

The Second Muse of Gerard Manley Hopkins

I wish I could pursue music; for I have invented a new style, something standing to ordinary music as sprung rhythm to common rhythm: it employs quarter tones.¹

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89) pursued music intermittently throughout his short life. He was not only a composer but also an *ad hoc* theorist. Hopkins's compositions, like his poems, remained almost entirely unknown during his lifetime. His theories about music and his compositions were distributed in the same way as the poems, as *aperçus* in his letters to friends, with the manuscript scores enclosed.

My purpose in this essay is to attempt a composite picture of Hopkins the musician. But it is necessary to make two caveats at the start. Firstly, Hopkins's ideas about music, and especially rhythm, are often inseparable from his theory of poetry. (The compositions, on the evidence of the letters, appear to be entirely vocal.) In other words, it is impossible to discuss one without touching upon the other. And secondly, a rounded picture of Hopkins the musician must be scratched and scraped, as he might himself have said, from the existing documentation, primarily the letters, for Hopkins, despite his best intentions, never wrote a comprehensive summary of his ideas about poetry, music and rhythm. The Hopkins student must therefore trawl the correspondence (the richest source) for the relevant passages. This is not too onerous a task, for Hopkins is one of the great letter-writers of the language. He was fortunate too (and hence are we) in the caliber of his correspondents. These included fellow poets Canon R.W. Dixon, Coventry Patmore and Robert Bridges, all of whom shared his interest in the minutiae of English metrics and, at least in the case of Bridges, in

¹ See, *A Hopkins Reader*, selected with an introduction by John Pick, Oxford U.P. 1953, p.194.

music also. Their honest failure to understand his aesthetic intentions, mixed with downright obtuseness on occasion, forced Hopkins to explain; and he was a compulsive as well as a brilliant explainer. This is not the end of the problem though. To formulate his theories Hopkins improvised an entirely new vocabulary. Rhythm, for example, can be sprung, counterpointed, rising or falling, mounted, running, roving-over and so on. None of these terms is part of standard metrical vocabulary in the way iambic or trochaic, for example, are, and the reader might become discouraged when first confronted by them, as if he were having to learn a new language. But they are worth persevering with. The terms all describe palpable phenomena, and help the reader to better understand some of the most beautiful poems in English.

From what I can determine, Hopkins's musical compositions are still only patchily accessible. They have provoked little interest among his literary editors.² Helen Gardner, who refers to Hopkins's 'minor but interesting gift' for composition, does not mention or include any of them in her Penguin edition. Gardner's edition is nonetheless a superb one and remains indispensable for the student of the poems and prose.³ I treasure John Pick's beautiful *A Hopkins Reader* published by Oxford in 1953, now sadly out of print.⁴ Pick reproduces the manuscript of the song *Fallen Rain* discussed later in this essay (see Fig.1).⁵ His notes on the music and in general, though,

² A list of the extant ms. materials can be found in: *The Correspondence of G.M. Hopkins and R.W. Dixon* edited with notes by Claude Colleer Abbott. Oxford U.P. 1935, pp. 167-170. A companion volume consisting of the correspondence with Robert Bridges contains Hopkins's setting of Sappho's *Ode to Aphrodite*, p.239, and of the patriotic poem 'What shall I do for the land that bred me?'

³ *Gerard Manley Hopkins, Poems and Prose* selected with an introduction by W.H. Gardner. Penguin books 1953. The most thorough recent scholarly edition is, *The poetical works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Norman H. Mackenzie, Oxford 1990.

⁴ See footnote one.

⁵ Pick, op.cit. see the fold-out at p.217

do not match Gardner's. Pick gives no information about the song, not even the date of composition; and it would have been helpful to have a printed copy of the poem by Canon Dixon.

Fallen Rain. (Silent fell the rain) words by Canon Dixon

Andante molto legato ed espressivo

pp.
 Si-lent fell the rain on the earth-ly ground; then a-roar a sound to con-plain: why am I cast down from the cloud so sweet, trampled by the feet of the clown, by the feet of the clown? why was I drawn through all the rain how bright, I who her smile did light, light, me to woo? why am I cast down from the cloud so sweet, trampled by the feet of the clown by the feet of the clown?
 then my tremblings ceased; to the smile I bowed and the weep-ing cloud flashed like a-go-my
mf.
 and I fall and die through a cleft. Why am I cast down from the cloud so sweet trampled by the feet of the clown, by the feet of the clown?
forte agitato
 flashed like a-go-my
Rallentando di molto, pp.
al tempo, mf.
 For the piano play as below —
 flashed like a-go-my

Fig.1 Hopkins's manuscript of the song *Fallen Rain*, his setting of the poem by Canon Dixon. The note at the bottom suggests a piano version of the passage with a quarter-tone, bar 39. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press.

