Music and Poetry:
Hopkins, Sprung Rhythm,
and the Problem of Isochrony

Greg Sevik
Binghamton University

I. Poetry and Music: A Troubled Comparison

This journal's recent Special Issue on "Hopkins' Prosody" attests to the importance of versification for the study of Gerard Manley Hopkins and his work. In this vein, many have attempted to explore Hopkins' prosody through analogies with music,[1] an approach strongly supported by Hopkins' own statements in his letters, journals, and other writings—including his poetic manuscripts, in which he frequently employs marks derived from musical notation. In the "Author's Preface" to "The Wreck of the Deutschland," Hopkins' most sustained—if not, as some have convincingly argued,[2] most authoritative— account of the workings of sprung rhythm, Hopkins explicitly compares his prosodic technique to musical structures. Sprung rhythm, he explains, is "the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music" (PI 49). In light of this claim, Hopkins suggests counting the rhythms of his poems in the manner of a musical beat, asserting that "for purposes of scanning it is a great convenience to follow the example of music and take the stress always first, as the accent or the chief accent always comes first in a musical bar" (PI 45). Such comparisons reflect Hopkins' lifelong interest in music: Hopkins, we know, even composed music himself, creating settings for his and others' poetry. At times, indeed, Hopkins seems to find more inspiration and room for innovation in musical composition than in verse (see, e.g., LI 103).

Given his substantial knowledge and enthusiasm in this arena, it is not surprising that the interarts study of music and poetry has become a major thread in Hopkins scholarship. John Golden, in his

recent analysis of Hopkinsøs complex and problematic use of the term õcounterpoint,ö suggests that we might consider loosening our understanding of the connection between music and poetry. We should not, he argues, view language as õ÷subjectedøto music (or vice versa)ö (65). Golden has a point. After all, it may or may not be that case that õ[a]*ll art constantly aspires to the condition of music,*ö as Walter Pater, Hopkinsøs tutor at Oxford, asserts (106). At the same time, it nevertheless seems clear that in many respects Hopkinsøs verse does imitate musical structures. And indeed, many questions concerning the analogy between music and poetry remain as yet unanswered. How far does the analogy really reach? What concrete elements of music and its aesthetic makeup bear useful comparison to verse structures? And to what extent does the analogy between the two arts pertain to precisely those elements of poetry that resist critical translation into fixed, verbal õmeaningö? Lawrence Kramer, one of the most prominent scholars to study rigorously the relationship between music and poetry, recognizes the dangers involved in such a comparison. õMusic and poetry,ö he writes, õ[have] often been linked, sometimes with speculative keenness, more often in vague, unsatisfying waysö (vii).

The body of Hopkins scholarship contains numerous examples of such vague juxtapositions of the two arts. H. Wendell Howard, for instance, attempts to apply the musical terms õchromaticismö and õdiatonismö to Hopkinsøs use of alliteration and other sound effects (146). As Christopher R. Wilson points out, however, it is simply õnot possible to apply chromaticism as a technical term in poetryö (35). (Poetic language, after all, does not constitute a tonal system.) In a more common misapplication, Fiona Vance describes what she terms the õmelodyö of Hopkinsøs verse. Reworking the concept of melody such that it applies to poetic language, Vance explains: õPitch is not the only part of melody. . . . Hopkins achieves his melodies mainly through his sound effects, such as assonance, consonance, internal rhyme and onomatopoeiaö (120). The problem with such a reworking, of course, is that in musical terms melody consists *precisely* in a succession of pitches.[3] Vance, like others before her, thus employs the term only in its vaguest sense of õeuphonyö or õpleasing soundöô just the kind of non-rigorous usage against which Kramer warns.

One of the most common, and most misleading, analogies between music and poetry moves in the opposite directionô not from music to poetry but from language to music. It takes the form of references to õmusical meaning.ö Kramer, in his generally excellent

work on the relationship between music and poetry, nevertheless characterizes music as conveying "meaning"—albeit indeterminate meaning, which is "always non-predicative and inexact. Its connotations are peripheral, always somewhat displaced—not so much vague as unlocalized, at a third remove, like a name on the tip of the tongue" (6). Some Hopkins scholars similarly assume that the sound of Hopkins's verse conveys a kind of subterranean "musical meaning" independent of its verbal, conceptual meaning (see, e.g., Wimsatt 543). One must wonder, however: if such meaning remains forever unattainable, unspeakable, "like a name on the tip of the tongue," then why should we bother calling it "meaning" at all? And if it never becomes fixed, never gets "localized," then how can we be so sure that it is not "vague"?

Part of this difficulty relates to a lack of agreement concerning the very meaning of the word "meaning." This ambiguity, admittedly, resides within the word itself, which can denote both (1) linguistic "signification" and (2) "significance," in its broader and vaguer sense of "importance," "purpose," or even "value" (e.g., "the meaning of life"). Critics who speak of "musical meaning" conflate, unnecessarily, these two distinct senses of the word (one that literature scholars, in particular, ought to employ with precision). Words, of course, have meaning(s) by virtue of the fact that they exist within a shared sign system. The signifier "dog" indicates *Canis lupus familiaris* because we all agree, by convention, that it does so. Musical sounds, by contrast, do not signify concepts (i.e., meanings) with any real consistency. A given musical note could never be made to function as a linguistic sign, since its quality depends so much upon its context within a piece of music: Middle C does not produce the same effect in the key of C as it does in the key of C#, and so on. If one considers further complications—tempo, note values, melodies, harmonies, the timbres of particular instruments— then the idea of "reading" music like a "language" falls apart entirely. As Theodor Adorno points out, music "bildet kein System aus Zeichen" [does not form a system of signs] (251, translation mine). Strictly speaking, in other words, absolute music resists—absolutely— translation into linguistic concepts. Music *has no meaning*, in the sense of "signification," though certainly it has meaning in the sense of "significance" and "value."

