

## Hopkins Unselved

In a well-known note, Hopkins identifies a characteristic he terms ‘Parnassian’. This ‘language of verse’, he says, ‘can only be ~~written~~ spoken by poets’; it is ‘~~wr~~spoken on and from the level of a poet’s mind’. Resisting the fickleness of ‘inspiration’, this ‘Parnassian’ way of composing relies on a kind of certainty:

Great men, poets I mean, have each their own dialect as it were of Parnassian, formed generally as they go on writing, and at last, ^-^ this point is to be marked, – they can see things ~~and describe them~~ in this Parnassian way and describe them in this Parnassian tongue, without further effort of inspiration. In a poet’s particular kind of Parnassian lies most of his style, of his manner, of his mannerism if you like. [. . .] Now it is a mark of Parnassian that one could conceive oneself writing it if one were the poet.<sup>1</sup>

That ‘most of his style’ invites further reflection: as the deleted ‘written’ almost splutters out again as ‘wr-’, we see the poet continually drawn back to something about poetry he cannot quite pin down here – or a temporality managed on the page which he cannot escape, as the deletions seem to suggest. Even as he begins to draw up a distinction between ‘inspired’ poetry and ‘Parnassian’, his qualification (‘generally’) puts him on the defensive. A further self-revision from ‘manner’ to ‘mannerism’ shows Hopkins reaching towards ideas rather than simply re-treading them, both syntactically and in his revisionary processes. If describing the more traditional notion of inspiration comes easily, turning his attention to how poetry works on the ‘level of a poet’s mind’ is a sticking point. There’s a subterranean anxiety for the poet concealed within his description of conceiving ‘oneself writing it if one were the poet’. Fluency in one’s own style arrives not as an aspiration but as a caution; to write as if you were yourself, then, might be a kind of self-assuredness to be avoided.

That Hopkins’s interest in a compositional style proved on the pulse might reflect his conception of selfhood is suggested in ‘As Kingfishers Catch Fire’. ‘Each mortal thing’, he writes, ‘does one thing and the same: Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; / Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells’.<sup>2</sup> That dash is not necessarily the self enervating, but suspends the process of selving before it transforms into something more discrete. It’s worth noting that in an earlier draft the poet wrote, ‘Itself in every stroke it speaks and spells’ (*PW*, p. 115). These lines sound increasingly like an echo of Keats’s description of his own creative process, which insists that poetry ‘cannot be matured by law & precept, but by watchfulness in itself – That which is creative must create itself’, helpfully reminding us that the fascination with self-formation *in* Hopkins’s poetry cannot be wholly disengaged from the

creative development *of* these poems.<sup>3</sup> How the growth of a poem can ‘resemble the growth of the self’, Daniel Tyler has noted, is one of the ‘most persistent recognitions of the way that composition and revision are brought to thematic pertinence’.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, Hopkins’s avoidance of Parnassian predictability is not only a matter of stylistic uncertainty; it is also a question of selfhood.

What implications might there be for a poet’s self if effects of process and momentariness are not only key to his compositional practice but qualities sought from the poetry itself? As Finn Fordham has pointed out, if a ‘work of art is supposed to express something with a certain finality and precision, might an unfinished work be a sign of incoherence in the maker, a self not yet formed, not yet in possession of itself, not yet “achieved”’? In this respect, an ‘unfinished work’ would be ‘truer to the way that the self exists in process, never itself fully formed’.<sup>5</sup> These questions put pressure on dominant theories of Hopkins and the self. Critics have tended to read the poet’s engagement with the self as something absolute, final, complete. J. Hillis Miller’s argument has had lasting critical currency, which insists the poet’s self ‘is already fully existent as soon as one is aware of oneself at all’. His suggestion that Hopkins composes ‘an eternally subsisting taste of oneself which prolongs itself from moment to moment as long as one endures’ is echoed by Walter J. Ong, who describes the poet’s self as ‘unavoidably there’, ‘even when I am attending directly to something else or someone else, asserting its presence to itself and thereby its differentiations from all else.’<sup>6</sup>

These models of stable selfhood across time see Hopkins as indebted to Romantic notions of composing the self. One view of Wordsworth’s practice of revisionism, for instance, is that time filters and shapes the raw experiences of the past into something meaningful and expressible. Take the cognitive self-revision in ‘Tintern Abbey’ where the poet observes, ‘These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows’.<sup>7</sup> Here, the gap between the initial sight of these ‘hedges’ and the poet’s re-encounter in memory is accompanied by an adjusted aperture, which brings into focus that original vision. This is only possible because the composition of the poem is underpinned by a continuous self – and the consolidation of that self is enacted in the self-revisions of Wordsworth’s verse. Revision in Hopkins is doing something quite different. As he re-encounters former experiences in his writing, the poet endeavours to evoke the raw edges of experience rather than trying to map the intellectual distance travelled. In so doing, he is able not only to see things anew, but to see himself in a different light.

