THE METHOD OF IGNATIUS
IN THE POETRY OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

by

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PART ONE

THE METHOD OF IGNATIUS

NOTE ON THE USE OF THE WORD COLLOQUY

The word "colloquy," which appears frequently in various contexts throughout this thesis, is a term common to religious meditation, especially in the Ignatian tradition. Normally, the word means "a talking together; a dialogue; converse." (cf. Shorter Oxford English Dictionary) However, Ignatius used the term specifically to refer to the last stages of meditation, when the exercitant speaks to God on a special level of awareness. He explained: "The colloquy is made properly by speaking as one friend speaks to another, or as a servant speaks to a master, now asking some favour, now accusing oneself for some wrong deed, or again, making known his affairs to Him and seeking His advice concerning them." (cf. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 56) One of the objectives of this thesis is to extend this meaning yet further by making the term applicable to poetry which affects the tone of the colloquy, i.e., when the poet turns his attention away from himself to either God or the collective audience in the manner suggested by Ignatius. It is, I believe, an essential shift of tone common to poetry in the meditative vein.

CHAPTER ONE

I

THE ART OF MEDITATION

> "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul."
>
> St. Ignatius

> "... be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."
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> Ephesians 5:18-19

> "God has not placed you in this world because He had need of you, for you are altogether unprofitable to Him, but only to exercise His goodness in you by giving you His grace and glory. To this end He has given you an understanding to know Him, a memory to be mindful of Him, a will to love Him, and imagination to represent His benefits to yourself, eyes to behold His wonderful works, a tongue to praise Him, and so of the other faculties."
>
> St. François de Sales

THE OBJECT of any disciplined religious meditation, whether taking the form of private prayer or more uniquely, poetry, is the same: to know God and to praise him. The quotations from Ignatius and de Sales which I have offered above are, by way of spirit, central to the famous devotional handbooks from which they are taken, the Spiritual Exercises of 1535 and the Introduction to the Devout Life of 1608.[1]

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1. St. Ignatius Loyola, The Spiritual Exercises, trans. by Anthony Mottola, with an Introduction by Robert W. Gleason, S.J. (New York: Doubleday, 1964) and St. François de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, trans. John K. Ryan (London: Longmans, 1953).

Before turning to the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins in the light of the Ignatian meditative tradition, let me make the assumptions upon which this tradition rests perfectly clear.

Essentially, life is regarded as a contest by Ignatius and his followers. The opposing forces of Good and Evil (God and Satan) clash in the daily spiritual life of the soul. The metaphor of the battlefield is central to our understanding of this struggle and the place for meditation. The boon for the successful contestant or soldier, if you will, is eternal life, most basically. But if one should lose in this great battle, the punishment of eternal damnation cannot be avoided. Lorenzo Scupoli, writing in the well-known sixteenth-century devotional work, The Spiritual Combat (known to Hopkins): "This is a battle from which we cannot escape ... The fight lasts a lifetime and he who lays down his arms will be slain."[1] As Scupoli, de Sales and, most importantly, the militant Ignatius advise, in order to receive God's grace, the elixir of eternal being, man must carefully apply all of his naturally given powers to one end, the constant, exuberant glorification of God.

For the purpose of overcoming the immense powers of Satan, it is necessary for man to concentrate or focus all of his human faculties. Through meditation, he may gather his strengths and direct them

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1. Lorenzo Scupoli, The Spiritual Combat and a Treatise on Peace of the Soul (by Juan de Bonilla), translated and revised by Wm. Lester and Robert Mohan (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Bookshop, 1947), p. 184.

towards God. And if the meditator should be the recipient of divine grace, he may experience that explosive mystical exchange of energy whereby the man becomes spirit himself, in the manner of the great medieval mystics such as St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, or Julian of Norwich. Among poets, the mystical experience is not uncommon. Rather, as C.F.E. Spurgeon has shown, mysticism is central to much of what might be considered one of the great themes of English literature.[1] But here we must be very cautious. Mysticism and meditation are not the same thing, although they are closely related. The "mystic", per se, whether in poetry or otherwise, is one who at least claims to have experienced that scarcely describable vision of the only true reality, spiritual reality. Wordsworth wrote of

> a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns[2]

only to show how difficult it is to be specific about this matter. The atmosphere of this mystical apprehension of a higher reality than that which is open to ordinary experience is, I think, marvellously described by the nineteenth-century Bengalese spiritual master Ramakrishna: "One day," he reported, "it was suddenly revealed to me that

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1. See C.F.E. Spurgeon, Mysticism in English Literature (London: Cambridge University Press, 1913), for a complete examination of this idea.

2. See "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," from the Lyrical Ballads of Wordsworth and Coleridge (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 207.

everything is Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, the altar, the doorframe — all Pure Spirit. Then like a madman I began to shower flowers in all directions. Whatever I saw I worshipped."[1] This enthusiasm, often coupled with a profound sense of awe, appears to be a fundamental aspect of the individual mystic experience. The perception of light, a blinding, penetrating light, is frequently the metaphor a poet will make heavy use of. So it is that Dante, upon reaching the final stage of his epoch-making journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, saw the Triune God in the Celestial Rose, symbolic of the union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But that was not all. Something further awaited perception. Bernard, he wrote,

> made a sign to me, and smiled, that I should look upward; but I was already, of myself, such as he wished; for my sight, becoming pure, was entering more and more, through the radiance of the lofty Light which in Itself is true. Thenceforward my vision was greater than our speech, which yields to such a sight, and the memory yields to such excess.[2]

Such peak experiences are not commonly found in the English meditative tradition. Although Spencer spoke of a dazzling light which even the angels could not endure (part of the neo-Platonic spirituality originating with Plotinus), he was no real mystic. The first English poets to practise disciplined meditation were the

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1. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, trans. Swami Nikhilanada (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivehanada Center, 1942), p. 396.

2. "Paradiso XXXIII," The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, trans. Charles Eliot Norton (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1902), pp. 253-254.

metaphysicals, especially Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan and Traherne. These poets occasionally experienced that moment of vision and ecstasy, to be sure. Vaughan, for instance, wrote

> I saw eternity the other night
> Like a great Ring of pure and endless light
> All calm as it was bright;
> And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,
> Driv'n by the spheres
> Like a shadow moved ...[1]

much in the spirit of Dante's "lofty Light", and Traherne came very close to the passage from Ramakrishna when he claimed that "You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars: ... Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and Kings in sceptres, you never enjoy the world."[2] But never does the supremely detached, scarcely comprehensible, cryptic mysticism one usually associates with medieval Catholic ascetics really occur. However, this kind of ultimate mystic experience represents the goal sought by the diligent meditator, no matter how far removed from possibility. The condition of perfect knowledge beyond the intellect, of perfect love beyond the interplay of subject and object, is that special reward succinctly described by the Spanish mystic and poet San Juan de la Cruz:

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1. "The World," in The Metaphysical Poets, ed. Helen Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 269.

2. Thomas Traherne, Centuries of Meditations, ed. Bertram Dobell (London 1908), p. 20.

The whole of creation forgotten
its Maker remembered forever.
Inward the gaze of the spirit,
forever in love with the Lover. [1]

It is important, then, when considering the meditative poetry in the light of the history of religious meditation to make a fine distinction between the practice of meditation and the moment of mystical perception which I have been describing. While the mystical experience of ecstasy in union with one's creator must be the highest goal of the contemplative soul, the practice of meditation does not so readily aspire to that summit. Rather, meditation is a way for the "cold" spirit to revivify itself, to kindle that "affection" for God which makes true communion (or the mystical union) a possibility. Especially among the religious orders, meditation has been a daily exercise for centuries. It is not performed under the sanction of special grace, as is the genuinely mystical act, and there is the main distinction. St. Bernard separated the degrees of meditation, or "truth", into three categories: (i) the humble effort of reason, or intellectual analysis of man's relationship to God; (ii) pity, that most godlike emotion of which a finite being is capable — engendered by the results of analysis; (iii) and the enraptured vision of light, God's grace, the final integration of human spirit within the splendour of divine spirit, God and man made one. [2] By these standards,

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1. "The Habit of Perfection," The Poems of St. John of the Cross, trans. John Frederick Nims (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 95.

2. Pierre Pourrat, La Spiritualité chrétienne: Le Moyen Age (Paris 1924): see the chapter on St. Bernard.

meditation must properly be associated with the preliminary stages of "analysis" and "pity" — only in the very final stages does meditation approach the borders of mysticism. Theoretically, they blend. But in practice, the cleavage between meditation and mysticism has grown steadily wider since the sixteenth century. Real mystics have always been rare, of course, even in the days of St. Teresa de Avila, who was suspect even among some of her closest associates.[1] Mysticism assumes a reciprocal act of "affection" by God, a great deal for any to claim for themselves. But for our purposes it is wisest to assume that there are many degrees of mystical insight, ranging from the mild speculations of Spencer, through the enlightened rapture of Traherne, and proceeding upwards to the perfect union of mortal and immortal described by San Juan.

What I shall be concerned with in this essay, then, is meditation in its lower stages, not mysticism except in its least transcendental forms. Specifically, I shall be investigating the poetry of Hopkins in the light of the meditative tradition of St. Ignatius, where Hopkins' achievement properly belongs. On the relationship of poetry to meditation, Professor Martz has brilliantly written: "Poetry

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1. Discussing the origins of the mystical experience in the case of St. Teresa, V. Sackville-West has written: "The answer to the question what is mysticism? what makes the mystic? would seem to be either that it is a matter of temperament, or, as believers will prefer to put it, a direct intervention of God inspiring the spirit with the revelation of truth. Such intervention, such revelation, may have nothing to do with the conscious desire of the chosen instrument." The Eagle and the Dove (London 1943).

and meditation are by no means synonymous, and yet there is, I believe, a middle ground of the creative mind in which the two arts meet to form a poetry of meditation."[1] His seminal study of meditative poetry, The Poetry of Meditation, examines the immense effect that devotional literature, chiefly Spanish, had on the metaphysical school of Southwell, Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan and others. These poets form the root of a distinctive tradition of meditative verse, winding upwards through Blake, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Browning, Yeats and others. The specifically Ignatian stem of this tradition appears to have dried up with the seventeenth century, then suddenly reappeared with Hopkins.

This will be considered later, but first it is necessary to examine a fundamental aspect of this topic: what exactly is the relationship of meditation to poetry? For what reasons did two quite separate arts so naturally ally? The answer is, I believe, at once elusive and obvious. It involves what D.H. Lawrence described as the "act of pure attention".[2] The sustained, almost savage concentration required of the artist in the act of creation parallels and blends with that same power enabling the contemplative to attain a spiritual union with his God. On a lesser level, one might easily admit that all significant discoveries demand a focusing of otherwise

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1. Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 14-16.

2. D.H. Lawrence, Etruscan Places (London: Martin Secker, 1932), pp. 97-99.

scattered impulses. But the intense, immensely charged and focused energy of the great artist and mystic alike can only indicate a highly disciplined, carefully developed sensibility. Otherwise, the energy would be hopelessly diffused and never gathered into the necessary pattern. These ideas are, of course, speculative, yet they find harmony with the theory of Coleridge about the nature of the creative act which still appears to be quite tenable: that is, that the poet brings into play the entire range of human faculties with his efforts, blending and ordering each respectively, uncovering the elemental unity of the whole by the divine powers of the imagination. Indeed, the religious meditator must similarly bring every faculty at his disposal into play. Traditionally, these powers numbered three: the memory, the understanding, and the will. The purpose of a meditative exercise, then, was to excite, exploit, channel and fuse these powers in a mighty act of contemplative love or "affective will". Ideally, God might then reply to complete the union and produce the ecstasy reserved for the special few. The meditative exercise might be usefully compared to a magnifying glass. It is a mechanical tool; it has no intrinsic powers of its own, but is capable of channelling outside energy (light) into focus. The energy, likewise, much like light, emanates from the meditator but is channelled through the spiritual exercises (the glass) and the maximum effect may be drawn from the individual's innate faculties.[1]

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1. Modern psychology has affirmed this description of the creative act / ....

Thus, the regular practice of meditation quite readily blends with the process of artistic creation. The disciplined movement of the spiritual exercise towards synthesis provides the poet with that fundamental organising impulse which must accompany the otherwise chaotic and diffusive sparks of the creative imagination. Surely, the ars poetica and the art of meditation are inseparably one for the serious poet, especially if he writes in the metaphysical tradition.

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act. Dr. C.G. Jung, for example, speaks of the poet, in his creative moment, forging a unitive vision out of the chaos of impulses which boil up from his primordial unconscious, the inherited hinterland of every human being. He sees the artist as a "collective man", processing for the masses these myriad, untied symbols coming from the unconscious. The demands that this puts on the artist are overwhelming. He says, "The disturbing vision of monstrous and meaningless happenings that in every way exceed the grasp of human feeling and comprehension makes quite other demands upon the artist than do the experiences of the foreground of life." See his Modern Man in Search of a Soul, trans. W.S. Dell and C.F. Baynes (New York 1933).

CHAPTER TWO

II

THE MEDITATIVE TRADITION

The history of meditation has benefited from a sudden revival of interest among theologians during this century. Most significantly, Pierre Pourrat has traced the history of Christian spirituality in three generative, original and entertaining volumes entitled La Spiritualité chrétienne.[1] This immense study uncovers a consistently developing tradition of religious meditation in Western Christendom. Its origins are the early masters Origen and Augustine, and the significant movements are those connected with St. Bernard (Abbot of Clairvaux in 1115) in the twelfth century, St. Bonaventure during the thirteenth century, Jean le Charlier de Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris (1363-1429) in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and culminating in the synthesis which the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius represent.

