

Hopkins's Portraits of the Artist: Between the Biographical and the Ideological

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Hopkins's letters written in the Dublin period¹ testify that in the last years of his life he suffered from anaemia and periods of deep depression verging on madness.² Different and heterogeneous factors contributed to Hopkins's mental condition: his intellectual loneliness and incessant self-scrutiny, the growing feeling of the disappearance of God from his life and his alleged failure both as a preacher and as a poet. But, in addition to these internal causes, Hopkins's anaemia and recurrent depressions resulted from a much more mundane one: from constant overwork. Shortly after his arrival to Dublin in March 1884, Hopkins wrote to Bridges: "I have been elected Fellow of the Royal University of Ireland in the department of classics. I have a salary of £400 a year, but when I first contemplated the six examinations I have yearly to conduct, five of them running, and to the Matriculation there came up last year 750 candidates, I thought that Stephen's Green (the biggest square in Europe) paved with gold would not pay for it."³ Hopkins did not exaggerate the amount of his future work; the contemporary study of his work has shown that in 1887 he checked 1795 exams, and in the rest of his Dublin years their numbers oscillated between 1300 and 1800 (O'Flynn 176).

In addition, Hopkins was overscrupulous as an examiner (he often divided points into fractions); and, as a result, he constantly felt that since his arrival to Dublin he had almost no spare time.⁴ Moreover, his drudgery frequently deprived him of the only type of intellectual communication he had until then: his correspondence. It often happened that Hopkins was unable even to write a letter; already in 1884 he complained to Bridges: "I cannot spend more time writing now"

(LI 192) and two weeks later: "I too am engaged on examination and must therefore be brief" (LI 192). In addition, the pressure of unfinished work caused the feeling of constant anxiety; Hopkins wrote to Baillie that one form of his "melancholy" "is daily anxiety about work to be done, which makes [him] break off or never finish all that lies outside that work" (LIII 256). Similarly, contemplating upon his ostensible lack of inspiration, which was one of Hopkins's most torturing thoughts,⁵ he ascribed it to overwork and the resultant feeling of exhaustion (LI 222).

In the light of this situation it is little wonder that Hopkins felt that he was not fit for his work (LII 132) and that this work gradually killed him. Already in his first letter to Bridges written in Dublin, Hopkins says: "I am not at all strong, not strong enough for the requirements" (LI 190). A half year later he writes: "I am in the very thick of examination work and in danger of permanently injuring my eyes. I shall have no time at all till past the middle of the next month" (LI 198). In the Spring of the next year, a season which always fascinated him, he continues: "I am in a low way of health, indeed I always am . . . The delightful old French Father . . . will have it that I am dying of anaemia" (LI 208). Two years later he remarks that he is "in a prostration" and almost unable to perform his "day's work" (LI 251). In 1888, although he is on vacation, Hopkins writes: "I cannot sleep (which is the very mischief) . . . and I am feeling very old and looking very wrinkled and altogether . . ." (LI 278, dots are Hopkins's).

Another problem to do with Hopkins's work in Dublin was associated with the quality of the work he was employed to do. Commenting upon Hopkins's notes on the exams he was checking ('Dublin Notebook'; Campion Hall ms.), Norman White writes: "Confronted with endless piles of examination scripts, he was shocked by the poor standard of answers, and by their grammar, expression, and spelling . . . Hopkins's bewildered and hopeless remarks reveal the fastidious distance between his standards and those of the students . . ." (White 371-72). In addition to all this, he was isolated in a place completely unfit for his intense intellectual life. "For the books," he wrote to

Ignatius Ryder, "I can answer: *they* at least are not at the Catholic University" (LIII 65). Furthermore, at the time when he was appointed to the University College, the Catholic University was a Jesuit myth rather than a real institution. "I am writing from where I never thought to be," he wrote to Cardinal Newman, "in a University for Catholic Ireland begun under your leadership, which since those days indeed long and unhappy languished . . . These buildings since you knew them have fallen into a deep dilapidation. They were a sort of wreck or ruin" (LIII 63). In his letter to Bridges, he was even more pessimistic: "The house we are in, the College, is a sort of ruin and for purposes of study very nearly naked" (LI 190). The drains of the college were infested with rats (White 365), and the surrounding city was even worse: dirty and extremely poor. After Hopkins's death his sister told Bridges that "he was made miserable by the untidiness, disorder & dirt of Irish ways, the ugliness of it all" (Martin 368).

But the worst of all was that this unceasing examination work in an empty and half-ruined institution was hardly useful. Hopkins complained to his mother: "I labour for what is worth little . . . And in doing this almost fruitless work I use up all opportunity of doing any other" (LIII 185). In 1887 he wrote to Bridges: "Tomorrow morning I shall have been three years in Ireland, three hard wearing wasting wasted years" (LI 250). The next year he remarked in the autobiographical part of the retreat notes of 1888:

The question is how I advance the side I serve on. This may be inwardly or outwardly. Outwardly I often think I am employed to do what is of little or no use . . . What is my wretched life? Five wasted years almost have passed in Ireland. I am ashamed of the little I have done, of my waste of time. (S 261-62)

