Startle the poor sheep back! is the shipwreck then a harvest,
> does tempest carry the grain for thee?

And there one runs hard up against Hopkins' Catholicism: what would in most men be a cause of sorrow is in this poem an occasion for joy. But this reversal of usual ways of feeling does not alone account for the faults in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'; one has to look to the pietism of the later stanzas for part of the reason. The poem is, in Dr. Leavis's words, 'a great poem - at least for the first two thirds of it,' [1] and what happens in the final third is that Hopkins has lost the sense of a wreck. The problems it poses are abandoned for pat answers.

This shows in the lines just quoted. The idea of men as a flock of sheep is a Biblical one and hence not original, but in other places Hopkins had considerable success in re-working Biblical imagery. What goes wrong here is easier to see if this image is taken in conjunction with the one which follows, one of harvest, again Biblical and again expressive of God's care. As the shepherd looks after his flock, so the lord gathers into his barn. But the images are badly used in the poem. The sheep of the Bible who need the shepherd's care

1 Leavis, Common Pursuit, p.57.

become sheep who can be driven at will, 'startled . . . back'. They are not so much helpless as fickle. Furthermore, the grain which in the Bible is separated from the chaff and stored, protectively, here becomes an index of profit, 'does tempest carry the grain for thee?' It is as if God were a merchant who benefitted at others' expense. The Biblical tones are changed for ones which suit the poem's praise of God's power but at the expense of their original compassion. Equally the image of the flock and that of insensate grain do not accord; they operate only doctrinally.

The formalism of the last fourteen stanzas (the trouble really begins in stanza twenty-two though exception might also be taken to the sectarianism of stanza twenty) is another debilitating feature. The number of drowned nuns is in itself of no human significance but Hopkins makes it important as the number of Christ's wounds,

> Five! the finding and sake
> And cipher of suffering Christ.

The implication is that the exiled nuns are chosen for death in this way and it is supported by the otherwise irrelevant apostrophe to St. Francis, St. Francis' stigmata being taken as illustration of the fact that Christ marks out men for sacrifice, 'But he scores it in scarlet himself on his own bespoken.' The effect of these stanzas (twenty-two and twenty-three) is to give the disaster a ritual significance which further distances the poem from the reader who does not share Hopkins' preoccupation. Again the verse is weak. The ugliness of 'seal of his seraph-arrival' is followed by

> and these thy daughters
> And five-lived and leaved favour and pride,
> Are sisterly sealed in wild waters,
> To bathe in his fall-gold mercies, to breathe in his all-fire glances.

There is an uneasy juxtaposition here of the physical plight of the nuns and the spiritual reality which Hopkins sees underlying it.

Fire and water are inimical yet he puts them together here and the ideas of bathing in 'mercies' and 'breathing in' glances are similarly strained.

The poem recovers in stanza twenty-four when it returns to the nuns' predicament, contrasted with the poet's ease:

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

and the recovery is essentially one of human sympathy. It is temporary. No amount of doctrinal explanation can take away the morbidity of the stanza which follows,

> The majesty! what did she mean?
> Breathe, arch and original Breath.
> Is it love in her of the being as her lover had been?
> Breathe,body of lovely Death.

How remote from 'flame, Fang or flood'! Neither these lines nor the clumsy experiement with consonant chime ('The keener to come at the comfort for feeling the combating keen?') with which the stanza closes are indicative of Hopkins' real poetic merit. They need mention only as examples of the flaws which spoil 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'.

Although the poem is Hopkins' longest work it is in many ways untypical. Struggling to overcome the problems posed to his world view by pain and transience Hopkins is set on finding the purpose of God in the destruction of life, and in the course of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' he has to insist, as in the stanza quoted above, that death is lovely. It is not there that the poem's greatness lies but in Hopkins' more characteristic involvement in the vitality of living. The sensuous hold on experience which marks out the quality of its greater part is finally relinquished for a religious concern which, here, is antithetic. Withholding the explanatory detail till the last moment, informal, terse ('the merit of the work may lie for one thing

in its terseness' [1]), Hopkins has been the superb story-teller,

> On Saturday sailed from Bremen
> American-outward-bound,
> Take settler and seamen, tell men with women,
> Two hundred souls in the round -
> . . . . . .
>
> 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-swivellèd snow
> Spins to the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps.

'The infinite air is unkind' but the unkindness of it all is dissipated in speculation about the real meaning of the nun's call to Christ and in sounds of praise,

> The heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden furled
> Miracle - in - Mary - of - flame,
> Mid-numbered he in three of the thunder-throne!

Although he wrote again about a shipwreck in 'The Loss of the Eurydice' - a much poorer poem - Hopkins did not allow the theme to end in this sort of rhetoric. There is a proper place for misery:

> O well wept, mother have lost son;
> Wept wife; wept sweetheart would be one:
> Though grief yield them no good
> Yet shed what tears sad truelove should.

There the wreck with its terrible loss of life is 'the awful over-taking', the ship's crew are 'precious passing measure', and Hopkins is uneasy about the storm which destroys old and young alike,

> Must it, worst weather,
> Blast bole and bloom together?

Again personified Death afflicts mankind, but there is no joy that its suddenness may have brought last-minute conversions. A sense of impotence troubles the priest,

> O his nimble finger, his gnarled grip!
> Leagues, leagues of seamanship
> Slumber in these forsaken
> Bones, this sinew, and will not waken.

1 RB p.266, November 6th, 1887.

for there is no recalling of this 'fleet life' and it is that which makes Hopkins feel his Catholicism is such an urgent matter; it is at the centre of the poem, not as an occasion for rejoicing but as a cause of sadness.

The explanation for the change is, I believe, to be found in the unique place which 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' occupies in Hopkins' evolution as a poet. Its first part is retrospective, appearing after seven years in which he denied himself verse as a medium for expression. It comes, then, as a summary of the experiences of those seven years. God has mastered him, God knows how and where the mastery was achieved, these are the ways in which God comes, this is the significance of Christ's birth as the poet now understands it - such are the statements of the first part, and they have the sort of scope which his other poems rarely claim. Some of these are immediate: 'Look at the stars!', 'Summer ends now', 'Some candle burns somehwere I come by'. Others are set in the recent past: 'I caught this morning', 'A bugler boy . . . This very very day came down to us'; or utter present and continuous truths: 'The world is charged', 'Nothing is so beautiful as Spring', 'Sometimes a lantern moves along the night'. Though they may involve past experiences they are grounded firmly in the present moment. By contrast 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' is in its first part a historical record ('what refers to myself in the poem is all strictly and literally true and did all occur' [1]) and in the act of recollection Hopkins has used the shipwreck as a way of reflecting his own experience. The enormous adversary of stanzas two and three is present in the second part in the unconquerable waves which destroy the seamen,

1 RB p.47, February 25th, 1878.

What could he do
With the burl of the fountains of air, buck and the flood
of the wave? (stanza 16)

then as an apparition, [1]

Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there,
Thing that she . . . There then! the Master
Ipse, the only one, Christ, King, Head: (stanza 33)

The adversary is Hopkins' adversary rather than the nuns', and the faults of the later stanzas should not be allowed to blur this sense of conflict nor the fineness of the lines of Part the First in which it receives expression. What in Part the Second is crudely conceived of as a chastening God of storm is in Part the First an element in a skilfully observed mental situation and it is this in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' which holds promise for a more complex understanding of the world than a philosophy of beauty could sustain.

1 Miss Schneider makes the bold and appealing claim that Hopkins is saying, particularly in stanza 28, 'that a miracle had occurred, that during the night of terror at sea Christ had appeared to the nun, not in a subjective or imagined vision but as a real miraculous presence and that this event, once acknowledged and published to the world, might become the needed signal, the turning point for the conversion of English Christians,' (Dragon in the Gate, pp.26-7). Her argument makes use of the fact that Hopkins speaks of Christ as 'Ipse' (his very self), that he spends time rejecting other possible meanings for the tall nun's call, and that her reading explains Hopkins' wish that not every part of the poem should be quite clear (RB p.50) - Hopkins was proclaiming a miracle.

Reluctantly - for it adds considerable force to the last part of the poem - one has to reject this idea. If Hopkins were proclaiming a miracle as 'the needed signal' for mass conversion one would not expect that he would be deliberately obscure about it. Miss Schneider seems to me to be perfectly correct in saying that 'Breathe, arch and original Breath' (stanza 25) is Hopkins' appeal to the Holy Ghost to answer his question about the nun's cry, but this is done in stanza 28 through 'Fancy' - he imagines the nun's vision. That it was her vision and not a supernatural fact seems to be emphasised by the number of personal references to it: she 'read' the night (stanza 29), the sight was her 'birth of a brain' (stanza 30) and 'she has thee for the pain' (stanza 31) whereas 'the rest of them' have not. If the event described in stanza 28 were supernatural it would be public and shared; it evidently is not.

Before the Irish poems the promise was not often fulfilled. Hopkins tended to celebrate the immediate moment rather than accept the problems which a larger view of experience must bring and this is so in 'Inversnaid' which gains from its acknowledgement that there is a possibility of something grimmer than the 'darksome burn' which rushes past the poet. The stream is alive with an animal life. It is 'horseback brown', it roars down its 'highroad', it has a 'fleece' of foam, it 'treads through' braes. In each trap formed by a bend in the river ('coop'), in each hollow, the foam is drawn into 'flutes' until it 'falls home' to the lake. There is in its course,

> a pool so pitchblack, fell-frowning
> It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning,

and there the real statement of the poem lies. It is unexpected, undeveloped but potentially very much more important than the 'Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet' of the close. The pool is so black that it is blacker than black Despair which it thus 'drowns'.

'Spring and Fall: to a young child' is one of Hopkins' greatest poems and its greatness involves a full recognition of the discord which 'Inversnaid' only mentions. It parallels stanza eleven of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' in averring that the death of man and the decline of nature are common process; the spring of Margaret's youth is already blighted and her grief for the leaf-fall is a sign and a part of the blight. In her innocence she has possession of a truth which experience can bring no closer for,

> Ah! as the heart grows older
> It will come to such sights colder
> By and by, nor spare a sigh
> Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie.

In her intuitive sympathy lies the melancholy truth about man. It is a truth which the title of the poem sufficiently clearly relates to the myth of Eden and Adam's sin but, 'Now no matter, child, the name.'

The knowledge which Margaret so wilfully seeks (as, one remembers, Eve and Adam did) will be of no help to her, for in the same words Hopkins is saying that her sighing is inevitable, 'you will weep and know why.' [1] All the while Margaret moves, as the poem moves, toward a greater understanding of her sorrow, of what

> Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
> What heart heard of, ghost guessed:

and the recognition that the understanding is powerless to help,

> It is the blight man was born for,
> It is Margaret you mourn for.

Man was born to grieve for himself, born (again the lines carry two senses) to die like the leaves. But that simile is, of course, a crude reduction of what the poem is saying: Margaret does not grieve because she is like the leaves, but because she has not that sense of separateness which a more sophisticated mind would use to escape from the experience. Any simile is, paradoxically, a recognition of dissimilarity (e.g. likening ice to glass involves, of course, a recognition that these two are in the first instance very different substances) and Margaret is too young to have this sense of disunity firmly marked in her - 'Sorrow's springs are the same'.

'Binsey Poplars' does not have the deep sadness of those lines but the sense of precariousness is still there, conveyed in the powerful suggestion that the destruction of nature is like human mutilation. The stanza which leads to this is intensely visual, a skilful play of light and shade. Branches are leafy against the sun which 'leaps' as they move in the wind; the aspens seen obliquely seem to line up behind a leader, each one standing out from the rank as folds do in fabric; it is as if a child swayed among the branches, as the strips

1 cf. Empson, Seven Types, pp.148-9.

of shade the trees cast on meadow and river are likened to the straps of a sandal ('dandled a sandalled shadow').

After this visual beginning the central stanza which contains the finest lines in the poem comes all the more powerfully. Vague ideas such as 'green' and 'country' are made precise as 'green' receives the axe-blows of 'hack and rack' and 'country' is made 'slender'. Then the phrase 'this sleek and seeing ball' holds our attention on an object like the other objects which the poem has so far shown us. But there is more to it than that (just as there is more to them). 'But a prick will make no eye at all.' Like the felled tree, the wounded eye still exists as an object but its essential nature (its ability, we may say, to put the world inside the head) is destroyed. A prick does that; how clumsy, then, to 'hack',

> Where we, even where we mean
> To mend her we end her,
> When we hew or delve.

As with the seeing eye, so with the growing trees,

> Strokes of havoc unselve
> The sweet especial scene.

What W.B. Yeats described as Hopkins' 'slight constant excitement' is to be found in 'Binsey Poplars', particularly in the lament with which the poem closes. It marks a sense of urgency and is, accordingly, just as conspicuous in 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' which addresses the problem of transience directly, 'How to keep . . . Back beauty?' Man's inadequacy is shown in the solution offered - as if by the physical restraint of lock and key he could stop decay. 'The Leaden Echo' despairs,

> no, nothing can be done
> To keep at bay
> Age and age's evils, hoar hair
> Ruck and wrinkle, drooping, dying, death's worst, winding sheets, tombs and worms and tumbling to decay.

