'THE LEADEN ECHO AND THE GOLDEN ECHO': HOPKINS'S VISION OF A CHRISTIAN AESTHETIC

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> . . . *the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life*
>
> *Jn 4,14*

IN SEPTEMBER 1886 Hopkins wrote to R. W. Dixon,

> I have long wished to write a tragedy of St Winefred and had some fragments of it done, and since I have been here I have got on with it a little, with promise of more.[1]

The tragedy was something that Hopkins had been working on since 1879. However, from his earliest days in theology at St Beuno's the story of Winefred and the well which bears her name held an attraction for him. Writing to Bridges a few years earlier in 1877 he observed, '[the well] fills me with devotion every time I see it and would fill anyone who has eyes with admiration, the flow of ἀγλαον ὕδωρ is so lavish and so beautiful'.[2]

Hopkins's fascination with the legend of St Winefred and her shrine had little to do with the Victorian fashion for reviving the medieval in architecture and religion. He displays a mind too tough, critical and individual to be persuaded by a romantic reconstruction of a past age or the vacuous aesthetic of Rossetti, Wilde or Pater. His correspondence reveals someone who is not only acutely aware of all the various movements of his time and culture, but who is also at work forging his own unique vision of things. That vision is most evident in his poetry, always for Hopkins the 'laboratory of the Spirit'.

Although the tragedy of St Winefred's Well remained unfinished, 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo', originally intended as a

chorus or maidens' song, stands complete in itself. It is a work of great technical mastery and freshness in which Hopkins is able to deploy his linguistic and musical sensitivity, but it also contains the themes which occupy him in all his major poems. It offers us an insight into the central struggle of his own intellectual and spiritual voyage and stands as a witness to the synthesis his art achieves. The purpose of this essay is to explore some of the key elements which lie at the centre of the uniquely Christian aesthetic which Hopkins develops. The first part will set out its main lines through a discussion of the form and argument in 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo'. The second part will examine the basis of 'The Echo's' argument in more detail, exploring the theological and spiritual 'logic' upon which it is constructed.

I

'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' produces its extraordinary effect through a series of complex interlocking patterns of sound, repeated not only within each of its two parts but also across them. These patterns, in tension with each other and within themselves, constantly threaten to disintegrate the unity of the whole piece. At a deeper level however, this potential cacophony is controlled and used as the vital tension which generates the harmony. This is realized through the total sound structure of the work which creates a sustained *aural* image of water. A use of internal rhyming and chiming consonants set in each line, Hopkins's version of the *cynghanedd* of Welsh poetic technique,[3] enables him to control the sound and to vary it so that now it echoes the regular, or sometimes staccato measure of water dripping, now the slowed pressure as the water encounters an obstacle, now the softer, fading sound as the water is absorbed into the earth and loses strength, finally bursting forth again in great glissandi of vibrant sound and movement. The aural image of water, however, is no display of mere technical virtuosity, it also carries a cogent, sustained intellectual argument which intends to answer the principal question of the opening movement,

> How to keep—is there ány any, is there none such, nowhere/ known
> some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace, latch or catch or/ key to keep
> Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty . . . from vanishing/ away?

It is not only taken up, answered and responded to both aurally and intellectually in the second movement, 'The Golden Echo',

but a whole series of scriptural 'echoes' are brought into play. This has the effect of generating an encounter between the aesthetic of a secular view of beauty, *usque ad mortem*, and the transfiguring vitality offered in the beauty of God's word. Not only are 'sad and stealing messengers grey' caught up and transformed, both in image and in sound, into a fulfilled and abundant 'heavy-headed hundredfold' by the 'fonder care' of God's grace and life, [Lk 12,6] but St Winefred's well becomes the well of the Samaritan woman [Jn 4,1-26]. At both wells the same issue is at stake and at both the same quest ended, the thirst quenched and nature fulfilled in the life of the Spirit:

> But anyone who drinks of the water that I shall give
> will never thirst again:
> the water I shall give
> will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.