On what specific terms, then, should the comparison between music and poetry take place? What constitute the common aesthetic elements? Music and poetry do not share the qualities of melody or harmony, in the strict musical senses of these terms, nor of meaning,

in the linguistic sense of denotation or connotation. However, they do have in common two discrete sensuous phenomena: (1) physical sound, including varying sound textures or timbres, and (2) the rhythmic organization of time.[4] Some of the most sensitive critics of Hopkins's work have, at least implicitly, recognized this parallel, exploring Hopkins's prosody as an aesthetics of rhythmic sound.[5] This recognition of the fundamental aesthetic similarity between verse and music— their existence as sound and rhythm— takes us a long way toward understanding the aural aesthetics of Hopkins's poetry, namely, that which in his verse pushes the limits of mere meaning. This significant advance, however, opens up new complications as well.

II. Isochrony and Common Speech

If music and poetry both consist of rhythmic sound, then the next question becomes: does the rhythm of poetry resemble that of music, or does it possess a rhythmic system all its own? More to the point, does *Hopkins's* rhythm resemble that of music? To answer this question, we will need to make a detour into Hopkins's own views concerning poetic rhythm. We can begin with one of his most frequently quoted statements on this issue, one found in the "Author's Preface," where Hopkins includes the following "Note on the nature and history of Sprung Rhythm":

> Sprung Rhythm is the most natural of things. For (1) it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them. (2) It is the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music, so that in the words of choruses and refrains and in songs written closely to music it arises. (3) It is found in nursery rhymes, weather saws, and so on; because, however these may have been once made in running rhythm, the terminations having dropped off by the change of language, the stresses come together and so the rhythm is sprung. (4) It arises in common verse when reversed or counterpointed, for the same reason. (PI 48-49)

This passage contains many noteworthy twists and turns, but we will focus for the moment on the first two items. Hopkins, as he often does, refers to sprung rhythm as "the most natural of things."[6] Sprung rhythm, he claims, produces the same rhythms as naturally occurring

uses of the English language, both "the rhythm of common speech and of written prose." At the same time, he asserts, it produces the rhythm characteristic of most music, indeed, "of all but the most monotonously regular music." Thus, aside from being "natural," sprung rhythm also approximates the height of artifice, namely, the musical organization of sound. We can only speculate as to what Hopkins means by "monotonously regular," but he likely had in mind military marches, certain forms of dance music, and the like.[7] Certainly, he was not referring to the music of Henry Purcell, his favorite composer. In either case, there is a clear contradiction at work, for sprung rhythm cannot simultaneously constitute both the natural rhythm of speech, which is "free rhythm" in the sense that it does not conform to an underlying tempo or time signature, *and* the artificial, imposed rhythm of Western music, which (monotonous or otherwise) generally structures itself around a more or less regular tempo and a repeated sequence of beats (3/4, 4/4, etc.). Some critics tend to commit themselves to one or the other of these divergent positions, often with productive results (Leech; Wimsatt 556). Still, if we hope to develop a fuller understanding of the quasi-musical aesthetic underlying Hopkins's poetry, the issue deserves closer consideration.

The question remains: does Hopkins's sprung rhythm produce "musical rhythms" or rather "speech rhythms"? An important key to this question lies in the concept of isochrony. Derived from ancient Greek (*ísos*), meaning "equal," and (*chronos*), meaning "time," isochrony describes the rough equality of duration between stressed syllables in a spoken utterance, regardless of the number of intervening unstressed syllables. Anthony Easthope defines isochrony as "the tendency to keep roughly the same time interval between stresses so that . . . the two syllables of *Jóhn stánds* is timed roughly the same as the six of *Jónathan understánds*, both having two strong stresses, in contrast to *Jóhnny Bláck withstánds*, which has three" (55). In Hopkins studies, critics generally operate according to the assumption that isochrony represents a fundamental component of Hopkins's prosody. Sprung rhythm, after all, is commonly understood as a variation on accentual rhythm, since it constitutes a meter that, as Hopkins explains, "consists in scanning by accents or stresses alone, without any account of the number of syllables, so that a foot may be one strong syllable or it may be many light and one strong" (LII 14). The assumed presence of isochrony would presumably tell us a great deal about Hopkins's sprung rhythm poems, inasmuch as every metrical foot, be it monosyllable (/) or first

paeon (/ x x x), would occupy the same interval of time. Hopkins himself emphasizes this point in the õAuthorøs Preface,ö noting that õ[i]n sprung rhythm, as in logaoedic rhythm generally, the feet are assumed to be equally long or strong and their seeming inequality is made up by pause or stressingö (PI 47-48).

At first glance, all this talk of isochrony seems clear enough, and Hopkinsøs personal endorsement of it seems to seal the deal. Upon closer examination, however, one realizes that the use of the term õisochronyö in Hopkins studies contains a startling ambiguity, one not generally recognized in the scholarship. Significantly, Easthopeøs definition of isochrony applies *not* to a particular genre of poetry, nor to a particular meter, author, or style; instead, it pertains to the general tendency of spoken English to manifest a õroughlyö equal time interval between stressed syllables, as in the examples he provides. According to Easthope, the English languageô and not just a particular use of Englishô is *per se* isochronous. When employed in this loose sense, therefore, the argument for the presence of isochrony in Hopkinsøs verse amounts to little more than the claim that it was written in English. It thus tells us next to nothing about the specificity of Hopkinsøs rhythm. In order to evaluate Hopkinsøs statement concerning the presence of isochrony as a positive claim, then, one must understand the term more literally: as iso-chrony, õequal time.ö In other words, one must exploreô at least provisionallyô the possibility that Hopkinsøs verse operates on the basis of a regular, quasi-metronomic, and therefore fundamentally musical kind of rhythm.[8]

