PREOCCUPATIONS OF THE POET: A READING OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS AND SEAMUS HEANEY*

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Seamus Heaney (1939–) once said that a poet "needs a way of saying and there is a first language he can learn from the voices of other poets, dead and alive" (qtd. in Buttel 19). In Heaney's poetry, we hear not only his own dominant voice but echoes of many other poets, such as Dante, Wordsworth, Keats, Yeats, Joyce, Frost, Kavanagh, Robert Graves, Osip Mandelstam, Robert Lowell, Ted Hughes, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Among them, Hopkins's is perhaps the strongest.

In fact, this important contemporary poet has on several occasions acknowledged his literary indebtedness to Hopkins; for example, as he remarked to Robert Druce: "The poet who had most affected me early on was Hopkins, and I wanted to make noise like that, over my own ground..." (25). Talking with James Randall, he admits that in his early days Hopkins's poetry meant most to him: "...as far as my, so to speak style is concerned, as far as my ear was educated ...it was educated by certainly by Hopkins [sic] ..." (13). In "Feeling into Words," Heaney tellingly recounts his literary relationship with Hopkins:

> One of the writers who influenced me ...was Gerard Manley Hopkins. The result of reading Hopkins at school was the desire to write, and when I first put pen to paper at university, what flowed out was what had flowed in, the bumpy alliterating music, the reporting sound and recochetting consonants typical of Hopkins's verse. (44)

In "Posterage" (*N*), a poem dedicated to his mentor Michael McLaverty, Heaney writes that he still keeps the copy of Hopkins's *Journals* given by McLaverty; the poem, starting with the quotation "Description is revelation!", ends with a tribute to Hopkins.[1] Heaney's familiarity with and insightful reading of Hopkins's poetry is best manifested in his lecture on Hopkins, "The Fire i' the Flint."

Indeed it is by no means difficult to detect Hopkins's voice in Heaney's poetry. "October Thought," one of Heaney's early poems, is a good example which reflects the impress of Hopkins's consonantal emphasis:

> Minute movement millionfold whispers twilight
> Under heaven-hue plum-blue and gorse pricked with gold
> And through the knuckle-gnarl of branches, poking the night
> Comes the trickling tinkle of bells, well in the fold.[2]

The seventh sonnet in the "Glanmore Sonnets" sequence (*FW*) provides yet another

example which shows many of Hopkins's poetic characteristics:

> Midnight and closedown. Sirens of the tundra,
> Of eel-road, seal-road, keel-road, whale-road, raise
> Their wind-compounded keen behind the baize
> And drive the trawlers to the lee of Wicklow.

The use of such rhetorical devices as alliteration, repetition, explosive consonant-cluster words, and epithetic compounds testifies to Hopkins's influence upon Heaney's poetry.

The Hopkins-Heaney literary relationships, however, are more than deliberate imitation, coincidental parallel, or unconscious assimilation; as a matter of fact, they share some common preoccupations, which are in close connection with their poetic conception and execution. This essay is an attempt to study some of their main concerns, such as their fascination with language, their treatment of the art-life dialogue, and their search for distinctive poetic voices; it is hoped that their literary ties and their poetic achievements can thus be further illuminated.

I

Among the preoccupations shared by both poets, their attentiveness to language is the first that comes to mind. In actuality, their obsession with words is intimately connected to the craft of their poetry.

The critical consensus is that Hopkins's innovative diction and meter and his invention of a distinct poetics owe much to his intoxication with language study.[3] Hopkins's early diaries and notebooks contain compelling evidence of his almost excessive word-obsession. As early as in 1862, he began to collect words—gritty and harsh-sounding words—such as: "grind, gride, grid, grit, groat, grate, greet ..." and "crock, crank, kranke, crick, cranky." One of the most famous passages in his early diaries is in the entry for 24 September 1863, about the word *horn* (see Gardner 89-90). That Hopkins, at the age of 19, discovered a plethora of words in Greek, Latin, and English related to the single root "horn" bears witness not only to his incredibly fertile imagination but his firm grasp of the etymological materials available to him in his own time (see Sprinker 49). Especially noteworthy is the poetic quality of such word-lists, which, according to Alan Ward, are in effect "miniature poems, or poems in the rough" (qtd. in Miller, "Univocal" 93).

In many ways, Hopkins was part of the vigorous philological movement in his time. The dialectal notes in the journal and his contributions to Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* show him sharing the attitudes of the early students of dialect. As James Milroy's study indicates, Hopkins's early diaries (1863-66) and journals (1866-75) show that he pursued language study with something of the same vigor and enthusiasm that were displayed by historical philologists. And his avid in-

terest in the history and relationship of words and his painstaking care in the definition and description of words were no less than those of the lexicographers. The etymological notes and other linguistic comments in the undergraduate diaries are often well-informed by the mid-century standards.

Hopkins's studies of Welsh, German, and Anglo-Saxon exerted a great influence on his poetry. Take Welsh for example: he began to learn the language in 1874, and, according to W. H. Gardner, he learned enough to write a passable Welsh poem himself and to master the strict and elaborate system of alliteration and internal rhyme called *cynghanedd*, which he partly adopted into his own English verse (250). To both Robert Bridges and R. W. Dixon, who were curious about the new poetic method of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, Hopkins spoke of the influence of nursery rhymes, the choruses of Milton's *Samson*, and in particular his readings in Welsh poetry: "The chiming of the consonants I get in part from the Welsh, which is very rich in sound and imagery" (qtd. in Warren 81).

Hopkins's obsession with language finds expression not merely in his etymological speculations in the early diaries or the early essays on words but in his mature poetry as well. As Hillis Miller observes, language is a dominant theme in the following poems: "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection." "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day" and, particularly, his masterpiece, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, where the theme of language is most elaborately developed ("Linguistic" 150).

