

2004

"What the Wind Said" The call of Poetry

Center for Catholic Studies, Seton Hall University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/catholic-studies>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Center for Catholic Studies, Seton Hall University, "What the Wind Said" The call of Poetry" (2004). *Center for Catholic Studies Faculty Seminars and Core Curriculum Seminars*. 6.
<https://scholarship.shu.edu/catholic-studies/6>

Summer 2004

"What the Wind Said" The call of Poetry

Center of Catholic Studies

Paul Mariani
Boston College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.shu.edu/summer-seminars>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Center of Catholic Studies and Mariani, Paul, ""What the Wind Said" The call of Poetry" (2004). *Center for Catholic Studies Faculty Seminars*. Paper 18.
<http://scholarship.shu.edu/summer-seminars/18>



“What the Wind Said”

THE CALL OF POETRY

2004 Summer Seminar
Center for Catholic Studies
Seton Hall University

To Brooklyn Bridge

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
Over the chained bay waters Liberty –

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
As apparitional as sails that cross
Some page of figures to be filed away;
– Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
Foretold to other eyes on the same screen;

And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
Some motion ever unspent in thy stride, –
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,
Tilting there momentarily, shrill shirt ballooning,
A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .
Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.

And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,
Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow
Of anonymity time cannot raise:
Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry, –

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
Beading thy path – condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
The City's fiery parcels all undone,
Already snow submerges an iron year . . .

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curviship lend a myth to God.

– Hart Crane

*D*edicated to the memory of the many faculty who have gone before us.
Particularly, we remember those faculty who died in the year 2004.

Nicholas Chirovsky, Professor Emeritus, Stillman School of Business

Monsignor Andrew Cusack, International Institute for Clergy Formation, Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology

John P. Deehan, Professor Emeritus, Stillman School of Business

Reverend Arnold DeRosa, Retired Faculty Member from the College of Education and Human Services

Florence Hargett, Professor Emerita, College of Nursing

Monsignor John H. Koenig, Professor Emeritus, Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology

Monsignor Joseph C. Manz, Professor Emeritus, Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology

Umberto "Bert" Marino, Professor Emeritus, College of Arts and Sciences

Monsignor Edward G. Price, Professor Emeritus, Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology

Guillermo Sanchez, Professor Emeritus, College of Arts and Sciences

Arthur Santucci, Professor Emeritus, College of Education and Human Services

*A*nd dedicated to the memory of

Paul Patrick Mariani

*Proceedings of the
Center for Catholic Studies*

“What the Wind Said”

THE CALL OF POETRY

Summer Seminar 2004



South Orange, New Jersey

SEMINAR ANNOUNCEMENT

“What the Wind Said” The Call of Poetry

Faculty Summer Seminar

*Monday-Wednesday, May 17-19, 2004
9 a.m. to Noon*

*Facilitator: Paul Mariani
Poet, Essayist, Critic*

Faculty are invited to take part in a seminar on poetry and the contemporary imagination.

Paul Mariani has published five poetry collections including *The Great Wheel* (1996). He is the biographer of William Carlos Williams, John Berryman, Robert Lowell and Hart Crane. He has also written *God and the Imagination: On Poets, Poetry and the Ineffable* (University of Georgia Press, 2002). He holds a chair in literature at Boston College and is the poetry editor for *America* magazine. He is currently writing a book on Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Poets to be discussed in this workshop include Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, T.S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Denise Levertov, as well as several contemporary poets. The workshop aims at understanding the “call” of poetry in today’s world and at inspiring our own poetic imagination. “There will be plenty of time for comment and discussion – and perhaps even trying one’s hand at a poem oneself.”

The seminar is open to fifteen full-time and permanent part-time faculty. Preference will be for those who have not made these seminars in the past. Participating faculty will receive a stipend of \$300 for the seminar and will be expected to write a short response-article. Apply by indicating your interest by March 30, 2004, to the coordinator of the seminar, John Wargacki, English Department at *John Wargacki/FAC/SHU*.

This seminar is co-sponsored by the Center for Catholic Studies and the Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership. It is part of a series of such workshops focusing on the notion of “calling” in the various disciplines.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cover photo *Brooklyn Bridge IX* by Joel Greenberg ©1983. Used by permission

Poetry and the Question of God <i>Monsignor Richard M. Liddy</i>	1
Epistle to Seton Hall <i>Paul Mariani</i>	4
For Its Own Sake <i>John P. Wargacki</i>	5
Passionate Presence <i>Edmund Jones</i>	6
Poet as Prophet: Reflections on 'The Call to Poetry' <i>Christy Guerra</i>	9
What I Did on My Summer Vacation <i>Karen Bloom Gevirtz</i>	12
An Amateur Reads Hopkins <i>Anthony C. Sciglitano</i>	14
The Call of Poetry: The Call of Teaching <i>Mary Balkun</i>	16
A Dantean Reading of Eliot's 'Little Gidding' <i>Nancy Enright</i>	19
Poetry: A Call to Visions of Depravity and Divinity? <i>David Powell</i>	23
Poetry Calling <i>Jeffrey Gray</i>	25
Hopkins and Browning: Variations on the Theme of Transcendence <i>Arundhati Sanyal</i>	28
Honesty and Vocation <i>Brigeth Rivera</i>	31
The Poet's Word as Talisman <i>Melinda D. Papaccio</i>	33
Fractioned Idiom: Poetry and the Language of Autism <i>Kristina Chew</i>	37
Closer to the Table <i>Robert T. McGovern</i>	42
Poets of Decline: Gerard Manley Hopkins and Bruce Springsteen <i>Stephen Martin</i>	44

POETRY AND THE QUESTION OF GOD

by Reverend Monsignor Richard M. Liddy

When I was young, I thought a lot about the proofs for the existence of God – Thomas Aquinas' five proofs, for example. Since then – the matter having been settled to my satisfaction in innumerable ways – I no longer worry about such proofs.

Still, many today are as I was – questioning, tentative, oscillating. And for such folk I would point to the very fact that we keep raising this question of God. And by "we" I mean, not just you and me, but poets, writers and thoughtful folk in general – such as the poets we read in the Paul Mariani seminar. Even though some people claim to be agnostic or atheist – and there can be a conscious decision not to raise the question – for others the question of God keeps resurfacing. The resurgence of religion in formerly communist countries is just one example.

And so we can ask "Why?" "What does this question really mean?" For questions point to answers and, as Plato pointed out, well-phrased questions are shadowy anticipations of their answers. If we did not have such questions, we would not be able to say, "Yes! That's it! That's what I've been searching for!" Without questions we would not recognize answers as answers.

Sometimes, of course, we can raise the wrong question, or formulate it in a way that makes it impossible to answer. Still, recognizing that is usually a breakthrough to a whole new way of questioning.

More important than proofs, then – and I do believe there are valid proofs for the existence of God - is turning one's attention to the dynamism of our own questioning; for that dynamism "is" an open question, a question that heads for God. In coming to terms with the infinitely open question that we are, we are virtually all the way home.

That is why poets are so important. Among other subjects, poets are continually painting expressions of the moods and experiences in which the question of meaning is articulated. Not always answering the question, they emphasize the many ways in which the question finds expression. Always it is a question of transcendence, of going beyond – even beyond this world, the world of clear and distinct answers, to the significance and meaning of our very searching beyond.

For of such searching we can ask: does not our unlimited searching imply an answer to such searching? Does not our very questioning presuppose that the world is intelligible, and if it is intelligible, that there is MIND at its root?

But why should the answers that satisfy the intelligence of the subject yield anything more than a subjective satisfaction? Why should they be supposed to possess any relevance to knowledge of the universe? Of course, we assume that they do. We can point to the fact that our assumption is confirmed by its fruits. So implicitly we grant that the universe is intelligible and, once that is granted, there arises the question whether the universe could be intelligible without having an intelligent ground.¹

Similarly, do our questions for judgment – is this so? Is that so? – presuppose an absolute Being at the root of the contingencies of our world?

And do our value questions – "Is this good? – and that bad?...this to be embraced and that abhorred?" – do such questions presuppose a basic Goodness at the core of our universe? As Bernard Lonergan puts it:

To deliberate about x is to ask whether x is worth while. To deliberate about deliberating is to ask whether any deliberating is worth while. Has "worth while" any ultimate meaning? Is moral enterprise consonant with this world?

Obviously, we are always praising and blaming. But the question can be asked whether the universe is “on our side...

or are we just gamblers and, if we are gamblers, are we not perhaps fools, individually struggling for authenticity and collectively endeavoring to snatch progress from the ever mounting welter of decline?...

Does there or does there not necessarily exist a transcendent, intelligent ground of the universe? Is that ground or are we the primary instance of moral consciousness? Are cosmogenesis, biological evolution, historical process basically cognate to us as moral beings or are they indifferent and so alien to us?

