

‘Almost Sung’: The Silent Spoken Life of Hopkins’s Poetry

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In the letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to his self-designated ‘public’ of one, Robert Bridges, among the most salient qualities to emerge is the poet’s confidence—not only about his church, politics, and aesthetic judgment, but about the correct way to recite those poems sent “To dearest him that lives alas! away.”¹ Hopkins’s insistence was, first and foremost, that his poems *be* read aloud, and he gave a priority to sound that has led many critics to struggle to define the precise hierarchy between sound and sense in his work.² Throughout Hopkins’s career, the injunctions persisted:

¹ ‘You ask may you call it “presumptuous jugglery.” No, but only for this reason, that *presumptious* is not English. I cannot think of altering anything. Why shd. I? I do not write for the public. You are my public and I hope to convert you’. From ‘To Bridges’ August 21, 1877. *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, vol 1, Correspondence 1852-1881*, ed. R.K.R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips (London: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 282 (hereafter referred to as *Correspondence*); and, from ‘I wake and feel’: ‘With witness I speak this. But where I say / Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament / Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent / To dearest him that lives alas! away’. Catherine Phillips, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), p.166.

² See J. Hillis Miller’s classic essay in which he works through the tentative hope of union between poet and world through linguistic mimesis to an understanding of language as ultimately independent of the experienced world: ‘Words become not the point of fusion of subject and object, but the locus of their most absolute and permanent division’ J. Hillis Miller, ‘The Creation of Self in Gerard Manley Hopkins’, *English Literary History*, 22.4 (1955),

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 think if you will study what I have here said you will be much more pleased with it and may I say? converted to it. (*Correspondence*, p. 282)

To do the Eurydice any kind of justice you must not slovenly read it with the eyes but with your ears, as if the paper were declaiming it at you. (*Correspondence*, p. 296)

As critics have long discussed, Hopkins's instructions for performance make liberal use of terms from musical performance and oratory—an import that (along with his own serious interest in music theory) has prompted arguments for a closer-than-analogic relationship between his poetry and music. References to mode, diatonics, chromatism, on top of the reiterated insistence to read 'with your ears', tilt critics such as H. Wendell Howard, G.N. Leech, Christopher Wilson, Pamela Coren, and Greg Sevik towards exploring musical terms as deliberate counterparts to Hopkins's poetic theory.³ Wilson (whose particular concern with agogics I build upon later in this essay) claims that 'Hopkins' mode of thinking and writing about poetry, his 'mindset', was that of a musician.... He perceived syllables or words as musical notes, metrical 'feet' as bars, lines or sentences as phrases, paragraphs or stanzas as movements or sections of movements'.⁴ In this essay, rather than taking Hopkins's use of musical terms as an invitation to make literal links between his musical and

pp. 293-319, p. 315. See also R. K. R. Thornton's analysis of the inconsistency in Hopkins's attitude towards purely aesthetic, sensual experience of language, on the one hand, and the compulsion towards moral purpose on the other. R. K. R. Thornton, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins: Aesthete or Moralist?' in *Saving Beauty: Further Studies in Hopkins*, eds. Michael E. Allsopp and David Anthony Downes. (New York; London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), pp. 39-58.

³ Pamela Coren, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins, Plainsong and the Performance of Poetry', *Review of English Studies* 60: 244 (2009), pp. 271-94 (p. 288); G.N. Leech, 'Music in Metre: Sprung Rhythm in Victorian and Georgian Poetry', *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters* 14:3 (1994), pp. 200-13 (cited by Wilson, 2000). Greg Sevik, 'Music and Poetry: Hopkins, Sprung Rhythm, and the Problem of Isochrony', *The Hopkins Quarterly* 39:1 (2012), pp. 3-25. Howard H. Wendell, 'The Influence of the Music of Henry Purcell on the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins', *The Hopkins Quarterly* 8:4 (1982), pp. 137-55. Christopher R. Wilson, 'The Idea of Musicality in Hopkins' Verse', *The Hopkins Quarterly* 26:1 (1999), pp. 27-55. Christopher R. Wilson, 'Nineteenth-Century Musical Agogics as an Element in Gerard Manley Hopkins's Prosody', *Comparative Literature* 52:2 (2000), pp. 72-86.

⁴ Wilson (2000), p.76.

poetic theory, I look to how these terms can point us towards the specific middle-ground between song and speech, where poetic recitation stood for Hopkins—to consider more closely his efforts to manage his readers' voices, and why this would have mattered so much to a man who would never have heard them, nor thought of public poetic performance at all.

In the first movement of this essay, I examine the nature of this middle-ground as an event of intoning; not so much with the usual connotations of chant that the verb implies, but in the more basic sense of the meditative discernment and careful production of tone. In this way, and as I demonstrate through my discussion of Hopkins's letters on the subject, what would seem to be a performative, audience-orientated event, is actually one that turns the reader inwards, towards a meditative, dialogic experience of how tone patterns interact with meaning (a practice that was particularly significant, as I explain, given the shared valence of 'tone' and 'pitch' between his religious and aesthetic interests). Hopkins's usage of one term in particular, *tempo rubato*, that expressive mode of musical execution most associated with romantic composers, can help, as I argue in the second movement of this essay, to elucidate Hopkins's notion of intoning as distinct from rhetorical or normative understandings of linguistic intonation. With *rubato* we encounter Hopkins's negotiations between 'freedom' and 'strictness,' and how the process of 'reading with the ears' offered an ideal of artistic expression—not of the reciter's interpretation or personal affect, but of subtle movements of tone, speed, and volume in the range of a poem's effects that require the human voice to find expression. His interest lies in the reflective, rather than public, life of his poems (even in the way a pianist, playing with *rubato* can seem to be in conversation with the score); a stress on private and earnestly sought understanding that was betokened by personal voicing and was a part of the human connection his instructions seem to seek with his correspondents. Here, I build upon James Milroy's idea of the 'personal' quality Hopkins sought in his poetry, which he explores through aspects of convoluted syntax and exclamation.⁵ While the

⁵ Milroy writes: 'He is much given to the use of interjections: ah, oh, well, oh well, ah well, alas (these are not unusual in Victorian poetry, for instance, that of Matthew Arnold). Hopkins uses

invocation of any definitive ‘best’ way to read can seem necessarily limiting, prescriptive, and self-gratifying, what I hope to show is how both his letters and poems instigate participation in the challenge for accuracy—not out of rigidity, but as a sign of serious engagement. I propose that Hopkins’s interest in inciting this effort implies an equally earnest attempt at intimacy between himself and his readers that his literal isolation forbade. While much criticism of Hopkins tends to paint a picture of his poetics as highly technical and self-isolating, I propose that the specificity and detail of his injunctions about correct reading were an expression of the affective and even physical bond he hoped to cultivate with his correspondents. I examine this gesture of intimacy through Hopkins’s letters to Bridges, to his brother, Everard, and, finally, in the dual practice of reading and intoning ‘The Loss of the Eurydice’, analyzing how the poem’s structure guides our attention to the importance of intonational phrasing. Here, I build upon Peter Milward’s 1999 ‘plunge’ at marking the beats of this notoriously unrewarding poem—not always in agreement with the particulars of his scanning, but continuing his investigation of what it means to ‘read with the ears’ and noting the startling metamorphosis this poem undergoes between silent and intoned readings.⁶ My close-reading thus acts more as a demonstration of what reading with the spirit of earnest ‘intoning’ *could* be like. Taking up Hopkins’s ardent appeal to his brother that till it is spoken it is

them more thickly than other poets and, since they are characteristic of spoken language rather than written prose, they reinforce the personal tone of his poetry. Speech is more personal, more tied to context, less formal and less public than written language, and Hopkins’s interjections help to bring about the sense of immediacy and closeness to situation and speaker that is so palpable in his poetry.’ James Milroy, *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1977), pp. 197-8.

