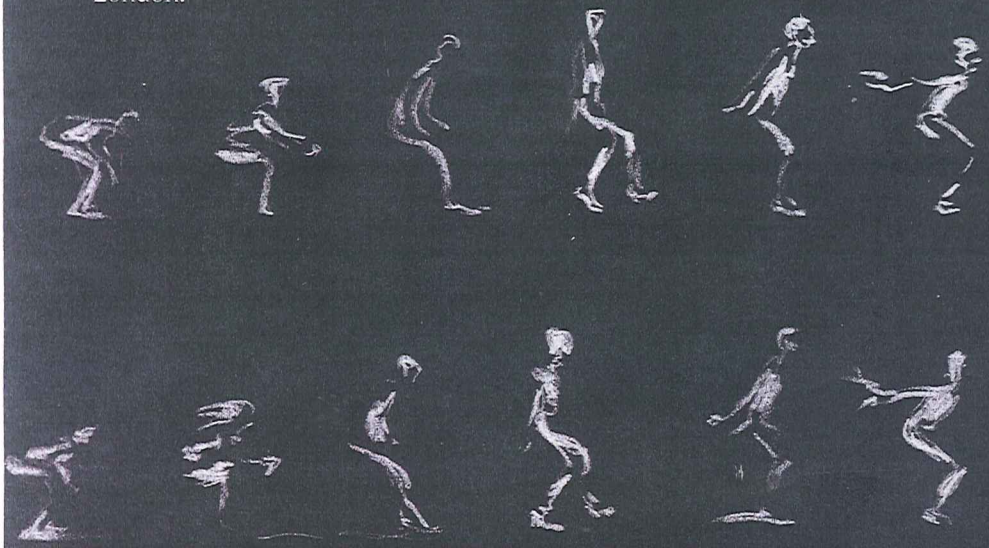


'This is a timely study and a very creative one that combines close reading and speculative critical thinking in ways that are fresh, original, and compelling.'
Lawrence Rainey, *University of York*

I do I undo I redo examines the writing processes of six modernist authors: Hopkins, Yeats, Conrad, Forster, Joyce, and Woolf. Finn Fordham explores how these processes relate to selfhood and subjectivity, both of which came under intense scrutiny during the modernist period. The study addresses several questions: what are the relations between writing and subjectivity? To what extent is a 'self' considered as a completed product like a book? How are selves, if considered as 'in process' or as 'constructs', reflections of the processes of writing? How do the experiences of writing inform thematic concerns within texts about identity?

Three theoretical and methodological chapters (about 'genetic' criticism, about studies of selfhood within modernism, and the 'effacement' of manuscripts in philosophies of the subject) are followed by chapters on each author. A different topic is linked to each—compression, selection, doubling, hollowing out, multiplying, and class. The study comprises new material from archives, and many fresh ideas stemming from the combination of different critical approaches: genetic, psychological, political criticism, and close reading.

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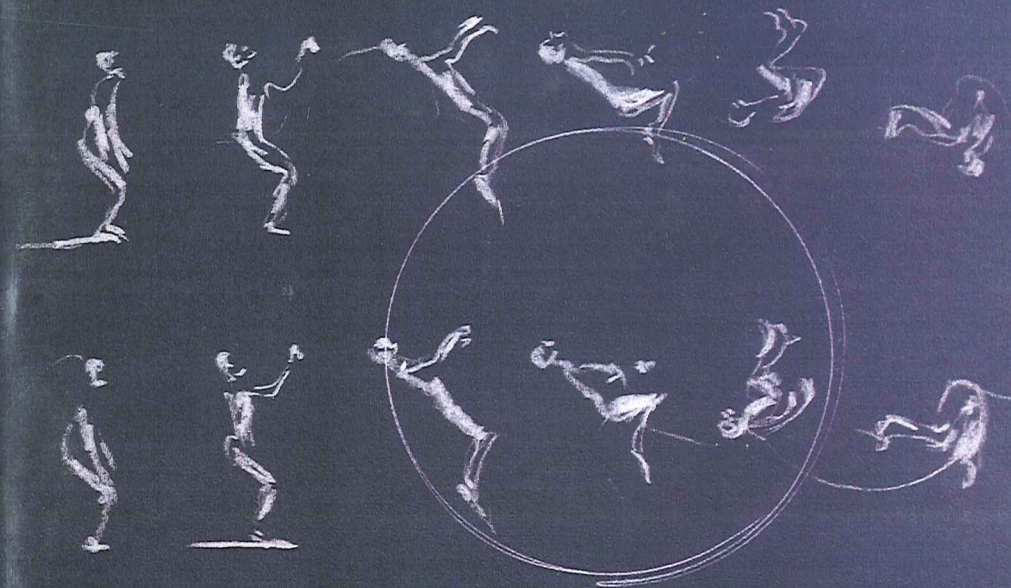


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I do I undo I redo

The Textual Genesis of Modernist Selves



FINN FORDHAM

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* Extract: pp 79-93

Extract from I do I undo I redo (OUP, 2016)
pp. 79-93

4

Hopkins and Compression

TO FINISH OR NOT TO FINISH

To begin with endings. Notoriously, modernism in its 'high' or 'formalist' phase in the 1930s was fond of trying to fuse the opposites of beginnings and ends. In *The Waves* Virginia Woolf made sure there would be waves breaking on each of the opposite shores of her novel. James Joyce tried to invert beginning and end, so that while the last half of an interrupted sentence opens *Finnegans Wake*—

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's... brings us... back to Howth Castle and Environs.¹

—the first-half of that sentence trails off unfinished at the novel's end:

A way a lone a last a loved a long the²

T. S. Eliot's *East Coker*, appearing just a year after Eliot had seen *Finnegans Wake* through to publication with Faber and Faber, similarly had these extremities reflecting each other. It begins: 'In my beginning is my end' and concludes: 'In my end is my beginning'. The feedback loopings of these and other works invited the reader to return to and reread the works' beginnings, catching them up in a self-prolongation of the works which their authors longed for and which they themselves had performed in the processes of writing and rewriting. With such formal and symmetrical roundings off they created a sense that the works' origins are all available in the work itself, that the work is structurally unified, auto-telic, and autonomously a sufficient *causa sui*. This sense helps define one notion of the ideology of a formalist and ideological modernism.

