

## *Two Images in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*

THE distinctiveness of Hopkins' vocabulary has been remarked on as one of the virtues of design of his poetry. In his word coinages in the unusual compounds, the resuscitations of obsolete words and the dialect usage, could be traced both his own representation of the special quality of a thing—its "instress" or "inscape"—and its natural extension of meaning for the poet. The potencies of many of Hopkins' words can of course be appreciated only by reference to the whole body of the poems, and by the evidence of the letters and journals. Certain words recur in a fashion which suggests cypher, a private vocabulary to be decoded by the investigation of larger extracts. In Hopkins the word is not only a referent of some symbolic value, it is itself a symbol.

48. See Jennings, *The Law and the Constitution* (2nd or 3rd edition), Appendix and the authorities there quoted.

This article proposes to take two examples from his vocabulary and to bring them to analysis in order to discover what light is thrown upon the words "wimpling" or "wimpled", and "hurl."<sup>1</sup> These words are unlikely to give any difficulty to the general reader. For Hopkins however these words have special senses and perform special functions. In "wimpling" the core of the word denotes the particular visual pattern so described—the wing of the bird in *The Windhover*, the lip in *Morning Mid-day*, the evening Sacrifice, and both water and face in *The Leaden Echo* and the *Leaden Echo*. This transcribes what is seen by the poet as curved—the Journals show that Hopkins was early interested in the etymology of the word "curve"<sup>2</sup>—a shape like the wimple which frames the face, something which Hopkins might have represented by the figure of a V inverted, the opposite of the "V winged" pattern of the woodlark's flight—see *The Woodlark*. The word denotes the physical aspect of a certain shape, oval, rounded. Its immediate references would be to the covering of the face, the nun's wimple which covers and protects; then anything which is covered and protected,<sup>3</sup> that which is enclosed in a tegument, that which swells within, the seed, the kernel, the precious juice surrounded by the rind. All such ideas attracted Hopkins sensuously, and his sensuous apperception would immediately throw off an equally gratifying religious feeling, so that where or this particular word is used, we are aware of the effect upon him first of all of a sensed pattern, and

All references to Hopkins' poems are to the 2nd Edition, 1930.

1. Hopkins comments on a line in Bridges' *A Passer By*—"When skies are cold and misty, and hail is hurling"—as follows: "'Hail is hurling' did remind me of myself but I do not well know why: I have something about hail and elsewhere several things about hurling, but that does not amount to hail hurling." *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*. Ed. Abbot, p. 80.

(For convenience I shall refer to this as *Letters I*, to *The Correspondence of Gerard M. Hopkins and R. W. Dixon*. Ed. Abbott, as *Letters II*, and to *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. Abbott, as *Letters III*).

2. *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. Humphry House, p. 5.

3. Hopkins insists that everything on this earth is vaulted over by the heavens. The thought is a commonplace, but the way in which he states it is to be noted. He objects to Bridges' "domeless courts" in *Prometheus the Firegiver*, not only because the Greeks did not know domes, and that courts anyhow are "roofless, a fortiori domeless," but also because "when anything, as a court, is uncovered and roofless strictly speaking, there is just the one kind of roof it may still be said to have and especially in a clear sky and on a mountain, namely the spherical vault or dome of heaven. What can you do?" *Letters I*, pp. 243/4.

Again in objecting to an image in Browning, he writes "I will give a glaring instance of Browning of false perspective in an image. In his *Instans Tyrannus* he makes the tyrant say that he found the just man his victim on a sudden shielded from him by the vault of the sky spreading itself like a great targe over him, 'with the sun's disk for boss.' This is monstrous. The vault of heaven is a vault, hollow, concave upwards, convex upwards; it therefore could only defend man on earth against enemies from above, an angry Olympus for instance. And the tyrant himself is inside it, under it, as much as his victim. The boss is seen from behind, like the small stud of a door." *Letters II*, p. 56.

