

'THE NAKED EYE': VISION AND RISK IN
THE WORK OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

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DECLARATION

The thesis which follows is entirely my own research and writing, notwithstanding the assistance acknowledged above. The total word count does not exceed 80,000 words.

ABSTRACT

This thesis takes as its subject vision and risk in the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1844-1889. Because Hopkins's poetry displays so evident a fascination with the particulars of language, it is unsurprising that the critical tradition on his work has thus far been heavily dominated by matters of sound: by the verbal, the rhythmic, the musical, and the aural. However, in this thesis I move from the sounded to the seen, identifying in Hopkins's work a central preoccupation with the visual, with looking and seeing, and the possibilities and dangers inherent in each. Here was a man driven to look for beauty, yet this compulsion to look was matched only by a desperate desire to look away. I shall argue that it is this dichotomy, and the excitement of the many and various possibilities it engenders, that so characterises Hopkins's engagement with the visual world.

Born into a rapidly-changing late Victorian world, Hopkins was fascinated by sight and by the increasingly problematic act of seeing. He frequently characterises himself in explicitly visual terms, and his poetry is littered with numerous references to eyes, eyeballs, eyelashes, eyelids, and eyesight, in addition to many metaphors of sight in its various forms. He demonstrates a recurring notably obsessive anxiety over the health of his eyes and the acuity of his sight, yet repeated medical reassurance does nothing to quell his fears over his perceived loss of vision. Counter to, but inextricably linked with, this fear for the loss of sight is an intense awareness of the danger of sight. This paradox is central to Hopkins's conception of himself and of his roles as both poet and priest.

Chapter One considers Hopkins's engagement with the intensely visual Victorian cultural environment. Hopkins was a keen draughtsman and painter in his youth and for a while considered becoming a professional poet-painter like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, with whose family he was well acquainted. Although he decided to relinquish his artistic ambitions in favour of the priesthood, he remained a keen critic of art and architecture throughout his life. His diaries and journals, littered with sketches and accounts of visits to galleries and exhibitions, are fascinating for what they reveal of this intensely eye/I-driven individual, and the acute anxieties he experienced when confronted by beauty, in whatever form.

Chapter Two continues this concern with beauty and its inherent dangers, but now moves to consider Hopkins's often anxious visual encounters with other people. As a vigilant social observer, his writing ranges from delightedly detailed depictions of other individuals, particularly young men, to deeply uneasy descriptions of massed crowds and formless groups of people. This chapter shows a particular concern, as Hopkins did, with the purpose of mortal beauty, and the dangers and challenges it could pose.

Chapter Three develops the concerns of the previous chapter, by pursuing the additional dimension of people looking. In this chapter I consider a group of Hopkins's strangest and yet most celebratory poems, united by a concern with people looking at others who are themselves looking. With the uneasy concept of the voyeur never far away, this chapter raises questions about the moral, psychological and social dimensions of seeing within Hopkins's work, and thus I assess the meaning of licit and illicit sight,

whether on the part of the benevolent or neutral observer, the systematic enquirer, the voyeur or the enlightened seer. This chapter argues that the dynamic nature of this relationship between perceiver and object, the seer and the seen, is central to his endlessly complex dialectic of vision and visibility. It closes by moving to consider the ultimate unseen seer, God. In the figure of Christ we find the ultimate exemplar of mortal beauty, and the chapter returns to the concerns explored in Chapter Two, now from a Christological perspective.

In Chapter Four, the concluding chapter, the concerns elicited in the previous chapters are pulled together in a discussion of Hopkins's longest and greatest symphonic poem, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1875-1876). This poem has at its heart an intense concern with seeing and the seeing of seeing, with the act of witness, and the role of the martyr, while foregrounding the reciprocal qualities of beauty and danger. The thesis concludes with a close reading of this electrifying poem about vision and sight in the many senses explored in the course of the study as a whole.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AMES* *All My Eyes See: The Visual World of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Edited by R. K. R. Thornton. Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, Sunderland Arts Centre, 1975.
- Correspondence* *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*. Edited by Claude Colleer Abbott. London: Oxford University Press, 1935.
- Early Manuscripts* *The Early Poetic Manuscripts and Note-books of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile*. Edited by Norman H. MacKenzie. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989.
- Further Letters* *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins: Including his Correspondence with Coventry Patmore*. Edited by Claude Colleer Abbott. London: Oxford University Press, 1938; 2nd edn. rev. and enlarged 1956.
- ILN* *Illustrated London News*.
- Journals* *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Edited by Humphry House. Completed by Graham Storey. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Later Manuscripts* *The Later Poetic Manuscripts of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile*. Edited by Norman H. MacKenzie. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991.
- Letters* *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*. Edited by Claude Colleer Abbott. London: Oxford University Press, 1935.
- Notebooks* *The Note-books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Edited by Humphry House. London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1937.
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 4 April 2000. <<http://dictionary.oed.com>>.
- Sermons* *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Edited by Christopher Devlin, SJ London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Works* *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips, *Oxford World's Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 2002).
- NB This thesis follows Phillips's edition in the inclusion of Hopkins's diacritical marks.

INTRODUCTION

... *What you look hard at seems to look hard at you* ...¹

Seeing is irrational, inconsistent, and undependable. It is immensely troubled, cousin to blindness and sexuality, and caught up in the threads of the unconscious. Our eyes are not ours to command; they roam where they will and then tell us they have only been where we have sent them. No matter how hard we look, we see very little of what we look at. [...] Seeing is like hunting and like dreaming, and even like falling in love. It is entangled in the passions – jealousy, violence, possessiveness; and it is soaked in affect – in pleasure and displeasure, and in pain. Ultimately, seeing alters the thing that is seen, and transforms the seer.²

Gerard Manley Hopkins was, throughout his life, a man who ‘look[ed] hard’. This experience of looking hard, and its reciprocal corollary of hard looking, is fundamental to Hopkins’s conception of himself, and of his place within the world, a world that, if looked at correctly, would ‘look hard’ back. The dynamic nature of this relationship between perceiver and object, the seer and the seen, is central to his endlessly complex dialectic of vision and visuality, as we shall see. Hopkins was, as Claude Colleer Abbott observes, ‘a man for whom the visible world triumphantly exists’, both as a form of external, objective, verifiable truth, however problematic, but also as a complex extension of his highly individual experience of selfhood.³ John D. Rosenberg goes further, proclaiming Hopkins to be ‘eye-driven, virtually photo-erotic’ in his sensitivity to the visual dimensions of the world and of each perceiving individual.⁴ Building on the seminal work of Alan Heuser,

¹ March 1871. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House and completed by Graham Storey (London: Oxford University Press, 1959): 204.

² James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (San Diego, New York & London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996): 11-12.

³ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins: Including his Correspondence with Coventry Patmore*, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1938; 2nd edn. rev. and enlarged 1956): xxxi.

⁴ John D. Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age: The Presence of the Past in Victorian Literature*, ed. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Anthem Nineteenth Century Studies* (London: Anthem Press, 2005): 154.

R. K. R. Thornton, Peter Milward and Raymond Schoder, and, more recently, Catherine Phillips, this thesis places Hopkins's 'photo-eroticism' at its very centre.⁵

Hopkins was not alone in this fundamental concern with the primacy of the eye. The Victorian period was characterised, as Kate Flint observes, by 'a growing concern with the very practice of looking, and with the problematisation of that crucial instrument, the human eye'.⁶ Never before had the world seemed so dominated by, and perhaps even defined by, such a rapidly changing awareness and analysis of vision. To an unprecedented degree, the visual appeared as a recurring cultural motif, as the Victorians opened their eyes to the possibilities and responsibilities of sight and of seeing. Daniel Pick has also identified this 'notable cross-disciplinary preoccupation with how we see and what we see', but makes clear that this does not represent 'some absolute epistemological or artistic break', instead emerging out of long-standing debates and discussions in art, poetry, painting, and science.⁷

In Jonathan Crary's analysis, profound changes in the way vision was understood and experienced at the start of the nineteenth century were fundamental in the Victorian construction of subjective experience, and thus ultimately of modernity. These led finally to a defining shift in the understanding of the role, position and responsibility of the observer, until eventually an alternative model of 'the observing subject' was proposed.⁸ This came about through the development of 'a new set of relations between the body on one hand and forms of institutional and discursive power on the other', as the viewer was suddenly released from beneath the metaphorical

⁵ Alan Heuser, *The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); R. K. R. Thornton, *All My Eyes See: The Visual World of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Sunderland: Ceolfriith Press, Sunderland Arts Centre, 1975); Peter Milward, SJ, and Raymond Schoder, SJ, *Landscape and Inscape: Vision and Inspiration in Hopkins's Poetry* (London: Elek Books Ltd., 1975); Catherine Phillips, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Visual World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶ Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 2.

⁷ Daniel Pick, 'Stories of the Eye', in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1997): 188.

⁸ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 1990): 3.

curtain of the camera obscura and confronted with a new visual autonomy.⁹ Crary identifies a number of new and less restrictive optical devices and technologies which, he proposes, together served as catalysts for this change. Lindsay Smith also examines the influence of contemporary technological developments, particularly photography, on the perception and representations of vision and sight.¹⁰ She considers how such technologies influenced and shaped the depiction of vision and visual perception in Victorian poetry, and also the more general influence of the wider availability of ‘cultural spectacles [...] promoted and propagated by the new mass media’ on the visual imagination, as Catherine Maxwell notes.¹¹ Suddenly the world appeared over-run with new possibilities for sight and spectatorship, as the limits of vision were pushed ever further and further.

For Hopkins, born into this rapidly-changing world, vision and sight are fundamental; he characterises himself in explicitly visual terms as the ‘all-accepting fixed eye’ that looks out from ‘the midst of every zone’.¹² It is thus unsurprising that his prose and poetry is littered with numerous references to eyes, eyeballs, eyelashes, eyelids, and eyesight, in addition to many metaphors of sight in its various forms. As we read his work, we become gradually aware of the numerous eyes that ‘look hard back’, until the process itself becomes self-reflexive:

The stars are packed so thick to-night
They seem to press and droop and stare
‘The Elopement’ (ll. 19-20)¹³

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Lindsay Smith, *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹¹ Catherine Maxwell, ‘Vision and Visuality’, in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman and Anthony Harrison (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002): 510.

¹² ‘The earth and heaven’, ll. 6, 3. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips, *Oxford World’s Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 2002): 77-78. All subsequent references are to this edition, unless stated otherwise.

¹³ *ibid.*: 94-95.

Ultimately this communicative force of looking transcends the distinction between external objects and their internal influence, and each becomes altered by the sight of the other. William Cohen's analysis suggests that this quality of looking is fundamental to this modern sense of incorporation: 'Bodily sensation affirms the status of the human subject as an object in the world – albeit a privileged one – which is both contiguous with other objects and mutually pervious to them.'¹⁴ This 'embodiment' is absolutely characteristic of Hopkins, for whom 'hard looking' so often causes all boundaries between internal and external to fall away, until the reader suddenly finds himself face to face with the 'greenish brown' roaming 'irises of the present writer's eyes'.¹⁵ David Spurr suggests that a 'writer's eye is always in some sense colonizing the landscape, mastering and portioning, fixing zones and poles', yet rarely is this 'writer's eye' quite as visually embodied in this landscape as that of 'the present writer's eyes'.¹⁶ For Hopkins's readers, this 'mastering' eye is a constant watching presence.

It is against this understanding of the primacy of the eye as the pre-eminent organ of truth, perception and communication that we must place Hopkins's markedly obsessive anxiety over the health of his eyes. He remarks as early as 1884 that he fears he is 'in danger of permanently injuring my eyes',¹⁷ and by 1887 he notes that the harsh winter 'half killed me [...]. Especially it has attacked my eyes',¹⁸ that his eyes are 'almost out of my head',¹⁹ and by January 1888 that his 'eyes are almost bleeding';²⁰

¹⁴ William A. Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 111.

¹⁵ 29 March 1887. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. Claude Collier Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1935): 253.

¹⁶ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire. Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 27. Cited by Flint, *Visual Imagination*: 3.

¹⁷ 30 September 1884. *Letters*: 198.

¹⁸ 27 January 1887. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, ed. Claude Collier Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1935): 150.

¹⁹ 28 September 1887. *Letters*: 262.

²⁰ 12 January 1888. *ibid.*: 271.

later that year he remarks that his ‘eyes are very, very sore’.²¹ Anxious for reassurance he consults his good friend and poetic mentor, Dr Robert Bridges: ‘Can there be gout or rheumatism in the eyes? If there can I have it.’²² His fears are clearly not assuaged by Bridges’s response and professional opinion, and his own research does not settle his fears: ‘I find there *is* gout or rheumatism of the eyes. It will, I hope, soon pass away from mine.’²³ A few days later he writes again to Bridges, confident now in his own diagnosis: ‘I have nothing now the matter with me but gout in the eyes, which is unpleasant and disquieting. The feeling is like soap or lemons.’²⁴ Eventually after several years of increasingly fervent anxiety, Hopkins seeks professional help. Although advised to get glasses to correct mild presbyopia normal at his age, his letter records that ‘The oculist says my sight is very good and my eye perfectly healthy but that like Jane Nightwork I am old’.²⁵ Clearly his fears for his sight, as well as betraying a general anxiety associated with reduced physical strength for the task in hand, are deeply implicated with his fears over loss of imaginative vision.

Hopkins was not alone in these concerns over fading sight and blindness. Kate Flint identifies blindness as a ‘central trope’ for Victorian writers, concerned as they were by the limitations and experience of vision, and by the structural relationships between sight and blindness, visibility and invisibility, light and dark, and by the dubious territories in between.²⁶ For those optical pioneers who most concerned themselves with pushing against these apparent boundaries and limitations, a devastating irony was that many did eventually succumb to blindness precisely as a result of this very process of ‘looking hard’, as Pick notes:

²¹ 7 September 1888. *ibid.*: 283.

²² *ibid.*

²³ 10 September 1888. *ibid.*: 289.

²⁴ 13-14 September 1888. *ibid.*: 290.

²⁵ 19 October 1888. *ibid.*: 296.

²⁶ Flint, *Visual Imagination*: 64.

Blindness became a frequent motif of Victorian fiction, just as, more tragically, it had sometimes been the fate of early nineteenth-century optical investigators, who stared for too long at the sun as they recorded the impact of dazzling light on their eyes and minds.²⁷

Hopkins's concerns that man might prove 'beam-blind' explicitly depicts just such a shattering result of unprotected 'dazzling light' on the eyes.²⁸ However, where the physical eye could be protected with a 'smoked glass', his anxieties over blindness of the mind or soul were not so easily assuaged, as we shall see.²⁹

Physical blindness was not the only form of inaccurate or fallible sight, as Hopkins noted. Susan Horton observes that one result of the extensive experimentation undertaken by the Victorians on the physiology of the eye and the nature of sight and visibility was the conclusion that 'the more that was learned about vision, the more unreliable it seemed to be'.³⁰ The imperfect nature of sight, and the degree to which perception was dependent on both the point of view and the specific perceiver fascinated the Victorians. Sight could no longer be seen as simply an objective process of looking and seeing, but rather had to be confronted as subjective and individual, as Flint observes:

In each case, the act of seeing was something performed by individuals, each with their particular subjectivities, and their own ocular physiology. Simultaneously, what was seen was necessarily selected, stressed, described and filtered through many cultural conventions.³¹

²⁷ Pick, 'Stories of the Eye', 186.

²⁸ 'The Candle Indoors', l. 12. *Works*: 144.

²⁹ 'The Candle Indoors', l. 12. *ibid.*

³⁰ Susan R. Horton, 'Were They Having Fun Yet? Victorian Optical Gadgetry, Modernist Selves', in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 3.

³¹ Flint, *Visual Imagination*: 2.

From the early fragments of *Floris in Italy* ('Beauty it may be [...] / [...] within the looker's eye')³² and 'It was a hard thing to undo this knot' to 'The Lantern out of Doors', Hopkins demonstrates an acute sensitivity to the individual nature of perception, to the epistemological status of the phenomenon. He notes carefully that each observer sees 'One bow each, yet not the same to all',³³ demonstrating through the rainbow a recognition of both intrinsic and extrinsic beauty; the thing as it is and as perceived by the viewer are given equal weight. Even John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite painters – the great proponents of realism, 'Truth', and 'fidelity to nature' – were forced to confront the individuality, subjectivity and even unreliability of sight.

On one of his many trips to the Swiss Alps, Ruskin laments 'how little the eye is to be trusted' when considering the fine details of the mountain peaks.³⁴ Hopkins frequently relates the fragility of nature to the vulnerability and physiological instability of the human eye, both of which can be seen as components in 'a shared body at risk of violation', as observed by Brian Day.³⁵ Throughout his writings Hopkins shows a particular fascination with the vulnerability of the body, and its susceptibility to weakness, illness, violence, mutilation, and torture, as we will see. The recurring motif of the 'clammy ball' of the eye serves as a particularly vivid encapsulation of this 'body at risk of violation', and is central to our concern with vision and risk. An early journal entry records the story of an Irish man who had 'one of his eyes thrust out' and served 'on a plate before him' for 'dealing with the fairies',³⁶ and Hopkins later

³² '[Fragments of] *Floris in Italy*', a, ll. 1 & 6. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Norman H. MacKenzie, *Oxford English Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990): 36-43, 36.

³³ 'It was a hard thing to undo this knot', l. 6. *Works*: 29 & 134. These poems are discussed further in Chapter One.

³⁴ John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-12): 6: 227.

³⁵ Brian J. Day, 'Hopkins' Spiritual Ecology in "Binsey Poplars"', *Victorian Poetry*, 42, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 186.

³⁶ April 1870. *Journals*: 198.

includes in a letter to Bridges a particularly detailed description of a young man who ‘put his eyes out [...] with a stick and some wire’, adding the characteristically Hopkinsian detail that ‘the eyes were found among nettles in a field’.³⁷ For Hopkins, despite in general being drawn to the brawny muscularity of ‘brute beauty’, it is paradoxically in the frailty and vulnerability of the human body that he locates much of this beauty, as we shall see.³⁸ This he likens to the delightfully fragile natural world:

That, like this sleek and seeing ball
But a prick would make no eye at all
‘Binsey Poplars’ (ll. 14-15)³⁹

Hopkins’s alliance between the ‘susceptible’ and ‘imperfect eye’ and the brittle beauty of the natural world was shared by Ruskin, of whom Ann Colley writes:

Ruskin’s acute consciousness of just how susceptible the eye is to weakness found an accomplice in the very mountains he explored. Through his climbing, he quickly learned that it is not only the body and the eye that are vulnerable but also the mountains themselves. [...] His sketches embody the violence of time that continues to sculpt the Alps. They catch the mountain’s lines of fall, and reflect, as well, his submission to the imperfect eye.⁴⁰

Hopkins’s journals and papers carefully record his struggles to see with this ‘imperfect eye’, and to see correctly, recognising and recreating the world with verifiable accuracy along the lines advocated by Ruskin as moral custodian of the Victorian visual imagination.

Hopkins entered Balliol College, Oxford with a high hope of ‘doing something – in poetry and painting’, inspired by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the poet-painters such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and the new poetry of paintings centring on visual representation, exemplified by Robert Browning’s *Men and Women*, and Rossetti’s

³⁷ 7 September 1888. *Letters*: 282.

³⁸ ‘The Windhover’, l. 9. *Works*: 132.

³⁹ *ibid.*: 142.

⁴⁰ Ann C. Colley, ‘John Ruskin: Climbing and the Vulnerable Eye’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37 (2009): 58.

A House of Life.⁴¹ The decision to abandon a possible career as a professional poet-painter in favour of the priesthood was not one he took lightly, and although he never regretted following his vocation, it remained a source of some regret in later life that he had not pursued his painterly ambitions further.⁴² However, he remained throughout his life a frequent visitor to art galleries and exhibitions, and he made careful notes on the paintings seen, following the advice of his many artistic guides and teachers.

Inspired by the writings of Walter Pater, John Ruskin and others, Hopkins worked hard at focusing, honing and developing his artistic 'eye' through careful attention to visual perception and acuity. He notes that the eyes must be 'trained to look severely at things',⁴³ 'schooled' in accurate and reliable looking,⁴⁴ and even punished when they wavered, as in 1869 when he carefully kept his eyes lowered for six months: 'A penance which I was doing from Jan. 25 to July 25 prevented my seeing much that half-year.'⁴⁵ It remained an ongoing frustration, and even a source of great fear at times, that even the 'educated eye' could not always

⁴¹ 20 July 1864. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 214.

Hopkins was not in general impressed by Browning's work, considering it to be untrue to nature, and thus 'frigid': 'Now he has got a great deal of what came in with Kingsley and the Broad Church school, a way of talking (and making his people talk) with the air and spirit of a man bouncing up from the table with his mouth full of bread and cheese and saying that he meant to stand no blasted nonsense. [...] The effect of this style is a frigid bluster.' 12 October 1881. *Correspondence*: 74. See also *Correspondence*: 56, 99, and *Letters*: 111. Hopkins's knowledge of Rossetti's work will be discussed in Chapter One.

⁴² In 1884 Hopkins wrote to his sister expressing regret over how little drawing he had done in the later years of his life: 'A dear old French Father [...] finding that once I used to draw, got me to bring him the few remains I still have [...] and admired them to that degree that he is urgent with me to go on drawing at all hazards; but I do not see how that could be now, so late: if anybody had said the same 10 years ago it might have been different.' 9 December 1884. *Further Letters*: 165.

In 1888 Hopkins writes to Bridges that, despite his sight problems, he has once again taken up drawing: 'And, strange to say, I have taken to drawing again. Perverse Fortune or something perverse (try me): why did I not take to it before?' 19 October 1888. *Letters*: 296.

⁴³ *Journals*: 77.

⁴⁴ A process described in 'She schools the flighty pupils', from June 1864 (*Works*: 21), discussed in Chapter Two.

⁴⁵ *Journals*: 190.

be trusted, as James Elkins observes: ‘Our eyes are not ours to command; they roam where they will and then tell us they have only been where we have sent them.’⁴⁶

Whilst the challenges and limitations of the ‘imperfect eye’ and its vulnerability to weakness, error and deception proved a constant battle for Hopkins, he was also able to take great delight in the very possibilities that this apparent unreliability introduced. In a letter published in *Nature* magazine in 1884, he comments on ‘the untrustworthy impressions of the eye’ and how easily it may be fooled by beauty, perspective, or ‘optical effect[s]’.⁴⁷ In his interest in this, Hopkins was again proving himself very much of his period. Although the Victorians were fascinated by sight and ocular physiology, a particular concern was the fallibility of the processes of vision. This spurred an explosion of optical gadgetry and toys, equipment designed to fool the eye, such as the phantasmagorias, dioramas, zoetropes, stroboscopes and iconoscopes.⁴⁸ Pick notes that this ‘vogue for gadgetry’ caused ‘earlier models of unified vision’ to give way to ‘sensory fragmentation and dispersed psychological experience’.⁴⁹

For a man so dominated by the particularity of selfhood and the individual, it is unsurprising to find that Hopkins was intensely drawn to such experiments into the reliability, or otherwise, of sight.⁵⁰ Hopkins was not only an avid student of art, but also a keen amateur scientist who conducted experiments of his own: in 1871, he made careful notes on experiments he conducted on a duck. He demonstrated that the creature could apparently be hypnotised by drawing a chalk

⁴⁶ Elkins, *Object Stares Back*: 11.

⁴⁷ Letter published in *Nature*, 30 October 1884, p. 633. Reproduced in the Appendix to Patricia M. Ball, *The Science of Aspects: The Changing Role of Fact in the Work of Coleridge, Ruskin and Hopkins* (London: The Athlone Press, 1971): 148-150. This letter and others are discussed in some detail in Chapter One.

⁴⁸ Information from Horton, ‘Victorian Optical Gadgetry’, and Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*.

⁴⁹ Pick, ‘Stories of the Eye’, 188.

⁵⁰ Hopkins’s knowledge and use of various theories of vision is the subject of the final chapter in Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 245-263.

line down its beak and onwards on to the ground in front.⁵¹ He also explored the possibilities and limitations of his own sight. His poetry and prose is littered with explorations of optical illusions and sensory misapprehensions, from the carefully recorded ‘optical effect’ of the sunsets in his letters to *Nature*, to the disappearing roofs of Oxford and even the gazing eye of ‘A Vision of the Mermaids’, to be discussed in the following chapters. Colley notes that ‘Hopkins did not wish to be bound by habitual ways of seeing. Throughout his life, he seems to have searched for a means to extend, even violate, the limits custom and his own mortality imposed upon his vision’.⁵² I suggest in this thesis that Hopkins’s engagement with the visual world is characterised by just such an ongoing resistance to ‘habitual ways of seeing’.

Whilst the physiological eye could be ‘imperfect’, fooled or even blinded, Hopkins shared with Ruskin a conviction that a man may see ‘though the eyeball be sightless’.⁵³ This distinction between the visible and the invisible, between seeing with the eye and seeing with the mind’s eye, was central to Victorian concerns with sight, its reliability, and its interpretation, as Flint notes:

For the topic becomes yet more complicated and controversial when one recognises the tension that existed between the different valuations given to outward and inward seeing; to observation, on the one hand, and the life of the imagination on the other. Seeing in the mind’s eye was linked to scrutinising the world around one, but it was not an identical process.⁵⁴

For Hopkins, it is probably this dichotomy that most defines his dual role as a poet-priest. His letters to Robert Bridges late in life make clear that his fears over his perceived failing physiological sight are deeply implicated with his fears over loss of imaginative vision, as depicted in his final poem, ‘To R.B.’: ‘The widow of an insight

⁵¹ 27 April 1871. *Journals*: 207.

⁵² Ann C. Colley, *The Search for Synthesis in Literature and Art: The Paradox of Space* (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 1990): 93.

⁵³ *The Stones of Venice*. Ruskin, *Works of Ruskin*: 11: 203.

⁵⁴ Flint, *Visual Imagination*: 2.

of both Adam and Eve ‘were opened’ by disobeying God.⁵⁹ It is with this opening of their eyes that Man becomes spiritually blind. Sight is ever after limited and restricted, and an overwhelming sense of this loss is present throughout Hopkins’s work: ‘Why do men then now not reckon his rod?’⁶⁰ This acute sense of loss is made only more intense through the continual presence of an unseen divinity watching over the stumbling actions of blinded Man. At a distance from God, there is darkness, and Man’s enfeebled eyes struggle to see.⁶¹

For Hopkins, the primary means of access to the divine was through sensory experiences, particularly vision. This is encapsulated in the image that opens ‘The Candle Indoors’ (ll. 1-4), where, as Cohen observes the house (or body) serves as ‘the perceptual medium for receiving light’, noting the emphasis placed on the ‘sensory apprehension through a visual apparatus’ of the traditional figure of the light of divine inspiration.⁶² Writing of the notably secular Thomas Hardy, also heavily inspired by Ruskin, Barrie Bullen could almost be describing Hopkins as he describes this sensual primacy: ‘Life is lived inwardly through the intensity of sensuous experience –

⁵⁹ Genesis 3: 4-7. ‘And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.’

All quotations from the Bible throughout this thesis are taken from the Authorised Version, commonly known as the King James Version, as owned by the Hopkins family and given to Hopkins at his baptism: see Madeline House, ‘Books belonging to Hopkins and his Family’, *Hopkins Research Bulletin*, 5 (1974): 31.

Throughout his life Hopkins will undoubtedly also have made reference to the New Testament in Greek, Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, the Rheims-Douay English translation, and eventually the 1881 Revised English Edition, with which Newman was heavily involved. For the sake of ease and consistency, I have followed the Authorised version throughout.

⁶⁰ ‘God’s Grandeur’, l. 4. *Works*: 128.

⁶¹ The power of God in the period was usually figured as indivisible from the light of salvation, following Psalm 119: 105. ‘Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.’ This is particularly clearly depicted in Holman Hunt’s celebrated painting *The Light of the World* (1851-53), which toured the country in 1861, as Flint notes. *Visual Imagination*: 73.

⁶² *Works*: 144. Cohen, *Embodied*: 114.

in the ear [...], in the sense of touch, but above all in the eye.’⁶³ Such was the centrality of the senses to Hopkins’s life and work that Bridges even felt it necessary to warn readers of the 1918 first edition of Hopkins’s works of the dangers of a ‘naked encounter of sensualism’.⁶⁴ This thesis stares headlong at such encounters, embraced in all their nudity for what they reveal of this eye/I-driven poet.

Though vision was always to be problematic, as we shall see, it still remained central to Hopkins’s engagement with the world. Cohen identifies this quality as a ‘tangible contiguity between human subjects and the world, interiority and the exterior’,⁶⁵ and it is crucial to Hopkins’s perception of his own place within the world. Shadowing the essential paradox of God as both incarnate and divine, Hopkins found traces of this in everything he saw: ‘The world is charged with the grandeur of God.’⁶⁶ Hopkins’s concerns from his earliest years that the eyes must be trained and schooled to see accurately now take on divine significance: ‘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.’⁶⁷ This direct association between perception and sensation, the earthly and the divine, is present even in Hopkins’s earliest works, but it undergoes a sharp refocusing through his Jesuit training and engagement with the writings of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, a series of meditations completed by all Jesuits during their training and then repeated periodically throughout their lives, are heavily centred around the utilisation of personal knowledge and individual experience of physical sensations as a means of appreciating and approaching the divine.

⁶³ J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986): 4.

⁶⁴ From Robert Bridges’s ‘Editor’s Preface to Notes’ in the 1918 edition. Reprinted in *Gerard Manley Hopkins, Poems: A Casebook* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1975): 43.

⁶⁵ Cohen, *Embodied*: 110.

⁶⁶ ‘God’s Grandeur’, l. 1. *Works*: 128.

⁶⁷ 1870. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Note-books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1937): 133-134.

The exercitant is required to create intense visualisations (or ‘mind-paintings’, in the words of W. H. Gardner)⁶⁸ of a scene from the life of Christ, and then to consider this ‘sweet especial scene’ as ‘seen’ in the light of each of his senses in turn.⁶⁹ Finally the mind is turned to considering the significance of the event, its implications and how these can best be incorporated into his own daily life. Numerous critics have studied the influence of this training on Hopkins’s poetry and writings, but the intensely sensual nature of this training has at times been overlooked.⁷⁰

Where Adam and Eve became distanced from God by opening their eyes, Hopkins sought to approach God. The purpose of beauty, particularly human beauty, was thus as an endless demonstration of this divinity, the Incarnation continually re-expressed:

[...] For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.
‘As kingfishers catch fire’ (ll. 12-14)⁷¹

It is only through the senses – particularly the eyes – that embodied humans can come to appreciate this beauty, and thus the body is ultimately the only ‘route through which human beings encounter the godhead’, as Cohen observes.⁷² Hopkins very clearly describes this process as he pictures his eyes moving first ‘from myself unholy / To the sweet living of my friends’, before eventually settling on the saving beauty of Christ:⁷³

No *better* serves me now, save *best*; no other,
Save Christ: to Christ I look, on Christ I call.
(ll. 13-14)

⁶⁸ W. H. Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition*, 1958 ed., 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1949): 2: 321.

⁶⁹ ‘Binsey Poplars’, l. 24. *Works*: 142.

⁷⁰ Fuller consideration of the influence of Ignatius on Hopkins’s work, and the relevant critical writing on the subject, appears in Chapter Four.

⁷¹ *Works*: 129.

⁷² Cohen, *Embodied*: 113.

⁷³ ‘Myself unholy’, ll. 1-2. *Works*: 67. This process is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two.

However, as the opening eyes of Adam and Eve revealed – and, through this revelation, ensured – this is a process fraught with danger.

From the very start of humanity, looking and danger are intimately entwined. For Hopkins, this observation was to form a central preoccupation throughout his life, both haunting and delighting him in equal measure, as this thesis will demonstrate. Everywhere he looked, Hopkins saw danger, in many and various forms. Looking itself could be dangerous, but not looking equally so. Renée V. Overholser notes that, for Hopkins, ‘danger came about through his own weakness in thought, speech and action.’⁷⁴ I suggest that it is looking that unites these three, as Ruskin observed:

The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to *see* something, and tell what it *saw* in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, – all in one.⁷⁵

For Hopkins, his poetry, prophecy and religion were united by this shared preoccupation with ‘seeing clearly’. This visual engagement involved both Rosenberg’s ‘photo-eroticism’ and Christian devotion, and this thesis will explore the complex interplay and dangers of the two, considering in turn Hopkins’s visual engagement with the world of art, artists and architecture, his engagement with other men, and finally, his engagement with himself and with God. To each of these we now turn ‘the naked eye’.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Renée V. Overholser, “Looking with Terrible Temptation”: Gerard Manley Hopkins and Beautiful Bodies’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 19 (1991): 26.

⁷⁵ *Modern Painters*. Ruskin, *Works of Ruskin*: 5: 333.

⁷⁶ 16 November 1882. Letter to *Nature*, reproduced in Appendix II in *Correspondence*: 161.

CHAPTER ONE

LOOKING AT PAINTINGS

... *in poetry and painting* ...¹

That the ‘photo-erotic’ Hopkins entertained ideas in his youth of becoming a professional poet-painter like Dante Gabriel Rossetti is well recognised, and it is clear from his letters and diaries that this idea was only finally abandoned in 1868 when he decided to act upon his vocation to become a Jesuit and then later a priest:

You know I once wanted to be a painter. But even if I could I wd. not I think, now, for the fact is that the higher and more attractive parts of the art put a strain upon the passions which I shd. think it unsafe to encounter. I want to write still and as a priest I very likely can do that too, not so freely as I shd. have liked, e.g. nothing or little in the verse way, but no doubt what wd. best serve the cause of my religion.²

However, it would be mistaken to believe that Hopkins’s interest in painting, its practice and its theory ceased when he joined the priesthood. Throughout his life his aesthetic and poetic philosophies and ideals of beauty and its representation, significance, purpose and even danger, were heavily informed by his interest in painting. Even in the final months before his early death, Hopkins was still enclosing new sketches and snippets of art criticism in letters to his friends and family;³ unfortunately, very few of his own sketches and drawings survive, either from before he joined the priesthood, or from his very different life thereafter. We do have his notebooks and journals, letters, and poems though, and these writings are full of description of paintings, critiques of painters, and discussions of the value of painting and the visual arts in general. From these surviving manuscripts, including the few remaining sketches,

¹ 20 July 1864. *Further Letters*: 214.

Earlier drafts of this chapter were written prior to the publication of Catherine Phillips’s study of Hopkins and the *Victorian Visual World*. I am deeply indebted to Phillips for her exhaustive cataloguing of so much relevant material. The close analytical approach of this thesis builds on Phillips’s more contextual and biographical readings, developing and expanding our understanding of Hopkins and the highly visual world in which he lived.

² 12 February 1868. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 231. The richness of this passage will be explored more fully later.

³ Writing from Dublin on 26 November 1888 to his brother Arthur, in a letter dominated by critical advice over his brother’s paintings, Hopkins includes ‘some trifles’, recent sketches. (*ibid.*: 189). He was also sending sketches to Bridges (*Letters*: 40-41, 96, 227), and indeed he arranged for his Shanklin sketch, ‘the best of my drawings’, to be photographed for posterity and then sent to his mother (*Further Letters*: 195).

I intend to demonstrate Hopkins's 'painterly' principles: what he sees, what he reproduces, and what he believes and understands about each process. I suggest that an understanding of this early framework is fundamental in establishing the context and culture out of which Hopkins's anxious dialectics of vision and of sight developed.

It could be argued that this approach is inherently flawed, as too few of Hopkins's own pictures and drawings survive to enable any reasonable conclusions. However, this is to turn our eyes from the not inconsiderable evidence that does remain, even in the gaps and absences where the paintings have been, as Richard Altick explains:

One who sets out to narrate an episode in the history of the English visual imagination is constantly confronted with blank spaces on the wall where pictures should be. Much of his primary evidence is literally invisible.⁴

Altick is, of course, primarily concerned with the study of an historical period rather than an individual, and he proceeds even though he accepts that many of the paintings – his 'primary evidence' – have disappeared, been lost or destroyed with the passing of time. I believe that this same method can be usefully applied to facilitate a study of Hopkins's work. It is known that many of his sketches, drawings and paintings did indeed disappear or were destroyed; there are descriptions in his journals and letters of sketches that have never been found, and it is generally agreed that most of his sketches from the 1870s and 1880s have not survived (although he was then sketching much less than he had done when younger). Just as Hopkins destroyed many of his poems on entering the priesthood in the infamous 'slaughter of the innocents', so he may also have destroyed many of his drawings and sketches, these being of even less value in the poet's eyes.⁵ Other sketches and drawings were enclosed in letters to friends

⁴ Richard D. Altick, *Paintings from Books: Art and Literature in Britain, 1760-1900* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985): 3.

⁵ 11 May 1868. *Journals*: 165. See also the letter to Canon Dixon of 5 October 1878, discussed in the final chapter. *Correspondence*: 14.

or relatives, and many were no doubt discarded by the recipients or their family. The lost poems are not the only massacred innocents.

Although it appears that many of Hopkins's sketches vanished, it is also possible that many of the sketches 'begun' in the journals (sometimes nothing more than a vague outline, hasty scribble, or collection of descriptive words) were never in fact completed: the pictures never existed at all. This is a different instance of Altick's 'blank spaces on the wall'. That there are 'missing' pictures, pictures that never made it beyond 'the mind [as] a mother of immortal song' to 'the creation' is the premise of Norman MacKenzie's article of 1984 about Hopkins's enigmatic poem, 'Lines for a Picture of St. Dorothea'.⁶ MacKenzie concludes that the portrait of St. Dorothea described so carefully within the poem 'was to be by Hopkins himself'.⁷ Such an instance of an intended painting that was never brought to fruition would be another example of 'notional ekphrasis' [*sic*] as defined by John Hollander.⁸ If this is the case, and the painting conceived but never created, it seems unlikely that this was a one-off occurrence:

Many projects in the strenuous Oxford years which led to his First in Greats, as well as others in the serious depression of his Dublin period, came to nothing. I believe that he had in his mind a picture which never reached canvas [...]. Both the visual composition and the literary characteristics point to the same mind.⁹

Thus in Hopkins's case we are left with two very different but ultimately complementary kinds of 'blank spaces'. Whether these spaces once contained paintings or sketches now lost, or whether the paintings ever made it beyond their creator's mind is not ultimately of importance. Certainly enough remains to justify a study of

⁶ 'To R. B.', ll. 4 & 12. *Works*: 184. Norman H. MacKenzie, 'Hopkins and St. Dorothea: Lines for Whose Picture?' in *Vital Candle: Victorian and Modern Bearings on Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. John S. North and Michael D. Moore (Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, 1984).

⁷ MacKenzie, 'Hopkins and St. Dorothea', 34.

⁸ 'Notional ekphrasis' – where a poem describes a purely fictional work of art. From John Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 4. This is a specific form of 'ekphrasis' – 'the verbal representation of visual representation' (W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 152).

⁹ MacKenzie, 'Hopkins and St. Dorothea', 34.

Hopkins's many and various relations with painting and the other visual art forms, as critic, viewer, poet, painter, draughtsman, or indeed nervous spectator.

These interactions with the visual arts were fraught with anxieties for Hopkins, anxieties that were to haunt him throughout his life in subtly changing forms. He returned to painting and paintings frequently throughout his life, yet his engagement with the visual art forms was never in his eyes straightforward or indeed entirely free from danger: 'You know I once wanted to be a painter. But even if I could I wd. not.'¹⁰ This compulsion to look, matched only by a desperate desire to look away, is, I shall argue, the defining feature of Hopkins's engagement with the visual world. The slightly obsessive self-consciousness that this dichotomy engenders is fundamental in the creation of both priest and poet, as is the irresistible compulsion that drew his eyes again and again to the alluring and yet ultimately, as he saw it, supremely dangerous world of art, as we shall see.

¹⁰ 12 February 1868. *Further Letters*: 231.

... *The irises of the present writer's eyes* ...¹¹

Born into a period in which art and art criticism were flourishing as never before, it is not surprising that a middle-class, well-educated young man expressed a keen interest in the contemporary art scene. However, whilst true, this generalisation falls short of expressing the true nature of Hopkins's immersion in, and the wide-reaching influence of, the visual arts. Hopkins came from a strikingly artistic family, and was exposed to art and to artists on all sides. According to R. K. R. Thornton:

Richard James Lane ("Uncle Dick" [...]) was a line engraver and lithographer. His mother was Gainsborough's niece; and he and his daughter Clara, a minor artist in watercolour and black and white, exhibited at the Royal Academy, while Clara and another daughter (Eliza or Emily) exhibited at the Society of Female Artists. Edward Smith [youngest maternal uncle] became a professional artist and exhibited at the Royal Academy. Two of Gerard's brothers, Arthur and Everard, became professional illustrators and painters.¹²

It seems most likely that Hopkins received his early artistic education at home. He certainly studied drawing as a young child, learning both from his own study of Ruskin's works – probably *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and a few volumes of *Modern Painters* (most likely those of 1843, 1846, 1856 and 1860) – but also from family members.¹³ Jerome Bump proposes that Ann Eleanor Hopkins (Aunt Annie), Maria Giberne (née Smith, Kate's oldest sister)¹⁴ and her husband, George Giberne,

¹¹ 29 March 1887. *Letters*: 253.

¹² R. K. R. Thornton, 'The People Hopkins Knew', in *AMES*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, Sunderland Arts Centre, 1975): 33. The passage quoted represents only a small section of the great list of artistic connections enumerated by Thornton.

¹³ Hopkins's knowledge of Ruskin's work will be discussed in greater detail later.

¹⁴ Norman White notes that Maria 'used to take him sketching in the garden of Blunt House, Croydon [...]. There were excursions in the countryside around Epsom, where they sat side by side with their sketch-books, making faithful outlines, then filling in minutiae.' Norman White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 20.

were probably the most significant of these.¹⁵ Meanwhile Phillips brings to the fore the influence of two further sisters: Katherine Beechey (Aunt Kate), with whom Hopkins attended at least one exhibition (the French and Flemish exhibition of 1867),¹⁶ and his godmother, Frances Ann Hopkins (née Beechey), a prolific painter who exhibited thirteen paintings at the Royal Academy between 1869 and 1918.¹⁷

Observing and sketching the world around was certainly encouraged: Hopkins's childhood journals and notebooks contain numerous illustrations snatched on day trips or excursions. Some of the sketches can be matched with similar illustrations by one or other of his siblings, which suggests that the young Hopkins children may often have spent their holidays sitting side-by-side and sketching the scenes before them. Hopkins wrote frequently to his younger brothers and sisters, and his letters, particularly to Milicent, are often richly illustrated with detailed sketches of insects and other wildlife. His drawings reveal the attentive eye of a naturalist, but now taken further by the imagination of the poet, so that a technical sketch of a beetle is, Edward Lear-like, enlivened and enhanced by the observation that the insect is riding along train-tracks in a walnut shell, being pulled in front by a wooden locomotive.¹⁸

As Hopkins grew older, his artistic education was further enhanced by cultural connections. At family engagements Hopkins met many contemporary artists and connoisseurs of his day, and indeed through the shared interests with his brother Arthur he was able to visit the studios of Simeon Solomon and Robert Walker Macbeth,

¹⁵ Jerome Bump, 'Hopkins' Drawings', in *AMES*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, Sunderland Arts Centre, 1975): 71.

¹⁶ 'Went with Aunt Kate to Foreign Paintings.' 27 July 1867. *Journals*: 149.

¹⁷ Catherine Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 24. She notes that 'In Frances Gerard had an example of someone who used art to record a way of life and the relationship between nature and man'.

¹⁸ Reproduced in Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 67, Fig. 12.

amongst others.¹⁹ Furthermore, as an undergraduate at Oxford, Hopkins was friends with Alfred and Frederick Gurney, and at some point between the 20 July and 14 August 1864, he attended a party:

I have been introduced to Miss and Miss Christina Rossetti. I met them and Holman Hunt and George Macdonald and Peter Cun[n]ingham and Jenny Lind at the Gurneys'.²⁰

This meeting may well have stimulated both his literary and artistic ambitions; in the same letter he notes that 'I have now a more rational hope than before of doing something – in poetry and painting'.²¹ Although it seems that Hopkins never actually met Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the two families were certainly acquainted and Hopkins demonstrates an unexpected familiarity with Rossetti's poetry, given that 'only two volumes of his own verse and two books of translations' were ever published in Hopkins's lifetime, as Phillips notes;²² moreover, in 1881 Hopkins went to considerable pains to see the Rossetti paintings held in the private collection of Mr George Rae.²³

A happy side-effect of the artistic environment in which Hopkins grew up is the surprising number of images of the young poet. The most famous painting of the young Gerard, a gentle water-colour, was completed by his 'Aunt Annie', his father's only sister, who lived with the family until 1856. Completed in 1859 when he was fifteen,

¹⁹ Hopkins met Simeon Solomon in May 1868, and in June he visited his studio (*Journals*: 167). The very particular danger aroused by Solomon is discussed in Chapter Three.

30 June 1886, Arthur took Hopkins to Macbeth's, where Hopkins was introduced to the work of Frederick Walker. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Correspondence*: 134-135.

²⁰ To Baillie, 20 July 1864. *Further Letters*: 214. Abbott suggests that Hopkins means Miss Maria Francesca Rossetti, younger sister of Christina, and Peter Cunningham. Phillips also proposes the possibility that Hopkins may have met Millais, Holman Hunt and Landseer through his connections with Richard Lane, his great-uncle. Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 37-39.

²¹ *Further Letters*: 214.

²² The two volumes are *Poems by D.G. Rossetti* (1870), which contains the sonnet sequence 'The House of Life', and *Ballads and Sonnets* of 1881, including the remaining sonnets to complete the sequence. The degree to which Hopkins was acquainted directly with Rossetti's work, rather than through general reputation, is the subject of Catherine Phillips, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins and Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *RANAM: Recherches Anglaises et Nord-Américaines*, 36, no. 1 (2003): 131.

²³ See letters to Bridges of 27 April and 14 May 1881. *Letters*: 127, 130.

it now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery.²⁴ There is also a watercolour drawing from the same sitting in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. In addition, Hopkins's uncle, Judge George Giberne, was a keen amateur photographer who took up the hobby early and produced a large number of family portraits, including several of Hopkins as a child (one, in fancy dress) and then as a young man (the final Giberne portrait appears to be from 1874).²⁵

As Hopkins was largely unknown as a poet during his lifetime, there was no popular demand for likenesses of him. Furthermore, a Jesuit priest who held back from publishing his poems for fear of 'vanity' could hardly have been expected to have commissioned, or even sat for, many portraits or photographs.²⁶ Despite this, there are five photographs of the adult Hopkins and even a portrait (completed from a photograph).²⁷ It appears that Robert Bridges commissioned this portrait from his close personal friend and celebrated artist and musician Harry Ellis Wooldridge, to match an earlier portrait of himself. Although persuaded to eschew worldly vanity by his profession, Hopkins's anxious enquiries in a letter of 1887 to Bridges are revealing:

It is a very pleasant and flattering thought that Wooldridge is painting my portrait, but is it (and was yours) wholly from memory? I am of late become much wrinkled round the eyes and generally haggard-looking, and if my counterfeit presentment is to be I shd. be glad it were of my youth.²⁸

Hopkins here demonstrates the precision and exactitude of the painter as he carefully catalogues his own physical appearance, from the precise colour of his eyes ('small and

²⁴ This watercolour can be found in the frontispiece material of R. K. R. Thornton, *AMES*.

²⁵ George Giberne's interest in photography and his relationship with Hopkins is discussed in the biography written by his grandson, Lance Sieveking, *The Eye of the Beholder* (London: Hulton Press, 1957): 277, 279-280.

²⁶ 'The life I lead is liable to many mortifications but the want of fame as a poet is the least of them.' 12 May 1879. *Correspondence*: 28. Later he expressed this in more explicitly religious terms: 'there is more peace and it is the holier lot to be unknown than to be known.' 11 November 1881. *Correspondence*: 89.

²⁷ Bevis Hillier collates these and notes that there is one from about 1874, a group photograph from 1879, one from 1880, a further group from the late 1880s and a final one from 1888. Bevis Hillier, 'Portraits of Hopkins', in *AMES*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, Sunderland Arts Centre, 1975): 3.

²⁸ 29 March 1887. *Letters*: 253.

dull, of a greenish brown; hazel I suppose; slightly darker at the outer rims’) to the nature of his hair (he even enclosed a sample within the letter): ‘lightish brown, but not equable nor the same in all lights [...]. It has a gloss’.²⁹ This insistence on absolute accuracy of detail reveals a belief that portraiture contains the possibility of truth, as advocated by the Pre-Raphaelite ideology.

Using the idiom of an artist, Hopkins here struggles to capture, and thus preserve, the face he sees before him – his own. However, this is not a neutral, objective description, but rather one fraught with anxieties, as he finds himself torn between his desire for absolute accuracy and fidelity to nature (a cornerstone of the PRB project) and the ardent yearnings of one for whom beauty and aesthetic appeal were everything. The ‘eye-driven’ youth has now become ‘wrinkled round the eyes’, in an observation that betrays far more about the fears of the weary old man than the simple objective description might imply.³⁰ The tired priest who was to die less than two years later here bemoans the passing of his lost youth, permitting the ‘Peter Pan’ within him to creep out momentarily as he requests that the image of his younger, more beautiful self should be preserved rather than that of the older poet, and more importantly, priest. This is not mere vanity (a character flaw he took very seriously), although there is surely an element of this, but more importantly this is an illustration of how deeply entwined Hopkins saw aesthetic appreciation and moral judgement, as we will see later.³¹

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age*: 154.