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that Hopkins had precisely this notion in mind. In one of his early letters to Richard Watson Dixon, Hopkins explains the musical basis of sprung rhythm:

> I do not say the idea is altogether new; there are hints of it in music, in nursery rhymes and popular jingles, in the poets themselves, and, since then, I have seen it talked about as a thing possible in critics. Here are instancesô õ*Díng, dóng, béll*; Pússyøs ín the wéll; *Whó pút* her ín? Líttle Jóhnny Thín. *Whó púlled* her óut? Líttle Jóhnny Stóut.ö For if each line has three stresses or three feet it follows that some of the feet are of one syllable only. So too õ*One, twó*, Búckle my shóeö *passim*. (LII 14)

Notably, in order to demonstrate the naturalness of sprung rhythm, Hopkins utilizes as examples õnursery rhymes and popular jingles.ö

Such rhymes tend to conform to a steady tempo—a more or less musical, metronomic beat—even to the extent that they distort ordinary speech rhythms. In the example above, for instance, the line "*Whó pút* her ín?" conforms, with its three stresses, to the three-beat pattern of the rhythm. In ordinary conversation, however, one would more likely pronounce only two strong stresses: "Whó put her ín?" As Easthope explains, such accentual meter— meter based on stress counts rather than syllable counts— generally "calls for an emphatic, heavily stressed performance, one typically recited or chanted, often in association with rhythmic gestures, clapping, dancing. In chanting, rhythmic repetitions take complete priority over natural intonation, subsuming it " (73). Given the fact that Hopkins' sprung rhythm is also at least partly accentual, given that it also "consists in scanning by accents or stresses alone," one might provisionally assume that his poetry also calls for this sort of emphatic— and emphatically regular— musical beat.

At least two critics have taken this line of thinking quite far. G.N. Leech, in his article "Music in Metre: 'Sprung Rhythm' in Victorian and Georgian Poetry," develops a system of "musical scansion" according to which Hopkins' stresses represent the commencement not just of metrical feet but also of musical beats, an approach implicitly sanctioned by Hopkins' comments in the "Author's Preface." Leech's method suggests intriguing solutions to some vexing problems in Hopkins studies,[9] but, despite its explanatory power, his system contains serious drawbacks, including (1) his notation, a visually-disorienting array of letters and bars that makes no use of existing musical notation or terminology, and (2) his failure to take seriously the question of whether or not one can actually read Hopkins' poems in the manner that he proposes, with the steady metronomic beat of a limerick or nursery rhyme. Christopher R. Wilson's article "The Idea of 'Musicality' in Hopkins' Verse" makes expert use of musical concepts but similarly fails to create a notation that usefully describes the rhythm of Hopkins' language. Employing a framework suggested by a passage in Hopkins' journal,[10] Wilson transcribes, in an unexplained and seemingly arbitrary procedure, each metrical *foot* of the sonnet "Harry Ploughman" into one *measure* of 4/4 time (40-41). The resultant "quasi-musical scansion" (39) does as much to obscure Hopkins' rhythm as to clarify it.

If we hope to compare Hopkins' rhythm and musical rhythm in a way that substantially illuminates something about the former, we must, first of all, make appropriate use of existing musical

concepts, such as time signature, note values, and rests. Just as importantly, we must work within a rhythmic framework explicitly built into the poems themselves. And indeed, such a framework clearly exists in Hopkinsøs verse, namely, in the number of stresses or beats per line. Given this fact, we can establish a notational system that mobilizes a different set of analogies with musical rhythm, one in which each line of verse becomes one measure (delineated by a double bar: ‖), and each metrical foot or beat occupies one quarter note (separated by a single bar: |). In this system, the time signature no longer imposes an arbitrary structure on the language but rather utilizes an existing one, so that 4/4 time describes a tetrameter line, 5/4 time a pentameter line, and so forth. Finally, rather than employing a musical staff, which inevitably distorts the shape of a song text, this system preserves the poem as is, with the musical notes presented above, and with the option of adding accentual marks to the verses (as below). In this framework, a musical scansion of the nursery rhyme cited by Hopkinsô in 4/4 time, with a rest after every third beatô takes the following form:[11]

‖ ♩ | ♩ | ♩ | 𝄽 ‖
Díng, dóng, béll;
‖ | | ♩ | 𝄽 ‖
Pússyøs ín the wéll;
‖ ♩ | | ♩ | 𝄽 ‖
Whó pút her ín?
‖ | | ♩ | 𝄽 ‖
Líttle Jóhnny Thín.
‖ ♩ | | ♩ | 𝄽 |
Whó púlled her óut?
‖ | | ♩ | 𝄽 ‖
Líttle Jóhnny Stóut.

Given this form of presentation, we can examine the more or less simultaneous interaction of multiple rhythmic levels: õmusical scansionö (Leechøs term), which accounts for relations of *time*; traditional metrical scansion, which accounts for relations of *stress*; and the rhythm of õnaturalö spoken utterance, given by a prose-like recitation of the text.