⁶ As Milward writes: ‘When Hopkins himself came to re-read his poem, he acknowledges that he was struck ‘aghast with a kind of raw nakedness and unmitigated violence I was unprepared for’; and thus, it may be pointed out, the poet has himself anticipated the most critical of his readers. But he goes on to add, what few of his critics see prepared to do, ‘Take breath and read it with the ears, as I always wished to be read, and my verse becomes all right’. This is indeed what I find in this remarkable poem, what Hopkins’ friends, Robert Bridges and Richard Dickson, also found there, a supreme expression—for all its obvious oddities—of the poet’s new-found ‘sprung rhythm’. Read silently and critically, the poem is all too characteristically eccentric; but read aloud with sympathy, it becomes breath-takingly impressive—vividly echoing what the poet calls in his other wreck poem, the ‘beat of endragoned seas.’ Peter Milward, ‘The Rhythm of the ‘Eurydice’, *The Hopkins Quarterly* 26 (1999), pp. 3-21, p. 3.

not performed, it does not perform, it is not itself, I hope to show how the dual vocal and aural experience of intoning this poem elicits the profoundly personal encounter with verse that Hopkins was interested in.⁷ Rather than dismissing such descriptions of individual aesthetic choice and experience as irrelevant to critical analysis because they can never be universal or clearly allied with a poem's structure as Wimsatt and Beardsley argued, I suggest that Hopkins's verses call readers to personal investment, to an embrace of what they hear (in the space between page and performance, sub-vocal and vocal experience) that is no less careful for its suspension of skepticism.⁸ While this essay considers the silent spoken life of Hopkins's poetry, and how a critical focus on what it means to intone can refresh our understanding of Hopkins's work, it also offers his individually meditative approach to intoning (akin to the mental process known as *audiation*, or the production of sound patterns in the mind) as an alternative to the way many studies of poetic intonation—such as those of Joseph Taglicht, Prudence Byers, and Gordon Cooper—focus on tracking normativity through digitized analyses of audio recordings (using equipment such as the spectrogram and data translation software).⁹ Byers' concern is to study the 'statistically significant differences' between recordings of 'poetry and non-poetry' and to arrive at a kind of formula for what features can define 'poetic' speech' (p. 368). In her study, this comes down to eight factors assessed using spectrogram analysis of the recordings of 'six experienced readers' (p. 369): 'Slow speech rate + Shorter tone units + More pauses + Relatively equal-length units + Low average pitch + Narrow pitch range + Simple falling melodies + Simple falling nuclei = Poetic intonation' (p. 373). Byers, like Taglicht and Cooper, far from being interested in making distinctions between readings that could be seen as more successful or 'poetic' than others, is rather seeking normativity in using recordings of speakers with a similar level of literary knowledge. Cooper uses recordings of both poets and 'general readers', which he

⁷ *Correspondence*, pp. 747-8.

⁸ W.K.J. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Concept of Meter: An Exercise in Abstraction', *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 74:5 (1959), pp. 585-98.

⁹ Prudence Byers, 'A Formula for Poetic Intonation', *Poetics* 8 (1979), pp. 367-380; Gordon B. Cooper, *Mysterious Music* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Joseph Taglicht, 'The Function of Intonation in English Verse', *Language and Style* 4 (1971), pp. 116-122.

submits to digital analysis in order to derive statistical data, but also, like Byers, works deductively—*from* the diversity of speakers and speech data, distilling discrete principles of poetic speech (for Cooper, these are principally ‘compression’, ‘repetition’, and ‘alternation’ of intonational patterns) (pp. 189-191). Taglicht articulates the disinterest in qualitative and comparative assessment of poetic readings perhaps most concretely. In his study of ‘features of intonation that are capable of functioning metrically’ the focus is on the ‘analytical part of prosody’ precisely because an individual recitation (or descriptions of it) ‘rarely reach[es] conclusions that command universal acceptance’ (p. 116). My concern in grouping these studies is to foreground two premises common to their approaches (despite the differences in their specific goals): (1) that recitation only becomes available for critical consideration in recordings and (2) that the goal of research of poetic intonation (what constitutes it, or how it can help or offer alternatives in lexical analysis) should be to work towards normativity rather than exceptionality.

A significant problem arises, however, when these premises are questioned. Can the aural life of poetry not be discussed without audio recordings to analyze? Will an outlier, whose recitation is at variance with the majority in whatever area, be considered less ‘poetic’ for that reason? Can the intoning of a poem matter, can it count as performance, if it lacks an audience to hear it? The following pages take up these questions in the case of a poet who forces them perhaps more strongly than any other: one who was not only so adamant about the peculiarity of ‘poetic speech’, whose interest was ‘correctness’ rather than typicality, but who also could not count on literal performance (of his own before others, or of others before him) to reinforce his certainty of the importance of speaking his verse. If a reader’s tone, pitch, tempo, and cadence meant something more to Hopkins (and conceivably many other poets) than statistical analyses and efforts towards the universal and normative can ascertain, might it not be important to consider this alternate meaning ourselves?

Between Speech and Song, Text and Voice

The distinctive vocal mode of recitation which Hopkins described in his letters sits squarely between that of speech or song, but it does not take long to realize that the

boundaries of that middle-territory can be defined differently. In his essays ‘Speaking to the Psalter’ of 1902 and ‘Poems for the Psalter’ of 1907, W.B. Yeats writes of his ideal of ‘lyrical verse spoken to notes’ which, rather than bending the verse to music, would express the ‘natural music’ of poetic lines. Neither ‘chanting’ nor ‘recitation’, Yeats describes this mode of reading as pointing to ‘a very early stage in the development of music, with its own great beauty ... a state of mind which created music and yet was incapable of the emotional abstraction which delights in patterns of sound separated from words’.¹⁰ In Hopkins’s case, as Walter Ong, Pamela Coren, and Alfred Thomas have explored, this lyrical ‘state of mind’ was specifically influenced by his exposure to plainchant and training in liturgical delivery. As Thomas writes, ‘Records show that during the time in the noviceship, one of the regular practices was the delivery of the “model tone” which you were expected to preach with appropriate gestures and voice inflexions’.¹¹ Ong notes that for Hopkins plainchant embodied the ‘elevation of speech’, and Coren builds upon this, seeing plainchant and its prioritization of phrasal rhythms over metre as a crucial ‘model’ for Hopkins.¹² ‘For a poet,’ she writes, ‘listening from the borderline of speech and song, plainchant, however the notation is interpreted, is active music in which the words alone determine the rhythm, free of a metric superstructure. The breath of the singers and the length of phrase are the only controls’.¹³ While for Coren, Ong, Thomas, and even Yeats, however, this mode between speech and music ‘with its own great beauty’ is necessarily one of public performance, for

¹⁰ W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats Volume IV: Early Essays*, eds. Richard J. Finneran, George Bornstein (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2007), pp. 12-17.

¹¹ Alfred Thomas, ‘G.M. Hopkins and “Tones”’ *Notes and Queries* 12:3 (1965), pp. 429-30 (p. 29). The “model tone” as Thomas uses it, can have two possible meanings. The first would be a musical tone, given by voice or instrument from an instructor or director, indicating one of the four modes of chant: Phrygian, Dorian, Lydian, Mixolydian. The second would be related to the first, but for public speech rather than chant: a tone of voice set by a leader or instructor for novices to hold as the vocal centerpoint of their sermon delivery. The point of this would be to insure that the voice stays in a somber, limited pitch range throughout speaking.

¹² S.J. Walter Ong, ‘Hopkins’ Sprung Rhythm and the Life of English Poetry’ from *Immortal Diamond*, eds. Norman Weyand and Raymond Schoder (London: Sheed and Ward, 1949), pp. 97-174, (p. 119).

¹³ Coren, p. 284.

Hopkins the nature and purpose of vocalizing verse was more peculiar—and private.

In the particular case of Hopkins, an interesting anomaly presents itself: that, around this poet who insisted on the aural life of his poems, there existed a nearly uncrackable silence. 20th-century poets such as Dylan Thomas, Basil Bunting, or W.B. Yeats, were similarly opinionated about the distinct sound of poetic reading and have left audio recordings that can act as texts for examination in their own right. In the case of Tennyson, too, anyone interested in his recitational practice only need turn to the abundant accounts of his reading style written by contemporaries,¹⁴ Yet Hopkins, who wrote far more (and more stridently) about the necessity of speaking and hearing his poems, is unaccompanied by any auditor's testament to his way of reading poems, let alone any audio-artifact allowing us to experience his voice for ourselves. The privacy and obscurity of Hopkins's writing process, as well as the importance of metrical notation in his legacy, have, understandably, led readers to focus on the silent qualities of his poetic life: diacritical marks, his participation in the debates over New Prosody, or the terms of his arguments for sprung rhythm. Meredith Martin goes so far as to state that 'any idealized or fetishized vocal performance of Hopkins's poems—indeed, of any poem—is a distorted (or selective) reading of nineteenth century poetic practice'.¹⁵ And Yopie Prins, in context of her discussion of the visual experience

¹⁴ In one of the many accounts of Tennyson's readings, for example, William Allingham writes of the poet's habitual correction of his intonation: 'Rocks peeping through the sward, in which I particularly delight, reminding me of the West of Ireland. I quote—"Bowery hollows crowned with summer sea." T. (as usual), "You don't say it properly"—and repeats it in his own sonorous manner, lingering with solemn sweetness on every vowel sound,—a peculiar incomplete cadence at the end. He modulates his cadences with notable subtlety'. (William Allingham, *A Diary* (London: Macmillan and Company, limited, 1907), p. 158. The terms used to describe just what Tennyson was doing when reciting are mixed throughout the accounts of Allingham and others. Both Frederick Goddard Tuckerman and George Granville Bradley referred to it as his 'manner of reading or chanting'; for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, it was as 'chanting intonation' (Alfred Tennyson, *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, eds. Edgar Finley Shannon and Cecil Lang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 102-105; Dante Gabrielle Rossetti, *Dante Gabrielle Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir, vol. I*, ed. W.M. Rossetti (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1895), pp. 190-1.