All these questions presuppose “the spark in our clod,” the fire within that heads toward the Fire. And so, no matter the concrete answers given to these questions, still at their core there is the drive of the human spirit toward unlimited questioning, including the implications of such unlimited questioning.

Paul Mariani’s workshop on “The Call of Poetry” pointed to this question of the Beyond present in the writings of five very modern – indeed postmodern – poets. For some, this question was explicitly the question of “God” with whom at times they wrestled – Hopkins:

*...birds build – but not I build; no, but strain,
Time’s eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.*

– Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Thou art indeed just, Lord*

For others this question was allusive. Still, the question, wrapped up in the meaning of their own existence, found expression in the feeling-packed images arising from their own human experience.

*Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker’s rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.*

– Wallace Stevens, *The Idea of Order at Key West*

After centuries of apparently exclusive attention to the “this worldly” – in the West as in the formerly Communist world – the question re-surfaces among some of our most perceptive writers. Scratching the surface of our apparently secularist culture, our Moslem brothers and sisters might find in many of our writers a profound openness to religious truth. In our post-9/11 world the question of transcendence re-surfaces through the cement streets of our sometimes crude secularism.

For Augustine of Hippo this restlessness at the core of the human spirit pointed to an ultimate Rest. “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” For Thomas Aquinas, not just our hearts but our very minds are restless. Radically capable of asking any question – “potens omnia fieri” – our minds are essentially the desire to know God as fully as it is possible for a creature to know the Creator. The medievals called it “the beatific vision,” the “supernatural” fulfillment of our natural desire to know. We have a desire to know that which goes beyond our capabilities.

So even through centuries of cultural alienation, the question of transcendence continues to re-appear. Unwilling to be in a world “without hope and without God” (Paul to the Ephesians), some intellectuals continue to point to this question. In a world that would distract us and keep our focus on the this-worldly (“one earns one’s money this way”), outstanding poets continue to express the everyday moods and feelings in which the very question arises. In spite of living in a world that “wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell,” still:

*And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.*

– G.M. Hopkins, *God's Grandeur*

1 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997; 101-103.

EPISTLE TO SETON HALL

Paul Mariani, Seminar Leader

*It is as though a poem gave the reader as he left it a single,
new word, never before spoken and impossible to actually
enunciate, but self-evident as an active principle in the reader's
consciousness henceforward.*

– Hart Crane, *General Aims and Theories*

What a great group you were! Whatever expectations I had were metaphorically blown out of the water by the warm reception I received and the tremendous response to what I had to say. Enough electricity was generated by the questions and insights in that room, I think, to light the City across the waters I saw from the ramparts of West Orange. Vivas for Seton Hall and for the work you do.

And so here is the letter I promised. My idea was to talk about six poets – all dear to my heart – for whom the question of the immanence and/or transcendence of the Unnamable seemed a central issue, and to look at some of the ways in which this question surfaced, in whatever protean formulations that question assumed.

And so we began on Monday with Hopkins, working from the central tradition of the Christian mystery, in terms of celebration, the essential poverty of the human condition, and ending with a sense of quiet affirmation. From there we went on to Hart Crane, the most Romantic of all American visionary poets, again examining both the ecstatic transcendence of “Atlantis” and the “Proem,” to the Dantesque vision of “The Tunnel,” and finally to the problematic resolution of “The Broken Tower.”

On Tuesday we attempted to move from Eliot’s apocalyptic vision in *The Waste Land* to the profound religious acceptance that underlies the last of his late *Four Quartets*, *Little Gidding*. From there we went on to examine some of the complexities of Wallace Stevens’ philosophical inquiries into the nature of the poetic: what the poetry tells us about our world, how it attempts to do that, and how language comes up against the problematics of the Sublime in a radically skeptical age.

On Wednesday we briefly examined some of the New Jersey poet, William Carlos Williams’ social and epistemological concerns, focusing in particular on how the poet attempts to lift the fallen world about and within him to the level of the imagination by discovering a language, however inadequate, for the immanent beauty that, in spite of the often crushing obstacles in our path, manages to appear each day in the world about us. And – finally – we examined some of John Berryman’s poems, including the hilarious albeit dark vision of the human and the divine, as well as the late *Eleven Addresses to the Lord*, with their plaintive cry and – finally – their own harking to the poetic and religious example of Fr. Hopkins, with whom we began our three-day seminar.

And so: six voices out of several hundred we might have chosen, to examine some of the large questions of our very existence. Who are we, what are we doing here, where are we going, and what – if anything – does it all mean? We also returned again and again—with a deeper sense of urgency as the hours passed—to the question of poetry itself as a call – a call from within, a call to witness, even when – like Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and so many of the prophets – the poet questions his or her own worthiness to answer that call. Reciprocally, we might ask how receptive each of us is to the poets we read, asking if we have understood what it is they are telling us. From what I saw, I think your ears, eyes, and minds were charged with the words we read. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this enriching experience.

FOR ITS OWN SAKE

John P. Wargacki

And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

– Hart Crane, *To Brooklyn Bridge*

In the midst of teaching, writing, and attending conferences, it is indeed a rare treat for 15 colleagues to spend three consecutive mornings engaged in pure conversation about literature. “The Call of Poetry,” sponsored by Catholic Studies at Seton Hall University and led by literary critic, author and poet Paul Mariani, allowed us this very opportunity and exposed us once more to the pleasure and beauty of learning for its own sake.

The response essays published here, in their multifarious approaches, will say far more about the breadth of this three-day odyssey than I can detail here. Instead, I prefer to focus on the chance we had to spend significant time reading, thinking, and conversing during those all-too-brief hours in May. Here was a way to rediscover what it once felt like to be students again – students suddenly free from the pressure of grades, taking notes for ourselves, with the added benefit of knowing we would never be tested. Some felt right at home with the list of poets selected by Paul Mariani for our intellectual consumption: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, and John Berryman. For others, however, this list felt outside their scope of scholarship. But as we all quickly discovered, that initial list was merely the beginning of a short but far-reaching conversation across literary periods and academic disciplines.

That conversation quickly became our motivation. Okay, the seminar stipend helped a little, but for three hours a day the delightful pleasure of learning things both new and/or long forgotten seemed to occupy us thoroughly. Paul Mariani supplied just the right balance of insight and passion while we navigated the conversation through countless courses, from intertextual allusions to rhetoric, from diction to interdisciplinary studies. The astonishing poetry of our primary figures – not to mention the hundreds of other writers and critics who showed up in that framework – did more than come to life, they danced in our imaginations, unyoked from research agendas and lesson plans, doing that thing which drew us to them in the first place. I can no longer count the number of times I heard from an inspired participant: “That really makes want to go back and re-read so and so.”

At this point in a good piece of writing I would expect a list of specific examples for evidence. But my colleagues, I’m pleased to say, have done that and much more through their acute, diversified, and emotive responses. My hope is that they will convey some fragments of a story that truly does belong in the elusive “you had to be there” category. But as we have all been reminded through this experience, words have a way of exceeding even our grandest expectations, and in all of our prose, there’s always something of a poem trying to get out. Here’s to Wallace Stevens’ “Supreme Fiction,” and the holy way in which poetry both reveals to us who we are, while calling us beyond ourselves.

PASSIONATE PRESENCE

Edmund Jones

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

– T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

At some point in my late adolescence, I learned that the Latin root for “passion” was the same as that for “passive,” and I was struck by this simple etymological fact. Both come from *passus*, the past participle of the Latin word meaning to suffer. It is particularly un-American to be passive, to suffer willingly; we pride ourselves on our rugged individualism, on our ability to do more than to think. Eisenhower crushed Adlai Stevenson, who lost in part because he could be successfully labeled an egghead. Eisenhower was no egghead; he had liberated Europe from Hitler.

It’s strange, then, that we so consistently reward passivity in our classrooms, at least during much of primary and secondary education. Students must sit quietly in classes of thirty and act only in response to the teacher or, in a lecture format, only by taking notes. Suffering indeed. As a young high school teacher, I had leaned in the direction of the “English invasion,” the educational reforms in the teaching of language and literature from England that American educators learned about in the Dartmouth Conference of 1966 and, later, in a book by John Dixon. The classroom was to be more student-centered, less dominated by drill and lecture. As a Ph.D. candidate in English education, I learned more about the theories underlying this approach. Student meaning-making was central to these classrooms; single correct interpretations of literature were out. Writing was first about discovering ideas, second about communicating, and only a distant third about being correct. But, mainly, the teacher was no longer at the center of the classroom; rather, s/he was a facilitator, ideally a coach.

During this period I generally scoffed at the lecture method as a waste of time. Why couldn’t we just *read* what the teacher or professor wanted us to learn? The classroom was the time for us, the students, to make sense of the material, in collaboration with our classmates and under the guidance of a teacher who knew how to ask the right questions and engage us with resources or varying points of view.

