

MUSIC AND MEANING TECHNIQUE AND

RHYTHM IN HOPKINS'S ~~POETRY~~ *Poetry*.

CHAPTER VTECHNIQUE AND RHYTHMIN THE POETRY OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

Hopkins's most remarkable technical originality has gained many admirers. His innovations language and sprung rhythm are daringly experimental.

"Hopkins found a tradition in English poetry which was older and stronger than the one in possession in his day".¹

Hopkins was indeed sincere to his feelings and to his intensity of innovating a new rhythm that would appropriately suit his poetry of religion. G.M. Hopkins devised his original innovation of a new rhythm called "Sprung rhythm". He used it because "it is nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms".²

Even while writing poetry Hopkins could not separate himself from his profession. He was obsessed by his priesthood. He naturally tended to preach as he wrote poetry so he had to choose poetic tone; So he choose the Sprung Rhythm.

Such rhythms have always religious overtones. G.M. Hopkins meticulously worked on the word power. He particularly labored on bringing out sound and sense beautifully in the rhythm of his poetry. "The emphasis is on the 'said' the human speech act which inverse words with life giving meaning". The view of Frank Howe matches to the poetic activity of Hopkins; The music and meaning is found blended in his poems. He has made continuous efforts to bring out a communicative essence with the fusion of sounds stresses and senses of words.

The distinguishing feature of Hopkins auditory technique is his implementation of 'Sprung Rhythm'. The term was coined by Hopkins himself. By 'Sprung Rhythm' Hopkins means something like an abrupt rhythm. In this type

the stress substitute the foot of the metrical verse. One stress stands for one foot regardless of the number of unstressed syllables, so the line consisting of five feet. The strong use of alliteration (consonants) and assonance (vowels) is made in order to gain the force, energy and a sense of shock. What Hopkins did as far as Sprung Rhythm was concerned was to scrape the idea of a fixed quantity of syllables and an underlying stress - pattern and allow any number of syllables per line, the unstressed clustering round the stressed."

Hopkins's favorite system divides a line roughly into three parts in two of these syllables rhyme while one of the rhyme words is linked to the third part by alliterating with a word there".

According to Hopkins, sprung rhythm is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose. It is the rhythm of music in the words of choruses refrains and songs. The basic notion of sprung rhythm of meaning is introduced into the metre itself. Each line has definite number of stressed syllables as in

The windhover'. The 'The windhover' is Hopkins's beautifully synchronized piece of sprung rhythm and magic of sound; so much so that the sprung rhythm appears to have suited to the religious moods and other somber moods expressed in the poems, for example:

I caught this morning morning's
 minion, king-
 dom of daylights dolphin, dapple-dawn
 -drawn falcon in this riding
 of the rolling level underneath
 him steady air, and striding.

The stressed syllables come as near as those in speech rhythm; and the language becomes at once a natural speech. Incidentally in "The Windhover" every line is sprung.

The 'Starlight Night' is a further advance in Sprung Rhythm. The lines in it are sprung in the richest tone:

Lóok at the stárs! lóok, lóok up at the
 skíes !
 O lóok at all the fíre-fólk

síttíng in the aír.
 The bríght bóroughs, the círcle-
 citadels there!

Here, one or two stresses fall at odd.

'The Wreck of Deutschland' was experimental with Sprung Rhythm. In the first part there are five stresses from stanza and hence have five feet; for e.g.

Fínger of a téndér of, Ó of
 a féathery délicacy, the bréást
 of the.

The second example from the second stanza is with six stresses and therefore six feet in only nine syllables. For e.g.

The sóur scythe críngé
 and the bléar sháre cóme

So when Hopkins said :

" I shall, 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 a syllable between"⁵

The above stated example from "The Wreck of Deutschland" wherein there is found a juxtaposition of stressed syllables indicates to some extent what Hopkins wanted to say by 'sprung' or 'abrupt' rhythm in the narrow sense. In a simpler statement what Hopkins did as far as Sprung Rhythm was concerned was to scrap the idea of a fixed quantity of syllables and an underlying stress patterns and allow any number of syllables per line.

