The Caress of God's Breath in Gerard Manley Hopkins

Duc Dau

This paper explores images of breath exchange between the soul and God in the writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins. These images are among his most effective and, indeed, beautiful portrayals of union between the soul and God. For Hopkins, breathing is an act that involves not only oneself but also another who sustains the breath by returning it to one. In his writings, this other being is God. While the focus of the paper's lens rests securely on Hopkins's writings, as well as those that were known to him, my argument is coloured by Luce Irigaray's theory of the caress. Within the scheme of Irigaray's ideal relationship between the sexes, two beings perform what she calls the caress. In *To Be Two*, she defines the caress as

> an awakening to you, to me, to us…. The caress is an awakening to intersubjectivity, to a touching between us which is neither passive nor active; it is an awakening of gestures, of perceptions which are at the same time acts, intentions, emotions. This does not mean that they are ambiguous, but rather, that they are attentive to the person who touches and the one who is touched, to the two subjects who touch each other.[1]

The caress comprises the mutual touch between two subjects. It enables them to participate in a relationship of common love, attentiveness, and concern. The caress both draws on and expresses one's regard for the otherness of the other. When two beings caress, they declare their respect for each other's alterity. As Irigaray states, 'We need to love much to be capable of such a dialectic. One must love enough to generate and not wound: love the other as a whole…. Respect him as a font derived from his own alterity'.[2] The reciprocal nature of the caress requires each participant to be 'open to otherness' (to use a phrase by Rosalyn Diprose), for openness is the condition

that enables one to touch and be touched, and to be the one who affects and is affected.[3]

Irigaray employs the idiom of heterosexual romantic love to argue for equality between the sexes. I employ this language to explore the romantic relationship between the soul and God in Hopkins's writing. I assert that Hopkins, a British Victorian poet, convert, Jesuit, and priest, looks upon God as the other whom the soul caresses and by whom it is caressed. For Hopkins, God is the lover to whom the soul is open, just as God, in the body of Christ, freely and lovingly opens himself to others.[4] Hopkins powerfully evokes the concept of the caress through tropes of breath exchange. In Genesis, God's act of breathing into Adam constitutes the first intimate and life-giving interchange between God and humanity.[5] Hopkins reminds us of this first contact in his description of the deity as the 'giver of breath and bread' in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1876), (st. 1).[6] Breath may be intangible to the naked eye, but it caresses us in ways that we do not immediately recognise. The breath that we inhale, and to which we are therefore open, touches, passes through, and sustains every living cell in our bodies. It reaches us from the bodies of other living and breathing beings. In this way, others touch us in a most intimate manner. Similarly, others inhale our exhalations; as a consequence, we touch them. Therefore, by our exhalations and inhalations, we caress, and are caressed by, others. We reach a fuller understanding of this circulation through a study of Hopkins's ideas of conversation, of 'inspiration' and 'aspiration', of sprung rhythm, and of the kiss. Spoken conversation is linked with breath exchange, for when two beings converse in close proximity, they open themselves to each other's breath. The paper's discussion of conversation proceeds to Hopkins's theological concepts of 'inspiration' and 'aspiration', which comprise the sharing of breath between God and the soul. This exploration moves to examine the sighs and stresses of sprung rhythm and of how spoken poetry can be a means of caressing God. The paper concludes with the kiss. For Hopkins, the kiss is the counterpart of speech and the supreme example of pneumatic touching.

'Speech', according to Friedrich Max Müller, 'is pre-eminently significant sound'.[7] Speech is the incarnation of one's thoughts and the verbal expression of one's exhalations. Therefore speech gives weight and volume to breath.

Within the structure of conversation, it promotes the openness that is necessary for one's meaningful relations with others. As Catherine Belsey asserts,

> Speech is a 'relation', the possibility of dialogue, of demand, of community, reciprocity, love. As the condition of subjectivity, permitting a difference between 'I' and 'you', speech is also necessarily the possibility of intersubjectivity, of address and response, question and answer.[8]

To realise its unitive potential, speech must be given to, and returned by, another in dialogue. That is, it must be in offered in the reciprocity of conversation. Conversation initiates and sustains one's verbal, intellectual, and emotional engagement with another being; speech moves outward from the utterer until it physically and mentally touches the listener. Dialogue facilitates a dynamic exchange of action and reception, of speaking and listening. During the course of a conversation, the listener replies to the speaker who in turn becomes the listener, thereby ensuring the ebb and flow of exchange. Conversation enables one to embrace the words of the other and, by so doing, inhale the other's breath. In the mutual embrace, one is both the enfolded and the enfolder. As the embraced, one is within the embrace of the other; as the embracer, one is outside that embrace. Through this interpenetration, one is simultaneously within and outside the other, equally the recipient and the giver, the listener and the speaker, the one who inhales and the one who exhales. In the intimacies of conversation, each individual inspires, and is inspired by, the other.