Moreover, this work not only gave Hopkins the feeling of wasted efforts, it was also complicit with torturing moral doubts. "The Catholic Church in Ireland," he wrote, "and the Irish Province in it and our College in that are greatly given over to a partly unlawful cause, promoted by partly unlawful means, and against my will my pains,

laborious and distasteful, like prisoners made to serve the enemies' gunners, go to help on this cause" (S 262).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Hopkins, as a Jesuit, had no right to the money he ostensibly received: his salary was automatically transferred to the college's funds; to his mother Hopkins wrote that his "salary helps to support [his] college" (LIII 185). As Robert Martin explains, "since Jesuits were prohibited by vow from having money, the sum [reverted] to the College as part of the much-needed funds for running the establishment" (363). Norman White adds some interesting details about the appointment of Hopkins to Dublin; Delaney [the president of the college] wrote for advice to a friend, Dr. Kavanagh, who replied: "Take Hopkins, if you cannot get a better. The £400 a year you will find useful, being an S.J." (360). This was one of the most important reasons for choosing Hopkins: the University College was extremely short of money. In all probability, Hopkins was aware, at least partly, of the financial considerations behind the decision to transfer him to Dublin. Certainly, he never said what part of his salary was actually spent on his needs (subsistence, personal necessities and vacations), but everything indicates that this was only a small part of it.⁶

Now the question to be asked is what were Hopkins's reasons for working as he did: what were the reasons that made him agree to his perennial, useless and profitless drudgery, which, as he believed, gradually killed him, and to do this work as diligently as he could. The answer to this question, quite predictable in the Victorian context, is the sense of duty.⁷ It is clear enough from both Hopkins's poetry and his letters that, like most Victorians, he admired those who fulfill their duties at all costs. In the poem "What shall I do for the land that bred me" he writes: "Immortal beauty is death with duty, / If under her banner I fall for her honor." In "The Loss of the Eurydice" he depicts the literal physical beauty (as opposed to the metaphorical one in "What shall I do") that is miraculously gained by the fulfillment of duties at life's cost; he describes the dead body of a sailor and then exclaims:

Look, foot to forelock, how all things suit! he
Is strung by duty, is strained to beauty . . . (77-78)

This sailor has fulfilled his duties to the very end; and this fulfillment of duty is reflected by the ultimate beauty of his body.

At the same time, there is an additional element of Hopkins's conception of duty, which distinguishes him from many of his contemporaries: in most cases Hopkins's contemplations upon duty are inseparable from metaphysical overtones. Thus, in his commentary on the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* he opposes the 'elective' and the 'affective' will; he says that the former, which eventually leads to God, is almost always opposed by the latter, by desire (S 146-59). In other words, the correct metaphysical and moral choice must be guided by the sense of duty exclusively. Furthermore, in the sonnet "The Soldier," which will be analyzed below, Hopkins explains that not only he, Gerard Manley Hopkins, but Christ himself admires those who fulfill their duties, whether religious or mundane, at all costs:

Mark Christ our King . . .
. . . seeing somewhere some man do all that man can do,
For love he leans forth, needs his neck must fall on, kiss,
And cry 'o Christ-done deed! So God-made-flesh does too:
Were I come o'er again' cries Christ 'it should be this'.

In other words, in Hopkins's poetic world the unconditional fulfillment of duties is not only an admirable way of life in itself but also a proleptic image of the world to come.

Divine love for those who fulfill their duties and the representation of the world to come as the world of duty, though strange at first sight, become more comprehensible when one realizes that Hopkins tends to equate duty and spiritual love. In one of his sermons he says:

Duty is love . . . There is nothing higher than duty in creatures or in God: God the Son's love for God the Father is duty. Only when I speak thus highly of duty I mean duty done because it is duty and not mainly from either hope or fear. (S 53)

In other words, according to Hopkins, the sense of duty is spiritual love, and as such it must be the highest goal of man's free will.

Finally, it should be mentioned that Hopkins attempted to apply this conception to himself as well; in the retreat notes of 1888 he wrote:

The Incarnation was for my salvation and that of the world: the work goes on in a great system and machinery which even drags me on with collar round my neck though I could and do neglect my duty in it I am not willing enough for the piece of work assigned me, the only work I am given to do, though I could do others if they were given. This is my work at Stephen's Green. And though I thought that the Royal University was to me what Augustus's enrolment was to St Joseph: *exiit sermo a Caesare Augusto etc.*; so resolution of the senate of the R.U. came to me, inconvenient and painful, but the journey to Bethlehem was inconvenient and painful (S 263)

A brief commentary on these lines seems to be necessary: Stephen's Green refers to University College, Dublin, a part of the Royal University (also "R.U." in the text), where Hopkins taught. The passage evokes an episode from the beginning of the second chapter of Luke, which says that because of the Roman census Joseph had to go to Bethlehem, where Jesus was eventually born. This tiresome and useless journey was necessary in order to fulfill the prophesy of the Hebrew Bible with regard to the birth of the Messiah. Evoking it, Hopkins stresses that a seemingly meaningless and undoubtedly painful requirement may serve a divine plan. And if the Roman census did, Hopkins's examination work even more so. If the former was a result of the decision made by a Roman emperor, the latter was assigned by Hopkins's own superiors in the order, whose decisions were certainly closer to the will of God than those of Augustus.