then of impulses which develop, interestingly enough, in contrary directions. There is the feeling of keen enjoyment in that which is enfolded, protected, lapped (the word "laps" comes naturally to him<sup>4</sup>), and this at once receives a new direction as an article of religious faith and emotional belief in that which laps everything round. The "wimpling wing" of *The Windhover*, the "wimpled lip" and "the wimpled-water-dimpled, not-by-morning-matched-face" express both the attractiveness of a distinct pattern and the proof and evidence of a mystical quality which the poet accepts as an article of belief. These suggestions progress by movement in contrary directions, both the sensuous physical and the visionary spiritual, to an individual emotional tension which is the mark of Hopkins' poetry.

That there is a chain of idea in which this definite physical pattern, the emotion of being protected, the sensuous feel of that which lodges in the core,<sup>5</sup> of the eggs warmed by the bird in the nest, of the heart in its close vault, the child in the womb are links, could be seen in numerous places in the poetry. It could be claimed that Hopkins' ideas of human individuality gave him the opportunity of gratifying this fancy of his, since individuality was what lay "furled"<sup>6</sup> and enclosed within the organism, it was the distinctiveness (his own word is "keepings" which occurs throughout the letters) which related man to God. So in the *Journal* he writes "Therefore in that 'cleave' of being which each of his creatures shews to God's ages alone (or in its 'burl'

4. See *The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe* II, 75 foll:

"O how! nay do but stand  
Where you can lift your hand  
Skywards: rich, rich it laps  
Round the four fingersaps."

See also *St. Winefred's Well*:

"Her head, sheared from her shoulders, fall,  
And lapped in shining hair, roll . . ."

5. In *Morning Mid-day and Evening Sacrifice* Hopkins changed his original "Silk-ashed but core not cooling" into—

"In silk-ash kept from cooling  
And ripest under rind —"

The reasons for the change reveal Hopkins' attribution of a special sense to "core" which his reader might have found difficult or missed. He writes "But the line 'Silk-ashed,' etc. in the *Sacrifice* is too hard and must be changed to "In silk-ash kept from cooling" I meant to compare grey hairs to the flakes of silky ash which may be seen round wood embers burnt in a clear fire and covering a 'core of heat,' as Tennyson calls it. But *core* there is very ambiguous, as your remark shews." *Letters I*, pp. 97/8.

6. In answer to Bridges' query about the lines in *The Loss of the Eurydice*—

"One stroke  
Felled and furled them, the hearts of oak."

Hopkins replied "How are hearts of oak furled? Well, in sand and sea water. The image comes out true under the circumstances, otherwise it could not hold together. You are to suppose a stroke or blast in a forest of 'hearts of oak' (*ad propositum*, sound oak-timber) which at one blow both lays them low and buries them in broken earth." *Letters I*, p. 52. "Furl" in Hopkins' poetry always has the sense "wrapped in."

ing uncloven) God can choose countless points in the strain (or countless of the 'burl') where the creature has consented, does consent to will . . ." <sup>7</sup> "Cleave" and "burl" in Hopkins' language express his sense of individuality as the Scotists described it.<sup>8</sup> Besides they link with one of the associations of "wimpled."

Throughout the poetry the warmth of the poet's feeling for everything which is lapped round and protected would help in the interpretation of "wimpled." As early as *Heaven-Haven*, one could see the prepotence of this "wimpled," if one calls it that. The nun who takes the veil, who is actually "wimpled," reaches the desired state of protection within the haven; "out of the swing of the sea" implies the haven's enclosing wall to bar. In *The Heart of the Deutschland* the stress of the poet's spiritual experience drives him to whirl out "wings that spell" (spell what? V? as in V winged?) and the heart flies to the "heart of the Host."<sup>9</sup> Gardner notes the special symbolic sense in which Hopkins uses the word "heart," to this might be added the poet's sensation of the heart as that which lies protected within the "bower of bone." In this word "bower" there might be a remembrance of the actual position of the women's apartment in the medieval house, so that Hopkins' immediate reaction to heart would be based on the feeling of its site or locality. He objected to Dixon's calling 'a naked floor' a 'tower' because "a tower is a camera, an arched shelter whether of boughs or of ceiling."