Like Hopkins, Heaney also displays an extraordinary interest in language study and dialect research and his writings are also fraught with examples of his word-obsession. While a student at Queen's University, Heaney attended the English-language lectures of John Braidwood and G. B. Adams, who later became the driving forces behind a book called *Ulster Dialects: An Introductory Symposium* (1964). The book, dealing with such matters as the relationship between Ulster dialect and Elizabethan English, may well have influenced Heaney: as Blake Morrison points out, it is the meticulous examination of the relationship between language and land as demonstrated in Ulster dialects that encouraged Heaney to become "a fieldworker" in the archives of grammar and pronunciation (40). Interestingly, Heaney's dialect study enables him to detect a connection between the heavily accented consonantal noise of Hopkins's poetic voice, and the peculiar regional characteristics of a Northern Ireland dialect; as Heaney reflects, "it may be because of this affinity between my dialect and Hopkins's oddity that these first verses turned out as they did" ("Feeling into Word" 45). And it is mainly because of his expertise that Heaney was invited to show up on the segment dealing with the Irish dialect of America's PBS series, *The Story of English*.[4]

In Heaney's writings, we can find that he is as obsessed with words as Hopkins. "Mossbawn," the first essay in *Preoccupations*, contains a typical example which describes Heaney's fascination with the Greek word *omphalos*. The word which means the navel and hence "the stone that marked the centre of the world," is repeated by

Heaney "until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside [their] back door" ("Mossbawn" 17).

In the beginning, Heaney, like Hopkins, was merely "in love with words themselves" and delighted himself in words as "verbal music" ("Feeling into Words" 45). Later, he sensed that "the secret of being a poet, Irish or otherwise, lies in the summoning of the energies of words" ("Belfast" 36). As he learned to craft words, "words as bearers of history and mystery" began to invite him ("Feeling into Words" 45).

The title poem of *North* contains the following important stanzas, recording the call of history and land.

> It said, 'Lie down
> in the word-hoard, burrow
> the coil and gleam
> of your furrowed brain.
>
> Compose in darkness.
> Expect aurora borealis
> in the long foray
> but no cascade of light.
>
> Keep your eye clear
> as the bleb of the icicle,
> trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
> your hands have known,'

Both "North" and "Bone Dreams" (*N*) are language poems, depicting the poet as an archaeologist-cum-etymologist commissioned to do the digging. The poet has to lend himself to "the rough porous language of touch" so that his "body was braille for the creeping influence." He is to delve into "philology and kennings" and "to lie down in the word-hoard." "In the tongue's old dungeons" the poet's work is to "weave out of his hoard" "a lost syntax" which hangs, "fading, in the gallery of the tongue!"

Morrison's investigation suggests that Heaney has retrieved from the "word-hoard" an impressive number of linguistic finds, many of them of Gaelic origin: *glib, corbelled, dulse, althing, bleb, hurdle, haggers, gombeen-men, pampooties, slobland, scop, coulter, gorget, pash, midden, felloes, crannog, holm-gang, obols, pash, quern, ban-hus"* (60). Besides, Heaney has also coined many words of his own, such as: *love-den, blood-holt, dream-bower, oak-bone, bone-vault, sun-bank, brain-firkin, moon-drinker, earth-pantry, mushroom-flesh, ringlet-breath"* (Morrison 60).

Heaney's word-obsession is further demonstrated in his use of linguistic (usually phonetic) terms as figures of speech, which has become one of the most conspicuous features in his works. In "Gifts of Rain" (*WO*), for example, the last four stanzas run

like this:

> The tawny guttural water
> spells itself: Moyola
> is its own score and consort,
>
> bedding the locale
> in the utterance,
> reed music, an old chanter
>
> breathing its mists
> through vowels and history.
> A swollen river,
>
> a mating call of sound
> rises to pleasure me, Dives,
> hoarder of common ground.

Here he describes the Moyola river as "an old chanter," "bedding the locale / in the utterance," as music "breathing its mists / through vowels and history."

Describing the school he attended, Heaney writes: "*Anahorish*, soft gradient / or consonant, vowel-meadow," ("Anahorish," *WO*). In "A New Song" (*WO*), he carries on a flood of river-linguistic-political metaphors:

> But now our river tongues must rise
> From licking deep in native haunts
> To flood, with vowelling embrace,
> Demesnes staked out in consonants.
>
> And Castedawson we'll enlist
> And Upperlands, each planted bawn

Here language becomes the new means of political geography.

"The Backward Look" (*WO*), a poem about a sniper, displays again Heaney's effective use of linguistic terms for poetry:

> A stagger in air
> as if a language
> failed, a sleight
> of wing.

A snipe' bleat is fleeing
its nesting ground
into dialect,
into variants,

transliterations whirr
on the nature reserves—

"Traditions" (*WO*), one of the poems which deal with Anglo-Irish relations, decries England's linguistic invasion:

Our guttural muse
Was bulled long ago
by the alliterative tradition,
her uvula grows

vestigial, forgotten
. . . .

The soft, fluid, feminine language of the Gaelic vowel is displaced by the hard, masculine, consonantal language of England.

In *North*, besides the title poem and "Bone Dreams," there are further examples of Heaney's using linguistic terms as metaphors. In "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces," which describes the Vikings' invasion in the ninth century, the poet writes: "its clinker-built hull / spined and plosive / as *Dublin*," and "My words lick around / cobbled quays, go hunting / lightly as pampooties / over the skull-capped ground."

"Kinship" (*N*) demonstrates the poet's crafting with words related to *bog*: "Quagmire, swampland, morass: / the slime kingdoms, / domains of the cold-blooded, / of mud pads and dirtied eggs. / But *bog* / meaning soft, / the fall of windless rain, / pupil of amber." For the poet, who grew out of all this, "This is the vowel of earth / dreaming its root / in flowers and snow .... "

After publishing *North*, which contains poems of more political nature, Heaney moved to Wicklow in 1972 and there he felt freedom of creation. Such creative freedom is again seen in several poems of *Field Work* in which he uses linguistic metaphors to describe his state of feeling. The opening poem "Oysters" reveals Heaney's determination not to be determined by history and to lean on his poetic imagination:

I saw damp panniers disgorge
The frond-lipped, brine-stung
Glut of privilege

And was angry that my trust could not repose
In the clear light, like poetry or freedom
Leaning in from sea. I ate the day
Deliberately, that its tang
Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb.