This essay's approach to Hopkins and the self goes against the grain of existing criticism. That said, it does complement and complicate several existing views: Andrew Hodgson, for example, has written that 'Hopkins's finest poetry is always on the move, urgent personal for its very resistance to being trapped by any static conception of personality.'<sup>8</sup> Fordham also insists that we must turn to Hopkins's manuscripts 'to realize the extent of [. . .] the fraught relation between textuality' and what he calls 'self-compression.'<sup>9</sup> I would add that attending to his manuscripts also helps us to see a more undetermined form of selfhood in the printed poems too. What remains from that 'most' of a poet's style, which Hopkins hints at above, is perhaps tied up with that less finalised and uncontainable vision of the self. I want to suggest that, as his remarks on 'Parnassian' imply, part of the point of writing was not to be too sure of himself.

### I – The Poet's Undoing

On numerous occasions, Hopkins returns to the idea that the dissolution of the self might be a form of liberation. 'Moonless Darkness Stands Between' (1865) conceives of the loss of selfhood in terms of religious transcendence, where its speaker hopes that 'the Bethlehem-star may lead me / To the sight of Him. Who freed me / From the self that I have been' (*PW*, p. 86). But there are also more wayward, even fraught, examples. For instance, 'St. Winefred's Well' (1884), where Caradoc's soliloquy finds him in a moment of confliction and unchanging selfhood leads to a dead end:

[...] one part,  
Reason, selfdisposal, choice | choice of better or worse way,  
Is corpse now, cannot change; | my other self, this soul,  
Life's quick, this kind, this keen self-feeling.

(*PW*, p. 179)

And in 'Henry Purcell' (1879), a more provisional imagining of selfhood comes as a moment of triumph: 'It is the rehearsal / Of own, of abrupt sélf there so thrusts on' (*PW*, p. 157). This provisional imagining of selfhood does not, however, need to lead anywhere, and like Caradoc's 'self-feeling', the drama of the rehearsal is what fuels the creation of the poem.

This open-ended model of selfhood is resonant with Hopkins's treatment of 'inscape' in his 'Lecture Notes on Poetry'. More often than not, 'inscape' is the poet's way of referring to the inimitable particularity of an object and, on occasion, the 'act of perception', as Martin

Dubois observes.<sup>10</sup> Expanding on this concept, however, Hopkins explains that ‘Poetry is in fact speech ^only^ employed to carry the inscape of speech’: ‘repetition, oftening, over-and-overing, aftering of the inscape must take place in order to detach it to the mind and in this light poetry is speech which afters or oftens in its inscape.’<sup>11</sup> His insertion of ‘only’ is suggestive because it not only makes ‘inscape’ central to the work of poetry but also conceives of ‘aftering’, a kind of revisioning, as essential to keeping the current of inscape live. Poetry *is* speech which ‘afters’: this is not a theoretical concern but a property of verse itself. And detach *to*, rather than *from*, the mind implies not so much a severance of mind from subject but something closer to a recalibration of the relations between them.

Like a cell that isolates us from a multifaceted experience of life, stable selfhood can be a blockage to the vital process of ‘aftering’. Take the predicament a speaker from one of the ‘terrible sonnets’ finds himself in:

My own heart let me more have pity on; let  
 Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,  
 Charitable; not live this tormented mind  
 With this tormented mind tormenting yet.  
 I cast for comfort I can no more get  
 By groping round my comfortless than blind  
 Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find  
 Thirst’s all-in-all in all a world of wet.  
 Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise  
 You, jaded, lét be; call off thoughts awhile  
 Elsewhere. . . (PW, p. 186)

It’s worth noting that the address to the poet’s ‘Soul’ was a later addition, as the original draft remained fixed on Hopkins’s preoccupation with the ‘self’.<sup>12</sup> The overwhelming sense of psychological entrapment is embodied in the verbal returns of the chiasmic rhyme scheme, as well as the cycling of grammatical forms, that characterise his ‘tormented mind tormenting yet’. If ‘inscape’ can figure both the object and perception, what we find here is that the fixity of Hopkins’s mind has come to shape this circular relationship between himself and his subject. Condemned to wander a desolate internal landscape, the speaker increasingly comes to resemble Walter Pater’s ‘solitary prisoner’ in the ‘Conclusion’ to *The Renaissance*:

when reflexion begins to play upon these objects they are dissipated under its influence;  
 the cohesive force seems suspended like some trick of magic; each object is loosed into a

group of impressions – colour, odour, texture – in the mind of the observer. [. . .]  
 Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us  
 by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way  
 to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those  
 impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping a  
 solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.<sup>13</sup>

An overly controlling self leads to isolation and entrapment: it straightens lucid impressions  
 and what we are left with is a sort of claustrophobic introspection. The mind is mirrored back  
 to itself. Its own ‘dream of *a* world’ – not *the* world – is the final barbed hook, as it  
 simultaneously reminds us what more is out there and how that has been fenced off. Like  
 Hopkins’s instruction to his self to ‘call off thought awhile / Elsewhere’, Pater’s description  
 of ‘reflexion’ suggests how ‘reflexion’ can be a question of knowing when not to overthink  
 things, imparting an attraction to regain the surplus of experiences and impressions before  
 thought arrives on the scene. That the ‘cohesive force’, which binds impressions of ‘colour,  
 odour, texture’ is ‘suspended’, not stamped out, leaves open the possibility that they might  
 return.