1. Paris 1923, 1924 and 1925. Other studies of importance include A. Allison Peers, Studies of the Spanish Mystics, 2 vols. (London: The Sheldon Press, 1927 and 1930); Pierre Debouquie, Jean Mombaer de Bruxelles (Louvain: Librairie Universitaire, 1927), and A Literary History of Religious Thought in France, trans. K.L. Montgomery, 3 vols. (London: Burnes, Oates and Washbourne, 1922, 1925 and 1927); Helen C. White, "English Devotional Literature (Prose) 1600-1640," Univ. of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature No. 29 (Madison, Wisconsin, 1931), pp. 104-109. Also very important is the work of Etienne Gilson, especially The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard (New York 1940).

Professor Martz has described the fissure which developed between the scholastics and the votaries of affective meditation during the Middle Ages. Along one side of the widening gap we find the masters of analysis: Abelard and Aquinas. On the other side, of course, the masters of devotion and affective piety: Bernard, Bonaventure, Hugh of St. Victor and Thomas à Kempis. At last, with the publication of On the Mountain of Contemplation by Gerson at the turn of the fifteenth century, the gap began to close once more. The separated vines of emotion and intellect began to knit. This work formed the basis for the integration of these reciprocal faculties which underlies the Exercises (1535) and which is the measure of their enormous value.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of course, experienced the fruits of this synthesis. Along with the impetus of the spreading Ignatian Exercises, a host of imitators and disciples arose, creating a formidable phalanx of Ignatian spirituality. The Spaniards led this movement dramatically. Luis de Granada produced the famous Book of Prayer and Meditation in 1554; Gaspar Loarte brought out the Exercise of a Christian Life in 1579. The development of Ignatius' exercises in self-analysis reached a plateau when in 1589 the Spiritual Combat, attributed to Lorenzo Scupoli, appeared; and finally the gentler, more inspirational Introduction to the Devout Life of St. François de Sales, published in 1609, rapidly joined company in English translation with the other works just mentioned, gradually to rival the Ignatian Exercises in popularity.

This flood of devotional literature engendered the enthusiasm for meditation which seventeenth-century English Catholics and Anglo-Catholics rapidly acquired. Undoubtedly, the proliferation of this literature was to a large extent the result of the Counter-Reformation, headed by the Jesuits. Other factors include the competition against a rising Puritanism and the general religious revival associated with this period, a reaction perhaps to the more humanistic Elizabethan age. In any case, as early as 1559 Catholic spiritual manuals were finding clandestine English translation in Antwerp, Louvain, Rouen, Paris and other continental cities. They were usually circulated by missionary priests among a receptive, growing audience.[1]

The Spiritual Exercises, then, represent the principal crest on a long gathering tide of devotional enthusiasm. The wake of the Ignatian Exercises is long and clustered with disciples. But the origins of the specifically Ignatian method are difficult to track with precision. H. Watrigrant, writing near the turn of the last century, managed to link the structure of the Exercises with the meditative traditions of the Low Countries in his article "La genèse des Exercices de Saint Ignace de Loyola."[2] He traces the Ignatian methods to the Scala Meditatoria of Jean Wessel Gransfort, incorporated in 1494 into the devotional Rosetum of Joannes Mauburnus. This Scala (scale of

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1. See A.C. Southern's study Elizabethan Recusant Prose, 1559-1582 (London: Sands & CO., 1950).

2. H. Watrigant, Etudes LXXI, p. 529, as quoted by Pourrat, Vol. III, p. 41.

meditation) set out a rigidly controlled pattern of mental objects or images for the meditator to follow. Beginning with a proposal of the specific subject for the daily meditation, the Scala moves through a series of confessions, propositions, "ruminations" and conclusions, ending with a separate programme of "affections" — at last approaching that final, unitive stage "wherein the soul doth cheerfully give up itselfe, and repose itselfe wholly upon her Maker, and Redeemer; committing her selfe to him in all her wayes, submitting her selfe to him in all his waies".[1] This methodical progression from the use of one's memory (emotion) to detailed analysis or "ruminations" (intellect), and their fusion (the affective will) in the final stages of the meditation, first found its formal setting in the Scala, as Pourrat suggests. Mauburnus, however, "cherche cette méthode dans Saint-Victor, dans Gerson et dans d'autres auteurs antérieurs au XV^e siècle".[2] Thus it is unlikely that the method arose from the specific inspiration of any one man. And in any case, Ignatius was not a trained scholar and would not have been familiar with the method of the Scala directly. For the immediate predecessor of the Exercises we must look elsewhere.

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1. The Scale of Meditation can be found in English translation by Joseph Hall in A recollection of such Treatises as have been heretofore severally published, and are now revised, corrected, augmented (London 1621). See also Martz, Poetry of Meditation, Appendix 1, for a discussion of Mauburnus, Hall and Crashaw, pp. 331-352.

2. Pourrat, La Spiritualité chrétienne, Vol. III, p. 25.

Pourrat, in concord with Watrigrant, believes that this threefold pattern came to the attention of Ignatius through the Ejercitatorio of Garcia Ximeniz de Cisneros (published in 1500). Cisneros reformed the abbey at Monserrat in 1492 and established the practice of regular meditations. The meditations made approximate use of the threefold technique. But it was to Monserrat that Ignatius himself came in 1522, and it was here, no doubt, that he became familiar with such meditations.

By the end of the fifteenth century, then, methodical meditation had been firmly established, at least among the religious orders. And the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius form the keystone of this gradually erected arch of devotional handbooks. As Pourrat has described the place of the Exercises:

> Ils sont le couronnement de cette systématisation de la vie spirituelle qui s'est opérée lentement, dans la suite des siècles, sous la pression des circonstances et des difficultés et qui s'est achevée à la Renaissance. Comme toutes les œuvres qui résument un mouvement, qui en sont comme ... l'épanouissement, les Exercices doivent beaucoup au passé. Un auteur, quel que soit son génie, quel que soit le progrès qu'il imprime à la pensée humaine, est nécessairement dépendent de son temps et de son milieu. Et nous savons à quel point, à l'époque où se convertit saint Ignace, où se préoccupait de méthodiser, de réglementer la prière, d'organiser en un mot la vie spirituelle, d'en coordonner les divers exercices de façon à créer un véritable système de réforme morale.[1]

However true this last point may be, the Exercises have importance for the student of literature because of their method. This systematic evocation of images and ideas, vividly imagined and analytically

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1. Pourrat, La Spiritualité Chrétienne, Vol. III, p. 28.

developed, provided the attentive artist with both a stimulus to set his art in motion and a means to control it.

CHAPTER THREE

III

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES: EXPLICATION

> "Believe me, dear Philothea, devotion is the delight of delights and the queen of virtues, for it is the perfection of charity. If charity be milk, devotion is its cream; if it be a plant, devotion is its flower; if it be a precious stone, devotion is its lustre; if it be a rich balm, devotion is its odour; yea, the odour of sweetness, which comforts men and rejoices angels."
>
> St. François de Sales

> "Sum up at night, what thou hast done by day;
> And in the morning, what thou hast to do.
> Dress and undress thy soul: mark the decay
> And growth of it: if with thy watch, that too
> Be down, then wind up both; since we shall be
> Most surely judged, make thy accounts agree."
>
> George Herbert

THESE TWO quotations witness the dominant themes of both religious meditation and meditative poetry: devotion and self-analysis. In the explication of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises which follows, I shall explore the delicate balance of these two aspects. The exercitant, in order to benefit from this interplay, must bring to his retreat only the three powers of the soul and a willingness to apply himself wholly and obediently to his spiritual master. "Though you search for the will of God," says Avila, "you shall never so assuredly find it as in the way of humble obedience, so much recommended and practised by all holy persons who have aspired to

devotion."[1]

Following the pattern for meditation given formal shape by Cisneros, the Spiritual Exercises divide evenly into four sections, one for each week of a normal month. The complete Jesuit meditation lasted about thirty days; however, popular practice among interested imitators in England and on the continent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries allowed for the shortening of the programme to whatever time happened to be available. But, as Hopkins was a Jesuit, he would have pursued the Exercises in their intended time span. My analysis will deal with them in their original form.

Before one actually begins the first exercise, the "Principle and Foundation" will be confronted, among other prefaces dealing mainly with methods. Here Ignatius makes clear the purpose of the entire meditation at the outset: "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul."[2] The devout is directed to make use of any thing in God's creation which may help him to fulfil this end for which he was created, hence the Jesuit motto: Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam. This concept inspired much of the life and thought of Ignatius and, later, Hopkins.

At first glance, this is quite simple. One must praise God constantly, in every way possible. But a great deal more is involved.

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1. Blessed John of Avila, Commentary on the Verse, Audi, filia, LV, 1. Avila was a Spanish priest known as the Apostle of Andalusia (1500-69). He was friend and adviser of St. Francis Borgia.

2. Spiritual Exercises, p. 47.

For instance, man's entire fate depends upon his ability to discover God's will for his life. Discovering one's "vocation", tantamount to the discovery of "self" in modern terms, lies at the heart of the meditation. As Pourrat says, "L'élection, le choix d'un état de vie conforme aux desseins de Dieu, telle est la fin des Exercices à laquelle tout se subordonne, le point central vers lequel tout converge ..."[1]

The first exercise is necessarily purgative. But the unique approach taken by Ignatius to this task should be of considerable interest for the literary critic. Its format consists of a preparatory prayer, two preludes, three principal points and a colloquy. It employs the three powers of the soul — memory, intelligence (reason) and will respectively, although the dominant "power" in this first exercise appears to be memory. By remembering one's condition of original sin, by exploiting the natural corruption which pervades the human soul untouched by grace, the exercitant may bring himself to a fuller consciousness of his own sin and the possibility of damnation, enhancing the affective will in its act of repentance.

The first prelude to this exercise embodies the famous Ignatian technique of mental composition or "composition of place". The exercitant is instructed to apply himself assiduously to the task of vividly imagining a chosen scene, object or image: "the image will consist of seeing with the mind's eye the physical place where the

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1. Pourrat, La Spiritualité chrétienne, Vol. III. p. 50

object that we wish to contemplate is present."[1] Ignatius elaborates: "By the physical place I mean, for instance, a temple, or mountain where Jesus or the Blessed Virgin is, depending on the subject of the contemplation." When the image is not directly physical, the imagination must be called into service to provide a startling metaphorical instance: such as the soul imprisoned within the corruptible flesh of a brute, the spirit in a state of tearful exile. This use of extended metaphors (or "concrete similitude", as St. François de Sales called it) parallels the metaphysical conceit, a common device in meditative as well as "metaphysical" poetry.

The effect of "composition of place" on literature has been enormous, both directly and indirectly (i.e., whether derived from first-hand contact with the Spiritual Exercises, or similar exercises, or from the less direct, mysterious process of "poetic influence"). Modern readers will be familiar with the Ignatian terminology used by James Joyce in his Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. The protagonist in this semi-autobiographical novel is a schoolboy, Stephen Dedalus, on a religious retreat with a number of schoolmates. The priest explains to the boys:

> ... A retreat, my dear boys, signifies a withdrawal for awhile from the cares of our life, the cares of this workaday world, in order to examine the state of our conscience, to reflect on the mysteries of holy religion and to understand better why we are here in this world. During these few days I intend to put before you some thoughts concerning the four last things. They

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1. Spiritual Exercises, p. 54.

> are, as you know from your catechism, death, judgment, hell and heaven. We shall try to understand them fully during these few days so that we may derive from the understanding of them a lasting benefit to our souls.[1]

A series of "compositions of place" follow, which the boys are expected to emulate. For example, in the meditation on hell which begins the retreat, the priest says:

> Now let us try for a moment to realize, as far as we can, the nature of that abode of the damned which the justice of an offended God has called into existence for the eternal punishment of sinners. Hell is a straight and dark and foul-smelling prison, an abode of demons and lost souls, filled with fire and smoke. ... In earthly prisons, the poor captive has at least some liberty of movement, were it only within the four walls of his cell or in the gloomy yard of his prison. Not so in hell ... and the damned are so utterly bound and helpless that, as a blessed saint, saint Anselm, writes in his book on similitudes, they are not even able to remove from the eye a worm that gnaws it.[2]

Later in the retreat, the moderating priest explains to the boys exactly what they have been going through:

> This morning we endeavoured, in our reflection upon hell, to make what our holy founder calls in his book of spiritual exercises, the composition of place. We endeavoured, that is, to imagine with the senses of the mind, in our imagination, the material character of that awful place and of the physical torments which all who are in hell endure.[3]

In the Portrait of the Artist, Joyce's priest uses the traditional device underhandedly, to scare children. No doubt this form of abuse has been practised within the church. Nevertheless, this

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1. James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (London: The Folio Society, 1965), p. 116.
2. Ibid., p. 126.
3. Ibid., p. 133.

lively and fundamental technique of Ignatius has been put to better use. Consider, for example, the following "mentally composed" openings from Donne's sonnets:

> Oh my blacke Soule! now thou art summoned
> By sicknesse, death's herald, and champion;
> Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
> Treason ...
>
> (Holy Sonnet IV)

> I am a little world made cunningly
> Of elements, and an Angelike spright,
> But black sinne hath betrayed to endlesse night
> My worlds, both parts, and (oh) both parts must die.
>
> (Holy Sonnet V)

In each of these instances Donne has evoked the sense of place by using vividly pictorial metaphors: the soul as pilgrim, the soul as a small world of elements. A direct parallel with the Spiritual Exercises can be observed in the manner in which Holy Sonnets XIII and XI begin:

> What if this present were the world's last night?
> Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell,
> The picture of Christ crucified, and tell
> Whether the countenance can thee affright ...

and:

> Spit in my face you Jewes, and pierce my side,
> Buffet, and scoffe, scourge, and crucifie mee,
> For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd, and only hee,
> Who could do no inequitie, hath dyed ...

