An Enduring Spirit In The Victorian Era Of Doubt

by

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The impact of Philosophical discourses on the Victorians; Old English poetry and that of G.M. Hopkins; Tractarianism; The decay of the Heroic spirit in Victorian times; Jesuit Philosophy; The Warrior Christ; Hopkins’s option for Catholicism; Hopkins’s unique poetic style; Victorian Romanticism; Old English and continuity.

Summary

The focus of this study is upon Gerard Manley Hopkins’s literary opinions about the state of affairs of Victorian England regarding its defence, religions, science, politics, the economy, and other concerns. His claim to a legitimate voice lies in the tremendous amount of erudite knowledge he accumulated over the years, on many different subjects, and his classical education. Major focus is on his pristine awareness of the Anglo-Saxons and their language of Old English. Hopkins’s unique style of writing poetry and his contribution to Victorian philology is highlighted. The work also deals, in some degree, with his mental state at various periods in his life, and attempts to disclose an overcoming of the anguish and depression evident in the poems. His enduring spirit under the grave swamping of Christianity by destructive discourses is another major theme.
Shall these bones live? Surely if they do not—surely if we neglect the dynamic relation which exists between past and present—the dead will bury the dead. There can be no present or future, in life or in art, if the past is not a living reality in its pastness.

(Robert Weimann)

There is an unmistakable Anglo-Saxon aura to the character and work of the Victorian poet, G.M. Hopkins, and where other writers of his time were anxious about the Age’s devastating scepticism, it seems worthwhile to observe this particular poet’s enduring faith, and his ideal of making literature speak from the mindset of an ancient people, antecedent to the scientific and industrial re-evaluation of the world the Victorians occupied. Hopkins’s work tells of his conviction that to have value, truth and reliability, man’s thought must acknowledge both the new science and technology, and take into account the eternal verities which were being undermined by inductive, scientific views.

The milieu in which he wrote, the Victorian era of doubt, is considered in the course of this examination, and I shall argue that Hopkins’s unequivocal Christian stance does not detract from his status as major poet: that by virtue of his erudite weavings through a multitude of discourses on every subject under the sun, of the utmost quality, his subsequent decisions and calibre of mind are noteworthy. There is nothing facile or sententious in his faith, such as ‘God put doubt as a means of testing men’s faith’, or ‘God hid the fossils in the rocks to tempt geologists into infidelity’ (Browning and Gosse consecutively, quoted from Altick 1973:231).
With regard to the Victorian-Mediaeval link in Hopkins's character and poems, evidence shows that he was directly concerned with Victorian thought and problems, and that he shared with his country's ancient relatives, who spoke Old English, a fellowship involving their language and customs. A trace back to the Anglo-Saxons can be discerned in three avenues: in his selection of a personal mediaeval-based religious context, in his interest in Tractarianism, and in his Old English style of writing.

The poet's hold on Faith aligns with his taste for mediaeval colouration in that it anchors in beginnings – he searches for an original Church. This 'origins' theme is integral and implied throughout the essay. Hopkins searches the beginnings of the English language, and the beginnings of Christ's legacy for his truths, rather than allowing himself to be hurriedly and automatically swayed by modern, scientific declarations which threatened to overturn centuries of trusted beliefs.

The body of my work subsists in examining how Hopkins's antique orientation is intrinsic to his enduring spirit. The emphasis should not suggest that he does not transcend the Anglo-Saxon model of poetic creativity. The content and concerns of his writing are inevitably Victorian, but a shadow of distant time seems to permeate his manner of expression and his values.

On the one hand, the poet criticizes Victorian practices and beliefs, and does not capitulate to the climate of powerfully plausible doubt. He writes in a style of his own, and W.H. Gardner (1961:7-11) explains that 'sprung rhythm' is a literary rhythm common to Greek, Latin and Old English verse, not used since Elizabethan times. Hopkins's 'sprung rhythm' is a unique variation, which, the poet maintains in a letter to Dixon, 'no one has professedly used... (or) made it the principle throughout, that I know
of" (1961:184). Other researchers remark on Hopkins’s atypicality: Altick’s Index
(*Victorian People and Ideas*) does not even feature his name.

On the other hand, elements of the Victorian atmosphere indicate that the poet is not
beyond the pale of a Victorian label. What occupied many people’s minds was the
question of how to deal with ‘the new headlong’ way of living everyday life, as opposed
to the ‘old leisurely one’. The change was brought about by an awareness of different
times and cultures which generated different values and viewpoints – more things to
think about and take into account. There was a change in the pace of life, ‘time fled
faster than ever before’ (Altick 1973:97). A new sense of history, and the
transformation of the physical and social environment, separated the past and the
present by a formidable barrier, and for all the pride the Victorians felt in the present,
they ‘had an ineradicable feeling... for the past’ (1973:101).

Some results of this were a Victorian architecture that was ‘almost by definition,
backward-looking’, and a vogue for old ballads and novels evoking mediaevalism. The
craze had its comic side, where tastelessness, with little regard for historical authenticity
was displayed, driving William Morris and others to wrath, says Altick (1973:103).

Hopkins was one of those in sympathy with the Pre-Raphaelites, considering his love
for architecture, and his compulsion to seek origins specifically for their potential buried
truths. Altick exposes ‘persistent Romantic-Victorian attachment to the Middle Ages’,
exonerating Hopkins from the accusation of being simply a throw-back to the Anglo-
Saxon poets, and positioning him as a true Victorian poet. Carlyle and Ruskin used
mediaeval society as a yardstick ‘with which to belabour modern society’, whereas the
Pre-Raphaelites’ concentration on mediaeval themes was a ‘life-giving relief from the
Oppressiveness of a materialistic society’ (1973: 289).

My research points to a Victorian and distinctive literary character for this poet, as well as a Victorian and Anglo-Saxon sensibility, comfortably married. Hopkins can be seen to be somewhat of a triumph over the Age’s throw-away nature by virtue of his image of stability.
Chapter 1. The Sceptical Philosophical, Scientific and Historical Discourses.

On examining Hopkins's credentials, one finds that his decisions about morality, religion and secular issues were closely involved with prevalent scientific and historical knowledge, as well as with the philosophical thought of those who were considered sages in his time. In his tumultuous, anxiety-riddled Victorian world, where his choices were to be made, sceptics were contending that the evidence from the rocks and ancient bones unearthed by geologists, archaeologists and palaeontologists indicated that God could not have created the world in seven days, and therefore that Christianity was a myth. The argument stemmed from as far back as the Renaissance, when the seeds of humanism were planted. A belief that man makes the world according to his knowledge had become a major factor in the make-up of eminent Victorian literary minds. Historians, philosophers, scientists and a well-read public (Altick 1973:64), contributed profoundly to a radically sceptical stance towards religion.

In 1694 John Locke wrote his Essay Concerning Human Understanding arguing against any form of personal identity. He influenced David Hume, who in 1779, when his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion was published, required that religious phenomena such as miracles be subject to the criteria of credibility, just as any other historical report would be. In 'Of Skepticism with Regard to the Senses', a section of his Treatise of Human Nature, Hume refuses to allow that human reason can give reliable knowledge about any form of identity. For the philosopher, any matter of fact and existence requires 'experimental reasoning', not merely abstract reasoning. You have to go out into the world to prove it. Nothing tells of unity or 'simplicity' in cases of miracles or personal identity, and there is thus no overarching, creating, caring, ordering.
mind in the universe. Natural religion can have no rational foundations at all. There is no 'glue' binding distinct perceptions into unified objects. Where is the real connection seen by the mind, Hume wants to know. We 'feign a principle of union' to support the simplicity we attribute. He then makes provision for abstract truths, and says that half of thirty is fifteen, which remains true because it cannot be negated contingently, whereas contingent truths can be negated – experimental reasoning is arbitrary (1992:73-79).

A.N. Wilson describes Hume's discourse as a 'time-bomb' to the Victorians.

Kant was 'woken up' by Hume (Honderich 1995:377), and proceeded to champion the human reason which the latter denigrated. In about 1788 he suggests that whilst the outer boundary of reason, the noumenal world, is unknowable - it nevertheless still has authority to govern our lives. Concepts such as God, soul and immortality have tacit validity, whilst the knowledge involved in human reasoning 'is essentially the notion of something one could encounter in experience' (1993:1i).

The English historian Gibbon, also had a finger in the Victorian sceptical pie. He made it difficult to continue to admire Christian saints, popes and doctors of the Church in his *The History of the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, begun in 1776. He admitted to being anti-clerical, and scoffed at Christian convictions such as miracles (Fuglum 1953:60).

Hopkins remained steady in this climate of insidious incredulousness: he knew the philosophers. In 375 BC, Plato spoke about the 'one-off' essential, unevolvable, immutable bed that 'god' had made, and this philosophy would sit well with Hopkins's ideas about individuality, discussed later. People who knew Hopkins in Ireland testified that in 'his undoubted brilliance (as a theologian)...the influence of Platonist philosophy
could be traced' (Thomas 1969:183). He had written essays for Pater on Plato at Oxford.

In *Send My Roots Rain* Wallhout makes reference to Howard Fulweiler's 'very insightful interpretation of Hopkins' as: there are two separated personalities of Hopkins – Hopkins himself 'identified the creative personality as Satanic and the strong-willed personality as Christ-like' (1981:129). Plato’s denunciation of artistic creativity in *The Republic* (1987:426), is echoed in Hopkins’s surmise.

The poet was conversant with the French philosopher, Descartes, who identified the stunning 'truth' that 'I think (doubt), therefore I am' (1668:103), in 1637. Descartes is claiming that the phenomenon of personal identity is a viable proposition: it may be proposed with impunity. This question became one which subsequent philosophers, such as Hume, took up, and vehemently denied. Thinkers after Descartes, for instance, Hobbes, Locke, and Reid, argue about what, if anything, is constitutive of the 'I'.

When one understands the passion with which Hopkins regarded his individuality, the value he gleaned from Descartes becomes clear. The poet also stated distinct opposition to Rationalism, but had no such difficulty with Cartesian Rationalism, for, with Descartes, he perceived divine guidance operating within Reason. The Philosophate lectures at Stonyhurst between 1870 and 1873 included discussion of Descartes, Locke, Kant (Thomas 1969:97+114), and David Hume (Nixon 1994:198). Thomas (1969:121) records too, that Hopkins 'knew' Gibbon.

Hopkins's secure knowledge of his individuality and consciousness is evident in his writings, yet he also entertained an 'intuitive need for unity', visible in his early essay on Parmenides (515 BC), which Maria Lichtmann describes as 'a curious philosophical counterpart' (1989:9). He is attracted to Parmenides' contention that 'only being is' and
that ‘being and thought are the same’ (Hoy and Oaklander 1991:9). The philosopher, writing at the dawn of Greek philosophy, studies ‘the nature of real being’, advocating that the reality of something created ‘is unchanging, undivided being – reality is One’ (1991:9). However, like Descartes, Hopkins was also aware of, and deeply concerned with, both his uniqueness and his connection to others and the outside world, thereby obviating charges of solipsism in his thinking.

So, in his search amongst pre-Socratic thought for the development of his ideas about the seeming contradiction of ‘unity’ and ‘individuality’ displayed in Reality’s nature, Hopkins is testifying early to a regard for old truths and beliefs. He rejects a propounder of modern thought, Hegel, in favour of a mediaeval theologian, Scotus. Much of the poet’s confusion was defused, when in 1872, he came across the texts of the great mediaeval thinker and Oxford Professor, John Duns Scotus (1265-1308 AD). As Austin Warren (1966:170-1) explains: Scotus’s philosophy extended Aquinas’s dictum that ‘the individuals of a species reproductively multiply their common originative pattern’. Scotus added that ‘each individual has a distinctive “form” as well’, a ‘thisness’ and a ‘whatness’. Hopkins felt free to indulge voluptuously in any inscape of sky, sea, or the self: ‘that taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum’ (Gardner 1961:147). His little, powerful poem which starts ‘As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame’ is evidence of his release. But, as John Pick points out, says Warren (1966:35), Scotus was no ‘initiating force’ in Hopkins’s mental formation, for the poet had been using ‘inscape’ for four years before he discovered the philosopher in the library at Stonyhurst. Scotus was, rather, a corroborator and soul-mate.
The above evidence of his being well-informed indicates that Hopkins would have been in sympathy with Newman on the matter of whether the atheist Gibbon was a reliable source. Yes, he is, Mark Kleijwegt, Professor of Ancient History at Unisa said to me, but Kleijwegt is probably not a Christian. No, says Newman, for 'he is almost our sole authority for subjects as near the heart of a Christian as any can well be...the English Church is destitute of an Ecclesiastical History' (in Wilson 1999:20). Many would disagree with Newman, of course, but it is surely not unreasonable to maintain that giving credence to reporters like Gibbon and Tacitus, who believed that men are born either good or bad, and cannot change (Fuglum 1953:61), is risky.

Regarding the evidence of the bones and the rocks, Hopkins was a keen Egyptologist, and had a lifelong interest in most of the sciences involved in recovering the past. He probably had his decided views on the suspected and expounded 'inaccuracy' of the Bible regarding the seven-day creation, as he had long been aware of the explanation in St. Peter's gospel, that 'a day' can mean a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8-9).

The human forgery to prove that God was dead, in the Piltdown Man saga of 1912, might not have surprised him either. The fraudulent fossil find, which tricked the cream of the scientific crop for over forty years by posing as Darwin's missing link (Weiner 1955), does much to unmask the sceptical compulsion emanating from the Victorian era, a force directing intellectuals to be 'modern' beyond any other consideration.

