

**The Poetics of Difference: Woman, Death, and Gender
in the Work of Gerard Manley Hopkins**

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

097 52614 7

Thesis L6167

Kaye Kossick

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Department of English Literary and Linguistic Studies
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
October 1995**

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the representation of women and the gender principles in the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins and situates his perceptions of "masculinity" and "femininity" within a cultural, historical and literary context. A selection of his less canonical poems and prose is discussed and re-evaluated in the light of feminist and psychoanalytical theory. In particular, the binarisms that fracture the representation of woman in Victorian art and literature and the issue of woman's alterity and subsequent association with death are identified and analysed.

The thesis is organized into a tripartite introductory section, ten chapters and a conclusion. The first section of the introduction offers a broadly-based socio-historical and theoretical examination of the gender principles and their origin. Part II of the introduction focuses on Hopkins and his society, examining Victorian cultural views of gender difference and the construction of masculinity. The third introductory section gives specific attention to Hopkins's theory of creativity and its relation to the gendering of genius and aesthetic production.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3, offer detailed critical consideration of the deep psycho-sexual ambivalence towards woman, and the carnal materiality she embodies, in Hopkins's early poems: "Il Mystico", "A Voice from the World", "Heaven-Haven", "I must hunt down the prize", and "A Vision of the Mermaids".

Chapter 4 gives a contextualized consideration of asceticism as an expression of the masculine will-to-power, and examines Hopkins's attraction to violence and the suffering of martyrs. The following three chapters explore the themes of death, violence and martyrdom, with particular emphasis on the issues of female sexual purity and masculine aesthetic virility in Hopkins's verse drama on the murder of St. Winefred, *St. Winefred's Well*, and its accompanying chorus: "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo".

The final three chapters of the thesis elucidate Hopkins's aesthetic and personal response to the Virgin Mary and the "feminine" psychological characteristics and virtues she represents. Chapter 8 assesses the status of the Roman Catholic Church and the Virgin Mary in nineteenth century England, and also suggests that the image of the Madonna and the fictive "angel in the house" are symbolically conjoined in opposition to the Tennysonian view of "Mother Nature" as a monstrous destroyer. This is followed, in Chapter 9, by a consideration of the view of Mary presented in Hopkins's prose. Chapter 10, the final chapter, presents a detailed analysis of Hopkins's Marian poem, "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", in which the ambivalence and anxiety that surround his concepts of selfhood, masculinity and the body of the mother are examined.

In conclusion, I argue that Hopkins's aesthetic and spiritual vocations are intimately linked with his notion of actual selfhood and are subject to the profoundly damaging influence of conflicting role expectations and mythic paradigms of masculinity and femininity which cannot be reconciled, either within the individual psyche, or in the society in which they are nurtured.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
Abbreviations	5
Introduction:	
i. Engendering Opposition: The Gender Principles at War	6
ii. Sexing the Self: Hopkins and Victorian Views on the Making of the Male	23
iii. Hopkins, Art, and Gender	43
1. Exorcising the Body: "Il Mystico" and the Flight from the Mother	63
2. Fish, Flesh, or Foul?: Woman and the Feminine in "A Vision of the Mermaids"	83
3. The Nun's Retreat and the Rake's Progress: "A Voice from the World", "Heaven-Haven", and "I must hunt down the prize"	105
4. "Plumed Passionflowers" and the "Ghastly Glories of Saints": Hopkins and Martyrdom	126
5. "Cheer whom though?": Caradoc, Hopkins, the Archetype and the Anti-hero in <i>St. Winefred's Well</i>	148
6. Death and the Maidens of <i>St. Winefred's Well</i>	167
7. The Killing of Winefred	183
8. Our Lady of Paradox: Mary, the One Woman Without Stain	200
9. The Virgin Mary in Hopkins's Philosophy and Prose	222
10. Inspiring Innocence: "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe"	247
Epilogue: "The Horror and the Havoc": Last Lines from the Front	274
Bibliography	288

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
Abbreviations	5
Introduction:	
i. Engendering Opposition: The Gender Principles at War	6
ii. Sexing the Self: Hopkins and Victorian Views on the Making of the Male	23
iii. Hopkins, Art, and Gender	43
1. Exorcising the Body: "Il Mystico" and the Flight from the Mother	63
2. Fish, Flesh, or Foul?: Woman and the Feminine in "A Vision of the Mermaids"	83
3. The Nun's Retreat and the Rake's Progress: "A Voice from the World", "Heaven-Haven", and "I must hunt down the prize"	105
4. "Plumed Passionflowers" and the "Ghastly Glories of Saints": Hopkins and Martyrdom	126
5. "Cheer whom though?": Caradoc, Hopkins, the Archetype and the Anti-hero in <i>St. Winefred's Well</i>	148
6. Death and the Maidens of <i>St. Winefred's Well</i>	167
7. The Killing of Winefred	183
8. Our Lady of Paradox: Mary, the One Woman Without Stain	200
9. The Virgin Mary in Hopkins's Philosophy and Prose	222
10. Inspiring Innocence: "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe"	247
Epilogue: "The Horror and the Havoc": Last Lines from the Front	274
Bibliography	288

Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to Professor Kelsey R. Thornton, who encouraged and guided me beyond the brink of beginning, and to Professor Terry R. Wright who encouraged and guided me towards completion. For their invaluable friendship and vitally sustaining encouragement I must also thank Helen Boden, John Goodridge, Graham Rendall, Neil Sedgewick and Vanessa Stafford. A special debt of gratitude is also owed to John for his expert advice and editorship and to Vanessa for combining meticulous proof-reading with critical insight and the undeserved gift of praise. Finally, my thanks and gratitude are given to Keith Tulip for his unfailing support and superb management, and to my mother, Patricia Churcher, for teaching me to read.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Facsimiles** *The Early Poetic Manuscripts and Note-books of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile, ed. with Annotations, Transcriptions of Unpublished Passages and an Introduction by Norman Mackenzie, Norman H. MacKenzie (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989).*
- F. L.** Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins Including his Correspondence with Coventry Patmore, ed. C.C. Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn., rev. and enlarged, 1956).
- J** *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Humphrey House and Graham Storey (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).*
- L, 1** The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, ed. C.C. Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1935; 2nd imp. rev., 1955).
- L, 2** *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, ed. C.C. Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1935; 2nd imp. rev., 1955).*
- Poems** The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Norman Mackenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
- Selected Letters** *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Letters, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).*
- S** *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Christopher Devlin, S.J. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).*
- OED** *Oxford English Dictionary, 12 vols, and Supplement, with 4 vols, 1927-86.*

Unless otherwise stated, all ellipses are mine.

Notes appear at the end of each chapter.

For a full list of works used see the Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

I

Engendering Opposition: The Gender Principles at War

Male and female created he them.
The Book of Genesis

For distinguishing between male and female in mental life we make use of what is obviously an inadequate empirical and conventional equation: we call everything that is strong and active male, and everything that is weak and passive female.
*Sigmund Freud*¹

Myths are nothing but a ceaseless, untiring solicitation, an insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in an image, eternal yet bearing a date, which was built of them one day as if for all time. For Nature, in which they are locked up under the pretext of being eternalized, is nothing but Usage. And it is this Usage, however lofty, that they must take in hand and transform.
*Roland Barthes*²

The demand that men and women should behave *differently* from each other appears to be both primordial and pandemic in human society. The mythic images of masculinity and femininity through which societies are organized have, as Barthes suggests, a time and place of origin. But like the graven figures in Larkin's "The Arundel Tomb",³ the verifiable socio-historical "facts" are transfigured by age whilst the mythic image abides, a floating signifier that is interpreted by succeeding generations as a sign of eternal value and eternal verity.

The English middle-class society of the mid-nineteenth century, into which Gerard Manley Hopkins was born, particularly required that men and women should "recognize" themselves in such powerfully gendered images, and was both a deep cultural repository and a generator of figurative gender paradigms. No work of gender construction exists in a vacuum, however, and Victorian conceptual images of "masculinity" and "femininity" are as intertextualized as any other work of art or fiction. In this, the first part of a tripartite introduction, I shall therefore attempt to present a general, though necessarily condensed, "history" of gender division and

sexual hierarchy, with particular reference to the association of woman with Nature and the flesh, and woman's alterity. The second part of the introduction will consider the perceived nature of sexual difference, most especially the concept of "manliness," in the context of Victorian society and in Hopkins's life. In the final introductory section, I will examine Hopkins's theories of creativity and his response to art in order to demonstrate how his aesthetic and his notion of selfhood are linked and framed within the gendered discourses of his time.

* * *

To engage in discourse on the criteria and psychological reverberations of the terms "masculine" and "feminine", is also to be aware that in so doing one may add substance to the illusion of their concreteness. What is intended as a deconstructive analysis of binary thinking may therefore risk perpetuating the separatist patriarchal attitudes which propel all human beings straight from the womb into a psychic war zone. Gender has nevertheless been "a standing classificatory fact in our thought-world" and we have all been trained to live with an "habitual consciousness of two sex classes".⁴ Every theory of culture, every theory of society, the whole conglomeration of symbolic systems, discourse, art, religion, the family, language, are all, as Hélène Cixous points out, ordered around

hierarchical oppositions that come back to the man / woman opposition that can only be sustained by means of a difference posed by cultural discourse as "natural," the difference between activity and passivity.⁵

The phenomenon that Mary Ellman has called "thought by sexual analogy"⁶ dominates Western culture and to examine any society or individual without also attempting to identify and evaluate the controlling power of this overwhelmingly influential distinction on modes of thought and expression is therefore to ignore the pervasive presence of an ideological system that profoundly affects all human beings, for all of their lives. The attempt to articulate some of the myths and conventions which have become embedded in the sedimentary layers of our mental life and language, is not only a "necessary condition for growth toward liberty"⁷ but an

essential step towards a greater understanding and compassion for those, like Hopkins, who have been crushed under the aetiological imperative which assumes the "*necessity* of the expression of the biological in the psychological".⁸

Marilyn French has remarked that conventions of thought and image are a form of shorthand, which like DNA form the building blocks of prejudice. In the "conventional" model of gender difference, given as epigraph to this introduction, Freud is clearly unhappy at the inadequacy of available terminology, for as he admits: "pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructs of uncertain content".⁹ In plain fact, the "content of 'pure masculinity and femininity' is not just uncertain but impossible" for these concepts have "no scientific content".¹⁰ They are socio-historical constructions which "refer to no real essence in the world"¹¹ and therefore do not exist except as ideas, yet as ideas they bear an ancient and venerable history which firmly binds Victorian conceptions of woman and the feminine principle to the great creation myth of Genesis.

In the beginning, as the beginning is described in the first chapter of the book that has determined world history and our conceptual lexicon more than is possible to know, the Bible offers us a spectacular paradigm of consummate masculine power. In an unimaginably vast display of creative action, as given in the first book of Genesis,¹² God took hold of the formless chaos of matter, "pulled that passive and amorphous mass into shape and divided and classified it, giving form to substance".¹³

In the Biblical model of creation, life itself is wrested and shaped out of division, contrast and subjugation, and the pattern of human society is founded on the same premise of duality, opposition and hierarchy. Darkness and light, water and sky, earth and stars, trees, fruits, herbs, and all living things are brought into being to be placed under the dominion of God and the human male. The "sign of human dominion is naming, language", and Eve, "like the other animals, is given her name, according to her function, by dominant man".¹⁴ Judaic myth aligns Nature and woman both in their generative function and in their subjection to the male, who bears the image of God and therefore the image of perfection. If Eve differs from Adam it is

perceived as a falling off, a deviation from the human, which is male. As Simone de Beauvoir states in her powerful and influential study of gender and women's subjugation, *The Second Sex*, woman *is* secondary to man for she is

defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other.¹⁵

De Beauvoir intended her title ironically, but Arthur Schopenhauer, the originator of the phrase, plainly did not. As Battersby notes, Schopenhauer's essay "On Women" published in 1851 expresses his "undisguised contempt for that half of humanity that he dubs 'the second sex'". Not only did Schopenhauer despise women for their supposed intellectual inferiority, he also found them physically aberrant:

It is only the man whose intellect is clouded by his sexual impulses that could give the name of *the fair sex* to that undersized, narrow-shouldered, broad-hipped, and short-legged race.¹⁶

Pagan Greek philosophy displays the same phallogocentric perspective: Aristotle, whose teachings formed the basis for the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, calls woman "*arren peperomenon*"¹⁷ a mutilated or imperfect male and in Plato's *Timaeus*, the "demiurge mixes the souls of humankind in his bowl, 'and ... being of two sexes, the better of the two was that which in future would be called man'".¹⁸ Ancient writings thus help to delineate the boundary lines of gender and lay the foundations of the "rigid forms of symbiosis, of fixed psychological complementarity" which have so far dominated relations between women and men.¹⁹ These conventions survive in part because the Classics form part of a body of knowledge and mythology shared especially by educated Victorian males. The Judaeo-Christian and Classical traditions were prominently shared by Hopkins, who considered himself an "Aristotelian Catholic" (*L*, 1, p. 95, 1879), and was also, of course, a Professor of Greek.

The argument that aligns woman with passive receptivity, weakness and moral febrility, and the male with "spirituality, strength, and mind or reason" takes diverse forms and "the values assigned to each category shift and alter", but in Marina Warner's view, women "usually fare the worse".²⁰ Hélène Cixous attempts to analyze "patriarchal binary thought" and offers the following list of oppositions:²¹

Activity / Passivity
 Sun / Moon
 Culture / Nature
 Day / Night
 Father / Mother
 Head / Emotions
 Intelligent / Sensitive
 Logos / Pathos

Toril Moi argues that each of these oppositions can be interpreted as a hierarchy where the "feminine" side is always seen as "the negative, powerless instance" and that the "hidden male / female opposition with its inevitable positive / negative evaluation can always be traced as the underlying paradigm".²² In this unequal contest, the masculine principle will always be the victor over the feminine and, as my thesis will demonstrate, Cixous is right to perceive a culturally imposed linkage of death, passivity, and silence with woman.²³ Woman is held paralysed in the web of language which engulfs her, language which is not hers but which binds her in a "chain of metaphors, metaphors that organize culture" and say that she

is matter to form, immobility / inertia to the march of progress, terrain trod by the masculine footstep, vessel While man is obviously the active, the upright, the productive.²⁴

The need for such elaborate machineries of restraint nevertheless indicates the existence of a real or imagined threat, and to suggest, as Moi seems to do, that the "feminine" side is *always* seen as "powerless," contradicts evidence that the masculine desire to subjugate the female and the feminine principle may be driven by profound anxiety. Patriarchal law may have rendered women *culturally* mute and relatively powerless, but the conventional equation of maleness (as a biological "given," not simply "masculinity") with the power of abstract reasoning and intellect, and of femaleness with instinctual materiality, must also identify women with the most mysterious and immense forces of natural fertility and the earth.

Camille Paglia locks the imagined linkage between the mindless forces of nature and woman into a bizarre contradiction with her claim that not only is mythology's identification of woman with nature "correct", but that woman's terrifying powers make it *essential* that men should protect themselves from her:

Male bonding and patriarchy were the recourse to which man was forced by his terrible sense of woman's power, her imperviousness, her archetypal confederacy with chthonian nature Woman is the primeval fabricator, the real First Mover. She turns a gob of refuse into a spreading web of sentient being, floating on the snaky umbilical by which she leashes every man.²⁵

In actual life, as opposed to Paglia's imagination, women are neither a class nor a separate species, and no woman is necessarily any nearer or further from nature (however that may be defined) than any man. Paglia's contorted representation of woman as a reptilian ensnarer of helpless men appears to ignore this fact and merely cannibalizes many of the mythic images that have been constructed to reflect masculine *perceptions* of female power.

Whether or not it is in any sense true, the *idea* of woman's "mystic continuity with non-human processes"²⁶ and forces is strikingly pervasive. Margaret Mead's extensive anthropological research is therefore interpreted by Dinnerstein as an affirmation that it is the "more visible, sustained drama" and more "conspicuous mystery" of woman's role in procreation that makes her seem to be a "center of magic non-personal force".²⁷ It is this sense of compelling regenerative magic that Nina Auerbach detects glimmering in the most dispossessed and seemingly passive of Victorian fictional heroines.²⁸ However, the same visible procreative functions of menstruation, pregnancy, parturition and lactation, may also mean that woman is more negatively associated with the animal and the sub-human. Like Nature, her presumed confederate, woman's powers arouse profound ambivalence in the male, in whose dualistic perception she may appear to be both magical and inferior, miraculous and feral, representing as she does the fertility goddess and the *femme fatale*, the beneficent mother and the alien Other.

In her important analysis of the woman / nature equation, Sherry Ortner argues that every culture asserts distinction between "the operation of nature and the operation of culture (human consciousness and its products)" and that it is always "culture's project to subsume and transcend nature". Because women are seen by men as being "*closer* to nature than men", Ortner suggests that "culture, (still equated relatively unambiguously with men) ... sees women as being more rooted in, or

having more direct affinity with, nature." They are thus perceived as representatives of a "lower" and less "transcendental" order of being than men.²⁹ In the first instance, of course, some control over nature was essential to human survival, but the "attitudes explicit in Genesis ... became, in one form or another, the dominant myths of human existence." Dominion over nature increasingly became "the proper moral relation to it"³⁰ and because of woman's putative association with nature, the "proper" moral relation between the sexes became one of polarization, inequality and oppression. Obeying this philosophy of difference and domination, what is virtuous in the human is "taken to be what minimises links to nature and the animal" and the ideals which are held up as truly worthy of a human life exclude those aspects

associated with the body, sexuality, reproduction, affectivity, emotionality, the senses and dependence on the natural world, for these are shared with the natural and animal; instead they stress reason, which is thought to separate humans from the sphere of nature.³¹

Woman's animal body seems to "doom her to mere reproduction of life" while the male asserts his creativity "externally, 'artificially,' through the medium of technology and symbols ... he creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables—human beings".³²

Thomas Aquinas, "The Light of the Church", official theologian of the Jesuits and a man so constricted by his "girdle of chastity" that he could "not even speak to a woman except under compulsion",³³ stressed the transcendent focus and "more perfect reason" of the male, and taught, as Augustine had taught, that the vilest and "bitterest" form of slavery was for a man to be in thrall to the fleshly allure of the female (woman was presumably already enslaved by her own materiality): "Nothing drags the mind of a man down from its elevation so much as the caresses of woman and the bodily contacts without which a man cannot possess his wife."³⁴

Underlying Thomist disgust is the ineradicable and disquieting truth that human beings *are* "perishable" and that the patriarchal bloodline cannot be preserved unless wives are "possessed" and legitimate heirs sired. Women's sexual power and fertility must be appropriated and controlled if "legitimacy" is to have any meaning and if what Joyce has called the "fiction of paternity"³⁵ can continue to be sustained.

French argues that it was the "divide and conquer" gnostic ethos of the early Christian church which enabled such control and defeated the supremacy of the feminine principle by "splitting it in two".³⁶ But as Elaine Pagels's study of sexual and moral attitudes in the emergent Christian Church amply demonstrates, the issue is complicated by the fact that early Christian Gnostics were decidedly not of one mind and some interpreted the "allegorical" account of the Creation in the book of Genesis, and therefore the position of women in the Christian order, in diverse and unorthodox ways.³⁷

First causes are in any case notoriously evanescent and impossible to prove, and whilst some Church fathers may undoubtedly have been hugely instrumental in creating a heritage of institutionalized misogyny, there are also convincing arguments which suggest that antagonism and ambivalence towards the feminine may be drawn from the mother's breast in earliest infancy. Ortner, for example, agrees that misogyny is a global phenomenon and that there is a split in perceptions of woman, but can find no current or even vestigial anthropological evidence to support the idea of antediluvian wholeness or a lost age of matriarchal supremacy.³⁸ Freudian theorist Melanie Klein detects a deep ambivalence towards the mother in the earliest stages of infant development when the child will feel violent hatred towards the mother's body, and in his "aggressive phantasies" will wish "to bite up and to tear up his mother and her breasts, and to destroy her also in other ways".³⁹ Dinnerstein also traces the phenomenon of misogyny back to familial first causes with her contention that the reason for women's universal subordination is that in the earliest stages of life a woman is very often the infant's main contact with the natural surround,

the centre of everything the infant wants and feels drawn to, fears losing and feels threatened by. She is the center also of the non-self, an unbounded, still unarticulated region within which the child labours to define itself ... She is this global, inchoate, all-embracing presence before she is a person, a discrete finite human individual with a subjectivity of her own.⁴⁰

Women's subjective humanity can hardly be fully recognized by those who have been parented from birth by women and may therefore be incapable of reconciling the

magical all-embracing presence of infancy with the living, individual, independent woman. Women may then be relegated to a state of "quasi-humanity" whilst "unqualified human personhood can be sealed off from the contaminating atmosphere of infant fantasy and defined as male".⁴¹

The deep emotional strife and antagonism towards woman which seems to be the legacy of infant dependency is not healed or reconciled in adulthood, and in two of the works I have selected for analysis, Hopkins presents strikingly different evocations of the mother as sky goddess and as earth witch. In "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" (see Chapter 10), for example, he creates a sublime vision of the mother as a numinous all-embracing global presence similar to that described by Dinnerstein; yet in "Il Mystico" (see Chapter 1) the desperate wish of the poet / persona to escape the polluted touch of the daemonic earth-mother seems the manifestation of a Paglian revulsion against the "grossness of procreative nature".⁴²

In Hopkins's work, as elsewhere in literature and throughout history, it is apparent that "the 'conventionally feminine' has been constructed antithetically" and that woman has been endowed with the double visage of Nature, and vice versa.⁴³ There is "no figurative image of woman", Simone de Beauvoir has declared, that does not call up at once its opposite:

she is Life and Death, Nature and Artifice, Daylight and Night. Under whatever aspect, we always find the same shifting back and forth, for the nonessential returns necessarily to the essential. In the figures of the Virgin Mary and Beatrice, Eve and Circe still exist.⁴⁴

However, such a dualistic vision of woman is believed by Freud to be the sign and the symptom of a "civilized man", for a man who has learnt to repress his original incestuous instinct towards the mother (as most "civilizations" demand) will also have learnt to regard the "sexual act basically as something degrading, which defiles and pollutes not only the body".⁴⁵ Love and sexuality are divided by Freud, as they are by art, into "sacred and profane (or animal love)" and are therefore mutually exclusive in the split minds of men, for "where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love".⁴⁶ Freud maintains that coalescence of the "two currents of

affection and sensuality" is rare and that a man needs to debase the object of his desire before he can develop "full potency":

he does not venture to satisfy [his sexual aims] with a woman he respects. He is assured of complete sexual pleasure only when he can devote himself unreservedly to obtaining satisfaction, which with his well-brought-up wife, for instance, he does not dare to do. This is the source of his need for a debased sexual object, a woman who is ethically inferior, to whom he need attach no aesthetic scruples.⁴⁷

Here the defining phrase, "well-brought-up", connotes much of the fear, shame and ignorance that middle class brides brought to the nuptial bed, and although he acknowledges the importance of cultural constraints in making these the prerequisites of the "marriageable" bourgeois female, Freud's analysis offers both a rationalization and a striking reflection of the typically Victorian binarism of the stainless angel and the filthy whore.

The virginal bride and the "fallen" woman are the figurative descendants of Mary and Eve, the prototypical "good" and "bad" mothers, who personify the elevated and debased aspects of the feminine and act as representative icons of the split feminine principle. French designates the symbolic poles over which they preside as the "inlaw" and "outlaw" aspects of perceived femininity. Eve, the first law-breaker, incarnates the "outlaw" feminine principle which reflects the innermost configurations of male anxiety and is "associated with darkness, chaos, flesh, the sinister, magic and above all, sexuality."⁴⁸ Because it is aligned with the wild energies and destructive capabilities of nature, the "outlaw" feminine principle is profoundly threatening to patriarchal power structures and signifies a descent into the maelstrom of anarchy and misrule, bacchanalian promiscuity, flux and cyclical change.

Unconstrained sex and pleasure, the prime aims of the outlaw feminine principle, are dangerously subversive of the "controlling structures" of hierarchy and legitimacy, and the "transcendent goals" of the masculine principle.⁴⁹ But, dangerous or not, society cannot survive without the fruitfulness and nurturant powers of women and the feminine principle. A process of pragmatic and symbolic taming and

"purification" is therefore necessary to ensure that when stripped of their subversive aspects and pressed into submission, the nurturant, regenerative capacities of woman and the feminine can be made to serve the interests of the patriarchy. The inlaw feminine principle is still grounded in emotion rather than thought, nature rather than culture, but it expresses the *benevolent* manifestations of nature and is founded on

the ability to give birth, it includes qualities like nutritiveness, compassion, mercy, and the ability to create felicity. It requires volitional subordination, voluntary relinquishment of power-in-the-world subordination of self to attain human harmony, meekness and tolerance.⁵⁰

Like its symbolic patroness, the Virgin Mary, the "inlaw" feminine principle represents woman on her "best behaviour", willingly taking on the ancillary role of "handmaiden" to the dominant patristic hegemony, her clipped powers dedicated to supporting the supremacy of the male. Only thus, it seems, can the female be allowed a place within the realm of culture. Her status, and the status of the feminine principle with which she is identified, nevertheless remains extremely ambiguous. As Ortner observes, woman continues to inhabit an intermediate space in the "hierarchy of being between culture and nature", she exists on the periphery or margins of culture and in every society, "the psychic mode associated with women seems to stand at both the bottom and the top of the scale of human modes of relating."⁵¹ Extremes of perception and perspective meet, fragment and reform themselves in ever more impossible shapes, in the symbolic meanings assigned to woman; thus literature, art, philosophy, religion and folk myth all deal in the currency of misogyny and all confront us with

both the subversive feminine symbols (witches, evil eye, menstrual pollution, castrating mothers) and the feminine symbols of transcendence (mother goddesses, merciful dispensers of salvation, female symbols of justice, and the strong presence of female symbolism in the realms of art, religion, ritual, and law).⁵² Feminine symbolism, far more often than masculine symbolism, manifests this propensity toward polarized ambiguity—sometimes utterly exalted, sometimes utterly debased, rarely within the normal range of human possibilities.⁵³

Symbolically situated above, beyond, or below, woman is the "embodiment of just those extremes of mysterious and intransigent Otherness which culture confronts with

worship or fear, love or loathing"; extremes made increasingly visible, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, in the art and literature of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Taxonomies and emphasis shift and change but the encoded value system whereby the male represents the fully human, whilst the female is perceived as lesser than the male and will always "seem the stranger", even to herself, is globally pervasive and strongly resistant to historical change. Indeed, there can be few Western societies that have appeared more anxious or more assiduous in their efforts to define, enforce and reify the mythic extremes of sexual difference than that reigned over by Victoria, a woman described by Jacques Lacan (in a phrase that reveals his own indebtedness to mythic stereotyping of woman as monster), as a "toothed vagina of ... immense size".⁵⁵

It is a critical commonplace that every historical period is remarked on as an "age of transition" but the nineteenth century seems genuinely distinctive as an epoch of social and sexual revolution in which God disappeared, the New Woman bicycled forth, Mother Nature wore red, and the *fin de siècle* decades of what the novelist George Gissing called "sexual anarchy"⁵⁶ offered hope of freedom from gender fascism to some, but infected others with the terror of apocalyp^{se} and Armageddon. Tumultuous and irrevocable social and scientific changes undoubtedly were effected within the span of that amazing century, not least those connected with the ground-breaking work of Sigmund Freud, whose psychoanalytic theories represent in part "an unveiling of the illusory idols of the Gentiles, an undoing of their culture".⁵⁷ As Susan Handelman suggests, Freud was a subversive iconoclast and therefore an enemy of the patriarchate, but the man who "killed" the Father in *Moses and Monotheism*, destroyed "the giver of the law" only to *become* the giver of the new law of psychoanalysis.⁵⁸ Freud's law was not necessarily hostile towards women,⁵⁹ and we have seen his unease at the "inadequate empirical and conventional equation" to which he feels compelled to make recourse when faced with the "great enigma" of sexual difference, but in addition to Freud's apparent *need* to separate the sexes in the mind as well as in the body, the key word here, Heath suggests, is "empirical" for this indicates that there is a measurable and *real* difference in the psychic nature of men

and women, that men and women are "*observably* active and passive so we might as well use 'male' and 'female', 'masculine' and 'feminine' as synonyms for these characteristics".⁶⁰ Societally nurtured behaviours thus begin to seem the expression of an innate mental configuration and we are again faced with "a dominant representation of men and women as active and passive".⁶¹ Freud wished to avoid the divisive essentialism that Heath attacks, but is nevertheless regarded by some as the most "influential modern conduit" of binary thinking.⁶² It may be important to remember, however, that the text acts as a conduit for the flow of ideology in which writer and reader are submerged. If the essential rightness of binarism and gender hierarchy are "read" as Freud's prime meaning then this may reflect as much on the needs of those who do so as of Freud's own needs and beliefs.

Reactionary conservatism on the part of those who hold power and do not wish to lose it is understandable, but there may be much more at stake than the desire for political power in holding woman at an artificially inferior and subservient level. The obvious corollary to the supposed passivity and irrationality of woman and the mental characteristics deemed feminine is that the conventional construction of femininity also defines what masculinity is *not*. Women must act according to the given conventions of feminine behaviour otherwise the implied form of *her* Other, of the male, will be lost. These "conventions include the expectation of difference, of hysterical behaviour: women are expected to be women. Women faint, lose their senses, burst into tears, are desperate and feverish: female behaviour".⁶³ Women are required to behave according to male expectations, including the "expectation of difference, of hysterical behaviour", because, says Stephen Heath, man's "identity depends on it, he needs the *opposite* sex as guarantee of his". The threat that accompanies such instability and dependency is that "man's being is fringed with darkness, the menace and unknown of the female".⁶⁴

If, as Heath argues, masculinity is anxiously arbitrary, and not essentialist or naturally "given"⁶⁵ then cultures which vigorously uphold the idea of male dominance may impose such intense ideological pressures on the male to *be*

dominant, especially over the volatile and affective (*ergo* "feminine") aspects of his own nature, that the strain, as we shall see in the case of Hopkins, may force the battered psyche to the terrifying edge of utter collapse.

[NOTES]

- ¹ Sigmund Freud, "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis (1938)", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), vol. XXIII, p. 188.
- ² "Myth Today" (1972), pp. 155-6; quoted in Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Picador, 1987), p. 61.
- ³ Philip Larkin, "An Arundel Tomb", *The Whitsun Weddings* (London: Faber, 1985).
- ⁴ Benjamin Whorf, "Thinking in Primitive Communities", *Language, Thought, and Reality*, ed. John B. Carroll (Cambridge, Mass., 1967 [n.pub.]) p. 69; quoted in Marilyn French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, (London: Sphere, 1983) p. 11.
- ⁵ "Castration or Decapitation?", *Signs*, 7, 1, (1981), 41-45 (p. 44).
- ⁶ *Thinking About Women*, (London: Virago, 1979), p. 6.
- ⁷ Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (London: Harper Colophon, 1977), p. 3.
- ⁸ Stephen Heath, "Difference", *Screen*, 19, 3, (1978), 51-112 (p. 62).
- ⁹ "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis" (1938), *Standard Edition*, vol. XXIII, p. 118.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 36.
- ¹² There are significant differences in image and tone between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, however. The priestly writer responsible for Genesis 1 is strongly masculinist in attitude, but the more ancient fragments of text in Genesis 2 appear so much more sympathetic towards women that Harold Bloom has suggested that the Yahwist author responsible was actually female. For an extended study of the subject, see Rosenberg and Bloom, *The Book of J: Translated from the Hebrew by David Rosenberg, Interpreted by Harold Bloom*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1990).
- ¹³ Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976; repr. London: Picador, 1990), p. 41.
- ¹⁴ French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, p. 14.
- ¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H.M. Parshey, (London: David Campbell Ltd., 1992), p. xl.
- ¹⁶ "On Women" from *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. in *The Essential Schopenhauer*, (London:

Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 107; quoted in Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), p. 107.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals* § 2, 3; quoted in Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Sake of Heaven: Women, Sexuality and the Catholic Church*, trans. by Peter Heinegg, (London: Penguin, 1991) p. 187.

¹⁸ As quoted in Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 64.

¹⁹ Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, p. 2.

²⁰ Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 64.

²¹ *La Jeune Née* (in collaboration with Catherine Clément), (Paris: UGE, 10/18, 1975), p. 115; quoted in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 104.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.

²³ For a comprehensive full length study of the relationship between death, art and woman, see Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

²⁴ Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", p. 44.

²⁵ *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 12.

²⁶ Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, p. 105.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105. See also Mead, *Male and Female* (New York [n.pub.], 1949).

²⁸ *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (London: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 17.

²⁹ "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?", in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. by Rosaldo and Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 67-87 (pp. 72-3). See also Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

³⁰ French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, p. 15; see also *Nature, Culture and Gender*, ed. by MacCormack and Strathern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

³¹ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 71.

³² Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?", p. 75.

³³ *Malleus Maleficarum*, part 2, q. 1; quoted in Stuart Schneiderman, *An Angel Passes: How the Sexes Became Undivided* (London: New York University Press, 1988), p. 106.

³⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (II/II q. 151 a. 3 ad 2); quoted in Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, pp. 188-9.

³⁵ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Modern Library, 1934), p. 205.

³⁶ *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, p. 23.

³⁷ *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988).

³⁸ "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", p. 70.

³⁹ Klein and Rivière, *Love, Guilt and Reparation: Two Lectures by Melanie Klein and Joan Rivière* (London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1937), p. 61.

⁴⁰ *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, p. 93.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁴² Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, p. 12.

⁴³ James Eli Adams, "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw: Nature and the Feminine in Tennyson and Darwin", *Victorian Studies*, 33, 1 (1989) 7-27 (p. 8).

⁴⁴ *The Second Sex*, p. 196

⁴⁵ "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of Love II), (1912)", *Standard Edition*, vol. XI, p. 186.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁴⁸ French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

⁵¹ Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", p. 85.

⁵² But see Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 65, on the difference in status of actual women and allegorical figures.

⁵³ Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", p. 86.

⁵⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 19.

⁵⁵ Seminar 11 February 1975, *Ornicar?* n 4, p. 94; quoted in Heath, "Difference", p. 61.

⁵⁶ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990), p. 3.

⁵⁷ Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 133.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Showalter remarks on Freud and Breuer's compassionate and respectful study of the female hysteric, *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), but appears to suggest that Freud later succumbed to the psychical rigidity that he regarded as typical of women. See *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), pp. 145-164. Freudian psychoanalytic theory has nevertheless been interpreted in a more liberating and pro-feminist sense by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose. See Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974); *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose

(eds), (London: Macmillan, 1982).

⁶⁰ *The Sexual Fix* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 140.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994), p. viii.

⁶³ Heath, *The Sexual Fix*, p. 27.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ See also Scott McCracken, "Male Sexuality and the Gender Industry", *Gender and History*, 7, 1 (April 1995), 106-112.

INTRODUCTION

II

Sexing the Self: Hopkins and Victorian views on the Making of the Male

Nurse did not pack my dumb-bells.
*Gerard Manley Hopkins, in a letter home from Balliol to his mother*¹

A perfect organization for crippling me exists.
*Gerard Manley Hopkins, in a letter to Robert Bridges*²

Take your places, Ladies and Gentlemen ...

Victorian art, literature and photography have bequeathed us a heritage of superbly constructed images of "manly" men and "feminine" women. Daguerrotype portraits of the married Victorian middle-classes offer a visual allegory of gender politics in which the male is typically posed as a whiskered pillar of bourgeois paternalism, fixed into position as "head" of the household. His inverse "opposite," the woman, is usually seated for she functions as the "heart" of the home and the intuitive feminine heart is literally and symbolically lower than the reasoning head (cf. "The head of the woman *is* the man", 1 Cor.11:3).³ In shape, she is all curves to his masculine linearity: he a dark monolith, she a soft-skinned, white-bosomed hour-glass.

Neither image is, of course, either natural or true. Indeed, much of the paradoxical duplicity of Victorian attitudes towards sexuality and gender is inherent in such images. For example, the corsets or stays, worn by all "respectable" Victorian women, have become a cultural and historical symbol of "straight-laced" sexual repression and rigid morality, and yet were specifically designed to emphasize the female erogenous zones of breast and buttock by distorting the body into an exaggeratedly baroque form, which one commentator said resembled "an ant with a slender tube uniting the bust to the haunches".⁴ The effect was to produce such a

swelling amplitude of bosom and hips that woman's putative biological destiny and emotional *raison d'etre* as nurturing wife and mother might seem self-evident. The tiny waist produced by tight-lacing, could also of course mimic the youthful slenderness of a virginal body not yet thickened and stretched by pregnancy and childbirth. This contradictory, but desired, combination of armoured virtue and brimming fertility, impenetrable chastity and boundless nurturance, actually emulates an ancient pattern of "inlaw" chaste constancy personified in Western cultures by the Virgin Mary.

Only Mary herself could eternally sustain such an impossible union of total denial and absolute promise, however, and other women, even "angelic" wives were hooped in whalebone and steel so that their bodies, those "poor, leaky vulnerable bag[s] of skin and bone and flesh so despised by churchmen"⁵ might appear to deny the fleshly concupiscence and loose morality commonly attributed to the female. According to the teachings of Ignatius Loyola, who created the rule by which Hopkins lived, Satan and woman had much in common:

the enemy [Satan] is as a woman in being weak perforce of circumstances, but strong of bent and purpose of will. For as it is the way of a woman in a broil with any man to lose heart and take flight when the man shows her a bold face; and contrariwise, if the man begins to lose courage and take to his heels, the anger, vengeance, and ferocity of the woman runs very high and passes all measure.... There is no wild beast so fierce on the face of the earth as is the enemy of human nature in the following out of his wicked intention with ever such enormous malice.⁶

Hopkins does not, indeed cannot, argue against Loyola's imputation that women are by nature weak, cowardly, malicious, vindictive, intemperate and wicked—that women are, in fact, "the enemy" and that we may recognize the ways of the devil by learning the ways of women. The scrupulous logic of his response is in many respects ~~ways~~ more devastatingly negative, for he contends that the devil "ought not *to* have been compared to a woman, for woman is naturally weaker than a man" (S, p. 205, ca 1882). If the devil were really like a woman then, so Hopkins implies, he could never have had the strength of character and intellect to prevail.

I should say at once that Hopkins's sexual politics are not exceptional for his time and certainly not for his circumstances. As we have seen, many of the "giants" of Western theology tried to make discrimination against women seem the only just way of dealing with ontological facts, arguing in the words of St. Augustine that "It is the natural order among human beings that women be subject to men and children to their parents. For it is a matter of justice that the weaker reason be subject to the stronger."⁷ John Ruskin also stressed the duty of "ladies" to their "Lords"; woman was "made to be the helpmate of man", and though encouraged to "rule" the home, her greater weakness made it unsafe for her to leave its protecting environs:

their separate characters are briefly these. The man's power is active progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war and for conquest ... But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle and her intellect is not for invention or recreation, but sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision.... Her great function is praise; she enters into no contest ... By her office and place she is protected from all danger and temptation.⁸

Ruskin thought that women should be dignified as queens, but queens nevertheless destined to willing servitude:

Your fancy is pleased with the thought of being noble ladies, with a train of vassals? Be it so; you cannot be too noble, and your train cannot be too great; but see to it that your train is of vassals whom you serve and feed, not merely of slaves who serve and feed *you*.⁹

Acknowledging the contemporary evidence of male contempt for women, visible despite Ruskin's periphrastic medievalism, even Queen Victoria, the great "toothed vagina" herself, felt the inferiority of her sex when she complained to her eldest daughter in 1859: "That despising of our poor degraded sex (for what else is it, we poor creatures are born for Man's pleasure and amusement) ... is a little in all clever men's natures; dear Papa even is not quite exempt though he would not admit it."¹⁰

Because he remained celibate for all of his life and lived in the close company of men for the greater part of it, Hopkins's role as a priest and confessor may indeed have allowed him to see little but the the gulf between the "angelic" Marian female persona and women's "demonic" reality. Fastidious in all matters and repulsed by the "sordidness of things" (*F. L.*, p. 226, 1865), the contrast between the pure ideal and

the actual cannot have been more bleakly apparent than to Hopkins in confessional, privy to the whispered sins and shameful intimacies of guilty women; the entire exchange of sin and absolution conducted under the iconic gaze of the flawless Virgin Mother. Hopkins's professional "experience" of women was thus gained in a manner that may well have made the "virgin-whore" dichotomy actually seem real.

Perhaps in consequence, a strong moral impulse to safeguard women's moral fragility is detectable in Hopkins's revealing and instructive illustration of the proper structure of relationships between men and women in his poem, "On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People", in which he contemplates a picture of a young brother and sister:

She leans on him with such contentment fond
As well the sister sits, would well the wife;
His looks, the soul's own letters, see beyond,
Gaze on, and fall directly forth on life.

The physical positioning of the sitters offers a visual correlative of the belief that women should look to men for authoritative guidance, and that the existence of a hierarchical power relationship between the sexes is morally and socially essential. The subtext of the picture is that as adoring sister, or adoring wife, the female should be emotionally, intellectually and physically dependent on the man. The male, upon whose greater physical strength and intelligence she is naturally happy to "lean", derives his authority from God and only he has the phallogocratic right and Ruskinian "penetrative vision" to read the world directly. He therefore acts as interpreter and author of her reality for he owns both the lexicon (the "soul's own letters") and the right of creation.

The speaker in the poem further acknowledges the brother's authority over language and the female by addressing him directly as "you", while the sister is "kept at a distance from the speaker and the readers by the pronoun 'she' ... hers is to be an indirect life, whose meaning she derives through men, but secondhand".¹¹ She offers a finely drawn example of the "clinging woman" who must bind herself to the

superior strength and moral judgement of the male if she is not to collapse or to grow wild. It is his responsibility to determine what is truth, hers to conform to his judgement, to "sway" according to his will ("There's none but good can be good, both for you / And what sways with you, maybe this sweet maid"). Her world is therefore sphered in him, but his world of direct encounter, intellectual endeavour, struggle, exploration and achievement (one we shall examine in "I must hunt down the prize"), is far beyond her scope. As Coventry Patmore's inspirational guide, Swedenborg, says "The man is born intellectual, and the female is born volitional."¹² Woman, that "psychological plant of tender growth" must therefore be "protected from the ruder blasts of social life in the conservatories of civilization".¹³

What is particularly revealing about Hopkins's representation of the "ideal" male-female relationship given in "On a Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People", however, is that it represents a significantly radical re-visioning of a "real" portrait seen by him during a visit to Monsterevan in 1886. Norman MacKenzie records Fr. A. Bischoff's description of a "delicate watercolour" which shows a boy "gazing tenderly at his sister".¹⁴ In his poem, Hopkins wears the angry persona of one valiant for truth in his poem ("I bear my burning witness though / Against the wild and wanton work of men") and appears driven by a passionate hatred of "corruption" and a zealous desire to reform a lawless and licentious culture. In an attempt to re-establish the traditional and morally "correct" relationship between the sexes, Hopkins completely reverses the children's postures and changes the object and direction of the boy's gaze, thereby "making the girl seem dependent on the boy".¹⁵

In his words to Coventry Patmore on the balance of power between men and women, Hopkins's passionate wish to have women kept in a subordinate feminine role is again plainly evident in his brutally uncompromising rejection of the "pernicious" doctrine of female equality:

it is said that a wife calls her husband lord by courtesy, meaning, as I understand, only by courtesy and 'not with the least consent of will' to his being so. But he *is* her lord. If it is courtesy only and no consent then a wife's lowliness is hypocrisy and Christian marriage a comedy, a piece of pretence ... now pernicious doctrines and practice are abroad and the other

day a wretched being refused in church to say the words 'and obey': if it had been a Catholic wedding and I the priest I would have let the sacrilege go no further.
(*F.L.*, p. 310, 1883, Hopkins's emphasis)

What is important and revealing in both cases is that they appear to mark Hopkins's crossing of the ideological line that separates men who "must perforce reflect the sexism of their time" from those who "overtly support it and promote it".¹⁶

The images and arguments discussed thus far in this chapter present a semiotic key to the apparently fixed power relations between Victorian men and women, but are of course designed to disguise the ferment of male anxieties that makes such visual and formal affirmations of class and gender difference necessary. The intensity of Hopkins's antagonistic response to a shifting of the delineating limits of traditional gender positions indicates a correspondingly powerful need to re-inscribe distinct "forms" of masculine identity. Most typically representative of these forms was that of the Victorian "Christian gentleman", for "gentlemanliness" offered a desirable and "attainable condition for those who were not members of the traditional aristocracy or gentry".¹⁷ The vital interest and importance that Hopkins attached to this ideal is clear: "if the British race had done nothing else, yet if they left the world the notion of a gentleman, they would have done a great service to mankind" (*L*, 1, p. 176, 1883). As we shall see, however, the astonishing strengths and excellences demanded in pursuit of the masculine ideal may have done less than great service to Hopkins.

Gentlemanly Hopkins and the model self

Robin Gilmour remarks on the particular fascination that the idea of "the gentleman" and "its relation to the actual and ideal possibilities for the moral life in society" held for writers like Dickens, Trollope and Thackeray.¹⁸ Gilmour regards the attempts to define the physical and moral lineaments of the "gentleman" as the result of the anxiety and insecurity caused by immense social change: "It is no accident that most

of the famous Victorian definitions of the gentleman occur in the 1850s and early 1860s for this is the period when the spirit of middle-class reform was making its challenge felt within the aristocratic framework of English institutions."¹⁹ Born in the 1840s, into a thoroughly bourgeois family, Hopkins was inescapably trapped in a mesh of closely overlapping ideologies, all of which offered variations on the central ideal of manliness. Principally, however, "the new gentleman was proclaimed to be the man who was an 'aristocrat of character' not an aristocrat by birth".²⁰

Some of the "varieties of manliness" current in mid-Victorian ideology are identified and examined by Norman Vance in *The Sinews of the Spirit*. According to Vance, the core values of Victorian "manliness" were "physical and moral courage and strength and vigorous maturity ... chivalry and gentlemanliness, and moral manliness, all of which tend to incorporate ... patriotic and military qualities".²¹ Middle class men and women alike were jammed into "tightly, coercively predefined modes of feeling and action",²² but Hopkins's adolescence can only have been made more anxious by the taxonomical imperative towards "manliness" inherited from his father. The name "Manley" plus the "positively vigorous connotations" of the suffix *-ard*, related to *hard* and *hardy*,²³ constituted a public and inescapable reminder of Hopkins's duty to display the *mens sana in corpore sano* ideal of moral robustness and muscular heartiness notably championed by Thomas Hughes (creator of the schoolboy hero, Tom Brown) and Charles Kingsley.

J.A. Mangan notes that the term "muscular Christian" was used in the *Saturday Review* of February 1857 "playfully and only a little maliciously to describe Charles Kingsley's strenuous paragon who feared God and could walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours, breathed God's free air on God's rich earth and at the same time could hit a woodcock, doctor a horse and twist a poker round his finger".²⁴ Despite gentle lampooning in the *Saturday Review*, the notion that bodily health was somehow an indicator of inward good, and that febrility, disease and death were connected with spiritual malaise, prevailed.²⁵

Even John Ruskin, revered by Hopkins for his immense intellectual gifts, looked for the signs of "fineness of nature" in the physiological. The first "characteristic of a gentleman", Ruskin declared, is "that fineness of structure in the body, which renders it capable of the most delicate sensation".²⁶ Ruskin's interest was in the finely tuned response and well-turned elegance of the "thoroughbred" rather than the gallant charger. Other moral commentators were less subtle, and the jeering prejudice that this creed encouraged against boys and men not cast in the "hardy-handsome" muscular mould that Hopkins himself admired beyond measure is evident in the words of William Acton, who insisted on the moral value of team games, firmly maintained that "effeminacy" itself was a sign of sexual licentiousness, and declared that

it was not the strong athletic boy, fond of healthy exercise, who thus early shows marks of sexual depravity, but your puny exotic, whose intellectual development has been fostered at the expense of his physical development.²⁷

Because he was delicate in physique, disinclined to like team games, and a passionate lover of art and cerebral pursuits, Hopkins might certainly seem an effeminate and puny exotic to diehard masculinists like Acton. The same kind of "sexual antipathy" is evident in the apparently homophobic bias of Father Joseph Darlington, who taught at University College, Dublin, in the 1880s and claimed to have known Hopkins "well, and intimately". Robert Bernard Martin records that "two decades after the poet's death, [Darlington] still remembered 'the very slippers he wore: the kind little girls of 10 or 12 used then to wear; with ankle straps!!' [Darlington] spoke of Hopkins's delicacy and how he was too good 'for the *pioneer* roughness of the College' ... 'no one could treat him otherwise than as some delicate, highborn, fastidious lady might be treated'".²⁸ Darlington's hostility towards what he perceived as Hopkins's "effeminacy" is palpable, but as Alan Sinfield points out, the very notion of "effeminacy" is founded on misogyny, and the subsequent stigmatizing of "certain manners and behaviours ... by associating them with 'the feminine' — which is perceived as weak, ineffectual and unsuited for the world of affairs" serves to "police

sexual categories, keeping them pure".²⁹ The stoic ideal of athletic masculinity worshipped by Acton takes its terms of reference from Aristotle, who declared that effeminacy is to maleness as softness is to endurance:

Now the man who is defective in respect of resistance to the things which most men resist and resist successfully is soft and effeminate; for effeminacy too is a kind of softness; such a man trails his cloak to avoid the pain of lifting it.³⁰

Men might be called puny exotics as a form of insult but women were *expected* to be soft, puny, feeble and Other (that "foreign land", as Patmore described them), and were encouraged to remain so, for this would "guarantee" the hard resistance of the male. In *Women in American Society* (1873), Abba Gould Woolson observes the cult of invalidism amongst middle-class women in Britain and America with trenchant scorn. Woolson largely blamed male writers for offering this particularly poisoned chalice of gender stereotyping:

The familiar heroines of our books, particularly if described by masculine pens, are petite and fragile, with lily fingers and taper waists; and they are supposed to subsist on air and moonlight.... A sweet-tempered dyspeptic, a little too spiritual for this world and a little too material for the next ... is the accepted type of female loveliness. No wonder, then, that boarding schools hold the tradition that it is interesting to be pale and languishing and consumptive.³¹

Within the narrow parameters of this anorexic half-life, female self-control is displayed in stillness and starvation, in the pursuit of a condition of "ladylike" incapacity and etherialization that ultimately "tapers" off into invisibility and death. Men, however, were expected to increase, expand and exercise their physical and mental capacities in every way possible. Sulloway identifies the quasi-Renaissance ideal of "diversity in excellences" that was the sign of a gentleman; men in holy orders were not exempt and therefore had to develop "the wholesome trivium of Christian morality, courtesy, and talent".³² The female "heroine" might become so by default, by not *doing* and, eventually, by not being, but maleness and masculinity had to be proven in action.

Masculinity "within patriarchy is a temporal, linear 'program'" states Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, and a male must "find it outside of himself ... for the little

boy, masculinity is experienced as constant insecurity in face of the threat of female absorption ... what theorists label 'symbiosis anxiety'.³³ This anxiety remains to inspire the ideal of transcendence, which requires that the birth mother be rejected and "Mother" Nature opposed. The maintenance of masculinity is thus precariously posited on constant vigilance against "drowning" in the feminine.

The masculine ideal of existence as action and *doing* is exalted in Hopkins's poem "As Kingfishers catch fire, Dragonflies draw flame". Here he defines selfhood as an activity, a glorious act of self-articulation, of willed authorship; though as an obedient son of God he is careful to observe the crucial proviso that in telling of ourselves we also "tell" of our Creator and fulfil the purpose of our being, which is to "give him glory" (*S*, p. 239, ca 1885):

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*
("As Kingfishers catch fire, Dragonflies draw flame")

Selfhood³⁴ and masculinity, are not simply "givens" in Hopkins's philosophy, but are the products of a dynamic process in which the masculine will provides the strength of positiveness, of emphasis, so that being might be expressed, Hopkins says, as "the *doing* be ... where there was no freedom of will it would become mere fact; where there is will it is free action, moral action" (*S*, p. 151, ca 1881, Hopkins's emphasis). Simply *being* in the mode prescribed for women (a woman should not *do*, but *be*) is not enough for full selfhood; action is the sign of life and action is gendered as masculine: "Unless above himself he can / Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!"³⁵ In Hopkins's words, "what acts is masculine" (*L*, 1, p. 35, 1877) and to be a man requires strenuous and apparently continuous acts of self-making through which he must forever climb to a yet higher level or "cleave of being" (*S*, p. 151, ca 1881).³⁶

Masculinity is thus perceived as "a becoming", a process as opposed to a perceived feminine "being" or state of passivity. The "masculine modality par excellence" is based on contest and opposition: "I come to know myself only by

knowing that something else is not me and is to some extent opposed to or set against me."³⁷ Hopkins's description of the world's "rebuff" suggests his awareness of the potential for deepest existential isolation and chilling loneliness inherent in the masculine process of self-making: "when I compare my self, my being-myself, with anything else whatever, all things alike, all in the same degree rebuff me with blank unlikeness" (*S*, p. 123, 1880). In Lacanian terms, however, this awareness of "lack, gap, and splitting" will propel the child into the realm of the symbolic, where language (the Word) will attempt to "fill the lack" that the awareness of separation from the mother and the world as a whole opens out.³⁸ Patriarchal culture therefore "revisions" lack by valorizing masculine pride in "unlikeness", in difference of sex and distance from nature. Masculinity is viewed as "something to be achieved and to be experienced as triumph over nature ... it is linear in orientation and directed towards goals. Competition and power are the watchwords":³⁹ self-indulgence, sensuality and "feminine" irrationality are the enemies:

Manhood or Manliness ... strength of Character in relation to the resistance opposed by Nature and the irrational passions to the Dictates of Reason; Energy of Will in preserving the Line of Rectitude tense and firm against the warping and treacheries of temptation.⁴⁰

This state of tensile nervous stress is what Hopkins calls being "strung to duty" ("The Wreck of the Eurydice") but the goal of self-mastery was for him made infinitely harder by an apparent conviction that his personality and his nature were destined to pull in opposite directions, and that God had deliberately placed him in the "state of the damned in hell" who endure an "irremediable divorce between desire and choice".⁴¹

Hopkins once declared all thought to be "an effort at unity" but in his complex theories of selfhood he emerges as a compulsive separatist. Anticipating Freud, he creates a model of the self made up of elements which are almost by definition antithetical. That which Hopkins calls the "bare self" or "personality" is determined prior to existence. This bare self is then clothed by "nature: essence or inscape" which is spontaneous and instinctively follows its own desires and affections.

Personality, more often referred to by Hopkins as the "elective will", is unique in every individual and determines destiny in this life and beyond.

In terms of gender, the elective will (the *arbitrium*) is masculine because of its vital controlling function over "nature". Because it is volitional, involuntary, reactive rather than proactive, the "nature" or affective will is linked with the feminine and with the heart. Hopkins's own heart, he tells us in "The Wreck of the Deutschland," is capable of spontaneously uttering truth, of greeting Christ with passionate love, but is also "unteachably after evil". Hopkins shows the heart's instinctive response to Christ in the spontaneous "feminine" outflowing of *jouissance* in "Hurrahing in Harvest". Two years after, he endorsed the "rapturous love's greeting" of unrestrained warmth and passion that should be integral to our response to Christ: "love for Christ is enthusiasm for a hero, love for a bosom friend, love for a lover". But Hopkins went on to make a statement which is crucial to an understanding of why he foregrounded the elective will over all else: "Love of God means the preferring his will to ours: it is the love of a subject for his ruler." As Hopkins admits, this is a "cold sort of love" which relies on total submission and self-control, but it is the love by which, he asserts, "we shall be saved" (*S*, p. 48, 1879).

Christopher Devlin believes that the metaphysical wedge that Hopkins drives between desire and choice is alien to Catholic spirituality but entirely consistent with the Victorian code of ethics that viewed duty as "a sort of Kantian categorical imperative" and took it for granted that conscious inclination and duty would always be in conflict.⁴² However, Hopkins did not believe that everyone suffered from the "hateful siege of contraries" that he detected in himself. In "The Handsome Heart", for example, he shows how the "unschooled" (i.e. undisciplined, uncoerced and untrained) heart of a young boy falls lightly and instinctively to its "own fine function of obedience", and as I shall argue, his female martyrs are gifted with the same enviable quality of innate moral percipience.

Elsewhere, however, the association of woman with nature, sex and the flesh,

and thus with fallibility, is maintained. According to John F. Danby there is no doubt about it: "the flesh is ... the female principle".⁴³ Hopkins implicitly acknowledges psychomachia, the conflict between flesh and spirit, as a contest between masculine and feminine principles *and* between male and female in his comments on Eve ("herself a tree of life") and the capitulation of Adam's elective will:

the wise assailant attacks the weakest spot, therefore Satan tempted Eve the woman.... The Serpent always puts his temptation in the plural, as though it were a joint act that he was aiming at and to this the Scripture agrees, making Adam's sin the consummation of Eve's, something as though *her's were the consent of the lower nature in one man*, which is not culpable, or not decidedly and mortally so, till the higher consents too. (S, p. 68, 1880, emphasis mine).

Hopkins's metaphoric scheme is strikingly similar to that of the nineteenth century evolutionist Joseph Le Conte who makes the same linkage of "animal nature, sin, and undifferentiated womanhood". In Le Conte's influential view, man

is possessed of two natures—a lower, in common with animals, and a higher, peculiar to himself. The whole mission and life-work of man is the ... complete dominance of the higher over the lower. the whole meaning of sin is the humiliating bondage of the higher to the lower ... man must enter upon a higher *spiritual* evolution to find its goal and completion.⁴⁴

The supremacy awarded to the masculine or Apollonian faculty of intellectual control is axiomatic in much of literature and it is important to note that Darwin, Le Conte, and Hopkins share a common textual source of origin in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. As Gillian Beer notes, the one book that Darwin "never left behind during his expeditions from the *Beagle*" was *The Poetical Works of John Milton*. Thus, not only were ideas shared and exchanged through the cultural stock of "shared discourse" but "metaphors, myths, and narrative patterns" were also exchanged and employed by scientists, philosophers and poets alike.⁴⁵

In Le Conte's "progressive" version of Milton's "right rule", scriptural antifeminist arguments are "scientifically" endorsed by the Darwinian or evolutionist psychiatry which dominated the English scene in the period from 1870 to the First World War.⁴⁶ Hopkins was not quite an enthusiastic Darwinian (see *F. L.* p. 128, 1874) but his emphasis on the rule of the elective will nevertheless melds

ancient patristic precedent, Miltonic sexual politics and the basic tenets of Darwinian psychology. In his view, mastery of the feminine "lower nature" was essential to the ordering of actual relationships between men and women and within the "small commonweal" of the self. If the outlaw energies of the feminine principle burst through the strait-jacket of repression then chaos is indeed come again, for according to Victorian psychologists, the dissolution of masculine will was the harbinger of a second "fall" into madness.⁴⁷

Manhood and Madness

The influential Victorian psychiatrist Henry Maudsley speaks for his age, sex, and class when he claims that in the development of the individual as well as in the evolution of the race, there was ascendancy from "sensation, passion, emotion, reason, to the highest phase of mental force, a well-fashioned will".⁴⁸ Sanity depends upon the assiduous cultivation of the intellectual will and is thus equated with the Victorian ideal of "manliness" and the masculine principle. Like Shaw's Octavius, Maudsley and his contemporaries seem to have regarded "the world as a moral gymnasium built expressly to strengthen character in".⁴⁹

Daniel Tuke, another Victorian psychologist and doctor, called the vital controlling faculty "inhibitory power" and maintained that "either because of hereditary taint or diseased cerebral development, some individuals could not control their lower nature and emotions".⁵⁰ Madness was a sign of regression and dissolution, the sign of the "impotent and unfit", and more ominously, as Elaine Showalter's powerful study demonstrates, was judged to be a characteristically female condition.

Hopkins might translate "hereditary taint" as original sin, or claim that his own elective will was well-fashioned enough, only incongruously matched with an emotional and intensely sensual nature. Whatever the theoretical interpretation, Hopkins's deep "fits of sadness" and "nervous prostration" (*L*, p. 193, 1884) place him in the Darwinian psychologists' "borderland", an amorphous area bounded by the

dark woods of madness. This joyless terrain nurtured the "seeds of nervous disorders" and was the province of those who, "without being insane, exhibit peculiarities of thought, feeling, and character which render them unlike ordinary beings and make them objects of remark among their fellows".⁵¹

Measured against this excessively conformist yardstick, Hopkins's contemporary reputation for eccentricity and his belief in the existential "unlikeness" of all human beings, might immediately qualify him (and many others) as a suitable case for treatment; more serious are his own feelings of depression, weakness and inadequacy in the world's moral gymnasium. Describing his "disease" to his friend Baillie, Hopkins remarked on the increasingly paralysing effects of his mental pain:

the melancholy I have all my life been subject to has become of late years ... more distributed, constant and crippling. One, the lightest but a very inconvenient form of it, is daily anxiety about work to be done, which makes me break off or never finish all that lies outside that work ... when I am at my worst, though my judgement is never affected, my state is much like madness. I see no ground for thinking that I shall ever get over it" (*F. L.*, p. 256, 1885).

The important thing to note here is Hopkins's dogged insistence on the inviolability of the controlling force of his "judgement", even in the face of incipient mental collapse. He may scrape an existence in a psychological "winterworld" (see "To R.B.") where no birds sing and inspiration does not come; but this is not because his "lower nature" has taken control, rather that reason, judgement, has been exercised to such a degree that *all* spontaneous emotions are viewed with intense suspicion and are therefore summarily stifled and repressed. Inevitably, these emotions break out in his life and in his poetry, but when they do they can emerge as profoundly negative feelings of pain and hopelessness: "My spirits were so crushed that madness seemed to be making approaches—and nobody was to blame, except myself partly for not managing myself better." (*L*, 1, p. 222, 1885). Again, Hopkins predicates selfhood on the power of self-management, thereby relating his ideas on the preservation of sanity to the key Victorian image of the self, especially the body, as "a kind of precarious economy, the site and the unit of a delicate balance of forces requiring regulation".⁵²

The fragile poise of this symbolic realm of checks and balances is always threatened "from below" by the eruption of the chthonic, irrational affective self. The "war within" is therefore all but constant, for masculine selfhood and sanity depend on dominance, control and suppression of the wayward feminine. This is not to say that Victorian men were not allowed to cry; on the contrary, the Ruskinian "gentleman" was expected to have a tender heart and a moist eye.⁵³ Newman also emphasized the sensitive forbearance of the true gentleman "who never inflicts pain" is "tender", "gentle", and "merciful". These "feminine" virtues reflect the "gentleness and effeminacy of feeling", which Newman believed was "attendant on civilization". But the man who aspired to the *beau ideal* of gentlemanly character had also to be intellectually "disciplined", accurate and steady in his "logical powers", "clear-headed", "decisive", and "forcible".⁵⁴ The primacy of "masuline" intellect and the need for overall control was never ignored: "so that the gentleman pursues a 'disciplined and tested passion,'— not the first passion that comes".⁵⁵ And needless to say, a true gentleman might weep for the sufferings of others but never for his own.

Hopkins's definition of selfhood inheres in willed action; it is constantly in process and therefore cannot be fixed, though it can of course be *stopped* by death or disabled by mental breakdown. Because he also perceived his sense of self and masculinity to be intimately bound, even dependent upon, his "mastery" of language, and therefore needed to control both the "mode and the means of production" in order to maintain the economic balance of his inward "commonweal", it was inevitable that the deepest pain, ontological confusion and despair would accompany the belief that this process had stalled or failed: "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" (*S*, p. 262, 1889). The tortured confusion of gendered images used here are all expressive of a crucial failure of design, purpose, and, above all, potency of will. Again, his

ambition is for masterful control and effective action, but to a man possessed of Hopkins's acute moral sensitivity and extraordinary gifts, the times and the life he chose to lead presented him with an insoluble contradiction of gender paradigms and an inevitable cause of grief and confusion.

In a culture which vaunted manliness, despised effeminacy, lauded the proud achievements and talents of the dominant and fearless "manly hero", it was inevitable that

manliness and Christianity should be ... uneasy together. The entertaining and healthy activism of the manly hero, whether in fact or fiction, was bound to jar with the less vivid religious imperatives: patience and heroic martyrdom, self-abnegation and the discipline of the will.⁵⁶

This conflict of values, an ideological dispute between ideals of heroic masculine action, may be figured as a contest between the requirement that moral manliness should show itself in visible, positive acts and the interiorized virtues of the "inlaw" feminine principle: obedience, silence, patience, and chastity. Public acts of self-assertion, of whatever sort, were as "unbecoming" to the Jesuit image of perfection as they were to the ideal of modest "femininity" ("brilliance does not suit us ... we cultivate the commonplace outwardly", *L*, 2, pp. 92-96, 1881). But Hopkins believed deeply in the morally educative function of art, therefore to fail to "word" God by producing "good works" could constitute a denial of God-given talent and an abdication of moral responsibility. More vitally, because Hopkins perceived the aesthetic function in terms of masculine self-making, the bafflement or breakdown of the creative process might even indicate the breakdown and fragmentation of selfhood itself.

Hopkins's apparently masculinist aesthetic philosophy has become almost as famed as his poetry and the gendered terms in which he describes the mind and the processes of genius reveal much of the way he perceived sexual difference and his own masculinity. In the final section of my introduction, I will therefore examine the highly gendered view of creativity and the role of the artist held by Hopkins and

his contemporaries, together with the gender paradoxes contained within that view. Most significantly, I wish to demonstrate how the clash of virtues described above, and inherent in the anomalous circumstances of Hopkins's double-vocation, made the full achievement of the *beau ideal* of "manliness" in art and life such a painful and impossibly contradictory ambition.

[NOTES]

¹ *F.L.*, p. 84, 1863.

² *Selected Letters*, p. 286, from a letter to Robert Bridges, October 1888.

³ Unless stated otherwise, quotations are taken from the Authorized Version of the Bible, King James translation of 1611.

⁴ Ronald Pearsall, *The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality* (London: Pimlico, 1969), p. 115.

⁵ Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 258.

⁶ Ignatius Loyola, "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits", *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*, with a continuous commentary by Joseph Rickaby, S.J., 2nd edn, (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1923), p. 73.

⁷ Leonardo Boff, O.F.M., *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expressions* (London: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 2.

⁸ John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens", *Sesame and Lilies; The Two Paths; The King of the Golden River* (London: J.M. Dent, Everyman's Library, 1970), §68.

⁹ *Ibid.*, §89.

¹⁰ Pearsall, *The Worm in the Bud*, pp. 12-13.

¹¹ Alison Sulloway, "Gerard Manley Hopkins and 'Women and Men' as 'Partners in the Mystery of Redemption'", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 31, 1 (1989), 31-51 (pp. 38-39).

¹² Pearsall, *The Worm in the Bud*, p. 74.

¹³ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 188.

¹⁴ *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by Norman MacKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 476-477. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 476.

¹⁶ "Gerard Manley Hopkins and 'Women and Men' as 'Partners in the Mystery of Redemption'", p. 35.

¹⁷ Joseph Bizup, "Walter Pater and the Ruskinian Gentleman", *English Literature in Transition*, 38, 1

(1995), 51-69 (p. 52).

¹⁸ Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 2; quoted *ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁰ Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*, (Cambridge, MA., [no pub.] 1978), p. 3; quoted in Roberta Park, "Biological thought, athletics and the formation of a 'man of character': 1830-1900", in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, ed. by J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 7-34 (p. 7).

²¹ Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 8-10.

²² Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and Minotaur*, p. 3.

²³ Norman White, "Hopkins's Women", Paper delivered at University of North Illinois, 12th April 1993, p. 2. I am greatly indebted to Dr. White for providing me with a transcript of his paper.

²⁴ As quoted in Mangan, "Social Darwinism and upper-class education in late Victorian and Edwardian England", in Mangan and Walvin, *Manliness and Morality*, pp. 135-159 (p. 137).

²⁵ This idea from Bizup, "Walter Pater and the Ruskinian Gentleman", p. 53.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁷ William Acton quoted in Paddy Kitchen, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), p. 35.

²⁸ Robert Bernard Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 420.

²⁹ Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 26.

³⁰ *The Nichomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, VII. 7, trans. Sir David Ross, London: Oxford University Press, p. 177; quoted in Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 26.

³¹ Quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 29.

³² Alison Sulloway, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 135.

³³ Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, "The Male Body and Literary Metaphors for Masculinity", in *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (London: Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 239-258 (p. 245).

³⁴ See Walter J. Ong, S.J., *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1986), for an extended treatment of this theme.

³⁵ Samuel Smiles, *Character*, quoted in Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*, p. 193.

³⁶ For an invaluable discussion of the cultural background to this idea see Sulloway, "New Nazareths

in us: The Making of a Victorian Gentleman", *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper*, pp. 115-157.

³⁷ Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, "The Male Body and Literary Metaphors for Masculinity", p. 244.

³⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 35.

³⁹ Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, "The Male Body and Literary Metaphors for Masculinity", p. 241.

⁴⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, (1825), 1884 ed., pp. 24, 128f.; quoted in Vance, *Sinews of the Spirit*, p. 47.

⁴¹ Christopher Devlin, S.J., in his introduction to Hopkins's spiritual writings, *S*, p. 118.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴³ John F. Danby, *Poets on Fortune's Hill* (London [n.pub.], 1952), p. 145.

⁴⁴ Joseph Le Conte, *Evolution: Its Nature, Its Evidences, and Its Relation to Religious Thought*, 1888-91, 2nd rev. edn (New York: D. Appleton, 1897), p. 330; quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 217.

⁴⁵ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 7.

⁴⁶ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 105.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-120.

⁴⁸ Henry Maudsley, *Body and Mind* (London: MacMillan, 1870), p. 154; as quoted in Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 105.

