

**GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS : CRITICAL  
PERCEPTIONS OF HIS RELATION TO POETIC  
TRADITION TO 1970**

Stephen J. Simkin

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**GERARD MANLEY**  
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**TO 1970**



**Stephen J. Simkin**

**Ph.D. Thesis**

**University of St. Andrews**  
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For Mum, Dad and Ed.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis has been to make an accurate assessment of the developments in Hopkins criticism up until 1970, with the overriding emphasis on perceptions of his relation to poetic tradition.

The chosen methodology involves a chapter by chapter discussion of Hopkins' perceived relation to individual poets or groups of poets. Generally, each chapter opens with an examination of Hopkins' published correspondence, scrutinizing his own criticism of the poet or poets in question, and proceeds in a chronological survey of the ways in which critics and reviewers have related him to the predecessor in question.

Material covered in the thesis includes major published works on Hopkins; articles and reviews in scholarly periodicals, as well as more popular journals and some newspapers; and other critical works where Hopkins receives some degree of attention. The 'cut-off' point of this study is 1970, although a final chapter has been appended with a less detailed survey of the developments from 1970 to the present day.

On certain occasions, I have ventured to investigate more fully some areas of Hopkins' literary genetics that

seem not to have received the attention they deserve. In general, however, the focus of the thesis is upon the perceptions of the critics, and attempts are made to assess the ways in which Hopkins' fluctuating critical standing has altered these perceptions and vice versa. One of the most frequently recurring demands has been the need to try and determine why Hopkins has been related to different poets and different poetic traditions at different times.

To provide a more 'three-dimensional' perspective, two chapters are devoted to exploring the ways in which Hopkins has been perceived as an influence on twentieth century poetry, in general terms, and in specific cases.

In conclusion, a 'map' of the territory of Hopkins' criticism charting the perceived relations between his *oeuvre* and poetic tradition is proposed. And, with a necessary emphasis on the provisional (particularly with the post-1970 study taken into account), some suggestions are made for new directions in this area of study.

DECLARATION

I, Stephen John Simkin, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 21/2/92

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

I was admitted as a research student under Ordinance No.12 in October 1988 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in October 1988; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1988 and 1992.

Date 21/2/92

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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I am greatly indebted to the work of two critics in particular: firstly to Tom Dunne, whose *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) provided the standard guide and reference for my research. Also to Gerald Roberts' *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Critical Heritage* (1987), which provided essential material otherwise unobtainable.

Thanks to Mr. George Jack for help and advice (particularly with the computer!) and to Dr. Ian Johnson for looking over Chapter XIII and giving very necessary advice and corrections.

To Aileen, for love, support and page-separation.

Above all to my supervisors, Mr. Stephen Boyd and Dr. Graham Bradshaw, for invaluable help, guidance, and, most importantly, constant encouragement. Without them, I am quite certain, this thesis would never have been completed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:	"INHERITING THE MANTLE" . . . . .	p.1
CHAPTER I:	"BEAUTY'S SELF AND BEAUTY'S GIVER": HOPKINS AND KEATS . . . . .	p.9
CHAPTER II:	"THE TEST OF SERIOUSNESS": HOPKINS AND MILTON . . . . .	p.38
CHAPTER III:	"CURRENT LANGUAGE HEIGHTENED": HOPKINS AND SHAKESPEARE . . . . .	p.68
CHAPTER IV:	"UNIFIED SENSIBILITY": HOPKINS AND THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY METAPHYSICAL POETS . . . . .	p.90
CHAPTER V:	"PAYSAGES SACRALISES": HOPKINS AND THE ROMANTIC POETS . . . . .	p.123
CHAPTER VI:	"EXTREMES MEET": HOPKINS AND WALT WHITMAN . . . . .	p.150
CHAPTER VII:	"AMIDST THE CHAFFINCH FLOCK": HOPKINS AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES . . . . .	p.184
CHAPTER VIII:	"THE CONVENTION OF FREEDOM": HOPKINS AS A VICTORIAN AND HOPKINS AS A MODERNIST . . . . .	p.211
CHAPTER IX:	"INNOVATOR AND LIBERATOR": HOPKINS' INFLUENCE . . . . .	p.260
CHAPTER X:	"ADMIRE AND DO OTHERWISE": HOPKINS' INFLUENCE ON SPECIFIC POETS . . . . .	p.293
CHAPTER XI:	"NOBLE STYLE": HOPKINS AND THE CLASSICAL BACKGROUND . . . . .	p.320
CHAPTER XII:	"SALAD DAYS": HOPKINS AND WELSH TRADITIONAL VERSE . . . . .	p.339
CHAPTER XIII:	"PURITY OF ENGLISH VERSE": HOPKINS AND ANGLO-SAXON POETRY. . . . .	p.353
CHAPTER XIV:	"NEW READINGS": HOPKINS CRITICISM AFTER 1970 . . . . .	p.365
CONCLUSION:	"MY OWN APPOINTED PLACES" . . . . .	p.381
FOOTNOTES . . . . .		p.392
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .		p.427

"I am a lake of blue air  
In which my own appointed place  
Field and valley  
Stand reflected"

THOMAS MERTON,  
*Emblems of a Season of Fury*

"Poetic influence is the passing of individuals through States, in Blake's language, but the passing is done ill when it is not a swerving. The strong poet indeed says: "I seem to have stopped falling; now I *am fallen*, consequently I lie here in Hell", but he is thinking, as he says this, "As I fell, I *swerved*, consequently I lie here in a Hell improved by my own making".

HAROLD BLOOM,  
*The Anxiety of Influence*

"The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise."

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS,  
letter to Bridges, 25 September 1888

INTRODUCTION: "INHERITING THE MANTLE"

In a letter to Richard Watson Dixon of 22 December 1880, Hopkins complimented his friend on the "extreme beauties" of his poetry, remarking, amongst other things, on the "imagery inheriting Keats's mantle".<sup>1</sup> While we might consider that Hopkins is over-generous in his praise - as he so often was with Dixon - the comment serves to illuminate something of Hopkins' own perspective on literary history: he evidently had some notion, however diffuse, of a sense of tradition in poetry, of a baton being passed from one poet to the next through the succeeding generations.

Many more fragments of prose could be cited to reinforce this impression, and, in the course of this study, some will appear: for instance, Hopkins appealed to 'tradition' - and individual poets - in defence of his prosodic system of sprung rhythm. However, the primary focus of the thesis is the spectrum of critical perceptions that emerges from the period up to 1970 in the history of Hopkins criticism. In its early stages of conception, the thesis was to be a more general account of the reception of Hopkins' verse, but it quickly became apparent that the volume of material written about Hopkins since he was first published in 1918 rendered this intention unfeasible.



## Introduction

As I narrowed the scope, the notion of poetic tradition seemed to loom large in Hopkins criticism. One of the most authoritative works on Hopkins is W.H. Gardner's *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition* (1948-9), and it provides a thorough, though not exhaustive investigation of the roots of much of Hopkins' poetry, and, in particular, his techniques. One of the dynamic paradoxes of Hopkins' situation is precisely his idiosyncrasy (which often makes him seem intractably isolated from the mainstream of English literature) allied to his own quite organized hierarchies of tradition, and his acknowledgement of his indebtedness to precedent. Hopkins' writings on his predecessors are fascinating in many ways, partly on account of the oddities of some of his groupings and classifications, as we shall see.

The other anomaly that is particularly relevant to an investigation of this kind is Hopkins' publication history. Unpublished in his own lifetime (save for a few minor poems, in strictly limited circulation), Hopkins was glimpsed in *The Poets and The Poetry of the Century* in 1893, with the first selection of his poetry not being printed until 1918, under Bridges' editorship. It is this 'time-warp' factor that fascinates, for it is often said that Hopkins' oddities would have made him unpalatable to the vast majority of Victorian poetasters. Perhaps if he had been published in his own

## Introduction

lifetime, he would have been filed alongside other Victorian eccentrics such as Charles Doughty and promptly forgotten. Certainly the muted reactions of friends such as Bridges and Patmore to his work, and the fact that both the *Deutschland* and the *Eurydice* poems were rejected by the *Month*, a Catholic periodical, seem to suggest that Hopkins was radically out of joint with contemporary modes and tastes. In the terms of a reception theorist like Jauss, the "horizon change" that Hopkins would have demanded from a contemporary receiving consciousness would have been too great.<sup>2</sup>

However, the delay in publication meant that the horizon of expectation had changed to meet that which the poetry demanded by the time it actually appeared in the early decades of this century. As we shall see, there was most certainly a mixed response, but there were enough critics on his side to champion his cause against the reactionaries, and carry him through to a more widespread and influential emergence in the 1930's. The scope of this study ventures beyond an investigation of Hopkins' roots and assesses his impact on later poets, as it was perceived by the artists themselves and their critics. These necessarily more tentative enquiries are an attempt to construct a three-dimensional model of Hopkins' position in poetic tradition, with some sense of a context that envelops past, present, and future around him.

## Introduction

The division of chapters has, generally, been built around studies of Hopkins' relation to individual poets or groups of poets. In the case of the groups, one or two have been stable classifications - Hopkins' contemporaries for instance - but others are traditional groupings that must remain open systems; for example, Romantics and Metaphysicals. Part of the work of this thesis has been to establish that standard notions of classification, when simple chronology is abandoned as a criterion in favour of definitions by style, must remain provisional and open to reorganization and even demolition. Critics have occasionally tried to slot Hopkins into a system of tradition only to find that he causes an apparently secure construction to collapse in upon itself. However, since my study is an investigation of critical perceptions, it seems appropriate to accept traditional strategies, in the first place at least.

Keats provides an anachronistic starting-point and opening chapter, but he is a useful model for the pattern of the majority of the following chapters, and discussions of his influence on Hopkins raise some of the most important and most frequently recurring issues. In addition, prejudices of critics and reviewers surface more readily in this chapter: elsewhere, though still active and germane to the work of the thesis, these prejudices are more subtle and carefully-camouflaged.

Shakespeare and Milton have been reversed

## Introduction

chronologically, since there is a profound interrelation between them in their connection with Hopkins, and the line of argument can be more clearly elaborated by this simple switch. The rest of the thesis proceeds in a more orderly chronological fashion up until the last three chapters. At this point I must make it clear that my own knowledge of Latin, Greek, Anglo-Saxon and traditional Welsh verse is limited. Therefore the relevant chapters have been placed at the end of the thesis: though they do not quite qualify as appendices, they are shorter and more reserved in judgement and evaluation.

The pattern of each chapter is set by a brief introduction, followed by a study of Hopkins' own perception of the poet in question. We are fortunate in that his correspondence is littered with studies, opinions or brief notes of many of his predecessors and contemporaries. This firm grounding launches a survey of any relevant connection by a critic or reviewer between Hopkins and the poet, or group of poets, under scrutiny.

A determined effort has been made to cover as many items as possible, from full-length studies of Hopkins, more general critical works, or books about other poets in which Hopkins figures prominently, to articles and reviews in scholarly journals, as well as daily and weekly newspapers and periodicals such as the *Times*

## Introduction

*Literary Supplement.* The range has been circumscribed by the exclusion of work published in foreign languages. Dunne's *Bibliography* has been the source index of my research, and since this is complete up until 1970, this date has become the somewhat arbitrary 'cut-off point' for the thesis. A chronological extension would produce an expansion of the thesis out of all proportion to its present size, but I have attempted an overview of the more important critical work up to the present day in a final chapter.

Chronology has been a guiding principle in the body of each chapter, too, for this is in part a study of trends and developing attitudes and understandings, readings and re-readings of Hopkins. However, as definite common approaches are identified, and conflicts of opinions emerge, critics are often gathered in accordance with these criteria.

My prime motive in studying the material gathered in the course of my research has been to establish critical trends: the relationship between critic and text seems dialectical, for Hopkins' standing in the canon of English literature has radically altered in accordance with the vagaries of critical fashion; at the same time, Hopkins' rise to prominence has led to an increasingly significant role in determining which mode of criticism dominates literary studies. Hopkins' influence on certain poets was potent, for a time; but

## Introduction

perhaps his more subtle but enduring effect has been on the literary and academic establishment.

The work of the thesis has also been evaluative: one of the most remarkable discoveries of the research has been how many critics and reviewers have failed to apply intellectual rigour to their investigations of Hopkins' relation to poetic tradition. Some of the most famous and well-respected critics of the century are amongst them. As I have already mentioned, prejudices also emerge from time to time. At certain points in the past eighty years, for instance, the strength and extent of anti-Catholic bias has been alarming and depressing. There must be scope for a major study in that area of Hopkins' critical reception alone.

Thirdly, I have supplemented critics' studies with my own speculations on the ways in which Hopkins was influenced by particular predecessors. This is a necessarily less systematic aspect of the thesis, although the work has generally been woven into the rest of the text, usually alongside the evaluative sections outlined above. There are one or two exceptions, where a 'gap' in critical coverage has overlapped with my own spheres of more detailed knowledge - the chapter on Walt Whitman is the best example.

This may appear, then, to be a study in which the

use of 'reception theory' might seem appropriate, and it is true that the thesis shares some of the fundamental assumptions of critics like Jauss, Iser and Fish. The thesis accepts that, in large part, Hopkins is as he is perceived. However, on the other hand, my methodology does not embrace these writers' massive shift into pure theory: this is a study of one particular aspect of Hopkins' critical reception and, almost exclusively, my territory is Hopkins' *oeuvre*, the critical explorations that crisscross his landscape, and the position of that landscape in the wider context of English poetic tradition.

CHAPTER I: "BEAUTY'S SELF AND BEAUTY'S GIVER"

HOPKINS AND KEATS

*Introduction*

In the Introduction, we noted that Hopkins had a conception of poets working within a tradition, of "inheriting the mantle".<sup>1</sup> This remark was made by way of connecting Dixon to Keats, and Keats is an interesting reference point, and an appropriate starting point, for an investigation of Hopkins' poetic ancestry for several reasons. Firstly, he was one of the most frequently cited influences in the early reviews and criticism; secondly, the later criticism produces a valuable dialectic that centres around Hopkins' so-called "Keatsian" characteristics; and thirdly, Hopkins himself had some provocative opinions about his predecessor's work.

*The Correspondence*

Hopkins' admiration for Keats is beyond dispute. In an letter of 13 June 1878 to R.W. Dixon, he writes:

"Keats' genius was so astonishing, unequalled at his age and scarcely surpassed in any, that one may surmise whether if he had lived he would not have rivalled Shakspeare".<sup>2</sup>



Keats' imagery Hopkins must have believed to be particularly admirable: in the correspondence we find him using it as a reference point when trying to express his admiration for Dixon's poetry. As well as the compliment paid to Dixon quoted above, he writes to Bridges that the "rich"ness of Dixon's imagery is "as like Keats as anyone that has been since has succeeded in being".<sup>3</sup>

Such comments in themselves are not particularly valuable as literary criticism, although they do help us to understand what aspects of Keats' work Hopkins particularly admired. We should also take note of a certain lack of objectivity in his remarks on Dixon; Hopkins perhaps allows his affections to get the better of his critical sense. It is fascinating to contrast this with those letters to Coventry Patmore and Robert Bridges, in which he discusses their poetry. Often full of praise, Hopkins is, nevertheless, equally likely to be quite vigorously aggressive and infuriatingly pedantic in his criticism.

A letter to Bridges of 16 June 1881, where a defence of Millais draws on a comparison with Keats, also provokes discussion:

"He has, I have always seen, no feeling for beauty in abstract design... but he has a deep feeling, it is plain, for concrete beauty, wild or natural beauty, much as Keats had."<sup>4</sup>

The parallel is an interesting one; Millais actually illustrated Keats' "Isabella" from Keats, and perhaps this was in Hopkins' mind as he wrote. But to talk of the "deep feeling for concrete beauty" in Keats is to get at the heart of the genius, not only in pieces such as "To Autumn", but even in the imaginative flights of fancy in "The Fall of Hyperion" or "The Eve of St. Agnes", where the fanciful is balanced and enhanced by the very precise, real, 'concrete' images that populate the lines.

The fullest, most fascinating discussion of Keats, however, took place in the correspondence between Hopkins and Patmore, in letters written between October 1887 and May 1888. It is vital to an understanding of the development of Hopkins' own work but, since it does not come into play until some time later in the history of Hopkins criticism, its proper place must be there.

### *Early Reactions*

In early reviews of the first edition of Hopkins' *Poems*, Keats was often chosen as a point of comparison. This reflects the rather unrepresentative selection of pieces on the part of Bridges, who edited the volume. It also, no doubt, indicates an unwillingness on the part of the critics to face the challenge of the more experimental poems; they retreated from the frontal

assault of sprung rhythm and took refuge in the juvenilia, where they could comfortably lapse into safe and frankly vacuous remarks of little value. We should also note that Bridges himself, introducing the poetry, noted that "'A Vision of the Mermaids' betrays the influence of Keats",<sup>5</sup> and in his introduction to the very earliest publication of Hopkins' work in Miles' *The Poets and Poetry of the Century* (1893), he talked of his friend's "mastery of Keatsian sweetness".<sup>6</sup>

On this account, we should not be surprised, if disappointed, to read nothing but affirmations of the same point: Matthew Russell, for example, wrote of "poetry of a sweet and tender beauty showing an affinity to the style of Keats."<sup>7</sup> Such remarks became so commonplace as to make themselves redundant as they were reiterated even into the 1930's: "[Hopkins] began by imitating Keats".<sup>8</sup> "[ 'A Vision' ] sometimes... breathes of Spenser, other times of Keats".<sup>9</sup> "[ 'A Vision' ] is] more Keatsian than Keats".<sup>10</sup> "[The early verses] show very markedly the influence of Keats, not only in metrical form but in imagery".<sup>11</sup> "Keats's influence is marked both in the irregularity of the prosody and in the union of classical and faery elements in the theme".<sup>12</sup>

Some critics did manage to develop their criticism a little further than this; George O'Neill, for instance, suggested that "the discussion on the question

'why sadness dwells in mermaids'" is "like Keats", and "very like Keats the description of their music".<sup>13</sup> Michael Henry's remark - "In acuteness of physical perception he could sometimes draw close to this great model"<sup>14</sup> - recalls Hopkins' own comment in the letter defending Millais. Henry goes on to add, however, that too often, unlike Keats, Hopkins' expression "does not reach identity with his conceptions".<sup>15</sup> This comment is vague and indeterminate, but perhaps reflects a mind unaccustomed to the idiosyncratic nature of much of Hopkins' own imagery. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the Victorian's work is his integrity, a fidelity to his own perceptions, and a commitment to giving expression to those perceptions as directly as possible, bringing language as close to the incoming data from the senses as he can.

Other writers commented on the "purity and keenness of his natural perception", always seen as a Romantic trait,<sup>16</sup> or the "element of Keats in his epithets"; this latter was noted by John Middleton Murry, who quoted "whorled ear" and lark-charmed" as examples.<sup>17</sup> Such comments as these, and Michael Henry's, indicated that the Keatsian influence did in fact extend beyond the schoolboy verses which seemed to be all but imitation pieces.

One comment made by E. Brett Young in his review, printed in *Today* in January 1918, stands out as the most

significant of all these. Quoting "A Vision" (lines 84-98) and "The Candle Indoors" (cited in its entirety), he was the first to comment on the gulf between the early aestheticism and the later asceticism that came to be seen as characteristic of Hopkins' life and work; the "Keatsian sweetnesses" of the juvenilia, and "the austere accents of those other lines".<sup>18</sup> Although this comment is chronologically isolated, it would become one of the focal points of Hopkins criticism in years to come.

Before moving on to examine the changing attitudes that emerged following the publication of the second, fuller edition of the poetry (1930), and the appearance of the correspondence (1935), it is interesting to quote another line or two from George O'Neill's *Essays on Poetry* (1919). Writing of "A Vision of the Mermaids", he suggests:

"Derivative and immature, such art might, nevertheless, one fancies, have flowered in later years into a style more charming than the somewhat anarchistic and word-thrifty manner that actually followed after a songless interval".<sup>19</sup>

This brief passage is perhaps a good representation of one school of thought that existed at the time, a time when reactionary critics had put up the barriers to try and stem the flow of modernism that was by this time threatening to wash away the most strongly-rooted principles and preconceptions of art and poetry.

Hopkins was destined to find few friends amongst the writers who might have been expected to welcome with open arms a 'lost' Victorian poet. Rather he would come to be claimed by the modernists as a 'displaced' writer of their own, brave new world.

*The Second Edition of the Poems, 1930*

The appearance of the second edition of the poetry, along with the publication of the correspondence, led to some welcome shifting and development of attitudes. Closer attention was paid to the 1930 edition, and no doubt the expansion of the volume cast a clearer light on the growth of Hopkins as a poet. Several critics now questioned the application of the "Keatsian" label to "A Vision of the Mermaids". C.C. Abbott, for instance, believed that it actually contained a strikingly personal and genuine sensuous apprehension.<sup>20</sup> Douglas Bush, a renowned critic of Keats, argued that "The Escorial" was truly Keatsian, while the "Vision" was "markedly and prophetically individual... a sharp-edged pattern of hard, bright, colour and sinuous movement",<sup>21</sup> suggesting that it held some promise of the special qualities of the later verse.

Up until this time, as the evidence so far

suggests, critics seemed to have no real case to present, no point to argue. The idea that Keats was an early influence has been posited (initially by Bridges), and some kind of consequent judgement passed in one or two cases. Most are little more than intuitive opinions, giving voice to personal taste. Intellectual bone and muscle are sadly lacking. However, it was at about the mid-point of this decade that two closely-related strands of argument emerged, issues significant not only within a discussion of Hopkins' roots; for a critic's evaluation of his oeuvre is largely dependent upon his opinion of the relation between aestheticism and asceticism, and between thought and feeling, in Hopkins' work.

### *The Aesthetic/Ascetic Debate*

At this stage it is necessary to investigate the section of correspondence mentioned above, the discussion of Keats that Hopkins engaged in with Coventry Patmore in 1887-8. The two major points of contention seem to be the 'gender' of the poet's verse, and the balance between the sensuous (and sensual) and the intellectual. The argument revolves around Shakespeare as an 'ideal' reference point.

Hopkins argues against Patmore's decision to class Keats "with the feminine geniuses amongst men". While

conceding the verses' "sensuality" (which is "their fault"), he adds "I do not see that it makes them feminine".<sup>22</sup> He cites Matthew Arnold's preface to the selection from Keats in Ward's *English Poets* (volume IV, 1880) as a defence, arguing for Keats' "masculine fibre", though he does not quote from Arnold's essay. (Patmore, replying, admits that he does not know the piece).<sup>23</sup>

Patmore's insistence upon drawing a distinction between Shakespeare and Keats - the one with intellect predominant, the other sensual - finally does seem to make an impression on Hopkins and he admits to feeling "how his verse is at every turn abandoning itself to an unmanly and enervating luxury".<sup>24</sup> Here, Hopkins seems to concede in part to an aspect of femininity in Keats' work, although he does persist in claiming that his mind had "the distinctively masculine powers", his character "the manly virtues". However, he admits that Keats' turn towards sense and away from intellect held those qualities "in abeyance".<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, it was Hopkins' belief that "His defects were due to youth" and "ill-education", and that the later pieces, the odes and "Lamia" for instance, were pointing the way out of the enmeshed sensuality and towards "an interest in higher things" and the emergence of "powerful and active thought".<sup>26</sup>

Herbert Read was one of the first critics to tackle the issue of aestheticism and asceticism, which



might correspond (to use the unfortunate sexist terminology of Hopkins and Patmore) to the feminine and the masculine qualities of the verse. Read picks up on Bridges' comment on "the naked encounter of sensualism and asceticism which hurt 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo'",<sup>27</sup> and denies any trace of asceticism, while agreeing that there was "in general... a conflict of this sort in Hopkins" - he notes the destruction of the early verse, and Hopkins' comments on Keats examined above as proof.<sup>28</sup> Read's account of the poetic gift involves a notion of elements held in opposition to one another; the poetic sensibility belongs only to those whose personalities are in tension, where one's own ideas are held in the face of a world of ready-formulated ideas that contradict the personal sensibilities. Hopkins' tension, according to Read, springs from his inner conflict of asceticism and aestheticism.

This is a fine example of the critic finding in the literary text that is under examination exactly what his prejudices lead him to find. Scrutinizing the painting, he unwittingly examines his own reflection in the glass of the frame, mistaking it for the work of art.

Bernard Kelly agreed with Read, offering a defence of Hopkins' abstemious nature in his argument:

"It is arguable that a man unchaste and disbelieving in the principles by which chastity is a true virtue may be wider and more vehement in his pleasures than a chaste man, to which pleasure is but a fuel, because he has set his senses to war against the real nature both of his mind and of the pleasures involved".<sup>29</sup>

Evidently, in this piece, Keats is cast as the "unchaste" and Hopkins as the "chaste" man.

E.E. Phare followed the same line, finding the two similar in "temperament" but opposed in their responses to their poetic nature: Hopkins was on his guard against Keats' "unmanly and enervating luxury".<sup>30</sup> Her remark that "a mature Keats would, it seems likely, have had much in common with Hopkins" implies some kind of value judgement, with Hopkins cast as the greater poet.<sup>31</sup> Terence Heywood made a similar kind of claim - "the mature Hopkins resembled more what Keats might have been than what he actually was"<sup>32</sup> - but there is less of an implied evaluative criticism in this context. M.D. Zabel saw Hopkins as taking Keats as "a model for himself", and compared their keenness of sensibility. But Hopkins also inherited a moral sense, and took on a spiritual discipline, and that is what set them apart.<sup>33</sup>

The issue here seems to be one of the moral status of the poet. It is the spiritual discipline that draws the line between Keats' aestheticism and Hopkins' asceticism. In the words of one critic, G.W. Stonier, "Hopkins... stifled the Keats in himself".<sup>34</sup> In a

separate article written the previous year, Stonier pronounced "Heaven-Haven" and "all of his poems of that kind... not so much bad as... *wrong*".<sup>35</sup> By this he means that they were wrong from Hopkins' point of view, in the light of his dislike of Keats' "enervating" qualities. The balance between truth (which Stonier takes to be "personal truthfulness" - something one might legitimately call into question) and beauty is upset in these instances, and "decorative grace" triumphs over a commitment to personal, individual perception and expression. One could argue that Stonier's reading of the poem is inaccurate here - the subtitle, "A Nun Takes the Veil", perhaps indicates a finer balance than he perceives.

Another interesting suggestion comes from John Pick, who offers the possibility that Hopkins' later criticism of Keats was, if only subconsciously, a criticism of his own youthful self.<sup>36</sup> It is also worth noting that Keats went through a similar process, and there is more explicit documentation in his case than there is in Hopkins' that he was aware of this development. Both his work - for instance, "The Fall of Hyperion" - and his correspondence offer ample evidence.

If the tension between aestheticism and asceticism can be given the shorthand classification of a moral issue, then the second strand of major importance is an

intellectual one that to a large extent stands outside the sphere of morality. Bernard Kelly covered both issues, claiming that Hopkins was "not a poet mainly of the senses as Keats too often was", but rather a *theological* poet.<sup>37</sup> And W.H. Gardner made the distinction clearer when he wrote that "Hopkins was not satisfied with a poetry which rested in the senses and the emotions alone, he desired intellectual satisfaction as well".<sup>38</sup> To justify this argument, Gardner did not choose the usual source (the Patmore correspondence of 1887-8) but a letter to Bridges of 18 October 1882, one that Hopkins christened his "de-Whitmaniser", since it was written in reply to Bridges' accusation that the poem "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" owed a debt of influence to Walt Whitman. Here, Hopkins contrasts his highly-wrought style with the American poet's savage art; Gardner seems to suggest that the "highly-wrought" notion implicates a more profound engagement of the intellect. In the same article, incidentally, Gardner covered the moral ground when he examined the two poets' approaches to Beauty; while it was single, whole and good - "Truth" - to Keats, to Hopkins it was two-fold, mortal and immortal: "beauty could be an insidious lure to the lower levels of being and a constant admonition to the higher".<sup>39</sup>

Against the confident arguments of critics like Gardner and Kelly, an early dissenter raised a contrary

tone. W.J. Turner, writing in 1931 (before the publication of the correspondence - although it should be noted that the letters discussing Keats with Patmore were excerpted in Lahey's biography (1930)), suggested that it was not simply a matter of Hopkins' verse shifting from the sensuous luxury of the juvenilia to the asceticism of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and anything chronologically subsequent. Instead, he maintained that Hopkins "remained to the end more sensuously enmeshed than Keats was in the last years of his much shorter life". For Turner, Hopkins lacked "creative originality", and "never showed in his work the intellectual power of Keats, who did not possess a tenth of his erudition".<sup>40</sup> Even if we might wish to contest the latter points, there is some truth in the judgement that Hopkins remained "more sensuously enmeshed" than Keats: Hopkins was as aware of the sensations of his asceticism as he was of those that played on his mind when it was of a more self-conscious, pre-Raphaelite, aesthetic cast.

#### *Criticism after 1940*

In the period post-1940, full-length studies of Hopkins' work proliferated. The references to the influence and imitation evident in his juvenilia became more detailed. W.H. Gardner, for instance, in his

seminal two-volume study of Hopkins, traced Keatsian influence in the plethora of precious stones to be mined out of the "Vision"; "in a poem of one hundred and forty-three lines, we find pearl, ruby, sapphire, garnet, beryl, turquoise, onyx, jacinth, coral and lapis lazuli". And the imagery is, in general, "as Keats would have it".<sup>41</sup> However, other writers like Grigson noted that there were perhaps more original elements in the work than Hopkins had previously been given credit for: "fashionable interests of the time which Hopkins liked", for example: "sunsets and marine-biological adorn-ments".<sup>42</sup> Writing some time later, in 1968, Wendell Stacy Johnson pointed out that some of the lines seemed to be characteristic of Hopkins' later poetry, and gave the violent image "Spikes of light/Spear'd open lustrous gashes, crimson-white" as an example,<sup>43</sup> although one could argue that this is as "Keatsian" as it is "mature Hopkinsian".

The publication of 'new' items such as the "Richard" fragments provoked more Keats comparisons; while Gardner traced the last echoes of Keats - as regards direct influence - in "Richard",<sup>44</sup> W.H. MacKenzie saw fit to connect "The Elopement" and "The Eve of St. Agnes" by theme, and "Richard" and "Endymion" by style;<sup>45</sup> both suggestions seem fairly tenuous, the former in particular: it is faintly ludicrous to imply an influence purely on the basis that the two poems deal

with the fairly commonplace theme of elopement.

More thoughtful studies of the two poets' use of imagery occurred over the next few decades, too. Even in the early pieces, for example, Jim Hunter noted that Hopkins was often "rarer and more precise" than Keats.<sup>46</sup> Hunter also suggested that Hopkins' complex noun/adjective constructions (such as "Thou mastering me God") were, "like all his 'innovations'... an extension of an already-current device, the compound adjective beloved of Keats".<sup>47</sup> These, however, as we will see, would be used as evidence of connections with many other poets and schools of poetry.

Josephine Miles chose to classify both as "painter-poets", and noted some of Hopkins' favourite epithets; these include "good", "sweet", "lovely", "clear", "bright", "dark" and "wild", all of which seem to her to be decidedly Romantic, while "good", "bright" and "sweet" are among those adjectives most often used by Keats.<sup>48</sup> In addition, just as "Keats had doubled Collins's compound epithets", so "Hopkins in turn doubled Keats's".<sup>49</sup>

W H. Gardner also made a note of the predilection for compound epithets, along with coinages, archaisms and provincialisms, and the use of nouns for verbs and vice versa - "Let him *easter* in us", for example - all of which placed Hopkins in the small class of true

innovators alongside Shakespeare, Keats and Meredith.<sup>50</sup>

*Revival of the Aesthetic/Ascetic Debate*

Developing perhaps from a focus upon Hopkins' criticism of Keats' "enervating luxury", we find a debate about their verse in terms of muscularity and motility, luxury and stasis. In general, a shift was thought to have occurred from Hopkins' early, luxurious sensuousness to the taut, muscular later work, with its hard edges and rigorous structures. Schemes of this kind might well bring Keats to mind, and that poet's own development from, for example, *Endymion* (composed between April and November 1817) to "The Fall of Hyperion" (July to September 1819). In drawing this kind of parallel, one cannot help but compare the thirteen year gap dividing "A Vision of the Mermaids" and "The Wreck of the Deutschland", with the space of less than two years dividing Keats's poems.

Donald Davie suggested that Hopkins' attack on luxury can be seen in terms of masculine and feminine, with "Victorian effeminacy" - presumably the watered-down Romanticism of Tennyson and the pre-Raphaelites - counter-balanced by the "strenuous masculinity" of "'inscape'".<sup>51</sup> An alternative lies in "the taut frame of intellectual argument";<sup>52</sup> a phrase which perhaps suggests seventeenth century metaphysical parallels.



The sexist metaphor may also remind us of Jonson's distinction between feminine and manly poets, and Crashaw's elegy on Donne, where he praises Donne's "line/Of masculine expression". However, in an earlier essay, Davie puts forward a quite different view, suggesting that this kind of poetic rigour is merely a new kind of sensuousness; Hopkins luxuriates now in "the kinetic and the muscular", merely carrying the Keatsian luxury "one stage further".<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, a critic such as John Robinson, writing some twenty-five years later, contests this point, arguing that the later verse finds "Keatsian strength" allied to "Hopkinsian stringency", resulting in poetry that is "if anything, too severe" thematically, rhythmically and phonetically.<sup>54</sup>

This is a more generally favoured view, confirmed by Paul L. Mariani in his investigations of Hopkins' lesser pieces and fragments of verse, where, for instance, the "Castara Victrix" stanzas exhibit "a growing muscularity in the language and a stepping away from the languorous style".<sup>55</sup> Mariani sees this happening in terms of a shift away from Keats as a model, and a movement towards Shakespeare. The new energy and dynamism apparent in "Ad Mariam" and "Rosa Mystica" is seen as further evidence of a continuing purge of Keatsian luxuriousness.<sup>56</sup>

In this way the critics were divided. The more dominant view, perhaps, was the one which saw Hopkins moving in his art, as in his life, away from the early influences of the pre-Raphaelites and so, originally, from Keats. With the burning of the early verses and the submission to the spiritual discipline of the Jesuits, Hopkins seemed to take a diligently ascetic line. So some critics, Mariani and Pick for example, find Hopkins suppressing the "indulgence of the eye and the ear", and engaging in a purge of "the tyranny of the senses".<sup>57</sup> Pick suggests that the Oxford verse shows this kind of suppression; Mariani also instances pieces such as "Castara Victrix" which was probably written in 1865.

A more complex perspective comes from Davie and also from F.R. Leavis; Leavis believes that the Keatsian influence remained in Hopkins' mature work; although it does not bring Keats' name to mind so readily, nevertheless the "essential Keatsian strength" is still there, "in its developed manifestations".<sup>58</sup> Certainly the feeling for concrete, physical beauty remained a defining characteristic of Hopkins' work. Even a piece such as "The Habit of Perfection", so obviously a kind of farewell to the sensual pleasures, is remarkable for the way it expresses the activation of the sensory faculties:

"Palate the hutch of tasty lust,  
Desire not to be rinsed with wine..."

and;

"O feel-of-primrose hands, O feet  
That want the yield of plushy sward..."

Hopkins never did renounce the senses; rather he sought to purify them, and make them receptive only to divine, immortal beauty; again, it is the moral dimension that distinguishes him from Keats.

The argument here becomes quite deeply complex. The Davie-Leavis approach casts a haze over the formerly clear divisions in the discussion - the purification of the senses to receive only transmissions of divine beauty could be seen as another way of defining the renunciation of the senses. Furthermore, the moral dimension that is assumed here is specifically a Christian one. It overlooks the humanistic sense of moral responsibility that emerges in the mature Keats - the rejection of "enervating luxury" attempted in "The Fall of Hyperion".

The energy, the dialectics of dynamism and stasis, evident in the two poets is also worth mentioning in this context. Gardner characterizes Hopkins' imagery as "dramatic", and Keats' as "contemplative"; Hopkins tends towards the "motile", Keats towards "images of relaxation, sleep, or

statuesque immobility".<sup>59</sup> Certainly there is a sense of 'slow motion' in much of Keats' work; one thinks particularly of the odes - the arrested vitality on the Grecian urn, and the lazy fluidity of the ode "To Autumn". Again, there is a distinction between Hopkins' muscular Christianity and the intoxicated sensuality of Keats' secular "life of impressions". But the distinction once more extends beyond subject matter, beyond imagery, and includes phonetic aspects and prosody; sprung rhythm itself is inherently more dynamic than the established metrical patterns that were Keats' paradigms.

### *Intellect and Feeling*

Perhaps the most controversial area of Hopkins-Keats studies has been the discussion of the balance of intellect and feeling. This has already been touched on in the discussion of aestheticism and asceticism, where, for instance, Bernard Kelly pointed out that Hopkins was primarily a "theological poet", "not a poet primarily of the senses as Keats too often was".<sup>60</sup> These arguments frequently cut right to the heart of critics' prejudices, preconceptions and systems of belief, and opinions often turn on humanistic and religious allegiances.

The debate is firmly grounded in the Patmore

correspondence. Patmore takes up Hopkins' comparison of Keats and Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" - in the latter, Patmore concedes that "there is plenty of sensuality, but the intellect is immensely predominant... In Shakespeare the sensuality seems the accident, in Keats the essence".<sup>61</sup> Hopkins somewhat reluctantly agrees that while his "contemporaries concerned themselves with great causes, as liberty and religion", Keats "lived in mythology and fairyland the life of a dreamer".<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Hopkins believed that "Reason, thought... would have asserted itself presently", and he considered the odes to be evidence to support this belief.<sup>63</sup> C.C. Abbott, editor of the correspondence, footnotes the 6 May 1888 letter and remarks "Neither poet fully understands Keats",<sup>64</sup> which certainly seems to be the case of the evidence of these letters.

The critics tended to divide quite cleanly into two camps; the humanists naturally preferred a rationale of 'negative capability', and thus, hating along with Keats "poetry that has palpable designs upon us", fought to proclaim his superior genius and intellect. Critics with a religious metaphysic, usually Catholic, argued that Hopkins displayed greater power of thought.

Two early opponents we have already noted - Bernard Kelly with the religious perspective and W.J. Turner, a humanist who slighted Hopkins as never having shown in his work "the intellectual power of Keats",

despite the fact that Keats never possessed "a tenth of his erudition".<sup>65</sup> W.H. Gardner, unsurprisingly, followed Kelly and E.E. Phare when he remarked that "Hopkins was not satisfied with a poetry which rested in the senses and the emotions alone, he desired intellectual satisfaction as well"<sup>66</sup> - perhaps one of the clearest summaries one could hope for of the kind of mind directly opposed to a rationale of negative capability.

Gardner drew on Hopkins' distinction between mortal and immortal beauty, an issue which itself seems to me to be the crux of the matter in respect of the two poets' relationship in Hopkins' maturity. Gardner's implication is that Keats can only see mortal beauty; Hopkins, on the other hand, "saw and grasped" the higher form of the two-fold beauty, something which "the humanistic poets dimly apprehended".<sup>67</sup> This is one critic who is quite open about where he himself stands - his view is quite evidently tempered by his religious outlook, and he makes no attempt to disguise the fact.

Wendell Johnson seems to argue that Hopkins' awareness of mortal beauty outstripped Keats', so that the later poet's superiority is not even dependent upon his religious 'second sight'. "In Hopkins's dappled world", Johnson writes, "there is almost never a living thing that does not show the seeds of its mortality... And so the mixed sense of life's joys is deeply felt in

his poetry, more terribly than it is in that of Keats".<sup>68</sup> MacKenzie also chooses to equate Hopkins' mortal beauty with Keats' "beauty that must die" and cites "Morning, Midday and Evening Sacrifice" as an example of this awareness.<sup>69</sup>

"This, all this beauty blooming,  
This, all this freshness fuming,  
Give God while worth consuming"

It was this that Leavis felt to be the "essential Keatsian strength", the ability to confront the transience of things, and he believed that Hopkins had it.<sup>70</sup> The comparison is undoubtedly a valid one, although Robinson's claim that Hopkins' expression is more terrible than Keats' seems hard to substantiate. It seems to me that the poet with no consolation of immortal beauty and eternity should feel that mixed sense more strongly; although it is also necessary to recognise Hopkins' fear of mortal beauty leading to mortal sin and damnation. In this way the two poets' sensibilities are subtly but vitally different; Keats' atheism is an important element of his poetic character that was played down in much Victorian criticism.

A second form of attack upon the thought - or lack of it - in Hopkins' poems involves his religious belief even more directly. W.J. Turner, complaining about the apparent lack of "original thought", blames Hopkins' Catholic vocation and announces that "the great poet...

is always a sinner... in the sense that he stands outside the law";<sup>71</sup> a rather odd statement that seems to betray a headily Romantic predisposition on Turner's part. Perhaps we could try to make some attempt at understanding Turner by referring back to Read's definition of a poet as one who clings to his own sensibilities in the face of the opposition of accepted, ready-formulated ideas of the world. The resultant tension is the birthplace of the poetic gift. However, as Read rightly points out, Hopkins himself is the perfect example of one whose personality is held in this kind of tension, and this argues strongly against Turner's claim.

W.H. Gardner is also correct in arguing thus:

"It would be extremely difficult to prove that the free play of intellect in agnostic poets like Shelley and Keats has produced ideas and attitudes which are *more valuable* than those arising from the play of an intensely original mind and imagination among and around the mature tenets of Christianity."<sup>72</sup>

Gardner also makes the point that within the fixities of the Catholic theology, there is ample room for contemplation of the mysteries of the Godhead. He cites a letter of Hopkins to Bridges (24 October 1883) where Hopkins describes Catholics trying to fathom the mysteries of the Trinity: "their knowledge leaves their minds swinging, poised but on the quiver..."<sup>73</sup> and



these words Gardner takes to be the Christian mystic's equivalent of negative capability.<sup>74</sup> The capacity for uncertainty is quite clear, and finds admirable, terrifying expression in the Dublin sonnets.

David A. Downes offers a defence of Hopkins that is aimed at a rather more oblique angle than Gardner's. To his mind, Hopkins provided "a radical corrective to the decadence of self" which Romanticism had been reduced to in his time: "he gave it a deific centre out of which could come again some grand transcendental values and perspectives".<sup>75</sup> Downes thus offers his own, Catholic credentials as openly as Davie did his thoroughly secular ones in the judgement quoted above.

Jim Hunter on the other hand, recognising Hopkins' achievement, nevertheless has much to say about Keats' opposing metaphysic of negative capability. He rightly points out that, in his best work, Keats' "brilliant rendering of sense-impressions is an attempt to grasp and reach a philosophic understanding of the transience of the physical world".<sup>76</sup>

So once again we find a clear division into two schools of critical thought, one group favouring the inherited, structured system of belief within which Hopkins moves; the other finding a greater free play of intellect and imagination in the world of Keats' negative capability.

Perhaps Downes is close to the mark in seeking to draw a distinction between the two poets' concepts of self. The important division comes not just from the gulf separating Hopkins' Catholicism and Keats' agnosticism, but from a profound difference of poetic sensibility.

W.A.M. Peters believed that Hopkins took a "non-imaginative" line of approach, refusing to "ascribe to an object qualities which in his mind it does not really and literally possess".<sup>77</sup> If this is a just criticism, then we can no longer match, say, "The Windhover" and "Ode to a Nightingale" as some critics, such as Wendell Johnson, tried to do.<sup>78</sup> However, it seems to me that this is a flawed line of argument: to say that Hopkins refuses to ascribe to an object characteristics it does not literally possess "in his mind" seems automatically to acknowledge again the role the imagination might play. We might agree with Gardner when he points out that Hopkins' falcon is a reminder of his harsh vocation, not a means of escape from the world,<sup>79</sup> but it remains, nevertheless, more than a mere falcon; it is a sign of the Godhead, a representation or analogue of Christ. And the beauty and discipline of the bird's physical activity becomes something that Hopkins himself might aim to emulate in his spiritual life.

Is this so very different, then, from Keats and

his "immortal Bird"? Certainly Keats ascribes qualities to it in no more imaginative a fashion than Hopkins does when he sees his Windhover as a symbol of Christ. The distinction lies not in "imaginative" and "non-imaginative", but rather in their agnosticism and belief; Hopkins' bird, mortally beautiful, signifies the higher, immortal beauty of Christ. Keats' bird sings to the poet of a world beyond "The weariness, the fever and the fret". In this earthly world, "Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes", but beyond, from where the nightingale sings, there is perpetual Summer, and Keats' own dream of immortal beauty. Perhaps Keats' analogue for Hopkins' heaven, his own consolation, is art.

### *Conclusion*

This area of the study of Hopkins' literary ancestry is one of the most effective in uncovering the prejudices of a critic, or in drawing out his or her own personal metaphysic. Our investigation reveals how the criticism develops from early, accurate but superficial acknowledgements of Hopkins' early debt to Keats, to a stark division into opposing camps whose conflict centres on the relation between aestheticism and asceticism, thought and feeling, belief and agnosticism in the two poets.

To my mind, the distinction between the two poets

remains a moral one. Both poets had keen poetic sensibilities, acutely aware of the power of their senses, and both were equipped with imaginations capable of giving full expression to their perceptions. The difference lies in the distinction between Keats' negative capability, which necessitates a coming to terms with mortality; and Hopkins' Christian metaphysic, which, while requiring renunciation and self-purgation, offers the divine consolation of immortal beauty.

## CHAPTER II: "THE TEST OF SERIOUSNESS"

### HOPKINS AND MILTON

#### *Introduction*

Whereas the significance of Keats in a discussion of Hopkins' poetic ancestry is largely dependent upon the pattern of critical thought in Hopkins studies, Milton's importance springs primarily from Hopkins' own opinions, as expressed in the correspondence. In general, any notion of a relationship between Hopkins and Milton was far from the critics' minds until the 1930's, when the expanded edition of the poems, and the major collection of letters, were published.

#### *The Correspondence*

Hopkins reserves his highest praise for Milton as a poet; "Milton's art", he wrote to Dixon in 1878, "is incomparable, not only in English literature but, I shd. think, almost in any; equal, if not more than equal, to the finest of Greek or Roman".<sup>1</sup> He wrote in the same letter that "His [Milton's] verse as one reads it seems something necessary and eternal"<sup>2</sup>. Showing a remarkable lack of religious bias, he stated his opinion that

*Paradise Lost* passed the test of "seriousness" (i.e. "being in earnest with your subject - reality") where both the *Divina Comedia* and *Faust* failed.<sup>3</sup> For Hopkins, it seems, "seriousness" is almost a synonym for "sincerity". At the same time, Hopkins did betray some trace of the Jesuit sectarian when he turned away from a consideration of Milton the artist and towards Milton the man: "I think he was a very bad man... those who break the sacred bond of marriage, like Luther and Milton, fall with eyes open into the terrible judgement of God".<sup>4</sup> Presumably the dark humour one could extract here from the choice of metaphor is unintentional.

It is important to study the correspondence quite closely in order to understand Milton's significance as a model for Hopkins' own art, for Milton was the mean, the final court of appeal, in several vital areas: firstly, in diction: in a famous passage from a letter to Bridges of August 1879, Hopkins wrote:

"For it seems to me that the potential language of an age shd. be the current language heightened, to any degree heightened and unlike itself, but not... an obsolete one. This is Shakespeare's and Milton's practice, and the want of it will be fatal to Tennyson's *Idylls* and plays, to Swinburne, and perhaps to Morris".<sup>5</sup>

Hopkins found in Milton the culminating point of "the

mean or standard of English style and diction".<sup>6</sup> Hopkins' argument seems to be specifically with linguistic anachronisms, the artificiality implicit in this kind of choice of vocabulary.

The fact that he targets Tennyson, Swinburne and Morris in the letter to Bridges gives us an indication of the kind of anachronisms he is attacking: the watered-down Romanticism and self-consciously 'prettified' style to which these three were prone. The comment springs from a criticism of Bridges' use of inversion in a certain poem that he had sent to Hopkins. Hopkins adds that he also avoids words such as "*ere, o'er, wellnigh, what time, say not (for do not say)*" for the simple reason that "they neither belong to nor ever cd. arise from, or be the elevation of, ordinary modern speech".<sup>7</sup> One of the greatest strengths - certainly of Shakespeare, but also of Milton - is that commitment to the current language. And the state of the English language at that time - its flux and its capacity for invention - is what lends these two their distinctive power and sense of 'new-minted' expression. The relative stasis of English in the Victorian era made the danger of stagnation a very real one, one that afflicted some of the most popular poets of that time. It was a danger of which Hopkins showed he was sharply aware.

To pursue the notion of style, Hopkins can be

seen again as one appealing to Milton as a mean or model. In a letter to Bridges written in 1879, he acknowledges that "my poetry errs on the side of oddness", but adds that "I hope in time to have a more balanced and Miltonic style".<sup>8</sup> At the same time, he excuses himself by explaining that his aim is "design, pattern... inscape", and, while it is the virtue of inscape to be distinctive, it is also its vice "to become queer".<sup>9</sup> One can understand why Hopkins emulated Milton in this respect, since Milton was himself one who sought to give particular expression to his own distinctive vision.

Milton remained the model as far as style is concerned. In sending a copy of the "Andromeda" poem to Bridges, Hopkins wrote that he had "endeavoured... at a more Miltonic plainness and severity", and, while acknowledging that "I cannot say it has turned out severe, still less plain", he suggested that it "seems almost free from quaintness".<sup>10</sup> In speaking of others' verse, too, he used Milton as a yardstick by which to measure their worth. Writing to Bridges, for instance, about Bridges' work, he noted that "Of the sonnets the Nightingale is the largest in style to my mind, the most Miltonic".<sup>11</sup>

Another aspect of the Milton model - worth mentioning in passing - is in Hopkins' composition of caudated sonnets. After appealing to Bridges for the



pattern of this form, he discovered that Milton's own piece of work, "On the New Forcers of Conscience", was sufficient as a standard, since all caudated sonnets seemed to him to be "formed on an invariable plan".<sup>12</sup> The sonnet in question is probably "Tom's Garland".

One of the most significant instances of Hopkins' appeal to Milton's precedent is in the area of prosody. In April of 1877, before Bridges had read any of Hopkins' poetry, we find Hopkins hinting at some of the revelations to come: by this time, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* had been composed, sprung rhythm formulated. But Hopkins' broaching of the subject is a cautious one. "I have paid much attention to Milton's rhythm", he writes, noting how contemporary critics seem to consider it "rough".<sup>13</sup> In a letter written the following year to Dixon, he recommends Bridges' verse, noting how they "affect Miltonic rhythms (which are caviare to the general, so that his critics, I believe, think him rough)", presumably referring here to *Milton's* critics.<sup>14</sup>

An interest in Milton's prosody was evidently an operative factor in the budding of the friendship between Bridges and Hopkins. Hopkins expressed a particular interest in the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*: "I think I may have mastered them and may some day write on the subject", he told Bridges.<sup>15</sup>

However, it was not until after he sent Bridges a copy of the *Deutschland*, and found it necessary to defend and explain his notion of sprung rhythm, that he suggested that the *Samson Agonistes* choruses were written according to that same rhythmic - as opposed to syllabic - scheme. Hopkins claimed that Milton projected a pretence of counterpointing a heard rhythm on a standard, counted rhythm; however, because the counted rhythm "is never heard but only counted", it "therefore really does not exist".<sup>16</sup> Hopkins went on to claim that it was "the fear of being thought to write mere rhythmic or (who knows what the critics might not have said?) even unrhythmic prose "that drove him to this" - i.e., to this pretence.<sup>17</sup> No doubt Hopkins knew some of this fear himself, and so was sensitive to the same in Milton. It was natural for Hopkins to seek a precedent for his 'new' rhythm, and so defend it by rooting it in tradition. And perhaps equally natural was his appeal to the specific precedent of Milton (among others), since Milton was, for him, a definitive, classical model.

Finally, before moving on from this ground work to the Hopkins criticism itself, we should take note of another remark in the letter to Bridges of 21st August 1877: "In fact, all English verse, except Milton's, almost, offends me as 'licentious'. Remember this".<sup>18</sup> And it is also fascinating to note

that one of the reasons why Milton is so greatly admired by modern critics - the power of his intellect that gave birth to such a massively, intricately patterned epic - goes unnoticed by Hopkins. His preoccupation is with form rather than content, and prosody in particular. This is, however, not atypical of the Victorian era.

### *Early Criticism*

The first critic to connect Hopkins to Milton was his correspondent R.W. Dixon. Of the three major figures in the Hopkins correspondence - Bridges, Dixon and Patmore - Dixon was the most enthusiastic about his friend's work, and perhaps the awed respect he felt for Hopkins' poetic gift blinded him to some extent to any faults and deficiencies. However, since Hopkins in general received little encouragement with his poetry from the others, Dixon's support was invaluable.

There is some poignancy in the fact that Dixon misquotes a couple of lines of "The Loss of the Eurydice":

"And you were a liar, a blue March day,  
Bright, sunlanced fire of the heavenly bay"

pronouncing them "more English-Greek than Milton, or as much so, & with more passion".<sup>19</sup> Hopkins replies, courteously, that "In one point I seem to have your admiration on false pretences", and corrects the grammar of the line.<sup>20</sup>

One term Dixon employs in admiring Hopkins' poetry became a favourite of later critics': that is, the "*terrible pathos* - something of what you call temper in poetry: a right temper that goes to the point of the terrible; the terrible crystal".<sup>21</sup> This last phrase would become a commonplace of Hopkins criticism, especially in relation to the Dublin sonnets. Dixon goes on to say that "Milton is the only one else who has anything like it", although he adds that Milton's was rooted in "indignation... injured majesty, which is an inferior thing in fact".<sup>22</sup>

A third aspect that Dixon noted is actually a quality which W.H. Gardner, amongst others, would later denote a *Shakespearian*, *un-Miltonic* affinity: "the quality of admiration... which reaches its fullness and completeness in giving the exact aspect of the thing it takes".<sup>23</sup> This surely relates back to what Hopkins himself had to say about the search for inscape, design or pattern, and inscape's virtue of distinctiveness.

