ABSTRACT

MORRIS, GABRIEL STEPHEN. Sacramental Conversation: The Poetry of Coleridge and Hopkins. (Under the direction of Antony Harrison.)

While much scholarship has considered the theological and metaphysical foundations of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's and Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry, this study seeks to add to the conversation by examining how a conversational mode of meditation unique to Christian sacrament inspires that poetry. Both Coleridge and Hopkins demonstrate an understanding of Christian sacrament that emphasizes engagement and encounter with God through language and creation; in turn, they create a poetry that uses all aspects of the form -- musical sound yoked to philosophical sense -- to record and reenact this sacramental encounter. Chapter 1 discusses how Coleridge, beginning from the Idealism of George Berkeley, counters Berkeley's passive, non-sacramental reading of nature with a theory of active engagement with nature, man, and God. We see how this theory issues in the "conversation poems," a set of meditations that enact the sacramental interchange that results from the poet's awareness of God's presence in the fullness of creation. Chapter 2 considers how Hopkins steps beyond the subtle machinations of Scotist theology to the meditative engagement of Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. Encouraged by Ignatius' emphasis on detail and particularity, Hopkins creates a poetic practice that uses the music of words to their fullest sacramental potential, demonstrating in poetry how man encounters God through active engagement with the world and takes on the image of Christ through sacrament.

Sacramental Conversation: The Poetry of Coleridge and Hopkins

by

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Chair of Advisory Committee

Dedication

to Christ our Lord

Biography

Gabriel S. Morris is a native of Johnston County, North Carolina. He graduated Summa Cum Laude from Campbell University in December of 2001 with a Bachelor of Arts in English. In the fall of 2002 he came to N. C. State University to pursue his Master of Arts in English and is currently considering Ph. D. programs. He hopes to become an English professor.

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General Introduction: Notes Toward a Religious Critique

In the aggressively secular setting of today's literary criticism, the religious critic – specifically, in this study, the Christian reader who attempts to approach devotional or sacral literature from an explicitly religious point of view[1] – would do well to take the Apostle Paul's near-disastrous (and, most likely, rather embarrassing) experience in Athens as a warning. According to the book of Acts, after hearing Paul preach to Athenian Jews in a synagogue, a few Epicurean and Stoic philosophers invited the evangelist to the Areopagus ("Mars' Hill"), apparently as a curiosity – the historian tells us they "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing" (17.17-21). There Paul, though apparently knowledgeable of Greek philosophy, makes a critical misapprehension by singling out an altar inscribed "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD" as his opening to declare to the philosophers the God "Whom therefore you ignorantly worship" (23). When he finishes his sermon on the Creator and the hope of resurrection, some are intrigued, a few believe, but most mock him, and Paul leaves for Corinth, apparently (judging from account's brusqueness) having failed to make any strong inroad in Athens (32-34). Paul had little to say that could convince an audience interested only in novelty and disputation – intellectual *play*, to put it more pointedly.

Paul's experience can serve as a helpful metaphor for the religious critic's position. The problem of knowing how and where to engage an indifferent or even hostile critical audience is one of the main concerns of the new religious criticism that has begun to surface in the last generation. In the work of J. Robert Barth from the 1970s

[1] The religion need not be Christian; any sincerely held religion, considered not as a historical fact or existing social institution, would find the same resistance. I cannot see why a Christian scholar would not welcome a Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or any other religious literary criticism, if founded on the same basic criteria here expounded upon – serious engagement from the perspective of a vital spiritual faith.

until today, in George Steiner's seminal essay *Real Presences* in 1985, in the works of a growing number of scholars in the only the last few years, the new religious criticism has striven for a means to encounter the massive body of literature that treats religious experience without degrading or dismissing its various claims to transcendent truth and reality beyond reality. As Dennis Taylor explains, religious criticism must confront the literatures that contemporary modes have "deconstructed, historicized, sexualized, or made symptomatic of covert power relationships" (3). Yet within that criticism an important question nags: who is to be the audience of a religious criticism? Is such a criticism doomed to preach to the choir? How are the Pauls of today's scholarly world to address the Epicureans and Stoics who form the current academic power structure?

Religion, as Taylor reminds us, is a "profoundly divisive and disturbing subject, and for that reason famously avoided in polite conversation" (27); but the contemporary academy's discomfort with religious experience (and its subsequent avoidance or reformulation) has a much deeper, and more difficult to remedy, cause than simple politeness. At the root of the problem is a modern scandal of the cross. In the first century, one of the difficulties of spreading the Christian message was the shame and humiliation associated with crucifixion, a cultural perception that made the idea of a crucified Savior "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. 1.23); today, the religious language available to criticism carries with it the weighty burdens of "grand narrative": imperialism, racism, sexism, oppression, domination – or, at best, superstition, the pap of the un- and anti-intellectual horde, worth only the mockery of ironic distance. Yet Paul, in 1 Corinthians, delivers the faith of these charges in a paradigm-smashing tour-de-force worthy of Derrida:

> the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. […] But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are[…]. (1.25-28)

The "offense" of the cross (to use the term in Galatians [5.11]), Paul argues, is an offense only by false standards. Some may consider Paul's a claim an intellectual cheat; others, a necessary re-drawing of critical boundaries.

In a similar and laudable spirit, Taylor proposes that religious criticism answer the challenge of contemporary theory – to prove itself a viable theoretical option – by formulating a new theoretical terminology: we need, he writes, "religious interpretations that are substantial enough to enter into a productive and competitive relation with the reigning critical discourses" (3). Taylor imagines such a language, a language that does not yet exist, as "critical and passionate, ecumenical and committed, detached and empathic" (27), a language by which the religious scholar and the secular scholar could find common ground. "A positive hermeneutic," Taylor writes, one which can answer the negative hermeneutics which dissolve religious language into waste, "must engage all the things that make mockery of it and threaten to make it null and void" (13). One wonders whether he has in mind Paul's failure at Mars' Hill or merely its countless echoes and reenactments in the life of every religious witness. Such wondering, however, uncovers the limitations and final insufficiency of Taylor's vision. On one hand, the desire to create a systematized critical language derives from the same impetus

that hardens religious experience into theology, doctrine, and dogma, eventually emptying out the experience to leave only the outward, dead forms, a problem Taylor seems to recognize: "Of course, a theological approach to these moments [of spiritual experience] can flatten them out as fully as the non-theological approach" (25). On the other hand, and perhaps more significantly, this compulsion repeats Paul's mistake by meeting contemporary theory on its own turf, so to speak. One must consider the possibility, even probability, that meeting secular criticism halfway will lose the essence of religious experience religious critics intend to share, or merely render committed, religious critics the grudgingly tolerated idiots of the academic village.

Perhaps, then, reformulating religious experience into a new theoretical language is not the most desirable approach. Yet the question still remains: how does religious criticism avoid becoming an "autistic echo-chamber" (to borrow Steiner's evocative phrase)? Before finding a means to encounter the academy, a religious criticism must establish its purpose; for a Christian criticism, as for a Christian art, the ultimate purpose is to glorify God. G. H. Hopkins' remarks on criticism are instructive in this question: "The only just judge, the only just literary critic, is Christ" (Dixon 8). The pessimistic interpretation of such a thought would suggest that Christian criticism must unavoidably, even willfully, remain in an academic ghetto, on the margins. Yet the history of deconstruction and cultural studies shows us that the best, most fascinating and most illuminating creative and interpretive work occurs on the margins. A proper Christian criticism – a *sanctified* criticism, even – will remain on the margins, not only of the academy but of culture at large, even in a nominally Christian culture, for the scandal of the Cross can only be alleviated by belief, else it must remain foolishness to the worldly-

wise. The Christian critic's only real option, therefore, is to practice his/her craft with all possible intellectual rigor and interpretive creativity, trusting that work of sufficient quality must be recognized and rewarded. The Christian critic, as Steiner demonstrates, first trusts the poetry, encounters the poetry, and responds to the poetry, keeping faith in the "real presence of significant being" the poetry incarnates (19).

Before a Christian criticism can speak to the rest of the academy, then, it must be able to perform confidently its own interpretive work. Steiner suggests the origin of a proper criticism when he asserts, "The poem comes before the commentary. The primary text is first not only temporally. […] Its priority is one of essence, of ontological need and self-sufficiency" (15). Just as a legitimate theology must remain always grounded in the Scripture that is its progenitor, so a legitimate religious literary criticism must remain grounded in the literature it studies. Obviously a certain amount of terminology, jargon, or "shop talk" is unavoidable and even desirable, but it is hardly a prerequisite when considering a literary mode that essentially speaks the unspeakable.[2] If we understand the language of religious poetry to be the untranslatable record of a transcendent experience (as the new religious criticism argues it must), then the only way really to approach such poetry is to treat it with a like devotion; to reduce it to a systematic set of fill-in-the-blanks theoretical terms would be profane. What we need is less a theory of Christian poetry than an encounter with and response to that poetry. Simply, the sacral element of religious poetry must be taken seriously: Steiner tells us, "We must read *as if*. We must read as if the text before us had meaning. […] Where we read truly, where the

[2] One might convincingly argue that the relatively recent explosion in theoretical and critical jargon is something of a disease afflicting contemporary criticism, a sort of over-compensation for some institutional inferiority complex; apparently literary scholarship, as its comrades in the humanities, looks upon the sciences with precision-envy.

experience is to be that of meaning, we do so as if the text (the piece of music, the work of art) *incarnates* (the notion is grounded in the sacramental) *a real presence of significant being*" (18-19). Anything less than an intellectual leap of faith seems an unacceptable compromise, far from instructive for either believers or nonbelievers.

Once the purpose of this Christian criticism is established (a process this introduction can only sketch), the critic may consider the question left earlier: where will a new language for such a criticism have its origin? At issue, perhaps, is a discrepancy between professionalism and faith; must the professional need for a language that can speak across theoretical divides be a diminishing language from the religious standpoint? Christian thought (as religious thought in general), from long before post-structuralism, recognizes the insufficiency of language to record spiritual experience, yet has functioned well within that limitation; the problem Taylor presents, then, is a purely professional one. Yet, in the peculiar criticism proposed, the devotional trumps the professional. The impulse itself is not at fault; Paul's attempt to meet the philosophers with their own terms surely was not a mistake, for the Gospel of John begins with a similar gambit: "In the beginning was the Word [Logos]" (1.1). The result, in John, is pure poetry, certainly among the finest in Christian art. As John took for granted the terminology of Greek philosophy, so may the religious critic take for granted, to his or her own purpose, the language and practice of post-modern theory; Deconstruction's playful engagement with text, for example, is only far from the engagement necessary to religious criticism not in its practice, but in the nihilism at its heart. The Christian critic, learning from Paul's true mistake, must nevertheless recognize not only the useful outward forms, but the underlying theoretical foundations of the language it chooses to use; for that reason

religious criticism must set itself apart from postmodern theory, even if it uses the same terms. Perhaps the life of a Christian criticism will come not from a theorization, but a poeticization of the sacral language whose insufficiency Taylor so laments. Traditional sacramental language, with its ancient terms, is no more or less sufficient to its task than ever; what it requires is a rehabilitation. It will be rehabilitated when criticism can use it in the creative, poetic spirit with which John christened Jesus "the Word." The poets under consideration – Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Gerard Manley Hopkins – exemplify this approach, both as subjects and as readers themselves; in fact, they are ideal models for our Christian criticism. Their poetic approaches both incorporate the body of poetic and religious thought before them and radically re-formulate that body in order to sanctify their poetry.

