

“MY CRIES HEAVE, HERDS LONG”:
METAPHOR, POSTHUMANISM AND GERARD MANLEY
HOPKINS’ ‘NO WORST, THERE IS NONE’

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ABSTRACT

Taking its cue from the dense mesh of imagery in the lines “my cries heave herds-long, huddle in a main, a chief/ Woe, world sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing - / Then lull, then leave off” (Gerard Manley Hopkins’ *Terrible Sonnets*), this article explores the entanglement and permeability of the human, the animal and the prosthetic in the poem ‘No worst there is none’, and argues that Hopkins’ use of figurative language effects a valuable ‘decreation’ which enables us to interrogate the human, and prefigures a complex posthumanist understanding of our imbrication in earth’s matrix. The article draws upon the emergent framework of ecomaterialism, in which the world is viewed as a “densely intertwined and improvisational tissue of experience” (Abram), and which recognises the agency of all matter, the biosemiotic voice of the more-than-human, moving towards a concept of the metaphorical for our times which demonstrates the potential of metaphor to explore that relational ontology and to develop our apprehension of *natura loquens* and *natura agens*.

KEYWORDS: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Ecomaterialism, Metaphor, Posthumanism, Human & Non-Human Entanglement, Neuroscience

«MIS QUEJAS RECORREN LEGUAS SIN FIN»: METÁFORA· POSTHUMANISMO
Y «NO HAY NADA PEOR QUE ESTO» DE GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

RESUMEN

Partiendo de la densa red de imágenes de los versos “mis quejas recorren leguas sin fin, se amontonan en un dolor grande / e intenso, el llanto del mundo; en un yunque primigenio se retuercen y cantan - / más tarde, se adormecen y se marchan” (*Sonetos terribles* de Gerard Manley Hopkins), este artículo explora la interrelación y la permeabilidad de lo humano, lo animal y lo prostético en el poema “No hay nada peor que esto”, y propone que el uso del lenguaje figurativo de Hopkins efectúa una valiosa “descreación” que nos permite indagar en lo humano y prefigurar una comprensión posthumanista compleja de nuestra imbricación en la matriz de la tierra. El artículo se apoya en el marco novedoso del Ecomaterialismo, en el que el mundo se percibe como un “tejido de experiencia densamente improvisadora y estrechamente relacionada” (Abram), el cual reconoce también la agencialidad de toda la materia, la voz biosemiótica de lo más-que-humano, moviéndose hacia un concepto de lo metafórico contemporáneo que demuestre el potencial de la metáfora para explorar esa ontología relacional y para desarrollar nuestra apprehensión de *natura loquens* y *natura agens*.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Ecomaterialismo, metáfora, Posthumanismo, interrelación humano & No-Humano, Neurociencia.

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Despite their critical and aesthetic success, for Daniel Harris, Gerard Manley Hopkins' *Terrible Sonnets* are "failures" (xiii). While stating that 'nature' has all but disappeared from the poems, Harris characterises the sonnets as foregrounding images of "animalized sensory perceptions" (3), with the clear implication that this represents a corruption of poetic vision, a debasement and a transgression. He calls it Hopkins' "decreation into animalized humanity" (3, emphasis mine).

Taking its cue from the dense mesh of imagery in the lines "my cries heave herds-long, huddle in a main, a chief/ Woe, world sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing - / Then lull, then leave off", this essay explores the entanglement and permeability of the human, the animal and the prosthetic in the poem 'No worst there is none'. Drawing on the insights of posthumanist theory and the new materialisms, the essay argues that Hopkins' use of figurative language effects a valuable 'decreation' which enables us to interrogate the human, and prefigures a complex posthumanist understanding of 'natureculture' (Haraway), and what Cary Wolfe describes as "the embodiment and the embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal" (2010: xv). This argument is supported by reference to contemporary neuroscientific insights into right-brain function and linguistic theories of metaphor, both of which suggest that metaphorisation is an embodied process which enables us to apprehend our imbrication in the world. In this the essay moves towards, in David Punter's terms, a tentative "concept of the metaphorical for our times" (139), which has implications both for ecocriticism in general and, more specifically, for ecopoetics.

INTRODUCTION

The thought processes behind this essay were set in motion in the late spring of 2011 when I was staying in Co. Kilkenny in Ireland. Walking alone through the countryside, I came across a field of bullocks. They were huddled together in a corner of the field, raising their heads and bellowing. It was an extraordinary, primal sound, which set my heart pounding and had the same effect on me as hearing a child crying in pain or voices raised in anger in the next room. I would not want to try to speculate on what the bullocks were feeling, but their cries filled me with a sense of anguish and fear, and it occurred to me that though I could not decipher their language, it was nevertheless a sound which had some kind of shared meaning and which had somehow crossed the species barrier. At that moment it would have been impossible for me to doubt that I was part of the same animal substance as the cattle or that I was enmeshed in the same material world.

