

MULTIPLIPLICITY IN THE POETRY OF HOPKINS

THE TECHNIQUE OF MULTIGUITY

IN THE POETRY OF
GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

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 1974

MASTERS OF ARTS (1973)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: The Technique of Multiguity in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins

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NUMBER OF PAGES: iv, 89

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: Most words in the English language have more than one meaning, and few poets exploit this fact more than Hopkins, who often uses one word to suggest others that look or sound the same. What brings these supplementary denotations or implications to the surface of a word is usually the diction and imagery of the poet in which it appears, but other poems by Hopkins and his diaries can also be illuminating. In this thesis I explore the relation between multiple meanings and systems of imagery in individual poems and in Hopkins' poetry as a whole. My discussion consists mainly of close analysis of selected poems and parts of poems intended to demonstrate the density and unity which result from this important stylistic technique.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply indebted to Dr. John Ferns for his counsel and encouragement.

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CHAPTER I

STRAINING THE MEANING

Gerard Manley Hopkins' first editor was Robert Bridges, who published his friend's collected poems in 1918, nearly thirty years after his death. Bridges was also Hopkins' first critic, and critical reception of this volume was not enhanced by his readiness to enumerate what he considered the dead poet's faults of taste and style. Evidently he wanted to concede these extravagances and explain them, so that they would not prevent new readers from appreciating the excellences of expression which also abounded in Hopkins' poems. Bridges' defensive attitude, however, does much to explain the cautious or delayed public response to the first edition. His most enthusiastic suggestion is that which concludes his "Preface to Notes": "Few will read the terrible posthumous sonnets without such high admiration and respect for his poetical power as must lead them to search out the rare masterly beauties that distinguish his work."¹ The phrasing of this sentence is not felicitous; "Few will read the terrible posthumous sonnets" has inauspicious connotations, and the word "search" is definitely ill-chosen. How many readers would be willing, with such encouragement, to "search out" those beauties that are so "rare" and difficult to find?

When Bridges says that the "masterly beauties" are "rare", does he in fact mean that they are of uncommon excellence, or few and far between?

¹G. M. Hopkins, The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. J. H. Gardner and K. H. MacKenzie (4th ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 243 -- hereafter cited as Poems.

In view of this unfortunate ambiguity, it is most ironic that one of the stylistic faults which Bridges condemns in Hopkins is his use of ambiguous words. Identical forms and homophones, he says, constitute a major "source of the poet's obscurity": "Nor is our author apparently sensitive to the irrelevant suggestions that our numerous homophones cause; and he will provoke further ambiguities or obscurities by straining the meaning of these unfortunate words" (Poems, p. 242). Hopkins is, on the contrary, extremely sensitive to the suggestiveness of many of his words, but to him and to other readers, their connotations are not always irrelevant. As for "straining the meaning", it is quite true that Hopkins often stretches the English language to its limits in his attempts to exploit in his poetry all the linguistic resources available to him.

The standards for poetry and prose are different: not higher or lower, but different. Certain elements which are to be condemned as errors in expository prose, such as Bridges' introduction, may be condoned and even commended in another type of writing. For prose that is intended to be read once and understood at once, the requirements are not the same as for poetry meant to be read several times and pondered each time. This is the difference between business and pleasure, between reading for information and reading for deeper enlightenment and enjoyment. One gets more out of a good poem or novel at each reading; we may define "literature" as that kind of writing which repays rereading, while inferior fiction or competent exposition is not so productive under repeated examination. To respond to such close attention, poetry must be rich in sounds and ideas. Hopkins appears to follow Keats' advice to

"load every rift with ore", for there are few poems in our literature more dense than his.

Bridges is especially concerned with the "confusion" caused by homonyms and homophones: "English swarms with words that have one identical form for substantive, adjective, and verb; and such a word should never be so placed as to allow of any doubt as to what part of speech it is used for". But this is only part of the problem. Bridges does not seem to realize that there are many nouns, for instance, that may not be mistaken for verbs or adjectives, but are still open to divergent interpretations. He is aware, however, that Hopkins' use of identical forms is deliberate, for he says, "our author not only neglects this essential propriety but he would seem even to welcome and seek artistic effect in the consequent confusion" (Poems, p. 242). Hopkins' attitude should prompt us to look for the reasons behind his practice, instead of censuring it as madness without method or justification. If we would believe Bridges, the artistic effect that Hopkins sought was never found: this is what we are to understand from the word "seek" in the above sentence. Had Bridges perceived and appreciated the effects which Hopkins did achieve, he would not have spoken so much of confusion, errors, and extravagances. An understanding must come before judgment, so interpretation should precede criticism.

It is this practice of Hopkins', his habit of using words with more than one possible meaning, that I wish to examine in this dissertation, but from a different point of view. Approached from a positive angle, this practice is not a fault of style but a source of richness

and a vital part of Hopkins' stylistic technique of interwoven imagery. This last phrase has been much exploited in the past few decades as a critical term, but I am convinced that there is more justification in applying it to Hopkins' poetry than to the/verse' of many other authors.

To discuss properly this aspect of Hopkins' poetic language, we also need a new critical term. "Ambiguity" is totally unsuitable on account of its negative connotations; it is commonly used as a synonym for "uncertainty" and "obscurity". "Pregnant ambiguity" is worse yet; it is a monstrous expression, calling up irrelevant and distracting images of some bloated creature waddling awkwardly along the lines of a poem. Furthermore, the word, "ambiguous" (from Latin amb "on both sides" + agere "to drive") indicates a double meaning, while there are more than two sides to many of Hopkins' words. When someone once called James Joyce's writing "trivial", Joyce replied that he meant his work to be "quadrivial", at least. On this pattern, I would like to coin a name for the characteristic of Hopkins' poetry I propose to discuss: "multiguity". Hopkins would have approved, I think, since he himself invented numerous words, and made new meanings for many old ones.

My first two chapters include detailed examinations of multiguity's operation in two poems greatly neglected and disparaged in spite of their density and careful construction. Since "Easter Communion" is an early poem, written in 1865, its explication also argues against the idea that Hopkins' characteristic techniques date from "The Wreck of the Deutschland", which was begun more than ten years later. Growing out of this discussion is a suggestion that George Herbert's influence on Hopkins' poetry is stronger than has been suspected. I attempt to show,

as briefly as possible, that Hopkins' use of puns in conjunction with systems of imagery is modelled, at least in part, on one of Herbert's favourite poetic techniques.

My second chapter focusses on one of Hopkins' lesser-known and less-respected mature poems. Because of its low reputation, "The Bugler's First Communion" has not been thought worth much attention, and several fascinating phrases and images have therefore been inadequately explained. This poem's fate exemplifies a kind of vicious circle of criticism. A bad poem is not worth interpreting, and a poem cannot be good if not understood. If a poem comes to be labelled inferior, one need not worry about interpreting any difficult passages which might reveal its depth. Construing the bugler poem requires no more imaginative effort than does interpreting many others of Hopkins', and close attention indicates that it has probably been under-rated. Here, as in the opening section, notes from Hopkins' diaries often provide insight into his creative process, and are appropriated to illuminate the denotations and connotations of words in this poem and a few related pieces.

In the concluding chapter, instead of centering on an individual poem, my discussion is organized around four or five words particularly rich in possible meanings or associations. This plan enables me to explore a variety of minor cruxes throughout the Hopkins canon. These points of interest are also bound together by the continual reappearance of a significant strand of imagery which is conveniently related to the stylistic device under consideration in this thesis. One more offshoot of the discussion has to do with the perennial question of John Donne's influence on Hopkins. Fairly clear verbal and conceptual echoes of

Donne's "Extasie" in a group of early fragments demonstrate, as definitely as any single piece of evidence I have seen, that Hopkins read Donne closely enough to adopt some aspects of his style or absorb certain of his poetic habits.

Poets and critics have recognized for many years the importance of word-play in Hopkins' writing. According to David Daiches, "the building up of complex patterns of meaning through the multiple suggestiveness given to words in their poetic context, is what so excited 20th-century poets when they discovered Hopkins".² But although many critics have commented on multiple meanings in some of Hopkins' words, none have approached multiguity as a specific poetic technique. Perhaps at this juncture I should emphasize that the examples I discuss in this paper are by no means the only instances of multiguity in action. Much of the evidence has already been presented by other writers, who at various times in various places have dealt with Hopkins' most obvious multi-levelled puns, such as "fell" in "I wake and feel . . .", "charged" in "God's Grandeur", and "buckle" in "The Windhover". Because it would be tedious and time-consuming to repeat all their perceptive observations, I have chosen rather to discuss poems which have been ignored and words whose implications have not been fully explored. This means that looking in "dark corners" of the Hopkins canon will lead us to the core of his method. There are distinct advantages to this mode of proceeding. There are fewer layers of criticism to penetrate before getting a fresh look at these poems. Examining the better-known poems would require

²M. H. Abrams, gen. ed., The Norton Anthology of English Literature (Major Authors Edition, Revised; New York: Norton, 1966), p. 2253.

too much involvement with critics, whose readings I would have to attack or support, but this method allows me to devote almost all my attention to the poems themselves. I much prefer this to going over old ground. The presence of multiguity in disregarded poems demonstrates not that it is unusual but that it is pervasive in Hopkins' poetry, for other readers have observed it in other poems, though most of them seem to view it as a fortunate -- or unlucky -- accident, rather than as a technique.

Yet another consideration is that the most obvious examples of multiguity are not necessarily the most revealing or felicitous. The most flagrantly multiguous words do not always show Hopkins at his best with this technique, which involves more than simply making puns. It is much more subtle than that, and totally integral to the poetry. Most of my examples have been selected because they illustrate clearly the delicate interaction between word-play and imagery. Multiguity is closely bound up with Hopkins' use of imagery to form a structural framework for, or ^{to} embellish the theme of, a poem. His method is illuminated by one of his letters to A. W. M. Baillie, in which he explains an effect he has noticed in the lyric poetry of ancient Greek tragedians: "two strains of thought running together and like counterpointed". What Hopkins calls the "overthought" is that which everyone sees and might be paraphrased, while the "underthought" is "conveyed chiefly in the choice of metaphors etc. used and often only half realised by the poet himself, not necessarily having any connection with the subject in hand but usually having a connection and suggested by some circumstance of the scene or of the story".³

³G. M. Hopkins, Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. C. C. Abbott (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 252 -- hereafter cited as Letters, III.

How applicable this theory is to the poetry of Aeschylus I do not know, but it throws a great deal of light on Hopkins' own practice. Among the words of a poem which operate on a narrative level are certain words and images which make patterns of their own. A large portion of the effort involved in writing a poem goes into the creation of these seemingly unmeaning but very important patterns. In some of Hopkins' poems there is more than one underthought or secondary image-group. Sometimes the underthought springs from a semantic coincidence or a random aspect of the overthought, but often it is intimately related to the poem's central theme. The most effective means of linking two or more of these systems of imagery is multiguity, using words with more than one association. In a poem containing two families of metaphor, for instance, the primary sense of a certain word may place it within one group of images, while the presence of the second group brings to the surface another denotation or implication of the word which relates it to that second family of images. When a poem includes several words working like this in conjunction with three or four strands of imagery, the result is not confusion but a tightly knit pattern of ideas and a highly wrought work of art. The essential thing to notice is that multiguity binds together the images in a poem, giving it both inevitability and unity. Hopkins protested to Baillie that he could not prove his hypothesis "except by a large induction of examples . . . nor without examples can I make my meaning plain" (Letters, III, 252). The whole concept is difficult to grasp when expressed in abstract generalities, but observing the technique as it operates in particular poems will make it easier to understand.

According to Bridges, the two chief causes of obscurity in Hopkins' poetry are omission of the relative pronoun, and sentence structure that allows nouns to be taken for verbs or adjectives. As I have already pointed out, exploiting multiple meanings goes beyond confusing one part of speech with another. This particular "fault of Style" is nevertheless closely connected to the kind of punning with which we are concerned, and is probably a stage in its development. Turning nouns into verbs or verbs into nouns is an important step towards multiguity as a poetic device. To use multiguity one must be alive to all the implications of a word, and be prepared to exploit associations arising from the visual or aural identity of one linguistic form with another form differing in grammatical function and meaning. To appreciate multiguity, one must be able to consider, at least momentarily, all possible denotations of a word, even if this entails imagining for it a different function in its sentence. Hopkins' poetry makes certain demands of its reader, but the rewards are proportionate to the imaginative power expended. One cannot appreciate any well-made poem by reading it quickly once or twice and then leaving it. One must be ready to listen and linger, ponder and peruse again. It is obvious from the poems themselves and from his letters to Bridges that Hopkins expected his poetry to be read with considerable care.

Our critical task now is not merely a matter of unearthing in Hopkins' poems as many words as possible that might involve puns. Paul Mariani has already exhausted those possibilities in the course of his excellent commentary on the poems.⁴ If seeing a pun were enough to prove

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

that the author intended it, criticism would be more subjective than meaningful. For each of my suggested readings, I hope to provide evidence of the poet's intention, usually from the text of his poems, and sometimes from his diaries. A supplementary meaning is relevant or justified if we can demonstrate that the author set the given word in a poetic situation which brings that implication to life. The primary source of evidence will always be the diction and imagery of the particular poem at hand.

The diction of "Heaven-Haven" (Poems, No. 9) marks it as a significant stage in the development of multiguity as a technique. In the second line of this early poem Hopkins has turned the verb "fail" into a noun. With at least one precedent in the common phrase "without fail", this change is not very bold, but it is a beginning:

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

Failure in that place does not spring up like thorns to choke the lilies, nor do storms spring up to beat them down. The subject of the clause in line 2 is "fail", while "springs" is the verb. That this is the first sense is supported by the parallel construction in line 3, where "where" is again the conjunction, "hail" (rhyming with "fail") is the subject, and "flies" the verb. Some people, however, read the second line as if the auxiliary verb "do" were omitted and "springs" were the subject. This makes sense, too, whether we understand "spring" as a fountain of fresh water or as the season of vegetative renewal and rebirth: the water of life is not lacking in that haven; and spring never fails to arrive, perhaps because it never leaves. Both of these readings work

in the poem because its imagery is both botanical and aqueous. Another striking use of language in this poem is the word "desire" in the first line. Here a word with strong sensual associations appears in a spiritual context. Sensual desires are subsumed by a larger power. The title, a hyphenated compound of two similar words, encourages the reader to watch for double meanings in the poem.

As W. H. Gardner points out, the title is probably adapted from the last line of a poem by George Herbert called "The Size": "These seas are tears, and Heaven the haven" (Poems, p. 248). Herbert's title, like many others in his book The Temple, also involves word-play.⁵ It seems significant that in his very next poem, "For a Picture of St. Dorothea" (No. 10), Hopkins experiments with the word size: "Had she a quince in hand? Yet gaze:/ Rather it is the sizing room." Hopkins may have remembered Keats' use of size as a verb in Endymion (III, 206). In that poem it seems to mean "grow" or "swell", but here "sizing" appears rather to signify "changing in size", "waxing and waning", since transience is the fundamental characteristic of the moon as a symbol. In two later poems, Hopkins again employs size as a verb. In "The May Magnificat", "sizing" apparently means "gaining in size" as it does in Keats' poem, but even so, Keats was using the word ^{an} in abnormal way. Once more in "My own heart . . .", Hopkins refuses to use the verb "size" in one of its commonly accepted senses. The word spring also appears as a verb in "For a Picture of St. Dorothea", as it did in the preceding poem: "Not set, because their buds not spring;/ Spring not, 'cause world is wintering." Both

⁵ See, for instance, "The Tesser", "The Collar", "The Crosses", "Content", "Lent", "Divinitie", and "The Reprisall".

verbs in the last line, of course, are formed from the names of seasons. Multiguity is awkwardly used in this poem but Hopkins gradually learns to handle the technique with more assurance and skill. His affectionate and irreverent attitude to language is already there.

