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An approach to the 'terrible sonnets'

of

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English at Massey
University.

John L. McKenzie

1973

- TO MY PARENTS -

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ABSTRACT: HOPKINS' "TERRIBLE SONNETS"

In contrast to those critics who examine Hopkins primarily in terms of the Exercise of St. Ignatius Loyola, this thesis proposes that Hopkins can usefully be examined in terms of certain Greek and Victorian contexts. The drive for unity, fruitfulness and wholeness which seems to characterize much of Hopkins' poetry may be represented as a Victorian phenomenon as well as Greek.

Hopkins' early poetry seems to capture the unique experience whereby multitudinousness (the tendency to fragmentation) is "held fast" in the instressing of God in Nature. It is the world of "Pied Beauty", where dappled complexity is united in the One whose "beauty is past change". The perception of this Being is the act of instress. This concept of reality, it is proposed, derives from Parmenidean epistemology. Unity for Parmenides is indivisible, timeless, motionless and complete, fixed in the present world. The "hurrahing" side of Hopkins' poetry derives from this notion.

However, in the "terrible sonnets" one can observe the horror of disintegration, both personal and universal. The most complete statement of this fear is the sonnet "The Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection" where change, as opposed to permanence, is inscaped for us. Through imaginary of fire, drowning and death, Hopkins expresses the anguished realization that God is outside nature, beyond the present. This reorientation is appropriately expressed in terms of Heraclitean epistemology. Hence it is useful to examine the development of Hopkins' poetry as a movement from a Parmenidean to a Heraclitean view of reality (mindful of certain qualifications.)

Appropriately, in terms of the Greek analogy, the pathway in this transition is the pathway of self-examination. At this point we are confronted by the Victorian parallel as concern about a meaningful, coherent universe is projected into an uncertainty about the value of the self. In the "terrible sonnets" there is recorded the self-examination of the poet Hopkins, the despair of "inscaping" the self: "I am gall, I am heartburn". Indeed, the sonnets can be seen to trace the classic descent/ascent pattern. The whole development of Hopkins' poetry in these terms is structurally reflected in the Heraclitean sonnet, such that the vision of the poem may indeed be Hopkins' final stance.

Hope for permanence and unity can only be found in the future: the Resurrection is not a comfort for the present. The final dilemma for Hopkins then is the problem of Time and the significance of Man. The "significant moment" for Hopkins was the Resurrection; the now was a world of impermanence, night, flux and conflict, both personal and universal.

PREFACE

This thesis is a study of the relationship between certain classical and contemporary perspectives in the sonnets of desolation (1885) of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

In examining the philosophies of Parmenides and Heraclitus, two early Greek philosophers who provide fitting contexts for the poetry of Hopkins, I have taken the liberty of relying on the works of W.K.C. Guthrie (A History of Greek Philosophy Vols 1-11 Cambridge, 1962) rather than attempting to assess the state of contemporary nineteenth century scholarship. I felt that such a task was beyond the confines of this thesis.

Furthermore, in examining the poems themselves, I have relied on the third edition (enlarged and edited with Notes and a Biographical Introduction by W.H. Gardner; Oxford, 1956 impression).

References to primary sources have been made in the text, and for the reader's convenience, the following abbreviations have been used:

- Poems : Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Third Edition.
Edited and enlarged by W.H. Gardner, Oxford, 1956.
- R/B : The Letters of G.M.H. to Robert Bridges.
Edited with notes and Introduction by C.C. Abbott,
Oxford, 1955.
- J/P : The Journals and Papers of G.M.H.
Edited by Humphrey House/Graham Storey, Oxford,
1959.
- F/L : Further Letters of G.M.H. including his
correspondence with Coventry Patmore Edited by
C.C. Abbott, Oxford, 1956.
- S/D : The Sermons and Devotional writings of G.M.H.
Edited by C. Delvin, Oxford, 1959.
- L/D : The Correspondence of G.M.H. and Richard Watson
Dixon. Edited by C.C. Abbott, Oxford, 1955.

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March 1973.

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"For there is a certain grief in things as they are, in man as he is come to be, as he certainly is, over and above those griefs of circumstance which are in a measure removable - some inexplicable shortcoming, or misadventure, on the part of nature itself...."

(Walter Pater Marius the Epicurean ch.25.)

CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

"Whoever would understand Hopkins," says W.H. Gardner, "must go not to Freudian psychology but rather to the 'Spiritual Exercises' of St. Ignatius Loyola." ¹ Generally, the "terrible sonnets" have been considered according to this view, that the path to spiritual integration and wholeness has its analogy and counterpoint in Loyola's schema of pilgrim's progress. Hence D. Downes asserts that the "final shape of Hopkins' vision was Ignatian."

"Hopkins expressed to an imposing extent both the spirit and ideals of St. Ignatius. Since he chose to live his life according to the spirit and disciplines of St. Ignatius' Company, and since...so much of his poetry can be so fully and fruitfully read in the light of the Spiritual Exercises, there is no question of the makeup of Hopkins' mind nor the ground of his poetic art. Both must be specified as Ignatian." ²

It is my contention that Hopkins' poetry, and these sonnets in particular, arise from certain epistemological and moral presuppositions that are not particularly "Ignatian" in spirit; that there exist other fruitful contexts in which Hopkins' poetry can and ought to be considered. This is not to deny the importance of St. Ignatius to Hopkins, but I consider that for a comprehensive understanding of the total development of his poetry (and of particular images and themes) other contexts are available and ought to be considered. More particularly, this thesis will attempt to examine, mindful of certain inadequacies, aspects of the classical and contemporary Victorian backgrounds

to the "terrible sonnets."

With regard to the classical background, little critical material is available. However, T.K. Bender has noted the classical background to the development of Hopkins' critical approach to poetry, his peculiar syntax and style.³ Bender concluded that Hopkins learnt, through his study of Greek texts, to approach a text in a certain way. He noted, for example, a similarity between the following undergraduate explication of a Greek text, the philological entries in the Journal and the "characteristic verbal intoxication" of such a poem as "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves."

- (i) " *διψιοί* as an epithet of *σραγόες* is a difficult word. It is one of those poetic touches which cannot be reduced to exact explanation but convey a fine image nevertheless. It may mean eager, or else perhaps thirsty is put for thirstily-drunk as the first large drops of a thunder shower would be. I would try salt in something of the same sense: because salt excites thirst. The Editors of course proceed to arrive at the sense by the method Aristophanes describes as used by Dionusos in Hades, weighing tragedy by ounce and scruple, and measuring it with squares, yard-measures, etc." ⁴
- (ii) "Flick means to touch or strike lightly as with the end of a whip, a finger etc. To fleck is the next tone above flick, still meaning to touch or strike lightly...It would seem that fillip generally pronounced flip is a variation of flick which however seems connected with fly, flee, flit, meaning to fly off...." ⁵

(iii) "Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable vaulty,
voluminous... stupendous

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

It is my contention that classical studies contributed not only to Hopkins' sense of the intricacies of language and syntax, but also contributed to his aesthetic theories and certain epistemological and moral issues that arise from those aesthetic theories.

More however, has been written with regard to the Victorian context of Hopkins' poetry. A. Mizner stoutly maintains that Hopkins was less eccentric than is commonly thought and that he possesses an essentially Victorian sensibility.⁶ Austin Warren, too, maintains that Hopkins learned much from Keats, the pre-Raphaelites, Pater, Ruskin, Newman, and the Victorian linguistic studies of Furnivall, Barnes, and others who sought to restore Teutonic English.⁷ N.H. MacKenzie has explored the relationship of Hopkins' theories of inscape and instress with Ruskin's idea of inner form and observed the similarity.⁸ W. Collins has noted the similarity of Hopkins and Tennyson in their concern with Victorian issues: the insistence on duty, work, sacrifice, heroism, idealism, search for cosmic unity and respect for the individual.⁹ Finally, W.S. Johnson has examined the poetry of Hopkins in the light of two Victorian themes: firstly, the feeling of self-consciousness in nineteenth century literature and secondly, the ambivalence of Victorian attitudes to the

natural and temporal world.¹⁰ I am indebted to these articles, particularly the last, in reconstructing my definition of the central epistemological and moral problems of the Victorian period, and I trust the reader will recognize the integration of Victorian and classical backgrounds, which this thesis will propose.

Late nineteenth century literature is replete with an overpowering pessimism, anguish and despair. The sense of coherence, and unified vision, seemed to be dissipated in a world of flux, relativity and uncertainty. The causes of this phenomenon are generally considered in the context of the transition from optimism and faith associated with a Christian cosmology to the sense of futility and hopelessness associated with a Darwinian cosmology. In the words of Tennyson:

"...Some, descending from the sacred peak
Of hoar high-templed Faith, have leagued again
Their lot with ours to rave The world about;
And some are wilder comrades, sworn to seek
If any golden harbour be for men
In seas of Death and sunless gulfs of Doubt." (ii)

This disintegration of faith not only revolved around one's understanding of the total cosmos but also focused on the microcosm of the self, the personality. In Hopkins' words, the late nineteenth century was confronted with an "atomism of personality," a "disproportioned sense of personality" deriving from the dominant philosophy of time (associated with Hegel) which seemed to give no significance to the individual now. (12) To me,

it is this sense of atomism in both the act of knowing (epistemology) and the act of doing (morality) that is the central "Victorian" concern in Hopkins' poetry, and it has explicit classical analogues. Briefly put, this thesis proposes that in contrast to the early poetry where multitudinous forms unite in the harmonious unity of God, and where exultation arises from an immersion into this state of "echoing being" (the metaphysical background to "inscape" and "instress"), in the later poetry this optimism in the present universe is no longer present. Instead we are confronted by a world of conflict and flux in which individual forms are at variance with one another. Exultation in the later poetry arises from a separation from this world and a belief in the transcendental reality of the next. Hence triumph arises out of conflict: it is a denial of present "being" and an assertion of "becoming." The pathway in this fundamental reorientation was an examination of the "clearest-celved spark" man: namely self-being. In the process of self knowledge, Hopkins discovered an essential dualism in his "being" that denied complete unity with God in the present. Hence he was led to posit a belief in the essential dualism of the universe: a world of flux and instability separated from a world of timeless permanence and unity, fixed in futurity. The bridge between the two was the hope of the Resurrection.

Chapter two

"...The truths of nature are one eternal change - one infinite variety. There is not bush on the face of the globe exactly like another bush; - there are no two leaves on the same tree which could not be told one from the other, nor two waves in the sea exactly alike. And out of this mass of various, yet agreeing beauty, it is by long attention only that the conception of the constant character - the ideal form - hinted at by all, yet assumed by none, is fixed upon the imagination for its standard of truth."

(Ruskin Modern Painters Pt.11, Sect.1, ch.2.)

"Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows like harmony in music, there is a dark, Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles Discordant elements, makes them cling together/ In one society."

(Wordsworth The Prelude 340-344.)

Chapter twoInscape and Instress : the epistemological context.

"All thought Hopkins wrote in 1865, in an essay for Walter Pater, "is of course, in a sense an effort in unity." Echoing Coleridge's dictum that the search for beauty is to discover unity in the face of "multa~~e~~city" ¹ Hopkins further wrote:

"But why do we desire unity? The first answer would be that the ideal, the one, is our only means of recognizing successfully our being to ourselves, it unifies us, while vice destroys the sense of being by dissipating thought... wickedness breaks up unity of principle." (2)

Behind the seemingly endless flux of life's forms, Hopkins recognized at this early age the necessity for a perception of, and belief in, a unifying principle, an awareness of the "stress of being" behind all nature, that would guarantee the value of human thought and action. The problem of achieving integration in a world of rapid change confronted the Victorians generally, and Hopkins was no exception. Arnold, like Hopkins, believed that constant change exhausted the energy even of the strangest souls:

"For what wears out the life of mortal men?
'Tis that from change to change their being rolls;
'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again
Exhaust the energy of strongest souls
And numb the elastic powers."

("The Scholar-Gipsy" 142-145)

If a rationally consistent universe is an essential presupposition of empirical science, so are coherence and unity necessary for the communicating artist. The Victorian concern with the role of the artist is clearly present in Hopkins' letter to Robert Bridges, (13th October, 1886):

"What are works of art for? to educate, to be standards. Education is meant for the many, standards are for public use. To produce then is of little use unless what we produce is known, if known widely know, the wider known the better, for it is by being known it works, it influences, it does its duty, it does good..." (3)

Such ideas could be Tennyson's: they belong however to Hopkins. But behind the notion of art for morality's sake is the assumption that the possibility of communication exists and that communication tends toward unity and cohesion: the wider known the better. But it was in the "tragic generation" of the 1880's, according to W.B. Yeats, that this sense of cohesion was finally dissipated:

"Why should men who spoke their opinions in low voices as though they feared to disturb the readers in some ancient library, and timidly as though they knew that all subjects had long since been explored...live lives of such disorder....Was it that we lived in what is called 'an age of transition' and so lacked coherence, or did we pursue antitheses?"⁴

For Tennyson and Arnold, personal relationships became the antidote to the fear of the "perilous seas of change and chance" and the "waste down of multitudinous - eddying light."⁵

"Ah love, let us be true
 To one another' for the world which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night."

