Gerard Manley Hopkins

The Wreck of the Deutschland

by Peter Cash

English Association Longer Poem Bookmarks No 1
Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)  
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**SCOPE OF TOPIC**

Although he lived his entire life within Queen Victoria’s reign, Gerard Manley Hopkins was not ‘a Victorian poet’ for two reasons: first, he rejected the ‘Parnassian’ poetry of the age in favour of his own utterly original style; second, his poetry was not published in his lifetime. For these very reasons, he finds himself discussed alongside T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound in F. R. Leavis’ pioneering *New Bearings in English Poetry* of 1932.

When Robert Bridges finally published Hopkins’ work in 1918, he put at the opening of the book the first poem that Hopkins wrote upon resuming writing in December 1875. Famously, he felt that he had to apologise for ‘the definite faults of style’ [= Hopkins’ ‘Oddity and Obscurity’) which were likely to alienate ‘those who love a continuous literary decorum’ and to refer to the opening poem (its 35 stanzas, 280 lines) as ‘a great dragon coiled in the gate to forbid all entrance’.

Today, it is Bridges’ apology for Hopkins’ ‘blemishes’ which tends to be ‘laughed at’: it may be assumed,’ he tells us, ‘that they were not a part of his intention’. That said, Bridges’ simile for *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is not without a degree of accuracy. Hopkins’ ode, about as extraordinary a debut as there has ever been, makes hardly a concession to ‘a continuous literary decorum’, but instead presents new readers with continual problems of exegesis, its oddities of style and its obscurities of meaning challenging them, if not actually forbidding them to go any further.

The aim of this Bookmark is to attempt an exegesis of some of the complexities of the poem: ‘If it is obscure, do not bother yourself with the meaning, but pay attention to the best and most intelligible stanzas,’ advised Hopkins himself. This is what I have done, referring in the process to a range of critics and scholars to whose work links can be found in the bibliography below.

**BOOKS TO READ**


Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Crisis in English Poetry*, 1951.
On 7th September 1868, Gerard Manley Hopkins was admitted to the Society of Jesus/ became a Jesuit priest – whereupon he abstained from writing poetry because he regarded such a pastime as being incompatible with his solemn vocation. On 11th December 1875, he read in The Times a report of a shipwreck by which he was so ‘affected’ that he was eventually persuaded to write verse again. Hopkins’ own account of the genesis of The Wreck of the Deutschland explains how his abstemious period of seven years came to a timely end:

What I had written I burnt before I became a Jesuit and resolved to write no more, as not belonging to my profession, unless it were by the wish of my superiors; so for seven years I wrote nothing but two or three little presentation pieces which occasion called for. But when in the winter of ’75 the Deutschland was wrecked in the mouth of the Thames and five Franciscan nuns, exiles from Germany by the Falck Laws, aboard of her were drowned, I was affected by the account and, happening to say so to my rector, he said that he wished someone would write a poem on the subject.

Letter to Canon R. W. Dixon, 5th October 1878.

His ‘rector’ did not of course know whom he was asking, for Hopkins was to approach his commission with an exceptional zeal and – what is more, much more – had at his disposal technical resources without previous parallel in the history of English poetry. As F. R. Leavis (1932) confirms, ‘he was one of the most remarkable technical inventors who ever wrote and he was a major poet. One of these resources is ‘a new rhythm’ which ‘consists in scanning by accents or stresses alone, without any account of the number of syllables’ (To Dixon, 5th October 1878). Sprung Rhythm (in which The Wreck of the Deutschland is written) is responsible for the freedom with which Hopkins is able to express feelings throughout the poem. Since its alliteration owes a great deal to the oral tradition in which Old English poets worked, he is probably wrong to say that ‘no one has professedly used it and made it the principle throughout’; but he is undoubtedly right to insist that this form of rhythmical organisation enables a radical departure from the ‘Parnassian’ poetry (Hopkins’ own term) that his Victorian contemporaries were mass-producing. The ‘professed’ irregularities of Hopkins’ verse show no respect for the literary decorum of the era.