¹⁵ Meredith Martin, *Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 76.

of Hopkins's 'Handsome Heart', claims that 'any attempts to confine such poetic conventions as meter, alliteration, or rhyme to the sound level are speculative reasonings without any empirical justification'.¹⁶ Scholars such as Martin and Prins have helped to open up interest in formal poetics beyond what Prins calls 'phonetic isolationism' (p. 246), but the stigma of speciousness that this trend has cast on the subject of vocal performance has been an unfortunate side-effect. Without attempting to re-conjure the actual intonations of Hopkins's voice, I suggest, alongside other critics interested in performative history, such as Catherine Robson, that the fact that Victorian poets *were* so interested in 'correct' recitations is a curiosity worthy of attention.¹⁷

Hopkinsian Pitch: The Reality of Intention

Considering the words 'tone' and 'pitch' in the context of Hopkins's writings is inevitably a complex undertaking. While he does use the terms in reference to aural effects in his poems and in sorting out the aesthetic relations between words for himself, 'pitch,' specifically, also figures prominently in his religious writings (as I will discuss below).¹⁸ It is physical—something that both comes from and interacts with material bodies—but also metaphysical, representing for Hopkins the first mental gesture of intention and even of original creation. The 'pitch' of a reader's voice, then, holds the potential of meeting the 'pitch' of a poet's meaning in the

¹⁶ Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), p. 246.

¹⁷ In *Heart Beats*, Catherine Robson investigates the role of recitation in the nineteenth and early twentieth century educational systems in England and America: the reasons it became institutionalized, and arguments made by contemporaries for the benefits of *learning* to recite—and recite well. She notes the overriding belief that 'the performance of lines committed to heart strengthened a youth's memory and developed his confidence, self-presentation, and vocal delivery,' and uncovers an array of manuals, guides, and reports on how to educate children to recite properly. Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats: Victorian Life and the Memorized Poem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 7.

¹⁸ From one of Hopkins' early journal entries: 'Flick means to touch or strike lightly as with the end of a whip, a finger, etc. To *fleck* is the next tone above *flick*, still meaning to touch or strike lightly (and leave a mark of the touch or stroke) but in a broader less slight manner. Hence substantively a *fleck* is a piece of light, colour, substance etc. looking as though shaped or produced by slight touches'. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphrey House (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 11.

moment of composition: an ideal of communication between mind and voice, idea and nature, poet and reader that, as I hope to demonstrate in this section, was hardly coincidental. Rather than treating this shared presence of pitch in aesthetic and metaphysical vocabularies as a mere idiosyncrasy, I would like to begin by questioning how the complexity of the term as Hopkins understood it could nuance our own understanding of what poetic intoning can mean.

In his philosophical and religious writings, pitch means, as purely as possible, distinctiveness (and is thus also allied with the way he writes about taste, especially ‘self-taste’)—a definition that is clearly far broader than the musical definition of pitch as a quality ‘governed by the frequency of the vibrations producing it, and which determines its highness or lowness of tone.’¹⁹ Pitch is known through experience, but is also the bridge *between* the experience of a thing and its essential transcendent identity (both Being and the way that Being impresses itself on the world, much like his notion of instress as a ‘stem of stress between us and things to bear us out and carry the mind over’).^{20 21} As Hopkins uses it, ‘pitch’ implies a variety of meanings alongside the acoustic: orientation, angle, force, intention, distinctiveness, or the position of x, y , or z in a given order. ‘Pitch’ can also be used in reference to anything with a singular being—a single word, therefore, *or* a single phrase of which that word is a member (similar to the way that *inscape* is indeed unique to an object or the perception of it, but can also apply to a landscape or arrangement of things – Hopkins’s descriptions of the inscape of tree branches, clouds, and sunsets are excellent examples of this).²² Critics have long discussed the

¹⁹ Dennis Sobolev has written most helpfully and thoroughly on the Hopkins’ use of ‘pitch,’ noting how the meaning of positive distinctiveness and indeed divine connection becomes subverted in later poems, such as ‘No Worst’ to evoke the separation of body and spirit through intense pain. Dennis Sobolev, *The Split World of Gerard Manley Hopkins: An Essay in Semiotic Phenomenology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2011), pp. 282-4; ‘pitch, n.2’, *OED Online*. December 2015. Oxford University Press <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/144681?rskey=OOdP6U&result=2#eid> (accessed 5 January 2016).

²⁰ Hopkins, *Journals*, p. 127.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²² ‘... before I had always taken the sunset and sun as quite out of gauge with each other, as indeed physically they are, for the eye after looking at the sun is blunted to everything else and if you look at the sunset you must cover the sun, but today I inscaped them together and made the

materiality of words for Hopkins, James Milroy most significantly, but it is the way Hopkins writes of them as having specific pitch and tonal qualities that can really help to elucidate the nature of a word as substantial object. For more, perhaps, than any other musical terms, pitch and tone denote the material source of sound; they are qualities that derive their very nature from the definite qualities (density, shape, size, tension, matter) of the object that produces its aural effects. We hear this most straightforwardly in the way Hopkins writes about words as having distinct ‘centers of gravity’:

... the accent of a word means its strongest accent, the accent of its best accented syllable. This is of two kinds – that of *pitch* (tonic) and that of *stress* (emphatic). We may think of words as heavy bodies, as indoor or outdoor objects of nature or man’s art. Now every visible palpable body has a centre of gravity round which it is in balance a centre of illumination of *highspot* or *quickspot* up to which it is lighted and down from which it is shaded. The centre of gravity is like the accent of stress, the highspot like the accent of pitch, for pitch is like light and colour, stress like weight, and as in some things as air and water the centre of gravity is either unnoticeable or unchangeable so there may be languages in a fluid state in which there is little difference of weight or stress between syllables or what there is changes and again as it is only glazed bodies that show the highspot well so there may be languages in which the pitch is noticeable.

English is of this kind, the accent of stress strong, that of pitch weak—only they go together for the most part.²³

We might say that one of the functions of intoning English poetry, to follow Hopkins’s metaphor, is to ‘glaze’ it, to reveal the highspots through a fluid and reflective attentiveness to the ‘palpable’ qualities of language that might otherwise go unnoticed. There is a play of stress and pitch here, which Hopkins equates with the play between two senses: touch (or the perception of weight) and sight. Words are not only ‘heavy bodies’ but ‘visible palpable bod[ies]’. Comparing our perception of words to a moment of perception that employs two senses—sight and touch—Hopkins calls attention to the special complexity of aural experience as almost two

sun the eye and true ace of the whole, as it is. It was all active and tossing out light and started as strongly forward from the field as a long stone or a boss in the knop of the chalice-stem: it is indeed by stalling it so that it falls into scape with the sky’. *Journals*, p.196.

²³ Hopkins, *Journals*, p. 269.

senses in one. If poetry's role is to create linguistic forms that are true to the physical properties of language, much like a sculptor, potter or architect who creates *by way* of his knowledge of the physics of his 'visible palpable' material, the intoner's role is to call attention to the poet's/poem's own attentiveness to these physics: to communicate balance, distribution of mass, places of stability, and how both center of gravity and highspot move over the development of a poem's shape. As a living body (one with its own center of gravity) is necessary in order to perceive the sensually complex physics of an object it encounters, so it is with the understanding of poetic language that Hopkins offers. It takes a body to know a body. As the perception of highspot, of light and color, is a less-fixed quality than weight, however, so with pitch. The highspot can't exist without solid contours, without the particular mass and shape of a body, but it also can't exist without a source of illumination. In this way, the melodic aspect of pitch is something that hovers between the word and the voice that illuminates it. As when Hopkins writes of the 'self-less self of being, most strange, most still,' in 'On a Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People,' pitch is a kind of 'self' that exists in between the being of an object and the recognition of it by a perceiver; it participates in both, but belongs to neither. Pitch is the quality inherent in any being, but which also exists as a fundamental bridge, or to use Hopkins's term, a 'stem' of communication, between that being and any perceiver (similar to the way he defines *instress* as that 'stem of stress between us and things to bear us out and carry the mind over').²⁴ In his 'Notes on Suarez, *de Mysteriis Vitae Christi?*' Hopkins uses 'pitch' to explain both the origins of self-hood and the potential elevation of self through the accession of grace. He begins:

First, though self, as personality, is prior to nature, it is not prior to pitch. If there were something prior even to pitch, of which that pitch would be itself the pitch, then we could suppose that that, like everything else, was subject to God's will and could be pitched, could be determined, this way or that. (*Journals*, p. 127)

²⁴ Hopkins, *Journals*, p. 127.