⁴⁹ George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman* (London: Penguin, 1952), pp. 68-9.

⁵⁰ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 106.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁵² Heath, *The Sexual Fix*, p. 14.

⁵³ Bizup, "Walter Pater and the Ruskinian Gentleman", p. 55.

⁵⁴ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. by Martin J. Svaglic, (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1960), pp. 159-161.

⁵⁵ John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols, Library edition (London: George Allen, 1903-12), XVIII, p. 80.

⁵⁶ Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit*, p. 7.

INTRODUCTION

III

Hopkins, Art, and Gender

Art has only one gender, it is masculine.
*Pierre Joseph Proudhon*¹

The mother to the child that men call hers
Is no true life-begetter, but a nurse
Of live seed. 'Tis the sower of the seed
Alone begetteth.
*Aeschylus*²

The mythic linkage of male sexual potency and the production of art has an ancient patrilineage. Ezra Pound therefore trawls a net of analogy that reaches back to the Stoic idea of the *Logos spermatikos*³ when he speculates on the "intimate connection between [man's] sperm and his cerebration". Awed by the brain's phenomenal capacity to make and present images, and not content to make the pen merely a "metaphorical" penis, Pound conflates biological procreation with abstract and textual generativity in his image of the brain as a "great clot of seminal fluid", capable of fecundating itself with intensely pressured jets of "spermatzoic thought".⁴

Hopkins's figurative synopsis of the processes of genius is less fundamentalist, though it is comparably phallogentric:

Now this is the artist's most essential quality, masterly execution: it is a kind of male gift and especially marks off men from women, the begetting one's thoughts on paper, on verse, on whatever the matter is; the life must be conveyed into the work and be displayed there, not suggested as having been in the artist's mind: otherwise the product is one of those hen's-eggs that are good to eat and look just like live ones but never hatch ... the mastery I speak of is not so much the male quality in the mind as a puberty in the life of that quality. The male quality is the creative gift.
(*L*, 2, p. 133, 1886)

For this, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have described Hopkins as an "apostle of aesthetic virility",⁵ and Christine Battersby has argued that Hopkins's "phallic view of art" merely dresses "in Victorian majesty the rather bathetic view of Timon,

one of Rochester's characters: 'I never Rhym'd but for my Pintle's sake.'"⁶

It is my view that Rochester's "Timon" is actually claiming to have used poetry as a means of gaining the sexual favours of women, and that therefore he does not equate *writing* poetry with masculine sexual expression or with autoerotic pleasure. Even if this were not the case, the suggestion that Hopkins was content to regard art in any sense as a merely self-indulgent, self-pleasuring act (onanistic or otherwise) is clearly misjudged.⁷ It is true that the gender-specific terms used by Hopkins to describe the processes of artistic production are "representative" of the Victorian male literary hegemony.⁸ But Gilbert, Gubar, and Battersby have chosen to ignore the compelling irony that subverts Hopkins's rhetoric of intellectual machismo, for he is one of the few male artists of his time and class who actually shares the equivalent of what Susanne Juhasz has called the "double bind" of the woman poet: on the one hand, the impossibility of self-assertion for a woman (or a priest), on the other hand, the necessity of self-assertion for a poet.⁹

The vital and ultimately unresolved contradictions of his situation and of his temperament emerge plainly in the fact that Gilbert and Gubar invoke Hopkins as a prime patriarchal bogey, and yet in *Silences*, Tillie Olsen's valuable treatise on writers (mainly women) abused and stifled by circumstances of sex, race, and economic class, he is memorialized as a suffering *victim*, condemned to the woman's lot of silence, and tormented by

Years in which poetry begged to be written, had to be denied.
Scarcely ever the slightest circumstance for writing—a life of sheer,
hard, tasking work.
When he did write, the sense of it as sin....
Lonely knowledge of his great and original achievement—unvalidated
outside himself. *To hoard unheard.*
Aborted hopes for publication in his lifetime; ineradicable hunger for esteem
[and] recognition of his achievement.... *To be heard unheeded.*¹⁰

Olsen easily relates Hopkins's particular circumstances to the more general conditions prevailing against the Victorian woman artist and seamlessly weaves his comments on his failure to have his words heard or valued into a plangent account of emotional deprivation and aesthetic "still-birth". But a further contradiction and an

additional reason for Hopkins's distress exists in the extreme moral dimension that he attaches to the uses of art:

what are works of art for? to educate, to be standards. Education is meant for the many, standards are for public use. To produce then is of little use unless what we produce is known ... for it is by being known it works, it influences, it does its duty, it does good Besides, we are Englishmen. A great work by an Englishman is like a battle won for England It is then even a patriotic duty ... to secure the fame and permanence of the work.
(*L*, 1, p. 231, 1886)

Writing might therefore constitute a betrayal of priestly obedience, and yet failing to produce works of educative art was a dereliction of a gentleman's moral duty to his country and the rest of the world. Here we see again the connection of writing with dominant masculine power, but whilst maleness remains the requisite of the artist, aspiration towards the ideal of *Christian* manliness applies in the realm of aesthetics as it does in morality.

Hopkins's masculinist theories of art hold the mirror to his philosophy of selfhood: pressure, tension ("stress is the life of it", *Selected Letters*, p. 97, 1878) and an insistence on a willed purpose ("to give God glory, and to mean to give it" *S*, p. 239, ca 1885)¹¹ are as essential to his aesthetic creed as they are to his ethical sensibility. There is a further parallel, however, for Hopkins articulates a theory of binary discourse in poetry which is clearly allied to his concept of the dual self.

Writing to Baillie on the Greek poets, Hopkins describes how two strains of thought run together in tragic poetry like counterpoint. The first is the "overthought" which can be abridged in prose and paraphrased, this gives the literal and intentional meaning of the piece. The counter, antiphonal strain is the "underthought", which is conveyed chiefly through choice of metaphors "often only half-realized by the poet himself, not necessarily having any connection with the matter in hand" (*F.L.*, p. 252, 1883). Hopkins's "underthought" appears to represent a kind of metaphorical parapraxis by which unacknowledged impulses and desires can slip the ego's net of censorship. In keeping with the gender conventions of the time, Hopkins locates the hidden and generative centre of these instinctive and "half-realized" feelings in the "feminine" heart. In his model of self, the heart—responsive and driven by

involuntary desires—is linked with the "affective will", the self's "nature". Hopkins's elective will is, in Christopher Devlin's arresting phrase, "nailed to the cross" (*S*, p. 217), but the spontaneous desires of the affective heart and the underthought that flows off them are less easily policed.

Hopkins's belief in the revelatory capability of art and the self's duality is suggested in his confession, after he had read only a small number of his poems, that Walt Whitman had a mind "more like [his] own than any man's living" (*L*, p. 155, 1882). In a review of *Leaves of Grass* read by Hopkins, Whitman is remarked on for the "prominence in [his] writings of the sexual passion and his cultus of death and pantheism".¹² This, plus Whitman's swaggering visions of his own "luscious" self feeding hugely from the trough of life: "turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking, and breeding" ("Song of Myself", stanza 24),¹³ may have been enough to persuade Hopkins that Whitman was at once "a very great scoundrel" (*L*, 1, p. 155, 1882) and yet also a *semblable*, a brother. Their affective "natures" seemed to Hopkins to be in some way twinned, but as Hopkins says, it is the elective will that controls destiny and he determined that his spiritual direction should be utterly different from that of Whitman.

The superiority that Hopkins awards to willed choice over "natural" impulse is evident in his contemptuous reaction to Whitman's supposedly unconscious use of sprung rhythm. In such matters, Hopkins said, "a thing does not exist, it is not *done* unless it is wittingly and willingly done; to recognize the form you are employing and to mean it is everything ... if he does not mean it, then he does not do it" (*L*, 1, p. 156, 1882). In view of Hopkins's recognition of the unconscious workings of "underthought" this emphasis on the primacy of authorial intention seems doubtful, but as a reflection of the way in which he elevates the masculine elective will over the chance effusions of "feminine" spontaneity it is singularly apposite. The intention of the artist, and the primacy of the masculine elective will are valorized here as elsewhere, but the enormous influential and revelatory powers that Hopkins attributes to the work of art and the artist also gives credence to Donald Davie's

suggestion that Hopkins "conceived of poetry as self-expression at its most relentless, as a vehicle for the individual will to impose itself on time", and thus as a dangerously phallic tool in the hands of a Jesuit priest.¹⁴

Hopkins's anxiety that as an artist he could be seduced by his own powers into an act of proud self-aggrandisement is revealed in his representation of Lucifer's first and fatal pride as that of an artist / singer, who becomes intoxicated by "the strength and beauty of his own voice" and "raise[s] a hymn in honour of [his] own nature" (*S*, p. 179, ca 1881). Sounding his "barbaric yawp" ("Song of Myself", stanza 52) across the rooftops and singing an autolatrous "song of myself", in the manner of his savage and sensual alter-ego Walt Whitman, could be spiritually disastrous. Hopkins again indicates his personal susceptibility to the sin of pride in his powers of authorship by including a pointed warning in his spiritual notes: "intellectual goods, as learning, still more / talents ... are more dangerous to be attached to and proud of" (*S*, p. 180, ca 1881).

Because of the particular psychological and ethical constraints binding him, sadly made worse by his own "mind forg'd manacles" ("I have of myself made verse so laborious" *L*, 1, p. 66, 1879), Hopkins's response to creativity became increasingly troubled. But though he deeply felt that the "disappointments and humiliations" of the spurned artist "embitter the heart and make an aching in the bones" (*L*, 2, p. 9, 1878), he was nevertheless spared the critical humiliation imposed upon female artists who were believed incapable of genius, and had, by taking up the pen become unsexed and monstrous *lusus naturae*, freaks of nature.

Hopkins's "hen's egg" analogy exemplifies the basic contradiction that underlies customary equations of creativity with biological procreativity, especially female procreativity. In the words of Susan Stanford Friedman, the "structures of patriarchy have divided *labor* into men's *production* and women's *reproduction*.... A man *conceives* an idea in his brain, while a woman *conceives* a baby in her womb". The pregnant body is therefore "necessarily female; the *pregnant* mind is the mental province of genius, most frequently understood to be inherently masculine".¹⁵ The

male can therefore be father *and* mother to the work of art, the woman can only be mother to an actual child. If she tries to produce great art, then the product, so Hopkins implies, will inevitably be an unfertilized and therefore sterile "wind egg".

The one partial exception to Hopkins's rule is Christina Rossetti whose influence is examined in Chapter 3; Rossetti and Hopkins shared an equivalent "coffin" of renunciation and alike created palimpsestic art compacted of stunning sensuality and pain. Hopkins's comments on actual women poets are otherwise scant and generally dismissive. Alison Sullo way suggests that Hopkins's description of the "gentle poetess", Katharine Tynan (a "simple brightlooking Biddy with glossy very pretty red hair", *F.L.*, p. 373, 1886) is not merely patronizing but may conceal a more subtle and devastating form of insult:

I have made the acquaintance [sic] of the young and ingenuous poetess Miss Katherine Tynan, a good creature and indeed somewhat too highly praised ... for the truth is she is not exactly an original 'fountain in a shady grove' (the critics would not be standing all around her so soon if she were), but rather a sparkling town fountain in public gardens and draws her water from other sources. She half knows this herself and lately wrote me a letter which for various reasons I am slow to answer and as long as I do not I cannot help telling myself very barbarously that I have stopped *her* jaw at any rate.
(*L*, 2, pp. 150-151, 1887)

Sullo way contends that Hopkins's "knowledge of Renaissance comedy would have informed him that to compare a woman to 'a town fountain in public gardens', whose comforting refreshment is available to all citizens casually walking by is to call her a whore".¹⁶ I would also add that by saying that she "draws her water from other sources", Hopkins suggests that Tynan produces unoriginal, adulterated art; her "half-awareness" also being an indication of imperfect insight. In the last and most reductive instance, she is viewed as a stereotypically garrulous woman whose overactive "jaw" must be "stopped". Hopkins's generally low opinion of women's poetry is also apparent in his remark that "sputters of poetry" by Michael Field (Katharine Bradley) are "vastly clever, pointed and flowing", but ultimately prove that Coventry Patmore "was right in his opinion of women's poetry" (*L*, 1, p. 245, 1886).

Patmore's ideas and opinions are most cohesively gathered in a critique of the

work of Alice Meynell published in *The Fortnightly Review*.¹⁷ As might be expected from the author of *The Angel in the House*, Patmore prefaces his discussion of Meynell's work by singling her out from her adored and more familiar counterpart, the "typical sweet companion of man's life, the woman who is so sweet and so companionable, even because, as Thomas Aquinas affirms, 'she is scarcely a reasoning creature'".¹⁸ Patmore's praise is of the kind despised by Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

... praise
Which men give women when they judge a book
Not as mere work but as mere woman's work,
Expressing the comparative respect
Which means the absolute scorn.
(*Aurora Leigh*, 2. 232 - 236)¹⁹

Patmore thinks of and admires the "poetess still more than her poetry" because she does not "put forth the great, impersonal claims of great poetry." Meynell's fault is that she has not mastered the "arduous *technique*" of great writing, her virtue is that she does not "strain to rival man's work". The result is that she drowns helplessly in her own "feminine" subjectivity: "Mrs. Meynell's thoughts and feelings seem to be half-suffocated by their own sweetness and pathos."²⁰

Masculine poetic discourse of the sort engaged in by Hopkins and Patmore imprisons woman within her body, by tacitly endorsing the Aristotelian dichotomy between woman (flesh, matter) and man (soul, form) within the assumption that "women are like—are—their bodies which then specify their nature".²¹ Patmore praises the "feminine factor" in the *mind* beyond measure; but it is, he states, "a greater thing than woman—it is goddess". In Patmore's opinion, Keats and Shelley, are therefore "in their best works ... wholly feminine" but add to this "such an insight and ... such a power of self-identification, as no woman has ever approached".²²

Patmore's argument suggests that the male mind is capable of containing the "feminine principle" (the goddess) but the female mind can contain neither the "goddess", nor, it seems certain, the quasi-divine power of masculine genius: "In man, the express image of God, *genius* is that divine third, quickening and creative

sex, which contains and is the two others."²³ Genius may therefore be "double-sexed", androgynous, but is always lodged in a male body: man can be all in all, but woman can only be woman. Meynell is therefore condemned with abstruse logic, for though her lines breathe:

... the purest *spirit* of womanhood, yet they have not sufficient force of that *ultimate* womanhood, the expressional *body*, to give her the right to be counted among classical poets. No woman ever has been such a poet; probably no woman ever will be, for (strange paradox!) though ... she may have enough and to spare of the virile intellect, and be also exquisitely womanly, she has not womanhood enough.²⁴

Jeffrey B. Loomis has argued that when Hopkins praised the "male gift" of "masterly execution", he meant to describe a quality in the mind. This is so, but neither Hopkins's "male gift" nor Patmore's "feminine factor" can in this context be interpreted (as Loomis would wish) as mental abilities which *transcend* gender and may be "possessed both by some men and some women".²⁵ Patmore's argument for the "double-sexed" male poet is more succinctly expressed by Otto Weininger, who awards to the male grandly inclusive mental powers, which women inevitably lack: "The man of genius possesses, like everything else, the complete female in himself; but woman herself is only a part of the Universe, and the part can never be the whole; femaleness can never include genius."²⁶ It is probable that few Victorian men would trouble to argue otherwise, for Darwinian theories of sexual difference and natural selection had "proven" what the Church fathers already preached, that man was superior to woman in courage, energy, ambition, "inventive genius", and the "higher powers of the imagination and reason". Men had therefore attained "higher eminence" in "poetry, painting, sculpture, music ... history, science, and philosophy", and would inevitably continue to do so. Women's accredited skills were of "intuition", "rapid perception", and "imitation" but these were shared by "the lower races", and were therefore the inferior characteristics "of a past and lower state of civilisation".²⁷ As a student of Walter Pater at Oxford, and a lifelong disciple of Ruskin, Hopkins imbibed these and equivalent ideas in "non-scientific" form, and therefore came to believe that not only was artistic endeavour "natural" to men, but

was indeed the sign of a full man.

Pater is unmistakably androcentric in his demand for "Manliness in art ... as distinct from that which ... must be called the feminine quality ... [consists in] tenacity of intuition and purpose, the spirit of construction as opposed to what is literally incoherent or ready to fall to pieces, and in opposition to what is hysteric or works at random".²⁸ Hysteria is of course regarded as the archetypal "feminine" complaint, and as we have seen, indicates a failure of the "managing" elective will when it rises in the male. Pater's masculinist "spirit of construction" is what appears lacking in the "castrated" speaker of "Thou art indeed just, Lord": "birds build—but not I build; no, but strain, / Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes". A failure to "beget" living art (in Hopkins's metaphoric scheme, to produce a live "fertilized" egg) is therefore a failure of life's purpose (to "give God glory") and a failure of manhood.

The linkage of masculinity and artistic prowess is again strongly evident in Hopkins's youthful description of Dryden's power to "take thoughts ... not by nature poetical" and to subject them to "a kind of living force like fire" so that they became "changed and incandescent" (*J*, p. 112, 1865). Hopkins apprenticed himself to learn Dryden's "blacksmithing" mastery of intractable material and years later claimed: "my style tends always more towards Dryden ... he is the most masculine of our poets; his style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of all our literature on the naked thew and sinew of the English language" (*L*, 1, pp. 268-9, 1888).

The "male gift" of creative power and the phallogentric terms in which Hopkins defines it pertain to every artistic medium. In music, for example, the dynamic force of the masculine power with which Hopkins invests the "forging" of the artist's inscape upon the blank page or the malleable form of the muse is unequivocally shown in his poem in praise of Henry Purcell:

Not mood in him nor meaning, proud fire or sacred fear,
Or love, or pity, or all that sweet notes not his might nurse:
It is the forgèd feature finds me; it is the rehearsal
Of own, of abrupt self there so thrusts on, so throngs the ear.

...

Let him oh! with his air of angels then lift me, lay me!
("Henry Purcell")

All that seems feminine: love, pity, sweetness; the virtues that solicit the ear and the heart with a soft "nursling" touch, are here rejected in favour of a conception of art as an act of "thrusting" masculine ravishment and possession. If there can be a virile "naked thew and sinew" of music (*L*, 1, p. 267, 1887), as Hopkins wished there to be of language, then Purcell has it.

In the visual arts, the masculine emphasis is defined by Ruskin, whose ideas on art and nature had revolutionized the way that many Victorians actually looked at the world, or rather "stared", because "to *look* only was no use".²⁹ Ruskin decreed that mind, heart, imagination and eye should engage in a willed act of possession:

I put my *mind* into the scene, instead of suffering the body only to make report of it; and looked at it with the possession — taking grasp of the imagination — the true one ... It required an effort to maintain the feeling ... The whole scene without it was but sticks and stones and steep dusty road.³⁰

Hopkins's indebtedness to the "Ruskinese point of view" (*F. L.*, p. 202, 1863) is palpable in this extract from one of his early letters, in which he reveals his passion for possessing visual beauty:

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 ... has subsided it is consigned to my treasury of explored beauty ... while something takes its place in my enthusiasm. The present fury is the ash.
(*F. L.*, p. 202, 1863)

Ruskin's "'Penetrative Imagination' is a 'possession-taking faculty' and a 'piercing ... mind's tongue'".³¹ In Hopkins's case, this phallic-sounding capability enables the visual equivalent of a Byronic rake's progress, and strongly suggests the presence of what Freud has identified as a "substitutive relationship between the eye and the male organ":

A desire to see the organs peculiar to each sex exposed is one of the original components of our libido ... The libido for looking ... is present in everyone in two forms, active and passive, male and female; and according to the preponderance of the sexual character, one form or the other predominates.³²

Freud suggests that there is an auto-erotic element in the scopic drive and that there is pleasure in seeing (*Schaulust*), indeed the Freudian theory of sexual difference rests

on the privileging of the visible penis over the "nothingness" (no thing-ness) of the female.³³ In the extreme form of scopophilia, what the voyeur seeks (voyeurs "seemingly are all males")³⁴ "is not the phallus on the body of the other, but its absence as the definition of the mastering presence, the security of his position, his phallus".³⁵ Lacan also refers to the "appetite of the eye that must be fed"³⁶ and stresses the narcissistic aspects of the gaze and the importance of the eye in the constitution of the ego.³⁷ Lacan's "ocularocentrism — his vision-centredness — in complicity with Freud's, privileges the male body as a phallic, virile body and regards the female body as castrated".³⁸ The eyes, as "one of the modes of access for libido to explore the world, become the instrument of the 'scopic drive'"³⁹ but the subjective bearer of the gaze may also be in some sense "captured" (captivated) by the "soliciting" object. In such instances, as Lacan points out, "it is rather it that grasps me".⁴⁰ Lacan's idea appears to correspond with Hopkins's theory on the "stem of stress" which allows subject and object to meet in "dynamic reciprocity"⁴¹: "What you look hard at seems to look hard at you" (*J*, p. 204, 1871). Such an intensity of gaze may therefore be essential to the male artist's "double-sexed" act of penetrative perception and creative making described by Patmore, and linked to the Wordsworthian belief that the world is in part our own imaginative construction; something half created and half perceived.

The Romantics, Ruskin and Hopkins, were all drawn to discover the hidden mystery of "reality" behind what Ruskin called "The Earth Veil"⁴² but in Hopkins's particular case, his "fury" to perceive and possess the inscapes (shape, unifying pattern, inner form) of the world through "long looking" was countered by acute psycho-sexual anxiety. The sin of "imprudent looking" is frequently noted in his early diaries,⁴³ and Hopkins's sensitivity to its particular dangers is shown in his refusal to become a painter because the "higher and more attractive parts of the art put a strain upon the passions" which he thought "unsafe to encounter" (*F. L.*, p. 231, 1868).

Martin remarks that it was "a Victorian cliché that the nude was the highest (and presumably the most attractive) subject in painting", and that Hopkins was "both in love with the phenomenal world and aflame with fear of it".⁴⁴ This impression is further heightened by the fact that he chose to inflict a six-month long "custody of the eyes" penance on himself in his first full year as a Jesuit novice: "A penance which I was doing from Jan. 25 to July 25 prevented my seeing much that half year" (*J*, p. 190, 1869). With the inventiveness of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Hopkins brings "assiduous ingenuity" to the art of self-punishment, choosing to "mortify the sense of sight" by keeping his eyes downcast and under strict restraint.⁴⁵ The personal penance chosen to do the most hurt (but spiritually, the most good) by Hopkins in his ardent desire for purity is to surrender his phallic pen and to veil his questing gaze in a manner which almost parodies the shy and modest demeanour ascribed in popular iconography and literature (including Hopkins's own) to nuns and virginal young women.⁴⁶

Leonardo Ancona believes that one "submits to God as one would to one's despotic and very severe father, who forbids all sexual activities, that is, a castrating father."⁴⁷ Hopkins's pride in exercising his "male gift", in "fathering" the text can therefore generate intense Oedipal anxiety and guilt, which he tries to resolve by means of an "artistic compromise" which enables him to

gratify conveniently both his narcissistic aesthetic inclination and his masochistic sense of religious duty by writing poems that glorify the mastery of God and idealize the "passive glory" attained by the crucified (symbolically castrated) Son, with both of whom the poet-priest identifies.⁴⁸

Significantly, however, what Moder describes as the "passive glory" of Christ seems to assume conflicting manifestations in Hopkins's imagination and words. As we have seen, Hopkins has been dualistically identified with the power-wielding phallocracy and with their "feminized" victims, each association being in some sense true. Greater dualisms meet and are also made true in Christ himself, who is the omnipotent master and the "gashed" (impotent) victim, king and slave. It seems, however, that Hopkins found it intolerably hard to absorb the full import and nature of Christ's

"feminized" role, not least, perhaps, because he was pledged to imitate it. Christ therefore emerges from one of Hopkins's earliest and most rhapsodic sermons as a majestically noble figure, the apotheosis of heroic manliness and intellectual brilliance:

Our Lord Jesus Christ ... is our hero.... He is the hero.... He is a warrior and a conqueror ... He is a king, Jesus of Nazareth king of the Jews.... He is a statesman.... He is a thinker He is an orator and a poet. In his body he was most beautiful.... His constitution too was tempered perfectly ... in his bearing how majestic, how strong and yet how lovely and lissome in his limbs, in his look how earnest, grave but kind.... He was the greatest genius that ever lived.... Never man spoke like this man.
(*S*, p. 35, 1879)

One critic remarks that Hopkins creates a "superman rather than a shepherd."⁴⁹ In fact, Hopkins seems to have created Christ in the express image of the Carlylean "great man" who epitomizes "genius", and will excel in any time or capacity:

[T]he Hero can be Poet, Prophet, King, Priest or what you will, according to the kind of world he finds himself born into. I confess, I have no notion of a truly great man that could not be *all* sorts of men. The poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic warrior, unless he himself were at least a Heroic warrior too.... There is in him the Politician, the Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher;—in one or the other degree, he could have been, he is all these.⁵⁰

The two most powerful masculine figures in Hopkins's mythopoetic system, Satan and Christ, are thus imaged as brilliant artists, as men of genius. Satan, of course, wilfully misuses his gift; Christ obediently surrenders his. As I will argue, Hopkins's "half-realized" attraction to the savage energy and phallic pride of the demonic anti-hero shapes the form of his character, Caradoc, in *St. Winefred's Well*. Hopkins's attraction to the "active" (*ergo* masculine) energy and power of Christ is also clear in the eulogy given above, but the real pattern for his life is found in the alternative later images of a "feminized" Christ, humbled, "cut short", broken, and baffled by failure (*L*, 2, p. 137, 1886):

He annihilated himself, taking the form of a servant ... he emptied or exhausted himself, so far as that was possible, of godhead and behaved only as God's slave ... and then ... humbled himself to death.
(*L*, 1, p. 175, 1883)

Hopkins found such examples "strengthening but not consoling" (*L*, 2, p. 137, 1886)

and voices a deeply frustrated sense of disappointment in "Thou art indeed just Lord":

... Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause ...

... birds build—but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes
("Thou art indeed just, Lord")

The speaker's shamed sense of emasculation is here almost eclipsed by a rankling and barely controllable sense of injustice as he watches lechery prosper and grow fat. Shakespeare famously details the compulsive allure and the extortionate cost of sexual lust: "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action".⁵¹ The metaphorical equivalence of expense or spending with male ejaculation therefore has a long history, but it is particularly appropriate to the Victorian age of high capitalism. The embittered speaker of "Thou art indeed just, Lord" must stand by in passive, feminized impotence, while the entire spiritual and physiological economy appears to fall into disarray and the accepted rules of exchange are broken. In his poem, we see "the drunkards" and "the filthy", despised by Hopkins (*L*, 1, p. 110, 1880), "spending" as if there were no tomorrow, or at least no day of reckoning. Within the strict terms of Victorian moral and medical justice the thralls of lust should be rewarded with impotence and sterility, if not syphilitic madness and death: instead they thrive and multiply, with time and life-spirit to spare.

The poet / persona of "Thou art indeed just, Lord" has willingly become the servant / thrall of Christ and has therefore elected to be one of those described in the Bible who choose to deny themselves erotic pleasure and procreative fulfillment for the sake of holiness: "which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matthew 19:12). His sexual and reproductive energies are voluntarily given up to the service of God but the hoped-for reward for this sacrifice is not given. Having submitted to the Law of the Father, he has crossed the Lacanian threshold between the "Kingdom of culture" and that of "nature abandoned to the law

of copulation".⁵² Submission to the Father, and Hopkins's submission is, as he points out in his poem, "for life", should bring as its reward a place as a speaking subject in culture, but when God the Father thwarts his production of the Word then he is doubly emasculated. Having repudiated the flesh (the body of the mother) so that he can share in the Father's authority, the Father then denies him a voice, and thus cuts off his power of authorship. Hopkins states his grievance more directly in a letter to Robert Bridges:

the fine pleasure is not to do a thing but to feel that you could and the mortification that goes to the heart is to feel that it is the power that fails you ... it is the refusal of a thing that we like to have. So with me, if I could but get on, if I could but produce work I should not mind its being buried, silenced ... but it kills me to be time's eunuch and never to beget (*L*, 1, p 222, 1885).

Incapable of displaying "the masculine powers" in the begetting of poetry (*F.L.*, p. 386, 1888) and equally unable to claim that he has voluntarily *elected* to make silence his chosen gift to God (cf. "shape nothing lips, be lovely dumb", in "The Habit of Perfection"), and therefore that he retains mastery and control of his heart and mind, Hopkins's sense of coherent selfhood begins to dissolve ("it *kills* me"). The difference then is vital between consciously *choosing* to sacrifice the living children of his brain or the children of his body to a religious ideal and discovering that he has been robbed of his fertility and is *incapable* of begetting anything that "wakes" and lives, whether that be child or poem. Hopkins's distress is greater because in describing himself as "*time's* eunuch" he seems to recognize that he is tied (in thrall) to the temporal, to the material and therefore to the very world of generation that seems to mock him with its easy fecundity.

Significantly, the Dark sonnets that belie Hopkins's declared creative eunuchism, come "like inspirations unbidden and against [his] will" (*L*, 1, p. 221, 1885). In this instance, the organ of feeling rather than reason, the affective will, prevails over the consciously controlling mind. Within a metaphorical hierarchy in which the feminine principle is required to be subordinate, this represents a "rape" that forces "surrender of the poet's 'male gift' of creative control to a desperately

obsessional, schizophrenic, state judged by Hopkins to 'resemble madness'.⁵³ These "unfathered" bastard productions, written not in Poundian seminal fluid, but in a "feminine" flow of blood, are arguably Hopkins's greatest works, but they are not what he *meant* to do. Guilt, shame, loss and humiliation therefore attend on their birth, for they signify what for Hopkins remains the "worst failure of all", a failure of masculine self-mastery and masculine self-making.

The "gripping melancholia" that pervades much of Hopkins's verse derives largely, Moder suggests, from the "retrogressive wish ... to rediscover and merge with the metaphorically 'lost' mother which activates every oedipal quest".⁵⁴ The masculine ideal of transcendence demands distrust and hostility towards the feminine, nonetheless, and the insecurity generated by this tangle of contradictions manifests itself in the antiphonal voices of Hopkins's early poetry. The "sex war" is not only conducted within the subtextual frame of individual poems, but is itself part of a larger and ongoing dialectic between whole poems: an argument and dilemma unresolvable when the words that hope to heal are themselves the carriers of ontological dis-ease.

[NOTES]

¹ Pierre Proudhon, *La Pornocratie, ou les Femmes dans les Temps Modernes* (Paris: A. Lacroix, 1875), p. 152; quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 208.

² Aeschylus, *The Eumenides, Complete Plays of Aeschylus*, translated with commentary and notes by Gilbert Murray (London: Allen and Unwin, 1952), p. 235.

³ Battersby writes that the concept of the "spermatic word" is central to the cosmology of ancient Greek and Roman Stoicism. She also suggests that the early Church Fathers may have been influenced by the idea of a universe created by the "coding contained within the male seed". See *Gender and Genius*, p. 49.

⁴ *Remy de Gourmont, The Natural Philosophy of Love*, translated with a postscript by Ezra Pound, (London: The Casanova Society, 1936), pp. 169-80.

⁵ *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 96.

⁶ *Gender and Genius*, p. 38.

⁷ Hopkins found the suggestion made by "Vernon Lee" (Violet Paget) that ancestral memories of

primitive mating behaviour might account for our powerful response to music ("that sexual business will in short be found by roking the pot") quite abhorrent. See *L*, 1, p. 172, 1883.

⁸ *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 4.

⁹ *Naked and Fiery Forms, Modern American Poetry by Women: A New Tradition* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1976), chap. 1, "The Double Bind of the Woman Poet", pp. 1-6; quoted in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 584.

¹⁰ *Silences* (London: Virago, 1980), p. 127.

¹¹ The precise chronology of Hopkins's private spiritual notes and his commentary on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises is not certain. Wherever possible exact dates will be given, otherwise (as here) an approximation based on the dates of previous and subsequent entries, and on the ordering of the notes by Christopher Devlin, will be offered. See Devlin's comments on the editorial arrangement of Hopkins's papers (Foreword, *S*, p. vii).

¹² George Saintsbury, *The Academy*, (10 Oct 1874) 398-400, as quoted in *L*, 1, pp. 311-316.

¹³ *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose and Letters* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1938).

¹⁴ "Hopkins the Decadent Critic", *The Cambridge Journal*, 4 (1950-1951), 725-739 (p. 739).

¹⁵ "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse", in *Speaking of Gender*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 73-100 (p. 75).

¹⁶ "Gerard Manley Hopkins and 'Women and Men' as 'Partners in the Mystery of Redemption'", p. 42.

¹⁷ "Mrs. Meynell, Poet and Essayist", in *The Fortnightly Review*, 52 (1892), 761-766.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 761.

¹⁹ *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. by Ruth M. Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

²⁰ "Mrs. Meynell, Poet and Essayist", p. 763.

²¹ Heath, *The Sexual Fix*, p. 119.

²² "Mrs. Meynell, Poet and Essayist", p. 762.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 761.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 762.

²⁵ "Birth Pangs in Darkness: Hopkins's Archetypal Christian Biography", in *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 28, 1 (1986), 81-106 (p. 81).

²⁶ *Sex and Character* (London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam, 1906) p. 189; quoted in Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, p. 113.

²⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2nd edn, (London: John Murray, 1913), pp. 847-859.

²⁸ "Plato's Esthetics", *Plato and Platonism* (New York, [n.pub.], 1899), pp. 253-4; quoted in Ellmann, *Thinking About Women*, p. 43.

²⁹ John Ruskin, *The Diaries of John Ruskin*, ed. by Joan Evans and J.H. Whitehouse, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1956-9), vol. iii, p. 685.

³⁰ *Diaries*, vol. i, p. 381.

³¹ *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 5.

³² "Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious", *Standard Edition*, vol. VIII, p. 98.

³³ Luce Irigaray, "Another 'Cause' — Castration", p. 41.

³⁴ Heath, "Difference", p. 85.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 115.

³⁷ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in *Feminisms*, ed. by Warhol and Herndl, (1991) 432-442 (p. 435).

³⁸ Grosz, *A Feminist Introduction to Jacques Lacan*, p. 39; see also Grosz's lucid discussion of the Mirror Stage, pp. 31-47.

³⁹ Madan Sarup, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 35.

⁴⁰ *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 96.

⁴¹ Bell Gale Chevigny, "Instress and Devotion in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins", in *Victorian Studies*, 9 (December 1965), 141-153 (p. 143).

⁴² This is the title of the first chapter in Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, V, *Works*, VII.

⁴³ Hopkins anticipated the self-scrutinizing regime of his adult career by beginning to record sins and temptations in 1865. Some of the "sins" may seem slight and unremarkable; for example, he notes instances of laziness ("idleness"), wasting time and lack of concentration. Since the two things that Hopkins found most painful in life were triviality and sordidness, these first sins would bear testament to his own lack (as he saw it) of earnest application. Hopkins's sexual misdemeanours would inevitably fall into the "sordid" category, though they mainly concern feelings of "attraction", or of gazing too closely or too long at beautiful faces and bodies. The subjects were more often men, but it is the opinion of psychiatrist Dr. Felix Letemendia that this resulted from the absence of ordinary social contact with attractive and educated women in the masculine circles in which Hopkins moved. Letemendia further states that Hopkins's sexual thoughts about women, recorded in three or more instances (*Facsimiles*, p. 25): His cousin Magdalen, three entries, (*Facsimilies*, Plates 146-7); a girl in a shop (140); "Newman's friend", a "face in the theatre", etc., (Plates 113, 117) are sufficient to show that

he was capable of forming a clear heterosexual intention, on one occasion explicitly stated as "adultery of the heart". The significance of the predominance of male interest ... is that his life had been, up to the time of the notes, one of socially enforced male environment at boarding school and university. After graduation he lived in all-male religious communities,

taught in schools confined to boys, ministered to soldiers in Cowley Barracks, and finally lectured in the Royal University of Ireland.
(*Facsimiles*, p. 32)

Martin dismisses Hopkins's confession of "Temptation to adultery of the heart" (*Facsimiles*, p. 182) with the lovely young wife of his friend Gurney as being of less significance than his "intense physical attraction to men" (*A Very Private Life*, p. 48). Martin supports his opinion with the argument that Hopkins's "unconscious insistence on the heart rather than the body suggests that the temptation may have been less than compelling physically" (*ibid.*). Martin appears to ignore the more obvious reason behind Hopkins's particular choice of words, namely that he instinctively used the terms of reference with which he was most enduringly and surely acquainted: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already in his heart" (Matthew 5: 27-28). Hopkins may well have felt a "compelling" physical attraction towards Alice Gurney but his "unconscious insistence" is always on the spirit as well as the letter of the Law. In any examination of Hopkins's moral sensibility it is therefore vital to remember his belief that guilt does not depend on the act but on what is committed with the body of the imagination. If tempted to dismiss his admission of "adultery" as a touchingly naive example of undue scrupulosity, we may at once be guilty of misunderstanding what Christ actually *said*, and consequently of failing to realize that for Hopkins sex in the head was as real and as dangerous as any other kind. As he explains in his *Spiritual Writings*:

there may be no outward commission intended, but yet *morosa delectatio* in lust ... This is in the will itself. The most inward and intimate kind of commission will be the intensity of the act of consent itself; for to consent implies no degree, it is pure Yes or No.
(*S*, p. 145, 1883)

Hopkins's Latin phrase *morosa delectatio* refers to the sinful "habit of dwelling with enjoyment on evil thoughts" (*OED*). Even the thought of lust is therefore morally dangerous, and adultery (imagined or *de facto*) a sin against Christ.

⁴⁴ *A Very Private Life*, p. 77.

⁴⁵ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (St. Albans: Triad / Panther, 1977), p. 137 (Chapter 4). See also *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola*, on "restraint of the eyes", p. 47.

⁴⁶ In later years Hopkins suffered greatly from the pain of "gout" or "rheumatism" in the eyes" (*L*, 1, p. 290, 1888). Devlin remarks that although Hopkins feared his eyes were threatened by an incurable disease, he endured pain for years before visiting an oculist. He was prescribed spectacles but was not happy with or without them (*L*, 1, p. 296, 1888). Devlin suggests that Hopkins's inner darkness

was by this time so great that practical remedies seemed useless to him. The castrative anxieties which surround Hopkins and the gaze would also seem to indicate the possibility of psychosomatic illness. ("my eyes are almost bleeding", *L*, 1, p. 271, 1888). Freud describes the disturbance of vision which may occur when the double claims on the organ of sight made by the conscious ego and repressed sexuality cannot be accommodated. In the severest cases, it is, says Freud, as if a "punishing voice was speaking from within the subject, and saying: 'Because you sought to misuse your organ of sight for evil sensual pleasures, it is fitting that you should not see anything anymore.'" "The Psycho-Analytic View of Psychogenetic Disturbance of Vision (1910)", *Standard Edition*, vol. XI, pp. 216-217. This said, I do not of course wish either to ignore or to belittle the punishing realities of Hopkins's duties as a teacher and examiner.

⁴⁷ "Considerations on Christian Vocations Seen from the Point of View of Psychoanalysis", *Psychoanalysis and Catholicism*, ed. Benjamin B. Wolman (New York: Gardner Press, 1976), pp. 65-94 (p. 86).

⁴⁸ "Aspects of Androgyny, Oedipal Struggle, and Religious Defence in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins", *Literature and Psychology* 32, 1 (1986), 2-18 (p. 3).

⁴⁹ John Robinson, *In Extremity: A Study of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 96.

⁵⁰ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-worship*, [1840], Introduction by Edmund Gosse, (London: Ward, Lock; The World Library edn. [n.d.]); quoted in Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, pp. 13-14.

⁵¹ *Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. W.J. Craig (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), Sonnet 139.

⁵² Grosz, *A Feminist Guide to Jacques Lacan*, p. 70.

⁵³ Moder, "Aspects of Androgyny...", p. 13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Exorcising the Body: "Il Mystico" and the Flight from the Mother

Woman sums up nature as Mother, Wife, and Idea; these forms now mingle and now conflict, and each of them wears a double visage. Man has his roots deep in Nature; he had been engendered like the animals and plants; he well knows that he exists only so far as he lives. But since the coming of the patriarchy, Life has worn in his eyes a double aspect: it is consciousness, will, transcendence, it is the spirit; and it is matter, passivity, immanence, it is the flesh.
*Simone de Beauvoir*¹

If it seems clear that the right and proper aspiration of a Catholic priest is to approach as nearly to Christ's perfection as possible, it must also be clear that such empyrean ambition may well breed the depressing awareness of inadequacy and shame that failure drags in its wake. Hopkins was not always a priest, yet seems to *begin* the life that we are privy to in his earliest writings with an immense burden of shame and guilt which seemed only to increase with time. Meditating on his sins during a Retreat at Beaumont in 1883, Hopkins records that "an old and terribly afflicting thought and disgust" drove him to seek help from Father George Kingdon, who advised him "not further to dwell on the thought" (*S*, p. 253, 1883). Fr. Kingdon was noted for the joyous trust with which he embraced the idea of God's intimate omniscience: "To be known at every moment from surface to core by our good God is nothing to be frightened at—it is a comfort."² Kingdon's cheerful confidence was not natural to Hopkins, however, and his writings manifest a compulsive preoccupation with the sins he has committed, or believes he has committed (Freud believes that such guilt may have no discernible foundation). Thus, in his spiritual notes Hopkins observes: "I find myself with my pleasures and pains, my powers and experiences, my deserts and guilt, my shame and sense of beauty, my dangers, fears and all my fate, more important to myself than anything I see" (*S*, p. 122, 1880). It is perhaps significant that Hopkins chooses to flank his "sense of beauty" with shame on the one hand and danger on the other, for his guilt and terrified apprehension as to what may be done to him by way of "fate" or punishment, appear to follow the classic contours of the Freudian model of Oedipal anxiety:

there is psychological truth in this. Even if a man has repressed his evil impulses into the Unconscious ... he is nevertheless bound to feel his responsibility for them as a sense of guilt whose basis is unknown to him. There can be no possible doubt that the Oedipus Complex may be looked upon as one of the most important sources of the sense of guilt by which neurotic people are so often tormented.³

Freud claims to argue from the "infidel" standpoint of one "completely estranged from the religion of his fathers—as well as from every other religion".⁴ Estranged perhaps, but never free, for it is surely relevant to Freud's theories of primal guilt that as a child he was cared for by a Catholic nurse who "implanted in him the ideas of Heaven and Hell", and that he later studied under the scholastic philosopher and one-time Catholic priest, Brentano.⁵ Whether we choose to believe, as Freud did, that the guilt of obsessional neurosis is the first cause of religion, or that theology presents us with a reason and an explanation of obsessional neurosis, guilt lies coiled at the heart of things and the cry of *cherchez la femme* sounds in each original case of patricide. The desired women of the Ur-tribe, the mother, or Eve the archetypal temptress, all such images of woman acknowledge a "tremendous feminine power that is neither reasoned nor moral, but instinctive, unconscious, mysterious". The fear that this potentially overwhelming power evokes in men may result in the creation of a force that could, "by creating even greater terror offset it"⁶ ("Thou heardst me, truer than tongue, confess / Thy terror, O Christ, O God", "The Wreck of the Deutschland," ll. 11-12).

The ethical terror engendered by the "fear of transgressing against gods" may in part represent a stratagem to "rescue men from both the moral and biological power of women"⁷ by elevating the invisible and cerebral over the corporeal and instinctual. Freud suggests that the "triumph of intellectuality over sensuality" which is the bedrock of patriarchy begins with the turn "from the mother to the father ... since maternity is proved by the evidence of the senses while paternity is a hypothesis, based on an inference and a premise".⁸ Jonathan Culler also argues that the privileging of "the rational, the abstract, or the intellectual", together with the assumption that these qualities constitute the province and the properties of the masculine principle (in practice, of the male), is the essential requirement of and for patriarchal dominance.⁹ Though it may appear to be in defiance of rationality to award greater heed and

deference to something which cannot be touched, seen or heard, than to that which proves its presence to our senses, the Christian religion and patriarchal society seem pledged to revere certain modes of behaviour according to their level of difficulty. As Freud points out, ethics is a "limitation of instinct" and God has become "entirely removed from sexuality and elevated into the ideal of ethical perfection".¹⁰ The young man who aspires to perfection must therefore distance himself as far from instinct and sexuality as is humanly (or superhumanly) possible; if he wishes to worship the symbolic he must first reject nature, the flesh, and woman who is the flesh.

The goal of masculine transcendence over his "feminine beginnings" is as fundamental to the Victorian evolutionist credo as it is to Christian asceticism, and as we have seen, the male's desire for ascendancy over the feminine was further validated by a "post-Darwinian 'sexual science' [which] offered expert testimony on the evolutionary differences between men and women".¹¹ Written in the 1880s, Joseph Le Conte's book *Evolution: Its Nature, Its Evidences, and Its Relation to Religious Thought* (1888-91)¹² describes the struggle towards a higher existence as the male's struggle to divorce himself from the female and the feminine. As Bram Dijkstra notes, Le Conte's imagery is strikingly suggestive of the iconography of the battle of the sexes;¹³ as we shall see, it is also strikingly like Hopkins's own.

Le Conte believed, as the speaker of "Il Mystico" believes, that to attain, "through a newer birth, unto a higher life ... Spirit must break away from the physical and material connection with the forces of Nature ... as the embryo must break away from the physical connection with the mother" (Le Conte, p. 321). Nature may be "likened to a level water-surface" with man as a "commencing drop" being pulled by some "individuating force," almost like an inverse gravity drawing the male upwards towards his real home in the higher realm of masculine spirit. "In man spirit emerges above the surface into a higher world, looks down on Nature beneath him ... and upward to the Father of all spirits above him. Emerged, but not wholly free—head above, but not yet foot-loose" (Le Conte, p. 320).¹⁴ Le Conte parallels Hopkins's emphasis on intensity of will, believing that the male spirit must fight for its freedom

against the dragging, regressive, downwards pull of the water surface. If the male's individuating will founders or flags he will be sucked down and lost in the amniotic mass of the mother.

Many of Hopkins's early poems, notably "Il Mystico", but also "The Habit of Perfection", "Myself unholy from myself unholy", "Pilate", and "A Voice from the World" (later known as "Beyond the Cloister"), appear to be preoccupied with plotting the necessary flight from carnality, the mother and the flesh she represents; they embody a rejection of the feminine and the body which is urged by Oedipal guilt and spurred on by ethical terror. Of all these, "Il Mystico" is most clearly, even arrogantly expressive of the masculine desire for transcendence. All that is shameful and squalid is projected onto the "grimy" body of the sensual earth-mother, who thus signifies what Julia Kristeva has described as the "abject": that element in human society which "disturbs identity, system, order" and is threatening and subversive of the masculine symbolic order because it does not "respect borders, positions, rules".¹⁵ Kristeva uses the term "abject" to describe what the subject must expel or reject in order to become an "I". In our "personal archaeology" the mother therefore becomes an "abject" as we attempt to become separate subjects by releasing "the hold of maternal entity", but it is "a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling".¹⁶

Historical and religious notions of abjection include the following "'abominations': sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest".¹⁷ The abject confronts us with "those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal" and woman represents the amorphous border between the animal and the human.¹⁸ The feminine and the body of the mother therefore arouses horror but may also hold a compelling attraction, for as Kristeva points out, "abjection is above all ambiguity" and victims of the abject may be "its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones".¹⁹ This may in part explain why Hopkins's poem argues an almost gnostic hatred of the flesh, but finally confounds its own premise by seeming to affirm, however ambivalently, the fascination of the abject that it

ostensibly rejects.

The overwhelming anxiety with which the male regards his carnal state and the way in which he focusses his horrified disgust on to the mother who condemns him to life, and thus to decay and death, is powerfully rendered in Simone de Beauvoir's visceral prose:

He sees himself as a fallen god: his curse is to be fallen from a bright and ordered heaven into the chaotic shadows of his mother's womb. This fire, this pure and active exhalation in which he likes to recognize himself, is imprisoned by woman in the mud of the earth. He would be ... like a pure Idea ... the absolute Spirit; and he finds himself shut up in a body of limited powers ... She also dooms him to death. The quivering jelly which is elaborated in the womb (the womb, secret and sealed like the tomb) evokes too clearly the soft viscosity of carrion for him not to turn shuddering away ... he would fain deny his animal ties; through the fact of his birth murderous Nature has a hold on him.²⁰

Disturbing though they are, De Beauvoir's words provide an unnervingly accurate gloss on Hopkins's poem, "Il Mystico", written when he was poised literally to reject "family, mother, and maternal bosom" for the manly enclave of Oxford, from whence he would emerge only to enter an even more exclusively masculine society. Appropriately, he claims an august paternal lineage for "Il Mystico", done "in imitation of [Milton's] 'Il Penseroso'" and (he says) plagiarizing Tennyson (*L*, 3, p. 9-13, 1862), a poet for whom Hopkins felt an early fascination and a "boyish stress of enchantment" (*L*, 2, p. 38, 1880), though he did harbour some doubts about his absolute genius (*F. L.*, pp. 215-220, 1864). His open admission of indebtedness seems markedly uncharacteristic in the light of Hopkins's later expressions of pride in singularity: "The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise" (*L*, 1, p. 291, 1888). Harold Bloom describes the Oedipal desire of the "strong poet" (also necessarily male in Bloom's patriarchal model of literary history) to kill his literary forefathers by writing himself (creating himself) anew.²¹ Hopkins here seems as yet uninfected by the anxiety of paternal influence but repudiates sexuality, the flesh, and all else that pertains to the symbolic feminine and the mother, in an ecstasy of revulsion:

Hence sensual gross desires,
Right offspring of your grimy mother Earth!
My spirit hath a birth
Alien from yours as heaven from Nadir-fires:
You rank and reeking things,

Scoop you from teeming filth some sickly hovel,
 And there forever grovel
 'Mid fever'd fumes and slime and cakèd clot:
 But foul and cumber not
 The shaken plumage of my Spirit's wings.
 ("Il Mystico", ll. 1-10)

The sordidness of things is here confronted almost with relish, and the distinction that Hopkins forces between the things of the flesh and the things of the spirit is clearly figured as a war between masculine and feminine. Nature and materiality are personified in the ancient symbolic equation of Sex = Woman = Earth. In Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, a work regarded by Hopkins as "divine" and genuinely inspired (*L*, 2, p. 24, 1879), Nature boasts of her absolute power over all living creatures, "I bring to life, I bring to death" (section 56), but the horrifying message of the poem seems to be that "the character of this feminine being has changed utterly—that 'Mother Nature' has become a mocking, savage oxymoron".²² In her positive role as giver of life and nurturance the mothering earth is represented in Isis, Demeter and Mary, but in "Il Mystico", as in Tennyson, she is associated with the baleful aspects of the Earth Venus, Circe, Astarte, and Lilith.²³ An act of symbolic exorcism is necessary because Mother Earth here incarnates the diabolical witch-like power of the feminine who "seduces, imprisons, blinds and maddens".²⁴ Clearly this personification of Nature, like Tennyson's image of the clawed female monster in *In Memoriam*, incarnates "that strangely tenacious and central theme of nineteenth century literature and art, the demonic woman".²⁵ In her mysterious cyclical self-sufficiency and primal materialism, Nature is the

primordial, maternal uroboros [an archetypal symbol showing a snake biting its own tail], the feminine principle which, as 'the Great Round, the Great Container, tends to hold fast to everything that springs from it and to surround it like an eternal substance.'²⁶

She may be the seedbed of life but Nature is also a clinging grave sucking her victims down into her dark, swamplike entrails.

Hopkins's literary role-model, Milton's "Il Penseroso", is similarly disdainful towards the feminine, though cooler in tone ("my poetry errs on the side of oddness. I hope in time to have a more balanced and Miltonic style", *L*, 1, p. 66, 1879), as the

speaker contemplates a life of spiritual introspection, purged of irrationality and illusory pleasures:

Hence vain deluding joys,
 The brood of folly without father bred,
 How little you bested,
 Or fill the fixed mind with all your toys;
 Dwell in some idle brain,
 And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,
 As thick and numberless
 As the gay motes that people the Sun Beams
 Or likest hovering dreams
 The fickle Pensioners of *Morpheus* train.
 "Il Penseroso", (ll. 1-10)²⁷

Milton's repudiation of all "vain, deluding" enjoyments is conventionally misogynistic in its personification of "folly" as a promiscuous female who breeds illegitimate and unauthorized "fancies". Folly and the feminine are subsequently equated with gaudiness, toys, fickleness, vanity, and idleness, and have no place in the powerfully "fixed" male intellect. Milton's contemptuous scorn for the frothy ephemera and whimsicality which he associates with femininity is countered to some extent by his presentation of female figures who personify the inlaw aspects of the feminine principle: as, for example, a "pensive Nun, devout and pure, / Sober, stedfast, and demure" ("Il Penseroso," ll. 31-32). Milton's gendered myth-making is nevertheless divisive and perpetuates stereotypical images of woman, yet there is nothing in "Il Penseroso" to equal the disgust with which Hopkins regards the substance of the mother. Hopkins's actual inspiration seems to derive from the female monsters, "emblems of filthy materiality", found in the more deeply misogynistic passages of Milton and Spenser, Shakespeare and Swift.²⁸

The "teeming" fertility of Hopkins's "grimy" hag and her "sickly" witch's "hovel" is inextricably linked with filth and disease in the same way as Spenser's *Errour*, "lothsom, filthie, foule", lies on the "durtie ground" of her "darksome hole", (Canto 1, stanzas 14-15)²⁹ suckling her spawn on poison. With "fever'd fumes" Hopkins adds a further suggestion of madness (the raging fever of sexual lust) to the stench of mortality. The "sensual gross desires" of the flesh which signify human fertility and sexuality are alike relegated to a symbolic female space, representing

both the womb and the grave which are "scooped" out of the body of the earth mother, as Lucretius says: "The universal mother is also the common grave."³⁰ Pursuing the theme of a gendered division between body and soul, Hopkins's poem suggests that the flesh is created in the fires of hell and the spirit in heaven: "My spirit hath a birth / Alien from yours as heaven from Nadir-fires." Hell, the "sulphurous pit", is a metaphor for the female genitals: a metaphor used to horrific effect by Shakespeare's Lear in his frenzied tirade against the uncleanness and monstrous treachery supposedly inherent in women:

Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
Though women all above;
But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
Beneath is all the fiend's:
There's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit,
Burning, scalding, stench, consumption ...
(*King Lear*, Act 4, sc. 6, ll. 127-132)

Hopkins's infernal "Nadir-fires" also closely reflect Tennyson's association of woman with the "Nadir hell / Down, down" in the body of the earth (*Idylls of the King*, "Merlin and Vivien", ll. 347-8).³¹ Like Hopkins, Tennyson creates a dualistic world where the female represents nature and sensuality, but the male cherishes dreams of spiritual perfectibility and is "given over to intellect, rule ... and altruistic projects calculated to ... promote civilization".³² In the story of Merlin and Vivien, the harlot-witch Vivien embodies snakelike carnality and the terrifying lure of the *vagina dentata*. Guinevere is perhaps even more deadly, for Tennyson likens her "adulterous wiles ... to the lethal spread of syphilis": "She like a new disease ... Creeps ... among the crowd ... stirs the pulse with devil's leaps, and poisons half the young" (Tennyson, "Guinevere", ll. 514-19).³³ Through Vivien's unmitigated treachery and Guinevere's sexual betrayal the masculine ideals of Merlin and Arthur are compromised and destroyed. The serpent of subversive female sexuality thus brings down the grand towers of Camelot, and Tennyson stares with the same fearful eye as Hopkins into the "chasm of chaotic, uninhibited copulation which ... the Abstract Female presages; a world where such as [Vivien and Guinevere] take any equal part can only roll 'back into the beast'".³⁴

The poet-persona in "Il Mystico" identifies with the most disembodied and resolutely spiritual of all Arthur's knights; hoping that through purification he may achieve the "close-folded peace that clad / The seraph brows of Galahad" (ll. 41-2). Pure, virgin and incorruptible, Galahad pursues his solitary quest for mystical union with the Divine unto death—finally riding, as have so many of his fictional avatars, into a glorious "blood-red" sunset. Tennyson's Galahad is in part inspired and guided by his spiritual soul-sister, a visionary nun, "beautiful in the light of holiness", and so etherealized by prayer and fasting that the light appears to shine through her ("The Holy Grail" ll. 97-100). But the muse invoked by the speaker of "Il Mystico" to teach him in the ways of mystic purity seems an angel dropped to earth from the masculine realm of spirit and purifying fire:

... come, thou balm to aching soul,
Of pointed wing and silver stole,
With heavenly cithern from high choir,
Tresses dipp'd in rainbow fire,
An olive-branch whence richly reek
Earthless dews on ancles sleek

...
Touch me and purify, and shew
Some of the secrets I would know.

Images of women as angelic helpmeets and moral muses are an essential feature in the Victorian "compendium of visual platitudes".³⁵ These captive female angels are defined by their domestic boundaries and functions (usually limited to nursery, church and kitchen), however, and deviate radically from the convention that to be an angel is to be "masculine and breathtakingly mobile: traditional angels take possession of infinite space with an enviable freedom that later Romantic poets dare attribute only to such birds as albatrosses, skylarks, and invisible nightingales".³⁶ Hopkins dares to have angels *and* birds in his poem and gives to both the freedom to traverse infinite space which traditionally "belongs" to the male and to the male artist.³⁷

Hopkins customarily follows the example of Milton and Blake in associating angelic spirituality with masculine physical prowess.³⁸ In one of his Liverpool sermons, he consistently refers to our "guardian angels" (Hopkins believed that we each have one) as "he" and praises their watchfulness and strength as if they were

soldiers on duty (*S*, p. 91-2, 1880). "Il Mystico" tends to blur the issue of angelic gender with its swirling iridescent swathes of metaphor, "sleek ancles" [sic] and rainbow tresses, but its one explicit reference is to the prophet Ezekiel's fabulous vision (Ezek. 1:5-7, 26) of fiery winged creatures with the "likeness of a man" who sparkle "like the colour of burnished brass" beneath the sapphire throne of God (cf. "Be discover'd to my sight / From a haze of sapphire light", ll. 17-18).

The possibility of femaleness is made even more remote by the fact that this guide holds secret knowledge of the Father's Law and has a Christ-like power to cleanse away impurity. Having thus invoked a masculine muse and allied himself with the most transcendent and other-worldly of role-models, the speaker places himself just a little lower than the angels (Psalms 8:5), and as far as ever possible from the grasp of the feminine. For him, as for Tennyson, the worst woman is judged to be lower even than dirt, for she represents hell itself: "For men at most differ as Heaven and earth, / But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell" (*Idylls of the King*, "Merlin and Vivien", ll. 12-13).

Lear's phobic excesses and Tennyson's angel / demon dichotomy seem difficult to match, but Hopkins equals both by introducing blood ("cakèd clot") and "slime" to the vile mix. Moreover, because this blood is caked and clotted and issues from the body of the primordial mother, it is, in every sense, "bad blood" and can therefore bear no comparison with the free-flowing blood of Christ, or indeed with any patriarchal concept of holiness.³⁹

Dread of the impure runs deep in myth and history, and Paul Ricoeur suggests that the "defilement of sexuality is a belief that is pre-ethical in character ... and is immersed in the archaic belief in the maleficent virtues of shed blood". Woman as a being who regularly sheds blood and magically *survives* may thus represent a source of impurity (and therefore death) and witch-like power. This primitive dread apparently "continues to prowl in the consciousness of modern man",⁴⁰ although the idea of defilement and impurity in sexuality and childbirth is now bounded by ethics and is "rationalized" by the doctrine of original sin. Kristeva argues that a "whole facet of the sacred" indeed "assumes the task of warding off" the danger perceived in

the mother: "where we encounter rituals of defilement ... based on the feeling of abjection and all converging on the body of the mother.... The function of these rituals is to ward off the subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother".⁴¹

In one of his Bedford Leigh sermons, Hopkins describes how the woman "with the issue of blood ... that stained and defiled her garments and made unclean those she touched" is healed by touching the robes (though not the person) of Christ, whose "very garments conveyed a cleansing and a healing virtue" (*S*, p. 32, 1979). It is noteworthy that the woman is not only physically ill but is regarded as a source of both literal and symbolic pollution. The blood of the male Christ has the power to cleanse and heal but the blood of the female is a sign (the "curse") of her impurity. The Bible strictly forbids intercourse with a menstruating woman (see Leviticus 15:19-24), whose touch alone may pollute. Hopkins's great teachers, Aquinas, Origen and Duns Scotus, were all convinced of woman's natural uncleanness and endorsed the belief, voiced by Berthold of Regensburg, that children conceived during menstruation would be born with terrible deformities: "You will have no joy from any children conceived during the menses. For they will either be afflicted by the devil, or lepers, or epileptics, or humpbacked, or blind, or crook-legged, or dumb, or idiots."⁴²

Whether it is shed during menstruation or in giving birth (lochia), ancient tradition declares that the blood of the female is contaminating, even poisonous. A mother who has just given birth is therefore subject to religious taboo and must be ritually cleansed before she can once again enter God's house: "she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled" (Leviticus 12:4). Because the "grimy" mother of "Il Mystico" breeds continually she cannot be cleansed of the "taint" of childbed (see Milton, "My Late Espousèd Saint"). Moreover, the sensual desires which are personified as her "offspring" carry the infection of her baseness and are condemned to crawl (like Milton's Satan) on the earth that bred them: "and there forever grovel" (from O.N. *a grufa*, face downwards). Those who drink from Circe's cup, or the poisoned pap of the witch-mother, will "lose their upright shape and downward [fall] into ... grovling

swine", thereafter to "roul with pleasure in a sensual stie" (Milton, *Comus*, ll. 52-3, 77).

The ideal of holiness and the contaminating substance of the blood and body of the mother are thus perceived as profoundly antithetical. The speaker cannot deny his carnal origins but consciously alienates himself from the mother and from the feminine sensuality in his own psyche. Holding the seraphic "plumage" of his wings apart from the filthy contamination of the female he claims an exclusively patriarchal genesis for his spirit, almost as if he could be, in the words of Hopkins's beloved Aeschylus,⁴³ a "Child sprung full-blown from Olympian Zeus, / never bred in the darkness of the womb".⁴⁴ Because the spirit is created in heaven, it is fledged cleanly from the mind of God, the "Maker of the universe, who is masculine ... For pre-eminence always pertains to the masculine, and the feminine always comes short and is lesser than it".⁴⁵ Far below indeed are the nadir-fires of earth, hell and woman.

The image of the fine white flying soul given in "Il Mystico" connects with the bird imagery that is manifest and multivalent in Hopkins's later work. As an image of self it may be transfiguring, as it is in "Il Mystico", or self-denigrating, as in "Myself unholy, from myself unholy". It also features in one of Hopkins's subtler jokes against himself, in "Wreck of the Deutschland", when he describes how in the midst of incredible spiritual agonies and vacillation, his "carrier-witted" heart flies straight and fast towards a truth that his intellect can only flounder at:

where, where was a, where was a place?—
I whirled out wings that spell
And fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host.—
My heart but you were dovewinged, I can tell,
Carrier-witted, I am bold to boast.
("The Wreck of the Deutschland", ll. 19-23).

In a magnificent flash of what may in this context be justifiably called feminine intuition, the simple bird-brained heart (seat of the feminine affective will), shows a surer grasp of eternal meaning than the trained masculine intellect ("What the heart is! like carriers let fly—/ Doff darkness: homing nature knows the rest", "The Handsome Heart").

No comparable humility or praising acknowledgement of his own feminine

self is apparent in "Il Mystico" however, for Hopkins's speaker puts on the gorgeous plumage of the male bird and flies from materialistic nature and the feminine with a disdain equal to that of Baudelaire,⁴⁶ who had denigrated the female and "glorified the image of the godlike male poet as early as the 1850s".⁴⁷ Baudelaire's poem "Benediction" elevates the male to astral heights whilst bitterly repudiating the clinging grasp of mother and wife, each portrayed, not as mere sensuous degenerates, but as poisonous, vicious monsters. With extravagant hauteur, Baudelaire's poet-persona turns his gaze toward Heaven

... where his eyes perceive a splendid throne,
Quite unperturbed the poet lifts his pious arms,
And the vast lightning flashes of his lucid intellect
Conceal him from the angry faces of the crowd.
(Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*)⁴⁸

Hopkins's visionary "white-winged golden boy-poet"⁴⁹ also thrusts upwards into the "rainbow fire" of the empyrean, seeking to see beyond the "veil that covers mysteries" (l. 36). Inspired by his desire for "mystic union with the divine light"⁵⁰ Hopkins's persona identifies himself with the higher elements of fire and air. Except where they are mysteriously translated as the products of a parallel, though cleansed, universe where "earthless dews" fall (l. 16), the grosser elements of earth and water are rejected, and with these the "primordial slime" from which life first came. In these depths are the "dark, sinister, feminine beginnings, in a region ruled over, not by the bright logos of intellect, but by the dark Eros of feelings".⁵¹

The horror of the clinging materiality of the feminine and of the drowning dissolution that Le Conte has described, provides the engine for "Il Mystico" and is equally manifest in one of Hopkins's later poems, "The Sea and the Skylark", where he contrasts the clean and crisp purity of a skylark's song with the squalid ooze of the "sordid, turbid" times. What the poet diagnoses as humanity's fatal moral decadence is actually imaged as the dissolution and putrefaction of the body: "Our make and making break, are breaking down / To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's first slime" ("The Sea and the Skylark"). Deftly juxtaposing Biblical and evolutionist accounts of human beginnings and endings, Hopkins suggests that the human race is caught in a circle, or rather, a vortex of degeneration.

Dirt and slime are the particular properties of the bad mother in "Il Mystico" and here the fluidity or slime which is part and product of human carnality (semen, exudation) seems to arouse the same repugnance as the slime of putrefaction. There is a moral connection, even an equivalence, between sexual desire and death if we accept Augustine's belief (as Hopkins appears to do) that they are the "result of human sin," that the taint of original sin is transmitted through the semen of the male, and that therefore we are all "from a condemned stock".⁵² Beneath the poem's surface rationale of theological philosophy, and conveyed by Hopkins's images of deadly liquescence in "The Sea and the Skylark" and "Il Mystico", there may lie an "evolutionary revulsion from slime" which signifies "the chthonic matrix from which we rose ... our site of biologic origin", the female sea and the abyss.⁵³ Hopkins's disgust at the idea of reversion, regression and engulfment seems to have at its core the fear of loss of self which Jean-Paul Sartre describes as the "haunting dread of a metamorphosis".⁵⁴

Hopkins's dread of dissolution and death is powerfully evident in his late poem, "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", in which he contemplates the promiscuous merging of discrete selves into a fluid mass, "self in self steeped and pashed—quite" in the whelming blackness of the "womb-of-all" night. This terror of absorption and drowning in the dark of the amorphous female matrix helps to define the quest of the speaker in "Il Mystico", for he pursues the ideal of "exquisite" jewelled colour and light against the engulfing formlessness of the feminine. The desired vision is of a world "limned about with radiance rare" (l. 60), where the form of each individual object is held and defined by an outline of brilliant light. The "breaking down" of boundaries and form that signifies the death of the self is opposed by the masculine shaping power of art: the "common earth and air", even the "gross" and "foulèd" minds of those who live in it are redrawn, limned with a transfiguring pencil ("limn", to illuminate, to paint, to embellish with gold or bright colour, *OED*). The degenerative pull of the earth is similarly countered by the soaring aspiration and upward flight of the poet-persona. Flinging "darkness from him", he glides "aloof" in the upper air (ll. 65-73), a sky-lark with the gloriously pure and immortal song that

Hopkins eulogizes in "The Sea and the Skylark" ("too old to end ... his rash-fresh re-winded new-skeinèd score").

Such an image belongs at the dreaming zenith of Romantic dream-fulfillment, however, and has floated well free of the ascetic impulse which first motivated the poem. Echoing the sexualized triumph of possession experienced by Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* ("we were the first that ever burst / Into that silent sea", ll. 105-6)⁵⁵ the bird / persona enters the silent heights of virgin space:

And when the silent heights were won,
And all in lone air stood the sun,
To sing scarce heard, and singing fill
The airy empire at his will;
To hear his strain descend less loud
On to ledges of grey cloud,
And fainter, finer, trickle far
To where the distant uplands are;
("Il Mystico", ll. 75-79)

Leaving behind the polluted matter of Mother Earth, he flies, in Henry Vaughan's words, "into a world of light" ("They are all gone"),⁵⁶ constructing and dominating an alternative empire of the air. But there is little that seems truly alternative in the spiritual or ascetic sense about this realm, for the speaker clearly has not jettisoned his fleshly luggage. Yes, the wish for control is still manifest, but the poem now seems less concerned with crushing the desires of the sexual self than with exercising the artist's masculine right to appropriate and score the *tabula rasa* of the universe "at his will". What follows enacts the orgasmic "rapture" of the "roll, the rise, the carol" of aesthetic creation (an image of "magnificent impurity" in the opinion of at least one critic)⁵⁷ that Hopkins sighs for in his last sonnet "To R.B.":

... then from his gurgling bill
Let the warbled sweetness rill,
And down the welkin, gushing free,
Hark the molten melody;
In fits of music till sunset
Starting the silver rivulet;
Sweetly then and of free act
To quench the fine-drawn cataract;
And in the dews beside his nest
To cool his plummy throbbing breast.
("Il Mystico," ll. 83-92)

This ejaculatory outpouring of song prefigures the strongly sexual symbolism of "The Sea and the Skylark", in which the bird sings "til none's to spill or spend", and seems to mark the poet/persona's final surrender to the lure of "sensations rather than of thoughts!"⁵⁸ Hopkins was a percipient and often acerbic critic and his comment on Keats seems utterly pertinent to his own work at this point: "his verse is at every turn abandoning itself to an unmanly and enervating luxury" (*F. L.*, p. 386, 1888). The swooning sensualism that Hopkins grew to despise, sweeps away the poem's masculine ascetic premise and leaves the work unfinished: open and abandoned, both literally and metaphorically.