Poet Laureate Robert Bridges (Hopkins’ university friend and the first editor of his poems in 1918) recognises at once that The Wreck of the Deutschland (because of its length and its radical irregularities) ‘stands logically as well as chronologically in the front of his book, like a great dragon to forbid all entrance’; in his Preface to the First Edition, Bridges (as Gerald Roberts puts it) ‘complained about the unintelligibility’. F. R. Leavis considers that Hopkins’ ‘prosodic account’ [of Sprung Rhythm] ‘will help no one to read his verse’ and recommends that readers follow instead Hopkins’ simpler advice: ‘Take breath and read it with the ears, as I always wish to be read, and my verse becomes all right.’ If readers follow this advice and permit Hopkins’ patterns of alliteration to beat out the rhythm of the verse, then they should find that one of his inventions/irregularities ceases to cause so much difficulty.

The Wreck of the Deutschland is an ode. R. K. R. Thornton (1973) points out that its stanza-form owes a debt to Milton’s stanza-form for the Hymn in his Ode on the Morning of Christ’s Nativity (1629). Although his rhyme-scheme contains no Miltonic couplets, Hopkins opts for an eight-line stanza in which he makes subtle variations of line-length. In Part The First, ‘Hopkins speaks about his own experience and sets out his understanding of the relationship between God and man’ (Catherine Phillips, 1995). In Stanzas 1-10, his variations of line-length express a range of personal feeling: ‘what refers to myself in the poem is all strictly and literally true and did all occur’ (Letter to Bridges, 21st August 1877). Hopkins adds:

The Deutschland would be more generally interesting if there were more wreck and less discourse, I know, but still it is an ode and not primarily a narrative …. the principal business is lyrical.

Letter to Bridges, 2nd April 1878.
From these comments, it becomes clear that Hopkins has chosen a lyrical form because he has resumed writing at a time when it is impossible for him to compose an assured and untroubled verse; he chooses an ode-form because he is principally interested in articulating the powerful emotions that the wreck of the Deutschland has aroused and crystallised in him. Devout Catholic though he is, Hopkins encounters acute difficulties in understanding God’s ways and seeks in this poem to resolve them.

Consequently, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is a theodicy: that is, it sets out to ‘justify the ways of God to man’ (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1660). The poem consists of Part The First (ten stanzas of lyrical self-analysis) and Part The Second (twenty-five stanzas in which, no matter what he says, Hopkins narrates events). In Part The First, Hopkins takes us inside his priest’s cell and appropriately confesses to us his innermost thoughts. It is helpful to imagine his consternation upon reading *The Times* report in his lonely cell: at first, he agonises over the news that God has permitted such a catastrophe to occur; then, his agony intensifies when he discovers that the Franciscan nuns were aboard the ship only because they were fleeing Protestant persecution in their homeland (the Falck Laws). What affects and unsettles Hopkins, the Roman Catholic convert, is God’s harsh treatment of his own true followers.

**PART THE FIRST**

- It is in Stanza 1 that Hopkins, reflecting on this cruel irony, wonders how God (the ‘giver of breath’) can, regardless of religious calling, be also its ruthless taker-away. Immediately, he questions God’s whereabouts:

  and dost thou touch me afresh?
  Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

  Hopkins can scarcely believe that he himself remains under God’s influence. In that rhetorical question, the accent on ‘dost’ conveys his incredulity that he too has not been abandoned and that he can still feel the finger of God (as in Michelangelo’s fresco, *The Creation of Adam*). At this point, the function of the f-alliteration is to emphasise that he can still ‘find’ God.

  Peter Milward (1968) considers that *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is a Pindaric ode in that it celebrates the perception of a private meaning in a public event:

  Behind the storm in which the nuns meet their fate, Hopkins discovers the same finger of God’s Providence which he had experienced on a memorable occasion in his past life.

  Milward believes that Hopkins’ familiarity with a Latin hymn is responsible for the image of God’s finger (Stanza 1); in *Veni Creator*, God’s finger occurs as ‘*digitus paternae dexterae*’ [= the finger of God’s right hand]. In Hopkins’ interpretation of the shipwreck, God’s finger is to be found pointing at the ship and summoning up the storm that wrecks it; at the same time, God’s finger can be imagined as pointing at Hopkins himself and casting upon him a ‘spell’ (Stanza 3) in which he is subjected to a spiritual test.

- In Stanza 2, he re-affirms his faith; he ‘did say yes’ to ‘lightning and lashed rod’. The image of the thunderstorm not only empathises with the plight of the five Franciscan nuns, but also stands for the terrifying storm of emotions through which God’s organisation of events has put him:
The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee trod
Hard down with a horror of height:
And the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress.