In the gathering momentum of its sound and argument the poem itself 'wells up' until it transcends even its own subtle, complex harmonies and memories and eventually leaves them behind. Sound and argument are suspended by the call of the 'Yonder'. The effect of this suspension does not signify the desultory desire for transcendence which informs Larkin's 'High Windows', 'that shows Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless'. Such a transcendence is the 'wisdom' of the 'The Leaden Echo' which remains essentially a sad hope of some relief. It is a hope born from a nihilistic weariness and impotence in the face of the trashiness of modern life. This transcendence has no vision of redemption, instead it can offer only the benign emptiness of death whose servant is time:

> Be beginning; since, no, nothing can be done
> To keep at bay
> Age and age's evils, hoar hair,
> Ruck and wrinkle, drooping, dying, death's worst, winding
> sheets, tombs
> and worms and tumbling to decay;

Hopkins is well aware of this *Totentanz* of man—'the deathdance in his blood'—and rejects the seductive aesthetic that it can create. Nor does the suspension of sound at the conclusion of 'The Golden Echo' enter the realm of an ambiguous silence, the sort that whispers in Arnold's 'Dover Beach' and 'Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse', or is heard in R. S. Thomas's 'Waiting',

> . . . leaning far out
> over an immense depth, letting your name go and waiting,
> somewhere between faith and doubt,
> for the echoes of its arrival.

The transcendence of 'The Golden Echo' never abandons the leaden one. Its echoes do not fade away as one might expect them to in the natural order and as the 'falling feet' of the repeated 'despair' suggest in the first movement. It is precisely in the ball of 'despair' that 'The Golden Echo' is caught—'Spare'—and 'pitched' at a new level. Transformed to a 'rising foot' it expands throughout the whole of the second movement sending its ripples in ever wider, intense and passionate circles to create an ascending fugue of life and grace. In this way, through its own form and movement 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' exemplifies the *Aufhebung* from nature through grace to glory. However, the possibility of this transformation, the 'key' to it, lies in the mystery of the way in which 'Spare' can be brought out of 'despair'. In it is contained Hopkins's vision of God's *immanent* transcendence upon which his own aesthetic is built; it is the dynamic architecture of presence, 'to flash from the flame to the flame, then tower from the grace to the grace'.

His mystery must be instressed, stressed

The immanent transcendence of God does not call us beyond the world but summons us into the centre of its multiplicity. It is in *this* that our striving for him and our finding of him takes place. The suspension of sound at the end of 'The Golden Echo' does not lead to a vacant silence but to an intense attentiveness. All the rhythms and multiple echoes and re-echoes have the effect of attuning our ear so that we hear both within and beyond them to another voice, one that is 'in and through all created things'. This is the *raison d'être* in all of Hopkins's poetry. The effect is to allow us to hear the invitation and challenge of the call. The 'Yonder' achieves this by generating its own unsettling echo within us, a sound which cannot be satisfied, and needs to be answered in our life beyond the context of the poem. Hopkins's poetry does not offer an aesthetic of escape, one that may heighten and refine our sensibility and through the beauty of its sounds, sentiments and forms promises order and refuge from the storms of meaninglessness that batter us. Rather, he directs us to the form of our own life for it is only here, in the immanence of our own humanity, that beauty is forged. Winefred is not a 'Nun taking the Veil'; the willowy pre-Raphaelite aestheticism of the latter has been left