According to Hopkins, conversation with God is founded on the exchange of what he calls 'inspiration' and 'aspiration'. These terms derive from the Latin word *spiritus*, which incorporates a greater array of meanings than its English equivalent, 'breath'. *Spiritus* encompasses the very idea of one's life-force, soul, being, and mind.[9] Hopkins is alert to the multiple meanings of the Latin derivation when he provides his unique interpretation of 'inspiration' and 'aspiration' in some notes on Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. He asserts that humanity's 'responding aspiration or drawing in of breath' follows God's 'continued strain and breathing on [humanity]'.[10] He

argues that humans are capable of responding positively to God: their 'drawing in of breath' replies to his 'breathing on'. Hopkins reasserts this notion in the same set of notes when he declares that 'the sigh or aspiration itself is in answer to an inspiration of God's spirit and is followed by the continuance and expiration of that same breath which lifts it … to do or be what God wishes his creature to be or do' (*Sermons*, p. 156). In addition to his contention that the 'aspiration' is the soul's 'drawing in' of God's breath, Hopkins asserts here that the soul's inhalation facilitates another form of 'aspiration', which is the 'expiration' that 'lifts' or aspires it towards a teleological end. By aspiring towards God's will, the soul unites its 'spirit' (and the various meanings of the word) with him: 'this sigh or aspiration [is the] stirring of the spirit towards God' (*Sermons*, p. 155). Furthermore, Hopkins believes that the soul's nature comprises its 'desire' to respire to God's 'inspiration' on its being: 'this least sigh of desire, this one aspiration, is the life and spirit of man' (*Sermons*, p. 155). '[T]his one aspiration', the response to God's 'inspiration', personifies the soul's yearning to meet God with like reply, to match breath with breath.

By this shared experience, this exchange of breath, each being is able to reach into, and consequently touch, the heart of the other. When two beings touch, they produce the one caress that entails their union. Think of Rainer Maria Rilke's image of the two strings that meet to fashion a single sound: 'Yet everything that touches us, you and me, / takes us together as a bow's stroke does, / that out of two strings draws a single voice'.[11] For Hopkins, the union between the soul and God is created by the exchange that enables each to touch, feel, and affect the other. As Hopkins asserts, 'inspiration' and 'aspiration' form '*that touch* which only God can apply and the response which only God can perceive' (*Sermons*, p. 158; emphasis added). God's 'touch', the 'inspiration' that he alone can apply, is intended for, and felt by, the soul alone. In like manner, the soul's signature response, its 'aspiration', is intended for, and felt by, God alone. God's desire for the soul to aspire towards him is set in motion by his touch. He touches in order to be touched, as he longs for 'the aspiration in answer to his inspiration' (*Sermons*, p. 158).

Hopkins describes the soul's response to the 'inspiration' as its 'sigh of correspondence' (*Sermons*, p. 156). A 'sigh' may be an inarticulate sound to

most, but for Hopkins it expresses its speaker's 'aspiration'. 'Poetry', he declares, is '*speech* framed for contemplation of the mind'.[12] Indeed, the poet's art, his or her 'speech', may rightly be called a series of spoken 'sighs' rather than words on paper. The speaker of 'Ashboughs' (1887) equates poetry with an act of sighing when he says, 'só sìghs déep / Poetry' (lines 2-3). In Hopkins's understanding, poetry's 'sìghs' answer to an external 'inspiration'. The speaker of his final poem, 'To R. B.' (1889), declares that 'I want the one rapture of an *inspiration*' (line 10; emphasis added). In concluding the poem, he tells the reader that the poem 'yields you, with some sighs, our explanation' (line 14). Poetry's 'sighs' answer to the muse's 'insight' (line 7), which 'Breathes once and … / Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song' (lines 3-4). Within the word 'insight' lies the word 'sigh', for out of the 'rapture of an inspiration' breathes the poet's 'immortal song'.

Hopkins's theory of sprung rhythm gives purpose to his emphasis on breath, speech, and the articulate sighs of poetry. This theory is given voice in his mature poetry, for example, 'Ashboughs', and his first poem written in sprung rhythm, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. In the 'Author's Preface on Rhythm', he declares sprung rhythm to be 'the most natural of things', as it is the rhythm of, first, common speech and some prose, second, of almost all music, and, third, nursery rhymes.[13] Nevertheless, sprung rhythm, according to Hopkins, ceased to be used after the Elizabethan Age.[14] The name 'sprung rhythm' denotes its relationship to rhythm, what Hopkins describes as the movement of 'stress' and 'slack', of the accented and unaccented syllables, respectively.[15] Hopkins reveals a propensity for stress in his various discussions of sprung rhythm. For instance, he asserts that the basis of a metrical foot is not the standard rhythm or metre, but stress: 'This then', he confirms to a friend, 'is the essence of sprung rhythm: *one stress makes one foot*, no matter how many or few the syllables'.[16] He reiterates the important association between stress and sprung rhythm in a letter to his brother Everard when he declares that 'sprung rhythm makes verse stressy'.[17] In Hopkins's opinion, stress brings to the fore the 'meaning and feeling' of terms: 'And so throughout let the stress be made to fetch out both the strength of the syllables and the meaning and feeling of the words'.[18] Similarly, in a letter to Coventry Patmore, he argues that stress is 'the making a thing more, or making it markedly, what it already is; it is the bringing out of its nature'.[19]

Stress brings to light the spirit or the 'nature' and 'the meaning and *feeling* of the words', a notion to which I shall shortly return.