Earlier, it was mentioned that Hopkins found no fault with Cartesian Rationalism. However, he, like Hume, found much to be sceptical about in current ideas about purely human reasoning powers. As far as Hume’s case goes, though, Hopkins would have been
aware of the philosopher's use of the human reason to doubt human reason. The poet
lectured for over ten years against Rationalism (van Oortmersson 1982:86). For him, if
something did not make sense in human terms — to accept possibilities and probabilities
as certainties, was mockery of logical thought. He was a student of logic and
'deduction', as opposed to science and 'induction'. Professor Kistner (1988:xii-xiii)
explains: 'In inductive arguments the truth of the conclusion is only probable. In an
acceptable inductive argument the premises support the conclusion, but the conclusion
need not necessarily be true even though the premises are'. Deduction needs absolute
proof, as in that 'all unmarried men are bachelors'. Anne Treeneer testifies to Hopkins's
'analytical mind, rapid powers of generalization' and training in argumentation (Thomas
1969:132). The rebellious, doubting mood of Victorian England did not seem to have
troubled Hopkins as it did many other intellectuals. Ruskin, for instance, could not get
the sound of the 'geological' hammers out of his ears as he sat in Church (Altick

Scientific empiricism had been the focus of intense and profound examination by
Hopkins and his respected tutor Jowett in the poet's Oxford days (Plotkin 1989:44).
Jowett was able to see that Humean empiricism is a circular argument, for its unavoidable
conclusion about what we may know is that knowledge (and faith) are not knowable. It
is the only reasonable (science's own criterion) eventuality to a sceptical, empirical,
viewpoint which maintains that 'science can never be anything but a disconnected
number of observations of phenomena' (Wilson 1999:152-153,+199).

Gardner (1985:xxix) observes in Hopkins's words, 'a chief woe, world-sorrow' in the
sonnet which begins 'No worst, there is none', an inward grief 'at the "schism of the
soul" of nineteenth-century man, at the common lack of a spiritual center, at the inroads into the Christian ethos which were daily being made by scientific rationalism and materialism. This perception is revealing—it might very well be that there is a more significant cause to Hopkins's despair than the purported harnessing of his literary ideals and shackling of his sexuality. Added to his observations of the decay of spirituality caused by scepticism, and science's questionable methods of conclusion (certain 'facts' lead to the conclusion that the world began with a 'Big Bang', would be a contemporary example), Hopkins was deeply disturbed by what he saw as he attended to his pastoral duties. Sulloway (1990:140) says he was exposed to some of the worst abuses of the nineteenth century in the industrial cities. What worried him deeply was that the down-trodden lower classes were not being taught the comforts of religion in this unbelieving climate. Dickens experienced similar disquiet about this, and created young Jo, the street-sweeper of Tom-All-Alone's, who, as he lies dying of want and abuse, reveals that he has never heard of Jesus (Bleak House).

Downes (1990:56) observes that Hopkins regarded his friend, Baillie's, temperament as 'cautious and sceptical', that 'he had a need of rational proofs which made a kind of atheist of him'. But it is telling that Hopkins's acquaintances accepted his uncompromising attitude unconditionally. Gardner (1961:245) remembers Baillie's comment in a letter to a friend, attesting to a distinct respect for the poet by his compeers. 'Though a rationalist, Baillie regretted his lack of a belief in a second life because he wanted so badly somewhere, somehow, to meet Gerard Hopkins again'.

The poet had distinct distaste for Hegel, whose stirring words (that 'God is dead!') were being shouted in the lecture halls of the German universities (Wilson 1999:129), and
were endorsed, accepted and understood by many Victorian readers and leading literary lights. That Hegelianism is a bottomless pit, Hopkins and Bridges agree upon (Gardner 1961:173).

Professor Grossman opines that Hegel penned an ‘obscure, ambiguous, ambivalent, impenetrable philosophy’, making few concessions to those ‘not familiar with his way of thinking’ (1995:343). Most readers, he says, find Hegel’s sentences simply incomprehensible and some ‘denounce him as a charlatan, hiding an emptiness of thought behind a deliberate obscurity of expression in order to give an air of profundity’.

Grossman adds that Hegel’s meaning does ‘eventually, become apparent’, and that as a formidable critic of Kant, the philosopher manages to posit an attractive case for the human reason. Our reason is historically conditioned: ‘history displays a rational process of development’ (1995:339). Be that as it may, for Hopkins, human reasoning power would always be God, and not historically induced. As he says to Coleridge in 1866, ‘Our Lord is the eternal reason’ (Gardner 1961:162).

Finally, it can be discerned that Hopkins’s theories have a lot in common with pre-dated Phenomenology. He is interested in the essences of things, and in the matters of individuality, connection with outside objects, words, concepts, meanings and experience. Of course, Husserl and Hopkins part ways when Phenomenology claims to investigate logically the essence of a constituted world, where questions about the existence of a physical and/or spiritual world are illegitimate’ (Kistner 1993:112).

Nevertheless, there is connection with Hopkins’s thoughts and Husserl’s investigation through analysis of the necessary essences of the concepts of experience, and the claim to provide thereby ‘absolutely certain, reliable knowledge’ (1993:85). Phenomenology thus
indicates that objects do not exist independently of us, and therefore that Hopkins’s emphatic assertion of his individuality need not arrive at solipsism, that ‘There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;’ (God’s Grandeur).

Hopkins writes that Henry Purcell’s music has an ‘air of angels’ (Henry Purcell), and, that on the night he first saw the Northern Lights, what struck him was that they ‘go on in a strain of time not reckoned by our reckoning of days and years but simpler (sic) and as if correcting the preoccupation of the world by being preoccupied with and appealing to (sic) the day of judgment was like (sic) a new witness to God and filled me with delightful fear’ (in Gardner 1961:123). The poet is speaking as if he perceives ‘meaning’ to have a transcendent core, disassociated from time. In the ‘dearest freshness’ is the phenomenological core of every aspect of creation: its transcendent part, that which accesses to God, and for Hopkins, those scientists and rationalists who deny this aspect are tragically exempt from the stupendous insights he has experienced.

Walhout uses the word ‘phenomenology’ too. He says Hopkins’s focus is phenomenological rather than literary (1981:4). By phenomenology he does not mean ‘anything esoteric…or as technically presuppositional as Husserl’s method’, and no particular school of phenomenology is reflected (1981:5). To describe ‘grace’ for example, in phenomenological terms, would be grace as a ‘felt experience, not theatologically as a divine attribute’. He argues that Hopkins’s poems have nothing essential in them, phenomenologically, which demands to be interpreted as uniquely Catholic or Jewish (1981:21), but the poetry does exhibit ‘a certain phenomenological structure, a certain phenomenology of religious experience’ (1981:186.)
In the poem, *The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo*, is to be found what Hopkins calls ‘beauty-in-the-ghost’, all the magnificently moving shocks people have had from life-perceptions. These come from and belong in God’s head, he says, and should be given back to Him in thanks, before we die. In the regenerating power of nature, in the ‘dearest freshness’, there is an emphatic claim to a transcendent ‘individually-distinctive’ form (made up of various sense-data), which constitutes the rich and revealing ‘one-ness’ of the natural object,’ which is Hopkins’s *inscape*. His *instress* is ‘that energy of being by which all things are upheld,…that natural (but ultimately supernatural) stress which determines an *inscape* and keeps it in being’ (Gardner 1961:xx).

Van Oortmerssen says Hopkins’s ‘scapes’ describe the ‘very essence of a thing’ (1982:222). The latter coins words such as ‘lovescape’ (*The Wreck of the Deutschland* st. 23), ‘inscape’, ‘offscape’ (Gardner 1961:125) and ‘Christscape’ (van Oortmerssen 1982:222) – all describing the essential, transcendent meaning living in the deep-down freshness of a word.

The subject of ‘meaning’ is elaborated on in Chapter 2.

The endlessly astonishing fact about Hopkins is the way in which he not only touches but escapes from his age.

Herbert Marshall McLuhan (Thesing 1993:263)

A walk along the poet’s mind-paths, and a revisitation of his judgements in the light of his studious insight and integrity, bring to mind after the terror attack on the towers of New York, how dangerous the ignorance, prejudice and violence of unaccommodating fundamentalism can be, and how important education, and therefore openmindedness, are.

Hopkins was well versed in empirical studies, as were many a Victorian writer, scholar, and reader. Cary H. Plotkin (1989:32) discovers in him ‘a silent accomplice of intellectual currents that formed Foucault, as far as the historiographic tradition is concerned, Ferdinand de Saussure and, e contrario, Jacques Derrida’.

Among the intelligentsia, writers such as Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Carlyle, Ruskin, Dickens, George Eliot, Wordsworth, Browning, all had their unique assessments of the world they lived in. They were cognizant of, and affected by, the very real threat to the Christian God whose words, which had previously been trusted, were now being found untenable. Many of the major literary figures made a compromise with the new science and German Rationalism, or assumed the cloak of Deism (God is there but He is far away and does not care), whereas Hopkins’s convictions about Christianity grew more intense. He was well aware of the Deistic atmosphere, which might be exemplified in line 7 of the
sonnet which begins ‘I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day’:

...cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away’.
(ll. 7-8)

Nixon (1990:99) demonstrates that Hopkins’s poetic reveals ‘a consciousness of Darwinism’. He quotes Hopkins’s remark to Bridges in 1888, that ‘everything is Darwinism’ whilst commenting on the eighth chapter of The Origin of Species about the instincts of bees and cell-building. Norman H. Mackenzie (1993:191-192) tells of an M.A. thesis submitted by one of his students who subsequently became a prominent astronomer, which focuses on Hopkins’s The Starlight Night, and proves that the poet ‘was no uninformed stargazer’. Norman White (1990:17) lists Hopkins’s lifelong interests as ranging through music, Greek choral odes, art, the Welsh language, Egyptology, botany, meteorology and Etymology. The scientist in Hopkins emerges in his attempts to persuade Bridges concerning the formation of continents and mountains. He maintains that these are built up and weathered by evolution, and that this does not contradict the fact that God originally made mountains and continents (Gardner 1961:211). As far as Nixon is concerned, Hopkins was both evolutionist and orthodox Christian, keenly aware of prevailing scientific trends, including Darwinism. He wrote four papers for the scientifically acclaimed journal, Nature, the researcher adds.

Hopkins had some scientific training, but in his Hopkins and Science, Mackenzie (1993:81-82) finds that the poet’s knowledge of the sciences grew from acute powers of observation, sensitivity, reading and listening. This training allowed Hopkins to successfully challenge an expert, Peter Tait, about his book on the subject of light. Tait’s achievements in science and mathematics were ‘unsurpassed in his day’, but he was
found to be in error after Hopkins contended that Tait’s discourse ‘should have referred to the laws of optics not the facts’ (1993:81-82).

On 31 October 1875, during a debate at the St. Bueno’s Club, Hopkins moved against the motion ‘That the advancement of material civilization is injurious to true progress’ (Thomas 1969:250). This indicates a healthy, balanced mind whose opinions deserve objective consideration. The poet’s decision to live an abstemious life among a fraternity with lofty ideals and mortal sacrifice, too, might be more tolerantly surveyed and respected, instead of often being the subject of ridicule and fault-finding – the kind of thinking which asserts that his ‘dark nights’ were the result of neutering his sexuality and stifling his poetic genius.

It cannot be denied that Hopkins’s poems are on occasion incomprehensible to the reader - Bridges points this out to him. Hopkins defends himself against the criticism gently and persuasively to his correspondent, and indicates prior awareness of the ‘problem’, saying that it concerns the human condition. Christ is often incomprehensible to him he says, ‘For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand’ (The Wreck of the Deutschland: st. 5). Sometimes there are no answers or meanings, and human beings cannot simply induce them. The little Hopkins wrote is enough to establish his excellence, and his weak constitution and difficult life ends on a splendid note. Would that we could all be extinguished with the words ‘I am so happy...’ (Gardner 1961:xxx1).

It has been put forward that Hopkins’s work puts him, as poet, into the next, different, and advanced age (an ahistorical position) on account of the individuality of his style. Trilling and Bloom (1973:679) say that ‘He has been discussed as though his closest
affinities were with Donne on the one side, and T.S. Eliot on the other’. It has also
sometimes been contended that the poet’s striking up of a new path is a change in
direction, backwards, into the past. Trilling and Bloom make this claim, too, regarding
the move as ‘an honorable eccentricity’ (1973:681). Nevertheless, I argue that Hopkins’s
choice of the heroic ethos, the fighting spirit of the Anglo-Saxon warriors with their love
and reverence for their female compatriots, their lord and for their land, is most
compelling. It can be seen as an assumption of a more manly mien than that of the
Victorian English gentlemen, rather than as a case of eccentricity.

Hopkins’s idea of a hero was in accord with the Anglo-Saxon concept, which first
finds a hero to be one who endures, and secondly, one who displays extreme valour
during times of trial. A hero always hurries to help and protect, and is devoted to
exercising complete allegiance and loyalty to leaders. Finally, a hero will give up his life
in defending others (Study Guide p.3) and (D.G. Scragg 1984:40). The early Anglo-
Saxon hero, existing before Christian influence, is given to much boasting about his
deeds, before and after their accomplishment. Thus Byrhtnoth at The Battle of Maldon
exhibits a harsh manner, sarcasm, and battle fever – exhorting his men to kill Danes, and
behaving jubilantly at this feat. He displays ofermod, which is pride with a negative
connotation (Scragg 1984:35). At all events, Bradley maintains that the very heart of the
heroic character, is the choice of standing and dying, rather than fleeing (1995-518).