"Il Mystico", ends as Hopkins's lines suggest, "in sweet uncertainty / 'Twixt real hue and phantasy" (ll. 121-2), for not only does the thematic ballast shift and slide from sexuality to the soul and back again, but the gender orientation of the speaker appears similarly mobile. I have suggested that the poet-persona appears to fear the sinking, dissolving metamorphosis or loss of self that is jointly threatened by sexuality, sin and the feminine; the "little death" of sexual orgasm being only the precursor of the greater fall into the "womb-of-all" night. The concept of possession and absorption by the feminine is terrifying but there yet lingers a seeming fascination with the idea of being possessed and consumed as a female by the phallic energy of the Father, symbolized here by the rainbow: "and be so melted in the dizzy bow / That I may drink that ecstasy / Which to pure souls alone may be" (ll. 139-142).

This fantasy of passive engulfment and union with the glorious light of God later emerges, burnished by Hopkins's more mature poetic genius, in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", where the dying nuns seem to drown in fire and be consumed by light ("bathe in his fall-gold mercies ... breathe in his all-fire glances", l. 184). Because they are virgin nuns, and therefore pure and "unsexed" females, the nuns of the Deutschland do not belong in the engulfing darkness of Mother Earth's regressive womb. They share in the "good" fantasy, which may involve taking a passive, feminine stance but is directed towards self-immolation for a transcendent, and therefore holy cause.⁵⁹

As I shall demonstrate in subsequent chapters, Hopkins's attitude to woman,

violence, and death, is bound together by dark and complex strands of anxiety and ambivalence. "Il Mystico" shows that psychosexual ambivalence seeking to resolve itself in conscious rejection of his "animal ties" to the hag mother. Written when Hopkins was eighteen, "Il Mystico" and "A Vision of the Mermaids" are the longest and most ambitious poems of his early adolescence and both stress the profoundly mysterious and profoundly threatening "otherness" of the feminine. Perhaps in reaction, woman "purified" as virgin martyr is a recurrent image in later poems, but a heady mix of adolescent fear and fascination appears to have spawned "Il Mystico" and his even more bizarre vision of the female as a freakish aberration in "A Vision of the Mermaids".

Nina Auerbach notes that while "right-thinking Victorians were elevating woman into an angel, their art slithered with images of [the] mermaid".⁶⁰ In the next chapter we shall see that like "Tennyson, Rossetti, Baudelaire—nearly any late nineteenth-century poet worth his salt water", Hopkins grappled with "sirens, mermaids, and their deadly desires".⁶¹ Through his submission to the lure of the siren, Hopkins shows himself to be enmeshed in the mythic "nexus of sex and death, prurience and terror, which underlies all such fictions".⁶²

[NOTES]

¹ *The Second Sex*, p. 152.

² Fr. Kingdon's obituary notice quoted by Devlin, S, p. 316.

³ "Development of the Libido and Sexual Organizations", *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, (Part III), *Standard Edition*, vol. XVI, pp. 330-331.

⁴ Preface to the Hebrew translation, *Totem and Taboo* (1912-1913), *Standard Edition*, XIII, p. xi.

⁵ Leo H. Bartheimer, "Psychoanalysis and Religion", *Psychoanalysis and Catholicism*, pp. 7-15 (p. 7).

⁶ Nel Noddings, *Women and Evil* (London: University of California Press, 1989), p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ *Moses and Monotheism*, *Standard Works*, vol. XXIII, p. 114.

⁹ Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 59.

¹⁰ *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 118.

¹¹ Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 8.

¹² *Evolution: Its Nature, Its Evidences, and Its Relation to Religious Thought*, 2nd rev. edn. (New

York: D. Appleton, 1897), as quoted in *Idols of Perversity*.

¹³ Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁴ Extracts quoted *ibid.*, pp. 216-7.

¹⁵ *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁷ Christine Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 9.

¹⁸ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 12.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁰ *The Second Sex*, p. 154.

²¹ *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); see also *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Ch. 2, on the anxiety of authorship in both men *and* women.

²² Adams, "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw ...", p. 1.

²³ Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expressions*, trans. Robert R. Barr and John Diercksmeier, (London: Harper and Row, 1987), pp. 55-56.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Adams, "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw...", p. 16.

²⁶ *Idols of Perversity*, p. 128.

²⁷ *John Milton: The Complete Poems*, ed. B.A. Wright (London: J.M. Dent, 1980). References are to this text unless otherwise stated.

²⁸ *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 29.

²⁹ *Spenser Poetical Works*, ed. J.C. Smith and E. De Selincourt, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). References to Spenser's poems are to this text.

³⁰ *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R.E. Latham (Baltimore [n.pub] 1951), p. 178; quoted in *Sexual Personae*, p. 43.

³¹ *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, (London: Longmans, 1969). References to Tennyson's poems are to this text.

³² Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1977), pp. 148-9.

³³ Richard Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment: Attitudes to Sex and Sexuality in Britain since the Renaissance* (London: Collins, 1990), p. 169.

³⁴ *Sexual Politics*, p. 147-8.

³⁵ *Idols of Perversity*, p. 16.

³⁶ Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*, p. 71.

³⁷ Biblical angels are usually represented as "manlike beings": see *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 138. For a detailed excursus see Stuart Schneiderman, *An Angel Passes: How the Sexes Became Undivided* (London: New York University Press, 1988).

³⁸ *Woman and the Demon*, p. 71.

³⁹ See *Nature, Culture and Gender*, ed. by MacCormack and Strathern, for a world-wide social anthropological study of attitudes towards female sexuality and menstruation.

⁴⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 28.

⁴¹ *Powers of Horror*, p. 64.

⁴² Quoted in Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 22.

⁴³ Hopkins began to write on the *Choephoroi* of the "noble genius" Aeschylus, but no trace remains of the work. See *L*, 1, pp. 255-6, 1887.

⁴⁴ *Complete Plays of Aeschylus*, p. 235.

⁴⁵ Philo Judaeus, *On Flight and Finding*, 51; quoted in Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 65.

⁴⁶ It is not known whether Hopkins had ever read Baudelaire, but Charles Lock suggests that they are linked by their Catholic sensibility, and that Catholicism and Decadence share in the fleshly sensuality that binds "carnality with incarnation". See Charles Lock, "Hopkins as a Decadent Poet", *Essays in Criticism*, 32, 4 (1988) 129-153.

⁴⁷ *Idols of Perversity*, pp. 233-234.

⁴⁸ Quoted *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Norman MacKenzie, *A Reader's Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 210.

⁵¹ Esther M. Harding, *Woman's Mysteries* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1976), p. 33.

⁵² Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), pp. 114-130.

⁵³ Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Robt. Denoon Cumming, (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 344. Sartre notes that the slimy is "rich with a host of obscure meanings and references" but both he and Hopkins choose to associate slime with the female and with the loss of self that the feminine threatens: the slimy represents a "retarded annihilation", it "sucks at me ... It is a soft yielding action, a moist and feminine sucking ... it attracts me to it as the bottom of an abyss might attract me ... it is a snare ... A ... feminine revenge ... I feel that I am going to be lost in it; that I may dissolve in the slime ... it is horrible." *Ibid.*, pp. 344-6.

⁵⁵ *Coleridge: Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, (London: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁵⁶ *Works of Henry Vaughan*, ed. L.C. Martin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn, 1957).

⁵⁷ Lock, "Hopkins as a Decadent Poet", p. 142.

⁵⁸ John Keats, Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 Nov. 1817, in *John Keats*, ed. Elizabeth Cook, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 364.

⁵⁹ Tom Paulin has criticized Hopkins for excessive artistic machismo and for making the tall nun's death "resemble a combination of sexual intercourse and a cavalry charge". See "On the Rampage", *TLS*, 14 Aug. 1987, p. 863.

⁶⁰ *Woman and the Demon*, p. 6.

⁶¹ *Idols of Perversity*, p. 266.

⁶² *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*, ed. by Regina Barrecca, (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 39.

**Fish, flesh, or foul?: Woman and the Feminine in
"A Vision of the Mermaids"***

**the strange woman, she the flower, the sword,
Red from spilt blood, a mortal flower to men,
Adorable, detestable.
*Algernon Charles Swinburne*¹**

**This is the place.
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
Streams black, the merman in his armoured body
We circle silently
About the wreck
We dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he.
*Adrienne Rich*²**

In a letter to Robert Bridges of January 1 1885 (*L*, 1, p. 202), Hopkins made the following criticism of a Swinburnian sunset piece:

Either in fact he does not see nature at all or else he overlays the landscape with such delirium-tremendous imagination that the result is a kind of bloody broth.

The "or else" of this withering diagnosis, albeit made by a mature Hopkins, could well be applied to his own early sunset piece, "A Vision of the Mermaids", in which he bombards the reader's sensibilities with such a hurl of vivid metaphors and sensory impressions that the overall effect is dizzying.

On a manifest level of meaning the poem may seem only to present a "naked encounter" with aesthetic sensualism; its prevailing mood of "sweet sadness" apparently part of a conventional romantic response to "beauty that must die". Jerome Bump accordingly dismisses the work as a pseudo-Keatsian indulgence in "pleasurable sensations", which, as Arnold said of Tennyson's Keatsian landscapes, "merely dawdles with the painted shell of the universe".³ Moder agrees that the "surface action of the vision and the fears it disguises are set at a 'safe' temporal distance in a mythological realm", but points out that within this realm women are "genitally distorted ... sirens of the sea who lure sailors to destruction and ... have come to denote doom".⁴ If Hopkins is merely dawdling with a painted shell, then it

is a peculiarly spiked and bloody one, and the poem's subversive "underthought" of violence indicates an early emergence of the strain of the psychosexual conflict that seems characteristic of his life and work.

Kenneth Seib notes that the "furtive watcher, a stranger to human bonding and the vital energies of nature", is an obsessive theme with Hopkins.⁵ Here his solitary observer is isolated on an island of rock, surrounded by "miles profound of solid green" beneath which yawn the deadly "chasms of the mid-main". Interpreting this scenario as a solipsistic landscape of the mind, the poem reveals premonitory hints of the vertiginous "cliffs of fall / Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed" ("No worst, there is none") of the dark sonnets: that terrifying "steep or deep" gulf of dark unreason over which Hopkins the priest would hang on his "higher cross" (S, p. 254, 1883).

The measureless gulf which threatens a degenerative chaos of mind worse than death, and from which no man returns ("no-man-fathomed"), or at least does not return as a man, is here only lightly hidden by the veils of perception. The terrible fall into madness is tantamount to a descent into the realm of the irrational and hence into the feminine. As a perennial symbol of the unconscious and of the maternal, the ocean symbolizes both, and in the depths of the sea it is always night: "woman is the *Mare tenebrarum*" and the *Mare tenebrarum* is woman.⁶

The sighting of the mermaids, which is the poem's central vision, has its imaginative roots in reality, being "sparked off" by a spectacular sunset. In later poems a splendid skyscape offers "news of God" and the sun acts, in the words of critic James Finn Cotter, as "a theophany of Christ-Apollo".⁷ But in "A Vision of the Mermaids" there is no triumphant "glean[ing]" of Christ's presence "down all that glory in the heavens" ("Hurrahing in Harvest"). The transcendent male God seems absent from this mythically feminine realm and the poem prefigures the movement towards darkness and dissolution of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", with no promise of the symbolic "dayspring" described in "The Wreck of the Deutschland": "let him ... be a dayspring to the dimness of us, / be a crimson-cressed east" (l. 277).

Hopkins may have been moved to frame one of his most surreal fantasies within a framework of prosaic action as a gesture towards the "commonsense" of

logical plotting. One of Yeats's early poems had failed in his view because he felt that it was totally disconnected from reality:

It was a strained and unworkable allegory about a young man and a sphinx on a rock in the sea (how did they get there? what did they eat? and so on: people think such criticisms very prosaic; but commonsense is never out of place anywhere, neither on Parnassus nor on Tabor nor on the mount where our Lord preached ...).
(*F.L.*, 3, p. 374, 1886)

In order to avoid the dangers of such abstraction, Hopkins locates the poem within a recognizeably realistic context of distance, place and time, and makes the "how", if not the objective, of the speaker's solitary odyssey, quite plain:

Rowing I reached a rock—the sea was low—
Which the tides cover in their overflow,
Marking the spot, when they have gurgled o'er,
With a thin floating veil of water hoar.
A mile astern lay the blue shores away;
And it was at the setting of the day.
(ll. 1-4)

The poem's revelatory dynamic suggests that the exposure of what is normally hidden beneath a "thin floating veil" is paralleled by a stripping away of cataract-like film from the imaginative eye of the observer. Nerves unsheathed react violently to stimulus, however, and the intensity of the speaker's subsequent response to the piercing beauty of the light recalls Hopkins's confession of Decadent ennui, made later in life to Richard Watson Dixon:

the mind after a certain number of shocks or stimuli ... is spent and flags ... the insight is more sensitive, in fact more perfect, earlier in life than later and especially towards elementary impressions: I remember that crimson and pure blues seemed to me spiritual and heavenly sights fit to draw tears once; now I can just see what once I saw, but can hardly dwell on it and should not care to do so.
(*L*, 2, p. 38, 1880)

Certainly the jading effects of time and custom on the senses are not apparent in "A Vision of the Mermaids", for the poem erupts into life as the alliterated plosives of "Plum-purple" signal the tearing open of the bruised firmament in an image which invests observed reality with sensuality and violent aggression:

Plum-purple was the West; but spikes of light
Spear'd open lustrous gashes, crimson-white.

The image is one of several which may seem to echo Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, described by Hopkins with unconscious irony, in a letter penned just before "A Vision of the Mermaids", as "a fine poem", although perhaps "a little too fantastic" (*L*, 3, p. 6, 1862):

Like the last glare of day's red agony,
Which, from a rent among the fiery clouds,
Burns far along the tempest-wrinkled deep.
(*Prometheus Unbound*, Act 3, scene 2, ll. 7-9)

Shelley's sunset is strikingly similar to Hopkins's in its suggestion of cosmic wounding but Hopkins presents an interaction of far more distinct sexual elements, with the sun's phallic "spikes" penetrating the "female" wound (gash) of the firmament like a blade thrust into soft fruit (plum-purple). The sensory impact of the image is also made concrete by the onomatopoeic contrast that Hopkins establishes between the lush open vowels and feminine endings of "plum-purple", "lustrous" and "gashes", and the stiletto-like sharpness of the vowel sounds and consonants in "spike" and "light". Images of penetration, and the tearing or crushing of fruit and flesh, are of course, key motifs in Hopkins's later work, their violent sensuality "legitimized" (although Robert Bridges might not agree) by their theological symbolism. But an initial imaginative attraction to the idea of torture and violence for its own sake seems evident nonetheless.

Comparable word-pictures of brilliant light and burning blood-red wounds are later used to stunning effect in "The Windhover", ("the best thing I ever wrote", *L*, 1, p. 85, 1879): "sheer plod makes plough down sillion / Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear, / Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion". Through this complex set of analogies Hopkins appears to pursue the Blakean concept of creation and progression as the spoils of a perpetual war of contraries. On this theme, Robert Langbaum comments:

There seems to be ... a necessary and splendid violence in the union of opposites by which the glory is achieved. Thus a shine emerges from even the aggression of the plough upon the soil; and dying embers are both aggressor and victim, falling of their own accord and wounding themselves into triumphant gold and the vermilion of blood and martyrdom.⁸

The violent interaction of masculine and feminine elements that gives "A Vision of the Mermaids" its mythic dimension, is re-enacted here in the splitting open of the earth and burning coals. The inert materiality of the passive body of the earth is transfigured after it is broken open, "gashed", by the blade of the plough ("ploughing", as in Shakespeare's "he plough'd her and she cropp'd",⁹ is a common and long-established metaphor for sexual intercourse). The light that breaks from the gleaming furrows of the earth is not self-generated, it merely reflects (though dimly) the billion times greater magnitude of its creator, as the feminine moon does the sun. The burning coals generate their own energy and light, however, and therefore symbolize autonomous masculine power. This power is voluntarily relinquished when they choose to "fall, gall and gash themselves" in order to give light and essential warmth to humanity. In so doing they present an allegorical form of Christ's kenosis (an act of self-emptying), through which (Hopkins writes) Christ "annihilated himself ... emptied or exhausted himself ... of Godhead [and] humbled himself to death" (*L*, p. 175, 1883).

As herb and as emblem of bitterness, the word "gall" is linked with Christ's mental and physical suffering both before and during his crucifixion (see Matt. 27:34). In addition to its more common usage as a word denoting injury through friction or rubbing, "to gall" can also mean "to break the surface of (ground, soil)", and therefore to till or plough the earth (*OED*). The embers then become "feminized" through an act of voluntary abasement (they choose to "fall"), and an act of symbolic wounding or castration (they are both galled and gashed). The dying embers may therefore symbolize the self-elected martyrdom of the male Christ, who *chooses* to behave in the manner that Freud finds most characteristic of femininity, which is to give "preference to passive aims",¹⁰ and to have his body broken open for the communal good.

"A Vision of the Mermaids" is not an explicitly theological poem (though neither could "The Windhover" be so described), yet an observable link seems to exist between Hopkins's later efforts to subdue his assertive self in imitation of the "feminine" passivity of his chosen role-model, the symbolically castrated Christ, and

the varying moods and actions of his passively receptive persona in "A Vision of the Mermaids".

The poem provides its own teasing lesson in the apparent futility of forcibly pursuing the "one rapture of an inspiration", for the poet-persona gains only tantalizing glimpses of an inscape hidden behind the veil of the female firmament, which fly when his eye ("I") becomes actively questing:

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

And thro' their parting lids there came and went

Keen glimpses of the inner firmament:

Fair beds they seem'd of water-lily flakes

Clustering entrancingly in beryl lakes

(ll. 9-14)

This briefly glimpsed vision of water-lily flakes set in beryl lakes is in contrast to the "stained, veined variety" surrounding the earthbound speaker, for these islands of white purity are the antitheses of the "fallen" mermaids, who are first seen after the metaphorical intercourse of sun and earth as "isle[s] of roses", symbolically "flushed" with the stain of blood and sexuality. Remarking on the Victorian vogue for using elaborate floral imagery of women as either Lilies or Roses and on the dispiriting fatality of the message that these images proclaim, Kate Millett comments: "to be a Lily is to be condemned to die; to be a Rose is to be fatal to others".¹¹ There are marked similarities between the chill stillness of this alternative world and the "death-in-life" imagery of ascetic withdrawal behind the veil in "Heaven-Haven". The chaste "beds" of virginal water-lilies, cold and pure like flakes of snow, and the "still waters" (Psalm 23) of green ("beryl") lakes—effectively sealed off from the turbulent currents of sensual desire—suggest that Hopkins's solitary observer is attracted by the concept of total withdrawal into a simplified state of purity, where the distracting demands of the senses are pruned away. The speaker appears to reiterate the wish for freedom from all sexual needs and desires expressed in "Il Mystico", but here Hopkins's funereal white lilies seem to acknowledge that such a state would constitute a form of death. "A Vision of the Mermaids" offers no explicit statement of the speaker's feelings of guilt or eroticism, however, and the poet-

persona's "dangerous" fantasies and desires are largely projected onto externalized nature. This displacement of responsibility frees the poet's hand, but it also presents a problem in determining whether he identifies with, in crudely symbolic terms, the "feminine" gash or the "masculine" spike, or indeed with both.¹² This apparent ambiguity on the question of gender identification is not solely a problem for the reader, however, as Hopkins seems to oscillate between the poles of psychical femininity and masculinity in his work and in his life without reconciling his ambivalence towards either state.

In the light of this alternation of receptive and assertive roles, an interesting connection emerges between the action of the aggressively masculine "sire of muse" (out of the same stable as Hopkins's harsh God of "lightning and lashed rod" in "The Wreck of the Deutschland") who is invoked by a "yielding" and wearily feminized persona in "To R.B." and what appears to be the speaker's moment of imaginative impregnation in "A Vision of the Mermaids":

Anon, across their swimming splendour strook,
 An intense line of throbbing blood-light shook
 A quivering pennon; then for eye too keen,
 Ebb'd back beneath its snowy lids unseen.

This throbbing lance of blood-light carries the same associations of violent phallic power as the earlier "spikes of light", and it strikes and ebbs with the swiftness of the fathering flame in "To R.B.":

The fine delight that fathers thought; the strong
 Spur, live and lancing like the blowpipe flame,
 Breathes once and, quenched faster than it came,

...

Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song.
 ("To R.B." ll. 1-4)

Some resistance to the laser-like penetrative power of the light is suggested in "for eye too *keen*" but in "The Alchemist in the City", the poet voices his conflicting wish to play an actively masculine role: to "*pierce* the yellow waxen light / with free long looking". We have already considered the psychological ramifications of Hopkins's attitude towards the male gaze, but as he memorably demonstrates in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", the heightened consciousness which enables him to penetrate the

"Earth Veil" can also bring glimpses of Apocalyptic terror.

The "delirium-tremendous" image of sensuality engendered by the lancing shaft of light in "A Vision of the Mermaids" seems a lifetime away from the vast and dragonish horrors that hang in the sky of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", however. Being born out of violence the image is inevitably linked with destruction, but the initial effect is primarily and overwhelmingly suggestive of burgeoning fertility:

Now all things rosy turn'd: the west had grown
To an orb'd rose, which, by hot pantings blown
Apart, betwixt ten thousand petall'd lips
By interchange gasp'd splendour and eclipse.
The zenith melted to a rose of air;
The waves were rosy-lipp'd; the crimson glare
Shower'd the cliffs and every fret and spire
With garnet wreaths and blooms of rosy-budded fire.

Here the rose of the firmament swells and dilates like an immense womb, and the suggestion of bloody defloration in the earlier image of "lustrous gashes" appears less disturbingly like an act of rape when these wounds are transformed into a more conventional image of "petall'd lips". There is an element of explosive violence in "blown apart", but "hot pantings" and "melted" suggest that the metaphorical act of is one of simultaneous orgasm and birthing. Intimations of mortality (the last "gasp"?) are present in this "interchange [of] splendour and eclipse": blown roses quickly die and Hopkins's poem seems again similar to Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, where nature's process is exemplified in the life-cycle of "budding, blown, or odour-faded blooms" (Act 3, scene 3).¹³ The orgasmic shower of "rosy-budded fire" from the siring blood-light ("crimson glare") of the sun also brings with it a *memento mori* in the shape of "garnet wreaths": a sign that the generative and destructive Heraclitean flux of "nature's bonfire" burns on. Hopkins's imagery reflects the paradoxical process of "interchange" by blurring the boundaries between elements. Solidity thus becomes an impermanent state which is constantly melting into liquid. Fluid and unstable substances "thicken" into solidity: the sky is gashed like flesh, then "melts"; the sea is fleshy-lipped or "solid green"; and colour takes on crystalline or metallic density which can pierce or melt—"sapphire-molten-blue".¹⁴

Hopkins creates a corresponding "sliding inscape" in "Epithalamion", a

celebratory ode on the marriage of his younger brother, Everard. The dramatic scenario of "Epithalamion" appears to offer a muted, nonfantastical version of "A Vision of the Mermaids", for the solitary protagonist of "Epithalamion" is the secret observer of a group of naked boys swimming and diving in a woodland pool:

By there comes a listless stranger: beckoned by the noise
 He drops towards the river: unseen
 Sees the bevy of them, how the boys
 With dare and with downdolphinry and bellbright bodies huddling out
 Are earthworld, airworld, waterworld thorough hurled, all by turn and turn about.
 ("Epithalamion", ll. 14-18)

Here sexual significance is also grafted onto nature and Hopkins's choice of water as a symbol of spousal love accords "with ancient and modern interpretations which have traditionally viewed it as the source of life, and today also associate it with the feminine principle in the unconscious".¹⁵ Not all is viewed as a positive however, even in a poem ostensibly celebrating sexual union. Something of Hopkins's ambivalence towards its "double natured" quality is embodied in his use of oxymoron in his description of the "water" of sexual love as a "flinty kindcold element", with the added effect of a possible submerged reference to the "cold-kind" grasp of death in Milton's sonnet "On the death of a fair infant".¹⁶ But Hopkins's hand falters when he turns from exuberant symbolism to an *explicit* statement of meaning ("What is ... the delightful dean? / Wedlock. / What the water? Spousal love") and the poem dwindles into silence: "It had some bright lines, but I could not get it done" (*L*, 1, p. 277, 1888).

The Protean mermaids who float up out of Hopkins's "bloody broth" also partake of the opposing elements of earthworld and airworld, being likened to "isles of roses", Cyclads and stars or "budding" planets; "drifting through delighted *air*", yet swimming like fish in "*shoals* of bloom". The boys in "Epithalamion" were vulnerable in the bloom of their youth and tender nakedness, but Hopkins's mermaids are themselves armed and armoured, silken roses spiked with menace. By their nature mermaids are paradoxical creatures but these in "A Vision of the Mermaids" are stranger than most:

Cluster'd in troops and halo'd by the light,
 Those Cyclads made that thicken'd on my sight.
 This was their manner: one translucent crest

Of tremulous film, more subtle than the vest
 Of dewy gorse blurr'd with the gossamer fine,
 From crown to tail-fin floating, fringed the spine,
 Drooped o'er the brows like Hector's casque, and sway'd
 In silken undulation, spurr'd and ray'd
 With spikèd quills all of intensest hue;

As the aquatic sisters of lamias and serpent-women, mermaids symbolize the contradictory and ambivalent attitudes towards women which seem particularly manifest in the art and literature of the Victorian period. Most dangerous, because most disguised, were serpent-women with a "lady face" like Thackeray's Becky Sharp, whose name suggests the "beckoning" allure and the cruelly sharp sting of the femme fatale:

They look pretty enough when they sit upon a rock, twanging their harps and combing their hair, and sing, and beckon you to come and hold the looking glass; but when they sink into their native element, depend on it those mermaids are about no good, and we had best not examine the fiendish marine cannibals, revelling and feasting on their wretched pickled victims.¹⁷

Tennyson presents a conventionally "throned and combed" mermaid who spreads the deadly net of her serpentine golden ringlets to catch souls in and dreams of love-play with mermen ("The Mermaid"). Her sensual allure is enhanced by the fact that Tennyson ("I never thought of Mermen and Mermaidens with tails")¹⁸ gives her human legs, and also, presumably, human genitalia, thereby making physical union a real, if potentially "soul-destroying", possibility. Matthew Arnold reverses the sex roles and has a forlorn merman dreaming of a wife who has deserted him and their "red-gold" sensual paradise for the barren uplands of religion ("The Forsaken Merman"). In each case the sea represents a Dionysian underworld of lawless appetite and spontaneous sexual pleasure which holds a concomitant threat to the immortality of the soul.

The mermaid's preternatural mystery and her vampiric proclivities are exemplified in a picture entitled "The Depths of the Sea" by Edward Burne-Jones. Hopkins commended the picture for its "powerful drawing" of the mermaid's face and the "treatment of her fishments and fishmanship, the tailfin turning short and flattening to save striking the ground" (*L*, 2, p. 136, 1886). Burne-Jones's mermaid stares beyond the frame of the picture, mesmerizing the onlooker with the haunting intensity

and power of her gaze, a "demon's magic glimmering within it".¹⁹ She is seen dragging the naked and inert body of her victim down into a narrow and suggestively tunnel-like lair. The arms of the drowning youth are pulled behind his back to give the appearance of being pinioned and the painting offers a pictorial allegory of the war between the ascendant ideal of the male and the swamping powers of female atavism as expounded by Le Conte. Hopkins presented no ideological objection to the picture but complained that the "youth's knees and feet" were very "crude and unsatisfactory in drawing". Burne-Jones was evidently at fault, not for depicting the female as an inhuman, cannibalistic predator, but because his slovenly drawing and "technical imperfection" showed (Hopkins said) that his "creative gift" had not reached full "manhood" (L, 2, p.133, 1886). The artist might therefore present an image of the male as a passive victim of the female's demonic lusts, but he could not be forgiven for failing to exert his own powers of "masterly execution" and technical control over the work itself.

The treacherous deceit of sea-witches, nymphs and mermaidens seems to be taken for granted by Hopkins himself in lines written to complete his friend Richard Garnett's poem, "The Nix". Garnett's poem describes how a "crafty Nix" (a kind of water witch or nymph in Germanic folklore) is consumed with envy of the beauty of a mortal woman and steals her identity by magic. Hopkins adds the motive of sexual jealousy to the tale by making the Nix act out of a desire to possess the mortal woman's lover. The disempowered female victim of the poem hopes that her lover will detect the cold iciness of the Nix's true nature beneath her glittering surface beauty, but her ruthless guile and predatory desire to entrap the male suggest that Hopkins's Nix and Thackeray's Becky Sharp are indeed sisters under the skin who will win at any cost, even if the prize is a corpse:

He sees her, O but he must miss
 A something in her face of guile,
 And relish not her loveless kiss
 And wonder at her shallow smile

...
 Or if I go, she stays meanwhile,
 Who means to wed or means to kill,
 And speeds uncheck'd her murderous guile
 Or wholly winds him to her will.

As Edith Wharton observes in her *fin de siècle* novel, *The House of Mirth*, "The mortal maid on the shore is helpless against the siren who loves her prey: such victims are floated back dead from their adventure".²⁰

The Nix is clearly kin to the Lamia who winds and crushes her victim within the coils of her will, but Hopkins's veiled and spiked mermaids in "A Vision of the Mermaids" are even more complex and threatening repositories of "otherness". The angel/monster dichotomy that seems to typify the age's fractured view of woman is strikingly manifested in these ambiguously sexed creatures, all mystery below the waist, who emerge from Hopkins's imagination. In his "Epithalamion", he refers to a group of playful and apparently non-threatening young boys as a "bevy" ("The proper term for a company of maidens or ladies", *OED*), but Hopkins's company of mermaidens gather in "troops" and therefore seem "unsexed" (or rather perversely sexed) in the manner of Lady MacBeth and the monstrous regiment of females who crave autonomous power. A suggestion of antagonism and combat (perhaps a real war of the sexes) is given in Hopkins's description of these martial maidens who bear warrior-like "crests" shaped like "Hector's casque", and are "spurr'd" like cavalrymen (one is crowned like an Assyrian *prince*). Conversely they are "halo'd" like angels or saints, are modestly covered from "white waist" to tail by "silver skirt[s]", and gaze heavenwards singing sweetly.

The sketch that Hopkins produced to accompany the poem depicts several distant groups of mermaids half submerged in a vast sea, gazing at the setting sun, their backs turned decorously towards the onlooker. The picture is principally remarkable for a riven and lowering sunset sky such as John Martin might have created as a backdrop to *Gotterdammerung* (*The Twilight of the Gods*); this massive skyscape, plus the upright stance of the mermaids in their conspicuously crested helmets, gives a Wagnerian gravitas to the scene, but presents the mermaids more in the aspect of stern Valkyries than seductive Rhine maidens. Winefred Nowotny notes Hopkins's early enthusiasm for Spenser and believes that his drawing would make a pleasing illustration for Book II, Canto 12 of *The Faerie Queene*, of which a

"prominent motif is the perilous journey to the enchantress's island".²¹ The enchantress Acrasia is a vampiric Circean witch whose lust degrades men to the level of beasts (Book II, Canto 12, stanza 73). Spenser's mermaids are the bait in Acrasia's gilded trap for they use their beauty and "sweet skill in wonted melody ... T'allure weake travellers, whom gotten they did kill" (Book II, Canto 12, stanza 31).

Hopkins's mermaids share this sweet skill in music and they too seem fashioned to fascinate and ensnare. Implications of web-like entrapment and danger are suggested in the comparison of the "translucent" membrane, floating like a bristling veil from "crown to tail-fin", with gossamer covered gorse. Yet these "tremulous film[s]" apparently increase the fascination held by the mermaids, for the voyeuristic speaker seems as mesmerized by their sinuous dance as perhaps Hopkins is by the mellifluous *sounds* of his phrase "sway'd / In silken undulation". A connection with Salome, the great Femme Fatale of Victorian art and a demonic temptress who damns and destroys those who see her unveiled, appears to be implied here. The mermaids' gauzy and gorgeously coloured "fishments" are "more subtle" than the finest spider's web and may be employed to a similar purpose. Their subtlety may further link them with the "suttlest beast of all the field" and the archetypal tempter, Milton's serpent in *Paradise Lost*, also "crested" like the mermaids, whose "wanton wreaths" and brilliant colours lure the eye of Eve (*Paradise Lost*, Book 9, ll. 516-7, l. 560). Though as Dijkstra remarks, in the "evil, bestial implications of her beauty, woman was not only tempted by the snake but was the snake herself".²² This combination of serpentine phallic power and the sensual seductiveness of white flesh and swaying movement emphasizes the exotic gynandrous nature of the mermaids. Fin de siècle writer, Joséphin Péladan, denounces the particular moral "deformity" of this kind of female aberration in his book *The Gynander* (1891): "the androgyne is the virginal adolescent male, still somewhat feminine, while the gynander can only be the woman who strives for male characteristics, the sexual usurper: the feminine aping the masculine!".²³ Such images may also hint at confused gender identification in the speaker, who is implicitly placed in the roles of Herod *and* Eve, each of whom is tempted by the revelation of forbidden knowledge which destroys life.

The mermaids are several times described as, or are connected with, wreaths, indeed they seem to "grow" out of "garnet wreaths" of fire. Thus intertwined like flowers (roses and *apple*-blossom) and snakes they symbolize the cause and effect of the Fall, for their life and colour is ultimately "quenched" in the poem and the fading of Adam's wreath is the first image of death in Eden: "From his slack hand the Garland wreath'd for Eve / Down dropd, and all the faded roses shed" (*Paradise Lost*, Book 9, ll. 892-4). Hopkins suggests that the seeming sadness of the mermaids may be caused by their exiled state, having to live "With loath'd cold fish, far from man" (l.124). But the mermaids actually *are* half-human and half "loath'd cold fish" and therefore cannot escape from their own loathly physical state. Like their ordinary counterparts they are confined to the margins of patriarchal culture because femaleness is itself considered to be a defect. As Thomas Aquinas declares: "women do not conform to 'nature's first intention', which aims at perfection (men), but to 'nature's second intention, (to such things as) decay, deformity, and the weakness of age'".²⁴ Like Spenser's Duessa, the mermaid's "neather parts misshapen, monstrous ... hidd in water" (*The Faerie Queene*, Book 1, Canto 2, l. 361) may symbolize a general male dread of woman's physiology and fear of her power. Only those who relish horror, Thackeray suggests, would dare to look beneath the surface of woman's reality:

has [the author] once forgotten the laws of politeness, and showed the monster's hideous tail above water? No! Those who like may peep down under waves that are pretty transparent, and see it writhing and twirling, diabolically hideous and slimy, flapping amongst bones, or curling around corpses.²⁵

In addition to what may be described as their conventional abnormality, Hopkins's mermaids also carry a strange armour of quills, whose possibly mortal sting associates them with Sin, the female avatar of Satan: "Woman to the waist, and fair, / But ended foul in many a scaly fold ... a Serpent armed with mortal sting" (*Paradise Lost*, Book 2, ll. 650-53). Milton's Sin represents the "wide womb of Chaos": a specifically female hell threatening darkness and engulfment but the "spikèd quills" with which the mermaids are "rayed" endow them with the masculine penetrative capability of the sun's piercing rays. Because of her predatory hunger and callous destruction of the male, the mermaid was supposed by some to have "allowed the

masculine force of the bisexual primal state to resurface" and therefore she personified the "regressive, bestial element in woman's nature".²⁶ Hopkins's extraordinarily accoutred mermaids make the paradox of this bisexual state visible and the speaker's implied anxiety may therefore be caused by a "feminine" fear of these phallically spiked incubi, who may penetrate him. Indeed, this fear may actually be a fantasy which is threatening to the speaker because it is at once attractive and repellent.

A less alienated vision of the feminine might be expected from the speaker's description of a company of Nereids, who emerge from legend as benevolent sea nymphs, gentle cousins to the *Ondine*, who is not a cruel siren but the "innocent flower of the sea's deep garden":²⁷

Then saw I sudden from the waters break
 Far off a Nereid company, and shake
 From wings swan-fledged a wheel of watery light
 Flickering with sunny spokes, and left and right
 Plunge orb'd in rainbow arcs, and trample and tread
 The satin-purpled smooth to foam, and spread
 Slim-pointed sea-gull plumes, and droop behind
 One scarlet feather trailing to the wind;
 Then like a flock of sea-fowl mounting higher,
 Thro' crimson-golden floods pass swallow'd into fire.
 (ll. 74-83)

Benevolent or not, even these seem armed with sharp pointed plumes and their actions of "mounting", "plunging", "trampling" and "treading" associate them with the sexual aggressiveness of the poem's male "violator", Summer. All of the female figures in the poem are ultimately destroyed or consumed in scenes to which the passive speaker is merely a witness. As wielder of his own "quill", however, the poet is in a sense witness *and* agent of destruction (Hopkins is not here interpreting an actual event as he did in "The Wreck of the Deutschland"), and may release suppressed violence and sexual energy through surrogate "masculine" figures, all of whom—sun, "father Sea", and Summer—are imaged both as begetters and destroyers. The urge to power over nature and the feminine that these figures embody is nevertheless countered by what appears to be a conflicting passive wish to be "swallowed into" a greater "self", to escape from his rock and be a part of the main, which is here enacted in the paradoxical dying into everlasting life of the Nereids.

In images which adumbrate the poet's wish to escape subjectivity and abase himself before God in "Let me be to Thee as the circling bird", and the whirling wings of the speaker's feminine heart in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (l. 20), the Nereids bathe in baptismal "crimson-golden floods", before being engulfed by the primal masculine element of fire. If the slimy serpentine tails of the mermaids symbolize the link between the female and the diabolical, then the white swanlike wings of the Nereids may associate them with the era's opposing and exalted image of woman as angel.²⁸ Their femininity is properly restored and proved by their final act of self-immolation, through which, legend has it, they achieve immortality.

An equivalent determination to immolate the self and embrace punishment ("kiss the rod") is the basic tenet of Hopkins's mature philosophy, but if taken to extremes, this may lead to the destructive action of the personality type described by Freud as a "moral masochist"; that is, one who seeks punishment from the "great parental authority of Fate" and therefore "must do something inexpedient, act against his own interest, ruin the prospects which the real world offers him, and possibly destroy his existence in the world of reality".²⁹ His "feminine" wish to be punished and humiliated is nevertheless countered by an assertive urge to wield the rod, with all the phallic connotations that the term implies.³⁰ The agonized "wrestling match" in "Carrion Comfort" well illustrates the tangle of psychological "[k]nots" created by this war within.

Hopkins's apparent awareness of his psychic fragmentation seems evident in remarks he made about R. L. Stevenson's classic Oedipal fantasy of father-son conflict,³¹ *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, "You are certainly wrong about Hyde being overdrawn: my Hyde is worse". (*L*, 1, p. 238, 1886). Hopkins goes on to say that the scene where Mr Hyde tramples over the body of a girl of "maybe eight or ten" and leaves her "screaming on the ground", being afterwards forced to escape scandal by paying money to the girl's family, was "perhaps a convention", and that Stevenson "was thinking of something quite unsuitable for fiction". Given the circumstances of the fictional incident and the fact that "ordinary" murder and violence are allowed to run rampant in Stevenson's tale, we are left with the impression that the unspeakable

crime is child-rape or sexual assault. Hopkins's criticism is fascinating both in its apparent accuracy and for what it reveals of his awareness of the duplicity of art.

The violent impulses of Hopkins's "Hyde" may be released in some measure through the "macho" aggressiveness of Summer, a personified figure who embodies the extremes of muscular brutality and bombast:

... As when Summer of his sister Spring
 Crushes and tears the rare enjewelling,
 And boasting 'I have fairer things than these'
 Plashes amidst the billowy apple-trees
 His lusty hands, in gusts of scented wind
 Swirling out bloom till all the air is blind
 With rosy foam and pelting blossom and mists
 Of driving vermeil-rain; and, as he lists,
 The dainty onyx-coronal deflowers,
 A glorious wanton;—all the wrecks in showers
 Crowd down upon a stream, and jostling thick
 With bubbles bugle-eyed, struggle and stick
 On tangled shoals that bar the brook ...
 (ll. 84-96)

Although his mammocking energies seem less sadistic than boorish and the violence of the language is diluted to some extent by the delicacy of phrases such as "the dainty onyx-coronal", Summer's "lusty" orgy of defloration asserts crushing masculine force over the mermaids and "sister Spring" in a "gloriously wanton" manner clearly relished by the speaker.

A comparable "rape" of Nature is imaged in Wordsworth's "Nutting": "Then up I rose,/ And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash / and merciless ravage". Wordsworth incorporates feelings of moral culpability and moral judgement into the language of his poem, however, and his young protagonist moves beyond immediate "exultation" to a "sense of pain" at his own destructive impulse. Hopkins's speaker can plead "not guilty" to the act yet his voyeuristic exultation is also succeeded by a mood of reflection and sadness.

The image of tangled shoals on which the mermaids are subsequently wrecked ("struggle and stick") counters the threat posed by their spikes, entangling hair and submerged (veiled) flesh, by emphasizing "father" Sea's, and, by implication, the poet's supremacy as begetter and wrecker. No such powers are arrogated by the poet's

passive "alter-ego", however, for the mermaids who crowd to his rock appear indifferent to the speaker's presence: "Careless of me they sported: some would plash / The languent smooth with dimpling drops, and flash / Their filmy tails", (ll. 102-4). If they are out to seduce the eye of the beholder then their apparently "careless" play could be an exercise in studied artlessness, and yet the poem's final mood shift into wistful melancholy suggests that Hopkins's speaker is more akin to Eliot's Prufrock than the Ulysses of myth. He hears the mermaids singing but they do not seem to sing to him, and therefore may not regard him either as a potential aggressor or as a victim to entice and destroy.

The speaker's implied lack of power or potency may indeed be reflected in the mermaids themselves for the "masculine" threat that they once presented seems to have been lost with their wreck, and a hitherto unseen "wound" beneath their "silver skirt[s]" is revealed to the speaker: "threads of carmine, shot / Thro' silver, gloom'd to a blood-vivid clot". This disquieting image associates the mermaids with the "feminine" gashes of the firmament, and also recalls the bad blood / bad mother imagery of "Il Mystico". In view of the mermaid's exotic physiology, the "clot" may indicate that the flow of natural fecundity has been dammed up or coagulated. Hopkins refers to his own creative processes in terms of blood, however, ("I am always jaded ... and my vein shows no signs of ever flowing again", *L*, 1, p. 178, 1883), and said of his Dark Sonnets that if ever "anything was written in blood one of these was" (*L*, 1, p. 219, 1885). The speaker's implied dread of this "glooming" image of thwarted fertility may therefore presage the anxiety over powerlessness and lack of productivity, which is elsewhere expressed in terms of castration and female barrenness.

The veil, as Gilbert and Gubar point out in a brilliant excursus on the subject, is "an emblem of obscure potential and mystery" and is therefore associated in male minds with the female. As an "inspiration and source of imaginative power, the presence behind the veil for many a poet is the female muse" but the angelic muse may easily metamorphose into the terrible Medusa.³² As here, the veil lifted may bring the shock of confrontation with absence and castration. Curiously, or perhaps not so if he

sees the now "feminized" mermaids as being correlatives of his own psychic state, the speaker begins to identify with them and their yearning to complete the "half-circle" of self. The mermaids and the speaker now share the same rock, symbolically the speaker's centre of consciousness, and all are beset by feelings of loss, estrangement, and melancholy:

But most in a half-circle watch'd the sun;
 And a sweet sadness dwelt on everyone;
 I knew not why,—but know that sadness dwells
 On Mermaids—whether that they ring the knells
 Of seamen whelm'd in chasms of the mid-main,
 As poets sing; or that it is a pain
 To know the dusk depths of the ponderous sea, and be
 With loath'd cold fishes, far from man—or what;—
 I know the sadness but the cause know not.
 (ll. 116-125)

Because the speaker cannot explain the reason for his grief, he seems at this point in the poem to become one with Margaret, the sorrowing female child of Goldengrove ("Spring and Fall"). The child's unconscious empathy with the dying leaves and the speaker's empathy with the mermaids cannot be articulated, only intuitively felt. The ancient threnody of the mermaids is as incomprehensible to the speaker as Hopkins's explanation of the cause of sadness in "Spring and Fall" would probably be to Margaret. But "sorrow's springs are the same", and the loss of innocence and psychic wholeness with the Fall of man sets the speaker's plight in a universal context.

In "Il Mystico", the poet longs to escape from the "sordidness" of the sinful body and shake his Marvellian spirit's wings free of "slime and cakèd clot". A similar urge to escape the "slime" of his dank rock of self and the implications of the mermaids' hidden wound, is embodied in the "sweet strain[ing]" towards heaven of the mermaids' song. The song ends in a "deep, heart-broken close" and its "melting" cadences suggest that such aspirations are destined to dissolve and sink earthwards, dragged down by the treacherous instability of the flesh. The "slabby" (miry, slimy) weeds which the mermaids "comb among" are almost indistinguishable from their own hair and offer a further example of Hopkins's anxious preoccupation with the ideas of breakdown and slimy dissolution. As Dijkstra remarks of a painting by Gustave Moreau, he "depicts the sirens as virtually melting into the rocks, an integral

part of the rotting, decomposing organic matter which obstructed the ideal male in his search for transcendence".³³ Death and corruption are hidden beneath the "satin-purpled" surface of the ocean and there is blood beneath the silvery veils of the mermaids. The speaker's premonitory suggestion, that to know the "dusk depths" of the mind's ocean is synonymous with pain, is deeply inscribed in the bitter blood of Hopkins's Dark Sonnets.

The final "quench[ing]" of the mermaids appears in some respects like a figurative act of moral cleansing performed by the "washing waves" of Father Sea, yet the creeping stealth of the wind and the furtiveness of the speaker ("I stole away") are indicative of culpability and guilt. The poem's closing images of a monochromatic landscape of "dusk" and "looming" white manifestly signal the fading of the vision, but they also anticipate the terrible black and white moral rack of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves". Safety is sought by the speaker in the "stirless bay": an image of retreat into pre-Oedipal stasis which recalls the chaste "beryl lakes" of the early part of the poem. But the dangerous vortex of life and sensuality still calls the speaker away from his barren sanctuary, where the heart is in hiding, and down to the sea. Hopkins and his persona in "A Vision of the Mermaids" can never fully belong in either and as we shall see in the next chapter, the anxiety and pain of self-alienation remains unassuaged.

[NOTES]

* A prototypical version of this chapter has been published. See Kossick, "No Haven for Hopkins: A Study of Violence and Self-division in 'A Vision of the Mermaids'", *The Hopkins Quarterly*, 7, 1 & 2 (1990), 35-48.

¹ "Atalanta in Calydon", in *Swinburne: Poems and Prose* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., Everyman's Library, 1940), p. 151.

² "Diving into the Wreck", *Diving into the Wreck, Poems 1971-1972* (London: W.W. Norton, 1973).

³ "Hopkins and Keats", *Victorian Poetry*, 10 (1972), 33-43 (p. 11).

⁴ "Aspects of Androgyny...", p. 4.

⁵ "Hopkins's Secret Watchers", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 31, 1 (1989), 52-65 (p. 52).

⁶ *The Second Sex*, p. 155.

- ⁷ "'Hornlight Wound to the West': The Inscape of the Passion in Hopkins' Poetry", *Victorian Poetry*, 16, 4 (1978), 297-313 (p. 300).
- ⁸ *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 68.
- ⁹ *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act 1, 2, l. 236.
- ¹⁰ "Femininity (1933)", *Standard Edition*, vol. XXII, p. 115.
- ¹¹ *Sexual Politics*, p. 150. In his mature career Hopkins appears to break these conventions and describes the Virgin Mary ("Rosa Mystica") and St. Winefred (time's "rich rose") as roses; though it is perhaps salutary that Hopkins associates *both* lilies and roses with death and martyrdom, for Mary and Winefred are emblems of chastity and prove their love of Christ, like St. Gertrude, "Christ's lily" in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (l. 158), by dying for him.
- ¹² Millett and Paglia note the repeated linguistic representation of the female genital as a wound, or "gash". See *Sexual Politics*, p. 47; *Sexual Personae*, p. 16.
- ¹³ *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Neville Rogers, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).
- ¹⁴ See James Milroy, *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: André Deutsch, 1977), pp. 147-53.
- ¹⁵ MacKenzie, *Poems*, p. 489.
- ¹⁶ I am indebted to Norman MacKenzie for this idea. See *Poems*, p. 491.
- ¹⁷ *Vanity Fair*, ed. J.I.M. Stewart, (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 738.
- ¹⁸ Tennyson quoted by Hallam Tennyson, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 195.
- ¹⁹ *Woman and the Demon*, p. 1.
- ²⁰ *The House of Mirth* (New York: Rinehart, 1962), p. 193.
- ²¹ *Hopkins's Language of Prayer and Praise* (Fourth Annual Lecture), (London: The Hopkins Society, 1973), p. 5.
- ²² *Idols of Perversity*, p. 305.
- ²³ *La Décadence Latine*, 14 vols. (Paris, 1884-96), 9: *La Gynandre*, p. 43; quoted *ibid.*, p. 273.
- ²⁴ *Summa Theologiae* 1 q 52 a 1 ad 2; quoted in *Eunuchs for the Sake of Heaven*, p. 188.
- ²⁵ *Vanity Fair*, p. 738.
- ²⁶ *Idols of Perversity*, p. 258.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ See MacKenzie on the winged Okeanid nymphs in Hopkins's translation of Aeschylus, *Poems*, pp. 220, 225.
- ²⁹ "The Economic Problem of Masochism (1924)", *Standard Edition*, vol. XIX, pp. 169-70.
- ³⁰ See Freud on conscience, punishment and "feminine" masochism: "Anxiety and Instinctual Life (1933)", *Standard Edition*, vol. XXII, pp. 104-9.

³¹ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 116.

³² "Made Keen by Loss: George Eliot's Veiled Vision", *The Madwoman in the Attic*, pp. 443-477 (p. 471).

³³ *Idols of Perversity*, p. 263.

***The Nun's retreat and the Rake's progress: "A Voice from the World",
"Heaven-Haven", and "I must hunt down the prize"***

Restfulness is a quality for cattle;
the virtues are all active,
life is alert.
*Robert Louis Stevenson*¹

Monastic incarceration is castration.
*Victor Hugo*²

"A Voice from the World"

It offers evidence of the extent and range of his psychic motility and ambivalence that having "quenched" the song of the dangerously alluring mermaids, Hopkins should later respond to the more saintly voice of Christina Rossetti with what seems in part to be an apologia for the sensual life. The speaker of the poem in question, "A Voice from the World", pays lip service to the masculine ideal of transcendence, yet seems helpless in the face of the difficulties that the quest for a wholly controlled state of being actually presents.

Hopkins's poem was written as a response to Christina Rossetti's "Convent Threshold" and both take inspiration from Pope's verse epistle, "Eloisa to Abelard", on the star-crossed love of priest Peter Abelard and Héloïse, the woman he seduces and secretly marries. Guilt, shame, remorse, and the "stubborn pulse" (l.27) of a passion that will not die, condemn the lovers to a restless torment of longing. Pope's original has Eloisa, after taking vows as a nun, speaking from a convent cell yet still trapped and pleading in the "hopeless, lasting flames" (l. 261) of her love for "cold" Abelard.³ Rossetti readjusts the spiritual power balance, however, and gives the stronger ascetic, renunciatory impulse to her heroine:

I choose the stairs that mount above
Stair after golden skyward stair,
.....
My lily feet are stained with mud,
With scarlet mud that tells a tale
Of hope that was, of guilt that was,
Of love that shall not yet avail;

Alas, my heart, if I could bare
 My heart, this selfsame stain is there:
 I seek the sea of glass and fire
 To wash the spot, to burn the snare;
 Lo, stairs are meant to lift us higher;
 Mount with me, mount the kindled stair

 Your eyes look earthward, mine look up.⁴

Christina Rossetti is arguably the only woman poet whom Hopkins respected and admired, or indeed ever took seriously, though he appears to confine her in the genteel assemblage of accomplished, but delicate, lady "poetesses", with his declaration that she had been

thrown rather into the shade by her brother. I have not read his book [Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Poems*, 1870]. From the little I have seen and gathered of it I daresay he had more range, force, and interest, and then there is the difference between a man and a woman, but for pathos and pure beauty of art I do not think he is her equal: in fact the simple beauty of her work cannot be matched.
 (*F. L.*, p. 119, 1872)

Jerome Bump ignores the suspicion of condescension in Hopkins's tone, and suggests that his response to her shared the same plane as that of Dante and Beatrice: "he knew her but little, saw her rarely, and his love for her was purely Platonic, ideal, vague, symbolical ... she was a creature of imagination, in whom he idealized love with all its intensity of passion".⁵ It is difficult not to suspect that this tale of passionate devotion may be embroidered out of notional cobwebs, however, for it seems to confuse Hopkins's feelings for the actual person of Christina Rossetti (they met once in 1864 "at the Gurneys", *F. L.*, p. 214, 1864) with his moral approbation of an earnest and unwavering religious sensibility equal to his own and what may be an instinctive response to her aesthetic of pain. The "righteous", in Rossetti's "The Convent Threshold" are those who prove themselves through suffering; having borne the cross and "drained the cup", they die terrible deaths: "Racked, roasted, crushed, wrenched limb from limb" (ll. 25-26). As later chapters will show, Rossetti's macabre list of tortures in many ways anticipates Hopkins's own apparent preoccupation with suffering. Similarity is also apparent in the fact that although her poem represents a vehement paean to fiery self-immolation it shares the rich and complex display of "ambivalently affirmed sensuality"⁶ revealed in Hopkins's early poems of

renunciation: "Il Mystico", "Easter Communion", and "The Habit of Perfection".

In response to Rossetti's urgent commendment of the transcendent stairway to heaven, Hopkins's speaker confesses to an unassuageable desire for the taste of human love. Emphasis is deliberately placed on feeding and appetite and we are introduced to a consciously debased and animalistic view of sexuality in the speaker's complaint about the difficulty of turning his "passion-pastured thought / To gentle manna and simple bread". "Passion-pastured" suggests that the lover is tethered like a brute beast to the earthy thoughts on which he feeds — ruminating on sensual images which stand in dark opposition to the ideal of gentleness and simplicity which is the promised reward of ascetic self-denial.

Tennyson's "Evolutionist" uses similarly bestial terms in describing the sensual low-life, but finds that increasing age is a great aid in man's striving for transcendence:

I have climb'd to the snows of Age, and I gaze at a field in the Past,
Where I sank with the body at times in the sloughs of low desire,
But I hear no yelp of the beast, and the Man is quiet at last
As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a height that is higher.
("By an Evolutionist")

Hopkins's speaker proposes a speedier solution to the battle with the body's "low desires" which seems simple in its clarity of aim, yet the means necessary to its achievement are described in terms of hideous violence:

... I am not spent
So far but I have yet within
The penetrative element
That shall unglue the crust of sin.
Steel may be melted and rock rent.
Penance shall clothe me to the bone.
("A Voice from the World", ll. 143-9)

Here again Hopkins implies a linkage of the spiritual and physiological economies with male sexual potency. Asserting his kinship with rock and steel, the toughest and hardest of substances, the speaker nevertheless claims that even these may be altered and reshaped if the will is sufficiently strong. The desires of the flesh and the impulses of the feminine affective will are bitterly regretted and repudiated, but in rejecting his sexuality the speaker nevertheless asserts the continuing existence of his

masculine force: the "penetrative element". Tearing away the leprous crust of sin seems equivalent to flaying off the untrustworthy flesh, replacing its weak corruptibility with the constancy of self-willed suffering. Hopkins's persona shares the image and the pathological self-disgust rendered in Tennyson's "St. Simeon Stylites", a poem which Hopkins admired and believed to be "indeed magnificent" (*F. L.*, p. 8, 1862):

Altho' I be the basest of mankind
 From scalp to sole one slough and crust of sin,
 Unfit for earth, unfit for heaven, scarce meet
 For troops of devils, mad with blasphemy,
 I will not cease to grasp the hope I hold
 Of saintdom....
 Mortify
 Your flesh, like me, with scourges and with thorns;
 Smite, shrink not, spare not.

Robert Langbaum remarks that there is a "certain obscene zest" in St. Simeon's insatiable lust for self-punishment, but the saint's passion for a heavenly crown is shown as "essentially demonic" and diseased.⁷ Wearing pain like a fiery hair-shirt, Hopkins's protagonist similarly elects to mortify his body and subjugate it to his will. But all this is revealed as bombast and airy rhetoric, when the arrow of the speaker's will to ascetic renunciation falls feebly back to earth: "Teach me the way: I will repent ... But grant my penitence begun: / I need not, love, I need not break remembered sweetness" ("A Voice from the World", ll. 150-3). Tennyson seems deliberately bent on crushing the ascetic ideal beneath the weight of his irony, but Hopkins does not seem to detest the aim of asceticism but rather the failure to achieve it. Unable to break free of past sin, the speaker's recidivist, bestial self still "licks its chops" (like Stevenson's Hyde) over the "remembered sweetness" of sensual pleasure.

In Hopkins's own judgement, the poem gave evidence of moral flabbiness and a failure of masterly execution, and he later came to disapprove of its artistic "licences" and immorality: "I shd. write better now, I hope" (*F. L.*, p. 36, 1867). The poem's "immorality" presumably lies in the vacillating attitude of its speaker towards sensual sin and his refusal to acknowledge total renunciation as total *good*: "I would remember. Love, forgive. / I cannot calm, I cannot heed". This kind of weakness is

anathema to those like Hopkins who upheld the Victorian ethic of self-mastery, for the ideal "Christian Gentleman maintained an absolute standard in controlling dangerous impulses". With total purity as the goal of perfection a young man should bear in mind "that when he yields to *any* passion, every repetition is giving it a power which may ere long bind with links stronger than any steel and more galling than the cruel gyves of the galley slave".⁸ Trapped by the honeyed lure of erotic reverie, Hopkins's speaker seems almost to endorse the morally culpable attitude of the Wife of Bath: "Allas! Allas! that evere love was synne!"⁹ Like Chaucer's "likerous" (lecherous) Dame, the speaker appears to regret the nature of the rules rather more than he regrets the breaking of them.

Norman McKenzie suggests that the precise situation of the guilty love affair is left "romantically vague", though Hopkins hints at its "irreligious basis" by "describing its springtime as 'scarce perceivèd Lent'",¹⁰ thereby suggesting that the initial intensity of the lovers' passion had blinded them to thoughts of God or religion, that *eros* had obliterated Christian *agape*. Hopkins's poem does not carry the subversive charge of the "new heaven and ... new earth" envisaged by Heathcliff and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, where Hell is predicated on the beloved's absence, Heaven on mystic union with the beloved, and the lovers imagine themselves ravished into an absolute state beyond good and evil,¹¹ but he nevertheless seems fascinated by the extremes of psychic dualism and human desire.

In spite of its considerable length (the poem runs to 189 lines), Hopkins first "reply" to Christina Rossetti is partial and fragmentary and certainly does not seem to have exhausted his consuming interest in the issues raised by "The Convent Threshold". In 1867, two years after writing "A Voice from the World", Hopkins composed some Latin Elegiacs which translate paragraphs one and nine of Christina Rossetti's poem. In the dream sequence chosen by Hopkins for translation (ll. 110-125), Rossetti's female persona seems to speak, not from beyond the stony threshold of the Convent, but from the grave itself:

I tell you what I dreamed last night:
It was not dark, it was not light,
Cold dews had drenched my plenteous hair
Through clay; you came to seek me there.

And 'Do you dream of me?' you said.
 My heart was dust that used to leap
 To you; I answered half asleep:
 'My pillow is damp, my sheets are red,
 There's a leaden tester to my bed:
 Find you a warmer playfellow,
 A kinder love to love than mine.'
 You wrung your hands; while I like lead
 Crushed downwards through the sodden earth:
 You smote your hands but not in mirth,
 And reeled but were not drunk with wine.
 ("A Voice from the World")

The necrophilic horror of this nightmarish scenario, in which the lovers' bed and the grave, the marriage-chamber and the charnel-house are juxtaposed and interchangeable, culminates in what seems to be a precipitate premature burial. As in "Il Mystico", threatening images of sexuality, the female, and the secret fissures of the earth are brought together into a fatal conjunction. Norman O. Brown writes that fornication comes from the word *fornix*, an underground arched vault and that "Death is genitalized as a return to the womb".¹² It may also be noteworthy that "in Jewish and Islamic tradition, the word for uterus means grave".¹³ In Rossetti's case, however, her subliminal concerns may be more specifically aligned with her sex, for the red of (or on) the sheets upon which she lies may betoken guilt or relate to the female's fear of bloody defloration.

Rossetti's evocation of a crepuscular existence which is tantamount to a state of "undeath" is gruesome in the extreme, yet it surely has a larger relevance to the stiflingly repressed shadow-life that many mid-nineteenth-century women were expected to lead. Like others of her time, Rossetti had few options but to seat herself, as her brother describes it, at the grave of buried hope and, especially in poems like "After Death" and "Song" ("When I am dead, my dearest ..."), often appears to speak out of or into the grave-pit. Dante Gabriel Rossetti seems almost to anticipate her actual demise in his poem, "My Sister's Sleep", in which the sleeping "sister" glides so silently and submissively into eternity that only he can tell that she is physiologically dead: "God knows I knew that she was dead. / And there all the while, my sister slept".¹⁴

Dante Gabriel's poem creates a linkage of equivalence between the dying sister, "Mary, Mother of God, the household nun, and woman as Christlike martyr".¹⁵ For the woman artist, however, a willing embracement of suffering could represent a form of escape if used creatively, it was "a way of stirring to life ... anesthetized senses" and an attempt at "turning a process of passive suffering ... into an outlet for creative energy".¹⁶ A poem such as Christina Rossetti's "Song", which invites the implied listener to consign the speaker's memory to oblivion, is clearly in protest against its own premise, for the speaker's self "lives" in the words of the poem. It is interesting to note, however, that although a woman writer like Christina Rossetti may achieve immortality through her poems, she retains the feminine mask of meek self-effacement within the poems themselves. Rossetti builds her art "on a willing acceptance of passionate or demure destitution".¹⁷ She and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are the "great nineteenth-century women singers of renunciation as necessity's highest and noblest virtue".¹⁸ Significantly, when Hopkins explores the confines of the "buried life" in "Heaven-Haven" and the bleak mid-winter of thwarted fertility in "To R. B.", he also wears a feminine mask. Even in an imaginary context, it seems that these arrested states properly "belong" to the female.

In his original answer to Rossetti's call from the convent cell, Hopkins's doomed lover considers the pain of desire against the protective sanctuary offered by the religious life and declares: "Who would not shelter from the hail?". The question seems rhetorical in more than one sense, however, for in the same summer as he wrote "A Voice from the World", Hopkins wrote two poems which offer radically different and strongly gendered responses to the cloister and the world. The most famous of these is "Heaven-Haven", probably one of his most purely beautiful and elegantly controlled poems in praise of renunciation and retreat.

"Heaven-Haven (a nun takes the veil)"

In his poem "A Voice from the World" Hopkins speaks with the voice of a weak willed sensualist, a deserted and self-pitying lover ("my cry is like a bleat; a few / Intolerable tears I bleed", ll. 66-7) who yearns for the mistress who has fled their

guilty idyll to find sanctuary in holiness. It may seem ironic therefore, that when in his poem "Heaven-Haven" (subtitled "a nun takes the veil"),¹⁹ Hopkins actually adopts a specifically female persona, speaking from *beyond* the convent threshold, the work produced is judged to be one of his most consciously wrought, most masculine poems. Seamus Heaney remarks that the words are "crafted together more than they are coaxed out of one another, and they are crafted together in the service of an idea that precedes the poem ... to which the poem is perhaps ultimately subservient ... The poem is fretted rather than fecund".²⁰ Simplicity in the sense of moral unity is the thematic goal of the poem and asceticism the means to that end. The reader is invited to feast at a Lenten banquet and the cool sparseness of Hopkins's imagery is entirely appropriate in a world modelled on masculine asceticism and disciplined restraint, a world from which the darkly subversive powers of risk, change, laughter and sex have been banished:

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

And I have asked to be
Where no storms come,
Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
And out of the swing of the sea.
("Heaven-Haven")

Hopkins's vision shares the equability of Tennyson's island-valley of Avilion, where "falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, / Nor ever wind blows loudly" and his silent green haven recalls the "still waters" of Psalm 23. The poem may also carry a subdued echo of a comparably disciplined piece by Christina Rossetti:

Safe from the frost and the snow,
Safe from the storm and the sun,
Safe where the seeds wait to grow
One by one
And come back and blow.²¹

Unconsciously or not, however, Hopkins's poem again reflects the contemporary fashion for producing sentimental images of women as flowers that we have seen in "A Vision of the Mermaids", but here adds to it the emotive and equally popular

image of the nun. Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) famously encourages women (the flowers of the title) to conform to the moral imperatives attached to such images by thinking of themselves as pure lilies and assuming the conduct of household nuns. The path of a good woman, said Ruskin, "is indeed strewn with flowers; but they rise behind her steps, not before them".²²

A popular painting by Charles Alston Collins (1851), "Convent Thoughts", typifies the genre and presents the "drooping image of a nun in a timeless garden surrounded by lilies", who is all the more deliciously desirable, writes Bram Dijkstra, because she has "turned quiet suffering and self-denial into a consummate art".²³ In the Collins painting a nun stands with eyes downcast, her attenuated body entirely covered by a habit pale as the lilies at her side, a high dark hedge behind her and a pool of still water at her feet. She holds a white flower and a book of hours, her robe is perfectly mirrored in the virginal, unbroken surface of the pool. Nothing moves. The death-in-life effect of Collins's pictorial allegory is nevertheless more subtle than that achieved by Millais, Hopkins's favourite painter at that time, whose painting "The Vale of Rest" shows two young nuns, again bounded by a high, dark hedge, but placed amidst tombstones, with one nun actually digging a grave.²⁴

Hopkins draws together the funereal symbolism of Millais's "Vale of Rest" and the static *mise en scène* of Collins's "Convent Thoughts" to create his own *pictura ut poesis*. Only a "few lilies" decorate the spare, minimalist landscape from which a woman speaks as if from a world where even the surge and swing of the blood (elsewhere, the sexually dangerous "deathdance in the blood") and the brain's restlessness (cf. Hopkins's "ocean of a motionable mind", "The Wreck of the Deutschland", l. 118) are calmed. The movements of the ocean and (supposedly) the mind's moods are subject to the pull of the moon, and Hopkins's poetic locus of still and dumbly silent waters, unmoved by "the swing of the sea", suggests an escape from the mutability and inconstancy associated with the female moon spirit. The perennial association of the moon with the feminine is emphasized in Hopkins's early poem "A fragment of anything you like" (1862):

Fair, but of fairness as a vision dream'd;
Dry were her sad eyes that would fain have stream'd;

She stood before a light not hers, and seem'd

The lorn Moon, pale with piteous dismay,
Who rising late had miss'd her painful way
In wandering until broad light of day;

Then was discover'd in the pathless sky,
White-faced, as one in sad assay to fly
Who asks not life but only place to die.

Woman and the moon are here twinned and equal in despair of life: pallid mirrors each reflecting the other's white-faced grief and loneliness. The haunting sadness of the "displaced" woman in this early fragment of verse seems to present a more intense version of the speaker's alienation and world-weariness in "Heaven-Haven". Each female protagonist finds life a dangerous and painful progress through a hostile and "pathless" masculine environment. In "Heaven-Haven", the violent aspects of the masculine principle are symbolized by harsh storms and by flying hail which seems designed ("sharp" and "sided" like flint arrow-heads) to hurt and penetrate. In "A fragment of anything you like", the masculine threat is manifested in the sun's consuming energy and in the power of the masculine gaze to "dis-cover" and shame the female when she is seen unveiled in the "broad light of day", entrapping her, as the French novelist Rachilde describes woman's apprehension of powerlessness, in "the eternal desperation of her own nothingness".²⁵

Hopkins's "fragment" personifies the Moon as a marginalized creature who has no legitimate place in the Apollonian cosmos ("I have ... a considerable belief in the Solar myth", *F. L.*, p. 263, 1886), and at best endures a secretive, silent, and creeping existence which offers an ironic reflection on the life of her earthly sisters. The moon nevertheless holds tremendous symbolic female powers, for her phases measure time and are believed to have a mystical control over the flow of life itself in women's menstrual cycle; more dangerously, the moon symbolizes feminine caprice, destruction, and has the potential to infect minds with the passion of madness.

Irrationality, sexuality, fertility and inconstancy, are all aspects of the feminine principle, but Hopkins's female persona chooses to renounce all of these and to take on the "holy, cold and still"²⁶ disposition which manifests the chastity and

subservience of the inlaw feminine principle at its most extreme. She longs to be safe from all passion, and out of the "shot and danger of desire", or rather *has* longed to be, for the poet's use of the past tense indicates a symbolic renunciation of all human desiring. Beauty, as Hopkins warns elsewhere, is dangerous (*L*, 1, p. 95, 1879), and the speaker in "Heaven-Haven" is clearly afraid of the flinty "hail" of sensual life, and its threat of painful wounding. Like Ruskin's flower-woman she is too vulnerable to survive unless "protected" by a wall or a veil:²⁷

This is wonderful — oh, wonderful! — to see her with every innocent feeling fresh within her, go ... into her garden to play with the fringes of its guarded flowers ... and no cloud upon her brow, because there is a little wall around her place of peace: and yet she knows, in her heart, if she would look for its knowledge, that outside of that little rose-covered wall, the wild grass, to the horizon, is torn up by the agony of men, and beat level by the drift of their life-blood.²⁸

Safety is equated with passive withdrawal, and the title's linking hyphen foregrounds the linguistic similarity of the words heaven and haven, whilst the poem itself assumes a conceptual correspondence between them (cf. George Herbert "The Size": "These seas are tears, and heav'n the haven").

