Introduction

Martin Dubois

Gerard Manley Hopkins was first discovered outside of his own contexts. Aside from a few, mostly minor pieces, Hopkins lay almost unpublished in his lifetime, with 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' among the now famous poems rejected by uncomprehending editors. Hopkins's strict notion of his religious vocation as a Jesuit priest also made him wary of pursuing literary renown. Many of his poems were only shared privately among a handful of friends and family. They did not appear in a full edition until 1918, nearly three decades after Hopkins's death in 1889. Even then, sales were small and slow; it would take a second edition in 1930 finally to bring Hopkins wide recognition. The story of his success and fame belongs to the twentieth century rather than to his own nineteenth.

Beyond these facts of publication exists a further and more profound sense in which Hopkins's poetry first thrived at a distance from his life's contexts. To his early twentieth-century readers, Hopkins's writing appeared so fresh and uncompromising that they could not think it anything other than modern. Critics who otherwise scorned Victorian poetry took him up as exemplary of the revitalizing force of new poetic trends. F. R. Leavis granted Hopkins a full chapter in his 1932 study *New Bearings in English Poetry*; the two other poets accorded the same status were T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Leavis wrote of Hopkins that 'He is now felt to be a contemporary, and his influence is likely to be great'; elsewhere, he observed that Hopkins 'existed in another poetic world from the other Victorians'.[1] Removing Hopkins from his own period rendered his newness more logical and acceptable to modernist sensibilities. The belief in his contemporaneity proved remarkably persistent. Even as late as 1959, more than forty years after Hopkins's initial publication, the writer and poet John Wain could assert that Hopkins 'had no dealings with the nineteenth century except that for forty-five years he drew breath in it'.[2]

The idea of Hopkins as a poet ahead of his time no longer holds the sway it once did. From Alison Sulloway's 1972 book *Gerard Manley Hopkins and*

the Victorian Temper onwards, and perhaps more especially in recent years, criticism has focused on situating Hopkins within a wide variety of nineteenth-century contexts. In effect, he has been thoroughly re-Victorianized. To mention just a few areas where this is the case: Hopkins's famous scheme of 'inscape' and 'instress', often said to be the conceptual bedrock of his poetry, is now known to have emerged in large part from his encounter with ancient Greek philosophy when studying at Oxford; in theology, the investigation of Hopkins's experience of Tractarian thought has led to an increased emphasis on his life as an Anglican ahead of his conversion to Roman Catholicism; in art and architecture, Hopkins's awareness of Victorian visual theories has been carefully researched and documented; and, in relation to gender and sexuality, Hopkins's attitudes have been shown to be shaped by the homosociality of his undergraduate life.

This volume brings together the insights of several decades of scholarship that has established Hopkins's poetry as fully Victorian. We present Hopkins historically, including in his formal innovations, with, for example, his experiments with rhythm understood within rather than without the poetics of his period. In surveying Hopkins's contexts, our effort is to set more specialized means of approach to the poet – such as via his invention of 'sprung rhythm', or the twin concepts of 'inscape' and 'instress' – in a broad frame. At the same time, our chapters also indicate the need for caution in relation to contexts either uncertain – as in the supposed influence of music upon Hopkins – or more layered than has been realized, as in Hopkins's Jesuit theological training. We additionally seek to highlight what the re-Victorianizing of Hopkins has sometimes obscured: the liveliness of modernist engagements with Hopkins, and his place in twentieth-century literature and criticism. Of course, Hopkins's influence did not end with modernism, and the volume also registers his legacy in later twentieth-century poetry and in theology. It closes by reflecting on Hopkins not just within his lifetime, but as part of his and our epoch, by examining his poetry within the proposed new geological age of the Anthropocene.

There have always been tensions in scholarship on Hopkins between critics more and less religious in their emphasis. For some, the primacy of the poet's religious and priestly commitments means that to consider him apart from these risks distortion; for others, it is part of Hopkins's significance that his insights – particularly about the environment – resonate in secular contexts even if their foundation in Christian belief is everywhere apparent. This tension is not something this volume tries to resolve. We attempt no unified position on Hopkins. What is certain is that Hopkins can

be daunting to approach for the first time. Even setting aside the intricacies of his ideas about God, self, and being, the density of his poetry's structure and language presents a large challenge to readers. This Hopkins knew and did not always or altogether regret. He described 'two kinds of clearness' needed in poetry: 'either the meaning to be felt without effort as fast as one reads or else, if dark at first reading, when once made out to explode'.[3] The ambition of this volume is to offer a wide-ranging and accessible overview of Hopkins's contexts. What it cannot do is make his writing altogether clear. Part of the brilliance of Hopkins's poetry is that its meaning explodes from obscurity; no amount of explanation will remove the surprise of its reading. With this limitation in mind, we hope nevertheless to foster an engagement with his writing that responds closely to the many and varied ways in which it was shaped by the world Hopkins inhabited.