Though each self, as Hopkins also explains, actually contains a whole scale of pitches (each coordinate with a ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ self according to one’s attunement with God’s will), the way he uses the term here is as an original gesture of determination—something that precedes actual creation. While it may seem at first that the theological use of ‘pitch’ from the sermons and the musical notion of pitch are not to be associated too closely, I suggest that the metaphysical sense can helpfully elucidate the aural sense as Hopkins conceived it—a distinctive determination of sound, whether vocal or instrumental, that is fixed (or ‘audiated,’ a term I expand on below) in the mind before it is actuated in voice. Such pitching, whether of a self by God’s determination, or of a sound by a human being, is, as Hopkins writes, ‘prior to nature,’ to literal hearing; like the pitch of a baseball or the pitch of a tent, it is, in the first instance, a definitive and active choice of orientation, target, gradient. In Hopkins’s journals as well as in the doctrine of spiritual formation he was receiving as a Jesuit novice, this determination of trajectory (whether of a newly created being, an object being thrown, a prayer prayed, or a voice sounded) is no less an action for taking place ‘prior’ to nature, that is, in the mind—whether of God or man.²⁵

The relationship between metaphysical and sonic notions of pitch in Hopkins’s writings is thus two-part. In the first instance, this metaphysical register of pitch helps to elucidate why Hopkins *would* be so attuned to evoking discrete experiences of pitch in his poetry—both in the discrete being of particular words, and in unique patterns. Pitch is the connection between any person experiencing it and the first

²⁵ Hopkins continues in the same note on Suarez to contemplate the range of ‘pitches’ intrinsic to mortal beings and the necessity to orient one’s aspiration towards the highest pitch in order to receive God’s grace to fulfill or carry out the determination: ‘For prayer is the expression of a wish to God and, since God searches the heart, the conceiving even of the wish is prayer in God’s eyes (see Rom. viii 26, 2). For there must be something which shall be truly the creature’s in the work of corresponding with grace: this is the arbitrium, the verdict on God’s side, the saying Yes, the ‘doing-agree’ (to speak barbarously), and looked at in itself, such a nothing is a creature before its creator, it is found to be no more than the mere wish, discernible by God’s eyes, that it might do as he wishes, might correspond, might say Yes to him; correspondence itself is on man’s side not so much corresponding as the wish to correspond, and this least sigh of desire, this one aspiration, is the life and spirit of man ... And by this infinitesimal act the creature does what in it lies to bridge the gulf fixed between its present actual and worsen pitch of will and its future better one’ (*Sermons*, p. 155).

gesture of creation—the felt-sound, we might think, of God’s first thought of any being or of a poet’s first conception of a poem. To not only experience the clear pitch of a thing, but to have one’s mind drawn to witness the event of detached ‘pitching’ itself, could equate, for a reader of Hopkins’s faith, to an experience of divine contemplation and worship. The second aspect of Hopkinsian intoning that this metaphysics of pitch illuminates is the importance of the internal, pre-vocalized life of pitch—that it is something felt and determined before actualized, and that there is a kind of literal movement, a ‘pitching’ in the mind before that gesture is echoed in voiced sound. Hopkins’s complex understanding of pitch is also thus helpful in understanding the precise attitude towards vocalization that he demands from his readers: how his sense of the ‘pitch’ of his work should (or could) be met by the vocal pitch of a reader. In this way, the reading of a poem (as he prescribed it) would put a person in the position to realize the distinctive meaning of his work fully: the pitch of primary intention meeting the pitch of nature.

The Case for ‘poetical (not rhetorical) recitation’

As far-fetched as such a theory of connection—of the metaphysical with the sonic, and, even more, of poetic intention with readerly voice—might sound, the idea is borne out in the precise directions Hopkins gives for the vocalization of his work: not simply that it *should* be read aloud, but *how*. As he writes to Bridges on December 11, 1886:

Of this long sonnet [‘Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves’] above all remember what applies to all my verse, that it is, as living art should be, made for performance and that its performance is not reading with the eye but loud, leisurely, poetical (not rhetorical) recitation, with long rests, long dwells on the rhyme and other marked syllables, and so on. This sonnet shd. be almost sung: it is most carefully timed in *tempo rubato*. (*Correspondence*, pp. 841-2)

In this excerpt, performance is correlative to a poem’s status as ‘living art’. The vocalization of it is not simply a preferred mode for encountering a poem, but intrinsic to the poet’s purpose and the poem’s being; it is ‘made *for* performance’ (my emphases). In this way, the passage is also reflective of Hopkins’s mode of composition; the writing of the poem itself is guided by the consciousness of a

certain style of intonation: 'loud, leisurely, poetical (not rhetorical)'. These words are significant for the way they describe what it would *mean* to 'read with the ear': a 'loud, leisurely, poetical' reading that is necessarily (as it supposes the reader as his own audience) self-reflexive. One both produces the sound and listens to it, the voice-ear dynamic acting as a kind of composite sense-organ of its own that is sent out to 'read'. Not apprehending this simultaneous dynamic between voice and ear would be like trying to taste without a sense of smell. The poem is 'living art' because it requires, begets, and enacts a dynamic effort that calls the reader's attention to her own life, turning ear to voice, and voice to ear. Hopkins's ideal reader is a performer, but a performer who is performing, unapologetically, for herself. The loudness and leisure connote a kind of increased breadth to the reciter's presence, an amplification of self through sound and time. To read loudly, to oneself, is both an act of entitlement and self-challenge, not only in the increase of energy demanded by a loud, slow reading, but in the way it deliberately calls the reader's attention to the choices and effects of her own voice. The kind of reading Hopkins is prescribing is one in which self-seriousness begets rigorous investment in, and thus (conceivably) better understanding of, the poetic work. For there is a strong correlation in this passage, too, between hitting that ideal reading and being in sync with the intention of the poet. The reader should 'dwell' on rests and rhymes *because* it is 'most carefully timed in tempo rubato'. The performative life of the poem is a part of its conception and composition; moreover, the specific tempo, *rubato*, bespeaks the significance of recitation to the apprehension of the character of a poem (as something that lives between ear and page).

While the use of musical terms, such as *rubato*, could be read as an indication of the interdependence of music and poetry for Hopkins, this particular term (a still quite modern effect at the time Hopkins was writing, and most often associated with the lilting expressiveness of Romantic pianists like Franz Liszt and Frederic Chopin) is illuminating in the way it could be considered to denote the closest gesture of music to the phrasal shape of speech. In the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Willi Apel defines *rubato* simply as 'an elastic flexible tempo involving slight accelerandos and ritardandos that alternate according to the requirements of the musical expression,' while, in a definition closer to Hopkins's period, John Alfred

Johnstone defines *rubato* as a two-part principle.²⁶ The first is ‘the principle of elasticity or freedom, as applied to the musical phrase or period’; the second is ‘the natural feeling of a tendency to hasten towards any climax, then to repose at the climax for an instance for the sake of emphasis; and finally to proceed more leisurely in moving away from that climax point to a point of rest’.²⁷ At its core, *rubato* is about the apprehension and transmission of musical phrasing. Christopher Wilson discusses Hopkins’s likely familiarity with *rubato* most thoroughly in his 2000 essay ‘Nineteenth-Century Musical Agogics as an Element in Gerard Manley Hopkins’s Prosody’, proposing multiple sources, from Hopkins’s reading of musical theory to his own piano practice, as contexts for his understanding of these expressive effects.²⁸ While Wilson’s correlation of Hopkins’s idiosyncratic diacritical system to musical agogics is convincing, the way in which *rubato* itself is a kind of gesture of music towards speech seems important for understanding the full dynamism of Hopkins’s use of the term in this instance. In fact, the analogy ricochets: from speech, to music, back to speech. The speeding and slowing of *rubato* quite literally creates phrasal shape in musical performance (similar to the rise-fall movement around the tonic pitch in spoken intonation). The regular time of the score is maintained, but by means of give-and-take, as the pianist quickens his pace to compensate for the time ‘robbed’ by notes given more leisure.

The carefulness of Hopkins’s sense of this robbing and lending of time is partly indicated by the diacritics he provides in the manuscript of the poem (as Wilson argues), but *rubato* is also an essentially expressive mode of performance (as Hopkins would have known), something that comes out of the pianist’s or reciter’s impressionistic investment in the piece in the moment of playing, as much (if not more) as from the written score. Such playing suggests a fusion of the player’s capacity to feel with the phrasing of the music, something like what Louis Charles

²⁶ Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 742.

²⁷ John Alfred Johnstone, *Rubato, Or The Secret of Expression in Pianoforte Playing* (London: Joseph Williams Ltd., 1920), p. 25.

²⁸ Christopher R. Wilson, ‘Nineteenth-Century Musical Agogics as an Element in Gerard Manley Hopkins’s Prosody’, *Comparative Literature* 52:2 (2000), pp. 72-86.