behind in the integrating dynamic of surrender and resurrection which Winefred's life has become. Her life, like that of the Sister in 'The Deutschland,' is caught by the chance and clash of elemental forces, natural and supernatural. They both stand, not out of the world but in the centre of its chaos: for one the ungovernable lust of Caradoc, for the other the impartial violence of the storm. Yet both, through their faith and a passionate, immoveable will set on God, are transformed from victim to conqueror. In this dynamic, personal history is transfigured into the history of 'the hero of Calvary' and breaks into royal glory—'Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion'. This is not a glory which leaves the world behind it; it is 'a flame', 'a spark' which runs through the world, 'like shining from shook foil', gathering and uniting all the moments of its appearances whether in falcons or kingfishers, the music of Purcell, the interplay of inscape and instress in a ploughman or a child's handsome heart. It is an immanent glory forged in and through the world's dissonances. It is not the apocalyptic glory of the parousia but the prophetic flame and 'fire which breaks forth' at Pentecost. In all of these moments we have a poetry of the Spirit that celebrates and proclaims 'the Resurrection,/A heart's clarion'.

This, however, is no easy aesthetic for the *ek-stasis* of Pentecost is the gift of Good Friday; Winefred and the Franciscan nun like all Hopkins's prophets, even the poet himself, must accept this way in order to receive the gift. It is a question of integrity for only in living the asceticism of obedience and faith can speech and life be sufficiently transparent so that we can say '*myself* it speaks and spells,/Crying *What I do is me: for that I came*'. Act reveals being only where there is integrity of life. This is the aesthetic of holiness and it is at the centre of Hopkins's art. It is the basis of his answer to that most fundamental of all aesthetic questions posed in 'The Echo', 'How to keep back beauty?' It is an urgent question for anyone who, like Hopkins, chooses to be immanent in the world and accept the risk of a 'Heraclitean' individuality and vitality which is always on the verge of contradiction, paradox and cacophony: 'All things counter, original, spare, strange,/Whatever is fickle, freckléd (who knows how?)'

This is nothing less than the risk of human freedom and history; the great risk of creation itself. The key is grace. It would be a misunderstanding to think of grace as a security from risk; rather, it is risk at its most urgent and intense because it is the point at which freedom is forged. The only way to 'keep beauty' is to 'keep grace'. In so far as it is an actualization of the true end of each created thing, grace is also the way in which each thing is most

itself, at once most individual but also most in harmony. This truth receives its theological and metaphysical articulation in the *analogia haecceitatis et personalitatis* of the Scotist school and could not but appeal to Hopkins.

Grace is not and cannot be the separation of the material and spiritual; in fact, it is the repudiation of a destructive dualism through the restoration of their right relation: each is so ordered to the other as to realize a dynamic unity of form in praise. Praise is the poetry of immanence:

> God's utterance of himself in himself is God's Word, outside himself in the world. This world then is Word, expression, news of God. Therefore its end, its purpose, its support, its meaning is God and its life or work to name or praise him. Therefore praise before reverence and service . . .[4]

Grace then, is not a 'thing' but a vital relation, a participation in the reality of the Spirit, it is just as present in *becoming* as in being. For this reason it is therefore active in and through history, the Spirit which moves over the waters of time and matter, bringing order and form out of chaos and its fragmented multiplicity. Grace is a *living* beauty which, at every moment, presupposes and expresses freedom. The glory of the resurrection is its most complete and immanent manifestation. Here the material and spiritual are so open to each other that they reveal the pneumatological *instress*, the gift of life which is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit recreating us in Christ. This is no loss of individuality but the illumination of its Christological *inscape* so that it participates in and radiates the glory of the risen Lord. In the resurrection we become so utterly transparent and filled with the life of God that the image in which we were first created is restored and perfected but in such a way that we know it to be our image also. To this extent, image is not a 'picture' but the dynamic pattern or history of Christ which becomes the form and interpretation of our history and reality: the only way in which we can recognize ourselves.