The protected enclosure of the cloister may itself function as an image of female space for it is comparable to the paradigmatic haven of the maternal womb. Donna Moder remarks on what appears to be the poet's wish for retrogressive escape, to be swallowed into "the metaphorically pregnant 'green swell' in the 'havens dumb'".²⁹ To be "swallowed" into an enclosure suggests an even greater state of passivity than that which accompanies the idea of voluntary retreat, for the devouring mouth of the womb (here perhaps, the harbour mouth) can signify castration and death. The veil can thus seem equivalent to a shroud and the womb a "warm-laid grave" ("Wreck of the Deutschland", l. 51). Complete stillness may also be suggested in the nun's election to be placed in fields where there are lilies growing, for in Christ's famous parable the "lilies of the field ... toil not, neither do they spin" (Matt. 6:28). Christ implicitly extends the promise of God's Kingdom to both men and women: the men who traditionally follow Adam by toiling and delving in the earth, and the women who spin and weave cloth. Hopkins's nun will not spin and nor will she bear children; she is neither spinster, wife or mother, but a bride of Christ who will

"perpetually wear the veil because [she] will never degenerate into the wife of Christ".³⁰ The scent of the world of process pervades the poem's enclosure, nonetheless, for Hopkins's white lilies carry funereal connotations of cold sterility and death, and the fact that they "blow" recalls Shakespeare's warning that the blown or festering lilies of ingrown virginity can smell worse than weeds (Sonnet 94). Unconsciously reflecting the bloodless pallor and the desolate theme of "A fragment of anything you like", the flight from life seems inevitably to become tantamount to a journey into death ("White-faced, as one in sad assay to fly / Who asks not life but only place to die"). The poem's dying fall also echoes the mood of dislocation, sadness and loss in another "quest poem", "La Belle Dame Sans Merci".³¹

No choice can be without loss and total enclosure may be perceived as a form of sanctuary or a prison cell. Hopkins later uses images of close confinement in his Devotional writings to represent the sufferings of the damned and, as Daniel Harris suggests, the womb can be seen as an antechamber to hell, for it is there that the "blight that man was born for" begins ("Spring and Fall"): "Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse" is an "irrevocably organic image of gradual imprisonment during the gestation process".³² Claustrophobia, constriction and a terrible "incoiling" of the self are more often representative of what Hopkins sees as his own state of paralysed creativity in which he is locked in lonely stasis, unable to receive or produce. Union with the *ideal* mother and identification with her fruitfulness remains a powerful unconscious goal, however, and as we shall later see, Hopkins strives to find the archetypal perfect mother in the Virgin Mary.

The speaker of "Heaven-Haven" imagines that the reward of a sequestered existence, though the prize is in fact negatively defined, will be an absence of the violent storms which symbolize the dangerous emotional turbulence of the sensual and worldly life. The position of a female in any patriarchal society is likely to be marginalized and subordinate to begin with, however, for she too is defined by her lack of the phallus and her consequent lack of a legitimate voice in the world. Passivity is ordained as her "natural" state and silence her "proper grace" (Sophocles, *Ajax*). Silence and passive obedience may also be deemed the proper graces of a

devout male monastic. Hopkins's poem therefore indicates the presence of a compelling desire to give himself to God in passive surrender, to behave almost in the abjectly submissive manner described by Charles Kingsley in his novel *Westward Ho!*. Eustace, Kingsley's "weak-natured" embodiment of the un-British and the effeminate, fails in love and becomes a Jesuit: "Eustace is a man no longer; he is become a thing, a tool, a Jesuit ... without a will, a conscience, a responsibility."³³ However, the poem's complex underthought of castrative engulfment and death may equally well indicate a countering force of deep resistance to the surrender of his male prerogative of action and authorship.

For Hopkins, as Eichner says of Goethe, the "ideal of contemplative purity" is feminine while "the ideal of significant action is masculine".³⁴ When compared with the philosophy of constant stress and dynamic process that surrounds the concept of masculine self-making, Hopkins's poignant vision of static retreat in "Heaven-Haven" can seem like the fantasy of someone half in love with the Keatsian, and therefore enervated and "unmanly", (*F. L.*, p. 386, 1888) vision of easeful death.

What is often simplistically termed the "death wish" is identified by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) as a drive towards the state of inorganicism, a desire for Nirvana where distinct selfhood is dissolved and all tensions are released.³⁵ The death wish or Thanatos instinct constitutes an entropic slide towards a formless zero state of undifferentiation and is quite opposed to the energy of the erotic, aggressive drives of any organism.³⁶ On a symbolic level "Heaven Haven" propounds the wish to enter a passive state beyond all human tension and conflict, and thus to let the death instinct have its way. In Lacan's view "*Desidero* is the Freudian *cogito*".³⁷ Need, demand, and desire are "expressions or effects of the orders of human existence Lacan defines as the Real, the imaginary, and the symbolic". Identity is posited on desire and desire is "in principle insatiable. It is always an effect of the Other, an 'other' with whom it cannot engage, in so far as the Other is not a person but a place, the locus of law, language and the symbolic".³⁸ To be beyond or without desire is therefore not to *be* anything at all.

Typically, in his Dark Sonnets, Hopkins describes an actual wish for death, the wish "not to be", as a slackening and unwinding of the "last strands of man" ("Carrion Comfort"), as if the strings of life would *automatically* loosen and fall into nothingness unless held taut by what seems (especially at life's worst moments) a grimly concentrated act of will. Tension, stress (instress), and the will to take shaping control are essential to Hopkins's conception of manhood and his philosophy of life, for in an ultimate sense total passivity means death. The active masculine values are equally essential to his view of art, and the crisply controlled form of "Heaven-Haven" itself strongly resists the idea of merging and undifferentiation. The poem enacts in little the conflict between the passive surrender of its female speaker and the determined control of the poet / creator.

"I must hunt down the prize"

The debate between feminine passivity and masculine action is continued and foregrounded in the explicit thematic contrast that Hopkins offers us between "Heaven-Haven" and its polar twin, "I must hunt down the prize" (1864), written at the same place and time. Hopkins's title line alone is sufficient to identify the poem as the dialectical antipodes of "Heaven-Haven", for it immediately announces the speaker's allegiance to the goal-oriented masculine life-agenda of aggressive action, competitiveness, and possession. Hopkins's persona seems modelled on the stereotypical figure of the swashbuckling freebooter, compulsively driven to penetrate the secrets of female nature in a manner that appears to bear the rugged impress of one of the Hopkins family books, Capt. Francis M'Lintock's adventure yarn *Voyage of the 'Fox' in Arctic Seas: Discovery of the fate of Sir John Franklin, 1859*:³⁹

I must hunt down the prize
Where my heart lists
Must see the eagle's bulk, render'd in mists,

...

Must see the waters roll
Where the seas set
Towards wastes where round the ice-blocks tilt and fret
Not so far from the pole.
("i must hunt down the prize")

Hopkins's two short poems each represent extreme and typically Victorian gender paradigms. Woman is a chaste nun, the passive angel of the *hortus conclusus* who chooses to live in veiled silence, modesty and stillness. Man is a daring hunter / explorer who arrogates the right to go wherever he desires; to range the world and the female body as a "colonizing and conquering hero". He develops his masculinity "oppositionally to nature" and therefore "seeks to penetrate and appropriate virgin frontiers".⁴⁰ Tennyson's poem "Ulysses" assumes an equivalent stillness and docility in women, and also valorizes the urge of the restless male (a living sword) to abandon "still hearths" and "aged" wives in pursuit of knowledge "Beyond the utmost bound of human thought":

... all experience is an arch wherethro'
 Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
 For ever and for ever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
 As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
 Were all too little, and of one to me
 Little remains:but every hour is saved
 From that eternal silence ...

....
 Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
 We are not now that strength which in old days
 Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.
 ("Ulysses")

Apparently engaging in a similar existential dialectic to Hopkins, Tennyson sets forth two opposing viewpoints in "Ulysses" (1842) and "The Lotos Eaters" (1832). One poem cries for movement, action, adventure, the other for "long rest or death, ... or dreamful ease" ("The Lotos-Eaters"). The undertow of the Thanatos instinct is strongly felt in "The Lotos-Eaters", as it is in "Heaven-Haven", but the narcoleptic voluptuousness of the lotos-eating life is spiritually void and cannot thus be matched with Hopkins's ascetic ideal. Ulysses' dream of conquest is unfolded in the language of virile epic, yet it represents the last hope of a man enfeebled by age and is intoned in music that "bears the enervated cadence of the song of the Lotus-Eaters".⁴¹ The contrasting perspectives of Tennyson's various protagonists seem

finally to converge in a shared sense of weariness, and the journey to be undertaken by Ulysses, his crew, *and* the somnolent lotos-eaters, seems to be a "decline, a sinking below the horizon", a journey into death.⁴²

Hopkins's quest poem has no such dying fall and its repeated imperatives, masculine verbs, and hunting motif ("I must hunt ... must see ... must see") bespeak the formidable energy and dauntless confidence that the Victorians admired and respected in young empire-building males. Imperialist nations like Britain were "virile nations" and according to John M. MacKenzie, British men expressed their virility

through their capacity to dominate their environment and they did that largely by a combination of hunting, killing and classification. It was in hunting that the most perfect expression of global dominance could be discovered.... Hunting required all the most virile attributes of the imperial male; courage, endurance, individualism ... resourcefulness, a mastery of environmental signs and a knowledge of natural history.... The Hunt has always been a masculine affair.⁴³

Hopkins's persona is not a big-game killer, but the sexual sublimation inherent in the hunting expedition metaphor suggests that his desire and his destiny is to be the one who unveils "Nature" as a woman is unveiled by the man whose gaze is "bold, direct and keen, the penetrating gaze of intellectual and sexual mastery".⁴⁴ Hopkins's epistemophilic impulse is here characteristically rendered in terms of sight, the sense which, Luce Irigaray notes, most "objectifies and masters".⁴⁵ Attempting to master and penetrate the earth, the body of the primordial mother, as Hopkins describes it in "I must hunt down the prize", may therefore represent a defiance of the "forbidding father" which is countered by the passive surrender of the female persona in "Heaven-Haven".

The choice of life actually made by Hopkins demanded an absolute rejection of power in the world and the total abasement of his will before God. We have seen that in at least one instance he chose to punish himself by adopting a literal posture of blind submissiveness, which reflected his feminized position in relation to God. This symbolic renunciation of self and masculine potency was further sealed by his "giving up" of beauty, and later by the destruction of his poems, the "children" of his brain, in an act which he called the "slaughter of the innocents" (*J*, p. 165, 1868).

In the year that followed the writing of "Heaven-Haven" and "I must hunt down the prize", Hopkins formally offered up the freedom of his eye and the power of his pen to the Father: "On this day by God's grace I resolved to give up all beauty until I had His leave for it" (*J*, p. 71, 1865). Hopkins's creative vein continued to flow, nonetheless, and confessions of "imprudent looking" at lovely faces continued to appear in his diary of "sins" (see *Facsimiles*, p. 25). Hopkins's bonfire of the vanities, the destruction of his poems, was also incomplete and his biographer Norman White notes that only three months after his apparent vow of aesthetic celibacy, Hopkins was remarking to Bridges with pride on "the particular beat" he had "introduced into St. Dorothea. The development is mine but the beat is in Shakespeare" (*L*, 1, p. 24, 1866).⁴⁶

The pulse of pride in the "manhood" of his creative powers was not easily subdued, and the theme that beats its presence more strongly the more that Hopkins tries to curb his own nature is one which combines violent physicality with physical violence. Trevor McNeely suggests that Hopkins's imagination "finds beauty ... as his soul finds its religious consolation, in subjecting itself to the extreme of what might be called aesthetic or spiritual violence ... which is the pillar of both his aesthetic and religious faith".⁴⁷ McNeely's statement seems to rest on the questionable assumption that Hopkins's imagination and his religious sensibility are pulling in the same direction. Even setting aside Hopkins's apparent conviction that his "nature" and "personality" were fundamentally mismatched, the evidence of his writings and his life tends to suggest otherwise. What is clear, as Michael Murphy points out, is that Hopkins "*liked* violence, that he was fascinated by knives and whips and mutilated bodies and bloody flesh, and that this fascination overflowed into his work".⁴⁸

Hopkins declared that the "better beauty" of grace far surpassed any physical loveliness, but in his own life the achievement of that moral beauty became synonymous with pain: "I saw how my asking to be raised to a higher degree of grace was asking also to be lifted on a higher cross" (*S*, p. 254, 1883). Out of violence against the self a strange kind of spiritual beauty may be wrested, but the compelling fascination that Hopkins seems to feel for violence against others is less easily

attributed to an excess of ascetic rigour, most especially when his imagination seems singularly gripped by the sufferings of innocent and lovely young women like St. Winifred. The perplexing ambiguity of Hopkins's "breath-taking" description of the bloodied flagellants in "The Easter Communion" points to one of the central conundrums of his work, which is of particular interest in relation to Hopkins's images of martyrdom and is explored in the following chapter. For it is not certain that Hopkins identifies with the victims of violence — those whose breath is taken away by the shock of pain, or whether he speaks as an observer, gasping in admiration, excitement, or horrified pity at the sufferings of others. Is he empathetically linked with his passive female victims or is he, as father to the text, involved in the God-like "act of creation in the infinite I AM"?⁴⁹

Hopkins's concepts of pain and martyrdom actually seem to change according to gender. To die in action, in the "manly" pursuit of honour and glory as he describes it in one of his most avowedly patriotic and overtly masculinist poems, seems a prize and fate worth winning:

What shall I do for the land that bred me,
Her homes and fields that folded and fed me?
Be under her banner and live for her honour.
Chorus. Under her banner we live for her honour.

....

Where is the field I must play the man on?
O welcome there their steel or cannon.
Immortal beauty is death with duty,
If under her banner I fall for her honour.
Chorus. Under her banner we fall for her honour.
("What shall I do for the land that bred me?")

As I shall argue, however, the form of "martyrdom" that fell to Hopkins's lot was that of the "the hidden life" (*S*, p. 260, 1885) in which the daily burden of ignominious obscurity and the slow suffocation of enforced silence seemed more taxing and more terrible than even an agonizing and bloody death. For a man to go unnoticed, unremarked, and unrecorded; to play the woman's part and be immured in silence and passive humility, like the nun in "Heaven-Haven", may thus represent the worst fate and the most punishing martyrdom of all.

[NOTES]

- ¹ Robert Louis Stevenson, "Talk and Talkers" (1882), 2.
- ² Hugo "Cosette", *Les Miserables*, trans. Charles E. Wilbour, (1862), 7.7.
- ³ *Alexander Pope: Collected Poems*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée, (London: Dent Dutton, 1980). References are to this edition.
- ⁴ First published in *Goblin Market and other Poems*, (1862), here in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, edited, with textual notes and introductions, by R.W. Crump, 2 vols (London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), I, pp. 61-65, ll. 4-17.
- ⁵ *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p. 44.
- ⁶ *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 564.
- ⁷ *The Poetry of Experience*, p. 87.
- ⁸ *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Burchard Hayes, Nineteenth President of the United States*, ed. Charles Richard Williams, (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Archeological and Historical Society, 1922) I, p. 72; quoted in E. Anthony Rotundo, "Learning about manhood: gender ideals and the middle-class family in nineteenth-century America", *Manliness and Morality*, pp. 35-51 (p. 39).
- ⁹ "The Wife of Bath's Prologue", *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson, 2nd. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), l. 614, p. 82.
- ¹⁰ *Reader's Guide*, p. 212.
- ¹¹ See J.F. Goodridge, "A New Heaven and a New Earth", *The Art of Emily Bronte*, ed. Anne Smith, (London: Vision Press, 1976) pp. 160-181 (p. 177).
- ¹² Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 48; quoted in Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), p. 188.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- ¹⁴ *Poems* (London: J.M. Dent, Everyman's Library, 1961).
- ¹⁵ *Idols of Perversity*, p. 60.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- ¹⁷ *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 564.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Originally titled "Rest" (see *J*, p. 33, 1864). The version given here is variant (*b*) in *Poems*. Catherine Phillips records that this version is the same as that held in the Dolben family papers (Northants Record Society, Lamport Hall) "except for l. 7 where it reads "green" not "great". See *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Catherine Phillips, Oxford Authors Series, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 311.
- ²⁰ *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 84.
- ²¹ Originally in Christina Rossetti, *Verses*, (1894), here in *Complete Poems*, II, p. 292.
- ²² "Of Queen's Gardens", § 93.

- ²³ *Idols of Perversity*, p. 13.
- ²⁴ See R.K.R. Thornton, *All My Eyes See: The Visual World of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, 1975), p. 84.
- ²⁵ "The Blood Drinker", *Contes et Nouvelles, Suivi du Théâtre* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1900), pp. 71-80; quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 338.
- ²⁶ This is the chaste demeanour of Octavia, the "inlaw" wife spurned in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (Act. II, 6, l. 130). Cleopatra bears the typical titles of the "outlaw" female: witch, gypsy, whore.
- ²⁷ But see David Sonstroem, "Millett versus Ruskin: a Defense of Ruskin's 'Of Queen's Gardens'", *Victorian Studies*, 20, 3 (1976-1977), 283-297.
- ²⁸ "Of Queen's Gardens", § 92.
- ²⁹ "Aspects of Androgyny ...", p. 6.
- ³⁰ *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 476.
- ³¹ My grateful thanks to Bernard Bergonzi for this idea.
- ³² *Inspirations Unbidden: The Terrible Sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 65.
- ³³ Ch. 2, *Westward Ho!*, (London: Macmillan [1855]), ch. 2; quoted in *Sinews of the Spirit*, p. 112.
- ³⁴ "The Eternal Feminine: An Aspect of Goethe's Ethics", in Johann Wolfgang van Goethe, *Faust*, Norton Critical Edn, trans. Walter Arndt, ed. Cyrus Hamlin (New York: Norton, 1976), pp. 616-7; quoted in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 21.
- ³⁵ *Standard Edition*, vol. XVIII, pp. 55-6.
- ³⁶ See Jackson on metamorphosis and entropy, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, pp. 73-82.
- ³⁷ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 154.
- ³⁸ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction*, p. 67.
- ³⁹ See *Hopkins Research Bulletin*, 5 (1974), p. 36, on the Hopkins family books; cited *Poems*, p. 241.
- ⁴⁰ Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 129.
- ⁴¹ Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience*, p. 90.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ "The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype in Late Victorian and Edwardian Times", Mangan and Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality*, pp. 176-198 (p. 179).
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- ⁴⁵ Interview in *Les femmes, la pornographie, l'érotisme*, ed. M-F Hans and G. Lapouge, (Paris [n.pub] 1978), p. 50; quoted in Heath, "Difference", p. 85.
- ⁴⁶ *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 161.
- ⁴⁷ "The Blissful Agony of Hopkins: Notes of a Neo-Reactionary", *The Hopkins Quarterly*, 12, 3 & 4 (1986), 97-114 (p. 103).

⁴⁸ "Violent Imagery in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins", *Victorian Poetry*, 7 (1969), 1-16 (p. 11).

⁴⁹ *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 5.

Plumed Passionflowers and the Ghastly Glories of Saints: Hopkins and Martyrdom

To die for a religion is easier than to live it absolutely.
*Jorge Luis Borges*¹

To die in agony upon a cross
Does not create a martyr; he must first
Will his own execution
*Henrik Ibsen*²

To modern observers, the age in which Hopkins lived can seem as remarkable for the gross sentimentality and lurid melodrama of its popular fiction as for the gross barbarism of its social policy. Hopkins was well aware of the anomaly and, like his near contemporary Conrad, saw the darkness at the heart of a "degraded" and hollow civilization "in great measure founded on wrecking" (*L*, 2, p. 97, 1881; *L*, 1, p. 28, 1871). He was equally contemptuous of the clammy pathos and clichéd "deathbed" scenarios of Victorian sentimental prose, poetry and drama, and his criticism of a poem by Robert Bridges, "On a Dead Child", is scathing and deadly in its parodic aim:

you say it is severe: perhaps it is bald. But indeed 'wise sad head' and 'firm pale hands' do not strike me as severe at all, nor yet exquisite. Rather they belong to a familiar commonplace about 'Reader, have you ever hung over the pillow of pallid cheek, clammy brow long, long night-watches ... surely, Sir Josiah Bickerstaff, there is *some* hope! O say not all is over. It cannot be'—You know.
(*L*, 1, p. 122, 1881, Hopkins's ellipses).

Oscar Wilde declared that only a man with a heart of stone and a calcified critical faculty could fail to laugh at the death of Little Nell. Hopkins had neither, but spent sixpence on Dickens's novel: "I bought *The Old Curiosity Shop* [but] am not going to give in to any nonsense about Little Nell ... I cannot stand Dickens's pathos; or rather I can stand it, keep a thoroughly dry eye and unwavering waistcoat" (*L*, 1, p. 279, 1888). With the other half of the same shilling Hopkins bought Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* and here his enduring fascination with sensational punishment and horrible events becomes apparent in his enthused comments to Robert Bridges on Dana's

description of a flogging at sea. The book, Hopkins writes, is "bristling with technicality—seamanship—which I must carefully go over and even enjoy but cannot understand: there are other things though, as a flogging, which is terrible and instructive *and it happened*—ah, that is the charm and the main point" (*L*, 1. p. 279, 1888, Hopkins's emphasis).

His susceptibility to the "charm" of cruel and terrible events is elsewhere evident in the brief lifespan of many of Hopkins's poetic subjects. Winefred's decapitation is bloodily dwelt on, murder ("The Queen's Crowning"), shipwreck and drowning ("The Nightingale", "The Wreck of the Deutschland", "The Loss of the Eurydice"), roasting alive ("The Escorial"), self-crucifixion ("Pilate"), crushing to death ("Margaret Clitheroe") and disease ("Felix Randall"), are all among the brutal modes of death explored in his work.

W.H. Gardner remarks the prevalence of violence in Hopkins's writings but suggests that his Jesuit training may have been powerfully influential:

Part of his training as a novice had been to make 'mind-paintings' or intense visualizations of scenes in the life of Christ, and especially for the various phases of the Crucifixion ... From being interested in the degree of pain which could be borne for a fixed idea or belief it was but a step, for one so insatiably curious as he was, to be 'intrigued' by the infliction and endurance of pain as a pure human anomaly.³

The logic of Gardner's argument is persuasive and plausible, but fails to admit the bloodiness of the early poems and the evidence they give to show that Hopkins was fully intrigued by ideas and images of torture, pain and death, long before he became a Jesuit, or even a Roman Catholic.

In his early poem "Pilate" (1864), for example, Hopkins assiduously plans the sequence of actions necessary for self-crucifixion with "a flint, a fang of ice":

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

The macabre theme of an even earlier poem on the martyrdom of St. Laurence ("The Escorial", 1860) further suggests that from his youth, he had found imaginative impetus in what Swinburne describes as the "ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of

gibbeted Gods!"⁴ St. Laurence is said to have roasted to death on a gridiron but Hopkins intensifies his agony by giving us the *sounds* of his pain and by incorporating two forms of destruction in his lines—thus seeming to have St. Laurence engulfed and drowned in terrible fire:

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—
("The Escorial", ll. 19-22)

It may be tempting to attribute the violence at play in this and other early poems to a fairly typical adolescent relish for gothic horror, but we must also recognize that some of Hopkins's greatest works are rooted in the dark alluvial soil of his predilection for the baroque and the grotesque. In prize-winning works like "The Escorial" there seems little doubt that he is self-consciously striving for pyrotechnical effect. But rising like a phoenix from this sea of flame is an emblem that haunts Hopkins's moral and poetic consciousness, an image of preternatural constancy in the face of terrible pain or immeasurable threat. The inspiring example of St. Laurence's absolute faith, and the image of his suffering body as a wrecked ship (cf. the self as a "foundering" ship in "That Nature is a Heralitean Flux and the Comfort of the Resurrection"), would combine again to sound a clarion to mark Hopkins's passionate surrender to the majesty of Christ in "The Wreck of the Deutschland". But after St. Laurence, for reasons I will attempt to identify, the greater number of the bearers of emblematic glory would be women.

For the Jesuit believer all roads should lead first and last to Calvary. But what seems remarkable in Hopkins's poetry is the obliquity of his approach to the foot of the cross. There are many images of physical and psychological torment in his work, yet few involve an *explicit* portrayal of Christ's own suffering. This "indirectness" on Hopkins's part is regarded by G.B. Tennyson as having some affinity with Tractarian "reserve".⁵ In brief, this doctrine is based on the idea that since God is

ultimately incomprehensible, we can know Him only indirectly; His truth is hidden and given to us only in a manner suited to our capacities for apprehending it. Moreover, it is both

unsuitable and undesirable that God and religious truth should be disclosed in their fullness at once to all ... Both the sacredness and the complexity of the subject of religious truth are such that they require a holding back and a gradual revelation as the disposition and the understanding of the recipient mature.⁶

According to this High Church principle, Divine truth can only be glimpsed at obliquely through types and analogies. In one sense Hopkins does pursue this philosophy, for analogy or parallelism is the double axle on which his world turns. All created things are unique, and therefore unlike, yet all cohere in Christ (see "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame"). But there seems little evidence of reserve in the way that Hopkins anatomises the world in violent metaphor, or in his attempts to catch and lay bare the felt life of things, the innermost grit and grain of objects and feelings. Preliminary drafts of poems were merely "the skeleton or flayed anatomy", what followed were "verses in the flesh" (*L*, 2, p. 23, 1879). Texture, sensual evocation, immediacy and foregrounding of detail are dominant features of Hopkins's poetry and in this respect he is closer to the "fleshly school" of Pre-Raphaelite realism than Tractarian reticence.

There are no flabby poeticisms to cushion the impact either of intense sensuality or intense suffering in his poetry, and even he could be struck "aghast" at the "raw nakedness and unmitigated violence" (*L*, 1, p. 79, 1879) in his work. He is no Shelleyan abstractionist, painting with light, but a visceral *realiser* out to win battles for England, no matter how bloody the action. Thus Hopkins can describe a flower in such apparently inseparable terms of sadistic cruelty and sensuality that it shocks and disturbs: "And crush-silk poppies aflash, / The blood-gush blade-gash, / Flame-rash rudred" ("The Woodlark"). The graphic power and immediacy of this wet scarlet wound obviously owes some of its impact to sexual symbolism, yet Hopkins uses images of bloodied flowers elsewhere to represent the crushing and piercing of Christ's body in the Great Sacrifice: "the rose ran in crimsonings down the cross-wood" ("Rosa Mystica"). As the flower in "The Woodlark" appears like a wound freshly made, its bleeding still unstanched, so Christ's wounding at the Crucifixion and his freely shed sacrifice of blood is happening *now* and is being offered *now*:

Jesus accomplished his bloody sacrifice on the cross ... But his sacrifice goes on to every year, every week, every day, because every day Mass is offered. This is why you are here, to

be at the slaying of the spotless lamb ... *He that comes upon the altar is your God that made you.*

(S, p. 236, 1879; Hopkins's emphasis)

Hopkins's unwavering attempt to make the "flesh and blood" symbolism of the Eucharist fully real may have been as unsettling to his parishioners as his poetry is to some readers, for he refuses to "unperplex" blood, beauty and pain, in either context. Hopkins's remark of "The Wreck of the Deutschland", that nothing was added for "poetical padding" (*L*, 1, p. 47, 1878), may serve as an ironic caveat to any reader who expects to emerge unbruised from the encounter.

Otto Fenichel claims that asceticism in puberty is "a sign of fear of sexuality and is a defense against it", but the acts of bodily deprivation or penance that often accompany this defence can become "distorted expression[s] of the blocked sexuality and give a masochistic pleasure".⁷ Hopkins's ambitious and ardent perfectionism may well have driven him to become one of the penitents described with apparent admiration and pleasure in "The Easter Communion" (revised autograph dated "Lent 1865"): "striped in secret with breath-taking whips, / Those crooked rough-scored chequers may be pieced / To crosses meant for Jesu's".⁸ But the long martyrdom of his life had little outward sign of drama; indeed he felt himself to be "coffined" (*L*, 1, pp. 214-5, 1885) in dejection and suffocating tedium. Always bound to the bruising wheel of the academic cart and crushed by unrelieved weariness, Hopkins suffered critical moments of such anguished distress that he feared for his sanity, even for his life: "I can not always last like this: in mind or body or both I shall give way" (*L*, 1, p. 282, 1988). As he argues in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", it is the endless dullness of the quotidian burden borne by the "sodden with its sorrowing heart" that most causes its victim to plead for death. Danger and electrical horror on the other hand seem to possess, for Hopkins, as for the Romantics, their own sublime and breath-taking grandeur.

Christian faith is bounded by the solemn premise that the physical and mental torment of one supremely innocent, though willing, victim should wipe out our sins. The iconography of Christianity is therefore often violent and harrowing, and when images of physical tenderness and human bonding are created they are often

restricted to loving representations of the infant Christ and His mother, Mary. The most prevalent and enduring icon of Christian femininity is a sublimely content and utterly devoted mother. But for men, the most resonant image of masculine perfection is that of Christ portrayed on the cross, tortured and bleeding, but steadfast in courage and, ultimately, indestructible. A marked emphasis on pain and suffering is therefore not automatically inconsistent with religious sensibility, as the long history of asceticism will demonstrate. Indeed it may well seem consistent with an ideal of manly behaviour that can *only* be achieved through the willing endurance of pain.⁹

This form of endurance is exemplified in the pitiless conquest of the flesh as demonstrated by Savonarola and Origen, the two great heroes of Hopkins's impressionable youth: "I must tell you he [Savonarola] is the only person in history (except perhaps Origen) about whom I have a real feeling, and I feel such an enthusiasm about Savonarola that I can conceive what it must have been to have been one of his followers" (*F. L.*, pp.17-18, 1865). Savonarola pursued an ascetic regime and lifestyle so punishing in its deprivation that his followers often collapsed with exhaustion and malnutrition.¹⁰ Origen, praised by Cardinal Newman and represented in the New Roman Breviary,¹¹ subjugated his body in even more dramatic form by taking literally Christ's saying about self-castration for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven (see Matt. 19:12).¹² Both men were persecuted, tortured and martyred for their beliefs, both were fiercely celibate. Origen in particular believed that sin entailed a fall from pure virgin spirit into flesh, that Adam was a "representative of the spiritual element in man, Eve of the fleshly".¹³ To mortify the flesh was therefore symbolically to subjugate the feminine principle and to establish the proper ascendancy of the Godlike masculine spirit.

For some martyrs, the impulse of self-sacrifice may be fuelled primarily by love: love of God and, supremely in Christ's case, love of humanity. This is "inlaw feminine" martyrdom, characteristically symbolized by the image of the female pelican who sheds the blood of her breast so that her young may live. The self-inflicted martyrdom of the arch-ascetic may have the same end but is less motivated by love than by hate, and may in part be an expression of the algolagnic impulse.

Trevor MacNeely points out that readers of Mario Praz will "recognize algolagnia as the synoptic term for the sexual attraction of pain, whether inflicted or suffered", and in Hopkins's own life, MacNeely suggests, "it is not difficult to find instances of behaviour that would lend support to the thesis that Hopkins had strong ascetic, not to say morbidly algolagnic tendencies".¹⁴ The ascetic's desire to sublimate and punish the flesh is comparable to a form of psychic as well as physical anorexia. Everything that lies beyond the domain of intellectual control threatens the ascetic's goal of self-mastery ("If I should die now I should die no master of myself and that is the worst failure of all", *S*, p. 262, 1889). The body, together with its functions and feelings, is loathed as if it were some malignant growth on the organ of will. Such fear and hatred of apparently ungovernable elements in the self leads inevitably to psychic division. Because the emotional responses of the heart cannot be dictated by the elective will the heart must be starved into submission and kept "in hiding". In effect, this means the denial or sublimation of all feminine impulses and values, except obedience. This loss is potentially catastrophic, however, for these feelings and responses are the spring and source of of generative energy, love and healing life-force.¹⁵

William James remarks that fanaticism is found only "when the character is masterful and aggressive" and suggests that in some circumstances "religion and fanaticism are twins".¹⁶ Self-deprivation of the intensity displayed by Origen and Savonarola can seem to represent an only barely rationalized ascetic impulse of the kind described by Nietzsche as a blood sport played out within the arena of self: "the last power invented by antiquity, after it became bored by the spectacle of the hunting of beasts and of fights between men".¹⁷ Hopkins's Flemish contemporary Emile Verhaeren recognizes violence and an introverted will-to-power as fundamental elements in the ascetic temperament. In his poem, "Les Moines", Verhaeren's fanatical monks exhibit an unrelenting autophobia which is matched only by fierce pride in self-subjugation. In the struggle to "stand erect once more, cruel to one's self, / Victor at length over something",¹⁸ Verhaeren's monastics demonstrate the paradox that the masculine aggression which here is conflated with sadism and sexual potency can be directed towards the "feminine" aim of absolute obedience.

Despite his intense admiration for men such as Origen and Savonarola, Hopkins was not inspired to write about them. He planned to write a treatise on sacrificial martyrdom and started gathering together accounts and stories of heroic actions, including one of a "pious and devoted prince ... called T'ang" who offered himself as a "propitiatory sacrifice in a great drought for the sake of his people" (*L*, 2, p. 102, 1882). Like other of his proposed "epic" projects, this was never completed, nor did Hopkins's planned ode on his *semblable*, the equally "brilliant and ill-starred Jesuit", Edmund Campion, reach more than a few "scattered stanzas" before inspiration flagged and his "vein dried" (*L*, 1, pp. 135-6). One notable poem in honour of masculine martyrdom was completed after "The Escorial", however; a dedicatory piece, "In honour of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez", which celebrates the invisible but prolonged inner torment of those who suffer daily and hourly to keep their hope, faith and chastity intact against relentless temptation. Hopkins's poem to commemorate the "hidden life" of St. Alphonsus was commissioned and therefore he had little choice but to finish it, yet its completion may have been urged on by the apparently intense personal empathy that the poet seems to have with his subject.

Alphonsus was a laybrother of the Society of Jesus in Palma, Majorca, and had spent forty years as hall porter at the Jesuit College of Montesion. Both he and Hopkins and were destined to endure "years and years ... of world without event" or recognition, fulfilling the mundane brief of their duties with patient humility.¹⁹ Outwardly at least, their lives aspired to the condition of Goethe's Makarie, a literary role-model for the nineteenth-century angel in the house, who "leads a life of almost pure contemplation ... in considerable isolation ... a life without external events—a life whose story cannot be told as there is no story".²⁰

The social facts of gender difference cannot be ignored, however, for Alphonsus and Hopkins led lives of submissive obedience, chastity and self-abnegation because they chose to do so and not because their respective cultures had taught them to believe that any other form of behaviour was deviant and unnatural to their sex. Because Goethe's "ideal of feminine purity" seems wholly passive she takes selflessness to the point of lifelessness; whatever core of troublesome humanity

she may have possessed has been eviscerated, leaving no "will-to-power", (whether introverted or extroverted), in her nature. The perfect "inlaw" female contemplative leads a life without disturbance either by external or imaginative event. But what Hopkins appears to reclaim and reconstruct in his requiem for St. Alphonsus is the status of heroic male warrior for those who are at war with themselves: "There is your world within. / There rid the dragons, root out there the sin. / Your will is law in that small commonweal" ("The times are nightfall"). He attempts to aggrandize the daily trials of this hidden life by taking a sceptical, Miltonic swipe at the notion that great honour is only due to those who make their mark on the world through sensational feats of physical strength and prowess:

Honour is flashed off exploit, so we say;
 And those strokes once that gashed flesh or galled shield
 Should tongue that time now, trumpet now that field,
 And on the fighter, forge his glorious day.
 On Christ they do and on the martyr may;
 But be the war within, the brand we wield
 Unseen, the heroic breast not outward-steeled,
 Earth hears no hurtle then from fiercest fray.
 ("In Honour of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez")

Readings from Brother Henry Foley's "life" of St. Alphonsus were given in the Refectory at Manresa House, Roehampton, during the years of Hopkins's novitiate.²¹ In his book, *The Life of Blessed Alphonsus Rodriguez*, Brother Foley describes how Alphonsus endured

a trial of the worst and fiercest temptations ... During the space of seven years God permitted the devils to pursue a most unrelenting and cruel war against his body to overcome his chastity ... with the most horrid and impure forms, gestures, and actions ... he was reduced to such terrible straits, pain and weakness from the violence of his efforts to resist them, that he must have died, if God had not put his enemies to flight.²²

Rodriguez was finally driven to blind himself to beauty by disciplining "his eyes never to look man or woman in the face"²³ and there seems an obvious connection between Hopkins's "custody of the eyes" penance and Alphonsus's fearful refusal even, as Hopkins says in "To what serves mortal beauty?": to "meet beauty", merely meet it and then "leave, let that alone". Alphonsus and Hopkins seem alike also in their apparent susceptibility to the physical beauty of both men and women, and in

the suspicion and fear that such vulnerability can generate. Clement of Alexandria quotes the gnostic belief that "the Saviour himself said: I came to destroy the works of the female" and explains that "By *female* he means lust; by *works*, birth and decay." Human nature would be restored to its pristine state only when men had "trampled on the garment of shame", the body.²⁴ Hopkins had read and noted the words of Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying* which offered rather severe "Remedies against Uncleanness", and advocated pain and penance as weapons to drive out the demonic feminine:

Corporal mortification and hard usage of our body hath, by all ages of the church, been accounted ... of some profit against ... fornication. A spare diet, and a thin coarse table, seldom refreshment, frequent fasts ... for by cutting off the provisions of victual, we shall weaken the strengths of our enemy. To which we add lyings upon the ground, painful postures in prayer, reciting our devotions with our arms extended at full length, like Moses praying against Amalek, or our blessed Saviour hanging upon his painful bed of sorrows, the cross, and (if lust be upon us, and sharply tempting) by inflicting any smart to overthrow the strongest passion by the most violent pain.... This was St. Paul's remedy.²⁵

Taylor regarded lust and "uncleanness" as the most shameful of all vices and for men the greater part of that shame seems to derive from its emasculating effects: "uncleanness is hugely contrary to the spirit of government, by embasing the spirit of a man, making it effeminate, sneaking, soft, and foolish, without courage, without confidence".²⁶ Tempting pleasures, when not literally offered by coquettes masked in cosmetics and tawdry finery, were personified in the same fashion, as false, painted whores:

Look upon pleasures, not ... where they look beautifully; that is, as they come towards you to be enjoyed, for then they paint and smile, and dress themselves up in tinsel and glass gems, and counterfeit imagery; but when thou hast rifled and discomposed them with enjoying their false beauties ... then behold them in their nakedness and weariness. See what ... unhandsome proportions and filthy carcass, they discover ... and be no more abused.²⁷

The moral gist of Taylor's Spenserian evocation of the hidden ugliness and filthiness of the fair-seeming female appears to be that men must beware the women around them and also distrust the "feminine" weakness in their own hearts. Taylor declared that longing after "sensual pleasures" made the spirit of man "loose, soft, and wandering" and thus most contrary to the state of a Christian, "whose life is a perpetual exercise, a wrestling and warfare", and whose greatest prize is the

"incorruptible crown" of martyrdom.²⁸ Hopkins heeded Taylor's demand for chastity and faithfully copied at least some of the acts of penance described in Taylor's book ("painful postures in prayer ... arms extended at full length like ... Our Blessed Saviour", *J*, p. 30, 1864). Hopkins's revered mentor, Cardinal Newman, also admired the austere example of Taylor and St. Paul, arguing that it was better "to torture the body all one's days" than to be damned at death.²⁹ Newman did however warn that no-one should take "pleasure in mortifications for their own sake".³⁰

As a knight of Christ it seems fitting that Hopkins should bestow chivalric status upon those who ride like St. George into mind's abyss in order to slay the dragons within. But St. George was also an extraordinarily popular icon in the nineteenth century and seems to have represented an ideal of heroic manliness which stood as the protective complement to the image of woman as passive Madonna. MacKenzie notes the particularly imperialist nature of the sexual and nationalist values that St. George was often seen to represent:

Many a literary Nimrod summoned up St. George as his exemplar. The iconography of St. George, ubiquitous in the period, with all its military, equestrian, moral and sexually protective, chivalric overtones ... represented the victory of civilized man over the darker, primeval and untamed forces still at work in the world.³¹

The role of the dragon-slayer and the panoply of martial imagery with which Hopkins surrounds it is quite gender-specific, however, and would seem to exclude women from this particular moral arena. Spenser does choose to have a female knight, Britomart, as his representative of chastity, but his choice reflects the belief that chastity (though it may be practised by extraordinary men) is the most essentially feminine virtue. It is significant that Britomart makes no serious "error in her quest and is the only knight in *The Faerie Queen* who does not require rescue by Arthur".³² Woman's chastity cannot be regained once lost; Britomart therefore cannot fail because she cannot be redeemed. Spenser and Hopkins seem alike in visualizing women as being above reproach or beyond redemption, and a woman who is above reproach cannot be tempted, least of all can she be tempted *from within*.

The dragons of sin that goad Alphonsus almost to madness and death are lewd avatars of Eve, the woman whose enticing allure allies her with the serpent, and who

first clothed man in shame. Alphonsus is admired and honoured because he preserves his chastity against the lubricious promptings of his own imagination, but it seems unlikely that Hopkins would find such behaviour worthy of canonization in a woman. It is a further indicator of cultural gender difference that "denial of the one power [sex] that they are assumed to have is demanded of *all* women (not just nuns) as their duty; whereas when men remain chaste they are seen as saintly and exalted".³³ Milton allows that evil thoughts may come and go even into the mind of God, but Hopkins appears to believe that good women would unconsciously recoil from sin and that lewd thoughts would never even reach the point of formulation. In this, Hopkins is almost at one with Mrs Oliphant who offers Desdemona as a paragon of feminine purity and goodness, and suggests that "every pure feminine mind ... holds the faith of Desdemona", that women were not capable of sexual infidelity or of prostitution.³⁴ Hopkins must have suspected that some women were capable of such behaviour, however, otherwise he would not so revere those who proved themselves above or beyond sexual desire. Thus, in his notes on Saint Cecily, a Roman martyr who persuaded her betrothed to join with her in death instead of marriage, Hopkins writes in praise of her virtue: "The heart is what rises towards good, shrinks from evil, recognizing the good or evil first by some eye of its own" (*S*, p. 257, 1884). The movements of the virtuous heart, it should be noted, are in strict contrast to the wayward "rising" of the penis when it succumbs to the lust of the eyes.

It seems evident from Hopkins's writings that sexuality itself is an evil from which virtuous women "naturally" shrink, for Hopkins also praises St. Thecla's rejection of marriage in favour of "the lovely lot of continence" ("St. Thecla", l. 28). St. Thecla, upon whom Hopkins bestows the lovely but unconsciously erotic title of "plumed passionflower" ("Margaret Clitheroe", l. 42), was inspired by St. Paul's teachings on celibacy, and the key argument of his poem is that "The world was saved by virgins" ("St. Thecla", l. 30). Part of the paradox that this valorization of sexual abstinence entails is evident in Hopkins's definition of virtue. In a characteristic conflation of terms denoting control and abstinence with sexual fertility, Hopkins identifies "true virtue" as the child of that "chastity of mind which seems to lie at the

very heart and be the parent of all other good, the seeing at once what is best, the holding to that, and the not allowing anything else whatever to be even heard pleading to the contrary" (*L*, 1, pp. 174-5, 1883). When moved according to the dictates of this apparently innate — because internalized — moral "I", the heart's affections are indeed holy and cannot be identified with the subliminal urges of the rebel self. The "better dead than defiled" choice of virginity and martyrdom over sexual love and ordinary human procreativity made by St. Cecily and St. Thecla indicates their possession of the "chastity of mind" which Hopkins felt was lacking in himself. Critically aware of his own contrariness and of his susceptibility to the world's "secret solicitations" (*L*, 2, p. 93, 1881), Hopkins prayed especially for St. Cecily's assistance in the fight against temptation:

We ought to look to God first in everything, to seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, his rightness, to be right with God and God to be king or first principle ... in us. Pray for this more in matters of interest, of pleasure, and of will. Ask St. Cecily's help.
(*S*, p. 257, 1884)

Hopkins had followed the example of Cecily and Thecla in willing his virginity and his mind to God, but his prayers show his difficulty in reconciling the "unchaste" impulses of pleasure and self-interest with the imperatives of duty.

The "innate" virtue of absolute moral constancy displayed by St. Cecily, St. Thecla and St. Winefred, belongs to the inlaw feminine principle and, like many male writers of his time and before, Hopkins seems to prefer to have this feminine virtue gender-locked in a female breast. Not all women can be elevated to such a superhuman level, however, for in common with his compulsion to perceive or create antithetical dualities in self and poetry, Hopkins's imagination seems to admit the possibility of only two role clusters for women: "the unearthly woman, silent wife or heroic martyr, or the Medusa, the monster, the slut".³⁵

Hopkins's most famous example of an ideal "inlaw feminine" heart in an "inlaw feminine" body is the tall nun in "The Wreck of the Deutschland": "Ah! there was a heart right! / There was single eye!" The nun's heart and mind are together strained to the highest pitch of perception, whereby she sees beyond the limits of pain and desperate circumstance into the eternal presence of God. The

"underthought" (affective will) and the "overthought" (elective will) of her being are thus inseparably bound and focussed on the same object. The storm that rages in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" assails the nun from without, (though the poet-persona is battered by the storm *within* his own head): the nun is threatened by external forces of annihilation just as Winefred is threatened by the "deathdance" of violent passion in the blood of the man who desires her body and her death. Each woman stands fast. There are no fault lines of doubt, weakness or mutinous self-will to undermine their marble constancy, for they symbolize, like St. Cecily, the perfect union of the conscious rational will and the heart's spontaneous desires. Though as women they are immersed in the flesh they are yet able to deny their own carnality. Hopkins further underlines their moral fixity and transcendence of carnal fleshliness by metaphorically perceiving the nun as a rock ("to the blast / Tarpeian fast"), thus linking her with St. Peter and the Roman Catholic church, and ultimately with the "granite" sureness of God. Winefred also is symbolically linked with Christ: the rock from which, when struck, water flowed as it had at Calvary (1 Cor. 10:4, John 19:34).

These women display none of the disjointedness and schism which seem symptomatic of masculine ambition; instead they approach the state of unearthly integrity described by Tennyson in *The Princess*:

Not a thought, a touch,
 But pure as lines of green that streak the white,
 O the first snowdrop's inner leaves; I say
 Not like that piebald miscellany, man
 Bursts of great heart and slips in sensual mire,
 But whole and one.
 (Canto V, ll. 187-92)

Hopkins's work undoubtedly *is* rich in bursts of great heart but his slips in sensual mire, together with the aggressive attack and sensuality of his underthought, have frequently startled his readers and critics. Censorship, as Jorge Luis Borges succinctly puts it, is "the mother of metaphor" and it is through metaphor that Hopkins's own heart betrays its black / white, piebald confusion of impulse and desire; being at once addicted to sin, "unteachably after evil", yet capable of "uttering truth" ("Wreck of the Deutschland", l. 141).

Women appear to fill an essential role in Hopkins's aesthetic, for as in "Spring and Fall", he speaks most clearly of human lack and mortality when he uses female figures to represent their effects. This may reflect a desire to displace and exteriorize his own human vulnerability and at the same time create an aesthetic icon which pretends to confer immortality upon its maker. Human vulnerability cannot really be sloughed off in this fashion, of course, for we are all helpless against the inevitability of death, but within a phallogentric culture (and in the Christian religion, as it is interpreted within that culture) woman is traditionally associated with what men choose to reject in themselves. St. Winefred, for example, is culturally linked with nature (she and her well are virtually interchangeable), with sexuality, with physical vulnerability, and with death.

The equation of woman with Otherness and with death may even, as Bronfen suggests, lie at the very heart of gender construction since it springs from the "illusory hope that by culturally placing 'lack', 'doubleness' and 'division' on the side of the feminine, real lack is exteriorised as well".³⁶ In a patriarchal society, the female is objectified and constructed as the Other, the one who lacks the masculine signifier for wholeness (the phallus) and is therefore considered to be incomplete. Woman is constructed as the site of absence, nothingness and silence, but also of that "horrifying void that 'castrates' the living man's sense of wholeness and stability". The masculine is constructed as "that which lacks death",³⁷ though in reality we are none of use entirely whole or stable, and all our bodies share the same "lack" in being helpless against the inevitable fall into the silent void of death.

If to suffer and be still is the sign of a good and dutiful woman,³⁸ it follows that taking on the absolute and permanent stillness of death is the logical apotheosis of female self-sacrifice. Although Freud himself warns against the conventional trap of making "'active' coincide with 'masculine' and 'passive' with 'feminine,'" Victorian culture seems predicated on this error. Death is obviously the most passive state of all and therefore the corpse (whether anatomically female or not) is by implication feminine. Conversely, the living spectator, especially a pen / penis wielding male, is automatically placed in a dominant masculine position. The pleasure that this illusion

of power brings may indeed be heightened for the male spectator if the dead or dying persona is actually female, for then the equation of woman with passivity, Otherness, and death can go unchallenged. If she is beautiful the male spectator as artist can further distance himself from the realities of violence and death by appraising her as an aesthetic object.

This method of translating human suffering into artistic gain is patently not new—though the emergence and extraordinary popularity of the "consumptive sublime", a mode of artistic representation which equated women's passive suffering and death with moral purification, seems a peculiarly Victorian phenomenon.³⁹ Hopkins does indeed appear to emphasize the helpless vulnerability of his sacrificial victims, though this pays needful tribute to the enormity of their courage, and he may even present them as glamourized objects of aesthetic contemplation. St. Thecla is of earnest and "modest mien" but she is also described as if she were a painting or a statue: "Twice lovely, tinted eastern, turnèd Greek" with "tender-slanted cheek" ("St. Thecla"). Manifold references are of course made to Winefred's tender bloom of innocence and flower-like beauty. The tall nun of the *Deutschland*, though superhuman in her fortitude and faith, is so delicately responsive towards Christ, her "lover", that her breast will tenderly swell and sway to His most "feathery" touch ("The Wreck of the *Deutschland*", ll. 246-7). Hopkins's eroticized description of the tall nun in "The Wreck of the *Deutschland*" seems to follow the tradition of *The Song of Songs*, but may also suggest the influence of popular medical wisdom which stressed the "presiding power of a woman's reproductive physiology, and the eroticism of her general nature". Commenting on the female's "natural" tendency to excess, medical author William Jones warned that a woman of sensibility who would "preserve her chastity, must guard her bosom well" for the female breasts are "exquisitely wrought formations" which are "electrified, as it were" by touch.⁴⁰ In contrast, one of the few matrons in Hopkins's pantheon, Margaret Clitheroe, is almost perfunctorily deemed beautiful: "The Christ-ed beauty of her mind / Her mould of features mated well"; though she is perhaps most distressingly vulnerable of all because of the unborn child who is crushed in the "ruins" of her body ("Margaret

Clitheroe").

The particularly religious aspect of Hopkins's neo-Romantic attraction to the torment of the "persecuted maiden"⁴¹ is shared by his contemporary, Charles Kingsley, though it should be stressed that Hopkins appears mercifully free of Kingsley's extreme "prurience and moral sadism".⁴² Disturbing images of death by crucifixion and sexual penetration are literally bound together in the illustrations for Kingsley's "Life of Elizabeth of Hungary" (given as a wedding present to his wife).⁴³ In this and elsewhere, Kingsley's heroines are usually stripped before dying and meet "agonizing deaths as if to expiate their exhibitionism. Argemone dies disfigured and in great pain ... St. Maura is crucified, Rose is tortured and immolated by the Spanish Inquisition, and the naked Hypatia is stoned to death by a vicious mob".⁴⁴

Viewed from a contemporary perspective, Hopkins and Kingsley might seem, like Geoffrey Hill's Offa (a "collector" of martyrs), to be simply feeding their taste for the macabre by visiting scenes of torture, suffering and death, leaving with "discreet souvenirs for consolation and philosophy".⁴⁵ Such a judgement ignores several important points, however, not least the perennial danger of confusing life and art.

Even when young enough to be less personally aware of the effects of ageing, Hopkins could not beat down the paralysing horror that gripped his mind when he contemplated the evidence of physical decay:

Even in withering the flower ran through beautiful inscapes ... It is not that inscape does not govern the behaviour of things in slack and decay as one can see even in the pining of the skin in the old and even in a skeleton but that horror prepossesses the mind, but in this case there was nothing in itself to shew whether the flower were shutting or opening.
(*J*, p. 211, 1871)

Hopkins's pastoral work in Liverpool and Glasgow also forced him into an intimate knowledge of the miserable realities of sickness, pain and death. Death in its quotidian form was clearly not the most inspiring *of spectacles* for he found the work "museless" and "depressing" (*L*, 2, p. 33, May 1880), and it would be crass indeed to suggest that he might have felt otherwise had his diseased and dying parishioners been less "base and bespotted" and more beautiful (*L*, 1, p. 127, April 1881). Real horror and real distress can be screened out by art, however,

for representations of death on paper or canvas create masks of order, beauty, and harmony which falsify the reality of death because they *are* ordered and beautiful and harmonious, and death is none of these.

Whether or not representations of violence against women actually endorse the "legitimacy" of men's desire to control them and therefore promote real acts of violence, is a huge and complex issue.⁴⁶ There may be, as Elisabeth Bronfen reminds us, a "fundamental difference" between real violence done to a physical body and any "imagined" representation of suffering or death "which has no concretely violated body as its ultimate signified".⁴⁷ But as we have seen, Hopkins claimed to like best those tales of violence which were true (L, 1, p. 279, 1888), and the Ignatian regime of Spiritual Exercises required its adherents to engage in a terrifyingly intimate contemplation of the concretely violated body of Christ (S, p. 132, 1883).

In spite of his adolescent admission of "evil thoughts" when looking at a "beautiful crucifix" (*Facsimiles*, p. 198), meditation on the reality of the crucifixion could have no pleasureable "charm". The "exquisite smart" that ignites Hopkins's creative drive in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" transmits exhilaration and "glee", in spite of its harrowing theme. But the grief with which Hopkins reacts to the sufferings of Christ has none of his poetry's oxymoronic doubleness — it is wholly bitter and wholly devastating: "they were reading in the refectory Sister Emmerich's account of the Agony in the Garden and I suddenly began to cry and sob and could not stop" (*J*, p. 195, 1869). With a characteristic image of violence, which is nevertheless meticulously observed, Hopkins describes the overwhelming flood of emotion that such insights can release:

neither the weight nor the stress of sorrow ... by themselves move us or bring the tears as a sharp knife does not cut for being pressed as long as it is pressed without any shaking of the hand but there is always one touch, something striking sideways and unlooked for, which in both cases undoes resistance and pierces, and this may be so delicate that the pathos seems to have gone directly to the body and cleared the understanding in its passage.
(*J*, p. 195, 1870)

The effect of this sudden and sideways knife-thrust which seems to produce an epiphanic moment of intense insight is similar in kind to the "live and lancing" spur of creative inspiration he invokes in "To R.B." But in spite of his craving for

inspiration, Hopkins recoiled from the notion of making poetic "capital" out of his emotional response to Christ: it would, he said, be "sacrilege to do so" (*L*, 1, p. 66, 1879).

Given the complexities and contradictions that seem to surround Hopkins's response to the martyrdom of women, however, his reluctance may be more easily understood. It is morally questionable to find "a zest, an edge, an ecstasy" (*St. Winefred's Well*) in the spectacle of human suffering, even one's own, and Hopkins dare not risk even seeming to exploit Christ in such a manner. Moreover, because Christ was crucified for our sins, any representation of his agony must be a reminder of the spectator's involvement and culpability. Hopkins's guilt and anxiety over the very act of writing was crippling enough and could not stand even the suspicion of a further betrayal of Christ. Capitalizing on the sufferings of Winefred and her sisters in adversity carries far less risk, for in the punitive eye of the Church, all women, even saints, carry the stigma of Eve and the blame for all the world's evil. As Tertullian warned his "sisters in Christ", even the best of them were, in effect, Eve's co-conspirators: "Do you not know that every one of you is an Eve? The sentence of God on your sex lives on in this age: the guilt, of necessity, lives on too."⁴⁸ Desdemona, Hopkins said, was a woman "whose virtue one could have trusted", but like St. Thecla, St. Cecily, St. Dorothea, Margaret Clitheroe, the nuns of the Deutschland, and St. Winefred, she must die to prove it.

Hopkins doubtless had an intense admiration for the courage of these women but he seems to show little pity for their pain. White remarks on his apparent lack of compassion, finding Hopkins's treatment of Margaret Clitheroe's horrible death to be "not just bad verse, but particularly insensitive from a normal human point of view in its crudity about the poor woman".⁴⁹ The "sufferings" of virtuous women, Hopkins told Bridges in a letter of "earnest sympathy" after the death of his sister, are "to be looked on as the marks of God's particular love and this is truer the more exceptional they are" (*L*, 1, p. 25, 1869). Perhaps this belief renders the notion of a "normal human point of view" irrelevant, especially in the extraordinary context of martyrdom. But Hopkins's point of view as an *artist* confronts us with the evidence

that in recreating women's suffering he satisfies several of his own most fundamental needs: he disowns death by displacement; he feeds his fascination with violence; he follows the apparently perennial male desire to view beauty in peril; and he reasserts his masculine position as survivor, spectator and creator. This position is nowhere more fraught and more layered with paradox than it appears in the work to which we will now turn, Hopkins's verse-drama on the murder of St. Winefred.

[NOTES]

¹ "Deutsches Requiem", *Labyrinthes* (1962).

² *Brand* (1866), 3.

³ *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) 2, p. 321.

⁴ "Hymn to Proserpine", *Swinburne: Poems and Prose*, p. 32.

⁵ *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (London: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 210.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷ *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1946, repr. 1980), p. 111 and p. 364.

⁸ White, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, pp. 112-113.

⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 172-187, for a discussion of Jesuit training in pain and penance.

¹⁰ See Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola*, trans. by Cecil Grayson, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

¹¹ See Loomis, "Birthpangs in Darkness ...", for a discussion of the influence of Origen's gestational imagery on Hopkins's thinking.

¹² See Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R.P. Lawson (New York:[n.pub.] 1956); *An Exhortation to Martyrdom and Other Works* (New York:[n.pub.] 1979).

¹³ See chapter entitled "Sexuality and the Fall of Man" in John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), pp. 5-29 (p. 16).

¹⁴ "The Blissful Agony of Hopkins...", p. 104.

¹⁵ Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986; London: Cardinal, 1991), pp. 77-84.

¹⁶ *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 3rd imp., (London: Collins, The Fontana Library, 1968), p. 335.

¹⁷ Quoted in Charles Badouin, *Psychoanalysis and Aesthetics*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1924), p. 126.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁹ Hopkins was Porter at Manresa during his noviceship; see Alfred Thomas, S. J., *Hopkins the Jesuit: The Years of Training* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) for a detailed account of Hopkins's training as a Jesuit.

²⁰ Eichner, "The Eternal Feminine: An Aspect of Goethe's Ethics", p. 620; quoted in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 22.

²¹ See *Hopkins the Jesuit*, pp. 218, 233.

²² *The Life of Blessed Alphonsus Rodriguez* (pub. 1873); quoted in MacKenzie, *Reader's Guide*, p. 199.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Stromata*, III, ix (PG 8. 1165-69), trans. M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, [n.pub.] 1926), pp. 10-11; quoted in *Virginitas*, pp. 11-12.

²⁵ *Holy Living and Dying* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), ch. 2, § 3, p. 69.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁷ Ibid., ch. 2, § 1, pp. 46 - 47.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 44 - 45.

²⁹ *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 8 vols. (London: Rivington, 1842-4) I. xxiv, last para.

³⁰ Ibid., IV. v, para. 12.; quoted in *Poems*, p. 266.

³¹ "The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter...", *Manliness and Morality*, p. 181.

³² French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, p. 27.

³³ Ibid., p. 127.

³⁴ *Blackwood's Magazine*, LXXVII, May 1855 (p. 560); quoted in Eric Trudgill, *Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 113.

³⁵ Sulloway, "Gerard Manley Hopkins and 'Women and Men' as 'Partners in the Mystery of Redemption'", p. 44.

³⁶ *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 218.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See Martha Vicinus, *Suffer and be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (London: Methuen, 1980).

³⁹ *Idols of Perversity*, p. 30.

⁴⁰ *An Essay on Some of the More Important Diseases of Women* (London, [n. pub.] 1850); quoted in Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 200.

⁴¹ For a pathological treatment of this theme see Mario Praz, "The Shadow of the Divine Marquis" *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson, 2nd edn, (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 93-187.

⁴² *Madonnas and Magdalens*, p. 10.

⁴³ See *ibid.*, Plate 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁵ *Mercian Hymns*, XVIII, in *Collected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

⁴⁶ There are numerous studies and arguments attacking and defending the postulated connection between cultural and aesthetic representations of violence towards women and actual harm done to them. I offer these in addition to works already cited, though I do not attach them to my arguments on Hopkins. See Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder* (New York: New York University Press, 1987); Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974) Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁴⁷ *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 59.

⁴⁸ *De Cultu Feminarum*, I, 12.; quoted in *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, p. 63.

⁴⁹ White, "Hopkins's Women", p. 10.

***"Cheer whom though?" : Caradoc, Hopkins, the Archetype and
the Anti-hero in St. Winefred's Well***

**Woman is man's art work; the art work is man's wife;
in fact these two enunciations mutually implicate and explicate each other.
*Nancy Huston*¹**

**Every author, however modest, keeps a most outrageous vanity
chained like a madman in the padded cell of his breast.
*Logan Pearsall Smith*²**

Hopkins fell under the spell of St. Winefred during the time that he would later refer to with affection as his "salad days" (*L*, 1, p. 163, 1882) at St. Beuno's College in north Wales. Of his frequent visits to her well, which flowed six miles away at Holywell, Hopkins wrote: "it fills me with devotion every time I see it and would fill anyone with eyes with admiration, the flow of [beautiful water] is so lavish and so beautiful" (*L* 1, p. 40, April 1877). Hopkins described Winefred as a "martyr of modesty" and his imagination was so captivated by her that twelve years after his first encounter with the legend he claimed his projected verse-drama was a "greater undertaking ... than any yet, a tragedy on St. Winefred's martyrdom" (*L*, 1, p. 92, 1879).

The *Catholic Encyclopaedia* (1910) records that St. Winefred, Winefride or Gwenfrewi, was born into a wealthy family in Holywell, Wales, and was guided by her uncle, St. Beuno, to dedicate herself to

an austere, religious life. Her reputation for wisdom and purity reached the ears of Caradoc, the son of a neighbouring prince. He pressed Winefred to marry him and when she, fearing for her chastity, tried to flee from him, cut off her head. The head rolled down a steep gully and where it came to rest a spring suddenly appeared. St. Beuno prayed successfully for Winefred's recovery. He also asked that Caradoc be punished and he was struck dead. St. Winefred became abbess of a convent at Holywell and later at Gwytherin.³

As with many magical legends, what begins as a factual event may be enhanced and sensationalized in successive retellings until it gains fantastic proportions. A more "naturalistic" account of Winefred's life claims that she was merely wounded in the neck by Caradoc's sword and was nursed back to health by her uncle.⁴ This last version would be more happily accepted by the influential philosopher-theologian,

David Friedrich Strauss, and many other "honest doubters" in the nineteenth century who took it as axiomatic that miracles like Winefred's "raising from the dead" did not "really" happen, though they might respond with sensitivity and approval to the mythic power of stories such as hers. Strauss argued that the "antiquated systems of supranaturalism and naturalism" which had for so long divided those who sought the "truth" of Christianity could be reconciled in the poetic truth of *mythus*. Thus, the supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension remain

eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts.... The *historical mythus* has for its groundwork a definite historical fact which has been seized upon by religious enthusiasm, and twined round with mythical conceptions culled from the idea of Christ.⁵

Hopkins had predicated his entire moral and intellectual existence on the "incomprehensible certaint[ies]" of Catholicism (*L*, 1, p. 187, 1883), however, and for him the age of miracles would never pass. He believed that the "mystery of the Nativity, the mystery of the Crucifixion", and the mystery of the Holy Trinity, pointed to a superior "reserve of truth beyond what the mind reaches" (*L*, 1, p. 188, 1883) and had to be accepted, not as mere mythic symbols, grammatical tropes, or poetical allegories, but as absolute and awe-inspiring realities:

the mystery [is] always the same, that the child in the manger is God, the culprit on the gallows God ... Otherwise birth and death are not mysteries, nor is it any great mystery that a just man should be crucified, but that God should fascinate—with the interest of awe, of pity, of shame, of every harrowing feeling.
(*L*, 1, p. 188, 1883)

Hopkins's verse-drama on St. Winefred blends the ultimate religious mystery and consolation of resurrection with a fairy tale mixture of the lovely, the magical and the grotesque, but it rests on the "charm" and "main point" of a real event. Humphrey House even suggests that a personal account of a miraculous cure effected by drinking water from Winefred's well may have inspired Hopkins's decision to become a Jesuit.⁶ On a visit to Devon in 1867, the year of his conversion, Hopkins met Father Kenelm Vaughan ("so charming and good a man", *F. L.*, p. 49, 1867) and recorded his tale of magical healing in his Journal:

this he told me about himself:—he was in consumption, dying: the sisters had a *novena* for him and he was drinking water from St. Winefred's Well: one Sunday he had crept down to say mass, when, there being no rain, before the consecration a quantity of water fell on him

and the altar so that he sent to ask the canon whether he should consecrate or not: he was told to do so and Mass went on: after the Mass he was perfectly well.
(*J*, p. 157, 1867)

Hopkins was moved and inspired by such accounts, even of cures with far less dramatic impact than Vaughan's, and was anxious to convince others of the miracles effected at Winefred's well:

I promised that I would let my father know the result of my enquiries about the alleged cure of a case of rupture at St. Winefred's well. I wrote to the young man enclosing a set of searching questions I had framed. He answered the letters and promised answers to the questions in a week or so when he should have been able to tell more certainly the permanence of the cure. Those answers never came. The case therefore was not satisfactory. I have heard of another cure having just been worked in London by the moss or water and am going to enquire into that.
(*L*, 3, p. 132, 24 April 1875)

Though it is not a condition which fits readily into a poetic context, Hopkins introduces an oblique reference to this reported cure into the drama itself. Rupture is included in a list of increasingly repellent and distressing ailments that can be miraculously cured by bathing in the waters of Winefred's well. Hopkins's proselytizing enthusiasm never flagged, but his father's sceptical demand for proof had perhaps diminished his confidence that others could share his own passionate belief, and though some two years later he urged Bridges to read Winefred's miraculous story, Hopkins seemed to take it for granted that the other man would respond in the Straussian manner: "if you have not read her story ... you should, though you should treat it as fable, as no doubt you do the Gospels" (*L*, 1, p. 40, 1877).

The Catholic Encyclopaedia puts great emphasis on Winefred's wisdom and purity, but Hopkins felt that his play was a "drama of passion more than character" (*L*, 1, p. 227, 1886) and therefore presents a heroine who is pure in mind and body, but is also a beautiful "rich rose", arrayed like the loveliest princess of romance with "shining hair" and "matchless eyes". The chorus written to accompany the drama ("The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo") stresses the perishable nature of feminine beauty and the futility of any attempt to heal or arrest the effects of ageing. Winefred, in effect, does perish and the horrific manner of her death is dwelt on with psychopathic intensity by her killer but her later life as a nun is given no mention.

Hopkins's attraction to pain, to beauty, and to flashpoints of intensity may be evident in his selective dramatic focus and in his words to Robert Bridges: "I seem to find myself ... equal to the more stirring and critical parts of the action, which are in themselves the more important, but about the filling in and minor parts I am not sure how far my powers will go" (*L*, p. 92, 8 Oct. 1879). What is perhaps more unexpected in Hopkins's treatment of the "persecuted maiden" theme is the intensity of his focus on the suffering of the *persecutor* rather than his victim. It is unclear whether Hopkins judged Winefred's reactions to Caradoc's violence and her "raising from the dead" to be less dramatically powerful or less *realizable* than the thoughts and actions of the men who surround her. If drama subsists on action and conflict, then the inlaw feminine virtues of meek and modest stillness cannot fulfil the usual requirements of the stage, but Hopkins's verse-drama pays scant attention to stagecraft or the creation of external dramatic effects. Passionate soliloquies from Winefred's father, Caradoc and St. Beuno make up what is essentially a drama of words in which the words are all spoken by men.

Hopkins complained that he felt hampered by his "insufficient experience of life" in writing *St. Winefred's Well* (*L*, 1, pp. 92-3, Oct. 1879), and a fully dramatized "woman's part" may have seemed to him to be beyond his understanding, yet the terrifying images that erupt out of Hopkins's own atavistic dread of invasion and extinction of self might enable him to understand and to "word" at least some part of Winefred's distress. The extremities of emotional crisis recorded in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and the Dark Sonnets, for example, are akin to those of someone about to suffer spiritual rape and the murder of self. But it is Caradoc's perceiving consciousness which functions as the "eye" of the drama; the most crucial events are filtered through Caradoc's brain and the most fully completed section of the work is dominated by his arrogant aggression and defiant despair. Conversely, Winefred behaves in the manner befitting iconic female figures in literature who embody the inlaw feminine principle: she is faithful, she is chaste and she is silent. Winefred is the virgin rose her possessive father fears to lose, the prey that Caradoc the hunter pursues, and the promised bride of Christ. The power of subjectivity is

denied her and she is defined and presented only as she exists in relation to masculine figures: Caradoc, her father, her uncle and God.

