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Response to Failure as Reflected in the Poetry of G. M. Hopkins, His Contemporaries (Francis Thompson and Lionel Johnson), and the Moderns (William Butler Yeats, Ireland, T. S. Eliot).

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RESPONSE TO FAILURE AS REFLECTED IN THE POETRY OF G. M. HOPKINS, HIS CONTEMPORARIES (FRANCIS THOMPSON AND LIONEL JOHNSON), AND THE MODERNS

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col. Ph.D. 1986

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RESPONSE TO FAILURE AS REFLECTED IN THE POETRY OF
G. M. HOPKINS, HIS CONTEMPORARIES
(FRANCIS THOMPSON AND LIONEL JOHNSON),
AND THE MODERNS

A dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in
The Department of English

by
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Abstract

The study of the poetic persona's responses to the experience of failure, as expressed in the poetry of G. M. Hopkins, his minor contemporaries (Francis Thompson and Lionel Johnson), and the moderns (particularly Dylan Thomas), actualizes the poet-text-reader interactions in the reading experience.

Chapter one concentrates on the Hopkins persona as he responds to his failures in priesthood and poetry writing, the effects upon the reader, the reader's involvement in the outcome of the poem, and the parallels and divergences between Hopkins and the persona.

Chapter two studies Hopkins' persona in his struggle to move from human isolation to human association. The poems of isolation emphasize the persona's dissociation from family, homeland and humanity in general. Through the medium of human interaction, the persona establishes a bond with God.

Chapter three deals with the dual vision expressed in Francis Thompson's poetry—the vision of the playful child and the aged man. In examining the poems in which the persona fails or succeeds in integrating the heavens and the London streets, the central interest is in Thompson's pull towards and away from Hopkins and the decadents.
Chapter four is concerned with Lionel Johnson and his aesthetics of failure. A combination of the "mask," "anti-mask" polarities of the self, the persona here is preoccupied with antithetical elements such as art and religion, life and death, and success and failure.

Chapter five examines the emergence of the anti-heroic clown persona in modern poetry. The clown figure images the central paradox in the modern world-view: a rejection of theology, yet a yearning to image the self as a kind of god. The chapter briefly analyses the use of personae in Yeats, Pound and Eliot, and concentrates on the variety and complexity of the clown personae as developed by Dylan Thomas.

The conclusion traces the movement from Hopkins, through Thompson and Johnson, to the moderns as that of a shift from a renewed integration of the self with God to a comic-pathetic collision of self with self and the existential reality.
Introduction

The study of the response to failure as reflected in the poems of Hopkins, Thompson, Johnson, and the moderns, particularly Dylan Thomas, implies two levels of responses—the reader's response to one aspect of the textual structure, that is, the experience of the persona as actualized in the selected poems; the experience of the persona under study itself constitutes failure and response to failure. Thus, the reader is involved in a double activity: responding to an experience and concretizing the experience of response to failure in the reading process.

The interrelationships among the poet, the text, and the reader are my area of investigation. In the process I utilize the poets' biographical, autobiographical materials and consider the social, psychological and historical forces affecting the text and the reader's response as influential factors. The balanced approach to literary works, as suggested by Louise M. Rosenblatt in The Reader, the Text, the Poem, is the emphasis in the present study:

Within the past few years, the spotlight has started to move in the direction of the reader. Sometimes the reaction has been more against the social-political implications of the New Criticism than against its aesthetic theory. Sometimes the rehabilitation of the reader takes the form of a rather extreme subjectivism or Freudianism. Thus, some, preoccupied with the author's text, have seen the reader as a tabula rasa, receiving the imprint of "the poem." Others, in reaction, see the text
as empty, awaiting the context brought by the reader. Rejecting both of these extremes, the discussion that follows begins with readers encountering a text and proceeds to meet the basic questions that flow from this event. The purpose will be to admit into the limelight the whole scene—author, text, and reader. We shall be especially concerned with the member of the cast who has hitherto been neglected—the reader.

Each of the poets selected in the present study experienced a sense of failure in his personal life or in his relation to the external world, and responded to it with extreme sensitivity. The concern here is with the experience actualized in the poems as that of the persona, and with comparing and contrasting it with the poet's experience in life. But since the poet disappears from the poems as a poet, the emphasis is on what is accessible to the reader, that is, the poem itself and the personality within the poem—the persona, his experiences and responses arising out of a nexus of social, personal and psychological conditions implied in the poem itself. Some of the persona's experiences can be summed up as follows: the persona's involvement in a struggle between a personal and a social interpretation of what constitutes a failure; resistance to and acceptance of the role of failure (reflected in the persona of a failed artist, a disappointed believer, a thwarted lover, a lonely exile, a cynical sceptic or a bumbling clown); the persona's attempts at actualizing self-integration (as in Hopkins, Thompson and Johnson) and his attempts at emphasizing his own alienation
and disintegration in the loss of a "containing framework" (as in the moderns).²

Some of the ensuing relationships between the reader's response and the text can be summed up as follows: empathy/antipathy between the persona's response to the experience of failure and the value system of the reader growing out of his own conditions which define and focus his understanding of aesthetic experiences in a certain direction; moments of contact and of breaks in contact between the reader and the experiencing persona in the poem traced to underlying motivations; the interaction of the mask of the persona and that of the reader in the context of trying out or breaking role-models.

The task of relating the poetic experiences derived from one poet to the other involves the task of comparing and contrasting the kind of activities the personae as well as the readers are involved in during the reading experience. The accessibility of the work to the individual reader is determined not only by the reader's interaction with the core of the textual structure but also by the motivations of the persona underlying his projection of self and his experience. In some of the poems, the persona through extravagant diction, language and imagery desires the reader's distance from his experience; in others, he builds up a rapport with the reader by drawing him in through simple, direct, evocative language and by assigning
him the role of a participant. The reader responds by accepting, rejecting, or modifying the assigned role, or by discovering a new role. The interaction with the reader implies failure or success in communication on other levels too—between the persona and the remote, often inaccessible God, between the hapless lover and his spiritualized beloved, between the comic-pathetic self and the creative-destructive universe.

The present study is not concerned with debates or speculations regarding whether the poets were "failures" or not; it is concerned with responding to poems dealing with highly self-conscious personae who enact their belief that their responses to the experience of failure reflect useful and relevant means of structuring experience, even if the experience is unsatisfactory.
References


Chapter 1

"The War Within":
Response to Failure in Vocation

Gerard Manley Hopkins aimed at inscaping nature, God and man in his poetry. Yet, despite this central unity and pattern, his poetry records a strikingly never-ceasing whirl of activity, process and creativity reflective of Hopkins' own life. The whole is always seething with the fragmented parts and it is this condition of continual "breaking within" that Hopkins' poetry captures. Often, Hopkins' inscape is considered to be the mark of the individual, its unity and pattern; yet Hopkins' poetry, especially the later poetry, rings with a perception of fragments, of pieces and parts not always coinciding or unifying with each other. His "inscape" seems to celebrate, beyond the unity and pattern of the individual being, the very existence of the duality, even the multiplicity of the individual being's nature. This duality or multiplicity is not always in opposition or contradiction, but neither is it in total conformity. Rather, the whole (a cognizable self) is the burgeoning of the fragmented parts (the self-divisions and the different roles of the persona in the poems) into a shape recognizable by the reader. Inscape, then, implies the interaction, the chiasmus between the whole and the
fragmented, chaotic parts of the individual being. "Inscape" is the final recognizable shape of the experiencing self and also the product of the reader's consistency-building activity. In *The Act of Reading*, Wolfgang Iser describes this activity as "a Basis for Involvement in the Text as an Event"; it involves the reader's "continual modification of memory and increasing complexity of expectation" leading to a "synthesizing activity."¹ "Instress," as an effect in Hopkins' poetry, is the impact on the perceiver (the persona and the reader) of this never-ceasing whirl of activity, of the transferring over of the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts, a process of eternal giving and taking within the being and between the self and the world without.

This understanding of inscape and instress attempts to construct a meaningful bridge between Hopkins' poetry and his life. Through such a perception, the fragmented life of Hopkins as a priest, poet and man is seen not as a mere contradiction. Though he felt that these roles were hurtling against each other, they were involved in a process. Not all the collisions of the parts are fruitful but, nevertheless, the whole takes a shape from the chiasmus of the parts. It is this eternal giving and taking process which is evident in his poetry and when we put them together we, as readers, begin to recognize the shape of Hopkins' poetic output. While the priest-persona gave up the
sensuality and fecundity of life, the persona as poet demanded it; what the poet sometimes doubted and despaired (kindly love of God), the persona as priest affirmed and celebrated. Though we can still say that inscape is the pattern of the individual being, we need to comprehend that pattern here is not a static, given quality; rather, it is an evolving shape. It is the intrinsic interplay of the parts among themselves and the whole as it is emerging into shape. This is what is called the "selving" of the individual being. Hopkins, in recording the fragmented parts of his self, was recording the very process of inscaping the whole, the final shape of his own individual being. In addition, the reader performs his own "selving" act as well, by responding to the recurring and differing roles of the persona at the experiential core of the poems.

The consciousness of self-fragmentation and, consequently, the need to define the selving process all the more intensely is actualized not only in the persona's struggle with his experience but also in the reader's response to the persona, projected as a failure in two vocations--failure as a priest and failure as a poet. This dual nature of the persona's sense of failure does not necessarily mean Hopkins conceived of his two vocations as being contradictory or self-exclusive. Rather, these two roles both formed the wholeness of his selfhood. What he recorded in his works was not so much a clash between the
two vocations but an emergence of each in a specifically intrinsic way. Besides the call of duty and the kinds of work involved, each vocation affected the other in a certain way. Hopkins would probably never have realized a wholeness of self if he had devoted himself to only one vocation. Neither, paradoxically, did he find a satisfying complementation of the poet-priest vocations. Instead of building on this dichotomy which has been elaborated on and discussed several times before, this chapter will concentrate on the persona in Hopkins' poems as he responds to his failures in the two vocations and their effect on the reader, the reader's involvement in the outcome of the poem, and the parallels and divergences between Hopkins and the evolving persona in their roles of poet and priest.

Our response, as readers, to the poet-priest persona in Hopkins' poems involves a dynamic, often a self-corrective process. This process can be illustrated by focussing on one aspect of the priest's confrontation with the possibility of failure in his chosen vocation—the struggle between human desires and their sacrifice in an ascetic way of life. In the early poems, the priest-persona responds to any signs of physical or sexual awareness in himself with fierce loathing and intense shame, often expressed as a desire to hide. In "Poem 16" and "Poem 18," the persona's awareness of the self's sinfulness is never concretized.² It is a rather overwhelming, generalized sinfulness
expressed as "myself unholy," "unclean," "the long success of sin," from the specific nature of which the persona attempts to hide. His response to the sense of sinfulness of self is scattered through the very process of generalizing the sin. By failing to specify the sinfulness, the persona is building his own world of delusions even as he seems psychologically to disperse the strength and the force of the guilt he felt so severely. The evasiveness of the persona triggers off an image-forming action on the part of the reader. The persona's self-delusions take force in a situation that is slowly built up as the reader forms his images—the dual situation where the persona is alone, confronting himself as in a soliloquy and one in which he is keenly aware of himself and his audience like a self-conscious performer on stage. This situation-building is the reader's actualization of the persona's dilemma, the conflict between inner desire (sexual, sensual, or worldly ambition) and outer norm (social and vocational). Wolfgang Iser in The Act of Reading points out that "fictional language provides instructions for the building of a situation and so for the production of an imaginary object." This process of situation-building on the part of the reader reflects his own process of interpretation of what is being signified or suggested as he plays out certain roles. At first, as an outside, unacknowledged observer of the persona, he objectively traces the evasive generalizations
in the persona's self-accusations—"He has a sin of mine," "I can but see the fall," "the long success of sin"—and contrasts them with the otherwise specific details in the poems. But soon, the reader becomes aware of the persona's self-consciousness and his addresses to a second person. The persona's audience is of course God, though he is never specifically mentioned; but in the reading process it is the reader who is the audience and also takes the position of God, however reluctantly. What was noticeable to an objective reader, the self-delusive nature of the persona, becomes all the more striking to the more discriminating reader as audience and as "God." Now he is in direct confrontation with the persona. The reader's embarrassment at the persona's ambiguities and evasive language and his own discomfort at the role of audience and of God suddenly thrust upon him, build up the emotional aura, the disposition with which he reacts to the persona. This kind of role-playing in a poetic context brings the reader and the persona into a tighter relationship than is experienced in reading Hopkins' own record of any signs of moral lapses in his diaries or even biographical analyses of Hopkins' feelings of guilt and self-torment. In the poetic context, the reader's evolving relationship with the persona is marked by a growing sense of emotional response, even though here it is one of antipathy, of a strained conflict of personalities and expectations.
In "Poem 18," the persona reverses his own self-delusive role and openly confesses to the hardening in himself, "Yea iron is mingled with my clay"; he is "clay uncouth" and "cannot buoy my [his] heart above." Echoing Deuteronomy 28:23, "And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron," the words reveal to the reader another aspect of the persona—his judgmental attitude to self. The reader needs to go back and revise his sequence of image production to admit the persona's more complex personality, which is self-delusive at times, but also self-judgmental at other times. By the end of the poem, the reader is left with the persona's defiant words:

A warfare of my lips in truth,  
Battling with God, is now my prayer.  
(p. 27)

The imagery of warfare and the ringing, heroic tone modify the reader's previous response to admit a growing impression of the youthfulness, almost the innocence of the persona in his confrontation with God.

In later poems, the personae more explicitly express the "dangerous" attractiveness of the human body—the sailor in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" was "pitched to his death at a blow,/For all his dreadnought breast and braids of thew" (p. 56); the Bugler boy in "The Bugler's First Communion" is described as the "Breathing bloom of a chastity in mansex fine" (p. 82); Harry, "hard as hurdle
arms, with a broth of goldish flue" (p. 104), in "Harry Ploughman" is celebrated in his physical activity.

Commenting on the responses to sex in Hopkins' poetry, Wendell Stacey Johnson in "Sexuality and Inscape" points out a significant fact:

Yet Hopkins recognizes in his poetry, and recognized in his life, the power of sexuality as an intrinsic aspect of humanity and as an intensely attractive one. He knew about the charm and (for him) the moral danger of sexual beauty. On that subject he was not half-consciously or unconsciously repressed, not hypocritical.

In Hopkins' later poems, the persona hovers on the verge of exposure and expresses his past self-delusions and self-judgments in the context of present self-knowledge. Moving through the quickly shifting scenarios, the reader concretizes the outer and inner drama:

The frown of his face
Before me, the hurtle of hell
Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?
(p. 52)

But how shall I . . . make me room there:
Reach me a . . . Fancy, come faster--
Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there.
(p. 60)

My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery
of the thing!
(p. 69)

Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire
Mend first and vital candle in close heart's
vault . . .

What hinders? Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault
In a neighbour deft-handed? Are you that liar
And, cast by conscience out, spendsavour salt?
(p. 81)

Cheer whom though? The hero whose heaven-handling
The reader's involvement now becomes much more intense and dynamic than ever before and the effect on him is of the density of the textual significations and the intensity of his own re-definitions and self-corrections which help to transform the text into a work of art. Wolfgang Iser's analysis of the process of reader-response need not be limited to novels; the process he describes is actively realized in the more complex poems of Hopkins:

Thus the reader's communication with the text is a dynamic process of self-correction, as he formulates signifieds which he must then continually modify. It is cybernetic in nature as it involves a feedback of effects and information throughout a sequence of changing situational frames; smaller units progressively merge into bigger ones, so that meaning gathers meaning in a kind of snowballing process.6

The significance of Hopkins' poetic expression of failure in vocation is worked out, however, not only in the dynamic relationship of the text and the reader but also in Hopkins' transformation of his life experiences into art-experience. In his letter to Dixon, dated 12 October 1881, Hopkins elaborated on the attraction of an ascetic way of life—the priestly life:

Besides all which, my mind is here more at peace than it has ever been and I would gladly live all my life, if it were so to be, in as great or a greater seclusion from the world and be busied only with God. But in the midst of outward occupations not only the mind is drawn away from God, which may
be at the call of duty and be God's will, but unhappily the will too is entangled, worldly interests freshen, and worldly ambitions revive. The man who in the world is as dead to the world as if he were buried in the cloister is already a saint. But this is our ideal.

In life, Hopkins felt pulled between the two vocations of priest and poet. He was to admit to Richard Dixon the distractions and waste of time caused by writing poetry and also the hopes of recognition aroused by it:

The question then for me is not whether I am willing . . . to make a sacrifice of hopes of fame . . . but whether I am not to undergo a severe judgement from God for the lothness I have shown in making it, for the reserves I may have in my heart made, for the backward glances I have given with my hand upon the plough, for the waste of time the very compositions you admire may have caused and their preoccupation of the mind which belonged to more sacred or more binding duties, for the disquiet and the thoughts of vain glory they have given rise to. A purpose may look smooth and perfect from without but be frayed and faltering from within. I have never wavered in my vocation, but I have not lived up to it.8

Another cause for disappointment and, in a sense, for a failing of the enthusiasm and fervency of his initial priestly duties, was the painfully overtaxing duties of teaching and examining students' papers. Not an outstanding teacher, Hopkins probably never enjoyed the lecturing and grading work, as they drained his energy to do anything else. In a letter to his mother, dated 20 April 1877, Hopkins described his work at St. Beuno's as "nondescript—examining, teaching, probably with occasional mission work and preaching or giving retreats attached."9

In his poetry, the sense of self's limitations is
experienced as an ever-decreasing radius between the central self and the surrounding circumference. This effect is often achieved through the rhetorical use of repetition so that the locus of the self is repeatedly narrowed to a nothingness. In the poem "A Voice from the World," the persona echoes the self's journey in a limiting circle as the futility of travels that lead nowhere. Here, repetitions rise in a crescendo of negatives that converge to a point where the reader, struck by the verbal and structural repetition, responds to the ingathering process of the self, that is, the self's constant return to itself:

Not further'd far my travel'd feet
For all the miles that they were sped;
No flowers to find, no place to halt,
No colour in the overhead,
No running in the river-bed . . .
(p. 125)

Hopkins' transformation of his life-experience into the persona's experience is marked by artistic control—a control achieved through the poetic development of the persona's restrained tone. In contrast to Hopkins' plaintive tone in his letters about burdensome priestly duties, the persona's appraisal is ambiguous. The self's journey is restricted by the surrounding circle, but nowhere does the self indicate whether the limiting circumference is the environment of the chosen vocation or the self's failure to actualize that which he seeks so intensely, that is, movement, expansion, and release from self-imprisonment.

Physical tiredness and weakness often caused Hopkins
extreme anxiety and depression. In a letter to Baillie, dated 12 February 1868, Hopkins described his state of spiritual negation:

> Teaching is very burdensome, especially when you have much of it: I have. I have not much time and almost no energy--for I am always tired--to do anything on my own account. I put aside that one sees and hears nothing and nobody here.10

The reiteration of "no" (and its variants) after having said "yes" to the conversion ("I did say yes," second section of "The Wreck of the Deutschland," p. 52) is a self-conscious appraisal of self's failure. This self-consciousness, in his poetry, is a revealing characteristic of his persona, emphasized in the self-reflexive tone of the "terrible sonnets":

> My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing--
> Then lull, then leave off. (p. 100)

> Wisest my heart breeds heaven's baffling ban
Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard,
Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began.
(p. 101)

> I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
(p. 101)

> My own heart let me more have pity on; let
Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
Charitable; not live this tormented mind
With this tormented mind tormenting yet.
(p. 102)

In these sonnets, however, the state of despair is not
merely thrust on the persona. It results from the deadening of his senses and his inability to feel the inscapes he had described earlier: "Comforter, where, where is your comforting?" "Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours." In "Poem 68" the heightened sense of hearing, "We hear our hearts grate on themselves" intensifies the persona's state of mind—he can "hear" but not "feel." In "Poem 69," spiritual barrenness is equated to physical blindness and thirst:

I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless, than blind
Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet.

(p. 102)

Physical weakness or failure of the senses and emotional stultification play a major role in the persona's recording of his failures in spiritual aspiration. One explanation for this is given in the poem, "The Caged Skylark":

Man's spirit will be flesh-bound when found
at best,
But uncumberèd . . .

(p. 71)

The human body is not the spirit's prison but limitations of the body and the deadening of the senses and emotions through "drudgery, day-labouring-out life's age" (p. 70) could encumber the spirit. In his letter to his mother, dated 30 April 1880, Hopkins expressed a similar sense of wretchedness of surroundings:

the work of Easter week (worse than Holy Week) was so hard, and I had happened to catch a bad cold, which led to earache and deafness: I felt wretched
for some time. Neither am I very strong now and as long as I am in Liverpool I do not see how I can be. . . . No, I see nothing of the Spring but some leaves in streets and squares.\\11

Similarly, he was disappointed with Dublin. In a letter to Bridges, dated 7 March 1884, Hopkins referred to Dublin as "a joyless place" and "as smoky as London is."\12 In Hopkins' poems, however, the persona's expression of the limiting environment is mingled with a self-conscious awareness of his own limitations as well. Unlike the letters complaining about the priestly duties and environment, and unlike his early poems of masochistic self-blame, the mature poems of Hopkins show an artistic restraint. That is why these poems escape a purely self-confessional quality. They present a persona involved in an inner and an outer struggle (the self's struggle with itself and with its limiting environment). Both struggles achieve a psychological significance by the way the persona reveals and conceals his own personality, through choice of rhetorical devices, such as repetition of words, ambiguity of structure and tone of voice.

Consequently, the persona's evolving definition of the state of self as an exile is a recurring motif in Hopkins' poetry. In the fragment "Pilate," the persona feels "shut out" from Christ even as Pilate did:

The pang of Tartarus, Christians hold,
Is this, from Christ to be shut out.
This outer cold, my exile from of old
From God and man, is hell no doubt.

(p. 116)
Paradoxically, to the reader the comparison seems almost self-deceiving. The persona's condition, ironically, is worse than Pilate's because, unlike Pilate, he feels "shut out" from Christ in the very vocation devoted to Christ. A similar sense of his state of exile is expressed in Hopkins' letter to Bridges, dated 26 July 1883, but without the paradox of self-knowledge and self-deception implicit in the persona-reader interaction of the poem:

It seems likely that I shall be removed; where I have no notion. But I have long been Fortune's football and am blowing up the bladder of resolution big and buxom for another kick of her foot. I shall be sorry to leave Stonyhurst; but go or stay, there is no likelihood of my ever doing anything to last. And I do not know how it is, I have no disease, but I am always tired, always jaded, though work is not heavy, and the impulse to do anything fails me or has in it no continuance.  

Within the Jesuit order, Hopkins was made to move from place to place so that, as Paddy Kitchen notes, "binding attachments to place or person were never encouraged to develop." Exile, for Hopkins, was a kind of death. In his sermons, Hopkins had related the two:

banishment is a civil death,
a being departed, dead and gone,
to all the blessings of the commonweal,
home and country, friends and
neighbours, power, the franchise, all,
disfranchisement is a civil death
within the commonwealth.  

The Jesuit way of life, with its regular reassignment from place to place, often meant for Hopkins banishment from "the blessings of the commonweal." In contrast, the persona in "The Alchemist in the City" romantically celebrates
self-banishment from the city to the wilderness in order to associate with the community of nature. Here is an early indication that the persona would never be satisfied without some kind of community, whether it be of nature, man or God. Through the willed act of self-banishment the persona, unlike the apathetic Hopkins of the letters, felt the need to find an alternative community to associate with.

On the other hand, within the Jesuit fold itself, Hopkins verged on a state of nervousness and crippling melancholy which debilitated him from acting independently. In one of his letters, Hopkins dwells on his mental state:

\[\text{When I am at the worst, though my judgment is never affected, my state is much like madness. I see no ground for thinking I shall ever get over it or ever succeed in doing anything that is not forced on me to do of any consequence.}^{16}\]

Within a month, Hopkins wrote to Bridges on 17 May 1885: "I think that my fits of sadness, though they do not affect my judgment, resemble madness. Change is the only relief, and that I can seldom get."\(^{17}\) Though Hopkins was moved from place to place, the kind of work he had to do was the same. Hopkins' sense of failure in his religious vocation was heightened by his constant self-reminder (through diaries and letters) of the drudgery of institutional work which had no immediate or worthwhile results. In a letter to his mother, dated 5 July 1888, Hopkins wrote about his work in Dublin:

\[\text{I am now working at examination papers all day and this work began last month and will outlast this}\]
one. It is great, very great drudgery. . . . The college is very moderately successful, rather a failure than a success and there is less prospect of success now than before. Here too, unless things are to change, I labour for what is worth little. And in doing this almost fruitless work I use up all opportunity of doing any other.

In his "Retreat Notes," written at St. Stanislaus' College, Tullabeg, 1 January 1888, Hopkins emphasized the worthlessness of his work:

I am ashamed of the little I have done, of my waste of time, although my helplessness and weakness is such that I could scarcely do otherwise . . . but what is life without aim, without spur? All my undertakings miscarry. I wish then for death: yet if I died now I should die imperfect, no master of myself and that is the worst failure of all. O my God, look down on me.

His self-loathing persisted; almost two and a half months later he uses the same metaphor to describe the poet-priest persona's condition in "Poem 74":

birds build—but not I build; no, but strain, Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.

(p. 107)

Hopkins related his sense of despair to the kind of distress which led to suicide by a young medical student in their community. In a letter to Bridges, dated 7 September 1888, Hopkins despaired at ever getting relief from the exhaustion of mind and body:

but I do not know that what I need I shall get in time to save me. This reminds me of a shocking thing that has just happened to a young man well known to some of our community. He put his eyes out. . . . After the deed he made his way to a cottage and said "I am blind please let me rest for an hour." . . . I mention the case because it is extraordinary: suicide is common.
What does this juxtaposition of personal depression and suicidal attempts of others suggest? Besides the obvious combination of self-pity and self-condemnation, the links between the January and the September 1888 quotes are striking. In his "Retreat Notes," quoted above, Hopkins mentioned, "I am ashamed of the little I have done, of my waste of time." Eight months later, Hopkins suggested a connection between his despair and his disappointment over the nervous exhaustion of a medical student who put his eyes out so he could get rest. The sense of shame Hopkins felt in not having fulfilled the high achievements he had set for himself was the underlying factor also in his desire to hide. In the poems the persona hides from different embodiments of perfection—God, bird, and even his own inner self:

The frown of his face
Before me, the hurtle of hell
Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?
(p. 52)

My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery
of the thing!
(p. 69)

Because, although
Self-sentenced, still
I keep my trust.
If He would prove
And search me through
Would he not find
(What yet there must
Be hid behind.
(p. 169)

The idealized concept of the duties which Hopkins brought to his vocation was far from the reality of
drudgery, isolation and monotony it involved. Consequently, Hopkins often felt discomfitted to acknowledge his own disappointments. The psychological significance of the sense of shame Hopkins felt at having failed in his vocation can be understood by referring to some studies done on the psychology of shame and self-consciousness and their social implications. Arnold H. Buss in *Self-Consciousness and Social Anxiety* comes to the following conclusion:

> The ashamed person cannot look another person in the eye. Gaze is averted, or the face is covered with the hands. Sometimes there is a stricken look. . . . Severe shame looks very much like depression.21

Among literary figures, Oedipus, who suffers extreme shame, puts out his eyes as an act of atonement. Miltonic self-awareness of guilt and shame in Adam and Eve after the Fall results in avoidance of contact with eyes. They are blinded by tears of mortification later. King Lear, though not physically blinded like Gloucester, is blinded by tears when he is reconciled with Cordelia. Here, as in *Paradise Lost*, the blindness through tears of shame and mortification leads to a new vision and relief from the burden of sin. In Hopkins' "Sonnet 65," the persona addresses the Lear-like self: "Here! creep, wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind." It was through shame and self-recognition that Lear could finally find rest and comfort in Cordelia. The desire to be thus transformed and the fear and despair that the transformation may never take place, that the "Jack,
Jake, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood" of self may never turn into the "immortal diamond," underlies Hopkins' sonnets of desolation.

The failure to see, whether physical or metaphorical (because of the strictures of the ascetic life as a Jesuit, because of nervous exhaustion which dulled his sensory perceptions and because of self-attribution of personal defect resulting in shame), also implied his sense of failure as poet. The seeing/not seeing dichotomy is intrinsic to understanding the inscapes of Hopkins' poetry. The inscapes appeal to our ability to look at things with extreme care, to observe the shape and pattern of each individual being. Seeing, in Hopkins' poetry, is a dramatic act of inscaping. Often it is expressed in the persona's interjection: "Look! Mark" ("The Wreck of the Deutschland"). This ability to see is a celebration of the inscapes of God: "To see thee I must see thee" ("Half-Way House"). "The Habit of Perfection" records a way of life in which the persona has failed to observe the inscapes and is, therefore, blinded with "shelled eyes, with double dark" (through an ascetic denial of the senses or a poetic phase of the exhaustion of the senses, as expressed in "A Vision of the Mermaids" and "The Escorial"). What made Hopkins despair was not that he had to sacrifice the keenness of his poetic perceptions and give up the sensuous life, for he was ready to do these, but the fact that life as a Jesuit offered him nothing but a
draining of his very spirit so that while he could possibly have said, "All my eyes see," he felt the failure of the self expressed as the persona's experience of conflict in "Carrion Comfort":

That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!)
my God.

(p. 100)

Frustrated by the disappointments of the priestly vocation, Hopkins returned to poetry and revived the dual-natured identity of the poet-priest self. No doubt, this meant a revival of his own sense of poetic failure as well as an affirmation of his desire to risk failure in search of perfection. In the early poems the dual persona prevails; the artist's questioning of his own creative resources and output can be traced to the aspirations set by the young visionary. Although the poem "The Alchemist in the City" cannot be read as merely allegorical, the alchemist who fails to transform lead into gold in the poem can be seen as the artistic projection of the failed miracle--loss of inspiration. John Robinson in In Extremity: A Study of Gerard Manley Hopkins observes:

The Alchemist is symbolic of all who try for the magnificent and risk failing even in the ordinary. His recondite practice acts equally well as an image for artistic creation and as one for laborious scholarship.

In the poem, the artist's complaint is that while "the whole world passes; I stand by." One way out is escapism--a
flight from the city to the wilderness. Here the alchemist contents himself by piercing "the yellow waxen light/With free long looking, ere I die." There is no true transformation here; the willed act of self-banishment dissipates into a kind of mind-lulling passivity which in no way helps him deal with his feeling of artistic incapability or powerlessness.

The revived poet's movement away from escapism is a painful one; in recording this movement, Hopkins confronts the risks and the rewards of self-exposure and self-expression. A careful reading of one of Hopkins' major poems, "The Windhover," reveals the different levels at which Hopkins confronted his own conflicts. In the beginning of the sestet, the persona defines his own role as that of an observer. He could have passively recorded his observations as the young romantic in "The Alchemist in the City" does:

I walk my breezy belvedere  
To watch the low or levant sun,  
I see the city pigeons veer,  
I mark the tower swallows run.  

(p. 25)

But, in "The Windhover," the persona's record is fused with an awareness of his own activity: "I caught this morning morning's minion." What he has caught is the inscape of the Windhover--the "riding," "rolling," "striding," "swinging," "gliding" motions of the bird coalescing to rebuff "the big wind." The poet-persona is no longer a mere observer.
Awakening to the miracle of the bird's self-expression, which can create beauty in the face of self-exposure, the persona dares to do what all poets must—he expresses himself: "My heart in hiding/Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!" (p. 69). This moment of awakening, however, is not like that of the Romantics—slow, dreamlike. Rather, the experience of awakening to inspiration and its effects is miraculous.

Emerging from his hiding, the persona is poised for great heights. The words at the end of the sestet, "Stirred for a bird," prepare the reader for the persona's metaphorical movement toward the bird, a creature of heights. Instead of this symbolic ascent, the reader with the persona is successively pulled down from the sky to the earth. Underlying the surface conflict of reader-expectation and dramatic development of the poem is a deeper, more fundamental concept—that of transformation. The word "transformation" is widely understood as the process of change from one state or form to another. It is a word used to describe some of the most mystical as well as some of the most physical aspects of life (in Physics, the word "transform" means "to change into another form or energy"). In "The Windhover," the first three lines of the octave illustrate the transformation of physical beauty into spiritual beauty. In this reading, Norman MacKenzie's explication of the variously interpreted word "buckle" is
significant:
The reference to the brilliant fire which results from the buckling suggests to me that Hopkins may possibly have had at the back of his mind that the buckling completed an electric circuit AND that this resulted in the production of a blinding arc of light. . . . God's grandeur (in No. 31, 11. 1, 2) is obviously thought of as an electric charge which will flame out like lightning. . . . In the Sermons (p. 195) creatures, the "works of God's finger"--the windhover being a fine example--are said to be "charged" with the Holy Ghost, "and if we know how to touch [or "catch"] them give off sparks and take fire."24

On one level, the physical beauty of the bird is transformed into its spiritual beauty. On the other level, the persona's impression of the bird's apparent mastery is modified to include an understanding of the bird's servitude to a "lovelier, more dangerous" force, Christ. The final three lines of the octave emphasize the persona's transformation of self-diffidence to self-fulfilment. True humility, not mere self-effacement, is an act of courage; it can transform "blue-bleak embers" to "gold-vermillion."