Although Bridges' Preface to the Notes in the first publication of the poetry (1918) did include a quotation of the "more balanced, Miltonic style" aspiration discussed above, almost every reviewer overlooked it. Instead, the majority of them reeled beneath the impact of the verse, muttering vaguely about "originality" with varying degrees of approbation, or else rushed to connect him to Milton's near-contemporaries the Metaphysical poets. This became the favourite label in the early criticism. However, John Middleton Murry, writing in the *Athenaeum* in June 1919, did note "an aspiration after Milton's architect- tonic in the construction of the later sonnets".<sup>24</sup> This does seem to chime with Hopkins' own thoughts on the direction his style should have taken.

#### *Reactions to the 1930 edition*

This comment aside, no critic seems to have made any connection between Hopkins and Milton until about the time of the publication of the second edition of the poems which occurred under the editorship of Charles Williams in 1930. His introduction suggested that Hopkins and Milton had a kinship of spirit in "the simultaneous consciousness of a controlled universe and yet of division, conflict and crises within that universe."<sup>25</sup> This

rather daring piece of literary analysis did not go unsubstantiated, although neither was it to remain unchallenged. Williams drew a parallel between "Thou art indeed just, Lord" and *Samson Agonistes*, presumably implying as a given that the latter is autobiographical, at least to an extent approaching that of Hopkins' own poem. However, Williams did acknowledge the limitations of the parallel by admitting that, while Hopkins felt free to "contend" with his God, Milton, "under the influence of an austerer tradition", refused to do so.<sup>26</sup> This is an interesting point, reflecting how authoritarianism in Protestantism - born of the notion of a private accountability to God - became as strong as - or even stronger than - the demand of papal law. It is ironic to reflect that Hopkins may indeed have felt a right to "contend" with God, even within the rigorous Jesuit order, when the Protestant Milton did not.

A few other writers at this time mentioned Milton's name when analysing Hopkins' poetry. Often it was in connection with the Dublin sonnets that signs of an affinity were detected: two reviewers writing in 1931 spoke of their "Miltonic majesty".<sup>27</sup>

G.F. Lahey, in his biography of Hopkins (1930), correctly traced the model for "Tom's Garland": Milton's "On the New Forcers of Conscience" was the

caudated sonnet that set the pattern for Hopkins' poem, deduced earlier from the letters to Bridges of 2nd and 6th November 1887.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that Lahey had access to the correspondence some five years before its publication. His comment on "Andromeda" as a poem exhibiting "an economy worthy of Milton" supports this idea, bearing in mind that Hopkins said that he had therein "endeavoured at a more Miltonic plainness and severity".<sup>29</sup> G.W. Stonier was another writer who agreed that Milton was an influence on Hopkins.<sup>30</sup> However, he also listed such diverse 'influences' as the *Becwulf* author, Swinburne and Shakespeare; and it was Shakespeare and Milton around whom some kind of pitched battle would soon be fought, as critics struggled to determine Hopkins' line of poetic ancestry.

E.E. Phare considered that the two had little in common beyond their "virtuoso" approach to the English language, and the fact that they could both be credited as "modifiers of the language" on that account.<sup>31</sup> Humphry House expressed similar sentiments when he wrote of how both seemed to fashion their own particular individual languages, and honed them to fine perfection.<sup>32</sup>

Some critics followed Williams' line of approach: C.C. Abbott, for instance, in his introduction to the correspondence (published in

1935), wrote of " a kinship of spirit between the two poets", specifically in the sense of a vocational conflict between the priest and the poet in each.<sup>33</sup> Others, however, took from the correspondence the sprung rhythm debate and used this firmer ground as a basis to pursue the connection between the two poets: Shane Leslie noted that "Through Milton he found the secret art of counterpoint and evolved his fantastic metrical theories".<sup>34</sup> Ellen M. Power also saw how new rhythms were derived from the past, "consciously derived - as a perusal of the letters to Bridges will show - not from the Romantics but from Milton and Dryden".<sup>35</sup> Even W.B. Yeats, in his introduction to the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, connected sprung rhythm, which "has given new vitality to contemporary verse", to "the metre of the *Samson Agonistes* chorus".<sup>36</sup>

However, running contemporaneously with these analyses, we find some cross-currents of dissent, including those emanating from some of the most important literary figures of the time, notably F.R. Leavis and C. Day Lewis. Before them, Morris U. Schappes chose to attack Lahey's thesis of the ancestry of sprung rhythm and to reject any comparisons of Hopkins and Milton, claiming that their differing styles and faiths made them incompatible.<sup>37</sup> Both these objections seem dubious:



Hopkins, as we have seen, revered and sought to emulate Milton's style; and Hopkins evidently seemed to find *Paradise Lost* preferable to the Catholic *Divina Commedia*, for instance, as evinced by his notes about the "test of seriousness".

### *New Bearings: Shakespeare and Milton*

Then, in 1932, Leavis' *New Bearings in English Poetry* proposed the two contrasting strands of poetic tradition; on the one hand there was Shakespeare, Donne, Eliot and the later Yeats; on the other, Spenser, Milton and Tennyson. And it was Leavis' view that "The way in which Hopkins uses the English language... contrasts him with Milton and associates him with Shakespeare".<sup>38</sup> He quotes the "mind has mountains" passage from "No worst, there is none" as an example that shows Hopkins writing in a manner that is "Shakespearian", and "quite un-Miltonic".<sup>39</sup> This issue will be examined further in the following chapter, but for now let us analyse the two streams of tradition Leavis is proposing.

Leavis' garrulous style is antithetical to systematic analysis, and we need to thread several passages together in order to pin down his distinction. He writes of Shakespeare's use of his medium "not as a literary but as a spoken one".<sup>40</sup>

And in the essay on T.S. Eliot, he sees Milton as one who exploits language "as a kind of musical medium outside himself, as it were".<sup>41</sup> Milton's idiom is remote from ordinary speech. In his lecture to the Hopkins Society of 1971, he clarifies his position by describing Tennyson's attempt to bring the English language as close as possible to the Italian, and Hopkins' determination to "get back into poetry the resources of living - that is, spoken - English".<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that, as is customary with Leavis, there is an implicit value judgement at work in all this.

It is vital that we analyse the implications of this opinion in association with Hopkins' own beliefs, but first let us see the strength of support that existed for Leavis in his association of Hopkins with a Shakespearian, as opposed to a Miltonic tradition.

Egerton Clarke expressed his views in terms reminiscent of the Patmore and Hopkins dialogue on Keats. Clarke suggests that Hopkins united the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' in the same way that Shakespeare did; Milton, on the other hand, "was so aggressively masculine that his work has never received anything more significant than admiration".<sup>43</sup> Clarke's distinction defined the feminine aspect as one paying more attention to

detail than to a wide perspective; he also talked of warmth and colour as opposed to the more severe and austere masculine style. Ralph S. Walker, talking of sprung rhythm, saw fit to identify its roots in Old English rather than in *Samson Agonistes*, and claimed, too, that Hopkins never achieved "the high, impersonal Miltonic style he told he Bridges hoped at last to possess".<sup>44</sup> The latter point is open to conjecture, since it can be nothing but an expression of personal opinion. The former claim is easily invalidated by the fact that Hopkins did not come to study Old English until quite late in his life, long after the formulation of sprung rhythm.

C. Day Lewis, on the other hand, writing in 1934, was prepared to accept that sprung rhythm owed something to *Samson Agonistes*, but, beyond that, rejected any suggestion of influence or similarity of temperament.<sup>45</sup> To his mind, Hopkins was a 'naif', difficult to connect to anything or anyone from the past.

When Terence Heywood attacked Williams' contention that Hopkins should be related back to Milton, in his own survey of Hopkins' literary ancestry, Williams responded with a letter written in the *Poetry Review* in 1939. Heywood had chosen rather to place Hopkins inside the Donne tradition, a parallel that Williams had considered in his

introduction to the poems, and then rejected. It was in their acceptance of "an ultimate religious inspiration" that the link between Hopkins and Milton existed, according to Williams.<sup>46</sup>

Heywood's response was a little more concessionary, agreeing that the two could be related within that particular framework, but still maintaining that the "relationship is not close enough to warrant the statement 'the poet to whom we should most relate Gerard Hopkins is perhaps... Milton'".<sup>47</sup> And Heywood followed Leavis when he declared that one of Hopkins' "main achievements" was in his rejection of "the Spenser-Milton-Tennyson tradition in favour of a more racy, more indigenous and mostly older tradition".<sup>48</sup> It seems clear that, in this particular confrontation, the two critics are focussing on different aspects of the poet, and poetry in general - in crude terms, Williams is dealing with content, Heywood with form - and this is the root cause of the disagreement. And it is quite evident that Hopkins, in relating himself to his great predecessor, is far more concerned with form.

We must also bear in mind that Leavis' separation of Milton and Donne might have seemed strange at different historical stages of literary criticism. Coleridge, for example, wrote:

"If you would teach a scholar in the highest form how to *read*, take Donne, and of Donne this satire [Satire III]. When he has learnt to read Donne, with all the force and meaning which are involved in the words, then send him to Milton, and he will stalk on like a master *enjoying his walk*".<sup>49</sup>

But how, in more general terms, does all this relate to Hopkins' own ideas about his relationship with Milton's precedent? While we must always remember Hopkins' dictum to "admire and do otherwise", it is indisputable that Milton is seen as a great master, almost the only poet who does not strike Hopkins as "licentious"; the one whose art is "incomparable" in English literature, and "equal, if not more than equal, to the finest of Greek or Romans"; the one whose "balanced" style he sought to emulate. And while his admiration for Shakespeare is unmistakable, we certainly do not see Hopkins using him as a model in the same way that he uses Milton.

We must add to this objection to the Leavis-Heywood school of thought the fact that Hopkins cited Milton and Shakespeare together in his remarks upon the correct poetic language of an age as "the current language heightened". And in the same letter he actually cites Tennyson as one who does not follow in this, to his mind, Shakespearian-Miltonic tradition of dedication to contemporary language. So we have an odd situation arising, whereby critics seek to establish a system of poetic tradition around Hopkins that Hopkins himself would take issue with. This is

a valuable reminder of the limitations of theories that attempt to establish schools of poetry. One can see the opposite tensions tugging within the wide-ranging classification of, say, 'Romanticism'; it is even more tenuous to build such classifications to run *through* the centuries, rather than within a group of contemporaries.

Heywood, perhaps in the light of the skirmish with Williams, made some further concession to those who found points of comparison between Hopkins and Milton; "the importance of his studying that consummate master of word-music should never be forgotten", he wrote, and he acknowledged "Miltonic touches" in the diction, enjambement, and the borrowing of the form of the caudated sonnet. Nevertheless, he still maintained that Hopkins' proper place was not within the Spenser-Milton-Tennyson tradition.<sup>50</sup>

Josephine Miles, writing in the *Kenyon Review*, was another who followed Williams in seeking to question the validity of placing Hopkins in a line of descent from Shakespeare. In her conclusion she suggests that writers such as Leavis, Heywood and Phare, all of whom she names and quotes, would do well to examine in detail what she christens, rather mawkishly, Hopkins' "sweet and lovely language".<sup>51</sup>

According to Miles, Hopkins "demanded for poetry the colourful, descriptive, elaborate, adjectival, and in this demand agreed outstandingly with Spenser, Milton, Collins and Keats".<sup>52</sup> Miles shows how a large proportion of the words in Hopkins' vocabulary, and his favourite epithets, root him firmly in his own time, but also relate back to some extent to the sixteenth century. And while Miles acknowledges his "revolutionary preoccupations" in the area of rhythm and sound, she maintained that he was "well enough content with vocabulary".<sup>53</sup> Hopkins sits comfortably among the "wordpainting poets", with their "epithetizing", compounds, and frequent use of present and past participles of verbs.

But none of these descriptions seem to me to set up any clear opposition to Shakespeare's style, particularly if we consider later plays such as *Cymbeline* or *The Winter's Tale*. Besides, Miles seems to ignore the great censure that Hopkins occasionally laid upon writers such as Tennyson and, indeed, Keats. There is none of the self-conscious aesthete in the mature Hopkins, no lapse into an outdated kind of sub-Romanticism that afflicted other "wordpainters" of his day. Perhaps what does distinguish Hopkins from the Miltonic tradition ( - the *tradition*, not necessarily Milton himself - ) is his modern spirit, a determination to write in the contemporary linguistic currency. Thus while he

learned much from Milton, he remained outside the line of descent by his refusal to become enslaved to the past. He was always determined to "admire and do otherwise". This is one of the strongest arguments against placing him within the Miltonic tradition.

Perhaps his individuality does place him more properly in the Shakespearian line, for this is a line of innovators, a fact which automatically throws the concept of a tradition into relief. Another of the Kenyon critics, Robert Lowell, suggested that Hopkins worked in at least four different poetic traditions during his career: "the alliterative, the Miltonic, the metaphysical and the Keatsian-romantic".<sup>54</sup> The fact that these come from different sides of tradition as formulated by Leavis will again cast doubt upon the validity of the division.

#### *1940 to 1950: Gardner and Davie*

For much of the 1940's, the focus in Hopkins criticism seemed to fall on an assessment of his modernity, and some major studies, such as John Pick's *Priest and Poet* (1942), and W.A.M. Peters' *Essay towards the Understanding of his Poetry* (1947), either made no mention of Milton or, in Peters' case, made do with a short note on Hopkins' interest in the rhythms of *Samson Agonistes*.



W.H. Gardner, however, was predictably less negligent. While confirming some of the issues already covered by earlier critics, he also pointed out certain places where it seems as if Hopkins has echoed Milton. This, for instance, from "God's Grandeur":

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

recalls this from *Paradise Lost* (I.19-20):

"...and with mighty wings outspread,  
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss".

"Consciously or not", Gardner writes, "Hopkins has echoed Milton".<sup>55</sup> Similarly, "Man day-labouring out life's age" is probably intended to recall Milton's "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?" (from "On his Blindness").<sup>56</sup> Gardner also makes some brief remarks about Hopkins' imitation of "Il Penseroso" in "Il Mystico", calling it, somewhat condescendingly, "competent", though "suffused with Shelley".<sup>57</sup> The second volume of Gardner's study also contains an interesting speculation that the character Caradoc, from Hopkins' unfinished poetic drama "St. Winefred's Well", resembles Milton's Satan in his "proud, defiant impertinence" - "In a wide world of defiance Caradoc lives alone".<sup>58</sup>

As for a more general survey of style, we find that Gardner tends to side with Leavis: his preference for Shakespearian parallels over the Miltonic ones is substantiated by arguments that in essence merely restate the Leavisite position. For example, Gardner writes that "The quick-fire of his [Hopkins'] figurative ideas admits no stately epic similes, like those of Milton or Arnold";<sup>59</sup> "Shakespeare's style does, and Hopkins's no less... 'catch the lively first glow of sensation'".<sup>60</sup> And this is precisely what Milton's style fails to do.

Again, on the basis of the critics, we are left with an apparent contradiction straddling the gap between Hopkins' literary criticism and his own poetic practice. Gardner deals with the apparent paradox, rather awkwardly, by concluding that Hopkins "overtly" professed to imitate Milton, while "tacitly" acknowledging "Shakespeare's ascendancy by being, in effect, more like him".<sup>61</sup> However, Gardner was prepared to accept the idea that some Miltonic influence was evident in Hopkins' work, and not only in the echoes that have been mentioned above. Both poets, he believed, had made attempts at "rejuvenat[ing] English poetic language with infusion of Greek and Latin flexibility".<sup>62</sup>

Following Gardner, the most enlightening new criticism concerning the relationship between the two

poets came from Donald Davie in an article entitled "Hopkins the Decadent Critic", which was published in the *Cambridge Journal* in 1951 and then reprinted in his book *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, published the following year. In this book, Davie culled from a serious examination of the letters, and with the modifying idea that "Milton is, for Hopkins, always the final court of appeal", some important new insights into this area.<sup>63</sup> Davie tackles the puzzling evaluation that Hopkins made of Milton in citing him as one who followed his rule of employing poetic diction that was the "current language heightened". Davie reminds us (as did Leavis) that Keats abandoned the Miltonic "Hyperion" with the explanation that "English must be kept up". But while agreeing that it seemed odd to use Milton as one of the two examples, he did note that it made more sense in the light of the proviso that stated that the "heightening" effect could be stretched to "any degree", according to Hopkins himself.

However, it does seem clear that Milton was some kind of definitive test or mean as far as Hopkins was concerned. "Style", it seems to Davie, is a term virtually interchangeable with "Miltonic", if we go on the evidence of the Hopkins correspondence. "So few people have style, except individual style or manner", Hopkins complained to Bridges.<sup>64</sup> And to Dixon, "the mean or standard of

English style and diction... culminated in Milton".<sup>65</sup> The implication seems to be, then, that Milton's genius, by elevating current language, reached some kind of creative plane that made his style 'The Style', made it definitive. Hopkins aimed to emulate this great model, but found himself too prone to the same kind of "individual style or manner" that led to oddity. In a book published some time later, in 1967, Davie also pointed out that, by taking Milton as a model, Hopkins contradicted "one of the best authenticated working principles in the English poetic tradition - the principle that Milton, however great himself, is a bad example for other poets", a fact that Keats obviously recognised.<sup>66</sup>

However, Davie is prepared to put forward the idea that "it was Milton's egotism which made him, for Hopkins, the model poet".<sup>67</sup> Davie contrasted this attitude with comments of other Catholic writers on Milton's "individualism" or "humanistic arrogance";<sup>68</sup> Presumably this implies that Hopkins' approval of these characteristics in Milton betrays some kind of heresy on Hopkins' part, but there is a balance - while we should remember that Hopkins considered Milton to be "a very bad man", we have also seen how Hopkins' deep-seated admiration for Milton led him to place *Paradise Lost* above the *Divina Comedia* in their "seriousness". Davie takes Hopkins' preoccupation with inscape as evidence that

he considered the "function of poetry" to be the expression of "human individuality in its most wilfully uncompromising and provocative form. His poetry is the poetry of the egotistical sublime".<sup>69</sup>

This well-worn phrase can be traced back to a letter from Keats to Woodhouse (27 October, 1818), where he dissociates himself from this Wordsworthian trait and aligns himself with the Shakespearian tendency to dissolve the Self in the Other - Shelley's notion of a "going out of oneself" to identify with the true and the beautiful in the Other is something similar (*Defence of Poetry*). In a riddling paradox that threatens to detonate the clear-cut distinction, Hopkins' notion of inscape comes quite close to this dissolution of Self in coming to identify with the Other. At the same time, Hopkins' "wilfully uncompromising and provocative form" does smack of the egotistical sublime of poet-prophets such as Milton and Wordsworth: we must be careful to distinguish between thought and expression, content and form, here. Hopkins is perhaps 'negatively capable' and close to Keats in his poetic character, with the implications of his notions of inscape and instress, but he remains egotistical in the idiosyncrasy of his form.

*1950 and After*

As we move into the 1950's, again, little discussion of any connection between the two poets took place. Many seemed to take on board unthinkingly the Leavisite position in a manner that becomes familiar after some time researching this kind of history of criticism. In general, the Williams-Bridges theorem was given short shrift - Amos Niven Wilder, for instance, writing in 1952, dismissed their opinions as "not very convincing",<sup>70</sup> although he carried the argument no further, displaying that lazy critical approach that is too often prepared to accept a popular judgement from a fashionable source without reflection.

However, by 1959, the tide seemed to be turning again. Davie's opinions were probably the basis for new investigations into the relationship. Gerard Meath, for example, suggested that both poets show a similar process of maturation; "Just as Milton's belief in self-mastery is set off against the sensuality of some of his early Latin and Italian verse", he writes, "so Hopkins' stern suppression of all vanity and self-esteem is set off against his passionate love of his poems and delight in inscapes".<sup>71</sup>

Two weeks later, Frank Kermode published an

article in the *Guardian* that boldly challenged the school of thought that Leavis represented. He remarked how most scholars had found Hopkins' repeated assertions that his master was Milton "extremely inconvenient", and had on that account "disregarded" them.<sup>72</sup> Kermode proposed that Hopkins was in fact "far closer to Milton than to any other poet", and he even went so far as to say that Hopkins would have been "unable to conceive of a poetry which invented a 'tradition' that included himself but not Milton".<sup>73</sup> Kermode highlighted the free rein of the possibilities for 'elevation' of current language implicit in the practice of both Hopkins and Milton. And he also suggested that the metaphysical strand of thought ran through both poets, in the threads of theological argument and dogma, and the "deeply held beliefs about the nature of spirit and matter which animate Milton's poetry and emerge as heresy in his theology".<sup>74</sup>

David A. Downes, also concentrating on Hopkins' literary criticism, proposes that this area of study tends to support the idea of Hopkins as a Christian Romantic, with the sense of self at a premium: the poet's distinctive quality is "to hold a special awareness of his own self 'inscaping' the world and, in consequence, his art aimed at expressing this heightened distinctiveness".<sup>75</sup> In looking for examples of "self-being" in earlier poets, Downes

writes, Milton was evidently the supreme example.

### *Provisional Conclusions*

And so, by the second half of the 1960's, some more profound literary criticism had led to a conclusion - at least provisionally - that Hopkins and Milton were united in a manner that ran deeper than the surface technique that was the basis of the Leavisite distinction between Miltonic and Shakespearian traditions. Much of the confusion of the issue can be seen to have derived from the gap that exists between Hopkins the poet and Hopkins the literary critic. And certainly the tension that exists within Hopkins of licentiousness - traditionally associated with Shakespeare - and propriety - traditionally associated with Milton - complicates the issue still further.

We should bring to mind again his remark to Bridges in the letter of 21st August 1877: "all English verse, except Milton's, almost, offends me as 'licentious'".<sup>76</sup> It is one of the greatest ironies that Hopkins, who was to some extent responsible for the new freedom English poetry found in the first half of the twentieth century - should be so staunch a defender of propriety in verse tradition. And, while we cannot deny the iconoclastic power of his



compositions, so startlingly original even to the critical sensibilities of an age already under the bombardment of modernism in 1918, we must acknowledge that he felt himself to be part of a tradition.

The roots of sprung rhythm are to be found in the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*, amongst other places. There is no sign of cant in Hopkins' appeal to this particular precedent. Bridges was a scholar who had also made close study of Milton's rhythms (his book on the subject was published in 1893), and we cannot believe that Hopkins would have expected to succeed in fooling his correspondent by the complexities of his argument, even if he had wanted to. We must conclude that the defence based on Miltonic precedent is a genuine one. However, the question of diction and style is less clear-cut. Although Hopkins venerates Milton as the "mean or standard of English style and diction", the implications of this judgement are unclear; and consequently, his remarks about aiming to achieve "a more balanced and Miltonic style", for instance, open themselves up to wide interpretation.

It seems clear that, if we wish to accept the Leavisite formulations of a Spenser-Milton-Tennyson tradition on the one hand, and a Shakespeare-Donne-Eliot tradition on the other, Hopkins must remain alongside the innovators in the latter group.

However, I would venture to suggest that Hopkins is a poet whose oddities of theory and practice strain Leavis' formulations to the point where they begin to lose their validity as useful assessments of a history of English verse. In a concluding analysis, Hopkins' poetry exhibits traits that could act as credentials to gain access to either group, and in so doing he closes up the area of mutual exclusiveness that may have once existed between the two.

CHAPTER III: "CURRENT LANGUAGE HEIGHTENED"

HOPKINS AND SHAKESPEARE

*Introduction: The Correspondence*

Hopkins' own references to Shakespeare - those that may be culled from his correspondence - do not build such an interesting case history as do his comments on, say, Keats, Whitman or Milton. Some of his remarks are frankly quite bland; for instance, he talks of "the breadth of... human nature that we admire in Shakespeare";<sup>1</sup> and of Shakespeare's gift of having "the finest faculty of observation of all men that ever breathed".<sup>2</sup> He also notes that "In reading Shakespeare one feels with despair the scope and richness of his gifts, equal to everything".<sup>3</sup> The latter remark may be perceived as having a remarkably close bearing on Harold Bloom's proposition of the anxiety of influence, but there is little else of great value here.

More significantly, references to Shakespeare often occur when he is defending or justifying a technique or a particular choice of a word or phrase. For instance, the opening lines of "Henry Purcell", that run:

"Have fair fallen, O fair, fair have fallen, so dear  
To me..."

were the subject of some discussion by Hopkins and Bridges in January 1883. Hopkins declares a quotation from *Love's Labour's Lost* to be "decisive"; one that has "set me at rest"; for he writes that, in the Shakespearian line "Now fair befall your mask! - fair fall the face it covers!" (II.i.64), the word is "a substantative [that] governs the verb".<sup>4</sup> The justification does hold, although it does not really form an exact parallel for "Henry Purcell", with its very odd verb form of third person singular imperative in the past tense.

Still, Hopkins did on other occasions appeal to Shakespeare's precedent as he fought to defend some of his oddities and obscurities. On one occasion, attempting to persuade Bridges to give *The Wreck of the Deutschland* a real chance to work its magic on him, he suggests:

"Why, one sometimes enjoys and admires the very lines one cannot understand, as for instance 'If it were done' sqq., which is all obscure and disputed, though how fine it is everybody sees and nobody disputes. And so of many more passages in Shakespeare and others".<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps more important is his appeal to Shakespeare as a precedent for his use of sprung rhythm. As early as 1868, he writes of the "peculiar beat" he has introduced to "St. Dorothea" and quotes "Why should

this desert be?" (*As You Like It* III.ii.133) and "Thou for whom Jove would swear" (*Love's Labour's Lost* Iv.iii.117) as examples of a similar beat.<sup>6</sup> The *As You Like It* quotation is used again in a letter to Bridges of 21 August 1877, where his acknowledgement that "I do not of course claim to have invented *sprung rhythms* but only *sprung rhythm*" strengthens the notion of precedent, and once more in a letter to Dixon of 5 October 1878. In this last letter, Hopkins also notes Shakespeare's use of "outriding feet", but "as a licence, where as mine are rather calculated effects".<sup>7</sup> He does not quote any examples, but does pin-point the later plays.<sup>8</sup>

The notion that Hopkins had of poetic diction - that it should be "the current language heightened, to any degree heightened and unlike itself, but not... an obsolete one" - is relevant to the discussion, since Shakespeare is cited as an example of a poet who does use such diction. This is perhaps a less controversial statement than to claim that Milton followed this line, which Hopkins also does, and there is much strength in Hopkins' remark that Shakespeare's example had done harm, "for poets reproduce the diction which in him was modern and in them is obsolete".<sup>9</sup> Hostile critics would later level similar accusations at Hopkins and denigrate his influence on twentieth century poetry.

Finally, we should note that Hopkins reserved the

highest praise for Shakespeare by acknowledging that the reason he does not "pall" is "because he uses... so little Parnassian".<sup>10</sup> Parnassian is poetry "spoken *on and from the level of* a poet's mind, not as in the other case, where the inspiration which is the gift of genius, raises him above himself".<sup>11</sup> This perhaps tells us something of Hopkins' own practice: his constant struggle to produce poetry of the highest order, poetry of inspiration; and we can understand a little better, perhaps, the despair he experienced when inspiration ran dry:

"Sweet fire the sire of muse, my soul needs this;  
I want the one rapture of an inspiration".

#### *Further Reflections on Leavis' Two Traditions*

When we return to the corpus of Hopkins criticism, perhaps the most startling discovery is that his poetic connection to Shakespeare is entirely neglected up until 1931; that is, until after the publication of the second edition of the poems, and this first comment serves only to assert that Hopkins possessed "none of the power of philosophic thought possessed by Shakespeare, Milton, Coleridge, Blake, Keats or Shelley".<sup>12</sup> In the following year, G.W. Stonier claimed a Shakespearian influence could be traced in Hopkins' verse, although specific examples were lacking.<sup>13</sup>



Leavis was anxious to assert that the similarity was not due to imitation, but instead something that arose out of "a similar exploration of the resources and potentialities of the language".<sup>17</sup> He wanted to show how both Hopkins and Shakespeare utilized "spoken" (as opposed to "literary") language, while sometimes departing from "current idiom".<sup>18</sup>

The vital point here, as has been made clear in the previous chapter, is that Leavis and Hopkins differ in their perspectives concerning the two great poets. For Leavis, there is a clear distinction between the two lines of tradition - Spenser-Milton-Tennyson on the one hand, and Shakespeare-Donne-Eliot on the other. Hopkins, however, classes Shakespeare and Milton together on the crucial point of poetic diction, one of the criteria for Leavis' classifications. As Hopkins wrote in the letter to Bridges already quoted, "the poetical language of an age shd. be the current language heightened, to any degree heightened and unlike itself, but not... an obsolete one. This is Shakespeare's and Milton's practice..."<sup>19</sup>

Many of us would probably find ourselves aligning with Leavis on this point, certainly so far as diction is concerned. Shakespeare's practice remained much closer to "the current language" than Milton's epic style did. This point dwells in some kind of dual, mutually reflecting relationship with the fact that



Shakespeare's plays were public (and, what is more, popular), while Milton's *Samson Agonistes* is very much an 'anti-performance' piece of dramatic literature. However, as I have argued in Chapter II, it seems to me that the classifications do tend to break down when Leavis tries to establish a more wide-ranging area of relevance and application for this theory of the two strands of tradition.

Leavis' piece of criticism dealing with Hopkins, published in *New Bearings*, proved to be vastly influential, partly responsible for an awakening awareness to the significance of Shakespeare in tracing the Victorian poet's artistic ancestry. C. Day Lewis, for instance, followed Leavis' line in *A Hope for Poetry*, a book seen at the time (1934) as a kind of mouthpiece for the group of politically radical poets that also included Spender and Auden. Dismissing the notion of any Miltonic connection outside of the counterpoint rhythm of *Samson Agonistes*, he likens Hopkins to Shakespeare in his success in "recreation of word and image", a phrase borrowed from T.S. Eliot.<sup>20</sup> This in itself seems to say little; if it means anything, the phrase manages to describe, perhaps, one of any poet's aims, but there is nothing very distinctive or especially pertaining to Hopkins or Shakespeare in this.

Perhaps Lewis' most accurate remark is little more

than an affirmation of the point made by Leavis: Hopkins is like Shakespeare in that he is "a true revolutionary poet", melting down and re-fusing the language.<sup>21</sup> Like Leavis, Lewis maintained that there was no direct imitation, only a similarity in technique. Hopkins' revolutionary techniques sprung from innocent experimentation, "as a child of genius might invent a new style of architecture while playing with bricks".<sup>22</sup> This particular analogy must strike us as an inappropriate one, bearing in mind Hopkins' subtlety and sophistication in matters of prosody.

Connections between Hopkins and Shakespeare remained rather sparsely scattered during most of this decade, the odd comment being limited to casual remarks that say very little and are presented with no substantiation: Elizabeth Drew spoke of Hopkins' difficulty being due to his "abnormal compression and richness in the use of language", aligning him with Shakespeare and Donne.<sup>23</sup> This perhaps betrays an exposure on Ms. Drew's part to Leavis' popular judgement. Daniel Sargent spoke of the Dublin sonnets as uniting "an explosive strength to the majestic pace of Shakespeare".<sup>24</sup> And Wulstan Phillipson, in an interesting remark that anticipated investigations of currents of Shakespearian 'underthought' in Hopkins' poetry, spoke of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* recalling "the nakedness and violence of the scene on the storm-swept heath in *King Lear*".<sup>25</sup> (See pp.78-80, below).

David Daiches, reliably, provided more thoughtful and penetrating criticism. In his book *New Literary Values* (1936), he writes of the "white-hot welding of form and content" that goes on in both Hopkins and Shakespeare, where the gap between the emotion itself and its expression in the medium of language is successfully bridged.<sup>26</sup> He also picked up Hopkins' term "explosion" of meaning and suggested that "Explosion was often Shakespeare's method, especially in the later plays".<sup>27</sup> Daiches is here, in effect, concurring with Hopkins' defence of his own obscurity when he cited the *Macbeth* soliloquy in the letter to Bridges of 13-21 May 1878 (see p.71, above). However, Daiches was of the opinion that the explosion occurred too rarely in Hopkins' case, often leaving the sense obscured. While Shakespeare "was able to bridge that gap consistently", Hopkins did so "only occasionally".<sup>28</sup>

Towards the end of this decade, some detailed analyses of similarities between Hopkins and Shakespeare began to appear. Ralph S. Walker, for instance, actually itemized certain characteristics of Hopkins' poetry that give it its special "activeness" of style - "his vehement rhetorical figures, his alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, false rhyme, - sound and sense echo... debate and dialogue, question and answer, and stage-aside"; Walker also commented that "The close-plaiting of figure in his richest poetry resembles that of a Shakespearian soliloquy".<sup>29</sup>

*'Overthought' and 'Underthought'*

The reference to the Shakespearian soliloquy is the most prophetic note struck here. Phillipson had earlier remarked on the echo of Act III Scene ii of *King Lear* in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, and it is true that some famous scenes and soliloquies from Shakespeare's plays seem to provide a kind of subtext for some of Hopkins' mature poetry. Louise Bogan, in an article published in the *Nation* on 30 July 1938, drew attention to Hopkins' ideas about "'overthought and underthought' in Greek tragic poets" which had foreshadowed recent ideas in her own time concerning "the underlying symbolism in Shakespeare's plays".<sup>30</sup>

It is important to be clear about these terms 'overthought' and 'underthought' before we investigate how critics have applied the terms to Hopkins' relation to Shakespeare. They spring from the correspondence between Hopkins and A.W.M. Baillie, where Hopkins is discussing lyric passages of the Greek tragedians. The 'overthought' is the overt sense of a piece, "that which", Hopkins writes, "everybody, editors, see... and which might for instance be abridged or paraphrased in square marginal blocks as in some books carefully written".<sup>31</sup> Of the more complex notion of 'underthought' Hopkins writes:

"the underthought, conveyed chiefly in the choice of metaphors etc. used and often only half-realised by the poet himself, not necessarily having any connection with the subject in hand but usually having a connection and suggested by some circumstance of the scene or of the story".<sup>32</sup>

More succinctly, he writes that it is "an undercurrent of thought governing the choice of images used".<sup>33</sup>

There is something startlingly modern about this analysis of Hopkins', for it hints at the operation of a subconscious in the mind and art of the poet; this is an element, incidentally, that seems to be absent from most of Milton's mature poetry - substantiation of Leavis' claim that Hopkins is in the Shakespearian line of tradition. This subconscious sense is especially strong since Hopkins actually writes that the process is "only half-realised by the poet himself". Certain astute critics began to pick out echoes of Shakespeare, not just by precise word or phrase, but by the general sense, atmosphere and impact of a line, a section, a poem, or even a sequence of poems. We have already noted Phillipson's comment; Terence Heywood found that a similar image of a human body in torment floated through the Dublin sonnets as floats through *King Lear*.<sup>34</sup> In these poems, Heywood writes, "Hopkins is himself a Lear".<sup>35</sup>

Whether or not he followed Heywood's clue, Robert

Speaight quoted "I wake and feel the fell of dark" and remarked "This is the continent of *King Lear*", writing a year after Heywood's articles.<sup>36</sup> But it was W.H. Gardner, in his two-volume study of Hopkins published in 1948-9, who fully explored the scope of the 'underthought' concept as it applies to Hopkins, the writer who first coined the phrase.

Gardner's general strategy is to map the Dublin sonnets onto a sequence of Shakespeare plays, most importantly, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and, above all, *King Lear*. The first line of a fragment of Hopkins' verse, "Strike, churl; hurl, cheerless mind, then", suggests Act III Scene ii of *Lear*.<sup>37</sup> The lines following on from "O the mind, mind has mountains" (from "No worst, there is none"), recalls both Gloster's speech to Edgar ("There is a cliff whose high and bending head/Looks fearfully in the confined deep" [IV.i.74-5]) and Edgar's description of the view from the make-believe cliff-edge in Act IV Scene vi.<sup>38</sup> The lines from "No worst, there is none" that run "Here! creep,/Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind" recall Lear's words to Edgar as they take shelter from the storm.<sup>39</sup>

There is some overwhelming evidence here to substantiate a claim that Hopkins had *King Lear* deliberately in mind as he wrote "No worst, there is none": even the title recalls a line from the play. However, Gardner is on rather less stable ground when he

begins to compare Hopkins to Hamlet in his "concern about the definition and performance of his heaven-appointed duty";<sup>40</sup> or to claim that "As Macbeth murdered sleep, so Hopkins suffered night-terrors for what served, to his scrupulous mind, commensurate crimes".<sup>41</sup> At this point, we no longer have our feet on the firm territory of textual evidence. One could certainly take issue with the notion that we cannot read the phrase "'fell of dark'... without associating [it] with another memorable phrase - the 'fell of hair'" of *Macbeth* V.v.11.<sup>42</sup>

These comparisons seem to take off into the realms of the fanciful, whereas the *Lear* parallels detailed above do seem to be valid, providing some kind of template for the poem itself. The Hamlet parallel, and the notion of a Macbeth-like guilt in Hopkins, are not textually grounded. While they may hold true for Gardner, they will be unconvincing for many other readers. Even textually based parallels have their limitations: various critics, including Gardner, have indulged in the generally pointless task of singling out individual words that seem to be rooted in Shakespeare, but there have only rarely been such extensive and fruitful comparisons as the *Lear* 'underthought' map for "No worst, there is none".

Gardner also has much to say about Hopkins' use of imagery in relation to Shakespeare. For the most part,

Gardner's claims are solidly backed by citation. In his view, Hopkins differs from, say, Donne, who tended to cultivate his images, developing them into ever-more elaborate conceits; his practice follows Shakespeare's example in producing "a rapid succession of independent images which are related only by some inner necessity and by their admirable fitness and relevancy."<sup>43</sup> Gardner chooses the opening lines of the fourth stanza of the *Deutschland* to illustrate his point:

"I am soft sift  
 In an hour glass - at the wall  
 Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift,  
 And it crowds and it combs to the fall;"<sup>44</sup>

Certainly this would contrast him strongly with Milton and his stately, epic similes that stand firmly within the classical tradition. However, we should also note that Gardner departs from Leavis in distinguishing Hopkins from Donne as he seeks to show the affinity to Shakespeare; In Leavis' perspective on tradition, Donne stands in the Shakespearian, not the Miltonic tradition. Leavis' position is not extraordinary to a twentieth century mind, although, as we have seen, Coleridge is one who felt that a reading of Donne would be good preparation for tackling Milton (see p.53).

W.A.M. Peters, writing in 1947, referred to this rapid-fire imagery as "not worked through",<sup>45</sup> and agreed that Shakespeare had at one point in his career



adopted the same practice. Peters gave four examples from Hopkins, including:

"With a mercy that outrides  
The all of water, an ark  
For the listener"

from the *Deutschland* stanza 33, but none from Shakespeare. John Robinson called this characteristic the "intuitive movement of Hopkins' thought", the "absence of conscious consideration - a Shakespearian absence, for, it is well known, Shakespeare, too, made brilliant intuitive use of the mixed metaphor".<sup>46</sup> The links here are not careful steps, but leaps made in seemingly haphazard directions, actually guided by a teeming kind of logic that allows a sequence to run along any one of its multitude of intricately-spliced connections.

Gardner provided a vast amount of evidence of Shakespearian influence in Hopkins' poetic craft, including an Elizabethan freedom of adverb usage;<sup>47</sup> coinages, archaisms and dialect words;<sup>48</sup> colloquial abbreviations,<sup>49</sup> and ellipsis.<sup>50</sup> For this last, Gardner parallels "I have a brother is condemned to die" (*Measure for Measure* II.ii.33) and "Deals out that being indoors each one dwells" (from "As kingfishers catch fire") as one example.<sup>51</sup> Gardner notes switches of syntax and word order effected to fit the rhythm of a line (compare "own my heart" and "good my lord");<sup>52</sup>

verb and object epithet ("*blear-all* black" and "*spendsavour* salt") and biadjectival epithets ("kindcold");<sup>53</sup> linking words by assonance (compare "surcease success" [*Macbeth* I.vii.4] and "The goal was a shoal");<sup>54</sup> and hyphenated noun compounds.<sup>55</sup> These few examples give some idea of the range and depth of learning Gardner has brought to this particular area of study, and the fact that he has been able to do so firmly establishes the extent to which Hopkins' mind was suffused with Shakespeare's work.

#### *The Leavisite Split: Slight Return*

During the 1940's and 1950's, much of the focus of comparative studies linking Hopkins and Shakespeare seemed to centre on a debate that probably had its root cause in the Leavis article in *New Bearings*. There was a general tendency to concur with Leavis' judgement; so Robert Speaight wrote of Hopkins' return to "an older tradition of English verse... a medieval tradition" rooted in Chaucer and *Piers Plowman* and "consummated" by Shakespeare.<sup>56</sup> R.G. Lienhardt wrote of the move away from Spenserian smoothness towards the Shakespearian, the "vigorous... energetic... concrete".<sup>57</sup> And Herbert Marshall McLuhan, writing in 1944, wrote of Hopkins' mission to "recover the full resources of English, to recharge the language with a fresh energy such as sprung from Shakespeare or Donne";<sup>58</sup> (note here, particularly,

the Leavisite position - McLuhan studied under Leavis at Cambridge).

It was Donald Davie who provided a valuable qualification to these kinds of comparisons, in his article "Hopkins, The Decadent Critic", published in September 1951. While agreeing that "Shakespeare shows similar audacity", Davie was keen to point out that the cases are not parallel: while in the Elizabethan age English was in a state of flux, "experimental and expanding rapidly", in the Victorian age this was certainly not the case. Davie writes that, even in everyday conversation, Elizabethans were free to "coin, convert, transpose, and cram together".<sup>59</sup> One of the most extraordinary things about Hopkins' work was his daring and ability to treat nineteenth century English as if it were still fluid and experimental. Martin Turnell attributed this boldness to his religion, which enabled him "to resist the disintegrating forces of his time".<sup>60</sup> This is perhaps one of those comments that reveals more about the critic than the object of criticism. It is, to say the least, a tenuous claim to assert that Hopkins' brave experimentation in poetic technique can be attributed to his priestly vocation. Denis Donoghue is perhaps closer to the mark when he writes that, while Hopkins was "more isolated than most poets of his day" - and this he certainly was - nevertheless, he "did not isolate himself from the composite mind which includes the single minds of

Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Wordsworth, Keats, Whitman and many other writers", including classical ones.<sup>61</sup>

This seems a more worthwhile approach. In many ways, it seems almost strained and unnatural to attempt forced categorisation when none is really needed. As we have seen in the Milton chapter, to align Hopkins exclusively with a so-called Shakespearian tradition is to go against Hopkins' vision of himself. Although this does not invalidate the connection *a priori*, it should at least provoke caution: it would be unwise to overlook the Miltonic aspects of Hopkins' work, and certainly of his theory, when Hopkins himself so evidently felt a weight of debt to Milton.

### *Shakespeare and Sprung Rhythm*

It is remarkable that so few critics have chosen to investigate Hopkins' theory and practice of sprung rhythm in relation to Shakespeare. One might have thought that, since Hopkins himself used quotations from Shakespeare to justify the new prosody, this might have proved an illuminating area of study. G.W. Stonier mentioned Shakespeare in passing - "Sprung rhythm - the most important metrical discovery of the last two hundred years - has its origin in nursery rhyme, its justification in Milton and Shakespeare".<sup>62</sup> He goes on to distinguish between Hopkins and Whitman, writing that

"where Whitman divined by accident, Hopkins struck and found".<sup>63</sup>

Sister Marcella Marie Holloway, in her *Prosodic Theory of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1947), has a more interesting point when she discusses Hopkins' "outrides", or "hangers". These, she believes, probably originate in Shakespeare, although there they are licences, departing from the regular metrical pattern, while in Hopkins they are calculated effects.<sup>64</sup> Because sprung rhythm counts by stresses rather than syllables, they cannot be licences in the strict sense, but they are there to provide variety.

W.H. Gardner, in the first volume of his work on Hopkins, acknowledged that Hopkins owed a debt to Shakespeare for his development of "outrides".<sup>65</sup> In the second volume, Gardner chooses some quotations from Shakespeare's plays, early and late, that display the freedom he enjoyed in composing the blank verse: "he frequently omits a weak syllable or adds extra ones, thereby giving his rhythm that vigour and flexibility which is implied in the word 'sprung'".<sup>66</sup> However, Gardner does not provide any further insight than this.

It seems that, in the light of the tendency to split Shakespeare and Milton and build separate traditions around them, there should be some point of tension here. For the fact is that Hopkins did not feel

the strength of the distinction to any extent approaching that felt by Leavis and his followers. In discussing diction ("the current language heightened") and in justifying sprung rhythm, Hopkins was quite prepared to cite both as precedents for his own practice. A failure on the part of the critics to deal with this dichotomy perhaps betrays the inadequacy of the Leavisite split, or at least indicates its limitations.

### *Conclusion*

It is worth noting in conclusion a point made by Terence Heywood in his articles of 1940, where he was keen to provoke some discussion of the notion of the "tyke" that appears in Hopkins' letter to Patmore of 20 May 1888. In explaining the term Hopkins refers to Pistol as "the typical tyke, he and all his crew are tykes..."<sup>67</sup> Hopkins is talking about a certain ineradicable smear on the human soul, "something of the 'old Adam'", a trace of something unrefined that ought to exist even in the most refined. It is this quality that Heywood believes associates Hopkins with Shakespeare, and the early seventeenth century in more general terms.<sup>68</sup>

And perhaps one might venture so far as to say that this is one respect in which Hopkins does move

towards Shakespeare, and away from Milton, and his puritanism; there seems something warmer and humanizing in this kind of tolerance that seems at odds with the asceticism of which we hear so much in discussions of Hopkins' life. It is worth quoting Egerton Clarke at this point, who, in an article published in 1936, wrote that Hopkins united the masculine and the feminine in his poetry - as Shakespeare did - while Milton "was so aggressively masculine that his work has never received anything more significant than admiration".<sup>69</sup> There is something in Hopkins, certainly, that distances him from the steely, unyielding moral force of Milton's 'high argument'.

In general it is not possible to conduct as satisfying an investigation of Hopkins' roots tracing through Shakespeare as it is, say, through Milton. We can see without too much difficulty that many of Hopkins' idiosyncrasies of style, such as ellipsis, epithet constructions, alliterative techniques and re-ordered syntax are preceded by Shakespeare, although it is difficult to determine to what extent this suggests influence of a direct nature. Perhaps it is, more indirectly, a case of Hopkins finding himself inspired by Shakespeare's boldness to take similar liberties with a language that was, by his time, devoid of Elizabethan fluidity. Although his degree of success in this practice varied quite wildly, there is no doubt

that this is one example of a healthy inheritance, with precedent providing inspiration rather than models for pale imitation. On a similar note, we may conclude that sprung rhythm was formulated without much direct attention to Shakespeare's example, although it did help to justify the new prosody to the sceptical Bridges.

But perhaps one of the most fruitful debates provoked by this survey, in conjunction with the second chapter, is the one that throws into some shadows of doubt the influential Leavisite theory of the splitting into Miltonic and Shakespearian traditions.



CHAPTER IV: "UNIFIED SENSIBILITY"

HOPKINS AND THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY METAPHYSICAL POETS

*Introduction and the Correspondence*

The nature of the connection between Hopkins and the seventeenth century - and the so-called "Metaphysical" poets of that period - has been the subject of heated debate ever since his poetry was first published. However, a shadow of doubt has hung over every theory of such connections since the publication of Hopkins' correspondence in 1935. The reason for this is quite simple: while critics and reviewers have been eager to draw comparisons between Hopkins and, particularly, Donne and Herbert, Hopkins himself had very little to say about these poets, at least on the available evidence. While he comments at length on other poets of the past - Keats, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, for example - and his contemporaries, references to the Metaphysicals are scant and, in the cases of Donne and Crashaw, non-existent. This fact, noted as "strange and disappointing" by W.H. Gardner,<sup>1</sup> could be seen as effectively hamstringing any criticism attempting to link Hopkins to the poets some have seen as his closest literary ancestors.

Hopkins' own remarks seem to be limited to passing references to George Herbert and Henry Vaughan. In a

letter to Bridges he comments on his partiality to Herbert's "Westcountry 'instress'" in a connection inspired by discussion of the dialect poet William Barnes.<sup>2</sup> Hopkins also notes Herbert, along with the Caroline poet Robert Herrick, as an inheritor of the "Elizabethan tradition of Shakespeare and his contemporaries".<sup>3</sup> Since some important critics have placed Hopkins within the Shakespearian tradition, this is worthy of note; however, the comment remains frustratingly isolated, and what Hopkins meant by the "Elizabethan tradition" is wide open to any interpretation.

The reference to Vaughan, too, gives away very little, merely expressing an opinion that he has "more glow and freedom than Herbert but less fragrant sweetness".<sup>4</sup> More valuable is a note on Caroline poets, whom one could term late Metaphysicals. In a letter to Bridges in 1879, writing of Patmore's poetry, he was moved to write that "he has an exquisiteness, a far-fetchedness, of imagery worthy of the best things of the Caroline age".<sup>5</sup> This description of the nature of the Carolines' imagery could describe equally well that of poets such as Donne, Herbert and Crashaw; it is precisely on account of Hopkins' imagery that some have seen fit to relate him to the Metaphysical poets.

It is highly unlikely that Hopkins never read any of John Donne's work, although it is feasible. On the

other hand, it is easy to imagine that Hopkins might have balked at some of the love poems, and been perturbed in a somewhat different fashion by the devotional verse, in the light of the fact that Donne converted from Catholicism to the Anglican Church. Admittedly, Herbert's Protestantism seems not to have prevented Hopkins from reading and enjoying much of that poet's verse. Perhaps the notion of conversion - and the uncomfortable, inverted parallel with Hopkins' own life - made the difference, but all this must remain, finally, conjectural.

Nevertheless, moral objections did not prevent Hopkins from writing at length about Swinburne, whom he referred to (along with Hugo) as "those plagues of mankind".<sup>6</sup> It is odd that Hopkins should refrain from making any comment at all on Donne, although it should be said that Donne's reputation was at a fairly low ebb during Hopkins' lifetime. The absence of Crashaw is perhaps more striking, since he was of Hopkins' religious persuasion. It is hard to imagine that Hopkins may not have been acquainted with his work.

### *Early Responses*

The anomaly becomes even more curious when we begin to examine early critical reactions to Hopkins' poems. Katherine Bregy, writing in 1909 in *Catholic*

*World*, suggested that Hopkins might well come to be known as "the Crashaw of the Oxford Movement". "For all its aloofness", she added, "the young priest's work struck root in the poetic past".<sup>7</sup> The likeness to Crashaw she describes as "very manifest".<sup>8</sup> It is worth bearing in mind that Bregy's review is based on a selection of Hopkins' work, and her opinion will naturally have been influenced by this fact. O'Neill, writing in 1912, objected quite strongly to the comparison, protesting that Hopkins' was "a tiny harp indeed" when set against Crashaw, whom he called "a master of melody".<sup>9</sup> Most critics would now regard O'Neill's point of view as eccentric, but it would not have sounded so at the time he was writing. This in itself gives some impression of the occasionally unexpected curves of response in critical reception.

On publication of the *Poems* (1918), Metaphysical comparisons were again frequent and strongly-argued. Crashaw's name was mentioned a third time, as Clutton-Brock suggested some considered justification for the parallel: in a pronouncement that sounds oddly moralistic, he declared Hopkins to be like Crashaw "in his extravagance and the manner in which he redeems it by good faith".<sup>10</sup> And M. Henry remarked on Hopkins, dubbing him "an ecstatic and difficult poet, like the men of the seventeenth century whose life centred in religion".<sup>11</sup> Since much critical interest in the earliest publications stemmed from Catholic sources, it

is perhaps unsurprising that, up to this point, Crashaw should have been a point of comparison rather than John Donne.

However, Donne's name started to appear in this context in 1919. Interestingly, the basis of perceptions of similarities was sprung rhythm. L.I. Guiney, writing in March 1919 in *The Month*, declared that Donne "roves and revels and radiates in sprung rhythm".<sup>12</sup> Some of the poems in which she believed it was most evidently manifest included the Third Satire ("Kind pity chokes my spleen"), "The Anniversary", and the Ninth and Fourteenth Divine Sonnets ("If poisonous minerals, and if that tree" and "Batter my heart, three-Peroned God").<sup>13</sup> G.F. Lahey, in his biography of Hopkins published in 1930, also insisted that the history of sprung rhythm could be traced through poets like Donne and Herbert.<sup>14</sup> He pointed out, too, that lines 'rove-over' for rhyme were used by the Metaphysical poets.<sup>15</sup>

Just as obscurity in Donne arose from "the nature of his thought", wrote Lahey, so it was with Hopkins: the "flash and quick succession of his ideas" caused the difficulty.<sup>16</sup> One might have thought this would align Hopkins more closely with Shakespeare than the Metaphysicals: poets like Donne and Herbert seem to have their sequences of thought more logically consequent and finely wrought, whereas both Hopkins and

Shakespeare do accomplish feats of quite astounding mental agility, with an almost subconscious logic of association linking the disparate ideas. Indeed, Lahey acknowledges that Hopkins does not have the Metaphysicals' "almost inevitable conceits".<sup>17</sup>

However one can only concur with the judgement that Crashaw and Hopkins display a power of "vaulting thought and striking imagery" in the more ecstatic moments of their poetry.<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Lahey sees Hopkins more in the Crashaw of "The Shepherd's Hymn" than of "The Weeper" or "The Admirable St. Teresa".<sup>19</sup> Lahey also found the fourth stanza of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* ("I am soft sift/In an hour-glass...") reminiscent of Donne, the second half of "Binsey Poplars" like Vaughan, and the opening of "Hurrahing in Harvest" like Marvell.<sup>20</sup>

#### *The 1930's: Phare's Biography*

During this decade, the Metaphysical parallels were more closely examined, and they gained much support. It is interesting to note that Hopkins and Donne began to come into fashion at roughly the same time. As one critic wrote, while both had seemed "'difficult' and 'harsh'" to their contemporaries, the realization had now dawned that this had been "an effect deliberately intended".<sup>21</sup> 'Difficulty' was no longer a

term of censure, but rather a measure of the quality of the poem. No doubt this fact was intimately related to the rise of such self-consciously obscure artists as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, and the general sea-change that had washed through English literature with the advent of modernism.