The texture of the verse conveys the intense pressure of Hopkins’ experience. The patterns of alliteration (first, ‘swoon’ and ‘sweep’; then, ‘heart’, ‘hurl’, ‘hard’, ‘horror’ and ‘height’) convey the ordeal through which Hopkins is going. The accents are those of a blind panic that his capacity to believe in God may desert him; he fears that he may fall from his present ‘height’ [= in God’s favour] into an abyss of despair. He feels physically sick (‘midriff astrain’) that he may succumb to the frightening pressure (‘fire of stress’) and lose his faith.

- In **Stanza 3**, Hopkins finds himself in a horrifying dilemma. Before him, he can see ‘the frown’ of admonition on God’s face; behind him, he can hear ‘the hurtle of hell’. As a consequence, he does not know where to put himself:

  where, where was a, where was a place?

In the effort to express this confusion, he resorts to a syntactical stammering. W. H. Gardner (1953) explains that ‘feeling in Hopkins is no vague romantic notion, but a sense of value – of nearness to or remoteness from God’. Because he can no longer feel near to God, he suffers an emotional and spiritual torment; in the frantic struggle to express this pain, his language breaks up, literally cracks under the strain. The heavy accents on the three ‘wheres’ are the accents not of a sudden panic, but of a full-blown neurosis.

- During this period of stress, ‘that spell’, Hopkins engages in self-analysis. **Stanza 4** is a reflective stanza in which he tries to make sense of his own nature:

  I am soft sift
  In an hourglass – at a wall
  Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift ....

Here, he comes to the calm conclusion that he resembles the sand (‘soft sift’) in a Victorian egg-timer or hour-glass in that he is so easily tipped to and fro by his reactions to this cataclysmic event ‘in the mouth of the Thames’. Hopkins confesses that he has an in-born tendency to vacillate between extremes; he is ‘mined with a motion’: that is, undermined by an emotional instability. In this case, his ‘drift’ [= his vacillation] is between belief and doubt.

Cecil Day Lewis (1934) complains that Hopkins’ ‘lightning dashes from image to image are so quick that we are unable at first to perceive the points of contact’. However, in **Stanza 4**, Hopkins’ sand-image suggests something both imaginatively and logically consistent with it:

  I steady as a water in a well, to a poise, to a pane,
  But roped with, always, all the way down from the tall
  Fells or flanks of the voel ....”

His plain statement ‘I steady as a water in a well’ marks a restoration of equilibrium; he uses ‘steady’ not as an adjective, but as a verb without its reflexive pronoun. The function of this usage is to confirm that such steadiness of religious purpose cannot be taken for granted; he feels that he can remain steadfast in his belief in God only if – like a bucket of water in a well – he is ‘roped’.

F. R. Leavis states that ‘Hopkins is really difficult’. 

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In **Stanza 4**, the difficulty is caused not so much by the radical imagery as by the fragmented syntax. The stanza cannot be easily parsed or paraphrased; it is not instantly apparent what work each word in the single-sentence stanza is doing. Ultimately, it is the grammatical balance between Hopkins’ phrases (’but mined with’/’but roped with’) which indicates the outcome of his analysis: namely, that he is involved in a continuous quest for religious/spiritual certainty.

- In **Stanza 5**, Hopkins explains how he is successful in maintaining his faith in God:

  I kiss my hand  
  To the stars ....  
  Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west ....

He keeps his eyes open ‘to the stars’ and ‘to the dappled-with-damson west’ and finds in the beauty of these natural phenomena proof of God’s guiding presence; in observing the yellow starlight and purple sunset, his eyes have seen the ‘glory’ (’glory in thunder’) of the coming of the Lord. Put another way, ‘Christ’s gift’ (Stanza 4) is the evidence that He gives us of His existence in such displays of ‘splendour and wonder’: in other words, his ‘gift’ consists of inscapes. Despite its length, the final line of Stanza 5 –

  For I greet him the days when I meet him, and bless when I understand

- moves with a serenity that expresses Hopkins’ thankfulness for such conspicuous evidence of God’s grandeur and pied beauty. He controls this line-movement by means of an internal rhyme (’I greet him’/’I meet him’) and a polysyllabic end-rhyme (’of it; and’/’understand’); such serene cadences imply that he is at ease with the mysterious ways in which God works.

