STRESS, SLACK, AND HOPKINS' TERRIBLE SONNETS

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by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

September 1988

MASTER OF ARTS (1988) McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(English) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Stress, Slack, and Hopkins' Terrible Sonnets

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SUPERVISOR: Doctor Mary O'Connor

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 176

Abstract

The main contention of this thesis is that considerable insight into Gerard Manley Hopkins' Terrible Sonnets may be gained through a consideration of Hopkins' term, *slack*. Much critical attention has been given to Hopkins' idiosyncratic vocabulary of *stress, instress, scape,* and *inscape,* but little has been given to *slack*. I argue that the concept of *slack,* an antonym to the well-known Hopkinsian term, *stress,* is fundamental to the man's thought, his way of seeing, and his poetry.

I begin by examining the incarnational vision which Hopkins began to develop at Oxford, and which depended upon his capacity to perceive a just proportion in the mixture between Being and Not-being, or between *stress* and *slack*. However, the dynamic apprehension of unity in diversity depends on the perception of the observer. Hopkins' metaphysic broke down when he was spiritually and psychically unable to perceive the Incarnate Word embodied in created forms. It is in this condition of *slack,* in which the poet could not uphold the *inscapes* of the created world, and in which he felt himself to be devoid of the sensations of both God's *stress* and of his own answering *instress,* that the Terrible Sonnets were written.

The experience of *slack* in the Terrible Sonnets is distinct from the experience of *stress*, which is the generative impulse at the heart of most of Hopkins' poetry, and especially his Nature Sonnets. The distinguishing features of the Terrible Sonnets are revealed by an examination of the imagery, metrical patterning, and structure of these six poems. In each area, the experience of *slack* is manifest in the thought and expression of the poetry. I conclude by noting that *slack* is a temporary condition, and that the possibility for returning to *stress*, and for re-establishing a dynamic relationship with God, was always present for Hopkins.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Lachlan MacRae, formerly a Professor at Brock University, and to Rob Watt, tutor in the Oxford University Graduate Summer School (1977), under whose tutelage this thesis had its origins; to Dr. Mary O'Connor, my supervisor, under whose care and attention this thesis has been brought to conclusion; and especially to my husband, John, under whose "fine delight" much thought, over the last eleven years, has been fathered.

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Introduction

"Slack they may be -- these last strands of man" in the Terrible Sonnets

Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote only forty-nine completed mature poems; most of these are sonnets.[1] The six poems known as the Terrible Sonnets,[2] written in 1885 in Dublin, are very different from the other poems in the canon, both in mood and in their distinctive "design, pattern, or inscape" (*L I* 66). Hopkins defined poetry as "speech only employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape's sake" (*J* 289), but in order to see how the "inscape of speech" in the Terrible Sonnets differs from the "inscape of speech" in his other poems, it is necessary to understand Hopkins' term, *inscape*. Moreover, an understanding of "inscape" is dependent upon an understanding of two other important terms in Hopkins' vocabulary: *stress* and *instress*. In opposition to these last two terms there is, further, a fourth term used infrequently by Hopkins, but which I believe to be fundamental to his conception of how stress and instress support and uphold inscape in the world. This term is *slack*. Stated baldly, I believe that the "inscape of speech" in the Terrible Sonnets of 1885 expresses the

experience and condition of "slack," while the "inscape of speech" of most of his other poetry, and especially the Nature Sonnets of 1877, expresses the experience and condition of "stress."

Inscape, stress, and instress are complex terms in Hopkins' vocabulary. Linguistically, they may be used as either nouns or verbs. Functionally, they are applied to a wide range of images and activities, and are used to describe art (painting, music, architecture, poetry), nature (especially water, trees, skies, and clouds), and spirituality (the relationship of God to the world and of man to God). Hopkins' study of Plato at Oxford in the 1860s provided him with the start for the development of his own theories of perception and form (Zaniello, "Platonism" 10),[3] but these ideas were not refined until his conversion to the Catholic faith at the end of his Oxford period. It was in 1868, when he had left Oxford to teach at Newman's Oratory School, that Hopkins first used the idiosyncratic vocabulary of scape, inscape, stress, and instress, that came to express his unique epistemology. *Inscape* is a coinage built on the root *scape*, in the same way that *instress* is built on the root *stress*. The prefix *in-* of both these coinages emphasizes their particular and individual nature. When Hopkins speaks of the "scapes" of things, he usually refers to their *forms* (Zaniello, "Platonism" 9). *"In- scape,"* however, refers to more than

material form; it is "the essential bridge between matter and the immaterial" (Robinson 35), the *a priori* idea that exists behind and in all created forms, giving them meaning, purpose, and order. Platonic Realism (the notion that Ideas and phenomena both have ontolgical reality) and Catholic faith (especially the belief in the presence of God in the material substances of bread and wine) were essential contributors to Hopkins' epistemology. This link between the real and the ideal is the basis of Hopkins' immanental vision, that activity of sight which allowed him to see the Incarnate Christ, the Word made flesh, as the Real Presence that *in-forms* created forms with divine meaning.

But in order for inscape to hold a thing in this way (*J* 127), two dynamic activities must infuse the object of perception. The first of these is *stress*; "God's activity giving existence to the idea" (Heuser 38) through his ongoing, reiterated creation operating outside historical time (*S* 137). It is God's stress, in fact, that eternally utters the Word in creation, that "rides time like riding a river" (*P* No. 28 1:6), thereby making possible the perception of both the inscape of the phenomenal object, and of the instress of the created form itself which upholds its unity, and which allows it to conform to the prior Idea behind it. But instress is not only the inherent force or tension in nature by which the inscape remains an

entity; instress is also the inherent force in the artist's personality by which the essential unity and force of an object of perception is upheld (Zaniello, "Epistemology" 18). This perception is dependent upon the observer's ability to respond to God's stress by an answering "*in-stress*" The stress of God which infuses created form with ideal form, thereby revealing the divine purpose and meaning of inscape in the world, must be identified and witnessed by the answering instress of the perceiver in order for the inscape to be so upheld. By virtue of the activity of instress, the perceiver is no longer a passive spectator of the beauty of nature, but a dynamic observer/participant who upholds the inscape of created forms, sees and celebrates the real existence of the Word in the world. Together, the terms *inscape, stress,* and *instress,* describe a triunal mode of perception through which purpose and meaning are revealed in the world.

This triunal mode of perception, then, is the basis for the incarnational or immanental vision which is expressed as "the inscape of speech" in Hopkins' Nature Sonnets. In these poems, images, sound, and structure all conform to a single unique pattern designed to reveal the Word in the world. These sonnets celebrate the operation of divine stress in creation, and are joyful expressions of the poet's ability to see Christ in the inscapes of created forms through the activity of instress. But this

meeting of stress and instress in the inscape of created forms which makes it possible for the poet to "see things for a moment as God sees them," is *only* possible "if the original motion of his mind is unimpeded" (Devlin 197). When that *original* motion -- that is, instress of the directed will toward the stress that gives all life meaning and purpose -- is *impeded*, the condition of *slack* is experienced. In the Terrible Sonnets of 1885, the joyous identification of the poet with nature through the mediation of Christ as Word is gone. The Terrible Sonnets do not celebrate the existence of inscape in the world; indeed, natural and visual imagery in them is greatly curtailed. Nor does their speaker express the outward-leaping, dynamic union with Christ through the reciprocal actions of stress and instress. The sound and structure of these sonnets express the torment of self-enclosure in an inner world, rather than the movement through the real world to its divine ideal: Christ. The world of the Nature Sonnets is a text which speaks God's name in every form, always directing the sight and the will beyond the self to the ultimate meaning and purpose. The poet's "word" in these poems inscapes the world as Word. On the other hand, the world of the Terrible Sonnets is the world of the isolated, in-turned self unsustained by God's stress and apparently bereft of the activity of instress by which movement out of the self towards God is

made possible. The poet's "word" in these poems inscapes him *self*.

The "inscape of speech" in the Terrible Sonnets thus expresses the pattern and design of the "slack . . . strands of man" (*P* No. 64) of the speaker's very self. The little compass of his own body has become, in 1885, the only world which he experiences and knows and gives utterance to in these poems. Since the early Greek philosophers, the faculty of sight had been "considered the most godlike of the five senses" in Western culture (Hagstrum 13), and Hopkins' incarnational vision is part of this tradition. In the Terrible Sonnets, however, this valuation is subverted by the privileging of the baser senses in metaphoric expression. The activity of sight which allowed for the identity of subject and object by the dynamic apprehension of Christ in self and in world is replaced, in these six poems, by the apprehension of the world within through the sensations of sound, taste, and touch. In this reduced apprehension of the world, subject and object are disintegrated into self and body, bereft of a unifying force to re-integrate them with meaning and purpose. The external world which imaged forth Christ in Hopkins' earlier immanental vision is collapsed and drawn into the interior world of self, where it is not God's stress, but God's felt absence, which the soul experiences. The force becomes centrifugal, a flying apart at the centre of the self, rather than

centripetal, a unifying leap into the centre of divine meaning in the heart of Christ. This experience of self in isolation, unable to move out of itself in joyous affirmation of, and union with, God is the state of slack which conditioned the writing of the Terrible Sonnets.

Other critics of Gerard Manley Hopkins' six Terrible Sonnets have used a variety of terms to describe the psychological and spiritual state they express. Perhaps the most familiar of these identifications is the theological term "desolation" which is co-opted out of the Ignatian and Catholic mystic tradition by Gardner (I:17), Mariani (*Commentary* 212), Loomis (59), Peters (49), and the like.[4] However, other readers of Hopkins have noted that he is not a mystic, and that the spiritual desolation described by St. John of the Cross in his Dark Night of the Soul cannot be applied with accuracy to him (Pick 131-2). Moreover, the effect of reading the Terrible Sonnets as a testament of Hopkins' personal Dark Night of the Soul is often to depart from the text of the poems themselves, and to search for their meaning "by following the map of St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*" (Mariani, *Commentary* 241), even going to such extremes as to re-order the sonnets into a pattern conforming to the descent into desolation followed by a re-ascent into consolation (Mariani, *Commentary* 212). Since the order in which these poems were written cannot be known,

we must take them in the order in which they were transcribed by the poet.[5] It seems to me that the Terrible Sonnets group must be studied as a text in which meaning is expressed in the pattern of imagery, sound and structure which gives shape to the experience the poems articulate.[6] "Desolation" is a theological term; it can describe the condition of the man's soul, but not of his poetry. For this reason, I prefer the term *slack,* for like its antonym, *stress,* it can describe both spiritual experience and poetic utterance.

Some critics who have found the theological description, "desolation," unsatisfactory, have turned to psychology and to philosophy in their search for a term to describe the state in which these sonnets of isolation and alienation were written. Such terms as "repress[ion]" (Orsini 113), "encagement,"[7] "solipsism,"[8] "paralysis of the will" (Rose 209), and "entropy" (Sprinker, *Counterpoint* 91) have been used. Other critics, seeing that Hopkins' poetry expresses the "naked thew and sinew" (*L I* 267-8) of the man's thought, have attempted to define the Terrible Sonnets by the absence of what is present in the Nature Sonnets of 1877, and in many of Hopkins' early journal entries, letters and sermons. In this view, the "immanental" or "sacramental" vision of the earlier poems celebrating Incarnation in creation is inverted, so that the Terrible Sonnets are seen to

express a vision of "dis-Incarnation" (Harris 55). In this reversed vision, a condition J. Hillis Miller names the "internal hemorrhage of the soul" or "diabolical gravity" (340-1) replaces the earlier relationship of stress between subject and object, and between the created world and God, in Hopkins' experience.

This last method of distinguishing the Terrible Sonnets, by isolating differences in them from the rest of the canon and further, by using the thoughts expressed in the man's prose writings as a sounding-board by which to measure their resonances, has been found to provide useful insights into this distinct group of poems. However, I believe that the application of Hopkins' term *slack* greatly enhances the benefits of this method. *Slack* can not only incorporate in its meaning many of the above-named spiritual, psychological, philosophical, and epistemological conditions, but can describe what happens in the poetry as well. *Slack* has authenticity, not only because the word is used by Hopkins himself, but also because the concept is fundamental to his thought, to his way of seeing, and to his poetry.

My notion of *slack* as integral to Hopkins' way of experiencing the world was derived primarily from my readings in Hopkins' poetry and prose writings, and was helped by Alan Heuser's work in *The Shaping Vision of*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, but I was also aware of the similar notion expressed in George Herbert's "Love (III)." For Hopkins, as for Herbert, Christ was both the source and the object of love, and spiritual union with him was the poet's highest goal (*L I* 66).[9] "Slack" for Hopkins, as well as for Herbert, expressed his own spiritual inadequacy in the achievement of that union:

> Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
> Guiltie of dust and sinne.
> But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
> From my first entrance in,
> Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
> If I lack'd any thing.
> (*Works of George Herbert* 188)

Only Alan Heuser, in *The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins,* has identified the existence of *slack* as a term fundamental to Hopkins' epistemology, although other critics have used the word as a descriptive term of both Hopkins himself and of the objects of his perception.[10] Heuser sees "slack" as standing in opposition to the notions of "stress" and "instress" which shaped the immanental vision Hopkins identified as inscape: "Thus, in explaining psychic experiences, Hopkins drew upon his ideas of stress and instress, spiritualized them, and added the reverse term 'slack,' so that he had a ready theory for acts in the *psyche*: sudden force, tension, on the fibres of being gave instress; suspension, relaxation, gave

slack or collapse" (30). Heuser's understanding of these terms, however, is not exclusively psychological; he sees spirituality and psychology as co-inherent determiners of the way Hopkins experienced his world. Heuser, therefore, further identifies stress with the creative strain of God's grace; he identifies instress with man's elective will: "man's reception, acknowledging and co-operating with the idea behind the existent"; and he identifies inscape with Incarnation: "the fixed type between natural form and essential idea" that gives witness to the Logos in creation (38). "Slack," then, for Heuser, is the absence of God's sustaining grace (30). I would amplify this notion of slack by identifying the congruent absence of the will's ability to move toward God through the activity of immanental vision. My working definition of *slack* is as follows: *the absence of the dynamic activities of both stress and instress in Hopkins' experience, and the presence of a mode of perception which apprehends multiplicity and diversity without an ordering principle which gives shape to the perception of oneness and meaning in creation.*

In his article, "The Present State of Hopkins' Scholarship," Edward Cohen praises Heuser's "seminal essay, *The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1958)," but notes that "unfortunately, too many scholars have responded only casually to Professor Heuser's . . . . wider critical

perspective" and have tended to limit their own commentaries on Hopkins "to applications of Christology or Scotism alone." Cohen notes that Heuser's work is an important beginning to understanding Hopkins' idiosyncratic vision through "a consideration of the technical terminology as *ideas* " (17). This thesis develops out of that beginning. I have attempted to understand Hopkins' ideas of inscape, instress, stress, and slack, and to see how these ideas "'rose in the forms of expression which we read in the poem in his mind, thought and expression indistinguishable'" (*J* 110).

Heuser's identification of "slack" in the thinking of Gerard Manley Hopkins provides a good beginning for inquiry into the poet's thought and poetry, but his study lacks an adequate foundation in Hopkins' theory of seeing and knowing which is implicit in the poet's use of the related terms inscape, stress and instress. Leonard Cochran, drawing on all known uses of stress and instress, has come closer to integrating Hopkins' use of these terms as they pertain to the way one sees and knows the world. Cochran identifies "inscape, instress, scape and stress" as the core of Hopkins' critical vocabulary, and notes that the poet used these words, from 1868 until 1887, two years before his death, a total of 212 times ("Instress" 143). Cochran emphasizes that instress and inscape are complementary terms (as their construction implies) and that "inscape may well be a kind

of psychological 'landscape' dependent upon the prior act/action of instress" ("Instress" 145). Cochran further suggests that inscape itself has some kind of activity (which the scope of his paper does not allow him to examine),[11] but that the activity intrinsic to inscape, as well as its ultimate meaning, is dependent on the initial dynamic activity of instress ("Instress" 145). Cochran's notion of a "psychological landscape" implies an interactive, emotional participation between subject and object. However, the focus of Cochran's paper is on the etymologies of stress and instress as they relate to Hopkins' poetic vision, and his inquiry does not extend into the implications of the interactions among all three terms as a triunal way of apprehending the created world for Hopkins. An understanding of how these terms express Hopkins' epistemology, however, is essential to understanding his poetic vision. This will be dealt with more fully in Chapter One.

Cochran's final definition of "instress" in his paper is "*the intrinsic tension upholding the unity of being of a particular being, and distinguishing and individualizing that being*" ("Instress" 167). "Stress" he identifies, following its first occurrence in the Parmenides entry in Hopkins' notebook, and documenting further uses of the term in the poetry and prose, as "the tendency of being to strain toward existence" ("Instress" 165). Cochran

further identifies (as does Heuser), stress with grace ("Instress" 161), and instress with choice, or directed will ("Instress" 160). What is of particular relevance to my study of "slack," however, is Cochran's recognition that "what has parts tends to 'fall apart,'" and that the struggle to maintain existence, to hold together, is effected through stress as a struggle toward being *in genere,* and instress as a struggle toward being *in specie* ("Instress" 160). He does not, however, sufficiently consider how the psychology of the perceiver is fundamental to upholding (maintaining) this "being-in-struggle" ("Instress" 159), for without the ability of the observer to *instress* the object of perception, the essential unity and tension upholding a created form cannot be apprehended.

In his list of sixteen words which he identifies as integral to Hopkins' poetic vision, Cochran does not note the significance of Hopkins' term *slack,* but he does identify the condition itself in his suggestion that Hopkins' use of the word "*distressed*" to describe the angelic fall is a very precise word in Hopkins' technical vocabulary, based on the stem "stress."[12] Cochran renders the term as "*de-stressed*" and defines it as "one's *stress* shorn of its principal function" ("Instress" 164) -- that is, incapable of an answering movement by the will towards God's incoming grace.[13] Here is the list of words (in addition to scape, inscape, stress, and instress) which

Cochran deems critical to Hopkins' vocabulary, along with the frequency of their appearance:

> *pitch,* forty-eight (however, thirty-seven occur in one essay on freedom of the will and grace, and have no significant contribution to make to Hopkins' critical vocabulary); *forepitch*, two; *install,* seven; *stem*, three; *forestalling,* twelve; *stalling,* three; *outstress,* one; *keepings,* two; *outscape,* one; *offscape,* one; *sakes,* one; *distressed,* one ("Instress" 176).

My contention is that *slack* should be added to this list of words that forms the critical vocabulary of Hopkins' poetic vision, partly because it occurs far more frequently than most of the words in Cochran's list. While I have not enumerated the dozens of occurrences of the word *slack* (as opposed to *stress*) in Hopkins' explication of his accentual prosodic theories in his notebooks, "Author's Preface," and letters, the following list of other appearances of *slack* in his poetry and prose should validate my contention:

> *slack,* five; *slacks,* two; *slacking,* one; *slackening,* one.

All instances of Hopkins' use of *slack* and its forms will be considered in the next chapter, with the exception of Hopkins' use of the word in "Carrion Comfort" (which will be dealt with in Chapter Two), and of its use in the early fragment, "Io" (1864). The following descriptive use appears in this poem: "Her milk white throat and folded dew-lap slack / Are still" (*P* No.

99). The appearance of "slack" as a substantive in this poem shows Hopkins' use of the meaning "that part of a sail which is not fully strained, or which hangs loose,"[14] in a figurative sense, and argues for an early familiarity with the word and its connotations.

Cochran's exhaustive study of the uses of stress and instress in particular is helpful because he asks the important question: "how does he [Hopkins] use the the words in question [inscape, instress, stress, and scape] *before* and *after* his discovery of Scotus?" ("Instress" 144). Cochran concludes that "Hopkins' outlook was essentially Scotist *before* he read the great English thinker" ("Instress 164);[15] that is, from his Oxford days onwards, the poet was establishing a theory of form and a way of seeing which could bridge the real and the ideal. Cochran's study of Hopkins' relation of "stress to being as universal and instress to being as supportive of it" in the Parmenides essay (1868) determines that "from this point on, until the final use of either word, these basic meanings obtain, clarified and nuanced to some degree, but never substantially changed" ("Instress" 165). Cochran, like Heuser, looks at Hopkins' technical terminology as *ideas* fundamental to the poet's thought, and not necesarily as adjuncts to a particular Scotist or Ignatian vision. A commentary on Hopkins' poetry which is conducted by an application of Scotist thought, like those

commentaries which would delimit the reading of the poetry by "following the map of St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*," does not give sufficient credence to the man's own thought and belief as expressed in both his poetry and his prose writings. Hopkins was a Christian, and, moreover, a Catholic Christian, but he was also a thinker about *form* (Robinson 24). It is these two essential aspects of the man -- his Catholicism and his Platonic Realism -- which provide both the foundation for and the impetus of his poetic vision.

Notes

[1] M. A. Yadugiri groups the forty-nine completed mature poems into two classifications: thirty-five sonnets and fourteen poems written in other forms (6).

[2] The six posthumous sonnets (*P* Nos. 64 - 69) are generally accepted as the group known as the Terrible Sonnets. However, some critics would add other poems to this group (such as *P* Nos. 74 or 61), or delete some poems from the group (such as *P* Nos. 64 and 68). See Mackenzie, *A Reader's Guide* 169.

[3] Thomas A. Zaniello has worked extensively with the unpublished "Oxford Essays" located in Campion Hall, Oxford. Zaniello states that these unpublished essays reflect Hopkins' study of philosophy at Oxford, especially his reading in the epistemological writings of both the ancients and the moderns ("Epistemology" 18). Zaniello contends that these unpublished essays reveal both Hopkins' interest in Plato's epistemology, and his influence by it ("Platonism" 5). Zaniello argues that Hopkins was affronted by contemporary epistemology which reduced all knowledge to sensation alone, and that he saw Platonism as potential "tonic for his own age" ("Platonism" 10), for Plato-- together with a belief in God's role in nature-- "helped to ensure that randomness would not prevail" ("Platonism" 15).

[4] See, for example, Robert Boyle, S.J. 152-161; Sister M. Eucharista Ward 321-331; Patricia A. Wolfe 85-103; Martin C. Carroll, S.J. (in *Immortal Diamond*) 3-50; and Christopher Devlin, S.J., *S* 117-8.

[5] Daniel Harris' work with the manuscripts of the Terrible Sonnets group has demonstrated that the order of the poet's transcription of the poems in folio 35 carries no presumption concerning the order of composition (7). He suggests that the order of Hopkins' transcription of the poems was "tailored to anticipate the responses of the only actual audience Hopkins could expect for these poems: Bridges" (10), and that "the order of

the series was perhaps Hopkins' mask against Bridges' disapproval [of his Catholic and Jesuitical life] and against his own recognition of an interior agony which, if it sometimes abated, also seemed endless" (11).

[6] See Daniel Harris and J. Hillis Miller who also approach the Terrible Sonnets "without relying on a supposed or imagined sequence" (Harris 15).

[7] In *Send my Roots Rain*, Donald Walhout contends that the whole of Hopkins' canon expresses the ENG experience -- encagement, naturation, and grace. See especially Chapter II, "Encagement" (24-48), in which Walhout identifies encagement as "the root source of the religious experience Hopkins discloses in his poetry," and defines it as "an encircling bondage in life with all of its emotional torment" which he contends is an *a priori* condition to the effect of spiritual dryness (24). Since Walhout is a philosopher, not a literary critic, he does not consider Hopkins' predilection for the confinements of the sonnet form as evidence for his thesis. This Daniel J. Orsini begins to explore in "Hopkins' Monastic Sonnets: A Revaluation." See also Daniel Harris' work on "the claustrophobic self-enclosure of the terrible sonnets" (33), as well as my treatment of the evidence of *slack* in the structure of these sonnets in Chapter Three of this thesis.

[8] Daniel Harris' work on Hopkins identifies an "unwilled submission to solipsism and its possible consequences" (3) in the imagery and structure of the Terrible Sonnets. Much of Harris' study confirms my inquiry into the evidence of "slack" in these sonnets; our points of difference will also become apparent as this thesis progresses.

[9] For a comprehensive consideration of the relationship between Hopkins and Herbert, see John George Herbert's unpublished thesis, "The Influence of George Herbert on Gerard Manley Hopkins" (McMaster 1983).

[10] See especially J. Hillis Miller 288, 344; Daniel Harris 59 and David Downes, *Great Sacrifice* 13, and *Ignatian Spirit* 31-2.

[11] Other critics have also noted the activity inherent in the concept of inscape. See especially Peters 20; Cotter 98-100; Ong 17; and Downes, *Sanctifying Imagination* 28.

[12] See *S* 201-202: "It would seem that their fall was at once the

attack of Michael and their own act: Michael and his angels instressed and distressed them with the thought of their unlikeness to the Most High. . . ."

[13] David A. Downes also notes the opposition between stress and Hopkins' use of "distress" in this sermon, and defines *dis-stress* as "the loss of perfection of being proper to a thing" (*Ignatian Spirit* 28).

[14] All word definitions in this thesis are taken from the OED.

[15] W.A.M. Peters (24) and Christopher Devlin ("The Image and the Word") also contend that Hopkins' incarnationist vision was well-established before he found a validating philosophy in the work of the Franciscan theologian, Duns Scotus.