The poet-persona, in "The Windhover," is involved in defining the movement from his early escapist tendencies, through his highly sensuous and emotive self-expressions, to his creatively humble poems and self-sacrificial acts. The persona is thus mapping out the spiritual growth of his own poetic perceptions. The reader too actively participates in the creative transformation of fragmentary impressions and conflicting expectations into what Wolfgang Iser, in his theories of reader-response criticism, referred to as a
Hopkins had expressed the state of self-transformation in an earlier poem, "Lines from a Picture of St. Dorothea"; the poet, however, could re-capture only traces of the miracle:

My eyes hold yet the rinds and bright
Remainder of a miracle.

(p. 36)

In "The Windhover," The poet shapes his language to resonate with the power, the danger and the wonder of such a transformation. Marylou Motto, in Mined with a Motion, records this gesture of assent to "the celebration of God in the world":

Hopkins' unreachable ideal is one that denies the Wordsworthian process of a journey of gradual change or approach and is instead an act of heroism in man that spells total transformation and not merely assent--an apocalyptic event that would escape any located time and place and wholly transform the self.

At this time in his poetic career, Hopkins had himself emerged from the self-imposed artistic impotency of seven years (1868-1875); he had consciously smothered the gleams of poetic inspiration and let the magic die in the cause of a more regulated, pragmatic, and even a safer though, eventually, an artistically frustrating way of "giving God glory." On being asked by a Jesuit superior to write a poem commemorating the memory of drowned Franciscan nuns, Hopkins felt justified to come out from his hiding. The seven year period, no doubt, was fruitful in strengthening Hopkins'
spiritual beliefs and training. But it was, nevertheless, a period of hiding from the wonder of artistic creation. In several poems Hopkins captures the moment of the persona's stepping out of his hiding into the magic of self-transformation through poetic power. "The Wreck of the Deutschland" inscapes the process of emergence and the discovery of poetic inspiration as the persona's spiritual and poetic celebration of God's glory, mystery and power. The sense of freedom, of magnitude and generosity of feeling and spirit experienced on emerging from the hiding is communicated through the physical gesture of the hand:

I kiss my hand
To the stars, lovely-asunder
Starlight, wafting him out of it; and
Glow, glory in thunder;
Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west.

(p. 53)

In "The Windhover" the persona inscapes a similar emergence of the poetic inspiration, "My heart is hiding/Stirred for a bird," which draws the reader back to the first few words: "I caught this morning" (emphasis mine). Marylou Motto aptly interprets the expression as the "hand within the mind." In its intense celebration of God and its creatures, the poetic inspiration is a concentration of spiritual, mental and physical energies. This magical transformation of the poet-persona is imaged in "Hurrahing in Harvest" as the heart with wings:
The heart rears wings bold and bolder
And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him
off under his feet.

(p. 70)

The heart itself becomes the image of inspiration; this process of internalizing the source of poetic creation is a significant move in the development of Hopkins' poetry. Even as the Romantic bird of inspiration is internalized in the heart with wings, the outer landscape, the platform and subject of poetic creation, becomes internalized too:

O the mind, mind has mountains, cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed.

(p. 100)

This moment of internalizing poetic inspiration is crucial in another sense too. Internalizing the source of poetic inspiration implies the greater responsibility of the artist towards creating his art. In "Poem 66," the poet-persona looks to all external sources of inspiration which have failed in one way or the other--his family, England and its indifference to his poetry, Ireland where he is only a "stranger," and prayers that go "unheard and unheeded." The poet here is still externalizing the source of his poetic inspiration and is able to lay blame elsewhere for his poetic failure. From this role of "a lonely began" ("Poem 66"), more sinned against than sinning, the persona moves to the image of self as "the lost," with whom he identifies ("Poem 67"). He hurls himself into self-condemnation--"I am gall, I am heartburn," "Selfyeast
of spirit, a dull dough sours," ("Poem 67") and "We hear our hearts grate on themselves," ("Poem 68"). The poems in which there is an attempt at finding a medium between the extremes of externalization or internalization are striking in their tone of quiet reconciliation to the reality of poetic endeavour, success and failure. They are also marked by a strain of painful self-awareness as the above stated poems were, but here the poet-persona encounters the creative self neither with self-praise nor with self-deprecation. In "Poem 68," the healing of the "ruins of wrecked past purpose" is provided by "patience," a quality possessed by God, one who "distills/Delicious kindness." In "Poem 69," the poet asks himself to be kinder to the creative self:

My own heart let me more have pity on; let me live to my sad self hereafter kind, Charitable; not live this tormented mind With this tormented mind tormenting yet. (p. 102)

With patience and kindness to self comes a recognition that poetic creation is dependent on self's generosity towards itself and acceptance of its jaded "Jackself" when inspiration fails, as well as on the mercy and kindness of the Lord who can sustain the self-tormented "Time's eunuch" with the rain of creative fertility. In all the above three poems the images of vegetation and growth abound. In "Poem 68," patience is described as "Natural heart's ivy"; in "Poem 69," the poet asks himself to "leave comfort
"root-room"; in "Poem 74," the poet asks the "lord of life": "send my roots rain." The final poem, "To R.B.," treats the theme of poetic failure in a way that combines all the above approaches—the poet is pained by the loss of the "rapture of an inspiration," but he refrains from mere self-condemnation or bitter flailing at external forces:

O then if in my lagging lines you miss

The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation,
My winter world, that scarcely breathes that bliss
Now, yields you, with some sighs, our explanation.

(p. 108)

By choosing to give expression to the two vocational aspects of the poet-priest self, Hopkins was experiencing the individuality of self at its keenest. In his notes on the Principium sive Fundamentum, Hopkins had elaborated on the individuality of self as a matter of pitch or taste. A look at the quotation clarifies the dual nature of the individual self (its beauty and its danger) Hopkins grapples with in his poetry. Here he expresses a kind of Romantic solipsism combined with Christian determinism:

I find myself both as man and as myself something most determined and distinctive, at pitch, more distinctive and higher pitched than anything else I see; I find myself with my pleasures and pains, my powers and my experiences, my deserts and guilt, my shame, and sense of beauty, my dangers, hopes, fears, and all my fate, more important to myself than anything I see.28

The very individuality of self, which is the essence of its beauty, can lead to its inscrutability. Here he examines the danger of self-consciousness that goes beyond the reach
of sensual awareness:

When I consider my self-being, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man (as when I was a child I used to ask myself: what must it be to be someone else?) Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own.29

The individuality of each self, that which gives it its unique identity, can also hurl it into a prison of loneliness. The impossibility to penetrate the other self's individuality catapults the self into a keener awareness of its own individuality, its own uniqueness and ultimately its own loneliness, "when I compare my self, my being myself, with anything else whatever, all things alike, all in the same degree, rebuff me with blank unlikeness."30 This distinctiveness of the self, expressed as its inscape, is celebrated by Hopkins in poem after poem. In "The Wreck of the Deutschland," the nun who like "a lioness arose" is unique in her spiritual faith and strength, towering above the doubting and the weak. Similarly, the response of the poet-persona is one of acute physical strain, expressed as a unique individual's unique response:

Ah, touched in your bower of bone,
Are you! turned for an exquisite smart,
Have you! make words break from me here all alone,
Do you!--mother of being in me, heart.
(p. 57)

It is the intense, self-reflexive language, striking in its
syntax, metaphor and use of exclamations, that surprises the reader into re-living the beauty of the individual self in its act of selving. In "As Kingfishers Catch Fire," the persona relates the selving act of each individual thing to its purpose in life: "What I do is me: for that I came" (p. 90). The beauty of the nun, the poet, the kingfishers and others glows from this selving act. Yet, in some poems Hopkins hints at a quality of the individual self he refers to as "dangerous." In "The Windhover" the bird's beauty is surpassed by Christ's; in its uniqueness, Christ's beauty is more inscrutable, more unknowable by the senses, and therefore more "alone" than anything else in the world. This is the mystery of Christ celebrated in Catholicism, and Hopkins' poetry reiterates its impact on the individual self of the persona and the reader: "His mystery must be instressed, stressed" (p. 53). It is also this quality of Christ which, while startling the priest-poet persona to deepest celebration, also plummets him down the "cliffs of fall." It is the inscrutability of Christ which appears magnified in the priest-poet's struggle--the unknowable becomes terrifying:

Thou hearest me truer than tongue confess
Thy terror, O Christ, O God;
Thou knowest the walls, altar and hour and night:
The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl
of thee
trod
Hard down with a horror of height.
(p. 52)

In the early poems the persona had asserted the dangers
of physical beauty, placing spiritual beauty above it, as in "Poem 16" and "The Habit of Perfection." In "The Caged Skylark," the persona attempts to understand the harmony with which the body and the spirit work. The unique inscape of physical beauty leads to, as observed, a dual response: one of joy or of fear. Paradoxically, in the "terrible sonnets" the persona emphasizes the dangers of spiritual beauty in physical terms:

God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me . . .
(p. 101)

or as in "Carrion Comfort":

But ah, but 0 thou terrible, why wouldst thou
rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb
against me?

scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones?
and fan,
0 in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic
to avoid
thee and flee?

(p. 99)

The difference between this fleeing and the one expressed in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is that here his fleeing from God's physical and spiritual beauty leads him to no spiritual comfort. The state resulting from this recognition is chaotic, like being tossed in a "whirlwind." The repetition of questions, of words and exclamation ("But ah, but 0," "me heaped there; me frantic to avoid/thee") create the effect of an ever-recurring, though ineffectual, circular motion.
In the "Terrible Sonnets," the spiritual beauty of God isolates, rebuffs, mystifies and torments the poet-priest persona. Answers to his turbulent questioning are rarely forthcoming, but when they are, they affirm the mystery of the man-God relationship. "To What Serves Mortal Beauty?" was written in August 1885, about the same time as the sonnets were conceived. Here the persona realizes that the answer is not so much to be found in God's selfhood, but in the give and take relationship between God and man:

"God's better beauty, grace."

To what serves mortal beauty—dangerous; does set dancing blood—the O-seal—that-so feature, flung prouder form
Than Purcell tune lets tread to? See:it does this: keeps warm . . .
at do then? how meet beauty? Merely meet it; own,
Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift; then leave,
let that alone.
Yea, Wish that though, wish all, God's better beauty, grace.

(p. 98)

By receiving grace, man becomes the link between the divine and the human. In The Notebooks and Papers, Hopkins gives the theological meaning of grace: "For grace is any action, activity on God's part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries the creature to or towards the end of its being, which is its selfsacrifice to God and its salvation." Besides receiving grace, man can be carried toward contact with God through an act of surrender. By accepting the reality of the separation between the
individual human self and the individual divine self, he is able to come to a state of self-giving: "For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand."

To have reached a point where a man can turn his head from the tempest and say "then leave, let that alone" ("To What Serves Mortal Beauty," p. 98), or even accept the fact that not all of God's mystery will ever be known or understood by man, is to have made peace with God and self, even as Hamlet does in Shakespeare's play:

Not a whit, we defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.33

(\textit{Hamlet}, V.ii.208-213)

As th'art a man
Give me the cup. Let go. By heaven, I'll ha't!
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name
Things standing thus unknown, shall live
behind me!34

(\textit{Hamlet}, V.ii.333-336)

In his tenacious probing of reality, Hamlet must act, but in order to act genuinely, to act with an absolute coherence of will, passion and reason, he knows his conscience must be in consonance with genuine emotion. This is his historical burden; he takes this burden responsibly and is reluctant to accept the roles which the ghost or his parents or the world wish to impose on him. As both player and critic, Hamlet feels all the self-divisions of the self-conscious man. He must get a coherent self to get a coherent action. He cannot be avenger and believe that his action is genuine
unless the world is coherent for him. Hamlet does realize that it is impossible to make a coherent self and a coherent world out of sheer determination; what is needed is to act with some faith. So long as he has only questions, Hamlet cannot act. His release from self-tortment comes when he is able to surrender himself, when he is able to say "Let be" and "Let go."

In Hopkins' poetry too, man's salvation comes through man's surrender to his faith, through his attuning himself to the larger forces that control the world. Then, he would, like St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, be prepared to fight "the war within" (p. 106). Hopkins' artistic and priestly vocations both aimed at transformation of man-self into a Christ-self, so in his poetry, the persona, "this Jack, joke, poor potsherd/patch, matchwood" would "crowd career with conquest" and become "immortal diamond." Hopkins was acutely conscious of his failures, of his lapses and his "backwardglances," yet he was also painfully aware of his efforts, his unflagging attempts at self-renewal and the unique keenness of his poetic sensibility. When he wrote to Dixon that Christ was "doomed to succeed by failure," he was echoing a belief in his own self and its resources. Both as a priest and a poet, despite poor health and failures in inspiration, Hopkins possessed a quality which his poems express through images, rhythm, language and the personality of the emerging persona—-the ability to rebound, to rise when close to a fall, or even to attempt to rise.
References


   Note: All subsequent quotes from Hopkins' poems refer to the above text.

3 Iser, p. 64.


6 Iser, p. 67.


8 Ibid., p. 83.


10 Ibid., p. 83.

11 Ibid., p. 157.

13
_Ibid._, p. 183.

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19
Devlin, ed., p. 262.

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25
Iser, p. 119.

27 Ibid., p. 17.

28 Devlin, ed., pp. 122-123.

29 Ibid., pp. 122-123.

30 Ibid., pp. 122-123.


34 Ibid., p. 973.
Chapter 2

The Self and the Other:
Response to Failure in Communication

The conditions of isolation and association experienced by the poet-priest persona in Hopkins' poems are reiterated not only in the thematic concerns but also in the rhetorical structure of the persona-reader-subject relationship. The first half of this chapter will deal with the thematic variations of the relationship between the self and the other and the latter half with the rhetorical structure of the poems emphasizing the artistic concern with "the other," the reader. Hopkins' response to breaks in communication between the priest-self and the parish community, between the poet-self and the reader-subject entity are relevant in understanding the evolving role of self in the face of failure.

One of the major tensions in Hopkins' poetry, that of human isolation and human association, was not only the outcome of his chosen careers of priest and poet; each of the chosen spheres embodied a duality of roles and functions. St. Ignatius Loyola's Spiritual Exercises emphasized the need for meditation and spiritual seclusion, as is evident in the twentieth annotation of the guidelines provided for the retreatant and the director:

44
In these he will, ordinarily, more benefit himself, the more he separates himself from all friends and acquaintances and from all earthly care, as by changing from the house where he was dwelling, and taking another house or room to live in, in as much privacy as he can, so that it be in his power to go each day to Mass and to Vespers, without fear that his acquaintances will put obstacles in his way.¹

On the other hand, the duties of the priest involved taking care of his parish in human terms; it meant looking after the sick, the poor, blessing those who came for communion and praying for those who did not. As a priest, Hopkins' main duties were teaching, which meant associating and communicating with students. As a poet too, Hopkins felt the dual pull toward isolation and association. In his early poetry, Hopkins withdrew from the community to dwell on his closeness to nature and to inscape his individuality. His isolation heightened his sense of loneliness, the central experience of the Romantics. On the other hand, as a poet writing in the Victorian milieu, Hopkins could never be blind to the social connection of man. The difference between the two chosen careers rested upon how successful Hopkins was in resolving the conflicts of isolation and association. As a priest, Hopkins openly expressed his own frustrations. As a poet, he found an imaginative outlet. Hopkins' poetry is the ground where the priest and the poet's sense of isolation and of communion find expression in the evolving sensibility of the persona. In some poems, the sense of despair and "encagement," as Donald Walhout puts it, is overpowering.² In others, Hopkins' persona
achieves a communion with a fellow sufferer or even a stranger, so that in those instances "world sorrow" is transformed by association with "men's lives" which are the "world's loveliest." 3

Bell Gale Chevigny in "Instress and Devotion in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins" outlines the three phases of Hopkins' mature poetry: the early period of inscapes in the "natural world," the middle period of inscapes in "the human beings with whom Hopkins has to deal as a priest," and the late period of inscapes in "versions of his own soul." 4 However, Chevigny, in his analysis, assumes that the experiences of isolation and association in Hopkins' poetry were chronological or linear in time. William B. Thesing, on the other hand, more realistically notes recurring instances of poems dealing with human isolation and association:

In all of Hopkins' poems about people, from the 1879-80 group of "Henry Purcell," "Felix Randal," and "Cheery Beggar" to the 1887 group of "Harry Ploughman" and "Tom's Garland" and the 1888-89 group of "In Honour of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez" and "The Shepherd's Brow," the poet struggles to order and harmonize difficulties that he sees in the figures' lives. 5

The total variations in these groups emphasize the nature of Hopkins' faith which was "intensely optimistic" in the early years, but became chaotic and pessimistic in the 1887 period, finally to re-affirm the inscapes of humanity again in the 1888-89 group. 6

The attempt in this chapter is to understand some of
the factors underlying the isolation of Hopkins' persona from human figures and the implications of his attempts at re-integration with them within the framework of the poem. The poems of isolation from humanity deal, in most part, with three kinds of isolation: isolation from family (paralleling Hopkins' isolation from family due to religious conversion), isolation from homeland (the priestly duties "banished" him to work in Wales and in Ireland; moreover, his poetry was rejected in his own country, England), and isolation from humanity in general (which spring from four main factors: the fallen condition of man, the extreme sense of failure in self, the modern man's experience of existential loneliness and Hopkins' romanticism). The poems of association deal with all these four factors and emphasize the possibility of man's renewal through human association.

In "To Seem the Stranger Lies My Lot, My Life" (p. 101), written probably in 1885, the persona expresses the gulf between his Anglican family and himself due to his conversion to Catholicism:

Father and mother dear,
Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near
And he my peace/my parting, sword and strife.
(p. 101)

His isolation from his homeland is of two kinds: he is in Ireland "among strangers," which makes him an exile. In life, continual rejection of Hopkins' poetry by publishers in England due to "his development of a strange and
difficult poetic style and rhythm" frustrated him and left his works "unheard" and "unheeded." The sense of isolation is captured by the persona in the striking description of himself as "a lonely began." The noun-equivalent "began" does not carry the promise of the fulfilment of the execution implied in "beginner." James Finn Cotter's discussion of the implications of the interjection "O" in the line "O all my heart woos," emphasizes "the cry of distress" expressed by the persona "as truth hits home."8

Unlike the trite, patriotic song "What Shall I do for the Land that Bred Me," "The Soldier" is a much more affirmative poem among the poems of association. It reveals the misleading criteria of manliness based on appearances, adopted by the general mass. Hopkins' persona pitches Christ's true service as against the people's sentimental opinion of the "soldier." The persona includes himself with the unseeing "seeing" mass: "Yes, why do we all, seeing of a soldier, bless him? bless/Our redcoats, our tars?" This identification of himself with the masses is a clear indication of his humanity and his humility. It becomes the platform from which he can instress Christ: "Mark Christ our King. He knows war, served this soldiering through."

The isolation from humanity in general was triggered by at least four main factors as mentioned above. In the inscapes of human figures, Hopkins' persona faces and attempts to resolve the despair caused by the sense of
original sin and, hence, the ultimate damnation of man. In "Spring and Fall," the persona solves the mystery of Margaret's mourning—she is mourning for the blight of man, for the universal condition of man, expressed as the "woe" and the "world sorrow" in the Terrible Sonnet 65, "No Worst, There is None." How can man leave his mark in these conditions? One answer lies in the inscapes of the "world's loveliest—men's selves" (p. 98). W. H. Gardner in his study of Hopkins had noted that "inscape" for Hopkins implied "the hand of God upon his Creation," and that "the perception of inscape in Hopkins is marked simultaneously, as a rule, by the flow of instress, as though the individual beholder becomes mystically one with the whole, and seems to imply a supernatural force which binds in, bounds the infinite one." Moreover, John Wain points out, in "An Idiom of Desperation," that in Gardner's definition, "instress is not only the unifying force in the object; it connotes also the impulse from the 'inscape' which acts on the stress and through them, actualizes the inscape in the mind of the beholder (or rather 'perceiver,' for inscape may be perceived through all the senses at once)." Thus the moments of inscape and instress are the moments of fusion of being and thought; in the inscapes of human figures, the perceiver and the perceived join in the experience of oneness, reaching its highest pitch in the realization of "the hand of God upon His Creation." This experience can be
extended to the evolving relationship of the reader and the persona. Even as the persona is the perceiver of his world, the reader participates as the perceiver of the persona and his interactions with nature, man, God and self. In a way, the effect of Hopkins' poem on the reader is one of a reiterated instress—one through imaginative empathy with the persona and one through the immediacy of his own responses to the persona's act of instressing. Thus the reader fulfills within himself the persona's celebration of the individual inscape:

Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder,
His mystery must be instressed, stressed . . .

(p. 53)

Hopkins' persona, besides associating with the sick and the poor, feels an affinity with the figures of the past. In "Duns Scotus's Oxford," the persona revisiting Oxford evokes the golden period of the middle ages. The city as he sees it now has lost its unifying way of life. Yet the figure who best embodied the true mark, Duns Scotus, has left his imprint in "the air" the persona gathers and releases. In inscaping Duns Scotus, the persona is reviving those distinctive qualities in human figures which become expressions of the ultimate beauty of God. Henry Purcell, the seventeenth century musician, is another such figure inscaped by the persona, in the poem "Henry Purcell." In the Preface to the poem, Hopkins praises him for having "uttered in notes the very make and species of man as
created both in him and in all men generally" (p. 80). The sonnet's moment of inscape is clearly marked in "the colossal smile" flashed off the great stormfowl, when "meaning motion fans fresh our wits with wonder." In his letter to Robert Bridges, Hopkins explained:

The sonnet on Purcell means this: 1-4. I hope Purcell is not damned for being a Protestant because I love his genius. 5-8. And that not so much for gifts he shares, even though it should be in higher measure, with other musicians as for his own individuality. 9-14. So that while he is aiming only at impressing his hearer with the meaning in hand I am looking out meanwhile for his specific, his individual markings and mottlings, the sakes of him.

But what does the poem as the expression of a persona's experience convey to the reader, what emotions does it evoke in him and how? These are questions which can be answered by observing the reader's responses to the expression of the persona-self. The persona's first line strikes one as an ambiguous combination of two states of the perceiving self--the questioning, doubting, hesitant state, beginning with the self's interrogative "Have fair fallen," only to merge into the state of realization charged with emotional intensity: "O fair, fair have fallen, so dear/To me, so arch-especial a spirit as heaves in Henry Purcell." A sense of the persona's passivity and activity in the expression of Purcell's inscape is developed in the poem:

"It is the forged feature finds me; it is the rehearsal
Of own, of abrupt self there so thrusts on,
so throngs the ear."
"Let him oh! with his air of angels then lift me,
lay me! only I'll
Have an eye to the sakes of him . . .
but meaning motion fans fresh our wits with wonder."
(p. 80)

The movement from the initial "I" as the perceiver to the final "we" involves the growing identity of the reader with the persona. It is through the experience of inscape and instress that the relationship between the persona and the reader reaches a point of shared wonder.

The poem "In Honour of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez" (1888) is about one of the lay brothers of Hopkins' order, St. Alphonsus Rodriguez (1533-1617), who had been a watchman and porter for forty years at the Jesuit College at Montesion in Palma, Majorca. The poem, though an occasional piece, is sincere in its celebration of a hero who struggled against "the war within," the various temptations by which God tested him. Through his patience, duty and purity of mind, he identified himself with Christ, who is inscaped by the persona as:

Yet God (that hews mountain and continent,
Earth, all, out; who with trickling increment,
Veins violets and tall trees makes more and more)
Could crowd career with conquest.
(p. 106)

It is in the moments of inscape and instress that the poet can establish a bond with the figures who are dead and gone, even as in the parenthetical asides he establishes a communicative bond with the reader. These poems are, in a way, answers to the regret expressed in "The Lantern Out of
Doors," "No Worst, There is None," and "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire"—that distance and death end all individuals:

Death or distance soon consumes them: wind
What most I may eye after, be in at the end
I cannot, and out of sight is out of mind.

(p. 71)

all

Life death does end and each day dies with sleep

(p. 100)

Manshape, that shone
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots
black out; nor mark
Is any of him at all so stark
But vastness blurs and time beats level.

(p. 105)

In "The Handsome Heart" (1879), the moment of human association is the moment of the priest-persona's perception of the beauty of character in the young boy who served with no desire for rewards. By expressing itself instinctively, the being, which is "Mannerly-hearted! more than handsome face," chooses the right course:

What the heart is! which, like carriers let fly—
Doff darkness, homing nature knows the rest—
To its own fine function, wild and self-
instressed,
Falls light as ten years long taught how to and why.

(p. 81)

In "The Bugler's First Communion" (1879), the moment of sacramental interaction between the priest-persona and the bugler, and finally between the bugler and God, is expressed in an image of the fullness of being:

How it does my heart good, visiting at that bleak hill,
When limber liquid youth, that to all I teach
Yields tender as a pushed peach,
Hies headstrong to its well being of a self-wise
self-will!

But there is another relationship that is partially
developed throughout the poem—the relationship between the
persona and the reader. The reader anticipated here is an
outsider; in the very first line the persona explains the
location, the barracks from where the Bugler boy came: "A
Bugler boy from barrack (it is over the hill/There)." At
this point, the persona's communication with the reader is
based mainly on revealing facts and carefully substantiating
the source of his information:

boy bugler, born, he tells me, of Irish
Mother to an English sire (he
Shares their best gifts surely, fall how things
will) ...  

From addressing the reader mainly in parenthesis, the
persona shifts to address the "divine" "heavens," though the
complicated syntax is baffling to the reader:

There! and your sweetest sendings, ah divine
By it, heavens, befall him! as a heart Christ's
darling, dauntless.

Norman MacKenzie unravels some of the complication when he
points out, "In stanza four, 'ah divine' is marooned from
its original noun, as we realize from the first fragmentary
draft: 'Your sweetest sendings, ah divine/Heavens befall
him!'"12 From the "divine" "heavens" and the
"angel-warder," the persona returns to identify the reader
with his community: "Nothing else is like it, no, not all so strains/Us," "The brow and bead of being/An our day's God's own Galahad" (italics mine). But the reader-involvement is scattered by the constant shifts in the persona's choice of addressee. Another effect, noted by MacKenzie, is deliberate reversal of the reader's expectations which has the effect of startling him rather than establishing a rapport: "He deliberately reverses our expectations: in defiance of normal usage he calls lads who are true to their own noble inscape of gracious personality 'headstrong' (st. 6); instead of putting a 'ban on' someone (a curse or anathema), the sealing chrism 'bans off' evil (st. 9). So too the 'divine doom' in stanza eleven is, surprisingly, a favouring providence."13

Norman MacKenzie's comment on Hopkins' sense of failure in poetic quality is also significant; it accounts for the constant shifts in reader-involvement:

His lament that he has nothing to show for his labours reflects both the loneliness of the artist, and a personal feeling of being a misfit among the crowds. He ends with a Romantic yearning to escape to the solitude of the wilderness, no matter how bleak.14

The desire for "the houseless shore" and "the wilderness" implies the persona's separation from the city and the crowds, often paralleled, in Hopkins' poems, by the distancing of the persona from the reader. The communion the persona wishes to establish is with nature: "And pierce the yellow waxen light/With free long looking, ere I die"
This Romantic tendency is manifest in Hopkins' early poetry, and is a kind of prison to which, as J. Hillis Miller notes, "Paterian phenomenalism had condemned him." Later, he subordinated the sensuous beauty of the world to "God's better grace" (p. 70). Yet, through inscaping God in natural beauty, Hopkins' poetry is a romantic response to the existential dilemma of the twentieth century. In J. Hillis Miller's view there have been a number of responses to the disappearance of God:

But a group of Victorian poets belong to another tradition: romanticism. The romantics still believe in God, and they find his absence intolerable. At all cost they must attempt to re-establish communication. Romanticism defines the artist as the creator or discoverer of new symbols, symbols which establish a new relation, across the gap, between man and god. . . . The central assumption of romanticism is the idea that the isolated individual, through poetry, can accomplish the "unheard of work," that is, create through his own efforts a marvelous harmony of words which will reintegrate man, nature and God.16

Hopkins' God is, on the one hand, an "extrinsic power," particularized by his finer or higher pitch.17 On the other hand, he is "the most complex pattern of all" who "contains in himself the archetypes of all things."18 The contradiction about the self evolving from the "contradiction about the nature of God" is, as J. Hillis Miller suggests, "at the heart of the poet's spiritual experience": individuality is both "a matter of pitch, of taste, something so highly tuned and idiosyncratic that it is like nothing else in the world," and also "a matter of
complexity and fineness of pattern," containing in himself "all the creatures lower than he in the scale of being."19

This brings us to the poems in which Hopkins expresses "resonances" between the persona and other men. These moments become the moments of the renewal of self from the personal despair of failure as well as from the "ultima solitude" in Scotus' phrase. These poems deal with the persona's inscapes of the sick or victims of society, and of the poor and the working men. "Felix Randal," one of the best of these humanistic poems, was written at Liverpool on 28 April 1880, in "that part of the city slums where Hopkins' parish duties lay."20 The news of the blacksmith's death leads the priest-persona to a rehearsal of the sickness that "broke him." The empathy between the priest and Felix, that resulted out of the suffering of and compassion for the blacksmith, is captured in a tender moment:

This seeing the sick endears them to us, us too it endears.
My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears,
Thy tears that touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix
Randal . . .

(p. 87)

In a structural analysis of line nine, "My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears," Joseph Eble notes the inversion of phrase and sound in the second half of the line as being significant in conveying the nature of the "sacramental consolation":


The reader is swept into a dynamic movement of sound and meaning that seems, in three closely linked structures, to take him forward and then backward. There is, it would seem, a mimetic struggle for contact between the speaking poet and the figure of the blacksmith. The two-way syntax suggests a two-way relationship. Through the exchange of love, poet and blacksmith are brought together and almost merge. The relationship clearly becomes much more than the mere "duty" it is at first labeled.21

The moment of inscaping and instressing the beauty of the farrier's body and character is a coalescence of the two-way relationship in Hopkins' unique poetic vision:

How far from then forethought of, all thy more boisterous years,
When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amidst peers,
Didst fettle for the great grey drayhorse his bright and battering sandal!

(p. 87)

While "Cheery Beggar" (dated probably 1879), among "the unfinished poems, fragments and light verse," is a simple poem of a carefree, undespairing beggar who has not been seared by his "struggling," "Tom's Garland" (written in 1887) is a gloomy, often harsh, vision of the unemployed in Victorian England. Many critics have noted political themes in the poem. John Sutherland notes, "'Tom's Garland' is Hopkins' solitary political poem," and goes on to claim that Shakespeare's Coriolanus is interfused in the underthought of the poem, in that the play is "angry in tone and conservative in attitude."22 Although beginning with a traditional belief in the divine order and hierarchy of
society, "What! Country is honour enough in all us--lordly
head,/. . . or mighty foot," the tone of the persona shifts
to one of sharp indignation:

    Undenizened, beyond bound
    Of earth's glory, earth's ease, all; no one,
    nowhere,
    In wide the world's weal; rare gold, bold steel,
    bare
    In both; care, but share care--
    This, by Despair, bred Hangdog dull; by Rage,
    Manwolf, worse; and their packs infest the age.

(p. 103)

Although Hopkins' famous 1871 letter to Bridges was shocking
in its controversial statement, "Horrible to say, in a
manner I am a Communist," it would be reductive to consider
"Tom's Garland" as a poem with a communist underthought. In
one of the letters written after the "Red Letter," Hopkins
contradicts his early statement:

    I have little reason to be red: it was the red
    communo that murdered five of our fathers
    lately--whether before or after I wrote I do not
    remember. So far as I know I said nothing, that
    might not fairly be said.23

Hopkins' belief in the hard work of the labourers and the
working class is not so much the outcome of his political
beliefs as much as of his spiritual convictions. The life
of a Jesuit priest was imbued with an affirmation of the
work ethic, derived directly from the teachings of St.
Ignatius Loyola. In the Notebooks, Hopkins refers to the
work ethic:

    There are then, as you know, in Commonwealths,
    ranks or (as they say) estates; for instance in our
    own are three, the crown, the peers, the commons. .
    . . . But the COMMON GOOD IS TO BE REALIZED, it is to
be brought about, BY ALL the citizens or members and estates of the commonwealth DOING THEIR DUTY. In the poem "Tom's Garland," the persona's awareness that the unemployed had no place in the "Commonweal" leads to a tone of explosive harshness which fails to be reintegrated in a more unifying inscape. William B. Thesing comments: "The shock of explosion of the structure of feeling at the end of 'Tom's Garland' was so profound that Hopkins attempted no further inscapes of Victorian society." It is a poem which hangs in the air. In his attempts to renew the self through human association, Hopkins' persona finds himself in a system which fosters bleak animality, and his response is one of frustration and chaos.