Literary history and scholarship, however, often re-interpret this incitement to return to beginnings in a wilfully contrary manner that might seem even perverse to the artist, as an incitement to sources and origins outside the limits of the work, and make moves which may not necessarily be facilitated by the works themselves. The loop of the self-referential work gets broken and alternative chains are formed that lead away from the work into, for instance, the processes of its formation. Such moves, before they can begin, have to have acknowledged

¹ FW 3.1-3.

² Ibid. 628.28.

that there may be alternative ends, and, in the end, it turns out, there may be many other beginnings. For the three works mentioned manuscripts were preserved by the authors which make these moves neither wilful, contrary, or perverse, but entirely logical. The existence of them and the historical network that they conjure up disrupts the so-called ideology of modernism.

I begin with these observations, partly because they coincide with the start of my genetic explorations, partly because they introduce a perennial issue in producing art works—how rounded off, self-sufficient, and finished should they appear to be. The marks of the maker that Michelangelo was keen to leave on his work extend the referentiality of the work—from the content which its mimesis is supposed purely to conjure up (David faced by Goliath, frowning over when to strike), to the scenes of its formation (Michelangelo frowning as he aimed his mallet at his chisel). The latter scenes become hinted at mysteriously, fetishized, and produce discussions about the presence of process. Should a work of art show, conceal, or emphasize marks of the process of its production? Are the marks of process blots on the product, or as intrinsic a part of it as every other part? If a work of art is supposed to express something with a certain finality and precision, might an unfinished work be a sign of incoherence in the maker, a self not yet formed, not yet in possession of itself, not yet 'achieved'? But do those practices of ours that bring processes to a finish help constitute the sense of our self as something that might in turn also be finished? So wouldn't an unfinished work be truer to the way that the self exists in process, never itself fully formed? But what is this 'self as process' that the work is to be true to more than the 'self as product'? Why should there be a measure between the work and the self at all? Can a work of art ever be called finished? How can we tell when something is finished or not? Is it finished when it's published, performed, exhibited, consumed?

Gerard Manley Hopkins and W. B. Yeats's artist father, John, may have broached similar topics in an unrecorded discussion that, nonetheless, they are known to have had about 'finish'. It took place in John Yeats's studio on St Stephen's Green in Dublin, in November 1886, where they were meeting for the first time. The reclusive Hopkins was living on the opposite side of the 'desolate gardens' as Joyce would later call them, at University College and had been coaxed over there by his friend and colleague priest Fr. Matthew Russell. A friend of Russell's, Katharine Tynan, whose portrait J. B. Yeats was painting at the time, witnessed the discussion and played with it in a letter to Hopkins that followed their meeting: 'I wonder how you and Mr Yeats finished the discussion on finish or non-finish.'³ She had left, it seems, while the discussion was unfinished, a discussion of this kind always impossible to finish, and while her portrait was unfinished too. Norman White believes it very likely that Hopkins would have come down on the side of 'finish', that he would have disagreed 'with Yeats's impressionism and tacitly therefore with

³ Katharine Tynan to Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dublin, 3 Nov. 1886; L.iii.430. See also GMH to Robert Bridges, 26 Nov. 1886, L.i.245.

John Yeats's own 'slight method of execution', as he judged it later.⁴ W. B. Yeats would himself later criticize his father's work on similar grounds:

Instead of finishing a picture one square inch at a time, he kept all fluid, every detail dependent upon every other, and remained a poor man to the end of his life, because the more anxious he was to succeed, the more did his pictures sink through innumerable sittings into final confusion.⁵

Yeats would in fact himself draft his poems through many sittings and would also tinker with poems already in print. He has been described as 'a reviser in an age of revisers', but it is as strictly true to say that he got himself republished in an age of people who got themselves republished.⁶ A revision is only half the story: the alteration means the poem needs a new airing, in the form of a new printing. While there is a tradition of exhibiting the sketches for paintings which makes an aesthetic out of the clear fact of non-finish, this has always been far less prominent in the world of text and print, which tends to move towards a clear imprint of sharp-edged legibility. The producers and setters of type bring this order to text. It was the nature of the medium of print which led Yeats to overcome the confusion and fluidity of process and value something for what it gained in the solidification of print. Yeats spoke, a son of a father, with a successfully resolved Oedipal overcoming. During his last years Hopkins, by contrast, frequently complained about his inability to complete projects.⁷ Hopkins lacked patronage, promotion, and fame and saw the young Yeats published, only 21 years old, despite producing poetry which he said lacked 'inscape', that was appearing prematurely as a result, he said, Yeats being 'perhaps unduly pushed by the late Sir Samuel Ferguson'.⁸ Discussing with Yeats's father and siding with the value of finish, he may have done so with the emphasis of one who could not be true to his own values. Hopkins promoted as a principle something he could not practise himself. Over a year before this meeting, he had been despairing about being unable to produce let alone complete his projects:

If I could but get on, if I could but produce work I should not mind its being buried, silenced, and going no further; but it kills me to be time's eunuch and never to beget.⁹

And just three weeks earlier, it was not the lack of production, but the lack of

fame, the being known, though in itself one of the most dangerous things to man, is nevertheless the necessary true and appointed air, element, and setting of genius and its works. . . . To produce then is of little use unless what we produce is known, if known

⁴ Norman White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁵ Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 13.