- In **Stanza 6**, Hopkins embarks upon his theological explanation of the mysterious wreck of the **Deutschland**. He offers the view that this catastrophe (this ‘stroke’ of ill luck) is an atonement for Original Sin [= in Genesis, Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden] and that the nuns’ deaths – in common with other judgements that ‘stars and storms deliver’ – are further sacrifices in the sequence that began with Christ’s Crucifixion.

- The disastrous wreck of the **Deutschland**, though it may make ‘the faithful waver’, belongs to the Christian tradition. In **Stanza 7**, Hopkins explains that ‘it dates from day Of his going in Galilee’ and from ‘the dense and the driven Passion’:

  there its swelling be,  
  Though felt before, though in high flood yet –  
  What none would have known of it, only the heart, being hard at bay,

  8  
  Is out with it!

According to Hopkins’ extended metaphor, Christ’s Passion [= his death on the Cross] has had a ripple-effect; throughout history, it has had global repercussions – of which the wreck of the **Deutschland** on 7th December 1875 is but the latest. He compares the effect of Christ’s Crucifixion to a tidal bore that continues ‘swelling’; it is ‘in high flood yet’ and – not only in metaphorical terms – retains the power to overwhelm a ship. At the same time, Hopkins’ spectacular use of an enjambment between stanzas (’the heart, being hard at bay, Is out with it!’) conveys rhythmically the quickening flow of his consciousness and finally enacts the moment when he recognises the theological reason for the disaster.
In Stanza 8, Hopkins finds for this moment of spiritual revelation another extended metaphor. By his ‘lightning dash’ (Day Lewis) to the image of the damson, he communicates his sudden realisation that God has a double (or ‘pied’) nature:

> How a lush-kept plush-capped sloe
> Will, mouthed to flesh-burst,
> Gush! – flush the man, the being with it, sour or sweet,
> Brim, in a flash, full!

Hopkins compares his personal experience of God to the physical sensation of a bitter-sweet fruit bursting in his mouth; by means of this gustatory image, he suggests that God’s Word is incarnated [= made ‘flesh’] in this tart fruit. He extends this metaphor with an arduous exactness; his series of six vowels – ‘lush’, ‘plush’, ‘flesh’, ‘gush’, ‘flush’, ‘flash’ – is onomatopoeic in that its very pronunciation makes the mouth water. Furthermore, the rapid recurrence of u-sounds is functional in exciting a sense of the sharp taste to which he likens his epiphany.

In Stanza 8, the construction of the sentence itself is dramatic: in order to capture the moment of revelation, Hopkins postpones his three infinitives (‘gush’, ‘flush’ and ‘brim’) until they finally appear at staggered distances from their auxiliary verb (‘will’) and their subject (‘sloe’). What is more, Hopkins’ punctuation is also functional in the expression of his epiphany. To suggest an abrupt and astonishing enlightenment, he makes a daring use of tmesis (‘Brim, in a flash, full!’) which two commas and an exclamation-mark underpin. Such grammatical precision regulates the tempo of his statement and serves further to dramatise ‘the overwhelming onset of the experience’ (Leavis).

- F. R. Leavis writes of this stanza that ‘it would be difficult to produce a more elaborate pattern of alliteration, echo, assonance and internal rime.’ Furthermore, he raises an important question about such writing: is such a pattern produced ‘for the sake of pattern’? Are Hopkins’ verbal effects merely decorative? He concludes not. He confirms that Hopkins’ complex patterns of words are capable of ‘expressing complexities of feeling, the movement of consciousness, difficult and urgent states of mind’.

- G. H. Hartmann (1966) adds that ‘Hopkins’ search for a language flexible enough to render the actual movement of consciousness drove him to a radical originality in which the mind mimes what it sees, words become actors, take on shape, weight and texture and ask to be read with all five senses’.

- In 1879, Hopkins writes to Robert Bridges that ‘the poetical language of an age should be the current language heightened’. In order to ‘heighten’ Victorian language, Hopkins expunges from his own verse both mellifluous metres and standardised expressions, the archaisms and conscious poeticisms of ‘Parnassian’ poetry. It cannot, however, be argued that he ever writes in the idiom of everyday speech; as he himself knew, his style is too idiosyncratic for that. Consequently, he finds himself responding to Bridges’ criticism of The Wreck with this advice: ‘If it is obscure, do not bother yourself with the meaning, but pay attention to the best and most intelligible stanzas.’ It is fortunate that Stanza 9 is one such stanza, for it expresses the theology of the entire poem.