Notes

1. F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), p. 192; *The Common Pursuit* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952), p. 48.
2. John Wain, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins: An Idiom of Desperation' (Chatterton Lecture, 1959); reprinted in *Essays on Literature and Ideas* (London: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 103–31, here p. 108.
3. *CW*, 1, p. 367; emphasis original.

PART I

Places

CHAPTER 1

London

Jude V. Nixon

In his playful lyric on Wordsworth's idea that 'The child is father to the man,' Gerard Manley Hopkins asks, 'How can that be?' ('A Trio of Triolets', ll. 20–21). These words are not as 'wild' as Hopkins contends in his poem. London, the city of his childhood, fathered his personal, spiritual, aesthetic, and poetic life, challenging the assumption that Wales, Oxford, and Dublin exerted the more consequential influence on Hopkins. Generative in myriad ways, London gave definition to Hopkins's life, serving as the genealogy of his ideas, site of cultural enrichment, and restorative space for the stresses of his personal and Jesuitical life. Hopkins's readings in secular and sacred literature, poetic composition, the development of his poetics, close observation of nature, illustrations, and sketches all occurred in London. London also provided key steps in Hopkins's Jesuit training, university teaching, and entry into the priesthood.

Family, Birth, and Boyhood (1844–1863)

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born at No. 69 Cornhill, Stratford, Essex, on Sunday, 28 July 1844, into a talented upper-middle-class, High Anglican family where 'simple piety and practical endeavour on the one hand and varied artistic culture on the other' helped shape 'the *personality* of the boy'.[1] Gerard was the eldest of nine children to Manley and Kate Hopkins. Manley Hopkins was a successful, self-made business insurance adjuster, an entrepreneur, and an accomplished poet, and he authored *A Handbook of Averages* (1857), *The Port of Refuge* (1873), *The Cardinal Numbers* (1887), and one book written pseudonymously with his brother Thomas Marsland (Brothers Theophilus and Theophylact), *Masters: Pietas Metrica; Or, Nature Suggestive of God and Godliness* (1849). His study *Hawaii* (1862) came with a preface by the bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce. Daughter of a prominent physician, Kate Hopkins, née Smith, was a not-too-distant relative of the author Sydney Smith and the painter Thomas

Gainsborough. Versed in poetry and music, she learnt German from her stay in Hamburg, spoke French, and knew some Italian. She was a keen student of history, philosophy, and politics. Her artistic and musical prowess exerted an influence on Gerard. Kate also gave him her 'gentle nature and love for metaphysical speculation'.[2] Their letters reveal close emotional ties between a mother and her first child. The family was 'deeply interested in the visual arts', 'accomplished in painting and music', and 'talented in drawing, in music, in mathematics and in writing verse'.[3]

In 1852, the family moved to Oak Hill, Hampstead, home to Thomas Birks, 'almost the only learned Evangelical going', according to Hopkins, and location of the legendary Jack Straw Castle public house, named after the charismatic leader of a peasant revolt launched at Hampstead Heath.[4] Hampstead and neighbouring Highgate had also been home to the Romantic poets John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and to artists such as Thomas Gainsborough and Joshua Reynolds. John Constable's famous paintings of the Heath memorialize this pastoral spot on the outskirts of London, far from the madding crowd, where, as Norman White observes, one could have seen grazing sheep, running streams, and streets lined with trees.[5] Writing in 1871 about the sight of lambs in rural Lancashire, Hopkins recalled, 'The same thing is I daresay to be seen (and earlier than this) about Hampstead.'[6] According to Humphry House, 'His home was surrounded with trees; he was also extremely sensitive to their shape and character and the minutest formations of branches and leaves,' and 'it was in Hampstead and the country northwards that he first came to love them'.[7]

Gerard was sent to nearby Highgate School with its 'old-fashioned' curriculum of Greek and Roman history with some French and German.[8] The school's headmaster was a harsh disciplinarian, John Bradley Dyne. Hopkins became a 'dayboarder' when he unsuccessfully petitioned Dyne for a private room in order to study uninterruptedly for an Oxford scholarship. After this 'terrible altercation' and other disagreements, he and Dyne, whom he disparaged as 'the Patriarch of the Old Dispensation at Highgate', would never be reconciled: 'Dyne had repeatedly said he hoped I might not be at the top of the school after the exam.'[9] In addition to his many friends who lived in Hampstead and Highgate, such as Edward Bond and Marcus Clarke, Hopkins had a close friendship with his schoolmates Alexander Strachey and Charles Luxmoore. He was an ardent scholar, winning an award for his poem, 'The Escorial' (1860), and composing his otherworldly 'A Vision of the Mermaids' (1862) and meteorological 'Winter with the Gulf Stream' (1863).