Lahey, who had been brave enough to attempt more detailed, textually-based comparisons in his biography of Hopkins, came under fire from some critics and was supported by others. Morris U. Schappes discredited the theory of evidence of sprung rhythm in Donne - much of what Lahey had instanced "is severely trochaic or iambic" argued Schappes,<sup>22</sup> indicating how unstable the ground is beneath those who try to link Hopkins with other poets on a prosodic basis. It seems that any consensus on what precisely constitutes sprung rhythm is unfeasible. Evelyn Underhill, commenting on another matter, agreed with Lahey that "Intellectually... [Hopkins was] a descendant of the seventeenth century 'Metaphysical' poets".<sup>23</sup> But Herbert Read remarked that Hopkins "is much more varied than Vaughan or Herbert, with whom he might rashly be compared".<sup>24</sup>

Donne was by now a popular point of reference: their handling of language was seen to bear resemblances - "compression" and "richness" of language;<sup>25</sup> "curtness and intensity of speech";<sup>26</sup> in the way that "verse is buffeted and made to wrestle";<sup>27</sup> and in the "acid

physical imagery" of the Dublin sonnets, likenesses to Donne were found.<sup>28</sup> C. Day Lewis found a resemblance between Hopkins' verse and the prose style of the "seventeenth century divines, and particularly Donne's".<sup>29</sup>

Others sought to draw comparisons at another level, finding kinship in their personalities - at least as evinced in the poetry. C.C. Abbott, for instance, wrote in his introduction to the correspondence (1935) that there is a resemblance in their "mental strife, restless curiosity, candour, complexity, and struggle towards asceticism".<sup>30</sup> Osbert Burdett, reviewing the correspondence, found the reconciliation of priest and poet in Hopkins incomplete, reminding him in this way "more of Donne than of George Herbert".<sup>31</sup> Geoffrey Bullough considered Hopkins to be a John Donne reborn "with a softer, more tremulous nature".<sup>32</sup> Others were less enthusiastic about the parallels - Harris Downey commented how much more "emotional" Hopkins is than Donne, contrasting the latter's objectivity and "apprehension" with Hopkins' "comprehension [and] direct feeling".<sup>33</sup> However, all these kinds of comments are vague and conjectural, lacking any firm textual basis. On a more solid, technical note, Abbott pointed out how both Hopkins and Donne were in some sense revolutionaries: Donne rejected the Petrarchan formula of the sonnet, and Hopkins turned his back on Tennyson and Pre-Raphaelite medievalism.<sup>34</sup>



The major work of Hopkins criticism in this decade was E.E. Phare's *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, published in 1933. Phare devoted a fair amount of space to a consideration of the parallels between Hopkins and Crashaw, and Hopkins and Herbert. She found evidence of "the naked encounter of sensuality and asceticism" (Bridges' phrase) "four or five times" in Hopkins, noting that by contrast it is "more often present than not" in Crashaw.<sup>35</sup> Strangely, she considered that, while both displayed evidence of "ingenious, exaggeratedly logical intellect", Hopkins did not have Crashaw's "intellectual detachment".<sup>36</sup> It seems to me to be the case that Crashaw is more like Hopkins - and unlike his contemporaries - in the lack of intellectual coolness he displays. In general, there is a feverish and excitable sense in much of Crashaw's verse that reminds one of Hopkins' more exclamatory passages.

However, one must concur with Phare's opinion that it is Hopkins' earlier poetry that most resembles Crashaw - poems such as "St. Dorothea" and "Margaret Clitheroe" are given "an air of triviality by an excess of shallow imagery", and the mature verse moves towards a greater sense of "organic harmony".<sup>37</sup> Phare borrows Coleridge's terms, and sees the shift in terms of a development away from works of the Fancy to works of the Imagination.

Phare was less convinced by the idea of

similarities between Hopkins and Herbert, primarily because of their very different relationships with God. In a crisis, she wrote, Herbert hangs on by the heart, and Hopkins by the reason and will. This is perhaps an exaggeration of the truth; at least, it could lead to a quite severely distorted perspective on Hopkins in particular. Certainly there is little doubt of Hopkins' depth of emotional involvement in poems like the Dublin sonnets. Perhaps it would be more accurate to frame the comparison in terms of activity and passivity. More often, in times of crisis, Hopkins will be seen to be striving to make contact with his God. In Herbert, the sense of desperation is muted. Perhaps he possessed a more secure, child-like sense of trust that Hopkins never had. But this, again, is biographical conjecture.

Most critics at this time saw only the differences between Hopkins and Herbert. Joan Bennett astutely remarked on the general difference between the two poets' conclusions: while Herbert's poems always end restfully, in Hopkins "the strongest expression is reserved for the last line".<sup>38</sup> Abbott distinguished Hopkins from Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne on the basis that Hopkins was not a mystic - a contentious point.<sup>39</sup> Such a point must remain contentious. There is little basis for classifying Herbert as a mystic in any agreed sense of the term, and the term itself must, almost by its nature, be one that remains intractable.

*The 1940's: Heywood, Stonier, Symes*

In 1940, Terence Heywood published an important article in the *English* periodical entitled 'Hopkins' Literary Ancestry'. Taking issue with C. Day Lewis' argument for Hopkins as a naif, Heywood proceeded to argue a case for Hopkins being firmly rooted in the past, and notably in the seventeenth century. In general, while the earlier poets had a greater range of imagery, both they and Hopkins, according to Heywood, were struggling for more natural speech rhythms in their prosody. This argument will remind us once more of the Leavis debate, and his contention that Hopkins moved away from the Tennysonian, Italianate tradition towards the 'real', spoken English language.

Heywood dwells on the 'masculine' quality of Hopkins' verse, and connects him in this to Donne, whose "words' masculine persuasive force" so impressed his disciples;<sup>40</sup> Carew wrote in his elegy of Donne having "drawn a line/Of masculine expression". The intricately bound links of thought and feeling, with condensed, explosive expression, are qualities that are also seen as characteristically Metaphysical. Heywood was eager to remind us, however, that, while in some ways we can match the Dublin Sonnets and Donne's Holy Sonnets with each other, nevertheless Hopkins was never sensual or obscene as Donne could be.<sup>41</sup> The sudden shift from matters of technique to the moralizing tone of the

latter remark does considerable damage to the strength of Heywood's case, but the notion of masculinity - again recurring from earlier discussion - is an important one. Heywood assumes that Hopkins never read any of Donne's poetry, however, and believes that real influence (as opposed to fortuitous similarity) could be found in Herbert - "a lasting influence, spiritual as well as technical".<sup>42</sup> The suggestion that Hopkins outgrew Herbert as he became more complex, profound and passionate is perhaps not entirely fair to Herbert.

Heywood was less patient with the Crashaw comparisons. While he admitted that he was superficially attractive as a reference point, he referred to Crashaw's work as "pyrotechnics" or "'happy fireworks'", set against Hopkins' "signals or life-rockets".<sup>43</sup> Again, a closely-argued case is here in danger of degenerating into an expression of personal taste.

During the 1940's, two critics in particular explored the relationship between Hopkins and Herbert, both of them attempting to back their arguments with firm, textual evidence. In 1942, G.W. Stonier, writing in the *New Statesman and Nation*, quoted from Herbert's poem "Employment" and Hopkins' "Thou art indeed just, Lord" to reveal a rather interesting similarity:



"affinity" between the two.<sup>45</sup> It is quite possible that Hopkins may have had Herbert's poems in mind at the time of composition. On the other hand, there is really nothing particularly idiosyncratic about the choice of subject matter - self-mortification, in particular, is common enough raw material for Christian writers - and we must remain sceptical.

In 1949, Gordon Symes published an article entitled "Hopkins, Herbert and Contemporary Modes", in which he made a connection between the two popular perceptions of Hopkins' place in literary history. While there had been much discussion of Hopkins as a "displaced modernist", experimenting some forty or fifty years ahead of the main current of poetic tradition, and there had been talk of Hopkins' relation to the Metaphysical poets, no-one had yet seen a link here. Modern poetry, from Eliot onwards, had been seen as having affinities with the seventeenth century, with the motivating force to 'unify sensibility'. Symes suggested that Hopkins' poetics "no less than Eliot's, looks back to the Metaphysical tradition of making a *sensible whole of experience*, of trying to order the acknowledged contradictions of living with a sort of sensuous logic".<sup>46</sup>

Following Heywood and others, Symes attacked the Crashaw comparisons, but concentrated on Herbertian parallels: Hopkins' "The Half-Way House" reminded him

of Herbert's "Love Bade Me Welcome", and there is indeed a strong basis for comparison, with the relationship between God and man seen as analogous to that between host and guest. The conversational tone of much of the two poets' work was another factor in Symes' argument - often the poems are direct or indirect colloquys with God.<sup>47</sup> This bears some similarity to the theories that Martz would propound in his work on the relationship between poetry and the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises (see pp.118-20). Most importantly, for Symes, "both poets are above all else bent on *reconciling the contrarities of existence and resolving the conflicts*".<sup>48</sup> The difference is in the way in which the conflicts are resolved - in Hopkins it is often by "violent" means, in Herbert it is almost always "warm-hearted". Herbert's conflicts are less complex, more plainly stated, and more smoothly resolved.<sup>49</sup>

### *The 1950's*

This connection between Eliot and his followers, Hopkins, and the Metaphysicals, became a major point of contention in criticism of the late 1940's and 1950's. The notion of Hopkins having "a habit of seeing things as charged with significance", indicating an ordered Universe, was endorsed by F.R. Leavis in his 'Evaluations' series published in *Scrutiny*.<sup>50</sup> Although in this sense Leavis saw him as "seventeenth century",

he was also eager to dash any hopes of pursuing connections between Hopkins and Herbert ("Hopkins's unlikeness to whom involves a great deal more than the obvious difference of temperament") or Hopkins and Crashaw (whom "he's still more unlike").<sup>51</sup> Leavis' opinion developed in the eight years or so that separated these articles from the publication of *The Common Pursuit* (1952). While his "metaphorical habit of mind and sensibility" dissociates him from Eliot and associates him with Herbert, the Victorian and the seventeenth century poet are, according to Leavis, very different; "behind Hopkins there is no Ben Jonson, and he has for contemporaries no constellation of courtly poets uniting the 'metaphysical' with the urbane".<sup>52</sup> In effect, Leavis is emphasizing a similarity of tone that Symes commented on, and adding a sociological explanation.

Another aspect of the Herbertian connection was explored by Alan Heuser in his major critical work, *The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1958). Heuser noted Hopkins' early enthusiasm for Herbert when he was an Anglo-Catholic.<sup>53</sup> The link comes in part through a similar 'baroque' feel - Heuser suggests the historical connection runs through the Pre-Raphaelites<sup>54</sup> - a strange notion considering that the Pre-Raphaelites rejected the baroque. In an interesting footnote, Heuser points out that both poets display a fascination with numbers and proportions. Thus while Hopkins



explores the possibilities for construction of lines through the methodology of sprung rhythm, Herbert experimented with "the counterpoint of short lines against long lines".<sup>55</sup> This is in the tradition of Donne and Jonson. Certainly there is a little tinkering with form going on in some of Herbert's work; however, there is nothing with which we can begin to compare the complexities of sprung rhythm. As Heuser himself says, Herbert was more concerned with the arrangement of a poem on the page - a fashion of the time - than with the impact on the ear of the reader.<sup>56</sup>

Before turning our attention to those critics who either rejected Herbertian parallels, or found Donne more useful as a point of reference, it is worth noting a number of textual similarities that have been suggested: Heuser connected Hopkins' "Beyond saying sweet, past telling of tongue" (*Deutschland* stanza 9 line 5) with Herbert's "Passeth tongue to taste or tell" ("The Banquet").<sup>57</sup> Joseph E. Duncan, in a study dealing mostly with Hopkins and Donne, noted the "Heaven-haven" phrase occurs in the last line of Herbert's "The Size".<sup>58</sup> Examples such as these, and those already discussed in examining articles by critics like G.W. Stonier, do suggest that Hopkins was very familiar with Herbert's work. Possibly the phrases that seem very similar or identical are echoes reverberating from Hopkins' subconscious, in the same way that we have

suggested in the chapter investigating his relation to Shakespeare. On the other hand, the connection might simply be on account of a stock of imagery shared by devotional writers.

Donne was the other poet frequently referred to in discussions of Hopkins' literary ancestry at this time. Some of the remarks were off-the-cuff value judgements with little substantiation; Henry Bett, for instance, complained that "too often one feels that Hopkins has some of Donne's obscurities and perversities without his sombre passion and his startling insight";<sup>59</sup> and "compared with Hopkins", wrote Vincent Turner, "John Donne, even, is almost languid".<sup>60</sup>

### *Donne and Hopkins*

However, as well as provoking a fair amount of such unenlightening criticism, the Donne connection produced several major contributions to an understanding of Hopkins' verse. One interesting suggestion came from Henry Treece, who found a current of thought that spanned four centuries: from Donne, through Hopkins, to Dylan Thomas, there seems to be a preoccupation with clinical vocabulary.<sup>61</sup> Treece quotes this from Thomas:

"I sent my creature scouting on the globe,  
That globe itself of hair and bone  
That, sewn to me by nerve and brain  
Had stringed my flask of matter to his rib"

and comments: "it is man described as a working model, as a machine; it is the legacy of John Donne".<sup>62</sup>

W.H. Gardner found affinities between Donne and Hopkins in "the play of the intellect on the problems of faith and religious endeavour", and in their both being "passionately intellectual and morally earnest"<sup>63</sup> - a matter of opinion, perhaps, in the case of Donne. There are rhythmical principles that are similar, too (although Gardner does not suggest, as early critics did, that Donne practised some prototypical form of sprung rhythm). Gardner proposes "Batter My Heart, Three-Personed God" as a good example.<sup>64</sup> Their mutual fondness for assonance is also noted.<sup>65</sup> However, as has already been discussed, there is a strong contrast in their use of metaphor, Donne building his images cumulatively into elaborate conceits structured quite logically, or at least with a flourish of apparent logic - however far-fetched they may be, they are carefully chained together. Hopkins indulges more in sensuous and physical description, and his piles of imagery are seldom logically worked-through.<sup>66</sup>

In Gardner's conclusion some religious bias, perhaps, begins to reveal itself: Donne, though wide-ranging is, for Gardner, less consistent. To Hopkins

belongs the "more rational and realistic world-view".<sup>67</sup> At once we are in the sphere of taste and moralistic judgement, and beyond the bounds of textual criticism that can be substantiated. Gardner, thought-provoking in his earlier analysis, here moves into subjective territory.

One of the most thorough investigations of the relationship between Donne and Hopkins was carried out by David Morris and published in 1953. In Morris' opinion, Donne is the most important influence in twentieth century English poetry.<sup>68</sup> Having been condemned to obscurity by neo-classical and romantic vogues, his revival seemed to have coincided with a shift away from Victorian romanticism. Morris proceeds to relate Hopkins to Donne on six counts: intellectual complexity, wit, recurrent themes, form, vocabulary and syntax. Of the much-discussed absence of any mention of Donne in Hopkins' literaria, Morris simply (and dangerously) asserts that we can assume Hopkins knew his work.<sup>70</sup>

Apart from this, however, each section of his argument is, at least, given some textual substantiation. The argumentative tone of a piece like "To What Serves Mortal Beauty?" is seen as characteristic of Donne, although Hopkins' tone is perhaps more speculative, Donne's more obviously pugnacious.<sup>71</sup> The unity of thought and feeling in the

second stanza of the *Deutschland* ("I did say yes / O! At lightning and lashed rod") is instanced as an example of the kind of "passionate feeling" familiar from poems like Donne's "Batter My Heart".<sup>72</sup>

Wit, puns and conceits are examined next. "For [Hopkins], as for Donne, nothing was intrinsically unpoetical", Morris remarked.<sup>73</sup> Often the metaphors were scientific, anatomical, the abstract made concrete. Although, as we have said, Hopkins tended not to build elaborate, logically-constructed conceits, there are one or two examples, as Morris points out; notably, the fourth stanza of the *Deutschland* ("I am soft sift/In an hour-glass"),<sup>74</sup> and "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe".<sup>75</sup> The recurring themes Morris noticed were his weakest arguments and included personal sin, death, the "metaphysical shudder" of physical decay, and the sensuous enjoyment of beauty,<sup>76</sup> most of which are by no means extraordinary, but the territory of any number of other poets. Furthermore, the theme of sensuousness must be qualified: while it exists in both, Hopkins' springs primarily from nature; for Donne, it is the sensual rather than the sensuous - conveyed in the love poetry, and in a curiously inverted manner in the Holy Sonnets.

Morris finds it "almost impossible to believe that Hopkins was not influenced by Donne's unconventional rhythms, particularly as these are coupled with other

characteristics of verse, diction and syntax which are common to the two poets".<sup>77</sup> He proceeds with a detailed examination of their treatment of the iambic pentameter. However, the case is still unconvincing: the fact remains that there is no mention of Donne in the Hopkins correspondence and Hopkins' own account of his development of sprung rhythm, relating strongly to Milton, stands alone, without any need for the seventeenth century precedent. Continuing the theme of poetic technique, Morris remarks on their use of assonance, internal rhyme and alliteration; the archaic, dialect, and colloquial elements of their vocabulary; the odd syntax, perhaps both rooted in classical precedent, and with the possibility that Donne's practice influenced Hopkins' omissions, inversions, and repetitions.<sup>78</sup> All these aspects have been used by various writers to connect Hopkins with many other diverse poets, and Morris' case is no more or less convincing.

Finally, the Dublin sonnets are suggested as being most 'Metaphysical' in the seventeenth century sense. Morris illustrates by pairing some lines, including these two sets:

"But ah, but O thou terrible..."

(Hopkins)

"God, in his stern wrath, why threatens he?"

(Donne, Holy Sonnet IX)

and:

"Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend  
With thee"

(Hopkins)

"But who am I, that dare dispute with thee"

(Donne, Holy Sonnet IX)

This is perhaps the low-point of Morris' argument: the idea of contending with God is one that is central to any religious believer, and is common subject matter for all devotional writers. But Morris' conclusion is that an indirect influence is beyond question.<sup>79</sup> The notion of direct influence, he admits, must remain in doubt, however, since the final, conclusive evidence - Hopkins' own - is lacking.

Another critic, Joseph E. Duncan, investigated the likelihood that Hopkins may have been familiar with Donne's poetry. Duncan believes that it is "probable that he knew some of Donne's and Crashaw's poetry. Although there is no evidence of direct imitation", he continues, "some of the resemblances are teasingly close".<sup>80</sup> He makes the worthwhile point that the Oxford Movement in general took a strong interest in the religious poets of the early seventeenth century, and Hopkins' close, if relatively brief, connection with

this company, makes it more likely that he would have read Donne's poetry. In general, however, Duncan's examples are even less impressive than Morris'. He covers no new ground, only retracing the same area of resemblance, and illustrating them less persuasively. He is convinced that the composition of the Dublin sonnets was directly influenced by readings of Donne's Holy Sonnets, and he finds strong parallels between Donne's "The Ecstasy" and "Hopkins' "The Blessed Virgin", and between "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" and "Floris in Italy".<sup>81</sup> He also found Herbert's influence in some of the earlier verse - "New Readings", "Barnfloor and Winepress", "Heaven Haven", and also "The Half-Way House", and Crashaw's in "Rosa Mystica" and some of the *Deutschland*.<sup>82</sup> Duncan's conclusion is that Hopkins probably "sampled and discarded" the Metaphysical poets, probably rejecting Donne for his lack of propriety and desertion from Catholicism, and Crashaw for his Latinisms and Italianisms, objectionable in Hopkins' predominantly Anglo-Saxon vocabulary.<sup>83</sup> However, his arguments are under-powered, fuelled by weak textual matter, and his conclusions are wildly speculative.

The third major attempt to investigate a link between Donne and Hopkins at this time was carried out by A. A. Stephenson, in an article published in the *Downside Review* in 1959. Stephenson began by looking at the history of the investigation of the matter,



mentioning a couple of major critics - Helen Gardner and F.R. Leavis. Introducing the 1952 edition of *John Donne: The Divine Poems* (Oxford edition), Gardner had suggested a Jesuit influence on Donne's Holy Sonnets, manifest in a combination of spiritual, emotional and intellectual analysis. This, of course, would weaken the case for direct influence, although it may help to provide an explanation by way of a common root. It is a topic that Louis Martz would research most profitably (see pp.118-20). On the other hand, Leavis, Stephenson wrote, had detected an affinity in their "muscular", Shakespearian use of language, expressive of "the very movement of consciousness".<sup>84</sup> Stephenson gives some examples of lines from Donne that have a Hopkinsian ring, an interesting inversion of the usual approach that seeks out traces of Donne in Hopkins' verse. There are a number of rather unconvincing examples given, only one or two of which - "To poor me is allow'd/No ease" (Holy Sonnet III) - is a far from satisfactory best - seem at all worthwhile.<sup>85</sup>

On the subject of rhythm, Stephenson concedes that Milton seems to have been the primary influence. However, picking up on Hopkins' claim that he was trying to get closer to natural speech rhythms, (the first of Hopkins' four notes on the nature and history of sprung rhythm at the end of the Author's Preface), Stephenson argues for a tighter connection with John Donne. "For, as many critics have remarked", writes Stephenson,

"Donne handled the traditional iambic rhythm with a freedom unsurpassed, outside dramatic verse, before Milton".<sup>86</sup> He notes that Donne uses many of the techniques and devices of which Hopkins seemed so fond - counterpoint, juxtaposition of stress, piling up of consonants, and dragging, heavy monosyllables - but admits that there is no evidence of any direct influence. Like Morris and Duncan before him, Stephenson examines possibilities why this might be so, deeming it "unlikely" that he hadn't read Donne, positing instead the suggestion that Hopkins found Donne "too congenial", and therefore decided that "he could not use Donne as a model without being dominated by him".<sup>87</sup> However, he concludes in a different, and perhaps more enlightening mode than that chosen by other critics, and suggests that the similarity comes not from comparisons of technique, but at a more profound level - the consciousness of each poet works in a similar fashion, evincing "an essentially Christian and sacramental apprehension of nature and of life", and developing a new means of expression that this faculty of consciousness demanded".<sup>88</sup> This is pure speculation, but it does echo a view that had been current at an earlier stage, expounded by Leavis and Symes, amongst others.

*Reactions against the Metaphysical Connections*

Beginning in the late 1940's and moving towards the end of the 1950's, then, we find a period of investigation into Hopkins' poetic roots that concentrated on his relation to the Metaphysical poets. With the paucity of relevant material in the Hopkins correspondence to shed light on the issue, much of this discussion was necessarily muted and tentative, and a number of critics reacted strongly against the Metaphysical connections.

Babette Deutsch, for example, while acknowledging Hopkins as "a writer of metaphysical poetry, in every sense of the term", nevertheless asserted that "Hopkins seems... not to have been influenced by the members of that company".<sup>89</sup> Of Herbert, for example, she writes, "[Hopkins] was strongly attracted by [his] work, but his admirations sent him scurrying in the opposite direction from their object".<sup>90</sup> Having denied the notion of influence, Deutsch was then content to allow the similarity between "I wake and feel" and "one of Donne's Holy Sonnets"; and to suggest that Hopkins and Traherne, one of the minor Metaphysical poets, held a similar cosmological view, perceiving it as "man's duty [to] continually recreate the world in his mind and so give it back to the creator".<sup>91</sup>

William York Tindall, in his book *The Literary*

*Symbol*, made a brief reference to the subject, noting Hopkins' "The Blessed Virgin" as a poem presenting "an extended comparison of the commonplace with the celestial... witty in the sense that Donne understood the word".<sup>92</sup> Tindall acknowledges that this is "typical" of Metaphysical poetry, but not "necessary" to it, and the implication is that we must take care when we try and classify Hopkins as a Metaphysical, for the use of the conceit is not exclusively the territory of the Metaphysicals; neither is it the defining characteristic of a seventeenth century poet.

### *Yvor Winters*

A discussion of this period would be incomplete without a mention of Yvor Winters' articles in the *Hudson Review*, published in 1948 and 1949, and notable for their unequivocal, sustained attacks upon Hopkins as a poet. Winters makes an interesting point in discussing "The Starlight Night": he pin-points the theme of the poem in the first line of the sestet - "Buy then! bid then! - What? - Prayer, patience, alms, vows". He then proceeds to suggest that a devotional poet of the Renaissance, dealing with "prayer, patience, alms, vows", "would have a good deal to say of each, what each meant in terms of daily life and toward salvation".<sup>93</sup> Winters cites Herbert's "Church Monuments" and Donne's "Thou hast made me" as two examples. This point is

really dealing with the elaboration of conceits, and the extent to which these elaborations are pursued. In Donne's poem, for instance, the notion that God has formed the poet physically is connected to spiritual decay, the spiritual sin seen as wasting the physical body, the weight of sin in the flesh drawing the poet towards hell. In this way the physical/spiritual dialectic is thoroughly worked out. Winters continues by suggesting that only in the nineteenth or twentieth century could a poet-priest think "he had dealt seriously with his love for Christ and his duty toward him by writing an excited description of a landscape".<sup>94</sup> Surely we must agree that this is a legacy of the Romantic period, and the poetry of Wordsworth in particular. What Winters argues is that Hopkins employs a landscape "as the immediate motive for a feeling which is too great for it", and then appends to it "the perfunctory moral as a kind of theoretic justification".<sup>95</sup> He lists "Spring", "The Sea and the Skylark", "The Windhover", "Binsey Poplars", "Hurrahing in Harvest", and "Duns Scotus's Oxford" as other prime offenders.

Winters is a vigorous critic, but his arguments are more notable for their energy than their incisiveness. The notion of a landscape being graded on an emotional scale to decide whether the "immediate motive for a feeling is too great for it" or not is a ludicrous one. The difference between these poems and,

say, "God's Grandeur", or "Pied Beauty" is in the movement of the thought. While these latter two begin with a focus upon God:

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God"  
and

"Glory be to God for dappled things"

The ones Winters lists are structured so that the focus shifts from the object of wonder, the creation, to the Creator. and Winters tends to find that the concluding sections lack the 'sincerity' of the more straightforward, naturally descriptive passages. But this reveals more about Winters and his bias as a critic than it does about the quality of Hopkins' work. Winters' orientation is a rigorously classical one, demanding some kind of Aristotelean ideal, a poetry of pure statement.

### *Poetry of Meditation*

Martz's seminal text *The Poetry of Meditation*, published in 1954, takes a much more enlightened approach to the relationship between Hopkins and the seventeenth century, and was the one book that finally gave a clear indication of the direction that such investigations had to take.

Martz's thesis united a large number of apparently

diverse poets - including Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, Marvell, Southwell, Blake, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Dickinson, and the later Yeats and later Eliot - under a classification of a 'meditative' style. The thesis does not concern itself with direct influence which, even when it may be "considerable", is only "secondary". He continues, "individual mastery of the art of meditation would lie behind the poetry and be the essence of the kinship."<sup>96</sup> In Martz's view, the kinship consists of a similar motion of the poet's creative spirit, "a studied and foreseen movement according to the 'three powers of the soul': the memory, the under-standing and the will".<sup>97</sup> Martz believes it is the meditative discipline exemplified by St. Ignatius that "cultivated" this tendency of mind.<sup>98</sup>

He argues that the poetry of Donne and Hopkins bears "the unmistakable imprint of the same Jesuit methods of meditation".<sup>99</sup> The Holy Sonnets, having much in common with the Ignatian meditations, provided "strong evidence for the profound impact of early Jesuit training upon the later career of John Donne".<sup>100</sup> The three-fold structure of composition (memory), analysis (understanding), and colloquy (the affections, or the will), is evident in the sonnets as it is in many of Hopkins' poems: Martz instances "God's Grandeur", "The Candle Indoors", "The Sea and the Skylark", "The Starlight Night", and "I wake and feel" as examples.<sup>101</sup> Hopkins, of course, is more evidently under the Ignatian

influence.

### *Conclusion*

And as criticism moved on through the 1960's, the issue of Metaphysical influence became quite firmly settled. Most remarks from this point on were confirmatory. Howard Sergeant, for example, found the elaboration of conceits provided an "unmistakable link between Hopkins and the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century".<sup>102</sup> Wendell Stacy Johnson found echoes of Donne in the *Deutschland* - particularly the ninth and tenth stanzas - and Herbert in, for instance, "New Readings".<sup>103</sup> A few others were less enthusiastic about the connection, but in general there was a consensus of opinion that Hopkins did have something in common with the poetic sensibilities of Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, and other Metaphysical poets.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Hopkins himself had very little to say about any of them, and we have no firm evidence at all that he ever read any of Donne's poetry. A pattern that will become familiar in some areas of this study begins to emerge: those critics who attempt to relate Hopkins to predecessors by finding 'evidence' or borrowings from texts, conscious or unconscious echoes of phrases, words, or specific themes, are generally unsuccessful. This must certainly



be the case when we have no evidence that Hopkins was acquainted with the work of the poet in question. His maxim to "admire and do otherwise" must always remain in our reckoning.

The broader approach - Martz's possibly being the best example here - is more appropriate, enlightening in a more general sense. While we may speculate on resemblances in style, technique and theme, the subtle study of parallel sensibilities is a surer, and ultimately more valuable function.

CHAPTER V: "PAYSAGES SACRALISÉS"

HOPKINS AND THE ROMANTIC POETS

*Introduction*

Hopkins' relation to the Romantic tradition becomes most evident in a study of the influence of Keats on his early verse. We have seen that the debate about Keats, conducted in correspondence between Hopkins and Patmore from 20 October 1887 to 11 May 1888, is enlightening in many respects, chiefly in the way it exposes some of the inner tensions that formed Hopkins' poetic. His relationship with other Romantic poets is a less explicit one. However, the Romantic movement cast a huge shadow across Victorian poetry - in particular, the most popular writers such as Tennyson and Swinburne - and for this reason it is important, (as it has historically been seen to be so), to examine this area of Hopkins' literary ancestry closely.

*The Correspondence*

When we investigate the Hopkins correspondence, it quickly becomes very clear that Hopkins' classification of the Romantics differs quite profoundly from our own. For instance, in a letter to R. W. Dixon of 1 December 1881, he writes of the "Lake Poets" (including, rather

oddly, Shelley and Landor in this group). In addition to them, there is the "Romantic school (Romantic is a bad word) of Keats, Leigh Hunt, Hood...".<sup>1</sup> And thirdly, there is the "sentimental school", headed by "Byron, Moore, Mrs. Hemans, and Haynes Bailey".<sup>2</sup> While we must bear in mind the informal context of the letter here, it is still evident that Hopkins had some strange notions, the latter group being a particularly motley assortment of poets and versifiers.

The Lake poets seem to have Hopkins' admiration, for he believed them to have represented "the mean or standard of English style and diction".<sup>3</sup> This immediately reminds us of Hopkins' comments on Milton's style. At the same time, Hopkins writes of their diction as "generally pure, lucid, and unarchaic";<sup>4</sup> and this may bring to mind what we know of Wordsworth's intentions as a poet, as detailed in the *Preface to The Lyrical Ballads*. Continuing his remarks on the Lake poets, he suggests that "Their keepings are their weak point, a sort of colourless classical keepings".<sup>5</sup> To understand what Hopkins means by this unfamiliar epithet, we may continue the quotation:

"...when Wordsworth wants to describe a city or a cloudscape which reminds him of a city it is some ordinary rhetorical stage-effect of domes, palaces and temples".<sup>6</sup>

What he seems to be implying by "colourless" is that

Wordsworth and his followers too often fell back on an accepted stock of poetic imagery, uncoloured by fresh, individual perspectives. This may seem odd if we bear in mind that individual perspective is generally seen as a major tenet of Romanticism, and that Wordsworth, for instance, declared his intention to use "a selection of language really used by men", throwing over them "a certain colouring of imagination" (*Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*).

However, some would argue that some development is evident in a comparison of Hopkins and Wordsworth, just as the difference between Wordsworth and, say, Dryden, is distinct. Take, for instance, "Hurrahing in Harvest", and bear in mind his comments on Wordsworth's cloudscapes, as quoted above:

"...up above, what wind-walks! what lovely behaviour  
Of silk-sack clouds! has wilder, wilful-wavier  
Mealdrift moulded ever and melted across skies?"

We cannot imagine Wordsworth comparing clouds to "silk-sacks" or "mealdrift". If anything, this recalls the far-fetched fancies of the Metaphysical poets. "Hurrahing in Harvest" predates the letter quoted above by some four years. It is possible that Hopkins had his own poem in mind as a point of contrast when he wrote of this in the letter.

The "classical" part of the epithet may relate to the Greek and Roman poets, for Hopkins writes of his "Romantic" school that they, by contrast, chose "medieval keepings", brought down via Shakespeare and the cavalier poets.<sup>7</sup> Hopkins was less patient with the "sentimental school", who had "a deep feeling but the most untrustworthy and barbarous eye for nature"; "markedly modern" diction, and their keepings "any gaud or a lot of Classical rubbish".<sup>8</sup>

Having defined these groups, Hopkins proceeds to classify his contemporaries, placing Tennyson and his school as a "mean or compromise" between Lake poets and medievalists.<sup>9</sup> The Lake School proper "expires in Keble and Faber and Cardinal Newman".<sup>10</sup> To add yet another supposition to the tottering stack of idiosyncratic judgements, Hopkins places the Brownings with the Romantics.<sup>11</sup>

These critical comments are revealing in their relation to Hopkins' own work, even if we may be sceptical about their value as objective judgements, or solid literary criticism. One might, for instance, question the placement of Browning alongside Keats and Leigh Hunt. Hopkins evidently had little time for the sentimentalists. Of the medievalists, Keats was Hopkins' main preoccupation; indeed, he was one of the major influences on Hopkins' early work, and in some respects their poetic sensibilities bear remarkable

similarities.

Some critics have traced a common thread of thought in Shelley and Hopkins (idealism, for example; the material world as a medium between man and the deity), but Hopkins himself had little to say of him. However, he did mention the triplet structure of "Ode to the West Wind" and admitted in a letter to Bridges of 1879 that "I wrote a little piece so printed when at school and published it in *Once a Week*".<sup>12</sup> The poem was "Winter with the Gulf Stream".

Coleridge is of interest for the prototypical sprung rhythm used in *Christabel*: in Coleridge's own terms, the "new principle" is "that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables". Dixon mentioned it in passing when Hopkins had written to him of the theory of sprung rhythm:

"I sd. like to see a piece in 'sprung rhythm'. Is that anything of the sort that Coleridge meant by his distinction between accent and quantity? You no doubt know of his making that distinction, and giving it out as a discovery; saying that *Christabel* was written in accent, not quantity, or something like that".<sup>13</sup>

In his reply, Hopkins states that he understood Coleridge made a clear distinction between two types of verse - one is "quite opposed to sprung rhythm", while the other "*is not, but might be developed into, that*" (Hopkins' italics).<sup>14</sup> The latter is the one that

interests Hopkins - it grants freedom to alternate two-syllabled and three-syllabled feet. Strangely, although usually eager to point out precedents to support his prosodic theory, and to help it gain wider acceptance, Hopkins here denies that Coleridge had produced a poem that displays fully-fledged sprung rhythm, although he does allow that it is a step in the right direction.

Wordsworth receives most attention. Direct influence is admitted on occasion; for instance, "The Brothers" was apparently suggested by Wordsworth's example, and originally written in "stanzas in Wordsworth's manner".<sup>15</sup> He admitted in the same letter that:

"when I compared it with his inimitable simplicity and gravity I was disgusted and meant to destroy it, till the thought struck me of changing the metre, which made it do".<sup>16</sup>

Wordsworth's "spiritual insight into nature" Hopkins believed had been granted "to so very few men since times was - to Plato and who else?"<sup>17</sup> But although he held certain pieces in the very highest esteem (one remembers his spirited defence of the Immortality Ode in a letter to Dixon),<sup>18</sup> he felt that he wrote "such an 'intolerable deal of' Parnassian".<sup>19</sup> It seems that Hopkins was exposed to a large number of Wordsworth's later, weaker poems. Nevertheless, even though Wordsworth's poetic voice may have been as different as

it could have been from his own, to Hopkins he was certainly an awe-inspiring model, if only for the breadth and depth of his philosophical vision (his "spiritual insight into nature").

### *Reactions to the 1918 and 1930 Editions*

It is perhaps surprising that so few critics raised the ghost of Romanticism when confronted with the first volume of Hopkins' verse in 1918. One critic noted that the "nature poetry" had "none of the high and dry philosophy of Wordsworth, or the gorgeous and unsettling anarchy of Shelley".<sup>20</sup> One of the few early critics to suggest parallels was John Middleton Murry, who argued that Hopkins' "main line" of "poetical evolution" lay in "a technical progression onwards from the "'Skylark'", and cited the "May Magnificat" as evidence.<sup>21</sup> It would prove to be an unpopular comparison, one that would be attacked by later critics including F.R. Leavis (see p.131).

On the whole, any relation of Hopkins back to Romantic ancestors was ignored, however. J.M. Hone found him "in reaction against most of the literary influences of the nineteenth century"<sup>22</sup> - a usefully representative point of view.

The second edition of the poems, published in



1930, drew more critics to consider a connection between Hopkins and his more immediate poetic ancestors; previously, the more popular line of comparison had been with the 'Metaphysical' school of the seventeenth century, Donne, Herbert and Crashaw in particular, as we saw in the previous chapter. Lahey saw a trace of Shelley in the line "I kiss my hand to the stars" (although one could argue this to be reminiscent of any number of poets);<sup>23</sup> Schappes found "The Nightingale" "Wordsworthian";<sup>24</sup> and W.J. Turner traced echoes of Byron, as well as Keats and Swinburne, in "The Escorial".<sup>25</sup>

Harman Grisewood made mention of Hopkins' criticism of the Lake Poets - "faithful but not rich observers of nature" - and concluded that "The school of Wordsworth... was not his school".<sup>26</sup> At the same time, Grisewood believed that "his natural perception was of a purity and keenness which one can compare with the original fountains of Romanticism".<sup>27</sup> There seems to be some truth in this, although terms like "purity" and "keenness" are rather vague and indistinct. However, Hopkins' own quarrel with the Lake Poets was with their being "faithful but not rich" in their observation of Nature.<sup>28</sup> And certainly one interpretation of these terms could set Grisewood's and Hopkins' views in opposition to one another.

Other critics refused to countenance any

similarities suggested between Hopkins and the Romantics. "[Hopkins] has none of the power of philosophic thought possessed by Shakespeare, Milton, Coleridge, Blake, Keats or Shelley", wrote W.J. Turner.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, as noted above, Turner found traces of some of the Romantics in Hopkins' juvenilia.

In addition, two notable critics attacked Shelleyan comparisons, specifically Murry's: "Where did Mr. Murry find his skylark poet?" wondered G.W. Stonier.<sup>30</sup> F.R. Leavis conceded the orthodoxy of the early poems, "in the relation they exhibit to Keats, Shelley, Byron and Tennyson", but added that "he has no relation to Shelley or to any nineteenth century poet".<sup>31</sup> Having made a show of being polemical and uncompromising, Leavis *does* venture to suggest a similarity to Blake in that both see "the outward symbol and the significance as one, in a kind of metaphor".<sup>32</sup> Like many of Leavis' remarks, this leaves an impression of import without its being quite clear exactly what it means. Perhaps Leavis is referring to Hopkins' concept of inscape. Or perhaps he means nothing more than something along the lines of "The world is charged with the grandeur of God" - hardly a notion exclusive to these two poets.

*Wordsworth*

In the years that followed, as major studies of Hopkins' life and work began to appear, the Wordsworthian comparisons found most favour. E.E. Phare found "a true, though slight affinity with Wordsworth", mostly confined to the idea of a divinity in nature.<sup>33</sup> She believed that the ecstasy or rapture was more dependent upon intellectual effort in Hopkins, although both seemed to glory in "wild" Nature, the unexplained: Hopkins is "particularly thankful for those features of Nature which do not accommodate themselves to our idea of order".<sup>34</sup> As far as imagery is concerned, E.E. Phare was aware of the differences between Hopkins' tendency towards the highly coloured and Wordsworth's to a limpidity like water.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the choice of words here reminds us of Hopkins criticism of the Lake Poets' "colourless classical keepings".

She also considered those attempts by Hopkins to write what she terms "exercises of sympathy", those entries into common experiences celebrated by so many (including Hopkins) in Wordsworth's poetry. Hopkins' forays she considered generally unsuccessful, with the sole exception of "On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People".<sup>36</sup>

Reviews of Phare's book brought reappraisal of the Wordsworth connection. Humphry House reminded us that

Hopkins always emphasized the distinction between Creator and creature, and so was saved from pantheism.<sup>37</sup> Wordsworth also tried to avoid this metaphysical pitfall, but had not the strong pull of dogma and orthodoxy to rescue him. Others considered the Wordsworth comparisons to be chimerical; Barker Fairley thought Wordsworth was "unlike without being helpfully unlike" and therefore was "best left out" of the discussion altogether.<sup>38</sup> Babette Deutsch considered the parallel inappropriate, too: "Hopkins's spirit was more intense, his senses sharper, his intellect more virile, than Wordsworth's".<sup>39</sup> The latter quotation is an example of the kind of subjectivism and unsubstantiated value judgement that recurs in these debates. Nevertheless, one can appreciate that there is a divergence of poetic sensibilities between the two poets, while resisting any inclination to exalt one above the other.

C. Day Lewis' book *A Hope for Poetry* (1934) is one of the most important documents of this period as far as a study of the reception of Hopkins' work is concerned. His thesis that connects Hopkins and Wordsworth is a fascinating one: while Wordsworth brought poetry closer to common speech by attempting to use the language of everyday conversation, Hopkins moved away from common speech in an attempt to weave some kind of incantatory spell in his poetry. At the same time, Lewis acknowledged, Hopkins' prosody built rhythms based

on common speech.<sup>40</sup> The distinction seems to be between *rhythm* and *diction*: Hopkins cultivated incantatory language while building speech rhythms into his poetry. Wordsworth did not break new ground as far as prosody is concerned, but concentrated on shifting away from self-consciously 'poetic' diction.

Although C. Day Lewis is careful to qualify his argument, and admit its generalized nature, its accuracy nevertheless seems to me to be in doubt. Hopkins had strong opinions about his diction and his prosody, both of which he seemed to believe were close to those of common speech. We may choose to disagree with Hopkins - certainly so far as diction is concerned, and, on occasion, rhythm, too. But while his poetry certainly does seem to possess this incantatory quality relatively often, nevertheless this does seem to come as much from the rhythms as from the language - "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" springs to mind, or perhaps "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves". Lewis' assertion that Hopkins was concerned to develop speech rhythms and incantatory language, therefore, seems questionable.

#### *The Publication of the Prose*

With publication of the correspondence in 1935, new avenues of exploration opened up. Access was obtained into the more discursive and ratiocinative

chambers of Hopkins' brain. The complexity and subtlety of his thought inevitably invited comparisons with Coleridge:

"In his psychological insight and the delicacy of his analysis of poetry, whether his own or another's, he rivals Coleridge, and his efforts to discriminate effects and affects anticipates the work of Coleridge's modern interpreter, I.A. Richards".<sup>41</sup>

Babette Deutsch stated this in a review of the correspondence, and two years later she turned her attention to the other prose works, concluding "His 'Dialogue on the Origin of Beauty' and his essay on 'Poetic Diction' both recall Coleridge".<sup>42</sup> It is interesting to set beside these comments Harris Downey's opinion of Hopkins' journal, "the prose of which resembles the poetry of Wordsworth".<sup>43</sup> Certainly this startling contrast does exist between the journals and the philosophical and academic exercises, although the journal does occasionally erupt with passages of such complexity of thought.

When M.D. Zabel reviewed the correspondence for the journal *Poetry*, he made an interesting point that shed light on Hopkins' relation to the Romantics and his own contemporaries. Hopkins' poetic practice was, in part, a step away from what one might term the 'watered-down Romanticism' that was fashionable in the late nineteenth century. His remarks about Tennyson and,

particularly, Swinburne underline this shift. Zabel suggests that Hopkins shows up "the extravagance and waste in poets of undirected or merely impulsive enthusiasms".<sup>44</sup> Zabel also proposes that Hopkins converted these experiences into something "far more accurate and intense" in description or symbolism "than the less critical Romantics were capable of mastering".<sup>45</sup>

Some might object to the value judgement expressed here. But perhaps there is a sense in which Hopkins finds direction and a kind of focus through the profundity and all-pervasiveness of his faith and the doctrine to which he had submitted his mind, something that is lacking in the poets whose philosophical systems were less firmly grounded.

Of the three major works on Hopkins published in the 1940's, John Pick's *Priest and Poet* (1942) made no mention of his Romantic predecessors, and W.A.M. Peters' volume concentrated more on Hopkins' relation to his contemporaries, his successors, and the much-neglected aspect of the ancients (Homer in particular) and the Anglo-Saxon heritage. Peters does mention Wordsworth, but it is more in the context of an examination of Hopkins as a reader and critic. There is a valuable note on Parnassian, displaying how it ties in closely with Hopkins' preoccupation with individuality, but nothing to indicate that Peters found any evidence of

direct influence or any kinship of poetic sensibility.

W.H. Gardner's two-volume study of Hopkins (1948-9) included passages dealing with all the major Romantic poets. In a general sense, he considered Hopkins' "love of May skies, stars, clouds, dawn and sunset... akin to that of the great Romantic poets".<sup>46</sup> His imagery is also reminiscent of the Romantic tradition in a strictly limited fashion: "in the freshness of its perceptions, its first-hand treatment of natural phenomena".<sup>47</sup> It is worth recalling, again, Hopkins' dubious criticism of the Lake poets' "keepings", and Gardner acknowledges that Hopkins condemned their vagueness;<sup>48</sup> "his total complex of style is Classical rather than Romantic".<sup>49</sup>

The early poetry shows its Keatsian colours more strongly than any other, but Gardner points out touches of "Byronic vigour" in "The Escorial",<sup>50</sup> echoes of "Keats, Coleridge, Byron and Shelley" in "Spring and Fall",<sup>51</sup> "nine lines of Blake-like intensity" in "Why should their foolish bands",<sup>52</sup> the "ethereal lights and rainbow-hues" of Shelley in "Il Mystico",<sup>53</sup> and similarities to Blake and Wordsworth (as well as Vaughan and Traherne) in his poems of childhood,<sup>54</sup> although he pointed out that Hopkins' view of the child tends to be less idealized than that of his predecessors.<sup>55</sup>



*Shelley*

However, one of the most interesting aspects here is Gardner's resurrection of the Shelleyan comparisons, first raised by John Middleton Murry in 1919, and so vigorously rebutted by F.R. Leavis and G.W. Stonier in 1932. Gardner found a kinship of ideas, noting line 381 of "Adonais" and the words "the One Spirit's plastic stress"; he adds that, "without participating in Shelley's pantheism he uses the word 'stress' in a similar way many times in the *Deutschland* and elsewhere."<sup>56</sup> Gardner believed that these lines from "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe" -

"Through her we may see him  
Made sweeter, not made dim"

were comparable to Shelley's Spirit of Nature behind the "screen" of matter.<sup>57</sup> Both were concerned with the One and the Many.<sup>58</sup>

These points are debatable. The issue of 'stress' is an interesting one: one may speculate as to influence, but perhaps it indicates merely parallel lines of thought that brought them both to the same word. The second point is more dubious. Though it is true that, for both poets, the material world is a screen between man and God, Nature is seen by Hopkins in a more favourable light; as a medium through which God may "flame out" in his grandeur. For Shelley, "the

solid Universe of external things is 'such stuff as dreams are made of'".<sup>59</sup> Shelley, like all Platonists and Neoplatonists, is necessarily led to a profound distrust of the validity, even the ultimate reality, of the external world. Take for instance the fifty-second stanza of "Adonais", and the ambivalence of:

"Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity". (ll.462-3)

and compare it with Hopkins' perspective, where the physical world is "news of God", reflecting His glory; rather than, as Shelley might argue, distorting it, making out of it beautiful but fundamentally deceptive patterns.

However, there is no doubt that Hopkins' early verse contains some of what Gardner calls the "restless energy of Shelley".<sup>60</sup> He cites the fourth and fifth lines of "The Starlight Night" as an example of "Keatsian luxuriousness" stirred by "something like a Shelley's dynamism".<sup>61</sup> Both poets found "a special beauty in growth, change, and movement", and often expressed themselves accordingly in "dramatic, motile imagery".<sup>62</sup>

This "dynamism" is certainly something they share. The frequency of interjected "Oh"s and "Ah"s, and the unrestrained use of the exclamation mark indicates this.

To take but one example of this common 'bidding' urgency, one can compare the fifty-third stanza of "Adonais" with the close of "Hurrahing in Harvest" or "Morning, Midday and Evening Sacrifice":

"Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, My Heart?  
Thy hopes have gone before, from all things here  
They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!"

("Adonais" stanza 53)

"The heart rears wings bold and bolder  
And hurls for him, O half hurls earth  
for him off under his feet."

("Hurrahing in Harvest", ll.13-14)

"What death half lifts the latch of,  
What hell hopes soon the snatch of,  
Your offering, with despatch, of!"

("Morning, Midday and Evening Sacrifice", l.19-21)

The latter perhaps also brings to mind Robert Browning, himself a great admirer of Shelley.

Having pointed out the similarities, it is also vital to bear in mind that Hopkins' own energy seems very much self-galvanized, an inevitable outworking of his poetic methods, not something inherited from a predecessor. These studies merely point out similarities of poetic sensibility, not evidence of direct influence. Interestingly, Gardner rejects Murry's basis for a comparison - "The quick-fire of his figurative ideas admits no... romantically elaborated

pictures like those of Shelley's 'To a Skylark'".<sup>63</sup> Gardner believed that Hopkins' true place was beside Wordsworth, despite his affinity with Keats and Shelley, "both in his choice of subjects and in his consistently metaphysical apprehension of natural phenomena".<sup>64</sup>

Specific poems that Gardner considered displayed some Wordsworthian touches include the nine sonnets written between April and October 1865, along with "The Sea and the Skylark", "Duns Scotus's Oxford", "Ribblesdale", and "In the Valley of the Elwy".<sup>65</sup> "The Nightingale" (1866) is "Hopkins' nearest approach to the Wordsworth of the *Lyrical Ballads*."<sup>66</sup> The latter comment certainly hits the mark; one notices immediately the careful adherence to common speech, and the straightforward rhyme scheme and metre.

The supposed resemblances in some of the other poems are more dubious. The high proportion of compound epithets in "Duns Scotus's Oxford" (for example, line five: "Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmed, lark-charmed, rook-racked, silver-rounded") is particularly un-Wordsworthian. Most important of all, perhaps, leaving aside the philosophical differences, is the fact that Hopkins' descriptions of nature are stretched taut across the framework of the verse, straining with a profoundly idiosyncratic utterance. Wordsworth could never have described clouds as "Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows" ("That Nature is a Heraclitean

Fire"), or "Thrush's eggs" as "little low heavens" ("Spring").

Gardner does point out a similar theme in some of the poems - such as "The Sea and the Skylark" - dealing with the regenerative powers of nature at work on man rendered degenerate by material civilization.<sup>67</sup> However, one could perhaps also point out their concern with social issues - "The Brothers", "Harry Ploughman", "Tom's Garland", for instance, and his infamous 'red letter' to Bridges of 2 August 1871, where his admission of Communist sympathies precipitated a two and a half year break in their communication. The young, revolutionary Wordsworth may have well understood the sentiment expressed in these words:

"... it is a dreadful thing for the greatest and most necessary part of a very rich nation to live a hard life without dignity, knowledge, comforts, delight or hopes in the midst of plenty - which plenty they make".<sup>68</sup>

### *Yvor Winters*

In the same year that Gardner's study was published, Yvor Winters - one of Hopkins' most articulate and prestigious detractors - published a document in the *Hudson Review*. In this two-part article

- which contained the most sustained, well-argued attack on Hopkins' work that had been published to date - Winters argued the case for Hopkins as a Romantic. The phrase "emotion over reason" could sum up Winters' rather sketchy and generalized notion of this school of poetry, and he finds in Hopkins' time a tendency towards "erudite eccentricity" fusing with the Romantic tendency so defined. He instances Doughty, Carlyle and Browning among the Victorians, and Pound, Eliot and Marianne Moore in the twentieth century.<sup>69</sup> "It is not curious", Winters continues, "that Hopkins should be inclined by his personal nature and by his historical setting... to practice an extremely emotional and eccentric form of poetry".<sup>70</sup>

Winters' articles are rather too overheated and hectoring to be of great value as literary criticism - it is evident merely that neither Hopkins nor the Romantics are to his taste. His opinion that Hopkins imposes on landscapes feelings that are too great to justify their inspiration has been dealt with in the previous chapter. However, the mention of "eccentricity" is an interesting one, and the names of Browning and Doughty will resurface in a discussion of Hopkins and his contemporaries.

At about the same time, another critic anonymously reviewing three major works on Hopkins - including a rare, scathing assault on Gardner as editor and glosser

- suggested elements of Hopkins' poetic that "fit[s] easily enough into familiar Romantic doctrine", notably the requirements of spontaneity, and "being in earnest" (to use Hopkins' own phrase).<sup>71</sup> However, it was not until about ten years later that the notion of Hopkins as a Romantic became a mainstream critical opinion. There had been a shift away from the idea of Hopkins as a "naif" (C. Day Lewis' term) towards a recognition of his influences. However, these influences were seen as very wide-ranging, "from Pindar to Shakespeare, from Donne to Crashaw, to Keats and Wordsworth".<sup>72</sup> It was not until about 1960 that the suggestions made by critics such as Winters - whose heckling was to a large extent lost in the clamour of enthusiastic voices - were developed.