Of course, the purpose of this exercise is not so much to perfect a notation for musical scansion, nor necessarily to produce musical scansions of particular Hopkins poems. Rather, the aim here

is to determine the extent to which (if at all) the rhythm of Hopkinsøs verse resembles that of music, that is, whether musical scansion in fact tells us anything at all about the nature of his poetry. We can approach this question by looking, first of all, at two competing scansions, by Harold Whitehall and Edward A. Stephenson, of the opening line of õThe Caged Skylark,ö a poem that begins: õAs a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage / Manøs mounting spirit in his bone-house, mean house, dwells í ö (PI 70). Both Whitehall and Stephenson argue for a dipodic reading of Hopkinsøs sprung rhythm poems, a scansion that includes not just two but three levels of accentuation: primary (or strong) stress, secondary (or weak) stress, and no stress (or a õslackö). Whitehall argues that Hopkinsøs poetry employs more or less the same metrical form found in medieval Anglo-Saxon verse, namely, the four-stress dipodic line, with each of its õdipodsö modeled on variations of the pattern: / x \ x (strong stress, unstressed, weak stress, unstressed). Whitehall thus scans the first line of õThe Caged Skylarkö as follows, with four dipodic feet: As a dáre-gàle skýlàrk scánted ìn a dúll càge (343). Stephenson, in his book *What Sprung Rhythm Really Is*, objects to this reading, arguing that even though Hopkins does employ dipody, he does not necessarily compose in a four-beat line. On the contrary, Stephenson explains, Hopkins generally composes his sonnets, even the õsprungö ones, with five feet per line, in accordance with the English sonneteering traditionô the proof being, among other things, that in those cases in which Hopkins employs a different number of feet, he often makes a note of it (Stephenson, õUniform Line-Lengthsö). Accordingly, Stephenson scans the line with five strong stresses, with the final word, õcage,ö promoted to a primary stress: As a dáre-gàle skýlàrk scánted ìn a dúll cáge (*Sprung Rhythm* 17). This may seem like a relatively minor, even trivial, difference. However, if we assume the presence of musical isochrony (*à la* õDing, dong, bellö), then Stephensonøs addition of another strong stressô and, consequently, of an additional musical beatô alters drastically the way one reads the line. Whitehalløs four stresses, rendered into 4/4 musical time, in fact capture the rhythm of the passage quite well, such that one can easily clap or tap oneøs foot to the beat and still read the line in a more or less unstrained, expressive way:

♬ ‖　　　|　　　| ♫　 ♫|　　　‖
As a dáre-gàle skýlàrk scánted ìn a dúll càge

By contrast, Stephenson's five-stress reading, translated into 5/4 time, distorts the natural linguistic rhythm of the passage even beyond the usual comfort zone allowed for by nursery rhymes. The words "dull" and "cage," as two adjacent strong stresses, become lone quarter notes amidst a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, creating an unnatural pause between them:

> ♫ ‖ | | ♪   ♪ | ♩ | ♩ ‖
> As a dáre-gàle skýlàrk scánted ìn a dúllí   cáge

 In this way, a musical scansion highlights some crucial differences between Whitehall's reading and that of Stephenson. Still, it does not necessarily tell us which critic has the "right" interpretation. If anything, musical scansion only emphasizes the contradiction inherent in Hopkins's competing claims of musical rhythm, metrical regularity, and "naturalness of expression" (LI 46). Whitehall's reading carries with it the advantage that it produces the most appropriate *musical* scansion; Stephenson's, that it conforms to Hopkins's probable *metrical* intentions, as well as the traditional requirement that end-rhyme correspond to metrical strong stress. As in the case in many of Hopkins verses, the musical (i.e., temporal) and metrical (i.e., accentual) scansions of the line simply cannot be reconciled (see note 9). One must often choose between honoring either the musical beat or the metrical accentuation. Stephenson attempts to have it both ways, asserting the importance of isochrony while providing the disclaimer that "we must never insist on metronomic precision in the equal-timed feet of sprung rhythm" (*Sprung Rhythm* 7). To be sure, Stephenson argues rightly that one must not read mechanically. At the same time, we recall that asserting "approximate"—rather than regular, foot-tapping, and therefore fundamentally musical—isochrony amounts to asserting little or nothing at all.

 This tension between musical-temporal and metrical-accentual scansions exists in many of Hopkins's sprung rhythm poems, especially those with longer lines. Consider, for instance, a musical reading of the final tercet of "The Windhover"—a reading based on a metrical scansion produced by Stephenson (*Sprung Rhythm* 80), who has labored as expertly and diligently as anyone to make Hopkins's poems scan according to their prescribed stress counts:

> *5/4*   ‖ ♪   ♪ | ♩ | | | ‖
> No wónder of it: shéer plód makes plóugh down síllion

‖ | | | |

    Shíne, and blúe-bleak émbers, áh my déar,

‖ | | ♩ | | ‖

    Fall, gáll themsélves, and gásh góld-vermílion. (PI 69)

One can leave aside for the moment the question of whether Stephenson has produced the õcorrectö metrical scansion of õThe Windhover,ö a problematic fraught with all sorts of textual and hermeneutic difficulties. Regardless of the particular metrical scansion, the poem clearly does not adapt well to a *musical* scansion. Recited with a steady underlying tempo, the poem sounds roboticô bereft of the long, expressive pauses that Hopkins so frequently recommends in his notes on individual poems. Instead, we encounter a lifeless chain of monosyllables: blue-bleak-em-bers-ah-my-dear-fall-gall-them-selves. One could likely produce a subtler reading with more dotted eighth notes and sixteenth notes, but the chief problem resides not so much in the note values themselves as in the total time allotted. One detects this fact especially in the lack of emphasis on the word õfall,ö which, given the commas on either side of it, wants both time and stressô both of which are denied in this scansion. One could amend this defect, perhaps, by adding a sixth beat to the final line, but this move would simply repair the musical problem while creating a new one on the metrical level. According to Hopkins, after all, õeverything is weighed and timedö meticulously in his poems; his is not the free and õsavageö verse of a Walt Whitman (LI 157). But if musical scansion does not bring õThe Windhoverö to life, a poem that Hopkins once described as õthe best thing I ever wroteö (LI 85), then what role does musical rhythm really play in his poems? In other words, what does Hopkins value more, the regularity of musical beat or the õnaturalö rhythm of õcommon speech,ö with the stops, starts, and long pauses necessary to give his poems their expressive due?