In the legend Winefred apparently chooses neither death nor dishonour, she chooses freedom and is killed while trying to escape; but Hopkins's telling of the tale seems to admit no option but that of martyr. She is placed, as is the speaker in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", between "the frown of his face" (Caradoc's psychopathic wrath) and the "hurtle of hell" (her punishment if she breaks her vow of chastity). Hopkins's claustrophobic scenario also traps her within a fervid dynamic of Oedipal and incestuous tensions, for Winefred's father, Teryth, lives in terror of losing her and his first speech propels us into the hothouse climate and grotesque imagery of the piece:

No man has such a daughter. The fathers of the world
 Call no such maiden "mine". The deeper grows her nearness
 And more and more times laces round and round my heart,
 The more some monstrous hand gropes with clammy fingers there,
 Tampering with those sweet bines, draws them out, strains them, strains them;
 Meantime some tongue cries "What Teryth! what, thou poor fond father!
 How when this bloom, this honeysuckle, that rides the air so rich about thee
 Is all, all sheared away, thus!" Then I sweat for fear.
 Or else a funeral and yet 'tis not a funeral ...
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, Act 1, sc. i, ll. 10-19)

Because Winefred is at all stages of the drama a mute and helpless victim, she is clearly undeserving of being viewed as a *Femme Fatale*, but as we shall see, Caradoc blames her beauty for his fatal fall and the images given here of her father's obsessive love are decidedly ambivalent. However beautiful the honeysuckle may be, the suggestion that its bines are coiling ever more tightly about a human heart is threatening and sinister. The "woman as flower" equation is here given an added dimension of suffocating entrapment, but as we have already seen in "On a Portrait of Two Beautiful People", and as the following extract from Ignatius Donnelly's best-selling novel *Caesar's Column* (1890) suggests, the presentation of women as "natural" clinging vines was common in Victorian literature and iconography:

What kind of a weak heart or a weak head have you, not to know that a woman never shrinks from dependence upon the man she loves, any more than the ivy regrets that it is clinging to the oak and cannot stand alone? A true woman must weave the tendrils of her being around some love object; she cannot stand alone any more than the ivy.⁷

The suggestion that woman is morally and physically debilitated, rooted in earth, and incapable of an unsupported and autonomous existence, may seem no more dehumanizing than her Ruskinian equation with other forms of decorative vegetative life. But more dangerous associations with poison ivy, the parasitic mistletoe, even the snake coiled round the Tree of Knowledge are also implied, and the clinging woman all too easily becomes associated with male terrors of serpentine strangulation, vampirism, engulfment and death. Hopkins accordingly describes the "Old Serpent" as "swaying like a long spray of vine or the bine of a great creeper, not terrible but beautiful, lissome" (*S*, p. 65, 1880), and in his sermon "The Great Sacrifice" (*S*, p. 198, 1881), writes that the Devil constricts and wreathes nature to his purposes. A "coil or spiral is then a type of the Devil ... because of its ... subtle and imperceptible drawing in towards its head, and it is a type of death, of motion lessening and at last ceasing". Elsewhere in Hopkins's work images suggesting "tight-lacing" can indicate a necessary and spiritually bracing effect. But Teryth seems as constricted and tormented by his enveloping love for Winefred as the speaker of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is by his coil of vulnerable flesh:

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 Wreck of the Deutschland", ll. 5-9)

The mood and imagery in both instances is of helpless bondage and the dread of invasion. Each man is placed in what Freud defines as a "characteristically female situation", that is, of being "gagged, bound, in some way maltreated, forced into unconditional obedience".⁸ In "The Wreck of the Deutschland" the speaker trembles before the fierce mastery of God, whilst Teryth is overwhelmed by the emotional force of his "womanish" fears and berates himself for allowing the "feminine" in his nature to dominate: "this is too much the father, nay the mother. Fanciful!" (*St. Winefred's Well*, Act 1, sc. i, l.23).

Teryth is haunted by fantasies of something ghastly and unsanctified and his vision serves as a dramatic foretaste of the horrors to come. The "clammy fingers" that seem to clutch at his heart are an attempt to convey the physical sensations of

sweating terror but also suggest the ambiguous nature of Teryth's fears. Death would seem the ultimate threat to what is described as an almost symbiotic relationship between himself and his daughter. But the idea of cruel severance with which Teryth's inner voice taunts him may be actual or symbolic: Winefred may be separated from him by death or she may be taken from him and her maidenhead severed by another man. We, the audience, know that Winefred's head will be cut off, that this "rich bloom", this golden fleece, will be "sheared away" by Caradoc's blade. We know also that she will survive death. But the underthought that flows off Teryth's soliloquy suggests that the fate he most fears for Winefred is one "worse than death". Teryth's situation is complex and his attitude may seem to be "too much the father; nay, the [lover]". Whatever sexual desire he feels for Winefred violates taboo and is therefore "monstrous" and can only find expression (and condemnation) when transferred onto the figure of death. The "monstrous" hand that tries to grasp Winefred (the honeysuckle) and tear her away from her father belongs to an invasive intruder. This intruder may of course be the personified figure of Death, traditionally known as "the grim reaper" and therefore associated with the cutting down or shearing away of human lives. Hopkins's description of his clammy "groping" and "tampering" fingers is fraught with disturbing hints of sexual assault, however. His loathing of impurity is sufficient to freight Hopkins's imagery with sexual menace and "Murder" stalks Winefred with "Tarquin's ravishing strides" (*Macbeth*, 2, 1, ll. 52-56).

Because Teryth cannot know of Caradoc's violent intentions, the implication is that even if Winefred *were* a glad and willing bride he would still regard her loss of virginity as a desecration. This may seem an extreme view, but what Hopkins appears to admire above all else in Winefred is her virginal "modesty". Closely linked with this, however, is the appeal of her virginal beauty: beauty so agleam with the lustre of youth and innocence that "sunlight to it is a pit, den, darkness, / foamfalling is not fresh to it" (*St. Winefred's Well*, Act II, ll. 23-4). The pit and the den symbolize all that is sinful, filthy and animalistic, and therefore represent the "outlaw" feminine principle elements of bestial sexuality and chaos: "For a whore *is* a

deep ditch; and a strange woman *is* a narrow pit" (Proverbs 23:27).

All this is what Winefred is not. Her modesty is specifically sexual and will not admit its antonyms: self-assertion, impurity and indecency. For Hopkins, as for Milton and Freud, female modesty seems the product of female "shame": that "feminine characteristic *par excellence* [which] has as its purpose ... concealment of genital deficiency".⁹ Winefred's wish to "take the veil" as a nun ensures that her "genital deficiency" and her sexuality will be concealed absolutely and forever; the veil of her hymen will also remain intact. Having thus renounced her threatening sexuality, she is "inherited" by God both above and below the waist, and her image, if not her body, remains unbroken. Conversely, the storm of lust and anger that rages in Caradoc's mind effectively breaks *him* apart.

The moral victory of the drama is of course ceded to Winefred and on a mythic level her "death" brings her the rewards that Hopkins most wanted in life. But by forcing us inside the mind of Caradoc Hopkins seems more instinctively *with* the impulse of the killer than the victim. Though morally dedicated to the values that Winefred represents, Hopkins the priest may be on the side of the angels but as a man and an artist his affinities are much more complex. It may be more than coincidence, therefore, that Caradoc's most deadly sin seems not murderous violence or lust for female flesh, but his fierce desire to inscribe his name and his story in "bloody letters" on Winefred and on history. Caradoc breathes dynamism, energy, action and pride and lives life with an intensity that Hopkins can match only imaginatively and in his poems. But it is perhaps Caradoc's role as the solitary, suffering male, overwhelmed by the attraction of beauty, thwarted in his attempts to possess it, and finally damned to failure, that most clearly links him with his creator.

Caradoc's fate is presumably drawn as an object lesson in the destructive horrors that uncontrolled lust and masculine aggression can unleash. As we have seen, Hopkins's laudatory poem on a very different kind of "hero", St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, claims that the inward fight to preserve spiritual truth and integrity is not less but more heroic and manly than any public display of force or power, yet Hopkins's attraction to displays of martial posturing is evident in his admiring

response to the "unsheathing of swords" in a cavalry march past: "a stirring naked-steel lightning bit of business" (*J*, p. 242, 1874), and Thomas Hardy's "great stroke" of genius in the "breathing epic" of the sword-exercise scene in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (*L*, 1, p. 239, 1886).

Hopkins complained that for the "base and bespotted masses", saintly virtue (almost by definition modest and self-effacing) did not hold the same fascination as the spectacular hubris of men like Caradoc: "violence is admired and, above all, insolence and pride. But it is our baseness to admire anything evil. It seems to me we shd. in everything side with virtue, even if we do not feel its charm" (*F. L.*, p. 308, 1883). In art at least, Hopkins confessed that his "bent" was for "violent action" (*Selected Letters*, p. 217, 1885), and his theories on psychological make-up seem to indicate his belief that what came naturally to him was almost synonymous with "baseness". The fact that Caradoc's war against all moral values, together with his naked blade, seems to dominate the piece, may then reflect the "base" admiration of violence and pride that Hopkins recognized and deplored in himself: "I am of a blackguardly nature and behaviour ... I believe it from my heart and clearly see it" (*F. L.*, p. 242, 1879).

Max Keith Sutton also detects subliminal affinities between Caradoc and Hopkins's worst self and in his Jungian reading of "selving" in Hopkins, remarks on the emergence in some of the poems of "two versions of the shadow, the archetype that represents 'the opposite side of the ego' and the 'qualities that one dislikes most in other people'".¹⁰ Sutton goes on to say that in the late poems

the sharpest revelation of this archetype comes through the contrast between "Carrion Comfort" and Caradoc's speech from the unfinished drama, *St. Winefred's Well*. Caradoc is the rebel sensual self, lustful and violent, warring with the spirit and undoing himself by making a god of the destructive will ... Murder becomes his great act of denial and unselving. He binds himself to the deed by choosing despair in words that both echo and oppose the opening of "Carrion Comfort". Where Hopkins cries "Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee", Caradoc as wilfully resists a positive action: "And I do not repent, / I do not and I will not repent".¹¹

Sutton perceives an antagonism and a likeness between Caradoc and the speaker of "Carrion Comfort", yet neglects to examine the ambivalent oppositions also evident *within* the contorted argument of Hopkins's sonnet. Most important of these is the

unresolved confusion of the "Carrion Comfort" persona as to whether he has in fact enjoyed a secret pride in his own wilful defiance of God, and has therefore "applauded" his satanic alter ego. An unconditional surrender to God's will should be the pattern of Hopkins's life, but as Patricia A. Wolfe points out, "man's reaction to [the sacrifice of human identity] is based entirely on his own personal willingness to relinquish his own limited potency in favour of the omnipotence of God".¹² The deep reluctance and pain with which Hopkins confronted the idea of "feminine" surrender is manifest in the tortured syntax and sado-masochistic imagery of his sonnet:

Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
 Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, cheer.
 Cheer whom though? the hero whose heaven-handling flung me, foot trod
 Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one? That night, that year
 Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.
 ("Carrion Comfort")

It is possible that in "Carrion Comfort" Hopkins may have intended a mocking and self-disparaging reference to the duplicity of the lover in Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, who puts on a show of frowning "angerly" resistance even while "inward joy" forces her heart to smile and submit: "That, like a testy babe, will scratch the nurse / and presently all humbled kiss the rod!" (I, 2, ll. 55-61). The role of fractious child does not fit into Hopkins's earnest moral repertoire, however; though that of deeply ambivalent adult clearly does. The "rebel self" which is identified with Caradoc's will to power is pitted against the better part of his nature which wants to submit to God's will and even to applaud God's apparent cruelty as a sign of love. In this agonized contest, spiritual submission seems to demand his willing embracement of a God who is metaphorically perceived as a brutal invader. Engaging with the sexual implications of the scene, Moder argues that the encounter is presented in the form of a "masochistic, psychically feminine punishment fantasy" in which the speaker's submissive self

passively and gratefully endures humiliation and degradation by 'kiss[ing] the rod' of, and cheering 'the hero whose heaven-handling flung me, foot trod / Me,' with 'rod' and 'foot' bearing sexual implications as displacements of the phallus.¹³

Sexual metaphor is here used to describe a religious experience which equates to nightmare, but the long tradition of expressing spiritual ecstasy in sexual terms has given us some of the most enduringly beautiful images in Scripture. In the Song of Songs, for example, the "consuming passion of the soul's final union with the Divine" is allegorically figured as the marriage of the feminine soul (the bride) with the powerful masculine God (the bridegroom). Other images approach Hopkins's darker emphasis on love as an act of violence, as in Origen's graphically sensualized description of the union of the "virginal soul with God", showing the "perfect" spiritual response to the visitation of the Word of God:

How beautiful, how fitting it is to receive a wound from Love! One person receives the dart of fleshly love, another is wounded by earthly desire; but do you lay bare your members and offer yourself to the chosen dart, the lovely dart; for God is the archer indeed.¹⁴

The full consent of the will can thus transform conflict into reciprocity and violence into passion, for Christ should be the desired Bridegroom of men's "feminine" souls, yet the mystical rapture that Origen describes can be achieved only by those who are *totally* emancipated from "the slavery of the flesh", the lust of the eyes and pride in self.¹⁵ This is clearly not the case when the "rebel self" is tempted to relish its own defiant opposition against a terrifying and unbeatable adversary.

Hopkins's rebellious persona, Caradoc, is the dramatic embodiment of this masculine "pride in self" and represents what Freud describes as "the destructive instinct, the instinct for mastery, or the will to power".¹⁶ Caradoc's lust for dominance means that he refuses to open his soul to repentance and attempts to seal himself off from God. His ambition is to stand alone and intact, to pursue the masculine goal of autonomy and control over others.

In "The Wreck of the Deutschland", Hopkins records the "swooning" submission of his feminine heart to the will of God: "I did say yes, O at lightning and lashed rod". But Caradoc is all defiance. The only god that he obeys is his own "unwavering" will and he literally is a law unto himself: "Caradoc lives alone,/ Loyal to his own soul, laying his own law down". Though Hopkins might struggle to learn how to kiss his hand in loving submission to the seemingly hostile heavens, Caradoc stands like an intransigent Don Juan, shaking his fist at God even at the moment of

death. The supreme effort required in sustaining either an everlasting yea or an everlasting nay must, however, by its very intensity threaten to burn out the soul. Only Christ, the perfect son, could support such an intolerable burden and Hopkins admiringly records how for every moment of his life, Christ proved his love, his courage and his filial obedience by "unflinchingly renewing or keeping up his first offer, offering his body to crucifixion, his blood to be shed" (*S*, p. 14, 1879). Hopkins struggled doggedly to imitate Christ's unflinching courage and, indeed, "never wavered" in his vocation but the emotional cost of "unwavering" psychic strain—whether directed towards good or evil—is powerfully felt in the words of Caradoc's soliloquy:

And right? Only resolution; will, his will unwavering
 Who, like me, knowing his nature to the heart home, nature's business,
 Despatches with no flinching. But will flesh, O can flesh
 Second this fiery strain? Not always; O no no!
 We cannot live this life out; sometimes we must weary
 And in this darksome world what comfort can I find?
 Down this darksome world comfort where can I find ...
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, Act II, ll. 43-7)

The psychological strain of the "war within" here, as elsewhere in Hopkins's work, is the burden and prerogative of the male and the masculine principle. Its motivating force is the desire for power and control and aggressive force of will is the weapon used to achieve it. But having chosen (masochistically) to close off the avenues of release, Hopkins's "will to power" is introverted and pitted against the self. We may therefore suppose that in Hopkins's case the "portion of the destructive instinct which has retreated appears in the ego as an intensification of masochism".¹⁷ Trapped within this psychic loop, the poisons of guilt and self-hatred are forced inwards with no release. The comfortless, interior darkness of "I wake and feel" shows the poet-persona existing on the margin of madness, yet for all its bleak negativity, the poem is relentlessly self-assertive. The crucial ordering of pronouns in the reverberant first line of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" ("Thou mastering me"), is reversed to throw attention onto the speaker: the "I" and his personal suffering taking linguistic precedence over a God, no longer directly addressed, but referred to in the third person:

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.

Selfyeast 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.
 ("I wake and feel")

A comparably intense fever of disgust and despair is powerfully rendered in Hopkins's presentation of his alter-ego Caradoc, who may approach from the opposite end of the spectrum of will, but nevertheless finds himself sharing the same hell:

Reason, selfdisposal, choice of better or worse way,
 Is corpse now, cannot change; my other self, this soul,
 Life's quick, this kind, this keen self-feeling,
 With dreadful distillation of thoughts sour as blood,
 Must all day long taste murder ...
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, II. 61-5)

The "wicked and the lost", Hopkins writes, are "like half-creations and have but a half-being" (*S*, p. 197, 1881). Trapped inside the bloody chamber of his skull, Caradoc undoubtedly *is* one of the "lost". Because he has let the flesh dictate his actions he has destroyed his reason and is therefore "unmanned". Without his rational, elective will (the *arbitrium*) he is powerless to save his mind or his soul: "Deed-bound I am; one deed treads all down here / cramps all doing". (11, ll. 66-7). Bound, trodden and psychologically impotent, Caradoc's sin has transformed him into a spiritual castrate. Hopkins seeks to emphasize the point that through his aggressive masculine drive for control and possession Caradoc actually loses everything. Having cast Caradoc as the agent of his own sterility, Hopkins drives home the moral message that overreaching does not pay, and Caradoc's craving for power is punished on earth, as it is destined to be punished in hell.

Caradoc's failure can nonetheless be regarded as a strange mirror inversion of Hopkins's own. Hopkins's quite opposite regime of renunciation, chastity and obedience had hardly paid him the spiritual dividends he might have hoped for and "disappointment" seems to have been the end to most of his endeavours (see "Thou art indeed just, Lord"). Deliberately to "lay yourself out for failure" is, as Hopkins says, "insane"; but his sorrowing observation that even Christ was "doomed to

succeed by failure" (*L*, 1, pp. 137-8, July 1886) takes on a deeper tone of paradox when we encounter the wild elation of Caradoc's soliloquy on the thrilling aspects of disappointment and defeat:

To hunger and not have, yet hope on for, to storm and strive and
 Be at every assault fresh foiled, worse flung, deeper disappointed,
 The turmoil and the torment, it has, I swear, a sweetness
 Keeps a kind of joy in it, a zest, an edge, an ecstasy,
 Next after sweet success ...
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, Act II, ll 54-9)

Pain and pleasure are again determinedly lashed together in a dynamic, Browningsque vision of a world where "overreaching" is ever the sign of a man: "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a heaven for?" (Robert Browning, "Andrea del Sarto").¹⁸ Even before he commits murder, Caradoc is patently not pursuing the same goals as Hopkins, but through him Hopkins suggests that the worst hell is one of impotence and inaction. Failure which involves active striving for the unattainable: the pain of becoming rather than the boredom of being, is in every way preferable to inertia. Living after the passive feminine mode is again equated with a form of non-being which is worse than death. It therefore seems evident that because Hopkins is attracted by the exhilaration of risk, to the idea of life lived on Browning's "dangerous edge of things" ("Bishop Blougram's Apology"), he can body forth Caradoc's emotional writhings with convincing passion. The peculiar attraction of such unremitting psychological turmoil is clearly not consistent with Hopkins's view of perfect womanhood, however, and has no part in the secluded existence prescribed for Winefred and her young female acolytes.

Caradoc's insatiable appetite for power equally sets him apart from the despised "sots and thralls of lust" ("Thou art indeed just, Lord"), who abandon themselves and their cares in the Dionysian reel of drunkenness and sexual pleasure. Caradoc's motivating drive has little to do with the giving up or abandonment of self (ego) to the sensual pleasure and unconstrained emotion that outlaw feminine sexuality requires.¹⁹ Caradoc is the slave of passion, but his lust seems primarily to be a manifestation of the masculine urge for control and possession of the female as object. By refusing to submit to Caradoc's will, Winefred's code of honour challenges

his masculine ego. Winefred appeals to a higher court, a metaphysical code of values, but Caradoc denies the legitimacy of her action and condemns her on two counts. In his tirade against her "rebellion" Caradoc crushes an issue of personal ethics under the linguistic weight of patriarchal supremacy. She is re-named and therefore re-visioned so that Caradoc can feel almost under a moral obligation to destroy her. An act of terrorist barbarity thus becomes an "execution" as Caradoc "strikes off" the "head of a rebel" (Act II, 1.2). Caradoc further attempts to justify his brutality by stressing Winefred's awareness of the consequences of her resistance: "whereas I had warned her— / Warned her! well she knew I warned her of this work" (Act II, ll. 6-7). Caradoc's violent act becomes a "necessary" punishment, a job of "work" that must be carried through. Moreover, Winefred is blamed for more than refusing to submit to Caradoc's lust. Hopkins may perceive, or wish to perceive her as a type of the Virgin Mary, but Caradoc dredges the deepest levels of misogyny when he condemns Winefred as the *cause* of his crime: "The blame bear who aroused me" (Act II, l. 34). His violence conveys the extremest form of male hostility towards "the female (who is sex) and towards sexuality itself (which is her fault)".²⁰

After killing Winefred, Caradoc engages in a melodramatized version of the shocked post-crisis dialectic that characterizes "I wake and feel" and "Carrion Comfort". The estrangement of intellectual perception from emotional response expressed in Hopkins's Dark Sonnets is presented as total fragmentation in Caradoc's reaction to Winefred's murder:

My heart, where have we been? What have we seen, my mind?
 What stroke has Caradoc's right hand dealt? what done?
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, Act II, ll. 1-2)

Faced with the apparent disconnection of the component parts of self — heart, mind and body — Caradoc attempts to disburden himself completely of all but the single force of will. In moral and theological terms he makes the most damning choice possible because his will is turned defiantly against God; indeed he seems to aspire to be greater than God, for Hopkins says that the pride "which is in all sin is essentially the matching of the sinner's self with God's and for himself preferring it, setting it higher in the scale [of being]; not his nature against God's ... but his bare self" (*S*, p.

140, 1883). Hopkins is at pains to point the fatal resemblance between Caradoc and the most defiant of all sinners, Milton's Satan:

Now be my pride then perfect, all one piece. Henceforth
 In a wide world of defiance Caradoc lives alone,
 Loyal to his own soul, laying his own law down, no law nor
 Lord now curb him forever ...
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, Act II, ll. 38-41)

Caradoc's idea of purified simplicity is then the infernal equivalent of Hopkins's own wish to be perfect and "all one piece" in his devotion to God. For Hopkins and his persona, however, the ideal of becoming "all one piece" seems to involve a process of psychological amputation which is antithetical to the possibility of achieving real unity of character. They display the lack of personal coherence that R. D. Laing identifies in the "unbodied self" where the body "is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual's own being".²¹ Hopkins's alienation from that level of the self which encompasses sexuality and the feminine is significantly shared by Caradoc, and as a consequence each man becomes a stranger to himself. Immediately after the murder, Caradoc either addresses himself as a sorry collection of isolated and uncommunicating parts or refers to himself "at a third remove": "What stroke has Caradoc's right arm dealt? What done?". Caradoc's attempt to dissociate himself from guilt by regarding his body as an autonomous object is taken further when he displaces responsibility onto his sword:

... here is a workman from his day's task sweats.
 Wiped I am sure it was; it seems, not well; for still,
 Still the scarlet swings and dances on the blade.
 So be it. Thou steel, thou butcher,
 I can scour thee, fresh burnish thee, sheathe thee in thy dark lair ...
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, Act II, ll. 11-15)

Hopkins's "dancing blood" metaphor is used elsewhere to signify the overwhelming effects of sexual arousal but here he transforms metaphor into externalized fact as Caradoc confronts the evidence and the implied cause of his crime. His sword, an obvious symbol of violence and the masculine will-to-power, is also an analogue of the penis and is therefore tainted with the dirt, sweat and bestiality that Hopkins associates with sexuality and sin. Caradoc's language of political justification for the

act falters when he berates the instrument of aggression. Though at first a "workman", apparently only following orders to perform his "day's task", his sword becomes an indiscriminate "butcher" and is then perceived as something vicious and bestial which must be wiped clean and kept hidden in the "dark lair" of the psyche. For a moment Caradoc teeters on the edge of self-realization. Like Othello, his belief in his own right to administer "justice" to erring women is shaken and a lawful "sacrifice" begins to show itself as a terrible murder: "thou dost stone my heart, / And mak'st me call what I intend to do / A murder, which I thought a sacrifice", (*Othello*, Act V, sc. ii, ll. 63-65). Despite this moment of insight, Caradoc reclaims his sense of legitimate masculine mastery by reasserting his right to control language and concealing his brutality in a swathe of self-aggrandizing rhetoric:

... What I have done violent
I have like a lion done, lionlike done,
Honouring an uncontrolled royal, wrathful nature,
Mantling passion in a grandeur, crimson grandeur.

Caradoc is most satanic and most culpable in Hopkins's eyes when he is most proud. But as we have seen, the pride that Hopkins seems to understand most intimately is the pride of the auteur. It is significant therefore that much of Caradoc's pride comes from having achieved, as he claims, the immortality of fame by "writing" history:

... written upon lovely limbs,
In bloody letters, lessons of earnest, of revenge;
Monuments of my earnest, records of my revenge.

In one sense, of course, Caradoc's wish does come true: the original legend endures and Caradoc's name with it. But it is Hopkins who ascribes and inscribes Caradoc's motivating impulses. With regard to Winefred, one might wonder, as Thomas Hardy does of Tess,

Why was it that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive.²²

Hopkins's metaphors relating to "the making of a mark, the carving of a line or sign, and the act of writing" suggest that Winefred is the "pure blank surface on which men inscribe or trace a variety of patterns" according to their deepest needs.²³ At this point

Caradoc's needs are those most fundamental to the masculine principle: structured permanence, control of the female, political legitimacy and the right to kill. Winefred has refused to be sexually appropriated and will not therefore reproduce the "mark" of Caradoc's patrilinear blood-line, but she will be "textually" possessed by Caradoc when he writes his law on her flesh.²⁴ Once "written" in Winefred's blood, Caradoc's story will become a permanent "monument" and "record" of his existence and he will thus achieve the only kind of immortality that can be secured through human action and power. Caradoc claims justification for his act by identifying it with the ancient patriarchal code of ethics which valorizes revenge killings. Having failed to impose his sexual will on Winefred, Caradoc "re-writes" her as a "rebel" and a "traitor". An innocent victim is thus revisioned for posterity as a disobedient female whose fate serves as an object "lesson" in the dangers of defying masculine authority. In reality, however, Winefred actually proves her obedience to masculine control. Because she defies one man for the sake of her wish to subordinate herself to God, her rebellion is firmly within the pale of inlaw feminine behaviour.

In the full context of Hopkins's drama, therefore, Caradoc's assertions of controlling power and legitimacy are meant to be viewed in a harshly ironic light: his pride very clearly initiates a desperate fall. But his desire to create an image of self which would permanently be inscribed on history, thus defying nature's power to obliterate all trace of his existence, is intimately connected with what P.N. Furbank calls "Hopkins's innermost temptations in art and in life".²⁵ The will to transcend oblivion unites Hopkins and his masculine persona. In the following chapter on Winefred and her maidens we will consider how the strategems, dreams and evasions that the will to defy death conceives, have as their focus the body of the woman.

[NOTES]

¹ *Journal de la Création* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p. 27.

² *Afterthoughts* ([n.p.:n. pub.]1931), 5.

³ *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 16 vols [London 1907-14] (New York: The Encyclopaedia Press, 1913).

⁴ Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, sub. Nov. 3 (Dublin, 1823).

- ⁵ *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot, 3 vols (London [n.pub.] 1846), I, pp. 85 - 87; quoted in Elisabeth Jay, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 102-105.
- ⁶ See Ernest Ferlita, S. J., *The Uttermost Mark: The Dramatic Criticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins, his Dramatic Works and the Performance thereof* (London: University Press of America, 1990), pp. 129-130.
- ⁷ *Caesar's Column: A Story of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, repr. 1960), p. 197; quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 222.
- ⁸ "The Economic Problem of Masochism (1924)", *Standard Edition*, XIX, p. 162.
- ⁹ "Lecture on Femininity", *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (1933 [1932])*, *Standard Edition*, vol. XXII, p. 132.
- ¹⁰ *Man and His Symbols* ed. Carl Jung, (New York: Dell, 1971), p. 182; quoted by Sutton in "Selving as Individuation in Hopkins: A Jungian Reading", *The Hopkins Quarterly*, 11, 3 (1975), 119-129 (p. 123).
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- ¹² "The Paradox of Self: A Study of Hopkins's Spiritual Conflict in the 'Terrible Sonnets'", *Victorian Poetry* 6 (1968), 85-103 (pp. 89-90).
- ¹³ "Aspects of Androgyny ...", p. 13.
- ¹⁴ *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*; quoted in John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), p. 77.
- ¹⁵ *Virginitas*, p. 77.
- ¹⁶ "The Economic Problem of Masochism", p. 163.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- ¹⁸ *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning* (London: Oxford University Press, 1905; repr. 1964).
- ¹⁹ *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, p. 143.
- ²⁰ *Sexual Politics*, p. 307.
- ²¹ *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Penguin, 1965), p. 109.
- ²² *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, New Wessex paperback edition, (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 107.
- ²³ J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 118.
- ²⁴ Sidonie Smith, "Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*: Filiality and Woman's Autobiographical Storytelling", in *Feminisms*, pp. 1058-1078 (p. 1064).
- ²⁵ P.N. Furbank, "Beauty and Danger: Hopkins's clear-headed collision-course", *TLS*, March 27 1992, p. 4.

Death and the Maidens of St. Winefred's Well

The war against death takes the form of a preoccupation
with the past and the future, and the present tense,
the tense of life is lost.
*Norman O. Brown*¹

Virginity ... is yet the virtue that holds our breakable vessel,
that is our feeble flesh, in whole holiness. And as that sweet unguent
and dearest beyond all others that is called balm protects the dead body
that is rubbed therewith from rotting, so also does virginity a virgin's
living flesh, maintaining all her limbs without stain.
*Hali Meidenhad*²

However insistently Hopkins's faith might urge him to look beyond the walls of this world by offering the hope of immortality and the "anticipation of happiness hereafter" (*S*, p. 262, 1889), this was seemingly not enough to eradicate the intensity of revulsion and grief that physical dissolution and death provoked in him:

Man, how fast his fire-dint, his mark on mind, is gone!
Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark
Drowned. O pity and indignation! Manshape, that shone
Sheer off, dissevered, a star, death blots black out; Nor mark
Is any of him at all so stark
But vastness blurs and time beats level.
("That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection")

The speaker's affinities in "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire ..." are firmly allied with the masculine principle and stand in ironic counterpoint to Hopkins's reputation as a celebratory poet of nature. Nature here becomes synonymous with death and is seen (as in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves") as an anarchic leveller who blurs and destroys the boundaries between self and other; she is the "enormous dark" who engulfs and "destroys us", as Freud says, "coldly, cruelly, relentlessly". Ultimately she is a monstrous mother who eats her children and the "principal task of civilization is to defend us against [her]".³ The dark face of the goddess therefore seems to mock the notion of fiercely distinct individuality upon which Hopkins's life philosophy is founded. In the words of Job, "a tree cut down will shoot up again, but where is a man when he is dead?" (14:1-15). Hopkins's distress and horror of cyclicity and organic decay draws on Job and feeds the same powerful impulse to make his mark on the world as that of Tennyson's beloved friend, Arthur Hallam:

In my fits of gloom I so often look death, and insanity in the face, that the impulse to leave some trace of my existence on this bulk of atoms gathers strength with the warning that I must be brief.⁴

Seemingly even more troubling than the knowledge that human life on earth is limited in scope and finite in length, is Hopkins's fear that the impress forged by powerful minds on the minds of others would also ultimately be lost in time's vast unmarked grave. The aggressively Wagnerian connotations of Hopkins's neologism "firedint" (O.E. *dynt*, a blow) further emphasizes his belief that only men have the intellectual fire and / or physical energy necessary to make their mark on the world, though their hopes of permanent memorial are futile, nonetheless.

Reacting against his terror of oblivion, Hopkins attempts a desperate *volta* in "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and the comfort of the Resurrection", a poem in which the speaker strains towards an exalted state of perfect order and brilliant clarity, his response powered by disgust at his ignominious destiny as "mortal trash" on nature's bonfire. Spiritual transcendence is one of the most powerful and enduring ways in which human beings can defy nature's power over their destiny and is the most obvious recourse for Hopkins. The alternative options of assuring continuity, of perpetuating his "firedint", are either forbidden or dangerous — he cannot father dynasties (at least, not legitimate dynasties), he cannot pursue political power, and he cannot, or should not, try to make his own mark on history.

The reward offered to those who choose to give up or govern their powers in this world for the sake of the next is an ideal of ultimate permanence which preserves and "locks in" the inscape of the individual. As Hopkins says, God "provides for all that happens to us, but most for the most important; therefore most for death: *the hairs of your head, Christ says, are numbered*" (*S*, p. 252, ca 1885). The Catholic doctrine of the Resurrection promises believers that the soul and "the body its companion dear" (*S*, p. 246, ca 1885) will be reunited in eternity. Moreover, Saint Augustine writes that the resurrected body will be perfected and elevated to a new level of aesthetic beauty: "for anything that is not lovely will be excluded. And we may be sure that where the spirit wills there the body will straightway be; and the spirit will never will anything but what is to bring new beauty to the spirit and the body".⁵ The spiritually

transcendent course of defying nature by aiming one's thoughts at the eternal life to come is to posit permanence and spirit over feminine flux and corruptible flesh. This is an idealistic recourse which remains attractive to both men and women, but Hopkins's ideas of why women should be attracted to this option suggest again that decay and corruption are perceived as being more monstrous and threatening in woman than they are in man.

The hope of Resurrection is prescribed as an antidote to the dismal miseries of ageing, catalogued at length in the chorus to *St. Winefred's Well*, "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo". The chorus is sung by a group of Winefred's maidens and focusses on Hopkins's conception of the *mundus muliebris* (the feminine world) and the life questions which, he suggests, most concern women (*L*, 1, p. 161, 1882):

How to keep—is there any any, is there none such, nowhere known
 some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace, latch or catch or key to keep
 Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty, ... from vanishing away?
 O is there no frowning of these wrinkles, rankèd wrinkles deep,
 Down? no waving off of these most mournful messengers, still messengers,
 sad and stealing messengers of grey?
 ("The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo")

Hopkins's comments in a letter to Bridges suggest a very "leaden" response to the signs of his own aging: "It is a very pleasant and flattering thought that Wooldridge is painting my portrait, but is it ... wholly from memory? I am of late become much wrinkled round the eyes and generally haggard-looking, and if my counterfeit presentment is to be I shd. be glad if it were of my youth" (*L*, 1, p. 253, 1887). But his anxieties are distanced by their displacement onto the young women of the Chorus. "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo", Hopkins told Bridges, "is not even spoken in my own person but in that of St. Winefred's maidens. It ought to sound like the thoughts of a good but lively girl" (*L*, 1, p. 158, 1882). These good but lively girls are Winefred's acolytes and have thus presumably set their minds on a celibate life of prayer and charitable works, yet the chief preoccupation that Hopkins ascribes to them in the "buttons and bows" milieu he creates is the maintenance and preservation of physical beauty. If this is true, then Winefred's maidens may well "be

the feminine. Through the incarnation it should also be identified with Christ and in earlier poems like "Hurrahing in Harvest" it very clearly is, but in "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire ..." Hopkins's perfect image of Christ and of himself is rendered in masculine, and therefore "antinatural", terms. What is natural to woman, said Isidore of Seville in the sixth century, is a "softness" which bespeaks vulnerability and decay:

He is called 'man' (*vir*) because there is greater 'strength' (*vis*) in him than in woman: whence 'virtue' takes its name But 'woman' (*Mulier*) comes from 'softness' (*a mollitie*)... therefore there is greater virtue in man and less in woman.⁸

Milton famously offers this physical and intellectual "softness" as a sign of Eve's innate femininity:

Whence true authority in man, though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed,
For contemplation, he, and valor formed,
For softness she, and sweet attractive grace.
(*Paradise Lost*, Book 4, ll. 295-298)

Though abundant in beauty, Milton suggests that it is Eve's easily manipulable vanity and lack of masculine intellect that causes death in the first place. The ideal offered to Winefred's maidens nevertheless concentrates on beauty of the body and reads in a manner like a "new for old" insurance policy, covering the tiniest particularity of physical beauty and promising restitution with advantage:

See; not a hair is, not an eyelash, not the least lash lost; every hair
Is, hair of the head, numberèd.
Nay, what we have lighthanded left in surly the mere mould
Will have waked and have waxed and have walked with the wind what while we slept,
This side, that side hurling a heavy-headed hundredfold
What while we, while we slumbered.
("The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo")

Hopkins says elsewhere that "nothing in good women is more beautiful than just the absence of vanity and an earnestness of look and character which is better than beauty" (*F. L.*, p. 308, 1883). But here he does not suggest that concern with her physical appearance need not be a woman's *raison d'être*, or even that both men and women possess skills, qualities and strengths which may be enhanced by experience and maturity. On the contrary, experience and maturity in women seem inimical to Hopkins's ideal of beauty, and the comfort he offers in his vision of eternity is that

they will be kept in a state akin to arrested development: "it is an everlastingness of, O it is an all youth" ("The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo"). What is prized most highly in Hopkins's chorus is what his society appears to have prized most in women:

the wimpledwater-dimpled, not-by-morning-matchèd face ... Winning ways,
airs innocent, maidenmanners, sweet looks, long locks ... girlgrace.
("The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo").

Hopkins believed that physical beauty was "the proof of inward beauty" when the soul impresses its form on matter, but that "the stamp of the seal" (*F. L.*, p. 307, 1883) could be spoiled if the "wax" was too soft to hold the image. Faces writ on water cannot of course last long. Therefore, while Hopkins's adjectival compound, "wimpledwater-dimpled", emphasizes the smooth elasticity of unlined young skin by suggesting that dimpling smiles come and go like ripples on water,⁹ leaving no mark or furrow on fresh young faces, the image must also remind us of the fluidity and inconstancy associated with woman and the feminine principle. Albert the Great, teacher to Thomas Aquinas and a profound influence on his thought, goes so far as to assert that woman's physical "fluidity" makes her "less qualified [than man] for moral behaviour" because

the woman contains more liquid than the man, and it is a property of liquid to take things up easily and to hold onto them poorly. Liquids are easily moved, hence women are inconstant and curious ... Woman knows nothing of fidelity ... and has a faulty and defective nature in comparison [with man] Her feelings drive woman towards every evil, just as reason impels man toward all good.¹⁰

It is this trembling "feminine" instability that Hopkins seems to despise in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" when he confronts his own "ocean of a motionable mind", but he is stanchèd, braced, balanced, and made (almost) diamond-hard by Christ's grace: "I steady as a water in a well, to a poise, to a pane, / But roped with, always, ... a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift" (ll. 29-32). Woman, even when bound by holy vows and veiled by a nun's wimple, is a creature associated with the flow of blood, milk, and tears, and cannot escape her ideological identification with the lower elements of earth and water, and ultimately with deliquescence and the grave. Hopkins's homophonic allusion to "Age and age's evils; hoar hair" (l. 10) also reminds us that Eve was the first beautiful woman ever to grow old and did so because of her

"whorish" vanity.

Because their thoughts seem fixed on the importance and ephemeral nature of their youth and beauty, Hopkins's maidens may appear to share Eve's vanity and thus to invite censure for narcissism. But the "qualities that a given period calls beautiful are merely symbols of the female behaviour that that period considers desirable". Youth and virginity have been considered "beautiful" in women "since they stand for experiential and sexual ignorance".¹¹ The "ideal" Victorian woman could therefore be expected to preserve an image of ignorant simplicity, to behave like a child and to keep her "girlgrace" even in mature years. In his essay "Of Women" (1851), Schopenhauer propounded the view that women could hardly do otherwise, for they were "naturally" like children and were therefore best qualified by nature to look after them:

women are directly fitted for acting as the nurses and teachers of our early childhood by the fact that they are themselves childish, frivolous and short-sighted; in a word they are big children all their life long—a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the full-grown man, who is man in the full sense of the word.¹²

Coventry Patmore provides a famed poetic model of this kind of infantilized female behaviour in his breviary of married love, *The Angel in the House*. Patmore's men seem privy to the ways of the world from birth but his perfect woman smells of bread and butter (according to Gosse) and lives in a paradoxical state that can perhaps best be described as regressive development:

He's never young or ripe; she grows
More infantine, auroral, mild,
And still the more she lives and knows
The lovelier she's express'd a child.
(Canto V, 1, 17-20)¹³

Patmore's heroine is by no means artless and displays a paradoxical mix of "bird-brained" idiocy (the "sweet folly of the dove") and serpentine duplicity (the "cunning of the snake"). But she is crowned with woman's "chiefest grace" of "modesty" (ibid. p. 84) and it may be for this that Hopkins attributed divine sanction to the poem, saying that it was "undertaken under a kind of inspiration from God", (*F. L.*, p. 307, 1883). Ruskin was of the same opinion as Hopkins and urged women to study Patmore's work as the pattern of their moral life:

You cannot read him too often or too carefully; as far as I know, he is the only living poet who always strengthens and purifies; the others sometimes darken and nearly always depress, and discourage, the imagination they deeply seize.¹⁴

Hopkins did have some criticisms of *The Angel in the House* but later decided that to quibble with such a morally improving work was to tamper with a sacrosanct object:

To have criticized it now looks like meddling with the altar vessels ... A good book is to educate the world at large ... [it] is in the highest degree instructive, it is a book of morals and in a field not before treated and yet crying loudly to be treated ... I want it to be ... read by many, recognized by all.
(*F. L.*, pp. 362, 1885)

The untouched freshness and "innocent airs" of Hopkins's young females, with their dimpling smiles and sweet looks, therefore conform to Patmore's paradigm of female behaviour in which women's "winning ways" are dedicated solely to winning male approval.

As author of their reality, it is inevitable then that Hopkins should shape Winefred and her maidens to fit the frame of his own desiring. Sexual innocence and a "natural" sweet docility are paramount for the opposite in woman is monstrous:

In Leonardo's famous picture 'Modesty and Vanity,' is it not taken almost for granted that the one figure is that of a virgin, the other that of a courtesan? If modesty in women means two things at once, purity and humility, must not the pair of opposites be no great way apart, vanity from impurity? ... It is the same in literature as in life: the vain women in Shakspeare [sic] are the impure minded too, like Beatrice (I do not know that I may not call her a hideous character); those whose chastity one could have trusted, like Desdemona, are free from vanity too. (*F. L.*, pp. 308-9, 1883).

Beatrice's "hideousness" would seem to lie in the vanity and pride of her belief that she is equal to any man and greater than most. Beatrice's attitude is hardly acceptable to anyone who regards Patmore's delineation of the proper power relationship between men and women as just and definitive, for she contemptuously demolishes the whole idea of feminine submission to the male: to be ruled by a man is to her to be "over-mastered with a piece of valiant dust ... to make account of her life to a clod of wayward marl" (*Much Ado About Nothing*, Act 2, sc. 1, ll. 63-66). Beatrice is made more "impure" and more dangerous because of her devastating wit and articulacy, for a "woman talker is a fornicator, according to a familiar male stereotype".¹⁵ According to this assumption, a loose tongue denotes loose morals

and a woman who asserts her selfhood through language will assert her sexuality with similar ease.

Not all Victorian women were able or willing to fit the confining mould of female desirability that Hopkins seems to approve. Those who were either too old or too clever to conform were caricatured and ridiculed as "old maids" and "bluestockings". Sulloway notes Hopkins's "barbarous" and mocking confusion of the Egyptologist and "living blue", Amelia Edwards, with the "mummy woman", Queen Hatsu of the Nile. Both women had a great interest in architecture and were therefore derided by Hopkins as "tomboys".¹⁶ Less risible, because they were involved in trying to dispel sexual ignorance and to promote the "pernicious doctrines" that set Hopkins's hackles bristling, were campaigners like Annie Besant:

Bradlaugh spoke here lately and Mrs. Annie Besant gave 3 lectures ... To think that I could ever have called myself a Liberal! 'The Devil was the first Whig.' These two are at large (... Bradlaugh and Besant) and the government is arresting Irish agitators, that will do more harm in prison than on the stump.
(*F. L.*, p. 243, 1879)

The real criminals, Hopkins suggests, were demons of unchastity like Besant who sought to dispel the sexual ignorance and vulnerability of women by publishing treatises on birth control. George Bernard Shaw thought Besant a consummate actress and compares her in her Fabian socialist phase to Mrs Siddons as Shakespeare's Beatrice. Shaw did not necessarily mean this as a deadly insult, but Besant and Beatrice were monstrous to Hopkins's eyes for the same reasons: outspokenness and sexual immodesty (no "modest woman" should associate with her, said one of Besant's judges).¹⁷ These were also the very characteristics which most contradicted the Victorian idea of beauty and therefore rendered them ugly and "hideous" to behold.¹⁸

Hopkins is swift and unrelenting in his condemnation of immodesty in women like Besant and Beatrice, and yet seems surprisingly tolerant of the apparent vanity of Winefred's maidens. However, he reflects the dichotomous view of women fostered by the Victorian age when he posits the existence of two kinds of vanity. The vanity displayed by Winefred's maidens is consistent with what he calls "the

daintiest beatitude and the last beauty of the soul" (*L*, 3, p. 311, 1883), that is, vanity which "implies humility" because the woman's pride is not in herself but in her "lover's delight in her beauty" (*ibid.*). Hopkins condones and even celebrates this kind of vanity when it involves the "abandonment of soul towards *one* person" (*ibid.*). In doctrinal terms this is also the theologically correct response of all fallible sinners — male and female — towards an omnipotent yet loving God. But women who attempt to appropriate power for themselves or who ignore Hopkins's crucial emphasis and abandon their souls to *more* than one person are guilty of first degree vanity, "the greatest of sins, and the cause of their saddest and most characteristic fall", for "what but vanity", argues Hopkins, makes them "first publish then prostitute their charms?" (*L*, 3, p. 308, 1883).

The implications of Hopkins's choice of terms in his condemnation of woman's fatal flaw are intriguingly diverse and conspire to launch several classic misogynistic attacks against women. The most powerful is undoubtedly the reference to Eve's fall, which draws in its wake the suggestion that all women share the same "characteristic" and fatal weakness. References to Hopkins's prevailing, even obsessive, concern with chastity and with the "male gift" of language combine to establish a further link between female self-articulation (self-publication), and sexual promiscuity.

The equivalence of woman and book, or more precisely, the masculine perception of woman *as* a text to be read or written by the male, is more explicitly foregrounded by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in his poem, "Jenny" (published in 1870). In Rossetti's poem, the speaker muses over the sleeping form of Jenny, a young prostitute. Jenny is framed within the perspective of the speaker's gaze and is illuminated and posed as if she were again offering herself as an erotic commodity for the consumption of an implied male reader. Softly sleeping in provocative *déshabillé*, Jenny is passive, silent and still: a lovely work of art, an object of marketable value, a warm "sweetmeat" to feed male lust, and a perfect surface on which to trace meaning:

Why, Jenny, as I watch you there,—
For all your wealth of loosened hair,

Your silk ungirdled and unlac'd
 And warm sweets open to the waist,
 All golden in the lamplight's gleam,—
 You know not what a book you seem,
 Half-read by lightning in a dream!
 (ll. 46-52)¹⁹

Jenny has openly "published" her charms and the form in which "the text reaches the market, a *book*, allies her not just with the legible or illegible text, but with the purchasable book as well".²⁰ "Scrawled" over like her pier-glass with the words of the men who have possessed her body, Jenny is beautiful yet is interpreted as a "vile text" (l. 259) upon which "pure women may not look" (l. 253). The "message" that the speaker reads (and of course, inscribes) on Jenny's body is one that reiterates the myth of woman's ancient enigmatic duplicity and instability and shocks the speaker out of his hitherto complacent belief that "good women" and whores were as palpably, visibly "different" from each other as if they had belonged to separate species. For Rossetti's poem addresses the idea that Jenny and "pure women" are made of the same "soft" clay and it is circumstance alone which separates them. It is woman's perceived propensity to slide from total purity to absolute corruption that shakes Rossetti's speaker with epistemological "doubt and horror", for if Jenny appears in sleep "just as another woman" does (l. 177) then how can woman's purity be recognized and trusted? Employing the textual metaphor that both Hopkins and Rossetti favour, women should be blank pages or single manuscripts dedicated to one man or to God, but when they bear the imprint of many men, or more presumptuously still in Hopkins's opinion, if they try to make their own mark on the world, they become abominations in the eyes of God and man: "blotted, ... scribbled over with foulness and blasphemy" (*S*, p. 240, ca 1886).

If, as it seems, Hopkins regards vanity as a "characteristic" fault of women and believes it to be the natural precursor of whorishness, it follows that like Rossetti he regards women as being both "basically pure and corrupt", that they have an instinctual tendency towards prostitution in their psychological make-up. The "fallen woman" is therefore not perceived as being simply a victim of the external economic system, for the "placement of purity and corruption in all women substitutes

an interior struggle for exterior circumstance" and what happens to women who "publish their charms" by putting themselves on display therefore "happens *inside* them, in their own interiority".²¹

As extreme as this viewpoint may appear, it is one with which many of Hopkins's contemporaries were familiar. The *fin de siècle* intellectual Otto Weininger spells out the received wisdom on the subject in his extraordinarily popular opus, *Sex and Character*, which Freud had read and admired before publication, and which had "spread through the serious male society of England as if it had been an epidemic":²²

Prostitution is foreign to the male element, although the lives of men are often more laborious than those of women ... The disposition for and inclination to prostitution is as organic in woman as is the capacity for motherhood.²³

The options for women are characteristically polarized and yet Weininger's view of women's intellectual inferiority, spiritual vacuity and gross materialism seemed in the opinion of Ford Madox Ford (who did not like the book), to support "the attitude of really advanced men towards woman-kind".²⁴ Weininger's opus was a pseudo-scientific bundle of notions "taken from Plato, Schopenhauer, Kant, Darwin, Spencer, the social Darwinists and ... Freud".²⁵ But contemporary clinical views made few concessions to ethical equivalence or indeed to any real idea of equality between the sexes, and official scientific opinion, as professed by Dr. Charles Mercier, was distinguished from Old Testament misogyny only by its choice of terms. Mercier claimed that women who could not restrain their appetites were defective evolutionary throwbacks, literally a lower form of life. Like Hopkins, Mercier insisted that modesty in women was not simply a pretty affectation or a societally created sense of unworthiness, it was the essential bulwark against all vice: untie that restraint and woman's "natural" intemperance would cause moral chaos:

they [prostitutes] exhibit other forms of vice, showing that generally, their capacity of self-restraint is undeveloped. They are usually drunkards; they are always spendthrift ... they are thoroughly immoral ... It is not that the moral impulse towards lust is greater in them than in most women, but the restraint of modesty is less.²⁶

Hopkins hated lewdness and promiscuity in either sex, but he reserves his strongest opprobrium for the female. His delight in youthful inexperience and sexual purity

therefore has as its subtext a correspondingly intense loathing of "courtezans". Winefred and the child-women of the "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" are thus vulnerable to more than the effects of the "sun's tingeing" on their soft complexions. Time is not the only enemy to loveliness for, as we have seen, Hopkins regarded physical beauty to be the outward manifestation of inner virtue:

It is certain that in nature outward beauty is the proof of inward beauty ... Fineness, proportion, of feature comes from the moulding force which succeeds in asserting itself over the resistance of cumbersome or restraining matter; the bloom of health comes from the abundance of life, the great vitality within. The moulding force ... is the soul.
(L, 3, p. 307, 1883)

Hopkins's belief in the correspondence of physical form and moral content follows an orthodox line of Neo-Platonic and Christian teaching which emerges in the late nineteenth-century "obsession with visible vice".²⁷ Wilde's Basil Hallward confronts, but does not quite convince a society of duplicitous mask-wearers that there are "no such things ... as secret vices" for the "leprosy of sin" will disfigure the loveliest face like acid eating through silk.²⁸ Hopkins's extreme attachment to "beauty of the body" and his intense horror of ugliness appear to precede his knowledge of any actual theory, however. Even as a very young child, he was "precocious and original, and his aesthetic preferences were decided. When he and [his brother] Cyril had some childish illness his mother found him crying, 'because Cyril has become so ugly!'"²⁹ Hopkins's aesthetic idealism could even bring him to the point of being "half inclined" to wish a young boy dead rather than have his "bloomfall" of beauty and his "bloom of chastity" blasted and corrupted by vice.³⁰

Ernest Ferlita comments that although Hopkins gave no indication where he wanted the Echoes song of Winefred's maidens to be placed, he clearly meant it to function in "the same way as the chorus did in Aeschylus: to embody his 'own interpretation of the play and his own moral to the story'".³¹ Read as doctrine, the message is one of loss and ultimate consolation: "whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25), but it is a lesson which specifically concerns women and the "*mundus mulieris*" of the flesh. In Western cultural consciousness, the image of the shrivelled and ugly old woman, the hag, has become linked above all else with the "prepossession of horror" that Hopkins felt when he looked on slack wrinkled skin,

dying flowers, skeletal forms and the "blight that man was born for" ("Spring and Fall"). Rembrandt's magnificent and tenderly loving portrayals of aged women show us that the "ancient equivalence between ugly body and ugly mind is an aesthetic construction which could be overturned", but in Hopkins it appears to stand firm.³²

In one of the best-known novels of the 1880s, Zola's *Nana* suffers one of the most horrible deaths in fiction and lingers as a suppurating symbol of the link that culture creates between eroticism, women, disease, and death. As Richard Davenport-Hines, points out, *Nana* does "not die of syphilis on Zola's account" but her death is hastened by her eroticism and "the penalty of carnality" is decomposition.³³ Winefred and her petal-soft maidens must therefore be saved from the world's infection and from their own, as yet, latent concupiscence. As representatives of all women, they must remain "sound, healthy, young, firm, smooth, white [and] rosy" if they are not "to speak to us of death or sin, or of lust, which represents the synthesis of them both".³⁴

Getting women to a nunnery is a time-honoured way of locking out experience and thus preserving them as beautiful (because virginal) blank pages on which no story is written. By taking the veil they will follow Winefred's steps into stillness and silence, there to embrace symbolic stasis whilst they wait to die and then awaken into into everlasting youth and everlasting loveliness. They conform to a masculine equation of female virginity with a kind of sleeping beauty existence. Framed within the narrow range of this masculine perspective, female virginity appears to be

virtually synonymous with ignorance ... virginity is a state of passive waiting or vulnerability; it precedes and is antithetical to wholeness, to a woman existing in a way that counts; she counts when the man, through sex, brings her to life.³⁵

Christ is the prince to all of Hopkins's sleeping beauties but Winefred alone has a story which fits both the transcendent and the earthly male frames. Her symbolic first awakening is cruel and bloody and her prince is of the Devil's party, but it is Winefred's violent encounter with Caradoc (an actual prince) which makes her exist in a way that counts for Hopkins. In the same letter that he expresses his troubling comments on the wished for death of the young bugler boy, Hopkins announced the inception of his tragedy on St. Winefred's martyrdom. That Caradoc's frustrated

sexual desire leads to her decapitation is as much a matter of history as it is of symbolism, but as the next chapter will demonstrate, the manner of Winefred's death is significantly related to one of the grisliest and most dominant motifs of *fin de siècle* literature.

[NOTES]

- ¹ *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, Conn. [n.pub.] 1959); quoted in Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, p. 119.
- ² *Hali Meidenhad. An alliterative homily of the thirteenth century*, ed. O. Cockayne, rev. F.J. Furnivall, (New York [n. pub.] 1969; quoted in *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 253.
- ³ "The Future of an Illusion (1927)", *Standard Edition*, XXI, p. 15.
- ⁴ From an 1829 letter to Richard Monckton Milnes, cited by Christopher Ricks in *Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 38.
- ⁵ *The City of God*, ed. David Knowles, (New York [n.pub.] 1981), book 22, chap. 30; quoted in *An Angel Passes*, p. 77.
- ⁶ *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 103.
- ⁷ "Victorian Discourses on Women and Beauty: The Alexander Walker Texts", *Gender and History*, 5, 1 (1993), 34-55 (p. 34).
- ⁸ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, XI, ii, 17-19; quoted in *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 65.
- ⁹ Hopkins refers to the wave patterns of "wimpling" water in his Journal of 1868 (*J*, p. 175).
- ¹⁰ *Quaestiones super de animalibus* XV q. 11; quoted in *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 178.
- ¹¹ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, pp. 13-14.
- ¹² *The Will to Live: Selected Writings*, ed. Richard Taylor, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1967), p. 296; quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 167.
- ¹³ *The Poems of Coventry Patmore*, ed. Frederick Page, (London: Oxford University Press, 1949, p. 89.
- ¹⁴ "Of Queen's Gardens", *Sesame and Lilies*, § 65.
- ¹⁵ Sulloway, "'Gerard Manley Hopkins and 'Women and Men' as 'Partners in the Mystery of Redemption'", p. 39.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- ¹⁷ See Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- ¹⁸ *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. Martha Vicinus, (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 189.
- ¹⁹ *Rossetti's Poems*, edited, with an introduction and notes by Oswald Doughty, (London: Dent,

Everyman's Library, repr. 1968).

²⁰ Kathy Alexis Psomiades, "Beauty's Body: Gender Ideology and British Aestheticism", *Victorian Studies*, 36, 1 (Autumn 1992), 31-51 (p. 46).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²² Ford Madox Ford, "Women and Men", in *The Little Review* (1918); quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 218.

²³ *Sex and Character* (London: Heinemann, [1906]), p. 217, quoted *ibid.*, p. 357.

²⁴ "Women and Men", quoted *ibid.*, p. 218.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Charles Mercier quoted in *Suffer and Be Still*, p. 167.

²⁷ Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 177.

²⁸ *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Vyvyan Holland, (London: Collins, 1966), p. 117.

²⁹ White, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 19.

³⁰ "I enclose a poem, the Bugler. I am half inclined to hope the Hero of it may be killed in Afghanistan", *L*, 1, 92, 1879.

³¹ *The Uttermost Mark*, p. 151.

³² *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 300.

³³ *Sex, Death and Punishment*, p. 162.

³⁴ *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 300.

³⁵ *Intercourse*, p. 113.

The Killing of Winefred

In dreams, a writing tablet signifies a woman, since it
receives the imprint of all kinds of letters.

*Artemidorus*¹

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other,
bound by a a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and
obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of
woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.

*Laura Mulvey*²

The severed head of John the Baptist served up on a silver platter to satisfy the *vagina dentata* of Salome, the "Goddess of Decadence",³ is a ghastly but familiar shape in the miasma of existential insecurity that pervades the art and literature of the *fin de siècle*. Salome, the veiled incarnation of feminine evil and lust has many avatars but she most chiefly lives as the eponymous heroine of Oscar Wilde's play.⁴ Wilde's sickly fantasy of obsessive lust and fierce rejection is heavy with sexual guilt and fear and, like Hopkins's drama on Winefred, seems to offer no "cure" for passion except death or the defence of psychically armoured chastity. Millett writes that it was "personal necessity which led Wilde to traffic in symbols and to refuse to deal with the actual woman responding to her circumstances, a product of history and conditioning".⁵ This may also be true of Hopkins, for whilst their social circumstances were utterly at variance, Hopkins and Wilde both wrote under the sword of proscription and prohibition. Wilde's homosexual desires, Hopkins's Oedipal conflicts, whatever could not be spoken of because it offended against taboo, secular law or God, might find utterance when encoded in the subtext of myth.

Hopkins appears to reverse Wilde's decadent schema by presenting a virtuous female victim of uncontrolled male lust. But as Caradoc evidently perceives himself as a victim of woman's beauty and is figuratively "hacked in half" by his encounter with Winefred, the spirit of the *femme fatale* still stalks abroad. Caught in the glare of displaced guilt and male dread of women, an innocent virgin becomes as deadly to the captivated male as the lust-driven, yet still physically chaste, arch-temptress Salome. Wilde's heroine maintains her virginity and her self-sufficiency so that she

may hold the "power to 'decapitate' the male by making him wait in impotent longing for her compliance to his wishes".⁶ Winefred's only wish is to comply with God's will, yet she also is a veiled woman who is dangerous to look upon.⁷ Oscar Wilde out-herods the original Herod when he ignores biblical precedent and has Salome put to death. Hopkins apparently prefers the ultimate violence of total decapitation over mere wounding in the neck. "Kill that woman!" is the final utterance of Wilde's play and represents the last word in *fin de siècle* misogyny.

In the masculine ethos, what cannot be controlled must be destroyed, and if men cannot control their sexuality they will kill the thing they love. Murder is therefore the means by which Caradoc attempts to reinscribe his masculinity and reaffirm his sense of self by destroying the object of his desire. Showalter remarks on the frequent occurrence of decapitation in male *fin de siècle* writing and the temptation to see "these episodes reflecting the castration anxieties Freud describes in 'Medusa's Head'".⁸ With the emergence of the New Woman, decapitation could also represent a wish to control women by separating the mind from the body. Symbolically, at least, this may reflect the emphasis in medieval paintings where women (especially Eve) are portrayed with conspicuously gravid bellies and very small heads. Decapitation or headshrinking can excise "unfeminine" intellectualism and assertiveness and put women back into their "natural" roles as givers of life, nurturance and support. In folklore the image of a headless, voiceless woman can function as a rebuke to women who dispute the judgement of Aristotle, that "silence is a woman's glory" (*Politics*). Husbands of French *Femmes Savantes*, and any articulate women of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were offered a fictive "cure" for the bad behaviour of their wives in doctor Lustucru (the "skull doctor"): "Superannuated, severed heads fill the shelves of Lustucru's surgery, or hang from the ceiling, outside, more heads are impaled to advertise his remedy". The shop sign "shows a headless woman ('Une femme sans tête') with the legend, 'Everything about her is good'".⁹

The behaviour of Hopkins's heroine Winefred presents an implicit criticism of the New Women who appeared to him to be shamelessly flaunting the old sins of

Eve: vanity and selfishness (*S*, p. 66, 1880). Teaching Winefred a lesson in proper humility need not be his main concern, for she has voluntarily put her head in a bridle by silencing the voice of her own will in submission to God's rule. Hopkins therefore reverses the more usual method of defining woman's role — ignoring her head and foregrounding her body — by disposing of Winefred's body and dwelling (to the deep discomfiture of some) on the glories of her severed head.

In Freudian terms, Winefred's decapitation reinscribes woman's inferiority because it merely reflects her original, hidden, "castrated" state:

To decapitate = to castrate. The terror of the Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something. Numerous analyses have made us familiar with the occasion for this: it occurs when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother ... This symbol of horror [the Medusa's head] is worn upon her dress by the virgin goddess Athene. And rightly so, for thus she becomes a woman who is unapproachable and repels all sexual desires — since she displays the terrifying genitals of the mother. Since the Greeks were in the main strongly homosexual, it was inevitable that we should find among them a representation of woman as a being who frightens and repels because she is castrated.¹⁰

Freud acknowledges the gynophobic bias of the ancient Greeks in his interpretation of the myth, but chooses to accept their viewpoint and to stress the repellent aspects of the Medusa.¹¹ His apparent endorsement of ancient mysogyny may well reflect the formative influence of the Classics on educated men — an influence which may in turn have helped to create the similarities in the "required subordination of wives and mothers in patrilineage, as exercised both in Athens and, so much later, in Vienna".¹² But Freud's complicit response to ancient terrors also suggests that male anxieties about the female, the Other, remain unresolved.

Freud was born in 1856, only twelve years after Hopkins, and as Hegel has said, "A philosopher is necessarily a child of his own time, and his philosophy is that time comprehended in thought".¹³ Freud bears the impress of his early contact with believing Catholics and his endorsement of women's subordination carries a ring of divine ordination about it comparable to Hopkins's credo of the husband's "lordly" supremacy over the wife: "It does little harm to a woman if she remains in her feminine Oedipus attitude ... She will in that case choose her husband for his paternal characteristics and will be ready to recognize his authority."¹⁴ Hopkins's iconic

portrayal of Winefred, his heroine, is therefore constructed on the same schema of female dependence on masculine authority and approval, except that Winefred's reliance is upon God. Gazing with eyes that are either "kept most part much cast down" in maidenly modesty or are "lifted" towards heaven in supplication, Winefred is posed and framed after the style of the masculine tableaux of angelic, womanhood—the "bloodless, brainless 'Anges'"—that Lucy Snowe rages against in *Villette*:

The first [painting] represented a 'Jeune Fille' coming out of a church-door, a missal in her hand, her dress very prim, her eyes cast down ... the second, a 'Mariée', with a long white veil, kneeling at a prie-dieu in her chamber, holding her hands plastered together, finger to finger, and showing the whites of her eyes in a most exasperating manner.¹⁵

Brontë's description is so warped by the pressure of her anti-Catholic hostility, that the serious point she makes is almost obliterated, but the *postures* of mutely submissive femininity she describes are as appropriate to the "angel in the house" as to the Bride of Christ and are not confined to the church of Rome. Winefred of course is destined to become a bride of Christ and should therefore submit to His authority and absolute rule, but Hopkins believed that women should in any case subordinate themselves to God and to the image of God in man (*F.L.*, p. 310, 1883).

For Hopkins and Lucy Snowe, hypocrisy is a sin against the self, but whereas Charlotte Brontë's heroine attacks false women ("she-hypocrites") for playing false roles, Hopkins does not attack the role of lowly submission, only those women who would not accept that role as being divinely ordained. Winefred's downcast gaze must therefore betoken true modesty *and* purity, or else she is damned, for Hopkins takes it "almost for granted" that in literature as in life vanity is the sign of a whore (*F.L.*, pp. 308-9). Winefred's selfhood is therefore doubly veiled; she cannot tell her own story, for that would be an appropriation of masculine control. Her function in the drama is as an *object* of desire or inspiration to men and the very few words that Hopkins allows her are brief acknowledgements of her father's instructions on domestic matters, whereby she demonstrates the womanly virtues of obedience and attention to what Wordsworth calls "household good". Neither can she look "directly forth on life" as Hopkins's male hero does in "On the Portrait of Two

Beautiful Young People", for the eye "objectifies and masters" and if the woman looks then "castration is in the air, the Medusa's head is not far off".¹⁶ As we have seen, Caradoc claims to be the victim of Winefred's beauty and thus blames her both for his crime and his resultant "half-being;" symbolic emasculation of the male by the female therefore seems to be very much "in the air". Through her faith and chastity, Winefred seems a clear exception to the notion of woman's prescriptive moral infirmity, but Hopkins compounds the idea of female powerlessness by indicating that she has no subjective power and even acts as a Medusa figure only by proxy:

In all her body, I say, no place was like her eyes,
 No piece matched those eyes kept most part much cast down
 But, being lifted, immortal, of immortal brightness.
 Several times I saw them, thrice or four times turning;
 Round and round they came and flashed towards heaven: O there
 There they did appeal. Therefore airy vengeance
 Are afoot; heaven-vault fast purpling portends, and what first lightning
 Any instant falls means me ...
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, Act II, ll. 22-32)

The patriarchal identification of the gaze with masculine authority remains unbreached because Winefred's gaze is only ever directed downwards in submissive self-effacement or heavenwards in pleading supplication to God. She does not look directly at Caradoc in true Gorgonian fashion but takes on an intermediary role between God and man (as do the Virgin Mary, and the tall nun in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", although they operate in different contexts). The fact that she is able to do this however is a sign of her spiritual elevation above the common run of womanhood. It is precisely because she has obeyed the rule of obedience, submission, self-effacement and chastity, which society and the Church expects of women, that her mute "appeal" to God is answered.

Hopkins intended that Caradoc should "die impenitent, struck by the finger of God" (*L*, 1, p. 212, 1885). The distress signal flashed out by Winefred's eyes towards heaven will therefore bring down the lightning bolts and "vengeances" of God on Caradoc's guilty head. The fast "purpling" vault of the sky (the angry face of the heavens) seems to signify the apoplectic rage of the Hebraic Father against Caradoc the disobedient son. Caradoc is destined for punishment because he has

dared to rival the Father by striving to possess Winefred—the promised bride of Christ, and has attempted to usurp the Divine prerogative by creating his own immortality.

Hopkins's culpability and involvement in this Oedipal battle is much less blatant, yet the passionate adoration that she inspired in him has made Hopkins take Winefred as "Wife / To [his] creating thought" ("To seem the stranger"), out of which union he has attempted to "beget" (*L*, 2, p. 133, 1886) a piece of history that is necessarily a reflection of his own inscape. There must remain unassailable distinctions between the actual reality of the two acts, but the symbolic and moral parallels between Caradoc's criminal actions and Hopkins's artistic ambitions seem evident and the threatened punishment is the same for both. These parallels are further emphasized by the fact that the spiritual identification that Hopkins *should* achieve with Winefred and her "passive glory" is far less apparent than the turmoil of thwarted impulse and desire that he shares with Caradoc. The paradoxical nature of this desire is manifest in Hopkins's description of Winefred's head:

What have we seen? Her head, sheared from her shoulders, fall,
 And lapped in shining hair, roll to the bank's edge; then
 Down the beetling banks, like water in waterfalls,
 It stooped and flashed and fell and ran like water away.
 Her eyes, oh and her eyes!
 In all her beauty, and sunlight to it is a pit, den, darkness,
 Foamfalling is not fresh to it, rainbow not by it beaming,
 In all her body, I say, no place was like her eyes,
 No piece matched those eyes kept most part much cast down
 But, being lifted, immortal, of immortal brightness.
 Several times I saw them, thrice or four times turning;
 Round and round they came and flashed towards heaven: O there
 There they did appeal. Therefore airy vengeance
 Are afoot; heaven-vault fast purpling portends, and what first lightning
 Any instant falls means me.
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, Act. II, ll. 18-32)

In an eloquent, although partial, defence of Hopkins's sexual orientation, Mackenzie cites this description ("full of lovely metaphor") as evidence of Hopkins's "normal" heterosexual admiration of female beauty (*Facsimiles*, p. 37). If we are to accept MacKenzie's implication that healthy masculine admiration of female beauty finds

inspiration in "lovely" images of dismemberment then Hopkins's aesthetic preference is unexceptional. But if we do not, it then becomes apparent that Hopkins's response reveals more than a twist of Poe-faced Decadence and that he is moved by the same tormented emotion that inspires Shelley's poem on the Medusa:¹⁷

Upon its lips and eyelids seems to lie
 Loveliness like a shadow, from which shine,
 Fiery and lurid, struggling underneath,
 The agonies of anguish and of death.

