CHAPTER III

THE GRAMMAR OF HOPKINS'S STYLE
Every poet has his own individual way of expressing his experiences and thoughts, which is known as his style.\(^1\) Hopkins's style is as vocative as possible. This fact is responsible for his effects of sound, grammar, figures of speech, and so on. While forwarding his Deutschland Ode to Robert Bridges, he asked the latter to pay adequate attention to the inherent qualities of the poem. He wrote:

> You must not slovenly read it with the eye but with your ear, as if the paper were itself declaiming it at you ... Stress is the life of it. \(^2\)

It is this stress and strain that Hopkins tried to make his poetic language as effective as he could. His efforts were so successful that it has been rightly affirmed that he revolutionized poetic style.\(^3\)

---

2  Abbott (ed.), *Correspondence with Bridges*, p. 72.
3  Hartman (ed.), *Hopkins*, p. 7.
Bridges, however, was highly critical of Hopkins' daring innovations in language and his poetic style. He wrote:

Apart, I say, from such faults of taste ["occasional affectation in metaphor", "perverted Marianism", etc.] which few as they numerically are yet affect my liking and more repel my sympathy than do all the rude shocks of his purely artistic wantoness - apart from these there are definite faults of style which a reader must have courage to face, and must in some measure condone before he can discover the great beauties. For these blemishes in the poet's style are of such quality and magnitude as to deny him even a hearing from those who love a continuous literary decorum and are grown to be intolerant of its absence. And it is well to be clear that there is no pretence to reverse the condemnation of those faults, for which the poet has duly suffered. The extravagances are and will remain what they were. Nor can credit be gained from pointing them out: yet, to put readers at their ease, I will here define them: they may be called oddity and obscurity. 4

Hopkins aimed at getting out of his words as much as possible unhampered by the rules of grammar, syntax and common usage. 5 These rules

5 Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry, p. 162.
were considered by Bridges and others as 'ends in themselves'. Bridges complained that in Hopkins one often has to determine the grammar by the meaning, "whereas the grammar should expose and enforce the meaning, not have to be determined by the meaning".  

Hopkins's syntax is the most significant aspect of his poetry. However, it is also the one which causes most difficulty. His attitude appears to have been that rules must always come second to rhythmic or assonantal effects and that important words such as auxiliaries and relative pronouns could often be omitted to make a line firmer and denser. Most of his oddities are, in fact, re-orderings or omissions, the result often being his coinage of new verbs, nouns and adjectives.

Hopkins's poetic language represents his superb refurbishing and regrouping of diverse elements in a richly composite and flexible idiom, which go to make it, as Hopkins himself says, 'all new beautiful to individuation'.

6 Williams (ed.), The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 96.
His power of forcibly and delicately giving the essence of things in nature owed much to his intense feeling for words and their arrangements. Commenting on Hopkins's poetic language, Leavis remarks:

Hopkins had keen interest in the English language as a living thing. He exploited the resources and potentialities of the language to the full. Hopkins belongs with Shakespeare, Donne, Eliot and later Yeats, as opposed to Spenser, Milton and Tennyson. He departs very widely from current idiom (as Shakespeare did) but nevertheless current idiom is, as it were, the presiding spirit in his dialect, and he uses his medium not as a literary but as a spoken one ... 8

The word-order in Hopkins's poetry is highly distinctive. He preferred concrete to abstract and active to static words. With a Shakespearean boldness, he attempted to increase the sense of dynamic reality by using the bare verb as a noun or the noun with verbal force; e.g.

'the achieve of, the mastery of the thing' 9

8 New Bearings in English Poetry, p. 164.
'with dare and with dowlphinry.\textsuperscript{10}

'Let him easter on us.'\textsuperscript{11}

With subtle expressiveness he uses a verb once or perhaps twice in the same line to convey two slightly different meanings, one material and the other moral:

'birds build - but not I build.'\textsuperscript{12}

These and such other poetic qualities make the poetry of Hopkins look more difficult than it actually is.