1 Introduction, Oxford Book of Modern Verse, Oxford, 1936, p.xl.

But out of this despair, out of the word 'despair', comes a different echo (the golden one):

> Spare!
> There is one, yes I have one (Hush there!),
> Only not within seeing of the sun
> Not within the singeing of the strong sun,
> Tall sun's tingeing, or treacherous the tainting of the
> earth's air.

There is a place where things are preserved, and it is 'yonder', out of reach of the sun which 'shines too long and withers the harvest' and the air which carries 'the poison of disease'.[1]

Hopkins' answer here, is . . . the Biblical one. Each hair of the head is numbered, and there is a providence in the growing of seed. What man so carelessly threw down ('left in surly') even the apparently worthless leafmould will have brought to life. The seed will have been scattered by the wind and come to fullness during the time ('what while') we were asleep.

Hopkins had, of course, turned to the idea of a caring God before and it is interesting in this connection to set 'The Lantern out of Doors'(written in Wales)in 1877 by the side of 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' (written in Ireland, in 1888): we can see from the comparison that the Biblical answer satisfied Hopkins less and less. In 'The Lantern out of Doors' the simple situation of a light in the darkness with its obvious contrast is used as the type of personal experience: Hopkins meets men who are distinguished by beauty - it may be of any sort, 'In mould or mind or what not else'; there is no aesthetic/moral division - and with whom he loses contact. The metaphor suggested by the original situation is transmuted and that situation becomes a symbol. The 'Death or distance soon consumes them' of stanza three is still informed by the original idea. In a sense the poem ends at the close of this stanza. The questions of the first

1 see p.148.

stanza have not been answered and the concern of the second has been allowed to peter out in the defensive, self-vindicatory, 'be in at the end /I cannot'. The poet rests in the cliché 'out of sight is out of mind', but then he breaks his too-easy complacency by picking a new meaning from the last word. 'Christ minds' and his concern, which is heartfelt and active ('foot follows kind') contrasts with ours which is only idle curiosity. The lantern 'interests our eyes', casually, but Christ 'eyes them' purposefully. There is a sense of struggle in the poem which is in part caused by the engulfing 'death or distance' but more by the resistance which opposes each movement: 'wide' and 'wading'[1] of the first stanza are sufficient to suggest the image of a river where progress is hard, and 'rain' of the next stanza and 'marsh-air' suggest a landscape in keeping. Moreover the power of this beauty, like the power of the lantern, is very limited; the 'rich beams' rain 'against' the air which by that word is given solidity, is made as unyielding as the darkness. There is a strong sense of place, of inhospitable place, here which means that Christ's 'rescue' is suited to the poem.

In the long lines of 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection' that rescue is much more evidently needed. The opening seems light-hearted enough. Nature is, as in Wales, celebrated in its activity and change but it is not the impetuous, ecstatic celebration of 'Look at the stars!' The busy indifference of the early nature sonnets is made here a point of contrast.

1 Professor Gardner points out the way this idea derives from Spenser's Faerie Queene I i 12, 'Vertue gives her selfe light, through darknesse for to wade.' (Gardner, Study, vol.I p.173) This is an interesting derivation since Hopkins seems to have thought poorly of Spenser. The Faerie Queene was 'nearly all' Parnassian ('that is the language and style of poetry mastered and at command but employed without any fresh inspiration ' - C p.72) (J p.38) and its lost books were among the 'fortunate losses of literature' (J p.49).

Nature burns, but is renewed; for man, renewal scarcely seems possible.

There is a reserve in the octave which marks pleasure rather than joy, and this is so because no single object or theme holds attention for long. We look not at a falcon, or a candle, or now-felled poplars but sometimes at the clouds, sometimes at sunny walls, sometimes at shadows or earth. It is with clouds that the poem opens, chasing each other 'on an air-built thoroughfare'. The notion is fanciful enough to recall the opening lines of 'The Starlight Night' and there is a similar sense of community here - the clouds are 'roysterers' thronging in 'gangs'. Along with this whimsicality goes that determination to avoid the mundane which I have commented on before,[1] a tendency which shows in the exorbitance of the language - in words such as 'shivelights' (sliced light) and 'shadowtackle' (ropes of shadow) and in alliterative patterns such as 'long lashes lace, lance'. The verse accumulates descriptive detail and shows too Hopkins' tendency to a kind of rhetorical parenthesis; we have in this poem 'Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows', 'ropes, wrestles, beats earth', 'dough, crust, dust', and many other examples. In the sense that there is change and development, the parentheses are not strict ones but the device, of which Hopkins was very fond, is much in evidence here.

Clouds, and wind, and sun, and drying wind arethe signs that 'nature's bonfire' is burning and there, at an earlier stage in his life one feels Hopkins would have been content to leave the matter, not so now:

> But quench her bonniest, dearest to her, her clearest-selvèd spark
> Man, how fast his firedint, his mark on mind, is gone!
> Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark
> Drowned.

1 See chapter 3, p. 136.

The sense of incomprehensible absence, of mystery surrounding man's passing, is as oppressive as unrelieved darkness. Not only does man die into something beyond his understanding but even the fact that he has ever been is not remembered by his fellows. 'O pity and indignation!' his life, as distinctive, as unique as the light of a star 'death blots black out'. 'We have an interval, and then our place knows us no more' [1] - in this poem how close Hopkins comes to Pater; there is no trace of man that will bear witness to his distinctiveness, what he is is lost in space and time,

> nor mark
> Is any of him at all so stark
> But vastness blurs and time beats level.

This is Pater's 'inevitable shipwreck'; [2] it is also Hopkins' - then,

> Across my foundering deck shone
> A beacon, an eternal beam.

The second coda to the sonnet opens out the theme of 'the comfort of the Resurrection', but it is a comfort present despite the natural course of life not as part of it. Though the world perish in fire, 'leave but ash', man persists. The ash of the pyre becomes carbon in its most imperishable form - but only after the burning.

> This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
> Is immortal diamond.

The Resurrection is a comfort in an otherwise desperate situation but the poem does not deny that man is indeed in distress.

Take away the comfort, and the direction this poem points in is either toward the nihilism of Macbeth's world, 'signifying nothing', or to the absurdity of Camus' universe where man lives by his own highest code despite the senselessness of it all. 'The shepherd's

1 Pater, Renaissance, p.224.

2 ibid., p.196.

brow' is at the point where these paths separate, so much so that Bridges found the poem hard to accept. 'This must have been thrown off one day in a cynical mood, which he could not have wished permanently to intrude among his last serious poems,' [1] he said, and accordingly placed it among the poet's unfinished work. Hopkins' latest editors properly counter with, 'This sonnet is the last of five full drafts, so it obvious that G.M.H. took it seriously.' [2]

The line in Hopkins' work which begins in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' with a celebration of God's power, ends - with entirely consistent logic - in 'The shepherd's brow' as a record of man's impotence. It is a remarkable piece of work for a poet writing in the late nineteenth century, and testimony to Hopkins' distinctive genius. In it he breaks entirely with beauty; it is the 'withering place' [3] where beauty struggles for life which has his attention.

Certainly the poem begins grandly. The spectacle which flickers its light across the brow of the shepherd (as, by contrast, man's estate is later to be reflected in the surface of a spoon) does not belong to the mundane world. It is titanic, ' - a story of just, majestical, and giant groans,' the clash of God and Lucifer's angels, given perspective by the frightened, wondering expression of the primitive man who watches.

> The shepherd's brow, fronting forked lightning, owns
> The horror and the havoc and the glory
> Of it. Angels fall, they are towers, from heaven - a story
> Of just, majestical, and giant groans.

1 reprinted Poems, p.296.

2 ibid., p.296. cf. also Robert Boyle, Metaphor in Hopkins, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1960, p.133 - 'That passing from the implied tragic viol of the fallen angels to the trivial bathroom shame of proud man was too strong for Bridges, I suspect, and plays a bigger part in effecting the banishment of the poem than does the alleged cynicism.'

3 cf. MS H 'Beauty is like one fresh rose blown in a withering place' (cancelled line for 'To what serves Mortal Beauty').

There is something majestic about the defeated, so awesome are the combatants, but what of the teller of the story? 'But man' - that beginning is too remote, however, too grand; the poet breaks off, and 'we' are involved,

> we, scaffold of score brittle bones;
> Who breathe, from groundlong babyhood to hoary
> Age gasp; whose breath is our memento mori -

In our mortality lies the insignificance and the meanness of our lives. We breathe, and that ephemeral breath is a continual reminder of death - one day it must cease. We are vulnerable, 'a scaffold' and 'brittle', and abject in our vulnerability; the 'groundlong babyhood' which so accurately conveys the idea of a crawling child has also within its compound the sense of 'headlong' - in age man will 'gasp'. 'World's loveliest', [1] man, is in this poem what he is in 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire', common Jack. Whatever his station he is Lear's 'poor, bare, forked animal', eating and excreting, joined with a slut,

> He! Hand to mouth he lives, and voids with shame;
> And blazoned in however bold the name,
> Man Jack the man is just; his mate a hussy.

This shameful surviving has nothing of dignity in it, and even the poet's frettings are robbed of Promethean grandeur, for instead of the 'giant groans' of the angels he observes life miniatured in a spoon, not a tragedy but a masque. Even the emotion which he has spent protesting at man's pitiable plight now seems no more than petulance; his tempests are 'tame', his fire 'fussy' - the subject simply does not justify grand passion. 'What bass is our viol for tragic tones?' he has asked, the last lines with their abrupt corrective to taking himself too seriously reply implicitly that there is none.

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

1 'To what serves Mortal Beauty?'

This poem was where Hopkins' sense of transience finally led. The binding of bones, the soft sifting of life away, resulted at last in this view of man. It was written only two months before his death but to seize on this and take it as Hopkins' final view would be opportunist. It is of more importance to see that 'The shepherd's brow' marks a major development in his growth as a poet, it matters as a sign of new possibilities - in the event, unfulfilled.

Like 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' it was written in Ireland and it is in that period of his life that he breaks with the limits which a celebration of beauty imposed upon him. Inasmuch as 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' is concerned with transience it points on to the poems discussed within this chapter; inasmuch as there is an introspective mental concern in its opening stanzas they properly lead on not to the nature poems which follow in sequence but to the sonnets of desolation.

Chapter Five

IRELAND AND THE END OF BEAUTY

> It is as if one were dazzled by a spark or star in the dark, seeing it but not seeing by it. [1]
>
> Hopkins

The last five-and-a-half years of Hopkins' life were spent in Ireland, and some of the poems he wrote there are of such an intimate nature that one is encouraged to believe that some hitherto-concealed but essential truth about Hopkins is revealed in these years. Here latent conflicts are made actual, here facts previously obscure are made plain - so one might suppose - and thus we may be led to look back on his work before this time with different eyes. Hence Professor Gardner can make the proposition that 'The Windhover' is 'best approached retrospectively from the standpoint of the later sonnets', [2] and, though Father W.A.M. Peters [3] does yeoman service in opposing the idea that Hopkins' sufferings in Ireland derived from the thwarting of his poetic talent by his priestly vows, this notion recurs in a book published eleven years after his. David Downes says that, 'In constantly denying and rejecting the artist in himself he was rejecting his true self, I submit, and it finally caught up with him in the last years in Dublin, during which period his death is but an anticlimax to the death of his poetic genius.' [4] Some of the sonnets written in Ireland are anguished in the extreme, and, if an

1 S p.262, Retreat Notes for January 1st, 1889.

2 Gardner, Study, vol.I, p.180.

3 Peters, op. cit., pp.45-8.

4 Downes, op. cit., pp.135-6.

explanation is not offered for that anguish,[1] there is left a vacuum and, faute de mieux, the worn idea of a priest conscience-wracked about his poetry reasserts itself, or, alternatively, the poet is to be blamed. Thus in an essay which is for the most part very well judged, Austin Warren speaks of Hopkins' 'psychic breakdown' and says,

> Precarious as it is to make the proper linkages and translations between the somatic, the psychic and the spiritual, I should suppose all breakdowns in maturity to be ultimately spiritual, testifying to the finite self's unwillingness to acknowledge its creatureness, its clinging to known securities instead of plunging itself gladly into the abyss of God. Accordingly I should be unable to reconcile irrecoverable breakdown with saintliness. [2]

This pattern of delving into the writer's soul for answers to his plight is the more remarkable because the causes of Hopkins' misery in Ireland are so often made explicit in his letters. There is no need to speculate: Hopkins was not wretched because he was shackled as a poet but because he was overtaxed by his work and frustrated as a religious - and this dissatisfaction with his role has, in the first instance, nothing to do with poetry. I now briefly trace Hopkins' experiences in Ireland before describing their impact on his poetry.

He was appointed to the Chair of Greek in the Royal University of Ireland early in 1884. The job mainly involved the management of examinations and from the first Hopkins did not want it. He was to write later that the 'resolution of the senate of the R.U. came to me, inconvenient and painful'; [3] at the time, he told Newman, tactfully

1 Peters (op. cit., pp.47-8) makes his failure to produce the main cause of Hopkins' misery. It was most certainly a cause, but he felt this failure acutely even while teaching at Stonyhurst College just before his move to Dublin (see e.g. RB p.178, p.183 & FL pp.251-2). There were additional factors operating in Ireland.

2 Austin Warren, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)' in The Kenyon Critics, Gerard Manley Hopkins, London, 1949, pp.18-19.