³¹ ‘In particular how can anyone admire or (except in charity, as the greatest of sins, but in judgement and approval) tolerate vanity in women? Is it not the beginning of their saddest and most characteristic fall? What but vanity makes them first publish, then prostitute their charms? [...] If modesty in women means two things at once, purity and humility, must not the pair of opposites be no great way apart, vanity from impurity?’. 24 September 1884. To Patmore. *Further Letters*: 308.

... *the bewildering wealth of beautiful things* ...³²

In a study of vision and seeing in the work of a poet-painter, it is not enough to note that he sketches; we need to think about what he sketches and why. Critics have given different accounts of this. John Piper argues that ‘Hopkins used drawings primarily to illustrate his ideas for himself. Rarely do the drawings pretend to be anything but analytical descriptions of things he was at the time looking at closely’.³³ In contrast, Francis Fike finds himself unnerved to ‘suppose what was probably a fact, that Gerard’s criticism was valid, [and] that he may indeed have had more talent [as a painter] than his brother’.³⁴ Whatever their value to the ‘outside world’ (and here I would have to disagree with Fike: Gerard’s sketches really do not stand up to comparison against those of his brother Arthur), these sketches are of fundamental interest to those concerned with Hopkins’s pictorial ‘vision’.

It is interesting to record *what* Hopkins sketches. Inspired by Ruskin, his mode of viewing involves ‘rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing’, and thus he approaches ‘Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk[s] with her laboriously and trustingly’. His writings give careful accounts of these direct experiences of natural scenes, of particular trees or flowers, or of specific points of ‘select[ed]’ architectural interest: the pages of his diaries and journals are littered with details from windows, mullions, columns and arches.³⁵ This fascination with the details

³² 1 February 1881. *Letters*: 142.

³³ John Piper, ‘Hopkins’s Drawings’, in *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House (London: Oxford University Press, 1959): 454.

³⁴ Francis Fike, ‘Gerard Manley Hopkins’ Interest in Painting after 1868: Two Notes’, *Victorian Poetry*, 8, no. 4 (Winter 1970): 317.

³⁵ Ruskin urged all artists to ‘go to Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth’. *Modern Painters*. Ruskin, *Works of Ruskin*: 3: 624.

that together constitute the whole not only reflects Hopkins's interest in the art and philosophy of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, but is indeed fundamental to his own meticulous poetics of immanence and detail.

Amongst all these sketches, there are notably few images of people: Thornton notes that of the 140 or so drawings, only five or six feature figures.³⁶ Although Hopkins was undoubtedly influenced by Ruskin's insistence that the human figure was not a subject for amateurs, we might also recall Hopkins's candidly expressed fears about the feelings and emotions inspired by human beauty. In a letter to his college friend Alexander William Mowbray Baillie he expresses his fear that 'this kind of beauty is dangerous' and 'the higher and more attractive parts of the art put a strain upon the passions which I shd. think it unsafe to encounter':³⁷ these uncertainties are the subject of Chapter Two. That this anxiety is a factor in his illustrations being so 'unpeopled' is supported by the fact that where he has drawn a figure the face is almost always obscured. This is sometimes done by scribbling over or otherwise 'spoiling', and sometimes by shrewdly placed details, such as the figure depicted lying in a punt who obscures his face with the book he's reading [Figure 1, p. 214]. Although occasionally he attempts a profile that is left blank and devoid of all characterising features, later figures are always depicted looking away, their faces turned from the 'mastering' eye of the observer.³⁸

It is notable that Hopkins's sketches include only two female figures (in addition to a few very faint sketches of faces in silhouette, some of which could be women): one a very Victorian-looking matron, the other a young girl very much in the

³⁶ R. K. R. Thornton, 'Hopkins and the Visual Arts', in *The Authentic Cadence: Centennial Essays on Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Anthony Mortimer (Fribourg, Switzerland: UP Fribourg, 1992): 155.

³⁷ 22 October 1879. *Letters*: 95. To Baillie, 12 February 1868. *Further Letters*: 231.

³⁸ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*: 27. Cited by Flint, *Visual Imagination*: 3.

Pre-Raphaelite style.³⁹ She appears in the notebook beside two of very few poems concerned with women – ‘A Voice from the World’ and ‘She schools the flighty pupils’ – and again depiction of her face is avoided as she looks down to the floor with her hair covering her face in shadow. Even his mermaids, the ultimate beautiful females, alluring yet dangerous, are depicted turned away from the observer.⁴⁰ This avoidance of the difficulty of capturing faces is understandable, and even more so when his considerable anxieties concerning mortal beauty are recalled, yet it sits uncomfortably with the confident advice he passes on to his brother Arthur, a professional draughtsman:

Now the number of really and regularly beautiful faces [...] is quite small in art [...]. If I were you then I would keep this type by me, correct its drawing, carefully compose *in life* and then from life draw the draperies, and work at it till I had made the most perfect thing of it I could.⁴¹

It is hard to realise that this comes from the same hand as these early evasive sketches, and does perhaps suggest an unfocused awareness of the difference in the potential danger of looking between some men and others. Hopkins casts aside any hope of pursuing a career as a painter due to the potential danger of the uncontrolled and uncontrollable ‘passions’, yet his letter insistently argues for just such passion from Arthur, as he is told doggedly to keep trying, again and again, ‘till [he] had made the most perfect thing of it [he] could’. Arthur must keep looking, whereas Hopkins can only look away.

In keeping with the insistence of the Pre-Raphaelites and Ruskin on drawing from life wherever possible, Hopkins’s illustrations are almost always taken from the observed world around him (or occasionally from Giberne’s photographs):

³⁹ The matron is from Sketchbook D and can be found reproduced in *AMES*: 140. The notebook pages are reproduced in Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Early Poetic Manuscripts and Note-books of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile*, ed. Norman H. MacKenzie (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989): 104 (Plate 154).

⁴⁰ ‘A Vision of the Mermaids’. *Works*: 11-15. This poem is the subject of a section in Chapter Three. See Figure 3, p. 216.

⁴¹ 26 November 1888. To Arthur Hopkins. *Further Letters*: 188.

‘carefully compose[d] *in life* and then from life draw[n]’.⁴² Very rarely do they represent imaginative creations. A compelling case can be made, as many critics have noted, that this is because the majority of his sketches are deliberate practical exercises rather than spontaneous acts of inspiration;⁴³ indeed, in most cases Hopkins appears to be following the drawing course of John Ruskin.

Hopkins was familiar with Ruskin’s work, and describes some of his early sketches as sharing ‘in a Ruskinese point of view’.⁴⁴ It is, however, very difficult to trace Hopkins’s specific and detailed knowledge of the contemporary painter, theorist and critic. Certainly by 1863 he was aware of this ‘Ruskinese point of view’ and he notes some thoughts in his Journals as being ‘as Ruskin says’.⁴⁵ This was a mantra he was to repeat frequently during his time in Oxford, while in 1865 he includes *Modern Painters* as among ‘books to be read’.⁴⁶ In 1868 he notes that he has ‘not read Ruskin’s new book’,⁴⁷ but in his journal for 14 September 1871 he quotes a passage from volume four of *Modern Painters*.⁴⁸ Curiously, despite these numerous references, there is no record of Hopkins or his family actually possessing any of Ruskin’s work. Madeline House notes that *The Sketcher* (1856) by the Rev. John Eagles (a distant relative) was the only art book in the Hopkins household. This is not strictly true: there was also a signed copy of Kate Thompson’s *Handbook to the Public Picture Galleries of Europe* (1877), and two books on architecture, the fourth edition of John Parker’s *Glossary of Terms used in Grecian, Roman, Italian and Gothic Architecture*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Most recently, Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 43. Norman White’s comparison of the sketches will be discussed in the following section. The influence of Ruskin, amongst others, on Hopkins’s art and art criticism, was the subject of J. D. C. Masheck, ‘Art by a Poet: Notes on Published Drawings by Gerard Manley Hopkins’, *Hermathena: A Dublin University Review*, 108 (Spring 1969).

⁴⁴ 10 July 1863. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 202.

⁴⁵ *Journals*: 13.

⁴⁶ *Notebooks*: 40.

⁴⁷ *Further Letters*: 230.

⁴⁸ *Journals*: 215.

(1845) and his *Introduction to the Study of Gothic Architecture* (1849).⁴⁹ Phillips also records the family as having owned James Fergusson's *Illustrated Handbook of Architecture* (2 volumes, 1855) and his publication of 1872, *Rude Stone Monuments*.⁵⁰

Although there is a problem with identifying exactly which of Ruskin's works Hopkins had read and when, a compelling case can nonetheless be made for the significance of his influence on Hopkins; this is not itself a surprising observation for one as heavily immersed as Hopkins in the contemporary art scene. In the book of the same title that accompanied the 1975 Sunderland exhibition, *All My Eyes See: The Visual World of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Norman White places sketches by Ruskin and sketches by Hopkins side by side: the similarities are unmistakable.⁵¹ Furthermore, White notes that during his tour of Switzerland in 1868, Hopkins records long descriptive passages on the same natural sights that Ruskin had seen and described in *his* diaries of 1835. Nearly twenty years after the exhibition, R. K. R. Thornton took over White's baton and continued the argument:

Ruskin was, without a doubt, behind [Hopkins's] whole approach to drawing [...]. The influence of Ruskin is unquestionably there, and seems particularly strong if one looks at Ruskin's *Elements of Drawing* of 1857 [...] or at *Modern Painters* [...]. Just as Ruskin [...] divides his subject into the four component parts of landscape [...] so Hopkins concentrates on those four elements. Just as Ruskin dismisses the human form as a subject for the amateur, so does Hopkins.⁵²

Of course, there is a rich ambiguity over whether Hopkins's determined avoidance of unnecessary contemplation of the human form was driven by the same fears that guided his drawing mentor and master, as we will see. Nonetheless, Ruskin's prose provided a ready framework on which Hopkins could build his prose, just as his sketches were so

⁴⁹ House, 'Books'. See also R. L. Starkey, 'Books Hopkins had access to', *Hopkins Research Bulletin*, 6 (1975).

⁵⁰ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 91.

⁵¹ Norman White, 'The Context of Hopkins' Drawings', in *AMES*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, Sunderland Arts Centre, 1975). This exhibition and the accompanying book were the first to draw attention to Hopkins's highly complex engagement with the visual and the visual world.

⁵² Thornton, 'Visual Arts', 154.

clearly guided by Ruskin's: Hopkins's essay 'On the Signs of Health and Decay in the Arts' (1864) shows an obvious debt to *Modern Painters* as he begins to analyse the relationship between art and the mind which views it. The risks and possibilities of such subjective sight would continue to fascinate Hopkins throughout his life.

From an early age Hopkins was driven by a desire to observe, collate and classify the world around him, constructing his understanding of the world based on these observances. His diaries, notebooks, journals and letters are littered with sketches, both verbal and pictorial, through which he attempted to preserve these findings, and it is clear that as a child and young man he was carefully and systematically working through a number of courses of instruction in drawing, most notably Ruskin's. He supplemented this study with careful reading in and around the subject, drawing on the recent work of Augustus Pugin, Walter Pater, the Rossetti family, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as well as other contemporary accounts of architectural and art criticism. These all served to influence Hopkins's emerging theory of the relationship between art, architecture, religion, nature and science. While this study undoubtedly influenced his own art and art criticism, it also informed his looking more generally. Aesthetics and aesthetic considerations were not simply to be confined to art and the created environment, but for Hopkins were very much part of the way he looked at and understood everything around him. To influence the way Hopkins *saw* something was to influence the way he *understood* that thing, and the place of that thing – and even of himself – within the world.

... *Bows of the eyelids. Pencil of eyelashes ...*⁵³

Having looked at what Hopkins sketched, we should consider *why* the poet sketched. Although as a young man Hopkins had toyed with the idea of becoming a professional poet-painter, this idea was soon abandoned, and he drew very little once he had entered the priesthood; this was a source of notable personal sadness.⁵⁴ However, just as the early drawings and illustrations were almost certainly completed as part of an instructional course in drawing following the teaching of Ruskin, so the few later examples also have a purpose. I want to suggest that many of these illustrated sketches represent early drafts for verbal compositions, and were opening gestures towards the capture of a moment or image later transformed for use in poems, or as White observes, ‘a shorthand means of getting hold of one or two essential features’.⁵⁵ These ‘preliminary guide-lines’ in his note-books serve as a way of fixing ‘the visual appearance of transient natural phenomena’, and are often annotated with verbal records of colours and form, as in the carefully noted colour of the two clouds studiously illustrated in his first extant journal, from 1862, for example, where pencil lines turn into scribbled words as text takes over where he felt image had failed.⁵⁶

Even when Hopkins does not provide a visual illustration, his journals are in verbal terms luxuriantly pictorial, a quality that at times becomes self-reflexive. Although images increasingly gave way to words, the painter was never far behind the poet, and the techniques of the former are often captured in the skills of the latter:

⁵³ 23 January 1866. *Journals*: 72.

⁵⁴ See Hopkins’s letters of 9 December 1884 to his sister (*Further Letters*: 165) and 19 October 1888 to Robert Bridges (*Letters*: 296).

⁵⁵ White, ‘Hopkins’ Drawings’, 55.

⁵⁶ Illustrated in Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 55, Fig. 10.

Putting my hand up against the sky whilst we lay on the grass I saw more richness and beauty in the blue than I had known of before [...]. It was not transparent and sapphire-like but turquoise-like, swarming and blushing round the edge of the hand [...] sometimes lightly shadowed in that violet one makes with cobalt and Indian red.⁵⁷

Memories of particular shades of paint that he ‘had known before’ are here summoned to the scene and held up before the image until the exact mixture can be identified. The easy familiarity of someone at ease with the possibilities of the painter’s palette is here combined with the precision and specificity of a naturalist and the verbal opulence of the poet in a manner which is uniquely Hopkinsian.

Although Hopkins never lost this fascination with the richness of light and colour, and throughout his life was driven by a desire to capture these accurately, in both images and words, these descriptions were increasingly informed by his study, both theological and more broadly. In a transformation that can be seen as typical of this poet-painter-priest, the sketched journal description of a moment experienced ‘*in life*’ as the recent Oxford graduate lay in the August sun appears again, now crucially changed, in the poem ‘The Blessed Virgin Mary compared to the Air we Breathe’, written by the mature priest in May 1883.⁵⁸ The precision and specificity of the painter selecting his paint shades is not lost, but the painter’s eye is now opened to the wealth of Roman Catholic imagery at his disposal, and the scene from his youth is recreated within a specifically theological context:

Again, look overhead
How air is azurèd;
O how! Nay do but stand
Where you can lift your hand
Skywards: rich, rich it laps
Round the four fingergaps.
Yet such a sapphire-shot,
Charged, steepèd sky will not
Stain light. [...]

(ll. 73-81)

⁵⁷ 30 August 1867. *Journals*: 154.

⁵⁸ 26 November 1888. To Arthur Hopkins. *Further Letters*: 188. Italics Hopkins’s own. *Works*: 158-161.

Drawing on traditional Roman Catholic doctrinal teaching, Hopkins here notes how, through the intercessions of Mary, the inexpressible nature of God is modified and softened until it is capable of being recognised and comprehended by the limited human heart.⁵⁹ This process is described in explicitly visual terms:

Through her we may see him
Made sweeter, not made dim,
And her hand leaves his light
Sifted to suit our sight.

(ll. 110-113)

Hopkins explains the source of this theological image in a sermon note from 1879:

St Bernard's saying, All grace given through Mary: this a mystery. Like blue sky, which for all its richness of colour does not stain the sunlight, though smoke and red clouds do, so God's graces come to us unchanged but all through her.⁶⁰

Just as the air transmits the blinding light of the sun unchanged, Mary 'does no prejudice' (l. 82) and 'will not / Stain light' (ll. 80-81); through her mediation the grace of God is conveyed unmodified ('Perfect' (l. 89)) to the receiving hearts through the dangerously fragile human eyes, now suitably 'sifted to suit our sight' (l. 113).

Whilst it is unsurprising that Hopkins's view of the world and its poetic recreation should be so heavily influenced by his theological study, he was also, as a deeply curious Victorian, fascinated by the discoveries of his age. The brief moment of wonder as the hand was held to the light in the summer of 1867, now recalled and recreated within a specifically Roman Catholic context, is by 1883 further enriched by Hopkins's keen interest in recent scientific discoveries.

Hopkins was particularly inspired by the work of John Tyndall (1820-1893) and his

⁵⁹ The doctrinal influences in the poem have been extensively discussed by, amongst others: W. H. Gardner, *Poetic Idiosyncrasy*: 1: 187-190; Paul L. Mariani, *A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1970): 193-196; Norman H. MacKenzie, *A Reader's Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981): 157-159.

⁶⁰ Sermon notes for 5 October 1879. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Christopher Devlin SJ (London: Oxford University Press, 1959): 26-30, 29.

essay from 1870 on 'The Scientific Use of the Imagination' in which a major concern is light and the reason for the sky's apparent colouration.⁶¹ Tyndall argued, controversially, that the sky was not air stained blue, but that minute particles in the atmosphere caused the refraction of solar rays. The degree of refraction depended on the wavelength, and the shorter the wavelength (registered by our eyes as blue), the more refracted the solar rays would be. Excited by this new idea, Hopkins adapts the image to serve his theological purpose, as Gillian Beer explains:

Mary is the medium. The sunbeams shine perfect through the blue, not stained by colour. Yet the solar rays are reflected so that colour is produced, a bath of air, that wards off the concentrated vehemence of the sun, of godhead. [...] Mary (like the azure sky a protective veil to ward off from us the stark heat of the sun) both reflects and transmits. Such reflection produces colour, which makes possible the apprehension of what otherwise would be dark. 'The limits of language and of our powers of distinction', as Tyndall wrote, lead us to describe the spectrum in seven colours though it may be 'seven or seven times seven' or 'an infinity of colours'. The paradox of Mary is that she sustains the sunbeam 'perfect' (she carries the godhead of Christ without staining it), yet, as air in which earthly particles are suspended, she deflects the unbearable light of godhead.⁶²

As an undergraduate at Oxford, Hopkins had a keen interest in contemporary developments in optics, physics and 'the [...] spectral analysis by wh. the chemical composition of non-terrestrial masses is made out'.⁶³ This was an interest Hopkins was to maintain throughout his life. Shortly before his death he wrote to Canon Richard Watson Dixon, formerly his school-master and later his devoted pen-friend and literary critic, of his progress on 'a popular account of Light and the Ether'; unfortunately it is not known if he finished this work and no further record of it has survived.⁶⁴

⁶¹ As noted by Gillian Beer, *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 265-266, and Daniel Brown, 'Victorian Poetry and Science', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 152-154.

⁶² Beer, *Open Fields*: 265-266.

⁶³ 'The tests of a progressive science', from 'Essays – Hilary Term '67'. D.IX.2. Reproduced in Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Oxford Essays and Notes*, ed. Lesley Higgins, 8 vols., vol. 4, *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 285-287, 286.

⁶⁴ 7-9 August 1886. *Correspondence*: 139.

In the poem, this interest in 'Light and the Ether' is brought into play as he describes the multiplicity of light:

The glass-blue days are those
When every colour glows,
Each shape and shadow shows.
Blue be it: this blue heaven
The seven or seven times seven
Hued sunbeam will transmit
Perfect, not alter it.

(ll. 83-89)

In his study of contemporary science and its influence on Victorian poetry, Daniel Brown notes that for Hopkins, unlike so many Victorians, science need never stand in opposition to faith. Rather the one could inform and enrich the other:

Spectroscopy provides Hopkins with an apt analogy to describe his ontology, which values individual difference as an expression of God's nature. [...] The inclusive yet transcendent white light of the Sun is, scientifically speaking, the source of all energy and life in the universe. Each creature is necessary as the means to disclose, by absorption and reflection, aspects of the vast spectrum of Being that, as pure transparent white light, would otherwise be imperceptible.⁶⁵

So an early diary entry, rich with the artist's rainbow palette of colours and textures is transformed, via the teachings of Augustine and the Catholic faith, into a poem deeply embedded in contemporary science. For most writers, incorporating any of these dominant understandings of the world would have to be at the exclusion of the others, yet Hopkins is able to use each, not as a pin-hole closing down the image, but rather as a prism through which to view the scene, so that finally the image, endlessly refracted and amplified, is 'Made sweeter, not made dim' (l. 111). This was a process that was to become central to Hopkins's life and work.

A second diary entry provides another example of this modifying process which yet holds the original in view. Here once again the diary finds the draughtsman and painter at work, as the young poet recalls the scene and toys with the dual role of the pencil as artistic implement and cosmetic tool:

⁶⁵ Brown, 'Victorian Poetry and Science', 153.

Blunt buds of the ash. Pencil buds of the bead. Lobes of the trees.
Cups of the eyes. Gathering back the lightly hinged eyelids.
Bows of the eyelids. Pencil of eyelashes.⁶⁶

This richly anatomical description appears to depict the eye wandering over a face, the eye that wanders meeting the eye observed; this returns us to the self-consciously reflexive quotation that opened this thesis: ‘What you look hard at seems to look hard at you.’⁶⁷ As the eye roams across the scene, the pencil that records these travels comes up against the ‘Pencil of eyelashes’; the inspiration is both the object itself but also the very process of viewing it. It is worth recalling that an eye for Hopkins is never a mere transmitter of images, but rather a terrifying conduit for both danger and delight. The eyes are to be schooled⁶⁸ and punished,⁶⁹ yet loss of sight was a very real and terrifying concern, deeply implicated as he saw it with loss of imaginative vision, as articulated in his final poem, ‘To R.B.’.⁷⁰

Whilst undoubtedly the epistemological home of imagination and creativity, it is impossible finally to remove the eyes from their anatomical, physical and ultimately sensual context: eyes open at birth and close at death; they burn with both hatred and desire. James Elkins captures these paradoxical qualities:

Seeing is like hunting and like dreaming, and even like falling in love.
It is entangled in the passions – jealousy, violence, possessiveness; and it is
soaked in affect – in pleasure and displeasure, and in pain.⁷¹

The eyes of the diary entry are deeply corporeal, ‘cup[ped]’ between the ‘lobes’ and ‘the lightly hinged eyelids’. In a phrase that stands at odds with their mechanistic ‘hinge’, the eyelids are gently ‘gathering back’, like fabric or clothing, to reveal that

⁶⁶ 23 January 1866. *Journals*: 72.

⁶⁷ March 1871. *ibid.*: 204.

⁶⁸ A process described in ‘She schools the flighty pupils’, from June 1864 (*Works*: 21), discussed in Chapter Two.

⁶⁹ ‘A penance which I was doing from Jan. 25 to July 25 prevented my seeing much that half-year.’ *Journals*: 190.

⁷⁰ *Works*: 184.

⁷¹ Elkins, *Object Stares Back*: 11.

which is usually hidden, guarded by the ‘bows’ of the sentry-like ‘eyelashes’.⁷² This motion of revealing the obscured, making evident that which is usually hidden, is always tense with uncertainty, as the invisible becomes visible for the first time. Again this motion prickles with excitement, motivated by both fear and desire.

The intensity of the description lays the eyes bare, a rude unveiling which recalls both the boudoir (the eye-pencil and the fabrics gathered back) and the battle-scene (the body is gradually dismembered, perhaps by the ‘bows’ of the eyelashes). Attention is drawn to the very act of seeing, to the eyes themselves, and indeed even further into the ‘lobes of the trees’. The ‘lobes’, held within the very centre of the description and accessed only through the eyes, are fundamental if anything is to be made of the images presented before the eyes. The ‘lobes’ cannot receive an image except through the eyes, yet the eyes alone cannot understand or interpret the image, and without a receiving eye, can there be any image at all?

This central epistemological question was an ongoing concern for Hopkins, and forms the subject of his poem ‘It was a hard thing to undo this knot’, from 1864:

The rainbow shines, but only in the thought
Of him that looks. Yet not in that alone,
For who makes rainbows by invention?

‘It was a hard thing’ (ll. 2-4)⁷³

⁷² This passage is strikingly similar to one in ‘A Vision of the Mermaids’, from 1862 (*Works*: 11-15), where the sky becomes a vast and unblinking eye, with ‘spear’d open lustrous gashes, crimson-white’ (l. 8):

And thro’ their parting lips there came and went
Keen glimpses of the inner firmament. (ll. 11-12)

This poem is discussed further in Chapter Three, ‘People Looking’.

⁷³ *ibid.*: 29.

Genesis 9: 12-17 describes how the rainbow should be regarded as a divine covenant sign, as George Landow observes: ‘As this passage from Genesis makes quite clear, the rainbow possesses a unique status: in its natural context, as an event that occurs after any rainstorm when the light conditions are adequate, it functions linguistically and symbolically as a divinely instituted sign. The rainbow, in other words, is a prime example of a natural object or event interpreted as part of an allegorical, sacramental universe.’

George P. Landow, *Rainbows: problematic images of problematic nature* (cited 08/11/08); available from <http://victorianweb.org/art/crisis/crisis3c.html>.

The final lines (ll. 12-14) of ‘The Caged Skylark’ offer a more explicit demonstration that Hopkins accepts the theological interpretation of the rainbow (*Works*: 133).

The rainbow is here used as ‘both prism and idea’, as noted by Beer, but is seen only ‘in the thought / Of him who looks’.⁷⁴ The eyelids must ‘gather back’ if the rainbow is to be seen, the ‘bows of the eyelids’ offering a prismatic vision of the eye, presenting an image of the rainbow to the ‘lobes’ (the source of ‘thought’) through the lashes. The subjective nature of this version of individual sight is explored, as each member of the group observing the image sees a different ‘bow’ (returning to the ‘knot’ and to the ‘eyelids’): ‘many [...] / See one bow each, yet not the same to all’ (ll. 5-6). Alan Heuser summarises this as ‘the principle of the one and the many – one object of sun on water, many objects to many people’.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the poem reveals a direct inheritance of the Romantic rainbow, as demonstrated in Wordsworth’s poem ‘My heart leaps up’ and Keats’s ‘Lamia’.⁷⁶ Hopkins’s observer does not himself create the rainbow, but perception of the rainbow does require a perceiver:

The sun on falling waters writes the text
Which yet is in the eye or in the thought.

(ll. 8-9)

In Hopkins’s aesthetic, it is the responsibility of the observer both to see and to understand the beauty of the world correctly, and through this, to realise some portion of God’s magnificence.

The individual nature of sight is also explored in the two sonnets coupled together under the title ‘To Oxford’, from ‘Low Sunday and Monday, 1865’. These poems, particularly the second, demonstrate a child-like excitement about the way the ever-changing world can be seen as new and different over and over again.

⁷⁴ Beer, *Open Fields*: 244.

⁷⁵ Alan Heuser, *Shaping Vision*: 15.

⁷⁶ ‘My heart leaps up when I behold’, William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill, 2000 ed., *Oxford World’s Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984): 246; ‘Lamia’, John Keats, *John Keats: The Major Works, including Endymion, the Odes, and Selected Letters*, ed. Elizabeth Cook, 2001 ed., *Oxford World’s Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990): 305-323.

Hopkins is fascinated here by the paradox that we have objective evidence for the existence of objects only through the subjective impressions of our eyes. The poet delights in viewing a familiar and beautiful scene ('this bye-ways beauty', l. 9) from an odd angle, which he invites others to share:

Thus, I come underneath this chapel-side,
So that the mason's levels, courses, all
The vigorous horizontals, each way fall
In bows above my head, as falsified
By visual compulsion [...]

(Sonnet 2, ll. 1-5)⁷⁷

There is an obvious pleasure in the observation that the eye can be tricked and sight 'falsified' through optical illusions, as the lines he knows to be straight are seen by the eyes as undeniably curved, 'in bows above my head' (recalling both the 'bows of the eyelids' and the 'rainbows' of individual sight). This delight – the 'pleasance' – was to become characteristic of much of his later work, and is here neatly encapsulated in the enjambement of the poem, which similarly plays with the problem of 'lines'.⁷⁸

Enjoying the playful division between what he knows to be true and what his eyes are incontrovertibly showing him, the speaker manoeuvres himself into a position from which the roof which must be present suddenly becomes invisible:

[...] till I hide
The steep-up roof at last behind the small
Eclipsing parapet; yet above the wall
The sumptuous ridge-crest leave to poise and ride.
(ll. 5-8)

Martin Jay observes that 'We are often fooled by visual experience that turns out to be illusory, an inclination generated perhaps by our overwhelming, habitual belief in its apparent reliability'.⁷⁹ Nevertheless Hopkins seems determined continually to counter

⁷⁷ *Works*: 62-63.

⁷⁸ Sonnet 1, l. 6. *ibid.*: 62.

⁷⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 8.

any sense of an ‘overwhelming’ or ‘habitual’ way of looking by testing the capacity and limits of his vision. He ponders in this sonnet whether his own way of looking at the world was unique, or common ‘to many unknown men’:

The shapen flags and drillèd holes of sky,
Just seen, may be [to] many unknown men
The one peculiar of their pleased eye,
And I have only set the same to pen.

(ll. 11-14)

I suggest that it is this concern to share the delight in the way he sees the world – characterised by this immediate shift from the ‘eye’ (l. 13) to the ‘I’ (l. 14), however ‘peculiar’ and unique this might be – that drives Hopkins’s fascination with the visual and vision within his work. The ‘pen’ here could be that of the poet, or indeed the draughtsman, but what is sought in each case is this ‘pleasured eye’.

... *it is worth your while to see ...*⁸⁰

Although the amount of sketching Hopkins completed dropped off rapidly once he joined the priesthood, his interest in painting and exhibitions did not. Throughout his journals, diaries and letters Hopkins makes numerous and detailed notes concerning visits to exhibitions and galleries, and he rarely visited friends without also scheduling in a visit to the local gallery or a painter's studio.⁸¹ This is perhaps surprising for a religious man, as Phillips records:

Aesthetic appreciation was not encouraged among novices [...]: of the seven places that scholastic novices could visit only with special leave from the Master, and for which it was noted 'leave rarely given', five were the places that housed fine art. They included the British Museum (except for certain sections), Art Gallery (presumably the National), the Tate Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Wallace Collection.⁸²

As a novice, Hopkins clearly followed the prohibitions of the Society of Jesus and there are no records of him attending any galleries or exhibitions between 1868 and 1870. However, by 1872 Hopkins had taken his vows and the constraints imposed were less strict. Although he never recaptured the heated engagement with art and the world of artists shown during the five years prior to his entry into the Society, he did retain an enthusiastic interest in the contemporary art world and attended many exhibitions and various galleries throughout his life, as his scribbled private notes and references in

⁸⁰ 7 September 1887. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 288.

⁸¹ Phillips notes that 'Between 1862 and 1886 [...he] attended two international shows (one in England and one in France); some sixteen exhibitions ranging from those at the Royal Academy, the two Societies of Painters in Water-colours, the Grosvenor, [...] several Old Masters, and a number of Gambart's annual French and Flemish shows, in addition to visiting the National Gallery, the South Kensington museum [...], the Basle Museum [...] and the home of a private collector, George Rae of Liverpool'. Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 111.

⁸² *ibid.*: vii.

letters reveal.⁸³ Whilst these gallery and exhibition notes are often very detailed, it seems likely that they were actually written up later, perhaps from brief notes taken at the time, as the occasional small and insignificant discrepancy of title or date that appears to have crept in might suggest.⁸⁴

Hopkins's gallery notes again demonstrate a clear indebtedness to Ruskin and the notion of accurate seeing as outlined in his *Elements of Drawing*. Ball finds in Hopkins's gallery notes substantial evidence that he is very much applying Ruskin's criteria: cypress trees are noted to be 'truthfully slanted', another picture demonstrates 'true drawing of clouds' and the painting *Goodwin Sands* by William Lionel Wyllie is 'all clean, atmospheric, truthful, and scapish'.⁸⁵ Ultimately, however, what is most striking about Hopkins's notes on the various paintings is their sheer 'peculiar[ity]' and particular appeal to their intended 'pleasured eye' (Sonnet 2, l. 13). Despite his careful study of Ruskin and his close engagement with the art theory of the day, Hopkins's own criticism remains startlingly original; this was the work of an idiosyncratic visionary whose writing was informed by the thriving critical culture of the day but remained very much his own.

A good example of Hopkins's deeply individual way of looking at paintings can be seen in his description of Lawrence Alma-Tadema's painting *The Picture Gallery*,

⁸³ From his notes, we know that Hopkins certainly attended the exhibitions at the Royal Academy in 1863 [In a letter to Baillie, 10 July 1863, Hopkins describes three paintings by Millais seen 'in this year's Academy'. *Further Letters*: 201], 1866 ['Was at the Academy too lately.' 2 July 1866. *Journals*: 142], 1868 ['To lunch with Pater, then to Mr. Solomon's studio and the Academy.' 17 June 1868. *Journals*: 167], 1874 ['I went one day to the Academy and again June 12', May 1874. *Notebooks*: 191], and 1886 [30 June 1886, 'I saw the Academy'. *Correspondence*: 132].

It is also possible that Hopkins attended in 1878. Norman White notes that: 'Recently I found some pencil scribblings on the back of a poetry manuscript of Hopkins which showed that he visited the RA again in 1878, and the list of artists' names and paintings which these jottings give is similar in some way to Hopkins' selection of paintings to comment on in 1874.' Norman White, 'Hopkins as Art Critic', in *AMES*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton (Sunderland: Ceolfriith Press, Sunderland Arts Centre, 1975): 96.

⁸⁴ An example of such an error, insignificant in itself but interesting for what it suggests of the process of looking, would be his notes on *A Game at Knucklebones* by Walter MacLaren, seen by Hopkins at the Royal Academy in 1874. Hopkins recalls the painting as *Girls playing at knuckle-bones*. 23 May 1874. *Notebooks*: 196.

⁸⁵ Ball, *Science of Aspects*: 129.

exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1874 [Figure 2, p. 215]. Hopkins records the following note:

The Picture Gallery – Less antiquarian; lighting just a little studio-fashioned; two Romans with check or patterned tunics like a snake’s slough, the arm of one resting on the other’s shoulder very faithful drawing; little colour; happy use of openings, accidental installs, people’s feet, hands etc seen through; use of square scaping.⁸⁶

Moving from Hopkins’s observations to look at the Alma-Tadema painting, one is struck first by how very partial and ‘fashioned’ Hopkins’s description is.

Ignoring all five central figures, he dwells on two soldiers that stand very much in the background. Recalling Hopkins’s avoidance of faces in his sketches, it is telling that he comments only on those whose faces are not clearly visible: he draws attention to the only people that do not look into the centre of the room and then out of the canvas and past the watcher.⁸⁷ They are, however, the only figures depicted in any form of interaction: as Hopkins states, ‘the arm of one [is] resting on the other’s shoulder’. Does Hopkins very deliberately choose not to meet the gaze of the other figures? He records time and time again in his journals his fears associated with the danger inherent in beauty (expressed again in ‘To what serves Mortal Beauty?’), and the potentially uncontrollable risks posed by looking at such beauty:

I think then no one can admire beauty of the body more than I do, and it is of course a comfort to find beauty in a friend or a friend in beauty. But this kind of beauty is dangerous.⁸⁸

From Hopkins’s noted anxieties and uneasy confessional notes, we know that he was haunted by fears that his sensitivity to art might prove so acute that even in this ‘indirect’ form beauty might arouse in him unwelcome and unnerving sensations. Certainly Hopkins was not alone in these fears: the Victorian period was characterised

⁸⁶ 23 May 1874. *Notebooks*: 193-194.

⁸⁷ All faces are visible other than the two soldiers, and the partially obscured bald gentleman seated behind the easel, identified as the painter and art dealer Henry Wallis by R. J. Barrow, *Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2001): 79.

⁸⁸ 22 October 1879. *Letters*: 95. Both the poem and the letter are the subject of a section in Chapter Two.

by ongoing public debates about the boundaries between purity and prurience in artistic depictions. However, these contemporary debates, usually centred on the figure of the nude female, become in Hopkins's writings clearly focused on the homo-erotic, as we shall see. This is further complicated by a strikingly religious-sexual dynamic: 'Evil thought slightly in drawing made worse by drawing a crucified arm on same page.'⁸⁹ The perverse beauty in this tortured body is the subject of Chapter Four.

As Hopkins surveys the Alma-Tadema picture, he finds his gaze arrested by the two young men turned away from the easel and in on each other, the intimacy of their relationship illustrated by and enhanced through their physical relationship as the one man casually rests his arm on the other's shoulder. Whilst Hopkins's note comments only on their dress – 'check or patterned tunics like a snake's slough' – there can be no doubt that it is the 'faithful' nature of their relationship that here commands his attention. Whilst there is undoubtedly 'beauty' in this friendship, there can be no denying the 'dangerous' nature of this beauty, and indeed the paradoxically attractive lure of this serpentine danger, as will be discussed.

A further surprising idiosyncrasy in Hopkins's comments on this picture is his reference to its 'little colour'; it strikes me rather as richly coloured, with repeated use of pinks, blues and yellows. The paintings on the walls are splendidly detailed, and the spaces between and above the frames reveal the walls of the gallery to be beautifully ornamented with murals and other decorative details. The yellow curtains block out much of the light, infusing the room with a warm glow (if perhaps 'just a little studio-fashioned'), but where the sunlight does sneak past it serves only to illuminate more keenly the richness of the room, the paintings, and the figures within. This rich chromaticity is in striking contrast to the other Alma-Tadema work seen at the Exhibition that year, the *Vintage Festival*, on which Hopkins also took a few notes;

⁸⁹ *Early Manuscripts*: 167 (Plate 115).

this is much more dominated by whites, creams, browns and blacks, in contrast with the warmth of colour in the *Picture Gallery*.⁹⁰

Despite the rich display of fabrics, textiles and textures depicted within the room, Hopkins's eye is drawn to the soldiers' 'check or patterned tunics like a snake's slough'. The colours of these tunics are muted and earthy, especially when compared with the careful brightness of the embroidery of Gambart's nephew (seated, studying the easel), or the delicate flowers on the pink shawl of the woman, thought to be Gambart's mistress, Madame Angelée. The colours on her clothes pick up those of the paintings in the background, especially in the frame to the portrait of Medea by Timomachus, pulling the two women together: the woman depicted in the picture and the woman captured from 'life', now seen by the observer as yet another 'woman in a picture'. Although the tunics of the Roman soldiers do stand out, in terms of the complexity of their designs, the back of a simple chair has more poetic prominence.

Ignoring the rich foreground, Hopkins compares the deeply artificial beauty of the patterned fabrics to one of the wonders of nature: the refreshing of a snake through the sloughing of its skin. In a characteristically Hopkinsian reference, the alluring but ultimately fatal appeal of the serpent to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is now recalled in the patterned dress of the two beautiful young men. Hopkins's delight in both of these patterns, the natural and the artificial, can be explained by reference to his Platonic essay 'On the Origin of Beauty' (1865). Discussing the patterned dress worn by the girl on the frontispiece of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862),⁹¹

⁹⁰ 'I saw also a good engraving of his *Vintage Festival*, which impressed the thought one would gather also from Rembrandt in some measure and from many great painters less than Rembrandt of a master of scaping rather than of inscape.' 23 May 1874. *Notebooks*: 194.

⁹¹ Christina Rossetti, *The Works of Christina Rossetti*, ed. Martin Corner, *The Wordsworth Poetry Library* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1995): 1-20.

the fictional Professor of Aesthetic notes that the three small circles that form the repeating pattern are more beautiful than a triangle would ever be.⁹²

And why is this? I should like to consider it as being because, while whatever beauty a triangle may have is suggested to the eye, there is added the further element of beauty in the contrast between the continuity, the absolutely symmetrical continuity, of the straight lines [...], and the discontinuity, if I may use the word, the emphasised extreme discontinuity, of the three dots.⁹³

The Professor thus notes that the absolute beauty of the ideal is more easily seen and comprehended when it is set against a background of ‘discontinuity’, contrast or variation. For Hopkins, this means that the beauty of God is more easily conceived when viewed against ‘the discontinuous’: the ‘dappled’ and the ‘brinded’, the ‘counter, original, spáre, strange’ so celebrated in ‘Pied Beauty’.⁹⁴ In the tunics of the beautiful soldiers, like the sloughed skin of the snake, Hopkins observes an example of the discontinuity that ultimately enables him more clearly to see God, or at least provides a ready reason to keep looking, as we will see.⁹⁵

The foundations of the picture are sharply defined. The gallery itself is notable for the richness of the walls, hung deep with paintings, in a repeated criss-cross of horizontal and vertical lines. Furthermore, the standing figures and the seated people leaning forward, indeed even the easel, echo and repeat the vertical lines of the large and often extravagantly detailed picture frames. However, the horizontals are also clearly present: the top and bottom of each picture frame is echoed in the window lintel and the base of the curtain, and the picture appears split across the middle by the large

⁹² The frontispiece is reproduced in White, ‘Hopkins as Art Critic’, 95. Phillips proposes that the Professor is probably ‘partly modelled on Ruskin’ and suggests that Ruskin’s *The Elements* lies heavily behind the essay: ‘Much of the argument about visual beauty seems to have been drawn from Ruskin’s book, taking not primarily now the practical advice but the theoretical arguments behind it.’ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 61.

⁹³ ‘On the Origin of Beauty’. *Notebooks*: 54-91, 77.

⁹⁴ ‘Pied Beauty’, ll. 1, 2, 7. *Works*: 132-133. White notices Hopkins’s fondness for the dappled in nature and places this in relation to his earlier essay. ‘Hopkins as Art Critic’, 95.

⁹⁵ The rich ambiguity of this looking ‘to Christ’ and yet also ‘on Christ’ (‘Myself unholy’ (ll. 13 & 14)) is the subject of Chapter Three.

yellow chaise on which the central characters sit. It is in these repeated squares and right angles that Hopkins finds the ‘square scaping’ – the foundation of the painting. Hopkins writes repeatedly of the need for ‘inscape of composition’ if a painting is to be successful, and clearly here he feels that the painting succeeds.⁹⁶ Certainly, the actual images (representing the ‘*Who’s Who* of ancient art’ as Vern Swanson observes)⁹⁷ within the frames are hazy, rough, and almost clumsy, but the overwhelming impression is of the repeated horizontal and vertical lines of the large and often extravagantly detailed frames.

Hopkins’s concept of inscape is explained in the essay ‘On the Origin of Beauty’:

The collective effect of a work of art is due to the effect of each part to the rest [...]. It depends however on the nature of the work what will be the importance of a gain or loss of this kind: I suppose that it will be greatest where the connection is strong, where the unity is strongly marked, that is a unity not of spirit alone but a structural one.⁹⁸

This is a concept Hopkins reiterated throughout his writing, insisting time and time again that the source and seat of beauty is proportion: ‘Now in the form of any work of art the intrinsic measurements, the proportions, that is, of the parts to one another and to the whole, are no doubt the principal point.’⁹⁹ His concept of form is therefore based on the interactions between the things that constitute the whole: in something that is beautiful the whole will far exceed the sum of its parts. It is the responsibility of an artist to capture this relationship and to present within the inscape of the work something that is far more than any one aspect of his representation of it. Thus it is the work of an artist not only to convey inscape, but also to communicate the instress: the moral and aesthetic energy of

⁹⁶ This term is frequently used by Hopkins in relation to paintings, most notably in his discussion of W. Holman Hunt’s painting, ‘The Shadow of Death’. Here the painting is considered successful in its details but lacking overall, primarily due to the complete absence of ‘inscape of composition’, as he saw it. 12 June 1874. *Journals*: 248.

⁹⁷ Vern G. Swanson, *The Biography and Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London: Garton & Co., 1990): 46.

⁹⁸ ‘On the Origin of Beauty’. *Journals*: 99.

⁹⁹ 29 October 1881. To Dixon. *Correspondence*: 85.

the whole, as noted in relation to the ‘knot’ untied in Hopkins’s early poem.¹⁰⁰ The artist is consequently not only responsible for depicting what he sees as accurately and as faithfully as possible, but also for ensuring that his work has the same effect on those who see it as the original object had on him, as Philip Ballinger notes: ‘Art, in its truest sense [...] is also an expression of the divine energy or will in a reality and the artist’s response to it.’¹⁰¹ Beauty is thus the result of a pleasing relationship both between the parts of the whole, and between the whole and the beholder. Art can be art without either of these things, but in Hopkins’s eyes it is impossible for it to be good art, in either an aesthetic or a moral sense.¹⁰²

Hopkins’s reference, in his journal, to the ‘square-scaping’ in Tadema’s *The Picture Gallery*, shows the continuity between his eye as a poet and as a spectator in an art gallery. That Tadema’s picture is *of* a ‘picture gallery’ is typical of Hopkins’s self-consciousness: his making a spectacle of spectatorhood. However, his comments also dramatize the potentially dangerous tension between the unity of ‘square scaping’ and the particular beauty of the ‘patterned tunics’. To compare the soldier’s uniform to the discarded ‘snake’s slough’ shows Hopkins’s characteristic eye for inscape, but the beauty of the casual arm ‘resting on the other’s shoulder’ may also suggest the post-lapsarian danger represented by the snake, and this fatal allure that so keeps his spirits from peace.

¹⁰⁰ ‘It was a hard thing to undo this knot.’ *Works*: 29.

¹⁰¹ Philip Ballinger, *John Ruskin: Gerard Manley Hopkins's Silent Don* ([cited 08/11/2007]); available from http://www.gerardmanleyhopkins.org/studies/john_ruskin.html

¹⁰² Hopkins’s gallery notes do sometimes remark that a painting contains little or no inscape, as with his comments on Holman Hunt’s *Shadow of Death*: ‘No inscape of composition whatever.’ 12 June 1874. *Notebooks*: 197.

... *branchy between towers* ...¹⁰³

Developing out of, and indeed very much feeding back into, Hopkins's intense interest in contemporary art and art history, was his fascination with architecture, and the place of these man-made creations in a world dominated by the spectacular architecture of nature. As an observer, he applied the same principles of looking to each: he sought out the unity of structure in everything, from the smallest leaf to the grandest Gothic cathedral. Hopkins recognised that everything within the world, even when apparently poles apart, was held together by a unity of structure, and that it was the duty of the sensitive trained observer to seek out this structural unity, the 'design' of a thing:

As air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling 'inscape' is what I above all aim at in poetry.¹⁰⁴

Thus it is clear that to Hopkins, poetry, like architecture, and indeed even like vision itself, is structured, and can be understood and analysed according to interchangeable principles. He was driven, in all his looking, by a visual acuity epitomised by this notion of '*inscape*, that is species or individually-distinctive beauty of style'.¹⁰⁵ This connection between 'pattern' and performance, between 'design' and purpose, is encapsulated within the notion of *inscape*, and can be detected in the natural world, in art, in architecture and indeed even in people. His study of any one of these was always for the purpose of improving his 'looking' at the others, and his study of architecture informed his looking at, and understanding of, the world around him, as well as his own poetic architecture.

¹⁰³ 'Dun Scotus's Oxford', l. 1. *Works*: 142.

¹⁰⁴ 15 February 1879. *Letters*: 66.

¹⁰⁵ 7 November 1886. To Patmore. *Further Letters*: 373.

Hopkins's interest in architecture began young: for Christmas 1857 he was given a copy of John Henry Parker's *Introduction to the Study of Gothic Architecture* (1849), inscribed, as House notes, "Gerard Manley Hopkins. Christmas 1857" in his mother's [sic] handwriting. Below this are initials 'M.H.' in pencil.¹⁰⁶ Developing out of a series of lectures delivered by Parker at Oxford in 1849, this manifesto was produced by the Oxford Society for Promoting the Study of Gothic Architecture. In 1864 he received another work by Parker, a fourth edition of his two-volume 1845 publication, *Glossary of Terms used in Grecian, Roman, Italian and Gothic Architecture* (inscribed: 'Gerard M. Hopkins from Frederick Gurney Coll: de Ball: Dec. 13. 1864').¹⁰⁷ These works were to become important to Hopkins, as White confidently acknowledges:

With the more scholarly, two-volume Parker's *Glossary*, it [*Introduction to the Study of Gothic Architecture*] became perhaps the most lastingly influential book in his early education, responsible for forming tastes which went well beyond architecture. It was out to make converts, and Hopkins became dictatorial and priggish in advocating its values.¹⁰⁸

Catherine Phillips also proposes a significant degree of influence, building on White's earlier work, and she draws particular attention to Hopkins's adoption of much of Parker's architectural language (particularly 'bay', 'boss' and 'fret'), now modified for use in his idiosyncratic landscape descriptions.¹⁰⁹

Inspired by Pugin and the Gothic Revivalist movement, and perhaps drawn by the essentially Catholic nature of the form, Hopkins's descriptions, whether of art, nature or people, are obsessively focused on the details of a scene, details which he observes, collects, classifies and collates:

¹⁰⁶ House, 'Books', 28.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*: 30. House notes that below the inscription 'apparently in Gurney's writing' is an earlier date of November 1860. She concludes that 'Gurney evidently inscribed the books to Hopkins after owning them himself'.