For his practice of using nouns of verbs, Hopkins may have taken a hint from Henry Vaughan, another "Metaphysical" poet whose work Hopkins read. In a letter to R. W. Dixon written in 1879, he says that Vaughan "has more glow and freedom than Herbert but less fragrant sweetness".⁶ Vaughan's possible influence on Hopkins has been discussed before, but not in the way I suggest. W. H. Gardner sees an important affinity between the two poets, and argues that Vaughan's "The Constellation" is "radically related and in many ways complementary to" Hopkins' "The Bugler's First Communion".⁷ I suspect that Hopkins noticed Vaughan's habit of turning nouns into verbs, a most unusual and daring practice in his time. In the following excerpts, Vaughan has italicized or capitalized certain words to draw attention to their exceptional use:

I have deserv'd a thick, Egyptian damp,
 Dark as my deeds,
 Should mint within me and put out that lamp
 Thy spirit feeds. ("The Relapse", p. 433)⁸

 Yet thou
 Led by thy Love, wouldst stoop thus low,
 And in this Cott
 All filth, and spott,
 Didst with thy servant Inne. ("Buriall", p. 427)

⁶ G. M. Hopkins, The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 24 -- hereafter cited as Letters, II.

⁷ W. H. Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), 2 vols. (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1958), II, 299 -- hereafter cited as Gardner.

⁸ Page numbers refer to The Works of Henry Vaughan, ed. L. C. Martin (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

Through the still shrouds
 Of sleep, and Clouds,
 This Dew fell on my Breast;
 O how it Blouds,
 And Spirits all my Earth!

("The Morning-watch", p. 424)

Busie, but sacred thoughts (like Bees) did still
 Within it stirr, and strive unto that Hill,
 Where redeem'd Spirits evermore alive
 After their Work is done, ascend and Hive.

("To the pious memorie of C. W. Esquire", p. 630)

He heav'nd their walks, and with his eyes
 Made those wild shades a Paradise. ("The Search"; p. 406)

In the last quotation, "walks" is a noun derived from a verb, but more notable is the verb "heav'nd" made by Vaughan from a noun.

Vaughan's bold applications of this device may well have influenced Hopkins, but not necessarily. What is important to understand is that this is not a cheap trick or a personal quirk of Hopkins', but a distinctive feature of our native tongue. The English language is notorious for the ability of its many identical forms to change functions at the drop of a hat. In my last sentence I dropped an example of this sort of freedom: the word "drop" is a noun formed directly from a verb. Our everyday speech abounds with similar instances. We slice a loaf of bread and then eat a slice. Perhaps we toast it first, in which case that slice becomes a piece of toast. In sporting, therefore, with the grammatical and semantic roles of words, Hopkins is simply exploiting the characteristics of idiomatic English. To Bridges he once wrote that "the poetical language of an age shd. be the current language heightened",⁹ and often the techniques of his poetry are not elevated so far as they seem above the level of common speech.

⁹G. M. Hopkins, The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 89 -- hereafter cited as Letters, I.

In the fourth edition of Hopkins' poems, the first St. Dorothea poem is followed immediately by "Easter Communion" (No. 11). Hopkins' early poems have never been very popular with his critics, from Father Lahey in 1930 to Paul Mariani in 1970, and this poem has suffered as much as any at their hands. "Language here is vitiated and languorous", says Mariani of "Easter Communion" (Mariani, p. 19), and Gardner talks about the limitations of its appeal to those who share the poet's faith. "The phrasing is strong and distinctive", he adds, but his other remarks imply that the poem is bad: appreciation of good art does not depend on our sharing the artist's beliefs (Gardner, II, 81). Examining a poem largely neglected and maligned has its advantages as well as handicaps. I am freed from the necessity of retracing the steps of previous commentators, because they have said so little. If my reading is successful it should help to repair the reputation of "Easter Communion", while demonstrating that Hopkins' multiguity is as highly developed in this early poem as in some sonnets written much later.

Pure fasted faces draw unto this feast:
 God comes all sweetness to your Lenten lips.
 You striped in secret with breath-taking whips,
 Those crook'd rough-scored chequers may be pieced
 To crosses meant for Jesu's; you whom the East
 With draught of thin and pursuant cold so nips
 Breathe Easter now; you serged fellowships,
 You vigil-keepers with low flames decreased,
 God shall o'er-brim the measures you have spent
 With oil of gladness; for sackcloth and frieze
 And the ever-fretting shirt of punishment
 Give gyrrhy-threaded golden folds of ease.
 Your scarce-sheathed bones are weary of being bent:
 lo, God shall strengthen all the feeble knees.

All the preceding generalizations should counterbalance to some degree the body of a paper mainly concerned to make very specific comments

about particular poems, lines, phrases, and words. In the sixth line of "Easter Communion", the primary sense of "draught" is a current of air, a cool breeze. The "draught of thin and pursuant cold" describes a chilliness which echoes later in the icy homophone of "frieze". The normal meaning of the word pursuant, "agreeable" or "conformable" (pursuant to a certain law), does not make sense here. To Hopkins it seems to signify "pursuing" or "persistent". An entry in his early diary describes a "Frieze of sculpture, long-membered vines tugged at by reaching pursuant fauns".¹⁰ This note is contemporaneous with the first draft of "Easter Communion"; both were written into the diary between March 2 and March 12, 1865. A "draught of thin and pursuant cold" is the kind that chills you to the marrow, chases you inside, and slips under doors to make you shiver in the warmest corner. But this meaning of pursuant is rare, and we might ask why the poet risks misunderstanding by using the word in this unusual sense. His reasons, I think, are the sharp, nasty sound of the word, and certain additional implications it contains. "Thin and pursuant cold" is not a common phrase, but it has a familiar ring. "Thin" and "pursed" are epithets one might apply to a person's lips, especially in the uncomfortable situation the poet presents. Both the idea of cold and the earlier reference to "lips" (line 2) underline this suggestion, so that Hopkins' phrases help us to imagine the people as well as the setting.

"Pursuant" also contains the word "purse", as "chequers" in the fourth line suggests "cheque" or "exchequer", words which have to do with money. Along with other words like "spent" (line 9) and "golden" (line 12),

¹⁰G. M. Hopkins, The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Humphry House, comp. Graham Storey (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 57 -- hereafter cited as Journals.

they draw another meaning out of "draught": a written order directing the payment of money, like a bank draught. Similarly, "pieced" (line 4) recalls a piece of money, a five-shilling piece, a coin, as in the epithet "piece-bright" in "The Starlight Night" (No. 32), another Hopkins poem which features financial diction in a religious context: "Ah well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize./ Buy then! bid then!--What?--Prayer, patience, alms, vows"(ll. 8-9). Also relevant is "The Lantern out of Doors"(No. 40), which includes such words as "ransom", "buys", and "interests".

What are the chances that Hopkins was aware of these secondary meanings? When he was writing this poem, Hopkins was a student at Oxford University, and as such was probably quite conscious of every penny he spent. When we read his diaries for this period, it is not surprising to find records of minor debts and money spent scattered among rough drafts of poems, names and addresses, books to be read, and notes on nature, architecture, and current events. We have evidence, then, that financial matters were seldom far from his mind at this time. In May or June of 1865, he writes himself a note on the procedure for cashing cheques. This entry appears two or three months following the beginning of "Easter Communion", but it precedes the final copy of the poem entered on June 26 (Journals, pp. 62-63). As a second-year university student living away from home, Hopkins knew quite well what a cheque was, and I think it very likely that he, too, could hear all the financial echoes in the words of this poem.

In the light of these associations, the piecing or coining of "rough-scored chequers" could suggest the cashing of a cheque. A "score" can signify a record of indebtedness -- another pecuniary term. The

association of religion and financial imagery goes back a long way. In the Middle Ages, people referred to a Treasury of Grace, in which wandering pardoners apparently had chequing accounts. Children are still taught to store up treasure for themselves in Heaven by depositing penance in some spiritual bank in the sky. Modern financial institutions might advertise by advising prospective customers to follow Christ's example: Jesus Saves.

The subliminal financial vocabulary in "Easter Communion" is very appropriate to the theme of the poem. Money is essentially a medium of exchange, and exchange or apocalyptic reversal is at the poem's heart. "For a Picture of St. Dorothea", which directly precedes "Easter Communion", has a similar message: "Sweet flowers I carry,--sweets for bitter." In that poem, a quince becomes the moon, and drops of dew turn into stars. The sonnet which follows promises spiritual rewards for physical punishment and self-chastisement. We might set this transaction beside these lines from Donne's "Hymne to God by God, in my Sicknesse": "So, in his purple wrapp'd receive me Lord, / By these his thorns give me his other Crown."¹¹

Financial imagery also figures in some contemporaneous verses to be found in Hopkins' early diaries. "The Beginning of the End" is a sequence of three sonnets begun in May 1865, before the completion of "Easter Communion". In the third of these quasi-Elizabethan poems (No. 14111), the neglected lover complains that his "bankrupt heart has no more tears to spend." A few months earlier, probably in January, Hopkins wrote in his diary an eight-line fragment which appears as one

¹¹J. Donne, The Complete Poetry of John Donne, ed. J. T. Shawcross (New York: New York University Press, 1962), p. 191 -- hereafter cited as Donne.

of "Seven Epigrams" (Poems, No. 96vii):

'Boughs being pruned, birds preened, show more fair;
 To grace them spires are shaped with corner squinches;
 Enrichèd posts are chamfer'd; everywhere
 He heightens worth who guardedly diminishes;
 Diamonds are better cut; who pare, repair;
 Is statuary rated by its inches?
 Thus we shall profit, while gold coinage still
 Is worth and current with a lessen'd mill.'

These lines echo not only some of the imagery, but also the theme of "Easter Communion", in the central concept of gain as a result of reduction, or profit in spite of loss. The idea of trimming, pruning, or paring corresponds to the penitential disciplines of Lent, and the consequent gains parallel the spiritual rewards of "Easter Communion":

"God shall o'er-brim the measures you have spent". Cutting oneself off from things and putting oneself down eventually leads to being fulfilled and lifted up. Glorification succeeds self-deprecation: "Your scarce-shathed bones are weary of being bent:/ Lo, God shall strengthen all the feeble knees." "Bent" and "spent" are rhyme-words which might remind us that this is a poem about the end of Lent. "Lent-en" is a key word.

In another epigram, dating from August 1864, Hopkins makes a pun which may well account for the major role of financial imagery in this Easter sonnet. The epigram, "On one who borrowed his sermons" (No. 96v) is perhaps the seed of "Easter Communion": "Herclots's preachings I'll no longer hear:/ They're out of date--lent sermons all the year."

Hopkins' editors point out (in Poems, p. 249) that the last line of "Easter Communion" echoes an apocalyptic passage from the Book of Isaiah: "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees" (Is. 35:3). In the same chapter (Is. 35:10) we also find financial imagery

of a sort: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and . . . they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Weariness will be exchanged for strength, and bodily deprivation replaced by spiritual sustenance, food for the soul. Feasting follows fasting, but Lent is longer than Carnival, at least on earth. Hopkins seems to dwell on the negative aspects, and images of physical suffering are common in his poetry, but his penitential vocabulary often implies the opposite of pain and fasting. Words like "feast", "sweetness", "lips", "o'er-brim", and "measures" invoke one more meaning of "draught": a quantity of liquid for consumption, a drink, like Keats' "draught of vintage" or a modern draft of ale. "Nips" at the end of line 6 has similar associations; a nip is a small amount of liquid or liquor which one may nip or sip. "Sack", contained in "sackcloth", is a dry Spanish wine, but, as Hopkins said of his poem "Tom's Garland", "It is plain I must go no farther on this road" (Letters, I, 272). More reasonable is another denotation of the verb piece "to eat between meals". The noun piece is slang for a "snack" or "sandwich", as in the Scots expression jeely piece "jam sandwich". In the context of all this diction concerned with food and drink, the piecing of scourge-marks in the fourth line suggests indulgence or satisfaction after self-denial.

We use pieces of a different kind in games like chess and checkers ("chequers", l. 4), or draughts ("draught", l. 6), as it is known in Britain. This imagistic motif enriches the word "scored", while the idea of winning and losing accords with the theme of exchange and turnabout. Compare "worthy the winning" at the end of "Spring" (No. 33), and also "The Starlight Night", where "all is a prize". In the latter poem, by

the way, "mealed" (l. 11) is one word which functions as do many expressions in "Easter Communion". "Mealed-with-yellow willows" are willows flecked or spotted with yellow, because meal may signify any powdery material. Another meaning of meal looks back to the secondary sense of "mess": "Look, look: a May-mess, like on orchard boughs!" (l. 10). The sight is as satisfying to the eyes as a full meal to the stomach: feast your eyes on that, he says. As the edible seeds of a grain, meal also points forward to the "shocks" or sheaves in the penultimate line of the sonnet. The idea of the Last Supper, which underlines the etymological connection between mess and mass, is inherent here, as it is in "Easter Communion".

To return to the game motif, Hopkins appears as well to be thinking of naughts and crosses, which Canadians call Xs and Os, and Americans, tic-tac-toe. The whip-welts make a chequered pattern inviting the imagination to supply Os and especially Xs, which remind the poet of Christ's cross, a symbol of both suffering and salvation. These crosses are "meant for Jezu's" in that this pain re-enacts Christ's Passion. Flagellation and other such acts of asceticism are imitations of Christ, and of his suffering on the Cross. To score is to gain or win points, but also to mark with cuts or lines, a meaning related to "draw" in the first line, as in "draughts": a draughtsman, for instance, is a man who makes plans or drawings.

Hopkins may have been aware that early Celtic monks and missionaries were known as "The Striped Ones", on account of their striped and chequered cloaks.¹² If he did know this, it would help to explain certain

¹² See a manuscript illustration and commentary in P. Francastel, Medieval Painting, 20,000 Years of World Painting, Vol. II (New York: Dell, 1967), p. 33.

elements in the poem. It is mainly in textile terms that Hopkins expresses his central idea: golden folds for sackcloth. Consider the pun in the title of another piece, perhaps the best of his early poems, "The Habit of Perfection" (No. 22). That this word-play is intentional is demonstrated by the poem's final lines, "And lily-coloured clothes provide/ Your spouse not laboured-at, nor spun." In fact, textile imagery figures in many of Hopkins' poems, most significantly in later works such as "Garrison Comfort" and "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves". I shall return to this topic later.

The word "folds" in line 12 of "Easter Communion" rouses a pun in "decreased" (l. 8), but it also suggests sheepfolds, an image which appropriately introduces the pastoral symbolism of Christianity and the Bible. The sheepfold represents peace and safety for the flock under the care of Christ, the Good Shepherd: thus "folds of ease". Even as a pastoral term, "folds" can be a textile word, if we follow this train of thought: fold, flock, sheep, wool, yarn, frieze, serge. I suspect, too, that the golden fleece was in Hopkins' mind; he was, after all, a brilliant classical student.