"Harry Ploughman," written in the same year as "Tom's Garland," inscapes Harry's physical beauty. Thesing points out the tortuous, complex syntax as another instance of a chaos which finds no resolution in "Tom's Garland." MacKenzie notes the source of obscurity in the poem as the "deployment of words at whose meaning one can still only guess"—words like "flue," "broth," "brough," and others. C. Day Lewis comments: "If Harry is a monumental figure, then I get only a fly's eye view of it, a series of blinding close-ups, as if I were crawling laboriously from limb to limb over the surface of a corrugated, undemonstrative statue." The main flaw in the poem, according to the critics, is the failure to integrate Harry's physical beauty with a total "beauty of character." However, a close
reading of the poem shows that here as in "The Caged Skylark" Hopkins reiterated the belief that "Man's spirit will be flesh-bound when found at best." The concentration on Harry's physicality has often been interpreted as Hopkins' unnatural attraction to the male figure. The act of inscaping Harry, in such a case, would be motivated by repressed sexual tension; yet one finds the description of the muscles, the ribs, the flank and other physical features, detailed, detached and scientific rather than repressed or sublimated. One of the qualities of Hopkins' persona, scientific observation infused with the vitality and abundance of emotional response, is obvious in this poem. The first eleven lines are devoted to the persona's minute observation. Then comes his emotional response, keen, wondering, connotative:

He leans to it, Harry bends, look. Back, elbow, and liquid waist
In him, all quail to the wallowing o' the plough. 'S cheek crimson; curls
Wag or crossbridle, in a wind lifted, windlaced--See his wind-lilylocks-laced;
Churlsgrace too, child of Amansstrength, how it hangs or
hurls
Them--broad in bluff hide his frowning feet lashed!
(p. 104)

He expresses himself in imperatives and dramatic interjections, heightening the emotional response. Besides the fact that "Harry Ploughman" displays Hopkins' typical concerns in poetry at the height of poetic energies, the
poem offers something else. The persona's concern with Harry's physical being leads to an expression that stands out in the poem: "He leans to it, Harry bends, look." James Finn Cotter's study of Hopkins' inscapes reveals the mythopoeic ordering of the poem: "Locked to the plow, Harry Ploughman's hard as hurdle arms fuse in one 'sinew service' and, like the blacksmith 'at the random grim forge,' define the contour of life's destination." Here Harry's bowed figure, expressing the arc of tension, is seen as the figure of the Omega, which is "the parabola and focal point of inscape, inclosed in the conic universe and heart." The act of bending or leaning is also a significant two-way response of the body to the conditions of its existence—the physical condition (the body bending to work and labour) and the spiritual condition (the body rising from the fallen state to Christ, almost "wind lifted," even as the curls are). The persona's inscaping of this physical stance is a recurrent motif in Hopkins' poetry. "Easter Communion" ends with the persona's fervent prayer and hope to rise from the "bent" state:

Your scarce sheathed bones are weary of being bent:
Lo, God shall strengthen all the feeble knees.
(p. 21)

In "The Wreck of the Deutschland," the self hiding from God feels the stress of Christ and its response is one of physical leaning:

The swoon of a heart that the sweep and
the hurl of thee
trod
Hard down with a horror of height:
And the midriff ast rain with leaning of, laced
with fire of stress.

(p. 52)

In "God's Grandeur," the "bent" world is a metonymic expression of the "bent man" (bent through the "original fall" or "universal sin"). Here there is hope for the "bent" world:

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

(p. 66)

In "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo," the word "back" conveys "the feeling of physical strain." In "Ribblesdale," the persona ironically stresses the fallen condition of man in physical terms:

And what is earth's eye, tongue, or heart else, where
Else, but in dear and dogged man?—Ah, the heir
To his own selfbent so bound, so tied to his turn.

(p. 91)

In "Harry Ploughman" the motif of the bent body, especially coming after a series of descriptions that highlight the perfection of the body, reaches its climax. In one sense, bending may signify the motion from an upright state to that of the fallen. In "Ribblesdale" man's condition is hopeless and the "bent" state will only lead to a fall. But in another sense, "bending" may signify the motion from a fallen to an upright state. In "Harry Ploughman" the hope that is expressed in "Easter Communion," "The Wreck of the
Deutschland," and "God's Grandeur" is revived. Harry, perfect in beauty like Adam in Edenic state, lives at the brink of a dangerous state—the fallen state. However, his spiritual beauty is sparked off from his action, that is bending (taking the burden of human sin and suffering, associating oneself to one's work and also preparing oneself for the spiritual heights) to transform the self into a risen state. The persona here is inscaping Harry at the moment of self-transformation through self-effort. The repetition of the "l" and "w" sounds in the latter half of the poem (as against the "b," "r," "k," "st," and "f" sounds in the first half of the poem) conveys to the reader a sense of Harry's beauty as touched by tenderness, grace, and harmony ("liquid waist," "quail to the wallowing o' the plough") and, ultimately, "beauty of character."

In the final analysis, the poems in which Hopkins' persona inscapes human figures are significant in that they record the moments of self's association with the other and also the moments of recovery from the self's spiritual and artistic loneliness as well as solipsistic individualism. As shown in the study, the interaction of the two selves is expressed most intensely in the moment of inscape and instress. Much has been said about Hopkins' inscapes of nature; though less abundant, the inscapes of human figures in Hopkins' poems are not mere theoretical attempts at phrasing social or political ideologies. Those which
attempt to grapple with some of these ideologies, as "Tom's Garland," end in unresolved chaos and frustration. On the other hand, the persona's inscapes of humanity, like the inscapes of nature, are spontaneous and intensely felt experiences of the individuality and unity of beings and are often communicated as such to the reader. In the chapter on "Naturation," Donald Walhout (in Send My Roots Rain) perceptively analyzes the "incarnational element" in Hopkins' "view of human association and its potentiality":

According to that doctrine (of incarnation), the vehicle for mediation between God and man is, after all, human embodiment. Using the idea of analogy (though not referring to theological salvation), one could then say that, pristinely, all persons are potentially mediating vehicles for the restoration of other persons within the times, places and situations in which they find themselves. Just as Christ restores, each person can be a healing vehicle for another in time of trouble. In this way is the human community designed. 32

In "As Kingfishers Catch Fire," the highly individual persona affirms the presence of Christ in other selves, even as he celebrates their individuality.

For Christ plays in ten thousand places, Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his To the Father through the features of men's faces.  
(p. 90)

As expressed in one of his hymns (unfinished draft, probably dated 1885), "Thee God, I Come from, to Thee, go," Hopkins' persona projects a keen awareness of the therapeutic and spiritual effects of human association:

But thou bidst, and just thou art,
As Hopkins examines the dubious qualities of the self, the other and the God-self, he relates each in a one-to-one linear strain of push and pull till it bends to a curve. It is the intensity and the tensility of the relationships that Hopkins translates into a language of kinesis. Besides the confrontation with the communal other, the poet of the poet-priest self takes into account the reader and his role. Hopkins had created another self, that of the reader, which would read, examine, penetrate, judge and finally accept or reject his work. In his letters to Bridges, Hopkins often referred to the problem of the common reader. In response to Bridges' criticism of his use of rhythm, Hopkins urged him to "hear" rather than "read" his verse:

My verse is less to be read than heard, as I have told you before; it is oratorical, that is the rhythm is so. . . . I cannot think of altering anything. Why shd. I? I do not write for the public and I hope to convert you. 33

Hopkins' notes on the poems sent to his own learned friends who could not understand his poetry imply his awareness that his poems were written to selected readers--Hopkins' version of what Wolfgang Iser would call "the ideal reader," who,
"unlike the contemporary reader, is a purely fictional being; he has no basis in reality, and it is this very fact that makes him so useful: as a fictional being, he can close the gaps that constantly appear in any analysis of literary effects and responses."³⁴ A great deal of Hopkins' poetry is dramatic precisely because it is addressing a selected group of individuals, ideal but also having its own personality, characteristics, or what Hopkins would call "pitch" or "inscape" of self. The role of the reader in Hopkins' poetry often shifts from that of the observer to that of the addressee. In stanza three of "The Wreck of the Deutschland," as an observer, the reader is either a witness to the direct interaction of God and poet (stanzas one and twenty nine of "The Wreck") or a privileged though unacknowledged confidante, overhearing the soliloquies of the poet-priest (stanzas four and five of "The Wreck"). In stanza six of the poem, a hint that the persona is aware of the reader begins to dawn. The parenthetical aside "(and few know this)" could imply that the reader is one of the "few." This suggestion is made obvious in stanzas eight and nine, where the persona and the reader share the experience and respond in similar ways (italics mine):

Oh,
We lash with the best or worst
Word last!
But we dream we are rooted in earth—Dust!
Flesh falls within sight of us, we, though our
flower the same,
Wave with the meadow, forget that there
must
The sour scythe cringe, and the blear share come.
(pp. 54, 55)

So far there has been a slow evolvement of the
persona-reader relationship. It is in stanza twelve that a
shift occurs. Stanza twelve was originally stanza one in
the first drafts; however, it works better dramatically in
the present position. It is in this stanza that the
addressee is, for the first time, two different selves. The
first four lines are the opening of the persona's narrative
and are therefore addressed to the reader. The details
about the time and the place of the incident and the number
of the wrecked specify the reader as a person interested in
facts and figures. An abrupt change has taken place in the
persona's attitude to the reader. After establishing a
closeness with the reader which verges on highly emotive
levels of experience (notice the metaphorical language of
the last four lines of stanza eleven), the persona
withdraws. The reader is placed at a distance and is given
prosaic details. The role of the persona veers to that of
the informer, a role much easier to assume than that of the
self-tormented sharer of false dreams. The withdrawal of
the persona from the reader is completed in the last four
lines of the same stanza. From the addressee, the reader
shifts to the role of the witness. The questions buffeted
by the persona to the Father are intense, soul-searing but
also a mixture of appeal and reprimand:
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?

The transposed syntax ("Yet did not the dark side" to "Yet
did the dark side . . . not vault them.") and the
positioning of the "even" (which "suggests that something
mentioned as a possibility constitutes an extreme case or an
unlikely instance"), while placing him as a bumbling
expostulator, wins the reader's sympathy. Removed to the
position of an observer, the reader's self understands, or
is at least drawn to understand the persona speaking as an
exile, bewildered by the turn of events. It is the persona
who makes the reader's self act by volition, for it is at
this moment of complete withdrawal that the persona is most
keenly comprehensible to the reader. The hint that the
persona and the reader share something--perhaps a way of
experiencing intense moments--is confirmed now. The shift
in the middle of stanza twelve is thus both an
unpremeditated, psychologically viable, self-protective
strategy of the persona and also an artist's final freeing
of the reader to achieve rapport of thought, feeling and
sympathy. It occurs again and again as in stanzas eighteen,
twenty five to twenty eight, thirty one (soliloquies) and
twenty one (narrative and address to God). In stanza thirty
one, the persona shifts from addressing God to soliloquizing
to addressing God again. The reader is nowhere mentioned or
acknowledged. However, the paeanic sprung rhythm and the long, breathless lines draw the reader into the poem's spectrum of feeling. It is this reader-participation, worked out in the language and rhetorical substance of Hopkins' poetry, that makes the persona so accessible, often endearing.

In "The Starlight Night," the reader is urged to participate by the ecstatic, child-like exclamations of the persona. The particulars from fairy tales' lore—"the fire-folk sitting in the air," "the bright boroughs," "the circle-citadels," "the diamond delves," "the elves'-eyes," "quickgold," "wind-beat whitebeam!," "airy abeles," "flake-doves"—appeal to the child in the reader and he accordingly takes on the role of an imaginative, wide-eyed believer in miracles. After luring the reader into the child-role, the persona suddenly shifts his tone. He addresses the reader with a matter of fact, "Ah well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize. Buy then! bid then!" (pp. 66-67). The reader must feel the abrupt change in his role. After the close rapport felt among children sharing the wonder and the magic of the fairy-tale world, the reader is jerked into the position of a prosaic, wordly merchant ready for a quick bargain. The relationship between the persona and the reader is one of wary businessmen at an auction, vying with each other—safe, stable but also underlined with a camaraderie. Both know that anyone can win the prize: "Ah
well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize." Having moved away from a childlike wonder to a businesslike caution, the persona defines his own evolving relationship to God. He is at first struck by the beauty of God's self (incapsed in the stars and skies), but then moves to acknowledge another aspect of God's self--its inscrutability, mystery and remoteness from the poet-priest self. What he must pay in return for the miracle are "prayer, patience, alms, vows"--duties of a Jesuit priest and also of a poet who must labor and expect no fame, who must give his wealth (poetry) to the world and make his own vows of artistic effort in the praise of God.

The persona, by creating a reader whose role shifts in the poem, is establishing a double relationship: the poet-reader and the priest-God relationship. Through the medium of a more accessible other-self (the reader), the persona succeeds in building a rapport with "Christ and his mother and all his hallows." After taking the cautious strategies necessary to overcome the distance between two highly developed individual selves of the persona and Christ, the persona again evokes the childlike wonder at the beauty of Christ. The miracle of "a May-ness, like on Orchard boughs!" "March bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows" is more accessible than that of "fire-folk sitting in the air" or of "the circle citadels," and yet retains its magical wonder--even as the merchant's cautious cameraderie
is more tractable than the dream world of children. In such ways does the persona move from the sheer wonder at Christ's remote beauty to a closer understanding of both the beauty and danger of Christ's selfhood. Affirming the priestly duties, the poet-priest is able to penetrate constructively the remoteness that separates Christ from himself. While in "To What Serves Mortal Beauty" God's "grace" saved him, and in "The Wreck of the Deutschland," he acknowledged that God's mystery is never fully knowable, in this poem the persona is ready to take the risk—to give all ("prayer, patience, alms, vows") in order to bring Christ home (to his own heart). By working out this resolution and by their very interactions, the poet-priest persona and the reader participate in overcoming individual failures in communication and anticipate the final communion of self with God.

In "Felix Randal" the persona addresses the reader, seeking confirmation from him regarding Felix's death: "O is he dead then? my duty all ended" (p. 86). The reader is somebody who was close to the farrier, perhaps a relative, a friend or a co-worker, in whose company the priest-persona can drift into past memories without embarrassment (lines five to eight). The persona's consoling sigh ("Ah well") and easy use of dialect ("Ah well, God rest him all road ever he offended," emphasis and parenthetical insertion mine) imply the persona's closeness to the reader-listener
self, but on a well-observed priest-parish level. Even the
generalization "this seeing the sick endears them to us, us
too it endears" is marked by the formality of a priestly
duty involving consoling the bereaved and edifying the dead.
So far, so good. Then, suddenly, the tone changes and so
does the addressee. The poet-priest persona directly talks
to Felix in a highly emotive language:

My tongue had taught thee comfort touch had quenched thy tears,
Thy tears that touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal.
(p. 87)

The mutual give and take of human interaction is paralleled
in the structure of the lines; the intensity of feeling, now
no longer hidden under formal generalization, breaks out
with the repetition of Felix's name: "child, Felix, poor
Felix Randal." The slow sinking into past memories (sestet)
is not a duty-bound attempt at consolation (for here the
persona is momentarily unaware of the reader's presence),
but a true expression of instress felt by him. The
sincerity of feeling is communicated to the reader most
intensely in these moments of the persona's withdrawal from
him, even as seen in "The Wreck of the Deutschland." The
intensity in the sestet works precisely because the reader
has been drawn in, at first non-committally, but later by
volition. The reader, though acting by volition, has been
brought to a position where he cannot but be a participant.
Conceding to grant the reader artistic freedom, the
poet-persona succeeds in keeping him within the parameters of his own rhetorical control.

The poems which record the failures in communication between the priest-self and the parish-communal-self or even the God-self, that is, the Terrible Sonnets, also display a marked lack of communication between the persona and the reader; often even the attempt is not made. The despair at the distance between the two selves is reflected in the increasing solipsism of the sonnets. From the very first lines, "No worst, there is none," "I wake and feel the fell of dark," "My own heart let me more have pity on," Hopkins reveals preoccupation with the self, referred to as a pitiful "wretch" or "heart." These poems dwell on a particular kind of loss--loss of comfort felt keenly through the absence of a dear, loved one:

Comforter, where, where is your comforting?

And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away.

I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless . . .

The persona's awareness of the absence of his Paraclete, Christ or Comforter, is poetically transmitted through his conscious awareness of the reader's absence. The poet-priest self is thus completely alone. In his spiritual notes "First Principle and Foundation," Hopkins had referred
to the nature of the self:

A self then will consist of a center and a surrounding area or circumstance, of a point of reference and a belonging field, the latter set out, as surveyors etc. say, from the former; of two elements, which we may call the inset and the outsetting or the display.36

In the Terrible Sonnets, the persona's pain and despair arise out of a realization similar to that expressed by Hopkins in his spiritual notes: "Since self consists in the relation the inset and the outsetting bear to one another, the universal has a relation different from everything else and everything else from everything else, including the universal, so that the self of the universal is not the self of anything else."37 The uniqueness of the self can also be its burden, and the Terrible Sonnets emphasize this burden, the loneliness of the self:

The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse. (p. 101)

In three of his later poems, the persona renews the attempt to relate himself to the reader. In "Harry Ploughman" (Sept. 1887), the tentative surfacing of the artist, involved not only with his subject but also with the reader, is indicated by the imperatives "look" and "see." The persona is inviting the reader to share his experience, to witness the beauty and strength of Harry inscaped in the act of ploughing. Moving out of his own self, the poet-persona again becomes aware of "the other self"--Harry Ploughman, the subject of his observation and the reader,
the addressee. The poem begins with no reference to the reader; only when the poet begins to observe Harry acting out his beauty and strength is the reader called in. The intensity of the moment, its significance to the persona who, in the dark sonnets, had felt the alienation of the ploughman (common man, self as poet and priest) from his plough, eases the bridging of the persona-reader distance.

In "St. Alphonsus Rodriguez" (composed around October 1888), the shared identity of the persona and the reader, "we," is placed in the larger framework of the common man:

But be the war within, the brand we wield
Unseen, the heroic breast not outward-steeled . . .
(p. 106)

Once the persona has established communication with the reader, the ensuing unified self, "we," takes the final leap to relate itself to the third entity of the rhetorical triangle—the subject. Here the subject of the poem is the common man. The persona, perhaps a failure in the world of events, does re-enact Christ who "could crowd career with conquest" in his inner struggle at self-discovery and communication with other selves.

In "The Shepherd's Brow," the shared identity of persona-reader-subject achieves an artistic significance. The history of its appearance among Hopkins' published works throws some light on the shifts that have taken place in the critical assessment of its importance. Robert Bridges had refused to include this poem among Hopkins' finished poems
because of its "cynical mood," and so did W. H. Gardner until the fourth edition of *The Poems*. In their notes to the poem in the fourth edition of *The Poems of Gerard Manely Hopkins*, Gardner and MacKenzie emphasized that Hopkins is "stressing man's essential limitations" in the poem. They analyze line twelve as follows:

The aposiopesis is obviously deliberate and seems to mark the culmination of disgust: "And I that . . . but why mention my own earnestness? Life is a grotesque masquerade of inverted or distorted images, and my own trials and tantrums are equally unheroic."39

With Robert Boyle, S.J., Sr. Mary Campbell, Robert Clark, S.J., and Paul L. Mariani, there came a rush of critical assessment of the poem as a finished and complex work of art.40 Mary Campbell's conclusion is noteworthy (here she is referring to the third edition of Gardner's *The Poems*):

The sonnet is not a simple one, and among its most interesting complexities is precisely that of tone: it passes from admiration through indignation and the deepest disgust and pain to a most sincere humility and quiet. This alone should redeem it from its status, in Gardner's edition, in the last page of the "fragments."41

The persona, in the mood of the last poems, views "Man Jack's pretense to greatness seen in the unflattering light of his essential smallness."42 In the world of ordinary daily life, the three selves, those of the poet, the reader and the common man (the subject of the poem), are but brittle bones: "But man--we, scaffold of score brittle bones." But does art in some way affect their identity? Thomas K. Beyette's analysis in this context is helpful to a
certain extent. In "Hopkins' Phenomenology of Art in 'The Shepherd's Brow,'" he discusses Hopkins' problem of artistic creation:

The subject of Hopkins' "The Shepherd's Brow" is, then, the double-edged problem of artistic creativity. The poet not only faces up to the lack of epic or tragic material available in common man or personal experience but also encounters the artistic problem of accommodating inspiration to a poetic shape that will faithfully convey its import.43

The ambiguity of the word "tame" in the following lines from the poem opens one to that quality of artistic creation discussed before—the transformation of self:

And I that die these deaths, that feed this flame
That . . . in smooth spoons spy life's masque
mirrored: tame
My tempeasts there, my fire and fever fussy.
(p. 107)

Beyette's analysis refers to taming of the fire of artistic inspiration in the mirror of art:

In any event, the "smooth spoons" of Hopkins' sonnets "feed this flame" or add to the blazoned story of common man, including himself, but at the same time "tame" the poet's "tempests"—his inspiration mirrored in poetry—as well as his inspirational "fire" and "fever fussy." "Tame" is also in a way characteristic of Hopkins, an adjective as well as a verb; that is, in the mirror of art the poet's "tempest" or "fever" appears tame—a reflected pale fire.44

"Tamed," however, can also be interpreted as "controlled," especially when we consider that it is not the "fire and fever fussy" of the Jack self, but that of the poet-persona which is being "tamed" by the artistic creation. The poet-persona had started off by associating himself with the
reader and the common man who share the same breath "from
groundlong babyhood to hoary/Age gasp," but in line nine the
"we" is divided into the "He" and "I." Paul L. Mariani, in
"The Artistic and Tonal Integrity of Hopkins' 'The
Shepherd's Brow'," points out this association:

But it will be noted that Hopkins who had
identified himself with man in lines five ("we")
and eight ("our"), in line nine contemptuously
dissociates himself from Man Jack with an emphatic
"He!" Having set up a comparison between Man Jack,
undistinguished by his generically undifferentiated
"manmarks," and the distinctively individuating
"sakes" of God's lightening on his shepherd and the
fallen angels, Hopkins, in line twelve, isolates
himself above the Jacks to plead his own particular
case, his own sake, his intensely personal agony.

In "smooth spoons," that is, art, the reflection of his life
appears a comical, distorted masque, unfit for high tragedy.
Hopkins' persona is aware of his own smallness, but unlike
the Man Jack he acknowledges it; he expresses it in words,
and this very expression becomes his hope for recovery.
From this state of humility, he can create an art that is in
consonance with his renewed awareness of self—an art that
"tames" or "controls" the subject of the chaos of his
struggles. Disillusioned by the absurdity of modern man as
a subject for high tragedy and the reality of common
existence, he wishes for an art which will help tone down
the extremities of his "tempests," his "fire and fever
fussy." At this point, he does not wish for art's magical
transformation that he had earlier believed in and had
captured in the moments of inscape and instress. Felix
Randal, in reality, was broken by sickness, but in art, in the persona's inscapes, the banality and pain of human suffering were transformed. In "The Shepherd's Brow" the poet-persona faces the reality of what art can do and what it cannot. Here the poet wishes for an art that would help one take a measured look at human life. In another sense too, art can tame one's tempests; in creating art one moves out of one's own pitiful self and all its feverish concerns (expressed in the Terrible Sonnets), out of the density of common man who is "the heir/to his own selfbent so bound, so tied to his turn" ("Ribblesdale," p. 90) to communicate with the other self. In this state of symbiosis, each self must unite with the other. Superficially, this sense of art's significance seems opposed to Hopkins' belief in creating individual inscapes in poetry. However, what the persona wishes to be toned down in art is not the beauty or mark of the individual self but its self-lacerating actions, its self-indulged importance, its grime and its shame. What he wants toned down, finally, is those qualities of the self which separate man and Christ. The poem read in this light evolves into a significant response. But it is markedly devoid of the paeanic assertion, of magical poetic transformation. Having faced one's own jaded self, Hopkins' persona withholds, in the last phase of his evolution, the exuberance of surrender to untested faith assumptions, even as he refrains from anxious self-accusations. W. H. Gardner
compares him to the Hamlet figure: "This is not the smiling, aloof cynicism of La Rochefoucauld but the bitter self-implicated cynicism of Hamlet—the cry of the disappointed idealist." However, for Hopkins, despite its inadequacies art does effect a change in the self's understanding of its condition. Paul Mariani's comment regarding "To R.B." in "The Sound of Oneself Breathing" is relevant in this context as well:

> What the last poem tells us, then, is that Hopkins has come to accept his very human condition. . . . Ironically for the first (and last) time in poetry, the density of anxious fretting in the introspective sonnets has lifted. One senses that Hopkins has come to accept himself, the apparent failure signalled by his long poetic silences, but the movement of the Spirit as well, operating within as it will. Affective and elective wills have for once meshed. The voice in this song is aware of the cost of the silence to one's poetic reputation, aware, but willing without anxiousness for once to pay the price. For once, then: something.

Worked out from the persona's self-depreciation, disappointment and cynicism to a kind of self-composure, the poem salvages something out of the chaos of the human condition. If we choose to live merely "hand to mouth," human insignificance can become the link between individual selves, and Hopkins' later poetry confronts this possibility. That is why we, as readers, are struck by the grit and grim picture of the "Jack" self. However, in art, as in priestly work, Hopkins found the substance for human interaction and communication. Often he felt thwarted in his efforts, his lines "lagging" ("To R. B.," p. 108),
himself as "Time's eunuch," and if in these last poems one notes the dominance of cynicism, one cannot but be aware of the poet's genuine attempts at creating the ideal community. Even as the priest-persona struggled to sympathize with the parish figures, the poet-persona sought the community of the reader and finally of the human lot. In priestly duties and in poetic work, he affirmed the growing relationships among the self, the other and God.
References


   Note: All quotes from Hopkins' poems are cited from the above text and will subsequently be indicated by page numbers in parenthesis.


13 Ibid., p. 125.

14 Ibid., p. 24.


16 Ibid., pp. 211-212.


18 Miller, p. 225.


25 Thesing, p. 47.

26 Ibid., p. 41.


29 Cotter, p. 282.

30 Ibid., p. 277.


32 Walhout, p. 65.


34 Iser, p. 29.


36 House, ed., p. 127.

37 Ibid., p. 127.


39 Ibid., p. 296.


Paul Mariani, "The Artistic and Tonal Integrity of Hopkins' 'The Shepherd's Brow,'" *Victorian Poetry*, 6, Spring 1968, p. 68.


Ibid., p. 212.

Mariani, p. 65.


Chapter 3

Between the Miraculous and the Quotidian:
Response to Failure in Vision

Francis Thompson's poetry records the fantasies and failures of a double vision, those of a child and of an old man, even as they are played out on a double stage, that of the heavens and of the streets. As a man in his thirties he could fling out with the abandonment of the very young, "Look for me in the nurseries of Heaven," and as a man in his forties he was to die with the self-regret of the very old, "My withered life, my withered life!" In a short span of poetic creativity, Francis Thompson lived and died with the nonchalant petulance of a spirit that creates miracles if it does not see one and with the soul-weariness of a body racked by drug addiction, ill health and indolence.

Often contrived and extravagant in his poetic style, Francis Thompson today survives as a minor poet on the basis of a handful of poems. Studied as a literary figure emerging from the upheavals of political, social and literary history, Thompson is often placed along with a coterie of Catholic poets attempting Catholic literary revival. Yet, his poetry, with its theological metaphors and subjects, is not concerned with the kind of religious conflicts and struggles we find expressed in Newman and
Hopkins. One explanation is that Thompson was a product of a generation that had already converted to Catholicism, unlike Newman and Hopkins who chose their Church out of a nexus of social, emotional and personal pressures. They needed to give utterance to the immediately felt convictions of faith, of self-torment, guilt and keenly fought triumphs. Thompson accepted the Catholic theology and translated its rituals, its theocracy and symbolism into his writings as a matter of fact. This ease in handling Catholic material gives his poems such as "The Hound of Heaven," "Grace of the Way," "Any Saint," "Desiderium Indesideratum," and "Kingdom of God" a strikingly confident sense of self's recovery, whatever the nature of its initial backward glances. But it also robs his poetry of a quality the modern reader has come to appreciate—the internal struggle, as in "Sister Songs," "Ode to the Setting Sun," "The Passion of Mary," and "Orient Ode." This kind of poetry does not jolt the reader or cause "the midriff astrain with leaning of" as experienced in reading Hopkins' poems. Here, Thompson's struggle, told not enacted, seems too facile to us, even as strained as his poetic style was. No doubt, much of his poetry and prose writing was journalistic, with comparisons, images, and feelings contrived in order to "get the opportunity of dropping in two or three 'bits.'" Lacking a defined poetic theory or even a conviction of his own poetic standards, Thompson drifted into poetic writing in a haze of
laudanum-induced poems. Until reading Alice Meynell's poems, he was not even sure of his own poetic capability. He constantly needed a push from the outside to make himself move to mental or physical activity, as evidenced in his passive acceptance of the vocations chosen by his parents—priesthood and medicine. Other evidences are his dependence on the unknown woman in the streets, on the Meynells and others who cared and nursed him (referred to in "Sister Songs"), and on Patmore whom he considered his literary mentor (reflected in his poems and letters to Patmore and to Wilfrid Meynell). This dependence of self on others defines the quantity and nature of Thompson's poetic subject matters: there are several poems written on the Meynell family (Wilfrid, Alice and their children), on the lost woman of his dreams, and on Patmore. This is not to say Thompson was insincere in his choice of subjects for his poetry, but that he was convinced to do so because these external factors gave direction and substance to his otherwise exiled existence.

Francis Thompson's poetry and writing reveal one interesting development in the late nineteenth century. While Hopkins recaptured the miraculous in the inscapes of ordinary natural and human objects, Thompson's flights into the cosmic playground are not won through "sheer plod." Thompson's miracles are not always won through self-torment and self-appraisal as Hopkins' are. Thompson's miracles
exist even as his "box of toys" and the "theatrical puppetdom" existed in his childhood, as recorded by Everard Meynell in The Life of Francis Thompson. These miracles do not need any justification, nor does the self batter itself and God by questioning its own worth and worthlessness for viewing such miracles. Thompson's writing, in consonance with his life, thus records the realm of the miraculous as a self-existent world. As the dark streets of London exist, so the heavens with star-marbles for "little Jesus" exist. It is only when Thompson brings together the two planes of existence, when he breaks the extremity of his vision, when he collapses the heavens and the London streets into the "labyrinthine" ways of the self, when he sees "Jacob's ladder/Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross" and "Christ walking on the water/Not of Gennesareth, but Thames" that he sees the miraculous and the quotidian not as separate realms of existence but as related worlds, linking scriptural truths and human experience. These instances are rare in Thompson's poetry, but when they do occur, they are as striking as Hopkins' poems. This is one way of salvaging Thompson's worth as a late-nineteenth-century poet. Another, and a surprisingly relevant one for us, is to evaluate those poems which actualize the failure to integrate the heavens and the streets, the miraculous and the quotidian. These poems are particularly relevant because they reveal in Thompson's poetry the emergence of
and the divergence from the spirit that was to characterize the poetry of Lionel Johnson, Oscar Wilde, Ernest Dowson, and even W. B. Yeats—the spirit of decadence. My attempt in this chapter is to read and respond to Francis Thompson's poems that express a dual pull—towards and away from Hopkins' and the decadents'.

In his biography of Thompson, The Life of Francis Thompson, Everard Meynell points out the double rule of Thompson's practice: "'to the Poet life is full of visions, to the mystic it is one vision.' . . . Having regarded the visions and set them down, he would, in another capacity, call them in. The vision enfolded them all." Within the broad framework of the cosmic vision, Thompson was concerned particularly with the nature of the God-man relationship. In Thompson's vision of love, man's relationship with the human and the divine are discovered at various levels; in his vision of poetic creation, Thompson confronted the soul's relationship to its own creative self and to God. In examining these visions, not as separate entities but as corresponding and interacting searchings of the soul, one can gather three different states—the untrained state of the vision, the failure of the vision in actual human experiences, and the emergence of the new vision or the transformation of the old vision. The attempt is not to neatly categorize the poems but to understand the poetic expressions (such as the "dropping down" of the "curbed
spirit," vol. I, pp. 77, 83; and the "up-thrusting,"
"skyward-jetting soul," vol. I, pp. 60, 82) in terms of the
responses they evoke in the context of the reading
experience.