Another axiom of a hero’s character is embedded in the role of the hero-ruler or leader.
The Lord of mankind hurries to mount His cross unaided and willing to die in The Dream
of the Rood. At the same time He exhibits the stuff of fatherhood and a caring
propensity. Hopkins tells of the heroic Christ’s loving, outstretched hand to the weary
soldier (The Soldier), and he calls a bugler boy from a barracks 'Christ's darling' (The Bugler's First Communion). He writes: 'make Christ your hero now. Glory to the courage and manliness of his sacred heart. Glory to its meekness and mercy (Gardner 1961:144). Bradley translates from The Battle of Finnsburh:

Then a hero came walking away wounded; a man of action in his military trappings, he said that his mail-coat was hacked to pieces and his helmet was holed too. Then the guardian lord of the people asked him at once how the combatants were coping with their wounds, or which of the young warriors…

(p. 509)

The hero Hopkins admired was notably an Anglo-Saxon Christian man, and some of the old literature points to a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible by the writers. For example, the writer of Beowulf explains that Grendel has 'bespelled' the weapons of war (1995:94), and that he is party to 'the power of fiends'. This idea is right out of Biblical narrative. In Isaiah 54, Yahweh assures his beloved children that He will never leave them, no matter how much they stray from His Word:

I it was created the smith
Who blows on the coal fire
And from it takes the weapons to work on.
But I also created the destroyer who renders them useless.
Not a weapon forged against you will succeed…
(Israel 54 vv. 16-17)

In The Bugler's First Communion, Hopkins evokes a protecting angel:

Frowning and forefending angel-warder
Squander the hell-rook ranks sally to molest him;
March, kind comrade, abreast him;
Dress his days to a dexterous and starlight order.
Grendel, true to Satanic form, inverts God's word, and puts himself in the avenging angel's position. *He is the destroyer who is able to defeat the might of weapons, but he will do it in a different power mode – that of an evil spell* (Beowulf' ll. 433-434). The old tales, as well as appealing to Hopkins's literary taste, take him back to Christianity's roots, in the company of a bard with a good knowledge of the Bible, writing probably in the mid-seventh century.

Hopkins's life suggests concurrence with an Anglo-Saxon code which celebrates both courage and stoicism in a hero's make-up. Bradley (1995:507) says that when one is in a tight or unhappy spot, it might be that there is only one possible, noble strategy: that of endurance. Hopkins fought to endure his chosen life of exile, rendered more painful by his ill-health.

Three moves towards the heroic image in his words and life are visible: Hopkins decides on Tractarianism even before he enters Balliol, and subsequently adopts the Ignatian way of life. His words reveal an indelible sense of fighting for a good cause, of noticing injustice and the plight of the Other, and of undergoing valiantly the sufferings life inevitably brings. This is an Anglo-Saxon frame of mind, whether pertaining to elegy or battle-cry.

A rebellious mood of Victorian England with regard to the 'fighting man' and the retreat into doubt retained Christian concepts such as not demanding a tooth for a tooth, but rather offering the other cheek, and this engendered a lack of will for action. 'Deeds, not words' became an outdated idea: man fought from the couch or with the pen, violence was to be fought with the mind, not with counter-violence. By contrast, Thomas
notes that Jesuit teaching insists upon ‘Deeds, not words... as proof of genuine service...’ (1969:31).

Carlyle and James Froude castigate people for their stupidity, and announce that Christianity is ‘intellectual dishonesty’ and ‘sheer silliness’ (Wilson 1999:128). They do not, like Hopkins, and Dickens, who also uses the mighty pen, climb more physically into the fray of social trouble and do something, not turn the other cheek, which is the proper Christian way. All Carlyle’s talk did not touch as many ears as Dickens’s did, and still does, through the heart and not purely via the brain.

What good did Carlyle’s war of words do, Hopkins asks Bridges. ‘I do not think he has done much except to ridicule instead of strengthening the hands of the powers that be’ (Gardner 1961:171). The die-hard Victorian Christian fighting man, Hopkins, whether he did his social work, or his teaching undertakings, effectively or otherwise, stayed at the job, trying to succeed, and hurt no man unnecessarily. He found that the class and intellectual snobbery of leading Victorians tainted any vestige of Christianity they might have owned to. For him, one sometimes had to turn the other cheek when one was personally involved, as he was with Bridges’s criticisms, but when those with no powers of resistance were at risk, it was man’s duty to defend them. In The Wreck of the Deutschland, his anguish at his own impotence, and that of others, to help the drowning Franciscan nuns is legendary: he took this tragedy personally. Heroes in literature will often experience a feeling that is particularly difficult to endure: helplessness.

Having suggested Hopkins’s Anglo-Saxon complexion, its validation is not easy, particularly in view of his remark to Bridges that he began to study Old English in 1882. This means, seven years before his death, by which time most of his poetry had been
written. Nevertheless, even Trilling and Bloom, in their scathing attack on the poet in which they make it clear that they regard him as a poeticule, testify to his knowledge of Old English: ‘Hopkins’s diction adds to its Keatsian and Pre-Raphaelite base a large stock of language derived from his study of...Old English’ (1973:681). Their later note that Hopkins came to it late seems to be mere reporting, rather than that it was an overriding factor in their estimation.

To give Hopkins’s work an earlier cast than many critics will allow, I believe that he probably read much Old English in translation: he was certainly preoccupied with the ancient Welsh literary stock. In addition to this, whilst he was at Manresa House, before he took his final vows as a Jesuit priest, the library held a copy of The History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, an extract from which was read at dinner on 27 November 1870, a few months after he had left for Stonyhurst (Thomas 1969:228). The book had surely been used as refectory reading often before his departure, and Hopkins would have perused most books in that library. If Father Alfred Thomas (1969:82) is conversant with The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle it is probable that this old book was also in the libraries of Manresa House and Stonyhurst in Hopkins’s time.

A significant point is that the poet sometimes considered his knowledge of a subject slight, when in fact it was considerable, be it Welsh, lightning (Mackenzie 1993:83), music, art, Egyptology, and perhaps even Hegelianism (Gardner 1961:151). He tells Bridges he has tried to learn a little Welsh – ‘in reality one of the hardest of languages’, yet he wrote a ‘passable’ Welsh poem, revealing mastery of ‘the strict and elaborate system of alliteration and cyngahanedd’ (Gardner 1961:244). With Egyptology, he capably judges the Biblical Archaeological Society and that ‘slipshod publication, the

Martin notes other correspondence with his friend Baillie, wherein Hopkins credibly posits the possibility of the Attic culture being derived from the Phoenicians via Egypt, which observation would require a specialist critique (1991-394). So when he writes to Bridges that he only began studying Old English ‘late in life’, in 1882, the contention for his Anglo-Saxon penchant can retain substance, especially when he uses the word ‘seriously’. He says he only began to study the language ‘seriously’, latterly.

Pursuing the mediaeval link, it is known that Hopkins expected that for full appreciation his poems were to be read, or sung, aloud. The accents which dot his lines indicate how the words should be stressed for the audience to experience in the fullest degree, that which is behind the expression. This is his ‘sprung rhythm’ and it follows the natural rhythm of human speech rather than that of traditional English poetry. The ‘sprung rhythm’ notion returns readers to how tales, anecdotes and history were enjoyed in mediaeval times, by the scop’s reading or singing of them, with his special brand of emphasizing, which lent further dimensions and nuances of meaning, understanding and emotion.

A word with regard to ‘meaning’, as requested, is perhaps required at this stage. Exposition of this aspect of existence concentrates on Hopkins’s likely understanding of it. He would consider the modern development incorrect, it appears, that the meaning of something lies purely in its name, that there is no meaning beyond words. Eagleton writes: ‘The linguistic revolution of the 20th century emphatically recognizes that language produces meaning’ (1992:52).
Many modern writers insist that thought is chaotic before words, and they represent a powerful school. Foucault has it that meaning is immanent in language, ‘the power of words can represent immediately the world they describe’ (Plotkin 1989:14). But in Victorian times, Plotkin suspects, the relation between words and sense at root level of a word was far more complex and credible than Foucault allows, and therefore the distinction imagined between a science of language and the art of poetry becomes blurred (1989:40).

What I offer to gainsay the empirical conclusion that thought is chaotic before words, is the simple query ‘does not a baby know the meaning of his blanket, warm bath water, and sustenance before he knows their labels’? But a baby without a vocabulary exhibits knowledge of what these things mean, therefore it seems quite possible that there is transcendent meaning to all earthly phenomena before their words.

Hopkins’s devotion to the search for origins involves words, meanings, a Church, and his very understanding. Your words and thoughts, he tells Dixon, are ‘the darling children of your mind’ (Gardner 1961:181). They are the offspring of something else before oneself. For Hopkins, this goes beyond his mind, which is his muse, ‘the mother of immortal song’, into the regions of that ‘Sweet Fire’, who is her Sire (To R.B.). He is expressing his belief here again, that there is transcendent meaning beyond a word. His idea of ‘scapes’, mentioned in Chapter 2, confirms it. ‘Although…living people are commonly dead to the world of inscape, this something called inscape can still preserve in the dead thing the distinctive quality of the living’ (Gardner 1961:xxi).

Hopkins believes that only part of what has filled our brains in life becomes accessible to us. We never get to the roots and completion of any item of knowledge:
The vault and scope and schooling
And mastery in the mind,
In silk-ash kept from cooling,
And ripest under rind -
What life half lifts the latch of...
(Morning Midday and Evening Sacrifice)

Only part of the meaning in an utterance, or a word, is available to human consciousness.

The meaning of something for this poet, has historical blood: its passage and evolution through a changing world, it has vitality from the present, and it has its beginnings, which for him are the most attractive. It follows consistently then, that ‘nature is never spent; there lives the dearest freshness deep down things’, and this ‘freshness’ imparts a sense of newness and difference which attaches to each visitation. He senses a meaning of a bluebell: it is the assurance of Jesus’s love (Gardner 1961:122). The poet is not getting the meaning of a bluebell, if there is such a thing. The meaning of this sighting of the bluebell which staggers his sensibility is a shock of ‘blue’ and ‘love’. Meaning is never altogether in a word, because it always hooks up to another meaning. It is probably here that Plotkin senses accord with the postmodern theorist, Derrida’s, discourse. For the latter, ‘meaning is (always) deferred’ (Kistner 1993:157).

In one of his note-books Hopkins writes: ‘I think the onomatopoetic theory (of the origin of words and roots) has not had a fair chance’ (Gardner 1961:92). What he is suggesting is that the words ‘creak’ or ‘crack’, for instance, came into being by virtue of their sounds, which were there long before the words which name them. Therefore, the meanings in ‘crack’ and ‘creak’ existed before their appellations, and therefore too, the full meaning of a crack or a creak extends beyond the mere fact of their sounds.
Compounding the issue about meaning is the manner in which word-meaning changes over time, and this occupied Hopkins's thoughts to a great degree. At nineteen years old, he is concentrating on tracing the meanings in the word 'horn' (Gardner 1961:91), and 'hue', he surmises later, 'once had a different feeling' (1961: 183). 'To shape', he tells Bridges, means in Old English, 'to hew' (1961:211).

For this poet, it is clear that there is more than a simple, referential function to words; they are instruments of music and meaning. The perfect fusion of Hopkins the aesthete and the scientist is revealed, for his work can be described variously as technical, metrical, highly mystical and emotional. He bows to laws and rules which music, the stuff of his poetry, necessarily has, and he uses words as instruments of sound. His call to the cuckoo to 'Repeat that' is an assurance that he has 'open ear wells' to capture the different songs, feelings and inspirations every time one of them calls, their ballad making 'nature suddenly flush by its sound', emitting a meaning (Gardner 1961:80).

Henry Sweet's presidential address to the Philological Society of London in 1877 might be recalled here. He pronounced phonology to be the axiom of philology (1989:16), and this puts Hopkins, in one way or another, in the mainstream of Victorian intellectual thought.

Just as the poet knows that each bird-call is distinctive, so too does he want an experience read in a certain way sometimes. Where he feels he has captured a moment, a meaning, as in *Moonrise*, he wishes to bring an experience to life for another. It is his experience and he wants to communicate its specificity; he feels this can be re-experienced, and his motive involves holding it as memory, and when a reader can live again 'the prized, the desirable sight', witness is given to the access we have to one
another. A third angle of Hopkins’s motive is, of course, his giving it back to God in thanks, ‘while worth consuming’ (*Morning Midday and Evening Sacrifice*).

This call for subjectivity is an emphatic dislocation from relativism, which would claim that ‘difference’ implies a non-arbitrary state of affairs, that difference means automatic and equal validity, that because beliefs and practices are different, one or other may not be argued wrong or untrue. For example, if a tribe considers cannibalism to mean that the partaker of human flesh will receive all the good and fine attributes of his victim, and that this is a good thing, his ethics may not be pronounced to be murder. One of the characteristics of Tractarianism was a strong anti-relativism, mentioned later, to which tenet Hopkins was strongly drawn. For him, there is a wrong and a right, and the criteria are Christianity-based, and thereafter, relate to Western creed. A relativism which would deny validity to ‘difference’ promulgating ultimate truths, would be in contradiction.

Intimately linked with his concern for individuality is the importance Hopkins attaches to a word’s history, which colours its meaning. He has need to scrutinize its stains and echoes, for, without having some idea about this, he feels a reader is deprived of a deeper meaning. If he had merely read the words about an old castle, he would never have received the richer impact imparted by the beholding of it in the flesh, as it were, and due to the knowledge he has of the old times. He explains: ‘We went up to the castle but not in: standing before the gateway I had an instress which only the true old work gives from the strong and noble inscape of the pointedarch’ (Gardner 1961:136). He finds richer revelation in the words ‘castle’, ‘pointedarch’ and ‘noble’, having enjoyed the actual castle which he previously knew about through mere words. T.A. Hoagwood packs up Hopkins’s ideas about meaning, succinctly, when he sums: ‘For Hopkins,
meaning is God, incarnate in the body of the world’ (1993:191).