An adjective followed by a noun is made to fulfil a descriptive function in Hopkins's poetry. In his poems an adjective preceding a proper noun, is either descriptive or restrictive. The 'field' of a proper name can be restricted in such a way that the restrictive adjective singles out one aspect as a distinct quality of the individual. Our attention is drawn to it as the most striking and the most typical way of expression. Very

\textsuperscript{10} "Epithalamion", Poems, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{12} "Thou art indeed just", Ibid, p. 106.
often Hopkins's language seems to be the most expressive of the inscape. For example, in Deutschland ode he addresses God as follows:

'Thou mastering me God'\textsuperscript{13}

and

'past all grasp God'\textsuperscript{14}

Another example is from "The Windhover," in which the hawk is described as:

'dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon'.\textsuperscript{15}

These adjectival groups are kept in the front position because they fulfil a restrictive function, while the normal post position would necessarily give it a descriptive function. In other words, the adjectival expression does not add a non-essential relation or quality to the noun qualified. It restricts the comprehension of the proper name in such a way that it singles out one aspect and posits the closest connection between

\textsuperscript{13} "The Wreck of the Deutschland", \textit{Poems}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{15} "The Windhover", \textit{Poem}, p. 69.
this outstanding quality and the individual essence. In a phrase like 'Thou God mastering me' the full connotation of God is communicated to us. This is neither limited nor strictly added to by the adjectival group following it. The only addition is the indication of a relation accidental to the essence of God. Similarly, in 'God past all grasp' there is lacking the close connection between the essence of God and the quality singled out. This can happen only when the adjectival group occupies the front position in the stanza. In the third example cited above, the 'Falcon' is contemplated as 'drawn' or carried by the 'dapple dawn'. It is the vision of the Falcon riding the dawn that draws it (the Falcon), is an essential element of the poet's vision.

Thus we see that in these examples the pattern of the logical language is set aside and the language is heightened by the poet's clinging to an elementary and fundamental logic of expression. Some examples of such restrictive adjectival groups are given below:

... why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock?^{16}

Time's tasking, it is fathers that asking
for ease
Of the sodden - with-its-sorrowing heart. 17
And the azurous hung hills are his
world weilding shoulders. 18

The noun qualified each time stands for
a part of the body and is so individualized.
No one quality stands out as the most
characteristic, but only concentrated attention
on every aspect yeilds a satisfactory knowledge of
its inscape. The fact that Hopkins had recourse
to his own peculiar way of expressing the inscape
of things, is proved by his fairly frequent
preference for the adjective as a predicate to the
attributive adjective; e.g.

And frightful a nightfall folded a
rueful a day. 19

18 "Hurrahing in Harvest", Ibid, p. 70.
Predication expresses the inscape of that dreadful night so stridently that its terror can be felt. This is so because 'frightful' does not immediately refer to the 'nightfall'. Similarly, 'nightfall' is allowed to assert itself with its full suggestive force, the retarded rhythm of the line giving the two notions very consciously.

For a proper understanding of Hopkins's poetry, it is necessary to realise his immediate expression of the inscape of language as much as the poet's peculiar attitude towards the medium of poetry. Grammatical and syntactic irregularities have their particular reason in the poetry of Hopkins.

The number of omissions in Hopkins's poetry has been grossly exaggerated. In fact, what is known as irregular omissions are rare in it. In the following examples, there are omissions of relative pronouns:

... why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end? 20

20 "Thou art indeed just" Poems, p. 106.
... ah; this air I gather
    and I release
He lived on ... 21

All the air things wear that build
this world of Wales. 22

I cast for comfort I can no more get ... 23

In all these instances there is no comma preceding
the relative clause, signalling that there is no
break of any kind. The relative clause is
restrictive, and this point should not be overlooked
as it confirms that no quality was in Hopkins's
apprehension ever accidental to the inscape. In
'I cast for comfort I can no more get ...' 24
he gropes for a comfort that of its essence is
beyond his grasp. To realise the poignancy of
this line one must substitute a continuative clause
for a restrictive one.

21 "Duns Scotus's Oxford", Poems, p. 79.
22 "In the Valley of the Elwy", Ibid, p. 67.
23 "My own heart let me more have pity on", Ibid, p. 102.
24 Ibid, p. 102.
The second group of omissions comprises those constructions in which the relative clause is dependent on a preposition, e.g.

It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for. 25

That neighbour-nature thy grey beauty is grounded

Best in; ... 26

In the following examples, however, what obscurity there is, arises not so much from the omission as from a certain form of contradiction. Here the preposition or the adverbial expression in the main clause functions in the subsidiary clause as well; e.g.