("Dover Beach" 11.29-36)

On the other hand, Walter Pater would seem to have resigned himself to the essential relativity of thought, perception and communication. In his conclusion to The Renaissance (1868) he wrote:

"Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us...Everyone of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world."

An awareness of subjective multiplicity lies behind the use of the dramatic monologue form giving rise to that duality of sympathy and judgment, involvement and detachment reflected both in characterization and audience. Truth, for Robert Browning, means not a monolithic principle governing and explaining the cosmos; it is the progress to individual self-realization. This accounts for the variety of experience enacted in his poetry: multiplicity does not lead to truth, truth

(self-realization) exists in spite of multiplicity. In Tennyson, Arnold and Browning we observe the concern for individual form confronted by a changing, complex cosmos.

Gerard Manley Hopkins shared these concerns. This is most clearly evident in the development of his aesthetic theories of inscape and instress which are his responses to the Victorian epistemological problem: the basis and value of human thought and action in a world of seemingly endless flux and change.

The importance of the concepts of inscape and instress is indicated in a letter to Bridges, dated 15th of February 1879:

"...But as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling 'inscape' is what I above all aim at in poetry."

and further, in the fragment on Parmenides (1867):

"...one can say, a little over defining his meaning, being is and not-being is not means that all things are upheld by instress and are meaningless without it."

Inscape and instress have both an aesthetic and metaphysical relationship. It is well known that Hopkins' references to the concepts are extremely various; Austin Warren has observed that they possibly undergo a development of meaning,⁶ but the risks associated with defining their relationship too systematically remain clear. An attempt must nevertheless be made, for my argument to be presented.

The concepts have usually been considered in the context of the metaphysics of Duns Scotus. W.A.M. Peters, who perhaps has investigated the ideas the most intensively and extensively, writes:

"The reason why the philosophy of Scotus attracted him even more strongly than Aristotle's is given by Hopkins himself where he says that the inscape of things made him think of Scotus. This argues that Scotus's philosophy gave the philosophical basis to his inscape."⁷

A summary of his point of view is rather difficult, and in the nature of summaries, tends to distortion of emphasis. However the main points are as follows. Peters examines the relationship of Hopkins and Scotus in terms of two perspectives: firstly, the nature of aesthetic perception; and secondly, the problem of self-awareness (to be dealt with in the next chapter). With regard to the first concern, Peters identifies the three entities that constitute an object (Scotus's "formalities") as generic, specific and individual forms. Peters equates the concept of inscape with individual form (Scotus's "haecceitas"). Whereas generic and specific forms are concerned with the universal as in Thomistic and Aristotelian philosophy, individual form for Scotus is the true basis of knowledge. That is, for St. Thomas Aquinas a tree is a tree by virtue of the general category "treeness"; for Scotus, the reality of a tree is not that it partakes of an abstracted universal but that it is a compound of unique qualities such as texture, shape, colour and pattern.

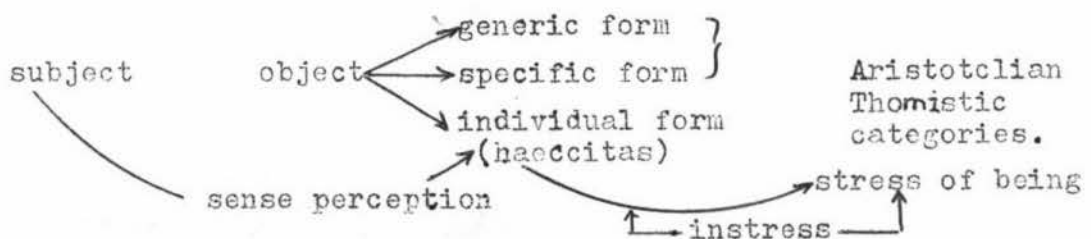
This compound is itself unique, and cannot be duplicated.

Inscape for Peters, then, is the unified complex of sense-data inherent in an object that is consequently unique. This unified complex is held together by the "stress of being" that constantly acts upon the object, holding it in unity. Ultimately this stress of being, inherent in each of the multiplicity of individual forms, derives from God, the one Being, the alpha and the omega. This stress, or instress, is perceived by the poet in a moment of active response. Hence instress has a dual aspect; it is both inherent in the object and conversely, infused into the object by the perceiver.

As Peters puts it:

"Instress stands for two distinct and separate things, related to each other as cause and effect: as a cause 'instress' refers for Hopkins to that core of being or inherent energy which is the actuality of the object; as effect 'instress' stands for the specifically individual impression the object makes on man." (8)

Peters' interpretation of the complete act of aesthetic perception, with its analogies with Scotus and St. Thomas Aquinas, may be best represented schematically:

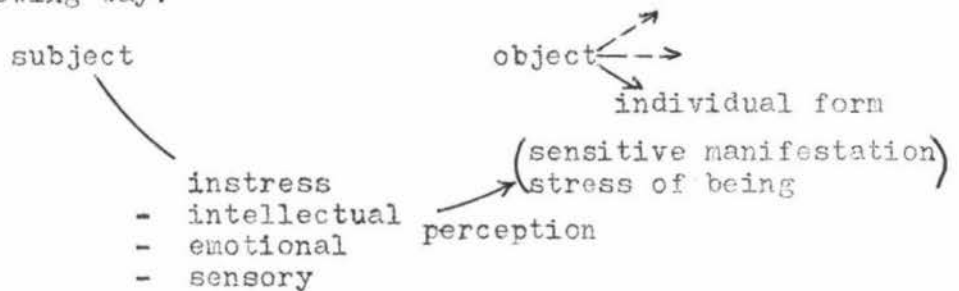


M.D. Coogan (9) who further develops the analogy between Scotus' metaphysics and Hopkins's aesthetics differs from W. Peters' interpretation as several points. Firstly she asserts that inscape is not just to be considered in terms of sense-data (as a study of Journal references would indicate) but is to be conceived of as a metaphysical reality as well. For example, the inscaping of man (as in Felix Randal and Harry Ploughman) is not found only in what is perceptible to the senses alone, but also in what is the essential core of his being: the self, the soul. Similarly, an inscape of a poem. (Hopkins speaks of poetry as "speech for the inscape's sake" (Coogan p 13) of senses, emotion and mind, intuitively perceived, organically held together. Instress is to be related to Scotus's first act of knowing. Hence the stress of being does not exist "behind" the inscape, to be felt after an overwhelming sensory experience, but is identical with the inscape.

Secondly, like Peters, M. Coogan points out that instress appears to be not wholly identified with external objects but in some way proceeds from the perceiver. "Hopkins emphasizes now its objective character, now its subjective, but always with the implication of something inherent in the object which is brought to its full being only in the effect upon the percipient subject." M. Coogan, in contrast to Peters, points out that this dual aspect of instress is not two distinct and separate things, but is one relationship: instress is the bridge between the inscape and the perceiver.

"Springing from the distinctiveness of the individual object, instress conveys, as it were, that distinctiveness, the haecceitas, to the perceiver. In other words, instress is the means by which inscape is realized by the poet. When he 'takes in' any inscape, he does so because of the instress which stems from its unique being and which exerts upon him the pressure of its unique being. The relationship between the poet and what he sees is intimate, neither intellectual alone nor sensitive alone, but a co-mingling of both modes of knowing...the uniqueness of the object... comes to its fullest extent only in his response." (9)

M. Coogans' interpretation may be represented schematically in the following way:



Perhaps, in the last analysis, Hopkins' use of these terms contain basic obscurities and confusions; perhaps too, there is an inherent folly in attempting to systematize them. However, the nature and relationship of inscape and instress can, I believe, be partially resolved if the concepts are examined in the context in which they were first used; five years previous to Hopkins' studies of the metaphysics of Duns Scotus, namely in the notes on Parmenides (J/P pp 127-130) and the early Greek studies of his youth.

Parmenides didactic poem ("De Rerum Naturae") opens with an allegory describing Parmenides' chariot journey from the House of

Night to that of Day, where he is greeted by a goddess whose welcoming address forms the remainder of the work. There are three ways of thought, the goddess announces; that "It is" which is to be identified with the way of truth, and that "It is not" and "It is and is not are the one and the same" which are to be identified with the way of seeming. The two latter she denounces; the first, which Parmenides has just travelled, she describes in detail. The poem, hence, is a rigorous deduction of the characteristics of "what is."

The subject of the verb 'is', is not expressly named. W.K.C. Guthrie, whose commentary I have largely relied on, points out that "In saying that something is, Parmenides undoubtedly had in mind what can be talked and thought about, since he explicitly identifies the two." ¹⁰ The verb translated "think of" (*noein*) could not in Parmenides' time include the idea of imagining something non-existent; it connoted an act of immediate recognition. What is apprehended by the "nous" must be. This knowledge goes beyond the superficial qualities of the senses and grasps universal truths immediately and intuitively. In the words of Aristotle (who, according to Guthrie, makes a sharp distinction between the activity of the 'nous' and the processes of discursive reason):

"Of the thinking states by which we grasp truth, some are unfailingly true, others admit of error - opinion, for instance, and calculation - whereas scientific knowing and nous are always true."

(*ibid.* ?)

For Parmenides, this mode of apprehension is not considered as a process of reasoning nor that of sense perception, but it is a sudden illumination, a seeing with the mind. What this mode of perception asserts, cannot be denied. It is.

Parmenides then goes on to state and demonstrate certain attributes which whatever is must possess. Firstly, it is eternal, neither coming into being nor perishing. "What Parmenides points out is that if reality is eternal and is one, then it could never have become the starting point (arche) of a manifold world. But its eternity and unity must be accepted. Just as 'what is', had it been generated, would have had to come out of what is not, so would any other being; and this is impossible. Hence the real is not only eternal but unique." Secondly, it is continuous and indivisible. In the words of Parmenides: "It does not exist more fully in one direction, which would prevent it from holding together, nor more weakly in another, but all is full of what is."¹² It is quite possible that Parmenides had Heraclitus in mind when he stated this argument, for Heraclitus' notion of the perpetual flux of matter ("It scatters and again draws together, it approaches and goes away"¹³), is clearly opposed to Parmenides indivisibility of reality. Reality for Parmenides is a single, unified, continuous whole to be apprehended by the 'nous'. Though the senses perceive the constant interaction of multitudinous forms, the 'nous' apprehends the essential and complete unity fixed in reality.

Thirdly it is motionless:

"Remaining the same in the same place it rests by itself and so remains firmly where it is; for powerful necessity holds it in the bonds of a chain that hems it in all round, because it is not allowed that what is should be incomplete; for it is not lacking, but by not being it would lack everything." (14)

It is at this point that the poem reaches a height of epic and religious solemnity as Parmenides alludes to the traditional functions of Ananke (Necessity) and her companion Meira (Fate) as found in Homer. Here the Fates exercise control over the universe, holding the many into one complete whole.

Clearly then, Parmenides foreshadows the basic propositions of Platonism: the metaphysical concept of immutable being and the epistemological contentions that knowledge is knowledge only if it proceeds from this "being." It is otherwise, not knowledge but illusion and opinion. "When the soul comes to rest on an object illuminated by truth and being, it understands and knows and appears to have 'nous'; but when it regards what is mixed with darkness, that is, what comes to be and perishes, it has only opinion and its sight is dimmed: its beliefs shift up and down and it is something without 'nous'." ¹⁵

For Parmenides and for Plato the way of truth is associated with light (unity of being and fixity) whilst the way of seeming is associated with darkness (mutability and multaeity). On the one hand we seem to have Parmenides for whom change is illusory; on the other hand we seem to have Heraclitus, for whom permanence is illusory.

The Heraclitean attachment to the doctrine of universal flux should not blind us to the fact that he also sought after and believed in the logos. His method is best described in his brief remark, "I search myself." His rejection of others' opinions implied a deep scrutiny of his own being - the nature of reality, of "being," could be discerned in this way rather than by a fruitless examination of the world, the non-self. As Diogenes Laertias put it: "He was no man's disciple but said that he had searched himself and learned everything from himself." ¹⁶ By attempting to discover the real meaning of selfhood, Heraclitus sought to discover the logos which was a universal, all-pervading divine law by which the totality of the cosmos (a conglomeration of selves) was ordered. This could be apprehended, only by those who searched within themselves. Paradoxically, the end-product of self-knowledge was not a retirement into a private world (associated with sleep and dreams in Heraclitean terminology) but was an apprehension of the common logos, the divine rational force that unites mind and matter. Historians of Greek philosophy see in Heraclitus, thus understood, the roots of Stoicism.

In the fragments of Heraclitus, the logos is symbolized by fire. Divine reason was associated with hot and dry vapours; foolishness and death was associated with cold and dampness. Death is seen as a turning of the soul to water. However, in contrast to Parmenides who sees reality as a motionless, indivisible, timeless unity of being, Heraclitus sees reality, both material and immaterial (and this distinction is never obvious)

as a process of constant cyclic change governed by the logos. Hence the fire image, as opposed to the water image which stands for the flux of the material world.

