Lesley Higgins, ed.

The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Volume III. Diaries, Journals, and Notebooks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 772. Hb, \$150.

It can—it will—take weeks to thoroughly read through every page of this book, including its nearly 1,600 footnotes, all printed in a small, clear but eye-straining font, many of which are mines of information and mini-essays in themselves. In addition, there is a thirty-five page chronology of events in Hopkins's life, running as a double column with the events that unfolded in the nearly forty-five years of Hopkins's life (1844–89). There is also the editor's forty-five page introduction to the diaries, journals, and—lastly—the entries and notations which together cover what we have in the various notebooks which have survived, other journals having either been destroyed by Hopkins himself or simply lost to posterity, so that—voluminous as Volume III is—it might well have gone on for several hundred pages more, if we had those materials as well.

Expertly, Professor Higgins takes us through what has survived and tells us what she is able to surmise of the lost diaries and journals, explaining with lucidity and authority how the diaries and journals themselves changed over the years, from the highly confessional entries of Hopkins's years as an Oxford undergraduate to the extensive entries Hopkins wrote dealing not with himself but with the world around him, a world sometimes gray and dull, but more often charged with awe and wonder as he looked carefully at everything from diamonds to dust, including the flora and fauna, the landscapes and seascapes, as well as the marvelous shape-shifting cloudscapes and river currents over and under him. Then too there are the multiple drafts of his early poems written while at Oxford, including many words, phrases and lines which Hopkins crossed out or revised.

Here he is on the eve of his twentieth birthday, July 1864, lines interspersed amid a bevy of sketches he has made of medieval columns and stone tracery, composing a preliminary draft of the opening lines of "New Readings," a poem which owes a great deal to his reading of one of his favorite poets, the seventeenth-century Anglican priest, George Herbert. Here are Herbert's lines from his 1633 poem *The Sacrifice*:

Then on my head a crown of thorns I wear:
For these are all the grapes *Sion* doth bear,
Though I my vine planted and watred there:

Was ever grief like mine?
And here is Hopkins:

Altho' God's word has said
On thistles that men look not grapes to gather,
I read the story rather
How soldiers matted thistles round His head
Where fruit of precious wine was shortly sped.

These lines Hopkins will shortly revise, in a version which survives in a manuscript copied out by his Oxford schoolmate, V.S. Coles, and which read:

Although the letter said
On thistles that men look not grapes to gather,
I read the story rather
How soldiers platting thorns around CHRIST'S Head
Grapes grew and drops of wine were shed.

NORMAN MACKENZIE, ed., *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990], 28

Multiply that one example several hundredfold, and you have a sense of how young Hopkins spent his time filling his early diaries.

Volume III makes a fascinating counterpoint to Volume IV (also edited by Higgins and the first of the eight volumes of the new Collected Hopkins to be published by Oxford University Press a decade ago), which by stark contrast gives us Hopkins the Oxford undergraduate at his most polished and assured. By contrast, the present volume reads like a minestrone or some thick alphabet soup where the eye darts from one topic to the next without transitions, as if trying to make sense of some massive Cubist text which we have been given to discover what order we can. The bulk of the materials printed here belong to the years 1862 (a mere fragment, since the diary for that year Hopkins himself destroyed, perhaps as telling too much) through early 1875, that is, from the time Hopkins was still at Highgate, through his years at Oxford, through the period immediately following his conversion to Roman Catholicism and his graduation from Oxford, to his teaching prep school students at Newman's Oratory in Birmingham, through his summer vacation hiking the Swiss Alps, followed by passages covering the first six and a half years of his life as a Jesuit, first as a novice, then as a scholastic and student of philosophy, followed by his first months of theology at St. Beuno's in Wales.

Higgins also provides an essay on what she calls Hopkins's "dangerous scrupulosity," a product in large part of his decision while still an undergraduate at Oxford and under the influence of the High Church Puseyites to write out his various faults and sins (and sounding like almost any other young man (*vide* Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), faults ranging from moral turpitude, to mocking and mimicking his parents and teachers, to searching magazines for images of physical beauty, to erotic thoughts and masturbation, something which he notes in his diaries by the letters O.H. (Old Habit).

There is in particular his attraction, as a Victorian male at an all-boys' school and all-male college, to male beauty—beauty both of intellect and body. We see it also in his notes on the various art shows in which he studied with an acute sensitivity sculptures and paintings by a host of Victorian English (the Pre-Raphaelites, Millais, Alma-Tadema, George Frederick Watts, and Frederick Walker) as well as contemporary French, German, and Belgian artists.