Many of Thompson's poems which deal with the God-man
relationship seem, at first, to be based on a contradictory
vision of God. They also reveal a dual vision of the self.
In some poems like "To My Godchild," "Sister Songs," "Ode to
the Setting Sun," "To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster,"
"The Veteran of Heaven," "Lilium Regis," "A Sunset," "Song
of the Heavens," "The Dread of Height," "Orient Ode," "From
the Night of Forebeing," "To the English Martyrs" and
"Heaven and Hell," God's distance from man is felt by the
persona as a palpable experience. A sense of man's
separateness from God is built up through a response to
various stylistic, tonal, structural, rhetorical and
philosophic features in the poems. In some poems, God's
remoteness is worked into the substance of language and
results in a felt remoteness of diction, imagery and
formality of tone, echoing the language from scriptural and
literary tradition. In poems like "Lilium Regis," "Ode to
the Setting Sun," "The Orient Ode," "Ad Castitatem," and
"Assumpta Maria," there is actual evocation of imagery from
the Holy Scripture and the Catholic liturgical and mystical
tradition. In "The Orient Ode," the liturgical pattern
reflected in the sacramental vision of the sun as the Host
consecrated in Benediction is elaborate and sustained:

Lo, in the sanctuaried East
Day, a dedicated priest
In all his robes pontifical exprest,
Lifteth slowly, lifteth sweetly,
From out its Orient tabernacle drawn,
Yon orbed sacrament confest
Which sprinkles benediction through the dawn . . .

("The Orient Ode," vol. II, p. 21)

Christ, who is symbolized as the sun and as the Lion of Judah—

Thou as a lion roar'st, O Sun,
Upon thy satellites' Vexed heel;
Before thy Terrible hunt thy planets run;
Each in his frightened orbit wheels—

(p. 23)

is also the "destroyer and preserver" out of a literary and a Catholic tradition. The response he evokes in Thompson and other creatures is one of mingled fear and awe:

Since the hunt o' the world begun,
Lashed with terror, leashed with longing,
The mighty course is ever run . . .

(p. 23)

Lo, my suit pleads
That thou, Isaian coal of fire,
Touch from yon altar my poor mouth's desire,
And the reluctant song take for thy sacred meeds.

(p. 26)

To those apparent sovereignties we bow
And bright appurtenances of thy brow!

(p. 26)

Here the persona emphasizes man's littleness before God's immensity, grandeur and splendour, even as the chorus in "The Song of the Hours" warns man: God breathes you forth as a bubble/And shall suck you back into his mouth!" (vol. I, p. 209).
The critical objections to Thompson's elaborate diction and imagery range from Alice Meynell, who called them "ceremonies of imagination," to J. C. Reid, who finds in this poem "a startling resemblance to the verse of the Spasmodics, who also present vague, cosmic vistas in inflated, repetitive language, grandiosely use all space as their stage and deal in large-sounding 'poetic' images." It is these very "faults" in language, style and imagery which build up to a picture of the distant God who inflicts pain and suffering on man. The lack of direct confrontation between God and the self is heightened by rhetorical structures in which the persona addresses a third "other" to intercede between himself and the absent God. Appearing "the happy Fool of Christ," the self like the "Dear Jester in the courts of God" finds he is unable to reach his King, Christ:

But I, ex-Paradised
The shoulder of your Christ
Find high
To lean thereby.
("To the Dead Cardinal," vol. I, p. 132)

Mystified by the "secret terrible," the mystery of God's loving acceptance of man, he prays to his friend Cardinal Manning to intervene:

So ask; and if they tell
The secret terrible,
    Good friend,
I pray thee send
Some high gold embassage
To teach my unripe age.
    Tell!
Lest my feet walk hell.
(p. 138)

In "Sing, Bird Sing" from The Man Has Wings, the self reaches God through kinship with the singing bird:

Hither, descend to me!
Brothers are we both:
Sit upon thy home-tree,
Sing, sing thy love-troth.
Surely otherwhere
Thy morning walks are trod,
Yea, thy winding stair
Leads to God.8

(MHW, p. 55)

A final break from the remote God and his entourage (pictured as old, bearded men in artistic and religious renderings) is expressed in "To My Godchild." The persona wishes to be in the company of the god who is young and playful--another child:

Then, as you search with unaccustomed glance
The ranks of Paradise for my countenance
Turn not your tread along the Uranian sod
Among the bearded counsellors of God;
For if in Eden as on earth are we,
I sure shall keep a younger company . . .

Look for me in the nurseries of Heaven.
("To My Godchild," vol. I, pp. 18-19)

Another rhetorical devise used to create the effect of distance between the self and God is obvious in the poem, "The Veteran of Heaven." Imaged as a warrior, Christ is addressed by the persona as "O Captain of the wars," "Strange chief," and is referred to as "ye" not "you."

These titles and formal salutations place God on a plane where even his suffering is awe-inspiring, rather than immediately felt:
O captain of the wars, whence won Ye so great scars?

In what fight did Ye smite, and what manner was the foe?

("The Veteran of Heaven," vol. I, p. 149)

In other poems, isolation or limitation of self indirectly suggests the unbridgeable gap between the cosmic reality and the quotidian self:

Utter stagnation
Is the solstitial slumber of the spirit
The bea

strife
er and blank negation of all life:
But these sharp questionings mean strife

Is the negation of negation.
The thing from which I turn my troubled look,
Fearing the gods' re

"From the Night of Forebeing," vol. II, p. 41)

A modernist expression of the isolation of self from God is nowhere more poignantly expressed by Thompson's persona than in the poem "The Dread of Height":

My soul with anguish and recoil
Doth like a city in an earthquake rock,
As at my feet the abyss is cloven then,
With deeper menace than for other men,
Of my potential cousinship with mire . . .

("The Dread of Height," vol. II, p. 20)

The persona whose "conquered skies do grow a hollow mock" is the inhabitor of the quotidian world, of the "city in an earthquake rock" whose "streets . . . on the utmost glittering day are black" (vol. III, p. 52). Yet, in other poems, the persona-self is "native to high heaven." Here the nearness of God to man and his accessibility are emphasized. The abundance of emotionally-charged metaphors, images, simplicity of style and language (compared to the
highly wrought technique characteristic of Thompson), direct addresses to God, and a sense of self's peace with itself and God, all work to create the loving bond of God-man relationship. Most of these poems begin with a child's faith in God's loving concern and are often marked by a charming naïveté. Sometimes, in playful questioning, the child-self of the persona replaces the given image of God as an old bearded man with that of another child:

Little Jesus, wast thou shy
Once, and just so small as I?
And what did it feel like to be
Out of Heaven, and just like me?
("Little Jesus," vol. I, p. 21)

Seeking identification with "Little Jesus," the persona establishes grounds for companionship. The self-confident tone, the repetition of questions and the simplicity of language are effectively controlled. Besides addressing Jesus directly, the persona invites him to take his hand:

So, a little child, come down
And hear a child's tongue like Thy own;
Take me by the hand and walk,
And listen to my baby-talk.
(p. 22)

Holding hands, a simple gesture in itself, evokes the relationship of friendship and love; it is also a recurring motif in poems that celebrate this human-divine bond. In "Love and the Child," as in "The Hound of Heaven," the persona's stubborn resistance to the clasping arms of God is broken when he perceives God not as the punishing but as the loving, tender father:
To the tender God I turn:—
'Pardon, Love most High!
For I think those arms were even Thine,
And that child even I.'
("Love and the Child," vol. I, p. 175)

In "Any Saint," God's nearness and his humbleness are in explicit contrast to the image of Christ with unreachable shoulders, as represented in "To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster":

And bolder now and bolder
I lean upon that shoulder,
So dear
He is and near . . .
(vol. II, p. 45)

The persona "blent/In wished content" with his "gentle lover" at first seeks the familiar image of God as the taskmaster, thus delaying the confrontation with an abundance of love which he does not know how to accept at this point:

Turn something of Thy look,
And fear me with rebuke,
That I
May timorously

Take tremors in Thy arms . . .
("Any Saint," vol. II, p. 46)

Sole fully blest, to feel
God whistle thee at heel;
Drunk up
As a dew-drop . . .
(p. 50)

The persona's words echo the choric warning in "Song of the Hours," but all the familiar images of God as "wrathful spear" and "thunder-spout" dwindle in the moment of the persona's embrace with God. Within the circle of that
embrace the persona learns to accept and give love:

Rise; for Heaven hath no frown
When thou to thee pluck’st down,
   Strong clod!
The neck of God.

(p. 51)

On the other hand, "The Passion of Mary" is quite formal and constrained in its tone and traditional in its imagery:

The red rose of this Passion-tide
   Doth take a deeper hue from thee,
In the five wounds of Jesus dyed,
   And in thy bleeding thoughts Mary!
("The Passion of Mary," vol. I, p. 171)

Until the fourth stanza, the persona is addressing "Lady Mary," and imagining her sorrow. It is in the fourth stanza that the persona becomes aware of himself, a distinct self which by emotional empathy partakes of Mary's sorrow:

Thy Son went up the angel's ways,
   His passion ended; but, ah me!
Thou found'st the road of further days
   A longer way of Calvary . . .
(p. 171)

The emotionally charged, self-reflexive "but, ah me!" is an instance of the persona's involvement, on a personal level, with the very texture of religious history so characteristic of Hopkins (see "The Wreck of the Deutschland," stanza eight: "Ah, touched in your bower of bone/Are you!").

Unlike Hopkins' persona, however, Thompson's stops short of searching self-analysis. As the poem develops, the instance of personal response is dispersed in a more generalized ("chills our mirth" as against "but, ah me!" [italics
mine]), traditional evocation of the symbols of the "Assumption of our Lady" and the "Ascension of the resurrected Body of Her Divine Son." Finally, in "L'Envoy," the persona's self-consolation through the identification of his sadness with Mary's is strained, even as the imagery is sentimental and prosaic:

Yet Christian sadness is divine
Even as thy patient sadness was:
The salt tears in our life's dark wine
Fell in it from the saving cross.

The point is not that all symbolism drawn from religious or literary tradition need be general, but without a personal significance given to the symbol, its potential remains undiscovered. The symbol drawn from tradition is rich in associations, but if the poet does not bring to it the substance of his own personal and emotional experience, it does not touch a fresh spark in the reader; then, the reader has no initiative to carry away an additional richness of the symbol. In most of Hopkins' poems using religious symbolism, the persona "I" is present at the experiential core of the poem. A look at one such poem, "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe," confirms this observation. It is not so much the comparison of Virgin Mary with air that is striking. As observed by Norman MacKenzie,

The Virgin has down the ages been represented by innumerable images, such as Noah's dove, the Ark of the Covenant, Star of the Sea, the Sheep that bore the Lamb of God and the Church's Diadem. Here
Hopkins develops with skill some metaphors for Mary in various famous hymns in the Divine Office—"the portal of heaven" or "the gateway through which light arose over the earth": in having given birth to the light of the world she is like the air which transmits sunshine and acts as intermediary between earth and heaven. Mary's traditional colour, blue, favoured the image, which Hopkins had already used in a sermon on 5 October 1879 (Sermons, p. 29). It is not so much "Mary's role as the spiritual mother of mankind" that is at the core of the poem, but its significance to the persona at the moment of his discovery of its actual relevance to him. The emphasis on "I," "me" and "my" draw the reader into direct contact with an experiencing persona who relives the religious symbol as a personal truth, not merely as a given tradition (italics mine):

My more than meat and drink,
My meal at every wink;
This air, which by life's law,
My lung must draw and draw . . .

I say that we are wound
With mercy round and round
As if with air: the same
Is Mary, more by name . . .

If I have understood,
She holds high motherhood
Towards all other ghostly good
And plays in grace her part
About man's beating heart . . .

Be thou then, O thou dear
Mother, my atmosphere;
My happier world, wherein
To wend and meet no sin:
Above me, round me be
Fronting my forward eye
With sweet and scarless sky;
Stir in my ears, speak there
Of God's love, O live air,
Of patience, penance, prayer . . .

(PGMH, pp. 94-97)
Francis Thompson's more complex, and in a sense, more rewarding poems are those which avoid viewing the God-man relationship either as destined to failure or as one of easy sympathy. These poems particularly stand out as coalescing the two voices into a vision of faith in the human self and in God. In "A Judgement in Heaven," the movement from a picture of a regal but distant God to that of a loving and gentle Father is worked out through an intermediary. It is Mary Magdalen who draws the rhymer-poet persona to God's attention. The rhetorical structure operating here is dramatic repetition, not of words but of a pattern of command and action. Mary's sentences, cast in the imperative mood, almost take on a choric effect: "'Turn yon robe,' spake Magdalen 'of torn bright/song, and see and feel,'" "'Take, I pray, yon chaplet up, thrown down ruddied/from his head'" ("A Judgement in Heaven," vol. I, p. 189). Each of these commands is fulfilled by the angels, revealing the hidden sufferings of the poet-persona's life. God has till now been a silent audience to the unfolding of the drama. Here God, unlike the pursuing "Hound of Heaven," needs to be convinced of the persona's suffering. The poet, "a dingy creature," "cloaked and clad in patchwork things," the rhymer's garb, is no doubt a poor and sinful figure, but then God, enthroned in his Paradise, king of "His aged dominions," is not directly approachable to the poet-rhymer.
Till now the man-God relationship has been one of an erring, wretched servant and his majestic king, surrounded by scornful angels and warden-spirits. But in the last stanza, God speaks. The reader anticipates God's words to be uttered in a loud, authoritative tone, and reads the line "'Fetch forth the Paradisal garb!'" as such. But the anticipation breaks even as the line continues, "Spake the Father, sweet and low." The adverbs "sweet" and "low," added almost casually, catch the reader's attention. Now, he needs to go back and revise his initial reading of the line. This difference between expectation and actuality comes as a surprise to the reader, even as it does to the poor poet-persona waiting for all thunder to break lose. Dramatically worked into the structure and the experience of the poem, the new vision is marked by the simple gesture of hand-holding:

'Fetch forth the Paradisal garb!' spake the Father, sweet and low
Drew then both by the frightened hand where Mary's throne made irised bow—
'Take Princess Mary, of thy good grace, two spirits
greater than they know.'

(p. 189).

Thompson's collection of poems seems to present, at first reading, a dual vision of the God-man relationship—a vision which is contradictory and sometimes paradoxical. It is in later readings that one comes to emphasize the place of "The Hound of Heaven" as central to the evolving nature of Thompson's cosmic vision. In "The Hound of Heaven," the
God-man relationship is discovered through God's pursuit of man. Whereas in "A Judgement in Heaven" the poet-rhymer had come to God's court, seeking his grace, here God pursues man through the streets and alleys of the quotidian world. God rushes man from self-deception to self-confrontation, to a vision of the God-man relationship. From the terrifying view of God and man as inhabitants of two separate worlds, the persona escapes into an unreal vision of himself. As an entity of the quotidian world, the persona is solipsistic ("I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways/Of my own mind") and dissipated ("I pleaded, outlaw wise,/By many a hearted casement, curtained red"). As an entity of the miraculous realm, the persona builds up an image of himself as an innocent companion of children and of nature:

But still within the little children's eyes
Seems something, something that replies,
They at least are for me, surely for me!

'Come then, ye other children, Nature's—share
With me' (said I) 'your delicate fellowship . . .'
(p. 109)

These two visions of the persona-self, however, neither "ease" the "human smart" nor "slake" his "drouth." The moment of the persona's recognition of the falsity of the vision of self, its divisive nature and its extremity, is also the moment of self-confrontation and its failures: "Yea, faileth now even dream/The dreamer, and the lute the lutanist" (p. 111). It is marked by a series of questions and doubts hurled at God, by a last minute attempt to
salvage some self-worth through self-pity. Although he had declared "Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!" the persona is not yet ready to face his own worthlessness:

Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it? . . .

Such is; what is to be?
The pulp so bitter, how shall taste the rind? (p. 111)

These questionings are drowned in the "trumpet sounds" heralding what appears to be a regal personage "enwound/With glooming robes purpureal, cypress-crowned." Even then, the persona, full of self-pity, tries to put in the last words:

Whether man's heart or life it be which yields
Thee harvest, must Thy harvest-fields
Be dunged with rotten death? (p. 112)

It is only in the resounding voice of God that the persona's complaints, questionings, and doubts disperse. In himself, on earth, man is seen as nothing but the "dingiest clot," "little worthy of love." It is only by taking God's hand that the persona understands the nature of the God-man relationship. Even as the Christ of miraculous heavens came down to earth, so man of the quotidian world can rise to heaven. By reciprocating God's embrace, the "fondest, blindest, weakest" persona-self is able to build a new vision of himself and his relation to God. In the last stanza, the persona, however, is addressed by God as "child," but is no longer an innocent (ignorant) entity of the "miraculous world." God's chiding tone reduces the
persona (the man-self) to his rightful status, yet this is not a mere ego-straightening exercise. Rather, the persona's recognition of his true habitation as lying between the miraculous and the quotidian relieves him of his lonely wandering like an exile. The realm of the persona-self, shaded by "His hand, outstretched carressingly," is his comfort and solace—his community.

The theme of God's pursuit of man's soul has been a recurrent concern in spiritual struggles, whether recorded by St. Ignatius Loyola in *The Spiritual Exercises* or by St. Augustine in his *Confessions:* "But behold, Thou wert close behind Thy fugitives—at once God of vengeance and Fountain of mercies, who turnest us to Thyself by wondrous means."\(^{13}\) From these and other sources of spiritual struggle, Hopkins had evolved a highly personal version of the God-man relationship. A study of his "The Wreck of Deutschland" at this point reveals an interesting development of a vision, sometimes similar and sometimes different from Francis Thompson's. In this poem, God's pursuit of man, whether the poet or the drowning nuns, is enacted not merely as a horizontal movement. The persona's self or soul is overwhelmed with God's presence as God pursues the soul from all sides, in all ways:

\[
\text{Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh (PGMH, p. 51)}
\]

\[
\text{The swoon of a heart that the sweep and hurl of thee trod}
\]
Hard down with a horror of height . . .  
(PGMH, p. 52)

The frown of his face  
Before me, the hurdle of hell  
Behind . . .  
(PGMH, p. 52)

The results of the confrontation of the self with the relentless, pursuing God are worked out in stanzas four and five. The persona-self realizes that he is both controlled in and controls the expression of his inscape:

I am soft sift  
In an hourglass--at the wall  
Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift,  
And it crowds and it combs to the fall . . .  
(PGMH, p. 52)

The self also realizes that its spiritual equilibrium is sustained by "God's gift," grace:

But roped with, always, all the way down from the tall  
Fells or flanks of the voel, a vein  
Of the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle,  
Christ's gift.  
(PGMH, p. 52)

The final outcome is the persona's spontaneous attempts to actualize Christ's incarnation in experiential terms:

Since tho' 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.  
(PGMH, p. 53)

In Hopkins' poetry the self, pursued by God returns to him even as it does in Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven," but there is a difference. In Thompson's poem, the persona as the child-self, chided lovingly by God, finds comfort within
his arms. The innocence and the transgression of the child-self are fused into the prodigal's abashed willingness to stay home. In Hopkins' poem, the persona, flinging himself to the "heart of the Host," is stilled to spiritual poise. But even as the soft sift and the water in the well, while being "at the wall/Fast" and "roped" down, express motion, so the poised self expresses "His mystery" with a kiss to "the stars" and the "dappled-with-damson west." The pursuing figure who confronted the persona from behind, above and front, is now expressed as being "under the world's splendour and wonder." It is the persona who willingly completes the awareness of God's pervasiveness. It is this recognition of God as the self's underlying foundation, as "ground of being, and granite of it" (PGMH, p. 62), which uplifts the persona into ecstatic celebration.

In Francis Thompson's poem, the persona finds the median, the comforting home between the fantasies and the streets. The persona reaches his place of rest and, in a way, the end of his past life. The poem closes on this note of an end of a journey. In Hopkins' poem, the persona-self never rests for long. He is effusive in the celebration of his homecoming to "the heart of the Host." The persona's inner poise is not a state of stasis; it defies stillness with motion, death with life. No longer swooning down to flee the pursuer, but freely communing with the stars and the sky, instressing Christ's mystery, the new self of the
persona reaches the heights of spiritual ecstasy. This is characteristic of Hopkins' poetry: from depths of despair he is able to rise to the heights. It is this convolution or evolution of the persona-self that binds the reader's attention. In her seminal book on reader-response aesthetics, Louise M. Rosenblatt refers to seeing the work of art as a special kind of lived-through experience, by quoting Keats' "On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again" and by commenting on it,

"... once again, the fierce dispute
Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay,
Must I burn through."
The special mark of the literary work of art is indeed that it is "burned through," lived through, by a reader.14

The intensity and dynamism of the persona-self in its relation to God, so profoundly captured again and again by Hopkins, give its moments of rest and poise a poignancy. It is felt by the reader, even as the persona experiences it, as a wrenching of the very soul.

Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven" is self-contained; the experience of the persona is unified and complete. An instance of spiritual composure attained through a process of self-deception, struggle and self-revelation, "The Hound of Heaven" records a genuinely felt faith in God's grace and man's destiny. The suffering of the quotidian man, expressed as "charred wood" and "broken fount" is a reflection of the hopelessness of human destiny. On the other hand, the miraculous "trumpet-sounds/From the hid
battlements of Eternity" seem to emphasize God as a remote sovereign. Thompson expresses a synthesis of the two visions at the end of "The Hound of Heaven" and successfully translates the crux of Christian theology into the individual's experience of God's abundant love. Later poems that reaffirm this simple faith, though not as well known as "The Hound of Heaven," are equally striking in their emotional composure and strength of belief.

In "Grace of the Way" God-man's "trysting place" is not the suffering, commonplace world ("alien tree"). In his article "Thompson's 'Grace of the Way'," George Williams explicates the poem in the light of what he calls "Thompson's gentle and loving theology":

Considered as a whole, the poem (as in the better known "The Hound of Heaven" and in many other of Thompson's works) expresses the belief that the way to God is easy, that it is simpler to have God than not to have Him, that happiness comes from having God, and sorrow comes from not having Him. . . . In plain prose, then, Thompson would say: "God does not establish any strange place of sorrow and suffering--uncongenial both to man and to God, and quite uncharacteristic of God's kingdom--as a spot where man's feet shall seek out a meeting with God. Christ suffered on a tree; man need not so suffer. Rather, the way to God is a "sweet Direction." Nevertheless [in the final stanza] it happens that some people fail to find God, yet find suffering, and think because they have suffered [the lesson] they have met God [the prize]."15

In the poem, the persona's soul meets God through the mediating "she" (who is like the bodiless paramour of "Sister Songs" and "The Mistress of Vision):

Out of this abject earth of me
I was translated and enskied
Into the heavenly-regioned She.
("Grace of the Way," vol. II, p. 67)

The "sweet Direction" to the "trysting-place" leads to the actual meeting, marked by God's humbleness and graciousness; "short arm needs man to reach to Heaven,/So ready is Heaven to stoop to him" (p. 67). In the sonnet "Desiderium Indesideratum," the soul of the persona similarly discovers the accessibility of God who dwells in his own bosom as against the distant God of the heavens:

'Whom seekest Thou through the unmarged arcane,
And not discern'st to thine own bosom prest?'
I looked. My clasped arms athwart my breast Framed the august embraces of the Cross.
("Desiderium Indesideratum," vol. II, p. 182)

In "All Flesh," man's dilemma as both the inhabitor of the miraculous and the everyday world is emphasized. Like the earthly grass blade, man too epitomizes the mystery of God's presence—"God focussed to a point":

My one hand thine, and one
Imprisoned in God's own,
I am as God...
("All Fresh," vol. II, p. 225)

But man is also imprisoned within his "clay-caught" self:

alas,
And such a god of grass!
A little root clay-caught,
A wind, a flame, a thought,
Inestimably naught!
(p. 225)

In another sonnet, "House of Bondage," the common state of man, incapable of love or searching the wrong love (human) or searching love in wrong places (a remote Heaven, rather than his own heart), is viewed as man's "House of Bondage,"
a place where "The spirit's ark [is] sealed with a little clay" (p. 179). In "The Kingdom of God," a similar image is used to describe the heart with "clay-shuttered doors" that misses "the many-splendoured thing" (p. 226). Even as God sets up "no alien Tree for trysting-place," so man too must come to God, not with "estranged faces" nor with a heart of "clay-shuttered doors." The "trysting place" lies neither in the remote Heavens nor in the Charing Cross of "darkest England"; it lies somewhere in-between:

and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

and it is here that man can define his own personally felt vision of "Heaven in Earth and God in Man":

Yea, in the night, my soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!
(p. 227)

Francis Thompson's vision of the God-man relationship is related to a deeply felt need for two kinds of love—human and divine. At one level, this dual need is expressed as a dual search—the DeQuinceyan search for Ann, the woman of the streets and "the Lady of Sorrow," and the Shelleyan search for "pale Asthtaroth," the "visionary lady" or spiritual beauty. Thompson often expressed human love as
a symbol of divine love:

All human love was to me a symbol of divine love; nay, that human love was in my eyes a piteous failure unless as an image of the supreme Love which gave meaning and reality to its seeming insanity.16

In his poems of human love, whether for the woman of the streets or the visionary lady, Thompson rarely grappled with the different scales of physical and emotional responses. Not so much concerned with the "human" aspect of the love relationship, Thompson's poems of love are often reduced to an abstract spirituality too generally stated. His search for the "unknown she," "the bodiless paramour," started early, from the days of strolling through the Manchester museums and galleries. Enthralled by the cast of the Vatican Melpomene he wrote later in his essay, "The Fourth Order of Humanity":

Wherefore, then, should I leave unmemorized the statue which enthralled my youth in a passion such as feminine mortality was skill-less to instigate? Nor at this let any boggle; for she was a goddess. . . . She stood nameless in the gallery of sculptural casts which she strangely deigned to inhabit. . . . With her leaf-twined locks, she seems some strayed Bacchante, indissolubly filmed in secular reverie.

(Vol. III, pp. 68-69)

The response evoked by such a visionary lady is determined by her very nature and is much easier to tackle than the ambiguous response to the human complexity of blood and flesh woman:

Thither each evening, as twilight fell, I stole to meditate and worship the baffling mysteries of her meaning. . . . Eyes of violet blue,
drowsed-amorous, which surveyed me not, but looked ever beyond, where a spell enfixed them, waiting for something, not for me. And I was content. Content; by such tenure of unnoticedness I knew that I held my privilege to worship: had she beheld me, she would have denied, have contemned my gaze. (vol. III, pp. 69-70)

This tendency to move away from a particular human experience to a more abstract contemplation of general truths and revelations are recurrent in Thompson. Very early in his poetry, Thompson's expression of love is mingled with a deep sense of loss. The pain of parting, at one instance, brings past and future losses to the mind:

She went her unremembering way,
The pang of all the partings gone,
And partings yet to be.
("Daisy," vol. I, p. 4)

However, by the end of the poem the personal sorrow and the intensity of one human relationship is generalized as a universal truth:

Nothing begins, and nothing ends,
That is not paid with moan;
For we are born in other's pain,
And perish in our own.
(p. 5)

In "A Carrier Song" and "After her Going," from the sequence "Love in Dian's Lap," a similar sense of emptiness due to the absence of the loved person is caught in rhapsodizing tones,

Since you have waned from us,
Fairest of women!
I am a darkened cage
Song cannot hymn in.
("A Carrier Song," vol. I, p. 85)
And she was gone, my sole, my Fair
Ah, sole my Fair, was gone!
Methinks, throughout the world 'twere right
I had been sad alone . . .
("After her Going," vol. I, p. 103)

In his letter to Wilfrid and Alice Meynell, who had visited him at Pantasaph, Thompson had written:

As you are together in my thoughts, so let me join you together in this note. I cannot express to you what great happiness your visit gave me; how dear it was to see your faces again. I think "the leaves fell from the day" indeed when your train went out of the station; and I never heard the birds with such bad voices."

This child-like dependence, especially on women, is characteristic of Thompson's poems of love as "the ambassador of loss" (p. 20). The central experience in Thompson's life was his relationship with the unknown woman of the London streets. In "Sister Songs" and "Memorat Memoria" the persona relives the painful experience with a sense of loss, regret, self-inadequacy and marvel at the woman's sacrifice:

Then There came past
A child; like thee, a spring-flower; but a flower
Fallen from the budded coronal of Spring,
And through the city-streets blown withering.
She passed,-O brave, sad, lovingest, tender thing!
And of her own scant pittance did she give,
That I might eat and live:
Then fled, a swift and trackless fugitive. . . .

Therefore I kissed in thee
Her, Child! and innocence,
And spring, and all things that have gone from me,
And that shall never be . . .
("Sister Songs," vol. I, p. 37)

In "Memorat Memoria" the memory of the loss of the loved one is persistent and haunting:
And above may ken, and Beneath may ken, what I mean
by these words of whirl,
But by my sleep that sleepeth not,--O shadow of a
Girl!--
Naught here but I and my dreams shall know the secret
of this thing:
For ever the songs I sing are sad and the songs I never
sing,
Sad are sung songs, but how more sad the songs we
dare not sing!

("Memorat Memoria," vol. II, p. 216)

The shift in the tone of the above passage from the first
lines to the last is striking. The repetitious echo of
words as in a dizzying "whirl," and the emphasis on "I" and
"me" reflect a highly personal expression of an equally
personal experience. But the last line replaces "we" for
"I" and the whole experience is again generalized. This
tendency to generalize experiences related to actual women
and deep feelings of sexual love is, in one sense, an escape
mechanism. Generalization makes the palpable experience
remote, and thus fit for contemplation rather than
self-reflection and possible torment. In another sense, it
helps him resolve the tension between the temporal aspect of
human and divine love, the "pagan" and "Christian" love by
merging the woman (Alice Meynell, Maggie Brien or Katie
King) with the "Visionary Lady" (the "Vatican Melpomene,"
"the Mistress of Vision," the "bodiless paramour" or "Lady
Mary" with the "Saint's and Mother's heart"). In his essay
"Paganism Old and New," Thompson declared the nobility of
the Christian poet's conception of Love:
On the wings of Christianity came the great truth that Love is of the soul, and with the soul coeval. . . . Therefore sings Dante, and sing all noble poets after him, that Love in this world is a pilgrim and a wanderer, a journeying to the New Jerusalem: not here is the consummation of his yearnings, in that mere knocking at the gates of union which we Christian marriage, but beyond the pillars of death and the corridors of the grave, in the union of spirit to spirit within the containing Spirit of God.

("Paganism Old and New," vol. III, p. 48)

In his poems occur several instances of spiritual love:

I am rapt towards that bodiless paramour;
Blindly the uncomprehended tyranny
Obeying of my heart's impetuous might.
("Sister Songs," vol. I, p. 43)

Like to a wind-sown sapling grow I from
The clift, Sweet, of your skyward-jetting soul,-
("Manus Animam Pinxit," vol. I, p. 82)

Whose body other ladies well might bear
As soul,—yea, which it profanation were
For all but you to take as freshly woof,
Being spirit truest proof;
Whose spirit sure is lineal to that
Which sang Magnificat:
Chastest, since such you are,
Take this curbed spirit of mine,
Which your own eyes invest with light divine,
For lofty love and high auxiliar . . .
(vol. I, pp. 83-84)

She that is Heaven's Queen
Her title borrows
For that she, pitiful,
Beareth our sorrows
So thou, Regina mi
Spes infirmorum;
With all our grieving crowned
Mater dolorum!
("A Carrier Song," vol. I, p. 87)

If I would praise her soul (temerarious if!)
All must be mystery and hieroglyph. . . .

In her alone to reconcile agrees
The Muse, the Graces, and the Charities . . .
("Her Portrait," vol. I, pp. 92-93)
neighbour’d on my heart with those pure lines
In amity of kindered pureness, lies
Image of Her conceived Immaculate . . .

The Lady of fair weeping,
At the garden's core,
Sang a song of sweet and sore
And the after-sleeping;
In the land of Luthany, and the tracts of Elenore.
("The Mistress of Vision," vol. II, p. 3)

But little food Love's beggars needs must serve,
That eye your plenteous graces from the street.
("Ultima," vol. II, p. 93)

Ah, Sweet! to cast away the slips
Of unessential rind, and lips
Fix on the immortal core, is well . . .
(vol. II, p. 99)

The final union of self, the lady and God is expressed in
"My Lady the Tyranness":

None shall deny
God to be mine, but He and I
All yours, my love, all yours!
(from "Ultima," vol. II, p. 98)

Other poems which deal with the particular experience of
love also express a preplexed feeling of rejection,
reflective of Thompson's own aborted love affairs with
Maggie Brien and Katie King. In "Beginning of End" from the
sequence, "A Narrow Vessel," the love expressed is more of
an adolescent kind, hurting and being hurt out of egoistic
motives:

She saw him at his gate, yet stilled her tongue—
So weak she felt her, that she would feel strong,
And she must punish him for doing him wrong:
Passed oblivious of oblivion still;
And, if she turned upon the brow o'the hill,
It was so openly, so lightly done,
You saw she thought he was not thought upon.
("Beginning of End," vol. II, p. 85)
Left at the level of human falls and foibles, the poem escapes easy translation into spiritual terms despite Thompson's own attempts to allegorize it:

The narrow vessel dreads to crack under the overflowing love which surges into it. She shrieks with tremor. . . . Now this is but the image and explanation of the soul's attitude towards only God. The one is illustrated by the other. Though God asks of the soul but to love him what it may, and is ready to give an increased love for a poor little, the soul feels that infinite love demands naturally its whole self, that if it began to love God it may not stop short of all it has to yield. . . . It falls back with relieved contentment on some human love, a love on its own plane, where somewhat short of total surrender may go to requital, where no upward effort is needful. 18

However, by the end of the sequence, Thompson's hesitation to deal with human love, as human, rounds off the whole sequence of "The Narrow Vessel" as an allegory, clearly expressed in the "Epilogue":

She, that but giving part, not whole,  
Took even the part back, is the Soul:  
And that so disdained Lover—  
Best unthought, since Love is over. . . .

