CHAPTER VI

OTHER POETIC DEVICES AND ARTEFACTS
Some of the grammatical peculiarities of Hopkins's poetic style have been considered in detail earlier. The distinctive features of his lexis and imagery have also been discussed. The present chapter proposes to consider briefly Hopkins's use of certain other poetic devices and artifacts which he thought essential for a forceful self-expression.

Hopkins was more interested in technical questions of rhythm, meter and form than in questions of content. He defined poetry as "speech framed for contemplation of the mind by the way of hearing or speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning." The most striking peculiarities of his verse are his ways of attaining the utmost refinement of inscape. Sprung Rhythm, internal rhyme, consonant chiming, alliteration, assonance

---

1 House and Storey (eds.), Journals and Papers, p. 289.
and consonance are some of the chief devices employed by him to add the highest possible degree of "brilliancy, starriness, quain, margaretting" to the texture of his poetry.²

Hopkins considered poetry an autonomous art like music. Music makes patterns of sequences of tones, and poetry makes patterns of sequences of words.³ He pointed out similarity between music painting and poetry. Pattern is the common ingredient in all the three forms of art. Hopkins laid great stress on the need of pattern in poetry. He wrote:

As air, melody is what strikes most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern and what I am in the habit of calling 'inscape' is what I above all aim at in poetry.⁴

In Hopkins's poetry there is nothing flaccid or lax, no blurring or smudging of the pattern, but each part of the poem is wound up to an intense

² House and Storey (eds.), Journals and Papers, p. 290.
³ Hartman (ed.), Hopkins, p. 93.
⁴ Abbott (ed.), Correspondence with Bridges, p. 66.
stress or pitch of distinctiveness. He aimed at comprehensibility for attaining a strongly marked pattern.

Hopkins wanted to produce music through words, for which he had to constantly elaborate and master certain technical devices. Melody, harmony and counterpoint are important aspects of his poetry, which were used not merely for musical effects but also for expressing the complexities of feeling and difficult and urgent states of mind. Hopkins argued that to express a subtle and recondite thought on a subtle and recondite matter, a subtle and recondite mode of expression was required. 5

The 'new rhythm' which the poet invented, is not merely Sprung Rhythm as such, for it is simply a matter of timing, of the stressed and slack syllables. It is, in effect, a total complex of style, in which the natural strong beat of the freer kinds of accentual verse is reinforced

5 Abbott (ed.), Correspondence with Bridges, p. 69.
by alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme and half-rhyme. These devices are used not casually but with a deliberate sense of design, so that the whole pattern and texture of his poetry echoes and fetches out the interior movement of thought and emotion. His strength lies in the fact that he brought poetry much closer to living speech, but persons like Bridges and Dixon, despite their interest in him, failed to appreciate his poetry properly and termed his technical experiments as 'artistic wantonness'. What Bridges called 'blemishes' were, in fact, essential to Hopkins's aim and achievement. Hopkins himself confessed in one of his letters:

"No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness... it is the virtue of design, pattern or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped."

"The Wreck of the Deutschland" was the poet's first ambitions experiment. It is

6 Williams (ed.), The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 96.
7 Abbott (ed.), Correspondence to Bridges, p. 69.
particularly interesting because in it his technical resources are deployed at great length. Far from being a mere 'metrical experiment', this ode is unique in showing the maximum of rhythmic flexibility within a fixed stanzaic form. Uninitiated readers are most likely to find Hopkins's poetry strange at first sight. But the "obscuring novelty of [his] mode", as Patmore calls it, "is no serious obstacle if we keep our mind fixed on the core of thought and emotion".  

Hopkins's unique command over rhythm, which is at once flexible and also strictly disciplined, is illustrated by his handling of the Italian sonnet form, an instrument with the help of which he could evoke a music of constantly varying tones and harmonic ranges, in accordance with the needs of mood, emotion and theme. His dramatic sonnets are profound in idea. The octet of his sonnets consists of the presentation, and the sestet offers an interpretation or antithesis or new development.