> Ever since he became a Catholic, Hopkins had been in emotional and spiritual turmoil: for his failure to accept the comprehensive concept of God, he had feared that he might be damned. In Stanza 9, he proceeds on the theological basis, characteristic of Catholicism in its automatic confession of sin, that man is a malicious ‘rebel’ who – on account of his ‘malice’ – deserves to be wrung ‘with wrecking and
storm'; at once, such theology explains the wreck of the *Deutschland*. Moreover, it answers William Blake’s major question:

Did He who made the Lamb make thee?

In *The Tyger* of 1793, Blake had rhetorically inquired how God, if He were benevolent and loving, could be responsible for the creation of both Lamb and Tyger, his animal-symbols for the two conflicting impulses of man, his Ariel compassion and his Caliban vengefulness. In Stanza 9, Hopkins has an answer:

Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm;
Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung;
Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then.

By means of three antitheses, expressed in three parallel phrases, he resolves the tense conflict in his soul between a God who is to be loved and a God who is to be feared. He resolves this tension by simply accepting that God can be both ‘lightning and love’ and ‘a winter and warm’; in Hopkins’ theology, God can be both ‘father and fondler’, a stern ‘father’ and a forgiving ‘fondler’.

In Stanza 21, Hopkins’ epithet for God is ‘martyr-master’. It is entirely consistent with this interpretation that, elsewhere in his poetry, Hopkins should marvel at the ‘pied beauty’ of God’s Creation, its dappled colour-schemes.

• It is on this basis that the Catholic poet invites God into his life and asks Him to shape it for him. In Stanza 10, Hopkins asks God to come into his life and ‘forge’ his future according to His ‘will’ – as if He were a blacksmith at an anvil (‘with an anvil-ding’). ‘Make mercy in all of us, out of us all mastery’: this idea – that God is to be ‘adored’ as both a stern master and a merciful father – remains central to the poem.

PART THE SECOND

• R. K. R. Thornton (1973) writes that the two parts of the poem are ‘images of each other, the internal and external shipwrecks’. In Stanza 12, Hopkins embarks upon his description of the external shipwreck. At one level, the writing takes the shape of a narrative:

On Saturday sailed from Bremen
American-outward-bound,
Take settler and seamen, tell men with women,
Two hundred souls in the round – ....

Yet did the dark side of the bay of thy blessing
Not vault them, the million of rounds of thy mercy not reeve even them in?

Expressed as a ‘round’ number, the number of passengers on the vessel which set sail for America was ‘two hundred’ – of whom a quarter (‘a fourth’) was to be ‘drowned’, including the five exiled nuns. Although Stanza 12 begins with a factual account of the external shipwreck, it ends with a rhetorical question that re-addresses Hopkins’ internal commotion: Did God – in his mercy – ‘not reeve in’ [= save the souls of] those men and women whom he drowned? ‘Is the shipwreck then a harvest’? (Stanza 31) If their souls have been saved, then the stark opposites [“father and fondler”] can be effectively reconciled, for the wreck of the *Deutschland* can then be seen as a physical manifestation of God’s terrifying power and tender
mercy. This stanza contains one of Hopkins’ most audacious triple-rhymes: to amplify his concern for the endangered souls aboard the ship, he rhymes ‘Bremen’ and ‘women’ (itself an inventive coupling) with ‘them in’: a pronoun + a preposition.

- In **Stanza 13**, it is plain that Hopkins finds in the literal storm/the physical wreck a metaphor for his emotional/spiritual turmoil. It was on Sunday 6th December 1875 that the *Deutschland* encountered a snow-storm off the Kentish Coast and ran aground on ‘a smother of sand’ (Stanza 14).

In **Stanza 13**, Hopkins envisages the blizzard; promptly, it becomes a metaphor for the identity-crisis that the event of the shipwreck has brought about in him. At a second level, he is writing about himself. Hopkins (‘Into the snows she sweeps’) is writing about the emotional/spiritual turbulence into which he ran upon realising what exactly had happened in the English Channel:

> And the sea flint-flake, black-backed in the regular blow,  
> Sitting Eastnortheast, in cursed quarter, the wind;  
> Wiry and white-fiery and whirlwind-swivelled snow  
> Spins to the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps.