Chapter One

"The Proportion of the Mixture": Stress and Slack in the Thinking of Gerard Manley Hopkins

"But why do we desire unity? . . . the ideal, the one, is our only means of recognising successfully our being to ourselves . . ." (*J* 83).

Gerard Manley Hopkins' incarnational vision was predicated on sight. For him, "to see" and "to know" were virtually synonymous because when he *saw* the beauty of a bluebell, he *knew* "the beauty of our Lord by it" (*J* 199). This *Journal* entry testifying to the recognition and knowledge of Christ in the inscapes of the created world predates Hopkins' discovery of a validating philosophy in the writings of the Catholic theologian, Duns Scotus, by two years (*J* 221). However, the perception of the Incarnate Word in individuated creation was the logical outcome of a theory of form which Hopkins had been developing since his conversion to Catholicism in 1866. This theory of form is essentially Platonic; its barest supposition would assert that the real object speaks no truth unless the divine Ideal behind it is perceived. Hopkins arrives at his particular brand of Platonism

-- in which Christ is the Form which causes the essence of things and in which all earthly forms participate -- by way of his Catholicism, and the doctrine of the Real Presence influenced both Hopkins' conversion, and his subsequent philosophy of form. For a Catholic, the bread and wine of the Eucharist are not merely symbols representing something that is in fact absent (Miller 6). No; the bread and wine *are* the real body and blood of Christ so that in each celebration of the mass -- a daily experience for Hopkins for over twenty years -- the material substance of two physical forms was *animated* (infused with life) and *consummated* (fulfilled, or given meaning and purpose) by the actual presence of Christ. Hopkins' theory of form extended this sacramental participation of the material in the immaterial (or the form in the Form), into the created forms of nature itself, so that when he caught the inscape of a budded lime, it was "the *form* speaking" (*J* 163).

Hopkins is justifiably known as a religious Nature Poet, but he did not begin to link his faith in God to his response to the beauty of nature until after he joined the Society of Jesus (Robinson 22). The poetry he wrote prior to his conversion (1866) and to his decision to be a priest (1868) expresses a fascination with and a recoil from the sensuous appreciation of natural beauty. No doubt it was this mistrust of his too-passionate

response to nature that impelled him to write, on November 6, 1865: "On this day by God's grace I resolved to give up all beauty until I had His leave for it" (*J* 71). Moreover, even after he became a Jesuit, Hopkins at times subjected himself to "custody of the eyes penances," in which he kept his sight downcast, resolutely denying himself even a glimpse of natural beauty for as long as six months at a time (*J* 190). Yet in the Parmenides essay in which Hopkins first uses the unique vocabulary -- stress, instress, inscape -- that articulates his logocentric theory of form, Hopkins validates sight as the means of unlocking the mystery of God in the world. As John Robinson contends,"seeing was to become for him a way of realizing the security of absolute truths in a world subject to change" (21).

However, the capacity to see and to know Christ in created forms was always conditional on Hopkins' ability to respond to the *stress* that gave existence to the object of his perception with an answering *instress* which could uphold the object's inscape. When that original motion of his mind was impeded, the activity of sight could no longer provide for him the certainty of absolute truths. The fear of flux, change, corruption, and multiplicity without the structure of a divine order to give it purpose and meaning was, for Hopkins, the fear of *slack* without *stress*. This horror of *slack* is implicitly present in Hopkins' opposition of "Not-being" to "Being"

in his Parmenides essay, as well as in his unstated (but implied) opposition to stress and instress. I am aware that here I am defining *slack* by implication and inversion, but the comprehensive study of Hopkins' uses of *slack* and its forms which follows my analysis of the Parmenides essay should validate this method.

Hopkins wrote the translation and commentary headed under the title "Parmenides" (*J* 126-130) in his notebook during his period of teaching at Newman's Oratory School in 1868. Since this essay contains the first extant use of stress, instress, and inscape, it is important to remember that Hopkins' conceptualization of these terms not only predates his discovery, in 1872, of a validating philosophy in the writings of Duns Scotus, as many critics have underscored, but also -- which few critics have noted -- that it postdates his conversion to Catholicism in 1866.[1] The subtext to the Parmenides essay, then, as I see it, is the initiating impulse for his conversion: the doctrine of the Real Presence. In 1864, Hopkins wrote to his school friend, E. H. Coleridge, that without the belief in the actual presence of Christ's blood and body in the Eucharist, religion was "sombre, dangerous, illogical," but that with it, religion became "*loveable*" (*L3* 17). Two years later, on his reception into the Catholic Church, Hopkins wrote his father that belief in the Real Presence "once got is the life of the soul

and when I doubted it I shd. become an atheist the next day" (*LJ* 92). As Margaret Ellsberg has asserted, "The first step in Hopkins' lifelong effort to make aesthetic and theological sense in a world of unrelated particulars was his conversion to Roman Catholicism" (83). Hopkins' Parmenides essay shows how his interest in the apprehension of Beauty and Truth in art and in nature, which he explored in his undergraduate essays of 1864-1865 is influenced, after his conversion, by his straining to understand how the Logos is uttered in the world.

It was at Oxford that Hopkins' epistemology and theory of form began to be articulated. In "On the Signs of Health and Decay in the Arts" (1864), for instance, Hopkins asserts that "Truth and Beauty . . . are the ends of Art," and that ultimately "Truth itself is reducible probably to the head of Beauty" (*J* 74). This identification of Truth with Beauty, of course, is not new in Hopkins, but the development the idea takes after his conversion is distinctively Hopkinsian. Christopher Devlin has convincingly demonstrated how Hopkins' notion of inscape "is another version of the old dilemma between Beauty and Truth: 'Beauty is the *species*, the image of nature-being-created./ Truth is the word, the reason why it is created'" (202). In an essay written for Walter Pater in 1865, "The Origin of Our Moral Ideas," Hopkins asserts that "All thought is of course in a sense an

effort an unity" (J 83; underlining by Walter Pater). The parallel construction of the phrases "an effort" and "an unity" suggests that, for Hopkins, *effort* and *unity* bear some sort of mutually dependent cause/effect relationship. This concept is later developed in his notion of stress as "being-in-struggle" (Cochran, "Instress" 159), but the reason for the never-ending struggle toward unity is articulated clearly in this essay: "the ideal, the one, is our only means of recognising successfully our being to ourselves . . . . If this," Hopkins concludes, "be thought mysticism further explanation may be given" (J 83). Hopkins' notion of knowing the individual, the unique self, by means of knowing the ideal, the One from which it came, is not mystical, but rather realist in the Platonic tradition of the "fixed species" or "type" located within a universal order or pattern, as he makes clear in "On the Origin of Beauty: A Platonic Dialogue" (1865). In this dialogue, Hopkins articulates his theory that "'All beauty may by a metaphor be called rhyme'" (J 102), and develops his notion that beauty is a relation of likeness and unlikeness in which "'there is a relation between the parts of the thing to each other and again of the parts to the whole, which must be duly kept'" (J 97). This "rhyming" ultimately shows "the proportion of disagreement joined with agreement which the ear finds most pleasurable" (J 101), and it is this proportioned "rhyming" of unlike with like and of like

with like which later becomes central to Hopkins' theory of form as it is first expressed in the term "inscape" in his Parmenides essay. Rhyme, like inscape, establishes relationships between words, between words and things, and between particular things and the universal, or God (Ellsberg 85).

However, it is especially in his essay entitled "The Position of Plato to the Greek World" (1865) that Hopkins' essential Platonism is expressed. In this essay he asserts that loss of "the old unity of belief which gives meaning to every subordination of thought and action" incited Plato's "raising the new religion of the Ideal Good to fill the place of the old" (J 116). Significantly, Hopkins suggests that "we feel less his [Plato's] enthusiasm for the new truth, the One, the Good, or whatever it is called, than his despair at the multiplicity of phenomena unexplained and unconnected,* the inconsistency of current speculations on the side of enquiry, and the pettiness of the ideals of the poets on the side of imagination." On the blank page opposite the asterisk, Hopkins wrote:

> *'unexplained and unconnected,
>
> --the heavy and the weary weight
>
> Of all this unintelligible world,
>
> the inconsistency etc.' (J 116).

This despair at the multiplicity of unconnected, unexplained phenomena is

also the underthought to Hopkins' Parmenides essay. In Hopkins' endeavour to raise a "new unity" in the immanental vision articulated by the terms *stress, instress, and inscape*, the opposition, *slack*, the "not-Being" of chaos -- multiplicity without stress, diversity without order --is always implicit. Hopkins' analysis of the Greek philosopher Parmenides expresses his personal vision by means of his unique and individual vocabulary. The underlying principle informing his comprehension of Parmenides is his own attempt to validate his intense perception of the uniqueness of individuated creation by incorporating that perception into an over-riding principle of unity in the world, so that the many may legitimately play in, and express, the One.

The pivotal statement Hopkins extracts from Parmenides' writing is "that Being is and Not-being is not -- which perhaps one can say, a little over-defining his meaning, means that all things are upheld by instress and are meaningless without it" (*J* 127). Hopkins goes on to identify the inter-dependency of inscape and instress as simple existence and affirmation: "But indeed I have often felt when I have been in this mood and felt the depth of an instress or how fast the inscape holds a thing that nothing is so pregnant and straightforward to the truth as simple *yes* and *is*" (*J* 127). Moreover, Hopkins describes the participation between subject

and object in such a mode of perception as an emotional dynamism which allows for the universal application of the copula in one's experience of the world:

> There would be no bridge, no stem of stress between us and things to bear us out and carry the mind over: without stress we might not and could not say / Blood is red / but only / This blood is red / or / The last blood I saw was red / nor even that, for in later language not only universals would not be true but the copula would break down even in particular judgments (*J* 127).

The "stem of stress," then, unites subject and object in the moment of dynamic apprehension of "Being." But Hopkins goes on to equate perception with knowledge and with existence, and with the use of language itself: "To be and to know or Being and thought are the same. The truth in thought is Being, stress, and each word is one way of acknowledging Being and each sentence by its copula *is* (or its equivalent) the utterance and assertion of it" (*J* 129). As Margaret Ellsberg notes, at the time of writing the Parmenides essay, "Hopkins was formulating the philosophic background to what would become an interlocking system of theology and poetics" (84), so that as the poet developed his epistemology, "'the Parmenidean "it is" becomes, in the vision of the cosmic Christ, the Biblical "I am"'" (85).

Hopkins arrives at this understanding of Being and Logos by considering the antithesis, "Not-being":

> (Not-being is here seen as want of oneness, all that is unforedrawn,

> waste space which offers either nothing to the eye to foredraw or many things foredrawing away from one another) (J 129).

Since Being "is the extended, foredrawn" which one must "'look at'" (either with the eye or with the imagination or memory of the mind's eye) in order to apprehend its dynamic unity (J 128), it is important to see that this tentative genesis of Hopkins' immanental vision involves seeing God's name, "I AM," uttered in created forms, and involves reciprocation by the instressing "yes" of the observer/participant.[2] This knowledge of God through perception and assent is opposed to the "waste space" of "Not-being" in which the eye cannot intuit the One in the many. Not-being is the "meaninglessness" of the world when not "upheld by instress," if the observer of the phenomenal world does not, through the dynamic apprehension of the ordering principle of unity in creation, perceive the One. "Being," Hopkins says, is "stress." "Not-being," I would assert, is "slack." The concomitant perception underlying *slack,* then, does not see unity in diversity, but multiplicity, fragmentation, chaos, and meaninglessness.

Yet in the Parmenides essay, Hopkins asserts that the two principles of Being (the One) and Not-being (the many) "meet in the scape of everything," because "the phenomenal world . . . is the brink, limbus, lapping, run-and-mingle / of . . . Being, under its modification or siding of particular oneness or Being, and Not-being, under its siding of the Many" (J 130). The

two principles are not, therefore, mutually exclusive, do not negate each other because "The two may be called two degrees of siding in the scale of Being" (*J* 130). What is of particular relevance to my study of *slack* is Hopkins' emphasis that "the inscape will be the proportion of the mixture" of Being and Not-being, and that each is a "siding in the scale of Being" (*J* 130). "Inscape," then, like rhyme, harmonizes likeness and unlikeness, and part to part and again to a whole, by means of a just proportion, agreeable to and apprehendable by the perceiver.

However, the dynamic apprehension of unity in diversity depends upon the *perception of the observer*-- perhaps what Cochran was beginning to articulate when he spoke of inscape as "psychological landscape." In this regard, James Finn Cotter's understanding of the cosmic meaning of inscape is helpful. In his analysis of Hopkins' "mythopoeic gnosis" (xviii), Cotter notes that the poet understood the Incarnation in Creation as ongoing activity, not historical act, so that his apprehension of Christ in the world makes Christ "not simply a fixed target but a flowing current" (50). This sense of the activity inherent in inscape which governs the behaviour of things and is impelled by the necessary concurrent activities of stress and instress becomes important when the opposition to these activities, the condition of "slack," is considered. The conceptualization of Christ, or of

man's relationship to Christ, in the figure of a flowing current is a significant image, for it aptly describes the relation of *stress* to *slack* in Hopkins' thought. A flowing current is an image of endless, reiterated movement; but all is not forward movement. In every current, there is a flow and an ebb, a stress and a slack, in which forward movement is temporarily stalled before the water moves forward again. This stress and slack, this forward motion, falling away, and temporary suspension before returning to stress, describes the spiritual relation of the soul to God as Hopkins understood it. The spiritual meaning of slack, however, is figurative. In order to see how Hopkins understood the literal denotations of *slack,* and applied them descriptively and figuratively in his writing, I have followed Cochran's method (in his etymological inquiry into "stress" and "instress") of isolating Hopkins' use of the word -- in this case, *slack*-- determining its meaning(s) as exemplified by his usage, and comparing these with the OED definitions ("Instress" 145).

It is in inscaping "flowing currents" that Hopkins opposes the terms slack and stress in his journal entries. In a passage written in Wales, 6 August 1872, Hopkins observes the movement of the sea as almost simultaneous alternating impulses of stress and slack: "I noticed from the cliff how the sea foots or toes the shore and the inlets, now with a push and

flow, now slacking, returning to stress and pulling back" (*J* 221). This use of the participial form of *slack* to describe the movement of water is similar to the adjectival use of *slack* in an earlier entry written in Switzerland in 1868, although in this instance the opposition to the "stress" of water is implied rather than stated: "In one place over a smooth table of rock came slipping down a blade of water looking like and as evenly crisped as fruitnets[3] let drop and falling slack" (*J* 178). The adjectival use of *slack* in this passage seems to correspond with the quality of water defined as "running with very little strength or speed."

In the 1872 entry, Hopkins uses *slacking* as a modifier in function and as a present participle in form. However, the meaning is principally derived from the substantive form of *slack* listed in the lexicon as "cessation in the strong flow of a current or tide (slack-water)." There are two entries in the OED citing the use of *slacking* in this sense prior to 1872. One occurs in 1625, and the other occurs in 1855, in Singleton's translation of Virgil II: "Many watch the ebbing motions of the slacking sea." As a classical scholar, Hopkins may have been familiar with this translation, but it is just as likely that he formed the word himself out of his own understanding of *slack* That Hopkins was familiar with the word *slack* and its derivations is made clear by the caret entered in the manuscript after the words "pulling back": "Aug

7-- see after Aug 8" (*J* 418 fn 4). The reference to August 8 seems to be the following passage: "And it is common for the sea looked down upon, where the sheety spread is well seen but the depth and mass unfelt, to sway and follow the wind like the tumbled canvas of a loose sail" (*J* 222). The OED notes another substantive form of *slack* defined as "that part of a rope, sail, etc., which is not fully strained, or which hangs loose." From Hopkins' vantage point on the cliff, then, he notes the *slacking* motion of water and later, by association, links it to the *slack* of a sail. Moreover, the action of wind and tide are incorporated in another modifier form of *slack* which is also used in the 1868 entry, and which may be defined as "of wind or tide: blowing, or running, with very little strength or speed." Finally, another reference to *slack* in Hopkins' *Journal* seems to incorporate figuratively the action of water in its meaning. In his description of bluebells in 1871 he writes that "in the clough / through the light / they came in falls of sky-colour washing the brows and slacks of the ground with vein-blue . . ." (*J* 208-9). The OED notes an obsolete form of *slack* meaning "pit or hole" as well as a current usage, "soft or boggy hole; morass." Either of these meanings may be applied to Hopkins' use of *slacks* in this passage, although Hopkins' use of *slacks* to describe the holes cut in the wood of stringed instruments in another *Journal* entry argues for Hopkins' familiarity with

the obsolete form: "viols, I think, differ from lutes in having slacks, hollows, in the sides, so as to be the original of the violin" (*J* 238). However, the meaning of "slacks" as coupled with "brows" in his description of bluebells seems to be a metaphorical extension of wave action seen when the ground is "washed" with light and colour.

Hopkins' mind had an associational turn, and delighted in finding resemblances of meaning and of sound, no matter how metaphorical or figurative the resemblance. James Milroy, in *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1977), has helpfully described Hopkins' etymological assumptions:

> first, that series of words that are related in meaning can be shown to be derived from a limited set of monosyllabic roots; second, that the meanings of words within these series are associated in a broadly metaphorical way, always going back to a root with a physical or "sensible" meaning, no matter how abstract some of the derivative senses may be; third, that there is a connection between sound and sense, so that "onomatopoetic" or "echoic" theories about word-origins are found illuminating (53).

In his poetry, and in many journal entries, Hopkins tends to group sets of words associated by initial consonants, and ascribe them to "original" roots with "original" meaning (Milroy 45). Milroy notes that Hopkins' alliterative sequences often explore the associational analogies of words formed after the initial consonant cluster *st-* (68), but rarely after the initial consonant cluster *sl-* (45).[4] Milroy cites the work of the British linguist, J.R. Firth, to demonstrate that words such as "*stresses* and *strains*, *strength*,

straight or *stretched-out*,'" though they have no common etymology, are associated by a common motor background, and are "'brought together by alliterative and experiential analogy'" (67-68). Firth's work on associational sequences demonstrates that the series "*slack, slouch, slush, sludge, slime, slosh, slash, sloppy, slug, . . . slum, slump, slobber,* and others," by an associated kinaesthetic background, imply pejorative meanings, even though the *sl-* sound is not *inherently* negative (Milroy 67). If we grant Hopkins' associational turn of mind in valuing words and meanings, and include the positive/negative *motor* relationships suggested by the *st-* and *sl-* origins, it can be seen that Hopkins' opposition between *stress* and *slack* was, in part, an emotional expression of the way he saw his world as incorporating the two sidings of Being and Not-being in every apprehended inscape.

The fundamental relationship between stress and slack as the proportionate mixture of two sidings of one inscape in Hopkins' thought is expressed most clearly in his writings on prosody. Hopkins' innovative accentual rhythm, in which stresses, not syllables, are counted, is well known. Yet integral to his understanding of the beauty of this rhythm, closely allied to natural speech, is the notion of "slack" or uncounted syllables that carry the stress into either mounting (x / or x / /) or

falling (/ x or / x x) rhythms. Hopkins explained sprung (or accentual) rhythm as opposed to common (or syllabic) rhythm to Canon Dixon in the following letter of 1880:

> But there may and mostly there does belong to a foot an unaccented portion or "slack": now in common rhythm, in which less is made of stress, in which less stress is laid, the slack must be always one or else two syllables, never less than one and never more than two, and in most measures fixedly one or fixedly two, but in sprung rhythm, the stress being more *of* a stress, being more important, allows of greater variation in the slack and this latter may range from three syllables to none at all-- *regularly,* so that paeons (three short syllables and one long or three slack and one stressy [sic]) are regular in sprung rhythm, but in common rhythm can occur only by licence; moreover may in the same measure have this range. Regularly then the feet in sprung rhythm consist of one, two, three, or four syllables and no more, and if for simplicity's sake we call feet by Greek names, taking accent for quantity, and also scan always for rising rhythm (I call *rising rhythm* that in which the slack comes first, as in iambs and anapests, *falling* that in which the stress comes first, as in trochees and dactyls), scanning thus, the feet in sprung rhythm will be monosyllables, iambs, anapests, and fourth paeons, and no others. But for particular rhythmic effects it is allowed, and more freely than in common rhythm, to use any number of slack syblIables, *limited only by ear* (*L2* 39-40; last phrase my italics).

The opposition of *stress* to *slack* in prosody is unique in Hopkins; the OED gives no such meaning as "the unaccented portion in metre" in its list of definitions. Hopkins' use of the term, then, may be seen as an extension of his associational logic which opposes stress and slack by their alliterative analogy. But stress and slack in metre may also be thought of in terms of

the currents of water which alternately slacken and return to stress in rhythmic progression. Furthermore, the dictionary definition of another substantive form of *slack* may also be incorporated here, that of "an interval of comparative inactivity" or "a slackening of speed," since Hopkins' poetry is always "carefully timed" and meant to be read loudly, leisurely, with the ear and not the eye (*L I* 246). Hopkins defined verse as "the inscape of spoken sound" (*J* 289), and the inscape of this spoken sound is the balance (or proportion) between stresses and slacks in utterance when the ear is able to instress the different lengths of vowels (*J* 271) by upholding the musical timing and lengths of stresses in syllables.

"Stress" and "slack," then, are fundamental concepts in the thought of Gerard Manley Hopkins. If we return now to his use of the terms in the journal entries cited above, it may be seen that the "inscape," or the natural, inherent behaviour and selving of the water, incorporates both stress and slack, but in continuous motion, so that one activity does not negate the other. In an unfinished poem written at about the same time as the Terrible Sonnets, Hopkins compares his interaction with God to a flowing current:

> Thee, God, I come from, to thee go,
> All day I like fountain flow
> From thy hand out, swayed about
> Mote-like in thy mighty glow.

What I know of thee I bless,
As acknowledging thy stress
On my being and as seeing
Something of thy holiness. (*P* No. 155)[5]

In the flowing current between Hopkins and his God,[6] there is both stress and slack as the believer is "now slacking, [then] returning to stress" when he is able to acknowledge (through the activity of instress, saying "*yes*") God's stress on his being (the grace that holds him together, that utters unequivocably "*I AM*"). So also in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" Hopkins' imagery of fluid sand and water incorporates the impulses of stress and slack, united into one inscape by God's informing binding motion and by his own ability to "greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand":

I am soft sift
In an hourglass--at the wall
Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift,
And it crowds and it combs to the fall;
I steady as a water in a well, to a poise, to a pane,
But roped with, always, all the way down from the tall
Fells or flanks of the voel, a vein
Of the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift.
(*P* No. 28 I:4)

The conception of God as a binding force which "ropes" individuated creation, including man, into a tension of unity is fundamental to the way in which Hopkins perceives the world: "He [Christ] of all can reeve a rope best" (*P* No. 63). J. Hillis Miller, in his chapter on Gerard Manley Hopkins in *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (1965), notes that

"Hopkins sees even the most apparently slack and unstructured objects, like clouds or water, as roped and corded together by a tense network of lines of energy. The image of strands, wires, stems, or veins recurs in his work" (288). On the other hand, Dom Anselm Hufstader, in "The Experience of Nature in Hopkins' Journals and Poems," notes that Hopkins' "journals and poems contain many images of unwinding, dividing, separating, undoing" (140). Nature, then, reveals evidences of "Not-being" or "slack," but the activity of instress allows for the apprehension of the binding force that upholds an inscape in oneness. As James Finn Cotter recognizes, "things themselves . . . are ever 'falling away' into multiplicity and nothingness," but Hopkins' incarnationist vision allowed him to see that "The cosmos coheres in the immanent presence of the One" (272).

This mode of perception, which sees the multiplicity and falling away of things redeemed by the unifying presence of the figure of Christ acting in all creation does not, however, only determine the nature of Hopkins' apprehension of the visible world. It also determines his experience of the self. In a journal entry in 1873, Hopkins uses the term *slack* in his record of an enervating nightmare:

> I had a nightmare that night. I thought something or someone leapt onto me and held me quite fast: this I think woke me, so that after this I shall have had the use of reason. This first start is, I think, a nervous collapse of the same sort as when one is very tired

> and holding oneself at stress not to sleep yet / suddenly goes slack and seems to fall and wakes, only on a greater scale and with a loss of muscular control reaching more or less deep; this one to the chest and not further, so that I could speak, whispering at first, then louder -- for the chest is the first and greatest centre of motion and action, the seat of θυμος. I had lost all muscular stress elsewhere but not sensitive, feeling where each limb lay and thinking that I could recover myself if I could move my finger, I said, and then the arm and so the whole body. 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 as I thought to do. It made me think that this was how the souls in hell would be imprisoned in their bodies as in prisons . . . (*J* 238).[7]

In this description of the state of slack, two things stand out clearly. First of all, as Alan Heuser points out, "the sense of God sustaining the soul [is] absent" (30), and concomitant with this is the loss of instress which holds the self together "as a piece." In this state of slack, the body "seems to fall in and hang" (like the blade of water he had observed on his trip to the Alps in 1868). Hopkins reflects that this experience of isolation and disunity is analogous to that of the souls in hell. It is by directing his will towards God and uttering "the holy name" (in effect saying *yes* to *I AM*) that Hopkins is re-vitalized by stress and, like the "slack" of the current he saw from the cliffs of Wales, he is able to "return to stress." Given Hopkins' understanding and use of the term "stress" as an intrinsic aspect of God's grace, and "slack" as the absence of that incoming stress and the reciprocal absence of man's instress of will, it may be posited that Hopkins was aware

of the obsolete compound form, *slack-grace*, "one who has little grace."