---

Hopkins follows the Petrarchan form of the sonnet. It has the rhyme scheme abbaabba, cdcdcd. This is a taxing form, since one is allowed only four rhyme sounds in fourteen lines. Furthermore, there are strict structural divisions, which Hopkins usually chooses to observe. His fourteen lines consist of an octet and a sestet, which are traditionally separated by a full stop and often by a gap on the page. He runs on from octet to sestet in only three sonnets, and even there the thought always changes, in the eighth or ninth line. He considered the octet as two quatrains to be firmly end-stopped and the sestet as two tercets. Thus the basic form of Hopkins's sonnets is 4 + 4; 3 + 3. It is strictly observed in eleven sonnets. There are, however, quite a number of variations in sonnets like "Pied Beauty", and "Peace", each of which has eleven lines divided into six and four-and-a-half (as Hopkins puts it). This is a new invention, which he called a 'Curtal sonnet', because it was shortened and curtailed. 9

Hopkins also made use of additions which he called 'cudas'. The word is from classical music and means tail-piece. These technical inventions in his sonnets might have been necessitated by the poet's feeling that the traditional fourteen-line structure gave him too little space.

One of Hopkins's letters to Dixon explains why he chose the Italian form of the sonnet. He wrote:

The Shakespearean sonnet is a very beautiful and effective species of composition in the kind. But then though simpler it is strict, regular and specific as the sonnet proper. Moreover it has the division into the two parts, eight and six (8+6) at all events, 4 + 4 + 4 + 2. Now it seems to me that this division is the real characteristics of the sonnet and that what is not so marked off and moreover has not the octet again divided into quatrains is not to be called a sonnet at all. The equation of the best sonnet is (4 + 4) + (3 + 3). 10

Abbott (ed.), Correspondence with Dixon, p. 84.
Hopkins also tried to find out the reason why the sonnet was not very effective in England as it was in Italy. He felt that in the form of any work of art the intrinsic measurement and the proportions of the parts to one another and to the whole, were the principal points. The Italian sonnet, he held, was successful because its proportions, inward and outward, was near perfection. English sonnet, being shorter, appears likely to be unsuccessful for want not of comparative but of absolute length. The English sonnet is, in comparison with Italian sonnet, short, light, tripping and trifling. This has been instinctively felt by many poets, and the best sonnets show various devices successfully employed to make up for the short coming. Talking about his own sonnets, Hopkins wrote:

I myself sometimes employ ostriding feet, for they more than equal the Italian elisions and make the whole sonnet rather longer than the Italian
Hopkins used various poetic devices to express what his eyes saw and heart felt. His main innovation in this context was his practice and theory of Sprung Rhythm, Counterpoint Rhythm, and Logaoedic Rhythm. Technically, Hopkins was both an innovator and a restorer in both rhythm and language. The total effect looked like one of revolutionary innovation, but most of the single features were a recovery of older practices.

Hopkins's sprung Rhythm, as he called it, went away from the syllabic foot back to the stress rhythm of the earliest English poetry before the Norman Conquest. He brought his rhythm closer to that of ordinary speech. This feature in the twenties and later was regarded as a touch stone of good poetry by most critics.

---

11 Abbott (ed.), Correspondence with Dixon, p. 84.
It was not merely dissatisfaction with the rhythm of the poetry of his day that drove Hopkins to explore other possibilities. Sprung Rhythm was a natural result of his theory of inscape as the aim and end of poetry. Hopkins explained to Bridges why he used Sprung Rhythm, in one of his letters to him:

Why do I employ Sprung Rhythm? Because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic, of all possible rhythms.12

The sprung rhythm gave him infinitely greater flexibility than syllabic meter would have ever done. Sprung Rhythm itself brought about the essential qualities he wanted his poetry to possess. He once wrote to his brother Everard:

Sprung rhythm gives back to poetry its true soul and self. As poetry is emphatically speech, speech purged of dross like gold in the furnace, so it must have emphatically the essential elements of speech.