"It is death to souls to become water, death to water to become earth, but from earth comes water and from water souls." ¹⁷

That is, reality is not a state of being but a process of becoming. From this premise, Heraclitus' view of reality can be summarized into three statements.

Firstly, harmony is always the product of opposites. As a consequence, the basic fact in the natural world is strife. Peace in the real constitution of things is a state of precarious equilibrium between striving forces. For example, the tuned lyre illustrates the close relationship between tension and beauty. "War is the father of all." ¹⁸ Secondly, everything is in continuous motion and change. One of Heraclitus' most famous sayings was, "You cannot step into the same river twice," for as Plutarch adds, "fresh waters are flowing on." ¹⁹ The stability of sensible things is only apparent; all is in motion; but the process of change and becoming, or what governs it, is paradoxically a constant process. Finally, the world was an everlasting fire. "This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made [sic]; but it was ever, is now and ever shall be an everlasting Fire, with measures kindling and measures going out." ²⁰ The universe is sustained simultaneously in two ways: in one part of the world it is being kindled (becoming "fire") and in another part extinguished (taking the

form of "earth" or "water") all within fixed measures or limits to ensure cosmic order: this is the operation of the logos.

Ritter and Preller sum up the relationship of Parmenides and Heraclitus in the following way:

"While...Parmenides denies Becoming, in order to maintain the conception of Being in its purity, Heraclitus denies Being that he may maintain in full force the law of Becoming; while Parmenides declares the notion of change and of movement is merely a delusion of the senses, Heraclitus asserts the same of the notion of permanent Being; while Parmenides regards the ordinary mode of thought as erroneous in principle because it assumes generation and destruction [i.e. because the senses deceive in suggesting that change is of the essence of things] Heraclitus comes to a similar conclusion for precisely the opposite reason [i.e. because the senses deceive by generating the notion of durability.] "(21)

Unity for Parmenides is indivisible, timeless, motionless, and complete; for Heraclitus, unity (the logos) never results in a state of rest: it is controlled change, it is harmony arising from continuous tension.

The relationship between Hopkins and these early Greek philosophers is twofold. Firstly, the insights into the nature of reality provided by Parmenides contributed to the philosophical basis of Hopkins' aesthetic awareness. The Parmenidean idea of "being" informs our understanding of the concept of inscape. Behind the seeming flux of multitudinous forms that crowd the senses, lies the simple yet astounding assertion, half aesthetic, half metaphysical, of the intrinsic being/assertion of each form that is not only unique but complete in its fullness. This 'hold'

on individual being is ultimately a 'hold' on the Great Being: God who fathers-forth his timelessness, unity and 'Being' in nature. This is not a dogmatic proposition but an intuition^{ed} 'stress': hence the Parmenidean idea of "nous" underlies Hopkins' concept of instress. As Hopkins lauded Parmenides:

"His feeling for instress, for the flush and foredrawn, and for inscape / is most striking and from this one can understand Plato's reverence for him as the great father of Realism."

To Hopkins, the thesis of Parmenides was not only a metaphysical concept but an experience: he felt the force of the verb "to be" in his every encounter with the things of the world, as they press themselves upon him:

"indeed I have often felt when I have been in this mood and felt the depth of an instress or how fast the inscape holds a thing, that nothing is so pregnant and straitforward to the truth as simple yes and is."

It is this form of perception that Hopkins believed would be the probable direction in the future of metaphysics (post 1867 : J/P pp 115+): a Platonic awareness of immutable being which will maintain "that the idea is only given...from the whole downward to the parts" (22) will counter the Victorian "atomism of personality." Unfortunately, I think for Hopkins, this did not occur; in fact, Hopkins became aware within himself and in others of this "atomism" of personality (of selves in the widest sense of the term) and was consequently led away from a Parmenidean/Platonic position to a Heraclitean position.

That is, and this is the second relationship, it seems to me that the contrast and opposition between Parmenides and Heraclitus gives us an analogical framework in which we can place the total development of Hopkins's poetry. Briefly put, Hopkins can be seen to move from a Parmenidean position, with regard to his attitude to form, (in 1868: the fragment on Parmenides in J/P pp 127-130 and the influence this has on his consequent early poetry) to a Heraclitean position (in the 'terrible sonnets' and the climactic poem "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and the Comfort of the Ressurrection"). This needs further defining; but firstly, it will yield greater meaning if related to an examination of the poetry itself.

As previously stated, the experience of Parmenidean 'being' apprehended by the 'nous' informs the concepts of inscape/instress. In a moment of energizing stress, mind and matter are fused into an awareness of cosmic order and unity. Without this moment of insight,

"There would be no bridge, no stem of stress between us and things to bear us out and carry the mind over: without stress we might not and could not say / Blood is red / but only / This blood is red / or / The last blood I saw was red..." (23)

This hold on 'being' that gives unity in a world of flux and allows the possibility of communication ultimately is sanctioned, as stated previously, by God. 'Being', in Hopkins' poetry, is a religious principle in nature; his attitude to nature is sacramental. It is the assertion of 'being' that guarantees

reality and value to individuality; without it, uniqueness is consumed in change and flux. It therefore forms the basis of Hopkins's early optimism.

In the poem "Pied Beauty" this is evident both thematically and structurally. In this sonnet the poet offers glory to God for the rich colour-dappling of the world of nature:

"For skies of couple-colour as a bridged cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim..."

God's plenitude is seen in the variety or multiplicity of objects in the world; yet all is not in a state of fragmentation, for God's unity of Being sanctions all:

"He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change
Praise Him."

Originality, quaintness, motion, pattern that is inherent in man ("all trades, their gear and tackle and trim") and nature are conceived in the mind of God and consequently exist, fathered-forth, foredrawn. The hold on unique being is reflected in the minutiae of details that surpasses other Victorian realists ("Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls"). The seemingly incomprehensible why and wherefore ("who knows how"), are resolved in the one whose "beauty is past change."

But the influence of the Parmenidean idea of being/in-scape and the optimism that arises from the hold on being is evident also in the structural techniques of the poem. In large terms, the structure is in three parts. Firstly (ll.1) the statement of the universal idea; secondly, (ll.2-9) a vivid composition of particular

detail that creates an illusion of flux and multiauty and finally, (11.10-11) a restatement of the main Idea that both dissipates the illusion ("the way of seeing") and asserts the universal that is contained in the particular.

Firstly, there is the initial exclamation of the main Idea, the universal, the sense of optimism established:

"Glory be to God for dappled things-"

In the second unit, by the use of the alliterative line and the juxtaposition of compounds and opposites there is created rhetorically (for poetry is "speech for the inscape's sake") a sense of the kinetic flux of things. This tension reaches a climax in the second stanza where multiauty is explored for its own sake (in contrast to the first) and not organically unified with objects in nature:

"With swift, slow: sweet, sour; adazzle, dim..."

The sense of "fickle" is not only evoked in nature but expressed structurally in the lines. This tension, the possibility of fragmentation ("who knows how?") is exploded in the ~~rh~~hythmical regularity of:

"He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change" and the simple yet significant coda of "Praise Him." The illusion of flux is exploded by the compound "fathers-forth" which, because of the alliterative "f" in the "fresh-firecoals" / "finches' wings" / "fickle, freckled" of the previous unit, unites all being in the Being of God. Behind the plenitude of God's glory is an awareness of the 'being' of individual forms; foredrawn in the mind of God,

fathered-forth in nature. Hence great emphasis is placed in the poem on the verb "to be!"

"Whose beauty is past change."

The assertion of "is" defeats the illusory flux. As Hopkins wrote in his Exercises (S/D p. 129.):

"Nothing finite can exist of itself..."

"God's utterance of himself in himself is God the Word, outside himself is this world. This world then is word, expression, news of God. Therefore its end, its purpose, its purport, its meaning, is God and its life or work to name and praise him."

The instressing of God's inscapes, the realization of univocacy of being, is for Hopkins, devotion. In this unity of the "hurrahing" cosmos is Hopkins' early optimism. "All things are upheld by instress and are meaningless without it," as Hopkins wrote in the Parnenidean fragment.

"I kiss my hand
 To the stars, lovely asunder
 Starlight, wafting him out of it; and
 Glow, glory in thinder;
 Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-danson west:
 Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder,
 His mystery must be instressed, stressed;
 For I greet him the day I meet him, and bless
 when I understand."

Yet in the poem "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of The Ressurrection" this sense of present optimism in the existent universe seems to be dissipated. Unity is not "deep down" where freshest things are, that is, an intrinsic part

of the cosmos (as in "Pied Beauty") but is extrinsic: a divine act that "In a flash, at a trumpet crash" operates on the cosmos. This is a fundamental reorientation in Hopkins's attitude to nature. As Hopkins wrote to Bridges (1888):

"and lately I sent you a sonnet, on the Heraclitean Fire, in which a great deal of early Greek philosophical thought was distilled; but the liquor of the distillation did not taste very Greek, did it?"

(R/B. p 291).

The "liquor of distillation" seems to me to be the sense of uncontrolled cosmic disintegration producing a feeling of pessimism and despair. If a belief in the logos gave to Heraclitus a certainty about ultimate order in the universe (the divine "fire" that governs change, as opposed to the principle of death symbolized in water) one can say that the fragments of Heraclitus are fundamentally optimistic. Though contrasts exist between Parmenides and Heraclitus about the nature of reality (as has already been elaborated) both believe in the presence of order in the existent universe: "being" for Parmenides, the "logos" for Heraclitus. Hence both, despite differences, are optimistic about present order.

But in Hopkins' poem, there is no longer the faith in the "dearest freshness deep down things" (Poems p.70) but the despair of the "enormous dark": "O Pity and Indignation!" This distillation is worked into the **very** fabric of the poem. It opens with a vivid composition of place: observing the still turbulent clouds racing ("chevy") through the air after the previous day's storm

("yestertempest") the poet imaginatively rejoices in the protean cloud formations: he delights in the fact of change and variety which the clouds symbolize; "gay gangs they throng; the glitter in marches." The mood is one of exultation. I suggest that Hopkins, through language, structure and mood is deliberately recreating before us the "Hurrahing in Harvest" attitude to nature. One is reminded of the frequent entries in his Journal where words like "tufts," "pillow," "snowy," "tossed," "meal-white," "flashing" are used in describing cloud formations. (See also J/P p.207 for a parallel to "heaven-roysterers"). In the line "Shirelights and shadowtackle in long' lashes lace, lance, and pair" the world of dapple and piedness is created: the splinters or shafts of light ("shirelights") that are perceived through the patterning of tree branches framed against the sky ("shadowtackle" - like the rigging of a ship - see also J/P p.192 "The hangers of smaller but barky branches, seen black against the leaves from within, look like ship-tackle"). The first quatrain then recreates "Pied Beauty": the exultation arising from a perception of echoing being in harmony.

In the second quatrain (plus outrider) the poet, as he meditates on the theme of change, is moved to agony. For change, unless controlled, brings about disintegration. "Delightfully" the wind evaporates the mudpools of "yestertempest" and, aided by the bright sun, parches the landscape bare to:

"squeezed / dough, crust, dust; stanches, starches."
Malevolence then, aptly describes the activity of Nature.

As Tennyson lamented in "In Memoriam" (LVI .15):

"Nature, red in tooth and claw."

In the stanching and starching (drying up, stiffening and disintegrating into powder) of nature, the marks of man (the footprints in the soil) became obliterated in the dust. If, in "God's Grandeur" man ("generations") has crushed the ooze of God's oil (a conventional symbol of the Holy Spirit), here it is Nature that squanders life-giving rain (cf. Poems p.113) into squeezed dough, crust and dust. The dust reduces pined complexity into formless chaos:

"in pool and rut peel parches
Squandering ooze to squeezed' dough, crust, dust; stanches
Squadroned marks and manmarks' treading toil there^{starches}
Footfretted in it."

The sense of futility imaged in the careless activity of nature's forms is carried over into the next movement of the poem where the theme of change is specifically identified with man. Again, I believe we are reminded of Hopkins' earlier poetry, what S. Hallgarth defines as the third period of Hopkins' poetry; "his 'human nature poetry,' poems in which nature is used descriptively or as a setting in order to call man's attention to nature as a reflection of God or to investigate man's relation to God."²⁴ Even man, the "clearest-selved spark" (cf Poems p.96), whose distinctive being is united in the plenitude of God and whom Hopkins had examined in "Felix Randal," "Prothers" and "Harry Ploughman," is part of nature's vast bonfire. The individuating marks of heroism ("firedint") in action and thought ("mark on mind" :note well that "mind" conotes the idea of self-assertion in the

context of Poems p.105 and p.107) are consumed in universal flux:

"Vastness blurs and time / beats level."

The Victorian wasteland was never so powerfully felt and written. This sense of "atomism" (ie, disintegration) that Hopkins' feared in 1867 (J/P p.118-21) is realized here in the image of "bonfire." Walter Pater recognized the relationship between ~~the~~ Heraclitean proposition and the Victorian dilemma in these terms:

"The entire modern theory of "development"...what is it but old Heracliteanism awake once more in a new world...and on the other hand of Darwin and Darwinism, for which 'type' itself properly is not but is only always becoming."

