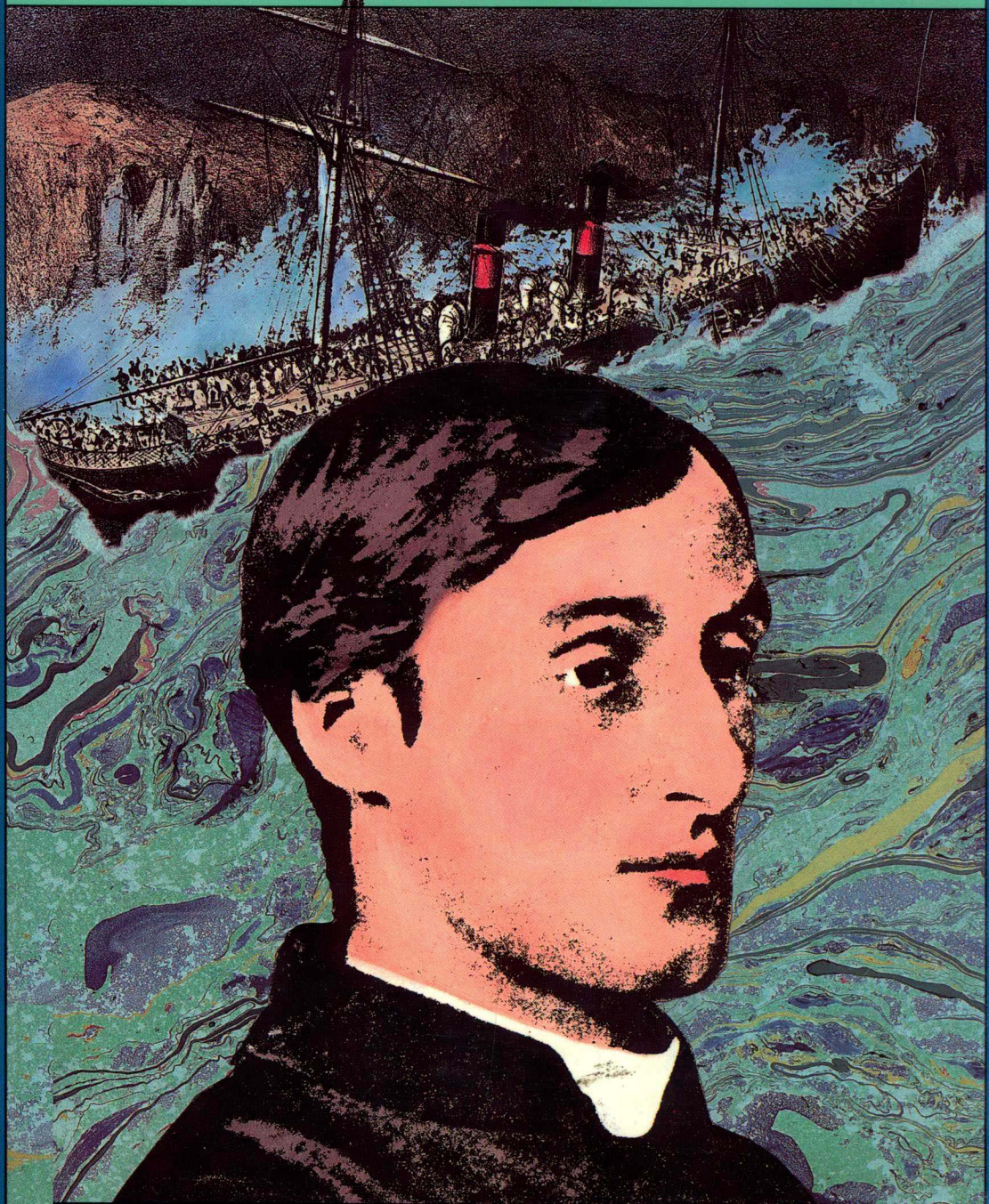


*Modern Critical Views*

**GERARD MANLEY  
HOPKINS**

Edited and with an introduction by  
**HAROLD BLOOM**



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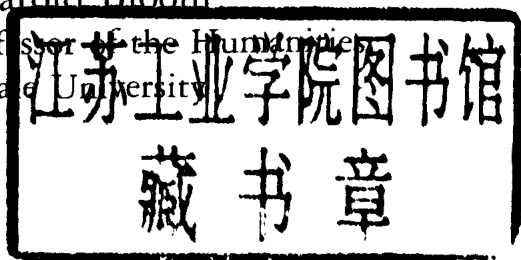
GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

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*Edited and with an introduction by*

Harold Bloom

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## *Editor's Note*

This volume gathers together a representative selection of the best criticism available upon the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, arranged in the chronological order of its publication. I am grateful to Eden Quainton for his erudition and judgment in helping to edit this book.

