SELF-DENIAL IN THE WRITINGS OF HOPKINS

THE THEME OF SELF-DENIAL
IN THE WRITINGS OF
GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

By

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ABSTRACT: A close study of the poetic canon of Gerard Manley Hopkins reveals the recurring theme of self-denial, which manifests itself not only as Hopkins' denial of his personal desires, but also as the abasement of his image of himself. A reading of Hopkins' correspondence, journals, sermons and devotional writings supports the poetry's suggestion that Hopkins' practice of self-denial (and self-deprecation) reflects his concern over the nature of his relationship with God. Only gradually does he come to accept his complete dependence on his Creator. In my thesis I comment on the poems in the light of the evidence for self-denial in the other primary sources. Concentrating on the poetry, I chart both the ebb and flow of self-denial as Hopkins passes through stages of optimism and desolation to a more tranquil and self-tolerant state of mind due to religious conviction.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Letters I	--	The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges.
Letters II	--	The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon.
Letters III	--	Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins: Including his Correspondence with Coventry Patmore.
J.P.	--	The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins.
S.D.W.	--	The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND EARLY POEMS (1860-66)

A close study of the poetic canon of Gerard Manley Hopkins reveals the recurring theme of self-denial. This theme manifests itself not only as Hopkins' denial of his personal desires, but also on the abasement of his image of himself. When he entered the Society of Jesus in 1868, this concern expanded to include the suspension of his individual will so as to make it more flexible and receptive to the Divine Will. The poetry suggests that Hopkins only gradually achieved a complete sense of the nature of his relationship to God, in which he could tolerate his complete dependence on God for strength, joy, and inspiration.

I propose to study in detail the evolution of this attitude through the stages of optimism and desolation to a relatively tranquil state of mind due to a renewed sense of grace. My views have been formed by a close reading of Hopkins' correspondence, journals, sermons, and devotional writings in conjunction with his poetry. My concern has been with both the ebb and flow of self-denial, the factors which influenced the tides, and (to continue the metaphor) the life which stubbornly occupied the sands before the sea surged back again.

Specifically, Chapter I examines the evidence for self-denial in the life of the poet, and comments on the theme of self-denial as it weaves through Hopkins' early poetry. Chapter II is largely a study of his poetry of affirmation, which is nevertheless sown with seeds of self-deprecation. By the time the poetry of desolation was written, these seeds had firmly taken root. Chapter III examines the sonnets of desolation, where the themes of self-denial and self-deprecation appear in their greatest concentration. Finally, the third chapter traces the themes into Hopkins' poetry of recovery, where they occur in a modified form. While Hopkins did suffer spiritual relapses during his final years, it is evident that his overall mood leaned in the direction of affirmation. He had by this point been able to accept his personal failures and shortcomings, because he had learned to regard them not only with patience, but also with a dark sense of humour.

It was a lack of patience with himself and with God that, in fact, threw Hopkins into his periods of desolation. Whenever he felt ignored or rejected by God, he decided that he must be to blame. Consequently he was plunged into a despair which made him introspective or self-critical to excess. On the other hand, when he felt that he was communicating with God either directly, or indirectly through nature, his sense of himself noticeably improved. An affirmation of faith then displaced his habitual tendency to criticize himself whenever he felt himself to be God's spokesman or correspondent. Personal feelings of worth, then, were directly associated with the periods of optimism in which Hopkins felt that he was 'in touch' with God.

Hopkins' most confident poems are discussed in the second chapter. A contrast lies on either side of these middle poems of affirmation. The pre-conversion poetry of 1865-66, which I consider in Chapter I, was a cry from the wilderness from a young man whose will to believe was hampered by his need for concrete evidence of God's existence. Twenty years later, in the poems of 1885 which are discussed in Chapter III, the poetry of the middle-aged priest cried out again for relief — this time from the feelings of self-loathing and hopelessness which then overwhelmed him. He sensed in these poems that he was responsible for God's withdrawal, yet was powerless to effect His return. Only with difficulty did Hopkins achieve a tolerance of his limited self that permitted him to patiently await God's eventual return. That God did return at the end to ease the priest out of a life that he had found to be largely frustrating is indicated by Hopkins' dying words. "He is reported to have died after uttering, three times, the words 'I am so happy'." [1]

Hopkins greatest gesture of self-denial was to repress the artist in his nature. Even at the time he was writing his pre-conversion poetry he was strengthening his resolve to sacrifice

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[1] W. H. Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), 2 vols. (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1958), II, 367 -- hereafter cited as Gardner.

the luxury of poetic composition. He reasoned that it would interfere with his vocation; the time he spent composing could be more dutifully employed. In retrospect he explained: "What I had written I burnt before I became a Jesuit and resolved to write no more as not belonging to my profession, unless it were by the wish of my superiors . . ." (Letters II, 14). He was confident that once he had joined the Jesuits, prose writings would replace poetic composition: "I want to write still and as a priest I very likely can do that, too, not so freely as I shd. have liked, e.g. nothing or little in the verse way, but no doubt what wd. best serve the cause of my religion" (Letters III, 231). But it was Hopkins, and not the Jesuits, who maintained that poetic composition was unprofessional, as he himself admitted to Robert Bridges: "It always seems to me that poetry is unprofessional, but that is what I have said to myself, not others to me" (Letters I, 197).

Because of these feelings, Hopkins renounced poetic composition for nine years (1867-75) until he was encouraged by a superior to write "The Wreck of the Deutschland". After he had broken his poetic silence, the priest continued to write poetry, but with an increasing concern for the moral worth of the act.

When he tried to compromise between the poet and the priest in his nature, attempting to inspire himself with suitable Catholic subject matter such as the death of martyrs, his Muse usually failed him:

> When at Glasgow I began an ode [in the honour of three Jesuit martyrs] (not that I think much of writing odes as a means of honouring the saints), but got not far with it nor was much pleased with what I had done; it might have turned out well if time and other things had suited; but now it is laid aside (Letters II, 76).

No remnant of this ode survives. Numbered among the instances where poet and priest do cooperate to produce an excellent poem, however, are "Felix Randal" and "The Wreck of the Deutschland".

Though R. W. Dixon tried to convince Hopkins that a second profession could enhance, rather than destroy the first, Hopkins stubbornly refused to let his friend help him to publish. He had already failed to publish "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and "The Loss of the ~~Eurydice~~" in the Jesuit periodical The Month. Following the rejection of his "two wrecks" (Letters I, 66) as he called them, he made no further attempt to publish. He claimed to be content to let God dispose of his poems when and as He willed. Because R. W. Dixon had encouraged him more than any other friend to publish within his lifetime, however, Hopkins gave him the fullest account of his scruples:

> I have no thought of publishing until all circumstances favour, which I do not know that they ever will, and it seems to me that one of them shd. be that the suggestion to publish shd. come from one of our own people . . . . The life I lead is liable to many mortifications, but the want of fame as a poet is least of them. I

> could wish, I allow, that my pieces could at some time become known but in some spontaneous way, so to speak, and without my forcing . . . my vocation puts before me a standard so high that a higher can be found nowhere else. The question then for me is not whether I am willing (if I may guess what is in your mind) to make a sacrifice of hopes of fame (let us suppose), but whether I am not to undergo a severe judgment from God for the lothness I have shown in making it, for the reserves I may have in my heart made, for the backward glances I have given with my hand upon the plough, for the waste of time the very composition you admire may have caused and their preoccupation of the mind which belonged to more sacred or more binding duties, for the disquiet and the thoughts of vainglory they have given rise to. A purpose may look smooth and perfect from without but be frayed and faltering from within. I have never wavered in my vocation but I have not lived up to it . . . . However I shall, in my present mind, continue to compose . . . and let what I produce wait and take its chance; for a very spiritual man once told me that with things like composition the best sacrifice was not to destroy one's work but to leave it entirely to be disposed of by obedience. [Reluctant to approach a superior about publishing a volume of poetry, the result of which he probably suspected to have an even chance of earning him misunderstanding and ridicule instead of admiration and encouragement, Hopkins rationalized . . .] but there is more peace and it is the holier lot to be unknown than to be known" (Letters II, 28-29, 88).

Seemingly anxious to make no outward show that would draw attention to himself, Hopkins preached in a self-effacing manner just as he courted poetic obscurity. Yet the fact that he valued poetry is obvious from the amount of space in his correspondence devoted to literary criticism and detailed commentary, on the poetry that his friends composed. It is towards his own verse that he appeared most indifferent. In his spiritual notes, we find that he

has prayed that God "watch over my compositions, not to preserve them from being lost or coming to nothing . . . but [that] they might not do me any harm through the enmity or imprudence of any man or my own; that he should have them as his own and employ or not employ them as he should see fit" (S.D.W., pp. 253-54).

In a letter written to R. W. Dixon, Hopkins explains why he values a prose project on Greek metres more than his poetry:

> What becomes of my verses I care little, but about things like this, what I write or could write on philosophical matters, I do; and the reason of the difference is that the verses stand or fall by their simple selves and, though by being read they might do good, by being unread they do no harm; but if the other things are unsaid right they will be said by somebody else wrong, and that is what will not let me rest" (Letters II, 150).

No lack of self-confidence is apparent here.

A reading of his letters reveals that Hopkins was privately convinced that success in this life did little to assure success in the next life. Both Christ and St. Ignatius seemed to advise him by their example to deny his artistic talents. Christ, Hopkins' model for the perfect gentleman, had lived a life of self-denial and self-effacement. St. Ignatius' teachings reinforced the idea that the Christian gentleman should be inconspicuous in the realm of worldly endeavour. He maintained that individual fame was not only incompatible with, but also highly dangerous to the priestly calling (Letters II, 96).

In denying the artist in his nature, Hopkins revealed that he was intent upon improving his spiritual nature. His poetic canon has been affected by his priorities: it has been limited in both

volume and subject matter. Yet it seems that the poetry written under repression has been immensely strengthened by the keen inner conflict between poet and priest. Not only had an effective new style emerged from the years of silence, but the poet had become interested in a subject matter that was to bear the poetic exploration of a lifetime.

Hopkins had become fascinated with the interrelationship between nature, God, and man, and repeatedly treats various aspects of his newly conceived world-picture from a religious point of view. His poetry is at once personal and universal -- personal in that he makes no attempt to hide behind a persona, universal in that the praises and laments that he voices as an individual speak eloquently to and for other men who are not so adept at translating their emotions into poetry. Hopkins' dynamic new style protected him from accusations of predictability caused by a narrowness of subject matter. Critical of poets who wrote "Parnassian" (predictable or uninspired verse), Hopkins was careful to exclude its characteristics from his own poetic composition. He believed that "Parnassian", which even masters such as Tennyson and Wordsworth occasionally wrote, could be transcended if the poet composed only in "flights of genius" and expressed his ideas solely in an elevated "language of inspiration" (Letters III, 216-17). In his own poetry, verbal precision is combined with verbal tension to convey an impression of violence barely restrained.

The subject matter itself is rooted in Hopkins' religious convictions, which first led him to deny the artist in his nature.

Because he is anxious to be worthy of everlasting grace, Hopkins is naturally interested in the difference between the elect and the damned. Behaviour in this life thus comes under his constant scrutiny. Focussing upon man in particular, he examines his natural impulse to assert his physical nature in contrast to his more virtuous spiritual role, which can be recognized through the practice of both self-sacrifice and self-denial. He is convinced that mortal beauty (physical beauty) [1a] can be both a source of pride (by which Lucifer, Adam and Eve fell) and a distraction from the contemplation of a preferable immortal beauty (spiritual beauty) which is associated with things of God. As a result, Hopkin's post-conversion poetry stresses the importance of being indifferent to individual talent. One must rather sublimate one's enthusiasm for one's unique ability, or in exercising it, make sure that such activity gives beauty back to God, "beauty's self and beauty's giver."[2]

Before we proceed with an examination of the evidence for self-denial in Hopkins' life, a brief consideration of the spiritual writings of Hopkins the priest is in order. Here we find expressions of assumptions and beliefs which almost necessitate self-

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[1a] In his sermons, Hopkins describes Lucifers' self-admiration in concrete terms (see S.D.W. pp. 179-80).

[2] G. M. Hopkins, The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (4th ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1967), Poem 59 — hereafter cited as Poem — in the thesis itself, and Poems when the reference is to critical commentary in the Fourth Edition.

denial in Hopkins' life.

While Hopkins began to question the role of poetry in his life from the time he became interested in the priesthood, it is in the spiritual writings that we discover how the act of writing poetry changed in his mind from a morally neutral act to a highly suspect one. From an act that brings the poet pleasure but wins him no divine grace, it changed to an act that may in fact be detrimental as far as his ultimate salvation is concerned. For the exercise of the poetic talent is one way in which man can "selve", or act in response to the impulses of his physical nature. While "selving" is a positive action in nature, God expects more from man who must also fulfill his spiritual nature. No doubt guided from within by his own experience of conflicting interests, Hopkins reasoned "that God selected quite arbitrarily the physical natures into which he put particular 'selves' or 'persons'."[3] He further believed that man, by merely "selving" as all of subhuman nature does instinctively, is not in any way satisfying God's intentions for him, or earning his own salvation. As far as Hopkins was concerned, God's gift of the divine spark of a soul is no assurance of His gift of grace: the soul has of itself no intrinsic desire to reach out and communicate with God, but must be prompted. Consciousness is the difference. Man alone has the will to subdue his nature to God's will, or the will to disobey God in order to

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[3] N. H. MacKenzie, Hopkins (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1968), p.9 -- hereafter cited as MacKenzie.

pursue his own self-interests, and to try the extent of his "selving" process.

The prime example of wilful disobedience Hopkins found in Satan, whose self-admiration and insistence upon "selving" led to his exile from Heaven: "This song of Lucifer's was a dwelling on his own beauty, an instressing of his own inscape, and like a performance on the organ and instrument of his own being; it was a sounding, as they say, of his own trumpet and a hymn in his own praise" (S.D.W., p.200). Christ, on the other hand, became the paragon of self-restraint, the opposite of indulgent selving. In a letter to Robert Bridges, in which Hopkins describes Christ as the model for gentlemanliness, he explained:

> It is this holding of himself back, and not snatching at the truest and highest good, the good that was his right, nay his possession from a past eternity in his other nature, his own being and self, which seems to me to be the root of all his holiness and the imitation of this the root of all moral good in other men (Letters I, 174-75).