⁶ See ch.3 n. 36.

⁷ Catherine Phillips, 'The Effects of Incompleteness in Three Hopkins Poems', *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 43/1–2 (1990), 21.

⁸ L.iii.373.

⁹ L.i.222 (2 Sept. 1885).

widely known, the wider known the better, for it is by being known it works, it influences, it does its duty, it does good.¹⁰

It takes a study of his manuscripts to realize the extent of this relation to the unfinished, and thence also to see the fraught relation between textuality and what I'll examine here—self-compression.

In the manuscripts it is striking how Hopkins did not bring to a 'finish' many of his important poems. I include as 'unfinished' poems in which there are unresolved versions and 'unrejected alternatives'.¹¹ If Hopkins had seen his work through to print, he would have had to choose between these alternatives, something all his editors have had to do for him, that is, until MacKenzie's 1990 collection, which often shows several versions and alternatives on the page. Editors of Hopkins have always played a vital role in finishing off several of his poems for him. While he was alive, Hopkins' poems, with just a few exceptions, never moved through and beyond the various stages of a poem's possible development to arrive at a point where they could be 'passed for press'. They never moved out of the 'genetic zone known as the Rough Drafts of the work', as Pierre-Marc de Biasi has defined it. The 'document types', in many cases did not move on, de Biasi would say, from 'avant-texte' to 'text', from the 'composition phase' to the 'prepublishing phase', let alone 'publication phase'.¹² De Biasi's schema is useful, but it leaves out a possible 'disseminating' phase of the manuscripts, which occurs prior to publication, and which occurs when some work is thought fit for distribution, for reading and it therefore joins, perhaps in a limited but often a crucial way, the social circuits of consumption. In this way it is closer to being text than avant-texte, if it's not in fact text already. Hopkins' work had, while he lived, a tiny audience. The most common process of production and dissemination was as follows: having drafted his poems, he sent them in rough fair copy (that is, still with some deletions and emendations) to Robert Bridges, who mounted them in an album and sometimes

¹⁰ L.i.231 (13 Sept. 1886).

¹¹ I thus disagree with Catherine Phillips's assessment that 'there are fewer incomplete poems than his laments might lead us to expect.' She says the 'Sonnets of desolation' and ten other late poems 'are complete' (Phillips, 'Effects of Incompleteness', 21) and that when Hopkins complains about not being able to finish his literary projects he is talking about a few large-scale plans that he failed to complete. But Phillips fails to mention several fragments from Hopkins' late period. Moreover, the sonnets of desolation all have unresolved variants within their final versions. One of the ten poems she lists as complete, 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire...', appears to be so, and Hopkins did send a fair copy (the sole autograph) to Robert Bridges (L.i.279); but he nevertheless wrote under the final line of that copy 'the last sonnet provisional only' (OET, 174; Norman H. MacKenzie (ed.), *The Later Poetic Manuscripts of Gerard Manley Hopkins: In Facsimile* (New York and London: Garland, 1991), Plate 505, 331). These instances and this claim of provisionality have a clear enough psychology behind them—they are a defensive preparation for the moment when an imagined reader, however unlikely that is, sees his poems and dislikes them. 'Well, that's all right, because they're not quite finished, so your criticisms can be absorbed.' It also leaves open the option of Hopkins being able to tinker with the verse, as indeed Hopkins did do, sending emendations for 'To what serves mortal beauty' (OET, 158), for instance (L.i.291, 25 Sept. 1888, to Bridges).

¹² Pierre-Marc de Biasi, 'What is a Literary Draft? Toward a Functional Typology of Genetic Documentation', 26–58, in *Drafts*, Yale French Studies 89 (1996), 34–5.

fair copied them. The mounting was at times difficult because of the state the drafts were in. Hopkins didn't prepare his manuscripts even for this kind of archival act. MacKenzie describes in some details one example of this problem, and with it, a description of Hopkins' compositional processes:

As the fair copy [of the first surviving draft of 'The Windhover'] evolved into a partial recasting, space was cumulatively lost until the bottom of the page was reached with three lines still to add. . . . Hopkins, exasperatingly economical, turned the page over and sideways, to fit his three lines *at right angles down the back!* It becomes impossible to mount normally on an album page. The paper is so inferior that blotches from the verso disfigure the ends of lines 1–11, and the sheet had to be tipped or guarded into the album. . . . the poet did not bestir himself to spend fifteen further minutes creating a clean copy.¹³

Bridges eventually made corrected fair copies and sent them (as a printer or typist might send proofs or copy) to Hopkins for him to check. Hopkins added things but didn't ever come to fair-copy them himself. Once he had got to know Coventry Patmore, he sent them to him, in this revised form, often with new interlineations, in the hope that, as a poet, Patmore might enjoy them enough to propose that they be published, so they could move out of their condition of the avant-texte (or beyond their manuscriptural 'dissemination phase'). But Patmore found that technically too much was going on simultaneously, that their experimentation and novelty were a 'distraction from the poetic matter', and returned them to Hopkins.¹⁴ Hopkins would then over the last five or six years of his life occasionally add the odd detail, but never fair copy them again. So even though some of his poems had got to the fair copy stage, the new versions that were made reversed them back into a state of the 'untidied' revised state. Despite this hostility to his poems, Hopkins continued to write.

