CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION
Hopkins was one of the most remarkable poets of the Victorian age. His importance as a poet underlies the fact that he revolutionised poetic language. He brought in freshness, variety and energy into poetry which the Victorian period lacked considerably. Hopkins's stature must be gauzed by the "intensity of the artistic process, by the quality rather than the quantity of his work."\(^1\) His remarkable rhythmic skill, his superb gift of image-making, his skilful handling of words, his total absence of literary decorum and his use of current language have made his poetry really outstanding.

Hopkins belonged to the 'aesthetic period', which was dominated by the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake. At that time problems of form came to assume an extraordinary significance. During his early days when he was at Oxford, Hopkins was much influenced by the aesthetic theories of Walter Pater. In his early essay "On the Origin of Beauty" we find the reflections of Pater's teachings.

\(^1\) Quoted in Gardner and Mackenzie, *Poems*, p. xxxiv.
The dialogue insists particularly on the beauty and importance of symmetry and asymmetry both in nature and art, acknowledging the validity of both kinds of pattern, symmetrical and asymmetrical, as the basis of beauty.

Hopkins says that there are two kinds of beauty, diatonic and chromatic. The first is characterized by parallelism in all its forms, while the other includes, when applied to poetry, emphasis, expression, tone, intensity, climax and so on. This distinction is very crucial, for Hopkins has, in this way contrasted the fundamental features of two kinds of artistic expression. The first kind dominated part of the nineteenth century, while the other insisted upon a sort of undulating lines of development representing graphically variations and hesitations of feelings and emotions. What Hopkins called chromatic beauty, is that of an art expressing with the utmost intensity and closeness the intellectual

reactions to sensations and emotions. He made it clear that the accepted Victorian standards of formal balance, emotional restraint, and material solidity were not the only canons by which a work of art could be created and judged. He put, on the same plane, the other kind of beauty—irregular, unrestrained, and at the same time subtler and more elaborate. This was the reason why he preferred chromatic beauty to diatonic beauty in his own poems.

Hopkins poems are not premeditatedly worked out; they are written under the stress of inspiration. He disapproved Tennyson's practice as a poet for composing poems in the Parnassian style. Much of the latter's poetry was written not necessarily under the stress of inspiration. For Hopkins's attempts at the destruction of Parnassian style could be successful by an extroversion of language that pushes verbal matter into foreground. As colour for nineteenth century painters was no longer a ground. (which carries on its function unobtrusively as part of
the subject), similarly; words come forward in Hopkins's poetry to reclaim what he called 'inscape'. They mimic, they paint and participate in arguments. They have the power to move, persuade and possess the inscape of the poet's vision.

Hopkins's poetry revived the pointed style in lyric. He was able to produce intrinsic music in poetry. The words in his poetry play their own "music within the orchestration of the poem"; but they are there not merely for superficial poetic effects. Words exist in his poems to convey the meaning and the intense experience of the poet. For this reason they are simple words of everyday speech. Hopkins was of the opinion that language of poetry should be the language of the age but it should be heightened for poetic effects and appropriate communication. Hopkins brought about unprecedented innovations in the language of poetry. It is obvious from

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his poems that he took words and expressions from the everyday language and also made use of constructions, including repetitions and interrupting clauses, characteristic of the spoken language. The licenses which he brought into the linguistic and syntactic features of poetry with their poetical elaborations, have made his poetic style most distinguished. As for his other characteristics, his striking compound words, alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, etc., have proved him to be a genuine and highly original artist.

Most of the characteristics of Hopkins's verse originate from his views on poetry. His theory of poetry is based in turn on his philosophy of 'inscape' and 'instress'. For him, "Poetry is in fact speech only employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscapes sake and therefore the inscape must be dwelt on".\(^4\) Inscape he considered to be the 'soul of art'.\(^5\)

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4 House and Storey (eds.), *Journals and Papers*, p. 289.
5 Abbott (ed.), *Correspondence with Bridges*, p. 135.
habitually looked at objects with fixed
determination to catch what was distinctive in
them, in order to arrive at some insight into
their essence as individuals. This individualizing
characteristic he called 'inscape' and the
excitement exerted from these patterns on us, was
called by Hopkins as 'instress'. He appreciated
inscape so highly because in perceiving it he
knew the individual well; and the better he knew
the object, more worthy it became of his personal
love and attention.