As noted by Morrison, Heaney in this poem "aspires to a poetry of 'clear light', untrammelled by the darkness and opacity of the past. To eat the day is to give oneself up to the present; being 'verb, pure verb', liberated from names and nouns and qualifiers, becomes an image of artistic independence" (75).

The "Glanmore Sonnets" sequence (*FW*) opens with the line: "Vowels ploughed into other: [sic] opened ground." This line reappears in the second sonnet with only a difference in punctuation.[5] According to Corcoran, the "vowels" in the opening line have two possible referents: the vowels of Irish speech or the words of the poem itself; they must be worked into the otherness of either the English iambic line or the actual world (144).

In *Station Island*, there is also a wondrous poem which uses grammatical terms for metaphors: "Intransitively we would assist, / confess, receive. The verbs / assumed us. We adored. / And we lifted our eyes to the nouns" ("In Illo Tempore"). This poem, on the loss of religious faith, takes its title from the words which introduce the reading of the gospel in the old Latin mass; it imagines Catholicism as a language one has lost the ability to speak (Corcoran 178).

"Alphabets," the opening poem of *The Haw Lantern*, explores his lifelong involvement with written language. The verse with its chiefly agricultural imagery, depicts the experience of letter-learning, such as Y as a forked stick or A as "Two rafters and a cross-tie on a slate." As Foster notes, "Throughout the poem the movement is from the local and personal toward the universal, until we reach the image of an astronaut viewing the world from his capsule" (133). The poem deftly combines agriculture with culture, language with land.

The poems discussed above bear witness to Heaney's recurrent preoccupation with language and to his successful manoeuvring of apt linguistic metaphors to express the interconnection of language and reality, to create desired poetic effect, and to increase poetic intensity. What's more, many of the poems can be read as "subtle, miniature allegories in which the binary opposition within words assume bodily forms and act out political, religious, poetic, and sexual battles that have sundered Ireland for centuries" (Hart 207). As Henry Hart insightfully notes,

> Vowels are Irish, Nationalist, Catholic, and female; they stand for a Gaelic literary tradition and for the mythic body and soil of Mother Ireland herself. Consonants are English, Anglo-or Scots-Irish, Unionist, Protestant, and masculine; they embody an Anglo-Saxon literary tradition and a rapacious, patriarchal England bent on imperial dominance. (207)

Like Hopkins, Heaney also displays a great fascination of place-names—the language of landscape. Among the astonishing number of place-names, *Mossbawn*, his birthplace, is the one that haunts him most, because it invariably evokes memories of his childhood and young manhood in a close-knit family/community in rural County Derry. Besides this, the etymology of "Mossbawn" is also of great significance to Heaney, because it represents the mixed cultural heritage of Ireland. Heaney discovers that this hybrid name is "a metaphor for the split culture of Ulster": "moss" being a Norse or Viking word used by the Irish to mean "bog," "bawn" being an English or Scottish word for "fort." Because of its location between Toome Bridge and Castledawson, it suggests to Heaney "a symbolic placing for a Northern Catholic, to be in-between the marks of nationalist local sentiment on the one hand and the marks of colonial and British presence on the other" (Heaney, "Saturday Review Interview" 5; see also "Belfast" 35).

Heaney uses "Mossbawn" as the title for the opening two poems in *North* and dedicates them to his beloved aunt, Mary Heaney. Heaney's allegiance to the name of his birthplace is further mirrored in "Belderg" (*N*), a poem about quernstones out of a bog:

> So I talked of Mossbawn,
> A bogland name. 'But *moss*?'
> He crossed my old home's music
> With older strains of Norse.
> I'd told how its foundation
>
> Was mutable as sound
> And how I could derive
> A forked root from that ground
> And make *bawn* an English fort,
> A planter's walled-in mound,
>
> Or else find sanctuary
> And think of it as Irish,
> Persistent if outworn.[6]

In its preoccupation with place-names, Heaney's poetry might be thought to belong to the tradition of *dinneseanches*, which, according to Heaney, refer to Celtic poems and tales relating the original meanings of place-names and constituting a form of "mythological etymology" ("The Sense of Place" 131). To Morrison, however, Heaney's is more a political etymology, because its accents are those of sectarianism (41). And from its burrowing in place-names and in the ancient "word-hoard," Heaney's poetry uncovers "history of linguistic and territorial dispossession" (Morrison 41).

II

Besides sharing an almost excessive obsession with words, Hopkins and Heaney, for all their different backgrounds, have each experienced a similarly painful choice in their poetic career. They are caught in the bitter quarrel of Art and Life, which rage between subjugation and subservience, in a continuing conflict. Their situation can be illuminated by what Heaney writes in the introduction to the English translation of a 7th-century Irish legend *Sweeney Astray* (*Buile Suibhne*), in which he sees "the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious, political, and domestic obligation."

In Hopkins's case, he is caught between his religious calling and his artistic craving. As a devoted Jesuit, he conscientiously places the claims of religion and the duties of his religious profession above his aesthetic interests, which include poetry, music, and painting. Before entering the Society of Jesus in 1866, he burned his finished poems and did not write poetry again until late in 1875 or early in 1876. Hopkins went through periods of deep depression, of a listless sense of failure, and of a deep spiritual emptiness. This mood of spiritual desolation is expressed in the so-called "terrible sonnets," written between 1885 and 1889 (see Wolfe).