To put it another way, in the passage above Hopkins implies that he must not only fulfill his duties, but do so willingly. In reality, being a Jesuit he had little choice what to do; but he could choose how to do it and how to respond to his work. This response was especially significant in the light of Hopkins's conception of personality, duty and moral responsibility, articulated in his commentary on the Ignatian

Spiritual Exercises (S 146-59). According to Hopkins, what matters is not only the deed, but the choice, the action of the free will (of the *arbitrium* in his scholastic terms), which is the direct continuation of the self in the realm of inner spiritual freedom. Moreover, the gradual perfection of the self, which is manifested in the choices made, turns it into Christ (S 154-58). In full accordance with this philosophy, Hopkins felt that, in order to make his self Christlike, he must willingly embrace his duties, which, though seemingly meaningless, must somehow accord with the divine plan. But, as has been already shown, although he forced himself to fulfill all his exhausting and wearisome academic duties as diligently as he could, he was never able to do this eagerly. In the passage quoted above Hopkins describes his inability to accept his work, his inner resistance to it, and, moreover, depicts himself as a slave or a prisoner of providence; he says that divine will "drags [him] on with collar round [his] neck."

Paradoxically enough, it is not in the world of human existence but rather in the poetic universe that Hopkins becomes capable of blindly accepting his duties. The poetic universe gives him the possibility of both the mediated representation of his existential situation and of the symbolic acceptance of his drudgery.⁸ Among Hopkins's Dublin poems there are several about common men from the lowest orders of society: a soldier in "The Soldier" ("Yes. Why do we all"), a peasant in "Harry Ploughman," a navy in "Tom's Garland," a lonely and ill doorkeeper in "St. Alphonsus Rodriguez."⁹ Like Hopkins, all of them have to perform hard and exhausting work. Moreover, St. Alphonsus was even canonized for his harsh life (White 440) and Hopkins's description of the peasant in "Harry Ploughman" focuses on the visible signs of his hard work and existence (e.g. "the rack of ribs; the scooped flank," "each limb's barrowy-brawned thew / That onewhere curded, onewhere sucked or sank," "back, elbow, and liquid waist / In him, all quail to the wallowing o' the plough"). It should be also noticed that all the characters of Hopkins's "poems of men," as these poems are sometimes called, are almost completely deprived of the pecuniary fruits of their work—like Hopkins himself. Moreover, like

him, they are all alone: nothing is said about their friends or families. Finally, to push the point a little further, like Hopkins, soldiers and navvys are devoid of a home which could console them in the moments of tiredness. In brief, the existential situation of Hopkins's characters is strikingly similar to his own.

But, unlike Hopkins, they have enough resilience to do their duties without complaints. Unlike Hopkins, Harry Ploughman is "hard as hurdle arms," "churlsgrace," "cragiron"; Tom Navvy is "seldom sick / Seldomer heartsore"; Alphonsus Rodriguez possessed "the heroic breast not outward-steed" (version 'c') that enabled him, though seriously ill, to withstand pain and to lead perennial internal war with demonic visions (MacKenzie 499). Consequently, all of them are able to perform their hard duties in this world: Tom tirelessly works with his "pick", Harry "quail[s] to the wallowing o' the plough," the nameless soldier does "all that man can do." For forty years Rodriguez was faithful to his humble duties of a doorkeeper, despite his incessant internal torture. In other words, Hopkins repeats the same portrait of the common man: poor and deprived, but resilient and faithful to his duties. This portrait echoes, though in a changed and detached form, Hopkins's existential situation, and, at the same time, it becomes the symbolic gesture of the blind acceptance of his work and his duties: the acceptance he required from himself and of which he was incapable. Thus, if Hopkins always felt that he lacked necessary resilience and ability to resist his tiredness, it is only in the poetic space that he was able to regain them. The poetic space became both the mirror and the symbolic alternative to Hopkins's existential situation.

In most cases, however, this symbolic function of Hopkins's portraits remains invisible. His portraits of common men have other poetic goals in addition to the inscription of his existential presence within their poetic space. Moreover, although Hopkins praises the resilience of Tom, Harry and the unnamed soldier, their faithfulness to duty and hard work, he also complicates their presentation from the moral point of view. To begin with, Hopkins's attitude towards Tom the navvy is deeply ambivalent; Tom is represented as rude and

indifferent to the suffering of others; furthermore, his work (and his garlands that represent it) are turned into the symbol of the destruction of the environment, of the “mammoth[ing]” of nature (LI 373; for the detailed analysis of the poem see Zonneveld 115-39). A concordant, though less pronounced, ambivalence characterizes Hopkins’s attitude towards Harry Ploughman, as the adjective “churlsgace” indicates. Similarly, Hopkins says that the soldier is “nay but foul clay.” It is only with the Jesuit saint Alphonsus Rodriguez that Hopkins expresses implicit self-identification. This self-identification was noted by Norman White, who also suggested that the fact that Rodriguez was accepted to the Society of Jesus at the age of 44 (at the same age when Hopkins wrote the poem about him) may have fostered this self-identification (440-41). This is, without a doubt, one of Hopkins’s complementary strategies of the inscription of his existential presence within the space of his portraits. Another, much more sophisticated strategy is used in the description of the most deprived of Hopkins’s characters, a soldier.

The members of the Catholic Church on earth (who are still fighting for salvation) are called the ‘Church Militant,’ as opposed to the ‘Church Triumphant’ of the world to come.¹⁰ This traditional name gets special resonance in the literature of the Society of Jesus: a religious order whose founder was a soldier, and whose members often called themselves “the soldiers of Christ.” In the meditation on ‘The Kingdom of Christ,’ a key meditation in *The Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius writes:

The First Point. I will place before my mind a human king . . .

The Second Point. I will observe how this king speaks to all his people, saying, “My will is to conquer the whole land of the infidels. Hence, whoever wishes to come with me has to be content with the same food I eat, and the drink, and the clothing which I wear, and so forth. So too he or she must labor with me during the day, and keep watch in the night, and so on, so that later they may have a part with me in the victory, just as they have shared in the toil.”