The importance of stress is equalled and complemented by the weight of poetry's utterance. To Hopkins's mind, the two chief characteristics of poetry, stress and speech, draw together in sprung rhythm. As we have seen, he argues that poetry is 'speech framed for contemplation of the mind'. In writing to his brother he reiterates the importance of speech when he argues that sprung rhythm perfects 'the true nature of poetry, [which is] the darling child of speech, of lips and spoken utterance'. Speech is the apex of sprung verse, while stress is its foundation: 'As poetry is emphatically speech, speech purged of dross like gold in the furnace, so it must have emphatically the essential elements of speech. Now emphasis itself, stress, is one of these'. In his opinion, poetry does not exist without speech, and therefore it is speech, rather than silence, which is golden. The written, and consequently silent, poem is mere potential waiting to be actualised by vocalisation:

> The play or performance of a stageplay is the playing it on the boards, the stage: reading it, much more writing it, is not its performance. The performance of a symphony is not the scoring of it however elaborately; it is in the concert room, by the orchestra, and then and there only. [20]

Like a play or a musical score, a poem must be given breath and sound to realise its latent capacity. It achieves the purpose of its being through the vocal performance, 'the playing it' aloud to a receptive audience. And Hopkins's audience, as we shall shortly see, is God.[21]

Sprung rhythm is a means of conveying the poet's 'aspiration'. This is because the two important aspects of poetry, stress and speech, converge in the 'sigh'. A sigh is a lengthened stress, and a stress is a syllable that 'the voice dwells on'.[22] A sigh in everyday discourse is expelled without poetic intent. In Hopkins's verse, however, a sigh is a deliberately weighed and timed sound that imparts a deep and expressive exhalation. 'To utter the word', as J. Hillis Miller notes, 'is to do what it names. One of the ways to

sigh is to say 'Sigh' or 'Sss-iii-gh,' drawing out the initial sibilant, prolonging the 'i' and then cutting off the expiration of breath with the 'gh' at the end, before all breath has been expelled'.[23] In Hopkins's poetry, the sigh is given equal prominence to, if not more prominence than, other words. Previous commentators have noted and explored his frequent use of exclamations, ejaculatory interjections, cries, and apostrophic addresses of 'O's, 'Oh's and 'ah's.[24] James Finn Cotter associates them with the primal 'Om' of human breath, as well as the Alpha and the Omega.[25] Hillis Miller associates these utterances not only with sprung rhythm but also with the sigh, for he believes that they exemplify Hopkins's attempts to 'keep the words at the level of sound'.[26] Similarly, Daniel Brown associates these exhalations with sprung rhythm, in addition to the primal 'ur-words from which all language develops'.[27] These commentators emphasise that breath, sound and stress are as significant for Hopkins as the dictionary meanings are to words.

Hopkins argues that sprung rhythm 'lends itself to expressing passion'.[28] Sighs have the ability to communicate 'passion' because they are expressive, primal sounds that convey and, indeed, stress the speaker's feelings. As we have seen, stress, of which a sigh consists, brings out 'the meaning and *feeling* of the words'. In 'Dun Scotus's Oxford' (1879), Hopkins deploys a sigh, an 'ah!', to great effect: 'Yet ah! This air I gather and I release / He lived on' (lines 9-10). The speaker's sigh expresses his intense delight and wonder at the realisation that he is currently inhaling the very breath that his role model Duns Scotus had 'lived on' centuries ago. In order to proclaim the 'ah!', one opens one's mouth to its roundest capacity, which enables one to release the greatest amount of air. Hopkins's use of the 'ah!' thus enables him to exhale enthusiastically the very breath of which he speaks. In like manner, the speaker's exclamatory 'ah!' in 'God's Grandeur' (1877) successfully expresses his heightened emotions at the sight of dawn: 'Because the Holy Ghost óver the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings' (lines 13-14). As was the case in 'Dun Scotus's Oxford', the 'ah!' forces the lips into a round, verbal smile of joy. This sigh, which has no dictionary meaning, eloquently articulates the speaker's joy and awe at the brightness and warmth that have banished the darkness of 'the black West' (line 11).

For Hopkins, poetry-writing (or, to be more specific, poetry-speaking) is an act of love that 'express[es] passion' and provides him with a means of caressing God. Giving breath and therefore life to a poem allows one to stroke the work with the tongue and mouth before offering it to God. Poetry comprises Hopkins's distinct form of 'aspiration', just as the cries of the tall nun in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* convey her personal 'aspiration' and, ultimately, her final expiration to her 'lover', Christ: 'Breathe, arch and original Breath. / Is it love in her of the being as her lover had been? / Breathe, body of lovely Death' (st. 25). Daniel Brown holds that the rhyme of 'Breath' with 'Death' exemplifies the nun's embrace of a 'Christlike death' and the offering of her 'whole being to him in death'.[29] In a similar but less dramatic manner, poetic creation is for Hopkins an act of vocation that enables him to offer his *spiritus* to God and in praise of God.[30] In his opinion, a poem can be as a prayer, which, once uttered, is informed by the essence that impels its speaker's life. He states in 'The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe' (1883), 'This air, which, by life's law, / My lung must draw and draw / Now but to breathe its praise' (lines 13-15). One is reminded of George Herbert's description of prayer as 'God's breath in man returning to his birth'.[31] Herbert's description refers to the believer's returning to God of the breath that he breathed into Adam, a concept that is so important to Hopkins. Certainly, his poetry can be regarded as a composition of sighs and a series of stresses that dwell upon God's creative 'inspiration' and offer to him their author's 'aspiration'. By equating 'aspiration' with the 'sigh of correspondence', Hopkins suggests that the 'correspondence' is initiated by God's act of sighing, and that his sighs are the stresses to which the poet responds in kind. Indeed, Hopkins asserts that the 'aspiration' is 'the counter stress which God alone can feel' (*Sermons*, p. 156).