Yet it is less the horror than the grace
 Which turn the gazer's spirit into stone,
 Whereon the lineaments of that dead face
 Are graven, till the characters be grown
 Into itself, and thought no more can trace;
 'Tis the melodious hue of beauty thrown
 Athwart the darkness and the glare of pain,
 Which humanize and harmonize the strain.
 ("On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci")¹⁸

Mario Praz identifies the image of the "glassy-eyed, severed female head" as the object of the "dark loves of the Romantics and the Decadents throughout the whole of the century".¹⁹ One result of this forced coupling of eroticism and mutilation is that we may descend into the nightmarish state envisaged by Andrea Dworkin, where myth goes beyond metaphor and we begin to perceive "sex and death as synonyms; killing as a sex act; slow dying as sensuality; men watching the slow dying, and the *watching* is sexual; mutilation of the female body as male heroism and adventure".²⁰ On the attraction of women's emotional and physical distress in this century, extensive research has recently confirmed that "30 percent of male college students rated faces of women displaying emotional distress—pain, fear—to be more sexually attractive than the faces showing pleasure".²¹ Hopkins's own words, given in a sermon on the Fall of Man, appear to endorse the truth of Wolf's findings and seem to suggest that the Fall may have been precipitated by Adam's susceptibility to the aesthetic appeal of a woman's suffering:

she had so little love for him that she said, if he loved her he must share her lot ... she stood before him now lovely and *her beauty heightened by distress* a thing never seen before in Paradise ... he did not pause to make an act of hope. He listened to her voice. He left his heavenly father and clave to his wife.
 (S, pp. 66-7, 1880, emphasis mine)

Emotional pain is new to Eve's experience and to Adam's eyes, and it is with the eye that he appears to respond. Eve's anguish does not occlude her loveliness; in fact, because it is something never before seen, it seems to endow her with a more exotic fascination. For Adam, for Hopkins and for Shelley, pleasure dances on the cutting edge of pain and the "tempestuous loveliness of terror" is irresistible (Shelley, "On the Medusa", l. 33).

Freud chooses to stress the repellent aspects of the Medusa but Hopkins is clearly enthralled by the verbal icon he creates out of Winefred's cruel death. He cannot view such things solely with the controlling gaze of the artist, however, for the vital difference between Hopkins and secular artists is that he cannot stand off—whether in sorrowing pity or aesthetic detachment—from the spiritual implications of martyrdom. Winefred's decapitation visibly signifies the punishment that Caradoc, the "rebel self", deserves, and the "feminine" state of being that Hopkins, the dutiful imitator of Christ, strives to attain. Terror and loveliness therefore combine in a monitory image which represents what Hopkins both wants *and* fears.

Winefred is the resurrected hero of the piece but she is brought back to life only to renounce it, and her "sweet success" must never prejudice the modesty that made her a martyr. Since she is not safely "unsexed" by death, Hopkins cannot visualize, as he does in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", a gloriously climactic union with Christ the warrior king as her ultimate reward for suffering. Instead, Hopkins envisages a reward by proxy, though the reward may say more of his own desires than Winefred's.

Because she is a woman, Winefred is culturally confined within the sphere of emotion rather than reason, reaction rather than action, dependency and uncomplaining endurance. Because she is a nun, the energies of her sexual nature and her fertility are similarly suppressed and denied. However much he may admire her virtue, therefore, it is hard to see how Hopkins can be inspired by a life even more circumscribed than his own. Of course, he is not. Winefred's moral fixity is envied and doggedly striven after, but in effect it is the well that bears her name (her "record" and "monument") that most truly corresponds to Hopkins's hunger for

consolation. Winefred disappears from the drama after her head is cut off but her living presence seems in fact to be substituted by the spring that breaks out at the spot where her head falls. Out of this symbolic metamorphosis, Hopkins begins to construct a consolatory fantasy which circumvents the sexual and ethical constraints under which he and Winefred live.

Using what seems a typically violent and masochistic image, Hopkins describes the self as being like a pomegranate fruit "cut in all directions across" (*S*, p. 158). The movement of the soul towards Christ and Christ's example of self-sacrifice is a traumatic shift from one of these exposed faces or "cleaves of being" to another (*ibid.*). Hopkins's image of the self being cut open and severed from its former state in order to achieve greater perfection clearly relates to Winefred's spiritual apotheosis when her body is cleft by Caradoc's sword. On a mythic level, however, Winefred is also representative of the deflowered virgin who becomes the well in which all men may bathe. White notes the indebtedness of Winefred's legend to Celtic hagiography and suggests that her story "is probably a Christianised version of a common northern pagan legend in which the pursuer succeeds in deflowering the maiden before killing her, and a spring gushes forth on the spot to signify the natural restoration of her maidenhead, rather than her natural head".²²

Caradoc's weapon is traditionally part of the iconography and language of masculine virility and the word *vagina* comes from the Latin meaning scabbard or sheath. Hopkins's *mise en scène*, "a wood, ending in a steep bank over a dry dean", is also analogous to the sexual parts of the female body (interpreting dream landscapes, Freud annotates "hill" as *mons veneris*, and a "wood" as pubic hair).²³ The dryness of the dene can be read as a sign of infertility and lack of nurturance, but once Caradoc enters this sexualized landscape and severs the maiden's head (symbolically her maidenhead) there follows a "breaking out of the fountain" and the valley becomes moist and fecund:

... this sweet spot, this leafy lean-over,
 This dry dean, now no longer dry nor dumb, but moist and musical
 With the uproll and the downcarol of day and night delivering
 Water ...
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, C. ll. 11-14)

The topography described here is again markedly similar to that used in "Epithalamion", where naked young boys with their dazzling "downdolfinry and bellbright bodies" seem to represent the active male principle in the union of masculine and feminine necessary for sexual love. Interestingly, in *St. Winefred's Well*, Hopkins suggests a more hermaphroditic combination of male ejaculatory power and female parturition in his image of the fountain and its "breaking" and "delivering" waters. The union of elements and qualities usually associated with either the masculine or the feminine principle is continued in the nature of the water itself:

With the uproll and the downcarol of day and night delivering
Water, which keeps thy name, (for not in rock written,
But in pale water, frail water, wild rash and reeling water,
That will not wear a print, that will not stain a pen,
Thy venerable record, virgin, is recorded)
(*St. Winefred's Well*, C. ll. 13-17).

The well is truly the place where opposites meet: delicacy and surging power, self-effacement and display, stasis and dynamism, impulse and control, nature and culture, are all held in magnificent counterpoise. In life these antitheses can hardly be reconciled, and certainly do not make up an portrait of Winefred as we have seen her. Neither does Hopkins's punning on newsprint and inkstains disguise his deep unease at what he sees as a potential for morally destructive egotism inherent in the act of writing. Caradoc tries literally to write his name in blood; Hopkins figuratively claims to do so when he is possessed by the demons of solipsism and depression: "I have after long silence written two sonnets ... if ever anything was written in blood one of these was". (*L*, 1, p. 219, 1885).

Winefred is not tainted by the turbid welter of impulses that Hopkins associates with the blood, however. In spite of the fact that the well comes into being at the place where her virgin blood is shed, all suggestions of contamination and female "uncleanness" are literally washed away.²⁴ Winefred's medium is water, a universal symbol of cleansing and rebirth, and her record is a living monument sanctioned by God: "the fountain of living waters" (Jer. 2:13). Winefred becomes the mother of unselfconscious natural song which "Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells" ("As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame"), but is *without* the

taint of egotism. The energetic movement of Winefred's uprolling and downcarolling music is plainly in ironic opposition to the poet's admission of sterile lack in "To R.B.":

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

In an obscene parody of the creative act described by Hopkins in "To R.B.", Winefred's "immortal song" is initially fathered by the "live and lancing" thrust of Caradoc's sword. She is victimized, rescued and rendered fertile by masculine violence and power. Her record is therefore clean because she has not challenged God's creative sovereignty and has not transgressed the rules of gender by actively seeking authority (in the fullest sense of the word), power or revenge. Winefred is shown to be spiritually superior whilst still being relegated to the feminine locales of nature and emotion. The letter of the law is traditionally and metaphorically carved in stone and as a woman Winefred is subject to the Law but cannot write it. Further, since the "letter killeth", and the ability to kill is fundamental to the masculine principle, it would be a double transgression of gender boundaries if she were even to attempt such an act. Nevertheless the biblical subtext of Hopkins's lines suggests that she embodies and expresses the spirit of Christ in the manner described by St. Paul: "written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (Cor. 11 3:3).

No longer a human presence in Hopkins's drama, Winefred has cast off the corruptible, and potentially corrupting, body that links her with Eve, Mother Earth and the sulphurous pit of female sexuality. Her decapitation represents an ultimate act of "cleansing" in which everything "below the girdle", indeed, below the neck, is done away with thus neutralizing her dangerous sexual attraction. Hopkins's fixation with purity and his tendency to perceive women either as things "enskyed and sainted" (*Measure for Measure*, 1, 4, l. 34) or as common hussies, is typical in many ways of the culture that shaped his thinking. In its extremest form it emerges in the invective

of Swiftian contempt with which Caradoc describes all who are not as Winefred is: "that mob ... Whose bloods I reckon no more of, no more rank with hers / Than sewers with sacred oils". Winefred has been freed from the deathdance in the blood and the defilement of her female sexuality, but those still living have not. For W.B. Yeats, love has "pitched his mansion / In the place of excrement", ("Crazy Jane talks with the Bishop"), but not for Caradoc or for Hopkins.

Caradoc's juxtaposition of the cesspit and the chrism sets up an unbridgeable contrast between images of filth and of divine purity. A similar, though more subtly indicated contrast, is presented in "God's Grandeur" between sacred oils ("greatness, like the ooze of oil"), the soil as holy ground, and the greasy, filthy mess of mankind's physical and moral reality: "all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared, with toil; / And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell". Mother Earth is not utterly fallen in "God's Grandeur" but is nevertheless befouled with "the print" of her violators. Hopkins's flight from sordidness therefore forces him to invoke a more reliably pure and enskyed source of maternal care and healing nurturance in his unusually feminine image of a warm-breasted Holy Ghost.²⁵

For all her sainted status, however, Winefred, is not a supernatural figure and cannot be either fertile or nurturing without destroying the virginal modesty that Hopkins reveres in her. Symbolically however, her well and the bathing pool it feeds represent the "clean" vagina and womb that men may enter and regain wholeness. Through her the "dearest freshness" of "deep down things" is made accessible and she represents a haven for the maimed, the diseased and the sick-of-soul:

While sick men shall cast sighs, of sweet health all despairing,
 While blind men's eyes shall thirst after daylight, draughts of daylight,
 Or deaf ears shall desire that lipmusic that's lost upon them,
 While cripples are, while lepers, dancers in dismal limb-dance,
 Fallers in dreadful frothpits, waterfearers wild,
 Stone, palsy, cancer, cough, lung-wasting, womb-not-bearing,
 Rupture, running sores, what more? in brief, in burden,
 So long as men are mortal and God merciful,
 So long to this sweet spot, this leafy lean-over,

...

Here to this holy well shall pilgrimages be,

...

What sights shall be when some that swung, wretches on crutches
 Their crutches shall cast from them, on heels of air departing,

Or they go rich as roseleaves hence that loathsome came hither!
 Not now to name even
 Those dearer, more divine boons whose haven the heart is.
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, C. ll. 3-26)

If the promise of curative grace is ignored, Hopkins's glossary of horrors could almost have dropped from the lips of Shakespeare's Thersites (*Troilus and Cressida*, V, 1, ll. 19-28) but more striking than his grotesquerie is the way in which he inverts the traditional rhetoric of Victorian anti-sex propaganda. Having had to work in the squalid slums of Liverpool in the eighteen eighties: "worse than filthy places, dens of shame" (*S*, p. 249, ca 1886), Hopkins was forced into an actual confrontation with the effects of deprivation and vice which few of his class ever experienced. But even those who did lead a sheltered middle-class life could not be unaware of the ravages of venereal disease. Advertisements promoting quack cures and preventatives filled the radical broadsheets of the day and even *The Times* was not immune to the plague of syphilophobia that convulsed the nation more violently than the disease itself.²⁶

Caradoc's disgusted excoriation of humanity is linked with the view, developed through general hostility to women, of the prostitute or sexually free woman as an "emissary of death",²⁷ a polluted well or human "sewer", and the brothel as a "seminal drain".²⁸ The prostitute's bed, writes André Couvreur in his novel *Les Mancenilles* (1900) has become the cesspool of all the people of colour of the quartier, bringing their vice and disease from all four corners of the world".²⁹

The many pilgrims who converge on Winefred's well are a similarly variegated assembly: "not from purple Wales only nor from Elmy England,/ but from beyond seas, Erin, France and Flanders, everywhere" (*St. Winefred's Well*, C. ll.19-20). This is fame indeed but innocently got and therefore not morally dangerous. The body of the prostitute is said to represent a sink of infection, sterility and death. The life-giving matrix of Winefred's well promises instead to heal sickness and to cure infertility ("womb-not-bearing"). Hopkins's language owes some of its pungency to Ignatian images of sin as disfigurement and disease: "[let me see] all my corruption and foulness of body [and] look upon myself as a sort of ulcer or abscess, whence have sprung so many sins, and so many wickednesses and such most hideous venom".³⁰

But however foul and repellent the complaint ("running sores" seems high on the list), Winefred's well offers sufferers the chance of curative renewal and rebirth: "they go rich as roseleaves ... that loathsome came hither" (*St. Winefred's Well*, C. 1. 24).

Winefred is ultimately objectified as an endless source of unconditional comfort and nurturance, and (except for a brief space as wrongly accused *femme fatale*) has made the mythic leap from the role of persecuted virgin to that of beneficent nursing mother without touching base earth. She therefore functions in the manner of Hélène Cixous's Absolute Woman, who gives coherence and strength to the male at the endless expense of her own self-definition: her "power of producing the other is a power that never returns to her. She is really a wellspring nourishing the other for eternity, yet not drawing back from the other".³¹ Immersion in her well symbolizes the satisfaction of two passive desires: to be incorporated into the ideal Mother's womb and to be "engulfed or surrounded by the mother's breast".³² The bright obverse of Hopkins's metaphorical coinage therefore presents Winefred as a pure woman (with no trace of Hardy-esque irony or ambiguity) who is given a fairy god-mother's magic to mend broken hearts and bodies. But as a woman who embraces death-in-life by becoming a nun and through her martyrdom, Winefred is a medium *par excellence* for the death drive. Her perfect self-sacrifice is "excess because it lies beyond the human" just as its counterpart, the feminine monster is "excess because it falls short of the cultural code's limit".³³ Too good for this world or too low to live; beyond the pale in moral excellence or depravity, woman represents Otherness and is the site where repressed anxieties emerge.

The history and physical actuality of St. Winefred's Well therefore serves as a mask which hides the reality of death and as a conduit for Hopkins's terror of dislocation, silence, and the horrors of corruption:

The strong unfailing flow of the water and the chain of cures from year to year all these centuries took hold of my mind with wonder at the bounty of God in one of His saints, the sensible thing so naturally and gracefully uttering the spiritual reason for its being (which is all in keeping with the story of St. Winefred's death and recovery) and the spring in place leading back the thoughts by its spring in time to its spring in eternity: even now the stress and buoyancy and abundance of the water is before my eyes.
(*J*, p. 260, 1874)

Death can have no dominion within this charmed and seamless circle of connectedness and perpetuity, but pressing hard at its outer edge is Hopkins's dread of "age, and then the only end of age".³⁴ The "act of denial, as Freud repeatedly demonstrates, in part affirms what it tries to occult".³⁵ Hopkins's drama on St. Winefred is meant to deny the terrors of physical disintegration and death and to celebrate the fact of resurrection but is nevertheless haunted by the creeping despair of the Leaden Echo. The mask is feminine but the expression of "haggard at the heart" grief is Hopkins's own.

The focus of the drama finally moves away from individual actions and emotions, spreading out to encompass the general burden of human pain and grief. The last known fragment of the work is dominated by the theme of renewal and recovery of powers; though it is one of the painful incongruities in Hopkins's life that his language falters and breaks down in the midst of his lyric speech on the sureness of continuity:

As sure as what is most sure, sure as that spring primroses
 Shall new-dapple next year, sure as tomorrow morning,
 Amongst come-back-again things, things with a revival, things with a recovery,
 Thy name ...
 (*St. Winefred's Well*, C. ll. 27-30, editor's ellipsis)

This is not a Romantic device meant to evade formal closure, leaving the door open to endlessly resonant possibilities,³⁶ or even a sardonic joke on Hopkins's part. His prickly rejoinder to Robert Bridges clearly shows that he breaks off because he feels psychologically incapable of going on:

... how cd. you think such a thing of me as that I shd. in cold blood write "fragments of a dramatic poem"?—I of all men in the world. To me a completed fragment, above all of a play, is the same unreality as a prepared impromptu ... There is a point with me in matters of any size when I must absolutely have encouragement as much as crops rain ... However I am in my ordinary circumstances unable, with whatever encouragement, to go on with *Winefred* or with anything else.
 (*L*, 1, p. 219, May 1885)

In spite of his confessed emotional impotence, this was not the last of Hopkins's references to his drama on St. Winefred; his hopes of completion limped on for the rest of his short life. With an irony that he may or may not have appreciated, his bastard brood, the Dark Sonnets, torn out of his brain against his will, were to prove

his most powerful productions and the most memorable monument to his existence. Winefred shares with Keats the distinction (or indistinction) of having her name "written in water". Hopkins shares with Caradoc the pain of having his most enduring record "written in blood".

Winefred's legend offered much needed "milk to the mind" ("Ashboughs") but could not assuage the hunger for comfort and healing that gnawed at Hopkins's heart. When the barbs of paradox in his own psyche could barely be tolerated he turned, often, to the tender and graceful image of his "universal mother" the Virgin Mary. For only in her could the "things that are thought to be and are opposite and incompatible ... maidenhood and motherhood; courage and meekness, height and lowliness, wisdom and silence, retirement and renown" be sublimely conjoined (*S*, p. 29, 1879).

[NOTES]

- ¹ Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, 2.45; quoted in *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 337.
- ² "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Feminisms*, pp. 432-442 (p. 433).
- ³ *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 149.
- ⁴ *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 300.
- ⁵ *Sexual Politics*, p. 155.
- ⁶ *Idols of Perversity*, p. 385.
- ⁷ *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 145.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- ⁹ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p. 28.
- ¹⁰ "Medusa's Head", *Standard Edition*, XVIII, p. 273.
- ¹¹ For an alternative view see Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", *Signs* 1, 4 (1975) 874-893.
- ¹² *Monuments and Maidens*, pp. 110-111. Warner also notes the proliferation of Medusan images in Viennese architecture.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- ¹⁴ *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, *Standard Edition*, XXIII, p. 194.
- ¹⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, ed. Mark Lilly (Middlesex: Penguin, 1979), ch. 19, p. 277.
- ¹⁶ Heath, "Difference", p. 84, p. 92.
- ¹⁷ Norman White records that on joining the Jesuits Hopkins passed on his copy of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry to his brother Cyril. See *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 29.

- ¹⁸ *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, edited by Neville Rogers, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).
- ¹⁹ *The Romantic Agony*, p. 27.
- ²⁰ *Intercourse*, p. 119.
- ²¹ *The Beauty Myth*, p. 165.
- ²² Quoted in *The Uttermost Mark*, p. 134.
- ²³ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams (1900)*, *Standard Edition*, V, pp. 356, 366.
- ²⁴ See Dworkin on the assumed equivalence of woman, sexuality and uncleanness, *Intercourse*, pp. 169-209.
- ²⁵ Lock comments on the "inappropriate suggestiveness" of this image, "Hopkins as a Decadent Poet", p. 131, yet there is a clear biblical precedent in Matt. 23:37: "I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings."
- ²⁶ See Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980) and Davenport-Hines, "Venus Decomposing", *Sex, Death and Punishment*, pp. 156-209.
- ²⁷ Dr. William Acton, quoted in *Sex, Death and Punishment*, p. 169.
- ²⁸ *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 193.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ St. Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, p. 34.
- ³¹ "Castration or Decapitation", p. 47.
- ³² Bertram Lewis, *The Psychoanalysis of Elation* (New York: The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, Inc., 1961), pp. 105-106.
- ³³ Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 218.
- ³⁴ Philip Larkin, "Dockery and Son".
- ³⁵ *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 88.
- ³⁶ Ferlita argues otherwise: "Is it Hopkins who finds himself here at a loss for words? Or is it Beuno?" (*The Uttermost Mark*, p. 150).

Our Lady of Paradox: Mary, the One Woman Without Stain

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.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

The Church and Satan agreed together in this, that the Son and the Mother
went together; and the experience of three centuries has confirmed this testimony,
for Catholics who have honoured the Mother, still worship the Son, while Protestants,
who now have ceased to confess the Son, began by scoffing at the Mother.

*John Henry Newman*¹

A new Eve incapable of a Fall: The Madonna and the Church in Victorian England

By turning apostate and repudiating the Anglican faith of his family and his nation, Hopkins ensured that he would begin to seem a stranger even to his own kin. The pain of estrangement was intense and prolonged, exacerbated by Hopkins's seeming coldness and youthful arrogance ("my only strong wish is to be independent", *L*, 3, p. 91-5), and felt most by grieving parents who feared that they had lost their son for ever: "the tone of your letter is so hard & cold ... Can you really put aside all our claims upon you by saying that it rests with us to think as you do? ... O Gerard my darling boy are you indeed gone from me?" (*L*, 3, pp. 95-7, Oct. 1866).

As he suggests in the opening lines of the poem quoted above, his Irish poem of exile and loneliness, "To Seem the Stranger", Hopkins's hunger for the affectionate warmth, understanding and support which characterize the ideal of family life had to find its fulfillment in Christ. That his need was not always met, is suggested by the ambivalent tone of the poem itself which seems to offer testimony to the fact that Hopkins's relationship with Christ was rarely serene and too often anguished. Hopkins's brother Cyril records how his "abandonment of the church into which he was born" had particularly shocked and distressed his mother, with whom he had always been "in close sympathy"² and who now felt estranged from her first-born son, her beloved "little pet" (as Hopkins signed himself in one of his earliest letters to her).³ Kate Hopkins eventually became reconciled to her son's betrayal but the ravelled bond between them was beyond full repair. For Hopkins it may then have

seemed like a divine consolation for the loneliness of his existence, that Catholicism offered him freedom to worship the lovely image of his "universal mother", the Virgin Mary (*S*, p. 29, 1879). His love for Mary notably bore fruit in his poem "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe". This work is given close individual analysis in Chapter 10, but I would like first to examine some important aspects of the cultural and theological climate in which the poem was produced.

* * *

In Birmingham in 1851, Cardinal Henry Newman concluded a series of lectures on the *Present Position of Catholics in England* with a cautiously hopeful view:

We live in a happier age than our forefathers; at least, let us trust that the habits of society and the self-interest of classes and of sects will render it impossible that blind prejudice and brute passion should ever make innocence and helplessness their sport and prey, as they did in the seventeenth century.⁴

Blind prejudice and brute passion were not easily banned from the streets, however, and in June of the following summer, a Protestant mob sacked and desecrated two Catholic chapels in the infamous Stockport riots; abuse, rioting and "anti-Popery" meetings continued throughout the 1860s. Poverty and unemployment were the root cause of many confrontations, for manual work was scarce and living standards often abysmal. Hopkins wrote of the desperate and dangerous mood of the unemployed who had become brutalized by despair and anger: "by Despair, bred Hangdog dull; by Rage, / Manwolf, worse; and their packs infest the age" ("Tom's Garland: On the unemployed", 1887). The times were sliding towards chaos, and vulpine "packs" of men without hope or purpose were the inevitable product of injustice and inequality:

it is all very well for those who are in, however low in, the Commonwealth and share in any way the common weal; but the curse of our times is that many do not share it, that they are outcasts from it and have neither security nor splendour; but that they share care with the high and obscurity with the low, but wealth or comfort with neither.

(*L*, 1, pp. 273-74, 1888)

An increasingly volatile situation was rendered critical by huge numbers of Irish immigrants who bulked up the number of Catholics in England considerably; but again, desperate competition for work and substance caused division and enmity to

fester and the Irish were mistrusted and disliked more because they took away work than for their Catholic faith.

In spite of the sturdy optimism voiced by Fr. Hermann, Prior of the Discalced Carmelites in London, that there was a "day by day" improvement in public attitudes to the Catholics and "prejudices were dying out",⁵ hatred of "Popery and priestcraft" persisted, even in the minds of those who had no need to fight for their bread. Tennyson created a caricature of Catholic excess and morbidity in his portrait of King Pellam in the *Idylls*.⁶ Pellam is enemy to Arthur, who seems to represent (however anachronistically) the pattern of Victorian manliness, nobility and Christian kingship.⁷ Irked and angered by Arthur's success, Pellam, once "Christless", turns to holy things, finds himself descended from Saint Joseph of Arimathea, takes to fasting and celibacy, pushes "aside his faithful wife, nor lets ... dame or damsel enter at his gates / Lest he be polluted" (ll. 13-15). Pellam, the "gray" and ineffectual king, worships at a shrine filled with a clutter of grisly relics of the very kind that many Protestant Victorians abhorred. More damningly, Pellam's antagonism to Arthur's authority and his rejection of his own "faithful wife" indicate that he is enemy to the cornerstones of the British Empire: Protestant monarchy and the family.

Anti-Catholic feelings were also incited by the publication of scandalous exposés like *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* (published in 1836). Norman remarks on the enormous popularity of tales such as this, in which *Maria* records the "bible-hating" mania of the Catholics who incarcerated her in the Hotel Dieu convent in Montreal for the "crime" of reading the Bible.⁸ Father Charles Chiniquy, a priest from Quebec, who defected to Protestantism in 1858, also published a morbidly gothic account of his life as a priest, "full of the horrors of the confessional, of instruments of self-mortification" and of bizarre moral and sexual improprieties by monks and nuns.⁹ With embarrassing irony, one of the most scurrilous verses attacking the grotesque superstition and avaricious excesses of the Romish faith was composed by John Henry Newman when he was an undergraduate at Oxford:

Mid the recesses of that pillar'd wall
Stood reverend Clement's dark confessional.

Here Rapine's son with superstition pale
 Oft thro' the grated lattice told his tale;
 Here blood-stain'd Murder faulter'd, tho' secure
 Of absolution for a faith impure — ...

Mistaken worship! where the priestly plan
 In servile bondage rules degraded man, ...
 — Where every crime a price appointed brings
 To soothe the churchman's pride, the sinner's stings,
 Where righteous grief and penitence are made
 An holy market and a pious trade.¹⁰

As Newman's biographer, Sheridan Gilley, points out, "even the most zealous anti-Catholic could hardly have said more [and] Newman must have smiled when, as a cardinal, he marked the lines as of his own composing for Bodley's librarian".¹¹ Deviancy, moral corruption, covert vice, deception and unnameable "horrors" of sexual depravity, were thus associated with "Romanism" even by young and gifted intellectuals like Newman, as well as a large (and fervently prurient) reading public. The early and middle years of the century sustained an "unshakeable belief in the blasphemous nature of Marian devotions" and a general depiction of Catholicism as "a sink of iniquity",¹² though by 1866 Cardinal Manning could drily observe that much ignorance and much prejudice still existed, "but the hostility is more civilized, and the ignorance is breached on all sides".¹³

Cardinal Manning had himself gained a reputation as a social reformer and repeated Hopkins's disgusted condemnation of the inequalities of British life: "The accumulation of wealth in the land, the piling up of wealth like mountains, in the possession of classes or of individuals cannot go on. No commonwealth can rest on such foundations".¹⁴ Some inequalities were to stay, however, for Manning firmly stated that a woman's place was in the home and therefore refused to receive feminists at Archbishop's House.¹⁵ The perfect image of woman was the serene and endlessly loving Madonna, but as to how much power the Madonna herself should be seen to wield, even fellow Catholics could not agree. There were shouts of "blasphemy" even from Catholics in 1845 when the itinerant Italian preacher Father Luigi Gentili spoke in Yorkshire of the honours due to the Virgin.¹⁶ Gentili was nevertheless gratified by the warmer reception he received from High Church

enthusiasts at Oxford in 1841.

Oxford was the visionary engine of what some saw as the revolutionary movement that would bring England back to the Old Faith. Ambrose Phillips (later known as Ambrose Phillips de Lisle), a Catholic convert and activist, was foremost in promoting this belief: "I am fully persuaded that there is no point of the globe at the present moment in which a more important work is going on for the glory of the Catholick Church, than that which is in progress at Oxford".¹⁷ The evidence of that progress seemed to hinge on the status and importance awarded to the Virgin Mary: "the devotion of the glorious Mother of God is rapidly increasing, great numbers of Anglicans now keep her blessed picture with extreme reverence, putting flowers before it ... many recite her little office; a fellow of Exeter College ... broke into tears when speaking of the Dear Mother of Our Saviour".¹⁸ To convert to Catholicism was an heroic act, and the most visible sign of intent was to kneel before the image of a woman. Those who disliked and feared Catholicism claimed either that this was an act of outright paganism, a reversion to the idolatrous worship of the ancient Mother goddess, or that Mary had usurped the premier authority of God. As we shall see, these accusations not only bred suspicion and hostility between the Anglican Church and the Church of Rome, but even caused dissent among believing English Catholics.

The illogical perversity of the prejudice against Catholicism that raged in the stolidly bourgeois hearts of many Victorians, is strikingly evident in the doubleness of an attitude which largely despised the "blasphemous idolatry" of Roman Catholicism, yet actively fostered the adoration of an idealized image of Madonna-like femininity, most readily recognized in Coventry Patmore's "angel" of submissive perfection. So pervasive was the Marian ideal of immaculate purity that it even provided the ideological subtext for the "dominant sexual discourse among New Women, as among other late-nineteenth-century feminists, [which] reproduced and intensified stereotypes of female sexlessness and purity".¹⁹

Because of the repeated emphasis on the "saving function of the nunlike purity of the woman in marriage, it was inevitable that she should be given the task of

aspiring to the position of the one figure in history who had clearly managed to be a complete success at being simultaneously virgin, mother, and wife: Mary, Mother of God".²⁰ Patmore had not converted to Roman Catholicism when he wrote *The Angel in the House* (1854-63) but his progression from his initial holy worship of "womanhood" and feminine purity, to his subsequent holy worship of Mary seemed equally inevitable: "All who approach womanhood in holy awe and belief in her perfection and with the mystic passion of refusal which is the first motion of love, believe in, love, and worship thee".²¹ The darker antithesis of the holy awe inspired by Patmore's flawlessly chaste image of womanhood may often involve the degradation of the sexed, subhuman slut. As a writer who is frequently remarked on for perpetuating the virgin / whore dichotomy in his writing, it seems ironic, but nevertheless appropriate, that Patmore should have amassed a secret library of exotic pornography.²²

Patmore's public ideals of the Virgin and the virginal feminine enjoyed wide acceptance and popularity with Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The apparent equivalence of the "angel in the house" image of wifely and maternal perfection, and the Virgin Mary, is also suggested in the unselfconscious way that non-Catholics might use the soubriquet "Madonna" for women. Ideas of moral beauty and desired physical characteristics were blended together in an image of the Madonna which eradicated any suggestion of dark "alien" strangeness and transformed her into the "typical English Rose". The French philosopher and observer of English manners, Hippolyte Taine, described the type in the 1860s: "The fair maiden — lowered eyes, blushing cheeks, purer than a Raphael Madonna, a kind of Eve incapable of a Fall, whose voice is music, adorable in her candour, gentleness and kindness; one is moved to lower one's eyes respectfully in her presence ... the perfect flower of England".²³

George Eliot, a "pagan" and therefore incapable of understanding true holiness in Hopkins's opinion (*F.L.*, p. 18, 1865), nevertheless had "no difficulty in accepting the Madonna as a figure of ideal womanhood", and in her novel *Felix Holt* (1866) the troubled hero "draws comfort from the beauty of his beloved, looking up at her quite calmly, 'very much as a reverential Protestant might look at a picture of the Virgin,

with a devoutness suggested by the type rather than by the image: an inspiring beauty who makes a great task easier to men".²⁴ Eliot came to realize that such images did not always make life easier for *women*, however, and confessed that the perfections of her character Romola ("The Visible Madonna") made her feel painfully inadequate: "You are right in saying Romola is ideal, I feel it acutely in the reproof my own soul is constantly getting from the image it has made. My own books scourge me".²⁵

Eliot's softly radiant Romola is indeed a paragon with lovely "hazel eyes" and rippling golden hair. But most arresting is the visibly transfiguring effect of Romola's "pity and affection", the "deepest fount of feeling within her", which finds its "outlet through her eyes" and transforms her to "the most lovable womanliness".²⁶ The strongly suggested likeness of Romola to Raphael's Sistine Madonna reflects Eliot's admiration and close study of the teachings of Auguste Comte, the "extraordinary early-nineteenth-century founder of sociology, Positivism and the religion of Humanity".²⁷ Comte saw the Blessed Virgin Mary as the embodiment of "the beautiful mystic reconciliation of purity with maternity"²⁸ and took Raphael's famous picture of the soft-featured, brown-eyed Virgin as the iconic representation of womanly perfection and the most important symbol of Positivist worship.

With her partner, George Lewes, who actually addressed her as "Madonna", George Eliot visited Dresden to see the original painting of the Sistine Madonna and was profoundly affected by its power to move and inspire; Eliot records "a certain awe, as if we were in the presence of some glorious being". Quiet "worship of the Madonna"²⁹ became the pattern of their six-week stay; quiet worship of the Madonna became the pattern of many of Eliot's books. Wright remarks on the frequency of the type of the Madonna in her novels: "'Paint us an angel", cries the narrator of *Adam Bede*, (I, p. 270) but 'paint us yet oftener a Madonna'. George Eliot's books are full of idealised portraits of suitable objects of worship. Arthur Donnithorne says of Dinah Morris, 'I could worship that woman', (*Adam Bede*, II, 275) while the Bede brothers literally meditate upon her virtues".³⁰ Seth even seems to learn patience and moral fortitude simply by contemplating her image in his imagination:

Dinah had never been more constantly present with him than in this scene, where everything was unlike her. He saw her all the more vividly after looking at the thoughtless faces and

gay-coloured dresses of the young women — just as one feels the beauty and the greatness of a pictured Madonna the more, when it has been for a moment screened by a vulgar head in a bonnet. But this presence of Dinah in his mind helped him to bear the better with his mother's mood.

(*Adam Bede*, I, 423-4)

Whether as rods for their own backs or (more often) to keep the "other" in line, writers and artists continued to produce variations on the perfect type. Dante Gabriel Rossetti produced his vision of inspirational female beauty in "Dante's Dream", but Hopkins staunchly championed Raphael's Madonna against the "vulgar head" of Rossetti's Beatrice:

Noel Paton is quoted as saying, with goodnatured gush, that ["Dante's Dream"] may be ranked with the Madonna di San Sisto. Now, you know, it may *not*, and I am considering whether I shall tell Hall Caine so.

(*L*, 1, p. 170, 1883, Hopkins's emphasis)

Setting aside the quality of painterly technique, Hopkins is justified in objecting to a comparison of the two pictures insofar as they are presumably meant to represent examples of beatific and spiritually transcendent female beauty. Beautiful they may be, but spirituality fares poorly in Rossetti's decadent image of a solidly fleshed and opulently draped Beatrice on her deathbed.³¹ Dante's unlikely model is the sombre exotic Janey Morris, a woman crowned with the heavy coiling hair that is the "Belle Dame Sans Merci's net of entrapment".³² The dark langour, voluptuous fleshliness and serpentine grace of the recumbent Janey Morris exudes the sepulchral allure of the *femme fatale*. Dante's dream in this decadent context is rendered as a shaded vision of Proserpine and the underworld, not Beatrice and the clean light of heaven.

Comparable extremes of vision are quickly found and there are few attempts to circumvent the stereotypes of feminine perfection and feminine menace. Thackeray describes the slimy reptilian coils of his deadly "mermaid", Becky Sharp, with disgusted prurience, but produces her shining antithesis in Lady Esmond: "pure as an angel" and looking "with her child more beautiful ... than the Madonna in the Queen's Chapel".³³ Swinburne obeys his decadent muse and re-fashions Mary as an eroticized idol of perversity, flaying his soul at the feet of Dolores, "Our Lady of Pain", in a blasphemous parody of Marian worship. Emile Zola, who creates Nana as the embodiment of sexual seductiveness and then destroys her for being so, has his

priest, Father Mouret, turn to Mary as the only woman he dares to look at "without fear of responding to the soft curve of her light-brown hair".³⁴ Zola's Virgin Mother represents the the purity and innocence of a pre-pubescent child, or that perennial symbol of what woman ought to be: a flower, who releases the male from the "filthiness" of thought and touch which is the curse of adulthood:

I want never to be anything but a child walking in the shadow of your dress. When I was very small, I folded my hands to say the name of Mary. My cradle was white, my body was white, all my thoughts were white. I saw you distinctly, I heard you call me, I went to you in a smile of rose petals. And nothing else. I did not feel, I did not think, I lived barely enough to be a flower at your feet. Men should not grow up. Only blond heads should surround you, only a race of children love you, their hands pure, their lips healthy, their limbs tender, without dirt ... Only a child can say your name without making it dirty.³⁵

Made all the more terrible by comparison with paragons such as Zola's Virgin Mother, was the image of the worst of monsters and the most damaging *femme fatale* : "that deformity of nature—that most fatal and mysterious form of evil—a *bad mother!*";³³ The apotheosis of woman into Madonna was clearly favoured by the *zeitgeist* and the image of the saintly "good mother" was elevated as the perfect form of woman. In *Women of England* (1837), her popular book on the "moral duty" of women to try to bring about this impossible metamorphosis, Sarah Ellis codified "an ideal of womanhood as a quasi-redemptive agency that operated almost entirely within the sphere of maternity and domestic life".³⁷

Owen Meredith favoured the "quasi-redemptive" strain of ideology advocated by Ellis and stressed the inspirational power of the Madonna-like woman who is herself so blessed with self-restraint and modesty that she can spare enough of these virtues to "redeem" her man. She lives according to the belief, expressed here in Meredith's best-selling verse novel, *Lucile*, that it is women's "mission" to act as housekeepers and nurses to men's souls:

... to watch and to wait,
to renew, to redeem, and to regenerate.
The mission of woman on earth! to give birth
To the mercy of Heaven descending on earth.
The mission of woman: permitted to bruise
The head of the serpent, and sweetly infuse,
Through the sorrow and sin of earth's register'd curse,
The blessing which mitigates all.³⁸

Meredith's view of women as intercessory creatures, hovering between heaven and hearth and acting as dispensers of divine grace, is clearly modelled on the role of the Virgin Mary as Mediatrix of all Graces. John Ruskin's ambitious gender profile further illustrates the view that women should fit the Marian mould by acting as extraordinarily virtuous and utterly selfless handmaidens. Woman, opined Ruskin, must be "enduringly, incorruptibly, good; instinctively, infallibly wise", her wisdom should be untainted by "insolent and loveless pride", not employed in the pursuit of personal power or self-development, but directed towards "self-renunciation" and an "infinitely applicable ... modesty of service".³⁹ Ruskin very clearly preferred Mary's modesty of service to what he called "the modern type of independent womanhood", and in *Fors Clavigera* champions the maternal ideal that she epitomizes against the "wild" libertarian ideas of John Stuart Mill, and the "contempt" of "British Protestants".⁴⁰ Ruskin's invocation of the Madonna was meant to inspire women to follow her in modest submissiveness, but for the artist, of any religious persuasion, she seems to function as supreme muse: "All beautiful fiction is of the Madonna, whether the Virgin of Athens or of Judah ... And all foul fiction is *lèse majesté* to the Madonna and to womanhood".⁴¹

Because of her inspirational and maternal qualities, Trudgill suggests that one of the greatest attractions of Roman Catholicism for converts was the emphasis it gave to the Virgin Mother and that this attraction "was often less doctrinal than psychological".⁴² Geoffrey Ashe broadens the argument with his suggestion that the Virgin has "an allure of her own, because of the abiding need for a female power, for the Goddess in fact, whom a rigidly male Trinity excluded". Before the rise of any "verified gods, human beings did indeed worship goddesses", more precisely "they worshipped The Goddess: in Goethe's phrase, the *Ewig-Weibliche* or Eternal Womanly".⁴³ Ashe also states that "heretical attempts to improve the Trinity by changing the sex of its Third Person, the Holy Spirit, had not been successful".⁴⁴ We have glimpsed Hopkins's "heretical" evocation of the tender embrace of an apparently *maternal* Holy Spirit in his poem "God's Grandeur" but whether heretical or not, it is certain that Hopkins was not alone of all his sex or of his religion in

craving the promise of safe refuge and comfort that such tender images extend.⁴⁵ It is also certain that the ardent promotion of a maternal paradigm indicates a deep dissatisfaction with the real and that the very fervour "with which motherhood is celebrated in this period makes plain the role of the ideal as a response to a wealth of adversarial forces".⁴⁶

Chief among the negative forces which made the elevation of the Madonna figure almost a psychological necessity may well have been the suspicion, latent in the evolutionary theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Charles Lyell, nurtured by Darwin and fanned to paranoia by Tennyson,⁴⁷ that culture's "most powerful icon of maternity: the very conception of nature as Mother Nature" was a deceiving mask which hid a pitiless and terrible reality.⁴⁸ The mother goddess had not only disproved Wordsworth's faith by betraying "the heart that loved her", but worse, *had* never cared, and *would* never care for any of her progeny. Even Protestant Wordsworth had found in Mary an "exalted representative" of human nature at its highest level, and called her "our tainted nature's solitary boast".⁴⁹ Such inspiration and confidence in the divine mother became more essential to those in the later years of the nineteenth century who found themselves spiritually orphaned yet still subject to the vicious whim of cruel Nature. Mother Nature had become that most "evil" thing, a "bad mother", who could no longer even be vilified as "unnatural" for she stood as the matrix of everything natural and she had been revisioned as a monstrous fanged harpy.

As Adams suggests, the archetypal doubleness of the feminine (and hence of Nature) clearly informs Carlyle's description of the Sphinx and may have suggested Tennyson's famous image of "Nature, red in tooth and claw":

Nature, like the Sphinx, is of womanly celestial loveliness and tenderness: the face and bosom of a goddess, but ending in claws and the body of a lioness. There is in her a celestial beauty ... but there is also a darkness, a ferocity, fatality, which are infernal ... Answer her riddle, it is well with thee. Answer it not, pass on regarding it not, it will answer itself; the solution is a thing of teeth and claws.⁵⁰

Carlyle's image of the female loudly echoes the fears of woman's "hidden monstrosity" that bedevil Western culture. Because her face remains lovely and bespeaks tenderness (however falsely), it is unlikely that her fangs are immediately visible and Carlyle's emphasis on the hidden lower parts of the body suggests that

her body actually ends in claws and *teeth*. Nature's hellish metamorphosis from nurturant mother to *femme fatale* is thus fully complete when she symbolizes predatory bestiality and a bloodied and omnivorous *vagina dentata*. Even this horrific view seems preferable to the prospect of life without *any* maternal "being" or conscious agency, however, and Darwin was perhaps less ready to relinquish the archetype of a tenderly mothering Nature than Tennyson, for he finds (or constructs) consolation in the "fact" of the female's innate disposition towards tenderness and motherhood:

Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness [sic]; and this holds good even with savages ... Woman, owing to her maternal instincts, displays these qualities towards her infants in an eminent degree; therefore it is likely that she would extend them towards her fellow creatures. Man is the rival of other men; he delights in competition, and this leads to ambition which passes easily into selfishness.⁵¹

Tenderness of any kind is utterly absent in Tennyson's viraginous personification of Nature, who speaks with the voice of demonic nihilism in her "shrieking" denouncement of love and the Law of the Father:

LV

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life;

....

LVI

"So careful of the type?" but no.
From scarpèd cliff and quarried stone
She cries, "A thousand types are gone:
I care for nothing, all shall go.

"Thou makest thine appeal to me:
I bring to life, I bring to death:
The spirit does but mean the breath:
I know no more." And he, shall he,

Man, her last work, who seemed so fair,
Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
Who rolled the psalm to wintry skies,
Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,

Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation's final law —

Though Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shrieked against his creed —

Who loved, who suffered countless ills,
Who battled for the True, the Just,
Be blown about the desert dust,
Or sealed within the iron hills?

....
O life as futile then, as frail!
O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
What hope of answer, or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil.
(*In Memoriam*)

Tennyson's barren spiritual desert of silent "wintry skies" is closely paralleled by Hopkins's nightmare vision of spiritual vacuity in his "Nondum" (1866): "God, though to Thee our psalm we raise / No answering voice comes from the skies... / Our prayer seems lost in desert ways, / Our hymn in the vast silence dies". Both poems dramatize the confrontation with what Hopkins calls "being's dread and vacant maze", and, as Norman MacKenzie observes, seem to echo the "inexpressibly depressing and desolate conviction" of nineteenth century Positivists like John Grote. Hopkins had taken notes (*J*, p. 530) from Grote's *Exploratio Philosophica* (Cambridge, 1865) in which the author states that we delude ourselves when we "humanize the universe, recognize intelligence in it, ... think it has any concern with us".⁵² Ostensibly, Hopkins and Tennyson seem to be appalled by the apparent disappearance of God and the consequent sterile indifference of the universe. But both men engage most intensely with their infant-selves through images of lonely crying children, whose most immediate desire is for the loving embrace of the absent or indifferent *mother*. Mother Nature has betrayed Tennyson's child-like faith and abandoned him to "doubt and fear ... an infant crying in the night" (*In Memoriam*, section 54). Hopkins also weeps alone in "blackest night",⁵³ calling on two agencies: Patience and God, to comfort him *specifically* as a mother soothes and comforts her child:

Oh! till Thou givest that sense beyond,
To show that Thou art, and near,
Let patience with her chastening wand
Dispel the doubt and dry the tear;
And lead me child-like by the hand
If still in darkness not in fear.

Speak! whisper to my watching heart
 One word — as when a mother speaks
 Soft, when she sees her infant start,
 Till dimpled joy steals o'er its cheeks.
 Then, to behold Thee as Thou art,
 I'll wait till morn eternal breaks.
 ("Nondum")

The oblique suggestion of Hopkins's poem is that the Father's absence can be borne but life is insupportable without the gentle care of the Mother. The overt suggestion of Tennyson's work is, as T.S. Eliot remarks, that Nature "becomes a real god or goddess, perhaps more real, at moments, to Tennyson, than God".⁵⁴ The feet of the goddess were not even of clay, but had been exposed as the bloody and taloned extremities of the harpy. For many like Tennyson, the greatest image of maternal solicitude had crashed to a hostile earth, yet the desire to believe in a maternal archetype remained. The psychic pressures of the times demanded an image of woman incapable of treachery, cruelty or lust, and this may have caused even non-Catholics to look with less bigoted eyes on the Virgin Mary herself. The shift was probably most enabled by the work and influence of two men: Cardinal John Henry Newman and Frederick William Faber, two of the greatest Catholic writers of the age.

Newman was the priest who actually received Hopkins into the Church of Rome and Hopkins's affection and admiration for the older man was roseate with the glow of hero-worship.⁵⁵ Hopkins especially admired Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, and told his friend Edward Bond that "The justice and candour and gravity and rightness of mind is what is so beautiful in all he writes" (*L*, 3, p. 58, 1873). However, Newman refused what was probably an over-enthusiastic offer on Hopkins's part to write a commentary on the *Grammar of Assent* because he thought the task "onerous and unnecessary" (*F.L.*, p. 412, 1883). Hopkins never met Faber, who was regarded by some as "the Marcel Proust of Catholic spirituality". Hopkins seemed not to share this high opinion and mentions Faber only glancingly in his letters ("The Lake School expires in Keble and Faber and Newman", *L*, 2, p. 99, 1881). The nearest Hopkins came to a literary judgement on Faber was to suggest that Richard Watson Dixon had a greater "command" of pathos (*L*, p. 54, 1881). Whether or not he was an admirer, Hopkins would have been very familiar with Faber's work for he was a

popular choice of reading in the refectory at Roehampton; Faber's *Creator and Creature, The Foot of the Cross; or, the Sorrows of Mary,* and *Spiritual Conference* "were read for several weeks at a time" and his many devotional works venerating the Virgin Mary became nationally popular.⁵⁶ Faber preached and promoted Mary's cause with a passionate intensity that may have caused the more circumspect Newman to tremble with anxious embarrassment. Recognizing, or indeed responding, to a deep emotional need for a feminine aspect to religion, Faber went so far as to blame the low state of Roman Catholicism in England on the fact that the image of the Virgin Mary ("mamma", as he fondly called her), was kept neglected and unseen:

Here in England, Mary is not half enough preached. Devotion to her is low and thin and poor. It is frightened out of its wits by the sneers of heresy. It is always invoking human respect and carnal prudence, wishing to make Mary so little of a Mary, that Protestants may feel at ease about her ... Hence it is that Jesus is not loved, that heretics are not converted ... that souls which might be saints, wither and dwindle ... Jesus is obscured because Mary is kept in the background. Thousands of souls perish because Mary is withheld from them.⁵⁷

Before their conversion, Newman had been Faber's spiritual guide and felt it necessary to prohibit him from invoking Mary, the Saints and the Angels in his prayers. Though still an Anglican, Faber felt "pain ... in not speaking to the Blessed Mother of God" and felt "weakened for the want of it".⁵⁸ Faber was actively drawn to the Catholic Church because it answered his deep need for a feminine object of veneration. Conversely, in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Newman admits that "Roman Catholic Mariolatry was his chief motive for *hesitation* in abandoning the stern patriarchal embrace of Anglicanism".⁵⁹ As often, the issue had as much to do with chauvinism as with doctrine, and the excesses of Mariolatry (as they were perceived) seemed to be encouraged by over-effusive foreigners like Gentili and Liguori. St. Alfonso Liguori (d. 1787) had in fact tried to "blunt the erotic edge" of traditional images of Mary as Queen of Heaven and as the young betrothed bride of God, by stressing Joseph's joy on being reunited with his wife after her "triumphant entry into heaven". Liguori does however go on to say that Mary was "crowned Queen of Heaven by the Trinity: The Father ... by imparting his power to her, the Son, his wisdom, the Holy Ghost his love".⁶⁰ Newman read Liguori's works with something like disgust:

it must be observed that the writings of St. Alfonso ... prejudice me as much against the Roman Church as anything else, on account of what was called their 'Mariolatry'.... Such passages as are found in the works of Italian authors [are] not acceptable to every part of the Catholic world. Such devotional manifestations in honour of our Lady had been my great *crux* as regards Catholicism; I say frankly, I do not fully enter them now; I trust I do not love her the less, because I cannot enter into them. They may be fully explained and defended; but sentiment and taste do not run with logic: they are suitable for Italy, but they are not suitable for England.... The idea of the Blessed Virgin was as it were *magnified* in the Church of Rome.⁶¹

Frederick Faber appears to have been afflicted with the kind of unmanly "grovelling heart" and "undisciplined imagination" that Newman despised in Liguori and believed would lead to idolatry and superstition. Faber had a winning way with words, nonetheless, and as an "influence for the self-confidence and advance of Catholic practice in the difficult conditions of Victorian England ... his writings were of quite outstanding importance". Faber's most popular book, *All for Jesus* ("it sounds like a trumpet and penetrates like a fire") was published in 1853 and had sold 100,000 copies by 1869.⁶²

Faber was a gifted enthusiast who appealed to the emotional needs of ordinary men and women, and may be regarded as "the guiding spirit of Victorian popular Catholicism".⁶³ Newman was a brilliant scholar and apologist who undoubtedly revered and respected Mary, but lacked Faber's "feminine" effusiveness and emotional abandon, and always insisted on a scrupulous distinction between adoration and veneration. Newman was a notable champion of Mary's cause nonetheless, for he defended her prerogatives against Dr. Pusey's *Eirenicon*—a work so called "for its enthusiasm for reunion with Rome" but delivered "as if from a catapult" and mainly attacking Romish idolatry in the form of exaggerated Marian pietism.⁶⁴ Newman's crushing response, his *Letter to Pusey* (1865), showed him to be "more English than the English" and therefore unlikely to countenance any corrupt "foreign" extravagances of goddess-worship. Newman appealed to scriptural history rather than emotion, logic rather than mysticism, set patristic law over matriarchal magic, and won the day.

Newman's victory in the national debate could well have helped to win the heart and mind of Hopkins himself, for like many others of the time he had followed

the controversy with intense interest and may finally have lost his faith in Pusey and Anglicanism as a result:

Dr. Pusey and Dr. Liddon were the only two men in the world who could avail to detain me [from becoming a Catholic]: the fact that they were Anglicans kept me one, for arguments for the Church of England I had long ago felt there were none that would hold water, and when that influence gave way everything was gone.... Dr. Pusey I revere most of all men in the world, but being pressed to explain how with all his learning and genius he did not become a Catholic, I said he had a confusion of mind which ... I called 'puzzle-headed' ... It has been said by friendly people of his *Eirenicon* and one who was wholly devoted to Dr. Pusey said the same thing and more strongly.
(*F.L.*, pp. 94, 99, 1866)

Newman's defence of Mary centres on "two great facts, Mary's Divine Maternity and her Spiritual Maternity" and he identifies her with "the woman clothed with the sun" in the twelfth chapter of Revelations:

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet ... And she being with child cried, travailing in birth.... And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.
(Rev. 12: 1-5)

As the Great Mother in this heavenly triad, Mary joins with the Son in rewriting the story of the Fall. As the New Eve she gives birth to light, not disobedience and death, and shares the Son's triumph over the primeval serpent. The grandeur of these images clothes Mary in a majesty that perfectly corresponds with her title of Queen of Heaven. But as with her secular cultural counterparts she must never usurp masculine power or privilege. One of the arguments in Pusey's *Eirenicon* that most irked Newman was that some Catholics (including Faber) had put Mary before Christ: "At every instant Jesus seems to be replaced by his Mother; graces are asked of her directly, which can be granted by God alone".⁶⁵ Newman felt "grief and almost anger" at any evidence of blasphemous Mariolatry and made Mary's eternally subordinate position clear: "Mary has shown herself, not the rival, but the minister of her Son; she has protected Him, as in his infancy, so in the whole history of the religion".⁶⁶

As a handmaid who ministers to her Son and her Lord, Mary exemplifies the subservient nature of woman's role and though magnificently exalted should *never* be lifted to the same level as Christ. In the view of Hopkins's beloved philosopher, Duns

Scotus, she is created to fulfil her role as a "fully worthy instrument for the accomplishment of the Incarnation";⁶⁷ she cannot therefore be worshipped as a great goddess armed with independent powers. As St. Bernard of Clairvaux suggests, her honours are all bestowed upon her and her greatest virtue is humility: "How sublime is this humility, which is incapable of yielding to the weight of honours, or of being rendered proud by them! The Mother of God is chosen, and she declares herself His handmaid".⁶⁸

In the Catholic Church of the nineteenth century, the broader issues of the Woman question informed and fed controversy over the role and status of Mary in the Divine plan. Christian faith could not exist without worship of Christ, but there certainly were Christians who regarded Mary as an essentially ordinary woman without supernatural immunity from sin or sex, pain or death. The myths, legends and mysteries that blossom so luxuriantly round Mary's image are rooted in a distant and largely invisible past, but in the nineteenth century the Pope chose to reify and encode certain theories and beliefs that placed Mary absolutely apart from the human race. Mary was first given the official title *Aeiparthenos* (ever-virgin) in 451. This acknowledged that Mary was a virgin before, during and after the birth of Christ and thus that Mary was not merely the bearer of a miraculous child but was herself miraculously protected from the physical effects of childbirth. Mary's perpetual virginity became a dogma of the Church in 649, but the centuries-old movement to shift Mary ever further from the natural order won a further victory for transcendence on December 8th 1854, when Pope Pius IX, in his Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, proclaimed the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ. By her exceptional freedom from original sin, Mary is "set apart from the human race in a special and separate transhuman category.... The lesson of the doctrine is that the ideal cannot be incarnate in a creature who is like everyone else".⁶⁹ Hopkins responded most profoundly to Mary's miraculous capacity to hold together the most extreme psychological and physiological contradictions. Most remarkably, she offered him and the world a "focus for the steeliest asceticism" while remaining the "ultimate of fertility symbols".⁷⁰ Through her image and example, female fertility could be

extolled and approved, but the free enjoyment of sexual activity that for some would seem to be its natural concomitant was excluded and outlawed.

Kate Millett states that one of the more remarkable accomplishments of the nineteenth century "consisted in its ability both to initiate and, ultimately, to withstand the inception of a sexual revolution, commonly known as the feminist movement".⁷¹ The Pope's definition of female perfection may not have been meant as a *specific* (though impossible) answer to the Woman question, but the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity and absolute sinlessness nevertheless appeared to throw all other women "back into the status of the first Eve" and essentially reinforced "the universality of women's low-caste status".⁷² The "closed gate" (Ezek. 44:2) of Mary's virgin womb had been sealed forever, but for detractors of women, Eve and Eve's daughters would continue to represent an ever-open "devil's gateway".⁷³

Hopkins was moved more by passionate conviction than by fact, when he claimed that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception "was known and believed by almost all Catholics long before", though he admitted that even in 1854 there were "a small number ... still disputing against it" (*S*, p. 45, 1879). Any renegade Catholics bold enough to voice dissent were effectively silenced in 1870 when Pope Pius IX further proclaimed papal infallibility a dogma of the Church. What the Pope said of Mary's sinlessness and perpetual virginity may simply have set a special seal on beliefs and ideas that had been "in the air" for centuries, but his insistence on Mary's stainless virgin perfection may have helped to enshrine the damagingly dualistic view of women that is characteristic of Victorian culture. In the next chapter we will examine the particular prominence and personality that Mary acquires in Hopkins's prose writings. There is no "formal synthesis" of Hopkins's Marian philosophy. What he has to say of her "is scattered loosely in his letters, sermons and devotional writings",⁷⁴ but from these we may consider how Hopkins's image (or images) of Mary reflect on his times, his psychological needs, and his expectations of actual women.

[NOTES]

- ¹ *The New Eve* (London: Newman Press, 1952), p. 76.
- ² White, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 143.
- ³ This letter is undated and was probably written for Hopkins by a relative (possibly his mother's sister, Anne): see note 1. *F.L.*, p. 68.
- ⁴ *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England, Addressed to the Brothers of the Oratory in the Summer of 1851*, new edn. (London [n.pub.], 1892), p. 269; quoted in Edward Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 205.
- ⁵ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 204.
- ⁶ See Jay, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain*, pp. 45-46.
- ⁷ Hopkins recognized the anachronistic tendency in Tennyson: "He shd. have called them *Charades from the Middle Ages* (dedicated to H. R. H. etc.)", *L*, 2, p. 24, 1879.
- ⁸ *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* (London [n.pub.], 1965), p. 31; quoted in Norman, *The Catholic Church*, p. 18.
- ⁹ *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome* (London [n.pub.] 1948); quoted *ibid.*, p. 18.
- ¹⁰ Sheridan Gilley, *Newman and his Age* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), p. 32.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² William Elfe Taylor, *Popery: Its Character and Its Crimes* (London [n.pub.], 1847), p. 327; quoted *ibid.*, p. 19.
- ¹³ E.S. Purcell, *The Life of Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Westminster* (London [n.pub.], 1895, II, p. 286; quoted *ibid.*, p. 24.
- ¹⁴ "The Dignity and Right of Labour", in *Miscellanies* (London [n.pub.], 1877), II, p. 97; quoted *ibid.*, p. 281.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 281.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 228.
- ¹⁷ E.S. Purcell, *The Life and Letters of Ambrose Phillips de Lisle* (London [n.pub.], 1900)I, p. 107; quoted *ibid.*, p. 209.
- ¹⁸ Ambrose Phillips de Lisle, I, p. 237; quoted *ibid.*, p. 210.
- ¹⁹ *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 45.
- ²⁰ *Idols of Perversity*, p. 17.
- ²¹ Frederick Page, *Patmore: A Study in Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 142.
- ²² *Madonnas and Magdalens*, p. 134.
- ²³ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 258.
- ²⁴ *Felix Holt* (II, 39), quoted *ibid.*, p. 262.
- ²⁵ *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. G. S. Haight, 9 vols, (London: New Haven, 1954 and 1978) IV, 103-4; quoted *ibid.*, p. 264.

- ²⁶ *Romola* (London: J.M. Dent, Everyman's Library, 1940), p. 48.
- ²⁷ Terence Wright, "Comte's Madonna and George Eliot: The Humanisation of a Symbol", in *Le Symbole religieux et l'imaginaire dans la littérature Anglaise*, edited by Solange Dayras, (Paris: Université Paris-Nord, 1987), pp. 266-273 (p. 266).
- ²⁸ *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau, 2 vols, (London [n.pub.], 1853), II, p. 290; quoted *ibid.*, p. 267.
- ²⁹ George Eliot, *Letters*, II, 471-2.
- ³⁰ Wright, "Comte's Madonna and George Eliot", p. 271.
- ³¹ See Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 97.
- ³² *Sexual Personae*, p. 491.
- ³³ *Esmond*, p. 140, quoted in *Madonnas and Magdalens*, p. 257.
- ³⁴ *The Sin of Father Mouret*, trans. Sandy Petrey, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 94-95; quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 189.
- ³⁵ *The Sin of Father Mouret*, p. 96; quoted *ibid.*
- ³⁶ Mrs Marsh, *Emilia Wyndham*, II, 30; quoted in *Madonnas and Magdalens*, p. 256.
- ³⁷ "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw", p. 9.
- ³⁸ Meredith, quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 14.
- ³⁹ "Of Queen's Gardens", § 69.
- ⁴⁰ *Works*, vol. 27, pp. 208-9.
- ⁴¹ *Works*, vol. 34, p. 371.
- ⁴² *Madonnas and Magdalens*, p. 260.
- ⁴³ *The Virgin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 10.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- ⁴⁵ For a full discussion of the concept of God as mother, see Leonardo Boff *The Maternal Face of God*.
- ⁴⁶ "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw", p. 9.
- ⁴⁷ See Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, on the cultural assimilation and preponderance of "Darwinian" ideas, before and beyond Darwin's own work.
- ⁴⁸ "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw", p. 9.
- ⁴⁹ Quoted in *The Virgin*, p. 228.
- ⁵⁰ Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, ed. Richard D. Altick (New York: New York University Press, 1977), p. 13; quoted in "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw", p. 8.
- ⁵¹ *The Descent of Man*, pp. 857-858.
- ⁵² *Exploratio Philosophica*, Pt. 1, repr. 1900, p. 15; quoted in MacKenzie, *Poems*, p. 289.
- ⁵³ Norman MacKenzie has noted the likeness of the crying selves in "Nondum" and *In Memoriam*:

see *Poems*, p. 289.

⁵⁴ "In Memoriam", *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1976), p. 335; quoted in "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw", p. 14.

⁵⁵ See G.F. Lahey, "Hopkins and Newman", *The Commonweal*, XII (June 25, 1930), 211-213.

⁵⁶ Paul J. Barry, *Mary in Hopkins' Writings and Life* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1970), p. 7.

⁵⁷ Bowden, *Life and Letters of F.W. Faber*, vol. 1, p. 219; quoted *ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Woman and the Demon*, p. 236

⁶⁰ St. Alphonsus de Ligouri, *The Glories of Mary*, trans. anon. (Baltimore and Dublin [n.pub.], 1962), pp. 95-6; quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 132.

⁶¹ *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 177-178.

⁶² Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 234.

⁶³ Sheridan Gilley, "Vulgar Piety and the Brompton Oratory, 1850-1860", *Durham University Journal*, XLIII (1981), p. 15; quoted *ibid.*, p. 232.

⁶⁴ Gilley, *Newman and His Age*, p. 339.

⁶⁵ Friedel, *The Mariology of Cardinal Newman*, p. 112; quoted in *Mary in Hopkins' Writings and Life*, p. 37.

⁶⁶ Ian Kerr, *John Henry Newman: a Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 586.

⁶⁷ *Mary in Hopkins' Writings and Life*, p. 36.

⁶⁸ St. Bernard, *Sermons*, ed. J. Mabillon (London [n.pub.], 1896), 3: 342; quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 177.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁷¹ "The Debate over Women: Ruskin versus Mill", *Victorian Studies*, 14 (Sept. 1970) 63-82 (p. 1); see also Elizabeth Helzinger, Robin Lauterbach Sheets, and William Vader, *The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837-1883*, 3 vols. (New York: Garland, 1983).

⁷² Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), p. 81f.

⁷³ Tertullian, *Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works*, trans. Rudolph Arbesman, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, S.J., (New York [n.pub.], 1959); quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 58.

⁷⁴ *Mary in Hopkins' Writings and Life*, p. x.

The Virgin Mary in Hopkins's Philosophy and Prose

She had no peer
Either in our first mother or in all women
Who were to come. But alone of all her sex
She pleased the Lord.
*Caelius Sedulius*¹

Thirty years after Hopkins's death, Robert Bridges saw fit to criticize the "exaggerated Marianism" of some of his poems.² Had he ventured to do so while Hopkins lived, Bridges might have been briskly informed that it was in fact impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Mother of God, for "when all is said heart cannot think her greatness, tongue cannot tell her praise", (*S*, p. 30, 1879). Moreover, such an unequivocal response would have been entirely fitting from a Jesuit priest, because "among all religious orders there is none that serves and honours the Queen of Heaven more ... ardently than the Jesuits".³ As Paul J. Barry points out, St. Ignatius associated Mary with the society of Jesus from its very foundation. To be Christ's knight was also to be Mary's knight.⁴

John Pick notes this especial allegiance and attributes Hopkins's love for the Virgin Mary to the formative and ineradicable influence of his Jesuit training. By teaching the exercitant to construct imaginative scenes comparable in intensity to our present-day notion of "virtual reality", the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola enabled and encouraged a deeply felt personal relationship with the members of the Holy family.⁵ Hopkins was particularly adept at this process of "making real" and insisted that the "true object" of the "composition of place" exercise was "to make the Exercitant present in spirit at the scenes, persons, etc. so that they can really act on him and he on them".⁶ To achieve this dynamic mental encounter and interchange, Hopkins combines textural detail, historical and geographical verisimilitude with a deeply empathic response. Christ and his mother, Mary, are thus neither static iconic figures nor shadowy theoretical abstractions, but intimately known and "dearest" friends (*L*, 1, p. 188-9, 1883).

Although Pick identifies the luminous strand of Hopkins's Marianism in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", (Hopkins's first proper and most importantly inspired Jesuit poem) and is undoubtedly right in saying that his Ignatian training intensified Hopkins's awareness of Mary's importance in the Divine plan, it is evident that the Jesuits were preaching to the already converted and that he had already fallen at her feet. Even before his reception into the Catholic Church, Hopkins's conspicuous display of devotion to the Virgin Mary had astonished at least one of his collegiate peers:

Before his reception by Newman, he used to invoke the Saints and became full of devotion to the Mother of Our Lord. This would astonish me, for nobody else I knew 'went so far'. But he always had a fund of good sense and modesty.⁷

More startling even than this was the theatrical religiosity of Hopkins's Oxford friend, Digby Dolben (the "mad monk") who took to dressing like a mendicant friar and would ostentatiously read "Romish Popish and Idolatrous books".⁸ Dolben shared Hopkins's passion for poetry, and his ardent religious "leanings toward Rome" may well have "incarnated Hopkins's suppressed spiritual inclinations".⁹ Above all other poets, Dolben admired the work of the arch-Marianist, Faber, and imitated him in a style displaying a "combination of fulsome religiosity and an improbable sincerity that nearly keeps the overblown imagery from being meretricious".¹⁰

Because of Dolben's avidly romantic interest in "the paraphernalia of a complicated ecclesiasticism", Henry James suspected that he had a deeper interest in gorgeous costume and ritual than in the true substance of religion.¹¹ Nevertheless, it was under Dolben's heady influence that Hopkins embraced the feminine dimension of Roman Catholicism with flamboyant ceremony — setting up a statue of Mary in his college rooms and abasing himself before it to kiss the floor beneath her feet every morning.¹² It is quite possible that Dolben's religious posturings were largely factitious, but Hopkins was always deeply in earnest. For the very reason that he was always in flight from the "sordidness" and "trivialness" of the ordinary human condition, it seems inevitable that he should idealize in Mary the consummate beauty, grace and purity that life seemed to lack.