12 Abbott (ed.), Correspondence with Bridges, p. 84.
Now emphasis itself, stress is, one of these: Sprung rhythm makes verse stressy.13

Explaining the principle of Sprung Rhythm to Dixon, he remarked: "To speak of a new rhythm shortly it consists of scanning by accents or stresses alone, without any account of the number of syllables so that a foot may be many light and one strong".14 In the Author's Preface to The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, he has explained, in details, the nature of Sprung Rhythm. According to him, Sprung Rhythm is measured by feet of, from one to four syllables, regularly, and for particular effects any number of weak or slack syllables may be used. It has one stress, which falls on the only syllable, or, if there are more, then scanning on the first gives rise to four sorts of feet, a monosyllable and the so-called accentual Trochee, Dactyl and the First Paeon. And there will be four corresponding natural rhythms. Namely, the

13 Quoted in Graham Storey, A Preface to Hopkins, p. 70.
14 Abbott (ed.), Correspondence with Dixon, p. 15.
feet are mixed and any one may follow any other. Sprung rhythm differs from Running Rhythm in having only one nominal rhythm, a mixed or "logocedic" one, instead of three. It has, however, twice the flexibility of foot, so that any two stresses may either follow one another running or be divided by one, two or three slack syllables; e.g.

\[2\]

Woe, world sorrow; on an age old anvil

wince and sing—15.

Yvor Winters writes that he is "acquainted with no poet save Hopkins who has used a sprung foot of three syllables, but the sprung foot of two syllables, employed as a variation on standard English meter, is fairly common in the sixteenth century". 16 Hopkins confessed that the new rhythm in which he wrote was not altogether new. He confided:

I do not say the idea is altogether new; there are hints of it in music, in nursery rhymes and popular

15 "No worst there is none", Poems, p. 100.
16 The Function of Criticism, p. 111
jingles, in the poet's themselves.
Here are instances...

'Ding dong bell, Pussy in the well.'

If each line has three stresses
or three feet it follows that
some of the feet are of one
syllable only, so too

"One two Buckle my shoe"
passim etc. But no one has
professedly used it and made
it the principle throughout,
that I know of. Nevertheless
to me it appears I own to be
a better and more natural
principle than the ordinary
system, much more flexible
and capable of much greater
effects.

...I have written some
sonnets and a few other little
things; some in sprung rhythm
with various other experiments—as 'outriding feet', that is
points of which do not count
in the scanning (such as one
finds in Shakespeare's later
plays, but as a licence,
whereas mine are rather
calculated effects) others in
the ordinary scanning counter
pointed, others one or two in
common uncounterpointed rhythm.17

The nearness of sprung rhythm to the rhythms
of speech shows Hopkins's genius for finding the
way to the maximum sound-impact of words in poetry.

17 Abbott (ed.), Correspondence with Dixon, p. 92.
It also gave him the sense of freedom that is an integral, perhaps, ultimately, the most exciting element in his poems.

The other devices which Hopkins used in his poetry to bring in variety, freshness and effectiveness are: 'counterpoint' lines, 'rope-over'; 'hangers' or 'outrides', and various 'rests' or 'pauses'.

Hopkins considered Milton a great master in the use of counterpoint rhythm. In his Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained Milton had employed counterpoint more or less everywhere, and the Choruses of Samson Agonistes are counterpointed throughout. Poets have from time to time brought in licences or departures from fixed rules to give variety especially when the natural rhythm is rising, as in common ten-syllable or five-foot verse, rhymed or blank. These irregularities are chiefly Reversed Feet and Reversed or Counterpoint Rhythm. By reversed foot Hopkins means putting the stress where the slack should be and slack where the stress should
be. The following example will illustrate the point:

More pangs will schooled at fore
pangs wilder wring. 18

Yvor Winters writes that the first two feet are reversed; the reversal is unusual and is the first indication of the violence to follow. 19 The reversal is done freely at the beginning of a line and in the course of a line after a pause; only scarcely ever in the second foot or place and never in the last, unless the poet designs some extraordinary effect. This seems to be so, for these places are characteristic and sensitive and cannot be touched. Hopkins observed:

...the reversal of the first foot and of some middle foot after a strong pause is a thing so natural that our poets have generally done it, from Chaucer down, without remark and it commonly passes unnoticed and cannot be said to amount to a formal change of rhythm, but rather is that irregularity which all natural growth and motion shews. If however the reversal is

18 "No worst there is none", Poems, 18.
19 Function of Criticism, p. 110.
repeated in two feet running, especially so as to include the sensitive second foot, it must be due either to great want of ear or else is a calculated effect, the superinducing or mounting of a new rhythm upon the old, and since the new or mounted rhythm is actually heard and at the same time the mind naturally supplies the natural or standard foregoing rhythm, for we do not forget what the rhythm is, that by rights we should be hearing, two rhythms are in some manner running at once and we have something answerable to counterpoint in music, which is two or more strains of tune going on together and this is Counterpoint Rhythm.20

Hopkins has used counterpoint rhythm very profusely in his poems not merely as a variation but with great deliberation. 'Hangers' or 'outriders' are one, two or three slack syllables added to a foot, which are not counted in the nominal scanning. They are so called because they seem to hang below the line or ride forward or backward from it in another dimension than the line itself. Outrider are used in plentiful in Hopkins's poetry.

---

20 Poems, p. 46.
A line is said by Hopkins to be 'rove over' if its scansion is counted as continuing into the next line, from which it may borrow some slack syllables. For Hopkins, scanning runs on without break from the beginning of a stanza to the end and all the stanza as one long strain; e.g.

Then lull then leave off, Fury had shrieked no ling 
ering: Let me be fell force I must be brief; 21

In the above citation the first line is simple except for the termination in mid-word, a procedure justified by Hopkins's theory and successful use of 'rove-over' rhythm. Milton's poetry happened to have provided precedence of this practice as well.

Hopkins's skilful handling of enjambement is worth noticing. Enjambement is the running of syntax over from one line into the next, without

21 "No worst there is none", Poems, p. 100.
punctuation. His use of enjambment forces him to take unprecedented liberty with the normal patterns. Sometimes phrases are broken between lines when no earlier poet would have broken them at all. Hopkins considered stanza as a continuous unit, and the same is true of each section of the sonnet. This accounts for his startling enjambments used by him to make the lines distinctive.

Not only enjambment but his use of pause and continuity is also distinctive. The variety is brought about not only by the effective use of enjambment but by the positioning of the 'caesura' and other pauses. Caesura is the natural pause which is held to exist in any verse-line except the shortest, though it is frequently so light as to be unnoticed. In most verse it occurs about in the middle of the line, though its position is flexible. In Hopkins's poems it may occur anywhere, with surprising results; e.g.

My own heart let me more have pity on; let ...

22 "My own heart", Poems, p. 102.
Crushed. \ Why do men then now
not reck his rod ?

Often there are secondary pauses, as in the
last three lines of "The Windhover":

No wonder of it // sheer plod makes
plough down sillion

Shine, // and blue-bleak embers, ah

my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash
gold-vermillion.

Sometimes the caesura or pause is of unusual
violence, coming upon a full stop after a stressed
monosyllable; e.g.

Crushed. // Why do men then now not
reck his rod ?

Or it may come at a turning point in the poem.
Then it may be called hiatus, meaning a break in
continuity, a real gap; e.g.

Surf, snow, river and earth
Crashed: // but thou art above, thou
Orion of light; ...

23 "God's Grandeur", Poems, p. 66.
In "Spelt from Sybil's Leaves" there are eight stresses to a line, and a 'rest' (i.e., as in music, a place where words would normally be, but there is silence instead) of one stress in the first:

earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, vaulty, voluminous ...