The soul's 'counter stress' is its answer to 'God's finger touching the very vein of [one's] personality' (*Sermons*, p. 158). God's 'finger' is the sigh of his Spirit, which moves in the world and touches every mortal being. This finger caresses the heart of the tall nun in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*: 'Fínger of a ténder of, O of a féathery délicacy, the bréast of the / Maiden could obey so, be a bell to, ring óf it' (st. 31). Hopkins alludes here to the Annunciation in which the Virgin Mary conceived by the influence of the Spirit. Elsewhere, he juxtaposes the 'Contemplation for Obtaining Love'

from the *Spiritual Exercises* with the hymn *Veni Creator* to argue that the finger is the Spirit which is, furthermore, 'the bond and mutual love' between the Father, the Son and humanity:

> the Holy Ghost is called Love ('Fons vivus, ignis, *caritas*'); shewn 'in operibus', the works of God's finger ('Digitus paternae dexterae'); consisting 'in communicatione' etc, and the Holy Ghost as he is the bond and mutual love of Father and Son, so of God and man (*Sermons*, p. 195; emphasis his).[32]

God's finger is not only his Spirit but also his love and the means by which he communicates this love (note Hopkins's emphasis of *caritas*). The Spirit, with warm breath, conveys and speaks to us of God's love for his Son and for the world. Hence, the Spirit is the instrument of God's caress. Like the air that an organism breathes, the Spirit reaches into the heart and, indeed, 'the very vein of [one's] personality'. In like manner, the soul's loving 'aspiration' allows it to caress God in return. The tall nun's 'bréast', caressed by the Spirit's 'Fínger of a ténder … féathery délicacy', quivers and 'ring[s]' like a 'bell'. Hopkins reiterates this image of the body as a bell in the later poem 'As kingfishers catch fire' (1877): 'like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's / Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name' (lines 3-4). The nun answers and speaks to God's touch by performing a sigh that reaches into, and resonates within, his 'Éars': 'she réars hersélf to divíne / Éars, … the cáll of the táll nún' (st. 19). The 'counter stress' of the soul's breath touches and communicates with God by offering a continual counterweight to the divine stress of love on its being: the speaker of the poem declares, 'Óver agáin I féel thy fínger and fínd thée' (st. 1).

Hopkins expresses his poetic 'aspirations' to God in another poem written in sprung verse, 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' (1882). The Golden Echo calls on the reader to 'deliver' his or her 'Winning ways' (line 31) with 'sighs': '[with] sighs soaring, sóaring sighs, deliver / Them; beauty-in-the-ghost, delíver it, early now, long before déath' (lines 33-4). The chiasmus of 'sighs soaring, sóaring sighs' depicts one's sigh as a pneumatic reflection, a 'ghost' of God's original breath or 'inspiration'. The use of the

word 'deliver' draws a comparison between these 'sóaring sighs' and letter-writing. In the poem, however, the 'sigh of correspondence' is not written expression, but living speech, uttered and 'motion[ed] with breath'. As the Golden Echo says, 'Resign them, sign them, seal them, send them, motion them with breath' (line 32). Once again, Hopkins rhymes 'breath' (line 32) with 'déath' (line 34) in order to foreshadow and reinforce the relationship between the soul's 'aspiration' and its final expiration. The Golden Echo calls on one to 'resign', that is, to yield and 'sign' away, one's best actions or 'Winning ways'. Hopkins's metaphor of letter-writing provides a further insight into the significance of sprung rhythm to the soul's relationship with God. As with a signature, one offers to God one's unique being, perhaps at first expressed through the poetic work of one's hands, yet, finally, uttered and set in 'motion … with breath'. The 'motion' of spoken poetry replies to God and returns to him his stress and 'inspiration' with the poet's 'aspiration' and 'counter stress'. The Golden Echo says, 'Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver' (lines 34-5). Through echoes or verbal reflections, the Golden Echo gives back to God the 'beauty, beauty, beauty' of his Trinitarian voice.

We see, then, how one is able to converse with God through poetry. However, what if God no longer touches the soul? What if he no longer offers his 'inspiration'? The importance of communication for Hopkins is evident by his fear of its absence. This is a fear held by both the youthful and the older poet. If Christ is the eternally speaking Word then silence spells his absence. According to the early poem '*Nondum*' (1866), a silent God is as uncomforting as an absent one. The speaker declares to God, 'Thou art silent' (line 31). Dejected, he also says, 'though to Thee our psalm we raise / No answering voice comes from the skies' (lines 1-2). God's silence urges the speaker to seek reassurance, for the speaker commands him to 'Speak! whisper to my watching heart / One word - as when a mother speaks / Soft, when she sees her infant start' (lines 49-51). Ordinarily, a loving mother would respond kindly to the child who seeks her. In this poem, her responsive voice exemplifies the love, attentiveness and concern of one being for another. Just as a mother responds to her child, so the speaker wishes the same of God. Earlier, he laments,

> I move along life's tomb-decked way
> And listen to the passing bell
> Summoning men from speechless day
> To death's more silent, darker spell. (lines 39-42)

The absence of light and love leaves only darkness; the silence of God serves to spell his absent affections. The bell tolls for the speaker who currently resides in 'speechless' and darkened day, and beckons him to the 'more silent, darker spell'. Here, the greater silence and darkness of death is hell, a place or state far removed from God.[33] The title '*Nondum*', which translates as 'not yet', alludes to the adjournment of God's presence, voice and love.