In each of these sonnets, the poet begins by meditating on the crucifixion. The object of each is the cultivation of shame, remorse and repentance. Donne has clearly found a common ground between the disciplines of poetry and meditation; and parallels with the first exercise of Ignatius are striking. In the second prelude of the

first week of meditations the exercitant is urged to "ask for pain, tears, and suffering with Christ". Then, after a prolonged consideration of man's sin, deprivation of goodness, and perilous prospects for eternal damnation, the devout is instructed: "Imagine Christ our Lord before you, hanging upon the Cross."[1] Antonio de Molina, writing in 1617 in his Ignatian handbook A Treatise of Mental Prayer, advises: "... see our Saviour taken prisoner, and used so ill, whipped and nayled on the Crosse; we must consider that we be they who abuse him, and take away his life."[2] This advice must have stimulated, or at least influenced, much of the crucifixion poetry that flourished in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Consider, by way of example, poems such as Herbert's "The Sacrifice" and "The Crosse", William Alabastor's "Upon the Crucifix", Giles Fletcher's "On the Crucifixion", or even the famous Protestant lyric "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross", by Isaac Watts.

The first week of meditation, consisting of five separate exercises, concentrates on the weight of sin that oppresses the desolate soul of man. An almost obsessive abnegation of man's worth coupled with an awesome regard for the power of God pervades the second exercise of this purgative first week. Surely, this is the very same conception of God which would reappear in the equally vivid, image-dominated language of the later seventeenth-century and eighteenth-

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1. Spiritual Exercises, p. 54.

2. Antonio de Molina, A Treatise on Mental Prayer, trans. J. Sweetman (St. Omer, 1617), as quoted by Martz, Poetry of Meditation, p. 49.

century Puritanism in both England and America. Consider the case and language of Jonathan Edwards, the American Puritan minister, who would terrify his congregations into submission by having them imagine themselves dangling on a spider's thread above the consuming flames of hell:

> The God that holds you over the Pit of Hell, much as one holds a Spider or some loathsome Insect over the Fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his Wrath towards you burns like Fire; he is of purer Eyes than to bear to have you in his Sight; you are Ten thousand Times so abominable in his Eyes as the most hateful, venemous Serpent is in ours ... and yet t'is nothing but his Hand that holds you from falling into the Fire every Moment ... Oh sinner! ... You hang by a slender Thread, with the flames of Divine Wrath flashing about it, and ready every Moment to singe it, and burn it assunder ... [1]

Although this would be most unlikely, it almost appears that the Reverend Edwards had been consciously "composing" the purgative images recommended by Ignatius in the second exercise of the first week. Consider the nature of the following suggestions from the Spiritual Exercises:

> Let me [the exercitant] consider all my own corruption and foulness of body ... Let me see myself as a sore and an abscess from whence have come forth so many sins, so many evils, and the most vile poison ... consider who God is against whom I have sinned, recalling his attributes and comparing them to their contraries in me: His wisdom to my ignorance, His omnipotence to my weakness; His justice to my iniquity, His Goodness with my sinfulness. [2]

Ignatius admonishes the exercitant to be filled with wonder and emotion

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1. Jonathan Edwards, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God (Boston 1742). This is a collection of sermons, the above quotation being taken from the sermon which titles the book.

2. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 57.

when considering that men are even sustained in life. The exercise ends with a colloquy for mercy. Although Ignatius is clearly less severe than Edwards, this strain of self-abnegation adumbrates the Puritan penchant towards extreme soul-searching. However, with religious meditation in the Ignatian sense the abnegation of worth is practised in the sense of a dramatic mask, i.e. the exercitant imagines himself to be a worthless, sinful creature. The Puritans, being literal-minded if not closed-minded, always tended (and still tend) to mistake the symbolic image for whatever it represents. Nevertheless, a direct link between the Ignatian system and Puritan meditations exists in the work of the Puritan Richard Baxter. His well-known The Saints Everlasting Rest[1] exploited the Ignatian methods already popular among Catholics and Anglo-Catholics in the seventeenth century.

The remaining exercises of this first, purgative week are largely repetitions or variations of the images and techniques that have already been discussed. The final meditation of the week is a tour de force, in a sense, drawing a vividly detailed portrait of hell much like that of the priest in Portrait of the Artist: "Here it will be to see in imagination the length, breadth, and depth of hell ... To see the great fires, and the souls enveloped, as it were, in bodies of fire."[2] All of the five senses are called into action by the imagination, bringing into focus the intense image of damnation which

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1. 4th edn. (London 1653).
2. Spiritual Exercises, p. 59.

Ignatius demands. Again, the exercise ends with a colloquy of thanksgiving for the mercy God has shown by providing an alternative to the infernal ravages of hell.

A curious, interesting appendix follows the first week of exercises in the form of "additional directions". Ignatius gives ten suggestions for increasing the sense of penitence. For example, the sixth one advises "not to think of pleasant and joyful things as heaven, the Resurrection, etc., for such considerations of joy and delight will hinder the feeling of pain, sorrow, and tears that I should have for my sins." The exercitant is told to dwell, rather, on death and judgment.[1] Ignatius goes as far as suggesting that the penitent should wear "hairshirts, cords, or iron chains on the body" or even wound himself physically to inflict pain if necessary.[2] It will be helpful to bear these suggestions in mind for later in this study when I shall examine Hopkins' "Terrible Sonnets".[3]

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1. Spiritual Exercises, pp. 60-61.

2. Ibid., p. 62.

3. It would be a mistake to equate the Ignatian conception of God too closely with the Puritan God, a much later aberration. The Godhead of the first week's exercises is rather severe, as I have shown; however the Godhead of the Spiritual Exercises as a whole combines rather evenly the qualities of awesomeness, perhaps severity, with an often benign sense of mercy later characteristic of the Salesian Godhead. This balance is, I think, necessary for a Godhead amenable to rigid contemplation. A parallel in the East would be the Hindu God Shiva, whose idol has experienced centuries of meditation. Shiva has two sets of hands; with one set he destroys, drums out time, presses man to dust, but with the other he sustains, lifts man into freedom, comforts him. At the top centre, his head remains perfectly still, poised amid the conflicting forces.

Thus, having purged the soul, stimulated the "three powers" and clearly defined the object of the meditation, whatever it may be, using the technique of "composition of place", the interlocking second and third weeks of exercises must be confronted. As memory served to generate and sustain the first week of meditation with a multitude of pictorial images and emotions, the second and third weeks utilise the powers of analysis. The exercitant, having extinguished the bulk of subjective emotions connected with the memory, can now reasonably consider the life of Christ with some objectivity. All aspects are considered: the mysteries of Christ's birth, the incarnation, the early life, presentation in the temple, the obedience of the apostles, and numerous other themes. Any facet of Christ's life before the passion may be included during the second week's meditations; the third week is restricted to the passion itself, not the resurrection. For example, during the second week Ignatius advises: "Here we will see in our imagination the synagogues, villages, and towns where Jesus preached."[1]

The life of Christ, with its constellation of symbols, its ambiguities and its fundamental paradoxes, offers the intellect room enough for the most elaborate analytical exercises. Beginning with the Incarnation, the exercises of the second week consist of twelve "days" or meditations. Meditations are directed upon the Virgin Mary, the manger scene, and the character of Christ as seen in the many

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1. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 67.

public activities, including his journeys, his miracles, and his sermons up to Palm Sunday. Again, what strikes the modern reader is the frequent emphasis on technique which occupies Ignatius at all points throughout the Spiritual Exercises. In this section, for example, Ignatius instructs the exercitant in the first "point" of the first "day" to "see all the different people on the face of the earth, so varied in dress and in behaviour. Some are white and others black; some at peace and others at war; some weeping and others laughing; some well and others sick; some being born and others dying, etc."[1] These kinds of concrete recommendations, I believe, served as a frequent source for Hopkins' poetry, much in the same way as they served many earlier poets as well as some from this century.[2]

One commentator of note, L. de Grandmaison, has called the second week "la partie la plus originale et la plus pressante".[3] It is in this part of the meditations that the important Ignatian concept of Christ as "chevalier" (a key issue in Hopkins' verse) emerges. The military metaphors in this section, a product of the military background of Ignatius, suggest the immanence of God's divine kingdom

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1. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 69.

2. There is a contemporary school of Catholic poetry in America which draws heavily upon both Hopkins and Ignatius. The leading poets in this movement have been Thomas Merton (1915-1968), Hopkins scholar turned monk-poet Brother Antonius (1912-), and the Jesuit Daniel Berrigan (1921-).

3. L. de Grandmaison, article on the Spiritual Exercises in Recherches de Sciences Religieuses (Sept.-Dec. 1920), pp. 401-2.

on earth with Christ as Commander-in-Chief, ruling Lord, and his votaries soldiers (vassals) as well as subjects: "I will consider how this king speaks to all his subjects, saying, 'It is my will to conquer all infidel lands.'"[1] This, of course, is the origin of that proselytising spirit which characterised the Jesuit Counter-Reformation. The important point, however, for the understanding of the Ignatian method behind this phase of the meditation is to see that metaphor becomes the medium for analysis. Metaphor lies at the very heart of the process of "composition". As in any of the characteristically "metaphysical" poems of the seventeenth century, contrast, paradox and resolution are given a concrete basis in the conceit — an elaborate, almost overly drawn-out metaphor.

The third week — a continuation of the second week's meditations on the life of Christ — carries the attention of the exercitant from the journey to Jerusalem from Bethany, through the Last Supper, up to the passion (Gethsemane to the Crucifixion). Seven days of contemplation are recommended. Because the progression and techniques of the Ignatian method are now firmly imbedded in the mind of the exercitant, this "week" leaves the formulation of metaphors or "compositions" much to the discretion of the individual. The purpose of the Spiritual Exercises, it would appear, was not so much to force the content of the meditation as to provide a working method, a technique. If the imagination should be excited, by all means the exercitant should allow

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1. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 67.

his emotions free rein to engage in creative affections. Only in periods of dryness should the pious adhere with excessive rigidity to Ignatius' content. As de Sales advised:

> Resolve, then, ... to accept with a ready heart all the inspirations it shall please God to send you. When they come, receive them as ambassadors sent by the King of Heaven, who desires to enter into a marriage contract with you.[1]

The final week of exercises is the culmination of the month-long labours to obtain that unitive vision of God dwelling in all things, even in the exercitant. The "will" or "affective will" is the primary medium of these final meditations. The memory purged, the intellect exercised, illumined with a fresh understanding of the Divine Will made manifest in the life of Christ, the soul is free to engage every human power in what for Ignatius was the greatest of all mortal acts — devotion. Man directs his love towards God. Ideally, a reciprocal experience of God's love may touch the heart of the elect with its freshness and stunning brilliance, producing in effect the mystic illumination, the merging of subject with object. But normally, to praise God and "to feel joy and gladness at the great joy and gladness of Christ our Lord (in the Resurrection)" is the objective of this final week.[2]

The exercise itself consists of the usual prayer of preparation, two preludes, five points, and a colloquy. The subject matter varies,

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1. Introduction to the Devout Life, pp. 93-94.
3. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 102.

ranging from the reunion of Christ with his Father after expiration to the Ascension. The memory composes the scene at the sepulchre, and so on. The intellect examines the mysteries of the Resurrection, and the will completes the meditation with a series of joyful, devout colloquies of praise and affection. The key to these exercises is the experience of spiritual nourishment: "In this Exercise more attention and time is to be given to the principal points and to those parts in which greater satisfaction and fruit are experienced."[1] The thought of heaven should be dominant throughout the week to enhance the delight of the affections.

A most interesting additional exercise follows the primary exercises for the week: the "Contemplation to Obtain Divine Love". By meditating on the energy of God in creation, the exercitant seeks to discover and assimilate this force, obtaining "Divine Love".[2] The third "point" of this exercise is worth noting. The exercitant is told

> ... to consider how God works and labours for me in all created things on the face of the earth, that is, He conducts Himself as one who labours; in the heavens, the elements, plants, fruits, flocks, etc. He gives them being, preserves them,

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1. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 102.

2. Cf. Joseph Campbell on this conception of the power of God. Referring to all mythological or religious systems he says: "... the universal doctrine teaches that all the visible structures of the world — all things and beings — are the effects of a ubiquitous power out of which they rise ... known to science as energy, to the Melanesians as mana, to the Sioux Indians as wakonda, the Hindus as shakti, and the Christians as the power of God" (Joseph Campbell, Hero with a Thousand Faces (New York: Meridian, 1970), p. 257; this is the fourteenth edition).

> grants them growth, sensation, etc. Then I will reflect on myself.[1]

Thus, our affections are directed through the blossoming universe of created things to a final turning of the affections in reflection upon the Self.[2] An appendix of additional meditations on the mysteries of the life of Christ and a series of "Rules" complete the text of the fourth week. A further appendix of scriptural meditations finishes the Spiritual Exercises as a whole.

Some insight into the origins of Hopkins' poems can often be found in these meditations, especially in the appendix called "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" — but this will be treated later in this essay. For the moment, the tripartite movement of the Spiritual Exercises as a whole (and in capsule form within each specific exercise) should be our concern. The image-making faculty, lodged in the "memory", grasps the object of the meditation solidly. The intellect examines each image, seeking to unmask symbols, determine consequences, render meaning from myth. And the final, most important stage in the meditation as a whole is the act of devotion, praise. This pattern, constantly rehearsed throughout the Spiritual Exercises, provided Hopkins with a fundamental organising impulse during the period after

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1. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 104.

2. "When mind is lost in the light of the Self, it dreams no more; still in the body it is lost in that happiness. 'My son! All things fly to the Self, as birds fly to the tree for rest.'" The Ten Principal Upanishads, trans. Shree Purolit Swami and W.B. Yeats (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p. 45.

his Jesuit training, the period of his mature poetry — 1877-1889. It provided a harness for the wild, expansive energy of his artistic impulse which otherwise might well have been dissipated.

CHAPTER FOUR

IV

POETRY AND THE METHOD OF IGNATIUS

Each Ignatian exercise, performed several times daily, lasted for an hour or more in most cases. This amount of time allowed the exercitant to complete the whole triadic process with every meditation, although one of the three powers — memory, understanding, or will — would be stressed each time, maintaining the overall triadic progression of the month-long superstructure. But obviously the length of even one exercise would be unsuitable for a poem. Thus, the poet must either condense the three stages of his meditation and offer a poetic miniature, or he may present only a portion of his meditation, usually part of the final stages. As in the case with the seventeenth-century votaries of Ignatius, and later with Hopkins, the long hours of meditation practised as part of a religious life so rooted the Ignatian process in the minds of the poets that it served as an unconscious guiding impulse rather than as a conscious attempt to paraphrase in poetry the meditative experience.