John Ferns reviews Plotkin’s book and claims that this biographer has cleared up the problem which has vexed scholars for years: the poet’s nature and extent of his knowledge of Old English. Hopkins used an 1863 book by George P. Marsh, entitled Lectures on the English Language for lectures at Manresa in 1874, and adapted his poetic style accordingly for The Wreck of the Deutschland. He was busy with the study of language, Plotkin discovers, from his earliest diary entries, until his death (1989:144). This would have to include the study of Old English.

Another item in defence of the knowledge of Old English claim, suggests Plotkin, quoting Lingard from his The History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, is that Anglo-Saxon poets used a particular form of alliteration which was not the alliteration of their native poetry. The works of native poetry displayed ‘alliterative and accented syllables’ which had to be the same, whereas Anglo-Saxon poets tried to improve these practices by reducing classical ‘method’ to gather more meaning into their poems by using their ears: repeating ‘the same letter in the same line, or in both lines of the couplet, without attention to the accent’ (1989:154).

Hooper and Harvey say that Hopkins’s use of alliteration in the Old English manner is not to ‘make the lines “flow” as in some Romantic poetry, but to bind ideas and feelings closer together’ (1957:91). Line 11 of I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark, not Day, demonstrates this: ‘Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse’.

Hopkins tells Dixon that his new rhythm is scanned ‘by accents or stresses alone, without any account of the number of syllables’, that any amount of ‘slack’ syllables may be used, as long as they are harmonious to the ear. It is true the poet was already
thirty four years of age when he explained this to Dixon, but he also told him that when he wrote *The Wreck of the Deutschland* his new rhythm had long haunted his ear (Gardner 1961:184).

A further source maintaining that G.M. Hopkins was familiar not only with Old English translations, but with the language in the vernacular perhaps, is Van Casey putting some words into the poet’s mouth in his play *A Jesuit in Poet’s Corner*. Hopkins has just submitted his first major poem for publication to *The Month* via Father Henry Coleridge. Van Casey has Hopkins reply to Coleridge’s question ‘Where did you find all those strange words?’ with ‘...above all I love the one-syllable Anglo-Saxon words of our language’ (1990:44). This might be poetic licence on Van Casey’s part, but it is pertinent nonetheless.

Thomas (1969:80) notes that Hopkins had a preference for simpler words: ‘went into’ instead of ‘entered’, and ‘wait on’ instead of ‘attend’, and that:

> this preference for a simpler verb plus preposition is one which can readily be paralleled from his letters and diaries. In its own way it provides interesting evidence of contemporary fondness for ‘the cult of the Saxon’.

White (1990:24) discovers that the poet quoted from Norse poetry, and Thomas (1969:88) records that in 1888, whilst at Manresa, he had visited the Museum and noticed the strange, old chapel and drawings of Roman remains in illustrated manuscripts, and that he was fond of old words like ‘bason’, and old books (1969:70). He loved the ‘beautiful, dappled moors’ (1969:89), and the ‘runes on the Danish crosses’ (1969:119), which he could view from his room.

Austin Warren finds ‘homely dialectical words’ and ‘compound epithets’ suggestive as survivors of Old English in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*: Christ is the ‘mid-numbered’
One on the 'thunder-throne', and the nuns are going to heaven via the 'heaven-haven roads. He nods to Henry Wells's judgement that Hopkins's influences are nearer to Cynewulf than to Chaucer, and that whilst the Victorian poet was intent on restoring the power the English language once had, Middle English should be ruled out as irrelevant, because he regarded the versification in *Piers Plowman* as a 'degraded and doggerel' form of Old English (1966:168).

But Warren does not affirm an Old English character to Hopkins's work, because, he says, of the poet's admission to Bridges, and because of Hopkins's own silence concerning the new poetic method of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*: 'The poet used words of Old English lineage which were dialectal, still-spoken English, 'not ink-horn terms but folk speech' (1966:177).

Pinning Hopkins down as being familiar with Old English for longer than can be proved is the contention that this fine nature poet was fired with enthusiasm by the clout of richness and texture of the ancient stories told by the scops. The arresting energy engrained in some of the nature passages is astonishing, and it is as if this beauty derives from the poet's attempt to capture the meaning of a sight by describing everything in its parameter, the words describe something that is already there, the prized sight is not created by the words.

The way Hopkins writes, though, always indicates his individuality. In a hurrying to and through words, and a 'bending' and searching of them, he strives to explain an explosion of meaning. The old poets have the same wish, but manage to capture their prey less excitedly. To call Hopkins's poems 'overloaded' (1973:680) probably means Trilling and Bloom have haunted classrooms for too long.
Hopkins adopted the alliteration, kennings and the use of the subjunctive tense, all of which are characteristics of the Old English language, (and some words which held particular attraction for him, such as the verb ‘swings’, elaborated upon later). He was fascinated by ships and water, would have sensed intimately the proximity of the Viking ships which prowled the ancient seas, and the birds which kept the Seafarer company:

Gewat þa ofer waeg-holm
flote fami-heals,
ōþaet ymb an-tid,
wunden-stefna
þaet þa liðende
brim-clifu blican,
side sae-naessas;
þa waes sund liden…

winde gefysed
fugle gelicost,
þres dogores,
gewaden haefde,
land gesawon,
beorgas steape
(Beowulf II. 217-223)

Across open seas, blown by the wind,
the foamy-necked floater went like a bird,
till in good time, the second day out,
the curved prow-carving had gone so far
that the seafaring men sighted land,
silvery sea-cliffs, high rocky shores,
broad headlands. The deep sea was crossed…

Hopkins is obviously familiar with these descriptions. As Howell D. Chickering (1977:11) notes, the style of Beowulf is ‘line by line...like the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins: packed, crowded, ornate, abrupt’.

Plotkin has unearthed the fact that Victorian philological research was involved with areas of language study which have now been marginalized, but at the time were the consideration of a surprisingly large and knowledgeable public, and which should occupy a place in the history of linguistics. There were issues and attitudes towards language in full flower, which are now abandoned, evident in the work of Hopkins from the time he wrote The Wreck of the Deutschland. He was part of the development of Victorian
philology. His interests in this field led him to apply, 'more radically than any of his English-speaking contemporaries, a view of language made possible by philological studies. He raised sound as the bearer of meaning to a level which constituted it as the organizing principle of poetry, rather than viewing meaning as totally confined to the world of sense. The sense of sound becomes an integral constituent of poetry: its meaning resides not in the sign but in its being. Like revelation, Hopkins meant his words to explode into meaning, not to be deciphered' (1989:135).

The author shows that Anglo-Saxon studies at Oxford date back to the Seventeenth Century, and their shortcomings were steadily improved upon. Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry is a text written by J.J. Conybeare, Professor of Anglo-Saxon studies at Oxford from 1807 to 1842, and Biographia Britannica Literaria, a work devoted to the Anglo-Saxon period, was published in 1842 (1989:19). Plotkin (1989:22) states that Hopkins was aware of Furnivall's 'Forewords' in his 'publishing undertakings' of long-forgotten texts and their vocabulary.

It is safe to say Hopkins also knew Max Muller's works and views on language. Plotkin says, 'in secondary literature, James Milroy simply states that Hopkins attended Muller's lectures at Oxford' (1989:43). This Professor was presenting lectures about the convergence of philology and modern literature in Hopkins's time there, and was involved with the roots of words, and a tracing back of English to Gothic through Old English (Plotkin 1989:54). In the poet's diary is a memorandum to read Max Muller (The Journals and Papers of G.M.H. 35-36). Here is, more likely than not, another instance of Hopkins having a considerable knowledge of a subject and then wanting to master it further. According to Jerome Bump (1993), Hopkins had read Muller's Chips from a German Workshop.
Among the Hopkins family books were Charles Knight’s *Old England* and John Lingard’s *The History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church*. They were read by the children who left their traces on them, but it cannot be proved that some of these belonged to G.M. Hopkins, William A. Quinn observes. Close attention paid to them, counters Plotkin, ‘by all except the painterly Gerard?’ (1989:149). He finally refutes Walter Ong’s claim that in Hopkins’s time, knowledge of Old English was not easy to come by (1989:154).

In this chapter, the endeavour has been to gather a sound enough picture of this classical Victorian scholar to credibly ascribe an Anglo-Saxon character to his work, and to present him as an enduring spirit in The Age of Doubt, worthy of being spotlighted.
Chapter 3. The Demise of the Combative Spirit in the Victorian Era.

Mario Praz's work, *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction*, is an attempt to indicate how the hero image was dying in Victorian fiction. Hopkins had a clear sense of this phenomenon, which rendered dramatic and ironical the issue of his middle name. 'Manley' was, of course, his father's name, and a 'play on “manly”' can hardly have escaped Gerard Hopkins', says Martin (1991:1). Manliness and heroism meant different things to Hopkins from what he observed about Victorian understanding thereof.

Praz (1956:168) decries pathos and sentimentality in art when it aims at 'forcing tears from the compassionate spectator'. He admires Thomas Rowlandson's work in which, he says, one can 'observe in full flower the primitive Anglo-Saxon exuberance' which was to be gradually suffocated by bourgeois morality (1956:27). (Many of Dickens's pages have this freshness, too, adds Praz, even though weighed down by 'a superstructure of middle class conventions'.) Romanticism in England gradually turned bourgeois, its 'entire riches of spiritual conquests' were toned down to make them 'accessible' to the middle classes, and this process culminated in the Victorian epoch (1956:39). The epic poem decayed and disappeared and the bourgeois form, the novel, was born (1956:29). The ancient picture of a hero, 'the primitive Anglo-Saxon exuberance' was on the wane.

Praz notes Wordsworth's 'Victorian sensibility' – how he changed the theme of poetry, which had been heroic, to something even more heroic and moving: he found the hero in common people. What interests this poet is not the dignity of the protagonist, but rather the 'spirits of the mind' of ordinary people, what makes them 'tick', as it were (1956:47). Wordsworth completed the 'democratization of the heroic', says Praz, but his
work is often damaged by the very romanticisms he is out to avoid: the way he writes, his
diction and metre, hark back to the heroic tradition. Praz uses lines from *Peter Bell* as an
example of what he means here (1956:50).

The author finds that what strikes Dickens and other Victorians about modern Rome is
its picturesque, sinister and squalid properties. This is evidence of Victorian
Romanticism, which preferred ruined, modern Rome, for example, to the ancient heroic
city (1956:446). Altick (1973:6) considers the Victorian Romantic root as ‘diluted and
vulgarized…’. Where Trilling and Bloom (1973:679) consider Hopkins ‘as High
Romantic as his master (Newman)’, my contention is that Hopkins’s Romantic nature
harks back to pure, olden-time, epic Romanticism, unlike the Victorian version.

Dickens’s heroes like to make money, settle down and do nothing, their leisure not even
taken up with energetic pastimes, continues Praz (1956:142-144). His benevolent old
boys, such as Pickwick, make modern readers impatient, they are ‘a naïve reaction on
Dickens’s part to the savage social background’ he lived in, with a Malthus proposing
birth control theories which frightened everyone, and a ‘work, work, work’ regimen.

Thackeray (1956:169) wrote *Vanity Fair* deliberately without a hero, intending to
concentrate on character study, and even though Dickens appears to set great store by the
idea of the hero, his creations, with the exceptions of Pickwick and David Copperfield,
are puppets. George Eliot initiated a scientific-literary world which led to disillusioned
observation of life as it really was, to examination of the psychological, unmapped
country of the mind, to the eclipse of the hero ‘and the disclosure of man’s swarming
interior world, made up of disparate and contradictory things’ (1956:383).

The genuine hero, then, appears to have vanished from literature, and therefore the
ethos of the time. Typical English values and decency were comprised of virtues such as honesty, chastity, virility, braveness, frankness, clean fingernails, and a host of others (Altick 1973:176), but the 'manliness' apparently inherent in these values was not met with kindly by the schoolboys of the time, and this should strike an ominous chord. Boys are not usually backward in desiring to follow in a hero's footsteps. The schoolmasters were an abusive lot, as Dickens has laid out for us, with exceptions such as the enlightened Arnold at Rugby. He was intent on channeling looked-for virtues into the arena of sport. A dominant element in public school education was the notion that team athletics and the spirit of 'manliness' would produce Christian gentlemen in working clothes (1973:143). Altick, though, points out the pitfall of carrying sought-after virtues too far, which the Victorian sensibility was prone to do, for it would probably produce priggish, rather than manly gentlemen (1973:176). Also, he says, many Victorian ideals were based on materialistic and self-serving ends, and thus defeated themselves, having paid no attention to the other milieu, that of the genuine world where address and protection was needed: the Victorian world of poor and oppressed lower-middle and lower classes.

It was this state of affairs that troubled Hopkins. His nature, whilst predominantly gentle, had another side. A facet of his character is revealed in his reactions to the despotic rule of the Headmaster of Highgate, Dr. Dyne. Dyne came down on him in unjust and cruel treatment, occasioned by, according to Martin (1991:15), undisguised jealousy of an adult for a child. Hopkins challenged this treatment, suffered the consequences, and after he left, never returned to his old school again.

For the poet-priest, it would seem that gallant values were not to be engrained through
cruelty and tyranny, for they would backfire. Only good men, good examples of cherished values, could instill those values in others, not the likes of Dyne or Mr. Squeers. Hopkins and the heroic ethos both accent the idea that heroism is only emulative when it follows a previously set good example. The mediaeval hero’s aim is to leave behind a brave name which first and foremost serves to be worthy of emulation. Hopkins’s standard of what constitutes a hero includes the qualities which define a gentleman. He says to Bridges (3rd February, 1883): the essence of a true man, or gentleman,

is that chastity of mind which seems to lie at the very heart and be the parent of all other good, the seeing at once what is best, the holding to that, and the not allowing anything else whatever to be even heard pleading to the contrary.