Hopkins stressed the need for originality
and individuality in poetry. Unlike his predecessors,
he was against the use of poetic diction. His
poems show a deliberate use of colloquial
expressions and in his subject matter he wanted
to be as down to the earth as possible. The poet
in whatever he creates brings individuality into
play, by means of which parts of a poem are
particularized. He criticised poets who failed
to project their individuality through their
poems. His desire to individualize and inscape
each part of a poem is quite compatible with his idea of the design or shape that a poem should have. His idea of impressing individuality on each part of poem is certainly novel.

Hopkins advocated the need of rhetoric in poetry. He even identified poetry with rhetoric. By rhetoric he meant all the teachable elements in literature. He frankly opined that the lack of rhetoric be considered as 'the universal fault of our literature'.

Hopkins was well read in Greek and Welsh literatures and from there he learnt and perfected many poetic devices which he used very effectively in his own poems.

Hopkins’s syntax is the most significant aspect of his poetry. His attitude appears to have been that rules must always come second to rhythmic or assonantal effects. To make his lines firmer and denser, he ruthlessly omitted less important words like the auxiliaries and relative
pronouns.

Hopkins's main innovations are in terms of sprung rhythm, counterpoint rhythm, rocking feet, outriders, and his various effective uses of pause and continuity. In fact, what has been thought of as innovations are basically the re-discovery of older practices. There are ample examples of Sprung Rhythm, Counterpoint rhythm employed by poets of the sixteenth century but no one had made them a principle throughout. It is because of this reason that Hopkins has been rightly called an innovator and restorer in rhythm and language. 6

A major source of strangeness in Hopkins's poetry may be found in his vocabulary. No true poet hesitates to invent words when his sensibility finds no satisfaction in current words and phrases. Most of Hopkins's innovations are in the nature of new combinations of existing words and contracted similes or metaphors. In this respect his vocabulary has a surface similarity to that of

6 F.R. Leavis, Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 36.
James Joyce. Hopkins was deeply interested in the English words. His choice of words is so apt that they vividly project before the eye the very image of the object he is trying to portray. Hopkins himself maintained:

You must know that words like chain and enchantment will not do, the thought is of beauty as of something that can be physically kept and lost, and by physical things only—like keys, then the things must come from the mundus muliebris and thirdly they must not be markedly old fashioned. You will see that this limits the choice of words very much indeed. 7

Hopkins always preferred the concrete to abstract and active to static words. Hopkins was convicted of affectation in metaphor, perversion of human feeling, exaggerated maxims, purely artistic wantonness, definite faults of style, incredible childishness in rhyming—at times disagreeable and vulgar and even comic,—and generally of deliberate and unnecessary obscurity. Herbert Read is of the opinion that we should remember that "Hopkins was

7 Abbott, Further Letters, p. 201.
a revolutionary and his values were so fundamentally opposed to current practices that only by an effort of imagination could they be comprehended. Once they are comprehended, many apparent faults are justified."  

Hopkins's poetic creativity can be divided into three phases. The early Hopkins is lively, energetic and full of exuberant expressions. The poet is easily thrown into rapturous ecstasy on viewing Nature, as is evident from his poems like "A Vision of the Mermaids". The early diaries, sketch books, letters and poems of the years 1862-66 all testify to his love of nature, his gift for friendship, his range of interests and above all the earnestness of his character. His zest for poetic expression lured him to ever new and, almost always unfinished literary enterprises—monologue, lyric, pastorals, plays. In poetry as in religion he was seeking the "authentic cadence". His inability to complete literary projects dogged him to the end.

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The middle period of Hopkins' poetic career opens with the Deutschland Ode and closes with "Tom's Garland" and "Harry Ploughman". This period is essentially the period of his experimentation and it represents a natural healthy development in his poetic art. He innovated and perfected his poetic style. As Bridges remarks, "The labour spent on his metrical experiments has served to establish the poet's prosody and diction".  