The principle upon which Coleridge and Hopkins found their poetics is fundamentally the same: the truest poetry records an encounter with God. Central to both poets' poetics is the symbol of conversation, representing God's Incarnational and sacramental communion with humankind. Both Coleridge and Hopkins consider sacrament, whether the sacrament of the church or of their own poetry, an act of conversation between the human and the divine, mediated by nature-as-language or by poetic language. Their use of sound – both as sound imagery within the poem, and sound as the music of the poem's expression – correlates to the symbolic colloquy of sacrament. Both further represent the interdependence of the spiritual and physical worlds: as God is the ground of all being, the physical world depends upon the active and sustaining power of divinity to animate it; the spiritual, in turn, uses the physical world as a language, expressing divinity through and within the world it sustains. Accordingly, Coleridge and

Hopkins both use sound to depict and emulate the fullness of creation, God's language, blurring the distinctions between spoken and written language, between sound and meaning, to perform their sacramental conversations. Finally, both poets are inspired to write a poetry that itself carries a sacral value, not only recording a sacramental encounter, but reenacting that encounter with each reading.

To depict this conversation, however, Coleridge and Hopkins use complementary but differing methods, intersecting in the use of sound but diverging in their individual poetic processes. In Chapter 1 we see how Coleridge, revising concepts proposed by Bishop Berkeley, depicts in his conversation poems a model of meditation and divine encounter based on a multi-leveled conversation: external, with another human; internal, within one's own self; and sacral, with God. Using the word in its completeness, as written sign and audible sound, Coleridge depicts a world full of sound, creating a poetry in which the fullness of sound metonymically represents the fullness of physical creation and of God's complete presence in creation. Chapter 2 examines how Hopkins, as a Jesuit, follows Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* as the model of his poetry, especially the sections of the *Exercises* which stress the deep imagining of Christ's life and work. (That each exercise ends with a "Colloquy," an imaginative conversation with God the Father, Christ, or the Virgin Mary, further underscores the centrality of conversation in meditative, sacramental experience.) Hopkins, holding the Incarnation of Christ as the prime act in creation, uses sound even more ambitiously than Coleridge; Hopkins uses sound itself both to represent the melding of spirit and flesh in Christ, and to represent the way the Christian images Christ in the world. Hopkins' most characteristic poems, even as they depict the spiritual animation of the physical world, attempt to embody the word

in his dense, agonistic music.

By considering these two poets in conjunction, we may see how particular currents of orthodox Christian thought may be expressed in unorthodox poetic practice, as both poets reach for creatively unique ways to depict unique creative visions ### Coleridge by inventing a hybrid genre in the conversation poem, Hopkins by stretching the metrical limitations of English verse to a degree daring even today. Numerous scholars have noted similarities in thought and doctrine between the two; René Gallet, for example, sees in Hopkins the "crisis of the romantic type of thought illustrated preeminently by Coleridge" (76), an existential rather than theological crisis. Still more instructively, in the shorter essays "Mortal Beauty: Ignatius Loyola, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the Role of Imagination in Religious Experience" and "Hopkins as a Romantic: A Coleridgean's View," J. Robert Barth examines the cross-currents between the two that his work has explored for years. A comparative study, then, is by no means novel; this study will therefore add to the conversation by examining in detail how the poets' theological and metaphysical speculations issue in poetic practice, fulfilling Christ's promise that "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (John 15.8).

Chapter 1:

Sound, Silence and Voice in Meditation: Coleridge's Conversation Poems

As James Engell reminds us, Coleridge considered himself a Berkeleian (110); yet elsewhere in Coleridge criticism we find denials: J. Robert Barth, for example, claims that we do not "have to resort to a Berkeleian philosophy" to find the source of Coleridge's belief in a God who actively sustains creation (*Symbolic* 20), while Seamus Perry argues that "his Berkeleianism is impure," because, "Even at his most rampantly idealist, he didn't deny that real existence of other things" (34). Coleridge's Berkeleianism is indeed impure, and, as Perry claims, nearly all Coleridge's work is held in suspension between idealist and realist tendencies[3]; furthermore, this tension is a fundamentally Christian one, inherent in a religion that worships a figure conceived as fully God and fully man. From such a viewpoint, Coleridge, so frequently accused of pantheism, appears more orthodox than a pseudo-Gnostic Berkeley. By building upon Berkeleian idealist principals, but using his own realism as a reformative tool, Coleridge models a radical method of Christian meditation in his conversation poems. The key to Coleridge's reform is sound, silence, and conversation as a corrective, balancing measure against idealism's alienating distance from creation and, ultimately, the Creator. Coleridge's meditation, in contrast to the Western (and Eastern, for that matter) tradition of silent, inward contemplation, relies on – in fact, consists of – conversation; only through conversation can one encounter the Divine. The conversation poems, then, are useful in two ways: first, they demonstrate the tension in Coleridge's thinking between idealism and realism, showing how Berkeley's influence is mediated by Coleridge's faith

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[3] I will here be using the word "idealist" to refer specifically to Berkeley's denial of material reality, and "realist" to Coleridge's defense thereof; no other technical uses should be assumed.

in the word and poetry; secondly, with their plentiful sound imagery, the conversation poems represent the ideal poetic genre for Coleridgean meditation.

I. Berkeleian Influence

Engell is correct in arguing that Berkeleian theosophy informs Coleridge's poetry and thought (110); the correlation can be seen easily by comparing Berkeley to Coleridge. One crucial Berkeleian concept is the formulation of nature as a readable, comprehensible language of divine revelation. As early as *A New Theory of Vision,*[4] Berkeley's first great work and the ground of his philosophy, Berkeley insists, "I think we may fairly conclude that the proper objects of vision constitute an universal language of the Author of nature" (147); near the end of his career, in *Siris*, he reiterates this assertion: "We know a thing when we understand it; and we understand it when we can interpret or tell what it signifies. […] Therefore, the phenomena of nature, which strike on the senses and are understood by the mind, form not only a magnificent spectacle, but also a most coherent, entertaining, and instructive Discourse; and to effect this, they are conducted, adjusted, and ranged by the greatest wisdom" (253-54). To Berkeley, in whose idealist philosophy all things exist by perception ("*esse* is *percipi*" he writes in *Principles of Human Knowledge* [3]), and take on meaning by understanding, all that exists, exists as a system of signs. That this language can be the language of God only is, to Berkeley, unquestionable, as it is God who not only created, but continues to sustain existence itself by his continual presence: "so long as they [created phenomena] are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some eternal

[4] References to Berkeley are to the individually numbered paragraphs in the multi-volume Luce and Jessop edition.

spirit" (*Siris* 6) – that is, while sensible objects exist only as they are perceived, all objects continually exist because they are continually perceived by God. In this way God sustains existence by his "immediate presence and immediate action," and it is God who "connects, moves, and disposes all things according to such rules, and for such purposes, as seem good to Him" (237). God is, according to Berkeley, an active, all-enveloping force that keeps all creation in existence by his continual attention, and he chooses to reveal himself through his creation. Thus "we do in all times and in all places perceive manifest tokens of the divinity" (*Principles* 148).

Berkeley's conception of God as sustainer of existence, and of nature as the intelligible language of God, with a grammar and interpretation, is especially important to Coleridge. We hear an echo of this sustaining God in the "one life within us and abroad / Which meets all motion and becomes its soul" in "The Eolian Harp" (26-7).[5] In other conversation poems Coleridge makes clear nature's role as language, veiling and revealing the divine: in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," for example, the long contemplation of nature makes it "seem / Less gross than bodily, and of such hues / As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes / Spirits perceive his presence" (40-43). Coleridge's use of the word "Spirits" is a notable Berkeleian touch, as Berkeley favors this word to differentiate "perceiving, active being" (particularly human subjects) from "ideas," the non-perceiving perceived (*Principles* 2). Interestingly, though, Coleridge imagines the spirit perceiving not signs of God through his language, but "his presence" – perhaps he is merely collapsing sign and author for poetic effect, but more likely the distinction reflects Coleridge's belief in the life and "thingness" of language, which we will discuss in more detail later. Elsewhere, in "Frost at Midnight," Coleridge hopes that

his child will one day learn to "see and hear / The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language, which thy God / Utters" (63-6). In this passage, in contrast to "Lime-Tree Bower," the pause signified by a comma emphasizes "language," while the caesura delays the utterance and gives "God" a second emphasis in the line. The effect, however, seems rather similar; Coleridge collapses God and his language in line 65, giving the things – language and God – priority over the action that one uses to call the other into being. These slight revisions of Berkeley give hints of Coleridge's larger break with Berkeleian thought, as does his description of "the great book of his [God's] servant Nature" in *The Statesman's Manual.*[6] Already we see an odd touch: nature is a "servant," not only a language system; nature apparently has some active life. Nature, Coleridge writes, "has been the music of gentle and pious minds in all ages, it is the *poetry* of all human nature, to read it likewise in a figurative sense, and to find therein correspondencies and symbols of the spiritual world" (366). On the one hand, we see Coleridge's Berkeleian insistence on nature as a language to be read; on the other, Coleridge formulates nature as a "music" and a "poetry," systems quite different from, though like, language.[7] Coleridge's use of sound will further illuminate the importance of music and poetry for encountering God.

A second Berkeleian concept that needs consideration is the "*minimum visibile*" outlined in the *Theory of Vision* and revisited throughout Berkeley's writing. Quite

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[5] References to Coleridge's poetry are from Mellor and Matlack's anthology.

[6] References to *The Statesman's Manual* are from the Norton Critical Edition of *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Halmi et al.

[7] The correspondence/relationship between music and poetry is a particularly illuminating matter that will be further discussed in Chapter 2; suffice to say, both instrumental music and the extra-linguistic properties of poetry – both being, in their simplest definition, temporally organized sound – possess the power to engage the mind on a non-intellectual (some would suggest, transcendent) level. As such, both have an obvious sacral potential, especially the yoking of sound and sense in poetry.

simply, the *minimum visibile* represents the limit of human vision, the smallest perceivable point "beyond which sense cannot perceive" (54). The *minimum visibile* has been frequently misconstrued as a concept of the infinitesimal, but Berkeley makes it clear that the *minimum visibile* "is not infinitely divisible" and, in fact, that the concept renders the idea of infinity unnecessary (54). Berkeley reiterates this concept, renamed the "*minimum sensibile*," in the *Principles*, again asserting that the concept itself makes the idea of infinity, which is "impossible" anyway, useless (132). There is no reason for infinity when imagining the *minimum visibile* because it conceives how the limits of vision effect the fullness of perception; in either case, since human vision cannot perceive infinity and because perception is full regardless, infinity is an unworkable concept. In every object, every plane of perception, the *minimum visibile* is "at all times an equal number" and whether in his study or outside surrounded by nature, Berkeley explains that his senses can perceive only a finite, but full, number of *minima visibilia* (*Vision* 82). As Engell writes, "Nature is everywhere equally full to our eye" (111).

Coleridge's claim, in "Lime-Tree Bower," that "No plot so narrow, be but Nature there" (61) points to Berkeley's concept of a full creation; no matter how small one's environment, whether under a bower or "the wide wide Heaven" (21), there is never any more or less to see. Further, Coleridge extends Berkeley's *minimum visibile* just as Berkeley himself did in the *Principles*, by continuing, "No waste so vacant, but may well employ / *Each faculty of sense*, and keep the heart / Awake to Love and Beauty!" (62-4, my italics). Here we have the *minimum sensibile* demonstrated within a tiny bower, previously a prison, now a wide-open space filled with sensation. Plentitude, then, not infinitude, characterizes the *minimum sensibile*, and the limitation of human sense is not a

poverty but a richness, as Berkeley himself claims numerous times: "if we consider the use and end of sight […], we shall not find any great cause to complain of any defect or imperfection in it, or easily conceive how it could be mended" (*Vision* 87) – what could be better than fullness? In the *Principles* and *Siris*, respectively, Berkeley goes on to claim that "the very blemishes and defects of Nature [including, presumably, the limitations of our senses] are not without their use, in that they make an agreeable sort of variety, and augment the beauty of the rest of the creation" (152), while "excesses, defects, and contrary qualities conspire to the beauty and harmony of the world" (262). It is the "use and end of sight" that concerns Coleridge in "Lime-Tree Bower" – to "keep the heart / Awake to Love and Beauty." Here Coleridge does not conflict with Berkeley.