The closing lines of ‘I wake and feel the fell of dark’ continue to throw into relief  
 Hopkins’s unresolved arbitrations over the need for the self to change versus the need for it to  
 cohere under an external telos:

Selfyeast of spirit	{	a dull dough	
	{	my selfstuff	sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their	{	scourge	
	{	loss	to be
[ As I am mine, their sweating selves;			
[ Their sweating selves as I am mine, but worse.			

(*PW*, p. 182)

Images of ‘selfstuff’ and ‘selfyeast’ conceive of selfhood as the beginning, not the end, of the  
 poet’s contemplation. What the poet discovers as he re-encounters his self through revision is  
 that the self ‘recognizes itself not as a lack, but as a plenitude’, as J. Hillis Miller has put it.<sup>14</sup>  
 Although anxieties arise over the possibility that these supplies of selfhood might go to  
 waste, ‘loss’ itself avoids being tarnished with the same associations as ‘scourge’ in  
 Hopkins’s reworking of the draft because he commits to what Caradoc called ‘selfdisposal,  
 choice | choice of better or worse way’, a choice carried out through his process of revision.  
 An earlier draft of the last line left open the possibility that the poet might find himself in the  
 same situation as those who are ‘lost’: ‘Their sweating selves, as I am mine, but worse’.<sup>15</sup> At  
 the same time as removing the comma after ‘selves’, Hopkins brackets ‘As I am mine, their

sweating selves' below the last line above, avoiding a damning eventuality that he might turn out more tormented than those in hell. It's the revisionism built into the poem (its openness to change), strengthened in the process of composition, which stages the poet's fulfilment of transformation and saves him from a determined fate that is 'but worse'.

Across the 'terrible sonnets', we see the poet tapping into the plenitude of the self via the 'selfyeast' of particular words and phrases being repeated in other lyrics, as they return to the enduring problem of consolation: 'Comforter, where, where is your comforting?' (*PW*, p. 157); 'No I'll not, carrion comfort' (159); 'Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind' (182); 'I cast for comfort I can no more get' (186). His poems start to resemble the individual selves they describe, as an assortment of varied responses to changing circumstances, not as a protracted fixation with the same problem. What's more, Hopkins even seems to be in dialogue with himself between poems, when he envisages 'these last strands of man / In me ór, most weary, cry *I can no more*. I can; / Can something, hope' (*PW*, p. 183). And a poem penned shortly after this cluster revises the final problem of 'I wake and feel': 'the departed day no morning brings / Saying "This was yours" with her, *but* new one, *worse*, / And then that last and shortest . . .' (*PW*, p. 186, my emphasis). This time round, 'but worse' is ruptured by the qualification 'new one', revealing a nugatory consolation in living day to day. It's the 'shortest' day, of course, because the poet's predictions for the remainder for his mortal self are stopped short by the morbid but inevitable fact of his death. And yet, the terminal ellipsis hints at a different sort of futurity, as a reminder that these 'last strands of man', fixed in the material form of the poem, are thereby likely to outlive their writer.

How far these 'last strands of man' might reach hasn't only drawn Hopkins's attention. George Eliot's narrator in *Middlemarch* observes that a 'belated historian' has 'so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe'.<sup>16</sup> Hopkins's analysis of human lots takes on a different role. It does not lead to a final, compressed explanation of experience. He has more in common with what Pater envisaged as 'that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves'.<sup>17</sup> For Pater, Kostas Boyiopoulos writes, 'the self is constantly recalibrated and rechannelled in its self-analysis, in its reflection on a wave-line of refined and fragile impressions with the work in continuous fracture.'<sup>18</sup> I would add that for something to 'seem the stranger' (*PW*, p. 181), it must be measured up against the known and familiar, meaning that 'continuous fracture'

risks overlooking what else is going on in Pater's 'passage and dissolution of impressions'. In revision as in self-analysis, we might follow up on former lines of thought only to discover that the re-encounter with a former self plays out as an alienating experience. Such moments of estrangement between current and former selves are further evidence of the self's survival because they reveal how we can be held accountable to our past. Or, in Hopkins's words, 'What you look hard at seems to look hard ~~and~~ at you'.<sup>19</sup>

We find the poet's most extended practical demonstration of such a 'perpetual weaving and unweaving' in 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves', where a decimation of the self leads to its overwhelming excess:

For éarth | her béing has unbóund; her dápple  
 is at énd, as –  
 Tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; | self ín self stéepèd and  
 páshed – quite  
 Disremembering, dísmémbering | áll now. Heart, you round me right  
 With: Óur evening is óver us; óur night | whélms, whélms, ánd will  
 énd us. (PW, p. 191)

'Throughther' is more or less a coinage, meaning 'intermingled', as if the poet's efforts to pin down unstable selfhood are matched by a wariness that pre-existing language might be unable to account for it. That said, Hopkins might have come across a similar phrase in James Durham's religious tract *Heaven upon Earth*, in which 'Conscience is disquieted, troubled, and as it were through other, or confused'.<sup>20</sup> Ruskin would later repurpose the term as the end result of revisions to his botanical book as he sought to devise 'a system of my own': '[I] unbound my botanical book, and rebound it [. . .] with all the pages through-other and backside foremost – so as to cut off all the old paging numerals'.<sup>21</sup> Hopkins's 'throughther' is poised between Durham's mental disquiet and Ruskin's compositional innovation, making it a suitable negotiation of the challenging demands placed on the poet undergoing the dissolution of self.