Almost instantaneously some lines came into my mind from Gerard Manley Hopkins' sonnet 'No worst, there is none': "my cries heave herds-long, huddle in a main, a chief/ Woe, world sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing - / Then lull, then leave off", and I wondered whether the bellowing of the bullocks was the sound that Hopkins was evoking in the poem and using as a metaphor for his own distress. At the same time I realised that this metaphor, and the use of imagery in



the poem as a whole, did not fully correspond with any concept or definition of figurative language I had previously been familiar with. Which was the ‘real’ and which was the ‘image’? Where did the human end and the animal begin? Where did the ‘natural’ end and the cultural or technological begin? How did the metaphors and their complex connotations relate to one another as they tangled together throughout the poem?

David Punter writes: “[...] we construct metaphors for our times, but we also construct *a concept of the metaphorical* for our times” (139, emphasis in original), suggesting that metaphor is historically situated and that, culturally speaking, it has both an indicative and constitutive role. This essay falls into three main sections. First, I would like to outline briefly some historical conceptions of the nature and function of figurative language and their influence on contemporary conceptions of metaphor, before touching on recent neuroscientific and linguistic research, which both frames metaphorisation as an integral and embodied means of interpreting our reality, and demonstrates the intrinsically metaphorical nature of our language. I will then discuss the ways in which posthumanism, with its notion of human embeddedness in our biological and technological worlds, offers a framework for a possible ‘concept of the metaphorical for our times’. In the third section I apply this notion to a reading of ‘No worst, there is none’, proposing that the poem’s complex metaphorical entanglement of self and world prefigures and enacts some of the central questions of posthumanism. In conclusion I suggest some implications of this concept of metaphor for ecopoetry.

METAPHOR

Punter makes the important point that the concept of metaphor is not a “pre-given datum” (139), and that, as suggested above, any construct of it will have a particular historical and cultural backdrop. There can be almost as many definitions of metaphor as there are eras and writers. However, there are certain aspects of our current cultural understanding of metaphor which have their roots in Classical, Enlightenment and Romantic writings, the implications of which continue to impact on the reception of ‘literary’ writing and the uneasy relationship and lack of equivalence between ‘scientific’ writing and literature. There appears to be a prevalent conception even now that metaphorisation is an act of intellectual and poetic artifice that is in some ways at odds with ‘objective truth’ or ‘reality’, a perception which perhaps harks all the way back to Plato’s contention that “truth is absolute and art mere illusion” (cited in Lakoff and Johnson 190). Aristotle, writing his *Poetics*, had a more positive view of art, and in particular the use of metaphor, ‘It is a great thing, indeed, to make proper use of the poetic form, [...] but the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor’ (*Poetics* 1459a, cited in Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, 190), and stressed the potential vitality of the device: ‘Ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh’ (*Rhetoric* 1410b, cited in Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, 190). But while he pinpointed the enhanced possibilities for ‘seeing’ available through metaphor, his notion that



the ability to use it was available only to the gifted few suggested that this was not a way of experiencing the world accessible to humanity as a whole: “This alone cannot be imparted to another: it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances” (*Poetics*, cited in Richards 89). This separation of the poet from the common people has perhaps played into a sense of doubt about the relevance or use of poetic discourse in the conduct of everyday life.

The emphasis on rationality of Enlightenment thought certainly promulgated a more emphatically negative view of the quotidian value of the metaphoric. John Locke, for example, claimed that “all the artificial and figurative application of words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement” (452). This mistrust of figurative language is mirrored in the reception of the Metaphysical poets of the 17th century, at least according to the famous and somewhat reductive summary of their endeavour made by Samuel Johnson in his ‘Life of Cowley’. In this case the mistrust arises from the poetry’s alleged lack of ability to move the passions—or ‘please’—rather than its effect on judgement. For Johnson, Metaphysical metaphor becomes a display of wit, in which “the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions” (133) in a wilful distortion of reality which values the vaunting of intelligence over genuine feeling. The notion of ‘nature’ and ‘art’ being ‘ransacked’ is telling in that it suggests (through its own metaphorical connotations) both that nature and culture are things which stand apart from—or in opposition to—essential human truth, and that the practice of metaphorisation, at least in the case of the Metaphysical poets, is a process of violent (mis)appropriation.

Whether it misleads the judgement through moving the passions or fails to move the passions through displays of wit, metaphor is so far basically understood as a largely intellectual (and poetic) process “by means of which one thing is made to stand in for another thing” (Punter 2). It may present the world afresh, but essentially it relies upon a conscious search to find the similar in the dissimilar, and in essence depends upon a dualistic manner of framing the world. This binary tendency is reflected in I.A. Richards’ 1936 discussion of metaphor in which he strove to find formal ways of describing the device. He devised the terms ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’, which Punter himself adopts in his 21st century analysis. Punter elaborates on these concepts, extrapolating: “tenor being the term which is being represented, the vehicle being the term which is doing the representing” (148), and thus perpetuating the notion of metaphor as being made up of two parts, one ‘real’ and one an ‘image’.