II. Idealism Vs Realism

Coleridge, however, is by no means a strict Berkeleian. His knowledge and thinking are too eclectic to be called a *strict* anything; as we have seen, even his Berkeleian pronouncements are tempered by a revisionary spirit. As Seamus Perry convincingly argues, Coleridge's thought is formed by a tension between Berkeleian idealism and an abiding sense of *reality*, understood as the real existence of *things*. While "spirits" may perceive "ideas," Coleridge's break with Berkeley comes, according to Perry, on this crucial question of "things" – Coleridge's "objection is to the denial of things' otherness, independent of the mind" (33). While Berkeleian philosophy attempts to circumvent the problem of pure idealism by arguing that ideas exist outside individual perception because of God's continual perception, nevertheless he refuses to acknowledge the existence of things:

> If it be demanded why I make use of the word *idea*, and do not rather in

> compliance with custom call them *things*. I answer, I do it for two reasons: first, because the term *thing*, in contradistinction to *idea*, is generally supposed to denote something existing without the mind: secondly, because *thing* hath a more comprehensive signification than *idea*, including spirits and thinking things as well as ideas. Since therefore the objects of sense exist only in the mind, and are withal thoughtless and inactive, I choose to mark them by the word *idea*, which implies these properties. (Principles 39)

Coleridge, on the other hand, takes exception to Berkeley's version of idea. In *The Statesman's Manual* he argues that "every idea is living, productive, partaketh of infinity, and […] containeth an endless power of semination" (357). In affirming the life of ideas, of Berkeley's things, Coleridge breaks from Berkeley's idealism in favor of a system that respects the religious potential in all creation. Coleridge's dissatisfaction with pure idealism is of a piece with what Claire Miller Colombo calls his "dual affirmation of the temporal and the infinite" (34), his assurance that the spiritual world requires the physical world, and vice-versa, as a compound symbol.

The importance of "symbol" in Coleridge's thinking has been studied at length, and we need only a brief explanation. In the *Statesman's Manual* Coleridge sets up an endlessly debated dichotomy between the language of allegory – "a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses […], both alike unsubstantial" – and the language of symbol – "characterized by a translucence of the Special into the Individual […]. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal" (360). The purpose of symbol, according to

Barth, is "to reconcile opposites, or what seem to be opposites, including the secular and the religious, the temporal and the eternal" (Symbolic 140) – we might also add, of the real and the ideal. Coleridge's vision is one which simultaneously unifies and respects difference. Columbo offers a fascinating corollary to Coleridge's thinking: "the idea that symbol must be predicated upon allegory, that human visions of unity must be born of division and ultimately disintegrate into the same" (40). Intriguingly, such an idea, that the limitation of human imagination makes symbolic language an unreachable ideal, would seem to be an extension of Berkeley's logic with the idea of the *minimum sensibile* – the limit of human sense. In arguing, as Colombo does, that Coleridge presents a co-dependence between symbol and allegory, we set the stage to demonstrate the fact that Coleridge's philosophy depends upon conversation and (to borrow Barth's term) encounter.

Coleridge's break with Berkeley, then, is based on one surprising fact: Berkeley's philosophy is not Christian enough. Ironically, the failure of Berkeley's metaphysics is that it is too abstract, not mystic. Berkeley, throughout his writing, considers the way in which God reveals himself – through thinking spirits' perception of ideas which can be read as God's language. But Berkeley's is a strangely passive version of reading; one encounters only the writing, not the writer. In short, Berkeley's theosophy finds no way to encounter God, only to read his revelation: his philosophy is not relational, but observational, though sacramental encounter with God ought to be at the center of any Christian world-view. Berkeleianism not only refuses a means to encounter God, but also to encounter other human beings; Berkeley, in fact, only slimly acknowledges that other human beings exist: "We may even assert, that the existence of God" – who is

behind all things, always active in his creation, but oddly distant nonetheless – "is far more evidently perceived than the existence of men; because the effects of Nature are infinitely more numerous and considerable, than those ascribed to human agents" (*Principles* 147). Throughout Berkeley's writing, the emphasis is on perception, vision, seeing the things of God, never on experiencing or encountering them; Berkeley's theology, to use Barth's definition, is largely non-sacramental, insofar as sacrament is "an encounter of the human person with God" (41). Berkeley allows us only to *see* God; Coleridge demands more.

III. The Conversation Poems

The sacramental failure of Berkeleian philosophy requires Coleridge to design a system with its roots in the strongest point of Berkeleian idealism – namely, the world as God's language – but that includes a place for sacramental encounter via other things and people. The indeterminate form of the genre he created for the purpose, the conversation poem, reflects its underlying philosophical bricolage: "he was consciously rejecting established genres, attempting to blend the best of flexible developments in meditative, descriptive, and reflective verse" (Engell 109). The concept itself – a *conversation* poem – seems Coleridge's response, as a poet, to Berkeley's reliance on sight and light to the detriment of the Word. Berkeley's conception of nature as the language of God seems to restrict nature to a *written* language, ignoring the life of language as intelligible sound; the curious absence of sound in a list early in the *Principles* – "the sensible qualities are colour, figure, motion, smell, taste, and such like, that is, the ideas perceived by sense (7) – makes the fact abundantly clear. Berkeley prioritized light, and visible ideas, as divine signs. But Coleridge, as a poet, certainly seems to follow the Gospel's priority of the

Word as sign of God (as in, of course, the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" [1.1]); as a poet, he considers the word in all its forms, as written symbol and as intelligible sound. Compare his version of nature to Berkeley's; Coleridge's nature is the "music of gentle and pious minds" and the "*poetry* of all human nature" (*Statesman* 366). Poetry is more than a set of written words for interpretation and understanding; poetry is the music of words, dependent on the relations of sounds for its meaning. Words without sounds are incomplete. Furthermore, according to Barth, Coleridge has an abiding faith in the word, against "those who do not trust language to convey the deepest reality" (*Transcendence* 127); it is, in fact, the indeterminacy of language, its resistance to univocal readings, that demonstrates the vitality of the word, and gives it its sacramental strength (*Symbolic* 39). Words, as Engell notes, are to Coleridge "living things" (112), for nothing that is not living can have sacramental value. Language exists and gains meaning through relation, conversation, interaction, and it is this quality that Coleridge finds useful for meditation.

Relation – whether the relation of sounds in poetry, the relation of sound to written sign, or the relation of human to God or other human – is the fundamental point of the conversation poems. Coleridge even, correcting Berkeley, provides a relation and equalization between light and sound: the "one life" in "The Eolian Harp" is "a light in sound, a sound-like power in light / Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere" (28-9). Though Engell claims that, as in traditional meditative tradition, "it is the absence of sound – stillness and silence – that likewise accompanies and envelops epiphanic moments of feeling" (115), sound, in fact, is the crucial medium for meditation in all of the conversation poems. It is through sound and conversation that encounters between

the poet and other people, and between the poet and God, occur. Because conversation is dependent on language, and in Coleridge's poetic art language and sound are mutually dependent, sound provides the critical medium for encounter and meditation. A reading of the central poems – those poems undeniably identified as "conversation poems" – will demonstrate Coleridge's conversational method of meditation.

First and foremost, the conversations share the crucial element of a second person (or persons) who functions variously as a surrogate (Charles in "Lime-Tree Bower, Hartley in "Frost at Midnight" [Barry 602]), a listener (Wordsworth and Dorothy in "The Nightingale," Sara in "The Eolian Harp"), or a questioner (Sara again). The presence of this second person is absolutely necessary for the meditation represented by the poem to take place; Coleridge's poet must have a listener to hear and respond to the intelligible sounds of his poetry. In all the poems, furthermore, sound emerges as the medium for meditation. In "The Eolian Harp," for example, the sound of the harp is obviously the thing that triggers the poet's contemplation, but it is not the first sound in the poem; after a movement through sight ("watch the clouds" [6]) and smell ("How exquisite the scents / Snatched from yon bean-field!" [9-10]), Coleridge notices first the "world so hushed," then revises his understanding of this sensation: "The stilly murmur of the distant sea / Tells us of silence" (11-12). "Tells us of silence" is no mere word game; in the world of the conversation poems, in which there is no such thing as silence (or, at least, silence is only a precursor to sound), the sound of the sea focuses the poet's mind and allows him to see the sound in silence. It is, in fact, this telling of silence that focuses his mind to hear the "simplest lute" on which his meditation proper depends.

Michael Raiger claims that the central symbol of "The Eolian Harp" represents

the way in which Coleridge converts realism and idealism "into a single system of necessity which nevertheless preserves the sense of the vitality of action in nature, including human nature, in contrast to a mechanical system of causes" (83), and if he is incorrect in anything, it is in thinking that the conversion is ultimately unsatisfying to Coleridge. If the meditation fails, it is only because it has to fail; as Colombo brilliantly argues, Coleridge's purpose is to preserve "an inadequate, or at best transient, symbol – one which must fall back into the allegorical 'alienated consciousness' of the poem's controversial finale" (40). The real problem with the meditation of "The Eolian Harp" is that the "witchery of sound" the harp creates leads the poet into an idealist reverie that separates him from reality. He checks the *minimum sensibile* in exclaiming, "Methinks, it should have been impossible / Not to love all things in a world so filled" (30-1), then launches into his most purely Idealist dream:

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all? (44-8)

So we see a Berkeleian passivity, a world of non-agents without life only moved by God like toys. It is Sara who calls him back to the world of reality with the "mild reproof" of her "serious eye" (49), and we suddenly recall that the poem begins with "pensive Sara"; it is she, as a perceivable, encounterable thing, that begins the contemplation that turns into meditation. Without her thoughtful presence, there would be no meditation, and while she may be considered negatively as the one who drags the poet down from the

heights of transcendence, we must remember that it is her reproof that in fact saves him from "vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring" and reminds him of the humility necessary for sacramental encounter: "never guiltless may I speak of him, / The Incomprehensible! save when with awe / I praise him" (57-60). Notice Coleridge does not say that he cannot speak of God – only that speaking of him without praising him (taking his name in vain, as it were) is guilty speech. Coleridge retains his faith in the word.

The interplay of silence and sound is especially fascinating in "The Nightingale." As the one poem labeled "A Conversation Poem," its status as the archetype of the form is unquestionable. In this poem, as in all the others, the poet addresses an immediate audience, William and Dorothy Wordsworth. In this poem, also as in all the others, sound is the trigger of meditation. Coleridge stacks the deck against light and vision here, opening with an image of imagelessness: "No cloud, no relique of the sunken day / Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip / Of sullen light, no obscure trembling hues" (1-3). He further notes that there is no sound, as the stream under their bridge "flows silently" and "All is still, / A balmy night!" (6-8). But slowly the sensory deprivation, like the sea that "tells us of silence," reveals sensations: "we shall find / A pleasure in the dimness of the stars. / And hark! the Nightingale begins its song" (10-12). The silence of the opening is only a precursor to sound, as it is again later in the poem when he tells the story of the "gentle maid" who "heard a pause of silence" that came just before a flock of nightingales, wakened by the moon, "burst forth in choral minstrelsy, / As if one quick and sudden Gale had swept / An hundred airy harps!" (69-82). Coleridge returns here to the image of the eolian harp, to the sound that is a medium for meditation, but with the change that the birds act out of their own vitality, only awakened and excited by

the wind, not dependent upon it. The birds may be ideas, but they are also things, with their own life and activity.