"Frieze" is a coarse woollen cloth, worn by penitents to mortify the flesh. But another type of "frieze" is a decorative strip on a wall, sometimes a broad band of sculpture. Are we meant to think of this? Hopkins was certainly aware of it. I have already quoted the descriptive note on a "Frieze of sculpture" which immediately precedes the first draft ("draught"?) of "Easter Communion" in his diary (Journals, p. 57). An "ever-fretting shirt" (l. 11) is rough and continually irritating, but fretting is also the name for an ornamental band or border: "fretty chervil"

in "Thou art indeed just . . ." (No. 74) has lacy leaves like fine fret-work. We cannot doubt that Hopkins knows this meaning as well. The previous year in his diary he describes clouds whose edges are "fretted with lacy curves and honeycomb work" (Journals, p. 27). "Fretting" also belongs to the vocabulary of yet another art form; fret as a musical term is one of the ridges across the neck of a stringed instrument like a lute or guitar. As an amateur musician and linguist, Hopkins knew these things. An additional musical word is "measures" (l. 9), and score can denote the complete notation for a piece of music. In "The Sea and the Skylark" (No. 35), there is a similar conjunction or cluster of imagery, as liquid, music, and textiles intertwine, not to mention the pecuniary image which concludes this quotation:

Left hand, off land, I hear the lark ascend,
 His rash-fresh re-winded new-skeined score
 In crisps of curl off wild winch whirl, and pour
 And pelt music, till none's to spill nor spend.

Multiguity is the use of a word to say one thing and imply something besides, something which is usually supplementary but sometimes consciously contradictory. "Frieze" and "fretting", for instance, are words which imply and include their opposites. Each contains both pain and pleasure, self-denial and self-indulgence, duty and beauty, religion and art, asceticism and aestheticism. "Fretting" stands for both irritation and artistic activity; the one stimulates the other. The multigamous "ever-fretting shirt", working and creating, may be interpreted as the essence of the poem, or of the whole Hopkins canon, as the phrase "melodious tear" is a miniature of Milton's "Lycidas". The relationship between duty and beauty, then, is not merely antithetical. As joy succeeds and subsumes sorrow, so folds of gold are woven with threads of

myrrh, a bitter herb used for funeral balm or incense. Of the three gifts the Magi brought to the Christ-child, gold was the first, symbolizing his royalty, and myrrh the last, representing his suffering and death. Myrrh, then, is Good Friday, and gold, Easter Sunday; they both belong in this poem. But "myrrhy" is an unusual word; Hopkins employs it, I think, in order to suggest a word antithetical in association -- merry. "Fase" (l. 12) and "gladness" (l. 10) help to draw this out. Like "frieze" and "fretting", "myrrhy" moves in divergent directions, to reflect a central truth of Christianity, one of John Donne's favourite paradoxes: "There I should see a Sun, by rising set, / And by that setting endless day beget." Thus he states it in "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding westward" (Donne, p. 366).

John Donne's influence in "Easter Communion" is vague and impossible to prove, but that of George Herbert, another seventeenth-century devotional poet, is more easily detected and demonstrable. Hopkins' poem is really about Lent, and Herbert has a poem called "Lent", in which he exploits the fact that the title is also the past participle of the verb lend.¹³ I have already quoted an epigram by Hopkins which depends on the same pun (Poems, No. 96v). The unspoken pun in Herbert's poem is reinforced by the appearance of several financial terms: "corporation" (l. 6), "use" (l. 10), "increase" (l. 16), "expense" (l. 20), "profits" (l. 25), "enlarge" (l. 26), and "forfeit" (l. 30). In addition, we are meant to connect the title with the Latin lentus (or the Italian musical term lento) meaning "slow", which is related to another pun on "fast" in the fourth line: "The Scriptures bid us fast; the Church says, now".

¹³G. Herbert, The Works of George Herbert, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 86 -- hereafter cited as Herbert.

A few months before the composition of "Easter Communion", Hopkins made essentially the same pun in one of his early diaries: "Fast days I have found slow days" (Journals, p. 37). This note is contemporaneous with the punning epigram on "lent sermons"; the occurrence of these two entries so close together suggests that Hopkins had been reading Herbert's "Lent". The fast/slow word-play leads Herbert to treat Lent in terms of a journey: "It's true, we cannot reach Christs forti'th day;/ Yet to go part of that religious way,/ Is better than to rest". Thus the multiguity of his title unites three systems of imagery in the poem: travelling, lending, and also eating, because Lent is paradoxically an ecclesiastical feast: "welcome deare feast of Lent".

An even better example of Herbert's multiguity is "The Temper"(I) (Herbert, p. 55), in which the title again is the most prolific word. One reference is certainly to the metallurgical process of tempering or strengthening steel by first heating then cooling. The mention of "steel" in the initial stanza emphasizes this interpretation, as does the poet's proneness to extremes of mood, like fire and ice: "Although there were some fourtie heav'ns, or more,/ Sometimes I peere above them all. . . . Sometimes to hell I fall." "Stretch or contract me" in line 21 could refer to the expansion and shrinkage of metal in the tempering process, but it also suggests a further meaning of the verb temper: to tune, or adjust in pitch the various strings of a musical instrument. Compare the phrase "the well-tempered harpsichord". The musical motif summons secondary meanings from other words in the poem. A "spell" (l. 16) is an incantation (Latin cantare "to sing") or a charm (Latin carmen "song"). As a noun, "measure" (l. 15) is a musical term: a bar, a melody,

or a rhythm. And the verb "meet" (l. 13) in the seventeenth century means "harmonize". "Temper" also has a medical meaning, signifying a proper balance between the four bodily humours. This is the source of our expressions "bad temper" or "ill-tempered", although being choleric is but one way to be temperamentally unbalanced. Since illness often results from humorous imbalance, to temper is not only "to mix in proper or equal proportions", but also "to cure, heal, refresh". "The Temper" re-enacts the poet's spiritual restoration through God's "power and love" (l. 27):

Yet take thy way; for sure thy way is best:
 Stretch or contract me, thy poore debtor:
 This is but tuning of my breast,
 To make the musick better. (ll. 21-24)

To be tuned or tempered, the strings must be stretched. Suffering leads to strength, duty to beauty, pain to purity and peace. No great art is born without labour: adversity is not the test but the origin of merit. On this question, consider Herbert's brilliant exploitation of the word "strain", which includes these contraries, at the conclusion of "Employment"(I) (Herbert, p. 57):

I am no link of thy great chain,
 But all my companie is a weed.
 Lord place me in thy consort; give one strain
 To my poore reed.

In Paul Mariani's opinion, "George Herbert is the most noticeable religious influence" in Hopkins' early poetry. He mentions a few poems which "owe something to Herbert", but "Easter Communion" is not among them (Mariani, p. 2). Herbert's "Lent" may be a source of inspiration for "Easter Communion", but Hopkins is more deeply indebted to Herbert for his technique of linking word-play and several strains of imagery to

produce fertile and integrated poems. He also shares with Herbert a thematic concern with the beneficial effects of hardship. Does Hopkins realize that this religious paradox applies to his art as well? "Easter Communion" expresses the resolution in metaphors from arts and crafts, but if he appreciated the discipline involved in poetry, why did he burn his poems on becoming a Jesuit? Before he began to write again, he had to realize that self-discipline was a fundamental aspect of his art, not an antithetical impulse. The multiguity of a word like "frieze" takes us right to the heart of Hopkins. This is what "The Windhover" is about: "sheer plod" (heavy, dull duty) "makes plough down sillion/ Shine" (light, bright beauty). Like the little bird soaring into the "big wind", poetic talent is not crushed but uplifted by the pressure of metre and form, the elements of poetic design. A cage intensifies the singing of the bird inside. All great art proceeds from a creative tension between freedom and discipline, expression and compression; spontaneity and structure. In like manner, divine love is able to reconcile opposites, as in the Song of Songs (5:1): "I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk."

CHAPTER II

STREAMS OF IMAGERY

W. H. Gardner says of "Easter Communion" that "its full appeal will be limited to those who, sharing the poet's faith, are able to respond also to the similar sacerdotal fervour of "The Bugler's First Communion" (Gardner, II, 81). The latter is another one of Hopkins' poems that his critics have often disparaged. Robert Bridges sets the trend in his "Preface to Notes", where he calls the rhyme to "Communion" in the second stanza "hideous" (Poems, p. 242). F. R. Leavis argues that most of Hopkins' "riving audacities" are successful, but he quotes this poem also to illustrate his "single-headed simplicity".¹ In the first volume of his study, Gardner attempts to defend the unusual rhymes of "The Bugler's First Communion" (Gardner, I, 147), but for the most part, critics discuss the poem only as it relates to Hopkins' life as a parish priest. Jim Hunter thinks it "over-decorated" and less satisfactory than the unfinished poem "On the Por-trait of Two Beautiful Young People" (No. 157),² while Norman MacKenzie feels that it is "not . . . one of Hopkins's happiest pieces."³

¹F. R. Leavis, "Metaphysical Isolation", in the Kenyon Critic, Gerard Manley Hopkins (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1945), p. 114.

²J. Hunter, Gerard Manley Hopkins (London: Evans Brothers, 1966), p. 111 -- hereafter cited as Hunter.

³N. H. MacKenzie, letter to D. C. Haggis, June 6, 1973.

In this chapter I hope to show that "The Bugler's First Communion" deserves more attention than it has received. It has been so consistently under-rated that readers are in danger of automatically passing over a poem which will generously reward their full consideration. Multiguity here is richer, better controlled, and more accessible than in the earlier communion poem. The middle of the poem seems as good a place as any to begin my revelation of its merits:

Then though I should tread tufts of consolation
 Days after, so I in a sort deserve to
 And do serve God to serve to
 Just such slips of soldiery Christ's royal ration.

So far in this study I have been primarily interested in one of the several types of pun distinguished by Renaissance rhetoricians, sylllepsis: a single word not repeated but with more than one relevant meaning. Hopkins' word-play, however, is by no means limited to this device, and in this seventh stanza of "The Bugler's First Communion" (No. 48), we can see examples of two other kinds of punning. Paronomasia, which many people mistakenly think is a simple synonym for "pun", involves two phonologically similar words in close proximity: Shakespeare often played on the likeness of the noun "cousin" to the verb "cozen". Here Hopkins follows "deserve" with "do serve". When he repeats the word "serve" in the third line, he is using what readers used to call antiphrasis, which repeats a word while moving from one meaning to a second. Hopkins serves -- obeys, honours, works for -- God by serving the eucharist to communicants as a waiter might serve food and drinks to guests or customers.

These puns, if we may call them such, are above-board, and fairly straight-forward, but we must not let them obscure some more subtle

and serious punning in the last line of this stanza. The bugler is just a young slip of a boy, small and slender perhaps, a "slip of soldiery". As usual, Hopkins takes a commonplace expression and renews it, as he freshens and fertilizes the phrase "a pool of light" when he describes the "yellowy moisture mild" (l. 3) of "The Candle Indoors" (No. 46). Often he will increase the significance of a word by placing it in a context which redirects the attentive reader to its origins. Hopkins' diction is radical because it returns to the roots of language. As the Spanish architect Antonio Gaudi used to say, "Originality is a return to the origins." From the time when he had to study philology for his Moderations at Oxford, until the end of his life, Hopkins maintained a deep interest in etymology, especially as it concerned the meanings of words. This particular expression, Hopkins reminds us, is a gardening metaphor; a slip is a "twig" or "cutting from a plant", and therefore young, slim, and tender. This is underlined by the botanical imagery that pervades the poem. In stanza 3 the holy wafer is light as a leaf. The bugler is the "Breathing bloom of a chastity" (st. 4), but his "freshyouth fretted in a bloomfall" portends an even "sweeter ending" (st. 8). The poet treads soft "tufts of consolation" when "limber liquid youth . . . Yields tender as a pushed peach" (st. 6). Notice how "limber" in this setting comes to mean "supple, flexible like the limb of a young tree". The origin of limber is still uncertain to the experts, but Hopkins implies here an etymology that taken poetic sense, at least.

In connection with this vegetal, botanical, or horticultural imagery, we ought to consider the word "rankle" in the penultimate

stanza: "but may he not rankle and roam/ In backwheels though bound home?" To rankle really means to "fester". Hopkins is worried that the innocent young soldier may become infected by evil in spite of "that sealing sacred ointment" of the eucharist (st. 9). This wound or sore that will not heal and readily grows septic seems to be an image for man's Original Sin. Earlier in the poem, Hopkins asks Christ, or the bugler's guardian angel, to "Dress his days" (st. 5) as one might dress with healing ointment a wound which may yet "rankle", even "though bound" up with medicated bandages (st. 11). John Pick, in his discussion of this poem, remarks that "Man's nature has been wounded by original sin", but appears not to realize the full relevance of his statement. He quotes only a part of stanza 9, omitting the line containing "ointment", and fails to comment on significant words such as "Dress" and "rankle". Possibly he thought it too obvious to mention, but it really looks as if he used the image himself but missed it in the poem.⁴ Paul Mariani also refers to "the crippling scar of original sin", but this occurs in his discussion of "The Handsome Heart" (Mariani, p. 143).

These implications, then, rise out of the normal denotation of rankle, but in these poetic circumstances, it also signifies "grow rank", like weeds out of control. Here again Hopkins is not so much inventing new words as using existing words in his own peculiar and concentrated way. We have already seen him doing this in his early poems, with words like "nizing" in "For a Picture of St. Dorothea" and "pursuant" in

⁴ J. Pick, Gerard Manley Hopkins: Priest and Poet (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 88 -- hereafter cited as Pick.

"Easter Communion". This interpretation of "rankle" is important, because the idea of the bugler growing rank, perhaps as he rises in military rank, climaxes (like a waterfall) the stream of botanical imagery running centrally through the poem. All the vegetative metaphors are the roots and leaves of an imagistic motif which blossoms in stanza 11. If this reading is valid, Hopkins' doubts at this time are painfully deep. He fears that the weeds of evil can continue to flourish even after they have been plucked up and tied in bundles, that they may become rank or "rankle . . . though bound". The operative image has its source in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn" (Mt. 13:30).

For further evidence that Hopkins is thinking in this stanza of luxuriant vegetation, note the phrase "In backwheels" which follows "rankle and roar" and may modify either verb. This close association parallels his reference in "Spring" (No. 33) to "weeds, in wheels" (l. 2), a description which suggests leaves growing out like spokes from hub-like stems, fragile stalks curling in spirals, as well as the easy speed with which unwanted plants seem to sprout and spread. In the New Testament, weeds or thorns or tares commonly symbolize evil, but this association is unusual in Hopkins. For him, weeds normally have positive connotations, in "Spring" as in "Duns Scotus's Oxford" (No. 44) and "Invercauld" (No. 56), where he says, "Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet", apparently because they represent vitality and variety better than do cultivated plants.

The adjective rank has other denotations too, most of them pejorative. It means, for instance, "disagreeable to the smell or taste". Sometimes a sore that rankles will become rank or strong-smelling; like the wound of Philoctetes. This connotation of "rankle" we may contrast with the sweet smell of youth "fretted in a bloomfall" (st. 3) or "tender as a pushed peach" (st. 6). Like fresh fruit, the suchrist is a veritable sweetmeat: "Forth Christ from cupboard fetched, how fain I of feet/ To his youngster take his treat!" (st. 3). Perhaps there is a connection in Hopkins' mind between the words sacrament (Latin sacere "to consecrate", sacer "sacred") and saccharine (Latin saccharon, French sucré "sugar"), meaning something very sweet; this is how his mind seems to work, especially in composing poetry. Mark, also, the subtle echoes of a nursery rhyme in these lines. Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard to fetch her poor dog one bone; Young Father Hopkins gives this boy Christ's whole body and blood. Furthermore, the word rank used to mean "lustful", and if the bugler does "rankle and roam", lechery might be the cause. This meaning seems related to the first denotation I mentioned of rank as an adjective; rank vegetation is luxuriant growth, and the Latin luxuria (or English luxury, formerly) means lust or lechery. When Claudius, in Hamlet, says that his "offence is rank, it smells to heaven" (III.iii.36), Shakespeare is telling us that his deeds are not only disagreeable, but also excessive, unjust, and lecherous. He is not merely a villain, nor only a bloody villain, but, in Hamlet's words, a "Bloody, bawdy villain" (II.ii.575).