Thus, to say that I was emotionally unprepared for the three-day seminar conducted by Paul Mariani would be an understatement. The last time I had attended a lecture class was probably in 1975. Of course, Paul wasn’t exactly lecturing us. There was time for questions and some discussion. But, I noticed, after the middle of the first morning, how Paul called our responses “interruptions,” even as he said he welcomed them. He encouraged our questions, even as they were couched in terms of questions for poems gone over, things he’d initiated. We were to be passive. It wasn’t the same as an invitation to explore these poems together. I wanted to get to know my colleagues, not a stranger whom I would have no professional connection with, in part because he lived in a state far away and in part because my discipline really is not literature but composition. I grew somewhat annoyed.

At the same time, I found myself taking in little pieces of knowledge about Gerard Manley Hopkins—the meaning of the word “sillion” that I could not find in any dictionary, the possible meaning of “Buckle!” as the moment of the falcon’s sudden drop, the Ignatian tradition of meditation in the first eight lines of the sonnet. And the poem “The Windhover,” which before I’d always admired because of the sheer syncopation of the language and the rise and fall of the rhythm across the meter, started making sense in a way it hadn’t made sense before. I found myself loving the stories about Hopkins, his early brilliance as a scholar followed by no recognition whatsoever of his enormous poetic talent. And I found myself in awe of the tonality and rhythm that Paul brought to the reading of Hopkins. I loved the “rollinglevelunderneath-himsteadyair.” I love how Paul did not just *read* “The Windhover”; he *proclaimed* it.

As Paul moved into Hart Crane, he started mentioning Williams Carlos Williams, noting the contest that implicitly lay beneath their craftsmanship: one bringing archaic language and formalism to the modern subject as a way of elevating to the level of myth, the other insisting that we start with modern language and elevate it, somehow. For Williams, Paul said, poetry segues naturally out of prose. It's not just the flower but the stem and the roots and the pots and soil. Williams was continually fascinated by the mystery of language. We learned that Williams said of Hart Crane, "If he's right, I'm wrong." Now, with this literary battle of sorts as context, I was beginning to deepen my understanding of why I appreciated Williams more than Crane. Why had I always found Crane too elusive (and allusive)? Why had Williams' language spoken to me even when I wasn't sure what it meant? The three-day seminar had started becoming an investigation into the meaning of poetry and, however briefly, the poems took on a life beyond the explications themselves, interesting as they were.

I was still annoyed with Eliot's obscurity and Crane's language, either through their references or vaguely evoked contexts. But I was enjoying have the thing made sense of. True, I still didn't enjoy Paul's detailed reading where the relatively obvious was explained in detail with personal connections, but I relished the multiple readings, the contexts he provided, the life stories. And so many stories: of Hopkins' lonely happiness at the end of his life in Ireland, of his apparently failing but ultimately winning, of Cranes' estrangement from his mother, of Stevens' "boxing match" with Ernest Hemingway, of Williams' encounter with a man who was going to be permanently blind in one eye due to a work accident but who wouldn't sue the company because he needed the job. I saw I was falling under the sway of Paul's own passionate response to these poets.

How could I not fall in love with the poet-critic-man in front of me, with his with his dynamic gestures, his arm movements, his infectious engagement with the poems and their ideas, his big laugh. He wasn't just sharing his knowledge of poetry; he was sharing himself, the man whose life had been dedicated to these poets, these poems. Whatever Paul was doing, it wasn't just lecturing. It was some kind of sharing that opened up further possibilities for my own relationship with Hopkins and Stevens and Williams and even Crane. Also, I found myself reinterpreting Paul's response to our "interruptions" since in fact he so enthusiastically encouraged our own sense-making. Our interruptions, I saw, became the occasion for further deepening his knowledge. We asked questions and he made them his own, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to think through a line or a word, on a couple of occasions mentioning some insight of John Wargacki, always exclaiming, "Yes, you're right." And being "right" wasn't really the issue. We were, in those three days and in his eyes, never actually wrong. He was just expressing his enthusiasm for our joining him in his appreciation of and critical response to these writers.

On day three, I took these notes. They form a sort of stream-of-consciousness in which I see myself capturing how Paul led up to one of those questions that resonates with me:

Poet trying to speak for all. Bearing witness. Hebrew prophets. The calling. Priests of the imagination. Greek idea of mediator for community – a duty to say something. Williams asks, who am I to speak for all? Was Whitman the last American poet who could speak for the American people as a whole? Can only writers of color experience the pressure to write for their people now?

I'd never thought of that. How marvelous.

I'd hardly said a thing during the three days we had together, Paul and all of us. Yet I could hardly characterize my experience as passive. My mind was actively engaged the entire time. What was happening to my precious beliefs about pedagogy? I had fallen under the spell of a man, and I had reveled in it. But it wasn't so much that I had fallen in love with the man, or the man as he-who-has-immersed-himself-and-returned, he-who-has-loved-these-poets-and-needs-us-as-much-as-we-need-him. It was his passion that I responded to. The "submitting without objection or resistance," is how the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines "passive." Hearing these words, it's hard not to think of the Passion of Christ, even if I'm not a believer, exactly. I experienced Paul as a man who had been willing to submit without resistance to the lives and lan-

guage of these four poets, utterly immersing himself in them. I cannot say if suffering was part of his experience, the suffering that is the core of passion, both etymologically and theologically. But I know that something came alive in me regarding each of the poets during those three days in May, and I responded because I got to experience the strange shortcut to knowledge made possible when a bunch of willing students sits and listens in the presence of someone whose passion is, in turn, evoked by being in the presence of both his revered poets and some willing students.

Next fall I will probably not teach too much differently from this spring. I cannot pretend to be for my writing students what Paul was for us, and yet I may have learned to trust a bit my own love of language to communicate something ineffable, something not possible by reliance on my roles as facilitator, prodder, questioner, responder. The word "lecture" means too many things to capture quickly in one educational theory. And we can't really redefine the word the way I'd like. After all, no one would say, "Oh, yes, I just experienced the most interesting *passionate presence*." But I do want to think about who it is I am up there in front of my students, and I know I want to have more of me up there, not less.

So much of my understanding of how to teach writing is bound up in pointing things out: See here, where you identified an apparent contradiction; that's so cool! And then: Now, what could you do with that contradiction in relation to your idea? And a little bit later (maybe): Let's see what Henry Louis Gates did in his essay on Michael Jordan. As I recapture these moments, I realize that there is some passion in my response to students' work, even if it's the response to a possible future for their writing and themselves as writers. But there is still something missing. Perhaps after all these years of valuing process, I'm feeling the urge to be immersed in some content, so immersed that my passionate response to it provides the occasion for my students' engagement in reading and writing on their own terms and for their own purposes.

POET AS PROPHET: REFLECTIONS ON "THE CALL TO POETRY"

Christy Guerra

*"Poor Sebastian!" I said. "It's too pitiful. How will it end?"
"I think I can tell you exactly Charles...I've seen others like him,
and I believe they are very near and dear to God."*

– Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*

As I think about the idea of "poet as prophet," I am amused at the juxtaposition that was presented in front of me at this year's summer seminar "The Call to Poetry." As any young Catholic, I was raised to know the word "vocation" was applied *only* to the people meant to become priests and nuns. In the days prior to the seminar, I had imagined we participants reading some Julian of Norwich, or a little Saint John of the Cross, or not even really reading poetry at all, perhaps skirting through the Psalms a bit – and if there was time, exploring the Song of Songs. Imagine my surprise, then, when receiving poets like Wallace Stevens, Hart Crane, and John Berryman in my seminar packet – poets that didn't automatically come to mind when I heard the idea of poetry as a calling. What I realized, though, was that these were the prophets of their respective generations...and they were also laying the ground for those poets to come to be prophets as well. What the seminar taught me, ultimately, were three important lessons I will carry with me the rest of my life: One, everyone has the experience and potential to share their talent with the world...; two, poetry is one of the most beautiful forms of prophecy (in the sense of proclamation, not necessarily in foretelling the future); and three, I learned that God's calling of poets to speak for Him is not over – it is a continuous process that is still manifesting itself among today's poets and authors.