Here, he imagines the turbulent conditions into which the *Deutschland* swept; his weather-report is symbolic of the hectic struggle which he has had to regain his sense of religious identity. The stanza is a tongue-twister, remarkable for its word-combinations: in order both to describe the blizzard and to articulate his private anguish, he composes sentences that resist clause-analysis and tax our powers of pronunciation. Contributing to the texture of this verse is a harsh form of assonance and a dense form of alliteration; the collisions between the vowels (‘the sea flint-flake, black-backed’) and the coincidences between the consonants (‘wiry and white-fiery and whirlwind-swivelled snow’) are used to imply the tempestuous conditions. Fractures of syntax (‘Sitting Eastnortheast, in cursed quarter, the wind’) and coined adjectives/neologisms (‘unchilding unfathering deeps’) add to the confusion of the dark and stormy night.

- F. R. Leavis (1932) concludes that ‘no one can come from studying his work without an extended notion of the resources of English’.

- For Hopkins’ method of composition, Cecil Day Lewis (1934) finds a brilliant metaphor: ‘Here is a kind of innocent experimenting with words, as a child of genius might invent a new style of architecture while playing with bricks’.

- V. D. Pinto (1951) maintains that Hopkins ‘is using the whole resources of the language’.

- W. H. Gardner (1953) writes that Hopkins ‘is utilizing the full resources of the English language’.

The critics hasten to agree that Hopkins has added his own dimensions to English vocabulary and its usage. The danger, of course, is that readers will be dazzled by the polished surface of his verse and will end up marvelling only at the dexterity (the triple-rhymes, the compound-adjectives) by which this veneer has been produced. Cecil Day Lewis’ brilliant metaphor recalls Leavis’ fear that Hopkins could be accused of weaving a word-pattern ‘for the sake of pattern’. For his part, Pinto points to **Stanza 21** in which Hopkins offers posthumous reassurance to the drowned nuns in the shape of an elaborate conceit: ‘Storm-flakes were scroll-leaved flowers, lily showers’. As Pinto notes, the idea that the snow-flakes are lilies which shower the doomed nuns with Christ’s blessings has about it ‘an exotic prettiness’ that recalls both Baroque furniture and Pre-Raphaelite painting.
No stanza acquits itself of such charges more clearly than Stanza 13. In **Stanza 13**, the storm is a convincing emblem of the violent disturbance through which Hopkins himself had to pass in order to reach a state of emotional/spiritual calm. As such, it offers to solve the mystery: how can God be both ‘father and fondler’? The solution is that man must endure the agony (inflicted by the stern master) before he can enjoy the ecstasy (granted by the fond father). In this critical respect, Hopkins’ experience parallels and replicates Christ’s Crucifixion and Resurrection.

- In **Stanza 19**, Hopkins sees his subjective experience objectified in the fate of the five nuns ‘of a coifed sisterhood’: ie. Franciscan. He arrives at an especially close identification with the ‘lioness’ who in Stanza 17 ‘fought with God’s cold’ and then ‘arose breasting the babble’:

  Sister, a sister calling
  A master, her master and mine!
  And the inboard seas run swirling and hawling;
  The rash smart sloggering brine
  Blinds her ....

  Depicted vividly is ‘the tall nun’ whose image looms large in *The Times* report. In the ‘seas’ that wash over her, Hopkins feels the force of the spiritual influences under which he has been smarting; he sketches their effects in a series of present participles (‘swirling’, ‘hawling’, ‘sloggering’, ‘brawling’) characteristic of his word-play in its refusal to observe the primary associations between actions and words. The secondary associations – which he prefers – exist between the sounds of words (‘rash smart sloggering brine’) and the raw, vigorous sensations which - by means of onomatopoeia – they describe. In the ‘rash’ sound of the plural ‘seas’, Hopkins hears the shouting (‘brawling’) of those antiphonal voices which have recently been quarrelling in his head, attempting to reconcile the conflicting ideas of God as ‘father’ and God as ‘fondler’. Fortunately for the vacillating poet-priest, this ‘prophetess’ sets him an upright example: even though the ‘brine’ literally ‘blinds her’, she still ‘sees one thing, one’: namely, that God raised the storm/‘that the storm occurred for a divine purpose’ (Phillips, 1995). At no point of her fatal ordeal does she lose metaphorical sight of the Cross; indeed, she ‘sees one thing, one’: namely, that God raised the storm/‘that the storm occurred for a divine purpose’ (Phillips, 1995). At no point of her fatal ordeal does she lose metaphorical sight of the Cross; indeed, she ‘sees one thing, one’: namely, that God raised the storm/‘that the storm occurred for a divine purpose’ (Phillips, 1995). At no point of her fatal ordeal does she lose metaphorical sight of the Cross; indeed, she ‘sees one thing, one’: namely, that God raised the storm/‘that the storm occurred for a divine purpose’ (Phillips, 1995).