The imagery of this poem, too, appears to be in dialogue with idealism's prioritizing of sight and light (visual reading); Coleridge insists that the poet's art is shaped by "the influxes / Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements," implicitly equalizing vision, hearing, and all of the other senses (27-8). Elsewhere, the poet describes the nightingales "Stirring the air with such an harmony, / That should you close your eyes, you might almost / Forget it was not day!" (62-3). These are deeply strange, and deeply revelatory, lines. Notice first that it is "harmony," the relation of sounds, that has such an effect on the listener; notice then the conflation of sound and light, as the nightingales' song makes day of night. Here we have a refutation of Berkeley's visionary passivity, an affirmation of sensory unity and relation. The interplay of sound and silence, light and sound, also finds a vehicle in Coleridge's child, who ends the poem. The poet speculates that his "dear Babe, / Who, capable of no articulate sound, / Mars all things with his imitative lisp," would, on hearing the nightingale, "place his hand beside his ear, / His little hand, the small forefinger up, and bid us listen!" (91-6). Here the child could be seen as a poet figure; as the poet uses language in imitation of God, marring it, nevertheless he has a crucial role in showing others the need to listen. The child's innocent affirmation of the importance of listening represents the poet leading his listeners and readers in meditation, however limited and imperfect, on the audible, intelligible language of God.

The infant Hartley plays a critical role in another of the conversation poems, "Frost at Midnight," and here as well he is a kind of surrogate for the poet. The poem

begins, again, with silence, as there is no wind (or sound of wind) to aid the frost's "secret ministry" (1-2). There is, briefly, the cry of an owl, then utter silence. While the poet claims that his "solitude […] suits / Abstruser musings" (5-6), still the calm is "so calm, that it disturbs / And vexes meditation with it's [sic] strange / And extreme silentness" (8-10). Contrary to the usual Western conception, silence is not a boon to meditation, but an impediment, for silence represents a dearth of conversation, the absence of divine language or human encounter. The poet cannot proceed in his meditation without some sound, which he finds metaphorically in the "stranger," the "sole unquiet thing" (16). Interestingly, the adjective "unquiet," with its double meaning, refers specifically to the fluttering movement of the film at the fireplace grate, not to a sound; once again, Coleridge is demonstrating not only the relations of senses to each other, but the relations of words by making his meditation turn on a pun (underscored by the wonderful pun "sole/soul," once again asserting the life of things).[8] What matters to his meditation is finding a "companionable form" in the stranger. The encounter his child cannot provide is shifted instead to a thing. Nor is it insignificant that his meditative remembrance calls up memories of "the old church tower, / Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang […] So sweetly, that they stirr'd and haunted me / With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear / Most like articulate sounds of things to come" (33-8). His meditation returns him to an enthusiastic moment in his past, to another time when sound became the medium of some divine encounter. The sound of the bells, of music, seems like "articulate," prophetic sounds, the sounds of revelation. In this passage Coleridge alerts us to the multiplicity of divine encounters, of the many possibilities of

[8] The sole/soul pun was noted to me, to my great embarrassment (not having noticed it myself), by John Morillo.

meditation, by introducing an ecstatic moment into what is otherwise a quiet, restful (but not silent) meditation.

His meditation, mediated by the stranger, brings the poet's attention back to his child, who, it seems, was never silent at all: the baby's breathings, "heard in this dead calm / Fill up the interspersed vacancies / And momentary pauses of the thought!" (50-2); the baby was never silent, but the poet, lost in his loneliness, could not hear or recognize the other presence. As he discovers his child's presence, the poet is able to establish an imaginary identification with him, making the child his surrogate. Barry calls it a "peculiar composite subjectivity - two companionable forms sharing one identity" (611). He dreams of bringing the child up in the countryside, where he will "see and hear / The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language, which thy God / Utters" (63-6). He will teach his son, as his son teaches him in "The Nightingale," his way of meditation, to see the unity of senses and to hear and read the revelation of God; what he dreams of, in fact, is his own unification with the child he loves into a sacramental emblem for a fragmentary world.

We notice, undoubtedly, that in none of these poems does a divine encounter appear as a blinding revelation, a sudden, violent act of God, or anything else we customarily consider signs of a meeting with the Almighty. Rather, these poems record small moments of *recognition*, founded on connections with people, places and things, simple reality. Indeed, their sacred import seems more a matter of mood or tone than dramatic epiphany; they are meditative, sacramental, in themselves, not because of their outcomes. As Barth reminds us, to Coleridge "the act of perceiving symbols (primary imagination) or of making symbols (secondary imagination) is essentially a religious

act," because God is "the supreme symbol-maker, the supreme symbol-perceiver" (*Symbolic* 38). So is it in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," a poem in which Berkeleian philosophy is upended and recreated. Here we can use James Engell's reading, which posits the poem as thoroughly Berkeleian, against itself. Tellingly, the first few lines depict an image of a future day "when age / Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness!" (4-5). Ironically, Engell sees this opening as an affirmation of Berkeley's insistence on the eye as "a visual semiotic organ [that] ultimately nurtures moral feelings and actions" (114); Coleridge's use of blindness, according to Engell, demonstrates the way in which vision, as all senses, should be used not for its own sake, but for reading natural signs that can be remembered, as moral lessons, later. While, as Engell insists, we should not think of "Coleridge's condemnation of the 'tyranny of the eye'" as a "flat rejection of vision nor a presumption of its false light" (114), we have seen Coleridge's condemnation already, not directed against the eye specifically, but against the priority of any sense over another. In foretelling a future of blindness, Coleridge reminds us, yet again, of the equality, unity, and mutual dependency of the senses.

Engell recognizes that sound and silence "play a vital role in the poem" in addition to vision and blindness, but he fails to recognize the importance of sound as meditative medium. In fact, he mistakenly claims that "it is the absence of sound – stillness and silence – that likewise accompanies and envelops epiphanic moments of feeling" (115), when we can clearly hear that there is no silence whatsoever in the poem. Engell's examples – "as I have stood, / Silent with swimming sense," and "While thou stood'st gazing; or, when all was still" – do not fit (115). In the first, only the speaker is still; his "swimming sense" suggests all the senses in concert, all in a high register. In the

second, “when all was still” is broken by the “creeking” of the rook, which Coleridge imagines flying over carrying his charm. Even in his bower Coleridge notices that, though the bat and the swallow are silent, he can still hear “the solitary humble bee [that] / Sings in the bean-flower” (58-59). What Coleridge demonstrates is not the power of silence to enrapture a subject, but a variation on Berkeley’s *minimum sensibile* – nature is full, and his recognition of this fullness is key to his meditative moment. As in the other conversation poems, however, this recognition is not a passive reading of nature, but an active encounter and engagement with it. Engell recognizes the “remarkable number of repetitions that connect and advance,” the way in which the poem has a “larger structure of inclusion and connection” in which “Coleridge, Lamb, the Wordsworths, and natural objects are all syntactically bound each to each” (117), yet he does not attempt to explain how this linguistic structure constitutes the meditative power of the poem. Again, this is not a Berkeleian poetry of observation, but a Coleridgean poetry of encounter. Coleridge does not just read the written language of God, he involves himself with it, when, after his contemplation, he sees “the last rook / Beat its straight path along the dusky air / Homeward,” and blesses it (68-70). Whatever Engell may believe, we have seen that such engagement is not Berkeleian – it is Coleridge’s mystic revitalization of Berkeley.

In the conversation poems, Coleridge revives the sound of language from Berkeley’s “dead letter” of written divine speech. Berkeley’s failing from a Christian point of view, it would seem, is an emphasis on the Light over the Word. In place of Berkeley’s incomplete, unsatisfying idealism, Coleridge proposes a symbolic language of meditation that, though unsustainable and broken, still provides the comfort of encounter. We may say that even a brief encounter with divinity is worth all the observational

knowledge in the world. "Thought for Coleridge," in Barth's words, "involves quest and discovery, and he expects his readers to join him on the quest, with Coleridge as intellectual friend and guide" (*Symbolic* 29). The egalitarian vision contained in that image is one that Coleridge's Christian faith is built upon. To Barth, Coleridge's poetry is a poetry of encounter, "the encounter between the poet and the reader, for whom the poem is setting and catalyst," and the "encounter between himself or herself and the sacred – the numinous 'other' – whether discovered within or outside one's self" (*Symbolic* 145). This poetic encounter is fundamentally Christian; the problem with Berkeleian subjectivity is its failure to account for others, when Christian faith demands that other things, and people, exist. Christian faith, after all, requires others for the believer to love: Christ's only two commandments (loosely paraphrased) are "Love God" and "Love Others." Barth may put Coleridge's poetic philosophy best: "the act of imagination is at bottom an act of love," a most Christian act (*Transcendence* 123). In combining idealism with realism, in creating the conversational poem as a hybrid genre, Coleridge is in fact following the example of his God, who combined divinity with mortality to create, if you will, the ultimate hybrid genre.

Chapter 2:
"Greet him the days I meet him": Sound and The Word in Hopkins' Poetry

The hybrid, Christ the God/man, is the foundation of Hopkins' poetry. To Hopkins, Christ is both the source and end of poetry, the "only just judge, the only just literary critic" (Dixon 8); and, as we shall see, Christ is the model for Hopkin's poetry. Christ, too, is the only model for life. Hopkins describes to Robert Bridges, in a humbly,

personally eloquent manner, how Christ's kenosis guides the righteous life: Christ

> annihilated himself, taking the form of a servant; […] he emptied or exhausted himself so far as that was possible, of godhead and behaved only as God's slave, as his creature, as man, which also he was, and then being in the guise of man humbled himself to death, the death of the cross. It is this holding of himself back[…] which seems to me the root of all his holiness and the imitation of this the root of all moral good in other men. (175)[9]

Christ's sacrifice – not merely the sacrifice of crucifixion, but of the Incarnation itself – is the center of Christianity and of Hopkins' poetic. Yet for Hopkins, as for every Christian, Christ must be personally encountered and engaged, and it is this encounter that Hopkins' poetry dramatizes and enacts for the reader. Like Coleridge, Hopkins formulates a meditative method founded upon conversation, using sound, language, and conversation in concert as his symbols and medium; but Hopkins goes farther than Coleridge could ever have imagined. Using Ignatius of Loyola's intensely imaginative meditation as another model, Hopkins demonstrates how the living language of poetry, along with the poet and the reader, can figure or represent Christ in the world.

I. Hopkins and Scotus

When we seek to examine Hopkins' poetic practice, we must inevitably consider the particular (not to say peculiar) theology upon which he founds his poetry, for Hopkins must be considered a man of faith first, secondly (perhaps consequently), a poet. The simple question, "What kind of Christian was Hopkins?" is of critical importance – a Roman Catholic, of course, a dedicated Jesuit obviously, but formed and molded by

numerous, sometimes competing traditions (his Anglican upbringing, his reading of the classical philosophers, his education in the Church Fathers and Medieval Schoolmen). Particularly crucial to critical study of Hopkins' theology is determining Duns Scotus' influence, especially as it affects the influence of Ignatius and Jesuit doctrine on the poetry. Critics remain divided as to whether Hopkins can be considered a true Scotist, whether he was a Jesuit first and merely influenced by Scotism, or whether he merely found in Scotus some coherence of ideas already forming in his thought. Before approaching Hopkins' poetry directly, I intend to show that while Duns Scotus may have had some influence on Hopkins' theology, Ignatius is rather the strongest influence in the formation of his poetic practice.

