Chapter - III

Sound - the flexible basis of language.

If meaning is elusive, what are we to look for in poetry? Hopkins answers this question to Bridges in the following words, "My verse is less to be read than heard, as I have told you before, it is oratorical, that is the rhythm is so. I think if you will study what I have said you will be much pleased with it and may I say? converted to it." ¹

Hopkins had The Wreck of Deutschland in mind when he was making this remark. But it applies to all his poems. In fact this was the hallmark of his poetry. Thus about The Loss of Eurydice, he wrote to Bridges, "To do the Eurydice any kind of justice you must not slovenly read it with the eyes' but with your eyes, as if the paper were declaiming at you. For instance the line 'she had come from a cruise training seamen' read without stress and declaim is mere Lloyd's Shipping Intelligence; properly read it is quite a different thing. Stress is the life of it." ²

Hopkins was fully aware that he was making a novel experiment in poetry. He knew that his departure from the traditional canon of poetry was likely to cause confusion among the readers of his poetry. He even understood that his appeal was
likely to be limited:

"Everybody cannot be expected to like my pieces. Moreover the oddness may make them repulsive at first yet Lang might have liked them on a second reading. Indeed when, on somebody returning me Eurydice, I opened and I read some lines, reading, as one commonly reads whether prose or verse, with the eyes, so to say, only it struck me aghast with a kind of raw nakedness and unmitigated violence I was unprepared for: but take breath and read it with the ears, as I always wish to be read, and my verse becomes all right."³

Years later writing about another poem Hopkins said to Bridges,

"Of this long sonnet above all remember what applies to all my verse that it is, as living art should be, made for performances and that its performance is not reading with the eye but loud, leisurely, poetically (not rhetorical) recitation, with long rests, long dwells on the rhyme and other marked syllables, and so on. This sonnet should be almost sung; it is most carefully timed in tempo rubato."⁴

Hopkins was deeply distressed by Bridges's insensitivity to his novel experiment. He repeatedly tried to draw his attention to the aural aspect of his poetry. Frustration and
despair led him to remark (this time about his poem Tom's Garland):

"I laughed outright and often but very sardonically, to think you and the Canon could not construe my last sonnet; that he had to write to you for a crib. It is plain I must go no farther on this road: if you and he cannot understand me who will? Yet, declared, the strange constructions would be dramatic and effective."\(^5\)

If we look into Hopkins's early diaries we shall come across plenty of examples where Hopkins was groping for a way to resolve the problem arising out of the conflicting demands of sound and sense. The diaries were written as early as 1863. But even here we find Hopkins busy with this problem. Here Hopkins tried to group words on the basis of their sounds and tried to connect them on the level of meaning. We quote some examples from Hopkins's diaries:

"Grind, grid, grid, grit, groat, grate, greet, crash, etc. Original meaning to strike, rub, particularly together.
That which is produced by such means is the grit, the groat or crumbs, like fragmentum from frangere, bit from bite. Crumb, crumble perhaps akin. To greet, to strike the hands together (?) Greet, grief, wearing, tribulation, Grief possibly connected, Gruff, with a sound as of two things rubbing together."\(^6\)
Again,

"Flick, fillip, flip, fleck, flake. Flick means to touch or strike lightly as with the end of a whip, a finger etc. To fleck is the next tone above flick, still meaning to touch or strike lightly (and leave a mark of the touch or stroke) but in a broader less slight manner. Hence substantively a fleck is a piece of light, colour, substance, etc. looking as though shaped or produced by such touches. Flake is a broad and decided fleck, a thin plate of something, the tone above it. Their connection is more clearly seen in the applications of the words to natural objects than in explanations. It would seem that fillip generally pronounced flip is a variation of flick, which however seems connected with fly, flee, flit, meaning to make fly off. Key to meaning of flick, fleck and flake is that of striking or cutting off the surface of a thing; in flick (as to flick off a fly) something little or light from the surface, while flake is a thin scale of surface. Flay is therefore connected, perhaps flitch."^7