It should be stated here that although stress is equated with Being, and with simple *is*, instress with will and *yes*, and slack with Not-being, that "slack" does not imply *no*. In "A Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People," written in Ireland in 1886, Hopkins notes that the self is "all foredrawn to No or Yes" (*P* No. 157). "Not-being," however, as defined in the Parmenides essay, is the "unforedrawn," and therefore *slack* represents the suspension between *yes* and *no*, the not-knowing or un-knowing reversal of the truth: "To be and to know or Being and thought are the same" (*J* 129). In exploring the nature of decision-making in *Hopkins, the Self, and God,"* Walter Ong has noted how free choice "employs diaeretic processes -- splitting the field of attention into this issue versus that issue . . . ultimately suspending the subject himself or herself between yes and no . . . ." This suspension is terminated by the decision, which is "holistic, doing away with the diaresis [*sic*]" (81). But if neither *yes* or *no* may be affirmed? Then the subject remains suspended in slack, in disabling entropy which cannot move either forward to *yes* or backward to *no*. In the state of slack, Hopkins does not deny God's existence; indeed, he fervently desires union with him. However, because his capacity for movement upward into God's grace has been balked, and because he cannot feel the descending stress of God's grace, he

collapses, body and soul, into a loose collection of parts which has no ordering principle to maintain the tension of the "being-in-struggle." As Marylou Motto's study of "gestures of assent" in Hopkins' poetry has demonstrated, "The yes-saying clasps instress, inscape, assents to the assent of the world . . . . Assent is an act of mind or body or language moving to meet and confirm feeling . . . . Conversely, without the responding assent, feeling remains undirected, purposeless, even chaotic" (14). Motto goes on to argue that the alternative to assent is "to be satisfied with enclosure, to cease following traces of God in the world -- [the alternative] forgoes direction and force and assents to a lack of meaning" (23). The state of slack, however, is a suspension between yes-saying and no-saying. I would argue that the alternative to "gestures of assent" in Hopkins' life and poetry is not the assent to, but rather the disabling experience of, lack of meaning, conditioned by a feeling of constraint or enclosure in the self, and by a mood and a mode of perception which impedes the ability to follow traces of God in the world.

In the record of his nightmare, Hopkins' state of slack is analogous to that of the souls in hell because of his bodily imprisonment and disunity, and because of his sense of alienation from God. However, his state differs from that of the souls in hell because his is a temporary condition. He

writes that he was able to call on the name of God and "recover myself as I thought to do." This the souls in hell are not able to do, because the stem of stress, the fountain moving from God to man and back, is no longer available to them. In this regard, J. Hillis Miller notes a hierarchy of pitches of self in Hopkins' thinking, "from the perfectly erect and vertical pitch which coincides with Christ, on down through the neutral and horizontal pitch to a devilish pointing of the soul straight down toward hell in complete slackness" (344). However, both vertical and horizontal movements are validated by the immanental vision Hopkins sought to incorporate into his way of seeing the world. Hopkins sees the activity of stress as vertical (stem, fountain) motion between man and God or horizontal (bridge) motion between man and the godhead incarnate in created form.

The shape and movement of *slack*, however, is the spiral that results when man's instress and God's stress are absent, and the uniting "stem" or "bridge" "falls apart and hangs." In writing of the angels' fall in heaven, and man's subsequent fall on earth, Hopkins notes that "the instress with which the soul animates and otherwise acts in the body is by death *thrown back upon the soul itself*. . . . This throwing back or confinement of their energy is a dreadful constraint or imprisonment . . ." (*S* 137; my italics). The throwing back of one's instress upon the self in a spiralling motion encoils

and hampers the soul in a self-imprisonment in which only one's *own* inscape can be instressed. This is a dreadful constraint, for although the soul desires to unite with God by ascending upward on the stem of stress between Creator and created, this forward movement is balked. For Hopkins, the "coil or spiral is then a type of the Devil . . . and it is a type of death, of motion lessening and at last ceasing" (*S* 198). "God," Hopkins asserts, "gave things a forward and perpetual motion," but the Devil throws things off the track into death, decay and corruption (*S* 198-9).

However, in his Parmenides essay, Hopkins notes that stress and slack are "two degrees of siding in the scale of Being," so that "the inscape is the proportion of the mixture" (*J* 130) only when the *perceiver himself* is able to instress that unity. In the integrated, immanental vision of the created world which Hopkins developed after his conversion to Catholicism, the poet was able to see stress and slack incorporated into one unity of inscape because he saw God's informing pressure giving meaning to the world. But the possibility for seeing the corruption of mortal beauty, its death and decay, was always present, indeed is expressed in much of his early poetry. In "The Habit of Perfection" (1866), for example, Hopkins describes how the fragmented nature of the created world's "ruck and reel. . . / Coils, keeps, and teases simple sight" (*P* No. 22).[8] The "habit of perception" that he first

articulates in the Parmenides essay was not, therefore, necessarily Hopkins' instinctive way of seeing the world; his sight was often baffled by seeing fragmentation rather than unity, his "sight / On being's dread and vacant maze" where man can only "guess . . . [the] unseen King" (*P* No. 23). In "Nondum" (1866), the just-quoted poem, Hopkins goes on to ask for the "sense beyond, / To shew Thee that Thou art, and near." Perhaps this is the "*sixth and radical sense in the experience of Hopkins*" that Geoffrey Hartman identifies as the pressure or stress which unites subject and object in Hopkins' immanental vision (122). And for a time, this "sense beyond" the five allotted to man was given to Hopkins; the "unseen King" was "father[ed] forth" (*P* No. 37) in the beauty of the created world, as the poet's celebratory Nature Sonnets of 1877, and many of his journal notings of this period, witness.

Unfortunately, the "original motion" of the poet's mind which allowed him to instress the inscapes of the created world, and thereby participate in the stress of God's grace, could not always be "unimpeded" (Devlin 197). Hopkins' immanental vision was "in thrall to his temperament" (Harris 35) because personal mood changes -- and he was subject throughout his life to fits of depression -- could affect his way of seeing the world. In a journal entry dated 19 June 1871, Hopkins articulates how the horror of perceived

fragmentation in the phenomenal world could impede his ability to instress the inscape of a thing when seen in its siding of mortal corruption rather than in its siding of divine immanence:

> The Horned Violet is a pretty thing, gracefully lashed. Even in withering the flower ran through beautiful inscapes by the screwing up of the petals into straight little barrels or tubes. It is not that inscape does not govern the behaviour of things in *slack* and decay as one can see even in the pining of the skin in the old and even in a skeleton but that horror prepossesses the mind, but in this case there was nothing in itself to shew even whether the flower were shutting or opening (*J* 211; my italics).

Hopkins' implicit identification of the terms "slack and decay" in this co-ordinate construction is significant because the meaning here derives principally from his associational understanding of *slack*, rather than from a specific dictionary definition. The closest related meaning would be "lacking cohesiveness or solidarity; not compact or firm; crumbling, loose, soft" or perhaps "not drawn or held tightly or tensely; relaxed, loose." Things in "slack and decay," then, may be perceived as being without the binding force that unifies them into one inscape; they are "not to be grasped and held together, 'scopeless'" (*J* 118). The godhead, Christ immanent in the world, is difficult to apprehend in mortal things which are crumbling into corruption, and it is this "horror" which confounds Hopkins' ability to instress the Horned Violet's inscape.

The apprehension of unity in the world is in this way determined by the

psychology of perception, by the attitudinal or emotional relation between subject and object. In *itself*, as Hopkins acknowledges, the withering Horned Violet is governed by inscape as it "Selves-- goes itself" (*P* No. 57),[9] but unless the perceiver is able to instress the unity inherent in the object, the perception of parts "which offers either nothing to the eye to foredraw or many things foredrawing away from one another" (*J* 129) overwhelms the sense of the One to which the parts cleave. This is made clear in a journal entry a few months later, in which Hopkins is able to apprehend unity of being in a dead tree: "There is one notable dead tree in the N.W. corner of the nave, the inscape markedly holding its most simple and beautiful oneness. . ." (*J* 215). And in an entry written earlier the same day as the Horned Violet passage, Hopkins noted that "a beautiful instance of inscape sided on the slide, that is / successive sidings of one inscape, is seen in the behaviour of the flag flower from the shut bud to the full blowing . . ." (*J* 211). The extent to which the sidings of stress and slack needed to be balanced by an integrated perceiver capable of instressing the inscape is evident in the following journal entry: "In fact being unwell I was quite downcast: nature in all her parcels and faculties gaped and fell apart, *fatiscebat,* like a clod cleaving and holding on only by strings of root. But this must often be" (*J* 236).

In the stark acknowledgement "But this must often be," we are given Hopkins' own bleak recognition of how his mood swings could affect his ability to apprehend God in the world. As early as his Parmenides essay, Hopkins' ability to "feel" instress and inscape is dependent upon his being "*in this mood*" (*J* 127; my italics). Periodically throughout his life, Hopkins suffered from depression, but in the period immediately before the writing of the Terrible Sonnets, as he wrote to Baillie in 1885, "the melancholy I have all my life been subject to has become of late years not indeed more intense in its fits but rather more distributed, constant, and crippling . . . when I am at the worst, though my judgement is never affected, my state is much like madness" (*LJ* 256). Hopkins' chronic depression in Ireland forced him to give up the regular practice of meditation[10] (apart from the annual retreat) because it would often trigger fits of madness (*S* 262). Since increased meditation is one of the activities St. Ignatius counsels for priests experiencing desolation,[11] those critics who see the Terrible Sonnets as a sequence describing a descent into desolation followed by an ascent into consolation would be well advised to consider the implications of a priest who cannot meditate without experiencing "loathing, hopelessness" and without fearing the onset of madness (*S* 262). Meditation, for followers of St. Ignatius Loyola, requires a precise and

concrete imagination which is able to experience the reality of the Gospels by directly participating in them. This Hopkins was able to do until the last five years of his life, and the Nature Sonnets of 1877 are joyous expressions of the immanental vision that allowed him to see Christ play "in ten thousand places / Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his" (*P* No. 57) through the revealed inscapes of the created world.

The spiritual inability to meditate on the reality of the Gospels reflects the congruent breakdown of Hopkins' immanental vision, in that the poet no longer seems to have the "penetrating imagination"[12] of perception which allowed him to incorporate stress and slack into one unified expression of inscape, informed by the stress of Christ's presence in the world and upheld by the instress of the observer/participant's dynamic actualizing activity. David Downes has suggested that Hopkins was living a hypothesis in his incorporation of the immanental vision he synthesized from Parmenides, Suarez, Ignatius, and Scotus, into his essentially Romantic personality, which Downes describes as "imaginative, affective, phenomenologically sensuous" (*Sanctifying Imagination* 77). Why or how Hopkins came to see this hypothesis as suspect is a matter for speculation; the causes are inferential,[13] but the effects are evident in his prose writings, his letters, and his poetry.

It appears that the downswing into chronic depression which Hopkins experienced with little relief during his stay in Dublin, 1884-1889, began during his period of teaching at Stonyhurst, 1882-4 (Roberts 36). The letters Hopkins wrote from Stonyhurst indicate that he was, for the most part, suspended in a state of slack, with no sensation of incoming or outgoing stress to animate him. He wrote to Bridges about his "flagging and almost spent powers" (*L I* 170) and complained that "I am always jaded, I cannot tell why, and my vein shews no signs of ever flowing again" (*L I* 178). Gerald Roberts notes that Hopkins' stay at Stonyhurst coincided with a period of "near-sterility as a poet" (39), and that "the depression of many of Hopkins' Stonyhurst letters reflects an unease of mind that is dangerously near the pathological" (42). Moreover, Roberts shows how both Hopkins' malaise and his poetic aridity are reflected by the fact that his letters exhibit few of his former precise and exuberant descriptions of the created world: Nature "seemed to have lost its immediate sensuous attraction. References to the external world in his letters are brief and sometimes significantly introspective" (43). This introversion of vision initiated at Stonyhurst becomes Hopkins' principal mode of perception in Dublin. In 1885 in Ireland, his senses are not directed outward to an apprehension of God in the world, but inward to an apprehension of the self.

Rather than instressing the inscapes of the created world which reveal God's Word in creation, the poet instresses his own inscape which can utter only the meager word of man.

"The basic bodily emblem of spiritual negativity" from which the Terrible Sonnets begin, according to Daniel Harris, is Lucifer's spiral: "the strands of Christian self-definition lie in a slack coil" (59). The Terrible Sonnets of 1885 express the spiritual state of slack both in their imagery and in their sound and structure. The "imagery of slack" in the Terrible Sonnets may be opposed to the "imagery of stress" in the Nature Sonnets of 1877. Many critics have noted that Hopkins' immanental vision is fused in these sonnets with Ignatian Meditative Pattern, so that not only the imagery, but the sonnet structure itself, incorporates Hopkins' triunal mode of perceiving Christ's Real Presence in the world through inscape, stress and instress. The Nature Sonnets, in their dense packing of cumulative natural images, are earthly celebrations of the inscape of the individuated thing "that interests our eyes" (*P* No. 40) as the observer experiences instress. The imagery is both visual and concrete: we are shown the "silk-sack clouds" (*P* No. 38), the "skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow" (*P* No. 37), "the grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies" (*P.* No. 32), and the "shining from shook foil" (*P* No. 31) that reveal Christ's

immanent presence in the world. The identity between subject and object that is experienced during instress is implied in these images, as well as the appropriate response: the willed movement of the soul toward God. This dependent relationship between the created world, the observer/participant, and God is expressed explicitly in "Hurrahing in Harvest":

> These things, these things were here and but the beholder
> Wanting; which two when they once meet,
> The heart rears wings bold and bolder
> And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet.
> (*P* No. 38)

In the Terrible Sonnets of 1885, both the "imagery of stress" and the incarnational vision mimed in the meditative structure of the sonnet form are gone.[14] The visual images by which Hopkins expressed his affirmation of the godhead in creation in his earlier poems are reduced to the images of the baser senses of sound, taste, and touch in the posthumous sonnets. These introverted sensations are the ones by which the "slack strands of self" experience the imprisonment and fragmentation of "self in self steepèd and pashed" (*P* No. 61). The extroverted, dynamic sight-identity of self with the external world, and ultimately, with Christ, is impeded in the Terrible Sonnets. The balking of the immanental vision that was able to integrate slack and stress into one inscape is powerfully expressed in the metrical utterance, the "inscape of spoken sound," of the Terrible Sonnets

themselves. The accentual sprung rhythm of the Nature Sonnets, with its careful timing of stresses and slacks into one unifying rhythm, is replaced by standard or mixed rhythm in the Terrible Sonnets, in which "the proportion of the mixture" of the two sidings of stress and slack is deliberately and markedly altered.

The sonnets as a whole express that condition of slack initiated (for whatever reason) during Hopkins' stay at Stonyhurst, but always inherently possible (and periodically actual) to his psychology of perception when he was unable emotionally to uphold a sensuous, unitive apprehension of Nature. For some reason, during the year 1885 in Ireland, Hopkins remained suspended in a state of slack, unrelieved by any return to stress. In this state of slack, as Daniel Harris has astutely observed, "Hopkins' universe has suffered a cataclysmic fragmentation,"[15] so that he is no longer able, by the activity of instress, to apprehend the two sidings of Being as one integrated inscape. Rather, where he saw unity and meaning, he now sees disorder and un-meaning. Geoffrey H. Hartman has suggested that Hopkins saw the act of sight as a moral responsibility (120), but in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," the sonnet which I believe introduces the state of slack evident in the Terrible Sonnet cycle, the only moral Hopkins is able to draw from the unwinding of the unity of "pied beauty" (*P* No. 37) "off her once

skéined stained véined variety" (*P* No. 61) is that all mortal things will be judged by God. In this way, the many that were incorporated in the One in Hopkins' immanental vision of the world become the many that are incorporated into "twó flocks, twó folds-- black, white; / right, wrong" (*P* No. 61) in his apocalyptic vision. Daniel Harris contends that the doctrines of immanence and apocalypse were mutually exclusive for Hopkins: "If nature were no longer a proleptic emblem of the redemption to come, but rather an image of human sin, the divinity that had previously informed its structure must have disappeared; as time and natural phenomena lost their sacred character, Hopkins's saving knowledge of Christ's indwelling in imperfect creation suffered great damage" (35-6). In "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," the perception of fragmentation and multiplicity in nature arouses fear of God's judgement,[16] and obviates the joy of ongoing, creative immanence in the world. In this horror Hopkins falls slack, and with him the world, too, slackens into its siding of decay, corruption, and death. As was noted in Hopkins' Horned Violet entry, the perception of slack in the world could work against the poet's ability to experience the unity of creation, and the apprehension of that chaos leads to the emotional horror of fragmentation and the fear of judgement, rather than to the emotional identification of unity with nature, and the joy of Incarnation.

In an undergraduate essay on "The Probable Future of Metaphysics" (1867), Hopkins noted how in "materialism, the afternoon of thought . . . we are blunted to the more abstract and elusive speculation." The replacement of the "freshness" of idealism by the "bluntness" of materialism may be seen, to some degree, as a "weariness or *slackening* [which] constrains individual minds" (*J* 119; my italics). Hopkins goes on to suggest that the outcome of the opposition between idealism and materialism, the "new Realism," "will probably encounter [an] atomism of personality with some shape of the Platonic ideas" (*J* 121). This "new metaphysics," by extension of the diurnal metaphor Hopkins incorporates in this essay,[17] may perhaps be called the "evening of thought." In the dark poems known as the Terrible Sonnets, the "slackening" to which Hopkins refers in this essay has wound itself down to the condition of slack, in which the self is atomized as the principal figure in a world which no longer has a bridge to close the gap between the real and the ideal necessary to both Platonic and Incarnationist perception.

Notes

[1] J. Hillis Miller, for instance, sees the seminal importance of Hopkins' Parmenides essay as evidence of his search to unify self, words, and world. Miller writes insightfully that Hopkins' "reading of Parmenides is a turning point in his thinking, and prepares him for the decisive encounter some years later with Scotus and St. Ignatius" (311), but he does not adequately consider that at the time of writing his Parmenides essay, Hopkins was already committed to the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence. Moreover, Hopkins' encounter with St. Ignatius was within a few months of writing the Parmenides essay, may even have been concurrent with it. Alfred Thomas, S.J., in *Hopkins the Jesuit: The Years of Training*, states that during the winter and spring of 1868, Hopkins was considering his vocation as a religious, and wavering "between St. Benedict and St. Ignatius." The choice to join the Society of Jesus was made in May (9). It hardly seems tenable that Hopkins should make his decision between the two orders without *some* familiarity with the writings and thought of their respective founders. I believe that Ignatius' Incarnationist theology may have predicated Hopkins' choice of religious order, and that the Parmenides essay gives evidence for Hopkins' need for an immanental vision which could apprehend the One in the many, and which could perceive the incarnate Logos uttered in creation.

[2] For an interesting analysis of inscape as a union of activity expressing both God's *"I AM"* and man's *"yes,"* see James Finn Cotter (14-16). But see also Marylou Motto's work on the "gestures of assent" in Hopkins' poetry (1-40).

[3] I have been unable to ascertain the meaning of "fruitnets." The OED cites no such compound form. Perhaps Hopkins was thinking of nets stretched out between trees used to catch the fruit when the boughs were shaken.

[4] I have found one such etymological inquiry: "*slip, slipper, slop, slabby* (muddy), *slide,* perhaps *slope,* but if slope is thus connected what are we to say of *slant*?" (*J* 9) In an earlier entry, Hopkins connects *slum* with *slime*

through a consideration of the word *clammy* (*J* 8). The following partial compilation of *st-* and *sl-* words I have taken from Hopkins' prose writings and completed mature poems:

st-
stress strain stalled steel stickles star(light) strand stroke storm stigma startle stanch(ing) steady sturdy stirred stipple stupendous stallion stalwart strange stooks sterner stones stranger strife starches

sl-
sloe sloggering slime slow slender slumbered slack

[5] This poem is an undated, unfinished draft on the same sheet with the first draft of No. 62, "To what serves Mortal Beauty?" and therefore probably written in 1885. See Gardner's note (*P* 316).

[6] In his "Meditation on Hell," Hopkins attributes the notion of a current of stress flowing between God and man to St. Ignatius, but he speaks here primarily of "the current of air in the blowpipe" or of "a magnetic current," rather than of a current of water (*S* 137).

[7] Hopkins' image of the initial movement of the will toward God in the recovery of spiritual and physical integrity suggested here in "if I could move my finger" recalls the parallel image of God's grace infusing wholeness in "The Wreck of the Deutschland":

> Thou mastering me
> God! giver of breath and bread;
> World's strand, sway of the sea;
> Lord of living and dead;
> Thou has 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.
>
> (*P* No. 28 I:1)

See also *S* 195, in which Hopkins meditates "on the contemplation of the Holy Ghost sent to us through creatures. Observe then it is on love and the Holy Ghost is called Love. . .shewn 'in operibus', *the works of God's finger*" (my italics); and especially *S* 157-8, in which Hopkins writes about the third action of assisting grace which is "elevating, which lifts the receiver from one cleave of being to another and to a vital act in Christ: this is truly *God's finger touching the very vein of personality,* which nothing else can

reach and man can respond to by no play whatever, by bare acknowledgment only, the counter stress which God alone can feel ('subito probas eum'), the aspiration in answer to his inspiration" (my italics).

[8] The wished-for "simple sight" baffled by the coil of the created world's multiplicity from seeing the "uncreated light" is perhaps the "single eye!" that made the nun's heart so powerfully "right!" in "The Wreck" (*P* No. 28 11:29).

[9] The notion of the differentiation of parts in the concept of "selves--goes itself" as expressed in "As Kingfishers catch fire" has been helpfully analysed by Michael Sprinker in "Poetics and Music: Hopkins and Nietzsche." Sprinker notes that "The threat to the orderly structure of nature posed by what Hopkins here calls 'selving' ('Each mortal thing does one thing and the same: / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; / Selves--goes itself, *myself* it speaks and spells, / Crying *What I do is me: for that I came'*) is avoided in the perspective in which nature is beheld by God through the agency of the Incarnation" (338). However, Sprinker goes on to assert that "the alliteration of 'speaks' and 'spells' attempts to gloss over a semantic split between the two actions that would disrupt the aesthetic unity of the entire poem," since "Speaking is an instance of denomination or 'selving'. . . which the octet asserts is the characteristic action of all things in the world," whereas "to *spell* 'myself,' that is, to pronounce each letter in the order given in the lexicon, m-y-s-e-l-f, is in effect to dismember the word . . . . Spelling 'myself' abolishes precisely that unity of the self in its action that speaking accomplished and that the poem as a whole attempts to protect" (339). However, I would argue that the alliteration on "speaks and spells" does not "gloss over a semantic split," but is rather an expression of how Hopkins saw inscape as "the proportion of the mixture" between the two sidings of stress and slack in his immanental vision. The notion of "spelling" *without* the balance of "speaking," as expressed in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (the poem which I see as introducing the state of *slack* I have identified in the Terrible Sonnets), reveals how such disproportion results in disunity. In this poem, the idea of "spelling" is drawn from the Sibyl's methods of revelation, in which she "wrote her prophecy on the leaves of trees and arranged them in the cavern. . .in the proper order to make sense and left them there. But when the enquirers entered the draught from the door blew the leaves about the cave so that it was impossible to recover the correct arrangement and sense of the oracle" (Parke 55). Hopkins' "spelling" in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" is

the labourious attempt to find the lost orderly structure of meaning in the world which he now sees scattered into fragmentation and diversity.

[10] Martin C. Carroll, S.J., asserts that "Hopkins' intense spiritual life, born of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, *daily strengthened by meditation* and vividly realized in every hour of joy or hardship, finds its full expression in the passionate and personal force of his verse" (in *Immortal Diamond* 49; my italics). Carroll, like many critics, has not considered fully the fact that Hopkins' spiritual life, by his own assertion, was *not* strengthened by daily meditation during his last years in Dublin.

[11] In his "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits," St. Ignatius defines consolation and desolation, and lays down the rules for those experiencing desolation. The passage to which I have referred is as follows:

> 6. Although in desolation we should not change our earlier resolutions, it will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation. This can be done by insisting more on prayer, meditation, frequent examinations, and by increasing our penance in some suitable manner (130).

It may be that Hopkins' intense sense of failure at this time in his life was in part due to his condition of *slack* which made Ignatius' recommendation to increase "activity" by "insisting more on . . . meditation" impossible for him.

[12] Daniel Harris suggests that Hopkins' "crisis of perception" took on a form which Ruskin had previously defined. That is, he confused the proper mode of seeing, through the "'penetrative imagination'" into "'the heart and inner nature . . . of outer detail'" with "'pathetic fallacy,'" caused "'by an excited state of feelings' in which the perceiver attributes to the things of nature his own emotions and, in indulging in such a proud, usurpative egotism, distorts 'the signature of God upon his works.'" See 26-7.