Hopkins's efforts to reconcile his religious discipline and his poetic genius are clearly revealed in his poetry and prose. "The Windhover," for example, may be read from this perspective. The poem develops the priest-poet's conflict between freedom and ascetic service of Christ. In the early morning, the priest sees the falcon flying on the wind in great ecstasy and strength as a horseman rides a horse (11. 1-7). The priest, restrained by his ascetic life ("heart in hiding"), is stirred by the contrasting freedom and mastery of the bird. For beauty, valor, act, air, pride all combine in the bird's soaring (11. 7-9). But the bird's mastery and beauty collapse ("Buckle") when the priest compares them to his own God. He finds "Christ Our Lord," his own "chevalier," to be "lovelier" than the falcon (11. 10-11). And there is "no wonder" that the priest prefers the restraints of ascetic service of Christ to the freedom of the falcon: the dullest ascetic service ("sheer plod," "embers," both as coals and as prayer and fasting) has great beauty (11. 12-14).

Throughout his writings, Hopkins struggled with inner dilemmas and apparently had great difficulties in reconciling his role as poet and priest. His fate was to remain hidden. In his essay "The Government of the Tongue" (96) Heaney quotes Hopkins's "Habit of Perfection" to suggest the other possible theme of "the government of the tongue": the monastic and ascetic discipline, which was what Hopkins strictly imposed on himself:

> Shape nothing, lips; be lovely-dumb:
> It is the shut, the curfew sent
> From there where all surrenders come
> Which only makes you eloquent.

Thus, Hopkins wrote in obscurity, virtually in secret, and his works remained unpublished until long after his death.

By comparison, Heaney's poetic life is much luckier than Hopkins's. Yet, though he does not feel the same kind of pressure from religion as Hopkins did, his Northern Irish Catholic background extends far beyond the form of the religion itself and does bring upon him a great political burden, especially after he becomes one of the best known Irish poets.[7] In a sense, Heaney experiences a similarly strenuous constraint from politics as Hopkins did from religion.

Whereas Hopkins later became one of the most profound religious poets in English literature, Heaney has, reluctantly or not, addressed himself to the complex political and cultural traumas of Ireland. He has not only forged poetry but, as James Joyce puts it, tried to forge the uncreated conscience of the Irish race. Just as religion becomes one of the most conspicuous themes in the Hopkins opus, so does politics in Heaney's. Since the religious motif in Hopkins's works has been much scrutinized by critics, this section will focus on Heaney's treatment of politics, particularly the Anglo-Irish relations.

In his interview with Corcoran, Heaney says, "I seemed always to be a little displaced; being in between was a kind of condition, from the start" (qtd. in Corcoran 13). Heaney has mixed feelings toward his homeground and England. All the ambiguities and divisions he feels arise out of his Ulster background. From his early age on he seems to have been very much conscious of his complex cultural identity. Growing up in Ulster, technically at least, makes him British, but being a Northern Irish Catholic and part of the minority is another matter. He receives English education and speaks and writes in English. He teaches English literature and publishes his poems in London. Yet, he never feels himself like an Englishman or shares all preoccupations of the English. In fact he has maintained a notion of himself as Irish in a providence that insists that it is British.

Trying to place the current Ulster troubles in a long historical and mythic perspective, Heaney deals with the political, cultural, geographical, and linguistic relationships between Ireland and England in many of his poems. As discussed above, in "Traditions," he describes England's linguistic invasion: "Our guttural muse / was bulled long ago / by the alliterative tradition. ..." "Ocean's Love to Ireland" in *North* depicts not only a political but a linguistic and literary conquest: Ralegh's "broad Devonshire" overcoming the "Irish" of the ruined maid: "Iambic drums / Of English" beating through the woods that used to harbor those Gaelic poets of the "Hidden Ireland."

Although Heaney has protested against British colonialism, his attitude towards England is not without ambivalence. As a poet he feels torn between his roots and his reading, between "words of the heart and hearth-language and the learned, public, socially acceptable language of school and salon" (Heaney, "John Bull" 397-99). He describes the process of poetic creation as "a kind of somnambulent encounter between masculine will and intelligence and feminine clusters of images and emotion"

and for him "the feminine element . . . involves the matter of Ireland and the masculine strain from the involvement with English literature" (Heaney, "Belfast" 34). Using linguistic metaphors again, he writes, "I began as a poet when my roots were crossed with my reading. I think of the personal and Irish pieties as vowels, and the literary awareness nourished on English as consonants. My hope is that the poems will be vocables adequate to my whole experience" (Heaney, "Belfast" 37).

Heaney's ambivalence towards England makes him write, "And poetry wiped my brow and sped me. / Now they will say I bit the hand that fed me" ("Freedman" [*N*]). The second part of *North* contains poems of stronger political import; yet, the overall tone of them is far from resentful or bitter. As Morrison comments, "England may be imperialistic but it is also, it appears, the provider of Wordsworth, Hopkins and a literary tradition in which Heaney aspires to participate ('Ulster was British, but with no rights on / The English lyric')" (66-67).

Heaney's vacillation is further illustrated in his publication of the pamphlet poem *An Open Letter*, which objects to his being included as a "British" writer in the 1982 *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*. The pamphlet drew a lot of media attention, but as Foster notes, "Heaney shrugs off its publication, telling Corcoran he partially regrets having written it, later laughing it off as a flight of whimsy" (9).