Hopkins made some bold adventures by making provision for additional stresses contradictory to the formula of sprung rhythm of having a fixed number of stresses per line. He called this bold adventure of adding a stresses as 'out-riding feet'. By outriding feet he meant a recognized extra metrical effect being a part of the metre producing a general

effect upon the reader. For example in the poem 'Hurrahing in Harvest we find such outriding feet":

I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes
 Down all that glory in this heavens
 to glean our saviour.

The use of sprung rhythm is abundantly found in Hopkins's poems, like "The Loss of the Purydice", "In the Valley of the Elwy", "Spring", "Gods Grandeur", 'The May-Magnificat' and several others.

Hopkins has used a variety of traditional metrical stanza forms. The buoyancy, tunefulness and flow of the ballad stanza is clearly seen in all the stanzas of the poem. the first and the fourth line in every stanzas rhythm with each other. For e.g. in "The Sea and the Skylark":

'The Sea and the Skylark'
 On ear and ear two noises too old to end
 Trench right, the tide that ramps
 against the shore
 With a flood or a fall, low lull-off or

all ro^oar
 Fr^equenting there while mo^oon shall we^ar
 and wend.

Here some lines have 3,4,or 5 stresses.

Similar pattern as mentioned above is found in Hopkins poems like "Andromeda", "The Bugler's first Communion", "The Handsome Heart", "Henry Purcell", "Felix Randall " and many others. The topic in hand being different, the analyses of prosodic patterns and metrical nuances of all poems is avoided. It is intended in this chapter only to show how Hopkins's metrical experiments were suited to his poetic, especially, religious sensibilities.

Various stanzas have varying Rhymes. In 'Inversaid' a stanza of four lines has the first rhyming lines:

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

Hopkins has followed this rhyming scheme in "Spring and Fall", "The Loss of the Eurydice" etc.

The "Wreck of the Deutschland" also reminds one of the bardic poems. The first line of every stanza is short. Each stanza is given a heavier movement by the repeated use of stressed syllable.

Hopkins has used alliteration boldly and originally to crack a sense of awe and wonder. In 'The Windhover' the action is partly complicated by alliteration in the line;

"Fall, gall themselves, and
gash gold vermilion".

Similar subtle interwoven of alliteration is found in 'Henry Purcell'

"Have fair fair fallen, O fair
have fallen so dear".

and in 'The May Magnifical'

"Flesh and fleece fur and
feather."

In 'Ribblesdale' there is interwoven alliteration in the third line of 'o' and 'i'

" To with no tongue to plead,
no heart to feel;

An identical instance of interwoven alliteration is found in the 'The Candle Indoors:'

"Some candle clear burns
Some where I come by"

In 'The Loss of Eurydice' the lines 'wept', wife, wept, Sweet heart would be one' and "His charge through the champ white white water in a wallow illustrate. Hopkins's interesting use of alliteration. In "The Windhover to Christ our Lord" the repetition of 'm' and 'd' sounds give the following lines a stirring musical effect:

I caught this morning morning's
minion king
dom of daylight, dapple
dawn-drawn falcon in his riding.

While residing at Beuno's Hopkins learnt Welsh and read the Welsh classical poetry. And this study played its part in his creativity as a poet. In a letter to Dixon he went on to mention.

"Certain chimes suggested by the Welsh poetry I had been reading (what they call cynghanedd)"⁶

Hopkins called it 'chimes'. The code of cynghanedd was established in Ceerwys Eisteddfod of 1524. This is the chief feature of the Welsh strict metre poetry. Since its establishment, it has been used by various poets with varying degrees of strictness. The example of cynghanedd gystain a variant of cynghanedd is found in the first line of the second stanza of 'Henry Purcell'.

"Not mood in him nor
meaning, proud fire or sacred fear".

The consonants 'n', 'm' and 'f' are repeated in one line.

In the poem "what being in rank old nature" the example of cynganedd sain which means the mingling of rhyme and alliteration can be found in the first stanza in which 'jaunting', 'vaunting', 'vaulting', 'assaulting', 'felling' rhyme. Similar example of cynganedd is found in 'As kingfishers catch fire'. In the line, "selves goes its self; myself it speaks and spells. The last two words rhyme with each other and also alliterate. The 'chime' of the consonants is vividly, seen in 'Margaret Clitheroe':

"The Immortals of the eternal ring" and
 "The litteres uttered, uttering"

Hopkins tried to bring in the essence of Welsh flavor. In 'In the valley of the Elwy' the arrangement of consonantal chime gives out the effect of cynganedd in the first two lines of 'Barnfloor and winepress'

For us was gather'd the first fruits
For us was lifted from the roots.