The Italian sonnet, with its tripartite structure (4-4-6), lends itself with remarkable ease to the Ignatian meditative structure. This may be one of many reasons accounting for its popularity among those poets grounded in the Ignatian tradition. By way of example,

and to demonstrate the miniature as realised in the metaphysical Italian sonnet of the seventeenth century, let me examine briefly one of Donne's most famous sonnets:

> Thou hast made me, And shall thy worke decay?
> Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste,
> I run to death, and death meets me as fast,
> And all my pleasures are like yesterday; [1]

This quatrain fulfils the objectives of the first two Ignatian preludes. The subject of the meditation is made explicit by the use of a startling metaphor — and the opening note is given urgency by the form of a question. The vivid image of man dashing towards Death, and likewise, of Death meeting him with equal force in a head-on fashion, might well be called a "composition of place". The metaphorical stage has been set. Man's precarious situation has been fixed dramatically in the foreground of the imagination.

> I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,
> Despaire behind, and death before doth caste
> Such Terrour, and my feebled flesh doth waste
> By sinne in it, which it t'wards hell doth weigh;

Here the movement towards analysis not only confirms the Ignatian connection, but the subject matter conforms with dexterity to the "three points" of Ignatius in the first week's exercises. The meditator is directed to "understand" the consequences of sin, thereby making the awful reality of hell imminently present in the imagination. Donne's analysis has prepared the reader for the impending colloquy.

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1. H.J.C. Grierson (ed.), Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 85.

Having gathered the emotions through memory and understanding, the cork is pulled from the bottle:

> Onely thou art above, and when towards thee
> By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe;
> But our old, subtle foe so tempteth me,
> That not one hour myself I can sustaine;
> Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art,
> And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart.

The poet speaks to God directly in the Ignatian manner, "as one friend speaks to another, or as a servant speaks to his master, now asking some favour, now accusing oneself for some wrong deed, or again, making known his affairs to Him and seeking His advice concerning them."[1]

For a fine example of the Ignatian process working in miniature see, for example, Herbert's poem in three perfect stanzas, "Love". His longer poem "Affliction" is similarly an extended, less condensed meditation along these lines. Returning to Donne, his longer poem "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward" fits the Ignatian pattern with an almost embarrassing precision: consider the nature of its final colloquy:

> O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;
> I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
> Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
> O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
> Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
> Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
> That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.[2]

The mistake must not be made of supposing that a poem is rooted in the Ignatian structure only if the contents of the poem suggest such affinities as well as the meditative progression, or development,

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1. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 56.
2. Grierson (ed.), Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems, p. 90.

of ideas. For example, the well-known poem "Life" by Herbert bears no trace of any Ignatian content. Yet the movement of the poem is from a vivid composition by metaphor (conceit) to analysis (development of the conceit by contrast, paradox, or further analogy) to colloquy (resolution). Many of Hopkins' poems follow this pattern. Let me examine Herbert's thematic structure:

> I Made a posie, while the day ran by:
> Here will I smell my remnant out, and tie
> My life within this band.
> But time did becken to the flowers, and they
> By noon most cunningly did steal away,
> And wither'd in my hand. [1]

The poet draws a vivid analogy: life is identified with the transitory arrangement of flowers picked by the impersonal "I" of the poem. (This manner of speaking to no one in particular, but really to oneself, is common to meditative poetry even up to this century.)

> My hand was next to them, and then my heart:
> I took, without more thinking, in good part
> Times gentle admonition:
> Who did so sweetly deaths sad taste convey,
> Making my minde to smell my fatall day;
> Yet sugring the suspicion.

The metaphor is developed further; the vehicle (flower) begins an overt identification (or merging) with the tenor (transitory life). The intellect, not the emotions, is aroused: "Making my <u>minde</u> to smell my fatall day." Of course, with metaphysical poetry, mind and heart are not severely dislocated. As Eliot observed, for the metaphysical poet, a thought <u>was</u> an emotion: hence the line "My hand was next to

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1. Grierson (ed.), <u>Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems</u>, p. 110.

them, and then my heart", which leads to what is, in effect, an account of the rational faculty coming to grips with the evanescence of life.

> Farewell deare flowers, sweetly your time ye spent,
> Fit, while ye liv'd, for smell or ornament,
> And after death for cures.
> I follow straight without complaints or grief,
> Since if my sent be good, I care not, if
> It be as short as yours.

In this final stanza the flowers are addressed, but only superficially. The poet is really talking to himself. The stanza brings resolution and synthesis into the poem. It is a drawing together of the separate threads of the metaphor, tenor and vehicle, subject and object. The tone is conversational. The overall effect is much the same as that achieved in the final colloquy of an Ignatian meditation.

PART TWO

A STUDY OF THE POETRY

V

HOPKINS AND IGNATIUS

> In the critics' vocabulary, the word "precursor" is indispensable, but it should be cleansed of all connotation of polemics or rivalry. The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future. In this correlation the identity or plurality of the men involved is unimportant.
>
> Jorge Luis Borges, Labyrinths

INDEED, every poet like every philosopher picks over his precursors and takes only what is useful to him. More often than not, fundamental misunderstandings of the precursor are involved. History has provided many examples.[1] However, we must simply accept that this is the nature of intellectual and literary history. Learning is not some thoroughly objective entity passed on from generation to generation undefiled, unmarked by criticism, untouched by subjective experience. Rather, each generation shapes its own conception of what the past offers. And Hopkins was no exception to this inevitable process. He experienced his precursors from the highly subjective vantage-point of Victorian England and his own very idiosyncratic

1. For example, the Nazi pseudo-philosophers exploited the writings of Nietzsche for their own vicious purposes. Likewise, Thomas Carlyle's famous misunderstanding of German philosophy provides another of what is most likely an endless string of examples.

temperament. In his early days at Highgate and Oxford, the young poet expressed his sensibility in a manner resembling Keats, much in the same way as the young Yeats was to emulate Shelley not long after. But after the long, arduous years of Jesuit training, Hopkins had a new standard: Ignatius. Later, he was to appropriate Duns Scotus in a similar manner. But the pattern is conventional: the poet <u>creates</u> his precursors, taking from them what he needs, what he can make use of, and ignores the rest.

Hopkins' affinities with the seventeenth-century poets of the metaphysical school are readily observed. There is the same reliance upon metaphor and conceit, the same use of contrast, paradox. Even the surface parallels are rather striking: the abruptness, that is, of rhythms and hardness of images. Before looking at the use that Hopkins made of Ignatius directly, we must consider his inheritance from the earlier poets who made use of Ignatius. Evidence abounds in his letters:

> Marvel, of whom I have read only extracts, is a most rich and nervous poet ... Vaughn's poems were printed not so long ago. He was a follower of Herbert's both in life and style: he was in fact converted from worldly courses by reading Herbert's poems on a sickbed and even his muse underwent a conversion (for he had written before). He has more glow and freedom than Herbert but less fragrant sweetness.[1]

Indeed, Hopkins had read widely and with a mature sensibility. Yet, surprisingly, nowhere in his letters does he mention Donne. Anyone

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1. <u>The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon</u>, ed. C.C. Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, revised edition 1955), pp. 23-24.

with Hopkins' dedication to poetry would have been unlikely not to have known the work of such a major poet (even given the Victorian neglect of this rich body of verse). Nevertheless, evidence is conspicuously lacking on this matter, even though critics have often tried to demonstrate the influence of the metaphysical tradition on Hopkins' verse.[1]

The very fact of Hopkins' vocation explains the origins of his Ignatian spirit. The exact details of his religious education have been proved by the Reverend Alfred Thomas in his recent study, Hopkins the Jesuit: The Years of Training.[2] Thomas follows Hopkins through the odyssey of his Jesuit education from the beginning at Manresa House (novitiate, 1868-1870) in Roehampton — where he was first introduced to the regular practice of Ignatian meditation which would become a regular aspect of his life — up to his final years of theological study at St. Beuno's College in the Welsh valley of the Clwyd (theologate, 1874-1877). It is significant that only a fortnight after coming into the order, Hopkins and his fellow novices began what the Jesuits refer to as the Long Retreat:

> It consists of thirty days occupied exclusively in prayer, meditation, and similar employments. Five times a day the master of novices gives points of meditation to the assembled novices, and they have subsequently to spend the following hour in

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1. Terence Heywood, for example, in his well-known essay, "Hopkins' Ancestry" in Poetry LIV, traces the poet's metaphysical roots through Whitman back to Donne. Another study dealing only with Hopkins' inheritance from Donne is David Morris's The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and T.S. Eliot in the Light of the Donne Tradition, Swiss Studies in English (Berne 1953).

2. Alfred Thomas, Hopkins the Jesuit: The Years of Training (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

> careful pondering over the points proposed to them, ... A regular system is followed.[1]

That "regular system" was, of course, the Spiritual Exercises. This serves to emphasise how deeply the Ignatian form of meditation was stressed in Victorian Jesuit seminaries. As Thomas says, it would be unlikely for a present-day novice to be subjected to the Long Retreat within a fortnight after entering the order.

This habit of regular meditation became a life-long duty for Hopkins, but it is doubtful whether or not he actually kept up the rigorous programme forced upon him by his superiors during the years of training. In any case, these long and difficult years were accompanied by a self-imposed poetic silence. This very fact, I believe, allowed for the deep assimilation of the Ignatian pattern which might not have happened had Hopkins continued to write in the Keatsian, Pre-Raphaelite manner of his early verse.

It should not be forgotten that at the same time that this Ignatian meditative structure was hardening like crystal in the unconscious of the dormant poet, Hopkins was developing a personal aesthetic in the Ignatian spirit. His well-known dialectic of "inscape" and "instress" has been the subject of a great deal of critical attention. In a way, I believe, the idiosyncratic aesthetic embodied in these terms gave Hopkins a needed theological super-

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1. "The Training of a Jesuit," article in The Nineteenth Century XL (Aug. 1896), p. 218: cited by Thomas, p. 28.

structure (a sanction) for his newly acquired meditative process. David Downes, in a study of the poet's Ignatian spirituality, has examined the correlation between the theological objectives of the priest and the development of the "inscape-instress" aesthetic.[1] This study, I believe, was the first to stress the Ignatian temper of Hopkins' verse. Downes points to the fact that Hopkins was himself occupied with the preparation of a commentary on the Exercises for many years.[2] The existing rough drafts of this abandoned project, as Downes shows, link Hopkins' aesthetic with the goals of Ignatian spirituality. Essentially, Hopkins interpreted the "Principle and Foundation" of the Exercises as a call to create verse: "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord and by this means to save his soul."[3] Here Hopkins discovered a principle which would serve both to inspire and to sanction his creative activities: Homo Creatus Est Laudare. Here is the point of confluence between meditative structure and aesthetic superstructure.

As I have said, Hopkins recreated his precursor, Ignatius. In

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1. David Downes, Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of his Ignatian Spirit (London: Vision Press, 1959). Downes essentially has provided a table of correspondences between aspects of Hopkins' poetry and prose, and the theological objectives of Ignatius. Although he does refer to Hopkins' meditative strain, his treatment remains on the more open plain of dogma rather than the deeper levels of poetic organisation and Ignatian patterns.

2. See The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, ed. C.C. Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, revised edition 1955), p. 180. He discusses his work on this commentary on Ignatius with Bridges.

3. Spiritual Exercises, p. 47.

the guise of an elaborate aesthetic, the poet shaped a distinct vision which in the end is more Hopkins than either Ignatius or, later, Scotus. Conceived of as a dialectic between "inscape" (shape, pattern, individual essence) and "instress" (force, flux, the energy of God in things, the process of becoming), Hopkins' aesthetic describes individuality in man, beast or thing as the successful merging of these two forces. Function becomes the key to meaning in life; matter (both animate and inanimate) is not static, as Aquinas would have it, rather it is substance under stress, active, in the process of becoming itself:

> Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
> Selves — goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
> Crying What I do is me: for that I came.[1]

The most perceptive study of Hopkins' aesthetic throughout its various stages of development is that by Alan Heuser.[2] In a chapter entitled "The Psychology of Instress" Heuser explains that Hopkins in essence spiritualised his sensations. He gave his natural reactions to experience a theological context, in this way defining them, enhancing their operative visibility, and in a sense shaping his own vision out of the raw materials of Ignatian spirituality.

The technique of the masks, later made much of by Yeats, occupies a place of far greater importance in the poetry of Hopkins than has

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1. The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by W.H. Gardner and N.H. MacKenzie, 4th edn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 90. [abbreviated to Poems in future references]
2. Alan Heuser, The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).

previously been suspected. Again, Hopkins sought the sanctions of his adopted tradition, I believe, and found them in Ignatius. "The enemy is accustomed ordinarily to propose apparent pleasure in those persons who go from mortal sin to mortal sin. He thus causes them to imagine sensual delights and pleasure in order to hold them more and more easily and to increase their vices and sins." But likewise, he may try the very opposite tactic: "Then it is common for the evil spirit to cause anxiety and sadness, and to create obstacles based on false reasoning ..."[1] To combat this, Ignatius provided his "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" at the end of his fourth week of exercises. By affecting states of desolation and consolation, one becomes familiar with each, thereby increasing the chances for early recognition of either state as proceeding from God or Satan. Hopkins then, by trying on different, even contrasting masks, could affect the alternate states of joy and desperation as an artistic as well as a religious exercise. As I shall describe later, in the course of Hopkins' very short poetic career he explored with amazing energies both the zenith and the nadir of the human spirit. This is all very much Hopkins' own interpretation of the method of Ignatius, an adaption from religious to artistic technique.