### *The 1960's*

David A. Downes' *Study of his Ignatian Spirit* (1960) suggested that it was "not too much to say that his relation to the beauty of being was ecstatic, as highly pitched as any of the Romantic poets".<sup>73</sup> And in his book *Victorian Portraits: Hopkins and Pater* (1965), he developed the thesis that, "however traditional his mind, his was a Romantic heart".<sup>74</sup> Downes wishes to oppose the "commonplace" view that Hopkins was a Keatsian Romantic in his early years, and insists that he became "something else after his conversion".<sup>75</sup> He

proceeds by a detailed analysis of Hopkins' poetic theory and practice to argue a strong case for connecting this to the theory and practice of writers like Wordsworth and Shelley: certainly the idea of "encountering this bird [in "The Windhover"]... in grasping [it] with a vital sensibility"<sup>76</sup> recalls Shelley's identification of ourselves with the true and beautiful that exists in thought, action or person not our own (*Essay on Poetry*). The sense of self is paramount in Hopkins' poetry, Downes declares; the notion of self 'in-scaping' the world and expressing this "heightened distinct-iveness".<sup>77</sup>

At the same time, Downes is careful to emphasize the point at which Hopkins diverges from the Romantic theorists. While maintaining the emphasis on in-scaping outlined above, he insisted that "Hopkins provided a radical corrective to the decadence of self which Romanticism had become in his time, for he gave it a deific centre out of which could come again some grand transcendental values and perspectives".<sup>78</sup>

In the same year, an article appeared in *Victorian Studies* that made a similar point: the Romantic tenets ("specifically Coleridgean"), are seen to be wedded to a Victorian "powerful, orthodox faith".<sup>79</sup> Bell Gale Chivigny pursues the Coleridgean connection further when she parallels Coleridge's primary imagination and Hopkins' objective instress, and Coleridge's secondary



imagination with Hopkins' subjective instress, or "responsive energy".<sup>80</sup> Coleridge's "we receive but what we give", Wordsworth's world composed of what eye and ear "half create/And what perceive", all these interactive models of the relationship between man and the universe are found to hold some kind of correspondence with Hopkins' theories. One could add to the list Blake's "As the eye, such the object". Again, the point is made that Hopkins' emphasis is ultimately on Christ, rather than the Romantics' "fusion... sought with unity, life, or beauty".<sup>81</sup>

During the rest of this decade, the critics seemed to be more comfortable with the habit of linking Hopkins to Wordsworth. Other commonplaces - Hopkins as a modernist anticipating poetic practice by forty or fifty years, or Hopkins as a Metaphysical - began to become less popular. With the notion that their poetic sensibilities bore a lot in common, more specific examinations of individual poems were carried out by different writers. The "unforced energy" of poems like the *Deutschland*, "Hurrahing in Harvest" and "The Windhover" reminded Jim Hunter of Shelley, while he acknowledged that it was really Keats to whom Hopkins owed a true debt, rather than an affinity.<sup>82</sup> Both Jim Hunter, and Wendell Stacy Johnson (in *The Poet as Victorian* (1968)), pointed out the common partiality for bird imagery: "their grace and power seem to have particular appeal" commented the former,<sup>83</sup> while Johnson

found that in Hopkins' windhover, Shelley's skylark and Keats' nightingale, the bird is "partly like the speaker himself and yet, transcending his ordinary world in its splendour, can inspire and reach him".<sup>84</sup>

Moving on to Wordsworth, Johnson found a similar theme in "Spring and Fall" as in the "Immortality Ode" - a poem that we have seen from the correspondence to be one that Hopkins held in the highest esteem.<sup>85</sup> In both, Johnson argues, the poet "relates his child very closely to the landscape and indeed concerns himself with the child's giving meaning and taking meaning from the scene".<sup>86</sup> Another writer commenting on "Spring and Fall" also found it reminiscent of "the 'shades of the prison-house' note of Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode'".<sup>87</sup>

Finally, Denis Donoghue's book *The Ordinary Universe* (1968) dealt in some detail with the relationship between Hopkins and Whitman - itself a study that sheds interesting light upon the debate over the extent to which Hopkins may be considered a 'Romantic'. Donoghue believed that Hopkins' spirit was best understood in Blakean terms:

"If Blake is prepared to see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower, Hopkins is quick to report that the changelessness of God is manifested in a world of dazzling change... All things to Hopkins are 'counter, original, spare, strange'. This is in Blake's idiom".<sup>88</sup>

### *Conclusion*

So we find at the end of the 1960's that the consensus of critical opinion favours the view that Hopkins owed more to his Romantic ancestors than a superficial study might suggest. Attempts to find evidence of direct influence via specific echoes - as in the case of the Metaphysical comparisons - were generally unsuccessful, except in the case of the juvenilia; here, much of the poetry owes an obvious debt to some of the Romantics, Keats in particular.

However, the more important area of investigation lies at a more profound level, although it is one that is more nebulous and less tractable to attempts to tie in notions of direct influence. As time passes, the Romantic period becomes more conducive to the compartmentalizing habits of literary critics; rough edges are smoothed by generalizations and notions of fashion and *Zeitgeist*. As a consequence, traditions of thought and poetic sensibilities are perceived to have been passed down from Romanticism to the Victorian period, and Hopkins comes to be seen more as a poet of his time: his theories of poetry, and his view of the universe and man's place in it, show signs of having developed within the new intellectual climate created at least in part by poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley. This issue will be dealt with more fully in the examination of Hopkins as a Victorian and as a

Modernist (Chapter VII). However, it is vital to remember the important ways in which Hopkins remains distinct from these predecessors : most obviously, in the deific and (more specifically) Christocentric structure of his philosophy.

CHAPTER VI: "EXTREMES MEET"

HOPKINS AND WALT WHITMAN

*Introduction*

Walt Whitman is, with the possible exception of Keats, the most fascinating poet one can study in relation to Gerard Manley Hopkins. The fascination stems primarily from their very evident differences, set against Hopkins' own words in a letter to Bridges of 18 October 1882:

"I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living. As he is a very great scoundrel this is not a pleasant confession".<sup>1</sup>

Close study of the two poets' work is repaid with some solid substantiation of Hopkins' own admission. Comparisons of passages of the verse yield similarities as well as the anticipated contrasts of thought, feeling and style.

*Hopkins' Acquaintance with Whitman's Poetry*

It is important to note the extent to which Hopkins and Whitman are contemporaneous, and how much exposure the English poet had to the American's work.

(Obviously, Whitman would not have known Hopkins' verse). Whitman was born in 1819 and died in 1892. *Leaves of Grass* was first published in 1855 (a dozen copies that he printed himself) and republications followed in 1856, 1860, 1867, 1871, 1876 and 1881, with the final 'death-bed' edition in 1892. William Michael Rossetti published the first British edition in 1868, although copies of the American edition seem to have found their way across the Atlantic as early as 1856: an unsigned review, unrelentingly abusive, appeared in the 1 April 1856 edition of the *Critic*.<sup>2</sup>

According to the correspondence, Hopkins was familiar with only a few of Whitman's poems. His letter of 18 October 1882 to Bridges reveals:

"I have read of Whitman's (1) 'Pete' [i.e. 'Come up from the Fields Father'] in the library at Bedford Square (and perhaps something else, if so I forget), which you pointed out; (2) two pieces in the *Athenaeum* or *Academy*, one of the Man-of-War Bird, the other beginning 'Spirit that formed this scene'; (3) short extracts in a review by Saintsbury in the *Academy*: this is all I remember. I cannot have read more than half a dozen pieces at most."<sup>3</sup>

The extracts in the *Academy* review (10 October 1874) included a few lines from "Song of Myself", "Death Carol" (from "President Lincoln's Burial Hymn"), a stanza of "Children of Adam", and these four lines, Whitman's description of the grass, well worth reproducing here since they show a parallel concept to match Hopkins' faith in Nature as "news of God":

"It is the handkerchief of the Lord,  
A scented gift of remembrance designedly dropt,  
Bearing the owner's name some way in the corners,  
That we may see and remark, and say Whose?"

Compare this with Hopkins':

"For Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces".

("As kingfishers catch fire")

And his reply to the question "To what serves Mortal  
Beauty?":

" See: it does this: keeps warm  
Men's wits to the things that are..."

We may assume with some confidence that this was indeed all Hopkins had read of Whitman's work up to this point. He noted that, on account of his realization of their mental kinship, he was "the more desirous to read him and the more determined that I will not"<sup>4</sup> - a heavily-charged statement, as we shall see, and one that a Freudian critic might instance as a beautifully clear manifestation of the conflict between the *ego* and the *id*. Nevertheless, Hopkins frankly admitted that what he had read would have been enough, "quite enough to give a strong impression" of "his thought and technique", even enough to "originate... or influence".<sup>5</sup> However, he denied that there was anything but a superficial

resemblance, at least as regards the form of the poetry itself. Whether he did resist the temptation to read more of Whitman's verse over the ensuing years is impossible to determine, although investigation may possibly lead us to suspect that he did not.

*The 'Echo' Poem and the 'De-Whitmaniser'*

The discussion of Whitman was provoked by a comment Bridges made on receiving a manuscript of Hopkins' "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo". Although Bridges' letter is not extant, it is evident from Hopkins' reply that Bridges had suggested the influence of Whitman in its composition. Hopkins' confession is most interesting for discussions of the poet's pattern of thought, but it is also worth noting Hopkins' demonstration of how they differed in their technique, for evidently it was style that Bridges had in mind when he suggested an affinity.

Hopkins agrees to a common preference for the Alexandrine and to a likeness in the length of line and irregular rhythm.<sup>6</sup> (The long line is common to almost all of Whitman's poetry, and is frequent in Hopkins' mature verse: "Henry Purcell", "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire" and "The Windhover", to name only a few. These span a decade and more, from 1877 to 1888. Although it is impossible to



determine exactly when Hopkins first read any of Whitman's work, the Saintsbury review he referred to is dated 10 October 1874). But he affirms, "There the likeness ends".<sup>7</sup> Hopkins actually misquotes Whitman when he chooses a model in the ensuing prosody lesson, writing "or a handkerchief designedly dropped" for Whitman's

"It is the handkerchief of the Lord;  
A scented gift and remembrance designedly dropt..."<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the point is made clearly enough, and the misquotation does not disrupt the demonstration. According to Hopkins, it is evident that Whitman's breaks in rhythm are simply not schematized, and that he does not use outriding feet as Hopkins does. He is not consciously writing sprung rhythm, and since "to recognise the form you are employing and to mean it is everything", Hopkins concludes that "what he means to write - and writes - is rhythmic prose and that only".<sup>9</sup>

Hopkins has an interesting suggestion as to why Bridges found some resemblance: "Extremes meet", he writes, and so Whitman's "savagery", his "decomposition into common prose", "comes near the last elaboration" of his (Hopkins') own art. He insists that in the lines of "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo", "everything is weighted and timed".<sup>10</sup> Hopkins was once again encountering that chronic difficulty, Bridges' partial

deafness to the unique music of his poetry. In view of this gulf of incomprehension, it is unsurprising that Bridges should be struck by a notion of the possibility of Whitman's influence.

However, it is worth noting the resonance that the suggestion had. While Hopkins dismissed any possibility of influence on style or technique, the remark sparked a chain of doubts and concerns at a deeper level, as we see in his "I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living".<sup>11</sup> At the end of the letter, he expresses concern lest the diction should show Whitmanesque colours: "It ought to sound like the thoughts of a good but lively girl and not at all like - not at all like Walt Whitman".<sup>12</sup> And as late as the composition of "Harry Ploughman", nearly five years after the defence of the "Echo" poem, Hopkins is worried about the content:

"But when you read it let me know if there is anything like it in Walt Whitman, as perhaps there may be, and I should be sorry for that".<sup>13</sup>

It is tempting to speculate that perhaps Hopkins had read more of Whitman's verse during the five year period. Perhaps he had done so, close to the date of the composition of "Harry Ploughman". Or perhaps the realization that Bridges had brought about in him in 1882, in criticizing the "Echo" poem, had spread

peculiarly deep roots. It is a shame that we do not have Bridges' reply to this letter, so as to discover whether Bridges did find any Whitmanesque touches in "Harry Ploughman".

It should be noted that in the letter of 18 October 1882, Hopkins had cited his "Binsey Poplars" as a companion piece to the "Echo" poem, defending himself against a charge evidently made by Bridges that the latter showed him being "untrue to [him]self".<sup>14</sup> This implies that Bridges generally did not consider the two poets to be very much alike.

### *Early Critical Response*

The first thing to note in assessing critical perceptions of the relation of Hopkins to Whitman is that it is impossible to say whether or not any connections would have been made if Hopkins had not first made it himself in the letters quoted above: in the notes to the first edition of the poems (1918), Bridges quoted from the letter of 28 September 1887 in the entry for "Harry Ploughman". Thus, as is the case with the parallels drawn with Keats, Bridges had already provided a precedent for such comparisons. It should also be noted, however, that Bridges did not print any extracts from the letter of 18 October 1882, which dealt at such length with the question of Whitman's possible

influence.

Frederick Page, S.J., in the *Dublin Review* of September 1920, quotes the letter in remarks on "Harry Ploughman", claiming the "beauty of the strength of manhood" is "a frequent theme, coinciding with Whitman"; he writes that there is indeed a resemblance, and that Hopkins "should not have been sorry that at least sometimes this self-chastened libertine might coincide with a Jesuit Father!"<sup>15</sup> Thus Page examines the matter from the other end of the telescope: while Hopkins was worried lest a resemblance illuminate his own spirit in an inappropriate manner, Page finds hope, a chink of redemptive light for the pagan, in his bearing a resemblance to Hopkins.

#### *Publication of the Correspondence, 1935*

However, the critical debate did not begin in earnest until after the publication of the first volume of correspondence (the letters to Bridges) in 1935. Abbott, editing the letters, picked up on "Harry Ploughman", as Page had, and noted how Hopkins was "moved by the loveliness of youth and young manhood... Here is one point at which he touches, with fastidious difference, Walt Whitman".<sup>16</sup> Abbott makes no further comment, and does not attempt to define the "fastidious difference" between the two; nor does he examine the

earlier letter dealing with the "Echo" poem. However, it is clear that Abbott is rooting the connection in a suggestion of their sexual orientation, and this will prove to be a bone of some contention in the critical forum. For now, Abbott acknowledges the significance of the link between the two writers, for he reprints the Saintsbury review Hopkins referred to and places it in an appendix.<sup>17</sup>

Opinions of critics reviewing the published correspondence tended to divide quite clearly on the issue. Babette Deutsch suggested that "One comes upon this passage with a kind of surprise at not being surprised".<sup>18</sup> She found them closely akin in their "responsiveness of the senses... the dear love of all comrades, [and] the sense of divinity transparent in all things".<sup>19</sup> Basil DeSelincourt registered a similar reaction - after initial surprise he wrote that he believed that "the kinship once acknowledged, it is easy to see that the sonnets like 'Hurrahing in Harvest' and 'God's Grandeur' are really an attempt to throw over the world a light which Whitman believed he found there, but which the devout Christian as a rule finds only on the altar".<sup>20</sup> The latter comment touches on an area that would be developed in Whitman comparisons and also in discussions of Hopkins and Keats. Osbert Burdett, also reviewing the correspondence, astutely cited the Whitman confession of 18 October 1882 as proof of a lack of self-unity in Hopkins' sensibility:<sup>21</sup> the conflict of

the priest and the poet, a recurring theme in Hopkins criticism.

On the other hand, a minority of reviewers were less convinced by the supposed kinship. R. Larsson believed the relationship seemed "less genuine than it did to Hopkins himself".<sup>22</sup> Hopkins' confession, Larsson reminds us, was based on a limited knowledge of Whitman's work. This is a fair point, although Larsson weakens his argument considerably when he declares that the poems Hopkins had read of Whitman's were some of the American's "less characteristic pieces".<sup>23</sup> James Gerard Shaw, writing in the *Commonweal* the following year, was similarly unconvinced. "The two men are so vastly different", he wrote, "that it may require further evidence... to demonstrate that the bond which drew Hopkins to Whitman was really the sympathy of kindred spirits".<sup>24</sup> As discussion proceeded, areas of both style and personality were explored in investigations of the kinship of the two poets. Both types of argument proved to be provocative.

#### *Points of Comparison: Style*

Ralph S. Walker agreed that "Superficially we may relate his style to Browning's and Walt Whitman's. In its speed and its spurring it sometimes recalls Whitman's..."<sup>25</sup> W.B. Stanford believed that, on the

occasions that Hopkins approached Whitman's style, he was at his weakest. In Stanford's view, Hopkins abhorred Whitman's style, and "rightly, because it is rhetorical not lyrical".<sup>26</sup> He quotes the opening of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" and pronounces it "bombastic" - and also "exceptional", in the sense that it is atypical of Hopkins' work.<sup>27</sup> Stanford seems faulty on several counts here - his implication that lyrical style is by nature preferable to rhetorical; that "Sibyl's Leaves" has a "bombastic" tone; and that the latter is not representative of Hopkins' work: most would agree that it is, on the contrary, a rather familiar mature Hopkins poetic landscape.

W.H. Gardner, one of the greatest Hopkins scholars, mentioned points of personality on which they resembled one another in articles for *Scrutiny* (1936-37), and concentrated on style in his two volume study published in 1949. As far as metre goes, Gardner seems to accept Hopkins' view as expressed in the letter to Bridges of 18 October 1882. he writes: "even Hopkins's most irregular [poems] have more pronounced rhythms than Whitman's".<sup>28</sup> Both were influenced, he believed, by the rhythms in the choruses of Greek tragedies and in the English translation of the Bible - presumably, Gardner is referring to the Authorized Version.<sup>29</sup> He notes that Whitman has short bursts of "Hopkinsian alliteration, exclamation, diction", quoting the line "Life immense in passion, power and pulse" from "One's Self I Sing".<sup>30</sup>

It is interesting that Gardner should word some of these comparisons as he does: the "transports" of the opening of *Leaves of Grass* are "Hopkinsian";<sup>31</sup> the "alliteration, exclamation, diction" of some of Whitman's lines are also "Hopkinsian".<sup>32</sup> We have already established that any influence could only have been of Whitman on Hopkins: the wording Gardner chooses must be intended as an assertion that the similarities are coincidental. Nevertheless, he does make one 'bet-hedgeing' remark by agreeing that Hopkins may have been influenced by the *Saintsbury* review and the extracts therein, for this year (1874) was an important one in Hopkins' poetic development.

Some close reading of the two poets' verse reveals more similarities in details of style than have been noted by these critics. Ellipsis, for instance, is something that Hopkins uses extensively, compression that often squeezes out words that he felt were functional rather than expressive: "leaves me a lonely began" for 'leaves me a lonely one who only began' (from "To seem the stranger") is one example of many that could be given, although we should note that this is not the only possible interpretation of the phrase. We may find similar tricks in Whitman, although they are never so bold: "Lack one lacks both" for 'He who lacks one lacks both' is an example ("Song of Myself").

Another point of style where the two converge is





which may have contributed to his suspicion of Whitmanesque touches. This is the hypnotic, incantatory repetition that occurs particularly in lines 3 ("beauty, beauty, beauty"), 16 ("Despair, despair, despair, despair"), 19 ("Beauty, beauty, beauty") and 31-32 ("Yonder, yes, yonder, yonder,/Yonder"), but which actually features in very many of the lines of this extraordinary poem. One may compare this to Whitman's beautiful "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", where many of the 'stanzas' open in this manner ("Blow! blow! blow!...Soothe! soothe! soothe!...Loud! loud! loud!..." etc.), and, more significantly, the penultimate stanza which closes with the line "Death, death, death, death, death". As far as we know, this is not one of the pieces that Hopkins had read. It is not included in the list of the letter of 18 October 1882.

### *Prosody*

Several critics did postulate that Hopkins and Whitman were two of the great nineteenth century pioneers who paved the way for the freer rhythms of poetry to come. M.C. D'Arcy suggested that Hopkins' likening of himself to Walt Whitman might help to answer the question, "How did Hopkins so escape [his time's] influence that he seems to belong to our own day".<sup>33</sup> Rayner Heppenstall saw Hopkins as one who broke down traditional "syllabic structure" and "threw open more of

the frontier between verse and prose than did even Whitman (who fascinated and repelled Hopkins)".<sup>34</sup> Obviously, this view is in direct opposition to Hopkins' own perspective on what he had accomplished in sprung rhythm.

However, it was in the 1960's that discussion of Hopkins and Whitman as prosodists really gathered momentum. W.H. Gardner saw the "loosening of rhythm" brought about by Hopkins' invention (or discovery) of sprung rhythm as a continuation of the work "begun by Blake, Coleridge and Whitman".<sup>35</sup> Harvey Gross, on the other hand, saw Hopkins' experiments and "Whitman's assault on syllable-stress metric" as "parallel".<sup>36</sup> Francis Noel Lees, in his study of Hopkins published in 1966, acknowledged that Whitman ("with Lawrence following him") had contributed to the "relaxing [of] precision demands on verse", but believed that Bridges' suggestion to Hopkins that he had been imitating Whitman "seems not to be justified..."<sup>37</sup>

We may conclude with some surety that Hopkins' development of his peculiar prosody owed nothing to Whitman's example: some critics have suggested that Hopkins' defence in the letter to Bridges is an instance of 'protesting too much'<sup>38</sup>, but Hopkins is quite clear on the difference between his highly complex, rationalized rhythm that was at the furthest extreme from Whitman's free style.

F.O. Mathiessen accepts Hopkins' rationalization of sprung rhythm, and his appeal to ancient precedent: "that before the language had bent itself to classical influence, and had still depended in its poetry wholly on speech stresses and on a variable number of unstressed syllables between it was 'a vastly superior thing to what we have now'".<sup>39</sup> The difference was that Whitman's was "intuitive" and Hopkins' carefully worked out. Mathiessen continues by quoting Hopkins' phrase "extremes meet", and suggests that the two extremes were opposite reactions to "the expansiveness of the age":<sup>40</sup> while Whitman luxuriated in it, Hopkins took a different path that led him to "a hitherto unparalleled concentration", epitomized by his concept of inscape - that "intense precision of design".<sup>41</sup> It is the libertine in Whitman that Hopkins reacted against. As Mathiessen points out, Whitman's imperative of man's freedom "...To the Catholic... would furnish the most compelling evidence why Whitman's rhythms had naturally fallen into the final looseness of decomposition".<sup>42</sup>

One other aspect of style that has perhaps been overlooked is what we may term, in Hopkins' own coinage, "bidding". Hopkins explains the notion in a letter to Bridges of 4 November 1882:

"I mean the art or virtue of saying everything right to or at the hearer, interesting him, holding him in the attitude of correspondent or addressed or at least concerned..."<sup>43</sup>

This remark was made in relation to Bridges' *Prometheus the Firegiver*, but since the "de-Whitmaniser" had been written only two weeks previously, it is not unreasonable to speculate that Whitman may still have been in the back of Hopkins' mind.

In any case, both Hopkins and Whitman undoubtedly have this "bidding" quality in abundance. "The Starlight Night" ("Look at the stars!"), "Felix Randal" ("Felix Randal the Farrier, O is he dead then?"), and "The Soldier" ("Yes. Why do we all, seeing of a soldier, bless him?") are just three that spring immediately to mind, but it is actually difficult to find a poem of Hopkins' that does not have this quality. Even in the more introspective Dublin sonnets, Hopkins addresses his own heart in dramatic fashion ("what sights you, heart, saw"), or personifies his affliction ("Not, I'll not, Carrion Comfort, Despair, feast on thee"). Even though this is not quite the same as saying things 'to' or 'at' the hearer, it retains the almost rhetorical mode familiar from the more 'public' poems.

It is characteristic of Whitman, too. The same kind of mock-conversational tone that Hopkins uses in "Felix Randal" occurs in "Song of Myself" ("You should have been with us that day..."), but in any case Whitman's tone is almost always that of a prophet, speaking to anyone who will listen: "...what I assume

you shall assume". Direct addresses and invitations to the reader occur frequently: "Loafe with me on the grass...", as do direct questions: "Do you know so much yourself that you call the meanest ignorant?" ("I Sing the Body Electric").

### *Personality*

In 1939, Philip Henderson published his volume *The Poet and Society* and began a trend that was to become the basis for connections between Hopkins and Whitman, a trend that carried overtones of a psycho-analytical approach. Henderson wrote that "Whitman represented all that side of himself which he (Hopkins) had vainly tried to suppress in the name of religion;... virile energy and turbulence, that luxuriant sensuality, that devouring love of the physical beauty of man and the world..."<sup>44</sup>

F.O. Mathiessen's formidable work, *American Renaissance* (1941) made the suggestion more explicit: referring to Hopkins' calling Whitman "a scoundrel", he adds: "He must have been referring to Whitman's homosexuality and his own avoidance of this latent strain in himself".<sup>45</sup> He cites the letter accompanying the "Harry Ploughman" sonnet as evidence of this fear, since it is in "Harry Ploughman" that "this feeling rises closest to the surface in his pleasure in the

liquid movement of the workman's body".<sup>46</sup>

Predictably, comments such as this caused some sparks to fly in the arena where Catholic and non-Catholic (or non-religious) critics met. Some remained neutral - "It would be interesting... to contrast the quality of this love [expressed in "Harry Ploughman" and other poems]... with Whitman's".<sup>47</sup> W.A.M. Peters, a Catholic, dismissed the Henderson thesis in a footnote - "It has been called 'excellent' by the reviewer of the *Times Literary Supplement* (8 July 1939), though to my mind it is one of the worst that has so far appeared".<sup>48</sup>

Hopkins' election of the celibate's life made him an easy and attractive target in the eyes of the Freudians. Wittgenstein, in notes from his lectures on aesthetics (published posthumously), remarked that "The picture of people having subconscious thoughts has a charm. The idea of an underworld, a secret cellar".<sup>49</sup> Hopkins' vocation and his obsessive privacy that led him to destroy many of his papers and diaries has kindled, perversely, a more determined effort by critics to shine a flashlight into Hopkins own secret cellar.

Whitman has suffered a similar fate, although accusations (it is fair to call them so within the period) were levelled at him during his lifetime too; Whitman was apparently deeply hurt by the aspersions. In his case, the 'evidence' most often cited is the

"Calamus" section of *Leaves of Grass*. Milton Hindus, the editor of *Walt Whitman: The Critical Heritage* (1971), is one who is sceptical of the value of these ad hominem judgements and quotes Marcel Proust in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* as a challenge: "a book is the product of a different self from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices..."<sup>50</sup>

One could also argue that Hopkins' celibacy, his very conscious decision to close off these avenues of temptation, has more complex implications than a mere renunciation of the sensual. Hopkins seals himself from the dangers of mortal beauty in whatever guise - the pantheistic appeal from contemplation of nature, the erotic from the human form - and elects to "merely meet it;... then leave, let that alone". One remembers that one reason why he gave up painting, an early enthusiasm, was the temptation provided by life drawing.<sup>51</sup>

Hugh l'Anson Fausset approached Hopkins' treatment of the male form and spirit in a more restrained manner than the would-be Freudians. His centenary essay on the priest and poet conflict in Hopkins, reprinted in 1947 in *Poets and Pundits*, noted how "in his later poems it was to man that he was increasingly drawn, to Felix Randal... and Harry Ploughman, and... the Bugler boy or the Brothers, whose 'chastity in mansex fine' he loved as he loved in Nature 'a strain of the Earth's sweet



being in the beginning/in Eden garden'".<sup>52</sup>

Hopkins' love has a tension at its heart - the innocence of the bugler or the boy of the 'handsome heart' "heightened his anxiety lest time and sin should mar [it] and natural beauty fall from grace".<sup>53</sup> There is certainly a fear that the bugler may "rankle and roam/In backwheels though bound home"; and a desperate sense of futility in the plea that "O on that path you pace/Run all your race" in "The Handsome Heart".

When considering the possibility of latent homosexuality in Hopkins and Whitman, it is also wise to bear in mind that the poetry of both of them betrays a preoccupation with the human frame: this is another aspect of correspondence that has been overlooked by critics up to the present time. The 'top to toe' description in the opening lines of "Harry Ploughman" matches the extraordinary closing section of "I Sing the Body Electric", beginning "Head, neck, ears, drop and tympan of ears", and concluding "the thin red jellies within you or within me, the bones and marrow in the bones". There is a Hopkinsian sense of tautness in the words "the play of masculine muscle", also from "I Sing the Body Electric". "Harry Ploughman" as a whole may remind us of the section in "Song of Myself" where Whitman writes of the negro and his team of horses.

The specifically anatomical twist at the end of "I Sing the Body Electric" recalls the *Deutschland's* "Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh", but takes it a step further away from poetic expression towards common speech terms.

There is a sense in which Hopkins' concentration on the physical frame of Harry Ploughman, for instance, is no different from the sharp, precise observation and idiosyncratic expression that sees trees in twilight as "beakleaved boughs dragonish" ("Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves"), feels a thrush's song "rinse and wring the ear... strikes like lightnings" ("Spring"), or pictures the wind's action thus:

"Delightfully the bright wind boisterous ropes,  
wrestles, beats earth bare  
Of yestertempest's creases".

("That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire")

It is the *choice* of subject matter that is relevant to the discussion: Hopkins' *treatment* of his subject does not waver from his customary intense scrutiny.

#### *The Aesthetic and the Ascetic in Hopkins and Whitman*

As a dialectic of asceticism and aestheticism had

developed from a comparison of Hopkins and Keats, so a similar trend can be detected in the Whitman parallels. Claude Vigee summarized the position of many critics who spoke of a tension between the priest and the poet in Hopkins: "he wanted to be a Christian ascetic, yet he was a poet, i.e. a sensuous man".<sup>54</sup> This tension found expression in sprung rhythm and the notions of instress and inscape. Vigee believed Hopkins to be "more in line with Walt Whitman than Catholic asceticism".<sup>55</sup> Perhaps this betrays a certain misunderstanding of Whitman's personality on Vigee's part. As W.H. Gardner points out, "Whitman, like Hopkins, knew the value of a strict asceticism in his private life".<sup>56</sup>

W.H. Gardner also pointed out one of the most fundamental differences between the two: Hopkins was centred on God, Whitman on himself. This egocentrism, in Hopkins' opinion, would have been a moral disease. This is important: we must remember Hopkins' condemnation of Whitman as a "scoundrel", and recognise that Whitman's egocentrism and anthropocentrism would have been sufficient, in Hopkins' eyes, to warrant such condemnation. Many critics have presumed without any pause for consideration that it must have been Whitman's reputed homosexuality that provoked the remark.

The second of Gardner's *Scrutiny* articles mentions Whitman and also John Keats. Gardner writes that, "As we know from his remarks on Keats and Whitman, Hopkins

was not satisfied with a poetry which rested in the senses and the emotions alone; he desired intellectual satisfaction as well".<sup>57</sup> Although this is a fair summary of Hopkins' opinion of Keats (leaving aside the matter of whether the opinion itself is a justifiable one), it does not adequately reflect what Hopkins wrote about Whitman. Hopkins distinguished Whitman's "savagery" from his own highly wrought artistry (a matter of style). He deplored the morality, or lack of it (as far as he was concerned) that was the logical consequence of the American's anthropocentric philosophy. However, we must not forget his "confession" of the kinship of their minds. It is a misjudgement of Whitman and a misrepresentation of Hopkins' views to place him under the same condemnation that he reserved for Keats.

### *Kinship*

Hopkins undoubtedly showed great introspective insight in acknowledging their kinship of minds. Several critics have pointed out their common purpose - seeking "a knowledge of the world by attending to it in its fullness and individuality".<sup>58</sup> Denis Donoghue adds, "They were, in that special sense, naturalists".<sup>59</sup> Jean-Georges Ritz points out that in Hopkins' "temperament, in his sensuous apprehension of reality, in his deep probing of the 'self', in his offering of

all things 'counter, original, spare, strange,' and in his love of 'the weeds and the wilderness', bears more than passing similarities with Whitman".<sup>60</sup> Eleanor Ruggles, in her biography of Hopkins published in 1947, observed how close Hopkins and Whitman seemed to come with their notions of selfhood. She quotes Whitman:

"The quality of being, in the object's self, according to its own central idea and purpose, and of growing therefrom and thereto".<sup>61</sup>

This does indeed bring to mind Hopkins' notion of inscape. However, it would be unwise to build too much theorizing of corresponding philosophies on this alone. Denis Donoghue points out that, while Whitman brings "thousands of [nature's] common forms into contact, into intimacy", Hopkins "lavished" the same attention "upon the particular case, the sample".<sup>62</sup>

It is true that Hopkins did place great emphasis upon individuality, the essential separateness of things even within the unity of God's creation. Often this awareness would lead him to the depths of despair in times of loneliness. His move to Dublin seemed to him a kind of exile - "To seem the stranger lies my lot" - and there are many tales of his social isolation at this late period and, indeed, throughout his life, while Whitman, by contrast, found that a crowd is like an ocean, where in "the cohesion of all", "we are not so much separated" ("Out of the Rolling Ocean the Crowd").

They were both, many would agree, 'nature mystics'. Although this is a rather vague term (and therefore of limited intrinsic value), it does point to the heart of what Hopkins perhaps felt made Whitman's mind "more like my own than any other man's living". Both of them rejoice in the wild variety and beauty of nature, and Whitman's reaction may almost be seen as a physical outworking of Hopkins' own response that often remains internalized. Compare:

"Alone far in the wilds and mountains I hunt,  
Wandering amazed at my own lightness and glee"

("Song of Myself")

with

"I walk, I lift up heart, eyes..."

("Hurrahing in Harvest")

Just as Hopkins' heart "rears wings bold and bolder" and "half hurls earth" in its flight to meet "that glory in the heavens", so Whitman writes:

"I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night,  
Press close bare-bosom'd night - press close magnetic  
nourishing night!"

("Song of Myself")

Predictably, Hopkins sees himself as the one who must project himself out; for Whitman, it is he who calls the night to "Press close". Always, of course, the



Moreover, both poets perceive that there is something 'behind' the physical manifestations of the natural world, although Whitman is far closer to the Romantic spirit in this respect, to the poets Wordsworth, Coleridge and especially Shelley. While Hopkins "glean[s] our Saviour" in his perceptions, and finds in Nature "the Comfort of the Resurrection", or learns from comparing "The Blessed Virgin" to "the Air We Breathe", Whitman declares that, though "The earth is rude, silent, incomprehensible at first", still "there are divine things well envelop'd", "divine things more beautiful than words can tell" ("Song of the Open Road"). Whitman's faith in the material universe is not so solidly based as Hopkins'. Although he can write in "Song of Myself" that "I hear and behold God in every object", he cannot, as Hopkins can, glean any insight from the signs: "...yet [I] understand God not in the least". In "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances", he speculates that perhaps "the things I perceive" are "only apparitions, and the real something has yet to be known". This is a rather Shelleyan sentiment, and in "Scented Herbiage of my Breast", he goes a step further and sees death as the one thing that is "the real reality" - "...behind the mask of materials you patiently wait".

This kind of unsteadiness, slewing from joy, to doubt, to despair, is a very different kind from that which we find in Hopkins' Dublin sonnets, and perhaps it



is symptomatic of the adoption of a libertine, anthropocentric philosophy over the theocentric, strict orthodoxy of Hopkins' choice.

Hopkins burned his early poems as an act of submission to the authority of the Church and the Jesuit order; Whitman demands "Why should I pray? why should I venerate and be ceremonious?" ("Song of Myself"). While Hopkins was troubled by the inveterate Protestantism of many of his friends, and wrote a sonnet expressing a hope that "Purcell is not damned for being a Protestant",<sup>64</sup> Whitman is "to Shastas and Vedas admirant, minding the Koran... Accepting the Gospels" ("Song of Myself").

Hopkins speculated in an unfinished poem, usually entitled "On a Piece of Music", that a work of pure art may be morally neutral ("This fault-not-found-with good/Is neither right nor wrong"), but insisted that the artist cannot remain neutral:

"Ask whom he serves or not  
Serves and what side he takes".

Whitman, on the other hand, holds no moral absolutes, but instead advocates pure amorality: "I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also" ("Song of Myself"). This leads to a kind of lawlessness that defies logic and which no doubt

would have horrified Hopkins:

"Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then, I contradict myself.  
(I am large, I contain multitudes)."

("Song of Myself")

Connected to this are the two poets' conflicting views of mortal beauty. In Whitman, Hopkins would have seen one who had been seduced, one who had not been content to "Merely meet" beauty and "then leave, let that alone". Most shocking to the Englishman, perhaps, would have been Whitman's narcissistic strain; compare the description of man's body and woman's body in "I Sing the Body Electric" with these lines from Hopkins' "The Shepherd's Brow":

"And, blazoned in however bold the name,  
Man Jack the man is, just, his mate a hussy".

And Whitman's "If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my own body" ("Song of Myself") with the conclusion to "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire", where only in the resurrection can man be transformed:

"This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood,  
immortal diamond,  
Is immortal diamond".

Hopkins is painfully aware of his own inadequacy: "I am gall, I am heartburn"; "Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours" ("I wake and feel"). He can never hope for perfection this side of the grave. Whitman, however, protests that "nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is"; and "Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself" ("Song of Myself"). Hopkins is aware at every turn that he is as nothing; Whitman finds

"I am larger, I am better than I thought.  
I did not know I held so much goodness".

("Song of the Open Road")

And so Hopkins, finding only imperfection in himself, turns to God and, in an act symbolic of his life, he dedicates "The Windhover" to "Christ our Lord". By contrast, Whitman's greatest poem is his "Song of Myself".

It is unsurprising that there are so few dark shadows in Whitman's poems. "All has been gentle with me", he declares. "I keep no account of lamentation" ("Song of Myself"). There is nothing that we might place alongside Hopkins' Dublin sonnets. It is interesting to read the section of "Song of Myself" where Whitman says he believes he could "turn and live with animals", for "They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins"; what more concise a summary of



been investigated as completely as it might. For as well as the 'red letter', there are poems such as "Tom's Garland" (actually subtitled "Upon the Unemployed"). The bulk is more substantial in Whitman's case, the self-styled poet of American democracy. In "Song of Myself", he writes of the "young fellow" driving the express wagon that "I love him, though I do not know him", and this characterizes his feeling for his fellow man. It shows in the broad, detailed sweep of individuals that populate the canvas of his poetry:

"Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and  
 religion,  
 A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker,  
 Prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest"

("Song of Myself")

He sings "Vivas to those who have failed!" and to "the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest heroes known!" ("Song of Myself"). During his lifetime, Whitman drifted further toward the political left, and a late poem, "Says", contains this manifesto:

"I say man shall not hold property in man;  
 I say the least developed person on earth is just as  
 important and sacred to himself or herself, as the  
 most developed person is to himself or herself".

Both Hopkins and Whitman dedicated their lives in service: Hopkins as a priest, and Whitman in voluntary work in Washington hospitals during the Civil War. His experiences are movingly chronicled in "The Wound-

Dresser":

" ...poor boy! I never knew you  
 Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die  
 for you, if that would cure you".

Again, this will bring to mind Hopkins' reactions to those he came in contact with - Felix Randal, for instance; the Bugler boy and the Brothers.

However, it is important to keep a clear perspective of the differences between Hopkins and Whitman: while we can find ample evidence to support Hopkins' own impression of the kinship of their minds, nevertheless the gulf between them in technique remains vast.

### *Conclusion*

We can conclude with some degree of certainty that Hopkins was not directly influenced by Whitman, although the possibility that he played some minor part in Hopkins' formulation of sprung rhythm cannot be ruled out entirely. However, despite the fact that the link is not as fruitful as that, say, between Hopkins and Keats or Milton, the connection between Hopkins and Whitman remains one of the most fascinating, at the points where their "extremes meet".

CHAPTER VII: "AMIDST THE CHAFFINCH FLOCK"

HOPKINS AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

*Introduction and the Correspondence*

In the next chapter, we shall see the pattern of debate over the theory of Hopkins as a displaced 'Modernist' poet, and how many critics have argued strongly for or against his Victorianism. This present chapter will look more closely at parallels drawn between Hopkins and specific Victorian poets and sift the validity of the comparisons.

Hopkins' correspondence, disappointing as a source when examining his relation, for instance, to Metaphysical poets, is much more useful in studies of his contemporaries. The letters - especially those written to Bridges and Dixon - are positive proof that Hopkins was quite keenly aware of the poetry of his own time, reading widely and vigorously exchanging views with his correspondents.

Often the judgements he passes are uncompromising in their severity. Browning, one poet who was seen as a convenient point of comparison by some Hopkins critics, was pronounced "not really a poet... he has all the gifts but the one needful and the pearls without the

string".<sup>1</sup> Some of the poet's verse, he thought, showed evidence of having come from "frigid fancy with no imagination".<sup>2</sup> He was horrified by the notion that a line of his own "The Sea and the Skylark" was reminiscent of Browning,<sup>3</sup> and, with remarkably astute judgement, he suggested that Bridges' attitude to his work was similar to his own to Browning's: "I greatly admire the touches and details, but... the whole offends, I think it repulsive".<sup>4</sup> Interestingly enough, Coventry Patmore was forced to admit to Hopkins a few years later that "I often find it as hard to follow you as I have found it to follow the darkest parts of Browning".<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, Browning is one poet whom we could refer to when challenging the claims of some critics who would promote Hopkins as a 'Modernist' on the grounds of obscurity. He was not the only Victorian who indulged in more 'difficult' poetry.

Charles Doughty is another writer Hopkins has been thought to resemble, but Hopkins' remarks about the great Victorian eccentric are few and unfavourable. He accuses Doughty of a fault that others have found in his own work: discussing the *Travels in Arabia Deserta* with Bridges in 1888, he complains of the "affectation" of writing in "an obsolete style"; in Doughty's case, Elizabethan English.

The other major connection between Hopkins and his contemporaries has been pre-Raphaelitism, and,



especially, poets such as Swinburne and Tennyson. This is understandable, in that Hopkins' juvenilia certainly treads a well-beaten path of lush, Keatsian sweetnesses; "A Vision of the Mermaids" is extant in a form that includes an illustration by the author that recalls Ruskin and Rossetti. However, his comments in the correspondence on the members of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood are almost uniformly censorious. One of his major objections, and an important point at which he diverges from fashionable Victorian practice, is in these poets' failure to utilize "current language heightened": Hopkins expressed the opinion that "the want of it will be fatal to Tennyson's Idylls and plays, to Swinburne, and perhaps to Morris".<sup>7</sup> In another letter to Bridges, some nine years later, he again complains of the "archaic" elements in "Swinburne, Morris and so on".<sup>8</sup> He levelled similar accusations in letters to Dixon, particularly against Swinburne, across a parallel period of time.<sup>9</sup>

Hopkins' objections to Swinburne are not purely on the grounds of style. His argument was with what he saw as a central moral rotten hollowness, all the more deplorable because his "genius" was "astonishing".<sup>10</sup> At one point, yoking him together with Victor Hugo, he dubs them "those plagues of mankind".<sup>11</sup> In one of his last letters, Hopkins again lamented this "perpetual functioning of genius without truth, feeling, or any adequate matter to be at function on".<sup>12</sup>

*Early Responses*

The earliest reviews of Hopkins' poetry are littered with tentative references to Victorians, either to the Pre-Raphaelites, in connection with Hopkins' early verse, or to the 'difficult' poets (Browning, Doughty, Meredith) in connection with his mature work. Many critics found refuge in the Browning comparison - Bregy, writing in 1909, put Browning amongst Hopkins' poetic ancestors, and the 1919 reviews abounded with remarks such as these: "Browning in his most crabbed and elephantinely humorous mood was smooth compared with Hopkins";<sup>13</sup> "Hopkins's simplest things are nearly as difficult as Browning's most complex";<sup>14</sup> "omissions of the relative pronoun which out-Browning Browning";<sup>15</sup> and references to "a kinship with the roughness and obscurity... of Browning and Meredith",<sup>16</sup> and "a kind of Browning obscurity".<sup>17</sup>

This kind of comment, however, does not take us very far. With a few very rare exceptions, there was no substantiation of claims of kinship, or even any suggestions of specific elements of style that the two might have shared. Confounded by the startling originality of Hopkins' poetry, "obscurity" was the reflex reaction, and the natural linkage was to Browning, the most well-known Victorian who was frequently lumbered with the same, fairly useless adjective. The anonymous reviewer in the *Tablet* in 1920

noted the omission of relatives as a common characteristic,<sup>18</sup> but apart from this one isolated judgement, any closer analysis was lacking until the publication of the second edition of the poems.

### *The Second Edition: Browning Comparisons*

Charles Williams' excellent introduction to this volume (1930) discussed the Swinburne connection at some length (see pp.202-3), but failed to mention Browning. However, other writers did expand on the topic: Lahey suggested a similar "internal versatility", fusing of styles, and "juxtaposition of vigour and euphony", all of which is extremely vague.<sup>19</sup> O'Brien referred to "cumulative cacophany".<sup>20</sup> Still, while comments became more specific, no critic yet ventured to pin-point specific poems or lines that bore particular, identifiable Browningsque features: two of the major Hopkins studies of the 1940's, those by Pick and Peters, made only passing references to Browning.

W.H. Gardner, with characteristic thoroughness, did provide a more rigorous examination of the issue, and suggested some points of reference, although none are really of great enough significance to justify any strong parallels in the poets' artistry: some are characteristics that Hopkins shares with a number of other poets; details such as hyphenated noun-

compounds,<sup>21</sup> three-element-epithets,<sup>22</sup> ellipsis,<sup>23</sup> and the occasional instance of sprung rhythm.<sup>24</sup> The latter is always a dubious classification; there has often been much wrangling over whether particular pieces of other poets' verse may or may not be described as "sprung".

Gardner did manage to unearth a few specific references, however: he notes the style of "The Loss of the Eurydice" as "often staccato, Browningsque",<sup>25</sup> and matches this poem's ninth stanza, and the *Deutschland's* twenty-eighth, to two passages from Browning's "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha". If we study these - particularly, if we read them aloud - we do sense that they share the same broken measure and exclamatory style, but in both cases the extracts are hardly representative. However, widening our scope, we can see traces of Browning's characteristic dramatic mode in some of Hopkins' other poems - "The Starlight Night", "Hurrahing in Harvest", and "Felix Randal". Mariani, in his *Hopkins Commentary* published in 1970, felt in general a touch of the "grating roughness of Browning's dramatic verse" in Hopkins' pre-1870 compositions.<sup>26</sup>

Following Gardner, very little more was written of parallels between Browning and Hopkins. One issue covered in the next chapter - that of Hopkins' habit of economizing by sweeping away little words - was raised in passing by John Press (*The Chequer'd Shade*, 1958),<sup>27</sup> but on the whole the parallel was discarded. The quite

astounding volume of comparisons in early criticism can be attributed simply to the bewilderment that the poems caused on their publication. As a contemporary of Hopkins, Browning would have been the obvious choice as some kind of anchor point. The unsuitability of the parallel at any significant level perhaps is an indication of how startled the critics were by Hopkins' originality.

### *Meredith*

Two more Victorians to whom Hopkins was to be compared were Doughty and Meredith. The latter is notable by his absence from the index of the Hopkins correspondence. However, this did not prevent early critics and commentators from likening Hopkins to Meredith in their mutual "roughness and obscurity,"<sup>28</sup> and in their common practice of the omission of the relative pronoun.<sup>29</sup> Sometimes the comments involving a Meredith comparison were censorious; for example, "Meredith's syntax is as nothing to the difficulty here from impermissible omissions and the clumsiest of inversions", wrote Frederick Page in the *Dublin Review*, September 1920.<sup>30</sup> At other times, the tone is the opposite, as when Peter McBrien finds a similarity in what he terms "psychological picture-work", and proclaims that Hopkins "condenses into verse the ascetic fire of the finest part of Meredith's *Egoist* and *Diana*

of the Crossways".<sup>31</sup>

Gardner, as with Browning, was willing to conduct a thorough investigation of a possible relationship. Meredith, he believed, "frequently displays the same spontaneous and puckish agility that is characteristic of Hopkins".<sup>32</sup> Details such as ellipsis<sup>33</sup> and compound epithets are cited.<sup>34</sup> At one point, Gardner quotes McBrien's comments from the *Irish Rosary* (1919) (see above), and seems to agree. In addition, there are two interesting similarities of some detail and precision that Gardner points out: eleven years after Hopkins wrote "The Starlight Night", Meredith wrote "Meditation under Stars" and used the same image of a harvest that Hopkins employed. So "The Starlight Night" talks of the Harvest "barn" and "Meditation" of "The binder of the sheaves".<sup>35</sup> Gardner shows how it is possible that Meredith actually saw Hopkins' poem in manuscript form, via Dixon, Hall Caine and Rossetti.<sup>36</sup> A second, similar point Gardner labels as "a curious coincidence": Hopkins' use of the phrase "a sandalled/Shadow" in "Binsey Poplars" (1881) is echoed in Meredith's "shadow sandals" in "A Reading of Earth" (1888).<sup>37</sup>

Having admitted some minor similarities, Gardner goes on to challenge Eliot's remark in *After Strange Gods* (1934) that Hopkins should be compared with "the minor poet nearest contemporary to him, and most like him: George Meredith".<sup>38</sup> Eliot linked them as a pair

of nature poets "with similar technical tricks", but affirmed that Hopkins was "much the more agile".<sup>39</sup> Contrasting their philosophies Eliot came to the (unsurprising) conclusion that Meredith's was "shallow", while Hopkins' had "the dignity of the church behind it".<sup>40</sup>

In view of this partisan judgement, Gardner's response seems a little heated; offended that Eliot should place "a humble apostle of Jesus Christ" next to the "chief hierophant of the 'philosophy of Earth'", he insists that "the technical link... is too tenuous to justify Mr. Eliot's comparison".<sup>41</sup> Though one must agree with Gardner's conclusion, this is perhaps not quite fair to Eliot, who was careful to contrast their fundamental divergence at the philosophical level.

Charles Williams, reviewing Gardner's study, added an interesting, more personal angle to the problem. When reading the three lines quoted on the first page of the book:

"But be the war within, the brand we wield  
Unseen, the heroic breast not outward-steeled,  
Earth hears no hurtle then of fiercest fray."

Williams writes, "my mind said 'Meredith'. It took me a moment to recognise them as Hopkins".<sup>42</sup> He goes on to remark that "We may come to see that Hopkins does not belong to our time... so much as we had supposed".<sup>43</sup> This comment signals some kind of shifting critical

ground, specifically on the issue of distinction between Hopkins as a Victorian and Hopkins as a Modernist.

Certainly there are some superficial similarities between the two, although not enough to fuel a long debate amongst the Hopkins critics. Williams and Gardner were virtually the last to examine the issue, and no-one seems to have pursued Eliot's line on their kinship; but then Eliot's comments are, characteristically, unsubstantiated, and leave little that one can use as a foundation for further study.

A few minor points are worth making. Meredith occasionally displays 'Metaphysical' tendencies, applying a metaphorical framework to his subject, as Hopkins often did. Meredith tends to be more self-conscious about these artifices: in *Modern Love* XXVI, he compares love "ere he bleeds" to "an eagle in high skies", which becomes a serpent when struck down, moving "but in the track of his spent pain". The *Modern Love* sequence, incidentally, has a similar tone to Donne's darker love poetry. Meredith very occasionally conducted prosodic experiments, most notably his "Phaethon", subtitled as having been "Attempted in the Galliambic Measure". However, more often it was his allusions and inversions that were out of the ordinary and that recalled Hopkins in particular; echoes, perhaps, of "Felix Randal" in these lines from "Bellerophon":



"Weak words he has, that slip the nerveless tongue  
Deformed, like his great frame: a broken arc:..."

Linking Hopkins and Meredith as 'nature poets' is a dangerous step, since their philosophies are quite evidently so inimical. However, there are superficial correspondences. One of these is worth mentioning here even though it is strictly speaking outside the chronological limit of the thesis.

In the 1972 edition of *Victorian Poetry*, John Sutherland examined "Tom's Garland" and suggested a parallel in Meredith's Tom of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*.<sup>44</sup> Sutherland quoted an extract from the *Ordeal*, which included these phrases that do indeed smack of Hopkins: "There lay Tom, hobnail Tom! a bacon-munching, reckless, beer-swilling animal! and yet a man; a clear brave human heart notwithstanding..."<sup>45</sup> Whether the resemblance be entirely accidental, a direct borrowing, or due to the fact that both are drawing on the same extraliterary tradition of Tom, the archetypal working-class man (Sutherland favours this third possibility), there is undoubtedly a kinship here, a chiming empathy in the two writers as they observe and recreate their respective 'Tom's.

### *Doughty*

The fashion for connecting Hopkins with Doughty

seems to have begun in the late 1920's. D.S. Mirsky, writing in 1927, found "a curious likeness of Doughty's rhythmical practice to that of Gerard Hopkins", both of them "destroying Spenserian fluency".<sup>46</sup> The debate reached a high pitch, however, in 1935, following the publication of Doughty's *Selected Passages from 'The Dawn in Britain'*, introduced by Barker Fairley, and Anne Treneer's *Charles Doughty: A Study of his Prose and Verse*, in the same year.

In 1934 Fairley had declared that "Clearly the metrical innovations of the one poet are closely related to those of the other", while admitting that there was a difference in temperament - "the one being as tight as the other is loose."<sup>47</sup> In the periodical *London Mercury* he presented an article entitled "Charles Doughty and Modern Poetry", which included some detailed comparison with Hopkins. There are at least seven points of likeness in the essay, each illustrated with an example.

Some of these do not really bear examination, or seem too trivial to form the basis of any case of real parallel, such as the splitting of words between lines,<sup>48</sup> and double-barrelled adjectives;<sup>49</sup> the latter is more likely to have been inherited from Keats. he also suggests that they both employ confused orders of phrases.<sup>49</sup>

"I caught this morning morning's minion, king-  
dom of daylight's dauphin..."

is set against Doughty's

" ...whom they bruised,  
Ah, and buffeted, and Him mocked, with sceptre-reed,  
(Him, before worlds, ALL-RULER) in his hand".<sup>50</sup>

This is more convincing; there is definitely something Hopkinsian in these lines, as there is in this parallel use of interjections: "O at lightning and lashed rod" and "O my chevalier" in Hopkins (one could add "and with ah! bright wings") and "Ah, and buffeted" in Doughty.<sup>51</sup> Alliteration and the omission of the relative pronoun are more familiar points.