At Hopkins' death, poems which Bridges had already seen were returned to him and Bridges incorporated the revisions into his own collection of Hopkins' work. Bridges also received drafts of poems he hadn't seen. After Patmore, Hopkins did compose some other poems, some known as the Sonnets of Desolation, which are heavily worked and often left with variant readings. Bridges eventually took many of these out of this zone of the composition phase by editing them and, in 1918, preparing them for publication. Unlike all the authors in this study, Hopkins never experienced the correction or the revision of proofs. An important determinant of genetic materials is precisely the relations to such factors of dissemination—whether in holographic or published form. Since the copying, distribution, and dissemination of what the self has made, of its self-expression, are all so bound up with the perception of the self's identity, there is a strong chance of a clear link between the long and unfinished sequence of writing processes and the formulations of concepts of the self in his verse.

¹³ MacKenzie (ed.), *Later Poetic Manuscripts*, 5.

¹⁴ See Robert Bernard Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 357.

What is striking about the account here—and MacKenzie's comment about Hopkins' indifference to polish—is how little tidying up of his work Hopkins carried out, especially compared with other writers. Yeats, as we shall see, fair copied the work he'd done on loose sheets into specially bound albums and managed, even when still young, to get help transferring his fair copies into the 'clarity' of printed type. Yeats's poems, often brought back from their 'finished' state to be revised once again, would also move forward again, returning to print, and thus moved to and fro between the state of cultural production and cultural dissemination. This move is a perfective move, a 'through-making'. But Hopkins claimed in what turned out to be the last letter he wrote to Bridges before his death that he strongly disliked making this move towards lucidity: 'we greatly differ in feeling about copying one's verses out: I find it repulsive, and let them lie months and years in rough copy untransferred to my book [the book of copies that in fact Bridges had made for and sent to Hopkins].'¹⁵ Hopkins is the opposite of Yeats in this unwillingness to transfer and in his incapacity to disseminate.

Hopkins deferred the burden and the potential disappointment of pushing his work towards print. In this he seems to have been running away from the decisions required for 'finish', and from the kind of labour required—a series of social acts that involve soliciting opinion, patronage, promises that the work will be taken up, and promotion. But he was running also from the possible censorship and from the ensuing disappointment that he felt was likely in any attempts to get his work published. However much his heart 'bred wisest words' he was barred by 'baffling heaven's dark ban' and also, as he doubled up the line with an alternative, 'dark heaven's baffling ban', different versions that were never resolved.¹⁶ Both of these bans refer closely enough to the baffling suppression his poetry was unable to come out from under, making it a 'hoard unheard' (line 13). Hopkins was adversely affected by the rejections he suffered: 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' was turned down by the Catholic journal *This Month*, an experience which, according to White, 'set up the barrier between Hopkins' central self and the public image'.¹⁷ In 1878, after another shipwreck poem was turned down, Hopkins attempted to justify this situation to himself:

If someone in authority knew of my having some poems printable and suggested my doing it I shd. not refuse, I should be partly, though not altogether, glad. But that is very unlikely. All therefore that I think of doing is to keep my verses together in one place—at present I have not even correct copies—, that, if anyone shd. like, they might be published after my death. And that again is unlikely, as well as remote.¹⁸

Entertaining such an 'if' beside such an 'unlikely' must have produced an agony that had to be rationalized.

¹⁵ L.i.304, 29 Apr. 1889, to Bridges.

¹⁶ See OET 154.12, in MacKenzie (ed.), *Later Poetic Manuscripts*, 181.

¹⁷ White, *Hopkins*, 260.

¹⁸ L.i.66, 15 Feb. 1879, to Bridges.

CONTEXTS FOR COMPRESSION

The tension between the two—between hopes raised and long odds—appeared in the thematics of his work, and also affected a chief feature of his mode of working and reworking. It seems clear that the disappointment from 'The Wreck's' rejection had a lasting impact on that very poetry, on its content, style, form, and formation. One of the qualities that subsequently became predominant in Hopkins' verse and life, though it had been, as we'll see, already present in both, is *compression*. Due to his disappointment, Hopkins did not shift his work or himself forwards from a state of compression to the *decompression* that comes with dissemination. It is the close formational relations between compression in compositional processes, compression in his poetic themes and compression of selfhood that I will be looking at here. Hopkins has been seen critically as a poet of compression and a poet of the self. But these preoccupations are not so often brought together to present Hopkins as the poet of the compressed self.

It is possible to source Hopkins' taste or aptitude for compression in a general excitement during the Victorian period about natural science that combined positivism with a microscopophilic attention to detail and, as Walter Ong emphasized, particularism. Particularism combines the ideas that every thing is definably distinct, and that the more distinct a thing is, the better it is, for both the object defined as unique, and for the subject able to perform its unique definitions.¹⁹ Distinctness comes from detailed data gathered from detailed observation. Positivism provides the justification for definitions: the many dictionaries and encyclopaedias in the nineteenth century are the proliferating offspring and symptom of positivism. Sir Richard Phillip's 1832 *Million of Facts*, for example, where each fact is distinct, is representative: a volume that accumulates knowledge and boasts of the fact, gathering it into one small volume, often reprinted.²⁰ In positivism, the more thoroughly each object is described, and the more accurately each of its planes is portrayed, the more likely is it that its particularity can be evoked, becoming alive with subtly differing textures of shades of colour and change. What this produces, if we measure knowledge of an object against the volume or space that the object consists in, is a formal ideal of density and compression of identifying components. This project of the sciences that intensifies the density of identity has a correlation in the aesthetic experiences promoted by poetic and artistic visionaries. Blake's vision of 'infinity in a grain of sand' is a vision of hyper-density and was attractive to those who promoted Blake such as Ruskin, Rossetti, and Hopkins, all working with a sense of the rich world within microscopic detail often in organic

¹⁹ Walter J. Ong, *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 5.