... have heard the prayer and granted
Grace that day grace was wanted. 27

I greet him the day I meet him ... 28

25 "Spring and Fall", Poems, p. 68.
Hopkins uses adverbs ending with 'ly' very scantily; e.g.

The bright wind boisterous ...
   beats earth bare. 29

Some candle clear burns ...

Hopkins's poetic language is particularly rich in constructions involving co-ordination. This predilection for co-ordination has given a specific character to his style. His preference for this particular transformation results in the startling suddenness of the recoil of thought in the sestet of his many sonnets. He is very fond of sudden transitions of thoughts, and the onrush of thoughts and images is so swift and so 'fused', as he himself would say. In the poem entitled "The Lantern Out of Doors", for example, the poet describes how a lantern moving along the night set him musing:

'... And who goes there'? I think; where from and bound, I wonder, where,
   With, all down darkness wide, his wading light? 31

---

29 "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and the Comfort of the Resurrection", Poems, p. 72. (hereafter referred as "Heraclitean Fire")


He then continues:

Men go by me whom either beauty bright...

While using the language of co-ordination, Hopkins has his own peculiar way of marshalling phrases side by side without properly joining them together. Sub-ordination is very rare in Hopkins's poetry.

It the poetry of inspiration, like Hopkins's, the poet has to adjust the expression to the logic of his experience. The fundamental rule is: what first presents itself to the poet's mind is expressed first. The rule is observed both within the sentence and the clause and within the word groups in Hopkins's poetry; e.g.

This darksome burn, horse back brown,
His rollrock highroad roaring down,
In coop and in comb the fleece of his foam
Flutes and low to the lake falls home.

Syntactically, 'this darksome burn' is a genitive and is shown by the use of the pronoun 'his'. But Hopkins has used it differently.

33 "Inversnaid", Ibid, p. 89.
The inverse order also occurs in Hopkins:

Must it, worst weather,
Blast bole and bloom together? \(^{34}\)

Wondering why my master bore it,
The riving off that race
So at home, time was, to his truth and grace. \(^{35}\)

One stroke
Felled and furled them, the hearts of oak. \(^{36}\)

Here the poet sunders part of the syntactic unit.
This seems to be an intended effect achieved by
the front position of the psychological subject as
well.

What is true of the sentence is also true
of the word group. Expressions like 'whole - my -
heart' and 'wide the world', will illustrate the
occurrence of the psychological subject within the
group.

A word in Hopkins takes pride of not from
any premeditated search after startling poetic

\(^{34}\) "The Loss of the Eurydice", Poems, p. 72.

\(^{35}\) Ibid, p. 72.

\(^{36}\) Ibid, p. 72.
effects but from the instinctive urge towards the most impelling directness of expression. Thus the poet speaks of:

wisest—my—heart, for with fonder a care, idle a being, etc.

Examples of inversions also are not lacking in Hopkins's poetry:

Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then. 37

Let me though see no more of him, and not disappointment
Those sweet hopes quell whose least me quickenings lift... 38

It is not that every inversion is always dictated by Hopkins's anxiety to place more important words in the sentence at the beginning. At times rhythm and rhyme undoubtedly tempt him to deviate from the logical word order, a temptation that he undoubtedly does not always resist. He once wrote to Bridges that he avoided inversions because "ambiguity or momentary uncertainty destroys the force of the

However, inversion is more frequent in Hopkins's poetry than the normal order of words. But in most cases the poet seems to have good reasons for inverting the order of words. As a rule, where he does so the verb is placed at the end of the sentence and the object and subject are found in close proximity. The mere juxtaposition of two terms will often clearly indicate the nature of the relation existing between them. The verb in such cases appears to be entirely redundant, as it would express a relation already implicitly indicated by the juxtaposition of two terms; e.g.

... his eye no cliff, or coast or
Mark makes in the rivelling snow-storm. 40

... God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste; my taste was me. 41

The working of contrast is also evident in such opposite pairs as:

earth - heaven, life - death, right - wrong. 42

These pairs are used at close proximity inside a sentence. When the relation is indicated by placing the terms side by side in the sentence, the verb becomes a redundant luxury and is no longer strictly required. More complicated is, however, the inversion of the following kind:

... rare gold, bold steel, bare

In both 43

The sense here has been obscured because of the omission of good many words. The two conditions are stated side by side, the gold of the few comfortable rich people and the steel of working classes, 'bare in both'. The language has succumbed altogether. A line like this requires not only right intonation but also right gestures. At times words serve to channel the on-rush of ideas, and the construction of a sentence gets completed in one word; e.g.