Despite his academic successes, Hopkins did not enjoy his time at Highgate. 'The truth is I had no love for my schooldays and wished to banish the remembrance of them,' he later told one of Highgate's teachers, Richard Watson Dixon.[10] Dixon recalled 'a pale young boy, very light and active, with a very meditative & intellectual face' and who 'got a prize for English poetry'.[11] Hopkins's nascent asceticism can be traced back to Highgate. An 1861 letter to Dr Müncke, one of Hopkins's German teachers at Highgate, queries why in Goethe's *Faust* the character Mephistopheles, 'a specimen of what pleasures can enslave the grosser minds of the vulgar', uses as temptation not 'the subtle charms of poetry, music, and art, to the beauties of nature, and the sweets of a fuller knowledge', but, instead, 'love of Margaret', the chaste young girl also called Gretchen whom Faust would seduce, as 'the only real pleasure'.[12]

Hopkins was a sensitive boy with a love of beauty and a hatred of ugliness. His sister Kate recalled, 'even in very early days, as e.g. when Gerard as a little fellow of four, during an attack of whooping cough which he and Cyril were suffering from', Gerard

> was found crying because 'Cyril looked so ugly' . . . Another straw was when at the age of five he wanted 'to sketch Culvers' because he saw an Aunt doing so – (Reculvers, really –) & from then on he was always drawing, & making himself his own model, by throwing himself into the attitude he wanted to depict first & then drawing. And the only other thing I recall having heard is that when he was made prefect at school he made himself so unhappy over things that he saw going on wrong & couldn't stop, that my Father took him away from being a boer [boarder] & he became only a day boy & was no longer prefect.[13]

In September 1862, at the end of his time at Highgate, Hopkins took up a number of literary projects, reading Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and recommending it alongside Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, studying and analysing Tennyson's 'The Vision of Sin' and 'St Simeon Stylites', which he would illustrate in 1864, and Milton's 'Il Penseroso', which formed the basis for his early poems 'Il Mystico' and 'A windy day in summer'. He also noted time spent observing nature: 'I have been writing numbers of descriptions of sunrises, sunlight in the trees, flowers, windy skies etc.'[14] And: 'The sun was eclipsed today. I saw it all up the City Road, to such a pass have natural phenomena come.'[15] He copied down Hampstead-based Ford Madox Brown's ekphrastic poem 'Work' (1863), written to accompany Brown's painting that historicizes sewage improvements in Hampstead. Hopkins would later use the poem, as White observes, 'to formulate ideas for his own sonnet on the same theme, "Tom's

Garland"'.[16] 'Growing up in Hampstead', says White, Hopkins had 'the advantages both of living in the countryside and of being near the largest, most lively and interesting city in the world' with its 'galleries, special exhibitions, museums, churches, meetings, open-air spectacles, the many kinds of London parks, and theatres and . . . the widest possibly variety of architectural styles'.[17]

Jesuit Preparation and Ministry

Roehampton: The Novitiate (1868–1870) and Teaching (1873–1874)

Two stages of Hopkins's Jesuit training, his novitiate and tertianship, took place in London. He began his Jesuit life there, writing exuberantly to Henry Parry Liddon ahead of joining the Jesuits, 'I am going to enter the Jesuit noviciate at Roehampton: I do not think there is another prospect so bright in the world.'[18] At Roehampton, Hopkins served for a time as novitiate porter (1869–70), chronicling the daily comings and goings of his fellow Jesuits; he also preached his first sermon there and received instructions on self-mortification. He would leave Roehampton in 1870 in order to undertake the next stage of his Jesuit training at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, but returned to Roehampton in 1873 to teach rhetoric, which would prepare him for his later assignment in Classics in Dublin. His light instructional load during this second period at Roehampton allowed him time for a rich social life with family and friends, freedom to attend parliamentary debates, and the opportunity for aesthetic delights. He explored many of London's galleries and exhibitions, and admired All Saints, Margaret Street, a William Butterfield church with its 'beautiful and original style'.[19] Yet, at the end of this idyllic year, Hopkins noted that he felt exhausted, a complaint that would recur often in his later priestly career.