These lines chime with internal consonantal correspondence. In the second line one gets a

pattern of alliterated syllables in symmetrical arrangement which is called cynganedd croes:

"But even our saviour's and our blood,
We are so grafted on His Wood".

'Spring abounds in such permutations:

"When weeds, in wheels,
 Shoot long and lovely and lush.
 and
 With richness; the racing
 lambs too have fair their fling.

Agnomination, a kind of play or echo of a sound by means of similar sounds is also seen in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe" where 'b' sound is echoed throughout in words like 'Blue', 'bloom', 'breathe', 'breath', 'bound', 'blear', 'binding'. Here 'b' is the cognate letter. Kenneth Burke 7 defines cognate letters as letters which are related to one another by the position of the mouth in pronouncing them. Cognate alliteration is present in 'Let me be to Thee':

And every praised sequence of sweet strings.

Another important device to vitalize rhyme scheme used by Hopkins is assonance. It is a 'vocalic rhyme' which denotes vowel identity in the tonic syllables. Almost all the poems have been written with this scheme of assonance. In 'The Caged Skylark', first we find assonance between the pair of words cage\page, dwells\fells, rest\nest. In the valley of Elwy" there is assonance pattern in good\wood thing\entering. In "the loss of Euridyce" thunder\under bravest\savest rhyme. Hopkins's poetry is not limited to the ends of lines. One word may echo anywhere in its immediate neighborhood and cause internal rhyme. The purpose of such rhymes is more rhetorical. Hopkins used 'internal rhyme' in "as kingfishers' catch fire" where internal rhyme is used in the middle. In the vowel sounds, 'ring', 'string', 'fling', 'thing', 'being', the ends and middles rhyme in crisscross pattern. the words 'rim' and 'wells' of the second line rhyme with 'ring' and 'tells' with the third line. In the 'fourth line' the words 'fling' and 'name' rhyme with the words 'thing' and 'same' of the fifth line. Hopkins has used this pattern which appears to be a conversation of sounds.

Hopkins has also effectively used broken rhymes by dividing a word at the end of a line in order to produce rhyme.

In 'To what serves Mortal Beauty', 'dance' in the first line rhymes with 'warm' in the third. Therefore, the word dancing is broken. In "No worst", 'sing' in the sixth line rhymes with 'ling' in the seventh line. Therefore, the word ling-Ering is broken a rhyme.

Apart from rhymes, Hopkins uses Repetition. Repetition is both a sound device and a structural device. In "O where is it the wildness", 'wilderness' is repeated at the end of each line. It is used to bring the emotional unity of the structure of the poems. In 'Penamen Pool' the Penamen Poll is repeated at the end of every stanza to emphasize its importance. Hopkins's poetry is filled with numerous symbols of various kinds. His symbolism is influenced by The Bible mainly: "Woman without a stain" and 'wild mothering air' refer to Mother Mary. 'Giver of breath and bread, 'midnumber of the thunder stone, 'Living bread' 'a springing well' all refer to Lord

Jesus. The 'doomfire' refers to the final judgment when this world is going to be destroyed by fire. The holy three in one refers to trinity. 'Yore-flood' refers to the flood during the time of Noah.

Abel, Cain, Christ, Mary Ezekiel, Gethsemane, Calvary, Nazareth, Galahad, Gabriel are Biblical words. The Biblical symbols and words indicate the religious depth of the poems.

Hopkins has also formed compounds which come together to enhance the richness of the poetic effect. The compounds that have created a striking effect are 'airy-grey', 'fresh-leaved', 'mid-number', 'houry-glow', 'heart-fleshed', 'maiden-furled', 'heaven flung', 'flesh-bound, 'May-mess' 'March-bloom'. They compress a large meaning and act metaphorically.

Hopkins's technical and rhythmical nuances have enhanced the poetic beauty of his poems making them 'counter-original'. His poetry is to be read aloud to enjoy it.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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