By relating his nature (his poetic impulse) to "selving" Satan, and his character[4] (his urge for austerity) to self-

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[4] I have borrowed W. H. Gardner's appropriate definitions for "character" and nature or "personality": "Character we define as the stamp imposed upon the individual by tradition and moral training; it may also be desired and self-imposed, and in any case it is maintained by an effort of the will. By personality we mean the free or comparatively untrammelled psychic individuality, that complex of native faculties, 'wild and self-instressed', which find their highest expression in great works of art. Character results when the mind and the passions are subjected to a strict regulative principle:

(cont'd --

sacrificing Christ, one can see how easily Hopkins could establish a war between Heaven and Hell, with his soul as the prize, within the microcosm of his own psyche. Thus originates Hopkins' contemplation for obtaining divine love:

> Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will, whatsoever I have and possess. Thou hast given it to me; to Thee, O Lord, I return it: all is thine, dispose of it entirely according to thy will. Give me thy love and thy grace for this is enough for me (S.D.W., p.192).

In W. H. Gardner's words:

> [Hopkins'] ostensible renunciation of success as an artist was really unavoidable, so imperative was his desire for moral justification, for sanctity. That he would suffer he knew; yet he chose self-immolation. For one who believes implicitly, as he did, all joy is an anticipation and all pain is a promise: 'Ah well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize.'[5]

In an examination of the evidence for self-denial in Hopkins' life, it is impossible to draw with accuracy the fine line between God's will and Hopkins' will. But to my mind Hopkins is several times guilty of attempting to convince his associates of the irreversibility of his own will by claiming

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personality, though eclectic and assimilative in all directions, tends to be guided only by the inner law of its own being. Yet in a subject like Hopkins, just as the character is partly determined by the individual will, so the personality is restrained and guided by the secondary force of character" (Gardner, II, 2-3).

[5] Gardner, II, 284.

his stance to be God's will interpreted.[6] Consider the issue of his conversion to the Catholic church and entry into the Jesuit novitiate. In one letter, Hopkins explained to his father his determination to convert before he completed his degree at Oxford (despite his parents' request of a half-year's wait) as a kind of divine magnetism, "It is God who makes the decision and not I" (Letters III, 92). Yet to the Reverend E. W. Urquhart he claimed to be rationally in control of his future: "Since I made up my mind to this I have enjoyed the first complete peace of mind I ever had" (Letters III, 51).

The same kind of discrepancy recurred in the matters of visits to friends and family which, although planned, failed to take place. R. W. Dixon received this telegram: ". . . Yesterday . . . my plans were disarranged. I am afraid now we shall not meet. It is a sad pity" (Letters II, 65). To Robert Bridges, Hopkins explained that the Provincial had encouraged him to visit friends or another Jesuit house in the free interval before the next term: "He would no doubt readily have given me leave to visit you and, had there been the possibility of saying mass, I might therefore have seen Yattenden. But it was not to be" (Letters I, 150-51). And his mother received the

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[6] It is interesting to note that when Hopkins was debating during his years of study at St. Beuno's (1874-77), he supported the opposition for the proposal " 'Men make circumstances and not circumstances men'. . ." (A. Thomas, Hopkins the Jesuit, the Years of Training (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.160 -- hereafter cited as Thomas). What else could he argue in favour of if not divine determinism?

small consolation that he would not be home for the Christmas break although he had leave because it would not look well for him to return to England having arrived so recently in Ireland (Letters III, 163-64). Apparent behind these letters are Hopkins' perfectionist standards, which made him wary of wasting time that could be dutifully employed, and even of the appearance of shirking responsibilities. In his letters he often accepted the responsibility for failing to contrive a change in his daily routines even though he often admitted that such a change might have been beneficial. Unless Hopkins could justify a break (perhaps by delivering a sermon), however, it was "not to be" — written with a determination that echoes the divine. Norman MacKenzie comments: "A close study of all that Hopkins has left us indicates time and time again that in his scruples he went beyond anything which was laid down for him, and even tended to reject concessions which his Rectors designed to protect his health and serenity."[7]

That Hopkins continued throughout his life to be a harder taskmaster for himself than any superior cannot be stressed enough. Having fallen in love with the people, the language, and the charming countryside of Wales, Hopkins nevertheless bypassed the opportunity to work for the conversion of the Welsh people because he suspected that he had other, more selfish motives for living there, notably a desire to study Welsh language and poetry for the benefit of his own poetic compositions.

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[7] MacKenzie, p.19.

Unhappy with his eventual location in Dublin, Hopkins nevertheless forced himself to become immersed in his responsibilities as he interpreted them, losing himself in mountains of research for the papers he felt he should be publishing, swamping his students with detailed lectures that would not be relevant to their exams, and assigning grades accurate to the quarter mark in his scrupulous marking procedures. All this was done in spite of his precarious health. One need not look long to read a sense of futility and unworthiness into the first letter Robert Bridges received from Dublin:

> I have been elected Fellow of the Royal University of Ireland in the department of classics . . . . It is an honour and an opening and has many bright sides, but at present it also has some dark ones and this in particular that I am not at all strong, not strong enough for the requirements, and do not see at all how I am to become so (Letters I, 190).

Reading Hopkins' sermons, it is interesting to see how some of them reveal the manner in which his life was regulated by his will for reunion with God, while others indicate advice that the perfectionist would have done well to listen to himself. It is tempting, for instance, to read the text of "No man can serve two masters" as an indirect comment on the double attraction Hopkins felt towards God, and towards his Muse. Hopkins preached:

> . . . [a man] will love . . . one of two things, he will follow his likings or his interests. If his likings then he will serve the one he loves and not serve but disobey the one he hates -- and not serve two masters; if his interests, then the one he fears or has expectations of he will attach himself to and hold by, though he

> should be a hard and hated master, and serve him, and the one he has not much to fear nor to hope from, though gentle and good, he will leave unattended to, neglect, despise, that is and disobey -- and that way too he will not serve two masters (S.D.W., p.21).

Furthermore, the fact that Hopkins pushed himself to the state of nervous exhaustion in the performance of his God-given task-work suggests that he interpreted the first commandment literally: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind and with thy whole strength: this is the first commandment" (Mark xii, 30). The moral for another sermon seems to confirm that this was, indeed, Hopkins' credo: ". . . God's work is first to be done, then ours; first the soul's good looked to, then the body's" (S.D.W., p.95).

Furthermore, in his "Duty is Love" sermon, he developed the idea that ". . . there is nothing higher than duty in creatures or in God: God the Son's love for God the Father is duty. Only when I speak thus highly of duty I mean duty done because it is duty and not mainly from either hope or fear" (S.D.W., pp.51-53). To be"in the way of salvation", he explained, we must practice "willing obedience" or "divine charity"; we must wish God's will done even when it is opposed to ours ". . . because God is God and we are only men . . ." (S.D.W., pp.51-53). But the sound advice he gives in this very sermon indicates that Hopkins sometimes failed to practice what he preached:

> . . . true and just selflove lies in wishing and in promoting our own best good and happiness, this is charity towards ourselves;

> short-sighted selfish love of ourselves, which is selfishness and not true selflove even, lies in the consenting to and gratifying the wishes of our lower, our worst, selves, our selves of flesh, our selves of this world and time" (S.D.W., pp.51-53).

In spite of the sense his words made, Hopkins who had an aversion to preaching before or lecturing to a 'captive audience', seemed incredulous that he sometimes had the power to move people. Lacking self-confidence, he was ready to deprecate himself at the least provocation, as this note reveals:

> I preached also the Friday before, but at half an hour's notice and have no notes. The sermon was made out of an old one in this book and was on our Lord's fondness for praising and rewarding people. I thought people must be quite touched by this consideration and that I even saw some wiping their tears, but when the same thing happened next week I perceived that it was hot and that it was sweat they were wiping away (S.D.W., p.81).

Having examined the circumstances and scruples which formed the background to his poetic composition, we are now in a position to examine self-denial, and its offshoot, abasement of one's image of oneself, as they appear in Hopkins' poetry. Following his entry into the Jesuit novitiate in 1869, Hopkins was slow to accept the idea which is central to the Society of Jesus, that of unquestioning obedience to both God and His representatives, his Jesuit superiors. He found it challenging but difficult to sacrifice his personal desires. The ensuing struggle within is expressed in his poetry. Here, Hopkins questions his circumstances, and even complains when he feels that he is being unjustly treated.

His primary concern, however, is his quest for patience. Essential to his new image of himself — that of a passive receptacle for God's will, who is able to cope calmly with disappointment, especially a failure to collect converts -- is his ability to consider man, perceived as selfish, mortal, and myopic, in a divine and eternal perspective.

Throughout Hopkins' poetic canon, and especially in "the terrible sonnets", the imagery used to describe the "I" of the poems collectively suggests a man with a low image of himself. Either through direct statement or implication, Hopkins presents himself in his poetry as an isolated stranger, a lost sheep, a foundering ship, a faulty musical instrument, an abandoned lover, an unravelling rope, a withered plant or seedless bed of soil, and the underdog in a wrestling match. In each case, the choice of image is intended to emphasize that everyman -- or more disparagingly everyjack -- is incomplete without God's grace: he is a dependent and incompetent weakling. In other poems, Hopkins reluctantly identifies with post-lapsarian man. Here Hopkins reveals how the creature with the greatest potential for good, because of his distinguishing rational capacity, can abuse this gift. Careless whether God disapproves or nature suffers, he uses his gift to pursue selfish interests instead of employing it to mediate between the Creator and the inarticulate Creation.

Before dealing with self-denial in the pre-conversion poetry, a brief discussion of two of the earlier poems, the undated "Spring and Death" (Poem 4), and "Heaven-Haven" (Poem 9, 1864),

will help to clarify why self-denial becomes a central theme during the years that immediately follow. "Spring and Death", which bears a close resemblance to "Spring and Fall" (Poem 55, 1880), since both examine the sense of affinity man feels with mutable nature when he accepts his own mortality, indicates that Hopkins had an early awareness of death. In anticipation of his own eventual death, he determined to avoid dying imperfect (a concern which had the power to subdue his longing for the oblivion of death in the later period of desolation). While Hopkins did not write his discourse on death until after he had composed "Spring and Death", the germ of the idea that he developed in his spiritual writings was already alive at the time he composed the early poem: "One of God's providences is by warnings -- the death of others, sermons, dangers, sicknesses, a sudden thought . . . beware of a neglected warning . . . A warning leaves a man better or worse, does him good or harm; never leaves him as it finds him" (S.D.W., p.252).

In "Heaven-Haven", a poem which is supposedly about a nun who "takes the veil", Hopkins expresses his own desire for a life of monastic seclusion in which he would not be exposed to the temptation of this world. Two letters written after his conversion support the reasons for joining the Jesuits that we find foreshadowed in "Heaven-Haven". To the Reverend E. W. Urquhart, Hopkins wrote, "It is enough to say that the sanctity has not departed from the order to have a reason for joining it" (Letters III, 51). When he was doing his tertianship at Manresa House, Roehampton, Hopkins

informed R. W. Dixon:

> my mind is here more at peace than it has ever been and I would gladly live all my life, if it were so to be, in as great or greater seclusion from the world and be busied only with God. But in the midst of outward occupation not only the mind is drawn away from God, which may be at the call of duty and be God's will, but unhappily the will too is entangled, worldly interests freshen, and worldly ambitions revive. The man who in the world is as dead to the world as if he were buried in the cloister is already a saint. But this is our ideal (Letters II, 75-76).

Not to be neglected is the lengthy fragment "Il Mystico", which Hopkins copied into a letter to his friend E. H. Coleridge in 1862. Paul Mariani comments on the significance of the opening lines: "That Puritan strain in Hopkins, that uneasy suspicion which was to nag him throughout his life, blares forth in the opening lines. Sensual gross desires are clotted, filthy, slimy, feverish, spawned in 'some sickly hovel'. They are earth-bound and alien to that fledgling spirit which would ascend unencumbered. He calls on the mystical spirit to raise him ... "[8] to a flight as free as the lark's. This will to subdue the flesh was translated into action in the life of the young man, who kept "a little book for sins" and noted as prescribed reading Dr. Pusey's ". . . sermon on Everlasting Punishment, and on the Remedy for Sins of the body . . ." (J.P., p.60), who persevered in a bet binding him

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[8] P. L. Mariani, A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p.4 -- hereafter cited as Mariani.

to abstain from all liquids for a week,[9] who voluntarily destroyed his poetry and renounced all beauty until he had God's leave for it (J.P., p.71), even going so far as a young Jesuit as to receive permission for a voluntary "'custody-of-the-eyes penance'",[10] and who could dictate to himself: "For Lent. No pudding on Sundays. No tea except if to keep me awake and then without sugar. Meat only once a day. No verses in Passion Week or on Fridays. No lunch or meat on Fridays. Not to sit in armchair except can work in no other way. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday bread and water" (J.P., p.72). All these are vivid instances of self-denial.

The poetry written previous to Hopkins' conversion to the Catholic church and entry into the Jesuit Novitiate also reveals his ascetic inclinations. In "Easter Communion" (Poem II), for instance, Hopkins celebrates the idea that those who do without, or suffer righteously in this world enjoy a peaceful ease in the next life. Unfortunately he seems masochistically too enthusiastic about the "ever-fretting shirt of punishment" of the pious, self-flagellating individual. His sensuous language, as in the line "You striped in secret with breath-taking whips", suggests pleasure derived from pain and violence. To readers troubled by this line, N. H. MacKenzie suggests that the phrase should be read

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[9] Thomas, pp. 1-2.