One of the early drafts of the poem contained in the notebook Hopkins kept during his time in Dublin allows two bracketed lines to exist alongside each other: 'For earth {her being has unpenned; unpenned her being'.<sup>22</sup> The pun in 'unpenning' offers something close to a subtle commentary on the compositional development of 'Sibyl's Leaves', since we see several pages earlier how revisions made to the poem figure undoing and disparateness as a necessary part of textual expansion:

Now he her  
 For earth | her being unbinds; the dapple  
 has unbound  
 is at an end, a –

lies is  
 Stray, aswarm, throughther, in throngs; she is self in  
 Stray and aswarm  
 with her or in her,  
 self steepèd in self ^, quite quite  
 Dismembering, disremembering all.

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 now  
 Swarms, swarms, throughther, in throng; ^ self she has in self  
 steeped

of her  
 in her; quite (or right)  
 Dismembering, disremembering all.

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 Swarms, swarms, all throughther, in throng; self in self steepèd

and flush; [quite  
 [right  
 Dismembering, disremembering all.<sup>23</sup>

‘Self in self steeped’ envisages a surplus of selfhood that turns into the disparate ‘Dismembering’ then ‘disremembering all’. Unlike the printed editions of Hopkins’s verse, which often swap the order of ‘dismembering, disremembering’, its refrain-like nature in the draft presents the dynamics between division and cognition somewhat differently. An absence of mind does not lead to the ‘dismembering’ of the text, as if the poet were severed from his sources of inspiration. Hopkins’s connection of surplus with ‘disremembering’ steers it away from its valence of ‘failure’ to reach something more in tune with the original sense of the prefix *dis-* as ‘apart’, ‘asunder’, or ‘opposite of’. It thus captures how the poet’s revisions work on the page: each revision is both a reversion to a previous state and a splintering. Lesley Higgins therefore misrepresents the poet’s handling of language when she asserts that ‘[h]owever inelegant [his] hybrid verbs may appear, Hopkins’s texts reveal an insistent pressure to *scientificize* and *historicize* what can and should be known; they participate in that “revival, so marked in the nineteenth century, of all the techniques of exegesis”’.<sup>24</sup> We might note the effect of that added ‘now’ in the midst of these revisions (‘*now* self she has in self steeped’), which both flags the consequences of revision which has led to this burst of selfhood, and recommits to the process of self-analysis.



It's worth remembering that 'weaving' and 'text' share an etymological lineage in the Latin *texere*, a link which highlights how a writer's drafts are particularly amenable to mediating the tweaks made to a tapestry of selfhood.<sup>25</sup> To delete is not always to erase, and at the end of his 'Platonic Dialogue', Hopkins himself notes how poetry's negative ways might uphold a certain kind of undoing:

And for the darksome locks being undone, you know how much use poetry makes of negative words and just for the reason that they express an antithesis. –

Unhouseled, disappointed, unannealed.<sup>26</sup>

It's a curious place to bring things to a close, as Hamlet's father (whom Hopkins is quoting) is once again 'cut off', this time in the midst of ghostly speech and not the 'blossoms of [his] sin'.<sup>27</sup> These negatives, like *Hamlet's* Ghost, express a desire to revert to a former state, giving rise to a contradiction by which the present state could not exist to voice this desire, as if to engage in a process of self-cancelling. And yet, as Kenneth Burke has observed, negation has its origins in a positive. Our language of negation would not have had the 'force of a negative at all, but of some *deterrent* positive state.' It's the difference, he says, between an "it is not" and "thou shalt not".<sup>28</sup> In this light, negatives are not simply a state of absence or emptiness; they are a revisioning of a positive state, a complication of former uses. If poetry thrives on antitheses brought about by negatives, it's because its contrasts are not simply prescribed; they are probed and reworked. That a process of negation might be resolved into a single word might also suggest that a single text can be a 'throng' of competing selves and antithetical pressures.