Hopkins was a musical amateur. His performing abilities were negligible; he took up the piano in his thirties, and only then so as to be less dependent on other musicians for trying out his pieces. He had almost no knowledge of harmony and counterpoint. He tried to supply these deficiencies by studying Stainer's *Treatise on Harmony*, and in Dublin he took lessons from Sir Robert Stewart, Professor of Music at Trinity College. Hopkins frequently bemoaned his lack of musical training; but these complaints are mixed with a characteristic note of defiance, the inevitable consequence of spirited amateurism coming up against wary professionalism. Hopkins called Stewart 'a demon for rule,' and after their first encounter Stewart wrote to Hopkins:

I saw, ere we had conversed for ten minutes on our first meeting, that you are one of those special pleaders who never believe yourself wrong in any respect. You always excuse yourself for anything I object to in your writing or music so I think it a pity to disturb you in your happy dreams of perfectibility - nearly everything in your music was wrong - but you will not admit that to be the case - What does it matter?⁶

The letters portray a Hopkins family cottage industry, the poet providing the melodic settings and his youngest sister Grace, who had studied harmony further than Hopkins, composing the piano accompaniments. This suggests sisterly devotion of no common order; it was not, however, sufficient to save her efforts from the criticisms of her persnickety brother. Hopkins was never comfortable with the piano. He complained about the instrument's inability to sustain independent voices and quotes a pianist as saying to him that his music 'dated from a time before the piano was invented'.⁷ But I

⁶ See, Robert Bernard Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A very private life*, Harper Collins 1991, p 396.

⁷ Pick op.cit. pp.153 and 196.

suspect that Hopkins mainly disliked the piano's melodic incapacity. This was an insuperable handicap to a composer who regarded melody as the most important element in music:

But as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I call 'inscape' is what I above all aim at in poetry.⁸

His favourite music was plainchant, and he contemplated composing a requiem entirely in plainchant style.⁹ To his ears, piano figuration could sound fussy, and he complains about 'one of Chopin's fragmentary airs struggling and toss[ing] on a surf of accompaniment.'¹⁰ Such remarks make Hopkins sound like one of those literary people for whom a good piece, and especially a good setting, is anything that does not get in the way of the tune and the words. Hopkins the composer is essentially a melodist and monodist. What Blake called 'the bounding line' was for Hopkins the essence of music.

The song *Fallen Rain* can serve to illustrate his compositional approach.

⁸ Pick op.cit.p.206

⁹ Pick ibid.206

¹⁰ Pick ibid.p.207

Fallen Rain

(Silent fell the rain)

Andante molto legato ed espressivo

Words by Canon Dixon

Si - lent fell the rain On the earth - ly ground; then a - rose a - round to com -
6 plain: Why am I cast down From the cloud so sweet, tramp - led by the
11 feet Of the clown, by the feet of the clown? Why was I
16 drawn through All the rain - bow bright, who her smile did light,
21 light, Me to woo? Why am I cast down From the cloud so sweet,
26 tramp led by the feet Of the clown, by the feet of the clown?
31 then my trem - blings ceased; to the smile I bowed And the weep - ing
35 cloud me re - leased. Then the cru - el smile Flashed like
39 a - gon - y And I fall and die through a wile. Why am I cast down From the cloud
45 so sweet Tramp - led by the feet of the
48 clown, by the feet of the clown?

pp
mf
p
forte vivace
mf
forte agitato
Rallentando di molto pp
a tempo mf

Dixon's poem is laid out in quatrains. The structure is verse-refrain, though the third stanza (beginning 'Then my tremblings ceased') has no refrain.

Silent fell the rain
On the earthy ground
Then arose a sound
To compalin.

Why am I cast down 5
From the cloud so sweet,
Trampled by the feet
Of the clown?

Why was I drawn through 9
All the rainbow bright,
Who her smile did light
Me to woo?