[10] Thomas, p.85.

metaphorically as well as literally, and supports his reading by associating the phrase with the internal struggle for self-discipline described in Poem 73 as "the war within".[11] In "Easter Communion", Hopkins further suggests that the religious man, accustomed to a regime of chill and fasting, must derive keen pleasure from the contrast of the feast.

N. H. MacKenzie also offers an interesting interpretation of Poem 15, which he defends as an autobiographical poem:

> "The Alchemist in the City" seems to be an allegory of an Oxford man's efforts to find spiritual wealth through his laborious classical study, and of the fated futility of his search. Looking back years later he echoed a friend's remark: 'What philosophy good or bad -- what system — did we ever learn at Oxford?' The pressure of foredoomed failure, seriously misplaced as we can now judge -- was crushing the undergraduate at Oxford as it later did the professor at Dublin.[12]

Dr. MacKenzie also observes, quite accurately I feel, that there is "a surprising degree of affinity in tone (though with significant differences) between the expression of his struggle of soul during his Oxford days and his last poems written in Ireland."[13] Despite the twenty-four year interval between the composition of the poems, the stylistically straightforward lines, "They do not waste their meted hours/But men and masters plan and build . . ." (Poem 15), anticipate the thought ex-

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[11] Poems, p.249.

[12] MacKenzie, p.9.

[13] MacKenzie, p.11.

pressed in the compressed language of the lines, "birds build -- but not I build: no, but strain/ Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes . . ." (Poem 74). Both excerpts convey a sense of helplessness and futility. Again, the sense of isolation in the simple lines, "My prayers must meet a brazen heaven/ And fail or scatter all away . . ." (Poem 18), has its verbally more complex echo in the lines, "my lament/ Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent/ To dearest him that lives alas! away." (Poem 67). Hopkins "deep-set feelings of inferiority"[14] appear to have had early roots.

"The Habit of Perfection" (Poem 22) combines the themes of "Heaven-Haven" and "Easter Communion", expressing as it does both Hopkins' desire to become a priest, and the pleasure that the senses derive from contrasts. Here, Hopkins portrays the ascetic life as a strangely sensuous one in which the deprived senses are refined to be capable of a heightened sensitivity, and therefore become appreciative of the smallest sensual stimuli. Habits of self-denial are presented in their positive aspects through the use of paradox, which allows "elected silence" to sing, and "lovely-dumb" lips to be "eloquent". In each of the first six stanzas, one of the sense organs is commanded to accept a self-denying role, in order to assist the speaker in ignoring worldly distractions to concentrate instead upon the development of the spiritual self. The pun in the title should not go unnoticed. Hopkins is anxious

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[14] MacKenzie, p.9.

to groom these habits of perfection so that he may be worthy of the garment which represents his marriage to Christ (and poverty), the clerical habit.

At the same time Hopkins was chastening his senses, he was also clarifying his conception of his sinful self. In "Myself unholy . . ." (Poem 16), he indicates that he need not be compared with Christ to be exposed as inferior. In the matter of faults, he feels that he surpasses his friends: "though each have one . . . I have all." The sentiments expressed in this poem were repeated throughout his life. When he compared his own nature and behaviour with A. W. M. Baillie's kindness (Letters III, 242, 1877), and R. W. Dixon's gentlemanliness (Letters I, 139, 1881), Hopkins became convinced that he was a blackguard. Developing this sense of self-deprecation in letters to Robert Bridges, he claimed: "I have in me a great vein of blackguardry and have long known I am no gentleman [Christ is, of course, his model for the perfect gentleman]; though I had rather say this than have it said" (Letters I, 129, 1881). Furthermore, admitting that he believed Walt Whitman's mind to work in a manner similar to his own, he continued, "As he is a very great scoundrel this is not a pleasant confession" (Letters I, 155, 1882). Finally, the most flagrant example of his propensity to self-deprecation originated in a literary discussion in which Hopkins disagreed with Robert Bridges: "Jekyll and Hyde I have read . . . You are certainly wrong about Hyde being overdrawn: my Hyde is worse" (Letters I, 238, 1886).

In "My prayers must meet a brazen heaven" (Poem 18), the syntax implies that both Hopkins and his prayers are "unclean and seeming unforgiven". Without God's cooperation, ("Battling with God is now my prayer"), Hopkins feels that heaven will most certainly reject him: "I reckon precedents of love,/But feel the long success of sin". He carries this sense of self-despite one step further in the sonnet which begins:

> Let me be to Thee as the circling bird,
> Or bat with tender and air-crisping wings,
> That shapes in half-light his
> departing rings . . . (Poem 19).

In "half-light", the bird would have but a dim spiritual vision, but even if the light were day-bright, the blind bat would be incapable of spiritual insights. The lowly bat's "departing rings" (which recall the relationship between the falcon [man] and the Falconer [God] in Yeats' "The Second Coming"), indicate Hopkins' awareness that everyman's natural bent is away from God — only through self-discipline can he hope to approach Him.

Reconstructing this relationship between the sublime and the ridiculous, or specifically, between God and his faithful bat, Hopkins assumes worm-like dimensions to address God in "The Half-Way House" (Poem 20): "See, Love, I creep and Thou on wings dost ride." Despite his acknowledged insignificance, however, Hopkins still expresses a will of his own. (Later, of course, he must grapple with his self-will, which is unsuitable to a Jesuit.) In "The Half-Way House", he asserts, "I must o'ertake Thee at once and under heaven/If I shall overtake Thee at last above."

He suggests that his faith will waver if he is denied a direct vision of God. This demand brings to mind a passage written by the mature priest (who has been visited by Christ), towards the end of his life: "It is as if one were dazzled by a spark or a star in the dark, seeing it but not seeing by it: we want a light shed on our way and a happiness spread over our life" (S.D.W., p.262). But it becomes apparent in "Nondum" (Poem 23), that the spark has failed to fall from heaven. Here the expression of neglect on God's part is intensified to a sense of anguish over God's silence. Finding no consolation in the "shadow" that he has "in his own imagining" volleyed up into the heavenly seat, Hopkins is impatient to experience the Divine Presence. (This poem leaves no doubt in my mind that Hopkins was not exaggerating when he told his father following his conversion that the Doctrine of the Real Presence alone prevented him from losing his faith in God: "This belief once got is the life of the soul and when I doubted it I shd. become an atheist the next day" (Letters III, 92).) Unable to tame his will entirely, Hopkins can only pray, as he also does in the Jesuit period, for "patience with her chastening wand" to "dispel the doubt", so that if he must proceed "still in darkness", or blindly in the spiritual sense, at least it will be with trust.

Willing to conform to the rigorous outline he established for himself in "The Habit of Perfection", Hopkins not only elected poetic silence for fear that his artistic inclinations would interfere with his new vocation, but also burned the finished copies of all his early poems in what he referred to as a

"slaughter of the innocents" (J.P., p.165, May 11, 1868). While he did keep a journal full of observations and insights that proved to be the raw material for later verse, he nevertheless abstained from the concentrated act of writing poetry until encouraged by a superior to break his nine year silence to commemorate the death of five Franciscan nuns in what became "The Wreck of the Deutschland".

CHAPTER II

MIDDLE POEMS (1875-83)

It would be unfair to suggest that there was no development in the poetically silent years between the undergraduate poems and "The Wreck of the Deutschland". Hopkins' journal reveals that between 1866-75 he became increasingly sensitive to nature. Furthermore, a growing spiritual awareness complemented his attention to detail in his natural observations. He began to assert that a close scrutiny of nature yields knowledge of God to the spiritually informed. For instance, he had grasped the beauty of Christ from his study of a bluebell: "I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it" (J.P., p.199, 1870).

Since postlapsarian man's vocabulary lacks the exact words to describe new dimensions to vision, Hopkins coined his own words to refer to the apprehension of God at the heart of a dynamic, personified nature. "Inscape", then, employed as both noun (representing an object truly perceived), and transitive verb (referring to the quality of fresh, intense vision) describes man's ability, if he looks sensitively at nature, to penetrate its constant flux and change and its pleasing superficial variety to glean the law or vital principle which informs each member of creation from within. Hopkins observes:

> All the world is full of inscape and chance
> left free to act falls into order as well
> as purpose: looking out of my window I
> caught it in the random clods and broken
> heaps of snow made by the cast of a broom
> (J.P., pp.173-74).

However, while there are laws perceptible in nature, one must allow that "inscaping" involves a subjective element: we cannot know reality objectively. Wallace Stevens, for instance, might have explained "inscaping" as the activity of Hopkins' "shaping imagination" as it forms pleasureable order out of the chaos of the natural world. Through imaginative vision, the external world can be transformed and be perceived as both a friendlier and a more comprehensible environment. Hopkins himself admits that when he searches for "inscapes", the subjective element often teases the mind of the observer: "What you look hard at seems to look hard at you, hence the true and the false instress of nature" (J.P., p.204).

"Inscape" is made possible by " stress" or "instress", the vital energy or informing spirit at the heart of all created things, which is God himself. But despite the fact that "instress", which is ceaselessly active, assures moments of vivid insight to the patiently attentive eye ("The world is charged with the grandeur of God./It will flame out like shining from shook foil . . ." Poem 31), it remains invisible to the spiritually lethargic. To achieve penetrating vision, the beholder must spend his own vital energy to "instress" God's omnipresence (or receive signals of divine energy as they are transmitted from the natural world).

Opening his heart one night, Hopkins reads a confirmation of God's beauty in the stars:

> As we drove home the stars came out thick:
> I leant back to look at them and my heart
> opening more than usual praised our Lord to
> and in whom all that beauty came home. (J.P., p.205)

Such experiences lead Hopkins to suggest that:

> All things therefore are charged with love,
> are charged with God and if we know how to
> touch them give off sparks and take fire,
> yield drops and flow, ring and tell of him (J.P., p.342).

As his theory of "inscape" evolves, Hopkins introduces some new terms to it. Briefly, when non-rational creation is instinctively praising God and advertising His presence by merely performing its God-given role, it is seen as "selving". (Poem 57 illustrates this "selving" process.) Man, however, can err in following nature's example. According to Hopkins, fallen mankind must wilfully repress his urge to act merely in response to the instincts of his animal nature. While such activity is beautiful to witness in nature, its human counterpart, selfish action, led to the exiles of Lucifer and Adam and Eve from Heaven and Eden. Higher "pitched" (having a more complicated, more highly developed "inscape"), than the rest of "selving" creation, man has been granted freedom of choice. "The sun and the stars shining . . . glorify God, but they do not know it. . . But men can know God, can mean to give him glory . . ." (J.P., pp.302-03). Man can conform to God's will by living self-effacingly, or he can ungratefully celebrate his selfhood by exercising his unique talents, mindless of the Giver's intentions. Only if he employs his tal-

ents (the pun on the parable of the talents is intentional), to "give beauty back ... to God" (Poem 57) with interest is he worthy of the superior gift of divine "grace", which Hopkins describes as:

> ... any action, activity, on God's part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries the creature to or towards the end of its being, which is its selfsacrifice to God and its salvation ... (S.D.W., p.154).

An understanding of these views is essential, since they inform Hopkins' mature poetry. His coined (or newly defined) words occur frequently, both in the poems themselves and in my commentary on them.

Convinced that writing poetry reflected obedience to his superior's will, Hopkins once more began to compose in order to express the religious significance of the wreck of the Deutschland. A letter to his mother in which he thanks her for the newspaper clippings relevant to the shipwreck, indicates that his own will was closely aligned to the will of his superior. Here Hopkins sounds anxious to commemorate an event which "made a deep impression on me, more than any other wreck or accident I ever read of . . ." (Letters III, 135). The reason that he was so deeply moved by the shipwreck is revealed in the resemblances he finds between the disaster at sea and a comparable crisis that he experienced within the microcosm of himself. In particular, the tall nun's ability to "inscape" Christ's presence in the midst of chaos recalls Hopkins' own insight into the ways that God's grace is bestowed, a knowledge which was confirmed in the personal experience described in the opening stanzas of the poem.

Thus, before the poet relates how some two hundred passengers, and in particular five nuns, confront a storm sent from heaven, Hopkins first reveals his own experience of God in the autobiographical "Part the First".

Referring to the first section of the poem in a letter to Robert Bridges, Hopkins leaves no room for doubt in his assertion of the personal authenticity of his experience: "I may add for your greater interest and edification that what refers to myself in the poem is all strictly and literally true and did all occur; nothing is added for poetical padding . . . "(Letters I, 47).

That he had had a profound experience of God's presence, which would qualify him to write with authority in his poem about the tall nun's similar experience, is suggested in a later letter to Bridges of February 15, 1879:

> I cannot in conscience spend time on poetry, neither have I the inducements and inspirations that make others compose. Feeling, love in particular, is the great moving power and spring of verse and the only person I am in love with seldom, especially now, stirs my heart sensibly and when he does I cannot always 'make capital' of it, it would be a sacrilege to do so (Letters I, 66).

Here Hopkins implies that while an experience of God inspires him to express his love of God poetically, it would be sacrilegious, at least for a Jesuit, to harness his Muse unless he could further direct her to express religious themes. Furthermore, the excerpt suggests that while Hopkins is not entirely deprived of signs and glimpses of God's presence at this point in his life, he nevertheless experiences these less frequently than he did at

an earlier time. In fact, the profound religious experience dramatized by Hopkins in "Part the First" most likely occurred several years before the composition of the poem, during "the First Week of his noviceship Long Retreat . . ." (1868) according to Father Devlin (S.D.W., p.12).

In the first stanza of "The Wreck of the Deutschland", Hopkins establishes himself as the submissive servant of an all-powerful master who is also his creator, sustainer, and eventual destroyer:

> Thou mastering me
> God! giver of breath and bread;
> World's strand, sway of the sea;
> Lord of living and dead;
> Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
> And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
> Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
> Over again I feel thy finger and find thee. (Poem 28, I)

Because he is 'in touch' with God at this stage of his life, he can acknowledge his relative insignificance without self-deprecation. An impressionable spiritual infant, he has experienced both of God's natures, both His comforting "finger" and the crushing pressure of His foot upon a "midriff" that strains under this "fire of stress" (Stanza 2). And he has learned not to question, but to cherish the "lightning" and "lashed rod" (Stanza 2) along with God's love, because without Him he is transient, finite, and unable to renew himself — "I am soft sift/ in an hourglass . . ." (Stanza 4), whereas he becomes "steady as water in a well" (Stanza 4) when replenished and made complete through "Christ's gift" (Stanza 4).