No critic can reasonably deny that Hopkins read and admired Duns Scotus; in his journal of 1872, Hopkins remarks on finding a volume of Scotus that made him "flush with a new stroke of enthusiasm" and so affected him that "when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus" (211), while in an 1875 letter to Bridges he declares "I care for him [Scotus] more even than Aristotle and more *pace tua* than a dozen Hegels" (31)[10]. Furthermore, Hopkins praised Scotus in "Duns Scotus' Oxford" for his having "fired France for Mary without spot" (14), and retained a strong Marian devotion ("The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe"). Scholars agree, though, that two Scotist concepts seem to be most strongly evident in Hopkins' theology and poetry: one is the doctrine of "haecceity" (*haecceitas*) best understood as "thisness" or individuality; as Efram Bettoni explains it, this haecceity "aims precisely at pointing out the individual's greater richness of perfection in contrast to the species, and at explaining

[9] References to Hopkins' letters to Dixon and Bridges are from the Abbott editions.
[10] References to Hopkins journal and poetry are from the Phillips edition.

how things cannot exist except as individuals" (63). Numerous critics have considered *haecceitas* the theological ground of Hopkins' "patient attention to particulars" (Lichtmann 43), associating the concept with either Hopkins' own coinage "inscape" or his iconoclastic use of "pitch" (see Boggs 836, Cotter 126, Gallet 71). David Shaw goes so far as to attribute the abysm of the terrible sonnets to Hopkins' desire to be "more 'Scotist' than Scotus" by taking the doctrine of *haecceitas* to its logical extreme – idolatry (136-37); according to Shaw, the moral vacillation between this idolatry and his kenotic impulse left him in a state of "deeper and unnerving aloneness[…] forever drifting in the void" (137).

One need only glance through the poems to see adequate demonstration of Hopkins' love for detail and particularity, as well as his spirited defense of the individual worth of each thing: the "dappled things" of "Pied Beauty," for instance, "All things counter, original, spare, strange; / Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?) / With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim" (7-9); or the magnificent declaration in "As kingfishers catch fire,"

> Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
> Selves – goes its self; *myself* it speaks and spells,
> Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*" (5-8)

Throughout Hopkins' poetry (except in the desolation of the terrible sonnets) we see this intense love for things and the particulars of things, always however maintaining the morally proper, Augustinian separation between use and enjoyment (Hanvey 152). Such love, however, need no more be attributed to Scotus than to Ignatius, as we shall see.

The more important Scotist concept generally supposed to have colored Hopkins' theology and poetic theory is Scotus' Incarnational doctrine. The doctrine is exceedingly difficult to understand, unsurprisingly as it comes from the "Subtle Doctor"; briefly, though, Scotus taught the pre-eminence of the Incarnation in creation, meaning that all the universe was created through Christ for the purpose of Christ's incarnation, meaning that "the human nature of Jesus is the aim and final cause God had in mind when creating": "The natural order," therefore, "is existentially oriented toward Christ who is its masterpiece and culmination" and "Nature has never lost this marking and glory" (Cotter 122-23). Because the universe exists for the sake of the Incarnation, "The universe is inherently and originally Christic and bears the mark of its creator-redeemer" (Cotter 123). The basic doctrine itself, though, allows for numerous interpretations; for our purposes one can understand, as does Cotter, "The world is Word in which man reads to achieve gnosis, for which man listens to hear its poetry, and on which God looks to see the crucified imprint of his Son" (124). Such an interpretation is tantalizingly close to the Berkleian/Coleridgean concept of the world as God's language, and must be considered more closely below.

In Hopkins' poetry, this Christic universe finds its clearest poetic representation in the "Kingfishers" sonnet, as Hopkins asserts that the righteous man "Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is – / Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places[…] To the Father through the features of men's faces" (11-14). In much the same way, while the unbelievers in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" see only a killing storm, in God's sight "Storm flakes were scroll-leaved flowers, lily showers – sweet heaven was astrew in them" (168). The idea recurs throughout Hopkins' poetry, though: in the "Deutschland"

he declares the Christ "is under the world's splendour and wonder" (38), while in "Hurrahing in Harvest" he lift[s] up heart, eyes, / Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour" (6), seeing Christ everywhere in nature, ever-present: "These things, these things were here and but the beholder / Wanting" (11-12). Most famously, in "God's Grandeur" "The world is charged with the grandeur of God," and this active and sustaining power "will flame out, like shining from shook foil" (1-2), just as the "piece-bright paling" that is the sky of "The Starlight Night" "shuts the spouse / Christ home, Christ and his mothers and all his hallows" (13-14). Turn almost anywhere in Hopkins' mature poetry to see the Father and Son alive in the world. Again, however, we shall see that such a vision is not exclusively Scotist.

Despite such seemingly convincing evidence of Hopkins' Scotist theology, evidence to the contrary is also abundant, and ultimately more convincing. Let us consider Hopkins' own testimony first. While Hopkins does indeed claim to love Scotus "more even than Aristotle," he later declares his allegiance to the "Aristotelian Catholics" in another letter to Bridges (95), while Cotter quotes his "even prostrate admiration of Aristotle," whom he considered the "end-all and be-all of philosophy" (qtd 23). To recognize fully the significance of his stated devotion, we must turn again to Bettoni, who explains the thirteenth-century rivalry between two main philosophical schools making up the Scholastic philosophers; one, the Aristotelian school "created, rather than renewed, by the penetrating genius of St. Thomas Aquinas" and the Platonic/Augustinian school, to which Duns Scotus leaned (15). Just as Aquinas' philosophy vainly "tries to assimilate Augustine" into an Aristotelian framework, so Scotus' Anti-Thomistic philosophy is "a new attempt to assimilate Thomistic Aristolelianism" into an Augustinian frame (20).

Hopkins is the heir of this medieval rivalry, as is reflected in his statements; while perceived as a Platonist or Augustinian by his peers (Cotter 22), he considered himself an Aristotelian who admired Scotus. Such a noncommittal self-definition would suggest a thinker open to the assimilation and synthesis of multiple theological traditions, sanctified, as it were, by their common Savior.

When we examine contemporary criticism, this is precisely the picture we see: critical consensus today, keeping with my own speculations, considers Hopkins an original, intuitive thinker, only marginally influenced, or rather affirmed, by Scotus. On the matter of *haecceitas*, in particular, numerous critics scorn the mistaken tendency to identify Scotus' doctrine with Hopkins' "inscape"; Rebecca Boggs, for example, declares firmly that "inscape is not identical with Duns Scotus' *haecceitas* in things of nature" (836). Cotter agrees, citing a Hopkins passage that seems to associate haecceitas with "pitch" rather than inscape (126); furthermore, however, he writes, "Certainly Scotus' theory of haecceitas contributed to the elucidation of his concept, but from his journal entries and essays it is clear that Hopkins had already framed the main points of reference while still a student at Oxford (111). The journal entry cited above confirms: Hopkins was already using the word "inscape" by the time Scotus' writing made him "flush with a new stroke of enthusiasm" (211). René Gallet convincingly makes the same argument, that in Hopkins' thought Scotus gave Hopkins merely "a confirmation of his own intuitions" (76), just as the centrality of the Incarnation was "the sublime myth Hopkins saw as the integrating force of his life and which he found confirmed and profoundly interpreted in Scotus" (Cotter 123); in all things theological, "it was in the New Testament and not in Duns Scotus that [Hopkins] first encountered the Alpha and Omega

of his myth" (Cotter 37) – in the Second Epistle to Timothy, for example, in which the writer affirms that salvation was given to man "in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ" (1.9-10). Therefore, it seems Hopkins' beliefs, and corresponding practices, were already formed by the time he discovered such forerunners as Scotus.

Besides Scripture and doctrine (as differentiated from theology, which studies doctrine), Hopkins seems to have trusted most his own, highly individual encounter with God; for this reason Hopkins fell so readily into coining words and usages for ways of thinking that could be described in no other way – ways that may remain somewhat untranslatable. It would seem an overstatement, then, to call Hopkins' theology Scotist; it is merely Christian, formed in the many influences Christianity is given: the New Testament foremost, with its Hebrew and Greco-Roman tensions, the Aristotelian and Augustinian modes as codified by the Scholastics, and the meditative tradition of Christian mystics such as Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order to which Hopkins dedicated his life. Treating this very question of Scotist influence, R. V. Young posits that Hopkins' poetry "poses in a particularly acute fashion the problematic nature of the relationship between philosophical propositions and literary vision" (48); one way of rectifying this problem (the way pursued here), is by seeing how Hopkins steps from the philosophical propositions of Scotus, Augustine, and even Scripture, into the realm of literary vision by taking Ignatius' creative, imaginative meditation of encounter as his poetic model. We shall see how Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* influence Hopkins' unique poetic principles; in addition to providing confirmation for Hopkins' love of detail and particularity, and affirming his Christocentric theology, the *Exercises* demonstrate a

model of meditation that Hopkins develops into a deeply personal, iconoclastic, and ultimately mysterious approach to poetry as conversational, sacramental act.

II. Hopkins and Ignatius

The debate concerning Scotus would have no purpose if two crucial ideas – haecceity and the Incarnation – were not so prominent in Hopkins' poetry. Having reviewed the body of critical conversation on this topic, however, we can see that these concepts are not only not exclusively Scotist. In fact, the theological and doctrinal matters criticism finds informing Hopkins' poetry derive more formatively from Ignatius, a source much closer to Hopkins' heart. Curiously, recent criticism has had little to say on Hopkins as a Jesuit; only the Jesuit scholars J. R. Barth and James Hanvey have given the matter any serious consideration, Barth claiming the *Exercises* as the "very special prism" through which Hopkins views his life (Romantic 109), Hanvey declaring Hopkins' aesthetic "radically Ignatian" (154). Yet, the simple fact that Hopkins dedicated himself to the Jesuit order recommends to us Ignatius as an influence. Perhaps the omission can be partially explained by a lingering anti-Jesuit bias of the kind for which Hopkins reprimanded Bridges: "You say you don't like Jesuits. Did you ever see one?" (Letters 40). Scholars seem much more taken with Scotus' potential heterodoxy, very nearly all advocating, admitting, or merely assuming Scotist influence[11]. Yet we can learn much more about Hopkins from Ignatius.

In the present context, the idea of haecceity is less important as a theoretical concept than as a practical technique in Hopkins' poetry, translated into Hopkins' fascination with the individuality of every thing. While Hopkins' eye for detail seems to be an almost inherent trait, it shows a significant affinity with the methods and

underlying theology of Ignatius' meditative exercises. As Barth describes the *Exercises*, "the emphasis on the particularities of experience is striking" ("Mortal Beauty" 73); truly, the imaginative depth of the *Exercises* is extraordinary. Most of the contemplations include what Ignatius calls "composition seeing the place," in which the exercitant imaginatively constructs in his mind some scene from scripture, doctrine, and especially the earthly life of Jesus. In the first contemplation of the second week, for example (the first week the exercitant meditates on his sin and purges himself of worldly desires; the second begins the meditations on Christ), Ignatius recommends a contemplation seeing the place which "will be the great capacity and space of the world, where dwell so many and different peoples; equally, then, the particular city of Nazareth in the province of Galilee, and the house and room where our Lady lives" (Ignatius 124)[12]. The imaginative movement here from general to specific – from the entire world, in fact, narrowing to a single room – presents us with an excellent image of Ignatian – and Hopkinsian – meditation; in meditation, all is relevant, especially what seems irrelevant, from the whole earth to a young woman's room.