Indeed Hopkins's diaries are full of instances like these where he has put together words beginning with same consonant or consonant clusters:
"Twig (pinch), tweak, twitch, twit, to give one a wigging, earwig, wicker, twig (small branch), twist, twine, twire (?), twy, two θύω, θυο, δυο etc. etc., Τυλίκος, wick (of candle), wick (Hackney wick etc.), wich, (Harwich etc.) wig (Schleswig etc.), weak, wicked." \(^{8}\)

Or

"Steel\(^{1}\) connected perhaps with Στὴρ, στέλλα, αστήρ, Stella\(^{2}\) perhaps for sterila, if not\(^{3}\), since Festus the ancients did not double letters, for stela which makes it nearer steel, not that I would insist on the 1, the change from r into l being made independently in the three cases of Στὴρ, Στέλλα etc. etc. stella and steel. The α' of αστήρ is to ease pronunciation\(^{4}\) and often found in Greek when its introduction had been early or even before the parting of Greek from its kindred tongues, but the Greek tongue pronounced Στ-, Στήρ etc. easily, and therefore a enunciative, if one may coin a word, was probably not used except in those words into which it had got already. E is used in the Romance tongues in the same way, e.g. Experance, estella.\(^{9}\)

These random examples from Hopkins' early diaries are clear pointers to Hopkins's early interest in the sound of words. At one place he was even toying with the idea of the onomatopoetic theory which was exercising the thoughtful minds of his time:
"In fact I think the onomatopoetic theory has not had a fair chance of Crack(4), Creak, croak, crake, graculus, crackle. These must be onomatopoetic."10

In his essay Rhythm And the Other Structural Parts of Rhetoric-Verse Hopkins discusses the role of sound in poetry at great length. Here, for instance, he defined verse in the following manner:

"Verse is speech having marked figure, order of sounds independent of meaning and such as can be shifted from one word or words to others without changing. It is figure of spoken sound."11

This definition of verse given by Hopkins clearly shows that Hopkins looked at verse from an altogether different angle. He was quite unlike Wordsworth or Coleridge or the Victorians in this respect. For Hopkins verse is a figure of spoken sounds and the sounds can be independent of meaning. The novelty of this conception is not grasped by most critics. They fail to understand how there can be poetry independent of meaning. So they try to look for something in Hopkins's poetry which is not there. Armed with various dictionaries they strain at words to find their exact meanings. They are puzzled over Hopkins's queer use of words, odd coinages, strange dislocation of syntax.
But careful study of Hopkins's letters, diaries, and papers show that Hopkins looked at poetry from an altogether different angle. For him, meaning had little importance in poetry. There can be good poetry, according to Hopkins, if spoken sound be arranged in systematic order. It is strange that critics should overlook this vital aspect of Hopkins's poetry although Hopkins was never tired of stressing the primacy of sound in his poetry. Thus in his essay *Poetry And Verse* Hopkins says:

"Poetry is speech framed for contemplation of the mind by way of hearing or speech even over and above its interest of meaning. Some matter and meaning is essential to it but only as an element necessary to support and employ the shape which is contemplated for its own sake."\(^{12}\)

Poetry, thus according to Hopkins, needs little meaning. It needs the systematic manipulation of words or sounds of spoken words for the sake of contemplation of the structure of sound itself. In the essay *Poetry And Verse* Hopkins is more explicit about poetry:

"Verse is (inscape of spoken sound, not spoken words, or speech employed to carry the inscape of spoken sound or in the usual words) speech wholly or partially repeating the same figure of sound."\(^{13}\)
If we read Hopkins's poetry in the light of his remarks much of the confusion regarding meaning ends. These remarks show that in writing poetry Hopkins's primary intention was not expression of his own thoughts, ideas and emotions about God, men and nature. Hopkins's poetry do, of course, express his thoughts, ideas and emotions. But they are secondary. The beauty of his poems emphatically rests on sound.