But we dream we are rooted
in earth - Dust 44

43 "Toms Garland", Poems, p. 103.
In Hopkins's poems the words which are not strictly wanted, are left out, there being no place for them in the speed of his poems. The omission of the conjunction 'that' is the rule in his poetry, as it is the rule in affective speech. Other conjunctions are also very rare. This is so because Hopkins's language is one of co-ordination, and because he prefers the subjunctive mood to the conjunction:

... I have put my lips on pleas
Would brandle adamantine heaven with ride
and jar, did

Prayer go disregarded:

Flesh fade, and mortal trash,
Fall to the residuary worm; world's
wildfire, leave but ash;
In a flesh, at a trumpet crash
I am all at once what Christ is ... 45

Hopkins's sentence structures are mostly brief and simple - simple in that they do not pile up subordinate clauses or balance lengthy phrases

45 "The Bugler's First Communion", Poems, p. 82.
46 Ibid, p. 82.
one against another in the cumulative, ordered manner of most poets. His greatest sonnets consist of short, direct statements. He does not offer us the carefully qualified and related sentence-structures, giving an impression of his maturity. But more frequently Hopkins ejaculates. Where he reasons out an argument, the result is either somewhat dry obscurity as in "Toms Garland" "Ribblesdale" or "The Loss of Eurydice", or else a series of associated colloquial ejaculations. The sestet of "To what serves Mortal Beauty" is so jerky and fragmentary that the rhythm and therefore the poetry is lost. In "The Windhover" the absence of reasoned links between stages of thought seems fitting to the sudden and emotional revelations. The poem on "Kingfishers catch fire" owes much of its clarity to the brevity of its statements.

The interjections 'Oh', 'O' and 'Ah' play an important role in Hopkins's poems. The poet tries to convince us by all possible means how deeply stirred he is by the particular thing or event. However, he never uses these words just to
fill up a line. Invariably, they strike a note of true feeling. A subdued enthusiasm or quietly ecstatic joyousness is well suggested by the use of interjections in the following lines:

Times told lovelier more dangerous,
O, my Chevalier. 47

... and blue - bleak embers,
ah my dear
Fall, gall themselves, and gash
gold - vermillion. 48

At times these interjections emphasize the terrible pathos and strike us as cries of utter helplessness:

But oh, but O thou terrible why wouldst thou rude on me.
Thy wring-world right foot rock? 49

What hours, O what black hours we have spent... 50

48 Ibid, p. 69.
An atmosphere of pity and indignation is suggested by their use in the following cases:

England, whose honour O all my heart woos ... 51

O then if in my lagging lines you miss
The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation. 52

Whenever these interjections are used, they are prompted by inspiration, and that is why they always sound true. They almost always bear out his sincerity and seriousness; e.g.

Two hundred souls in the round —
0 Father, not under thy feathers nor ever as guessing
The goal was a shoal, of a fourth the doom to be drawned; 53

Hopkins is in the habit of asking questions. The questions put up by him, however, are not merely rhetorical. They are questionings of the poet's heart and more often than not questionings to which the poet was at a loss to find an answer.

51 "To seem the Stranger lies my lot", Poems, p. 101.
Fear and terror are expressed beautifully in these lines:

And after it almost unmade, what with dread
Thy doing and dost thou touch me afresh? 54

The frown of his face
Before me, the hurtle of hell
Behind, where, where was a,
where was a place? 55

Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief? 56

Why do sinners' way prosper?
and why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end? 57

The interjection, the exclamatory phrase and the form of address are some of the obvious means by which Hopkins heightened his poetic language.