The final questions which must be dealt with before I can turn directly to the poetry of Hopkins are these: Can one properly refer to Hopkins as a "mystic" (therefore regarding his poetry as part of

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1. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 129.

the "mystical tradition")? And to what extent does this "mysticism" derive from Ignatius?

As with all cases of definition, and especially when the term is as slippery as "mystic", needless pedantic quibbles may obscure the essentials. For instance, Geoffrey Hartmann, an original and otherwise direct critic to be sure, declares: "Hopkins is in no way a mystic." Referring to the famous sonnet "The Windhover", Hartmann says: "The mystic seeing the windhover, would be snatched away by it, divinely raped like Ganymede by Zeus the Eagle."[1] This sort of criticism, I believe, exaggerates and falsifies an important issue for the sake of drawing out an overly elaborate critical metaphor.

Hopkins was no mystic in the medieval sense of St. Theresa or S. Juan de la Cruz. He is not known to have experienced long trances, visions or the like. But he did experience sudden bursts of tears, unrelated to any known occurrence. In the same way, he was subject to enormous, unexpected and unaccountable periods of ecstasy. It is almost as if great pools of emotion gathered to a point where the pressure became finally unbearable. Release would follow like a flood of waters bursting from a dam. The well-springs of the unconscious suddenly break into the visible arena of the conscious. And is this not akin to the mystical process whereby through long hours of daily

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1. Geoffrey Hartmann, The Unmediated Vision (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), chapter on "The Dialectic of Sense-Perception".

meditation a sudden burst of ecstasy beyond knowledge overwhelms?

The Ignatian leap from understanding to transcendental joy represents a fundamental, perhaps archetypal, psychological pattern in both meditative and mystical experience. Without doubt, there are many degrees, even varieties, of mysticism. In a way, by allowing only Hartmann's definition of "mystic" — i.e. one who is absolutely swept away by his experience — we deny the possibility that something of the vision, even a hint of the joy, can be communicated. And this is surely not the case. Even the most classical examples of the mystic adventure show that once the experience itself is accomplished, the desire to communicate something of the ecstasy and amazing brilliance of the discovered realm is very strong indeed. For example, in the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna stands with his friend Krishna awaiting the famous battle which is the subject of the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata. He sees that many of his kinsmen and friends are part of the opposing forces. Dismayed, he decides to lay down his weapons and be killed himself in preference to slaying his loved ones. Suddenly, in the course of a meditative discourse with his friend Krishna — a god in disguise — the divine form (Vishnu) of the incarnate is revealed to Arjuna. The unfathomable reaches of the mystic vision are granted to him, perhaps because of the purity of his motives. He is overwhelmed, yet when he returns to normal reality he goes on singing of what he has seen and experienced, which is a realm

> Made up of all wonders, the god,
> Infinite, with faces in all directions.

Of/...

Of a thousand suns in the sky
If suddenly should burst forth
The light, it would be like
Unto the light of that exalted one.

The whole world there united,
And divided many-fold ...[1]

This same magnitude of experience can be seen in Hopkins' startling reaction to the falcon of "The Windhover". Somewhere between the octave and the sestet a magic leap of association occurs. Sparked by the symbolic flight of the bird, a bonfire of clustering ideas and emotions erupts:

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier![2]

As Hartmann points out, Hopkins is not developing a system of correspondences or analogies in nature. Instead, Hopkins will acknowledge only <u>one</u> correspondence: Christ, who underlies, supports and becomes all things in nature, be it a lump of clay, a falcon, or a man. Indeed, Hartmann has established the most important argument for the mystical nature of Hopkins' poetry, which is the perception of the pervasive <u>One</u> (as in Plotinus) behind the many. But for Hopkins the <u>One</u> is "the Master,/<u>Ipse</u>, the only one, Christ, King, Head".[3]

It is a mistake to confuse Hopkins' metaphysics, which include

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1. <u>The Bhagavad Gita</u>, trans. Franklin Edgerton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 56; cf. also Chapter XI.

2. <u>Poems</u>, p. 69.

3. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 60; cf. "The Wreck of the Deutschland".

the aesthetic, with the substance of his verse, of course. Hopkins' images are hard, not abstract. He is concerned with normal reality, not mystic flights. And, as usual with this poet, his originality is such that he is difficult to pin down. Nevertheless, his view of reality was Platonic (and therefore, in a sense, mystic) and the origins and designs of his poems reflect a deep appreciation of Ignatian meditations pressed to their final culminations in mystical insights, if not experiences.

It should be clear by now that Ignatius was not really concerned with preparing people for mystical experiences. If both the exercitant and God were ready for such an occurrence, then all well and good. However, the central purpose of the Spiritual Exercises was always to keep the Holy Spirit alive in the lives of evangelistic Catholic Christians. Ignatius was a practical man above all else. He was concerned with countering the Reformation, with establishing the Church of Rome triumphantly in every part of the earth as the vehicle of God's grace through Christ. Thus, he would not have approved of languishing or ecstatic mystics living perpetually in secluded monasteries, merely for the sake of their personal visions. Ignatius probably would not have approved of Hopkins, who preferred the solitude of his study to the depressing task of labouring among the poor, the neglected, or the heathen. Although Hopkins attempted to live up to his ideals as a Jesuit, he believed that he had failed and suffered enormous guilt on behalf of his creative life. And it was only because he could remake Ignatius and, later, Scotus into

sanctioning authorities for his art that he continued at all. We can be grateful to Ignatius for providing a work as rich and malleable as the Spiritual Exercises; otherwise, the poems of Hopkins might never have been born.

CHAPTER SIX

VI

"THE WRECK OF THE DEUTSCHLAND": A STRUCTURAL STUDY

Hopkins' masterly ode, "The Wreck of the Deutschland," has been the object of waves of critical opinion. This is in part due to its nearly eccentric originality of surface texture (rhythms, diction, syntax, etc.). Indeed, in keeping with Hopkins' personal aesthetic (which was ultimately religious), all things in nature, including men, praise and serve God best by virtue of testing their own unique essence, or "thisness". With regard to the poet's dialectic of "inscape" and "instress", all things are seen as in the process of becoming. And so, what we have in the "Deutschland" ode is not elegy but rather the outburst of Hopkins' too long dormant Muse, testing itself, giving concrete embodiment to Hopkins' individual temperament. Yet the explosion is under severe controls. And the method of Ignatius, underlying the skeletal structure of the poem, provided the poet with a means of control.

Most significant criticism of "The Deutschland" has dealt with exegesis of particular textual difficulties. Most recently, there is Peter Milward's excellent Commentary on the ode, as well as Paul Mariani's.[1] A great deal has been said about the technical innovations

1. Peter Milward, A Commentary on "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (Tokyo:/.....

that abound in Hopkins' verse. And without doubt the most immediate key to the intensely personal, even idiosyncratic nature of Hopkins' sensibility lies within the texture of his language. Hopkins, it has often been noticed, is above all else a "verb poet". His poems are always in a state of becoming. This is eminently true of "The Deutschland", and partially accounts for its surface difficulties. However, once exegesis of particulars has been completed (though some difficulties will inevitably remain), as Milward says, "the poem must be read over again, aloud, ... to share fully in the experience of the poet, which transcends the common poetic vision of nature in a mystical union with Christ the Lord."[1] The glory of this poem is in its synthesis of myriad diverse, straining elements. Like Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell, "The Deutschland" represents a dialectic of vision and anti-vision. Similarly, God for Blake and Hopkins alike means God acting in Man and Nature. Hence Blake's aphorism, "Where man is not, nature is barren." Life is a dialectical warfare of contraries, and not to act, not to choose, not to be involved in the Process, is not to live, is to be subsumed into hell. But this dialectic is not merely cyclical and descriptive. It leads to apocalypse. As Harold Bloom has said of Blake's Marriage, it

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(Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1968); also Paul Mariani, A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970). A less interesting study is that by Donald McChesney, A Hopkins Commentary (London: University of London Press, 1968).

1. Milward, Commentary, p. 11.

"preaches the risen body breaking bounds, exploding upwards into psychic abundance".[1] And Hopkins' ode can be understood in the same way. Its theme is the mystical union of God (objective) and man (subjective). And the way of the dialectic is through the controls of the Ignatian method, which gives the poem its Coleridgean power of organisation and single vision amid the diverse explosions of Hopkins' combustive imagination.

The Ignatian development of "The Deutschland", of course, is not immediately perceived. For that matter, the organising genius underlying any great objet d'art is unlikely to be obvious. However, Hopkins' ode has baffled even the most attentive readers. Robert Bridges, Hopkins' friend and editor, called the ode "a great dragon folded in the gate forbidding all entrance" to Hopkins' poetry.[2] Although it is the first of the poet's mature poems, practically the entire range of Hopkins' poetic voice can be found in "The Deutschland". The poem is a majestic tour de force, a focal point from which the other poems in Hopkins' corpus radiate, further developing and elaborating the major themes of the poet's vision which are all present in this primary work.

Hopkins took the trouble to explain the origins of this unusual ode to his very sympathetic friend, Canon Dixon:

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1. Harold Bloom, "Dialectic in the Marriage of Heaven and Hell," PMLA LXXIII (Dec. 1958), pp. 501-504.

2. Cf. "Preface to Notes," first edition of The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London: Oxford University Press, 1918), p. 104.

> What I had written I burnt before I became a Jesuit and resolved to write no more, as not belonging to my profession, unless it were by the wish of my superiors; so for seven years I wrote nothing but two or three little presentation pieces which occasion called for. But when in the winter of '75 the Deutschland was wrecked in the mouth of the Thames and five Franciscan nuns, exiles from Germany by the Falck Laws, aboard of her were drowned I was affected by the account and happening to say so to my rector he said that he wished someone would write a poem on the subject. On this hint I set to work and, though my hand was out at first, produced one. I had long had haunting my ear the echo of a new rhythm which now I realised on paper.[1]

Seven years of intimate contact with the meditative style of Ignatius had effected massive transformations within Hopkins. The submission of his artistic impulses to a religious system led to the unique blend of elements that makes his aesthetic so important for the understanding of his poetry. Whereas for Pater art became a religion, for Hopkins religion became an art. And the method of Ignatius, with its dialectical approach to meditation, provided Hopkins with a necessary apparatus for the making of a "new" poetry. All that was needed was the proper occasion, such as the shipwreck, for Hopkins to set to work.

Todd K. Bender has considered the organisational problem in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" in his fine study of Hopkins' classical inheritance.[2] Indeed, Hopkins was a dedicated classical scholar and this element in his poetry has been sadly neglected. Bender points

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1. Hopkins/Dixon Correspondence, p. 14.
2. Todd K. Bender, Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Classical Background and Classical Reception of his Work (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

to "The Deutschland" as a modern example of the Pindaric ode. And without doubt, many resemblances are to be found. For instance, Hopkins' poem shows signs of a "ring composition", i.e. the beginning and the end seem to be of a similar substance; the poem, in effect, bites its tail like the mythological world serpent. In addition, the main body of the ode portrays a descriptive myth which is used (as in Pindar or, later, Horace) allegorically. This is all very true. "The Deutschland" is an ode based on the Pindaric model with attendant ring composition and central myth. Of course there is room for argument on this: for instance, I would quarrel with the idea that the myth of the wreck is merely allegorical. Anagogical would be a fairer representation of its use; it does not present a metaphor for truth, rather it embodies and displays what the poet conceived to be truth. Nevertheless, on the surface this ode imitates the Pindaric form. This does not detract from my point, which is that the method of Ignatius underlies the fundamental organisation of the poem at its deepest, most important level. The parallels that Bender finds between Pindar and Hopkins are extremely interesting and helpful, yet they neither explain nor illumine the driving consistency of the ode's genius. Hopkins has managed to harness a massive outpouring of imaginative energy. He sustains his intense pitch of compressed energy at every stage of the poem, and at the same time manages to move the poem carefully and with immense skill in the direction of his particular vision. This, in itself, makes "The Deutschland" a masterpiece by any standard. Nevertheless,

the key to a proper understanding of the poem's development is in the pattern of the Ignatian meditation.

W.H. Gardner, a seminal modern critic of Hopkins, has divided the ode into four principal parts:

> (1) Proem: A meditation on God's power as contrasted with subservient man (stanzas 1-10)
> (2) Dramatic description of the wreck and attendant circumstances (stanzas 11-17)
> (3) The behaviour of the heroic nun: her motives attributed to faith, prophetic inspiration (18-31)
> (4) Return to Proem's theme: reconciliation to God's will (32-35)[1]

With a view to the underlying Ignatian pattern of the poem, it becomes clear, I believe, that the poem's skeletal structure should be regarded as not fourfold, but threefold. The Pindaric affinities stressed by Bender should enhance this argument, as the Pindaric model is generally regarded as triadic. Thus, I divide the poem in the following manner:

(1) Proem: meditations on God's power and man's relationship to his Creator (stanzas 1-10).

(2) Central narrative strain of the poem, describing the storm, the events on board, the sinking and consequent act of acceptance by the nun, including a commentary on her motives (stanzas 11-29).

(3) An address to God and apotheosis of the nun, resuming original meditations on reconciliation of God's will to

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1. W.H. Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 50.

man's. A colloquy in the Ignatian manner (30-35).

The ode develops around the core of the Ignatian pattern, not "organically" as Bender would have it, with each stanza unfolding out of the previous one like an opening accordion.[1] Of course, critics have long considered the deep spirituality of the poem, which is quite easily recognised as Ignatian.[2] David Downes has succinctly stated the theological meaning of the ode:

> There are two qualities in this poem which make it especially Ignatian. The first is that Hopkins, in true Ignatian fashion, discerns the actions of God in this affair. He sees in the jeopardy of the wreck God placing men in such dire stress that they must choose, and choose quickly, to offer their lives to Him, again renewing the Passion and Death of Christ, made rich in eternal value by virtue of this commemoration. The other Ignatian quality that is notable is the kind of service to Christ that the five nuns offer. They give themselves over completely and irrevocably amid the most frightening circumstances. But it is not only that they commit themselves fully to Christ; it is also the way they do it. The way is heroic, chivalric, knightly. This is precisely the stamp that the soldierly Ignatius put on the Society of Jesus ...[3]

Indeed, the theology of the ode is markedly Ignatian; Hopkins was a Jesuit and this is as it should be. But the cumulative power and masterly control over diverse elements which make this poem great literature are the result of more than merely external dogma, be it Ignatian or otherwise. In my analysis of "The Deutschland" which

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1. Bender, Gerard Manley Hopkins: pp. 71-96 embody his arguments on "The Deutschland".