These undertones swell out into the image of the sloe in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*—"lush-kept, plush-capped." The soft mass ("the dearest freshness deep down things") protected by the smooth outer membrane is at once felt in the tactile sensations of the poet's words.<sup>10</sup> As that pressed bursts to "flush the man" (flush will suggest both redden and flood), so man in his trial is in an instant filled (as he is literally through the service of the Mass) with the completeness of Christ's passion—in *The Bugler's First Com-*

7. *The Note-Books and Papers, etc.* Ed. House, p. 332.

8. *A Note on Hopkins and Duns Scotus*: W. H. Gardner. *Scrutiny*, June, 1936.

9. There are numerous references in the Psalms to the Psalmist's desire to take refuge from his enemies under the shadow of the wings of the Lord. Perhaps the best known is "And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove then would I fly away, and be at rest . . . I would haste me to a shelter from the stormy wind and tempest." Psalm 55, v. 6.

10. Abbott has a choke pear of his own grafting here. He objects that "this example . . . is, perhaps because of rhyme-greediness, over-wrought. A sloe is not 'lush,' it 'bursts' on the tongue like a grape. It is a spare fruit, and must be bitten. The sharp astringency of taste experienced is here lost." *Letters I*, p. xxixn. If this were so—I am not competent to judge—it does not invalidate my point that Hopkins derives a sensuous gratification from the feel of the soft mass, first of all enclosed under the roof of the mouth, and then contained in the whole body. "Rhyme greediness" have brought in the sloe, but it hangs very naturally with "plush-capped" and "sweet." The latter is itself a recurring symbol in Hopkins. If there is a literary reason for the image it surely is Keats' *Ode on Melancholy*.

*munion* Christ is described in the sacrament as "Low-latched in leaf-light housel his too huge godhead," there is besides a residue of the sloe image in "limber liquid youth" that "yields tender as a pushed peach." Dr. Leavis in *New Bearings in English Poetry* remarks of this stanza in the *Deutschland* "we do not feel of any element (except, perhaps, 'lush-kept plush-capped') that it is there for the sake of pattern. Even of 'lush-kept plush-capped' it might be said, that by a kind of verbal suggestion (two different expressions sounding so alike) it contributes to the sense of the mystical identification that the passage is concerned to evoke identification of 'the stress felt' with the Passion; helps also the metaphorical identification of the experience with the bursting of the sloe."<sup>11</sup> If one may venture to add anything to this, it is the suggestion that the identification of the man's possessing, enfolding the inmost secret of the sloe, its juice, with the spiritual possession of the knowledge of the passion is natural to Hopkins when the vehicle of the metaphor is remembered. Such an image would naturally tap deep reserves of Hopkins' personal emotion.

Extensions of the "wimpled" associations might be seen in the reference in God's Grandeur to—

The Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah!  
bright wings

In *In the Valley of the Elwy* and *The May Magnificent* the most actively felt sensations are those of the eggs in the nest warmed and protected by the overshadowing wings of the bird.<sup>12</sup>

In the former, the poet feels himself protected by the goodness of his hosts, they are—

a hood  
All over, as a bevy of eggs the mothering wing  
Will, or mild nights the new morsels of spring:

In *The May Magnificent* the surest evidence of spring and growth is:

Star-eyed strawberry-breasted  
Throstle above her nested.  
Cluster of bugle blue eggs thin  
Forms and warms the life within;  
And bird and blossom swell  
In sod or sheath or shell.

In *The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe* it is the air which is "world-mothering" which nestles the poet everywhere. The poem ends with the nostalgic—

World-mothering air, air wild,  
Wound with thee, in thee is led,  
Fold home, fast fold thy child.

11. *New Bearings in English Poetry*: F. R. Leavis, p. 178.