Looking at the idea of the prophet in the Judeo-Christian sense, the idea of God's prophets is almost laughable – or if not exactly that, it is a clue to the sense of humor God has when choosing his workers to go out and reap the harvest. Jeremiah complained that he was too young; Moses pointed out he had a stutter; Isaiah reminded God of his sinfulness; and Jonah readily boarded a boat to head in the opposite direction. Rarely in the Bible does anyone leap at the chance to speak for God, something that everyone since has identified with. Even those who occupy what we know as the "Communion of Saints" had to deal with uncooperative clergy, furious parents, and painful martyrdoms in front of them before choosing to speak for God; and although writers do occupy, in a sense, a more accepted form of prophecy, than, say, dressing in loincloths and shouting on a street corner, there is a sort of sadness and even a sense of burden in what a poet addresses. One of those burdens is acting as a mockingbird to their respective societies, as William Carlos Williams did, for example, when he describes domestic fear in *Paterson*:

*I think he means to kill me, I don't know
what to do. He comes in after midnight,
I pretend to be asleep. He stands there,
I feel him looking down at me, I
am afraid!*

Sometimes that same doubt is written as a projection of self, especially when it comes to one's relationship with God. John Berryman writes much of this in his *Eleven Addresses to the Lord*, when he combines the idea of faith with the honesty of someone who almost doesn't want to believe they are believing:

*Unknowable, and I am unknown to my guinea pigs:
how can I 'love' you?
I only as far as gratitude & awe
confidently & absolutely go.*

Even Gerard Manley Hopkins, a poet who combined the idea of writing and faithfulness, was not without his own misery, which he shares with his readers in lines that reflect uncertainty in himself and the faith in God he had built his entire life upon:

*Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would
laugh, cheer.
Cheer whom, though? The hero whose heaven-handling flung
me, food trod
Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one?
That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!)
my God.*

There is a beauty in realizing who God calls to bring others closer to Himself; and even more beautiful is the idea that those who speak God's word are the imperfect ones. Writer Brennan Manning once realized that in the form of who Jesus Himself appeared to in His ministry on Earth:

Here is the revelation bright as the evening star: Jesus comes for sinners, for those as outcast as tax collectors and for those caught up in squalid choices and failed dreams. He comes for corporate executives, street people, superstars, farmers, hookers, addicts, IRS agents, AIDS victims, and even used car salesmen. Jesus not only talks with these people but dines with them – fully aware that His table fellowship with sinners will raise the eyebrows of religious bureaucrats who hold up the robes and insignia of their authority to justify their condemnation of the truth and their rejection of the gospel of grace.

And this is what is embodied in the poets discussed during the seminar: the troubled Hart Crane, the agnostic Wallace Stevens, the realistic Gerard Manley Hopkins. The mystery is revealed, then, to everyone – no one is exempt from God's love and His call of love, and in turn, no one is rejected from it, either, no matter what the person's perception of the relationship. God uses everyone for an important and unique purpose, no matter how battered, tortured, or agnostic: and in these poems, the reader is exposed to the "other side" of the lives of those who follow God - the confusion, the uncertainty, the seemingly faithless times that everyone (from any point in history) is familiar with. Combine this knowledge with the ability to write beautifully, and the results are spectacular, are marvelous, are true mirrors of human potential. Whose breath doesn't catch in their throat when reading lines such as:

*The maker's rage to order words of the sea,/Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred/And of our-
selves and of our origins,/In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds*

or wince at graphic, numbing lines that outline the brickwork for T.S. Eliot's Unreal City in *The Waste Land*?

Where many readers can think poets such as Crane, Stevens, and Berryman fail in responding to "God's call" (at least in their tortured personal lives) to be perfect, strap on a tight halo, and write only about Good Things, perhaps they have responded more readily to His call of telling it like it is, by revealing the facets of human nature that all experience but are

loath to describe for themselves. These poems say it is okay to experience feelings of doubt, of question – and maybe this is the message God is proclaiming through them, because, after all, “Even God cannot fill what is already full.” It is through this brokenness that God works most brilliantly; and in these, our own times of war, of money-controlled politics, of uncertain economy, perhaps the message that God continues to relay to us is that He is still with us. The challenge, then, is for our current poets to recognize this, to pick up the pen and continue the tradition; and like Crane, write of the awe of the beauty around us (as he did in *The Bridge*), like Berryman, write of the honesty that comes in questioning our respective faiths, (as he did in *Eleven Addresses*), like Williams, mirror the lives that are happening around us (as he did in “Paterson”), and like Eliot (as he did in *The Waste Land*), project the hope and optimism that can arise out of a broken world, with God’s help.

WHAT I DID ON MY SUMMER VACATION

Karen Bloom Gevirtz

*But it was more than that,
More even than her voice, and ours, among
The meaningless plungings of water and the wind...*

– Wallace Stevens, *The Idea of Order at Key West*

Consider what ordinary people do with their summer vacations. Discussing poetry probably does not rank high with this population, since not a lot of them choose to do it. And yet there we were, not just talking about poetry, but doing so in the morning no less. What possessed any of us or all of us to do that with our summer vacations? What makes us so different from other people?

In February, 2004, I administered an informal survey to my British Literature course, which was populated primarily by English and English-Education juniors and seniors. The survey was optional and seventeen, a little over half, chose to respond. I asked them to demonstrate their level of familiarity and of interest in literature courses classified by period, genre, or author. The lowest ranking was 1: they would prefer death to taking such a course. The two highest rankings were 4—interest in such a course—and 5—excitement about such a course. The greatest number of students who responded with a 5 to any course was six, less than half. In contrast, the greatest number of 4s any course received was ten, more than half. While they might be interested, even English and English-Education majors are not generally *excited* about studying literature. Furthermore, eight out of seventeen respondents, almost half, rated poetry a 1 (death would be preferable to taking a course in this topic) or a 2 (the student could stand such a course if absolutely necessary). Only one student was excited to take a course in a subject about which he or she knew very little; more often, students were least excited to study a subject about which they knew the least.

If these are English or English-Education majors, how then did *we* come to be, people volunteering to discuss literature, specifically poetry, at 9(ish) on three summer mornings? Were we born or made? If we were made, then perhaps whatever helped us come to be people excited about something, specifically literature, can be shared with students.

Of course, why worry about whether students are excited, as long as they are interested? Or why worry about whether they are interested as long as they're there? We plant a seed. If it doesn't sprout until a student is much older and connecting his or her life and say, *King Lear* or *Trifles* or *Silas Lapham* or "Do Not Go Gently into That Good Night," what matters whether he or she was excited to take Metaphysical poetry at age twenty?

Fair enough. Does it matter whether they come in and/or go out excited? Does it matter whether they're excited about some or all or none of their education? Does it matter when that excitement kicks in? Me, I think it does. I think young people ought to be excited about something and I think people training and stocking their minds with something ought to be excited about it. Excitement doesn't necessarily trump discipline, but it's not a bad hand all the same.

I also think excitement is necessary for democracy. What, after all, does it say about current and future American society that young people are so reluctant to invest themselves deeply, as excitement requires? That they prefer to hear about what they already know? So for me, this question—how did we, the members of the seminar, get there—seems to be of crucial importance in addressing another important issue, the pale showing of 5s, this lack of excitement in my respondents. It gets right to the larger point of teaching: preparing students to be people, members of society, maybe even voters. If stu-

dents come out of my class loving the material, perhaps they will move from interest to excitement about literature. Or about something: global warming, local recycling efforts, the corporatization of baseball. Something beyond the merely appetitive.

I have emerged from the seminar wondering if "stories" is an answer. Perhaps it is the transmission of stories, joyfully given on my part and willingly owned on theirs, that will help my students be not just interested but excited. I take this idea from the participants and the participation. After all, stories occupied much of our time in the seminar. Why else invite a biographer? Drawn by the chance to hear—hear stories that the poems tell, that the poets tell, that the facilitator could or did tell—as well as to speak, we gathered. I'm sure that there was altruism in the gathering, but also something primordial. Human culture has featured storytelling, which requires storylistening, across an enormous range of cultures and geographies and time.

Admittedly, I already depend on stories to bring students and texts together on common ground. I tell stories about authors, about the genesis and life spans (and sometimes afterlives) of texts, about historical moments. But that may be the problem. They are my stories to tell and when students hold on to them, they hold on to them as my property, not their own. "Dr. Gevirtz said." "Remember what Dr. Gevirtz told us in class." "What was it she said about Pope getting kicked by a horse when he was a boy?" Yes, it's true I ask them to write their own stories linking themselves and texts—imagine yourself in this situation, consider what choices you would make in expressing yourself, how is this response like yours, how is this story like ours of today, for example. But all this really is, is first telling them the story, then asking them to write a subsidiary tale.

Ownership begets excitement and vice versa. It was clear during the seminar that there was not only willingness from Professor Mariani to give, but also from us to claim, to take, to hear and then to own in some way. Is it possible that we in the seminar could willingly yield three summer mornings to stories because we already had our own tales, our own connections with the undertaking of poetry, of studying poetry, of the poets we were reading and so on? "I was born in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge." "I am a stranger to modernist poetry." "I adore Williams." "I hate the subway." "I am Catholic." "I am not." "I am baffled by Hopkins." If so, what could that mean for my teaching and their learning? How can I help students to own, to claim, or write stories linking themselves and texts?