> For grace is any action, activity, on God's part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries the creature to or towards the end of its being, which is its self sacrifice to God and its salvation. It is, I say, any such activity on God's part; so that so far as this action or activity is God's it is divine stress, holy spirit, and, as all is done through Christ, Christ's spirit; so far as it is action, correspondence, on the creature's it is *actio salutaris*; so far as it is looked at *in esse quieto* it is Christ in his member on the one side,

> his member in Christ on the other. It is as if a man said: That is Christ playing at me and me playing at Christ, only this is not play but truth; That is Christ *being me* and me being Christ.[5]

In a sense, the resurrection is the first time in which we can know and see ourselves truly because it is the first time when we will be complete [cf 1 Cor 13,12]. The resurrection is the constant theme of Hopkins's poetry and forms what might be called his *eschatological aesthetic of the kingdom*. It is a beauty, truth and life in which we already participate; we catch glimpses of it if our eyes have the vision of faith, and our heart and will through the discipline of love's *adhaerere Deo* is open to hear his call and follow it.

'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' states this aesthetic of the kingdom and it places Hopkins in a different range from the aesthetic of his day. His is no mere poetry of ecstasy or inspiration for it has a rigorous and subtle theological underpinning. In it is located the source of Hopkins's distinctive voice, at once sharing that individuality and uniqueness which it celebrates, while retaining an objectivity even when intensely personal. It is poetry which is always attentive to the dialogical grammar and dynamic of grace whose patterns of mediation it traces and explores in every circumstance from natural disasters which catch public attention to the hidden depths of the soul's most intimate moments of anguish and *delectatio*.

It is also in the light of this aesthetic that we can see that Hopkins's celebration of personality is not romantic nor is his vision of God's presence in the world pantheist.[6] In the incarnation, the world becomes a graced realm appropriated in the gift of the Holy Spirit, recreating it in the image of Christ. The grace of creation and redemption are not separated by Hopkins nor are they collapsed but related through Christ's sacrifice. In the same way through our 'self-sacrifice to God' they are also related to each other in our life and history. Humanity through its own redeeming 'Yes' to God becomes itself the mediation of redemption to creation. It enters into the work of Christ the High Priest fulfilling its own intrinsic call to priesthood implicit in the creation of humanity but rejected through original sin. The vision behind Hopkins's intense humanism and sacramental view of reality is a christology and soteriology expressed in his aesthetic of grace.[7]

Within this dynamic reality the *mysterium tremendum* of the storm or the 'Brute beauty and valour and act' of the windhover and the 'fire that breaks forth from thee' all point to the reality of God's transcendent immanence. It is the '*Thou* mastering me' who is also the Master *in* me, whose very transcendence is his presence *intimior*

intimo meo. It is only a God who is so close, so attentive who can hear the fall of 'despair' and the cry within it, a cry which we can barely hear ourselves—'Spare!' : the great cry for mercy and salvation which runs through the psalms, the cry that is heard through all creation until answered with God's own Word in Christ. Only God himself, through his own intense listening can catch the echo hidden in despair and through his response he makes it explicit in order that we too can hear it. In this one act of his attentive love, God returns the echo to us, no longer as our sentence of death but as the gift which becomes our prayer, a prayer already answered in the giving. It is with this turn that 'The Leaden Echo' is transformed into the 'Golden Echo'; it has found the right key, both musically and morally. Not only is it a new key in which to bring out the harmony of form, it is also the 'key' which unlocks beauty from its mortal prison and sets it free. The rhythm of 'The Golden Echo' captures this as it rushes forward, overtaken by the Spirit and given life:

> Yes I cán tell such a key, I dó know such a place,
> Where whatever's prized and passes of us, everything that's fresh and fast flying of us, seems to us sweet of us and swiftly away with, done way with, undone . . .
>
> . . .[is] fastened with the tenderest truth
> To its own best being and its loveliness of youth: it is an everlastingness of, O it is an all youth!

This is beauty baptised and redeemed, alive and secured already in possession of the promise and the glory of the resurrection:

> Nay, what we had lighthanded left in surly the mere mould
> Will have waked and have waxed and have walked with the wind what while we slept,
> This side, that side hurling a heavy-headed hundredfold
> What while we, while we slumbered.