And then there is his strong attraction to a youth nearly four years his junior: Digby Augustus Stewart Mackworth Dolben. Dolben was a distant cousin of Hopkins's close friend Robert Bridges, whom Hopkins met only once, and then in Bridges's rooms at Oxford, when Dolben had just turned sixteen and Hopkins was not yet twenty. A student at Eton, Dolben was an exceptionally handsome and aristocratic Protestant youth given to strange, even shocking, behaviors, such as walking barefoot about the city streets of Birmingham clothed in a Franciscan robe, while being hooted by adolescent boys who slung mud at him, and who—after much diligent tutoring—managed to faint while taking his entrance exams for Oxford (and thus failed), and who shortly after drowned in the shallows of the Welland River in late June of 1867, at the age of nineteen.

Dolben was also an accomplished poet, whose verse Bridges would edit and publish, along with a memoir (including all of Dolben's surviving thirty-one letters) some forty years after his cousin's death. The diary entries and Hopkins's letters indicate that Hopkins was drawn to Dolben's religious and chastely homoerotic verse. Higgins calls the impact the boy/man had on the youthful Hopkins "the Dolben Effect," something which coincided with Hopkins's own early interest in verse as well as his and Dolben's High Church attraction to Roman Catholicism. But Higgins, more careful than Hopkins's earlier biographers, is also careful to explain that, while the emotional and the religious were not one and the same in Hopkins's mind, Hopkins's self-torturing impulse to scrutinize his own motivations about "the possible consequences of both made him feel at times as if he had been—to quote from his own late sonnet, "Spelt from

Sybil's Leaves," stretched on a 'rack/Where, selfwring, self-strung [...] thoughts against thoughts in groans grind."

Only later, following the consolations and discipline of the Jesuits and the integration of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises on his own life did Hopkins distance himself as he could from his youthful infatuation and allow himself to forgive himself as he in Christ's name forgave in the confessional, and—learning to be kinder to himself—let go of some of his self-torturing scrupulosity. Of course his keen sense of self-deprecating humor and brilliant comic wit—not present here, but certainly to be found in his letters—was a great help as well in getting through the daily grind of things as he carried out his pastoral and scholarly duties.

But it is the instress and inscape—the dynamic explosion of the inner form of a thing striking the eye of the observer—with which Hopkins seems most often preoccupied in his journals especially. It is as if he were looking at the world with the eye of a painter searching for the design, the deep inner form, which holds a landscape or cloudscape or seascape together and gives it its life, its *vif*, if you will. It is the same dynamic force which holds a successful painting or piece of music or a poem together, rather like a complex mathematical and musical calculus which magnetically coalesces the shards of a poem together and which give Hopkins's tightly-bound and yet free-ranging sonnets both their discipline and their sense of wild freedom.

And what is this inscape and instress we find so often in Hopkins? Take as an example the following. The thirty-year-old Hopkins is in Devonshire on his summer break from his scholastic studies. It is Thursday afternoon, August 13, 1874, and Hopkins, in company with his fellow Jesuits, has hiked to the Kenaway Railway Tunnel in Dawlish, a town which directly fronts the English Channel. The waves are fairly tame on this day, unlike the gales which will smash the rail line 140 years on in February 2014, shutting down rail transportation for weeks and forcing the evacuation of the inhabitants of those lovely eighteenth-century houses fronting the sea.

Like the careful student of John Ruskin and J.M. W. Turner that he is, Hopkins separates himself from his fellow Jesuits in order to quietly focus all his attention on the dynamics of a wave breaking against the red gritty sand of the shore in order to follow the kinetic action unfolding before him and record what is happening as closely he can:

The wave breaks in this order—the crest [...] is broken into a bush of foam, which, if you search it, is a lace and tangle of jumping sprays; then breaking down these grow to a sort of shaggy quilt tumbling up the beach [which then] unfolds into a clear foam and running forward in leaves

and laps the wave reaches its greatest height upon the shore and at the same time its greatest clearness and simplicity; after that, raking on the shingle [...] it is forked and torn and, as it commonly has a pitch or lurch to one side besides its backdraught, these rents widen: they spread and mix and the water clears and escapes to the sea transparent and keeping in the end nothing of its white except in long dribble bubble-strings which trace its set and flow (588).

