CHAPTER IV

LEXICAL FEATURES
Hopkins is one of those poets who wielded a particularly distinctive diction. He was deeply interested in the etymology of the English language. His early diaries show his fascination for words in themselves, without reference to the grasp they give of the external world. He viewed poetry as a kind of music of words. For him, poetry, like music, was an autonomous art. As music makes patterns of sequences of tones, poetry makes patterns of sequences of words. He was also of the view that if words are similar in sound, they will be similar in meaning, too. Hopkins assumed that a group of words of similar sounds are variations of some ur-word and root meaning. Among the earliest entries in his diaries are lists of words of similar sounds with comments on their similarity of meaning; e.g.

- Grind, gride, grit, groat, grate,
- greet, crush, crash, etc.

Original meaning to strike, rub, particularly together. 2

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2 House and Storey (eds.), *Journals and Papers*, p. 5.
Crook, crank, kranke, crick, cranky.  
Original meaning crooked, not straight 
or right, wrong, awry. 3

Hillis Miller has dwelt on the linguistic aspect 
of Hopkins's diction. According to him, "each 
word for Hopkins is a node or pattern of linguistic 
energy. It has its own unique tone, but it is at 
a fixed interval from other similar words and is 
therefore able to chime with them, both, in sound and 
in meaning". 4 Hopkins notes that "sequences like 
**flick** : **fleck** : **flake** are like a chord of variations 
on the same sound and meaning, each change in 
vowel producing a different tone in the chord and 
a new nuance in meaning". 5 Variations in 
consonant can also produce a sequence, such as : 
"**flick** and flip, flog and flap, flop". 6 Such 
sequences were thought to be of special 
significance by the poet because he wanted to

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3 House and Storey (eds.), *Journals and Papers*, p. 5.  
4 Hartman (ed.), *Hopkins*, p. 93.  
5 House and Storey (eds.), *Journals and Papers*, p. 11.  
6 Ibid, p. 12.
carry, as far as possible, the principle of rhyme into every aspect of his verse.

Hopkins was always greatly interested in music. In one of his letters he confesses that if he had not been a poet he would have been a musician. His theory of poetry is much like his theory of music. In one of his letters to Bridges he explictly the central idea of his theory of music:

... the air becomes a generic form which is specified newly in each verse. 7

The inscape of a piece of music is that generic form, present in all specifications of itself, but usually visible only through our perception of their similarity. The inscape of poetry is analogous.

Poetry, Hopkins thought, is not distinguished from other uses of words by its intensity or complexity of meaning. The meaning

7 Abbott (ed.), Letters to Bridges, p. 305.
is there only as a necessary support for the
pattern:

Poetry is 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.
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...
Poetry is in fact speech only
employed to carry the inscape of
sake — and therefore the inscape must be dwelt on.

The inscape, he further held, is a pattern of
sound, and therefore "verse is ... inscape of
spoken sound, not spoken words, or speech employed
to carry the inscape of spoken sound". 9

The inscape is the generic form which
recurs in varied forms throughout the composition.
It must be repeated in different specifications
in order to detach it from its particular
manifestations. The basic method of poetry, as

8 House and Storey (eds.), Journals and Papers,
p. 289.
9 Ibid., p. 289.
of music, is repetition, the repetition of different forms of the same inscape. This inscape must echo and reverberate through the poem in order to become visible. Hopkins was fascinated by the relations of word sounds. Through his principle of rhyme he has conquered the whole realm of words and has organized them into a theory of poetry. Different modes of echoing enable words to form an elaborate system of interrelated reverberations. Poetry, said Hopkins, is the exploration and exploitation of these possible 'figures of sound'.

Besides the sounds of words, Hopkins was also interested in the way words are used as a means of possessing nature. He knew that there must be a strong grappling action on the part of mind to go out and meet the powerful energy with which things are what they are. He felt that "there must be a stem of stress between us and things to bear us out and carry the mind over".

10 House and Storey (eds.), Journals and Papers, p. 289.
11 Ibid, p. 127.
For Hopkins this stem of stress is constituted by words. Hopkins had a marked inclination for onomatopoeic words. He feels that onomatopoeic words imitate the inscape of the substance or thing they name. He does not, however, like words which are a superficial echo of the sound of a thing. He is attracted by those words which are kinesthetic imitation of their meaning and give a deep bodily, muscular or visceral possession of the world. Words are, to him, the dynamic internalizing of the world. Browning was also attracted to words which gave a kinesthetic possession of the thing named. But his words are thick with harsh consonants, expressing the universal density of material substance.