3 S p.263, Retreat Notes, January 5th, 1889.

(the University was Newman's own attempt to provide for Catholic higher education in Ireland), that he had tried to decline the offer, feeling unfitted for the position. [1] Such misgivings as Hopkins had were only deepened when he took up his post. No amount of money, he thought, could be suitable repayment for the six examinations he had to conduct every year; [2] the post was 'an honour and an opening and has many bright sides but at present it has also some dark ones and this in particular that I am not at all strong, not strong enough for the requirements, and do not see at all how I am to become so.' [3] His anxiety about being too weak to bear the responsibilities of the job was swiftly justified. Two months later he was telling Bridges, 'I am, I believe, recovering from a deep fit of nervous prostration (I suppose I ought to call it): I did not know but I was dying,' [4] and in July 1884 Dixon wrote to him saying that he was distressed 'by the news of your illness, or at least prostration of strength'. [5] In August Hopkins was 'the better and fresher for my holiday', [6] but in October he was again 'drowned' [7] in examinations, and the situation worsened during the first half of 1885. He had unwisely refused an invitation to spend Christmas with his parents [8] on the grounds that winter-travelling would tax him and that it would not look well if he returned to England having been so short a time in Ireland. He

1 FL p.63, February 20th, 1884.

2 RB p.190, March 7th, 1884.

3 RB p.190.

4 RB p.193, April 30th, 1884.

5 C p.122, July 9th, 1884.

6 RB p.195, August 3rd, 1884.

7 C p.123, October 25th, 1884.

8 FL p.163, November 26th, 1884, to his mother.

regretted the decision. [1] By April he was talking of himself as living in a 'coffin of weakness and dejection', [2] and in May he thought this dejection resembled insanity. [3] In the spring and summer of that year his misery reached its intensest pitch; [4] then in August he went on holiday to his parents at Hampstead and to Patmore at Hastings and temporarily recovered. [5] This pattern of cumulative dejection relieved by holidays, particularly those away from Ireland, is repeated in following years, though the dejection is less severe. In 1886 he recovers his spirits in a fortnight's holiday in Wales [6] and in 1887 in a visit to his parents and Bridges; [7] but in 1888 a not entirely successful stay in Scotland is scarcely adequate. [8] 'All I really need is a certain degree of relief and change' [9] he has decided but he doubts whether he can last in this sort of life. He does not repeat what seems to have been a mistake in 1884 of staying in Ireland the whole year through, but though this in itself is sufficient to keep the misery in check it does not end it.

Hopkins found his work onerous, then, and it made him wretched. However - and this is of great importance - he also thought there was

1 cf. RB p.201, January 1st, 1885.

2 RB pp.214-15, April 1st, 1885.

3 FL p.256, May 17th, 1885, to Baillie & RB p.216, May 17th, 1885.

4 RB p.222, September 1st, 1885.

5 RB pp.220-22.

6 cf. RB pp.226-9, October 2nd. He also visited Bridges in May that year, cf. RB p.224 & 225.

7 cf. RB pp.258-9, August 25th, 1887.

8 cf. RB pp.278, 282, 284-5 (3 letters, dated August 18th, September 7th, & September 10th, 1888).

9 RB p.282, September 7th, 1888.

little value in it. In 1887 he tells Bridges, 'Tomorrow I shall have been three years in Ireland, three hard wearying wasting wasted years,'[1] and in 1888 he gives his mother this considered view of his life:

> I am now working at examination-papers all day and this work began last month and will outlast this one. It is great, very great drudgery. I can not of course say it is wholly useless, but I believe that most of it is and that I bear a burden which crushes me and does little to help any good end. It is impossible to say what a mess Ireland is and how everything enters into that mess. The Royal University is in the main, like the London University, an examining board. It does the work of examining well; but the work is not worth much. This is the first end I labour for and see little good in. Next my salary helps to support this college. The college is very moderately successful, rather a failure than a success, and there is less prospect of success now than before. Here too, unless things are to change, I labour for what is worth little. And in doing this almost fruitless work I use up all opportunity of doing any other. [2]

Hopkins was working for a college which was 'struggling for existence'[3] and unlikely to live long, [4] and he was so exhausting himself in his arid daily labours that he could find no energy for anything worthwhile. He had given himself over wholly in the Church's service only to find himself writing in 1889, 'I often think I am employed to do what is of little or no use,' [5] - his anguish is hardly to be wondered at.

The consequence for Hopkins' art is that in Ireland, in the years till his death from typhoid fever on June 8th, 1889, his greatest poems turn away from beauty. The turning is involuntary but it marks a breaking of the bounds which confined so much of his earlier work. It is a new development in him. When - rarely - beauty comes he is

1 RB p.250, February 17th, 1887.

2 FL pp.184-5, July 5th, 1888, to his mother.

3 FL p.163, November 26th, 1884, to his mother.

4 FL p.173, November 13th, 1885, to his mother.

5 S p.261, retreat notes, January 1st, 1889.

still able to celebrate it, but no longer as the central and finally important truth about life.

Hopkins is now exploring a world which, in its mental aspect, is grim, obscure and sorely afflicted, and, in its outward expressions, unproductive and lonely, virtually deprived of sensible delight. It is not charged with the grandeur of God but fitfully and feebly illuminated.

It was a world which had always threatened him. For a man of fine sensibility, misery was a permanent possibility in the life which Hopkins led. His work as a Jesuit priest sent him among the great cities of the north - to Liverpool, Glasgow, Preston - and this grimy urban living always depressed him. Liverpool was 'this horrible place' [1] and Glasgow a 'wretched place . . . like all our great towns.' [2] In this work, however, he was being used to some Catholic purpose and perpetually there was the likelihood of change, and that in turn might bring relief. His Order was, it seemed to him, continually on the move. 'Ours can never be an abiding city,' he wrote to his mother, ' . . . and it is our pride to be ready for instant dispatch.' [3] To Bridges: 'permanence with us is ginger-bread permanence; cobweb, soapsud, and frost-feather permanence,' [4] and in 1880, twelve years after he joined the Society of Jesus, he evidently looks forward to change; he writes from Liverpool, 'I do not think I can be long here; I have been long nowhere yet. I am brought face to face with the deepest poverty and misery in my district.' [5] Then he finds

1 RB p.126, April 27th, 1881.

2 RB p.135, September 16th, 1881.

3 FL p.142, September 23rd, 1876.

4 RB p.55, July 13th, 1878.

5 FL p.245, June 9th, 1880, to Baillie.

himself established in Ireland, a kind of exile. Dublin too is 'a joyless place'[1], but now, with no promise of return, the effect of the joylessness is cumulative, 'Change is the only relief, and that I can seldom get.' [2] He loves country life and dislikes any town, 'and that especially for its bad and smokefoul air.' [3] His dream is 'a farm in the Western counties, glowworms, new milk . . . but in fact I live in Dublin.' [4] The wandering is at an end but that means not growing security but near-constant strain.

In the past his poetry and his happiness had been tied together, the one, as it were, bidden by the other. In Glasgow, 'the vein urged by any country sight or feeling of freedom or leisure (you cannot tell what a slavery of mind or heart it is to live my life in a great town) soon dried,' [5] and the pattern outlined here had shown before. Liverpool was 'of all places the most museless', [6] and, 'My muse turned utterly sullen in the Sheffield smoke-ridden air.' [7] (Where there was a source of delight in great cities it was only because of some intrusion by nature; and such were 'the frostings, which have been a lovely fairyland on the publicans' windows'. [8])

Yet in Ireland this is reversed. He is writing poems not about delight but about the misery of his life. Unhappiness, instead of

1 RB P.190, March 7th, 1884.

2 RB p.216, May 17th, 1885.

3 FL p.292, May 1st, 1888, to Baillie.

4 ibid. FL p.293.

5 RB p.136, September 16th, 1881.

6 C p.42, December 22nd, 1880.

7 RB p.48, April 2nd, 1878.

8 RB pp.116-17, January 26th, 1881.

completely stifling his poetry, causes it to come sometimes 'like inspirations unbidden and against my will'. [1] He says, 'I want the one rapture of an inspiration'; yet there he is, writing poetry about the lack of this'fine delight' ('To R.B.'). He appeals, 'Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain'; yet the appeal comes in one of the most eloquent poems he ever wrote ('Thou art indeed just, Lord'), and we are immediately confronted with the paradox that he is creating great poetry about his need to create: the misery and sterility he feels to be ending his art are, in fact, increasing its stature.

This is not to deny the efforts which Hopkins had to make with his verse, not that his Irish sonnets are indeed 'the thin gleanings of a long weary while' [2] (- and, as he himself added, 'singly good'). He had always taken great pains over the writing of poetry, sometimes spending years re-touching verses, and often the initial act of composition taxed him. He writes to Bridges from Oxford, 'I have of myself made verse so laborious,' [3] and the same complaint comes two years later from Glasgow, he is surprised 'at how slow and laborious a thing verse is to me.' [4] From Ireland he tells Patmore, 'I find writing prose easy and pleasant. Not so verse.' [5] His final extant letter to Dixon shows his resignation to what is now so demanding. In one of the extended metaphors which characterise his letters [6] he says, 'my

1 RB p.221, September 1st, 1885.

2 RB p.264, November 2nd, 1887.

3 RB p.66, February 15th, 1879.

4 RB p.136, September 16th, 1881.

5 FL p.379, May 12th, 1887.

6 Hopkins' frequent lightheartedness is easily overlooked amidst so much gloom. For other e.g.s see RB p.40, 'A junk of a letter . .' etc., p.50, 'The Deutschland on her first run . ...'etc., p.183

muse has long put down her carriage and now for years "takes in washing" The laundry is driving a great trade now.' [1]

The themes of the Irish poems interconnect and it is thus mistaken perhaps to regard the sonnets of desolation written in 1885 (nos. 64-69 in the fourth edition of the poems) as a distinct group. Themes which occur there are found elsewhere. The poet is a 'wretch' ('Carrion Comfort', 'No worst there is none'), desperate for comfort ('No worst there is none', 'Carrion Comfort', 'My own heart let me have more pity on') whose cries and pleas go unheeded ('To seem the stranger', 'I wake and feel'). The world he lives in is dark and terrifying ('Carrion Comfort', 'I wake and feel', 'No worst there is none') and it baffles him. His attempts to understand and control it are painful and frightening for they only reveal his inadequacy, and his mind itself seems to be an agent of torture ('No worst there is none', 'My own heart'). Whenever there is relief, it is symbolised in the processes of creative nature.- in 'Natural heart's ivy' with its seas of leaves, in the rooting of comfort - processes which the poet cannot share in, for his projects are no more than 'ruins of wrecked past purpose' and he himself 'a lonely began'. Beauty is order, and creativity, and growth, and the poet is denied access to it. His world is tempest-blown, barren, mountainous, 'frightful'; it is bruised and blind. Its sounds are cries and hammer blows, its tastes gall and bitterness.

There is, in fact, a unity to this world - the unity of hostility and affliction - and, though there are Irish poems which do

'Fortune's football . . .' etc., p.296 'I must whet myself . . .' etc.; FL p.157 'humble pie . . . ' etc., p.191 'coat of correspondence . . .' etc., p.225 'pragmatical snuffers' etc., p.235 'sprig of rhetoric' etc., p.238 'irons in the fire' etc.

1 C p.157, July 29th, 1888.

not belong to it (notably 'Tom's Garland' and 'Harry Ploughman') and others whose connection with it is not immediately obvious ('That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire', for example), it is the description of this 'winter world' ('To R.B.') which is Hopkins' major artistic achievement in Ireland. Neither James Thomson in 'The City of Dreadful Night' (1874) nor Francis Thompson in 'Hound of Heaven' (1893) really managed to write anything similar. In Hopkins' world God lives and it is not flight from him but service which lies behind the poet's wretchedness.

Hopkins had given his allegiance to the Society of Jesus and in consequence had been sent away from his own country, to which he felt such strong devotion, to a life of unproductive labour. His work at the University should have suited him but, inasmuch as it was chiefly concerned with examination-marking, it proved burdensome. His faith had thus involved him in a job which he found unrewarding and of little consequence for Catholicism. His feelings about it were at odds with his vow of obedience. Was it really God's will? On the one hand a sense of a life wasted, in every way unproductive; on the other, a rule to be kept.

The opposition of these two provides the dynamic for much of his poetry in Ireland, and 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' is about the clash between them. It is one of Hopkins' most important poems for it is here that the experiences of the sonnets of desolation begin, in the end of beauty. The poem is avowedly oracular, Hopkins' own awesome warning of what his life would be [1] - a joyless conscience-searching and a barren effort of will. The poet who had exclaimed

1 The poem was begun in October 1884 and though not completed until two years later may be taken as preceding the sonnets of 1885 (cf. Poems, p.xlii)

'Glory be to God for dappled things' now pronounces that 'earth her being has unbound; her dapple is at an end'. This new sense of finality, not the finality of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' which is ineluctable death, but one of a disorder and calamity which has to be lived through, is the more striking in comparison with two other poems, the fragments 'Moonrise' (written in Wales in his years of training) and the Irish 'Ashboughs'.

In 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' the 'bleak light' of the evening sky is patterned by the boughs of trees. Leaves stand out like beaks, and the branches themselves are 'dragonish', utterly black in silhouette against the scarcely-relieved darkness of evening-time. In that colourless contrast is 'our oracle', the grim warning of a time when the fullness of living has been narrowed down to an unrelenting struggle between right and wrong, when the moral has supplanted the aesthetic. The world is black and white, without colour or cheer.