This definition of poetry given by Hopkins anticipates Archibald MacLeish, a practising poet of distinction. In his book *Poetry And Experience*, he almost echoes Hopkins's definition of poetry. Wherein consists the pleasure of poetry, asks MacLeish and answers it much in the manner of Hopkins. He answers this question with reference to a particular poem of Dylan Thomas *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*. Where does the appeal of this poem lie? It lies in the words themselves. But the words of Dylan Thomas's poem are very ordinary words and they are in no way remarkable. And these words in a different arrangement, say, in a paragraph of prose or in conversation, do not have the same sort of beauty as they have in the context of the poem. In the context of the poem, according to MacLeish, the words are charged with meaning or charged with 'a particular kind of meaning'. The source of this particular meaning, according to MacLeish, is that:
"They are also held in another kind of structure: a structure the elements of which have nothing to do with sentences or syntax but with something which sentences and syntax regard as irrelevant and fortuitous - the sounds the words make in the mouth and in the ear when they are spoken - the accenting and unaccenting of their syllables - the sound of their letters, both consonants and vowels.”

MacLeish later breaks up the poem of Dylan Thomas to show how this precisely happens:

"They are arranged, first of all, in 'lines', nineteen in all, each line consisting of ten syllables, five accented and five not, these 'lines', in turn, are so arranged that they end in words which, as we say, 'rhyme'. The rhymes, again, are two in number based on night and day, the first rhyme appearing thirteen times and the second six, in a regular pattern. Finally, though this does not exhaust the elements of construction - two of the lines are repeated four times each. These statistics may be impertinent and annoying but the structure they describe is obviously neither. This a structure deliberately and purposefully composed of words as sounds, or more precisely, of the repetitions of words as sounds."
Later MacLeish refers to Stephane Mallarme to strengthen his argument:

"Writing to Degas in a famous letter Stephane Mallarme gave it as his flat and considered opinion that poetry is made not with ideas but with words. Since ideas are expressed in words and cannot very well exist without them, and since many words must be taken to mean that poetry is made not with words-as-expression-of-ideas but with that Mallarmé elsewhere called 'words themselves', words as sensuous events - in brief, words as sounds that convey them."  

MacLeish concludes:

"What this assertion comes down to then - the assertion that poetry is made not with 'ideas' but with 'words' - what it comes down to is the proposition that it is exclusively in the relationship of words as sounds that poem as poem exists. The poem's meaning is evoked by the structure of words-as-meanings. And the enhancement of meaning, which we feel in any true poem, is a product, therefore, of the structure of sound."  

The writer who according to MacLeish goes farthest in manipulating sounds of words 'with a view to enriching their meanings' is James Joyce. MacLeish quotes how famous passage from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and remarks:
"No one else, I think, has assumed as explicitly as Joyce did that words as sounds are malleable and may be made to multiply their meanings by the management of their shapes and movements in the ear. When Joyce was told that Finnegans Wake was unintelligible he always replied in the same way: 'Read it aloud!' And if you have the chance to listen to it — to compare the printed page of it with a few minutes of one of the recorded readings by an accomplished actress like Siobhan McKenna, or by the master himself, I think you will agree that Finnegans Wake, as Joyce said it would be, more intelligible to the ear than it is to the eye, which, if true, implies that it is the management of the sounds which works in it to distort and multiply the meanings."  

While reading the words of MacLeish one cannot fail to be struck by the close resemblance between what Hopkins admonished Bridges regarding his poetry and what Joyce remarked, about his Finnegans Wake. 'Read it aloud!' 'Listen to it' — are not these advices similar to the ones Hopkins was never tired to giving to Bridges and others?  