Hopkins had a strong sense of the variations in texture, substance and structure of the things of the world. His power of forcibly and delicately giving the essence of things in nature owed much to his intense feeling for words. He is surely the greatest master of the poetic compound words
in English. He had the power of re-animating a word and the greatest proof of his genius lay in his ability in coining new words.

Some significant processes of word creation by Hopkins may be considered. Analogy plays an important role in his coining of words. It increases the capacity of his linguistic expression. Without doing violence to the essence of language, analogical creations enable him to fully exploit its hidden resources. Analogy is evident in the many coersions used by Hopkins. Having inscoaped a word, he could make abstraction of its normal function. No word in his poetry is, of its essence, bound to a certain grammatical or syntactical function. The poet freely converted nouns into verbs; e.g.

'Let him easter Cn us', 12

Other examples are: to power, to foot, to size, to tongue, to trumpet. The reverse process is also evident: hurl, sweep, breaks, awakes, dare, furl.

Similarly the verb 'achieve' has been used as 'noun' by Hopkins:

Stirred for a bird - achieve of the mastery of a thing.13

Similar examples like:

_plod, ride, sift etc._

as nouns are Hopkins's own formations.

The following lines contain an excellent example of verbs being converted into nouns:

... where a glance

Master more may than gaze, gaze out of countenance.14

The poet was obliged to resort to this tactics on account of insufficiency of existing words.

To Hopkins there existed no dead suffixes.

The range of any living suffix was very much wider in his use of it than in that of common speech or writing. Most of these analogous

formations are clear enough. Some of them are coined by adding the ending '-y':

... ale like goldy foam, 15

Other examples are:

towary, branchy, pillowy, fretty.

These are regular in so far as the suffix is appended to a noun. But Hopkins occasionally conjoins it with adjectives; e.g.

yellowy, vasty, roundy.

The word 'a' is added to form adverbs; e.g.

astray, and abreast, aswarm, 16

The prefix 'un-' is used in:

to unchild, to unfather, 17

also: to unselve, to unleave, unchrist.

The prefix 're-' regains its original meaning in creations like 'recurr' and 'recovery'. Hopkins also liked to juggle with the suffix 'ale' after verbs. He uses expressions like 'mursele, girdle and brandle. 18

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15 "Parmean Pool", Poems, p. 64.
17 "The Bugler's First Communion", Ibid, p. 82.
18 Ibid, p. 82.
At times Hopkins truncates a compound word, e.g. 'overwhelm' becomes 'whelm' in his poetry:

Our evening is over us, our night whelms, whelms, and will end us. 19

Other similar examples are:

Endurance becomes durance, enlisted gets shortened to listed, to endear becomes to dear.

Hopkins has also formed other compounds on the basis of analogy which have become part and parcel of the English language. In these compound words the component parts never lose their individuality. If any word was capable of entering into compound formation with another, then, for Hopkins, there was no reason why that word should be restricted into entering into compound formation with this one word only. Thus landscape and seascape are good compounds but Hopkins forms lovescape. 20

If we have rainproof then why can we not have prickproof. Peacemeal is a common word, but Hopkins thought that when trees lose their leaves


they lose their *leafmeal.* Quickgold was, undoubtedly, formed on the analogy of quicksilver, and mainstream on that of mainstay. Schoolfellow is common, but fallowbootfellow needs a lot more concentration as no hyphens are used. To cry havoc is the standard expression, but when the context asks disaster instead of havoc Hopkins coins the expression *to cry disaster.* World without end very likely becomes in his hands *world without event.* More complicated are such expressions: God rest him all: road ever he offended.

Certain typical expressions of Hopkins's demand a careful analysis. For example: in *inwhatway,* way does not lose its original meaning, an account of which it was synonymous with road. By writing *earth low under,* Hopkins is expressing the opposite of *heaven high above.*

*Expression of care* to him was not so concrete;

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21 "Spring and Fall", Poems, p. 84.
22 "The Starlight Night", Ibid, P. 64.
so he wrote braves of care.

Thus Hopkins examined the workings of the English language and, by adding prefixes and suffixes in new contexts, greatly increased its expressive potential. But his greatest creative genius lay in his capability of forming fresh compound words. Some of his compounds comprise the combinations of adjective + noun. This formation is very common in Hopkins's poetry; e.g.