It's not only in 'Sibyls' Leaves' Hopkins conceives of the self as a 'throng'. 'I find myself both as man and as myself something ~~to me~~ most determined and distinctive', he writes in a commentary on the *Spiritual Exercises*. After a subtle shift in grammar, he sees himself instead 'at pitch, more distinctive and higher pitched than anything else I see': 'I find myself with my pleasures and pains, my ~~faculties~~ ^powers^ and ^my^ experiences [. . .] this throng and stack of being'. His original phrasing 'something *to me*' shares an affinity with Pater's vital question from the 'Preface' to *The Renaissance* that underpins any aesthetic engagement: 'What is this [. . .] *to me*?'.<sup>29</sup> And there are further resemblances between the poet's 'stack of being' and the essayist's description of 'one's whole nature' as 'one complex medium of reception' from *Marius the Epicurean*.<sup>30</sup> If Pater is not solely interested in new ways of re-encountering the world but, as Fergus McGhee suggests, 'values new ways in

which he might differ from himself', then Hopkins too wondered what was made of the self in such moments.<sup>31</sup>

## II – Second Sights

'[A]ll first-rate poetry', Pater once insisted, has 'such qualities generally as depend upon second thoughts.'<sup>32</sup> His phrase 'as depend upon' might make us think twice – this kind of poetry is nurtured by the second thoughts of reflection (in the writer) but it also has characteristics (within the poetry) that remind us of the nature of second thoughts. Not only do 'second thoughts' assume centre stage in Pater's writing, they also turn out to be closely allied with the unrefined. Take his description of 'the mystery of so-called *white* things' (fictitiously attributed to a 'quaint German mystic') in *Marius the Epicurean*: 'the white queen, the white witch, the white mass' which are, in comparison to their originals, 'ever an afterthought – the doubles, or seconds, of real things, and themselves but half-real, half-material'.<sup>33</sup> These images are associated in Pater's mind with 'thought or reverie' rather than mere blankness – they are not etiolated sequels but recharged with mystery and promise.

It's suggestive that Angela Leighton reaches for Hopkins's coinage 'aftering' in her treatment of Pater's attraction to the indistinct. The 'act of aftering, reappraising, of taking the side of vagueness rather than precision', she writes, 'is Pater's way with both thought and language.'<sup>34</sup> Hopkins clearly took something from his tutor, as his meticulous process of revision shows.<sup>35</sup> What's more, Pater's 'second thoughts' have much in common with Hopkins's, whose poetry, I have been arguing, depends not simply on the refinement with which any self-conscious artist might treat his work as it reaches a more 'finished' state. Taking another look at one of Hopkins's re-encounters with a familiar sight in Oxford, we see how his treatment of a subject courts a form of Paterian secondariness:

even where we mean  
 To mend her we end her,  
 Whén we hew or delve:  
 Áfter-comers cannot guess the beauty been.  
 Tén or twélve, ónly ten or twelve  
 Strókes of havoc únsélve  
 The sweet especial rural scene,  
 Rúral scene, a rural scene,  
 Swéet especial rural scene.

(PW, p. 157)

Pater's 'vanishing' act of the self finds a new lease of life in Hopkins's suggestive collocation of 'mend' and 'end', which entails not so much a retrieval of a previous state as a moving on. In the earliest draft of 'Binsey Poplars', the poet's anxiety that he might be forever deprived of experiencing this place again is more urgently felt, and the tussle between first- and second- person pronouns distances the poet from having a hand in this injustice:

We wd. mend her but end her  
 You who  
~~When we~~ mean  
 To e mend her we [*overwritten* you] end her,  
 you and you  
 When ~~we~~ lop ~~of~~ when ~~we~~ delve  
 After comers cannot guess : what has been;  
 So little will  
~~Li~~Trifles un ÷ selve  
 The sweet especial rural scene.  
 Such trifles un : selve  
 The sweet especial rural ~~green~~ scene!<sup>36</sup>

'You and you' hang over these original lines like a spectre or an accusation, while the idiosyncratic great colons, which throw the weight of stress squarely onto both syllables of 'unselve', lend the act an abrupt cadence.<sup>37</sup> As Hopkins re-encounters this scene in further drafts, the added incantatory closing lines ('The sweet especial rural scene, / Rûral scene, a rural scene') compose a self-revising pattern that delineates a movement away from a pure representation of 'what has been'. This movement is bolstered by the substitution of *a* for *the*, as the poem dramatizes a second 'unselving' within the poem, a re-encounter in language that returns the 'sweet especial rural scene' not as its original self but one that's 'half-real' and 'half-material'. James Wimsatt is right, therefore, when he observes that the "reverberations of language" work as an 'instrument for detaching inscape, not the inscape itself'.<sup>38</sup> To put it another way, it's the process of 'aftering' within language that allows the sight to return to him not as a husk of its former self, but as an ongoing experience pregnant with mystery.

That stylistic uncertainty might hold a valuable place in poetry is reaffirmed in *The Renaissance*. The 'very perfection' of verse, Pater says, 'often appears to depend, in part, on a certain suppression or vagueness of mere subject, so that the meaning reaches us through ways not distinctly traceable by the understanding'.<sup>39</sup> Here, 'mere' retains something of its etymological root, meaning 'pure' or 'undiluted' (from the Latin *merus*).<sup>40</sup> The quality which Pater identifies is one that Hopkins praises in Plato's style, in which '[a]spects of thought and

meaning, subtle effects, growing on us gradually, belong to it. The truth always remains unexpected and exhausted in prose like his.’<sup>41</sup> It’s an apt slip, because out of unpredictability comes inexhaustibility. What each writer is getting at is a movement away from a more finessed, purified treatment of a subject, transforming it into something both more and less than finite. Some experiences cannot be contained, but it’s that very excess for which we value them.