But inspite of clear evidence in Hopkins's letters and papers of his intention and in spite of clear confirmation in Hopkins's poetry of his intention, critics have generally
turned away from this aspect of his poetry. Critics have, of course, noticed the importance Hopkins attached to the element of sound in his poetry. But they could not understand how this could be made the corner-stone of poetry. Where the confusion started from was, of course, the critics' refusal to look upon words as malleable and supple as melody or pigment. And behind this refusal was the notion of words as being conceptual. How could the words be cleansed of their meanings that have gathered around them over the centuries? Thus wrote Bridges:

"... in aiming at condensation he (Hopkins) neglects the need that there is for care in the placing of words that are grammatically ambiguous. English swarms with words that have one identical form for substantive, adjective and verb; and such a word should never be so placed as to allow of any doubt as to what part of speech it is used for; because such ambiguity or momentary uncertainty destroys the force of the sentence. Now our author (i.e. Hopkins) not only neglects this essential propriety but he would seem even to welcome and seek artistic effect in the consequent confusion; and he will sometimes so arrange such words that a reader looking for a verb may find that he has two or three ambiguous monosyllables from which to select, and must be in doubt as to which promises best to give any meaning that he can
welcome; and then after his choice is made, he may be left with some homeless monosyllable still on his hands. Nor is our author apparently sensitive to the irrelevant suggestion that our numerous homophones cause; and he will provoke further ambiguities or obscurities by straining the meaning of these unfortunate words. 19

Bridges's confusion is understandable. He was looking in Hopkins for something which was simply not there. After all if clarity of meaning was all that Hopkins intended he need not have made his poems 'complex' and labour-consuming. He could have simply said what he meant and could have said them in simple language. But since expression or communication of meaning was not uppermost in Hopkins's mind, he did not always care about 'clear, unmistakable meaning'. He rather concentrated on doing what he had set out to do, namely the manipulation the sounds of words for the purpose of giving aesthetic pleasure arising out of such contemplation.

There are, of course, discerning critics and scholars who have not lost sight of the importance of music in poetry. George Steiner is one of them. In his book Language and Silence he has dealt with this problem in some detail. We shall quote extensively from him to illustrate the point:
"From medieval Latin poetry to Mallarmé and Russian symbolist verse, the motif of the necessary limitations of the human word is a frequent one. It carries with a crucial intimation of that which lies outside language, of what it is that awaits the poet if he were to transgress the bounds of human discourse. Being, in the nature of his craft, a reacher, the poet must guard against becoming, in Faustian terms, an over-reacher. The daemonic creativity of his instrument probes the out-works of the City of God; he must know when to draw back lest he be consumed, Icarus-like, by the terrible nearness of a greater making, of a Logos, incommensurable with his own (in the garden of fallen pleasured, Hieronymous Bosch's poet is racked on his own harp)."20

Again,

"The interpretation of poetry and music is so close that their origin is indivisible and usually rooted in a common myth. Still to-day the vocabulary of prosody and poetic form, of linguistic tonality and cadence, overlaps deliberately with music. From Arion and Orpheus to Ezra Pound and John Berryman, the poet is maker of songs and singer of words. There are many and intricate strains (itself a musical term) in the concept of the musical character.
of poetic speech. The fortunes of Orpheus as we follow them in Pindar and Ovid, in Speesper, Rilke and Cocteau, are almost synonymous with the nature and functions of poetry. Because he is part Orpheus, the poet in Western literature is architect of myth, magician over savagery, and pilgrim towards death. The notion that the structure of the universe is ordered by harmony, that there is a music whose modes are the elements, the concords of the planatory orbits, the chime of water and blood, is ancient as Pythagoras and has never lost its metaphoric life. Until the seventeenth century and the 'untuning of the sky' a belief in the music of the spheres, in Pythagorean or Keplerian accords and temperance between star and planet, between harmonious functions in mathematics and the vibrant lute string, underlies much of the poet's realisation of his own action. The music of the sphere is guarantor and counterpoint to his own use of ordering, harmonious 'numbers' (the terminology of rhetoric is consistently musical).