At Roehampton, Hopkins was introduced to ploughing, which, as Lesley Higgins writes, 'was done by lay brothers or employees; clerical novices did unskilled labour and tended the grounds'.[20] He was curious about this form of agrarian labour and fascinated by its artistic representations, such as Frederick Walker's *The Plough* (1870) and George Pinwell's *The Princess and the Ploughman* (1874). That interest would later inform 'Felix Randal' and imbue the verisimilitude of 'Harry Ploughman', which he described as 'a direct picture of a ploughman', and which, in an Ignatian sense, was meant to be 'a vivid figure before the mind's eye'.[21]

The Curacy: Farm Street (1878)

Following studies in theology at St Beuno's in North Wales and brief stays at Mount St Mary's College, Chesterfield, and again at Stonyhurst, Hopkins in July 1878 joined his spiritual mentor and advocate, Father Peter Gallwey, as acting curate at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm Street, Mayfair. His duties there for five months involved officiating at High Mass, celebrating Vespers, and preaching three sermons, one of which Bridges attended and liked, telling their mutual friend Lionel Muirhead, 'I went to hear him. He is good.'[22] Hopkins, however, voiced dissatisfaction: 'I was very nervous at the beginning and not at all after. It was pure forgetting and flurry. The delivery was not good, but I hope to get a good one in time. I shall welcome any criticisms which are not controversy. I am glad you did not like the music and sorry you did not like the mass.'[23] Making converts was important to Hopkins during his time at Farm Street. He apologized to Bridges for spending their time on literature rather than on spiritual matters.

The Tertianship (1881–1882)

After his period at Farm Street, Hopkins made brief visits to Manresa, Yarmouth, Windsor, and Bristol before working in parishes in Oxford, Leigh, and Liverpool. He returned to Roehampton in October 1881 for his tertianship, the last stage in Jesuit formation, ending with the taking of final vows. Here he composed '16 pages of a rough draft of a commentary on St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises': 'This "work" would interest none but a Jesuit', Hopkins told Bridges, 'but to me it is interesting enough'.[24] Hopkins also gathered material for something 'on the subject of Sacrifice' on which 'nothing at all exhaustive or satisfactory has been written . . . either speculatively or historically'.[25] According to Christopher Devlin, at Roehampton Hopkins was 'flooded with light on religious subjects which boded well for his poetry'. He had, Devlin observed, 'at least five works in mind: three in prose and two in verse', one a commentary on the Exercises, another a treatise on sacrifice in ancient religions, and yet another on Greek Lyric Art.[26]

Poetry, Nature, and the Aesthetic Experience

London's variegated landscape, invaluable to the poems Hopkins would compose in Wales, Oxford, and Dublin, was the source of some of his most salient insights into nature. His entries made in London might even be thought of as prose poems. At Roehampton, says Robert Bernard Martin,

Hopkins 'kept his eyes peeled constantly, repeatedly jotting down subjects that might work in poetry'.[27] Although 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' was written 'On a pastoral forehead of Wales' (l. 186), for example, it also shadows a text Hopkins heard read in the novitiate at Roehampton, Anne Catherine Emmerich's *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord* (1833). The image of the young man wielding the scythe in Frederick Walker's *The Harbour of Refuge* (1872), which Hopkins saw in London at an 1873 exhibition, made its way into 'The Wreck', according to Paul Mariani.[28] Other poems, too, have London sources. Hopkins's Oxford elegy, 'Binsey Poplars', draws inspiration from his father Manley's poem, 'The Old Trees', which remonstrates against the planned removal of limes on Hampstead Heath. 'The Starlight Night' echoes stellar observations Hopkins made in London, and the Roehampton journal entry observing 'Chestnuts as bright as coals or spots of vermilion' 'gestated to emerge nine years later as "Fresh-firecoals, chestnuts-falls" in "Pied Beauty"'.[29] Hopkins's famous journal entry on bluebells from May 1870 could have inspired the later poems 'The May Magnificat' and 'The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe'. Lines for 'St Winefred's Well' were written in Hampstead, and Hopkins's fascination with the sound of the cuckoo at Roehampton led to his observation that cuckoos 'do not always sing (or the same cuckoo does not always sing) at the same pitch or in the same key'.[30] He would attempt to work out this insight in the short lyric, 'Repeat that, repeat.'

London also accounts for some of Hopkins's most astute observation of trees, cloudscapes, sunsets, light and optics, all of which nurtured his talent as poet and naturalist, the one vocation informing the other. It was in London that he would struggle to decipher 'the law of the oak leaves' but after close study would declare confidently, 'I have now found the law of the oak leaves.'[31] He recorded entries on irises, haymaking, the sky, the clouds, the leaves of chestnuts, poppies, poplars, beeches, carnations, and roses.

Nascent development of Hopkins's theory of inscape and instress also took place in London. Early in its discovery, he admits about this individualizing and distinct structure of a thing, 'I have no other word yet for that which takes the eye or mind in a bold hand or effective sketching or in marked features.'[32] Hopkins developed the concept of instress during his novitiate at Roehampton. On a visit to the National Gallery in June 1868, he pondered: 'has not Giotto the instress of loveliness?'[33] From that time on in London, inscape and instress would frequent Hopkins's journal entries, as when he detected inscape in the optical effects of a sunset against a cloud, in newly leafed limes, elms, and oaks, or in his famous entry on