Using the analogy of misshapen metal, Hopkins invites God to either slowly melt or abruptly forge the postlapsarian form

of everyman into a worthy receptacle for divine grace (Stanza 10). In the context of the poem, pain is given a positive significance, since human suffering can be the outer display of divine grace at work within. Exceptional people, Hopkins explains in a letter to Bridges of April 29, 1869, who nobly endure the torments of intense pain are experiencing "the marks of God's particular love . . ." (Letters I, 25). God's benevolence can be discerned behind His harshest actions: "Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung:/ Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then . . ." (Stanza 9).

In religion as in education, Hopkins like most Victorians believed that physical discipline generously administered augmented learning and right thinking. His own academic experiences would seem to justify this view. Apparently prompted to devour the classics by the seldom idle rod of Highgate School's Headmaster, Dr. Dyne, Hopkins submitted to the discipline although it was in his nature to rebel against Dyne's methods. He concentrated on the classics in his studies and eventually excelled in 'Greats'.[15]

Hopkins, then, conceived of his God as a divine instructor whose teaching methods motivate the high 'achiever' or the perfectionist. His description is of an unpredictable, double-natured Creator who cloaks his love beneath the guise of a stern disciplinarian, and whose praise, though not grudgingly given, is hard to win. Love of God is duty, Hopkins indicates in his first Liverpool

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[15] MacKenzie, p.3.

sermon. In carrying out His will, we must not infrequently act in a manner which is contrary to our own inclinations (S.D.W., pp.51-53).

While Hopkins speaks with praise in this sermon of the man who can perceive and fulfill his duty, the reader is struck by the underlying assumption that desire and duty rarely correspond. In his attempts to fathom God's will, it seems that Hopkins was at times guilty of determining what he would like to do, and then doing what he thought he ought to do, which lay in the opposite direction. As I observed in Chapter I, Hopkins was often unkind to himself in the matter of visits to friends and family. Bypassing natural opportunities, he restricted the limits of his narrow life still further, when a brief holiday, indeed any change of environment would have been both restorative and quite in order. One wonders, in these instances, if he was attempting to please God with his small sacrifices, or merely punishing himself and gaining a strange sense of pride in his ability to deny his natural inclinations.

Father Devlin claims that Hopkins' "mind forg'd manacles" (Blake's "London"), his self-imposed rules of conduct, were formed from a misreading of Duns Scotus. (Influenced by the writings of this scolar since 1872, when he was studying philosophy at Stonyhurst, Hopkins praised him in Poem 44 "of realty the rarest-veined unraveller".) Commenting on Hopkins' spiritual writings (most of which were written in the year of his tertianship in 1881), he criticizes Hopkins' assumption that there is an "inevitable opposition" (S.D.W., p. 115) between the 'elective will'

(or choice) and the 'affective will' (or rational desire). Oversimplifying the distinction between the two, Hopkins links the former with Christlike obedience, and the latter with Satanic disobedience. Rather, the role of the 'elective will' is to guide instead of contest the inclinations of the 'affective will'. Interpreting Scotus, Father Devlin explains that ". . . rational desire supplies the impetus for choice and that choice, as an expression of the whole man, would be impossible without it" (S.D.W., p.116).

In the light of Father Devlin's interpretation of this conflict, it becomes easier to grasp why Hopkins repressed seemingly harmless desires, and why the priest in him acted indifferently to, and was even embarrassed by the poet in his nature. This opposition is not in evidence, however, in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", which can be read as a sermon in verse. Here poet and priest combine in a fervent attempt to communicate the divine warning that Hopkins reads from the disaster.

In "The Wreck of the Deutschland", unlike some of his sonnets of desolation, Hopkins finds no fault with divine justice. While its immediate application may be logically inscrutable to everyman, the divine intention behind the shipwreck is apparent to the poet. Such a violent example is needed to shake erring mankind out of his spiritual apathy.

Nor does the poem reflect any sense of unworthiness in Hopkins himself. Self-assured, he speaks as the intermediary between God and everyman: he is the poet-prophet with a vision to

communicate and share. Confident that his vision is sound, he attempts to enlighten the spiritually myopic in order that they, too, may interpret the moral significance behind the violence in nature. For nature in her many moods reflects divine displeasure or approval. And while Hopkins expresses a sense of horror at an event which abruptly terminated so many lives, it is mingled with the visionary's admiration for the soul-saving power revealed in a crisis which brings untried moral strength to the surface. Complacent mankind, Hopkins realizes, is more likely to make a leap to faith, or to affirm his belief in the moments before a premature and unexpected death than during the dull course of a routine life. "Stress" reveals the best or worst in man.

Hopkins is aware that many men forget that they are transient, and uses the pronoun "we" to encourage an imaginary congregation to identify with him in the realization that "we dream" when we think our time on earth is endless ("we are rooted in earth," Stanza II). Recalling his discovery in the early poem "Spring and Death" (Poem 4), he emphasizes that death constantly makes his mark on the life around us. We should heed the warnings of the "flesh" that "falls within sight of us": we are made of the same "flower" (flour, dough) and will share its fate (Stanza II). No matter how well we evade this realization through social involvement ("wave with the meadow," Stanza II), we will all eventually learn the lesson of death in soul-testing isolation. How many of us would be as prepared as the tall nun (or as Hopkins in "Part the First") to give beauty back to God with a fling of the heart?

In "Part the Second", Hopkins invites a comparison between himself and his sister in faith in which he presents himself unfavourably. Unaware of the tall nun's desperate situation, he was "under a roof . . .[he] was at rest . . ." (Stanza 24) (emotionally uninvolved, spiritually complacent), while she was "the prey of the gales . . ." (Stanza 24) (testing her moral mettle, cf. metal, Stanza 10) in an experience Hopkins associates with the Crucifixion.

Having "startle[d] the poor sheep back" (Stanza 31) into the fold of the Church by the example of her heroic behaviour, the martyr-shepherdess dies in action, having augmented God's harvest of souls. In contrast, Hopkins' role is an outwardly uneventful and patiently enduring one. In his case, it is "not danger, electrical horror" (Stanza 27) that prompts him to welcome the idea of death in anticipation of his reunion with God, but the sense of prostration which can be the result of "years and years . . . of world without event . . ." (Poem 73). His suffering is of the slow and subtle kind:

> The jading and jar of the cart,
> Time's tasking, it is fathers that asking for ease
> Of the sodden-with-its-sorrowing heart . . . (Stanza 27).

While he seems envious of the premature and heroic death of the nun at the time he writes "The Wreck of the Deutschland", Hopkins voices a different attitude in "St. Alphonsus Rodriguez" (1888). Although both kinds of suffering can precede spiritual redemption, he is now convinced that a victory in the "war within" (Poem 73) is actually preferable and more ennobling than a public-

ly acclaimed conquest.

While the Jesuit journal The Month dared not print the unusual "Wreck of the Deutschland", submitted complete with marks to indicate the stresses, Hopkins was not yet discouraged as a poet. The exercise of this superb occasional poem had unfettered his Muse; he began to write poetry in a demanding new style with its own rules of composition. Now inspired by the charm of the Welsh landscape, and encouraged by the criticism that his renewed correspondence with Robert Bridges yielded, Hopkins experienced a burst of creative activity.

In his sonnets of 1877, Hopkins abandoned the voice of the preacher which he had used so effectively in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" to examine the interrelationship between God, nature, and man from the point of view of the moral individual. His poetic perspective is shaped by the influence of Ruskin, as were his natural descriptions in his journals. In these poems, he constantly examines postlapsarian man and his environment in contrast to the Edenic ideal as he conceives it to have been. He forms his comparisons by penetrating the appearances of things in order to "inscape" pure essence and the divine and human perfection which was sullied by the Fall. His nostalgic awareness of the superior state that God had originally created often makes him less than tolerant of the shortcomings he shares with mankind.

Fallen mankind, placed in relief against fallen creation, appears unfavourably in these poems. Whether the criticism focuses

on Hopkins himself or the species of which he is a member, the poems reflect disappointment and disgust with human deficiency. This tone of disgust grew stronger in his later years. Overwhelmed by a feeling of hopelessness when he was confronted by the squalor of Liverpool (1880-81), Hopkins wrote: "'. . . the drunks go on drinking, the filthy, as the scripture says, are filthy still: human nature is so inveterate. Would that I had seen the last of it . . .'" (S.D.W., p.10). Man, whose rational gift once assured him dominion over the non-human creation now abuses his inheritance, having corrupted himself since the Fall. Hopkins' admiration is therefore directed towards the purer parts of creation which serve God better than man manages to do.

In "Pied Beauty" (Poem 37), Hopkins claims that God's beauty can best be appreciated through a study of the creation which He pervades in all its variety. It is as if God were both orchestra and conductor: so many unique, natural things simultaneously spend their common, informing energy as they "selve" distinctively — yet the effect is one of harmony. Nor need man's "selving" introduce a note of discord: Hopkins elevates and ennobles physical labour by including "all trades"[16] (Poem 37) in the list of divinely approved methods of "selving". Most, however, is to be learned from observing the "fickle, freckled" and "dappled" members of creation. For if these finite things can be so unique and full of contrasts, then how much more unique must God be, who "fathers-forth whose beauty is

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[16] See also Poem 71.

past change" (Poem 37), when all this diversity adds up to suggest His infinite beauty and omnipotence?

Expressing the qualities of "Spring" (Poem 33), Hopkins captures nature's ceaseless activity. Much more optimistic about the future of wild birds and unruly weeds than he is about mankind's future, he admires the seemingly undisciplined selving he witnesses in nature:

> Nothing is so beautiful as Spring —
> When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
> Thrush's eggs look like little low heavens, and thrush
> Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
> The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing . . .(Poem 33).

All this "juice" and "joy" he claims is but "A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning in Eden garden" (Poem 33). "Strain" invites two readings. In the musical sense it suggests a single melodic thread which evokes the memory of an obsolete symphony. But if one thinks of kitchen equipment, it puts one in mind of a liquid sifting (perhaps the thrush's voice) deprived of its retaining matter (possibly the prelapsarian thrush) which alone survives the strainer of fallen Time.

Each spring, nature still manages to give back to God a sense of Edenic beauty. Since fallen man is so prone to corruption, his best chance of redeeming himself by giving beauty back to God also occurs in the spring of his life. Most optimistic about the opportunity of the young to attain salvation, Hopkins appeals to Christ in the sestet of the sonnet to receive back youth's "innocent mind" with its accompany-

ing virtue of chastity "before it cloud . . . and sour with sinning. . ."[17] (Poem 33).

In contrast, when he discusses his own nature in "In the Valley of the Elwy" (Poem 34), the reader is moved to recall Hopkins' 'blackguard complex', which I discussed in Chapter I. Hopkins begins in a self-deprecatory tone: "I remember a house where all were good/ To me, God knows, deserving no such thing . . ." (Poem 34). After he reflects upon the beauty and variety of the Welsh landscape, he laments: "Only the inmate does not correspond" (Poem 34), and is moved to appeal to God to complete the inadequacy of man, and himself in particular.

In "God's Grandeur" (Poem 31), Hopkins reveals man as the insensitive polluter, the black sheep in contrast to nature's variegated freshness:

> Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
> And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
> And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
> Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod . . . (Poem 31).

In fact, though man was originally placed at the apex of creation, Hopkins suspects that he has degenerated since the Fall. No longer God's favourite, he has surrendered his position to less corrupted nature, embodied in the sea and the skylark, in the poem which bears their name:

> We, life's pride and cared for crown,
> Have lost that cheer and charm of earth's past prime:
> Our make and making break, are breaking, down
> To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's first slime . . .
> (Poem 35).

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[17] This idea is further discussed in Poems 47, 48, 49 and J. P., p. 254.

Hopkins sees degenerate man returning his mortal clay to the slime from which he emerged. He uses the image of draining dust, which recalls the image of the hourglass in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", to emphasize man's mortality. In isolation (or behind glass in Poem 28), man is helpless to ease his spiritual dryness with the restoring powers of divine moisture, nor can he control his inner erosion (corrosion?) as time and circumstance waste away his mortal clay. Unlike "The Wreck of the Deutschland", here there is no counterbalancing image of a well's surface held steady by the pressure of mountain springs flowing into the well from beneath -- the hope of eternity, represented by the healing waters of St. Winefred's Well, is not extended.

Hopkins' faith in human dignity and man's spiritual heritage may have been momentarily shattered when he composed this poem, which would explain why "The Sea and the Skylark" ends on a note of pessimism. A letter to his mother suggests that Hopkins was troubled by Darwin's insights into man's bestial background:

> I do not think, do you know, that Darwinism implies that man is descended from any ape or ascidian or maggot or what not but only from the common ancestor of apes, the common ancestor of ascidians, the common ancestor of maggots, and so on: these common ancestors, if lower animals, need not have been repulsive animals. What Darwin says about this I do not know (Letters III, 128, 1874).

N. H. MacKenzie understands that before arriving at St. Beuno's, Hopkins had read John Tyndall's presidential address to the British Association. (Tyndall was the man whom W. B. Yeats held responsible for his own loss of faith.) According to Dr. MacKenzie, the address

"was full of a vague and diffuse Darwinism; looking 'back to an obscure origin, he looks forward with the same content to an obscure future.'"[18]

In contrast, "Hurrahing in Harvest" (Poem 38) is a poem of affirmation with little room for self-deprecation. It was composed in a brief interval following a fishing trip when Hopkins felt extremely enthusiastic, and very close to God-in-nature, having just glimpsed "the only person [he is] in love with" (Letters I, 66), Christ.