I want my students to know the stories that I know, but also to feel that those stories hold them tightly to the texts (and sometimes are actually the texts), and to feel that those stories belong to them and therefore are a part of their lives, however dimly felt later. Perhaps I can generate a sense of ownership and the confidence to be excited through the way that I tell the stories, or bring students and stories together. Perhaps more research projects. Perhaps more reading quizzes on the historical notes to the texts. Perhaps more creative writing. I also wonder how the stories that *they* bring can be a starting point, rather than the stories that I supply. What allowed the seminar participants to listen? Is it confidence in ourselves because of our own tales, because we know our own tales, that allows us not just to be quiet, but also to change through listening? If so, perhaps my students' own stories can be a foundation for that confidence. I suspect then that the ending that I seek lies through making myself a marginal or distant character, someone who listens much more than I do. I can hear my own excitement loud and clear. I must learn how to hear the faint calls of others' nascent excitement, and how to call in response.

AN AMATEUR READS HOPKINS

Anthony C. Sciglitano

Glory be to God for dappled things –

– G.M. Hopkins, *Pied Beauty*

Nietzsche once cleverly observed that grammar was the last bastion of faith in God. Grammar organizes meaning rightly, opposing at every turn the onrush of nonsense—chaos. A comma, period, semi-colon hammers matter into meaning, like a God defining seas from land, light from dark. Fall astray of grammatical speech, and be consigned to the outer darkness. Thus grammar, for Nietzsche, bolsters the illusion that our meanings convey or mirror that which is real, true, and good, allowing degradation of all that falls outside these categories.

I don't know that Hopkins was aware of Nietzsche, but I picture these two lonely figures locked in struggle, perhaps the struggle that continues to define modern Western civilization. Where Nietzsche fears the power illusions that accompany grammatical control, Hopkins' wild linguistic forms punctuate the world with a semicolon traduced by God. Where Nietzsche plays an all or nothing gambit – and frequently hopes for nothing – Hopkins admits degrees of beauty and goodness coincident with the deepest sin and desolation. Where for Nietzsche, perspective is all, for Hopkins all attempts are to gain God's perspective, to shape sight in accord with divine will and forming power. I will focus these brief reflections on two poems, a period, and a semi-colon.

"God's Grandeur," a relatively early poem, compresses the Christian story from creation to Pentecost into fourteen lines. Divine glory and power packs infinite energy into illuminating form ("gathers to a greatness") that at the Fall is "Crushed." Crushed-period. Form and content join to set off lush Garden from the postlapsarian state of toil, barren soil, and shame-clothed feet insensitive to God's creation ("nor can foot feel being shod"). When Adam crushes the given greatness (the "ooze of oil"),¹ he simultaneously breaks divine law (fails to "reck his rod").² The grandeur of creation, we are to understand, respects laws that are at once aesthetic and moral; the beautiful and good form an exuberant, focused whole, perhaps like well-used poetic language.³ Hopkins' poetry seeks a secondary enfleshment of the divine Word.

The next stanza accomplishes a poetic feat that, according to Harold Bloom, is important to many epic poems: "Most poets who attempt cosmic and religious epics are forced by the nature of their themes to experiment with the presentation of radically different but coexistent states of being."⁴ While the period sets off one state from another, neither human sin nor the crucifixion can perish the "dearest freshness deep down things" which now coexists in an agonistic relation to sin. The Holy Spirit preserves the goodness of nature, gives it warmth and light, but it remains a "bent World" over which the Spirit "broods."⁵

"Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" gives us a modest apocalypse – rooted in Matthew 25 rather than John's Revelation – that relativizes worldly beauty for the goodness of neighbor love or works of mercy. This poem deepens the *agon* that we noticed expressed in quieter terms in "God's Grandeur." The poem opens as evening comes upon the earth; but evening is ambiguous as life-giving ("womb-of-all) and death dealing ("hearse-of-all night). The normal turning of the days comes to a halt at "Waste;" The semicolon hurtles the reader from earthly days and nights – the postlapsarian state of being – into eschaton and judgment. Whereas "Crushed-period" definitively sets off Garden from history, however, "Waste-semi-colon" allows continuity or fluidity between eschaton and the temporal realm. What, then, is waste, and what is allowed to have continued significance in the eschaton?

Hopkins tells us that "earth's being has unbound . . . her dapple is at an end." The end to "dapple" indicates a loss of mortal beauty, variety and potency.⁶ Being is no longer lush vitality dynamically ordered by form, but is now "astray or aswarm," diffuse and powerless. Colorful and varied threads spin off their aesthetic spool onto the spools of ethical decision and judgment that matter ultimately: "upon, all on two/spools; part, pen, pack/Now her all in two flocks; two folds—black, white; right, wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind/But these two." He offers a vision of hell as total self-absorption that recalls Kierkegaard's notion of the demonic as the self closed in on itself and unable to find freedom. It seems, though, that Hopkins pulls here from Dante's vision of a hell where the suffering are alert to the joy they missed:

ware of a world where but these two tell, each off the other; of a rack/Where, selfwring, selfstrung,
sheathe-and shelterless, thoughts/ against thoughts in groans grind.

The choices that we make in this time and world are choices for one or the other "spool" or "flock" in the eschaton. Self-absorption now leads to a strung out self in the end. Ethical movement is fluid between the two realms whereas aesthetic movement does not appear to be. Is the aesthetic or the beautiful waste? Or, in Hopkins' own terms, "To what serves Mortal Beauty?"

If there is a danger in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" of perceiving mortal beauty as an obstacle to goodness rather than its entrée, a reminder that beauty is observed in this poem from the perspective of eschatological judgment can be helpful. Other Hopkins poems take a different point of view. "Pied Beauty," for instance, offers a hymn of praise to the creator of beauty whose own beauty is "past change." There exists, then, some analogy between immortal beauty and mortal beauty. "To what serves Mortal Beauty" supports this view. Mortal beauty exists to "keep warm men's wits to the things that are; what good means—where a glance/ Master more may than gaze, gaze out of countenance." Here, beauty brings us into goodness, makes us attend to creation, and more importantly, to love of the "World's loveliest—men's selves" contrary to any philosophy that thinks one needs to deny Christ to love humanity. While mortal beauty is "heaven's sweet gift," and therefore should be recognized as such, it is not the end. We are to wish for all "God's better beauty, grace." Beauty is not forfeit in the eschaton, but rather infinitely elevated, given over or surrendered to that which is ever-greater in beauty and goodness and calls forth praise.

A word of thanks to Paul Mariani who generously shared his knowledge, energy, and poetry with us for three immortal days.

- 1 Whereas the "ooze of oil" in the Garden gathers to a greatness, it is then crushed, giving rise to the Fall, or, in the postlapsarian state of "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection," it is "squandered" suggesting, at least, that evil is as much waste and carelessness as it is willful disobedience, but also that the sin of Adam is unique.
- 2 Following patristic theology, Hopkins views law as part of the created order itself, and not merely a result of sin. Tertullian ...
- 3 As one commentator notes, "formed can also mean worded." Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, volume III: *Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 366.
- 4 Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 23.
- 5 Hopkins' theology in this poem is interesting in that "nature is never spent" despite the Cross ("And though the last lights off the black West went") not in view of or because of it.
- 6 "Pied Beauty" begins "Glory be to God for dappled things—/For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow..."

THE CALL OF POETRY: THE CALL OF TEACHING

Mary Balkun

*She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.*

– Wallace Stevens, *The Idea of Order at Key West*

The struggle and joy of writing, the effort to give shape and meaning to reality as one perceives it, and the way individual writers respond to the call of authorship, these are the common threads of the quotations which introduce this reflection piece, and the ideas which returned to me again and again as we read and discussed the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Hart Crane, T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and John Berryman over the course of three days in the Catholic Studies seminar led by poet, critic, and teacher Paul Mariani. (I will add Emily Dickinson to this list, not only because she became an ongoing presence in our discussions but also because otherwise the list is completely devoid of the female perspective). While each of these writers in turn considered the call of poetry and what it meant to be a “maker” (several even using this actual term), two in particular—Hopkins and Stevens—called to me in a special way. The call of poetry is not really much different from the call of teaching, it seems; each involves a transition from the abstract to the real, and much of what “happens” occurs in the space between idea or inspiration and actuality. This liminal space is the area of possibility, where the vision of what could be is still alive and the inevitable pang of disappointment over the limits of what one is able to create or make real to others is but an intimation. Both poetry and teaching are about a vision of what could be in the face of what is.