As with the speaker in '*Nondum*', the speaker of one of Hopkins's 'sonnets of desolation' feels the despair and darkness of his unanswered calls. In 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day' (1885), conceived nineteen years after '*Nondum*', the speaker bemoans that 'my lament / Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent / To dearest him that lives alas! away' (lines 6-8). The absent recipient, the 'dearest' one who 'lives alas! away', does not receive, or is unreceptive to, the letters of the lover. The speaker's words are like unreturned 'dead letters' because the intended addressee no longer corresponds with him. The speaker's despair is comparable to the following declaration by the Leaden Echo: 'O there's none; no no no there's none: / Be beginning to despair, to despair, / Despair, despair, despair, despair' ('The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo', lines 13-15). For the lover of 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day', the circuit of correspondence has been broken. Consequently, he laments with an 'O' that is reminiscent of the Leaden Echo's 'O' of emptiness and desolation: 'What hours, O what black hours we have spent / This night!' (lines 2-3).

In 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day' and '*Nondum*', silence and broken communication exemplify the separation between God and the soul. However, in the poem 'He hath abolish'd the old drouth' (1864), the deity's response recommences his correspondence with the believer. In the poem, the speaker's greeting is met not with Christ's silence but with his reply. The speaker addresses Christ and declares,

> We meet together, you and I,
> Meet in one acre of one land,
> And I will turn my looks to you,
> And you shall meet me with reply,
> We shall be sheavèd with one band
> In harvest and in garnering (lines 10-15)

These lines incorporate the image of two people who turn to face each other in order to greet and converse. Moreover, this image of turning to Christ foreshadows that of the exchange of wedding vows in 'At the Wedding March' (1879), and may therefore be regarded as one in which the speaker exchanges his vows with Christ.[34] To utter a wedding vow is to initiate a conversation. During the ceremony, the vows uttered by one party are repeated and, in a real sense, replied to, by the other. Indeed, a reply is necessary for the couple's union to be binding. In the poem, the speaker addresses Christ in the first person, as one would when exchanging vows: 'And I will turn my looks to you, / And you shall meet me with reply, / We shall be sheavèd with one band'. In this instance, to 'meet' refers not simply to the couple's coming together in 'one acre of land', but also to the response of one being to the looks and speech of the other in the course of a conversation. The exchange of greetings, looks and replies enables the subject and Christ to unite through the 'one band' of the harvest sheaf, a signifier of the wedding ring. The gathering of the harvest into sheaves, the culmination of agricultural labour, symbolises the fullness of communication between the soul and Christ.

Like his counterpart in 'He hath abolish'd the old drouth', the speaker of 'Hurrahing in Harvest' (1877) salutes Christ at the instant when the 'two … ónce méet' (line 12). In greeting Christ, the speaker offers to him his looks, as well as the feelings from his heart, and the words from his lips: 'And, éyes, héart, what looks, what lips yet gáve you á / Rápturous love's greeting of realer, of rounder replies?' (lines 7-8). The association between 'greeting' and 'replies' suggests an exchange of friendly salutations. However, as the 'replies' are described as 'realer' and 'rounder' and are, furthermore, aligned with 'love's greeting', they also suggest the kiss of greeting. The kiss is one of the most intimate forms of caress and, as such, can present a significant

gesture of love and welcome. In *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, the speaker introduces the fifth stanza by declaring, 'I kiss my hand / To the stars, lovely-asunder / Starlight, wafting him out of it' (st. 5). He concludes the stanza with the statement, 'For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand'. An outstretched hand to the stars provides the body with its greatest vertical extension. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it is his hand that the speaker kisses in order to extend his greeting to the approaching Christ. Moreover, because Hopkins associates a hand with its fingers, and the fingers with breath, the hand also signifies the speaker's *spiritus*.[35] Thus, when the speaker touches Christ with the hand that he has kissed, he communicates to him his breath and being.

In traditional Christian exegesis, the kiss in the Song of Songs is held as a trope of union between the soul and God.[36] In a similar vein, it is also considered an image of breath exchange. Bernard of Clairvaux, the medieval saint with whose work Hopkins was familiar, proclaims in a sermon from *On the Song of Songs*,

> Joining his mouth to this dead mouth of mine, [Christ] gave the kiss of peace, for while we were yet sinners and dead to righteousness, he reconciled us to God [Romans 5:10]. Setting his mouth to mine he breathed into it a second time the breath of life [Genesis 2:7].[37]

The kiss of Christ on the believer's mouth both initiates and represents the exchange of 'the breath of life', of *spiritus*. For Bernard, this 'kiss of peace' is a typological re-enactment of God's inspiration in Adam. A similar idea of pneumatic exchange is found in the Apostles' encouragement of the 'kiss of peace' among the early Christians. This kiss on the mouth, however, is not merely allegorical; it is also literal. Peter exhorts his fellow Christians to 'Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity'.[38] For Paul, the 'holy kiss' encourages closeness and community among his fellow Christians.[39] In his opinion, the 'kiss of peace' facilitates unity, for in the kiss, the believers are 'all made to drink into one Spirit'.[40] The kiss of greeting among the early Christians was understood to transmit the unitive qualities of the Spirit.