In the unfinished 'Ashboughs', written in the same year (1885), again the branches of a tree break the sky (not an evening one here),

> Not of all my eyes see, wandering on the world,
> Is anything a milk to the mind so, so sighs deep
> Poetry to it, as a tree whose boughs break in the sky.

In this instance, however, its arms reaching skywards are made the sign of affinity between earth and heaven, no cause for alarm but a way of finding perspective, of making sense of 'The smouldering enormous winter welkin', for

> it is old earth's groping towards the steep
> Heaven whom she childs us by.

The superb beginning, 'Moonrise', has the same concord. It is night-time but disturbed sleep only brings more beauty (- not the torments of 'I wake and feel'),

> I awoke in the Midsummer not-to-call night, in the
> white and the walk of the morning:

> The moon, dwindled and thinned to the fringe of a fingernail
> held to the candle,
> Or paring of paradisaical fruit, lovely in waning but lustreless,
> Stepped from the stool, drew back from the barrow, of
> dark Maenefa the mountain;

The scene is indeed the fruit of paradise; there is no discord or imperfection:

> This was the prized, the desirable sight, unsought, presented so
> easily,
> Parted me leaf and leaf, divided me, eyelid and eyelid of slumber.

It is entirely sensuous, this 'bye-ways beauty', [1] and to describe 'the desirable sight' is enough, there is nothing more to be said.

Now contrast 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves'. Nothing here is presented easily. As the first long, slow words show, there is more here than the temporary encroachment of dark on day. 'Stupendous Evening strains', and the sense of slow, painful effort is there throughout the poem. Night encloses as the 'womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all', but not simply with its 'overbending' stars, for with the physical limit goes a moral one. 'Our evening is over us; our night whelms, whelms and will end us.' The darkness defeats us, is 'over us' in supremacy. The 'fond yellow' light of the setting sun has been replaced by light which is 'wild' and 'hollow', and there is no control in this 'earthless' evening. Patterns have been broken by the darkness and like animals or insects have gone wild, as indistinguishable as the word 'throughther' which mimics the confusion. This is reality, and the order imposed by relatedness, the order of memory, is wilfully put aside,

> her dapple is at an end, as -
> tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; self in self
> steeped and pashed - quite
> Disremembering, dismembering all now.

But order is recovered from the hostile night, the eery order of black

1 from the second of two early sonnets 'To Oxford' (1865).

dragons hard-edged against a sky so strangely bleak that it has more to do with the dead existence of the machine than with organic growth,

> Only the beakleaved boughs dragonish damask the tool-smooth bleak
> light; black,
> Ever so black on it.

The onset of nightfall when the intricate web of life is unwoven and, regardless of its colouring, seen only in terms of black and white, is a correlative for the moral agony of self-judgement, for the afflictions of a conscience which operates it own Day of Reckoning, denying any considerations but

> black, white; right, wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind
> But these two; ware of a world where but these two tell, each off
> the other.

When life becomes only the ricochetting conflict between what is right and what is not, when beauty - the beauty of 'her once skeined stained veined variety' - is at an end then existence is torture,

> a rack
> Where, self-wrung, self-strung, sheathe - and shelterless,
> thoughts against thoughts in groans grind.

The prophecy spelt out from the Sibyl's books is that beauty will end, and it is a prophecy which is already being fulfilled in the poem. The onset of night is an augury of the division of the sheep and the goats on the Day of Judgement, penned in two folds; but, for the poet, the judgement has already begun. The clash of right and wrong is happening inside his own mind, is happening and is unresolved even as the poem ends.

The turmoil in the poet's mind in 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' is shown in the conflicting instructions he gives himself. He is to 'let' the world divide into good and bad, he is to 'reck' only these two; but he must beware of a world so divided. He must cope with an absolute, unanswerable order of reality. In 'Carrion Comfort' and in 'Thou art indeed just, Lord' (discussed near the end of this chapter)

the fixed reality is personal but the person is the God of the Old Testament, God of the first stanza of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' (with its paraphrase of the prophet [1]), righteous, wrathful, unknowable God of Jacob, of Job and Jeremiah. [2]

In 'Carrion Comfort' the 'winter world' is still a dark one, the poet still 'shelterless'. The giant adversary of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' is present here as an unrecognised wrestler whose blows are a metaphor for the same conscience-wrackings with which 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' closes - more clearly distinguished here as a conflict of wills.

It is with the exercise of will that the poem opens, Hopkins struggling to preserve a residual humanity by not giving way to Despair. His is the plight of the hungry man tempted to feed on dead flesh (Despair, by that device, being given a separate objective existence), and having nothing to set against the lure but his own determination. Despair is dead comfort, 'carrion comfort', and he will not collapse before it,

> Not untwist - slack they may be - these last strands of man
> In me or, most weary, cry <u>I can no more</u>. I can.

In the final, emphatic 'I can' lies the poem's moral strength, but set against this resolution is the aweful difficulty of any practical action. The course is a vague 'Can something'. The proffered answers to the implicit question (Can what?) are all attitudes of mind - 'hope' 'wish' or the merely passive 'not choose not to be'.

The second stanza turns on the adversary as causer of torment, but of his superiority there is no doubt. The pressure he applies is gentle. He 'rocks' a foot, 'lays' a limb, and yet still the poet's

1 cf. Chap.4, p.147.

2 cf. Austing Warren, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)' Kenyon Critics, p.17.

bones are bruised. The adversary is puzzling. His eyes 'scan' and 'devour' in eager examination but he himself is inscrutable, terrifying. The poet 'frantic to avoid thee and flee' can find no explanation for his suffering.

Not until the sestet does the iterated 'why?' prompt some kind of answer. This beating is a winnowing, 'That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear' - Hopkins' misery in Ireland is a test of his faith - but just as he is about to confirm the proffered explanation, to make his mind up, he falters,

> 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.

His confidence breaks on the word 'seems'. Has he in fact submitted? Was it obedience - the obedience which is given despite all personal inclination; or affection? The only things he can be sure of are ambiguous; that he has relished such strength as he could find, stolen joy, desired laughter. Which was wrong? - wanting joy so badly, or getting so little? The correctness of even this scanty pleasure is immediately put in question. The struggle breaks out again,

> 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?

This is a nightmare world where the poet cannot be sure of what is happening, or even of the significance of events which he does recognise. Even in the last lines of the poem, which try to end the experience by seeing it as something past, he fails. The 'night' becomes a 'year' of darkness, and Hopkins' attempt to define - and thus limit - the experience founders in the process of definition. The adversary's identity is only now realised, he was '(my God!) my God!' and the juxtaposition of oath and allegiance, phonetically identical, semantically at polar extremes, points up the struggle

which has been waged obscurely throughout the whole poem. This is the final irony, that the contest, apparently resolved, goes on even in the moment of resolution. Hopkins becomes Jacob, [1] struggling as much with the limits of understanding as with those of faith.

The struggle is, of course, a mental one. In it there is no dead flesh, no unravelled strands, no bruised bones, tempest winds or grain, but instead the intangible and the invisible. To offer this reminder is not to rob these metaphors of their significance but to indicate the complexity of the task which Hopkins has undertaken here. In the poem, for the reader, the abstracts of will and mind with which he is concerned have their existence only in these concrete particulars. Unlike, for example, 'The Starlight Night' there is no external component in the experience, it is essentially an act of introspection. Some of the Irish poems are thus at the very limits of what is communicable in language. Of these limits Hopkins was well aware, aware

> when I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man (as when I was a child I used to ask myself: What must it be to be someone else?). Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this self-being of my own. Nothing explains it or resembles it, except so far as this, that other men to themselves have the same feeling. [2]

In acknowledging the same 'thick wall of personality' which Pater wrote about, Hopkins risked the possibility of being simply idiosyncratic, of abandoning any attempt at the communal sharing of language which we call communication. But the reverse might also apply, language might be a way of breaking out of the flux and isolation of individual experience. Indeed, this latter seems to have happened in

1 Genesis 32: 24-30.

2 S p.123, August 20th, 1880.

Hopkins' case. It is difficult not to see some of the sonnets of desolation as a kind of therapy, for what is set down on paper is thereby fixed in the public medium of words and, to that extent, under control. Inasmuch as the poet thus needs language the process is involuntary; and some such pattern of dependence I take to underlie Hopkins' (perhaps defensive) comment to Bridges that four sonnets he wrote in Ireland came against his will. [1]

Whatever their personal significance for Hopkins, the most anguished Irish sonnets are certainly outside nineteenth-century conventions of what poetry should be about (they remind one more of the 'confessional' poetry of Sylvia Plath). 'No worst there is none' is written with an imaginative intensity outside the range of Hopkins' contemporaries, it is at the heart of his 'winter world' and takes the afflictions of 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' and 'Carrion Comfort' to a new extreme. The 'wretch' is fighting for that basic security without which there is no sanity.

Yvor Winters finds the poem unacceptable. He says of Hopkins,

> he cannot move us by telling us why he himself is moved, he must try to move us by belabouring his emotion. He says, in effect: 'Share my fearful emotions, for the human mind is subject to fearful emotions.' But why should we wish to share an emotion so ill-sponsored? Nothing could be more rash. We cannot avoid sharing a part of it, for Hopkins has both skill and genius; but we cannot avoid being confused by the experience and suspecting in it a fine shade of the ludicrous. Who is this man to lead us so far and blindfold into violence? This kind of thing is a violation of our integrity; it is somewhat beneath the dignity of man. [2]

That 'No worst, there is none' contains no invitation to share the experience it describes barely needs mention, for, on the contrary,

1 RB p.221, September 1st, 1885.

2 Yvor Winters in The Function of Criticism, Denver, 1957, reprinted in Hopkins: a collection of critical essays, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman, Englewood Cliffs, 1966, pp.45-6.

Hopkins' misery is partly abated (it 'lulls') when he recognises that he is sharing the misery of others, that his cries, 'huddle in a main, a chief-/woe, world sorrow.' Winters' rhetorical appeals to 'our integrity' and 'the dignity of man' may therefore be set aside; Hopkins has made no assault on either.

The main ground for Winters' unease is stated early on, Hopkins 'cannot move us by telling us why he himself is moved,' and this bears directly on the above discussion. 'Why he himself is moved' is not relevant to an understanding of this poem which is in essence an act of introspection. It is an attempt to understand and come to terms with something which is of its nature unlocalised. To ask then for a location is to ask not for explanation but for a different subject. These points may become clearer in contrast with a poem by Oscar Wilde called 'Requiescat' which I give in full.

Tread lightly, she is near
Under the snow,
Speak gently, she can hear
The daisies grow.

All her bright golden hair
Tarnished with rust,
She that was young and fair
Fallen to dust.

Lily-like, white as snow,
She hardly knew
She was a woman, so
Sweetly she grew.

Coffin-board, heavy stone
Lie on her breast,
I vex my heart alone
She is at rest.

Peace, Peace, she cannot hear
Lyre or sonnet,
All my life's buried here
Heap earth upon it.

The poem is Wilde's attempt to accept into his life the fact of a loved one's death. It begins by being sentimental and stylised. He

says 'she can hear the daisies grow' when she obviously cannot; she is 'Lily-like, white as snow' - traditionally pure, that is - but the moving last stanza breaks through convention and sentimentality. It is in flat contradiction to the opening one which is now seen as merely wishful; 'she cannot hear'. He is distraught with grief and, far from achieving the sort of calm which the opening so spuriously offered, he confronts the full significance of her death,

> All my life's buried here
> Heap earth upon it.

To deal with the fact of final separation, with death and burial, is to deal also with the emotion which these things engender.

Hopkins has no such recourse. It is in the nature of his misery that it is regenerative, 'More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.' It is not then a momentary or occasional thing but something which is persistent and undefined, for the opening words of the poem show that the awesome thing about this experience is that it is without the sort of limit that Winters would like to see there, the limit imposed in Wilde's poem by the girl's death. Hopkins has said not that there is nothing 'worse' than this, but that there is 'No worst'; the prediction is for suffering which has no foreseeable limit. The appeal to the Comforter, desperate in its insistence, brings no answer:

> 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.'

'Heave' suggests the involuntary motions of sickness, and, though this sonnet deals with the abstract, it is in the most physical of terms. As cattle herd together for comfort Hopkins finds consolation as his sufferings are joined with those of the human race, a 'world-sorrow', 'age-old'; and in the shrieking of Fury (a conflation

of the three Greek goddesses of vengeance) comes the first promise of relief. The misery may be 'fell', cruel and oppressive, but, for a reason as yet unspecified, it must be short-lived.

Only now in ths sestet does it become clear that the agony we have had described is a mental one. (It has been enacted for us like a miniature drama; the shrieked word 'lingering' dragged out across a line-ending and thus displaying its meaning.) Now, as in 'Carrion Comfort', the poet tries to reflect on the experience but becomes involved in it again,

> O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
> Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed.