In 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' Hopkins answers the question of beauty with the aesthetics of the kingdom. It is never just an intellectual construct but it is a praxis, a 'doing the truth'. Essentially it is an aesthetic of *metanoia*, one that can never be an end in itself, a beauty for beauty's sake, but must always be a reponse to the invitation, 'Come then'. In response to that call art and life are purified and purify each other. It is to this that we must now turn.

II

As we have seen, although the aesthetics of grace is a transcendent and transfiguring one, 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' makes clear that it is never without the challenge of the 'call'. In an Ignatian sense, it is also the aesthetics of the kingdom attained only through responding to the call of the Eternal King.[8] 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' places us at the centre of the Election in the Exercises. It is not therefore only about the transcendence of God but the transcendence of self and exposes the deep paradox which runs through the whole piece and much of Hopkins's poetry: 'anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it' [Mt 11,39]. It is the ascetic tension which lies at the centre of Hopkins's own life and out of which his poetry comes.

1. The aesthetics of renunciation: integrity of life and speech

Although 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' expresses and develops Hopkins's own eschatological aesthetic and is a complete statement in itself, we must not forget the setting for which it was intended. The beauty of St Winefred is not an easily won thing, it has a high price. According to the legend Winefred was savagely murdered by Caradoc because she would not yield to his lust. Beuno, the Welsh saint, brought her back to life and where the blood from her severed head fell a spring flourished bringing healing to all who bathed in it. The fragment of Hopkins's drama contrasts the brutal and chaotic passion of Caradoc, unredeemed force and concupiscence of his will, with the ordered strength and passion which is the fruit of Winefred's faith. Her beauty comes from this; a beauty which is expressed in the form of a life and a will already alive with the Spirit, tested and refined through martyrdom.

As was seen in the first part, beauty for Hopkins is not some *a priori* form imposed from without or shaped by some abstract ideal but is always the dynamic expression of an inner life. It is a purity of will incarnated and expressing itself not only in body but in actions. Beauty is virtue, 'I say more: the just man justices'; it is this which reveals itself in time and history, no longer the enemy of beauty but its field of play. It is history made transparent to the Spirit through the life of the righteous person who illuminates the fundamental instress and inscape of redemption. Here, poetry is a form of life and cannot be separated from life's history. This is why Hopkins's poetry will not allow us to remain neutral. It will not be treated like some *objet d'art* for poetic speech is itself 'speech from the heart' realizing the righteousness and grace which is present there. Hopkins's poetry takes seriously the promise of the

Beatitudes, 'happy are the pure in heart for they shall see God' [Mt 5,8]. All of Hopkins's work is a striving after the integrity of this purity and expresses its vision—'For I greet him the days that I meet him, and I bless when I understand'. A pure heart is also an innocent heart, one that is free, it has energy to play and delight in the world in which it is at home and its speech expresses this,

> Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows flaunt forth, then
> chevy on an air—
> Built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs they throng,
> they glitter in marches.

However, it is not an undisciplined or self-indulgent speech which has lost sight of its object and is narcissistically concerned only with its own form and style. All Hopkins's poetic language, precisely because it expresses this aesthetic of the kingdom, is pneumatological speech. It is, so to speak, grace, brought to the surface of language, the ordinary rhythms heightened[9] so that their structure too participates in and mediates the event. Once again it is the same principle of grace building on nature to make that nature more completely itself; now it is applied directly to language.

> Why do I employ sprung rhythm at all? Because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is native and natural rhythms of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms, combining as it seems to me, opposite and one wd. have thought, incompatible excellences, markedness of rhythm—this is rhythm's self—and naturalness of expression.[10]

Hopkins's attention to the 'discipline' of sprung rhythm is his attention to proper instress and inscape of language so that it can express *its* true self. Language like people is also graced and when it understands itself in correct and ordered action, when it is language in harmony with the Spirit, then it too is virtuous and expresses and gives voice to 'God's better beauty, grace'. Hopkins's poetic voice is the same as his theological one; it seeks the same integrity of action and being for 'any untruth to nature or to human nature is frigid'.[11] In Hopkins's hands sprung rhythm becomes 'free' or 'purified speech': intense, passionate, personal, 'fire i' the flint',[12] but never indulgent or decadently captivated by its own technique. Both language, life, poetry, grace and freedom have one work to do: 'Let all God's glory through'.