¹⁰⁸ White, *Literary Biography*: 21.

¹⁰⁹ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 89-91.

Oaks: the organisation of this tree is difficult. [...] The normal growth of the boughs is radiating and the leaves grow some way in there is of course a system of spoke-wise clubs of green – sleeve-pieces. And since the end shoots curl and carry young and scanty leaf-stars these clubs are tapered, and I have seen also the pieces in profile with chiselled outlines [...]. However the star knot is the chief thing: it is whorled, worked round, a little and that is what keeps up the illusion of the tree.¹¹⁰

His sketchbooks, journals and notebooks are littered with illustrations of architectural details; many of these details were almost certainly drawn from Giberne's photographs. He was also a keen visitor at buildings of architectural merit, both old and new, particularly churches and cathedrals; again the influence of his reading, particularly Parker, Fergusson and Ruskin, can be detected in his notes from these visits.¹¹¹

As with his study of art and its theory, the reclusive poet-priest again finds himself drawn into current debate concerning the merits or otherwise of contemporary architecture. He violently dislikes the 'base and brickish skirt' that he sees as so souring his beloved Oxford,¹¹² and yet he notes in Ruskinian vein, clearly influenced by his reading of the evangelical Parker, that:

There is now going on what has no parallel that I know of in history of art. Byzantine or Romanesque Architecture started from ruins of Roman, became itself beautiful style, and died, as Ruskin says, only in giving birth to another more beautiful than itself, Gothic. The Renaissance appears now to be in the process of being succeeded by a spontaneous Byzantinesque style, retaining still some of bad features (such as pilasters, rustic-work etc) of the Renaissance. These it will throw aside. Its capitals are already, as in Romanesque art, most beautiful. Whether then modern Gothic or this spontaneous style conquer does not so much matter, for it is only natural for latter to lead to a modern spontaneous Gothic, as in middle ages, only that the latter is putting off what we might be or rather are doing now. Or the two may coalesce.¹¹³

It is unusual for even professional critics to show such sensitivity to the place of contemporary design amidst the cycles of history, but Hopkins feels no trepidation in

¹¹⁰ 11 July 1866. *Journals*: 144-145. Cited by Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 89. Hopkins's detailed descriptions of people are discussed in the following chapter.

¹¹¹ As noted earlier, the Hopkins family owned a copy of James Fergusson's *Illustrated Handbook of Architecture* (2 volumes, 1855).

¹¹² 'Dun Scotus's Oxford,' l. 5.

¹¹³ *Journals*: 13. The omissions are Hopkins's own.

attempting this; once again, by concentrating on the details he can consider the larger pattern. A. R. Jones argues that this interest in architecture was fundamental to his conception of himself, his place in history, and his work. Indeed, he argues that Hopkins's writing is, in all respects, the 'verbal equivalent of Victorian Gothic architecture. Antiquarian, mediaevalist, fastidious and erudite'.¹¹⁴ The notion of architecture and its place in relation to both art and life is central even in Hopkins's earliest extant poem, 'The Escorial', and this poem and the much later 'Dun Scotus's Oxford' provide vivid examples through which to explore Jones's claim.

Dated 'Easter 1860', 'The Escorial' is very much an immature and incomplete work (there is the occasional missing line, an omitted stanza 9, and a few errors of rhythm and dubious rhymes), but already one can detect interests and passions that will concern the poet for the rest of his life: architecture, aestheticism, art, beauty, martyrdom, witness, and memorialisation, to name just a few.¹¹⁵ Like another early poem, 'A Vision of the Mermaids', it is clearly inspired by the richness and opulence of Keats and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, yet it is also recognisably the work of the poet who was eventually to produce *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (indeed much of the language of torture and violence is shared between the two). As Elizabeth Schneider argues, 'it is crowded with rich images of sensuous luxury and beauty on the one hand, and on the other it is marked by an inclination to dwell upon physical torture, cruelty and martyrdom [... These] represent an emphasis not demanded by the designated subject'.¹¹⁶ The troubled appeal of the tortured and broken body, and its role in

¹¹⁴ A. R. Jones, 'G. M. Hopkins: Victorian', in *The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969): 304.

¹¹⁵ *Works*: 1-5. Written as an entry for the annual poetry competition at Sir Roger Cholmeley's School, Highgate, the set-topic adopted by the school was also that utilised by the University of Oxford for the Newdigate Poetry Prize that year. Information from notes to the poem in *Poetical Works*: 215.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth W. Schneider, *The Dragon in the Gate: Studies in the Poetry of G. M. Hopkins*, vol. 20, *Perspectives in Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968): 5.

martyrdom in particular (unique through its position on the very edge of spectatorship legitimacy), were subjects that were to fascinate Hopkins throughout his life, as we will see.

Hopkins sets out to consider Philip II's memorial to Saint Lawrence (c. 225-258), a martyr grilled to death by the Romans during their persecution of the Christians.¹¹⁷ In his poem, Hopkins identifies an intense tension 'between what was done to Saint Lawrence and what Philip II made of that', as Eric Griffiths notes.¹¹⁸ Hopkins's first known poem is thus about something that already has a shape or form to it; it is an ekphrastic poem that recreates in poetic form things that already exist in physical form, both artistic and architectural. Indeed, as Hopkins the shape-ist notes, the Escorial was itself seeking to recreate the shape of something else: it was 'built in the form of a gridiron, – the rectangular convent was the grate, the cloisters the bars, the towers the legs inverted, the palace the handle'.¹¹⁹

This early poem features an observer figure through whose eyes the reader must look. As the narrator wanders the richly decorated corridors (themselves encapsulating 'all the richest productions of art and nature'),¹²⁰ he notes that 'With paintings gleam'd the rich pilaster'd walls' (10/3). In this poem he has thus created the verbal equivalent of Alma-Tadema's later painting, *Picture Gallery*: as readers we are looking at someone who himself looks at paintings. However, unlike the Alma-Tadema painting where the easel, the primary focus, is facing away from us, the poem places us alongside the speaker: we too wander the corridors, see through his eyes, and marvel at the magnificent sights.

¹¹⁷ The poem bears the traditional spelling of the saint's name, but the footnotes retain Hopkins's more unusual spelling, Laurence; this discrepancy is true even in the manuscript.

¹¹⁸ Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): 268.

¹¹⁹ Hopkins's own note to stanza 4.

¹²⁰ Hopkins's own note to stanza 10.

The first of these is a Mother and Child by Raphael, as the notes inform us. The mother is playing in 'some broad palmy mead' (10/5) with her young child, smiling and gathering flowers. Though this offers a picture of domestic happiness, the young mother holds 'a cross of flowers', which draws the eyes on to the next painting, Raphael's 'Lo Spasimo'. The eye of the reader is in turn guided by the eye of the speaker, who is guided by the eye of the young Christ, who looks out from the scene of familial happiness to see his future suffering and that of his mother to come, in the adjacent painting:

He, where the crownals droop'd, himself reviled
And bleeding saw [...]
(10/7-8)

All sense of chronology and sequence is removed as present and future are presented simultaneously through the two mediums, painting and poem, in both of which we look to the past to see the future.

As the speaker continues to wander the corridors, paintings are displayed one by one to the reader: works by Raphael, Claude, Titian, Rubens and others. In the delight taken in each image, there is an almost sensual excitement. Indeed, there is a strong sense of voyeuristic trespass as those within the paintings continue their usual activity unaware of those who watch from the rich darkness of the corridors. This uncomfortable sense of voyeurism is felt even more acutely when the eyes of observer and reader suddenly confront a series of eyes that look straight back: the statue of 'hapless [...] Antinous' who 'Gazes aslant his shoulder' (11/6) at Hyacinthus, while the Belvedere Apollo watches the dying python 'with placid eye' (11/8). The poem is dominated by various depictions of the male gaze, and the reflexive nature of this looking, where each iconically beautiful male figure is simultaneous both a gazer and himself gazed at, returns us once again to the many dangers of mortal beauty in a post-lapsarian world, as indicated by the 'smitten' python. In this monument to counter-reformation piety this

at first seems startlingly out of place, but this is to overlook the fundamental concerns with the dangers of looking, spectatorhood, martyrdom, beauty, and of viewing viewers, as established within the poem.

To observe a death, even that of a python, with nothing more than a ‘placid eye’ seems inappropriate yet strangely familiar; the reader is suddenly confronted with the startling realisation that the hideous death of St. Lawrence ‘hissing on the grate’ (3/2) (even the sound of his death unites him with the python) was viewed with just such ‘placid eye’. Hopkins deliberately invites comparison between the Roman torturers of St. Lawrence and the detached Roman God, but this is complicated even further by the compromised position of the reader: this is simultaneously both a legitimate and an illicit spectacle. ‘The Escorial’ is thus as much a poem about how to look at and make sense of the danger of looking, as about looking at danger, and central to this is the reader’s response to such sights, and specifically to the act of looking, as we shall see. It is with this startling realisation that the monumental stasis of the palace is destroyed and the mood suddenly changes, heralding the beginning of the process that leads finally to total spoliation of the Escorial.

The decay and eventual destruction of the Escorial is initially described in terms of light: the ‘summer beam’ fades the ‘Rich Titians’ (12/3), and in the sunlight the ‘ceaseless eddy shine and fall’ (12/4) of dust particles is observed. The ‘perennially unstable’ nature of dust in Victorian society is the subject of an entire chapter in Kate Flint’s study of *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*. She carefully describes how dust could be seen as a marker of undesirable class status, and thus used to map divisions within society, but also as ‘an equaliser [...and as a] long-standing equation with the most reductive form of matter to which we must all return – ‘dust to dust’’.¹²¹

¹²¹ Kate Flint, *Visual Imagination*: 40, 41. Dust, and dirt more generally, also form the subject of an article by Tom Crook, ‘Putting Matter in its Right Place: Dirt, Time and Regeneration in Mid-Victorian Britain’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 13 (October 2008).

It is easy to see why dust might appeal to the scientifically-minded poet; here was a substance that paradoxically juxtaposed beauty and utility (for the first time it was possible to study dust under a microscope and begin to understand and admire its fundamental constituents), and yet was also the harbinger of both death and decay. It is certainly worth noting that dust and its most visible effects were responsible for the rare appearance of Hopkins in print during his lifetime.

Dust was of particular interest to the Victorians because of its unique position on the border between the seen and the unseen. Itself unseen, dust could be responsible for spectacular atmospheric ‘optical effect[s]’, as Hopkins noted.¹²² Similarly, although invisible to the naked eye, even a single particle located within the dust could be responsible for horrendous and disfiguring disease. Dust could thus, through its effects, become devastatingly visible, yet paradoxically, it was often its most invisible elements that caused the most visible impact. Dust could be seen everywhere, yet to be seen in any detail, microscopes and other optical accessories were necessary. As Ruskin noted in *Modern Painters*, a work Hopkins may have drawn on here, ‘This very question of visibility is an endless one, wavering between form of substance and action of light. [...] Dust, unperceived in shade, becomes constantly visible in sunbeam.’¹²³ This is a quality exploited by Hopkins in stanza 12.

Following the carefully described paintings of the previous stanzas, the twelfth stanza is ushered in by a blank line of asterisks (11/9). It opens with a temporal instruction, ‘Then’ (12/1), which not only implies sequential progression, but also suggests causation. However, where the reader looks for an explanation to precede stanza 12, nothing is given: 11/9 is a blank line, with only the ‘placid eye’ of Apollo looking back. Narrative progression stalls, to be replaced by an acute sense of

¹²² Letter published in *Nature*, 30 October 1884, p. 633. Reproduced in the Appendix to Ball, *Science of Aspects*: 148-150. See also Footnote .

¹²³ *Modern Painters*. Ruskin, *Works of Ruskin*: 7: 139. Cited by Flint, *Visual Imagination*: 42.

chronological dislocation, as time gradually slips away: first it is ‘afternoon’, then ‘cooling gloom’, until all is undermined by the ‘ceaseless eddy’ of ‘long accumulated dust’ (12/6). Somewhere between stanzas 11 and 12, dust has had time to gather and ‘accumulate’, until the delicate tracery of the plates is gradually ‘obscur’d in age’s crust’ (12/9): the invisible is suddenly rendered visible, and that which was visible is removed. Dust operates then as a metaphor for the intersection of the visible and invisible, the created and the natural, the seen and unseen, the beautiful and the destructive; this is richly exciting territory for the ‘photo-erotic’ poet.

As it happens, Hopkins’s interest in dust and its visible effects was responsible for at least two of his very few appearances in print during his lifetime. Following the explosion of Krakatoa on 26-27th August 1883, Hopkins wrote several letters to *Nature* magazine, which described in detail ‘the remarkable sunsets’ occasioned by the explosion and both confirmed and refuted the observations provided by others.¹²⁴ Although it was not initially recognised, the paradoxically ‘*intense and lustreless*’ quality of the sunsets was due to the vast quantities of dust released into the atmosphere, a dust that ‘optically changed’ the skies, rendering the colours observed in the sunsets ‘*impure and not of the spectrum*’.¹²⁵ Once again, the invisible is rendered ultimately visible, and the spectacular quality of the sky captures the eye of the poet-painter, who is attentive in his description to not only colour and quality, but also shape, form and even behaviour:

The green is between an apple-green or pea-green (which are pure greens) and an olive (which is tertiary colour): it is vivid and beautiful, but not pure. The red is very impure and not evenly laid on. [...] The pigments for it would be ochre and Indian red. [...]

¹²⁴ Three letters are reproduced in Appendix II in *Correspondence*: 161-166. One predates the explosion at Krakatoa and is a general discussion of sunsets published in *Nature* in the issue of 16 November 1882. The two letters concerned with the explosion were published in the issues of 15 November 1883 and 3 January 1884. There is also a fourth letter, not collated by Abbott, published in *Nature* on 30 October 1884, p. 633. This letter, from ‘GMH, Dublin’ is reproduced in Ball, *Science of Aspects*: 148-150.

¹²⁵ 21 December 1883. *Correspondence*: 163, 164. Italics Hopkins’s own.

I subjoin an account of the sunset on the 16th, which was here very remarkable, from my own observations and those of one of the observatory staff. [...] The glowing vapour above this was as yet colourless; then this took a beautiful olive or celadon green, not so vivid as the previous day's, and delicately fluted; the green belt was broader than the orange, and pressed down on and contracted it. Above the green in turn appeared a red glow, broader and burlier in make; it was softly brindled, and in the ribs or bars the colour was rosier, in the channels where the blue of the sky shone through it was a mallow colour. Above this was a vague lilac.¹²⁶

The characteristic idiom of Hopkins's verse is easily detected here, and the painter is once again present in this verbal painting as the 'pigments' of 'ochre and Indian red' are 'laid on' like impasto.¹²⁷ Indeed the *Nature* letters are rich in diverse and exotic metaphors and analogies, chosen specifically to create an exact evocation of the scene on the part of the reader: 'inflamed flesh', 'yellow wax', 'fish-scales', 'crimson silk, or a ploughed field glazed with crimson ice'. Richard Altick draws attention to this process, through which:

Hopkins enhances the immediacy of the various phenomena, indeed converts the visual into the tangible, by describing them as much in terms of texture and shape (flecks, spangles, quilted, ploughed, hummocks, fluted, burlier, brindled, ribs, bars) as in language of color and light. [...] He combines the spatial dimension of the spectacle with the temporal as he describes the subtle arrangement and succession of effects, the impingement, mingling, and shifting of respective bands of color.¹²⁸

Once again, the optical effects of the eruption are described in language that draws heavily on painting, science and poetry.

This combination of the 'spatial dimension [...] with the temporal' that Altick identifies as a particular characteristic of the prose description also occurs in Hopkins's poetry, and can be helpfully explored in 'Duns Scotus's Oxford', written a little earlier in March 1879.¹²⁹ The poem opens with a splendid conjunction of man and nature as

¹²⁶ *ibid.*: 164, 165.

¹²⁷ Indeed, it is a great shame that this description was not finally translated into poetry. However, it should be noted that Bridges's poem, *Eros and Psyche*, appears to borrow heavily from Hopkins's letter. Piqued, Hopkins wrote to his friend: 'The description [...] so closely agrees with an account I wrote in *Nature*, even to details which were local only, that it is very extraordinary: you did not see my letter, did you?' (1 January 1885. *Letters*: 202). This co-incidence has been discussed in some depth by Flint, *Visual Imagination*: 58, and by Richard D. Altick, 'Four Victorian Poets and an Exploding Island', *Victorian Studies*, 3, no. 3 (1960).

¹²⁸ Altick, 'An Exploding Island', 259, 260.

¹²⁹ *Works*: 142.

Oxford's famous silhouette is described: 'Towery city and branchy between towers' (l. 1). Within the city, branches and towers stand harmoniously together, seemingly in a permanent embrace, their arms intertwined. This harmony within the city is replicated beyond, as both 'country and town' (l. 3) are presented as balanced, 'poisèd powers' (l. 4), the two drawn together in the 'Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmèd, lark-charmèd, rook-racked, river-rounded' (l. 2) Oxford that the poet evokes. The description carefully moves from the sound to the sights, as any clear distinction between man and nature is eradicated: man-made bells swarm like bees, larks lay charms like alchemists, and the river rounds off the city as a carpenter might a chair leg. The first few lines represent a careful movement in the vertical plane, as the eye is gradually drawn down from the towers, trees and the circling birds, to the gentle but persistent movement of the river, and even further down, to 'The dapple-eared lily below thee' (l. 3).

However, this is not a suspended image as the busy motion within the city is countered by an equal, more destructive, motion outside. Gradually the city is changing, subjected to a man-driven process of 'graceless growth':

Thou hast a base and brickish skirt there, sours
 That neighbour-nature thy grey beauty is grounded
 Best in; [...]

(ll. 5-7)

This passage develops from observations in his letter to Dixon of February 1879, where he describes 'that landscape the charm of Oxford, green shouldering grey, which is already abridged and soured and perhaps will soon be put out altogether'.¹³⁰ Both represent jarring colours, the anatomical yet harmonious 'green shouldering grey' replaced by the ungainly and ridiculous 'brickish skirt', the image recalling the self-conscious modesty of the Victorian middle-classes. Here the garish red brick of the new college additions and the burgeoning city suburbs is contrasted unfavourably with the sedate beauty of the old grey stone colleges, and perhaps even with the great monument to times passed, 'The Escorial'.

¹³⁰ 27 February 1879. *Correspondence*: 20.

Hopkins was not against new architecture in principle: his diary from Easter 1864 includes a list of new buildings to show visitors including ‘New College Chapel and Gardens; Trinity, S. John’s, Wadham, ditto. The Radclyffe. [...] Merton new buildings [Butterfield, June 1864].¹³¹ Christ Church new buildings [Deane, 1862-65] ... The Museum [Deane and Woodward, 1858]’.¹³² However, here he sees only the impact of the new buildings on the delicate harmony that pre-existed the suburbs, the ‘confound[ing]’ of the ‘Rural rural keeping – folk, flocks, and flowers’ (l. 8). This quartet of lines (ll. 5-8) is in itself beautifully poised, with the consonants remaining consistent throughout (only five major sounds are used (b-n-g-r-f), all alliteratively). This ensures the subtly shifting vowel sounds can be heard, as the ‘neighbour-nature’ balance gradually becomes unsettled. Yet, for the speaker, the city remains invigorating through all. The profile of the city may have changed, but ‘walls’ remain that were once brushed by the ‘air’ of his great inspiration, Duns Scotus:

Yet ah! this air I gather and I release
 He lived on; these weeds and waters, these walls are what
 He haunted who of all men most sways my spirits to peace;
 (ll. 9-11)

As he breathes, the walls seem to slice through the years since Duns Scotus was present, their physical presence a testimony to the existence of those who have gone before.

It was through the teaching of the Franciscan and theologian John Duns Scotus (1266-1308), ‘the rarest-veinèd unraveller’ (l. 12), that Hopkins was able to reconcile his poetry with his theology, moving away from the Thomist thought of most of his peers: ‘I care for him [Duns Scotus] more even than Aristotle and more *pace tua* than a dozen Hegels’.¹³³ In Scotus’s writings Hopkins found a focus for his concern with the

¹³¹ 23 January 1864. To his mother, Hopkins wrote: ‘The new buildings at Merton are finished externally and are beautiful and of course universally maligned.’ *Further Letters*: 87.

¹³² *Journals*: 21. Information on architects and opening dates from R. K. R. Thornton, ‘The Places Hopkins Knew’, in *AMES*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, Sunderland Arts Centre, 1975): 14.

¹³³ 20 February 1875. *Letters*: 31.

individual essence of visible things: *haecceitas* (usually translated as ‘thisness’) and the responsibility of each thing to offer of himself and his best back to God, as articulated in his ekphrastic poem ‘On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People’:

Man lives that list, that leaning in the will
No wisdom can forecast by gauge or guess,
The selfless self of self, most strange, most still,
Fast furlèd and all foredrawn to No or Yes.
(ll. 25-28)¹³⁴

Whilst Hopkins had already independently developed his notion of the individualising force within each and every thing (inscape) and the relationship between this force and the observer (instress), it was through his study of Scotus from 1872 that he found a theological foundation for these thoughts. Although Hopkins’s notion of inscape should not be fully identified with *haecceitas* (and indeed Hopkins is quite clear on this), there can be no doubt that both concepts are fundamentally concerned with the importance of individuality. This notion of individuation is often revealed through the motion of a thing (Scotus argued that all created things are immediately active), the process by which, as Gardner notes, ‘he makes the activity of a thing a special element in that thing’s being’:¹³⁵

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves – goes its self: *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*
‘As kingfishers catch fire’ (ll. 5-8)¹³⁶

This dynamism through which something both becomes and expresses itself, focused in Hopkins’s mind through his study of Dun Scotus, is illustrated in the poem written in his honour. As the city reverberates with noise and motion, ‘Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmèd, lark-charmèd, rook-racked, river-rounded’ (l. 2), so the poem itself illustrates this through its own structural and formal features (sprung rhythm,

¹³⁴ *Works*: 176-177.

¹³⁵ W. H. Gardner, ‘A Note on Hopkins and Duns Scotus’, in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Gerald Roberts (London: Routledge, 1995): 338.

¹³⁶ *Works*: 129. Italics Hopkins’s own.

internal rhyme, alliteration), as Brown notes: ‘lines such as this [l. 2] [...] reproduce in microcosm the barely contained dynamism of Hopkins’s world.’¹³⁷ Furthermore, the complex architecture of the sonnet structure of the poem itself replicates the multifaceted architecture of the city. The octave of the sonnet is addressed directly to the city, whereas the sestet focuses on Scotus: the first tercet draws both Hopkins and Scotus together through their shared experience of the city (‘this air I gather and I release / He lived on’ (ll. 9-10)), while the final tercet concentrates on Scotus’s theology and the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception:

Of realty the rarest-veinèd unraveller, a not
Rivalled insight, be rival Italy or Greece;
Who fíred Fránce for Máry withóut spót.
(ll. 12-14)

Here the national rivalry of ‘The Escorial’ is recalled, but now in an explicitly Marian context.

It goes without saying that Pugin, Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites, and even Pater, shaped and were shaped by, contemporary debates about the relationship between art, architecture, and religious and philosophical culture. That Hopkins’s first poem, the Byronic travel poem ‘The Escorial’, grappled with different cultural and aesthetic models in terms of painting, statuary and architecture, is an early example of this. However, it also lays the foundations for the more deeply solved idiosyncratic architectural poetics of the later Hopkins, exemplified by ‘Duns Scotus’s Oxford’. Here he is able to depict the physical concrete presence, both of Duns Scotus and of his beloved city, yet the work also neatly encapsulates the influence of Scotus on his thoughts in both the structure and content of the poem. By showing how it is possible to look past the surface appearance of a thing to the spiritual reality within, he demonstrates how aesthetics and spiritual meaning can never finally be separated, an observation that was to both haunt and delight him in equal measure, as we will see.

¹³⁷ Brown, ‘Victorian Poetry and Science’, 155.

It also offers a counter-model to the refused Gothic of the 'Escorial' and its Counter-reformation asceticism and Renaissance aestheticism. For Hopkins even the most abstract relationship is considered, as Jones notes, through 'concrete, sensuous images and very careful, very precise analogies', the hope being that through careful study and sensuous perception each and every thing would finally yield up that spiritual reality that lies beyond its appearance.¹³⁸

This observation returns us once again to Hopkins's early poem, 'It was a hard thing to undo this knot'. Here Hopkins searches for some assurance that particular sense impressions, the instress of a thing, have their identity both within and beyond each generating object, as observed by Carol T. Christ:

The poem asserts that Hopkins has solved the problem: "It *was* a hard thing to undo this knot." This particular poem does not explain how he undid it, but his later poetry repeatedly dramatizes his solution, which he names "instress."¹³⁹

Instress is thus identified both with the distinctiveness of an object, as taught by Duns Scotus, but also with the impact such an object has on an observer. Christ notes that it is by identifying this dual nature of instress, found both within the object itself and within the viewer's perception of the object, that Hopkins finds the solution that enables him ultimately 'to undo this knot'. The dynamic nature of this relationship between perceiver and object, the seer and the seen, is central to his endlessly complex dialectic of vision and visuality, and is the subject of the following chapter.

¹³⁸ Jones, 'G. M. Hopkins: Victorian', 305.

¹³⁹ Carol T. Christ, *Victorian and Modern Poetics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984): 70.

CHAPTER TWO

LOOKING AT PEOPLE

... *treasury of explored beauty* ...¹

It is for his poetry of the natural world that Hopkins is probably best known, and typically his work features a single observer looking out on and observing the beauty and bounty of God found within it. This is not passive observation – Wordsworth’s ‘wise passiveness’² – instead Hopkins scours, his eyes alighting hungrily on beauty, ‘shape, effect’ and pattern which he then records for what he calls his ‘treasury of explored beauty.’³ The active, and indeed interactive, nature of this looking he described to Baillie:

I think I have told you that I have particular periods of admiration for particular things in Nature; for a certain time I am astonished at the beauty of a tree, shape, effect etc, then when the passion, so to speak, has subsided, it is consigned to my treasury of explored beauty, and acknowledged with admiration and interest ever after, while something new takes its place in my enthusiasm.⁴

These are the words of a collector, one with a ‘treasury’ to fill; yet this is a collector with no clear sense in advance of what he is collecting: it is only when his eyes alight on the ‘thing’ that he recognises how he is ‘astonished’ by its beauty. His ‘passion’ inflamed, for a period he can do nothing but search out other examples of this ‘particular thing in Nature’ to add to his collection. Eventually sufficient time will have passed (he refers only to the passing of time, not to the number or type of examples ‘collected’) and his admiration will move on to other things, although the way he looks at the first thing will be changed for ever; ‘ever after’ it will be ‘acknowledged with admiration and interest’ even after something else has replaced the first ‘fury’ it inspired.

¹ 13 July 1863. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 202.

² ‘Expostulation and Reply’, l. 24. Wordsworth, *Works of Wordsworth*: 129-130.

³ 13 July 1863. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 202.

⁴ *ibid.*

Hopkins did not confine this ‘passion[ate]’ viewing of the world to nature, although it is this which has been most studied by critics.⁵ In this chapter I want to look at the way Hopkins looked at people, particularly men, and the manner in which he recorded this looking. Typically his poetry features a lone individual observing the natural world, but Hopkins was, for most of his life, a deeply social person: his diaries and letters are littered with accounts of visits to or from friends, and when the young Hopkins first went up to Oxford, he boasts proudly to his mother in his letters home about his hectic social schedule, only later adding details of the stimulating intellectual environment in which he thrived. He undoubtedly formed deep and lasting friendships; those with his literary trio of friends, Richard Watson Dixon, Coventry Patmore, and Robert Bridges, are probably the most fully documented, but his friendships with Digby Mackworth Dolben and A.W.M. Baillie were also hugely influential.⁶ As an undergraduate, Hopkins was a frequent presence at parties, after-dinner ‘wines’ and other social gatherings and he acquired a large circle of acquaintances and casual friends. These characters did not escape the poet’s eager eyes and were often themselves the subject of keen ‘fascination’ on the part of the poet.⁷

⁵ Articles include: George Goodin, ‘Man and Nature in Hopkins’ “Ribblesdale”’, *Notes and Queries*, 6 (1959); Susan A. Hallgarth, ‘A Study of Hopkins’ Use of Nature’, *Victorian Poetry*, 5 (1967); Alison G. Sulloway, ‘The Nature of Art, Nature, and Human Nature in Hopkins’s Poetry’, in *Vital Candle: Victorian and Modern Bearings in Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. John S. North and Michael D. Moore (Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, 1984); Jerome Bump, ‘Hopkins as Jesuit Poet: Poet of Nature’, in *Critical Essays on Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Alison G. Sulloway (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1990); Russell Elliott Murphy, ‘Nature and Nature’s God in Hopkins’ St. Beuno Sonnets’, *An Irish Quarterly Review*, 87, no. 346 (Summer 1998); Day, ‘Spiritual Ecology’.

⁶ Although Hopkins met Dolben only once, he left a deep and lasting impression. Of Dolben, Hopkins wrote: ‘You know there can very seldom have happened the loss of so much beauty (in body and mind and life) and of the promise of still more as there has been in his case – seldom I mean, in the whole world, for the conditions wd. not easily come together.’ 30 August 1867. *Letters*: 16-17.

Following her son’s death, Baillie wrote to Gerard’s mother (17 June 1889): ‘He is the one figure which fills my whole memory of my Oxford life. There is hardly a reminiscence with which he is not associated. All my intellectual growth, and a very large proportion of the happiness of those Oxford days, I owe to his companionship... Apart from my own nearest relations, I never had so strong an affection for anyone.’ *Further Letters*: 449.

⁷ 24 September 1866. *Letters*: 8.

Hopkins was a prolific sketcher of the world around him, yet critics have often noted a marked absence of figures and people in his illustrations.⁸ It is indeed the case that there are few completed portraits of others, but the sketchbooks and journals are littered with numerous quickly etched silhouettes, and lightly traced, patchy sketches of faces. Furthermore, his letters often contain carefully constructed verbal portraits in which Hopkins employed his considerable skills in collection, classification and close observation to recreate the faces before him. Although the figures depicted in the letters are frequently mutual friends, quite often a letter's recipient would receive an intensely detailed description of somebody entirely unknown even to Hopkins, as in this example sent to Bridges, in which Hopkins feverishly describes 'the Corpus man whose name I wanted to know':

As far as I can give it this is the description of him: he has plenty of thick rather curly dark auburn hair parted in the middle and [...] whiskers of the same; his eyes are deep set and I think rather near together; the fault of his face is that the features are too broad and depressed; his forehead is wide across and narrow upwards to the hair; he looks happy. I drew him when I got home but some touches destroyed the likeness at last.⁹

This is a 'fascinating' description, rich in the details that inspire both desire and danger, as we shall see, and it should be noted just how quickly Hopkins moves from neutral description – 'curly dark auburn hair', to aesthetic judgements – 'rather near together', and finally from aesthetic to qualitative – 'he looks happy'. This swift movement is characteristic of Hopkins, for whom aesthetic and qualitative, or at times even moral, judgements can never fully be separated.

In this letter to Bridges, Hopkins offers a teasing glimpse into the relationship between the two men, and an even more intriguing insight into his relationship with the world of men that he observes:

⁸ Jerome Bump's analysis of Hopkins's drawings is the most comprehensive example of this line of argument, 'Hopkins' Drawings', building on the earlier work of John Piper, 'Hopkins's Drawings', and J. D. C. Masheck, 'Art by a Poet'.

⁹ 28 September 1866. *Letters*: 9.

It curiously happens that I have seen two people we were talking about. The first is the Corpus man whose name I wanted to know. I met him riding in one of our roads a few days ago and I stared at him in order to note his features but not very comfortably, for he plainly recognised my face.¹⁰

We do not know the context of the discussion between Hopkins and Bridges about the appearance of a man unknown to either of them, and we can only speculate on why and how such a conversation took place. However, it is interesting to note Hopkins's response to seeing the man again: he 'stare[s]' at him, 'in order to note his features', so that later he can record them accurately. He makes no mention of the man's response to such intense scrutiny but remarks only on his own discomfort, 'for he plainly recognised my face'. There is a clear sense of danger in this experience, but here the danger is not that of looking – Hopkins 'stared' shamelessly – but of being looked at. The fear is rather one of social embarrassment, of being recognised, of being *caught* looking. He wishes to know the man, but only by 'name' and 'feature', as one might come to know a painting or portrait. This is characteristic of Hopkins's manner of looking at others around him: he scours the world for passive subjects to observe, but shies away from any active engagement, aware perhaps that if looking is dangerous in itself, how much more so is action? This active distancing of himself from anything but a one-sided ocular engagement is a fundamental distinction Hopkins maintains between the safe and welcome 'passion'¹¹ aroused by a natural subject, and what he calls the 'dangerous'¹² 'strain upon the passions'¹³ induced by the beauty of the body, as we will see.

In his letter to Bridges, Hopkins records that he first attempted to sketch the man, only turning to a verbal portrait when his graphic image failed. In each attempt, as Phillip notes, Hopkins is grappling with 'the puzzle of translating what he saw

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ 10 July 1863. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 202.

¹² 22 October 1879. *Letters*: 95.

¹³ 12 February 1868. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 231.

into lines on paper'.¹⁴ In this example, words take over from drawing, and this is indeed representative of Hopkins's artistic career as a whole: as time went on, words gradually took over from sketches as his preferred form of recording the world that he saw. The record offered by these 'lines on paper' is not always that of beauty or attraction, but sometimes simply of 'fascination'. Echoing closely the language used to describe the 'particular periods of admiration for particular things in Nature',¹⁵ Hopkins describes 'another Oxford man, whose name I did not know':

His face was fascinating me last term: I generally have one fascination or another on. Sometimes I dislike the faces wh. fascinate me but sometimes much the reverse, as is the present case.¹⁶

Bridges could not have known the man in question, as Hopkins does not, and Hopkins appears unable (or unwilling) to provide any explanation for his 'fascination' with him. Nevertheless, one is struck by just how similar to photographs and descriptions of the young Hopkins the man appears to be: 'a delightful face (not handsome), altogether aquiline features, a sanguine complexion, rather tall, slight, and eager-looking.'¹⁷ Perhaps marginally inclined to vanity, and certainly heavily inclined to introspection, it is unsurprising that Hopkins would find himself so attracted by the features and figure of a man superficially so like himself.¹⁸

Hopkins never defines the nature of such a 'fascination', but he does note that it is distinct from liking or disliking: the appeal can be something other than aesthetic, but it is certainly commanding, whatever the source. *OED* defines the verb 'to fascinate' as describing an ability 'to irresistibly attract the interest' of something, and it should be noted that early uses of the term often implied a magical spell or other form of

¹⁴ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 66.

¹⁵ 13 July 1863. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 202.

¹⁶ 24 September 1866. *Letters*: 8.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ See again Hopkins's anxious comments to Bridges regarding Wooldridge's portrait, discussed in the previous chapter. 29 March 1887. *ibid.*: 253.

enchantment. That an individual might become an innocent victim of such a ‘fascination’, powerless to help himself or to resist, would certainly appear an appealing notion to Hopkins. Although a man dominated by aesthetics and the notion of ‘right’ aesthetic judgement, it is clear that ‘fascination’ falls beyond this; hence the admission that he can be drawn to someone he dislikes or finds aesthetically unpleasant.

This apparent separation between aesthetics and appreciation might prove surprising for a man for whom even the most ordinary perceptions were so often governed by aesthetics: he doggedly refused to address his close friend as Robert purely on the grounds that ‘your surname is the prettier’.¹⁹ However, this interest in the ‘pretti[ness]’ of his friends is not confined to surnames alone. Hopkins’s journals, notebooks and letters are littered with references to, and descriptions of, the beauty of his friends: he confesses that ‘from myself unholy / To the sweet living of my friends I look’.²⁰ He notes that there is indeed a ‘sweet[ness]’ in this beauty, observing that ‘it is of course a comfort to find beauty in a friend or a friend in beauty. But this kind of beauty is dangerous’.²¹ The precise nature of this danger is the subject of the following section, but it should be noted that the apparent externalisation of a ‘fascination’, and indeed its ostensibly irresistible and overpowering nature enable Hopkins to write freely of male attraction without any apparent guilt. He is here drawn irresistibly to look at and admire another man, yet he acknowledges without unease that he finds this man attractive: ‘Sometimes I dislike the faces wh. fascinate me but sometimes much the reverse, as is the present case.’²² His private writings are littered with appreciations of male beauty and accounts of the attraction and enjoyment he felt on looking at other men, yet for Hopkins to acknowledge such a sensation without any apparent sense of

¹⁹ ‘You sometimes now address me by my Christian name and I like it but I do not you by yours, for first it wd. not feel natural to me and secondly it wd. be unnecessary, for your surname is the prettier.’ Christmas Eve 1867. *ibid.*: 21-22.

²⁰ ‘Myself unholy’, ll. 1-2. *Works*: 67.

²¹ 22 October 1879. *Letters*: 95.

²² 24 September 1866. *ibid.*: 8.

guilt or disquiet is almost unheard of in his writings, and appears only possible because of the apparent externalisation and displacement of responsibility that this ‘fascination’ permits.

Understanding of the exact nature of Hopkins’s attraction towards, or homoerotic interest in, other men has a long and complicated history. In 1958 W. H. Gardner noted firmly that ‘there is nothing in these diaries to suggest, let alone prove, that Hopkins was tainted with any serious homosexual abnormality’, yet the passion of this denial and the very particular choice of language in which it is made clearly reveals just how very much Gardner felt could be at stake in even acknowledging such a possibility.²³ The first printed suggestion that Hopkins’s attitude towards men could be anything other than conventional was in 1936, when W. H. Auden mentioned the ‘conflict’ aroused by Hopkins’s ‘homosexual feelings’, in his review of Elsie Elizabeth Phare’s poetic survey of 1933.²⁴ A further glancing reference was made in 1941 by a second critic, F. O. Matthiessen, in his discussion of ‘Whitman’s homosexuality and his [Hopkins’s] own avoidance of this latent strain in himself’.²⁵ It is clear that by 1944 there was at least some degree of public conversation on the subject, as Vincent Turner’s outraged footnote reveals:

One of the finest of Hopkins’s scholars has, in unpublished MSS. and in conversation, thought it necessary to bring ‘homosexuality’ into his explanation of Hopkins’s mind [...]. This seems to me to be blunting Occam’s razor [*sic*] and to find no support in the evidence.²⁶

²³ Gardner, *Poetic Idiosyncrasy*: 2: 85.

²⁴ W. H. Auden, Review of *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, by E. E. Phare. *Criterion* 13 (April 1934): 497-500, 500. Elsie Elizabeth Phare, *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Survey and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933). Cited by Dennis Sobolev, ‘Hopkins’s “Bellbright Bodies”’: The dialectics of desire in his writings’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 45, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 114. Much of the information in this section concerning the critical reception is taken from Sobolev’s article.

²⁵ F. O. Matthiessen, ‘Hopkins and Whitman’, in *Hopkins: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966): 145. Originally published pp. 548-91 in *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941).

²⁶ Vincent Turner, “‘Many a Poem That Both Breeds and Wakes’ (1944)”, in *Gerard Manley Hopkins, Poems: A Casebook*, ed. Margaret Bottrall (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1975),

It was perhaps in response to these ‘unpublished’ and thus untraceable ‘conversation[s]’ that Gardner had uttered his memorable riposte, unshakeable in its certainty but noticeably vague about the exact nature of the accusations against which it was so vigorously defensive. Certainly there is little further debate for many years, until the late 1970s, when an article in 1976 on ‘Sexuality and Inscape’ by Wendell Stacy Johnson noted the lack of critical interest in the subject up to this point, but observed that ‘it would be disingenuous to deny that sexual identity and sex as a force are present in much of his poetic art – sometimes subtly, sometimes rather plainly’.²⁷ This was swiftly followed by the seminal publications of Bernard Bergonzi, Paddy Kitchen and Michael Lynch, all of whom took Hopkins’s homosexuality as a widely accepted critical assumption and very much part of his identity: Lynch even feels confident enough to proclaim Hopkins ‘a fully gay *poet*’ whose ‘gayness has long been humming but never allowed to sing’.²⁸

As Dennis Sobolev observes, ‘it is partly because of these responses that in the 1980s the pendulum swung back, and the question of Hopkins’s sexual orientation became marginal once again’.²⁹ Certainly, the later critical studies tread the highly complicated and sensitive ground much more subtly than the ground-breaking works of the 1970s, aware as they were by then that the assumption of any restrictive, and so often anachronistic, labelling in response to the work of such a complex priest-poet and individual would always be flawed. These articles tended to offer more general considerations of the presence or otherwise of sexuality within Hopkins’s

138 (Footnote 2). Originally published as ‘Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1844-1944’ in *Dublin Review*, vol. 215 (October 1944).

²⁷ Wendell Stacy Johnson, ‘Sexuality and Inscape’, *Hopkins Quarterly*, 3, no. 2 (July 1976): 59.

²⁸ Bernard Bergonzi, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (New York: Macmillan, 1977); Paddy Kitchen, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Life*, 1989 ed. (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1978); Michael Lynch, ‘Recovering Hopkins, Recovering Ourselves’, *Hopkins Quarterly*, 6 (1979): 112, 107. Italics Lynch’s own.

²⁹ Sobolev, ‘Dialectics of Desire’, 115.

work.³⁰ These were swiftly followed by a series of articles considering his place more broadly in the context of the aesthetic movement and the cult of male beauty at Oxford,³¹ with particular reference to a diverse group of individuals loosely united by an interest in homoeroticism and pederasty that came retrospectively to be known as the Uranians.³²

I do not intend to follow any one model of identity, gay or otherwise, but rather I shall be engaging with the different ways in which Hopkins experiences and expresses desire. This thesis is concerned with *looking*, and central to that endeavour for Hopkins is the issue of how to look at and respond to the spectacle of beauty, and more specifically male beauty. This thesis aims to stand alongside Hopkins and to look at his looking, to see what he sees and what he permits his readers to see, but also to remain vigilant to when he turns us away. In doing so, however, the intimate relationship between beauty and potential ‘danger’ is never far away.

³⁰ See, for example, Byrne R. S. Fone, ‘This Other Eden: Arcadia and the Homosexual Imagination’, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 8, no. 3-4 (1983), and John B. Gleason, ‘The Sexual Underthought in Hopkins’ “The Windhover”’, *Victorian Poetry*, 27, no. 2 (Summer 1989).

³¹ See, in particular, Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), and Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

³² Particularly significant full-length studies include: Richard Dellamora, *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999); Julia F. Saville, *A Queer Chivalry: The Homoerotic Asceticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Michael M. Kaylor, *Secreted Desires: The Major Uranians: Pater, Hopkins and Wilde* (Brno, CZ: Masaryk University Press, 2006). Paul Fussell includes a significant discussion in his compendium of writings on *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

Journal articles include: Johnson, ‘Sexuality and Inscape’; Overholser, ‘Terrible Temptation’; Joseph Bristow, ‘“Churlsgate”: Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Working-Class Male Body’, *English Literary History*, 59 (1992); Peter Swaab, ‘Hopkins and the Pushed Peach’, *Critical Quarterly*, 37, no. 3 (1995); Michael M. Kaylor, ‘“Beautiful dripping fragments”: A Whitmanesque Reading of Hopkins’ “Epithalamion”’, *Victorian Poetry*, 40 (2002).

Although actually published in 1970, Timothy d’Arch Smith’s work on the Uranians seems to have gone largely unnoticed at the time, but did receive significant critical attention later: *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English ‘Uranian’ Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). A more contemporary discussion of this, particularly in relation to Gerard Manley Hopkins, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde is provided by Michael M. Kaylor, *Secreted Desires*.

... *To what serves Mortal Beauty?* ...³³

Writing to Bridges in 1879, Hopkins clearly defined three levels of beauty – of body, mind and character – and identified the relative ‘dangers’ of each:

I think then no one can admire beauty of the body more than I do, and it is of course a comfort to find beauty in a friend or a friend in beauty. But this kind of beauty is dangerous. Then comes the beauty of the mind, such as genius, and this is greater than the beauty of the body and not to call dangerous. And more beautiful than the beauty of the mind is beauty of character, the ‘handsome heart’.³⁴

However, in an earlier letter to Bridges, written in 1867 following the death of Digby Mackworth Dolben, Hopkins had drawn up a subtly different concept of three discrete levels of beauty:

You know there can very seldom have happened the loss of so much beauty (in body and mind and life) and of the promise of still more as there has been in his case – seldom I mean, in the whole world, for the conditions wd. not easily come together.³⁵

Twelve years later, ‘beauty [... of] life’ is replaced by ‘beauty of character’; this change perhaps reflects the weary recognition that the unpredictable and sometimes uncontrollable nature of human life can stand in the way of the manifestation of this third level of beauty, though it will not eradicate it. In both letters, Hopkins clearly maintains three different levels of beauty, but it is only in the later letter that he places them in an unambiguous aesthetic and moral hierarchical order, in relation to his complicated concern with their relative dangers.

This concern with the danger of beauty rather than its spiritual import, is at first glance a relatively unusual topic in Hopkins’s poetry, although very much a recurring one in his journals and letters, and was to vex him throughout his life. In the notebook

³³ ‘To what serves Mortal Beauty?’, l. 1. *Works*: 167.

³⁴ 22 October 1879. *Letters*: 95.

³⁵ 30 August 1867. *ibid.*: 16-17.

completed between March 1865 and Lent 1866, Hopkins compiled a careful list of 'sins', and the less serious transgressions of 'scruples' (uncertainty over whether or not a sin has occurred) and 'temptations' (not a sin if resisted). Many of these are concerned with the dangers inherent in looking, and particularly looking at beauty: 'Looking at a man who tempted me', 'Looking at a cart-boy fr. Standen's shopdoor', 'Looking at a temptation in Newman's friend', 'Looking at Fyffe [...] Looking at Mitchell', 'Looking at a man who tempted me on Port Meadow', 'Looking at face in the theatre', 'Looking at boys, several instances', 'Imprudent looking at organ-boy and other boys', 'Looking at temptations, esp. at E. Geldart naked', and so on.³⁶

Although Hopkins is never quite clear about the nature of this 'danger', there is clearly a strong homoerotic element, as significantly more often than not the looking is at another man. As Overholser observes, these are the writings of 'an anxiety-ridden and sexually confused young man who was concerned over even a hint of sexual arousal, and who had to resist, over and over again, a flood of 'temptations' which surrounded him and sometimes came close to overwhelming him'.³⁷ Hopkins is torn between a seemingly irresistible urge to look at and enjoy the illicit homoerotic gratification of spectatorship and a non-negotiable and, at first glance, seemingly uncomplicated sense of the sinfulness of such looking. This aesthetic and moral minefield is quickly recognised as an exciting and desirous place for the young Hopkins, as again and again he appears deliberately to place himself in situations where he can luxuriate in this heady world of danger and desire, simultaneously tempting and chastising himself.

As early as 1865, Hopkins was associating the temptations of 'looking' with the dangers inherent in pursuing his possible career as a painter: 'Temptations as looking at William [...] Idling despondently in evening over work and speaking despondently of

³⁶ Examples from the many available in *Early Manuscripts*: 156, 157, 165, 168, 168, 173, 174.

³⁷ Overholser, 'Terrible Temptation', 26.

prospect of not being a painter'.³⁸ Within six months this despondency had clarified itself and Hopkins was able to identify to Baillie his fears over inflammation of 'the passions':

You know I once wanted to be a painter. But even if I could I wd. not I think, now, for the fact is that the higher and more attractive parts of the art put a strain upon the passions which I shd. think it unsafe to encounter.³⁹

These dangerous 'passions' are clearly very different from the more benign 'passion' inspired by his admiration for beauty in nature. There he aligns passion with his 'fury' to record the world: 'I am sketching (in pencil chiefly) a good deal [...] The present fury is the ash.'⁴⁰ In the second letter, the context is very different. Hopkins is explaining how soon he is to take Holy Orders, and his wish that this should remain a secret for the time being. He notes that 'Besides that it is the happiest and best way it practically is the only one'. It is clear that the now plural passions inspired by 'the higher and more attractive parts of the art' of painting are far too dangerous and easily come under 'strain' (the term suggesting a finite limit or final point beyond which the strain may prove too much). What would occur should the passions break is never described, indeed it is perhaps too terrible to contemplate, but certainly the danger is so great that all steps must be taken to avoid any such 'strain'. This is the reason Hopkins provides for his decision not to pursue a possible vocation as a painter: he could not risk the corruption of his immortal soul through threats to the chastity of either his body or mind. He concludes by saying that life within the Church is not only the 'happiest and best', but practically 'the only' future under which such strains will not be encountered; a place, in other words, where it is safe to look:

No *better* serves me know, save *best*; no other,
Save Christ: to Christ I look, on Christ I call.

'Myself unholy' (ll. 13-14)⁴¹

³⁸ September 1865. *Early Manuscripts*: 188 (Plate 136).

³⁹ 12 February 1868. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 231.