For the ancient Greeks, the word “maker” (*Poietes*) referred to the poet, and the word has retained the connotation of one who brings something new into the world, in either tangible form (“A person who fashions, constructs, prepares for use, or manufactures something”) or less tangible form (“a person who brings about or produces a condition, effect, state of mind, etc.; a creator or producer”) (OED). Writers contemplating their craft tend to emphasize the struggle of using the (very slippery) vehicle of language to turn idea into reality. Some are concerned with the responsibilities inherent in any act of creation (Hawthorne, for example, as even the brief quotation in the epigraph suggests), others are sensitive to the implied hubris of their calling (Hopkins falls into this category), while still others focus on the elusiveness of inspiration, the lifeblood of the poetic enterprise. I’d like to start by considering several of the poems which led me to an awareness of the intersections between the calling of the poet and the calling of the teacher, laying the groundwork for some final reflections.

In “To R. B.” Hopkins considers the nature of poetic inspiration, that it “Breathes once and, quenched faster than it came/Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song.” This inspiration is harbored within the poet—it may be for nine months, it may be for nine years—but the result is an “aim now known and hand at work now never wrong.” But what happens when inspiration fails to come? The result is “lagging lines” and a “winter world.” This poem contains a line that is a cry from the heart on behalf of writers (and teachers?) everywhere: “I want the one rapture of an inspiration.” In the void—the empty space—that is the lack of inspiration, the poet can only try to explain what is missing—“the roll, the rise, the carol, the creation”—and does so “with some sighs.”

Wallace Stevens also considers the construction of inspiration in "The Idea of Order at Key West," positing an ideal of poetic creation and then linking it to a collective "rage for order" of which poetry is but one manifestation. He uses two simultaneous layers of imagery to achieve this: the ocean inspires the female singer, but the singer is also the poet's own muse, one he observes rather cryptically, trying to understand both how she creates and the ultimate effect of this creation. The ocean inspires the singer—"Even if what she sang was what she heard"—but the song that results is purely her own, one that she "utter[s] word by word" (which, of course, is the way poetry is constructed):

*For she was the maker of the song she sang,
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.*

This partition of poet and muse ostensibly allows the speaker to evaluate the work of creation objectively, as a curious onlooker rather than an active participant in the creative process. However, it also allows Stevens to ally himself with other efforts to bring order to the chaos of existence, represented by "The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there" and also by "pale Ramon" (referring to the philosopher, Ramon Fernandez, who is walking with the poet). The final stanza is worth quoting in its entirety:

*Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.*

The ambivalence of the word "rage" in this usage—it refers not simply to anger but also to a tempestuous passion—attests to the ambivalence of the writer's condition, one which is repeated in the inherent contradiction of the final line.

I began by describing the dilemma of the "maker": the struggle to create, to bring something original into the world despite the struggle (and despite the fear that the very attempt is doomed from the start). But there is also the possibility of mastery—whether one masters language, reality, or the self—and the "ecstasy" of bridging the gap between vision and reality, of moving from the liminal to the actual. In "The Windhover" Hopkins describes his response to a bird—a windhover, or "morning's minion"—as it soars through the sky. But it is "the achieve of, the mastery of the thing" to which he responds. The flight seems effortless, yet the impact on the viewer is profound. The glory of the bird in that moment of its existence lies in its absolute control over itself and its environment. Yet even here, mastery carries a suggestion of risk; the bird "a billion times lovelier, more dangerous" in this moment. This is a reflection on the liminal world, that which lies hidden behind the apparent reality of things; it is this reality the poet must contend with if he is to create a new reality, a new vision. The speaker first compares this activity to the act of plowing, which "makes plough down sillion/ shine" and then to "blue-bleak embers" which, when they break open, reveal "gold-vermilion." Suddenly, the opening line of the poem has a new significance—"I caught this morning morning's minion"—is indeed what the poet has done, although he can never really know for sure.

Stevens also captures the joy of creation—although in a much grittier form—in "Reality is an Activity of the Most August Imagination," which describes an evening's ride from Cornwall to Hartford. Unlike the ethereal ecstasy of "The Windhover," Stevens describes a night which is "not a night blown at a gasworks in Vienna/Or Venice..." Instead, "There [is] a crush of strength in a grinding going round/Under the front of the westward evening star." What for most of us would be the simple rush of scenery passing by, a blur of shapes and colors, is for this speaker "The vigor of glory, a glittering in the veins/As things emerged and moved and were dissolved." This is the liminal space in which the poet exists, that juncture between

idea and reality where anything is possible; it is "An argentine abstraction approaching form/And suddenly denying itself away." This is the moment in which poetry is created, but it is also the moment of the poet's struggle. In fact, this is also the space inhabited by the reader of the poem (and the teacher of the poem), who can step in and make her own meaning, bringing forth a reality the poet may never have conceived but which is just as valid.

But what does all of this have to do with teaching? Certainly as teachers we have a "rage to order," a desire to bring meaning to chaos, to communicate a vision of what could be. Yet we spend much of our time wondering whether our vision is ever truly conveyed or whether we are shouting into the wind. One of the joys of this seminar – besides having an opportunity to reread beloved poems and discover some new ones – was the opportunity to share ideas, readings, and a vision of poetry with like-minded colleagues. What we had in common with the authors of the poems we read and discussed was a call to poetry – as teachers, writers, or both – and a belief that we could make meanings that would, in turn, have some meaning for others. There were moments when certain visions of a particular work were hard or impossible to reconcile, but this enhanced rather than curtailed discussion. This is not typically what happens in the classroom, however.

Instead, poetry is the *bête noir* for students (far more than any other genre), and they can be quite vehement in their responses: they don't like it; they don't understand it; case closed. Yet, like the "rage to order" that can be either anger or passion in the Stevens poem, perhaps we need to consider this response in more productive ways, treating it as one of the raw materials in our efforts to help students create meaning. I think this is one of the mistakes we often make in our passion to share our vision: we expect students to be where we are, to share the reality we have created, and to do so in our time rather than their own. In an ideal world, our students would be like the speaker in "Idea of Order;" they would hear the song, see the singer, and start to make connections and draw conclusions. This kind of world making takes time, however, one of the things in short supply in the typical classroom (and even in this seminar, where there was never quite enough time for everything we wanted to explore and share). So what can we do? Instead of time, we can provide the kind of space where awareness can happen, an environment where open discussion, reflection, and a variety of texts are welcomed. When this happens—when the classroom becomes a space for inspiration, world making, and even mastery – then we too become part of a new reality.

Like the speaker in "The Idea of Order at Key West," I was reminded in this seminar that both poetry and teaching can be about seeking an ideal. The rage to order – represented by the singer/poet, the lights on the ships at anchor, the companions also struggling to give meaning and form to an often confusing existence – is what draws us on as teachers, class by class and semester by semester. If it were not for the belief that we can bring order, that we can make a difference, it would be impossible to go on. We do so because, despite the elusiveness of the goal and the frustrations of the struggle, we also hear "In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds."

A DANTEAN READING OF ELIOT'S "LITTLE GIDDING": REFLECTIONS AFTER THE SEMINAR WITH PAUL MARIANI

Nancy Enright

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

– T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

When Dante reaches the highest level of Mount Purgatory, he passes through the level where the saved sinners are being purged of the sin of lust. It is here that he faces the wall of fire, into which he must pass if he is going to enter Paradise. Virgil exhorts him that his beloved Beatrice is on the other side and tells him that he will not be harmed by the terrifying fire. Though frightened and hesitant, Dante eventually enters the fire and passes into Paradise, finding Beatrice, not Virgil, on the other side. This scene from Canto XXVII of *Purgatorio* enacts an experience of salvation like that described in T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding," a poem which consciously invokes Dante, especially in its Canto II. First, the scene from *Purgatorio* shows the timelessness of the communion of saints as existing between Beatrice and Dante and which Eliot experiences at Little Gidding, the site of a seventeenth century Anglican community, described in Canto I of Eliot's poem. Second, the scene depicts the limitations of intellectual and literary pursuit, even as represented in their highest form – Virgil. We see this same idea strongly portrayed in the Dantean Canto II of "Little Gidding," where the poet/narrator meets the dead humanist, who exists in a damned state and offers a warning to the poet/narrator. Third, it portrays the redeeming fire of regeneration, the Pentecostal fire of the Holy Spirit, the only salvation from the other kind of fire, depicted graphically by Dante in *Inferno* and, in this particular scene of *Purgatorio*, the fire of lust; this distinction between the two kinds of fires is made by Eliot in Canto IV of "Little Gidding." Finally, as in the entire *Divine Comedy* and in particular in the scene of the wall of fire, "Little Gidding" also makes clear the concept of salvation by grace: no one can be saved by his or her own efforts. Salvation is a gift, and forgiveness is unearned. Overall, "Little Gidding" can be looked at as an explication of theological truths shown in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

One of the key ideas in the *Divine Comedy* is the concept of the Communion of Saints, the eternal link between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven or, as they are sometimes called, the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. Dante, the pilgrim, represents the Church on earth – imperfect, sinful, but struggling toward salvation. Beatrice, along with the other souls in heaven, exemplifies the Church in heaven, though she also serves as a symbol of God's grace, His unconditional love. As she reaches out to Dante, going even into hell to seek Virgil's aid in rescuing him, as Virgil himself recounts in Canto II (ll. 52-74), she represents the love of the Church in heaven for the earthly Church, beset with weakness and needing her help. Of course, she herself is only a vehicle of God's love, as are all the saints in *Paradiso*, where time gives way to eternity and a Communion of Saints from all the ages exists in perfect happiness and in connection with believers on earth. This timelessness and communion between the righteous dead and the living is an important theme also in "Little Gidding," where Eliot depicts a meeting of heaven and earth in a little Anglican Chapel in England. He makes it clear that this place is an open door to timelessness. As he approaches the chapel, he clarifies this quality: "This is the spring time/But not in time's covenant" (Canto I). In this place, the Church in heaven connects with the Church on earth: "And what the dead had no speech for, when living,/ They can tell you, being dead: the communication/ Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living." Like the redeemed souls in *Paradiso*, the saints linked to Little Gidding have spiritual gifts to impart to the living pilgrim who comes to the chapel, gifts flowing from the Pentecostal fire of the Holy Spirit.