"Harkening to this music, as does Lorenzo in the garden at Belmont, he receives not only echo but that assurance of a transcendent presence, of a convention of statement and communication reading beyond and concentric to his own which Dante receives from exceeding light :"
Look how the floor of heaven 
Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold 
There is not the smallest Orb which thou beholdest 
But in his motion like an angel sings, 
Still quiring to the young-eyed Cherubines; 
Such harmony is in immortal souls!

("Patens are the small flat dishes used in Holy Communion – by which choice of word Shakespeare would have us note that communion and communication through transcendent harmony are vitally akin.

"From this inexhaustible topic of the interactions of music with language, I want to abstract only one theme, the notion that poetry leads towards music, that it passes into music when it attains the maximal intensity of its being. This idea has the evident, powerful implication that music is, in final analysis, superior to language, that it says more and more immediately. The thought of rivalry between poet and musician is antithetical to the origins and full realization of both; it rends Orpheus more decisively than did the women of Thrace. Yet it too has its long, though often subterranean history. We find evidence of it in Plato's argument or the respective functions of poetry and music in education, and in
Patristic beliefs which are at once related to Platonism but different in stress and conclusion, on the irrational daemonic powers of music as contrasted with the rationality and verifiability of the word. In the Johannine beginning is the Word; in the Pythagorean, the accord. The rival claims of singer and speaker, moreover, are a Renaissance topos long before they find comic echo in Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and in Richard Strauss's uses of Molière's and the music-language quarrel in *Ariadne*. The possible blackness of that quarrel, the way in which it may search out and articulate the soul's relationship to God, is at the heart of Mann's *Doktor Faustus*.

"But it is not the contest I want to draw attention to: it is the recurrent acknowledgement by poets, by masters of language, that music is the deeper, more numinous code, that language, when truly apprehended, aspires to the condition of music and is brought, by the genius of the poet, to the threshold of that condition. By a gradual loosening or transcendence of its own forms (Verlaine's *musique avant toute chose*) the poem strives to escape from the linear, denotative, logically determined bonds of linguistic syntax into what the poet takes to be the simultaneities, immanences and free play of musical form. It is
in music that the poet hopes to find the paradox resolved of an act of creation singular to the creator, bearing the shape of his own spirit, yet infinitely renewed in each listener."

Again -

"The word, especially in its sequential, typographic forms, may have been an imperfect, perhaps transitory codes. Music alone can fulfil the two requirements of a truly rigorous communicative or semiological system: to be unique to itself (untranslatable) yet immediately comprehensible. Thus (in defiance, I think, of the specialised conventions of different musical 'languages') argues Levi-Strauss. He characterizes the composer, the inventor of melody, as 'un être paueil aux dieux' even as Homer was characterized by Montaigne. Levi-Strauss sees in music 'Le supreme mystère des sciences de l'homme, celui contre lequel elles butent, et qui grâce la cle de leur progrès'. In music our deafened lives may regain a sense of the inward motion and temperance of individual being, and our societies something of the lost vision of human accord. Through music the arts and exact sciences may reach a common syntax."
With these words in mind if one reads Hopkins's poetry, one will find that while writing poetry the meaning of the words was not Hopkins's chief concern. Hopkins was primarily concerned with the beauty of the words-as-sound. Indeed the elaborate system of notation that Hopkins invented was to throw into prominence the sound of individual words and their relation to each other. He wanted to make new patterns of sounds which it was difficult to achieve in English language. This demanded compression which led to dislocation of normal syntax. For the same purpose Hopkins made such elaborate use of Sprung Rhythm. Emphasis on sound demanded flexibility and density of language which could not be achieved within normal syllabic-stress pattern of English poetry. Hence the strange coinages, the use of compound words, dialect words and occasional use of words from Romance languages (dauphin, minion, etc.) in spite of his preference for words of Anglo-Saxon origin. In short, all considerations of grammar become trifling in comparison with the demand of sound.