The introduction attempts to correct anachronistic views of Hopkins as a modernist poet, rather than as the High Victorian ephebe of Keats, and pupil of Walter Pater, that he actually was. Austin Warren's superb overview of Hopkins's achievement begins the chronological sequence, and needs no correction, recognizing as it does that the poet's mind was "first aesthetic, then technical."

A remarkable reading of "The Windhover" by Geoffrey H. Hartman emphasizes that "in Hopkins the figurative sense is always derived from physical phenomena," while showing also that the complexity of the figurations inheres in their "aesthetic surface." The analysis of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* by Elisabeth W. Schneider ranks it among the great odes of the language. A similarly high estimate is maintained by Paul L. Mariani in his spirited exegesis of the Terrible Sonnets, a veritable descent into that state named by St. John of the Cross as the Dark Night of the Soul.

Few poets are as original in their diction as Hopkins was, an originality that is the subject of James Milroy's investigation. Related to this complex question of vocabulary is the parallel study by Ellen Eve Frank, which examines Hopkins's concerns in the *Note-Books* both with architecture and with etymology, linked by an obsession with "fineness, proportion of feature."

Marylou Motto sensitively formulates some of the complex ways in which Hopkins mingles sacred and secular senses of time, as he works out the status of his poems as fictions of duration. In this book's final essay, J. Hillis Miller

offers a distinguished instance of Deconstructive criticism, in which the poet's "linguistic moments" are seen as instances of the realization that "language is a medium of separation, not of reconciliation." By returning us to Pater, the poet's tutor, as well as to Hegel and Nietzsche, Miller reminds us again that Hopkins was very much a poet of his age as well as a seer of timeless moments.

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## *Introduction*

Of all Victorian poets, Hopkins has been the most misrepresented by modern critics. He has been discussed as though his closest affinities were with Donne on one side, and T. S. Eliot on the other. Yet his poetry stems directly from Keats and the Pre-Raphaelites, and the dominant influences upon his literary thought came from Ruskin and Pater. A disciple of Newman, he is as High Romantic as his master, and his best poetry, with all its peculiarities of diction and metric, is perhaps less of a departure from the Victorian norm than Browning's, or Swinburne's, or even Patmore's. His case is analogous to Emily Dickinson's. Published out of their own century, they became for a time pseudocontemporaries of twentieth-century poets, but perspectives later became corrected, and we learned to read both poets as very much involved in the literature and thought of their own generations. Hopkins was, in many of his attitudes, a representative Victorian gentleman; indeed he was as much a nationalistic jingo as Tennyson or Kipling, and his religious anguish is clearly related to a characteristic sorrow of his age. His more properly poetic anguish is wholly Romantic, like Arnold's, for it derives from an incurably Romantic sensibility desperately striving not to be Romantic, but to make a return to a lost tradition. Hopkins quested for ideas of order that were not available to his poetic mind, and as a poet he ended in bitterness, convinced that he had failed his genius.

Hopkins was born on July 28, 1844, at Stratford in Essex, the eldest of nine children, into a very religious High Anglican family, of comfortable means. He did not enjoy his early school years, but flowered at Balliol College, Oxford, where he studied Classics from 1863 to 1867, and became a student of Walter Pater, who corrected his essays. In the atmosphere of the continuing Oxford Movement, Hopkins underwent a crisis, which came in March 1865 and partly resulted from meeting an enthusiastic, young, religious poet, Digby Dolben, who was to drown in June 1867 at the age of nineteen.



In 1866, under Newman's sponsorship, Hopkins was received into the Roman Catholic Church. Two years later, he began his Jesuit novitiate, and continued faithful to the Order until he died. Ordained a priest in 1877, he preached in Liverpool, taught at Stonyhurst, a Jesuit seminary, and from 1884 until his death in 1889 served as Professor of Greek at the University College in Dublin. Though perfectly free to write poems and paint pictures, so far as his superiors in the Society of Jesus were concerned, Hopkins was a congenital self-torturer, and so much a Romantic that he found the professions of priest and poet to be mutually exclusive.