Eliot makes it clear that this experience is beyond an intellectual inquiry. In Canto I of "Little Gidding," he says, "... You are not here to verify,/ Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity/ Or carry report. You are here to kneel/ Where prayer has been valid...." A certain humility, even and maybe especially for the intellectual, is enjoined. Dante also makes it very clear that human intellect, including its great expression in poetry (as represented by Virgil), is not enough to carry a soul to salvation. Though beautiful and wonderful, intellect/poetry/human reason are not enough. This concept is clearly seen when even Virgil, from Dante's point of view probably the greatest poet who ever lived, is not able to take Dante into Paradise. As Virgil himself says in Canto I of *Inferno*: "If you would then ascend as high as these [i.e. the saints in heaven]/ a soul more worthy than I am will guide you/ I'll leave you in her care when I depart." It is after the scene of the wall of fire in the Seventh Terrace that Virgil must depart and leave Dante to the care of Beatrice. In case Dante, the pilgrim, misses the point here, Virgil explains:

*My son, you've seen the temporary fire
And the eternal fire; you have reached
The place past which my powers cannot see.
I've brought you here through intellect and art;....
Await no further word or sign from me.... (Canto XXVII, ll. 127-139)*

Despite this warning, Dante is surprised when Virgil disappears and is found weeping by Beatrice when she appears to him in Canto XXX.

Eliot depicts a similar limitation of art and intellect, when devoid of the spiritual, in Canto II of "Little Gidding," in which he also very consciously echoes Dante, in terms of the use of terza rima, as well as his encounter with his "dead master." This dialogue recollects Dante's encounter with Brunetto Latini in Canto XV of *Inferno*. Eliot describes his master's "baked brown features" and asks him, "What! are *you* here?" just as Dante, the pilgrim, asks, "Are you here, Ser Brunetto?" whom he also describes as having "baked, brown features." In "Little Gidding," the dead master tells the pilgrim/poet, "I am not eager to rehearse/My thought and theory which you have forgotten" (Canto II). As life ends, the dead humanist promises, this is what can be expected, if one is unredeemed:

*First, the cold friction of expiring sense
Without enchantment, offering no promise
But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
As body and soul begin to fall asunder.
Second, the conscious impotence of rage
At human folly, and the laceration
Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.
And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
Of all that you have been; the shame
Of things ill done and done to others' harm
Which once you took for exercise of virtue. ("Little Gidding," Canto II)*

All illusions fall away, and one is left with the consciousness of one's own sinfulness and the emptiness of what was used as a cover from the truth. This is the promise for the unsaved life of intellect, "unless restored by that refining fire/Where you must move in measure, like a dancer" ("Little Gidding," Canto II). It is at the wall of fire at the top of Mount Purgatory, where Dante reaches the limitations of reason and must move into Paradise aided by grace.

In this scene, the fire is clearly terrifying, though not destructive. As Virgil assures Dante:

... "My son, though there may be
suffering here, there is no death....
Be sure: although you were to spend a full
one thousand years within this fire's center
your head would not be balder by one hair." (*Purgatorio*, XXVII, ll. 20-27)

The fire is that of regeneration. As Dante is in the fire, accompanied by Virgil and Statius, he hears the voice of Christ saying, "*Venite, benedicti Patris mei*," ("Come, blessed of my Father"), singing within "a light that overcame me," so much so that Dante looks away from it. The holy Voice encourages him to "hurry on before/the west grows dark" (XXVII, ll. 61-63). The sinners in the Terrace for purgation from lust exist in purifying fire, like that within the wall. This fire is entirely different from the fire of destruction depicted in *Inferno*. Eliot also talks about the two different kinds of fire, one destructive, the other redemptive in Canto IV of "Little Gidding." Clearly, he is connecting two very disparate things: the descent of a plane, the German bomber planes nicknamed "doves" and the descent of the Holy Spirit, as described in Acts 2 of the New Testament, where the Holy Spirit descends on the young Church, filling them with His power and resting on them in appearance as "tongues of fire." Though the repentance involved with this regenerative fire can involve suffering ("Who then devised the torment? Love."), it is created by a loving Father.

The theological concept underlying both Dante's and Eliot's discussion of the limitations of reason and the regenerative and Pentecostal fire that redeems is salvation by grace. Christianity is rooted in the idea that humanity cannot save itself. Though various heresies, like Pelagianism, have asserted that we can save ourselves, the Church has denied it. When the Church herself has lost sight of this idea in its fullness, through saints and other prophetic voices, she has returned to it. However, the fact that reason cannot save us does not mean that it is useless. On the contrary, in a theology correctly rooted in the incarnation, all of life is redeemed and can be a part of the plan of salvation. In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante leans on Vigil throughout Hell and Purgatory. As the embodiment of Reason, he can assist Dante in the recognition of sin that is necessary to repentance; however, it takes grace, God's unconditional and ever-outreaching love, to get anyone into the Kingdom of Heaven, and this is what Beatrice represents at Heaven's gate. Within the fire, Virgil reminds him that Beatrice is on the other side. However, once purged by the regenerative fire, Dante, the pilgrim, finds that Virgil is gone from him. Graphically, Dante, the poet, is illustrating that human Reason can go only so far in the life of the spirit. We are dependent on God's grace.

This concept of salvation through grace goes back to the earliest days of the Church. St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, for instance, develops this concept in great length. He also speaks of it in the Epistle to the Galatians. Augustine of Hippo also articulated this doctrine. For instance, at the end of his account of his mother Monica's life, he says of her – despite her sanctity: "For although she was alive in Christ even before her soul was parted from the body, and her faith and the good life she led re-sounded to the glory of your name, yet I cannot presume to say that from the time when she was reborn in baptism no word contrary to your commandments ever fell from her lips.... Hear me through your Son, who hung on the cross and now *sits at your right hand and pleads for us* [Romans 8:34]. (*Confessions*)" Even a saint is dependent on Christ's sacrifice for redemption.

Eliot also echoes this concept in Canto III of "Little Gidding," where he quotes Lady Julian of Norwich: "Sin is Behovely, but/All shall be well, and/All manner of things shall be well." We are all sinners, and the awareness of our sin can sometimes drag us almost to despair, but grace and mercy are greater than the pervasiveness of sin. Later in the Canto, he repeats the same lines, offering clarification: "All shall be well, and/All manner of thing shall be well/ By the purification of the motive/ In the ground of our beseeching." As suggested in the terrifying fire in Canto IV of "Little Gidding," there is a certain amount of pain in the facing of oneself that is part of the Pentecostal regeneration. Repentance – "the purification of the motive in the ground of our beseeching" – is part of the experience of salvation. Repentance involves the recognition of sin, and that is not easy and can be, in fact, very painful. But, as Dante realizes on the other side of the wall of fire, Beatrice – representation of God's love – is on the other side. Christ is near the repen-

tant heart, and His grace is freely given. As Eliot says in Canto IV of "Little Gidding," the choice is ours, but we have grace available to help us make it: "The only hope, or else despair/Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre --/ To be redeemed from fire by fire."