On this question, as on so many others, Hopkinsø own comments provide ambiguous insight. Many of his reflections seem to corroborate the implication, in the above-cited passages, that his poems should be recited in a style akin to the metronomic rhythms of folk rhyme. In a May 1879 letter, he comments to Robert Bridges that õ[s]ince the syllables in sprung rhythm are not counted, time or equality of strength is of more importance than in common counted rhythm, . . .ö (LI 81). Hopkins thus suggests that sprung rhythm should display a more marked isochrony than, say, iambic pentameter. This notion falls in line with Easthopeøs characterization of iambic pentameter as a more õnaturalizingö rhythm, one that

approaches or simulates the cadences of normal speech, as opposed to accentual meters—such as sprung rhythm—which often accompany metronomic clapping, dancing, and so forth (64-65). At the same time, Hopkins points out that even music has not always conformed to such strict timekeeping. Taking up Coventry Patmore's theory of musicality and poetic rhythm, Hopkins writes,

> I think I remember that Patmore pushes the likeness of musical and metrical time too far—or, what comes to the same thing, not far enough: if he had gone quite to the bottom of the matter his views would have been juster. He might remember that for more than half the years music has been in the world it had perhaps *less* time than verse has, as we see in plainchant now (LI 119).

Hopkins, referring to the nineteenth-century revival of interest in Gregorian chant, thus points to the fact that not all music employs the kind of mathematically-measurable time associated with Western classical and popular traditions, thereby complicating the analogy between musical and verse rhythm. Even so, he returns to the notion of a stricter, more highly regulated poetic time, while favoring a loosening of musical time, saying, "Now this principle of symmetry and quadrature has, as I think, been carried in music to stifling lengths and in verse not far enough and both need reforming; at least there is room, I mean, for a freer musical time and a stricter verse-prosody" (LI 120).

This reference to plainchant may provide a clue to the type of rhythm Hopkins has in mind, one that would somehow combine the looser rhythms of Gregorian chant and spoken language, on the one hand, and those of strict musical tempo, on the other. After all, Hopkins's sprung verse, even in a relatively metronomic poem like "Spring and Fall," generally produces a markedly less regular beat than much balladic and tetrameter poetry in the British tradition—from Andrew Marvell ("Had we but world enough, and time") to William Blake ("How sweet I roam'd from field to field"). Even compared to his fellow Victorians, such as Tennyson ("On either side the river lie") or Christina Rossetti ("When I am dead, my dearest"), Hopkins's works often seem *less* rather than more metronomic. As Pamela Coren emphasizes, "when Hopkins writes of the delivery of his own verse he directs to ways of slowing it down, of lingering and pauses" (289). In other words, Hopkins indicates exactly the type of

time-stretching measures necessary to save "The Windhover" from his own metronomic prescriptions.

III. Beats, Feet, and Meter: What Really Puts the "Spring" in Sprung Rhythm?

We have observed that the rhythm of verse language in many ways resembles that of music, but also that it diverges from music— at least from much popular and classical Western music— in important ways. One can imagine this relationship as existing on various points along a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum, the two correspond exactly, so that one might easily provide musical accompaniment to a poetic text without substantially altering its performance, as in the case of such highly rhythmicized forms as the ballad stanza or nursery rhyme. At the other extreme, as in the case of free verse or even— as Easthope points out— iambic pentameter, poetry approximates a rhythm much nearer that of everyday speech, a "free rhythm" that does not at all conform to the kinds of tempo divisions set out by the musical organization of sound. Hopkins's verse seems to lie somewhere between these two extremes, sometimes resembling that of folk rhymes, at other times corresponding much more closely to speech rhythms.

This schema helps us to understand something about the temporal dimension of Hopkins's rhythm, but what about its metrical-accentual dimension? In his article "What Sprung Rhythm Really Is NOT," Michael D. Hurley deftly puts to rest the notion that sprung rhythm is essentially dipodic. In refuting Stephenson's model, however, Hurley by no means claims to have solved, once and for all, the puzzle of how one should scan Hopkins's verse. Indeed, he acknowledges that two important facts complicate any scansion of Hopkins's sprung rhythm poems. First, sprung rhythm, being logaoedic, does not possess the same fixed, underlying pattern found in syllabic meters, so that "by definition, it resists metrical normalcy, such that there is no paradigm to work from: feet may be mixed in any order" (79). Second, as Hurley indicates, critics by no means agree as to what type of metrical system sprung rhythm even is (76).

Both Hurley and Brewster Ghiselin have gained substantial ground in their shared problematization of the standard view that the "Author's Preface" presents Hopkins's most authoritative statement on sprung rhythm. Their revision calls into question the prevailing— namely, *falling*— scansion of Hopkins's verse. Their argument rests, first of all, on a passage in the "Preface" itself, in which Hopkins

emphasizes that all kinds of rhythm—rising, falling, and "rocking"—are equally "real and true to nature" (PI 45). Hopkins thus characterizes his suggestion to begin the scansion of every line with a stress, as in music, *not* as the metrical or rhythmic essence of sprung rhythm but merely as a "great convenience" (PI 45). Thus, for Hurley—as for Ghiselin—an effective scansion of sprung rhythm "should ideally include rising, falling, and rocking rhythms, not to mention the spondee, whose characteristic abruptness provides much of the 'spring' of sprung rhythm" ("Darkening" 493). Passages from Hopkins's letters to Bridges and Dixon support this reading, as when Hopkins refers to a line from the "Eurydice" as being composed of both rising and falling feet: "an anapest, followed by a trochee, a dactyl, and a syllable" (LI 52-53).