Lifting up his heart as well as his eyes, Hopkins "inscapes" the curve of Christ's shoulder as it supports two hills in a moment of intense vision. Earlier experiences of a similar nature led him to write in his journal: "I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it and it could be called out everywhere again . . ." (J.P., p.221, 1872). He makes the same observation in the sestet:

> . . . these things were here and but the beholder
> Wanting; which two when they once meet,
> The heart rears wings bold and bolder
> And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him
> off under his feet . . . (Poem 38).

The Hopkins reflected in this poem is in a much happier position than the undergraduate who composed Poem 20. In the earlier poem, he had not yet seen Christ, and could only creep while He flies above. Now, because of his enlightening vision, Hopkins walks with a lighter tread. Although his feet are still on the ground, his heart has risen

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[18]MacKenzie, p.55. He quotes from Letters III, 127-28.

to meet the Saviour.

There is, however, a corner reserved for modified self-deprecation in the poem. Before the refreshing change that made him spiritually alert (the fishing trip), Hopkins was the "beholder" who was found "wanting" (desiring such a vision, lacking the attentive eye which shuts all else out in order to instress Christ), since "inscape" will always reach out to meet the eye that returns "stress" for "stress". One feels that the sense of joy which results from his vision is so intense that Hopkins is mildly annoyed with himself for failing to "instress" Christ's "stress" on an earlier fishing trip.

Hopkins returns to direct self-criticism in the companion poems "The Lantern out of Doors" (Poem 40, 1877) and "The Candle Indoors" (Poem 46, 1879). In the former, which echoes the theme of "Myself unholy . . ." (Poem 16), he realizes what a poor friend he makes when compared to Christ, who does not become distracted by "death" or "distance", and always "minds" (Poem 40). With Christ as his model for the perfect gentleman, Hopkins cannot choose but style himself as the imperfect gentleman who knows his own shortcomings. "The more a man feels what it means and is [to be a perfect gentleman]", he wrote to Robert Bridges, "the more backward he will be to think he can have realized in himself anything so perfect . . ." (Letters I, 175). In the latter poem, Hopkins alludes to the Bible in chastising himself for being so eager to counsel and criticize others, when his own spiritual fire and light require attention: "Are you beam blind, yet to a fault/ In a neighbour deft-handed?" (Poem 46).

Like Poem 38, "The Windhover" (Poem 36) captures Hopkins' ecstacy as he "inscapes" Christ's beauty in the gracefully swooping falcon. But there is more to this poem: it has an autobiographical element which reflects the reasoning behind Hopkins' choice of vocation.

Two conflicting sets of values, one of the flesh and this life (or mortal beauty), and the other of the spirit and the after-life (or immortal beauty) are juxtaposed and a selection made between them. In a poem addressed "To Christ our Lord", Hopkins affirms his choice to live self-effacingly for tomorrow as Christ's loving servant instead of selfishly for today. But this decision has not been made without a longing glance at the windhover, the seductive representative of mortal beauty.

While this is not a poem of self-deprecation, Hopkins nevertheless indicates his weakness: "My heart in hiding/ Stirred for a bird . . . ." He cannot help but admire such unrestrained yet masterful "selving," yet he feels it would be folly to imitate the falcon. He does not see the bird itself as evil, (for ". . . in nature outward beauty is the proof of inward beauty, outward good of inward good . . ." Letters III, 306), but he is aware that God expects man, who is higher "pitched", to please Him in a less instinctive or merely physical way.

While Hopkins is confident that he has made the right choice, one wonders if the poem mentions all of his reasons for making it. To me the poem suggests that if he had failed to hide his heart or discipline his eyes he might have become mesmerized by the bird's "achieve" instead of looking beyond it to Christ's example of ultimate self-

sacrifice. Suspecting an element of escapism in Hopkins' choice of vocation, I feel that his "heart" is "hiding" from much more than the temptation to imitate a bird. Symbolic centre of the human emotions, (and used inter-changeably with "mind" in Old English verse), his "heart" responds to his artistic aspirations, which were hidden away or repressed upon his entry into a selfless vocation, but had been aroused by the activity of the masterful bird.

Though artistically inclined since his youth, Hopkins nevertheless seemed unprepared for the emotional strain and fear of failure which would accompany an attempt to make a living through artistic endeavour. In selecting the self-effacing life of the Jesuit, Hopkins simultaneously satisfied his need for security and obscurity. Sundered from his family by his conversion, he found both financial independence and a surrogate family within the Society of Jesus. How many other professions not only tolerate lack of distinction in performance but actually discourage worldly achievement?

Three months before deciding upon his vocation, Hopkins renounced his ambition to become a painter because" . . . the higher and more attractive parts of the art put a strain upon the passions which I should think it unsafe to encounter . . ." (Letters III, 84). Just before joining the Society of Jesus, when he was struggling to write and publish an article in order to subsidize a trip, he appealed to Father Ryder for sympathy: "Shd. you not feel it painful to write for money?" (Letters III, 53, 1868). Such remarks urge the reader to mentally raise an eyebrow when he tells Robert Bridges, years later, that the gentleman (who exercises Christlike modesty and self-restraint)

is in the position to despise the brilliant poet or the famous painter "for anything in him that shewed him not to be a gentleman . . ." (Letters I, 175, 1883). Perhaps he also tempts the reader to recall the fable of the fox who, having failed to reach the tempting grapes, rationalizes that they were most likely sour.

Consolation for his choice of vocation is further revealed in "The Windhover", but it is a promise that will only be realized with death. Just as Christ "was doomed to succeed in failure; his plans were baffled, his hopes dashed, and his work was done by being broken off undone . . ."(Letters II, 137-38), the martyrs and priests of this world are frustrated in their attempt to give beauty back to God. Hopkins' word choice in the final tercet, however, assures us that the spiritually-refining life is not without dignity. The priest's soul (represented by the plodding "plough") is polished as he labours, while the mortally-wounded martyrs (suggested by the "blue-bleak embers") are described as expiring in a burst of "gold-vermilion" glory as they finally give beauty back to God (Poem 36).

While "Brothers" (Poem 54, 1880) was written three years later than "The Windhover", it, too, contrasts action that is admirable by this life's standards with the observing passivity preferable to the spiritual life. Alison Sulloway interprets the poem as follows:

> Henry, the patient, adoring onlooker below the stage, turns out to be playing the more 'dangerous', the more authentic role of the Christian gentleman than John, the dazzling performer, who is heedlessly selving himself above his audience like some latter-day Lucifer.[19]

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[19] A. G. Sulloway, Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p.148 -- hereafter cited as Sulloway.

A psychological reading of the poem is also possible if one extends the poet-priest duality in Hopkins to the two brothers in the poem, so that each one represents one side of his nature. John, the exhibitionist, can be aligned with the poet, while the priest finds his representative in self-effacing Harry. W. H. Gardner observes that Harry's attitude, which is a combination of love and shame, represents the priest's feelings for his own verse.[20] Hopkins' admiration, on the other hand, is reserved for "the moral spectacle of Henry's conduct."[21]

While Hopkins had written ten of his best known sonnets in 1877, he lacked the stimulation which would give him the incentive to compose poetry as frequently in the years to come. He needed the encouragement of an appreciative audience. Robert Bridges was critical of his new style, and R. W. Dixon's praise was not in itself sufficient sustenance. Nor did the Jesuits encourage Hopkins to compose. Having in mind the rejection of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" by the Jesuit periodical The Month, Hopkins composed "The Loss of the Eurydice", making it "simpler, shorter, and without marks" (Letters I, 66). When this, too, was rejected in 1878, he determined to make no further attempt to publish. And since he communicated to so few, he slowly became discouraged. Several years later, he admitted his need for recognition. "There is a point with me in matters of any size", he confided to Robert Bridges, "when I must absolutely have encouragement as much as crops rain; afterwards I am independent" (Letters I, 218-19,1885).

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[20] Gardner, II, 304.

[21] Sulloway, p.148.

It was in the period following 1877, however, that the seeds of futility were sown. They were to sprout in the sonnets of desolation as the unanswered cries of the isolated individual who, sensing that both God and fellow man had withdrawn from him, stubbornly tried to overcome his inability to communicate.

Two poems written within the next few years take up the theme of priestly isolation. In "At the Wedding March" (Poem 52, 1879), Hopkins, having married a couple, sheds tears over his own sense of isolation. Although married to Christ through his own self-effacing vocation, and figuratively an exile on earth since his true home is otherworldly, he is human enough to crave a more immediate consolation. In "Peace" (Poem 51, 1879), he reveals that God has not yet granted him true Peace, and that "peacemeal peace is poor peace." In this poem, Hopkins undervalues the kind of peace that God does send. He complains that the elusive wooddove, Peace, visits him occasionally when he is performing task-work but abandons him in moments of relaxation:

> And when Peace here does house
> He comes with work to do, he does not come to coo,
> He comes to brood and sit . . . (Poem 51).

He suggests that until Peace (the wooddove) comes to reside permanently within his heart ("under . . .[his] boughs" in the hollow heart of his (human) trunk) he will not have a true sense of direction in his lifework.

Hopkins is still concerned with the interrelationship between God, man, and nature. He suggests that if man could only maintain his sense of affinity with nature, the unconscious damage he does to

both himself and nature would diminish. In "Spring and Fall" (Poem 55, 1880), we see young Margaret weeping "over Goldengrove unleaving", and at the same time, unconsciously, over her own mortality. Unfortunately for both man and nature, insensitivity comes with the years: "as the heart grows older/ It will come to such sights colder . . ." (Poem 58). As "Ribblesdale" (Poem 58,1882) indicates, by the time the inheritor of the earth is mature, he is deaf to earth's dumb appeal. Myopic, insensitive man is "so bound" to "his own selfbent" (Poem 58) that he selfishly plunders the riches of the earth with no thought of how such behaviour will deprive the next generation: "And none reck of world after. . . ." This line, however, permits an alternate reading. Living entirely for the moment, selfish man has no thought of the afterlife. Hopkins enlarges upon this idea in a Liverpool sermon, in which he interprets "the Fall of Man as springing from too confident a resting upon permitted pleasures, instead of positive activity leading to God's glory. A-musing ourselves, using our leisure in blameless ways . . . all these were morally neutral or indifferent acts which laid up no treasure in Heaven."[22] And because man fails to take measures to protect nature, the eroded earth, personified as a suffering woman, expresses her dumb concern with furrowed brows of care.

Hopkins' lament is repeated in the sestet of "Binsey Poplars" (Poem 43, 1879), an occasional poem which describes the destruction of "the aspens which lined the river" at Godstow (Letters II, 26):

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[22] MacKenzie, p.35. He refers to S.D.W., pp. 166-68.

O if we but knew what we do . . .
. . . . . .
. . . even when we mean
To mend her we end her,
When we hew or delve:
After-comers cannot guess the beauty been . . .(Poem 43).

As long as Hopkins could appreciate nature, he was in no danger of giving in to Despair. While he experiences the magnetism of rushing water in "Inversnaid" (Poem 56), he shrugs off Despair's appeal to follow him over the waterfall to drown in the churning cauldron. Shifting his focus, he concentrates instead upon the details of the landscape above the burn. The poem ends with a prayer for the preservation of "the weeds and the wilderness", which emerges as a source of mental tranquillity.

Despite a seven year struggle to make progress in the composition of his play, "St. Winefred's Well", only a portion of it, "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" (Poem 59, 1882) "reached a high state of finish."[23] Writing to Robert Bridges from Liverpool in 1881, Hopkins lamented that work on the play had come to a standstill: "Every impulse and spring of art seems to have died in me, except for music, and that I pursue under almost an impossibility of getting on ..." (Letters I, 124). Both the oppressive atmosphere of Liverpool (S.D.W., pp.10-12) and his choice of the dramatic mode were against him. Keeping in mind Hopkins' narrow range of experience and his self-isolated nature, one finds it easy to conclude with N. H. MacKenzie that

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[23]MacKenzie, p.86.

"lyric suited Hopkins far more naturally than did the give-and-take of dramatic interlocution."[24]

Hopkins' best poems involve the expression of a personal experience or a personal point of view. The Maidens' song from "St. Winefred's Well" is no exception. In response to the Leaden Echo's lament that mortal beauty cannot be kept from fading, the Golden Echo voices Hopkins' own solution to the problem: "Give beauty back . . . back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver", for He keeps it with "fonder a care" than we could have kept it ourselves (Poem 59).

W. H. Gardner interprets the sentiment behind the poem in the following way: "The enjoyment of beauty is a sacrament, and the implied obligation is an act of sacrifice, the controlling of the sensibility by the disciplined will."[25] N. H. MacKenzie observes further that Hopkins' three firmly held beliefs concerning mortal or physical beauty are expressed in the poem: "its evanescence", "the conviction that beauty is a danger to those who wear it", and "that physical beauty [is] too dangerous for a devout man to contemplate intently".[26] (This third belief seems to shed some light on Hopkins' hesitation to look too long at the windhover in Poem 36). It comes as no surprise, then, when Father Devlin reports Hopkins' fear that the beauty in his choruses for "St. Winefred's Well" could lead someone morally astray (S.D.W., pp.215-16).

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[24] MacKenzie, p.86.

[25] Gardner, I, 19.

[26] MacKenzie, p.85.

The undated poem "As kingfishers catch fire . . ." (Poem 57) is far from a poem of self-denial or self-deprecation. The octave expresses the familiar idea that all members of creation, by merely engaging in characteristic action, simultaneously express themselves and their love of God. Their "selving" behaviour is verbally enhanced by Hopkins' application of "the onomatopoeic theory of language"[27], which emphasizes the importance of accurate naming and describing in the identification process. Hopkins thus takes care to appeal to the inner ear as he creates the resonating voices of the ringing stone (repeated "r" reinforced by soft "i"), the plucked string (repeated "t" suggests a string played pizzicato), and the ringing bell (rhymes ending in -ung, -ing, -ells) through the use of assonance, alliteration, and internal rhyme.