²⁰ The book first came out in 1832, and was reprinted in (according to the Bodleian Library Catalogue) 1833, 1835, 1836, 1840 (the revised and stereotyped edition making use of recent publishing developments), 1855, 1857, 1859, 1872, 1882.

forms. The vision prepares the mind for conceiving of something like the super-dense and highly compressed ball of matter now thought to have preceded the big bang at the origin of the universe. That this sense of the compression of the essence of identity has repercussions on the compression of *personal* identity and the self is of course crucial. I will return to this.

Hopkins' middle-class Anglican and well-educated background was likely to have conformed to these trends that popularized detailed knowledge of the individuated world around it. And the ideal of economic values, certainly pursued by the Hopkins family, reflected this, since his family would have valued attitudes which feared the squandering of time, of money, of virtue, and of intellect and despised looseness in all its forms. Such fears translate easily into the kind of obsessive inventory and account of 'sins' that Hopkins, through painstaking and continuous self-examination, underwent for about a year, from the spring of 1865.²¹ Hopkins' choice of joining the Jesuits also provides a context for compression: not just in the self-denial that holds back multiple bodily impulses, but also in the expectations that every moment would be accounted for, especially when he was teaching.

My central concern here is to open up the notion of the compressed self by bringing it alongside the forms of Hopkins' composition methods and the condition of the manuscripts which often appear dense with reworking, with interlinations that cramp the available space and with variants that Hopkins frequently chose not to resolve. Compression in his activities of writing, I contend, relates to the particular kind of poet of the self that Hopkins is understood to be. Further, I want to pose a more general question: about whether we should just as properly speak of writing's effectiveness at producing a state of 'self-compression' as we do of writing being a form and consequence of 'self-expression'.

THE MODERNIST AESTHETIC OF COMPRESSION AND THE COMPRESSED SELF

Recent Hopkins criticism has moved away from treating Hopkins as a modern, and returned him to what Victorian scholars see as his rightful place among the Victorians.²² This historicizing turn is valuable for showing Hopkins' active engagement with

²¹ See Lesley Higgins, "To Prove Him with Hard Questions": Answerability in Hopkins' Writings, *Victorian Poetry* 39/1 (2001), White, *Hopkins*, 113–18.

²² See, for example, among many others, the biographies by White and Martin and journal and book studies by Nathan Elliot, 'A More Rational Hope: The Influence of George MacDonald's *Phantastes* on Hopkins' Short Story "The Dolphin"', *Hopkins Quarterly* 28 (2001), 103–13; Ian Turnbull Ker, *The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845–1961: Newman, Hopkins, Belloc, Chesterton, Greene, Waugh* (Gracewing, 2003); Maureen Moran, 'Lovely Manly Mould: Hopkins and the Christian Body', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 6 (2001), 61–88; Jill Muller, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and Victorian Catholicism: a Heart in Hiding* (London: Routledge, 2003); Bernadette Ward, *World as Word: Philosophical Theology in Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), and *eadem*, 'Hopkins on Warfare: "The War within"', *Hopkins Quarterly* 30 (2003), 72–82; and Norman White, *Hopkins in Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002).

the contemporary, but it can turn Hopkins into an effect and a symptom rather than a cause. It underestimates also the skill and daring with which the modernist critics energetically promoted Hopkins' importance and it unintentionally dehistoricizes his impact on modernist criticism and on subsequent poetry. Frequently it was the component of compression which impressed the readers of the 1918 edition and the 1930 second edition of Hopkins' poems. From the mid-1920s onwards first one then both editions were used to herald—or confirm—a new critical and poetic practice that has since become one of the distinguishing features of modernism and indeed avant-garde art: a kind of compression which, in its wake, brings density and difficulty.

Middleton Murry, one of the earliest to respond to Hopkins, noted guardedly that 'there is compression but there is comprehension'²³ as if compression was at the time a risky and unorthodox quality in poetry because of the way it endangered comprehension. But making comprehension secondary to compression would in fact become one of the chief aims of 'modernist' poetic language. An influential article by I. A. Richards interpreted this compression psychologically—but critically or, rather, diagnostically: 'intellectually [Hopkins] was too "cogged and cumbered" with beliefs, those bundles of invested emotional capital, to escape except through appalling tension'.²⁴ Dylan Thomas, only 15, wrote with great precision of Hopkins' language, in the *Swansea Grammar School Magazine*, that it 'was violated and estranged by the effort of compressing already unfamiliar imagery'.²⁵ He also had the insight to notice that 'The most important element that characterizes our poetical modernity is freedom' and that 'it has its roots in the obscurity of Hopkins' lyrics'.²⁶ William Empson, stimulated by Richards, analysed 'The Windhover' and, without feeling to need to support Richards' critical stance against Hopkins' beliefs, made use of Freud:

in the first three lines of the sestet we seem to have a clear case of the Freudian use of opposites, where two things thought of as incompatible, but desired intensely by different systems of judgements, are spoken of simultaneously by words applying to both; both desires are thus given a transient and exhausting satisfaction, and the two systems of judgement are forced into open conflict before the reader. Such a process one might imagine, could pierce to regions that underlie the whole structure of our thought; could tap the energies of the very depths of the mind.²⁷

The cumbersome bundles of belief that the rationalist Richards had worried about became a perversely masochistic strength in Empson's vision—the tension that was produced provided a means of getting under the 'whole structure of thought', no less. Empson's theory of ambiguity that was to prove so influential in various

²³ Quoted in Walford Davies (ed.), *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poetry and Prose* (London: J. M. Dent, 1998), xxii.