[13] Various causes have been attributed to the crisis Gerard Manley Hopkins experienced during his last years in Ireland. Perhaps the most familiar is the priest-in-conflict-with-the-poet theory. Hopkins' nationalism, and his sensitivity to the political situation in Ireland, has also been cited. Some critics have noted that the teaching and examining duties to which Hopkins was assigned at University College were the merest drudgery, and that Hopkins was not fit for such tasks. Still others have seen him in conflict theologically with his own order, in his stubborn adherence to Duns Scotus' philosophy as opposed to the Jesuit's official philosopher,

Aquinas. Others have inquired into his inability to complete anything at all in Ireland-- that is, not only to compose poetry but also to get along any further in the scholastic and critical works he planned to write. Weak bodily health during this period has also been seen as a cause for the increase in Hopkins' melancholia during this period. Finally, some critics hold that Hopkins' primary aesthetic interest in his last years was musical rather than poetic, and have argued that his creative powers were not so much balked as re-directed.

[14] Daniel Harris contends that the sonnet form in the Nature Sonnets was shaped by the Ignatian Meditative Pattern of 1) composition of place--the imaginative actualizing of the persons of the Gospel as if they were real; 2) moral analysis--the discovery of one's proper action within the scene so composed; and 3) colloquy--the willed movement of the soul to God (87-88). Harris' thesis is that the Terrible Sonnets "deviate sharply from the patterns of meditation that Hopkins had derived largely from St. Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and that he had previously meshed with the sonnet to create his primary poetic form . . . all the poems detail his speaker's failure to achieve the climactic and redemptive colloquy with Christ which, he knew, Ignatius and others had stipulated should conclude each meditative exercise" (4).

[15] Daniel Harris asserts that Hopkins' "modes of naturalistic observation had been fixed and well-developed for years -- as the *Journal* entries between, say, 1864 and 1871 make plain -- before Hopkins subsumed them to a Christian theology specifically focussed on the Incarnation. Hopkins's crisis, that is, shows simultaneously the tremendous urgency of the need he felt in the early 1870s to give his delight in empirical observation a systematic, transcendental basis, and the substantial risks he took in doing so, as the aftermath of that effort in the 'terrible sonnets' testifies. When he made his habits of perception depend upon a supernatural validation, he made them vulnerable, subject to damage *if* the metaphysic itself underwent stress" (35). Harris here equates Hopkins' Incarnationist perception with his discovery of Duns Scotus in 1872. However, as I have argued in this chapter, Hopkins' conversion to Catholicism, predicated on a faith in the Real Presence, and perhaps also by a fear of "the loss of the old unity of belief," was already influencing his thought and his incarnational mode of perception as early as the Parmenides essay of 1868.

[16] Hopkins' poem has as its subject the Latin hymn *Dies irae*: "'As David and the Sibyl testify . . . what terror shall affright the soul when the

judge comes . . .'" (Gardner's note *P* 284). The Jesuit order considers the Sibyl "an acceptable topic for prelections" (Heuser 114).

[17] Hopkins opposes materialism, the afternoon of thought, to idealism, which he likens to "the freshness and strain of thoughts in the morning. . ." (*J* 119).

Chapter Two

"The times are nightfall": The Imagery of Slack in the Terrible Sonnets

The imagination is employed to realize truth, not error, but under its own imagery, without which . . . truth cannot be reached (*S* 179).

At the end of 1884, or the beginning of 1885, Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote the following unfinished sonnet, apparently a first sketch for "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves":[1]

> The times are nightfall, look, their light grows less;
> The times are winter, watch, a world undone:
> They waste, they wither worse; they as they run
> Or bring more or more blazon man's distress.
> And I not help. Nor word now of success:
> All is from wreck, here, there, to rescue one--
> Work which to see scarce so much as begun
> Makes welcome death, does dear forgetfulness.
>
> Or what is else? There is your world within.
> There rid the dragons, root out there the sin.
> Your will is law in that small commonweal. . . (*P* No. 150).

This fragment contains Hopkins' only use of the imperative "look" in all poems written during 1885; in the Nature Sonnets, the command "to look" is a distinctive feature of the poetic vision expressed in them.[2] James Finn Cotter's research into the etymology of inscape has shown that the

Greek-Latin *scopos-us* (18) is likely an originating root for Hopkins' coinage, and that "look" and "mark" are root equivalents used to express the experience of inscape in Hopkins' vocabulary (20).[3] In the Nature Sonnets of 1877, the command to "look" into the night sky reveals to the instressing observer the presence of "Christ and his mother and all his hallows" (*P* No. 32) in the stars. The night sky looked at in 1885, however, reveals not immanent presence and unifying order giving meaning to the beauty of creation, but rather the absence of light, the disorder and wreck of "a world undone" which is not an emblem of salvation and resurrection, but an emblem of sin and death.

The Terrible Sonnets of 1885 are located in this impregnable darkness. In his Parmenides essay, Hopkins equates Not-being with "'unmeaning (ὀμίχλη) night, thick and wedged body'" (*J* 130), which hides meaning and obscures knowing by its mantling of perceptible forms.[4] In Hopkins' epistemology, knowledge and truth are obtained through visual apprehension, for "out of sight is out of mind" (*P* No. 40),[5] whereas "by seeing and looking, the poet knows his Lord as maker and redeemer; he hits the mark" (Cotter 263). As early as 1872, when he was still "flush" with the discovery of Duns Scotus, Hopkins "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* 221; my italics).[6] However, in 1885, "the times are nightfall" for Hopkins; he no longer has "eyes to see" and "call out" inscapes everywhere again. Immanence in creation lies buried under "the fell of dark, not day" for him because in his altered mode of perception he is not able, by the activity of instress, to uphold the unity of individuated forms in both sidings of their Being. He looks, not at the Logos uttered in created forms, but at the "world within" where the incarnate Word is not only unseen, but where the reciprocal human word is also "heard unheeded" (*P* No. 66).

The experience of slack in Hopkins' life at this time is not only accompanied by a change in his mode of perception, but is also expressed by a change in his poetics. Hopkins' early mature work expresses the univocity of perception which could affirm "that is Christ *being me* and me being Christ" (*S* 154) through the use of visual imagery which carried the meaning of the Incarnation in each image of nature. However, this immanental vision is altered in his last years, so that perception becomes a revelation of fragmentation rather than of integration. The faculty of sight -- once the source and expression of Hopkins' faith and joy -- becomes a fearful and painful sensation, an abhorrent experience to be avoided. The Terrible Sonnets of 1885 express the anguish that this change in perception brought

to Hopkins: "As the radical decrease in frequency and potency of visual images indicates, the speaker undergoes a suppression of sight, the faculty which Western philosophical and religious traditions have since the Renaissance venerated above all others" (Harris 59-60). If Nature could no longer be seen as an emblem of the Incarnation, the link between the real and the unreal that was the basis for Hopkins' immanental vision was lost to him. It is the anguish of this loss that causes the poet to avert his eyes from the created forms of the natural world. The predominantly visual imagery that distinguishes the Nature Sonnets of 1877 is curtailed to a total of seven images in the six poems of the Terrible Sonnets group (Harris, 19).[7] In order to put this drastic reduction into perspective, we might note that one of the Nature Sonnets, "The Starlight Night" (*P* No. 32), has fourteen visual images in its fourteen lines alone; ten of these are drawn from nature. The jettisoning of visual and natural images[8] from the Terrible Sonnets is an indication of the degree to which sight is averted by Hopkins at this stage in his life. Visual perception is no longer a means to the truth: where he saw unity and meaning in created forms, he now sees fragmentation and chaos. This suspension of the faculty of sight is like the blotting out of light with the darkness of night. In this darkness, "Not-being" overwhelms "Being," and the eye cannot perceive the inscape

that should be "the proportion of the mixture" (*J*130). In the nightfall world of the Terrible Sonnets, there appears to be no light that by "its being puts blissful back /. . . night's blear-all black" (*P* No. 46) for the isolated and introverted observer.

The effect of this altered way of seeing and knowing the phenomenal world, and the spiritual implications of this perceptive mode, are apparent in Hopkins' use of imagery. The imagery of slack in the Terrible Sonnets of 1885 is distinct from the imagery of stress in the Nature Sonnets of 1877 in kind, frequency, and function. The subject of such early sonnets as "God's Grandeur" (*P* No. 31), "The Starlight Night" (*P* No. 32), "Spring" (*P* No. 33), "The Windhover" (*P* No. 36), and "The Lantern Out of Doors" (*P* No. 40) is developed emotionally and associationally by the use of cumulative, predominantly visual, imagery. This imagery is in general distributed evenly over both sonnet sections, but its function changes. In the octave, the concrete natural imagery celebrates the inscape of individuated things in the phenomenal world which the observer, through the dynamic activity of sight, instresses in order to uphold. In the sestet, the imagery tends to be less visual, but still concrete and natural, as the meaning and purpose of the instressed inscapes are apprehended. The octave, then, celebrates the existence of inscape in the world, and the sestet is a heaven-directed praise

and explication of the spiritual significance of that visual apprehension. Simply put, the sestets of these sonnets celebrate the operation of stress in the world, the divinity toward which both inscape and instress point. In both octave and sestet, it is the ability of the observer/participant to instress the unity of creation which flushes the imagery with meaning. In the octave, the movement of this instress is the horizontal "bridge" which unites the seer and the seen; in the sestet, this instress is transcended into the vertical stem of stress between the created world and God.

In the incarnational vision expressed in the Nature Sonnets of 1877, the imagery literally *embodies* the meaning.[9] However, in the Terrible Sonnets of 1885, the expression is more discursive, more highly charged with intellectual tension and paradox. The imagery of these sonnets does not express the instressing connection that unites diverse phenomena into divine meaning, but rather expresses the absence of such connection, the isolation and fragmentation of the alienated self with neither bridge nor stem to relate its parts to a whole, to give it meaning and purpose. Each image in these sonnets becomes an objective correlative for the speaker's psychic and spiritual experience (Mackenzie, *A Reader's Guide* 176), and because the imagery is used more sparingly than it is in the cumulative technique of the earlier sonnets, each image carries a great deal of force in

the midst of the relatively plain verse.

Not only is the frequency of images in the Terrible Sonnets greatly reduced from that in the Nature Sonnets, but the distribution of the imagery over octave and sestet is also distinctly altered. Whereas the earlier sonnets tend to have an equal distribution of imagery over octave and sestet, in the more abstract and discursive Terrible Sonnets, the sparse imagery contributes to the structural, as well as to the conceptual, tension of the poetry. The two-part structure of octave and sestet is usually counterpointed by a heavier packing of images in the mid-section of each sonnet, in an attempt to make the volta of each poem more powerful. By poising the asymmetrical balance of octave and sestet on a dynamic circumference of images around the central volta, Hopkins retains the mystery of "the cipher 14" which, he proves mathematically to Canon Dixon, resolves the inequality of 8 + 6 by its hidden but essential equality of 2 x 7. The equation he works out for the best sonnet is "(4 + 4) + (3 + 3) = 2.4 + 2.3 = 2(4 + 3) = 2.7 = 14" (*L*2 71). In the Terrible Sonnets, the tension between asymmetry and symmetry in the balancing of part to part in the sonnet form is created by the distribution of the imagery. But the new system of imagery which ought to initiate the emotional or conceptual turn at the ninth line is frequently not distinct enough to perform that function. The

quantitative rush of imagery initiated in the second quatrain is not altered, but is rather continued into the first tercet. The effect of this heavy mid-section is to create a new tension in the sonnet form itself, peculiarly well-suited to the balanced oppositions with which Hopkins works in the Terrible Sonnets. By means of this careful distribution of imagery, Hopkins also avoids one of the problems inherent in the Petrarchan Sonnet form he employs: the lack of appropriate density in the octave, resulting from the second quatrain merely repeating or reprojecting the first quatrain, rather than advancing or complicating it (Fussell 124). However, the centring of images over the last quatrain and first tercet can confound the turn which ought to be effected by a change in imagery at the ninth line.

Perhaps the best example of this typically heavier use of imagery in the mid-section of the Terrible Sonnets is "Carrion Comfort" (*P* No. 64). The initial quatrain, in which the subject is projected, is argumentative and paradoxical; the tension is focused on the logical opposition of "not" and "can" between the first two and last two lines. Rather than embodying the argument, the images of this quatrain -- the feasting and the untwisting -- serve to modify the focal "not" of the initiating lines. The effect is to stress the overall negativity of the quatrain in which the opposition, "can," is given no parallel concrete expression, but remains abstract: "Can

something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be." In the second quatrain, the use of imagery increases. Here the occasion for the suicidal despair projected in the opening lines is expresed in images which describe the speaker's relation to God, but the pain of experiencing God's stress on his being can generate no answering instress in the speaker. The reduction of the speaker to ununified parts introduced in the image of the "last strands of man" is repeated in the second quatrain in the image of "bruisèd bones" and continues into the small, helpless image of "heaped" in the eighth line. God himself is described in synecdochic epithets that express the speaker's partial apprehension of him through the sensation of touch, rather than the unitive apprehension of him through the immanental vision of sight. The speaker feels God's "wring-world right foot," his "lionlimb," his "darksome devouring eyes," and his "tempest." The first quatrain, through the tension between "not" and "can," expresses the speaker's suspension beween "downright 'No or Yes'" (*P* No. 41); the second quatrain, which contains four interrogatives, questions the meaning and experience of "I AM" in the world, when "is" can neither be affirmed nor denied. "Thou terrible" is an identification of God, but an abstract, not an incarnational one.

The first tercet attempts to reconcile the first quatrain's paradoxical suspension and to answer the second quatrain's interrogatives by reworking

positively the images of the octave.[10] The increase in imagery in the second quatrain is continued through the volta initiated by the "Why?" of the ninth line, and is balanced by a similar increase in the tercet. The image of the tempest fanning him "heaped there" is recast in the purgatorial image of man being threshed by God: "Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear." Similarly, "that coil" in the following line recalls "these last strands of man / In me" which the speaker refuses to "untwist" in the opening lines of the sonnet. The tension inherent in the image of a coil, however, is immediately released by the outstretched images (rod and hand) which follow it, and the transition is eased emotionally by moving from the harsh "rod" of discipline which the speaker kissed in fear, to the warmer "hand" kissed in love. The loving contact with God's more human "hand" also reworks the animal imagery that expresses the fearful contact with God's power in the octave. Finally, the feasting imagery of the octave is reworked positively by the image "lapped strength." This image is an oblique Biblical allusion to Gideon, whom God nurtured at a time when he complained of being forsaken. The use of this analogue demonstrates that, although the speaker may, like Gideon, feel abandoned by God, he is nonetheless one of the priesthood which has been elected in the work of salvation, for it was the three hundred men who lapped who were appointed by God to save the chosen

race (Judges VII: vii).

However, the tension initiated by the not/can paradox and by the unknowing interrogation of the octave is not, in fact, resolved by the turn at the beginning of the sestet, or by the attempt to recast the early images of negation and fragmentation into images of affirmation and purpose in the last lines of the sonnet. The structure of the poem is organized around the the climactic centre of increased imagery in the final quatrain and first tercet, but the asymmetrical sonnet form is in fact not balanced on this central pivot. The sestet has not one, but *two* voltas. The turn initiated in the ninth line by "Why?" does not bring about resolution. Another question -- "Cheer whom though?" -- initiates another turn in the final tercet, whose five interrogatives over-balance the four interrogatives of the second quatrain and confound the resolution of the entire sonnet. The second turn suspends the affirmation of "cheer" at the end of the first tercet by the equivocal "Cheer whom though?" at the beginning of the last tercet. The ambiguity of whom is cheered creates a tension not unlike that between "not" and "can" in the first quatrain, and is similarly expressed by two tactile images. God remains the "hero whose heaven-handling flung" and whose "fóot tród" the speaker with his "wring-world right foot" and his "lionlimb"; but the speaker is also the hero who "lay wrestling with (my

God!) my God." In this image, the speaker instresses *himself*, would say "yes" to "I," not to "I AM." As David Downes has suggested, "Carrion Comfort" "is Hopkins' Lucifer poem" (*Great Sacrifice* 108). The function of imagery in this sonnet is not to utter the Logos, but to sing the single note of the self in its extremeties of abject pain and triumphant power.

Hopkins' incarnational vision by which he could see Christ transfigured in created forms was predicated on sight. In the transcendent activity of sight, not only did the Real Presence take on the flesh of earthly forms, but the observer/participant who was able to instress that inscape could become a communicant at earth's altar, where Christ's Incarnation was daily celebrated. As David Downes puts it, "the deepest 'inscape' in things is Divine Presence" (*Sanctifying Imagination* 1). In perceiving the inscapes of created forms in the beauties of nature, Hopkins could "greet him [Christ] the days I meet him, and bless when I understand" (*P* No. 28 I:5). But the perception of such a "beatific landscape" requires the eyes of faith (*Great Sacrifice* 100). Without the psychic and spiritual ability to be "in this mood" (*J* 127), the poet could not sustain his immanental vision. The opposite of Hopkins' sacramentalized landscape, as Margaret R. Ellsberg has astutely noted, is "entropy and dissociation,"[11] the slackening of energy and will and its concomitant experience of isolation and fragmentation. The

reality of inscapes in the phenomenal world lies buried for those who cannot instress them: "their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matt. 13:15). This healing grace is withheld from the "blind eyes" (*P* No. 69) of the speaker in the Terrible Sonnets. The "night" that "whelms, whelms, and will end us" (*P* No. 61) that initiates the state of slack expressed in these poems obscures sight and inverts the extroversion of vision celebrated in the Nature Sonnets to the introversion of the senses by which one primarily identifies the self's "world within": hearing, tasting, and touching.

The imagery of slack in the Terrible Sonnets is thus differentiated from the imagery of stress in the Nature Sonnets primarily in terms of the senses employed in image-making, and this differentiation is based on an altered perceptive mode. Critics such as Peters (18-19) and Cochran ("Instress" 173-4) have rightly noted that instress is the source of imagery for Hopkins. Instress provides the grounds for comparison by which two like and unlike things can fully participate in each other's being while still maintaining their individual essences, just as the Incarnate Christ "is in every sense God and in every sense man" (*J* 188). Hopkins' "ecstasy of interest" in this "equation in theology," this "locked and inseparable

combination" (*J* / 187,188), is the source of his imagery in his early mature poetry. Metaphor in these poems is not implied comparison, but equation which expresses immanence: "Hopkins' view of the Incarnation permits no comparison of terms, no transformation of one term into the other; it insists that both terms -- God and man -- are absolutely and simultaneously real, and that the copula between them is literal metaphysical truth" (Harris 44). In such metaphoric equation, not only are tenor and vehicle the same (Harris 45), but the observer himself, the *scop*, the image-maker also participates in the source of that identity -- the figure of Christ. Hence, the "true instress" of nature: "What you look hard at seems to look hard at you" (*J* 204).

However, Hopkins' preference for metaphor over simile, that is, for identity over comparison (Boyle xii) in his early poetry undergoes a change in his later poetry, and specifically in the Terrible Sonnets under consideration here. In the Parmenides essay, Hopkins noted how without the "stem of stress between us and things to bear us out and carry the mind over. . . the copula would break down (*J* 127). The breaking down of the copula "is" in the equation of identity formed in Hopkins' immanental imagery is evident in the imagery of slack in the Terible Sonnets.[12] In these poems, as Daniel Harris has observed, the structure of metaphor itself

is at variance with Hopkins' earlier work (19); metaphor becomes an expression of implied comparison rather than identity, and simile, rarely used in Hopkins' earlier work, becomes incorporated more frequently.[13] In this way, the emphatic statement of identity in "Hurrahing in Harvest" -- "And the azurous hung hills *are* his world-wielding shoulder" (*P* No. 38; my italics) -- is compressed into a synecdochical implied comparison, which abstracts qualities rather than expresses essential equation, in "Carrion Comfort": "Why wouldst thou rude on me / Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me?" (*P* No. 64). Moreover, metaphoric equation in the Terrible Sonnets group, when it does occur, tends not to express the identity of the godhead in creation, but rather to unite God with abstractions, such as "He is patient" (*P* No. 68), or "Thou terrible" (*P* No. 64). The breaking down of the equation predicated by the copula (or its equivalent) is perhaps most powerfully expressed in these poems by the absence of the subject from the equation, such as in the elliptical "comfort [*he*] serves in a whirlwind" (*P* No. 65), or in the even more grammatically ambiguous "as skies / Betweenpie mountains-- [*his smile*] lights a lovely mile" (*P* No. 69). Finally, the distance between the speaker and God is suggested by the underlying implications in the use of simile which, as Robert Boyle suggests, "is the expression of the detached mind observing

and comparing beings" (175). But the detached mind initiating comparisons in the Terrible Sonnets does not work from empirical observation of the phenomenal world. Far from encountering his God face to face in the dappled beauty of the world, the speaker of these sonnets encounters self, not God. The comparison in "I wake and feel the fell of dark," for example, implies that this intense selving is neither heard nor seen: "And my lament / Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent / To dearest him that lives alas! away" (*P* No. 67).

The imagery of slack describes this world of self in isolation, in which the stress of God's sustaining pressure is not felt, and in which the reciprocal instress of man's will can neither uphold inscapes in nature, nor acknowledge and assent to God's activating stress on the self. The self knows itself by its taste, by its smell, and by its touch. It does not know itself by sight; sight tells the self principally of the external world. In Hopkins' epistemology, knowledge is obtained through sight. By ironically elevating the baser senses in the Terrible Sonnets (Harris 60), Hopkins demonstrates his declining ability to see and to know Christ in the world. In his "Meditation on Hell," Hopkins gives a hierarchy of the senses by which man experiences hell. Whereas sight can give the keenest experience of Christ's immanence on earth, sight is the least able to convey the full

horrors of hell:

> Sight does not shock like hearing, sounds cannot so disgust as smell, smell is not so bitter as proper bitterness, which is in taste. . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> And still bitterness of taste is not so cruel as the pain that can be touched and felt. Seeing is believing but touch is the truth, as the saying goes (*S* 243).

This reversal of the traditional hierarchy of the senses is also found in the Terrible Sonnets, in which the baser senses of sound, taste, and touch predominate.[14] The devaluing of the sensation of sight, and the privileging of the other senses, was seen by Hopkins "not only as a mortification but as the progressive curtailment of human cognition" (Harris 62). When barred from sight, Hopkins was barred from the presence of Christ in the world, and his experience was reduced to the agonizing and inescapable presence of self.

At the beginning of his "Meditation on Hell," Hopkins states that "the great evil of hell" is "the loss of God" (*S* 241). It is the feeling of isolation and separation from God which is "the great evil" expressed in the Terrible Sonnets, and underlying this great evil is Hopkins' own awareness that in this hell he experiences in life, like the eternal Hell, "we are our own tormentors" (*S* 241) and so he asks that he might "not live this tormented mind / With this tormented mind tormenting yet" (*P* 69). Yet in the poem just quoted, Hopkins makes this request of "My own Heart," not of God; and in

this we see how his dark sonnets express the "evening of thought," in which the personality is atomized (*J* 121). The extroversion of vision which was the enabling force of Hopkins' immanental imagery, and allowed for tenor and vehicle to participate in each other's being, becomes reduced, in the Terrible Sonnets, to the introversion of the senses by which only the self is felt and known, and the self is that "which nothing in the world can match" (*S* 125). It follows then that if the self is the basis for image-making, metaphoric identity cannot exist; metaphor can only be a comparison which says "other" is *something* like myself, but I cannot know the degrees of likeness and unlikeness because there is nothing in the world that matches my sense of self. As Hopkins said, "But to me there is no resemblance: searching nature I taste *self* but at one tankard, that of my own being. The development, refinement, condensation of nothing shews any sign of being able to match this to me or give me another taste of it, a taste even resembling it" (*S* 123). It is for this reason that the metaphors in the Terrible Sonnets "all lead back to the self" (Ong 146). The imagery of slack conveys, through comparison rather than identity, through the experience of self rather than the observation of and participation in the godhead uttered in creation, the exquisite torture of the self separated from God which is apprehended through the isolating senses of sound, taste, and touch.

The image of the incarnate Logos uttered in creation is, of course, both visual and aural. In his "'Notes on the history of Greek Philosophy etc.,'" written in his Notebook in February 1868 immediately before the Parmenides essay, Hopkins deals with the notion of word as follows: "For the word is the expression, *uttering* of the idea in the mind. That idea itself has its two terms, the image (of sight or sound or *scapes* of the other senses) . . . a word to oneself, an inchoate word, and secondly the conception" (*J* 125). The "image" which orginally utters the idea in the mind, then, is principally of sight or sound, although the other senses too may express it. In the absence of visual images in the Terrible Sonnets, Hopkins employs the sound -siding of the image to express the inchoation of his experience of self, not world. In his commentary on "The First Principle and Foundation" (1882), Hopkins writes that "part of this world of objects, this object-world, is also part of the very self in question. . . . A self then will consist of a centre *and* a belonging field . . ." (*S* 127). However, in the state of slack expressed in the Terrible Sonnets, the "object world" -- the "belonging field" which co-inheres in the self -- is interiorized to the point that the circumference collapses into the centre in a spiralling action, in which motion seems to be "lessening and at last ceasing" (*S* 198). The high-pitched agony of sound winding down into deadly silence in the Terrible

Sonnets enters the self by the ear which is itself a whorled aperture.[15] In this interior world, the word uttered and heard is not the incarnate Logos, but the cries of the self in torment and isolation.