2. For example, see John Pick, Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poet and Priest (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), Chapter III.

3. Downes, Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 71.

follows below, I shall attempt to make clear the submerged Ignatian superstructure (or substructure) which rides the poem through like a massive underground river of unconscious controls.

Ignatius, in the Spiritual Exercises, begins with memory. He exploits the imagination for visual images of place. The meditation begins subjectively — the Self must be isolated, given position. Hopkins does just this throughout the first section of the ode (stanzas 1-10). A succession of images is evoked:

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

In this magnificent, thundering first stanza the attention is riveted on the image of man juxtaposed against God: a vivid example of "composition of place". This sense of place is then further developed in the second stanza. From the memory, the poet plucks the images connected with the night of his conversion:

> Thou knowest the walls, altar and hour and night:
> The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee trod
> Hard down with a horror of height ...

In the third stanza the dialectic of heaven and hell begins. Again, images of place give the sense of a precarious position, that of man swaying between damnation and salvation. Both choices seem ominously fearful. The problem is one of choice, and it is even difficult to choose salvation because of lingering doubts:

The frown of his face
Before me, the hurtle of hell
Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?

The central image of the poem is repeatedly evoked in analogical forms: man teetering at the brink of the abyss: man constrained to choose. New metaphors are employed, new compositions of place bordering on the overdrawn conceits of Donne:

I am soft sift
In an hourglass — at the wall
Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift,
And it crowds and it combs to the fall;

In the same stanza a new analogue:

I steady as water in a well, to a poise, to a pane,
But roped with, always, all the way down from the tall
Fells or flanks of the voel, a vein
Of the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift.

In these conceits the intellect can be said to intrude. Memory alone serves the poem up to stanza 3 with but a little ingenuity to compose the metaphors of place. With this new strain, the poet seeks to understand by analysis, although we are still in the domain of memory throughout this section of the poem. Nevertheless, many subjects are meditated on by the use of metaphor. In stanzas 4-8, for example, the poet considers the meaning of Christ in nature, salvation, the meaning of salvation, Christ's life and works, the decision to accept or not to accept grace: these are the subjects. But in keeping with the method of Ignatius, Hopkins offers a colloquy to end the first movement of this ode:

Be adored among men,
God, three-numbered form;
..... (stanza 9)

Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm
.....
(stanza 9)

Make mercy in all of us, out of us all
Mastery, but be adored, but be adored King. (stanza 10)

With the eleventh stanza a whole new poem begins. The emphasis during the first ten stanzas was heavily centred upon the memory. Now, a meditation begins which relies chiefly upon the intellect. A myth is used: although it is a "true" myth in this case. Indeed, the shipwreck is used metaphorically. Man is a creature foundering as if he were shipwrecked. The valiant nun who calls out to God and offers herself to Him willingly, eagerly, symbolises existential man, acting out of free will, choosing Christ over Satan, life over death, courage over fear.[1] The nun steps directly into a relationship with God not unlike the dialogic existentialism of Martin Buber, who says in his famous little book, I and Thou:

> The Thou meets me through grace — it is not found by seeking. But my speaking of the primary word to it is an act of my being, is indeed the act of my being.
>
> The Thou meets me. But I step into direct relation with it. Hence the relation means being chosen and choosing, suffering and action in one ...[2]

Stanzas 11-29 are, in effect, a meditation on the Crucifixion, on the archetypal pattern of submission by choice, sacrifice and redemption. The nun, the poet, the reader — all participate in the

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1. The existential aspects of this poem were suggested to me in private conversation with Father Walter J. Ong, S.J.

2. Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. R.G. Smith (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), p. 11.

bearing of this crucial burden.

The intellect is focused on a succession of sacrificial, almost sacramental images:

> But wé dream we are rooted in earth — Dust!
> Flesh falls within sight of us, we, though our flower the same,
> Wave with the meadow, forget that there must
> The sour scythe cringe, and the blear share come.
> (stanza 11)

This vivid imagery recalls the precarious state of man without God, Hence the memory is present in this first part of the ode's second movement. However, the purpose of these images is to present the intellect with the object of analysis. As Ignatius says:

> I will recall to mind the sin of the angels, remembering that they refused to make use of their freedom to offer reverence and obedience to their Creator and Lord, and so sinning through pride, they fell from grace into sin and were cast from heaven into hell. In like manner my understanding is to be used to <u>reason</u> more in detail on the subject matter, and thereby move more deeply my affection through the use of the will.[1]

Thus, Hopkins provides the foundering images of the wrecked ship for meditation. The passengers were without hope of rescue:

> Hope had grown grey hairs,
> Hope had mourning on,
> Trenched with tears, carved with cares,
> Hope was twelve hours gone ... (stanza 15)

Stanza 16 presents a wild, intensely vivid image of hopeless terror. A man "stirred from the rigging to save / The wild woman-kind below" with a rope fastened around his waist. But he is bashed against the ship and is "pitched to his death at a blow / For all his dreadnought

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1. <u>Spiritual Exercises</u>, p. 55.

breast and braids of thew." And with the next stanza (17) the chaos of the unchecked rage of stormy waters becomes an immediate, thoroughly concrete symbol of the chaos of a world in conflict with God (or a world without the redeeming Christ). But the climax and resolution begin at the end of this magnificent stanza. Women are wailing, a child is screaming ... "Till a lioness arose breasting the babble, / A prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told."

The poet is present as himself throughout the narration, making the connection between myth and the reality of Hopkins' spiritual odyssey explicit. Stanza 18, as a case in point, consists of the poet addressing himself personally:

> Ah, touched in your bower of bone
> Are you! turned for an exquisite smart,
> Have you! make words break from me here all alone,
> Do you! — mother of being in me, heart.

Indeed, the entire poem is an extended meditation on Hopkins' salvation, using the wreck as an external, concrete embodiment of this. The obvious symbols are directly exploited, vehicles collapsing spontaneously into tenors. And here is the power of the poem. Hopkins' apprehension of reality is intensely direct, unmediated by distantly related analogies. Thus, as I have said, the function of the wreck myth is anagogical, not allegorical. Truth is embodied, not suggested by metaphor. Symbols participate in the reality they paradoxically extend, drawing one through and beyond them.

In stanzas 22 and 23, the vehicle (the nun's Passion) is abandoned momentarily for its tenor (Christ's Passion). This is a direct

parallel with the third week of the Spiritual Exercises:

> Five! the finding and sake
> And cipher of suffering Christ.
> Mark, the mark is of man's make
> And the word of it Sacrificed. (stanza 22)

The nun becomes as Christ:

> ....
> Drawn to the Life that died;
> With the gnarls of the nails in thee, niche of the lance, his
> Lovescape crucified
> And seal of his seraph-arrival! and these thy daughters
> And five-lived and leaved favour and pride,
> Are sisterly sealed in wild waters,
> To bathe in his fall-gold mercies, to breathe in his all-fire glances.
> (stanza 23)

Thus, the archetypal pattern of sacrifice and redemption is rehearsed. The mystic identification of subject and object occurs, and in this sense the nun (or Hopkins) may be said to become Christ. Memory and understanding have worked, in the manner Ignatius expected, to bring about that point where the affective will may offer itself fully to God with no discord between emotion and intellect. Stanza 30 of "The Deutschland" quite obviously begins the Ignatian colloquy, the third and final movement of the ode:

> Jesu, heart's light,
> Jesu, maid's son,
> What was the feast followed the night
> Thou hadst glory of this nun? —
> Feast of the one woman without stain.
> ....

Christ is addressed "by speaking as one friend speaks to another, or as a servant speaks to his master ..."[1] In this section Hopkins

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1. Spiritual Exercises, p. 56.

unleashes his affective will. His breathless outbursts carry the poem swiftly through this highly-charged final phase:

> I admire thee, master of the tides,
> Of the Yore-flood, of the year's fall;
> The recurb and the recovery of the gulf's sides,
> The girth of it and the wharf of it and the wall;
> .....
> (stanza 32)

The very last stanza (35) affects a moralistic tone after the manner of Pindar. It is something of an epilogue. However, the form is again that of the colloquy. The sacrificed nun is addressed — entreated to "Remember us in the roads, the heaven-haven of the Reward:" clearly, an apotheosis of the nun-hero has been accomplished. Heaven and the Divine are still being addressed. Thus, in the last lines Hopkins lavishes approbation and devotion on his Lord:

> Pride, rose, prince, hero of us, high-priest,
> Our hearts' charity's hearth's fire, our thoughts' chivalry's throng's Lord.

It may be clear by now that one can and must read Hopkins' great ode with full awareness of its meditative technique. Here is the key to its success. The Ignatian triad is the harness within which the poem, like a wild steed, races. The magisterial effect of the work as a whole is a direct result of its positive, though underlying, direction. The explosiveness of the poem's surface detail may obscure an immediate recognition of this direction which I have outlined. However, once the unconscious reins of the Ignatian method are understood, the immensely rich experience which this poem so brilliantly embodies becomes increasingly open to our understanding and appreciation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

VII

TOWARDS A VISION OF CREATION: HOPKINS' MIDDLE YEARS

> 1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
>
> 2. Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
>
> 3. Energy is Eternal Delight.
>
> Blake

THE BEST poems of Hopkins' middle years (1876-1885) apart from "The Wreck of the Deutschland", reflect a growing mastery of the Ignatian method. It would be destructively exclusive to call these richly imaginative poems "Ignatian exercises in poetical form". They are more than this. They are genuine examples of a rare, exquisitely acute poetic Energy equivalent to that force which Blake elevates to a religious plane in the above epigraph.

Indeed, Hopkins' mature poems (preceding the "Terrible Sonnets" of 1885) are a celebration of the senses, a garden of Eternal Delights, a controlled expression of affection for the Thou which animates and pervades the universe for which Hopkins' poems are praise.

The flexibility of Hopkins' poetic gifts is revealed in the way he moved from "The Deutschland", which is a rather strict meditation

along Ignatian lines, to modified applications of the established method. At times, he would employ but a single part of the Ignatian triad. Or again, he would produce a triadic miniature in the manner of, say, Donne. But most interestingly, he would incorporate the Ignatian movement in a manner that utilised the organising power of the system without directly evoking the distinct flavour of Ignatius. This oblique approach, now common to poetry in the meditative vein, governs a poem such as "Spring and Fall" unconsciously, contributing immeasurably to its terrifying spareness of form, to its intense, firmly controlled pathos which succeeds where a similar poem might easily degenerate into sentimentality. But first, some of the more overtly Ignatian poems should be considered.

Most of the exuberant nature sonnets were written during the year of 1877 while the poet enjoyed the tranquillity of St. Beuno's College in North Wales. Blake's remarkable aphorism, "Exuberance is Beauty", finds easy application here. For Hopkins' immense store of creative energy and childlike joy in nature exudes from these poems. They explode so brilliantly that the boundaries of their poetic structures are not immediately perceived. They look so easy! But great literature is always deceptive in this manner.

The faculties of memory, understanding and will are blended skilfully in such poems as "God's Grandeur", "Spring", "The Starlight Night", "The Windhover" and "Hurrahing in Harvest", though in most of these the dominant factor is that of the affective will in colloquy.

Essentially, most of Hopkins' mature poems reflect the final stages of the Ignatian meditation. The energy that drives the poems to their object — God — is an energy already composed, processed, and delivered. As a case in point, consider the miniature of the Ignatian triad embodied within the beautiful "In the Valley of the Elwy":

> I REMEMBER a house where all were good
> To me, God knows, deserving no such thing:
> Comforting smell breathed at very entering,
> Fetched fresh, as I suppose, off some sweet wood.

Hopkins first <u>remembers</u> the house; but there is no really visual imagery here. The poet defers to the sense of smell instead, effecting a slight variation of the Ignatian technique of "composition of place".

> That cordial air made those kind people a hood
> All over, as a bevy of eggs the mothering wing
> Will, or mild nights the new morsels of Spring:
> Why, it seemed of course; seemed of right it should.

Now the intellect is brought into play. The concept of cordiality is meditated by the use of three metaphors: the air, the wing which covers the egg, the night which shrouds the morsel in spring. The guiding super-image is that of motherhood which underlies and connects the three metaphors. Again, the movement is Ignatian, and this time rigidly so.

> Lovely the woods, waters, meadows, combes, vales,
> All the air things wear that build this world of Wales;
> Only the inmate does not correspond:

The movement is towards colloquy. Not God, but the projection of the poet's ego is addressed (as Freud would have it), or the eternal <u>Thou</u>

is addressed (in Buber's terms). More simply, the audience receives this confession of the poet's ill-fitting presence within this pastoral, pristine setting. The sestet ends with a traditionally Ignatian colloquy:

> God, lover of souls, swaying considerate scales,
> Complete thy creature dear O where it fails,
> Being mighty a master, being a father and fond.

This poem fits the pattern almost too perfectly. Nevertheless, the poem is impressive in its craftsmanship and individuality alike. Everything in the poem is under control. With few words, a pastoral background having an immediately sensuous texture is given a concrete reality in language. Femininity, motherliness, fragrance and energy constitute Nature for Hopkins during this prolific period of his career. As in this poem, the reconciliation of subjective human discord with the harmonies of the objective world is a constant theme. Here is the irony on which the poem turns. And the method used to overcome this subject-object cleavage is that of Ignatius.