In Heaney's poetry, words, as mentioned before, become more and more history- and myth-burdened. Poems such as "The Tollund Man" (*WO*) and "The Grauballe Man" (*N*), among others, trace the clash between Irish Catholic and Ulster Protestant to its long rites of Irish political and religious struggles. Looking at the current troubles in Ireland from religious and historical perspectives, Heaney discovers that

> To some extent the enmity can be viewed as a struggle between the cults and devotees of a god and a goddess. There is an indigenous territorial numen, a tutelar of the whole island, call her Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the poor old woman, the Shan Van Vocht, whatever; and her sovereignty has been temporarily usurped or infringed by a new male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange and Edward Carson, and whose godhead is incarnate in a rex or caesar resident in a palace in London. ("Feeling into Word" 57)

Conscious of his political and cultural dilemmas, Heaney often ponders questions about the proper functions of poets and poetry. In a review essay, Heaney expresses his concern about a crisis of poetry: "We live here in critical times ourselves, when the idea of poetry as an art is in danger of being overshadowed by a quest for poetry as a diagram of political attitudes" ("Faith" 219). Heaney's decision to leave Belfast and to move to Wicklow in 1972 can be seen as a symbolic gesture to pledge a new commitment to art, for he has felt that political demands on him have run contrary to his artistic aims. At the end of *North* he writes:

How did I end up like this?
I often think of my friends'
Beautiful prismatic counselling
And the anvil brains of some who hate me

As I sit weighing and weighing
My responsible *tristia*.
For what? For the ear? For the people?
For what is said behind-backs?
("Expsoure")

As manifested in this poem, there is a drift towards placing art above all else; the "diamond absolutes" are decisively preferred to the "sling-stone / Whirled for the desperate."

Being an Irish poet, however, Heaney cannot completely detach himself from politics. Wherever he is—in the Irish Republic, in Spain, or in the United States– he cannot forget the North and its Troubles. The poems in *Field Work*, written after he moved to Wicklow, make this clear. "After a Killing" was written after the murder of the British Ambassador to Ireland, Christopher Ewart-Biggs, in July 1976. The "march at Newry" in "At the Water's Edge" took place in March 1972, in protest against the thirteen killings on Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972. "The Strand at Lough Beg" is in memory of Colum McCartney, a cousin of Heaney's shot dead on night while driving home in County Armagh. "A Postcard from North Antrim" is an elegy for Sean Armstrong, a social worker and a friend of Heaney's, whose "candid forehead stopped / A point-blank teatime bullet." In "The Toome Road," which describes the poet's early-morning encounter with a convoy of British Army vehicles, he speaks in a tone of a native whose territory has been invaded. He asks a question from indignation: "How long were they approaching down my roads / As if they owned them? The whole country was sleeping. / I had rights-of-way, fields, cattle in my keeping...."

As a serious poet who is dedicated to the art of poetry, Heaney, nonetheless, constantly feels the restraints or demands from politics. Although he feels the need to address the issue of the violence and repression in Northern Ireland, he is also aware of the dangers involved. Deeply aware of the art-life relationship, he feels there are two demands for the poet: first, "to deal somehow with truth and justice"; second, "beware of the fallout of [one's] words..." (see Foster 6). On the one hand, Heaney celebrates language throughout his career: on the other, he paradoxically maintains a wariness about the damage language can do. After examining Heaney's poems of political nature, Thomas Foster comments: "He [Heaney] has written about a good many aspects of the hostilities– terrorists and victims, journalists...activists and bystanders. His handling of that material, however, while clearly informed by his religious and political and personal background, has been conscientiously even-handed" (6). Though he realizes the necessity of facing political issues, he is also concerned

with his art- what is artistically good. In "The Interesting Case of Nero, Chekhov's Cognac and a Knocker," Heaney writes, "The fact that a literary action was afoot was itself a new political condition, and the poets did not feel the need to address themselves to the specifics of politics because they assumed that the tolerances and subtleties of their art were precisely what they had to set against the repetitive intolerance of public life" (*Government* xxi). What he wants to affirm is that the art of poetry is "an unharnessed, non-didactic, non-party-dictated, inspired act" ("Interesting" xix).

Heaney's recent collections of poems, *Station Island* and *The Haw Lantern*, again, by dint of the code he spells out in different modes, convey his commitments and attachments to his people and his responsibilities as a poet.

III

Both Hopkins and Heaney have written highly acclaimed nature poems recording their minute perception of the color, form and detail of nature. Yet, in those artistically rendered poems, description continually gives way to revelaton: the poet, to use Emerson's metaphor, becomes "a transparent eyeball," fixing his eye on the object and transforming it. Thus, the quotation "Description is revelation!" is equally fitting to serve as an epigraph to Hopkins's *oeuvre* as to Heaney's (see Parini).

Hopkins once wrote in his journal, "I saw the inscape freshly, as if my eye were still growing" (qtd. in Heaney, "Fire" 89). For Hopkins the glories of the natural world are always important. Poems such as "God's Grandeur," "Spring," and "Pied Beauty," "The May Magnificat," and "In the Valley of the Elwy," show his zeal for noting anything that delights his eye and stimulates his sense of form. His *Journals* record down many of his carefully written observations on natural phenomena- on color, organic form, movement, and what not. With subtlety and sharpness he describes trees, breaking waves, glaciers, distant hills, clouds, bluebells, primrose, and elms. Yet, all these are the revelation of God's presence. As he writes, "I know the beauty of Our Lord by it." Hopkins enjoys moods of intense pleasure in the natural world, linked with a profound sense of natural beauty as a reflection of divine reality. For example, in "God's Grandeur" Hopkins writes: "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things."

According to the divine revelation hypothesis of language origin which was current in Hopkins's time, language and nature are mirrors reflecting each other in a simple and undistorted manner. In his poetry, especially in the nature sonnets of the 1870's, Hopkins sought to "affirm the immanence of God in creation by miming God's presence in language" (Sprinker 52). As Hillis Miller in "The Linguistic Moment" points out, for Hopkins, "Nature ... is 'word, expression, news of God' ... because God has inscribed himself in nature. The structure of nature in its relation to God is like the structure of language in relation to the Logos, the divine Word" (150-51).

To represent the "individually-distinctive" form which constitutes the rich and revealing "oneness" of the natural object, Hopkins coins the words *inscape*. For the

energy of being by which all things are upheld, for that natural stress which determines *inscape* and keeps it in being, he coins the word *instress*. There are several instances of inscape in his *Journals*; for instance, on the entry for 13 June 1871, he wrote: "A beautiful instance of inscape sided on the slide, that is / successive sidings of one inscape, is seen in the behaviour of the flag flower from the shut bud to the full blowing...."