Art, like life, attains beauty only when it becomes transparent to the beauty which is God himself. Such openness is possible only

when art, like life, forgets itself either in its contemplation of God or in its striving for him. It entails the recognition that all created things, even beauty, have to be redeemed. There is no refuge in 'Mortal Beauty' precisely because it is mortal. When man forgets this and makes his own works the source of his salvation then his worship of beauty is idolatry. As Hopkins observes of Lucifer, 'This song of Lucifer's was a dwelling on his own beauty, an instressing of his own inscape, and like a performance on the organ an instrument of his own being . . .'[13] The question is never just about the preservation of beauty, it is also about its purpose. The one cannot be answered without the other. 'To what serves Mortal Beauty?' Hopkins's answer is clear: we cannot rest in it 'then leave, let that alone'. However, this is not enough for, if beauty is to last, we need to press further to the recognition that it is also gift. Beauty must become a call because in its mystery as gift it points beyond itself to the one who is 'Beauty's self and beauty's giver'. When mortal beauty itself calls us to renounce it, it has gained a purity which is 'an everlasting of'; it has become an 'Immortal Diamond'. At its core lies the paradox of obedience and freedom which turns on surrender,

> Resign them, sign them, seal them, send them, motion them with breath,
> And with sighs soaring, soaring sighs, deliver
> Them; beauty-in-the-ghost, deliver it, early now, long before death
> Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God
> beauty's self and beauty's giver.

Creation and its beauty are ultimately a great school of the heart in which we learn to trust the promise that,

> the thing we freely forfeit is kept with fonder a care,
> Fonder a care kept than we could have kept it, kept
> Far with fonder a care . . .

2. The dynamic of renunciation: the instress lovescape crucified

The call to renunciation is the ascetic tension at the root of Hopkins's life and art. It is the crucible, 'nature's bonfire', in which his aesthetic is purified and refined. At its heart lies the great mystery and strange violence of martyrdom. In poems as different as 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and 'St Alphonsus Rodriguez' the same reality and the ambiguity of violence and surrender is explored. The same tension is at work in the sonnets of desolation. Although on a different, more intimate and hidden

scale, 'where war is within', the expression of the desire as well as the reality of transfiguration is still given both expression and form in art. Hopkins never abandons the struggle of renunciation which releases 'the selfless self of self'; the integrity of his art lies in the fact that he does not resolve the dark ambiguities of this process, 'Thou art lightning and love', but through an intellectual rigour and honesty lets these potential cacophonies have their place. If they are not resolved they are, however, transfigured by the God who reveals himself in them. It is again part of the integrity of Hopkins's vision that he never takes the easy way of an aesthetic resolution; he never allows art to become the redeemer, which is why there is always a certain 'shock' in his work. In essence, it is the dying to self which even art must undergo.

This ascetic tension, however, is not a pathology of suffering or a neuroticism which would be yet another form of narcissism, an effect of wounded nature rather than its healing. Hopkins is too good a theologian and too much formed by the Exercises to engage in this. He understands well that it is the asceticism of life and not of death. If all grace has a Christological form then it is sealed by the Cross, a *lux in tenebris lucet*. For Hopkins, as for any Christian spirituality, this is the redemptive expression of the incomprehensible mystery of God's own being as Trinity, the deepest point of his immanent transcendence:

> Why did the Son of God go thus forth from the Father not only in the eternal and intrinsic procession of the Trinity but also by an extrinsic and less than eternal, let us say aeonian one?—To give God glory and that by sacrifice, sacrifice offered in the barren wilderness outside of God . . . This sacrifice and this outward procession is a consequence and shadow of the procession of the Trinity, from which mystery sacrifice takes its rise . . .[14]

In the major poems of Hopkins there is never a *theologia gloriae* without a *theologia crucis*. Hopkins shares Herbert's eloquent insight that all our Easter *Exultets* are composed on Calvary:

> Awake, my lute and struggle for thy part
> With all thy art.
> The crosse taught all wood to resound his name,
> Who bore the same.
>
> His stretched sinews taught all strings, what key
> Is best to celebrate this most high day.