Fairley is careful to acknowledge that any kinship that exists must be accidental: he asserts that they did not know of one another's work (this is not actually the case - Hopkins was aware of Doughty's writings);<sup>52</sup> and he adds that Doughty had none of Hopkins' metrical knowledge and skill.<sup>53</sup> However, both were innovators seeking new forms of expression. Hopkins was the more consistent, Fairley believed. Doughty was sometimes "uncouth and monotonous".<sup>54</sup> In his introduction to the *Dawn in Britain* selection, he commented that "they shared the same revolt against a declining tradition long before that revolt became widespread".<sup>55</sup>

Anne Treneer's study suggested that the two poets'

oddities often took the same linguistic form.<sup>56</sup> These two writers' opinions may perhaps bring to mind the parallels with Whitman, and the idea that "extremes meet". Again, like Whitman, Treneer asserts that "Like Hopkins, he [Doughty] needs to be read with the ear, not the eye".<sup>57</sup>

However, many critics firmly rebutted the comparisons, notably F.R. Leavis in a review of Fairley and Treneer that was published in *Scrutiny* in December 1935: "Now to appreciate Hopkins is to lose all sense of oddity; but Doughty, in the very nature of his achievement, remains insistently and essentially odd".<sup>58</sup> An anonymous reviewer in *New Verse* attacked Fairley for suggesting that the two are "'as natural a pair to name together as Wordsworth and Coleridge'".<sup>59</sup> This critic writes that, if we search for "the roll, the rise, the carol, the creation" of Hopkins, we will find only "the limp, the squawk, the gravel, the antique..."<sup>60</sup> On Doughty's use of archaisms he remarks that his are "as dead and dull as those used by Hopkins are quick and shining".<sup>61</sup>

Terence Heywood thought there was some "superficial resemblance"; Doughty's verse "reminds us that certain poets of the time were groping out for new rhythms".<sup>62</sup> But on the whole the link was now out of fashion. For the most part, the work of writers like Treneer and Fairley in this area seems to have been an

attempt at raising awareness of Doughty's verse by yoking him somewhat uncomfortably to the broadening shoulders of Hopkins' reputation. One critic, Henry Treece, commented: "Technically, he [Hopkins] is the most surprising poet of his generation. Some supporters of Doughty have questioned this. No serious critic will".<sup>63</sup> In 1949, Gardner reviewed the area, noting similar use of inversion, transposition and omission, but concluded that, as with Meredith perhaps, the similarities were only skin-deep.

Nevertheless, some critics insisted on pursuing the parallel, even after these authoritative refutations from both Leavis and Gardner. Notable amongst these was John Heath-Stubbs, whose *The Darkling Plain* (1950) contained a strongly reasoned and argued case for a comparison of Hopkins and Doughty. He accused Hopkins himself of falling "into the error of dismissing it as no more than a piece of pseudo-Elizabethan archaism".<sup>64</sup> In direct opposition to Leavis' judgement, Heath-Stubbs insisted that "Read slowly and carefully, Doughty is never obscure", and that his style was, like Hopkins', "in reaction against the verbose and rhetorical tradition which had overspread English poetry".<sup>65</sup> He did draw one major distinction, however, in acknowledging that Hopkins was striving for "a subjective and lyrical", while Doughty aimed to create a new "epic" style.<sup>66</sup> We may wonder what Hopkins' reaction to this might have been: certainly Hopkins'

ambitions ranged beyond the lyrical, as his composition of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and his fragmentary *St. Winefred's Well* makes abundantly clear.

One or two other writers maintained that there was a bond between them: usually it involved the much-reiterated point of rebellion against conventional Victorian poetry. Donald Davie, however, made a rather different, and very astute point, in his article 'Hopkins, the Decadent Critic' (September 1951). For Shakespeare, he wrote, language was still in a state of flux. "Hopkins, like Doughty", he continues, "treats nineteenth century English as if it were still unstable and immature".<sup>67</sup> Certainly this is true, although it remains as only a slender, tenuous link between the two Victorians.

Perhaps what is most important here is what Hopkins himself pointed out in his letters to Bridges, and in his comments on Doughty: the oddities of the latter are primarily ends in themselves. Archaisms seem to conjure an 'atmosphere' simply by their presence, and they tend to squat indecorously upon the page, obtrusive and awkward. Even Doughty's advocate Heath-Stubbs admitted that the archaisms "are consciously employed to enhance the ritual effect".<sup>68</sup> Hopkins' occasionally violent man-handling of language is always in the service of a higher purpose, which is to apprehend and express, to grasp and hurl again into the outside world,

the exact and individual nature of the object he observes. To give an example, the use of the Anglo-Saxon term "bonehouse" in "The Caged Skylark" perfectly fulfils what is required of it: within the metaphor, the skylark is man's spirit, the cage his physical body along with all its limitations. The word "bonehouse" evokes the image of a skeleton, particularly a rib-cage, which beautifully complements the "dull cage" inhabited by the skylark.

This is one manifestation of a symptom indicating a profound difference in the two poets' approach to composition. It may also serve as an indication as to why Hopkins is considered by many to be a great poet, while Doughty remains a minor one.

### *Swinburne*

The other area that must be carefully studied in an examination of Hopkins' relation to his contemporaries is the more mainstream tradition that runs in poets like Swinburne and Tennyson.

Many early reviewers mentioned Swinburne in discussions of Hopkins' poetic roots, recognizing, for instance, a shared fondness for alliteration. However, many were also perceptive enough to see the utility of the device in Hopkins, in contrast to Swinburne.

Sapir's review of September 1921, for example: "These clangs are not the nicely calculated jingling lovelinesses of Poe or Swinburne";<sup>69</sup> nor are they, "as for Swinburne, a means of emphasizing the rhythms of the verse", as E. Brett-Young pointed out.<sup>70</sup>

The inclusion of more early verse in the second edition of the poems fuelled Swinburnean comparisons. Williams, introducing the new volume, referred to alliteration, and, as others had before him, he noted that "the astonishing thing about Swinburne is not its presence but its uselessness, as the admirable thing about Hopkins is not its presence but its use".<sup>71</sup> While in 1919 John Middleton Murry could declare that "Swinburne seems hardly to have existed for Hopkins",<sup>72</sup> now "Ad Mariam" was singled out as "thoroughly Swinburnean" by many, including Lahey, W.J. Turner and Morris U. Schappes.<sup>73</sup> Bridges himself had described it as a "direct and competent imitation of Swinburne".<sup>74</sup> Other remarks ranged in tone from the cautionary - "perhaps momentarily influenced by Swinburne"<sup>75</sup> - to a blatant pronouncement of the early Hopkins as "another Swinburne".<sup>76</sup> This is perhaps overstating the case. Although there are vague signs of some kind of influence in Hopkins' early work, what Arthur Little refers to as "echoes of Swinburne",<sup>77</sup> they are, at heart, very different. Several critics made the issue clear, approaching from varying angles but converging on the same point.



Harris Downey described Swinburne's alliteration as "a thin coat of bright paint that only obscures the beauty of the natural wood: Hopkins' alliteration is in the grain".<sup>78</sup> Irene Haugh conceded that complaints about Hopkins' "wordiness" were justifiable in certain instances, although, "unlike Swinburne, he never uses words meaninglessly or for the sound sake only".<sup>79</sup> In an analogy similar to Downey's, G.W. Stonier considered Swinburne's words to be akin to "showers of sequins", while each word in Hopkins is "a living microcosm".<sup>80</sup> This last metaphor is over-blown and vague, but the point is taken.

Michael M. Scott wrote that "there was in his [Hopkins'] poetry the thought and emotion that Swinburne's lacked".<sup>81</sup> Charles Williams, in his introduction to the second edition of the poems, put it this way: quoting the line "Thou hast bound bones... fastened me flesh", he writes:

"It is as if the imagination, seeking for expression, had found both verb and substantive at one rush... and had separated them only because the intellect had reduced the original unity into divided but related sounds... The very race of the words and lines hurries on our emotion; our minds are left behind, not, as in Swinburne, because they have to suspend their labour until it is wanted, but because they cannot work at a quick enough rate..."<sup>82</sup>

F.R. Leavis declared that "Hopkins is really difficult, and the difficulty is essential".<sup>83</sup>

In one sense, these comments tell us as much about the critics as they do about Hopkins or Swinburne. The sheer volume of criticism that runs in this vein - centring on 'difficulty', or complexity of thought - bears testimony to the intellectual climate at this point in literary criticism. One of the most striking things we have noticed in early reviews, around 1918-19, is the number of complaints about Hopkins' so-called 'obscurity'. As we saw earlier in this chapter, a favourite early anchor-point was Browning - "Browning in his most crabbed and elephantinely humorous mood was smooth compared with Hopkins" is a typical example.<sup>84</sup> By 1930, difficulty had become a virtue, and Hopkins had come to be compared favourably with the 'shallower' Swinburne.

One or two writers managed to provide closer analyses of the similarities between the two poets - two especially worthy of note are Gardner and Mariani. Gardner, in his major essay on the *Deutschland* published in 1935, isolated one line - "To flash from the flame to the flame then, tower from the grace to the grace" - as one that suffered from a "typical loping Swinburnean movement", an accurate note and an apt description.<sup>85</sup> Elsewhere, Gardner concurred with other critics and reviewers (Hopkins used alliteration with "far greater imaginative purpose than... either Langland or Swinburne").<sup>86</sup> He agreed with Bridges' (and just about everyone else's) verdict on "Ad Mariam". Interestingly

enough, he also notes the fact that some do not believe that it was written by Hopkins at all, finding it literally incredible that he should ape a poet that he denigrated so unrelentingly. C.C. Abbott, editor of the correspondence, is one: "Only the discovery of a manuscript copy in his handwriting will begin to shake my unbelief".<sup>87</sup>

Mariani, in his commentary on the poetry published in 1970, disturbed again the issue that had lain dormant for several decades. In his remarks on the early poetry, he seems to find some signs of the gestation of sprung rhythm. "Rosa Mystica", Mariani believes, has "the predominant anapaestic lilt of Swinburne", indicating a break from the traditional form of prosody handed down from Keats and incarnate in Tennyson.<sup>88</sup> Mariani talks of Hopkins' long poetic silence, when "he was... looking for a new rhythm which Swinburne helped to supply. A number of lines in 'The Deutschland' do recall Swinburne".<sup>89</sup> Later, he attempts to match the rhythm of

"I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes"

with Swinburne's

"Lift up thy lips, turn round, look back for love"

but this is not very convincing.<sup>90</sup> In short, Mariani's

sketches of an influence of Swinburne on Hopkins' prosody are unsuccessful. There are other models that seem much more likely, and which have been discussed in earlier chapters.

A number of critics were keen to point out how Hopkins had fallen under the spell of the Pre-Raphaelites in early life, "starting very happily in a Keatsian line, a normal young contemporary of Tennyson, Matthew Arnold and Rossetti".<sup>91</sup> However, everyone agreed that the flirtation was immature and short-lived. John Pick noted that Hopkins tried his hand at a Pre-Raphaelite ballad, but considered the influence to be "most easily perceptible in his drawings".<sup>92</sup> Anyone who has seen the beautiful, fragile delicacy of sketches such as that of Shanklin, Isle of Wight, can only concur with this judgement. Mariani noted that the early verse "suffers... from what Hopkins would later come to call medieval keepings".<sup>93</sup> Poets he refers to, following other critics before him, include the Rossetti's, Pater and Ruskin. Geoffrey Bullough provided a more original perspective by placing Hopkins in the ranks of the late Victorian Catholics - Patmore, Thompson, Alice Meynell. However, his discussion is couched in the vaguest of terms - "by their assiduous pursuit of the poetic moment, the flash of ecstasy, the Victorians gave dramatic force and variety to the lyric"<sup>94</sup> - and is consequently inconclusive.

*Tennyson*

The other major figure amongst Hopkins' contemporaries is, of course, Tennyson. Tennyson has neither obscurity (Browning, Doughty, Meredith) nor a particularly obtrusive device (Swinburne's alliteration) to make him an attractive target for comparisons with Hopkins. Still, Katherine Bregy had a sharp enough eye to trace a suggestion of Tennyson in "A Vision of the Mermaids", although she was the only one of the early critics to raise the point<sup>95</sup> - surprising, perhaps, speaking with the benefit of hindsight. Lahey was the next to raise the name, finding "The Escorial" and "Heaven-haven" as two instances where Tennyson was echoed; he even went so far as to say that the latter poem's "delicacy... almost surpasses Tennyson, even at his best".<sup>96</sup> He also labelled as Tennysonian a couple of lines from the *Deutschland*; for example, "sweet heaven was astrew with them". But these lines could just as readily be taken as reminiscent of, say, Swinburne - and perhaps lead back more naturally to Keats, to whom Tennyson owes a considerable debt as a poet. The examples are certainly not so startling as the resemblance that "Ad Mariam" bears to Swinburne's idiom.

The paucity of references in the criticism is interesting, especially when one considers Hopkins' preoccupation with Tennyson in his letters. It is

evident that he retained an affection for the poetry even after he developed a painful awareness of its faults. Hopkins even admitted to basing the measure of "The Loss of the Eurydice" on Tennyson's "The Daisy" (Hopkins refers to it as "Violet").<sup>97</sup> He was very disappointed when Tennyson lost his power to charm: "his gift of utterance is truly golden, but go further home and you come to thoughts commonplace and wanting in nobility".<sup>98</sup> And his criticism was invariably tempered by some concluding remark such as "but for all this he is a glorious poet".<sup>99</sup>

Wendell Stacy Johnson's study of Hopkins, *The Poet as Victorian*, pointed out that Tennyson's influence "especially is one which Hopkins could not escape, one of which he was aware".<sup>100</sup> Mariani found echoes of Tennyson in "Il Mystico", "A Vision of the Mermaids" and "Heaven-haven";<sup>101</sup> he even suggests a direct borrowing in the third Oxford sonnet of a line from Tennyson's "A Dream of Good Women".<sup>102</sup> Much of Hopkins' early poetry "suffers, in fact, from that Parnassian tinge which Hopkins complained of in Tennyson in September 1864".<sup>103</sup> However, in general, there was a consensus of opinion that allowed traces of Tennysonian influence in the early verse, being in the mainstream of English poetic tradition, but asserting that the mature poetry placed him, according to Leavis, Heywood and others, in the company of "Shakespeare, Donne, Eliot and the later Yeats as opposed to Spenser, Milton and Tennyson".<sup>104</sup>

*Hopkins as Victorian*

One or two writers have ventured towards some kind of overview of Hopkins' relation to his contemporaries. For the most part, this issue has been covered in the chapter discussing Hopkins as a Victorian and as a Modernist, but it is interesting to note how the debate relates to more specific connections.

Inevitably, terminology begins to lose its hard surfaces and sharp edges in this area: Leavis contrasts Hopkins with Rossetti, and what he refers to as the latter's "shamelessly cheap evocation of a romantic and bogus Platonism", in typical bullying fashion.<sup>105</sup> Less clearly, he talks of a separation of feeling and thought in other Victorians, and Hopkins' quality of "a vigour of mind that puts him in another poetic world".<sup>106</sup> All of the terms used here - "vigour", "mind", "poetic world" - are so nebulous as to yield any number of possible meanings. R.G. Lienhardt talks of an "horizon" in Hopkins "far more comprehensive... than Pater's aestheticism, or Tennyson's vague Arthurian idealism". This much is reasonably clear - Lienhardt is presumably talking about the range of issues uncovered in the poetry, the extent to which the poet enlightens the condition of man. However, Lienhardt's conclusion - "his [Hopkins'] work consequently surpasses those in firmness and depth"<sup>107</sup> - is again in the cloudy zone of the ill-defined.

### *Conclusion*

Perhaps W.A.M. Peters came closest to the heart of the issue in his critical essay published in 1948. As one might expect, he succeeds where others fail by strapping himself tightly to the Hopkins correspondence and allowing the poet himself to lead the way through the debate. "He had often discovered that imagery was little more than ornament and more or less superfluous illustration, as for instance in Swinburne and Tennyson", wrote Peters.<sup>108</sup> And:

"Swinburne was to Hopkins the most striking instance of a poet who had the gift of great poetry, but who in his poetical activity had upset the right order of values: sincerity, earnestness, truth, humanity, feeling had taken second place after melody, word music, flow of verse and so on".<sup>109</sup>

It is this complaint Hopkins voices about Swinburne that becomes one of the major signs of his distinction from his contemporaries. Although there are other vital clues - sprung rhythm being one of the most obvious - it seems to me that Hopkins is very near the mark when he speaks of "genius uninformed by character".<sup>110</sup> It seems that Keatsian "enervating luxury" has partially paralysed the intelligence and, in a sense, form has taken precedent over content. This is one area which highlights Hopkins' unique status in the Victorian canon, and perhaps helps to explain why a twentieth century audience responded to him so positively even as



## Chapter VII: Hopkins and his Contemporaries

it revolted against the poetry of mainstream Victorianism.

CHAPTER VIII: "THE CONVENTION OF FREEDOM"

HOPKINS AS VICTORIAN AND MODERNIST

*Introduction: The Literary Scene in Post-War Britain*

Much discussion has been devoted to the timing of Bridges' publication of Hopkins' verse. There have been disputes over whether the laureate delayed publication to allow himself the opportunity to mine his friend's caverns of innovative talent and exploit their potential as far as his own talent would allow. Other reviewers and critics have claimed that Bridges' only thought was for the reaction Hopkins would receive, albeit posthumously, and that he was only awaiting the most favourable critical climate in which to present the work.

The truth is that, whatever his intention might have been, Bridges launched the volume *Poems of Hopkins* (1918) into a seething maelstrom of artistic and critical currents and cross-currents. Modernism had assaulted all received and preconceived notions in literature and related fields - in the arts and philosophy - and although the last strains of late romanticism were finally dying away, a reactionary group began to gel around a unifying commitment to tradition. This group had been battered by the various '-isms' of the modernist movement - Imagism, Futurism, Vorticism - and, on the defensive, found voice in publications like

the *London Mercury*. The *Mercury's* first edition (November 1919) contained an editorial that mounted a counter-attack on modernism, and the publication soon enlisted the help of 'Georgian' poets such as Turner, Binyon, Sassoon, Walter de la Mare and others to assist in its cause.

The irony of this is notable: the first appearance of Georgian poets - volumes of *Georgian Poetry* appeared regularly between 1912 and 1922 - had been warmly greeted by many reviewers, admired for their supposed rough edges and destruction of Victorian literary and philosophical frameworks. In fact, the style was almost invariably conventional blank verse, and its chief quality, as T.S. Eliot noted, was "pleasantness". The supposed ground-breakers of 1912 were, within a few years, to be seized upon and enlisted in the cause of buttressing the crumbling arch of tradition.

### *Early Reactions*

Hopkins arrived in the aftermath of the first blaze of modernism - in particular, the work of the Imagists. However, the flash of daring and controversy in the work of Pound, for example, and the theorizing of T.E. Hulme, disguised the fact that, at its core, the movement lacked any corresponding white heat of creativity. While Hulme's grafting of absolutism and

classicism onto a thoroughly modern sensibility - one profoundly conscious of political, social and industrial upheaval - was itself strikingly original, his manifesto, by its very nature, left sparse materials with which to build a new poetic, as Pound soon realized. As visual art should be geometric, Hulme declared, so poetry should be created in terms of pictures. Imagism demanded "direct treatment" of the subject; the exclusive use of words contributing to the presentation, and a composition "in sequence of the musical phrase, not of the metronome". It is unsurprising that the most successful Imagist poems - those that followed the guide-lines most closely - were notable more for their oddity than their substance as works of art. This was inevitable, since the Imagists' 'rules' were in effect 'anti-language', attempting to reduce words, the only true substance of the art of poetry, to an absolute minimum.

It is important not to underestimate the significance of the Imagist movement. However, by its very nature, it was more successful at 'blasting' than it was at 'blessing' - it attempted to bring down the edifices of the past, and was to a large extent successful; but it was less successful in its efforts to build something new from the rubble. In the words of Eliot, they "know only/A heap of broken images". The reconstruction would be the work of the later Modernists - Eliot most evidently, and then the Auden group in the

thirties, including Stephen Spender, W.H. Auden and Louis MacNeice.

One of the earliest critical remarks we can find that places Hopkins into some kind of context is that of George Saintsbury, in his *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature* (1896). Saintsbury, familiar with only a small sample of Hopkins' early pieces, assigned him to the Pre-Raphaelites.<sup>1</sup> Other critics, on publication of the poems in 1918, understandably drew the names of the Victorian eccentrics from the shelves of the past to find points of comparison. Thus the anonymous reviewer in the *Dial* (31 May 1919) came up with Browning and Meredith,<sup>2</sup> and others followed suit: Peter McBrien in *The Irish Rosary* found the "psychological picture-work" and "ascetic fire" of Meredith in poems like "Tom's Garland".<sup>3</sup> Frederick Page (*Dublin Review*) also cited Meredith,<sup>4</sup> while the *Glasgow Herald* reviewer,<sup>5</sup> Fr. George O'Neill (*Essays on Poetry*),<sup>6</sup> and others settled for Browning.<sup>7</sup>

Other critics, however, were less content with Victorian parallels for Hopkins' distinctive style. In an anonymous review of Bregy's *The Poet's Chantry*, there was the declaration: "Here is a writer emancipated from time and tradition".<sup>8</sup> There were movements towards an assessment of Hopkins in the context of the present. J.M. Hone (*New Statesman* 9 June 1917) found him to be "in reaction against most of the literary influences of

the nineteenth century";<sup>9</sup> similarly, Edward Sapir recognised that Hopkins "strives for no innocuous Victorian smoothness".<sup>10</sup> Michael Henry found in poems like "Binsey Poplars" and "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" an "Elizabethan loveliness with the added weight of modern thought";<sup>11</sup> and even O'Neill, who had suggested comparisons with one or two Victorians, acknowledged that Hopkins was "quite ahead of his own generation and anticipated doing things still far off in the twentieth century".<sup>12</sup>

Some of the opinions of critics in this particular vein were double-edged, the barbs along their wires aimed at the modern poets - Arthur Clutton-Brock's remark in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 9 January 1919 could be taken either way: "In 1876, he wrote a poem, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', which is still more modern than the most novel poems of today".<sup>13</sup> But others, like Theodore Maynard, were more direct: he accused the modern poets, with their supposed experimentation, their rejection of rhyme and metre, of "generally succeed[ing] because they attempt so little", contrasting them with Hopkins' "amazing intricacies", "the results of the toil and tortures of a giant".<sup>14</sup> (One could imagine that Hopkins might well have found himself in agreement with Maynard on this point).

Maynard attacked Pound in particular, declaring him "stale when set beside this poet who has been dead

for thirty years".<sup>15</sup> The "wildest work" of the Georgians "seems tame" by comparison. Hopkins, Maynard concludes, is "the last word in technical development".<sup>16</sup> He credits Hopkins with a more progressive technique than these twentieth century poets - as implied by the use of terms such as "stale" when describing Pound - but, paradoxically, the effect seems to be to make Hopkins appear more of a Victorian than a Modern in this emphasis on intricacy and "technical development".

The reviewer of the 1918 edition of the poems in the *Oxford Magazine* (23 May 1919) was anonymous, but is thought to have been a senior member of the university, and he articulated most clearly the reason why Hopkins could be considered as a modern and simultaneously employed as a stick with which a more traditionalist critic could beat the recent modern poets. The Oxonian considered it doubtful whether Bridges had chosen the right moment to offer his friend's work to the public forum: "we are still afflicted with an intolerable deal of verse which is unintelligible through sheer indiscipline and carelessness".<sup>17</sup> This critic ably contrasted their "indiscipline" with Hopkins, "who is rather too much given to one form of discipline and to a too constrained selection".<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey Bliss, writing in the *Tablet* the following month, defended Hopkins against charges of obscurity by insisting that "poetry which attempts to speak the deepest thoughts of the

soul, will surely be obscure at times".<sup>19</sup> (One thinks on the one hand of Eliot, and the deliberate obscurity of modern poetry, and on the other of Shelley's "The deep truth is imageless", and the whole of the mystic tradition). Hopkins' work was new in that it achieved "the identity of sound and sense".<sup>20</sup> "We think that Hopkins has made the beginning of a breach in the walls of the impossible," Bliss concluded. "Let it be for others to break through".<sup>21</sup>

Such a meeting of extremes perhaps reminds us of Hopkins' own words on Whitman, to whom he was likened by Bridges in Bridges' criticism of "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo". Hopkins suggested that, as "Extremes meet", so Whitman's "decomposition into common prose... comes near the last elaboration" of his own art.<sup>22</sup>

### *Hopkins, Modernism, Imagism*

In this sense, Hopkins and the moderns also meet at extremes: while these literary revolutionaries had broken free of constraints of rhyme and metre, Hopkins had chosen a route that had led in the opposite direction. He had laced and buckled himself into a tight harness of disciplined metre. His sprung rhythm, as a calculated scheme, may have been new, but his experimentation had taken him deeper into the labyrinth of prosody. The modernists had merely turned their



backs on it.

Having acknowledged this much, it is perhaps worth looking again, briefly, at those principles of Imagism proposed by T.E. Hulme and applying them in a criticism of Hopkins' verse. The direct treatment of a subject may be linked, to some extent, to Hopkins' obsession with what he called "inscape" - Duns Scotus' "haecceitas", the "thisness" of anything he examined, its uniqueness, and his aim to render that quality of particularity in his poetry. One of the most notable expressions of this concept comes in these lines of "As kingfishers catch fire":

"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*".

However, this preoccupation is not quite the same: there is an almost pessimistic slant in the Imagist approach, a profound distrust of language and its validity, an attitude which is distinctively modern and which would have been alien to Hopkins. The distrust leads to a paring down and a stripping away, a reductionism that allows only the most 'necessary' and 'exact' terms through the filtration process.

Hopkins, also concerned with exactitude of expression, had faith in language as a God-given

medium, believing it a valid and trustworthy tool. He is not afraid of metaphor and analogy, or even of conceits in the metaphysical vein - see, for instance, "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe", and sections of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. In this he differed from the Modernists: for the majority of them, the disappearance of God had removed that guarantee that had underwritten the Word, the Logos. Faith in meaning had been undermined, in the 'substantiation' of language, a passage from meaning to meaningfulness - what George Steiner terms a "real presence" behind the sign.

In addition, we see a tendency to allow thought processes to spill out onto the page, and we may occasionally witness in the lines of a poem the footholds and handholds he employed to climb toward the exact term he was seeking. For example, in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", where all these words contribute to the effect:

"...her earliest stars, earl-stars, stars principal  
overbend us..."

"Evening strains to be time's vast, womb-of-all, home-  
of-all, hearse-of-all night".

The maxim of economy may be seen as having been transgressed by this practice, but Hopkins often showed the same desire for concise expression that led Pound into his experimentation with Chinese ideograms.

Hopkins' ellipsis, and in particular his omission of the relative pronoun in places where such omission renders meaning ambiguous or obscure, has been criticized. The most famous case, perhaps, is the phrase "O hero savest" (instead of "O hero that savest") in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, but there are others. This compression and concision - often to the point of obscurity - is a familiar feature of Hopkins' mature work.

Finally, the Imagists' preference for the musical phrase over the rhythm of the metronome parallels Hopkins' adoption of sprung rhythm, a move away from traditional metre in its counting by stress rather than syllable. Hopkins emphasized how sprung rhythm was the measure of nursery rhyme and gave this as an example:

"Ding, dong, dell, Pussy's in the well;  
Who put her in? Little Johnny Thin" etc.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Hopkins' passion for music, and his attempts at musical composition, are well-documented. The cross-fertilization between the two creative instincts is inevitable.

#### *Developments in Literary Criticism*

Between the publication in 1918 of Bridges' first edition of the poetry, and the second edition, with an

introduction by Charles Williams (1930), new schools of criticism had emerged that were to have a profound effect on the courses both of literature and literary studies in the twentieth century. Most heterogeneous of these was the 'New Criticism' that can be characterized by its obsession with "the words on the page" - close textual analysis that put the works of art themselves under the microscope, but lost sight of the artist as he existed in his social, historical context. On the other hand, the work of Freud had inspired other critics to frame psychoanalytical approaches to literary criticism. And in addition, studies of linguistics and the nature of language in pure philosophy - and the rapid disintegration of a consensus of philosophical perspective (a perspective that had been in decay for some time) - yielded a remarkable shift into subjectivism. The focus in criticism was no longer on how well an artist could frame the landscape of external reality, but instead on what that expression could tell us of the artist's - and reader's - internal, mental landscape.

Prescriptive, didactic literary criticism was anathema to critics such as I.A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Graves. Their commitment to subjectivism was not a capitulation but, in their view, a new level of enlightenment. However, the apparent tolerance here, the liberalism, the openness to all philosophical perspectives, was an illusion. When relativism meets absolutism, the two are essentially

irreconcilable, both in the essence of their nature forced to deny the other. This is bound to have serious consequences for a poet such as Hopkins, whose religion provides an interpretation of reality that would have been for him, as a Catholic priest, incontrovertible. Atheism and agnosticism were the common perspectives of the new critics; I.A. Richards, for example, referred to religious belief as "bundles of invested emotional capital".<sup>24</sup>

It is also important to note the intellectual élitism that was another defining characteristic of the new critics. The *Criterion*, one of the most vociferous of the new critics' periodicals, was edited by T.S. Eliot and the first edition included *The Waste Land*. Other important periodicals included the *Dial*, devoted to American poetic modernism, and *Scrutiny*, which A.C. Ward describes as being dedicated to the "defence and maintenance of 'minority culture' through an intellectual élite".<sup>25</sup> The poets themselves were very much a part of the élite - often they juggled their creators' and critics' caps as they moved from poetry to essay and back again; this, from Graves' foreword to his *Poems 1938-1945* is typical; "I write poems for wits... To write poems for other than poets is wasteful".<sup>26</sup> But perhaps there is no greater monument to this contempt for unschooled and common intelligence than *The Waste Land* itself.

An article written by I.A. Richards in the September 1926 edition of the *Dial* gives a clear and immediate indication of the new critics' approach to Hopkins. Declaring that "Modern verse is perhaps more often too lucid than too obscure", Richards goes on to announce Hopkins as "the most obscure of English verse-writers".<sup>27</sup> His comments on Bridges' preface, which found the laureate apologizing and making excuses on his friend's behalf, attack his "lofty tone and confident assumption"; "The more the poems are studied, the clearer it becomes their oddities are always deliberate".<sup>28</sup> There can be few stronger expressions of the élitist perspective of the new critic than Richards' remark that "It is a good thing to make the light-footed reader work for what he gets".<sup>29</sup>

Other critics were a little more charitable to Bridges. Isidor Schneider recognised that the delay had been a wise decision: "the temper of Hopkins's generation and the general impatience with experiment will account for his hesitation".<sup>30</sup> Schneider also acknowledged that the attitude to innovative verse had altered considerably: "Today we have become not so much tolerant of as styled to experimentation".<sup>31</sup>

Laura Riding and Robert Graves' *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) also tackled the issue of obscurity; they, too, registered approval of Hopkins' difficulty, that same characteristic that had been the

most serious charge against him less than a decade before. Riding and Graves display a preoccupation with the poet's internal world, finding in Hopkins' expression "so minute, so more than scientific" a poetry that has been made into a "higher sort of psychology".<sup>32</sup> Their defence of his obscurity is, perhaps, a little more satisfying than Richards'; they see the difficulty as essential to the expression: the poems "*had to be understood as he meant them to be, or not understood at all*". The authors italicized this clause, for they saw it as "the crux of the whole question of the intelligibility of 'difficult' poetry".<sup>33</sup>

In one sense, this defence stands in opposition to Richards' technique of practical criticism. The reader is removed from the position of high focus he occupies in Richards' model, and the emphasis is placed on the *intention* of the writer - over against the *interpretation* of the reader - an interesting reversion to a more traditional critical stand-point.

It is important to remind ourselves at this point of Hopkins' own comments on his obscurity. While he conceded that his poetry "errs on the side of oddness", he showed great concern to balance intelligibility and a commitment to that unique vision of his that often required idiosyncratic expression. One remembers his distress over Bridges' refusal to re-read *The Wreck of the Deutschland*,<sup>34</sup> and his decision after having to give

a crib for "Tom's Garland": "I must go no further on this road".<sup>35</sup>

So it seems that Hopkins, giving unique expression to his unique vision as a poet, is willing to concede to the requirements of his audience: he is *not* prepared to sacrifice intelligibility for this commitment to poetic integrity. For Riding and Graves, it was Hopkins' courage to break away from convention, to seek the exact word and form for the expression of his idea, and to follow it whichever direction it happened to take, that made him a modern. The delay in publication by Bridges had had the effect of "making Hopkins even more of a modernist poet".<sup>36</sup> Again, the focus here is on Hopkins as he is received or interpreted, not what he is in essence.

#### *The Second Edition, 1930*

The publication of the second edition of the poems did not come until 1930, and by this time the wheels of the new criticism were spinning freely. Charles Williams, in his introduction, sought to remind the reader that forty years had passed since Hopkins' death, and that he differed from his contemporaries not in kind but "only because his purely poetic energy was so much greater".<sup>37</sup> Williams, then, with the aid of vague phrases that defy precise definition, was hedging his



bets on Hopkins' Victorianism.

However, the reception of Hopkins' poetry this time was almost unanimous in its acceptance of the Victorian into the modernist fold. The notice of the forthcoming edition gives evidence that the current of critical opinion had been running in this direction for some time: "'Considered opinion... ranks him among the greatest of the Victorians. In his prosody he was more modern than the moderns'".<sup>38</sup> Thus the Oxford Press, quoted in *Commonweal*. Critics agreed: "Hopkins... anticipated in his technical experimentation even our modern exponents of free verse", wrote Michael M. Scott.<sup>39</sup> M.C. D'Arcy noted that "the most advanced poets confessed frankly that much of what was best in their aims and experiments had already been anticipated and surpassed by the long-dead poet".<sup>40</sup> H.L. Binsse saw Hopkins' poetry as the place where "modern poetry can find the rationale, the convention of freedom it has been seeking",<sup>41</sup> and Morton Zabel wrote that Hopkins "anticipated by a quarter of a century the most searching experiments of contemporary writers"; in "symbolic, prosodic and verbal" modes of innovation.<sup>42</sup> Many reviewers seemed to agree that Hopkins had gone further than their own contemporaries: "There has been no modern poetry attaining to the amazing effects of lines in Hopkins".<sup>43</sup>

Herbert Read, writing in the *Criterion* (April

1931), and in his book *Form in Modern Poetry* (published the following year), was convinced that "nothing could have made Hopkins' poetry popular in his day. His values were so fundamentally opposed to current practices that only by an effort of imagination could they be comprehended".<sup>44</sup> Presumably, Read was referring here to values in poetic composition. He obviously found the necessary effort lacking in the few men who did read Hopkins' poetry before his death.

Both R.L. Megroz<sup>45</sup> and F.W. Bateson<sup>46</sup> believed that Hopkins was engaged in a revolt against pre-Raphaelitism. However, Bateson believed the revolt to be an "abortive" one, for, in Hopkins' time, "the language had not increased sufficiently in precision... for the massive concrete poetry of Hopkins to be possible at all without very special precautions".<sup>47</sup> B. Ifor Evans considered *The Wreck of the Deutschland* "inexplicable" to an audience of the 1870's: "no-one was writing poetry similar to this found in 1875".<sup>48</sup>

F.R. Leavis contrasted the verbal richness of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" with the work of some of Hopkins' contemporaries and found a correlation between style and content: "The intellectual and spiritual anaemia of Victorian poetry is indistinguishable from its lack of body", he wrote.<sup>49</sup> This was another line that some critics pursued as they argued for Hopkins' modernity: not only was Hopkins an innovator of form,

he also tackled issues that seemed markedly 'modern', and in a manner that set him apart from his contemporaries.

### *Hopkins and the Modern Mind-Set*

Michael M. Scott wrote that it was his intensity of emotion that set him apart, and which "set the model for those modern realists - Gibbon, Nichols, Sassoon, Brooke".<sup>50</sup> The Victorian method had been inherited directly from Wordsworth - poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity". With Hopkins, Scott claimed, as with the moderns, "it took new shape - emotion written down bluntly and as it came".<sup>51</sup> Such a remark reminds us again of the narrow limitations of such generalizations: "emotion written down bluntly and as it came" hardly seems a very accurate description of Eliot's poetry, for instance. M.C. D'Arcy followed a similar line, but made a distinction between the Victorian inclination toward the "sentimental and romantic", and a rejection of this "appeal to the emotions" in favour of an attempt "to convince the world that beauty can be achieved by intellectual passion".<sup>52</sup>

John O'Brien thought Hopkins' poems created a new language and made use of new rhythms, while at the same time they drew upon "themes to which, shockingly new as they would have been in Hopkins' day, we have been

introduced and in some cases accustomed by our contemporary idols".<sup>53</sup> Michael Roberts was more specific about these "new" themes, pin-pointing the "scepticism" of the new poets engaged in building a new faith. Not merely "intellectual uncertainty", it consists of "a desperate insecurity" in the face of the question: "how can we prove anything at all is valuable?"<sup>54</sup> Roberts thus found it "natural" that Hopkins (and T.S. Eliot) should be regarded "as a starting-point for the moderns".<sup>55</sup>

One interesting comment in an article by Harman Grisewood casts the poetry in a philosophical perspective, one that has a bearing also on the Imagist discussion: noting "immediacy" as one of his chief qualities, Grisewood goes on to claim that "Hopkins agrees that the object for poetry is not the thing seen but the seeing of it".<sup>56</sup> While this calls to mind Blake's dictum, "As the eye, such the object", it also strikes us as a profoundly modern philosophical standpoint, exposing the naivety of the Imagists' position, and their advocacy of "direct treatment" of the subject. Perhaps the best way of summarizing the attitude to Hopkins amongst writers and critics at this time is to look at Monroe's *Anthology of Twentieth Century Poetry* (1929). We find that the collection contains as much of Hopkins' work as it does of T.S. Eliot's, and Monroe's justification is stated in the introduction: "he belongs temperamentally and technically to the twentieth

century, not to the nineteenth".<sup>57</sup>

E.E. Phare's *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1933) was the first full-length study of his work to be published. Since it was written as a thesis under the supervision of I.A. Richards, its practical criticism slant is unsurprising, and perhaps her decision to follow Richards' lead in the modernist debate is equally to be expected. Phare dubbed Hopkins a "Modernist-Victorian poet", and acknowledged that "his poetry is generally taken to belong in spirit and by adoption to the twentieth century".<sup>58</sup> In her opinion, no Victorian innovated to such a degree, and none of them accomplished more.<sup>59</sup>

Alexander Calvert, writing two years later, noted how "the exponents of modern poetry" hailed Hopkins' poetry "with delight, as belonging essentially to the new era, and as capable of giving direction to the search for a new technique".<sup>60</sup> Calvert saw Hopkins rejecting the form and content of the inherited tradition; "he seems summarily to have rejected the poetic language of his day and to have invented a new one".<sup>61</sup>

*Sprung Rhythm*

However, there were some dissenting voices, and, in other areas, clashes of opinion. One of the most important issues was the notion of sprung rhythm, and how Hopkins' theory related to the technique of the modernists. The free-versifiers, Herbert Read felt, worked by intuition rather than analysis. It was Read's opinion that Hopkins proceeded upon a similar principle:

"the principles contended for by Hopkins on the basis of scholarship and original tradition (but only *contended* for on that basis: he actually wrote as he felt, and then went to history to justify himself) are in many essentials identical with the principles contended for by those modern poets already mentioned (whose advocacy and practice of 'free verse' is also based on feeling and intuition rather than historical analysis)".<sup>62</sup>

Edith Sitwell, writing in *Aspects of Modern Poetry* (1934), agreed that Hopkins' "rhythmical principles, which are based on scholarship, arose, actually, from his feeling, his instinct, and so "in many ways" were the same as those of Pound, Owen and others.<sup>63</sup>

The third significant name that appeared in this camp is that of C. Day Lewis. In his *A Hope for Poetry* (1934), he classed Hopkins as a revolutionary moving in a different direction from Wordsworth, away from common speech, towards an incantatory style.<sup>64</sup> In the light of Hopkins' own defence of sprung rhythm being closer to the rhythms of speech, this is a strange claim, with

complex repercussions. To Lewis, Hopkins was a "naif", a poet writing on the bank of the stream of tradition. This term "naif" also implied that he agreed with Edith Sitwell and Herbert Read on the issue of Hopkins' prosody and poetic instinct, and all three writers were in this way expounding beliefs that seemed to sit uncomfortably next to Hopkins' own pronouncements on the subject, his insistence upon the debts he owed to the roots of English versification, and the finely-wrought artistry of his sprung rhythm. Read seems to be the only one who tries to accommodate this, as the passage quoted above indicates.

### *Dissenting Voices*

It is important to note at this point that the vote that carried Hopkins into the heart of modernist poetry was not a unanimous one. Within a couple of years, with publication of the correspondence and then the notebooks, journals, sermons and devotional writings, a reappraisal of Hopkins' Victorianism would begin in earnest. However, even before these publications, there were a number of dissenting voices.

G.W. Stonier had one of the loudest, insisting that Hopkins "was a Victorian in style, outlook and feeling", and that in his disapproval of Keats, for instance, one could trace the "very accent of a

Victorian" - a valid point.<sup>65</sup> While he admitted that Hopkins was "alone in his art, demonic", he insisted that he was nevertheless "characteristic of his time".<sup>66</sup>

Humphry House agreed that Hopkins had been "wrenched out of his context and distorted by ephemeral and propagandist judgement".<sup>67</sup> This particular essay took aim at Phare's book, noting how she recognised the lack of "private symbols" in Hopkins - a lack that renders him distinctly unmodern in one sense - but criticising her for not pressing on to the inevitable conclusion of the weight of her evidence: that "in the whole structure of his thought and imagery Hopkins does not belong to our generation at all, and that his adoption into it is excessively misleading".<sup>68</sup> In the *Times Literary Supplement* the following year, House provided one explanation for Hopkins' peculiarity: "His personal independence of opinion in many things was guaranteed by his being a Jesuit, and most of all in literature".<sup>69</sup> House pointed out how few of his fellow members either knew or cared whether he was a poet. But this is perhaps to give an exaggerated impression of his isolation. We know from his letters that he took a great interest in contemporary poetry, and his long discussions in correspondence with Bridges, Dixon and Patmore indicate that he lacked neither opportunity nor inclination to participate actively in such debates.

As for 'Hopkins the naif', Geoffrey Grigson



attacked Lewis' *A Hope for Poetry* in the January 1935 edition of the *Criterion*: "Hopkins controlled his writing by theory and no poet was less a naif".<sup>70</sup> Egerton Clarke agreed that "He was essentially a traditionalist" and qualified this remark by placing him in the Anglo-Saxon (rather than the Latinist) tradition.<sup>71</sup> The two categories correspond, approximately, to Leavis' division of the 'Shakespearian' and the 'Miltonic' lines of poetic descent.<sup>72</sup>

Before we proceed to an examination of how the publication of the correspondence affected critical opinion in 1935, it is worth noting not all those who found modernist strains in Hopkins' poetry were happy with them. G.M. Young's article in *Life and Letters* from that year is notable for its disapproval of the direction taken by the Modernists, for his attributing it to a set of late Victorian influences, and also for its author's rather self-important tone. "Rhythm", Young believes, "being a function of the dominant speech habit of a whole race, cannot be created or changed by an individual".<sup>73</sup> Young takes a rigorously prescriptive line, sketching the "injunction with which the Muse started English poetry on its career", and citing Hopkins as an offender on two counts, his use of paeon and his collision of stress".<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, he sees the innovation as one that leads back towards forms of verse that are rooted deep in literary tradition, the "Old Northern Rhythm" of poems like *Piers Plowman*.<sup>75</sup> He

concludes that "in their main principle Hopkins and those who derive from him are entirely wrong".<sup>76</sup> It is important to realise that some critics, even at this late stage, remained committed to the mainstream of tradition, even though it would perhaps be more accurate to say that tradition had been diverted from the flow at this point, and that the majority of poets had sprung from the new wells of a seemingly sourceless Modernism.

*Publication of the Prose: Reassessment*

Publication of the correspondence in 1935 brought many critics to a realization that their opinion of Hopkins' contemporary status would require some reassessment. C.C. Abbott edited and introduced the volumes, and made his position very clear: "he is an Englishman and a Victorian... he may be a strange Victorian, but he belongs to that company".<sup>77</sup> He referred to the tendency amongst "the young" to accept Hopkins as "one of their contemporaries, and judged that "the misconception is glaring".<sup>78</sup> Abbott took as evidence to substantiate his claim Hopkins' patriotism and his preoccupation with nature. The shift here is, once again, to personal traits, and away from elements of technique. The constant vacillation between two approaches - often within the same critic's argument - is one of the causes of confusion in this kind of study. Incidentally, Hopkins' patriotism, undeniably a factor,

is tempered by the infamous 'red letter' of 2 August 1871 which, as we shall see, became at one point a major issue in critical debate.

C. Day Lewis modified the perspective he expounded in *A Hope for Poetry* in an article for the *New Republic* (22 May 1935): he suggested that Hopkins had the mind of a Victorian, as evinced by the letters, and the spirit of a medieval ascetic; but he insisted that his was the poetry of "the exile". While a poet like Eliot was "rootless", Hopkins suffered "the more terrible exile of the man born out of his time".<sup>79</sup>

Undoubtedly the letters shone a new, important light on Hopkins' character, his mind and his art. However, surprisingly few critics followed the line of Stonier and House. Rather, those who had been keen to welcome Hopkins' canon into their own company, predictably, used the volumes to work in arguments to their favour. C. Henry Warren found much to explain why, "of all poets, Hopkins is the most admired and studied by the younger, contemporary school":<sup>80</sup> his concern with poetic technique and his "unsentimental" and "exact" approach to nature.<sup>81</sup> Babette Deutsch also noted that "he was clean of Victorian sentimentality... as in his remark that he cannot stand Dickens' pathos".<sup>82</sup> Deutsch is perhaps overlooking some of Hopkins' own less satisfactory poems here - "Spring and Fall", for instance, and "The Handsome Heart", neither

of which completely elude the subtle snares of mawkishness.

G.M. Turnell placed Hopkins in the tradition of subjectivity in his poetry, perhaps implying something along the lines of Keats' 'negative capability'. While he conceded that Hopkins can be "often magnificently objective", he continued: "We cannot for this deny that Hopkins belongs clearly and definitely to the age that gave us Baudelaire, Proust and Eliot".<sup>83</sup>

Another point C. Henry Warren made in arguing for Hopkins' modernity was that of the so-called 'red letter' that Hopkins wrote to Bridges on 2nd August 1871.<sup>84</sup> It was to become a particularly dog-eared page. One anonymous writer in the December 1936 edition of the *Month*, referring to an article in *America* that disclosed the widespread misrepresentation of Hopkins as a communist,<sup>85</sup> felt it necessary to denounce the practice.<sup>86</sup> Babette Deutsch, however, believed that the letter, "presumably unknown to the young Communist poets when they began to model themselves on Hopkins, help[s] to clarify the attraction they feel toward him".<sup>87</sup> "For such sentiments", she added, "subtly vein his poetry",<sup>88</sup> sentiments that might have been congenial to the Auden generation, but were undoubtedly alien to earlier writers like Pound and Eliot.

During October and November of 1935, a series of

letters appeared in *G.K.'s Weekly* that dramatizes very clearly and appropriately the kind of critical divide that existed at this time. The argument was launched by an article by Bernard Kelly, in which he identified four traits that put Hopkins in touch with the moderns: "an aversion to pomposity, bombast and rhetoric... an intensely theological excitement wedded to the poetic excitement... his... close acquaintance with despair", and the quality of his sensibility which was such that "The joy in Hopkins is always at that point where a little more would be unbearable".<sup>89</sup>

Two men in particular, Victor Bennett and B.A. Young, made spectacles of themselves by mounting vicious attacks on Hopkins, by way of response to Kelly's article. Bennett's letter was ill-reasoned, claiming simultaneously that "no modern poet worth speaking of derives from him" and that "The tendency to looser form which he himself inherited has since ended in the verse which is formless".<sup>90</sup> B.A. Young was a little more imaginative, describing Hopkins' poetry as producing "an effect such as one might expect from Frankenstein's monster after a week's intensive browsing in the Complete Oxford Dictionary".<sup>91</sup> He concluded that "The twentieth century, which worships oddness for its own sake, accepts him as a major prophet; his own, a saner generation, ignored him".<sup>92</sup>

It is a self-consciously clever little remark, and

some might say that Young hasn't a tenth of the literary sensitivity of Mary Shelley's creation, but it would be unwise to dismiss the latter comment out of hand purely on this account. Despite its flippancy, it does warn of a potential danger in some critics' attitudes, and in poets who might be influenced by Hopkins. It is possible that they might have been drawn to him simply because he is such a blatantly peculiar poet. "Make it new" had been Pound's dictum, and much had been done by the new movement to rid literature of forms that had become invalid. However, a new form could just as easily be - or become - irrelevant clutter, and it is self-evidently counter-productive to destroy something only to replace it with something equally useless. More important to Hopkins' reputation and the growth of his stature as a truly great poet were the critics who indicated that they had a grasp of why Hopkins' poetic was so unusual, and were able to justify it and perhaps relate it to similar principles in the modernist poetic.

#### *Daiches' New Literary Values*

In 1936, an important book was published that was to help meet this need. In his *New Literary Values*, David Daiches suggested that the issue was more complex than simple "loyalty to a predecessor" in poetic composition; it was Hopkins' and the moderns' attitude to the poetic medium that formed a point of contact.<sup>93</sup>

Hopkins was straining after "a directness beyond that allowed by the formal syntactic use of language";<sup>94</sup> and Daiches found in the moderns "a new directness and an escape from the normal rhythms of English verse".<sup>95</sup> What they have in common is "impatience with the poetic medium" of their times.<sup>96</sup> Daiches traces all the features of Hopkins' verse - alliteration, tmesis, enjambements, coinages and so on - to this impatience, and "a desire to get behind syntax to a more cogent logic".<sup>97</sup> Daiches is here carrying out an analysis that seems to have been informed by recent philosophical inquiries into linguistics, studies that, obviously, would have been beyond Hopkins' ken. The issue is raised again of the limitations of language, and the loss of faith in the word, the *Logos*, and the growth of scepticism in this area of metaphysics.

Daiches also outlined the main difference between the moderns and Hopkins, which he saw as the contrast between Hopkins' imagination that was "to a very high degree sensuous", and the moderns who were more "intellectual".<sup>98</sup> Hopkins was more concerned with form, the moderns with content.<sup>99</sup> The "fresh, lyrical vein" of the Victorian is lost in the modern.<sup>100</sup> The latter point one may concede, but to suggest that Hopkins was more concerned with form than content is to do him a disservice. Perhaps it would be fairer to say that Hopkins kept a steadier balance than the moderns, who for the most part rejected prosody as irrelevant. Four

years later, in his *Poetry and the Modern World*, Daiches added another distinction: in the 1920's and 1930's, the problems were drawn from "the general state of culture"; Hopkins' problems are more personal.<sup>101</sup> *New Literary Values* provides us with one of the most clear-eyed views of Hopkins' position in poetic tradition, and it seemed to set the agenda for discussion in the years to come, covering the issue of lyricism, and the dialectics of the sensuous and the intellectual, and of form and content.

While some critics still argued strongly against the modernizing of Hopkins, most seemed unable to resist the direction of the flow of opinion, and acquiesced, sometimes, it seems, almost in spite of themselves. Ralph S. Walker, for instance, while determined to remind us that "he died as long ago as 1889", admitted that, while his "experience" was common to his age, his "peculiarly intimate way" of expressing "the spiritual perplexities of the ordinary individual in that age, at their acutest" isolated him.<sup>102</sup> Walker, a touch rhetorically, described the experience of turning from Hopkins' contemporaries to Hopkins himself as being "like stepping out of a warm, languid atmosphere into a keener air".<sup>103</sup>



### *The 1940's*

Moving into the next decade, many critics still preferred to view Hopkins as a displaced modern poet. In Ruth Bailey's *Dialogue on Modern Poetry*, he appeared as "the type of the Modern Poet".<sup>104</sup> Philip Henderson called him "a Victorian with a strangely modern sensibility".<sup>105</sup> "He was a Victorian. Yet he anticipated the poetry of half a century later", puzzled Robert Speaight. "That is the mystery".<sup>106</sup>

However, some did express doubts: Henry W. Wells suggested, a little cryptically, that Hopkins was still "probably many years in advance of our own times," but that "critics have been all too eager to assert his undoubted modernity".<sup>107</sup> And others insisted on exploring the Victorian and traditional strands in him. G.W. Stonier believed that if Hopkins "had not stifled the Keats in himself", he would have been a pre-Raphaelite.<sup>108</sup>

### *Hopkins as a Victorian*

Much debate now centred around Hopkins' cast of mind, as revealed, supposedly, in his published prose. Tillemans, in an article entitled 'Is Hopkins a Modern Poet?' (June 1942), found the confusion rooted in the dichotomy between the poetry and such literary remains

as the letters and the notebooks. While the modern poets found all the requirements of Imagist poetry in the form of Hopkins' verse, the content is markedly Victorian: "Hopkins' ideas are firmly rooted in the fertile soil of the Victorian period".<sup>109</sup> Tillemans argued that he is distinctly un-modern in his patriotism (attributed, a little eccentrically, to his love of the British landscape). He dismisses the 'red letter' by emphasising a couple of words in the confession: "*Horrible to say, in a manner I am a Communist*" (my italics).<sup>110</sup> And Tillemans insists that Hopkins was an imperialist, and one who believed that the worker was ruled by the social classes above him, rather than that authority being delegated upwards by the worker, the democratic ideal.<sup>111</sup>

As evidence of this, Tillemans cites "Tom's Garland", in what is perhaps a fairly superficial reading of this complex poem. However, Hopkins' politics are certainly in one sense reactionary - "the fools of Radical Levellers" he scorns in a letter to Bridges that provided a crib for "Tom's Garland".<sup>112</sup> In the same letter, he draws on a familiar argument that recalls *Coriolanus*:

"well-ordered human society is like one man; a body with many members and each its function; some higher, some lower, but *all honourable...* The head is the sovereign, who has no superior but God and from heaven receives his or her authority..." (my italics).<sup>113</sup>

However, certain critics, eager to use the 2 August 1871 letter as some kind of Communist Party membership card, need to understand the context and open their eyes to the rest of the evidence; what Hopkins wrote in the 'red letter' is nothing more than the cry of a conscience acutely aware of mankind's suffering, expressed in non-political and reasonable but heart-felt terms. In his next letter to Bridges (after a two and a half year gap), Hopkins protests quite justly at his friend's childish reaction, chiding him with wonderfully gentle irony for not replying:

"So far as I know I said nothing that might not be fairly said. If this was your reason for not answering it seemed to show a greater keenness about politics than is common".<sup>114</sup>

Recently, Robert Bernard Martin, in his biography of Hopkins, has suggested that the first letter had been a deliberate, perverse piece of mischief on Hopkins' part - he would have been fully able to predict that Bridges would have found the letter highly provocative.<sup>115</sup> This is an appealing scenario in some ways, although it belies the urgency and sincerity that seem to run in the undertone of the passage.