Austin Warren, one of Hopkins's best and most sympathetic critics, justly remarked that in Hopkins's most ambitious poems there is "a discrepancy between texture and structure: the copious, violent detail is matched by no corresponding intellectual or mythic vigor." Following Keats's advice to Shelley, that an artist must serve Mammon by loading every rift of his poem with ore, Hopkins sometimes went too far, and even a sympathetic reader can decide that the poems are overloaded.

What then is Hopkins's achievement as poet? It remains considerable, for the original, almost incredible, accomplishment of Hopkins is to have made Keatsian poetry into a devotional mode, however strained. In the "Subtle Doctor," the Scottish Franciscan philosopher Duns Scotus (1265–1308), also an Oxonian, Hopkins found doctrine to reconcile a concern for individual form, for the "thisness" of people and natural things, with the universal truths of the church. Following his own understanding of Scotus, Hopkins coined the word "inscape" for every natural pattern he apprehended. "Instress," another coinage, meant for him the effect of each pattern upon his own imagination. Taken together, the terms are an attempt at scholasticizing Keats's fundamental approach to perception: detachment, the poet's recourse to nonidentity, Negative Capability.

Hopkins remained unpublished until his friend, the poet Robert Bridges, brought out a first edition of the poems in 1918, nearly thirty years after Hopkins's death. By chance, this first publication almost coincided with the start of the aggressive literary modernism that dominated British and American poetry until the 1950s, and Hopkins was acclaimed by poets and critics as the true continuator of English poetry in the otherwise benighted nineteenth century, and as a precursor who could help justify modern experiments in diction, metrics, and imagistic procedure.

Hopkins's diction adds to its Keatsian and Pre-Raphaelite base a large stock of language derived from his study of Welsh and Old English, and from an amorphous group of Victorian philologists who sought a "pure English," less contaminated by the Latin and French elements that are incurably part of

the language. Hopkins's metric was based, as he said, upon nursery rhymes, the choruses of Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, and Welsh poetry. Against what he called the "running" or "common" rhythm of nineteenth-century poetry, Hopkins espoused "sprung rhythm," which he insisted was inherent in the English language, the older, purely accentual meter of Anglo-Saxon verse. Evidently, Hopkins read Keats's odes as having this rhythm, despite Keats's Spenserian smoothness.

Though Hopkins came to the study of Old English late, his essential metrical achievement was to revive the schemes of Old English poetry. But the main traditions of English poetic rhythm go from Chaucer to Spenser and Milton and on to the major Romantics, and Hopkins's archaizing return to Cynewulf and Langland, though influential for a time, now seems an honorable eccentricity. Nevertheless, its expressive effectiveness is undeniable. The metrical basis of many of Hopkins's poems is a fixed number of primary-stressed syllables, surrounded by a variable number of unstressed ones, or "outrides" as he called them. The alliterations of early Germanic poetry also work powerfully to recast the poetic line into a chain of rhythmic bursts. Thus, in "The Windhover," the first two lines each have five of Hopkins's beats (as opposed to five regularized, alternating, accentual-syllabic ones):

I caught this mórning, mórning's minión, kíng-  
dom of dáylight's daúphin, dapple-dáwn-drawn Fálcon, in his ríding . . .

But the first line has ten syllables, and might be mistaken for an iambic pentameter, while the second has sixteen; and we realize as we read through the poems that what is common to them, their *meter* rather than their individual rhythms, is the sequence of five major stresses. Moreover, the phrase "dapple-dawn-drawn" is so accented as to preserve the meaning "drawn by dappled dawn" through its interior rhyme and alliterative clusters. Hopkins's own invented metrical terminology is, like his other philosophical vocabulary, highly figurative: "hangers" or "outrides," "sprung rhythm," "counterpointing" (or superposition of rhythmic schemes), even the blended emotive-linguistic meanings of "stress" itself, all invoke the imagery of his poems, and are as subjective as are his metaphysical concepts, but like those concepts constitute an extraordinary approach to a Catholic poetic transcendentalism.