The Third Point. I will consider what good subjects ought to respond to a king so generous and kind; and how, consequently, if someone did not an-

swer his call, he would be scorned and upbraided by everyone and accounted as an unworthy knight. (146)

This is the first, 'preparatory,' part of the meditation; the 'Second Part' of the same exercise (147) requires to apply this parable of the king and his knights to the moral warfare of Christ. This application should elucidate to every believer his spiritual duties, which thus become spelled out by means of military metaphors.

Once again, this is the pivotal meditation of *The Spiritual Exercises*, well known to every Jesuit; and this meditation has become one of the most important sources of military tropes in Jesuit literature. The examples of its influence are numerous; Jesuit writings are replete with military metaphors.¹¹ In this respect, Hopkins is not an exception. In his retreat notes, for example, he writes that he is "enlisted 20 years in the Society of Jesus" (S 261). He frequently presents Christ as a commander and himself as Christ's soldier.¹² In one of his sermons Hopkins says:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, my brethren, is our hero, a hero all the world wants . . . Christ, he is a hero . . . He is a warrior and a conqueror; of whom it is written he went forth conquering and to conquer. He is a king . . . (S 34)

Many other passages are concordant with this sermon. "Christ is my king," he says, "Christ is my hero, I am at Christ's orders, I am his to command" (S 17). About the faithfulness to religious duty, he writes: "Cowardly it would be and a wretched inconsistency in a knight . . . to decline a glorious campaign from dislike of the hardships to be borne in securing its success, dislike of being obliged *to share his general's lot*" (S 163). "As we are soldiers," he adds, "earnestness means . . . ready obedience to our Captain Christ" (S 234). He writes that "Confirmation is spiritual knighthood" (S 163) and that Christ "led the way, went before his troops, was himself the vanguard, was the forlorn hope, bore the brunt of battle alone, died upon the field, on Calvary hill, and bought the victory by his blood" (S 70). In "The Windhover" he addresses Christ as his "chevalier," in "Carrion Comfort" as "the hero," in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* as the "hero of Calvary." To put

it briefly, Hopkins's Christ is a metaphorical general, who despite his high rank knows all the hardships that accompany the life of a soldier, and Hopkins is a metaphorical private in Christ's metaphorical army.

However, this is not the only sense in which Hopkins considered himself a soldier. It is clear enough from his letters that he was a zealous adherent of the empire. Having come to the conclusion that "Gladstone negotiates his surrenders of the empire" (LI 210), he wrote to Baillie that "Gladstone is a traitor" (LIII 263) and that "he ought to be beheaded on Tower Hill" (LIII 257). He painfully suffered from British military failures; he emphasized that "Transval is an unredeemed disgrace" (LI 131) and that the Englishmen "have been shamefully beaten by Boers" (LI 128). On the alleged lack of courage on the part of the British soldiers he commented with unusual indignation:

Do you know and realize what happened at Majuba Hill? 500 British troops after 8 hours' firing, on the Dutch reaching the top, ran without offering hand to hand resistance before, it is said, 80 men. (LIII 293)

Yet the real issue of the time was not the Boer war, but rather, as usual, the Irish problem. The British Empire might be defeated in a local conflict, and still remain the same country; but without Ireland it would never be the same again. At the same time, by the end of the eighties the Irish problem became so serious that most people felt that something should be immediately done: as Hopkins himself wrote in a letter to Baillie from 1887, to this situation "must be put an end either by the sword or by Home Rule" (LIII 281).

Hopkins's attitude towards Home Rule was rather ambivalent. He wrote to Baillie that Home Rule of itself is a blow for England and will do no good to Ireland" (LIII 281), "but still they must have Home Rule" (LIII 283). Clearly, this paradoxical conclusion required explanations. The Irish, he continued, "allow neither the justice of the law nor the honesty of its administrators. Be assured of this, that the mass of Irish people own no allegiance to any existing law or government" (LIII 283). In order to substantiate this conclusion he told his friend a

long story of a local feud which, according to him, illustrated the Irish disregard for any civil obligations (LIII 282-83). It is clear enough that such a people must be ruled by brutal force rather than by law; and if one is unwilling to do this, he must not rule this people at all. Therefore, he concluded, Home Rule "will have some good effects and it will deliver England from the strain of an odious and impossible task, the task of attempting to govern a people who own no principle of civil allegiance" (LIII 282).

At the same time, according to Hopkins, in the long run this autonomy was unable to solve the Irish problem and had to become extremely dangerous. In the letter quoted above Hopkins stressed that the goal of the Irish is not autonomy but rather an independent state ("Nationhood" LIII 281), and that the institution of an autonomous government only "has inflamed" this passion. However, he wrote, this passion "is of its nature insatiable" (LIII 281). It is not difficult to understand why he considered this desire insatiable: the independence of Ireland would become a precedent which could immediately entail the collapse of the empire. And this, in turn, means, though Hopkins did not say it explicitly, that, despite the institution of Home Rule, the war with Ireland is inevitable. Moreover, on the basis of his Dublin experience Hopkins came to the conclusion that Ireland is already "in a peaceful rebellion" (LIII 281). And as an Englishman in a rebellious province of the empire and as the arduous adherent of this empire, he could not but consider himself a kind of soldier.