⁴⁰ 10 July 1863. To Baillie. *ibid.*: 202.

⁴¹ *Works*: 67.

In fact, life within the Church was to present its own challenges, but also its own solutions, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

To Hopkins, looking was a highly dangerous activity, the eyes – and through them, the mind – being so very vulnerable to corruption. Overholser introduces the notion of ‘visual purity’ as an aesthetic and moral concept, and draws attention to Hopkins’s observation that artists departed from the truth in ‘an age in which the eye had not been trained to look severely at things apart from their associations, *innocently* or *purely*’.⁴² It is clear that the eyes themselves could be subject to moral censure and ascetic discipline, and one wonders who, or perhaps what, exactly was being punished in 1869 when for half a year Hopkins kept his eyes continually lowered as a penance.⁴³ Had Hopkins frightened himself with the sights that he saw, and thus lowered his eyes to protect and defend himself? Or was it rather the more complicated, but characteristically Hopkinsian, situation: the eyes had looked and found, delighting in the scenes they viewed, however firmly the mind might wish this not to be the case, as his feverish and ever more introspective and obsessively self-critical confession notes from this period might suggest?

This notion of ‘training’ the eyes ‘to look severely at things’ is one that differentiates Hopkins’s earlier work from what followed. Independent, wayward, beauty-seeking eyes appear only early in Hopkins’s work; quickly the eyes are restrained and brought to order, a process described in ‘She schools the flighty pupils’, from June 1864.⁴⁴ These eight compact lines, perhaps intended as the start of a sonnet, are, as Overholser suggests, heavily influenced by Shakespeare as they deal

⁴² *Journals*: 77. Cited by Overholser, ‘Terrible Temptation’, 47-48 (Footnote 4). Emphases Hopkins’s own.

⁴³ *ibid.*: 190.

⁴⁴ *Works*: 21.

‘uninhibitedly and punningly with the heady dangers of looking at a lover’.⁴⁵ The woman in the poem is variously teacher, mistress, ruler, knight and priest as she increasingly tries to control ‘the flighty pupils of her eyes’ (l. 1) and her own simmering infatuation. The argument is given (and comically proved not to be true) that if she can learn to control her eyes, like a teacher with unruly pupils (in the other sense) in a class, she will be similarly able to control her words, reactions, and ‘love-thoughts’ (l. 7). Her bodily control will ensure that she does not reveal her ‘disquiet’ (l. 2) (through the unrestrained movements of the ‘flighty pupils’) to the looks of others. The rich eroticism here betrays the giddy excitement of first love and, Overholser suggests, the uninhibited puns reveal ‘Hopkins’s prelapsarian vision’ of a time when looking was just an uncomplicated matter of seeing and enjoying.⁴⁶ She argues that Hopkins’s ever more frantic diary notations during his undergraduate years reveal an increasingly ‘crippling self-consciousness about the poetic problem of “looking”’, a problem he was only finally to solve with his conversion into the Roman Catholic Church and the subsequent refocusing of his desires and delight on the physical body of Christ incarnated.⁴⁷ Certainly his undergraduate diaries record the sin of ‘looking’ again and again, and with it there is always a clear sense of ‘danger’. What exactly constitutes the substance of this danger is never entirely clear, but clearly visual purity is deeply implicated in moral chastity in Hopkins’s eyes.

Whether Overholser is correct to identify Hopkins’s conversion to Catholicism as the turning point for the change in his way of looking at his place in the world is unclear, but the timings of the change make it plausible. As a child, Hopkins’s letters and diaries are full of youthful enthusiasm over the delights of looking and seeing.

⁴⁵ Overholser, ‘Terrible Temptation’, 34-35.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*: 34.

⁴⁷ The major focus for this argument is Hopkins’s sermon at Bedford Leigh, 23 November 1879, dedicated to the physical beauty of Christ. This sermon is reproduced in *Sermons*: 34-38. This subject is discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

Gradually the records ‘darken’ with the loss of this ‘prelapsarian vision’, and his undergraduate diaries represent the height of this period of troubled vision, characterised as they are by the frenzied panic of the sexually-charged notebooks, and the careful record of each nocturnal emission, ‘evil thought’ and unwanted ‘physical’ reaction to every ‘temptation’.⁴⁸ From the time of his conversion, Hopkins’s records of ocular vigilance begin to fall away, and in one sense, ‘looking’ appears less and less frequently as a sin. Indeed, by August 1885 the sonnet ‘To what serves Mortal Beauty?’ is able to articulate an explicitly visual solution to the challenges imposed by the ‘mortal beauty’ of the title, even if Hopkins cannot entirely quell the potential danger invoked by the ‘danc- / Ing blood’ (ll. 1-2). To understand the sonnet’s ocular aesthetics, however, we need recourse to the records of visual ‘dangers’ Hopkins chronicled in earlier years.

These different kinds of beauty and their relative dangers are the subject of Hopkins’s sonnet, which sets out to ask and to answer the two questions given in the opening line: what is the purpose of human physical beauty, and what is the appropriate response in the face of such beauty? The answer to both of these questions is presented as simple and unambiguous: mortal beauty is attractive yet dangerous (the sonnet considers the interconnected but discrete senses of ‘mortal’, as ‘human’ and ‘transitory’). The purpose of mortal beauty, in both manifestations, is to serve as a readily accessible analogy for spiritual beauty, a visual demonstration of the link between Man and God. This is not without its perils: beauty is ‘dangerous; does set danc- / Ing blood’, and can lead to behaviour that is ‘prouder’ than is morally

⁴⁸ Hopkins’s undergraduate diaries are thick with occasions when he experienced ‘temptation’, and even a few instances where he experienced ‘terrible temptation’ (*Early Manuscripts*: 191 (Plate 139)). Sobolev produces an inventory of these, including the observation that ‘Hopkins registered homoerotic feelings towards Fyffe [...], Baillie [...], Phillimore [...], Maitland [...], Buchanan [...], “Geldart naked” [...], unnamed “Newman’s friend” [...], an “organ boy and other boys” [...], “a chorister at Magdalen” [...], “men at Worcester sports” [...], and a “boy [he] saw” [...]’. Sobolev, ‘Dialectics of Desire’, 121.

acceptable.⁴⁹ However, where earlier the dangers faced by ‘looking’ were so many and various that they had to be carefully controlled by rigorous notation, now the purpose of beauty can be expressed in explicitly visual terms: ‘See: it does this:’ (l. 3).

From the dangers of beauty, the poem finally moves to answer the opening question in explicitly visual terms:

[...] | See: it does this: keeps warm
Men’s wit to the things that are; | to what good means – where a glance
Master more may than gaze, | gaze out of countenance.
(ll. 3-5)

Human beauty, as opposed to the beauty of the world, is thus represented as dangerous and potentially morally contaminated. However, at the same time, this frail and seductive beauty serves a divine purpose: it is a constant reminder of the wonder that is God’s creation. It is all too easy for Man’s sense of wonderment to pall over time, yet human beauty is present to serve as a daily reminder of the miracle of the Incarnation, as a symbol of God’s goodness and grace. That it ‘warm[s] / Men’s wits’ (ll. 3-4) transfers the potentially dangerous warmth of the ‘blood’ to the safer territory of the mind, and also counters the potential coldness of morality as an abstraction. This beauty should be readily accessible, available at a ‘glance’ as an instinctive and spontaneous response.

The sonnet draws a distinction between two forms of looking when it invokes the long-held distinction in religious writing between the gaze and the glance. Norman Bryson explains that:

A division separates the activity of the *gaze*, prolonged, contemplative, yet regarding the field of vision with a certain aloofness and disengagement, across a tranquil interval, from that of the *glance*, a furtive or sideways look whose attention is always elsewhere, which shifts to conceal its own existence, and which is capable of carrying unofficial, *sub rosa* messages of hostility, collusion, rebellion, and lust.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ ‘To what Serves Mortal Beauty’, ll. 1-2 & 2. *Works*: 167.

⁵⁰ Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983): 94.

The gaze is certainly a recurrent image throughout Hopkins's poetry, from the 'hapless youth, Antinous' in 'The Escorial' (ll. 5-6) who powerfully manifests Bryson's 'aloofness and disengagement', to the eternal cry of the Thomist 'Fallen Man' whose gaze, by contrast, longs for complete and overwhelming infinite personal engagement:

Jesu whom I look at veiled here below,
I beseech thee send me what I thirst for so,
Some day to gaze on thee face to face in light
And be blest for ever with thy glory's sight.

'S. Thomas Aquinatis' (ll. 25-28)⁵¹

Bryson draws a moral distinction between the two forms of looking: he depicts the gaze as a forceful, deliberate form of looking, whilst the glance is a passing look which is stolen and therefore morally inferior to the purity of a gaze. Hopkins certainly maintains a temporal distinction between the two, but with the opposite effect: true beauty does not require a steady prolonged 'gaze' in order to be appreciated, and indeed under such a 'gaze' even the sweetest 'countenance' may fall 'out of' beauty, but rather it is recognised and appreciated as such in an instant. Crucial to a gaze appears to be the lack of temporal confinement: the speaker in 'S. Thomas Aquinatis' longs for 'some day to gaze [...] / [...] for ever' (ll. 27-28), as opposed to the snatched moment of a glance.

Whereas Bryson is happy to draw a straightforward moral distinction between the gaze and the glance, for Hopkins the situation is more complicated. The purpose of mortal beauty is to 'keep warm / Men's wit to the things that are' (ll. 3-4).⁵² The true Christian longs for the day when he can gaze adoringly into the unshrouded face of God, free of the sins of the past and the confines of this earthly life as he stands in the sight of God. Elsewhere, Hopkins imagines:

⁵¹ *Works*: 105.

⁵² *ibid.*: 167.

Moonless darkness stands between.
Past, the Past, no more be seen!
But the Bethlehem-star may lead me
To the sight of Him Who freed me
From the self that I have been.

‘Moonless darkness’ (ll. 1-5)⁵³

This desire has clear biblical precedents: ‘For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known’.⁵⁴ However, as articulated in the Aquinas poem, this moment of seeing and of being seen can be foreshadowed and foreseen in the experience of looking into the face of mortal beauty. Beauty is given by God to serve as a symbol and visual demonstration of the association between Man and God, and Hopkins believes that this is best perceived in glances, which ‘Master more may than gaze’ (l. 5).⁵⁵ This only seems counter-intuitive if this beauty is seen merely as human and earthly. Catherine Phillips argues that Hopkins chooses instead to maintain an Augustinian distinction between the gaze and the glance:

Hopkins is not, I think, saying that we can absorb more of human beauty by a covert glance that leaves the person viewed unselfconscious but, following Augustinian ideas, that what we need to look for in humans is God's beauty and good and that this is perceptible in glances.⁵⁶

Mortal beauty is thus a gift from God, ‘heaven’s sweet gift’ (l. 13), not only through its enriching presence in the mortal world, but also as ‘the gift of the availability of connection with God on earth’.⁵⁷ The line breaks in the sonnet make clear this direct association through the verb/noun ambiguity of ‘Master’ which opens the fifth line.

⁵³ *ibid.*: 77.

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 13: 12. Further examples include: ‘Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually’ (1 Chronicles 16:11); ‘When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek’ (Psalm 27:8); ‘Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face evermore’ (Psalm 105: 4).

⁵⁵ *Works*: 167.

⁵⁶ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 258.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

The presence and promise of the 'Master' is seen in every human manifestation of beauty; similarly, every manifestation is in itself a lesson, an example of how to 'master' this association between Man and God. The blankly repeated 'gaze' both affirms and denies the looking, as the first occurrence introduces a masterful form of looking, but this is then countered by the modification of a discomforting or abashed gaze, as the 'countenance' returns to the face of mortal beauty.

In his letters to Bridges of 1867 and 1879, Hopkins very clearly argues against any alignment of beauty and moral virtue, yet it is clear that at other times he very much struggles to uphold these distinctions, as we shall see in relation to Hopkins's work with the urban poor.⁵⁸ In his sonnet dedicated to 'Mortal beauty', Hopkins draws attention to the national and theological significance of physical appearance. Faced with the overwhelming beauty of the Angles, Pope Gregory felt certain that such pure beauty as that of 'those lovely lads' could hide nothing but virtue and purity, and thus 'God to a nation | dealt that day's dear chance' (l. 8). It was the beauty of the men that led to St. Augustine's first mission to England, and the eventual conversion of the country to Western Christianity.

Whilst there is here an obvious elision of mortal beauty and moral value – there is in the Pope's response to their beauty an assumption that outward beauty reflects an inner moral worth, and this the poem repeats: 'Self | flashes off frame and face' (l. 11) – there is also an interesting partnership between the Catholic Church and the beautiful captured English slaves, figured by Hopkins as the 'wet-fresh | windfalls of war's storm' (l. 6). It is through the physical beauty of the 'World's loveliest' (l. 11) that an entire nation is offered a chance of salvation and redemption and so mortal

⁵⁸ 30 August 1867 and 22 October 1879. *Letters*: 17, 95.

beauty serves directly as a metaphor for spiritual beauty, Christ's beauty foreshadowed in that of the slaves. However, there is also a clear insistence on the sensual physicality of these 'lovely lads' (l. 6) as they stand dripping wet on the beach before the Pope. If this might seem all too like the dangers of looking recorded in Hopkins's early journals, the sonnet expresses very clearly that the appropriate response to such beauty (articulated in deeply parochial and familiar terms) is ultimately to turn to God:

[...] | Merely meet it; own,
Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift; | then leave, let that alone.
Yea, wish that though, wish all, | God's better beauty, grace.
(ll. 12-14)

Whilst this ideal response is presented with a certainty that is pure, absolute and without condition ('Merely meet it'), the multiple qualifications and the contorted syntax of these lines suggest the complexity of ensuring and maintaining just such a response. Whilst the sonnet insists that 'mortal beauty' (l. 1) must be acknowledged as not at all the same as 'God's better beauty, grace' (l. 14), yet it by extension offers a ready motive to keep looking at 'mortal beauty', however tenuous this apparent sanction might ultimately prove to be, as Hopkins was to find again and again throughout his life.

... *The making and the melting crowds* ...⁵⁹

Influenced no doubt by the Augustinian tale of Pope Gregory and the Angles, and his own ‘peculiar’ aesthetic sensibilities, Hopkins delighted in beauty wherever and whenever he found it. As a young man surrounded by beautiful friends, fine buildings, acclaimed artworks and impressive landscapes, Hopkins had a full ‘treasury of explored beauty’ and he felt happy and confident in his place amidst the ‘happy throng’.⁶⁰ However, his vocation as a priest drove him away from all of these things, and he quickly found himself far from home, far from friends, and frequently socially, politically and religiously removed from those he came to serve. In this section I intend to explore the impact that living among the urban poor in fast-moving industrialised cities had on Hopkins, and the very different kinds of ocular crises that these experiences provoked. Gregory’s vision of immortally beautiful Angles was not always easy to sustain in Hopkins’s life as a parish priest in industrial Victorian Britain.

Although apparently vigorous in his insistence on the separation of moral and aesthetic worth, Hopkins frequently struggled to maintain this distinction. An example of just such an alignment where the nexus between physical and moral decay is clearly emphasised can be seen in the discussion of the poor in cities from a letter to Baillie:

What I most dislike in towns and in London in particular is the misery of the poor; the dirt, squalor, and the illshapen degraded physical (putting aside moral) type of so many of the people, with the deeply dejecting, unbearable thought that by degrees almost all our population will become a town population and a puny unhealthy and cowardly one.⁶¹

Whilst Hopkins is here seen working hard at ‘putting aside moral’ judgements, his fears in this passage are most telling. In the unattractive aesthetics of the ‘towns’

⁵⁹ ‘The Alchemist in the City’, l. 3. *Works*: 65-66.

⁶⁰ ‘Easter’, l. 25. *ibid.*: 83-84.

⁶¹ 1 May 1888. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 293.

and of 'the poor' he identifies what he fears will be an unstoppable decline into a 'puny unhealthy' population, their 'illshapen degraded physical' appearance revealing their 'cowardly' nature. Here physical degradation is clearly aligned with a moral slide, as Hopkins anxiously considers the negative impact crowded city living will have on both. These fears surrounding the crowds and their urban surroundings were in many ways typical of his period. He was heavily influenced by the dire predictions of the Romantic poets concerning the dangers of urbanisation; notable examples of these anxieties can be found in William Cowper's *The Task* (1785), William Blake's poem 'London' (1794), and William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (especially Book VII, 1850). For the Victorians, these concerns took on an increasing urgency as debates over evolution and degeneration intensified, debates with which Hopkins, the keen amateur scientist, was actively engaged.

From the late eighteenth century onwards, speculative debate had been conducted on the scientific study of human origins in contrast to the biblical account of creation in *Genesis*. This had deepened in 1859, following the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* and these decades were marked by a growing desire to find and identify the so-called 'missing link' which would prove beyond doubt the theories articulated later by Darwin as evolution.

As Gillian Beer notes:

The emphasis on the *missing* link both suggested that such a link might in the future be found and yet emphasised the break between mankind and the 'lower orders' of nature. Chains are two chains, not one, without a link. The fascination with the idea of the link was also often a dread of finding it. Once found, mankind would indissolubly be part of the material order. So long as the gap remained, mystery prevailed and the supremacy of the human could remain intact.⁶²

⁶² Gillian Beer, *Forging the Missing Link: Interdisciplinary Stories* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 22.

Perhaps surprisingly for a Jesuit priest, Hopkins showed a keen interest in and understanding of the evolutionary debate, recognising that evolution did not necessarily predicate a direct line from monkey to man:

I do not think, do you know, that Darwinism implies necessarily that man is descended from any ape or ascidian or maggot or what not but only from the common ancestors of apes, the common ancestors of ascidians, the common ancestor of maggots and so on: these common ancestors, if lower animals, need not have been repulsive animals.⁶³

In this apparently uncomplicated view, Hopkins was relatively unusual, as for many the notion that Mankind might be descended from animal species inspired disgust, whether physical, aesthetic or even sexual. Implicit in this was a fear that if humans were descended from animals, it might therefore be possible, under appropriate conditions, for humans to return to animals, or at least an animal-like state.

Degeneration, this fear of evolutionary regression, was a major anxiety for the Victorians, although the exact nature of these concerns altered slightly through the period, as Daniel Pick identifies:

The *Oxford English Dictionary* helps confirm the periodisation of the word 'degeneration' [...]. It tells us that in the 1850s medical definitions of degeneration had been introduced into the language, suggesting '[a] morbid change in the structure of parts consisting in disintegration of tissue or in a substitution of a lower for a higher form of structure'. The *OED* quotes a further nuance in 1880 when the eminent Darwinian zoologist Edwin Ray Lankester stated that: 'Degeneration may be defined as a gradual change of the structure in which the organism becomes adapted to less varied and less complex conditions of life'.⁶⁴

The 'less varied and less complex conditions of life' that so ignited these fears were primarily those associated with increased urbanisation, and the changes in lives and living conditions brought about by industrialisation.⁶⁵ The employment opportunities in

⁶³ 20 September 1874. To his mother. *Further Letters*: 128.

⁶⁴ Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848 - c. 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 216.

⁶⁵ Census records for London show the population in 1851 as 2,362,236, and by 1871, 3,254,260. Information from Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000): 14. This census showed, for the first time, that Britain was now a predominantly urban population.

the cities and the promise of better living and working conditions led to a huge relocation into the cities, prompting Hopkins's fears of the growing 'puny unhealthy and cowardly' urban population.⁶⁶

In these fears, Hopkins was certainly not alone: many shared his concerns that the debilitating physical conditions experienced by those flocking into the cramped and dirty cities could only result in damaging moral consequences, and the 'degradation even of our race'.⁶⁷ In 1840 a Select Committee on the Health of Towns issues a report concerning the state of life in industrial cities. It concludes that:

The dirt, damp, and discomfort so frequently found in and about the habitations of the poorer people in these great towns, has a most pernicious effect on their moral feelings, induces habits of recklessness and disregard of cleanliness ... and thereby takes away a strong and useful stimulus to industry and exertion.⁶⁸

The damning implication of this report, as Pick notes, is of course the self-reproducing nature of this perceived degeneration: 'not the effect but the cause of crime, destitution and disease. The putative biological force of degeneration produced degeneracy in society.'⁶⁹ This link between degrading physical conditions and moral and even aesthetic degeneration had been explicitly described by Charles Dickens in *Oliver Twist*, and *Dombey and Son* of 1846-1848, which was read by Hopkins in 1865.⁷⁰

The deeply troubled Hopkins certainly had no doubts of the spiritual and moral impact of such an existence. He had first-hand experience as a priest of this new urban world and as he moved from posting to posting, he was struck again and again by the dirt, the noise, the squalor and the ugliness that confronted him:

⁶⁶ 1 May 1888. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 293.

⁶⁷ 1 December 1881. *Correspondence*: 97.

⁶⁸ From the *Report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns* (1840). Reprinted in facsimile (New York, 1968), p. xiv. Cited by Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004): 40.

⁶⁹ Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*: 21.

⁷⁰ *Journals*: 56.

In sordidness of care and crime
The city tires to death.
And faces fit for leisure gaze
And daylight and sweet air,
Missing prosperity and praise,
Are never known for fair.

‘Summa’ (ll. 11-16)⁷¹

Whilst horrified by the daily assault on every sense, perhaps the most distressing observation for the dispirited poet was the ‘museless’⁷² quality of the many industrialised cities in which he found himself, Bedford Leigh, St. Helen’s, Liverpool, Glasgow, Sheffield and Dublin:⁷³

My Liverpool and Glasgow experience laid upon my mind a conviction, a truly crushing conviction, of the misery of town life to the poor and more than to the poor, of the misery of the poor in general, of the degradation even of our race, of the hollowness of this century’s civilisation: it made even life a burden to me to have daily thrust upon me the things I saw.⁷⁴

Even his treasured Oxford was suffering from ‘man’s smudge’⁷⁵ amidst the increased need for urban housing; he laments both in poetry and in prose the ‘base and brickish skirt’ so souring his beloved city.⁷⁶

Hopkins found Liverpool ‘of all places the most museless’, and it was in this ‘hellhole’ that he most struggled to see the moral value in the people that surrounded him:⁷⁷

⁷¹ *Works*: 85.

⁷² 22 December 1880. *Correspondence*: 42.

⁷³ Bedford Leigh and St Helen’s: ‘probably the most repulsive place in Lancashire or out of the Black Country. The stench of sulphuretted hydrogen rolls in the air and films of the same gas form on railing and pavement.’ 8 October 1879. *Letters*: 90.

Liverpool: he notes that the parish work ‘leaves me nothing but odds and ends of time. There is merit in it but little Muse’. 14 May 1880. *Correspondence*: 33.

Glasgow: ‘Wretched place too Glasgow is, like all our great towns; still I get on better here, though bad is the best of my getting on.’ 16 September 1881. *Letters*: 135.

Sheffield: He notes how his ‘muse turned utterly sullen in the Sheffield smoke-ridden air’. 2 April 1878. *Letters*: 48.

Dublin: ‘Dublin itself is a joyless place and I think in my heart as smoky as London is: I had fancied it quite different.’ 7 March 1884. *Letters*: 190.

⁷⁴ 1 December 1881. *Correspondence*: 97.

⁷⁵ ‘God’s Grandeur’, l. 7. *Works*: 128.

⁷⁶ ‘Dun Scotus’s Oxford’, l. 5. *ibid.*: 142. See also letter to Dixon of 22 February 1879. *Correspondence*: 20.

While I admired the handsome horses I remarked for the thousandth time with sorrow and loathing the base and bespotted figures and features of the Liverpool crowd.⁷⁸

His vocabulary here is strong and uncompromising; although he is once again drawn to the beauty of nature figured in ‘the handsome horses’, his instinctive emotional response to the ‘crushing [...] misery of the poor’ is one of ‘sorrow and loathing’.⁷⁹ Here he aligns both their physical appearance and their moral character: both are ‘base and bespotted’. This he finds similarly true of the workmen he observes, with partisan shame, in Liverpool:

Spitting in the North of England is very, very common with the lower classes [...] as a Frenchman remarked to me with abhorrence and I cd. only blush. And in general we cannot call ours a cleanly or clean people: they are not at all the dirtiest and they know what cleanliness means, as they know the moral virtues, but they do not always practise it.⁸⁰

There is an interesting dynamic in this letter between ‘our [...] people’ and the Frenchman who looked on. Evolutionary fears were often inextricably bound with an imperialistic insistence on the racial superiority of the West, and a fear that some lower species might be developing in ‘Darkest England’:⁸¹

Assuming the Norse to be the highest type of mankind, we find the town dweller to be a reversion to an earlier and lowlier ethnic form. While the rustic remains an Anglo-Dane, his cousin in London is smaller and darker, showing a return to the Celto-Iberian race. [...] Nor is this reversion confined to the Celto-Iberian. In the true bred cockney of the East End, the most degenerate cockney, we can see a return to an earlier archaic type of man. [...]. It would seem that the cockney, reared under unfavourable circumstances, manifests a decided reversion to an earlier and lowlier ethnic form.⁸²

⁷⁷ ‘Liverpool is of all places the most museless. It is indeed a most unhappy and miserable spot.’ 22 December 1880. *Correspondence*: 42. 15 June 1881. To Paravicini. *Further Letters*: 63.

⁷⁸ 27 April 1881. *Letters*: 127.

⁷⁹ 1 December 1881. *Correspondence*: 97.

⁸⁰ 23 February 1889. *Letters*: 299.

⁸¹ This was a phrase first developed by William Booth, and then used by many as a shorthand for inner-city poverty. William Booth, “In Darkest England and the Way Out (1890),” in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886)*, ed. Martin Danahay (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd., 1999).

⁸² J. Milner Fothergill, ‘The Town Dweller: His Needs and Wants (1889)’, in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886)*, ed. Martin Danahay (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd., 1999): 176-177.

Hopkins's work as Chaplain of the local Society of St. Vincent de Paul and other similar increasingly common organisations,⁸³ was a practical way in which he could employ this concern for the poor and attempt to alleviate some of the poverty he observed around him.⁸⁴ Lynda Nead draws attention to the increasingly enthusiastic efforts by so many religious organisations to bring about moral salvation through physical assistance: 'The Victorian Church seized enthusiastically upon this biblical language of light and darkness and Nonconformist groups, in particular, drew on its unambiguous moral message to represent their evangelical mission into darkest London.'⁸⁵ Thus salvation and survival, of the fittest or otherwise, became intimately entwined.

For Hopkins, however, individual assistance on a local level could never be enough; it was a burning sense of the inadequacy of this limited charitable assistance that led to the infamous 'red letter' of 1871:

Horrible to say, in a manner I am a Communist. Their ideal bating some things is nobler than that professed by any secular stateman I know of. [...] Besides it is just. – I do not mean the means of getting to it are. But it is a dreadful thing for the greatest and most necessary parts of a very rich nation to live a hard life without dignity, knowledge, comforts, delight, or hopes in the midst of plenty – which plenty they make. They profess that they do not care what they wreck and burn, the old civilisation and order must be destroyed. This is a dreadful look out, but what has the old civilisation done for them?⁸⁶

Whilst Hopkins never exactly retracted this letter, by 1874 his views had certainly changed markedly. Whilst remaining fascinated by Communism as an abstract or

⁸³ St. Vincent de Paul: a charitable organisation involved in guiding its members in personal holiness, and encouraging them in material ways of helping the poor and unemployed, through financial grants, hospital letters, offers of employment and other practical forms of ministry and assistance.

⁸⁴ Zonneveld notes that membership of the charity experienced a sharp increase in 1880, 'in all probability partly due to [Hopkins's] work'. Certainly Hopkins's work and 'loving compassion' with 'the young, the weak, the poor, and all who were in any trouble or distress' formed the backbone of his obituary. Anon., "Father Gerard Hopkins", *Letters and Notices*, March 1890 (pp. 173-79), p. 175. Cited by Sjaak Zonneveld, *The Random Grim Forge: A Study of Social Ideas in the Work of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Assen [etc.]: Van Gorcum, 1992): 58, 59.

⁸⁵ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*: 103.

⁸⁶ 2 August 1871. *Letters*: 27-28.

academic concept, he later became put off by the potentially uncontrolled and uncontrollable nature of dramatic political change and the risks of huge social upheaval.

At their worst, such changes could ultimately prove murderous:

I have little reason to be red: it was the red Commune that murdered five of our Fathers latterly – whether before or after I wrote I do not remember. So far as I know I said nothing that might not fairly be said.⁸⁷

Confronted by the nameless, numberless and formless mass of the ‘Liverpool crowd’, Hopkins does not identify individual people – indeed he appears to struggle to see the human at all – but rather he sees nothing more than a collection of misshapen and undistinguished ‘figures and features’, their only identifying characteristic that of being ‘base and bespotted’.⁸⁸ There is something animal in this description, and it is certainly a long way from the letters of the excited Oxford poet, who so carefully noted each face, and every feature within each face, so fascinated was he by the beautiful people he found around him. Here that fascination is replaced by disgust, repugnance and ‘loathing’, as the delicate eye of the aesthete yearns desperately to withdraw from such sights. His vocation placed him in a social world which the Paterian within him found deeply troubling, socially, politically, and perhaps most importantly, aesthetically; this was a world away from Duns Scotus’s Oxford. He found himself repelled by the moral and social degeneracy he observed among the impoverished working-classes, and once again this was expressed in explicitly visual terms:

And the drunkards go on drinking, the filthy, as the scripture says, are filthy still: human nature is so inveterate. Would that I had seen the last of it.⁸⁹

Hopkins here desires to shield and defend his eyes from the ‘filthy’ sights that he sees before him, preventing any further damage or contamination of his own moral virtue. Similarly, he found himself truly ‘crush[ed]’ by such sights, so much so that ‘it made

⁸⁷ 22 January 1874. *ibid.*: 29.

⁸⁸ 30 April 1881. *ibid.*: 127.

⁸⁹ 26 October 1880. *ibid.*: 110.

even life a burden to me to have daily thrust upon me the things I saw'.⁹⁰ Although experienced as an aesthetic crisis of vision, these sights were no doubt complicated by their ethical, political and social ramifications and the young priest's understanding of his role in relation to each of these, as I hope to demonstrate.

In his study of Hopkins and the city, William Thesing draws attention to Hopkins's treatment of crowds or groups of assembled people.⁹¹ He notes that before 1879 and his movement into the urban parishes that were to cause him so much unhappiness, Hopkins's depiction of crowds is 'generally happy, harmonious, and demonstrative of purposeful motion'.⁹² An early example of such an assembly would be the crowds of tiny mermaids from his 'Vision' of 1862, 'Cluster'd in troops' (l. 36) around 'An isle of roses' (l. 29), their disciplined movements giving pleasure to the observer as they move silently yet harmoniously into organic shapes recalling variously 'the drifted bloom' (l. 99) and a 'wreath of sweet Spring-broidery' (l. 101).⁹³ Another such instance would be the 'men and masters' (l. 6) at the foot of the tower in 'The Alchemist in the City', from May 1865.⁹⁴ Couched in specifically visual terms, the alchemist high within the tower craves 'free long looking' (l. 44), as he watches from his tower to 'see' (l. 7) the pleasurable 'labours' (l. 11) of 'They who do not waste their meted hours' (l. 5). He expresses a desperate yearning as he recognises the impotence of his position, his artistic creativity stifled by his stagnant seclusion so that finally he is rendered 'More powerless than the blind or lame' (l. 20). In his isolation, he can do nothing more than 'watch', 'see' and 'mark' (ll. 26, 27, 28) the 'plan[ning]', 'build[ing]' and 'fulfill[ment]' (ll. 6, 8) of the structured harmonious society that is

⁹⁰ 1 December 1881. *Correspondence*: 97.

⁹¹ William B. Thesing, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins's Responses to the City: The "Composition of the Crowd"', in *Critical Essays on Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Alison G. Sulloway (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1990).

⁹² *ibid.*: 136.

⁹³ 'A Vision of the Mermaids', *Works*: 11-15. This poem is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*: 65-66.

‘The making and the melting crowds’ (l. 3), although even his ability to do this is in question as he specifically compares himself to one unable to see (l. 20). Here is a double ‘shame’ (l. 18), as the alchemist both indulges in ‘free long looking’, and simultaneously ‘waste[s]’ time unproductively: both sins were the subject of many a guilty confession note by the anxious Hopkins, as we will see.

Thesing notes that within this depiction of the labouring many busying away at the base of the tower ‘are two paradoxical tendencies: the ability of the crowd to be “making,” to gather and be creative, to be involved in harmonious employment, and the opposing force which goes toward “melting,” dispersion, dissolution, and maybe even toward destruction and chaos’.⁹⁵ Hopkins’s later work is certainly characterised by a swing in this balance, as the ‘making’ quality of the crowds is subsumed beneath their ‘melting’ characteristics. We might relate this to the methods Hopkins utilised to make sense of the world around him when he seeks to identify unifying forms, patterns and shapes. Duns Scotus’s ideals were not so easy to affirm in the filthy Victorian industrial city.

In these early depictions of crowds, Hopkins finds himself able to identify the features that unify individuals: through their assembly into identifiable shapes, structures and formations, the harmonious blending of their voices in ‘praises, prayer, and song’.⁹⁶ He is even able to find aesthetic satisfaction in the crowds if he is able to identify their underlying unity, their common line of energy, as seen here in a degree ceremony at Oxford University:

Was happily able to see composition of the crowd in the area of the theatre, all the heads looking one way thrown up by their black coats relieved only by white shirt-fronts etc: the short strokes of eyes, nose, mouth, repeated hundreds of times [...] I could find a sort of beauty in this, certainly character.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Thesing, ‘The “Composition of the Crowd”’, 140.

⁹⁶ ‘Easter’, l. 27. *Works*: 83.

⁹⁷ 13 June 1866. *Journals*: 139.

It is this ability to identify the ‘composition of the crowd’, the inscape, which renders these early gatherings of people aesthetically pleasing to the young poet. The unities of colours, posture, behaviour, and perhaps most importantly in this instance, their unified and unifying social background, please him. Later, as a Tory Catholic priest, Hopkins was in an unusual position: alienated both from his friends and from those around him through religion, politics, class or upbringing, yet required through his profession to provide the constant support and guidance of God’s love to all. It is from this peculiar position of isolation and intense engagement that Hopkins surveys the people around him, and more often than not the position adopted is that of passionate observer, removed yet emotionally entangled.

From 1879, Hopkins was placed in one urban parish after another, coming ‘face to face’, as he said, ‘with the deepest poverty and misery’.⁹⁸ It is against this setting, and with an increased political awareness, that his visualisation of crowd scenes changes. As his political engagement became more complicated, moved as he was by the difficulties he observed among the poor in British industrial cities and in Ireland, so he appears to struggle more and more with the aesthetics of crowd scenes. Where politics facilitated the eager looking depicted at Stonyhurst and in ‘Harry Ploughman’ (to be discussed later), so politics impeded later looking as he struggled to identify any shared force of energy or ‘composition of crowd’ (the relationships one with another) in the crowds he saw before him. As these aesthetic crises were often also political, crowds in his later work are more likely to be depicted as morally repugnant, threatening and dangerous, the language recalling the highly emotive contemporary debates about degeneration and evolution: either ‘bred Hangdog dull’ or ‘Manwolf, worse’.⁹⁹ The Liverpool crowd, considered above, is a vivid instance of this.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ 22 May 1880. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 245.

⁹⁹ ‘Tom’s Garland’, ll. 19 & 20. *Works*: 178.

A more complex example is the ‘monster meeting held in the Phoenix Park’ in Dublin, March 1885.

If the English industrial city, like Liverpool, was a problematic site for Hopkins, Ireland was more so. Hopkins felt increasingly uncomfortable about the suffering among the poor, and particularly the part played by the British in this suffering. He felt this anguish deeply, writing to his mother that ‘I can neither express it nor bear to speak of it’.¹⁰¹ Torn as he was between his personal experience of the Irish poor and his patriotic loyalty to the British representation of the Irish poor, he struggles to describe what he sees before him, given added poignancy by its location: Phoenix Park held the largest British military barracks in Ireland. He readily admits that actually the meeting was ‘not so very monster’, yet it is still viewed with a ‘monstrous’ sense of fear and unknowing. The overall impression he gives is of movement, noise, bustle and confusion:

Boys on the skirt of the crowd made such a whistling and noise for their own amusement as must have much interfered with the hearing of the speeches. [...] There were bands – it gave them an outing – and banners, including the stars and stripes and the tricolour.¹⁰²

Not only is the scene one of intense sensory stimulation and disorder, but Hopkins also picks up on the unrestrained mixing of classes noted here indirectly by reference to the visual code of discrepancies in dress:

The people going were in Sunday clothes when they had got any, otherwise in their only suit, which with some was rags.

The scene is presented as a jarring juxtaposition of sounds, colours, shapes, dress and ages, a nightmarish horror for an anxious social observer and peculiarly sensitive aesthete.

¹⁰⁰ *Letters*: 63.

¹⁰¹ 2 March 1885. *Further Letters*: 170. This is too significant an issue to tackle here but see, in particular, Zonneveld, *Random Grim Forge*.

¹⁰² *Further Letters*: 169-170.

Interestingly, the usually self-aware Hopkins is unable to identify the source of his discomfort. He reassures his mother that ‘It was not so very monster, neither were the people excited’, ‘They were quiet, well behaved, and not jocular’.¹⁰³ Nonetheless he struggles to represent the scene before him. Again and again he edits his letter, correcting confusions that were actually never present: ‘I should correct what I said above about the crowd, that it was neither sad nor glad: It was, I should say, cheerful but not merry.’ Hopkins is here discomforted but unable to identify why, finding before him a scene not half as frightening as British politics and his own fear of massed individuals, particularly the poor, had led him to expect. He confronts a large meeting of Irish people, a disordered and unrestrained mingling of classes, and thus he struggles to classify the scene before him. This may be because there is no over-riding institution holding them together. Though presumably largely Catholic, this is not a church congregation, or a university gathering, or any other collection where people are unified by a shared belief; rather this is a ‘making’ and ‘melting’ crowd whose form, shape and pattern is unfixed and unidentifiable. Wordsworth had exalted in such exciting and unpredictable crowds, rich in variety and promise, relishing the prospect of ‘the crowd, conspicuous less or more’ with ‘all specimens of man / Through all the colours which the sun bestows, / And every character of form and face’.¹⁰⁴ Faced with a similar scene, Hopkins struggles.

In his description of St Bartholomew Fair, 1802, Wordsworth depicts the delight with which people gather together at fairs and gatherings, their shared purpose being, as Altick explains, ‘to eat, drink, gamble, brawl – and, above all, to gawk’.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, the prime attractions at such fairs were often the highly imaginative and deeply unlikely curiosities put forward as the ‘missing’ evolutionary links:

¹⁰³ *ibid.*: 169, 170.

¹⁰⁴ ‘The Prelude’ (1850), Book 7: ll. 235, 236-238. Wordsworth, *Works of Wordsworth*: 474.

¹⁰⁵ ‘The Prelude’ (1850), Book 7: ll. 650-695. *ibid.*: 484-485. Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 35.

‘All out-o’-th’-way, far-fetched, perverted things, / All freaks of Nature’ (Book VII, ll. 688-689). Whilst Hopkins was never drawn into such speculation and generally took an unexpectedly scientific and rational view of evolution, as noted earlier, in his letter home about the ‘monster meeting’ in Dublin he is unexpectedly united in fear with those who come ‘to gawk’ open-mouthed at these unlikely ‘perveted’ creations. Where many feared the ‘monstrous’ implications that such creations may one day prove beyond doubt that man was descended from monkeys, Hopkins’s fears are rather that ultimately, under the right conditions, it might be possible for man to revert back to such an animal state.

These very real social and political concerns, combined with an inability to identify an ‘instress’ to the scene, leave the poet deeply unsettled. Unable to find an interpretation that would enable him to digest the sight, his experience is jarring, discordant and frightening, and thus his letter to his mother is wavering and uncertain, flickering as it does between what he sees and what he had expected to see, how he understands and interprets the scene before him and how he feels he ought. Here the aesthetic crisis provoked by the messy, inconsistent and changeable crowd is in actuality a political crisis. By the same token, it is as a result of his increasing unease regarding Irish politics and British representations of the impoverished Irish that he is faced with this very particular ocular crisis, as he struggles to understand and describe the scene before him.

... *a stirring scene* ...¹⁰⁶

Whilst Hopkins's later work was certainly characterised by a striking attention to the 'melting' characteristics of large crowds, Thesing does identify three late instances where Hopkins was able to interpret large assemblies of people positively, in each case because 'he [could] capture the line of positive energy that animates the group and admire the unity of impression or movement', as we will see.¹⁰⁷ However, Hopkins's positive response in each case was surely facilitated by the nature of the assemblies in question and his own preferences and interests: the first is an engagement with nature, the second a religious scene, and the third simultaneously artistic, political and corporeal.

The first of these occasions occurs during an intense January frost of 1881, when 'throng[s] of people' come out to feed 'the infinite flocks of seagulls': 'The river was coated with dirty yellow ice from shore to shore [...]. The gulls were pampered; throng[s] of people were chucking them bread.'¹⁰⁸ Although the people depicted are the same 'Liverpool crowd' that so dismayed Hopkins elsewhere, he stands in awe now as they gather outside the city to witness and feed the gathering crowd of hungry seagulls. In their moment of intense engagement with nature, Hopkins identifies a positive energy that drives a potentially dangerous collection of massed individuals to act as one as they engage with the natural world. This unity of purpose enables him to understand the 'inscape' of the scene before him, and evokes his admiration.

In the second occasion identified by Thesing, the people in the crowd before him are united by their common purpose: a procession through the streets of London in aid

¹⁰⁶ 26 September 1882. *Letters*: 151.

¹⁰⁷ Thesing, 'The "Composition of the Crowd"', 142.

¹⁰⁸ 26 January 1881. *Letters*: 116.

of Corpus Christi, 1882. Hopkins is drawn by the religious symbolism and significance of the event, but he also admires the spectacle of an orderly, co-operative marching of people:

But the procession has more meaning and mystery than this: it represents the process of the Incarnation and the world's redemption [...]. The procession out may represent the cooperation of the angels, or of the patriarchs and prophets, the return the Church Catholic from Christ's death to the end of time.¹⁰⁹

Although Hopkins notes disappointedly that the pace of the procession was insufficiently 'brisk and joyous', he is still strongly drawn to the spectacle, both because of the shared energy and strong interest very like that he identified in the earlier description of the academic Oxford congregation, and for what this mortal procession foreshadows of a heavenly procession. Suddenly, at the Corpus Christi procession, the human experience of time, beauty and experience is placed firmly within a continuum with these experiences in the world beyond, as the Catholic crowd before him, affirmed as a group ('the Church Catholic'), enables the incarnational promise of grace, just as the 'mortal beauty' of the individual Angles did for Pope Gregory.

The final late occasion at which Hopkins observes a crowd positively represents another strongly influential aspect in Hopkins's approach to the world: that of a Victorian heavily invested in contemporary criticism and arguments about culture. In 1882, Hopkins wrote to Bridges encouraging his friend to come and admire the work of a group of builders engaged in constructing a new building on the campus at Stonyhurst College. Whilst Hopkins, as architectural critic, notes that the building is 'worth seeing', it is not purely for architectural merit. Although it is anachronistic to describe it as such, Hopkins could not help but be inspired by the emerging social-democratic movement popularised by Thomas Carlyle, William Morris, the Pre-Raphaelites, and the notion of the noble working classes: Ruskin's 'work for all'.

¹⁰⁹ 16 June 1882. 1881. *ibid.*: 149.

These ideas were well represented in the visual arts, in such works as the contrasting paintings of ‘The Stonebreaker’ by John Brett (1857-58) and Henry Wallis (1857), or ‘Work’ by Ford Madox Brown (1852-1865), which is thought to lie behind Hopkins’s poems of 1887, ‘Harry Ploughman’ and more particularly, ‘Tom’s Garland: upon the Unemployed’, Hopkins’s only poem explicitly concerned with public affairs.

Whilst Hopkins makes no specific mention of having seen Brown’s ‘Work’, exhibited 10 March to 10 June 1865 on Piccadilly Street, Manchester, in a special exhibition organised by the artist himself, he makes the following anxious note on 21 April of that year: ‘Madox Brown’s pictures. Looking at [?] navvies in Swiss Cottage Fields.’¹¹⁰ It therefore seems likely that this shameful ‘looking at navvies’ was provoked by (or simply brought to his attention by) a visit to see ‘Madox Brown’s pictures’, and certainly Hopkins had copied into his notebook Brown’s accompanying pendant sonnet for this painting in February of that year.¹¹¹ Both Dixon and Bridges struggled to understand ‘Tom’s Garland’ and Hopkins wrote an elaborate crib of the poem in February 1888 in which he explained that ‘the ‘garlands’ of nails they wear are [...] the visible badge of the place they fill, the lowest in the commonwealth. But this place still shares the common honour’.¹¹²

[...] Commonweal
 Little Í reck ho! lacklevel in, if all had bread:
 What! Country is honour enough in all us – lordly head,
 With heaven’s lights high hung round, or, mother-ground,
 That mammoicks, mighty foot. [...]

‘Tom’s Garland’ (ll. 8-12)¹¹³

To work for a structured peaceful society is honour enough for the cheerfully contented urban worker Tom, as whether at the ‘head’ or the ‘foot’, all are united in one body: a ‘well ordered human society is like one man; a body with many members and each its

¹¹⁰ *Early Manuscripts*: 158 (Plate 106).

¹¹¹ Gardner, *Poetic Idiosyncrasy*: 2: 12.

¹¹² 10 February 1888. *Letters*: 273.

¹¹³ *Works*: 178.

function'.¹¹⁴ It is this unifying presence that so delights Hopkins as he observes the Stonyhurst builders. Writing to Bridges, he notes the energy and purpose with which the men are working towards a common goal and highlights the instress which enables him both to understand and to appreciate the scene before him:

There is always a stirring scene, contractors, builders, masons, bricklayers, carpenters, stonecutters and carvers, all on the spot.¹¹⁵

Here the men are incorporated by their work, their numbers both decreased (as they become almost one corporate labouring body, 'one man') and increased (their might is in their very numbers) by the strength of their unifying sense of purpose, and the devotion and dedication of their work. He urges Bridges to come and observe the men at work so that he too might experience a 'stirring' within through its magnificence. This is very clearly a 'making [...] crowd', creative both in itself, as the men work together towards a common and admirable goal, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in its 'stirring' impact on those who watch.¹¹⁶ The anxious shame of 'looking at navvies' is noticeably absent here.

Though Hopkins did not write of these positive crowds directly in his poems, the image of the working male returned in several of his later works. However, these particular aesthetic representations of individual labourers were complicated by an acute awareness of the very different 'dangers' inherent in looking at men. This is most clearly seen in the sonnet 'Harry Ploughman', a poem in which early Socialist ideas and the influence of Brown's 'Work', and perhaps also Walker's 'The Plough', can be detected.¹¹⁷ This poem once again sets out to capture a 'stirring scene',¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ *Letters*: 272.

¹¹⁵ 26 September 1882. *ibid.*: 151.

¹¹⁶ 'The Alchemist in the City', 1. 3. *Works*: 65.

¹¹⁷ Hopkins described Frederick Walker's 'The Plough', first exhibited in 1870, as 'a divine work' (30 June 1886. *Correspondence*: 134). The influence of this work on Hopkins's Ploughman sonnet is the subject of an article by Paul L. Mariani, 'Hopkins' "Harry Ploughman" and Frederick Walker's "The Plough"', *The Month*, 40, no. 1-2 (July-August 1968). Catherine Phillips also discusses this in some detail: *Victorian Visual World*: 240-244.

to create in words ‘a direct picture’, but here the picture is of a single named individual: ‘I want Harry Ploughman to be a vivid figure before the mind’s eye; if he is not that the sonnet fails.’¹¹⁹ Hopkins sets out very clearly to describe every minute detail of the physical presence of the farm-worker to ensure his visual image is accurately captured for the reader, yet he remains uncomfortably aware that such scrupulous attention to the physical details of another man was not without its dangers: ‘But when you read it let me know if there is anything like it in Walt Whitman, as perhaps there may be, and I should be sorry for that.’¹²⁰

This fear that there might be ‘anything’ of Walt Whitman in his work represents a lifetime of anxious considerations concerning the American, probably homosexual, poet.¹²¹ Caught in a tantalisingly exciting position somewhere between attraction and repulsion towards both the poet and his work, Hopkins could not help but acknowledge a certain similarity:

But first I may as well say what I should not otherwise have said, that I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman’s mind to be more like my own than any other man’s living. As he is a very great scoundrel this is not a pleasant confession. And this also makes me the more desirous to read him and the more determined that I will not.¹²²

As Edward Herrington observes in his article on Hopkins and Whitman, ‘there are a number of strangenesses about the way this is phrased’.¹²³ Whilst the specificity of Whitman’s mind compared to ‘any other man’s living’ does ‘displace[s] a more obvious candidate such as Newman’, the phrase also opens the possibility of a closer tie with

¹¹⁸ 26 September 1882. *Letters*: 151.

¹¹⁹ 28 September & 6 November 1887. *ibid.*: 262 & 265.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*: 262.