Elson called ‘intelligent individuation’.²⁹ It is the phrasal shapes of *rubato* music that give it the feeling of heightened expressiveness, quite literally as though the music is speaking (here, we might think back to that injunction to read a poem ‘as if the paper were declaiming it at you’).³⁰ A composer may write a piece with *tempo rubato* in mind (perhaps even very clearly in mind), but it is not something that can, itself, be written directly into a score—or into a poem’s metre.

This helps to elucidate the distinction Hopkins makes in the passage between ‘poetical’ and ‘rhetorical’ recitation. The latter implies that the performer is trying to convince his audience of something—to make a point, win an argument, prove something about himself—by way of language that stands as a means to an end. Hopkins’s notion of ‘poetical’ reading, by contrast (and which is hard to understand on its own until we consider the note about *rubato*), is a mode of recitation where the poetic work itself seems to speak through the reader, rather than the reciter speaking by means of it. A *rubato* recitation would mean a heightened attention to phrasing itself, emphasizing the movement of pitches—up, down, fast, slow, dense, or diffuse—that *gives* phrases their shapes; it would mean reciting for the sake of those phrase shapes, rather than a purpose or effect achieved by means of them. Here, we might think of Hopkins’s infamous definition of poetry as ‘in fact speech employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape’s sake’ (*Journals*, p. 289). This approach to poetic intoning is thus especially important to pause over as it provides such a contrast to understandings of normative intonation, such as that of Dwight Bolinger, as proceeding *from* rhetorical purpose.³¹ The employment of ‘rubato’ then, while seeming at first light to demonstrate a connection between

²⁹ Louis Charles Elson, *Modern Music and Musicians: Famous compositions for the piano; v. 3. Famous songs* (New York: The University Society, 1912), p. 630.

³⁰ Hopkins, *Correspondence*, p. 296.

³¹ While Dwight Bolinger acknowledges that intonational patterns (particularly at the end of phrases) may be indirect in their expression of a speaker’s intention, and that there is no fixed correspondence between an intonational pattern and sentence type, the speaker’s intention is what gives any phrase its tonal shape: ‘Intonation especially affects the other variables in subtle ways because of its gradience, and also because it, along with gesture, conveys the speaker’s feelings most directly, and indirectly the speaker’s intentions—and these override the import assigned to a syntactic arrangement’. Dwight Bolinger, *Intonation and Its Uses: Melody in Grammar and Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 98.

Hopkins's poetic and musical theories, in fact is only a means of emphasizing the nature of poetry as *speech*, and its expressive potential.

One of the anomalies of *rubato*—what gives it such power when successfully performed, and what relates it to intonational dynamics in Hopkins's work—is the balance it requires between accuracy and freedom. Even while the performer might vary his pace with seemingly spontaneous feeling, the economy of the time signature is maintained. Disobey math, and the pulse is lost, the sense of freedom and movement veering into chaos. In this way, the mention of *rubato* is also helpful for understanding the balance between strictness and freedom in Hopkins's poetics that struck Bridges as so paradoxical. When Hopkins writes to Bridges on August 21, 1877, for example, he is replying to an apparent remark from his friend that 'there is no conceivable licence [he] shd. not be able to justify'. Hopkins holds firmly to the contrary, claiming 'with all my licenses, or rather laws, I am stricter than you and I may say than anyone I know'. He proceeds to defend this strictness with a discussion of stress and quantity, specifying that (unlike Swinburne) he would

never allow e.g. *I* or *my* (that is diphthongs, for *I* = *a* + *I* and *my* = *ma* + *i*) in the short or weak syllables of those feet, excepting before vowels, semi-vowels, or *r*, and rarely then, or when the measure becomes (what is the word?) molossic—thus: X – X | X – X | X – X, for then the short is almost long. If you look again you will see. So that I may say my apparent licenses are counterbalanced, and more, by my strictness. (*Correspondence*, pp. 280-1)

This exchange represents well Hopkins's serious attention to phrase shape. The placement of a diphthong in the weak syllable position, while generally avoided, is nonetheless ultimately subject to its relation to other words. Simply forbidding a diphthong to stand in the position of a weak syllable would mean ignoring the way that words, when keeping company, shape each other. While Hopkins clearly has a care for the physical integrity of single words and their intrinsic patterns of short and long vowels (and would not ignore that integrity for the sake of his own compositional ease or rhetorical purpose), there is another value and integrity that exists in the sonic dynamic between words. While, say, in the phrase 'I am,' *am* does not actually change the quantity of the diphthong *I*, it does, as a vowel-starting word, call upon and demonstrate the flexibility of 'P' – its ability, if called upon in the right

way, to subdue and contract itself to a weak syllable position. Gordon Cooper makes note of this phenomenon as the way that ‘syllables may ... be promoted or demoted to a different level of stress in order to avoid dis-euphonic sequences’.³² Phrases, as material linguistic forms with individual centers of gravity and high-points in their own right (to use Hopkins’s metaphorical terms again), exist because of the unique balances between strictness and flexibility in the individual words that compose them (a principle we will see at work in ‘The Loss of the Eurydice’). The idea of *rubato*, both as it exists in Hopkins’s mind while ‘timing’ his poems and as he requires it in the ‘living’ reading of those works, gets at this idea of a dynamic balance: if time, or strict time, is compromised in one area, it is compensated for or ‘counterbalanced’ elsewhere. It’s in this way that, even with the constant licentiousness that tempo *rubato* implies, both in the dynamics between words and the dynamics between phrases, the individual economies of word, phrase, and poem as a whole, are also strictly realized and protected.

While this metaphor of borrowing and compensating, bending and resisting, is helpful for understanding how ‘living art’ and ‘strictness’ reinforce rather than undermine each other, as well as how intonational patterns are a part (rather than a complement or afterthought) of his compositional process, the reality of performing a poem in this way remains a bit of a problem. How does one *know* ‘strictly’ where to speed and where to slow? Where to steal and where to lend? Hopkins’s comments to Bridges on a revision of another poem give a sense of the difficulty of this transmission of knowledge – of how a poem ‘should’ be read, even by a close-friend familiar with one’s diacritical marks:

I send a recast of the Handsome Heart. Nevertheless the offence of the rhymes is repeated. I felt myself the objection you make and should only employ the device [the outride] very sparingly, but you are to know that it has a particular effect, an effect of climax, and shd. Be[sic] read, with a rising inflection, after which the next line, beginning with the enclitic, gracefully falls away. (*Correspondence*, p. 363)

³² Gordon Burns Cooper, *Mysterious Music: Rhythm and Free Verse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 25.

The modal infinitive ‘you are to know’ both expresses and skirts the difficulty of the direction that follows. Is Bridges ‘to know’ this vocal choreography because a properly attentive recognition of the outsize *should* get him to produce it? Or is Hopkins’s precise description of how it ‘shd. Be [*sic*] read’ indicative of the essentially subjective nature of inflection—that without the direction, Bridges, in fact, wouldn’t be able to know this intended movement, even if he ‘should’ read and think most carefully about how the poem seems to move? Hopkins’s tone seems to imply the former, especially as his reference to the enclitic denotes a textual clue to the dynamics he’s describing. While it can be possible to pass over such performative directions as idiosyncratic, too open to variation between individual readers to be worthy of serious consideration, the unique reality of what performance meant between Hopkins and his correspondents—an event that could only ever *be* known through description—calls for a more patient consideration. What I would like to suggest, and expand upon with the even more particular directions Hopkins gives to his brother, Everard, is that the ‘should’s that stud his reflections on the performance of his poems are perhaps their most important aspect, indicative of an attitude he wants his reader to adopt: that there *is* a singularly correct intonation out there which it will require *work* to find: the one that is ‘poetical’ as discussed above, rather than ‘rhetorical’.