He agrees with the Poet Laureate about ‘gentlemen and damfools’, and believes that to be a gentleman in the England of Victoria would mean to be ‘but on the brim of morals and rather a thing of manners than of morals properly’ (Gardner 1961:194). Christ is the ideal man, slow to anger, but no doormat. Hopkins feels that a real man, however superior, would conduct himself as a servant and not be at all hasty in concluding that he possessed the quality of a gentleman…this is no ‘snatching-matter’, a gentleman is modest and prefers to give rather than take the honour (1961:195). If all that England had ever left posterity was the example of what constitutes a gentleman, she ‘would have done a great service to mankind’, Hopkins adds (1961:196). Therefore, the poet is not your ‘representative Victorian gentleman…a nationalistic jingo’ as Trilling and Bloom would have it (1973:680).
Where a gentleman would prefer to give, rather than take the honour, there is a parallel with the warrior-orientated society of the Anglo-Saxons. The *comitatus* ruled it a disgrace for a chieftain to be surpassed in valour by his companions and for the latter not to equal their leader’s prowess. The chief fights for victory for the clan, the companions for the Chief, and any acts of supreme bravery are put down to his credit (Kossick & Saycell 1991:3). Thus it is automatic that a real man gives, rather than takes, the glory. Hopkins’s ideas of manhood are consistent with those of the Anglo-Saxons. He writes to Dixon that St. Ignatius regarded ‘individual fame…as the most dangerous and dazzling of all attractions’ (Gardner 1961:192).

The scop of yore, recounting the story of Beowulf, would be telling the same truths. A true man has a fair and just disposition, and always has the plight and position of the other in mind. Beowulf, as a noble and gallant man, insists on laying down his battle-axe, good-sword, chain-shirt and helmet:

...forpan ic hine sweorde swebban nelle,  
aler beneotan, peah ie eal maeges.  
Næt he para goda, pæet he me ongean slea,  
rand gehæawe, pæah þæ e he rof sic  
nifæ-geweorca; ac wit on niht sculon  
sece ge ofersitan, gíf he geþecan dear  
wig ofer waepen, ond si þæ an witig God  
on swa hwæfe ære hond, halig Dryhten  
maerðo deme, swa him gemet þince.  
(l. 679-687)

... and so I will not kill him by sword,  
shear off his life, though I easily might.  
He does not know the warrior’s arts,  
how to parry and hew, cut down a shield,  
strong though he be in his hateful work;  
so swords are laid by if he dare seek battle,  
tonight, no weapons, and then Almighty God  
the Lord wise and holy, will give war-glory
to whichever side He thinks the right.

It transpires later, during the fight, when Beowulf’s battle-warriors try to enter the fray to give him aid, that God’s enemy, the evil demon Grendel, has rendered all weapons of battle ‘bespelled’ – ‘ac he sige-waepnum forsworen haefde’ (l. 804), and therefore powerless.

Where Hopkins speaks about chastity of mind being the parent of all other good, a parallel is drawn with the Beowulf incident. Both combatants are aware of the potential for the fight being unfair and the Geat’s decision is as ‘a parent of all other good’, whereas Grendel, true to form, resolves the issue in a stealthy, evil way, determined to take advantage of it, rather than to give each side consideration.

There is fascinating vindication of Hopkins, the patient, suffering man. The man who knew the plight of his beloved land, the man who had a distinct idea of definite and correct masculinity, and who was at the same time aware of his failings. It is history that the eighth of December was the date of a ceremony in Westminster Abbey on which G.M. Hopkins was welcomed to Poet’s Corner in 1975, and that it was the date in 1875 when the Deutschland floundered.
Chapter 4. The Tractarian.

It has been suggested that a good measure of Hopkins’s heroic flavour derived from his engagement with Tractarianism, and this Oxford Movement also moulded his decision to accept what he came to regard as the one true Church. The Movement involved academic clergymen at Oxford University who published ninety ‘Tracts’ establishing their position against the political tendencies of the State to reduce the Church to complete subservience. In a word, it was a strong engagement with the Protestant Reformation.

Tractarians advocated the doctrine of the Incarnation: that the real presence of God and of Christ the man exists in the bread and wine of the Communion wafer (Altick: 1973 208-214). James Froude explains the inclination of the Tractarians to resurrect the initial meaning of the sacrament of Communion as a rebuttal of the Protestant re-arrangement of the words ‘This is my body’ to ‘my body is (only) this’. They felt this adjustment seriously compromised the utter significance and vital importance of ‘the mysterious gift of which I spoke’ (Johnson 1997:13 quoting Jesus in John v:1). This dilemma of Christian dogma became of paramount importance to Hopkins.

The Movement’s aims were consolidated into a campaign against rationalism, which was felt to be a neglect of spirituality, and against liberalism which strove to relax the attitude towards doctrine and to cut down on Church privileges. It denounced the modern tendency of individual liberty of interpretation and required the re-establishment of Bishopric authority which was being eroded by congregational dissent. Finally, it was anti-relativistic, stressing the contemporary Church’s maxims about ultimate truths, which were linked to its history and its origins (Altick 1973:211).
Tractarian disciples were invariably a throwback to the Romantic era. They detested the materialistic mood of industry, their sensibility was Romantic, their ideas reflecting visitations to the old time of the Church Fathers, the Mediaeval or Middle Ages period when the Christian religion was unbroken.

In the Tractarian understanding that sacramentalism is a means to grace, there is kinship with the romantic ‘exultation of the symbol’, as in nature where ‘seen’ is connected to ‘unseen’ – the analogy being that the invisible is immanent in the visible, that Christ is really present in the Eucharist (Altick 1973:215). Keble’s thinking, in trying to put the controversy raging around Transubstantiation into an acceptable tenet for the High Church, from Tractarian perspective, was that there is a close organic relationship between truth and symbol which is considered ‘natural’ about and within Nature which is instinctively felt to be devoid of deception.

In opposition to the Tractarian emphasis, Evangelical Protestantism taught that the presence of God in the Eucharist is symbolic, not real. Their claim was that ‘Material forms were not and could not be a connecting link between God and the human soul’ (1973:215). Christians were to live morally, and read their Bibles. It was this point with which Tractarians finally had to come to terms, and Christians such as Newman and Hopkins eventually changed allegiance from the Anglican Church, to Rome. Because Newman was such a notable churchman, and a leading figure of the Oxford Movement, his decision to defect led to almost complete dissolution of the sect.

Tractarianism was crucial to the outcome of Hopkins’s religious life and his literary concerns, for the relevant decisions he made set him on a path of priestly isolation and the harnessing of his literary ambitions. The Tractarian spirit, which looked back to
Mediaeval tracts, to Old English literature, and which denounced the abuse of nature by
industry and progress, was a drawing card. Hopkins remembered and consoled himself
all the while with those things ‘too old to end’ - the noises of the sea and the skylark.
‘On ear and ear two noises too old to end…” (The Sea and the Skylark). He
became a disciple of a creed which asserted that the Church was not a ‘finished
institution… (but a) growing organism, the product of long centuries of development and
possessing still undiminished vitality’. A ‘deep sense of historical continuity…denied the
prevailing assumption that whatever is new is…better and that the greatest obstacle to the
future is the persistence of the past’ (Altick 1973: 212-215.)

Hopkins’s memory of those very old things, the noises of the sea and the skylark, brings
to mind the companions of another self-relegated exile, the Seafarer. They are ‘the
tossing salty waves’ (The Seafarer 1. 35) as he wanders over the whale’s haunt ‘hwaeles
efel’, accompanied by the sea-eagle’s screech, the gannet’s cry and the sea-mew’s
singing (ll. 18-19). Two exiles, the Victorian poet and the Seafarer, have decided to
shun the pleasures of the world, and receive comfort from two of God’s timeless
creations: His continuities.

Johnson (1997:1-15) records that Robert Bridges considered Hopkins’s work to have
been written ‘in the devotional and cathartic mode of Tractarian poetry’, in the mode of
Dixon’s, the Rosettis’, Dolben’s and Newman’s poetry, the poetry which Hopkins knew.
There is no doubt that Hopkins greatly admired Richard Watson Dixon’s works - he said
so in his letter dated June 4, 1878. He told the Anglican priest that after he had read
Christ’s Company at Oxford, he made it part of his own mind. He felt Dixon’s Ode to
Summer should sit alongside Keats’s Ode to Autumn on bookshelves, and he declared that
one particular line in *Feathers of the Willow* gave him more ‘delight’ than any single line in poetry ever did (Gardner 1961:177). Dixon’s words are ‘Her eyes like lilies shaken by the bees’.

Hopkins adds that what he loved about the Tractarian mode of poetry was the ‘mediaeval colouring’ of their works, but that it was Dixon’s which had it so ‘unaffectedly’. He was thirty-seven years old when he wrote this letter, proving that ‘Tractarian’, and ancient days and works were always with him, despite the strict choices he had made.

Some of the poets Johnson mentions were also artists, and members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (1850-1890), a movement forging an attachment with mediaeval times to re-live naturalness and simplicity, and which appreciated early Christian symbolism and Romanticism. The mediaeval colouring Hopkins speaks of is the Romantic element in old writings, which abound in this type of depiction, in an all-consuming love of nature and the beloved middle-earth, and the hope for better things.

The poetry of Romanticism is firstly the poetry of *nature*, then it studies mankind. It has a spirit of liberty or revolt, and simplicity, challenging rules and bonds when they became confinements, and the ‘classic’ and ‘correct’ (Albert 1936:132). Romanticism reflects so many different forms of expression so ‘as to defy any concise elucidation’. It does, however, display a ‘lasting enchantment with the Middle Ages’, its artists’ nationalist character disposing them to the history and folklore of their own countries. One of the most salient features of Romantic sensibility was a keen perception of the natural world, entailing an imaginative and emotional experience of profound personal experience (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 1974, s.v. ‘Visual Arts, Western’: 444-445).
All critics agree upon one Romantic trait: individualism. The power of the individual was pitted against ‘good taste’. The fundamental Romantic purpose was to capture and express all manner of experience of people, places and the ‘internal world of man’. (1974, s.v. ‘European Culture Since 1800:1068-1069).

Earlier, the old poets’ Romantic character was described as less impassioned than that of Hopkins. It seems clear that their renderings of experiences are too full and rich with heavy revelation for comparison with Hopkinsian hyperactivity. Mediaeval employment of alliterations displays the same permeating sobriety. The m’s and g’s below, (Beowulf I.710) set up a convincing atmosphere of menace, spelt out slowly, as it were, rather as if Old English discloses a disposition amongst the inhabitants to accept joy and grief with as little fuss as possible, to enjoy and to suffer in Platonic mode.

Hopkins on the other hand, through alliteration, creates songs of joy and elegy, recalling the sounds of life. The Anglo-Saxon tone comes across, perhaps, as redolent of wyrd, of no life after death, whereas Hopkins’s tone resounds with this hope and benediction. At only twenty years old he shows how well he knows himself: ‘I am coming to think much of…moderation, I who have sinned against… (it) so much’ (Gardner 1985:158). He is fully aware of his propensity for fun, and a tendency to become excited in the presence of God and nature. He was described by a fellow Jesuit as ‘a delightful companion, full of high spirits and innocent fun’ (Thomas 1969:127 n.6).

Hopkins writes like this: ‘But from the mountain glens in autumn late, adown the clattering gullies swept the rain’ (The Escorial), seemingly in memory of lines such as:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Da com of more} & & \text{under mist-hleo} & & \text{um} \\
\text{Grendel gongan,} & & \text{Godes yrre baer;} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\textit{(Beowulf II. 710-711)}
Then from the moor, under misty hills, Grendel came walking, marked with God’s anger;

or:

Hwaet! Ic swefna cyst  seegan wylle
hwaet me gemaet  to midre nihte,
syro an reordberend  reste wunedon.
Fuhte me Paet ic gesawe  sylicre treow
on lyft leaden  leohte bewunden,
beama beorhtost. Eall Paet beacen waes
begotten mid golde; gimmas stodon
faegere aet foldan sceatum;  swylce Paer fife
waeron
uppe on Paem eaxlegespanne.  Beheoldon Paer
engel Dryhtnes ealle,
faegere Purh forgesceaff. Ne waes Paer huru
fracodes gealga.

(The Dream of the Rood II. 1-11)

Behold! I wish to tell of the best of dreams that I dreamt at midnight, when voice-bearers were at rest.
It seemed to me that I saw an unusual tree raised up on high, wrapped in light, in the shining streams of the rays of light. The whole symbol was sprinkled with gold. Beautiful jewels studded its earthly anchorage; and there were also five, above, on the cross-beam.
All beheld there the angel of the Lord, preordainedly beautiful. This was no criminal’s gallows.

or:

reced hliuade
geap ond gold-fah;  gaest inne swaef
Paet hrefn blaca  heofones wynne
blit-heort bobode.  Da com beorht scacan…

(Beowulf II. 1800-1802)

The hall towered high, golden in darkness, the guest slept within till the black raven, the blithe-hearted, announced the dawn,
heaven’s joy. Then sunrise came....

After the smashing battles with Grendel, and then his mother, Beowulf rests in Hrothgar’s hall. The agony subsides and the fight is won, and peace returns in romantic imagery. When Hopkins’s life’s battles are hopefully won, all that is ‘seared with trade; blear’d, smeared with toil; and wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell’ shall be replaced with a better lot for men - with hope:

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –  
(God’s Grandeur)

So Hopkins can sometimes match the Romantic grasp of the old scops, but his urge does go head-over-heels, as in Starlight Night, where he exhibits consuming joie-de-vivre, in his alliterative style of Romantic indulgence. In that mood, he shares with Bridges his intense endeavour to put the ‘heavenly beauty’ of Collins’s Ode to Evening to music, with romantic excitement: ‘I groped in my soul’s very viscera for the tune and thrummed the sweetest and most secret catgut of the mind’ (Gardner 1961:198). One looks in vain for such intensity in Old English romanticisms and alliterations. Hopkins avoids the label of Victorian Romantic, always exhibiting his mediaeval Romantic side, as has been mentioned before.