¹²¹ To cite Peter Swaab on Hopkins: ‘The word “homosexual” is of course anachronistic in reference to Hopkins’s lifetime, but the non-anachronistic alternatives are so fussy and unwieldy that I have stayed with it – scrupulous readers should insert imaginary scare-quotes for each usage.’ The same policy should be applied here. Swaab, ‘Hopkins and the Pushed Peach’, 44.

¹²² 18 October 1882. *Letters*: 155.

¹²³ Eldrid Herrington, ‘Hopkins and Whitman’, *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism*, 55, no. 1 (January 2005): 45.

someone no longer living, such as perhaps Duns Scotus, ‘who of all men most sways my spirits to peace’.¹²⁴ However, while Scotus brings ‘peace’ to his spirits, this self-defined alliance of Hopkins’s ‘mind’ with Whitman’s does not bring peace, but rather a teasingly complex state of acknowledged desire and resistance. It should be noted that Hopkins rarely depicts the attractions of peace and quiet retreat (‘Heaven-Haven’ of 1864 is very much the exception) but rather his poetry is dominated by the rich excitement and threat of desire and danger. It is perhaps the thrill of this desire/danger tension that engenders the lifelong attraction to Whitman, an attraction that Hopkins regards as a reflection of his own sense of self: ‘I *always* knew’ [emphasis mine].

Whilst Hopkins was teased and tantalised by Whitman’s mind and work, so Hopkins’s readers are teased and tantalised by his assessment of Whitman. The poetic similarity between the two poets is indisputable, centring on an intense visuality, and Joseph Bristow among other critics regards it as ‘the closest Hopkins ever comes to make a specific declaration of his sexual interest in other men’.¹²⁵ However, this claim surely simplifies the deeply complicated nature of Hopkins’s interest in and engagement with other men; it also overlooks so many non-sexual interests shared by the two poets: the contemporary subjects of their poems, their experimental verse forms, stylistic innovations and philological interests, and democratic politics, to name just a few. Hopkins here clearly separates the ‘heart’ and ‘mind’, and very firmly identifies his ‘mind’ as the shared ground with that of Whitman. This division is important. Bristow’s phrase subsumes into ‘sexual interest’ any distinction between homosexuality, homoeroticism, homophilia, and aesthetic interest. As I hope this study will make increasingly clear, however temptingly decisive, such an approach inevitably

¹²⁴ ‘Duns Scotus’s Oxford’, l. 11. *Works*: 142.

¹²⁵ Bristow, ‘Churlsgace’, 704.

undermines much of the complexity of Hopkins's engagements with other men, and indeed with Christ.

Returning to the 'vivid figure before the mind's eye' that is Harry Ploughman, it is clear that Hopkins very much intends the poem to appeal to the visual. Citing the appeal to the 'mind's eye' as the very basis on which this sonnet succeeds or 'fails', Hopkins turns to the imagery and vocabulary of the natural world (although, strikingly, this is not a pastoral) to both locate and create the ploughman before the reader, emphasising the connection between 'the flesh / Of lusty manhood' that is Harry and the land he works.¹²⁶ As Phillips observes: 'his arms are 'hard as hurdle', those tough young branches supple enough to be intertwined to make a fence – and his legs 'firm as beechbole'; beeches were cut for use as masts because they were straight and strong.'¹²⁷ However, rather than using simple pictorial imagery to draw up the 'vivid figure', McChesney notes that it is 'the compressed tortuousness of the syntax, and the forceful but controlled irregularities of rhythm that help to evoke the physique and movements of a powerfully muscled man'.¹²⁸ The strength and beauty of this healthy body is all turned to one end: ploughing the landscape. Here, in a near-reversal of the unifying process by which the labouring Stonyhurst men became one, Harry's body is dissolved into numerous body-parts: arms, 'rack of ribs', flank, thigh, knee, shank, 'Head and foot, shoulder and shank' (l. 4). Each part is beautiful and powerful in itself, but magnificent even beyond the sum of its parts as the body is then reassembled as 'one crew' (l. 5), a crew that works together with the same sense of unity of purpose, devotion and dedication that Hopkins so admired in the 'stirring' builders.

¹²⁶ From lines 1-2 of Ford Madox Brown's poem to accompany his painting 'Work'. Reproduced by Gardner, *Poetic Idiosyncrasy*: 2: 12.

¹²⁷ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 242

¹²⁸ Donald McChesney, *A Hopkins Commentary: An Explanatory Commentary on the Main Poems, 1876-89* (London: University of London Press Ltd., 1968): 169.

Importantly, however, here that admiration results from the detailed study of an individual, a man very much subjected to intensely detailed scrutiny by another man, as the description strips the ploughman's body naked to observe and admire each 'rib', 'flank', 'shank' and 'thigh' (ll. 2 & 3). However, it is striking that there is no uneasiness or evasiveness as the eye, or 'mind's eye', pores excitedly over the labourer's exposed form. This can probably be explained through reference to Thesing's insistence that, despite all this individual attention, Harry Ploughman remains ultimately an Everyman figure, a happy Victorian worker as seen in Brown's 'Work': 'a universally representative peasant totally devoted to his work and completely devoid of political opinion or hostile emotions'.¹²⁹ Just as the Stonyhurst builders became 'one body', here the 'one body' that forms the focus of the poem is revealed as just one of many, as the description repeatedly assembles and disassembles Harry the individual, leaving finally only Harry the Everyman. Through this rich ambiguity, Hopkins introduces an attempt at distance between the observer and the observed, to shield the 'vivid figure' from any accusations of a Whitmanesque attention to the particulars of another man, and simultaneously provide a deeply intimate physical description of one man by another with a reassuringly political alibi. However, as his fearful enquiries to Bridges reveal, Hopkins still struggled with unresolved anxieties about the portrait and a clear need to distance it from 'anything' of Whitman.¹³⁰ Hopkins and Harry have nowhere to hide.

¹²⁹ Thesing, 'The "Composition of the Crowd"', 150.

¹³⁰ 28 September 1887. *Letters*: 262.

... *my dúty all énded ...*¹³¹

Whilst Hopkins in later life became increasingly uncomfortable around crowds and indeed people in general if the comments of a ‘close friend’ from his time in Dublin are to be believed, he did continue to feel a strong degree of empathy, and at times even attraction, towards individuals.¹³² Bedford Leigh in Lancashire he finds in 1879 ‘very gloomy’,¹³³ ‘a darksome place, with pits and mills and foundries’,¹³⁴ yet he does note that despite the murkiness and recalcitrant surroundings, ‘Our flock are fervent’,¹³⁵ ‘our people are hearty and devoted’,¹³⁶ and he explains to Baillie that ‘these Lancashire people of low degree or not of high degree are those who most have seemed to me to welcome me and make much of me’.¹³⁷ Inspired by Pope Gregory’s vision of the beauty of the Angles and the missionary work this invoked, Hopkins did try repeatedly to detect and affirm the beauty in the landscape and people with which he was now surrounded. Whilst he bemoans the ‘museless’ quality of these urban cities, it is notable that this period did inspire some of his most intensely visual portraits of individual men. It is here that his dual roles as priest and poet come together in perhaps his most enduring role: as observer, watcher, and seer of the ‘lovely lads’, his own Angles.

¹³¹ ‘Felix Randal’, l. 1. *Works*: 150.

¹³² ‘One of his most intimate friends’ from his last months in Dublin recalled: ‘During the years of which I speak, he was very seldom away from home [...]. He was of a very retiring disposition and made few acquaintances in Dublin, even these he seldom visited, and very rarely could he be induced to ask permission to lunch or dine out. Without permission he could scarcely be prevailed on to take a cup of tea.’ G. F. Lahey, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 1972 ed. (New York: Gordon Press, 1930): 145.

¹³³ 24 October 1879. *Correspondence*: 29.

¹³⁴ 19 November 1879. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 243.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ 24 October 1879. *Correspondence*: 29.

¹³⁷ 22 May 1880. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 245.

Between December 1879 and August 1881, Hopkins took on the role of assistant to the parish priest at the Church of St. Francis Xavier, Liverpool. He did not find the area or the work conducive to poetic creations:

The parish work of Liverpool is very wearying to mind and body and leaves me nothing but odds and ends of time. There is merit in it but little Muse, and indeed 26 lines is the whole I have writ[ten] in more than half a year, since I left Oxford.¹³⁸

However, although repelled by the dirt and grime of the city and the faceless crowds that surrounded him, Hopkins did find some ‘merit’ in his pastoral work within the parish, particularly in those individual cases in which he was ‘brought face to face with the deepest poverty and misery’.¹³⁹ Hopkins found himself offering spiritual and material comfort to his parishioners, both through his work as Chaplain of the local Society of St. Vincent de Paul and more immediately: in a letter of 1880 to his mother he recalls ‘a poor consumptive girl’; he was so overwhelmed with pity and pained by her suffering that he first blessed his ‘comforter’ (a Christmas present from his parents) and then, in a gesture of compassionate charity, handed it over to the dying girl.¹⁴⁰

However, this period of intense engagement with suffering individuals is perhaps captured most intensely in his first poem from the Liverpool period, composed in April 1880, ‘Felix Randal’. According to Alfred Thomas, this is ‘the greatest and most exquisite product of Hopkins’s twin callings as priest and poet’.¹⁴¹ The sonnet is a wonderful illustration of Hopkins’s distinctive mode of looking at others, but in this instant explicitly through the eyes of a priest. Whilst Liverpool itself may have offered ‘little Muse’, here the death of a young man provokes one of Hopkins’s most concentrated portraits of others, as he captures in fourteen lines the

¹³⁸ 14 May 1880. *Correspondence*: 33.

¹³⁹ 22 May 1880. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 245.

¹⁴⁰ 2 March 1880. *ibid.*: 155.

¹⁴¹ Alfred Thomas, ‘Hopkins’s “Felix Randal”: the Man and the Poem’, *Times Literary Supplement*, (1971): 331.

paradoxical reality of Felix in life and death.¹⁴² While the Greeks may have been inspired by goddesses, Hopkins condenses into this study an account of the ‘mould of *man*’ (l. 2 – my emphasis) and of all that ‘endéars them tó us’ (l. 9). The traditionally female figure of the Muse is here replaced by a male, in a move that can be seen as characteristically Hopkinsian, but no less inspirational for that. Felix Randal, recalled in his prime, presides over, and is yet seen through, the depicted image of the dying farrier, just as the Muses became embodied in and sponsors of the works of literature and art that they inspired. The early death of the blacksmith at the age of 31 was certainly not unusual: the death rate in Liverpool during this period was over twice the national average, and in the week of Felix Spencer’s death (the man persuasively identified as the true blacksmith behind the poem),¹⁴³ ‘four other parishioners who had died [...] were commended to the prayers of the faithful [...] in St. Francis Xavier’s’, as MacKenzie notes.¹⁴⁴

The poem opens gently, with the dead man recalled by name and by trade, ‘Félix Rándal the fárrier’ (l. 1). However, unlike ‘Harry Ploughman’ and ‘Tom Navvy’, Hopkins’s other portraits of idealised working men, Felix is given an identity beyond his trade, a surname with which to identify him and a Christian name which is peculiarly resonant: Felix is not some Tom, Dick or Harry, but rather one whose name means ‘blessed’, ‘fortunate’ or ‘happy’.¹⁴⁵ At first glance this auspicious name seems paradoxical: ‘Félix Rándal the fárrier, O is he déad then? my dúty all énded’ (l. 1). The news of his death is greeted by the speaker with muted surprise, the conventional

¹⁴² 14 May 1880. *Correspondence*: 33.

¹⁴³ Whilst Christopher Devlin (Introduction to his edition of *Sermons*: 11) and Paul Mariani (*Commentary*: 167) both suggest the poem is based on the death of a child from his time at Bedford Leigh, a more compelling argument is made by Alfred Thomas (‘Hopkins’s “Felix Randal”’) that the individual in question is Felix Spencer, a 31-year old blacksmith who died in Birchfield Street, Liverpool on 21 April 1880 of pulmonary phthisis.

¹⁴⁴ MacKenzie, *Reader’s Guide*: 136.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Harry Ploughman’, *Works*: 177. ‘Tom’s Garland’, l. 4. *Works*: 178.

literary expression of grief – ‘O’ – here couched in a calm and neutral question, asked, presumably, of the person who brought the news. It is with the news of the parishioner’s death that the priest is absolved of responsibility, and the nature of this pastoral relationship made clear: his ‘dúty all énded’. This quiet reflection on the passing of the farrier is matched by the muted vowels and the thudding ‘d’ sounds of the first line, and the simple diction and lightly syllabic metre recall the sadness of the speaker, the vocabulary of the farrier, and the muffled sounds of the tools of the blacksmith’s trade, to be recalled in all their strength in the final lines of the sonnet.

The lack of surprise in the opening question is explained, as the first quatrain gently moves from the initial questioning of the speaker to an intensely visual return of the past, again structured as a question:

[...] my dúty all énded,
Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy-handsome
Pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it and some
Fatal four disorders, fleshed there, all contended?
(ll. 1-4)

Confronted with the news of his death, the priest instantly recalls his contact with the farrier in life: their shared suffering as he ‘watched’ the gradual and prolonged wasting typical of tuberculosis, the ‘Pining, pining’ of the body he once admired for its strength and masculinity, ‘big-boned and hardy-handsome’. In the ‘great beauty’ of alliteration, these compounds recall early English poetry. Whilst Hopkins does not appear to have read any Old English before 1882, his earlier writing does bear many similarities to it, perhaps indicating that he may have read translations. Writing to Bridges in October 1882, Hopkins noted that sprung rhythm ‘existed in full force in Anglo saxon verse and in great beauty’, and by November he clarified this, explaining

that ‘In fact I am learning Anglosaxon and it is a vastly superior thing to what we have now’.¹⁴⁶ He also identified the particular appeal of alliteration:

To my ear no alliteration is more marked or more beautiful, and I used to take it for granted as an obvious fact that every initial vowel lettered to every other before ever I knew that anything of the sort was practised in Anglo Saxon verse. [...] How this alliteration arises is, I know, very hard to say, but to my ear there is no doubt about the fact.¹⁴⁷

Through the repeated alliterative phrases, Hopkins thus elevates Felix the farrier, evoked in his strength, to place him within a lineage of great warriors and heroes, ‘powerful amidst peers’ (l. 13).

As he ‘watch[es]’ the dying labourer, his eyes turn to the physical body before him. As the speaker finds himself torn repeatedly between what he sees now and what he expects to see, so Felix’s physical body is caught somewhere between life and death, and the observer caught between desire and repulsion. Like the iron shoes he manufactured for the horses, Felix was held within a ‘mould of man’, the body a depersonalised object both enabling and containing the spirit within. In a spiritual sense the farrier’s body is made in the ‘mould’ of Christ, yet the description here of the body is strikingly physical. However, like the ‘lovely manly mould’ of the sailor in the *Eurydice*, this ‘mould’ can never finally be removed from death.¹⁴⁸ The ‘mould’ perhaps becomes a landscape, peopled first by an almost idyllic depiction of ‘rambl[ing]’, the pastoral charm shattering suddenly with the recognition of the identity of the rambler – ‘reason’ – the source of all human identity and intelligence as the mind wanders feverishly. This horrifying image of a delirious body turning against itself is

¹⁴⁶ *Letters*: 156, 163. The change in spelling is Hopkins’s own.

J. F. Cotter provides a comprehensive summary of the critical field concerning Hopkins’s knowledge of Anglo-Saxon and its versification, noting particularly R. J. Schoeck, ‘Influence and Originality in the Poetry of Hopkins’, *Renascence*, 9, no. 2 (Winter 1956), and William A. Quinn, ‘Hopkins’ Anglo-Saxon’, *Hopkins Quarterly*, 8, no. 1 (Spring 1981). James Finn Cotter, ‘Hopkins and Cynewulf: “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” “The Windhover,” “The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe,” and the *Christ*’, *Victorian Poetry*, 43, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 32 (Footnote 3).

¹⁴⁷ 7 November 1883. To Coventry Patmore. *Further Letters*: 331.

¹⁴⁸ ‘The Loss of the *Eurydice*’, 19/2 (l. 74). *Works*: 135-138.

countered by the next, as the landscape of the body disintegrates (recalling the rotting decay of the 'mould') into a battle-field between 'some / Fatal four disorders', all 'fleshed' in as they fight it out. The battle is fierce: the position of the adjective at the start of the fourth line emphasises the lethal nature of each disorder individually, yet for the farrier it took all four before his strong body succumbed. This notion of strength even in death may suggest a cosmic dimension to Felix's suffering, as Zonneveld notes:

The struggle in Felix's strong body becomes even more awe-inspiring if, as the adjectives suggest, it is associated with the ancient theory of the four humours and the corresponding theory of the four elements: it took all four working together to defeat him.¹⁴⁹

Others postulate a similar case: Thomas draws attention to the four humours – blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile – and from this the four elements to which they are often related. He notes that the forge, 'with its fire, water, earth and air provides an excellent microcosm'; in Hopkins's sonnet, so too does the body of the farrier.¹⁵⁰

In the end it does not matter whether it took one fatal disorder or four, as the farrier's physical body is broken at last: 'Sickness broke him' (l. 5). However, just as the breakings in 'The Windhover' (l. 10) and 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' (18/3) lead ultimately to a creative act, so it is the breaking of Felix's physical body that engenders his spiritual growth: physically he must break before the priest can 'mend'. Initially, Felix resists: 'Impatient, he cursed at first' (l. 5), the internal rhyme ('cursed' and 'first') strengthening the anger with which Felix the sinner, renowned for his physical strength, confronts sickness and death. The priest is able to 'tender' to the dying man, the verb suggesting both tenderness of touch, warmth and compassion, but also a 'ransom' bargaining or the making of a financial deal: 'Í had our swéet repriéve and ránsom / Téndered to him' (ll. 7-8). This is the bargain that the

¹⁴⁹ Zonneveld, *Random Grim Forge*: 97.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas, 'Hopkins's "Felix Randal"', 332.

priest, on behalf of the sinner, makes as intermediary with God: through confession, Holy Communion and Viaticum, the sinner is offered salvation.

That this is an offer made specifically and personally by God through the medium of the priest to Felix is reflected in the switch in the poem into his native idiom and Lancashire dialect in the most Anglo-Saxon line: 'God rést him áll road éver he offéended!' (l. 8). It is here that the duty of the priest is 'ended', but the salvation offered by God takes over, offering preservation and forgiveness to the sinner as he continues along the 'road' ahead. However, both the farrier and the priest are forever changed by this 'dúty'; like the shipwrecked sailor, the priest is stretched and 'strung by duty', yet this leaves him strangely open to being 'strained to beauty'.¹⁵¹ It is only through the requirements of his 'dúty' that the priest is here able to acknowledge and embrace the beauty of the dying man, as an analogy for the spiritual beauty of God. However, on a very prosaic level, it is only through the requirements of his duty that the lonely and isolated priest here finds himself at the bedside of another man, sharing in these most intimate moments, legitimized both through his occupation and through the distance afforded by death and the dying process.

This binding of one with another is enacted in the vocabulary: the verb that opens line 8 ('Téndered') continues to tie sinner, priest and God together. In the process of 'ténder[ing]' to the dying man, the Catholic priest believed he was holding in his hands Christ Himself; it is no wonder that the touch is 'tender', as the body of Christ is passed from priest to sinner. Through Communion and finally Viaticum, both priest and sinner find '*our* swéet repriéve and ránsom' [emphasis mine] as they are drawn closer, both to each other and to God. Hopkins had always expressed a fervent belief in the doctrine of transubstantiation, even before his conversion, but the physical and

¹⁵¹ 'The Loss of the Eurydice', 20/2. Hopkins only uses 'duty' three times: here, in 'The Loss of the Eurydice' and in 'What shall I do for the land that bred me', where again duty is closely associated with beauty, and indeed with death: 'Immortal beauty is death with duty' (l. 18). *Works*: 181-182.

corporeal nature of the incarnation should not be overlooked here.¹⁵² To ensure the spiritual survival of the farrier when the physical body has given way, the priest passes on the physical evidence of Christ incarnated. Hopkins's engagement with the physical body of Christ is the subject of the following chapter, but that the two men, priest and dying farrier, are here drawn together over the physical body of Christ is striking.

The sestet opens with an encapsulation of the sweetness and tenderness described in the administration, by which the dying heart and the grieving heart are drawn closer together, and closer to the 'heavenlier heart' (l. 6). This is a process described in explicitly visual terms:

This séeing the síck endéars them tó us, us tóo it endéars.
My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears,
Thy tears that touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal.
(ll. 9-11)

Again farrier and priest are united (the double use of 'endears' marks the transforming nature of each upon the other and is rich in dialectical suggestiveness), but now in suffering rather than through divine grace, as both share in the mystery that came about through Christ's physical suffering. This practice of 'séeing the síck' recalls the priest's pastoral visits to the ailing, but also Hopkins's characteristic investment in actually *seeing*, a physical process placed firmly alongside the 'tongue', 'touch', 'tears' and 'heart' of the human priest and patient, as the physical body of both farrier and Christ become inextricably linked in the eyes of the visiting priest. It is only through the sight of one that he is granted access to the sight of the other, although which it is that grants this access remains a moot point.

As the poem moves once again into the present tense with which it began, it also moves from the great Christian truths to focus again on the individual, Felix Randal. Zonneveld describes this movement:

¹⁵² This belief is expressed clearly in 'The Half-way House' where he notes that 'He is with you in the breaking of the bread' (l. 18). *ibid.*: 76.

Man's life – and his death – is thus set against the general backdrop of the communal life of the Church, but the Church, however immense it is, also pays attention to and takes care of personal and individual needs.¹⁵³

This is again the same movement as that depicted in the administration of the Blessed Sacrament: both farrier and priest became dear to each other, and simultaneously also dearer to God. The speaker turns to Felix, addressing him personally: 'My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears' (l. 10). The repetition and alliteration gives this process and the intimate relationship that results vivid embodiment as the vocabulary recalls the working of the Holy Ghost: 'tongue,' 'taught,' 'touch,' 'tears'. However, this is also the language of a deeply intimate physical relationship, one in which the actions of tongue, touch and tears are shared between two men. Perhaps to forestall any possible objections to the nature of this relationship, the name of the farrier is repeated once again with a paternalistic affection: 'child, Felix, poor Felix Randal' (l. 11). The emphatic tenderness of this repetition of his name counters (and also modifies retrospectively) the neutral detachment of the first mention of his name (l. 1), clarifies their intimate relationship, and emphasises the parishioner's status as both the child of his priest, to be nurtured, fed and tendered, and yet also the child now welcomed home by the loving Father.

As the farrier's physical body gives way, he gradually moves from being a 'big-boned and hardy-handsome' warrior, who faced 'Fatal four disorders' (l. 4) to a helpless 'child, Felix' (l. 11); only through this physical disintegration can the spiritual reawakening be depicted. However, just as it is the 'dúty' of the priest that enables the spiritual rebirth of the farrier, so it also enables the physical rebirth: the poem ends with the triumphant image of Felix at the height of his muscular power. Suddenly the weak dependency of the dying farrier is displaced by a vividly recalled image of the healthy man in the prime of his life, 'powerful amidst peers' (l. 13):

¹⁵³ Zonneveld, *Random Grim Forge*: 99.

When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amidst peers,
Didst fettle for the great grey drayhorse his bright and battering sandal!
(ll. 13-14)

Once again the noise and harshness of the farrier's environment that opened the sonnet are recalled, but now the sounds are unmuffled: hard consonants fall again and again as the hammers fell on the 'bright and battering sandal'. The figure of the 'great grey drayhorse' seems to merge with the powerfully muscular form of the labouring farrier, the alliterative 'bright and battering sandal' recalling the strong battering strokes of Randal, as both are made ready for the journey ahead.

'Felix Randal' has been variously received by the critics. A. R. Jones notes the 'self-conscious' nature of the language, and Elsie Phare finds 'the poet's intention [...] too overt'.¹⁵⁴ However, as an encapsulation of many of the concerns that haunted Hopkins throughout his life, it can scarcely be bettered. The poem is both an intensely personal portrait of an individual, Felix Randal the blacksmith, and, as Thesing notes, 'an idealized portrait of the Victorian Everyman in the role of happy, productive worker'.¹⁵⁵ Felix is given a surname and so a specific identity, yet this identity is inextricably linked to his role as a labourer, tied forever by the alliteration that unites his name and occupation: 'Félix Rándal the fárrier'. He cries tears, first of impatience, then of the pain and grief of one facing death, yet through all of this he remains Felix, the 'blessed,' 'fortunate' or 'happy' one. As an individual he dies, yet as an Everyman, he lives on.

As a farrier, Felix is deeply rooted in the history and traditions of the country, yet the description of the 'random grim forge' in which he is resurrected recalls much of the language of Hopkins's descriptions of contemporary industrialised cities. As he moved from one urban posting to another, Hopkins found himself terrified that the 'bright and battering' noise of the 'great grey drayhorse' would eventually be

¹⁵⁴ A. R. Jones, 'G. M. Hopkins: Victorian', 311-312. Phare, *Survey and Commentary*: 53.

¹⁵⁵ Thesing, 'The "Composition of the Crowd"', 141.

extinguished forever, replaced by the insistent noise of the new factories and the dirt and grime of the sprawling cities. Although Hopkins did indeed fear for the impact of these cities on individuals, as his letters and diary notes relate, he rarely articulates these fears in his poetry. Harry Ploughman is not placed in an obviously pastoral setting, and similarly, Felix Randal is at home in a dirty, grey forge, the overwhelming battering of steel on steel casting out sparks and 'flint-flakes' that briefly illuminate but ultimately darken the forge with the soot.¹⁵⁶ For many anxious Victorians, such an image could only be that of hell, or an industrial Victorian city, which they feared was not so very far removed. For Hopkins, however, this is the natural home of the farrier, and it is against this background of sound, sights and smells that the living figure of Felix is visibly and audibly resurrected, powerful as the 'great grey drayhorse' of the natural world.

Ultimately, however, this poem is concerned with the intersection between the physical and the spiritual, the visible and the invisible. It is through his role as a priest and spiritual guide to the 'road' that Hopkins is drawn to the bedside of the ailing farrier, yet it is for the demise of the powerful muscular physical body that Hopkins mourns. As a Catholic priest, Hopkins was frequently geographically, socially and spiritually removed from those he cared about most, and yet paradoxically it was through his privileged position as a parish priest that he found himself welcomed into the homes and lives of those around him. As a priest, Hopkins's concern was for his parishioner's spiritual welfare, yet during his time in the industrial north, he could not help but find himself working towards an improvement in the social conditions of the poor and unemployed. These social concerns are articulated most explicitly in 'Tom's Garland', yet each of his poems concerned with other men toys with this fertile point of intersection between the physical and the spiritual, both of the watched, but also,

¹⁵⁶ 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', 13/5. *Works*: 110-119.

and more importantly, of he who watches. This slippery ground of uncertainty was to prove ultimately perhaps the most exciting territory ever confronted by the poet-priest, and yet also the most dangerous and alluring. It was this paradox that was to prove the most haunting for Hopkins, as we will see in the next chapter, as we move to consider the aesthetic body in some of his strangest and yet most celebratory poems.

CHAPTER THREE

PEOPLE LOOKING

... more than one observer, in the sky ...¹

The vast majority of Hopkins's poems feature a single individual looking out at the natural world beyond, glorying in the majesty of God's creation. At times this 'all-accepting fixed eye' (l. 6) forms the very centre of the world, the geographical axis of 'earth and heaven' (l. 1), 'the midst of every zone' (l. 3) from which all others, 'East and West' (l. 4) take their bearings.² At other times the figure is a distant and remote observer, a detached surveyor of the world before him whose task it is to identify the patterns and forms necessary to understand the scene and to inscape the world. However, there is an important group of Hopkins's poems which break away from this pattern and feature a single individual observing another figure who is also watching. This was first observed by Kenneth Seib, in his essay of 1989 on 'Hopkins's Secret Watchers'. Seib identified 'the furtive watcher, a stranger to human bonding and the vital energies of nature' as a repeated theme to which Hopkins returned throughout his career, from his earliest poems, 'The Escorial' and 'A Vision of the Mermaids' right up to 'Epithalamion', the aborted poem composed a year before his early death.³ Concerned as he was by the problematics of seeing particularly where it involved seeing other people, he was also fascinated by the seeing of seeing, by looking at looking, and the possibilities, risks and potential danger that these processes entailed. With the haunting figure of the voyeur never far away, this chapter considers the moral, psychological and social dimensions of seeing within Hopkins's work, as we turn to consider not only his gaze, but also his concern with the gaze of others as it impacted on him.

¹ Letter to *Nature*, 21 December 1883. Reproduced in Appendix II in *Correspondence*: 161-166, 166.

² 'The earth and heaven', *Works*: 77-78.

³ Kenneth Seib, 'Hopkins's Secret Watchers', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 31, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 52.

Despite his active social life and large circle of friends, Hopkins was in many ways an isolated figure. Yet although he was separated from friends and family by geography, occupation, religion and celibacy, his journals and letters are rich with accounts of watching others. This fascination is explored further in an important group of poems in which watching others, and particularly watching others watching, are essential elements. Kenneth Seib identifies three distinct categories of secret watchers within Hopkins's work – 'exiles from God, the world, or themselves' – but notes that 'all seek inclusion, comfort, and peace'.⁴ The least common of these three are the 'exiles from [...] the world': those who have, through choice or circumstance, withdrawn themselves into solitude. The latter group, those withdrawn through circumstance, includes Pontius Pilate (isolated 'exile from of old / From God and man'),⁵ and Philip II in the Escorial: the hidden speaker watches as the lonely monarch 'rang'd long corridors and cornic'd halls' (10/1), his only contact with the outside world being through the eclectic paintings that cover the 'rich pilaster'd walls' (10/3).⁶ There are also those who have through choice isolated themselves from the world; this group includes the nun in 'Heaven-Haven' who has made the choice to retire to a place 'Where springs not fail' and 'no storms come' (ll. 2 & 6).⁷ In exile from the world, she has found the path to God.

The second and third groups, those that Seib defines as exiles from God and from themselves, are the most numerous, and feature a 'confrontational self, a stranger within, [who] seeks to overcome human isolation by integrating with the continuum of the external world, [...] or by melding his hidden heart with the Sacred Heart of

⁴ *ibid.*: 54.

⁵ Fragments of 'Pilate', ll. 45-46. *Works*: 18-20.

⁶ *ibid.*: 1-5. This poem was discussed in Chapter One.

⁷ *ibid.*: 27.

Christ'.⁸ Seib notes that this state of self-division is often signalled in Hopkins's work through the use of metaphors of the senses of sight or of hearing. When concerned with the figure of the secret watcher, a distinction between these two can be helpful in enabling a separation between the watcher and the world he watches, as David Baily Harned explains:

Sight is concerned with the solidity of things and the ear with their motion, the one with being and the other with becoming, the first with form and order and the second with events that surprise and engulf us despite ourselves. The eye discerns a world that is moribund and mute; it communicates its life to us through the ear [...]. All sound is evanescent, while the world of the eye is motionless and enduring. Sight enforces the illusion of immortality, for we seem to share the permanence of the object before our eyes.⁹

The figure of the secret watcher is caught between the two, torn by self-division. Faced with a world 'that is moribund and mute' he must yet communicate this world through words which might reveal and destroy his status as a secret [unseen] watcher and may also destroy the enduring quality of the visual scene of the observed. In these circumstances, Hopkins's secret watchers become acutely aware that 'wordy warrants are flawed through'.¹⁰ In this chapter, I continue the concerns of the previous chapters with looking, and particularly looking at people, but now developed further along the lines suggested by Seib's account of Hopkins's secret watchers – of people looking at people – and suggest that it is intimately related to the anxious poetics of vision articulated across his work as a whole.

⁸ Seib, 'Secret Watchers', 54.

⁹ David Baily Harned, *Images for Self-Recognition: The Christian as Player, Sufferer, and Vandal* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 26-27. Cited by *ibid.*: 55.

¹⁰ 'Lines for a Picture of St. Dorothea', l. 38. *Works*: 84-85. This series of poems is discussed in Chapter Four.

... *bellbright bodies* ...¹¹

These subtle distinctions between sound and sight, licit and illicit sight, granted and stolen sight, watcher and the watched, are fundamental to the late unfinished poem, 'Epithalamion' (1888), a work which has divided the critics sharply. To W. H. Gardner the poem is 'one of the loveliest nature-poems in the language';¹² by contrast, for Norman White the poem is nothing more than 'second-hand impressions pasted together [... from] Landscape descriptions [which] have no force of plot behind them'.¹³ James Earl goes even further: he claims its moral is that 'we would do well to destroy the poems we write while administering exams' and dismisses it as 'a beautifully embarrassing sexual fantasy'.¹⁴ Even Bridges thought it 'in Gerard's most difficult manner'.¹⁵ In fact, these divergent views serve only to highlight the idiosyncratic contest staged in 'Epithalamion' over the significance of looking.

The poem, written either during or shortly after Hopkins's period of invigilation at Dublin, remains unfinished, but was intended to celebrate the marriage of his brother Everard to Amy Sichel in April 1888, hence the classical title.¹⁶ It should be noted, however, that the manuscript itself is untitled; the notional title is derived from the letter

¹¹ 'Epithalamion', l. 17. *ibid.*: 179-180.

¹² Gardner, *Poetic Idiosyncrasy*: 2: 360-361.

¹³ Norman White, 'Hopkins' Epithalamion', *Hopkins Quarterly*, 4, no. 3&4 (1977-78): 159, 157.

¹⁴ James W. Earl, 'The One Rapture of an Inspiration', *Thoughts*, 65 (1990), 560. Cited by Kaylor, 'Hopkins' "Epithalamion"', 157.

¹⁵ Robert Bridges' prefatory note to the third autograph draft of the poem, the old exam answer book from the Royal University of Dublin. This is reprinted in Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Later Poetic Manuscripts of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile*, ed. Norman H. MacKenzie (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991): 326 (Plate 500).

¹⁶ *OED* defines an epithalamion/epithalamium as 'A nuptial song or poem in praise of the bride and bridegroom, and praying for their prosperity'. Edmund Spenser is the first to adopt this as a title. The date and circumstances of its composition are discussed in Simon Humphries, 'Gerard Hopkins's "Hark, Hearer, Hear What I Do": Two Editorial Traditions Examined', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*, 22, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 29-30.

to Bridges: 'I began an Epithalamion on my brother's wedding: it had some bright lines, but I could not get it done'.¹⁷ That the fragment has no title to announce its status as an Epithalamion is important. Indeed, Simon Humphries argues that the editorially imposed and critically agreed title reflects the possibility that without it 'those forty-two lines might begin to look like the kind of poem that is uncongenial to some critics'.¹⁸ More recently Humphries has suggested that the fragments that remain may not actually represent the intended longer poem at all: "Epithalamion" is the title that editors give the text they construct from these drafts, but we approach that text knowing that the wedding poem was an aborted project.'¹⁹

The poem is certainly unorthodox, and even problematic, when considered as a bridal hymn, the more so when we note the complete absence of any overt female presence. Critics, following Hopkins's cue in the letter, have suggested various ways in which the poem can be allegorised as a wedding hymn, replete with the water of 'Spousal love' (l. 47) and the woody valley of 'Wedlock' (l. 47), but these remain essentially unconvincing. That said, Hopkins has unequivocally placed the poem within the literary tradition of the Epithalamion; it stands squarely in the lineage of Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* and Spenser's marriage-poems, when it draws on the ceremonial paraphernalia of pastoral, with its traditional tropes of flowers, birds and echoing woods. However, like so many seemingly innocent pastorals, this poem is paradoxically inseparable from its sexual overtones.

The poem opens with the focus clearly on the auditory, rather than the visual, with an invitation to listen: 'Hark, hearer, hear what I do' (l. 1). Here the narrator summons the reader/hearer to participate in the creation of the vision that is to come, to 'make believe' alongside him. In the light of what follows, this opening address

¹⁷ 25 May 1888. *Letters*: 277.

¹⁸ Simon Humphries, "'All by Turn and Turn About": The Indeterminacy of Hopkins's "Epithalamion"', *Victorian Poetry*, 38, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 344.

¹⁹ Humphries, 'Two Editorial Traditions', 28.

raises unsettling questions of culpability. The hearer/reader is present, but only as an observer/listener, not necessarily a participant as he is exhorted to ‘hear what *I* do’ [emphasis mine]. Michael Kaylor draws attention to this relationship between the speaker and the hearer and places it within a literary tradition which seems a far cry from Victorian marriage poetry:

As a direct address, “hearer” has miscreant connotations which would have been clearly evident to a classical scholar like Hopkins [...]. Such an imperative [...] has served throughout pederastic tradition – especially among the classical Dorians – as an address emphasizing the beloved’s role within a pedagogic, pederastic relationship, an affiliation between “hearer” and older “inspirer” [...].²⁰

The vision to be summoned is one of young boys bathing, watched over by a silent stranger, who is himself watched by the unseen speaker. The potential ‘danger’ of looking could not be more fraught.

With the assistance of the ‘hearer’, the ‘inspirer’ summons a scene to be created in the here and now, present before the reader. The success of this joint venture is confirmed by the speaker: ‘We are there’ (l. 8). The place has already been specified, ‘with the hood / Of some branchy bunchy bushybowered wood’ (ll. 2-3), and the speaker now specifies the time:²¹

We are there, when we hear a shout
That the hanging honeysuck, the dogeared hazels in the cover
Makes dither, makes hover
And the riot of a rout
Of, it must be, boys from the town
Bathing: [...]

(ll. 8-13)

The exact moment and location is pinpointed as we stand alongside the speaker and assent that the source of the noise ‘must be’, indeed, ‘boys from the town / Bathing’.

²⁰ Kaylor, ‘Dripping Fragments’, 160.

²¹ The exact setting of the poem is the subject of Norman White’s essay of 1972. White concludes that it is the bathing-place in the Hodder river near Stonyhurst College: ‘The Setting of Hopkins’ “Epithalamion”, *Victorian Poetry*, 10, no. 1 (Spring 1972).

The image of boys bathing in the natural world was increasingly popular in Victorian poetry, painting and photography, and is evident, for example, in the work of Frederick Walker, the American Thomas Eakins, and the later Henry Scott Tuke. These were paintings which, as Emmanuel Cooper asserts, ‘far from outraging Victorian morals, [...] were seen as innocent and guileless celebrations of the joy and pleasure of youth’.²² Hopkins was certainly familiar with Frederick Walker’s work, as he confirmed in a deeply effusive letter written less than two years before the poem:

The genius of that man, poor Walker, was amazing: he was cut off by death like Keats and his promise and performance were in painting as brilliant as Keats’s in poetry; in fact I doubt if a man with purer genius for painting ever lived. The sense of beauty was so exquisite; it was to other painters’ work as poetry is to prose: his loss was irretrievable. [...] I revere everything that Walker did (I remember the news of his death gave me a shock as if it had been a near friend’s).²³

Hopkins’s reverence for Walker and his work had early roots. Walker frequently submitted illustrations for *Once a Week*, ‘considered the best of the illustrated journals of the day’, and a regular publication in the Hopkins household, devoured eagerly by the young Gerard, Arthur and Everard.²⁴ The longevity of this relationship and the scale of Walker’s influence on the young poet may go some way towards explaining Hopkins’s extremely emotional response to the news of Walker’s death. Although he does not appear to have met Walker, they did share a mutual friend, Simeon Solomon; Walter Pater introduced Hopkins to Solomon’s work, and Hopkins then went to visit Solomon’s studio.²⁵ Dellamora observes the potential danger in this visit:

²² Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 40. Cited by Swaab, ‘Hopkins and the Pushed Peach’, 55.

The motif of the boy bathing and its representation within the poetry and paintings of the time has been extensively studied by critics such as d’Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest*: 169-172; Joseph A. Kestner, *Masculinities in Victorian Painting* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995): 255-272, and Julia F. Saville, ‘The Romance of Boys Bathing: Poetic Precedents and Respondents to the Paintings of Henry Scott Tuke’, in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

²³ 30 June 1886. *Correspondence*: 133-134.

²⁴ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 6.

²⁵ ‘To lunch with Pater, then to Mr. Solomon’s studio and the Academy.’ 17 June 1868. *Journals*: 167.

In arranging for Hopkins to meet Solomon, Pater tacitly pointed Hopkins to a road not yet taken but still open – conversion to Catholicism, after all, frequently proved to be a temporary stopping place among Oxford graduates.²⁶

Whilst the introductory conversation was ‘more likely to have been about art than homosexuality’, as Phillips observes, Pater, Solomon, Walker and Hopkins all, to varying degrees, shared a delight in the male form.²⁷

In 1867, Frederick Walker exhibited a painting entitled *The Bathers* at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. Whilst it does not appear that Hopkins attended the exhibition that year, the painting was widely discussed, although not universally praised.²⁸

The critic from *The Times*, Tom Taylor, snorted that it was ‘only a study of vulgar little boys bathing on the flat bank of say the River Lea not far from Tottenham’ (13 May 1867).²⁹

Taylor’s snide criticisms of Walker’s painting draw attention to a few important points about the Victorian use of the motif of boys bathing, identified by Julia Saville as ‘a particular concatenation of cultural circumstances converge[d]’, ‘a matrix of political, aesthetic, and psychosexual tensions’.³⁰ Whilst Taylor dismisses the ‘vulgar little boys’, Robert Martin identifies nude bathing as a particularly class-inflected activity:

Bathing was in some ways the Victorian male recreation that most clearly marked out its participants as members of the upper classes, or at least aspirants to them. Practically every school with any pretension arranged for its boys to stand in shivering rows before they launched themselves into weedy streams.³¹

Whether ‘weedy streams’ or ‘the flat bank of say the River Lea not far from Tottenham’, the implication of both of these dismissive comments is that however much

²⁶ Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*: 50.

²⁷ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 155.

²⁸ Hopkins attended the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy in both 1866 (*Journals*: 142) and 1868 (*Journals*: 167), but there is no record of attendance in 1867, when *The Bathers* was exhibited.

²⁹ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 227-228.

³⁰ Saville, "Boys Bathing," 253.

³¹ Robert Bernard Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (Hammersmith: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991): 14.

they might try, Victorian England could never recreate ancient Greece, the ‘shivering rows’ of apprehensive boys serving only as a hollow imitation of the shimmering rows of burnished Greek athletes.

In ‘Epithalamion’, Hopkins explicitly states the origins of the boys: these are ‘boys from the town’ (l. 12), not from some exclusive nearby school or wealthy family. This is both characteristic of Hopkins, whose poetry deals almost exclusively with males from the lower or working classes, but it is also typical of the period, in which the figure of the working man, as Joseph Bristow argues, was seen to bring together ‘many and divergent social and political interests, from those who were proponents of empire to members of the emerging socialist groups’.³² For some this idolization took on a spiritual argument: the glory of the noble working classes was celebrated, the dedication of the nameless mass of industrial workers to their labour put forward as an example of the ‘sinew-service’ to the ‘deed he each must do’, as we saw in Chapter Two.³³ Furthermore, Hopkins saw in the working-class male body of the ‘just man’ a fundamental power that he could by analogy attribute to Christ, and thus to the Godhead:

Acts in God’s eye what in God’s eye he is –
Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.
‘As kingfishers catch fire’ (ll. 11-12)³⁴

However, as with Pope Gregory’s dripping slaves, the distinction between physical and spiritual beauty, and appropriate appreciation of each, is not always easy to uphold. Whatever the philosophical or spiritual arguments in favour of the popularity of the working-class labourer among the cultural elite, on a very prosaic level it is unsurprising that Victorian artists most commonly turned to the muscular and toned

³² Bristow, "Churlsgace," 695.

³³ ‘Harry Ploughman,’ ll. 11 & 10. *Works*: 177.

³⁴ *ibid.*: 129

bodies of manual labourers. Their bodies most closely accorded with those of the Greek athletes as represented in Classical art, to which the motif of the nude bather was always returning:

It was understood that there was a vaguely Greek cachet about it that no other sport could match. Since it was exclusively male, the bathers were always nude, so that there was an undercurrent of unspoken sensuality about it, as well as the associations of the classical gymnasium that made it respectable.³⁵

Martin here identifies the indisputable ‘cachet’ the Victorians afforded to anything associated with Ancient Greece, or ‘to which the Victorians chose to give a Hellenic colouring’.³⁶

Originally inspired by a growing interest in architecture, travel and topography, the Hellenic revival, with its emphasis on noble simplicity and sedate grandeur, quickly spread through all areas of Victorian culture, and ancient Greece was elevated as a model of ideal beauty, transcendent philosophy, democratic politics, and homosociality or even homosexuality. Linda Dowling’s *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* carefully delineates the elevated position afforded to an idealized vision of ancient Greece, and she analyses in particular ‘the way Greek studies operated as a “homosexual code” during the great age of English university reform’.³⁷ Whilst Hellenism undoubtedly offered some the excuse they so desperately desired to ‘contemplate the naked body with good conscience’, for Hopkins the associations of a Classical revival were always going to be more complex.³⁸ Hopkins was a devoted scholar of the Classics: at the time of his death he held the Chair in Greek at University College, Dublin, as well as a Fellowship in Classics at the Royal University of Ireland.

³⁵ Martin, *Private Life*: 14. It should also be noted that ‘gymnasium’ derives from the Greek word for ‘naked’, so nudity was implied even in the very title. Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 1980): 134.

³⁶ Jenkyns, *Victorians and Greece*: ix.

³⁷ Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality*: xiii. This idea developed out of her earlier study, ‘Ruskin’s Pied Beauty and the Constitutions of a “Homosexual” Code,’ *Victorian Newsletter*, 75 (Spring 1989).

³⁸ Jenkyns, *Victorians and Greece*: 136.

His adoption of a classical form, an Epithalamion, complete with the conventional naturalised setting, the presence of young boys, and an opening invocation, should not be dismissed as mere Victorian Hellenism, with all its rich associations. There is undoubtedly an element of this, as Hopkins's vigorous attack on Hellenism reveals to Dixon: 'But the Greek gods are rakes, and unnatural rakes.'³⁹ This letter of 1886 is fascinating for the familiarity it implies with 'the use of Greek literature for exemplary polemics', and as Swaab notes, the tone with which Hopkins discusses this issue is 'neither panicked nor horrified', although it is certainly uneasy.⁴⁰

That Hopkins's boys come from the 'town' instantly identifies them as 'Other', both to the naturalised country setting in which the observer finds them, and indeed to the poet himself. Despite his own solidly middle-class background, Hopkins's poetry depicts almost exclusively working-class male figures, such as Felix Randal, the farrier, Harry Ploughman, Tom Navvy, and so on. Martha Vicinus suggests that cross-class admiration, particularly among Oxbridge idealists, was often driven by 'a particular fascination with earthiness' and the associated suggestions of passion and even violence.⁴¹ This 'earthiness', which offered a proximity to nature, is indeed present in Hopkins's boys, but through their complete engagement with and participation in the natural world:

[...] how the boys
With dare and with downdolfinry and bellbright bodies huddling out,
Are earthworld, airworld, waterworld thorough hurled, all by tum and turn about.
(ll. 16-18)

Whilst these boys were first introduced in their 'Otherness', the first given *vision* of them is of their complete union with the natural world. They are reduced to a pure physical presence, the movements of their bronzed 'bellbright bodies' modelling that of

³⁹ 23 October 1886. *Correspondence*: 146.

⁴⁰ Swaab, "Hopkins and the Pushed Peach," 47, 48.

⁴¹ Martha Vicinus, "The Adolescent Boy: Fin-de-Siècle Femme Fatale?" in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999): 87.

the natural world as, dolphin-like, they show complete harmony with the water, 'huddling out' (l. 17) only to 'hurl' themselves back in again. The landscape enfolds the 'bevy of them' (l. 16), the 'hanging honeysuck' and the 'dogeared hazels' (l. 9) 'hover[ing]' (l. 10) protectively like a brooding bird as all nature unites to affirm 'it is summer's sovereign good' (l. 13).⁴²

The bathing boys show a complete engagement with nature, as fearlessly they hurl themselves again and again through 'earthworld, airworld, waterworld'. Martha Vicinus argues that this freedom, from both fear and restriction, is typical of the Victorian presentation of the adolescent male: 'He personified a fleeting moment of liberty and of dangerously attractive innocence, making possible fantasies of total contingency and total annihilation.'⁴³ Indeed, as the boys hurl themselves into the water, mirroring the 'rainbow arcs' of Hopkins's 'dripping' mermaids, a process of annihilation occurs as all individuality is lost and each boy becomes a mere component in the 'bevy of them', a 'flash' of 'bellbright' movement that together constitutes an exhilarating whole.⁴⁴ This is a positive annihilation, and again typical of its type: the adolescent boy in literature represented 'a double desire – to love a boy and to be a boy'.⁴⁵

The transience of boyhood, characterised by a rich sense of fearless freedom and sexual innocence, is also painfully beautiful in its fragility and impermanence: this moment, once gone, is lost forever. We should recall here the particular anxieties

⁴² The protective nature of a brooding bird occurs frequently in Hopkins's work. See especially 'God's Grandeur', ll. 13-14, and 'In the Valley of the Elwy', ll. 5-7. *Works*: 128 & 131-132.