Why am I cast down 13
From the cloud so sweet,
Trampled by the feet
Of the clown?

Then my tremblings ceased; 17

To the smile I bowed

And the weeping cloud

Me released.

Then the cruel smile 21

Flashed like agony

And I fall and die

Through a wile.

Why am I cast down etc.? 25

Each occurrence of the lines ‘Trampled by the feet /Of the clown’ is repeated in the song. Hopkins also repeats ‘light’ in l.10 (b.21). Hopkins uses Dixon’s rather formulaic imagery to word-paint. The word ‘ceased’ in l.13 is followed by a dramatic rest (b. 32);and ‘tremblings’ in the previous bar is ornamented with a grace note. The phrase ‘And I fall’, (l.23;bb. 39-40 and marked ‘Rallentando di molto’) makes a feature of falling sixths and sevenths. Most dramatically, the climactic word ‘agony’ is set with a passing quarter-tone which Hopkins marks with a reversed flat (b. 39).

The tonal organisation of the song is its most unusual feature. Though the first eight-bar phrase is in F major, it is clear from the cadence of the first stanza (b. 14) and from the end of the song that Hopkins is thinking in a modal D minor. The second and third stanzas, however, are in *F minor* rather than one of the more convenient tonal relatives of D. This makes for the unconvincing jolt back to the D tonality for the final refrain

(b.43). This scheme also makes the central statement of the refrain (bb.23-30) structurally somewhat redundant: it is merely a literal re-statement of the previous refrain transposed to the tonal level of F. Hence it neither performs the standard role for a refrain of anchoring the song in the home tonality nor fully justifies its new tonal position with melodic, motivic or other intensifiers.

The setting is basically strophic, which is to say that similar music sets similar lines from verse to verse. But the variations in the strophic formula are interesting. The word 'drawn' (l.9;b. 16) falls in the same place (musically, not poetically) as 'rain' in bar 2. But the hemiola phrase now incorporates a tritone, and 'how bright' is a diminished seventh compared to the minor sixth of '-ly ground' in bar 3. The settings of the short three-syllable stanza-endings presented a problem for Hopkins. The first of these, 'To complain', enables him bathetically to introduce the true D minor modality of the song. 'Me to woo' slightly varies this with a lower auxiliary flat seventh (e flat in this context;b.21-22);but the strophic chime with the first verse forces Hopkins awkwardly to drag out 'Me' over four notes (b.22-23). At b.35-36, 'me released' is an emotional outburst - 'forte vivace', Hopkins indicates - but it unhelpfully anticipates the A flat climactic note of the song on 'agony' just three bars later.

Metrically, the song's six-eight meter allows for the free use of hemiola, for example in b. 2, where the three-four places the stress on the first and most important noun of the poem. At b.16 Hopkins can use the corresponding moment to enhance the word 'drawn.'

The unusual tonal layout of the song suggests that Hopkins had difficulty in effecting a smooth modulation. In the letters this fault is turned to a strength:

As for not modulating, that was deliberate: I look on modulation as a corruption of the diatonic style. What they call the key of the dominant, viz. one in which the fourth of the tonic is sharpened, I say is not the key of the dominant (which is in another mode than the key of the tonic and has no leading note) but the key of the tonic misplaced and transposed. ¹¹

By ‘diatonic style,’ Hopkins is clearly referring to modality. Modality preserves the distinct character of the scales founded on each of the seven diatonic pitches, a system to which tonal harmony with its introduction of accidentals, reducing the possible scale-types to two and rendering possible modulation, is clearly inimical. Hopkins would have been interested to know that Stanford also felt that modality was a melodically and harmonically enriching possibility for composers fed up with the two-party system of major and minor, but not ready for innovations like the whole-tone scale. Hopkins’s practice in *Fallen Rain*, however, does little to support his theory, for in the passages in F he unhesitatingly introduces accidentals to replicate the D tonality. Hopkin’s dislike for the piano notwithstanding, it should be stressed that the song’s solo status would not necessarily have represented his final intention.

¹¹ Pick *ibid.* p. 206.