(Plato and Platonism ch.1., p.14)

Though Hopkins did not believe in Darwinian ideas as such, he found the language of Heraclitus a fitting vehicle for expressing his dilemma: a sense of atomism of personality projected into a fragmenting world (and vice versa): a Victorian phenomenon. Death by drowning ("enormous dark/drowned") recalls the Heraclitean association of death and water; the image of "darkness" (as elaborated in "Spelt from Sibyl's leaves" as well) recalls the Parmenidean association of darkness with the way of seeming or not being. Here Hopkins is confronted by the ultimate agony: the fear of madness. (S/D p.262) clearly then, the Platonic/Parmenidean assertion of the one holding together the many in unity-echoing "Being", has proved inadequate.

"Manshape, that shone

Sheer off, disseveral, a star', death blots black out..."

It is through an examination of man (and of himself in particular: one is reminded of the previously written "terrible sonnets" where Hopkins "is concerned with his own relation to God...,"²⁴ the fourth of Hallgarth's categories) that Hopkins realized the essential strife existent in the world. "Disseveral" is a combination of dissever (to dissolve, break up) and several (the many) denoting the Heraclitean proposition: war is the father of all. The fire of instressing God in nature ("gash gold vermillion") is transformed into the fire of universal fragmentation where all coherency is gone: "time beats level."

The pain and anguish of this thought is too much for the poet. "Enough" he cries in horror "I have had enough." The thought of ~~The~~ Resurrection, the hope that reality is present in the transcendent future, the separation of this world and God, infuses the heart of the poet, and he cries with relief:

"Away grief's gasping,/ joyless days, dejection."

A beam of light "eternal" flashes over the foundering deck of the poet. A beam (and beacon) is, as J. Milroy points out "the shape of the Cross imprinted on the phenomena of nature, and one of the standard figurae for the Cross was the mast of a ship."²⁵ The "eternal beam," is then, in the context of the poem, a symbol of the transformation of "being" occurring at ~~the~~ Resurrection. The image of the "foundering deck" is, in terms of The Heraclitean analogy, appropriate. (see J.H. Buckley for Victorian parallels of the symbol of sea and the "pattern of conversion"²⁶). Again imaged in fire ("in a flash") - the concept of the logos cannot

spread over our life" (S/D p.262). Hence, through a separation of the present world and the next, Hopkins asserted "becoming" as opposed to "being." In these terms, I think it is valid to describe the total development of Hopkins' poetry as a movement from Parmenides to Heraclitus, bearing in mind the qualifications that have been mentioned. This transition, I have suggested, is structurally represented in the Heraclitean sonnet.

At this point, two questions arise. Firstly, what brought about this transition, and secondly, ~~at~~ what final value do the concepts of inscape and instress have for Hopkins. The next chapter will attempt to examine these issues.

Chapter three

"Me miserable! which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
O then at last relent: is there no place
Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?
None left but by submission...."

(John Milton Paradise Lost iv: 73-82.)

Chapter ThreePitching and Selving : the moral context.

Despite our awareness of Hopkins' peculiar style, his intensity and apparent optimism in the face of Victorian hesitancy, the dilemma which I have described as epistemological is constantly interwoven in the fabric of his poetry. His aesthetic theories of inscape and instress, derived from the Parmenidean idea of the univocacy of being (and the Scotist doctrine of the immanence of Christ in nature) contributed to Hopkins' search for unity and integration. But in the 'terrible sonnets' there is recorded the despair of the "enormous dark" where even the "clearest-selved" spark is consumed in the universal bonfire of nature. The pathway to this fear of disintegration is, appropriately in terms of the Heraclitean analogy, the pathway of self-knowledge, or (in Hopkins' terms) an instressing of his own inscape and that of humanity.

The progress from instressing first nature's inscapes, then man's inscapes and then specifically Hopkins' inscape (a progress that defines the total development of Hopkins' poetry, as noted by S. Hallgarth,¹ and is structurally reflected, I suggest, in the Heraclitean sonnet) clearly presents a movement from the macrocosm of the universe to the microcosm of the individual psyche. If in the final poems Hopkins is concerned with nature, it is seen as conflicting, fragmentary and violent. In the context of the previous chapter, where nature's forms are seen to be held together by the unified Being of God and the immanence of Christ in nature, the final poetry represents a redefinition, a revaluation of man

and nature in relation to God. This re-definition centres upon Hopkins' attitude to individual selfhood in relation to the selfhood of God. This concern with the self, as W.S. Johnson has observed, is very much a Victorian phenomenon. Much of Victorian literature can be characterized by the transference of uncertainty in the external world to that of uncertainty about the internal individuality of man.

" 'I am' was the great Romantic assertion, whether or not it was sublimated in the idea of an oversoul; 'who am I?' is the great Victorian question, and it can easily be translated into the simpler question 'Am I' in a time when the assumptions of both Descartes and Wordsworth have to be doubted."²

The problem of self-consciousness was essentially ambiguous for the Victorian: the self could either be a solace and source of integration for some, or for others, it was a constant battleground of conflicting loyalties, a stumbling-block for harmony. On the one hand, the exploration of self-consciousness could become a means for discerning an inner peace as a basis for action in the world, or on the other hand it was antithetical to righteousness and needed to be obliterated.

In the poem "Self-Dependence," Arnold sought to overcome this "identity crisis" by extending his being into the vastness of nature's ocean, to "Feel my soul becoming vast like you!" as an

antidote to despair. Despair for Arnold, was to be:

"Weary of myself, and sick of asking
What I am, and what I ought to be."

Harmony, the poet is told, is self-realization, to "Resolve to be thyself." In the poem "The Ancient Sage," Tennyson asserts that integration is achieved through a perception of an immanent spirit (the "Nameless") common to all selves. One is reminded of the logos of Heraclitus. Giving advice to his son, before his own death, the sage urges:

"If thou wouds't hear the Nameless, and wilt dive
Into the Temple-cave of thine own self,
There, brooding by the central altar, Thou
Mays't haply learn the Nameless hath a voice,
By which thou wilt abide, if thou be wise...."

It is through faith in the immanence of spirit discoverable in the depths of selfhood that man is able to discern meaningfulness as a basis for moral action.

On the other hand, in Thomas Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, it is only through Selbst-Tödtung, the annihilation of self, that a basis for a new life of work and service can be found. In Carlyle's schema of pilgrim's progress, the 'Everlasting No' is the despairing product of materialistic unbelief, that egotism and isolation of the self in anguish. The "Centre of Indifference" describes the alienated soul's anguished search for a broader perspective on the cosmos by a denial of the self.

"Here, then, as I lay in that Centre of Indifference; cast, doubtless by a benignant upper Influence, into a healing sleep, the heavy dreams rolled gradually away,

and I awoke to a new Heaven and a new Earth. The first preliminary moral act, Annihilation of Self, had been happily accomplished; and my mind's eyes were now unsealed..."³

The "Everlasting Yea" asserts the new-found harmony arising from the death of the self (the "healing sleep") and the resolution of contradictions in action. This intense awareness of the self resulted for James Thomson in a form of schizophrenia, a confrontation of self with self, (in the words of Hopkins, though in a different context, "steeped and pashed"):

"As I came through the desert thus it was
As I came through the desert: I was twain,
Two selves distinct that cannot join again;
One stood apart and knew but could not stir,
And watched the other stark in swoon..."⁴

In Browning's dramatic monologues, this ambiguity in the nature of self-hood is constantly upheld as an ambiguity: the variety of characters are stretched on the rack of self-realization (the acquisition of Truth) versus self-deception (true Evil). It is this sort of confrontation, sometimes violent, which Arnold lamented in the preface to his poetry of 1853:

"the calm, the cheerfulness, the disinterested objectivity have disappeared; the dialogue of the mind with itself has commenced; modern problems have presented themselves; we hear already the doubts, we witness the discouragement, of Hamlet and of Faust..."

As the Sea of Faith ebbed, the very reality of the self lay naked to all the winds of doubt. This loss of faith and certainty about the self and the cosmos was not simply an epistemological concern

that taxed the philosophical mind, but it also touched the root of Victorian sensibility: the impulse for righteousness, for right action. Without a belief in God and immortality of the individual self "everything would be permissible"⁵

"There is no God, or if there is,
The tradesman thinks, 'twere funny
If he should take it ill in me
To make a little money."

(Clough Dinyschus, 1862)

If Evangelical dogmas slowly dissipated under the close scrutiny of the critics, the old thirst for righteousness remained for most a categorical imperative: the Puritan impulse for moral strenuousness underlies much of late Victorian attitudes. From the dilemma of inner uncertainty and hopeless fluctuation, harmony could be achieved by action: "I myself must mix with action," wrote Tennyson, "lest I wither by despair."⁶

"For the God-given mandate, Work thou in Welldoing, lies mysteriously written, in Promethean Prophetic character, in our hearts: and leaves us no rest, night or day, till it be deciphered and obeyed; till it burn forth, in our conduct, a visible, acted Gospel of Freedom."

(Carlyle Sartor Resartus 11:1x)

The world was no featherbed for the repose of sluggards but required stoical endurance, fortitude and work. Even without an ultimate object in sight, the thirst for strenuousness for its own sake was an antidote to despair. One must strive, seek and never yield:

"The troubles of our proud and angry dust
 Are from eternity and shall not fail.
 Bear them we can, and if we can we must
 Shoulder the sky, my lad, and drink your ale."

(Houseman Last Poems ix., 1922)

The problem of identity, of the nature and reality of the self in a world of seeming flux and change is, in the Victorian context, a moral problem: the relationship of belief and action. This concern with the self, and the related problem of righteousness is pivotal to a proper understanding of Hopkins' poetry, theology and biography. For the problem of the self is what the poetry of inscape is all about.

It is in the period 1880-1883 that Hopkins carefully examined, in his spiritual writings, the relationship of the self with God. (S/D pp. 122-159.) These writings are, indeed, complex and highly wrought statements, reflecting the intensity of Hopkins' thought, vocation and style. Hence, any attempt to summarize and schematize these writings will be necessarily dangerous, arbitrary and of somewhat uncertain value in terms of final, absolute conclusions. There is always the possibility that Hopkins himself had not completely systematized his thinking, and therefore, a critic's attempt to do so would be fundamentally misguided. Though aware of this problem here as earlier, I believe it necessary to attempt to define the dominant line of argument in these writings, as the problem of the self is so central to the 'terrible sonnets.' If my "system" seems to be inconsistent with the text, I can only plead my awareness of the hazards.

We have characterized the early "Parmenidean" stage of his poetry by the fact that the total universe glorifies the unity of God in one, harmonious Being. The world of multaeity (of multitudinous individual forms) does not exist as particularization for its own sake, but by their 'being', they "gash gold vermillion" of God's glory. This idea of the univocacy of 'Being' is reflected in Hopkins' thinking about the nature and origins of the self.

The self, which is defined as "the intrinsic oneness of a thing"⁷ comes into being through God. Before the acquisition of nature/personality/being/inshape (and these terms are largely synonymous: personality referring to a rational supposit), that is, before birth, the "bare self" exists in a world of possibility, of intention, "foredrawn" in the mind of God.

"Now a bare self, to which no nature has yet been added, which is not yet clothed in or overlaid with a nature, is indeed nothing, a zero, in the score or account of existence, but as possible it is positive, like a positive infinitesimal, and intrinsically different from every other self...For self before nature is nothing yet but only possible... it is identified with pitch, moral pitch, determination of right and wrong."⁸

In this foredrawn state, the self partakes of the unity of God and is dependent upon God for its 'existence! This state is the ultimate reality to which all nature tends. The "juice and all this joy" of Spring is a "strain of earth's sweet being in the beginning/In Eden garden."⁹ Eden Garden, as a spiritual state, is

characterized by the multitudes of individual forms, each highly distinctive, united in the Being of God, "pitched" to an intense awareness of right and wrong. Thus the Fall was described by Hopkins as the "fixing of a false standard of right and wrong, (arboris scientiae, the test-tree, criterion-of-right-and-wrong-tree)." ¹⁰

However, with the acquisition of nature through birth or coming into 'being', the self is realized as an independent individual and acts in the world. Whereas previously the self was a positive intention in the mind of God, a possibility, it is now realized as a real self, for selfhood is to be identified with moral freedom.

"Two eggs precisely alike, two birds precisely alike/ will behave precisely alike: if they had been exchanged no difference would have been made. It is the self then that supplies the determination, the difference, but the nature that supplies the exercise, and in these two things freedom consist."

With the acquisition of independence, there is the possibility of separation from God's will. Conversely harmony can be achieved by the deliberate attachment of the self to God's will. The difference between these two courses is a matter of choice. It is a matter of choice whether to glorify God by being dependent upon Him, through the activity and operation of His grace ("faith is God in man, knowing His own truth"). This necessarily involves the sacrifice of the self that is independent of God. Grace, therefore, is:

"any action, activity, on God's part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries the creature to or towards the end of its being, which is its self-sacrifice to God and its salvation."