Such a Soul, for saddest end,  
Finds Love the foe in Love the friend;  
And—ah, grief incredible!—  
Treads the way of Heaven, to Hell.  
(vol. II, p. 89)

The sonnets to Katie King, the "Ad Amicam" series, attempt to translate unfulfilled love into immortality through poetry:

And shall it end,  
Because so swift on friend and friend broke love?  
Lo, when all words to honour thee are spent,  
And fling a bold stave to the old bald time  
Telling him that he is too insolent  
Who thinks to rase thee from my heart or
The sense of time separating two human beings, whether expressed as a passage of time or as a difference in ages, comes out of the literary tradition Thompson was familiar with—particularly that of Shakespeare:

```
Love, love! your flower of withered dream
In leaved rhyme lies safe, I dream,
Sheltered and shut in a nook of rhyme,
From the reaper man, and his reaper Time.
("The Poppy," vol. I, p. 9)
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A child and man paced side by side
Trading the skirts of eventide;
But between the clasp of his hand and hers
Lay, felt not, twenty withered years.
(p. 6)

In Thompson's poems, the emerging image of the persona-self central to the experience of human love is of more interest than the experience itself or even the object of love. At one level, there is the persona, conscious of his own self-image; at the other level, we as readers must go beyond the persona's appearances and claims to understand the complexity of his personality and motives. The image of self as isolated from other human beings, an exile in an unfamiliar world, provides the motive for the persona's persistent yearnings for a love that transcends human limitations:

```
Nay, how or with what countenance shall I come
To plead in my defence
For loving thee at all?
I who can scarcely speak my fellow's speech,
Love their love, or mine own love to them teach,
A bastard barred from their inheritance,
Who seem, in this dim shape's uneasy nook,
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Some sunflower's spirit which by luckless chance
Has mournfully its tenement mistook;
When it were better in its right abode,
heartless and happy lackeying its god.
("Sister Songs," vol. I, p. 40)

On the other hand, the persona's desire to be immune to human love, is based not only on an awareness of the uncommon nature and longing of the self, but also on an unresolved sense of love as both a gift and a lack. In "Cheated Elsie" this paradox is dramatized:

Elsie.
Ah, what is this? Take back thy gift!
I had not, and I knew no lack;
Now I have, I lack for ever! . . .
Ah! why the present did I take,
And knew not that a heart would ache?

Fairies.
Ache! and is that all thy sorrow?—
Beware, beware—a heart will break!
("Cheated Elsie," vol. I, pp. 218-219)

Set in easy rhymes, an overall flippant tone, and a fairy tale structure, the poem is supposed to teach a lesson—not too grave a lesson, but enough to convince one of the foolishness of possessing a heart. Out of this "worldly knowledge" the self-conscious persona projects a self-image foreshadowing the soul-weariness and exhaustion of spirit characteristic of the decadents:

Weary, I no longer love,
Weary, no more lack;
O for a pang, that listless Loss
Might wake, and, with a playmate's voice,
Call the tired Love back!

Such a condition is accompanied by a recurrent expression of self-inadequacy and guilt born out of the failure of the
persona's dreams—to love and to be loved:

Love! I fall into the claws of Time:
But lasts within a leaved rhyme
All that the world of me esteems—
My withered dreams, my withered dreams.
("The Poppy," vol. I, p. 9)

Yea, faileth now even dream
The dreamer, and the lute the lutanist . . .

Alienated from the rest of the humanity and nature, the persona is conscious of his solipsistic state:

And ah! so long myself had stayed afar
From child, and woman, and the boon earth's green,
And all wherewith life's face is fair beseen . . .
("Sister Songs," vol. I, p. 37)

Suffer me at your leafy feast
To sit apart, a somewhat alien guest
And watch your mirth,
Unsharing in the liberal laugh of earth . . .
("From the Night of Forebeing," vol. II, p. 33)

Failure to attain the highest ideal of love plunges the persona into the lowest depths—either of "base" love or disgust with the physical aspect of love:

Lest like a weary girl I fall
From clasping love so high
And lacking thus thine arms, then may
Most hapless I
Turn utterly to love of basest rate
For low they fall whose fall is from the sky.
("The Dread of Height," vol. II, p. 19)

I shall have no comfort now in scent, no ease in
dew, for this;
I shall be afraid of daffodils, and rose-buds are amiss . . .
I shall never feel a girls's soft arms without
horror of the skin.
("Memorat Memoria," vol. II, pp. 216-17)

The decadent image of the persona in Thompson's poems is
that of a poseur—a self-conscious observer who exaggerates his own inadequacies into an aesthetics, a suave mannerist who finds his success in the fall itself. The pretentious and assumed elegance of the persona's language contrasts with the poet/Thompson's condition—as a possible alcoholic, a drug addict and even a suicidal. This contrast between the persona's mannerisms and echoes of the poet's frayed existence emphasizes the malaise of the turn of the century. In Hopkins, the deep sense of self-failure found an outlet through the analogy of Christ's life and his "success through failure." Thompson made a similar attempt to find the recovery of self through the example of Christ's victory in failure, but often the attempt is too pat and hyperbolical:

What is this, unheard before, that the unarmed
make
war,
And the Slain hath the gain, and the Victor hath the rout?
What wars, then, are these, and what the enemies,
Strange Chief, with the scars of Thy conquest trenched about?
("The Veteran of Heaven," vol. I, p. 149)

The persona of Thompson's poems presents, at one level, the picture of self as "destined to love, not to be loved," as an outcast, "Forlorn, and faint, and stark" enduring "through wretches of the dark" time's "barbed minutes" (p. 36), as tempted through despair to self-destruction:

For such migration my poor wing was strong
But once; it has no power to fare again
Forth o'er the heads of men,
Nor other Summers for its Sanctuary:
But from your mind's chilled sky
It needs must drop, and lie with stiffened wings
Among your soul's forlornest things;
A speck upon your memory, alack!
A dead fly in a dusty window-crack.
{"Manus Animam Pinxit," vol. I, p. 83}

For Thompson failure was always imminent. In his life experiences and outcast existence, Francis Thompson's likeness to the decadents is obvious. In his study of Thompson, J.C. Reid emphasizes this aspect of Thompson:

Although he did not know it, he was to become spiritually one of a band of young literary men, the "beat generation" of the late eighties and nineties, including Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Aubrey Beardsley, who were pursuing the decadent muse through the sinuous corridor of disordered lives.¹⁹

Terence Connolly, in his "Review-Article" on J.C. Reid's book, is outraged by what he refers to as Reid's "extravagant statements" and goes on to quote Holbrook Johnson according to whom Francis Thompson "cannot be located" in the "poetic impulsion of the nineties."²⁰

Without denying that Thompson's religious convictions were based on deeply felt principles, one can still trace in his poetic persona the beginnings of what was to develop into a more obviously self-parodying decadent aesthete. This link is an important one, for it highlights the crisis of the nineties as having begun in genuinely felt experiences. The extravagant indulgence on the artificial and the perverse as seen in the decadent personae is a later extension of the "experience of failure" into an "aesthetics of failure." But
it is true that, apart from his biographical affinity to the lives of other decadents, Thompson's poetry foreshadows the decadent's major concerns. In its rhetorical and stylistic treatment Thompson's resemblance to the decadents is obvious. In the decadents we find Thompson's preoccupation with the montage of the self-conscious persona exaggerated to a pursuit of experience through the mannered posture of language and literary affectation.

Thompson's biographers and critics, however, have constantly taken care to mention Thompson's innocence, his lack of bitterness despite a tragic life, and his "strange other-worldliness." 21 Alice Meynell had specifically pointed out Thompson's ability to laugh:

He has been unwarily named with Blake as one of the unhappy poets. I will not say he was ever so happy as Blake;—but few indeed, poets or others, have had a life so happy as Blake's, or a death so joyous; but I affirm of Francis Thompson that he had natural good spirits, and was more mirthful than many a man of cheerful, of social, or even of humorous reputation. . . . It is pleasant to remember Francis Thompson's laugh, a laugh readier than a girl's, and it is impossible to remember him, with any real recall, and not to hear it in mind again. 22

So also in his poetry, there are instances of intellectual and emotional assimilation when the decadent, quotidian self is renewed through the faith that transforms. Here, the uplift of the soul from the streets to the "red pavilion" of Christ's "heart" marks the tearing of the persona's mask. No longer an objective, analytical poseur, projecting himself as hard-hearted and immune to love, the
persona in these poems openly responds to the lover, 
Christ's wooings of his heart, and is overcome by emotion, 
not mere sentiment:

Light of my dark, blood of my heart, 0 come!
("Arab Love Song," vol. I, p. 168)

Yea, in that ultimate hearts occult abode
To lie as in oubliette of God,
Or in a bower untrod,

Built by a secret Lover for His Spouse;--
Sole choice is this your life allows,
Sad tree, whose perishing boughs
So few birds house!

These spent, my heart not stinteth in her breast
Her sweet 'Friend! friend!'--one note, and
loves it best.

Love, he is nearer (though the moralist
Of rule and line cry shame on me), more near
To thee and to the heart of thee ... 
Save that great law to tremble and to be
Shook to his heart-strings if there do but pass
The rumour of thy pinions.
("Love's Varlet," vol. II, p. 183)

These responses, similar to the persona's reciprocated 
embraces of God, are marked by a discovery of the personal 
involve ment in human and divine love as a deeply emotional 
one. This personal involvement entails the ability to 
integrate intellect and emotion so one can move from the 
state of intellectual and emotional detachment to empathy 
and finally to a state of equilibrium. In the man-God 
relationship this state, as pointed out before, is often 
culminated in the gesture of holding hands or the embrace 
which encloses the erring man and the loving God in a
community of give and take. In Thompson's depiction of human love relationships, this kind of equilibrium is very rarely reached. The persona-self, at the center of the human experience, is either too cautious or too naive. Despite Thompson's proportionate appeal to the merits of the body and the spirit in the essay "Health and Holiness," one set of Thompson's love poems seems shy of exploring the depths of human passion or sexual love, and more comfortable to regard the "chaste and intelligential" (vol. I, p. 83) aspect of human love. The beloved is perceived as "perfect," and her "body is a temple of God" (vol. I, p. 100). She is also "Christ bearer," "Divine pavilion" and "A tenement for God and Peace" (MHW, p. 30). In the poem "The Bride of God and Thee," the Patmorean ideal of married love in which the woman is equal to man is given expression to, "Yet she's thine equal. . . ./That thou shalt rule her as her King,/And she shall rule thee as thy Queen" (MHW, p. 32). Ideal but also ethereal is the embrace between the man and the woman; it is an "authentic cestus of two girdling arms" (vol. I, p. 37). In such a relationship, the persona declares, "Within your spirit's arms I stay me fast/Against the fell" (vol. I, p. 82), "This soul which on your soul is laid,/As maid's breast against breast of maid" (vol. I, p. 84), "What if no body she have for embracing? (MHW, p. 27). In the other set of Thompson's poems of human love, there is a sense of guilt and frayed nerves:
Her haunting blushes!—mine the blame:
What fair injustice did I rue
For what I--did not tempt her to! . . .

O hour of consternating bliss
When I heaved me in thy kiss;
Thy softness (daring overmuch!)
Profaned with my licensed touch . . .

("A Narrow Vessel," vol. II, p. 81)

Love, thou hast suffered many wrongs of mine,
When my sad youth, for hunger and lack of thee,
Fouled, O most foul, its heavenly plumage fine,
Living on carrion.

(MHW, p. 42)

while I, chaste I,
In cheap immaculateness avert mine eye;-
Poor galley-slave of lust, rot in your gyve!"
This is her doom! . . .
And though she strive, yea, strive and strive, how

strive!-
The gates of Hell have shut her in alive.

(MHW, p. 43)

My child! what was it that I sowed, that I so ill
should reap?
You have done this to me. And I, what I to you?—It
lies with sleep.

(vol. II, p. 217)

Intellect and emotions are often fraught by a nightmarish
clash between a need for stoic control and a neurotic desire
for the passion of love:

Come you living or dead to me, out of the silt of
the Past
With the sweet of the piteous first, and the shame
of the shameful last?
Come with your dear and dreadful face through the
passes of Sleep,
The terrible mask, and the face it masked--the face you
did not keep?
You are neither two nor one--I would you were one or
two . . .

("Memorat Memoria," vol. II, p. 216)
Behold, behold! 
Come hither; thaw from out their torpid cold 
My thoughts, as weeds in waters are 
Congealed with severe frost. . . . 
The vision parts in tears, and yields 
Pang to the poor heart and brain 
For a dead day dead again. 

\textit{(MHW, pp. 19-20)}

And in my madness vowed that it did smile; 
I said:"Dear Soul, learn laughter, leave thy shed. 
Sore tears, put off thy mourning weeds a while. 
\textit{(MHW, p. 21)}

I keep the lonely burning thought of thee 
Trimmed in my lonely heart. . . . 
But O, rebuke me not if sometimes at the last 
Love wakens with a shrill and piercing cry. 
\textit{(MHW, pp. 25-26)}

The erratic tone shifts from a reflective soliloquy to a 
rising pitch ending on a cry, to an ironic statement, 
echoing the persona's unsatisfied desire for love and 
companionship. This building up of diverse feelings and 
conflicting responses reveals accessible human feelings, 
whether disturbed as in "I Love and Hate thee" \textit{(MHW, p. 27)} 
or more balanced as in "Ultimum" \textit{(vol. II, p. 102)}. The 
sane, rational, anti-Petrarchan stance of the persona is a 
surprising turn to the personality and fits in with the 
"enlightened" view he gains in his relationship with God:

\begin{verbatim}
And, Lady, thus I dare to say 
Not all with you is passed away! 
Beyond your star, still the stars are bright; 
Beyond your trueness, Lady, Truth stands true. 
\textit{("Ultimum," vol. II, p. 102)}
\end{verbatim}
Out of the pain, loss and disappointments of human love, the soul seeks, besides God, poetry as the avenue of consolation. In Thompson’s vision, poetic creation is an expression of the soul’s dependence on love and sanctity:

Love and Song together sing;
Song is weak and fain to cling
   About Love’s shoulder wearily.
Let her voice, poor fainting thing,
   In his strong voice drowned be!  
("Love in Dian’s Lap," vol. I, p. 76)

Now in both the mountains’ shine
Dress thy countenance, twice divine!
From Moses and the Muses draw
The Tables of thy double Law!
(vol. I, p. 79)

In his attempts to express his faith and love in poetry, the poet suffers in his life. In "A Judgement in Heaven," Mary Magdalen reveals the poet-persona’s "bloodied hairs, like "hairs of steel" his "torn flesh," and "the punctures round his hair." It is in his suffering that the poet gains Paradise, even as the "wounded" Christ gained victory ("The Veteran of Heaven," vol. I, p. 149). In "The Mistress of Vision," this idea of success found in the apparent failure of a surviving artist is developed in a kind of choric message delivered by the mistress of vision:

Pierce thy heart to find the key ...  
Learn to dream when thou dost wake,  
Learn to wake when thou dost sleep  
Learn to water joy with tears,  
Learn from fears to vanquish fears ...  
Lose that the lost thou may ’st receive  
Die, for none other way canst live.  
the poet transforms the quotidian world but what kind of world does he finally create? In early poetry, Thompson viewed the poet's world as the realm of the miraculous, and poetry as a miracle:

'Tis a vision:
Yet the greeneries Elysian
He has known in tracts afar;
Thus the enamouring fountains flow,
Those the very palms that grow,
By rare-gummed Sava, or Herbalinor
Such a watered dream has tarried
Trembling on my desert arid . . .

Rhyme did I as a charmed cup give,
That who I would might drink and live.
("Love in Dian's Lap," vol. I, p. 72)

To escape the dark despair of the London streets the poet-persona creates his "Sinai-Seraphim" world. At first, this world is often conceived of as remote, abstract, and impalpable. Here the personal experience of self-sacrifice is objectified and made remote by the image from literary tradition:

How the sweet viol plains him to the harp,
Whose panged sobbings throng tumultuously.

Oh, This Medusa-pleasure with her strings!
This essense of all suffering, which is joy!
("Ode to the Setting Sun," vol. I, p. 127)

It is in the New Poems that the poet's growth from the quotidian world into the world of "new things," achieved through self-effort and sacrifice, is expressed as synthesis of personal experience and scriptural prophecy:

Poet! still, still thou dost rehearse
In the great fiat of thy Verse,
Creation's primal plot . . .
Thou makest all things new,
Elias, when thou comest! Yea
Mak'st straight the intelligential way
For God to pace into.
("Carmen Genesis," vol. II, p. 58)

Commenting on the poet as the "maker," Thompson notes, in
his obscure fustian style:

In the beginning, at the great mandate of
light, the sea suddenly disglutted the earth: and
still in the microcosm of the poetic, the making
mind, Creation imitates her august and remembered
origins. Still, at the luminous compulsion of the
poet's intellect, from the subsidence of his
fluctuant senses emerges the express and founded
consistence of the poem; confessing, by manifold
tokens, its twofold parentage, quickened with
intellectual light, and freshened with the
humidities of feeling. . . . This is the function
of the maker since God first imagined. . . . For
the poet is an Elias, that when he comes, makes all
things new. It is a converse, alas, and lamentable
truth, that the false poet makes even new things
old.23

Decrying what was to become the aesthetic tenet of the
decadents, "Art for Art's sake," Thompson viewed poetry as
an expression of reality, rather than of an abstraction,
"She sees the Is beyond the Seems" ("The Singer Saith of his
Song," vol. II, p. 228). The condition of the poet's soul
is "somewhat sweet" and "somewhat wan" till in the land of
"Luthany" and "Elenore," the poet "like a city under ocean"
contains within himself "untumultous vortices of power"
("Contemplation," vol. II, p. 13). This power comes from
his possession of vision and reality—the heavens and the
streets.

Out of the city of earthquakes, out of "perished
cities" glutted with "cold houses," (vol. II, p. 115) "and
towns" of "copied fragments" (vol. II, p. 181), the poet builds his own new empire, imparting "the grandeurs of his Babylonian heart" (vol. II, p. 181), even as the self discovers its renewed relationship with God in the enclave of his shaded arms. Thompson's expressions of man's experience of failure in worldly and other-worldly relationships appear as breaks in human-human or human-divine communication. The poet-persona often finds his experience of failure reflected in the moments of poetic unproductiveness ("Could singer pipe one tiniest linnet-lay, /While song did turn his face from Song?" vol. I, p. 25). Often the responses to these moments of failure have to be gleaned from a plethora of poems experimenting with diction, rhythm, and imagery, and poems reflecting literary and scriptural influences. But the responses are organic to the growth of the poetic mind and the struggling persona. They reveal a faith in God-man relationship similar to Hopkins'. But Thompson's persona also experiences a faith burdened with the soul-weariness and unresolved frustrations which were to become part of the characteristic mood of the nineties and which Thompson could foresee:

I know her for I am of the age, and the age is hers. Alas for the nineteenth century, with so much pleasure, and so little joy; so much learning, and so little wisdom; so much effort, and so little fruition; so many philosophers, and such little philosophy; so many seers, and such little vision; so many prophets, and such little foresight. . . . the one divine thing left to us is Sadness. Even
our virtues take their stamp; the intimacy of our loves is born of despair; our very gentleness to our children is because we know how short their time. "Eat," we say, "Eat, drink, and be merry; for tomorrow ye are men."

("Moestitiae Encomium," vol. III, p. 111)
References


   Note: All subsequent quotes from Thomson's poems and essays refer to the above text unless otherwise specified.


4 Ibid., p. 32.


6 Ibid., p. 201.


   Note: References to poems from the above source will be indicated in the chapter as MHW, followed by page numbers.

   Note: References to poems from the above source will be indicated in the chapter as PGMH, followed by page numbers.


   Note: In the notes the editors point to the "nature of Mary" as "the softening, humanizing medium of God's glory." Hopkins' poem dwells on this human aspect—the relationship between Mary and the persona's self.


17 Walsh, ed., Letters, p. 117.


19 Reid, p. 36

20 Terence L. Connolly, S.J., "Laudanum or Poetry?" Renascence, XIII, Summer 1961, p. 204.

21 Meynell, Life, pp. 249, 255.

22 Ibid., p. 331.

23 Meynell, Life, p. 310.

Note: Thompson had developed his faith independently but it is illuminating to note that he had read at least one of Hopkins' poems, that is, "Heaven Haven," as is evidenced in his review, "The Preferential Anthology," first published in Academy, July 19, 1902.
Chapter 4

In the "tragic shade":
Response to Failure of Life and Death

Against the backdrop of an "age of tedious woe,/that
snaps and snarls," Lionel Johnson etched out a life true to
a tradition and to "the private fictions of order":1

Thine was a life of tragic shade;
A life, of care and sorrow made:
But nought could make thine heart afraid,
Gentle Saint Charles!
(p. 121)

The assumption that one can "make" one's life and shape it
to a desired rather than a given form underlines the
decadent generation's philosophy and "aesthetics of
failure":

The primary vision of the poets of Johnson's
generation involves an aesthetics of failure: a
consistent self-distance; a consciousness of
failure which is the necessary prelude to the
tragic vision of Yeats's later work. In general,
the aesthetics of failure was formulated in revolt
against the Victorian moral order. Sickness became
an ironized honesty in a social world that
proclaimed health while manifesting generalized
sickness.2

Commenting on Johnson, W. B. Yeats pointed out, "it
often seemed as if he played at life, as if it were an
elaborate ritual that would soon be over. I am certain ...
that he was himself that mystic and cavalier who sang: 'Go
from me: I am one of those who fall. . . .'"3 Johnson

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created a self which adopted a Celtic and a Catholic tradition in life and a classical tradition in art. He often played the role of the Epicurean decadent, who in Pater's *The Renaissance* tradition could escape into his own "mind and spirit":

> When the endless region of faith and doubt is once entered, life becomes weary of itself: and to remain without that land, contented with the colours of a rainbow and a curtain, the sound of a storm and a sonata, appears the higher, more dignified way.\(^4\)

Then there is the committed critic in *The Art of Thomas Hardy*. Here the Samuel Johnson persona was an "image of what he wished to become and, at the same, an image almost absurdly antithetical to what he was"; it represented "not only an anti-self but a figure symbolically opposed both to what Johnson saw as "Decadent excesses and to a part of himself he wished to disown.\(^5\)

> For men of wide culture, able to range at ease through the literatures, the histories, the sciences of long gone times, danger lies upon the side of vague and dreamy thought, in which nothing, not truth itself, is at a stay.\(^6\)

There is also the hieratic spiritualist—the persona who looks towards the "other world":

> I will be a priest of the Church of England as I have so often dreamed of being.\(^7\)

> I have one monotone to which I will intone my life: "I will be a priest": not, you may think, the music of the spheres: but at least not out of tune.\(^8\)

The persona in Johnson's poetry often shifts from one role to the other. Our understanding of the "mask" and the
"anti-mask" in poetry has been greatly enriched by W. B. Yeats' theories and their application in his poetry. However, Lionel Johnson, Yeats' close friend and associate in the Celtic movement, developed through the voice of his persona the mask and anti-mask of the decadent hero—the isolated, melancholy escapist, the committed eighteenth century Johnsonian figure with a desire for certitude, and the transcendentalist with a longing for philosophical idealism, fellowship and love, extending to a Whitman-like acceptance and celebration of life and death. This Yeatsian opposition of the persona's dual self, however, is not a consciously developed theory in Johnson's poetics; it is rather reflective of Johnson's own divided pull toward and away from the decadent aesthetics. Barbara Charlesworth in The Dark Passages points out the "personal quality" in Lionel Johnson's short story "Incurable" (which appeared in The Pageant, I, 1896):

On the surface the sketch pokes fun at aestheticism by describing a young poet who feels that life holds no more for him. He decides to commit suicide, regretting only that the river most convenient for his purpose is waterlily-less. But even without waterlilies he finds it possible to imagine himself floating down, like a male Lady of Shalott (in Elizabethan costume), to a heartless and unthinking London. In the midst of this reverie he falls absent-mindedly into the river, comes to himself, and swims strongly for shore. Underneath its satire, the story has a personal quality, a note of both self-mockery and self-pity.9

The pull away from decadence is dogmatically presented as a rejection of decadence through the assumed persona of Samuel
Johnson in *The Art of Thomas Hardy*:

It is a sick and haggard literature, this literature of throbbing nerves and of subtile sensations; a literature, in which clearness is lost in mists, that cloud the brain; and simplicity is exchanged for fantastic ingenuities. Emotions become entangled with the consciousness of them: and after-thoughts or impressions, laboured analysis or facile presentation usurp the place of that older workmanship, which followed nature under the guidance of art.10

But as Linda Dowling points out, the persona's dogmatic exterior is underlined by the typically decadent desire for escape from the present:

For all its angry rejection of Decadent sensibility, Johnson's book nevertheless shares in it—not simply because a tortured ambivalence is a characteristic Decadent attitude, but because *The Art of Thomas Hardy* is concerned with its narrator's attempt to escape from himself and his time into art. Disturbed by the subversion of a rich and spacious and significant past, by an incoherent trivializing present, Lionel Johnson saw in aesthetic terms Pater's epistemological problem of "each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world." Imprisoned in the solipsistic present, a writer could yet reach the world of the past by becoming at once a character in it and a commentator upon it.11

As this pull toward and away from decadent aesthetics was often erratic, there are personae in Johnson's poetry who fall between the "mask" and the "anti-mask," personae whose attachment to life collides with a desire for the after-life. The ambiguity of the intermediary persona can be sensed as one reads the poem "Victory." The reiteration of the color "white," such as "white steps," "white roses," "white upon the shadowy lawn she stood," set against the background of "the dark and visionary wood" brings into
focus the two concerns of the persona: life and death. In his "Notes on Walter Pater," Johnson observes the connotations the word "white" held for Pater:

   The Welsh word for white means also something which is a combination of holy, reverend, felicitous; much in the sense of Herrick's White Island. In the finer portions of Mr. Pater's work, there is a "whiteness," a "candour" indescribably felt, through this purity and cleanliness of it, as though there were "a sort of moral purity" in art of so scrupulous and dainty a distinction . . .\textsuperscript{12}

At another point in the essay, Johnson points out the association of spiritualism with white as reflected in Pater:

   Things hieratic, ascetic, appealed always to him. Dissolute and lawless art, flung upon the world in a tumultuous profusion and disorder, was not art in his eyes. His favourite type of "hero" was le bel serieux, self-contained, of an almost monastic habit, with the "white soul" of youthful Virgil, yet sensitive to everything fine in life.\textsuperscript{13}

In this connection, Ian Fletcher points out Pater's influence on Johnson's generation:

   Pater was devoted to the word 'white': Marius's old home "White-Nights," the "white light" and the mystery of so-called "white things" are three examples of that 'sacred' colour. His sense of the word was transmitted to his followers . . .\textsuperscript{14}

Seen as an extension of the Paterian symbolism, "white" in Johnson's "Victory" could reflect the purity of life:

   Down the white steps, into the night, she came; Wearing white roses, lit by the full moon . . . (p. 162)

But the color "white" is, elsewhere in Johnson's poems, also associated with "death's perfection":

   No Alban whiteness doth she wear,
But death's perfection of that hue.
("Glories," p. 35)

Thus, "white" in Johnson's poem is an idealistic conception of both life and death, and appears as the feminine figure, "she." The final effect of the poem is orchestrated on the visible movement of the poem: from outside ("into the night, she came") to inside ("And went into the room..."); from the natural "night" and "day" to "a room of burning lights." At this point, we can bring to the poem what we know of Johnson's constant pull toward and away from the decadent aesthetics. The poem suggests (in the first two stanzas and the beginning of the third) the shift in the persona's attachment to philosophical ideologies--from naturalism to decadence. The basis for such an analysis is our knowledge of Johnson's concern with the central decadent rejection of nature in favor of artificiality. In The Decadent Imagination, Jean Pierrot discusses this seminal characteristic of decadent aesthetics:

The rejection of nature ... was to become even more intense during the decadent period. Indeed, one of the specific features of the decadent esthetic is a conscious determination to diverge as far as possible from nature, in an overt repudiation of the classical dogma that the aim for all art is the imitation of nature. For the decadent, art is identified with the artificial, and it is the artificial that must be developed by every available means.  

The movement in the poem "Victory" is further corroborated by the dedication of the poem to George Moore. Moore's A Mere Incident, in particular, was greatly influenced by the
French Decadent Huysman's *A Rebours*, which expresses a "rejection of nature" in the "form of an antiromantic depreciation of the so-called beauties of natural landscapes.16

Now, in Johnson's poem "Victory," the persona's "white she" moves not only away from the night "lit by the full moon" to the "room of burning lights" but also from a waiting "lover" to a "loveless husband" sleeping "his brute sleep." This information in the last stanza of the poem pulls the reader to closer examination of the issues involved. Until the last five lines of the poem, the movement from naturalism or even romanticism ("visionary woods") reflects the philosophical bent of the persona. It is in the last five lines that the persona's attitude to his own philosophical attachment is revealed. The value words, "loveless," "brute," "comfortless" and the image of the colorless "ashen flame" placed against the "dark" "woods," gather to emphasize the persona's self-distance and self-parody in accepting decadence as his dominant philosophical ideology. The break in the final refrain "She turned not back," while implying a certitude reached, also ironically suggests the persona's awareness of his own blindness. Ian Fletcher, in his notes to the poem, suggests, "The breaking of the refrain in the last two lines enacts the "victory."17 But it is not a simple victory, even as the persona of the poem is not a simple self. The
"victory" implies, ironically, both success and failure. This ambivalence in the attitude of the persona and in the inevitable responses of the reader is crucial to understanding Lionel Johnson's constant preoccupations with antithetical elements, such as art and religion, life and death, and success and failure.

Gerald Kent Clifton expanded on the polarity of religion and art through the "central pattern of imagery," light ("of Neoplatonic mysticism and . . . Newman's Catholicism") and darkness ("associated with his desire to write poetry"). Johnson develops other polarities through a recurrent pattern of images which creates a picture of life true to the decadent assumptions of life as conflict:

I have passed over the rough sea,
And over the white harbour bar . . .
("In Falmouth Harbour," p. 8)

Dark Angel, with thine aching lust
To rid the world of penitence:
Malicious Angel, who still dost
My soul such subtile violence!
("The Dark Angel," p. 52)

Of lonely quiet was my dream;
Day gliding into fellow day,
With the mere motion of a stream;
But now in vehement disarray
Go time and thought,
Distraught
With passion kindled at thy ray.
("A Proselyte," p. 83)

"Born into life, busy with life" (p. 223), the persona lives out the decadent spirit of world-weariness, "A life of noise": "Our wearier spirit faints,/Vexed in the world's employ" (p. 12). Like Thompson's persona buffeted by the
London streets, Johnson's persona is weary of the city life and seeks an escape from its noise and, paradoxically, its death-like silence, from "the turmoil of the town," "the sullen gloom, the faces full of care," "Thoughts of the world, unkind and weary," the "sudden gloom that invests this city strange," (pp. 13-14), "the sleeping town" (p. 8). The persona seeks to escape not only the place which has become an exile for him, but also the present time: "Weary, the cares, the jars;/The lets, of every day" (p. 10). Even as Thompson's persona dwelt on the innocence and freshness of childhood, so Johnson's persona is nostalgic for "childhood's delicate memory" which is one way to undo the "sad, destroying work" of "hard, dull hours" (p. 37).

Memory revives the past with its "ancient grace" in the midst of present despair. In "Oxford," the persona, through memory, revives the wondrous city of the past:

City of weathered cloister and worn court;
Gray city of strong towers and clustering spires:
Where art's fresh loveliness would first resort;
Where lingering art kindled her latest fires

Where on all hands, wondrous with ancient grace,
Grace touched with age, rise works of goodliest men . . .

Where at each coign of every antique street,
A memory hath taken root in stone . . .
That is the Oxford, strong to charm us yet:
Eternal in her beauty and her past.

(p. 115)

In "Winchester," memory has the power to transform the present, "the shadowy world":

Our thought of thee is as the thought
Of dawn, when nights are bitter:
The shadowy world begins to glitter . . .
A place of friends! a place of books!
A place of good things olden!
With these delights, the years were golden
And life wore sunny looks.
They fled at last:
But to that past
Am I in all beholden.