In order to express his emotional experience, Hopkins often had to discard the intricacies of systems of logical language. The loss of

56 "No worse, there is none", Ibid, p. 100.
grammatical and syntactic clarity is compensated for by the elements of affective language. Logical language is usually the language of subordination, but the language used by Hopkins is the language of co-ordination. The former adopts the expression of the relation between two clauses to a systematic link. In Hopkins, however, the relation between the clauses is not expressively indicated in a structure whereby what goes before is necessarily related to what follows by means of a syntactic link. Hopkins observes and places facts side by side, the relation being apprehended in the juxtaposition itself. If the verse is read aloud correctly, the nature of the relation would become amply evident. Hopkins had difficulty in writing, because the written lines, according to him, would "lose the very serviceability, pliability and suppleness of the spoken line". 58

Since no consistent system of marks could overcome this difficulty and remedy this defect, Hopkins made use of some marks generally recognized

58 Peters, Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 110.
and used them for his purpose. Thus to indicate that there exists a relation between two co-ordinated sentences, he takes recourse to the colon. The colon precisely introduces the dependent, though co-ordinated, sentence. This reading sign is always functional and illuminates lines that would otherwise be obscure. Some of its main functions in Hopkins's poetry are as follows:

(1) The relation may be one of temporal succession, e.g.

She drove in the dark to leeward
She struck - not a reef nor a rock
But the combs of a smother of sand : night
drew her

Dead to the Kentish Knock; 59
And she beat the banks down with her bows
and the ride of her keel:

The breakers rolled on her
beams with ruinous shock. 60

Thou knowest the walls, altar
and hour and night:
The swoon of a heart that the
sweep and the hurl of thee trod. 61

60 Ibid, p. 51.
61 Ibid, p. 51.
(ii) Often the colon introduces the explanation of the first sentence and thus almost replaces the co-ordinating conjunction 'for'; e.g.

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillon Shine ... 62

Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung:
Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then. 63

The Burydice - it concerned thee, O Lord:
Three hundred souls, O alas. on board ... 64

(iii) Sometimes contrast is expressed by the colon:

Then let the march tread our ears:
I to him turn with tears ... 65

... world's wild fire, leave but ash:
In a flash, at a trumpet crash. 66

Dash is another favourite reading sign with Hopkins. It marks a complete break in the structure

65 Ibid, p. 72.
of the sentence which increases the effect of the bluntest juxtaposition. It signals generally attention to the contrast between two sentences:

Never ask if meaning it, wanting it,
warned of it - men go.67

Often the dash introduces an afterthought or the correction of the foregoing statement:

Heart, go and bleed at a bitterer vein for the Comfortless unconfessed of them —
No not unconforted: lovely-felicitous Providence. 68

Man's mounting spirit in his bone-house,
mean-house dwells —
That bird beyond the remembering his free fells;
This is drudgery ... 69

Hopkins's use of the connective 'and' is also noteworthy:

Thou art lightning and love, I found it,
a winter and warm
Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then.70

70 Ibid, p. 70.
I was under a roof here, I was at rest
And they the prey of the gales. 71

The terror communicated by these lines is mainly conveyed by the juxtapositioning of two extremes. The relation of temporal succession implied by the conjunction 'and' in the following lines deserves attention:

She rears herself to divine
Ears and the call of the tall nun
To the men in the tops and the tackle rode
over the storm's brawling. 72

The phrasing in the following lines looks dramatic:

They fought with God's cold —
And they could not and fell to the deck. 73

Do what you may do, what, do what you may
And wisdom is early to despair. 74

Very often, however, co-ordination is not even indicated by a colon, a dash or a simple 'and'. One fact is placed after the other, and the abruptness

72 Ibid, p. 51.
73 Ibid, p. 51.
of the diction intensifies the effect:

She drove in the dark to leeward,
She struck—not a reef or a rock. 75

Hopkins often comes up with comparison all of a sudden, which is neither properly worked out nor properly introduced, but placed side by side with the fact it illustrates:

The lush kept, plush capped sloe. 76

More concealed and more easily overlooked is the comparison in the following lines, where it has been embodied in the expression of the experience itself:

We, though our flower the same
Wave with the meadow, forget that there must
The sour scythe-cringe, and the
blear share come. 77

76 Ibid, p. 51,
77 Ibid, p. 51.
Hopkins, then, is a poet who does not always speak directly. He is for the most part terse and economical. He is difficult because of his use of archaic and dialectal words and also because of his unusual syntax. The liberties that he took with the normal syntactic patterns of the English language, were necessitated by his complex thoughts and recondite feelings, which were seeking an outlet as early as possible. His experiments with the language and its structure were generally a compulsion rather than a luxury. They give us a feel of his highly creative and fertile sensibility. His word formation processes will make it even more clear how highly original he was.