Conversely, it is a dwelling upon one's independence, on one's "artificial self"¹³ of in fact, instressing one's own inscape, that results in separation from God and fragmentation. This was Satan's sin prior to the War in Heaven:

"The song of Lucifer's was a dwelling on his own beauty, an instressing of his own inscape, and like a performance on the organ and instrument of his own being; it was a sounding, as they say, of his own trumpet and a hymn in his own praise. Moreover it became an incantation: others were drawn in...raising a countermusic and countertemple and altar, a counterpoint of dissonance and not of harmony."¹⁴ (see also S/D. p.139)

In his prose notes, Hopkins drew an important distinction between two states of the will. On the one hand he posited the elective will (or arbitrium: faculty at pitch) which decided action, or intended action; and on the other hand, he posited the affective will (or voluntas: faculty at aplay) which was the sense of desire or affection towards an action. In the cosmic drama for the soul of man, it is the arbitrium which elects either to respond to God's grace and sacrifice the independent self or to instress its own inscape and follow the course of absolute evil (S/D p.149). The arbitrium is capable of achieving an infinite object (S/D p.138) only by a rejection of nature: and nature is the field in which the arbitrium operates. The initiative in this process is

curiously ambivalent: God, on the one hand, exercises his mastery and dominion over his creatures by activating firstly, the affective will by simply instressing or determining (S/D p.149) it to a particular desire, and secondly, by transforming the arbitrium, the elective will from one pitch (tending to evil) to another (tending to God) by a process of conversion:

"an exchange of one whole for another whole, as they say in the mystery of Transubstantiation, a conversion of a whole substance into another substance... a lifting him from one self to another self, which is a most marvellous display of divine power." (S/D p.151)

Conversely, the elective will, by definition, is the deciding force in the person, the will of the individual. Hence, in the union which Hopkins desired, how was the act of God to be distinguished from that of the self?

However, in defining one's relationship to God, in these terms, two potential areas of conflict are evident: firstly, a conflict is possible between the elective will and affective will; between reason and desire, to put it in gross terms. Secondly, a conflict is possible in the "field" of the arbitrium between self-assertion and self-sacrifice.

To consider the latter first, I think that the problem of self-assertion versus self-sacrifice is essential to an understanding of Hopkins' intensity in the "terrible sonnets." Of himself, Hopkins wrote:

"I find myself both as man and as myself something most determined and distinctive, at pitch, more distinctive

and higher pitched than anything else I see; I find myself with my pleasures and pains, my powers and my experiences, my deserts and guilt, my shame and sense of beauty, my dangers, hopes, fears, and all my fate, more important to myself than anything I see. And when I ask where does all this throng and stalk of being, so rich, so distinctive, so important, come from/nothing I see can answer me...Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own...searching nature I taste self but at one tankard, that of my own being...." (S/D. pp. 122-3)

Indeed it is the taste of Hopkins' own distinctiveness, of the power and peculiarity of the self, that is ultimately the justification of the existence of God. For only a being of higher pitch could determine this distinctiveness which finds no counterpart in the world.

"For a self is an absolute which stands to the absolute of God as the infinitesimal to the infinite."

(S/D. p.153)

This act of selving on the part of God and all creation exists in time and out of time: it is part of an harmonious heirarchy with God at the summit. This is the theological theory behind the poem "As Kingfisher's catch fire" (p.95) and "Pied Beauty." As kingfishers feed on dragonflies in a moment of exchanged fire so all the universe echoes to the intricate unity centred upon God.

In non-rational nature, this is automatic: no choice is involved:

"Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves-goes itself; myself it speaks and spells;
Crying 'what I do is me; for that I came."

But in rational nature ("I say more: The just man justices") there exists the element of choice: The "just" man must strive to glorify God ("keep"... "act") who in turn, lives His Being through the individual ideal man:

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

Again, the initiative in this process is ambivalent. Self, in these terms, is a means to integration, to unity in God. However, such an awareness of the self can easily lead to egotism, to a perversion of the hierarchy. We can observe this element of egotism in the early poem "The Earth and Heaven" (1866):

"The earth and heaven, so little known,
Are measured outwards from my breast.
I am the midst of every zone
And justify the East and West."

In this intense awareness of the self which can unite in the totality of all selves (God), there is always the temptation of pride: a usurpation of one's proper place in the scheme of things:

"Pride lies in claiming a higher rank in this scale and the pride which is in all sin is essentially the matching of the sinner's self with God's and for himself preferring it, setting it higher in that scale; not his nature against God's, which even Satan could not do, but his bare self." (S/D. p.140)

This is the path of Satan and his followers: a matching of one's own being against the Being of God, and an excessive dwelling upon it. Hence there is the impulse to reject all aspects of the

self that are contrary to God's will: one's nature (or independent self) must be sacrificed in this mystical union with God. Hopkins speaks of "... the self then that supplies the determination...but the nature that supplies the exercise." (S/D p.147) Nature, I think, is here to be indentified with the affective will - the desires and affections of the "old man", in St Paul's terminology. Here we have the second area of conflict within the self: in the 'terrible sonnets' there is the presupposition, according to G. Delvin, "of the lonely will struggling grimly against all that is most attractive to his higher nature."¹⁵ We can observe this in his private notes recorded in Dublin, dated June 1885:

"Facere nos indifferentes - with the elective will, not the affective essentially; but the affective will will follow."
(cf Poems p.165)

Hopkins had seemingly forgotten the dictum of St. Thomas Aquinas that grace is built upon nature, not upon the abolition of nature. "Natural life", Aquinas asserts "pertains to man's substance, and hence cannot be more or less."¹⁶ Hopkins recognised that this self-sacrifice would be no easy Thing ("the keener the consciousness The greater the pain" (S/D. p.138)) but in 1883-5 he constantly strove for this ideal:

"Wish to be bound to God's will in all things,
in the attachment of your mind and attention to
prayer and the duty in hand; the attachment of
your affections to Christ our Lord and his wounds
instead of any earthly object." (S/D. p.255)

Hence the "terrible sonnets" record the fact of self-assertion (we note the associated references to Satan, Hell, separation

and death) and its consequences; the need for self-sacrifice to the will of God (we note the 1888 Retreat references to the helpless self-loathing which made him "fear madness": the penultimate of personal fragmentation) and the exercising of his nature, or affective will, to that end. In the words of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (again, a different context):

"self in self steeped and pashed-quite
 Disremembering, dismembering all now. Heart, you round
 me right
 With: Our evening is over us; our night whelms,
 whelms and will end us."

The mystical union that Hopkins wills does not eventuate: there is not the cosmic "hurrahing" but the anticlimactic "My own heart let me have more pity on." He has, (like Caradoc, "my being have hacked in half....") failed to integrate the warring elements within his consciousness. Again we must observe the ambivalence. There is recorded a "failure of grace"¹⁷ such that Hopkins is left with the Heraclitean dualism: the present universe is "all in an enormous dark/drowned," consumed in the "fire" of disintegration: unity (as fixed in the diamond) is not intrinsic to the universe but achieved in the act of the Resurrection. The "Parmenidean" unity that inheres in the world of "Pied Beauty" and "As Kingfishers catch fire" is repudiated: as the fixity imaged in the diamond (fixed 'fire') arises from the 'fire' of strife and despair, so being that achieves union with God arises from a process of becoming finally fixed in the Resurrection.

This process is clearly a violent one. For Hopkins' attacked his own nature with the complete insistence and strenuousness of his will. What is important to note is the fact that this

strenuousness with regard to himself was a characteristic of Hopkins' personality throughout his life. When only eighteen, he wrote:

"Hence sensual gross desires,
 Right offspring of your riny mother Earth
 ...foul and cumber not
 The shaken plumage of my spirit's wings."¹⁸

This Miltonic plea for righteousness, which infused the Victorian consciousness despite the various dogmatics that the Victorians possessed, dominated Hopkins' mind. As M.W. Murphy has observed, Hopkins spent much of his life performing various acts of self-deprivation and punishment: denying himself salt for a week on one occasion; going without all liquids for a week on another (and collapsing from dehydration at the end); giving up the comforts and pleasures of a normal life by joining the Jesuits - an Order famous for the rigorous discipline it imposes on its members; burning all the poems on which he had devoted so much energy; working himself to the point of exhaustion in every endeavour he undertook (confessions, examination papers) and practising numerous acts of self-denial during the Lenten season. (eg J/P, p.72). The Victorian dichotomy between duty and inclination, will and desire dominated the highly sensitive mind of this self-conscious Victorian. As M. Murphy suggests¹⁹ this conflict in Hopkins explains much of the violent imagery of his writings. It is interesting to observe that the use of violent imagery is particularly evident after 1880 in contrast to the previous "sweet and lovely language"²⁰ associated with the "hurrahing" side of

Hopkins' poetry. This seems to me to reinforce the analogical framework which I have attempted to establish: the movement from "Parmenidean" unity to the "Heraclitean" dualism through the pathway of self-knowledge. The evidence in the sonnets of desolation shows that the transition was, indeed, a violent one.

Clearly an important by-product of such a transition in Hopkins' world view would be the necessary reassessment of the concepts of inscape and instress. If an intuitive apprehension of the stress of unique being united in the heirarchy of God in an harmonious whole is central to the idea of inscape/instress, then a belief in the flux/logos dualism, where the universe and God are separated, would require a reevaluation of the metaphysical basis of inscape and instress. Unfortunately, because of Hopkins' premature death (at forty-five years of age) such a reassessment was not formulated. However, I think that one would have been forthcoming. It is a necessary outcome of the fact that his world is now defined as fragmentary, separated from God, awaiting the grace of the Resurrection.

The task remains of tracing this transition in detail in terms of the sonnets themselves...

Chapter four

"I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of
his wrath
He hath led me and caused me to walk in darkness
and not in light...
My flesh and my skin hath he made old, he hath
broken my bones...
Yea, when I cry and call for help, he shutteth
out my prayer...
He is unto me as a bear lying in wait, as a
lion in secret places.
He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in
pieces; he hath made me desolate...
To crush under foot all the prisoners of the earth,
To turn aside the right of a man before the face
of the most High,
To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord
approved not...
Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our
prayer should not pass through...
Fear and the pit are come upon us, devastation
and destruction...
Waters flowed over mine head: I said, I am
cut off.
I called upon Thy name, O Lord, out of the
lowest dungeon.
Thou heardest my voice: hide not thine ear
at my breathing, at my cry."

(The Lamentations of Jeremiah. Revised Oxford., 1885 ch.2)

The "terrible sonnets" : language, structure and meaning

W.J. Rooney, in a critical analysis of the poem "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", raised a very important issue in terms of one's critical approach to poetry. He observed that a critical evaluation of a poem is largely dependent upon one's critical assumptions which are largely subjective in character. His purpose in writing the article, was to:

"compare the evaluation arrived at by this more structural, or syntactical study, with that arrived at by the more semantical studies of the explicators, drawing the methodical generalizations implied in the developed contrast... This is to make unmistakably clear that the difference of emphasis in the methods here involved leads necessarily to a difference in evaluation."¹

Hence an explicator, who gives close attention to small semantic units, discussing various elements of irony, ambiguity and meaning, will often arrive at a different evaluation from a structuralist, who is concerned with the relation and integration of larger syntactical units. Mindful then, of the problem of valid evaluations, the following critical analysis depends on certain critical assumptions.

Firstly, in contrast to certain tendencies in New Criticism, it is to be assumed that the individual sonnets are not created in an aesthetic vacuum, isolated in their own uniqueness, but that there can be observed certain themes, types and motifs (often with biographical undertones) that relate the individual sonnets into a comprehensive experience. That is, I think that there

exists a total structure (and consequent progression) composed of consistent motifs. However it is to be noted that the chronology of composition is extremely tenuous, making the concept of progression rather arbitrary. The following account of the sonnets is the order established by J. Ritz: it follows the logical pattern of triumph arising out of desolation (the Heraclitean analogy: harmony arising from strife): the descent represented in "To Seem a Stranger", "I wake and feel The fell of dark", and "No Worst"; the ascent represented in "Carrion Comfort", "Patience, hard thing" and "Mine own heart."²

Secondly (and herein consists the major point of this exercise), the individual poems must be able to yield the maximum allusiveness, where appropriate; to interpret them in terms of one, or even two, contexts is finally not to understand them. The poems are indeed, multifaceted "immortal diamond [S]." Though obviously concerned with fixing the context already established into the poems themselves, it would be shortsighted not to mention and acknowledge other traditions and sources evident in the poem. Thus, for example, the extract from Lamentations must be recorded as a likely source of imagery for the sonnets (namely, the references to the rod, footstool, broken bones, dead 'letters', the lion pit and finally the image of thirst in a world of plenty).