Gaygear, gay ganga, van wood, boldboys,
goldengrove, silk sack, fine flower, etc.

Noun + Noun compounds also appear on every page of Hopkins's poetry; e.g.

Windpuff-bonnet, fown-froth, beadbonny,
fellow boot fellow, etc.

There is another group of compounds in which the first noun is indicative of the same relation as its corresponding adjective would

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have been. In this category we may include such compounds as:

heaven-handling, neighbour-nature, winter-world, hoar light, couple colour, etc.

In yet another group of compounds used by Hopkins the first noun replaces a genitive construction as in:

flockbells, marmark, girl grace, manshape, etc.

It may occasionally replace a subjective genitive; e.g.

wind walk, sea-swill, lip music;

Or it may replace an objective genitive as in gospel proffer.

Such compounds have a unique poetic effect, as is illustrated by those in which the first noun indicates the material of which the object represented by the second noun consists; e.g.

foam fleece, meal-drift, raindrop-roundels, lily-showers, bone-house, etc.

The connection between the nouns in these compounds seems to be very much closer than in a genitive combination, as would be evident if we compare *Showers of lilies*, and *lily showers*, *ropes of hail*, and *hail ropes*.

There is, moreover, one more clearly marked group of compounds. An object's inscape might recall the shape of another thing, this shape being part of the object's individual distinctiveness. Under such circumstances Hopkins would form compounds like:

*loop locks, horn light, moon marks*, etc.

Finally, there are comparative compounds in which the likeness between the objects symbolized by the two nouns is not primarily sensible but is a likeness of instress. To this group belong compounds like:

*Wolfsnow, eart stars, braggart - bugles, carrion comfort*.

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27 "Henry Purcell", *Poems*, p. 80.
There are two more classes of compounds which deserve mention here. First, there is the Adverb + Noun combination; e.g.

back wheels, after drought, between pie,
and secondly, there is the Verb + Noun combination, as in dare - gale, spend savour, treadmire and fall-gold.

Hopkins always desired to achieve the closest parallelism between his perception and its expression. This drove him to string words together into many long combinations like:

day-dissolved, self-instressed,
not-by-morning matched.

This tendency and his practice of resorting to collocational clashes has given an individual stamp to his poetic language.

In Hopkins's poems a word functions with its whole being. It may possess two grammatical or two syntactical functions, both of which the poet employs with great artistic effect. It may have various meanings, which he would make converge in his poem. For example, he writes:
The glassy pear tree leaves and blooms,
    they brush
The descending blue. 29

The lines are clear enough, yet they contain
a violent distortion. 'They' refers to 'leaves
and blooms', which are used here as verbal forms
and not as nouns. Hopkins transcends the actual
function of these words in the line. First they
function as forms of verbs and then immediately
afterwards as nouns. Some more examples of this
kind are given below:

    ... out of sight is out of mind Christ minds; 30

    God's most deep decree
    Bitter would have me taste; my taste was me. 31

    In the following example 'while'
performs the function of a conjunction and is
also used as a noun:

... walked with the wind what while we slept,
This side, that side hurling a heavy headed hundred fold

What while we, while we slumbered.\textsuperscript{32}

In all these instances a word performs two grammatical functions. Hopkins also uses a word twice over in different syntactic functions;

I caught this morning morning's minion.\textsuperscript{33}

The first 'morning' indicates time and is rather flat in comparison with the 'morning's minion'. The meaning of 'morning' is enriched by being impersonated in the second occurrence. The following lines also illustrate the same point:

I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless than blind
Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet.\textsuperscript{34}

'Thirst' used in the third line stands for the 'thirsty', and in the closing line it is an abstract noun.

\textsuperscript{32} "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo", Poems, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{33} "The Windhover", Ibid, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{34} "My own heart let me more have pity on", Ibid, p. 102.
The discussions reveal a real artist's firm grasp over his diction. There is nothing affected or artificial about it. Only a true poet can succeed in such daring experiments.