As he said of another of his settings: ‘If I could make my own harmonies much of the expression of the piece could be conveyed in the accompaniments of course.’¹²

Hopkins’s most famous contribution to rhythmic theory, and the one that has resonated most for poets and musicians who come after him, is what he called sprung rhythm. The principle is complex in its ramifications but simple in its basic idea. This consists of scanning the poetic line by accents only, regardless of the number of intervening weak syllables or ‘slacks.’ Indeed there need be no slacks at all, and when this happens the result is sprung rhythm pure:

I díd sáy yés

(The Wreck of the Deutschland, stanza 2)

This theory clearly contradicts the basic iambic pulse of English poetry, which allows for one slack to one stress, alternating:

Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war

As Hopkins acknowledges, the practice of English poets going back to Shakespeare and beyond was considerably more flexible than the standard theory of one slack to one stress would suggest. Indeed, the choruses of Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* were in

¹² The poet and novelist Anthony Burgess added a piano accompaniment to the song. Unfortunately, Burgess did not publish it. See, ‘Nothing is so beautiful as sprung’, in Anthony Burgess, *This Man and Music*, Applause 2001, pp.117-133. This is one of the best essays on Hopkins’s metrics that I have read, though Burgess’s claim that his rhythmic version of the sestet from *The Windhover* ‘will not please literary academics, but musicians will understand’ proves optimistic, at least where one musician is concerned.

sprung rhythm, and Coleridge in his preface to *Christabel* had even defined the technique succinctly.¹³ Hopkins's innovation was to apply the technique more generally and systematically. He was at pains to emphasise the strictness of his application of it and resented Bridges's comparison of his long lines in sprung rhythm to Whitman's rangy near-prose in *Leaves of Grass*.¹⁴ Somewhat inconsistently, though, he explained that the reason for preferring sprung to standard rhythm was its proximity to prose:

Why do I employ sprung rhythm at all? Because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the natural and native rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms.....¹⁵

The contrast between standard and sprung rhythm is neatly illustrated by the opening two lines of the sonnet *The Windhover*:¹⁶

I caught this mórning mórning's mínion, kíng-
dom of dáylight's dáuphin, dapple-dáwn-drawn Fálcon, in his ríding

The first line is an almost standard iambic pentameter, five metric feet with the pattern weak-strong, ten syllables in total. In Hopkins terminology, this is a rising five-stress line, in running rhythm. *Rising* is his word for any meter that follows the pattern weak-

¹³ See, *Complete poetical works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, Oxford U.P. 1912 (most recently 1975), Vol.1, p.215. This is the relevant passage: 'I have only to add that the metre of *Christabel* is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables.'

¹⁴ Pick op.cit. pp.110-112.

¹⁵ Pick *ibid.* p.86.

¹⁶ Gardner op.cit.p.30.

strong, typically iambic. (Consequently a trochaic or strong-weak metric foot is *falling*.) *Running* is Hopkins's term for standard iambic alternations of stress and slack. It will be immediately apparent that the second line submits to no such simple scansion. In place of the first line's standard ten syllables, we now have no less than sixteen. The trick is to fix the stresses and allow the slacks to run as they will. The composite adjective carries one stress: 'dapple-*dawn*-drawn'. A possible scansion for l. 2 might therefore read like this: the first stress is preceded by two rising slacks ('-dom of'), the second (first syllable of 'dauphin') is preceded by one, the third ('dawn') carries three, the fourth (first syllable of 'Falcon') has one, and finally the fifth (first syllable of 'riding') no less than four, three before and one after. I have counted the syllables *preceding* the accents because the predominant meter of this poem seems to me to be rising, or weak-strong. But the line could be scanned differently with a mixture of rising and falling feet. This kind of rhythm Hopkins calls *counterpointed*. The important point to grasp is that where the first line has five slack syllables to five stressed, the second has no less than eleven slacks to five stresses. Yet according to the principle of sprung rhythm, which counts only stresses, both lines are pentameters.

These lines contain another rhythmic subtlety in the form of what Hopkins calls *outrides*. These are free-floating syllables which stand outside the pattern of slacks and stresses. In his manuscripts Hopkins denotes these syllables with nether slurs.¹⁷ Two examples occur in l. 2 of *The Windhover*: the second syllable of 'dauphin' and the second syllable of 'Falcon.' Outride syllables would have been denoted in earlier poetry with a comma (fall'n, ne'er), a practice Hopkins disliked; here they are

¹⁷ Gardner op. cit. p. 227, note 13. Harold Bloom, in an otherwise excellent essay, wrongly describes an outride as *any* slack syllable. See *Modern Critical Views: Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited with an introduction by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, p. 3.

pronounced, but in much the way that grace notes are interpolated in music, without impeding the basic metrical flow.