The melancholy to which Hopkins had been subject all his life became,³ from 1885 onwards, not so much more intense but more "distributed, constant and crippling" (F.L. p.256). One manifestation of this "sultry siege of melancholy" (Poems p.33) was

the inability to complete work which he had begun; the tendency to dissipate his energies over myriads of incomplete tasks. The failure to achieve integration harassed the jaded mind of Hopkins and is evident in the "terrible sonnets": "four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will." (R/B p.221) In August 1886, Hopkins wrote to Dixon: "It is not possible for me to do anything, unless a sonnet, and that rarely, in poetry with a fagged mind and a continual anxiety; but there are things at which I can, so far as time serves, work, if it were only by snatches." It is in this context of increasing anxiety, weakness and aridity, both in his creative and religious aspirations, that Hopkins wrote to Bridges in November 1886:

"I have at last completed but not quite finished the longest sonnet ever made and no doubt the longest making. It is in 8-foot lines and essays effects almost musical. Otherwise I am recovering from the effects of my Welsh holiday and returning to helplessness."

This sense of being anaesthetized by aridity and despair is evident in both the theme and rhythmic structure of the poem "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves." The poem is in three parts: firstly there is a vivid composition of an event in nature (ll. 1-7); secondly, the poet's heart announces the terrifying symbolism of the event (ll. 7-10); finally, the poet spells out the Sibylline warning from the symbol (ll. 10-14). In 1870, Hopkins, having contemplated the vastness of space and the movement of heavenly bodies, wrote:

"This busy working of nature wholly independent of the earth and seeming to go on in a strain of time not reckoned by our reckoning of days and years but simpler and as if correcting the preoccupation of the world by being preoccupied with and appealing to and dated to the day of judgment was like a new witness to God and filled me with delightful fear."
(J. p.200)

If in 1870 Hopkins was moved to delightful fear, in 1885 (when the poem was originally started) only the fear remains in the catastrophic event that "time's night" portends. For the poem spells out the irrevocable doom of God's forthcoming judgment upon the world, imaged in the poem by the inexorable death of daylight in the straining of evening to become "time's night": the hour of judgment. This sense of straining to the final doom is evoked in the verbal incantation (a pattern of alliteration and assonance) of the opening lines:

"Ernest, earthless, equal, attuneable, vaulty, voluminous
stupendous
 Evening strains to be time's vast, womb-of-all, home of-all
 hearse-of-all night.

The sonnet relies for its unity on the evocative power of images of slow, relentless transition: 'strain'; 'wound'; 'unbound'; 'whelms, whelms'; 'wind'; 'rack'. In the first line this suggestion of irreversible change is created by the anaesthetizing effect of rhythm; effects "almost musical" as Hopkins put it. The total atmosphere created is more important than the logical meaning of each word: with the dying day, shapes, contours and identities lose their selves, being or inscape, and dissolve into the

nothingness and darkness. Hence an atmosphere of the blended vastness of the evening is contrasted in the poem with the pined complexity of the daylight world. With the setting of the sun in the West and the associated warmth and light ("fond yellow hornlight wound to the west"), the coldness of evening envelopes the world ("wild hollow hornlight hung to the height"), culminating in the emergence of the majestic constellations which 'overbend' the world in their fiery radiance. It is the coming of the 'fire-folk' of "Starlight Night." (Poems p.70) We must notice the apocalyptic overtones in these lines where the "hornlight", "wound" in the west reminds us of the "Last trump": "for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Corinthians XV:51). The astrological overtones of the overbending, fire-featuring heaven continue this atmosphere of impending judgment and doom. In the coming of the constellations we have again a three-fold progression of time ('earliest stars, earl stars, stars principal') in a provocative juxtaposition of images. With evening and the coming of the stars (reflected light) only outlines and etchings remain: the world of pined beauty is an illusion, the earth's dapple is at an end. With the advent of night, the Scotist world of distinctiveness and individuality is dissolved into formless chaos ("all throughther,⁵ in throngs").

"self in self steeped and pashed-quite
Disremembering, dismembering all now."

'Disremembering' is the psychological equivalent of the
'dismembering' occurrence in nature. (Hopkins had used the opposite

'membering' to denote the distinctiveness of the pied world in the Journal extract (J/P. p.153): "What I most noticed was the great richness of the membering of the green of the elms, never however to be expressed but by drawing after study"). Such is the formless chaos associated with evening that even simple apprehension is impossible: for memory is to Hopkins, "the name for that faculty which towards present things is Simple Apprehension...towards past things is Memory proper; and towards future or Things unknown or imaginary is Imagination" (S/D. p.174). Time's evening, then is complete disintegration. This is the world of Parmenidean "Not-being": the darkness associated with primordial chaos. It is finally a repudiation of the daylight dapple of 'Pied Beauty', the world of "Being."

The Heart then grapples with the awesome symbolism of the event. The heart "rounds" upon the poet (turns upon, and warns) about the absolute certainty of the meaning of the event in nature: night will benumb apprehensive powers (again the sense of anaesthesia in the assonance of "wh~~o~~lms wh~~o~~lms and will end us") and leave behind only distortion: gnarled remains, etched in the sky by the overbending stars.

"Only the beak-leaved boughs dragonish demask the
tool-smooth bleak light;"

Here Hopkins, by the opposition of light and darkness has recreated a wasteland landscape: one is reminded of the horror and satanic distortion of Browning's "Childe Roland to The Dark Tower Came." The quest for the Dark Tower, ugly ("round and squat") and

mysterious ("blind as the fool's heart") is, as Isobel Armstrong suggests, a quest "for that core of the self which each person blindly assumes to exist in order to see himself as a living, active entity at all...Childe Roland's discovery is that some kind of redeeming centre can be found in the self in spite of the world's multitudinousness imaged in the wasteland motifs."⁶ As Childe Roland put it: "I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart." In this quest, the traveller perceives a fiendish machine that seems to embody his experience:

"What bad use was that engine for, that wheel
Or broke, not wheel - that harrow fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air
Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware
Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel."

As E.R. Kintgen asserts, Childe Roland is characterized by a "perversity of the mind" that interprets the world in malicious terms such that "ultimate victory lies in the conquest of his human frailty"⁷ He is, in other words "self wrung, self strung" upon the rack or harrow of his own selfhood. Hopkins, like Childe Roland, is fearful of the Satanic possibilities of the self; being wrung on the rack of eternal damnation. If Childe Roland finds salvation in self realization, Hopkins finds salvation in self-sacrifice to God. In a meditation upon the pain and isolation of the damned, Hopkins wrote:

"But after death the soul is left to its own
resources with only the scapes and species of its
past life; which being unsupplemented or undisplaced
by a fresh continual current of experience, absorb

and press upon its consciousness." (S/D. p.139)

The oracle then, is a meditation of the state of judgment and hell brought about by the relationship of the self to God. Things are then seen, not as they appear by day ("skeined stained veined variety"), but will be reduced to its basic moral determination: black, white; right, wrong. Multitudinousness is an illusion of time's daylight, the Apocalypse reduces all to "two flocks, two folds":

"When the Son of Man shall come in his glory,
and all the angels with him, he will sit on the
throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered
all the nations: and he shall separate them from one
another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from
the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his
right hand, but the goats on the left..."

(Mathew 25: 31-34).

In the words of The Roman Catholic Burial Mass,

"Dies irae, dies illa
Solvat, saeculum in favilla
Teste David cum Sibylla."⁸

The oracle warns the poet to both avoid, yet prepare for ("ware") this final dichotomy: this rack of selfhood (feeding on the self; instressing ones own inscape; hell) and eternal separation from God ("sheathe- and shelterless"). "God is good and the stamp, seal, or instress he sets on each scape is of right, good, or of bad, wrong. Now the sinner who has preferred his own good...to God's true good... is carried and swept away to an infinite distance from God; and the stress and strain of his removal is his eternity of punishment." (S/D. p.139).

futurity. That is, the reality of hell (self assertion) versus the reality of the Resurrection (self-sacrifice). The universe does not echo to God's chiming, but is wrung upon the rack, the harrow of black/white, right/wrong. Instead of multaeity united in the Being of God we have a harsh dualism, fixed in futurity.

P.L. Mariani observed that "the sharpended agony of this realization of what essentially matters - right, wrong - evokes that bitter self-taste in himself, the frightening realization of his own unworthiness before the Judge of the Universe, and the pain of mastering himself. His meditation on hell evokes the hell within."⁹ If Childe Roland is wrung upon the harrow of self-deception, Hopkins is wrung upon the rack of self-consciousness: of the satanic possibilities of the self and the consequence in the hereafter. The remaining sonnets record the wrestling of Hopkins with his God on the level of the arbitrium: that faculty at pitch which can choose to tend towards God (self-sacrifice to Him, and the salvation of the soul) or towards Satan (self assertion opposed to God). Associated with this are images of grinding, wringing, battering, bruising, tormenting, sweating.

II

Firstly, in the sonnet "To seen the stranger" we have the necessary pre-condition of an alienated self, exiled from the social world of communication: from family, countrymen and from God. This poem is a mild expression of that anguish of sterility: to "hoard unhooded" culminates in the self-laceration of the "straining eunuch" (1885: S/D. p.262).

In the first quatrain Hopkins echoes the stern words of Christ, to the effect that whoever would follow him must separate himself from his family, and take The way of the cross. (Mathew 10: 34-8). That his family were devout Anglicans and had bitterly opposed his conversion to Rome in 1866 caused Hopkins much anxiety and distress. "Religion, you know, enters very deep; in reality it is the deepest impression I have in speaking to people, that they are or that they are not of my religion." (F/L. p.245) When in February 1884, Hopkins went to Ireland as a Professor of Greek at the University College, Dublin, he felt further removed from "the land that bred me" (Poems p.168), the country that he loved ("Call me England's fame's fond lover" Poems p.168, "rare-dear Britain" : Poems p.67). The idea that England was a necessary circumstance in his creative thought was a self-rationalization for his frustration, as Hopkins realized in a letter to Bridges in 1887: "...But out of Ireland I shd. be no better, rather worse probably. I only need one thing - a working health, a working strength: with that any employment is tolerable or pleasant, enough for human nature: without it, things are liable to go very hardly with it." (R.B. p.251) But the Irish versus English conflict harassed Hopkins, who, in the circumstances where many of his colleagues were Irish nationalists, was forced into silence: "the grief of mind I go through over politics, over what I read and hear and see in Ireland about Ireland and about England, is such that I can neither express it nor bear to speak of it" (F/L. p.170). But even in these situations, exiled from home and

countryman, Hopkins can give and receive "kind love." But what was most disheartening for Hopkins, was his sense of isolation from God: his desire to communicate ("what Word/Wisest my heart breeds") his inner self seems to be frustrated by either a ban from Heaven above, or a spell from Hell below. To "Hoard" thus his own inner being, "this throng and stack of being, so rich, so distinctive, so important" (S/D p.122), this fathered-forth word of God, is the ultimate in isolation. To be heard "unheeded, leaves me a lonely began." R. Bridges glosses the line, 'leaves me a lonely (one who only) began'; but W.A.M. Peters says: "Began is a noun...the poet calls himself a "began", not a "beginner."¹⁰ I suggest, however, that "began" is a preterite passive of the verb "to begin" (denoting an attack on a person: "to begin upon a person" OED), functioning as a gerund. Hence there is the notion of Hopkins as a victim being assailed by the "baffling ban" or "hell's spell." The poem, then, ends in this situation: the isolated poet is forced, as a victim, to confront his own self, not to communicate it, stretched on a rack between the ban of heaven ("right") and the spell of hell ("wrong"). The poet is being forced, "strained" into the evening of "Spelt from Sibyl's leaves." Hence the first line of the next poem (Poems p.109) has added poignancy:

"I wake and feel The fell of dark, not day."

The daylight of dapple, of echoing beauty in the Being of God is gone: the dialogue of the mind with itself has commenced ("heard unheeded").

III

Like God's wrath upon the Egyptians when with the "darkness which may be felt" (Exodus 10:21), He sought to force Pharoah to free Israel's bondage, Hopkins awakes to the crushing weight of night, a visitation of God's wrath ("deep decree"). The "fell of dark" should be taken in three senses: firstly, the smothering effect of an animals 'fell' or hairy skin; secondly, the archaic adjective 'fell' used as a noun, to mean "malevolence" or "cruelty"; finally, the dialect noun "fell" (from the verb 'to fell'), meaning a "knock down blow" (OED). Again the concept of Hopkins as a victim in some cosmic drama is implied.

Hopkins recalls the hours of suffering in the blackness of evening and understands that he must yet sustain more in "longer light's delay." That this suffering is not superficial or of passing importance Hopkins asserts: "With witness I speak this." Perhaps "witnessed" by records of previous lamentations (of Jeremiah and Job for example) or perhaps aware that he was an actor on the stage of this cosmic drama, Hopkins further laments, "Eut where I say / Hours I mean years, mean life." Time, in the context of suffering is a non-real element: "vastness blurs and time beats level." Furthermore, the conflict here described is a culmination of Hopkin's life: a necessary outcome of certain presuppositions. (viz, the egotism of selving and the problem of free-will: see chapter three and the exposition of "As Kingfishers catch fire").