At the same time, it is evident from Hopkins's letters and retreat notes cited above (L1 250; LIII 185; S 262) that he was acutely aware of the fact that his work at the university did not serve the British Empire, and perhaps, even the other way round. In the light of this situation it was not so simple for Hopkins to decide how he could help his country without violating the duties appointed by his order. But, eventually, he found a solution. As mentioned above, he maintained that his contemporaries were gradually losing their courage, which once had made possible British military successes (e.g. LI 128, LIII 293). Therefore, on the verge of a war with Ireland, it was vital for the

British soldiers to regain their lost courage. And for a moment Hopkins began to believe that as a poet he could contribute to this. He wrote to Bridges: "I had a great light. I had in my mind the first verse of a patriotic song for soldiers, the words I mean: heaven knows it is needed" (LI 283). His passion was so intense that for a moment Hopkins seemed to forget not only about his *ultima solitudo*, but also about his religious and geographical alienation from England—the alienation of which he often complained. Moreover, he even forgot what he himself said in the sonnet "To seem the stranger," forgot that his England will not hear his words.

For a moment this project gave him the feeling that he could seriously help his troubled country. But this mixture of enthusiasm and self-delusion could be sustained only for a while; the poem ("What shall I do for the land that bred me") was written and buried with the rest of Hopkins's poems. And, consequently, he had to find another way to relate his poetry and his politics. In order to do this, Hopkins turns to the crucial question of the justification of the existence of the British Empire and, correspondingly, of his political convictions. The first answer to this question that, according to Hopkins, may be propounded is Christianity; "but," he writes, "our Empire is less and less Christian as it grows" (LIII 367). Another answer may be freedom; but "to that cry there is the telling answer: No freedom you can give us is equal to the freedom of letting us alone . . . let us first be free of you" (LIII 367). The last possibility Hopkins discusses is civilization; but taking into account his utterly negative attitude towards contemporary urban civilization,¹³ one can easily guess that this possibility could hardly satisfy him.¹⁴ In the last analysis, Hopkins was able to find only one justification:

What marked and striking excellence has England to shew to make her civilization attractive? Her literature is one of her excellences and attractions and I believe that criticism will tend to make this more and more felt; but there must be more of that literature, a continued supply and in quality excellent. This is why I hold that fine works of art . . . are really a great power in the world, an element of strength even to empire (LIII 368).

Consequently, a poet is also a soldier of the empire; his existence is its *raison d'être*; on his activity hinges its strength. And that is why he can write to Patmore: "Your poems are a good deed done . . . for the British Empire"; hence also his famous dictum: "A great work by an Englishman is like a great battle won by England" (LI 231). It must not be forgotten that, in the last analysis, Hopkins and Kipling were almost contemporaries.

The above description of Hopkins's existential situation, his conception of duty and the 'poems of men,' as well as the foregoing analysis of his military rhetoric and political views, can help to unravel the semantic tissue of one of his most strange and obscure sonnets, "Yes. Why do we all," which is known as "The Soldier." The design of this sonnet is both simple and enigmatic. The octave puts one central question: "Why do we all seeing a soldier bless him? bless / Our redcoats, our tars?" At first sight, there is no reason to distinguish a soldier from other human beings: he is as weak, vulnerable and mortal as they are: "but frail clay, nay but foul clay." Therefore, Hopkins's answer to his own question is that men tend to believe that a soldier must be similar to his harsh profession, and thus that they create his 'ideal' heroic image in their imagination. The second quatrain ends with the renunciation of this self-deception.

But then a volta, both structural and thematic, follows. At the beginning of the sestet the speaker points to the example of Christ and says that he is the best soldier: "He knows war, served this soldiering through; / He of all can reeve a rope best." Then, at the end of the poem, as at the end of *Apocalypse* (21:5-8; 22:11-16), Christ himself begins to speak; he says that he loves and blesses everyone who fulfills his duties, does "all that man can do"; and this evidently includes soldiers. Evoking Apocalyptic motifs, now almost explicitly, Christ adds that this unconditional fulfillment of duties is the proleptic image of the world to come: "'Were I come o'er again' cries Christ 'it should be this.'" Thus, though Hopkins does not say this explicitly, the uncanny feeling that Christ blesses soldiers and mariners, is the real reason why "we" follow his example and bless them too.

Several questions may be asked about the poem. The most important of them is why Christ is represented as the best soldier, why he can "reeve a rope best," and, above all, why he, the Lord of Peace, should bless soldiers, whose work is accompanied by bloodshed and destruction. In the light of the analysis above, the answer to these questions is rather evident, though not without difficulties. It has been shown that Hopkins, drawing upon the discursive practice of the Jesuits, often represents Christ as a metaphoric general of his moral warfare, who, despite his high rank, fights shoulder to shoulder with his soldiers. These metaphoric references to Christ as a soldier-general are able to account for several features of the poem. First, they explain why the example of Christ is mentioned in the discussion of soldiers at all. Secondly, this recurrent metaphoric representation can explain why, according to Hopkins, Christ knows war better than anyone else: as a captain or a general he must know it better than ordinary soldiers. Finally, one can surmise that soldiers must be in some way similar to the eternal image of the soldier-general, to Christ, and this is another reason why people bless them. Thus, the understanding of Jesuit rhetorical conventions and Hopkins's use of them explains many of the peculiarities of the sonnet. At the same time, it is worth noting that the above explanations foreground not only the structure of meaning behind the surface of the sonnet, but also the fact that the whole semantic construction of the poem turns on one specific rhetorical effect: on the effacement of the boundary between the literal and the metaphorical.¹⁵ The argument of the sonnet is based on a connection between soldiers, in the literal sense of the word, and the metaphorical soldier-general Christ.