12. Once again the Biblical parallels might be noted—Matthew 23, 37 and Luke

The wished for state is that of being "wound" in a greater enfolding and protecting power—the word "wind" is another of Hopkins' cyphers—both sense and feeling suggest the Mutterleib Phantasie.

That the poet responds with heightened emotions to these suggestions would now be clear.<sup>13</sup> The visual image of the "curved" form supported by associations of the bird protecting its nest, religious symbols, and Hopkins' notions about individuality would give "wimpled" a deeper emotional quality than would at first sight seem justifiable. Both the keenly perceived continuous thrill and the deeply felt religious exaltation co-exist here, so that in *The Windhover* when "wimpling wing" occurs, it is more than ever clear that much more than the bird or even brute beauty crowds into the poet's consciousness—it is "Christ our Lord."<sup>14</sup>

Examination of the word "hurl" would again throw light on Hopkins' attitude and his habits in poetry. Here, once again, there is a common set of associations linking the "inscape" of the action depicted by the word with the poet's sensuous and religious intuitions. By meaning and sound the word "hurl" would lend itself to connection with "hurtle," and "hurly" as a dialect word, or as the first element in the common "hurly-burly." The visual picture would be of strong quick movement through the air of a mass propelled by a superior force away from it. In the poems "hurling" or "hurl" (whether used as noun or verb) record the poet's impression not of the movement of mass alone, but of movement in opposite directions which comes from the collision of two masses. The word implies the presence of huffer and thing hurled.

This is surely the statement in *Hurrahing in Harvest* where the heart rears wings bold and bolder—

And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off  
under his feet.

13. Further proof of the persistence of this image might be provided by Hopkins' reading of Dixon's poetry. He commented on two images he liked in Dixon's poetry: "I think the images I like best of all are in *Love's Consolation* about the quicksilver and the heart combed round with hair." Dixon's lines as quoted by Abbott are as follows:

"and of us some  
About our hearts meshed the loved hair with comb  
Of our great love, to twine and glisten there,  
And when 'twas stiffened in our life blood dear,  
Then was it rent away."

When Hopkins provided a short note on Dixon's poetry in T. Arnold's *Manual of English Literature* he remembers this: "But he is likeliest and owes most to Keats, and his description and imagery are realised with a truth and splendour not less than Keats' (see the scene of the nine lovers in *Love's Consolation*: the images of the quicksilver and of the heart fastened round with hair, *ibidem*)." *Letters II*, pp. 71 and 177. The rendering of Dixon's lines is significant.

14. Herbert Read's description of *The Windhover* as "a poem which has no obvious relation to any beliefs at all" is surely perverse. He continues "The *Windhover* is completely objective in its senseful catalogue: but Hopkins gets over his scruples by recasting the poem "To Christ our Lord." But this is a patent deception." *New*, January, 1933.

The earth is described as being pushed away, hurled away by the heart, the earth hurled under the heart rearing wings upward. In *The Loss of the Eurydice* the sudden cloud bringing the squall in which the ship foundered is pictured as follows:

Now near by Ventnor town  
It hurls, hurls off Boniface Down.

The movement of the cloud (note the sense of riding in the air) portrays the action of throwing apart and away from it Boniface Down. In *Harry Ploughman* there is the following:—

Churlsgrace, too, child of Amansstrength, how it hangs or hurls  
Them—broad in bluffhide his frowning feet lashed! raced  
With, along them, cragiron under and cold furls—

Here "hurls" portrays the movement of the boot as it meets the earth and with the impact pushes it away from under the foot. "Hangs" marks the foot "broad in bluffhide lashed" raised in the air, and "hurls" is Hopkins' exact notation for the action which follows the next movement. The effect of the mass, its weight and force are well seconded by the actual shape and implications of "Amansstrength" and "bluffhide." This seems to be much more likely than that "hurls" is merely fast movement of the foot as it races. Here very definitely it must refer to motion following upon the contact of two forces. In *Tom's Garland* the same image is paralleled in—

then Tom's fallowbootfellow piles pick  
By him and rips out rockfire hometh—

When one considers now *The Wreck of the Deutschland*—

The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee trod  
Hard down with a horror of height:

"hurl" conveys the impression of dire strength, the weight which impinges on the heart and throws it down from the upper regions of the air. "A horror of height" could be the heart's swooning at the imminence of the shock of God sweeping down upon it, and also the heart's horror at the dizzy abyss opening below it as it is flung by God's superior force. The image repeats the known terror of the universal dream of falling from a great height.