Bridges criticised Hopkins's poetry and wrote:

Here, then, is another source of the poet's obscurity; that in aiming at condensation he 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 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 monosyllables still on his hands. Nor is our author apparently sensitive to the irrelevant suggestions that our numerous homophones cause; and he will provoke further ambiguities or
obscurities by straining the meaning of these unfortunate words. 35

Hopkins was never really responsible in a conscious way for most of the sins mentioned by Bridges. He took liberties with the language when he was in dire need. In the following lines, for example, the words 'build' and 'tear' are used both in their literal and metaphorical senses:

... birds build - but not I build. 36

... touch had quenched thy tears,
Thy tears that touched my heart. 37

In the following case, however, the verb 'to shine' is used only once, but its literal and metaphorical senses converge:

And fright-ful a night-fall folded
rueful a day
Nor rescue, only rocket and light-ship, shone. 38

In the above examples, the poet's meaning would not have been conveyed by any other means except an interplay between the literal and metaphorical meanings.

35 Williams - Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 98.
37 "Fix Randal", Ibid, p. 86.
Hopkins never wrote down his words until he had most diligently weighed them. The critical deliberation with which he fixed his choice on a word is the outcome of his very sensitive and most personal word-consciousness. In *Eurydice* he writes:

She had come from a cruise, training seamen
Men, boldboys soon to be men:
Must it, worst weather,
Blast hole and bloom together?\(^{39}\)

There would have been no better word than 'blast' in this context. The fact that bad weather causes shipwrecks, makes one take the verb in its primary sense of 'to be like a strong gust of wind'. Being used transitively, however, it has the sense of 'to ruin', 'to wreck'. It is thus a clear instance of how Hopkins renewed a word altogether by withdrawing it from its meaning in common use.

By giving a very subtle twist to a word Hopkins is capable of re-creating the meaning of

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\(^{39}\) "Loss of the Eurydice" *Poems*, p. 76.
that word, for example, he has very beautifully recreated the meaning of the word 'mind':

Now her all in two flocks, two folds -
    black, white, right,
Wrong; reckon but, reck but mind
But these two; ware of a world where but
    these two tell, each off the other, of a rack. 40

The verb 'to mind' is used in combination with various nouns. Its nuances markedly affect its core of meaning, which is something like to think of, bear in mind. Hopkins has, however, hardened this central meaning. 'To mind' here has nothing of the vagueness of 'to think about', because the original meaning has been most successfully re-created. This re-created word contains in itself all the freshness which it originally possessed but which it lost by being tied down to customary use. This is a very good illustration of what has been called the 're-creation of word' and which, according to Cecil Day Lewis, is the 'last secret of poetic

Other excellent examples of such re-created, re-animated words can also be cited:

These things, these things were here
and but the beholder
Wanting, which two when they once meet,
The heart rears wings bold and bolder
And hurls for him, 0 half hurls
earth for him off under
his feet. 42

The word 'rears' not only signifies that the heart 'grows' wings but it also suggests that it raises them. Unless the two-fold meaning is taken into account, the line loses its real charm. If we accept the first meaning of the word 'rears', the transition of the thought expressed in the closing line becomes very abrupt, too abrupt to be considered logical. If the verb is taken in its second meaning of 'to rise' only, then the question arises as to how the poet came to speak of the heart rearing its wings. It is only by making the two senses of 'to rear' converge that the line becomes effectively

41 A Hope for Poetry p. 6.
42 "Hurrahing in Harvest", Poems, p. 70.
meaningful. What impresses us most in Hopkins's poetry is his economy of effects. In the following extract 'spend' has the meaning of 'to pass time', which is evident from the use of the word 'life' joined to the verb:

Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive
    than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause.
Not today we need lament
Your wealth of life in some way spent. 43

But the other meaning of 'to spend' cannot be overlooked, by which it can be put as synonymous with the expression 'to lay out money'. Life, as if it were money, has been laid out without stint in gaining the greater glory of God. The convergence of meanings indicate that the word is recreated, re-animated, and thus acquires a meaning which is far more than the sum of the two converging senses. In the opening line of The Wreck of the Deutschland, 'mastering' should be taken in its two fold sense of 'over-coming,

43 "Hurrahing in Harvest" Poems, p. 70.
reducing to subjection' as well as of 'being a master'.

