

## *Book Reviews*

Lesley Higgins, Ed. *Oxford Essays and Notes*, Vol. IV of *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. pp. xxiv + 368, \$199.00 cb.

*Reviewed by Jerome Bump*

The first of the eight volumes of the new Oxford edition to be published, this edition includes Hopkins's Birmingham Oratory notebook as well as all of his Oxford essays and notes. Full of previously unpublished materials, it is the most important publication in Hopkins scholarship in the last twenty years.

A brief examination of just two previously unpublished items in the new edition suggests some of its controversial links to worlds unexplored by traditional Hopkins scholarship, such as Orientalism and Animal Studies (the subject of twelve articles in *PMLA*, March 2009). These two items also lead us to new territories in areas that Hopkins scholars have already begun to map out, such as ecocriticism, and advance our understanding of Victorian culture, Hopkins's life and works, and his reputation outside the academy.

The two items that I have chosen are a note on Buddhism, and the essay, "The contrast between the older and the newer order of the world as seen in Caste." Lesley Higgins's initial note on this essay (213-14) refers the reader to the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and various related publications. Admittedly, the India connection may be disputed on at least three grounds. First of all, India is not mentioned in the essay, though Herodotus and the Romans are. Secondly, Professor Higgins reminds us that "GMH had been invited to write an essay on the subject 'Estimate the value of India to England'," one of two topics in Hopkins's diary that may have been suggested by his tutor, perhaps from a list for a group of students; but we have no evidence that Hopkins wrote this essay. Finally, at first glance, even the last word of Hopkins's title fails to support a

connection to India. The first definition of “cast” in the *OED* includes the obsolete “race, stock, or breed (of men)”; the Spanish word *casta*; and cast as “breed of animal.”

Nevertheless, I would argue for the India link for three reasons. First, Hopkins’s spelling of “caste” with an “e” (“hardly found before 1800”) refers specifically to India, and the *OED* entry concludes, “this is now the leading sense, which influences all others.” Secondly, the first *OED* example after this definition is from “1818 JAS. MILL *British India*.” In her note, Professor Higgins cites this book (along with Max Müller’s works and Jowett’s notes and lectures), and states that for the essay on caste Hopkins “consulted James Mill, ‘Caste’,” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Finally, I would point to Hopkins’s statements in a letter to a friend in India: “I have a yearning towards Hindoos...as Baillie and I used to say, the Vedas and Hindoo philosophy are what I should hugely like to go in for.” Hopkins adds that if his friend knows Sanskrit, “I go April-green with envy.” More importantly, Hopkins asks him to write to him about specific castes and to “develop caste” generally.

Assuming, then, that India is at least one of the subjects of the essay, it seems that Hopkins is not just explaining, but defending caste, and thus the natives of India, at a time when there was almost no British sympathy for either. Still more intriguing is his comment on “the difference of food” (213), implying acknowledgment of a cause of the mutiny rarely taken seriously. (Ostensibly, the British forced the native soldiers to use cow and pig fat in the preparation of the cartridges of the new Enfield rifles, thereby violating the deepest precepts of their religions.) If Hopkins is admitting the validity of one of the religious causes of the mutiny, as well as defending the Indian caste system, we may need to revise our simplistic assessment of him as a jingoist and, to some extent, our account of the Victorian representation of India.

Space does not permit further exploration of such a complex topic here, so I’ll turn to Hopkins’s brief citation from Max Müller’s *Chips from a German Workshop*: “Establishment of Buddhism by Asoka ‘the Constantine of India’” (296). Even here the India connection may be resisted: when I directed the attention of one Hopkins scholar to this quotation, he argued that Hopkins was interested primarily in Constantine and stressed that this is the only time Hopkins even uses the word “India” in these essays and notes. This argument was made despite the fact that this extract appears in the middle of

pages of citations from Müller's discussion of India and in spite of knowledge of the Hopkins letter cited above.

Inspired by that letter and Professor Higgins's note on the Caste essay, I propose that Hopkins's citation of Müller's phrase advances our understanding of "Binsey Poplars" and one of the strangest entries in Hopkins's journal: "The ash tree growing in the corner of the garden was felled. It was lopped first: I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more." These sentences enhance Hopkins's reputation in the world beyond the academy. Drawing attention to Hopkins's nature writing, the source of many readers' initial attraction to Hopkins, these sentences enhance his contributions to the environmental movement's powerful impact on international, national, and campus politics. As we shall see, they may even be said to help in their own small ways both to heal divisions between the West and East and to increase awareness of the spiritual aspects of the environmental crisis.

Hopkins's "pang" is an expression of, among other feelings, the elegiac lament that pervades the environmental movement. In this regard, the word "felled" in the journal entry recalls "Binsey Poplars." Both illustrate Hopkins's "compassion" for trees—that is, his ability "to suffer together with" and to "participate in the suffering of another" (*OED*). In "Binsey Poplars," the speaker's own body suffers with the trees' inscape, "so tender / To touch, her being só slender, / That, like this sleek and seeing ball / But a prick will make no eye at all." In his journal entry, Hopkins's suffering is more intense, going beyond loss of an eye to the death of the whole body.