The structural peculiarities of the poem make this even clearer. "The Soldier" is one of those poems which reproduce the recurrent structure of Hopkins's poetry, the structure developed in his 'nature sonnets' (the celebrated sonnets of 1877-78): from a description of the world of human experience the sonnet proceeds to the appearance of Christ. Moreover, it seems that, at least in one sense, "The Soldier" is a more pronounced example of this structure than the 'nature sonnets':

if these sonnets end with the invocation of God or sometimes with a simple benediction, at the end of the sonnet under consideration Christ appears himself and speaks in his own voice. However, there is a marked, though invisible, difference. The recurrent structure of Hopkins's nature poetry is sustained by the elaborate building of his philosophy:¹⁶ the appearance of God from nature is made possible by Hopkins's sophisticated philosophy of the univocity of being (Miller 273-324) and by his conception of the unified aesthetic-religious vision. Unlike these sonnets, "The Soldier" does not describe a series of the inscapes of nature¹⁷ but rather a social role a man might have. And, therefore, Hopkins's philosophical views cannot help to account for Christ's emergence from Hopkins's initial contemplation.

In other words, in this sonnet the seemingly familiar connection between the octave and the sestet is essentially different. Here the appearance of Christ, who is both a soldier and (primarily) a general in his metaphorical moral warfare, is introduced by the description of a literal soldier. Thus, unlike the appearance of Christ from nature, which in Hopkins's poetry is mediated by the hidden semantic structure of nature itself, the appearance of Christ after Hopkins's remarks about the causes of the admiration for soldiers is made possible by the structure of a specific discursive practice: it happens not in nature but rather in language.¹⁸ A soldier whose alleged virtues are renounced in the literal space of the octave is redeemed in the metaphorical space of the sestet: in the space which is created by a conventional discursive practice of the Jesuits. Thus, it is only in the world of rhetoric that this poem as a unified semantic structure can exist. This conclusion, however, has unexpected hermeneutic implications.

Paradoxically enough, the understanding of the rhetorical character of the relation between the two parts of the sonnet can help the critic to find the missing existential element that mediates between the octave and the sestet and regulates their metaphoric exchange. This element is Hopkins's own presence: his non-literary life with its biographical relations to the major discursive practices which mould the rhetoric of the sonnet. To begin with, it is the conventional discursive

practice of Jesuit Catholicism that underpins the poem. Within this discourse, Hopkins is a soldier of Christ. As such a soldier, he is faithful to his soldiery: he tries to fulfill his duties at the University College, which he considers completely useless, if not subversive, and which slowly kill him, at all costs. And so it is he, private Hopkins, whom his general Christ blesses among other soldiers at the end of the sestet. In other words, the conventional discursive practice of the Jesuits turns the sestet with its seemingly impersonal contemplation upon duty and its religious significance into a fragment of Hopkins's meditations upon his own life in Dublin, its meaning and its justification.

But there is another important sense in which Hopkins considered himself a soldier: he was a soldier of the empire in a rebellious province. It has been already shown that the rhetorical justification of this conception was at hand: it is precisely because Hopkins was a poet that he could consider himself a soldier. Furthermore, the fragility of the body that he stresses in his description of the soldier ("the greater part / But frail clay, nay but foul clay") echoes his self-presentation in the 'terrible sonnets': his feebleness, mortality, his vulnerable and 'fragmented' body. In addition, describing the wide-spread mythologization of the soldiers, Hopkins says that people "dear . . . the artist after his art." This reference to art is inserted in the most unexpected place and suddenly foregrounds the poet's own presence. The noun 'artist,' which is metaphoric when it is applied to the soldier, becomes literal when it is applied to Hopkins himself. What must be interpreted as a far-fetched trope when the poem is read without reference to extratextual reality, becomes a trace of Hopkins's acute and incessant self-scrutiny, so important for his late writings,¹⁹ when the sonnet is placed in its existential context.

Moreover, it is also noteworthy that the use of the metaphors of 'artist' and 'art' in relation to soldiers creates a conspicuous semantic discrepancy, which entails further questions on the part of the critic. There are two senses that the word 'art' may have: art as profession and art as its aesthetic products. When this word is applied to the

soldier, it must be understood in its first sense, for the soldier produces nothing; the art Hopkins mentions must be glossed as the art of war. However, in this case the comparison becomes bizarre: if the difficulties of war indeed allow us to suspect that soldiers are stronger and more resilient than other people, there is nothing in art as profession (say, in the art of poetry) that can make an artist dear to other men: art may be merciless, obnoxious and even vicious. It is only a given artistic object, say *Alice in Wonderland*, that may endear its author to us.