The notation of Hopkins's manuscripts is a difficult and contentious issue for his editors. With their indications of accents, slurs, pauses and phrasing, some of the manuscripts can look as much like musical scores as poems. Few editors have the courage to reproduce the manuscripts as they stand, and most printed editions are a compromise. Gardner is sparing in her allowance of slurs, accents and pauses in the body of her text, but helpfully itemises the omissions in her notes. Some of Hopkins's accents should always be retained, though, as in the second line of the 'dark sonnet', poem 44 in Gardner's edition:

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hoürs we have spent
This night!¹⁸

Tom Paulin has suggested that the intensifying diphthong on the second 'hours' intended here is the cavernous Ulster *ou* which Hopkins would have heard as a parish priest in Liverpool and Glasgow. (Hopkins remarks in the letters on Ulster speech.) I think Paulin's suggestion is plausible.¹⁹ At any rate, editions which omit Hopkins's notation diminish the sonic resonance of this line for the reader. Fig.2 reproduces the

¹⁸ Gardner op.cit.p.62. See also the letter to Bridges in Pick, op.cit. p.207: 'This is my difficulty, what marks to use and when to use them: they are so much needed and yet so objectionable.'

¹⁹ See Tom Paulin, 'Hopkins on the rampage' in *Minotaur: Poetry and the Nation State*, Faber and Faber 1992, p.98..

sonnet *Henry Purcell* in Bridges's handwriting, including Hopkins's annotations, for this poem comparatively spare.²⁰

Fig.2 Manuscript of the sonnet *Henry Purcell* in Robert Bridges's handwriting. Nether slurs denote outrides. Upper slurs blend adjacent syllables in *legato*, to be run together like quavers. The emendations are in Hopkins's hand. They show that the 'oh!' in line 9 and the word 'fresh' in line 14 were later thoughts. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press.

Henry Purcell,

Have fair fallen, O fair, fair have fallen, so dear
To me, so arch-special a spirit as heaves in Henry Purcell,
An age ~~is~~^{is} now since passed, since parted; with the reversal
Of the outward sentence, law lays him, listed to a heresy, here.
Not mood in him nor meaning, proud fire or sacred fear,
Or love, or pity, or all that sweet notes not his might nurture:
It is the forged feature finds me; it is the rehearsal
Of own, of abrupt self there, so thrusts on, so throngs the ear.

Let him ^{oh!} ~~with~~ his air of angels, then lift me, lay me, only I'll
Have an eye to the sakes of him, quaint moonmarks, & his pelted
plumage under
wings: so some great storm-fowl, whenever he has walked his while
The thunder-purple seabeach, plumed purple of thunder,
If a wuthering of his palmy snow-pinnions scatter a chopal smile
Off him, but meaning motion fans ^{fresh} our nits with wonder.

Oxford. 1879

²⁰ Gardner, op.cit. p. 237.

This detailed notation is important. Hopkins repeatedly stresses that his poems are to be read aloud and that many obscurities will become clear when the poems are heard. In this sense the manuscripts are indeed like musical scores. In returning to the poems in preparation for this essay I was struck again and again by the quality of Hopkins's vocal orchestration; this is the only poetry of its era which approximates to Wagner. In Hopkins's greatest poem, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*,²¹ the hard *k* and *ck* sounds of the word 'wreck' resonate like a recurrent motif throughout the poem, especially at the moment of crisis as the fate of the ship is described:

And the sea flint-flaked, black-backed in the regular blow (Stanza 13)

The poem is written in eight-line stanzas with the unvarying rhyme-pattern ABABCBCA. This scheme throws emphasis on the B-rhymes which are the only ones to occupy a roughly equidistant place in the irregular stanza-shape, and hence form a real chime. At the climactic moment of the shipwreck Hopkins uses these B - rhymes to enforce the 'ck' dissonances:

They fought with God's cold-

And they could not and fell to the deck

(Crushed them) or water (and drowned them) or rolled

With the sea-romp over the wreck.