The extravagant display of Hopkins's youthful Mariolatry is perforce

tempered in later years, but he continued to revere her as a woman totally unlike any other. When preaching a celebratory sermon on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ineffabilis Deus*, Hopkins described to his listeners how the Pope had been so "deeply affected as he read the decree that ... his handkerchief was wet through with his tears" (S, p. 43, 1879). What had seemed so moving and so beautiful to the Pope and to Hopkins was the idea that Mary was predestined to be "conceived without spot" and was never in original sin, that she was completely different from all other human beings because

she never, even for one moment of her being, was by God held guilty of the Fall; and that this grace was granted beforehand.... So that the Blessed Virgin was saved and redeemed by her son not less but more, for she was saved from even falling.... All others but Mary, even the holiest have fallen at least in Adam, St. Joseph and St. John the Baptist so fell; her privilege has been granted to none but her.
(S, p. 43, 1879)

The logic in one sense is clear: Christ the perfect man should be born of a perfect woman, but this inevitably raises the genealogical conundrum of infinite regression, for if Mary is perfect then her parents must have been born without original sin, and their parents before them, and so on back to Adam and Eve, the original sinners. As Newman suggests, applying "paper logic" to such mysteries is to ignore their emotional power and validity,¹³ though it is disturbing to realize that these ingenious formulations may spring from a fundamental wish to separate Mary from full humanity, and that her elevation to supernatural status can have a correspondingly adverse effect on the standing of ordinary women. Hopkins's veneration depends upon her uniqueness and for this reason it is difficult to regard his admiration for the Virgin Mary as an intensification or focussing of his regard for women in general. The ideal that the Virgin Mary represents is absolute and unattainable and may even threaten to drive her adherents "into a position of acknowledged and hopeless yearning and inferiority".¹⁴

Feelings of inferiority are not necessarily specific to one gender, however, and Hopkins was intimately acquainted with the pains of failure and inadequacy, but he yet adored the miraculous and was most captivated by the most supernatural doctrines of the Catholic Church. In an age when the supernatural economy of ideas was contested

by sceptics and empiricists, miracles were considered unfashionable and dogmatic theology was often viewed with suspicion and even repugnance,¹⁵ Hopkins showed himself to be a "natural" Catholic and a true follower of Newman. Newman's own position was made clear in 1849 when he argued that Catholic faith brooked no dalliance with woolly-minded indeterminacy or hollow symbolism and spelt out the real difference between Catholics and Protestants:

Mere Protestants have seldom any real perception of the doctrine of God and man in one Person. They speak in dreamy, shadowy ways of Christ's divinity, but when their meaning is sifted, you will find them very slow to commit themselves to any statement sufficient to express the Catholic dogma ... they will speak of Christ, not simply and consistently as God, but as a being made up of God and man, partly one and partly the other, or between both, or as a man inhabited by a special divine presence.... They cannot bear to have it said except as a figure or mode of speaking, that God had a human body or that God suffered.¹⁶

For Hopkins, as for Newman, the Holy Trinity, the Nativity and the Incarnation, were not abstract "equation[s] in theology" or the "dull algebra of schoolmen", but related directly to life, and to believers gave news of "their dearest friend or friends". Hopkins echoes Newman's words and certainties in his declaration that sceptics like Bridges could not feel the same "ecstasy of interest" in such doctrines because they were attracted by uncertainty and a mystery that had been formulated could have no hold on their minds. "To the Protestant", Hopkins informed Bridges, "Christ is in some sense God, in some sense he is not God and the interest is in the uncertainty", but to the Catholic, "Christ is in every sense God and in every sense man, and the interest is in the locked and inseparable combination" (*L*, 1, pp. 188-9, 1883).

Mary's locked and inseparable combination of virginity and maternity therefore represents one of the mysterious doctrinal truths that sets Hopkins's mind "on the quiver", and in one of his earliest sermons he praises her as a dream incarnate of unity, existing at the calm centre where absolute virginity and universal motherhood, total humility and breathtaking exaltation, are made true in one woman (*S*, p. 29, 1879). Mary easily encompasses all such oppositions in the generous embrace of her powers, but she cannot heal, indeed for some she stands as a symbol of, the crucial division that the Church appears to drive between sexuality and moral goodness.

Hopkins innocently adds to this subtly divisive process when he emphasizes and embellishes further aspects of Mary's perfection which are less generally accepted. He follows conventional Catholic doctrine in believing her to be entirely without sin, but edges towards heterodoxy by claiming that as a "further privilege" she "was never even tempted" and if she had been tempted "she would not have fallen any more than Christ her son fell when he was tempted" (*S*, p. 44, 1879).¹⁷ Even more than Hopkins's other exemplary heroines, Mary is clearly excluded from the Miltonic premise that virtue is something that must be tested in the arena if it is to be true: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary".¹⁸

In a later age, Hopkins and Ruskin firmly take up the standard of Milton's combative image of virtue, but even setting aside their implicit identification with St. George in the moral imperative of "dragon-slaying", Ruskin's philosophy is expressed in such aggressively masculine terms that even the conventional personification of virtue as "she" would seem markedly inappropriate in the final "assault" on the Citadel: we "are intended, as long as we live, to be in a state of intense moral effort.... Our full energies are to be given to the soul's work—to the great fight with the Dragon—the taking of the kingdom of heaven by force".¹⁹ As we have seen, Hopkins celebrates the lonely courage of men, like his alter-ego St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, who are caught up in the same solitary war as himself, but he follows Newman in setting Mary far apart from the heat of battle: "the highest graces of [her] soul ... matured in private, and without those fierce trials to which many are exposed in order [sic] to their sanctification".²⁰ The possibility of Mary even having a sinful thought, far less her responding to its secret solicitations, jars fiercely against the ideal of serene womanly purity that Hopkins and Newman seem to demand.

By stressing that she "does all the good she possibly can" and acts up "to all the graces God gave her" Hopkins tries to emphasize the fact that Mary is not a "mere nondescript", resting at a standstill, that (he says) we would be if freed of even the smallest desire to sin (*S*, p. 44, 1879). But his pronouncements cannot altogether avoid leaving an impression of marmoreal imperturbability which can actually make

Mary seem less humanly vulnerable than Christ, for although Christ did not sin he did at least know what it was to be tempted. Mary can still be capable of intense feeling, however, and Hopkins answers the mystery of how Mary can die when not subject to the curse of original sin, by suggesting that she *chose* to die for love of her son and in imitation of his sacrifice:

Now since the Blessed Virgin was saved from the guilt of original sin and even from its first great consequence one might have thought that God would have saved her also from so great an evil as death ... And perhaps he would have kept her from it if she had so wished, but her son had undergone it ... and she could but wish to be like him. So she died, but not by violence, sickness, or even age, but as, it is said, of vehement love and longing for God. From sickness indeed she was, like her son, always free.
(*S*, pp. 44-5, 1879)

Hopkins's idealized vision of Mary as a beautiful martyr to passionate love follows Francis de Sales in emphasizing her overwhelming emotion. De Sales suggests that Mary suffered such an intense desire to be with her son that she died from the pain of her longing for Christ:

this love assaulted her so many times, her heart leapt so many times, the wound became so inflamed that in the end it was impossible for her not to die of it.... O passion of love, O love of the passion".²¹

The ardour that Hopkins attributes to Mary helps to retrieve her humanity and yet also emphasizes her profound kinship with Christ, for in choosing to die for love she truly imitates her son and achieves a greatness of heart that more temperate versions of her death seem to deny. Toril Moi writes that the "two great archetypes of Christianity" are the "*ecstatic* and the *melancholic*".²² Mary, the mother of dualism, combines both: she is the "much proud maiden" of "The May Magnificat" who exults in her sublime maternity and yet is awed by her state of blessedness. She smiles in tender wonderment at her son, but her eyes are misted by sad reflectiveness; ultimately she is the *Mater Dolorosa*, the mother of tears and sorrow who expires in an ecstasy of love and pain. Suarez, an "official" Jesuit theologian, but disliked by Hopkins for his lack of "originality or brilliancy" ("you never remember a phrase of his", *L*, 2, p. 95, 1881), stated that Mary chose to give up her exemption from the grave out of "profound humility".²³ Hopkins would equally insist on Mary's humility but adds to it a positive and vital impulse of desire to be with, and like, her son.

Mary's exemption from the necessities of ageing and death means that even when she does choose to die she is not subject to decay or dissolution.²⁴ This doctrine, like that of the Immaculate Conception, appears to rest on the equivalence of death and sexuality. Because of her purity Mary is not condemned to the bodily corruption which is the legacy of sin and carnality and becomes the most perfect being after Jesus Christ. Yet her very uniqueness may offer a challenge to the idea that the Incarnation celebrates the union of flesh and spirit and affirms our physical nature as a gift of God and therefore worthy of love and respect. Indeed, the Church's insistence on the miraculous manner of Christ's conception and birth can seem to point to a profoundly antinatural bias. In the Augustinian view, however, what we "now call *nature* we have come to know only in a state of chronic disease" and it is the "pessimistic views of sexuality ... and human nature", especially of female nature, held by St Augustine and St. Paul which have "become the dominant influence on western Christianity ... and colour all western culture, Christian or not".²⁵

St. Paul was one of two men who had a particular influence on Hopkins's thinking on the world, the flesh and the devil; the other was the medieval theologian Duns Scotus. Hopkins felt his first "flush of enthusiasm" for Scotus in 1872 (*J*, p. 221, 1872) but had developed his admiration for St. Paul before his conversion, and was deeply impressed by Paul's proscriptive teachings on sexual morality. In his poem on the virgin martyr, St. Thecla, Hopkins describes how Thecla is so dazzled by Paul's persuasive rhetoric on "the lovely lot of continence" and the world-saving power of virgins, that she renounces the world for a life of suffering and celibacy. George Bernard Shaw attributed Paul's celibacy to his "terror of sex and terror of life",²⁶ and Paul's wish to free even married people of the "anxieties and obligations" that "plague" the marriage bed suggests that he thought all sexual relationships were by their nature a cause of grief. For many women, however, celibacy could at least offer relief from the ordeal and the dangers of constant childbearing. Paul's new beatitudes might appear restrictive but in some sense they were meant to release men and women from "external anxieties" so that they could prepare for the "age to come",

and the promised recompense, as it is recorded in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, was great:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are they who have kept the flesh pure, for they shall become a temple of God. Blessed are the continent, for to them God shall speak.... Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be well pleasing to God, and shall not lose the reward of their purity.²⁷

White records that Hopkins received many of his ideas on the Pauline code from the Rev. Henry Parry Liddon, when he was a student at Oxford. Liddon was a High Church don, famous for serving "Tea, Toast and Testament", who did not appear to make any distinction between "St. Paul and God, or between Paul's injunctions and his own". The message from Liddon was strict and unequivocal: fornication was "a sin against the body", marriage was only marginally better than fornication, and virginity was next to godliness.²⁸

The less ascetic teachings of Duns Scotus might at first appear to contradict Paul's antagonism to the flesh, for Scotus's theories of individuation seem to favour "intuition rather than ratiocination", and to urge us to value God's "real, particularized, creation"²⁹ in all its richly varied density and beauty. Scotus seems to offer freedom to find God, not through coldly abstract theorizing, but in "lovely eyes and limbs" and in the flesh and "features of men's faces" ("As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame"). In the case of Mary, however, Scotus is regarded as the most vehement defender of her spotless virginity and freedom from all sin. Although Mary's sinless purity is now an article of faith, her image of perfection has become reified through centuries of scriptural exegesis and debate. Ashe takes a typological view of the "evidence" and suggests that the "flawlessness" of the Beloved in the Song of Songs (4:7, 6:9) may be taken "as an inspired hint at the stainless Virgin". Thus the verse from the Song of Songs about the Beloved being "all beautiful without flaw may be read to this day, with Mary's name interpolated, over the entrance to the Lady Chapel in Westminster Cathedral".³⁰ But Marina Warner points out that, although the tradition of Mary's elevation is powerful and popular, "nothing in the New Testament refers to the absence of sin in the Virgin" and even Augustine had "enigmatic reservations" over the question of the Immaculate Conception:

of whom out of honour to the Lord I wish no question to be made where sins are treated of — for how do we know what mode of grace wholly to conquer sin may have been bestowed on her.³¹

Scotus (the "Marian doctor") countered all such reservations and was principal advocate of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which became dogma in Hopkins's lifetime after centuries of stormy debate. Hopkins praises him in his dedicatory poem "Duns Scotus's Oxford" for convincing French theologians of Mary's sinless and guiltless nature:

... these walls are what
He haunted who of all men most sways my spirits to peace;

Of realty the rarest-veinèd unraveller; a not
Rivalled insight, be rival Italy or Greece;
Who fired France for Mary without spot.

Hopkins's intense admiration of Scotus, is equally evident in his words to his Bedford Leigh congregation on the subject of the Immaculate Conception:

It is a comfort to think that the greatest of the divines and doctors of the Church who have spoken and written in favour of this truth came from England: between 500 and 600 years ago he was sent to Paris to dispute in its favour. The disputation or debate was held in public and someone who was there says that this wise and happy man by his answers broke the objections brought against him as Samson broke the thongs and withies with which his enemies tried to bind him.
(*S*, p. 45, 1879)

Scotus may not have been quite such an unequivocal advocate of Mary's sinless origins, as Hopkins seems to believe, however, for in a special study of Duns Scotus, Father M. Roschini concludes that he "appreciated the weight of contrary arguments" and "hesitated to come out in favour of the Immaculate Conception and merely admitted a certain probability thereof". Further, the "account of Scotus' alleged dispute at the University of Paris had its origin in a sermon by an unknown Franciscan about 1430".³² Now, as in previous centuries, Scotus champions the truth of the faithful heart's affections against reductive empiricism and scepticism. What Hopkins most needed to find in Scotus was corroboration of his own heart's wish for a mother undefiled by sin or sexuality, the antithesis in fact and deed of the "grimy" dam of "Il Mystico".

Scotus's major theory on the Incarnation counters the sordid nature of being but marks the crux of his divergence from other theologians and philosophers. He contends that the Incarnation was not dependent on the Fall, that the world was made for Christ and that Christ would have come to live amongst us, lovingly and without suffering, *whether or not* Adam and Eve had sinned. James Finn Cotter warns that the place of Christ's Mother in the "preexistent universe" that such a scheme implies may be "incongruent and pious daydreaming"³³ and has still not been officially defined as a dogma of the Catholic faith, but because Hopkins believed that the Incarnation was not dependent on the Fall *and* that Mary was predestined to be the sinless mother of Christ, he credits her with an existence independent of worldly time. Thus Mary stands as the nonpareil of feminine meekness and self-effacement yet also achieves cosmic magnitude in her manifestation as the sun-robed Woman of the Apocalypse:

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

And his tail drew the third part of the stars of the heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

And she brought forth a man child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

(Revelation 11:1-5)

The woman clothed with the sun is often interpreted as a symbol of the Church of God; Newman allows her to be both,³⁴ but Hopkins does not seem to leave open even the possibility of symbolism and takes his explanation from Scotus, the "unraveller" of mysteries: "I suppose the vision of the pregnant woman to have been no mere vision but the real fetching, presentment, or 'adduction' of the persons, Christ and Mary, themselves" (*S*, p. 200, 1881). Providing a gloss on this difficult passage, Christopher Devlin explains "adduction" as a term used by Duns Scotus in a treatise to prove that the same body can be in more than one place at the same time. Hopkins believed that Christ and Mary were really present to the angels (the stars of the heaven) and to Satan (the dragon) before the Fall.³⁵ Because Mary and Christ have a

fleshly ("flesh being the name for a condition of matter", *S*, p. 171, ca 1885) but pre-human existence in heaven, the actual birth of Christ at Bethlehem is part of a continuum, an epiphanic moment in a story begun long before.³⁶ If Adam had not fallen, Hopkins writes

Christ and his mother would not have been born among his descendants. But as the Blessed Virgin, who bore Christ in the flesh without birthpangs, is with great birthpangs the mother of all men in the spirit, so she would then have been their mother in the spirit but without sorrow. She would have been mother of man but not daughter of man and Christ would have been Son of Mary but not 'Son of Man,'
(*S*, p. 170, 1881)

The difference that this makes to Hopkins's view of the world is profound and far reaching, for if one believes, as Hopkins did, that Christ's descent into creation was planned as "an act of love ... a sacrifice of joy and adoration, which only incidentally ... became one also of sorrow and reparation",³⁷ it becomes very difficult to see the Fall as anything less than a wholly unmitigated and needless tragedy: the "sacrifice might have been unbloody; by the Fall it became a bloody one" (*S*, p. 257, 1884). Hopkins states that Christ's sacrifice is made infinitely greater because made in blood: "as bloodred is richer than white and bloodshed costlier than to heave a sigh" (*S*, p. 170, 1881). But the terrible consequence of such a view for women is that they may become even further implicated in a crime that can never be fully expiated.

The Scotist view encourages us to believe that the physical, material world is worthy of love because it was created specifically for Christ, but it damns Eve and her daughters, and the sensuality they are supposed to embody, to an even hotter perdition. This "selfish woman" (*S*, p. 66, 1880), as Hopkins refers to Eve, carries the burden of blame for every bad thing and even for death itself. It seems then inevitable that as Eve falls lower, Mary must be lifted further into the heavens to float free of time and mortality.

A measureless gulf of sorrow and loss separates the world that might have been from the world that is, and a comparable distance seems to lie between Mary's flawless nature and that of her fallible human daughters. Hopkins urges us to make her the pattern of our moral life, nevertheless, for she embodies the essential virtues of femininity: purity and humility. These, Hopkins says, are the "great virtues" that

pleased God and are the virtues that "we too may see in her and please him by copying" (*S*, p. 45, 1879):

How beautiful is purity! All admire it, at least in others. The most wicked profligate man would wish his mother to have been pure, his wife, sisters, daughters to be pure. And in men it is honoured as in women: the man that this same profligate knows he can trust where he himself could not himself be trusted he cannot but deeply honour.... And for this virtue the Blessed Virgin became the mother of God.
(*S*, p. 46, 1879)

There is an unconscious tang of Wildean irony in Hopkins's statement that all admire purity, "at least in others". A more accurate comment on his society's gender distinctions might have read: "all admire purity, at least in women", and even in his attempt to spread the creed of chastity equally between the sexes, Hopkins's argument betrays subtle distinctions and bias. Men are cast in the active role as judges of purity and bestowers of honour, while women are defined by their familial or spousal relationship to men. Although he praises "purity" in both sexes, his phrasing tends to suggest that purity in the male is the reflection of "gentlemanly conduct", of honourable dealings with other men, of trustworthiness; it is ethical rather than sexual. Physical chastity is undoubtedly integral to Hopkins's ideal of manliness but it is not all. Even the grossest libertine would "naturally wish" that his womenfolk were sexually continent but it is doubtful that a promiscuous woman could legitimately cherish the same hope. Hopkins found sexual excess repellent in either sex, but as in the case of drunkenness (which itself leads inevitably to "all incontinence and impurity", *S*, p. 42, 1879),³⁸ he found the idea of a woman behaving in a bestial fashion almost too horrible to express:

Drunkenness is shameful, it makes the man a beast ... they stagger and fall ... their faces grow blotched and bloated ... it defiles and dishonours the fresh blooming roses of youth ... it corrupts the child unborn ... It is ugly in man, but in woman it is hideous beyond what words can say.
(*S*, p. 42, 1879)

Here again, Hopkins appears to reserve his particular condemnation for the "hideous" outlaw female, whose bad behaviour reaches as far beyond the language of insult, as Mary's perfect purity and humility reaches beyond the poetry of praise. The sexual double standard that underpins his argument was enshrined in law and science,

however; and as the *Saturday Review* put it, when commenting on the 1857 Divorce Act:

as long as society exists, incontinence on man's part will be compared with incontinence on woman's part ... as a matter of public policy. On ethical grounds it is the same in one case as the other: on social consideration, the adultery of the wife is, and always will be, a more serious matter than the infidelity of the husband.³⁹

Across the divide from the lower life-form of the fallen woman was the Marian "angel in the house", and we have seen how writers like Ruskin, Patmore and Meredith, hoped that woman in the role of moral nurse would help to tame and reform masculine bestiality. In his own life Hopkins could have no wife ("I like men to marry [because] a single life is a difficult, not altogether a natural life", *L*, 1, p. 194, 1884), but whether because of this or out of an excess of radical zeal, Hopkins expected men and boys to take responsibility for their own sexual behaviour. Moreover, he genuinely believed that men and boys should cherish their chastity and was "disgusted" by those, like the authors of an article in the *Saturday Review*, who did not share his opinion:

Everyone has some one fault he is tender to and vice he tolerates. We do this ourselves, but when another does it towards another vice not our own favourite (of tolerance, I do not say of commission) we are disgusted. The *Saturday Review* contrasting the Catholic and Protestant ideal of a schoolboy came out with the frank truth, that it looked on chastity as a feminine virtue (= lewdness a masculine one: it is not quite so raw as I put it, but this was the meaning).

(*F.L.*, p. 308, 1883)

Hopkins is typically dismissive of populist middle-ground morality and appears to admit only the extremes of sexual behaviour. Here he creates a saint / lecher, chaste / lewd, dichotomy for men which seems to spring from the same polarizing mode of thought which splits women off into madonnas and whores. The oppositions that exist in Hopkins's perceptions of human nature and morality are undeniably raw and uncompromising, but they are as much directed inwards as out. Hopkins's fierce insistence on the preservation of purity seems almost desperate and may be rooted in personal awareness of the pain that its destruction can bring, for if he tolerated no "middle-ground" in others, he was merciless on himself.

The Virgin Mary plays a vital role in the preservation of chastity for women but she is also the guardian of celibacy, especially of priests, and for men like Hopkins she must take the place of the domestic angel in the house. Her importance in such matters is proclaimed by the twelfth century poet Marbod of Rennes: "After the Lord, thou [Mary] art the hope of men whom the mind conscious of sin consumes—the mind which is foul through the contagion of Venus".⁴⁰ It is interesting to note Marbod's connection of dirt, disease and sexual lust, with the pernicious influence of a female deity. The Virgin Mary's spiritual function as a mediatrix of heavenly grace enables her to douse the flame of venery, even though many of the paintings and icons of the Virgin depict her as a very lovely woman. Passionate desire and passionate devotion are not necessarily antithetical, however, and the Virgin Mary has been created by artists and writers as a representative of an ideal of femininity which may actually make all other women seem foul and contagious. Unlike her sisters, Mary is never sick, never grows old, and, as Hopkins points out, keeps "her bodily frame perfect in beauty and health" (*S*, p. 45, 1879).

Because of the oppressively prohibitive view of sexuality that burdened Hopkins and his contemporaries, the love and admiration that Mary inspires must run an abstract course, however, for she is lauded as a figure who will disarm sinful desire. Hopkins's fellow writer and fellow Catholic, James Joyce, suggests that the Victorian Catholic male was encouraged to believe that *all* sexual desire was inherently sinful and describes how his young alter-ego Stephen Dedalus suffers the vilest horrors of hell on earth for his "wretched, wretched sin" of lust. Joyce's priest demonstrates how the Virgin Mary continued to be prescribed as a kind of antidote against the sin which "kills" both body and soul: "Pray to our mother Mary to help you.... Pray to Our Blessed Lady when that sin comes into your mind".⁴¹

It appears a sad commonplace that a young man of his time and class would believe that "unlawful" sexual desire, masturbation or simply exploring his own body could lead to eternal damnation, via blindness and insanity—a feeling not dispelled by the public spectre of syphilis and its effects, which offered "proof" that blindness and insanity *did* result from sex. Ignorance and morbid anxiety, as well as an

unremittingly prurient fascination over all aspects of sexuality, were tightly woven into the ideological fabric of the age,⁴² yet Hopkins was unusual in being a Jesuit and remarkable, even within that iron band of disciplinarians, for the extreme sensitivity of his conscience. Because of his compulsive self-scrutiny, Hopkins could not help but be aware of the dangers of magnifying the evil in his own soul to such an extent that he ran the risk of being utterly overwhelmed by it. The remedy for this and all other sins was the same: look to Mary and copy her ways:

There is a way of thinking of past sin such that the thought numbs and kills the heart ... It does not seem that we are to pray for this, but for that feeling which our Lady felt or would feel when sins were presented to her and shrunk from them instantaneously ... For [our Lord and the Virgin Mary] turn from sin by nature ... and finding it embodied with a thing they love find it infinitely piteous: 'O the pity of it!'
(*S*, p. 134, Sept. 1883)

In this extract from his spiritual notes, Hopkins again reveals how his ambition to be totally in command over his own nature, and the anguish of his inevitable failure, rebound painfully against the self. In this contest, the heart (representing the instinctual feminine element in the psyche) is robbed of its powers of feeling and response and is effectively "killed" by the merciless probings of the masculine super-ego. If he is to be able to love God, this is what he must avoid, for a dead heart cannot nurture the seeds of unlawful desire but neither can it spontaneously give love and glory to its maker.

Mary's response to sin is inherently different because she can only contemplate sin in others, never in herself. To Mary, "as to no other being, the sinful powers were alien and unknown, and had never had the chance to hold her in bondage",⁴³ therefore she cannot actively sin, only react to the signs of sin in others. Hopkins's particular allocation of verbs in the extract from his sermon is instructive and revealing: he "thinks", "numbs", and "kills", whereas Mary "shrinks", "pities", and "loves". Each embodies distinct and prime elements of the masculine and feminine principles, and the division of gender is clearly drawn. The image of Mary shrinking away from the sight or the idea of sin suggests that she reacts with a rather tremulous emotional sensitivity that seems to take her far from her own real time and further still from more robust medieval portrayals of her as a sensual, cheerful and

sturdy-limbed nursing mother. Instead, Hopkins may be dressing Mary to suit the pastel tints of the times, by endowing her with some of the delicacy that was admired as virtue in Victorian middle-class young women.

In either context, the pronounced tender-heartedness that makes Mary so admirable as a mediatory figure has been interpreted by some as a "natural" female characteristic and even as a reflection of woman's general inferiority. In 1858, Pierre Proudhon restated Schopenhauer's ideas on women's "lack of moral energy" and anticipated Freud's argument that women "must be regarded as having little sense of justice",⁴⁴ by remarking that woman is perfectly and naturally fashioned to act as a mediating influence, for "man tends more to insist on letting rigid, hard, pitiless justice prevail, while woman tends to reign by means of the heart ... the qualities of love, charity, pity, and grace, which bring woman's perfections to their highest point, also testify—from the point of pure justice—to her inferiority".⁴⁵ Ashe also feels that Mary's pity may be interpreted as a sign of weakness: "Her eyes of mercy are eyes of pity. But one result from the ordinary worshipper's viewpoint she can seem to condone *self*-pity, culpable weakness, ethical irresponsibility".⁴⁶ From the point of pure justice to the Mother of God, this is untenable, but as a reflection on the low status accorded to the ordinary woman and of the manner in which "feminine" emotions and responses are at once demanded of women and yet often despised, the pronouncements of Proudhon and Ashe are less easily dismissed.

Masculine ambivalence towards women is also encoded in Hopkins's rather incongruous choice of a quotation from Shakespeare's *Othello*, that most unjust of characters, to illustrate Mary's "pitying" response to sinners: "the pity of it, Iago! O! Iago, the pity of it" (*Othello*, 4, 2, ll. 205-6). Shakespeare's play pivots on male attitudes towards women and sexuality, and Othello's response is prompted by shock and pain at hearing of Desdemona's adultery. In just a few words, therefore, Hopkins manages to encapsulate the concepts of the totally pure Madonna and the (alleged) whore. The idea of sin is thus unconsciously linked with a specific female (Desdemona) and generically with the outlaw aspect of the feminine (sexuality). This juxtaposition is made more complex by the fact of Desdemona's innocence and by

Othello's subsequent murderous blood-lust ("I'll chop her into messes. Cuckold me!", *ibid.* 1. 210). But the implicit contrast between the notion of woman's inherent concupiscence, her "natural" inclination towards sexual excess, and the snowy purity of the Virgin Mary persists.

In writing his notes on the proper reaction to the remembrance of sins past, Hopkins seems to have realized that any form of excess, even of remorse, could be dangerous to the state of his sanity as well as his soul. Against the foul distillation of Hopkins's self-disgust, even the merest drop of pity seems fresh and sweet. His first step towards healing is to release his own repressed feminine qualities, to imitate Mary's role by acting as nurse and mother towards his own heart, and to copy Mary's ways by rejecting the sin but not the sinner:

so that we may pity ourselves in the same way, that such a thing as sin should ever have got hold of us. This pure pity and disavowal of our past selves is the state of mind of one whose sins are perfectly forgiven. But as long as we are not certain this is the case, which is always, as long as we have before God the status of penitents, which we should have till death, we must not wholly get rid of the shame of sin, for it is a part of the penance.
(*S*, pp. 134-5, 1883)

The first part of Hopkins's statement is positive and true to Catholic teaching on confession and repentance, but he then appears to destroy any confidence in forgiveness by his assumption of perpetual uncertainty. As Devlin points out, we *can* be "morally certain that the *guilt* of sin has been forgiven" by God, but Hopkins's "questionable" argument seems almost to demand that we should never fully forgive or pity ourselves (*S*, p. 287, n. 135). His sermon therefore begins by elevating the feminine values of pity and compassion but then reverts to the harsher, self-scourging impulse of asceticism. Hopkins adds a further element of paradox by his insistence on shame, regarded by Freud as a quintessentially female condition.⁴⁷

The tensions apparent here also provide an illuminating gloss on his poem "My own heart let me more have pity on", in which, having destroyed all sense of inner peace through the desperate urge to be absolute master of his own psyche, the speaker tries to learn the gentler Marian virtues of pity and charity ("the greatest" of the virtues, Cor. 13:13):

My own heart let me more have pity on; let
Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,

Charitable; not live this tormented mind
 With this tormented mind tormenting yet

...
 Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise
 You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile
 Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size ...
 ("My own heart let me more have pity on")

Daniel Harris believes that the context of pain in "My own heart let me more have pity on", is so secularized and "bereft of eschatological framework that its debate ... betrays no apprehension of the supernatural order at all".⁴⁸ I agree with Harris that the poem seems bitter in tone and offers only the hope of the future possibility of joy, and yet I cannot agree that it has somehow worked itself loose from the supernatural order. Such a nihilistic reading tends to ignore Hopkins's belief in the possibility of equivalence, of trying to create a better self by imitating virtue; the kind of imitation, as he exultantly claims in his devotional writings, which may become a rehearsal of reality when it is dedicated to God's service: "It is as if a man had said: That is Christ playing at me and me playing at Christ, only that is no play but truth; That is Christ *being me* and me being Christ" (S, p. 154, ca 1881, Hopkins's emphasis).

Christ is undoubtedly the prime symbol of love, and the word "charity" in the biblical and religious sense encompasses Christian love and benevolence, general love and good will, as well as traditional almsgiving,⁴⁹ but it is *mother-love* that Hopkins most strongly invokes in "My own heart let me more have pity on", and as he suggests in his sermon on the "pure pity" that Mary extends to penitents, it is Mary's charity that he needs to breed in his own soul. There are no explicit references either to Mary or St. Paul in Hopkins's poem, but by understanding and interpreting "charity" and "pity" within a broader textual and historical framework it becomes apparent that Hopkins's association of charity with Mary follows close on St. Paul's personification of the virtue as distinctly feminine. Paul does not mention Mary by name and there is no evidence to suggest that he even knew of the idea of the virgin birth,⁵⁰ yet it seems probable that Paul's ideal of "feminine" conduct may well have helped to shape subsequent images of Mary:

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
 Doth not *behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own*, is not easily provoked, *thinketh no evil*.
 (Cor. 13: 4-5, emphasis mine)

Certainly the modesty shown by Paul's paradigm is totally in accord with Hopkins's image of Mary, for "who can think of the Blessed Virgin and of vanity?" (*F.L.*, p. 308, 1883). With Mary as his model, the speaker of "My own heart let me more have pity on" attempts to break free of his cyclic compulsion to self-torture by sketching out the ideal of a new self. The image of the "jaded" masculine "Jackself", carries associations of arid joylessness ("all work and no play ... make Jack a dull boy") and low-life meanness of spirit (see "The Shepherd's Brow"), but the violent drama of his interior life is suggested in the idea of thoughts that have to be "called off" like a pack of savage hunting dogs. This past self is to be disavowed or at least to have its hierarchy of masculine and feminine elements substantially revised and re-evaluated, but this cannot be achieved without Mary's help.

In his spiritual notes, Hopkins writes that God chooses to give all grace indirectly and through Mary, as if "stooping and drawing it from her vessel, taking it down from her storehouse and cupboard" (*S*, pp. 29-30, 1879). Hopkins reinforces the nurturing and domesticated role of motherhood through his homely image of the water jar and the cupboard, but the metaphor also emphasizes her passive receptivity, for Mary has nothing of her own to give, except for her pity and love and the example of her purity. She retains her importance because of her role as a mediator and intercessor, but all active power belongs to the masculine triumvirate of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. In order to receive the communication of God's love (which is brought by the Holy Ghost) man has to become like Mary, or like woman, a passive vessel waiting to be filled:

The word Temple at first sight hides the thought ... that God rests in man as in a place, a *locus*, bed, vessel, expressly made to receive him as a jewel in a case hollowed to fit it, as the hand in the glove or the milk in the breast.
 (*S*, p. 195, 1881)

Hopkins is here explicating a passage from the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*.⁵¹ Ignatius follows St. Paul (Cor. 3:16) in describing the human body as a

temple, but Hopkins can only fully connect with the idea of God being within us when he replaces Loyola's coldly remote image of architectonic form with a clutch of increasingly feminine similes. The gender-based categories of penetrator and receptor are here presented as the model of relations between a masculine God and his "feminized" subjects. The divine contact described fills the recipient with an influx of the elevating grace necessary to bring about a dramatic change from "one cleave of being to another", it is, Hopkins says, "God's finger touching the very vein of personality, which nothing else can reach" (*S*, p. 158, ca 1883). This penetrative action enables the birth of a new self, nearer to Christ but also more "feminized" because the grace given is a "purifying and mortifying grace, bringing the victim to the altar and sacrificing it" (*ibid.*). Recognizing the spiritual truth that he must be more feminine in order to be more Christlike, Hopkins prays to his mother, Mary, in order to receive the grace which will enable him to bring his new self to birth. As Mary was, this new self will in turn be. Once filled with Christ like "the milk in the breast", the new self may be able to show true Marian charity and with a graceful turn of gender role will nurse itself with kindness.

Inevitably, Hopkins is unable to achieve the state of "pure pity" which characterizes Mary's response to those who sin and are sorry. Mary has the perfect attitude and Hopkins longs to share it, but the vital element in the life of the Virgin Mary that neither he nor anyone else can ever share is her total freedom from ordinary human weakness and vulnerability. Her very perfection can therefore act as an inspiration *and* a reproach, a source of comfort and a spring of grief.

The Bible endorses the virtue of virginity and the power of women's flesh to pollute in St. John's vision of the "new heaven", where special honour is given to the chosen virgins "which were not defiled with women" (Rev. 14:4). Only Christ, Origen writes, "entered into this world without defilement; in his mother he was not impure, he entered into a body that remained intact".⁵² The resilience and power of such ancient images affects the thinking of believers and non-believers alike. Writing in the year that Hopkins was born, Karl Marx was scathing about what he perceived as the insuperable contradiction of the virgin birth, but still pondered on whether it could

be possible for the Holy Spirit to "take up his abode in a body soiled by original sin". Marx is scarcely sympathetic to believers, but he recognizes and seems to acknowledge the need felt by "subjective man" to transcend the indivisible trinity of sin, sexuality and defilement, that culture has created and still sustains, with an opposing and idealized image of maternal purity. Even the most wicked non-believer, Hopkins might say, would wish his mother to have been pure:

The supernatural birth is not less welcome than the resurrection to all, namely to all believers; for the conception of Mary, not polluted by male sperm, which constitutes the contagium [contagious poison, *ansteckende Gift*] peculiar to original sin, was the first act of purification of mankind, soiled by sin, i.e. by Nature.⁵³

To be born of a woman in the ordinary way is a degradation: as Job says, "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" (Job 14:4). Despite the fact that her fame rests on giving birth to a child, Mary is therefore somehow detached from her own female flesh by commentators like John of Damascus: "in the fleshly part of her being Mary was wholly uncontaminated; her body was so totally under the spiritualizing influence of her soul that it seemed she possessed no body at all".⁵⁴ Ascetic etherealists like John would admit that Christ was born in a stable, but could not allow him or his mother to be seen to be too closely tethered to their animal selves.

When Scotus exalted the will over the intellect and struck a blow for faith in defiance of empirical reasoning in his defence of Mary's total purity, he may also have struck an unwitting blow against the matriarchal power that Mary is sometimes thought to represent. Because she is predestined to be the mother of Christ, Mary has an existence independent of worldly time. Mary and Christ have a fleshly, or at least, a material, pre-human existence in heaven (*S*, p. 171, ca 1885). Mary is thus greater than any other human being, yet for some this exaltation may actually detract from the wonder and achievement of her motherhood.

At the reductionist end of belief lies a demeaning image of Mary as a human incubator with no personal virtues or special exemption from sin or from death: "When she bore Christ within her womb, she was like a purse filled with gold. But after giving birth, she was no more than an empty purse".⁵⁵ In the supernatural order

envisaged by Scotus, Mary obviously ranks as much more than a mere vessel into which the spirit of God is poured, yet her alternative image as a powerful virgin matriarch who gives birth without the help of man is seriously diminished. Because she is brought into being before she descends to earth, Mary must first exist as an idea in the mind of God and is therefore the product of autonomous masculine creativity: like Christ, though infinitely inferior to him, she is the Word made flesh, originally conceived and delivered in and from the mind of God.

In one respect at least, Mary is then like all human beings in that she cannot claim the power of completely original and independent creation; yet Hopkins suggests that there are two ways in which we can attempt to imitate Mary's mothering of Christ *and* the divine act of intellectual parthenogenesis; one is spiritual and one is aesthetic.

The spiritual mode of creativity is stunningly dramatized in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", when Hopkins describes how the Tall Nun's vision allows her to give spiritual birth to Christ in her heart and brain:

Jesu, heart's light,
 Jesu, maid's son,
 What was the feast followed the night
 Thou hadst glory of this nun?—
 Feast of the one woman without stain.
 For so conceived, so to conceive thee is done;
 But here was heart-throe, birth of a brain,
 Word, that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright.
 ("The Wreck of the Deutschland", stanza 30).

This poem constitutes Hopkins's greatest poetic correlative of the "touching" interchange with the infinite that the Jesuit "composition of place" allows. The virgin nun who "conceives" and "gives birth" on the eve of The Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is clearly a "sister" of Mary herself, and follows a threefold process of spiritual conception, gestation and birth, familiar to all readers of the *Roman Breviary*:

Blessed too, were all who conceived that same Word spiritually, by the faith that comes from hearing, and who by their good works strove to bring it to birth and, as it were, to nourish it, in their own hearts and in the hearts of their fellow men.⁵⁶

Hopkins's "birth of a brain" is the poem itself, produced in the white-heat of aesthetic energy and meant to startle the lost sheep of England back into the Catholic fold by force majeure: "My verse is less to be read than heard ... it is oratorical" (*L*, 1, p. 46, 1877). As Hopkins's comment suggests, he attaches a consciously polemical and consciously public aspect to the poetic act, yet the production of "good works" (whether practical or artistic) can allow him to mimic the "private graces" and female generativity of the Virgin Mary and the Tall Nun. By nurturing Christ, the Word, in his heart and mind *and* by producing a poem alive with the spirit of God, Hopkins can play at being Mary and at being Christ. The poem may then act as a psycho-aesthetic tour de force, in which the poet can become "not only father and mother to the poem but also the 'Son' the ode exalts".⁵⁷

In the next chapter we will therefore examine the poem which treats most intimately of these ideas of renewal and rebirth, and offers hope of "mothering in both sexes":⁵⁸ "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe".

[NOTES]

¹ "Paschalis Carminis", Book II, ll. 68-9, *Sedulii Opera Omnia*, ed. John Huemer (Vienna, 1885); trans. Herbert Musurillo, S.J., in *Symbolism and the Christian Imagination* (Baltimore and Dublin, 1962), pp. 112-13; quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. xvii.

² Introduction to *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 1st edn., ed. Robert Bridges, (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918).

³ Pinard de la Boullaye, S.J., "Ignatian Spirituality", in Jean Gautier, ed., *Some Schools of Catholic Spirituality* (Tournai: Desclée Co., 1953), p. 236; quoted in *Mary in Hopkins' Writings and Life*, p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁵ *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Priest and Poet* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), p. 103.

⁶ Thomas, *Hopkins the Jesuit*, p. 178.

⁷ William Addis, quoted in G.F. Lahey, S.J., *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970 [reprint]), p. 19.

⁸ Martin, *A Very Private Life*, p. 84

⁹ White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 110.

¹⁰ Martin, *A Very Private Life*, p. 83.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

- ¹² White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 111.
- ¹³ *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ch. 4.
- ¹⁴ *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 337.
- ¹⁵ *Mary in Hopkins' Writings and Life*, pp. 14-15.
- ¹⁶ *Discourses to Mixed Congregations* (1849), (London: Longmans, Green, 1909, repr.), p. 345f.; quoted *ibid.*, p. 14.
- ¹⁷ Devlin regards this as "merely the private opinion of certain devout authors". See Notes to Sermons, *S*, p. 278.
- ¹⁸ *Areopagitica* (1644), in *John Milton: Complete English Poems, Of Education, Areopagitica*, ed. Gordon Campbell, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., Everyman's Library, 1990), p. 590.
- ¹⁹ *Works*, XXII, p. 344; quoted in Sulloway, *Hopkins and the Victorian Temper*, p. 122.
- ²⁰ *Public and Parochial Sermons*, in *Works* (London: Longmans, Green, 1907-8), 23: 136.
- ²¹ St. Francis de Sales, "Sermon on the Feast of the Assumption", 1602; quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 253.
- ²² *The Kristeva Reader: Julia Kristeva*, ed. Toril Moi, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 147.
- ²³ *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 253.
- ²⁴ The doctrine of Mary's Assumption was proclaimed dogma in 1950, when the Pope declared that Mary was taken up body and soul into heaven.
- ²⁵ *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, p. 150.
- ²⁶ "The Monstrous Imposition upon Jesus", reprinted in W. Meeks, ed., *The Writings of Saint Paul* (New York [n.pub.], 1972), pp. 296-302; quoted *ibid.*, p. 17.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- ²⁸ *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 63.
- ²⁹ Ong, *Hopkins, the self, and God*, p. 107.
- ³⁰ *The Virgin*, pp. 9, 209. It is interesting to note that William Addis recalls this of Hopkins: "I remember long arguments we had on the eternity of punishment and in a walk on Headington Hill he said, 'I never can believe that the Song of Solomon is more than an ordinary love song'. All changed after his first confession to Liddon". Quoted in Lahey, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 19.
- ³¹ *De Natura et Gratia*, ch. 36; Preuss, *Mariology*, p. 78; quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 238.
- ³² *Duns Scoto e l'Immacolata* (Rome [n.pub.], 1955); quoted in *Mary in Hopkins' Writings and Life*, p. x-xi.
- ³³ *Inscape: The Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), p. 131.
- ³⁴ See *Letter to Pusey*, in *The New Eve*, pp. 28-33.
- ³⁵ Devlin does not share Hopkins's view but warns that it would be "subjectivism on our part to regard the story as no more than a dramatic allegory of world history", *S*, p. 307.

³⁶ See E. Proffitt, *Hopkins Quarterly*, 7, 3 (1980), 97-100, on "Christ's sacrificial assumption of a created nature" in what Scotus (and Hopkins) call "angelic or aeonian time". Quoted in MacKenzie, *Poems*, p. 326.

³⁷ Devlin in *S*, p. 109.

³⁸ See Introduction to *S*, p. 10, on drunkenness in Liverpool in 1886.

³⁹ *Saturday Review* (1869); quoted in *The Worm in the Bud*, p. 169.

⁴⁰ "Stella Maris", *Penguin Book of Latin Verse*, pp. 189-90; *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 236.

⁴¹ *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (St. Albans: Triad/Panther, 1977), p. 133.

⁴² See Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment*, for a detailed treatment of sexual hypocrisy and the criminalization of desire since the Renaissance.

⁴³ John of Damascus quoted in *Virginitas*, p. 152.

⁴⁴ In Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, ed. *Freud on Women: A Reader* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), p. 361.

⁴⁵ *La Pornocratie, ou les Femmes dans les Temps Modernes*, pp. 38-39; quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 211.

⁴⁶ *The Virgin*, p. 228.

⁴⁷ "Lecture on Femininity", *Standard Edition*, XXII, p. 132.

⁴⁸ *Inspirations Unbidden: The Terrible Sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 94.

⁴⁹ For biblical interpretations of the word "charity" see Alexander Cruden, new and rev. edn, *Cruden's Complete Concordance To the Old and New Testaments* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1941), p. 84.

⁵⁰ *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*, Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, John Reumann, eds. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978), p. 43.

⁵¹ "A Contemplation to obtain Love", p. 209.

⁵² Commentary *In Leviticum*, XII, iv; quoted in *Virginitas*, p. 151.

⁵³ Marx, *Manuscripts of 1884*, vol. 3, 204a-5a; quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. J.P. Leavey, Jr, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1986), p. 17.

⁵⁴ John of Damascus quoted in *Virginitas*, p. 152.

⁵⁵ Mâle, *Religious Art*, p. 167; quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 251.

⁵⁶ Quoted Catherine Phillips, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 341.

⁵⁷ Moder, "Aspects of Androgyny..", p. 8.

⁵⁸ Sulloway, "Gerard Manley Hopkins and 'Women and Men' as 'Partners in the Mystery of Redemption'", p. 46.

*Inspiring Innocence: "The Blessed Virgin Compared to
the Air we Breathe"*

Man's main task in life is to give birth to himself.
*Erich Fromm*¹

Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
Gerard Manley Hopkins

"The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", the longest of his Marian poems, was written in the years when Hopkins complained of existing in a "wretched state of weakness and weariness ... incapable of reading or thinking to any effect" (*L*, 1, p. 168, 1883). That he wrote anything at *all* is somewhat miraculous, given that he had endured a "state of poetical incapacity" for "two or three years" which he feared would "probably be permanent" (*F. L.*, p. 344, 1883). Enfeebled and depressed, trapped in the "feminized" state of sterility he so loathed, Hopkins felt that his energies were "almost spent" (*L*, 1, p. 170, 1883) but still grasped at the hope of a cure for his creative impotence, quizzing Bridges on the efficacy of alternative techniques with anxious interest: "You speak of writing the sonnet in prose first. I read ... that Virgil wrote the Aeneid in prose. Do you often do so? Is it a good plan? If it is I will try it; it may help on my flagging ... powers" (*L*, 1, p. 170, 1883).

Despite the *poet's* confessed weakness, the mood of the *persona* in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" has been described as one of "supreme confidence".² It is unlikely that any prayer would (or should) be made in a mood of supreme confidence, however, and though there are points (see ll. 34-37; 73-85) when the speaker sounds assured and oratorical, his rhetorical swagger only partially masks what is ultimately a tender and personal prayer for Mary's unique inspiration and maternal protection.

Hopkins believed that Mary could function as a proactive muse, directly extending inspiring grace and help to those who wished to "write in her honour" (*F. L.*, p. 359, 1885). From the tone of his comments, however, it seems apparent that such particular inspiration did not come. Hopkins regarded the poem as an

aesthetic failure, being "in part a compromise with popular taste" and inevitably falling short of the magnitude of its given theme: "it is too true that the highest subjects are not those on which it is easy to reach one's highest" (*L*, 1, p. 179, 1883). The poem offers an instance of "succeeding by failure" nonetheless, and it may be for the very fact that Hopkins had restrained and smoothed his aggressively individualistic style that it was one of his earliest poems to be anthologized.³ In spite of its Catholic theme, Bridges said that it was "admirable" (*L*, 2, p. 110, 1883) and Coventry Patmore delighted in both its theme and style, and in an exchange of letters praised it (against the unpalatable "strangenesses" of "The Wreck of the Deutschland") as "exquisite" and "ambrosial" (*F. L.*, pp. 353-335, 1884). Patmore's epithets suggest a feminine delicacy and sweetness about the poem's sentiments and language which marks a forced deviation from the Anglo-Saxonized "native earth and real potato" style (*ibid.*) Hopkins sought to achieve elsewhere.

Because it is in small part a disquisition on the nature of light and eternity, (Hopkins had planned to write a "sort of popular account of Light and the Ether", *L*, 2, p. 139, 1886), "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" might seem to approach Shelleyan abstraction, but even in his elevated "ambrosial" mode Hopkins endeavours to make us touch the infinite sky and connect with the intangible, by rendering the blueness of sky as a richly palpable and *tactile* presence that wraps us in its radiant folds:

Again, look overhead
 How air is azurèd;
 O how! Nay do but stand
 Where you can lift your hand
 Skywards: rich, rich it laps
 Round the four fingergaps
 Yet such a sapphire-shot,
 Charged, steepèd sky will not stain light. Yea, mark you this:
 It does no prejudice.
 ("The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 73-82)

The poet does not strip his sleeve and expose the naked thew and sinew of "masculine" language here, as he does in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", but in that poem, Hopkins attempted to confront and grasp the uttermost extremes of terror and faith, and to look on the fury of God without flinching. Syntactical violence, and

language as powerful and texturally stressed as sprung steel, seem the essential and appropriate elements needed to word God in his most forbiddingly patriarchal manifestation as the Winter Lord of lightning fire and blinding hail. But Mary is the pacific antithesis of storm and exclusively epitomizes delicacy, feminine softness and nutritive care. The poem's baroque style and convoluted Latinate syntax therefore reflects the curvilinear feminine form of its subject,⁴ but Mary's freedom from the gross materiality of ordinary women is also emphasized in her suggested correspondence with sweet air and pure light. The metaphor of the Virgin's enveloping, but unrestricting presence is seamlessly extended as her blue robe "becomes" the all-encompassing blue sky and her gift of grace surrounds us like a softly lapping ocean of air.

Hopkins's sermon notes of October 1879 provide one of the clearest sources for the analogies drawn in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" between Mary as dispenser of divine grace and the sky above us:⁵

St. Bernard's saying, All grace given through Mary: this a mystery. Like blue sky, which for all its richness of colour does not stain sunlight, though smoke and red clouds do, so God's graces come to us unchanged but all through her. Moreover she gladdens the Catholic's heaven and when she is brightest so is the sun her sun: he that sees no blue sees no sun either, so with Protestants.
(*S*, p. 29, 1879)

Blue, the colour of limitless skies and calm sea, had always possessed an intense aesthetic resonance for Hopkins (*L*, 2, p. 38, 1880), and is traditionally regarded as Mary's colour. At St. Beuno's in Wales, where Hopkins spent his happiest years, the statue of the Virgin in the chapel wears a cornflower-blue sash and veil. St. Beuno's chapel also boasts a fine stained glass window, high over the altar, which portrays Mary wearing a robe gorgeously edged with bright gold and coloured like a perfect summer sky. The effect is of looking through clear glass into pure blue space.

Limitlessness, in the sense of eternity and boundless love, are the attributes necessary for Mary's universal motherhood, and the example of her unruffled serenity may also help to persuade ordinary women that passion and anger are ugly and "unfeminine": "A woman moved is like a fountain troubled, / Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty", *The Taming of the Shrew*, 5, 2, l. 143). As the sky mother,

whose exalted presence touches and permeates matter like air, but who appears not to be *of* matter, Mary represents the point where the masculine dream of transcendence and the feminine happily meet. The dragging degeneracy and cloacal darkness of the earth mother in "Il Mystico" is countered by Mary's weightless and pure embrace. The life of pure spirit and the aspirations of the ascendant male cannot be endangered by a mother whose "sexual purity confers sacramental immunity from the world of corruptive matter" and who lived "the life of pure spirit even while residing in the body".⁶

The long history of popular belief in Mary's unique spirituality is reflected in the second-century *Protovangelicum of James* which records that Mary "never touched the ground with her feet until she was presented at the temple at the age of three. Thereafter she received food at the hands of the angels".⁷ In Hopkins's own time there was a fashion for paintings of floating or "weightless women", which invites a less reverent and less touching interpretation. Feminine compliance and self-sacrificing dependence, as well as woman's link with nature, are famously projected in Millais's "Ophelia" (1851), where the feebly supine heroine waits passively for death, at one with the tangled confusion of flowers and foliage that frame her watery element. The airborne women in the paintings of Victorian painters like Walter Shirlaw ("Dawn", 1886), Edwin Howland Blashfield ("Sleep and Poetry", ca 1886), Jean-Louis Hamon ("Twilight", 1867), and William Adolphe Bougereau ("Twilight", 1882), form aerial alternatives to earthbound victims like Ophelia but do not escape her passivity.⁸ Weightless, beautiful and ethereal, they float through the air without volition because to walk "is to act, [it is] a way of taking charge". Woman's "weightlessness was a sign of her willing—or—helpless submission"⁹ and Dijkstra suggests that the image of the insubstantial floating woman allowed the male to remain uninvolved but "still permitted him to maintain his voyeur's distance from this creature that *was* nature, who both fascinated and frightened him".¹⁰

The Virgin Mary is of course the one woman who presents no sexual threat to the male. Contact with her can neither pollute nor consume, for Mary's purity means that unlike every other woman and every other mother, her flesh is not corrupted

with sin and therefore cannot stain anything that touches her or emanates from her. The boundaries of Mary's body have remained intact, thus making the equation of physical integrity with moral purity a literal fact. The inheritance we have from Eve is death, but whatever comes to us through Mary is pure and uncorrupted. Eve was sexual and open to the devil's persuasion but Mary is inviolate and inviolable. In the words of the thirteenth century jongleur Rutebeuf, Mary resembles a "glass-blue" sky in her unbroken virginity: "Just as the sun enters and passes back through a windowpane without piercing it, so were you *virgo intacta* when God ... made you his mother and lady".¹¹

Hopkins metaphysical speculations on grace and blue sky are intimately linked with his doctrinal studies and beliefs, but as his title indicates, it is the comparison of Mary with air that dominates the poem. In his private meditation notes, Hopkins describes man as a bag of foul air, corrupt and corrupting: "Are we his censer? we breathe stench and not sweetness" (*S*, p. 240, ca 1885). The remedy envisaged in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" is a form of spiritual "impregnation" which will fill out the receptive feminine soul with an inspiration of grace, resulting in the creation of a "new self and nobler me". The sacrificial cleansing essential before this new Christlike self can be born, appears to demand a willing submission to the life of stillness and patient suffering associated with fictional paradigms of Victorian womanhood. The necessary lesson in feminine virtue and holiness is taught by the Virgin Mary, who most exemplifies all in-law feminine virtues: "Stir in my ears, speak there ... Of patience, penance, prayer" ("The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 121-3).

Learning to listen is the first step in a process of purification which demands feminine receptivity, yet in terms of gender construction, it is at odds with the masculine empowerment of the speaker. The priest persona acts as a father to his flock but strives to give birth to a more Christ-like self, and in so doing to act like the virgin mother of the Lamb. The same speaker also actively directs and commands the focus and response of his audience thus: "I say that we are wound / With mercy round and round ... Nay, do but stand / Where you can lift your hand ...

Yea, mark you this". But he must play a passive feminine role by opening himself to the Word of God, transmitted through Mary as sound is transmitted by air. Sounds are "dynamic events, not just static qualities, and thus trespassers by nature". Whereas the eye is free to seek out and "catch" beauty ("I caught this morning morning's minion, king- / dom of daylight's dauphin", "The Windhover"), the ears cannot wander over "a field of possible percepts, already present as material for attention, but must wait for sound to strike them".¹²

The passivity of the feminine soul before the impregnating word of God has been interpreted by Church fathers like Origen to be analogous to the mystery of Mary's role in the conception of Christ. Origen mined the "multi-layered meanings of the word *logos*" and suggested that that the words of the angel carried the "seed" to Mary. This asexual interpretation of the Incarnation is made literal in the words of St. Ambrose: "Not from human seed but by the mystical breath of the Spirit was the Word of God made flesh and the fruit of the womb brought to maturity".¹³ These ideas are developed in later devotional interpretations, such as this from *Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary*: "Receive the word of the Lord, O Virgin Mary, which hath been sent thee by the angel; conceiving through the ear thou shalt bear God and Man".¹⁴

Sounds may be "masculine" trespassers by nature and therefore able to penetrate the consciousness without consent but, as Hopkins believed was the case with lustful thoughts, they can have little power or substance without the inward consent, the "pure Yes or No" of the passive recipient (*S*, p. 145, ca 1883). Mary is not shown initiating or encouraging action in any scriptural or poetic scenario, she simply submits to God's will with her *fiat*: "be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). But Hopkins valorizes free assent of the will as the root of all holiness; it is what he describes in his spiritual writings as "the saying Yes ... the 'doing agree'" (*S*, p. 154, ca 1881) to God's purpose, whatever suffering that may involve. The gladness of Mary's inward "Yes" from the moment of conception onwards is therefore made manifest when Mary accepts the role of perpetual motherhood with all her heart, soul and body:

... who not only
 Gave God's infinity
 Dwindled to infancy
 Welcome in womb and breast,
 Birth, milk, and all the rest
 But mothers each new grace
 That does now reach our race—
 ("The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 17-23).

Mary's readiness to suckle the infant Christ makes clear sense when viewed in the historical context of Christ's birth, but in the nineteenth century the image of Mary breast-feeding Christ had all but disappeared from the repertoire of Christian symbolism. Menstruation, painful childbirth and lactation, are traditionally supposed to be a part of the punishment meted out to women because of Eve's fall. The breast-feeding mother can therefore symbolize women's subjection to her biological destiny, but Mary does not share this physiological imperative. With the proclamation of her immaculate conception in 1854 it was no longer necessary or even accurate to show her in the very human, but to some minds, very "lowly" position of wet-nurse. Victorian prudery, together with a sentimentalized view of motherhood had made it necessary to cover-up the evidence of women's shameful "animal" functions. Women with aspirations to gentility were never seen breast-feeding their children, and servants were often employed specifically to take over the messy business of lactation.¹⁵

In his early career, Hopkins had preached at Farm Street Church, close to the rich London parish of Mayfair, and as Robert Bernard Martin suggests, it may well have been a flock of middle-class socialites who were shocked by the vulgar indelicacy of his "native earth and real potato" image of the Church as a "cow full of milk, with seven teats, the sacraments, through which grace flowed".¹⁶ Sensualism and ascetism are as nakedly confrontational in Hopkins's sermons as in his poetry and, along with his "sweetheart" sermon (*S*, p. 89, 1880), this was judged too earthy for polite consumption. Poems like "Tom's Garland" may seem to burst the bounds of linguistic eccentricity, yet on his own admission, Hopkins dearly liked "calling a spade a spade" and hated the contrivances and evasions of euphemism and "poetical" language. As a result, in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" he uses a bluntly phrased

suckling metaphor to emphasize the world's confusing duality and the shared origins of brute and saint, virgin and beast:

... Gertrude, lily, and Luther, are two of a town,
 Christ's lily, and beast of the waste wood:
 From life's dawn it is drawn down,
 Abel is Cain's brother and breasts they have sucked the same.
 ("The Wreck of the Deutschland", ll. 157-160)

Brother, breast and beast are alliteratively linked to show that lifegiving nurturance, and life-destroying passion all flow from the breasts of Eve, the mother of Cain and Abel, and the mother of death. Eve's milk may be soured with sin but Hopkins's attraction to breast imagery seems evident nonetheless. Freud has argued that the child's "first erotic object" is the female breast that nourishes it; pleasure and the satisfaction of desire surround the maternal breast in infancy, yet in adulthood the child within remains hungry, convinced that "however long it [was] fed at its mother's breast ... its feeding was too short and too little".¹⁷ White notes that amongst his fellow Jesuits "there was the constant sense that Hopkins was unmothered"¹⁸ and this may in part be reflected in his images of the breast and its nurturance. Natural beauty offers "milk to the mind" ("Ashboughs"); the Holy Ghost offers a warm breast and embracing wings ("God's Grandeur"); in "Rosa Mystica" the poet asks: "to thy breast, to thy rest ... / Draw me by charity, mother of mine"; he refers, in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", to the "breast of the Maiden": quiveringly sensitive and obedient to the slightest movement of God's will (ll. 245-6), and (earthy again) the heavy, low-hanging clouds of a "down-dugged" sky. Less maternal, but equally admirable is the muscular torso of a brave seaman with "dreadnought breast and braids of thew" (l. 125).

The linking themes of the most important images here are self-immolation and unselfish love (the sailor sacrifices his life in trying to save others), and in the case of the Tall Nun, virgin purity. These reflect the prime virtues of Mary and Christ who each elected to show their love through humility and submission. Christ chose to behave, in Hopkins's phrase, as a "slave" (*L*, 1, p. 174, 1883) and because Mary was moved to imitate Christ in everything, even to the final act of passionate death, it would be morally inconsistent if she did not also choose to act as a servant or

"handmaiden" in all lesser functions. Though she need not share the punishment or the destiny of other women, she would choose to come down to their level in the same spirit of humility as she chose to descend from heaven into "mortality and the world of corruption" (see *S*, p. 171, 1885). In "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", Mary provides a "nursing element" of grace which mysteriously nourishes and sustains the human soul in the same way as a mother's milk feeds her child. More than this, Hopkins claims her to be "the sweet alms self": she *is* the "nursing element" that she gives to her children. Mary suffers for us, she is the vessel into which we pour our pain and in return she is endlessly consumed. Newman praises her as God's "beautiful gift" whose spirit

is sweeter than honey, and her heritage than the honeycomb. They that eat her shall yet be hungry, and they that drink her shall still thirst. Whosoever hearkeneth to her shall not be confounded, and they that work by her shall not sin.¹⁹

Even more than Winefred, the well-spring of life-giving water, Mary is a paradigm of feminine self-sacrifice who nourishes her children freely, endlessly, and without stint. She is the nurturing breast which is never denied us.

Ordinary human beings are broken and dusty mirrors in which God's image is poorly glimpsed, or "worst of all, we misshape his face and make God's image hideous" (*S*, p. 240, ca 1885). Mary's perfect glass-blue sky reflects a pure and impossible image of what *Redemptoris Mater* calls the "self-offering totality of love".²⁰ She is meant to teach by example and in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" Hopkins explicitly invokes her as a moral educator who answers the need, expressed by Patmore and Ruskin, for a woman who will not only "cast her best [and] fling herself" down the gulf of man's "condoled necessities" ("The Angel in the House", Canto IX) but will leaven and refine his gross nature. Hopkins's language is indeed remarkably like that of Ruskin in "The Queen of the Air", a work on the powers and attributes of the mythical goddess Athena which may well have influenced Hopkins's poem.²¹ Ruskin maintains that a deep emotional need for a mother goddess links paganism with Mariolatry. On the Ancient Greeks, Ruskin writes: "The common people's [belief] was quite literal, simple, and happy: their idea of Athena was as clear as a good Roman Catholic peasant's idea of the

Madonna".²² There is nothing demotic, earthy or peasantlike about Ruskin's goddess, however, for she transcends what Hopkins disgustedly calls the "moral evil" of much mythology (*L*, 2, pp. 145-9, 1886), and is unequivocally placed in the "moral uses" category (*ibid.*). Athena's immense physical powers are combined with the educative influence of a superior moral governess who could as well have sprung fully armed from a Victorian schoolroom as from the head of Zeus:

physically, [Athena] is the queen of the air ... spiritually she is queen of the breath of man, first of the bodily breathing which is life to his blood ... and then of the mental breathing, or inspiration, which is his moral health and habitual wisdom; wisdom of conduct and of the heart, as opposed to wisdom of imagination and the brain; moral as distinct from intellectual; inspired as distinct from illuminated".²³

The "atmosphere" provided by Hopkins's Mary and the "ambient air" of Ruskin's Athena are redolent of the same *zeitgeist* and seem constituted to answer the same psychic needs. Both women exemplify the pattern of the dedicated and endlessly nurturing female, whose nature is resolutely "moral as distinct from intellectual" and who therefore rules, and is ruled by, the heart rather than the brain.²⁴

This distinction also helps to explain the seeming paradox in Hopkins's descriptions of Mary as "wild" ("wild web", "air wild"). Mary is wild only in as much as she is utterly without artifice or constraint and goes freely and naturally towards good. Hopkins turns to Mary when he wants help in curbing and educating his own nature into the ways of feminine submissiveness. The moral virtues of "patience, penance, prayer" have been practised by ascetics of both sexes for centuries but for many Victorians seemed especially appropriate to women. Hopkins lacked the natural inclination to behave "like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief", (*Twelfth Night*, 2, 4, ll. 111). Indeed, his poem, "Patience, hard thing", illustrates his temperamental aversion to the requirement that he should suffer and be still:

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.

Here Hopkins's "rebellious will" expresses the masculine imperative for resistance and action while at the same time begging to be forced into patient submission: "the

rebellious wills / of us we do bid God bend to him even so". The poem is at war with itself, and strikingly demonstrates the phenomenon of masochism, defined in 1886 by Richard Krafft-Ebing, as "the wish to suffer pain and be subjected to force". This phenomenon was judged to be a true "perversion" only in men. Women were "naturally" inclined to "servitude" and subordination.²⁵ The lesson, again, is best learnt from Mary, but the means are very different. In "Patience", Hopkins offers two forms of patience; one is the manifestation of tough endurance and fortitude (note that in this instance "Patience" takes the masculine pronoun), the other consists in serene and certain composure. In "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" we see only the feminine face of the virtue. In absolute contrast to the bruising masculine antagonist of "Patience", Hopkins invokes Mary as a soft, protective cushion against harm:

Whereas did air not make
This bath of blue and slake
His fire, the sun would shake,
A blear and blinding ball

...

Whose glory bare would blind
Or less would win man's mind.
Through her we may see him
Made sweeter, not made dim,
And her hand leaves his light
Sifted to suit our sight.

("The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 94-7)

Drawing on the long tradition of God's intolerably bright and blinding presence, but adding to it a hint of the choleric Victorian paterfamilias, Hopkins finds protection from His fury in the gentle mediating presence of his mother, who is made to seem even more comfortingly maternal and nurturant by the suggestion that she "sifts" light as a pastry cook might sift flour. Because of her presence the speaker apparently relegates the terrible threat posed by the "blinding" or symbolically castrating father to the Old Testament past ("So God was god of old"), but the speaker's relative safety is predicated on conformity and obedience to Mary's teaching. If he elects to share Mary's life in the sense of imitating her mothering role ("And men are meant to share / her life as life does air") then the poet-persona has

voluntarily chosen to become "feminized", thereby obviating his Father's anger.

To describe Hopkins's persona as "feminized" in this context, however, is far different from the state of agonizing sterility recorded elsewhere. Identification with Mary the "universal mother" can hardly presuppose infertility, but before he can hope to take on her role, he must control his aggressive and erotic impulses. Mary's part in this is vital:

And plays in grace her part
 About man's beating heart,
 Laying, like air's fine flood,
 The deathdance in his blood
 ("The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 51-53)

As we have seen in "St. Winefred's Well" and "To what Serves Mortal Beauty?", "dancing blood" signifies sexual arousal and carnality. Augustinian tradition regards subjection to the passions and lusts as punishment for original sin²⁶ and here Hopkins proclaims the synonymy of sex and death in his linguistic coupling of Chaucer's "olde daunce" of erotic passion and the allegorical Dance of Death. Hopkins has asked Mary to teach him penance, of which the major purpose is to atone for past sin and "to overcome oneself to the end that the sensual appetite may obey reason, and all the lower parts be more subject to the higher".²⁷ Because of original sin, concupiscence is innate and the subversive pressure of carnal and chthonic energies is constant and debilitating. Penance and prayer are therefore essential if the froward, carnal, assertive self is to be tamed and subjugated. To this end, Ignatius Loyola lists terrible methods of inflicting pain, but Hopkins selects a more subtle and individual penance by submitting his "froward eye" to Mary's control thus effecting a figurative version of Loyola's "restraint of the eyes"²⁸ and a repetition of his own youthful attempts to control his powerful drives.

In "Heaven-Haven", the walled enclosure of the cloister can be construed as an emblematic surrogate for the maternal womb. Here the desired state of bliss is explicitly imaged as one of complete enclosure in the "body" of the mother:

Be thou then, O thou dear
 Mother, my atmosphere;
 My happier world, wherein
 To wend and meet no sin;

Above me, round me lie
 Fronting my froward eye
 With sweet and scarless sky

...

Wound with thee, in thee isled,
 Fold home, fast fold thy child.

("The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 114-126)

Hopkins offers up his "froward" eye ("perverse", "refractory", "evilly-disposed", *OED*) as if offering up the sign of his masculinity and the sign of his sinfulness; having given up both, he hopes to reclaim childlike innocence. As a child in the womb feeds from its mother's blood, so Hopkins imagines here that he is breathing in Mary's pure substance. Like St. Teresa's God, the fish is in the sea and the sea is in the fish; the poet persona is "inside" Mary and Mary is inside him, carried like oxygen to every cell of his body.

By its nature, all choice must involve some degree of renunciation and loss, but the underthought of death in the convent cell of "Heaven-Haven" is countered in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" by an infinitely expanded image of the world itself havened in Mary's womb. The perfect choice envisaged is therefore not "the cloister or the world" but the whole world cloistered from sin.