Hurley and Ghiselin make a fairly convincing case for the presence of mixed feet in Hopkins's verse. Still, the question then arises of why one must employ feet at all in the scansion of Hopkins's sprung rhythm poems. After all, the conscious (and conscientious) translation of Hopkins's lines into a mixture of rising, falling, and rocking feet might well become just as arbitrary as the "great convenience" according to which one chooses a falling rhythm and employs it throughout. Metrical feet, contrary to Hopkins's assertion, are not in themselves necessarily "real and true to nature." They do not explain, for instance, where the pauses in a line should take place. Often, breaks between feet occur not just within a fluid clause or phrase but even within a single word. Metrical feet, and the divisions between them, serve merely as the skeletal underpinning of a prearranged succession of stresses and slacks. If they held more force, one would have to read lines like these, from Shakespeare's Sonnet 55, rather differently: "Not marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme." If the placement of caesurae, or the beginnings and endings of words, held any influence over decisions concerning metrical feet, then one would have to read each of these two verses as beginning with an amphibrach ("Not márble," "Of prínces," x / x), rather than a series of iambs. And yet, of course, no critic—armed with the knowledge that Shakespeare composed his sonnets in iambic pentameter— would ever do so.

Consequently, given the fact that Hopkins's sprung rhythm poems in fact possess *no* fixed metrical substructure, the assignment of metrical feet must always remain largely arbitrary. In this respect, it may indeed make sense to employ metrical terminology *adjectivally*—that is, to describe a particular line as having a generally rising, falling, or rocking rhythm, or even to depict a line as

particularly õtrochaic,ö õanapestic,ö or what have you. On the other hand, arguing forô or aboutô the placement of particular metrical feet would appear basically incoherent in this light. Although on the issue of feet, as on so many other others, Hopkins provides mixed signalsô at times speaking of the õreal natureö of his verse (LII 40), while nevertheless extolling his õgreat convenienceöô it seems in any case evident that Hopkins composed his poetic lines in stresses or beats rather than in feet. As Hopkins comments to Dixon above, sprung rhythm õconsists in scanning by accents or stresses alone, without any account of the number of syllables.ö In such a context, feet become largely irrelevant.

To be sure, leaving out the question of metrical feet does not entirely solve the problem of how to scan Hopkinsøs poetry: his stress counts often create just as many prosodic complications. As James I. Wimsatt points out, Hopkinsøs accentual marks do not appear to correspond to ordinary õsense stressö or the usual rhythms of spoken language (541). Furthermore, as Anthony Mortimer reminds us, õHopkins himself is not always certain where the stress should fallö (166). Stephenson, downplaying the difficulty of determining stress patterns, remarks that õ[w]hen the reader is informed, as in the note on *The Deutschland*, of how many main stresses each line of a poem should have, the problem of locating them is greatly simplifiedö (33). Stephenson, we recall, argues for the utilization of three levels of stressô a technique not authorized by any of Hopkinsøs comments on sprung rhythm, but one that renders identifying the õmain stressesö a much simpler matter indeed. If, however, we accept Hopkinsøs own statement that sprung rhythm consists chiefly in a fixed number of strong stresses, with a variable number of unstressed syllables in between, then locating these stresses becomes much more challenging.

As previously noted, Hopkins often calls for stress in unlikely places, as in the final line of õThe Lantern out of Doors,ö in which he seems to position the accents on precisely the wrong syllables, like an automated voice recording: õTheir ránsom, théir rescue, ánd first, fást, last friéndö (PI 71). One almost suspects, as both Coren and Mortimer insinuate, that Hopkins wrote his poems first and fit them to his metrical system as an afterthought. In the case, especially, of longer sprung rhythm lines, keeping the number of stresses to the count prescribed by Hopkins is no simple task. Consider the following line from õHarry Ploughman,ö a poem that, according to W.H. Gardner, consists of five-stress lines (244): õHe leans to it, Harry bends, look. Back, elbow, and liquid waist / In himö (PI 104).

On a first reading, without the benefit of the marks from Hopkins's manuscripts, one could easily count as many as eight strong stresses in this line: He léans to it, Hárry bénds, lóok. Báck, élbow, and líquid wáist. Even given the information from the manuscripts— a 'slur' over 'to it, Harry,' indicating that the reader should hurry over these syllables; and an 'outride,' or marked extrametrical syllable, under the word 'look' (PI 293)— one could still read six strong stresses. In light of the prosodic contortions involved in merely discovering the number of stresses per line, one begins to realize that the metrical basis of Hopkins's sprung system appears just as shaky as the musical one.

Sprung rhythm, we come to apprehend, has an identity problem. Like an immigrant torn between two countries and two cultures, sprung rhythm cannot reconcile its many identities and contradictions: its claim that 'the scanning is plain enough' (LII 31) and the generations of confounded scholars left in its wake; its irreconcilable claims to reproducing both musical rhythms and the rhythms of 'common speech'; its claim to being both stricter than and, at the same time, 'much more flexible' than ordinary poetic meter (LII 14-15); the claim for the usefulness of the 'great convenience' and Hopkins's assertion that when 'considering the character of a rhythm we must be careful to see what it really is, not the easiest or most obvious way of scanning it' (J 274). To be sure, one could easily argue that Hopkins's prosodic intentions do not matter here: we might better infer 'what sprung rhythm really is' from the texts of the poems themselves, disregarding Hopkins's own theoretical statements. Simon Jarvis insists, rightly, that we should not allow ourselves to become slavish observers of prosodic orthodoxies, 'truncating reflection in blind obedience to them' ('Prosody' 12).