Tractarians, it has been noted, gave prominence to the romantic symbolic which appealed to Hopkins as a mode of expression. The concept harks back to the Anglo-Saxons in many texts, making it a mind-path of very early writers and Christians. Aelfric’s Life of King Oswald tells of the immortal hand of the King. The latter and
Bishop Aidan sat down on the Holy Easter day to a silver tray of food, and the hungry poor start congregating outside. The King sends out the food, and all the hungry satisfactorily partake of it. The noble Bishop Aidan then consecrates Oswald’s hand, promising that it will never decay. When Oswald’s body is recovered after his battle with the Mercian King, Oswald’s hand is discovered preserved. The physical hand which had stood for everything good, wise, generous and valiant, remains forever physically uncorrupted, and symbolically immortalized (Sweet 1994:77-84).

Entrancing little riddles entertained scops, writers and audiences:

Mec on issum dagum deaden ofgeafun
faeder and modor: ne waes me feorh a gen,
ealdor innan. a mec(an) ongon
wel hold mege wedum eccan,
heold and freo ode, hleosceorpe wrah
swe arlice swa hire agen bearn,
o aet ic under sceate, swa min gesceapu waeron,
ungenibbun wear eacen gaeste.
Mec seo fri emaeg fedde si an,
o aet ic aweox, widdor meahte
si as assetan. Heo haefde swaesra y laes
suna and dohra y heo swa dyde.

Father and Mother abandoned me to deadness on this day; there was no life within me yet. Then a very gracious kinswoman, noble and protective covered me so kindly in a maternal robe, as her own child, until I, under covering which was my sheath, became unrelated - great spirit. She reared me so lovingly afterwards until I grew up and could set out on distant journeys. She had fewer beloved sons and daughters because she did so.

It is not difficult to see the symbolism here: the earlier poet is using different words
to symbolize a certain meaning, playing a guessing game with his audience. ‘I’ of course, am a cuckoo (Sweet 1994:170-171).

Lastly, symbolism in Old English is used in the ‘kennings’ (defined in the last chapter), most strikingly. ‘The swan’s road and ‘the gannet’s-bath’ are the sea, the ‘old dawn-flier’ is the dragon, horses are ‘apple-dark steeds’, ‘God’s candle’ is the moon, and ‘world-candle’ is the sun. Wounds are ‘feud-bites’, one’s ‘word-hoard’ is one’s vocabulary, and a ‘peace-weaver’ is a woman. Symbolism abounds in Old English.

Hopkins is obviously familiar with kennings: he describes a beach as a ‘weeded landslip’ (The Alchemist in the City). For him, the fear of the doomed is identified with the Anglo-Saxon dragon, it is ‘dragon food’ (Andromeda, Gardner 1985:45), and five Franciscan nuns perish in ‘endragoned seas’ in The Wreck of the Deutschland. He uses the Old English kenning ‘ban-huse’ (bone-house) - a physical body - in describing the poor ‘dare-gale’ skylark’s prison (The Caged Skylark). The symbolic is alive in the Hopkins poems too.

A work which expresses both concerns of the Victorian poet pertaining to his Tractarian education, and exhibiting Old English traces, is Andromeda. Andromeda is an Ethiopian princess, chained to a rock to appease the sea monster sent by Poseidon to devour man and beast. She has offered herself as sacrifice to save her people; she is ‘doomed dragon food’ (Gardner 1985:45). This beast ‘from west’ is more destructive than any other. On his way home after killing the Gorgon, Perseus comes across Andromeda. He kills the monster and marries the princess.

The poem is allegorical – Andromeda is the Christian Church beset with enemies, not the least of which is a dragon, or beast. ‘Time past she has been attempted and pursued
by many blows and banes' (ll. 5-6), and she is Christ's bride. Perseus is the watching, avenging Anglo-Saxon Christian God.

Are things what they seem at the start? Has the Princess, the Christian Church, been forsaken? Her patience belies this. Christ is there as Perseus, His action suspended: 'Pillowy air he treads a time and hangs His thoughts on her, forsaken that she seems,.' The ancient writer of *Beowulf* depicts Grendel as inverting God's words in the 'weapons are bespelled' incident, and Hopkins now inverts Satan's words from the *Fall of the Angels*. Satan calls for those among his fiends who will 'pass through this barrier... with feather-form' up to destroy God's beloved (l. 170). Hopkins has Christ treading the pillowy air, and then descending to save his beloved.

Perseus 'alight(s) disarming, no one dreams,'. According to legend he brandishes the Gorgon's head afterwards in a mighty sense of purpose and power-lust (*Mythology* 1959:203). He is Christ arriving quietly, or unexpectedly, and stunning everyone by His image. He appears in retaliatory fighter-form, using as a warrior's weapons and trappings the 'Gorgon's gear and barebill, thongs and fangs'. A 'bill' is Old English for a sword.

Grendel's mother's watery lair comes to mind. She is also an 'evil harmer of mankind', another water monster. Surely Hopkins has read how she has the upper hand in the fight of the bad against the good. *Beowulf* has his back against the wall, but the mighty Lord, the ruler of the skies, has always been in control of the fight.

Geseah a on searwum sige-eadig bil,
eald sweord eotenisc ecgum ytig,
wigena weor -mynd; aet [waes] waepna cyst...
god ond geatolic, giganta geweorc.
(ll. 1555-1560)
Saw I, says Beowulf, among the armour (on the wall), a victory-bright blade, old sword of the giants, with a sharp edge. An honour for its bearer; that was the most splendid of weapons...ornamented and burnished, from Weland’s smithy.

(part-Bradley translation).

God says in Isaiah he created the smith and the weapons. Whoever had the magic sword before Beowulf, or the Gorgon’s barebill before him, is irrelevant. According to Hopkins, and the purveyors of old beliefs, what is important is that the weapons bear the potential for being used honourably in the hands of the honourable, with God’s blessing. Hopkins’s vision of the returning Christ is as we’ve never seen or imagined Him - in his Old Testament robes and armed: a metamorphosis into His old form, the angry, punishing God, and He now will give evidence of His prowess at managing His weapons of war, in their ultimate concept.

The Tractarian in Hopkins is a co-incidence of the Anglo-Saxon adoration of nature and the fighting spirit which was part of Anglo-Saxon being. The combats were usually physical, whilst Tractarianism fought succinctly, defiedly and purposefully with the pen. Both fought for God. King Alfred certainly did, and so did Beowulf and King Oswald – they believed they fought for the good. The religious context for Anglo-Saxon Christians was the original, undivided Church, and the context is same for the Tractarians and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.
Chapter 5. The Ignatian.

This life, though it is hard, is God's will for me as I most intimately know, which is more than violets knee-deep. (Letter to Baillie: Gardner 1961:xxv)

My intention is to discuss briefly how, and to what extent, Hopkins's life and works were influenced by his choice of an exacting and severe religious persuasion. The Anglo-Saxon link is suggested where relevant. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) was a military leader who founded the order of the Society of Jesus, which comprises the intellectual complement of the priesthood. Hopkins's inclination towards this order coincides with his including the past in the celebration of his life, and a burgeoning fascination with the concept of 'sacrifice'. Basically, a choice for The Society of Jesus comprises promises of chastity, poverty and obedience, to the deliberate sacrifice of personal ambition, for the whole priesthood.

The Ignatian vision stresses 'a Triune God of action', with the central figure as Christ, the Incarnate (Downes 1990:54). Loyola's disciples still formed an army, under battle orders to fight evil, and his Exercises were designed to replenish exhausted soldiers, a practice of mental or meditative prayer. Under the banner of Christ, the battle of life is fought, valiantly, honourably and obediently. Christ, through his sacrifice, resurrection and indwelling presence, makes victory certain. This is the teaching of Loyola, of the Church Militant.

Ignatian influence is evident in Hopkins's poems. Christ is 'Mid-numbered He in three of the thunder-throne!' (The Wreck of the Deutschland, st.34). When the poet found
Scotus's work, its content fused comfortably with Jesuit beliefs. In Scotus, Hopkins found a focus on 'selfness, Christness and connection', Downes explains. Every individual entity of a species derives its identity directly from God without intermediate principles of individuation – Hopkins was able to align his 'inscapes' of things as unique beings with this. Another relevant Scotian notion is to concentrate on God's first intention in Creation, which is the Incarnation.

This means that the universe and humankind share in their individualities the prototypical individuality of Christ, the perfect expression of God (1990:20). Christ is in creation antecedent to all created things. It follows that by seeing deeply into the particular aspect of an individual thing or person, one comes into contact with Christ: 'In a flash, at a trumpet crash, I am all at once what Christ is...' (That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection)

According to Downes, all who answer Christ's call experience the utmost joy, and no-one has written a better expression of what Loyola meant by this than Hopkins did in the above poem, where what is attained 'in powerfully dramatic fashion is the Apocalyptic destiny in Ignatian Christian spirituality of electing Christ as King of one's heart' (1990:93).

In Hopkins's terms then, the 'instress' of every existing thing is some existential mode of the Incarnation, and the 'inscape' of every existing thing is some expressive mode of it. Therefore all perception and knowledge are insights into the Incarnation. Christ is the Divine Inscape to be instressed in all Creation in order to differentiate mortal from immortal beauty. It was St. Ignatius who provided Hopkins with enhanced methods of finding the Christ-scapes in experience, through the Exercises.
The affinity the Ignatian character has with that of the Anglo-Saxon is obvious — a determined fight to the death. Beowulf on his deathbed, having been mortally wounded by the dragon, says, ‘deab ði sella eorla gehwylcum onne edwit-lif’ (death is better for any warrior than a shameful life [ll. 2890-2891]). In Hopkins’s poem The Soldier, the speaker announces ‘Mark Christ our King. He knows war, served this soldiering through’. Christ endorses this: ‘Were I come o’er again’ he insists, ‘it should be this’.

Hopkins’s first concern of man as protector - a prime attribute of the Anglo-Saxon warrior’s make-up, is given another glance. He moved a motion that ‘Eminence in arms is a better object of national ambition than eminence in commerce’, during a session of the St. Bueno’s Debating Club on 27 December 1874. Another factor suggestive of a heroic personality is that Hopkins’s decision to join the Jesuits would involve a certain amount of courage, for the Order was intensely disliked, and even illegal, in England at the time (van Oortmerssen 1982:117). The resolve to the move entailed genuine and not would-be courage. After thoroughly investigating the Jesuit credentials, Hopkins entered his noviciate at Manresa College in 1868, and for twenty-one years remained faithful to the Jesuit Order.

Downes elucidates that the ‘Spiritual Exercises’ is a manual which steers the student toward using Christian aesthetic experience specifically as a conduit towards a free decision about the best way to love and serve God. Transcendent experience leads to a personal relationship with Him - in other words, God directs the ponderer’s will (1990:56). This is profound because to all intents and purposes, man will be judged on his choices, what he did on a certain day about a certain problem. Whilst Christ says to man’s compeers ‘judge not’, for only He knows the context of the choice, the Ignatian
man takes no chances, and has found a way for God to make his choices for him.

For Downes, Hopkins is so deeply immersed in the Ignatian ideal that he cannot be fully read without taking the Exercises into account. The Ignatian man has a keen awareness of the grandeur of God’s works and ways and is so overtaken by His greatness that he freely dedicates himself to the Almighty will, trying his best to live his life according to it. He is a sensuous man, a disciple who has not withdrawn from the world, but who plunges into it, overwhelmed by the beauty of things because they are manifestations of God – ‘news of God’, as Hopkins puts it. His heroic personality and his Tractarian and Anglo-Saxon make-up are thus connected.

In Beowulf, Hrothgar’s situation, deep into the old times, blends in with the Ignatian psyche. This king’s society and possessions were virtually lost to the evil one, and Beowulf came from afar to fight for him. Loyola’s means of refreshing his embattled soldiers via his Exercises, where calm and rest provide the means of a regular fresh look-out, find parallel when Hrothgar, Beowulf and their warriors sleep a strength-giving few hours before the battles with Grendel, and then with his mother. Afterwards, too, healthy rest is taken.

Among the verbal pebbles of Hopkins’s fragment, Moonrise, there are also traces of an Ignatian psyche. When he ‘awoke in the Midsummer not to call night, in the white and walk of the morning’, Hopkins had obviously had a refreshing night’s sleep, and felt blessed to awake to a new day, and revisit his beloved with fresh vigour.

Gardner states that the supreme ideal of the Ignatian discipline is Sacrifice. He finds that full force of the impact of this ideal upon Hopkins is revealed in three poems: The Windhover, The Soldier and In Honour of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez (1961:xxv). In the
first poem, the bird’s ‘heroic graces and beautifully disciplined physical activity’ is transmuted spiritually in Christ’s willing sacrifice (1961:221). The Soldier gives the sacrifice a heroic flavour, from Christ’s own lips. Ignatian concepts find a ‘wider application’ in the third poem, written in 1888, when a state of submission might have to be achieved through an inward fighting spirit, ‘unseen...in heroic breast’. The nature of the battle, ‘the brand we wield’ is the same against ‘the war within’, as it was formerly when honour gained by ‘those strokes once that gashed flesh or galled shield’ (1961:66-67).