⁴³ Vicinus, "The Adolescent Boy," 83.

⁴⁴ 'A Vision of the Mermaids', ll. 78 & 60. *Works*: 11-15.

⁴⁵ Vicinus, "The Adolescent Boy," 84.

the vitality, 'sweet[ness]' (l. 31) and 'freshyouth' (l. 30) of the boy, with a heavy emphasis on his bodily perfection.⁵¹

The tenderness and love of the relationship between teacher and pupil is repeatedly stated throughout the bugler poem, but the simile used to depict this is ambiguous: the boy 'to all I teach / Yields tender as a pushed peach' (ll. 22-23). One is again reminded by this phrase of the 'classical (in both senses of the word) context of homosexuality' as identified by Sobolev: that of teacher and pupil;⁵² this is also the heritage exploited by Hopkins in 'Epithalamion'. The 'tender[ness]' with which the pupil 'Yields' himself to the teacher is unsettling, and particularly when combined with Hopkins's strangely possessive comments to Bridges, which led Helen Vendler to remark that the 'metaphor takes on such unconscious sexual analogy that a psychoanalytic reading finds it almost risible'.⁵³ Certainly the physical strength of the bugler, more exciting and yet more dangerous through its paradoxical vulnerability, seems directly implicated in the love and tenderness exhibited by the priest towards his charge, but to reduce this complex relationship to purely sexual terms does this poem a disservice. There is also a spiritual, if no less selfish, desire at work when the Bugler is applauded for the manner in which he 'Hies headstrong to its wellbeing' (l. 24). Kaylor notes that he is here commended for the manner in which he 'spontaneously gratifies his own spiritual hunger without concern for the reproach of others'.⁵⁴ A lack of 'concern for the reproach of others' would certainly render this a more 'dangerous' poem, in so many ways.

⁵¹ The particular appeal of the 'Soldier Boys', attractive because of 'their youth, their athleticism, their relative cleanliness, their uniforms, and their heroic readiness, like Adonis or St. Sebastian, for "sacrifice",' is the subject of Chapter Eight in Fussell, *Modern Memory*. He considers Hopkins within a literary tradition that he traces from the writing of the early 'gentle literary fantasists' (in which camp he firmly places Hopkins) to the 'less respectable but no less influential prewar tradition of homoeroticism' by the writers frequently identified as the Uranians (*Modern Memory*: 278, 279, 283).

⁵² Sobolev, 'Dialectics of Desire,' 118.

⁵³ Helen Vendler, *The Breaking of Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995): 23.

⁵⁴ Kaylor, 'Hopkins' "Epithalamion",' 169.

The poem is full of beauty and desire, but this is beauty rich in implications and associated danger, as is so common in Hopkins's work. Vicinus identifies within the poem the desires both 'to love a boy and to be a boy'.⁵⁵ We have already discussed the particular appeal offered by the transience and fragility of boyhood, and the particular danger this might pose for one so very concerned with the sins of 'wasting time'. However, this impermanence, whilst attractive in itself, also offers even greater desirous possibilities, as its very fragility seemingly enables the viewer to collapse time, fusing the ideal image of boyhood with that of his own lost youth. This is a move that simultaneously sanctions the desire, as the restrictions imposed by the dangers of the present are removed, but it also in some sense extends the forbidden possibilities, as the writer's own boyhood self can now take up place alongside the idealised image in an eternal timeless past, no longer threatened by the unstoppable passing of time. As I suggested in the Introduction, Hopkins was certainly haunted by the image of his lost youth as his poignant comments regarding Wooldridge's portrait revealed: 'I am of late become much wrinkled around the eyes and generally haggard-looking, and if my counterfeit presentment is to be I shd. be glad it were of my youth.'⁵⁶ However, he also well understood that 'nothing can be done / To keep at bay / Age and age's evils',⁵⁷ such that even death seemed preferable at times, as his only half-joking comment to Bridges about the soldier headed to Afghanistan reveals. His days as an attractive ebullient child, popular among his friends, who daringly climbed trees and entered into physical contests, must have seemed a very long time ago to the Jesuit priest, confined, ordered and restricted in so much of his life both by the Society's regulations, and by the far more restrictive rules he imposed on himself.

⁵⁵ Vicinus, "The Adolescent Boy," 84.

⁵⁶ 29 March 1887. *Letters*: 253.

⁵⁷ 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo,' ll. 9-11. *Works*: 155-156.

The exuberance and vitality of the boys at play in ‘Epithalamion’ is infectious. Nature draws in, to ‘cover’, ‘hover’, and partake, and so too did the speaker, drawing with him the reader, his attention first being caught by the ‘shout’ of the boys at play (l. 8). Just as the boys gradually melt into the natural world around them, so too does the narrator, and with him, the reader, as they become ‘leaf-whelmed *somewhere*’ (l. 2, emphasis added), their location now vague against the natural world into which all disappear. Having participated in the imaginary creation of this fantastic world (l. 1) we are now enfolded seductively into the foliage from where we may observe and admire the unfolding visual ‘feast’ (l. 28). However, we are not the only ones to remain ‘unseen’. Echoing the movements of the speaker who was drawn by ‘a shout’ (l. 8), now a ‘listless stranger’ appears, similarly ‘beckoned by the noise’ (l. 14). In his movements, ‘listless’ and ‘drop[ping]’ (ll. 14 & 15), even the late-arrived stranger echoes elements of the scene around him: the ‘hanging honeysuck’ that could ‘drop’ at any time, or perhaps the ‘froth and waterblowballs’, the movement of which is, like the stranger’s, ‘down’ (l. 7).

Having been aligned variously with the speaker and with nature, suddenly the stranger now takes on elements of the boys, as his initial ‘listless[ness]’ is in a moment displaced as a ‘garland of their gambol flashes in his breast’ (l. 19). The stranger finds himself so inspired by the sight of the boys’ movements that he is stirred to imitate them.⁵⁸ Silently he moves to ‘a pool neighbouring’, out of the sight of the boys, so that he remains visible only to our eyes. His ‘Fairyland’, the ‘sweetest, freshest, shadowiest’ (l. 23), is so very different from the vibrant world of the boys: the noise and movement replaced by poised stillness, the bright sunlight that glistened on their ‘bellbright bodies’ replaced by the rich ‘shadow’ of the densely erotic foliage:

[...] silk-beech, scrolled ash, packed sycamore, wild wychelm,
hornbeam fretty overstood

⁵⁸ 26 September 1882. *Letters*: 151.

By. Rafts and rafts of flake-leaves light, dealt so, painted on the air,
Hang as still as hawk or hawkmoth, as the stars or as the angels there,
Like the thing that never knew the earth, never off roots
Rose. Here he feasts: lovely all is! [...]

(ll. 24-28)

He is inspired in his actions by the vision of the boys ‘painted on the air’, yet the thick foliage hides him from their view, just as an observer looking at a painting is able to look unobserved. However, whilst the ‘painted’ image to some extent ensures a ‘safe’ distance between the stranger and the boys he watches, this cordon is continuously undermined by the almost mirage-like qualities of the image: no longer simply an external observer, the stranger appears almost to have entered the painting as he finds it ‘painted on the air’ around him, and like the wedding guest in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), he is a figure for the now-gendered and physical reader.

For a moment, the stranger pauses, feasting on the sight: ‘Here he feasts: lovely all is!’ (l. 28). It is not clear on what the stranger is feasting – we might ask whether Hopkins can still see the boys? He can certainly hear them, as perhaps the homophonic play on here/hear (l. 28) suggests. Or perhaps it is rather the beauty of the ‘hornbeam’, ‘flake-leaves’ and sycamore that offer him satiety? Whatever the answer, he has suddenly had his fill of this sensual banquet and he leaps into decisive energetic movement, the moment of contemplation long gone, ‘declaring, as if to establish a poetic volta’:⁵⁹ ‘Nó more: off with’ (l. 28). As the poem draws so suddenly to stillness, there is a sense of increasingly intense anticipation and scarcely controlled excitement as the long rambling sentences that have characterised the poem thus far are in an instant replaced by tiny dense structures, each held in a taut position of balance around the central colon: ‘Here he feasts: lovely all is! Nó more: off with’ (l. 28).

⁵⁹ Kaylor, "Dripping Fragments," 170.

As the stranger suddenly leaps into movement, unable to bear the anticipation any longer, he pulls feverishly at his ‘woolwoven’ clothing, ‘teasing[ly]’ inappropriate for the ‘summertime’ heat:

[...] down he dings
His bleachèd both and woolwoven wear:
Careless these in coloured wisp
All lie tumbled-to, forehead frowning, lips crisp
Over fingerteasing task, his twiny boots
Fast he opens, last he off wrings
Till walk the world he can with bare his feet
(ll. 28-35)

In his eagerness to rid himself of these unnecessary accoutrements, he struggles with his clothes as they become caught around his ankles by his shoes, his impatience causing his clumsy fingers to stumble and his struggle reflected in his ‘frowning’ face. The gratuitous status of these discarded garments is made clear in the total disregard paid to them once removed: he casts his clothes aside ‘careless’, so that they lie ‘tumbled-to’, a crumpled heap of ‘woolwoven wear’ very much at odds with the natural surroundings.

In removing his clothes, the stranger also appears to remove many of the inhibitions acquired through the process of growing-up that previously stood as a barrier to prevent him from experiencing the ‘total annihilation’ enjoyed by the boys. By stripping himself of the acquired layers, the stranger appears as exposed as a newborn, reawakened to the world around him, his bare feet now free to feel the ground beneath him, as he stands naked at the edge of the pool, ‘burly all of blocks / Built of chancequarrièd, selfquinèd, hoar-huskèd rocks’ (ll. 36-37).⁶⁰ However, for a moment the stranger hesitates, the fearless leaping of the carefree ‘boys from the town’ into their pool forgotten as the stranger, no longer a carefree boy, girds himself in preparation, ‘Here he will then, here he will’, before finally he submits

⁶⁰ This echoes the sentiment in ‘God’s Grandeur’: ‘nor can foot feel, being shod’, l. 8. ‘God’s Grandeur’, *Works*: 128.

to the moment of consummation as ‘Flinty kindcold element let break across his limbs / Long’. This moment of release is marked by a sound which is the first sound not made by the boys:

[...] Where we leave him, froliclavish, while he looks about him,
laughs, swims.

(l. 42)

In laughing, the stranger appears to be imitating the joyful noise of the boys at play, but his laughter immediately puts his ‘unseen’ position in jeopardy. However, this is no longer a concern; like the boys, he is now ‘froliclavish’ in his pool, at one with the ‘heavenfallen freshness’, of the water or perhaps of the young boys.⁶¹ With the other onlooker now exposed, it is only the speaker and, by extension, the reader, who remains hidden in the foliage, afraid of discovery; as the stranger ‘looks about him’, we too should perhaps fear discovery, as hitherto we too have been ‘unseen / See[r]s’. The nature of these unseen watchers, and the problematic role of the voyeur, suddenly come into sharp focus, as we will see in the next section.

⁶¹ A few critics have made much of a “Freudian slip” in which Hopkins accidentally transcribed ‘heavenfallen freshness’ as ‘freshmen’ (l. 39) in an earlier draft of the text. (See, for example, Humphries, ‘Indeterminacy’, 344-345, and Sobolev, ‘Dialectics of Desire’, 130-131). Whilst this slip is of interest, I feel the implication is present in any case, as ‘heavenfallen freshness’ already suggests both the restorative water of the pool and yet also the exhilarating youthful beauty of the boys.

... *unseen / See[r]s* ...⁶²

'Epithalamion' is an ambiguous poem, rich in contradictions and uncomfortable tensions. One of the most fundamental of these is the tension between the hidden watchers, the stranger and the speaker/hearer, and the unknowing object of these attentions, in this case the boys, and the stranger himself. This triad of speaker, hearer, and secret watcher is not unique to this poem; 'The Windhover,' for example, features a hearer, a speaker with heart 'in hiding' (l. 7), and the 'Falcon' whose masterful movements invoke a powerful response in the heart of the onlooker.⁶³ The heart is hidden, and the reason is given: 'the fire that breaks from thee then [...] / [...] more dangerous' (ll. 10-11).

The heart is in hiding to protect itself from the power presented by the kestrel and by the beauty and potential danger it represents. R. D. Laing's assertion that danger is an inherent component of visibility chimes with Hopkins's self-protective desire to hide. For Laing,

In a world full of danger, to be a potentially seeable object is to be constantly exposed to danger. Self-consciousness, then, may be the apprehensive awareness of oneself as potentially exposed to danger by the simple fact of being visible to others. The obvious defence against such a danger is to make oneself invisible in one way or another.⁶⁴

The nature of this danger is ambiguous. In 'The Windhover', the heart is hidden to protect itself from the awesome 'mastery of the thing!' (l. 8), but also, and perhaps more importantly, the heart is in hiding to protect itself from exposure to any potentially uncontrollable feelings inspired by the majesty of sight. To emphasize the nature of this

⁶² 'Epithalamion', ll. 15-16. *Works*: 179-180.

⁶³ 'The Windhover'. *ibid.*: 132.

⁶⁴ R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Penguin, 1965), 109. (London: Penguin Books, 1965): 109.

danger, the majesty is expressed in the explicit language of physical violence, as the ‘blue-bleak embers’ of the ‘fire that breaks’, ‘Fall, gáll themséives, and gásh góid-vermílion’ (ll. 10 & 14). Even the refuge from the danger carries with it a threat: ‘hiding’ suggests both the situation of being hidden, and also a physical beating from which one would seek just such sanctuary. Both looking and being seen are inherently dangerous activities in Hopkins’s world and yet are all the more desirable for it.

‘Epithalamion’ opens with both narrator and hearer/reader in hiding, ‘leaf-whelmed somewhere with the hood’ (l. 2). From the start a relationship between the speaker and the ‘hearer’ is established, a relationship between the beloved and his teacher that falls well within traditional pederastic pedagogy, as Hopkins would certainly have known. The Greek heritage of reader/hearer and speaker/inspirer to which Hopkins’s poem is undoubtedly referring can be usefully explored in the light of a passage by Walter Pater, Hopkins’s tutor at Oxford and later friend, in his publication on *Plato and Platonism*:

The clean youthful friendship, “passing even the love of woman,” [...]. The beloved and the lover, side by side through their long days of eager labour, and above all on the battlefield, became respectively, *aitês* the hearer, and *eispnêlas*, the inspirer; the elder inspiring the younger with his own strength and taste in things.⁶⁵

This ‘clean youthful friendship’, despite the absence of women (for this love is superior), is not barren: together the ‘beloved and the lover’ ‘labour’ ‘through their long days’, until eventually a new relationship, exceeding the first, is brought forth. In ‘Epithalamion’, women are noticeably absent, yet again this is not a sterile relationship: hearer and speaker labour together to create – not new life – but a mutual fantasy (and indeed an artistic creation), the experience of which will change forever the nature of their shared relationship.

⁶⁵ Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism: A Series of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1893): 231-232. Cited by Kaylor, ‘Dripping Fragments’, 161.

The relationship between speaker and hearer is not the only one depicted within the poem, although it is the ‘perspectival view’ of this ‘couple’ that ‘frames the scene’, as Dellamora notes, and indeed the whole poem is seen from within this single framing device.⁶⁶ This ‘clean youthful friendship’ appears also to be the relationship sought by the ‘stranger’, who is ‘beckoned by the noise’ (l. 14) of the boys playing, just as the speaker himself was captivated by ‘a shout’ (l. 8). No physical description of the stranger is given, despite him being watched; we are told only of his general demeanour: he is ‘listless’, in sharp contrast to everything seen hitherto. Both the natural landscape and the behaviour and appearance of the boys were characterised by movement and playful physical power, a testosterone-fuelled exuberance where bodies and rivers merge seamlessly and endlessly one into the other:

[...] the loins of hills, where a candycoloured, where a gluegold-brown
Marbled river, boisterously beautiful, between
Roots and rocks is danced and dandled, all in froth and waterblowballs, down.
(ll. 5-7)

Just as the bodies of the boys take on the qualities of the natural world in their daring ‘downdolfinry’, so the natural world here brims and bristles with barely controlled eroticism, an eroticism that eventually floods over into more explicit sexuality.

Drawn by the sound, the stranger, unaware that he is being watched, ‘drops’ towards the river where he observes the boys at play. It is only at this point that the hearer is granted a vision of the boys, as stranger, speaker and hearer stand secreted side-by-side observing for the first time ‘the boys / With dare and with downdolfinry and bellbright bodies huddling out’ (ll. 16-17). As all look on, the speaker notes the novel sensations experienced by the stranger as he watches the boys at play (l. 9); at this point, focalization is clearly occurring from *within* the stranger, and it is only through *his* eyes

⁶⁶ Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*: 43.

that the scene of the boys at play is accessible. This focalization through the eyes of the stranger leads Lionel Adey to suggest that this stranger *is* the narrator:

As though he has descended with the stranger, the narrator describes the boys subjectively, sharing the stranger's vision [...] sensing how the elements of earth, air, and water fuse when the boys dive and spread out beneath the surface. How could he descend unnoticed by the stranger, how share in so subjective a perception, unless in some way he *were* the stranger?⁶⁷

Again, Humphries notes:

Yet it does seem that the depersonalizing device of the "stranger" has made possible a new directness in the poet's work (while being none too opaque: the strained shift in the point of view from "we" who "hear a shout" to that of the stranger hints the identity of speaker with "stranger," but gets out of writing "*I drop towards the river... I see the boys*").⁶⁸

Although Hopkins does refer to himself as an exhausted stranger in the slightly earlier poem 'To seem the stranger lies my lot', it seems limiting in this case conclusively to identify the speaker with the stranger.⁶⁹ Rather this shifting focalization is characteristic of the poem as a whole, a poem in which nobody and nothing is fixed, and all characters appear constantly in the dynamic process of 'Heraclitean' flux, an endless series of emergences and disappearance within the natural world.⁷⁰ These endlessly shifting viewpoints, and the narrative potential this introduces, come to characterise much of Hopkins's later work, as we will see.

The stranger thus far has been described only as 'listless', lacking in the enthusiasm, energy and appetite that so characterises the boys and the landscape in which they appear. Kaylor proposes that the stranger here represents 'abstracted

⁶⁷ Lionel Adey, "A Reading of Hopkins's "Epithalamion", " *Victorian Newsletter*, 42: 16.

⁶⁸ Humphries, "Indeterminacy," 345.

⁶⁹ Probably 1885. *Works*: 166.

⁷⁰ This constant process of movement and endless change within the natural world is the subject of Hopkins's poem of 1888, 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection'. *ibid.*: 180-181.

All discussions of focalization take the definitions proposed by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, Routledge, 1989 ed. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1983).

sensuality' in human form, 'limned with a Paterian solidity', following Pater's teaching of Plato:⁷¹

To speak, to think, to feel, about abstract ideas as if they were living persons; that, is the second stage of Plato's speculative ascent. [...] Abstract ideas themselves became animated, living persons, almost corporeal, as if with hands and eyes.⁷²

Thus initially the stranger is only 'almost corporeal', hence his lethargy. He represents abstracted sensuality and it is not until he watches the boys at play that he becomes fully animated by thoughts and feelings: 'This garland of their gambol' provokes a sensuous response within him, 'flashes in his breast' (l. 19). Like the stirring of the hidden heart in 'The Windhover' as the dynamic movements of the kestrel are observed, or indeed the stirrings in Hopkins's 'hidden heart' as he watched the Stonyhurst builders at work, so here the boys provoke a response in the stranger, rich in the 'sudden zest / Of summertime joys'.

The stranger bursts into movement, 'he hies to a pool neighbouring' (l. 22), swapping the visual pleasures of observing the boys for the physical pleasures of the 'flinty kindcold' pool, a pool he assures us 'is the best / There,' indeed the 'sweetest, freshest', but also the 'shadowiest' (ll. 22-23). The stranger is not yet willing to forfeit his position as an 'unseen / See[r]', but instead luxuriates in a double-edged desire, caught between the equal but opposing dangers posed by being seen and by remaining hidden. These dangers are beautiful in their possibilities, as he begins to negotiate between the various roles of benevolent or neutral observer, systematic enquirer, the privileged or enlightened seer, and ultimately, the voyeur. In his isolated dark pool, away from the bright lights of motion and activity, the stranger strips off his clothes, the sight of the boys re-igniting within him a desire once again 'to be a boy'. However, the more he seeks to imitate, the more apparent the differences become,

⁷¹ Kaylor, 'Dripping Fragments', 166.

⁷² Pater, *Plato and Platonism*: 170. Cited by Kaylor, 'Dripping Fragments', 161.

and thus his attempt to imitate the boys, or even to be one of the boys, seems hollow, like the final laugh, and in the most Victorian sense, perverted.

In his article on John Henry Newman, Oliver Buckton draws attention to the recurring charges of ‘perversion’ made against him, and suggests that in many instances perversion was used ‘as a “catch-all” term for the various layers of Newman’s “otherness” [...] – his Catholicism, his celibacy, his gender transgression, or “effeminacy,” and, relatedly, his homosexuality’.⁷³ Buckton takes as the basis of his argument Jonathan Dollimore’s careful analysis of perversion in the period:

Although the ‘modern’ sexual pervert does not appear in the *OED*, the wayward woman figures prominently as one of the two kinds of pervert [...]. The other is the religious heretic. [...] In theological discourse perversion may describe the opposite of conversion, signifying that terrible [*sic*], unforgivable deviation *from* the true faith to the false.⁷⁴

Buckton interprets Newman’s conversion to Catholicism as the ultimate perversion, using the term to encompass both his religious transgression and his sexual ambiguity. It can be seen how easily the term fits Hopkins. By ‘perverting’ to Catholicism, ‘the most powerful and determining commitment of his life’, Hopkins accepted a life of celibacy. As Dellamora notes, ‘This conviction is not a substitute for an unrealized sexual desire; but neither is it simply a sublimation’.⁷⁵ Hopkins’s poems, like his journals, are often dripping in erotic charge and sensuality, even – if not indeed more so – after his conversion, as demonstrated in ‘Epithalamion’. However, whilst in one sense poetry offered Hopkins a ‘safe’ manner of addressing these issues (unlike painting), it could be argued that Catholicism offered Hopkins another. By providing both a vocabulary of devotion and an established literary tradition within which to work, the Catholic Church could be seen as both facilitating and legitimising Hopkins’s attention to the male physical form, as we will see.

⁷³ Oliver S. Buckton, “‘An Unnatural State’: Gender, “Perversion,” and Newman’s Apologia Pro Vita Sua’, *Victorian Studies*, 35, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 361.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991): 120. Cited by Buckton, ‘An Unnatural State’, 361. The typographical error is corrected in Buckton’s reproduction.

⁷⁵ Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*: 47.

... *one's views of everything* ...⁷⁶

Hopkins's 'Epithalamion' is richly erotic, and deeply sensual, yet at no point does this eroticism fall directly onto either the bathing boys or the stranger. This has led many to dismiss the claim and settle instead on Hopkins's additional fragments as proof that this is indeed, despite appearances, an Epithalamion.

It is generally considered that the poem remains complete (if not completed) up to line 42, after which two separate fragments have been added, ll. 43-47, and ll. 48-53. Paul Mariani, taking his lead from Hopkins's first fragment, reads the poem as an allegory of marriage. He suggests that the stranger represents the bridegroom and although this does leave his 'listless' character unaccounted for, the fresh water figures his future married life, and the trees and natural landscape depict his supportive enfolding circle of family and friends.⁷⁷ In contrast, Lionel Adey reads the poem as an allegory, albeit a flawed one, of a pilgrimage, with the water representing baptism, and the bathing boys unfallen Man: 'In a further sense the stranger is Man, regenerated by throwing off worldly vesture, an estranged creature renewing his relationship with God through the walk across the bare rock and the immersion in the healing waters of grace, to become as a child.'⁷⁸ Whilst both allegorical readings are interesting, and as Sobolev notes, difficult to refute ('almost any existing literary text can be read as a flawed (and, consequently, incomplete) allegory'),⁷⁹ they seem ultimately unpersuasive. Both dismiss any erotic charges, even while claiming it as a bridal hymn.

⁷⁶ 10-12 September 1865. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 226.

⁷⁷ Mariani, *Commentary*: 290-292.

⁷⁸ Adey, 'Hopkins's "Epithalamion"', 19.

⁷⁹ Sobolev, 'Dialectics of Desire', 128.

An alternative to dismissing the eroticism is to accept its presence, and claim that it was Hopkins who was unaware of it. Martin, for example, argues that it is a poem ‘drenched with the innocent, probably unknowing, sensuality that seems peculiarly Hopkinsian’.⁸⁰ Again, this seems unpersuasive, not least given the inherent sensuality in the two literary forms alluded to in this poem. According to Sobolev: ‘in most cases pastorals are inseparable from sexual overtones. Moreover, the fact that this pastoral is part of an epithalamion foregrounds the sexual dimension which is implicit in the pastoral as a genre.’⁸¹ Hopkins would not have been unaware of the implications of these literary forms, just as his familiarity with the hearer/speaker relationship cannot be denied.

There is certainly no compelling biographical reason to claim Hopkins as a sexual naïf.⁸² One of his earliest poems, ‘A Vision of the Mermaids’ (probably December 1862), is hugely erotic, and betrays a startling sexual awareness from the schoolboy poet. The eye of the speaker, as though studying the face of his lover, is drawn from the eye of the sky to the flushed excitement of the ‘rosy’ lips, recalling the elusive ‘gashes’ of ll. 7-10:

[...] which, by hot pantings blown
 Apart, betwixt ten thousand petall’d lips.
 By interchange gasp’d splendour and eclipse.
‘A Vision of the Mermaids’ (ll. 20-22)⁸³

This passage is singled out by Gardner as ‘sentimentally trite’, yet I find it could not be further from sentimental.⁸⁴ It is rather hugely rich in the excitement and danger of

⁸⁰ Martin, *Private Life*: 390.

⁸¹ Sobolev, ‘Dialectics of Desire’, 129.

⁸² Obviously Hopkins’s decision to become a celibate priest changes the direction of his later life, and there is certainly no evidence to suggest that Hopkins ever acted on any of his homoerotic impulses, even before his conversion. However, this should not be taken as evidence that he was therefore unaware of or unable to recognise his own sexual impulses and desire. Indeed, his high level of anxiety regarding his own sexuality, his ‘evil thoughts’ and his Old Habits (thought to be nocturnal emissions) would very much suggest the opposite.

⁸³ *Works*: 11-15. See also Figure 3: ‘A Vision of the Mermaids’ (Christmas, 1862). Pen and ink sketch by G. M. Hopkins, in a six-inch circle, p. 216.

looking that so characterises Hopkins's later work. The repeated adjectives that Gardner dismisses as 'sentimental' – 'rose of air', 'rosy-lipp'd', 'rosy-budded', and 'isle of roses' – whilst clearly there for deliberate poetic effect, I suggest depict a speaker in the throes of a sexual fantasy. His vision is coloured by the 'throbbing blood-light' (l. 16) of the scene, before finally he can take no more and 'the crimson glare / Shower'd the cliffs' (ll. 24-5). A couple of years after the composition of this poem, in the list of sins in his diary, Hopkins records 'Looking at the *Lancet*', the medical journal.⁸⁵ Whilst there is nothing of particular erotic interest in this edition, it is not unusual for a young man to show such a prurient interest in the anatomical, the physical and the sensual. However, it is undoubtedly characteristic of Hopkins to make such a careful record of this 'sin', specifically a sin of looking, and indeed of the other occasions on which he records 'Looking at a dreadful word in Lexicon', 'Evil thoughts in dictionary etc', or 'Reading a dangerous thing'.⁸⁶

Although 'A Vision of the Mermaids' and the much later 'Epithalamion' are very different, in so many ways reflecting the significant changes undergone by the poet, they share the figure of the secret watcher. In the first poem, the speaker has rowed out to a rock, from which he observes 'shoals' (l. 31) of mermaids at play. In a striking echo of Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' (1802-04), a work Hopkins saw as so significant that it caused 'human nature' to 'tremble ever since', the speaker bemoans a vision now lost to him, perhaps again through age: 'Whence oft I watch but see those Mermaids now no more' (l. 143). Like the stranger and the speaker in 'Epithalamion', the viewer never emerges from his position of

⁸⁴ Discussing ll. 23-29: 'Hopkins uses as lavish a palette as a Pre-Raphaelite painter. At times his description is too lush, and drops into the sentimentally trite, as in a passage near the beginning, where we find "rose of air", "rosy-lipp'd", "rosy-budded", and "isle of roses" – all within seven lines.' Gardner, *Poetic Idiosyncrasy*: 2: 55.

⁸⁵ *Early Manuscripts*: 167 (Plate 115). The issue that Hopkins consulted was probably *Lancet*, 21, no. 1 (27 May 1865).

⁸⁶ *Early Manuscripts*: 156, 157, 165.

hiding, and prefers to enjoy the spectacle of the mermaids from his own secluded isolation, watching but always himself remaining 'unseeable'.

Both poems are strongly sensual, even erotic, but in neither case is this eroticism seen to arise directly from the central subjects of the poems, as might be expected. Instead it is found to have been 'safely' transferred to nature and the natural world, which now bristles with eroticism and fecundity. Whilst mermaids are traditionally dangerously alluring, their status as half beautiful woman and half fish renders them sexually unattainable; their beauty is their danger, but this danger is in itself beautiful. However, perhaps unexpectedly for one so driven by beauty, Hopkins's mermaids are markedly asexual. Great emphasis is placed on their piscine qualities in the poem, and in his illustration all are turned away from the viewer so that both faces and breasts are hidden [Figure 3, p. 216]. Even more strikingly, the 'bevy' of boys in 'Epithalamion' is similarly lacking in direct eroticism: the natural scene in which they are depicted bubbles with scarcely controlled excitement and blossoming sexuality, but the playful boys are attractive only through their powerful physical movements and their engagement with this sexually vibrant world, not in themselves. No specific physical description of the boys is given – unlike the rich corporeal detailing of 'Harry Ploughman' or 'Felix Randal' – they are seen only as bright flashes of movement, their individual shapes indistinguishable as the sunlight glistens on their wet bodies.

Although neither the boys nor the mermaids are depicted as sexually arousing in themselves, in each case the scene remains deeply erotic: the natural world is seen to be dripping in sexuality, fertility and fecundity. This undoubtedly represents a seemingly safe transference of the otherwise dangerous 'passions' liable to be invoked by 'looking'. In the first poem, the erotic landscape is predominantly female, characterised by 'lustrous gashes' (l. 8), 'parting lids' (l. 11), and a 'throbbing blood-light' (l. 16).

There is violence in the language and imagery, and even an aggressively sexual metaphor in the image of incestuous rape, as the mermaids crowd around the speaker's rock (a rock which is empty at the beginning and end of the vision):

Soon – as when Summer of his sister Spring
Crushes and tears the rare enjewelling,
And boasting 'I have fairer things than these'
Plashes amidst the billowy apple-trees
His lusty hands, in gusts of scented wind
Swirling out bloom till all the air is blind
With rosy foam and pelting blossom and mists
Of driving vermeil-rain; and, as he list,
The dainty onxy-coronals deflowers,
A glorious wanton [...]

(ll. 84-93)

In the sudden burst into movement and the resulting imagery of ravishment we are once again reminded of Wordsworth's 'Nutting', of a scene 'among the flowers' ('Nutting', l. 24) where a similar ravishment took place.⁸⁷ However, where Wordsworth's natural world and that depicted by the early Hopkins are most certainly female, with beckoning gashes and an exposed vulnerability (both scenes feature a 'deflower[ment]' by 'lusty hands'), the landscape of 'Epithalamion', as Kaylor notes, is assuredly male, with rich phallic imagery:

The delicate-yet-abrasive softness of the "silk-beech" – like the surface of the glans penis ("glans" being the botanical name for the nut of the beech mast) – is immediately followed by the engorged bundles of the "scrolled" ash and the "packed" sycamore, creating an erection of bark which displays those primal passions which refuse to be restrained (the "wild" wychelm) under a state of agitation ("hornbeam fretty overstood / By"). [...] Thrust upwards, this cluster of trees ejaculates [...].⁸⁸

Although the gendering of the landscape is different, in both poems the erotic charge is moved off the figures (where 'dangerous'⁸⁹ 'strain upon the passions'⁹⁰ might be

⁸⁷ The similarities between these passages in the two poems are discussed by Kaye Kossick in her article on violence in Hopkins's 'Vision'. She argues that the speaker in Hopkins's poem is far more interested in viewing the violence than in participating, but also stays clear of accepting any moral responsibility, unlike the speaker in Wordsworth's 'Nutting'. Kaye Kossick, 'No Haven for Hopkins: A Study of Violence and Self-Division in "A Vision of the Mermaids"', *Hopkins Quarterly*, 17 (April-July 1990): 45.

⁸⁸ Kaylor, 'Dripping Fragments', 169-170.

⁸⁹ 22 October 1879. *Letters*: 95.

encountered) and instead ostensibly displaced onto nature. That the natural world is now imbued with a deeply human, corporeal and indeed even genital, sexuality renders this transference to some degree academic.

As with mortal beauty, the subject of the sonnet of that name, Hopkins argues that beauty in the natural world serves as a readily accessible analogy for spiritual beauty.⁹¹ *Ad Majorem Dei gloriam*, the motto of the Society of Jesus, reminded Hopkins every day that beauty, mortal or otherwise, is there to function as a visual demonstration of the wonder of God and His creation:

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. It[s inscape] is [mixed of] strength and grace, like an ash[tree]. The head is strongly drawn over [backwards] and arched down like a cutwater [drawing itself back from the line of the keel]. The lines of the bells strike and overlies this, rayed but not symmetrically, some like parallel. They look steely against [the] paper, the shades lying between the bells and behind the cockled petal-ends and nursing up the precision of their distinctness, the petal-ends themselves being delicately lit. Then there is the straightness of the trumpets in the bells softened by the slight entasis and [by] the square splay of the mouth.⁹²

Whilst it was a familiar Victorian practice to find analogies between objects in nature and their divine equivalents, Dellamora notes that ‘To specify Christ, however, and to refer to boy-parts (“head,” “cockled”) gives this passage – to my eye at least – a Whitmanian aspect, since the American poet likes to draw series of analogies between objects in landscape and parts of the male body, including the genital flower’.⁹³ This ‘series of analogies between objects in landscape and parts of the male body’ is indeed absolutely typical of Hopkins, and I would argue that it is his ‘perversion’ to the Roman Catholic Church that ‘authorised’, in Hopkins’s eyes, his continued devotion to looking at the male physical form, now to some degree celebrated as the embodiment of Christ. Hopkins’s conversion did not in any way remove these desires

⁹⁰ 12 February 1868. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 231.

⁹¹ ‘To what serves Mortal Beauty?’, *Works*: 167. This sonnet was discussed in the previous chapter.

⁹² 18 May 1870. *Notebooks*: 133-134. Hopkins’s own brackets.

⁹³ Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*: 49.

and devotions, but it did in some way legitimise them by offering a valid theological pretext in which to continue looking. However, as the next section will show, earthly and spiritual desires, neither completely resolved, would continue to run uncomfortably close together in Hopkins's view of the world, an observation that terrified and thrilled him in equal measure.

... *Man lovely and loveable* ...⁹⁴

Hopkins spent his life surrounded almost exclusively by men, from his earliest schooldays to his untimely death as a celibate Jesuit priest. Whilst originally designed to avoid exposing vulnerable young boys to the dangers of temptation, these single-sex institutions may, for Hopkins, have had quite the opposite effect, as he found himself surrounded on all sides by beautiful men. At school and at university this intense and passionate environment provided men with deep and intense friendships, which, as Dellamora observes, were ‘based in the idealization of romantic friendships in their earlier schooling and focused on religious discussion, shared prayer, and joint observance of ritual. This environment stimulated homoerotic feeling, valorized it, and provided it with a convenient alibi’.⁹⁵ That these friendships were based on shared intellectual and theological experiences appeared to provide some explanation for, and protection against, any physical or even sensual ‘passions’ that such intimacies might provoke.

Following his conversion to the Catholic Church and joining of the priesthood, Hopkins became much more isolated, geographically, socially and spiritually. The intensely stimulating intellectual friendships of his youth were gone, replaced only by lively and intellectually-probing relationships with three devoted pen-friends. However, as noted already, Hopkins’s physical and aesthetic desires could not be entirely sublimated. Nature was one recipient of these displaced desires, as we have seen, and the figure of Jesus Christ, the beloved, the culmination of all things that ‘can make man lovely and loveable’, was another.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ From the sermon ‘For Sunday Evening Nov. 23 1879 at Bedford Leigh’. *Sermons*: 34-38, 35.

⁹⁵ Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*: 46.

⁹⁶ *Sermons*: 35.

Adoration of Christ's physical body is typical of the Roman Catholic Church, and Loyola's training, which inspired in the Jesuit followers a strong sense of the visual presence of God, appears to have affected Hopkins particularly strongly.⁹⁷ This was a firmly sensuous experience, yet it also demanded that the exercitant look imaginatively at human and divine bodies. Hopkins seems to have focused his spiritual longing, in the ambiguous form of 'eager desire', on the physical body of Christ, acknowledging as he did so the possibility of his comments invoking unease: 'for myself I make no secret I look forward with eager desire to seeing the matchless beauty of Christ's body in the heavenly light.'⁹⁸ There is a clear acknowledgement of the potential danger in this 'eager desire', as in 'mak[ing] no secret' it introduces the very possibility it denies. This dialectic of 'seeing' the 'matchless' beauty of the male 'body', particularly one that is, as here, without match, either comparatively or through marriage, is rich in desirous possibilities. Whilst the looking is in some sense vindicated through its theological grounding, it cannot be forgotten that this is again the figure of a beautiful young male, perfect in every aspect.

Hopkins's very strong sense of Christ's physical appearance as fully incarnated, and as an exemplar of 'noble but fully embodied selfhood' is revealed in this 'painterly' description from one of his sermons:⁹⁹

There met in Jesus Christ all things that can make man lovely and loveable. In his body he was most beautiful. [...] They tell us that he was moderately tall, well built and tender in frame, his features straight and beautiful, his hair inclining to auburn, parted in the midst, curling and clustering about the ears and neck as the leaves of a filbert, so they speak, upon the nut. He wore also a forked beard and this as well as the locks upon his head were never touched by razor or shears; neither, his health being perfect, could a hair ever fall to the ground. [...] I leave it to you, brethren, then to picture him, in whom the fullness of the godhead dwelt bodily, in his bearing how majestic, how strong and yet how lovely and lissome in his limbs, in his look how earnest, grave but kind.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ The influence of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* on Hopkins is discussed in the following chapter.

⁹⁸ *Sermons*: 35, 36.

⁹⁹ Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*: 51.

¹⁰⁰ *Sermons*: 35, 36.

Close attention is paid to every detail of his physical appearance, and in tightly alliterative phrases he is pictured, ‘lovely and loveable’, ‘lovely and lissome in his limbs, in his look’, ‘beautiful’ in his ‘body’, ‘tender’ in ‘frame’ and ‘features’ until the repeated ‘l’, ‘f’ and ‘b’ consonants come together in the ‘leaves of a filbert [...] upon a nut’. This is a fascinating metaphor that, for modern readers, reintroduces the painter who ‘picture[s]’ the scene, perhaps with the ‘filbert’ brush.¹⁰¹ However, the description of Christ’s hair, described in colour and behaviour as being like the leaves of the hazelnut, also serves to combine an erotic image with that of the natural world, as the leaves ‘curl’ and ‘cluster’ around the nut, just as the hair (to which the leaves are likened) might around the genitals (which cannot be removed entirely from the pictured ‘nuts’). This erotic metaphor sits centrally in the description, as the eye moves down the body, from the hair, head and neck, to the nut metaphor, and then down to the limbs, before returning to ‘his look’, a specific term which is yet more general. Whilst Hopkins does move on from Christ’s physical appearance to applaud his mind (‘the greatest genius that ever lived’)¹⁰² and his beauty of character which conforms to the distinctions Hopkins laid down for mortal beauty, this is certainly an intense celebration of male physicality and indeed of Christ’s body. Here Christ is presented as the pattern-giving example of Manhood, of masculinity. For Hopkins, as both priest and poet, Christ offers a figure on which he could legitimately focus his admiration of the male physical form.

This displacement of desire, from dangerous and tempting human beauty to the redemptive beauty of God, a ‘legitimate object of loving vision and glorification’¹⁰³ in Overholser’s words, is depicted in ‘Myself unholy’, from June 1865.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ *OED* notes that ‘filbert, *n.* (and *a.*): More fully, *filbert brush*. A kind of brush used in oil-painting, having a flattened, oval, bristle head; also as *adj.*, designating this shape of brush’. However, the first recorded use is 1950, so this may be anachronistic for Hopkins.

¹⁰² *Sermons*: 36.

¹⁰³ Overholser, ‘Terrible Temptation’, 42.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Myself unholy’, *Works*: 67.

Here the process of appropriate looking is made explicit: first at ‘myself,’ then ‘To the sweet living of my friends’ (l. 2). However mortal beauty is flawed, full of ‘fault’ which he recognises in himself and in others. Finally this desperate search is over, as to the ideal figure of ‘Christ I look’:

And so, though each have one while I have all,
No *better* serves me now, save *best*; no other,
Save Christ: to Christ I look, on Christ I call.
(ll. 12-14)

In the absolute purity of Christ he finds the ‘best’, but also, I would suggest, he finds a valid pretext on which to continue ‘look[ing]’ at mortal beauty: as an analogy of divine beauty. Conversely, in the figure of Christ, Hopkins found an alternative, and indeed ultimate, masculine ideal, which he was not only permitted to look at, but encouraged to love.

The centrality of the incarnation, and the possibilities for ‘redemption’, or at least salvation from the irresistible sins of ‘looking’, offered by the Catholic Church were not lost on Hopkins. Writing to Baillie shortly before his conversion (or ‘perversion’) to the Roman Catholic Church, Hopkins noted the benefits of this condition:

I may for once speak [...] of the difference the apprehension of the Catholic truths one after another make in one’s views of everything, beyond all others those of course of the blessed sacrament of the altar. You will no doubt understand what I mean by saying that the *sordidness* of things, wh. one is compelled perpetually to feel, is perhaps [...] the most unmixedly painful thing one knows of: and this is (objectively) intensified and (subjectively) destroyed by Catholicism.¹⁰⁵

Not only did Catholicism offer Hopkins a legitimate focus for his homoerotic aesthetic desires, but, through the doctrine of the Real Presence, an insistence on an ever-present physicality. Thus Catholicism offered a route to salvation and a valid solution to the ever present dangers of ‘looking’, as Dellamora observes:

¹⁰⁵ 10-12 September 1865. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 226-227.

By perverting to Catholicism, Hopkins prepared for his choice of celibacy, an option to which he felt strongly, if ambivalently, attracted. Life as a religious promised to valorize masculine desire by focusing it on Christ while folding Hopkins into a range of “safe,” male homosocial relations. [...] Christ’s beauty authorized priest and poet’s continuing devotion to an embodied selfhood and to the poetic celebration of desire for other men.¹⁰⁶

Thus the body of Christ offered Hopkins a permitted ideal, but also a ready reason to search for elements of this ideal in each and every man he met. Whilst mortal beauty was dangerous unless fully understood – as a ready analogy for the ultimate physical beauty of God – it was also irresistibly attractive. Throughout his life Hopkins embraced beauty, both in nature and in men, and his poetry and diary entries celebrate both, usually inseparably bound together. In the absence of readily accessible beauty, Hopkins found himself ‘impotent’, as his final poem, ‘To R. B.’ reveals.¹⁰⁷ It should not be overlooked that his poetic creativity, or more explicitly the loss of it, is couched in explicitly physical and procreative terms. Beauty brought creativity, yet it also aroused passions, passions which could be profoundly ‘dangerous’. Beauty and desire can never finally be separated, yet to some degree the Catholic Church offered a ready outlet for these passions, in the physically perfect incarnate figure of Christ. This enabled a redemptively metaphysical cast for his aesthetic view of male beauty, but this did not fully account for what remains, for Hopkins, a highly fraught and indeed dangerous relationship between the physical and the spiritual significance of male beauty. The figure of Jesus Christ could be celebrated and even desired as the ultimate exemplar of ‘Man lovely and loveable’, but it also offered a ready, and indeed legitimate, reason to continue to look at, desire and appreciate men, lovely or otherwise. These delicate negotiations, replete with beauty and risk, characterise Hopkins’s engagement with the visual world and are exemplified in his greatest exploration of vision, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*.

¹⁰⁶ Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*: 47.

¹⁰⁷ *Works*: 184.

CHAPTER FOUR

LOOKING AT GOD

THE WRECK OF THE DEUTSCHLAND

... a scene for an artist's pencil rather than a reporter's pen¹

Composed at some point between December 1875 and May 1876 whilst Hopkins was studying his theological courses in preparation for the priesthood at St. Beuno's College in North Wales, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is Hopkins's most sustained and developed work, and probably his greatest. At first glance it appears slightly apart from most of his poetry, apparently far removed from the questions of voyeurism, male beauty, and the beauty of Christ that have concerned this study so far. This is, by contrast, a poem dominated by the 'all-fire glances' (23/8) of revelation, a climactic and euphoric display of God's power and command over the natural world and all within.² However, this exhilaration is underscored by, and indeed amplified through, the very acute human danger that it describes. The allure of this danger, and the ambiguous and highly charged possibilities it presents, are familiar dynamics in Hopkins's work, but it is only in *The Wreck* that they come together in such an electrifying vision, as this concluding chapter will demonstrate.

Hopkins makes repeated references throughout his writings to William Wordsworth, and particularly to his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (1802-1804). This was clearly a poem that had a huge impact on Hopkins, and on the way he looked at and understood the world, as he acknowledges:

¹ From the recollections of the journalist from the *New York Herald*, one of the first at the wreck scene. Cited by Sean Street, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (London: Souvenir Press Ltd, 1992): 162.

² 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', *Works*: 110-119.

There have been in all history a few, a very few men, whom common repute, even where it did not trust them, has treated as having had something happen to them that does not happen to other men, as having *seen something*, whatever that really was. [...] Human nature in these men saw something, got a shock; wavers in opinion, looking back, whether there was anything in it or no; but is in a tremble ever since. [...] Wordsworth when he wrote that ode human nature got another of those shocks, and the tremble from it is spreading. This opinion I do strongly share; I am, ever since I knew that ode, in that tremble.³

Hopkins ascribes this ability ‘*to see*’ and to understand with a ‘spiritual insight’ only to Wordsworth and Plato.⁴ In his own extended and symphonic ode, Hopkins attempts to give poetic expression to this ‘shock[ingly]’ pseudo-divine power of ‘first seeing’, here expressed in explicitly visual terms: through the process of ‘see[ing] something’, ‘waver[ing]’, and finally, ‘looking back’ to ‘tremble’. This is achieved by locating at the heart of his ode a central concern with seeing and the seeing of seeing. The poem serves as a demonstration of this ‘spreading’ power to prove and recreate the ‘shock’, which leaves all who ‘know’ in ‘that tremble’, through a consideration of the acts of seeing and of witness, while foregrounding the reciprocal qualities of beauty and mortal danger. A close analysis of this exhilarating vision of beauty, danger, martyrdom, desire and death concludes this study, with Hopkins’s finest poetic exploration of what it really means to ‘*see something*, whatever that really was’.

³ 23 October 1886. *Correspondence*: 147-148. Hopkins’s own italics.

⁴ 7 August, 1886. *ibid.*: 141.

... a deep impression ...⁵

Other than the three happy and creative years spent at St. Beuno's in Wales, 1874-1877, Hopkins was deeply landlocked through most of his life: born in Stratford, Essex, schooled in Highgate, at university in Oxford and then posted to Birmingham, Roehampton, Chesterfield, Stonyhurst, Bedford Leigh in Lancashire, and Glasgow. Even the few years spent in the major ports of Liverpool and Dublin appear to have given Hopkins little relief, and he makes no reference to the sea, the coast or to local shipping during either of these periods.⁶ Despite this, the sea and its sometimes disastrous effects formed an important backdrop to much of the family's imaginative life: Arthur completed and exhibited a series of paintings inspired by shipwrecks and Hopkins made frequent references throughout his writings to the images, symbols and language of the sea and of shipping, in addition to his two momentous poems inspired by shipwrecks: *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1875) and *The Loss of the Eurydice* (1878).⁷ Both brothers were undoubtedly influenced to some extent by the work of their father: as head of a firm of marine insurance loss adjusters, the sea and its devastating shipwrecks were very much Manley's day-to-day business.

Whilst these narrative poems are certainly of great significance in themselves, it is also worth noting that in each case the very public occasion of a shipwreck

⁵ 24 December 1875. To his mother. *Further Letters*: 135.

⁶ Although impressed by his parishioners, he found Liverpool (1879-1881) a sprawling industrial city to be 'a most unhappy and miserable spot' (22 December 1880, *Correspondence*: 42), and a 'hellhole' (15 June 1881, *Further Letters*: 63) from which he struggled to see any escape. His time in Ireland (1884-1889) was deeply unhappy and unproductive, characterised by 'hard, wearying wasting wasted years' (17 February 1887. *Letters*: 250). It is clear that the long family holidays spent at the seaside, and in particular at Shanklin on the Isle of Wight, were nothing but a distant memory to the lonely isolated priest, however close the sea might be geographically.