This hypersensitivity is rare in the West, but it surfaces in Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, Thoreau's *Walden*, and Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Many have assumed that Hopkins's response to the ash tree is, in Hardy's terms, an "excessive sensibility," perhaps even a "weakness of character" justifying the psychoanalysis of Hopkins as a person attracted to pain. In *Elegy for an Age*, John Rosenberg traces this extreme sensitivity to the Greek and Latin literature Hopkins studied at Oxford. During those years, Oxford was becoming famous also for Sanskrit studies, a language that transmitted an even older and more sacred poetry of the earth than the western classics. Hopkins's comment on Müller's chapter on Buddhism suggests that we widen the scope of our

inquiry beyond Anglophone literature, with its heritage of Greece and Rome, to the rest of the world. When we do so, we discover that if Hopkins's "excessive sensibility" is a "weakness of character," he shares it with the hundreds of millions of people who have lived in India in the last three thousand years. Moreover, as the Victorians in India were discovering, this spirituality was not extinct, like that of the Romans and Greeks. Indeed, at this moment it is reframing the issues of the environmental crisis.

Hopkins's interest in Asoka suggests that his "pang" and this death wish can also take us to the cutting edge of Animal Studies research, extending to plants the definition of species-ism, the "discrimination against or exploitation of certain animal species by human beings, based on an assumption of mankind's superiority" (*OED*). In the chapter in *Chips* that Hopkins cited, Müller notes that, in Buddhism, "cruelty to animals is guarded against by special precepts," and he cites Asoka's "rock inscriptions...which might be read with advantage by our own missionaries, though they are now more than 2,000 years old." These famous edicts, carved on man-made pillars, boulders, and caves throughout southeast Asia, celebrated the rest-houses, wells, and shade trees Asoka planted along roads for the benefit of animals as well as people. The second rock edict demanded medical treatment for animals and the fifth pillar declared special protection for trees as well.

These proclamations embodied the first of the Five Precepts of moral conduct in Buddhism: abstaining from causing injury to other sentient beings, a doctrine fundamental also to Hinduism and Jainism, where it is known as *ahimsa*. Since the eighth century B.C., some Hindu texts recommended that *ahimsa* be applied not just to animals but also to plants, both wild and cultivated, and called for a diet so limited that no plants would be destroyed in food gathering. Jains (whom the British at first confused with Buddhists) made this kind of vegetarianism mandatory, thereby surpassing Buddhists as well as Hindus in the application of *ahimsa*. Indeed, Jains avoid almost all agricultural occupations and some take pains to prevent injury to creatures too small to be seen. For example, some Jains avoid eating or drinking after dark so as to not injure tiny insects attracted to the light, and some Jain monks wear mouth covers to avoid ingesting tiny creatures and/or carry brooms to sweep the ground in front of them so that they (like Jude) would not step on them.

We move closer to a feeling akin to Hopkins's "pang" when we focus on the basic rule of Jainism stated by Mahavira, a rival of Buddha: "As you want to live, so do to others." By "others," Mahavira meant not only all living beings that can move but also earth, air, water, and vegetation. He considered injury to any of these a sinful act. In this context, Hopkins's list of his sins of "Killing a spider," "Cruelty to a moth," and "Killing an earwig" evoke a profound spirituality akin to that of Hindus, Buddhists, and especially Jains. In the *Arcanga Sutra*, a primary Jain scripture (one of two published by Müller), Mahavira explicitly extends sympathy to plants: "Vegetation has life just as human beings have life. It is born as are human beings; its body grows and feels pain when pricked or cut with weapons."

The significance of "pricked or cut," which foreshadows Hopkins's journal and "Binsey Poplars," may be seen in the Jain story of the majestic banyan tree. One day, a man came along, ate its fruit, deliberately broke off a branch, and left. The spirit that dwelled in the tree thought, "How amazing, how astonishing that anyone could...be so evil." This tree spirit came to Mahavira and complained that someone had *cut off his child's arm* (italics added). Mahavira, acknowledged as the protector of the mute world, then proclaimed that trees should never be mutilated in any way because they are a source of life. Presumably no one thought that Mahavira suffered from a "weakness of character." The founder of Jainism even said that forests are like saints. Who would not be upset if a saint was lopped, maimed, and killed?

Clearly, as the doctrine of *ahimsa* evolved to prevent the acquisition of the bad karma that keeps us in this world, it encouraged a "hypersensitivity" to the environment beyond the wildest imaginations of most Westerners—until they encounter India. As we have seen, this extraordinary sympathy, like Hopkins's, is the product of a spiritual belief. In fact, Jains believe that every living being in this world has *jīva*, what we call a soul. Hence Müller, in the second chapter on Buddhism in *Chips*, marveled that "something divine was discovered in everything that moved and lived" and concluded that in India "the Divine presence was felt everywhere."

That phrase might recall for Hopkins scholars the doctrine of the "Real Presence" that brought Hopkins to Roman Catholicism, with the huge difference that in India the Real Presence is not confined to the Eucharist. This belief that "the Divine presence was

felt everywhere” suggests a new understanding of that extraordinary image of the earth in “Hurrahing in Harvest”: “the azurous hung hills are his world-wielding shoulder.” After reading this line, I like to pose to students the question, “How would we act toward the environment if we believed that this world was the body of God?” Müller’s chapter on Buddhism in *Chips*, which Hopkins cited extensively, provides answers to that question.

On a more personal note, I will conclude simply by saying that I have studied Hopkins for over forty years and now I can say, with Keats:

Much have I travell’d in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
Round many western islands have I been.  
But when, with the aid of the new edition, I traveled to India,  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
He star’d at the Pacific—and all his men  
Look’d at each other with a wild surmise  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

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