The Ignatian understanding of ‘sacrifice’ is akin to that of the Anglo-Saxon ideal. For Hopkins, Christ is ‘hero of Calvary’ (The Wreck of the Deutschland stanza 8). The ancient warlock had two ideas in mind as he strode through the precious middangeard: to live his life in the hopes that he had fought and provided for his loved ones, and that he would be remembered favourably after his departure. The Ignatian man must fight, and provide a good name which others might wish to emulate, thus continuing the Jesuit Order. What is anathema to both parties, is passive resistance – its counterpart is called for.

In the poem from antiquity The Dream of the Rood the Saviour is seen in Anglo-Saxon hue, where there is no hint of passive standing about and waiting to be martyred and nailed to His cross. The cross, or rood, is speaking:

Geseah ic
a Frean mancynnes
efstan elne mycle   aet he me wolde on gestigan.
(l. 34)

I saw the Lord of mankind hurry with great courage
in order to mount me.

Evidence shows that ‘sacrifice’ had occupied Hopkins’s mind for a long time. Towards the end of his life he said that he believed he could, and should, write a treatise on the subject (Gardner 1961:xxvii). I believe he was concerned with an Anglo-Saxon variation on the theme: to sacrifice something is sometimes the easy way out, and is not the thing to be done. The ‘maudlin’ has to be eradicated from the reckoning, sacrifice must always be in the company of bravery at the start, and must bring peace at its end, totally free of self-pity. Gardner finds this very sense of ‘sacrifice’ in Hopkins himself. Dixon’s description of his poems as ‘terrible pathos’, ‘does not quite hit the centre...there is, from *The Deutschland* to the last sonnet, more of heroic acceptance than self-pity...’ (1961:xxx).

Lichtmann holds the opinion that the Ignatian *Exercises* were not beneficial for Hopkins. She believes that his descent into depression began with the ‘emphasis on self-observation and examination of conscience essential to the *Exercises*’ (1989:157). He admits to a fear of madness, in 1888, when he meditates. However, Hopkins’s ‘depression’ should not be too casually labeled as commonplace psychological depression. As this work is trying to point out, Hopkins’s mental lack of peace is worlds away from an inmate’s in a Mental Home, unable to come to grips with either himself, or his world. One could examine the poet’s meaning when he calls Despair a ‘Carrion Comfort’ in the poem of that name.

A sense of victory is in place during the recounting of melancholy’s insidious tentacles as ‘carrion comfort’. The terrible distress Hopkins manages to portray in this sonnet is, first of all, a ‘now done darkness’: he has overcome it. He has not feasted on
the ‘comforts’ of Despair, which are the lure of a death-wish, a loss of anchor of the last shreds of hope or manhood - a giving up, in other words. The comforts of ‘not-being’ in this context crawl with maggots which feed on death, he says. ‘Not, I’ll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;’ Hopkins writes this poem after he has achieved victory over desired ‘peaceful’ death, and loathsome-looking Despair. What he can do, he decides, is wait for day to come.

Another time, whilst enjoying time at Loch Lomond and observing a ‘peaty, brown burn’ named Inversnaid tumbling into the lake, Hopkins describes a small whirlpool which ‘rounds and rounds Despair to drowning’ (Inversnaid). Despair has been defeated once more, and his being has again satisfactorily settled into a peaceful and accepting mode. So whether or not he had sensations of impending madness when he meditated, Hopkins’s depression had more to do with other factors, principally his sadness, his ‘world-sorrow’ (poem no. 42), and was always under control.

The Exercises may be seen to save him in the Carrion Comfort poem, when he recognizes the need for a few hours’ rest. This was afforded by a quiet watch for dawn, and the new day. Also, the Ignatian ideal of sacrifice would not permit suicide, the call to sacrifice is contrary to this action. Victory from this sonnet written probably in 1885, which Hopkins described to Bridges as having been ‘written in blood’ (Gardner 1985:233), and the new dawn he waited for, bore fruit. In 1888 he was immortalizing St. Alphonsus, rejoicing, and giving ideas about triumph over ‘the war within’. His suffering, mental and physical, did not seriously, or permanently, affect his fighting, solicitous intellect, and whether or not he managed to defend and help poor ‘dear and dogged man’ (Ribblesdale), that was his intention, and he stuck to it. Walhout describes
how he stuck to his tasks and promises most excellently (1981:115). Van Oortmerssen points out Hopkins’s frustration with his failures, and says that ‘his virile, militant spirit was to make impossible demands on his delicate constitution’ (1982:145).

Finally, a convincing assessment of the impact of Hopkins’s poetics, born from his religion, and affinity for the spirit of endurance and staying-power he found in the Anglo-Saxon being, is made by Herbert Marshall McLuhan. His essay *The Analogical Mirrors* deals with the ‘undemanded vigilance and depreciation’ of Hopkins’s poems by readers unsympathetic with his religious views, because they are understandably timid or hostile in the presence of his faith and doctrine. These attitudes lead to distortion of the patterns and texture of the poems by many. Catholic readers, on the other hand, he says, have developed ‘mental squints’. They distrust intellectually the ‘emotional chaos of Shelley or Browning’, but acclaim their vision. Then they hail as ‘Catholic poetry the febrile immaturities of Francis Thompson and Joyce Kilmer’. No Catholic magazine would recognize Hopkins in his lifetime, and only adopted him as their ‘big gun on the literary front’ after Bloomsbury’s sudden acclaim of him as a major poet.

McLuhan develops his ideas about Hopkins’s status as an analogist rather than as a nature or religious mystic. He deals with *The Windhover* in this respect convincingly, and finally casts the poem in a tremendously superior light, arguing that even Shakespeare’s and Donne’s finest sonnets cannot rank with *The Windhover* in the ‘range of experience and multiplicity of integrated perception’ found there (1990:84).

He makes this remark about Hopkins’s Anglo-Saxon bearing. The Catholic assumes proprietorship of Hopkins on purely doctrinal strength, which the professors of Anglo-Saxon might do just as equally were it not for their ‘insentience or modesty’. Another
reason, he adds, which might have prevented them from staking out an exclusive claim
on the poet though... is their failure to recognize that his work ‘is almost the sole
civilized fruit of their brain-starved plodding’ (1990:80-88). Professor McLuhan
therefore believes that those who study Old English and its time in history, are neglecting
one of its crucial aspects: the fact of its development and continuity. It lives on, he
says, unacknowledged - in the poetry of G.M. Hopkins, quite clearly.
Chapter 6. The Anglo-Saxon.

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

(Heaven Haven, ll.1-4)

This final section deals further with the various techniques and strategies observable in the Old English and the Hopkins poems. Other linkages that show up are explored, such as a predilection for certain words and meanings, and the subjunctive mood. A common bond is suggested between Hopkins and an old singer concerning a love for the wintertime. The conceptions 'bravery' and 'meaning' are again briefly encountered and inspected.

Compound words and 'kennings' have been mentioned before, and the difference between these devices is that a compound word has pure metaphorical relation to the object. For instance, where 'ban-hus' is a compound with real relation to the 'body', the kenning 'swanrad', the swan's road (the sea), does not have this relation (Kossick & Saycell 1991:12). Hopkins describes clouds in That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire in kenning terms: 'heaven-roysterers', and also in these terms are the clouds in Hurrahing in the Harvest: they are 'wind walks'. He also uses compounds, such as 'yestertempest's creases' for the marks made by former storms on the earth's surface. His purpose in the kenning mode of description is that of Old English poetry – to enhance and deepen impact.

Kossick points out the use of appellation and epithet in Old English which can denote love and concern for protagonists, or the hatred of invaders and others (1991:278-279).
The devil, for example, is known as a ‘dark death-shadow’, and Hopkins will personify despair and rage into epithets: ‘Hangdog dull’ and ‘Manwolf’ (Tom’s Garland), and Christ is his ‘chevalier’ in The Windhover. His names for Christ in The Wreck are ‘the hero of Calvary’ and ‘the Life that died’, distinct mediaeval designations.

One finds Old English alliteration used profusely in the Hopkins poems. The technicalities of this type of alliteration have been discussed, but Anglo-Saxon echoes in his descriptions bear singling out ‘...beak-leaved boughs dragonish...’ and, ‘...dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon...’ are among the multitudes of Hopkinsian alliterations, which startle a reader into new understanding, inspiration and interest. The den of Grendel’s mother, that ‘towering mere-wife’ and ‘witch of the sea-floor’ is evoked in phrases like ‘dreadful frothpits, waterfearers wild’ (St. Winefred’s Well), and ‘blood-gush blade-gash’ (The Woodlark). The Victorian poet and the vanished one use alliteration to elicit the song-form of sound in nature to capture and embellish their experience. Hopkins harkens to the nature-song: ‘teev o cheev o cheevio chee...weedio-weedio’, indicating his obsession with alliteration which is the sound and song of nature.

He and the old bard know this together. If you say ‘aep pel fealuwe mearas’ (apple-dark steeds) aloud, you will hear the sound of a horse galloping, and from lines quoted previously, ‘Da com of more under mist-hleo um Grendel gongan, Godes yrre baer’, the alliterative ‘m’s and ‘g’s are ominous with Grendel’s walking and coming. Van Oortmerssen remarks on the ‘poetical music’ afforded by the alliteration in the little poem, Inversnaid (1982:356).

A strain of assuagement can be discerned in the Victorian poet’s use of alliteration – ‘...piecemeal peace is poor peace’ lessens hardship somewhat, the
tattered peace remains more valuable than if Hopkins had simply told of his depression without the song. There are strains of ‘pence’ coming through, and faint further meaning is the sight of a small piece of bread in the grimy hand of hunger. The alliteration has provided all of this (Peace).

Hopkins appears to be fond of particular words used with special meaning by the poets of yesterday:

No harp-joy
play of song-wood... no good hawk
swings (swing) through the hall, nor the swift roan
stamps in the courtyard. An evil death
has swept away many living men.
(Beowulf II. 2264-2266)

He loves the verb ‘swings’, and his Windhover is a kestrel or small hawk which flies ‘off forth on a swing’. When the child in The Handsome Heart gives his ‘gracious answer’, he ‘swung to his first poised purport of reply’, and Tom of Tom’s Garland ‘swings’ ‘lustily’ through ‘his low lot’. Hopkins observes to Bridges how the labourers have finished their toil, and yet ‘swing off home... to supper and bed’, their strength yet prodigious (Gardner 1961:235). The crutches which the pilgrims at St. Winefred’s Well ‘swung’ on, are a means of allowing movement to the cripples. The poet calls to the city-folk to ‘Come, swing the sculls on Penmaen Pool’, and he reminds us that it is not primarily God in the tragedy of The Wreck of the Deutschland who ‘swings the stroke dealt’. The word for Hopkins denotes power, the power the good hawk has as he swings through the feasting-hall early in the morning, impatient to be off with the kinsmen on a hunt.
In Old English literature and speaking terms, a clear distinction is made between the world of supposition and the world of fact, and the subjunctive mood expresses this distinction where doubt, fear, desire and other not quite factual situations in the experience of humankind are involved (Davis 1964:39). Fowler explains that the subjunctive is moribund now, for the indicative and other moods supply any need we might have when referring to a fact or a fantasy. Hopkins uses this old mood on many occasions perhaps because he senses that when we lose track of our past, we are actually lost: lost to self—adrift in a bewildering sea of relativism. What was always the stuff of horror to him was that his individuality be compromised. Instances abound in his poetry of his use of the subjunctive:

Let them be left...  
(Earth) that canst but only be...  
...do what you may do...

Why? That my chaff might fly...  
No lingering! Let me be fell...  
But be the war within...

What sights shall be...

And, Poverty, be thou the bride...

Be adored among men, God...

God rest him...

That canst but only be...

Be thou then, O thou dear Mother...

Now be my pride then perfect...

4th verse Inversnайд
1st verse Ribblesdale
line 11: The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo
1st verse Carrion Comfort
2nd verse Carrion Comfort
2nd verse St. Alphonsus Rodrigues
St. Winefred's Well (page 77)
The Habit of perfection
The Wreck
Felix Randal
1st verse Ribbesdale
The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Earth we Breathe (page 57)
St. Winefred's Well (page 75)
(Gardner 1961)

Two facets in the Anglo-Saxon spirit of the Victorian poet can be discerned: elegiac and martial modes. Old English poems speak of the physical and mental anguish sufferers endure when the camaraderie of the meadhall and the battlefield is gone. Some speakers have merely grown old and are looking back at their youth and long-
departed loved ones, others have chosen exile from the beloved as a sacrifice to God, to
be forevermore among strangers in a strange land. Their pathway thereto is the sea, their
‘high-road’, or ‘whale’s-road’. Other wanderers who experience desolation are those
who roam searching for a new Lord to serve, perhaps their former retainer’s castle and
possessions have been overtaken by invaders.

Christianity was in transition at this time, and whilst there were many who already
believed, their faith was pocketed with trappings from the old times, and there were those
who remained pagans. The ‘Seafarer’ poet will say in one breath ‘Wyrd bi swi re,
meotud meahtigra...’ (Fate is stronger, God is mightier... [ll.115-116]), whilst for the
remnant pagans, the true comitatus spirit still prevailed, where immortality is *lof*, that
fame which a man wins by bravery in battle, and which lives after him. The pagan’s
game is his ‘long-home’. The Christians are spiritual exiles too, as sons of Adam, but
their lot is, of course, only temporary.

Hopkins, through his words in the quotation above from *Heaven-Haven*, might be
remembering content from *The Wanderer* ‘...nor an onsende hreo haeglfare haele um
on andan’ (from the north drives a fierce hailstorm, to men in vexation [ll.104-105]).
And he seems to understand the Seafarer’s report that ‘Nap nihtscua, nor an sniwe,
hrim hrusan bond, haegl feol on eor an, corna caldast’ (Nightshades darkened, northern
snows bound the earth with ice, hail fell on the ground, coldest of corns [ll. 31-33]). His
elegies are in line with Old English elegies such as these laments, for just as they end on
a note of Christian hope, so do Hopkins’s. He is happy with a ‘piecemeal peace’ despite
that when she comes she is always laden with stuff to brood on: the world’s troubles and
his seeming ineffectiveness. She is never ‘pure’, but God sends Patience to help him
cope with this \textit{(Peace)}.