The effects of this attraction to the indeterminate are detectable even in Hopkins’s lesser-known poems like ‘The Woodlark’, where the changes made to its manuscript draft increasingly blur the line between the abstract and the concrete:

To-day the sky is two and two  
 With white strokes and strains of the blue  
 [The blue wheat-acre is underneath] (PW, p. 132)

Today the sky ~~was~~<sup>is</sup> two and two  
**With strokes of white and strains of [bol] blue**  
 With white strokes,<sup>^</sup>and strains of <sup>^</sup>the blue (MS H.ii. 49v)

‘White’, ‘blue’, and ‘streaks’ compose a variety of visions that evade definition as colours become a more hazy or abstract property of the shapes they make (we read of ‘*the* blue’ rather than simply ‘blue’). Playfulness is blended with the sensuous and the conceptual with the impressionist. The sensuous excess of the sky’s appearance being ‘two and two’ bleeds into the poem’s composition, which starts out as two columns on the manuscript page, juxtaposing lines like ‘Not to be found, all round’ with its alternative ‘And all round; not to be found’, and ‘Neither left neither right; / Nowhere in the súnlight’ with ‘Either left either right / Anywhere in the súnlight.’<sup>42</sup> These emendations shift from a simple description of the bird’s absence in space to an organisation of space in terms of absence and obscurity.

‘Strain’ is a decidedly musical term to use, and its employment in such a sensuous context might remind us of Pater’s well-known dictum that ‘All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music’, given that it is equated several pages later in ‘The School of Giorgione’ by his comments on ‘vagueness of mere subject’.<sup>43</sup> That in coming closer to the condition of music other forms of art are drawn towards indirection is a connection Hopkins makes when he praises that element in Richard Dixon of the ‘necessary and yet unforeseen’: ‘And there <sup>^</sup>is, as in music a remarkable sequence, of feelin~~g~~ seemingly necessary and yet unforeseen, of ~~this~~ feeling, acting often with magical strokes’.<sup>44</sup> Again, we encounter that intriguing word ‘strokes’, which had been the source of ‘havoc’ in ‘Binsey Poplars’. According to the *OED*, a ‘stroke’ can be a ‘a tune, strain’, so the fact that we might more

conventionally associate one with the movements of a pen or a painter's brush conjures a mixed metaphor in the musical context.<sup>45</sup>

The association between music and sketchy qualities is elaborated in 'The School of Giorgione', where Pater conceives of music as something that can play a role *within* thought, releasing or loosening its constraints:

In sketch or finished picture, in various collections, we may follow it through many intricate variations – men fainting at music; music at the pool-side while people fish, or mingled with the sound of the pitcher in the well, or heard across running water, or among the flocks; the tuning of instruments, people with intent faces, as if listening, like those described by Plato in an ingenious passage of the Republic, to detect the smallest interval of musical sound, the smallest undulation in the air, or feeling for music in thought on a stringless instrument . . .<sup>46</sup>

Pater's opening elision between 'sketch or finished' picture might be more capacious than first appears, because it allows for the possibility that the latter might retain something of the sketchiness of 'second thoughts'. Within such pictures, those 'intricate variations' might be a harbinger of the rest of the writer's own passage: variations play out in the development of this prose, as '*finger*' leads to '*refining*' and lastly to '*infinitely*'. It is no longer music at all, but 'the smallest interval of musical sound' Pater closes in on. It is the 'interval' of something that has the quality of music, which Pater then spells out in his description of 'feeling for music in thought'. Sensation is thus organised along the lines of the musical. According to Adam Phillips, Pater 'made vagueness, informed vagueness, intellectually respectable'.<sup>47</sup> 'Informed' is the key word. A stringency of thought is not the end of thinking but a bedrock on which the modifying effects of music might take place.

'Informed vagueness' might be a description of 'sprung rhythm'. Its technical achievement is to bring the organized rhythms of verse more in touch with the cadences of natural speech, but it does so by pulling against the pre-established metrical frames of a poem. The preface Hopkins adds to *The Wreck of the Deutschland* describes 'sprung rhythm' as

the superinducing or *mounting* of a new rhythm upon the old; and since the new or unmounted rhythm is actually heard and at the same time the mind naturally supplies the natural or standard foregoing rhythm, for we do not forget what the rhythm is that by rights we should be hearing.





These lines are not just about a bird in flight but the flightiness of perception. Several critical emendations from the original draft strengthen Hopkins's achieved bewilderment. Lines two and three read 'he was riding / Rolling level underneath him steady here, and striding' (MS. Res. d. 488), but the added prepositional phrases ('in his', 'of the') distort and dismantle grammatical categories. 'Riding' loses its verbal force, becoming something closer to a verbal noun. Unable to capture the bird's flight through language's definitive means of denoting movement, Hopkins alters the word to one that treads an unresolved line between verb and noun. These devices do not simply underpin the poem's evocations of space and movement in the poem's octave; they obfuscate them. This is revisionism being used not to finesse experience into something recognisable and contained, but to restore the kind of irrepressible experience that provoked Hopkins to re-encounter what this experience meant to him in the first place.