In his elevated position in the natural hierarchy, man also makes his "inscape" known. Henry Purcell, for instance, "selves" through his music. When he "instresses" Purcell's music, Hopkins claims: "It is the forgèd feature finds me; it is the rehearsal/ Of own, of abrúpt sélf there so thrusts on, so throngs the ear . . ." (Poem 45). But it is insufficient for man to merely "selve" when he can assume Christ's attributes to become a just man, just as He once took on the humility and discomfort of a human existence to become a model for human conduct. J. Hillis Miller explains that:

> Belief in the Incarnation makes it possible
> to face the full triviality of human life,
> but at the same time it redeems this triviality

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27 MacKenzie, p.83.

> and makes it part of the imitation of Christ: 'I think that the trivialness of life is, and personally to each one, ought to be seen to be done away with by the Incarnation . . . .'[28]

A poem of both affirmation of belief and appreciation of the distinctively "selving" natural world around him which freely offers up its "inscapes", Poem 57, with its emphasis on the glory of "selving", foreshadows despair. In his devotional writings (1881), Hopkins indicates how important his own taste of self is:

> I find myself both as man and as myself something most determined and distinctive, at pitch, more distinctive and higher pitched than anything I see . . . . And when I ask where does all this throng and stack of being, so rich, so distinctive, so important come from/ nothing I see can answer me . . . For human nature, being more highly pitched, selved, and distinctive than anything in the world, can have been developed, evolved, condensed, from the vastness of the world not anyhow or by the working of common powers but only by one of finer or higher pitch and determination than itself and certainly any that elsewhere we see, for this power had to force forward the starting or stubborn elements to the one pitch required. And this is much more true when we consider the mind, when I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnut leaf or camphor. . . . Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own . . . (S.D.W., pp. 122-23).

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[28] G. H. Hartman, ed., Hopkins: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p.111, hereafter cited as Hartman. J. Hillis Miller quotes from Letters III, 19 in his article.

For the moment, Hopkins' awareness of his unique self-taste was a blessing. A knowledge of his own complexity and degree of refinement happily confirmed his belief in his Creator. His existence alone was sufficient evidence of a yet higher"pitched" Being who is the Source and Sustainer of all "selving". Sensing the similarity between nature's "selving" process and his own, he was convinced both of his affinity to nature and of his own elevated position in the natural hierarchy. With a sense of importance, then, he attempted to mediate between God and man, confident in his spiritual vision. He also attempted to speak to man on nature's behalf, since his source of mental tranquillity was more abused than protected by his careless fellow men.

At this point Hopkins had already accepted to a degree his detachment from other men, since it seemed to be required by his profession. When nature's power to soothe him diminished, however, it was a serious matter. That God could will his self-taste to sour, thereby altering his perception of both himself and his environment, he had yet to discover.

CHAPTER III

LATER POEMS (1885-89)

In 1885, Hopkins ended a brief poetic silence with the first of his sonnets of desolation. The sonnets of desolation reflect an intensified self-awareness and a preoccupation with introspection. "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (Poem 61), which Hopkins described at the time as "the longest sonnet ever made and no doubt the longest making" (Letters I, 245) had doubtlessly been coloured by the physical and mental deterioration that he had experienced since his transfer to Dublin (January, 1884). Eleven years earlier, Hopkins had remarked upon his tendency to allow depression and poor health to influence his appreciation of nature: "being unwell I was quite downcast: nature in all her faculties gaped and fell apart, fatiscebat, like a clod cleaving and holding only by strings of root. But this must often be . . ." (J.P., p.236). Thus it is understandable that nature should again "[fall] apart" for the victim of overwork, "worry" and "fits of sadness" which "resemble madness" (Letters I, 216). Sensing that his own "strands of man" (Poem 64) were slack within him, Hopkins projected what he observed within onto a humanized environment. He then described nature in a state in which she has insufficient tension ("stress") to keep her multitude of distinctive selves from melting and merging.

Where J. Hillis Miller sees a "complete reversal"[29] in Hopkins' treatment of nature in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", I see a logical extension and a widening perspective. (He reaches his broadest perspective in Poem 72). When he was praising the Creator who is responsible for nature's variegated freshness, it was logical for Hopkins to write poems such as "Spring" and "Pied Beauty" which focus upon natural life in its youth and prime. That he was aware, even at this point, of the entire mutability process, however, can be ascertained from his lament, in "Spring", that both youth and innocence are evanescent. Yet his determination to faithfully represent natural detail was still firm. One need only compare the description of the tree in Poem 61 with its probable inspiration in Hopkins' journal: "Aspens blackened against the last light seem to throw their scarcer leaves into barbs or arrowheads of mackerel patterns . . ." (J.P.,p.141). Now, intent upon reunion with God, Hopkins again examined the cyclic mutability process, but concentrated upon decay and death. He had been warned by his heart to recall his own mortality as he observes nature's deterioration, and to correct his imperfections while time allows. Uninterested for the moment in the superficial variety of morally neutral nature, he attempted to glean a moral message from the leaves of his "oracle" (Poem 61). He then pondered the fate of human souls (and his own soul in particular) in the essentially "earnest", black and

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[29] J. Hillis Miller, "The Creation of the Self in Gerard Manley Hopkins" ELH, XXII (December, 1955), 293-319, in Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by J. F. Scott and C. D. Scott (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1969), p.22 -- hereafter cited as Miller.

white world which follows the Day of Judgment, when all must endure the consequences of their behaviour in this life.

When the colour is drained away, and only right and wrong remain, there will be no opportunity for self-deception: we will be forced to examine ourselves. Imperfect as we are, it will be a 'rude awakening' as "selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, thoughts against thoughts in groans grind" (Poem 61) as they have never done before. Using violent images, Hopkins convincingly captures the tension as "thoughts" which represent past ideals (concretely portrayed by a cord straining against an opposing cord), conflict with memories of failures and ignoble actions, to emphasize the discrepancy. As the last line of the poem illustrates, Hopkins conceives hell-fire as mental torment rather than an element which torments the flesh. Forever isolated from the God it now yearns for, and repelled by the sins it once enjoyed, the mind's only activity is to review the past actions of the self. Paul Mariani accurately observes that Hopkins' meditation on hell "evokes the hell within"[30]: "The sharpened agony of this realization of what essentially matters -- right, wrong -- evokes that bitter self-taste in himself, the frightening realization of his own unworthiness before the Judge of the Universe, and the pain of mastering himself."[31] Is it any wonder, then, that once he had brooded for so long over the composition of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (one of the requirements of a meditation on hell

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[30] Mariani, p.209.

[31] Mariani, pp. 208-09.

being that no consolation may be offered), that six sonnets related by their heart-searching themes should spring forth in quick succession? While Hopkins never forwarded the "five or more" sonnets that he promised to send Robert Bridges in his letter of September 1, 1885, we can safely assume that he was referring to the desolate sonnets, which must therefore have been written between January and August, 1885. This assumption is further supported in the same letter by Hopkins' claim that "four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will."[32] If further evidence is required, one need only glance at an earlier letter. By May 1885, Hopkins had already composed two sonnets. To Robert Bridges he disclosed, "if ever anything was written in blood one of these was!" (Letters 1, 219).

As the rift between Hopkins and his God became more pronounced in the desolate sonnets, his penchant for self-deprecation correspondingly became more personal. The theme of priestly isolation, already mentioned in the discussion of Poem 52, is resumed in "To seem the stranger . . ." (Poem 66). Here, Hopkins laments the tiresome sense of exile ("stranger", the important word, appears twice in the first sentence) that he must endure because of his choice of vocation. He had been dismayed rather than honoured by the news that he had been elected to the Professorship of Greek at the Royal University of Ireland in Dublin (January, 1884), where he would not only be required to teach Latin and Greek, but also to examine the nation for the B.A. degree in the classics.[33] Already oppressed by "daily

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[32] Poems, p.289.

[33] Mariani, p.215. See also S.D.W., p.263.

anxiety about work to be done" (Letters III, p.256), he found it impossible to proceed cheerfully with his daily responsibilities. The hyphenation of "wear-y" which allows the adjective to span two lines, emphasizes Hopkins' feelings of unproductive stagnation: he is but idly "by where wars are rife." Voicing the suspicion that God must find him spiritually idle despite the fact that the drudgery of marking papers involved his time for months on end, he complained to his mother: "I bear a burden which crushes me and does little to help any good end . . ." (Letters III, 185). Its demand was so taxing on his strength that he lost all chance of compensating in spare time with "spare strength, so to speak . . ." (Letters III, 379).

Even "at a third/ Remove" in Ireland, Hopkins found some comfort in Christ and his brothers-through-Christ, but at the same time, Christ, his "peace" was also the reason for his "parting" from family and homeland. Separated from England ("wife/ To [his] creating thought") and lacking a sense of affinity with the Irish nationalists who surrounded him, the English patriot suffered an inability to communicate both as a poet and as a priest:

> Only what word
> Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
> Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard,
> Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began . . . (Poem 66).

Comparing himself to the abandoned projects and "beginnings of things" which had been reduced to "ruins and wrecks" through his lack of energy and incentive to complete them (Letters III, 255), Hopkins decided that he, too, was a "began": he had not accomplished what he had set out to do. Unsure whether hell was thwarting him, or whether his

failure was due to heavenly purposes he could not comprehend, Hopkins directed his frustration inwards. He decided that he, rather than his circumstances, was mainly to blame. Having failed to satisfactorily deliver the truth his mind was pregnant with, he was left with an unresolved central purpose which soured his image of himself to that of a "lonely began" -- one who is isolated because he has not been able to establish a new family in faith.

According to Father Devlin, Hopkins should have seriously considered the advice of his revered medieval theologian, Duns Scotus, before he accepted his transfer to Ireland. Duns Scotus maintained that a man cannot serve God well unless his duty is performed with joy and spontaneity. Once in Dublin, Hopkins was instead plunged into a melancholy that was "more distributed, constant, and crippling" (Letters III, 256) than the melancholy fits he had previously been subject to. If he was acting against his own better judgment, he should have advised his superior "so that the bitterness of doubt and self-reproach might not be added to his dilemma . . ." (S.D.W., p.117).

Questioning Hopkins' motivation, Father Devlin finds an ambiguity in Hopkins' unquestioning acceptance of his new assignment:

> His transfer to Dublin and the events that followed might be read as an acceptance of his offer of a greater sacrifice for a closer union with Our Lord. But it could also be read as a rejection of that offer, as a sign that he had presumed beyond the measure of grace that was due to him. He himself insisted perhaps too strictly upon justice in his dealings with God; and doubts as to the acceptance of his sacrifice accompanied by involuntary doubts about God's justice, were possibly at the root of the misery that now entangled him . . . (S.D.W., p.218).

In "To seem the stranger . . .", then, Hopkins' final lament seems to be that in this life he has nothing to show for his efforts. Compared to the warring elements around him, he seems idle, since his inner, spiritual struggle is invisible. In the later poem "St. Alphonsus Rodriguez" (Poem 73, 1888), written after Hopkins' emergence from his spiritual doldrums, he is consoled by the recognition that the inwardly steeled breast does keener combat than the outwardly steeled breast, and that there is a superior form of honour to 'public honour' (Poem 73). He seems to have known this all along, in fact, and only laid it aside until he could personally test and re-confirm it. Consider the fate of the strong young sailor aboard the Deutschland, who tried to use brute strength alone to save the drowning women, in contrast to Christ's rescue of the souls of the five Franciscan nuns who relied instead upon spiritual strength in their moment of crisis, which led to the salvation of others who were moved by their example.

In "No worst, there is none" (Poem 65), Hopkins reveals himself to be furthest removed from his God. Consequently, the tone is self-deprecatory, and no consolation is offered. The poem itself is a study in fear and pain. An excerpt from Hopkins' devotional writings suggests the poetic intention behind the composition of this poem. In a meditation on hell, he asks God "for an interior sense of pain which the lost suffer, so that if I should through my faults forget the love of the Eternal Lord, at least the fear of punishment may help me not to fall into sin . . ." (S.D.W., pp.135-36). Providing

further enlightenment, Alison Sulloway indicates the significance of mountain images in apocalyptic works:

> The metaphor usually takes one of two forms: either the climber fears he is about to lose his precarious hold on some pinnacle, or the rock itself is cracking beneath his weight . . . For the Victorians, fear, awe, or suffering of this kind was supposed to issue in moral improvement; the same could be said of any intense emotion that directed the mass of men back to the eternal heart of things."[34]

The pain and emotional constriction in the poem, then, conveyed through violent images and a condensed language, assume a positive significance when they are associated with the workings of God's grace. The suffering individual, however, is often too spiritually myopic to realize that he is enduring divine "stress" which will ultimately assure his salvation, and this is the case with Hopkins. God is here acknowledging the request he made in "Part the First" of "The Wreck of the Deutschland", when he invited God to straighten his own misshapen metal, and to solder his independent will more firmly to God's will. The use of the present tense in the octave of the sonnet suggests that while he was immersed in the painful experience, he lacked the perspective to understand its significance. Only in retrospect (the sestet is in the past tense) was he able to appreciate the suffering that he had endured.

The sonnet opens with the image of physical torment made more intense by the sensitivity of the mind, which can remember and anticipate:[35]

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[34]Sulloway, pp.174, 178.

[35]Hopkins' devotional writings include his logic of suffering, which is applicable here: "The keener the consciousness, the greater

(cont'd --

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring . . .(Poem 65).

Revealing his wavering faith, the speaker abandons any attempt to further endure Fury's torment in an anguished appeal to Christ and Mary for immediate "comforting" and "relief". His cries, that "huddle in a main" like a flock of abandoned sheep, seem to wait indefinitely for recognition and redirection. These cries bewail not only the immediate suffering he endures on God's anvil, but also his heritage of original sin("a chief-/woe, world-sorrow").