The Romantics diverged from this definition in the sense that they were looking for metaphors from the natural world in which one thing could perhaps be made to stand for *all* things—to evoke an overarching similarity—in order to enact their holistic vision of the one life of all creation. William Wordsworth, for example, in his 1802 Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, stated simply “poetry is the image of man and nature” (105), signifying a belief in a profound unity which could find expression in poetry. Ultimately, for Wordsworth, this sense of harmonious oneness develops into a transcendent vision linking man with God (as the originator of all creation). This manifests itself in the imagery of passages such as the Snowdon



episode from The Prelude Book XIV where, applying an image from the human world to 'nature', the landscape is imagined as a "mind/ that feeds upon infinity" (1805: l. 70-71) which brings the observer "to hold fit converse with the spiritual world" (l. 108). For the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, too, the natural world is also the source of an overarching image: "the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind" (22), a means by which we might reach towards an understanding of the human soul as it aspires towards Godliness. These transcendent applications of metaphor have been carried over into later literature which takes its place within the broader Romantic/spiritual tradition. In the poet R.S. Thomas's work this is associated with the search for the 'ultimate reality' –in his case, perhaps, the Christian God:

I can't think of a more direct access to meaning and eternity than metaphor – it's the unifying process which goes on throughout the Universe, isn't it? It's the ability to see all things as one, so that if these similarities exist perhaps there is in a way one gigantic metaphor which commands all things, and this is the ultimate reality. (R.S. Thomas, *The South Bank Show*, 17/2/91).

This Romantic tradition of the revelatory, transcendental interpretation of landscape has, of course, come under critical scrutiny by some ecocritics, for whom it represents a dangerous tendency to appropriate and to value landscape "less for its own sake than as a way of achieving spiritual rebirth" (Jarvis 122). While it may seek metaphors of ultimate oneness, this is of a metaphysical rather than an embodied kind. For Emerson, the universe is composed of nature and the soul, the soul being the 'me' and nature (including the body) being the 'not me', showing that even the quest for metaphorical unity is dependent upon an ontology which perpetuates the Cartesian mind/body binary and denies the ultimate imbrication of the human in the material world. It is perhaps because of this legacy that there seems to be an ongoing suspicion of metaphor in the context of contemporary writing about the natural world, even from the perspective of creative writers themselves. In a recent interview with *Earthlines* magazine, for example, Jay Griffiths says of her practice:

The odd thing is that I (like many writers?) feel that I live most powerfully in the world of metaphor rather than the world of reality. This is a deep sadness in me and maybe a lack in me, but it is a truth. In writing, I am able to carry myself across from my own inner world out into the real world. But I can only do so metaphorically. (28-9)

There is a sense here that in 'resorting' to metaphor to mediate between the inner and outer world Griffiths is in some way betraying the material world around her and rejecting 'the world of reality'.



METAPHOR: NEUROSCIENCE AND LINGUISTICS

In recent years, however, there has been a radical re-appraisal of metaphor in the fields of neuroscience and linguistics, the implications of which have, perhaps, yet to be fully realised in literary studies and ecocriticism. It suggests that, far from removing us from our reality, metaphorisation is an integral means by which we apprehend that complex reality and our imbrication within it. In neuroscience this insight has come about within the context of increased understanding of the two hemispheres of the human brain. In a ground-breaking work published in 2009, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, former clinician and consultant psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist draws on emerging research to outline the varying functions of the hemispheres and the complex interplay between the two. Put simply (and it is well worth reading McGilchrist's detailed and sophisticated account), though each side of the brain is able, if necessary, to perform the functions associated with the other, the left and right hemispheres provide us with two distinctly different ways of apprehending the world. McGilchrist characterises these as follows:

The right hemisphere underwrites breadth and flexibility of attention, where the left hemisphere brings to bear focussed attention. This has the related consequence that the right hemisphere sees things whole, and in their context, where the left hemisphere sees things abstracted from context, and broken into parts, from which it then reconstructs a 'whole': something very different. (27-8)

His view is that both of these functions are essential to the human, one to accommodate the complexity of experience, the other to sort and make use of the data:

Hence the brain has to attend to the world in two completely different ways, and in so doing to bring two different worlds into being. In the one, we experience –the live, complex, embodied, world of individual, always unique beings, forever in flux, a net of interdependencies, forming and reforming wholes, a world with which we are deeply connected. In the other we 'experience' our experience in a special way: a 're-presented' version of it, containing now static, separable, bounded, but essentially fragmented entities, grouped into classes, on which predictions can be based. (31)

McGilchrist's overriding thesis is that western post-Enlightenment thought has seen a gradual favouring of the left hemisphere, to the detriment of our species and our modes of being in the world. Towards the end of *The Master and his Emissary*, McGilchrist carries out an extended imagining of what the world would be like if the left brain (the 'emissary' in McGilchrist's metaphor) were allowed entirely to dominate the right (the master) in terms of our understanding and behaviour. It's a chillingly dystopian picture of fragmentation of knowledge, abstraction and reification: "fewer people would find themselves doing work involving contact with anything in the real, 'lived' world, rather than with plans, strategies, paperwork, management and bureaucratic procedures" (429). This left-brain regime stresses subtly increased forms of government control, constant monitoring via CCTV



cameras, and a gradual ‘disenchantment’ with the world around us. Of course, as is McGilchrist’s intention, it reads uncomfortably like an insightful and accurate analysis of contemporary (western) society. McGilchrist himself comments: “This is what the world would look like if the emissary betrayed the Master. It’s hard to resist the conclusion that his goal is within sight” (434).