Another reason behind Hopkins' using the word "rankle" is, of course, that rank as a noun is a military term. It is appropriate that

a poem about an army bugler should exploit military vocabulary and imagery. The word "ranks" appears earlier in the poem, in stanza 5, where it is also associated with the forces of evil and corrupting experience:

Frowning and forefending angel-warder
Squander the hell-rook ranks sally to molest him;
March, kind comrade, abreast him;
Dress his days to a dexterous and starlight order.

Dexterous denotes "adroit" or "skilful", but literally it means "right-handed" (Latin dexter). It is extremely illuminating to compare this stanza, written in 1879, with an entry from his 1864 diary: "The other day I heard a crow sitting in a tree in a field on my left croaking dolefully" (Journals, p. 21; Hopkins himself underlined these three words). The crow, as a carrion creature, is traditionally a bird of death, but to hear one croaking alone on one's left hand is a sinister, ominous, unlucky sign. By the same token, a good omen on the right is particularly dexterous, favourable, or propitious. Was that crow in the field one of "the hell-rook ranks"?

Hopkins feels a bond with the bugler because they are both soldiers, both Englishmen, and both Roman Catholics. He often uses the Christian military imagery familiar to him from the writings of St. Paul and St. Ignatius, the former knight who founded the Society of Jesus. Christ is the ideal King or Knight, and Hopkins is one of his followers. The bugler boy is a Christian soldier too, but what makes this poem particularly painful is the poet's awareness that, in a deeper sense, they are probably on opposite sides, or will be before too long. Contrary to the patriotic evangelist and religious nationalist of his age, Hopkins knew that in the end, one can no more serve both Christ and Country than one can serve both

God and Mammon. The soldiers who crucified Christ were serving their country, the Roman Empire, and Hopkins cannot help thinking of their part in what followed the first last Supper, as he re-enacts that meal with this youthful soldier. By the middle of the poem, the site of the army barrack "over the hill/ There" has become "that bleak hill" (st. 6), as these soldiers remind him of others involved in events at the bleak hill of Calvary:

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him. (Mt. 27: 27-31)

Hopkins realizes that this boy may well desert the Lord's side and join the ranks of the Adversary, where service seems easier. His half-Irish blood may be meant to represent this dual nature, and to stress the likelihood of turning ~~traitor~~ when one tries to serve two masters.

Hopkins has fears that as this bugler becomes a common soldier, a member of the rank and file, he will follow an all-too-common path, making small mistakes or slips which will eventually lead him away from the narrow way to Christ. This is another meaning for "slips of soldiery" in stanza 7, the spiritual lapses or moral errors to which such soldiers are liable. It is to these slips that the priest must minister in confession and communion. When Hopkins says "may he not ruckle and roam", he makes a request as well as a query. It is not only a question but also a prayer: let him not grow rank, fester, wander, or err in thought and deed. The word error comes from the Latin verb errare "to roam or wander". The poet ^{is} concerned about the bugler backsliding or slipping

from the right path to Heaven. Although he is headed in the right direction now ("bound home"), this boy may yet stray, "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Mt. 7:14). The road to salvation is uphill, and wandering backwards is as easy as rolling down a hill. This is neatly and effectively conveyed by the phrase "In backwheels", a superb invention with appropriate military connotations: Right wheel! Left wheel! Back wheel! It should be noted at this point that the wheeling manoeuvre may be performed by a line of ships as well as by a body of troops changing direction while remaining in alignment.

The Wheel of Fortune, bringing about changes (especially for the worse) in human destiny, is also relevant, but much more illuminating for present purposes is this passage from Hopkins' journal for the summer of 1871:

James Shaw . . . told us among other things that . . . to sail as in Sail wheel is to circle round. This is no tautology, for wheel is not whirlpool but only means, as I think, the double made in the water by the return current where at the spread of the stream caused by the bend or otherwise the set or stem of the river bears on one bank and sets the slacker water on its outside spinning with its friction and so working back upstream. (Journal, p. 211)

As I understand him, Hopkins is trying to say that a wheel, in water is not a whirlpool but an eddy, a reversal or change in direction. This greatly clarifies the word "backwheels", especially when we look at it alongside the metaphor which precedes it:

Though this child's drift,
Seems by a divine doom channelled, nor do I cry
Disaster there; but may he not rattle and roam
In backwheels though bound home?--
That left to the Lord of the Eucharist, I here lie by.

Like a small vessel, the bugler may be pulled off course by a back-eddy. Here again is the shipwreck image so frequently used by Hopkins and obviously central to poems like "The Loss of the Eurydice" and his masterpiece "The Wreck of the Deutschland". This image, which acquires the significance of a major symbol in Hopkins' poetry, appears even in the first poem in the fourth edition of his Poems: "the poor collapsing frame, / Hung like a wreck that flames not billows beat". These lines come from stanza 3 of "The Escorial", which Hopkins wrote at the age of fifteen. Like a verbal lodestone, the nautical image in stanza 11 of "The Bugler's First Communion" draws boat metaphors out of other words in the poem, such as "locks" (st. 9), which are sections of a canal, where Hopkins wishes the boy could be kept, away from the dangerous open sea of experience. When the poet says "I here lie by", he seems to be deliberately using nautical terminology. To lay to or lie by is to "maintain a vessel facing into the wind in a stationary position". Hopkins stands by like a tug or a lifeboat ready to assist other vessels in the event of trouble. The "Lord of the Eucharist" is a title which recalls the "Lord of the Admiralty". There is also one more submerged meaning in "slips", which is the name for piers sloping down to the water, where vessels are constructed, launched, landed, and repaired. The bugler boy is like a newly built ship, waiting in the slipway to slide into the beautiful but deep waters of the world. The poet-priest fears that he may not reach his distant "Heaven-Haven", but the stars may guide him, as their disposition led many ancient mariners safely home, showing him the right way to port. "Dress his days to a dexterous and starlight order" includes yet another nautical term. One dresses

a ship by displaying all its flags and banners, in honour of an event. In the life of an individual, a First Communion is certainly occasion enough for a comparable celebration.

Sailors navigate not only by the sun and stars, but also by compass. The needle of a compass points to the magnetic north pole, which people used to think was a huge piece of lodestone, a rock often identified with the legendary mineral adamant. When Hopkins calls heaven "adamantine" in his final stanza, he compares it to the north pole on which the mariner with his compass depends for a safe passage. Compare the following lines from a later poem, unfinished but thematically similar to this one, "On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People" (No. 157): "Where lies your landmark, seamar, or soul's star?/ There's none but truth can stand you. Christ is truth" (st. 5).

The word "adamantine" caps the nautical imagery, and also some other image-groups which flow through "The Bugler's First Communion". Since adamant is the hardest substance in the world, "adamantine heaven" suggests an impenetrable fortress, the strength and solidity of which contrast with "limber liquid youth, that . . . Yields tender as a pushed peach". Does the epithet "adamantine" also stress the eternity or the ancientness of heaven, suggesting that it was there even before (Latin ante) Adam? Adamant is sometimes identified with the diamond, which is actually the hardest mineral, and the two words are in fact linguistic doublets, that is, they entered the English language through different intermediary languages from the same source. Hopkins, as I have already pointed out, was always fascinated by this facet of philology. If his "adamantine heaven" is diamond-like in hardness and lustre, we may relate

it to the guiding "starlight order" earlier in this poem, and to the celebrated "immortal diamond" principle in a later work, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection" (No. 72).

Hopkins' editors draw our attention to the many military images in "The Bugler's First Communion" (Poems, p. 276), but the focal metaphor of the poem is nautical, not military, though the two branches of the armed forces are closely linked in the poet's mind. Consider "The Soldier" (No. 63) in which Hopkins talks about "Our redcoats, our tars" in the same breath in the second line. The reason is not far to seek. Christ was not just a soldier; as Leonard Cohen says in "Suzanne", "Jesus was a sailor/ when he walked upon the water/ And he spent a long time watching/ From his lonely wooden tower".⁵ There is plenty of evidence (starting with the "Deutschland") in Hopkins' poetry that he shared this idea, a concept which has the support of traditional Christian typology. Noah, who was the first sailor of the Bible, is one of the more common Old Testament types of Christ; the proportions of the Ark (300 x 50 x 50) in which he dwelt and journeyed on the sea are identical with the proportions of the human body in which Christ lived and travelled on the earth. (If you measure the length, width, and thickness of your body you will find that the ratio between the dimensions is roughly 30:5:3.)

The battle against the Adversary Satan goes on and on, at sea, as on land. Christ "knows war, served this soldiering through", but he is a good sailor, too: "he of all can reeve a rope best" (l. 10). Notice how this sentence follows the word "through" in the preceding line.

⁵ L. Cohen, Parasites of Heaven (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966).

A seaman reeves a rope by passing it through a block or pulley and fastening it. Perhaps Hopkins has in mind George Herbert's poem, "The Pulley" (Herbert, p. 159). Or he may also be thinking of the well-known image from the Gospels: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mk. 10:25). Reevesing a rope is like threading a needle, but on a larger scale. The image is particularly fitting here since Hopkins seems to conceive man as a rope in the next poem, "Carrion Comfort" (No. 64), where he refers to "these last strands of man". For some people it is almost impossible to go through the gates of heaven, but Christ will get them in, if anyone can. He will help them reach their goal, or hit the mark.

This last word is an important one in Hopkins' thought and poetry, one that he associates with the last letter of the Greek alphabet, omega. Omega, the great O, is in turn associated with the Greek word Telos, because they both signify "purpose", "end", "goal", "aim". According to St. John of Patmos, in the final chapter of the Bible, Christ said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22:13). He is the agent of creation and the source of redemption. He is the archer and the bullseye of the target (o), the end and the means to the end. He is both the arrow, whose head is shaped like a capital Alpha (A), and the bow, which resembles when bent the great Omega (Ω). In "The Bugler's First Communion", he is the "brow and bead of being" (st. 10): the top and the target, the arrow and the aim. Head is another military metaphor; it is the small knob at the end of a gun barrel, used as the front sight. We talk of "drawing a bead on" something when we aim at it. A very interesting sidelight here is that this word

is derived from the Old English gebed "prayer", evidently on account of the Christian use of rosary beads in praying. A mountain brow is the upper edge of a steep place. Divinity, especially the God of Judaism and Christianity, has long been associated with mountain-tops. This metaphor is also congruent with Hopkins' recurrent image of God as a giant embodied in nature. Compare the close connection between God and mountainous landscape in "My own heart . . ." (No. 69), "No worst, there is none. . . ." (No. 65), and stanza 4 of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (No. 28). In stanza 24 of the "Deutschland", he turns over a commonplace colloquialism, "the Brow of a hill", and shows us the fresh underside of a worn-out metaphor: "On a pastoral forehead of wales".

"That brow and bead", then, do not correspond to Alpha and Omega, but are variants of the latter, unless we think of the brow, forehead, front part of the brain, as the seat of reason and imagination, as the source of creative power in man, therefore a good metaphor for Christ as Alpha, the agent in the beginning of all creation. Something else exciting results from the interaction of these two words. In conjunction with "brow", "bead" becomes a bead of sweat on someone's forehead, in particular the forehead of Christ, who was crucified by soldiers on the brow of "that bleak hill". Mingled with his beads of sweat were "scarlet" (st. 10) drops of blood. "Mark Christ our King", says Hopkins in "The Soldier". Man has already marked him with five wounds. This is one fact that Hopkins is asking his readers to observe when he says in the "Deutschland", stanza 22, "Mark, the mark is of man's make". Make is also Middle English for "mate", "companion", "equal", "goodly fare", "fellow soldier", as Hopkins was probably aware: see his notes

on the Middle English hymn "Angelus ad Virginem" (Poems, pp. 342-343).

Thus the sign is a symbol of Christ as a man, as Man's mate.

"Mark Christ our King." ~~Mark~~ his Word, heed his command, follow his example, "reck his rod" ("God's Grandeur"), and he will help you hit the Mark, which is himself, the Word of God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1). "Mark Christ our King", he says: behold him there. "Mark" is another way of saying "look", as Hopkins often asks his readers to do; in "The St. rlight Night" he urges us to "look, look up at the skies!" If we look and listen closely, as Hopkins was always accustomed to do, we will observe one more meaning in this context of the word "Mark". Since it happens to have an initial capital, it looks like the name Mark. I have already quoted from Mark's Gospel in connection with the very next line, but it seems more significant that his name (Latin Marcus) derives from Mars, the Roman God of War. In view of Hopkins' continual interest in etymology, can it be mere coincidence that this word (which is uncommon in his poetry) appears capitalized like a name (which is even less common) in a poem about a soldier?

Each of the four evangelists is traditionally identified with one of the four living creatures that appear in Ezekiel's prophecy. The symbolic beast of Mark the Gospel-Maker is the lion, which is also a symbol of Christ. The "king of beasts" is associated especially with the Resurrection, because young lions were once thought to be born dead, coming to life only three days after birth when breathed upon by their father. In the poem that follows "The Soldier", God is like a lion, not so much in his capacity for rebirth, as in his majesty, strength, and ferocity.

There are several less tenuous links between "The Soldier" and "Carrion Comfort" (No. 64). The former deals with sailors and soldiers, while the latter features "turns of tempest" (l. 8) and hand-to-hand combat. In "The Soldier", Christ "can reeve a rope best", and the succeeding poem begins with similar imagery, including a brilliant pun on knot: "Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;/ Not untwist--slack they may be--these last strands of man/ In me". Notice how the combination of consonants separates the words "last" and "strands", (or rather forces the reader to separate these two stressed syllables in speaking them) so that the diction imitates the last strands or fibres of a rope coming apart. This involves an exquisite suiting of sound to sense. The line break between "man" and "me", and the parenthetical cry "--slack they may be--" function in the same direction, as the sentence separates like the metaphorical cable, rope, or yarn. The speaker refuses to feast, like a jackal or hyena, on the dead body of Despair, who was drowned in the earlier poem "Inversnaid" (No. 56). That would be to deny his human nature, to dwell on his failure, to live on his own dead self. He will struggle instead with this divine demon for the right to eat fresh meat, like a man-jackal engaging the king of beasts.

All this is done to avoid untwining "these last strands of man". Even before we meet the winnowing image in the center of this sonnet, certain words suggest the positive value of this fierce contest. In line 6, for instance, "wring" is the opposite of "untwist" in the second line. This "wring-world right foot", which can twist the world in the right direction, by wringing him can help to rewind the fibres of his being.

The same goes for "turns of tempest": tornadoes or twisters. One reason he uses the archaic word "coil" ("confusion" or "tumult") in line 10 is that it conforms to this strand of imagery: "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." His heart stole joy like a wretch, by debasing itself ("lo!" sounds like "low") gained strength, lapping it up like an animal, a cat, a lion. But if we think for a moment of "lapped" as an adjective, this phrase could signify a suit of armour: a knight completely enclosed in impenetrable armour is "lapped in proof". In "The Butler's First Communion", the soldier is armed against evil when he kneels, lowers himself, to receive the sacrament of the eucharist: "O now well work that sealing sacred ointment: / O for new charms, arms, what bans off bad / And locks love ever in a lad! (st. 9).

This reading of "lapped strength" in "Carriac Comfort" is readily justified by the battle motif of the poem. Suppose we try reading "stole" as a noun, which will accord with this armour and the earlier strands of clothing or textile imagery. A stole is a "robe" or "scarf", but when this word occurs in the poetry of a priest, we must consider a more specific denotation. The stole is one of a priest's sacred vestments. According to my Roman Catholic misal, it is a long band of fine cloth worn about the shoulders by priests when officiating at a mass. It symbolizes "the dignity and power of the priesthood". The words "stole joy" therefore suggest the happiness of being a priest, which grows out of the strength found in inner conflict and the joy found in submitting oneself to the will of the greater.