One image is turned to give the sense of both obstacle and risk, and again it is the absence of limit which makes the imminent danger of the 'cliffs of fall' so frightful. 'Fathomed' is restored to its original meaning - no-one has explored their depths - but it holds too the sense of 'understood' and the metaphor underlines the fact that we are dealing with a landscape of the mind. The brain pushed to the very limits of control has a precarious hold on normality and there is an exclusiveness and at the same time something self-justifying about 'Hold them cheap May who ne'er hung there'. The poem begins with echoes of Edgar's

> And worse I may be yet; the worst is not
> So long as we can say "This is the worst." [1]

It ends with Macbeth's sleep, 'The death of each day's life' [2] (- and 'balm of hurt minds'). We cannot last long in such a position, but in that very fact, in Fury's brevity, lies the comfort the wretch grovels for, the unassailable universality of 'All /Life death does end and

1 King Lear IV i 27-8.

2 Macbeth II ii 37.

each day dies with sleep'. The relief promised is future and permanent, temporary and soon.

Hopkins had written a poem about the risk of madness.[1] The anxiety may well have been wholly mistaken but it is one recurrent in his letters for that year (1885) and what matters more than any clinical estimate is surely the fact that he felt the risk. He was as hard-pressed as that.[2] He wrote to Baillie,

> The melancholy I have all my life been subject to has become of late years not indeed more intense in its fits but rather more distributed, constant and crippling . . . when I am at the worst, though my judgement is never affected, my state is much like madness. 3

The same fear was repeated in letters to Bridges: 'I think that my fits of sadness, though they do not affect my judgement, resemble madness,' [4] 'Soon I am afraid I shall be ground down to a state like this last spring's and summer's, when my spirits were so crushed that madness seemed to be making approaches.' [5]

Those approaches show in the unfathomed 'cliffs of fall'; they show too in 'I wake and feel the fell of dark', another of the 1885

1 This runs counter to Elizabeth Schneider's view that the poem suffers from 'a central vagueness' which results from 'an indecisiveness about what constitutes the central emotion and theme,' (Schneider, Dragon in the Gate, p.197).

2 for an opposed view see G.F. Lahey, Gerard Manley Hopkins, London, 1930, p.139: 'his work itself was interesting and consoling and his friends congenial and satisfying; then too, the monotony of routine was easily broken by the utmost freedom he had received from his superiors. It is necessary to insist on this because so many writers have drawn tragic portraits of an exiled Englishman slowly dying of loneliness, drudgery, and despair.' It is no criticism of either Hopkins' friends or his superiors to note that the evidence of both his prose and his verse is against Lahey on this point.

3 FL p.256, April 24th, 1885.

4 RB p.216, May 17th, 1885.

5 RB p.222, September 1st, 1885.

sonnets. His sense of uniqueness, of 'self tasted at one tankard only', [1] here becomes self-loathing. The idea expressed in his devotional writings that a self and a nature are joined by God in a completely arbitrary fashion [2] - in Christopher Devlin's words, 'as if a man could be saddled with a nature fundamentally out of tune with his destiny' [3] - operates in this poem as a curse. The conflict between the requirements of service (his duties in Ireland) and his personal disinclination makes him blame himself. His own reaction to what is expected of him becomes an unchangeable burden (whereas the reaction in most people would be to blame - and change - the job or duty).

> I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
> Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
> Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

God has ordained a personality and a destiny for him which are badly at odds; then, as if with the inexorable movement of a Greek tragedy, the poet's birth and life fulfil this curse.

Supposing, Hopkins said in some thoughts on Suarez & St. Thomas Aquinas, that we call natures by capital letters ('A,B, . . Y,Z') and selves by lower case ('a,b, . . y,z')

> then if a is capable of A,B, . . Y,Z . . and receives, say, A, if b capable of the same receives also A, and if c capable of the same receives M, so that we have aA, bA, cM, these combinations are three arbitrary or absolute facts not depending on any essential relation between a and A, b and A, or c and M but on the will of the Creator. Further, a and b are in the same nature A. But a uses it well and is saved, b ill and is damned. 4

The free choice of a or b is what matters finally, says Hopkins, not the link between a and A or b and A; but it is interesting to see that

1 S p.123, August 20th, 1880.

2 S p.146.

3 S p.118.

4 S p.146, 'On Personality, Grace, and Free Will'.

the damned (b) is here given a nature out of accord with it. Hopkins feels himself soured by his personality, and in that respect akin to those in hell:

> Self-yeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
> The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
> As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

If the sestet moves inamore bitter, more resentful way than the close of 'No worst, there is none', the opening stanzas contain similarities with that poem. There is the same sense of continuing and unheard appeals - 'cries countless' - compounded by the absence of Robert Bridges, 'dearest him that lives alas! away'; the same feeling, too, of an experience which cannot be confined. This is no momentary interruption which gives sight of beautiful Maenefa but a disturbed night which by its blackness becomes symbol for a lifetime. There is the same wracking internal debate, not here in Fury's shrieking or in the movements of a mute opponent but in the colloquy with the heart,

> What hours, O what black hours we have spent
> This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
> And more must, in yet longer light's delay.

There is the same attempt at reflection - 'With witness I speak this' - but finally there is no resolution.

The sixteenth century poet Edward Dyer could write,

> My mind to me a kingdom is,
> Such present joys therein I find,
> That it excels all other bliss
> That earth affords or grows by kind.

With Hopkins in Ireland the position is exactly reversed. He must escape from his own mental processes to share the intuitive life of the natural world, and the other poems he wrote there are wholly or in part movements in this direction. 'Tom Navvy' presents in his estate thoughtless happiness, and Hopkins reads the marshalling of Harry Ploughman's muscles as a willing commitment to their activity, 'one crew, fall to'. These men - their hard bodies possessed of the

strength denied to the poet - are right, in the way that the cluster of clouds in 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' is right or the 'trickling increment' of 'St. Alphonsus Rodriguez' is right. There is an accord in their lives which is lacking in his. Most bitterly his personal dissatisfaction shows in 'I wake and feel', but it is present too in his recognition that he does not share the life around him, that 'birds build - but not I build'.

Later on in Ireland the misery of 'No worst, there is none' and 'I wake and feel' is brought under control, and the confusion of 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' and 'Carrion Comfort' is overcome; but the experiences of this inner world always threaten to make the natural world of less account. The base creature who moves through 'The shepherd's brow' is not sustained by delight in clouds and trees; the nature which works so busily in 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' effectively witnesses against man who is, by contrast, headed for an 'enormous dark' (which, like the 'cliffs of fall' is 'unfathomable'), blotted 'black out' by death.

The remaining poems about his personal predicament in Ireland are either complex acts of resignation or eloquent protests against his lot. Both groups are firmly outside any recognisably Victorian tradition (in the former I include 'Patience, hard thing!', 'My own heart let me more have pity on', and the untypical fragment 'Hope holds to Christ the mind's own mirror out'; in the latter 'To seem the stranger', 'St. Alphonsus Rodriguez', 'Thou art indeed just, Lord' and 'To R.B.')

Arguably the superb, unfinished 'The times are nightfall' is also an act of resignation (it ends with Hopkins telling himself to live for inner perfection 'rid the dragons, root out there the sin') but it provides an interesting connection between the sonnets of desolation and some of the poems of protest. The theme of failed creativity

forms the link. (I give the first stanza only here.)

> The times are nightfall, look, their light grows less;
> The times are winter, watch, a world undone:
> They waste, they wither worse; they as they run
> Or bring more or more blazon man's distress.
> And I not help. Nor word now of success:
> All is from wreck, here, there, to recue one -
> Work which to see scarce so much as begun
> Makes welcome death, does dear forgetfulness.

A night world, a winter world, 'a world undone' - these are the themes of 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves', but Hopkins soon turns to his own failure to achieve anything, to the 'wrecks' which have a place in 'Patience, hard thing!', and to the idea that what he has done' is scarcely a beginning - an idea prominent in 'To seem the stranger'.

In 'Patience, hard thing!' the wrecks are accepted - as they are in 'The times are nightfall' - as facts to be lived with, for the poem chastens the impatience which initially has its way. The last line of the first stanza which recalls the Jesuit vows of poverty, chastity and obedience points specifically at the dilemma Hopkins faced in Ireland.

> Patience, hard thing! the hard thing but to pray,
> But bid for, Patience is! Patience who asks
> Wants war, wants wounds; weary his times, his tasks;
> To do without, take tosses, and obey.
>
> Rare patience roots in these, and, these away,
> Nowhere.

The hard thing is to wish to be patient in the first place; the quality of patience is never required where there is excitement. No-one engaged in active warfare ever needs it, but only those whose lives and whose jobs are dull. Patience is rooted in monotony. For Hopkins the correct course of action offers no enticement; to take it is simply an unaided effort of will. Indeed the merit in the act seems to lie in overcoming the adversity; remove this, and there is none.

Patience is rooted in dullness, but from the metaphor comes a

quite different movement, patience grows once it takes hold; it makes failures endurable; patience is luxuriant. Hopkins turns to the natural world to find a means of consoling himself, a fixed point of reference.

> Natural heart's ivy, Patience masks
> Our ruins of wrecked past purpose. There she basks
> Purple eyes and seas of liquid leaves all day.

In this striking image we see once again Hopkins' radical tendency to find correspondence for mental and emotional states in things he can see and touch. Yet he is seemingly unaware of the image as such; he does not, like Donne, exercise a mathematic and qualifying control over it. ('Hope holds to Christ the mind's own mirror out' is a notable exception to this and, if I am correct, it is not surprising that that poem and 'To his Watch', which attempts the same kind of considered figure, are both unfinished.) What shows in the lines quoted above is a certain creative fecundity. Instead of considering further the relation between the ivy and the 'wrecked past purpose' he allows the image to multiply and out of the phrase 'seas of liquid leaves' comes the further 'We hear our hearts grate on themselves,' where the underlying idea is of pebbles moved by waves.

'My own heart let me more have pity on' has the same swift transference of thought. The mind groping for consolation is the victim of its own activity, can no more get comfort

> than blind
> Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
> Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet.

The search for solace becomes a search for light and then a search for water. The searcher becomes the hunted one, pursued as it were by hounds ('call off thoughts awhile Elsewhere') and since the idea of a quest can produce no solution to the poet's problems these images are changed for ones of space. Comfort must have 'root-room'. Joy must

take its 'size' (used in the poem as a verb) according to circumstance. The poem ends by expecting, sometime, the unexpected. The sudden dappling of sky between mountains gives the light previously denied to 'blind Eyes', and the 'lovely mile' relieves the claustrophobic searching of the second stanza.

'Hope holds to Christ the mind's own mirror out' is in marked contrast to the two poems just discussed. It shows the calmer attitude to his situation which Hopkins was trying for in the sober counsel ('I do advise /You, jaded, let be') offered there. It is in its restraint, its use of personification, domestic imagery and anecdote, more like George Herbert's poetry than anything else Hopkins wrote.

> Hope holds to Christ the mind's own mirror out
> To take His lovely likeness more and more.
> It will not well, so she would bring about
> A growing burnish brighter than before
> And turns to wash it from her welling eyes
> And breathes the blots off all with sighs on sighs.
> Her glass is blest but she as good as blind
> Holds till hand aches and wonders what is there;
> Her glass drinks light, she darkles down behind,
> All of her glorious gainings unaware.
>
> I told you that she turned her mirror dim
> Betweenwhiles, but she sees herself not Him.

The operations of the will, determined on a more Christ-like life, so deaden the consciousness that it goes unaware of its achievement. The personality is too tarnished to mirror Christ's image ('it will not [do it] well') so the believer weeps tears of mortification, sighs for his inadequacy, and this onto the mirror, so that, as with a glass cleansed by washing it and breathing on it, this mirror too gives a clearer image. But the glass is held out away from the holder and Hope cannot see that her sorrowing has brought a finer holiness.

The fragment has a certain attraction in the way it rigorously stays with the one metaphor but it is basically unsatisfactory in the obvious sense that a mirror is used to reflect the holder's image, to

give back rather than receive. Nonetheless it is interesting as an attempt by Hopkins to accomodate himself to circumstances adverse and unrewarding by presenting himself as handicapped in knowledge and understanding.

He was not usually so resigned. Ireland had forced him to confront the workings of his own mind, to find in his own personality part of his malaise. It also brought to him an unqualified belief that his purpose in life was to create, to produce, and that he had failed, not in keeping the Rule to which he had submitted his life, but in making that submission at all valuable. His sense of failure receives its most anguished expression in the Retreat Notes he kept just a few months before his death which are in a manner a synthesis of many of the themes in his Irish poems.