AUSTIN WARREN

## *Instress of Inscape*

**T**he early Hopkins follows Keats and the "medieval school" (as he called the Pre-Raphaelites). The latest Hopkins, who wrote the sonnets of desolation, was a poet of tense, economic austerity. Their nearest parallel I can call would be Donne's "holy sonnets": "Batter my heart" and "If poisonous minerals." For mode in "Andromeda" and the later sonnets (1885-9), Hopkins himself projected "a more Miltonic plainness and severity": he is thinking of Milton's sonnets and the choruses of *Samson*. In 1887 he invoked another name: "my style tends always more towards Dryden."

The middle period, which opens with the *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1875) and closes with "Tom's Garland" and "Harry Ploughman," both written in 1885, is the period of experiment. But it is also the most Hopkinsian,—the most markedly and specially his.

Middle Hopkins startles us by its dense rich world, its crowded Ark, its plentitude and its tangibility, its particularity of thing and word. There is detailed precision of image ("rose moles all in stipple upon trout that swim"). The poet is enamored of the unique, the "abrupt self."

The exploration of Middle Hopkins,—its style, the view of life and art implicit in its style,—may well start from the institutions and movements from which the poet learned, in which he participated. The motifs are the Ritualistic Movement, Pre-Raphaelitism, Aestheticism, linguistic renovation, England, the Catholic Church. In Hopkins' celebration of the sensuous, the concrete, the particular—his "instress of the inscapes"—all of these converge.

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From *Gerard Manley Hopkins* by the Kenyon Critics. © 1944 by The Kenyon Review, © 1945 by New Directions.

As a Catholic, Hopkins was an incarnationist and a sacramentalist: the sacraments are the extensions of the incarnation. As a Catholic, he believed that man is a compound of matter and form, and that his body, resurrected, will express and implement his soul through all eternity. "Man's spirit will be flesh-bound when found at best. But unencumbered." Like all Catholic philosophers, he believed in an outer world independent of man's knowing mind—he was, in the present sense of the word, a "realist."

Hopkins was an Englishman, of a proud and patriotic sort. This is not always remembered, partly because he became the priest of a Church viewed by his compatriots as Continental, or Italian, or international. But there is an English way of being Catholic. Hopkins was not an "old Catholic" of the sturdy, unemotional variety nourished on Chailoner's *Garden of the Soul*; no convert could be that. But, like his admired Newman, and unlike Manning and Faber (also converts), he was "Gallican" not Ultramontane, British not Italian in his devotional life and rhetoric. He remembers when England was Catholic, when the pilgrims frequented the shrine of our Lady of Walsingham.

Deeply surely, I need to deplore it,  
 Wondering why my master bore it,  
 The riving off that race  
 So at home, time was, to his truth and grace  
  
 That a starlight-wender of ours would say  
 The marvelous Milk was Walsingham Way  
 And one—but let be, let be;  
 More, more than was will yet be.

The four real shapers of Hopkins' mind were all Britons; we might go further and say, all were British empiricists—all concerned with defending the ordinary man's belief in the reality and knowability of things and persons.

Two of them were encountered at Oxford. Pater, who remained his friend, was one of his tutors. In the abstractionist academic world, Pater boldly defended the concrete—of the vital arts and music of perception, of the unique experience. "Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face, some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest." Though Hopkins could not conceivably have written so representatively, abstractly " . . . hills . . . sea . . . choicer," the text pleads for a stressing of the inscapes. Hopkins followed some lectures by Pater on Greek philosophy: perhaps he heard, in an earlier version, Pater's lectures on Plato and Platonism, in which,

with monstrous effrontery, the Doctrine of Ideas was praised as giving contextual interest to the concrete.

With Ruskin, whose *Modern Painters* he read early and admiringly, Hopkins shared the revolt against that neoclassical grandeur of generality praised by Johnson and expounded by Reynolds. The influence of Ruskin—art medievalist, devout student of clouds, mountains, trees—is pervasive in Hopkins' sketches (five of which are reproduced in the *Note-Books*) and in his journalizing—his meticulously technical descriptions of church architecture (often neo-Gothic) and scenery.