"The cobbled foam-fleece," he will call waves like these (only fiercer, much fiercer) in his ode, "The Wreck of the Deutschland," composed sixteen months later, as his mature poetic voice roars into life upon learning of the death by drowning of five Franciscan nuns exiled from Germany by Bismarck's decree and bound for a New World far different from the one they thought they were on their way to see. Here is the helplessness one feels before the sublimity of the sea's unleashed gale force, "the burl of the fountains of air" crashing against and then over a seawall or the side of a ship, "the buck and the flood of the wave," the sea-romp having its cat-and-mouse way with the ship, "The woman's wailing, the crying of child without check," followed by "the inboard seas [...] swirling and hawling," and finally "the rash smart slogging brine" blinding the beholder.

That is the one side: nature's unleashed violence. And then there is the other side: the very violet sweetness of things, of the Welsh landscape viewed from St. Beuno's, where Hopkins will spend three years studying Thomistic theology as he makes his final preparations for ordination to the priesthood. Here is another entry, dated September 6, three and a half weeks after the previous entry, and quite different in its delights. It is Sunday, and he is walking with another Jesuit, a former officer in her Majesty's navy, William Kerr, who takes him up Mount Mynefyr behind the stone buildings of the college, where he can view the entire Welsh landscape down to the North Sea. All the length of the Valley of the Clwyd, he notes, "the skyline of hills was flowingly written [...] upon the sky. A blue bloom, a sort of meal, seemed to have spread upon the distant south, enclosed by a basin of hills" (601).

And then it strikes him: the finger of God's instress and inscape in it all, and with it the gripping down, as once again he begins to awaken to the inner beauty of what lies there before him. "Looking all round," he will write afterwards, "but most in looking far up the valley, I felt an instress and charm of Wales. Indeed in coming here I began to feel the desire to do something for the conversion of Wales. I began to learn Welsh too but not with very pure intentions perhaps." He is thinking of learning Welsh so that he can work for the conversion of Wales, he tells himself in his initial exuberance. And then,

four days later, on September 10, the first day of his annual eight-day retreat, in consulting with his rector on his decision, he admits to himself that, really, it is something about the beauty of the Welsh language itself, which somehow captures the inscape of the Welsh countryside, that he so deeply desires to understand, and so for the time being he will forego learning the language to get on with the real work of his studies.

But discernment goes deeper even than that, and something deep within him will not let go of his dream. And so, with the approval of his superiors, he will come back to the language, haunted by its beauty, not yet realizing that, yes, in fact, he will drink in the Welsh language, and in doing so literally change the shape and sound of the English language as much as James Joyce will change the lilt and lift of the language with his Irish soul and wit. Within a few short years, Hopkins, in welding the Welsh to his Victorian English, will transform English poetry itself, in the process turning the hearts of thousands to—as the Jesuits say—the greater glory of God by creating a music like nothing ever heard before. “Glory be to God for dappled things,” he will write in the Spring of ’77 in a language itself dappled with the distinctive strains of Anglo-Saxon English and Welsh *cynghanedd*:

For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough...

Poems, 144

And, he adds, glory be to God for “All things counter, original, spare, strange,” all this dizzying, scintillant beauty about us a gift of the Father “whose beauty is past change.” And how can we best acknowledge this beauty once we are aware of what is there before our very eyes and ears? Simply by giving praise to the Creator.

So: what can we glean from this tumble of fragments, these journal notes with their hundreds and hundreds of entries, which take account of everything from the majesty of the night skies to those quilts of bluebells in woodland coombs to the corbels and arches of England’s great medieval cathedrals and bare-ruined choirs? Once we have felt with our minds and our hearts the world’s beauty and within and under and through it the Creator of that beauty (*in Ipso* and *cum Ipso*) what can we do but what Hopkins bids us do, and kiss our hand

to the dappled-with damson west:
Since, though he is under the world's splendour and wonder,
His mystery must be instressed, stressed;
For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand (120)

And that, it seems, is surely the real fruit of these journal notes and diary entries, when everything else has been peeled away, including the self which has been preoccupied with too much self-scrutiny and even—as in Hopkins's case—self-laceration and self-loathing, washed away by the merciful tides of time, and we find ourselves standing, amazed, at the wonder and glory of it all.

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DOI 10.1163/22141332-00303008-04