> I am now 44. I do not waver in my allegiance, I never have since my conversion to the Church. The question is how I advance the side I serve on. This may be inwardly or outwardly. Outwardly I often think I am employed to do what is of little or no use. Something else which I can conceive myself doing might indeed be more useful, but still it is an advantage for there to be a course of higher studies for Catholics in Ireland and that that should be partly in Jesuit hands; and my work and my salary keep that up. Meantime the Catholic Church in Ireland and the Irish Province in it and our College in that are greatly given over to a partly unlawful cause, promoted by partly unlawful means, and against my will my pains, laborious and distasteful, like prisoners made to serve the enemies' gunners, go to help on this cause. I do not feel then that outwardly I do much good, much that I care to do or can much wish to prosper; and this is a mournful life to lead. In thought I can of course divide the good from the evil and live for the one not the other; this justifies me but it does not alter the facts. Yet it seems to me that I could lead this life well enough if I had bodily energy and cheerful spirits. However these God will not give me. The other part, the more important, remains, my inward service.
>
> I was continuing this train of thought this evening when I began to enter on that course of loathing and hopelessness which I have so often felt before, which made me fear madness and led me to give up the practice of meditation except, as now, in retreat and here it is again. I could therefore do no more than repeat <u>Justus es, Domine, et rectum judicium tuus</u> and the like, and then being tired I nodded and woke with a start. What is my wretched life? Five wasted years almost have passed in Ireland. I am ashamed of the little I have done, of my waste of time, although my helplessness and weakness is such that I could scarcely do otherwise. And

> yet the Wise Man warns us against excusing ourselves in that fashion. I cannot then be excused; but what is my life without aim, without spur, without help? All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch. I wish then for death: yet if I died now I should die imperfect, no master of myself, and that is the worst failure of all. O my God look down on me
>
> Jan 2 - This morning I made the meditation on the Three Sins with nothing to enter but loathing of my life and a barren submission to God's will. The body cannot rest when it is in pain nor the mind be at peace as long as something bitter distills in it and it aches. This may be at any time and is at many: how then can it be pretended there is for those who feel this anything worth calling happiness inthis world? There is a happiness, hope, the anticipation of happiness hereafter: it is better than happiness, but it is not happiness now. It is as if one were dazzled by a spark or star in the dark, seeing it but not seeing by it: we ant a light shed on our way and a happiness spread over our life. 1

Each of these three paragraphs is in marked contrast to the others. In the first there is a sense of scrupulous care as in the compilation of a record. His consciousness of the futility of his work is qualified by 'I often think', the Irish cause is '<u>partly</u> unlawful', promoted by '<u>partly</u> unlawful means'. His efforts are 'laborious and distasteful' - the adjectives are restrained - and his life 'mournful'. The second paragraph is basically a repetition of the first but control has broken and his language is impassioned. His time is 'wasted', his life 'wretched'; he is 'ashamed', caught up in 'loathing and helplessness', 'a straining eunuch'. Set this paragraph by the first one and we can see how harsh he is being here. He allows himself no excuse - not even the failing health for which he is beyond blame and yet which is the crucial factor. Initially he says, 'Yet it seems to me that I could lead this life well enough if I had bodily energy and cheerful spirits. However these God will not give me', but this becomes, 'my helplessness and weakness is such that I could scarcely do otherwise. And yet the Wise Man warns us against excusing ourselves in that fashion.' There is no way out. Yet the

1 S pp.261-2.

third paragraph is not concerned with responsibility but with describing the consequence of the sense of futility. Hopkins' self-discipline is 'a barren submission'. It gives no happiness. The relation between faith and life, clear and explicit in the sensuousness of the nature poetry, is obscure now. The condition of mind thus described is remote indeed from that shown in 'The Windhover' where Christ's presence irradiates the mind of the perceiver. Now God does not flame out but merely shows, a long way off.

'A barren submission'. The poems which protest against the barrenness are as highly personal as those which record other aspects of Hopkins' predicament in Ireland. Again Hopkins breaks from the limits of his earlier work (his pre-Ireland verse) not by changing or developing it but by stepping outside it altogether.

The isolation of 'To seem the stranger lies my lot' provides a partial explanation for this. Hopkins' lifelong sense of his own singularity is here made acute by his move away from England to a country he found alien, and which set up a conflict within him more heart-breaking than any he had known, for, in addition to his sense of a life wasting away in unprofitable labour, his appointment in Ireland set his loyalty to his country at variance with his vows as a religious. The Catholic Church in Ireland was working against England, he felt, and all his efforts for it were thus a kind of betrayal, 'like prisoners made to serve the enemies' gunners'. [1]

One might feel that this clash could only come because of an essentially Victorian intenseness in the religious feeling and the patriotism but this would be beside the point: in 'To seem the stranger' these sentiments are transmuted into something universal, the lament

1 S p.262, Retreat Notes, January 1st, 1889.

of a man bereft of a community he can call his own. (The transmutation is the more remarkable if the feelings of this poem are contrasted with the Establishement Victorianism of 'What shall I do for the land that bred me', Hopkins' 'patriotic song for soldiers' [1] full of sentiments which the first World War was to make unfashionable.)

> To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life
> Among strangers, Father and mother dear,
> Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near
> And he my peace/my parting, sword and strife.
>
> England, whose honour O all my heart woos, wife
> To my creating thought, would neither hear
> Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I: I weary of idle a being but by where wars are rife.
>
> I am in Ireland now; now I am at a third
> Remove. Not but in all removes I can
> Kind love both give and get. Only what word
>
> Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
> Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard
> Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began.

Each of the first three stanzas offers a new form of isolation. The first has the same air of pre-determination as 'I wake and feel'. The definite article picks out the position established, as it were, for him, 'the stranger'; this is his 'lot'. But it is not just that he must seem to be this to others, they too are strangers to him. Those who are not strange are alienated (even matters of faith are described in terms of physical contiguity), his family 'are in Christ not near'. The Biblical prophecy [2] has come true for him, Christ has brought a sword.

The second stanza introduces another sense of estrangement, not specifically from his country, England (that is the theme of the third), but from the possibility of achieving anything. England would never provide him with an audience, he knows he is rejected before he

1 RB p.283, September 7th, 1888. Hopkins appreciated that it was 'a task of great delicacy and hazard to write a patriotic song that shall breathe true feeling without spoon or brag.'

2 Matthew 10:34-7.

tries. Gladstone, the 'Grand Old Mischief-maker', [1] 'a traitor to government in a great way and a danger on an imperial scale,' [2] 'negotiates his surrenders of the empire' [3] while the race 'gapes on'. These, the wars of politics, must be among those which are rife while Hopkins is 'but by'. His sense of impotence in this field is naturally increased by being in Ireland - the 'third Remove' - and some indication of the feelings this prompted in him has already been given.

However, it seems to me mistaken to extend Hopkins' political disquiet - as Professor Gardner does - to explain the lines of the last stanza. He refers the reader [4] to a letter which Hopkins wrote to his mother about 'the grief of mind' he endured over Irish politics being such that 'I can neither express it nor bear to speak of it,' [5] and certainly Hopkins did several times in 1885 utter his despair, but his letters of that year are much more concerned with the themes of obscurity and of personal desolation. To Baillie he speaks of, 'beginnings of things, ever so many, which it seems to me might well have been done, ruins and wrecks,' [6] and says, 'I see no ground for thinking I shall . . . ever succeed in doing anything that is not forced on me.' [7] He tells Bridges that, 'There is a point with me in matters of any size when I must absolutely have encouragement as much as crops rain.' [8] Again, 'if in any leisure I try to do anything I

1 RB p.257, July 30th, 1887.

2 RB p.300, February 23rd, 1889.

3 RB p.210, March 24th, 1885. In 1880 Hopkins made an especially virulent attack on Gladstone (q.v. FL pp.293-4).

4 Poems, p.288.

5 FL p.170, March 2nd, 1885.

6 FL p.255, April 24th, 1885.

7 FL p.256.

8 RB pp.218-19, May 17th, 1885.

make no way.' [1] Finally - and, it seems to me, conclusively - he writes,

> I can scarcely believe that on that [metre] or on anything else anything of mine will ever see the light - of publicity nor even of day . . . if I could but get on, if I could but produce work I should not mind its being buried, silenced and going no further; but it kills me to be time's eunuch and never to beget. [2]

It is this obscurity and sterility to which the final stanza of the poem refers. The phrases 'dark heaven's baffling ban' and 'hell's spell' suit these themes more readily than they do Hopkins' pain over politics (he does not suggest that he might ever involve himself in politics, there is nothing 'baffling' about his inability to do anything about the Irish situation). Professor Gardner's explanation also takes no account of the word 'breeds' which relates the ideas of the last stanza to the maieutic image of the second, 'wife to my creating thought'. Two further objections follow on the grounds that 'wisest' ill-describes disquiet at political manoeuvrings and the idea of incompleteness contained in 'a lonely began' does not accord with an interpretation of the stanza as a reference to Irish troubles [3] but it does relate to the poet's sense of failed creativity. The connection is strengthened by his letter to Baillie about 'beginnings of things' which are but 'ruins and wrecks'. In the light of this, the last stanza is about Hopkins' inability to produce anything of his own ('hell's spell') and about his conviction that what he did produce would never be published ('dark heaven's baffling ban'). He must either 'hoard this unheard' - keep this to himself - or feel that his

1 RB p.221, September 1st, 1885.

2 RB pp.221-2.

3 for references to Hopkins' feelings about politics in letters of 1885, see (to his mother): FL p.166 'these unspeakable nationalist papers', FL p.170 'grief of mind etc., FL p.171 'do not let us talk politics, it kills me, especially under the present Prime Minister,' & (to Baillie): FL p.257 'Mr. Gladstone ought to be beheaded on Tower Hill' etc.

pleas are disregarded ('heard unheeded'). Sterility, then, couples itself with isolation, and the poem's lament is a joint one, that he is 'a lonely began', unable to communicate or produce.

In my first chapter I pointed out the way in which Hopkins' fear that his creativity would fail was present with him even in his university days. What was new in Ireland was not the fear but its intensity - an intensity which was the consequence of his being frustrated in his aspiration towards valuable religious service and his turning to his creative impulse as the only way of justifying himself. His daily academic duties were arid: he must write books, must write papers, must write poems - yet he had no strength.

The fear that his creative ability had come to an end is several times expressed during his life. At St. Beuno's in 1874 he is sorry that his talent for musical composition seems to be finished. [1] In 1878 we have a more muted sense of failure: his Oxford parish work leaves him 'a good deal of time' but he manages to do very little with it, [2] and at Liverpool in 1881 'Every impulse and spring of art seems to have died in me, except for music, and that I pursue under almost an impossibility of getting on.' [3] At Stonyhurst in 1883 'I am always jaded, I cannot tell why, and my vein shows no signs of ever flowing again,' [4] and 'the impulse to do anything fails me or has in it no continuance.' [5] The pessimism deepens in this year. He tells Dixon 'I see no grounded prospect of my ever doing much not only in poetry

1 FL p.127, September 20th, 1874, to his mother.

2 C p.16, October 5th, 1878.

3 RB p.124, April 3rd, 1881.

4 RB p.178, March 26th, 1883.

5 RB p.183, July 26th, 1883.

but in anything at all,' [1] and says to Baillie, 'I try, and am even meant to try in my spare time . . . to write some books; but I find myself so tired or so harrassed I fear they will never be written.' [2] In Ireland after scarcely two months how he wishes he could get on with his play! [3] (St. Winefred's Well) in fact, he has long been 'at a standstill'. [4]

In 'Thou art indeed just, Lord' this sense of frustration finds utterance in the image of castration - he is 'Time's eunuch', sexually maimed. The image is a striking one and since it is not an isolated reference the issue of sexuality in Hopkins' later poems merits further discussion. We have become accustomed, after Freud, to find the source of psychic energy in sexuality; to be mistrustful of any attempts to thwart or restrain it; to suspect that someone's conscious explanation for his actions may be belied by unconscious impulses of which he is unaware. As a celibate priest - one especially zealous in his efforts at self-discipline - and a poet, Hopkins is particularly vulnerable to the clumsy application of these ideas. It may save him from this if the reference in 'Thou art indeed just, Lord' is set in perspective.

As Dr. Pick points out [5] the idea is Biblical in origin. In St. Matthew's gospel we read, ' . . and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.' [6] This

1 C pp.108-9, June 25th, 1883.

2 FL pp.251-2, January 14th, 1883.

3 RB p.191, April 16th, 1884.

4 RB p.197, August 21st, 1884.

5 Pick, op. cit., p.124.

6 Matthew, 19:12.

image enabled Hopkins to express that sense of conflict between his just wish to live a different kind of life to the one he was leading in Ireland and his determination to keep the rule which had taken him there.

The same phrase occurs three other times in his prose work: in the Retreat Notes for 1889 already cited and in correspondence with Bridges, In the first of these letters (September 1st, 1885) he says, 'it kills me to be time's eunuch and never beget.' [1] In the second, two-and-a-half years later, 'Nothing comes: I am a eunuch - but it is for the kingdom of heaven's sake.' [2] In other words, because of the life in Ireland which his particular dedication to Catholicism has brought him he is unable to finish satisfactorily any work he embarks on - and that is like being impotent, he says.

Hopkins habitually identified the processes of composition with those attendant on birth. Thus of Dixon's poems he writes, 'It is sad to think what disappointment must many times over have filled your heart for the darling children of your mind.' [3] He says that 'the artist's most essential quality: masterly execution' is 'a kind of male gift' a 'begetting one's thoughts on paper,' [4] then he qualifies this, 'the mastery I speak of is not so much the male quality in the mind as a puberty in the life of that quality,' and Whistler's genius 'has not yet come to puberty.' [5] Dixon wants to publish Hopkins' poems and the latter asks, 'with what grace could you, a

1 RB p.222, September 1st, 1885.

2 RB p.270, January 12th, 1888.

3 C p.8, June 13th, 1878.

4 C p.133, June 30th, 1886.

5 C p.133.

clergyman of the Church of England, stand godfather to some of the stanzas in that poem?' [1] Hopkins' poems, too, relate the processes of thought to those of reproduction. When the tall nun of the Deutschland calls out Christ's name it is 'birth of a brain' (stanza thirty). England, as we have seen, is 'wife to my creating thought', 'wooed' by his heart which in turn 'breeds' words. In 'To R.B.' the mind receives inspiration as if it were being fertilized and then carries an idea as if in pregnancy. The failure to make, then, as 'Thou art indeed just' shows, is a failure of the life-force.