Nicholas James Perella, discussing the significance of the pneumatic kiss in the New Testament, argues that 'When the individual bodies kiss, they give evidence of being knit together by virtue of the Spirit they have in common. It may be said that they kiss one another with that Spirit'.[41]

Two beings must meet in order to form a kiss. In the caress of the kiss, one kisses, and is kissed by, another. The kiss provides an intimate example of one's openness to the other. The kiss on the mouth undoubtedly circulates 'inspiration' and 'aspiration', and enables two beings to share and exchange the same breath. For Hopkins, this kiss is synonymous with the transference of the Spirit, breath, and speech. In 'Hurrahing in Harvest', the speaker describes his greeting as both 'realer' and 'rounder', thereby suggesting a greater than usual exchange of *spiritus*. In the kiss, as with conversation, breath circulates from the open lips of the one who breathes to the other who replies in kind. By opening his mouth to a 'rounder' capacity, the speaker increases his ability to inhale and, moreover, return to Christ his breath, his speech and his kiss.[42] The kiss allows the speaker and Christ to simultaneously unify and retain their otherness. This idea of difference within unity is exemplified by the nature of the Trinity, the Three in One. The Spirit forms the kiss that unites the Trinity. According to Bernard of Clairvaux, the Father is the kisser, the Son is the kissed, and the Spirit is the kiss that unites them:

> truly the kiss … is common both to him who kisses and to him who is kissed…. If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.[43]

Hopkins holds to a similar notion of the Spirit's unitive character when he declares that the Spirit consists '"in communicatione"' and is 'the bond and mutual love of Father and Son, so of God and man' (*Sermons*, p. 195). For Hopkins, the Spirit, which unites the Trinity, also unites God with humanity.

Hopkins makes important use of the pneumatic kiss in an early ballad,

'The Queen's Crowning' (1864). This poem, while neglected by critics, is nevertheless important to Hopkins studies, for it displays the earliest sign of his preoccupation with the exchange of breath between the soul and God. Hence, it foreshadows his later concepts of 'inspiration' and 'aspiration'. The poem tells the tale of Alice who weds William, the heir to the English throne. After their wedding night, William leaves his new wife and returns to England. He informs his brothers of his marriage to a woman of low status. They kill him to punish him for this marriage. Two years later, a stranger knocks at Alice's door. When she asks him where he is from, he replies,

> 'I am not come from England land,
> Nor yet from over the sea.
> If I were come from Paradise
> It were more like to be.' (lines 125-8)

He bears a lily and a rose from Paradise. In addition, the speaker says,

> The more she ask'd, the more he spoke,
> The fairer waxèd he.
> The more he told, the less she spoke,
> The wanner wanèd she. (lines 141-4)

The more Alice speaks, the more she weakens. Conversely, the stranger gains in vigour and speech. The ballad suggests that during the course of their conversation the stranger inhales her breath, leaving her with less and less, and thereby drawing her closer to death. Certainly, the entrance at which Alice meets the stranger is as much the threshold between life and death as it is between her and him.

The stranger asks Alice if she will follow him and if she will accept his 'kisses three'. She replies,

> 'O I will follow thee, my true love.
> Give me thy kisses three.
> Sweeter thy kisses, my own love,
> Than all the crowns to me.' (lines 149-52)

The poem concludes thus:

> He gave her kisses cold as ice;
> Down upon the ground fell she.
> She has gone with him to Paradise.
> There shall her crowning be. (lines 153-6)

The stranger's trinity of kisses completes what was begun by the verbal exchange: namely, it allows him to suck the breath out of Alice. His kisses are described as being 'cold as ice', and this alludes to a version of the ballad 'Sweet William's Ghost', upon which 'The Queen's Crowning' is based. However, 'Sweet William's Ghost' is a supernatural ballad, which concludes with Margaret spurning the cold kisses of the dead lover. In contrast, the climax of Hopkins's ballad has a clear theological significance. It suggests that Alice's 'true love' is Christ, the king of Paradise, whose three kisses exchange her breath for eternal life with him.

In Hopkins's later, although undated, Latin hymn, '*Ad Matrem Virginem*', the kiss both initiates and personifies the conversational exchange between the soul and Christ. The principle that unites the Father with the Son through the Spirit is at work here, for the Spirit is not only the bond between the Father and the Son, he is also the bond between the Son and the believer.[45] The Spirit is crucial to the hymn's delineation of the relationship between kissing and conversing. The speaker asks Mary for the embrace and kisses of her Son: 'Allow me to embrace Him, grant me a little of the love given to you, and kisses meant for your mouth'.[46] The speaker's request to Mary for the 'kisses meant for your mouth' is informed by the fact that both speech and breath enter and leave through the mouth. In the hymn, therefore, Hopkins suggests that Mary conceived her Son, the Word, through the kisses of the Holy Spirit. This idea of conceiving through the mouth is reminiscent of certain Renaissance depictions of the Annunciation, which show a sequence of Hebrew letters emanating from the angel's mouth and reaching Mary's head.[47] These renderings gesture towards God's act of breathing his Spirit into the mouth of Adam. The angel of the Annunciation breathes the life of the Second Adam into the mouth of Mary. In Hopkins's hymn, the speaker yearns for the kisses from the mouth of this new Adam, Christ.