The evidence of the correspondence encouraged others to assert in strong terms the need to replace Hopkins in his correct, Victorian context. Terence Heywood referred to the popular view of Hopkins summed

up in C. Day Lewis' *A Hope for Poetry* (1934): that he had "entered the world by a kind of parthenogenesis".<sup>116</sup> Heywood describes this statement as "possibly excusable then, but hardly so now that the correspondence and notebooks have been published".<sup>117</sup> Heywood believed that Hopkins had not broken with tradition altogether, but had simply reached further back into the past. He considered the masculine quality in Hopkins' verse - "tykishness" - to be one of the key elements that set Hopkins apart from his contemporaries;<sup>118</sup> he also noted Browning as being perhaps the closest to him "in some respects".<sup>119</sup>

G.W. Stonier, one who had argued before against the concept of Hopkins as a modern, was another who felt that the letters gave Hopkins "his true setting as a Victorian among Victorians".<sup>120</sup> M.C. D'Arcy saw that Hopkins' adoption into the canon of modern poetry was due, to a large extent, to the fact that "Its freshness of style, its intellectual hardness, its piercing individualism of outlook suited the mood of the time";<sup>121</sup> he, too, believed that the letters and notebooks cast grave doubts on this displacement.<sup>122</sup> This seemed to be confirmed by Humphry House, who described the experience of reading Hopkins' work for the first time in the first edition of the poetry: "To those of us who were young in the twenties the voice and idiom... seemed to belong to a young contemporary".<sup>123</sup>

Geoffrey Bullough was keen to plant Hopkins more firmly back in his Victorian plot, where he felt he belonged. This led Bullough to rank him alongside Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson and Alice Meynell, finding a common "flash of ecstasy... dramatic force and variety [in] the lyric... impressionistic approach... growing consciousness of intellectual and social problems", and the abandonment of the archaicisms and artifices of the Pre-Raphaelite school.<sup>124</sup> Such a judgement is perhaps a little too content to gloss over the differences, to paint across the very wide gap that exists between Hopkins and these others. Setting aside their shared Catholicism, viewing their poetry merely as words upon a page, Hopkins seems even more peculiar, sitting more uncomfortably there than he would if set beside some twentieth century poets. One might argue for Hopkins the Victorian as regards his mind and personality, but the form of his art stubbornly refuses to slot easily into any of the categories of Victorian poetry.

This was the position that was to become customary now amongst the critics. The *Times Literary Supplement* was adamant that "the idea that our modern psychological conflicts make us sufficiently akin with [Hopkins] is ingenuous", but recognised him as "an inspired originator... in the forefront of poetry's unfolding", one who "broke through the decorous Victorian ranks".<sup>125</sup> Arthur Mizener, in the *Kenyon Review* (Autumn 1944) wrote

a generally well-received article entitled 'Victorian Hopkins'. Mizener made a good, if slightly over-generalized point that, in criticizing his contemporaries, Hopkins complained about tone and style, rather than about theme.<sup>126</sup> His "eccentricity, individualism" is marked as a "nineteenth century, and especially a British habit";<sup>127</sup> in the manner of the Oxford group, he "combined intense sensuousness and seriousness";<sup>128</sup> his "minute and objective observation of nature" makes his work parallel to that of Ruskin and Tennyson;<sup>129</sup> his interest in etymology connected him to Browning and Carlyle,<sup>130</sup> and the whole lexicography boom of the Victorian period. Mizener acknowledged that "the combination of... exactitude of image with the precision of his thought and structure" distinguished him from his fellow Victorians, but insisted nevertheless that the "consequences of studying Hopkins' poems anew in the light of the letters and notebooks is inescapable. It is a conviction that Hopkins is a Victorian."<sup>131</sup>

Reviews of several works at about this time showed a preoccupation with the issue of Hopkins' Victorianism: the biography by Eleanor Ruggles, W.H. Gardner's two volume work, the third edition of the poetry, and the collection of essays by the Kenyon critics. One or two writers still believed he transcended his era - "he not only touches but escapes from his age", wrote Herbert Marshall McLuhan.<sup>132</sup> Most, however, approved of Mizener's approach, mostly on the basis of the

correspondence. "It is clear from the letters that Hopkins himself was very much part of his period", wrote Harman Grisewood, "in the sense that, where they touched him, the events and personalities of it meant much to him".<sup>133</sup> R.G. Lienhardt agreed with the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer - the twentieth century's feeling of "universal disorder and disruption... belonged to an age and temperament as foreign to Hopkins as to Dryden".<sup>134</sup>

Grisewood modified his opinion a little in the following year, writing that while Hopkins was "liable, along with most of his Victorian contemporaries, to excessive and irrelevant moral judgements", still in much of his poetry, and especially in his literary criticism, "he belongs out of his period, to our own century rather than to his own".<sup>135</sup> Donald Davie agreed that "it is in his criticism that he is most plainly ahead of his time."<sup>136</sup>

W.H. Gardner's definitive study of Hopkins, strangely enough, did not address the issue of Hopkins' modernity in any confrontational fashion. The first volume contained a chapter entitled "Hopkins and Modern Poetry", but it was more concerned with Hopkins' direct influence on the new generation of poets, and did not attempt to identify similarities that might have suggested Hopkins was in any way chronologically displaced.<sup>137</sup> Gardner's thesis entailed a thorough examination of Hopkins' poetic roots, and he found

precedents for some of the Jesuit's oddities in poets from the past, Shakespeare in particular, amongst many others.

Gardner showed a greater range of knowledge and depth of understanding of Hopkins' poetic roots than any other critic. While recognising that, "in an age of diffused Romanticism, he broke through the hidebound literary tradition, restoring to poetry something like the fluidity and resourcefulness of Elizabethan English", he was also conscious of Hopkins' debt to tradition.<sup>138</sup> Gardner does remark of the fragment "Moonrise" that "in the year 1915, [it] would have passed for an Imagist poem... Hopkins was one with those poets in striving to put meaning before suggestion and sound".<sup>139</sup> But in general Gardner is more concerned with exploring the poet's idiosyncrasies and attempting to identify possible causes and precedents. He sees Hopkins as a Victorian set apart from his contemporaries; but then, for Gardner, Hopkins would be no more comfortable in any other company. In this sense he would probably agree with C.C. Abbott that "Hopkins is free of all ages and entombed by none",<sup>140</sup> a remark that inevitably brings Shakespeare to mind.

In 1952, F.R. Leavis' *The Common Pursuit* was published, and in one chapter Leavis laid a forceful challenge to the insistence upon Hopkins' Victorianism.



As he had done before, Leavis expounded his theory of Hopkins as a metaphysical poet;<sup>141</sup> he resisted the Victorian tendency to separate thought and feeling, and developed "a habit of seeing things as charged with significance".<sup>142</sup> Leavis, however, was careful to note that Hopkins is still unlike Herbert, Crashaw and other poets of that period. He also recognised that Hopkins failed to "transcend the poetic climate of his age", and so, despite the power of his originality, he was unable to break away from the role of nature poet.<sup>143</sup> This last point is debatable. The labelling of Hopkins as a nature poet is one that does a disservice to the range of his verse, and the importance of the religious dimension. However, it is characteristic of Leavis to reduce the significance of the spiritual, and thus betray an at best myopic, and at worst insincere perception of the poet.

### *The 1950's and 1960's*

During the 1950's and 1960's, critics divided into three main factions as the topic of his Victorianism - or lack of it - became the central issue in Hopkins criticism: most argued for a reassessment that would return Hopkins to his correct chronological position; a few continued to assert his modernity, while the rest, usually working at a greater depth of complexity, saw both elements co-existing.

Those who argued for Hopkins' modernity with little or no compromise tended to target their assault on a patch of critical ground that seemed beyond recovery: so William Henry Hudson declared that the poetry would have been unwelcome in Hopkins' own time - a familiar theory that had been popular in the 1930's - since the Victorians did not favour this kind of "intellectual complexity" and "spiritual probing".<sup>144</sup> Hopkins' verse did not glide smoothly over "a surface of appearances", but acted instead "as a rock-drill driving down into realities".<sup>145</sup>

Elizabeth Jennings attempted to define the nature of Hopkins' approach in less colourful but more careful terms than Hudson had, and saw it in terms of a turning inward on the part of the poet himself.<sup>146</sup> This is the reason why Hopkins "is regarded as a master of modernity".<sup>147</sup> This is an odd critical position; many would suggest that a "turning inward" had begun with poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge, and would certainly consider it a characteristic of Tennyson and Arnold, for example. Incidentally, Jennings' note that Hopkins shows no sign of the separation of thought and feeling - Eliot's 'dissociation of sensibility' - reminds us of Leavis' account in *The Common Pursuit*.

Frederick J. Hoffman pursued this line of detection a little further, framing his discussion in more philosophical terms. In an article entitled 'The

Religious Crisis in Modern Literature' (1966), he writes:

"The creator of the twentieth century regards external reality as somehow... the product of his own creativity. Hence, if the object is dependent upon the subject, in a strange and confusing sense, God is not only created in man's image but depends for his substance on the mind of man".<sup>148</sup>

This may remind us of the two pillars of Hopkins' aesthetics - inscape and instress, the focussed view of a pattern discerned in the world, the inner form of that pattern, and the power that holds the inscapes of the universe together, and brings one into contact with another. The notion of subjectivity, the beholder and the object beheld, has occurred earlier in this chapter - Harman Grisewood commented that the view that "the object for poetry is not the thing seen but the seeing of it" is one with which Hopkins would have agreed.<sup>149</sup> But this reflexiveness, and distinction between the objective and the subjective is in any case one that strikes us as modern. However, we should also bear in mind the markedly agnostic, or atheistic twist to Hoffman's line of thought, which Hopkins would obviously have found anathema.

Others saw his modernity as something that was actually triggered by his response to the Victorian poetic climate. This is the implication in Stephen Spender's *The Struggle of the Modern* (1963), where he

writes that "The modern arises from the need to express a situation outside and beyond the present time in imagery which is of the time".<sup>150</sup> It was "the intensity of his lived experience and the pressure of surrounding life" that forced him to invent a new idiom.<sup>151</sup>

A number of esteemed Hopkins critics, however, took up arms against those who sought to establish the Victorian in the modern canon. It was their view that, to quote Humphry House, Hopkins had been "wrenched out of context and distorted by ephemeral and propagandist judgement".<sup>152</sup> The whole structure of his "thought and imagery" proves that he does not belong to the modern age.<sup>153</sup>

For the most part, the focus for these writers was on the Victorianisms of Hopkins' thought, in line with the publication of more prose works, the journals and notebooks, and the sermons and devotional writings. Herman Peschmann, for instance, saw Hopkins' dismissal of the Homeric gods as unfit matter for poetry as symptomatic of his Victorian moralism.<sup>154</sup> Derek Stanford agreed that Hopkins was "a cultural offspring of his time".<sup>155</sup> Jim Hunter thought that religious fervour and resultant psychological tensions, and patriotic fervour, were all characteristically Victorian, at least in opposition to Modernism. The first two elements are beyond dispute; the patriotism is more debatable, but Hunter is convinced that it is "an

emotion of some importance" in Hopkins, and he cites *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and "The Soldier" as examples.<sup>156</sup>

Ilftud Evans believed that the publication of Hopkins' journals and sermons reminded us of the Victorian priest "with all their clutter of trivial odds and ends, their "Victorian nostalgia".<sup>157</sup> When John Wain stated that Hopkins "had no dealings with the nineteenth century except that for forty-five years he drew breath in it"<sup>158</sup> (a rather grotesque turn of phrase), W.H. Gardner countered that "for the attentive reader of *Journals and Papers*", it is difficult to agree.<sup>159</sup> The prose works are indeed valuable documents that open up new vistas on Hopkins' character. However, the emphasis laid on them by some critics seems to me to be misjudged: it is really no surprise at all to find Hopkins' letters and journals detailing breakfast parties at Oxford, or the comforts of his father's house in Hampstead. We are not startled by the idea that Hopkins' etymological interest was a typical late Victorian pursuit,<sup>160</sup> or to discover strains of imperialism and reactionary politics in his social perspective. The novelty of the form of the poetry itself - and, arguably, his choice and treatment of the content - is what lifts Hopkins out from amongst his contemporaries. Once again, the issue is raised of what the proper criteria for a decision on this matter really are.

Three writers in particular produced penetrating arguments and sustained attacks on the pro-modern stronghold. Alan Heuser's *The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1958) examined closely Hopkins' aesthetics in particular, and concluded that "In both art and religion Hopkins was closely linked with his times".<sup>161</sup> According to Heuser, Hopkins was a pre-Raphaelite without the Victorian limitations - "divorce of ideal theory and practical vision", "archaic diction", and "an effeminacy of exotic forms".<sup>162</sup> His aesthetic theory was a blend of Ruskin, Pater, Plato and Pythagorean mathematics.<sup>163</sup>

Francis Noel Lees devoted a fairly substantial section of text to the issue of Hopkins' modernity in his book *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1966). The theological construct in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is seen to be Victorian in its examination of God, Providence, and suffering and evil.<sup>164</sup> Lees also pointed out the strain of "Victorian patriotism", and the documentary 'feel' to the poem - "In responding promptly to the newspaper accounts of the wreck... Hopkins was very much of his time".<sup>165</sup> At the same time, Lees acknowledged the breakthrough of sprung rhythm (even though "The style was old rather than new"),<sup>166</sup> and the succession of the direct, "spontaneously engendered feelings" that were expressed in the verse, rather than Victorian "exposition, reflection and argument".<sup>167</sup>

Certainly there is very often this sense of immediacy to Hopkins' work, contrasting perhaps, as has been discussed earlier, with Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquillity". However, it is also important not to overlook the fact that Hopkins often conceals tight, highly-organized structures of thought and imagery beneath the surface of the poetry. The notion of this kind of construction is not lost in Hopkins as it is in much modern poetry.

In 1968, Wendell Stacy Johnson published a study with the uncompromising title *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Poet as Victorian*. According to Johnson, "'I am' was the great Romantic assertion; 'Who am I?' is the great Victorian question".<sup>168</sup> Disguise, ambivalence and ambiguity infect the imagery, the feeling of self-consciousness is all-pervasive. Johnson believes that this gets to the heart of inscape, the unique individuality of the self. This is reflected in the relationship with the natural world, and the mind becomes a landscape ("No worst, there is none"), the spirit becomes a bird ("The Sea and the Skylark"). *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is seen in terms of a cyclical journey, from the self, to the world, and back to the self, and is placed alongside works like *Sartor Resartus*, *In Memoriam*, *Great Expectations* and *Middlemarch*.<sup>169</sup>

Other themes are noted as being particularly

Victorian - the theme of the triumph of time; "In Hopkins' dappled world there is almost never a living thing that does not show the seeds of its mortality";<sup>170</sup> Johnson lists "Binsey Poplars", "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire", "Spring and Fall" and "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" as examples. The notion of the Victorian child - more victim than visionary according to Johnson - is to be found in "Spring and Fall".<sup>171</sup> One could suggest other poems such as "The Bugler's First Communion" and "The Brothers" as other examples, good evidence of that Victorian sentimentality of which Babette Deutsch considered him to be "clean".<sup>172</sup> Johnson concludes that Hopkins often ordered "idea, plot, iconography and tone" in a manner "quite remarkable for his period". However, he insisted that Hopkins' subject matter was quite definitely "the themes of his period".<sup>173</sup>

Perhaps the critical perspective that is most enlightening is that which portrays Hopkins' mind as being fed, and at the same time buffeted, by a spiritual and intellectual environment that part of him revolted against. Walter J. Ong, for instance, reviewing a number of books including Heuser's *Shaping Vision*, found in this study the "contemporary Victorian matrix for Hopkins' work, so long neglected, laid open expertly".<sup>174</sup> Ong believed that the Hopkins that emerged from the pages of the journals and devotional



writings was one "more pre-eminently Victorian than ever and more modern, a man who precisely because of his profound and uninhibited reaction to the intellectual and artistic forces of his own time finds himself projected as a living force into the second half of the twentieth century".<sup>175</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Much of the complexity in unravelling Hopkins' validity as a Modernist or as a Victorian stems from the fact that the critics themselves have failed to provide any kind of definition, or to establish criteria, on which to judge the issue. Of course, any attempt to define 'Victorianism' or 'Modernism' is doomed to collapse under the strain of the tensions that have to be contained within such generalizations. However, more critically, there has been a failure to make distinction between criteria of form and content - or poetic technique and personality - and it is this that has fuelled much of the debate, usually producing more heat than light.

If we are to come to any kind of mature understanding of Hopkins' relation to his past and the future into which he was so unnaturally propelled, we must begin to see the relationship between these two issues, and the manner in which Hopkins is kept in

tension between the two centuries. Inner pressures drove him to find new forms of expression for his thoughts and emotions. In the final analysis, it is perhaps providential that Hopkins was not published until some time after his death. For as Donald McChesney points out, "It is only perhaps because the twentieth century understands more of the states of mind to which Hopkins... was exposed, that it is beginning to see the organic connection between those states and the tense taut language" in which they were incarnated.<sup>176</sup>

CHAPTER IX: "INNOVATOR AND LIBERATOR"HOPKINS' INFLUENCE*Introduction*

One major strand of discussion and contention that runs through this fifty year period of Hopkins criticism lies in a survey of the influence he has exerted over twentieth century poets. To oversimplify the case, for the sake of a clear overview at the outset, four broad perspectives are evident: firstly, investigations of evidence of direct influence on individual poets (covered in the next chapter); secondly, examinations of the effect Hopkins' example has had on style and technique in modern poetry; discussions concerned with assessing the influence on content as opposed to form; and finally, closely bound to all three, opinions as to whether the influence has been for good or ill.

In this chapter, we shall see how these strands are woven through the period 1918-1970, sometimes with one dominant, always with some degree of tension in dissent and debate. It is an area that has provoked much strong feeling, and also one where it is possible to trace some quite distinct development of opinion.

### *First Publication*

The most interesting thing about the earliest reactions to Hopkins' work - that is, to the first edition of the poetry published in 1918 - is the general lack of excitement. As has been noted in earlier chapters, a sense of astonishment and confusion was dominant, and certainly it is true that hardly anyone had any notion of how important this slim, modest volume would become. John Middleton Murry, for example, was convinced that Hopkins was, and "must remain", "a poet's poet".<sup>1</sup> Edward Shanks was in agreement: "it is too rare and difficult for the ordinary reader to make much of it";<sup>2</sup> Shanks added that he could envisage a situation where "a few poets will discover, absorb and render again the little which Hopkins has to offer to English verse, either in new rhythms or the free and vigorous use of epithet".<sup>3</sup> In these remarks, he accurately predicted two of the elements in Hopkins' work that would be important for future poets, but he is sceptical, and seems to have no conception of the width of influence Hopkins would come to exert.

One exception to this general rule was a review that appeared in *The Tablet*, 5 April 1919, written by Geoffrey Bliss. This item is remarkable both for its insight and foresight. For Bliss recognizes that there is essentially nothing new in sprung rhythm, and yet he understands that, paradoxically, "this poetry is a new

poetry", pointing out its "identity of sound and sense" as unique.<sup>4</sup> Bliss also glimpses the radical aspect of Hopkins' sprung rhythm, even if it is a revolution achieved by a return to ancient precedent: "we think that Hopkins has made the beginning of a breach in the walls of the impossible", he concludes. "Let it be for others to break through".<sup>5</sup>

Twelve years passed between the publication of the first volume and the appearance of the second edition. It is remarkable that, while reactions to the 1918 edition had been muted, with sales very slow, the 1930 edition was greeted with major reviews on both sides of the Atlantic. What had happened between 1918 and 1930 to warrant such a change in attitude on the part of the critics?

An article Dylan Thomas wrote for the *Swansea Grammar School Magazine*, just prior to the publication of the second edition of Hopkins' poems, provides a clue: the "freedom" characterizing poetical modernity - freedom "of form, of structure, of imagery and idea" - Thomas acknowledges - "had its roots" in Hopkins, where "the language was violated and estranged by the efforts of compressing the already unfamiliar imagery".<sup>6</sup> Jim Hunter, writing in 1966, points out a sentence in Charles Williams' introduction to the second edition - "It is true that we cannot make haste when we are reading [Hopkins], but that is what helps to make him

difficult" - and remarks how the word "difficult" here "seems to be an almost unqualified term of praise".<sup>7</sup> This is a neat, clear sign of that change we have already noticed that had been wrought in English verse and criticism during the nineteen-twenties; under the influence of Eliot, Pound and others, and with the rediscovery of the seventeenth century Metaphysical poets, words such as "obscure" no longer had negative connotations; rather, this kind of difficulty had become something to be cultivated by poets and praised by critics.

### *1930: Reassessment*

The 1930 edition provided an opportunity for an assessment of the impact Hopkins had had on poetry up to that point. Most critics recognised the prominent position Hopkins held in respect to contemporary poets - "I know of no young poet of talent in this country today whose face is not turned to him", wrote Stanley Kunitz.<sup>8</sup> Isidor Schneider pointed to the work of Bridges, and Hart Crane's "The Bridge" for evidence of "the present benefits of Hopkins's liberating and enriching experiments".<sup>9</sup> Another reviewer named Auden as one who stemmed "directly from Hopkins".<sup>10</sup> Schneider, along with Morton Dauwen Zabel (writing in the periodical *Poetry* later that year), hoped that the influence Hopkins was bound to exert would be in his example, that

he would "stimulate and encourage other poets along the paths of their own individuality",<sup>11</sup> teach the future poet his "ideals of integrity and pure creative ardour".<sup>12</sup> Both seemed to recognise the potential dangers lurking in the shadows of such an idiosyncratic model. C.C. Abbott, who would later edit the Hopkins correspondence, also distinguished between influence and imitation - the former had been for the good, he acknowledged, but "as a model... he is likely to prove dangerous".<sup>13</sup>

The occasional dissenting voice should be noted: the *New York Times* reviewer, for instance, in 1930, saw the enthusiasm for Hopkins as nothing more than "a modern fad" for being different.<sup>14</sup> But at this point, the tide of opinion was definitely in favour of the notion of Hopkins as an important influence, and the dissenters were obtrusive by their paucity. The beginning of the nineteen-thirties, then, witnessed a complete transformation in critical opinion, from admissions in 1918 and 1919 that the occasional poet might feel Hopkins' influence, to a proclamation such as this, from Herbert Read, capturing the atmosphere of enthusiasm: that, in the coming years, "no influence will rank in importance with that of Gerard Manley Hopkins".<sup>15</sup>

*Influence: Poetic Form*

During the nineteen-thirties, the acknowledgement of Hopkins' influence became more widespread, more self-assured, and it also tended to separate into two distinct notions of the exact nature of the influence; in the first case, form dominated, with a critic usually concentrating either on diction or on metre. F.R. Leavis' important essay on Hopkins in *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) took a less strident tone than some, but did state that "no-one can come from studying [Hopkins'] work without an extended notion of the resources of English".<sup>16</sup> E.E. Phare, who published the first major study devoted to the poetry of Hopkins, declared that there was no Victorian "whose actual accomplishment in modifying our poetical vocabulary is comparable to his".<sup>17</sup> F.W. Bateson expressed a similar view in a book published in the following year (1934), noting Hopkins (along with Housman) as being the major figure contributing to "the one indisputable achievement of post-War poetry - its catholicity of diction".<sup>18</sup>

Other critics focussed instead on the theory and practice of sprung rhythm as being Hopkins' major contribution: R.L. Mégroz, for instance, believed that this new system of prosody had rendered "the discarding of rhyme, stanza and other prosodic resources of poetry quite an unnecessary means to freshness".<sup>19</sup> Muriel



Kent, reviewing the second edition of the poems, noted that the "influence of Hopkins's style... has been traced in more than one volume" of contemporary poetry;<sup>20</sup> and G.F. Lahey, Hopkins' first biographer, referred to his influence on "the texture and form" of English verse "over the past fifteen years" - this article was published in 1933.<sup>21</sup>

### *Influence: Content*

However, this was not the only kind of influence that critics were now tracing. As the turmoil of the Great War receded into the middle distance, its economic, social, cultural and spiritual consequences became clearer, and the passing of time allowed some sense of perspective to be brought to bear. Now, just as critics had begun to realise that there were certain qualities and characteristics that distinguished Hopkins from the majority of Victorian artists, so they began to see how his influence extended far beyond mere style and technicalities of poetic method. This is the second case, where content was seen as more significant than form.

At a first glance, perhaps, it would seem that no poet was less likely to be congenial to the early twentieth century than this deeply, strictly religious man who had eschewed the relative broad-mindedness of

Anglicanism for the rigours of the Jesuit order. However, it was the opinion of Michael Roberts, amongst others, that modern poets were in fact searching for a system of belief, and that consequently the best of them were "metaphysical and (in the widest sense) religious", looking to Hopkins and T.S. Eliot as "a starting-point".<sup>22</sup> Roberts sees them building a new faith, seeking to escape "desperate insecurity" and answer the question: "how can we prove that anything at all is valuable?"<sup>23</sup> Bernard Kelly saw Hopkins' qualities of "sincerity, intensity and actuality of psychological fact" as being attractive to young poets of the post-War period.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps also the impression of Hopkins being an outsider, both as a poet and as a personality, was another factor in this attraction.

Herbert Read, on the other hand, recognised that both form and content had contributed to Hopkins' significance as a literary precedent: he believed that Hopkins had "made a calculable impression" with his example in his use of alliteration and sprung rhythm, but also that he had had a "latent" influence, "breathing into the ear of every poet open to the rhythms of contemporary life, the music of our existence, and the tragedy of our fate".<sup>25</sup> Read's style here, unfortunately, is rhetorical, clouding the issue, but he seems to have recognized a connection between the extreme states of mind mapped in much of Hopkins' work and his radical new technique - and he believed that

both were congenial to the post-War poets. The idea that form and content are inseparable in Hopkins' work is an issue that will recur and form a basis for much negative criticism of those who imitated Hopkins' style.

One of the most important books, after *New Bearings*, published at this time was C. Day Lewis's *A Hope for Poetry* (1934). Lewis was one of the most pre-eminent poets of the period, and his book was seen almost as a manifesto for the movement known as the 'thirties poets', a set that also included Stephen Spender and W.H. Auden. What is more, Lewis was a poet who displayed quite brazenly the debt his work owed to Hopkins. Lewis' thesis included the concept of a two-stranded revolution in English poetry - firstly, the revolution in diction, beginning with Wordsworth, which brought poetry closer to the common language used in speech and prose. And secondly, a paradoxical movement in metre away from common speech toward "incantation", while retaining rhythms based on common speech.<sup>26</sup> This latter revolution he attributed to Hopkins. According to Lewis, post-War poetry takes both strands of this development, for it consists of "common speech rhythms together with a mixture of simplified, superficially un-'poetical' language and highly poetical incantatory language".<sup>27</sup> Lewis also pointed out how some of Hopkins' poetical devices, such as alliteration, internal assonance and repetition were popular amongst his generation.<sup>28</sup>

### *Publication of the Correspondence*

Hopkins' correspondence was published in 1935, and the reviewers took the opportunity to make an assessment of Hopkins' stature, both as a poet in his own right, and as a literary influence. Opinions varied from disapprobation to the fervour of those enthusiasts who perhaps tended to overestimate his importance: Bonamy Dobrée considered him an influence "almost universally felt" within ten years of the publication of the 1918 edition of the poems;<sup>29</sup> the reviewer writing in *Commonweal* considered Hopkins' impact to be "greater than that of all but the most influential of living poets" (presumably Eliot and Pound);<sup>30</sup> the anonymous reviewer in *Life and Letters* considered his example "one of the most valuable contributions to modern English prosody".<sup>31</sup> And a critic as distinguished as Herbert Read considered that sprung rhythm had brought about "a renaissance of English poetry", adding somewhat over-zealously that "before another generation has passed I doubt if any other measure but sprung rhythm will be in use".<sup>32</sup>

Several reviewers investigated the nature of the influence in greater depth, attempting to establish why the young poets of the preceding decades had taken Hopkins so eagerly to their bosom. The light thrown on Hopkins' character and his art by the published letters

no doubt assisted these investigations. For instance, Bonamy Dobrée thought that the most valuable lesson the young poets could learn from Hopkins' example lay in "the amazingly high standards he set himself, and others, in poetry".<sup>33</sup> To an extent, this quality is self-evident in Hopkins' verse, in its highly-wrought artistry, but it is certainly borne out by the letters; one remembers his discourse on what he dubbed "Parnassian" poetry; and his painstaking, often unrelentingly harsh criticism of the work of his correspondents, Robert Bridges and Walter Pater.

Perhaps the notion that poetic diction should be "current language heightened" inspired Desmond McCarthy's comment in a *Sunday Times* article that "his insistence on sincerity and on the importance of using living words and phrases in poetry or prose are qualities which make Hopkins influential today".<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Hopkins' notion of bringing poetry closer to the rhythm of speech was picked up by Desmond McCarthy as "part of the same effort to get closer to a contemporary and natural rhythm of thought and feeling" which he thought had inspired contemporary poets.<sup>35</sup>

Bernard Kelly, an enthusiastic Hopkins critic, admitted that the Victorian's influence had not always been fortunate, but pointed out that Hopkins' maxim had always been to "admire and do otherwise", so that "the blame for the bad Hopkinese can hardly rest with him".<sup>36</sup>

Kelly provided one of the most penetrating examinations of Hopkins' appeal to twentieth century poets to this date, listing his "aversion to pomposity, bombast and rhetoric", "an intensely theological excitement wedded to the poetic excitement", "his own close acquaintance with despair", and the "quality of his sensibility" where "the joy is always at the point where a little more would be unbearable", as the qualities most congenial to modern poets.<sup>37</sup>

Larsson, the *Commonweal* reviewer, considered that Hopkins' influence extended beyond technique to "ideology".<sup>38</sup> And C. Henry Warren believed that the pages of the newly-published correspondence made the reasons for his attraction "abundantly clear: His attitude to nature... is completely after the heart of the poets of today..." He is "unsentimental... exact ...", and, what is more, expressed "Communist" sympathies in the infamous 'red letter' of 2nd August 1871.<sup>39</sup>

On the matter of this political aspect, Theodore Maynard has something to say. Unlike Larsson, writing two months earlier in the same periodical, he believed that "So far the influence of the Jesuit has been purely technical", while conceding that, if any degree of attention was paid to the content of his verse, then the young poets would "not find any very deep gulf fixed between Communism and Catholicism".<sup>40</sup> Much was made of

Hopkins' political leanings at this time, but such suggestions as Maynard's were vigorously refuted by other critics and poets. Indeed, despite the 'red letter' and the sentiments underpinning such poems as "Tom's Garland" and others, Hopkins tended to follow quite orthodox political views, evidently supporting, for instance, Victorian imperialism. A full examination of critical debate over the 'red letter' can be found in Chapter VIII (pp.243-4).

Certain critics pointed out instances of Hopkins' influence on individual poets - Stanley Kunitz, writing in the *Wilson Bulletin*, referred to attempts at emulating Hopkins' "tremor of expectancy" in Auden, Spender and Lewis;<sup>41</sup> Maynard gave examples of places where sprung rhythm had been adopted by all three;<sup>42</sup> G.M. Young gave an example of direct influence on C. Day Lewis;<sup>43</sup> and another critic, Victor Bennett, saw Hopkins as "the missing link between Keats and Mr. Joyce".<sup>44</sup> And C. Day Lewis himself essentially admitted to the influence in his own review of the correspondence in the politically left-of-centre *New Republic*, writing that sprung rhythm was "one of his best gifts to posterity... the increasing use of which by later poets justifies his claim to be numbered among the technical innovators in verse".<sup>45</sup>

One or two critics, on the publication of the second edition of the poems, actually echoed the

negative sentiments popular earlier in the decade, their articles varying in the strength of their disapprobation. Basil De Selincourt was one, deploring the practice of novices imitating Hopkins without seeming to have any idea "what exultations, what renunciations, what agonies went to the formation of his style".<sup>46</sup> Perhaps the problem here was that, while Hopkins' verse was often the tortured act of a self-tortured soul, the lesser poets of the 'twenties and 'thirties, while recognising that such radical techniques in prosody and diction were congenial to the spirit of their own age, did not feel it in the way that Hopkins did; thus their work lacks the tang of authenticity and becomes mere pale imitation.

### *Negative Responses*

Two articles in particular stood out from the rest in their antagonistic attitude towards Hopkins and his admirers. One is just a letter, written in response to Bernard Kelly's enthusiastic article in *G.K.'s Weekly*, which stated bluntly that "Father Hopkins died in 1889 and no modern poet worth speaking of derives from him".<sup>47</sup> Bennett's letter argued that "the tendency to looser form which he himself inherited has since ended in the verse which is formless".<sup>48</sup> It is at this point that he contradicts himself, for he acknowledges that Hopkins is a link in the chain running down to



"formless" verse, but at the same time he contends that Hopkins has influenced "no modern poet worth speaking of". We can only assume, then, that Bennett considers the writers of modern free verse unworthy of discussion.

G.M. Young launched a more coherent and sustained assault on Hopkins in an article written some eight months earlier, in February 1935, and published in *Life and Letters*, under the title 'Tunes Ancient and Modern'. Here, Young propounds a thesis linking Hopkins to Bridges and Doughty, claiming that they instigated a new metre in English verse. However, believing rhythm to be "a function of the dominant speech habit of a whole race", he argued that "it cannot [therefore] be changed by any individual", or small group of individuals. He concluded that "in their main principle Hopkins and those who derive from him are entirely wrong".<sup>49</sup> Young represents that school of critics who continued to hold out against the free-flight experimentation of younger poets, whether under the shadow of the likes of Eliot and Pound, or the radical political 'thirties poets' headed by Auden, Lewis and Spender - those seen as lying in a direct line of descent from Hopkins. Young argued his case from a close prosodic analysis of Hopkins' technique, and the two main points on which he challenges sprung rhythm are the paeon (where a foot consists of one long syllable and three short occurring in random order) and the collision of stress that Hopkins considered permissible, and which contributed to

the effect of a natural speech rhythm. Young believed that Hopkins' counterpoint "tears through the tune altogether: his rhythm is sprung until it founders".<sup>50</sup>

Young is one of only a handful of critics who take time and great pains to mount a well-considered and systematic attack upon Hopkins, and in particular Hopkins' prosody, the more popular method of disapprobation being to pick up, lazily, Bridges' superficial criticisms such as "oddity" and "obscurity" and to ridicule the most daring of Hopkins' experiments. Certainly we can concede that, in places, the rhythm is, one might say, "oversprung". However, it surely betrays an inveterate, stubborn deafness to Hopkins' music to condemn sprung rhythm as a system on that account.

However, as we have seen, Young's antagonism was the exception at this point in time: though many regretted the efforts of Hopkins' imitators, all but a very few agreed that his effect on English poetry had been a liberating one, and one that was destined to persist. Furthermore, some critics and reviewers were keen to point out how Hopkins had, in many ways, spoken words that echoed, or rather prefigured the spirit of the early twentieth century, and in a voice that rang sharp and clear some forty years or more after his death.

*The Turning Tide*

It is over the next couple of years that the tide of opinion turns against Hopkins. Perhaps inspired by the publication of the letters in 1935, and by the heated debate that followed, several critics published articles that tackled the issue of Hopkins' influence, and other writers debated it in full-length studies. David Daiches published his important work *New Literary Values* in 1936, and in it he devoted a good deal of space to an investigation of the problem.

Daiches acknowledged the significance of sprung rhythm - "highly important in its liberating effect on English metre since 1918"<sup>51</sup> - and also saw a similar situation that existed both for Hopkins and for the moderns - an impatience with generally accepted form. However, according to Daiches, by clinging so tightly to Hopkins as a liberator, the poets unfortunately finished in a new kind of slavery, a bondage to Hopkins' example; they ended up merely "superimposing crude Hopkinsesque fragments on to an alien style".<sup>52</sup> Daiches picked up on Hopkins' own description of his obscurity, and the notion that the meaning of difficult lines should "explode" on a second or third reading. Daiches accuses Hopkins' imitators of "not perhaps grasping his principle of explosive meaning at all, fail[ing] even

more frequently to achieve any kind of intelligibility".<sup>53</sup> He pointed out several ways in which Hopkins differed from contemporary poets - their sense is more intellectual, less tactile and more visual than Hopkins'; Hopkins has a gift for "neutralising words in foreign contexts" (for example, his use of the word "behaviour" in describing the clouds in "Hurrahing in Harvest"); he is more concerned with form, the moderns with content; and, despite his preoccupation with technique, Hopkins "retained the ability to sing, which the moderns seem to have lost through overmuch self-consciousness".<sup>54</sup> Having examined some examples of Hopkins' influence on Auden, C. Day Lewis and T.H. White, Daiches concluded by acknowledging Hopkins' contribution to English prosody in inventing a valid and valuable new metric, while regretting the work of the post-War poets, spurred on by the Victorian precedent to "go to strange lengths in their desire for immediacy of expression".<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps the lukewarm attitude of W.B. Yeats to Hopkins had some effect on writers at this time - Yeats was no great admirer of Hopkins, although he grudgingly admitted that sprung rhythm "has given new vitality to much contemporary verse".<sup>56</sup> Other reviewers began to cast some shadows of doubt over the reputation that had been built up around Hopkins' posthumous publications - Egerton Clarke, in the *Dublin Review*, announced that his influence "was not nearly so extensive or real as is

generally supposed". Like many others, he believed that "the genuine Hopkins technique cannot thrive apart from the philosophy to which it is so intimately bound".<sup>57</sup> Harris Downey saw his influence as being strictly limited to technique, but at the same time he admitted that Hopkins had proved that "the rhythm of speech is the rhythm of the best poetry".<sup>58</sup> However, even this discovery he would not attribute solely to Hopkins. It was his opinion that Hopkins only gave impetus to a change that "would doubtless have come anyway".<sup>59</sup> He listed Auden, C. Day Lewis, Charles Madge, James Joyce and E.E. Cummings as being under his influence, and also added a note on the issue of the 'red letter', which he saw as merely the strong expressions of a humanitarian churchman rather than the considered words of a political radical - a far more sensible and level-headed treatment of this issue.<sup>60</sup>

G.M. Young, having launched one powerful attack on Hopkins' prosody, followed it with an article 'Forty Years of Verse', published in the December 1936 edition of the *London Mercury*. He again announced that Hopkins' views on metre were "demonstrably wrong", and his influence "as pernicious as it had been potent".<sup>61</sup> He displayed his dusty traditionalist credentials once more with irritable remarks such as, "much subsequent verse has run into the Hopkins siding and got stuck there, while the mainline is bare of traffic"; and gloomy predictions that the next edition of the *Oxford Book of*

Verse might be subtitled "The End of an Old Song".<sup>62</sup>

Not many critics took such an extreme position as Young, although Cornelius Weygandt thought Hopkins' value as an originator of new effects had been "overemphasized", and was also concerned that his style was peculiar to his own "unusual circumstances", and "tortured but vital personality", and so not an advisable model for imitation.<sup>63</sup> Similar opinions were expressed by other critics (Hildegarde Flanner wrote that "true originality must be honoured by true originality not by imitation")<sup>64</sup> and poets (Louis MacNeice noted that "some poets tend to imitate the Hopkins letter while being miles away from the Hopkins spirit").<sup>65</sup> Edith Sitwell, characteristically crusty, considered his influence to have been "all to the bad" - "it is useless to try to form a technique from the outside".<sup>66</sup> Incidentally, she links Hopkins with Browning and Walt Whitman and names them as the three who formed "the youngest generation of our poets".<sup>67</sup> The anonymous reviewer in the *Oxford Magazine*, reviewing the *Journals and Notebooks*, noted with great distaste and condescension, the "unfledged poets and versifiers" who made "great play with Hopkins' eccentricities".<sup>68</sup>

Several critics, while not expressing such obvious disapproval of the influence Hopkins had exerted, nevertheless cast a doubtful eye over the authenticity of that influence. Laurence Binyon, for instance,

reviewing the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* edited by Yeats, suggested that it was Bridges' experimentation in sprung rhythm that initiated a broadening of outlook on prosody. In this way the audience was primed for the extreme originality of Hopkins' own poetry - that which had inspired Bridges in the first place - when he was published in 1918.<sup>69</sup>

Others, while admitting that some of the reverberations on Hopkins' impact on English poetry had been unpleasant, defended Hopkins, pointing out how the concept of poetry as nothing more than "rhythmic prose" or "prose bewitched" is in "direct defiance" of Hopkins' own principles.<sup>70</sup> These remarks, from C.K. Ogden's article in the periodical *Psyche*, were written as a defence against Young's attack in the *London Mercury*.

Although some kind of reversal of Hopkins' fortunes, then, is noticeable in the criticism of these years 1936 and 1937, some writers continued to see him as "a bearer of new life in English poetry" in his "insistence upon poetic sincerity and immediacy",<sup>71</sup> and a source of "what is new in English song".<sup>72</sup> Morton Dauwen Zabel, a critic who often shed original, valuable light on disputed issues in Hopkins criticism, presented another perspective: Zabel saw Hopkins' major contribution as his "discipline of realism", providing a kind of corrective function, escaping the esoteric and "the stiffening or enervating decorum" of the

Victorians.<sup>73</sup> This is a valid comment, although one could object that, while it is true that Hopkins was a pioneer in this respect, yet it was not necessarily his example that triggered the twentieth century reaction against those Victorian characteristics. Critics are often liable to forget that only one or two of Hopkins' most conventional pieces were published before 1918, and he did not achieve any measure of wide recognition until after 1930. The Georgian poets, writing before publication of Hopkins' work in 1918, and the first modernists, had already begun to initiate a move away from stale form and even staler subject matter.

It is also worth noting that the occasional critic continued to make much of the 'red letter' - Babette Deutsch considered that Communist sentiments "subtly vein his poetry"<sup>74</sup> - and C. Day Lewis, one of those radical leftist poets supposedly influenced by Hopkins, believed that the Platonic dialogue "On the Nature of Beauty", in its exploration of "the dialectical principle of the unity of opposites, was "one of the utmost importance both to Marxist critics and to practising poets".<sup>75</sup>

### *Centenary Appraisals*

In 1944, the centenary of Hopkins' birth, all the major periodicals and newspapers devoted articles to an



assessment of Hopkins' stature as a poet and his significance as an influence on the course of English poetry. By this time, opinions had begun to settle. Most agreed, to some extent, that Hopkins was "one of the most influential ancestors of modern poetry".<sup>76</sup> Humphry House asserted that "Hardly a poet who began writing between the wars was not directly influenced by Gerard Hopkins".<sup>77</sup> At the same time, almost everyone recognised that a distinction had to be drawn between influence and imitation. Desmond MacCarthy, reviewing W.H. Gardner's study of Hopkins, agreed with Gardner that "cuttings from the Hopkins tree have seldom flourished in other poets' gardens".<sup>78</sup> John J. Hayes identified one of the faults - "he is not very well understood; he is often scanned as free verse, whereas he always intended metre".<sup>79</sup> The other commonly-agreed fault was remarked on by a writer in the *Times Literary Supplement*: "The idea that our modern psychological conflicts make us sufficiently akin with him to appropriate his technique is ingenuous".<sup>80</sup>

Interestingly, F.R. Leavis, in his series of 'Revaluations' essays, dismissed the issue ("About Hopkins as a direct influence there seems little to say").<sup>81</sup> Leavis did *not* consider the use of him by the leftist poets of the nineteen-thirties to be "of a kind to demand serious critical attention".<sup>82</sup> And Stephen Spender, one of that group referred to, acknowledged that, though "he ferments in other poets... he is not an

influence".<sup>83</sup> This latter remark is a good example of a critic, by a clever twist of a phrase, managing to have his cake and eat it too.

Evidently, the revolutionary nature of Hopkins' experimentations, both in prosody and other areas, was very attractive to the young poets. Unfortunately, it seems to me that Hopkins was not only revolutionary but also, in essence, inimitably idiosyncratic. Consequently, imitation was bound to fail. In the words of one critic, those who "tried to play the sedulous ape to Hopkins... only succeeded in reflecting his mannerisms".<sup>84</sup>

### *The 1950's*

Moving into the next decade, with the explosion of Hopkins' popularity in 1930 beginning to recede into some kind of perspective, critics began to study in more detail his influence upon specific poets, and at the same time they investigated more deeply Hopkins' general impact, the reasons behind it, and the relation it bore to other elements of the literary climate at the time.

Gordon Symes was one critic who made a note of how many modern poets had, at some stage, taken on Hopkins' mannerisms - not only sprung rhythm but also his "internal harmonies and dissonances, his 'rove-over'

enjambement and interjected Ohs and Ahs, his hyphenations and portmanteau effects..."<sup>85</sup> Symes also remarked on the "commonplace" notion that "modern poetry from Eliot onwards has affinities with Donne and the seventeenth century metaphysicals",<sup>86</sup> and this makes the connection with Hopkins - the possible link to the seventeenth century was a popular one, one whose heritage reached back to the very earliest Hopkins criticism. Symes found that same kind of attempt to "order the acknowledged contradictions of living, with a sort of sensuous logic" in Hopkins as in the Metaphysicals,<sup>87</sup> and suggested that it was the same qualities in both Hopkins and Herbert that had made them attractive to modern poets. Joseph E. Duncan agreed that it was the Metaphysical strain that appealed - in his book *The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry*, he suggested that Hopkins was "the first to combine successfully a revived Metaphysical technique and the new romantic stress on the particular, the personal and the subjective".<sup>88</sup> This is perhaps not a very fair implicit judgement of the seventeenth century poets, for some of the lyrics of Donne and Herbert in particular are very raw and sensitive in their personal nature, but the point is taken. Others still insisted that the appeal lay in the "intellectual complexity" and "spiritual probing".<sup>89</sup> Babette Deutsch, meanwhile, continued to cite the existence of the 'red letter' as a factor that "makes intelligible" the kinship of minds that existed between Hopkins and the modern poets.<sup>90</sup>

She believed that the 'thirties poets saw in Hopkins "an earnestness and an energy like their own, and an attractive independence".<sup>91</sup>

With half the century now passed, and the poetry of the 'thirties in perspective, historical patterns began to emerge for these first fifty years. It was universally acknowledged that Hopkins' influence had not taken a hold before the time of "W.H. Auden's generation",<sup>92</sup> when the second edition of the poems found "an excited audience... of rising poets".<sup>93</sup> One or two critics challenged a claim made by Reeves who edited a selection of Hopkins' poetry published in 1953. Reeves had stated that the writing of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* made "the year 1875 the most important date in twentieth century poetry".<sup>94</sup> The critic reviewing the book in the *Times Literary Supplement* rightly dubbed this "a wild exaggeration", and pointed to Yeats, Eliot and Pound as three poets who "show not a trace either of his mannerisms, his technical peculiarities or his characteristic attitudes... Up to 1930 Hopkins had no influence on modern poetry at all".<sup>95</sup> G.S. Fraser also named these three as poets "who would have written as they do if Gerard Manley Hopkins had never existed".<sup>96</sup>

Critics continued to deplore the efforts of Hopkins' imitators - referred to variously as "alliterative diarrhoea"<sup>97</sup> and poetry that "foster[s]

the illusion that clarity is inferior to obscurity, and that obscurity and profundity go hand in hand..."<sup>98</sup> One could argue at this point, inverting the arguments of Reeves' critics, that it was Eliot and Pound who were more responsible for the unwelcome drift into obscurity for obscurity's sake - Hopkins' influence was not widely felt until this practice had become quite firmly embedded in modern poetry. At any rate, there remained a sharp division of critical opinion over the more profound influence - or lack of it - Hopkins had exerted over English poetry as a whole.

### *Sprung Rhythm*

The argument centred specifically and almost exclusively on sprung rhythm, and a dialogue was maintained throughout the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties by critics offering differing opinions as to the real impact of the new prosody. Rayner Heppenstall, writing in the *New Statesman and Nation* in 1950, spoke of Hopkins as the "liberator" of English prosody: "He ended the tyranny of ti-tum, ti-tum, to which... English had submitted since Spenser".<sup>99</sup> At the same time, Heppenstall maintained that the liberation had been achieved in spite of Hopkins' own theorizing which he pronounced "unsound", and his practice, "frequently confusing" and "cumbrous".<sup>100</sup>

John Heath-Stubbs agreed that twentieth century poets had followed the track beaten by the pioneering Jesuit: they chose the prosody of sprung rhythm, "based on broken speech", over Patmore's "extension of Miltonic cadences".<sup>101</sup> Howard Sergeant, in two articles in the *Aryan Path*, pointed out the traditionalist strain in Hopkins ("principally Langland, Skelton and Milton (in *Samson Agonistes*) and the English nursery rhymes"), and suggested that "every new movement is a rediscovery of what has been lost".<sup>102</sup> In this sense, both Hopkins and that other great traditionalist, T.S. Eliot, exerted a profound influence on the poetry that followed. Sergeant considered that the impact of sprung rhythm had been for the good, and believed that it would spread beyond superficial imitation as poets grew to realise how the tensions in Hopkins that gave rise to such a strange prosodic form "parallel those of our own age".<sup>103</sup>

Stanley Burnshaw, reflecting on "Three Revolutions in Modern Poetry", picked out Hopkins (along with Arnold and Whitman) as one who had encouraged the poets of the early twentieth century in experimentation.<sup>104</sup> His sprung rhythm and his extensive use of assonance, alliteration and other devices, had been the inspiration for a movement that had changed the face of English verse.

However, other critics took the opposite view, and

argued that sprung rhythm had in no way altered the course of English prosody, although it had sparked off flashes of imitative verse in a small number of twentieth century poets, efforts better left forgotten. This anonymous reviewer of the second volume of W.H. Gardner's study of Hopkins is an example: while conceding that "a certain amount of interesting innovative experiment" had sprung from Hopkins' precedent, he argued that "no major deflection" from the main tradition of English verse" had been achieved. The natural word order and the five-foot line remained intact.<sup>105</sup>

The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer also made the surprising claim that "it is hard to point to any first-rate piece of verse, written since 1930... that properly puts his metrical principles into practice".<sup>106</sup> This critic argues that it is Hopkins' tone of voice that echoes in later poets, rather than any specific of technique. Harvey Gross went even further along this tangent of opinion: referring to Hopkins, Whitman and Browning, he argues that "they established no schools, attracted no immediate disciples"; they were "prophets rather than practical reformers".<sup>107</sup>

These views sit uncomfortably alongside contemporaneous criticism that almost universally acknowledged the impact Hopkins' verse and metrics had had on young poets of the 'thirties in particular.

Perhaps the remarks of Gross and the *Times Literary Supplement* critic should be taken more as qualitative judgements of these poets than of Hopkins and his impact on the twentieth century. To the suggestion that Hopkins established no "school" of poetry one might reply that this is true enough, for Hopkins' influence was essentially more wide-ranging, liberating the verse form in English as a whole rather than in individual poets. At the same time, as we shall see in the next chapter, it is undeniable that certain poets, such as Auden, Spender and C. Day Lewis, certainly three of the most prominent poets of their period, did come under Hopkins' *direct* influence, if only for a short span of a few years.

Finally, during this period, a number of new (and often contradictory) explanations were offered as to the reason why Hopkins was so attractive to modernist poets. The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer quoted above considered the 'thirties poets men "hot for certainties" who found them in Hopkins' "sturdy and simple fervour".<sup>108</sup> Vincent Buckley came to a similar conclusion by a route that is almost an inversion of the *Times Literary Supplement* critic's: Buckley suggests that in the modern age, anyone who believes in God is assumed to be in conflict with Him and this is "one of the interests Hopkins has for our time".<sup>109</sup> However, Buckley himself considers the interest a "false" one, for he does not find that great tension and conflict of



faith and doubt in Hopkins that many take for granted. Francis Noel Lees is more orthodox in believing that it is the complexity, the ambiguous imagery and the impression of "living experience" in Hopkins' verse that attracted the modernists, just as it had earlier repelled his contemporaries.<sup>110</sup> This, to me, is not altogether convincing. It is an oversimplification to insist that all Victorian verse was devoid of "the succession of spontaneously engendered feelings" so much admired in Hopkins.

### *Conclusion*

One of the most noticeable tendencies in perceptions of Hopkins' influence is the critics' selection of elements of his work most conducive to their stand-point. Deutsch, for instance, repeatedly cites the 'red letter' to indicate how his influence has extended beyond the merely technical. Others preferred to concentrate on the ways in which sprung rhythm had affected those who followed him. A finer distinction could be drawn between those who indicated how sprung rhythm had opened up new paths to freshness of expression without abandoning prosody altogether, and others who dismissed the system as an aberration. Each critic in this case is making some kind of stand against the twentieth century tendency towards total metrical liberty.

However, some sense of balance seems to have been achieved in critical perceptions of Hopkins' influence by the close of the nineteen-sixties. The extreme positions occupied by the likes of G.M. Young (on the one hand, antagonistic) and Herbert Read and Humphry House (on the other, overly enthusiastic) have both been eliminated. We are left with a consensus that seems to unite in deploring the fad of Hopkins imitation, agreeing that Hopkins is, in essence, inimitable - his unique style the result of unique circumstances and personal and artistic characteristics. Although there are still some dissenters, it is generally acknowledged that Hopkins at least contributed to the liberation of English verse, that sprung rhythm did much to loosen the cruelly constrictive bonds of traditional prosody.

This, it seems to me, is the major impact Hopkins had upon English poetry. Along with a couple of other revolutionary figures, notably Walt Whitman (and, to a lesser extent, Browning and Bridges - although this latter was unoriginal, in effect plagiarizing Hopkins' work -), Hopkins encouraged his literary descendants in experimentation, urging them on as they struggled to break free of a tradition that they no longer felt was appropriate for what they had to express. In a certain sense, Hopkins *did* anticipate the modern mind set, daring to explore and map out extreme states of mind that previously had been too often ignored. Hopkins was

not afraid to twist, bend, or fracture and re-set the established poetic forms in his attempts to make these forms vessels capable of carrying the content he intended to pour into them. As certain critics predicted, the inevitable rash of flimsy imitations came and went, but the real heritage lies elsewhere, in almost every modern poet who eschews the ancient rules of rhyme and metre.