This position applies especially in the case of *rhythmic* analysis, for Hopkins's poems undoubtedly contain important rhythmic effects beyond his conscious prosodic intentions. As James Olney observes, sprung rhythm 'was *his*, he possessed it but it also possessed him' (40). On the other hand, if we wish to contend that sprung rhythm consists in a particular metrical underpinning, an abstract, repeated pattern, then, as Hopkins himself remarks, 'In a matter like this a thing does not exist, is not *done* unless it is wittingly and willingly done; to recognise the form you are employing and to mean it is everything' (LI 156). Hurley speaks of the search for 'the true identity of sprung rhythm' ('Sprung Rhythm' 76); however, like 'musical meaning' and the 'metrical feet' in Hopkins's poems, the

"true identity" of sprung rhythm" as a fixed, abstract metrical pattern" does not exist anywhere if not in Hopkins' stated intentions, or as clearly manifest in the poems themselves. Any other identity, as artificially (re)constructed by critics, could never constitute the sole "true" one. Much like the hypothetical immigrant described above, sprung rhythm has no pure, true, univocal identity prior to or separate from the contradictions built into its concept and into its particular manifestations. Where would one find it, after all, if not in the course of decades of scholarly work on the poems themselves? Sprung rhythm is not "really" musical rhythm or "really" speech rhythm" or "really" iambic or dipodic" any more than the immigrant's "real," "true," or "whole" identity can be found either in the old country or in the new. One must learn to live with the contradictions, for in the case of sprung rhythm the logical contradictions *are* the truth.

Of course, one can take this line of thinking" or a certain version of it" too far. In their otherwise brilliant essays, Coren and Mortimer both imply that one can, even should, more or less disregard Hopkins' own statements concerning sprung rhythm (Coren 293; Mortimer 169). As Peter L. Groves notes, however, the incredible importance that Hopkins attaches to prosody suggests that "we ignore it . . . at our peril" (109). When critics advocate working "against" Hopkins' technical descriptions, as Coren does (285), they throw the baby out with the bathwater. After all, we can now recognize that Hopkins theorized and worked within strictly timed, musical rhythms *and* within the looser rhythms of speech, with all of its irregular pauses and hesitations, stops and starts. We know that he worked both with *and* against an accentual meter based on fixed numbers of stresses per line" inventing, to this purpose, such metrical trappings as "outrides" and "slurs" as exceptions to the rule. We know that he made ambiguous statements concerning the importance of metrical feet, but that concerning the value of metrical stress he did not equivocate, writing to Bridges, concerning sprung rhythm: "Stress is the life of it" (LI 52).

So how can we make use of this knowledge in analyzing Hopkins' rhythms? As Jarvis suggests, we must remain cognizant of all the prosodic tools at our disposal, "attentive to the languages for prosody historically and nationally and personally available" ("Prosody" 12). This advice likely applies even when" perhaps especially when" these languages contradict one another. Consider the example of the first line of "The Caged Skylark," where we discovered that the best musical scansion (four beats) and best the

metrical scansion (five stresses) do not always correspond. A statement of Hopkins's concerning the idea behind the word "sprung" (noted by Hurley above) may help us to reconcile the two. What exactly puts the "spring" in sprung rhythm? In a letter to Dixon from February of 1879, Hopkins explains in an aside: "I shd. add that the word Sprung which I use for this rhythm means something like *abrupt* and applies by rights only where one stress follows another running, without syllable between" (LII 23). The word "sprung," then, indicates the presence of two strong stresses side by side and describes the sensation of "abruptness" or "suddenness" created thereby. Now, the problem with Whitehall's scansion, we recall, was that although he preserved a simultaneously musical and unstrained delivery of the line, he cut it short by one stress. Stephenson's scansion, on the other hand, preserved the stress count but created—in light of Hopkins's instruction that each metrical stress should equal one musical beat— an unnatural pause between the words "dull" and "cage." In musical terms, there is nothing sudden about Stephenson's scansion: instead, it creates an uncomfortably plodding, unnaturally slow rhythm. If, however, we take seriously Hopkins's claim that the "sprung" in sprung rhythm in fact describes the suddenness of two successive stresses, then a third possibility necessarily emerges, namely, *spondaic rhythm*, a rhythmic phenomenon in which *two* strong metrical stresses occupy *one* musical beat, thus cutting— abruptly indeed— musical time in half. The phrase "dull cage" should neither trail off, weakening into a quasi-duple rhythm (Whitehall), nor should it create a long and lingering two beats (Stephenson). Rather it should spring, abruptly, as two strong stresses compressed into one musical beat:

♪ ‖　　　|　　|　♪　♪　|　　‖
As a dáre-gàle skýlàrk scánted ìn a *dúll cáge*

In this reading, the line erupts with energy at the end rather than receding or slowing to a crawl. Restructured in this way, sprung rhythm consists neither of musical time *per se* nor entirely of free, speech-like rhythms. Instead, it mobilizes a mixture of (1) the freer speech rhythms associated with iambic pentameter, (2) steady musical tempo, and (3) abrupt explosions and interruptions of that tempo.

　　We can take as another example of this "sprung" phenomenon the first two lines of one of Hopkins's most read and anthologized poems, "God's Grandeur," a lyric composed not in

sprung rhythm *per se* but rather in "counterpointed" iambic pentameter—a poem that nevertheless approximates various sprung effects. The first two lines declare: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil" (PI 66). In his Manuscript B, Hopkins scans the first line with trochaic counterpoint in the third and fourth feet: The wórld | is chárged | wíth the | grándeur | of Gód (PI 263). This reading—despite the authority bestowed on it by Hopkins—places undue, even clumsy emphasis on the preposition "with." As such, it appears as one of those instances in which we can momentarily set aside Hopkins's explicit authorial intention. In its place, we can produce another, more expressive and "musical" reading, one that initiates a "pyrrhic counter-spring" (as one might dub it) in the third foot, thus rendering the passage in an energetic 4/4 time:

$$\| \qquad | \qquad ♫\ | \qquad ♫\ |$$
The wórld is chárged with the grándeur of Gód

This revised scansion emphatically *charges* the line with energy, especially through its appropriately rapid, dismissive leap over the rhythmically less prominent phrase "with the"—a move that also calls greater attention to the alliteration in the last two feet ("grandeur of *G*od").