Perhaps the most powerful expression of the self experiencing "the great evil" of separation from God uttered in the aural imagery of these poems may be found in the octave of "No worst, there is none," thought by some critics[16] to be the sonnet "written in blood" of which Hopkins wrote to Robert Bridges in 1885 (*L* I 219). The argument of the octave is governed by images of sound, but in each case the image incorporates a tactile sense as well. In the sestet, the imagery reverts to tactile images alone, but this change in imagery initiates neither emotional nor logical turn in the argument:

> No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
> More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
> Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
> Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
> My cries heave, herds-long, huddle in a main, a chief-
> woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing--
> Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No ling-
> ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief'.
> O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
> Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
> May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
> Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
> Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
> Life death does end and each day dies with sleep. (*P* No. 65)

In the opening image, "Pitched past pitch of grief," Hopkins directs the

synaesthesia of sound and touch to an unbearable pitch. "Pitch" may be understood as the highest point to which "O the mind, mind has mountains" refers later in the sestet. The "steep or deep" of those mountains also refers back to "pitch" in the sense of "a steep place, declivity; a descent, usually sloping, sometimes perpendicular." But "pitch" also evokes the notion of musical sound, produced by a comparative rapidity of vibrations. A violin string, for example, is tuned to a pitch by tightening or loosening it, thereby increasing or decreasing its vibrations of sound.[17] A string which is overly tightened, or pitched past its pitch, will snap. The implied metallic snap of this image is associationally linked with the image of the anvil in the second quatrain, on which the beaten metal "wince[s] and sing[s]." The "pangs" of the initial quatrain which are "disciplined, brought under control, corrected" by virtue of being "*schooled* at forepangs" (my italics) will "wilder wring" when so pitched. The coinage "forepangs" suggests pangs anterior in time to the "more pangs," although the prefix *fore-* also bears with it a localizing sense, bringing the "forepangs" into a front or foremost position relative to the "more pangs." In either case, the "forepangs" suggest some kind of originating "pang" or spasm of pain which onomatopoetically also expresses the sound of the snapped string of the violin, now hanging loose, which "wilder wrings" just before the accelerated

vibrations cease. Spoken orally, the poem incorporates the homophone "ring" in the utterance of "wring," and this aural association develops further the auditory imagery of the octave.

Since "pitch" is also a very precise term in Hopkins' vocabulary of the self, these originating "forepangs," linked by rhyming to "more pangs," warrant examination. In his writing "On Personality, Grace and Free Will," Hopkins notes "the truth [that] . . . though the self, as personality, is prior to nature, it is not prior to pitch" (*S* 148) -- that is, pitch is an aspect of self anterior both to its objective nature and to its subjective personality. Hopkins equates "pitch" with "Scotus's *ecceitas*" [18] (or "thisness"), that is, with "simple positiveness, that by which being differs from and is more than nothing and not-being . . . (It is also at bottom the copula in logic . . .)" (*S* 151). "Pitch," then, is closely related to Being and to Stress which make possible the "is" of existence. But it is also identified with instress, which moves the will to its proper purpose and end. Hopkins asserts that this "pitch" of self is that to which nothing is prior except God, so that "like everything, [pitch is] subject to God's will and could be pitched, could be determined this way or that" (*S* 148), that is, *could* be pitched by God, but is given freedom to pitch itself to God's will. Therefore pitch in man "is identified with . . . moral pitch, determination of right and wrong. And so

far, it has its possibility, as it will have its existence, from God, but not so that God makes pitch no pitch, determination no determination, and difference indifference" (*S* 148). In this way, the possibility inherent in pitch (that is, the self's capacity to instress objects of choice) allows for the operation of free will, "of consent or refusal as the case may be" (*S* 149). Hopkins' final consideration of the nature of freedom and will is as follows: "freedom of pitch, that is / self-determination, is in the chooser himself and his choosing faculty; freedom of play is in the execution; freedom of field is in the object, the field of choice" (*S* 149).

The notion of freedom of pitch and freedom of play in particular is important in this consideration of the image "Pitched past pitch of grief, / More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring." An examination of the grammatical construction of these lines foregrounds the question of self-determination and of free execution. The bare sentence of this statement is "Pangs will wring." "Pitched past pitch of grief" and "schooled at forepangs" are participial phrases placed in a modifying capacity to the subject, "pangs." But the phrases are built on verbals, so that two implied actions or activites, and two times, operate on the "pangs." "Past," like "fore," expresses location and time. Both before and after, and there and here, are in this way expressed in the chimings of "more pangs" and

"forepangs." The "forepangs" suggest an anteriority in time and a privileged location to the "more pangs" whom the corrective schooling or discipline has not brought under control, but has pitched to a time and a place beyond the proper pitch which ought to be that aspect of the self's determination which allows it freedom of play, execution and object. But in Hopkins' discussion of pitch, he asserts that nothing is prior to pitch but God. The "forepangs," then, may perhaps be identified with some supernatural agency which is there, not here, and which antedates this present pain. According to Hopkins, there is "a scale or range of pitch which is also infinite and terminates upwards in the directness or uprightness of the 'stem' of the godhead and the procession of the divine persons" (*S* 148). The notion of being "pitched past pitch" suggests that the self has somehow been thrown off the track of this ascending vertical stem.

Though the subject, "pangs," has its quality described by the participial phrase "pitched past pitch of grief," the verbal weight of this modifier implies another, unknown, subject. Who or what is the agent doing the pitching? The shriek of the personified "Fury" dominates the high-pitched note of the entire octave; it "had shrieked 'No ling-/ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief.'" Since "pangs" are "brief spasms of pain," Fury's short intensity seems to be linked both to the subject "pangs" and to its quality,

"pitched," so that "Fury" may be seen as an inferential agent of the "pitched" action expressed in the participial phrase. Fury may be defined as "a fierce passion, disorder or tumult of mind approaching madness," and it is this mental disorder which perhaps pitches the speaker beyond the pitch proper to himself. However, "Fury" is also linked to the second modifying phrase, "schooled at forepangs," for the use of the verbal here incorporates some sense of chastisement or punishment. Since Fury is personified, the image also suggests one of the Furies of classical mythology, the dread goddesses sent to punish crimes, although the less specific meaning -- "an avenging or tormenting infernal spirit" -- may also be applicable. In this way, the mental torment of the speaker is associated with a demonic or supernatural agency which throws the stress of the self off its track toward its proper end, which is the correspondence of the creature to the creator (*S* 154).

Hopkins associates the coil or spiral with the Devil and death because of the metaphoric implications of the snake or serpent as symbol of the Devil, "I suppose because of its 'swale' or subtle and imperceptible drawing in towards its head or centre. . ." (*S* 198-9). Since the Fury of classical mythology had writhing snakes for hair, the Fury of Sonnet 65 may be an analogical type of "the Devil, that is / thrower of things off the track, upsetter, mischiefmaker. . ." (*S* 199). However, the primary task of the

Furies was to punish sinners. "Fury," then, may be a type for both Christ *and* Devil. The identity-in-opposition of Christ and Devil, Heaven and Hell, exerts equal counter pressures on the speaker of the Terrible Sonnets, and stalls both his action and his voice in a state of slack. At the pitch beyond pitch described in Sonnet 65, the self does not respond to the stress of God to "fling out broad its name" (*P* No. 57) and in so doing utter the Logos. Rather, the pitch is self-stressed; the high pitch of sound brought to breaking point in the octave "wilder *wring[s]*" (my italics) under the pain of being thrown off the track of the vertical stem of grace. "Wring," especially in association with "pang," carries with it the meaning "to twist, turn, or struggle in pain or anguish." The notes sung by the speaker of this sonnet, then, like the notes of Lucifer's song, raise "a counterpoint of dissonance and not of harmony" (*S* 201), for the music twists and turns from the proper pitch sung by "the angel choir" (*S* 200) into the spiral that "is a type of the devil" (*S* 198) which negates the instressing of the will to God's in the proper pitch of self. There is "no worst" than this. The emphatic double negative incorporated with the superlative form of "bad" eliminates the possibility that hell may be a "greater evil" than this state of slack in which the Comforter's presence and consoling action are absent, and in which the intensity of the experience disables the speaker from either the consent or

the refusal fundamental to Hopkins' notion of pitch.

The cries of the lost in hell initiate the second quatrain of this sonnet. Here the notion of individual self is abandoned. As in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," unique identity is lost in the mass of bodies linked by the dissevering association of sin, rather than by the unifying association of grace: "all [is] throughther, in throngs; / self in self steeped and pashed -- quite / Disremembering, dismembering / all now" (*P* No. 61). In the second quatrain of Sonnet 65, the cries are animalized; like unidifferentiated beasts, they "heave, herds-long, huddle in a main, a chief-/ woe, world-sorrow." Since "fury" is frequently applied to beasts (especially Biblically, as in "the fury of beasts"), the animalized cries become linked with Fury's shriek on an even higher level of intensity. But the cries are also beaten "on an age-old anvil" -- perhaps a reference to the "forepangs" of the first quatrain -- where they "wince and sing." "Cries" thus becomes a synecdochic image for the speaker of the poem who is, like the souls in hell, a bodiless voice: "Neither do they [the lost in hell] cry with throat and tongue, they have none, but their wailing is an utterance that passes in their woeful thoughts. Nevertheless spirits as they are, they hear and understand each other and add to each other's woe" (*S* 242). The image of the speaker as "cries" suggests that it is his "word" that is being forged on the anvil.

The completed image, "on an age-old anvil wince and sing-- / Then lull, then leave off," further suggests that the word which utters his pitch of self is recalcitrant. In "Wreck of the Deutschland," Hopkins asks God to

> With an anvil-ding
> And with fire in him forge thy will
> Or rather, rather then, stealing as Spring
> Through him, melt him but master him still.
> (*P* No. 28 I:10)

However, on the anvil of Sonnet 65, the poet's word and will are *not* mastered; he does not instress his will toward God's, but rather ceases his utterance, "lull[s], then leave[s] off." The spiralling motion of decreasing sound initiated by "wring" is completed at the end of the octave when the vibrations of sound suggested by "pitch" at last cease. James Finn Cotter's work on Hopkins' theology is helpful here. He notes that "for Hopkins, inaction and deadly silence issue from this demonic presence [i.e., the spiral shape], just as motion and music spring from the Word of life. One lessens and dies, while the other 'rings right out'" (275).

The inaction and deadly silence that exist in the state of slack make the auditory imagery of the Terrible Sonnets group express the inarticulate word of the poet, rather than the Incarnate Word of God. "To seem the stranger" not only lacks a single visual image to utter "the idea in the mind" (*J* 125), but the sound-aspect of that image, and of that utterance, is also

rendered voiceless. The sonnet concludes

> 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. (*P* No. 66)

The wisest word bred in the speaker's heart is not heard, or if heard, is unheeded; voice as communication of self, or word as utterance of pitch, is rendered ineffectual. The stalling or suspension of the creative word in the speaker's heart is effected by two opposing negations, and the language used to describe these contrary forces is nearly synonymous. Both "dark heaven's baffling ban / Bars" the word from coming forth out of the poet's heart, and "hell's spell thwarts" it. "Ban" has the denotation "sentence of banishment" which may be equated with the "sentence of outlawry" incorporated in the term "spell." At the same time that heaven's ban keeps the speaker out of the precincts of the Kingdom, hell's spell identifies him as an outlaw outside the environs of the Inferno. "Spell" is also "a curse having supernatural sanction," whereas "ban" can mean "to curse, anathematize, interdict, imprecate damnation." Between the contrary forces of the curse of hell and the curse of heaven, the speaker's word is immobilized. The paradox of this identity of heaven and hell lies in the ambiguous nature of "word" itself. If the poet's "word" can utter only "an instressing of his own

inscape" (*S* 201), he is damned like Lucifer, banished from the kingdom of God. On the other hand, "hell's spell" -- thought of now under its meaning of "enchantment or trick" -- thwarts his ability to utter the Incarnate Word, to sing out the Logos in the world. "Hell's spell" is Lucifer's song, the "incantation . . . [by which] others were drawn in . . . by which they were dizzied, dazzled, and bewitched . . . [and] would not listen to the note which summoned each to his own place" (*S* 201). Caught between the opposing forces of heaven and hell, the poet's word lies suspended, silent and motionless in the slack in which his "creating thought" (l. 7) "breeds" without issue.

The "word" of a poet, however, is both utterance and text, and the aural and graphic representations of the speaker's incommunicative silence are expressed in the auditory imagery of "I wake and feel the fell of dark." Here the "cries" that "lull, then leave off" in "No worst, there is none" do not cease, but rather, like the "word" of "To seem the stranger," are reiterated without effect:

> And my lament
> Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
> To dearest him that lives alas! away. (*P* No. 67)

In the experience of "unmeaning night" expressed in this sonnet, "longer light's delay" becomes a metonymn for the sun/son "that lives alas! away,"

whose being is not uttered in the beauty of individuated creation because "the belonging field" of the exterior world has been blotted out. The speaker of the sonnet thus remains an isolated subject whose object (Christ) can neither be seen as Word nor spoken to with word. The implication of the simile "cries like dead letters" is that the word is stalled somehow between sender and recipient; perhaps it may not be too far-fetched to posit that the receiver's address itself is no longer known.[19] In any case, the desire of the will suggested by the movement of letters up to Christ is reciprocated by no returning stem of stress from the divinity, and so the instressing movement falls back upon itself, remains silent and effectually motionless.

Hopkins' "cries like dead letters," then, fall on deaf ears. This sense is repeated in the auditory image expressed in "Patience": "We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills / To bruise them dearer" (*P* No. 68). This image is also found in Hopkins' instruction on "The Principle or Foundation," in which he shows that man's sins have rendered discordant what was intended to be harmonious: though we are "his singing bird. . . we will not learn to sing"; though we are "his pipe or harp. . . we are out of tune, we grate upon his ear" (*S* 240). The possibility for harmony, for learning to sing or learning to be in tune, is initiated by repentance and consummated by fulfilling "the end of our being" which is "TO GIVE GOD GLORY" (*S* 240). In

the instruction, Hopkins presupposes God's listening ear; God's presence is actual, even if man, through sin, is temporarily separated from him. But in "Patience," the sense of God's presence is gone, and with it the possibility of making ourselves in tune with his song. It is not *his* ear that hears the harsh grating of the sinners' hearts, but the sinners themselves who, in their isolation, hear the discordant friction of their impure hearts. The condition expressed by the introverted absorption in self--" *We* hear our hearts grate on themselves" (my italics) -- is analogous to that of the lost in hell "Where, selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe-and shelterless, / thoughts against thoughts in groans grind" (*P* No. 61), and where they "have nothing else to do but wail or listen to but wailing" (*S* 242).

The auditory imagery of the Terrible Sonnets expresses the horror of the introverted sense experience which takes sound into itself without relief, for the countless cries which the speaker himself initiates fall back on his own ears, and are taken back into his own body again where they can do nothing but grind against each other discordantly. This is the cacophony that results when the self is not properly pitched to God's tune, when the song of the self "raises a counterpoint of dissonance and not of harmony" to the song of God. But the production of speech is at least an attempt at extroversion, an attempt to connect subject with object through the

mediation of word. Taste, on the other hand, is that sensation which isolates the self from the external world because one's own selftaste can be matched to nothing else on earth, and can be known only by the self. Taste is identified by Hopkins as that sensation which above all others makes self known to self: "I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man" (*S* 123). In the state of stress, Hopkins can use his notion of this distinctive selftaste as proof for the existence of God (*S* 128); in the state of slack, however, that "selftaste is evidence of man's Satanic isolation" (Miller 339). The taste of self becomes the agonizing experience of self-enclosure in the Terrible Sonnets, for the aperture of the mouth leads only into the self, and the possibility of tasting "other" -- as in the taking of Communion -- is obviated by the overpowering taste of self: "my taste was me" (*P* No. 67).

In Hopkins' hierarchy of the senses by which the lost experience hell, taste follows sound[20]: "*taste as with taste of tongue* all that is bitter there, the tears ceaselessly and fruitlessly flowing; the grief over their hopeless loss; the worm of conscience, which is the mind gnawing and

feeding on its own most miserable self" (*S* 243). The taste imagery of the Terrible Sonnets group expresses "the mind gnawing and feeding on its own most miserable self" most powerfully in the inverted images of Holy Communion. The horror of a world where the Eucharist which is consumed is the cursed flesh and blood of the self, not the redemptive flesh and blood of Christ, underlies the agony of Hopkins' separation from God in "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day." The taste imagery of this sonnet is sustained throughout the entire sestet and moves the argument irrevocably, not to a vision of Incarnation as in the Nature Sonnets, but to a vision of hell:

> I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
> Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
> Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.
>
> Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
> The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
> As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse. (*P* No. 67)

The equation of identity expressed by the copula "is" in "I am gall, I am heartburn" instresses the speaker's own inscape. But what does it mean to instress one's own inscape? W.A.M. Peters' study of Hopkins' perception of inscape is useful here. He notes that "at times it did happen that some property of the object or some definite aspect so strongly impressed the poet as being of the very essence of this object, that he completely

identifies this property or aspect with the essence of the object itself" (120). Peters asserts that "It is for the very same reason that he could say that he *was* gall, that he *was* heartburn . . . he did not *have* a disease; no, it was so in him and it caused him such sufferings that he knew that he *was* the disease" (124). In other words, the equation, "I am gall, I am heartburn," identifies the pattern, design, or *inscape* of the self with this particular hellish essence. Peters, however, does not consider how the equation indicated by the copula instresses the speaker's *own* inscape, rather than instresses the inscapes of creation which reveal Incarnation. The inscape of self receives its validity from the sustaining stress of God's grace and the reciprocal instress of man's will. When these two corresponding stresses are balked, the "inscape" is no longer "the *form* speaking" (*J* 163) the divine idea that orignated its unique pattern. Rather, it speaks nothing but itself: "sin is inscape gone awry, a self-centered enthronement of strange gods in one's own God-likeness" (Cotter 275). To instress one's own inscape is to put self in the central position, to see self as so distinctive that it is self-sustaining and self-dependent.

In Sonnet 67, the "selftaste" which distinguishes the self from all other creation is identified with "gall," the bitter taste of hell itself, and with "heartburn," the taste/touch-equivalent of the sound of the heart that

grates upon itself. The hell of separation from God in an unspeakable taste of self is powerfully evoked by the inverted Eucharistic image of the sonnet. The Real Presence in the bread of the Holy Sacrament is replaced by the flesh of the self which, by God's unfathomable "most deep decree" he is forced to eat. "Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours" is an expression of stress and scape in wholly human terms, uninformed by the incoming creative stress of God, and incapable of revealing a pattern that points beyond itself to a prior divine idea. It is the speaker's own spirit turned in on itself which provides the rising action of agony in his own worthless body, the "dull dough" which can only produce the "sour taste of me." The "sweating selves" in the last line of this sonnet is part of this image, since bread sweats as it rises, and this continuity of imagery makes the vision of hell in the last line resonate through to the ambiguity of the last words: "but worse." The bitter taste of self separated from God is so strong that it is not clear whether it is the speaker's state which is worse than that of the lost souls in hell, or whether the experience of the damned is the worse "scourge."[21]

The fragmented and unredeemed elements of the Eucharist are also found in the imagery of "Carrion Comfort" and "Patience." The bitter taste of self expressed in "I wake and feel the fell of dark" may be seen as the

logical outcome of feasting on the "carrion comfort, Despair" of Sonnet 64 (Gardner II: 336). The word "feast" in this image carries with it the sense of joyful religious celebration as well as of sumptuous sensual gratification. In combination with the oxymoron, "Carrion comfort," "feast" conveys an inversion of Hopkins' earlier immanental vision of the world in which he could, through the agency of sight, be a celebrant of the Real Presence in created forms, into the reduced loathesomeness of the "world within" which is apparently dead and putrefying. The suicidal impulse governing the opening quatrain of this sonnet makes this explicit. Far from being able to instress his will toward God, the greatest effort of will the speaker can make is indeterminate: "Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be." The struggle of the isolated self, alienated from the incoming stress of God's grace, to achieve this negative good, is made the more difficult by the image of God himself feasting on the self in its torment: "But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou . . . /. . . scan / With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones?" In an ironic inversion that emphasizes the loss of Hopkins' ability to partake of Communion through the perception of nature, God's "eyes are metamorphosed into engulfing mouths" (Harris 60) which feed on the speaker himself. The taking of communion makes every Christian another Christ as he takes the body and blood of

Christ into his own body (Miller 347), and Hopkins' metaphysic allowed him to further participate in the Incarnation through the perception of inscape in created forms. However, at the time of writing the Terrible Sonnets, the perception of the figure of Christ in nature has been blotted out, and this experience is imaged forth in these poems in the inverted images of the Eucharist. The estranged speaker of Sonnet 67 who is "gnawing and feeding on [his] own most miserable self" (*S* 243) is, in Sonnet 64, fed on by God.

In "Patience" the taste imagery and the partial elements of the Eucharist are once again ascribed to God, who "distills / Delicious kindness" (*P* No. 68). The word "distill," however, suggests that the sweet taste of Christ has been reduced to a mere trickle, in contradistinction to the overflowing gush found in "Wreck of the Deutschland" where Hopkins describes

> . . . How a lush-kept plush-capped sloe
> Will, mouthed to flesh-burst,
> Gush! -- flush the man, the being with it, sour or sweet,
> Brim, in a flash, full! . . . . (*P* No. 28 l:8)

The joyous matching of man's will to God's in a world where "never ask if meaning it, wanting it, warned of it-- men go" to do his bidding (*P* No. 28 l:8) is reduced, in "Patience," to the stasis of waiting for meaning and purpose to be revealed in a world of "rebellious wills" and "wrecked past purposes" (*P* 68). The final tercet of the sonnet, in which the "patience" the

speaker prays for in the opening quatrain is identified with Christ, and the promise of reward for the submissive soul is identified with the honey of paradise,[22] does not fully resolve the isolation, alienation and thwarting experience expressed in the preceding lines. The question posed by the speaker: "And where is he who more and more distills / Delicious kindness?" remains unanswered in the response: "He is patient. Patience fills / His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know." Christ and his attributes are identified here, but not located, not tasted here and now. Christ remains "dearest him that lives alas! away" (*P* No. 67), and his presence remains both unlocalized and unfelt. The copula in the identifying equation "He is patient" affirms his existence, but the absence of his Real Presence in the individuated inscapes of creation balks Hopkins' instressing "yes."

When Hopkins wrote "searching nature I taste *self* but at one tankard, that of my own being" (*S* 123), he set the boundaries for his experience of the world. Through the extroverted agency of sight, he was able to leap out of the confinement of self, to identify the observing subject with the object of perception by recognizing the common "stem of stress" that unites all creation (including self) with the Creator. However, through the introverted agency of taste, Hopkins can know only the self, can experience no union with the rest of creation and ultimately with God. In his "Meditation on

Hell," Hopkins speaks of the angelic fall and of men's subsequent mortality as a

> throwing back or confinement of their energy . . . and, as intellectual action is spoken of under the figure of sight, it will in this case be an imprisonment in darkness, a being in the dark; for darkness is a phenomenon of foiled action in the sense of sight. But this constraint and this blindness or darkness will be most painful when it is the main stress or energy of the whole being that is thus balked. This is its strain or tendency towards being, towards good, towards God . . . (*S* 137).

In "My own heart let me more have pity on," this balking of being is expressed in the second quatrain in images which show how the extroversion of sight is replaced by the introversion of taste:

> I cast for comfort I can no more get
> By groping round my comfortless, than blind
> Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
> Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet. (*P* No. 69)

The futility of attempting to obtain comfort in any form than that of the Comforter[23] is expressed in the contracted "my comfortless" around which the "blind eyes in their dark" grope. The effect of making "my comfortless" bear the weight and force of a substantive is to reinforce the sense of constrained self-imprisonment in which the "strain . . . towards being, . . . towards God" is balked. This may be an elliptical noun phrase, that is, "my comfortless world within." However, the extreme contraction of the expression, together with the synecdochical identification of the speaker with "blind eyes," is an image for the foiled action of sight which imprisons

the self in darkness, and which blots out the light of Christ.

The taste imagery that concludes this quatrain is connected to the "blind eyes" by co-ordinate parallelism. The blind eyes cannot see day, the light of God; the speaker can no longer find the comfort of the Incarnation in the visual world.[24] And, just as blind eyes cannot "get" day, neither can "thirst . . . find / Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet." Like the "blind eyes" which stand as metonymic indicators for the self of the speaker, the personified Thirst becomes a fragmented image of what the speaker has become. He is neither a thirsty man, a thirsty mouth, nor a thirsty stomach; he is thirst itself (Boyle 147). Moreover, he is unrequited thirst, thirst which cannot sate itself even in "a world of wet." The bitter taste of self as "gall" expressed in Sonnet 67 is here expressed as undifferentiated thirst without appeasement. "Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet" also evokes the image of a parched and shipwrecked sailor surrounded by salt water -- obviously unable to attain for himself the comfort that he needs (Gardner II: 347). But "thirst's all-in-all" also connotes the "living water" which Christ promises will end all thirst (John IV: 11-14), and on this spiritual level, the "world of wet" which cannot alleviate thirst suggests that the "fountain flow" (*P* 155) which comes from God and returns to God has been suspended. In the state of slack, it is not that the living water has evaporated into a

dry well, but rather that the parched mouth of the speaker has forgotten how to appease his thirst, and at the same time, that the water seems to be withheld, no longer freely given. In this state, the fountain flow doubles back on itself before reaching its target; it becomes the constrained imprisonment of the "world of wet" which cannot dispense "thirst's all in all" to the thirsty soul in need of grace. This condition is also analogous to that of the souls in hell. In the parable of the damned rich man, for example, the rich man's plea to Abraham to "send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame," cannot be granted because the "great gulf" between heaven and hell cannot be passed (Luke 16:24). In his state of slack, Hopkins has apparently fallen into this great gulf between heaven and hell. In sight of both the living waters of heaven, and the tormenting flames of hell, constrained by them both, he can assert knowledge of nothing but what he knows through the sensations of this own body.