'The Windhover's' process of composition reveals the extent to which the poem is self-reflexive, invested as much in the making of poetry as it is in a poem's 'representational' purpose.<sup>54</sup> How the poet alters 'the mastery of the thing', I suggest, gets to the heart of Hopkins's poetic and revisionary practices:

My heart in hiding  
>  
: Stirred for a bird - ~~for~~ the mastery of the thing!  
^the achieve of<sup>55</sup>

The direct 'mastery' of vision is no longer Hopkins's concern. It becomes, instead, 'the achieve of', the endeavour to attain a certain 'level of performance'.<sup>56</sup> His curious use of the verbal form, rather than the conventional noun 'achievement', implies an ongoing act or a yearning rather than an attainable, finished vision.<sup>57</sup> Like Pater, Hopkins is repeatedly drawn on to explore what is beyond the self, to push the boundaries of what it means to come to an end, relieved of the constraints of selfhood by which the static might turn stagnant. It is through the process of re-encounter staged in his poems, as well as re-encountering them through revision, that Hopkins continues to re-discover the thrill of the unrealisable in realisation.



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<sup>1</sup> G.M.H. to Alexander William Mowbray Baillie, 10–11 Sept. 1864, *Correspondence 1852–1881*, vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, eds. R. K. R Thornton and Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), pp. 68–71. The ongoing *Collected Works* of Hopkins's writing is complete with his deletions, interlineations, and diacritical markings.

<sup>2</sup> Hopkins, *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. N. H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), p. 115. Hereafter cited in the text as *PW*.

<sup>3</sup> John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), i: 374.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Tyler, "Introduction," in *Poetry in the Making: Creativity and Composition in Victorian Poetic Drafts*, ed. D. Tyler (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2021), pp. 17–18.

<sup>5</sup> Finn Fordham, *I do, I undo, I redo: The Textual Genesis of Modernist Selves in Hopkins, Yeats, Conrad, Forster, Joyce, Woolf* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> J. Hillis Miller, "The Creation of the Self in Gerard Manley Hopkins," *ELH* 22 (1955): 294; Walter J. Ong, *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2016), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797–1800*, eds. J. Butler and K. Green (Ithaca & London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992), p. 116. On Wordsworth's textual revisions and self-division see Jack L Hart, "Wordsworth's Self-Composure," *English* 70 (2021): 294–316.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Hodgson, *The Poetry of Clare, Hopkins, Thomas, and Gurney: Lyric Individualism* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> Fordham, *I do, I undo, I redo*, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Dubois, *Hopkins and the Poetry of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017), p. 12. For a survey of inscape's various meanings, see Dennis Sobolev, "Inscapè Revisited," *English* 51 (2002): 219–234.

<sup>11</sup> Hopkins, *Sketches and Scholarly Studies*, vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, eds. R.K.R. Thornton and M. Creech (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), p. 307.

<sup>12</sup> Hopkins, *The Later Poetic Manuscripts of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile*, ed. N. MacKenzie (New York: Garland, 1991), p. 287.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Pater, "Conclusion," in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Walter Pater (Works)*, 8 vols. (1900–1; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), pp. 234–235.

<sup>14</sup> J. Hillis Miller, "The Creation of the Self," p. 294.

<sup>15</sup> MS H in *The Later Poetic Manuscripts*, p. 270.

<sup>16</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. D. Carroll (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 138–139.

<sup>17</sup> Pater, "Conclusion," p. 236.

<sup>18</sup> Kostas Boyiopoulos, *The Decadent Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2016), p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Hopkins, *Diaries, Journals, and Notebooks*, p. 504.

<sup>20</sup> James Durham, *Heaven upon Earth* (Edinburgh: Thomas Lumisden and John Robertson, 1732), p. 54.

<sup>21</sup> Ruskin to Carlyle, Oct. 1855, *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1982), p. 68.

<sup>22</sup> Hopkins, *The Dublin Notebook*, vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, eds. M.F. Suarez and L. Higgins (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), p. 134.

<sup>23</sup> Hopkins, *Dublin Notebook*, p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> Lesley Higgins, *Oxford Essays and Notes*, vol. 4 of *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. L. Higgins (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), p. 22 (Higgins's italics). Her reference is to Michel Foucault's overly generalising claim from *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 262.

<sup>25</sup> See "text, n.," *OED Online* (pubd. December 2022).

<sup>26</sup> Hopkins, *Oxford Essays*, p. 168. Here, Hopkins is quoting *Hamlet*, I. v. 77.

<sup>27</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. G.R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008) p. 189.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1945), p. 296. Burke's emphasis.

<sup>29</sup> Pater, "Preface," *Renaissance*, in *Works*, 1: viii. Emphasis in original.