The second line of "God's Grandeur" presents a more perplexing case. Quite possibly, Hopkins intended to scan this line as regular iambic pentameter: It wíll flame óut, like shíning fróm shook fóil—another awkward rendering that places undue emphasis on a preposition ("from"). Without a doubt, iambic pentameter functions as the line's metrical substructure, but this unmodified rhythmic reading creates a lifeless, lethargic performance. Given the musical scansion of the previous line, and given the rhythmic resemblance of "shook foil" to "dull cage," one might attempt to continue with another 4/4 measure, including a spondaic beat at the end: It || wíll flame | óut like | shíning from | *shóok fóil*. However, this rendering also fails to depict the energy latent in the line, a charge that requires even more abruptness. Reciting the line expressively requires (in the eyes and ears of this critic, at least) three discrete moments of strong stress, whereby the expression "flame out"—which possesses the character of an exclamation, followed by a substantial pause—entirely breaks down in its abruptness the possibility of maintaining musical time:

4/4   ‖ | ♪ | ♪ |
The wórld is chárged with the grándeur of Gód.
    ♪ ‖ (*Free Time*)   ‖
It will *fláme óut*, like shíning from *shóok fóil*

In this scansion, the poemøs second line becomes a free-time series of eruptive stresses, one not comprehended by the strictures of musical tempo but nevertheless possessing a certain structural parallelism, inasmuch as its two spondaic bursts correspond, respectively, to the beginning and end of the break in musical time. After this sprung interruption the third line returns, once more, to a more or less even tempo, again presenting a four beat variation on the poemøs pentameter underpinning: It gáthers to a gréatness, like the óoze of óil (PI 66).

Such analysis, to be sure, does not solve the puzzle of õwhat sprung rhythm really is.ö On the contrary, it holds that sprung rhythm exists as a set of often self-contradictory prosodic statements, techniques, elements, and potentialities that make themselves felt only in concrete realization, and which the critic must constantly revisit and renegotiate. Even the above compromises between musical and metrical scansion, between metronomic and common-speech rhythms, represent only possible (if, in my view, favorable) outcomes of such a negotiation. As Meredith Martin observes, when it comes to Hopkinsøs prosody õthere is no ‑right answerø or ‑right readingøö (11). Instead, any particular scansion in fact comes down to a *decision*ô an aesthetic, indeed, even an artistic decisionô on the part of the reader. Furthermore, such conscious choices serve merely as representations of that toward which this paper urges, namely, an extra-semiotic aesthetics of verse sound, a poetics of musicality that recognizes those elements of poetry and its performance which impart to the reader more than mere meaning, more than just signs. As Jarvis observes, õTo scan a line of verse is not to describe the properties of an object. It is, instead, to make a diagram of a performance, of an interpretation, and of an experience. . . . But no diagram of a performance, of an interpretation, or of an experience can be adequate to themö (õFor a Poeticsö 933). The foregoing analyses present, in this light, the development of tools for approaching the theoretically unapproachable, that is, the singular aesthetic event implied in the oral/aural performance of Hopkinsøs poetry.

Notes

1. See, among others, Coren; Golden; Howard; Leech; Vance; and Wilson.

2. See Ghiselin 110-11; and Hurley, "Darkening."

3. To be sure, pitch does constitute a significant factor in spoken language—a crucial factor at times, as in the case of the rise in pitch that accompanies a question in many European languages. Still, pitch does not factor in as an explicit issue in the aesthetics of poetry, at least not to the extent that it produces patterns complex— or oft-repeated— enough to warrant characterization as "melody." Hopkins himself recognizes this fact, writing, "Once music and verse were one perhaps but were differenced by dwelling on the mere pitch and the lettering respectively" (J 268).

4. Adorno comes to a similar conclusion, describing both language and music as a "zeitliche Folge artikulierter Laute, die mehr sind als bloß Laut" [temporal succession of articulated sounds that are more than just sound] (251, translation mine).

5. Consider, especially, Coren; Ghiselin; Hurley, "Sprung Rhythm"; and Mortimer.

6. See, also, LI 46; LI 156; LII 14-15; SL 218-21; etc.

7. In a letter to Bridges, Hopkins writes: "Sir Oozy Gore (so to say) says, and I believe him, that strict musical time, modern time, arose from dance music" (LI 119).

8. In an important sense, of course, this identification of metronomic, "countable" time with "musical time" *per se* is an oversimplification (or overgeneralization), since not all music conforms to such timekeeping. Still, the use of the phrase "musical time" to denote a type of rhythm measureable by time signatures (3/4, 4/4, etc.) serves as a convenient terminological tool for differentiating it from the "free rhythms" of everyday speech.

9. Why, for instance, does Hopkins place a second stress on the name "Margaret" in the poem "Spring and Fall" ("Márgarét, áre you grieving"? [PI 88]), when no native English speaker would pronounce it that way? According to Leech, the line's second diacritic represents not a stress marker but a musical beat (122-23), indicating a measure of time rather than of accentuation.

10. Hopkins writes: "The musical syllable is the note, the musical foot or word the bar, the bars in double time stand for double feet or   and for, say, unverbal sub-clauses, the strains or *phrases* for wing-clauses, the passage or melody down to the cadence for the

sentence, the movement for the paragraph, the piece for the discourse" (J 273).

11. Such a musical scansion naturally represents rhythm only, not pitch. The upward and downward slants on the eighth and sixteenth notes possess no signifying force. One should also keep in mind that any performance based on a "musical scansion," like one based on a musical score, generally allows for expressive variations in tempo.

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