The theme here is virtually the same as that we observed in "Easter Communion", the focal point of Chapter I. In that early poem we also saw how Hopkins began to strain the meaning of words by placing them in verbal situations which magnified their implications. Many words in our language have several possible denotations, and Hopkins exploits this feature to reinforce his theme in "Easter Communion". It is, however, difficult to develop too many images within the strict limits of a sonnet, and "The Bugler's First Communion" demonstrates more fully the possibilities for fruitful interaction between multiple meanings and various streams of imagery. Although this poem includes at least four major imagerial systems (eucharistic, vegetative, military, nautical), Hopkins' gifted handling of multiguity makes it both rich and cohesive.

In my first chapter we observed Hopkins' multiguity functioning in a short early poem; the centre of attention in Chapter II is a longer and later poem. In the second chapter we have learned still more about the poetic process as it operates in Hopkins. As we grow more accustomed to his eccentric habits of thought, we are able to trace more accurately the notions of his mind. The better we understand how the poet's mind works in creation, the better equipped we are to interpret the products of that imaginative activity. The density of Hopkins' poems makes it possible ^{to} explore each one in depth, but their fertility makes it almost impossible to limit these explorations to a single poem. Not only are images within a poem closely linked through multiguity, but the poems themselves are connected too, by recurring themes, imagery,

and words. A line or phrase in one poem seems sometimes to inspire another, and adjacent poems often shed a strong light on one another. This is one thread of the preceding discussion that I will take up at greater length in my next chapter.

CHAPTER III

REEVING IN THE STRANDS

The organization of this final chapter differs from that of the two preceding sections, each of which centres on one poem. In the pages that follow, I approach various cruxes and points of interest by following several words through a considerable number of Hopkins' poems. The most important of these words, selected for their contribution to multiplicity, are strain, wind, sheer, and comb. Each word taken in turn readily leads us from one poem to another, and the poems take us from one multiplicitous word to the next. The reasons behind this unusual method of discussion are simple. I find myself with many things to say about many different poems by Hopkins, and this seems the most coherent and effective way to organize my comments within the limits of available space. Because I refrain from paraphrasing and summarizing every poem discussed, because I avoid repeating in my own words anything someone else has already written, and because completely new readings of entire poems are rare indeed, I must move about extensively through the Hopkins canon in order to continue making observations and expositions that need to be made, but have not, to my knowledge, previously been made.

Too often critics quote a passage from Hopkins and praise it highly without explaining how it is good or even what it means. The details of Hopkins' diction often require more elucidation than they receive. Interpretation is my primary concern; as long as parts of poems

remain in darkness, one cannot easily proceed to other kinds of commentary. I try not to stray from the words on the page, for there is still much to be learned from the poems themselves. Most of the points I make are minor, but together they constitute a major aspect of Hopkins' poetic art. I have tried to choose these words and passages with an eye to the insight they can provide into the creative processes of the poet's mind. My wide-ranging exploration also uncovers an important class of images, most of which have been noticed before, but which have not been treated as a group. This strand of imagery, which turns out to be pervasive in Hopkins' poetry and deeply embedded in his thinking, is related to the technique of intertwining images revealed in the earlier chapters of this dissertation.

I will begin my discussion by remarking on one of Hopkins' habits of composition which sometimes results in effective multiguity. Some words with several meanings he employs with different denotations in different poems. The same word will often appear in adjacent poems, but seldom in exactly the same sense. It might be argued, of course, that no word ever has precisely the same meaning twice, but this is not my point here; my hypothesis is not quite so recondite or rarified. Because he likes to keep his language, both the English tongue and his own poetic vocabulary, alive and growing, Hopkins seems reluctant to use a word in quite the same way twice in succession. In fact, he has a habit of repeating a word in closely contemporary poems, usually with a deliberate and distinct shift in signification. Observe, by way of example, charged in stanza 3 of "Heaven Pool" and the first line of "God's Grandeur", seas in stanza 3 of "Heaven Pool" and "The Star-

light Night" (l. 10), piece in "The Starlight Night" (l. 13) and "Pied Beauty" (l. 5), wring in "Spring" (l. 4) and "The Caged Skylark" (l. 8), ring in "The Sea and the Skylark" (l. 10) and "The Windhover" (l. 4), spring in "Heaven-Haven" and "For a Picture of St. Dorothea", plough in "The Windhover" (l. 12) and "Pied Beauty" (l. 5), sheer in "Carrion Comfort" (l. 9) and "No worst, there is none. . . ." (l. 10), wind in "The Sea and the Skylark" (l. 6) and "Hurrahing in Harvest" (l. 2) and "The Lantern out of Doors" (l. 9), would in "Hurrahing in Harvest" (l. 4) and "The Lantern out of Doors" (l. 5). The word fell has a different meaning in each of "The Wreck of the Deutschland", "The Loss of the Eurydice", "Binsey Poplars", and "I wake and feel . . .".

Often when he uses a word such as these, Hopkins seems to recognize one more potential meaning that he has not fully considered. The excitement of fresh poetic possibilities sometimes prompts him to exploit it in a different ^{sense} in his next poem, or one already in progress. A word used in this manner may build up a backlog or bank of meanings, so that when one reads it in a Hopkins poem after seeing certain earlier pieces, one senses several layers of connotation underlying the primary meaning. In a few instances, an idea associated with one denotation will adhere to the word, even when it is used in a totally separate sense in another poem. An interesting example of this, and an extremely revealing one, is the word strain, which repeatedly appears not only in Hopkins' poetry, but also in critical discussions of his life and art.

In connection with Hopkins' terms "underthought" and "overthought" Elizabeth Schneider wonders about the relation "between two strains in a poem". As she has been using music to illustrate her argument, strain

here is presumably a "melody" or "passage of music".¹ Hopkins the amateur composer uses the word in this sense when he tells Bridges that "in a really organic tune the second or third strain or both tend to be good counterpoint to the first" (Letters, I, 278). In a more recent book, Alison G. Sulloway calls on the word several times in her first chapter:

Certainly the strains Hopkins had undergone would have been demoralizing even for a man much less sensitive and much less concerned about the problems of liberty and authority than he. But Hopkins's strains were personal as well as theological.

In this quotation, strain seems almost identical with "stress". We can find the same critico-biographical vocabulary in much earlier books about Hopkins. At the beginning of his formidable study, now thirty years old, W. H. Gardner refers to "two strains in the man which tend to pull in opposite directions" (Gardner, I, 2). For Gardner, it appears, the primary meaning of strain is a "hereditary tendency", an "inborn element", but there is also a strong suggestion of strain as "a mental or physical injury resulting from excessive tension or effort". Hopkins' critics may have been influenced by his ^{use} of the verb strain in a well-known excerpt from his private spiritual notes written in the last year of his life: "All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch".³ To strain is to "strive", but beyond that, to "stretch, pull, twist, wrench, exert to the utmost".

It is fitting that Alison Sulloway and others should appropriate this word for their discussions of Hopkins' years at Oxford, because he

¹ E. W. Schneider, The Dragon in the Gate (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 150 -- hereafter cited as Schneider.

² A. G. Sulloway, Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 19.

³ G. M. Hopkins, The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. C. Devlin, S.J. (London: Oxford U. Press, 1959), p. 262.

exploits it as much in his early poems as in his mature verse. We find it in the initial poem in the fourth edition, "The Escorial" (st. 13): "Afar in corridors with pained strain/ Doors slammed to the blasts continually". The doors must be pulling or twisting on their hinges so that they creak, squeak, or squeal as if in pain. In the poem that follows this one, "A Vision of the Mermaids" (No. 2), the noun Strain denotes something else, a piece of music: "Now melting upward thro' the sloping scale/ Swell'd the sweet strain to a melodious wail" (ll. 132-133). Hopkins seems, however, to have also in mind the first meaning of strain (stress, exertion, lesion), because this strain "Swell'd" to a "wail" and ended in a "heart-broken close." Conversely, the musical meaning may be suggested in the first poem. Preceding the lines quoted above from "The Escorial" is this one: "Louder the monks dron'd out Gregorians slow". The tortured noise of doors aswing on old hinges, and the sound of monks chanting ancient hymns, come together in the word "strain", which stands in a position of emphasis, at the end of a line.

In the sonnet beginning "Let me be to thee . . ." (No. 19), "strains" are again melodies: "The authentic cadence was discovered late/ which ends those only strains that I approve" (ll. 9-10). Paul Mariani sees a double meaning in "ends", but surely the one in "strains" is more obvious and significant (Mariani, p. 28). Discovery of the authentic cadence climaxes the poet's strenuous efforts to find it, ends the strains or tensions of a lengthy spiritual search. This is only one of several words in poem No. 19 in which a musical meaning coexists with at least one other operative meaning: "minor" (l. 12), "dominant" (l. 13), "range" (l. 13). "Dominant" suggests too the Latin word for Lord, dominus.

The bat's "departing rings" or circles, in view of the musical imagery, remind us of bells ringing, especially in an evening scene, and since "rings" in this poem rhymes with "sings" and "sweet strings". The verb "rung" in the fourth line of a later sonnet "The Windhover" (No. 36) increases in significance when one knows that the official name for the kestrel or windhover is falco tinnunculus (compare the Latin tinnire "to ring like a bell"), and that some falconers actually attach little bells to the legs of their birds.

Again in "Let me be to thee . . .", notice the word "sweet", which also appears along with "strains" in "A Vision of the Mermaids", three times within six lines, as a matter of fact (ll. 130-135). Also in close proximity is "sweetness", which reappears in No. 19, two lines after "strains" in line 10. In one of his 1877 sonnets, "Spring" (No. 33), Hopkins brings out yet another meaning of strain, a liquid that has been strained, filtered, percolated, purified:

What is all this juice and all this joy?
 A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
 In Eden garden.--Have, get, before it cloy,
 Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning.

For Hopkins, this kind of "strain" is virtually synonymous with "concentrate" or "distillate", and is symbolic of purity and innocence: clean, clear, and intense. Once more in this poem sweetness and strains are intimately associated, because the flavour of a purified liquid will be stronger than that of the original diluted or adulterated fluid, sweeter than normal. Had Hopkins this in mind when he linked the two words in his earlier poems? Or was he merely thinking of a strain or spell of music being sweet in the more commonplace metaphorical way?

In "The Woodlark" (No. 138), an unfinished poem begun in 1876, less than a year before "Spring", Hopkins says, "Today the Sky is two and two/
With white strokes and strains of the blue", describing the colours in terms of painting and music, if that is what he means by "strains of the blue" (l. 17). Sometimes a colour or taste or smell or touch or sound is so powerful or unusual that it demands description in terms of another sense. It is very likely that Hopkins is doing so here, for this synaesthetic impulse is evident elsewhere in his writing. We might call this the inverse of his line about a thrush in "Spring": "it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing". Or perhaps by "strains" Hopkins intends to suggest that the blue is as intense as a liquid that has been strained by filtration.

In "The Handsome Heart" (No. 47) Hopkins uses strain once more as a noun, apparently in approximately the same sense as in the first poem "The Escorial": "O on that path you pace/ Run all your race, O brace sterner that strain!" (ll. 13-14). In other (but weaker) words, strengthen your resistance even more, extend or stretch yourself further yet, make your efforts still more intense. A strain can also be a moral tendency forming part of a character: a strain of asceticism, or a strain of silliness. In this poem it is a basic element of goodness, or inner purity, or spiritual beauty. What the poet wants the boy to brace, reinforce, hold on to tightly, is this natural strain of grace, or sweetness, in him: "'Father, what you buy me I like best./ With the sweetest air that said, still plied and pressed,/ He swung to his first poised purport of reply" (ll. 2-4). In his very next poem, "The Bugler's First Communion", Hopkins employs the word strain again, but this time,

and for the first time in his poetry, as a verb: "Nothing else is like it, no, not all so strains/ Us: freshyouth fretted in a bloomfall all portending/ That sweet's sweeter ending" (st. 8). Again, as it seems almost superfluous to point out, there is the sweetness inseparable from the straining. Here, then, is an excellent instance of that practice mentioned earlier. In using the word "strain" in No. 47, Hopkins seems to be ~~one~~ aware of poetical resources in the word which he has not tapped and which he proceeds immediately to exploit by using it in a new way in the succeeding poem. Both "The Handsome Heart" and "The Bugler's First Communion" Hopkins wrote in 1879 while at Oxford, and in each poem a meaning of strain is operative that has not been used previously in the Hopkins canon.

Up to this point we have witnessed Hopkins utilizing the word strain in seven poems in almost as many different senses. I can think of one substantive meaning he has not employed, but it may be implied in "Spring": "A strain of earth's sweet being in the beginning/ In Eden garden." A strain is "a line of animals or plants bred from a certain species and maintained at a high level of perfection by selection." One preserves distinctive qualities in animals, plants, or people by inbreeding, which produces a strain of individuals hopefully free of undesirable qualities and possessing certain special characteristics, in this case, innocence and sweetness. Hopkins' phrase suggests something kept pure and free from bad influences since the beginning of time.

A strain is distinctive, a special breed, a symbol of individuality. This denotation Hopkins also has in mind as a supplementary or complementary meaning in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (No. 61): "Earnest,

earthless, equal, attuneable, ' vaulty, voluminous, . . . stupendous/
 Evening strains to be time's vast, ' womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-
 of-all night" (ll. 1-2). Obviously, "strains" is primarily intended as
 a verb: evening is striving to become night. But the significance of
 nightfall in this poem is that it tries to make everything the same.
 At night the multitudinous inscapes of the world disappear, reduced by
 darkness to shadows in two shades. The individualizing and, for Hopkins,
 life-giving details of nature can no longer be seen or distinguished.
 There are various ways of restating the principle behind this idea. The
 vitality of earthly life lies in its variety. Many strains or species
 make life something special. Variety of species is the real spice of life.
 In view of his philological interests, it is quite possible that Hopkins
 was aware of the etymological links between words like spice and species
 which go thus together in his attitude to life.

Like Death, Night is a great leveller, making distinctively dif-
 ferent things the same, equal, or even; evening strains which are essen-
 tially symbolic of individuality and vitality. Thus, though grammar de-
 mands that we read "strains" as a verb predicating the noun "Evening", it
 also makes poetic sense, because the result suits the theme so well, to
 understand "strains" as a noun, object of the present participle "Evening".
 The position of this word, which immediately follows a list of adjectives
 in the first line, makes it easy to commit the profitable "mistake" of
 reading it as a verbal adjective.