‘performing it satisfactorily is not at all easy’

Hopkins’s long letter to his brother Everard from November 1885 dwells lengthily on this challenge of poetic intoning, and expresses, perhaps even more fully than his letter to Bridges, both the necessity of speaking verse aloud *and* the great difficulty of finding the correct intonation. The letter is fascinating for many reasons, but chiefly (for the purposes of this essay) because of the shift in Hopkins’s confidence that occurs—from a rather cheerful, affectionate reflection on Everard’s ability to perform ‘The Loss of the Eurydice’ to a blank exemption of even himself from the ranks of those who could pull it off. The following excerpt begins about a third of the way through the letter, following Hopkins’s turn to ‘touch on the Eurydice etc again’: ‘I am sweetly soothed by your saying that you cd. make any one understand ~~the~~ ^my^ poem by reciting it well. That is always what I hoped, thought,

and said; it is my precise aim. And thereby hangs so considerable a tale, in fact the very thing I was going to write about Sprung Rhy[th]m in general ...'.³³ Hopkins's enthusiasm for Everard's remark is perhaps most clear in the way he misses what could very well have been read as rather an unflattering comment—that, unless it *was* recited 'well,' *no one* would be able to understand it. Hopkins is usually very sensitive to even the faintest whiff of criticism, often half creating and half perceiving insults from his friends. Here, though, Everard happens to have introduced one of Hopkins's pet subjects, poetic performance, allowing the poet to launch into an extensive sermon to his choir. After a pause of a day or so, Hopkins picks the letter back up with a more philosophical explanation of his enthusiasm:

Every art then and every work of art has its own play or performance. The play^{ing} of performance of a stage play is ^{the playing} it on the boards, the stage: reading it, much more writing it, is not its performance. The performance of a symphony is not the scoring it, however elaborate^{ly}; it is in the concert room, ~~with~~ ^{by} the orchestra, and then ^{and there} only. A picture is performed, or performs, when anyone looks at it in the ~~int~~ proper and intended light. A house performs when it is ^{now} built and lived in. To come nearer: books play, ~~or~~ perform, or are played and performed when they are read; and ordinarily by one reader, alone, to himself, with the eyes only. Now we are getting to it, George. Poetry was originally meant for either singing or reciting, a record was kept of it; the record could be, was, read, and that in time by one reader, alone, to himself, with the eyes only. This reacted on the art: what was to be performed under these conditions for these conditions ought to be and was composed and calculated. Sound-effects were intended, wonderful combinations even; but they bear the marks of having been meant for ^{the} whispered, not even whispered, merely mental performance of the closet, the study, and so on. You follow, ^{Edward} Joseph? You do: ^{then} We are there. This is not the true nature of poetry, ^{the} darling child of speech, of lips and ~~human~~ spoken utterance: it must be spoken; till it is spoken it is not performed, it does not perform, it is not itself. Sprung rhythm gives back to poetry its true soul and self. As poetry is emphatically speech, speech ~~re~~ purged ~~of all but~~ ^{of dross} like gold in the furnace, so it must have emphatically the essential elements of speech. Now emphasis itself, stress, is one of these: sprung rhythm makes verse stressy; it purges it to an emphasis as much brighter, livelier, more lustrous than the ^{regular but} commonplace emphasis of common rhythm of poetry in general

³³ Hopkins, *Correspondence*, p. 747.

is brighter than ^common^ speech. But this it does by a turn from that regular emphasis, ~~to~~ ^towards, not up to^ the more picturesque irregular emphasis of talk – ~~not~~ ^without^ however becoming itself lawlessly irregular; then it would not be art; but making up by regularity, equality, of a larger unit (the foot merely) for ^in^ equality in the less, the syllable. There it wd. be necessary to come down to mathematics and technicalities which time does not allow of, so I forbear. For I believe you now understand. Perform the Eurydice, then see. I must however add that to perform it quite satisfactorily is not at all easy, I do not say I could do it, but this is ~~no hind~~ nothing against the truth of the principle maintained. A composer need not be able to play his ~~music~~ violin music or sing his songs. Indeed, the higher wrought the art, clearly the wider severance between the parts of the author and the performer. (*Correspondence*, pp. 747-8)

There are a number of things here that are unsurprising to read from Hopkins's pen—that he would stand so strongly for poetry *being* oral in its essence; that he would create such a strong bond between the being of art and its becoming (the performing of a work of art *is* what it is, 'deals out that being indoors each one dwells'); that he would create this analogical relation (common speech : poetry in general :: poetry in general : sprung rhythm); and also, frankly, that he would back off from the explanation of 'mathematics and technicalities' under the plea of insufficient time and in favor of metaphorical explanations. What *is* surprising is the play between confidence and modesty (even personal misgiving) in Hopkins's tone, as well as the ambiguous possibility he concedes of a 'satisfactory' performance of sprung rhythm. The attitude towards Everard is so clearly that of a big brother (playful, affectionate, patronizing) but also of one who has thought long, methodically, and enthusiastically on this topic; there is something *he* sees clearly (how 'Sprung rhythm gives back to poetry its true soul and self') that he wants his reader, Everard, to also see as clearly and precisely as he does. The problem is that Hopkins's lesson works up to its climax—'Perform the Eurydice, then see'—but then almost immediately undermines itself. What are the chances that Everard *will* be able to 'perform it quite satisfactorily'? From Hopkins's tone of warning at this juncture, as well as his note that he himself probably couldn't recite it adequately, Everard's shot at a satisfactory performance (and thus 'then see[ing]' what Hopkins has been trying to explain) doesn't seem very good. Thus, while Hopkins begins, adamant about poetry's only reality in full speech (not whispered or imagined), the

way this paragraph ends makes that reality *seem* like much more of a theoretic ideal. The performance has become a thing of imagination—of no less importance to Hopkins’s theory of what poetry is, perhaps, but an entity whose sudden ghostly grail-like status casts a pale shadow over the ‘sweet’ thought Hopkins began with: of his poem coming to life through Everard’s voice, and of that brother’s confidence in his ability to perform it. This shift in the letter illustrates the main problem of Hopkins’s insistence on performance: that that insistence itself, the existential importance that Hopkins places on the performance of a poem, becomes inhibitive of performance’s actualization.

Or does it? The main point of difference between the way that Hopkins is discussing recitation in this letter (and elsewhere) and the way that linguists and prosodists do, is the element of strain, work, concentration and practice that Hopkins sees as necessary to saying a poem aloud. When linguists like Prudence Byers, Joseph Taglicht, and David Crystal are intent on locating the differences between poetic intonation and that of normal speech, these differences are the product of a situation—of reading a poem rather than prose—and not necessarily of the individual readers’ intentional practice of reading.³⁴ Thus intonation is treated as something that ‘happens,’ the very opposite of something that necessitates special concentration. This is quite similar to the interests of Gordon Cooper, as well, in his helpful unison of linguistic and literary approaches to intonation in *Mysterious Music*. Cooper, too, is more interested in the acoustical data of recorded readings, in observing what certain poetic effects on the page—stress density, parallel structures, stress clash—*do* to the reading voice, than in aesthetically assessing those readings and the interpretive/performative choices latent in them. This mode of considering poetic intonation is certainly less intimidating to a potential performer, and can even seem more democratic, but it is worth considering the great divide between this approach and that proposed by Hopkins—and whether it amounts to a difference not only in intensity but in their very conceptions of what it means and does to give a poem voice.

³⁴ See note 7.

The very same letter to Everard continues with the statement that ‘True poetry must be studied’ and a reflection on the symbiosis Hopkins conceives between study and recitation. While the latter is necessary to the former in allowing the reader to imagine the sound while reading ‘like a musician reading a score and supplying in thought the orchestra (as they can)’, that study ‘before [the performance] or after or both’ is also necessary to produce effective performance. One has to have the recollection of a performance to begin with, something to give the mind imaginative acoustic material, but Hopkins actually ends up giving the imagining activity priority – ‘no further performance is, substantially, needed’. ‘No other performance’ implies, interestingly, that the imagining *is* a kind of performance—not a performance to which anyone else is witness, but no less *real* for Hopkins.

Audiation, Intonation: How Sound Becomes Shape

Clearly, such mental intoning of a poem would pose problems for those keen to study intonational patterns—as well as for Hopkins’s energetic defences of an *active* performance. How could the imagined acoustics of a poem be measured or described? And yet if, for example, my reading of T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Wasteland’ *is* so affected by hearing his recorded performance that even my silent readings of it are mentally intoned as he speaks it, how can I say that that mental intonation is less ‘real’ than if I were to read it aloud? Anyone will have had this experience, whether in listening to Sylvia Plath, Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, or Anne Sexton—that the particular intoning of a poem, once heard, can lodge itself indelibly in the mind, bending all future ‘silent’ readings of a poem to that imagined acoustical shape. In music theory, the phenomenon is called ‘audiation,’ the term first used by Edwin Gordon in 1976, for what he described as kind of aural equivalent to imagination. The concept was central to his philosophy of music education, but also to his understanding of what music itself essentially *is*. This is a relationship, I would argue, that is not far removed from the way Hopkins writes of the relationship between saying/hearing and understanding poetry. Gordon writes:

Sound itself is not music. Sound becomes music through audiation, when, as with language, you translate sounds in your mind and give them meaning. The meaning you give these sounds will be different depending on the occasion and will be different from the meaning given them by another person. Audiation is the process of assimilating and comprehending (not simply rehearing) music we have just heard performed or have heard performed sometime in the past. We also audiate when we assimilate and comprehend in our minds music we may or may not have heard, but are reading in notation or composing or improvising. In contrast, aural perception takes place when we are actually hearing sound the moment it is being produced. We audiate actual sound only after we have aurally perceived it. ... Moreover, compared to what is often called musical imagery, audiation is a more profound process. Musical imagery casually suggests a vision or figurative picture of what music might represent. It does not require assimilation and comprehension of music, as does audiation. (Gordon, p. 14)³⁵

The ability of the mind to create (or recreate) sound is inextricably linked, for Gordon, with the production of aural meaning. Aural perception (the moment of hearing a song or a poem being performed), and the sense of what that percept means, are divided by this stage, this ‘process’, of ‘assimilation’—a stage, as he also posits, that can happen at varying levels of depth and sensitivity depending on the hearer. Gordon, like Hopkins, makes clear that the perception (and then memory storage) of actual sound necessarily comes before audiation: it must be produced and perceived before it can be reproduced in the mind). But without the intermediary process, ‘sound’ would remain just that. Audiation, moreover, while a common phenomenon to the human mind, is unique to each person and to the time and place of first hearing. Each person will assimilate sound into music differently, assigning slightly or vastly different meanings depending on a host of circumstances that make up subjective experience. Yet this essential difference of audiation between individuals is not the same as saying that all performances are equal, or their distinctions so inevitable that they become uninteresting—something that is perhaps even easier to understand with poetry than with music since certain recitations of a poem could potentially warp its fundamental meanings. To return to Hopkins’s description of the difficulty of ‘quite satisfactorily’ performing the

³⁵ Edwin Gordon, *Learning Sequences in Music: A Contemporary Music Learning Theory* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2007) p. 14.