Supercilious 28

The existence of a pause in a line is not in itself either a merit or a weakness. The strength of Hopkins's verse, in addition to its rhythmic freedom, is its variety. In the following example:

Sister, a sister calling
A master, her master and mine!
And the inboard seas run swirling
And hawling;
The rash smart slobbering brine
Blinds her, ... 29

the first two lines have an exciting but easy swing to them, epigram approaches jingle, and the enjambement 'calling A master', makes the lines more distinctive. Jingle is dispelled by the

---

successive stresses of 'rash smart slogging brine' and they carry over into the emphasized verb 'Blinds her', with strong early caesura following them. This is violent, not easy, and the lines continue with urgent repetition, supported by the punctuation; e.g.

but she that weather sees one thing, one;
Has one fetch in her ... 30

Similar excitement is generated by the punctuation and the enjambement in the following lines of "The Windhover":

Brute beauty and valour and act,
    oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! 31

Hopkins considered rhetoric to be the most important element of good poetry. By rhetoric he meant all the "common teachable elements in literature". He had been studying Welsh poetry and picked up its devices and rules known as cynghanedd. He is, in fact, the first English

poet to use them so extensively and successfully in his poetry. Scarcely ever is the sense forced for the sake of the word - pattern, and many times the relationship between key words is made clear by the bonds of sound or the balance of paradox accentuated by the poise of the line. It is therefore essential to pay due attention to the sounds and sound-patterns of Hopkins's poetry.

Hopkins makes use of alliteration, assonance and rime not merely as a musical trick but also to increase the expectancy involved in rhythm and change its direction to control movement, to give words new associations and bring diverse ideas and emotions together, to intensify the sense of inevitability. Thus these devices enable him to give new, precise and complex responses out of words; e.g.

Is out with it! oh,
We lash with the best or worst
Word last! - How a lush-kept plush capped sloe
Will, mouthed to flesh burst,
Gush I! flush the man, the being with it,
sour or sweet,
Brim, in a flash, full! - Either then,
last or first.
To hero of Calvary, Christ's feet -
Never ask if meaning it, wanting it,
warned of it - men go. 32

Leavis is of the opinion that, "it would be
difficult to produce a more elaborate pattern of
alliteration echo, assonance and internal rime,
but we do not feel of any element (except perhaps
"lush-kept plush capped") that it is there for the
sake of pattern." The poet by a kind of verbal
suggestion in 'lush-kept plush capped' has been
able to evoke a kind of mystical identification
which the passage suggests. It is interesting
to note how the words stressed by the pattern
justify their salience:

    Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the
    west, her wild hollow hoarlight
    hung to the height.
    Disremembering, dismembering all now. Heart
    you round
    me right. 33

Hopkins employed alliteration with a special power
to shock the reader into deeper attention by

binding together of unexpected words by this device. Alliteration, so largely present in his poems, comes out to be significant specially if it is compared with that of another notable Victorian poet Swinburne. It is, of course, prevalent in all poets but it is generally unintentionally disguised. But no poet has employed it more than Hopkins and Swinburne. The most astonishing thing about Swinburne is not its presence but its uselessness and the remarkable thing about Hopkins is not its presence but its usefulness. With the help of exact verbal repetition he is able to 'orchestrate' his poetry by bringing\(^34\) into play the devices like alliteration, consonance and assonance:

My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled
Quelled or quenched in leaves
    the leaping sun,
All felled, felled, are all felled.\(^35\)

\(^{35}\) "Sinsey Poplars", *Poems*, p. 78.
Hopkins's originality, as we have seen, was radical and uncompromising. His prosodic experiments in terms of Logaoedic Rhythm, Counterpoint Rhythm, Sprung Rhythm, Rocking Feet and Outriders indicate the genuiness of his originality. His syntactic inversions, ellipses, far-stepping parentheses and violent packing of words into unexpected places are devices which, were deliberately used by the poet, without which he would have failed in communicating his ideas and feelings effectively.