The speaker of '*Ad Matrem Virginem*', immediately after requesting the kisses of the baby Jesus, asks of Mary,

> The One who wishes to be given for me,
> Unspeaking, to speak to me,
> To converse with me,
> Do you give to me that I may contemplate Him too. (lines 67-70)[48]

The Word is transmitted and 'given for me' through kisses, kisses originally given by the Spirit to Mary's mouth and, later, by the Word in conversation. By asking Mary, 'Do you give to me that I may contemplate Him too', the speaker reiterates his desire for the kisses that bear the Word. Christ willingly seeks to fulfil the speaker's desire, for, according to the speaker, he 'wishes to be given for me', so that he might 'speak to me, to converse with me'. However, the unborn Word is yet 'Unspeaking'; he is physically incapable of speech, and may only 'speak' and 'converse' through kisses, kisses that both embody and transcend speech. In this way, the kiss is necessary for the speaker to 'converse' with Christ. The speaker's reply would be his own kisses, for if the speech of Christ were given in kisses, the conversation between Christ and the speaker would be made possible only through the kisses given and responded to. This act requires face-to-face intimacy, and affirms that the conversation of kisses is a demonstration of love. Indeed, when the speaker asks for 'a little of the love given to [Mary]' and the kisses meant for her mouth, he reveals that the word *ore* (from your mouth) is given in the word *amore* (out of your love). The kiss facilitates a circle of touching and a sharing of breath between the soul and God. It enables each participant to caress the other, to become one, and yet remain two.

I began this paper by citing Luce Irigaray. I conclude by citing her example of breath. 'With whom do I cultivate the breath?' she asks. She continues:

> Who will allow me to remain two: the one, the other, and the air between us? Life is taken from no one. Each one safeguards it for him or herself and for the other, existing in solitude thanks to nature, but still wanting to live with the other. Each one, therefore, trains the breath in order to be, to be and to become: divided

> between us, perhaps, but together at the same time. Distanced by our difference, but present to each other.[49]

In a relationship of mutual interchange, what is the thing that distinguishes one from, and unites one with, another? What enables one to touch, and be touched, in equal measure? For Hopkins, the spring of mutual caress, of otherness and unity, is the breath that moves between him and God.

Notes

1 Luce Irigaray, *To Be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (London: Athlone Press, 2000), p. 25.

2 Irigaray, *To Be Two*, p. 12.

3 In her definition of generosity, Rosalyn Diprose argues that generosity is 'an openness to others that not only precedes and establishes communal relations but constitutes the self as open to otherness. Primordially, generosity is not the expenditure of one's possessions but the disposition of oneself, the being-given to others that undercuts any self-contained ego, that undercuts self-possession': Rosalyn Diprose, *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 4.

4 God's openness to others is traditionally articulated in Roman Catholicism by the literal openness of Christ's Sacred Heart and wounds.

5 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul' (Genesis 2:7, Authorised Version).

6 Unless otherwise stated, poems by Hopkins will be cited from *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Norman H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), with line or stanza numbers incorporated in the text in parentheses.

7 Friedrich Max Müller, *The Science of Language*, Vol. 2 (London: Longmans, 1913), p. 371. It is known that Hopkins read *The Science of Language*: Norman White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 105.

8 Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 56.

9 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the noun 'spirit' can denote 'The animating or vital principle in man (and animals); that which gives life to the physical organism, in contrast to its purely material elements; the breath of life', 'The soul of a person, as commended to God, or passing out of the body, in the moment of death', and 'The mind or faculties as the seat of action and feeling, esp. as liable to be depressed or exalted by events or circumstances' (2nd edn, 1989, s.v. 'spirit').

10 Notes written on 30 December 1881, in T*he Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Christopher Devlin (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 157. Subsequent page references are incorporated in the text in parentheses.

11 Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Lovesong', *Translations from the Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. M. D. Hertner Norton (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 153.

12 *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 2nd edn, ed. Humphry House and Graham Storey (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 289; emphasis added. These notes are undated, but point to his time as Professor of Rhetoric at Manresa House, Roehampton, between 1873 and 1874 (p. xxvii).

13 Hopkins, *Poetical Work*s, p. 117. Many of the arguments from the 'Author's Preface on Rhythm' can be found in a letter to his friend Richard Watson Dixon, dated 14 January 1881: *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, 2nd edn, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 39-42).

14 Hopkins, *Poetical Works*, p. 117.

15 Hopkins, *Poetical Works*, p. 115.

16 From a letter dated 27 February 1879, *Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon,* p. 23; emphasis his.

17 From a letter dated 5 November 1885: Anthony Bischoff, 'Hopkins's letters to his brother', *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 December 1972, p. 1511.

18 'Author's Note on the Rhythm in '*The Wreck of the Deutschland*'' (Poetical Works, p. 118).

19 From a letter dated 7 November 1883, *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins Including his Correspondence with Coventry Patmore*, 2nd edn, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 327.

20 Bischoff, 'Hopkins's letters to his brother', p. 1511.

21 Hopkins instructs his friend Robert Bridges on how to read his poems in a letter dated 22 April 1879: 'take breath and read it with the ears, as I always

wish to be read' (*The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, 2nd edn, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott [London: Oxford University Press, 1955], p. 79).

22 *Poetical Works*, p. 118.