As Miller points out, "His [Hopkins's] vision of nature as pied beauty is balanced in tension between a strong sense of the uniqueness of each thing and a feeling of the omnipresence of God in all things" ("Univocal" 104). To illustrate the idea that God's beauty is like a ubiquitous fluid or electric energy molding everything in the image of the Sun, an idea which presupposes Hopkins's nature poems, Miller uses "The Starlight Night" for example. The night sky, with its treasure of stars, is like bright people or cities hovering in the air, like "dim woods" with "diamond delves," like "grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies," like a flock of doves flying in a barnyard, like May blossoms on orchard trees, and like "March-bloom ... on mealed-with-yellow sallows." The poem, like so many of Hopkins's nature poem, is made up of a list of natural phenomena set in appoisition to one another. It shows the ubiquity of Christ in nature, because He is the treasure within all things.

Heaney, like Hopkins, also takes the natural world as his concern. His early nature poems, deeply rooted in his homeground, are frequently sharp, vigorous recreations of life in a rural community, memories of a country boyhood. The art of his early nature poems is a vital extension of the genre of pastoral. There is something at once earthy and intellectual about Heaney. He does, indeed, as he puts it himself, "dig" with his pen, emulating in his art his father and grandfather who delved in the soil and bogland of the Ulster farm where he grew up. Heaney invariably works toward significant complication of an apparently simple evocation of rural life. In "The Badgers" (*FW*), for example, he adroitly moves his description of the animal toward its psychologically sophisticated conclusion:

> How perilous is it to choose
> not to love the life we're shown?
> His sturdy dirty body
> and interloping grovel.
> The intelligence in his bone.
> The unquestionable houseboy's shoulders
> that could have been my own.

As religion is a strong element in Hopkins's nature poems, so is politics with its ramifications in Heaney's. Born in County Derry, Ulster, Heaney, like Wordsworth, "grew up / Fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (*The Prelude*, Book I). This sense of place with elements of beauty and fear is clearly manifested in his poem "The Ministry of Fear" (*N*), which begins with "Well, as Kavanagh said, we have lived / In

important places," and ends with "all around us, though / We hadn't named it, the ministry of fear." With clear awareness of contemporary troubles in his homeland, Heaney writes nature poems which contain political elements related to Irish history and mythology.

The title of his first book, *Death of a Naturalist*, suggests that there is nothing naive about Heaney's treatment of nature. His images of the natural objects are often couched in the idiom of a distinctly modern and violent world. In "Trout," for instance, the fish is first "a fat gun-barrel," then it darts like "a tracer bullet"; in "Digging" the poet's pen rests between his finger and thumb, "snug as a gun"; in "In Small Townlands" the art of the painter is described as making the spectrum burst, "a bright grenade, / When he unlocks the safety catch."

Prominent in his work are images of the Irish land and the Irish bog, which serve as important symbols: the land as the subject of the historical-contemporary struggle for possession and the bog as the metaphor for the dark unconsciousness of Ireland and the self. Heaney's bog poems retain the element of violence, though they use it in a more profound way. The bogs of Northern Europe generally are a fearful storehouse of the past, and Heaney connects the victims of ritual murder found in the bogs of Denmark with the victims of political murder in modern Ireland. The tangle of emotions elicited by such powerful poems as "The Grauballe Man" mingles a sensuous appreciation of the artifact the victim has become with a painful sense of outrage and guilt.

Heaney's reading of P. V. Glob's *The Bog People* in 1969 exerted a great impact on him. From then on, the bog is no longer merely a fearful place to go nearby but becomes "the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in and to it" (Heaney, "Feeling into Words" 54). As his later poems demonstrate, Heaney has extended his subject matter from personal memories and private experience to history and mythology and the origins of a culture. For him, the problems of poetry moved from "being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to [Irish] predicament" (Heaney, "Feeling into Words" 56). The landscape in Heaney's poetry, in other words, has become associated with history and with language, changing from the actual physical landscape of his home area, to a conceptual, cultural landscape embodying the past, or to a visionary landscape which reveals a kind of social history.

In the same way as William Wordsworth, their literary predecessor, advocated and practiced, Hopkins and Heaney have both written about ordinary people and praised their courage, their strength, and their transfiguration of suffering into triumph and joy. In Hopkins's poetry, there are a shepherd, a soldier, a miner, a manual laborer ("Tom's Garland"), the blacksmith Relix Randall, the navvy Tom, and Harry Ploughman—they were the people he came to know in the parishes he served. Nonetheless, as a shy man, he seemed to have found it easier to find "inscapes" in the natural world than to portray them with deep psychological insights. He wrote about them with sympathy but not with the same sharpness and delicacy as he observed the natural

objects such as ashtrees.

Due to his rural background, Heaney has direct and even intimate relations with down-to-earth common country folk and he writes about them with sympathy and respect. Many of them are traditional craftsmen, to whom the poet feels affinity in that they are all makers, requiring craft, labor, patience, perseverance, and deliberation in their jobs. Some of memorable characters in Heaney's poetry are curt, crafty turf-cutters, thatchers, salmonfishers, mummers, ploughmen, diggers, and the water-diviner. Like Hopkins, Heaney does not depict them with much psychological insight; in reality, they are rather symbolic figures for the poet. This is rather clear in Heaney's "Digging," in which the poet says that he will dig with his pen into the dark earth to excavate treasure. On Wordsworth's poetry, Heaney draws an analogy of the poet with the ploughman:

> The poet as ploughman, if you like, and the suggestive etymology of the word 'verse' itself is pertinent in this context. 'Verse' comes from the Latin *versus* which could mean a line of poetry but could also mean the turn that a ploughman made at the head of the field as he finished one furrow and faced back into another. (Heaney, "Makings of a Music" 65)

Here, as in the second sonnet in the "Glanmore Sonnets" – "Each verse returning like the plough turned round" we see the intertwining of agriculture and culture, nature and poetry, and language and reality.