Significantly for this essay, one of the key right-brain functions which McGilchrist sees as performing a necessary corrective to the experience of the world afforded by the left brain is the capacity to deal with metaphor. Metaphor is, in his view, the means by which we form complex kinaesthetic, holistic pictures of embodied experience. He goes as far as to suggest that it is the linguistic intermediary that, far from removing us from the felt world, returns us to it. Language “begins in the world of experience and returns to the world of experience –and it does so via metaphor, which is a function of the right hemisphere and is rooted in the body” (115). He elaborates:

Only the right hemisphere has the capacity to understand metaphor. That might not sound too important –like it could be a nice thing if we were going to do a bit of lit crit. But that is just a sign of the degree to which our world of discourse is dominated by left-hemisphere habits of mind. Metaphoric thinking is fundamental to our understanding of the world, because it is the only way in which understanding can reach outside the system of signs to life itself. It is what links language to life. (115)

To an ecocritic about to embark on some ‘lit crit’ this does not sound at all unimportant. An understanding of metaphor as the means of linking language to life is profoundly significant within the context of the ecocritical project, and has major implications for our response to and use of metaphor in literary discourse.

Research into the linguistic use of metaphor, which predates and prefigures McGilchrist’s work, but also draws on recent advances in neuroscientific knowledge, has also shown the extent to which metaphor is both an embodied response to the world and is embedded in our language to powerful effect. In *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson point out the futility of any attempt to separate the literal from the figurative in the search for ‘objective truth’, effectively demonstrating the omnipresence of conceptual metaphors in even the most apparently ‘objective’ language. Their analysis of orientational metaphors, for example, demonstrates the way in which these metaphors arise from our embodied existence: “HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN. I’m feeling *up*. That *boosted* my spirits [...] I’m really *low* these days, my spirits *sank* [...] Physical basis: Drooping posture typically goes along with sadness and depression, erect posture with a positive emotional state” (2003, 15, capitalisation and emphases in original), and their work on conceptual metaphors such as “argument is war” (4) shows how once a metaphorical concept is culturally established it begins “to structure (at least in part) what we do and how we understand what we are doing [...]” (5).

Like McGilchrist, Lakoff and Johnson also make a powerful statement of the value of metaphors in enabling us to make sense of the world:



But metaphors are not merely things to be seen beyond. In fact, one can see beyond them only by using other metaphors. It is as though the ability to comprehend experience through metaphor were a sense, like seeing or touching or hearing, with metaphors providing the only ways to perceive and experience much of the world. *Metaphor is as much part of our functioning as our sense of touch and as precious* (2003, 239, emphasis mine).

Metaphorisation, then, is an aspect of human ‘reason’ that “makes use of rather than transcends our animal nature” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, 4). Previous formulations of metaphor as, by its very nature, a conscious, intellectual device, are challenged here by the picture which emerges of its role in a profoundly phenomenological and often unconsciously generated response to the world which arises from the embodied mind. With this new understanding of the mind and its processes, for these thinkers, “the question of what a human being is arises for us anew in the most urgent way” (1999, 7).

The idea that metaphorisation raises questions regarding the nature of the human itself, suggests that posthumanism and its recent formulations via material ecocriticism may provide an ontological framework for a ‘concept of the metaphorical for our times’. One of the gaps in McGilchrist’s and Lakoff and Johnson’s analysis, is, perhaps, a recognition of the potential for this embodied metaphorisation to facilitate a profound apprehension of our ecological entanglement with and immersion in the world. This is just the kind of understanding that contemporary strands of posthumanist ecocriticism are reaching towards.

POSTHUMANISM, *ANIMOT* POSTHUMANISM AND MATERIAL ECOCRITICISM

Posthumanism is emerging in the ecological humanities as a means of interrogating the human, dismantling the tradition of the Great Chain of Being, and disrupting the binaries enshrined in western post-Enlightenment thought – binaries such as human/nature, human/animal, culture/nature, and, in a more ‘cyborg’ strand, human/machine. Louise Westling was one of the first critics to begin to give posthumanism a specifically ecocritical spin in her essay ‘Literature, the environment and the question of the posthuman’. In this piece she combines Cary Wolfe’s insight that “the ‘human’ [...] is not now and never was itself” (2010 xiii) with Jacques Derrida’s questioning of the term ‘the animal’ and his sense of “the heterogeneous multiplicity of the living” (399). She borrows the latter’s term *animot* (a neologism which plays on the homophones *maux*, of *animaux* – animals, and *mot* – word, in order to disrupt the semantic boundary between human and animal) to formulate the concept of “animot posthumanism” (29), which blends an ongoing interrogation of the human with an increasing awareness of animal subjectivity. Drawing on the phenomenological perspectives of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and David Abram, Westling emphasises our imbrication in the “matrix of earth’s life” (26), and foregrounds the myriad biosemiotic voices of that earth. The