⁷ I shall not consider *The Loss of the Eurydice* in any detail in this chapter. Although it does have a central concern with the aesthetics of male beauty, visualisation and, of course, death and salvation, there is insufficient space in this project to consider both extended poems and *The Wreck* is the more 'shock[ing]' work.

provoked from Hopkins an elaborate narrative work, and triggered a period of poetic creativity. *The Wreck* was written at the end of a seven-year period in which very little had been written following his 'Slaughter of the innocents' of May 1868; *The Loss* followed a similarly barren period following his departure from Wales.⁸ On each occasion, contemplation of the devastating effects of awesome and uncontrolled water and the resulting loss of life enabled Hopkins to breach the self-imposed and Jesuitical barriers between the 'visible' (the sayable, the permissible and the thinkable), and the 'invisible':

What [verse] 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 [...] 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.⁹

Less than two years before Hopkins began his great ode, his father completed his own most significant publication: *The Port of Refuge, or Advice and Instructions to the Master-Mariner in Situations of Doubt, Difficulty and Danger* (1873). Whilst ostensibly a practical manual for sailors, the text is at times richly elaborate and highly poetic, suffused with quotations from Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Hopkins thus had authorisation from two, so often conflicting, patriarchal authorities, yet each appeared to grant him permission to see, to speak, and to write poetry as an appropriate response to a terrifying 'situation of doubt, difficulty [or] danger'.¹⁰

⁸ 11 May 1868. *Journals*: 165.

2 April 1878: 'I had not written a line till the foundering of the *Eurydice* the other day and that worked on me and I am making a poem.' *Letters*: 48.

⁹ 5 October 1878. *Correspondence*: 14.

¹⁰ For further information on literary depictions of shipwrecks in the period, see Chapter Two of George P. Landow, *Images of Crisis: Literary Iconology, 1750 to the Present* (Boston, London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

In the dedication that opens the poem in almost all printed editions, Hopkins foregrounds its genesis in an actual event:

The Wreck of the Deutschland
Dec. 6, 7 1875
to the happy memory of five Franciscan nuns,
exiles by the Falck Laws, drowned between
midnight and morning of December 7.

In one sense then, *The Wreck* can be seen as having much in common with Hopkins's earlier ekphrastic poems of paintings and architecture; in each case, he is giving poetic shape to something that already exists in physical form. However, an important distinction between this poem and his more conventionally ekphrastic works is that Hopkins had no direct personal experience of the thing, or in this case, the historical event, that he seeks to recreate. His recreation (or reconstruction) had to be mediated through his reading of the accounts of others in newspapers and other public records. It is therefore worth considering these as a very different version of Altick's 'primary evidence', before exploring the poetic transformations that result.¹¹

Whilst a theology student at St. Beuno's in Wales, Hopkins was relatively restricted in his access to newspapers.¹² For detailed reports of the sea and shipping disasters, even those that touched both him and his colleagues deeply, he was forced to rely primarily on cuttings sent by his mother:

I am obliged for the cuttings, nevertheless you made two oversights. You sent two duplicates, for one thing, and the other was that you omitted the most interesting piece of all, the account of the actual shipwreck: fortunately I had read it but still I should have been glad to have had it by me to refer to again, for I am writing something on this wreck, which may perhaps appear but it depends on how I am speeded. It made a deep impression on me, more than any other wreck or accident I ever read of.¹³

This passage contains a number of strikingly visual images, from the 'oversights' of his mother, to the description of 'this wreck, which may perhaps appear'. The haunting

¹¹ Altick, *Paintings*: 3.

¹² This continued throughout his life. Hopkins noted later to Bridges that he 'see[s] no newspapers, read none but spiritual books'. 22 October 1881. *Letters*: 137.

¹³ 24 December 1875. To his mother. *Further Letters*: 135.

image of a disaster just out of sight beyond the horizon recalls the Kent coastguard and the vigilant ‘look-out men on the bridge’, none of whom could foresee ‘this wreck which may perhaps appear’, despite their vigilant looking.¹⁴ Hopkins, however, as letter-writer and poet, is in a position of privileged ‘insight’, able to see or not as he is ‘speeded’. Despite his mother’s ‘omissions’,¹⁵ he has seen enough and the accounts of the shipwreck press on the sensitive poet so heavily that they leave almost a physical mark on his body – a ‘deep impression’ – which the ode takes as both process and result. Frustratingly, it is not possible to identify for certain which accounts of the shipwreck Catherine Hopkins sent her son, although there are clear clues within the poem to suggest likely contenders. The most detailed reports of the wreck appeared in the *London Times*, and there are sufficiently close parallels between articles in the newspaper and details in the poem to support this. Another likely candidate is the *Illustrated London News*. Hopkins had long been familiar with the paper – Arthur Hopkins contributed illustrations to it for over 25 years (1872-1898) – and the shipwreck of *The Deutschland* featured heavily in the issue of 18 December 1875.

The wrecking off the Kent coast on 6 December of the German liner, *The Deutschland*, en-route from Bremen to New York, received widespread attention in the national and regional British press for nearly ten days. The first reports appeared in the *Times* on Wednesday 8 December, and are striking in their brevity; taut telegrams relay only the most cryptic details, with no space for anything other than the most basic facts – date, time, and event:

¹⁴ The *Times*, 10 December 1875, page 10. Norman Weyand and Raymond V. Schoder, *Immortal Diamond: Studies in Gerard Manley Hopkins* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969): 360.

I am indebted in this section to the work of Weyand and Schoder, who collect and collate the major public accounts of the shipwrecks in their study of ‘The Historical Basis of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and *The Loss of the Eurydice*’, Appendix 1: 353-374.

¹⁵ The *OED* defines an ‘omission’ as ‘The non-performance or neglect of an action which one has a moral duty or legal obligation to perform; an instance of this’. We can recall from Hopkins’s early diaries, journals and confession notes just how significant and sinful he considers such neglect to be.

A boat came ashore this morning from the Deutschland, steamer, with Quartermaster named Beck August and two dead men in her. Had been in boat 38 hours.¹⁶

However, as the telegrams continued to arrive in London through the day, more details gradually emerged: the intended route of the steamer, the place of the accident, the weather conditions, the estimated number of dead, and the identities of the cabin passengers. It is notable that not until the third telegram of the day is it recorded that ‘Assistance has been sent’; this delay was to prove a crucial point of concern at the official inquiry into the shipwreck and the events that followed.

The first visual detail to appear in the newspaper reports is one that loomed large in later accounts (and the subsequent inquiry) as well as in Hopkins’s poem: the air is described as ‘thick, with snow’.¹⁷ This phrase appears in both the second and the fourth telegram of the day, yet in his poem adapted from these reports, Hopkins does not use the phrase at all. Instead, the words ‘thick, with snow’ are taken as the starting point for an astonishingly fertile process of expansion: the ‘seeing’ prevented by the weather in the newspaper accounts is made ‘visible’ by Hopkins as he adopts a series of alternative and finally kaleidoscopic viewpoints within the poem. The description is given life and movement as his lines conjure up a blinding flurry of activity:

Wiry and white-fiery and whirlwind-swivellèd snow
Spins to the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps.
(13/7-8)

The ‘thickness’ of the newspaper account is captured in the violent motion of the all-encompassing snow, the movement of the flakes foreshadowing the ensuing ‘sea-romp’ (17/4) of the drowning passengers. The snow and sea pull together,

¹⁶ Telegram dated ‘SHEERNESS, Dec. 7’, reprinted in the *Times*, Wednesday 8 December 1875.

¹⁷ The *Times*, Wednesday 8 December 1875, page 5. Reprinted in Weyand and Schoder, eds., *Immortal Diamond*: 355.

the sea taking on the 'flint-flake' form of the snow as the opaque white air of the newspaper report is replaced by the violent battleground of the poem.

This 'thick[ness]' was considered crucial to the inquest into the disaster, reported in the *Times*, 10 December 1875. Although Hopkins may not have read the account, his creative process is very much like that represented by the official inquest: both privilege certain forms of information relating to the shipwreck, although according to different criteria. Hopkins removes many of the finer details (the very heart of any inquiry) to present a more elemental account in which the drama is purified from its practical circumstances. The poem cannot recreate the event (even the official Inquiry cannot objectively report it), but it can provide a series of 'impression[s]' of it, recreating the sense of firsthand witness. Through his ode, Hopkins presents both something 'seen', an impressionistic reconstruction of the wreck, and an account that intimates other sorts of vision. Indeed, these become the very focus of the poem.

At the inquiry, the captain of the liner, Captain Brickenstein, told the court how 'the wind [was] blowing from the north-east pretty freely, with snow falling at intervals'. Overnight the weather darkened, so that the 'four look-out men on the bridge and two in the bows' were found to be 'of little use' as 'the weather was so thick'.¹⁸ Later in his testimony the captain again insisted on the opacity of the weather: 'The weather was so thick that we could not see the light on the Kentish Knock.'¹⁹ The captain did make one allowance to sight: 'we saw breakers. [...] We saw the breakers.'²⁰ It seems ironic that these 'breakers' appear to have 'shown' the captain nothing of the breaking that was to come. It was thus an inability to see *completely*

¹⁸ The *Times*, 10 December 1875, page 10. *ibid.*: 360.

¹⁹ *ibid.*: 362.

²⁰ *ibid.*: 360.

that was crucial to the newspaper accounts, inquest, and in an intensified form, Hopkins's ode.

Captain Brickenstein appeared before the jury as a 'witness'. As the captain of the stricken liner he was undoubtedly summoned in his role both as 'One who is or was present and is able to testify from personal observation; one present as a spectator or auditor' and as 'One who gives evidence in relation to matters of fact under inquiry'.²¹ However, in the light of the repeated imagery of water (and through water, rebirth), we are reminded that a 'witness' is also 'a sponsor or godparent at baptism'. In putting forward a candidate for baptism, the sponsor takes on responsibility for ensuring the candidate understands, and is appropriately prepared for, the event that is to follow. As the captain of the stricken liner, Brickenstein was to some degree inevitably responsible for the death of the passengers. On the other hand it was only through her death by water that the Tall Nun was able to achieve her much longed-for spiritual rebirth, as we will see. The captain was therefore witness to the shipwreck and the events leading up to it, a witness to the cries of the nun, a witness to her period of preparation, and also, in Hopkins's reading of the disaster, her sponsor for the spiritual rebirth depicted in the poem. Thus spectatorship, observation and testimony sit at the very heart of the ode, uniting the material and spiritual narratives that are interwoven throughout.

As Brickenstein gave his account, he was questioned on another failure of vision: the inability to ensure rescue through the appropriate use of the distress signals. Despite the weather, desperate attempts were made to draw attention to their plight: rockets were fired during the night, and on Monday when other vessels came into sight, Brickenstein noted that 'we made such signals as we could with pistols and otherwise,

²¹ From the *OED* definitions of 'witness'.

but none of the passing vessels answered us'.²² The fate of the liner was actually sealed by a reciprocal failure of sight; the passengers and crew on the stricken liner reported that they failed to 'see any answering signals' in response to the rockets, while the Coastguard 'saw no rockets on the Sunday night, nor yet on Monday morning. Rockets could not be seen in the daytime. No rockets were seen till Monday night'.²³ Although the rockets were initially obscured by the 'blinding snowstorm', by Monday the weather was clearer and the passengers were able to observe their hopes of salvation sailing by unawares:

[...] Passing vessels were distinctly seen from the Deutschland's deck, and every effort was made to attract their attention [*sic*]. The passengers and crew watched those vessels, two of them steamers, hoping that each of them had seen, or must soon see, the signal of distress. But one after another passed by and night came on.²⁴

The desperate anguish of those aboard the liner, able to see but unable to make themselves seen, in a perverse reversal of the role of the voyeur (as explored in the previous chapter), is keenly felt in the survivors' accounts.

In his ode inspired by the shipwreck, Hopkins subtly adapts the problems of sight recorded in the newspaper reports. He does not mention the 'thick[ness]' of the weather, but rather depicts both 'rocket and lightship' (15/6) as plainly visible: they 'shone' despite the conditions. In doing so he adopts the position of a privileged observer, able clearly to see the shining of both the rockets, fired to signal the position of the liner, *and* the lightship, illuminated to mark a point of danger. Of course, this role as an omniscient observer could never have occurred during the historical wreck: depending on the position of the observer, the 'thick' weather would have prevented the sight of either the lightship or the rockets. Hopkins therefore re-imagines the historical accounts, envisaging the heart-breaking position of being able to see but

²² Weyand and Schoder, eds., *Immortal Diamond*: 361.

²³ *ibid.*: 363, 364.

²⁴ *The Times*, 11 December 1875, page 7. *ibid.*: 366.

being powerless to act or bring about a response in others; this tortuous position is hauntingly familiar to readers of either the newspaper reports or Hopkins's ode, who find themselves similarly impotent, able only to 'look', 'waver' and 'tremble'. It recalls the essential paradox of the doctrine of Free Will, so that the reader, sharing the anguished omniscience of the narrator, becomes aligned with God and made to watch, to share in the pain of the 'sodden-with-its-sorrowing heart' (27/4), yet ultimately, unlike God, unable to help.

Whilst the captain's testimony records several other ships sailing by, oblivious to the tragedy, Hopkins chooses instead to depict the liner as very much alone against the wild weather. The ship thus becomes the first in a series of protagonists in battles between the individual (the liner, the sailor, the tall nun, the passengers in the rigging) and the elements. Despite their limited sight, the passengers in Hopkins's ode can see enough to know that they are alone and powerless; once again the newspaper accounts have been simplified and purified to their most basic elements. From this horrifying revelation of their impotence, the passengers seek to protect themselves:

And lives at last were washing away:
To the shrouds they took, – they shook in the hurling and horrible airs.
(15/7-8)

As the passengers climb into the 'shrouds' of the rigging, the noun conjures other associations. It might suggest a gesture of resignation to death as passengers dress themselves in their grave clothes. Alternatively, it proffers a more defensive act, a deliberate shielding of the eyes from the hideous sights of the 'rocket and lightship' that only illuminate their distress and impotence. It is not surprising that the passengers might 'shroud' themselves from the hideous scene that follows.

The incident described by Hopkins in stanza 16 appears in only one newspaper account, that of the *Times*, 11 December 1875. We can therefore confidently assume

that this was one of the two cuttings Hopkins received from his mother.²⁵

Hopkins's stanza closely parallels the newspaper account, as noted in bold:

One brave sailor, who was safe in the **rigging**, went down to try and **save** a child or **woman** who was drowning on deck. He was secured by a **rope** to the rigging, but a **wave** dashed him against the bulwarks, and when daylight dawned his headless body, detained by the **rope**, was swaying **to and fro** with the waves.²⁶

Hopkins's ode repeats much of the vocabulary, but now crucially changed and erotically recast, as we shall see:

One stirred from the rigging to save
The wild woman-kind below,
With a rope's end round the man, handy and brave –
He was pitched to his death at a blow,
For all his dreadnought breast and braids of thew:
They could tell him for hours, dandled the to and fro
Through the cobbled foam-fleece. What could he do
With the burl of the fountains of air, buck and the flood of the wave?

Although the linguistic repetition in the poem of material from the *Times* is interesting, Hopkins's deviations from the newspaper report are more so. He removes the identification of the individual: 'One brave sailor' becomes simply 'One' (16/1). This both elevates the sailor as he is raised towards the transcendent 'One', but also draws him back to the previous stanza, where *unnumbered* 'lives at last were washing away' (15/7) as 'they' (15/8) climbed into the rigging. Hopkins also plays with the passage of time: in the newspaper account the 'headless body' had remained invisible until 'daylight dawned'; by contrast, in *The Wreck* the body is visible throughout: 'They could tell him for hours' (16/6). Even darkness offers no respite from the horrific vision.

Stanza 16 can be seen as a stanza of two halves. The first quatrain appears to depict creatures almost inhuman as they draw close to each other: 'One' 'stirs' from the rigging, as a wild animal might stir in its lair, to greet its adversary, 'The wild woman-

²⁵ See letter to his mother of Christmas Eve, 1875. *Further Letters*: 135.

²⁶ Weyand and Schoder, eds., *Immortal Diamond*: 368.

kind' (16/2). Hopkins dismisses any notion of 'a child', as in the *Times* report, and even the civic elements are removed so that she is 'wild' and *of* 'woman-kind', leading us to question whether she is indeed 'woman' at all? Just as this image captures some of the 'wild' monstrosity of Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*, the sailor now takes on the 'dreadnought breast and braids of thew' (16/5) of a great warrior as he fights against the 'blow' of his opponent. Here we can also detect a warped echo of the victorious Greek athletes celebrated in Pindar's odes.²⁷ The archaism in the language of the sailor's physical description removes him from the literal moment of the shipwreck and places him as an ironic failure among a lineage of mythical warriors and victors. Similarly, the passengers 'tell[ing]' of the scene suggest both a visual image, perhaps of a pendulum or clock to 'tell' the time, or of the beads on a rosary that one 'tells' in prayer, and also an oral record, passed on from one to another, just like the tale of *Beowulf*. These visual/verbal/oral puns are of great significance within the ode and crucial to its development of vision as both theme and phenomenon; it is the crucial correspondence between a 'virginal tongue' (17/8) and the 'single eye' (29/2) that forms the central focus of the ode. Indeed this relationship between seeing and speaking correctly is fundamental to the many narratives that drive the work.

Hopkins's greatest departure from the newspaper accounts is in the depiction of the five nuns. Their appearance in the newspaper reports was brief and factual, first recorded in the final telegram reported in the *Times* on 8 December:

The names of the cabin passengers missing are Ludwig Heerman, J. Grossman, Maria Forster, Emil Hack, Bertha Fundling, Theodor Fundling, five nuns, Procopi Kadolkoff, and O. Lundgren.²⁸

Although this is the first telegram to report a significant number of survivors ('Part of the crew and passengers were landed here to-day'), it is also the first to report the deaths of

²⁷ Hopkins's knowledge and adaptation of the various odic forms is discussed by Jenkyns, *Victorians and Greece*: 89-90.

²⁸ The *Times*, 8 December, page 5. Weyand and Schoder, eds., *Immortal Diamond*: 355.

the anonymous ‘five nuns’, the dedicatees of Hopkins’s great ode: ‘To the happy memory of five Franciscan Nuns’. The second appearance of the nuns was in the *Times* report ‘From Our Own Reporter’ of Saturday, 11 December.²⁹ Supposedly continuing the narrative of the previous day, it was in this account alone that the nuns were given any degree of prominence:

Five German nuns, whose bodies are now in the dead-house here, clasped hands and were drowned together, the chief sister, a gaunt woman 6 ft. high, calling out loudly and often “O Christ, come quickly!” till the end came.³⁰

The *Times* continued its coverage of the tragedy with an elaborate and detailed description of the funeral arrangements made for the nuns by various Catholic communities across England. However, Julia Saville identifies what she considers to be an obvious omission from the newspaper report of the funeral preparations:

Insisting on the respectability of this scene – for instance, emphasizing the schoolroom as spacious, the dais as raised, the visitors as numerous and devout – the reporter overlooks the specifically spiritual nature of the Catholic response to the tragedy.³¹

Saville argues that ‘a Catholic eye’ (again, the emphasis is on the visual) would be drawn to read the candles, the wreaths of eternal flowers and the white satin lining the coffins as incontrovertible ‘signs of the joyful release for the dead to the life hereafter’ rather than as the trappings of a ‘consoling Victorian funeral’.³² In his poem, Hopkins may have been driven by a desire to rectify this oversight.

Just as Hopkins isolated the drowned sailor to ‘tell’ the tale, ‘One’ nun is set apart from the group in the newspaper accounts of their final actions:

²⁹ *ibid.*: 365-368.

³⁰ *ibid.*: 367-368.

³¹ Saville, *A Queer Chivalry*: 63.

³² *ibid.*

One, noted for her extreme tallness, is the lady who, at midnight on Monday, by standing on a table in the saloon, was able to thrust her body through the sky-light, and kept exclaiming in a voice heard by those in the rigging above the roar of the storm, “My God, my God, make haste, make haste.”³³

Given her prominence in the press and in Hopkins’s poem adapted from these accounts, his cuttings must have included either the account of the funeral from the *Times* or this issue of the *ILN*.

The 18 December issue of the *ILN* carried three illustrations of the shipwreck: ‘Wreck of the *Deutschland* as it Appeared on the Morning of Thursday Week’ [Figure 4, p. 217], ‘Wrecker at work in the saloon’ [Figure 5, p. 218], and a double-page spread of the ‘Rescue of The Survivors of the *Deutschland* By The Harwich Steam Tug *Liverpool*’ [Figure 6, p. 219]. There was also a brief written report. The newspaper’s artist travelled out to the wreck on the rescue tug *The Liverpool*, and, as the journalist from the *New York Herald* (who also travelled on the tug) testified, much of the sketching for these illustrations took place on site:

It was a scene for an artist’s pencil rather than a reporter’s pen [...]. My comrade at the ‘Illustrated London News’ who had gone down with me, discouraged at first by the immensity of detail in the picture, soon settled down into his sketchbook.³⁴

It is not entirely clear what renders this, in the journalist’s eyes, a ‘scene for an artist’s pencil rather than a reporter’s pen’, and one wonders whether Hopkins would ever have agreed with such a stark polarisation of the two, given his early journals where pencil lines and scribbled words merge seamlessly into each other. Nevertheless, it is in this ‘immensity of detail’ that the accounts of the two are notably consistent, despite the initial hesitations of both journalist and artist when confronted with the scene. In spite of this, their accounts were to become the subject of a censorious public attack by the registrar leading the inquiry for ‘inflaming the public’ with claims of pillaging

³³ The *Times*, Dec. 13, page 10. Weyand and Schoder, eds., *Immortal Diamond*: 374.

³⁴ Information from Street, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*: 162.

[see Figure 5, p. 218]. In this illustration, the ‘tall nun’ who ‘stood on this table’ to make her heart-felt cries to God is parodied in the stout fisherman who stands on the table to push his illegal booty through the skylight and out of the reach of other wreckers. The scene is one of debauchery and violence, with a figure on the left hastily devouring the contents of a bottle, an empty bottle lying at his feet, and another taking a pick-axe to a sealed container to break it open. A figure just to the right of the table in faux-coyness hides his face behind a lady’s fan – the ultimate symbol of decadence and unnecessary excess – whilst others rifle through suitcases and bags looking for objects of material value. It was undoubtedly a scene designed to shock, yet it was also characteristic of the illustrations provided in the increasingly popular pictorial press.

In an unpublished conference paper of 2006, Catherine Phillips proposed that an awareness of this blend of material fact and symbolic elaboration typical of the illustrated media is crucial for an accurate understanding of Hopkins’s great work, and represents a mode with which both Hopkins and his readers would be familiar.³⁵ In her book published the following year, Phillips gives extended consideration to just why Hopkins ‘chose to incorporate this sort of information and [...to] the questions it raises about the perceived relation of different types of truth – factual reality and the psychological reaction to that factual reality’. She suggests that Hopkins ‘constructs a poem in which industrial, technical detail combines with emphasis on human reactions to that tragedy’.³⁶ She also notes that this ‘constant moving from the physical to something beyond, the turning of physical fact into symbol’ was characteristic of the symbology, iconography and typology of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings that Hopkins so admired, as we have seen.³⁷ These useful observations can be taken further in considering *The Wreck*. Not only does Hopkins’s ode blend ‘fact’ taken from the

³⁵ Catherine Phillips, ‘Educating the Audience: Issues of Truth in Nineteenth-Century Illustration’. Presented at CRASSH (Centre for Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities) in Cambridge as part of the ‘Literary Circles: Word, Image and theatre in Britain c. 1800-c.1920’ seminar. 27th October, 2006.

³⁶ Phillips, *Victorian Visual World*: 209-210.

³⁷ *ibid.*: 213.

newspaper cuttings sent by his mother with complex theological and personal observations to create a highly imaginative poem, but it also features a striking number of varying viewpoints. Just as Hopkins's art criticism is characterised by idiosyncratic shifts of gaze and unexpected points of focus, so too is the ever-changing representation of seeing in the shipwreck ode.

In a series of articles about the pictorial press, Peter Sinnema observes its tendency to assimilate many different accounts:

It seems that the *ILN* struggles to produce a true story by binding every eye-witness account, every obtainable perspective, into a conglomerate narrative. [...] The synoptic strategy so often employed in the *ILN*'s reportage, producing a kind of aggregate reality-effect through the amassment of extracts, commends itself to readerly expectations about comprehensive coverage.³⁸

He suggests that catastrophe, in particular, typically attracted this 'cumulative approach'. I propose that Sinnema's argument can help us understand *The Wreck*, where Hopkins deliberately adopts just such a 'cumulative' or 'conglomerate' approach in the multiple narrative modes he adopts.

Rather than doggedly following a single narrative viewpoint throughout, the ode repeatedly switches from one point of observation to another, flickering from vantage point to vantage point, showing us one visual detail and then instantly moving to another visible only from a completely different position. This is not unlike Hopkins's art criticism, where the 'peculiar' scenes captured in his writing appear guided almost exclusively by the overwhelming concerns of the 'pleasured eye' that so dominate his looking.³⁹ However, the effect in the ode is more profound, as the formal structure is finally revealed as a representation of cumulative scenes that could never have been seen by any single observer alone. Thus the reader is presented with a kaleidoscope of stories and viewpoints, and 'seeing' within the ode is presented as, amongst other things, a splicing together of a range of narratives.

³⁸ Peter W. Sinnema, 'Representing the Railway: Train Accidents and Trauma in the *Illustrated London News*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 31, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 148.

³⁹ Sonnet 2 from 'To Oxford', l. 13. *Works*: 62-63.

Sinnema argues that a reader of the *ILN* becomes ‘saturated’ with information, ‘so that it is difficult to resist the conviction that truth does indeed reside in these columns’.⁴⁰ However, Hopkins’s ‘cumulative approach’ in *The Wreck* has the opposite effect: the reader is carefully negotiated into the uncomfortable position of an omniscient voyeur, given privileged insight into scenes that could never have been seen by any single witness. This position is ethically fraught, but more significantly, it would be a fundamental ‘misreading’ of the ode if a reader found himself concluding, as Sinnema suggests he might, that the ‘truth’ could be found within these ‘conglomerate narratives’. Instead the reader discovers that these multiple viewpoints all lead to a single perspective, a single understanding: that the truth can never reside *but* in the ‘single eye’ (29/2). Despite the continuously shifting perspective and the endless revealing and removing of sight (depicted in the repeated imagery of veiling and revealing, lightness and darkness, blindness and insight, as we will see), Hopkins intends that the reader should ‘see’, but also indicates that our human sight is fallible, restricted, and faltering:

But how shall I ... make me room there:

Reach me a ... Fancy, come faster –
Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there,
Thing that she ...

(28/1-4)

Eventually the poem tries to show its readers, not the ‘truth’ Sinnema saw as the goal of the *ILN*, but Hopkins’s identification of truth with ‘*Ipsa*, the only one, Christ, King, Head’ (28/5). His aim is to show that out of a series of events re-imagined from various viewpoints emerges a single true Christian perspective. Bidding us ‘look at it loom there’, he wants us to see a vision made theologically coherent, however violently complex, through the presence of ‘the only one’.

⁴⁰ Sinnema, ‘Representing the Railway’, 151.

... *But who looks east at sunset?* ...⁴¹

Readers of Hopkins's work are immediately struck by his deeply idiosyncratic way of looking at the world; he approaches it with a very particular 'Gaze[s] aslant his shoulder', a focused way of looking but with a particular angle and perspective unique to this poet-priest.⁴² Martin Jay writes of 'our overwhelming, habitual belief' in the reliability of visual experiences, but I have argued instead that Hopkins is driven throughout his life by a desire to counter and contest any restrictive notion of such a 'habitual' way of looking.⁴³ Whilst the quotation that opens this section may be nothing more than a proverbial turn of speech, I suggest that it indicates once again Hopkins's fundamental concern with actual looking. Although the sunset produces a universal and almost 'overwhelming' desire to look west and admire the setting sun, Hopkins's interest is rather with the very process of looking itself: he turns his face from the sunset to look at those looking, to consider whether there are any indeed who 'look east at sunset?' In so doing, Hopkins has himself answered the question, as his eastward-facing eyes confront the sea of eyes looking west: 'But who looks east at sunset?' *I do*.

It is this particular quality of self-conscious and self-questioning looking that renders his verse so rich in the vocabulary of sight, eclectic description and pictorial depictions. Seeing, and not seeing, are crucial to *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, and a number of techniques are exploited to ensure this desire to experience the 'single eye' remains in focus throughout. Just as Hopkins turned to see who was 'look[ing] east at

⁴¹ 'There seems no reason why the phenomenon [beams or spokes in the eastern sky about sunset, springing from a point due opposite to the sun] should not be common, and perhaps if looked out for it would be found to be. But who looks east at sunset?' This letter, 'A Curious Halo,' appeared in *Nature* in the issue of 16 November 1882, in response to an earlier letter. Reproduced in Appendix II in *Correspondence*: 161.

⁴² 'The Escorial', l. 86. *Works*: 4.

⁴³ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*: 8.

sunset', so a careful reader of his work should pay attention to what we see and what we do not, what he permits us to see and when he turns us away.

The process of seeing is itself a subject within the poem. The speaker in Part I declares that he is 'sóft síft' in a delicate metaphysical conceit of the hourglass of mortality (4/1), but the verbal form of 'sift' here brings with it the notion of examining closely or scrutinizing narrowly. Other variant forms of intensely focused looking are found in 'peeled' (26/4), 'conceivè[d]' (30/6) and 'heeds' (32/8). Not always driven by a specific instruction to see (we recall again Elkin's 'roam[ing]' eyes, free to travel 'where they will'),⁴⁴ sight and vision can also be granted whilst unconscious in 'dréam[s]' (11/5), or just unexpectedly, as described in the notions of 'find'/'finding' (11/1 & 22/1), 'tell[ing]' (16/6), 'appearing' (26/4) and 'loom[ing]' (28/3). However, sight can also be removed or obscured, not only through 'dimness' (35/5) or the dark, but also through the 'stealing' (10/3) of sight, a 'forget[ting]' (11/7), or a distinct attempt to 'hide' (32/8) or 'dazzle' (34/6); poor sight renders the night 'unshapeable' (29/3), and all result in a 'blind[ness]' (19/5). Just like the apostle Thomas and all who doubted the 'risen' (33/7) Christ, Hopkins recalls the need for observable evidence on which to base belief: visible 'mark[s]' (22/3) are necessary as 'Stigma, signal' or 'token' (22/7) to satisfy the unbelieving or faltering eyes.⁴⁵

Predictably for a man so fascinated by the visual world, the eyes themselves do not escape Hopkins's attention. He makes only a single reference to the source of vision (both internal and external) within the ode – the 'single eye' (29/2) – but in the repeated allusions to lacing and binding, we find the 'lash' (8/2), recalling the gentle lids that

⁴⁴ Elkins, *Object Stares Back*: 11-12.

⁴⁵ John 20: 24-29: 'But Thomas, one of the twelve, [...] was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. [...] Then came Jesus [...] and] saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.'

serve to open and close upon the eye, enabling and preventing vision. There is an inevitable thrill of excitement in this unveiling, as the unseen is finally rendered visible in a transforming moment of revelation. However, this moment of visual consummation is never in Hopkins entirely free of its carnal associations. Eyes open at birth, and close at death, but both can be replicated in the epiphanic moment of the 'petit mort', another transforming moment of revelation. In the lacing, binding and lashing of the poem, this is given a specifically masochistic eroticism, as sex, violence and vision become intimately entwined. The repeated references to the speaker, 'I', in Part I also serve to confirm the primacy of the 'eye'. The eye is the source and origin of the tears that flow from the speaker's eyes (18/6), and of the blinding by brine that paradoxically enables the nun to see (19/5). There are numerous references to 'sight' (11/6; 21/7; 28/3) and to 'eyesight' (26/8), and it is the fundamental challenge of struggling to 'see' (19/5 – strengthened throughout the poem by the repeated appearance of the homophone 'sea') that drives the poem and enables the nun finally to face directly into the 'all-fire glances' (23/8).

Like the Pre-Raphaelite painters, Hopkins cares deeply that his poems should be as truthful and faithful as his sight could render them and that 'All things counter, original, spare, strange' should be depicted in their original beauty, however 'dappled' that might be.⁴⁶ One way of ensuring this fidelity of representation is through his meticulous descriptions. Hopkins rarely supplies a conventional description or clichéd adjective; instead he devises compound adjectives to mark minute distinctions: 'dappled-with-damson' (5/5), 'black-backed' (13/5), 'jay-blue' (26/3). Whilst these compounds might at first glance appear to suggest a plethora of colours within his ode, the palette he uses is actually very restricted; the only colours are subtly differentiated versions of red, grey, white and black, with two instances of blue and one of gold. In

⁴⁶ 'Pied Beauty,' l. 7. *Works*: 132-133.

keeping with his desire to reproduce the world as he saw it, not as it is conventionally reproduced, the expected colours of the sea (greens, blues and their compounds) are notably absent. However, although limited in range, the colours he does use are predictably generous in associations, and create an intricate chromatic design.

Unexpectedly perhaps given the shipwreck subject, red is the most frequent colour to appear within the poem, in splendidly varied guises. From the gentle pink of the 'flushed' hearts (6/6) and the 'flush[ed]' man of stanza 8 (l. 5), to the 'rose-flake[s]' (22/8) and the allusion to Christ the 'rose' (35/7), red appears again and again in the text. Crimson (35/5) is the 'cresseted east' of the sunrise and the symbol of rebirth (st. 13, 21, 22, 23, 26, 35), and the red of the sun is also the bright flame of fire (2/8; 10/2; 34/8; 35/8), the cleansing of redemption. However, as Hopkins himself noted, red is also the colour of blood, of bleeding, of pain and of death: 'Blood is red / but only / This blood is red / or / The last blood is red'.⁴⁷ Bloody imagery runs throughout Hopkins's poetry, from the 'bleeding' paintings studied by Philip II, imprisoned and alone in his ekphrastic monument to art and architecture (10/8 & 15/2), and the 'throbbing blood-light' that leaves the playful mermaids as 'gloom'd' as a 'blood-vivid clot' (ll. 16 & 107), to the terrifyingly beautiful blood 'set danc – / Ing' by mortal beauty (ll. 1-2).⁴⁸ However, in a theological profundity that Hopkins was frequently to explore (and even exploit, as we have seen), Christ in his Incarnation took on bodily form, and thus red is also the colour of the Passion, as the 'suffering Christ' (22/2) 'scores it in scarlet himself' (22/5). This sacrifice beyond all others is shadowed and echoed in each and every subsequent sacrifice, even in the 'blue-bleak embers' of 'The Windhover', which 'Fall, gáll themséives' until they 'gásh góld-vermílion'

⁴⁷ Jottings from the notebook of 1868. *Journals*: 127

⁴⁸ 'The Escorial', 'A Vision of the Mermaids', and 'To what serves Mortal Beauty?'. Each of these poems has been discussed earlier in this study.

to display the traditional colours of the martyr.⁴⁹ Whilst *The Wreck* is steeped in the red of blood, gold appears only once. Here the ‘fall-gold mercies’, seen in the ‘all-fire glances’ (23/8) that meet our eyes, call to mind the earlier terrifying vision of ‘the frown of his face’ (3/1), but are now crucially changed.⁵⁰

When a fire is at its most intense, the red of the flames turn to bright white; here the delicate oxymoron of the ‘white-fiery’ (13/7) snow captures the intensity of such a blaze, in addition to the burning coldness as the flakes touch raw exposed skin. This is a re-enactment of baptism, as the wild waters deliver the marks of grace: ‘Storm flakes were scroll-leaved flowers’ (21/8). This is also a baptism through fire as the ‘Wiry and white-fiery [...] snow’ (13/7) recalls the ‘witness’ of the Captain at the Inquiry, but here the white fire of punishment also offers the gentle ‘lily showers’ (21/8) of forgiveness. Associated with virginity and martyrdom (so often entwined as the poem develops), here the ‘scroll-leaved flowers’ carry images of ‘sweet heaven’ ‘astrew in them’; for the five nuns, the lilies offer a further identification with ‘Gertrude, lily’, and even with ‘Christ’s lily’ (20/5, 6). The flowers mark their moment of union in ‘marriage’ to the ‘bridegroom’, Christ, and also anticipate their deaths: white lilies are traditionally the flowers of mourning, and the newspaper account of the funerals relates how the room was decorated with ‘vases of flowers and wreaths of immortelles’, while ‘upon the breast of each lay a cross of white flowers’.⁵¹

Black and grey occur again and again throughout the poem, as would be expected in a text about a steel liner facing the darkness of night and the blinding violence of a storm. Grey is the colour of ageing hair as ‘Hope had grown grey hairs’

⁴⁹ ‘The Windhover’, ll. 13 & 14. *Works*: 132

⁵⁰ Revelation 1: 14-16: ‘His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.’ Much of the imagery and vocabulary of the poem appears inspired by this passage.

⁵¹ Weyand and Schoder, eds., *Immortal Diamond*: 373-374.

(15/1), and also that of the ‘Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey’ (7/3), of a final resting place foreshadowed even before birth. Black is the colour of mourning (15/2), and of the violent waves (13/5) and vicious air (24/5) that bring about death. There are constant references to the darkness of the night and to the darkness of isolation from God, although this darkness and its modifications become a subtle but integral part of the spiritual symbolism of the text.

Stanza 26 stands out within the poem as though struck by a shaft of sunlight; the clouds and the darkness suddenly lift and ‘The down-dugged ground-hugged grey’ that has characterised the poem to this point ‘Hovers off’ (ll. 2, 3). Although we still find the familiar colours of the ode, here they are changed and softened as the bright sunlight of May casts its transforming rays upon them; grey is now a ‘hoary-glow’ (l. 5), and even the dark night is now illuminated with ‘belled fire’ and the tactile ‘moth-soft’ (l. 6) stars of the Milky Way. Hopkins here closely resembles the Pre-Raphaelite painters that he so admired for their fidelity, as he carefully reproduces the brilliance of each colour as distinct and discrete, not blended or ‘bleared, smeared’.⁵²

In this stanza too we find a subtle explanation of the significance of the date – ‘Dec. 6, 7 1875’ – which is not only the historical date of the shipwreck, but also the Eve of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Like ‘Gertrude, lily’ and the five nuns, Mary was a virgin, and the feast on 8 December commemorates her elevation to the status of one ‘preserved exempt from all stain of original sin’:⁵³

Féast of the óne wóman withóut stáin.
For so conceived, so to conceive thee is done;
(30/5-6)

⁵² ‘God’s Grandeur’, l. 6. *Works*: 128.

⁵³ In the Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December, 1854, Pius IX pronounced that the Blessed Virgin Mary ‘in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin’. Information from the article on ‘The Immaculate Conception’ in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Palatino, Illinois: Jack Heraty & Associates, 1981) <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07674d.htm>>.

Here we find Mary in the ‘jay-blue heavens appearing / Of pied and peeled May’ (ll. 3-4). ‘May is Mary’s month’, and blue, in any shade, is also the colour of fidelity traditionally associated with Mary, as confirmed in ‘The May Magnificat’:

Is it only its being brighter
Than the most are must delight her?
Is it opportunist
And flowers finds soonest?⁵⁴

Once again in the reference to ‘jay-blue heavens’ Hopkins’s attention to the minute details that characterise the world is evident: jays (*Garrulus glandarius*) are primarily reddish-brown in appearance, with their plumage bearing bars of jet-black and patches of white.⁵⁵ However, they are distinguished from other similar birds by the strikingly vivid streaks of cobalt blue that edge their wings; it is this that provides the ‘thisness’ of the jay, its ‘inscape’.⁵⁶ The eggs of the bird also capture this chromatic richness: the eggs are a greenish-blue with brown speckles and stand out within the nest like polished stones. With this reference to the ‘jay-blue heavens’, Hopkins has captured both a very specific variation of blue, but more importantly, the delight with which that blue is welcomed as it stands so unexpectedly against the brown plumage; so the brightness of the clear skies is welcomed in the storm narrative as the clouds and the darkness of the stormy night take on the flight of the bird (returning to the jay) and ‘Hover[s] off’ (26/3).

Against the darkness of the murky blacks and greys that have surrounded it, this stanza stands out as a ‘treasure’ (26/8), its brightness made even more vivid by the temporary release from the dark suffering that had preceded it. The vibrant shades here recall the vivid colours of the Renaissance portraits, the ‘Old Masters’ that Hopkins

⁵⁴ ‘The May Magnificat’, l. 1 and ll. 9-12. *Works*: 139-140.

⁵⁵ Information from David Gosney et al., "BirdGuides," (2007) <<http://www.birdguides.com/species/species.asp?sp=173037>>

⁵⁶ In the letter of 7 November 1886 to Patmore, Hopkins defines ‘inscape’ as ‘species or individually-distinctive beauty of style’. *Further Letters*: 373.

loved so well, or the D. G. Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones paintings where the clear blues and white stand out starkly against the neutral earthy shades that surround them.⁵⁷ If this is an apotheosis of Hopkins the would-be painter, it is also from this moment of startling brightness that the poem begins its final transformation. From here to stanza 29 the principal meaning of vision is gradually transformed, as one way of seeing and not seeing is displaced by another.

If Hopkins's colour palette in the poem is surprisingly restricted, the shades depicted are numerous. This is to a large extent due to his careful manipulation of light and shade: this is an ode written by a poet who observed the world around him as richly enhanced by the changing illumination of a 'Landscape plotted and pieced' by the sun.⁵⁸ Hopkins's poem begins in darkness, in the 'walls, altar and hour and night' (2/5), perhaps recalling the chapel at St. Beuno's. However, it should not be assumed that this darkness is calm; the spiritual crisis being experienced by the speaker is embodied in the lightning (2/2 & 9/6) and the 'flash from the flame to the flame' (3/8). Against the 'glory' of the thunder (5/4), we see the 'flash' (8/6) in the 'dark descending' (9/8). So violent are the lights that in this opening MacKenzie finds 'the awful spectacle of the dark lit up by a forest fire, from which the dove flees in terror to the bright beacon on the hilltop'.⁵⁹

Yet the darkness *is* broken – by the gentle light of the stars. As the speaker reaches out to them (5/2; 6/6), he feels the constant presence of God 'wafting [towards] him' out of the 'Starlight' (5/3), and the gentle 'glow' of the stars serves as a repeated reminder that:

⁵⁷ 'I went yesterday to the Junior Water Colours and the British Institution (Old Masters). The latter were charming.' To Baillie, 20 July 1864. *ibid.*: 211.

⁵⁸ 'Pied Beauty', l. 5. *Works*: 132-133.

⁵⁹ Norman H. MacKenzie, "'Thy Dark Descending": Light and Darkness in *The Wreck*', in *Readings of The Wreck: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of G.M. Hopkins' The Wreck of the Deutschland*, ed. Peter Milward, SJ, and Raymond Schoder, SJ (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1976): 18.

His mystery must be in-stressed, stressed;
For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand
(5/7-8)

There are no stars in Part II, and although the darkness continues, the vocabulary changes. Part II opens with the ship drawing out of the German harbour. Although charged with optimism (marked in the quick upsurge in pace at the start of stanza 12 that follows the dreamy autumnal stillness of the end of stanza 11) as this ship sets sail 'On Saturday', there is a 'dark side' to this 'bay' (12/7) and although the funereal 'vault' and even the 'forget[ting]' can be overlooked, there can be no mistaking the sudden darkening as 'Into the snow she sweeps' (13/1). Unable to see 'in the dark' (14/1) and blinded by the sea 'flint-flake' and the 'whirlwind-swivellèd snow' (13/5, 7), the boat is easily misled:

[...] night drew her
Dead to the Kentish Knock;
(14/3-4)

Like the sailors drawn by the alluring songs of the sirens in many a shipwreck narrative, the boat is drawn dangerously off course by personified 'night', until she arrives 'Dead' at the site of the shipwreck.

The ease of the liner earlier as she 'swept' and 'sailed' is now replaced by the laborious 'driving' of the ship, as the lights in the darkness serve only to illuminate more keenly their isolation: 'Nor rescue, only rocket and lightship, shone' (15/6). In so 'frightful a nightfall', all clear sense of time is removed, a disorientation enhanced by the manipulation of the sentence order so that the main verb is frequently held right back. The day that never lightened is replaced by the darkness of night and a full day passes between the wreck of stanza 14 and the night of stanza 15, yet Hopkins makes no reference to its light. No gentle stars shine now, but only the lights of disaster: only the 'flash' (34/8) and 'flames' of the 'storms' (11/2, 3) in the darkness (12/7; 14/1; 33/4; 34/6).

However, in the midst of this desperate ‘brawling’ (19/8), as ‘Night roared’ (17/5), suddenly a worthy challenger appears, ‘a lioness’ (17/7) no less, to take on the thunderous beast of the night. In a paradox that underpins the ode and characterises Hopkins’s entire dialectic of vision, this Sister is able to see clearly, despite the blinding of the ‘rash smart slogging brine’ (19/4), as the repeated ‘one’ confirms: ‘[...] but she that weather sees óne thing, one’ (19/5). Like St. Paul at his conversion, it is only through her blindness that the nun is suddenly enabled to see the light.⁶⁰ As she ‘rears herself to divine / Ears’ (19/6-7), the speaker is mediated to see ‘in thy sight’, as the tall nun calls upon God, ‘Orion of light’ (21/5). Not through the gentle stars, but through the ‘all-fire glances’ (23/8) interceded by this ‘blown beacon of light’ (29/8) is he given the ‘light’ (30/1), but a light adapted to the weakness of his mortality, as Hopkins asserts in the poem dedicated to the ultimate intercessor and witness, Mary:

Through her we may see him
 Made sweeter, not made dim,
 And her hand leaves his light
 Sifted to suit our sight.⁶¹

This notion of the intercessor, granting us mediated access to a divinely-sanctioned vision – ‘sifted to suit our sight’ – is fundamental to both the ode’s content and structure, as we shall see.

As a poem is ‘a picture made out of words’, imagery is clearly fundamental to what a reader ‘sees’.⁶² *The Wreck* utilises three major image themes: water, the human body, and fire, and it is through a complex interplay of these that the two seemingly disparate sections of the poem are united.

⁶⁰ As depicted in Acts 9, 22 and 26.

⁶¹ ‘The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe’, ll. 110-13. *Works*: 158-161.

⁶² C. Day Lewis, cited by M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981): 78.

In a shipwreck narrative, water is inevitably everywhere. It is also deeply implicated in the ritual and symbolism of baptism through which one is 'reborn' into a life in communion with Christ. Water is also the mechanism through which, in the deluge, souls were saved but the world destroyed.⁶³ Within the ode, water is clearly shown destroying life, as the storm devastates the liner and the wild waves 'drown[ed] them' (17/3), yet it is through the blinding brought about by the 'rash smart slogging brine' (19/4) and the tall nun's subsequent baptism into grace that eternal life is granted. These ostensibly opposing impulses of destruction and salvation tug at each other through the narrative until the conclusion aligns them in the same direction. When life and death are not placed in opposition, Hopkins can see a true communion: 'Thou are lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm' (9/6).

Throughout the poem, the mortal body, or 'bower of bone' (18/1), is depicted as very much present, both as a necessary sustainer and also as a restrictive prison to the soul. As we have seen in so much of Hopkins's writing, the spiritual and physical are never to be separated: it is only through a fatal threat to her physical body that the tall nun is finally given spiritual insight. Of course, this emphasis on the elemental restrictions of the corporeal frame is archetypal biblical imagery (Christ as 'the Word made flesh' (John 1:14)) and it is only through escaping his mortal frame that Christ is able to 'easter in us' (35/5). That said, Hopkins's utilisation of this conventional trope is characteristically fleshy.

Part I depicts the trials to which the speaker subjects his body in order to bring about a re-birth of the soul, as he contemplates the fate of the nuns on board the *Deutschland*. The vocabulary is that of punishment and mortification, of binding (1/5), lashing (2/2), lacing (2/8) and ropes (4/6), as the body is constructed as the rack upon which the fleshly clothes that protect and restrain the soul are 'fastened' (1/5).

⁶³ See Genesis 6 and 1 Peter 3: 20.

Corporeal punishment is deployed to figure punishment of the soul, yet, perhaps surprisingly, the speaker submits to it voluntarily:

I did say yes
O at lightning and lashed rod;
Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess
Thy terror, O Christ, O God;
(2/1-4)

The *imitatio Christi* has a long devotional history. However, here the willing submission to the torture of the body brought about through such vibrant punitive energy seems more earthly corporeal than spiritually guided. Again and again the physical body is punished, whipped and beaten, yet the speaker only cries out for more: 'I did say yes'. The body stretches and strains, the bare 'midriff' braced against the 'sweep and the hurl' (2/6), as the tears of fear and pain run together over the 'bound bones' (1/5) of a sweaty body 'laced with fire of stress' (2/8).