(pp. 177-178)

The persona images the failure of life, both in time and place (at the present moment and in the city), in three striking ways—as living in a dark prison, as a fall, and as ageing or withering of life. A persistent image is that of the persona caught in the dark, in the mist or in a narrow space—a prison: "You wait upon my heart, my heart a tomb," "this close world" (p. 23), "Only the mists, only the weeping clouds:/Dimness, and airy shrouds" (p. 25), "the melancholy vale" (p. 84), "the dark way" (p. 110), culminating in the image of life as a "tragic shade" (p. 121); the persona, wracked by misery, guilt and despair must "shudder in the shade" (p. 111) and meditate upon "the shadowy nature of the world" (p. 147). In "Quesque Suos Manes" the central idea of "to each man his own appropriate suffering," referring to the "Pythagorean doctrine of reincarnation" as expounded by Aeneas' father (translation by Ian Fletcher), brings to the fore the vision of man suffering his punishment as a shade:

Therefore are they punished and pay the penalty for old misdeeds: some hung aloft are exposed to the bodiless wings; from some the taint of sin is washed away beneath to vast abyss, or burnt away by fire. We each suffer our own punishment as a shade. Then are we sent out
through wide Elysium and possess the fields, a scanty band.\textsuperscript{19}

Another image for the failure of life is the fall. The concern with self's fall and rise in Hopkins carried, as noted in chapter two, a sense of man's struggle with the physical and the spiritual; in Francis Thompson it implied the struggle between the quotidian and the miraculous. In Lionel Johnson the same image recurs and is somehow bound up with the legend of Johnson's own death:

"Much falling" . . . alludes to Johnson's constant physical as well as his moral falls, from hansoms, down stairs and the final falling on sleep in the Green Dragon Public House. . . . There is the famous phrase quoted by Arnold in his \textit{Study of Celtic Literature}: "they went forth to the battle, but they always fell," so Johnson taking pleasure in his doom: "in ten years I shall be penniless and shabby, and borrow half-crowns from friends" and knowing that "The end is set:/though the end be not yet."\textsuperscript{20}

In the poem, "Mystic and Cavalier," the persona caught between the "shadowy depths" and the "pure skies" expresses self's dilemma in the image of a fall:

\begin{quote}
Go from me: I am one of those, who fall
What! hath no cold wind swept your heart at all,
In my sad company? Before the end,
\quad Go from me, dear my friend!
\end{quote}

(p. 24)

While the horsemen, active in the battle, "fall on sleep" and achieve sudden calm, the persona looks forward merely "to fall" with a despairing hope that his "spirit may have sleep." In another poem, "A Cornish Night," the empty circularity of repeated falls is echoed by the persona in the voice of Iseult mourning for her dead lover, Tristan:
Tarry to pour some balm upon mine head,
Some pity for a woman, who hath wed
With weariness and loneliness, from fall
To fall, from bitter snows to maybloom red:
The hayfields hear, the cornlands hear, my call!
From weariness toward weariness I tread;
And hunger for the end: the end of all.

(p. 24)

The landscapes and the settings themselves reflect the persona's inner fall: "night falls," "and the world as well/Was darkened over us, when that night fell!" (p. 16), "Look, where the embers fade, from ruddy gold/Into gray ashes falling without bruit!" (p. 19), "The fires of hearth are fallen" (p. 20), "our fires are fallen from their blossoming height,/And linger in sad embers" (p. 21), "there broods/Thunder, thunder; and rain will fall" (p. 33), "Age long to watch the falling day,/And silvery sea, and silvery moon" (p. 87). In "Ireland," through the voice of the captain battling for Ireland, the persona links the image of fall with the possibility of actual defeat and hope for ressurrected success:

Was it for nought, captain asks captain old,
Was it in vain, we fell?
Shall we have fallen like the leaves of gold,
And no green spring wake from the long dark spell?
Shall never a crown of summer fruitage come
From blood of martyrdom?
Yet to our faith will we not say farewell!

(p. 94)

Succipating the "King of Souls," the repentant persona, in "The Darkness," seeks deliverance from life's dark shadows and fears:

Now give me light! I cannot always walk
Surely beneath the full and starless night
Lighten me, fallen down, I know not where,
Save, to the shadows and the fear of death.  
(p. 125)

The third dominant image of the failure of life is that of old age and madness. One of the decadent preoccupations was the "carpe diem" philosophy intensified by a belief in the annihilation of the individual and civilization. In The Decadent Imagination, Jean Pierrot traces some of the motive forces governing the decadent pessimism flowing through French literature and finally evident in English decadent literature as well:

The underlying melancholy of the decadent era stemmed first and foremost from a pseudomedical theme, that of the degeneration of the race... This belief had its origin in Darwinian theories concerning the evolution of species: like all animal species, man must follow the same path as that of each individual organism, from youth, through maturity, to old age. The peoples of Europe, inheritors of centuries of evolution, were therefore threatened with inevitable senility, and their civilization doomed to imminent death... Hovering over this entire era, therefore, we find the myth of a Twilight of the West, of a wholesale destruction of civilization... At the individual rather than the collective level, the idea then gaining ground was that modern man lives in a constant state of imbalance summed up in the new term neurosis; since the human machine was now worn out, man could keep going only by living on his nerves.

From Hopkins and Thompson to the decadent era there is a growing preoccupation with ageing, sickness, nervous depression and suicide. Hopkins recorded his sense of failure often as a kind of fatigue, a weariness with life: "And I do not know how it is, I have no disease, but I am always tired, always jaded, though work is not heavy, and
the impulse to do anything fails me or has in it no continuance. In another letter to Bridges, Hopkins had dwelt on the tragic suicide attempt by a young man in their community. Francis Thompson (whose suicide attempt Wilfrid Blunt has mentioned in My Diaries) also expressed a sense of nervous strain in his letter to Wilfrid Meynell: "The fact is my nerves want taking up like an Atlantic cable, and recasing. I am sometimes like a dispossessed hermit-crab, looking about everywhere for a new shell, and quivering at every touch. Figuratively speaking, if I prick my finger I seem to feel it with my whole body." Thompson lived out the paradox of childlike youthfulness and old age; Johnson too was both young-looking and haggard, as described by his friends, contemporaries and acquaintances. George Santayana in The Middle Span looks at the way Johnson appeared to his friends—haggard and persecuted:

He still looked very young, though he was thirty, but pale, haggard, and trembling. He stood by the fireplace, with a tall glass of whisky and soda at his elbow, and talked wildly of persecution. . . . As he spoke, he quivered with excitement, hatred, and imagined terrors.

Richard Le Gallienne's portrait in The Romantic 90's emphasizes Lionel Johnson's youthful appearance:

I looked with wonder at the young scholar, who, it proved, was but a year younger than myself, being twenty-three. Not an advanced age, indeed, but not even the knowledge that he was Lionel Johnson could make him look more than fifteen, and he never seemed to look older as long as he lived, which was only two years longer than his friend Dowson, for he died when he was but thirty-five. His little, almost tiny, figure, was so frail that it reminded
one of that old Greek philosopher who was so light
of weight that he filled his pockets with stones
for fear the wind might blow him away.26

The dominant impression of Johnson among other
contemporaries was that of the decadent poseur, wearied by
sickness and the burden of life, and verging on
self-destruction. Ian Fletcher notes:

We hear of him from Stopford Brooke. "Lionel
Johnson and Miss O'Brien dined with us. Miss
O'Brien is gay and fresh. L. Johnson is mournful
and decaying. Both are young, but Johnson is also
very old. A small, dark, withered man. . . ."
[evidence of Stopford Brooke, Ms. Journal, 4 June
1898]. A photograph taken at this time agrees with
this description; it shows what can only be
described as a haunted face. . . .

It is from the latter part of 1899 that we
date his final physical decline. On that small
delicate body the repeated doses of spirits were,
at last, taking full effect. . . . There is
something of an epic quality about this
single-minded self-destruction.27

Besides alcoholism, another of Johnson's specifically
decadent preoccupations was with suicide, as reflected in
the persona of the young poet in his short story
"Incurable."28 In one of his letters to Richard Le
Gallienne, he mentions a suicide attempt by his brother,
revealing how close he was to a whole generation on the
brink of self-destruction: "But if ever you had a brother
committing ineffectual suicide, and driving an invalid
mother to the verge of the grave, you would understand my
troubles of that day."29

The persona of the aged man, warning others of the
brevity of life, the passing of time and the loneliness of
old age was not only the decadent mask worn by Johnson in life, but also a recurring figure in his poetry. The persona often becomes the mouthpiece for expressing the evident failure of life:

Pity thyself! youth flies, youth flies.  
Thou comest to the desert plain,  
Where no dreams follow in thy train:  
They leave thee at the pleasaunce close;  
Lonely the haggard pathway goes.  
("Lines to a Lady," p. 37)

Their dignity of perfect youth  
Compels devotion, as doth truth:  
So right seems all, they do, they are.  
Old age looks wistful, from afar,  
To watch their beauty, as they go,  
Radiant and free, in ordered row;  
And fairer, in the watching, grow.  
("A Dream of Youth," p. 43)

Ah how the fire of youth is fair,  
Yet may not be forever young!  
(p. 45)

The full force of "the tragic shade" within which we mortals live is felt starkly in the poem "In a Workhouse." The persona is a young man observing the old in a workhouse. In the earlier persona of the old man, Johnson could only warn the youth; but now, in the voice of the young man, he can express the stark reality, the horror and the bleakness of all life ending in old age and senility:

Old hopes I saw there: and perchance I saw  
Other old passions in their trembling age,  
Withered and desolate, but not yet dead:  
And I had rather seen an house of death,  
Than those live men, unmanned, wasted, forlorn;  
Looking towards death out of their empty lives.  
(p. 147)

Inhabitants of "the shadowy nature of the world," the old
have lost their dreams, their faith, and their "impassioned trust." Their tragedy is not glorious like that of the Greek heroes. This realization comes as a blow to the young decadent whose pose of world-weariness, on the one hand, becomes a reality. On the other hand, his search for keen sensations and vivid dreams becomes a mockery when he can foresee his own old age in the workhouse:

Nor wisdom of bright dreaming came there back
To these dull'd minds, that never had the time,
The hard day's labour done, to do with dreams.
Naught theirs, but sullen waiting for no end . . .
here were no pagan souls,
Grandly enduring dooms, mighty to bear
Stern visitation of majestic fates,
Proudly alone and strong: these had no wills,
These were none else, than worn and haggard things,
Nor men, nor brutes, nor shades: and yet alive.

(p. 147)

Against such a scenario, the persona in Lionel Johnson's poems takes two antithetical positions— that of a participant in the aesthetics of failure and that of a theorist responding to the aesthetics with philosophical idealism and Catholic mysticism. From the latter standpoint the persona projects certain ideals as alternatives to the failure of life— fellowship, love, death and eternity.

The decadents developed a growing fellowship, often considered unnatural, among themselves. Whether deviant or not, the bond among the individuals became a saving grace from the interminable solipsism into which their decadent aesthetics plunged them. The ideal of fellowship was largely conveyed to the decadents through Walter Pater. In
Marius the Epicurean the sustaining bond of friendship with Flavian is Marius' escape from absolute loneliness:

And, dating from the time of his first coming to school, a great friendship had grown up for him, in that life of so few attachments—the pure and disinterested friendship of schoolmates. He had seen Flavian for the first time the day on which he had come to Pisa... Marius knew that those proud glances made kindly note of him for a moment, and felt something like friendship at first sight.30

In Volume II of Marius the Epicurean, Pater dwelt on the extension of one-to-one friendship to a feeling of general "brotherhood":

There is that in death which certainly makes indifferent persons anxious to forget the dead: to put them—those aliens—away out of their thoughts altogether, as soon as may be. Conversely, in the deep isolation of spirit which was now creeping upon Marius, the faces of these people, casually visible, took a strange hold on his affections; the feeling of human kinship, asserting itself most strongly when it was about to be severed for ever.31

Some of the letters of Lionel Johnson to his friend Charles Sayle sound very much like the younger Marius:

I have been intensely interested in life in many ways—and my philosophy, or systematic want of it, has received its final perfection in the few days lately lived at Oxford. Not the beautiful spell and associations—not the thought and the idea of the holy and eternal city—rather the personal delight and fascination of contact with true life and true love: the sense of fellowship has seized hold upon me. By nature unfamiliar enough and unemotional, still the close intimacy of those I can feel for in common has been a dreamy revelation of happiness.32

In another letter to Charles Sayle, dated 29 June 1884, Johnson writes:

It seems so altogether strange, all this unconventional friendship of strangers, and the
something higher than friendship crowning our friendship. I can imagine no more beautiful happiness than to walk with you by the sea in the winter and the cold fresh breath of wind and waves...  

In Johnson's poetry, the ideal of friendship is one of the persona's positive responses to the failure of life. Moving out of the city of gloom and defeat, the persona in "De Amicitia" seeks the White City, "Land of the Love, that never fails":

Ah, friends too dear and goodly to be lost!
Though you be tempest-tost
On bitter surges, raised by envious arts
Of the great Unholy Ghost...

Ah, friends of loving voices, and kind hands,
And eyes, that with all confidence accost
Ours in the silent eloquence of love,
As the heart understands...

Friends, whose true care for us is our best proof,
From grace and good we keep not quite aloof! (pp. 104-105)

The adulation of friendship reaches a crescendo in the repeated addresses. While everything else declines, the persona holds on to friendship as one way out of the despair and inconstancy of life:

Hearts greatly stationed in eternity
Friends, dear our friends, O fellowship of gold!
...

Since you have found our friendship something worth,
And in our hearts, not a mere dust, nor dearth
Of what your own hearts hold so perfectly,
Courage and constancy:
Bear with us, while we bear the bonds of earth!
Bear with us, for if friendship pine, Waver and wane,
Not yours, but ours
Will be the sad fault, the disastrous sign,
Of friendship's dear decline
And drooping flowers:
But you against ourselves will we maintain
Friends without stain . . .

O royal David! we too love, like thee,
Friendship's confederacy:
Friends, than the Cedars of Mount Lebanon,
Stronger: than orchards of Isle Avalon,
Fairer: O king! we love, like thee,
Friends, in their charity,
Wonderful: and we know them God's, each one.
(pp. 105-106)

The persona seeks the companionship of his friends to defy the fear of death:

Poor powerless Sorrow! Helpless Death!
Think they to worst me in the end?
Come when they will, my Faith still saith:
I face them with a single friend.

Were I alone, I could not fight
The imperious Powers: I should but fear,
And tremble in the lonely night,
With never a friend of all friends near.
("Friends," p. 134)

In "To Alfred Ferrand," the persona envying the several lives (roles) an actor lives claims a friend as his relief from monotony and loneliness:

Yet sometimes, for a little space,
Pitying my loneliness, they send
To give my days a little grace,
The goodliest of their gifts, a friend.
(p. 211)

The persona celebrates Winchester as

A place of friends! a place of books!
A place of good things olden!
With these delights, the years were golden . . .
(p. 177)

Fare then thee well! In Winchester,
Sleep thy last fearless sleep serene.
Friends fail me not; but kindlier
Can no friend be, than thou hast been,
("In Memory of M.B.," p. 34)

A significant recurring pattern is that friends are the way
to love and eternity. Johnson's persona displays an
Emersonian exuberance in poems that celebrate this belief:

The haunting hopes, the perfect dreams,
The visionary joys, that fill
Mine heart with sudden gracious gleams:
Through friendship they grow clearer still.

Each friend possesses, each betrays,
Some secret of the eternal things:
Each one has walked celestial ways,
And held celestial communings.
("Friends," p. 135)

I thank Eternal God, that you are mine,
Who are His too: courageous and divine
Must friendship be, through this great grace of
God;
And have Eternity for period.
("To Certain Friends," p. 80)

Through fond memory, the living can bring their dead friends
back to life:

For men and women, safe from death,
Creatures thine, our perfect friends:
Filled with imperishable breath,
Give thee back life, that never ends.
("Bronte," p. 70)

In "Plato in London," "The Classics," "Winchester" and "The
Ballade of the Caxton Head," books and their authors are the
persona's companions in times of loneliness. Substituting
books for human friends, the persona encloses himself within
the aesthete's desired realm of objects d'art. The persona
in "Plato in London" distillates the culture of the past
from a world of "noise and glare" (p. 7). He relates
himself to Plato on a host-guest level. In contrast to the
persona's "world of noise and cold," Plato's home is in the "city of high things." While communing with Plato, the persona is in a state of "impassioned contemplation" and of intense aliveness so acutely described by Pater as burning "always with this hard, gemlike flame":34

Without a world of noise and cold:  
Here, the soft burning of the fire.  
And Plato walks, where heavens unfold,  
About the home of his desire.  
From his own city of high things,  
    He shows to us, and brings,  
Truth of fine gold.  

(p. 7)

In "The Classics," the persona lists Virgil, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Horace, Lucretius, Plato, Thucydides, and Pindar, among others, as his companions. In this connection, Thornton in The Decadent Dilemma refers to Johnson's cultivation of an "artifice of eternity":

In a poem that familiarly and rather charmingly goes through a roll-call of "The Classics," the authors are much more than the names on dead books; they become the companions, the "friends that fail not" among— one presumes— many failing friends. . . . What one usually means by Classical reference, the myths and the legends of the ancient world, is on the whole absent from Johnson's poems. He longed to join literary and classical fraternity and, by cutting himself off from contemporaries and living among books as he did, he began to construct his own "artifice of eternity."35

In the jaunty voice of a paper-boy or a salesman, the persona in "Ballade of the Caxton Head" proclaims the value of books:

Let moralists talk of the lifelong friend:  
But books are the safest of friends, say I!  
The best of good fellows will oft offend;  
But books can never do wrong: for why?
To their lover's ear, and their lover's eye,
They are ever the same as in dear years fled . . .
(p. 210)

Johnson's own advice to his friend, Francis Russell, runs in
the above lines:

Read Whitman: he will never fail you, that is the
test of divinity: Jesus and Shelley and Whitman,
they are stedfast in faith, never wavering. Men
think that the Whitman doctrine is a mean
unwholesome poison trying to pass for the breath of
God.36

Out of a conviction of the degeneration of the human
race, the growing senility and final destruction of
civilization, grew the sceptical cynicism toward sexual
love. Hardy's poems, perhaps the most enduring depictions
of man-woman relationships, prefigure the end-of-the-century
despair at the corrosion of love, the tragic crippling
moments that scar human bonds. Towards the latter part of
the nineteenth century, a definite attitude toward sexual
love was developing, from avoidance of such issues (as in
Hopkins) to an idealization of the man-woman relationship
(as in Patmore and Thompson), and finally to a cult of
friendship among the decadents. The late nineteenth century
English poetry confronts the barrenness of healthy man-woman
love relationships. Even before Freud, the theory of the
unconscious, as disseminated through von Hartmann's
**Philosophy of the Unconscious**, was far-reaching:

Hartmann's unconscious has a biological dimension
as well as a psychological one; it is that force or
energy that obliges individuals to conform with the
higher ends of the species, even despite
themselves, as when they are controlled by their
instinctual mechanisms, for example. . . . As far as the influence is concerned, however, Hartmann did clearly assert that the unconscious plays a determining role in our sexuality. Convinced, like Schopenhauer before him, that sexual activity is in itself obscene and ridiculous, and that man would never subject himself to it unless some unknown and unconscious force were obliging him to bow to the superior desire of the species to ensure its perpetuation, he denounced love as a purely subjective illusion serving to mask the essential mechanism of reproduction.37

One of the outcomes of such an outlook, an artificial reduction of woman as contemptible, as natural and not spiritual, is seen in Schopenhauer and Baudelaire particularly. Schopenhauer reduced love to "nothing other than the specialized instinct."38 Greatly influenced by the current German and French philosophical and literary trends, as well as by a growing sense of pessimism, the English decadents reacted to a loss of faith in natural love by a theory of "antinaturalism": "Antinaturalism leads quite naturally to antifeminism, since woman symbolizes nature."39

Avoiding the bleak cynicism of a pure decadent, Lionel Johnson posits the theory of fellowship, of a generalized brotherhood in place of man-woman love: "So the universal of happiness would be the absolute equality of act and word by the pervading uniter, Love"; "I want corporate love."40 He further elaborates in other letters:

Love—love towards one, one alone, one in the world; what is this but love for all, if you think rightly? When a yearning stirs within the spirit to become one with a high lonely star, to make two one, that unity may be the sole existence, then love of men and women is sprung to light out of dark hesitation; the single love is the myriad
love—is'nt it so?\textsuperscript{41}

But the spirit of love is in all and transmutes clay into air and stars—the clay and dust of daily ugliness and commonplace Love; don't you know the meaning of universal love the passion which is only reason and the mind of God, so unintelligible and infinite?\textsuperscript{42}

The Johnson persona's euphoric celebration of fellowship reconciles a decadent detachment from natural man-woman love with an overriding involvement in the brotherhood of the Irish National Movement and a truly Catholic spiritual desire for Christ's love. From the mask of the disillusioned decadent arises the anti-mask—the transcendentalist committed to the Irish cause, to peace, human fellowship and divine love. In the poem "Friends," the intense love felt by the persona, among his friends, teaches him the eternity of God's love:

\begin{quote}
But in the eyes of every friend, 
Voice, or the holding of his hand, 
I learn, how love can never end: 
Oh, Heart of God! I understand. 
\end{quote}

(p. 134)

In the poem "Our Lady of France," through prayer and dream the persona subdues "Thoughts of the world, unkind and weary" to celebrate Christ's crowning of "Laborious day with love" (p. 13). In "A Descant Upon the Litany of Loretto," the persona's invocation to Mary is rich in allusions to mystical love:

\begin{quote}
A flood of chaunted love, 
Love white and virginal, 
Makes this rich temple gloom more musical, 
Than woodland glooms; where slow winds nightly move 
\end{quote}
Soft leaves, that rise and fall
Upon the branches of clear nightingales . . .
(p. 108)

Ah mother! whom with many names we name,
By lore of love, which in our earthly tongue
Is all too poor, though rich love's heart of
flame,
To sing thee as thou art; nor leave unsung
The greatest of the graces thou hast won,
Thy chiefest excellence!
Ivory Tower! Star of the Morning! Rose
Mystical! Tower of David, our Defence!
(p. 109)

In the second part of "Carols" the quick exchange of
dialogue among friends reflects their shared fellowship and
a faith in the love that resides in their eternal home:

Oh! say, Brother! Oh, say Brother!
What then shall be?
Home in His Sacred Heart
For you and me.

Oh! what can we give, Brother!
For such a thing?
Body and soul, Brother!
To Christ the King.
(p. 130)

The persona in "Magic" dissociates himself from "logicians"
and finds an alternative to his present existence (described
as "the ground, where shadows are") in the ritual of the
magician. His dilemma is to make the final break from the
engirdling solipsism to reach eternal love:

Men pity me; poor men, who pity me!
Poor, charitable, scornful souls of pity!
I choose laborious loneliness: and ye
Lead Love in triumph through the dancing city:
While death and darkness girdle me,
I grope for immortality.
(p. 133)

Very similar to Francis Thompson's persona is the Johnson
persona's rejection of cerebration for feelings. Johnson's poem "Sursum Corda," dedicated to Thompson, illustrates a faith in the emotions as against the intellect:

Lift up your hearts! We lift
   Them up
To God, and to God's gift,
   The Passion Cup . . .

Lift up your hearts! But he
   Bows His
Deeps of our infamy:
   There that Heart is!

(pp. 145-146)

In "Poems from the Henn Ms.," the persona affirms the heart with love which triumphs over the coldness of life. In contrast to the "cold air," "the gray-walled/city," "cold sunlight," "cold hills," "cold waters," and cold days of "wind chills and wails," "grey shadowed skies" where "all sunlight struggling fails" lies "the city not made with hands,/Where Love makes merry for new hearts won,/For Love triumphant in many lands" (p. 252). On the other hand, the persona, earth-drawn, selects the life on earth where love is possible:

Whatever it was, it was love new won
   And my heart of a sudden took heart to sing.

A brother found in the young spring world,
   A brother hailed by his golden glance . . .
   (p. 252)

Here the cold of the earth is defied by the fire of love:

Over the ends of the world on wings of fire
   Over the folded night
Flies the soul of my love to my soul's desire
   Flies with the stars for light.
   (p. 252)
Out of this celebration of human love culminating in divine love, the persona projects the after-life as an answer to the present sorrow:

    I would, that with eternal wings we went,
      All sorrow spent, all things
    Ended, save the song love sings!

    ("To Morfydd Dead," p. 124)

The persona seeks death and consciously pursues it. Although the voices in "Vigils" warn, "Death ends life: And life is death" (p. 64), and he himself knows that "Death and the shadows tarry not ("The End," p. 173), the persona regards death as a desired relief from life. "In Falmouth Harbour," death is imaged as a "calm harbour" lying below "Long, terraced lines of circling light" (p. 7). In contrast to the turmoil and the noise of life, "seas of desolate storm," death is a place of "pure rest" where there is "deep peace," "No sight, no sound, no living stir/But such as perfect the still bay" (pp. 7, 8), where "Memories of open wind convey/Peace to this harbour strand" (p. 8), perceived in another poem as a place where the traveller can rest from the "labour of life" (p. 33). The persona conceives of death as a land of dreams:

    I have passed over the rough sea,
    And over the white harbour bar:
    And this is Death's dreamland to me,
    Led hither by a star.

    ("In Falmouth Harbour," p. 8)

    And there goes loveliness about the grave,
    And death means dreaming, not life's long despair.

    ("Gwynedd," p. 20)

    Pity thyself! youth flies, youth flies . . .
But thou wilt never see them more,
Till death the golden dreams restore.
("Lines to a Lady," p. 37)

Could we lay hold upon your haunts,
The birthplace of your chaunts:
Where we in dreamland, deathland, then?
We, sad and wondering men?
("Bells," p. 89)

The equation of death with dream gave the decadents an excuse to indulge in self-destruction through alcohol, drugs, or suicide. Besides an outlet for the decadent impulses, desire for death was a central ideal in practically all the religious, philosophical and political systems Johnson dabbled in—Buddhism, Emersonian Transcendentalism, Catholicism, Celticism, and Irish Nationalism. In all these beliefs and movements, death is viewed as perfecting life. This outlook, in Johnson, took the form of both a decadent obsession with refinement and an idealistic conception of death as the way to eternity. In "By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross," the dead king attains a dignity lacking in life:

Vanquished in life, his death
By beauty made amends:
The passing of his breath
Won his defeated ends.

Brief life and hapless? Nay:
Through death, life grew sublime.
(p. 11)

In the seventh of the "Poems From the Henn Ms.," the persona realizes that the fruition of life is in death:

Where lies the land of the light, the sound, the scent,
The land of one hour?
Or must the urge at the heart of a love-thrilled soul
Find its supreme fruition here, where the hours
Fall past to death and death's control
Faint oracles are fair in passionate flowers?
(p. 249)

In "The Silent," the persona, living the "lone life beneath/Sad skies," entreats his dead friends to sing to him. However, though he is drawn to death, his position is not clear. Alive, he fears death and this clash of impulses is evident in the poem:

Let Death refine mine ears
To catch your thin, far airs
Breathe from your shadowy spheres
One sign, to soothe my cares;
One thought, ere death appears,
Ere my worn spirit shares

Your fellowship of gloom.
To warn me of your black,
Chill pathway of the tomb,
Speaks from that bitter track:
To mind me of their bloom,
From days of old come back!

(pp. 158-159)

In the poem "Nihilism," the persona counters his own fear of the "chill pathway of the tomb," echoed in "The Silent," with a fear of life, not death:

Under the Heavens, upon the Earth, there stands Man's life, my life: of life I am afraid.

Where silent things, and unimpassioned things Where things of nought, and things decaying are: I shall be calm soon, with the calm, death brings.
The skies are gray there, without any star.

Only the rest! the rest! Only the gloom, Soft and long gloom! The pausing from all thought! My life, I cannot taste: the eternal tomb Brings me the peace, which life has never brought. For all the things I do . . .
Are as the hollow music of a bell
That times the slow approach of perfect death.
(pp. 160-161)

The reader, dealing with Johnson's often vague and
generalized language, must realize that the epithets "gray"
and "gloom" in Johnson's poetry gain meaning according to
the context. In themselves, they are neutral, with the
potential to connote either negative or positive responses.
For example, in one poem London is described as "O gray, O
gloomy skies! what then?/Here is a marvellous world of men"
(p. 117); in other poems, the persona dwells on the "grave
eyes gray" of the three-year-old child (p. 36), accepts
"this world of the gray cottage by the hill" (p. 21), and
celebrates rain which falls "through eve and gentle gloom"
(p. 21). In "Morning Twilight," the scene and the persona's
mood are described through the images of darkness, gloom and
light:

Darkness, whence calm pallor of moonlit cloud-
cirques
Glows to the full moon.
Light with light, gloom swiftly with ardent gloom
Counterchanges; high overhead supernal
Stars with keen flames fluctuating await the
Glory of sunrise.
(p. 254)

As noted by Gerald Clifton in his Lost in Light, "To
Johnson, language is always an inferior imitation of the
object or concept it attempts to describe, a 'false'
diminution of universal truth.... and the best way to
express such truths in language was to name objects
according to their general qualities." These generalizations often leave the reader with an impression of repetition, vagueness and even of contradiction. Although there is no evidence that Johnson was consciously using the reversibility of language to reflect the antithetical nature of his concepts, it does achieve this effect. Death is imaged as a "larger room" (p. 23), as a "home" (p. 14), "a sleeping city" (p. 84), the "sacred darkness" (p. 68); but so is a state of deathlessness (again an ambiguous term, here meaning a negative state of spiritual barrenness) in the poem "Visions." Deathlessness, in this context, is described as a "mighty house of hate" and "utter black." Death and deathlessness imply inner states, perhaps states of mind. Johnson often images death as dark, as a "gray land" that has not touched "white brows" (p. 45); but he also images death as white, as in the previously quoted poem "Glories" (p. 35). So, it is context alone which determines whether the epithets carry a negative or a positive connotation. It is this generalized use of language that demands a greater attention from the reader towards even the tiniest of details. This situation is further complicated by the fact that the persona's attitude toward death is often reflected in opposing though equally compelling images. While it is, on one hand, a desired city, death is also a comfortless "room of burning lights" (p. 162). Sometimes death is seen as kindly:
Make the friends with kindly Death,
That this long dominion,
With a not too bitter thrall,
Hold thee at the end of all.
("Oracles," p. 73)

At other times, it is a fearful, dark, cold end to life:

Lighten me, fallen down, I know not where,
Save, to the shadows and the fear of death
Thy Saints in light see light, and sing for joy:
Safe from the dark, safe from the dark and cold.
("The Darkness," p. 125)

Sometimes death is a rest; at other times an antagonist, a challenge to the persona:

The impotence of death is plain to us,
Whose faith victorious
Laughs death into defeat, and spurns all dread
Of nothingness, and dead
Lifeblood, and deathless spirit bound to death,
And man an empty breath.
("Vita Venturi Saeculi," p. 229)

Let no man dare to be disheartened now!
We challenge death beyond denial
Against the host of death we make our trial.
("The Coming of War," pp. 39-40)

For his pride
Bears him upon a mightier tide:
May death not be by youth defied?
("A Dream of Youth," p. 44)

Where now is death? where that grey land?
Those fearless eyes, those white brows grand,
That take full sunlight and sweet air
With rapture true and debonair,
These have not known the touch of death!
(p. 45)

We give our life, our heart, our breath,
That you may live to conquer death;
That, past your tomb, with souls in health,
Joy may be yours, and blessed wealth;
Through vigils of the painful night,
Our spirits with your tempters fight . . .
("Our Lady of the Snows," p. 76)

In "Friends," the dualism regarding death is clarified to a
certain extent. It is the persona who can qualify death as he wills. If faced alone, death can be the overpowering "imperious Powers"; if faced with a friend it is but a "Poor powerless Sorrow! Helpless Death!" (p. 134). Moreover, love and fellowship can conquer death.

Now hath Death dealt a generous violence
Calling thee swiftly hence . . .

Death cannot conquer all: your love and mine
Lives, deathlessly divine.
("Brothers," p. 221)

Similarly, in "The Sleep of Will," the "long, and thin, and white" fingers of the "unfathomable sleep" imply the touch of death. It is the will of the persona which can strengthen the will of death:

Oh, to the chambers of your brain,
The chambers of your soul,
Those hands will call, and still control,
Sleep, soft as rain.

Were but to me that soul of thine
So vassal, evermore:
Your will were mightier than before,
Made one with mine.
(p. 160)

Thus, for Johnson's persona, both life and death can imply either a positive or a negative stage of human existence, suggested by the phrases "death in life," and "life in death" (p. 170). As seen above, images like "gray," "gloom," "white" and "dark" can refer to either life on earth or to death, and either to a sad or a happy state. One other striking and central image, implying life or death, is that of the "shade" or the "shadow." While life
was seen as a "tragic shade" (p. 121) and a reflection of "the shadowy nature of the world, death too is often referred to as a shade/shadow. In "A Dream," the ambiguity of "shade" and "fainter shade" can be seen to echo the ambiguity of separating life from death, or death from life:

Yet, to sleep the eternal sleep.
Knowing this thing to all unknown!

I shall shudder in the shade
At a fainter shade astir
There, within the gray: some strayed
Melancholy wanderer
Through the misty barricade.

(p. 111)

In "The Darkness," the self supplicates the master of spirits to uplift him from the "shadows and the fear of death" (p. 125). In "Hugo," the persona laments the loss of Victor Hugo:

Our silence and our tears thou takest: vainly tries

The passion of our pain by song to pierce the cold Gulphs of the Shadow of Death, winged by our love's desire.