world experienced through this imbrication is, in David Abram's words, a 'densely intertwined and improvisational tissue of experience' (145). Westling is careful to differentiate between this strand of biologically embedded posthumanism and more techno- or 'cyborg' incarnations, contending that the latter have limited relevance to ecocriticism since, in her view, they promulgate the concept of the *transhuman* –the perfectible, technological human, which is able to surpass its embodiment– thus perpetuating problematic humanist modes of thinking.

However, the insights of the recent New Materialisms, with their understanding of the complex entanglement of areas of life previously deemed discrete, such as the biological and the political, and the common vitality of all matter, have resulted in more disturbing implications which somewhat disrupt Westling's (and Abram's) broadly harmonious deep ecological sense of human immersion in the world. Jane Bennett, in *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, stresses that the "onto-story" (4) of shared materiality she proposes is not one of unproblematic interrelationship: "in contrast to some versions of deep ecology, my monism posits neither a smooth harmony of parts nor a diversity unified by a common spirit" (ix). Bruno Latour's notion of the "Gordian knot" (3) in which "biology, sociology, natural history, ethics, sociobiology" (50), human and non-human, local and global, are all interwoven suggests that our entanglement in the world may bring us into increasingly dissonant and complicated relationships, and foregrounds the necessity of exploring new paradigms such as Donna Haraway's "natureculture" (2), and, as Cary Wolfe contends, "the embodiment and the embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal" (2010: xv). This also suggests a need to re-engage with the forms of techno posthumanism Westling rejects, in order to reach towards a more fully encompassing ontology. Given the emergent nature of posthumanist thought and its varying strands, it is unsurprising that there is not yet any clear sense of ontological cohesion or synthesis. But perhaps this is the point. Neil Badmington, acknowledging this uncertainty, contends "what matters, rather, is that thought keeps moving in the name of a beyond, in the shadow of the unknown, in the faultlines of the 'post-'" (10). And just as thought must keep moving, so must our understanding of being human. As Serenella Iovino states, "far from being an essence and an end, being human is a dynamic process, a continuous biological and conceptual evolution" (58).

The sense of complicated and contingent entanglement and continuous coming into being described above emphasises all the more the vital importance of the kind of right-brain function outlined by McGilchrist which might equip us with the ability to accommodate and translate our experience of this disorientating imbrication in "the live, complex, embodied, world of individual, always unique beings, forever in flux, a net of interdependencies, forming and reforming wholes, a world with which we are deeply connected" (31). As we have seen, McGilchrist theorises that one of the means by which the right hemisphere accomplishes this task is through metaphorisation. But what might the kind of metaphor able to reflect this complicated world look like, and how might it be presented culturally?

These questions bring me to discussion of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and his use of metaphor, particularly in the poem 'No worst, there is none',



which does indeed present a complex world view that hints at the interrelation of the human and the animal and foregrounds a sense of profound imbrication and entanglement of the human in its biological, cultural and 'prosthetic' world, all of which are involved in a momentum of continuous becoming.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS AND METAPHOR

Having suggested that Hopkins might provide us through his profoundly innovative practice with 'a concept of the metaphorical for our times', it is important to note that there are undoubtedly points of connection between Hopkins' use of metaphor and that of earlier poets and eras. The phrase "mine, O thou Lord of life, send my roots rain" from 'Thou art indeed just Lord', for example, has resonances of the heart/flower which has recovered "greenesse" in the Metaphysical poet George Herbert's 'The Flower'. There is also a sense of the transcendental oneness of the life of all things that Wordsworth strove to express. Much of Hopkins' work is concerned with the representation of the world as the work of God's creation. It is this aspect of his poetry which Daniel Harris sees as representing his greatest achievement, revealing as it does his "imaginative temperament and religious vision" (xiii) and always working towards "colloquy with God" (xiii).

Hopkins' method of representing elements of God's creation, however, involved a theoretical and literary development which took him beyond the poetic forms employed by earlier poets and articulated a more complex apprehension of those elements. He endeavoured to show the 'this-ness' (or *haeccitas*)¹ of all things through his notion of 'inscape', which represents the very essence of any given thing, and 'instress', which relates to the innate force or energy which both sustains the 'inscape' and is a conduit for its perception. Perception is a key word here since, as W.H. Gardner points out in his introduction to Hopkins' poems; "[...] inscape may be perceived through all the senses at once" (1953: xxi). This mobilisation of the senses also carries through into the reading of the poems, with Hopkins using idiosyncratic rhythm and stress in the poetry to further convey the energy of the 'instress' to the reader's ear. In this respect Hopkins' approach is profoundly phenomenological in the terms which Abram (1996) describes,² and corresponds with (though predating by over a hundred years) Westling's notion of a posthumanism of sensuous imbrication. His interactions with the natural world are realised in the poems in a kind of linguistically enacted synaesthesia which brings all the senses into play, conjuring tactile impressions, visual images and sounds.