The *Exercises*, however, do not end with simple observation; rather, they lead to active engagement with the imaginative scenes (we may be reminded of the failure in Berkeley's passive metaphysics, corrected by Coleridge). In the fourth contemplation of the day, the *Exercises* require that the exercitant "apply the five senses to the first and second contemplations," seeing the holy family at the birth of Christ, hearing what they say, smelling and tasting "the infinite fragrance and sweetness of the Divinity, and of the soul, and of its virtues, and of all else," finally engaging directly in the scene by touch,

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[11] See Lichtmann, Boggs, Gallet, Shaw –virtually anyone who treats "inscape."
[12] References to *The Spiritual Exercises* are from the de Nicholas edition.

"embracing and kissing the place where the persons walk or sit" (127). The level of imaginative engagement required is extreme, even somewhat ridiculous to the irreligious (what might Divinity, soul, and virtue smell like?), but the activity itself is what matters; the *Exercises* are designed to be life-changing, after all. The same lesson emerges in the section on food and self control, as Ignatius suggests, "while one is eating, one may consider that one sees Christ our Lord at the table with His Apostles, how He eats and drinks; how He looks and how He speaks, and he will strive to imitate Him" (142). When contemplating the Passion, furthermore, "The proper thing to ask for is suffering with Christ suffering, a broken heart with Christ heartbroken, tears, and inner pain because of the great pain Christ endured for me" (140) – in short, identification with Christ.

Such identification exemplifies the life-altering purpose of the *Exercises*, and points toward the Incarnational theology implicit in Ignatius' teaching. As fully and radically as Scotus – arguably more radically, in proposing a lifestyle on its basis – Ignatius presents the Incarnation at the center of life; for this reason, three of the four weeks are taken up in intense imaginative meditation on Christ's earthly life, death, and resurrection, with the first week designed for the self-mortification and kenotic relinquishment necessary for that imaginative identification. Though not theorized or systematized, a profoundly Incarnational theology underlies the *Exercises*, showing throughout the instruction; Ignatius' theology is one that clearly sees God the Father and God the Son as active, sustaining forces in existence itself. When Ignatius warns about making insincere oaths, explaining the moral difference between swearing by the Creator or a creature, he declares that swearing by created things can actually benefit one who is

spiritually mature, as they "are more able to consider, meditate, and contemplate God our Lord as existing in all creatures by his essence, presence, and power" (114). Certainly nowhere in Ignatius, however, is this doctrine more beautifully stated than in the climactic "Contemplation to Attain Love"; here Ignatius instructs the exercitant to

> consider how God dwells in His creatures; in the elements, giving them being; in the plants, giving them life; in the animals, giving them sensation; in men, giving them understanding. So He dwells in me, giving me being, life, sensation, and intelligence, and thus making a temple of me, since He created me to the likeness and image of His Divine Majesty. (145)

Clearly we can see here the same God-view already briefly demonstrated in several of Hopkins' poems, and assumed by most critics to be primarily Scotist; why, then, consider Hopkins any more Scotist than Ignatian?

Of special interest in the current study, however, is the conversational mode of the *Exercises*, and their influence on Hopkins' poetic practice. Were there any positive evidence, we might even suspect an influence on the conversational mode Coleridge developed – indeed, Barth writes on similarities between Ignatius and Coleridge stemming from similar intellectual and spiritual concerns, though he stops short of suggesting any direct influence ("Mortal Beauty" 77ff). From the beginning Ignatius assumes that the *Exercises* will be founded on a conversational, teacher-student relationship between the exercise leader and the exercitant, and he thus begins his written guide with thorough instructions to the giver of the *Exercises*, advising how best to encourage, strengthen, and guide the exercitant. In the first week, for example, when

Ignatius warns that the exercitant will be tested by depression, he recommends, “If the one who is giving the Exercises sees that he who makes them is in desolation or tempted, he should be careful not to be severe or harsh with him but rather gentle and kind” (106). Further, Ignatius stresses the importance of the sacrament of auricular confession as a part of the meditative process. For an exercitant who has “little aptitude, or little natural ability,” Ignatius recommends “some of the lighter, easier exercises until he has gone to confession, and then […] a program for more frequent confession than has been his custom, so that he may preserve what he has gained” (109). For any exercitant, he declares, “After making a better confession and being better disposed, he will be more worthy and better prepared to receive the most Holy Sacrament,” and recommends a full confession “immediately after the Exercises of the first week,” when the exercitant will still feel the effects of his long meditation on sin and temptation (115). Verbal, conversational interaction is thus a fundamental element of Ignatius’ *Exercises*, apparently facilitating the meditation by the interplay between the exercitant’s voluntary humility and the leader’s charitable encouragement.

Yet the *Exercises* are also profoundly personal, ultimately centering on the exercitant’s unique experience with the Divine. In that first section Ignatius warns the giver not to exert his influence to lead the exercitant to a particular vocation, such as the priesthood, considering it more important “that our Creator and Savior should communicate Himself to the devout soul [..]. [The one giving the Exercises] should allow the Creator to work directly with his creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord” (108). Here, then, is the purpose of the *Exercises* – that the exercitant engage conversationally with his God. For this reason, Ignatius designs a meditation that

“embraces every method of examining one’s conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of praying mentally or vocally, and of other spiritual activities” (105); for this reason, he makes provisions for all types of people, allowing the *Exercises* to “be adapted to the requirements of the persons who wish to make them, that is to say, according to their age, their education, and their capacity,” whether literate or illiterate, rich or poor, intelligent or “of narrow comprehension” – all, Ignatius tells us, can speak to and hear God.

To this end, conversation with God, each day’s exercise ends with a “colloquy” in which the exercitant imagines a conversation with some divine being; like all aspects of the *Exercises*, this colloquy is both imaginary and profoundly real (a point Barth likens to the Coleridgean symbol [“Mortal Beauty” 74]): the exercitant, by imagining conversation with Christ, Mary, or the Father, is truly conversing with these figures. The first day’s colloquy may be the most shocking: “Imagine Christ our Lord before you, hanging upon the cross. Speak with Him of how from being the Creator He became man, and how, possessing eternal life, He submitted to temporal death to die for our sins” (117). Ignatius does not ask the exercitant to think about Christ on the cross, but to see him, imaginatively to become a witness to the Crucifixion, a task he will repeat in the third week, specifically using each of the five senses to construct the scene (141). More importantly, Ignatius asks the exercitant to speak with the Crucified Christ, with the expectation that the Christ will answer, revealing mysteries, for the conversational model requires exchange. As Ignatius notes in the “Contemplation to Attain Love,” “love consists in a mutual interchange by the two parties” (145); the exercitant’s meditation is not a mere turning-inward and self-examination, but an interchange with God. Barth explains that this Contemplation is the “great crowning colloquy” of the *Exercises*

("Romantic" 74), but the explicit instructions of the Contemplation are significantly simple: after contemplating the active presence of God in his creation, the Contemplation ends with merely the instructions, "conclude with a colloquy and the 'Our Father'" (146). After the strenuous meditations of the four weeks, the exercitant is prepared to find his own terms on which to speak with God.

III. Hopkins and the Word

Hopkins certainly found his own terms, in more senses of the word than one; his poetry speaks with God in an iconoclastic way, a process he describes in iconoclastic terms. Here, in fact, is where J. R. Barth's reading of Hopkins, for all its exceptional insight, falls short: in neglecting the importance of Hopkins' pronounced fixation with language, both words themselves and the act of speech. While Barth is surely correct in seeing the *Exercises*, and particularly the "Contemplation to Attain Love," as the "privileged source for Hopkins' sacramental view of self and the world" ("Romantic" 110), he seems to regard the idea of conversation as purely metaphorical or metaphysical, ignoring the fact that the conversation Ignatius recommends has a truly verbal basis. In the *Exercises*, the colloquy is not exclusively mystical, but founded on actual speech; the exercitant is compelled to make the colloquy "by speaking as one friend speaks to another, or as a servant speaks to his master, now asking some favor, now accusing oneself for some wrong deed, or again, communicating one's affairs to Him and seeking His advice concerning them" (117). Just as Hopkins' theology is confirmed and influenced by the *Exercises*, so is his love of language, for Ignatius places words on a high plane of significance, as in his warnings on swearing and "idle words" (113-14), or in the wonderful method of prayer suggested in the "Three Ways of Prayer," in which the

exercitant meditates on each word of the "Our Father," "reflect[ing] on this word as long as he finds meanings, comparisons, relish, and consolation in the consideration of it" (148), even spending his entire hour's meditation on one word. Surely this Ignatian emphasis on the word encourages the language fixation that gives rise to Hopkins' obsessive fascination with metrics and versification.

"Encourages" is, of course, the operative word. As was Scotus, we must conclude that Ignatius is not the inspiration for, but the confirmation of Hopkins' language-centered meditative mindset; Ignatius was, however, a more significant influence, for while Hopkins may have been attracted to Scotist theology, his poetic practice is clearly a revision (or condensation) of Ignatian meditation. Our purpose in examining Ignatius, then, is not so much an examination of influence, but of the prism, to borrow Barth's term, that focused his mental energies. Our examination, in addition, provides us with an uncommon entryway into Hopkins' challenging poetic; like Coleridge, Hopkins never succeeded in codifying his complex, ultimately personal (as meditation must be) poetic theory, perhaps to our benefit. Like Ignatius with his *Exercises*, Hopkins left only guideposts for a journey that could not really be led, only followed. Years of attempts at completing the codification process have only muddied the water in Hopkins' studies; we are arguably no closer than ever to a complete understanding of Hopkinsian terms like "inscape," "instress," "pitch," or "sake." One begins to wonder whether they can properly be called "terms" at all, at least in any rigorous academic sense. They seem rather to have been markers, placeholders, for ideas that could only really be expressed as poetry rather than theory. By beginning with Ignatius, then, we can free ourselves to examine the poetry as a meditative act and observe that poetry's effect on its witnesses

("readers" seems too conventional a word).

So finally we come to the poetry, and ask the question of questions; what are the qualities of the poetry that emerges from such a rich theological, metaphysical, and philosophical stew? Rather than using a clear set of poems like Coleridge's conversation poems, for Hopkins we will make a broader selection to show how the way these concepts – existence as the language of God, poetry as meditation, meditation as conversation, language and sound as the key to all – illuminate all of Hopkins' mature verse (except for the terrible sonnets, for varying reasons[13]). Coleridge will help guide us, since, despite such fundamentally different influences, the characteristics of Hopkins' verse already noted are remarkably like those of Coleridge. Above all, Hopkins, like Coleridge, uses language and sound to achieve a sacramental conversation with the Divine.