("Hugo," p. 139)

In "The End," the persona echoes the 'carpe diem' philosophy in the line: "Death and the shadows tarry not" (p. 173). In "To the Saints," the erring persona appeals to the "white souls" of the saints:

Freedom and weakness in my will I know:
Ah, is it malice, conscious and aglow,
That into paths of death persuades me so?

Not malice, loathliest of loathly things!
Oh, let it not be malice, that thus brings
My soul within the shadow of death's wings!

(p. 223)
Even as living in "the tragic shade" implied a failure of life, so the shade or shadow of death implies a failure of death as an idealistic conception:

What choice is ours, but tears? For the world fails. . . .

I
Have mourned, because all beauty fails, and goes Quickly away: and the whole world must die.
(p. 148)

Associated with fall, death is opposed to life: "Here rise and fall, here live and die" (p. 117). Elsewhere life too was perceived as a fall:

Some pity for a woman, who hath wed
With weariness and loneliness, from fall
To fall, from bitter snows to maybloom red . . .
("A Cornish Night," p. 24)

The conviction that what Johnson's persona is struggling to express is the meeting place between the opposing elements, the borderline between the mask and the anti-mask, where concepts are interchangeable, is clearly stated in lines such as "You saw there death in life; you will see life in death." So, if death implies fall, in Johnson's poetry, it also implies a rise:

This only can be said:
He loved us all; is dead;
May rise again.
("A Burden of Easter Vigil," p. 10)

If it implies the clash of swords, "swords of death rang round my way" (p. 123), it also is "gracious" and "kindly"--"the last music": "Holy my queen lies in the arms
of death: / Music moves over her still face" (p. 42).
Similarly, if life implies the jarring noise of the city streets, it also rings with the "pleasant village noise" that "Breaks the still air" ("In England," p. 29). If life is a "haggard pathway" (p. 37), it is also blessed with the "memories," "splendours," and the "desires" of the earth (p. 20). In "Gwynedd," the persona's celebration of life involves anti-decadent, Whitman-like acceptance of all its aspects:

We will not wander from this land; we will
Be wise together, and accept our world:
This world of the grey cottage by the hill,
This gorge, this lusty air, this loneliness:
The calm of drifting clouds; the pine-tops whirled
And swayed along the ridges. Here distress
Dreams, and delight dreams: dreaming, we can fill
All solitary haunts with prophecy,
All heights with holiness and mystery;
Our hearts with understanding, and our will
With love of nature's law and loveliness.
(p. 21)

Even the image of life as a fall is transformed:

The wet earth breathes ancient fair fragrance
forth;
And dying gales hang in the branches, blow
And fall, and blow again: our widest home
Is with rich winds of west, loud winds of North,
Sweeping beneath a gray and vasty dome. . . .
rich rain
falls on our hearts . . .
(p. 21)

The most striking response to the dual reality of life and death occurs in the unifying image of life and death. The persona's response to the image of life and death as
"tragic shade" is a projection of historical figures who embody the ideal of victory in defeat. Some of these figures are Newman, King Charles I, Lucretius, Charles Lamb, and Victor Hugo, culminating finally in the vision of Christ. A curiously consistent feature in the persona's presentation of the historical figures is his highly personal and subjective evaluation of them as masters of their destiny in a world alien to heroism. These figures are etched, as it were by an artist, against the background of grey skies, "Sombre and rich" (p. 11), of "thunders of shaken dark" (p. 57), against "a life of tragic shade" (p. 121) and "terrible thunders/hurled/From out night's battling clouds" (p. 138). These sketches, thus, are subjectively created antitheses of life-death and triumph-failure.

In "Falmouth Harbour," the persona paints an allegorical picture of Newman as a Catholic soldier fighting with "Death." The very motif of warfare is fraught with the questions that are the persona's central concern—how does one transform failure into success or how does one discover success in failure:

Hence by stern thoughts and strong winds borne,
Voyaged, with faith that could not fail,
Who cried: **Lead, kindly Light!** . . .

**Fighting with Death in Sicily** . . .

(p. 8)

Armored with faith, Newman's courage is seen to lie in his own acceptance and transformation of earthly sorrow to "songs and prayers":

The freedom of the living dead;
The service of a living pain:
He chose between them, bowed his head,
And counted sorrow, gain.

(p. 9)

In "By the Statue of King Charles," the persona's subject is not just the historical King Charles I, but his statue—an artistic emblem, which implies the transformation of life-form, wraught with "passionate tragedy," into an art-form, a "sweet austerity." The persona can stand back and reflect on the artifact. His contemplation appears as a passive act, but is underlined by an active deliberation, thus paralleling the appearance-reality antithesis of failure and success:

Brief life, and hapless? Nay:
Through death, life grew sublime. . . .
He triumphs now, the dead,
Beholding London's gloom.

(pp. 11-12)

In "Lucretius," the persona portrays a figure of death-in-life, with "worn and haunted eyes." It is through death that Lucretius gains the wisdom which truly makes him "King of men":

Thou knowest now, that life and death
Are wondrous intervals:
The fortunes of a fitful breath,
Within the flaming walls.

Without them, an eternal plan,
Which life and death obey:
Divinity, that fashions man
Its high, immortal way.

(p. 57)

Charles Lamb is the persona's projection of the decadent's self-division. He is opposed to the decadent
torpor and failing spirit:

Thou, by the pleasant chimney nooks,
Didst laugh, with merry-meaning looks,
Thy griefs away:
We, bred on modern magazines,
Point out, how much our sadness means;
And some new woe our wisdom gleans,
Day by dull day.

(p. 121)

And yet like Lionel Johnson, and the Johnson persona, Lamb lived in the "age of tedious woe,/That snaps and snarls!"
The "tragic shade" echoes the "tragic generation" of the decadents with whom the persona self-consciously identifies himself. For the persona who already has shown a need for an authority figure, Charles Lamb becomes a source of instruction:

Lover of London! Whilst thy feet
Haunted each old familiar street
Thy brave heart found life's turmoil sweet,
Despite life's pain.
We fume and fret and, when we can,
Cry up some new and noisy plan,
Big with the Rights and Wrongs of man:
And where's the gain?

(p. 121)

Gentle Saint Charles! I turn to thee,
Tender and true: thou teachest me
To take with joy, what joys there be,
And bear the rest.

(p. 121)

The stoical figure, "walking thy London day by day," is quaintly reminiscent of other figures who either influenced the decadents or participated, consciously or unconsciously, in their moods and aesthetics. Two such figures who stand out are Thomas De Quincey and Francis Thompson; both are often portrayed as exiles on the streets of London.
Thompson has also been constantly described as gentle and sweet natured, despite his tragic misfortunes. So is Charles Lamb by Johnson's persona. Johnson was not merely using Lamb in place of Thompson; rather, Lamb embodied for him what Thompson did not—"The brave heart" which could calmly accept "life's pain" and make "life's turmoil sweet."

This juxtaposition of Lamb and Thompson gains weight when we bring to the poem what we know about Johnson's opinion regarding Thompson. Johnson, as a critic, admired Francis Thompson. In "The Soul of Sacred Poetry," collected in the Post Liminium essays, Johnson points out the positive elements in Thompson and other sacred poets:

so poets, from the young Jesuit martyr Southwell to Mr. Thompson, have played with a devout audacity upon the theme of the Divine Passion. Not shirking the truth, out of a falsely reverent reticence, they stir the imagination to mystical journeyings in heavenly places, by their Franciscan fearlessness and cunning . . .

His own poems on Catholic themes show the influence of Thompson, Crashaw and Patmore. But Johnson also saw the negative effects of Thompson's influence, as his note to Katherine Tynan reveals:

He has done more to harm the English language than the worst American newspapers. . . . He has the opulent, prodigal manner of the seventeenth century; a profusion of great imagery, sometimes excessive and false. . . . Incapable of prettiness and pettiness: for good and bad, always vehement and burning and—to use a despised word—sublime. Sublime, rather than noble! too fevered to be austere: a note of ardent suffering, not of endurance.45

Paradoxically, Johnson could identify with as well as
dissociate himself from Thompson. In Johnson's poems, Charles Lamb, a figure from the past serves as a much more approachable example of the success-in-failure hero than does Thompson or any other contemporary. Johnson's persona thus exposes the self's psychological attempts to objectify its own inner division. Passively receptive to the wisdom of an older, more distant "Saint Charles," he constructs a relatively simple mode of resolving inner conflicts.

A similar simplification of deeper significances by an obvious punning on the name "Victor" occurs in the poem "Hugo." The persona's exaggerated sentiments are focused on the paradox of victory achieved through peace, not war:

Victor and loving Lord, who, seeing this poor world
Wasted and worn with wrongs, wouldst not war, but peace,
And little children's laughter, and the law of love!
(p. 138)

As prototypes functioning within the culturally rich medium of art and religion, the historical figures represent not their historically verifiable natures but the misty area of mythical transposition of self into the figure of Christ. Perhaps nowhere is the conflict of opposing elements and selves better resolved than in the compelling image of Christ as "Victor Victim":

Would, that with you I were imparadised,
White Angel around Christ!
That, by the borders of the eternal sea
Singing, I too might be:
Where dewy green the palm trees on the strand,
Your gentle shelter, stand:
Where reigns the Victor Victim and His Eyes
control eternities!
("De Profundis," p. 150)

The lines from "Dominica in Palmis," translated by Ian Fletcher read: "The passion of Christ is sung: Jesus! who redeemed us, Victor dead on the Cross." In the poem, "Hawker of Morwenstow," the Catholic-convert friend's eyes "closed in death" but opened on "the Victim's Breast" (p. 169). It is in the death of Christ that the opposition of success and failure is resolved:

Yea, thorny crown
And purple robe and rods beating the face,
And death of God: I spoke not to displace
The glory of that passion. . . .

It were so fair to win;
So fair to die therein?
("Poems From the Henn Ms.," p. 247)

Again and again, from the human to the Christ figures, the persona grasps a pattern that is useful for his own final discovery of man and Christ as both creators and exemplars of beauty that is harmony. It is from perceiving the central paradox of Christ as "Victor Victim" that we, as readers, can attempt to understand what appear at first as strikingly conflicting images of life and death, victory and defeat. A significant concern of Johnson's persona, throughout the gamut of his experiences, is to seek order out of chaos; it also justifies the reader's attempt at resolving opposing images in Johnson's poem. Johnson's quotation from Walt Whitman, at the beginning of the poem "Sir Walter Raleigh in the Tower," reflects the eternal
search of the persona-self:

I do not know what you are for (I do not know what I am for myself, nor what anything is for),
But I will search carefully for it even in being foiled,
In defeat, poverty, imprisonment--for they too are great.
Did we think victory great?
So it is--but now it seems to me, when it cannot be helped,
that defeat is great.
And that death and dismay are great.

--Walt Whitman

(p. 240).
References

   Note: All subsequent quotes from Johnson's poems refer to the above text and will be indicated by page numbers in parenthesis.

2. Ibid., p. xvi.


8. Ibid., p. 133.


13  Ibid., p. 29.

14  Fletcher, p. 293.


16  Ibid., p. 166.

17  Fletcher, p. 325.


19  Ibid., p. 332.

20  Ibid., pp. lxvii-lxviii.


23  Ibid., p. 282.


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Fletcher, p. lvii.

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Lionel Johnson, "Incurable," The Pageant, I, 1896, pp.131-133.

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Ibid., p. 167.

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Pierrot, p. 120.

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Russell, ed., pp. 128, 130, 148, 162.

41  
Ibid., p. 148.
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Clifton, pp. 94-94.

44
Whittemore, ed., pp. 113-114.

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46
Fletcher, ed., p. 327.
Chapter 5

The Clown's Grimace:
Response to Failure of Modern Man

In reading modern poetry we are faced with the poet's attempts to grapple with words and his recognition of how words can fail. The poem, in one sense, is the outcome of this experience of failure. It grows out of a felt need to express something, a felt need to use words to express it in and, finally, a felt need to be put together by the reader. Each of these needs is fraught with blank spaces. Conscious of the very vulnerability of the creative effort, exposed to a highly analytical environment and to the constant failure of one analysis against another, the modern poet balks at making easy equations. If obscurity is a characteristic of modern poetry, it is also an expression of failure— that words fail, that meanings fail, that form fails, that even the poem itself fails. If Plato rejected poets from his Republic, modern poets constantly undermine their own efforts. The modern poem often seems to collapse into oblivion. The very concreteness and immediacy of the words and images used constantly highlight the modern poet's distrust of abstract concepts. At the same time he is in constant confrontation with the disintegration of a concrete self-identity or a coherent world-view. He is like a circus
performer who, aware of his own absurd risk-taking gestures, dares to expose himself to the ultimates.

An emerging persona in modern poetry is that of the clown, often a figure of ridicule, even of self-ridicule. We can recognize the affinities of this clown figure with diverse literary traditions—the buffoon of Aristophanes, the "Fool" of Shakespeare, the bumbling hero of the Picaresque tradition, the self-parodying narrator of Lawrence Sterne, the highly dramatic, introspective Browning persona, and so on. But an important aspect of the modern persona is his collapsing of the profound and the bathetic, of his intense individuality and his several masked selves; it grows out of the modern poet's attraction to and withdrawal from the religious-poetic fervor in the latter part of the nineteenth century—a period in which poets like Hopkins, Thompson, and Johnson confronted the conflicts and paradoxes of the human body and the divine soul, the terrestrial and the celestial concerns which shape and break the self. In the twentieth century, a revived interest in Donne and the Metaphysicals developed, mainly due to the practising credo of the New Critics who valued poems with dramatic conflicts and complex images. The interest in Hopkins' poetry was often, therefore, linked to the emerging interest in complexity and obscurity which demanded searching analysis of images and constraining oppositions in the structure of the poems. Yet Hopkins' impact on modern
poetry goes deeper; we can realize the connections when we place Hopkins not as an isolated figure, but as one who headed the late-nineteenth-century poetic attempts at expressing the dilemma of man caught in his "mean house, bone house" yet aspiring for the heavens. Therefore, the study of Hopkins along with his contemporaries, Thompson and Johnson, with particular emphasis on their personae, brings a renewed understanding of the historical growth of modernism. The moderns rejected theology with an ironical gesture yet yearned for a ritual of some kind, rebuffed a given God but could not live without imaging the self as a kind of God, undermined the hortatory efforts to create success out of failure by irony, parody and clowning, yet in the very figure of the absurd, modern man confronted the meaning of his existential destiny.

W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot are three major modern figures who created a kind of poetry in which the persona and his various masks are the crucial experiencing centers. In Hopkins, Thompson, and Johnson we traced the dimension of human and divine conflicts within the evolving figure of the persona. One noticeable feature of the late-nineteenth-century poet's preoccupation was to explore the persona's split nature, his psychological tensions and conscious self-examination; however, despite the agitation of his mind and soul, the persona was a definable entity. A significant affirmation of self's success through failure
was maintained by drawing the reader's attention to the self's yearning for such affirmation. In their creation of the poetic persona, the duality and complexity of his nature were developed as necessary aspects of the persona's evolution to an identifiable human condition. Yeats, on the other hand, set out to formulate his doctrine of the self and the anti-self, an approach which was to influence the modern poet's distancing of his motivations, personalities and complexities from those of the persona. Thus the poetic persona was given an existence independent from the poet's:

I think all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, on a re-birth as something not one's self, something created in a moment and perpetually renewed; in playing a game like that of a child where one loses the infinite pain of self-realisation, in a grotesque or solemn painted face put on that one may hide from the terror of judgment. . . . If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves though we may accept one from others. Active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask . . .

Another characteristic of the modern poetic persona as worked out in the poetry of Yeats, Pound, and Eliot is its tragi-comic nature. Unlike Hopkins' persona whose intense experience of the human will and divine aspiration overcomes the moments of self-ridicule, the modern poetic persona dwells on his own absurdity and plays up his existential dilemma by assuming the mask of a clown figure, similar to but also different from the decadent poseur. Whereas the
decadent persona celebrates his pose of failure, he is doing so as a kind of challenge. He accepts failure, but as an act, not as a reality. The modern clown-persona accepts the limitations of life as a reality, but his acceptance is marked by a vision of life as a dark comedy. Walter Kerr in *Tragedy and Comedy* exposes the existential dilemma of the clown in modern times:

For us the tragic landscape has become virtually invisible. . . . The clown, staring at it for inspiration and knowing that he must take all of his own sustenance from what he sees outside himself, can only have had the sensation of going slowly blind. The landscape has darkened. What can comedy do but grow darker with it? . . . But what drives comedy to desperation in our own time is something deeper than darkness. The tragic landscape is now described as a place that never truly existed, or at least a place that is not going to exist in future. Thus it claps down into utter blackness. On the instant comedy turns black with it.2

In Yeats, a striking persona who acts out the human failure--loss of youth's beauty and idealism--is the stuttering, bumbling caricature of old age. The comical, senile persona in Yeats's later poetry is a condensation of the imaginary figures he had created and of the figures from Irish mythology--Fergus, king of the Red Branch, seeking to "learn the dreaming wisdom" of the Druid but caught within the "great webs of sorrow" and left with the cry "But now I have grown nothing, knowing all" (*CPY*, pp. 32-33); Aengus, the beautiful young man who has become "old with wandering/Through hollow lands and hilly lands" in search of beauty and love (*CPY*, p. 57); Oisin who is punished, for
desiring the human world, with old age:

    And my years three hundred fell on me, and I rose, and walked
    on the earth,
    A creeping old man full of sleep, with the spittle on his beard
    never dry.³

(CPY, p. 379)

In "Sailing to Byzantium," the persona's self-description is marked by both bathos and pathos: "An aged man is but a paltry thing,/A tattered coat upon a stick" (CPY, p. 191). In "The Tower," the persona's self-description is part of a painful self-questioning and self-pity:

    What shall I do with this absurdity—
    O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature,
    Decrepit age that has been tied to me
    As to a dog's tail?

(CPY, p. 192)

The absurd figure with old age tied to his back is debased to the non-human level ("As to a dog's tail"), a kind of Swiftian human-nonhuman clown. Out of this self-image the persona articulates the horror of human life and the grotesque reality of his meaningless existence. This enactment of self-failure as a clown's performance occurs again and again in Yeats's poems. In "Among School Children," the persona is conscious of his own image, "A sixty-year old smiling public man" who is nothing but "old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird" (CPY, p. 214). In "The Circus Animal's Desertion," the persona is "but a broken man" who once ran a circus show but now is left with
self-recrimination and the desolation of old age:

Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

*(CPY, p. 336)*

The clown's performance is built on the paradox of action and inaction. He mimics a bicyclist by pedalling his legs furiously, but he rides no bicycle, only the thin air. The absurdity lies in the constant play of action against inaction. Further, the clown is involved in a constant process of "doing" and "undoing"—he may climb a ladder but will eventually slip down and reach the original point as does Charles Chaplin in his films. This occupation implicit in the clown-mask provides illimitable outlets for the modern poetic persona to express the absurdity of his own existence, while balancing the thin line between tragedy and comedy. The clown-mask implies another possibility for the poet—the clown is a performer, an artist who often uses mime and gesture; he is both a counterpart and a counterpoint to the poet who also is an artist but who uses words to express himself. The image of the self, both as the artist and man, remains a central concern to Yeats. His is a new religion born out of mythical figures and "those imaginary people" "created out of the deepest instinct of man to be his measure and his norm." In *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, Richard Ellmann points out the emerging symbolism in Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" which is relevant to Yeats's preoccupation with personae:
for an image is in the world of art as holy as a
sage. God in the poem stands less in the position
of the Christian God than in that of supreme
artist, artificer of eternity and the holy fire; he
is thus also the poet and the human imagination
which is sometimes in Yeats' system described as
the maker of all things.®

Yeats's major persona in his later poetry, the
tragi-comic figure of senility, replaces God, or rather,
through his undying dreams and regrets becomes a different
kind of god, a different kind of creative artist and
maker—a clown who "thinks in a marrow-bone," who is "For
the song's sake a fool," "A foolish, passionate man" (CPY,
p. 281) and ultimately, a figure who embraces humanity in
all its follies, foibles, and earthly struggles.

Ezra Pound was another major poet whose constant
preoccupation with personae or versions of the self became a
way of defining the past in the light of the present,
tradition in the light of contemporaneity. In his essay,
"Vorticism," Pound elaborated his preoccupation with the
"search for oneself":

In the "search for oneself," in the search for
"sincere self-expression," one gropes, one finds
some seeming verity. One says "I am" this, that,
or the other, and with the words scarcely uttered
one ceases to be that thing.

I began this search for the real in a book
called Personae [1909], casting off, as it were,
complete masks of the self in each poem. I
continued in a long series of translations, which
were but more elaborate masks.®

Bertrans de Born, Sextus Propertius, Hugh Selwyn
Mauberley, Ulysses are all personae, versions of the self,
past figures who eventually become contemporaneous. K. K.
Ruthven in *A Guide to Ezra Pound's 'Personae'* (1926) points out the significance of creating 'personae' for Pound: at one level, Pound associated the creation of personae with a "sort of metempsychosis"; further his personae from the past sound like his contemporaries, and this leads him to the conviction that since "all time is contemporaneous, the point of focus [is] the consciousness of the writer whose mind ranges backward and forward over many hundreds of years"; finally, "the creation of personae is a way of imposing order on the chaos of history and serves much in the same function as myth in *The Waste Land* or *Ulysses*."

Ezra Pound was obviously interested in creating personae who reflect at once their historic identity and their contemporaneous features. Thus, Propertius is the historical figure who resisted the pressure of the powerful Maecenas to write political and rhetorical poems and continued to write love poems. But he is also the young Pound-artist struggling to maintain his own artistic integrity. The shifts in time are reflected as shifts in the persona's language—\ from the archaic:

\[\begin{align*}
I \text{ who come first from the clear font} \\
&\text{Bringing the Grecian orgies into Italy,} \\
&\text{and the dance into Italy.}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
&\text{Who hath taught you so subtle a measure,} \\
&\text{in what hall have you heard it } \ldots \ ?
\end{align*}\]

*(SPEP, p. 78)*

\to the modern:

\[\begin{align*}
&\text{I ask a wreath which will not crush my head.} \\
&\text{And there is no hurry about it;}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
&\text{I shall have, doubtless, a boom after my funeral,}
\end{align*}\]
Seeing that long standing increases all things regardless of quality. (SPEP, p. 78)

The reader's awareness of the modernity of the persona is marked by tracing an ironic tone of self-mockery, a feature which recurs with greater force and persistence in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley." The Propertius who prophesizes

And I also among the later nephews of this city shall have my dog's day,
With no stone upon my contemptible sepulchre . . .
(SPEP, p. 79)

is a kind of "homeomorph" of the dual identity of the E. P.-Mauberley persona. Ruthven elaborates on this self-antiself mask in some detail:

Self-analysis produced the two personae in the poem, Mauberley and E. P., each of whom is an oversimplification of radically different elements in Pound himself. E. P. is a sort of pragmatic person Pound would like to be, a man fully aware of his own historicity and working in difficult conditions at the task of restoring literature to a more central place than it holds at present in our civilization. Even in 1922, however, Pound feared . . . that he was basically a tour d'ivoire aesthete like Mauberley, a man inordinately and helplessly attached to "nacre and objets d'art" (Letters, p. 234), and therefore incapable of anything more urgent or strenuous than subjective reveries.

Confronting the possible failure of one's artistic integrity in an age of cheap imitation, mechanical production, and commercialized civilization, the modern poet-persona's ultimate self-defense is irony, in which the self is as much the target as the sordid modern world:

All men, in law, are equals
Free of Pisistratus,
We choose a knave or an eunuch
To rule over us.  

(SPEP, p. 63)

Besides, the persona emphasizes the prosaic triviality of the modern age by an ironic use of allusion. The hortatory "O bright Apollo" is followed by a quote from Pindar's Olympian meaning, "what man, what hero, what god." The grandeur of the line is undercut by the image of the "tin wreath": "What god, man, or hero/Shall I place a tin wreath upon!" (SPEP, p. 63). The ironic force of the passage is summed up succinctly by Ruthven:

In such instances, the quotation is inappropriate in a meaningful way: the confrontation of gods and tin wreaths, the contrast between the powerfully rhythmic and the flatly prosaic, persuade us that heroic action and heroic literature are equally anachronistic in our time.  

Exposed to the persona's wordplay, literary associations, classical allusions, ironic undercutting and parody, the reader reacts to him as if he was a modern "verbal clown" whose reality is constantly maintained by his historical identity.  

Pound, in his own personae, developed an attribute of the modern fool whose romantic irony is as much a revelation of the self's failure as of the age; it was also an attribute which recurred in many of T. S. Eliot's poems.

Eliot's personae in the early poems and the tonal centers of "The Waste Land" experience failure, often sexual failure, in the larger framework of social failure. J. Alfred Prufrock's "love song" is a desultory confession of
ennui, vacuity and inaction: "Do I dare? Do I dare?, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons," "Then how should I begin/To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?" (CPE, p. 5). Prufrock identifies himself as the anti-heroic figure, the "ridiculous" "Fool":

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; Am an attendant lord, one that will do To swell a progress, start a scene or two, Advise the prince; no doubt an easy tool, Deferential, glad to be of use, Politic, cautious, and meticulous; Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse; At times, indeed, almost ridiculous— Almost, at times, the Fool. (CPE, p. 7)

Prufrock identifies himself as the intellectually agile Shakespearian Fool. Tragic heroes have had their day; this is the age of the comic-pathetic "Fool." Underlining the self-mockery and parody is a strain of the prophetic, "the sage fool," the clown as truth-teller. This strain marks the other tragi-farcical personae in Eliot's later poems.

The persona in "Gerontion" describes himself as an "old man,/A dull head among windy spaces" marked by inaction, sexual sickness and loss of faith:

I was neither at the hot gates Nor fought in the warm rain Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass, Bitten by flies, fought. . . .

The goat coughs at night in the field overhead . . .

I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it Since what is kept must be adulterated? I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and
How should I use them for your closer contact?
(CPE, pp. 21, 23)

Yet, he too, like Prufrock, is not wholly the insane clown; he can read the signs too:

Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a sign!"
The word within a word, unable to speak a word, Swaddled with darkness. In the juvescence of the year Came Christ the tiger . . .

(Sweeney, who appears and reappears in "Sweeney Erect," "Sweeney Agonistes" and "The Waste Land" is a sexually depraved figure. Struck by "the falling sickness," symbolic of the fallen state of man, Sweeney reflects the failure of civilization. His grotesque, absurd appearance confirms his affinity with the crude, base, buffoonish figure who has appeared as the literary "social parasite" since the second century in Greece and in Plutarch's accounts: 15

This withered root of knots of hair Slitted below and gashed with eyes, This oval O cropped out with teeth: The sickle motion from the thighs Jackknifes upward at the knees Then straightens out from heel to hip Pushing the framework of the bed And clawing at the pillow slip.

(CPE, p. 25)

This lewd, obscene figure, however, is an evolving persona whose tragic nature the reader can perceive by linking him to Agamemnon, Orestes, and even Christ. In "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," Sweeney guards the "horned gate"—the gate of lechery, death, but also of truth. In "The
Wasteland" Sweeney is not present as a persona but as a ghostly figure haunting the Narcissus-exiled Israelite-Rousseau-esque persona of 'The Fire Sermon' section. Mrs. Porter and Sweeney appear in the unfinished poem "Sweeney Agonistes" as the "Queen of Hearts" and a possible "King of Clubs" respectively. In the "Fragment of an Agon" Sweeney also is a reminder that human life is nothing but birth, copulation and death:

Birth, and copulation, and death
That's all, that's all, that's all, that's all,
Birth, and copulation, and death.  
(CPE, p. 80)

I tell you again it don't apply
Death or life or life or death
Death is life and life is death . . .
(CPE, p. 84)

The Sweeney-figure in 'The Fire Sermon' passage echoes both the depravity of the civilization as well as the prophecy of death in a series of mock-literary allusions to Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress," Day's Parliament of Bees, and Verlaine's Parsifal, among others:

But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et o ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!
(CPE, p. 43).

Eliot's own note on Tiresias and his central importance in "The Waste Land" is revealing:

Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character" is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just
as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem.

(CPE, p. 52)

As an experiencing center of the poem, Tiresias disrupts the briefly sketched, rapidly shifting gallery of personae, appearing often as fragmentary, disembodied voices. This feature is important in the structure of the whole poem, for Tiresias is an intrusion, an old misfit, a grotesque parody of sex:

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see . . .

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest--

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on the same dawn or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)

(CPE, pp. 43-44)

It is the prophetic distance coupled with a human sympathy that makes Tiresias' voice a pervading consciousness, but Tiresias is not a wholly tragic figure. He is in many ways a grotesque, comical misfit, and it is in this role that he humanizes the tawdry scene of modern sexuality and conveys echoes of neurotic fears, moral righteousness and cold cynicism: "one must be so careful these days," "what you get married for if you don't want children?" (CPE, pp. 39,42), culminating in the lines:

When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

(CPE, p. 44)

Eliot's peculiar use of "voices" in "The Waste Land" is not so much to create characters, but as Rosenthal and Gall point out in The Modern Poetic Sequence, "to build the poem's tonal centers." It is, therefore, the volatile, rapid succession of voices, echoing and counterpointing each other, bawdy, ironic, poignant or indifferent that Tiresias' voice orchestrates. The reader in responding to the voices is involved in a kind of juggling act. His identification with each voice is brief, not sustained, yet the cumulative effect of the rapidly succeeding voices is to impress him with their own resonance. Thus, the reader, while believing that he can easily dissociate from each voice, is being pulled into a whirlpool from which he cannot escape so easily.

Yeats, Pound and Eliot have each developed personae who are the key centers of their poems. They are both specific figures in a specific age and civilization twisted by inner and outer failures, and also voices that collapse time and space in their own consciousness of how the absurd comic-pathetic modern man can still create his own reality in his own mind.
Among the modern poets, a highly ingenious yet controversial figure who claimed the imagination and the fervent adulation (often filtered with intrigue, puzzlement and angry disappointment) of the readers and the audiences in the thirties to the early fifties was Dylan Thomas. Much has been written about Dylan the bawdy, incongruous man, the sensational poet of birth, sex and death, and of course, the tongue-in-cheek bohemian philanderer out to shock the world and to rebel against his own Welsh non-conformist upbringing. What is of particular interest in the present context—the exploration of the modern poets' responses to the experience of failure—is Dylan Thomas' use of different roles and innumerable masks in order to project a highly riddling persona in an equally riddling world of paradoxes.

A passage from Thomas' letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, dated 25 December 1933, may be taken as one explanation for his incessant preoccupation with different personae in his poetry:

Think how much wiser we would be if it were possible for us to change our angles of prespective as regularly as we change our vests: a certain period would be spent in propelling ourselves along our backs, in order to see the sky properly and all the time; and another period in drifting belly-downwards through the air in order to see the earth. As it is, this perpetual right-angle of ours leads to a prejudiced vision. Probably this was the divine plan, anyway, but I certainly intend to spend more time lying on my back, and will even, if circumstances permit, follow Mr. Chesterton's
David Holbrook, the psychoanalytic biographer-critic of Dylan Thomas, employs object-relations psychoanalysis in *Dylan Thomas: The Code of Night* and concludes that Thomas' role playing stems from the schizoid persona's fear of loss of identity. The extensive exploration of Freudian psychoanalysis to accommodate one's cultural experiences leads Holbrook to some very acute observations about Thomas' obviously problematic personality. But it is unsatisfactory, or at least incomplete, in that it does not account for Thomas' artistic dexterity in creating various masks and his conscious manipulation of the poetic personae in a search not only for one's personal identity but for human identity as well.

Thomas' own words about his desire to escape a "prejudiced vision" and the wisdom of changing "our angles of perspective" are supported by his constant efforts to escape the narrow moral code of his Welsh non-conformist background. He constantly plays on sexual innuendoes, puns, often blatant ribaldry and puckish candour in the persona of the bohemian rebel. FitzGibbon touches on the resources of this persona as a combination of both sympathy and cunning: "This ability to present his very strong personality in so many different guises contains within itself both the most marvellous and enriching sympathy as well as a low and despicable cunning—and all the gradations that lie..."
between." The curious but highly characteristic tension between genuine sympathy and diabolic cunning pervades all of Thomas' personae, coming to an explosive reconciliation in the figure of the clown which will be explored as the central persona in Thomas' poetry.

The chief characteristic of the bohemian-rebel persona is a reckless, adventurous spirit. No doubt Thomas had seen himself as a "provincial bohemian" leaving Wales for London as a gesture of revolt: "The land of my fathers. My fathers can keep it." In his unfinished story, The Adventures in the Skin Trade, the rebel-hero, Samuel Bennet escapes from the prosaic, secure life of his parents: "In the biggest bedroom overlooking the field that was called the back, his father turned over the bills of the month in his one dream; his mother in bed mopped and polished through a wood of kitchens. He closed the door: now there was nobody to disturb him." But his leave-taking is not so simple or innocent; it is destructive in its rebellious tearing up of his mother's snapshot ("The whole of her dead, comfortable face remained in one piece, and he tore it across the cheeks, up through the chins, and into the eyes," CS, p. 241). He destroys his sister's framed photograph "with the ripping of her set smile and the crumpling of her bobbed head into a ball" (CS, p. 241), smudges his father's history sheets "with a lump of coal from the dead fire" (CS, p. 241), and breaks the china set. The whole point of the
destructive acts is to confirm his own self-banishment as final, irrevocable: "Come and look at Samuel Bennet destroying his parents' house in Mortimer Street, off Stanley's Grove; he will never be allowed to come back" (CS, p. 242). The bleary-eyed adolescent Samuel Bennet's sexual fantasying is another deliberate mark of rebellion against the structures of the Swansea moral code.