Night roared, with the heart-break hearing a heart-broke rabble,

The woman's wailing, the crying of child without check-

²¹ Gardner, *ibid.* pp.12-24.

A phropheless towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told. (Stanza 17)

Note how Hopkins in l. 2 of this stanza musically links the two parentheses which are phrased in relation to one another as well as to the rest of the line. The effect is of a counter-melody. The storm-description's climax is stanza 19 with its extraordinary vision of 'the tall nun' whose prayer is heard above the tumult:

Sister, a sister calling

A master, her master and mine!-

And the inboard seas run swirling and hawling;

The rash smart slogging brine

Blinds her; but she that weather sees one thing, one;

Has one fetch in her: she rears herself to divine

Ears, and the call of the tall nun

To the men in the tops and the tackle rode over the storm's brawling.

The tremendous third line here is sprung ('The rásh smárt slóggering bríne'); this roll of adjectives crescendos into 'brine' which is then capped by the verb 'Blinds' at the beginning of the following line. Thus does sprung rhythm enable Hopkins to mass his effects with a thrust and thrash unequalled in English poetry since Milton.

Some aspects of sprung rhythm remain unclear, and one can only lament the lack of a precise method for notating the temporal dimension of a poem (and Hopkins clearly did lament it). It has never been clear to me whether the stresses are to occur in a kind of free rubato dictated by the number and length of slacks, or as isochronous pulses -

crotchets, say - within which the slacks must squeeze themselves in a mixture of what a musician would think of as quavers, triplets, semiquavers and so on. Perhaps Hopkins never fully resolved this matter in his own mind. If the first of these possibilities is the more plausible, Hopkins can be credited with anticipating the metrical shifts of Stravinsky and the free-verse poets of the 1910s and 1920s. Certainly this view would find support in some of the almost surreal late poems, such as *Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves*:²²

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, vaulty, voluminous,... stupendous

Evening strains to be time's vast, womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse of all night.

Hopkins describes these lines as eight-stress with a 'rest' in the first line, presumably signalled by the dots. But this, I suspect, will be of little practical help to the reader, who would be much better to stick to Hopkins's more general advice for reading this poem: 'This sonnet should be sung: it is most carefully timed in *tempo rubato*.'²³

Hopkins's rhythmical ideas have not entered the mainstream of metrical theory; the critic Harold Bloom has even called them an 'honourable eccentricity.'²⁴ But they have continued to influence poets as diverse as Seamus Heaney, Geoffrey Hill and Ted Hughes. If other poets, notably A.E. Houseman,²⁵ have rejected them, it is because

²² Gardner *ibid.* p.59.

²³ See, Norman White, *Hopkins in Ireland*, University College Dublin Press, p.24.

²⁴ Harold Bloom *op.cit.* p.3.

²⁵ Houseman's objections were outlined to Bridges in his acknowledgement letter of a first edition copy in 1918. 'Sprung rhythm, as [Hopkins] calls it, is just as easy to write as other forms of verse; and many a humble scribbler of words for music hall songs has written it well. But [Hopkins] does not: he does not make it audible; he puts light syllables in the stress and heavy syllables in the slack, and has to be helped out with typographical signs explaining that things are to be understood as being what in fact they are not.' See *A.E. Houseman, Collected Poems and Selected Prose*, edited with an introduction by Christopher Ricks. Penguin books, 1989, pp.460-461. On this

they struggle too hard to counter the language's fundamentally iambic drumkit.

My own view is that Hopkins's idea of rhythm was conservative and that he wished to preserve the basic patterns like pentameter and hexameter (he says that *Henry Purcell* is written in hexameters), and also standard shapes such as the sonnet, which was his preferred form. Indeed, the concept of *counterpointed* rhythm is precisely this, namely the mounting of a spoken and heard surface-rhythm on a standard template like the pentameter, which it subtly contradicts, analogously to *tempo rubato* bending a basically steady pulse.²⁶

The *Wreck of the Deutschland* was written in response to the sinking of a German ship which ran on a sandbank at the mouth of the Thames in December 1875. On board were five Franciscan nuns who had been exiled from Germany by Bismark's anti-Catholic Falck Laws. All of the nuns perished in the disaster. Hopkins's Jesuit superior suggested that he write a poem on the subject and the result is the most impassioned counter-Reformation poem in the English language. The poem also has an overt nationalistic theme. The fact of the ship's being called 'Deutschland' is fortuitous for Hopkins's purpose, and he plays on its two-fold significance in stanza 20:

O Deutschland, double a desparate name!

while the last stanza is a prayer for the re-conversion of 'rare-dear Britain.'

matter of the importance of the sound of Hopkins's poems, a personal note might be in order. My conversion to Hopkins was the result of hearing Richard Burton reading *The leaden echo and the golden echo*. Unusually for an actor, Burton read poetry beautifully, and I couldn't help thinking that Hopkins would have felt his deep love for Wales reciprocated in this wonderful reading.