Hopkins follows the general line of Ruskin in more than art. Remote from him is the old "natural theology" which finds the humanly satisfactory and well furnished world such an effect of its Creator as the watch of the watchmaker. Nor does he, after the fashion of some mystics and Alexandrians, dissolve Nature into a system of symbols translating the real world of the spirit. Like Ruskin, he was able to recover the medieval and Franciscan joy in God's creation. And like Ruskin he protested against an England which is "seared with trade . . . and wears man's smudge." His political economy, as well as it can be construed, was Ruskinian; what may be called Tory Socialist or Distributist.

It was to Newman, his great predecessor, that Hopkins wrote when he decided to become a Roman Catholic. And Newman's closest approach to a philosophical work, his *Grammar of Assent* (1870), interested Hopkins so far that in 1883 he planned to publish (should Newman agree) a commentary on it. There were marked temperamental and intellectual differences between the men. Newman, much the more complex and psychologically subtle, could feel his way into other men's minds as Hopkins could not. Hopkins was the closer dialectician and scholar. He did not share Newman's distrust of metaphysics, including the scholastic, his tendency to fideism; but he was, like Newman (in words the latter used of Hurrell Froude), "an Englishman to the backbone in his severe adherence to the real and the concrete."

The great medieval thinker who most swayed Hopkins' spirit to peace, Duns Scotus, was also a Briton, had been an Oxford professor. He was "Of reality the rarest-veined unraveler": he was able to analyze, disengage from the complex in which they appear, the thinnest, most delicate strands ("vein" may be either anatomical or geological). Perhaps "rarest-veined unraveler" is a kind of *kenning* for the philosopher's epithet, the Subtle Doctor. Scotus, the Franciscan critic of the Dominican Thomas Aquinas, was centrally dear to Hopkins by virtue of his philosophical validation of the individual. St. Thomas held that, in the relation of the individual to his species, the "matter" individuates,

while the "form" is generic: that is, that the individuals of a species reproductively multiply their common originative pattern. Scotus insisted that each individual has a distinctive "form" as well: a *haecceitas*, or thisness, as well as a generic *quidditas*, or whatness.

After meeting with this medieval Franciscan, Hopkins, taking in "any inscape of sky or sea," thought of Scotus. The word, of Hopkins' coinage, occurs already in his Oxford note-books. Suggested presumably by "landscape": an "inscape" is any kind of formed or focussed view, any pattern discerned in the natural world. Being so central a word in his vocabulary and motif in his mental life, it moves through some range of meaning: from sense-perceived pattern to inner form. The prefix seems to imply a contrary, an outer-scape—as if to say that an "inscape" is not mechanically or inertly present, but requires personal action, attention, a seeing and *seeing into*.

The earliest "Notes for Poetry" cite "Feathery rows of young corn. Ruddy, furred and branchy tops of the elms backed by rolling clouds." "A beautiful instance of inscape *sided* on the *slide*, that is successive sidings on one inscape, is seen in the behavior of the flag flower." In 1873, two years before the *Deutschland*, he "Saw a shoal of salmon in the river and many hares on the open hills. Under a stone hedge was a dying ram: there ran slowly from his nostrils a thick flesh-coloured ooze, scarlet in places, coiling and roping its way down so thick that it looked like fat."

He made notes on ancient musical instruments and on gems and their colors: "beryl—watery green; carnelian—strong flesh red, Indian red." His love of precise visual observation never lapsed. Nor did his taste for research. Like Gray, he had a scholarly, fussy antiquarianism, adaptable to botany or archaeology. He liked "Notes and Queries," details, studies in place-names, amateur etymologies.

What is perhaps his most brilliant prose celebrates the self and its wonders: "That taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum." Other selves were mysterious. As a shy man, he found it easier to reach natural "inscapes" than to know other selves. He hadn't Newman's psychological finesse; wrote no psychic portraits matching by their sharpness and delicacy his notations of ash-trees. The men in his poems are seen as from a distance—sympathetically but generically.

But he gloried in the range and repertory of mankind. Like Chesterton, who was concerned that, in lying down with the lamb, the lion should "still retain his royal ferocity," Hopkins wanted monks to be mild and soldiers to be pugnacious. He imagined Christ incarnate again as a soldier. He didn't want other men to be like himself—scholarly, aesthetic, neurotic: he was drawn to soldiers, miners, Felix Randall the Blacksmith and Harry the Ploughman, to



the rough and manly manual laborers. And each of these selves he wished to be functioning not only characteristically but intensely, violently, dangerously—on their mettle, like the Windhover, like Harry Ploughman, like the “Eurydice’s” sailor who, “strung by duty, is strained to beauty.”