Hopkins asserts that "the imagination is employed to realize truth, not error, but under its own imagery, without which 'pro hoc statu' the truth cannot be reached" (*S* 179). The truth of the experience of slack is expressed through imagery based on the lesser senses, and principally on the sensation of touch. In his "Meditation on Hell," Hopkins says that "Seeing is

believing but touch is the truth" (*S* 243). The reduction and alteration of visual imagery in the Terrible Sonnets is balanced by a privileging of tactile imagery. The sensation of touch, as has been seen above, is often a synaesthetic image incorporated with sound and taste, but it is also the most frequently used sense in the metaphoric expression of these sonnets.[25] In the state of slack, as in the condition of the lost in hell, sight is the least able, and touch the most able, to convey the truth of man's experience of self and of God. In his earlier immanental vision of creation, the activity of sight revealed to Hopkins the truth of "yes" and "is" in a world informed by the Real Presence, the incarnate divinity that gives unifying shape and purpose to individuated phenomena. But in the introversion of the senses expressed in the imagery of slack in the Terrible Sonnets, such a unifying apprehension is gone. Images in the Terrible Sonnets are used to define a single part or aspect of man ununified by an informing whole, as in such images as the "strands of man" and "bruised bones" in "Carrion Comfort," the "cries" beaten on the anvil in "No worst, there is none," the "heartburn" of "I wake and feel the fell of dark," or the "blind / Eyes" that grope in "My own heart." Each of these images incorporates the sense of touch, that sensation which Hopkins identifies with the most exquisite torture of hell (*S* 243). The intensity of the

reduction of the self to a single sensation is an important aspect of the slack imagery of the Terrible Sonnets. In the state of slack, there is no sense of the unique and individuated pattern of the speaker, no sense of creative energy binding him into a unique pattern. God's stem of stress sustaining the soul appears to be gone. What is given instead, rendered in powerfully tactile images, is the intensely physical struggle of the self constrained within his inner, meaningless, world.

In the poem Hopkins chose to stand first in the group of six sonnets written in 1885, "Carrion Comfort," *slack* is an identification both of the self and of his relation to God. The horror of Hopkins' nightmare of 1873, in which his body "suddenly [went] slack" and "the nervous and muscular instress seem[ed] to fall in and hang . . ." (*J* 238) is fully expressed in the slack "last strands of man in me" which the speaker of Sonnet 64 refuses to "untwist." James Finn Cotter notes that the activity of instress and inscape is a "mythic knot" for Hopkins, the "oneness of redemption with creation, and the resultant coupling of nature and grace" (100-1). In the nightmare, this knot is re-tied when Hopkins is able to call "on the Holy Name" and receive the healing grace of God's incoming stress. But in "Carrion Comfort," the absence of God's sustaining grace, and the inability of the speaker to call on him, works against the tying of such a mythic knot. In

this regard, Paul L. Mariani's suggestion that there is a pun on "not" in "Carrion Comfort" is significant. The roping imagery of "untwist," "slack," and "strands" suggests that the homophone, "knot," lies in the underthought of the run-on imagery, intimating that the speaker "will not untwist; he will *knot* the strands which keep him a man . . ." (*Commentary* 229). But because the entwined strands of the speaker's self hang slack, their "twisted" quality suggests the downward spiral into inactivity and silence, rather than the stressed "knot" of dynamic connection expressing the Logos in creation.

This tactile spiral image is repeated in the second quatrain, in which the speaker is described as "heaped" "In turns of tempest," but "frantic to avoid thee and flee."[26] Here the spiralling motion of the tempest, now associated with God's chastising power, so constrains the movement of the speaker that his ability to move either forward to "yes," upwards and through the centre of the whirling winds on the stem of God's grace, or backwards to "no," fleeing out of God's chastening tempest, is suspended.[27] He remains imprisoned in the spiralling force which ultimately ends "in motion lessening and at last ceasing" (*S* 198). This is made explicit in the sestet, in which the chiming of "toil" and "coil" suggests that the speaker's work for the Kingdom has constrained him in a coil, the emblem that for

Hopkins signifies "a type of the Devil . . . and . . . a type of death . . ." (*S* 198) which throws off the track the forward and perpetual motion God has given to things (*S* 198-9). The suspension of the speaker in this state of slack is emphasized by the accentual stress on the parenthetical "seems":

> Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
> Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would
> laugh, cheer. (*P* No. 64)

The speaker's inability to say "yes" to "I AM," to instress the godhead and act out the purpose for which he was created, is expressed by the un-knowing acknowledgement of "seems." It *may* be that the speaker once kissed God's chastening rod, or rather his hand of mercy, and subsequently "stole joy, would laugh, cheer," but it may also *not* be; it only *seems* as if this might be the case. The action "*stole* joy" (my italics) is an important aspect of this suspension of knowledge and affirmation, for it suggests that the "joy" was obtained secretly, even guiltily, for his own use without the right or leave of the originator and dispenser of joy -- Christ. Stolen joy is not an out-directed expression of man's purpose "to praise, reverence and serve God Our Lord and by so doing to save his soul" (*S* 122), but rather an inner hoarding of something not rightfully his. The paradoxical culpability of spiritual joy which was *apparently* (but perhaps not *actually*) initiated by accepting God's discipline is expressed in the ambiguous tension of "Cheer

whom though?," for the speaker remains uncertain whether his strength and joy, his laughter and cheering, come from and return to God, or come from and return to self.

The spiral of the chastening tempest and the thwarting coil of Sonnet 64 become the ironic "comfort serves in a whirlwind" of Sonnet 65. Here the constraint of the spiralling motion of the whirling winds is the obverse of the stem of stress and grace which the Holy Spirit infuses in man. In "On Personality, Grace and Free Will," Hopkins writes that "And even the sigh or aspiration itself [of man] is in answer to an inspiration of God's spirit and is followed by the continuance and expiration of that same breath which lifts it, through the gulf and void between pitch and pitch of being, to do or be what God wishes his creature to do or be" (*S* 156). However, the "comfort" ironically served in the encoiling whirlwind is the "comfort," not of inspiration, but of annihilation: "all / Life death does end and each day dies with sleep" (*P* No. 65). The "wretch" in the vortex of the whirlwind remains in the "gulf and void" of *slack*, the gap between self as it is and self as it was intended, in which his breath has ceased, and in which God's Spirit does not infuse him. The "wretch" who creeps into the whirlwind, like the "wretch" who wrestles with God in Sonnet 64, is ironically an exile from his proper home, "one driven out of his native country," for even in the

moment of physical contact with his God, the speaker of these sonnets is helplessly distanced from him.

If there is an activity incorporated in the state of slack, before the motion ceases all together, it is the activity of struggle,[28] the attempt to preserve self in the experience of intense pain which is expressed physically, but is both spiritual and psychic. The contraction of pain and the attempt to avoid or release it has already been seen in the image of untwisting "these last strands of man in me" (*P* No. 64), in the pangs "pitched past pitch of grief" (*P* No. 65), in the cries beaten "on an age-old anvil" which "lull, then leave off" (*P* No. 65), in the "scourge" of the self-inflicted pain of "the lost" (*P* No. 67), in the hearts that "grate on themselves" (*P* No. 68) and in the "tormented mind tormenting yet" which is asked to "let joy size" (*P* No. 69).

This tactile struggle is expressed most powerfully in "Carrion Comfort." In the octave, the "wring-world right foot" of God that is "rudely rocked" on the speaker is an image of immense strength, size, and all but unbearable pressure. The concrete verb, "rock,"[29] carries the weight of the substantive in its suggestion of a phenomenal boulder, but the activity of pressure and agitation is incorporated in its verbal force. The modifier, "rude," is adjectival in its relation to the implied substantive form of

"rock," and elliptically adverbial in its application to the verbal form of "rock."[30] The contraction of the expression, contrived by allowing two parts of speech to play within one form, inscapes the idea of God by expressing his activity and his being in one semantic unit. Throughout the Terrible Sonnets the *existence* of God is never questioned; it is rather the *experience* of him which is contested. In "Carrion Comfort," God is terrifyingly present, but not visible. The compound adjective, "wring-world," is a highly charged epithet, for it carries both an acknowledgement of God's power on earth, and a complaint by the speaker of the use of this foot, capable of crushing the whole world, to rock *him*. Moreover, the "wringing" action of the foot suggests that, in the action of being "foot trod," the speaker is also being twisted into a position not natural to the self which causes extreme pain. "Wring" also suggests the pressure applied to extract fluid, and this sense is continued in the run-on imagery of the next two clauses. In "lay a lionlimb against me," it is the heavy pressure of the lionlimb which is evoked by the image, not the visual suggestion of the animal itself, and the subsequent clause, "scan / With darksome devouring eyes my bruisèd bones," suggests that blood has been wrung out from his very bones.

The intensity of struggle in "Carrion Comfort" is fully expressed in the

final image of the sonnet: "That night, that year / Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God." The word "wrestling" is linked associationally with the implied spirals of "untwist," "wring," "turns of tempest," and "coil," since the root, *wrest*, means "to turn or twist." In the image of wrestling with God, the speaker says neither "yes" or "no" to God. Although the image acknowledges the "is" of God's existence, the speaker affirms "I," not "I AM." The Biblical allusion to Jacob is instructive here, for the speaker is both identified with, and differentiated from, the combatant of the Biblical analogue. When Jacob wrestles with the Lord, the struggle is so equal that, even though his hip is dislocated, he is not overcome, and he refuses to loosen his grip until he is given a blessing by his adversary (Gen. 32:24-30). The speaker of "Carrion Comfort," though maimed and in pain, is unable to give up his struggle and either conclusively to affirm God's power and justice, or to ask for and receive the grace of his blessing. The most he can do is to admit the existence, and strength, of his adversary, and to wonder at his own audacity (my God!) in combating him. Although he can resist the suicidal impulse, and can speak of that experience as "now done darkness," he cannot unequivocably attribute his victory over the self to God's grace. That darkness may now be past, but the ambiguity of the experience is still conditionally present: he "would . . . cheer. . . each one."

In this equivocation, "I" remains distant from "I AM" because there is no bridge or stem of stress, and no corresponding instress, to affirm God's mastery over the self.

In a sermon delivered in 1880, Hopkins asserts that God must "master the world, or it would fly to pieces" (*S* 55). The struggle incorporated in the slack imagery of the Terrible Sonnets group expresses not only the absence of that mastery, but also the centrifugal flying apart of the world into fragmentation and disorder. In "The Wreck of the Deutschland," Hopkins celebrates the nun's "single eye" which "Read the unshapeable shock night / And knew the who and the why" (*P* No. 28 11:29). But the speaker of the Terrible Sonnets has no such "heart right" which enables him to know the who and the why in his experience of "unmeaning . . . night" (*J* 130).[31] The faculty of sight which can reveal God's immanent presence in creation for those who "had eyes to see it" and who know how to call out inscapes (*J* 221) is obscured by the tactile apprehension of the "fell of dark" which blots out the light "like the skin of some animal"; an "'intense darkness which one can feel'" (Mariani, *Commentary* 219). Although in Hopkins' poetry the "eye" is his most frequent anatomical reference (Michael Murphy 6) and "to know" his most frequently used verb (Cotter 264), the distorted vision and disordered knowledge of the Terrible Sonnets is expressed by the

ironic use of these terms.

In the Terrible Sonnets, the word "eyes" is used three times. Its use as a synecdochic image for God's chastising energy in "Carrion Comfort" has already been noted. There God's "darksome devouring eyes" (*P* No. 64) feed on the poet in his state of slack and decay. "Eyes" also appears as a metaphoric description of the berries growing on "Natural heart's ivy, Patience": "There she basks / Purple eyes and seas of liquid leaves all day" (*P* No. 68). As a metaphor expressing the essence of "Patience," however, this natural image cannot adequately perform the service it is put to. "Basks" suggests an unblinking indifference, an enjoyment of warmth and light which is "there," not here, not shared. Moreover, since Patience "masks / Our ruins of wrecked past purpose," the "purple eyes" may even be hooded, blind. Patience, then, the consolation prescribed by St. Ignatius for those experiencing spiritual desolation (131) is, in this sonnet, a blind and masking comfort, a temporary good, not a redemptive one. The subsequent identification of Christ with this blind comfort -- "He is patient" -- demonstrates the degree to which the light of Christ's real and redemptive presence has been blotted out by the constraint and blindness which balks the energy of being (*S* 137), and which is expressed in the nightfall world of the Terrible Sonnets. This notion is reiterated in the third use of "eyes"

in the group, the "blind / Eyes in their dark" (*P* No. 69) which cannot see the light, cannot obtain comfort for themselves in their own "comfortless" being, and from whom the Comfort of Christ, the light of the world, is also withheld.

To know and to see are equivalents in Hopkins' epistemology, and in the state of slack expressed in the Terrible Sonnets, these terms are used ironically. In "I wake and feel the fell of dark," for example, the self is divided into two elements: an "I" and a "heart," who are referred to together as "we." In this fragmentation and division of the self into subject and object,[32] the use of "see" and "sight" does not express activities or conditions of unity. "What sights you, heart, saw" (*P* No. 67) remains unknown, but the admission that the heart "must" see more sights "in yet longer light's delay" ironically places sight in darkness, so that, like "the fell of dark," the "sights" are actually *felt*, not *seen*. At the conclusion of the sonnet, the speaker states "I see / The lost are like this, and their scourge to be / As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse." The image here dislodges "knowing" from the activity of sight. Knowledge in this tercet is obtained tactilely, through the felt lacerations of the "scourge" and the endless "sweating" of his body. Finally, the use of "see you" in "whose smile/'s not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather--as skies /

Betweenpie mountains -- lights a lovely mile" (*P* No. 69) is actually an expletive, not a necessary construction that asserts that sight may be identified with knowledge. In this image, God's smile is not seen immanent in the created world. Rather, "as skies / Betweenpie mountains" it *sometimes* -- and those times are indeterminate -- "lights a lovely mile." Since the implied sun betweenpie mountains remains unseen as well as "unforeseen" because it is not an empirical observation of the activity of Being in the world, but rather an inferential memory, the separation of "to be and to know" from the faculty of sight disables "the utterance and assertion of it" (*J* 129).

In his notes on the Foundation written during his 1882 retreat, Hopkins asserts that

> God's utterance of himself in himself is God the Word, outside himself is this world. *This world then is word,* expression, news of God. Therefore its end, its purpose, its purport, its meaning, is God and its life or work *to name and praise him.* Therefore praise put before reverence and service.
> . . . the world, man, should after its own manner give God being in return for the being he has given it or should give him back that being he has given (*S* 129; my italics).

In the imagery of slack, Hopkins neither "names" nor "praises" God. The fountain flow "giving back the being he has been given" is expressed fully in the joyful Nature Sonnets of 1877, in which the world as Word is named, and in which the union of Christ as man and Christ as God is the ground for the

metaphoric equations that celebrate the inscapes of individuated creation, thereby not only naming God but also, through the activity of instress, praising and serving him.

However, in the Terrible Sonnets of 1885, the imagery of slack cannot utter the divine Word in the world, but can only hoard the human word in the "world within." Concomitant with the absence of stress and instress in Hopkins' experience is the loss of Christ as the grounds for metaphoric equation. Where such equations are attempted, the "unseen King" is merely *guessed* (*P* No. 23), as in the final tercets of "Patience" and "My own heart," or in "thou terrible" in "Carrion Comfort." In general, however, the imagery of the Terrible Sonnets expresses not essence and identity, but implied or overt comparison. The one-to-one correspondence of subject and object, and of object with the object in which it co-inheres (Christ) is gone. Not only is Hopkins distanced from the objects of his "belonging field," but the objects themselves express no shared likeness, either of their parts to a whole, or of their whole to another whole, the prior divine idea which gives them being. In his *Journal* in 1871, Gerard Manley Hopkins notes how the discovery of "scaping" can help "the eye over another hitherto disordered field of things" (*J* 205). The nightfall world of the Terrible Sonnets, however, "offers either nothing to the eye to foredraw or many things

foredrawing away from one another" (✓ 129). In this disordered field of things, in which dark night mantles perceptual forms and obscures sight and knowledge, the truth of the experience of slack is expressed by the imagery of the isolating and introverted sensations of sound, taste, and touch.

Notes

[1] Gardner's note *P* 314. The fragment is undated, but since "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" seems to belong to the end of 1884 or beginning of 1885 (*P* 284), it is likely that "The times are nightfall" was also written about this time.

[2] In "The Starlight Night" (*P* No. 32), for example, the imperative "look" occurs seven times.

[3] James Finn Cotter notes the equivalency of mark and scape as follows: "The mark on which one fixes the eye, the scapes of curving wave and skeining birdsong, are marked within: *in*-scaped. 'Mark, the mark' (*P* 28, 22), Hopkins insisted, which has been scored in 'fire and night' throughout the world: sun, stars and lightning are runes of its mystery and meaning. End and purpose are everywhere present already, for the world is riddled with apertures of light" (20). However, these emblems of light, these "runes" of mystery and meaning in the world are notably absent from the dark world of the Terrible Sonnets, and with the loss of these "marks," and of man's ability to "mark" them, end and purpose remain unrevealed.

[4] J. Hillis Miller sees this identification in the Parmenides essay of "unmeaning" with "night" as the source of the "night" in Hopkins' poetry which symbolizes the "nonbeing which will overtake all mortal things" (325).

[5] In this regard, Hopkins' understanding of memory in Ignatian terms is significant: "Memory is the name for that faculty which towards present things is Simple Apprehension and, when it is a question of the concrete only . . . the faculty of Identification; towards past things is Memory proper; and towards things future or unknown or imaginary is Imagination; when continued or kept on the strain the act of this faculty is attention, advertence, heed, the being *ware*, and its habit, knowledge, the being *aware*" (*S* 174).

[6] In "if they had eyes to see it," Hopkins is perhaps thinking of Matt. 13:16: "But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see. . . ."

[7] The natural images Daniel Harris identifies in the Terrible Sonnets are the whirlwind and mountains in "No Worst," the tempest and chaff and grain in "Carrion Comfort," the ivied tower and beehive in "Patience," and the dappled sky in "My Own Heart" (19). But see also Susan A. Hallgarth, who unaccountably identifies only two natural images in the Terrible Sonnets (the lionlimb and the tempest in "Carrion Comfort"), and states that they are "used metaphorically to describe violent means God can use in his plan for salvation" (90-1).

[8] Susan A. Hallgarth's statistical chart on the use of nature imagery in Hopkins' poetry isolates 13 cases of central nature image in the 15 poems written between 1876-78, and only 3 central nature images in the twelve poems written between 1885-89. See 80.

[9] See W.A. M. Peters 53: "To him [Hopkins] imagery was inseparable from the true poetic experience; the image was given with the emotion, and flushed by it; and thus an image is embodied in the poem as a living part." However, Peters does not adequately consider how this kind of imagery is distinct from that located in the Terrible Sonnets.

[10] See Hallgarth 91. She notes that the threshing image which initiates the turn supplies an analogical answer for the rhetorical question of the octave, which may be differentiated from the analogical development of the earlier poems which was effected "through a clustering of nature images developing the same instress." She also concurs with my contention that the Terrible Sonnets have a more abstract, argumentative structure than the Nature Sonnets, and that the nature images in them "function as parts of logical argument rather than as a series of 'inscapes' universalizing the message of the poem through their 'instresses.'"

[11] But Ellsberg does not note the existence of "entropy and dissociation" in the Terrible Sonnets; she sees all Hopkins' poetry as expressive of "sacramentalized landscape" (122).

[12] For an interesting account of Hopkins' use of metaphoric equation in the early poetry and of the subsequent degeneration of identity into comparison in the Terrible Sonnets, see Daniel Harris 44ff.

[13] Robert Boyle does not note the proportionate increase of simile in the Terrible Sonnets group and consider its implications, but he does give a convincing account of the perceptual mode and accompanying poetic expression that underly the uses of metaphor and simile. See 175ff.

[14] Hopkins' use of the sense of smell in the imagery of slack is slight, and is usually present as synaesthesia in the sensation of taste, such as in "Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours," in which the strong acrid smell of yeast is suggested; and in the "sweating selves," (*P* No. 67) in which both the salt-taste and strong odour of sweat are implied. For this reason, I shall focus on the dominant sensations of sound, taste, and touch in the imagery of the Terrible Sonnets.

[15] See "The Habit of Perfection": "Elected Silence, sing to me / And beat upon my whorlèd ear" (*P* No. 22). The silence and inaction intrinsic to the spiral will be dealt with later in this chapter.

[16] See Mariani, *Commentary* 224; Boyle 152; and Gardner, *P* 287. Robert Bridges and many critics after him have considered "Carrion Comfort" to be the sonnet "written in blood." But see also N. H. Mackenzie, who argues that "I wake and feel" may be the sonnet written in blood (*A Reader's Guide* 171-2).

[17] Hopkins began to study the violin while teaching at Newman's Oratory in 1868, and his *Journal* and letters show that he maintained an interest in the instrument throughout his life, but it does not appear that he ever became a violinist (*LJ* 231).

[18] Christopher Devlin's inquiry into Hopkins' use of the rare Italian form "*ecceitas*" for Duns Scotus' "*haecceitas*" is instructive, because he suggests that "the association of *Eccel*, 'Look!' appealed to him" (*S* 294). If this be so, Hopkins' notion of "thisness," incorporated in his term "pitch," like his notion of inscape (whose cognates are "look" and "mark") is fundamental to his epistemology grounded in the activity of sight.

[19] For an interesting gloss on the biographical force of Hopkins' comparison of his cries to Christ to "dead letters," see Edward Proffitt 16.

[20] Taste does not follow sound immediately, but rather after the

intervening analysis of the sense of smell. See note 14 above.

[21] Robert Boyle, S.J., denies the ambiguity of "but worse"; he sees these words as "quiet, positive assertion" (156), expressive of "the act with which the poet resists the horror which fills his very being. They indicate the apparent smallness of his determined 'yes' in the face of overwhelming darkness . . ." (155). Although "but" may co-ordinate two clauses with the shared subject "the lost" (i.e., "The lost are like this . . . but the lost are worse [than I]"), the co-ordinate clauses thus joined are not parallel, and the governance of "I see" over the whole statement, together with the initiation of another co-ordinate clause after "and," and with the intervening parenthesis "as I am mine," obscures this grammatical connection. Moreover, the semi-colon suggests that a new independent clause has been initiated (i.e., "but I am worse"). The syntactical confusion makes it impossible to affirm either one or the other grammatical constructions, and so the meaning remains equivocal.

[22] See *S* 239 in which Hopkins describes how creation reflects the honour of God, is of service to him, and how the praises fall short because though "the honey [is] *like* his sweetness," it is only "*something* like him, [it] make[s] him known . . . tell[s] of him . . . give[s] him glory," but does so without cognition (my italics).

[23] For a good understanding of how Hopkins saw both Christ and the Holy Ghost as Paracletes see his sermon delivered at Liverpool 25 April 1880 (*S* 68-75). He says the English equivalent, "Comforter," is inadequate, for a Paraclete does not only comfort, but "calls us on to the good" (*S* 70).

[24] The extent to which Hopkins' early perceptual identification of the Incarnation as the joyful end and purpose of both his own being and the created world is eroded by the end of his life is evident in his Retreat Notes of 1889, written five months before his death. The image of suffocation, restraint, and unwilled propulsion by the "machinery" which drags him on by his priestly collar, and the barren recognition of the Incarnation as mere fact, poignantly express the loss of the comfort of the Incarnation in Hopkins' life: "The Incarnation was for my salvation and that of the world: the work goes on in a great system and machinery which even drags me on with the collar round my neck though I could and do neglect my duty in it. But I say to myself that I am only too willing to do God's work and help on the knowledge of the Incarnation. But this is not really true: I am not willing enough for the piece of work assigned me, the only work I am given

to do, though I could do others if they were given. This is my work at Stephen's Green" (*S* 263).

[25] Since many images are synaesthetic, an absolute classification of sense-images in the Terrible Sonnets is impossible. However, taking what I see to be the principal sensation of each image, the proportion of sound, taste and touch images in the Terrible Sonnets may be identified as follows: Sound, 10; Taste, 11; Touch, 31.

[26] The Biblical analogue Hopkins works with here and again in Sonnet 65 is Job, who suffered God's wrath without comprehendable cause, but who receives God's comfort when he hears his voice in the whirlwind, and is able to acknowledge the justice of God's working in the world, repent, and be blessed (Job 38-42). Hopkins may also be working with the image of Jonah imprisoned in the belly of the whale as an analogue for his condition of constraint within God's punishing tempest, for Jonah, too, wished to "avoid and flee" God. However, like Job (and unlike the speaker of the Terrible Sonnets), Jonah is able to acknowledge God's justice, repent, and be released from pain (Jonah 1-3).

[27] Daniel Harris astutely notes that the whirlwind's spiralling ("Jaweh's most inchoate theophany"), "cannot easily be discerned from that of Satan" in Hopkins' iconography (108). But see James Finn Cotter, who sees the whirlwind as a positive image of God: "The stem of being in God is a dynamic axis and gyre of flowing, upturning stress. Lifted up, it draws all things to itself" (274). Satan and his spiral are, according to Cotter, the AntiChrist and counterfeit image that "projects a rival spiral or reverse movement which dissipates and draws toward non-being instead of mounting toward its target of truth" (274-5).