Ephrem of Syria writes that Eve's sin had covered Adam in a shameful coat of animal skins but Mary has woven a new garment of salvation. Mary is the bright eye that illuminates the world, Eve is the other eye, "blind and dark".²⁹ Eve's moral incapacity and the hellish pit of her outlaw sexuality are implied in Ephrem's suggested image of her as a dark, "nether" eye. Mary's intimate ("nestling me everywhere") but wholly pure web of sexless love is therefore the antithesis of Eve's shameful animality and the clinging bestial pelt (the "fell of dark") that blinds the tormented persona in the fetid, airless pit of "I Wake and Feel". In "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", Hopkins endows air and grace with tangible substance and a sense of underlying pattern through fabric and weaving metaphors: air "girdles" each eyelash and hair; grace and mercy are like a "wild web, wondrous robe", that "mantles the guilty globe"; and the sky is "sapphire-shot" like silk. Mary's veil of air is needed to hide the fallen earth and its sinful inhabitants from the destroying gaze of God but what lies inside her "scarless" mantle then becomes sealed within the circle of her

unbroken virginity and unmarked purity. The hope of the poem is that Mary's wild web of grace can bind together and make whole a world morally polluted and falling piecemeal / leafmeal into decay. Elsewhere, Hopkins examined the "bent world" with a darker gaze, and in a sermon of three years before had used weaving images to quite different effect:

God's Providence is plainly imperfect ... everything is full of fault, flaw, imperfection, shortcoming ... we contend with cold, want, weakness, hunger, disease, death ... as many marks as there are of God's wisdom in providing for us so many marks there may be set against them of something having made of this very providence a shattered frame and a broken web.

(S, p. 90, 1880)

The fabric of the post-lapsarian world is snagged and torn with paradox, and Nature, a "selfish" mother like Eve, lets her children die of cold and hunger. Mary is the only mother who does not infect her children with the taint of mortality; only she "holds high motherhood" towards all spiritual or "ghostly good". Mary's seamless mantle and girdle of grace symbolize her virginity and chaste integrity, and the dream that the poem encapsulates is that, born again through Mary, the blown rose of the world can shut again and be a virginal bud.

Hopkins's poem describes how air, which symbolizes the grace that God dispenses through Mary, surrounds and permeates all living things, holding them distinct and sustaining (in some sense "instressing") their individual form:

... world-mothering air,
Nestling me everywhere,
That each eyelash or hair
Girdles; goes home betwixt
The fleeciest, frailest-flixed
Snowflake; that's fairly mixed
With, riddles, and is rife
In every least thing's life.

("The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 1-8)

These lines resonate with hope of the promise given in the Bible (Luke 21: 16-18), and reiterated by Hopkins in "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo", that after death the physical bodies of the Elect will be restored and enhanced in every particularity: "not a hair is, not an eyelash, not the least lash lost; every hair / Is ... numbered". But the larger scope of "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" seeks to

encompass a vision of an entire world restored to pre-lapsarian wholeness. The protection from corruption that Mary's sinless virgin state ensures is symbolically bestowed on her child—the world itself. Hopkins describes how the girdle of air maintains the discrete shape of even the most vulnerable and evanescent objects: the fine downy hairs on the breasts of small mammals (flox), and snowflakes. More vital even than this is the girdle of grace which can sustain chastity of mind and body in all human beings. The loss of virginity involves the merging of self with other, a blurring and breaking of physical and mental boundaries and the penetration of another's space. Chastity and virginity depend on the keeping of boundaries, on maintaining an inviolable separateness even when physical distancing is impossible. In other words, Hopkins's nature is, as Hillis Miller notes, a nature without blurring or smudging "in which each thing stands out vividly as though it were surrounded by perfectly translucent air". For air can reach "all the surfaces of even the smallest and most intricate object, so abrupt is the frontier between the object and its surroundings".³⁰ The insulating action of the air maintains the distance necessary for objects to keep their individual integrity, but Mary's girdle of grace enables the earth to share in the miracle of virginal fertility that she herself represents.

The *sacratissima cintola*, the girdle or sash worn by the Virgin Mary, is celebrated in medieval legend as the object thrown from the skies to convince doubting Thomas of Mary's physical presence in heaven. The history of the girdle as a powerful symbol is much older, however, for the girdle "that encircles the loins of a goddess has direct mythological antecedents in the west". These legends almost invariably involve seduction or the promise of sexual favours; in Roman mythology, for example, Juno Cinxia (Juno of the Belt) "presided especially over the unknotting of the bride's girdle".³¹ Untying or loosening a bride's girdle is an obvious metaphor for the loss of virginity and the girdle becomes an almost literal analogue of a woman's sexual experience: tightly closed and virgin, or open and morally "undone". It would be an absolute contradiction in terms to suggest that the Virgin Mary was in any sense a "loose woman", however, and in her unique case the girdle is linked with unbroken virginity and with fecundity, an association which is "preserved in the

Romance languages, in which the word 'engirdled,' *enceinte* or *incinta*, means pregnant with child".³² The encircling blue sky is thus wrapped closely round the earth as if Mary held the earth within the compass of her blue sash:

I say that we are wound
 With mercy round and round
 As if with air: the same
 Is Mary, more by name.
 ("The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 34-7)

As if to emphasize the fruitfulness of Mary's chaste new world, and the gentle tenderness associated with her function as an insulating buffer between the vulnerable earth and an angry God, Hopkins describes how she imparts her own bloom of beauty and innocence to her "child":

... this blue heaven
 The seven or seven times seven
 Hued sunbeam will transmit
 Perfect, not alter it.
 Or if there does some soft,
 On things aloof, aloft,
 Bloom breathe, that one breath more
 Earth is the fairer for.
 ("The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 86-93)

The blue mist that often seems to shroud distant uplands, (as it does in the "azurous hung hills", of "Hurrahing in Harvest"), is translated as the sign of Mary's gift of grace and fertility. The earth is covered with the bluish velvety bloom of barely ripe grapes and plums. Vulnerability, tenderness, and virgin innocence are all combined in an image which may have its counterpart in lines from "The Bugler's First Communion".³³ In this earlier poem, the young bugler of the title possesses the "breathing bloom of chastity in mansex fine" and has an innocently receptive heart which yields "tender as a pushed peach" to the word of God.³⁴

The anxious "message" of "The Bugler's First Communion" is that "fruit" so tenderly virginal is easily bruised and rotted, and that once lost, the "bloom of chastity" is irreplaceable. In "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", Hopkins strains to conjure a new virgin self ("new self and nobler me") who is born again of Mary and will therefore inherit her instinctive aversion to sin, and will yield

only to God's will. Through the impregnating action of grace in the human soul we may all become, as Mary was and is, the mother of Christ:

Though much the mystery how,
 Not flesh but spirit now
 And makes, O marvellous!
 New Nazareths in us,
 Where she shall yet conceive
 Him, morning, noon, and eve;
 New Bethlems, and he born
 There, evening, noon, and morn—
 Bethlem or Nazareth,
 Men here may draw like breath
 More Christ and baffle death;
 Who, born so, comes to be
 New self and nobler me
 In each one and each one
 More makes, when all is done,
 Both God's and Mary's Son.
 ("The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 57-72)

Hopkins's desire to identify with the Virgin Mary and to become the place where Christ is reborn (Bethlem) and the place in which he lives and works (Nazareth) is evidence of his belief, as it is interpreted by Jeffrey Loomis, that both men and women encounter the Divine "most profoundly in their receptively 'feminine' souls.... Such a humble soul can be impregnated, transubstantiated with a Christly spirituality and eventually bring that spirituality to fruition".³⁵ In terms of doctrine this is unexceptionable, but Loomis argues that this is sufficient to make us believe that Hopkins "reached far past the boundaries of his own dominantly sexist culture" and that the "Marian soul where the Holy Spirit indwells can come to mother antisexist Divine Sonship".³⁶ As Loomis suggests, Hopkins did recognize that "masculine and feminine personality traits are not the same as male and female gender"—indeed, as part of a church that teaches its male priests to regard Christ as the "truelove and bridegroom" (*S*, p. 35, 1879) of their souls, and to cultivate passive submission to God, whilst at the same time exerting "fatherly" authority over their flock, it is hard to see how Hopkins could fail to recognize such a palpable truth. What is more at issue are the differing values that he and his culture accorded such traits and functions and how women were actually perceived and treated. Hopkins's order asked that its priests should nurture some of the "feminine" aspects of their personalities, but it also

demanded that each soldier of Christ should follow a punishing regime of mental and physical discipline towards the supreme masculine aim of total self-control.

A woman's strength of will, such as it was, might be let loose as unconstrained malice and vengeance in the case of the "hideous" evil / Eve-ill sinner, or else turned inwards against her "natural" weakness (*S*, p. 205, ca 1882). The virtuous woman who wants to give birth to Christliness in her soul may therefore be "naturally" fitted to display only those aspects of Christ's nature which are supposed to accord with her "weaker" feminine nature: patience, humility, chastity, submissiveness and self-sacrifice. She follows Christ but her role is tightly constricted and her real model is Mary. The male, however, appears to have far greater scope, for as well as imitating the feminine aspects of Christian virtue he can also reflect the full humanity of Christ in his assertive, "manly" capacities as "hero, warrior, conqueror, king, statesman, thinker, orator and poet" (*S*, pp. 34-5, 1879). It was perhaps the most "strengthening" but least "consoling" (*L*, 2, pp. 137-138, 1886) lesson of all that Hopkins struggled to learn, that the most truly Christlike role was the least public and oratorical of all, grounded as it seemed to be in silent endurance and the "feminine" virtue of volitional self-sacrifice.

Alison Sulloway responds to the masculine bias she detects in Hopkins's thinking, by suggesting that Hopkins was so impressed by the Victorian ideal of "diversity in excellence which is the prevailing beauty of the spirit of man", that when he called for "'New Nazareths' in the ordinary Englishman" he was speaking as a gentleman prophet who wanted to people England with a "new and finer breed" of Christian gentleman: renaissance man in his most complete form.³⁷ Sulloway's reading suits the occasional bursts of public exhortation in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", as Hopkins did indeed long for a Catholic revival in England and revered the notion of gentlemanly behaviour as Britain's greatest gift to the world (*L*, 1, p. 176, 1883). But while Hopkins found diversity and contrast admirable in art and in the attributes necessary to a gentleman, in morality he would brook no shadows or ambiguities: "the highest consistency is the highest excellence" (*J*, p. 83, 1865). Absolute unity is Hopkins's ideal and essential to that ideal is "chastity of

mind ... the seeing at once what is best, the holding to that" (*L*, 1, p. 174, 1883). This key to all virtue is held by Christ but is also exemplified in Mary, and in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" it is Mary who is asked to direct the speaker's eye / I so that he sees with her pure and undeviating vision: "through her we can see him, made sweeter not made dim" (ll. 110 - 111). Mary's guidance is needed to correct the doubleness of his nature, and to help him achieve the "single eye" of the Tall Nun and of Scripture: "if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt. 6:22).

Ultimately, the poem seeks to retreat from the public world and the requirements of adult, even "gentlemanly" behaviour. The vision of a regenerated world seems to be abandoned as the speaker turns inwards in his search for the lost kingdom of innocence. There appears to be no way forward but to go back, and his longing for a world now gone, where all was pure and division unknown, becomes the most archetypal of all quests, the quest for union with his "lost mother", Mary:

World-mothering air, air wild,
Wound with thee, in thee isled,
Fold home, fast fold thy child.
("The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", ll. 124-6)

The speaker's wish to become the sole "island" in the amniotic waters of his mother's womb, suggests that the world is well lost in order to gratify his regressive need for passive withdrawal. Indeed there may even be an edge of urgency as well as a need for permanence and security in his asking to be held "fast" in Mary's embrace. Mary holds him in the "fold" of her body as she held the sacred Lamb of God, and "folds" her child in her arms as any mother might; but in his first "home", which is his mother Mary's womb, he is held in the chaste fold of good and is safe from the agonies of guilt, fear, and remorse that attend a world where the mind's ambiguous impulses must be ripped asunder and forced into "two folds—black, white; right, wrong" ("Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves"). Mary has no ambiguous impulses and the speaker's final prayer is less for the good of the actual world than the expression of a personal wish to be lifted free of the moral choices that adults must make, to be subsumed in Mary and thereby immune to all temptation. This wish seems to be in part moulded

by the Jesuit ideal of perfection: "The man who in the world is as dead to the world as if he were buried in the cloister is already a saint. But this is our ideal" (*L*, 2, p. 76, 1881). This may appear to parallel the yearning for a state of safe but almost deathlike stasis expressed by Hopkins's "feminine" persona in "Heaven-Haven", but there remains a paradoxical tension between psychological needs and societal imperatives. The pull and sway between regression and rebirth, passivity and creativity, masculine and feminine is foregrounded in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", but pertains to all of those poems in which the poet persona contemplates annihilation or the renunciation of active powers. Even Mary is not entirely free from the association of passivity, femininity and death, for in an arcane disquisition on the Last Supper and the death of Christ,³⁸ Hopkins argues:

we cannot doubt that at the Last Supper Christ invisibly but sacramentally communicated his Blessed Mother ... by the hands of angels or otherwise. After this she would have fasted till the Resurrection and the Sacred Host have lain in her breast unconsumed. In her then as well as on the cross Christ died and was at once buried, her body his temple becoming his sepulchre.
(*S*, p. 190, 1881)

Here, as elsewhere in Hopkins's writing, woman, the mother, and the feminine "ideal of 'contemplative purity' evoke both heaven and the grave".³⁹

Earlier I suggested that through the creation of the Word, Hopkins could play at being Mary and at being Christ. His prayer and his aim in "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe" is to reverence and imitate the feminine qualities of both so that he might learn how further to abase himself completely before God's will. Mary's role centres on female procreativity, submitting herself to an unconscious and uncontrolled process of gestation and parturition, and finally giving birth to someone who becomes independent of her and has power over her. The history of Marian myth may doubtless have helped to sustain the argument that motherhood is woman's sole destiny, yet through physical procreation women may lose control over their bodies and their destinies. They sacrifice self in giving birth to the new life that will replace them and are therefore in every sense feminine and feminized.

In the act of creation, however, the artist is psychically androgynous, integrating the feminine role of Mary and the siring masculine role of God. Within the

poem, Hopkins identifies with Mary and hopes to be impregnated by divine grace so that he can give birth to a new sense of Christ-like humility and self-sacrifice in his soul. But through the creation of the text the artist has independently created, or re-created, the literal "new self" that the poem identifies as the product of God's grace. The birth of a spiritual "new self and nobler me" involves the ultimate hope of achieving eternal life, but Walter Benjamin has pointed to the widespread male belief that the production of the art work promises a direct line to immortality:

... in the process of being fulfilled, the creation gives birth once again to the creator. Not in his feminine mode, in which his creation was conceived, but rather in his masculine element. Reanimated, he exceeds nature ... he is the masculine first-born of the art work, which he once conceived.⁴⁰

Self-annihilation and self-creation are thus engaged in a dialectic of which the resolution seems to involve the "death" of the feminine. Having reanimated the self through the process of creativity, the artist has distanced himself from the natural processes of death and decay. As Bronfen argues, this signifies a triumph over death

figured as the triumph over natural maternal birth, genius over *gynein*. The artist, born a second time, assumes the site of self-sufficient, self-created masculinity, superseding the 'dark realms of nature' by supplanting them with the 'lighter realms' of autonomous symbolism ... While the feminine as source and executor of inspiration dies, the masculine artist is born.⁴¹

Hopkins is therefore caught in a paradox which requires him to praise feminine values whilst performing an act which he and his culture perceive as being essentially masculine and self-sufficient. He can have no control over the getting of divine grace, but the poem is his creation and he has god-like control over its form; Coventry Patmore remarked that Hopkins's "self-imposed shackles" of versification and form (*F. L.*, p. 353, 1884) seemed less constricting in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", but they are there nevertheless.

Hopkins may have won something of an intellectual victory over maternal nature through the creation of his artificial "child", but he is looking towards an *actual* victory over death which can only be granted by God. The implied subtext of the prayer that the poem encapsulates involves the rejection of the mortality that the "natural" mother represents, by clinging to the celestial image of the Virgin Mary. The gendering of the creative act and its attendant assumptions of masculine self-

creation and god-like power are all strategies for dealing with the fundamental terrors of dissolution and extinction, though relatively few artists are stalked by the knowledge that using such powers may result in an eternal agony of tortured remorse. In "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", Hopkins acknowledges these terrors by pleading to be taken into the protection of the mother who transmits only life to her children, but at the same time evades them by constructing a transfigured vision of a world without sin and death. To brood over the crawling horrors of corruption in a poem meant as an inoffensive offering to popular taste may appear unusual even by Hopkins's idiosyncratic standards, but in his need for Mary's intercession he betrays the depth of his fear and vulnerability.

The surface of "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" is as "scarless" as Mary's blue sky but in order to achieve this fragile poise the poet-persona has symbolically sacrificed the dangerous power of his masculine "eye". If he cannot see beyond the veil he is also safe from the apocalyptic terror which may accompany penetrative consciousness, but he cannot be an unbruised innocent again, any more than the "old earth" can be newborn and pure. Mary is worshipped as the Mother of God and the Queen of Heaven, but the Church has insisted that her lack of autonomous power be known and recognized. She is greater than the saints, but lesser than her son. Mary's "principal mediatory position, as a creature belonging both to earth and to heaven" is perfectly reflected in Hopkins's comparison of her with earth's atmosphere and is represented with scholastic nicety in the "special worship" to which she is entitled: "God is owed *latria* (adoration) and the saints *dulia* (veneration)": Mary is owed *hyperdulia*.⁴² Folk tale and mythic legends have tended to exaggerate the power of Mary's influence, and in the "myriad stories that star the Virgin as all-powerful sorceress with dominion over angels and devils alike" the qualification that "she never works on her own, but only through Christ" is forgotten and therefore subconsciously denied.⁴³ But Mary's selfless "femininity" helps in fact to define what "masculinity" is, and she cannot answer to the need for what Freud calls "that revered creation of primaeval phantasy", the phallic mother-goddess, androgynous and puissant.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Hopkins does appear close to Mariolatry when he announces that Mary's power is "great as no goddess's / Was deemèd, dreamèd" (ll. 26-27). Mary can of course offer the tenderest comfort to her children and may plead successfully for the protection of their souls. It therefore gave Hopkins the "deepest consolation" that his Grandfather, whom he had very earnestly commended daily to "the Blessed Virgin's protection", had died on the Feast of the Holy Rosary, a day "signalised by our Lady's overruling aid". This coincidence Hopkins received "without questioning as a mark that [his] prayers [had] been heard and that the queen of heaven had saved a Christian soul from enemies more terrible than a fleet of infidels" (*Selected Letters*, pp. 92-93, 1877). Hopkins's description of Mary's aid as "overruling" is provocatively ambiguous for it may seem to suggest that hers (at least on some occasions) is the abiding decision as to who will be saved. God is masculine and just, Mary is feminine and tender-hearted and in the matter of his grandfather, Hopkins appears to be emotionally committed to the medieval belief in Mary's boundless love and independent powers: "Those whom the Son in his justice casts away, the mother in her superfluity of mercy brings back again to indulgence".⁴⁵ But in his public poem, "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe", Hopkins crushes the bud of incipient adoration with the grounding declaration that Mary is "merely a woman" and that the life-giving grace that flows so lavishly from her is initially generated by God.

In the hierarchy of divine power Mary's "mere womanhood" ensures that she has no power to change the names of the Elect or the names of the damned; even in the way of ordinary women she remains outside the masculine power base which is constituted of "God and his hypostases—reason, science, law".⁴⁶ Mary is the bearer of Christ, the eternal "dayspring" and the morning of life. Nature can create, crush, diminish and annihilate but Mary can only increase and make greater. Cradled within the finely transparent "walls" of Mary's womb the cyclic momentum that carries us towards oblivion seems to be held momentarily in stasis, but only momentarily. God's gifts of grace and mercy *may* be given through Mary, but only two things remain certain: "every minute we and the world are older, every minute our death and the

world's end are nearer than before" (*S*, p. 41, 1879).

In his *Spiritual Writings* Hopkins claimed that there was "a happiness, hope, the anticipation of happiness hereafter", but it was not "happiness now", and a great vastness of distance and cold seems to isolate him from all comfort: "It is as if one were dazzled by a spark or star in the dark, seeing it but not seeing by it: we want a light shed on our way and a happiness spread over our life" (*S*, p. 262, 1889). Mary is *Stella Maris*, the star of the sea and the hope of the lost, she remains a supreme symbol of solace, but with final and consummate irony, Hopkins appears to read the answer to his prayer for sweet haven in Mary's womb in the nightmare sky of his apocalyptic nocturne, "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves". The message read from the dark leaves of the Sibyl's text is not comforting. The fatal estrangement between the "old earth" and the heavens cannot be healed and Nature will reclaim her own: "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust", greedily swallowing the earth and all into the "womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all night".

The "answer", though not the last word, appears to demand a final splitting of the self, an ultimate psychomachia in which the masculine *arbitrium* must win and all that belongs to feminine Nature, even Marian pity, must be resisted. The gender war continues in the winter world of Hopkins's last years and last words; but it is waged as a cold and increasingly difficult battle of interiorized wills in which Hopkins becomes his own worst casualty.

[NOTES]

¹ *Man for Himself*, (1947).

² Mackenzie, *A Reader's Guide*, p. 159.

³ See A. Thomas, *Book Collector*, 20 (1971), 103-4; Tom Dunne, ed. *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), A17; ref. from Mackenzie *Collected Poems*, p. 436.

⁴ MacKenzie, *A Reader's Guide*, p. 159.

⁵ MacKenzie suggests several further sources, of which two seem particularly relevant. The first is found in the ancient hymn "Ave, Regina coelorum", which hails Mary as "the gate through which light reached the world" [trans. Mackenzie]. The second is from Sister M. Estelle (Casalandra), OP, *Rosary*, 94, 10 (16th Nov. 1943) who cites Louis-Marie Grignon (now St. Louis of Montford), *True Devotion to the B.V. Mary*, trans. F.W. Faber, 1862, (1937), p. 146: "When will souls breathe Mary as the body breathes air?", *Poems*, p. 436.

⁶ Bugge, *Virginitas*, p. 145.

⁷ Ed. and trans. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 41-42; quoted *ibid.*, p. 145.

⁸ *Idols of Perversity*, pp. 87-93.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹¹ *Le Miracle de Théophile*, ed. Grace Frank; quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 44.

¹² Don Parry Norford, "'Very like a whale': the problem of knowledge in *Hamlet*", in *English Literary History*, 46 (1979), 559-576 (pp. 560-1).

¹³ *Veni Redemptor Gentium*, in Frederick Brittain, ed., *Penguin Book of Latin Verse* (London: 1962), p. 91; quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 37.

¹⁴ *The Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or "Little Office"* (London: Percival and Co., 1892), 3rd Lesson.

¹⁵ George Moore's novel *Esther Waters* (1894) exposes the miserable conditions and exploitation of women employed as wet-nurses.

¹⁶ Quoted in *A Very Private Life*, p. 282.

¹⁷ "An Outline of Psychoanalysis (1940 [1938])" *Standard Edition*, XXIII, pp. 188-189.

¹⁸ "Hopkins's Women", p. 12.

¹⁹ *The New Eve*, p. 90.

²⁰ *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice, (London: Collins Marshall Pickering, 1990), p. 164.

²¹ "The Queen of the Air: Transformation of Myth in Ruskin and Hopkins", *Victorian Poetry*, 12, 4 (1974), 335-342.

²² *Works*, XIX, p. 347.

²³ "Athena Chalinitis", *Works*, XIX, pp. 305-306.

²⁴ It is a further point of similarity between Hopkins and Ruskin, that in his preface to the work, Ruskin confessed: "My days and strength have lately been much broken; and I have never more felt the insufficiency of both". *Works*, XIX, p. 291.

²⁵ *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. Franklin S. Klaf, (New York: Bell Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 86, 130; quoted in *Idols of Perversity*, p. 101.

²⁶ *Adam, Eve and Serpent*, p. 111.

²⁷ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*, p. 49.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁹ *Hymn on the Nativity*, 17, 4; quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 60.

³⁰ *Victorian Subjects* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 6.

³¹ "Mythology", *New Larousse Encyclopaedia* (London [n.pub], 1970), p. 203. Quoted in *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 279.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 278-9.

³³ W.H. Auden thought that this poem was a "dreadful lapse", mangled by unconscious desire and the tension between homosexual feelings and a moral sense of guilt". *Criterion*, 13 (Apr. 1934), (pp. 499-500). Ref. given in *Poems*, p. 412. Anthony Burgess gives a fictional exposition of the same idea in *The Clockwork Testament or Enderby's End* (London: Hart Davies, MacGibbon Ltd; Bantam, 1976), Ch. 6.

³⁴ Hopkins uses the peach as a symbol of irresistible sensual temptation in one of his sermons:

When ... one of Eve's poor daughters, stands by a peachtree, eyeing the blush of colour on the fruit, fingering the velvet bloom upon it, breathing the rich smell, and in imagination tasting the sweet juice, the nearness ... is enough to undo her.
(*S*, p. 65, 1880)

As Robert Bridges recognized, Hopkins's personal vulnerability to sensual appeal was highlighted rather than disproved during a visit by Bridges to the lush (Edenic?) garden of Manresa House in 1881 (see White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 335). Bridges recorded the incident as an illustration of neurotic repression and the "fear of pleasure" that drives Saints and ascetics to sublimate their emotions and desires in a "self-holocaust":

when the young poet my companion in study
and friend of my heart refused a peach at my hands,
he being then a housecarl in Loyola's menie,
'twas that he fear'd the savour of it, and when he waived
his scruple to my banter, 'twas to avoid offence.
The Testament of Beauty: A Poem in Four Books (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929),
Bk. IV, ll. 434-438

³⁵ Loomis, "Birthpangs in Darkness...", p. 83.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

³⁷ *Hopkins and the Victorian Temper*, pp. 128-9.

³⁸ Again, Devlin seems to regard Hopkins's theology as highly esoteric and unorthodox: "This view of Our Lady's communion is purely private speculation without foundation or authority ... [it] seems to go counter to the nature of the sacrament". *S*, n. 190, p. 304.

³⁹ *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 25.

⁴⁰ "Denkbilder", *Gesammelte Schriften IV.1* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 305-438 (p. 438);
quoted in Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 125.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴² *Alone of all her Sex*, p. xxii.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁴⁴ *Standard Edition*, XI, p. 98.

⁴⁵ *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 325.

⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image Music Text*, ed. Stephen Heath, (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 147.

Epilogue

The Horror and the Havoc: Last Lines from the Front

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
*W.B. Yeats*¹

The letter killeth.
St. Paul, 2 Corinthians 3:6

It is tempting to those in possession of historical hindsight to ascribe proleptic portent to works completed soon before the death of an artist—whether or not the artist was actually aware of what was to come. In Hopkins's case, however, it would seem wrong to suggest that anyone could be more constantly aware or more earnestly engaged with the idea of imminent death than he. His religious faith of course required that he should always regard this world as a mere antechamber to the next and greater, but his mind and vision were latterly so bleared by tedium and weariness that even daily survival became a trial: "I can not always last like this: in mind or body or both I shall give way—all I really need is a certain degree of relief and change; but I do not think that what I need I shall get in time to save me", (*L*, 1, p. 282, 1888).

Throughout, we have examined evidence of the "prepossession of horror" (*J*, p. 211, 1871) that gripped Hopkins's mind when confronted by the fact of decay, but worse feared and seemingly beyond negotiation or control were the eruptions of self-loathing, failure and madness that increasingly disfigured the final years of his life. Self-scourging mental discipline, strict observance of the letter of the law, and valorization of the elective will, were the nails with which Hopkins tried to secure his errant sanity and fasten himself to the cross of salvation; these same nails may in fact have helped to build the "coffin of weakness and dejection" (*L*, pp. 214-215, 1885) that housed him long before he was actually dead.

The uncompromising nature of his mood and the discipline with which Hopkins laboured to sustain self-control in his last years is evident in "The Times

could not know his. One woman's defiance of her gendered position had thus betrayed Adam to the dragon, her children to shame and mortality, and Christ to an agonising and humiliating death. Man's first "mate" and mankind's first mother had proved herself then a worthless "hussy", and in "The Shepherd's Brow", written and carefully revised in the year of his death, Hopkins appears convinced that Eve's daughters are no better than she:

Angels fall, they are towers, from heaven—a story
Of just, majestic, and giant groans.
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?
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.
And I that die these deaths, that feed this flame,
That ... in smooth spoons spy life's masque mirrored: tame
My tempests there, my fire and fever fussy.
("The Shepherd's Brow", Hopkins's ellipsis)

"The Shepherd's Brow" marks a resurgence of the sexual nausea of "Il Mystico", but exposes a far uglier, more explicitly carnal and excremental vision of the fallen human condition. Elsewhere we have encountered the implied contrast between woman's capacity for angelic moral chastity and the "hideous" immodesty of the courtesan; here the angels referred to are Lucifer and the rebel hosts of heaven, and as elsewhere in Hopkins's work, appear entirely masculine. These gigantic phallic "towers" have a stature and a history that retain majestic and tragic proportions even in loss. The poem therefore confronts and despairs at the massive incongruity in scale between the pathetic corporeality of Man Jack, the "everyman" figure, (including Hopkins's own "Jackself") and the comparative grandeur even of heaven's fallen angels. The contrast dwelt on is between men and magnificent masculine angels; women are pejoratively dismissed as "mates" and "hussies", words that suggest both their involvement in the physical act of copulation, the "all too evident intrusion of the animal" in their sexual behaviour,⁵ and their brazen lack of shame in the matter. The putative vampiric power of the sexual female may also be covertly suggested in the sense that to "mate" is also to "overcome", "exhaust",

"render helpless" and "confound" (*OED*). The hope that men and women might be reborn through Mary and be immersed in her purifying "bath" of grace is abandoned as we are plunged back into a world of abjection and unmediated grossness, where Eve's "primal deed" of fornication marks out her children as damned and a shamelessly impenitent Mary Magdalen (not Mary the Virgin) is the pattern of Everywoman.⁶

Though undeniably brutish, the male is presented rather as a victim of his own physicality, driven by bodily need to carry out "animal" acts and functions but yet sufficiently alienated from his fleshly nature to regard its desires with humiliation and embarrassment. His "shame" may in fact represent an avowal of his sinful nature, for sexual arousal notoriously defies the rule of rational will and is regarded by Augustine as a visible sign of the effects of original sin. In Augustine's literally phallogocentric view, a man's shame and a man's failure are signified by his lack of control over the flesh: "the genitals are rightly called *pudenda* [parts of shame] because they excite themselves just as they like, in opposition to the mind which is their master, as if they were their own masters".⁷

Richard F. Giles remarks on the preoccupation with death and decay revealed in the poem and notes the ambiguity of "this flame", a phrase which he believes may refer to "any number of things: the 'fire' of inspiration; the flames of hell; the agony of doubt; the heat of desire; or the internal 'combustion' of the human body, fed hand to mouth and excreting noisily (the rhyming of 'shame'—to describe 'void'—with 'flame' reinforces this idea".⁸ In addition, I would suggest a further connection with Hopkins's earlier work: "That Nature is a Heraclitean Flux and the Comfort of the Resurrection", for here the cyclicity and destructive processes of Nature are made visible, personal and immediate as Nature's consuming "bonfire" of mortal trash "burns on" in the microcosm of the human body.

Hopkins's phrase, "voids with shame", further suggests that sex, dirt, defecation, and death are perceptually linked in this cyclical process, for the term can be variously interpreted as a reference to death ("to go away, to depart", *OED*), to the bodily excretion of waste products ("To discharge (some matter) from the body from a natural vent or orifice, esp. through the excretory organs", *OED*), or of male

ejaculation ("To come, flow, or pass out", *OED*). The effluvium of mortality (*S*, p. 240, ca 1885) and the overall sense of pollution and repugnance which issue from the poem seem thus to admit no distinction between the life-creating potential of the sexual act (whether in male ejaculation or female parturition) and the expulsion of foul waste. As we have seen, however, misogynist revulsion may be fuelled by those who hope to regulate human sexual energies, as it is, for example, in the declaration of the thirteenth-century ecclesiastic, Humbert de Romans, that since lust was the greatest filth and fornication was a particularly female vice, "the whore was to be compared with dung as she was the greatest filth".⁹

Freud offers a psychoanalytic rationale for the perceived relation between genitals, babies and faeces in his discussion of the "pre-genital anal-sadistic phase" of human development when the "faecal 'stick,' represents ... the first penis, and the stimulated mucous membrane of the rectum represents that of the vagina".¹⁰ In adult "obsessional neurotics" a "regressive debasement of the genital organization" may occur in which "every phantasy originally conceived on the genital level is transposed to the anal level".¹¹ The male organ is specifically included in the transposition described by Freud, yet the relationship of the penis to the faecal "stick" is "evocative and symbolically distant" whereas the vagina of the woman is not "phenomenologically distinct from the mucous membrane of the rectum".¹² The "obsessional neurotic's" view of woman's scatological "uncleanness" is therefore perceived as literal rather than symbolic and in Freud's view even "menstrual blood must be counted as excrement".¹³ Neither "tears nor sperm" have "any polluting value" but what flows, leaks, or is discharged from the feminine body defiles.¹⁴

"Obsessional" masculine phantasies of woman's excremental filthiness have survived over the several centuries that divide Humbert de Romans from Hopkins, Freud, and their contemporaries, and we have noted that images of promiscuous women as "sewers" filled with filth, corruption and disease were an integral part of nineteenth century medical discourse. The connection of woman with dirt and defilement may easily be related to Freud's theories on the "debasement" of women "necessary" for male sexual potency to be fully achieved. In its most intense form,

however, the "ethical" distancing of man from woman that this requires may become so absolute that the male's original fear of woman is translated into an overwhelming disgust and hatred, killing all desire except the wish to escape her, for the "penile descent into the woman", into the "castrating cave, the vagina" is held to be synonymous with the "descent into death".¹⁵

The contrast between this and the paradisaical dream of sweet maternal embracement in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the air we breathe" could not be more marked or more unhappy. In youth, Hopkins had complained that "the *sordidness* of things, wh. one is compelled perpetually to feel is ... the most unmixedly painful thing one knows of" (*F.L.*, p. 19, 1966, Hopkins's emphasis). He did not specify what he meant by this, but his emphasis suggests that his correspondent, Baillie, would not need to be told. As a gifted etymologist, Hopkins would almost certainly have known that the word is linguistically rooted in filth and ordure (*sordes*: dirt, filth; foul or feculent matter, *OED*), and in common usage refers to unclean personal or sexual habits. Such is the intensity of revulsion expressed in "The Shepherd's Brow" that all of these significations seem appropriate. In this "masque" which is yet too degraded for tragedy, too grotesque for comedy, the actors are the hated "sots and thralls of lust", performing bestial acts in a wasteland befouled by their own sin and the black horrors of the Industrial Revolution.

"The Shepherd's Brow" marks the intensification of Hopkins's early distaste into an obsessive loathing of the moral and physical obscenity of the human condition. But having confessed that the hidden monstrosity of his own "Hyde" persona was "worse" than anything in Stevenson's fiction: "the horror is nature itself" (*L*, 1, p. 238, 1886), Hopkins cannot, and does not dissociate himself from the failings of other men. Though the connection may be painfully and reluctantly made it is enacted in the poem's grammatical shifts from objectifying generic terms ("man") and third party pronouns (He!) to the acknowledgement of collusion and common weakness inherent in the collective "we". But woman remains marginalized and distanced as a dubious possession of the male, apparently unsanctified by the title of wife or the sacrament of marriage. By implication "ill-

behaved", "loose-living" and "insolent" (*Collins New English Dictionary*), the hussy stands as signifier for abjection and the "threatening Otherness of the body, of nature, of sexuality".¹⁶ All men, whatever their pretensions to rank or fame, are brought down to the same demotic level, but it remains apparent that Hopkins's

fear of 'the Eve syndrome' in women was even stronger than his fear of the sin in man. 'Man Jack' may make unpleasant smells and perform undignified functions in the bathroom, but his mate is a 'hussy,' a 'courtezan,' who is 'prostituting her charms'.¹⁷

As a type of Eve, moreover, woman is inevitably more deeply implicated in blame because of Hopkins's Scotist conviction that the Incarnation was not dependent upon Man's fall. Neither Giles nor Sulloway venture to connect Hopkins's view of women and this aspect of Scotist thought, but Giles nevertheless detects the burning sense of futility that this lapsarian belief creates at the heart of Hopkins's unresolved tensions: "The whole process — the brittle bones, the gasping breath, the meager existence, the fouling of the body, the need for fornication ... was not necessary, was and is pointless".¹⁸

Sulloway notes Hopkins's uncompromising austerity in his attitude towards human fallibility and remarks on the evidence of the Manichean spirit in Hopkins's "treatment of the paradoxical cosmos" and his tendency to see in all paradoxes

the mirror of the Manichean Prince of Darkness, who lurked in the body of all created things, opposing his principle of evil to the good in the Prince of Light, who lived only in the soul. Hopkins had come to believe that salvation might depend on this distinction. Therefore he had to oppose mere 'good' which might contain seeds of evil, to absolute 'right,' which could contain no evil. 'Right' therefore always came before mere 'good'.¹⁹

Such is the inherent dualism of his aesthetic and psychological theories that it is arguably beyond surprise that Hopkins should turn a cold eye on the paradox of his own selfhood and condemn himself to a quest for absolute self-mastery that no human being, other than Christ, has achieved or ever will achieve:

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 does not alter the facts All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch. I wish then for death but if I died now I should die imperfect, no master of myself, and that is the worst failure of all.
(*S*, p. 262, 1889)

Bronfen argues that because "the conscious subject is necessarily not coherent" for it is always "already divided against itself;" the idea of conscious mastery of a self which is forever "split" therefore belongs "to the realm of life-preserving fantasy."²⁰ Here it appears that *only* the fantasy that perfect coherence and self-mastery may be possible separates Hopkins from despair. The fierce inward division of good and evil required for Hopkins's process of "justification" sounds an absolutist note which too easily segues into frigid legalistic formalism. His belief that we will be "saved" by a "cold sort of love" (*S*, p. 48, 1879), which appears to subsist *only* in absolute obedience and unwavering attention to duty, is further shown in a sermon which exalts and reinforces the Victorian schism between duty and inclination:

sighs and tears will not do nor cries of enthusiasm unless his sovereign will is done: obedience is better than sacrifice; seas of tears and sighs to fill the firmament are waste of water and loss of breath where duty is not done. *Duty is love*. What a shame to set duty off against love and bloat ourselves because we act from love and ... our dull neighbour, can but plod his round of duty! *There is nothing higher than duty* in creatures or in God.
(*S*, p. 53, 1880, Hopkins's emphasis)

Here the emotional spasms of the affective will are given their characteristic symbolic association with the inconstant fluidity, vanity, irrational passions, and weak-willed flabbiness of the feminine. Against this, duty is esteemed as an expression of the "higher" masculine faculty for reason and willed endurance. Manliness is set next to godliness on a route to salvation that is perceived as an undeviating, linear progress (Hopkins claimed never to have "wavered" in his vocation) which depends upon the valorization of the "masculine" trinity that Barthes has identified as reason, logic, and the law.

I have argued that the Virgin Mary's irrational feminine compassion stands outside this power base, yet her generous pity is all the more vital in the last years of Hopkins's life when the "covert pact between Christ, the gentleman Don, and Hopkins, his willing student" appears to crumble at the agonizing suspicion that "Christ the Hero [who] should be above the reproach of injustice" had betrayed his trust and was behaving in as darkly illogical and capricious a manner as any outlaw feminine witch or goddess.²¹ Hopkins's deep anxiety and confusion is palpable in his notes on the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee:

Two men went to the Temple to pray ... after their prayer one was justified, that is was made just, and the other was not; the one who was a great sinner ... had become a just man and his sins were forgiven; the other, whose deeds, as we learn from himself, were good and just, went back worse than he came and sinned even in his prayers. The sin was that of pride There is a suddenness about the story and the suddenness seems to terrify rather than to comfort, as if the way of God were full of incalculable hurricanes and reverses, in an instant building up and in the same casting down, making it seem better (which God forbid) to live recklessly and trust to a single hearty act of sorrow than to toil at prayers and mortifications which a breath of pride may in one fatal instant shatter and bring to nothing.
(*S*, p. 237, ca 1885)

These comments reveal what Devlin has called (with unnerving emphasis), Hopkins's "slight—*but fatal*—sympathy with the Pharisee rather than with the Publican" (*S*, p. 217). In many respects, however, Hopkins *is* the pharisee, a functionary of the patriarchate dedicated to upholding the Law of the Father, toiling at prayers, mortifying his senses and his body, spending "Sir, life upon thy cause", only to find himself betrayed by his own fierce adherence to the masculine principle. The Parable presents the terrifying possibility that affectively driven "sighs and tears" and uncontrolled "cries of enthusiasm" *will* do what long years of total dedication to duty and contractual obedience apparently cannot, that the drunkards and whores, the publicans and the magdalens, every man Jack and every hussy can hope to find grace through the spontaneous affections of their full and passionately contrite hearts, while he remains a stranger to God's love.

Mary Magdalen, voluptuous and sexual, tenderly washing the feet of Christ, her tears and sighs enough to fill the firmament, is forgiven much because she loves much. Hopkins's heart, kept "in hiding", disciplined into deadness, is "seldom moved" by Christ. Neither has he learnt the gentle kindness of the Virgin Mary for he appears unable to love or to forgive himself: "I began to enter on that course of loathing and hopelessness which I have so often felt before, which made me fear madness.... 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" (*S*, p. 262, 1889). In this raw and painful confession is all the cumulative grief and disappointment of Hopkins's final years. Aesthetically and creatively sterile, he can no longer claim to carry his "burning" phallic brand against a deformed and immoral culture ("I bear my burning witness through / Against the wild and wanton work of men", from "On a

Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People"). The ardent youth who dreamed of following his hero, Savonarola, charismatic preacher and destroyer of the towering "bonfire of the vanities",²² ultimately perceives himself as a man "fussily" feeding the impotent flame of his own vanity.

It has been said that "The Shepherd's Brow" is the product of a mind "nearing its physical and creative death".²³ In some respects it offers a *fin de siècle* re-visioning of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* expelled from a brain so alienated and disjunct that healing would seem beyond hope. More surely it is an expression of what Seib has defined as Hopkins's "discarnate spirituality", which narrowly evades "the Gnostic belief that the soul should be divorced from body"²⁴ but is fully consonant with the fierce ambivalences encouraged by Victorian flesh-denying ideals of spiritual transcendence and masculine self-mastery.

"The Shepherd's Brow" is a war poem, and ranks with the darkest of all Hopkins's sonnets, for the shared emotions that force the speaker's reluctant kinship with the common man are fear, shame, and loathing of his dying flesh. The horror of the abject expressed in the poem nevertheless belongs to the universe of "socially signifying performances where embarrassment, shame, guilt, desire, etc. come into play—the order of the phallus".²⁵ Bodily waste, excrement, refuse and corpses (cadaver: *cadere*, to fall) show us what we

must permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement ... are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death ... such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything ... it is death infecting life ... it is something rejected from which one does not part.... It beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.²⁶

Rejection of the "feminine" corporeality that threatens the fragile symbolic order is necessary for the construction of the self. Loss, division and separation from the maternal body represent the price of entry into that order. In the act of expulsion, of voiding, Hopkins's "manjack" therefore engages in "the mastered *repetition* of the archaic separation from the mother" that marks the beginning of selfhood, and also of course the beginning of bereavement.²⁷ In this sense, then, the "The Shepherd's

Brow" can be interpreted as a testament to Hopkins's continuing rejection of death and the maternal body that represents death; of his refusal to defile himself by ingesting the unclean flesh ("carrion") of despair. We have seen that Hopkins defined his subjective being in terms of taste: "my shame, my guilt, my fate are the very things in feeling, in tasting, which I most taste that selftaste which nothing in the world can match" (*S*, p. 125, ca 1880). But the sense of suffocating entrapment (the "engulfment" of death) and agony, given here and in the Dark sonnets, suggest that "selftaste" had become the taste of something unclean, corrupt and foul: "I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree / Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me" ("I Wake and Feel").

Kristeva regards the disgust and loathing induced by unpleasant tastes or smells as perhaps the most archaic form of abjection. The spasms and vomiting that protect the self from that which it finds loathsome by ejecting it actually establishes the border, the difference, on which subjective selfhood depends.²⁸ The self that Hopkins describes, "cursed", brimming with blood, condemned to "sweating" and "straining" without issue, is an image of the self unable to expel, unable to separate itself from the pollution of its own abjection. It is also a suggestive image of the artist-self "feminized", and either "cursed" with the defilement of menstrual blood (also a sign of non-pregnancy) or with the non-issue of miscarriage ("all my undertakings miscarry"). The pain is devastatingly real, yet Hopkins falls part victim to the gendered metaphors through which he and his culture describe and therefore perceive the act of "wording". The same symbolic weight and value that transforms the production of a work of art into a sublimated act of "double-sexed" procreation (of siring and of bearing: the "birth of a brain", "The Wreck of the Deutschland", l. 239) and the visible evidence of spiritual grace, must also interpret the failure to produce as a sign of total nullity, of masculine sexual impotence and of feminine barrenness, and ultimately of the death of the self.

In the epic of his youth, "The Escorial", Hopkins had scorned Philip of Spain and his Catholic subjects for misreading the gospel of Christ and translating religion into a forbidding regime of "frigid gloom and barren rigour". Hopkins's final

confession of a "barren submission to God" shows him too nearly shackled in the same joyless prison by the wish for transcendence over the flesh and absolute rule over his mind and heart. He pursued a lifelong "effort at unity" (*J*, p. 83, 1865), but his striving to find grace and coherence in the jagged elements of the psyche, and thus to give real glory to the God he loved beyond all, could not hope to triumph when the "scorched earth policy" of spiritual asceticism appends success to the rejection of the feminine within, and fear and denigration of the woman without.

The emanations and representations of the feminine and of woman that we have examined in Hopkins's writings are profoundly shaped by the extraordinary power of his unique poetic gift, but inevitably bear the impressure of a specific historical moment and draw on an encoded lingua franca of fear, ambivalence, and gender separatism. In Mary, Hopkins exalts woman as representative of the blissful otherness of the sublime, she is mediatrix and angel, a "bridge to beyond" and an endlessly nurturing breast. Hopkins's dreams of Mary's enveloping embrace, as well as his more melancholy visions of life havened or confined in a convent cell, all suggest longing for the primal fusion of mother and infant. But as we have seen, even these concepts of bliss are ringed by anxiety, for the site of origin is also perceived as the site of castration and death.

Hopkins's dualistic view of woman as sublime mother and monstrous Other is most visibly rendered in his image of the spiked and veiled mermaid, who threatens dissolution of self in the oceanic womb. But even saints like Winefred must be "sheared away", the clinging bines of femininity severed and death objectified in the form of woman so that the masculine artist can create himself anew. The price of that selfhood, of subjectivity, is immeasurably high and is only gained through wounding loss. It is life predicated on separation, disunion and fear of the feminine, and it is a life that caused Hopkins intolerable pain.

The vocabularies of division that Hopkins inherited from his fathers remain extant and there is as yet no language beyond the clamour of gender imperatives and the stentorian boom of ecclesiastical orthodoxy. Until we have a tongue that speaks differently, but does not perpetually *encode* difference, human beings will

continue in exile from themselves and each other, condemned always to the loneliness Hopkins hated. Each to suffer, each to seem a stranger among strangers.

[NOTES]

- ¹ "Easter 1916", *Selected Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1962).
- ² See *Fin de Siècle / Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*, edited by John Stokes, (London: Macmillan, 1992).
- ³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 126.
- ⁴ Heath, *The Sexual Fix*, p. 27.
- ⁵ Pearsall, *The Worm in the Bud*, p. xi.
- ⁶ Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 137.
- ⁷ Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, p. 111.
- ⁸ "'The Shepherd's Brow': Hopkins 'disparadised'", *Victorian Poetry*, 23, 2 (1985) 169-187 (p. 176).
- ⁹ Quoted in Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 152.
- ¹⁰ "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism (1917)", *Standard Edition*, vol. XVII, p. 131.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² Dworkin, *Intercourse*, p. 188.
- ¹³ *The Freud / Jung Letters: The Correspondence Between Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung*, ed. William McGuire, trans. Ralph Manheim and R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 65; quoted in *Intercourse*, p. 183.
- ¹⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 71.
- ¹⁵ Dworkin, *Intercourse*, p. 188.
- ¹⁶ Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 223.
- ¹⁷ Sulloway, "Hopkins and 'Women and Men' as 'Partners in the Mystery of Redemption'", p. 38.
- ¹⁸ "'The Shepherd's Brow': Hopkins 'Disparadised'", p. 186.
- ¹⁹ *Hopkins and the Victorian Temper*, p. 95.
- ²⁰ *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 212.
- ²¹ Sulloway, *Hopkins and the Victorian Temper*, pp. 152-153.
- ²² See chapter 49, "The Pyramid of the Vanities", in George Eliot's *Romola* for a fictionalized account of Savonarola's public burning of profane objects in Florence in 1497.
- ²³ "'The Shepherd's Brow': Hopkins 'Disparadised'", p. 169.
- ²⁴ "Hopkins's Secret Watchers", p. 53.
- ²⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 74.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

[K. Kossick, 1995: Epilogue]

²⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

Bibliography

I. Primary Material by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, edited by Claude Colleer Abbott, (London: Oxford University Press, 1935; 2nd imp. rev., 1955)

The Early Poetic Manuscripts and Note-books of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile, ed. with Annotations, Transcriptions of Unpublished Passages and an Introduction by Norman Mackenzie, Norman H. MacKenzie, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989)

Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins Including his Correspondence with Coventry Patmore, edited by Claude Colleer Abbott, (London: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn., rev. and enlarged, 1956)

Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by Catherine Phillips, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, The Oxford Authors Series, 1986)

Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Letters, edited by Catherine Phillips, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by Humphrey House and Graham Storey, (London: Oxford University Press, 1959)

The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, edited by Claude Colleer Abbott, (London: Oxford University Press, 1935; 2nd imp. rev., 1955)

Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1st edn, edited by Robert Bridges, (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918)

The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by Norman Mackenzie, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by Christopher Devlin, S.J., (London: Oxford University Press, 1959)

II. Biographical and Critical Studies of Hopkins

Ball, Patricia M., *The Science of Aspects: The Changing Role of Fact in the Work of Coleridge, Ruskin and Hopkins* (London: The Athlone Press, 1971)

Balthasar, Hans Urs von, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. III: *Studies in Theological Styles: Lay Styles*, trans. by Andrew Louth and others, edited by John Riches, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986)

Barry, Paul J., *Mary in Hopkins' Writings and Life*, pars dissertationis ad laureum in facultate S. Theologiae apud pontificam Universitatem S. Thomae De Urbe, (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1970)

Boyle, Robert, S.J., *Metaphor in Hopkins* (U.S.A.: University of North Carolina Press, 1961)

Bump, Jerome, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982)

———"Hopkins, Feminism, and Creativity: An Overview", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 31, 1 (1989), 1-30

———"Hopkins and Keats", *Victorian Poetry*, 10 (1972), 33-43

Chevigny, Bell Gale, "Instress and Devotion in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins", *Victorian Studies*, 9 (Dec. 1965), 141-153

Cotter, James Finn, "'Hornlight Wound to the West': The Inscape of the Passion in Hopkins' Poetry", *Victorian Poetry*, 16, 4 (1978), 297-313

———*Inscape: The Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972)

Davie, Donald, "Hopkins, The Decadent Critic", *Cambridge Journal*, 4 (1950-51), 725-739

Dilligan, Robert J., and Bender, Todd K. *A Concordance to the English Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970)

Downes, David Anthony, *Hopkins' Sanctifying Imagination* (London: University Press of America, 1985)

Dunne, Tom, ed. *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976)

Ellsberg, Margaret, *Created to Praise: The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)

Ferlita, Ernest, S.J., *The Uttermost Mark: The Dramatic Criticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins, his Dramatic Works and the Performance thereof* (London: University Press of America, 1990)

Fox, Judith, "The Queen of the Air: Transformation of Myth in Ruskin and Hopkins", *Victorian Poetry*, 12, 4 (1974), 335-343

Fraser, Hilary, *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 67-106

Furbank, P.N., "Beauty and Danger: Hopkins's Clear-headed Collision-course", *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 March 1992, p. 4

Gardner, W.H., *Gerard Manley Hopkin: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1958)

Giles, Richard F., "'The Shepherd's Brow': Hopkins 'disparadised'", *Victorian Poetry*, 23, 2 (1985), 169-187

Harris, Daniel, *Inspirations Unbidden: The Terrible Sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, (London: University of California Press, 1982)

Heaney, Seamus, "The Fire i' the Flint: Reflections on the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins", in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), pp. 79-97

Johnson, Wendell Stacy, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Poet as Victorian* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968)

———"Sexuality and Inscape", *The Hopkins Quarterly*, 3, 2 (1976), 59-65

Keating, John, *The Wreck of the Deutschland: An Essay and Commentary*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Bulletin, 1963)

Kitchen, Paddy, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978)

Lahey, G.F., S.J., *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (New York: Octagon Books, repr., 1970)

Lock, Charles, "Hopkins as a Decadent Poet", *Essays in Criticism*, 32, 4 (1984), 129-154

Loomis, Jeffrey B., "Birth Pangs in Darkness: Hopkins's Archetypal Christian Biography", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 28, 1 (1986), 81-106

——— *Dayspring in Darkness: Sacrament in Hopkins* (London: Associated University Press, 1988)

MacKenzie, Norman, *A Reader's Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981)

McNeely, Trevor, "The Blissful Agony of Hopkins: Notes of a Neo-Reactionary", *The Hopkins Quarterly*, 12, 3 & 4 (1986), 97-114

- Martin, Robert Bernard, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (London: HarperCollins, 1991)
- Miller, J. Hillis, "Gerard Manley Hopkins", in *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 270-359
- Milroy, James, *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: André Deutsch, 1977)
- Moder, Donna, "Aspects of Androgyny, Oedipal Struggle, and Religious Defence in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins", *Literature and Psychology*, 32, 1 (1986), 2-18
- Murphy, Michael W., "Violent Imagery in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins", *Victorian Poetry*, 7 (1969), 1-16
- North, John S. and Moore, Michael, eds. *Vital Candle: Victorian and Modern Bearings in Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Ontario: University of Waterloo Press, 1984)
- Nowotny, Winefred, "Hopkins's Language of Prayer and Praise", The Hopkins Society, Fourth Annual Lecture, (Enfield, Middlesex: The Hopkins Society, 1973)
- Ong, Walter J, S.J., *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1986)
- Peters, W.A.M., S.J., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Essay towards the Understanding of his Poetry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970)
- Pick, John, "Gerard Manley Hopkins", in *The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research*, 2nd edn, ed. by Frederick Faverty, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969, pp. 317-351
 ————*Gerard Manley Hopkins: Priest and Poet* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943)
- Robinson, John, *In Extremity: A Study of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978)
- Ruggles, Eleanor, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Life* (London: Bodley Head, 1947)
- Salmon, Rachel, "Prayers of Praise and Prayers of Petition: Simultaneity in the Sonnet World of Gerard Manley Hopkins", *Victorian Poetry*, 22, 4 (1984), 383-406
- Seib, Kenneth, "Hopkins's Secret Watchers", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 31, 1 (1989), 52-65

- Barrecca, Regina, ed. *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1990)
- Barret-Ducrocq, Françoise, *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London*, trans. by John Howe, (London: Verso, 1991)
- Barthes, Roland, "The Death of the Author", in *Image Music Text*, edited by Stephen Heath, (London: Fontana, 1977)
- Battersby, Christine, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Women's Press, 1989)
- Beer, Gillian, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983)
- Bizup, Joseph, "Walter Pater and the Ruskinian Gentleman", *English Literature in Transition*, 38, 1 (1995), 51-69
- Bloom, Harold, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973)
- Boff, Leonardo, O.F.M., *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expressions*, trans. by Robert R. Barr and John Diercksmeier, (London: Harper and Row, 1987)
- Bord, Janet and Colin, *Sacred Waters: Holy Wells and Water Lore in Britain and Ireland* (London: Paladin, 1986)
- Brennan, Teresa, *The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity* (London: Routledge, 1992)
- Bridges, Robert, *The Testament of Beauty: A Poem in Four Books by Robert Bridges, Poet Laureate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929)
- Brod, Harry, and Michael Kaufman, eds. *Theorizing Masculinities* (London: Sage Publications, 1994)
- Bronfen, Elisabeth, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992)
- Brontë, Charlotte, *Villette*, edited by Mark Lilly (Middlesex: Penguin, 1979)
- Brown, Raymond E., Karl P. Donfried, Joseph Fitzmyer and John Reumann, eds. *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978)

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett, *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, edited by Ruth M. Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974)

Browning, Robert, *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford University Press, 1905, repr. 1964)

Bugge, John, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975)

Catholic Encyclopaedia, 16 vols [London 1907-14] (New York: The Encyclopaedia Press, 1913)

Chaucer, Geoffrey, *Works*, edited by F.N. Robinson, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957)

Cixous, Hélène, "Castration or Decapitation?", *Signs*, 7, 1 (1981), 41-45

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Poetical Works*, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, (London: Oxford University Press, 1980)

Collins New English Dictionary, ed. Alexander H. Irvine, (London: Collins, 1956, repr. 1971)

Cooper, Robyn, "Victorian Discourses on Women and Beauty: The Alexander Walker Texts", *Gender and History*, 5, 1 (1993), 34-55

Creed, Christine, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993)

Crow, Duncan, *The Victorian Woman* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971)

Cruden, Alexander, *Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments*, new and rev. edn, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1941)

Culler, Jonathan, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983)

Daiches, David, "Walt Whitman's Philosophy", in *Literary Essays* (London: Oliver and Bond, 1966), pp. 67-87

Daly, Mary, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: The Women's Press, 1986)

- Darwin, Charles, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2nd edn, (London: John Murray, 1913)
———*The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1911)
- Davenport-Hines, Richard, *Sex, Death and Punishment: Attitudes to Sex and Sexuality in Britain since the Renaissance* (London: Collins, 1990)
- Davies, Horton, *Worship and Theology in England from Newman to Martineau, 1850-1900* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962)
- Davis, Lloyd, ed., *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature* (New York: University of New York Press, 1993)
- De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, trans. and edited by H.M. Parshley, (London: David Campbell, Everyman's Library, 1993)
- De Gourmont, Remy, *The Natural Philosophy of Love*, trans. with postscript by Ezra Pound, (London: The Casanova Society, 1936)
- Dijkstra, Bram, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986)
- Dinnerstein, Dorothy, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (London: Harper Colophon, 1977)
- Dworkin, Andrea, *Intercourse* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987)
- Ellman, Mary, *Thinking About Women* (London: Virago, 1979)
- Fenichel, Otto, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1946, repr. 1980)
- Fletcher, Pauline, *Gardens and Grim Ravines: The Language of Landscape in Victorian Poetry* (Guildford, Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1983)
- French, Marilyn, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (London: Cardinal, 1991)
———*Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (London: Sphere, 1983)

- Freud, Sigmund, *The Standard Edition of the the Complete Pyschological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74)
- "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis (1938)", *S.E.*, vol. XXIII
- "Anxiety and Instinctual Life (1933)", *S.E.*, vol. XXII
- "Development of the Libido and Sexual Organizations (1917[1916-17])", *S.E.*, vol. XVI
- Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), *S.E.*, vol. VIII
- "Lecture on Femininity (1933[1932])", *S.E.*, vol. XXII
- "Medusa's Head (1940)", *S.E.*, vol. XVIII
- Moses and Monotheism* (1939), *S.E.*, vol. XXIII
- "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism (1917)", *S.E.*, vol. XVII
- "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of Love II), (1912)", *S.E.*, vol. XI
- The Ego and the Id* (1923), *S.E.*, vol. XIX
- The Economic Problem of Masochism* (1924), *S.E.*, vol. XIX
- "The Future of an Illusion (1927)", *S.E.*, vol. XXI
- The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *S.E.*, vol. V
- "The Psycho-Analytic View of Psychogenetic Disturbance of Vision (1910)", *S.E.*, XI
- Totem and Taboo* (1912-1913), *S.E.*, vol. XIII
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979)
- No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth-Century*, 3 vols, (London: Yale University Press, 1994)
- Gilley, Sheridan, *Newman and his Age* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990)
- Goodridge, J.F., "A New Heaven and a New Earth", in *The Art of Emily Brontë*, edited by Anne Smith, (London: Vision Press, 1976), pp. 160-181
- Graham, Deborah, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Croom Helm, 1982)
- Greeley, Andrew M., *The Mary Myth: On the Femininity of God* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977)
- Grosz, Elizabeth, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London, Routledge, 1990)
- Handelman, Susan, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982)
- Harding, Esther M., *Woman's Mysteries* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1976)

- Haskins, Susan, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (London: HarperCollins, 1993)
- Heaney, Seamus, *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988)
- Heath, Stephen, "Difference", *Screen*, 19, 3 (1978), 51-112
 ——— *The Sexual Fix* (London: Macmillan, 1982)
- Hughes, Ted, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992)
- Jackson, Rosemary, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981)
- James, William, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Collins, The Fontana Library, 1960)
- Jay, Elisabeth, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1986)
- Jewett, Paul K., *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdman's Publishing Co., 1976)
- Jones, James W., *Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Religion: Transference and Transcendence* (London: Yale University Press, 1991)
- Joyce, James, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (St. Albans: Triad / Panther, 1977)
 ——— *Ulysses* (New York: Modern Library, 1934)
- Klein, Melanie, and Joan Rivière, *Love, Hate and Reparation: Two Lectures* (London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1937)
- Kline, Paul, *Fact and Fantasy in Freudian Theory* (London: Methuen, 1981)
- Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)
 ——— *The Kristeva Reader: Julia Kristeva*, edited by Toril Moi, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986)
- Kurzweill, Edith, and William Phillips, eds. *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983)
- Lacan, Jacques, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979)

- Laing, R.D., *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Penguin, 1965)
- Langbaum, Robert, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1971)
- Larkin, Philip, *The Whitsun Weddings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985)
- Lewis, Bertram, *The Psychoanalysis of Elation* (New York: The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 1961)
- McCracken, Scott, "Male Sexuality and the Gender Industry", *Gender and History*, 7, 1 (1995), 106-112
- McHugh, Paul, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980)
- Mangan, J.A., and James Walvin, eds. *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Morality in Britain and America 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987)
- Mason, Michael, *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
- *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
- Meyers, Carol, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)
- Miller, J. Hillis, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1982)
- Millet, Kate, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1993)
- "The Debate over Women: Ruskin versus Mill", *Victorian Studies*, 14 (Sept. 1970), 63-82
- Milton, John, *Complete English Poems, Of Education, Areopagitica*, edited by Gordon Campbell, (London: J.M. Dent, Everyman's Library, 4th edn 1990)
- *The Complete Poems*, edited by B.A. Wright, (London: J.M. Dent, 1980)
- Moi, Toril, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985)
- Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987)

- Laing, R.D., *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Penguin, 1965)
- Langbaum, Robert, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1971)
- Larkin, Philip, *The Whitsun Weddings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985)
- Lewis, Bertram, *The Psychoanalysis of Elation* (New York: The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 1961)
- McCracken, Scott, "Male Sexuality and the Gender Industry", *Gender and History*, 7, 1 (1995), 106-112
- McHugh, Paul, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980)
- Mangan, J.A., and James Walvin, eds. *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Morality in Britain and America 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987)
- Mason, Michael, *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
- *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
- Meyers, Carol, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)
- Miller, J. Hillis, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1982)
- Millet, Kate, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1993)
- "The Debate over Women: Ruskin versus Mill", *Victorian Studies*, 14 (Sept. 1970), 63-82
- Milton, John, *Complete English Poems, Of Education, Areopagitica*, edited by Gordon Campbell, (London: J.M. Dent, Everyman's Library, 4th edn 1990)
- *The Complete Poems*, edited by B.A. Wright, (London: J.M. Dent, 1980)
- Moi, Toril, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985)
- Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987)

Nead, Linda, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988)

Newman, John Henry, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of his Religious Opinions*, edited by Martin J. Svaglic, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967)

——— *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 8 vols (London: Rivington, 1842-4)

——— *The Idea of a University*, with introduction and notes by Martin J. Svaglic, (New York: Rinehart Press, 1960)

——— *The New Eve* (London: Newman Press, 1952)

Noddings, Nel, *Women and Evil* (London: University of California Press, 1989)

Norford, Don Parry, "'Very like a whale': the problem of knowledge in *Hamlet*", *English Literary History*, 46 (1979), 559-576

Norman, Edward, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984)

O'Brien, Lynne B., "Male Heroism: Tennyson's Divided View", *Victorian Poetry*, 32, 2 (1994), 171-183

Olney, James, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973)

Olsen, Tillie, *Silences* (London: Virago, 1980)

Pagels, Elaine, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988)

Paglia, Camille, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London: Yale University Press, 1990)

Patmore, Coventry, "Mrs. Meynell, Poet and Essayist", in *The Fortnightly Review*, 52 (1892), 761-766

——— *The Poems of Coventry Patmore*, edited with an introduction by Frederick Page, (London: Oxford University Press, 1949)

Paxton, Nancy L., *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism and the Reconstruction of Gender* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991)

Pearsall, Ronald, *The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality* (London: Pimlico, 1993)

Plumwood, Val, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993)

- Pope, Alexander, *Collected Poems*, edited by Bonamy Dobrée, (London: Dent Dutton, 1980)
- Praz, Mario, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson, (London: Oxford University Press, 1954)
- Prickett, Stephen, *Words and The Word* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986)
- Psomiades, Kathy Alexis, "Beauty's Body: Gender Ideology and British Aestheticism", *Victorian Studies*, 36, 1 (Autumn 1992), 31-51
- Ragland-Sullivan, Ellie, and Mark Bracher, eds. *Lacan and the Subject of Language* (London: Routledge, 1991)
- Ranke-Heinemann, Uta, *Eunuchs for the Sake of Heaven: Women, Sexuality and the Catholic Church*, trans. Peter Heinegg, (London: Penguin, 1991)
- Rich, Adrienne, *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* (London: W.W. Norton, 1973)
- Rickaby, Joseph, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, Spanish and English with a Continuous Commentary*, 2nd edn, (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1923)
- Ricks, Christopher, *Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1974)
- Ricoeur, Paul, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Beacon Press, 1969)
- Ridolfi, Roberto, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola*, trans. by Cecil Grayson, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959)
- Rogers, Katharine M., *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (London: University of Washington Press, 1973)
- Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist, and Louise Lamphere, eds. *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974)
- Rosenberg, David, and Harold Bloom, *The Book of J: Translated from the Hebrew by David Rosenberg, Interpreted by Harold Bloom* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990)

Ruskin, John, *Sesame and Lilies; The Two Paths; The King of the Golden River* (London: J.M. Dent, Everyman's Library, 1970)

——— *The Diaries of John Ruskin*, edited by Joan Evans and J.H. Waterhouse, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1956-9)

——— *The Works of John Ruskin*, edited by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, Library Edition, 1903-12)

Sarup, Madan, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992)

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, edited by Robert Denoon Cumming, (New York: Vintage Books, 1972)

Sayers, Janet, *Sexual Contradictions: Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1986)

Schneiderman, Stuart, *An Angel Passes: How the Sexes Became Undivided* (London: New York University Press, 1988)

Shaw, George Bernard, *Man and Superman* (London: Penguin, 1952)

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *Complete Poetical Works*, edited by Neville Rogers, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972)

Showalter, Elaine, ed. *Speaking of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1989)

——— *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990)

——— *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987)

Sinfield, Alan, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Movement* (London: Cassell, 1994)

Soelle, Dorothee, *The Strength of the Weak: Towards a Christian Feminist Identity*, trans. by Robert and Rita Kimber, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984)

Sonstroem, David, "Millett versus Ruskin: A Defence of Ruskin's 'Of Queens' Gardens'", *Victorian Studies*, 20, 3 (1976-1977), 283-297

Soskice, Janet Martin, ed. *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition* (London: Collins Marshall Pickering, 1990)

Spenser, Edmund, *Spenser Poetical Works*, edited by J.C. Smith and E. De Selincourt, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970)

Stokes, John, ed. *Fin de Siècle / Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1992)

Svaglic, Martin J., *John Henry Newman* (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1960)

Swinburne, Algernon Charles, *Poems and Prose* (London: J.M. Dent, Everyman's Library, 1940)

Taylor, Jeremy, *Holy Living and Dying* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1864)

Tennyson, Alfred, *Poems*, edited by Christopher Ricks, (London: Longmans, 1969)

Tennyson, G.B., *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (London: Harvard University Press, 1981)

Thackeray, William Makepeace, *Vanity Fair*, edited with an introduction by J.I.M. Stewart, (London: Penguin, repr. 1985)

Surtees, Virginia, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971)

Trudgill, Eric, *Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (London: Heinemann, 1976)

Turco, Lewis Putnam, *Visions and Revisions of American Poetry* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1986)

Ullman, Chana, *The Transformed Self: The Psychology of Religious Conversion* (London: Plenum Press, 1989)

Vance, Norman, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

Vaughan, Henry, *Works*, edited by L.C. Martin, (London: Oxford University Press, 1980)

Vicinus, Martha, ed. *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (London: Methuen, 1980)

——— *Suffer and be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (London: Methuen, 1980)

Walkowitz, Judith R., *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980)

Warhol, Robyn R., and Diane Price Herndl, eds. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991)

Warner, Marina, *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976; repr. London: Picador, 1990)

———*From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994)

———*Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985)

Weinstein, Donald, and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1982)

Wharton, Edith, *The House of Mirth* (New York: Rinehart, 1962)

Whitman, Walt, *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose and Letters* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1938)

Wilde, Oscar, *Complete Works*, edited by Vyvyan Holland, (London: Collins, 1966)

Wolf, Naomi, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used against Women* (London: Vintage, 1991)

Wolman, Benjamin B., ed. *Psychoanalysis and Catholicism* (London: Gardner Press, 1976)

Wright, Terence R., "Comte's Madonna and George Eliot: The Humanisation of a Symbol", in *Le Symbole religieux et l'imaginaire dans la littérature Anglaise*, edited by Solange Dayras, (Paris: Université Paris-Nord, 1987), pp. 265-274

W. B. Yeats, *Selected Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1962)