Even in his poems on common folk there are elements of politics. "Servant Boy" in *Wintering Out* is a simple portrait of a lower-class child. There is nothing overtly political about it, but the poem recollects the old feud between invading noblemen and the indigenous servant classes; it helps to explain the present Irish conflict by pointing to centuries of accrued resentment.

IV

Hopkins's and Heaney's fascination with the relations of words and sounds, language and rhythm, coupled with their creative experiences, have led them step by step to develop their own poetics. Both Hopkins and Heaney claim that they write poetry not just for the eye, but, more importantly, for the *ear*. That is to say, they place great stress on the auditory quality of their poetry. Hopkins always insists that his poems should be read with the *ear* and not with the eye. He writes to be spoken or to be sung: "Take breath and read it with the ears, as I always wish to be read, and my verse becomes all right." In a letter to Robert Bridges, Hopkins writes that the rhythm of his sonnet "Harry Ploughman" is "altogether for recital, and not for perusal (as by nature should be) ..." For Hopkins, sprung rhythm is "the most natural of things"; it is more natural than common rhythm because it derives above all from spoken language and from music. In Hopkins's conception, all his verse is "as living art

should be, made for performance and that its performance is not reading with the eye but loud, leisurely, poetical (not rhetorical) recitation..."[8]

Heaney, like Hopkins, is also greatly concerned with the music of poetry. His preoccupation is clearly reflected in his essay on Wordsworth and Yeats entitled "The Makings of a Music" and in his repeated references to T. S. Eliot's notion of "the auditory imagination," which, according to Heaney, is "one of the most precise and suggestive of T. S. Eliot's critical formulations" ("Englands of the Mind" 150).[9]

As Hopkins's letters to his fellow poets show, he seems to be more interested in technical questions of rhythm, meter, and form than in questions of content. To re-symbolize the world, he seeks to transform the apparatus of poetry- he pulls, twists, and stretches the rhyme and meter so much that his poetic practice becomes something new in English verse. The striking peculiarities of his poetry are ways of attaining the utmost refinement of inscape. Each part of the poem must be built up to an intense stress or pitch of distinctiveness. Comprehensibility, grammar, and clear logical form may be sacrificed in order to attain a strongly marked pattern.

For Heaney, the processes of the poet's creation are what interest him most, although in his essays, interviews, and criticism he has expressed his concern with both the form and content of poetry. Heaney once said, "A poet begins involved with craft, with aspirations that are chiefly concerned with making" (qtd. in Buttel 19). To Heaney, there is a distinction between craft and technique. He says that in the beginning stage of his career, his poetry is "all craft -and not much of that -and no technique" ("Feeling into Words" 47). According to his distinction, craft "knows how to keep up a capable verbal athletic display..." while technique

> involves not only a poet's way with words, his management of metre, rhythm and verbal texture; it involves also a definition of his stance towards life, a definition of his own reality. It involves the discovery of ways to go out of his normal cognitive bounds and raid the inarticulate: a dynamic alertness that mediates between the origins of feeling in memory and experience and the formal ploys that express these in a work of art. Technique entails the water-marking of your essential patterns of perception, voice and thought into the touch and texture of your lines; it is that whole creative effort of the mind's and body's resources to bring the meaning of experience within the jurisdiction of form. ("Feeling into Words" 47)

Using the water-diviner's divining as a metaphor, Heaney further defines technique as "what allows that first stirring of the mind round a word or an image or a memory to grow towards articulation: articulation... in terms of its own potential for harmonious self-reproduction" ("Feeling into Words" 48).

What seems to be the best example of the artistic act is Heaney's observation that in Hopkins there is "a masculine forging rather than a feminine incubation." In "The Fire i' the Flint" Heaney notes: "the function of language in much modern poetry, and in much poetry admired by moderns, is to talk about itself to itself" (81).

Heaney's idea about poetry as articulation's own potential for harmonious self-reproduction echos what critics have commented on Hopkins's poetry.[10]

Although Heaney is more concerned with the divining, vatic, oracular function of the creative process and more interested in feeling getting into words, yet, as he says, "it is hard to discriminate between feeling getting into words and words turning into feelings" ("Feeling into Words" 52). In his canon there are examples of both "feeling into words" and "wording into feeling"; his first poem "Digging" (*DN*), for example, is the former while "Undine" (*DD*),the latter.[22]

In his essays, reviews, and interviews, Heaney repeatedly advances the idea that there are two kinds of poetry and two kinds of poet. In his book on Heaney, Blake Morrison has laconically summed up all the dichotomies:

> *les vers donnes* as against *les vers calcules*; the poetry of chance and trance as against the poetry of resistance and perseverance; the poetry of 'sinking in' or the poetry of 'coming up against'; the instinctual or the rational; the feminine or the masculine; the 'artesian' or the 'architectonic'; the epiphanic or the crafted; the 'ooze of poetry or its 'spur of flame'; the 'lived, illiterate and unconscious' or the 'learned, literate and conscious'; the takers (Wordsworth, D. H. Lawrence, Keats, Patrick Kavanagh) and the makers (Yeats, Hopkins, Jonson, Lowell, John Montague, John Hewitt); poets who sense, surrender, dive, divine, receive and coax, or poets who command, plot, assert, strike, labour and force. (53-54)

Heaney sees himself fluctuating between these two types of poetic creation and in his work he has tried to reconcile these two opposing spirits of poetry.