This particular reading has not been suggested before, but "Spelt
 from Sibyl's Leaves" has attracted a great deal of critical attention, and,
 as Mariani says, it has "received several quite different interpretations"

(Mariani, p. 199), beginning with F. R. Leavis' discussion in New Bearings in English Poetry. "The Wreck of the Deutschland" was the only other Hopkins poem to undergo a detailed examination in that pioneering essay. Certain sections of the poem have proved especially troublesome. There has been little agreement and much argument, for instance, about the exact meaning of this deceptively simple line of description near the opening of the poem: "Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the west, / her wild hollow hoarlight hung to the height/ Waste." According to F. R. Leavis, the "yellow hornlight" is the setting moon, primarily because, I suppose, the points of a crescent moon are known as horns.⁴ To support this reading one could point to a similar image in "Winter with the Gulf Stream" (No. 3), one of Hopkins' earliest poems, where he describes the "bugle moon" that floats "by daylight . . . So glassy white about the sky". A bugle, of course, is another kind of horn. Gardner hints at this in his study of Hopkins, but not very explicitly, so that most readers have probably missed his insight: "this horn is heard as well as seen" (Gardner, II, 313). It is interesting that he does not press this reading or explain it further because the interpretation is slightly unusual or perhaps imaginative ("strained", some might call it, but without justification), Gardner is careful not to commit himself, expressing it so that only those readers who agree, having seen it themselves, will catch his real meaning. This is a very cagey kind of criticism -- bold it certainly is not, though Gardner was a perceptive critic. In fact, what we have here is another example of Hopkins' synaesthetic impulse in action. The light of the moon meets the eyes (if in fact it is the moon) as the sound of a bugle beats the ear. The colour is so bright, brassy, and clear that it can

⁴F. R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (London: Penguin, 1963; originally Chatto & Windus, 1932), p. 149 -- hereafter cited as Leavis.

only be compared to the brightly distinctive note of a sounding horn. This is the converse of Hopkins' journal description of church bells ringing: "the orange of the pealing of Mitton bells" (Journals, p. 218). This note, by the way, involves a pun on peeling an orange, as well as multiple synaesthesia in the colour, shape, taste, and aroma of the fruit. Other instances I have mentioned above. This reading of "Hornlight" also gains support from the word "wound", as a horn sounded by blowing is said to be "winded" or "wound".

F. R. Leavis thinks "her wild hollow hoarlight" is "the cold, hard starlight . . . remote, inhuman, a kind of emptiness in the hollow vault" (Leavis, p. 149). Mariani appears to agree, but the majority of critics, from Gardner to Cotter,⁵ identify this as the pale or grey light in the zenith (Mariani, p. 201). Elisabeth Schneider points out that this light does "wane with the advance of evening", while the starlight does not (Schneider, p. 165). Sentence-structure also argues against either "hornlight" or "hoarlight" emanating from the stars, as "casts" is followed by a semi-colon, and the second half of the sentence (ll. 4-5) describes the stars. This, as I say, is the most popular interpretation, although Alan Heuser, for some peculiar reason, identifies "hoarlight" as the Northern lights.⁶ But surely evening's "wild hollow hoarlight" could be the silvery-white moon, which, when waxing or waning, appears to be scooped or hollowed out. And the moon is also "wild", a traditional symbol of transience and female unpredictability, as opposed to tame order and constancy. The moon

⁵ J. F. Cotter, Inscape: The Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), p. 217 -- hereafter cited as Cotter.

⁶ A. Heuser, The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 67 -- hereafter cited as Heuser.

is associated with women (unpredictability), madmen (lunacy), and monsters such as the werewolf (or "Manwolf" as in "Tom's Garland"). These are all wild creatures.

So far, then, it appears that the moon could be either "yellow hornlight" or "hollow hoarlight" or neither of these. Both Gardner, and Schneider, twenty years later, argue that neither "hornlight" nor "hoarlight" can be the moon, because both words are subjects of the verb "waste", and the moon, even a setting moon, does not waste (or fade) as evening advances. As Gardner says, "the moon would surely grow brighter as the night deepened" (Gardner, II, 313). But the verb waste does not necessarily mean "fade", as most critics seem to assume. Surely the word could quite reasonably signify that the moon was wasting, diminishing, shrinking, wearing away, or waning rather than waxing. As a matter of fact, this meaning of waste is more common and more easily justified than "fade". People have probably passed it over because this meaning could apply only to one subject of the verb "waste", whichever one we choose to understand as the moon. Now this is entirely true, but it is a mistake to think that this would prevent Hopkins from using the word in just this way. When dealing with this poet, we may never assume that something is linguistically or grammatically so simply because it is reasonable or conventional. Because it is customary for a verb to have exactly the same meaning for each of its multiple subjects is not justification to presume that Hopkins will always follow the rule. No other example of precisely this practice came immediately to mind, but by now we should expect this sort of thing from Hopkins. Jim Hunter avoids this whole problem by reading "waste" as an adjective modifying the noun

"height", so that "the height/ waste" is the vast and desolate sky above. He is also the only critic I have read to suggest that "hoarlight" is the moon, and in this I agree with him (Hunter, p. 92).

With regard to "hornlight", the most common opinion sees it as the light of the sun disappearing below the horizon, and this view I have come to share, but even those who agree on this have different reasons for their readings. Gardner, as usual, takes a stand on both sides (Gardner, I, 166-167). He first quotes part of this diary entry for September 24, 1870: "First saw the Northern Lights. My eye was caught by beams of light and dark very like the crown of horny rays the sun makes behind a cloud" (Journals, p. 200). Notice here, by the way, Hopkins' attention to details of expression, even when writing to himself. His attitude to language in the Journals is the same as in his Poems; his way with words is at once playful and careful, sporting and exacting. These horns of light were so impressive that they caught his eye, as the horns of a bull might catch the cape of a matador. Gardner might have quoted also a description of a "Sunset over oaks a dapple of rosy clouds blotted with purple, sky round confused pale green and blue with faint horned rays" (Journals, p. 146). He then goes on to say that "Horn suggests also the colour of the rays", that is, pale yellow or gold (Gardner, I, 167). His illustrative quote does not make it clear, however, whether this is the yellow of animal horn or of the brass bugle hinted at elsewhere in his study. In the notes to this poem in the fourth edition, his co-editor Norman MacKenzie refers to the following descriptive diary notes: "In the sunset . . . cloud holding the yellow-rose light like a lamp" (Journals, p. 201). To grasp the relevance of this, we must assume that the lamp

is an old-fashioned lantern, for Mackenzie reminds us that our word "lantern", though it originates with the Latin lanterna, used to be spelled "Lanthorn" because the sides were once made of thin sheets of translucent horn (Poems, p. 284). Mariani agrees with Mackenzie (Mariani, p. 201), as does Robert Boyle, who gives credit to Raymond Schoder for explaining that "yellow hornlight" is "like candle light glowing through a horn lantern".⁷

But multiguity does not give us the freedom to make any interpretation we like; the critic has a responsibility to control his "responsibility". I do shy away from the latter reading of "hornlight", as the evidence is decidedly weaker than for the other two suggested interpretations, which also co-exist more easily. Here we have only one use of the word "lamp" in the Journals, from which we must make an imaginative leap to "lantern" and then again to "lanthorn" and thence to "horn", and we still require additional equipment such as the candle to make the metaphor work. I will not say this reading is too "far-fetched", because that expression I believe Hopkins would accept as a great compliment.

Obviously, there are some words in this sentence from "Spelt from Adeline's Leaved" more troublesome or open to interpretation than others, and the most problematic seem to be "hornlight", "wound", "hollow", and "hante". Any valid explanation of the line must grapple with these four words, and account for the presence of each. Elizabeth Schoder goes down rather hard on P. A. Leavis, accusing him of deliberately ignoring the word "hante" (presumably decapitating the sentence to fit his Frostian bed), but it is difficult to find any published reading of this passage that does not identify at least one word, and Miss Schoder's

⁷R. Boyle, S.J., Lantern in Hopkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 140 -- hereafter cited as Boyle.

exposition is no exception. Hopkins is by no means a sloppy poet, and for each word he uses, he could probably supply specific reasons for using that word and not any other. If we turn again to the Journals, we will find that two of these crucial words appear in the philological notes in his early diaries. One of the earliest entries, and the longest of all his etymological notes, deals with the many meanings and cognates of the word Horn (Journals, p. 4). This indicates that we have not been mistaken in considering carefully the meaning of "heralight"; it demonstrates Hopkins' awareness of the semantic possibilities in words in general, and in this word particularly. It is therefore unlikely that we will think of a meaning, unless it is local or modern, that did not occur to Hopkins. One cannot practise this kind of reading with all poets, but with Hopkins there is little danger of seeing in a single word a relevant meaning not intended by the author. We may rest assured that Hopkins was aware of all the plausible denotation we have discussed, and more.

Although the Horn entry is helpful to understanding Hopkins' poetic processes, I have not mentioned it before in connection with "heralight" because the great number of suggestions therein render it practically useless as evidence for a particular reading. Opening one's eyes as it does to the possibilities of meaning included in one simple word, it is a good source of clues, but not of indisputable proofs. The early diaries also include a note on the word Hollow (Journals, p. 12). From the date of his Yaddo entry in September 1874, these etymological notes cease, but he must have kept another notebook, because Wasson tells us that his "unpublished manuscript collection" of words

is acknowledged in the bibliography of the English Dialect Dictionary published in 1888.⁸ Etymological suggestions and inquiries in later letters (1886-8) to A. W. E. Baillie and Professor W. W. Skeat also argue the existence of language notes among the papers not found by Hopkins scholars (Letters, III, 258-286, 431). The discovery of these papers could conceivably shed light on many poems, as they might contain entries on words such as these I examine in this essay.

I have suggested above that "wound" is one of the trickier words in this poem, and I have already proposed one meaning apparently not considered by previous interpreters, most of whom take for granted Gardner's "clockwise mechanical motion" (Gardner, II, 313). "Clockwise" to him simply means "in a circle", like the movement of a clock's hands, or the wheels inside. The word "wound" seems to remind Gardner of winding up a clock: the sun is wound from the east to the west across the sky, as on some huge winch or wheel. This vague and very ordinary meaning does not, it seems to me, account fully for the use of this uncommon word; it is not exciting enough to justify an unusual application of the word "wound". There is some more precise image hidden here, and this word's resources deserve more consideration than they have earned from the poem's commentators.

The verb "wound", for instance, need not imply circular or downward motion, as F. H. Leavis accuses when he identifies "hornlight" as "the setting moon" (Leavis, p. 169): to wind in is to "rain" or "hoist" means of a windlass. As we have already noted the abundance of

⁸ N. H. MacKenzie, Hopkins (London: Cliver and Boyd, 1968), p. 111 -- hereafter cited as Mackenzie.

nautical language elsewhere in his poetry, it hardly seems necessary to mention his father's profession (marine insurance adjuster) or his own preoccupation with shipwrecks, real and metaphorical. If any word in his poems has a secondary sailing sense, we must not assume that Hopkins shares our ignorance of it. We must always be on the look-out for nautical imagery and vocabulary in his writing.

Whatever the primary level of meaning in this case, there is one denotation that insinuates itself into the poem quite apart from the sense of the sentence, and that is "wound" as injury. What draws out this meaning is the occurrence in succeeding lines of violent verbs like "whelms", "unbound", "dismembering", and "pashed" (bashed, crushed, dashed to pieces), not to mention the powerful image in the last line of a torturing rack, "where, selfwring, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, ' thoughts against thoughts in greans grind." Even more revealing is a comparison between the use of "wound" in line 3 and another of Hopkins' many sunset descriptions, this one from the early poem "A Vision of the Mermaids" (ll. 7-8): "blue-purple was the west; but spikes of light/ Spear'd open lustrous dashes, crimson-white". The colours, of course, are different, but the idea is strikingly similar, with spikes of light performing the same function as the horns of light in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves". In the same line as "wound", the word "hung" also deepens and darkens in significance when considered in context, when seen in the lurid light of the words and images quoted above. As we reflect further on the context, we realize too that the final phrase of the preceding line is "hearses of-all night". Many readers have remarked on the wealth of images of physical suffering in Hopkins' poetry, and this is a poem about the death

of day and the end of life.

As sunset fore shadows the Day of Judgment, so the "hornlight wound", in another sense, prefigures the Trumpet of Doom, the Last Trump. Despite "The bugle moon" earlier presented in evidence, it is not strictly necessary to read "hornlight" as the moon in order to understand horn as a musical instrument. Consider, in support of this reading, the musical meanings of "strains" and "attuneable" in the first line. The colour of the sunset is so brightly distinctive that Hopkins can only compare its impact to the note of a horn being winded or wound. Perhaps the image struck him because sunset is the time for blowing "taps" or "the last post" on a bugle. A horn is usually sounded as a signal, and in this poem, Hopkins is reading the sky for signs of future events. To justify the word reading, James Finn Cotter would have us notice the bookish associations of words such as "Leaves", "unbound", "pen", and volume in "voluminous" (Cotter, p. 218). It is also significant that "earnest", the very first word in this poem about the future, can be a noun meaning a "sign" or "token of something to come". Both the position of the word and the extreme thematic relevance of this denotation argue for its acceptance as an intended sense.

At the beginning of this chapter I drew attention to Hopkins' habit of repeating words in closely contemporary poems in order to stretch their significance in different directions. The word "wound" exemplifies this practice, as it appears in the poem composed immediately before "The Wound" from "Sibylla's Leech". There is a gap of perhaps two years between the two, but no other poem appears to have been composed in the meantime. Hopkins may have begun to draft "The Wound" very shortly after writing "The

Blessed Virgin Comp red to the Air we Breathe" (No. 60), which ends with these lines:

World's Hering air, air wild,
Wound with thee, in thee isled,
Fold home, fast, fold thy child.

Here is a meaning of "wound" we have yet to contemplate in the following poem, and one with which we know Hopkins is familiar. Perhaps he is suggesting that the light is wound, woven, wreathed, entwined, or tied to the western horizon. The adjective "fond" implies the same slowness or unwillingness of the light to leave the upper world. (Is the daylight simply wound up, like thread onto a spool? This would well suit the textile imagery which later rises to the surface of the poem in words like "dusk", "skeined", "spools", "folded". In this context, "fond" also gains. The "horrlight" may be clinging fondly to the horizon, or it may look fluid, melting (French fontant), but it also forms the background (French fond) to the scene of the poem. The latter French word has been adopted by the English language to designate a particular kind of background, the basic pattern in a piece of lace. This interpretation takes much sense when we read line 9: "Only the beetleaved boughs dragonish / dusk the toolsmooth black light".

Hopkins' use of "wound" in "Spelt from Sibyl's leaves" is a more subtle and complex version of a pun he employed previously in "The Sea and the Skylark" (No. 35), exploiting several meanings of wind as verb and as noun:

Left hand, off land, I hear the dark ascent,
His rash-fresh re-winded new-obtained shore
In crisps of curl of wild which whirl, and pour
And felt music, tiller-logs to spill on strand.

Hopkins explained this sonnet in a letter to Bridges often quoted in critical commentaries and footnotes (Letters, I, 164):

The skein and coil are the lark's song, which from his height gives the impression . . . of something falling to the earth . . . tricklingly or wavingly, something as a skein of silk ribbed by having been tightly wound on a narrow card . . . or as fishingtackle or twine unwinding from a reel or winch. . . . The lark in wild glee races the reel round, paying or dealing out and down the turns of the skein . . . to the earth . . . where it lies in a heap, as it were, or rather is all wound off on to another winch, reel, bobbin, or spool in Fancy's eye by the moment the bird touches earth and so is ready for a fresh unwinding at the next flight.

Thus each time the lark renews his song it is "re-winded" in three ways: the imaginary thread or twine of notes is wound again on its reel, spool, or card; the bird has regained his breath, his wind, after the last snatch of singing; and his song is winded or sounded once more, like a tune blown on a bugle, because the lark, too, makes music by expelling air. By using the flamboyant word "re-winded" rather than the more common "rewound", Hopkins meant to draw the reader's attention to its multiguity.

A. N. Gardner offers this passage (twice -- once in each volume) as an example of synaesthesia, the mingling of sight and sound (Gardner, I, 102, and II, 246), but more particularly, it brings together two elements or strains of imagery also found in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves": the musical and what we might call the twine or textile imagery. The lark's song is also liquid, pouring and pelting, so that the aural sensation is illustrated by both visual and tactile impressions. The connecting point or synapse between musical and rope strands of imagery is the stringed instrument. This, at least, seems the most likely point of intersection. A good illustration from "The Loss of the Barque" featured a word I have already discussed: "How all things suit! he/

Is strung by duty, is strained to beauty" (ll. 77-78). Here the sailor is like a string on a guitar, lute, or violin, stretched into tune, wound up to the higher pitch of beauty. The word suit signifies that all things fit, they go together, but the verb used to have a specific musical application, meaning "harmonize". It may be significant too that a suit is a set of clothes, and cloth is woven from strands or strings of fabric. In the next stanza Hopkins continues his eulogy to the drowned sailor, describing him with words like "gnarled" (l. 81) and "sinew" (l. 84), both of which include the idea of twisting or weaving together. It may be only coincidental that water appears in this passage in conjunction with strings and music, as in the octave of "The Sea and the Skylark". The close connection of these two concepts has an etymological parallel in the meaningful similarity of the words twist, twine, and twang.