In *The Windhover*—

High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy, then off, off forth on swing,  
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding  
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing.

Surely here the bird (and all it means for the poet) soars triumphant with a power which colliding with the wind "rebuffs" it.

The answer to the question why this image recurs so often in Hopkins' there are instances in *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo*, in No. 56 by Bridges *Ashboughs*, and in the unfinished *Epithalamion*,<sup>15</sup> and religious and spiritual connotations might be, would be provided by his constant sense of a personal struggle with God—his feeling of impact upon him of a force which pitches him past pitch of grief. Nos. 40, 41, 45, 47 would supply the evidence. In No. 40, God is—

the hero whose heaven-handling  
flung me, foot trod  
—Me . . .

"Heaven-handling," "flung," "foot trod," they repeat ideas discussed in *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo*. This is one aspect of the poet's relation with God—the terrible father who "hurls," just as definitely as the other is of the protecting mother who "embraced." Hopkins holds both attitudes together, both are sensuously perceived and emotionally experienced. That this should be so is not surprising. The quality of a good image can fairly be translated by metaphors which describe it as the natural growth of the poet's attitude as it is expressed in his words; dissection would show in the tissues the distinguishing trait of the poet's organism. Hopkins' words share certain features of his imagery, they "repeat" "shadow" and repeat something of the structure of his thought and the disposition of his emotion.<sup>16</sup> The single word and the image call up two seemingly opposed lines of feeling, in the poetry the "core" is not so much a conflict as the ambivalence of his emotions. *The Windhover* looked at again is a transcription not of a struggle between two equal and opposite sets of

<sup>15</sup> In *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo*—

"This side, that side hurling a heavyhanded hundredfold."

In No. 56 (*Ashboughs*)—

"They touch, they labour on it, hover on it; [here, there  
hurled],

With talons sweep

The smouldering enormous winter welkin."

In *Epithalamion*—

"how the boys

With dare and with down-dolphinry and bellbright bodies huddling out,

the earthworld, airworld, waterworld thorough hurled, all by turn and turn about."

There is besides in No. 71—

"Strike, churl; hurl, cheerless wind, then."

<sup>16</sup> Hopkins to Baillie: "My thought is that in any passage of the tragic poets there are—usually, I will not say always, it is unlikely—two strains of thought running together and like counterpointed; the overthought that which everybody, editors, see . . . the underthought, conveyed chiefly in the choice of metaphors, etc., used and only half realised by the poet himself, not necessarily having any connection with the subject in hand, but usually having a connection and suggested by some circumstance or of the story . . . Perhaps what I ought to say is that the underthought is only an echo or shadow of the overthought, something like canons and repetitions treated in a different manner, but sometimes it may be independent of it."

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feeling succeeding each other in time—"brute beauty" and an asceticism which can find compensation in another sort of beauty of a less vivid kind—but of a frame of mind in which "naked sensualism," if you like, and spiritual rapture are, and can be, held together. The Windhover is always both bird and not bird, both Pegasus and Christ the Chevalier, both "wimpling wing" and the terror of "hurls."<sup>17</sup> This is Empson's feeling about the poem.<sup>18</sup> He sees in the last three lines which profess to come to a single judgment on the matter a more beautiful record of the conflict. I would make a plea for stressing not conflict but ambivalent attitude.<sup>19</sup> The attitude itself might be explained in various ways, but such things lie outside the scope of this article.

E. F. C. LUDOWYK.

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