[28] Sister M. Eucharista Ward argues that in the Terrible Sonnets Hopkins sees his suffering as having positive value; it is a call to respond with a search for God, to struggle against the evil of suffering and finally to unite with Christ in an act of resignation (321 - 331).

[29] W.A.M. Peters defines "concrete verb" as "a verb that can only be properly predicated of a concrete thing." He suggests that the "juxtaposition of abstract noun and what might be called . . . concrete verb expressed the inscape of Christ in His dealings with the poet," as in "the sweep and the hurl of thee trod / Hard down with a horror of height" (*P* 28,

1:2), and "as in another sonnet Christ *rocks* His foot upon him" (123).

[30] James Milroy suggests that Hopkins' linguistic technique is to override difference in parts of speech, so that a single word can "be an action and a thing at the same time." Milroy connects this with the same effect undertaken in Hopkins' use of imagery: "Hopkins attempts to capture (in one perception) motion in stable things, and by the opposite process, solidity in mobile things" (224).

[31] In his study of inscape in Hopkins' Christology, James Finn Cotter notes that "Significantly, even the English 'scope' at one time meant not only the material object or thing intended, but also the person pursued, sought for, and overtaken. Hopkins, in short, knew Christ to be the efficient ('the who') and final cause ('the why'), because Jesus is the man who is God and the head of creation" (21).

[32] Walter Ong notes that the Terrible Sonnets "have to do most directly with the self, not simply as the object of close philosophical attention but rather as the real, reflexively obtrusive, insistent, inescapable person present in all Hopkins' conscious hours" (134). Ong suggests that Hopkins' use of "I" is unknown in English poetry before his time: "The self addresses itself point-blank . . . . This is not the declamation more or less evident in earlier self-talk, but confrontational self-address" (140).

Chapter Three

"The Inscape of Speech": The Sound and Shape of Slack in the Terrible Sonnets

"to recognise the form you are employing and to mean it is everything" (*L* / 156)

In his Platonic dialogue, "On the Origin of Beauty," Gerard Manley Hopkins articulates how the poet's creative imagination functions: "'the idea [rises] in the forms of expression which we read in the poem in his mind, thought and expression indistinguishable'" (*J* 110). The idea of "slack" in the Terrible Sonnets is expressed both in their imagery and in the metrical cadences and poetical structures which carry it. The sound of slack is heard in the mingled rising and falling rhythms of these poems. The shape of slack can be seen in the enclosure of the sonnet form itself, in which the possibility for resolution is negated by a tendency of the sestet to double back on the experience of the octave, rather than to resolve it. The distinct "inscape of speech" of the Terrible Sonnets will be examined in this chapter, first in terms of their metre, and secondly in terms of the structure of their composition.

I have shown how the perception of inscape as the proportion of the

mixture between Being and Not-being, the One and the Many, is fundamental to Hopkins' epistemology. Hopkins' innovative sprung rhythm has been identified by many critics as the poetic expression that is indistinguishable from the conception of that inscape. Sister Marcella Marie Holloway, for instance, notes that Hopkins' prosodic theories are based on a notion of rhythm as an organic "harmony of diverse elements" (65), so that the metrical utterance itself becomes the unification of the many in the one. W.A.M. Peters, working with Hopkins' definition of poetry as "the inscape of speech for the inscape's sake" (*J* 289), asserts that "sprung rhythm is a natural result of his theory of inscape as the aim and end of poetry" (71). Michael Sprinker, however, after noting that Hopkins' theory of form is based on Plato's "logocentric or idealist tradition," but that for the poet form is more "eccentric, realist, differential" (*Counterpoint* 24), goes so far as to assert that in *itself* "Sprung rhythm metrically objectifies Hopkins's theory of form" (*Counterpoint* 27).

Just as visual/natural images of inscape are absent from the Terrible Sonnets, so too is the metrical objectification of that perception. Most readers of Hopkins agree with Elizabeth Schneider's assessment of the "plain style" of these sonnets, which she says "is marked in most instances by a return to old, relatively conventional rhythm, an iambic pentameter

handled with only a shade more freedom than may be found in other nineteenth-century sonnets" (179). Schneider asserts that the plain style is employed as an appropriate "vehicle for despair or dejection" (177), but does not inquire *why* this should be so.[1] I believe the answer lies in the experience of slack which conditioned the writing of the Terrible Sonnets.

Hopkins' sprung rhythm, in which so many of his poems were written,[2] is dependent on the emotional stress of word as sense-sound, rather than on the stress of rhythm-sound found in the quantitative counting of regularly accented syllables (*J* 279). The relation of metric stress to a semantic unit is a logical extension of Hopkins' metaphysical understanding of stress, first articulated in his Parmenides essay: "The truth in thought is Being, stress, and each word is one way of acknowledging Being . . ." (*J* 129). By emphasizing words as sense-sounds by means of metrical stress, sprung rhythm could acknowledge the existence of Being in the world, could effectively imitate the utterance of the Logos in poetic form. "The essence of Sprung Rhythm," Hopkins wrote to Canon Dixon in 1879, is that "one stress makes one foot, no matter how many or how few the syllables" (*L* 23). In such accentual rhythm, as opposed to the Common or Standard English rhythm, although the "slack" or unaccented portion is not counted, it is integral to the determination of the stress: "the stress being more *of* a

stress, being more important, allows of greater variation in the slack . . . . for particular rhythmic effects it is allowed, and more freely than in common rhythm, to use any number of slack syllables, limited only by ear" (*L2* 39-40). In this way, sprung rhythm incorporates in one flowing rhythm the two sidings of stress and slack, and the poetry expressed in this utterance is the "inscape of speech" that aurally exhibits the proportion of this mixture.

Sprung rhythm is also integral to Hopkins' conception of poetry as "current language heightened" (*L1* 89). According to Hopkins, sprung rhythm is to be preferred to syllabic verse because it is more *natural,* more like the "inscape of speech," and "inscape," he asserts, "is what I above all aim at in poetry" (*L1* 66). In a letter to Robert Bridges in 1882, Hopkins writes that "sprung rhythm, once you hear it, is so eminently natural a thing and so effective a thing that if they [i.e. other poets] had known of it they would have used it" (*L1* 156). Sprung rhythm, then, like inscape, has ontological reality, but lies unknown and buried away from the common folk; if they have ears to hear, they will hear sprung rhythm and use it; if they have eyes to see, they will see inscape and call it out "everywhere again" (*J* 221).

Though Hopkins "knows" of sprung rhythm, he does not use it as the governing measure in the Terrible Sonnets; the source of this incapacity is

the same which barred his sight from the perception of the Logos in the inscapes of created forms. In the experience of slack which conditioned the writing of these sonnets in 1885, the dynamic equation -- "this world then is word" (*S* 129) -- became a hypothesis, not a living reality, for the poet. The "Logos" is, of course, both visual-- the Word made flesh-- and aural-- the Word that as the Spirit of God called life into being when it moved over the face of the waters. However, when the copula integral to the utterance of the Logos-- In the beginning *was* the Word -- and the Word *was* made flesh -- breaks down, the loss of the "is" of that equation suspends the responding "yes," for the Word is neither seen nor heard. The suspension of that "yes" has already been examined in terms of the imagery of the Terrible Sonnets. The metrical expression, however, is also indistinguishable from the thought that gives rise to the images of the Terrible Sonnets; indeed, rhythm and metre themselves may be considered "as forms of metaphor" in Hopkins' poetics (Boyle xiii).

"Stress" for Hopkins is a complex term; it means "'the supporting pressure of divine animation as well as metrical utterance'" (Ellsberg 59). In the following passage, Margaret R. Ellsberg describes the mimetic function of Sprung Rhythm as an expression of inscape:

> Sprung, hard-stressed rhythm was his way of charging each poetic line with the maximum of energy, in imitation and praise of what

> he perceived in nature -- nature, that is, supported by the Incarnation and promise of Resurrection. Sprung rhythm was the opposite and antidote to the enervated, predictable, one might almost say, entropic meters of 'Parnassian' verse (59).

If nature is no longer "supported by the Incarnation and promise of Resurrection," however, but is perceived as the chaos of corruption, disorder, and dissociation which expresses man's sin and mortality, and prefigures the Apocalyptic Judgement, then sprung rhythm can no longer be the mimetic expression of that perception. The Terrible Sonnets are "inspirations unbidden" (*L* / 221), and are in no sense "Parnassian" which Hopkins defined as poetry of genius without inspiration (*J* 38). However, their rhythmic expression may perhaps be seen as the "entropic" metres which Ellsberg opposes to sprung rhythm, and it is in this way that their cadences express the condition of slack.

"Entropy" refers both to molecular disorder and to the thermal energy that is lost but not replaced in the world (Ellsberg 57). Margaret R. Ellsberg argues convincingly that Hopkins' belief in the Real Presence of the Eucharist, his perception of the Incarnation in created forms, and his expression of sprung rhythm in imitation of this belief and of this perception, were formed in response to the nineteenth-century theory of entropy:

> The concept of entropy, that energy was running out of the universe, was troubling to Victorians who had counted on the beneficent and

> constant presence of a divine Creator. Furthermore, entropy contradicted the idea of a divine order. Belief in the sacrament of transubstantiated bread and wine provided Hopkins with a reversal of this: the localization of divine energy into these two physical elements established order of a special sort, and added to, did not subtract from, the amount of energy in a given system:
>
> "The transformation of bread and wine into body and blood provided a model for change that served as an alternative to the physicist's model of thermodynamic decline. In the transubstantiation there is a change from a lower to a higher state of charge instead of the reverse; therein lay the action of grace" (57-8; last paragraph James Leggio quoted by Ellsberg).

While I do not believe that Hopkins' faith in the Real Presence of the Holy Sacrament ever wavered (*S* 261), the epistemology and the poetic expression grounded in that belief did suffer radical alteration in his final years. The sprung rhythm that is the mimetic expression of his incarnationist perception of inscape in many of the Nature Sonnets is replaced, in the Terrible Sonnets, by an "entropic" metre which imitates his experience of slack. Michael Sprinker notes that "As Hopkins's career progressed, his writing became a 'subtle and imperceptible drawing in towards its head or centre' [like the emblem of the spiral which represents Lucifer's 'instressing of his own inscape']. His texts tended more and more toward entropy, toward 'motion lessening and at last ceasing'" (*Counterpoint* 91).

Five of the Terrible Sonnets are written in standard (not to say "entropic") rhythm. "Carrion Comfort" is the only poem in this group

composed in sprung rhythm; a full consideration of this poem shall be reserved for later. In Poems 65 - 69, Hopkins replaces the emotional stress of emphatic accentual verse, which he sees as more "natural" to English versification, with the artificial structure of syllabic verse derived from classical poetry. But the notion of the metric "foot" in English prosody is, according to Hopkins, a fiction. In his lecture notes on "Rhythm and Other Structural Parts of Rhetoric -- Verse," Hopkins says that spoken English is naturally accented according to the sense-words, not accented according to the rhythm-words (*J* 279), that is, according to the *length* of syllables as in Greek and Latin (*J* 270). Quantitative length of syllable does not exist in spoken English; accent is weighted according to the strength given to a morpheme, and is varied by the emotional pitch of utterance. The foot determined by the grouping of long and short syllables in classical poetry is in English merely a "so-called foot," an accepted but arbitrary "convenience" in traditional scansion (Holloway, *Prosodic Theory* 44). Why Hopkins resorts to the fiction of counted syllables as opposed to the more natural expression of emphatic stress-sense in the Terrible Sonnets shall be examined in the metrical analysis of Poems 65-69 which follows.

Although these sonnets are written in "iambic pentameter handled with only a shade more freedom than may be found in other nineteenth-century

sonnets" (Schneider 179), the way in which the iambic metre is varied merits consideration. It is perhaps more correct to call the rhythms of these sonnets "mixed" rather than "standard," for Hopkins frequently varies the monotonous regularity of the iambic pentameter by "mounting" a new rhythm on the old. In his "Author's Preface" to the Poems (1883), Hopkins says that the reversal of a single foot in iambic metre

> . . . cannot be said to amount to a formal change of rhythm, but rather is that irregularity which all natural growth and motion shews. If however the reversal is repeated in two feet running, especially so as to include the sensitive second foot, it must be due either to great want of ear or else is a calculated effect, the superinducing or *mounting* of a new rhythm upon the old; and since the new or mounted rhythm is actually heard and at the same time the mind naturally supplies the natural or standard foregoing rhythm, for we do not forget what the rhythm is that by rights we should be hearing, two rhythms are in some manner running at once and we have something answerable to counterpoint in music, which is two or more strains of tune going on together, and this is Counterpoint Rhythm (*P* 46).

This counterpoint rhythm is used extensively in Poems 65-69, so that two rhythms, rising and falling, are ofter heard simultaneously. "Sprung Rhythm," however, "cannot be counterpointed" (*P* 47). It is throughout a "falling rhythm" in which the stress "falls on the only syllable, if there is only one, or, if there are more, then scanning as above, on the first, and so gives rise to four sorts of feet, a monosyllable and the so-called accentual Trochee, Dactyl, and First Paeon" (*P* 47). Now in standard iambic rhythm, the movement is "rising;" the slack always precedes the stress.

Counterpointing a standard rhythm is achieved by mounting a "falling" rhythm on a "rising rhythm," and the effect of these two heard and felt rhythms running against each other, when used consistently as a metrical principle over two or three feet in succession, is to create a rhythmic suspension of movement, a temporary stalling occasioned by the meeting of two contrary movements. It is in this way that the counterpointed rhythms of the Terrible Sonnets imitate the state of "slack" that gave rise to their expression.

The reversal of the second and third foot in the seventh line of "I Wake and feel" demonstrates the mimetic nature of counterpointed rhythm:

                                        x   /   x   /
                                . . . And my lament
x /   /   x   /   x   x   / x   /
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
x /   x   /   x   /   x /   x /
To dearest him that lives alas! away. (*P* No. 67)

The thought here is indistinguishable from the metrical expression, for like the "cries like dead letters" which are inexplicably stalled before reaching their recipient, the rhythm too is suspended halfway through the line. Instead of proceeding in an ongoing rising rhythm of regularly alternating slack and stress, the iambic pentameter is mounted by a falling rhythm. The two movements which meet in the sensitive second and third feet of this line may be seen as two contrary motions which stall the metrical cadence

before the predominant rising rhythm is reasserted. In this meeting of opposing motions effected through the counterpointing of rising and falling rhythms, the metre is temporarily suspended between the third and fourth feet. As Daniel Harris observes, the metaphor and metre of the line "And my lament / Is cries countless, cries like dead letters. . .," like that found in the lines "My cries heave, herds-long" (*P* No. 65), and in "We hear our hearts grate on themselves" (*P* No. 68), are indicative of the fragmentation of Hopkins' immanental vision: "These hyperconscious anatomies of the qualities of sound, for all that they reveal of Hopkins's brilliant musicianship, are instances of 'foiled action'; leading nowhere, they demonstrate the failure of Hopkins's effort to communicate spiritually with his body as object" (63). This "foiled action" is evident in the rhythms of the line now under examination in "I wake and feel." The stress system of the seventh line highlights the alliterated "cries" and emphasizes their "countless" quality, then falls almost into silence on the two slack syllables "like dead" before the next stress is asserted. Like the movement of the spiral, in which "motion is lessening and at last ceasing," the opposition of rising and falling rhythms centred over the caesura of this line is a "subtle and imperceptible drawing in towards its head or centre" (*S* 198). The generating condition of slack is in this way expressed not only in the

imagery, but also in the rhythm which carries it.

Although Hopkins likens counterpointed rhythm to counterpoint in music, the analogy, when examined, is imprecise. In music, two or more melodies, each with its own rhythm, may be heard simultaneously as one, but the essential musical statement is always heard as the underthought or "plain song" of the accompanying melodies mounted over or under it. However, in poetic rhythm, it is not tune, but motion which is "mounted" on the ground-rhythm or "plain style." The ear can discriminate different organizations and complex levels of sound and rhythm in music and still hold them together, but poetic rhythm is expressed and understood syntactically and semantically.[3] While the ear can distinguish metrical counterpoint as the "carrying on of two figures at once," the resultant "breaking up of the rhythm into sense-words of different lengths from the sound-words" (*J* 280) can be just that: a breaking up, not a harmony. The felt impression of the counterpointed rhythms of the Terrible Sonnets is the stalled repetition that arises when a falling rhythm is suddenly interposed in the midst of a rising rhythm. When the poetic rhythm actually counterpoints the syntactic rhythm, the expression of the sensible meaning can become "a counterpoint of dissonance and not of harmony" (*S* 201).

Rhythmic counterpoint is caesura "fixed by rule" (*J* 280), and Hopkins

argues that the "various means of breaking the sameness of rhythm and especially caesura do not break the unity of the verse but the contrary; they make it organic and what is organic is one" (*J* 283). However, the metrical caesura in the second line of "To seem the stranger" plays against the syntactical caesura of the period. The organic unity of the rhythm in this way not only counterpoints, but countermands, the sensible meaning of the utterance by means of two conflicting caesuras. The first quatrain of the poem is written in standard iambic pentameter. However, the reversal of the sensitive second and third feet in the second line counterpoints the iambic rhythm:

x / x / x / x / x /
To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life
x / / x / x x / x /
Among strangers. Father and mother dear,
/ x x / x / x / x /
Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near
x / x / x / x / x /
And he my peace / my parting, sword and strife. (*P* No. 66)

Hopkins observes that a reversal extending over two feet running, especially when including "the sensitive second foot," must be a "calculated effect" (*P* 46) by a poet who does not lack an ear, but who can be said "to recognise the form [he is] employing and to mean it" (*L* 156). The effect of the reversed feet in the second line of "To seem the stranger" is two-fold. First, the reversals add weight to the line by slowing down the speed of the

utterance and effectively lengthening the ten syllables. Hopkins believed the sonnet form in English to be less successful than the Italian version because, although it has the same "inner proportions," it lacks the Italian sonnet's "absolute length" which the Romantic language's quantitative syllables give it (*L2* 85-6). The lack of "absolute length" can be corrected by such things as inversions and gravity of thought which compel "a longer dwelling on the words" (*L2* 86). This last is the second effect of the reversed feet in the second line of "To seem the stranger." The sense-words "strangers" and "father" are associationally linked because their metrical units (trochees) mirror each other. Although "father and mother dear" are one conceptual phrase, the emotional association as expressed by the metrical stresses is on "strangers" and "father." Moreover, these two words exhibit "*vowelling off*," that is, the "changing of vowel [in this case *a*] down some scale or strain or keeping" (*J* 284), and their echoic suffixes (ers/er) complete the chiming. The result of this "calculated effect" is the aural association of "strangers" with "father," so that the meaning of "father" is expanded beyond the particular member of a specific family group (suggested by the phrase "father and mother") to include the implied "Our Father." The reversal of these two feet may be seen as an expression of Hopkins' reversed experience of Christ's words: "I was a stranger, and ye

took me not in" (Matt. 25:43).

Hopkins told Robert Bridges that his poetic rhythms were meant to be imitative of the thought expressed in his words and images (*L* I 52). However, in identifying a particular rhythmic cadence as imitative of the thought or experience expressed in the words of a poetic line, it is well to keep in mind that this is not the same as saying that a particular rhythm is *symbolic* of that thought. The same configuration of stresses and slacks in a line can express equally well praise of God's immanence as the sense of his absence; the conditioning determiner is, of course, the semantic expression, the words and images which are carried by the rhythm. It is in this way that "thought and expression are indistinguishable" in poetry. The sprung rhythm which is used with such assurance throughout the thirty-five stanzas of "The Wreck of the Deutschland," and which employs accentual stress to express the poet's consideration of the operation of divine stress in the world, is not absolutely abandoned in the mixed rhythms of the Terrible Sonnets which express the poet's experience of spiritual slack. Rather, the use of sprung rhythm and the meaning expressed by it are altered. Some lines of these sonnets are so counterpointed that the underlying iambic rhythm is in fact "destroyed . . . and what is written is one rhythm only and probably Sprung Rhythm" (*P* 47). Sprung rhythm, in the

Terrible Sonnets, is used as a calculated metrical effect in one or two lines of any given fourteen, and both the "over-reaving" of lines natural to this rhythm, and the licence of "out-riding feet" peculiar to it (*P* 48), are employed to give extra emphasis to the expression of their thought. The sudden imposition of a single sprung line between lines written in common metre leaves the scansion itself doubtful for a time, and this technique effectively imitates the sense of suspension experienced in the condition of slack. At the same time, however, the impassioned voice of the speaker is foregrounded, for sprung rhythm is "oratorical" rhythm, the "markedness of rhythm -- that is rhythm's self" (*L* / 46). This mingling of two rhythmic systems is, according to Hopkins, "the most delicate and difficult business of all" (*L* / 45), and in the Terrible Sonnets, it is used with great precision to marked effect.

In the final tercet of "My own heart," the thirteenth line is "sprung" between two lines of standard iambic pentameter:

> x / x / x / x / x /
> at God knows when to God knows what; whose smile
> x / / x x / / x x /
> 's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather -- as skies
> x / x / x / x / x /
> Betweenpie mountains -- lights a lovely mile. (*P* No. 69)

The phoneme *s* is over-reaved from the final "smile" of the twelfth line, so that the "'s" is rhythmically slurred into the "not," rather than being a part

of the contracted semantic unit "smile *is*." The copula "is" in this way is broken down into a phoneme of sound rather than a morpheme of sense; effectively, the "is" of this equation does not exist. Moreover, the expletive "see you" is an out-riding foot, two slack syllables not counted "in the nominal scanning," which seem "to hang below the line or ride forward or backward from it in another dimension than the line itself" (*P* 48). An imperative clause built on the verb "to see," equated in Hopkins' epistemology with "to know," which is in "another dimension than the line itself," indicates the degree to which his integrated incarnationist vision is altered in the Terrible Sonnets. In the slurred suspension of the copula "is" and in the severance of "see you" from the scansion of the line, the metaphoric rhythm of line thirteen imitates the experience of slack that the words express.

The final tercet of "Patience" also has a sprung line inserted between two standard iambic lines:[4]

x / x / x / x / x /
And where is he who more and more distills
x / x / x / x / x /
Delicious kindness?-- He is patient. Patience fills
x / / x x / x / x /
His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know. (*P* No. 68)

Apart from the initial "rocking" foot (*P* 45) of line thirteen, the line is

scanned with the stress always on the first syllable of each semantic unit, so that the rhythm is falling. However, this scansion is made possible only by the outriding foot after the first caesura -- "He is." These two slack syllables are not counted in the nominal scansion; without the licence of this outride, the pentameter would extend to twelve syllables. In this way, the breaking down of the copula "is" which occurs when there is "no stem of stress between us and things to bear us out and carry the mind over" (*J* 129) is imitated by the metrical expression. Rather than being integral to the identity of the equation, "He is patient," and fundamental to the expression of thought in the line itself, the subject and its copula, "He is," are metrically severed from the completion that gives them meaning: "--patient."

"No worst, there is none" is a sonnet whose metre is so complex that it all but defies definitive scansion. The restraining structure of the pentameter is threatened in almost every line. Lines which are written in ten syllables (such as 1 and 2) are so counterpointed that they have, at times, *six* felt accentual stresses playing over the five nominal syllabic stresses; other ten-syllable lines (such as 9 and 10) are actually written in sprung rhythm. On the other hand, lines of twelve syllables (such as 13) or eleven syllables (such as 7 and 8) are, apart from their outriding feet,

actually written in common rhythm with the licence of reversed feet. In this sonnet, the tensions among sprung, common, and counterpointed rhythms are so intense that the metrical expression becomes, as Yvor Winters has contended, "a rhythm based on the principle of violent struggle with its governing measure, and it contributes to the violence of feeling in the total poem" (in Hartman 45). Winters goes on to suggest that "the violence is in some degree the result of the inadequacy of motive" in the poetic "statement": "since he [Hopkins] cannot move us by telling us why he himself is so moved, he must try to move us by belaboring his emotion" (in Hartman 45).

However, Mr. Winters jumps too quickly from his appreciation of the mimetic nature of the rhythm in "No worst" to a condemnation of the lack of a "generating concept" for the expression: "This kind of thing is a violation of our integrity; it is somewhat beneath the dignity of man" (in Hartman 46). Mr. Winters would falsely distinguish the thought from its expression; Hopkins is in fact subtly using the rhythm itself to "tell us why he is so moved." In the opening line, for example, the nominal scansion is as follows:

x / x / x / x / x /
No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief. . . . (*P* No. 65)

However, the line has two alternative scansions. The first of these is as follows:

x / x x / / x / x /
No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief. . . .

In this scansion, the rhythm is still basically iambic, with the acceptable licenses of a rising anapest in the second foot and a reversal in the third foot, so that two strong stresses lengthen the dwelling on the line's central caesura. In the first scansion, "the break in the middle divides the line indeed but it leaves a foot unfinished, so as to give the equation 2.5 + 2.5 = 5" (J 280). In the second scansion, the monotony of the pentameter is avoided by the introduction of an asymmetrical balance over the central caesura: 2 + 3 = 5. But there is a third, emotional rhythm, in which *six* accentual stresses may be felt. The line would then be scanned as follows:

/ / x x / / x / x /
No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief. . . .