The sestet of the sonnet turns inward, since the biggest obstacle blocking a larger, more tolerant view of his situation, lies within. To illustrate the weakness (as he sees it) of his own fallen spirit and will, Hopkins presents himself dramatically as a physical weakling hanging from the sheer-faced mountains of his own mind, fearfully speculating upon the potential for evil which has lurked at the base of these "cliffs of fall", perhaps since the original fall of man. A mere insect, ("creep, wretch"), he indicates that he lacks the "durance" (endurance, sufficient period of confinement in the mortal body) to come to terms with the overwhelming dimensions ("that steep or deep") of his mental mountains. Hiding "under a comfort [which] serves in a whirlwind,"[36] or in the oblivion of death-like sleep, provides

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the pain; the greater the stress of being the greater the pain: both these show that the higher the nature, the greater the penalty . . ." (S.D.W., p.138).

[36] He is unaware that this is the divine wind which separates the wheat from the chaff as it does in Poem 64.

a temporary escape, but no real solution.

Even at his lowest point, Hopkins did not consider suicide. As an excerpt from his devotional writings confirms, he was reluctant to leave life due to natural causes because of concern over his imperfections: "All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch. I wish then for death yet if I died now I should die imperfect, no master of myself, and that is the worst failure of all . . ." (S.D.W., p.262). It would therefore be most unlikely that he would consider risking further condemnation by taking his own life.

In "I wake and feel the fell of dark . . ." (Poem 67), Hopkins again reveals himself to be isolated from his God. Longing for spiritual day and divine light, he describes the claustrophobia of his soul as it awakens to find itself almost smothered beneath a darkness as heavy and impenetrable as an animal's "fell" or skin. Through repetition ("What hours, O what black hours we have spent. . ./ . . . But where I say/ Hours I mean years, mean life . . ."), Hopkins suggests that his spiritual night has been an endless one. He feels that he is being deliberately neglected, and judges himself to be as repulsive in God's eyes as he is in his own, and consequently unworthy of recognition:

> I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
> Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
> Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the
> curse . . .(Poem 67).

The whole poem, in fact, suggests a lonely individual having a conversation with himself in front of a mirror, a poor substitute for the Presence he craves. He has become introspective in God's absence, and critically aware that removed from Him, he has to accept a further

imprisonment, that of the limited, transient flesh (and what he refers to in Poem 39 as his "bone-house, mean house".) In the previous poem, Hopkins' cries were compared to lost sheep. Here, they are likened to "dead letters sent/ To dearest him that lives alas! away . . ." (Poem 67). In both cases he is trying to initiate communication, being too impatient to wait for God to open correspondence. God, he feels, could provide him with the yeast that would shape him into a useful, self-respecting loaf. He has tried to bake unassisted and knows from experience ("With witness I speak this") that his "dough" (his fleshbound self) is spiritually "dull" when it is deprived of the divine ingredient. "Selfyeast" is no substitute for God's yeast: a "sour" (disappointed, self-abasing) failure of a loaf (the poet himself) is the result (Poem 67). Hopkins had once been proud of his distinctive self-taste; now he is humiliated by the realization that it is only one of a multitude of extensions of the divine Self, and that he must passively let God decide whether his personal flavour will be appetizing or noxious.

Poem 67 is based on an autobiographical experience, which is recorded years earlier in Hopkins' journal:

> I had a nightmare that night. I thought that something or someone leapt onto me and held me quite fast . . . . I had lost all muscular stress . . . but not sensitive [stress] . . . . The feeling is terrible: the body no longer swayed as a piece by the nervous and muscular instress seems to fall in and hang like a dead weight on the chest. I cried on the holy name and by degrees recovered myself . . . . It made me think that this was how the souls in hell would be imprisoned in their bodies as in prisons and of what St. Theresa says of the 'little press in the wall' where she felt herself to be in her vision . . . (J.P., p.238, 1873).

With Poems 65 and 67 in mind, the reader may well wonder what compels Hopkins to compose sonnets which recount frightening imaginative or autobiographical experiences. Surely if they were meant to be cries for help they would not have been filed in a drawer. Why should Hopkins want to relive a painful or embarrassing experience? To do so is to experience hell-on-earth for a person who believes hell to be a mental atmosphere which has its source in intense personal dissatisfaction when the mind, reviewing what might have been, despairs over what actually happened, and begins to feed upon itself. "Against these acts of its own", Hopkins explains, "the lost spirit dashes itself like a caged bear and is in prison, violently instresses them and burns, stares into them and is the deeper darkened . . ." (S.D.W., p.138). Is he intentionally tormenting himself? I think not. Rather than looking to Freud for a definition of sado-masochism, I recalled an article that discussed the therapeutic value of poetry.[37] It seems apparent to me that the theory expressed in this article is as relevant to Hopkins' poetry as it is to Emily Dickinson's. By reconstructing a painful or embarrassing experience, the imaginative individual can create order out of chaos as he interprets the experience. By attributing to the experience a rational explanation (it need not be the right one, as long as it is believed), the mind is able to soothe itself and consequently the memory of pain or fear diminishes.

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[37] Cynthia Chaliff, "Emily Dickinson and Poetic Therapy; The Art of Peace", in Poetry the Healer, edited by J. J. Leedy (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Co., 1973), pp. 24-49.

Hopkins is particularly concerned with the pain of his conscience as it dwells upon his sins. In his devotional writings, he suggests two possible means of relief: either God can diminish the sense of pain by diminishing his consciousness, or a diversion can temporarily interrupt introspection. But if memory and imagination combine favourably, there is a third alternative:

> ... the concentration of the mind on the scapes of its own sin is some relief, as we act over to ourselves again and again the very scene which cost us shame as a relief to the shame . . . the pain of sense lessens while it conditions the pain of loss . . . (S.D.W., p.138).

Through a repeated exposure to its past transgressions or failures, the sensitive mind learns to tolerate, and even gains some immunity against the upsetting self-knowledge that it must live with.

In "I wake and feel the fell of dark . . .", Hopkins honestly acknowledges that he is in a state of desolation, yet his sense of isolation is not irreparable as is the state of the damned in hell. Confident that spiritual day will eventually come, he knows it is best to "stand firm and constant in the resolution and determination in which we were the day before the desolation" (S.D.W., p.204), and to review the "three main causes on account of which we find ourselves in desolation . . ." (S.D.W., p.204). If God has removed spiritual consolation, He may be testing our worth, pointing out our spiritual negligence, or attempting to teach us:

> . . . that it is not in our power to acquire or retain great devotion, ardent love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is a gift and grace of God our Lord; and to teach us not to build our nest in another's house, by allowing our intellect to be lifted

> up to any kind of pride or vainglory, by attributing to ourselves devotion, or other kinds of spiritual consolation . . . (S.D.W., pp.204-05).

Through the use of the image of baking, Poem 67 indicates that Hopkins is desolate for the third reason. He has tried to rise to consolation unassisted, and has been humbled by the realization that he must trust to God's methods and sense of timing.

The state of weariness described in the octave of "Carrion Comfort" (Poem 64) echoes the mood of "To seem the stranger . . ." Hopkins here, however, is making a conscious effort to pull his "unravelling strands of man" together. Paul Mariani notices that the juxtaposition of "not" with "the roping imagery of 'untwist', 'slack', and 'strands'" contains a pun on "knot".[38] Hopkins is strengthening his resolve not to cry "I can no more", substituting "I can;/ Can something." Studying the ambiguity of this phrase, Ann Louise Hentz observes:

> The ellipsis of 'I can no more,' shows the weariness of the sufferer, and the Elizabethan force of the word recalls the dying Antony's cry:'I can no more.' The word also has the overtones of the middle English 'can' (to understand or know how to do something), for the sufferer no longer knows how to escape despair and has lost the intimate understanding of his God.[39]

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[38] Mariani, p.229.

[39] Ann Louise Hentz, "Language in Hopkins' 'Carrion Comfort'", V.P., IX (1971), 344 -- hereafter cited as Hentz.

Nevertheless, Hopkins has turned his back on Despair, and abandoned his previous tendency to prey upon his rapidly diminishing sense of self: to "live this tormented mind/ With this tormented mind tormenting yet . . ." (Poem 69). At least, he reasons, he can watch and pray for illumination: "I can;/ Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be . . ." (Poem 64).

But as he rejects Despair, he is confronted by a new tormentor: God only gradually makes His identity known to him. To describe the struggle of will against Will, Hopkins employs the image of wrestling that he introduced in Poems 18 and 28.2 . Immediately established is the self-deprecatory contrast between the two wrestlers, "hero" and "wretch". Hopkins is the weakling, ("me heaped there"), the coward ("me frantic to avoid thee and flee"), but God, the lion-limbed champion, more instructor than competitor, will not let Hopkins leave the ring ("wring-world") until He has 'made a man' of him. The image of wrestling is reinforced by another violent image, God's purging "turns of tempest" which scatter his chaff, leaving his "grain" "sheer and clear". Suggesting both that the experience of grace is frequently painful, and that God has major alterations to make before man can become a worthy receptacle for grace, Hopkins consistently uses violent images to describe such a transformation. As long as spiritual darkness reigns, Hopkins continues to question and struggle against his unrecognized tormentor. With spiritual "day" dawns the recognition that his considered foe is "(my God!) my God". This new insight satisfies his earlier questions. He now seems prepared to submit to

the role of God's obedient servant, whereas he only seemed to have "kissed the rod,/ Hand rather" when he first took orders. Greedily now his heart "[laps] strength, [steals] joy". These verbs, usually reserved for animals or thieves, lend to Hopkins' depiction of himself a furtive and bestial quality, thereby reinforcing the contrast between heaven's "hero" and the presumptuous "wretch" that dared to oppose Him.[40] It seems that Hopkins is attempting to emphasize his essential nothingness and lack of dignity when he gathers to himself borrowed strength and joy from the omnipotent Source. While he depicts himself this basely <u>after</u> the encounter with divine grace, "battling with God" (Poem 18) has nevertheless strengthened his moral fibre, the "strands of man" within him.

Poems 67 and 68, companion pieces, mark a decision on Hopkins' part not to be so self-critical when his individual will is thwarted. He has learned that self-reliance is not the route to comfort, which must be granted from without. He resolves to wait for God's decision to visit him instead of trying to be the initiator. In doing so, he follows a suggestion in his devotional writings:

> Let him who is in desolation strive to remain in patience, which is the virtue contrary to the troubles which harass him; and let him think that he will shortly be consoled, making diligent efforts against the desolation . . . (<u>S.D.W.</u>, p.204).

At the same time he strives to accept his own failures, his "ruins of wrecked past purpose" (Poem 68) as part of God's vast plan.

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[40] Hentz, p.346.

In "Patience, hard thing!", he prays for the rare virtue patience, with the understanding that he is asking for more buffeting in this "wring-world" (Poem 64), where obedience to God's will must be violently wrung from him:

> Patience who asks
> Wants war, wants wounds; weary his times, his tasks;
> To do without, take tosses, and obey . . . (Poem 68).

The language itself, condensed, inverted and broken down by frequent punctuation suggests the ordeal that a self-abnegating individual must learn to accept. While Hopkins identifies with those "of us" "with rebellious wills", his self-deprecating tone is milder now, because he has discovered a solution to his problems. He has prayed that "God will lift me above myself to a higher state of grace, in which I may have more union with him . . .", realizing at the same time that he was "asking also to be lifted on a higher cross . . ." (S.D.W., pp.253-54). Now he willingly consents to hear his heart grate on itself as God bends his independent will into alignment with His own will, to provide a crisp receptacle for patience: "Yet the rebellious wills/ Of us we do bid God bend to him even so." Read aloud, the string of monosyllables which require distinct pronunciation conveys the resistance of the independent will, which only yields to divine manipulation in short, jerky movements.

In "My own heart let me more have pity on . . ." (Poem 69), Hopkins continues in this self-tolerant vein. He is, indeed, still a "sad self" (unhappy, disappointing), but verbal self-flagellation is not the answer to his woes, nor is comfort to be found in introspection. Rather, he must:

call off thoughts awhile
Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size
At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile
's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather — as skies
Betweenpie mountains — lights a lovely mile . . . (Poem 69).

The mind which indulges in compulsive introspection will find neither divine light nor divine moisture, concrete symbols of God's grace, within it. Comfort indeed grows within the mind, but its seed must be "inscaped" in the external world. If only Hopkins would watch and wait, both God and joy would come to him unexpectedly.

As he witnesses the sunlight breaking between cloud-dappled mountains, a seed of comfort takes root in his mind. This is the consolation which Hopkins described as "any increase of hope, faith, and charity, and any interior joy which calls and attracts one to heavenly things and to the salvation of his own soul, rendering it quiet and at peace with its Creator and Lord . . ." (S.D.W., p.203).

Of course, the realization of his need for patience is only beginning. Hopkins is still striving for it in "Thou art indeed just, Lord . . ." (Poem 74, 1889). While "sinners . . . prosper" and nature renews herself annually around him, he, devoted to God's cause, is a frustrated failure:

. . . why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?
. . . . . .
. . . birds build -- but not I build, no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes . . . (Poem 74).

But instead of searching out the flaw within, which would lead him to conclude on a note of self-deprecation, Hopkins prays in this later poem for inspiration, concretely represented by the image of divine moisture, "Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain . . ." (Poem 74).

In his devotional writings, Hopkins explains that "consolation should be our normal state and . . . when God withdrawsit he wishes us to strive to recover it . . . (S.D.W., p.117). There is evidence that Hopkins was trying to shake off his introspective habit even while he was immersed in the deepest desolation. Central to the poetic evidence is the unfinished curtal sonnet, "Ashboughs" (Poem 149). Hopkins seems to have been working on this undated sonnet at the same time that he was composing the six desolate sonnets which remained unseen by anyone but himself until after his death, since it first appears on the sheet of manuscript which contains sonnets 66-69 and precedes them. Critical opinion links this sonnet with the earlier nature poetry which was composed in Wales, and maintains that "Ashboughs" has most likely been inspired by the memory of a Welsh landscape.[41] Indeed, Wales seems to have been the only environment in which Hopkins could envision God as "instressed" from a natural setting. Even the "inscape" of God's enormous smile which Hopkins observes gleaming between the mountains in Poem 69 harks back to a Welsh setting.[42]

In the curtal sonnet, Hopkins resumes his old theme: nature is a consolation for the heart of the individual whose eye can "instress" God's omnipotence behind it:

> Not of all my eyes see, wandering on the world,
> Is anything a milk to the mind so, so sighs deep
> Poetry to it, as a tree whose boughs break in the sky . . . (Poem 149).