¹ A concept deriving from the work of Medieval theologian Duns Scotus, who was a major influence on Hopkins (Parham, 2010).

² For example, in 'The Windhover', having evoked the energy and movement of the falcon, Hopkins goes on: "My heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird", just the kind of physical resonance with the natural world which Abram (1996, 2010) sees as vital to our reconnection with the more-than-human.



These concepts add another dimension to the phenomenological aspects of the approach, in that Hopkins also wishes to understand and express the way in which the ‘instress’ enables the ‘inscape’ to take hold in the mind. This mirrors the concern of Lakoff and Johnson who state that “phenomenological reflection, though valuable in revealing the structure of experience, must be supplemented by empirical research into the cognitive unconscious” (1999, 5). Hopkins’ means of enacting ‘instress’ is through complex metaphorical perceptions which arise and are perhaps also received at an unconscious level. An example of this method is the evocation of the inscape and instress of the falcon in ‘The Windhover’. In the line “how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing”, for example, the metaphoric use of the word ‘wimpling’ seems to call into play a range of associations: the idea of a medieval head-dress connected with devotional service; a ruffled or plaited fabric; the movement of water under the wind. I would suggest that it is not unrealistic to consider every possible connotation of each word (extant in his lifetime) since Hopkins was himself so alive to these possibilities. I would also contend that the entanglement of images from the ‘natural’ or more-than-human world with those deriving from the cultural and prosthetic world (as in the example above) is not accidental. His diary entry for September 24th 1863, for example, features an extended analysis of the word ‘horn’, exploring a host of etymological and metaphorical applications of the word in a list which makes no distinction between the biological and the technological³. Later in this diary entry he also turns to the non-literal connotations arising from the sound of words. In this respect, Hopkins seems to have intuited the dual nature of language and metaphor as arising both from immediate embodiment but also the (still embodied) cognitive unconscious long before linguists and neuroscientists reached the same conclusion.

THE ‘TERRIBLE SONNETS’ AND ‘NO WORST, THERE IS NONE’

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
 More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
 Comforter where, where is your comforting?
 Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
 My cries heave, herds-long, huddle in a main, a chief
 Woe, world sorrow, on an age-old anvil wince and sing –
 Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked. ‘No ling-
 ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief’.

³ The diary entry begins (but subsequently continues in this vein for a further page and half): “The various lights under which a horn may be looked at have given rise to a vast number of words in language. It may be regarded as a projection, a climax, a badge of strength, power or vigour, a tapering body, a spiral, a wavy object, a bow, a vessel to hold withal or to drink from, a smooth hard material not brittle, stony, metallic or wooden etc”.



Oh the mind, mind has mountains, cliffs of fall;
Frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: All
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

The 'Terrible Sonnets' of 1885 can be regarded as something of a departure from Hopkins' previous work. Although they represent a continuity with his lifelong search for God and a similar sensitivity to the entanglement of the literal and the figurative, human and more-than-human, they project a more chaotic and complicated imbrication. In critical terms they have sometimes been seen as an aberration in Hopkins' oeuvre, a failure of vision, albeit a powerful and artistically successful one, in which his evocations of elements of nature as evidence of God's creation are replaced by an uncontrolled solipsistic projection of his own self-image onto the world, as he falls into a sense of desolation and estrangement from God. Daniel Harris suggests that they "fail" to embody the methods [Hopkins] had previously employed" (xiii). He argues that the poet himself "saw in these poems the fragmentation of his capacity to represent his Christian vision adequately" (xiii). He bases this interpretation, at least in part, on Hopkins' reference to some of the sonnets in a letter to Robert Bridges of 1st September 1885; "I shall shortly have some sonnets to send you, five or more. Four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will" (2002, 263). However, as Harris himself states, Hopkins must have seen some value in the poems or he would have destroyed or sought to suppress them, as he did with others. Indeed Harris, having named them failures on some counts, also believes that they "show a sudden and darkly brilliant heightening in Hopkins' scope and linguistic incisiveness" (xiv).

For Harris, though, this incisiveness is not enacted by the metaphoric content of the poems. Believing that 'nature' has all but disappeared from the poetry here, he states categorically that there are only seven natural metaphors in total in the sonnets (though the metaphor central to my inquiry, 'my cries heave herds-long', is not included in his list) with the dominant images being those of "distorted and animalized sensory perceptions" (3), which reveal Hopkins' "deformed image of his own humankind" (xiii). He feels that in general the use of imagery in these poems is inferior –he speaks of "the failure, in the entire group, of what Ruskin calls the 'penetrative imagination'" (19) and the "loss of capacity [...] to 'catch' the inscapes of nature" (ibid). These comments perhaps say more about the critic than the poem, arising, as they seem to, from Harris' own deep-seated cultural and theological conviction about what constitutes the human, and, indeed, what constitutes 'nature'.