Hopkins shares with Coleridge a faith in both the word and the world, coalescing into a belief in the world as the language of God. Returning to a question postponed earlier, we recall Cotter's statement, "The world is Word in which man reads to achieve gnosis, for which man listens to hear its poetry, and on which God looks to see the crucified imprint of his Son" (124). This statement, concerned with the dual use of the world as language by both man and God, would be a magnificent summary of "As kingfishers catch fire"; this poem, so frequently used as an exemplar of Hopkins' Christology, is also a good place to begin considering certain key characteristics of

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[13] Numerous critics consider the terrible sonnets atypical of Hopkins' verse, with good reason; Shaw considers their dark desperation the unavoidable result of Hopkins' replacing the analogical Thomist conception of the world with an "idolatrous defense" of Scotus' univocity (136), while Chambers considers their images of strained impotence symptomatic of a general Victorian malaise (115). Boggs, on the other hand, sees them as the record of Hopkins' turning "outside the self to appreciate the things of God" as a way of saving himself from narcissistic despair (846). Most fundamentally, these poems record sacramental failures, and though fascinating in their own way, they represent an antithesis to Hopkins' ideal

Hopkins' verse. While it begins with a visual image ("As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame" [1]), the poem quickly shifts to a more engaging round of sound/language imagery: "As tumbled over rim in roundy wells / Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's / Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name" (2-4). Note the interchangeability of terms: the stones falling in a well "ring," not the bell, while it is the bell's "bow" (a musical pun, as well as a unique description of the shape of a bell) that sounds as the string is instead "tucked" (not "plucked"); Hopkins' is a unifying verse, working in multiple puns and showing the essential kinship of words. More importantly, though, we have a movement from inanimate to animate, though all three images depict inanimate objects. The stones "ring," inanimate but making a somewhat meaningful sound; the string (not only one, but "each" equally) "tells," a word implying intellectual agency and communication; the bell, furthermore, not only speaks but does so forcefully, acquiring a "tongue" that "fling[s] out broad its name." This movement, however, should by no means be seen as an implicit hierarchy; rather, it merely demonstrates the underlying animation of even inanimate objects by the God who moves in creation and grants all things existence. Lastly, we see sound become word, as in other poems we shall see word become sound.

If these things speak, though, what do they speak? We might say, "Simply their names," but their utterance is not at all simple, for by speaking their names they "[Deal] out that being indoors each one dwells" (6), which is to say, they reveal their "true" being, their "selves" in Hopkins' richly meaningful word. Significantly, Hopkins turns "self" into a verb in line 7, declaring that each thing "Selves – goes its self," again making an a noun vigorously active. But things do not only speak; of each thing,

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poetry.

Hopkins writes, "*myself* it speaks and spells" (7, original italics). This phrase is tightly packed with meaning; we may read "myself," in its italics, as the word spoken and spelled, a direct quotation of the word that all things say, but we may also see the italics as an intensifier with "myself" being the object of "speaks and spells," meaning the thing speaks and spells itself into existence. The introduction of "spells" into the poem is further significant, as it positions writing as the equal and confederate of speaking. Unlike Coleridge, Hopkins seems to have privileged the spoken word over the written (as suggested by his frequent advice to Bridges and Dixon to read his poetry aloud, and his obsession with producing a notation system for poetry like that for music, reducing writing to merely "the record of speech" [Bridges 265]), but here speech and writing seem to be taken together. We must not, however, ignore a possible additional use of "spells" in its magical sense, perhaps adding to the idea that the thing's utterance of its name brings it into existence.

But no – the suggestion is pure heresy: only God's Word can speak anything into existence. Hopkins leaves the heretical possibility open in the octave to clarify it according to orthodoxy in the sestet.[14] The turn of this sonnet carries a great deal of responsibility, then; it also makes the turn from nature as language heard and read by man to language read by God, to use Cotter's idea. In the octave, things speak their name, but man goes farther in showing forth his self by action: "the just man justices; / Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces" (9-10). More important, though, is what God reads in that action: the righteous man "Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is – / Christ" (11-12). In this reading is the secret of salvation; Christ's substitutionary death covers man,

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[14] Such use exemplifies the reasoning behind Hopkins' preference for the Italian sonnet over the English, which he considered "light, tripping, and trifling" (Dixon 86).

so that God, looking upon the faithful, sees only Christ. The way in which man acts his self, further, removes the possibility of heresy in the octave; things do not speak themselves into existence, but only communicate the selves God has created them. Man, even further, communicates the Savior who inhabits him. The many speaking and listening voices create a polyphonic conversation in which things communicate with man, man communicates with God, and God communicates by the Incarnation – recall "The Wreck of the Deutschland," in which "Heaven and earth are word of, worded by" Christ (230). The ending, in which "Christ plays in ten thousand places[…], / To the Father through the features of men's faces" (12-14), reminds us of the sacramental exchange that produces salvation; any encounter with God, after all, is sacral.

The "kingfishers" sonnet, besides demonstrating Hopkins' conversational technique, serves to show how, like Coleridge, Hopkins' fascination with the word encompasses the word as a unit of meaning, as an audible sound, and as a written sign. We can see, though, that Hopkins uses the conversation trope differently than Coleridge; while Coleridge depends on the illusion of a listening and responding second person, Hopkins steps straight into the world of Berkeley's *minimum sensibile*, showing us the plentitude of communication in every dimension: sound, language, and sacrament. Hopkins also goes much further in his use of poetic sound than Coleridge. Having already mentioned Hopkins' insistence that his poems be read aloud, we pursue that insistence further to find an explanation. While we know that Coleridge was rather metrically conservative (McKim 288ff), Hopkins constantly forced the limits of English verse. The actual technical requirements of sprung verse – "scanning by accents or stresses alone" rather than by syllables, each foot having "equal strengths," one stress

equaling one foot (Dixon 14, 22-23) – are less important to our purposes than the rhythm's intended effect, and that effect is largely dependent on the sound of the words.

More than Coleridge, then, Hopkins, an amateur musical composer, is concerned with poetry as organized sound. His discovery of sprung rhythm – as he claims not to have "invented *sprung rhythms* [as a poetic effect] but only *sprung rhythm* [as a conscious poetic technique] (Bridges 45) – was the key to his mature poetry. He called sprung rhythm "rhythm's self," the essential rhythm, in comparison to which "all English verse, except Milton's, almost, offends me as 'licentious'" (45-46), presumably using "licentious" not only to describe its lack of metrical and intellectual rigor, but its vague, corresponding immorality – metrically ignorant poetry, lacking self, seems nearly identified with unregeneracy. While he occasionally wrote poems in what he called "common" or "running" rhythm, the heart of his poetry is in sprung rhythm, "the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms" (Bridges 46). Notice in this description an implicit faith we have already seen – the faith in the word, and specifically in speech, vigorous, active language; here is the nature that communicates the divine, a method of sound organization that lends itself to rhetoric and the emphasis on particulars already characterizing Hopkins' mind. Hopkins later states the poetry should be "the current language heightened," and if these descriptions superficially resemble Wordsworth's seminal "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*, we may not be surprised; Wordsworth's thought, so closely aligned to Coleridge's, shares that kinship with Hopkins'. He mourned the lost vigor of ancient Anglo-Saxon – "no beauty in a language can make up for want of purity" (Bridges 163) – and sought to emulate the "*cynghanedd* or consonant-chime" of Welsh (163). Above all

Hopkins desired a language that could act as the living mediator for conversation with God.

When language and sound are the crucial media through which one achieves colloquy with God, a vitally auricular style must be required. For this reason – because language is only half alive when silent – Hopkins urged his readers Dixon and Bridges to read his poems aloud; of the "Eurydice" he told Bridges, "you must not slovenly read it with the eyes but with your ears, as if the paper were declaiming it at you" (52), and later reminded him of the principle that "applies to all my verse, that it 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" – the poem, in fact, should "be almost sung" (246). When he tells Bridges to read with "long dwells on the rhyme and other marked syllables" (246), we are reminded of Ignatius' lingering contemplation of a prayer's each word for illumination. The crucial word "performance" recurs when he sends Dixon "Tom's Garland" and "Harry Ploughman": "They are meant for, and cannot properly be taken in without, emphatic recitation; which nevertheless is not an easy performance" (153). Just as things and men in the "kingfishers" sonnet show their characters in speech and action, so the poem shows itself in performance, and in fact, Hopkins argues, loses its meaning when not performed. By yoking meaning and sound, Hopkins effectively creates the sort of physical/spiritual unity toward which Coleridge strove. What his style sacrifices in obviousness is repaid in immediacy and life: as Hopkins himself put it, there are "excellences higher than clearness" (Bridges 54). Hopkins seems to have agreed with Coleridge that words are living things (as Hanvey puts it, "Language like people is also graced" [148]), and only by its taking on life in sound can language live fully. In a way,

perhaps, we can see an implicit parable of the human life with God, for words are inert until spoken, just as man is essentially lifeless until he shows forth Christ through his action.

One of the poems for which Hopkins explicitly mandated oral recitation, "Harry Ploughman," ("altogether for recital, not for perusal," as Hopkins described it to Bridges [263]), ideally demonstrates this intense sound usage. Hopkins expected the far more poetically conservative Bridges to find it "intolerably violent and artificial" (263), which it perhaps is, though hardly in the negative connotations of those words. The poem must be violent, for it is revolutionary; it must be artificial simply by virtue of its artistry. "Harry Ploughman" is a radical work that depicts a body with words simultaneously embodied and spiritualized by syntax and sound. From the first words, the poem is founded on the physical, requiring six lines to reach anything like a verb, and even that verb – "fall" followed by "Stand" (5-6) – is not strictly active (though theologically resonant). But the description of the ploughman is nonetheless profoundly vivacious: even the hair of his "Hard as hurdle arms" is not merely hair, but "a broth of goldish flue / Breathed round" (1-2). His features, from his "scooped flank" to his "Rope-over thigh" and "barreled shank," are characterized by verbs and nouns turned adjectives (2-3). To underscore the ploughman's brute physicality, Hopkins uses bestial words like "flue," "rack of ribs," "flank" and "shank," suggesting the man as a beast of burden, albeit one with a certain dignity. This opening depicts a great power still, but not at rest, as it "Stand[s] at stress" (6). "Stress," of course, is a recurrent word in Hopkins' poetry; here it seems to suggest the huge potential energy of the body, but also the capacity for accepting action upon it, for the ploughman's body seems to be both him and his

possession. The ploughman's body is his, the "barrowy brawn" belongs to the body, but all must be taken together to form a full man.

"Harry Ploughman" also performs the "kingfisher" sonnet's declaration, "What I do is me." It is "Each limb's barrowy brawn" that "finds [the ploughman's] rank" (9), meaning that the ploughman finds his identity, his being in the world, through his body and work. Further, each limb standing "at stress" "features, in flesh, what deed he each must do" (7). If we understand the verb "features" as "makes the image of" or "represents," we see that while his work gives him identity, his body itself is not only the medium through which that work is done, but the image of that work: what he does is what he is, and he is the image of what he does. In Hopkins' metaphysics, the things of the world are spiritual resonances, the spiritual is embodied in work and action, and the physical is imaged in vigorous but ethereal spoken words. The interplay between physical and non-physical that characterizes "Harry Ploughman" may be seen throughout Hopkins' sprung-rhythm poems, and is the purpose for sprung rhythm's existence; sound, to speak theoretically, is both physical (generated by physical action, caught and interpreted by physical organs) and incorporeal (existing only as the moving of air, invisible and intangible). Hopkins seizes on this material ambiguity of sound in poems such as "Harry Ploughman" to show concretely the intersection of the spiritual and physical.

Writing along the same lines, Maria Lichtmann claims that, in Hopkins' poetry, "As the poems' patterns play again in the visceral reading given by the reader, the poems become flesh in a final sense" (47). While her claim is quite astute, especially when we consider the difficult oral translation of phrases like "in a wind lifted, windlaced – /

Wind-lilylocks-laced" (14-15), Lichtmann's conclusion – "the kenosis of the human Christ in his poems is as nearly complete as it is in Christ's first incarnation into Eucharist. The poem, for Hopkins, is the Body of Christ" (48) – is at least a step too far down the path of pure reason. Lichtmann argues from an interpretation of Scotus' Incarnational doctrine suggesting that "Christ incarnates himself over and over again in the world of nature and in human beings, becoming their 'inscape' or individuating design" (37); thus, "Christ's body inscapes the world as Eucharist," and all existence has a sacramental value (41). Such an interpretation, however, seems beyond the pale of either Scotus or Hopkins; it exemplifies the "idolatry" Shaw imputes to Hopkins. Such an understanding of the Incarnation is a heresy Hopkins could not have subscribed to: theologically, it is absurd to say that Christ is the inscape of anything but himself. Hopkins would have us see instead that each human inscape has the capacity, having been made in the image of God, to feature (represent) Christ. The world itself is not sacramental, but is rather a medium for sacrament, just as the bread and wine of the Eucharist are not sacrament until blessed. Things of the world are not "sacrament waiting to happen" as Lichtmann would seem to suggest, but can (by God's grace) become the medium for the sacramental conversational interchange that can only occur between man and God.