Twine or textile imagery, moreover, is not limited to descriptions of things heard. In fact, it probably enters more often into visual impressions, as in this poetic fragment from the early diaries (Journals, p. 50):

Although she be more white,
 More white,
 Than a skeined, than a skeined waterfall,
 And better veined than pea blossoms all
 And though she be so light
 As thin-bran whirling bats' wings in the air etc.

Earlier he thought the moonlight hung "on trees like blue cobweb" (Journals, p. 23), a description we might compare with the "horralight sound to the west". This imagery is particularly noticeable not so much in descriptions of things seen as in presentations of light itself, the medium of sight. An evidence, consider the following line from "That Nature is a Helacitean Fire" (No. 72): "Shivelights and shadowtackle in long lashes lace, lance, and pair." "Shivelights" are strips or

slices of light, cut perhaps like pieces of sheer fabric. On board a ship, the tackle is a mechanism of ropes and hooks used with a pulley or windlass for moving sails, spars, and weights. Fishing-tackle is the reel and the line, which might be made of silk. A lash is a "thong", which may be used for fastening as well as for flogging. A shoe-lace is a thong, too, while the verb lace primarily means to "tie together" or "intertwine". Pair as a verb implies the same; a pair is two, which word is etymologically related to Twine and twist, because rope or thread is made by winding two or more strands or yarns about one another.

In another passage concerned with the effects of light, Hopkins says

I saw how the sea . . . is drawn up to a brow at the skyline and stoops away on either side, tumbling over towards the eye in the broad smooth fall of a lakish apron of water, which seems bound over or lashed to land below by a splay of dark and light braids: they are the gusts of wind . . . with which all the sea that day was dressed.
(Journals, p. 222)

Notice not only "bound", "lashed", and "braids", but also "dressed" and "apron". His fantastically fastidious mode of expression, even in his private papers, I have already remarked upon.

Again, this type of image may be more properly linked not to the effects of light, but to the very act of seeing. Throughout his life, Hopkins maintained a special interest in the visual process. In "The Habit of Perfection" (No. 22), one of the seven stanzas is devoted, or rather addressed, to the sense of sight:

Be shelled, eyes, with double dark
And find the uncreated light:
This ruck and reel which you remark
Coils, keeps, and teases simple sight.

Gardner translates "This ruck and reel" as "the disturbing, dizzying turmoil and excitement of common life" (Gardner, I, 117). In the explanatory

notes to the fourth edition, the interpretation is even more impressive: "variegated throng, and vortex of material interests" (Poems, p. 252). These words, as Gardner observes, "have two or three relevant meanings which reinforce each other" (Gardner, I, 118). A reel is a lively Scottish dance which might leave a novice reeling, or dizzy. To reel is to "stagger, sway, stand unsteadily". But a reel is also an apparatus in which thread, yarn, rope, wire, fishing line and so on, is wound and later unwound. A ruck is a heap, crowd, mess, jumble, as in the "ruck of horned waves" Hopkins describes in "the Rhone glacier" (Journals, p. 178). But, like reel, this word possesses a textile meaning too, which Hopkins uses in a description of real waves, explaining how "the ruck or crease one sees in them shows the way of the wind" (Journals, p. 223). Five years earlier, he observed waves in the English Channel wrinkled, creased, or "rucked in straight lines by the wind" (Journals, p. 148). Together, therefore, "ruck and reel" create the picture of a great tangle, a confused mass of sights liable to trap or ensnare the innocent eye. "Coils" in the next line sustains the image.

Another interesting word in this stanza is the participle "shelled": "The shelled, eyes, with double dark". Here is one more instance of Hopkins' using an existing word, in a new or abnormal way, this time with a sense quite contrary to the accepted meaning. The verb shell is generally understood as "remove the shell from", but in "The Habit of Perfection" it must mean "enclose", "put in a shell", rather than "take out of a shell". It should come as no surprise to us to find this object of semantic experimentation appearing several times in Hopkins' philological diary notes (Journals, pp. 12, 31, 32): "skill, originally I believe to divide,

discriminate. From the same word or root shell (in a school), shilling (division of a pound) . . . and other words meaning to cut, divide" (Journals, p. 25). By being "shell'd", his eyes will be cut off, separated from the "ruck and reel", and so become more discriminating through discrimination or division (double vision in the double dark).

In another early poem, apparently complete but printed with unfinished poems and fragments in the fourth edition (No. 91), the act of seeing is again connected with a rope or textile metaphor:

It was a hard thing to undo this knot.
The rainbow shines, but only in the thought
Of him that looks. Yet not in that alone,
For who makes rainbows by invention?

In part this is a variation on the philosophical chestnut about the tree that falls in a deep forest where there is no one to hear it. Does the tree make a noise when it falls? But there is more than that to this ten-line poetic note. A knot was a common image for a problem in the vernacular of Victorian England. In 1880, Lewis Carroll contributed a series of mathematical brain-teasers to The Monthly Packet. Before the answer to each problem he says, "A knot! Oh do let me help to undo it!", quoting from Chapter III of his Alice in Wonderland.⁹ Hopkins, however, uses the metaphor because it is particularly applicable to the knotty question at hand. What he must untie, as it were, is the tangle of sight lines running between the rainbow and the eyes of "many standing round a waterfall", who "See one how each, yet not the same to all". The idea of invisible lines or shafts of light leaving and returning to the eyes is not new with Hopkins; on the contrary, it is very old. John

⁹L. Carroll, The Annotated Alice, ed. Martin Gardner (London: Penguin, 1965), p. 52.

Donne exploits this essentially Platonic concept in "The Extasie" (Donne, p. 130): "Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread/ Our eyes upon one double string".

Donne is one major poet Hopkins never mentions in his letters or journals, but I must agree with W. H. Gardner that Donne is among those poets "who must have exerted an influence on his own work" (Gardner, II, 195). If we want any evidence to prove that Hopkins did read Donne's poetry, it may be found in No. 91 and some contemporaneous fragments, which reveal that Hopkins was reading or remembering "The Extasie" in particular, in the summer of 1864. The similarity between the lines quoted above and Hopkins' piece, where knotting and seeing also combine, is not in itself convincing. In the very next fragment (No. 92), however, appears the phrase "A thread of light". But what clinches the argument is the unfinished poem (No. 93) that follows, beginning "Late I fell in the ecstasy". The evidence has grown too strong for coincidence. If anyone requires more proof, let him read the second part of this last fragment (No. 93b):

Think of an opening page illuminated
With the ready azure and high carmine:--think
Her face was such, as being diapered
With loops of veins; not of an even pink.

To find the inspiration for this unusual, not to say weird, image, we need look no further than the following couplet from Donne's "Extasie":

"Love's mysteries in souls do grow, / But yet the body is his book".

Hopkins has merely taken the metaphor one step further. If the body is a book, then the face is a page. It is also significant that this is a description of a woman, unusual for Hopkins, but most common in Donne's poetry.

Leaving Donne, and going on to examine other fragments from Hopkins' university years, we consistently discover references to the eyes associated closely with this textile imagery, even when the subject is not strictly sight but blindness, or sleep stopping vision:

Sleep Floris while I rob you. } Tighten, O sleep,
Thy impalpable oppression: Pin him down,
Fly fold on fold across his dangerous eyes,
Lodge his eyes fast; but yet as easy and light
As the laid gossamers of Michaelmas.

This passage is an excerpt from the unfinished verse drama "Floris in Italy" (No. 102). Later, when Floris deceives himself about the woman who loves him, another character says, "he ties spider's web across his sight"; a web, of course, is woven. The preceding collection of textile images can help us to undo a knot in one of Hopkins' nature poems that has puzzled his readers for decades, in the fourth line of "The Garden Inducers" (No. 46):

Some candle clear burns somewhere I come by.
I muse at how its being puts bliseful back
With yellowy moisture mild night's blear-all black
Or to-fro tender trambeams truckle at the eye.

These trambeams could be rays of light parallel like tram-tracks but converging in the distance; but familiarity with Hopkins' visual imagery takes us tend to another denotation of tram, a kind of double silk thread. The textile meaning must be considered as well as the other. Paul S. Mariani is quite right to argue that Hopkins "is playing on the root meaning of 'ply', which means to work at a task, but also to interweave the threads of yarn suggested by 'tram' in line four" (Mariani, p. 145). Notice too that ply recurs, in a different sense, of course, in the poem immediately following this one, "The Handsome Heart" (No. 47): "With the

sweetest air that said, still plied and pressed, / He swung to his first poised purport of reply." As usual, Hopkins uses the word in a sense differing from that in the preceding poem, but a ply as a strand of rope is also implied here in the idea of the boy swinging. If he needs something to swing from, there is a rope concealed in "plied".

"The Candle Indoors" has received sufficient attention and explanation from W. H. Gardner, R. V. Schoder, N. H. MacKenzie, and F. L. Mariani to preclude any further comment here, but investigation of visual-textile imagery will illuminate a related expression in "The Lantern out of Doors" (No. 40), for which No. 46 is a companion-sonnet, "not at first meant to be though" (Letters, I, 84):¹⁰ "Men go by me. . . . wind / What most I pray eye after, be in at the end / I cannot".

Hopkins was obliged to defend the image to Bridges, by explaining away the true imagination involved, in what MacKenzie calls "a bare mathematical exposition" (MacKenzie, p. 75):

I mean that the eye winds / only in the sense that its focus or point of sight winds and that coincides with a point of the object and winds with that. For the object, a lantern passing further and further away and bearing now east, now west of one right line, is truly and properly described as winding. (Letters, I, 69)

This is satisfactory but somewhat painful, and we can obtain a better idea of the origin of this image by looking at another of Hopkins' early etymological notes (Journals, p. 47): "Twig . . . wicker, twig (small branch), twist, twine, twire (?), twy, twog, . . . etc." The implications of this word-list, the last one printed in the Journals, are easy to miss. In the words of Alan Ward, who discusses Hopkins' "Philological Notes" in Appendix III, "The appearance of twire here is

¹⁰R. V. Schoder, S.J., "An Interpretive Glossary of Difficult Words in the Poems", in Norman Weyand, S.J., ed., Immortal Diamond (New York: Octagon, 1969), p. 206. See also Gardner, II, 244-245; MacKenzie, pp. 72-75; Mariani, pp. 144-146.

of great interest" (Journals, p. 526). The verb twire, known, but rare, in the nineteenth century, means "peer" or "look narrowly"; later Hopkins seems to use it thus of stars peeping or "twiring brilliantly" (Journals, p. 181). A much less common and then obsolete meaning for the verb is "twist", "wind", "twirl", or "spin". The former denotation was probably most familiar to Hopkins, and he apparently jumped at the chance to place a verb of seeing alongside words such as wicker, twist, and twine which invoke the idea of weaving. Twire "twist" is probably related to these words, but the pedigree of twire "peer" is less certain. The important point for our purposes is Hopkins' association of textile and visual terms in the context of linguistic exploration or hypothesis. I think it highly unlikely that his connection of the two concepts begins here; he seems rather to be watching for evidence or proof for an hypothesis already present in his mind. This is only a clue. The key is perhaps in Donne's "Extasie", perhaps elsewhere. I would propose, however, that as music and filament imagery link up in the related words twang and twine, so the words twine and twire, or the latter alone, represent the nexus of textile and visual imagery.

Our exploration of certain sources of multiguity has led us to a central stream of imagery. An excellent indication of its importance is Hopkins' description of his favourite philosopher in "Duns Scotus's Oxford" (No. 44): "Of reality the rarest-veined unraveller" (l. 22). Scotus was one of the chief influences on Hopkins' thought. The idea of an interdependent nature comes through strongly in the preceding poem, "Binsey Poplars" (No. 43):

Since country is so tender
 To touch, her being so slender,

 Where we, even where we mean
 To mend her we end her,
 When we hew or delve:
 After-comers cannot guess the beauty been.

The lives of plants, animals, and people are interwoven, in a sense which we understand more fully now than a hundred years ago. We may not feel the relationship any more deeply than people did then, but there is more information available to us which illustrates the delicacy of nature's ecological balance. The trees, the sky, the water, all elements of the former scene in "Binsey Poplars", are inter-connected to create a striking but fragile collection of natural patterns. The sun was entangled or imprisoned among the trees, and the river winds through the weeds:

My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,
 Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,
 All felled, felled, are all felled;
 Of a fresh and following folded rank
 Not spared, not one
 That dandled a dandalled
 Shadow that swam or sank
 On meadow and river and wind-wandering weed-winding bank.

"dandalled/ shadow" is patterned like the interlacing straps of a sandal. The effect is similar to that of "hive-light and shadow-tackle" which "lace, lance, and pair" in "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire" (No. 72). These effects Hopkins observed not only in nature but also in man, as in the poem preceding No. 72, "Harry Ploughman", where he describes Harry's "lank/ hope-over thigh", and his curia that "sag or snow-stride, in a wind lifted, wind-laced". Things are woven together not only physically in the parts of an individual, but spiritually too, between people. "Brothers" (No. 59) begins in this manner:

How lovely the elder brother's
Life all laced in the other's,
Love-laced!

laced as they are in one another's, our lives are also attached to God by a kind of spiritual umbilical cord, woven out of the same material that joins the brothers in the above quotation. In stanza 4 of "The Wreck of the Deutschland", Hopkins portrays himself "roped with . . . a vein/ Of the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift." This is love, the same principle that twines the brothers' lives together. This connection can sometimes be painful, as when the poet is "laced with fire of stress" (st. 2).

In the first stanza of the "Deutschland", Hopkins calls God the "World's strand, sway of the sea". He is the dry land under and around the chaotic sea of life, the solid "Ground of being, and granite of it" (st. 32). We are tossed on the waves of the world, and God is the shore, the beach, the safe harbour. But the haven of dry land can also be a horror, and this is the point of the poem: the Deutschland foundered on land, on a sand bar. Like the dual-natured strand, God is "lightning and love . . . a winter and war". Or perhaps God is to the world as the strand to London in the Victorian age. Also present in this word, of course, is Hopkins' pervasive weaving imagery, especially since it is followed so closely by this line: "Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh". God is the strand, a set-line, or limit of the universe; he has also made man, woven him from strands of bone and blood, tied him together with his gigantic hands: "Over again I feel thy finger and find thee." The same image is implicit in the phrases ~~quoted above~~ from "Harry Ploughman" and in "arrison Comfort" as well:

"I'll not . . . untwist--slack they may be--these last strands of man/
In me". Man is like a rope; and in the preceding poem, "The Soldier",
Hopkins says that Christ "of all can reeve a rope best". He is best at
pulling man through the strait gates of Heaven. The spiritual connec-
ting cord between man and God may be Christ's love, or it may be life
itself, which unwinds, "skeined stained veined" in the basket of "Spelt
from Sicyl's Leaves". In the poem that follows "Carrier Comfort", "the
worst, there is none. . . .", there is an image of the speaker hanging
from a cliff (ll. 9-11):

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathered. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there.