‘The Loss of The Eurydice,’ the ‘good’ performance is more of an audiated ideal, something imagined and striven for through study, through earnest investment, rather than something one is likely to hear in actuality. The close-to-good reading, we might say, is one that points towards it, precisely through its exhibition of meaning assignation—its ability to turn audiation inside-out and activate it in a listener’s own mind.

The distinction between audiation and ‘musical imagery’ that Gordon makes is also helpful for better understanding Hopkins’s notion of ‘the inscape of speech’. James Wimsatt’s *Hopkins’s Poetics of Speech Sound: Sprung Rhythm, Lettering, Inscap* is perhaps the most helpful study of Hopkins’s poetic philosophy (taking it as a necessary counterpart to the meaning of his poems, rather than the “irrelevant theory of prosody” as Herbert Marshall McLuhan dubbed it).³⁶ Wimsatt points readers to consider more fully Hopkins’s most mature writing on the subject, his lecture notes ‘Poetry and Verse’ from 1873-4. Here, Hopkins writes of poetry’s function as that of making ‘figures of speech sound’ themselves ‘available for contemplation,’ detaching speech sound from its lexical or rhetorical purposes.³⁷ As he writes: ‘Poetry is speech framed for contemplation of the mind by the way of hearing or speech framed to be heard for its own sake even over and above its interest in meaning’ (p. 289). It is important to pause at this notion that speech sound (which, in the text, refers to both individual units of sound *and* phrases made out of them) *has* a ‘sake’ of its own. Hopkins defined ‘sake’ to Bridges as ‘the being a thing has outside itself, as a voice by its echo, a face by its reflection, a body by its shadow, a man by his name, fame, or glory, *and also* that in a thing by virtue of which especially it has this being abroad.’³⁸ Conceiving of speech sounds as having ‘sakes’ of their own, independent from cultural or lexical signification can feel like a hard sell. This is one of the reasons, as Wimsatt observes, that the significance of these ‘figures’ themselves, and the mystery of what ‘inscape of speech’ meant to Hopkins,

³⁶ James Wimsatt, *Hopkins’s Poetics of Speech Sound: Sprung Rhythm, Lettering, Inscap* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Herbert Marshall McLuhan, “The Analogical Mirrors” *Kenyon Review* 6:3 (1944), pp. 322-332, p. 322.

³⁷ Gerard Manley Hopkins, ‘Poetry and Verse’, *Journals*, pp. 289-90, p. 289.

³⁸ Hopkins, *Correspondence*, p. 359 (emphases original).

has been sidelined by critics' greater attention to the methods of enforcing that inscape, such as parallelism, 'repetition, oftening, over-and-overing, aftering of the inscape'.³⁹ For Hopkins, as Wimsatt emphasizes, the speech sound has 'a proper and positive value' of its own, independent even of mimetic significance (p. 12). Like Gordon's insistence that the process of audiating is not the same as 'musical imagery'—imagining Sonja in *Peter and the Wolf* when the oboe plays, or marching lions and gliding swans in *The Carnival of the Animals*—so this inscape of speech that poetry calls attention to is something that occurs in the mind of a perceiver and can be experienced independent of a signifying system. The 'meaning' of poetic speech is how it moves, a notion that can, at least at first, seem quite similar to the way some critics write of inherent meaning communicated by certain intonational phrases. For example, in his chapter on 'Intonational Tunes' Cooper helpfully catalogues various types of 'intonational meaning' both from his own research and others, particularly Janet Pierrehumbert (1980) and Alan Cruttenden (1986). 'Seeking an answer', 'uncertainty or dubiousness about one's assertion', 'seeking approval from the hearer', 'weighty, powerful, impatient', 'protesting, hostile', 'soothing, reassuring, patronizing', 'self justification, appeal, warning', 'menacing' (Cooper, pp. 125-6)—all of these are varieties of *affective* meaning, perceived through the patterns of rise and fall in a speaker's phrasing.⁴⁰ These varying phrase shapes, and the contents of feeling, mood, and relationship they convey, are mostly discussed by Cooper in the context of acoustical data—in sample sets of recorded speech that can be heard and analyzed. While this is interesting for studying general trends of rhetorical intonation in natural speech, and while the audio data is clearly crucial to this process, it becomes difficult to think how this understanding of 'intonation' could apply to a text that (though 'meant' to be intoned, and that very particularly) survives with no audio record. How can we manage to have a sense of speech sound, as Hopkins understood it, when faced with written text alone, as Hopkins's poems and performative instructions require?

³⁹ James Wimsatt, *Hopkins's Poetics of Speech Sound: Sprung Rhythm, Lettering, Inscap* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁰ Byers sorts out these connections between intonational patterns and affect more generally; for example, 'A rise ... usually implies incompleteness, a rise-fall surprise, and fall-rise condition or reservation.' Byers, p. 373.

At this point, we come to an aspect of Hopkinsian intonation that seems to have everything and nothing to do with the way that linguists might approach it. As cognizant of the physiology of pronunciation as a linguist would be, Hopkins and his interest in speech sound and patterns require a concentration on pronunciation that detaches pitch and tone from their rhetorical purposes. In creating a design out of intonation, the latter comes to have a being separate from its practical use—and yet, anomalously, for Hopkins, allowed him a unique means of imagined community with his few but well-loved readers. The intonational design of a stanza may call forth an emotional effect, but it will be in response to the physical experience of pitch and speed, rather than semantics. In this essay's final movement then, it is necessary to test the interrelation between the performing, scanning, and understanding that Hopkins recommended to his correspondents, as well as the tentatively personal connection such a practice could produce between him and his readers.

'Perform the Eurydice, then see'

There are a few aspects of 'The Loss of the Eurydice' that make it a particularly good subject for considering aspects of intonation, perhaps even over and above the metrical structures that can be found in it. The simple fact of its sprung rhythm is one of them, but there is a heightened quality of give-and-take, of elasticity in its sound space that distinguishes it from Hopkins's other sprung works. For each quatrain, as a note on the manuscript reads, 'The 3rd line has three beats, the rest 4'.⁴¹ While such variations assimilate easily into conventionally metred poetry (as with hymn metres), the third line change-up in a sprung structure is more challenging since not all of those third lines happen to be shorter than the four-beat lines around them. The only way to realize which syllables take the beat in these lines *is* to read them aloud, in context of the stanza as a whole. The other element in the poem that requires close attention to intonational patterns is its heavy use of enjambed rhymes. As the manuscript note states, following its mention of beats:

⁴¹ Hopkins, *Works*, p. 230.

“The scanning runs on without break to the end of the stanza, so that each stanza is rather one long line rhymed in passage than four lines with rhymes at the ends.”⁴² We can hear this particularly in the abundance of compound rhymes—‘thither’ (l.43) and ‘with her’ (l.44); ‘crew in’ (l.95) with ‘ruin’ (l.96); ‘burn all’ (l.119) with ‘eternal’ (l.120)—rhymes that at times sound more like Byron than Hopkins.⁴³ Such rhymes point towards the deep cohesion of each stanza’s elements, the peculiarity of which becomes manifest with the great attention to intonation that the scansion requires. It is within these stanzas that we can witness through practice the mutually dependent processes of scanning, speaking, and interpreting that Hopkins described to Everard and how the principle of *rubato* that he described to Bridges could have also been a guiding force in composition.