According to Heaney, in the masculine mode of poetry, the language functions as "a form of address, of assertion or command, and the poetic effort has to do with conscious quelling and control of the materials, a labour of shaping; words are into music before they are anything else, nor are they drowsy from their slumber in the unconscious, but athletic, capable, displaying the music of sense" ("Fire" 88); in other words, the masculine mode is tantamount to the intellectual. The language in the feminine mode, on the other hand, functions more as "evocation than as address, and the poetic effort is not so much a labour of design as it is an act of divination and revelation; words in the feminine mode behave with the lover's come-hither instead of the athlete's display, they constitute a poetry that is delicious as texture before it is recognized as architectonic" ("Fire" 88); that is to say, it is the sensuous.

In Heaney's view, Hopkins's poetry is a successful union of the masculine and the feminine ("Fire" 95). And he claims he has also tried to integrate the intellectual and sensuous strains in his poetry, too. As he writes, "I suppose the feminine element for me involves the matter of Ireland, and the masculine strain is drawn from the involvement with English literature" ("Belfast" 34).

V

As demonstrated in the foregoing sections, there is an undeniable poetic kinship between Hopkins and Heaney. Strongly influenced by Hopkins, Heaney has written poetry with recognizable Hopkinsianism. Heaney's early poems show that he did try to write like Hopkins, but on his own ground. This is evident in his use of diction, alliteration, internal rhyme, assonance, and epithetic compounds. Later, in his efforts to find his own distinctive voice, Heaney does not follow Hopkins rigidly; nevertheless, Hopkins's influence in his mature works is still traceable.

Among the common preoccupations shared by both poets, their great fascination with words is most striking. Their obsession with language and rhythm leads them not only to dabble in verse but to deliberately create something new. In order to seek originality and authenticity in their poetic expression, they are experimental in their use of poetic language and rhythm. This is especially true of Hopkins. They coin new words, invent new phrases, experiment with rhythms, and try to borrow from literatures other than English tradition. Hopkins was as much influenced by Anglo-Saxon and Welsh poetry as Heaney by Gaelic literature. Generally speaking, though not as innovative as Hopkins in terms of poetic techniques, Heaney has demonstrated versatility and virtuosity in his use of various poetic forms.

Both poets face a similarly trying choice in their poetic career. Torn between his religious vocation and his artistic creation, Hopkins tries to reconcile religion and poetry, and, as Heaney suggests, he does embody the congruence of the perfection of the life and of the work. In Heaney's own case, though political responsibilities pose a threat to his artistic freedom, he has successfully incorporated political elements into his poetry. He has placed the current Irish troubles in a historical and mythical perspective and in so doing he has broadened his poetic vision to an impressive extent.

Aside from their common obsession with words and their similar trying dilemma, Hopkins and Heaney as original poets have also the following similarities. Though they both write nature poems and write about common folk, they are not naive romanticists. While crafting words with high seriousness and devotion, they maintain that the poet should create in the living language in its heightened form and they both emphasize the auditory quality of their poetry. In the poetic theory developed from their original obsession with word-sound relationships, they lay stress on craft and technique. And they are also keenly conscious of the necessity of marrying the masculine element (thoughts) and the feminine (sensations) in poetry.

Notes

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1. The following abbreviated titles will be used in the text:
   DN—Death of a Naturalist; *DD—Door into the Dark;*

WO——Wintering Out; N——North; FW——Field Work

2. In "Feeling into Words" (44), Heaney himself quotes another stanza from "October Through" to illustrate Hopkins's influence on his poetry:

> Starling thatch-watches, and sudden swallow
> Straight breaks to mud-nest, home-rest rafter
> Up past dry dust-drunk cobwebs, like laughter
> Ghosting the roof of bog-oak, turf-sod and rods of willow. . .

3. Many critics have dealt with the issue of Hopkins's language. See, for example, Hillis Miller, Warren, Milroy, Berry, Bump, Fuller, Hartman, Korg, Miles, Ong, and Sprinker.
4. In *The Story of English*, companion to the PBS television series, Heaney is quoted as saying: "Your language has a lot to do with your confidence, your sense of your place and authority...So to speak your own language [Irish English] and to get a trust in the pronunciation and in the quirks of vocabulary, and so on, is to go through a kind of political re-awakening" (qtd. in McCrum, et al. 193). Together with Tom Paulin and other Irish writers, Heaney formed one group which, calling itself Field Day, has adopted a program planning to tackle the language problem in Ireland.
5. The last line but one of the second sonnet is: "Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground,". I am not sure if the colon in the opening line of the first sonnet is a typo.
6. See Heaney, "The Sense of Place" 131.
7. Being a Catholic in Northern Ireland, Heaney writes in his essay "The Poet as a Christian" that "we never felt ourselves alone in the universe for a second" (qtd. in Corcoran 14). In his childhood, there were "the liturgical and popular forms of the religion itself: the Mass, confessions, the family rosary, the recitation of the catechism, and the numerous small pieties of an earlier phase of Irish Catholicism, which supplied an entire context for a life" (Corcoran 14). While studying at a Catholic boarding school, which also served as the diocesan seminary, Heaney, unlike some of his fellow students, did not choose to follow a religious vocation– the priesthood. (See Corcoran 16.)
8. Hopkins's insistence that verse is a form of *speech*, a "figure of spoken sound," that his poems should be read "with the ear" and that the meter of the *Deutschland* was born of a rhythm that had been haunting his ear, show him as one sharing in the nineteenth-century philologist's insistence on the primacy of "speech."

   Milroy and Ong have made a vigorous case that Hopkins's poetry is an attempt to imitate spoken language.
9. Eliot's "auditory imagination," as quoted by Heaney, is "the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling,

invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back," fusing "the most ancient and the most civilized mentality" ("Englands of the Mind" 150).

10. As Geoffrey Hartman has pointed out, "I. A. Richards, William Empson, and F.R. Leavis championed Hopkins as the classic example of the modern poet. They agreed that his strength was bound up with the immediacy of his relation to words: he seemed to fulfill the dream that poetry was language speaking about itself, language uttering complex words that were meanings as words" (Hartman 1).

22. See "Feeling into Words" 41-42; 52-54.

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