It was Plato who wrote that the eye is, of all sense organs, the one that holds the most sun.[1] Indeed, the faculty of sight dominates in normal perception. As Geoffrey Hartman argues in The Unmediated Vision, sight is even a tyrant over the other senses unless it is opened by the imagination into symbolical awareness. Nevertheless, symbols are first, for the most part, images. Where the

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1. Cf. The Republic, Bk. VI.1.508b.

imagination takes over, metaphor comes into play. The end result of this process, what Hartman calls pure representation or imageless vision, is the reconciliation of perceiver and perceived. It is the land of Beulah in Blake, where subject and object are no longer separate. And ultimately, it is the mystic identification of exercitant and his God in the religious meditation.

François Courel, a French Jesuit, describes the personal mysticism of Ignatius as originating with the perception of created things. Obviously, Hopkins understood this intuitively. Courel says of Ignatius:

> Until the end of his life, he remained sensitive to this beauty of the "heavens which sang the glory of God" which at the same time led him to the summits of praise. One can still see in his tiny room at Rome the window on which he went to lean while admiring the sky at night. Ribadeneira reports for us a scene from his life which has come down to us, thanks to the patient observations of Laynez:
>
> "He went up to a terrace or belvedere, where one could get a good view of the sky. He stood there, head uncovered, a long moment, without moving, his eyes fixed on the heavens. Then kneeling, he humbled himself before God, and finally sat down upon a small stool, because his weakness did not permit him to do more. He remained there, his head weeping softly. The tears flowed so silently that not a sob or a groan, not a sound could be heard, or a single movement of his body."[1]

Ecstasy proceeding from close observation of natural imagery was an integral part of the personal spiritual method of Ignatius in his daily devotions. Remarkably similar habits of observation served Hopkins as well, both in his personal devotions and in his poetry.

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1. François Courel, "Finding God in All Things," trans. W.J. Young, article in Christus (Paris), no. 11 (July 1956); taken from a collection likewise entitled Christus (Chicago: H. Regney Co., 1958).

Hopkins' journals, for example, are full of minute recordings of the many transfigurations of the heavens. The same can be said for his poetry, of course. Consider a passage from "The Deutschland":

> I kiss my hand
> To the stars, lovely-asunder
> Starlight, wafting him out of it; ....[1] (stanza 5)

The him referred to here is, of course, Christ. In "God's Grandeur" the poet describes the sky at sunrise:

> Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
> Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
> World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.[2]

"The Starlight Night" begins:

> LOOK at the stars! look, look up at the skies![3]

and ends with the observation that all the amazing beauty he sees is but the outside of the "barn" of heaven, for "withindoors" there is Christ and his flock ("the shocks" — or sheaves of grain symbolising the followers of Christ). In the magnificent colloquy of "Hurrahing in Harvest" again we see the same theme:

> I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes,
> Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour.[4]

Christ is "gleaned" out of the glory of the heavens. In the same way, Hopkins finds Christ in all natural things, animal and vegetable. This is but another aspect of his adaption of the Ignatian system.

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1. Poems, p. 55.
2. Ibid., p. 66.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 70.

He fixes on his image, a natural one, and proceeds through the image to the creative force behind it — Christ. This is a form of Christian Platonism, of course; however, it is thoroughly Ignatian as well. Nature is in a state of perpetual becoming. It is a constant source of energy, often called "instress" by Hopkins. From the poet's journals numerous examples of this method are available; for example the entry for April 22, 1871, begins:

> But such a lovely damasking in the sky as today I never felt before. The blue was charged with simple instress, the higher, zenith sky earnest and frowning, lower more light and sweet.[1]

More explicitly Christian is the following observation of May 18, 1870:

> ... One day when the bluebells were in bloom I wrote the following. I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it.[2]

Hopkins, as I have stressed earlier in this essay, rarely crossed the thresholds of ordinary perception into mysticism. His nature poems are essentially colloquies of praise. The faculty of sight, obviously, lords over most of them. However, in the best of his work, such as "The Windhover", the release of symbolism occurs. I shall use this poem briefly to examine the Ignatian structure which controls the poem's central image (the falcon) in its transformation from sign into symbol. Composition of the image, as one should expect, comes first.

> I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
> dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon,
> in his riding
> Of the rolling level underneath him steady air ....

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1. The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by Humphry House, completed by Graham Storey (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 207. Hereafter cited as Journals.

2. Ibid., p. 199.

Already the symbolism is deeply present. The poet sees a bird. But he also sees a minion, princely and majestic. The kestrel is in absolute control — equilibrium suggested by "steady air" which supports the flight.

Two metaphorical images are then brought into play, giving the poem its swift, centrifugal movement. The bird is "rung on the rein of a wimpling wing" in the same way that a horse rings around his stationary master on a tethering rein. The second image is that of a skater rounding a curve, his "heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend". The sense of controlled movement is suggested by these visual metaphors of circular motion.

The Ignatian direction should be obvious. The image of the falcon is a remembered image. The tense of the opening octet is past. The images of the metaphors are visual and metaphysical, that is, they are rather distant parallels forced into startling apposition with the bird's movement. At last, in the sestet, the fusion of emotion and intellect, subject and object, occurs:

> Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
> Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
> Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier! [1]

The falcon as Christ is the recipient of this startling colloquy. Christ as chevalier, it should be remembered, is a specifically Ignatian notion, and a central image of Jesuit theology. The poem is

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1. Poems, p. 69.

explicitly a lo divino, subtitled: "To Christ our Lord." And all of the disparate manifestations of the poet's experience of this natural scene are united and identified with Christ, especially in the sestet. The delightful ambiguity of the central verb — "Buckle" — increases the symbolic potential of the language.

The poem ends with a tercet of rare concentration. It is directed towards Christ and the reader, and is essentially a summing up. a strike towards a universal:

> No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
> Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
> Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion. [1]

Action under stress tests and exercises the resilience and individuality of all things. A plough is at stress with the earth (sillion), hot embers exhaust their substance, breaking gloriously upon themselves, and the windhover in like manner buffets the atmosphere, expending itself to the hilt, all to the greater glory of God: Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.

In Romans 8:19 we read: "For the created universe waits with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed." Hopkins' conception of nature could be thought of as beginning here. All created things are potentially Christ revealing himself. As Hopkins moved from the idyllic, contemplative life of St. Beuno's to the practical duties of a priest and teacher in urban environments, he began to look towards society as well as natural objects. One of his earliest poems

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1. Poems, p. 69.

reflecting this change of subject matter is "The Candle Indoors," a sonnet with strong Ignatian movements.

> Some candle clear burns somewhere I come by.
> I muse at how its being puts blissful back
> With yellowy moisture mild night's blear-all black,
> Or to-fro tender tram beams truckle at the eye.
>
> By that window what task what fingers ply,
> I plod wondering, a-wanting, just for lack
> Of answer the eagerer a-wanting Jessy or Jack
> There/God to aggrandise, God to glorify.—

The octet composes a spare, contemplative scene. The poet, walking out at night, sees a candle burning in a window where someone, he concludes, is working. The light is imlicitly symbolic. The poet meditates on the potential of his metaphor in the first quatrain ("I muse at.."). The small candlelight illumines ("gives bliss to") the blearing darkness. The octet ends with the poet assuming the role of priest, overwhelmed with the desire to "aggrandise" God by obtaining the souls of "Jessy or Jack." But a sudden awareness of the pretentions of the word "aggrandise" leads the poet to shift his tone radically from one of spiritual pride to one of humility:

> Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire
> Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault:
> You there are master, do your own desire;

In this modification of the colloquy, the poet addresses himself, calling himself "home," rebuking himself for his pride. The Ignatian movements provide the necessary unity, the link between octet and sestet in the manner of the Spiritual

Exercises. The Scotist theme of "do your own desire" is nearly ubiquitous in Hopkins and is, partially at least, the result of his interpretation of Ignatius. This phrase, in particular, recalls the very words of Ignatius in the "First Day and First Contemplation" of the Second Week: "The third prelude is to ask for what I desire ... that I may love and follow him better."[1]

The last part of the sestet continues the probing:

> What hinders? Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault
> In a neighbour deft-handed? Are you that liar
> And, cast by a conscience out, spendsavour salt?[2]

The candle motif is maintained. The poet asks himself if he is blind to his own beam, though he is skilful ("deft-handed") in watching his neighbour's. He asks if he is himself that hypocrite ("liar") who, as an outcast of his own conscience, wastes (spendthrift: "spend-savour") the salt of his faith, recalling the Sermon on the Mount when Christ declares: "You are the salt of the earth, and if salt becomes tasteless, what can make it salt again? It is good for nothing but to be thrown out to be trampled underfoot by men."[3]

The movement of the poem is supremely meditative, of course. The octet contemplates the objective image — the distant candle — then reverses it in the sestet, deferring to the subject. The tone

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1. Spiritual Exercises, p. 69. This is a slight distortion, reading Hopkins into Ignatius in a way that the poet might well have done.

2. Poems, p. 81.

3. Matthew 5:13 (The Jerusalem Bible translation).

moves towards reconciliation. And the modification of the colloquy shows Hopkins' growing flexibility when writing in the Ignatian mode.

Many of Hopkins poems are simply not in this mode, of course; although rarely are there no remnants of the meditative technique present. His imagery is nearly always graphic; his poems proceed by metaphorical analysis, and even the less Ignatian of his sonnets, such as "Henry Purcell", an elegy, uses the modified colloquy ("Let him oh!") in the sestet.[1] "Andromeda" is a short exercise in the extended metaphor (metaphysical conceit), and so is the long, unusual poem "The Blessed Mother Compared to the Air we Breathe".[2] Generally, and apart from "The Deutschland", Hopkins relies most heavily upon the Ignatian method when composing in the sonnet form. And it is not merely a coincidence that these are, in fact, his better poems.

Finally, I should examine Hopkins' more oblique approach to the Ignatian method as it is seen in the delicate "Spring and Fall". The poem is addressed to a young child. Although no form is immediately visible, there is a tripartite movement which can be discerned by careful listening. The shifting tones of the poem operate within a four-stress line. The first movement awakens the reader with a question; the child is asked:

> Margaret, are you grieving
> Over Goldengrove unleaving?
> Leaves, like the things of man, you
> With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?

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1. Poems, p. 81.
2. Ibid., pp. 84, 93.

The image is secured. The child stands in a golden autumn grove with leaves falling about her ("unleaving"). Can she comprehend the meaning of this experience? The poet intrudes with an answer:

> Ah! as the heart grows older
> It will come to such sights colder
> By and by, nor spare a sigh
> Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
> And yet you <u>will</u> weep and know why.

These speculations, seeking to analyse and <u>understand</u> (in the Ignatian sense), are at the same time grounded in the poet's <u>persona</u> of wisdom gained by experience (a function of <u>memory</u>). The child would have to strain beyond her limits in order genuinely to understand her experience of autumn, of course. However, the poet shifts tones once more, now addressing the reader as well as the child:

> Now no matter, child, the name:
> Sorrow's springs are the same.
> Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
> What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
> It is the blight man was born for,
> It is Margaret you mourn for. [1]

Such a terse, intense, rare and beautifully crafted specimen of English verse at its best! The poet, having already mastered the three-fold meditation, transforms the somewhat rigid Ignatian pattern into a stunning method for tone control.

The emerging theme in all of these poems from Hopkins' middle years is that of an understanding derived by intuition and through the senses, the body acting as medium. As Geoffrey Hartman so brilliantly

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1. <u>Poems</u>, pp. 88-89.

observed, "Nature, the body, and human consciousness — that is the only text."[1] Hopkins seizes upon natural images or images of individuals that stick in his memory, such as "Felix Randal" or "Harry Ploughman", and these become the texts of his poems and the agents of his understanding. He seeks to analyse by metaphor, making full use of this important "power of the soul". And finally, in his poems and devotional life alike, Hopkins makes that leap of will which Ignatius demanded of his exercitants. It is the will to praise, the exercise of divine love which brings about the reconciliation of opposites and the "atonement"of subject and object. Out of all this comes an energetic and highly personal unity of vision. The soul breathes through the senses. Energy is the only life. Energy is Eternal Delight.

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1. Geoffrey Hartman, The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 155.

CHAPTER EIGHT

VIII

THE POETRY OF SELF-ANALYSIS: LAST YEARS IN DUBLIN

> Our moral life develops like a network, the human threads of which intercross, without our knowledge, with the dark and unperceived threads of heavenly and diabolical spirits. This is a truth vouched for by Holy Scripture and by the teaching of the Church. Experience shows that we make a mistake in attributing to it only an ordinary importance. It would be very interesting, therefore, and very profitable to study from this point of view the subtle wiles of the demon in the course of temptation: how, for example, he brings into agreement his external snares with the perverse tendencies which he has discovered or aroused ... thus paving the way for falls.
>
> François Charmont, S.J.

> The enemy's behaviour is also like that of a military leader who wishes to conquer and plunder the object of his desires. Just as the commander of an army pitches his camp, studies the strength and defences of a fortress, and then attacks it on its weakest side, in like manner, the enemy of our human nature studies from all sides our theological, cardinal, and moral virtues. Wherever he finds us weakest and most in need regarding our eternal salvation, he attacks and tries to take us by storm.
>
> St. Ignatius

IN THE world view of Ignatius and his followers, self-analysis is ultimately associated with the universal order of things. The military metaphors of Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises (1541) and Lorenzo Scupoli in the Spiritual Combat (1589) portray man as an embattled creature who must constantly resist the "sensitive appetite" — which is the domain of Satan. In addition, man must struggle to achieve a

rapprochement with the Divine Will. Life is a perpetual battle, and the stakes are high. The only way to maintain one's ground in this struggle is to "wage continual warfare against yourself".[1]

Self-examination, therefore, is of primary importance to the individual in meditation. It keeps the conscience alert, leads to humility and, ideally, makes the discovery of God at the heart of one's being a possibility. Understanding this, Ignatius provided an appendix to the Spiritual Exercises called the "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits". According to these "Rules", it is essential for the individual to be aware of both the demonic and the divine "motions of the soul" if he is ever to achieve a moral victory. Thus, the exercitant should examine his conscience for the presence of good and bad spirits alike, and in this way learn to distinguish between them, and to choose the one over the other.