This poem is a disputation against that failure. It turns the energy of agony which is felt in 'No worst, there is none' and 'I wake and feel' and 'Carrion Comfort' into a petitioning urgency which will brook no denial. God is reasoned against as the causer of sterility.

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

Like Jeremiah (who provides the poem's epigraph [2]) the poet is the just man arguing the age-old grievance that the righteous suffer and sinners are rewarded in their stead. In everything he tries he is

1 C p.31, October 31st, 1879.

2 Jeremiah 12:1.

disappointed, thwarted, defeated by his friend, and that after a life-time's devotion. That such strenuous labour meets only frustration when the lascivious effortlessly flourish only exacerbates his feeling of impotence. Everywhere there is life, organic, moving, but he is an unnatural thing deprived of the vital force and incapable of breeding 'one work that wakes'.

It will be seen how strong the procreative imagery is here - strong, that is, even in its distortions. The idea of 'Time's eunuch' is replaced by that of stillbirth implicit in the mention of works which do not wake, and we have a parallel to the 'spell' and 'ban' of 'To seem the stranger'. The complaint is twofold: he cannot produce, he cannot publish what he has produced. As the image has to change in 'My own heart let me have more pity on' if there is to be any solution, so it does here if the petition is to be capable of answer. The notion of plants needing water still holds out the possibility of life (in a way that the image of the eunuch never could) and makes possible the final just appeal, 'Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.'

Toward this plea, which is in the nature of a suit to a judge rather than a prayer, the whole poem moves. It is an appeal prefigured in the second line, and the '<u>contentio</u>, the strain of address'[1] which Hopkins thought essential to good prose-writing is preserved here by the continual identification of the hearer, 'lord', 'but, sir', 'O thou my friend', 'Sir,' 'O thou lord of life.' There is formality in this; when the auxiliary is used, the verse is thus given a Shakespearean quality:

> Oh the sots and thralls of lust
> Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
> Sir, life upon thy cause.

1 FL p.380, October 20th, 1887, to Patmore.

The formality is tied to a new-found restraint, for four years separate this poem from the sonnets of 1885.

The theme of failed creativity is followed through in 'To R.B.' where the making of a poem is analogously the act of procreation. It is a fine piece of work, blemished only by the heavy rhyming of the sixth line (which in consequence makes too much of the alliteration there).

> 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 she 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.

'Immortal song' 'hand at work now never wrong' - the conviction an unrewarding Jesuit life in Ireland had brought to him was that poetry was for him of fundamental importance. But how far this poem is from the patriotic and Catholic justifications he had written some two-and-a-half years earlier! What we have in his letters to Patmore and Bridges is the imperialism of a late nineteenth century Catholic; what we have in the poem is a claim for the imaginative life of the soul which is completely unmarked by these concerns. The more Hopkins' letters testify that he was Victorian the more his poems evidence their separateness from the occupations of either Victorian society or its poetry. As his work became more personal, so too it became freer. Firstly to Patmore:

> Your poems are a good deed done for the Catholic Church and another for England, for the British Empire, which now trembles in the balance . . .
> . . . what marked and striking excellence has England to show to make her civilisation attractive? Her literature is one of her excellences and attractions . . . but there must be more of that literature, a continued supply and in quality excellent. This is why I hold that fine works of art, and especially if, like yours, that are not only ideal in form but deal with high matter as well, are really a great power in the world, an element of strength

even to an empire. [1]

And to Bridges:

> I say it deliberately and before God, I would have you and Canon Dixon and all true poets remember that fame, the being known, though in itself one of the most dangerous things to man, is nevertheless the true and appointed air, element, and setting of genius and its works. What are works of art for? to educate, to be standards. Education is meant for the many, standards are for public use . . . We must then try to be known . . . Besides, we are Englishmen. A great work by an Englishman is like a great battle won by England. It is an unfading bay tree. It will even be admired by and praised by and do good to those who hate England (as England is most perilously hated), who do not even wish to be benefitted by her. It is then even a patriotic duty τῆς ποιήσεως ἐνεργεῖν [to be active in producing poetry] and to secure the fame and permanence of the work. [2]

To a Catholic, a Catholic and imperialist justification, to an 'Englishman', a patriotic one; but, for himself, the example of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, a man entirely removed from public life. Professor Gardner says of him, 'Like that of Hopkins, his "war" was all "within", and in paying him this worthy homage the poet reveals the deep significance of his own stern trials.' [3] The significance shows in his identification with the lay-brother's struggles. The 'brand . . . unseen' is one which 'we wield' my italics , and Hopkins' poem is a memorial against unnoted obscurity. It contains a quiet grievance.

> And those strokes once that gashed flesh or galled shield
> Should tongue that time now, trumpet now that field.

They should, and 'On Christ they do and on the martyr may', but there is no proper recognition for those whose battles are internal ones, 'Earth hears no hurtle then from fiercest fray'. As in 'Thou art indeed just, Lord', nature enters the poem as witness; the change of landmass, the patterning of violets, the growth of trees - the physical

1 FL pp.366-8, June 4th, 1886.

2 RB p.231, October 13th, 1886.

3 Gardner, Study, vol.I, p.184.

manifestations of a living earth - contrast with Alphonsus' life, 'without event'.

> Yet God (that hews mountains and continent,
> Earth, all, out; who, with trickling increment,
> Veins violets and tall trees makes more and more)
> Could crowd career with conquest while there went
> Those years and years by of world without event
> That in Majorca Alfonso watched the door.

Here, and in the play on 'steeled' (in 'the heroic breast not outward - steeled') Hopkins insists on the merit of those who must discipline their own mundane lives, with no glorious challenge to test them.

When he put his poetry to public service, then, it was to that of a religious society not an Empire. The sonnet was 'written to order on the occasion of the first feast since his canonisation proper of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez', [1] but even here Hopkins has no public statement to make, no prophecy about the future, no large lesson to draw from the past.

It will not seem flattering to the Society of Jesus to suggest that Ireland was for Hopkins a sort of incarceration, but his superiors can scarcely be held responsible for this, nor can Hopkins himself. When he accepted Jesuit rule he renounced his freedom out of choice, and, whereas that renunciation brought indirectly the intense happiness he knew in Wales, indirectly, too, it resulted in the miseries of Ireland. He learned to live with these by avoiding in general that too close scrutiny of his conscience [2] which had gone to the making of the terrible sonnets and thus he turned as best he might from melancholy (which by its very nature threatened to perpetuate itself) to

1 RB pp.292-3, October 3rd, 1888.

2 cf. S p.262, Retreat Notes, January 1st, 1889 ' . . I began to enter on that course of loathing and hopelessness which I have so often felt before, which made me fear madness and led me to give up the practice of meditation except, as now, in retreat and here it is again.'

the sensible world which had delighted him before. That he was still capable of such delight is shown by 'Tom's Garland' and 'Harry Ploughman' and by 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire'; but both of the first two describe men in manual labour, absorbed by their tasks and able to tread 'through, prickproof, thick Thousands of thorns, thoughts', and the sensuousness of 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' is part of a recognition that temporal things fail and only faith is to be trusted. Thus, when he does find beauty, it comes virtually as a witness against him, in the bodies of men who are strong whereas he is weak, in an endlessly regenerative nature that does not founder as he does, or that only confirms by its contrast his sense of sterility.

Was Hopkins' poetry in Ireland simply the temporary product of circumstance, or does it represent a permanent development in his art? It hardly seems possible that the poet of 'No worst, there is none' could have celebrated the world he lived in with the same confidence that he showed before, but his early death makes this a matter of speculation; there was no return to duties in England, no long period in Ireland to confirm the change in him. He died happy,[1] but we must take as our image for understanding that happiness the idea of the spark in the darkness, shedding no light here and now.

1 Eleanor Ruggles, Gerard Manley Hopkins: a life, New York, 1947, Chap. 'A land of hardship'.

CONCLUSION

The circumstances surrounding Hopkins' work are singular. A small and distinctive body of poems, the products of a life marked by extremes of joy and suffering and ruled by the instructions of a religious society, finds its way to print some thirty years after the poet's death and then only because the poems have been carefully garnered by a close friend. The poems are marked by devices unusual in English verse and many are founded on rhythmic ideas which have been dormant for centuries. Moreover, they are written with an urgency and economy which suggests a mind too immediately engaged with its own excited moment to ponder large questions in any sustained way. The poet chooses as his favourite form the sonnet, an apt medium for his jets of inspiration [1] but, both in its lines and its length, sometimes extended by him so as to receive his own personal stamp. An uncommon concern with masculine beauty and a special involvement with mental anguish (close, he feels, to insanity) would seem to distinguish his work yet further. Accordingly, on first acquaintance, the reader may be - in a phrase of Hopkins' - 'rebuffed with blank unlikeness': [2] neither the life nor the poems are readily understood. The logic operating behind them is not easily grasped.

There was a logic in both, however, as it has been my purpose to show; and once this has been understood the comments of some critics seem merely bizarre. Such is J. Hillis Miller's 'In the end Hopkins finds that poetry is not trivial or neutral but, like other positive ways of affirming self-hood, a means to damnation.' [3] That this view

1 RB p.270, January 12th, 1888.

2 S p.123.

3 J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth Century Writers, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963, p.335.

is entirely mistaken should, I think, be apparent from my last chapter, but such an attitude does more than misjudge simply a part of Hopkins' life, it takes away coherence from the whole. Accordingly the abruptness of 'In the end, Hopkins finds . . . ' needs to be opposed now.

Of all the patterns in Hopkins' life that of the development of his poetic theory evolves most smoothly. It has its beginning, I have suggested, before Hopkins joins the Jesuits in the idea that there are forms which strike the mind 'with a conception of unity which is never dislodged', [1] and that a work of art's essential nature is expressed in the idea of form penetrating matter. In his ideas about art Hopkins has much in common with Pater but for Pater form is fixed only in the art-work, everything else is in flux; and Hopkins is directly opposed to him in this. For the undergraduate, form exists in the external world as something to be explored and when, as a young Jesuit, he reads the medieval schoolman Duns Scotus he is confirmed in the view that form constitutes a link between the physical and the immaterial. Hopkins' poetry is thus inseparable from his world-view, for both make form, or 'inscape' as Hopkins call it, expressive of a thing's essential nature - be that thing tree or sonnet - and all natures are summed up in Christ.

In what I have called his fallow years, Hopkins develops his idea of poetry as something which carries the essential nature of ordinary language, 'the inscape of speech', [2] and to this end he develops 'the peculiar beat' [3] he experimented with as an undergraduate which is, at the end of the period, enfranchised as 'a regular and

1 J p.120.

2 J p.289.

3 RB p.24.

permanent principle of scansion.' [1] He calls it Sprung Rhythm and he values it because it helps him to use the rhythms of everyday speech. Since it is the spoken language, the communal language, which he employs, archaic diction - some special inherited language of poetry - has no place in his attempt, but he draws heavily on what may be learnt from other poets about patterning sound and particularly from the Welsh bardic poets of the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries who teach him cynghanedd. In later years Hopkins increasingly thinks of poetry in musical terms but, once his principles have been firmed in the years of silence, there is little further development in his thinking: poetry is ordinary speech purged of dross, he tells his brother Everard in 1885 [2] and each poet, he tells Patmore one year later, ', [3] is unique in his attempt to do this.

There was no sudden change, then, in Hopkins' poetic theory nor was there any volte-face in Hopkins' thinking about the place poetry should occupy in his life. As long as he was fully engaged in his studies or in his priestly duties poetry had to be fitted in as time allowed but when, in Ireland, his daily labours seemed to him to have little point, writing poetry - like writing books and essays - is a way of redeeming days otherwise wasted. Plainly throughout his life Hopkins made writing verse difficult for himself because inspiration cannot be summoned at will as he seemed to want, but the idea that Hopkins thought he would be damned for the attempt is insupportable. (His symbolic burning of his early work was a gesture that had its place at the time as expressing his single-mindedness, but which

1 RB p.45.

2 TLS, December 8th, 1972, p.1511.

3 FL p.370.

had no wider significance than that.) Moreover the idea is at odds with his obvious disappointment at failing to produce more and his fear, present in him even as a young man at Oxford, that he might indeed fail altogether. I return to this theme in a moment.

There was no sudden change in either his poetic theory or his view of poetry, nor was there in his attitude to the Society of Jesus. When he wrote, near the end of his life, that he had never wavered [1] he told the truth, as far as we are in a position to judge it. His feeling on first joining the Society that 'it is . . . God's will for me as I most intimately know' [2] is not cancelled by the anguish he so often felt in Ireland. Indeed it was only because that sense of doing God's will remained so strong with him (and obedience had made him unhappy) that he felt so anguished: 'God's most deep decree / Bitter would have me taste,' he thought. The rule he had given himself to was, as far as he was concerned, incontrovertible. Of course, anyone who sacrifices his individual liberty as Hopkins did, who is prepared to be told where to go and what to do, is then under an inevitable tension between personal will and adopted discipline. Inevitably there will be times when the two do not coincide, and at such times discipline involves obedience. Hopkins' period in Ireland was the only time when this tension became extreme and obedience became really hard for him, but to suggest that his misery was incapable of relief by change of duty would be to misinterpret his earlier life.