Every sense is pushed up to and beyond its limit, until the body so bristles with sensual tension and physical electricity that even the spiritual touch of God is felt like a probing finger touching where 'nothing else can reach':⁶⁴ 'Over again I feel thy finger and find thee' (1/8). So the exhilarating excitement of 'touch' (1/7), 'tongue' (2/3) and 'terror' (2/4) builds and grows, 'sweep[s]' and 'hurl[s]', until a sudden moment of climactic paralysis. In abrupt silence a faltering voice is heard in the darkness: 'where, where was a, where was a place?' (3/3). This quivering moment of vulnerability is fleetingly brief, and finally the speaker bursts free in a desperate exhalation, an orgasmic moment of release:

I whirled out wings that spell
And fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host.
(3/4-5)

⁶⁴ In his spiritual writings 'On Personality, Grace and Free Will', Hopkins describes grace as being 'threefold' – quickening, corrective, and elevating: 'this is truly God's finger touching the very vein of personality, which nothing else can reach and man can respond to by no play whatever, by bare acknowledgement only.' *Sermons*: 146-159, 158.

Finally the two hearts are united, that of God (now in corporeal form with both 'face' and 'heart') and that of the speaker, yet in this process of moving closer together, the fundamental differences are paradoxically made more apparent. Just as the silent watcher in 'Epithalamion' became more detached from the laughing boys the more he sought to imitate them, so the human heart is revealed as ever more flawed and limited the closer it moves towards the heavenly heart. This process can only be completed through the transformations depicted in Part II.

In Part I, bird imagery was used to depict the poet's heart, as it flew 'dovewinged' and 'Carrier-witted' (3/6, 7) in a poor imitation of 'the heart of the Host' (3/5). The 'wings' (3/4) that enable this flight are both those of a bird and the Holy Spirit, again often depicted as a dove, after Luke 3: 22 and Mark 1: 10, particularly by the Pre-Raphaelite painters.⁶⁵ The Holy Spirit also assumes the form both of wind and of fire, from Acts 2: 1-4. As Part II opens, the bird appears initially absent, but there is no doubting the presence of wind and fire. However, in this crucial transitional stanza 26, the gentle bird of Part I suddenly returns, again counter-pointed to the heart. Heart imagery is fundamental to the poem, appearing 18 times. Through this successive series of hearts, the poem gradually aligns the speaker of Part I, the German liner, the nun and finally Christ, until all can be united as the heart 'finds a place' (3/3). It is through the image of the bird that this coronary movement takes place.

The image of the heart is in itself ultimately paradoxical because it represents the origin of spiritual and mortal life equally, and operates too as a sign of spiritual stress. It combines the ambiguity of the physical organ, wayward and vulnerable to emotions and corruption, with the dignity of the seat of the soul, the element necessary

⁶⁵ Images of a bird and especially a dove recur again and again throughout the Bible, often combined with the notion of a retreat to rest and solace, often in the arms of the beloved. See especially Genesis 8, Psalm 55 and Song of Songs.

for an affective response to the Divine. This is an ambiguity Cohen attributes to the body in general:

The body is the route through which human beings encounter the godhead; the problem is that the body also incarcerates the soul, corrupting it through the occasions the body supplies for taint and temptation.⁶⁶

This problem is encapsulated in its purest form in the doctrine of the Incarnation. In order to fulfil his divine function, God had to take on mortal form, assuming the weak and confining human flesh to bring about spiritual liberty; he had to die in order to experience a bodily resurrection. The necessity of the spirit having to reside in the 'bone-house' (l. 2, another kenning inspired by Hopkins's interest in Anglo-Saxon poetry) but not be 'cumbered' by it is the subject of 'The Caged Skylark' of August 1877:

Man's spirit will be flesh-bound, when found at best,
But uncumberèd: meadow-dówn is nó distréssed
For a ráinbow fóoting it nor hé for his bónes rísen.⁶⁷

This is a fundamental paradox that inspired Hopkins throughout his life, as we have seen. The human body was both beautiful and yet supremely dangerous. Mortal beauty could foreshadow divine beauty, yet it could also displace the eyes from their heavenly goal. This ambiguity both terrified and delighted Hopkins in equal measure.

Body imagery does not disappear when the ode moves away from the speaker and onto the narrative of the shipwreck. The vulnerability and weakness of a life based in flesh is made all too clear by the personified figure of Death who opens the second half of *The Wreck*:

'Some find me a sword; some
The flange and the rail; flame,
Fang, or flood' goes Death on drum,
And storms bugle his fame.

(11/1-4)

In Part I, death was merely a presentiment, but here at the opening of Part II it must be confronted face to face. The trials endured by the speaker, the heart fleeing desperately

⁶⁶ Cohen, *Embodied*: 113.

⁶⁷ 'The Caged Skylark', ll. 12-14. *Works*: 133.

in search of refuge, are here echoed by the steel ‘body’ of the liner, as ‘Into the snow she sweeps, / Hurling the Haven behind’ (13/1-2).

Like the terror experienced by the speaker in Part I, the liner’s trials build up to provoke another moment of ecstatic revelation. As the speaker’s heart breaks free of the corporeal binds, so the ‘tall nun’ appears to transcend her mortal frame, becoming first a ‘lioness’ (17/7), then a ‘prophetess’ (17/8) and finally a ‘virginal tongue’ (17/8). Recalling the Pentecostal fire that enabled those touched by the Holy Spirit to speak in multiple tongues, she overcomes her physical weakness as a woman blinded by the ‘rash smart slogging brine’ (19/4) to stretch up ‘to divine / Ears’ (19/6-7), her voice carrying clearly above the noise of the storm. At this climactic moment, in a resonant duplication of the sudden paralysis of Part I, the narrative suddenly cuts away to the speaker ‘Away in the loveable west, / On a pastoral forehead of Wales’ (24/1-2). His physical comfort is contrasted to her suffering, and he calls out for an intermediary to translate her words: ‘The majesty! what did she mean?’ (25/1). No immediate reply is given, and it is not until stanza 30 that the answer is provided: these are the crucial stanzas of transition from a sight reliant on intercession and translation to a sight ‘right’. Only through her testimony can the speaker come to see.

As the nun’s physical body is threatened, the ode returns to the erotic language of the opening. Displacing the speaker from Part I, the nun now places herself as lover and bride of Christ. Again physical and spiritual suffering and excitement are inextricably linked, as the virginal bride faces her wedding night, with emphasis once again on Christ’s suffering and the pain endured by the corporeal body:

Is it love in her of the being as her lover had been?
Breathe, body of lovely Death.
(25/3-4)

Once more the willing assent to a climax of pleasurable tortuous suffering induces a state of brief paralysis. Even the tongue is silenced as language falters and fails:

But how shall I ... make me room there:
Reach me a ... Fancy, come faster –
(28/1-2)

It is the sudden movement of the heart that enables the breaking free from these limitations, and its replacement by something greater:

Ah, there was a heart right!
There was single eye!
(29/1-2)

Through the death of the nun, the speaker finds he is 'new born to the world' (34/1), and through her vision he is able to overcome his own blindness. There is thus a complex interplay between the submission to, and the transcendence of, the physical limitations of the temporal frame ('I am sóft sift / In an hourglass' (4/1-2)), and with it, an acute awareness of, and indeed excitement in, the dangers inherent in sensation, however pleasurable: 'a winter and warm' (9/6). Seeing and speaking are continually intertwined, and inappropriate use of one always renders the other useless. This central concern with seeing and with witness is intimately bound up with the role of the martyr, which shares its linguistic etymology with 'witness' being one who 'bears witness for their belief' (*OED*). The very different kind of seeing this invokes can be usefully explored through a brief consideration of Hopkins's quartet of poems dedicated to St. Dorothea, another significant female witness and martyr, which has a significant bearing on the martyrology of *The Wreck*, as we shall see.

... *My eyes hold yet the rinds ...*⁶⁸

Between December 1864 and September 1871, Hopkins completed four poems (or four drafts of a single poem) about Saint Dorothea.⁶⁹ Although significantly earlier than *The Wreck*, they share many of the same concerns, and demonstrate an early attempt to engage with matters that were to remain central to his work: sight and vision, witness, danger and sexuality. Hopkins was to remain fond of these poems throughout his life: in 1884 he wrote to Bridges that he ‘disavow[ed]’ his earlier work, except for two pieces which he was considering retouching – ‘Elected silence’ and ‘St. Dorothy’.⁷⁰ Dorothea refused to marry, considering herself already engaged as the Bride of Christ, and for this she was beheaded. Moments after her death an angel appeared, delivering a basket of unseasonal flowers and fruit to the doubting pagan lawyer, Theophilus, just as Dorothea had promised; for this miracle and her martyrdom she was canonised. All versions of the poem share a central concern with testimony, and the role of the witness and martyr. This fascination with the spaces between the seen and the unseen, the spoken and the unspoken, and the interplay between witness, vision and danger in these poems provide useful insights into the complexities of *The Wreck*.

The first draft of the poem, ‘For a Picture of St. Dorothea’, was completed in December 1864, and is one of three poems (out of the four) that appears ekphrastic in origin. The painting the poem references has not been identified; there may have been an existing work that provided the inspiration for the poem, or as some suggest, perhaps Hopkins himself intended to paint such a picture, an example of Altick’s

⁶⁸ ‘Lines for a Picture of St. Dorothea,’ ll. 33. *ibid.*: 84.

⁶⁹ ‘For a Picture of St. Dorothea’, ?November/December 1864; ‘A basket broad of woven white rods’, 2-12 March 1865; ‘Lines for a Picture of St. Dorothea’, 7 August 1868; ‘St. Dorothea (Lines for a Picture)’, ?September 1870-September 1871. *ibid.*: 48, 61, 84-85, 90-91.

⁷⁰ 30 September 1884. *Letters*: 198.

notional ekphrasis.⁷¹ In either case, this title instantly alerts the reader to the visual dimensions of the text, and to its central concern with sight, its possibilities and inherent dangers.

The poem opens in the first person, although as it progresses this relationship between narrator, reader and some other figure becomes less clear. The speaker provides a detailed commentary, yet it is striking that all the details so carefully expounded are actually those that should be immediately visible without verbal explanation:

I bear a basket lined with grass;
I am so light, I am so fair.

‘For a Picture of St. Dorothea’ (ll. 1-2)⁷²

This verbalisation of the supposedly visible continues, as the speaker describes the reaction provoked in others by her appearance (‘men must wonder as I pass’, l. 3) and by the miraculous basket that she carries. The reader is thus left with no certainty over what he should be able to see, what the speaker intends him to see, and what the poem would have him see.

Exacerbating this visual uncertainty, the narrator begins a playful trick: first lilies are presented – ‘Lilies I shew you’ – and then instantly removed from sight – ‘lilies none’ (l. 7). Already the reader is questioning what he sees, uncertain whether or not to trust the visual scene before him, yet the poem continues, and quickly the enjambment reveals more optical trickery:

⁷¹ It is worth briefly mentioning Edward Burne-Jones’s painting, first entitled ‘St. Dorothea’, later ‘St. Theophilus and the Angel’. This painting was first exhibited in the summer exhibition of the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours in 1867. We know that Hopkins attended this exhibition in 1866, and Hopkins notes that he has seen paintings by Burne-Jones in both 1866 (*Journals*: 358) and 1886 (*Correspondence*: 136) but there is a gap in his journal from 6 August 1866 to 10 July 1867, so it is not known whether he attended the exhibition in 1867 or saw the painting. Hopkins may have read Ruskin’s review (*Modern Art*, Ruskin, *Works of Ruskin*: 19: 211-212), but as Hopkins produced his first draft before it was first exhibited, and the scene depicted in the Burne-Jones’s painting is slightly earlier than the scenes captured in any of Hopkins’s drafts, this seems unlikely.

Catherine Phillips provides some discussion of possible sources in her edition of the works (*Works*: 323), as does MacKenzie, ‘Hopkins and St. Dorothea’, 22 (Footnote 6). MacKenzie argues that Hopkins himself intended to complete the picture.

⁷² ‘For a Picture of St. Dorothea’. *Works*: 48.

Lilies I shew you, lilies none,
None in Caesar's gardens blow, –
And a quince in hand, – not one
Is set upon your boughs below;

(ll. 7-10)

Suddenly the supposedly absent lilies are revealed again – these lilies are present, as they always have been, but other lilies are absent: 'None in Caesar's gardens blow' (l. 8). The verbal/visual illusion is then repeated with the quince. This is not a revealing and then removing from sight as it first appeared, but rather a gentle trick at the expense of the reader who is able only to see the poem as lines on a page. This playful exploration of the reliability or otherwise of sight is not unlike the process explored in Sonnet 2 of 'To Oxford'. That poem's problems with architectural 'levels' and 'vigorous horizontals' (ll. 2 & 3) are echoed in the structural architecture and enjambment of the Dorothea poem which also recalls the childlike delight taken in the 'repeated topsyturvy' sights reflected 'in fairy Penmaen Pool'.⁷³

This exploration of the reliability of sight continues as the mocking lawyer, Theophilus, is suddenly confronted by a vision of the impossible: flowers and fruit despite the inclement season. The speaker at first questions himself and those around him, before eventually supplying a more rational explanation for the impossible vision. He suggests that this is not an unseasonal quince but the far more likely moon:

Had she a quince in hand? Yet gaze:
Rather it is the sizing moon.

(ll. 19-20)

Although the speaker is temporarily satisfied, ultimately he cannot dismiss the evidence of his eyes:

[...] So soon?
Sphered so fast, sweet soul? – We see
Nor fruit, nor flowers, nor Dorothy.

(ll. 22-24)

It is only as the vision is taken away that he is suddenly able to see and understand its miraculous nature.

⁷³ *ibid.*: 62-63. 'Penmaen Pool', ll. 15, 16. *Works*: 123-125.

In later drafts, this astonishing vision leads to a further miraculous transformation, as the speaker becomes, like Captain Brickenstein and the tall nun, a witness: ‘One who is or was present and is able to testify from personal observation; one present as a spectator’ (*OED*). However, in an unforeseen side-effect, in gaining insight the speaker is rendered speechless. Despite the treasured vision, or rather perhaps because of it, he can present no testimony, as the repeated uncertain questioning reveals:

How to name it, blessed it!
Suiting its grace with *him* or *her*?
‘Lines for a Picture of St. Dorothea’ (ll. 25-26)⁷⁴

What value is vision and spectacle if it renders the witness unable to testify? Theophilus, the eloquent and erudite lawyer, struggles desperately to articulate his vision, his speech lapsing into the legal vocabulary of ‘writs’ and ‘parleys’ with which he is most comfortable. Finally the only evidence he can present is that of his wordless tears:

My eyes hold yet the rinds and bright
Remainder of a miracle.
O this is bringing! Tears may swarm
Indeed while such a wonder’s warm.
(ll. 33-36)

He finds himself speechless, with only the physical evidence of the elemental ‘river of youth’ (*The Wreck*, 18/7). Paradoxically, it is only as speech is taken away that he is suddenly able to understand its imperfect and limited nature: ‘And wordy warrants are flawed through’ (l. 38). Words are not to be trusted, but the eyes hold yet the ‘bright / Remainder of a miracle,’ the perfect form of optical witness.

This tension between words and sight, seeing and articulating, and the dangers of each, is developed throughout *The Wreck*, where again there is a central concern with types of testimony. Just as Theophilus can ultimately only offer testimony through his

⁷⁴ *Works*: 84-85.

wordless tears, so the tall nun remains silent in her suffering until blinded by ‘the rash smart slogging brine’ (19/4), as the waves of the wild ocean mix with the ‘river of youth’ of the speaker’s tears. As her sight is removed, the nun becomes concentrated into her most elemental being – ‘a virginal tongue’ (17/8), the very basis of speech and of sound. Paradoxically, it is through her calls that carry ‘over the storm’s brawling’ (19/8) and her intercessions to God that this tongue, brought about through blindness, is able gradually to engender sight. Those who hear her calls, either directly or through the recorded words of the poem, are invited to look through her eyes: this is her witness and testimony. Like the Dorothea poems, *The Wreck* toys with the interplay between the various senses, even offering such visual/oral puns as the ‘tell[ing]’ of the sailor (16/6), and the ‘peeled’/‘pealed’ skies of May (26/4). In both, this correspondence between seeing and speaking is revealed as fundamental to a true and ‘right’ (29/1) Christian existence.

Theophilus and the tall nun act as mediators between their various senses, and between themselves and those who listen and watch. This role as mediator is fundamental to a saint, who has a primary duty in the Catholic Church to approach God on behalf of those who pray for their assistance, and it is for this that the nun offers her vision. Just as Mary ‘sifts’ the light with her hand to render it fit for weak human eyes, so the nun offers her eyes to enable the speaker (and through him, the reader) access to a vision normally closed;⁷⁵ similarly, through the intercession of Saint Dorothea, Theophilus is granted a vision which his eyes preserve as evidence.⁷⁶ This figure of the intercessor, martyr, and witness, is presented variously throughout *The Wreck* as Mary, Christ, Gertrude and the tall nun, and it is through the witness that comes about through

⁷⁵ ‘The Blessed Virgin Mary’, ll. 110-13. *ibid.*: 158-161.

⁷⁶ Hopkins was fascinated by the saints, and all but one (St. Alphonsus) of the saints that he makes subjects of his poems were martyrs (or witnesses) of the Church – St. Dorothea, St. Thecla, St. Winifred and Margaret Clitheroe. It is worth noticing that these are Hopkins’s only significant poems concerning women.

adoption of their saintly/virginal eyes that the speaker is granted an insight into the spiritual narrative of the poem, in the service of the ‘single eye’ (29/2). This process – the movement during which one sort of seeing is replaced by a very different sort of seeing – occurs at the focal centre of the ode, stanzas 26-29.

During this central transitional passage, the speaker is gradually drawn closer and closer to the nun, until he is suddenly and miraculously able to see through her eyes – ‘in thý sight’ (21/7). The faltering vocabulary of poor visibility in stanza 2 is rapidly replaced by the confident articulation of a witness putting forward his testimony: ‘There then!’ (28/4). To articulate this transformation, the poem returns to the vocabulary of light and illumination used at the start, though the light is now that of God as Creator and Redeemer, ‘incarnate shining in stars, storms, sunsets of nature’.⁷⁷ On its return this vocabulary is crucially changed: the terrifying flames of MacKenzie’s ‘forest fire’ have become a ‘maiden-furled / Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame’ (34/3-4), and the thunder that served as a fanfare to signal the speaker’s acceptance of God (5/4) is now that of the ‘thunder-throne’ (34/5):

Not a dooms-day dazzle in his coming nor dark as he came;
Kind, but royally reclaiming his own;
(34/6-7)

In Part I the speaker had tentatively declared, ‘Thou art lightning and love’ (9/6), but this is now visibly demonstrated:

A released shówer, let flásh to the shíre, not a lightning of fire hard-húrléd.
(34/8)

No longer reliant on ‘wordy warrants’ or anguished prayers in the darkness, the tall nun knows her physical testimony is heard ‘truer than tongue confess’ (2/3). Through the cries of her ‘virginal tongue’ she is able to bring about enhanced vision through the ‘single eye’ (29/2) of the spiritual imagination. Her witness serves as a ‘blown beacon of light’ (29/8) and her flame is fanned to greater heights by the wind and ‘infinite air’

⁷⁷ Heuser, *Shaping Vision*: 44.

(13/4). As her flames brought light by which to see, so through her mediation she brings sight to others. Through her baptism in water (a spiritual rebirth through death), a baptism in fire is re-enacted; through the illumination of these flames, the tall nun serves as 'a dayspring to the dimness of us' (35/5). Hopkins makes her martyrdom ensure this testimony.

Whilst Hopkins frequently takes great delight in the pleasurable potential of sight, it is in *The Wreck* that he presents sight in its purest and most elemental form. *The Wreck* features no displacement of sight, or of desire, but rather depicts looking straight into the face of God. This terrifying vision, the source of both death and life, is paradoxically also the sight most yearned for by any Christian. Once again danger, death and desire are intimately entwined, and yet all are focused on a single end, a single vision – the sight of God. *The Wreck* depicts this process in its purest, more beautiful, and yet most dangerous, form.

... *There was single eye!* ...⁷⁸

Hopkins was, to an extraordinary degree, a visual poet with a complex investment in the dramatic nature of vision, as I have argued throughout this study. The very intensity and scale of *The Wreck* makes a particularly vivid case of this, as does its subject, a ship in danger.

From its very conception, Hopkins made clear that *The Wreck* was a poem to which sight was integral. His first reader, Robert Bridges, was unenthusiastic about it, while Canon Dixon expressed similar reservations, and Hopkins's replies to them, in different ways, heavily stressed the visual. To Bridges, Hopkins wrote an extended analogy, comparing the 'thickening and clouding' effect of reading the poem on the mind with the experience undergone by vessels such as 'The Deutschland' and those 'sailing from the port of London'.⁷⁹ Initially, Hopkins reminds Bridges, the water taken aboard was filthy, made up of 'vulgar mudbottom and common sewage' which was 'foul and stunk at first'. However, within a few days, the water would 'settle', becoming 'very pure and sweet and wholesomer and better than any water in the world'. This intensely evocative visual description of the water gradually changing to take on a different and altered appearance – an increased degree of clarity – is a revealing analogy for the carefully constructed experience of reading the ode. On this model murky confusion, 'clouding' and opacity give way to glorious insight.

Hopkins's response to Canon Dixon's guarded praise of the poem was equally revealing.⁸⁰ He explained the genesis of the poem, and the 'haunting [...] echo' that was

⁷⁸ 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', 29/1.

⁷⁹ 13 May 1878. *Letters*: 50-51.

⁸⁰ 'The Deutschland is enormously powerful: it has however such elements of deep distress in it that one reads it with less excited delight though not with less interest than the others. I hope that you will accept the tribute of my deep and intense admiration.' 1 March 1880. *Correspondence*: 32-33.

to become the poem's distinctive rhythm.⁸¹ However, Hopkins's account of these auditory effects is given an explicitly ocular twist, as he discloses his fears that the poem 'could not but dismay an editor's eye'. Whilst this is to some degree a reflection on the poem's unorthodox appearance in manuscript, with a varying left-hand margin and idiosyncratically coloured diacritical marks,⁸² it also reflects Hopkins's characteristic insistence on the primacy of the 'eye' throughout this deeply personal, intensely 'I'-driven work. Even the title intimates the visual intensity and complexity of the work, as the reader 'reck[s]' the account of the wreck.⁸³

Hopkins's ode is not simply an account of a shipwreck. Although it takes as its genesis an historical event mediated through eye-witness accounts of others, the ode is far removed from the factual accounts of the news reporters. Hopkins, the journalists, and the newspaper artists are united by a shared desire to reconstruct the event, but according to very different criteria. 'Sift[ing]' (4/1) through the newspaper cuttings, as the newspaper illustrator sifted through the 'immensity of detail' at the wreckage, and the wreckers through the abandoned luggage and valuables on the shipwrecked vessel, Hopkins lifts words, phrases, details and images, and re-positions them within his own scene/'seen'.⁸⁴ Not bound by the need to follow any one, single, witness account, the ode presents a shifting kaleidoscope of sights and scenes and the influences of the reported eye-witness accounts wash across the poem as 'The breakers rolled on her beam' (14/6). Furthermore, floating only slightly beneath the surface of the poem are the submerged narratives of the many witnesses and survivors, and their accounts of

⁸¹ 5 October 1878. *ibid.*: 14-15.

⁸² For further information on the appearance of the poem in both manuscript and print, see MacKenzie's introduction to Hopkins, *Poetical Works*: xxxiv, and Randall McLeod, 'Gerard Hopkins and the Shapes of His Sonnets', in *Voice, Text, Hypertext: Emerging Practices in Textual Studies*, ed. Raimonda Modiano, Leroy F. Searle, and Peter Shillingsburg (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁸³ 'God's Grandeur': 'Why do men then now not reckon his rod?' (l. 4). *Works*: 128. 'Reck' can be understood as 'To heed, regard, or care for (something); to concern oneself with, be troubled by, take notice of', as well as 'to destroy' (*OED*).

⁸⁴ Street, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*: 162.

those who died, and it is through the complex interplay of these different forms of testimony that the ode achieves its final design, interweaving reportage with witness in many senses.

For Hopkins, this working together of multiple narratives was directly implicated with questions about vision:

My thought is that [...] there are – usually; I will not say always [...] two strains of thought running together and like counter pointed; the overthought that which everybody, editors, *see* [...] the other, the underthought, conveyed chiefly in the choice of metaphors etc used and often only half realized by the poet himself.⁸⁵

This ‘overthought’ is, as Holloway notes, ‘the obvious paraphrasable parts of the ode, what we might call the literal meanings’ which ‘everybody see[s]’.⁸⁶ In *The Wreck*, this comprises the historical account of the German liner and her passengers and crew, including the tale of the five drowned German nuns. However, it is in the richly complex ‘underthought’, ‘often only half realized by the poet himself’, that the contrapuntal force of *The Wreck* lies. Hopkins’s poem has at least two, if not three, clear strains sustained within this underthought. These under- and over-thoughts are not to be seen as simply running parallel or reinforcing each other, but as ‘counter-pointed’, independent melodies working around the same pulse. The tension between these narratives generates the bristling sense of danger that runs throughout the work, as we will see.

The first narrative is the account of the shipwreck and the drowning of ‘five Franciscan nuns’. This is constantly buffeted by an underthought beneath it, a story of the nuns’ spiritual death and rebirth. This is primarily revealed through ‘the choice of metaphors’ (already discussed), but it is also figured by a third grand narrative which weaves through the poem: the triumphant theological story of the

⁸⁵ 14 January 1883. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 252. Emphasis mine.

⁸⁶ Marcella M. Holloway, “‘The Rarest-Veinèd Unraveller’”: Hopkins as Best Guide to *The Wreck*’, in *Readings of The Wreck: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of G.M. Hopkins' The Wreck of the Deutschland*, ed. Peter Milward SJ and Raymond Schoder SJ (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1976): 92.

Redemption of humankind by the sacrifice of Christ.⁸⁷ The nuns may experience a spiritual rebirth, but this can only come about because of the ‘Lovescape crucified’ (23/4); only because of this ‘seal’ are the nuns ‘sisterly sealed in wild waters’ (23/7). For a Roman Catholic, this self-sacrificial love is demonstrated in the re-enactment of the Passion of the Last Supper, where the priest repeats the words of Christ, as death, birth, body and blood come together in a visible demonstration of Divine Love as the Eucharistic Host is elevated: ‘Drink ye all of this. For this is my blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins.’⁸⁸

The fourth narrative is the personal struggle of the poet, foregrounded explicitly in Part I. The speaker’s struggles are precisely located in physical time and place, and this moment is clear for all to ‘see’. However, this narrative (the overthought of Part I) is additionally presented throughout Part II, as an underthought to the struggle of the nuns. This is demonstrated visibly: as the nun cries out to God – ‘The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best’ (24/8) – so the poet similarly yields himself to the ‘worst Best’:

I did say yes
O at lightning and lashed rod;
(2/1-2)

The parallel cries of the two speakers enable us to see the opposing nature of their analogous battles. Their testimonies grant authority to the vision. However, the ‘walls, altar and hour and night’ (2/5) also carry their own underthought, as the reader comes to see that the grand narrative of the Redemption is counterpointed against the speaker’s personal crisis. Furthermore, beneath the historical account of the shipwreck is the story of the spiritual death and rebirth of the nuns. Every narrative carries at least one underthought, and is also itself an underthought to another. Thus ‘seeing’ is presented as a way of putting together a play of narratives, of locating and observing the

⁸⁷ 14 January 1883. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 252.

⁸⁸ Matthew 26: 27-28.

interpenetration of them all. The poet and the witness are inextricably linked, both by the complex interplay of narratives within the poem, and by its compositional process.

Ultimately the multiple submerged narratives of *The Wreck* make available no authoritative interpretation, as the many divergent critical analyses of this work make clear. Each is complete in itself, whilst also serving a triumphal central narrative. The climactic moment of vision within the poem is the point at which it suddenly becomes possible to see the inter-penetration of all four. Paradoxically, this comes about through a moment of blindness, when the tall nun loses her sight as the enraged ocean 'blind[s] her' (19/5); through her blindness she becomes nothing more than 'a virginal tongue' (17/8), yet through her testimony she is able to share her mediated insight. Through her cries to God, her intercessions gradually enable those around to adopt her eyes (28/1-4), thereby gaining access to a privileged vision (encapsulated in 28/5). We who are witnesses to the nun's revelations find ourselves suddenly able to see and to understand the multiple narratives that penetrate the ode, and in Hopkins's eyes, the world: 'There was single eye!' (29/2).

For Hopkins, as a Jesuit priest, this underwriting of seeing by religious witness is fundamental. Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* required the exercitant to visualise the scene under contemplation, and then to consider the impact of this 'picture' on each of the senses in turn.⁸⁹ This process is to be followed by a contemplation of the significance of the event, and of its impact on his own life. The influence of this pattern is very clear in Hopkins's retreat notes, particularly his Meditations 'On Hell' and 'On Death',

⁸⁹ 'For a visual contemplation or meditation, the picture is an imaginative representation of the physical place where the event to be contemplated occurs. By physical place I mean, e.g. a temple or mountain where Jesus Christ our Lord is, as demanded by the subject-matter'. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, translated by Thomas Corbishley, SJ (1963), 30-32. Cited by Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 344.

but can also be seen replicated in many of his poems, as numerous critics have noted.⁹⁰

The Wreck provides a particularly fine example of just such a meditative approach, with numerous appeals to the senses (as documented), and the need then to locate this experience in both time and place, as demonstrated in Part I.

That these engagements with the senses and examinations of consciousness could at times prove overwhelmingly powerful for Hopkins is demonstrated in the account he gives of almost fainting away after a particularly vivid dream and the occasions when he longs desperately for blindness or even death when confronted with such visual horrors as the ‘maim[ing]’ of the ashtree in his garden.⁹¹ Other times he is moved to tears through hearing about the suffering of others, including the account of De Rancé’s ‘final conversion’, or when listening to a series of intense visions of ‘the dense and the driven Passion, and frightful sweat’ (7/5) experienced by a female Catholic ecstatic:⁹²

One day in the Long Retreat (which ended on Xmas Day) they were reading in the refectory Sister Emmerich’s account of the Agony in the Garden and I suddenly began to cry and sob and could not stop. [...] I remember much the same thing on Maundy Thursday when the presanctified Host was carried to the sacristy.⁹³

⁹⁰ Particular studies of the influence of Ignatius on Hopkins have been made by, amongst others: David A. Downes, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of His Ignatian Spirit* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1959); Elizabeth W. Schneider, *Dragon in the Gate*; Donald Walhout, *Send my Roots Rain: A Study of Religious Experience in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Athens and London: Ohio University Press, 1981); Philip A. Ballinger, *The Poem as Sacrament: The Theological Aesthetic of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Louvain: Peeters, 2000); Tomiko Hirata, *Dimensions of Hopkins’ Poetry* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 2003).

Jerome Bump’s work always places Hopkins’s Catholicism as central to his life and work. Michael Wheeler provides a specific consideration in his chapter on *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (*Death and the Future Life*: 341-366), as does Catherine Phillips in the Introduction to her volume of his works (*Works*: xviii-xxiii).

⁹¹ 23 December 1869. *Journals*: 193-194.

‘I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not to see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more.’ 8 April 1873. Hopkins, *Notebooks*: 174. Many additional examples were provided in Chapter Three in relation to crowds and industrialised cities.

⁹² 13 March 1872. *Journals*: 218.

⁹³ 23 December 1869. *Notebooks*: 128.

It is clear that stimulation of the senses, directly or through the work of the imagination, could invoke a powerful physical response in the hyper-sensitive priest-poet. Hopkins struggles at times to analyse or justify the strength of his response – ‘I stood in a manner wondering at myself not seeing in my reason the traces of an adequate cause for such strong emotion’ – but there is little evidence here that he sought to quell or control it, despite the intensely rigorous rules and regulations he generally placed on himself, as seen in his early obsessive journal notations.⁹⁴ This moment of surprised wonderment is echoed in the heart’s response to the suffering of those aboard *The Deutschland*: ‘Why, tears! is it? tears’ (18/6). That these emotions are embraced, however unexpectedly they arise, is not surprising for a man for whom sensual stimulation, replete with all its associated dangers, was central. *The Wreck* provides a powerful illustration of this, demonstrating particularly clearly his anxious investment in the complex dialectic of sight in its various manifestations, occasioned by a narrative of mortal danger.

Hopkins was driven throughout his life by beauty and also by the responsibilities of the perceiving individual to identify and respond appropriately to it, as many of his poems testify. However, this dynamic was far from straightforward for the scrupulous poet since, as I argued in my introduction, though Hopkins shared his period’s intense investment in visual culture, he was particularly ‘eye-driven’ in his unique brand of ‘photo-eroticism’.⁹⁵ Rosenberg is correct to identify the ‘erotic’ nature of this desire, as for Hopkins this compulsion to look was certainly driven by love – of nature, of mankind, and above all of beauty – but there is undoubtedly a passionate, sensual and even sexual, element to this love, as I have shown. Furthermore, Hopkins’s work is dominated by a clear acknowledgement of the danger of this love, and the thrill of this danger.

⁹⁴ *ibid.* .

⁹⁵ Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age*: 154. See also the Introduction of this thesis for further discussion of this ‘photo-eroticism’.

For Hopkins, beauty was dangerous, as we know from ‘To what serves mortal beauty?’; indeed the very process of looking was fraught with difficulty, as we have seen. However, they were also both endlessly appealing. Throughout his life he sought out beauty, and in beauty he found danger. Both beauty and danger drove the characteristic desire to look further. If *The Wreck* encapsulates this paradox, it also demonstrates another alternative equally central facet to Hopkins’s looking. In this study we have been primarily concerned with what Hopkins saw as the danger of beauty. In *The Wreck*, this dynamic changes: it turns on the beauty of danger.

The Wreck takes as its starting point the newspaper accounts of a genuine human crisis, as the passengers and crew aboard a stricken ship confront the real and imminent likelihood of their deaths. However, through a series of generic and typological transformations, Hopkins reconstructs this event within a baroque narrative of martyrdom and Christian triumph. Indeed Wheeler argues that ‘the *Wreck* is essentially a religious poem into which documentary data are interpolated’.⁹⁶ Whilst this movement from the documentary to the visionary is absolutely typical of Hopkins as a religious poet for whom the underwriting of seeing by religious witness is fundamental, it is also possible to identify an additional dynamic in play, as the ‘zest, [...] edge, [and] ecstasy’ associated with ‘The turmoil and the torment’ of both danger and beauty reveal.⁹⁷

In a shipwreck narrative, catastrophe and danger are clearly central. The poem blinds with the flashes of lightning and of flames through the darkness, and deafens with the ‘hurling and horrible airs’ (15/8), the ‘wailing’ and ‘crying’ of the drowning passengers (17/6), and the groans and cracks as the very structure of the ship, the poem, and seemingly, the world, breaks up. Whereas the newspaper reports tend to concentrate on specific accounts of individual suffering, the ode reconstructs this at a far more elemental level, turning the narrative into a celebratory ode of victorious rebirth and a

⁹⁶ Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life*: 355.

⁹⁷ *St. Winefred’s Well*, Act II, Scene C, ll. 68 & 67. *Works*: 161-165.

paean 'to the happy memory' of the martyred nuns. It could be argued that this determination on the part of the poet to ensure that the visually recreated story of crisis and catastrophe must be read *only* as a celebratory account of triumph and redemption introduces a further element of danger into the poem, as the complex underplay of narratives reveals. The ode is electric with excitement and exhilaration, as it insists on the triumphant joy of Christian recognition. However, there is something potentially dangerously egocentric and self-fulfilling in this determined insistence on immortal beauty in the face of mortal danger.

The martyrdom of the five nuns ('exiles by the Falck Laws': it was their Catholic faith that ultimately led to their death, as stanza 21 makes clear) forms the overthought to Part II of the ode, but this section is underscored throughout by the poet's personal struggle in Wales 'under a roof' and 'at rest' (24/3). This alignment between the spiritual and emotional crisis of the poet and the desperate suffering of the nuns, in mortal danger at sea, is inherently dubious, but even more so when the masochistic excitement of Part I is recalled. The speaker who leaned forward again and again with every muscle of the eager 'flesh' quivering to 'say yes / O at lightning and lashed rod' (2/1-2) is explicitly aligned with those being broken and destroyed by the lightning and lashings of waves, wind and breaking ship. This is taken even further, when the tall nun's physical suffering is subsumed within her metaphysical triumph, and the cries of the drowning passengers at the very heart of the poem are banished beneath the rapturous calls of the tall nun. Speaker and nun become inseparable as the excitement builds to ecstasy and blindness brings vision. Following in a long tradition of ecstatic female martyrs and witnesses, in a climactic moment of stumbling speech, the tall nun through her blindness recognises the figure of 'Christ, King, Head' (28/5). Everything is temporarily suspended in a moment of heightened tension until the orgasmic moment of recognition and release.

Here the nun (and through her, the poet) confronts the vision for which every element of her being has yearned: the figure of ‘the Master, / *Ipse*, the only one, Christ, King, Head’ (28/4-5). This is a moment of almost unimaginable danger, and thus also, for Hopkins, breathtakingly beautiful. That everything that makes life beautiful must be surrendered in the name of this vision is a sacrifice he is willing to make time and time again, as he reaches out his quivering form towards God: ‘Over again I feel thy finger and find theé’ (1/8). Hopkins, like all Christians, understood that both ‘suffering’ and ‘Sacrifice’ (22/2 & 4) must be endured in the name of this vision. However, it is characteristic of Hopkins that this suffering is frequently understood as beautiful in itself. There is danger in beauty, but there is also a great beauty in danger, and Hopkins looked out eagerly for both.

As a young man, Hopkins was undoubtedly ‘eye-driven’, permitting and indeed enabling (through his careful study of art and artists) his eyes to ‘wánder [...] on the world’.⁹⁸ Driven by a seemingly insatiable appetite for beauty, his eyes avidly scoured the world and everything within it, alighting jubilantly on beauty in all its manifestations. However, with such a growing ‘treasury of explored beauty’ came an increasingly strong sense of anxiety, as the risks of looking, and particularly of looking at beauty, became ever more and more apparent.⁹⁹ Delighting in what he saw, but terrified by what he saw in himself, the introspective and anxious young man turned his eyes inwards to diagnose an excessive or inordinate desire to look. Unable to reconcile his looking and this sensual enjoyment of looking with the restrictions imposed by his growing faith and the far more restrictive controls he placed on himself, he turned to the priesthood as ‘the happiest and best way’ forward, but also ‘practically

⁹⁸ (Ashboughs), l. 1. *Works*: 177-178.

⁹⁹ 13 July 1863. To Baillie. *Further Letters*: 202.

[...] the only one'.¹⁰⁰ In many ways the Church appeared to offer a solution to his 'photo-eroticism'. Following the teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, he willingly submitted to corporeal mortification and bodily penance in an attempt to rid himself of any impediments that could hinder his soul from a complete engagement with God. The extended penance of lowering his eyes to the ground for six months is shocking, but as we have seen it serves as a shocking trope for the ways in which Hopkins sought continually to regulate his wayward visual desire. Whilst this radical change of direction from poet-painter to priest in many instances simplified his looking – by removing physical opportunity, moral justification, or frequently both – it also paradoxically provided religious sanction to continue it in pursuit of encounters with Christ in others. This form of looking for beauty became fraught with danger and desire too as this thesis has demonstrated.

To argue that Hopkins's engagement with the visual world is characterised not only by an acute sensitivity and awareness of beauty and danger, but also by an endlessly complex enjoyment of both of these, is, I suggest, to identify Hopkins's own 'inscape', his personal, professional and poetical 'species or individually-distinctive beauty of style'.¹⁰¹ It is his desire to look, matched only by a desperate desire to look away, and an electric enjoyment of the tension between the two, that so characterises Hopkins's engagement with the Victorian visual world. It is for this that Hopkins repeatedly 'rears [himself] to divine / Ears' (19/6-7) and the enjambment here captures his distinctive, teasing interplay between the physical and the spiritual, as he fixes his eyes on the beautiful world and repeatedly affirms that 'I did say yes' (2/1).

¹⁰⁰ 12 February 1868. To Baillie. *ibid.*: 231.

¹⁰¹ 7 November 1886. To Patmore. *Further Letters*: 373.

FIGURES



Man lying down

Figure 1: 'Man lying down'. G. M. Hopkins. From a notebook inscribed 'Gerard Hopkins. 1863'. Balliol College, Oxford.



Figure 2: Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 'The Picture Gallery'. 1874. Oil on canvas. Towneley Hall, Burnley Borough Council.

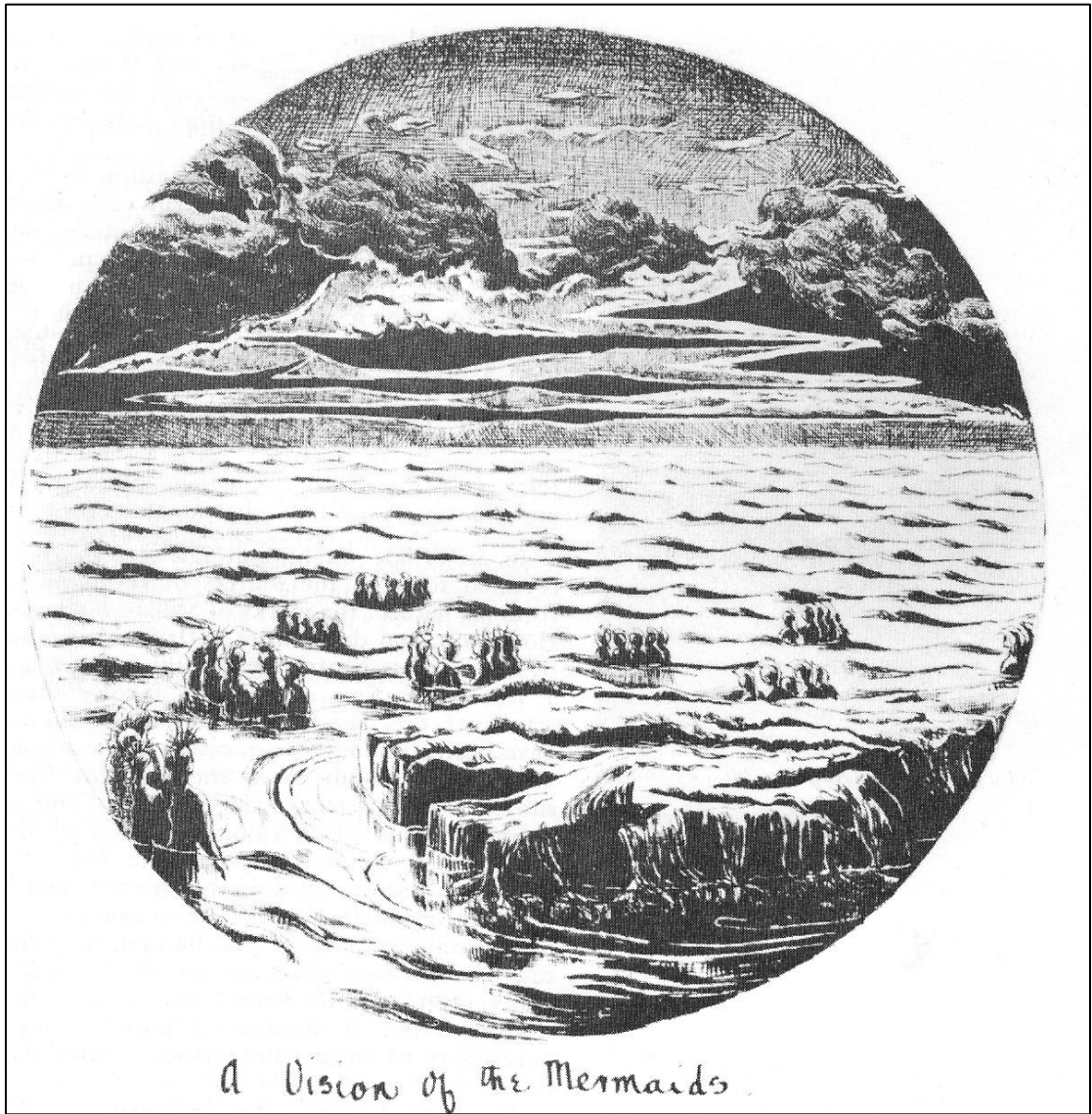


Figure 3: 'A Vision of the Mermaids' (Christmas, 1862). Pen and ink sketch by G. M. Hopkins, in a six-inch circle. Balliol College, Oxford. Reproduced in *Journals*, Plate 3.

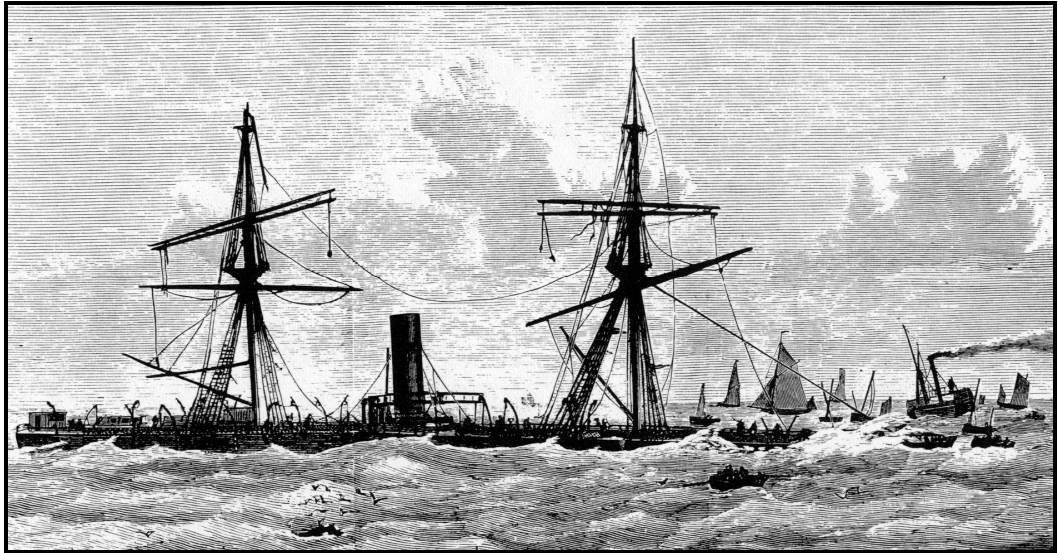


Figure 4: 'Wreck of the *Deutschland* as it appeared on the Morning of Thursday Week' (*Illustrated London News*, Dec. 18, 1875).



Figure 5: 'Wreckers at work in the saloon. The tall nun stood on this table to cry out through the broken skylight.' (*Illustrated London News*, Dec. 18, 1875).

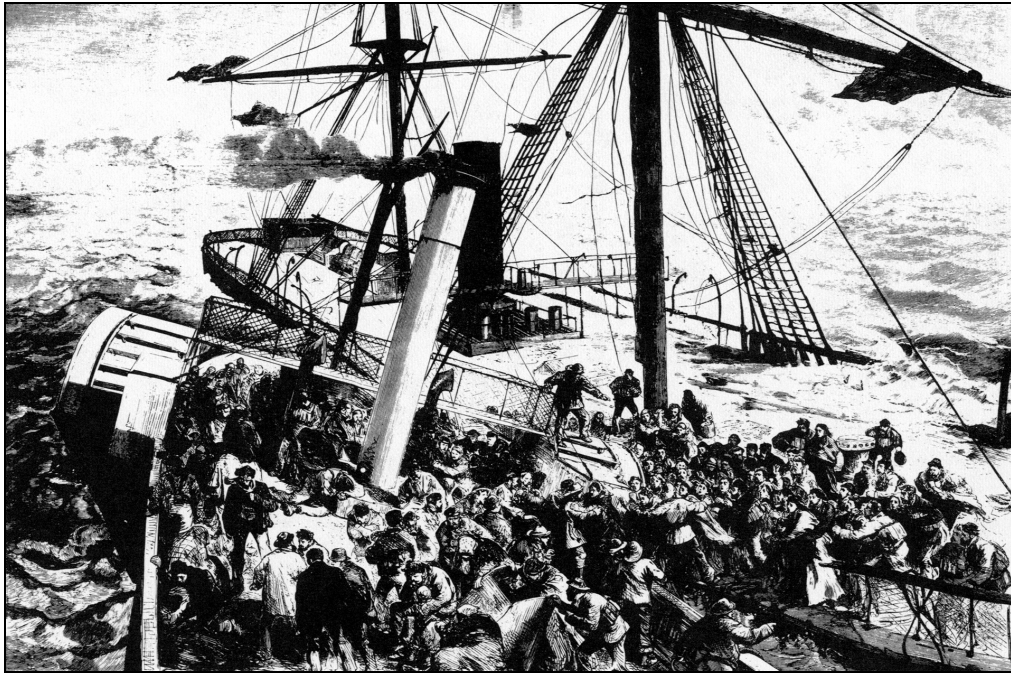


Figure 6: 'Rescue of the Survivors of the *Deutschland* by Harwich steam-tug *Liverpool*' (Illustrated *London News*, Dec. 18, 1875).

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