²⁴ I. A. Richards, *The Dial* 81 (Sept. 1926).

²⁵ Quoted in Robert Boenig, 'Hopkins and Dylan Thomas', in Richard F. Giles (ed.), *Hopkins among the Poets: Studies in Modern Responses to Gerard Manley Hopkins*, vol. iii (Waterloo, Ont.: International Hopkins Assn., 1985), 91–8, esp. 91.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930), 286.

kinds of criticism took credence from displaying the 'contemporary' poet Hopkins alongside older poets. What could be more modern than something ignored by the past for having been, at least in retrospect, ahead of its time, then exhumed, as it were, archaeologically—like the reputation of van Gogh, or the discovery of Traherne. Such rediscoveries were the equivalent of the return of a repressed, romantic narrative of exile and return, of a kind that we shall see the young W. B. Yeats negotiating in the next chapter. Leavis, writing in the wake of Richards and Empson and sealing Hopkins' fate of posthumous fame, defined two characteristic methods in Hopkins, one of which was 'compression'.²⁸ His 'techniques are... for expressing difficult and urgent states of mind.'²⁹ And Geoffrey Grigson in 1931 said his verbal obscurities 'are often the boldest compressions of fine thought that, once explained... provoke, most of them, respect, rather than impatience.'³⁰

The post-Freudian role of poetry to relate to structures of the 'mind' is spun towards the 'self' and its Dionysiac undoing by the young poet Charles Madge who, in an excited and exciting comment, stated that it is because of 'the violent self-identification with kinaesthetic Nature, and the exalted physical states of empathic hyperaesthesia—that he is interesting in 1935.' Madge traced this back to the Victorian period:

under cover of Tennyson and Longfellow, a silent revolution took place: the annihilation of the self. The annihilation was undertaken in two historic directions, Inwards, by the solipsist technique of Lear: 'we think so then and we thought so still'... and Outwards by the Whitmanesque identification of the self with Nature.³¹

Madge does not talk directly about compression here, but his terms relate easily enough to my contention that Hopkins represents an embodiment of the self brought through compression to one of its densest expressions: an embodiment of a moment in the history of the formulation of the self that brings about the possibility and the probability of a new structuring of that self, a decompression through a dissolution, an 'annihilation' through an explosion. Hopkins himself suggested this in terms that feel as decidedly modern and un-Victorian as his poetry was felt to be by the few readers he had: 'One of two kinds of clearness one should have—either the meaning to be felt without effort as fast as one reads or else, if dark at first reading, when once made out *to explode*.'³² What follows such an explosion would be a dissolution and dispersal, as the inevitable flipside of the compression of his psychology and language. Hopkins was at times interpreted as announcing this quality of self-dispersal, rather than its opposite of self-compression. Madge saw

²⁸ F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1972), 188.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 174.

³⁰ A review of Hopkins for the *Saturday Review*, quoted in Tom Dunne, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

³¹ Charles Madge, *New Verse* 14 (Apr. 1935), 18–19. Quoted in Davies (ed.), *Hopkins: Poetry and Prose*, 201.

³² *L.i.* 90, 08 Oct. 1879.

him in this way and believed that it was liberating; for Eliot, it was anything but. At his most notoriously conservative, in *After Strange Gods*, it must have been the threat of such a dissolution of the self which resulted in his criticism that in:

the struggle of our time to concentrate, not to dissipate; to renew our association with traditional wisdom; to re-establish a vital connexion between the individual and the race; the struggle, in a word, against Liberalism: from all this... Hopkins has very little aid to offer us.³³

Eliot, whose dislike of nature poetry is probably what lies behind his dislike of Hopkins, presumably didn't know how conservative Hopkins in fact was politically, and couldn't capitalize on it nor make any attempt to link his politics with his poetry—something generally lacking in Hopkins criticism, too.³⁴

The modernist cult of compression has remained in critics who sustained the practice of close reading. Hence D. W. Harding in 1977 spoke of how Hopkins is 'looking just for the terms that convey most of the force of his feeling, and he uses those compressed as closely as possible,'³⁵ while Vendler in 1995 analysed his 'extreme syntactic compression'.³⁶

Though we have seen Madge's reading of Hopkins as one made by a particular kind of poet of the self in 1935, the focus on Hopkins as the poet of the particular unique and individual self came to dominate criticism (the humanist branch of 'New Criticism') after the first wave of modernist criticism. For Donald Davie, in 1952, he is the poet of 'the egotistical sublime'.³⁷ For Robert Goldsmith, a 'sense of selfhood is affirmed as vigorously by Gerard Manley Hopkins as by Whitman or any other poet.'³⁸ And for Ong, Hopkins' fascination with particularities 'comes to a head in his intense and often agonizing preoccupation with the human self'.³⁹ Given that Hopkins believed in the a priori existence of selves, he is quite distant from the notion of the 'fluid' and constructed self of many forms of modernist and post-modernist writing. Hopkins is, nonetheless, interestingly interpreted as a harbinger of these versions of the self, even though he is more plausibly interpreted as a symptom in which the opposite idea—the essential and particularized self—is taken to an extreme. But it is at this extreme, as Madge sensed and Eliot feared, that we go through a sudden process, of a kind which Hopkins expressed as an ideal of how communication should happen: in an explosion.⁴⁰

Having established the modernist aesthetic of compression confirming itself in Hopkins, and the New Critical interest in the construction of the self, the challenge now is to turn to the manuscripts for instances of textual compression.