It is important not to confuse this issue of obedience which involved Hopkins relinquishing control, with that very personal one over which he had little control to begin with, namely that of

1 S p.261.

2 FL p.235.

artistic inspiration. I have already indicated above that he made things hard for himself, but that he was anyway fearful from his university days that his creative impulse would fail him. He wrote poetry fitfully, and then in small compass (as his fondness for the sonnet attests); he found it hard to write in towns, hard to write when bearing responsibility, and difficult to finish work not completely organised in the first rush of inspiration. Being a Jesuit affected this pattern only incidentally (inasmuch as it provided him with conditions more, or less, difficult for composition). His general wish to remain unknown, though justified by him on spiritual grounds and - as I have said - deriving from his feeling of vulnerability, is entirely in keeping with this fear of being unable to produce: public attention would have been an extra burden on him, its possible hostility and capriciousness he resented in advance.

I have so far resisted here the idea that 'in the end' Hopkins came to any new discovery about the nature of his poetry. However, there plainly were changes in the substance of his work and it remains to indicate in this summary how far the notion of gradual development may be applied to these, and to what extent some of the features in his verse are due to changed circumstance.

In my first chapter I suggested there was a continuity between Hopkins' early awareness of himself as a perceiver and that awareness as it is shown in his mature nature poetry, and particularly in 'The Windhover'. I also suggested that we could trace the evolution of his mature work over a number of years by referring to images recorded in his Journal which are later adopted in his poetry. However that quality which distinguishes his post-Deutschland nature poetry is the synthesis which he makes between visible beauty and moral purpose: God's grandeur is not exclusively aesthetic or moral, it is both.

This development in Hopkins is gradual and is traceable to that idea of form whose evolution I have already outlined above: it is the logical issue of such a world view. However, though nature was a rich vein in Hopkins it was not one to be worked usefully forever and it does carry with it a limitation in scope. Hopkins' nature is beautiful, and that beauty includes the humble nature of weeds and bluebells and dragonflies just as much as the grand nature of cloud- and sea- and landscape, but it does not include 'nature red in tooth and claw'. Nature's vicious, destructive, bestial part has no place in his poetry because Hopkins is intent on seeing the grandeur of God and thus his world-view will not easily sustain the idea of an active malign presence outside man: the devil is remote for Hopkins, evil is in man's soul. Although in his prose he recognises that some things seem to do only harm he is not very ready to explore this difficulty. The questions Blake puts of 'The Tyger' - questions about the moral nature of the universe - are, understandably, not asked by Hopkins:

> Did he smile his work to see?
> Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

If there is in Hopkins' view of nature a selective or idealising tendency which acts rather to define the character of Hopkins' understanding than to damage the poetry, the same tendency when it is evident in his poems about men of action is a severe limitation. He judges them in terms of their role as Ideal Man; they either fulfil it as God's handsome creatures (the handsomeness being moral as well as physical) or else fail and show their failure by despoiling God's world. Hopkins' poems show little interest or insight into individual character (the exception to this rule being 'Felix Randal').

The view thus presented of man and nature (of which man is part) allows of little development because it admits discord only

between what is and what might have been; the answer to the problem why this discord should be is always a ready one: man is culpable. The varieties of human experience are not adequately accounted for under such a head, however, and it is when Hopkins deals with the problem of transience that we see him outgrow the limitations so imposed. His sense of transience and change, so unruffled in his undergraduate years, becomes increasingly a difficulty for which he can scarcely find an adequate answer. His first major attempt - 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' - is untypical in that it finally resolves the problem by making death beautiful; elsewhere the precariousness of all physical life is cause for increasingly anguished lament. In his attempts to reconcile this sorrow with the idea that 'Christ minds' and that every hair of the head is numbered there are presages for the inner struggles of the mind which Hopkins is involved in in Ireland where he is again trying to reconcile things seemingly irreconcilable.

In his view of nature and man and his preoccupation with transience the principle of gradualism still applies just as much as it does to the evolution of Hopkins' poetic theory. However, circumstance plays a part in this evolution and that part is central when he moves to Dublin. Would Hopkins have celebrated the natural world with the sort of intensity we have in his Welsh poems if he had never been posted to St. Beuno's? It seems unlikely - Wales always had a special attraction for him. Would he have written more if he had not been given work in the cities of the north? Almost certainly; for he felt his poetry was stifled there. It is also true that as far as his time in Ireland is concerned many of his poems are in their complexity a direct consequence of the unique problems he had to face there. One is reminded here of Wilfred Owen's comment from the trenches during the First World War:

> Tennyson, it seems, was always a great child.
> So should I have been, but for Beaumont Hamel. 1

There is no such admission from Hopkins, and there was no such single watershed in his life, but altered circumstance did force change upon him in Ireland. There is this much in his growth as a poet that is involuntary: that the greatness of his greatest Irish poems derives from his being in circumstances which were not of his choosing and which were quite alien to him. Those sonnets come from the clash between his complete determination to live a full and useful life in the service of his faith and the over-burdening work which he came to see as the near-complete frustration of that aim. Had he been less exacting, less intense, less determined, they could not have been written; and in this one may contrast him with Arthur Hugh Clough whose urbane, slight smiling irony is not so much the weapon of satire as a way of keeping possibilities open, of allowing that, while one alternative is wrong, a too fervent involvement with another may be equally mistaken. In marked contrast Hopkins was, in respect of his beliefs, totally committed.

1 Wilfred Owen, Collected Letters, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell, London, 1967, p.482.

Appendix

THE POETRY OF WILLIAM BARNES

Hopkins' affection for the Dorsetshire poet William Barnes is well shown in letters to Bridges, who did not share his enthusiasm, and to Coventry Patmore, who did. Hopkins admired Barnes' independence and originality, [1] but it was his 'naturalness' which struck him most.[2] Hopkins makes several comments to the effect that Barnes' most admirable quality is just this one: that his poetry comes from nature, from real rural life. [3] This is true not just of his language and his images but also, 'His rhythms are charming and most characteristic: these too smack of the soil.' [4].

Barnes' poetry thus casts an oblique light on Hopkins' own. In many respects their objectives were similar, but what a comparison between them re-emphasises is the degree of alone-ness in Hopkins' life, and the energy behind his spiritual purpose. Hopkins' strength is taut and solitary; Barnes draws on the life of a community and his poetry is an easy sharing in its untroubled ways.

The parallels between the two men are striking. Both were priests (Barnes, an Anglican), both lived retiring lives, both knew languages other than their native one, and both were interested in philology (in 1854 Barnes produced a Philological Grammar). Barnes experimented with Welsh verse forms, so did Hopkins; Barnes believed that 'Speech was shapen of the breath-sound of speakers, for the ear

1 FL p.370, October 6th, 1886.

2 cf. FL p.371.

3 cf. RB pp.87-8, August 14th, 1879, & RB p.236, October 28th, 1886.

4 FL p.371.

of hearers, and not from speech-tokens (letters) in books' [1] - Hopkins would have agreed enthusiastically; and likewise Barnes held that '. . . The beautiful in nature is the unmarred result of God's creative or forming will . . . the beautiful in art is the result of an unmistaken working of man in accordance with the beautiful in nature.' [2] The similarities are so striking that Geoffrey Grigson suggests that Barnes stimulated Hopkins' interests in Welsh and Anglo-Saxon and in a re-vitalised English [3] but the evidence for this is not conclusive.

Barnes was a countryman, and the marks of this are clear in his work, not simply in the Dorsetshire dialect in which so much of it is written, but in his sense of community. Barnes enjoys the lives of people as he enjoys their surroundings. Their work is a bond -

> The bwoy is at the hosses head
> An' up upon the waggon bed
> The lwoaders, strong o'earm do stan'
> At head, an back at tail, a man
> Wi' skill to build the load upright
> An bind the vwolded corners tight;
> An' at each zide o'm sprack an strong
> A pitcher wi' his long-steu'd prong.
>
> ('Hay-carren')

There is no friction between Barnes' role as poet of an agricultural community and his concern for the loveliness of a consecrated nature, and it is this almost complete absence of disharmony which is so characteristic of his poetry.

> In dying autumn; lovely are your bow'rs
> Ye early-dying children of the year
> Holy the silence of your calm retreat.
>
> ('Rustic Childhood')

Hopkins' nature poetry is that of an ecstatic observer ('Look

1 quoted, Introduction, Selected Poems of William Barnes, ed. Geoffrey Grigson, London, 1950, p.16.

2 ibid., p.35.

3 cf. ibid., p.29.

at the stars!') whereas Barnes' shares the same life ('An' sleep did come wi' the dew'): there is a common rhythm which man may not interrupt without violating the natural order,

> Ah! zome do turn - but tidden right -
> The night to day, an' day to night;
> But we do see the vu'st red streak
>
> O mornen, when the day do break
> Zoo we don't grow up peale an' weak
> But we do work wi' health and strength
> Vrom mornen drough the whole days length
> An' sleep do come wi' the dew.

Death takes its place within this pattern; it comes, as the dew comes, at the appointed time, and Barnes is firm that 'God above / If we be true' will

> . . . teake us into endless rest
> As sleep do come wi' the dew.

Barnes' equanimity comes from the fact that the cycle does go on repeating itself, and in the strength of that order is the strength of his poetry. There is a benevolence underlying eternity, evincing itself first in nature and thence in faith,

> If winter vrost do chill the ground
> Tis but to bring the zummer round
> All's well a-lost where He's a vound
> Vor if 'tis right for Christes seake
> He'll give us more than he do taeake.

The agrarianism here attests to the fact that the mainstream of Victorian life has passed him by. In the 'Sonnet: Rural Nature' 'vice' is the property of 'the noisy town' and it is to the countryside that the poet must flee, as much for moral health as peace of mind. There could be no clearer statement of this antagonism to distant cities than the famous 'My Orcha'd in Linden Lea' where the countryman conceives of the city as producing only venality and pollution,

> Let other vo'k meake money vaster
> In the air o' dark-roomed towns,

and, pushed to extremes, this mistrust of any kind of urban sophisti-

cation results in a proud independence,

> I had no call vor han's to bring
> Their seav'ry dainties at my nod.
>
> ('Blessens-a-left')

If this stops short of smugness or complacency it is because it is defensive, a response to the dimly apprehended threat of urban living where the cities are growth-points of a change that must be for the worse.

It would be unfair to suggest that this parochialism was the only consequence of Barnes' seclusion, however. At best it issues out in lines of fine lyric simplicity,

> I knew you young, and love you now
> O shining grass, and shady bough
> . . . .
> O rain-bred moss that now dost hide
> The timber's bark and wet rock's side
> . . . .
> O winter moss, creep on, creep on
> And warn me of the time that's gone
>
> Green child of winter born to take
> Whate'er the hands of man forsake.
>
> ('Moss')

It is the simplicity of one not caught up in the anxieties and complexities of the age. Barnes said that he had written only one poem 'with a drift' ('The Times', written against the Chartists);[1] for the most part his verse is freed from the more oppressive, more characteristic features of the nineteenth century milieu as it is from the limitations of reactions against them. Neither medievalist nor aesthete, suffering neither uncertainty nor ennui, any nostalgia he feels is for the immediate past and it is felt only because the pall over the cities is just faintly visible, a threat - though a slight one - to the security of his 'rural nature'.

1 cf. Poems, ed. Grigson, p.27.

INDEX OF WORKS CONSULTED

Dates refer to editions used and are not necessarily dates of first publication. An asterisk denotes that a work has been referred to in the study, even if briefly.

Works by Hopkins

Manuscripts

* MS A, a book of poems in Hopkins' handwriting compiled by Robert Bridges, now held on deposit in the name of Lord Bridges in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

* MS B, a book comprising fair copies made by Robert Bridges and other poems in Hopkins' own hand. Bodleian MS. Eng. poet d 149.

* MS H, a collection of papers which came into Robert Bridges' possession after Hopkins' death. Bodleian MS. Eng. poet d 150.

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(i) Collections

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(ii) Single items

a) A letter dated May 8th sent from Elgin House, Highgate School to Professor Muncke, German Master there, published by Anthony Bischoff in The Month, November 1972, pp.342-3.

b) A letter dated Aug 12th, 1881 and sent from St. Joseph's, 40, North Woodside Road, Glasgow apparently to the Roman Catholic Bishop of Liverpool; published by H.C. Sherwood in The Times Literary Supplement, September 4th, 1969, p.984.

* c) Two letters dated November 5th, 1885 and December 23rd, 1885, sent from, respectively, Clongowes Wood College, Naas, Ireland, and University College, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin to Everard Hopkins; published by Anthony Bischoff in The Times Literary Supplement, December 8th, 1972, p.1511

d) Two letters dated Lady Day 1887 and March 31st 1887, sent from, respectively, Monasterevan, Ireland and University College, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin to Dr. Michael F. Cox; published by the editor in Studies, Spring 1970, pp.22-25.

e) Two letters to his father; one from Stonyhurst dated Dec 23rd 1871; one from Castlebar, County Mayo dated July 5th. Four letters to Katherine Tynan dated Nov 14th 1886, June 2nd 1887, July 8th 1887 and Sept 15th 1888 and all sent from University College, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin.
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