The bohemian-rebel personae that occur in Thomas' poems project different aspects of the Samuel Bennet figure—anger, cynicism, rashness, vitality, exuberance, pugnacity, self-confidence, but also guilt and shame. A recurring quality of these personae is a constant obsession with sex as both a life-giving and a life-denying feature of the human identity. The young boys of "I See the Boys of Summer" are the rebel figures, "the dark deniers" who challenge the seasons, who can destroy creation and create from destruction, who

Hold up the noisy sea and drop her birds,
Pick the world's ball of wave and froth
To choke the deserts with her tides,
And comb the country gardens for a wreath.\(^{22}\)
(\textit{CP}, p. 2)

Celebrating life and death in the phallic symbol of the "poles of promise," the bohemian-rebel figures abandon themselves to nature. Echoing the jaunty "hey, ho" from the song of the clown in Shakespeare's \textit{The Twelfth Night}, the boys celebrate their own image of self as a kind of wise fool:\(^{23}\) "In spring we cross our foreheads with the
holly, / Heigh ho the blood and berry" (CP, p. 3). One of the pervading self-images of the bohemian-rebel persona is that of the "tough guy"—either as the "sons of flint and pitch" (CP, p. 3) or as the highly tense physical dynamo with the "jawbone riven" and "the flesh's lock and vice" revolting against the mechanical "jointed lever" and "screws" (CP, p. 39), a kind of the Hopkinsian Harry Ploughman figure whose stance is to defy the power of poetic, social, political or sexual conformity:

Fear not the working world, my mortal,  
Fear not the flat, synthetic blood,  
Nor the heart in the ribbing metal.  
Fear not the tread, the seeded milling,  
The trigger and scythe, the bridal blade,  
Nor the flint in the lover's mauling.  
("All All and All . . .," CP, p. 38)

Another recurring image of the free-spirited persona is that of the self as dog. In the collection of stories titled Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog, the young boy is a vital, spirited being with a strong affinity for the world of senses:

On my haunches, eager and alone, casting an ebony shadow with the Gorsehill jungle swarming, the violent impossible birds and fishes leaping. . . . I felt all my young body like an excited animal surrounding me, the torn knees bent, the bumping heart, the long heat and depth between the legs, the sweat prickling in the hands, the little balls of dirt between the toes, the eyes in the sockets, the tucked-up voice, the blood racing, flying, jumping, swimming, and waiting to pounce. There, playing Indians in the evening, I was aware of myself in the exact middle of a living story, and my blood was my adventure and my name. I sprang with excitement and scrambled up through the scratching brambles again.  

(CS, p. 132)
Performing his "sensual strut," the dog-man persona perceives the outer and the inner regions through keen sensitivity to sensations:

How shall my animal
Whose wizard shape I trace in the cavernous skull,
Vessel of abscesses and exultation's shell,
Endure burial under the spelling wall . . .
("How Shall my Animal," CP, p. 100)

In an early version of the poem the persona is more explicit in his celebration of the physical senses than in the printed version:

My senses see
Speak then, o body, shout aloud,
And break my only mind from chains
To go where ploughing's ended.24

Other poems emphasize the persona's world of sensory responses:

A process in the weather of the world
Turns ghost to ghost . . .

A process blows the moon into the sun,
Pulls down the shabby curtains of the skin,
And the heart gives up its dead.

("Before I Knocked," CP, p. 7)

As yet ungotten, I did suffer;
The rack of dreams my lily bones.
Did twist into a living cipher,
And flesh was snipped to cross the lines
Of gallow crosses on the liver
And brambles in the wringing brains.
("Before I Knocked," CP, p. 8)

In "My Hero Bares his Nerves," the mock-heroic figure deliberately plays on the multi-leveled imagery of the poet's ego, hand or phallus:

My hero bares his nerves along my wrist
That rules from wrist to shoulder,
Unpacks the head that, like a sleepy ghost,  
Leans on my mortal ruler,  
The proud spine spurning turn and twist.  

(CP, p. 11)

Commenting on the last line, "He pulls the chain, the cistern moves," William York Tindall in A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas sums it up as implying that "masturbation, writing a poem, and defecation are parallel and of equal value. ... This poem cleans up darkness by bringing it to the light of ribald comedy." This constant upsetting of the serious, often philosophical subject matter (such as birth, procreation, death, human identity and loss of it, passage of time, and human suffering) by a kind of bawdy, puckish humor is characteristic of the bohemian artist of animal spirits:

A candle in the thighs  
Warms youth and seed and burns the seed of age  
Where no seed stirs,  
The fruit of man unwrinkles in the stars,  
Bright as a fig;  
Where no wax is, the candle shows its hairs.  

("Light Breaks," CP, p. 29)

The "young dog" image in the Portrait stories and its variations in Thomas' personae, the "boily boy," the wind chaser, and the spirited poet of the physical senses suggest certain characteristics. Richard A. Davies in his article, "Dylan Thomas's Image of the 'Young Dog' in the Portrait" points out some of these traits:

The stance Dylan Thomas chose to emphasize in his Portrait stories, that of a "young dog," evokes an image of bravado, defiance and aggression in the face of life, a devil-may-care approach to existence that would seem to be well suited to
Thomas' fertile comic fancy. I use the word "seem" because a reader would be insensitive to Thomas's version of life if he failed to see the irony of the "young dog" pose. There is a pattern in Thomas's parade of youthful versions of himself. . . one of a gradual loss of courage and boldness, a consequent increase in fears and terrors, until the young dog is fully metamorphosed into a "terrified prig of a love-mad young man . . . "

The outer mask of bravado which hides the fears and sexual innocence of the adolescent in the Portrait stories, like "The Fight," "Extraordinary Little Cough," "Just Like Little Dogs," is a projection of Thomas' own identification with the dog-figure in life. In one of his letters to Vernon Watkins, dated 15 July 1937, Thomas dwells on self-recrimination by a sustained image of self as a cringing dog:

If, in some weeks' time, you see a dog-like shape with a torn tail and a spaniel eye, its tail between its legs, come cringing and snuffling up Heatherslade gravel, it will be me; look carefully at its smarmy rump that asks to be kicked, its trembling penholding paw that scribbles, "kick me," in the dust. It will deserve your anger.

The extremes of self-apply and self-denigration in the personae, as in Thomas' life, are humanized by comic exaggeration. If much of Thomas' poetry has been criticized as adolescent and immature, the fact remains that he is concerned with the limitations of human beings at their most critical period, adolescence, a period when the self is emerging from the conflicts of 'id' and 'ego.' Freud had exposed the horrifying implications of childhood maladjustments in his psychoanalytic theories; Dylan Thomas
wished to go further. Through comic parody and a kind of Swiftian, incisive juxtaposition of the human ego and his animal nature, Thomas cut both ends—he made the Freudian theories realistic, human and even, at times, laughable because they were so much a part of human nature; at the same time, the ironic self-display counterpoints the easy, humorous acceptance of self with a recurrent, clinical appraisal in the moments of self-failure. In the episode, "Extraordinary Little Cough," the "young dog" persona painfully tries to be like Brazell and Skully, the "two big bullies," and thus escape from the reticence and sexual fears of the "poor little Cough," a part of his own self. The embarrassing moment when his cap drops, while he is being introduced to three young girls, is revealing:

As I bent down, three lumps of sugar fell from my blazer pocket. "I've been feeding a horse," I said, and began to blush guiltily when all the girls laughed.

I could have swept the ground with my cap, kissed my hand gaily, called them señoritas, and made them smile without tolerance. Or I could have stayed at a distance, and this would have been better still, my hair blown in the wind at all that evening, wrapped in mystery and staring at the sun, too aloof to speak to girls; but I knew that all the time my ears would have been burning, my stomach would have been as hollow and as full of voices as a shell.

(See, p. 171)

Thomas' first published poem, "The Song of the Mischievous Dog" is in the derivative mode of his Grammar School magazine publishing days. Yet it is significant that he begins this piece of humorous verse with the line, "There
are many who say that a dog has its day." Among his early drafts (most of them remain unpublished as poems) from his Notebooks is the poem "Sweet as [a dog's] kiss night sealed," in which the dog image is associated with tenderness, peace and kindness. Opposed to the dog image and emphasizing its life-preserving qualities are the destructive animal images:

The maggots feasting on dead flesh,
The vulture with appraising beak,
The redcheaked vampire at the neck,
There is the skeleton and the naked ghost . . .

The personae in Thomas' poetry do not always associate youthful innocence with the dog image. As seen in the projections of the adolescent's inner feelings, conflicts and sexual confusions, there is a dark comedic streak in the personae's identification with or dissociation from their animal nature. In "Out of the Sighs" the persona regrets that man has nothing to give; his sterility, his inability to offer, if not love, anything at all, is man's "perpetual defeat." In this context, he evokes the dog-man image:

Were that enough, bone, blood, and sinew,
The twisted brain, the fair-formed loin,
Groping for matter under the dog's plate,
Man should be cured of distemper. (CP, p. 57)

In other poems, the shapeless, unborn persona, the Shandian figure, often describes the process of his conception and creation in images of the bestiary devoid of the free-spirited dog image:

The patchwork halves were cloves as they scudded
The wild pigs' wood, and slime upon the trees,
Sucking the dark, kissed on the cyanide
And loosed the braiding adders from the hairs;
Rotating halves are horning as they drill
The arterial angel.

("My World is Pyramid," CP, p. 35)

In "Before I Knocked and Flesh Let Enter," the images of the worm and the maggot link the unborn foetus persona to the cycle of death-in-life: "I who was shapeless as the water.../Was brother to Mnetha's daughter/And sister to the fathering worm" (CP, p. 8); "My heart knew love, my belly hunger;/I smelt the maggot in my stool" (CP, p. 9). The human self, at times a dog figure, at times a worm, ranges among all evolutionary scales in order to comprehend its own identity and destiny. Perhaps the most striking image of the evolving persona occurs in the first sonnet of the sequence, "Altarwise by Owl-Light":

Altarwise by owl light in the half-way house
The gentleman lay graveward with his furies;
Abaddon in the hangnail cracked from Adam,
And, from his fork, a dog among the fairies,
The atlas-eater with a jaw for news,
Bit out the mandrake with to-morrow's scream.

(CP, p. 80)

Tindall concludes that the movement in this section is towards the birth of "Thomas, the young creative devil-dog mandrake," for Thomas was a reporter for the Swansea paper at one time and could be said to have had "a jaw for news." Tindall concludes that the movement in this section is towards the birth of "Thomas, the young creative devil-dog mandrake," for Thomas was a reporter for the Swansea paper at one time and could be said to have had "a jaw for news." 31

The mandrake legend is explicated by H. H. Kleinman in some detail:

The mandrake has a bifurcated root, giving the appearance of a tiny human form. It was rare, valuable, and dangerous to obtain. Medieval legend
endowed it with the power to induce fecundity and assuage pain. In order to uproot a mandrake one had to avoid being within hearing distance of its fatal scream; therefore, a dog was tied to a mandrake root and lured forward to grab the food, pulling the mandrake out of the earth; and at that moment the piercing deadly scream of the mandrake killed the dog.32

The reader is confronted with images that move from the Biblical sphere to the present world of journalism and back to legend and myth. Further, the reader must unravel the words "altarwise" and "owl light" to see that they are compounds or words, parts of which have been transposed—"altarlight" and "owlwise." Engaged in an activity of perpetual cross-transference, the reader is prepared for the dog-poet persona's own movement from the stance of the observer and reporter to that of an active participant. In proclaiming the story of the Nativity, the dog-poet must go through a kind of death for the birth of Christ or his own heart. The persona as "a dog among the fairies" echoes Eliot's phrase, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales." Sweeney, in Eliot's poem, is a figure of sordid animality whose coarseness is a contrast to the mythic reminders of spiritual beauty, the "nightingales" singing in the background (CPE, pp 35-36). By associating himself with the "dog" image and with Sweeney, the Thomas persona blatantly claims to be no more than a figure of animal spirits. It is significant to recall that Sweeney, in Eliot's "Fragment of an Agon," had asserted that life is nothing but "Birth, and copulation, and death"; so does the
dog-poet persona in Thomas' poem.

Furthermore, Kleinman's identification of dog with Christ, "the hound of Heaven, who bites out the mandrake (man) from the fork or loins of Abaddon, thus redeeming man from sin (Adam) and death (Abaddon)" is justifiable. The poetic persona in Thomas' poem "Foster the Light" addresses God: "High lord esquire, speak up the singing cloud,/And pluck a mandrake music from the marrowroot" (CP, p. 69). Moreover, the image of God as the "hound of Heaven" must have impressed him for he often acknowledged the influence of Francis Thompson; the image of the mandrake might have been influenced by Donne's use of it in "Go and Catch a Falling Star," or "The Progress of the Soule." The image is also recurrent in Shakespeare's plays (Romeo and Juliet, IV.iii.37; Anthony and Cleopatra, I.v.4; Henry IV, part II, I.i.i.17; III.i.i.339; VI.i.i.310).34

Dylan Thomas must have been aware of the intriguing fact that "dog" spelt backwards would read "god," as his playfulness with words makes clear. David Clay Jenkins points out in his article:

He had a love of words. He liked to twist them delightfully around, roll them and bowl them . . . He was delighted at subtitling himself for an advertising man: The Ugly Suckling; and astonished when he once found on a menu that 'live' backward spelt 'evil.' It must have been this playfulness with words that caused the boily boy to toy with his own name on the back of one of the notebooks: "Samoth Nalyd" (his name spelt backwards).35

The identification of poetic persona with dog and god (as
Christ), justifiable on grounds of sacrificial deaths that each undergoes, is also achieved by explosive verbal clowning.

To understand the significance of the roles played by the poetic personae, in Thomas' poetry, it is essential to keep in mind that its intrinsic quality is one of clowning. It is a quality that the modern poetic persona has come to adopt in the face of an age with few sustaining traditions—an age of comic-pathetic gestures rather than of any overwhelming tragic acts. Thomas' clown persona is an "Enfant Terrible" figure, a combination of the wildly wicked bohemian-rebel and the innocent, childlike druid-bard, a prophet and a pacifist—a figure who holds in himself the composite of contrarieties, even as Thomas felt he did: "I hold a beast, an angel and a madman in me." In the poem "My World is Pyramid," the persona is an unborn Shandian figure who relates the story of his own conception and birth with verbal and syntactical juggling; Tindall calls this juggling a kind of "metaphysical fun": "Plainer syntax could impair the gaiety, which, like the theme, requires a little darkness and something more than grotesque double rhymes: 'doubles . . . dabbles,' for instance, and 'bubbled . . . babbled'." The unborn persona describes himself as the "arterial angel" (CP, p. 35), "the unborn devil" with an "angel's hood" (CP, p. 37)—a product of the opposites described in "Incarnate Devil," "good" and "evil,"
God the "fiddling warden" of Eden and the "serpent" fiddling "in the shaping-time" (CP, p. 46). The "fiddling" action of both God and the serpent recalls the infamous Nero fiddling while Rome was burning down. Nero was a mad figure. The persona's identification of himself as madman grows out of his parodic version of the creative-destructive forces working in Eden.

In his letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, dated 9 May 1934, Thomas appraises himself as "a freak user of words, not a poet. . . . a fool like the hyena, sitting up till dawn without any pleasure, making a noise with his guts."\(^{38}\)

In another letter written to Marguerite Caetani, dated 6 November 1952, Thomas describes his own psychological conflicts with insight:

One instinct of fear is to try to make oneself as little, as unnoticeable, as possible, to cower, as one thinks, unseen and anonymous until the hunt is past. My fearful instinct is to bloat myself like a frog, to magnify my unimportance, to ring a bell for a name, so that, as I bluster and loom twice my size, the hunt, seeing me monstrous, bays by after different and humbler prey.\(^{39}\)

The madman in Thomas' short story, "The Mouse and the Woman," has a brief vision of life as something wonderful through the "dark woman" of his dreams: "She pointed out bird and bush with her fingers, illuminating a new loveliness in the wings and leaves, in the sour churning of water over pebbles, and a new life along the dead branches of the trees" (CS, p. 76). The madman, however, fails to keep his "miracle" and so "the miracle passed" (CS, p. 83). The
madman is also a creative artist, and the loss of his creation is through his own limitations: "He knew that he had failed before the eye of God and the eye of Sirius to hold his miracle" (CS, p. 85). A version of this madman appears in the poem, "Love in the Asylum." Here the madman persona lives in a house with "madhouse boards worn thin by [his] walking tears" (CP, p. 119). He too is visited by a girl "mad as birds." Here the persona, however, overcomes the failure that the madman in "The Mouse and the Woman" had experienced:

And taken by light in her arms at long and dear last
I may without fail
Suffer the first vision that set fire to the stars.

(CP, p. 119)

The clown as the devil, the angel and the madman is a figure from convention. In the medieval plays the devil often appears as a clown; in Marlowe's Faustus the devil appears as a bumptious trickster. The angelic aspect of the clown is explicit in his universal hearty, good humored Santa Claus image—a lovable, childlike, innocent figure. The clown as madman is a kind of "the sottie clown" defined by William Riggan in Picaros, Madmen, Naifs, and Clowns:

Yet inasmuch as . . . a sottie clown . . . annihilates reality, turns life into a game and the world upside down, and ends by creating chaos, there is something of a dark abyss beneath the whole elaborate joke; for the world inhabited by Harlequin and the sottie fool is irrational, menacing, and demonic.40

In Dylan Thomas' poems the devil-angel-madman clown persona
is transformed into a modern man, fraught by nerves, limitations, failures and unique revelations, in search of his own identity. Whether expressing sexual abhorrence or sexual indulgence, the bawdy, lewd court jester of the second-century Greek accounts underlies the complex persona exploring the creation and disintegration of the world and his own personality.

One of the crucial issues that the clown persona in Thomas' poems is responding to is his own failures—failure of the self to find reality, to find human value in others, and failure to feel. Outside Thomas' poetry, some of the bumbling, clownish figures in his play, Under Milk Wood, find a human generosity towards their own feelings. Like Joyce's Dubliners, Thomas' play explores the lives of ordinary people living in the pastoral-magical setting of the Welsh countryside, called "Llaregyb" in the play. One of the characters, Eli Jenkins, voices the strain of normalcy in apparent madness and clownish foolery that Dylan Thomas had struggled to express throughout his career. Jenkins' portrayal also brings a fresh way of looking at self in Thomas' creative output and also a possibility to accept oneself for all one's human inadequacies and failures:

We are not wholly bad or good
Who live our lives under Milk Wood.

In Thomas' poems, however, the various self-dramatizations of the persona are underlined by self-criticism. In "There
was a Saviour," the persona begins with an observation about the stricures of religious beliefs which imprison the children. Then slowly, in the third stanza, he includes himself and the reader among the lost children, both victims and participants of a ritual that stultifies human feeling:

There was glory to hear
In the churches of his tears
Under his downy arm you sighed as he struck,
O you who could not cry
On to the ground when a man died
Put a tear for joy in the unearthly flood
And laid your cheek against a cloud-formed shell:
Now in the dark there is only yourself and myself.

("There Was a Saviour," CP, p. 139)

The tone of outrage is deflected, in the last line, towards "yourself." The extreme opposite of this self-critical persona is the defiant rebel. Often the defiant persona is both comical and pathetic in his response to self-failure, as seen in the dog-man identity. The mixed attitude toward self is captured in the poem "Should Lanterns Shine":

So fast I move defying time, the quiet gentleman.
Whose beard wags in Egyptian wind.

I have heard many years of telling
And many years should see some change.

The ball I threw while playing in the park
Has not yet reached the ground.

(CP, p. 72)

The motion and activity of the defiant self-critical persona as well as his poised waiting for the ball to come down constitute both heroic and mock-heroic gestures.

The persona's failure to find human value in others is expressed as an inability to feel. In the story, Adventures
in the Skin Trade, this failure is expressed as a sexual impotence:

On his first free days since he was born Samuel sat with a loose girl in a locked bathroom over a tea-shop, the dirty curtains were drawn, and his hand lay on her thighs. He did not feel any emotion at all. O God, he thought, make me feel something, make me feel as I ought to, here is something happening and I'm cool and dull as a man in a bus.

(CS, p. 269)

Before exploring the poetic personae's responses to failure in feeling, it is interesting to trace the autobiographical truth underlying Thomas' presentation of Samuel's character and then see how he reworks a different kind of poetic persona. A letter Thomas wrote to Trevor Hughes at the time of his aunt Ann Jones's death reveals his consciousness of his own failure to feel:

But the foul thing is I feel utterly unmoved, apart, as I said, from the pleasant death-reek at my negroid nostrils. I haven't really the faintest interest in her or her womb. She is dying. She is dead. She is alive. It is all the same thing. I shall miss her bi-annual postal orders. And yet I like—liked her. She loves—loved—me. Am I, he said with the diarist's unctious, egotistic preoccupation with his own blasted psychological reactions to his own trivial affairs, callous and nasty? Should I weep? Should I pity the old thing? For a moment I feel I should. There must be something lacking in me. I don't feel worried, or hardly ever, about other people. It's self, self, all the time. . . . Is this, he pondered, a lack of soul?

A kind of "clown-against-the-universe," the Samuel-Dylan complex is "an outsider, an artful dodger," and in many ways one aspect of the Charles Chaplin figure—the agile, circuitous caricature who wishes to avoid "what he knows
will defy him." The other aspect of the Chaplin figure— the wise tramp with an abundance of feeling—is what gains development in the following poetic personae. Often this sympathetic aspect grows out of the earlier mask of the "sly opportunist" or the two masks appear as the opposing natures of two dramatic personae.

The attitudes of cynicism and denial of feeling and the human alternatives to such attitudes are explored in the poem "Find Meat on Bones." Here the father's advice to the son is:

"Find meat on bones that soon have none,  
And drink in the two milked crags,  
The merriest marrow and the dregs  
Before the ladies' breasts are hags  
And the limbs are torn.  
Disturb no winding-sheets, my son,  
But when the ladies are cold as stone,  
Then hang a ram rose over the rags. . . ."

But the son through the experience of pain and heartbreak in following his father's advice disposes of his father's denial of feeling:

"The maggot no man can kill  
And the man no rope can hang  
Rebel against my father's dream . . .

I cannot murder, like a fool,  
Season and sunshine, grace and girl,  
Nor can I smother the sweet waking."

The persona in "Out of the sighs" goes beyond rebellion. His response is one of giving:

For all there is to give I offer:
Crumbs, barn, and halter.  

His act of giving, however feeble or comically surreptitious, is one way of redeeming something out of his failures:

All could not disappoint;  
There must, be praised, some certainty,  
If not of loving well, then not,  
And that is true after perpetual defeat.

In "The Conversation of Prayer," the man on the stairs "full of tears" for the dying woman whom he loves is rewarded:  
"the man on the stairs/To-night shall find no dying but alive and warm/In the fire of his care his love in the high room" (CP, p. 111). On the other hand, the child going to bed, "not caring to whom he climbs his prayer," finds his own nemesis: He "shall drown in a grief as deep as his made grave" even as he is dragged "to one who lies dead" (CP, p. 111).

In the poem "Lament," the "windy boy" persona recalls his own outrageous wickedness with black humor:

And on seesaw sunday nights I wooed  
Whoever I would with my wicked eyes,  
The whole of the moon I could love and leave  
All the green leaved little weddings' wives  
In the coal black bush and let them grieve.

However, the persona grows out of this image of the self as callous:

And I gave my soul a blind, slashed eye,  
Gristle and rind, and a roarer's life,  
And I shoved it into the coal black sky  
To find a woman's soul for a wife.
The finest, most sustaining persona who lives out his true feelings is the boy mourning his aunt's death in "After the Funeral." Comparing this poem to the previously quoted letter of Thomas to Trevor Hughes at the time of his aunt's death, the reader notices a complete reversal of character portrayal—the unfeeling boy of the letter is transformed into the only sincere mourner among other hypocrites with their "mule praises, brays, /Windshake of sailshaped ears." The persona, beneath the cynicism of the first few lines expresses his own self-consciously inadequate but sincere memorial to his aunt:

But I, Ann's bard on a raised hearth, call all The seas to service that her wood-tongued virtue Babble like a bellbuoy over the hymning heads, Bow down the walls of the ferned and foxy woods That her love sing and swing through a brown chapel, Bless her bent spirit with four, crossing birds. (CP, p. 96)

The "wise fool" image is a significant mask because it is so different from the Dylan-Samuel identity. Usually, the Dylan-Samuel poetic personae have much in common and are often reflections of each other. But here the departure is an evidence of Thomas' ability to create personae who reflect the unexplored depths of feeling that he possessed but often feared to expose. This evidence also modifies Holbrook's assertion that Thomas' "poems are part of the disguise against the contact that would destroy," that is, the contact with the reality of his own inner self.45
The "wise fool" image of the poetic persona projects a positive response to self-failure. However, it is not the final gesture or even the only gesture in Thomas' poetry. There is always the devilish, wicked practical joker who cannot help but ridicule any signs of transformation in himself:

Chastity prays for me, piety sings,
Innocence sweetens my last black breath,
Modesty hides my thighs in her wings,
And all the deadly virtues plague my death!
("Lament," CP, p. 196)

Dylan Thomas' poetry is rich in the variety of personae who act out the comic-pathetic condition of modern man—a condition which E. E. Cummings explored in his poems and plays through the verbal acrobats and wily playfulness of the spunky little "i." In Cummings' play "Him," the character called Him compares an artist to a circus performer astride three chairs placed one on top of each other and balanced on a high wire. The three chairs proclaim the identity of the clown-acrobat figure: "I am an Artist, I am a Man, I am a Failure." So do the personae in Dylan Thomas' poetry:

I, in my intricate image, stride on two levels
Forged in man's minerals, the brassy orator
Laying my ghost in metal,
The scales of this twin world tread on the double,
My half ghost in armour hold hard in death's corridor,
To my man-iron sidle.  

(CP, p. 40)
References


   Note: Further quotes from the above text will be indicated by the contraction CPY followed by page numbers in parenthesis.


   Note: Further quotes from the above text will be indicated by the contraction SPEP followed by page numbers in parenthesis.


    Note: Riggan deals mainly with novels, but his identification of the different kinds of clown figures and his terminology can be applied to several personae in modern poetry.

    Note: Further quotes from the above text will be indicated by the contraction CPE followed by page numbers in parenthesis.


15 Riggan, p. 79.


    Note: Further quotes from the above text will be indicated by the contraction CS followed by page numbers in parenthesis.
Note: Further quotes from the above text will be indicated by the contraction CP followed by page numbers in parenthesis.

Note: The clown is a free ranging spirit who can move from the main-plot to the sub-plot and vice versa with impunity. The boys in Dylan Thomas' poem, like the clown, affirm human nature.


29 Maud, ed., Notebooks, p. 163.

30 Ibid., p. 163.

31 Tindall, p. 129.

33 Ibid., p. 19.

34 Ibid., p. 132.


37 Tindall, p. 71.


39 Ibid., p. 381.

40 Riggan, p. 97.


42 FitzGibbon, ed., Selected Letters, pp. 11-12.

43 Kerr, pp. 197-199.


   Note: Ferris quotes Moffat commenting on the likeness between Dylan Thomas and Charles Chaplin: "They were roughly the same size...and both possessed this extremely fluid rag-doll like, quick emotion, striding about the enormous drawing-room together, talking and chattering."

45 Holbrook, Code of Night, p. 205.

Conclusion

Hopkins, Thompson, and Johnson, each in his own way concerned himself with the panorama of the human self in conflict with itself and the divine force. In the milieu of religious and scientific disputations, of man's disaffection with his environment, both outer and inner, these poets employed what John Tyndall in another context referred to as "various modes of leverage" in order to "raise life to a higher level."1 Aware of the power of their own inner visions, they celebrated their adopted religion, Catholicism, as the mark of unity in an otherwise chaotic existence. Each of the poets set the goal of priesthood as his vocation in life, with varying sense of fulfilment. Hopkins became a Jesuit priest, achieving what he had prepared himself for, but he was never relieved of the immense responsibilities and heart-aches the vocation demanded of him—a human figure torn by illness, exhaustion, and constant self-reminder of his own slim poetic output. Francis Thompson studied for the priesthood only to be disappointed by the decision of the President of Ushaw College, who wrote to his father:

He has always been a remarkably docile and obedient boy, and certainly one of the cleverest boys in his class. Still, his strong, nervous timidity has increased to such an extent that I have been most reluctantly compelled to concur in the opinion of his Director and others that it is not the holy

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will of God that he should go on for the Priesthood.  

But Thompson expressed in his poetry his enthusiasm and faith in the Catholic tradition. Lionel Johnson constantly referred to becoming a priest even at the early age of seventeen, as evidenced in his letter to J. H. Badley, written on 10 May 1884:

I will be a priest of the Church of England . . . Only think of the chances which the priesthood offers: the countless influences of the pulpit and the altar, all potent against the devil in given feeble hands: and how I could train myself!

He, however, never realized his early ideal. In his yearnings for a spiritual order—a kind of Paterian "hieratic beauty"—Johnson converted to Catholicism and confirmed for himself that life is a ceremony and a ritual.  

Thus, each of the poets, Hopkins, Thompson, and Johnson found through his own effort an artistic rendering of his vocational ideal—a rendering not free of inner turmoil and self-laceration but also not bereft of a significant response to living on the brink of a century's final death throes. Hopkins, Thompson, and Johnson responded to the possibility of the death of God by the self's renewed assertion of a resurrected faith. The present study, emphasizing the poet-text-reader interactions, examines how specifically the poets differ in the way they handle human dilemmas at the crossroads of the earthly and the divine. It also studies how the poets direct their movement to success through failure, and how their personae's
sufferings, doubts and anxieties about the self's failures serve as straining, but necessary, directives for the final inscapes and visions of God.

The greater possibilities of individualizing the textual perspectives in Hopkins' poems prefigure the endeavors of the moderns. Although Hopkins differed from the moderns in projecting a religious certitude in his poems, the drama (both within the persona and in his interaction with the reader) takes precedence over any referential statements. The first two chapters concentrate on exposing the enactment of this drama in the context of self's struggle with different kinds of failure. The absence of a principle of individualization (such as Hopkins' "inscape" and "instress") in Francis Thompson and Lionel Johnson reduces their personae's perspectives to a theologically confirmed viewpoint. This reduction of the textual perspective does not allow the reader to make many revisions or modifications of past observations. However, in the third and fourth chapters, the present study identifies the nature and quality of the poet-reader-text transactions that are present in a selection of the minor poets' works. The thesis is that such a study leads to an understanding of the qualities in minor or major poems that can be of abiding interest and significance to an individual reader.

The study of the textual perspectives and their
interactions extends to the modern poets in the fifth chapter. The beginning of modernism was not marked by an immediately discernible demarcation. The fin de siècle mood continued into the twentieth century. Only now the historical turns and tides, which had been the source of disaffection among the decadents, became much more pronounced and could no longer be evaded—the von Hartmann interest in the unconscious reached a fully developed psychoanalytical theory in Freud; the British imperialism met defeat at the Boer wars; the illusory world of the decadent aesthete was replaced by the concrete images of the Imagistes, even as in painting a revolutionary trend towards innovation and individualism found expression in Fauvism, Abstract Impressionism, and Cubism. The moderns declared themselves free of the circumspection and strait-laced morality of Victorianism. But neither did they feel comfortable to be aesthetes living in an inner world of dreams. If they sought religious faith, they sought it as a direct statement of their own age's tragic search for the tenables; and if they rejected it, they only seemed to affirm the inevitable alienation of modern man.

With the moderns, the dilemma was not so much how to relate to God, how to resurrect the self's faith in ultimate goodness or how to celebrate triumph through defeat, but rather how to relate to oneself, how to understand the drive to failure, annihilation, war, atrophy within and without,
and how to express the disintegration and fragmentation of self and the world through language that sustains and personae that survive. The only triumphs that modern poets claimed were their constant projections of personae (vital, complex, often unexpected, and various) who invigorate the reading process despite their expressions of constant failure. The dramatic context, so appealing to the new critic (because so full of the possibilities for the interplay of irony, tension, and parody), becomes a medium for reader-involvement. This very medium is used to create a certain kind of reader--alienated, self-critical, and often a self-styled failure, in other words a figure who like the personae in modern poetry aspires to the role of a clown. This figure of the clown that both the personae and the readers shape into existence is really an image and an act of the mind, inflating and collapsing the substance of self and the world in its infinite bumps and seemingly accidental falls.
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