In the sonnet which begins `My own heart let me more have pity on;' he decides to be kinder to his `sad self hereafter', more charitable, to entertain other thoughts in his tormented mind. Come on self, poor jaded jackself, give `Comfort root-room;' he encourages, enjoy the `size' and entity of the happiness God gives. There are huge smiles of His, behind mountains maybe, `betweenpie mountains', but they are there, look for them!

Days are slipping away, fears the sad scop, reliving the old words passed down, and all the pomps of the earthly kingdom have vanished too:

There are now no kings, no gold-givers as of yore, when the greatest among them performed glorious deeds and lived on lordly renown.

\textit{(The Seafarer II. 80-85)}

But let us remember that God is mightier than any man's thought. Let us think where our home is and then let us think how we can get there.

\textit{(116-118)}

An old singer bemoans \textit{wyrd} again. It is destiny, it is fate that:

property is transitory here, a friend is transitory here, man is transitory here, a kinsman is transitory here, all this world's framework becomes desolate. So said the wise in spirit, sitting apart in secret. Good is he who keeps faith, counters the poet, who never grieves too quickly, who never makes known his heart unless he know beforehand how to remedy it, to act with courage as a man. Well are those who are seeking mercy, solace from Father in heaven, where all of our stability resides.

\textit{(The Wanderer II. 106-116.)}

On the `martial' front a little has already been said in the `Ignatian' chapter, with
Hopkins’s inevitable return always to his Christian ethos, and the two poems *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and *The Soldier* were taken for example. These Christian poems find a parallel with a slice of the heroic ethos in *Beowulf*, where both outcomes of valour, the victorious and the tragic, are plain. Hrothgar, King of the Scyldings’ kingdom has been marauded for twelve years by the human beast, Grendel, and now the good and valiant king ‘sat silent in grief, the strong man suffered his loss of thanes’. It was a great torture, his spirit was breaking and all the plans of the wise men helped them but little. He tells Beowulf of his shame at his impotence. The tall Geat leader delivers the Scyldings from the evil, and some see in him the image of Christ in answer to Hrothgar’s prayers. The latter says ‘Holy God in the fullness of mercy has sent him to us’, and there are Biblical echoes in the text, for example in line 1600: ‘Then came the ninth hour of the day’.

Hopkins’s manhood (he is the speaker) is sorely battered in the sixteenth stanza of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. What could the sailor, ‘handy and brave’ with ‘his dreadnought breast and braids of thaw’ do against ‘the burl of the fountains of air, buck and the flood of the wave”? ‘He was pitched to his death at a blow’ in the ‘black-about air’, and the dames were drowned ‘at our door’ and ‘among our shoals’. Years later, in 1885, Hopkins penned Christ’s outstretched, loving hand to the soldier who He saw had done all he could humanly do, in the soldier poem. He allows the trooper to fall ‘on his neck’ and He kisses him, saying that were He to come again, it would be as a fighter. He had fought before, and seen it through to the death. Norman White notes that for Hopkins, Christ is hero, warrior and conqueror (1992:408:16).

The poet again appears to be familiar with ‘Eardsta a’, the ancient poem; *The Wanderer*. After use of the ‘ubi sunt’; the ‘where are’ motif, which imparts much
desolation and loneliness as emanating from the old speaker, the latter continues:

Stonde nu on laste leofre dugue
weal wundrum heah wyrmlicum fah.
Eorlas fornoman ascary c,
waepeon waelgifru, wyrd seo maere...
(ll. 97-100)

Standing now in the tracks of the dear body of mature men,
is a wall wonderfully high, decorated with serpent shapes.
The might of the ash-spears, weapons greedy for
slaughter, have destroyed the men – notorious fate.

The wall of desolation, where Hope is non-existent, is a poignant moment from the heroic
history of paganism, and can be compared with Hopkins’s wall in stanza 4 of The
Wreck of the Deutschland. He is ‘soft sif in an hourglass - at the wall Fast’, just as
vulnerable as the fallen heroes of yore, but he has a connection: ‘a vein’, which is the
hope of the resurrection, ‘Christ’s gift’. The old scop’s dirge, singing of the lonely days
of the wanderer, also ends on a note of hope, for he too is a Christian.

Both the Seafarer and Hopkins have contempt for towns. In a letter to Bridges, Hopkins
says ‘what a slavery of mind’ concerning life in towns, and the Seafarer warns city-folk
about complacency and selfishness: ‘for on him gelyfelyt, se een lifes wyn gebiden
in burgum, bealosi a hwon, wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werg oft in brimlade bidan
sceolde’ (ll. 27-30) : he who has tasted life’s happiness in towns, flushed with wine, safe
from such frightful wanderings, can little know how often I chose to remain, wearily, in
the sea’s course (ll. 25-30).

The wintertime is a contingency playing a part in the amalgamation of the heroic ethos
and Hopkins’s mentality. In the poem, To R.B., loaded with alliteration, the poet
speaks of a ‘winter world’ which is his lot. Martin (1991), spends one chapter entitled ‘My Winter World’, missing I feel, what Hopkins meant by his winter world. Firstly, he misses the clear love Hopkins has for his world, which has been cold at times, but which he always cherished in its coldness, and he misses that Hopkins is saying goodbye to it, that, difficult though it is, it is all he has, and at times it was splendid. He asks for a last burst of creative power, a mental ‘live and lancing spur’, for he has a feeling, perhaps deeper than consciousness, that he has not long to live. Indeed, he died about five weeks later. The poet had described the indwelling love of Christ as ‘lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm...’ *(The Wreck of the Deutschland).*

One should know the extent of Hopkins’s love for the wintertime; its beauty was matchless for him. ‘I never saw her so divine’ was his comment whilst gazing at *Winter with the Gulf Stream*, and casting his artist’s and musician’s senses on it. In Anglo-Saxon poetry the winter is mentioned usually as a timespan; ‘six winters passed’, or, ‘the space of twelve winters’. In *The Wanderer*, the exile laments ‘I went abject from there, wintry-hearted, over the waves’ expanse’ (l. 24), and this is like Hopkins’s condition. ‘Wintry-hearted’ does not mean all hope is lost, rather, for both the teller of the wanderer’s tale and the Victorian poet, implicit in the woe is release and hope. Both are suffering on purpose for the love of God. One could keep in mind here that the Ignatian way is the desolation path, not the consolation one – the former is the elevated state of soul (Salmon 1990:25). The winter has its place: ‘indeed, no man becomes wise until he has undergone his winter’s portion in the world’, says the Wanderer (ll. 64-65).

Hopkins writes to Bridges eight months before he died (October, 1888), that he had handed in his ‘last batch of examination-work’ for the term, ‘and if all were seen, fallen
leaves of my poor life between all the leaves of it'. But this is merely a winter frame of mind, he is not depressed - he is fired with Anglo-Saxon energy the next moment. If I had a piano, I would 'prance on ivories' this afternoon, he tells his friend. He then becomes 'picky' about his eyesight and his new glasses, for he loves the body God gave him, albeit that it was short and fragile. 'The occulist says my sight is very good and my eye perfectly healthy...' (Gardner 1961:210).

This 'winter' issue has further dimensions. In The Fall of the Angels, Satan, in a magnificent portrayal reminiscent of Milton's, has been cast down to hell and is lying, bound, suffering 'misery and injury in this hell'. 'Is es aenga sryde ungelic swete am o rum e we aer cu on, hean on heofonrice, e me min Hearra onlag'; (this is a narrow place that God grants me, so unlike the other that we knew high in Heaven (ll. 111-113)). He goes on to exclaim:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wala! Ahte ic minra handa geweald,} \\
\text{and moste ane tid uete weor an,} \\
\text{wesan ane winterstunde, onne ic mid ys werode} \\
\text{ac licga me ymbe...} \\
\text{(ll. 123-126)}
\end{align*}
\]

Alas! If I but had it in my power to be outside for one hour, for one winter's hour, rather than to be lying around with this troop...

'One winter's hour' is more than a timespan, there is more meaning than that in this case. That Satan is talking about his hot hell and how nice it would be to get some coldness about him, is perfunctory - his despair is deeper. He loved his heavenly kingdom to distraction, this is evident in the text, and above all he loved the winter time, and to be outdoors. The outdoors is essentially wide, its keen pleasures never ending,
whereas his place now is a ‘narrow’ one. One winter’s hour for him, is full of longing for the things he has lost forever, but can never forget. That one winter’s hour, if he could but have it, would satisfy him for the future, enable him to continue his work of destruction, and endear all his fiends to him, it would allow him to affirm the decisions he has made. He could then put away all the good he has known, and set to the task ahead. This is the profundity of the love he has borne for winter and to be outside and free. The wintertime with its snow, ice, cold and arbitrary character, is indicative of a blurring of margins and boundaries, it is a respite from the stress of adhering to choices made. I think Satan and Hopkins shared a fellowship about wintertime.

Perhaps evidence for G.M. Hopkins having read The Fall of the Angels (besides Milton’s Paradise Lost) is to be found in his fragment which starts with “The shepherd’s brow...”. He says: ‘Angels fall, they are towers, from heaven – a story of just, majestical, and giant groans’. The ancient poet has it that ‘feollon a ufon of heofnum urh [swa] longe swa reo niht and dagas a englas of heofnum on helle...’ (then the angels of heaven fell from above, from heaven, for three long nights and days, into hell...’ [ll. 60-63]). Hopkins’s word ‘giant’ belongs deep into the old times.

In the Old Saxon original poem mentioned above the speaker is on the same track as the speaker in That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and the Comfort of the Resurrection. Both are in anticipation of a journey. ‘Cloud puff-ball, torn tufts, tossed pillows flaunt forth, then chevy on an air-built thoroughfare...', implies goings to and comings from, and implicit in ‘thoroughfare’ is connotation of a choice to be made. Hopkins’s journey will take him to meet Christ in the Eucharist, having answered His call. The purpose of Satan’s journey is clear, for him it is a matter of:
...gif his gien wolde
minra egn hwilc ge afa wur an,
aet he up heonon ute mihte
cumin urh as clustro, and haefde craeft mid him
aet he mid fe erhoman fleogan meahte,
windan on wolcne, aer geworht stonda
Adam and Eve on eor rice
mid welan bewunden...

(ll. 168-175)

Yet, if he would agree to serve me, to consent to pass through the barrier up from here to outside, and have power with him to be tossed in the clouds with featherform coat, to where Adam and Eve live with riches...

Hopkins has surely scrutinized the face of evil, examined its character and essences of darkness, despair and death. He seems to have experienced the worst demons of the human condition, in a fallen, chaotic, out-of-harmony world, at first-hand. He has what can be called an Anglo-Saxon respect for the depths and strength of these forces, and has learnt to live side-by-side with them. His experiences resulted in his setting great value on human life, its loss was always grief to him. Hence his Anglo-Saxon predisposition to fight for it.

His observation in Moonrise (1876) about the moon is that she first whitened the dawn with her brilliance. Her full, young beauty woke him and tempted him to the glories of the outside. But he remained sleepy, it was not the crowning experience for him. This occurred when she dipped behind the mountain, and then her changed being and form became ‘the prized, the desirable sight’. She was the shape of an eyelash with hooks and cusps at her ends, and she was no longer youthfully splendid, but waning – glowing and mature.

The fingernail-shaving form of the moon pushed the poet into full wakefulness and
consciousness by her refusal to descend into the grave of the dark mountain, to be extinguished by that form. She held on to life by her hooks and claws, keeping death at bay. This bravery was what Hopkins revelled in at the sight of the lovely moon as she ‘drew back from the barrow, of dark Maenefa the mountain’.

We know a barrow as concave, but Hopkins is using the word as ‘outward bulging’, as the Anglo-Saxons did. A grave was a ‘barrow’ (biorh), and for Hopkins, the dark mountain is a grave wherein the dead moon is going – into oblivion. His words can easily be construed as depicting something sinister, and riddled with a nameless fear. The moon has ‘stepped from the stool’, the process of her destruction is in motion, she is heading for her tomb, dark Maenefa’s form.

But the poet is offering none of these morbid things, he is not wallowing in the sight of an elimination, a restfulness of not-being. The moon’s fighting for life is his very benediction, first and foremost. His Tractarian, Ignatian and Anglo-Saxon psyches all come home in this poem. Just as after the fight with the dragon, ‘Beowulfes biorh’ is no place of unhappiness either.

‘... ne maeg ic her leng wesan.  
Hata hea o-maere hlaew gewyrcean,  
beorhtne æfter bæłe æt brimes nosan;  
se sceal to gemyndum minum leodum  
heah hlifian on Hrones-naesse,  
aet hit sae-li end sy an hatan  
Beowulfes biorh, æ e brentingas  
Ofer floda genipu feorran drifa’  
(Ill. 2801-2808)

‘... I must remain here no longer.  
After the pyre, order a bright mound, made by the brave at the sea’s shore; let it rise high on Whale’s Cliff, a memorial to my people, that ever after sailors will call it “Beowulf’s barrow”
when the steep ships move out on the sea,  
on the darkness of waters, from the lands far away.

Hopkins’s fighting power is always unyielding behind his dejection, always quick, like  
the departed poets’, and like that of the vanished, long-gone kinsmen’s. If the Victorian  
poet had never read these old texts, then it can only be that some deep instinct born of  
a shared faith, binds the writers’ spirits – ancient, Victorian and immortal or enduring –  
together.

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LIST OF SOURCES:


Harmondsworth: Penguin.


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N.B. Two editions of Gardner have been used.