In poetry, he desired both to record inscapes and to use words so that they would exist as objects. His was a double particularity.

Poetry, he wrote, shortly before the *Deutschland*, is “speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning. Some [subject] matter and meaning is essential to it but only as an element necessary to support and employ the shape which is contemplated for its own sake. Poetry is in fact speech for the inscape’s sake—and therefore the inscape must be dwelt on.”

In 1862, he was already collecting words—particularistic, concrete words. The earliest entries in the *Note-Books* are gritty, harshly tangy words, “running the letter,” “grind, gride, grid, grit, groat, grate” and “crock, crank, kranke, crick, cranky.” He is also aroused by dialectal equivalents which he encounters: *whisket* for *basket*, *grindlestone* for *grindstone*. He notes linguistic habits: an observed laborer, when he began to speak “quickly and descriptively, . . . dropped or slurred the article.” He attends to, and tries to define, the sundry schools of Latin pronunciation—this while the priests say mass. He inquires concerning the character of the Maltese language; wants to learn Welsh—not primarily in order to convert the local Wesleyans back to their ancestral faith.

As a beginning poet, Hopkins followed Keats and the “medieval school.” Even in his middle style, there remain vestiges of the earlier decorative diction, frequent use of “beauty,” “lovely,” “dear,” “sweet” (“that sweet’s sweeter ending”). But already in 1866, “The Habit of Perfection,” though dominantly “medieval,” anticipates the later mode:

This ruck and reel which you remark  
Coils, keeps, and teases simple sight.

*The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1875) inaugurates Hopkins’ middle period (his first proper mastery). The diction is as remarkable as the rhythm. Characteristic are homely dialectal words, words which sound like survivors from Anglo-Saxon, and compound epithets. From the concluding stanzas of the *Deutschland* come these lines:

Mid-numbered He in three of the thunder-throne!  
Not a dooms-day dazzle in his coming nor dark as he came;

and

Dame, at our door  
Drowned, and among our shoals,  
Remember us in the roads, the heaven-haven of the  
Reward:

From "The Bugler's First Communion":

Forth Christ from cupboard fetched, how fain I of feet  
To his youngster take his treat!  
Low-latched in leaf-light housel his too huge godhead.

Modern readers take it for granted that Hopkins was influenced by Old English poetry. In his excellent *New Poets from Old: A Study in Literary Genetics*, Henry Wells notes that all the technical features representative of that poetry appear conspicuously in Hopkins; judges him far nearer to Cynewulf than to Chaucer; finds a plausible parallel to a passage in *Beowulf*. But by his own statement, Hopkins did not learn Anglo-Saxon till 1882, and seems never to have read either *Beowulf* or Cynewulf. There need of course be no pedantic mystery here. Hopkins knew something of *Piers Plowman* and is likely to have known some specimens of Old English versification.

In any case, Hopkins was already a student of Welsh poetry and an attentive reader of linguistic monographs; and he belongs among the poets who can be incited to poetry by scholars' prose.

In 1873-4, he taught "rhetoric" at Manresa House, wrote the observations on that subject collected in the *Note-Books*. His notes lead us to the *Lectures on the English Language*, published in 1859 by the versatile American scholar, George P. Marsh. This book is full of matter calculated to excite a poet, for Marsh has a real interest in the future (as well as the past) of the language and a real interest in the literary (as well as the pragmatic) use of words. The whole direction of his book suggests that literary experiment can find much in its purpose in literary history, that new poetry can come from old. Ending his lecture on "Accentuation and Double Rhymes," he urges: "We must enlarge our stock [of rhyming words] by the revival of obsolete words and inflections from native sources," or introduce substitutes for rhyme; in the following, the 25th Chapter, he incitingly discusses alliteration (with illustrations from *Piers Plowman*), consonance—e.g., "bad, led"; "find, band" (with illustrations from Icelandic poetry and invented English examples), and assonance (with illustrations from the Spanish). Hopkins' quotations from *Piers* are Marsh's; only in 1882 did he study *Piers*, and then without admiration, regarding its verse as a "degraded and doggrel" form of Anglo-Saxon sprung rhythm.