- <sup>30</sup> Pater, “Animula Vagula,” *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*, in *Works*, 2: 147.
- <sup>31</sup> See Fergus McGhee, “Pater’s Montaigne and the Selfish Reader,” in *Walter Pater and the Beginnings of English Studies*, eds. C. Martindale, E. Prettejohn, and L. Østermark-Johansen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, forthcoming 2023).
- <sup>32</sup> Pater, “English Literature,” *Essays from “The Guardian”* (1901; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), p. 7.
- <sup>33</sup> Pater, “White-Nights,” *Marius the Epicurean*, in *Works*, 2: 17.
- <sup>34</sup> Angela Leighton, “Walter Pater’s Dream Rhythms,” in *Thinking Through Style: Non-Fiction Prose of the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Michael D. Hurley and Marcus Waithe (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018), p. 219. Fergus McGhee has recently situated Pater amid the ‘discourse of vagueness in nineteenth-century aesthetics’ as a way of connecting ideas of ‘haziness, beauty, mutability, and indefinability’; “Rossetti’s Giorgione and the Victorian ‘Cult of Vagueness,’” *The Cambridge Quarterly* 50 (2021): 280-281.
- <sup>35</sup> On Pater’s influence on Hopkins, see Lesley Higgins, “Essaying ‘W.H. Pater Esq.’: New Perspectives on the Tutor/Student Relationship Between Pater and Hopkins,” in *Pater in the 1990s*, eds. L. Brake and I. Small (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1991), pp. 77–94; Ellen E. Frank’s *Literary Architecture: Essays Toward a Tradition: Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust, Henry James* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983); Mirko Starcevic, “Gerard Manley Hopkins and Walter Pater: The Labyrinths of Transience,” *Acta Neophilologica* 49 (2016): 85–108.
- <sup>36</sup> MS. H in *The Later Poetic Manuscripts*, p. 157. Following deletions at the level of the letter or the word (as transcribed here), each line and then the whole draft is struck through.
- <sup>37</sup> Norman MacKenzie glosses this typographical sign as a “‘spring” in the Sprung Rhythm, where it leaps from one full stress to another over an omitted slack’; “Introduction,” *PW*, p. liv.
- <sup>38</sup> James I. Wimsatt, *Hopkins’s Poetics of Speech Sound: Sprung Rhythm, Lettering, Inscap* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 6–7.
- <sup>39</sup> Pater, “The School of Giorgione,” *Renaissance*, in *Works*, 1: 137.
- <sup>40</sup> See “mere, adj.,” *OED Online* (pubd. December 2022).
- <sup>41</sup> Hopkins, *Sketches and Scholarly Studies*, p. 169.
- <sup>42</sup> MS H in *The Later Poetic Manuscripts*, pp. 76–77.
- <sup>43</sup> Pater, “The School of Giorgione,” *Renaissance*, in *Works*, 1: 135.
- <sup>44</sup> Hopkins, *Dublin Notebook*, p. 117.
- <sup>45</sup> “stroke, n.,” *OED Online*, §8 (pubd. December 2022).
- <sup>46</sup> Pater, “The School of Giorgione,” p. 151.
- <sup>47</sup> Adam Phillips, “Introduction,” in *The Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), p. xv.
- <sup>48</sup> Summer Starr, accordingly, misses the mark in putting forward a notion of ‘sake’ as Hopkins’s representation of the ‘intimacy he conceived between meter [. . .] and the affirmation of a human self’s purposiveness’; “‘For the Inscap’s Sake’: Sounding the Self in the Meters of Gerard Manley Hopkins,” in *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. J. Hall (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2011), p. 154.
- <sup>49</sup> Hopkins to Bridges, 17–18 Feb. 1887, *Correspondence 1882-1889*, vol. 2 of *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, eds. R.K.R Thornton and C. Phillips (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), p. 854.
- <sup>50</sup> Pierre-Marc de Biasi, « Fonctions et genèse du titre en histoire de l’art, » in *La fabrique du titre: Nommer les Oeuvres d’Art*, eds. P. de Biasi, M. Jakobi, and S. Le Man (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2012), p. 88: ‘Tout à coup la forme prise par l’artefact suggère à l’artiste une idée, une formulation ou l’esquisse préliminaire d’un intitulé qui lui révèle ce qu’il était en train jusqu’ici de créer à son insu.’ Translation is my own.
- <sup>51</sup> Pater, “Postscript,” *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style*, in *Works*, 5: 257–8.
- <sup>52</sup> Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” Oxford, Weston Library, MS. Eng. Poet. c. 48, f. 29<sup>r</sup>.
- <sup>53</sup> Pater, “Joachim Du Bellay,” *Renaissance*, in *Works*, 1: 176.
- <sup>54</sup> See Michael Hurley, *Faith in Poetry: Verse Style as a Mode of Religious Belief* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018) p. 123.
- <sup>55</sup> MS. A in *The Later Poetic Manuscripts*, p. 120.
- <sup>56</sup> “achieve, v.,” *OED Online*, §1 (pubd. December 2022).
- <sup>57</sup> Adrian Grafe expresses this idea well when he says that Hopkins’s word choice signals ‘the coming into being of achievement at the moment of achieving’; “Gerard Manley Hopkins,” *VP* 58 (2020): 355.