I began my own inquiry spurred on by my curiosity about the metaphor, "my cries heave, herds-long", because of what appeared to me not as evidence of a terrifying eruption of the beast within but as the equitable arrangement of man and cattle in the image. As I began to look at the poem in more detail, my conviction grew that its immense power lies in its extraordinary metaphoric density – the way in which the images flow inextricably into each other, and the richness and



embeddedness of their connotations –which points to an unusually complex sense of human imbrication in the world. This is not to suggest that the poem models a specifically ecological sensibility or to deny that its primary concern is mental suffering and a loss of access to faith (with many of its allusions drawing on aspects of theological belief). However, I would contend that in many ways its metaphorisation prefigures some of the recent neuroscientific and linguistic insights discussed above, with this poem (and other sonnets in this sequence) going further than Hopkins' earlier work in evoking the sense of contingency and entanglement that postmodern and posthumanist thought are only now beginning to address. In the complex interweaving of its imagery 'No worst, there is none' prefigures the kind of 'natureculture' advanced by Haraway, even a re-tying of Latour's 'Gordian knot'.

In terms of the kind of brain functions McGilchrist describes, in his utter distress Hopkins perhaps lets fall away the stranglehold grip of the left hemisphere on rationality and singular precision, and experiences the bewildering holism of the right. McGilchrist's discussion of the arena of right brain function could almost be put forward verbatim as a description of the world Hopkins' use of metaphor in the poem conjures up –one which is: "forever in flux, a net of interdependencies, forming and reforming wholes, a world with which we are deeply interconnected" (31). In fact, McGilchrist himself makes reference to Hopkins in this context:⁴ "Hopkins is a case of particular interest: almost everything about him suggests a right-hemisphere predominance" (380). He outlines the significance of the poet's interest in inscape and instress, his sense that "the ground of beauty was sameness within difference, and difference within sameness" (381) and his stressing of "the importance of the relationship between things over the things themselves" (381). It is perhaps also significant that the sonnets were written in a time of profound emotional distress. McGilchrist includes a cautious discussion of the relative functions of the brain hemispheres in terms of emotion, suggesting in broad terms that the right brain is associated with sadness. He also makes mention of Hopkins' observation that some of the 'Terrible Sonnets' came to him unbidden, but here in support of his notion that Hopkins was experiencing a kind of right brain inspirational epiphany rather than a debasement of poetic vision.

In 'No worst, there is none', Hopkins uses a variety of techniques to express an episode of extreme mental suffering. As already discussed, his use of metaphor in poems predating this sonnet was profoundly embodied. Similarly, this poem enacts its subject in a synaesthesia which calls upon every sense: in the octet he evokes tactile sensation and physical pain in the words "pangs", "wring" and "wince"; sounds through expressions such as "cries", "sing", "shrieked"; emotional suffering and balm in the words "grief", "comforting", "sorrow", "relief"; and movement in "heave" and "huddle". There is a sensuous richness to the poem even before the linguistic con-

⁴ This was something I was unaware of when I first wrote the paper that has been written up as this essay, but which gave me increased confidence in my conviction that Hopkins' use of metaphor prefigured some of the much later insights of neuroscience.



notations of each of these words (and the phrases in which they occur) are explored. In developing the 'inscape' and 'instress' of his emotion Hopkins plays on all of the associations the words carry with them. 'Pitch' and 'pitched', for example, play on the variety of their possible grammatical forms, acting verbally, adjectivally and nominally to suggest staking a point of rest, being hurled through the air, and the thick, black impenetrability of tar. They also evoke a sense of sound, the verb and noun 'pitch' also relating to the frequency of a note which dictates how high or low it is. Here they conjure the idea of intensifying cries of grief, prefiguring the actual 'cries' which appear later in the octet.

In terms of the movement of the poem, there is an energy whereby the syntax constantly carries one forwards, enacting the motion of being "pitched past pitch" and evoking the sense of a self and world constantly involved in dynamic processes of change. The first line of the poem immediately confounds our grammatical expectations using the superlative "worst" rather than the expected comparative "worse", prefiguring the infinite possibilities of suffering, and indeed the poet predicts that the pangs of grief will intensify, will "wilder wring". Again, 'wring' carries plural connotations – a sense of twisting material to remove fluid; the writhing of a body in pain; (from its homophone 'ring') the sound of a bell. A pause in the onward motion comes after this with the two questions of lines three and four, where the poet calls on the "Comforter" and "Mary" to release him from his pain, but then we are plunged back into the tumultuous experience of distress. "My cries heave herds-long" is for me the central metaphor of the poem, conjuring as it does, without naming them, cattle and our kinship with them, and expressing in the very entanglement of the metaphor our animal imbrication in the world. Again, the complicated syntax of the lines carries us forward. At several points where we would expect to find the closure of a clause, Hopkins pushes it onwards by substituting one part of speech for another. The "main" of "huddle in a main", instead of acting nominally becomes an adjective for the subsequent phrase, "a chief woe, world sorrow".