CHAPTER X: "ADMIRE AND DO OTHERWISE"  
HOPKINS' INFLUENCE ON SPECIFIC POETS

*Introduction*

The previous chapter went under the name "Innovator and Liberator", a fairly accurate slogan for the effect Hopkins had on the course of twentieth century poetry. His influence was to a large extent a subliminal one, and it is not easy to find examples that show a poet taking him as a direct model for imitation. Indeed, it is almost a truism that Hopkins' style is so idiosyncratic that such direct imitation would amount to artistic suicide.

However, we can nevertheless find traces of his distinctive style in quite a number of major poets of this century, although perhaps the most valuable place to begin the investigation is at a point that actually precedes the publication of his work.

*Bridges*

Some critics have accused Bridges of abusing the trust that Hopkins placed in him when the Jesuit left his manuscripts to his friend's safe-keeping. Bridges always insisted that his intentions in delaying

publication were honourable; that he felt he had to wait for the right time, the most suitable literary climate for such odd and original poetry. But it has been suggested that the laureate actually exploited the theory of sprung rhythm until he exhausted it within his own artistic limitations - or else it exhausted him.

It was not until the 1940's that discussion began in earnest over how great an effect Hopkins had had on his friend's work. Geoffrey Bullough was convinced that Bridges' experimentation "owed much to the initial promptings of his friend Gerard Manley Hopkins".<sup>1</sup> Nowell Smith, more specific in an article actually focussing on a discussion of Laurence Binyon's poetry, suggested it was "the deliberate emphasis in Hopkins on a speech-stress rather than metrical beat which influenced both Bridges and Binyon".<sup>2</sup> He singles out "London Snow" as an example.

Another critic, writing in the same year, notes that it was his "use of speech rhythms" and his "experiments in the use of accentual and syllabic verse" that "undoubtedly opened the way for his successors to escape from the melodic sway of Tennyson and Swinburne..."<sup>3</sup> The reviewer admits that Bridges owes much to Hopkins for this, but it is nevertheless an interesting slant that seems to be ignored by most critics: that is to say, although Bridges never approached the heights of inspiration scaled by Hopkins,

and never came near the extent of his friend's audacity in experimentation, the fact remains that he was a far more widely-read poet than Hopkins, at least until the second edition of Hopkins' work, published in 1930. It is perhaps a valid suggestion that Bridges himself helped to pave the way to a guarantee that Hopkins' work would receive an attentive, even a sympathetic ear, when he came to be published. It would be unwise, however, to attribute the loosening of verse form in general in twentieth century English poetry to Bridges' work. Certainly, of the two, it was Hopkins who proved to be the model and inspiration for many of the young writers, particularly after the publication of the second edition.

Some time later, in 1951, an article appeared in the *Cambridge Journal* that supports this idea: certainly it reinforces our impression that Bridges' own poetry lacked the revolutionary power, the radical nature that Hopkins' had, and which inspired the young poets who were eager to break the ornaments of tradition. J.M. Cohen here quotes Saintsbury, the prominent literary historian and prosodic theorist, who claimed that "When the new prosody is worth much, it seems to us reducible with advantage to the old".<sup>4</sup> "A Passerby" and "Nightingales" are singled out. Cohen adds that "This was true of all Bridges' experiments, but never of Hopkins'", conceding "London Snow" as the only exception.<sup>5</sup> Cohen believed that the new rhythms,

in Bridges' hands, made "rather for formalism than for freedom" and noted that the influence was waning by the time the fourth volume of *Shorter Poems* was published.<sup>6</sup> However, these lines quoted perhaps suggest that the influence was not entirely absent, even from *The Testament of Beauty*:

"The sky's unresting cloudland, that with varying play  
Sifteth the sunlight through in figured shades, that now  
Stand in massive range, cumulated stupendous  
Mountainous snowbillowy up-piled in dazzling sheen..."

It is amusing to speculate what Hopkins might have made of these lines; whether he might have detected a resemblance between them and "Hurrahing in Harvest". Almost certainly he would have disapproved of the archaic form "sifteth".

The last item of interest on this particular topic is actually a series of letters that appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* under the recurring title "Bridges's Debt to Hopkins" between May and September of 1961.<sup>7</sup> Simon Nowell-Smith (supported by Norman H. MacKenzie)<sup>8</sup> was certain that Bridges' poem "Poor Withered Rose" could not have been influenced by Hopkins - despite the fact that Bridges said it was - because the poem had been written in July 1872 (i.e. during the time of the friends' estrangement); because Hopkins himself did not notice the influence (a weak argument); because it was a number of years thereafter before the

two discussed prosody; and since *The Wreck of the Deutschland* was still some years away, sprung rhythm had not yet been conceived in Hopkins' mind at this point.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, two Hopkins heavyweights, W.H. Gardner and Jean-Georges Ritz, argued that this poem did bear the stamp of influence. Ritz reasons that Hopkins and Bridges must have discussed prosody prior to their estrangement; and that the first of Hopkins' poems Bridges ever read was a good example of "a poem in sprung rhythm *avant la lettré*" - "St. Dorothea".<sup>10</sup> Gardner backs this position with a quotation from a letter from Hopkins to Bridges (7th August 1868): "I hope you will master the peculiar beat I have introduced in 'St. Dorothea'". And he suggests that a discussion might have taken place during their meeting at Roehampton in late 1869.<sup>11</sup>

It think it is reasonable to conclude that Hopkins did exert a degree of power over the development of Bridges' verse; perhaps he was too deeply entrenched in tradition to follow the paths as far as Hopkins did, into the more shadowy and dangerous areas of experimentation. But one of the most important discoveries that has been made by critics investigating the relationship is the way in which Bridges did help to prepare the literary milieu for the bolder verse that was to follow when he published his friend's work.



### *Yeats*

W.B. Yeats is one name that occurs most frequently in Hopkins criticism to argue against the proposal that the Victorian had a profound influence on twentieth century poetry. Eliot and Pound are also cited in this context. (Although it is worth noting one critic's claim that Eliot "studied Hopkins in preparation for his ode of regeneration, *Ash Wednesday*".<sup>12</sup> Whether or not this is so, Eliot evidently had quite a low opinion of Hopkins, while accepting his brilliance within his limitations, and surely most would agree that there was no real influence of the one poet upon the other).

The most important article published up to 1970 that deals with the relationship between Yeats and Hopkins appeared in *Notes and Queries* in May 1945. Here, R.G. Howarth declares that Yeats first read Hopkins in 1935, while he was selecting pieces for inclusion in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, and that the effect of reading him was to "stir him to imitation".<sup>13</sup> The dating of this seems inaccurate - Yeats' friend Monk Gibbon, in his book *The Masterpiece and the Man* (1959), quotes from a letter written to him by Yeats dated 12 March 1932, in which Yeats claimed that "Gerard Hopkins never understood the variety of pace that constitutes natural utterance".<sup>14</sup> However, as Howarth makes clear in quoting Yeats' letters to Lady

Gerard Wellesley (16 and 26 December 1935), he did decide at this point to try to write something in sprung rhythm, but changed his mind. Howarth claims, nevertheless, that some of Yeats' later work - "The Herne's Egg", "An Acre of Grass", "Imitated from the Japanese" and "Sweet Dancer", for instance - do show "distinct marks of sprung rhythm".<sup>15</sup> Yeats' penultimate play, *Purgatory*, apparently "suggests the verse of *Samson Agonistes*, the choruses of which Yeats, with Hopkins, recognised to be in sprung rhythm".<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps one of the difficulties in deciding the real extent of the influence here lies in the fine line between sprung rhythm and "free verse". Certainly it is true that the later Yeats abandons syllabic verse, but whether it is fair to say that he became a convert to sprung rhythm, in Hopkins' conception, is extremely dubious. Howarth is perhaps on firmer ground when he quotes a couple of lines from "Sweet Dancer" -

"On the leaf-sown, new-mown, smooth  
Grass-plot of the garden".

and notices "a suggestion of Hopkins' compounds and internal rhymes".<sup>17</sup> And there is something similar in the lines Howarth chooses to pick from *Purgatory*:

"Half-door, hell-door  
Hither and thither day and night,  
Hill or hollow, shouldering this pack  
Hearing you talk"

They seem to have some of the swaying antheses characteristic of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*; similarly, the insistent, gasping repetition of "h" sounds brings Hopkins to mind. However, these few instances, though interesting in the way they seem to echo Hopkins, do not really constitute any kind of evidence for a claim of direct influence.

In the final analysis, moreover, Yeats rejected Hopkins' prosodic theory - even if, in practice, it was difficult for him to escape its impact - and it was with some reluctance that he included Hopkins in his edition of the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. But it is worth noting, as Louis L. Martz does in his seminal *The Poetry of Meditation* (1954), that Hopkins could be seen as "the forerunner of a new era of meditative poetry, represented in the later poetry of Yeats and Eliot".<sup>18</sup> This, however, is to shift from a focus on form to content, and to initiate a much more general discussion that has been scanned in the previous chapter.

### *W.H. Auden*

Perhaps the area where Hopkins made his greatest impression - as has been noted in previous chapters - was on the young, politically radical poets of the nineteen-thirties, in particular W.H. Auden and C. Day

Lewis. Since it was following the publication of the second edition of Hopkins' poems in 1930 that some real interest began to be taken in him, reviewers were quick to pick up on these occasions when his idiosyncratic voice echoed through contemporary verse. Geoffrey Bullough, for instance, noted the influence of Hopkins on Auden in these lines taken from the *New Country* volume:

"Me, March, you do with your movements master and rock  
 With wing-whirl, whale-wallow, silent building of  
 cell".<sup>19</sup>

The internal rhyme, alliteration of "m"s, "w"s and "silent ... cell"; the distinctive rhythm, the rocking motion of the second line, all smack of Hopkins. Theodore Maynard, writing a year later, picked up on the same lines, and noted ruefully, "If Hopkins was only too often extremely obscure, Auden at times completely outdoes him in incomprehensibility."<sup>20</sup>

Michael Roberts suggested that part of the reason that Hopkins had become important to the young poets was due to the fact that they were being forced to build "a new faith... 'how can we prove that anything at all is valuable?' they ask". Roberts considers Eliot and Hopkins to be their "natural... starting-point".<sup>21</sup> Remaining on the level of content (as opposed to form), Maynard believes that the political element is significant, too - in a refreshingly progressive and

enlightened note, he remarks that there is not "any very deep gulf fixed between Communism and Catholicism".<sup>22</sup> This is, of course, a matter of opinion and perspective, but it inevitably reminds us of the political or social overtones of, for example, "Tom's Garland", and the 'red letter' to Bridges that reveals Hopkins' understanding of the Communists' motivation.

The critic F.O. Matthiessen, who made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the relationship between Hopkins and Whitman, comments in passing on this phenomenon, neatly linking the form and content in his perception that "Auden and the other radical poets have tried to develop sprung rhythm into a vehicle for public speech, for drama that will restore to poetry a wider social range".<sup>23</sup> There is certainly a virility and vitality in sprung rhythm that makes it an ideal form for the oratorical mode. While it does often bring us closer to speech rhythms - in itself useful for didactic content - it can also take on an incantatory quality, with a muscular motility and irresistible driving force.

Later critics acknowledged that Hopkins had been an influence "throughout Auden's early verse";<sup>24</sup> John Press cites "1929" and "Paid on Both Sides" as two examples of Hopkins' "occasional jerkiness... erected into a system";<sup>25</sup> Todd K. Bender claims "we can open Auden's *Collected Shorter Poems* almost at random and hear Hopkins' influence" (which is perhaps overstating

the case).<sup>26</sup> And Harvey Gross cites "Look, Stranger"'s "Hopkins-like alliterative and assonantal patterns" and even "a minor theft from Hopkins' 'The Loss of the Eurydice' - 'And you were a liar... deadly-electric'", stolen directly from the "Eurydice"'s sixth stanza - "he/Came equipped, deadly-electric".<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, as Babette Deutsch notes, Auden declared Hopkins to be a minor poet, "unable to influence later men in any fruitful way".<sup>28</sup> Is this Auden acknowledging, by implication, the failure of his own early verse? Perhaps he concluded from his experiments that Hopkins was simply too odd to be correctly, fully assimilated by poets open to his influence. This in itself would help to provide some explanation as to how Hopkins' influence did, in fact, become more widespread, and yet more subtle, as it assisted in breaking young poets free of traditional metre. For it was through filters such as Auden that the spirit of Hopkins' revolutionary nature permeated English poetry - while early imitators could copy the letter, the tricks and devices that adorned the shell of Hopkins' verse, the spirit was distilled into the work of the next generation of poets. Harvey Gross seems to believe that something like this occurred; he claims that "it is largely through Auden and Dylan Thomas that Hopkins' techniques became common currency during the thirties and forties".<sup>29</sup>

However, we must also bear in mind that poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were working this process of liberation from tradition in their own informal rhythms, the conversational mode, for example, and others, jazz-inflected. Pound and Eliot were, moreover, much more well-known than Hopkins. It is highly likely that their influence was stronger and more widespread than Hopkins'.

Hopkins certainly did have an impact on W.H. Auden. The strangeness of the verse, perhaps allied to the fascinating conditions under which Hopkins had struggled into the public arena, no doubt was very attractive to Auden and his fellow radicals. However, as a critic writing in 1953 in the *Times Literary Supplement* asserts, Auden, at least, "certainly soon outgrew" the influence, "turning to quite different models, like the Byron of *Don Juan*".<sup>30</sup> Like most poets who are strong in the power of their own inspiration, Auden seemed to realise that Hopkins' voice was too much his own, too deeply rooted in his peculiar circumstances and unique psyche, to be a useful model.

### *C. Day Lewis*

C. Day Lewis, one of the other major figures in the group of thirties poets, also fell under Hopkins' spell. The same critics who looked at the connection

with Auden found Hopkinsian elements in Lewis; in particular, the "Magnetic Mountain" sequence is picked out by Bullough, Deutsch and David Daiches. Bullough points out phrases such as "kestrel joy" and "O hoverer in wind";<sup>31</sup> Deutsch also notes the falcon image and the fact that the poem is prefaced by a line from Hopkins' "Peace";<sup>32</sup> and Daiches calls it "'The Windhover' subdued", with its omission of the relative pronoun, medial insertions of exclamations, and words split at the ends of lines for rhyme.<sup>33</sup> Theodore Maynard, as with Auden, noted the connection between Catholicism and Communism.<sup>34</sup>

Again, the duration of the enchantment was relatively short. The two poems that seem to be most heavily influenced are "The Magnetic Mountain" (1933) and "A Time to Dance" (1935) - sections of the latter have the characteristic long line familiar from readings of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo", "Carrion Comfort" and other mature Hopkins poems. However, Lewis seems to be quite severely hampered by his attempts to emulate his model. The lines seem heavily weighed-down, or otherwise they do not seem like poetry at all, merely chopped prose. "A Time to Dance" is more successful in its occasional use of compounds, new coinages and hyphenated words:

"Fog first, a wet blanket, a kill-joy, the primrose-of-morning's blight"



" ... heroic peaks, tumbling-to-zero depressions"  
 " ... the sound as they soar, an octave-upward slur  
 Scale of sky ascending."

And Lewis, inspired by Hopkins' boldness, is not afraid to re-order the elements of sentences: "... flame streamed out behind,/A crimson scarf of, as life-blood out of a wound" reminds us of "And the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress" from *The Wreck of the Deutschland*.

"The Magnetic Mountain" strikes us immediately as owing something to Hopkins, firstly because one section is prefaced by a quotation from one of his poems, and secondly on account of the imagery of the first section, with its "kestrel joy, O hoverer in wind". Indeed, the whole section is reminiscent of Hopkins - the rhythm is sprung, we find a couple of portmanteau words, two medial "Oh"'s within the twenty short lines, and a fair amount of alliteration:

"From heaven harried by carrion cares"

"Not to be found by gun or glass"

"Void are the valleys, in town no trace"

However, most of the rest of the poem bears very little resemblance to Hopkins' work, and it is perhaps more appropriate to see the opening of "The Magnetic Mountain" as a homage to Hopkins, in quite open

imitation, rather than as an example of strong, integrated influence. We must agree, nevertheless, that Lewis doubtless benefitted from the contribution Hopkins made to the loosening of English verse in general, helping to provide a basis for later poets' experimentation.

### *Other Disciples*

Before we proceed with an examination of the relationship most thoroughly and vigorously discussed by critics - Hopkins and Dylan Thomas - it is worth mentioning in passing a number of other names; some less well-known, others more famous names infrequently mentioned in the context of Hopkins and his influence.

Stephen Spender belongs to the group of thirties poets that includes C. Day Lewis and Auden, but is discussed only rarely. Daiches name-checks him in passing in *New Literary Values*, but does not quote any of Spender's work to substantiate the claim that he, too, fell under the Victorian's powerful spell.<sup>35</sup> Early poems do indeed show Hopkinsian tendencies - the hyphenations, for instance ("mid-ocean-drowned" from "He will watch the hawk"; "heart-surrendered troopers" from "Acts passed beyond the boundary of mere wishing"; "wave-winged storks" from "At the beginning of two months' holiday"); these are all drawn from the *Preludes*

volume (1930-33), and some of the poems in this volume - "I think continually of those who were truly great", perhaps, and "After they have tired of the brilliance of cities" - show that Spender owed a debt to Hopkins in the lessons learned from sprung rhythm. Certainly the later work - as with Auden - found its own furrow to plough, the prosody becoming even more liberated, the voice gaining its own independent authority, although it is still interesting to note the occasional line in the later work that cannot help but bring Hopkins to mind - "Blue-bird-shell eye pink-sea-shell ear" is a good example, from "Elegy for Margaret".

Others mentioned by critics include T.H. White, and, in particular, his "A Dray Horse" - both Todd K. Bender<sup>36</sup> and David Daiches<sup>37</sup> refer to it. Charles Williams, the editor of the 1930 edition of Hopkins' poems, is noted by George Every.<sup>38</sup> Babette Deutsch suggests Denis Devlin, Leslie Aiken, Richard Eberhart, Ralph Gustafson, Richard Wilbur, Thomas Merton, Hart Crane and Louis MacNeice; the latter in his "more turbulent rhythms and more conspicuous sound patterns, especially in his onomatopoeic pieces".<sup>39</sup> Julian Bell, according to Michael Roberts, "infuses a new vigor into English pastoral poetry by the use of rhythms and dynamic imagery caught from Gerard Manley Hopkins".<sup>40</sup> Allen Tate and Robert Lowell are suggested by Louis L. Martz;<sup>41</sup> George Barker by both George Every<sup>42</sup> and C.

Day Lewis - Lewis refers to the poem "To My Mother" as one showing Hopkins' influence "fully assimilated".<sup>43</sup>

Another poet Lewis thought had "fully assimilated" Hopkins' influence was W.R. Rogers; Lewis singles out the poem "Europa and the Bull" at this point.<sup>44</sup> However, the critic Denis Donoghue finds himself in sharp disagreement. He quotes a line - "But look! the Bull! indubitably bull.." and characterises it as "'Look what I can do with the letter 'B''". One can only concur with his judgement, and with his concluding remark where he admits to finding it "deeply depressing".<sup>45</sup> It is poetry such as this that caused many critics, both reactionary and progressive, to regret the influence Hopkins had had on some poets.

It is also worth noting two poets who specifically credited Hopkins as being a formative influence, or else one that had inspired some kind of alteration in the course of their creativity. Nowell Smith quotes from an article Laurence Binyon wrote for the *University of Toronto Quarterly* in April 1939 - "'I was especially interested by his [Hopkins'] new prosody... and very soon I ventured on experiments in it myself'".<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Monk Gibbon found that reading Hopkins gave him "a sense of glorious liberty", and he dedicated his *Seventeen Sonnets* to Hopkins' memory.<sup>47</sup>

*Dylan Thomas*

Dylan Thomas is perhaps the most interesting poet to discuss in relation to Hopkins and his influence. Certainly this relationship has provoked the most discussion; both poets have traditional Welsh poetry locked in the matrix of their artistic genetics, and they share a common preoccupation in that much of their work is "nature poetry" (in the widest sense), although their spiritual frameworks are very different. The fact that Thomas was always reluctant to admit that Hopkins had influenced him only adds to the interest, in an inverted way that reminds us of Hopkins' denial of Whitman's influence.

One of the first to remark on the relationship was Geoffrey Bullough, writing in 1941 of Thomas' "kinship to Joyce and Manley Hopkins".<sup>48</sup> Henry Treece, five years later, offered "conclusive proof" of influence in Thomas' use of compound words. He lists twenty examples, including these: Hopkins' "moonmark" to Thomas' "moon-turned"; "star-eyed" to "star-gestured"; "sea-corpse" to "sea-laiths"; and "bone house" to "bone-rail".<sup>49</sup> He observes their shared fascination with "clinical" vocabulary, comparing Hopkins'

"Thou hast bound bones in me, fashioned me flesh" [sic]

with Thomas'

"I sent my creature scouting on the globe,  
 That globe itself of hair and bone  
 That, sewn to me by nerve and brain  
 Had stringed my flask of matter to his rib".<sup>50</sup>

Treece weakens his claim somewhat by the misquotation - Hopkins' "*fastened me flesh*" makes the connection a little stronger (Treece also omits "*bones and veins*"). He distinguishes Thomas from those lesser poets who merely imitated Hopkins, noting that Thomas learns "both from the manner and matter of Gerard Manley Hopkins, how to tackle his own independent technical and spiritual problems". Their resemblance lies in their "sources of poetic energy; both look within to find tension and disorder".<sup>51</sup> But he also notes that Hopkins looks to God, while Thomas always focuses on himself. The lines quoted above are clear enough evidence of that.

It was during the nineteen-fifties that suggestions first began to arise that the Welsh tradition may have something to do with the poets' similarities. Herbert Read may have been the first to entertain the notion, in his book *The True Voice of Feeling* (1953), but he takes it no further than a recognition of the possibility.<sup>52</sup> He also notes that while Thomas was undoubtedly a great innovator, he "must acknowledge a proud debt to Hopkins, as to a liberator".<sup>53</sup>

In the Spring of 1955, Geoffrey Moore published an article entitled "Dylan Thomas" in the *Kenyon Review* and provided the first details of the roots of the kinship in cynghanedd. Moore notes that Hopkins made a thorough study of cynghanedd and in particular the consonantal chime which he introduced into his own work.<sup>54</sup> However, Moore points out that, while Hopkins only adopts the technique for the sake of the music of the verse, Thomas tends to use it for its own sake, for its "curiosity value".<sup>55</sup> The distinction here is hazy, but the implication is, presumably, that Hopkins' technique is more genuine, the principle being submissive to the poetry itself, rather than grafted on in a self-conscious fashion, with the principle itself highlighted at the expense of the poem as a whole. Moore cites the Prologue to *Collected Poems* as an example. But Moore also notes that Thomas can be more systematic, presenting "a more meticulous... a more wilful patterning than Hopkins allowed himself" - "The Conversation of Prayer", with its complex consonantal chime, is cited as an example, where Thomas shows himself to be "More Welsh" than Hopkins.<sup>56</sup> The willingness to credit Thomas with a thorough knowledge of Welsh traditional verse would be disputed by later critics who specialized in the legacy of cynghanedd (see below and Chapter XII).

Babette Deutsch noted in passing that Hopkins and Thomas shared a debt to cynghanedd.<sup>57</sup> Giorgio Melchiori

commented that the two poets' "relish for the sound of words has been attributed to their 'Welshness'.<sup>58</sup> He also remarked on their well-exercised techniques of alliteration, assonance and adjectivation, as well as their "complete disregard for grammatical parts of speech"; and their anatomical preoccupations that Henry Treece explored.<sup>59</sup> The latter we can certainly agree with; and there is some truth in his description of Hopkins as "visual", as opposed to Thomas as "intellectual", although this may be accused of overlooking the complexity of thought in poems such as *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe", "Tom's Garland" and others.

Both Melchiori and J.H.B. Peel (writing in the following year, 1957), considered Hopkins to be "the inventor, Thomas the imitator".<sup>60</sup> Peel also seemed to agree with Moore in considering some of Thomas' alliteration, amongst other things, as having been used purely for effect. While the result was sometimes "vulgar" as a consequence, Hopkins was always "dignified". Peel also contended that Hopkins had a real love for Wales, while Thomas used his homeland purely for caricature.<sup>61</sup> This last remark is a bizarre judgement that surely betrays a profound misinterpretation - or else a lack of familiarity with Thomas' verse.



The year 1962 saw the publication of *A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas*. The author, William York Tindall, evidently believed Dylan Thomas owed much to Hopkins; the book is in typical 'Reader's Guide' format, with an entry for each poem: works dating (in manuscript) from as far back as 1930 are noted as having "rhythms indebted to Hopkins" ("How Shall My Animal").<sup>62</sup> Tindall finds sprung rhythm in, amongst others, "The Hunchback in the Park" (1941; ms. 1932), "The Spire Cranes" (1938; ms. 1931), and "And Death Shall Have No Dominion" (1933).<sup>63</sup> Even the relatively late "In Country Sleep" apparently contains "Abundant echoes of Hopkins in rhythm, sound and image".<sup>64</sup>

Sprung rhythm, in a discussion of Hopkins' influence, always seems to be a grey area. Critics have squabbled over poets' works, and individual poems, as some claim that they are written in sprung rhythm, while others provide rigorous counter-arguments. Prosody is not an exact science, and one poem may quite neatly fit several patterns that different critics choose to map onto it.

However, there are other avenues of exploration open when we research the relationship between Hopkins and Thomas. The topic of *cynghanedd* is one, although we should bear in mind that a common interest in traditional Welsh verse is not necessarily evidence of *influence*. Another area is diction and imagery, and

Tindall several times points out instances where Thomas has, he believes, echoed Hopkins, whether consciously or unconsciously: "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower", for instance, written in 1933, "recalls *The Wreck of the Deutschland*" in its "imagery of rope, sand and water";<sup>65</sup> in "And Death Shall Have No Dominion" the "Birds and waves of the last stanza recall Hopkins' poems of sea and skylark".<sup>66</sup> He also compares "wind-drawn" with "dapple-dawn-drawn" ("Today, This Insect" (1936; ms. 1930)).<sup>67</sup>

All these examples are rather weak, although one or two others he proposes are more convincing. Examining "Among Those Killed in a Dawn Raid" (1941), Tindall suggests that Thomas' image "his grey-haired heart" might have sprung from Hopkins' letter to Bridges where he refers to his own heart as "all shaggy with the whitest hair".<sup>68</sup> Tindall also compares "Jackself" with "Jack-Christ" ("Altar-Wise by Owl-Light" (1935-6));<sup>69</sup> and this:

"The beaked, web dark and the pouncing boughs"

("In Country Sleep I")

" ... beak-leaved boughs dragonish"

("Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves")<sup>70</sup>

From the same poem, "High, there, on the hare-/Heeled winds" is "an obvious echo of Hopkins' 'Windhover'".<sup>71</sup>

On the subject of the Welsh influence, Tindall quotes Thomas as admitting that *cynghanedd* was "a foreign, a closed form to me", and deduces from this that "the occasional and unsystematic interweaving of sounds in his poem shows a likelier debt to Hopkins".<sup>72</sup> Tindall remarks, in the entries for "Today, This Insect" and "We Lying by Seasand" on the interwoven nasals and liquids "in the manner of Hopkins and the Welsh",<sup>73</sup> and also points out how "If My Head Hurt a Hair's Foot" (1939) "unsystematically display[s] all the devices of Welsh sound: alliteration, assonance, dissonance, internal rhyme and chiming vowels".<sup>74</sup>

Tindall obviously has a close and detailed knowledge of both poets' work, providing the kind of fascinating study with which W.H. Gardner has furnished us on his tracing of Hopkins' roots in tradition. The only missing piece of evidence is some kind of acknowledgement of the debt from Thomas himself. But in fact he mentioned Hopkins only rarely, and "when he did, claimed independence".<sup>75</sup> This could be taken at face value, and we could conclude that the effects were much more unconscious, rather than deliberate 'borrowings'. Alternatively, we could conclude, along with Tindall, that Thomas' reluctance to talk about Hopkins was due to embarrassment at the weight of debt that he owed.

Harvey Gross' comments on the relationship between the two poets - those in his book *Sound and Form in*

*Modern Poetry* (1964) - move away from the favoured topic of cyghanedd and concern themselves with testy complaints about "the violence of Thomas' strong stressing and dislocated grammar" in "Over St. John's Hill" and the crowded stresses of "Poem in October"; the latter modelled, according to Gross, on *The Wreck of the Deutschland*.<sup>76</sup>

But perhaps the last word, in the period up to 1970, belongs to the writer Glyn Jones, who knew Dylan Thomas personally and who dealt with the issue of Hopkins' influence in his book *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (1968). Jones is convinced that the cyghanedd connection is rooted in Hopkins himself. Whereas some critics credited Dylan Thomas with a knowledge of Welsh metrics, Jones insisted that Thomas had no such knowledge.<sup>77</sup> Interestingly though, he informs us of an article he himself contributed to *Life and Letters Today* in 1939, an article entitled "Hopkins and Welsh Prosody". Jones remarks: "I sometimes wonder if Dylan got his idea of basing his lines on a count of syllables, rather than on a count of feet, from it. I know he was a reader of and contributor to the magazine at the time".<sup>78</sup> This is thought-provoking, although it does seem to be a little late when we bear in mind some of the poems we have considered, with composition dating back to around 1930.

Thomas and Hopkins certainly held some things in

common as regards both their techniques as poets and their individual psyches. It is likely, therefore, that at least for a time, Thomas was drawn to the Victorian's work, even unconsciously or against his will. Even if Thomas did not undertake a thorough study of Welsh metrics, as Hopkins did (see Chapter XII), he was doubtless aware of his heritage, and he is as likely to have picked up the elements of *cynghanedd* that are evident in his work from this as from Hopkins. More likely it would have been a combination of the two. Those lines and words in his poems that seem to be quite definite echoes of Hopkins provide firmer evidence that Thomas was under his predecessor's spell, whether or not he realised it.

### *Conclusion*

Thomas is perhaps the one poet who, whilst absorbing Hopkins' work, managed to create the most strongly independent and original voice in his later work. Others who were directly influenced by the Victorian tended to be either slavish imitators forever destined to be discounted from the class of great poets, or else in that group that quickly discovered how Hopkins was simply inimitable: his art too immersed in its own inscape to be successfully 'borrowed' by anyone else.

Hopkins led by example, spurring on later poets in

their search for their own voices, breaking the bonds of tradition and encouraging all who followed to be truthful to their own individual inspiration; to "admire and do otherwise".

CHAPTER XI: "NOBLE STYLE"

HOPKINS AND THE CLASSICAL BACKGROUND

*Introduction: Hopkins' Classical Reading*

Hopkins' classically-based education has perhaps been the best excuse critics have had to seek to prove his connection with the Latin and Greek poets. It is a point worth noting, naturally: we might also do well to remember that Hopkins spent the last years of his life as Professor of Greek at Dublin (1884-89). However, as we should take care when investigating any possible influences on Hopkins by other poets, so these words from a letter to Bridges should double our caution:

"I must read something of Greek and Latin letters and lately I sent you a sonnet, on the Heraclitean Fire, in which a great deal of early Greek philosophical thought is distilled, but the liquor of the distillation did not taste very Greek, did it? The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise... Perhaps then more reading would only *refine my singularity*, which is not what you want". (Hopkins' italics).<sup>1</sup>

We should also note, however, that, just as Hopkins found Welsh traditional verse and Anglo-Saxon particularly palatable, so, too, and on the same account, he loved certain classical authors: referring to his poem "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo", and rebutting Bridges' suggestion of a Whitmanesque influence, he writes:

"No, but what it *is* like is the rhythm of Greek tragic choruses or of Pindar which is pure sprung rhythm..."<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note that in his Preface, probably written in 1883, Hopkins appeals to classical precedent in defence of sprung rhythm:

"But nevertheless, in spite of all this, and though Greek and Latin lyric verse, which is well-known, and the old English verse seen in *Pierce Ploughman* are in sprung rhythm, it has in fact ceased to be used since the Elizabethan age..."<sup>3</sup>

### *Early Criticism*

Turning to the criticism, we find that, at least in the early years, no mention was made, in either challenge or agreement, of his theory of sprung rhythm's classical precedents. However, much was made of the peculiar word order of some of his verse, and comments such as these were forthcoming: "he chooses to cast his sentences and phrases into Latin order, the fanciful order of Latin verse".<sup>4</sup> Another writer, publishing in the following year (1920), complained that "He casts his words about, forgetting that when using an uninflected language this cannot be done unduly without involving the sense in obscurity".<sup>5</sup> Alan Porter blamed "his scholarship in Latin" for making him forget "that an uninflected language has need of such words" as conjunctions, articles and pronouns.<sup>6</sup>



The other favoured subject at this time, in connecting Hopkins with his classical roots, was the tendency to tmesis and compounds, splitting words, and splicing others that are usually strangers to one another. The same reviewer spoke of his "involving the sense in obscurity", mentioned his "love of compound words" and attributed this, too, to his classical learning, "particularly Greek".<sup>7</sup> Lahey's biography attributed the tmesis to the influence of Homer; the example he uses from Hopkins to illustrate the point is "Brim, in a flash, full".<sup>8</sup> It seems possible that Hopkins may have been encouraged by his reading of Latin and Greek to be liberal in his splicing of words, although other candidates have been suggested, ranging from the Anglo-Saxon and the Welsh, through Shakespeare to Keats. The latter cases are just as plausible, and this must come as a sobering reminder of the highly speculative nature of many of the connections critics advocate so keenly.

The idea that Hopkins' eccentricities of syntax and word order could have been due to his study of Latin and Greek strike us as implausible, at least in the manner in which they are presented in these instances. The implication seems to be that somehow Hopkins simply 'forgot' that modern English is an uninflected language (one critic even uses this precise term), or else that he thought he could get away with rupturing conventional syntax, without any sacrifice of clarity. Both tend to

imply a foolishness, or else a naivete, neither of which seems acceptable to our understanding of Hopkins. These connections somehow seem too glib, and disregard both other possible precedents (such as Shakespeare), as well as the fact that some of the more eccentric Victorians seemed equally happy to make use of this technique.

Two critics writing in the nineteen-thirties saw fit to mention the compounding: Alan Pryce-Jones cited the "supple composites" "dapple-dawn-drawn", "O-seal-that-so", "no-man-fathomed" and "wind-lilylocks-laced" (a tmesis) as proof that "in Greek alone would it be possible for Hopkins to write, if not in English", for only in Greek could such new-minted words "be built into the language".<sup>9</sup> And R.S. Stanier, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement* (1933), went so far as to pick out Sophocles as the one whose work "the actual wording of Hopkins' poetry greatly resembles".<sup>10</sup> Stanier suggests that both poets get their effects "very largely by a heaping together of words whose syntactical connection is comparatively unimportant."<sup>11</sup> This seems to say something about eccentric word order *and* the compounding of words that other critics had commented on as separate issues.

*The TLS Debate, 1933*

In 1933, a stormy debate brewed between a few critics whose arguments appeared over a period of a couple of months in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Herbert Read had made what was perhaps the first comment on Hopkins' mention of classical precedent for sprung rhythm. Read connects the classical and Anglo-Saxon, as Hopkins did, when he claimed that "not only Greek and Latin lyric verse, which are in sprung rhythm, but the whole tradition of Teutonic and Norse poetry favours the principle of sprung rhythm."<sup>12</sup> Read's investigation into this area led him to the same conclusion that he came to in studying Hopkins' relation to Anglo-Saxon; in reaching for "the naked thew and sinew of the English language" (quoting Hopkins on Dryden), the poet falls into the most "natural" idiom which is, according to Hopkins (and Read), sprung rhythm. This "naturalness", according to Read, is the secret of Anglo-Saxon, of Greek, and, of course, of Hopkins.<sup>13</sup>

The literary debate referred to above involved Michael Tierney, Humphry House and Herbert Read, and centred on Tierney's claim that Hopkins was influenced in his formulation of sprung rhythm by his study of Greek metrics; Tierney actually takes this a step further and connects Hopkins to a particular study of Greek metre of the time, J.H. Schmidt's *Leitfaden in die Rhythmik und Metrik der Classischen Sprachen*, an

American translation of which appeared in 1878. Tierney argues that Hopkins' prosody of sprung rhythm could apply equally to Schmidt's schema of Greek metre, and that the theories actually utilized identical elements of dactyls, trochees, monosyllabic feet and the reduction of multiple metres into the one, termed "logaoedic".<sup>14</sup> The implications, as far as Tierney is concerned, are germane to the debate over the extent to which Hopkins "liberated" English verse from conventional metrics. Tierney goes so far as to conclude that "to apply to English versification a system invented for Greek choral poetry meant the substitution, so far as metre was concerned, of one set of laws for another".<sup>15</sup> Thus Hopkins did nothing, consciously, to free English verse from the tyranny of obsolete laws. He merely imposed a new kind of tyranny.<sup>16</sup>

Herbert Read mounted a counter-attack in the following week's edition of the *Times Literary Supplement*. To him, what was significant was the fact that Hopkins had put an irregular metre in the place of the old regular one. "Moreover", he added, "the theory, such as it is, is *ex post facto* to the practice. There can be no possible doubt that the rhythm of Hopkins's poems, considered individually, was intuitive in origin".<sup>17</sup> The following week, Humphry House continued the assault with a claim that Tierney's theory of the Schmidt influence "will not upon the published evidence

bear examination".<sup>18</sup> While the American translation of Schmidt surfaced in 1878, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* was written in 1875-6; besides, according to Hopkins himself, the new rhythm in which it was composed had long been "haunting my ear".<sup>19</sup> House, like Read, was convinced that the 1883 Preface was merely "a formal statement of earlier principles and practice".<sup>20</sup> House also remarks that Hopkins' arguments rest more heavily on justification by means of Milton's precedent in the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*.<sup>21</sup>

On March 9th 1933, Tierney responded to both House and Read. Without any textual substantiation, Tierney still rejects the idea that sprung rhythm was intuitive; and he thinks that the Greek influence was direct, not indirect through Milton. Tierney is adamant that the term "logaoedic" and the admission of monosyllabic feet point to the influence of Schmidt's work.<sup>22</sup>

That Hopkins did become acquainted with Schmidt's work is not in doubt - he mentions him in a letter to Bridges in 1886 as he propounds his own theory of Dorian rhythm.<sup>23</sup> It is possible that Hopkins knew of Schmidt's study when he wrote the Preface, where he uses the term "logaoedic". However, we must, I think, concur with that judgement that denies any direct influence of Schmidt on Hopkins' formulation of sprung rhythm.

Nevertheless, there is certainly some truth in Tierney's opinion that Hopkins would have been reluctant to accept "the place assigned to him by Mr. Read among the pioneers of free verse or alongside Walt Whitman".<sup>24</sup> Tierney insists that sprung rhythm has its own laws, and certainly, taking Hopkins' own comments provoked by a comparison of his work with Walt Whitman's, this is substantiated by the poet's own words:

"Extremes meet, and... this savagery of his art, this rhythm in its last ruggedness and decomposition into common prose, comes near the last elaboration of mine. For that piece of mine is very highly wrought..."<sup>25</sup>

We might also remember his comments in a much earlier letter, when he first attempted to clear Bridges' mind over his friend's doubts about sprung rhythm:

"... my apparent licences are counterbalanced, and more, by my strictness. In fact all English verse, except Milton's, almost, offends me as 'licentious'. Remember this..."<sup>26</sup>

It seems to me that Tierney is closer to the truth than Read in this instance, although the evidence perhaps weighs in favour of Read and House when they claim sprung rhythm was an intuitive inspiration - at least initially - but one that Hopkins proceeded to justify in theoretical terms. The description of his writing of the *Deutschland* in the letter to Dixon, the notion of a

rhythm "haunting" the ear, seem to speak in favour of this point of view.

As we move on from this debate, we find valuable new perspectives being opened up on the relationship between Hopkins and the great writers of classical Greek and Latin. From C. Day Lewis' rather vague but evocative description of Hopkins and Aeschylus - "the same fluidity of line, the same architectural massiveness and decorated verbal accumulation"<sup>27</sup> - to Louise Bogan's valuable pinpointing of Hopkins' concept of "overthought and underthought" in Greek tragic poets, where the underthought is conveyed by the choice of metaphor, simile or imagery, and only half-realized by the poet himself. These instances, Bogan points out, "foreshadow recent ideas of scholars concerning the underlying symbolism in Shakespeare's plays".<sup>28</sup> Ironically enough, W.H. Gardner and others have gone on to investigate the currents of underthought in some of Hopkins' own work, sometimes tracing Shakespearian themes and images, for instance, in some of the Dublin sonnets.

### *Hopkins and Aeschylus*

In September 1941, a nine page article appeared in *Studies* (Dublin), entitled "Gerard Manley Hopkins and

Aeschylus", and in it the critic W.B. Stanford put forward a sustained and detailed case for the notion that Hopkins was directly influenced by the Greek poet.

Stanford began by listing the occasions on which Hopkins mentions Aeschylus in the correspondence; and there are certainly a fair number of these, often accompanied by exclamations such as "How noble is the style!"<sup>29</sup> and "What a noble genius Aeschylus had!"<sup>30</sup> Stanford does not omit to mention Hopkins' dictum to admire and do otherwise, but adds that he believes that a strong unconscious influence exerted itself nevertheless.

He includes some impressive quotations to substantiate the case: phrases such as "knee-knave" ("almost certainly from *Seven Against Thebes* line 371")<sup>31</sup> and "fleece of beauty" ("comes, most likely, from *Suppliants* 664-6").<sup>32</sup> However, these could quite conceivably be coincidental. More impressive is this example: from Hopkins:

"O the mind, mind has mountains, cliffs of fall  
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed"

and from Aeschylus' *Suppliants*:

"A sheer, goat-deserted, unpointed-out,  
lonely-minded, hanging,  
vultury, crag..."



"In which the brilliant and vivid epithet "lonely-minded" suggested, I believe, Hopkins's mountains of the mind".<sup>33</sup> This is a good example for displaying both Hopkins' and Aeschylus' favoured practice of coining new words, or else accumulating adjectives to concoct "striking compound epithets".<sup>34</sup> Stanford quotes

"Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, vaulty,  
voluminous... stupendous"

from Hopkins, which he personally finds too "bombastic" but which serves well to convey the necessary impression, and then from Aeschylus -

"a sacrifice different, lawless, banquetless, kin-  
builder of quarrels,  
not manfearing"  
(*Agamemnon* 151-2)

to show how similar these practices are.<sup>35</sup> Finally, Stanford lists several other minor devices - ellipsis, abrupt parenthesis and synaesthetic metaphor - all of which are favoured by Hopkins and Aeschylus.<sup>36</sup>

Stanford is less successful when he takes a broader sweep across the canvas to encompass their "disciplined sensuousness, the same emotional and religious nature, a similar affinity with spacious, deep-penetrating concepts." And, above all, for both poets "The world is charged with the grandeur of God".<sup>37</sup>

These generalizations weaken his case: once again, the argument moves into a much broader arena where connections with any number of poets become possible.

In all, though, this is a penetrating study that indicates a great depth of knowledge of both poets. Some of the parallels in individual instances are indeed startling, although one might question how far this takes us toward a conclusion of definite influence. The habits and devices that characterize their poetic methods may well lead us to suspect this kind of connection, but it is important to note how Hopkins has been connected to other traditions of poetry and other individual writers for the same reasons that Stanford has linked him to Aeschylus. This said, the individual examples of apparent echoes of the Greek poet's verse could well be subconscious borrowings or imitations, born of Hopkins' readings of such works as *Agamemnon* and *Suppliants*. Walter Shewring, in an article published in 1944, took this kind of approach, writing of the difference between "outward and inward imitation of a classical model". He continues: "He [Hopkins] learnt from the ancients (and Milton) in the profound sense in which Dante learnt his style from Virgil".<sup>38</sup>

During 1948, W.A.M. Peters and W.H. Gardner published their important studies of Hopkins. Peters made a few brief, glancing references to Aeschylus (noted as Hopkins' favourite Greek tragedian); and to

Homer, in whom he traced that quality of Hopkins', where "image and object are 'given simultaneously'..." so that the image becomes "one with the object, both in the poet's mind and in the expression in a language".<sup>39</sup> Vague terminology render his argument weak and profoundly unconvincing.

*W.H. Gardner*

As for Gardner, the study of the influence of Latin and Greek began in earnest only in the second volume, published the following year, in 1949. Covering well-trodden ground, Gardner summarized those aspects of Hopkins' work that seemed to owe some kind of debt to classical writers: freedom in positioning of words, alliteration and assonance as found, particularly, in Pindar and Sophocles; cumulative epithets; and the importance of Greek metrics in the formulation of sprung rhythm.<sup>40</sup>

Gardner was convinced that sprung rhythm did owe much to Latin and Greek models. He reviewed the debate between House, Tierney and Read that had taken place in 1933 in the *Times Literary Supplement*, finding himself more in sympathy with Tierney's view than with the others'. He writes that "Professor Tierney seems to be nearer the truth when he says:

"Whether or not Hopkins was influenced by Schmidt's work in the ultimate formulation of his theory, there seems every likelihood that his practice was influenced by his own profound acquaintance with the poetry of which Schmidt's work was a particular metrical interpretation".<sup>41</sup>

And while Gardner maintains that sprung rhythm was certainly "largely intuitive in origin", yet at the same time he demurs to Read's claim that sprung rhythm justifies free rhythm:<sup>42</sup> sprung rhythm has its own laws, laws which do bear a great resemblance to the metrics of classical Greek poetry. Emphasizing the mention of Greek Hopkins makes in the Preface, Gardner also points out the significance of a musical connection; music is closely allied to Greek melic poetry, and it is clear both from Hopkins' letters and from the poems themselves that music and poetry were close kin in Hopkins' mind, too.<sup>43</sup>

While it is true that Hopkins made exhaustive studies of Greek metre, (although his theories of Dorian and Aeolian rhythms have now been discredited, along with Schmidt's), we must not forget that these investigations were not undertaken until he took up his Professorship at Dublin in 1884, long after he had introduced sprung rhythm into the practice of his poetry. Perhaps the most secure conclusion we can come to is that the original, more intuitive inspiration, as opposed to the theory, of sprung rhythm, came in part from his reading of Greek, as well as traditional Welsh

verse and English poets such as Milton. When he came to write the Preface in defence of his prosodic system, he drew upon his broader and deeper knowledge - in particular, of the classical poets - to substantiate his case.

In addition to this, Hopkins' syntax and even his diction may owe something to his love of the Greek: the freedom of an inflected language was (perhaps too freely) echoed by Hopkins - what Gardner, after Coleridge, refers to as "esemplastic syntax" - "a syntax that shapes the whole thought or concept into a unified model of utterance, welding beginning, middle and end so that each receives light and heat from the other two simultaneously."<sup>44</sup> This covers, too, his ability to compress thought and expression, his cumulative epithets, and also the "speed and unity" that Greek verse achieves by lack of punctuation: in Gardner's words, "the mind must sweep on, like a sea-surge, to overtake the meaning" in Greek verse, as in Hopkins.<sup>45</sup>

Following Gardner's study, no new ground was broken in this area for some time. Reviewers, if they commented at all on the topic, tended to concur with Gardner's judgements, noting how it helped to show Hopkins "not as a mere innovator, but as winged with abstruse researches".<sup>46</sup> Stanford's work seemed to be stamped with approval, too; other critics confirmed his research with almost casual references, such as Gordon

Symes' note that Hopkins' coinages "may come from Aeschylus".<sup>47</sup>

### *The 1960's*

It was not until the nineteen-sixties that the debate was really opened up again. Robert Boyle, S.J., in his book *Metaphor in Hopkins*, made another note on Aeschylus - he "is apparently echoed in the words 'earl-stars' and 'Fire-featuring heaven'"<sup>48</sup> - but it was in 1963 that the next significant investigation of Hopkins' classical roots began. Leo Hines published an article in the *Month* entitled "Pindaric Imagery in G.M. Hopkins", in which he claimed that "Pindar substructures Hopkins' entire aesthetic",<sup>49</sup> although he quickly points out that Pindar's religious poetry would not have been known by Hopkins. Nevertheless, Hines presents us with a list of the categories of Pindaric verse and then elects poems of Hopkins' that would fit under each heading: so, hymns ("God's Grandeur"); paeans ("Pied Beauty"); hypochremata (more secular celebrations) ("Hurrahing in Harvest"); processional ("Bugler's First Communion"); encomia (laudatory) (the poems addressed to Christ); threnoi (laments) (*The Wreck of the Deutschland* and "The Loss of the Eurydice"). These are the more plausible suggestions: when forced to choose poems to match the headings parthenia (virgins' songs) and

paroinia (drinking songs), he is obliged to rummage through the minor, unfinished and juvenile poems.<sup>50</sup> Hines is also keen to point out the themes that they have in common - love of nature, the cycle of boyhood, manhood and old age, moral idealism, mythology parallelling contemporary events, hailing old friends, patriotism, and bird symbolism.<sup>51</sup>

All this seems extremely dubious as literary criticism. The categories strain against the point Hines is trying to make, and when he comes to a list of shared themes, credulity finally bursts at the seams. It seems to me that one could find similar patterns of thought and theme in any number of great poets. And to cite "bird imagery", or "love of nature" as particular themes connecting two writers seems faintly ludicrous.

Todd. K. Bender, writing in 1966, tried to make a case aimed at lambasting the critical establishment for ignoring Hopkins' classical background and instead tying him into a purely English context, often stretching no further back than Milton. His argument is based on the idea that Hopkins has been perceived as a *naif*. But as Robert Boyle pointed out in his review of Bender's book *Gerard Manley Hopkins: the Classical Background and Critical Reception of his Work*, this was no longer the accepted point of view.<sup>52</sup> Bender's argument was based on theories some thirty years out of date. And Gardner's and Stanford's work more than compensated for

any early slackness in investigating Hopkins' classical roots. In Boyle's words, "Mr. Bender tilts at windmills that disappeared a quarter of a century ago. And his quoting of classical writers and demonstrations of parallels in Hopkins has long since been done by more knowledgeable men".<sup>53</sup>

Bender's book came in for more scathing attacks - John Goode summarised it as dubious footnotes on Pindar and Greek rhetorical syntax padded out to 160 pages.<sup>54</sup> However, only two years later, Mariani felt secure enough to make a connection between Pindar and Hopkins. His point is actually a valid one, comparing *The Wreck of the Deutschland* with Pindar's odes. Hopkins himself makes the connection:

"The *Deutschland* would be more interesting if there were more wreck and less discourse, I know, but still it is an ode and not primarily narrative. There is some narrative in Pindar but the principle is lyrical... "<sup>55</sup>

Mariani proclaims the *Deutschland* to be "the one English ode to have captured the Pindaric spirit".<sup>56</sup> Mariani was also keen to point out that the music of "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" was based on "the choral strophes of the Dorian mode", especially as found in Pindar's epicinian odes in plainsong".<sup>57</sup>



***Conclusion***

However, it seems in general that by 1949, with the work of Tierney, Stanford and Gardner, the classical roots of Hopkins' poems had been quite thoroughly investigated. Opinions were still divided as to the extent of the influence - particularly on the subject of Greek metrics and sprung rhythm - but whether or not they were consciously incorporated into a carefully-theorized prosody, or whether they exerted a subconscious influence, and were later drawn upon in an *a posteriori* justification of sprung rhythm, the Latin and Greek poets are certainly echoed in the poet whose break with tradition owed so much to his journey to the most ancient springs of inspiration.

CHAPTER XII: "SALAD DAYS"

HOPKINS AND WELSH TRADITIONAL VERSE

*Introduction and Correspondence*

Hopkins' relation to Welsh verse is one that has provoked several detailed studies over the past fifty years. The relationship is more interesting than that of, say, Hopkins and Anglo-Saxon, because there is ample evidence for *direct* influence in this case. Moreover, it is a basis for one of the more stimulating instances of Hopkins' influence on twentieth century poetry, namely his influence on Dylan Thomas (see pp. 310-18).

A study of Hopkins' correspondence will immediately alert us to the likelihood of a strong effect of the Welsh poetic tradition on the Victorian. The earliest reference seems to come in a letter to Bridges dated 20 February 1875 - that is to say, preceding the composition of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and coming close to the end of Hopkins' self-imposed poetic silence:

"Nevertheless, I have tried to learn a little Welsh, in reality one of the hardest of languages".<sup>1</sup>

Wales was dear to Hopkins' heart: his determination to learn the language sprang primarily from a desire to evangelize the people of the country; much later in life he would refer to Wales as "always to me a mother of Muses".<sup>2</sup>

The next reference comes in a letter to Bridges in which Hopkins attempts to provide some kind of background to and explanation of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. Among the remarks lies this one:

"The chiming of consonants I got in part from the Welsh, which is very rich in sound and imagery".<sup>3</sup>

This letter is dated 3rd April 1877. Hopkins writes along similar lines to R.W. Dixon, in October of the following year, talking of "certain chimes suggested by the Welsh poetry I had been reading (what they call *cynghanedd*)... "<sup>4</sup>

As we shall see, the consonantal chime would be an important characteristic of Hopkins' poetic method for some time to come. However, before we move on, it is worth noting another two remarks on the Welsh made by Hopkins. The first refers to metre, noting that "Such rhythm as French and Welsh poetry has is sprung... "<sup>5</sup> This is a profoundly idiosyncratic judgement - French poetry, at least up until the iconoclasm of Mallarmé - is notable for its classical order and regularity.

However, the remark does hint at an influence spreading wider than mere alliterative patterning. Secondly, in what should serve as a caution to those critics investigating the Welsh factor, we find what amounts to a 'cooling' of Hopkins' enthusiasm in a letter of November 1882. Writing of the poem "The Sea and the Skylark", Hopkins comments:

"The sonnet you ask about is the greatest offender in its way that you could have found. It was written in my Welsh days, in my salad days, when I was fascinated with *cynghanedd* or consonant-chime, and, as in Welsh, *englyn*s, 'the sense', as one of themselves said, 'gets the worse of it'".<sup>6</sup>

We must be careful, then, lest any enthusiasm for the connection between Hopkins and *cynghanedd* should allow us to become over-zealous in seeking out examples of that influence.