³³ Quoted in Davies (ed.), *Hopkins: Poetry and Prose*, 196.

³⁴ For one of many instances of Hopkins' political conservatism, see White, *Hopkins*, 221–2.

³⁵ Quoted in Davies (ed.), *Hopkins: Poetry and Prose*, 222.

³⁶ Helen Vendler, *The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Graham*, Richard Ellmann Lectures in Modern Literature (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 19.

³⁷ Donald Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952), 182.

³⁸ See Robert H. Goldsmith, 'The Selfless Self: Hopkins' Late Sonnets', *Hopkins Quarterly* 3 (1976), 67–75, 68.

³⁹ Ong, *Hopkins*, 3.

⁴⁰ *L.i.* 90, 08 Oct. 1879.

TEXTUAL COMPRESSION

Earlier I quoted MacKenzie's frustration at the way Hopkins was 'exasperatingly' economical in his use of paper. We can trace such economy back through Hopkins' writing practice—in his lists of sins for instance. As White observes, 'Hopkins wrote his lists of sins in his diary, in gaps between notes on architecture, poems, notes of things to do.'⁴¹ This description implies that Hopkins was in the habit of returning to a used notebook in which various notes were scattered, separated by blank spaces which he would then plug. In fact Hopkins simply alternated between recording his sins and making other kinds of notes, economically using just one notebook for everything. It is true, however, that he fills every spare inch of it, as can be seen from Figure 1, where Hopkins packs in the data from self-observation with minuscule hand-writing. At the end of the notebook he also registered nocturnal losses of semen and whether they were voluntary or involuntary. Hopkins is anxious about wasting time and 'spirit'. Given this anxiety about voluntary and involuntary wastage, he attempts, as if in a kind of economy with himself, to save paper by using every spare square inch of the small cheap notebook he is using, ensuring that while he sins somehow most of the time, at least he doesn't in the way he uses paper. The compact closeness of the writing presses home the intimate nature of the material, in a small volume easy to be held literally close to the body. Writing provides the opportunity to practise a private economy in which the available resources of pen, ink, paper, and identity are carefully apportioned. Such relations get lost in the transferral to the decompressed regularity and generous spacing of print.⁴²

The choice to compress the expression of his self in between the expressions of his cultural interests is of further significance: for despite his self-examination being interspersed with them, the composing of poetry is itself faulted within the self-examination:

14 [Sunday, Jan, 1866] Wasting time...Waste of time in going to bed...Laziness. Very late down. Idling at night. Doing no work and idling badly all day...Idling much, twice. Self-will in writing down (past 12) corrections in The Nightingale agst. warning...Dwelling on

⁴¹ White, *Hopkins*, 113.

⁴² I am arguing for a measure of *iconicity* here and that there may be a relation between the appearance of a page and the content of the material the text describes. Daniel Ferrer argues against iconicity if in slightly different terms: 'iconicity implies...that manuscripts must be similar to the final work that is issued from them'. He offers counter examples: 'who would guess from Faulkner's disheveled books, full of sound and fury, that they are issued from incredibly neat-looking manuscripts?' and proposes that 'one might question seriously the very notion of "similitude" as an instrument of analysis.' See Daniel Ferrer, 'The Open Space of the Draft Page', in George Bornstein and Theresa Tinkle (eds), *The Iconic Page in Manuscript, Print, and Digital Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 253. Obviously one cannot draw up a general rule about this: I would simply argue that there are exceptions, and that Hopkins is one. What may shape the fact of these exceptions is the degree of reflectivity brought to bear by a writer on their manuscripts and thus their iconicity. I suggest there was a high degree of reflectivity from Hopkins, a reflectivity shaped by the lack of dissemination.

| | | |
|---|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| <p>Wasting time...Waste of time in going to bed...Laziness. Very late down. Idling at night. Doing no work and idling badly all day...Idling much, twice. Self-will in writing down (past 12) corrections in The Nightingale agst. warning...Dwelling on</p> | <p>C. II. p. 111</p> | <p>Not in J. 72</p> |
| <p>Wasting time...Waste of time in going to bed...Laziness. Very late down. Idling at night. Doing no work and idling badly all day...Idling much, twice. Self-will in writing down (past 12) corrections in The Nightingale agst. warning...Dwelling on</p> | <p>5</p> | <p>Sub. Jan. 14 1866</p> |
| <p>Wasting time...Waste of time in going to bed...Laziness. Very late down. Idling at night. Doing no work and idling badly all day...Idling much, twice. Self-will in writing down (past 12) corrections in The Nightingale agst. warning...Dwelling on</p> | <p>10</p> | |
| <p>Wasting time...Waste of time in going to bed...Laziness. Very late down. Idling at night. Doing no work and idling badly all day...Idling much, twice. Self-will in writing down (past 12) corrections in The Nightingale agst. warning...Dwelling on</p> | <p>15</p> | |
| <p>Wasting time...Waste of time in going to bed...Laziness. Very late down. Idling at night. Doing no work and idling badly all day...Idling much, twice. Self-will in writing down (past 12) corrections in The Nightingale agst. warning...Dwelling on</p> | <p>20</p> | |
| <p>Wasting time...Waste of time in going to bed...Laziness. Very late down. Idling at night. Doing no work and idling badly all day...Idling much, twice. Self-will in writing down (past 12) corrections in The Nightingale agst. warning...Dwelling on</p> | <p>25</p> | |
| <p>The stars were packed so close out night They seemed to press & stare & gather in like hurdles bright & liberties of air.</p> | <p>4</p> | <p>QET No. 756</p> |
| <p>Wasting time...Waste of time in going to bed...Laziness. Very late down. Idling at night. Doing no work and idling badly all day...Idling much, twice. Self-will in writing down (past 12) corrections in The Nightingale agst. warning...Dwelling on</p> | <p>30</p> | <p>Not in J. 72 Jan. 23 1866</p> |
| <p>Wasting time...Waste of time in going to bed...Laziness. Very late down. Idling at night. Doing no work and idling badly all day...Idling much, twice. Self-will in writing down (past 12) corrections in The Nightingale agst. warning...Dwelling on</p> | <p>35</p> | |
| <p>For Lent. No pudding on Sundays. No tea kept it to keep me awake & then w/ Omelette Meat only once a day. NO PIES or PASTRY</p> | <p>J. 72</p> | <p>Lent- Feb. 14 to Mar. 30</p> |