The next image, "on an age old anvil", takes us in to the area of technology, and again gives force to the sense of the momentum of continuous becoming in the poem. The metaphor of the anvil suggests creation⁵ and transfer of energy, a reading which the, at first sight, contradictory linkage of "wince and sing" allows –wince alluding to physical pain but sing suggesting a more positive response. The final phrases of the octet compounds this sense of headlong momentum –the personification 'Fury' is allowed "no lingering", but must be "brief" and "fell". Hopkins has again here disrupted the expected grammatical construction of the line –"Let me be fell", like 'pitch' and 'wring' has a complicated array of grammatical possibilities, meanings and associations. "Fell" in its primary adjectival sense means fierce, cruel, terrible and destructive (Shorter OED, 944); but it is also the past tense of the verb 'fall', perhaps giving an additional sense here of being 'fallen' in the biblical sense

⁵ The blacksmith and the farrier, associated with the use of the anvil, play a positive creative and self-creating role in other poems by Hopkins, e.g. 'Felix Randall'.



of sinful and disobedient, or fallen physically through accident or illness, or in the emotional sense of being depressed in spirits; and in its verbal present tense form it means to lay low, for example to cut down a tree. The cumulative heft of these connotations prepares us for the dominant image of the sestet.

Four of the final six lines of the poem put forward one extended metaphor –of the mind as a mountain. While this may be viewed as a more conventional comparison, the way in which Hopkins develops the theme enacts something more akin to common substance than comparison. In other words, the “cliffs of fall” of the mind evoke the same vertiginous embodied response as literal cliffs. At the same time they continue to carry the more cultural associations of “fall” such as the religious connotations of sinfulness and disobedience discussed above. In using the word “fathomed” Hopkins reveals his sensitivity to the combination of the word’s more literal application with its role in the conceptual metaphor of the mind and ideas as spatial. “Fathomed” can signify gauging the depth of an abyss but also the understanding of a cognitive process. His metaphor also builds powerfully on the already established sense (as per Lakoff and Johnson’s analysis) of ‘sad’ being metaphorically characterised as ‘down’.

In the absence of transcendental, religious succour, Hopkins finds a stark comfort –the cessation of anguish in sleep and, finally, physical death: “Here! Creep/ Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all/ Life death does end and each day dies with sleep” (107). Harris’ interpretation of the poem as a whole is that it reflects “a mind wholly unhinged by the dissolution of the value it confronts”. Perhaps it is this very dissolution of value which enables an apprehension of the kind of imbrication the poem enacts. As his metaphysics deserts him, Hopkins’ sense of relationship with the material world rises to the fore. In the final chapter of *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, Robert Pogue Harrison suggests that our understanding of dwelling on the earth is limited by our lack of instinctive knowledge of finitude –of dying. He says; “And in the final analysis only this much seems certain: that when we do not speak our death to the world we speak: death to the world” (249). By failing to understand the implications of our own mortality we condemn the planet to death. In ‘No worst, there is none’ Hopkins does not shrink from speaking our death – our ultimate dwelling within the matrix of earth’s life and our shared destiny with the cattle.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the ongoing cultural view of metaphor I touched on earlier in the essay, as being ‘deceitful’, and at odds with ‘truth’, I have argued in this essay that, quite to the contrary, metaphor gives us an access point which enables us to interpret our ‘reality’ more fully than any other cognitive or linguistic tool, and potentially reveals to us our imbrication in earth’s matrix. I have also suggested that Gerard Manley Hopkins’ use of figurative language in general, and specifically in ‘No worst, there is none’, takes us beyond the broadly deep ecological understanding of phenomenological immersion implied by animot posthumanism and David



Abram's 'tissue of experience', pointing us towards a more dissonant and challenging entanglement in 'natureculture' or the 'Gordian knot' of existence.

Robert Pogue Harrison (1992) suggests that human language gives us the space to construct our manner of dwelling on the earth. Jonathan Bate (2000) and David Abram (1996) take this argument further in suggesting that it is in poetry that we are able to construct our dwelling. For them the potential lies largely in the sounds of poetry –its oral dimension. However, another key aspect of poetry is figurative language, and it seems to me that it is in embodied perceptual metaphor such as Hopkins' that we might find a version of dwelling which recognises and is able to explore the complexity of our entanglement in all the dimensions of our earthly existence. Iain McGilchrist cites Max Black's observation that "If to call a man a wolf is to put him in a special light, we must not forget that the metaphor makes the wolf seem more human than he otherwise would" (117). The whirlwind of imagery in the 'Terrible Sonnets' enacts a whole range of juxtapositions that disrupt existing constructions of the human, the animal, the cultural and the prosthetic, drawing them into powerfully complex associations in which all are disrupted, entangled, refracted and reformed. It suggests that the contemporary ecopoet or new nature writer should not feel diminished by or guilty about using metaphor to mediate between his or her inner and outer worlds, but should instead embrace the extended world view that this embodied human sense enables.

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