In this case, the caesura again evenly divides the stresses, this time into 3 + 3 over the ten syllables. This falling, six-stress rhythm counterpoints the rising five stress rhythms of the first two scansions. Since the ten syllables are in fact ten semantic units, determining the "actual" stress of these monosyllables is problematic, and can only be determined by the emotional "pitch" of utterance in oratorical reading. In his lecture notes on "Rhythm and the Other Structural Parts of Rhetoric -- Verse," Hopkins differentiates between two kinds of accent:

> that *of pitch* (tonic) and that *of stress* (emphatic). We may think of words as heavy bodies, as indoor or out of door objects of nature or man's art. Now every visible palpable body has a centre of gravity round which it is in balance and a centre of illumination or *highspot* or *quickspot* up to which it is lighted and down from which it is shaded. The centre of gravity is like the accent of stress, the highspot like the accent of pitch, for pitch is like light and colour, stress like weight . . . (*J* 269).

In the line "No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief," the "centre of gravity" of each "heavy word" is a variable determined by the illumination thrown on it by the emotional pitch of impassioned oratorical reading. Since the thought expressed includes the notion of a musical pitching beyond a proper pitch, the elusive "highspots" moving over this line effectively express the "generating concept" of the poetry: at this pitch past pitch, pitch itself is indeterminate. Moreover, since the "centres of gravity" of the words in this line are in flux, the metrical utterance expresses the "diabolical gravity" that is the "innate propensity of the self to fall in on itself and disappear" (Miller 341, 340). Not only is the speaker of "No worst" thrown off the "stem of stress" that gives his pitch of self meaning and definition, but the rhythmic stresses themselves are thrown off the regular rising cadence of the governing iambic pentameter, and it is by means of this integrated expression that Hopkins tells us why he is so moved in the poem.

In "Carrion Comfort," Hopkins uses the six-stress alexandrine line rather than the pentameter, and employs the emphatic emphasis of sprung rhythm rather than the accentual count of iambic rhythm. Hopkins considered that the English Sonnet, "in comparison with the Italian [,is] short, tripping and trifling" because of its want of "absolute length" (*L2* 86). In a letter to Canon Dixon in 1881, Hopkins argues that the "mechanical remedy" of this "mechanical difficulty" can be achieved through the use of "'outriding' feet" and by the use of "Alexandrine lines" (*L2* 87). The gravity of thought expressed in "Carrion Comfort" necessitates the extension of the conventional pentameter by the marked oratorical rhythms of the hexameteter he uses to increase the sonnet's "absolute length." Hopkins had a "preference for the alexandrine" and argued that "the long lines are not rhythm run to seed: everything is weighed and timed in them" (*L1* 157).[5] In "Carrion Comfort" the sprung alexandrine lines of the final tercet are so long that line thirteen, for example, has seventeen syllables, and lines twelve and fourteen have fifteen each. However, the syllables are so carefully weighed and timed that the regularity of the six accentual stresses still governs the metre:

/ x /x / x / x /
Cheer whom though? The hero whose heaven-handling flung
x x /
me, foot trod

/ x / x / x / x
Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one?
x / x /
That night, that year
/ x / / x / x x x /
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!)
x /
my God. (*P* No. 64)

W.H. Gardner argues very plausibly that in "Carrion Comfort"[6] "the skill with which Hopkins avoids the weakness of the mid-line break by placing the caesural pause between closely related syllables and obviates the 'invariable end pause' by a rapid over-reaving from line to line should dispel once for all any legislator's qualms about the suitability of this sonnet-form to the English language" (I: 103). In line thirteen, for example, not only is the first outride a metrical over-reaving of the previous line's
/ x x
felt dactyl ("trod / me or"), so that the first foot actually starts on the stressed second "me," but the outrides preceding the third and fourth feet also develop the intensity of the line's interrogatives by emphasizing the
/ x / x
chimed "which one?" and "each one?" before the reversal of the fifth and sixth feet. In addition, the rising intonation conditioned by the question marks is counterpointed by the falling stresses that emphasize the first syllable in each metrical unit rather than the last. The meeting of these two rhythms, the oratorical and the metrical, gives "a full sonority to each word" (Gardner I: 92), thereby effectively lengthening each monosyllable,

and adding weight and tension to the expression. Similarly, the out-rided "Cheer" at the head of the twelfth line is over-reaved from the stressed "cheer" at the end of the previous line (" would laugh, cheer / Cheer whom though"), which creates the same echoic effect by metrical stress and slack as is achieved by the repetition of an identical figure of sound. Finally, the initial outride of line fourteen is over-reaved from the first paeon of the previous line's final foot: "year / of now done darkness." But since these three slack syllables are, metrically speaking, an outride "in another dimension than the line itself," the words "of now done" are reduced to a feeble whisper located outside the strength of stresses on "darkness," "I," "wretch," "wrestling," "God," and "God." In this way, the interrogative mood of the entire sestet is imitated by the rhythm of the final line itself. The outriding foot, "of now done" which modifies "that year," is not a ringing and emphatic affirmation, but a suspended "maybe."

Hopkins' skill in handling the weak central caesura of the alexandrine line in this final tercet is considerable. In effect, he changes duple time (3 + 3) to triple time (2 + 2 + 2) by means of a felt caesura between alliterated pairs. In line twelve, for example, the ostensible central caesura is placed between the two alliterated pairs, "hero whose," and "heaven-handling;" this divides the line into two balanced but asymmetrical groups of seven and

eight syllables each. However, due to the outrides on "cheer" and "the," there are only two felt stresses in the first half of the line, on "whom though" and "hero whose." These two stresses are matched after the caesura by two groups with two alliterated feet each, "heaven-handling" and "flung me, foot trod [me]." Thus, although there is a central caesura which ostensibly divides the syllables more-or-less equally, the real determination of the timing of the line is created by the accentual and alliterative metre.

The countering of two rhythms is in music known as *hemiola*. Hemiola allows for alternate groupings of the six rhythmic units into either binary rhythm with ternary subdivisions (i.e., 2 x 3) or else ternary rhythm with binary subdivisions (i.e., 3x2) (Sachs 190). Hopkins' revival of functional alliteration (Ong in Hartman 158) in sprung rhythm is achieved in part by his sensitivity to the variable hemiola of a six stress line. The alternate rhythmic divisions which allow for 2-time and 3-time to be heard and felt simultaneously charge all fourteen lines of "Carrion Comfort" with additional tension. The binary opposition of not/can and me/him (or I/thou) which informs the conceptual tension of the sonnet is expressed by the parallel groupings of alliterated pairs, such as "Thy wringworld right foot rock," and by the paired chimings of internal rhyme in "That my chaff might

fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear." But the marked parallelism of the images and of the metrical structure is played out over nine interrogatives which Gardner suggests are not strictly "legal" to the sonnet form (I: 79). The nine interrogatives, however, are essential to and indistinguishable from the sonnet's thought and expression; they introduce a ternary motif to the conceptual tension which makes the binary oppositions of the sonnet effectively irresolvable. The coinciding duple and triple rhythms of the six stress lines of "Carrion Comfort" imitate both those oppositions and the impossibility of stabilizing or solving them.

Rhythm and metre, in Hopkins' prosody, may be seen "as forms of metaphor" (Boyle xiii). The metrical units determined by the "stress" of each heavy word's gravity and illuminated by the "highspot" of pitch thrown over each word in oratorical reading objectify Hopkins' rhythmic responses to the experience of slack which the poetry expresses. Moreover, Robert Boyle suggests that "It is a . . . complex of metaphorical rhythms which often dictates the structure of Hopkins' verse and, therefore, of the imagery included in that verse" (xv). Boyle goes on to argue that "in order to understand Hopkins' images fully and to perceive the reasons which justify his novelties and boldness, it is not enough to consider merely the significations of his words and predications. The dictates of meter,

rhythms, and sound must also receive full consideration" (xviii). The sound and shape of the Terrible Sonnets, like the images which they carry, express the distinct "inscape of speech " which the experience of slack generated in the poet.

A poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins (or by any non-Parnassian poet, for that matter) is not a "statement in words" to which rhythm and structure have been superadded, as Mr. Winters would have it (in Hartman 37-8), but an integrated metrical utterance in which thought and expression are indistinguishable. The thought expressed grammatically in Hopkins' poems is given shape in the structure which embodies it. The governing grammatical moods of the Nature Sonnets, for example, are imperative: "Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!" (*P* No. 32); declamatory: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God" (*P* No. 31); and exclamatory or vocative: "a billion / Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!" (*P* No. 36). The structure of these sonnets reflects the assurance of the grammatical mood; in each case the sestet resolves the particular experience described in the octave by revealing its universal and divine meaning in the sestet.

However, the governing grammatical mood of the Terrible Sonnets is interrogative rather than imperative or exclamatory, and the questions

posed in them are not only unanswered, but apparently unanswerable. Marylou Motto has helpfully contrasted the use of the question in the Nature Sonnets to its use in the Terrible Sonnets. She sees the question in the Nature Sonnets as essentially an exclamation rather than an interrogative, expressing wonder at the certainty that has been revealed. The question-and-answer pattern of these sonnets is like that of the catechism, each question followed by a ready, immediate, known, answer (103). Motto contends that in the Nature Sonnets, "the recurring pattern of question and answer forms yet another structure that signals the speaker's exactitude, his sureness, and most of all, his belief in a continuously responsive universe" (103). In contrast, the questions posed in the Terrible Sonnets have no pat and ready answers, and this change in pattern effects an important structural change in the sonnet form. The questioning is no longer rhetorical, no longer an exclamation of certitude, but the real questioning which arises out of a state of mind which says: "I do not know, but I live in hope of an answer." As Motto maintains, "there is a presumption that there are answers, but like God's grace they are now unlocatable and unforthcoming" (107).

The structure of the Terrible Sonnets reflects this questioning voice: the sestets do not resolve the experience described in their octaves.

Rather, the turns are delayed, doubled, or even omitted. Of all six sonnets in this group, only "I wake and feel" and "My own heart" have anything like a standard volta at the ninth line which introduces a new system of imagery to initiate a conceptual and/or emotional turn. In "I wake and feel," the turn is initiated by the identity of the speaker with the experience itself: "I am gall, I am heartburn" (*P* No.67). But the resolution attempted over the final six lines *leaves* him in that condition rather than redeems him: "I see / The lost are like this, and their scourge to be / As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse." Unlike the affirmative sestets of the Nature Sonnets, in which the speaker instresses his will to God's incoming stress in ecstatic union, the final sestet of "I wake and feel" leaves its speaker not only separated from God, but doubting whether his condition is "like" that of the lost in hell, or "worse."

In "My own heart," the turn at the ninth line is initiated by a change into the imperative mood:

> Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise
> You, jaded, let be; 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. (*P* No. 69)

But the final command, "let joy size / At God knows when to God knows

what," slackens into indeterminacy, perhaps even into "good-humoured swearing" (Mariani, *Commentary* 240), if such a thing can be said of a devout Jesuit priest. This is a far cry from the imperative which expresses the instressing union between the observer/participant and God at the end of "Pied Beauty": "He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: / Praise him" (*P* No. 37). In "Pied Beauty," the "structure of rhythm and sound seems to be for the purpose of making the poem a model in little of the universe it names" (Miller 303). In "My own heart," however, neither the poetic structure, nor the imagery, name and praise God; the sonnet form does not create a "little world," but a "world undone" (*P* No. 150).

In "To seem the stranger," the turn is delayed until the tenth line: "Not but in all removes I can / Kind love both give and get" (*P* No. 66). However, this turn does not effect resolution: the sestet does not develop and define the meaning of this change of heart and thought. A second turn, presented as an implied question but not completed, follows the first immediately, beginning at line eleven with "Only what word. . . ." This turn doubles on the first by effecting a re-turn to the experience of the octave. The lonely condition of "the stranger" introduced in the sonnet's opening lines is not resolved but re-iterated in the "lonely began" of the last words, so that the sonnet's structure itself doubles in on itself, and so that resolution is

effectively stalled. The "inscape of speech" that determines the structure of this sonnet's form reflects the poet's inscaping of his own instress. The speaker's self seems to be "confronted by that scape, that act of its own, which blotted out God and so put blackness in the place of light," with the result that his voice is imprisoned in his own sonnet form, where he "violently instresses and burns, stares into [these scapes of his own] and is the deeper darkened" (*S* 138).

This self-enclosure in the sonnet form also occurs in "Patience." Here the turn initiated in the ninth line by the introduction of a new system of imagery which confounds the calm basking of Patience by the cacophony of rebellious hearts, does not resolve the speaker's disability to achieve his desire. Rather, a second volta initiates the final tercet by posing an unanswered (and perhaps unanswerable) question: " And where is he who more and more distills / Delicious kindness?" (*P* No. 68). This turn, like the second volta of "To seem the stranger," is essentially a re-turn to the experience of the octave, not a resolution of it. "Patience" remains "there" in "His crisp combs," but not here and tasted in the speaker's mouth, not experienced in his own body. The separation and disintegration of the speaker from his own body suggested in the image "we hear our hearts grate on themselves" is in the final line of the sonnet expressed by the separation

of the speaker's mouth from the object of his taste-desire. Although the speaker acknowledges that Patience "comes those ways we know," Patience is not experienced here and now, but is a suspended future possibility that remains "the hard thing but to pray, / But bid for."

The indeterminacy caused by the two voltas in the sestet which confound the resolution of the experience of the octave in "Carrion Comfort" has already been examined.[7] But the sonnet showing the greatest suspension of resolution in the Terrible Sonnets group is the one "written in blood" -- "No worst." In this sonnet, the turn is neither delayed nor doubled; it is absent (Mariani, *Commentary* 227). The reason resolution is not even attempted in this sonnet is emphatically asserted in the opening line: "No worst, there is none" (*P* No. 65). In the experience of being "pitched past pitch of grief," the only apparent resolution is the cessation of inner torment made possible by death or sleep: "all / Life death does end and each day dies with sleep." In the fragmented world of slack, separated from the grace of God's divine stress and unable to re-integrate the self through an instress of will, the dearest desire becomes, not the seemingly impossible union with Christ, but the all-too-possible disintegration of death. J. Hillis Miller suggests that in Hopkins' "shattering experience of the disappearance of God" in his life at the time of writing the Terrible Sonnets, his "self is

cut off from everything outside and shrinks into the impenetrable enclosure of itself" (353). In the poetry which expresses the experience of this suspension of the activating stress of grace in Hopkins' life, the sonnet form itself shrinks into an impenetrable enclosure.

In his final years, although Gerard Manley Hopkins attempted longer dramatic poems, he complained of having "no inspiration of longer jet than makes a sonnet" (*L I* 270), and in fact all his completed poems from 1885-1889 are sonnets. Daniel J. Orsini posits that Hopkins' predilection for the sonnet form was conditioned by his desire for order and by his fear of his own sensuousness (106). He argues that "It is not accidental that Hopkins uses a form in which, typically, a problem is stated and then resolved. . . . Invariably, Hopkins' poems offer comfortable resolutions that satisfy, one senses, the poet's expectations as much as the reader's, and this format is as true of the 'joyous' nature poems as it is of the grief-stricken holy sonnets" (107). However, the sonnet structure of these poems becomes a constrained enclosure for their speaker. There is, in fact, no "comfortable resolution" in the Terrible Sonnets; indeed, there is often no resolution at all. This irresolution is also expressed by the rhythms which carry the thought and structure of the poetry. As Michael Sprinker notes, "The shape of verse, its formal structure, is primarily determined by its

rhythm. But rhythm is not a univocal concept. It is produced by a kind of tensional play between stress and pitch" (*Counterpoint* 29). In the "tensional play between stress and pitch" in the rhythms of the Terrible Sonnets, and in the concomitant irrresolution of the sonnet structure determined by it, Hopkins found the sound and shape which expressed the condition of slack out of which he wrote. If ever a poet may be said to have recognized the form he was employing, and to mean it (*L I* 156), that poet was Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Notes

[1] See also W.H. Gardner, who suggests that to read "the sonnets of desolation, written between *Carrion Comfort* and the poet's death, is to realize how persistently he kept his eye on the traditional mould. At certain times, when the mood of joy-in-creation was ousted by *the mere desire to discharge a grief,* he reverted to the regular sonnet in standard rhythm with occasional trisyllabic or hurried feet and a few counterpointed or sprung lines" (I:108; my italics).

[2] In his categorical chart on the rhythmic classification of Hopkins' completed poetry, M.A. Yadugiri notes that 26/49 poems are written in sprung rhythm, 11/49 in mixed rhythm, and 13/49 in standard rhythm. Yadugiri places "Carrion Comfort" in the sprung rhythm category, "No Worst," "To seem the stranger," "Patience," and "My own heart" in the mixed rhythm category, and "I wake and feel" in the standard category (5). However, as I demonstrate above, "I wake and feel" is also written in mixed rhythm, for it has some counterpointed lines.

[3] It is interesting to note that even in musically counterpointing the airs he composed for poems, Hopkins "stylizes the pattern of sound (which is usually also the pattern of meaning) as GMH heard it in the poem" (*J* 459). It seems that as a musician, Hopkins' gift was "a gift for *melody*" rather than for the harmony he later added to an air (*J* 458). In "The Battle of the Baltic," for instance, his most ambitious surviving composition (a chorus put to the words of Thomas Campbell's poem), the interest is in the essential melody; the contrapuntal melody mounted under it in the bass is "capable of subtle *rhythmic* rather than of harmonic development" (*J* 477). See John Stevens, "Gerard Manley Hopkins as Musician" *J* 457-497.

[4] The reversed second foot of line fourteen, while unusual, does not alter the standard iambic rhythm of the line. Counterpoint rhythm only occurs when the reversal is repeated two feet in succession. See "Author's Preface" *P* 46.

[5] Hopkins is here speaking of the alexandrine lines of "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" (*P* No. 59), but the same can be said of the long lines of "Carrion Comfort."

[6] Gardner includes "To what serves Mortal Beauty" (*P* No. 62) and "The Soldier" (*P* No. 63) in this argument. See I:103.

[7] See above, Chapter Two 73ff.

Conclusion

The Terrible Crystal and the Immortal Diamond

The experience of slack which was the generating condition for Gerard Manley Hopkins' Terrible Sonnets "rose in the forms of expression which we read in the poem in his mind, thought and expression indistinguishable" (J 110). Visual imagery, rhythmic metaphor, and poetic form are in this group of sonnets radically altered from that of other sonnets in Hopkins' canon. The fragmentation of world and self into their siding of "Not-being" is uttered in the "inscape of speech" of these sonnets. The world has become internalized to the point that the eyes, those apertures of sight which enable the perceiver to unite with the object he perceives in Hopkins' epistemology, are blocked, and the apertures which lead only into the self -- ears, mouth, flesh -- become privileged. It is by these sensations that Hopkins "knows" his world in the Terrible Sonnets. But these sensations are differential, not unitive. They isolate the self's experience of his own body as object, but they can provide no integration of subject (I) and object (body). Furthermore, this isolated and introverted experience obviates the

possibility of instressing union with God through the immanental perception of inscape. The emotional participation between subject and object in that "psychological landscape" is reduced, in the state of slack, to the fragmented experience of self with self in the "waste space" of Not-being. In the horror which prepossesses the mind in the apprehension of diversity without the unity of a prior divine idea to give meaning and purpose to individuated creation, the world and the self "fall apart and hang" in a state of slack. The stress of God, conceived of as the binding force which ropes individuated creation into the tension of unity, and the instress of the observer/participant which upholds the "being-in-struggle" in Hopkins' incarnationist vision, are absent from the poetic expression of the Terrible Sonnets.

Hopkins' perception of inscape was dependent upon his ability to see the One in the many, to see the Incarnate Word featured in the faces of men and in the forms of nature. But that unitive perception was conditioned by his emotional, psychological, and spiritual moods. His experience of stress in the world could become the experience of slack when he was unable to uphold a unitive apprehension of Nature. In this state, the horror of fragmentation, corruption, and death, and the fear of final judgement, threw his "stem of stress" off its vertical track toward God, and doubled it back on

itself. Out of the inaction and deadly silence at the vortex of Lucifer's spiral, we hear the voice of the speaker of the Terrible Sonnets instressing his own inscape. In this constrained self-imprisonment, the speaker cannot call on the Holy Name and recover himself; he remains isolated in the slack strands of his own body, an "I" separated from the dynamic stress of "I AM" with which it desires, but cannot achieve, union. The slack of this experience is expressed by the inability either to name or to praise God.

The felt absence of the dynamic activities of stress (God's sustaining grace) and instress (man's responding will) is expressed in the imagery and composition of the Terrible Sonnets. The loss of the copula "is" and the reciprocal loss of man's "yes" is imaged forth in the synaesthetic metaphors and in the metaphoric rhythms of these sonnets. With the loss of the perception of the Real Presence in created forms, the grounds for metaphoric equation, and for the dynamic identification of subject and object, are suspended. Metaphor becomes implied comparison, a hypothetical "maybe" rather than an affirming "is." This suspension between "yes" and "no" is imitated by the irresolution of the sonnet structure itself. Rather than moving out beyond itself in the sestet to a glorious affirmation of and identification with the Word which the poet's word mimes, the sestets of the Terrible Sonnets double back on the initiating impulse of each

poem. In this instressing of his own inscape, the poet cannot move out of the constrained imprisonment of the sonnet: the form itself becomes an image of his encoiled experience in the state of slack. Moreover, the metaphoric rhythms which carry the images and determine the structure by their tensional play of stress and pitch are also imitative of the experience of slack. The mixed rhythms of the Terrible Sonnets metrically objectify Hopkins' disabling entropy in which he felt his motion toward God to be "lessening and at last ceasing." The imagery of slack in the Terrible Sonnets includes images of word, sound, and structure, each indistinguishable from the thought that gave rise to their expression. This thought is the horror of slack: the sensed separation from God which Gerard Manley Hopkins endured during 1885 in Dublin, and which he expressed in the writing of the Terrible Sonnets.

But Hopkins thought of his relation to God in terms of the current of a tide or the flow of a fountain, each of which incorporates moments of stall and falling back in its upward or forward-moving motions. For Hopkins, God was the "master of the tides" whom he admired, "the recurb and the recovery of the gulf's sides" he desired, whose sovereignty "heeds but hides, bodes but abides" (*P* No. 28 11:32). In the slack suspension of the Terrible Sonnets, the poet waits numbly for "the God that hidest [him]self" (Isaiah 45:15) to

be revealed again, waits for the recurb and recovery of his fountain-flow to be mastered again (through his own willing submission) by God.

The "terrible crystal" (*L2* 80) of the Terrible Sonnets reveals the internal structure of Hopkins' tormented world with frightful clarity, but those faceted surfaces could again reflect the light of the world when charged with God's grace. In "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection" (*P* No. 72), written in July 1888, we not only see Hopkins' spiritual state returning to stress, but we see how hard-won and easily threatened by slack that state of stress is. The sonnet opens -- as do the Nature Sonnets of ten years before -- with an earthly celebration of the images of nature. But these visual natural images are not given divine meaning in the sestet: the beautiful particularity of created forms is not roped together by a divine order which gives meaning and purpose to individuated creation. The meaning of the boisterous accumulation of imagery is simply to contrast the constant replenishment of "nature's bonfire" to the momentary glow and extinction of man's "firedint." But at the moment of horror at the "disseveral" manshape which "death blots black out," the slackening is resisted, and the instressing will is moved forward again to meet God's stress.

It is not, however, the Incarnate Word imaged forth in the forms of

nature or in the faces and features of men, enabling Hopkins to experience Christ in the world here and now, which effects the change of heart and mind. Rather, the turn initiated in the first coda with "Enough! the Resurrection" is dependent, not primarily upon an assent to Christ's taking on of flesh in the incarnation, but rather upon an affirmation of Christ's rising from the dead as a token of the rising of all men on the last day. The Resurrection, of course, is dependent upon the incarnation for its meaning, but the change of focus allows Hopkins to see "Flesh fade, and mortal trash / Fall to the residuary worm" without falling into the horror that prepossesses the mind when it views things in slack and decay. The sonnet concludes in a ringing affirmation that demonstrates how "the Resurrection, / A heart's clarion" can provide the "stem of stress" which not only allows "each hung bell's bow. . . to fling out broad its name" (*P* No. 57), but also to resonate with the ultimate meaning of that speaking and of that spelling:

> In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
> I am all at once what Christ is, / since he was what I am, and
> This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, / patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
> Is immortal diamond. (*P* No. 72)

The final affirmation -- *This Jack is immortal diamond* -- assents to the stress of God which gives purpose to the world and direction to the soul. The terrible crystal that revealed the agonized interiority of the slack self

separated from God's grace in the Terrible Sonnets, is -- emphatically and unchangeably -- immortal diamond.

Abbreviations

J	*The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Eds. Humphrey House and Graham Storey. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
P	*The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Eds. W.H. Gardner and N.H. Mackenzie. 4th ed. Oxford: University Press, 1984.
L1	*The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*. Ed. Claude Colleer Abbott. Rev. Impr. London: Oxford University Press, 1955.
L2	*The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*. Ed. Claude Colleer Abbott. Rev. Ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1955.
L3	*Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins Including his Correspondence with Coventry Patmore*. Ed. Claude Colleer Abbott. 2nd ed. Rev. & Enl. London: Oxford University Press, 1956.
OED	*The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*. 2 vols. Oxford: University Press, 1971.
S	*The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. Christopher Devlin, S.J. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.

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