"And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away."

The feeling of being totally cut off from God, as D. McChesney points out, has been suffered by many in a religious state.¹¹

In the words of St. Ignatius, spiritual desolation is characterized by:

"darkness and confusion of soul, attraction towards low and earthly objects, disquietude caused by various agitations and temptations, which move the soul to diffidence without hope and without love, so that it finds itself altogether slothful, tepid, sad, and as it were, separated from its Creator and Lord."¹²

It was the cry of Jeremiah and it was the cry of Hopkins. In this complete alienation, Hopkins was confronted by the despair of solving: "I am gall, I am heartburn." Instead of finding the self echoing in the harmony of universal being, Hopkins found the self antithetical to righteousness.

"Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours."

Here Hopkins recognized that the instressing of human inscape apart from God (the independent self: "self yeast") makes bitter and desolate ("sours") one's being ("dull dough": originally Hopkins used the phrase "self stuff"). "Dull" in this context means, I think, inanimate, wanting sense perception (OED) and may refer to the acquisition of nature, or birth of the independent self. Hence the expansion of the line "mean years mean life" would be meaningful: what Hopkins may be saying is that the poetry of selving for its own sake ("What I do is me: for that I came") sours the right relationship between God, man and nature. More obvious, the image of bread making, is clearly New Testament, as in

1 Corinthians 5: 7-8. The lost are in this condition of being: they are left to feed on Themselves: "the mind gnawing and feeding on its own miserable self." (S/D p.242). The image of "sweating selves" is clearly Heraclitean. In the meditation on Hell (S/D. pp. 241-52) Hopkins uses the traditional symbol of Hell: fire, flames and burning. But in the image of the damned "sweating" their selves out, one is reminded of the Heraclitean association of water with death and alienation from the logos. If only half-conscious of it, Hopkins is treading the path analogical to the Heraclitean dualism: the path of self-knowledge. If the poem ends in consolation, it is the belief that the suffering of the damned is absolute and everlasting, and that the suffering of the Christian, however tense, is limited by time. If this is theologically accurate, it is not very consoling. The precarious resolution of the poem is shattered by the tormented cry of the next poem: "No worst, there is none."

IV

"No worst, there is none" is perhaps the most violent of the sonnets of desolation, a poem which conveys such a depth of emotions that language seems to be inadequate: emotions that are mind mountains no-man-fathomed. In a letter to R. Bridges, May 1885, Hopkins wrote: "I have after long silence written two sonnets, which I am touching up: if ever anything was written in blood, one of these was." (R/B p.219) Bridges identified "Carrion Comfort" as that poem, but more recent critics believe that 'No Worst' must be that sonnet.¹³

The poem is constructed around three movements: firstly, the poet recreates the experience of the "fire" of self-sacrifice to the will of God; secondly, the poet is brought to the brink of spiritual suicide in the recognition of the consequences of self-assertion; finally, the poet seeks refuge from the experience of wrestling with God, in sleep.

The poem opens with the climactic superlative, "No Worst there is none." Seemingly Hopkins had arrived at the bottom of the pit, pitched past all experience of grief. The exact context, however, of the line may be clarified from a comment in his notebooks:

"All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining
I wish then for death yet if I died now I should die
imperfect, no master of myself, and that is the worst
failure of all." (S/D. p.262)

Clearly the extremity of grief is to be identified with the problem of self in relation to God. ("master myself": Again we must note Hopkins' ambivalence concerning the initiative in the process of redemption). Failure, in Hopkins' terms, is a failure to come to terms with the cross of Christ the hero, the exemplar of mankind.

"Christ Jesus...finding...his human nature informed by
The godhead...annihilated himself, taking the form of
servant (sic)...he emptied or exhausted himself so far
That was possible, of godhead and behaved only as
God's slave...It is this holding of himself back, and
not snatching at the truest and highest good, the good
that was his right, nay his possession from a past
eternity in his other nature, his own being and self,
which seems to me the root of all his holiness and

the imitation of this the root of all moral good in
other men." (L/B p.175)

The path to this holiness, the path of self-annihilation (the crucifixion) is necessarily violent "no worst" experience can be thought of. The "sots and thralls" (Poems p.113) of one's nature -the chief woe in the redemptive process, the world-sorrow in that nature denies spiritual fulfillment in all-must be placed on the cross: "the age-old anvil." The keener the consciousness, the greater the pain: pitched past pitch of grief. (S/D p.138)

"More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring."

The torment that he has felt is not then the ultimate: the cliffs of mental suffering are "frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed," such that the sufferer must endure wilder pains until self-centredness is obliterated. In the laments of Edgar:

"And worse I may be yet: The worse is not
So long as we can say 'This is the worse!

(King Lear IV: 1 : 27-8)

There is no comfort or relief: his cries are like those of the archetypal Jeremiah, or of Christ on Calvary: "Why hast thou forsaken me?" "The poet is left in the anguish of his isolation from God, battered ("anvil ding" : Poems p.58) on the cross of self-sacrifice.

"Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
As yet knocke, breathe, shine and seeke to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, and bend
Your force, to break, blowe, burn, and make me new."

(John Donne: Holy Sonnets, XIV)

In an almost surrealistic touch, the Greek mythological figure of the Avenger, Fury shrieks, "No lingering! Let me be fell swift, malevolent : force I must be brief." Fury, then, is a symbol of the Avenging Christ (Romans 12:19) who is "lightening and love" (Poems p.58). The tormented mind of the poet is brought right to the edge of spiritual suicide: this is the awareness of the infinite pit of self-assertion ("mind has mountains/cliffs of fall") that must be placed on the anvil. As in the previous poem, one must remember Hopkins' attitude to the damned: "their impurity comes up before them, they loved it once and breathed it, now it revolts them...and they cannot quit themselves of it...if is their own sin...the mind gnawing and feeding on its own miserable self." (S/D. p.242). There is no worse experience, cries Hopkins, than to be confronted by the reality of the self, whether in Hell or on the cross of sacrifice: none can endure such torment for long. Like the Heraclitean sonnet where the poet seeks refuge from the fragmented universe ("Enough!") the poet here flees from the fragmenting self and crawls for comfort, literally, under the bedcovers.

"Nor does long our small
 Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
 Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
 Life death does end and each day dies with sleep."

There is no Christian consolation here, but the despairing desire for death and oblivion. Like Hopkins, Job had cried:

"When I say, My bed shall comfort me
 My couch shall ease my complaint
 Then thou scarest me with dreams
 And terrifiest me through visions
 So that my soul chooseth strangling,
 And death rather than these bones."

(Job, ch VIII:13-16)

Perhaps in death or sleep (the benumbing of self consciousness) Hopkins could find refuge. Such refuge will always be precarious. In "Carriem Comfort" this refuge is indeed, rejected, and the self again asserted.

V

In "Carriem Comfort", a rhetorical masterpiece, the image of wrestling, (unwinding, bruising, fanning and grinding) is basic to the movement and resolution of the poem. Though the physical appearance of the sonnet clearly points to the Italian sonnet form (with the primary division of octave and sestet), the poem is divisible into three parts: firstly (ll 1-4), the poet rejects the comfort of "No Worst" and asserts his own self-being in defiance of the "anvil" of sacrifice; secondly (ll. 5-8), the poet succumbs to the will of his fire-featuring God and surrenders his will (or independent self); finally (ll. 9-14), the poet seeks to explain the phenomenon, coming up against a mystical impasse: who is responsible for the event (the ambivalence we have noted in Hopkins' attitude to Redemption).

The repetition of 'not' six times, and its concomitant 'can' three times in the opening quatrain strikes a defiant note. The

poet refuses to accept the "carrion comfort" of Despair and conversely, asserts his independence. The warmth, relief and consolation he had sought in sleep and death is only "carrion": it feeds his "morbid spleen" (Gardner: Vol II: p.332) and results in corruption and decay. He refuses to untwist "these last strands of man" and splice them into the "coil" of the will ("rod") of God: rather he will knot (a pun on "not") his own self-being in defiance of God, and refuse to cry "I can no more." He can hope for self-induced daylight and reject the straining of the "hearse-of-all night" (i.e. to be wound on the spool of right/wrong): he can assert the world of independence and self-being: "not choose not to be." As a critic recently pointed out, Hopkins may be repudiating Newman's "The Dream of Gerontius" where the old man, in death agony, can only gasp:

"I can no more; for now it comes again,
That sense of ruin, which is worse than pain,
That masterful negation and collapse
Of all that makes me man; as though I bent
Over the dizzy brink
Of some sheer infinite descent."¹⁵

It is from the dizzy brink ("cliffs of fall") experience where Hopkins was confronted with the necessity for self-sacrifice (The Anvil), was shown the satanic proportions of self-assertion that needed to be sacrificed (the image of the pit), and fled for the carrion comfort of sleep ("not to be"), that Hopkins asserts his own powers of recovery. This is in marked contrast to the "just man" of "As Kingfisher's catch fire"; the just man who "can know God, can mean to give him glory" (S/D p.239).

With line five, the speaker directly responds to the antagonist with the expletives "But ah, but O", wrung from him by the repeated blows of a "lightning and lashed rod" (Poems p.56). The second quatrain, as Angela Carson points out, depends upon the rich allusion-value of the metaphors which reveal both the power of his adversary and the significance of the struggle.¹⁶ Hence, the four main metaphors that describe the antagonist ("thou terrible", "wring-world right foot," "lionlimb" and "fan/turns of tempest") draw upon conventional terms that describe the power of God. For example:

"thou terrible" : Deut 7:21, 10:17; Veh. 1:5; 4:14;
9:32; 11 Samuel 7:23.

"wring-world right foot" = Psalms 99:5; Isaiah 66:1
Acts 7:49; Mathew 5: 34-35.

"lionlimb" : Job 10:16; Lam. 3:10; Hosea 13: 7-8

"fan/winnowing" : Jeremiah 15:7; Luke 3: 16-17

It is interesting to observe that Hopkins' excursion amongst the prophets tells us something of his image of God: it is primarily the Old Testament God: the covenant of law, righteousness and judgment. Perhaps Hopkins' stress on the dichotomy between the will and inclination arises from this conception. (cf S/D. p.268).

Turning then from an estimation of his own inner resources (which the staccato nervousness of the lines indicates that they are, at the most, precarious) the protagonist asks his adversary: "why would's't thou rude on me/ Thy wring-world right foot rock." The evocative power of the image "rude" is startling: it no doubt

alludes to the medieval expression "rood" (rod, rode, roode, rude) signifying the cross of Christ, besides the more obvious meaning: "rough-handling." Generally an archaic term, the OED notes a Victorian use of it in William Morris's "Earthly Paradise" (1870) I.1:336:

"Good hope I have of help from Him that (sic)
died upon the rood." (OED.)

Clearly then, in this quatrain, the protagonist is faced with the violent power of God,, bending the will of the poet, through the cross of self-sacrifice, to His own. The image of "wring - world" recalls the "wilder wring" of the previous sonnet and the rack of "Spelt from Sibyl's leaves" upon which the lost are "selfwring." The defiance of the first quatrain ("self wrung") necessitates the violence of the second. The concept of God as judge is reinforced by "scan" with the obsolete meaning "to judge the value of something." The "darksome" eyes of the penetrating God contrast with the earlier aspiration for self-induced daylight; the poet is caught as an inert mass ("heaped") despite the frantic desire to escape the wringing ("ware of a world...of a rack." Poems p.105).

The poet seeks an explanation of the event in the octet (the shift to past tense suggests a more objective perspective). Why? The poet is confronted by the spiritual ideal to surrender the "chaff" of the independent self, to allow the "grain" of the arbitrium to "coil" with his master (cf S/D pp. 267-8). Hopkins has sensed the presence of divine stress throughout the conflict for "in all that toil" since the poet kissed the rod (or cross as in Ezekial 21:11 referring back to the experience of line 5) there

have been moments of happiness when he "lapped strength, stole joy" from his antagonist and felt the need to "cheer" someone for the experience. The transition from the cross to the hand nailed to the cross ("Lovescape crucified": t.23 of "The Wreck of The Deutschland") notes a change in the antagonist: this is not the Old Testament God but the New Testament Christ: the hero "whose heaven-handling flung me, foot trod me." Christ as hero was a frequent object of thought for Hopkins, and constantly induced a devotional attitude (eg S/D pp. 34-6):

"Hither then, last or first,
To hero of Calvary, Christ's feet -
Never ask if meaning it, wanting it, warned of it - men go."
(Poems p.58)

The rod handled by God is the rod of Christ, the hero and exemplar for holiness. Yet the poet seems to reach a mystical impasse: who initiated the resolution of the struggle? Was it Christ who gave the example of self annihilation, or was it Hopkins who most recently experienced it? The final line of the sonnet records the awesomeness of the antagonist, negating this question in the expletive "wretch" and the tone of submission implied in the repetition of "My God." In "Carrion Comfort" we observe the beginning of triumph; difficult, highly wrought, even terrible. For triumph in "Carrion Comfort" arises from conflict: not from a perception of Christ immanent in the selving of nature, but from the fragmenting self Hopkins begins to find hope, triumph and patience. "Carrion Comfort" then marks the transition from the

"Heraclitean" pessimism of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" where the world of echoing Being ("earth her being has unbound") is overcome by the evening of self-knowledge (self-wrung, self-strong"), to the dualism of the Heraclitean sonnet: fixity found in flux; the logos in the "enormous dark." Harmony in the later sonnets arises from tension, not cosmic unity. This is clearly evident in the next sonnet "Patience, hard thing."