Figure 1 Hopkins' Journal, Sunday Jan 14th, 1866, illustrating textual compression. See pp. 90–92. From *The Early Poetic Manuscripts and Note-Books of Gerard Manley Hopkins: In Facsimile*, edited by Norman MacKenzie (New York and London: Garland, 1989), Plate 149, p. 201.

poems.—And in morning of 21. Very little read. Inatt. at ch. Vanity, consciousness, etc. —22. No L[essons].

The stars were packed so close that night
They seemed to press and stare
And gather in like hurdles bright
The liberties of air.

Wicked/forecasting. Idleness in morning and evening. Weak dilatoriness twice.⁴³

From the confession of self-regard and vanity in the act of corrections, it only takes small steps for him to consider his poems always secondary and subversive concerns, to turn any acts of bringing them to a finish into sources of shame. And thence Hopkins will hoard his own verse, unwilling to share the spirit of his poetry.

The ideal of a waste-free economy of the virtuous self is reflected and produced in a literally compressed texture for the text. And the experience of this texture may in turn be reflected in—or even shape—ideals expressed in the poetry. Accepting this idea dispels as just a simple coincidence the appearance of the brief verse about 'close-packed stars'. An ethics of and taste for the economy of compression will positively assess an economical use of space in which matter too appears in a compressed form. The ideal economy that finds a virtuous embodiment in the close packing of text will take pleasure in reflections of its own virtuous compression in the world around it. These stars in their stares have, moreover, become watchful agents, are inverted from having been objects of our gaze to becoming subjects that gaze. And when they 'gather in' certain 'liberties', they have also taken on a power and authority. Hopkins has projected into this conventional poetic image by which the heavens are personified, the way that words develop watchful agency too, as they stare back reproachfully at their author, challenging him with the problem (what he has been warned against) of correcting them, an act that will result in another inversion of self-correction and self-examination. In self-examination, the self stares at itself and notices all faults, thereby attempting to rein in all such liberties that break away from the constraints of virtue. Part of the process of self-examination is the scrupulous account of its faults. It is not only the self that stares at its faults: the written record of the self's faults stares back too. Whether Hopkins already had a taste for it, or whether the obligations of self-examination developed that taste, writing as a site for self-reflection is generally prevalent in his prose.

The close-packed stars are close-packed words. The staring and gathering that these stars and words carry out are effects of the economy of self-examination.

⁴³ Norman H. MacKenzie (ed.), *The Early Poetic Manuscripts and Note-Books of Gerard Manley Hopkins: In Facsimile* (New York/London: Garland, 1989), Plate 149.

But they are also an origin of further self-examination and a compression of that self. Writing is an effect of a compression that seeks decompression in expression, but it can as quickly become a cause of compression. Hopkins' particular circumstances—historical, personal, social, religious—produce in him an ultimate limit case in which writing and the compressed self are caught up in a self-confirming cycle.

Compression, as a symptom of an idealized space-saving, energy-saving, and soul-saving economy, becomes an ideal for Hopkins in textual formation but also through its appearance in nature, in meaning, and in sound. Six months after writing the above material, Hopkins discovered while out walking: 'the law of the oak leaves'. The law echoes the verse written six months earlier: 'It is of platter-shaped stars altogether; the leaves close like pages, packed, and as if drawn tightly to. But these old packs, which lie at the end of the twigs, throw out now long shoots alternatively and slimly leaved.'⁴⁴ Part of what makes this a 'law' is noting a quality but also a counter-quality, balanced harmoniously around the conjunction 'but'. Such a law suggests that Nature arranges itself in aesthetically balanced arguments, with a thesis and an anti-thesis, its 'laws' are a dialectic, rational and aesthetic. Such a law thus avoids any evolutionary aims at functionality and survival. Compression, of being 'drawn tightly', is balanced by dissemination, by shoots which are 'thrown out'. As we will see, the necessity of this balance—the need for shooting out from a compressed form—becomes part of Hopkins' experience of textuality and audience (or lack of it). But Hopkins' being is unable to comply with or emulate this natural law. His pages, like the oak leaves, may be close packed but there are no long shoots that get thrown out as dissemination. Dissemination, even of a kind that is just barely above the most minimal, is never, depressingly, for Hopkins, achieved.

THE DESIRE FOR DECOMPRESSION AND LOSING PRESSURE IN REVISION

The natural just law in which compression and unravelling are in balance recurs time and again in Hopkins. The two aspects reappear in the suitably dense texture of his poem 'The Sea and the Skylark', which he sent to Bridges.

Faced by Bridges' incomprehension, however, Hopkins had to gloss his work in a way that was a kind of comprehensive unpacking. The year of this gloss—1882—is over forty years before Joyce and Eliot would be similarly unpacking their dense work, because of what came to be seen as a classic symptom of

⁴⁴ See Humphry House and Graham Storey (eds), *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 141–6.