The eschatological aesthetic of 'Lovescape crucified' which emerges from this ascetic tension is formed by the dynamic of the

Spiritual Exercises where it is to be located as Hopkins's own commentaries indicate.[15] Its argument is that of 'The Principle and Foundation' which is a manifesto of freedom. Behind it lies Augustine's distinction between *uti* and *frui*, use and enjoyment, though it also needs to be read in the context of a Pauline freedom of the Spirit whose dynamic it seeks to preserve and keep true.

The whole of creation exists for humanity to help it praise, reverence and serve God. It is in this that our true happiness and beauty consists. When our will is rightly set and 'cleaves' to God in and through all things, then we and all creation come to the perfection and enjoyment of God's life. It is when we choose to rest in and enjoy creation for itself that we misuse it, not only bending it back to our own use but making it the victim of our own disorder. Thus creation becomes an obstacle to us and we to it so that the whole of creation is obscure to the Divine Glory. It becomes 'bitter' and 'sour' because it is trapped in self: 'I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree/Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me; . . .'[16] The Cross, in its fact and in its grace, when active as the dynamic of renunciation frees us from this closed circle. It refocuses our sight and lets us see the Truth. The dynamic of renunciation keeps Truth as the centre of our being. It is the birth of freedom in the paradox of obedience. Through the acceptance of this ascetic *eros* is purified, becoming the richness of *agape*. Augustine calls this a 'chaste heart'; 'God wishes to be loved disinterestedly, that is, to be loved chastely, not to be loved because He gives something besides Himself but because He gives Himself'.[17]

A 'distinterested' love is not a *care-less* love. On the contrary, it is a love which is so free that it can sacrifice itself for the beloved. It is the way in which God loves us and our love of him echoes it. This is Hopkins's *O Deus, ego amo te*, a desire which is there from the beginning but one which is transformed into the aesthetic of the kingdom through the Exercises. The 'Principle and Foundation' itself echoes through the whole of the Spiritual Exercises, determining choices and preserving the integrity of God's call and our response; it does not cease but is absorbed in the *Contemplatio ad Amorem* where it opens out to the whole of reality and is fulfilled. The *Contemplatio* is the immanent enjoyment of the life and love of God in all his creation; the moment when love and freedom are understood and lived in their unity. As Hopkins well understood, this is the aesthetic of the kingdom in action, 'All things therefore are charged with love, are charged with God and if we know how to touch them give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring and tell of him'.[18]

Conclusion

In a perceptive and critical essay on 'Religion and Literature', T. S. Eliot observed,

> What I do wish to affirm is that the whole of modern literature is corrupted by what I shall call secularism, that it is simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of, the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life: of something which I assume to be our primary concern.

In the light of our discussion we can see that it was of primary concern to Hopkins as well. However, his is not a supernaturalism of another world but of this one, a vision of God's immanent transcendence. It is an aesthetic of God's presence and grace which is lived in poetry as well as life. It is also radically Ignatian. Any approach which attempts to drive a wedge between Hopkins the poet, the priest and the Jesuit simply has not understood the unity of his life and work. It tries to read him with a secular eye. His poetry challenges this as it does any aesthetic of 'mortal beauty'. In all of Hopkins's work we cannot smother the call of the King without quenching its flame. This is why his poetry is unsettling, demanding and embarrassingly intensive; it has a chaste passion which is as strange to our age as it was to his own.