23 J. Hillis Miller, 'Naming and Doing: Speech Acts in Hopkins's Poems', *Religion & Literature* 22 (1990), 188.

24 James Finn Cotter, Inscape: *The Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), pp. 288-9, and Miller, 'Naming and Doing', 184-5, include an extensive list of these occurrences in Hopkins's poems.

25 Cotter, *Inscape*, pp. 286-7. See also his article 'Sounding Alpha and Omega in Dante, Milton, and Hopkins', *Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889): New Essays on His Life, Writing, and Place in English Literature*, ed. Michael E. Allsopp and Michael W. Sundermeier (Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1989), 164-72.

26 Miller, 'Naming and Doing', 187-8.

27 Daniel Brown, Hopkins' *Idealism: Philosophy, Physics, Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 320-2.

28 From a letter dated 8 October 1879, *Letters … to Robert Bridges*, p. 92.

29 Daniel Brown, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Horndon, Devon: Northcote House, 2004), p. 88.

30 The word 'vocation' is derived in part from the Latin word *vox*, 'voice'. Hopkins delivered a sermon on vocation on 21 September 1879 (*Sermons*, pp. 23-5).

31 Prayer (1)', *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*, ed. John Tobin (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 45. Herbert's description resonates with the following from Psalm 150:6: 'Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord'. Hopkins had owned Herbert's collection *The Temple*, which he gave to his sister Millicent in September 1868, shortly before his entry into the Society of Jesus: Madeleine House, 'Books Belonging to Hopkins and his Family', *Hopkins Research Bulletin* 5 (1974), 30.

32 Notes of 14 August 1882 on the 'Contemplation for Obtaining Love'. The phrase 'fons vivus, ignis, *caritas*' (living fountain, fire, love), is from the hymn *Veni Creator*, which, according to Robert Boyle, is perhaps more liturgically familiar than any other: Robert Boyle, *Metaphor in Hopkins* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1961), p. 39. Hopkins had

heard the hymn as early as 1 October 1870, and perhaps earlier: Alfred Thomas, *Hopkins the Jesuit: The Years of Training* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 92.

33 For more on the idea that hell is the soul's separation from God, see the early poem 'Pilate' (1864). Pilate describes his exile from God thus:

> The pang of Tartarus, Christians hold,
> Is this, from Christ to be shut out.
> This outer cold, my exile from of old
> From God and man, is hell no doubt. (lines 1-4)

34 Then let the márch tréad our ears:
I to hím túrn with tears
Whó to wedlock, hís wónder wedlock,
Déals tríumph and immortal years. ('At the Wedding March', lines 9-12)

35 He asserts in a sermon, given on 15 May 1880, that the Spirit 'is called the finger of the Father's right hand, that is all the fingers, for the fingers are to the hand or arm as many things are to one' (*Sermons*, p. 99).

36 The Latin text of the Song of Songs begins with a kiss: 'Osculetur me osculo oris sui' [Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth]. (It is the second verse of the King James Bible). In one sense, the kiss is literal because, as spoken of in the text, it did indeed take place between two historical people. However, insofar as the kiss refers to the relationship between God and the Church or the soul, it is read allegorically. For a history of Christian allegorical readings, see Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City NJ: Doubleday, 1977).

37 Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs I*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 16.III.3. Hopkins was familiar with Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs. He makes reference to them in a sermon when he declares that 'such was the case with the worship of the Sacred Heart: we find it in St. Gertrude's prayers and in St. Bernard's Sermons' (*Sermons*, pp. 100, 282n).

38 1 Peter 5:14.

39 Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26.

40 1 Corinthians 12:13.

41 Nicholas James Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretive History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 15.

42 This reading of the 'realer, rounder replies' is inspired by E. Ann Matter's exploration of the relation between the 'O', the mouth and the kiss: E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1990). She briefly discusses an illuminated capital of a Cambridge manuscript of Bede's commentary on the Song of Songs, 'which exploits the O of 'osculetur' ('kiss') by portraying a mouth in which Christ and the Church sit locked in a kiss' (p. 101). The Latin rendering, '*Os*culetur me *os*culo *oris* sui', she argues, 'repeats related words for kiss and mouth three times'. Her translation invokes this: 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his kisser' (p. 126; emphasis hers).

43 Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, 8.I.2.

44 *Poetical Works*, p. 262.

45 For Bernard of Clairvaux, however, the kiss of the mouth is given only between the Father and the Son, while the lesser 'kiss of the kiss' is given between God and the human subject: 'For Christ therefore, the kiss meant a totality, for Paul only a participation; Christ rejoiced in the kiss of the mouth, Paul only in that he was kissed by the kiss' (*On the Song of Songs*, 8.VII.8).

46 'Da complecti Illum, / Mihi da pauxillum / Tuo ex amore / Et oscula ab ore'. I have given here the translation from *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 4th edn, ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 337-8. The translation given by the *Poetical Works* is ambiguous: 'Grant that I may embrace Him / And give me a little out of the store of your love/ And of your mystic kisses' (lines 64-6). Subsequent translations of '*Ad Matrem Virginem*', however, will be from *The Poetical Works*.

47 See, e.g., Simone Memmi, example 91, in Anna Brownell Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna as Represented in the Fine Arts*, 2nd edn (London: Unit Library, 1903), p. 275.

48 Qui pro me vult dari, / Infans mihi fari, / Mecum conversari, / Tu da contemplari'.

49 Irigaray, *To Be Two*, p. 11.

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