In other words, when the phrase "dears the artist after his art" is used in its literary sense, it implies the interpretation of the noun 'art' as 'the object of art,' whereas when it is applied metaphorically to a soldier, it must be based on the understanding of 'art' as profession. Thus, this metaphorical application is made possible by a diaphoric shift. Consequently, it seems that there is a marked semantic gap in the middle of the poem. However, the hypothesis that Hopkins's contemplation upon the meaning of the admiration for soldiers masks the gesture of self-portrayal, as well as the moment of introspection and self-scrutiny, can help the critic to account for this semantic discrepancy without resorting to the concept of diaphora. In his poems Hopkins repeatedly stresses strength and resilience,²⁰ and so his imaginary, non-existent, readers may suspect, like some readers of Nietzsche, that he is strong and resilient, creating "the artist after his art" (now in the most literal sense of the word) in their imagination. Taking into account this 'underthought,' to use Hopkins's own poetic term,²¹ a deeper and 'bi-lateral' meaning may be read in his use of the metaphors of 'art' and 'artist' in the denunciation of the mythologized image of the soldier. This implicit comparison between soldiers and artists suggests that the imaginary figure of an artist, which is created 'after his art,' is not only a product of the self-delusion on the part of the reader; this imaginary figure can be 'redeemed' in the same fashion as Hopkins's admiration for soldiers, which, at first sight, seems to be nothing but self-deception. Indeed, he, Gerard Manley Hopkins, like any other English soldier, is only "frail clay," but his personal

vulnerability is overcome in the harsh world of his poetry, and transfigured by its strength and resilience—precisely as the vulnerability of any given soldier is transfigured by their common faithfulness to duty, which has made possible British military glory.

Thus, there is one crucial, though invisible, point in which the octave and the sestet cross: Hopkins's presence. The octave and the sestet circulate within different discursive practices: within the discourses of British Politics and Jesuit Catholicism. And it is only the presence of Hopkins, who is simultaneously an English poet in rebellious Ireland and a Jesuit priest who fulfills his meaningless duties at all cost, that enables the crossing of these referential contexts; it is only Hopkins, with his rare and deeply problematic existential situation, who is a soldier in both discursive domains. The transition from the octave to the sestet is the transition from one referential field to another, which becomes possible due to the pivotal point of Hopkins's constant self-reference, introspection and self-portrayal. It is Hopkins's singular existential situation and, consequently, his unique position in relation to different discursive practices that structures the configuration of the ideological elements of his sonnet. Or, to put it another way, it is the shadow of his invisible presence that Hopkins retains by the act of writing.

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NOTES

¹For a more detailed discussion of Hopkins's life in Dublin and for a picture of Hopkins's Dublin in general see: Pick, Bergonzi, Kitchen, Feeney, Storey and especially two recent biographies of Hopkins written by Martin and White.

²See, for example, S 262, LI 168, LI 183, LI 192, LI 214-15, LI 216, LI 222, LI 282, LII 139, LIII 256. For the analysis of the representation of insanity in Hopkins's late poetry see Sobolev 2001.

³In October 1884 (the year of his arrival to Dublin) Hopkins already complained to Dixon: "I have 557 papers on hand: let those who have been thro' the like say what this means" (LII 123). Two years later he described his "examination-work, six or seven weeks of it without any break, Sundays and weekdays"; in the same

year he called his exams the "attack of the plague" (LI 236). Moreover, this overwhelming and exhausting work penetrated into his private notes. "In the battered exercise-book called Hopkins's 'Dublin Notebook' there are pages and pages containing thousands of examination ticks, marks, and occasional comments" (White 372).

⁴Hopkins wrote to Dixon that "in school time [he] can scarcely undertake anything" (LII 149). He pointed out to Bridges that he could not leave Ireland because of exams: "I should be about beginning my examination work and it would be altogether impossible for me to be out of Ireland" (LI 193).

⁵In his well-known letter to Bridges Hopkins writes: "All impulse fails me. If I could but produce work I should not mind its being buried, silenced, and going no further; but it kills me to be time's eunuch and never to beget" (LI 222). Hopkins's late writings are replete with similar complaints.

⁶Thus, for example, describing one of his rare vacations (his only occasions to return to calmness if not happiness), Hopkins wrote that in order "to save journey money we went to Wales" (LI 228). He added that they "lived cheap, too cheap, so that nearly £8 is left out of £20, and that is mismanagement" (LI 228). It is not clear from this passage whose initiative it was 'to save journey money'; but, in any case, the felt necessity 'to live cheap, too cheap' indicates that the sum which was at their disposal was very limited.

⁷One should remember that an unwavering devotion to the burdens of duty is practically a byword of "Victorianism." After all, few ideas so thoroughly suffused Victorian life as Carlyle's exhortation, "Work, for the night cometh wherein no man may work."

⁸The meaning of the term 'existential,' which is used several times in this essay, must be specified. Speaking about Hopkins's 'existential situation' or contrasting the existential to the ideological, I try to underscore the unique alloy of materiality and meaning, which makes up one's life—by contrast to its pure 'physical' facticity, on the one hand, and the trans-subjective universality of the philosophical and ideological, on the other. Therefore, in the analysis of Hopkins's existential situation, which has been carried out above, I often emphasized those of its aspects which are 'burdened' with subjectively important meaning more than others—tragic, painful, problematic. At the same time, it should be stressed that no 'ready-made' philosophical or literary context is implied by the term 'existential' as it is used in this paper.

⁹Alphonsus Rodriguez "was a temporal coadjutor, a lay brother . . . His entire Jesuit career was spent in the role of college porter, and he died after years of physical and spiritual suffering" (White 440-41). "When Alphonsus Rodriguez (c. 1533-1617), a devout Spaniard whose wife and children had died, first applied in his late thirties for admission as a Jesuit, he was rejected as . . . too frail after many austerities to become a lay brother"; "his fragmentary spiritual writings . . . recount his heroic struggles against demonic visions" (MacKenzie 499).