However, Hopkins's aesthetic not only challenges the secular but it also unsettles the religious aesthetic built on an 'other-worldly' supernaturalism. This can only produce a 'frigid passion' for God and his creation; it is built on fear, it 'knows the world' and in its own self-generated knowledge has lost its innocence. Such an aesthetic cannot really create beauty because it cannot trust it. Hopkins's aesthetic offers us the living asceticism of love. This is not a *noli me tangere*, on the contrary it is precisely the 'knowing how to touch' of a contemplation in action. It calls and challenges us to the same integrity:

> What high as that! We follow, now we follow.—Yonder, yes
> yonder, yonder,
> Yonder.

NOTES

[1] *The correspondence of G. M. Hopkins and R. W. Dixon*, ed. C. C. Abbot. [Dixon] XXXVI, cf Bridges LXIII.

[2] *The correspondence of G. M. Hopkins to R. Bridges*, ed C. C. Abbot [Bridges] XXX.

[3] Bridges p 38.

[4] *Spiritual writings*, Devlin p 129.

[5] Notes on Suarez, *De mysteriis vitae Christi* in *G. M. Hopkins*. Oxford authors series ed. by C. Phillips p 285; Bridges p 95ff.

[6] H. W. Fulweler in his study, *Letters from a darkling plain* [1972] is partially correct in identifying epistemology as one of the main tensions in Hopkins's poetry. This raises the question of God's immanence and transcendence so that the choice is not between belief or unbelief but between a transcendent versus an immanent God [p 91ff]. However, Fulweler is badly mistaken in assuming that it is a choice between deism or pantheism. This could only be a choice in a theology or a poetry which did not have a doctrine of grace. As we have been arguing, this is not the case with Hopkins. It is also his understanding of grace, more rooted in the Spiritual Exercises than in Scotist theology, which provides the solution to the epistemological question.

[7] *Creation and redemption, the great sacrifice*. Phillips 287.7; Bridges, p 89.

[8] Cf *Exx* §91 ff.

[9] Bridges p 46.

[10] Dixon p 36 ff.

[11] Dixon p 74 where Hopkins speaks of Browning's 'frigid fancy'.

[12] Cf Heaney's perceptive lecture by this name (British Academy, 1974) although he fails to uncover the source of Hopkins's understanding and use of 'sprung rhythm', a failure which is shared by many critics who also fail to grasp the significance of Milton for Hopkins. He is not only Hopkins's teacher in his mastery of poetic diction but, even more than Donne who only deploys theological themes, Milton is a theologian. In both poets poetry and theology explore the great themes of sin and redemption under the tutelage of the Spirit, 'that does prefer/Before all temples the upright heart and pure . . .'.

[13] *Commentary on the Spiritual Exx. Long Retreat 1881*, H. House p 349.

[14] Phillips p 289.

[15] Fulweler argues for a tension and implicit contradiction between Ignatius's Principle and Foundation and the position that the creative imagination of man is the expression of Christ and his continual new birth in the world. It is unfortunate that Fulweler misunderstands the Exercises and fails to read the Principle and Foundation in terms of the *Contemplatio*. It is for this reason, as well as the one mentioned above, that he, like many critics sets Hopkins's poetic vocation in opposition to his religious one. The position is clearly distorted and untenable. The hermeneutic for Hopkins's life and his poetry is Ignatian. It is the one he himself used and if we are to understand him and his work then we must work within this, if we are to understand both its strengths and weaknesses.

[16] There has been a tendency to read the sonnets of desolation in a psychoanalytic way. Undoubtedly they do reflect a highly personal spiritual and mental strain and dryness. However, it is also a measure of our own age's secularization that it has lost the language of faith in which to understand these moments. All the sonnets of desolation draw heavily upon imagery used in the first week of the Exercises. It is clear that Hopkins does not falsify his experience by doing this but struggles to understand it, not as a crisis of faith, but as its purification, an intensification of truth.

[17] *En. Ps.* LII, viii.

[18] Cf H. House, *op. cit.* p 342.