Needless to say, Hopkins's elaborate use of devices to enhance the beauty of sound, devices like alliteration, assonance which he called vowelling-on and vowelling-off and Welsh technique of Cynghannedd are directed towards the same goal.
A fresh look at Hopkins's poetry will reveal new beauties. Poems like the *Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo* are of course musically attuned:

How to keep - is there any, is there none such, nowhere known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace latch or catch or key to keep
Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty ... from vanishing away?
O is there no frowning of these wrinkles, ranked wrinkles deep,
Down? no waving off of these most mournful messengers,
still, messengers, sad and stealing messengers of grey? —
No there's none, there's none, O no there's none,
Nor can you long be, what you now are, called fair,
Do what you may do, what, do what you may,
And wisdom is early to despair:
Be beginning; since, no, nothing can be done,
To keep at bay
Age and age's evils, hoar hair,
Ruck and wrinkle, drooping, dying, death's worst, winding sheets, tombs and worms and tumbling to decay,
So be beginning, be beginning to despair.
O there is none; no no no there's none;
Be beginning to despair, to despair,
Despair, despair, despair, despair.
This poem is the most likely to be quoted as an instance of Hopkins' musicality. But all Hopkins's poems without any exception, are exercises in sound-pattern. Let us take another example. The poem has been highly commended by critics for its rich meaning. But let us take a second look at it:

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

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

Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the West, her wild hollow hoarlight hung to the height

Waste: her earliest stars, earlstars stars principal, overbend us,

Fire featuring heaven, For earth her being has unbound; her dapple is at end, as -

tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; self-in-self steeped and pashed - quite

Disremembering, dismembering all now. Heart, you round me right

With : Our evening is over us; our night whelms whelms and will end us.

Only the break-leaved boughs dragonish damask the tool - smooth bleak light; black,

Ever so black or it. Our tale, O our oracle! Let life, waned,
This poem may be very rich in meaning. But that is secondary. What is more important is the intricate pattern of sound that Hopkins builds up bit by bit. The poet's use of assonance in the opening line, his recurrent use of alliteration, his frequent repetition and use of contrasts - all help to build up a mosaic of sound which is unique in English poetry.

Or let us take the poem That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection. This is also a poem of rare beauty. But again over and above the beauty of meaning is the beauty of the words:

Cloud - PUFFBALL, torn tufts, tossed pillows flaunt forth, then chery on an air - built thoroughfare: heaven-royesterers, in gay-gangs they
throng; they glitter in marches.
Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, where ever an
alm arches.
Shivelights and shadowtackle in long lashes, lace, lance, and pair
Delightfully the bright wind boisterous ropes, wrestless, beats earth bare
Of yestertempests' creases; in pool and rutpeel parches
Squandering oozo to squeezed dough, crust, dust; stanches, starches
Squadroned masks and manmarks treadmire toil there
Foot-fretted in it. Million - fueled, nature's bonfire burns on.
But quench her bounniest, dearest to her, her clearest - selve'd spark
Man, how fast his firedint, his mark on mind, is gone!
Both are in an unfathomable, all is an enormous dark
Drowned. O pity and indignation! Manshape, that shone
Sheer off, disseveral, a star; death blots black out; nor mark
Is any of him at all so stark
But vastness blurs and time beats level. Enough! the Resurrection,
A heart's clarion! Away grief's gasping, joyless days, dejection.
Across my foundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam, Flesh fade, and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm; world's wild fire, leave but ash:
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal
diamond,
Is immortal diamond.

There is, of course, a core of meaning in this poem. But what overwhelm us, is the sheet witchery of language, the patterned sequence of sound.

Not one or two poems, but the whole body of Hopkins's mature verse is constructed to prove this point— that verse could be constructed independent of meaning, that beauty of sound itself could be the end of poetry.