²⁶ The key letters on sprung rhythm and metrics are grouped by Pick under the title 'Poetic Theory', op.cit. pp.71-124.

It is the implications of this anti-German bias for Hopkins's music that I want to discuss here. Hopkins grew up in the midst of the Purcell revival and, unusually perhaps for a Victorian, considered music from a possessively English standpoint.²⁷ (It may be significant in this respect that I can find the hugely dominant figure of Mendelssohn nowhere mentioned in the letters.) Purcell, the 'arch-especial spirit', was from the beginning and remained Hopkins's ideal composer and the one by whom all others were measured. His attitude to German music could be described as a calculated refusal of awe. Of the tune *Pray Goody* he writes to Bridges: 'And it is but one out of a host of such masculine and (what some one called) earnest, melodies, little known here and I suppose abroad totally unknown. It is simple truth that no German since Mozart has been capable of anything of the sort. The Germans are great and I believe unsurpassable in expressing mood and feeling, but for the bone, frame and *charpente* of music they cannot come up to this kind of thing.'²⁸ Among the German composers whom he admired were Handel and, curiously enough, Weber. In October 1879 he wrote to Bridges:

Do you like Weber? For personal preference and fellow feeling I like him of all musicians best after Purcell. I feel as if I could have composed his music in another sphere. I do not feel that of Handel or Mozart or Beethoven. Moreover I do not think his great genius is appreciated. I shd. like to read his life. He was a good man, I believe, with no hateful affectation of playing the fool and behaving like a blackguard.²⁹

²⁷ For Hopkins and the Purcell revival, see, Jennifer Stolpa, 'Henry Purcell and Gerard Manley Hopkins: two explorations of identity.' Publication of the Illinois Philological Association (PIPPA), vol.1, 1998.

²⁸ See Pick op.cit, p.201.

²⁹ Pick op.cit.p.236.

This high estimate of Weber might have seemed less eccentric in 1879 than it does now. Nonetheless, when you consider the company that Weber is here placed in (and above) you cannot help thinking of Hopkins's withering comment on Cardinal Newman's preference for Southey's *Thalaba* over *Samson Agonistes*: 'It is as if you were to compare the Panathenaic frieze to a teaboard and decide in the teaboard's favour.'³⁰ But it is the non-musical part of his remarks about Weber that is interesting. 'He was a good man' is an unambiguously moral evaluation, and it is difficult not to believe that Wagner is the object of that concluding swipe. Hopkins wrote these remarks at the high-water mark of Wagnerism, just three years after the *Ring* premiere at Bayreuth. (1876 was also the year of *The Wreck of The Deutschland*.) Hopkins was aware of Wagner and of his own possible affinity with him, which would have caused him as much unease as his affinity with Walt Whitman, whom he described as 'a very great scoundrel.' This in turn raises the question of his sense of Englishness and of England's role in the world, cultural and political.³¹

While he still lived in England, Hopkins could be very critical of what he called the English culture of 'wrecking'³² (that significant word again); but his move to Dublin, where he became professor of Greek at University College in 1885, had the not uncommon effect of reminding him how English he was. He regarded the Parnellite Home Rule movement with the horror of a true unionist and abominated Gladstone for

³⁰ Pick *ibid.* p.88.

³¹ For Hopkins and European culture see, Michael E. Allsopp, 'Hopkins's European mentors: exploratory observations' in *Studies, an Irish Quarterly Review*. Vol.85 no.338. Allsopp rightly stresses the importance of European thought in shaping Hopkins's mind in two aspects particularly, his music, and Catholicism. I think, though, that he misses some of the ambivalence, especially in relation to Germany. See also, Norman White, *op.cit.*, for the most comprehensive treatment of Hopkins's ideas on Irish politics.