During the later phase, however, Hopkins was always under the pressure of his personal anguish, which resulted in his later sonnets. They convey the very realisation of frustration and failure. The later sonnets lack his characteristic: "The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation". These sonnets are the poet's cries of anguish from a far deeper level of consciousness. Lacking the stimulus of a wide audience, Hopkins was sustained in his poetic activity by his literary correspondence with Bridges. The partial inhibition of strong creative

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instinct was, no doubt, one of the immediate causes of his neurosis. He declared that the want of fame as a poet was not one of the many mortifications to which the life he led was exposed. He admitted that fame was a 'spur very hard to find a substitute for, or to do without'. He also confessed:

"Unhappily I cannot produce anything at all".

He had made verse-writing so laborious that he was loath to embark on it with a jaded mind. In spite of the "terrible pathos" which these sonnets represent, Hopkins's poetry, as a whole, gives the impression of strength, a strength which is often refined to delicacy. His later sonnets aim at 'a more Miltonic plainness'. They certainly represent a natural development in his poetic art and in some-way they are his crowning achievement.

Certain representative poems from all the three phases of Hopkins's poetic creativity were stylistically analysed. A stylistic analysis of his poems reveals certain significant patterns in respect of average sentence length, average word

10 Abbott (ed.), Correspondence with Bridges, p. 231.
length and distribution of word classes. The sentence structure is of complex nature in the first phase of his poetic creativity, which is simplified later on. The longest sentence in his poem is of sixtytwo words and the shortest sentence is of four words, as is evident from Table 1. The poet prefers monosyllabic words (78%) to disyllabic (15.72%) or trisyllabic words (3.97%). He uses far more nouns (39.62%) than verbs (9.97%). The poet has more inclination for abstract nouns. He is in the habit of freely converting verbs into nouns and nouns into verbs as in: 'the achieve of, the mastery of the thing', 'Let him easter on us'. Adverbs are very few (2.42%) and in some poems they are almost totally absent. There are numerous adjectives (21.30%) and adjective phrases in his poems. With the help of various adjectives and their combinations the poet has been able to bring novelty and liveliness to his language. R.S. Thomas, himself a poet of considerable excellence, says: "The true test of a poet is to be seen in his use of adjectives."

Adjectives provide a lot of freedom for arrangement and rearrangement in a poem. Hopkins does not make much use of conjunctions in his poems; he usually places facts side by side making use of reading signs like the colons and dashes. Various features of Hopkins's poetic style are given in Table 1-3.

To conclude, Hopkins's poetry is nothing if not intellectually tempered, virile, masculine, the "terrible crystal", the very opposite of all that is sentimental and indulgent. Diction, rhythm, meter were fully emancipated from formal artifice, and the poet was free to act creatively under laws of his own origination. His poetry was not always understood, for it cast off tyranny of obsolete laws. His poetic genius is now being slowly comprehended and he is now being accepted as a great master of poetic style.
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<th>S2</th>
<th>S3</th>
<th>S4</th>
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| Grand Total | 918 |

The following samples were chosen for analysis:

A = "Spring and Death"  | B = "Habit of Perfection"
C = "God's Grandeur"    | D = "The Loss of the Eurydice"
E = "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire"  
F = "I wake and feel the fall of dark". 
Table 2: Average Word Length

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<th>Phase</th>
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<th>Trisyllabic words</th>
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<td>1125 (78.35%)</td>
<td>226 (15.72%)</td>
<td>57 (3.97%)</td>
<td>29 (2.01%)</td>
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A = "Spring and Death"  B = "Habit of Perfection"  C = "God's Grandeur"
D = "The Loss of the Eurydice"  E = "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire"
F = "I wake and feel the fell of Dark".
Table 3: Distribution of word classes

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<th>Verb</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
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A = "Spring and Death"  B = "Habit of Perfection"  C = "God's Grandeur"
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