Unlike *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, ‘The Loss of the Eurydice’ enters without preface into the circumstances of a shipwreck (this one, of a training vessel wrecked in a storm off the coast of England). For Hopkins, the circumstances are dually physical and spiritual as he grieves both the loss of physical human beings, ‘strung by duty, ... strained to beauty / And brown-as-dawning-skinned’ (ll. 78-9) and their non-Catholic English souls, ‘rolled in ruin’, who have only the tears and prayer of mourners to help them receive divine pity. As in *The Wreck*, the work of the sprung rhythm is also dual: mimetic as it produces the physical pitch and shudder of the ship, and lyrical as it produces the emotional response of the speaker. In ‘The Eurydice,’ however, Hopkins is less reliant on alliteration in creating his rhythm, and while the consistent alternate third line of three beats would seem to give greater support to a scanner than we get in *The Wreck*, the phrasal and rhythmic shape of that third line (in service of the timing of the whole stanza) is always

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ As Alan Pryce-Jones notes, such ‘hideous’ rhymes are ‘allowed’ because ‘they are not to be set one against the other as full rhymes, but to be noticed as the milestones during a furious journey, for a mark only and not for a halt’ (p. 221). In the context of Pryce-Jones’ full discussion of Hopkins’ prosody, ‘The Loss of the Eurydice’ does not fare well, even with this caveat about the logic of its rhymes. While recognizing the intent for each stanza to be read as one line, Roberts claims that Hopkins ‘exceeds his effect’: ‘But,’ as he states parenthetically, the poem is already a failure, and perhaps notable only for as bathetical a couplet as ever a religious poet confected: “A life-belt and God’s will / Lend him a lift from the sea-swill” ...’. Alan Pryce-Jones, ‘Gerard Manley Hopkins’, in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Gerald Roberts (New York, London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 217-222, (p. 221).

unique, and so requires multiple ‘tries’ to find which beats both ‘fit’ rhythmically, and are mimetically or lyrically expressive. Below is an excerpt of stanzas eight through eleven (my stresses in bold, arrived at, as I will explain, in dialogue with aspects of intonation), which exemplify the shifting time of the third line and how the affective content of the whole relies on its ability to vary in phrase shape.

Now **Carisbrook keep** goes **under** in **gloom**;
Now it **overvaults Appledurcombe**;
Now **near** by **Ventnor** town
It **hurls, hurls** off **Boniface Down**.

Too **proud, too proud**, what a **press** she **bore**!
Royal, and **all** her **royals wore**.
Sharp with her, **shorten sail**!
Too late; **lost; gone** with the **gale**.

This was **that fell** capsize.
As **half** she **righted** and **hoped** to **rise**
Death **teeming in** by her **portholes**
Raced down **decks**, round **messes** of **mortals**.

Then a lurch **forward, frigate** and **men**;
‘**All hands** for **themselves**’ the cry **ran then**;
But **she** who **had** housed them **thither**
Was **around** them, **bound** them or **wound** them **with** her. ⁴⁴

Scanning ‘without break to the end of the stanza’ means that we consider how the shape of each phrase is conditioned by the ones around it. It’s the give-and-take of time and space that determines the individual identity and shape around the gravitational centers of each phrase (how they rise and fall, slow and speed up to or down from their stresses), and how the ‘highspot’ of pitch moves in dialogue with the weight of stress. As with the ‘mess of mortals’ Hopkins describes, the rule for each line, given the liberty of the sprung rhythm, only *seems* to be ‘all hands for themselves’. In actuality, each line, and indeed each phrase within it, is inextricably ‘bound’ and ‘wound’ by the stanza-vessel. Stanza eight demonstrates this principle

⁴⁴ Hopkins, *Works*, p. 136.

most accessibly in regards to how we hear the interplay of stress and pitch patterns. The two first lines imitate the storm overtaking the Isle of Wight: the first line mimicking its progress with the rising rhythm and, with the tonic accent on ‘under’, the low overshadowing of the land; the second line, switching to a falling rhythm with the main accent on ‘over’ performs the proportional power and size of the storm over the island’s landmarks. With these two momentum-building lines, the third has to hit the brakes hard in order to create the suspense Hopkins needs to set up the fourth. The three-beat structure of each stanza’s third line means, in general, that they tend to come out particularly ‘stressy’ (to use Hopkins’s term)—either because we dwell on the three beats longer to make up time for the missing fourth beat, or because Hopkins strings more unstressed syllables between them to take up time, thus making the stresses bound out with greater energy. The third line in this stanza is no exception, the stressiness even played up by the alliterative *n*’s, yet the pitch range of the line has less variation than the lines before. The tonic accent of ‘Ventnor’ just rises up towards the end of a line that otherwise feels monochromatic, eerily even. The line allows a full three unstressed, suspense-building syllables (enjambing with the fourth line) before the repetition of ‘hurls’. The duality of Hopkins’s practice of intoning and composing is particularly evident in reading ‘It hurls, hurls’. We can read the comma taking the space of an unstressed syllable—as though the storm were taking an ominous breath before the second blow—then continuing with the impetuous rhythms established in line one; but we can also hear a slightly longer and higher accent on the second ‘hurls’, achieved by the stronger force of a repeated word and by the slight slur between ‘hurls’ and ‘off’. In this way, Hopkins creates a stanza in which stress cannot exist independently of tempo and pitch. As speakers, we have an awareness of the necessity to speed or slow, and of how the velocity of phrases is created both by the weight of stress and by the moving highspot of pitch.

A similar dynamic is at work in the ninth stanza, though here punctuation and stress call our attention to cadence and tone, rather than tempo. ‘**Sharp** with her, **shorten sail!**’ imitates both the cadence of an order and the desperation of delivery. Mercilessly, that desperate, tense energy of the line (far more important than the semantic content) is met and matched by the leisurely expansiveness of despair in

‘**T**oo late; **l**ost, **g**one with the **g**ale’; a line that creates the sense of dilation through its division into three distinct tonal phrases “Too late; | lost | gone with the gale.” As in stanza nine, in ten, too, there is a kind of affective narrative achieved by the progression and peculiarity of intoning it—from solemnity, to earnest effort and hope, to insidious failure, to swift, dehumanizing destruction. The third line follows the rule of being crucial in making this movement effective; while ‘Death’ would seem like a prime candidate for both stress and accent, when speaking the stanza as a whole, one realizes that in order to achieve the time dilation, the stress (as I read it) must be on ‘teeming’ (as a long vowel) and the tonic accent on ‘in’ as the mid-point of the phrase’s shape: an intonation that in fact also conveys more forcefully the spill of seawater *inwards*. The third line of stanza eleven (where Milward, alternately, puts the stress on ‘housed’) requires the same aural care in choosing ‘had’ rather than ‘housed’ as the stress—again, as the mid-point, or center of gravity of the phrase.⁴⁵ Here too the revision of the natural intonation (making ‘housed’ the stress) through performative attention to the aesthetics of the phrase (allowing one to hear ‘had’ as though it is the main verb) carries a deeper meaning back into the lexical interpretation of the stanza: as the ship ‘had’ protected the men through their commitment to her, now that union drags them down; such a reading is particularly important given the poem’s larger reflection on England, both ‘housing’ and damning its people through its rejection of Catholicism.

It is perhaps in this way that we can come to see the paradoxically inward, contemplative effect of the performance Hopkins insisted on. By requiring his readers to speak his writing, Hopkins was also requiring them to acknowledge the deep intention of his own compositional practice. In the moments when hearing the performative demands for tempo, pause, cadence, or accent over-ride what might be assumptions of silent or even subvocalized reading (as the latter does not

⁴⁵ Milward’s scansion of the stanza runs as follows: “Then a **lurch forward frigate and men**; / ‘All **hands for themselves**’ the **cry** ran **then**; / But **she** who had **housed** them **thither** / Was **around** them, **bound** them or **wound** them **with** her’. My reading puts the stress on ‘Then’ rather than ‘lurch’ in the first line as the trochee/iamb combination in fact performs the feeling of a ‘lurch’ better than stressing the word can do. Also, in the second line, stressing ‘selves’ rather than ‘them’ is crucial both to the natural pronunciation of the word and the sad, wailing pitch of a read ‘cry’ that the quoted speech takes on by ending on a beat. (Milward, p. 11).

force one to encounter the physical demands of verse and physical limits of voice as powerfully), *and* when that aural priority also lends new meaning to the poem, Hopkins achieves his uncanny intimacy with the reader: not so much in the sense we have of imagining his compositional process, but in the feeling that he has foreseen the problems and potentials of our performance. Thus, while Hopkins explains to Everard in quite objective terms that speaking a poem is necessary to its very existence—‘it must be spoken; till it is spoken it is not performed, it does not perform, it is not itself. Sprung rhythm gives back to poetry its true soul and self—we might also read this as having a very personal meaning: writing in sprung rhythm was a way to re-materialize his own voice for his friend and family readers, to ‘give back’ that voice to them, and to make them aware of that distinctive, ‘pitchy,’ quality of voice and expression (over and above lexical content) through the unique challenge of dually performing and scanning. When the challenge is met, the poem, to use Hopkins’s terms, ‘performs’—not only existentially, or for our interpretive understanding, but in the sudden realization of intimacy as a voice not our own becomes present: distinct, but claiming understanding from our mouths and minds.