³² Gardner *op.cit.* p.173. This is Hopkins's famous 'Red letter,' which so offended Bridges that the correspondence lapsed for three years, to be resumed only on Hopkins's initiative.

his support of it.³³ Clearly with one eye on Fenianism, he wrote to Bridges from Dublin in 1886:

Besides, we are Englishmen. A great work by an Englishman is like a great battle won by England. It is an unfading bay tree. It will even be admired by and praised by and do good to those who hate England (as England is most perilously hated), who do not wish to be benefited by her.³⁴

It is in this context, I believe, that Hopkins's wariness of the Germanic claim in the realm of the art form that was perhaps dearest to him is to be understood. What is singularly missing in his extensive musical observations is any acknowledgement of the central line of German music from Bach through Mozart and Beethoven to the romantic composers of his own time. This omission cannot have been a matter of ignorance for such an omniverous polymath as Hopkins. The central role of Beethoven in particular for the English intelligentsia – Emily Bronte and Cardinal Newman were fervent admirers - is well attested. The omission could of course be a matter of taste; but taste is never as disinterested a matter as it pretends to be. It is as if acknowledgement of musical supremacy would have meant conceding too vital a point to the country whose imperial ambitions most threatened those of England. It is, I believe, these restless but largely unspoken apprehensions that give *The Wreck of the Deutschland* much of its tremendous power.³⁵

³³ Pick op.cit.p.246.

³⁴ Pick ibid.p.250.

³⁵ The favorite sea epic of the era was Campbell's *Battle of the Baltic*, a poem which envisions a full-scale naval conflict between Germany and Britain. Hopkins's letters around the time of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* express his great admiration for Campbell's epic and he set the first two stanzas of it to music. For discussion of Hopkins's attitude to Germany and Bismark, see also, Tom Paulin, 'A juicy and

From an aesthetic standpoint, Hopkins's criticisms of German music and romanticism anticipate those of the English nationalist school on the one hand and of the European modernists on the other. He set as high a value on a folk song as on a symphony, and probably more. In exchanging one for the other, you sense, he would have felt like someone trading in a lorry-load of brick for a small diamond. In his note-books, he lovingly recorded local speech-idioms and peculiar words. Hopkins was in this respect a sort of proto-connoisseur of the provinces, especially Lancashire, and of what used to be called the Celtic fringe. He had a Lawrentian appreciation for the unaffected and its roots in the vernacular, coupled with a disdain of aesthetic 'would-be'. But that remark about *charpente* is characteristic too. The implicit image is of good music as a well-crafted ship. For Hopkins, a composer like Chopin lacked 'manliness' (a favorite term of approbation with him). His aesthetic of taut structure and emotional spartanism is, from our viewpoint, pre-Eliot and pre-Stravinsky, and helps to explain why the poems, when they eventually appeared, created such a stir. This Victorian poet was the day-star of the modern, and one cannot help lamenting that early death denied him the chance to hear works like the *Rite of Spring*, depriving us of his reactions to them. Hopkins considered himself something of a musical innovator. To anyone reading through his conventional musical works this will come as a surprise. The lesson that is compellingly evident from his literary output – that real innovation is usually produced by artists of considerable traditional technique – seems to have been lost on Hopkins the composer. He nonetheless retained a touching confidence in his music: 'If the whole world agreed to condemn it or see nothing in it I should only tell them to take a generation and come and see me again.'³⁶ His poems would have to wait for a

jostling shock: Hopkins's poems and poems in prose' in *Crusoe's Secret: the aesthetics of dissent*, Faber and Faber, 2005, pp.234-253.

³⁶ Pick op.cit. p.207.

generation: Bridges did not publish a first edition until 1918. If late Victorian England knew nothing of its greatest poet, modernism gained an unexpected windfall. And the compositions? The handful that I have seen confirm Gardner's assessment cited above. Purely on its merits, Hopkins's music would be unlikely to detain us much more than Nietzsche's or Pasternak's, and from the standpoint of pure technical accomplishment, it would do so a good deal less. But his music and thinking about music, like his gift for drawing and painting, deeply informed his central creative endeavour. For that reason alone it merits our interest. Music fortified and sustained this priest and poet who in his wonderful poems repeatedly gives us 'the roll, the rise, the carol, the creation.'