- Of **Stanza 20**, the third line is ‘O Deutschland, double a desperate name!’ The significance of this name-calling is that Hopkins’ sub-text in this poem is his troubled conversion in 1866 from Anglican Protestantism to Roman Catholicism. Catherine Phillips (1995): ‘The poem is one of conversion.’

  The first man to *protest* against Roman Catholic Doctrine was Martin Luther, a German born in Eisleben in 1483; in 1517, he nailed to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg his *95 Theses* and initiated the Protestant Reformation across Europe. ‘Deutschland’, then, is ‘double a desperate name’ because it is both Germany (with its wrecked religion) and the wrecked ship itself. This being so, Hopkins’ cry of pity is for Deutschland/Germany (the Protestant country) and the Deutschland (its symbolic ship of state).

- **Stanza 29** states explicitly that the wreck of the Deutschland is an act of God and as such is ‘a blown beacon of light’. In **Stanza 31**, Hopkins states that the fatal wreck is the work of ‘lovely-felicitous Providence’: by this interpretation, the shipwreck sent the nuns to a death that God was gracious/’kind’ enough to provide for them. It is in this stanza that he rhymes ‘pain, for the’ with ‘vein for the’ (and ‘breast of the!’) Has any other poet ever rhymed the definite article?
• In **Stanza 34**, Hopkins declares that the wreck of the *Deutschland* is in effect a reproduction/another narrative of Christ’s story. It is another shining example (a ‘beacon’) of the Christian experience:

> Now burn, new born to the world,  
> Double-natured name,  
> The heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden-furled  
> Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame ....

In this invocation, ‘Double-natured name’ has two connotations. By virtue of the martyrdom, ‘Deutschland’ has acquired a second significance, a Catholic significance. It can therefore be related to Christ, a man who, as the son of God, has himself a second significance, a divine significance. The metonym which Hopkins finds for Jesus Christ involves another daring use of tmesis. By virtue of the Immaculate Conception, Christ was a ‘miracle of flame’ in that he was in the Virgin Mary’s womb; by means of his hyphenated word-order, Hopkins enacts this unique state of affairs; quite literally, he (Jesus) was the miraculously conceived babe in Mary: ie. the ‘maiden-furled miracle’. By the magnitude of the event, as reported in *The Times*, Jesus appears to Hopkins as ‘new born to the world’.

In Stanza 34, Hopkins seeks finally to ‘justify the ways of God’ by arguing simply and without an air of euphemism that God, in wrecking the *Deutschland* and taking the nuns’ lives, was ‘royally reclaiming his own’.

• **Stanza 35** (the final stanza) takes the shape of a prayer. It is addressed to ‘the chief sister, a gaunt woman …. noted for her extreme tallness’ (*The Times*) who is reported as going to her death with a martyr’s equanimity (Stanza 19 and Stanza 24). In this prayer, Hopkins asks her (‘Dame at our door, Drowned’)* to intercede with Christ on behalf of ‘English souls’: in other words, Hopkins, in writing a public ode, is concluding with some Catholic propaganda. Since the Reformation, England has been a Protestant country. When you see Christ, says Hopkins to the Drowned Dame, ‘remember’ to ask him if He will once more ‘easter in us’: that is, re-convert ‘rare-dear Britain’ to Roman Catholicism.

* Nowhere is G. M. Hopkins’ technical audacity more evident than in the triple-rhymes of **Stanza 14** where ‘leeward’ and ‘endured’ rhyme with ‘drew her/Dead’, of **Stanza 31** where ‘of the rest of them’ and ‘unconfessed of them’ rhyme with ‘the breast of the/Maiden’ and of **Stanza 35**. To appreciate this effect, examine Stanza 35 very closely. It might be observed that the Line 1 a-rhyme (‘our door’) does not correspond with the Line 3 a-rhyme (‘reward’) and the Line 8 a-rhyme (‘throng’s Lord’). But listen: read aloud Lines 1 and 2 and it becomes evident that Hopkins can hear the sound that is made by the elision of ‘door’ and ‘Drowned’: in his mind’s ear, the first rhyme-word is ‘our door’!

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