¹⁰The problem of the military aspect of the Jesuit discourse and the problem of Hopkins's political views, which will be discussed a little later, are only a part of a more general problem: one of the relationship between Hopkins's writings and his ideological milieu. Hopkins was, without a doubt, one of the poets for whom ideology was of paramount significance; and hence the problem of ideologies and their relationship is crucial for the understanding of his poetry. Moreover, from the end of the sixties, when the search for the philosophical unity of Hopkins's poetry was abandoned, Hopkins critics tend to represent it as a superposition of diverse and heterogeneous ideologies (in the wide sense of the term) to which Hopkins was exposed: the discourses of Classical scholarship, Scholastic philosophy, Jesuit metaphysics, Romantic poetry, Oxford aestheticism, Victorian particularism and, finally, emerging modernism. For the analysis of the influence of ideology in the narrow, socio-political, sense of term on Hopkins's ideas and writings see Bowra, Lucas, Marucci, Mizener, Sutherland, Thesing 1977 and 1993 and Zonneveld.

¹¹It should be mentioned that the question of the relative importance of the 'military' aspect of the Society of Jesus is controversial; and the answers to this question seem to be different for different periods. Moreover, it seems that the conception of the Jesuits as a military or paramilitary order was often played up by their opponents as a part of anti-Jesuit polemics. At the same time, there can be little doubt that the Jesuits do resort to military ideas and metaphors much more than any other Christian order.

¹²In the choice of quotations from Hopkins's devotional writings which represent Christ as a military commander I follow, in most cases, the suggestions made by Norman H. MacKenzie (459).

¹³See, for example, LI 127, LI 135, LII 97, LIII 393, the sonnet "Duns Scotus's Oxford" and the elegiac "Binsey Poplars."

¹⁴"Of course," writes Hopkins, "those who live in our civilization and belong to it praise it: it is not hard, as Socrates said, among the Athenians to praise the Athenians; but how will it be represented by critics bent on making the worst of it or even not bent on making the best of it? It is good to be in Ireland to hear how enemies, and those rhetoricians, can treat the things that are unquestioned at home" (LIII 367).

¹⁵One can argue that from the point of view of Hopkins's philosophy there is no essential difference between the literal and the metaphorical, substance and rhetoric, nature and language, for Hopkins believed in the origin of both language and the world in the Word. I cannot agree with this. Two years ago I analyzed this problem in the essay "Hopkins, Language, Meaning" (Sobolev 2000). The conclusion that I reached there says that despite the use of onomatopoeic effects Hopkins did not believe in the immanence of meaning in language, and that his poetic space implies no intrinsic connection between the Word and the words of human languages. To put it another way, in Hopkins's poetic world there is an essential difference between nature, whose diverse (generic and singular, eternal and

transient) forms are closely associated with God, and language, which is bereft of such relation. And, correspondingly, there is an essential difference between the literal and metaphorical application of language. Thus, for example, Christ as the Word is not a metaphor for Hopkins, but Christ as the word "soldier" or the word "general" is still a metaphor—from the biographical point of view Christ was neither a soldier nor a general.

¹⁶For different analyses of Hopkins's philosophy of God and nature, which, in my view, is most similar to panentheism, see, for example, Gardner, Heuser, Hartman, Loomis and Miller.

¹⁷It is well known that the concept of 'in scape' is central to both Hopkins's poetics and his philosophical views. Moreover, one can often hear that in the context of Hopkins's philosophy this notion ensures the identity between God and nature, God and language, nature and language. In my view, however, this is not the case. I analyzed the meaning and the use of this notion in a long essay "Inscape Revisited," which will be published in *English: the Journal of the English Association* (UK) in 2002. The analysis carried out in this paper has shown that the meaning of this notion is much wider than most critics admit; in general terms it can be paraphrased as "embodied organized form," and its more exact meaning is specified only by its actual application. Therefore, 'in scape' as such does not imply a necessary metaphysical relation, but only its possibility. It is only in the context of Hopkins's 'panentheism' (see note 16) that 'in scape' becomes capable of mediating between God and nature, retaining both their identity and their difference. In another context, like that of Hopkins's philosophy of language (see note 15), the meaning of 'in scape' becomes essentially different. It is partly because of this potential semantic multiplicity that analyzing Hopkins's portraits, I used the term 'in scape' only in relation to Hopkins's 'nature sonnets,' where this term is indispensable. In addition, it should be said that this notion has become an overdetermined one—in my essay I quoted more than twenty existing definitions of 'in scape', most of which are mutually contradictory.

¹⁸It may be argued that in Hopkins's poetic world there is no essential difference between nature and language. I cannot agree with this. See note 15 for a brief discussion of this problem. For a more detailed analysis of Hopkins's philosophy of language see Sobolev 2000.

¹⁹Constant self-scrutiny and long meditations upon the problem of the self belong to the most important components of Hopkins's late poetry. See, for example, Hopkins's celebrated 'terrible sonnets' or his last sonnets, the most famous of which is "Thou art" ("Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend / With Thee . . ."). For a critical assessment of these poems with reference to the problem of the self see Wolfe.

²⁰See, for example, Hopkins's sonnet "The Windhover," which he considered his best poem. After the description of the flight of a kestrel, Hopkins turns to his own response to it and says that his "heart in hiding stirred for" "the achieve of, the mastery of" the bird, which managed to retain the unique trajectory of its

flight—despite “the big wind.” For the analysis of the poem from the perspective of strength and resilience, see Hartman.

²¹‘Underthought’ is one of the most famous and most obscure terms in Hopkins’s poetics. It is used in a letter to A. W. M. Baillie from 1883 (LIII 252-53) and designates a motif or an idea which is not manifested explicitly, but revealed in the choice of diction and imagery.

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