One of Satan's most obvious ploys for discouraging the faithful, Ignatius warns, is desolation:

> I call desolation all ... darkness of the soul, turmoil of the mind, inclination to low and earthly things, restlessness resulting from many disturbances and temptations which lead to loss of faith, loss of hope, and loss of love. It is also desolation when a soul finds itself completely apathetic, tepid, sad and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord.[2]

Such desolation can be the agent of either Satan or the Lord, depending on the circumstance. And it is up to the exercitant to know himself

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1. Cf. Martz, Poetry of Meditation, p. 126.
2. Spiritual Exercises, p. 130.

as thoroughly as possible, both weak points and strong, so as to judge the source of his unfortunate spiritual condition.

The metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century were fully conscious of the various techniques for self-analysis, including those developed by Ignatius, Scupoli and their school. For example, Donne's ninth "Holy Sonnet" begins with the wilful cultivation of blasphemous thoughts:

> If poysonous mineralls, and if that tree,
> Whose fruit threw death on else immortall us,
> If lecherous goats, if serpents envious
> Cannot be damn'd; Alas; why should I bee?
> Why should intent or reason, borne in mee,
> Make sinnes, else equall, in mee more heinous?
> And mercy being easie, and glorious
> To God; in his sterne wrath, why threatens hee? [1]

Of course, Donne is quick to admonish himself for such blasphemy in the sestet, a colloquy of repentance. However, the technique is important. Donne puts his most unholy thoughts up for examination. He seeks to understand the weakest aspects of his nature. His eagerness to dispute with God over the nature of things upsets him. And doubts torment him. So he explores them by meditation and in this way assures himself of control over his spiritual state of affairs. Through self-analysis he is drawn closer to God.

This technique is, of course, familiar to Herbert as well. For example, "The Discharge" begins:

> Busie enquiring heart, what would'st thou know?
> Why dost thou prie;
> And/ ...

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1. Grierson (ed.), Poems of John Donne, p. 297.

And turn, and leer, and with a licorous eye
Look high and low,
And in thy looking stretch and grow?[1]

He rebuffs himself, like Donne, for an overly active curiosity. Often, Herbert meditates on his desolation and its causes. In "Grief" the despairing is excessive, perhaps. But in "The Crosse" a fine exercise in self-analysis is converted into good poetry. Herbert speaks honestly and directly. And the result is astonishing. That Herbert explored this mode with fascination and great success will be obvious to anyone reading his five poems entitled "Affliction".

In like manner Hopkins turned his attentions upon himself during the last years of his life (1885-1889). His appointment to the Chair in Classics in Dublin University did not suit him as one might imagine. The long hours of tedious work (as it proved for him) wore his nerves down to a rough edge. He suffered from bad eyesight, nervous tension, despair and religious doubts. In addition, his personal dislike of Ireland itself made life all the more difficult.

The most important poems to come out of this period are those often called the "Terrible Sonnets". They were all composed during the year of 1885 while Hopkins was struggling to adjust to his new, uncomfortable environment. The majestic sonnet, "Carrion Comfort", is the first of these. Its initial line, awesome as it is, establishes the poem's unusual rhythms:

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee.

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1. Arthur Waugh (ed.), Poems of George Herbert, p. 148.

The poet is wrestling with himself, determined to ward off Despair, the agent of Satan, the Giant of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. In effect, the poem is something of a resolution. The poet asserts that he will

> Not untwist — slack they may be — these last strands of man
> In me or, most weary, cry I can no more. I can;
> Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.[1]

It is the positive force of the assertion I can which is a direct reflection of Hopkins' Ignatian spirit. Patience and determination are the qulities necessary to ward off the temptations of despair. Ignatius advises the meditator:

> One who is in desolation must strive to persevere in patience, which is contrary to the vexations which have come upon him.[2]

The poet completes the octet by reverting to blasphemous questioning of God's motives, which is all very much in the tradition established in English poetry by Donne and Herbert:

> But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
> Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me? scan
> With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones? and fan,
> O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid
> thee and flee?

Hopkins lays his blasphemous feelings towards God on the line for examination. Then, in the sestet, a colloquy directed back at himself, the poet analyses God's motives by a dialectic of questions and answers:

> Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.

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1. Poems, p. 99.
2. The Spiritual Exercises, p. 130.

God afflicts the poet, beats him in order to sort out the good from the bad. "Cheer whom though? the hero whose heaven-handling flung me ...?" — that is, it is Christ, the Ignatian Hero, who is cheered. Refining the argument yet another degree, the poet asks whether it is just Christ or the sufferer — or both — who are to be cheered. The sonnet ends in triumph over darkness.

In the sonnet considered above, the poet is something of a Job figure, being tested by God for a good reason, which is the refinement of this atmosphere of consolation in "No worst, there is none ..." (sonnet 65). In this terrifying, highly rhetorical sonnet the poet probes the limits of his desolation. The opening lines,

> No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief
> More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring. [1]

recall the anguish of the son Edgar in King Lear upon seeing his blinded father, Gloucester, led across the heath:

> O gods! Who is't can say, "I am at the worst"?
> I am worse than e'er I was ...
> And worse I may be yet; the worst is not
> So long as we can say, "This is the worst."
> (IV.1)

As with "Carrion Comfort", this poem repeats the Ignatian pattern. Beginning with a striking image ("Pitched past pitch of grief"), the poet makes full use of Ignatian techniques. The fourth line questions:

> Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?

This is much the same as Herbert's "Grief", where he asks, "O WHO will

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1. Poems, p. 100.

give me tears?"

Hopkins develops this sentiment by the use of metaphor, and the imagery is vivid to an astonishing degree:

> My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief
> Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing —
> Then lull, then leave off.

A colloquy of despair completes the poem; there is no consolation in suffering this time:

> ... Let me be fell: force I must be brief'.
>
> O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
> Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
> May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
> Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
> Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
> Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

These sentiments of despair are not simply the jaded outpourings of a desolate spirit. The poet is consciously making full use of the Ignatian method and the techniques of meditation. The "Terrible Sonnets" are the refinement of the poet's long-tried exercises in the discernment of spirits and controlled self-analysis.

The sonnet beginning "To seem the stranger lies my lot, ..." (sonnet 66) is an assessment of the poet's immediate situation.[1] It is a prelude to meditation. The poet feels out of place and lonely. However, he puts his feelings up for scrutiny. Perhaps it is his special burden to bear a "life / Among strangers". The sense of place is immediate and not metaphorical: "I am in Ireland now," this adds to the poem's sense of urgency. The poet may find a little

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1. Poems, p. 101.

consolation among his confrères (Jesuits): "Not but in all removes I can / Kind love both give and get." Yet his every word, no matter how wise or ingenious, seems doomed:

> Only what word
> Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
> Bars or hell's spell thwarts.

Who frustrates his efforts? Is it heaven — with some "baffling ban" on him? Or is it hell with a "spell"? The poet has no sure answers. But, according to the method for discernment, he dutifully considers both possibilities.

The final sonnet of this bitter sequence is the one that begins:

> I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
> What hours, O what black hours we have spent
> This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways
> you went!
> And more must, in yet longer light's delay. [1]

Hopkins remembers the "black hours" of one anguished night. He recalls to mind the hideous "sights" his heart "saw", the "ways (it) went". His desolation is given a concrete location. It is the labyrinthine "vale of tears" of the first Spiritual Exercise. It is hell. The meditation evolves organically:

> With witness I speak this. But where I say
> Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
> Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
> To dearest him that lives alas! away.

His hours, as if prolonged to a life sentence, witness the desolation or "dark night of the soul" common to medieval mystics and dealt with

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1. Poems, p. 101.

by Ignatius in the "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits". Hopkins is desperate, though not out of control for a moment. Proof of this is the careful attention to Ignatian and poetic technique apparent in the poem. For all its wealth of passion, it remains a work of art — a piece of craftsmanship. For example, the development by metaphor of the sense of desperation could be nothing but the result of deliberate artistry. His cries are like letters to God, sent but unanswered: a restrained simile.

The sestet is a self-addressed colloquy which seeks to relate the poet's immediate suffering to the general blight of human sinfulness. But like Donne in Holy Sonnet IX, Hopkins does not understand why God "decreed" this state for man:

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

In the last tercet of the colloquy, the poet resorts to a rather contrived (extremely metaphysical) analogy. Man's corrupt spirit enters the body like yeast put into dough. Naturally, the result is one of souring. The lost souls of hell have a similar experience, he claims, though they are even worse off than the poet:

> Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
> The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
> As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

During this same period (1885) Hopkins managed to compose the comforting, soft and delicate sonnets beginning with number 68, "Patience, hard thing!" and number 69, "My own heart let me more have

pity on ..." These poems are written in manuscript on the same sheet with the harsh, resentful "To seem the stranger ..." and the bitter "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day." This alone, I believe, points to their character as spiritual exercises. The poet-exercitant is practising the various emotions perceived, however slightly, in his soul. In so doing, he hopes to become more knowledgeable and better able to deal with those issuing from Satan. The structures of these sonnets, especially "My own heart ...", testify to their Ignatian appropriateness. "My own heart ..." is a perfect Ignatian tripartite miniature, ending with a colloquy of self-analysis directed toward the poet's own soul, advising relaxation in order to allow joy and comfort to take root and grow to the size God would have them. Consolation is a gift from God and cannot be forced or foreseen. It is compared to sunlight appearing unexpectedly from behind clouds, lighting the road "a lovely mile", making mountains pied. Again, the analogy is extremely visual.

Hopkins' last finished poems show a newly emerging variety which was prematurely cut off by death. He continued writing descriptive poems, many of them with didactic intentions. "Tom's Garland: upon the Unemployed" is such a poem. "Harry Ploughman" is descriptive in the Scotist vein of earlier poems, tinged with awareness of social problems. It reflects Hopkins' fascination with the common man and reveals his affinity with the American poet, Walt Whitman.[1] There is

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1. Hopkins only knew of Whitman through gobbets quoted in reviews; nevertheless,/...

nothing about these poems which can be called specifically Ignatian; however, they are the obvious product of an extremely disciplined visual sensibility. Indirectly, they reflect Hopkins' Jesuit training.

"That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection" is Hopkins' last major poem. It is a sprawling piece which seeks to incorporate the diverse elements of early Greek philosophy into Hopkins' own theological framework. The poem can be viewed as a highly contrived meditation. Its images, as W.H. Gardner has shown, were garnered from a period of up to eighteen years of recorded sense impressions.[1] It accords with the Ignatian pattern as so many of his poems do. Rather, the Ignatian element is subdued, controlling the motions of the poem from a distance. Although firmly grounded in the method of Ignatius, the poem demonstrates Hopkins' innovative temper.

The poem opens with the usual composition of place. The poet attempts to create the sense of the universe in a state of flux, after Heraclitus. Air, earth, water and fire form a constant cycle of integration and disintegration. The rhythms of the opening lines suggest the stormy, roughly dialectical nature of this process:

> Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows flaunt
> forth, then chevy on an air-
> built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs
> they throng; they glitter in marches.
> Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash ...[2]

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nevertheless, he spoke of the American poet as the one closest to his own poetic sensibility among contemporaries.

1. Cf. Gardner, Study I, p. 164.
2. Poems, p. 105.

Hopkins is casting each image in tough, rhythmical patterns suggesting the destructive energy of his universe. Sight and sound combine brilliantly in these lines; the result is a language of elemental force. The poet's world is primordial, self-destroying: elms arch, the wind "ropes, wrestles, beats earth bare". All creases, footprints and memories are flogged out of the soil by nature itself, and still "Million-fueled, nature's bonfire burns on." And man, as part of this total vision, is likewise consumed. The poet courts blasphemy again for a moment and observes:

> Is any of him at all so stark
> But vastness blurs and time beats level. ....

The reversal in the poem, the point at which colloquy usually comes in with resounding force to redeem the blasphemous sinner, occurs in an extremely powerful shift of tone:

> .... Enough! the Resurrection,
> A heart's clarion! Away grief's gasping, joyless days, dejection.

Hopkins revels, like Parmenides, in the mere fact of being, which is, indirectly, the ontological argument for the existence of God. Existence is affirmation, and affirmation is assurance. The poem incorporates the separate elements of flux and of pure being — reconciling the baffling opposites of early Greek philosophy. Amid the disintegration of all physical forms, Christ is the one constant factor, "immortal diamond". And Christ is identical, in Hopkins' personal metaphysics, with all things in the process of becoming, including the poet:

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal
diamond,
Is immortal diamond.

Indeed, this magnificent poem ends in affirmation and praise. It reflects the amazing virility of Hopkins' vision of creation and his uncanny ability to make original use of the Ignatian method — whether consciously or unconsciously employed.

Hopkins wrote a few more poems before his death, the most beautiful of them being the terse colloquy, "Thou are indeed just, Lord" (sonnet 74), wherein he admits an inability to comprehend God's ways. He speaks of his own sterility, referring to himself as "Time's eunuch". He prays for nourishment: "O thou lord of life, send my roots rain." In a curious way, Hopkins' symbols tend to presage the early work of Eliot, wherein the identification of dryness with spiritual poverty was to become a dominant symbol for the twentieth century.

In the spring of 1889, Hopkins died shortly after contracting typhoid fever. A reconciliation with Ireland and with his condition in life was never to be realised. Yet the ferocity of his vision of the universe, which to the end was able to perceive in creation "the horror and the havoc and the glory", continues to inspire and overawe. A rich, enormous energy seethes beneath every turn and twist of his language, which seems to wrestle with itself, straining to loose its wild powers in every direction. That Hopkins could bridle such energy is to his credit as an artist. He set himself firmly within

the reins of the Ignatian method. Then he worked with it, modified it, and made full use of its unique controls. It was by this means that he tamed his muse, producing at last "immortal diamond".

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