Hopkins was acutely conscious of various meanings words could have, irrespective of their spellings. He carefully weighed each of the words before placing them in his sentences. If a word had different meanings he was fully aware of each of them and took great pleasure in using them. He writes:

On ear and ear two noises
too old to end ... 44

Hopkins introduced this repeated echo purposely and unobtrusively. The repetition of 'end' is also not accidental in the following lines:

... why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end? 45

A more obvious example is contained in:

Deep deeper than divined,
Divine charity ... 46

44 "The Sea and the Skylard", Poems, p. 68.
46 "At the Wedding March", Ibid, p. 86.
Hopkins had the power of making most of various nuances of one meaning. Words are used in quick succession, and though the fundamental meaning is the same, the poet manages to use the words with a slight variation, which has very often a very poetic effect:

Thou art indeed just, Lord if I contend
With thee, but Sir, so what I plead is just. 47

In the following lines the verb 'to cheer' is used transitively and intransitively in rapid succession, which suggests the speed of the poet's thought:

Nay in all that toil, that coil,
since (seems) I kissed the rod,
Hand rather my hand to ! lapped strength, stole joy, would
laugh cheer,
Cheer whom thought ? the hero ... 48

As for the sources of Hopkins's diction, his poetry is unusually full of English words. In his compounding and coining he goes back to prmodial word-making processes. Usually, he

47 "Thou art indeed just", Poems, p. 106.
prefers pure Anglo-Saxon roots, as in fathers-forth, after-comers, sodden-with-its-worrying-heart, brown-as-dawning-skinned, etc. Many other compounds have the smack of Old English poetry; e.g.

bone-house, man-wolf, hailrpes,
havengravel, wanwood, etc.

Hopkins borrows from the older and more provincial English a number of semi- or entirely obsolete words or words belonging to different dialects. He was obliged to employ such words because of their assonantal patterns, their context and their connotation. For instance, throng (a Dales word in Ribblesdale), voel (a local name) in the Deutschland and disremembering (an Irish word) in Spelt from Sybil’s Leaves. Papple and rbe have now become obsolete, but Hopkins uses them effectively. Reave, meaning ‘strip away,’ 'remove,' is frequent in Hopkins’s poetry and so is reck for 'think' or 'consider’. Hurl is a special favourite of Hopkins's and is used not so much in a metaphorical sense as in emotional suggestion to create a feeling of violent effort.
Hopkins was deeply interested in the etymology of the English language. His Note books show his keenness to explore the connections and suggestions of an individual word. The best example of the association of sound and sense in Hopkins is found in "The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo":

The flower of beauty, fleece of beauty,
too too apt to ah, to fleet... 49

Another example is:

Resign them, sign them, seal them, 50
send them....

Hopkins also makes use of Latinate diction. He particularly values longer Latin words for their fluid rhythm:

He was to cure the extremity
where he had cast her; 51

And the azurous hung hills are his world —
weilding shoulder

Majestic — 52

49 "Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo", Poems, p. 91.
51 "Hurrahing in Harvest" Ibid, p. 70.
52 Ibid, p. 70.
Repeatedly, the 'nobility', inherent in many Latin or French words, is deliberately exploited by the poet, especially in passages about God. "The Windhover" is a notable example of it. Hopkins evokes court, Kingdom and Chivalry in words like: minion, dauphin, mastery, valour, billion, Chevalier, sillion, etc. 53

The difference between one kind of word and another is perhaps most clear and most sensitively maintained in "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire", where much of the point of the poem rests in the juxtaposition of the so-called 'common' or 'mean' English words with Latin phrases:

I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor pot sherd patch, matchwood, immortal diamond, Is immortal diamond. 54

Hopkins's has thus been able to carve a lively language for himself. His idioms involve a continual effort to give words the solidity and

completeness of dimension, that one associates with physical things. In this respect he may be contrasted to Swinburne, whose words are always and inescapably merely words. In his poems each word does much more work than the words of any other poet. Hopkins apprehended all things vividly—their colour, form, movement, touch, taste and smell, and his aim was to portray in words what his eyes saw and heart felt. One critic has remarked that in "Harry Ploughman" where his theme is the man's nature, "physically his verse can so excite muscular responses that the poem leaves the reader feeling almost as though he has been excercising himself in a gymnasium."  

Such is the force of Hopkins's words. So great was his interest in words that if he heard a Lancashire gardner use an unfamiliar dialect word, he would treasure it up and, as often as not, use it in his poem.

55 A.S. Collins, _English Literature of Twentieth Century_, p. 67,
This explains why he could so consistently censure the literary archaism of Bridges, arguing for a poetry based on living speech. At times be made use of expressions likely to baffle the common reader. His lexical innovations were well motivated and were employed to serve a useful purpose when the poet found that words of the common run could not do.