This unique quality of the human, to "feature" Christ, we see in "Harry Ploughman." Hopkins wanted most of all for the ploughman "to be a vivid figure before the mind's eye" (Bridges 265), but of course, according to Augustine's doctrine of enjoyment and use, we may not innocently enjoy observing an object for its own sake. The vivacious figure of the ploughman, presented in the vivacious language of sprung

rhythm, must point us back to the Creator. Such is the ultimate purpose of Hopkins' embodied language, like Coleridge's imagination, to reenact God's creation with our medium, word and sound (words *that* sound); thus, "Harry Ploughman" begins with a purely carnal image, only to turn that image to God's service. The octave ends with the ploughman's limbs discovering "what deed he each must do," his "sinew-service" (11). If this "service" is something the ploughman "must do" to display his "self," if it is the "stress" that reveals the inscape, then even plowing is an act of sacramental conversation, between the man and the earth, and between the Creator and the creature. We remember from the "kingfisher" sonnet that when man performs his appointed work (anything that glorifies God), he figures the image of Christ to God's eye; Hopkins thus sets up the sestet in which the ploughman will figure Christ.

In the turn the poet urges us (we are not only his audience, but his partners in this colloquy), "look" as "He leans to it, Harry bends" (12). The turn works much like the process Andrew Davidson finds in "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo": "Hopkins deliberately turns away from an artifact-based aesthetic and instead places the emphasis on symbolic act" (195). But never in the poetry, neither in "Harry Ploughman" nor the "Echoes," does Hopkins give up the "thingness" of his subjects, to use Davidson's word (195). Rather than physicality being transfigured into pure energy or spirit, the soul and its home the body are intertwined ever more vitally in the individual's action. The image of the ploughman's hair woven in the wind – "curls / Wag or crossbridle, in a wind lifted, windlaced – / Wind-lilylocks-laced" (13-15) – would seem a lovely metaphor for the process. The wind – traditionally associated with "spirit" and "inspiration," particularly by the Romantics from whom Hopkins descends – "lifts" the ploughman's hair, raising it

heavenward even as it tangles in itself, even as the ploughman sets to his grubby work. The "wind-lilylocks-laced" word-sandwich Hopkins so regretted (to Bridges he wrote "a desperate deed, I feel, and I do not feel that it was an unquestionable success" [265]) actually, admirably sums up the wind-and-hair image, all at once mingling the hair, the wind, and the wind's action into one noun-verb-adjective. Such synthesis is the very verbal image of Hopkins' poetic technique.

The poem concludes in lines among the most syntactically difficult that Hopkins ever wrote. The ploughman sets to work, and the poem ends with an image, at once humble and spectacular, of his feet:

> Churlsgrace too, child of Amansstrength, how it hangs or hurls
> Them – broad in bluff hide his frowning feet lashed! raced
> With, along them, cragiron under and cold furls –
> With-a-fountain's shining-shot furls. (16-19)

In the time it takes us to reach the "frowning feet" that are the object of the clause, we are more strongly affected by the power of the "Churlsgrace," how it "hangs or hurls" (what we do not yet know); we are aware not of the thing but of the activity of the thing. The words, though – "broad in bluff hide his frowning feet lashed" – force us in our performance to fall hard on "broad," "bluff," "hide," "frown," "feet" and "lashed," verbally enacting the heavy, plodding steps. In the same moment the physical parts of that body are identified and classed with the earth in those strange words – the ploughman's feet are "raced / With, along them, cragiron and cold furls." The choice of "raced" is sheer brilliance; on the one hand, it is in line with the vital wording of the rest of the poem, as the feet do not just move but race, but punning on "race" as a

classification (the human race, the Anglo-Saxon race), the feet would seem to be equal and kin to the "cragiron" earth and the "cold furls" of earth rolled away from the blade of the plow. Again, our tongues fall heavily on "cold furls," as the vowels force us to slow down to pronounce them, making us again aware of our own bodies. Therefore we see that the body is embodied by the sound and imagery even as it is sublimated into energy by the syntax; as always, Hopkins melds the physical and incorporeal[15].

But how does this embodiment figure Christ? We must turn to the source of the ploughman's power: "Churlsgrace," the "child of Amansstrength." The ploughman, a common "churl," has a grace all his own, being a unique creation as equally capable of colloquy with God as any other creature. We are reminded of Christ, the carpenter, Divinity in churl's form; Hopkins was of course fond of the image of Christ as the "hero of Calvary" (in the "Deutschland," line 63), and delighted in the idea of a rugged, lively Christ. In another letter to Bridges, Hopkins summarized the mystery of the Incarnation: "he emptied himself or exhausted himself so far as that was possible, of godhead and behaved only as God's slave, as his creature, as man, which also he was, and then being in the guise of man humbled himself to death, the death of the cross" (175). We see a similar emptying performed in "Harry Ploughman," as the ploughman becomes identified with the earth from which he came, being humbled to his "rank" though given the right, by Christ's sacrifice, to be a son of God. Insofar as he humbles himself to his appointed work, the ploughman figures Christ. "Child of Amansstrength," with its curious proper

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[15] As Coleridge was aware of the ambiguities of language, using that indeterminacy to his advantage, so was Hopkins aware of ambiguity, complaining to Bridges, "My meaning surely *ought* to appear of itself; but in a language like English, and in an age like the present, written words are really matter open and indifferent to the receiving of different and alternative verse-forms" (265). Ironically, though Hopkins sometimes wished for a more clear method of representation (ie, his metrical notation), "Harry Ploughman," one of the most heavily marked of his poems, is an excellent argument for the multi-vocal readings Hopkins feared, and a testament to his efficacy with an indeterminate language. Only by

noun, would seem a deliberate parallel to "Son of Man," Christ's chosen name for himself, underlining the ploughman's role as a possible reflection of Christ. His grace then, though it be but humble churl's grace, is founded on his capacity to feature Christ.

But the ending of "Harry Ploughman" can be further illuminated by the conclusion of "Hurrahing in Harvest," in which we are presented with a moment of colloquy more conventional than that of "Harry Ploughman" because initiated by speech. After an opening quatrain describing the scene (somewhat conventional relatively, but still dramatizing the active agency of things in the stooks that "rise / Around" as by their own volition, and the "wind-walks" in which the clouds display "lovely behaviour" [1-2]), Hopkins turns to the sudden realization that Christ is visible in everything: "I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes, / Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour" (5-6). The poet does not only "glean" (not see, but "glean," much more active and more sensually ambiguous) Christ's presence, but hears his words as well: "what looks, what lips yet gave you a / Rapturous love's greeting of realer, of rounder replies" (7-8). Christ speaks; and that speech is more real ("realer") than the scene around him, "rounder" or fuller than the earth itself. But it is through the medium of this creation that he speaks, and the reality of that medium cannot be denied.

The poet, having recognized the presence of Christ in creation and encountered Him in conversation, declares that "These things [that show forth Christ], these things were here and but the beholder / Wanting; which two when they once met, / The heart rears wings bolder and bolder / And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet" (11-14). Some remarks of Gallet's express our point: "Discovering the Christological meaning implicit in natural 'inscapes,' the beholder's 'heart,' or deeper

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encouraging a multi-tiered reading could Hopkins make his poem such a fully-developed symbol.

self, is stirred to a spiritual response, called 'correspondence.' And the dynamic or performative aspect of this experience may make a more static term like 'rhyme' slightly inadequate" (77). The moment of colloquy, "correspondence" to use Gallet's term, so strongly effects the speaker that his heart seems one with the motion of the earth. Gallet's explanation also underscores the yoked effort of language and performance; as the dynamic performance raises the language to a vital and affecting pitch, it makes conventional critical language fall short, powerless to express the profoundly mysterious interaction of these charged sounds any more than conventional language can truly express the colloquy between God and his believing creature.

The performative language at the conclusion of "Hurrahing" is remarkably like that of "Harry Ploughman"'s conclusion in rhyme and sound: in the auditory similarities of "bolder and bolder" to "Churlsgrace" and "broad in bluff hide," in the use of "hurls" in both, in the image of feet and earth, the connections seem intuitively obvious. When we place the two side-by-side, we see that while "Hurrahing in Harvest" is a dramatization of a character's moment of colloquy, "Harry Ploughman" functions as the image of what that colloquy effects: "Harry Ploughman" is the poetic image of that "dynamic or performative aspect" of the conversational experience. In this way the outridden sonnet can be seen, on the one hand, as celebrating the intermingling of body and spirit, and on the other, perhaps more profoundly, as a symbol like those Coleridge saw exemplified in the Bible: at once "real" (as any written image can be), allegorical, and symbolic. The stories recounted in Scripture, Coleridge tells us, are "the living educts of the imagination," and by unifying the reason and the senses, the historical and the prophetic/allegorical, give "birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and

consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors" (359). Just so, in Scripture "both Facts and Persons must of necessity have a two-fold significance, a past and a future, a temporary and a perpetual, a particular and a universal application (359-60); such is the Coleridgean symbol we have already discussed, both real and symbolic. So is "Harry Ploughman" a Coleridgean symbol, at once simply itself and "consubstantial," sharing the substance, of the truth it communicates: by the grace delivered in Christ's Incarnation – the grace by which we realize and figure Christ in the world – we, God's creatures encountering the Divine in and through Creation, become worthy to converse sacramentally with Him as "one friend to another."

In Conclusion: The Problem Revisited

Clearly, if we take Coleridge and Hopkins for our models in forming a functional Christian criticism, the truest answer to our question – how to make such a criticism relevant – is not further theorization, not further systemization, but rather an unashamed, unskeptical encounter and engagement with the primary text. Coleridge, we have seen, goes beyond the passive Berkeley, who could read God's writing but not encounter the author, to form something radically different, a meditation that could encounter and engage author, text, and other readers. Hopkins, in turn, learns from but puts aside the subtle machinations of Scotus' theology to take up the cross Ignatius offers with the *Exercises* – not a system, but a few signposts, not a work of dry doctrine or even theory, but a work of meditative art. Significantly, though both tried throughout their lifetimes, neither was capable of fully developing and perfecting his pet system (Coleridge's unification of all knowledge, Hopkins' less ambitious poetic notation); yet, had Coleridge

been more reliable, had Hopkins lived longer, perhaps their systems would still have never seen completion – the life of their work is in the struggle, for, as Steiner writes, "The great artist has had Jacob for his patron, wrestling with the terrible precedent and power of original creation" (22). Yet, without fully developed systems each was able to do something far more meaningful: encounter the Divine. The religious critic can take comfort, further, in knowing that their words did not fall upon deaf ears. In obeying the call of their religious and poetic professions, the poets were able (not to say "blessed") to find words that continue to speak with authority. Coleridge and Hopkins look beyond the superficial beauty of easy understanding to the One Hopkins calls "beauty's self and beauty's giver" ("The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" 19); so should we look into the beauty of their poetry to find "God's better beauty, grace" (Hopkins, "To what serves Mortal Beauty?" 14). The sanctified critic, as the sanctified artist, uses words to reach beyond words, as God the Father used flesh to reach beyond flesh.

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