Kumiko Tanabe

Gerard Manley Hopkins and His Poetics of Fancy. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015. Pp. 245. £47.99.

The purpose of this book is to show how Hopkins recuperated the idea of *fancy*, which had been denigrated by the Romantics in favor of *imagination*, and made it the guiding principle of his theory of poetic diction and thus, ultimately, of his poetic practice.

The book has three chapters. The first, and by far the shortest, focuses on the formation of Hopkins's poetics during his undergraduate years. He began by drawing heavily on Samuel Coleridge and the distinction between fancy and imagination proffered in the *Biographia literaria* (1817). But as usual Hopkins took the distinction and made it his own. For Coleridge, the imagination was a higher power because it drew upon the poet's subjectivity, whereas fancy depended upon the objectivity of "fixities and definites." Hopkins reverses the priority: he prefers fancy precisely because it luxuriates in "fixities and definites." Hopkins added to Coleridge extensive readings in John Ruskin, who kept the Coleridgean priorities between fancy and imagination but to a lesser degree. The fruits of these readings are found in Hopkins's undergraduate essays such as "Poetic Diction" and "On the Origin of Beauty: a Platonic Dialogue," where the aspiring young poet emphasizes the necessity, as he saw it, of abrupt parallelisms in poetic language, of sudden and surprising yokings.

The second chapter continues the analysis of Hopkins's formative undergraduate years but concentrates more on his original applications of what he had learned. In notebooks and letters from 1864 we find him dividing poetic language into three kinds, ranging from the highest, "the language of inspiration," to "Parnassian," which is genuinely poetic but lacks the fire of inspiration, and down to the humdrum language of poetasters. Much of the chapter focuses on the term "Parnassian," which the author connects to the French poets who would soon use the term as self-description in their pursuit of "the autonomy of beauty" (37). Hopkins shared with them a rejection of Romantic sentimentalism but never accepted their full-blown aestheticism, despite the further influences of his tutor Walter Pater and of the pre-Raphaelites. Much poetry, even by good poets, is Parnassian, Hopkins contends, but he believes true poetry comes from a selfless poet who is, in Dr. Tanabe's words, "a genius in poetic diction [...] [with] the ability to express in his words the true essence of an object which he or she sees and relate it to other objects in a surprising way" (41). Once again we come back to the importance of "fixities and definites." The chapter includes some analysis of poems both early ("Floris in Italy," "Il

Mystico," "A Vision of Mermaids") and later ("Leaden Echo and Golden Echo," "To What Serves Mortal Beauty?"), but only to the extent necessary for showing how they put into practice Hopkins's basic convictions about poetic diction.

The third and final chapter extends the argument by showing the connection between Hopkins's ideas about poetic diction and his new religious beliefs resulting from his conversion to Roman Catholicism. A belief in the Blessed Sacrament, for example, is analogous to his beliefs about poetic diction: both involve seeing "fixities and definites" (in this case bread and wine) as both themselves, real physical *things*, and something—or Someone—else. As Hopkins puts it in a letter to his father on October 21, 1866: "I shall hold as a Catholic [...] that literal truth of our Lord's words by which I learn that the least fragment of the consecrated elements in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is the whole Body of Christ" (137). Both this doctrine of the transubstantiation and the idea of "abrupt parallelism" in poetics come to poetic expression in early poems like "Barnfloor and Winepress" and "Half-way House." Other, related influences soon came to affect Hopkins's work. For example Hopkins's sketchbooks show his absorption in the Gothic revival in architecture associated with names like William Butterfield. He also came to admire the medieval philosopher Duns Scotus, who argued for the univocity of being, i.e. the notion that each being is wholly Christ, and also for *haecceitas*, the "thisness" of things. While this chapter contains a lengthy discussion of Scotus's influence, much of it derives from the work of Christopher Devlin, Maria Lichtmann, James Finn Cotter, and others. These influences taken together, Dr. Tanabe argues, result for Hopkins in a new set of coinages, namely *inscape* and *instress*. She sees another undergraduate essay, the "Parmenides" of 1867, as embodying this distinction, with *instress* being linked to imagination and *instress* to fancy. An intriguing side argument is the way Dr. Tanabe links Hopkins's theories with those of such modern philosophers as Roland Barthes. Somewhat less convincing is her claim that "There are two major styles of Catholic art: Gothic and baroque"—such a claim seems needlessly reductive. She concludes the chapter with analyses of "fancy at work" in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and the nature poems of Hopkins's years in Wales; it was the feeling that fancy had deserted him that led to the darker poems of the Dublin years.

Perhaps the best summary of the work comes in its final sentence: "Hopkins's poetry [...] expresses his idea of the fixity of fancy, reigning over the fluidity of imagination and the self, which is ultimately absorbed into fancy as the source of the language of inspiration, and whose unification of subject and object parallels the meaning of Christ incarnate" (218). This carefully researched

book will interest those readers who have an interest in Hopkins's poetics or in aspects of his biography. Readers looking for provocative new interpretations of the poems themselves may be disappointed, but no book can accomplish everything.

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