### *Glyn Jones*

Glyn Jones provided a thorough examination of the issue; it was his article published in *Life and Letters Today* in June 1939 that he considered might have been inspirational for Dylan Thomas' own experimentation in incorporating elements of *cynghanedd* into his verse.<sup>7</sup> Jones considered that the "combination of alliteration and internal rhyme regulated into a system of great strictness and intricacy" found in *cynghanedd* were

"matters of enormous interest" to "a technician and innovator [such] as [Hopkins] was".<sup>8</sup>

Jones, an expert in the field of Welsh bardic verse, described Hopkins' usage as "capricious and faulty".<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, an example such as the one below shows to what powerful effect Hopkins sometimes used what he learnt from the Welsh:

"A master her master and mine  
Banned by the land of their birth  
 The down-dugged ground hugged grey"

Here the lines are divided into three, where the first and second parts rhyme and the second and third are alliterative; so, "master/master", "banned/land", and "down/ground" form the rhymes, and the alliteration is formed by the "m"s (first line), "b"s (second) and "g"s (third line).

Jones pointed out other practices for which Hopkins was indebted to the Welsh, in particular, rhyming accented with unaccented syllables, formation of compound words, and lines broken up by phrases inserted between dashes or parenthetically.<sup>10</sup> Concluding, Jones admits that while Hopkins did imitate some practices of poets such as Daffyd ap Gwilym, yet "until we know more of his reading while he was at St. Bueno's, the question of his indebtedness cannot be fully decided".<sup>11</sup>

Jones, concluded, then, on a rather cautious note, and in the years between his book and the next major piece of criticism in this area (in 1943), only a couple of references were made in passing to the likelihood of the influence of *cynghanedd* - although one reviewer saw fit to mention, in a survey of translated Welsh poetry, that "Even the... experiments of G.M. Hopkins in the 'chiming of consonants' fall far short... of Welsh practice".<sup>12</sup>

#### *Gweneth Lilly*

Gweneth Lilly provided a most exhaustive piece of criticism in an article published in July 1943 entitled "The Welsh Influence on the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins". After a brief discussion noting how the nature of Welsh poetry was well-suited to Hopkins' own poetic sensibilities, Lilly begins by examining Hopkins' comments in the correspondence. Lilly points out the remark on "The Sea and the Skylark" as one implying that the Welsh influence did come to an end at some time before 1882, but also adds that the wording is strong enough to "imply that the influence was at one time considerable".<sup>13</sup> In addition, bearing in mind the Shakespearean context of the phrase (*Antony and Cleopatra*), one could also perceive the implication that these were days of achievement, rather than the more immediately obvious suggestion of immaturity.

Lilly notes some similarities between Hopkins and Welsh verse that might strike a reader on first impressions: a style "economical, impressionistic, concrete"; frequent omission of article, relative pronoun, and even of the verb; and compression by the use of compound words - this latter is portrayed by Lilly as a natural tendency in Hopkins that was perhaps "encouraged by his discovery of the profusion and variety of compounds in Welsh".<sup>14</sup> This sets the tone for what is a very clear, thorough, level-headed examination of the evidence. Lilly is of the opinion that Hopkins' voice is so truly his own that "external influences could at most only modify or develop some of its characteristics". But since Hopkins and the Welsh poets came so close to one another in several regards, "it is at least possible that his natural tendency... was encouraged and developed by his study of Welsh".<sup>15</sup>

Hopkins' idiosyncratic syntax has been frequently criticized, and cited as one of the characteristics most likely to cause unnecessary obscurity. Some critics have seen this as having been brought about by his reading of Latin and Greek, where the inflected languages make new schemata of word order possible - orders that would be grammatically illogical in an analytical language. But these inversions and syntactical ruptures are just as likely to have been prompted, if by precedent at all, then by the Welsh. And Lilly's investigation does provide some evidence to support this theory.

Lilly also provides good examples of the kind of alliterative patterning - the "consonantal chime", in Hopkins' terms - to which he seems, in effect, to have admitted in the correspondence. These include pairs of initial consonants:

"Flashing like flecks of coal"

"And the braided ear breaks out of the sheath"

medial consonants:

"And cipher of suffering Christ"

"O Father, not under thy feathers"

ends of words:

"With gnarls of nails"

"And the riot of a rout"

And internal rhyme:

"Was around them, bound them, or wound them with her"<sup>16</sup>

While Lilly recognizes that Welsh poetry may well be responsible for the inspiration of some of these patterns, he says nothing about Anglo-Saxon, and the possibility that Hopkins' study of these poets' styles may have influenced his own alliterative and internal



rhyme technique. When carried over into modern English composition, it can be hard to distinguish the practices. Finally, any approach to certainty in this matter must come via chronology and the evidence we have that Hopkins' close acquaintance with Anglo-Saxon came much later in his life (see Chapter XIII).

Lilly quotes the unfinished piece "The Woodlark" as one where Hopkins exceeds even the elaborate metrical systems devised by the Welsh. In lines such as these:

"The ear in milk, lush the sash  
 And crush-silk poppies aflash  
 The blood-gush blade-gash  
 Flame-rash rud-red  
 Bud shelling or blood-shed ... "

Hopkins is in full-flight here, unfettered by scholarship and learning. While his knowledge of Welsh or Anglo-Saxon may be a factor, it has been transmuted in poems like these, and he seems to have found, with a steady confidence, his own voice.

Lilly believes that Hopkins' verse would have borne the same defining characteristics of internal rhymes, half-rhymes and alliteration had he never gone to St. Bueno's. But he is equally convinced that "they would not have been found in the same profusion, or in such a variety of patterns".<sup>17</sup> Lilly also provides an impressive rationale for Hopkins' usage of elements of *cynghanedd*: in it Hopkins found "a means of making the

language of poetry more forcible, of giving to the common speech on which it is founded the heightened emphasis of rhetoric".<sup>18</sup> And he concludes by emphasizing once more the essentially unique spirit of Hopkins' work, "nourished by various influences, but in itself vigorously independent".<sup>19</sup>

*W.H. Gardner*

One could hardly expect to find the thoroughness and clarity of Lilly's article exceeded, but W.H. Gardner managed an even more detailed explanation of the principles of *cynghanedd*. However, it would be easy to suspect that this in itself was more for the sake of a display of the critic's virtuosity, since the study does not cover the ground as clearly or effectively as Lilly's simpler item managed to do. After reaching the end of a complex explication, Gardner concludes that Hopkins "allows himself plenty of latitude" when working with *cynghanedd*.<sup>20</sup> Gardner lists and instances the same aspects that other critics and reviewers have noted - consonant chime, vowel-rhymes, fashioning of new compound words, omission of functional words and so on - and adds a few previously-ignored items.

One is what is known in Welsh poetry as *dyfalu*, "the accumulation of images to illuminate one central idea".<sup>21</sup> Gardner gives examples:



Hopkins, what is known as a *Cywydd*, and for which there is no equivalent form in English verse. This piece is dated 24 April 1876. Apparently, the *cynghanedd* in this piece is incorrect in all but two lines. More technically correct is Hopkins' Welsh version of the poem "O Deus, ego amo te", where he was not compelled by choice of form to employ *cynghanedd*. One Welsh scholar's judgement, on the evidence of these pieces, is that:

"I think the poem betrays very definite signs of being the work of a person who has learnt the language but is not sufficiently acquainted with all the details".<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, Gardner tells of a final piece of evidence, an item that was found amongst Hopkins' papers - a long newspaper cutting dating from 1875, which contained a complete Welsh text and translation of Tudur Aled's *Cywydd i Wenfrewi Santes*.

Reviewers seemed impressed by Gardner's exhaustive research; Anne Treneer noted how Gardner "turns to Greek, Latin, Old English and Welsh for help, and very fruitful help, to show Hopkins not as a mere innovator, but as winged with abstruse researches".<sup>24</sup> And from this point on, most seemed agreed that there was conclusive proof that Hopkins had learned some of his practices from his study of Welsh, from "the frequent omission of the article and the relative, the use of

compound words; the device of placing a clause between the pairs of a compound word or between noun and qualifying adjective"<sup>25</sup> to "elaborate consonantal harmonies".<sup>26</sup>

One or two more suggestions were put forward - Anthony Conran claimed that one aspect in particular had been overlooked, and that was the fact that "like many Welsh odes it [the *Deutschland*] is an occasional poem. One could add that this makes it like many *English* odes, too. "Commentators," he added, "have followed in some detail the metrical debt to the bardic conventions that it exhibits", implying that other details had been passed over.<sup>27</sup> He suggests the poets Guto'r Glyn and Tudur Aled as points of comparison.

A couple of writers noted the strange fact that the poet who most successfully introduced characteristics of Welsh traditional poetry into English verse was not a Welshman but a Victorian English gentleman: both Jim Hunter and Glyn Jones commented on this.<sup>28</sup> Hunter also noted the persistence of alliterative patterns in the later sonnets, implying that the influence remained long after the initial enchantment of *cynghaedd* wore off.<sup>29</sup> Again, we must remember that these alliterative techniques are certainly not exclusive to Welsh poetry.

*Conclusion: New Perspectives of Hopkins' Influence*

Finally, moving into the nineteen-sixties, critics began to recognise the influence Hopkins had had on the work of Dylan Thomas, and there was some debate over how the poets related to each other, and how they threaded back to *cynghanedd*. Babette Deutsch, betraying her own uncertainty, suggested that Hopkins and Thomas "share" *cynghanedd*.<sup>30</sup> William York Tindall and Glyn Jones set the record straight: Tindall quotes Thomas as admitting *cynghanedd* to be "a foreign, a closed form to me", and attributes the "occasional and unsystematic interweaving of sound in his poems... to Hopkins, who was a student of Welsh".<sup>31</sup> This is confirmed by Jones, who knew Thomas personally, and who is "sure that the few traces of *cynghanedd* in his work appear there by accident, or as a result of the influence of Hopkins, whose knowledge of this involved study was considerable".<sup>32</sup>

In conclusion, this is certainly one of the clearer areas of a study of Hopkins' literary genetics. With speculation substantiated by documents such as the letters to Bridges of 3 April 1877 and 26 November 1882, and the two Welsh poems written by Hopkins, we can itemize characteristics of Hopkins' poetic that show an indebtedness to traditional Welsh verse and make some attempt at calculating the extent of those debts.

Furthermore, a study of this topic throws invaluable light on the connection between Hopkins and Dylan Thomas.

CHAPTER XIII: "PURITY OF ENGLISH VERSE"

HOPKINS AND ANGLO-SAXON POETRY

*Introduction and the Correspondence*

Certain characteristics of Hopkins' poetry have given rise to speculation that he may have been influenced by the Anglo-Saxon verse he read. In particular, it has been suggested that he may owe something to the Old English writers in his formulation of sprung rhythm, as well as being affected by their complex system of syllabic and alliterative patterning.

When Hopkins' correspondence was published in 1935, the evidence became clear that he had made some study of Anglo-Saxon verse. Hopkins' own preface to his poetry, written in 1883 and published in the first edition of the poems (1918), does not mention Anglo-Saxon, although he does refer to the medieval poem *Piers Plowman* as an example of a piece written in what he would classify as sprung rhythm, and in his letters to Bridges we find that he did see a close hereditary connection between the Old English and the later-medieval. He came to study Anglo-Saxon quite late in life: in a letter of 26 November 1882 he writes:

"In fact I am learning Anglo-Saxon and it is a vastly superior thing to what we have now".<sup>1</sup>



In a couple of other places he refers to *Piers Plowman*: in a letter of 5 September 1880 he admits "I have not studied *Piers Ploughman* [sic],"<sup>2</sup> and on 18 October 1882 he writes that "I am reading that famous poem and am coming to the conclusion that it is not worth reading".<sup>3</sup> However, in this same letter he does note that sprung rhythm existed "in full force in Anglo-Saxon verse and in great beauty",<sup>4</sup> while it is in "degraded and doggerel shape" in *Piers Plowman*.<sup>5</sup>

Hopkins' attitude to the Anglo-Saxon precedent is one of a recognition of kinship. It would be unwise to suggest (as some critics have) that he was directly influenced by any Old English writers, because it seems clear that he came to study them very late in life, many years after he had formulated and applied his own prosodic system. Old English was a confirmation of that system, a kind of substantiation, rather than a model that could be imitated. We might speculate that it would have appealed to Hopkins' patriotic tendencies, and we may also remember Leavis' classification of him that connects him to the 'roots' tradition of English poetry, rejecting the Italianate leanings of such contemporaries as Tennyson and Rosetti.

*Early Critical Responses*

Some of the comments relating Hopkins to Anglo-Saxon do date from before the publication of the Hopkins correspondence. G.W. Stonier, in 1932, noted the "influence" of the author of *Beowulf* in a scatter-gun list of possible poetic ancestors.<sup>6</sup> Herbert Read's important essay on Hopkins, printed in the volume *English Critical Essays of the Twentieth Century*, suggested one way in which Hopkins might resemble Anglo-Saxon poets: Read begins by quoting Hopkins' description of Dryden:

"His style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of all our literature on the naked thew and sinew of the English language".

He then goes on to suggest that this tells us something about Hopkins' approach to the English language: "poetry must start from the nature of a language - must flow from a language's inflections and qualities, must... be natural. Such was the secret of Greek and Anglo-Saxon poetry".<sup>7</sup> Read believes that the natural rhythm must be sprung rhythm, and also attempts to show, in a sketchy, colloquial fashion, how "the tradition of sprung rhythm to which Hopkins returned has a tradition within our own linguistic world at least twice as long as the tradition of running rhythm".<sup>8</sup>

This is fully in tune with Hopkins' own beliefs.

He always maintained that he did not invent sprung rhythm, only that he fashioned a particular type for his own use. Believing it to be (ideally) as close as possible to speech rhythms and musical patterns, he considered it the most natural form of prosody.

Occasionally, a critic's remark will betray an inexcusable flimsiness of his or her knowledge of a particular subject, or perhaps a superficial reading of a review text. As I made clear in the Introduction, my own acquaintance with Classical, Welsh and Anglo-Saxon verse is very limited, but one example is Eda Lou Walton's article 'Portrait of a Poet', published in the *Nation* on 24 July 1935. Her comments include the remark that Hopkins "learned his use of sprung rhythm from Anglo-Saxon".<sup>9</sup> Since the article itself is a review of the newly-published correspondence, which, as we have already noted, shows quite clearly that Hopkins did not study Anglo-Saxon for the first time until 1882, this is a particularly conspicuous error. Similarly, Cornelius Weygandt in *The Time of Yeats* (1937), while usefully summarizing the intentions of sprung rhythm ("naturalistic richness of conversation" and "variety of rhythm for variety's sake"), nevertheless is mistaken when he claims that Hopkins' "eye was on the Old English model".<sup>10</sup> Egerton Clarke was nearer the mark when he noted that Hopkins was "essentially a traditionalist", and one who found himself, almost inadvertently, fulfilling the Anglo-Saxon tradition.<sup>11</sup>

*More Perceptive Criticism*

Up to this point, remarks had been restricted to general comments on sprung rhythm. However, towards the end of the 1930's, more thoughtful judgements were forthcoming. Ralph S. Walker, writing an introduction to Hopkins for the *Aberdeen University Review*, commented on sprung rhythm's "forceful beat... alliteration [and] free run of unstressed syllables" which brought it closer to Old English (*Beowulf* and *The Wanderer* were singled out), than to the *Samson Agonistes* choruses that Hopkins was so fond of using as a clear precedent.<sup>12</sup> Walker suggests that Hopkins and Old English verse-writers share a common vision: both were "intended to be heard: it [Old English] was for chanting, or for recitation, not for reading..."<sup>13</sup> This chimes with Hopkins' opinion of his own poetry, constantly emphasized in the correspondence, that it needs to be read aloud to be fully understood.

Walker also points to another feature of Hopkins' verse that had generally been neglected up to this point: Hopkins' diction. Although many critics have followed Leavis and placed him outside the Latinate tradition of Spenser, Milton and Tennyson, and ranked him alongside Shakespeare, Donne, and Eliot, no-one has yet pointed out the significance of Hopkins' preference for Anglo-Saxon words over Latin ones. But as Walker points out, "His taste for words of Anglo-Saxon

derivation, and for word formations on Anglo-Saxon principles, can be seen affecting almost every line of his mature poetry".<sup>14</sup> This is only a mild overstatement of the case - words such as "bone-house", "wan-wood" and "hailropes" spring to mind - but it is important to note how Hopkins' classical background may also have influenced him, as we saw in Chapter XI.

In 1940, Henry W. Wells made several comments on Hopkins' relation to Anglo-Saxon precedent in his study of literary genetics *New Poets from Old*. He too noted the Anglo-Saxon rooted words and imaginative compounds,<sup>15</sup> as well as alliterative patterns fashioned after Old and Middle English,<sup>16</sup> but also offered one or two more original suggestions. Firstly, he suggested that Hopkins' ecstatic devotion recalled that of Cædmon or Cynewulf.<sup>17</sup> This in itself does not take us very far, for it seems that one could easily say the same (only more so) about Hopkins and Donne, Crashaw, Vaughan, and any number of other religious poets. The second is a somewhat bizarre suggestion, that the opening of Part Two of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is a paraphrase of lines 1761-8 of *Beowulf*.<sup>18</sup> Compare:

"'Some find me a sword; some  
The flange and the rail; flame,  
Fang or flood,' goes Death on drum,  
And storm bugles his fame".

with:

"...Nu is þines mæznes blæd  
 ane hwile; eft sona bið,  
 þæt þec adl odde ecz eafopes zetwafed,  
 odde grippe meces, odde zares fliht,  
 odde fyres feng, odde flódes wylm,  
 odde atol ylðo; odde eazena bearhtm  
 forsited and forsworced; semninga bið,  
 þæt dec, dryht-zuma, dead aferwyded."<sup>19</sup>

which could be translated as:

"Now, for a little while, your might is at full glory; yet soon it will come to pass that sickness or the sword's edge will strip you of your strength; or it will be the embrace of fire, or the surge of flood, or the bite of a blade, or the flight of a spear, or fearsome old age; or else the clear light of your eyes will fade and grow dim; presently it will come about that death shall overpower you, O warrior!"<sup>20</sup>

As we have already noted, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* was written some six years before Hopkins began to study Anglo-Saxon, and so this cannot be a direct paraphrase. However, it is possible that Hopkins may have glanced at a translation of *Beowulf* before this time.

Terence Heywood made the same point in an article published about the same time as Wells' book, when he remarks on a mistake made by Babette Deutsch - the same kind of mistake that both Wells and Walton made. Heywood quotes Deutsch's *This Modern Poetry*: "what he took from Anglo-Saxon verse was not merely stress prosody, but the emphatic alliteration, the energy which characterized it".<sup>21</sup> Heywood states that Hopkins could

not have taken any of these things from Old English; "when eventually he did turn to it and to *Piers Ploughman*, they merely tended to confirm him in his practice".<sup>22</sup> In this Heywood agrees with Herbert Read's judgement that sprung rhythm was an intuitive part of Hopkins' poetic genius, and that the theory came later, only as a justification of what his Muse had led him to write.

W.A.M. Peters' important study, published in 1948, had something to add on the subject of Hopkins' diction. It is Peters' opinion that Hopkins occasionally went too far in his determination to seek out the Anglo-Saxon word over the Latinate, a search that led him through a labyrinth of obscurity.<sup>23</sup> However, Peters is convinced that the idiosyncrasy was not mere affectation, nor even "added ornament that well-suited the tone or atmosphere of his poetry". Rather "they were part of the expression of his own inscape".<sup>24</sup> Peters also commented on the "alliteration" and "structure of his sentences" that bore a resemblance to Anglo-Saxon, but it was W.H. Gardner who was to develop this study most fully, in the first volume of his major work on Hopkins, first published in 1948.

#### *W.H. Gardner*

Gardner first established the background of

Hopkins' acquaintance with Anglo-Saxon, as far and as accurately as possible. According to Gardner, Hopkins' knowledge of Anglo-Saxon prior to his studies in 1882 would have come solely from his reading of the American philologist G.P. Marsh's *Lectures on the English Language*.<sup>25</sup> From this, Hopkins would have known that stress and alliteration were structurally important in Old English, but would have known none of the detail of the structure's patterning. Gardner continues by providing a quite detailed explanation of the Old English syllabic system.<sup>25</sup> Incidentally, it is just possible that Hopkins may have become acquainted with the passage of *Beowulf* quoted above from Marsh.

Although it has been firmly established that Hopkins could not have taken any lessons directly from his Anglo-Saxon poetic ancestors, yet we still recognise striking similarities between the Old English prosodic system and Hopkins' own, both falling into the 'pro-stress' camp of believers. Gardner notes that Hopkins gave the old stress-metre "a new lease of life": by taking its regular lineal alliteration, in itself somewhat prone to monotony, and "wedding it to the more varied rhymed verse forms of Romantic origin", Hopkins managed to preserve the best and avoid "the effete in the older Teutonic and Romantic modes and rhythms".<sup>27</sup>

The other important point made by Gardner - one echoed by later critics both in relation to Anglo-Saxon



and classical precedent - was regarding syntax. The fact that Old English was considerably more inflected than modern English gave the poets freedom to place the elements of their sentences in what would seem to us to be an eccentric order. Gardner notes that "those inversions and far-stepping syntactical relationships which are occasionally so puzzling in Hopkins" were common in Anglo-Saxon.<sup>28</sup> However, if we are to speculate that Hopkins took this practice from precedent, we would also have to consider his reading of Latin and Greek as a more likely model, for, again, this practice of his does predate his study of Old English verse: up until 1882, his knowledge of its system was very limited.

#### *Decline of Critical Interest*

In the following decades, the interest in Hopkins' relation to Anglo-Saxon seemed to die away. Perhaps the limited usefulness of the topic was realized and accepted once it had been established that Hopkins could not have come under any direct influence. Some critics persisted in making the same mistake, however - Gordon Symes claimed in 1949 that Hopkins' prosody was rooted in Anglo-Saxon and the Welsh *cyngan edd*;<sup>29</sup> in 1968 Donald McChesney wrote that Hopkins "gathered art and techniques from Old English poetry, Old Norse and Icelandic verse, Welsh bardic verse and the rhetoric of

Greece and Rome",<sup>30</sup> again supposing Hopkins to have a range of knowledge that he did not possess; the same writer, in a different publication, spoke of Hopkins' alliterative system and admitted it was "partly true" that he derived it from Old English, although more so from *cynghanedd*.<sup>31</sup> Again, it seems more likely that the practice was intuitive, and perhaps stimulated by his study of *cynghanedd*, and later only confirmed by the Anglo-Saxon precedent.

John Heath-Stubbs, writing in 1950, is more accurate than either Symes or McChesney; he recognises that Hopkins had unearthed a tradition in English verse that stretched back through the centuries, one that had been lost by the cross-breeding of pure Anglo-Saxon blood: "The combination of the principles of stress, alliteration, and quantity which go to make up the style of Hopkins's verse is, fundamentally, the same as had existed in Old English poetry before the essential genius of the language had been overlaid by French influence".<sup>32</sup>

### *Conclusion*

This takes us back to Herbert Read, and his quotation of Hopkins' comment on Dryden. The endeavour to reach "the naked thew and sinew of the English language" is part of Hopkins' poetic intent. The stress

here is definitely on the word *English*. While we must conclude that Hopkins did not come under the direct influence of Anglo-Saxon verse, nevertheless we must recognise that Hopkins' poetic chimed in harmony with what he found there when he did come to study it. Commenting in the letter of 26 November 1882 on William Barnes' *An Outline of English Speech-Craft* (1878), written in "a sort of modern Anglosaxon", he remarks, "It makes one weep to think what English might have been", and that "Anglosaxon... is a vastly superior thing to what we have now".<sup>33</sup> He evidently felt some kinship with Anglo-Saxon; "I cannot doubt that no beauty in a language can make up for want of purity", he wrote to Bridges,<sup>34</sup> and it is through this search for pure, true Englishness in his poetry that he is connected to his country's most ancient literary tradition.

CHAPTER XIV: "NEW READINGS"CRITICISM AFTER 1970*Introduction*

In the Introduction I made clear my reasons for limiting this survey chronologically, and this chapter should be seen more as an afterword, perhaps: a prototype for an investigation of the post-1970 period along the lines of the thesis. My methodology in research-terms has, by necessity, undergone a transformation for the recent material. I have chosen two major strategies: a survey of some of the most important works of criticism on Hopkins published since 1970, and, secondly, a review of the specialized periodicals; this means, for the most part, the *Hopkins Quarterly*, and publications of the annual Hopkins Society lectures, along with one or two issues of *Victorian Poetry* and the like. What is most evidently lacking is a broader sweep of literary studies where Hopkins may figure prominently without taking the 'title role', and the studies and reviews in general in popular periodicals and newspapers.

The results of my skirmishes with the post-1970 material have been susceptible to some kind of tentative shaping and classification. With a degree of generalization, it is possible to detect a couple of

major trends: the thorough scrutiny of Hopkins' Victorian context, and his relation to his Romantic precursors. Other approaches are notable by their scarcity, particularly the Metaphysical connections, and there has been a recession of the Shakespeare-Milton question except in the category of 'underthought' studies.

### *Underthought Studies*

The latter have, predictably, appeared in some profusion in the *Hopkins Quarterly* and other periodicals. It is not my intention to give any detailed discussion of these articles, although a brief mention of one or two may hint at their curious interest: "'Tom's Garland': Hopkins's Political Poem" (John Sutherland, *Victorian Poetry*, 1972) is a rather indirect parallelism of that poem and Shakespeare's social themes in *Coriolanus*;<sup>1</sup> Walter J. Ong, S.J. suggests the underthought of *Henry V* III.vii, the scene in the King of France's camp, in "The Windhover" (*Hopkins Quarterly*, 1974).<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, James Milroy compared the rhythm of stanza 28 of the *Deutschland* (beginning "But how shall I... make me room there") with the *Macbeth* I.vii soliloquy ("If 'twere done when 'tis done").<sup>3</sup> And John Robinson revived the more familiar parallel of "No worst there is none" with passages of *King Lear*. Milton was less popular in this critical

vein: however, John J. Glavin made a strong case for a comparison of the *Deutschland* and "Lycidas" in 1980,<sup>5</sup> and Ong developed this further in his *Hopkins, the Self and God* published later the same year.

### *Milton and Shakespeare*

Although much of the study of relations between Hopkins and Milton and Shakespeare was now limited to these tracings of specific influence - or else manifestations of the concept of underthought - there were a few reminders of the great debate that Leavis had engendered in the 1930's.

Robinson took note of Hopkins' references to Milton and Shakespeare and suggested that he was "attempting to give himself definition with relation to officially great poetry" in these instances.<sup>7</sup> Robinson maintains that, while Hopkins did see the need for a change of direction in English poetry, "we should be foolish to accept uncritically his own estimations" of his work, and he adds "obviously he is not Miltonic".<sup>8</sup>

In an article scrutinizing the sonnet "Thou art indeed just Lord", Kunio Shimane raised a familiar critical ghost in utilizing a "masculine" and "feminine" dialectic. Interestingly, Shimane defines Hopkins as a "masculine" poet, with a "rigid and dynamic style of

exaggerating the supremacy of the consonant".<sup>9</sup> Milton belongs in the other group, with his "feminine, heavy and static style... featuring the sonority of the vowel".<sup>10</sup> This is a reversal of Egerton Clarke's terminology that we came across in Chapter III (see p.88). There, Milton's style was "aggressively masculine", whereas Hopkins, like Shakespeare, successfully combined the virtues of the two genders.<sup>11</sup> Clarke is perhaps concentrating more on tone, the stance of the poet as he confronts and addresses his reader, while Shimane is concerned with a more technical point of style.

### *Ironic Harvest*

One of the most thought-provoking accounts of Hopkins' reception occurred in Geoffrey Thurley's *The Ironic Harvest*, published in 1974. Thurley's thesis was that the ironist-intellectualist tradition had come to dominate English poetry and had led contemporary artists into a creative impasse. Much of the responsibility is placed at the feet of critics like Richards, Leavis and Empson. The obsession with irony had made poets sceptical of the wide, exalted scale their art had traditionally embraced since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Leavis in particular demanded self-knowledge as a goal, coupled with a deflationary irony. Thurley refers to Leavis' "almost emotional need to

debunk Milton"<sup>12</sup>. Milton, along with some of the Romantics, were obvious targets, with the emphasis on the 'egotistical sublime'. According to Thurley, Hopkins fulfilled the ironists' criterion of self-knowledge, with his "increasingly intense spiritual drive towards absolute 'honesty', and an acquaintance with the spirit's bedrock".<sup>13</sup> Although he had roots in Romanticism - anchored by landscapes - there is a "significant hardening of texture and feeling" in his work that distinguishes him from his predecessors.<sup>14</sup> His "existential" thrust is what makes him attractive to the ironists.

Thurley's argument is a cogent and convincing one. It goes a long way towards explaining how Hopkins became fashionable at the time of the publication of the second edition of the poetry in 1930. Richards used "Spring and Fall" in his *Practical Criticism* experiments. Leavis wrote one of the most influential pieces in Hopkins studies in *New Bearings in English Poetry*, and works like Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* seem eminently suitable for interpretations of Hopkins' work. Interestingly, Eliot, another of the intellectualist-ironists, remains an exception, in that he was not a Hopkins fan, but, for the most part, Hopkins was perfect grist for their mills; the notion of 'difficulty' in poetry being transformed from a derogatory judgement into a term of praise in this period has already been noted (see pp.222-4, above). Thurley's emphasis on the



ironic, almost as if the distrust of language is extending to include distrust of the self and the poetic voice, is an important development of this understanding.

### *Romanticism and the Anxiety of Influence*

The other major idea that is prominent in a survey of the post-1970 material is rooted in Harold Bloom's important work *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). Bloom's theory, that all poets write in the shadow of a predecessor's work, and that they attempt to escape that shadow of influence by remoulding the previous poem, has been applied to studies of Hopkins in several different ways. Michael Sprinker, in *A Counterpoint of Dissonance* (1980), found Hopkins trapped in "the paradoxical situation of the modern poet in which he is compelled to honour and to imitate his precursors and to differ from them at the same time."<sup>15</sup> The *Deutschland* was an act of creative revisionism of Milton and the Romantic sublime.<sup>16</sup> The "'ruins and wrecks'" that Sprinker refers to in speaking of all the poetry that followed "resulted from his too successful quest for the Sublime in the first and only poem in this mode".<sup>17</sup> His idiosyncrasies are described quite memorably by drawing an analogy with Jacob's wrestling with the Angel of the Lord: just as Jacob limped forever after, so was Hopkins "permanently marked with the stylistic oddities imposed

by the strain of creating himself as a poet".<sup>18</sup> Sprinker was of the opinion that it was with Hopkins that "Modern English poetry properly begins".<sup>19</sup>

The Romantic connection is another that has been pursued in this recent period of Hopkins studies, although the influence of Bloom's study has not usually been so apparent as it is in Sprinker's book. Louis Rader, for instance, seems to approach the topic in a more old-fashioned way, noting Hopkins' use of Romantic epithets,<sup>20</sup> his mapping of the correspondence between man and nature (in, for example, "Penmaen Pool" and "The Sea and the Skylark")<sup>21</sup>, and his structure, which proceeds from description to contemplation to a realization of significance, as Wordsworth's did.<sup>22</sup> Rader distinguishes him from the Metaphysicals (who had had no interest in Nature), and his fellow Victorians, who used Nature as a setting rather than, as Hopkins and the Romantics did, as a theme.<sup>23</sup> Rader's conviction is that Hopkins is most closely related to these predecessors; however, his argument is unsound, lacking depth and detail above all, although he does recognize the limitations of his study, proposing that the connection requires more critical attention.<sup>24</sup>

Norman H. MacKenzie, in his *Reader's Guide* (1981), found Keats' influence much in evidence in the early poetry - "The Habit of Perfection",<sup>25</sup> "God's Grandeur",<sup>26</sup> "Morning, Midday and Evening Sacrifice",<sup>27</sup>

and "The Elopement"<sup>28</sup> amongst others - and Leavis, too, singled out "The Habit of Perfection" for comment in his lecture "Gerard Manley Hopkins: Reflections After Fifty Years" in 1971. "The poet who wrote [it]", he proclaimed, "was more like Keats than any other of the Victorian age - or any other that I know of."<sup>29</sup> The quality he emphasized was the language's "sensuous concreteness", precisely what is lacking in Tennyson, according to Leavis.<sup>30</sup>

Other studies of Hopkins' relation to the Romantics tended to move along the lines of Bloom's study, whether consciously or not. David A. Downes produced one of the most worthwhile articles in the *Hopkins Quarterly*, which has generally concerned itself with irritatingly dust-dry analyses of minutiae. Writing about *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, Downes suggests that we have yet to rid ourselves of the legacy of Romanticism - ours is a post-Romantic age - and that "one of the major reasons we revere this poem... is that it is a supreme example of the Romantic imagination".<sup>31</sup>

Marylou Motto, in her work *Mined with a Motion* (1984), set out clearly the main distinction between Hopkins' poetic and that of the Romantic poet: she sees Keats' "negative capability" at the core of their rationale, contrasting it with Hopkins to whose life and work "fact, reason and a defined system of religious values are of course integral."<sup>32</sup> Motto saw Hopkins as

one who de-emphasized the role of the poet (his rejection of the idea of publication is symptomatic), eschewed paganism and, naturally, rejected the idea of poetry as religion. What is more, Hopkins did not see the poet (to use Wordsworth's term) "half-creating" the world with his imagination but, rather, discovering what was already there.<sup>33</sup> In this he seems to be closer to the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century.

Paul Mariani (*A Usable Past*, 1984) has argued a similar point while referring directly to Bloom's work, where Hopkins is seen as a weak Romantic, generally overestimated in Bloom's opinion.<sup>34</sup> Mariani writes that Hopkins was trying to escape the Romantic revolution in sensibility that had led to a flaunting of the self.<sup>35</sup> Generally, this was achieved by a concentration on the object rather than subjective *seeing*, and a stress on the singing, not the singer.<sup>36</sup> Mariani concludes with a suggestion that Hopkins, returning to tradition, chose Shakespeare and Dryden over the heritage of Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson and Swinburne.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note how Leavis' Shakespeare/Milton split has remained a commonplace. In an earlier chapter, Mariani also traces the influence of Swinburne (his "sensual music") on Hopkins, and Hopkins' swerve away from it, as well as the impact on his style of Whitman's longer line, which Hopkins then controlled and chastened.<sup>38</sup>

Sprinker, Motto and Mariani all seem to be implying a swerve away from the Romantic predecessors, and Lichtmann's very recent study (*The Contemplative Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*) argues the same: "I believe Hopkins was at special pains to distance himself from Wordsworth throughout his work".<sup>39</sup> Lichtmann usefully clarifies an issue that became quite complex in arguments of C. Day Lewis and others during the 1930's. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge had tended to mark off poetry as the territory of the emotions, and reserved prose for scientific truth and empirical fact. Wordsworth's distinction in diction, then, was not between poetry and prose, for he believed that the language spoken in each was identical; his division was only between poetry and science.<sup>40</sup> Lichtmann feels that Hopkins wished to "'re-sacralize' poetry to make its utterance special and discontinuous with ordinary prose".<sup>41</sup>

### *Hopkins the Victorian*

The other major area of study has been in the related spheres of Hopkins as a Victorian, as a Modernist, and as an influence on later poets. Alison G. Sulloway's *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper* (1972) is a detailed, closely-argued investigation of Hopkins as a Victorian gentleman, made up of the manly virtues ("'prowess, loyalty and honour'")

allied to pathos and courtesy and a Christian morality.<sup>42</sup> She sees "The Handsome Heart" as a poem dealing with "the apotheosis of street urchin into modest, deferential Christian gentleman", and "Brothers" and "On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People" as being in a similar vein.<sup>43</sup> Her most detailed analysis is of the relation between Hopkins and Ruskin, finding common themes in both ("social anger... platonic pairs of opposites... hot and cold, swiftness and slowness, dimness and dazzle, sweet and sour", the "mimetic function of religious art", and "nature's infinity and nature's specificity" amongst others.<sup>44</sup> Sulloway admits the futility of attempting to delimit the exact areas of debt Hopkins owed Ruskin or to decide where such overlap was due to "direct imitation" and where to "a mere startling similarity of vision, bred perhaps of a common temperament, a common intellectual climate, or similar education and reading".<sup>45</sup> Lichtmann, incidentally, also found a connection between Hopkins and Ruskin,<sup>46</sup> and Hilary Fraser's *Beauty and Belief* has also helped to place Hopkins' aesthetics within their Victorian context.

Sulloway devoted a chapter of *The Victorian Temper* to a study of the apocalyptic themes and language of the *Deutschland*, for the Romantics and, even more so, the Victorians, had "an intensely apocalyptic view of history", many fearing "national and international catastrophes not only as present dangers, but as semi-

divine premonition of more upheavals to come".<sup>47</sup> Pusey, Liddon and Newman, acquaintances of Hopkins' commanding varying degrees of his respect and reverence, all sounded apocalyptic alarms at one time or another.<sup>48</sup>

While Sulloway convincingly establishes much common ground between Hopkins and some of his contemporaries - Ruskin in particular - the emphasis is, for the most part, on the earlier poetry. Only one of the Dublin sonnets is mentioned at all, and it is the opinion of many critics that it is precisely these poems that constitute a large part of Hopkins' greatness and originality. Moreover, the startlingly progressive techniques he employs are generally played down in Sulloway's study, and she sometimes twists and crams her material uncomfortably into her notions of such concepts as the Victorian gentleman. Nevertheless, it is valuable within its own limitations, with much impressive tying-in of biographical detail.

#### *Other Investigations*

A few writers cast doubt on general trends in Hopkins criticism during the century: Bernard Bergonzi, speaking in 1975, complained that Hopkins' reputation had not been helped "by those eager critics who used to assume that he was essentially a great twentieth century poet born out of his time".<sup>49</sup> Bergonzi stressed the

Tory politics, imperialist sympathies and jingoistic patriotism Hopkins displayed both in his correspondence and his poetry.<sup>50</sup> Incidentally, Bergonzi is one of the only critics I have found who has maintained seventeenth century Metaphysical roots for Hopkins' poetic, claiming Herbert's influence on his "plain diction" and "argumentative, dialectical structure".<sup>51</sup> As usual, the same traits could connect Hopkins to any number of other predecessors.

Leavis returned to the debate over which he had held sway some forty years earlier in his lecture to the Hopkins Society in 1971. He was doubtful of the value of the insistence of some on the relation between Hopkins' prosody and Greek prosody, or Welsh *cynghanedd*, considering it to be "academic in the bad sense".<sup>52</sup> He believed that his importance in the 1920's had been in bringing back into poetry "the distinctive speech strength of English", the "resources of living - that is, spoken English".<sup>53</sup> He concluded by reiterating that well-known, much-contested placement of Hopkins in a Shakespearean stream of tradition, as opposed to the Spenser-Milton-Tennyson line of descent.<sup>54</sup>

James Milroy agreed that Hopkins' guiding principle in honing his diction had been towards speech,<sup>55</sup> and in this he anticipated the direction that twentieth century poets would take. Hopkins aimed to "exploit the potential of English - phonetic,



etymological, syntactic and lexical - as fully as he could", Milroy maintained. "He was the only major Victorian poet to have broken away from the standard Model".<sup>56</sup> There is an interesting paradox here, however: as Milroy noted some time earlier (in an article for the *Hopkins Quarterly*, in 1975), the language research conducted in Victorian times, unearthing dialects and non-standard words, greatly influenced Hopkins.<sup>57</sup> We should also remember the work of Barnes and Doughty in this respect, and recall the attempt by some critics to yoke Hopkins to the latter in particular during the 1930's (see pp.194-7).

### *Hopkins' Influence*

Finally, it is noticeable how little attention has been paid to Hopkins' influence over the last twenty years. One article did reassess his impact on a few poets, appearing in the *Vital Candle* volume of 1984. The author, Peter Hinchcliffe, suggests that the 1930's poets lionized Hopkins partly because Pound, Eliot and others of that set had rejected him: they were "looking for an ally in their own struggle with the previous generation" and found Hopkins. Hinchcliffe works in the light of the Bloomian anxiety of influence theory, where the real influences on a poet are those against which he struggles hardest. So the fact that Dylan Thomas and

W.H. Auden, for instance, denied having been influenced by Hopkins is taken as proof in itself.<sup>58</sup>

Thomas denied being aware of the influence without discounting the possibility altogether, and Hinchcliffe finds Hopkinsian alliteration, assonance, coinages and compounds in "Fern Hill" and "Especially When the October Wind".<sup>59</sup> Others have carried out more comprehensive and detailed examinations of parallels between these two (see pp.310-17).

If the "hot" Hopkins inspired Thomas (Hinchcliffe's terms), then the "cool" Hopkins influenced Auden. Hinchcliffe compares, illuminatingly, the opening of "St. Winefred's Well" and "Paid on Both Sides", and also argues that the landscaping in Hopkins must have affected Auden's early verse.<sup>60</sup> And almost incidentally, it is worth noting as we conclude this sketch of the period 1970-90 that Hinchcliffe agrees with Williams and not with Leavis on that much-debated issue of the two traditions: he aligns Hopkins with Milton rather than Leavis' Shakespearean line.<sup>61</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Although this study of the past two decades has had to be much less comprehensive than the preceding chapters, I believe that some trends can still be

detected. However, they must remain sketchy and provisional, for they lack the weight that the sheer bulk of earlier research lends to the rest of the thesis.

In brief, the Metaphysical connections have all but vanished. Milton and Shakespeare parallels have for the most part been shunted into a siding specializing in close analysis of underthought and similar studies; the idea of Hopkins as a Victorian has solidified and been subjected to some close scrutiny and substantiation; and the notion of Hopkins' influence has been accepted, its boundaries circumscribed. One or two others, it seems, Whitman in particular, have yet to receive the full attention they deserve. But most rewarding has been the work displaying Bloom's influence, and emphasizing Hopkins' swerve away from the burden of the past imposed upon him by his Romantic predecessors.

CONCLUSION: "MY OWN APPOINTED PLACES"

The territory this thesis has surveyed has been wide, unruly and often difficult: my intention has been to impose upon it some kind of pattern, an order that makes some sense of more than half a century of scholarship and criticism. The scope, I had originally presumed, would narrow when it shifted from reception of Hopkins in full to perceptions of his relation to poetic tradition. As it has turned out, while the 'microscoping' has provided opportunities for some enlightening, close textual analysis, it has also formed a solid foundation for more adventurous, and widely-implicated, speculation.

I would suggest that all the material gathered by archive and library research may be placed in four general categories: first, and usually of least intrinsic value, is the review. Occasionally, some remarkable insights have gleamed from the vast, bare, grey rock of generalizations and off-the-cuff remarks; more often, reviews have been those areas where personal prejudices have been most clearly exposed - this is understandable, since by its very nature the review must be allowed to encompass personal taste, and we should be grateful for this - the prejudices themselves have often contributed to our study. Nevertheless, in the context of the thesis, these items have been more useful 'in

## Conclusion

bulk', as they may be taken (with some reservations) as gauges of Hopkins' critical standing at any one point in time. Chronologically, they have grouped around certain key dates - the publication of the first edition (1918), the second edition (1930) and the correspondence (1935), although not exclusively: major works on Hopkins also prompt flurries of reviews, as do anniversaries such as the centenary of his birth (1944). Of course, there is also a good deal of interaction between the reviewers and the review-text; Hopkins' 'importance' at any one time has influenced the amount of reaction he has generated, just as his position has altered dependant upon how much attention he has received.

Secondly, of slightly more value is the article or section of a major work that offers very detailed, minute textual analysis, comparing a poem of Hopkins with, say, a poem by Keats, a passage of Shakespeare, or even something by Aeschylus or the *Beowulf* author. Some of these may be fascinating, convincing, or both; others may be fascinating but incredible. Some shed more light on wider areas of apparent interrelation between Hopkins and the alleged influence. I have omitted a fair number and included only the most worthwhile, but have restricted myself to the briefest survey of even these best examples. I have made the occasional exception for one or two of the more hare-brained suggestions.

Thirdly, there is a class of research that attempts to establish evidence of a more general influence, or kinship. Gardner's book did this most comprehensively, although his work also encompasses the other categories at various points. I have myself attempted this type of investigation in the chapter on Whitman. Criticism of this kind has tended to be more successful in books, as opposed to articles in journals and periodicals.

Finally, there is a fourth class that is the most ambitious and often the most rewarding: some of the more astute critics have ventured to apply a much broader, objective field of vision to their subject: they have seen Hopkins' poetry as a 'live' issue, and in a constantly-shifting relationship with the past and the present. What is more, appraisal and re-appraisal of Hopkins has often led to a fresh approach to poetic tradition as a whole. The most intriguing times in my own research have been when I have unearthed 'fourth-category' items, analyzing them in isolation, and then bringing them together to observe how they respond to one another.

My decision to structure chapters around individual poets or groups of poets has occasionally limited these analyses but, with a certain amount of overlap, the thesis has yielded to the necessary interpenetrations. The Shakespeare and Milton debate

## Conclusion

immediately springs to mind as a case in point. But in other ways, the 'poet by poet' plan has helped establish patterns and trends, and it seems to me the clearest, most reliable format to have adopted.

Is there any way we can attempt to formulate a chronological overview that plots Hopkins' perceived relatedness to tradition? And can we draw any conclusions from the results, explaining exactly why he has been seen as existing under different influences at different times? What follows is a brief and provisional conflation of the many hundreds of pieces of literary criticism I have studied.

Initial shock-waves on the publication of the 1918 edition of Hopkins' *Poems* consisted of a majority vote rejecting this assault on literary decorum and established notions of prosody, the balance between complexity and obscurity, suitable poetic subject matter and so on. Some critics targeted the mature poetry and labelled Hopkins an eccentric Victorian, filing him alongside other Victorian poets who had been judged odd or wilfully difficult. Other popular parallels were with the Metaphysical school of Donne and Herbert, and while the publication of the prose would cause a decline in the popularity of the notion of direct seventeenth century influence, interesting theories of kinship would follow.

The selective nature of the 1918 edition caused some distortion: the volume was heavily weighted in favour of the more derivative, 'prettier' juvenilia such as "A Vision of the Mermaids"; Bridges had omitted many of the more difficult (and more rewarding) poems in favour of material that his contemporaries would find more congenial to their flabby appetites. The obvious influence here was Keats, and, following naturally, the Pre-Raphaelites. But while the connections with Pre-Raphaelitism withered in the ensuing decades, the Keatsian comparisons matured and became more sophisticated, providing more subtle explorations of the kinship between the two of them. Some of the most satisfying accounts of Hopkins' development as a poet were the fruits of perseverance in this area, exploring the relation between the ascetic and the aesthetic, and the sensual and the intellectual in his verse.

At this point, certain names were conspicuously absent - Milton, Shakespeare, and the Romantic poets. The first two were injected into the central stream of the debate by Leavis in 1932, when he associated Hopkins with a Shakespearean line of descent, as against a Miltonic line. The climate of the British literary scene at this time favoured the former - Milton was out of favour with the dominating New Critical stance, of which Leavis is representative.



At the same time, the idea of Hopkins as a displaced Modernist, an artist forty or fifty years ahead of his time, first appeared: Hopkins' relation to his contemporaries was perceived as one of rebellion against stale forms. His connection to the Romantics was implicated here, too, since the Victorian age was generally held to be one of diluted Romanticism, although the idea of Hopkins as a Nature poet seemed to show that he was an inheritor of the intellectual shift that had occurred at the turn of the century. But principally he was an iconoclast, an Hephaestus forging new poetic metals in the furnace of his creative faculty, discarding the weak, rusty relics of the preceding era that his contemporaries clung to. In addition to his prosodic advances, he had obscurity on his side - now regarded as a reason for heaping more praise upon him - and his raw emotional and intellectual honesty, the struggle and the suffering of the Dublin sonnets in particular, struck all the right chords - or dischords - in the audience of the late 'twenties and early 'thirties. As we saw in Chapter VIII, this notion of a man born out of his time provoked much heated and protracted debate.

The lionizing that ensued raised Hopkins to the position of a hero for poets of the 1930's, and debate about the extent to which he influenced them, along with the long-term effects he might have on English poetry, flourished throughout the 'forties, 'fifties and

## Conclusion

'sixties. Later, some of the most thought-provoking criticism would come from those Hopkins had supposedly influenced, while debtors such as Auden and Thomas would come to deny that they had ever fallen under his spell. However, perhaps the most decisive outcome of all this would be confirmation that Hopkins was too idiosyncratic, with a tight welding of his identity as a poet and his mode of expression, to be a benign influence, although in a more diffuse and long-term perspective he did provide a useful corrective to the course of English poetry.

The publication of the prose in 1935 radically altered the direction of Hopkins studies. Hopkins may have been a revolutionary poet, but he was also, quite definitely, a Victorian personality. Much dissension was the consequence of this tension between the idealized image of a poet who transcended his age and the sheer weight of material that seemed to be dragging him down to earth, replacing him amongst his contemporaries. The state of tension was held for so long because of the ardour with which he was feted as a prototype of the Modern method and sensibility. The prose was cited by the pro-Modernist camp, too, in attempts to confiscate the ammunition that had proved so damaging to their cause. A notorious example is the fad of presenting Hopkins as a Communist, which provoked furious, proselytizing, exasperated or amused responses in roughly equal measures.

But a fundamental dislocation in the systematizing of the debate occurred here, with critics often unwittingly arguing at cross-purposes. What they failed to establish, almost without exception, was a distinction between form and content. So while we may agree that the idea of Hopkins as rather typically Victorian in outlook accords with both common sense and the evidence of the published prose, nevertheless, he was certainly iconoclastic in his approach to composition. And indeed this is borne out time and again in analysis of his discussions of his predecessors and, particularly, his contemporaries.

The latter part of the period closely studied is notable for its mature reassessments of issues such as Hopkins' kinship with Metaphysical poets - Martz's *Poetry of Meditation* is a good example. However, the glimpses of the post-1970 period afforded by Chapter XIV offer possibilities reminiscent of the early part of the century, although the interest ignited here is of a very different kind. It is difficult to estimate how significant Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) has been, and he is certainly not the only one to approach poetic tradition from this angle - Bate's *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* actually preceded his study - but this is certainly a useful touchstone for investigations of the shift in Hopkins criticism. The re-emergence of Milton, vital to Bloom's thesis,

## Conclusion

suggests that *The Anxiety of Influence* was a direct inspiration for some critics reassessing Hopkins' position in tradition. He was also analyzed in respect of the Romantic tradition. What is more, Hopkins' own influence has also been re-read in a Bloomian mode.

The past twenty years have been responsible for much buttressing and reinforcement of the argument for Hopkins as a Victorian, and close analyses that attempt to map Hopkins' poems onto fragments of Milton and Shakespeare have also been rife. However, I would suggest that the most promising road ahead lies in the notion of the anxiety of influence. That remark of Hopkins' that I have already quoted on a number of occasions takes on a new resonance in this context:

"The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise".<sup>1</sup>

This survey is, as I say, brief and provisional. I have omitted reference to, amongst others, Whitman, and the classical, Anglo-Saxon and Welsh influence, all of which are integral to the thesis, and in this sense it is a short and incomplete overview. It is also provisional: these fragments of literary criticism are not jigsaw pieces that build a neat, clear picture. Their valencies are unstable, and they bond and repel

## Conclusion

one another in ways that are startling, unexpected, and never permanent.

Moreover, as I have mentioned once or twice before, Hopkins' own notions of poetic tradition were rather peculiar - remember, for example, his classification of the Romantics. We must be wary of those critical judgements that directly contradict what we can understand of Hopkins' own formulations. For instance, as Frank Kermode pointed out, Hopkins would have been "unable to conceive a poetry which invented a 'tradition' that included himself but not Milton".<sup>2</sup>

In drawing a study such as this to a close, the emphasis must be on the tentative, the provisional, and the volatile. As I suggested in the Introduction, while I would like to retain my distance from reception theorists' methodology, the major implication of this thesis is in alignment with their assumption that the poet is as he is perceived. We may marvel at the ingenuity of a critic who can detect in a stanza of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* a paraphrase of a section of *Beowulf*, but the indefatigable fascination is with Hopkins' journey through a maze of circus mirrors: Hopkins the Victorian eccentric; the Keatsian crucifying his sensualist nature; the displaced Modernist; the liberator of twentieth century verse; the poet struggling to swerve as he falls, caught in a slipstream of Miltonic or Romantic influence.

## Conclusion

Hopkins will presumably continue to be the subject of much reconstruction as critics proceed in the very different, but mutually complementary, practices of close analysis of Hopkins' legacy and widening, deepening perspectives of tradition and influence. We may never experience anything like the flushed excitement of the initial discovery of his poetry after its strange, time-bending nativity. But the uniqueness of his achievement should ensure that any account of literary genetics will be incomplete if it omits to mention him. And no doubt a labyrinth of reflections, new readings and re-readings, will continue to grow around him as he passes through the readership of successive generations.

FOOTNOTES - KEY TO ABBREVIATIONSAbbreviated Names

G.M.H	}	
G.H.	}	Gerard Manley Hopkins
H.	}	
R.B.	-	Robert Bridges
R.W.D.	-	Richard Watson Dixon
C.P.	-	Coventry Patmore
A.W.M.B.	-	A.W.M. Baillie

Abbreviated Titles

LRB	-	C.C. Abbott (ed.). <i>The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges.</i> London: Oxford University Press, 1935.
LRWD	-	C.C. Abbott (ed.). <i>The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon.</i> London: Oxford University Press, 1935.
FL	-	C.C. Abbott (ed.). <i>Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins.</i> London: Oxford University Press, 1938.
WHG	-	W.H. Gardner. <i>Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition.</i> (2 vols). London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1948-49.
CH	-	G.Roberts (ed.). <i>Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Critical Heritage.</i> London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.
TLS	-	<i>Times Literary Supplement.</i>

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