He could be holding on by his finger-tips, but the imagery of the sur-
rounding poems suggests a mountain-climber at the end of a rope. Christ
is his fellow-climber, helper or Para-Lite pulling up the rope and fas-
tening it above. Thus God is the guide, but He is also the mountain:
"Ground of being, and granite of it". God is here, dominating man like
a mountain. Jim Hunter points out that "The image of God as a giant is
appreciative in the Deutschland and recurs in Carrier Comfort" (Hunter, p. 115):

Why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lion limb against me?
The hero whose heaven-handling flung me, foot tread . . .

The word wring, which figures in the last quotation, is one that
appears several times in Hopkins' poems. We find it again in the next
poem (no. 65):

the worst, there is none. Fitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder shriek.

In "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", thoughts are "selfwring, selfstrung," as one of the "Brothers" is "wring all on love's rack". Both man and "The Caged Skylark" "droop deadly sometimes in their cells/ Or wring their barriers in bursts of fear or rage" (No. 39, ll. 7-8). These passages have been cited by other critics, usually to exemplify Hopkins' violent or painful imagery, but the high incidence of this word in his poetry again illustrates that the concept of twisting, twining, weaving, is central in his thought.

Not all of Hopkins' commentators have bypassed the importance of this imagery. The final chapter of Robert Boyle's book is "The Thread for the Maze", but this strand of imagery is not really his concern. Paul L. Mariani demonstrates an awareness of its significance when he praises "The wreck of the Deutschland" in these terms: "all of its strands are carefully interwoven, braided together, reeved in" (Mariani, p. 122). Much remains unexplained about the reasons behind this imagistic system, but we ought not to miss the opportunity of relating it to Hopkins' poetic style, and to the technique of multiguity in particular. "Interwoven imagery" has become an over-worked critical phrase, but it accurately describes Hopkins' manner of combining multi-levelled words with two or more families of metaphor in a poem. As we have already observed in earlier sections of this essay, two or three strands of imagery in a poem may be knotted or woven together most effectively by multiguous words. Consider words such as "drought", "pursuant", and "friends" in "Winter Communion", or the intertwining of sacramental, botanical, nautical, and military imagery in "The Beggar's First Communion". In the latter poem are several words which participate in more

than one of these systems, and each becomes a point of intersection in a unified poetic fabric. Though punning is prevalent in Hopkins, not all his poems are quite so rich in imagistic texture. Several other poems feature one eminently multigamous word, usually at the beginning or at the climax, that has attracted, excited, and frustrated a century of critics. Examples are "charged" in "God's Grandeur", "buckle" in "The Windhover", "minds" in "The Lantern out of Doors", "plumes" in "Peace" (No. 51), "plays" in "As kingfishers catch fire . . ." (No. 57), and "fell" in "I wake and feel . . ." (No. 67). Because too much has already been written by others about these words, I do not discuss them here, but they are good examples of multiguity and an important part of the evidence for this thesis.

One meaning of fell in No. 67 is the "hairy hide of an animal": the furry pelt of some wild beast (compare No. 64), or the woolly fleece of a black sheep. The idea of a woollen skin in this sonnet of denunciation conforms with the textile imagery of the preceding poems, the thread of life unwinding in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", "these last strands of man" and the "stole joy" in "Carrion Comfort", not to mention the poet's cries huddling like frightened herds of sheep in "No worst, there is none. . . .": "My cries heave, herds-long, huddle in a gain".

In both of the two latter poems the word "sheer" appears, and it too has a textile application: very thin, diaphanous fabrics are sheer. But, although one strand of imagery might remind us of this meaning, Hopkins uses the word in two quite different senses in these adjacent poems. Sheer is another of those many-sided words of which Hopkins shows a different facet each time he employs it. Here it occurs in

poems composed at about the same time, and this phenomenon, too, we have previously remarked. In no poem does Hopkins use "sheer" with specific reference to textiles, but this sense may have influenced his decision (conscious or otherwise) to exploit it more than once in his sonnets of desolation. Its use in "Carrion Comfort" is rather unusual: "Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear." Sheer grain is mere grain, nothing but grain, undiluted, uncompounded with chaff. It should be free and clear of husks and impurities. In this setting, "sheer" means virtually the same thing as "clear", but the two words are synonymous in another way. The English word clear comes from the Latin clarus and French clair "light, bright, clear", while sheer is descended from Germanic words signifying the same thing, like the Old English scir "bright, shiny". As I have suggested before, it is reasonable to assume that Hopkins was aware of an etymological relationship such as this. His journals and his poems are packed with evidence of his familiarity with the ancestries of the words which are his artistic medium.

Knowing the derivation of sheer enables us to appreciate more fully Hopkins' verbal artistry at the conclusion of "The Windhover": "sheer plod makes plough down sillion/ Shine". In this line the primary meaning of "sheer" is something like "simple", "bare", "just plain", but the word "Shine" calls up a much older meaning. "sheer plod" also refers the reader to the origins of the noun ploughshare and the verb shear in the Old English verb scieran "to cut, slice". Nor is "sheer" the only multiplex word at the end of this poem. "Black" in the penultimate line, also carries extra connotations: bare and dreary; cold and cutting; black. The third is not a dictionary meaning, but is at

least as strong as the other two, because of its position beside the colour "blue", its phonological resemblance to "black", and its other meaning "colourless". The first two meanings of "bleak" are supported by the dismal and chilly associations of "blue", and the second by words like "sheer", "plough", "sillion", "gall", and "gash", all in the last three lines of the poem.

In "No worst, there is none. . . .", Hopkins attempts to describe the mountains of the mind: "cliffs of fall/ Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed". A sheer cliff is perpendicular, as if it were shorn or sheared off. Three years later, in "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire", Hopkins seems to be using all the meanings he has extracted from the word in the past: "Manshape, that shone/ Sheer off, disseveral, a star death blots black out". Man's star is cut off, separate; it is far apart, wholly distinctive; it is bright, shining; and it is pure and simple. His interest in this particular group of words we can trace back many years. One of his earliest etymological notes concerns shear and related words: "Shear, shred, potsherd, shard. The ploughshare that which divides the soil. Share probably = divide. . . . Shire, a division of land? Shore, where the land is cut by the water?" (Journals, p. 12).

There are several possible ways of tying in this last word-group (sheer/shear/share) with the textile imagery which has become our guide through these notable sources of multiguity. Sheer fabric I have mentioned above, but one thinks also of shearing sheep's wool, and of shearing off a cable, rope, or piece of cloth. For the sake of unity, the last word to be examined in this chapter can also be connected, in one of its senses, with this major strand of imagery. The word is comb, which

names an instrument that may be used to dress wool or flax, or to arrange other things that become tangled, such as hair or thread. It is a good word with which to conclude this study, not only because it appears several times throughout the canon of Hopkins' poems, but because it occurs twice in his first mature poem and once in his last-completed poem, each time with a different meaning.

It first occurs in stanza 4 of "The Wreck of the Deutschland":

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.

Here "combs" is a verb, but there is no accepted meaning of the verb comb that will fit. To explain this last line, W. H. Gardner extracts the following description from Hopkins' 1873 journal (Gardner, I, 168):

"fainted white cobbled foam tumbling over the rocks and combed away off their sides again" (Journals, p. 235). This would be helpful if the word in the poem had the same meaning, but it really seems doubtful. The sand ("soft sift") in the "Deutschland" is subject of the verb "combs", while "foam" in the journal passage is the object of the participle "combed".

A better mode of proceeding is to consider possible senses of comb as a noun, for Hopkins is accustomed to make new meanings by turning nouns into verbs, or verbs into nouns. I have discussed both processes in action as early as "Heaven-Haven".

Elsewhere in his journal he describes "the comb of crest" of a wave (Journals, p. 227). A cock's comb is another kind of crest or ridge.

Thus the verb comb could mean to "form a crest" or "break like a wave".

This makes fairly good sense and the image certainly suits the poem, but

it is by no means the only reading possible. Many times in his diary, especially during the years 1873 and 1874, Hopkins uses the word "comb" for coomb or combe, which is a "ravine", a "short narrow valley". He spells the word both ways; on page 250 of the Journals, "comb" appears twice, and "coomb" three times. He also uses comb in this way in two of his other poems. "In the Valley of the Elwy" (No. 34) contains a reference to the "combes . . . of Wales", and "Inversnaid" (No. 56) is mainly a description of a "darksome burn" that roars down "In coop and in comb". Most likely Hopkins acquired this word in Wales, where it would be more commonly used than in Oxford or London. In the journals he also uses comb as a verb in its normal sense: "soft garoon . . . handkerchiefs of ploughfields, sometimes delicately combed with rows of green" (Journals, p. 250). But perhaps the sand in the hourglass is sloping down like the side of a coomb, or suddenly sinking like the ground collapsing to form a little valley where the sand drains out.

The word "combs" appears again, this time as a noun, in stanza 14 of the "Deutschland", the fourth stanza in Part the Second. Its position therefore parallels the word's first occurrence, in the fourth stanza of the first part of the poem:

She drove in the dark to leeward,
 She struck--not a reef or a rock
 But the combs of a smother of sand: night drew her
 Dead to the Kentish Knock.

Are we to think of these sandy combs as ridges or as furrows? Are they little hill-crests or miniature valleys? Probably both. Sandbars are commonly rippled by the action of wind and water, and the sand under water looks as if a huge comb has been dragged across it. In 1873,

Hopkins learned from a lay-brother that ploughmen talk of "combing" the ground (Journals, p. 237). The "smother of sand" has combs not so much because of its little crests and ravines, but because its parallel ridges appear to have been combed.

Since these stanzas of the "Deutschland" must have been composed at about the same time, they afford us yet another instance of Hopkins' playing a word off against itself in closely contemporary passages. About ten years later, he uses the word "combs" again in the same manner, repeating it, but with different meanings, in a pair of poems apparently written in 1885. One of them is the curial sonnet "Ashboughs" (No. 149), the first draft of which was found on the "same sheet with the four sonnets 66-69" (Poems, p. 313). Actually, this is a finished poem, because it has ten and a half lines like Hopkins' other curial sonnets, but his editors print it with the fragments on account of variants included for the second part of the poem:

Say it is ashboughs: whether on a December day and furled
Fast or they in clammyish lashtender combs creep
Apart wide and new-nestle at heaven most high.

It is possible that these boughs are like a rooster's crest at the top of the tree, but more likely they resemble a simple hair-comb. The teeth of a comb are straight and rigid, but the boughs are soft and slightly splayed like eyelashes, spreading apart as they blossom. "Patience, hard thing!" (No. 68) is one of the four poems that share a page with No. 149 in Hopkins' posthumous papers. It ends with these lines:

And where is he who more and more distills
Delicious kindness?--He is patient. Patience fills
His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know.

Patience is a honeybee, and the patient man is a honeycomb. The whole hive is a comb, but so is each tiny cell; each is hollow like a deep coomb. It is surely relevant that the hive is a traditional Christian symbol of Heaven. St. Ambrose and Bernard of Clairvaux figured the Church as a beehive, the perfectly organized community. By the time of Dante, swarming bees had come to be associated with Heaven. Had Robert Bridges known this, he probably would not have substituted the word "moulds" for "combs" in the second quatrain of Hopkins' final finished poem, "To R. B." (No. 76):

Nine months she then, nay years, nine years she long
 Within her wears, bears, cares and combs the same:
 The widow of an insight lost, she lives, with aim
 Now known and hand at work now never wrong.

Poetic inspiration is, appropriately enough, the subject of this last sonnet. The first quatrain deals with the instant of conception that leaves "the mind a mother of immortal song" (l. 4). The verb "combs" may derive its meaning from the noun comb as it is used in "Patience, hard thing!": gestates, matures, as in a honeycomb. Not only is the honey stored, but also bees are formed in these combs. The song will therefore become sweeter and better shaped or structured.

This is only the second time Hopkins has used "combs" as a verb in his poetry, and in addition to sensing this novel or idiosyncratic meaning, we may understand it in its ordinary sense. The mind combs, carries, untangles, or orders its song, perhaps like a bird preening its feathers. Birds are traditionally linked with inspiration, and this image acquires further support from the series of substantives in the tenth line, which suggest a singing bird in flight: "The roll, the rise,

the carol, the creation". If we picture the mind as a bird, then the "fine delight that fathers thought" should be a male bird, a cock: "the strong/ Spur" makes us think of a rooster.

When the "winter world" descends, many birds migrate, flying to warmer climates; many other creatures, like bears, go into hibernation and sleep through the season. That line 6 of "To R. B." may invoke images of a dreaming bear is probably unfortunate, but the idea of hibernation is not far removed from the concept of gestation, which represents a more valid interpretation of the line. One meaning of the verb bear is "give birth (to)", "produce". If we give the word this reading here, then "combs", which follows, can hardly mean "holds in the womb".

"Within her wears" could, however, refer to this process. We speak of a woman "carrying a child"; and in Latin (in which language Hopkins may have done much of his thinking, since he regularly wrote and spoke in Latin) "to wear" and "to carry" are the same word, portare. To complete this interpretation, "cares" could mean "nurtures", and "combs" would correspond to the final grooming of the poem before it meets the public.

Since "combs" is the last word in the series, another meaning is relevant, one derived from comb as a noun equivalent to crest: climaxes, caps, culminates. Each of Hopkins' poems caps, completes, or combs many hours and sometimes years of mental shaping and perfecting. This particular poem, despite his denials of inspiration, is the culmination of his poetic career. The multiguity of "combs" in this final poem climaxes Hopkins' use of the word, and in this context it gives off more light than in any of its previous settings, beginning with "The Grack of the Deutschland". The "nine years" in this poem refer perhaps to those that

passed between his reception into the Catholic Church in 1866 and the composition of that great ode in 1875, which marked his return to poetry.

It was much longer than nine years from the date of Hopkins' death until the publication of his collected poems. For twenty-nine years Robert Bridges combed -- stored and tidied -- Hopkins' poetry before he delivered it to the public in 1918. Hopkins' effect on the poetry of the 1920's was as limited as the public response to the first edition of his Poems. The second edition appeared in 1930, and in the following decade his influence was apparent in the published work of many "younger poets who, for a few years, at least, threatened to inaugurate a haphazard and largely un-Catholic 'school of Hopkins'" (Gardner, I, 271).

W. H. Gardner quotes from several poems in which the echoes of Hopkins are perhaps too clear. It would be pointless to repeat the names of all the authors, because most of them are now unknown, but the most familiar are W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, and T. H. White. In these poems Hopkins' style is imitated rather than absorbed. It was a few more years -- a generation passed -- before the best poets learned to comb Hopkins' poetry for techniques which they could make an integral part of their own style. More recent poets echo not so much his words as his way with words, his attitude to language, and the deeper spirit of his poetry. Most obvious among these poets in whom the benign influence of Hopkins has been fully combed -- groomed and nurtured -- are John Berryman (an American), Dylan Thomas (a native of Wales, where Hopkins spent his most productive year), and Ted Hughes (an Englishman, like himself).

I have said that the word "combs" is richer in significance here than in its earlier appearances. The honeycomb sense, I think, is the most important. Not only is the image fitting, but it is also reflected at the beginning of the sestet in "Sweet fire the sire of muse". There is, however, another factor that attracts me to this reading. As his health gradually failed, Hopkins' thoughts must have often turned to his life after death. To me, his use of "combs" in his last poem indicates that the honeycombs of Heaven were already in his mind. But it seems that the home of sweetness had been in his poetic thoughts throughout his years. In "Easter Communion" he says, "God comes all sweetness to your Lenten lips". The "golden folds" of that poem develop into combs to be filled with honey, the "oil of gladness". In "The Bugler's First Communion", too, Hopkins looks forward to working in the hive of Heaven with his sweet Lord. Life here is sweet, but he anticipates with joy "That sweet's sweeter ending;/ Realm both Christ is heir to and there reigns."

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