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[41] Mariani, p.250. He cites W. H. Gardner and J. G. Ritz.

[42] Mariani, p.241.

Through all of her seasons and changes of her natural adornment, earth, personified as an old woman, plucks down thoughts of heaven with her "talons" (skyward-stretching tree branches) in order to impregnate our minds with seeds of comfort (Poem 149).

Hopkins recalls another of his old themes in "To what serves Mortal Beauty?" (Poem 62). If the assumption that the desolate sonnets were composed before September 1, 1885, is correct, then this sonnet, written on August 23, 1885, was composed along with or soon after them. Too often Hopkins failed to contrive a change of environment for himself, but here he is writing during his annual eight-day retreat. Thus his attention focuses naturally upon the Spiritual Exercises being studied, rather than upon his own shortcomings.[43]

Mortal beauty, quickly glimpsed, he tells us, is both pleasing and informative, suggesting to us as it does what God's greater beauty must be like. Yet a longer look is distractingly "dangerous" in the spiritual sense, due to man's tendency to become mindless of his heavenly goal once he is immersed in earthly pleasures, and overcome by less spiritual impulses (Poem 62). Not an exceptional poem, it nevertheless shows that Hopkins has "call[ed] off thoughts awhile/ Elsewhere" (Poem 69).

But this is not always the case. Hopkins was working on drafts of Caradoc's soliloquy for his tragedy in verse, "St. Winefred's Well" (Poem 152) at the same time that he was presumably pondering the contents of Poem 61. In this soliloquy Hopkins makes Caradoc his mouthpiece, and reveals as he does so his inability to dramatically express sentiments which are not his own. Both Paul Mariani and W. H. Gardner

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[43] Mariani, p.253.

observe that "Hopkins' own tensions and frustrations are the materials out of which the soliloquy is generated."[44] "Of the stimulus of unsuccess, the fascinating uncertainty of groping towards certainty, he speaks unmistakably through the mouth of that thwarted lover, Caradoc"[45]:

> To hunger and not have, yet hope on for, to storm
> and strive and
> Be at every assault fresh foiled, worse flung, deeper
> disappointed,
> The turmoil and the torment, it has, I swear, a sweetness,
> Keeps a kind of joy in it, a zest, an edge, an ecstasy,
> Next after sweet success . . . (Poem 152).

This particular soliloquy draws attention to Hopkins' "pathetic failure to launch into the world one child of his mind which would exist in its own right, apart from himself."[46] I cannot help but agree with Dr. Gardner's verdict: "It is one thing to deny oneself; it is another and often a better thing to forget oneself. Excessive introspection is a form of egoism. . . ."[47] In contrast, he judges "Harry Ploughman" (Poem 71) to be a poem of recovery because of its "healthy objectivity."[48]

As he composed the occasional poem "St. Alphonsus Rodriguez" (Poem 73), Hopkins it seems was indirectly writing about himself.

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[44] Mariani, p.243.

[45] Gardner, II, 328.

[46] Gardner, II, 347.

[47] Gardner, II, 347.

[48] Gardner, II, 358.

Contrast plays an essential role as it did in the earlier autobiographical poems, Poems 28, 36 and 54. In the first poem, the plodding priest appears unfavourably when compared to the heroic martyr-nun. In the other two, Hopkins resolves an inner struggle by selecting the behaviour of the spiritually sensitive observer as preferable to the behaviour of the boldly "selving" performer. Here, he is intent upon defending his own potential for divine grace by illustrating that there is another kind of honour than public honour. Since God the artist has both the power to "hew[ ]mountain[s]" and the patience to "vein[ ]violets", Hopkins reasons that it is also His decision whether to bestow divine grace mightily in a moment of violence, or mercifully over a period of months or years. Sensing that his own gift of grace is of the subtly accumulating sort, Hopkins identifies with the subject of the poem. An entry in his devotional writings made during the same year that he composed the poem indicates that he understands from experience how an outwardly uneventful life can harbour a "war within" (Poem 73):

> I do not waver in my allegiance . . . The question is how I advance the side I serve on. This may be inwardly or outwardly. Outwardly I often think I am employed to do what is of little or no use (S.D.W., pp.261-62).

He concludes that God could make him more useful by changing his assignment or improving his health. Yet he knows that his "inward service" is what is most important (S.D.W., pp.261-62). St. Alphonsus, like Hopkins himself, had been a hall porter.[49] While the 'honour" that is "flashed off [the] exploit[s]" of heroic individuals is admirable,

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[49] Thomas, p.67.

Hopkins suggests that a victory in the invisible "war within" is equally virtuous, and perhaps preferable, since it provides opportunity for neither publicity nor loss of humility.

Although he is still able to question his usefulness to God as he performs his self-effacing role, Hopkins feels confident that he will not remain unrewarded, and so defends its spiritual advantages. By the time he writes Poem 74, however, he seems to have suffered a spiritual relapse.

During the Dublin years, Hopkins' letters were filled with dramatic descriptions of his poor health. "The winter", he claimed in one letter, "half killed" him, left him "languishing", and had "especially . . . attacked [his] eyes" (Letters II, 150). He sorely lacked"a working health, a working strength" that would make "any employment . . . tolerable or pleasant" (Letters I, 251). I suspect that he was once again allowing his feelings of prostration to colour both his vision of himself and his impression of the world around him.

In Poem 74, he cannot help but feel that he is being unfairly treated by God when he compares himself to the thriving sinners around him. Yet he is the one who has devoted his life to God's cause, and who would willingly do much more in His service if He would only refresh his strength and spirits. The sentiment of the poem is echoed in a private note, where Hopkins laments that he has wasted five years in Ireland:

> I am ashamed of the little I have done, of my waste of time, although my helplessness and weakness is such that I could scarcely do otherwise . . . All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch . . . (S.D.W., p.262, 1888).

Nor is this the only place where he "inscapes" himself as a "eunuch" or "Time's eunuch" (which suggests that the stigma will be removed in eternity) who fails to "breed one work that wakes" (Poem 74):

> the fine pleasure is not to do a thing but
> to feel that you could and the mortification
> that goes to the heart is to feel it is the
> power that fails you . . . if I could produce
> work I should not mind its being buried,
> silenced, and going no further; but it kills
> me to be time's eunuch and never to beget (Letters I, 221-22).

> Unhappily I cannot produce anything at all, not
> only the luxuries like poetry, but the duties
> almost of my position, its natural outcome --
> like scientific works. . . . Nothing comes: I
> am like a eunuch -- but it is for the kingdom
> of God's sake (Letters I, 270).

Clearly he believes that it is God's will that he feels so hopelessly unproductive: God may well be testing his faith. Hopkins, having learned the lesson of his nothingness and his complete dependence on God for strength and consolation, has resolved to endure his lot patiently. Yet he cannot help praying for at least temporary relief in the form of occasional periods of happiness during his lifetime: "It is as if one were dazzled by a spark or star in the dark, seeing it but not seeing by it: we want a light shed on our way and a happiness spread over our life . . ." (S.D.W., p.262). This is the sentiment behind his eloquent final line: "Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain" (Poem 74).

By the time he wrote "The shepherd's brow . . ." (Poem 75), Hopkins had gained a new understanding of his limited existence. By approaching life with a grim sense of humour, he found it no longer necessary to question or contest God's will. He seems to have decided

that just as this life is insignificant, mortal man's actions are inconsequential. Why, then, should he take himself so seriously? Even his letters reflected a change: he had succeeded in placing mind over matter. "I am ill today," he informed Robert Bridges, "but no matter for that as my spirits are good" (Letters I, 303). Suffering from typhoid fever, he was nevertheless able to assure his mother lightheartedly that "food and medicine keep coming in like cricket balls" (Letters III, 197-98).

In Poem 75, Hopkins indicates that he can now discuss his human failings with an air of ironic detachment. He has finally overcome the mental mountains that seemed to overwhelm his weak self-image in "No worst, there is none", to gain a perspective on his own life that most closely resembles the divine one. This is not to say that he presents a total picture here. While he takes a full cosmic perspective in the Heraclitean sonnet, he omits to discuss man's possibilities for redemption in Poem 75. Rather, he focuses upon this ridiculous and impermanent "Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood" which, spiritually refined in the ordeals of this life, has the potential to become "immortal diamond" in the next life (Poem 72).

In Poem 75, his self-criticism moves from general ("man") to specific ("he", "I"), a method that he used in earlier poems. The emphasis is placed on man's mortal nature: a "scaffold of score brittle bones" is both an undignified and impermanent structure. Contrasting man's fleshbound activities with the tragic and heroic actions of Moses and the fallen angels, Hopkins portrays man as a

hopelessly limited creature. He is burdened by a bestial nature that he is ashamed of, and is so baseborn that he is incapable of a tragic fall. Yet he deceives himself into thinking that he is as he "blazon[s] . . . bold [his] name".

The light man uses to "blazon[ ]. . . bold [his] name" (or celebrate his selfhood) is a weak and artificial one, as is the independent self. This is especially noticeable when man is juxtaposed to Moses. The fact that he reflects great quantities of divine light indicates that he is dominated by a will which is dependent on God. Even the fallen angels, who fell farther than Adam and Eve did, have a brighter remnant of light, since they were once closer to God.

Turning from the shortcomings he shares with mankind to his own weaknesses, Hopkins masters his problems as the reader looks on. Once his problems appeared to him as enormous, and were concretely imaged as magnified projections on the screen of his mind. Having briefly recreated his obsession with his poor health ("I that die these deaths") and his tendency to exhaust himself with introspection ("I . . . that feed this flame"), [50] he abruptly minimizes them. Following the ellipsis, it is as if he is looking through the wrong end of a telescope at his life. His emotional storms are ludicrously reflected in the distorting surface of a spoon. Hopkins has repeatedly

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[50] Hopkins emphasized that hell-on-earth could be attained through a sensitive conscience:". . . we are our own tormentors, for every sin we then shall have remorse and with remorse torment and torment fire" (S.D.W., p. 241).

called attention to his insignificance in earlier poems, but never before with a grim sense of humour. I think Paul Mariani is accurate in his observation that Hopkins has finally learned to laugh at himself.[51] Both amused and sobered by the comic grotesqueness of his own reflection in a polished spoon, Hopkins is moved to consider how trivial God's reflection, man, must at times appear to Him.

In his last major poem,"That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection." (Poem 72), Hopkins says all that he fails to say in Poem 75. Here he presents a total picture of human destiny as he sees it. The broad perspective taken in Poem 72 suggests that Hopkins has abandoned self-denial, to practice a little charity towards himself. As we observed in Poem 75, his tolerance of his shortcomings here, too, seems to be reinforced by his newly discovered ability to laugh at himself. Notice how little emphasis he gives his weak eyes and his demanding marking responsibilities in the letter in which he reports the composition of Poem 72:

> there was one windy bright day between floods last week: fearing for my eyes, with my other rain of papers, I put work aside and went out for the day and conceived a sonnet. Otherwise my muse has long put down her carriage and now for years 'takes in washing'. The laundry is driving a great trade now (Letters II, 157).

In patient rather than bitter tones he admits that he has resigned his muse to the performance of task-work.

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[51] Mariani, p.304.

Beginning with a discussion of the transience of nature in Poem 72, Hopkins proceeds to observe man's affinity with nature because of his mortal body. Man, like nature, is composed of the four elements, and being subject to decay and death, he is bound to surrender them. Unhappily, nature's "dearest", "her clearest-selved spark" has to endure an additional loss: "Man, how fast his firedint, his mark on mind is gone" (Poem 72). Yet his whole life has been spent in pursuit of achievements that bolster his own ego while they distinguish him among men. How unfortunate, then, that "death blots" his "manshape"

> . . . black out; nor mark
> Is any of him at all so stark
> But vastness blurs and time beats level . . . (Poem 72).

At this point the volta of the extended sonnet occurs, and the tone changes from one of despair to an expression of affirmation: "Across my foundering deck[52] shone/ A beacon, an eternal beam" (Poem 72). Consoled by the divine signal that the important part of him will indeed live on, Hopkins now encourages the "world's wildfire", which Heraclitus maintained was constantly extinguishing extant life only to rekindle it elsewhere,[53] to consume his "mortal trash" (Poem 72). For when his physical nature fails him, his spiritual nature will be "uncumbered" (Poem 39). Furthermore, since Christ valued man's soul enough to occupy a mortal shape in order to redeem it, this fire-purified remnant must be even more precious and

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[52] The image recalls Poem 28 and Hopkins' fascination with shipwrecks and shipwreck images.

[53] Sulloway, p.179.

Christ-like than can be realized from a perusal of mortal man's largely ignoble actions, and his tendency to become distracted from spiritual pursuits.

Hopkins had previously maintained that a consolation which comes from God is almost always considerably greater than might reasonably be expected (S.D.W., p.207). Thus he is deeply calmed rather than made incredulous by the realization that as common and ridiculous ("Jack, joke"), and as makeshift and transient ("patch, matchwood"), as he appears in the flesh, his vital inner self will nevertheless be compressed and polished to become a permanent reflection ("immortal diamond")[54] of his God. Self-deprecation is triumphantly overcome in this poem which provides the dramatic climax to Hopkins' whole poetic enterprise.

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[54] In his illuminating essay "Hopkins, Heraclitus, Cosmic Instress and of the Comfort of the Resurrection", V.P., X (1972), 235-242, M. L. Johnson points out the aptness of this final image, which succeeds in synthesizing the Heraclitean world-picture with the Christian one: ". . . the Christian soul as 'immortal diamond' is, by a pun, the Heraclitean soul or 'daimon'" (p.235). "This daimon [or dry soul] survives the death of the body [by water] and remains as a disembodied spirit until . . . it reunites with the cosmic fire [substitute Christian God, represented by light imagery]" (p.240).

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