VI

"let him who is in desolation," wrote St Ignatius, "strive to remain in patience, which is the virtue contrary to the troubles which harass him; and let him think that he will shortly be consoled, making diligent efforts against the desolation, as has been said in the sixth rule."¹⁷

The striving for patience, in Hopkins, is not merely an achievement of a state equilibrium but is a constant attitude in a world of conflict: "Patience who asks, / Wants war, wants wounds." As Heraclitus put it: "War is the father of all." Reality for Hopkins then, is not a state of being (as in Parmenides) but a process of becoming. "Rare patience roots in these" : war, wounds, weariness, tasks, sacrifice, conflict and submission. It is only in the "toil", the kissing of a rod that unity ("coil") with God can be realized. Harmony arises from conflict.

"Patience masks our ruins of wrecked past purpose." Like ivy that conceals ruin by showing forth the fruitfulness and fullness in its berries and rich greenery ("purple eyes and sear of liquid leaves"), it is only in the "ruins of wrecked past purpose", the

sacrifice of poetic ambition, that divine virtue, true beauty can be revealed. In a meditation of 1885, Hopkins wrote: "Facere nos indifferentes make ourselves indifferent with regard to all created things - with the elective will...but the affective will, will follow." (S/D. p.256) The concern for "created things", the world of "earth's sweet being" (Poems p.71) was surely a "past purpose" of Hopkins: the delight in nature's inscapes that the poem "Pied Beauty" celebrates. The need to reject the world of inscape, self-being and assertion ("what I do is me, for that I came"), despite the rebellions "affective will", concerned Hopkins in 1885: it is only in sacrifice and conflict can real "fruitfulness" be achieved. "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Mathew 10:39).

"Natural hearts ivy, Patience masks
 Our ruins of wrecked past purpose. There she basks
 Purple eyes..."

The word 'natural' is significant in this context: nature in Hopkinsean terms is to be associated with the independent self, essentially divorced from dependence upon God. Again, through the image of ivy we observe this important theme in the sonnets: the sacrifice of selving, of instressing one's own inscape ("past purpose") to achieve union with God.

The following tercet continues this theme:

"We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills
 To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills
 Of us we do bid God bend to him even so."

("Dearer", as Gardner points out in his edition, is used in a Shakespearian sense - 'more seriously.' Poems p.250).

If the poem "Patience, hard thing" represents a milder mood, an upswing in consolation, there is always the spectre of the blackness of the "tormented mind, tormenting yet" (Poems p.110). Harmony is not a static state, but a process of becoming: Hopkins will henceforth be precariously poised over the pit ("no-man-fathomed"): consolation is transient - only in the Resurrection is there complete triumph. Again Hopkins realizes he may yet have to sustain greater desolation: it is implied in the clause "we do bid God bend to him." This seems at once in contradiction to the rule of St. Ignatius: "making diligent effort against the desolation." Hopkins, consumed by the Victorian thirst for righteousness, bids God to again place him on the anvil, the rood, the cross. To Hopkins, there is sweetness, honeycombs ("crisp combs") in pain and anguish ("those ways we know"). To him, Christ is the epitome of this impulse:

"Above all Christ our Lord: his career was cut short...his plans were baffled, his hopes dashed, and his work was done by being broken off undone. However much he understood all this he found it an intolerable grief to submit to it. He left the example: it is very strengthening, but except in that sense it is not consoling." (L/D. pp. 137-8)

Perhaps through fear of future desolation, of the necessary outcome of "we do bid God", Hopkins in the next poem retires from the conflict, perhaps recognizing the masochistic, Victorian strain of his personality.

"Mine own heart let me have more pity on..."

VII

This sonnet is the last of Hopkins' desolate sonnets of 1885 and it records Hopkins' awareness that the endless morbid introspection is eating away his life. It is the realization that his desolation has been self-induced: he has forced a harsh distinction between the arbitrium, his elective will (the "me" of line one) and the voluntas, the affective will ("my own heart"). He has striven to place his natural bent on the anvil, and found that the anvil was an illusion of his will. The effort for unity, for a transcendental harmony of man and God is finally something that he cannot attain by force of mind, but must be a "visitation", unforeseen, as "skies/Between the mountains - lights a lovely mile."

"I cast for comfort I can no more get
 By groping around my comfortless, than blind
 Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
 Thirsts all-in-all in all a world of wet."

Like the hunter who sends his hounds in different directions in search of lost scent, Hopkins "cast [s]" himself in search of lost comfort: he rejects a narrow prison of self-consciousness and casts for a comfort beyond the self. R. Boyle, who criticises Gardner's explication of the image of blindness and thirst, rightly points out the force of the image: "Thirst is completely helpless to do away with itself, to dissolve itself in water; it can only yearn for the wet that swallow it up. This is true even though the whole world is full of thirst-quenching wet...Likewise, though the world is full of light, blind eyes of themselves can't get at it, but must wait for it to be brought."¹⁸ Hence Hopkins is left only

with the yearning for comfort, for consolation, and like thirst and blindness, he is, in himself, incapable of finding relief. He can only cast, yearn, hope. "Comforter, where, where is your comforting?" (Poems p.106).

The poet in the sestet then invokes his elective will, to let things be (in contrast to the earlier Victorian earnestness), to allow things to take their natural course. He resigns himself to what he is: not an alter-Christus, nailed to a cross, but a "poor Jackself", "joke", "poor potshed", "patch" (Poems p.112). Hopkins in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" and "No Worst" had spoken of the grinding of thoughts against thoughts that was the affliction of the damned; here the poet rejects this self-induced torment, casting for comfort "root-rain." "O thou Lord of Life, send my roots rain." (Poems, p.113) In colloquial phrasing, reinforcing the relaxed tone, the poet invokes his heart to allow joy to grasp ("size" and the homophonic "sieze") God's measure or estimate ("size") of comfort, whatever its time or nature ("At God knows when to God knows what"). The smile of comfort cannot be forced from God (and, noting the ambivalence, from Hopkins) but is an unexpected visitation "as skies/Betweenpie mountains - lights a lovely mile."

Betweenpie (ie 'to dapple in between') was rejected as a metaphor by Robert Bridges because of its "homophonic absurdities." Dr. Gardner, however defends it as follows: "But for G.M.H. the verb "to pie" did exist - as a 'back formation, from magpie or pied': in Notebooks, p.176, he speaks of 'white pieings' on the 'dull

thunder' colour of pigeons." (Poems, p.251). Hence, as skies light up the dapple of mountains that have been shadowed by clouds, so God can light up a "lovely mile" of the progress of his pilgrims, in his good time.

The sonnet "My own heart" would seem then to represent a return to the 'pied' world, of God in nature fathering-forth his joy. This is not so: the last line of the poem is a deliberate simile, a literary device and not a metaphysical proposition. This is clearly evident in the Heraclitean sonnet: nature is antithetical to the needs of man (the image of the parched desert "delightfully" laid waste by the sun and the wind) and needs to be acted upon by the Resurrection. ("world's wildfire leave but ash").

In conclusion, the sonnets of desolation record the coming of evening upon the world of nature ("earth her being has unbound") and of man ("our evening is over us"). The Parmenidean concept of echoing being united in the One (in Hopkins' terms: God) disintegrates in the moral confrontation of "black, white; right, wrong." In this disintegration we have the beginning of the Heraclitean dualism: nature (individual being) is separated from God (the One), who then can only "supernaturally" act upon the cosmos finally fixing change in the Resurrection. This dualism was wrong from Hopkins when he examined himself, when he found a dualism of aspiration that could not be bridged. Namely, the conflict between the spiritual ideal of self-sacrifice versus the fact (and fear) of satanic self-assertion tormented the sensitive mind of the poet-priest, destroying for him the vision of cosmic

harmony. In the present world, strife is the father of all, only in futurity can conflict be resolved: in the apocalypse of the new heaven, and the new earth.

Chapter five

"But will flesh, O can flesh
Second this fiery strain? Not always; Oh no no!
We cannot live this life out; sometimes we must weary.
And in this darksome world' what comfort can I find?

(Hopkins "St Winifreds Well," Poems p.156)

Chapter Five: conclusion

Gerard Manley Hopkins, in his final poems, has been thrust into the wasteland of disintegration, a winter world of frustration and conflict. If there is triumph in the Heraclitean sonnet (July 26th, 1888), a triumph that I suggested was fixed in the future, there is also in it the despair in the present: a despair of sterility and of discontinuity.

"...birds build - but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou Lord of life, send my roots rain."

("Thou art indeed just." March 17, 1889).

Hopkins is finally confronted by the essential relativity of Time - the impermanence of this world, and the failure to "breed one work," to recover the lost fullness and completeness which he had earlier celebrated. It was not to be; "rain" seldom came for Hopkins in his final poetry. Instead he is a "lonely began," isolated from the exuberance of nature. Indeed, I suggest in the poem "Thou art indeed just" there exist two stylistic threads that epitomize Hopkins' final dilemma: the dramatic starkness of "Wert thou my enemy...life upon thy cause," contrasting with the deliberate poetic intensity of "see, banks and brakes/Now, leaved how thick..." W.H. Gardner has observed that "when the mood of joy-in-creation was ousted by mere desire to discharge a grief, he reverted to the regular sonnet in standard rhythm."¹ That is, the 'terrible' sonnets are characterized by the lack of technical experimentation, of virtuosity that marked his earlier poetry.

This contrast I suggest is evident in the sonnet "Thou art indeed just." The imperative "See" is an attempt to recover the "skeined stained variety" of daylight which he had earlier celebrated, to "build" again the mood of joy-in-creation. But it fails: he is left in the evening of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves", in the darkness of the Heraclitean sonnet, the dilemma of ~~the~~ 'terrible' sonnets:

"not breed one work that wakes."

(Poems p.113).

The attempt to "wish day come" is hopeless: he is "Time's eunuch," a bitter image of sterility. It is the cry of a man who fails to find a significant moment in "that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves."² If Pater exhorts his generation to "burn always with this hard, godlike flame, to maintain his ecstasy," Hopkins can only retire from the strain: "tame/My tempests there, my fire and fever fussy" (Poems p.173, April 3rd 1889). The latter poem, "The Shepherd's brow" accepts the loss of his earlier aspirations ("firedint," Poems p.112) not in an elegiac lament but in a burst of cynicism:

But man - we, scaffold of score brittle bones;
 Who breathe, from groundlong babyhood to hoary
 Age gasp; whose breath is our memento mori-
 What bass is our viol for tragic tones."

No longer is man a clearest-selved spark that "stands to the absolute of God" (S/D p. 153) but a "scaffold of score brittle bones." Man Jack the man is. The glorification of individual form united in the Being of God is illusory: man is only a "joke," a "poor potsherd," a "patch," an accidental infinitesimal in flux of

things. The unity that proceeded from his early Christian idealism is an illusion of his youthful Miltonic desire for heroic "mark on mind." That aspiration is fine for the Angels ("they are towers, from heaven") but is a ridiculous aspiration for man:

"Man Jack The man is, just; his mate a hussy."

The "firedint" of the past is swallowed up in the futility of the present:

"And I that did these deaths, that feed this flame
That...in smooth spoons spy life's masque mirrored, tame
My tempests there, my fire and fever fussy."

It is only in the future that integration will be achieved: in a visitation from God, in a transformation of being, in the Resurrection.

"For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crest the bar."

(Tennyson, "Crossing the Bar," Poems p.831).

This then, is the final dilemma for Hopkins: the problem of Time and the significance of man. It is the problem of permanence in a world of flux. It is at this point that Hopkins is most Victorian and Heraclitean.³ If Carlye in Past and Present sought to bring hope for the future by a rejection of the present and a glorification of the past, if Walter Pater sought ecstasy in the present moment in a world of Heraclitean flux (note the epigraph to the conclusion of The Renaissance), if Tennyson sought permanence in the future ("from out of bourne of Time and Place") Hopkins sought for integration in the Resurrection: "it is better than

happiness, but is is not happiness now" (S/D p.262). The "now" is a world of impermanence, night, flux and conflict. This is, of course, the Heraclitean Dualism.

"Let this now suffice, for I see that one might pursue some further subtleties and they weary the mind."

(Hopkins, S/D. p.155)

Postscript

If the reader has persevered to this point, I must offer my apologies for a certain longwindedness at times and perhaps, a certain compression at other times. I am conscious also of having strayed into an area where a wide background of ideas is implicit, of an urge to spend a leisurely few months digesting further what I have written. This problem is, perhaps, a major weakness in the circumstances of writing a thesis.

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