Although the majority of critics have overlooked this important aspect of Hopkins's poetry, there are a few who have discerned it. Among them is J. Hillis-Miller. Hillis-Miller believes that Hopkins' poetry is at once self-expression, the inscape of words, and the imitation of nature! And goes on to say,

"To initiate natural things is to express the self, for are not all natural things created in the image of man, since man too is in the image of Christ? To express the
self is to imitate nature, for the best means of self-
expression is those exterior things which so naturally
and delightfully mirror the self to express the inscape
of the self in terms of the inscapes of nature is also to
express the inscape of words. Christ is himself the Word,
the origin of all language. He is what "Heaven and earth
are word of, worded by. The inscape of nature flow from
Christ the Word, and the inscapes of language flow from
the same source. There is a natural harmony between the
words and their meanings, and a poet seeking to express
the harmonics of one will naturally express the harmonics
of the other. Far from being the place where we are forced
to confront the unbridgeable gulfs between world, words and
self, poetry is the medium through which man may best express
the harmonious chiming of all thee in Christ."23

We do not share the whole of Miller's theory about
Hopkins's poetry and for obvious reasons. But Hillis-Miller is
one of the few critics who have tried to travel off the beaten
track. Upto a certain extent, Hillis-Miller believes Hopkins
poetry to be sound-patterns which can be enjoyed independent of
meaning. Thus he writes,

"Poetry is not distinguished from other uses of words by
its intensity or complexity of meaning. The meaning is
there only there as a necessary support, for the pattern.
The design of a piece of verse would be first visible, perhaps more visible, to someone who did not know the language in which it was written. Such a person would be better able to recognise the precise sound-shape of the words. The inscape is this shape of sound .... As in music the inscape is generic form which recurs in varied forms throughout the composition, so the inscape of verse is a pattern of sound which may be repeated in different specifications in order to detach it from its particular manifestation. The basic method of poetry as of music is repetition, the repetition of different forms of the same inscape."24

Again,

"What is important in poetry is neither the expression of the inner self of the poet, as some romantic poets had thought, nor the imitation of something in the external world, as Aristotle had said. Poetry, like music, is an autonomous art. Music makes patterns of sequences of tones. Poetry makes patterns of sequences of words. The notes in a piece of music tell us nothing about the external world, and the meaning of a word in poetry is also part of its substance, no more related to the outside world than its sound."25
The other critic who, to our mind, has grasped the true nature of Hopkins's poetry in Donald McChesney. McChesney looks upon Hopkins's poetry as 'inscapes in language' and he also recognises that in Hopkins's poetry meaning is secondary and the 'soundscape' can be enjoyed for its own sake. Writes McChesney:

"In his poetry, he is not merely trying to reproduce in language his particular 'inscaped' vision of nature; he is also trying to produce inscapes or patterns of speech-sound which can be contemplated for their own sake. To use an analogy, it is as if a craftsman in wood, not content with carrying an object, also endeavoured to bring out and even to create the arabesques and patterns inherent in the very grain of the wood."26

McChesney quotes a few lines from Hopkins's Heraclitean sonnet and remarks:

"The following passage, for instance, basically describes the restless energies of cloud and sunlight on a windy day. The clouds swirls down the heavens their shadows races across the sides of the buildings and the glancing sunlight flashes in shafts through the foliage of the elm trees .... The passage, is, of course, from the 'Heraclitean Fire' sonnet."
Its raison d'etre however, does not lie in its descriptive merits, although it adequately describes and even enacts the 'million-fueled bonfire' of nature. Over and above its merits as communication, it is also an intricately patterned piece of language; language raised to an ecstatic pitch, the same kind of ecstasy as one might find on an intricately convoluted piece of carving. It is there for its own sake - or perhaps for the sheer glory of God. Some critics, especially earlier ones, have strained at a gnat to over-praise Hopkins for descriptive power or onomatopoeic skill. True he possesses both, but his use of language goes far beyond such mere utilitarian function, and his poetic purposes stretch beyond these into the realm of pure 'play', pure pattern, pure energy of spirit."