The end of "Little Gidding" echoes the several themes it shares with the Divine Comedy that we have been discussing here – the communion of saints experienced in the timeless moment, the limitations of reason, the fire of regeneration, and salvation by grace. We are one with the holy dead: "We die with the dying/ See, they depart, and we go with them./ We are born with the dead./ See, they return, and bring us with them." These lines, like all of Canto V of "Little Gidding," are Dantean in their meaning and imagery. The dead interact with the living, not in a ghostly haunting, but in a communion wrought by love. We are "one Body," as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12. To experience this communion in the fullness of redemption, we must be born again and become "like little children," as Jesus said (Matt.). Eliot echoes this concept in the references to the "children in the apple-tree," in Canto V, suggesting innocence and immediacy. To be like them, we must let go of everything – our pride, our self-sufficiency, our claims to figure it all out by means of reason, and we must enter "A condition of complete simplicity/ (Costing not less than everything)" (Canto V). As Dante must let go of Virgil, so we all must realize the limitations of our intellect, or else we face the fate of the damned humanist of Canto II of "Little Gidding." The regenerative fire that saves us from this fate is mentioned once again in Canto V of "Little Gidding," in words that echo Dante's imagery of the white rose of Heaven, along with yet another use of the words of Lady Julian:

*And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.*

Salvation is a free gift that cannot be bought even with the best we have --- with intellect or even our own goodness. All is a gift. "Little Gidding" is a modern interpretation of ancient truths. No poet has depicted them as Dante has, but Eliot does a masterful job of interpreting them for a complex and disturbing century.

POETRY: A CALL TO VISIONS OF DEPRAVITY AND DIVINITY?

David Powell

*Muttered Henry: - Lord of matter, thus:
upon some more unquiet spirit knock,
my madness have cease.
All the quarter astonishes a lonely out & back.
They set their clocks by Henry House,
The steadiest man on the block.*

– John Berryman, *Dream Song* 17

I recall that when I was in elementary school there would be the occasional “What do you want to be when you grow up?” day in class when an adult would come and provide tidbits of fascinating information of such and such a career. I remember the boys inevitably wanted to be firemen, doctors, and professional athletes. Never once did I hear, “I want to be a poet!” In high school and college students are provided a similar treat in a “career day” that provides glimpses into the so-called adult vocational world. And never at these events have I seen a booth entitled: POETS. Truthfully, I am not quite sure what the selling points would be for the booth’s pamphlet: ARE YOU INTERESTED IN A LIFE OF LITTLE OR NO PAY? DOES A LIFE OF OBSCURITY FASCINATE AND EXCITE YOU? Although a few poets enjoy fame during their lifetime, and fewer still monetary rewards, what would draw someone to pursue this life? (And here I am excluding those who inhabit coffee shops wearing berets, sipping cappuccinos, and taking a drag off a clove cigarette while proclaiming a poetic genius.) At the recent seminar among the poets discussed were two men of apparently diametrically opposed lifestyles, Gerard Manley Hopkins and John Berryman, who expressed within their works some sort of inherent compulsion to explore divinity and humanity (and the divinity and depravity therein) as if they could scarcely refuse to write poetry.

Berryman once remarked something to the effect, “When one looks back, reluctantly, on the lives of poets, one is marked by the tragedy and disaster.” Berryman himself aptly fits this description as an alcoholic, adulterer, and eventual suicide. But it is in this act of suicide that the full tragedy of Berryman’s life is fledged out: he had sobered up. Although he had explored it his entire life, it was in this period that he began to grapple with and praise a divine presence in the world most directly. Hopkins, a devout monastic Jesuit -- his work, luckily saved by a friend in lieu of being burned as Hopkins had asked following his death – became for Berryman both a mentor and an opponent in his struggle to define and describe the stigmas and beauties of life. Their work exemplifies the oscillation of searching minds between bliss and depression, order and chaos, purpose and confusion, to wrestle with what it means to be human.

While Hopkins composed works dedicated “To Christ our Lord” the sonnet “The Windhover” and uttered “Glory be to God for dappled things” in his poem “Pied Beauty,” he also cried out in question, “Comforter, where, where is your comforting?/ Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?” It was perhaps Hopkins’ ability to breach into realms of doubt and depression and yet retain his faith and direction that Berryman most envied. As Berryman’s death exemplifies, it was not a model he could mimic. In one of his poems, Berryman seemingly admires Hopkins’ conception of the Holy Ghost as a cheerleader for humanity goodness and happiness. But through his poetic persona Henry Berryman writes: “This is a ghost town./ It’s Xmas. Henry, can you reach the post?” The lines are Berryman’s grief from holiness so to speak and his internal questioning as to whether he can weather the tide and live his life out. The poem moves to end in question of what happens to the poet after death. Is he buried to be forgotten?

The poet's function, the initial call to poetry, the drive to record and explore the darkness and the light, to soar as Hopkin's "Windhover" and to sink in Berryman's vision where "hard on the land wears the strong sea and empty grows every bed," may, perhaps probably, not be a choice of vocation, but some internal haunting that genuine poets cannot simply be swept up and discarded like a broken glass. Instead they are forced to look at how the sunlight glimmers in the shards, and then take the splinters of glass in hand (forgive the hyperbole) to feel them despite the cuts they inflict. It is Berryman's bewilderment:

Why did we come at all,/ consonant to whose bidding? Perhaps God is [. . .]/ Something disturbed,
ill-pleased, & with a touch of paranoia/ who calls for this thud of love from his creatures.

It is Hopkins' praise:

God, lover of souls, swaying considerate scales,/ Complete thy creature dear O where it fails,/ Being
mighty a master, being a father and fond.

It is in looking upon the lives of the poets and gleaning from their works fragments of their visions of what defines humanity, in all its qualities and questions, that their "calling" may in part be understood. Sparked by some force, whether one wants to call it a function of God or a necessary element of society and human nature, poets such as Hopkins and Berryman seem incapable of ignoring the intellectual probing, some aptly argue prophetic, and arduous task of poetic creation. Although there are those who declare themselves poets, it is in the breadth of vision and crafted artistry marked by an indefinable all-consuming yearning that poetry as a "calling" rather than as a career option reveals itself.

The exact quote may be found in Paul Mariani's biography of Berryman.

POETRY CALLING

Jeffrey Gray

*This is America calling:
The mirroring of state to state,
Of voice to voice on the wires,
The force of colloquial greetings like golden
Pollen sinking on the afternoon breeze.*

– John Ashbery, *Pyrography*

Paul Mariani's seminar on modern poetry allowed me to pursue in a group format certain preoccupations of my own teaching and writing, and for this I am most grateful. Mariani's work in general has been important to me, and in recent years, his biography on Robert Lowell was particularly helpful in my writing on that poet. I discovered, just before meeting Paul this May, that he had been one of the readers contracted by my publisher to read and comment on my book manuscript. So I owe him a debt of gratitude on that count as well. Many thanks to all who participated.

Apart from the important framing idea of a call to poetry, the strength of the Seton Hall Spring seminar on the "Call of Poetry" lay in the many illuminating close readings from Paul Mariani and the other participants. The framing idea was illuminating without being constraining: readings proliferated in rich and unforeseen directions, not simply along a particular line of inquiry. But rather than try to catalogue here those many important insights and readings, I'll comment on that framing idea of the "call," its uses and its interpretations--staying largely with poems we discussed but briefly looking at a few others.

Whitman, in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," writes of the hermit thrush,

*Sing on there in the swamp,
O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear your call,
I hear, I come presently, I understand you....*

Among the meanings of a "call" for Whitman is that of a summons by the natural world—in this case by a sentient comrade in the natural world – and then the urge to *respond* to that world, to participate in it, and, even, to sing it into being (like the Australian aborigines' belief in singing the world into being, as described in Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines*) by means of incantation – that is, by pre-rational, bardic, and vatic modes. More Platonically, it also suggests the urge to represent the world as accurately as possible in a medium that, while secondary and even alien to the ideal object, is meant to evoke that object faithfully.

This latter, linguistic emphasis leads us toward a more recent sense of the "call," a sense informed by the recognition in postmodernity of the mediated-ness and constructed-ness of all perception and all representation – the call, Louis Althusser would have said, as an "interpellation," not in the sense that one employs a system (language, in the writer's case) to answer one's expressive needs but that the system calls one into it; according to Althusser, language speaks *us*: it doesn't merely provide a set of signs to accommodate a prior content; rather, it determines and constitutes what we say and indeed who we are. We are called into the world by language as we are called into it by all other human social structures – families, relations, professions, and so on.

Let me try to discuss these two interpretations of the "call" separately, though in the end they may not be separate at

all: In the first case – the archaic, aboriginal, and vatic case--Gerard Manley Hopkins pursues a movement backward and downward to find the “dearest freshness deep down things” – not just in perception but in the sense of a defamiliarized and therefore “refreshed” medium. Hopkins’ ambition prefigures and underscores the archaism and “primitive” ambitions of modernist and linguistically innovative poetry in general. Hopkins’ movement backward – toward an Ur-language that he thought to find in Welsh roots, or in his invention of a “sprung” rhythm meant to echo Anglo-Saxon--illustrates Theodore Roethke’s idea (Roethke could have been thinking of Hopkins) that all great innovations in art are forms of regression to the ancient or to the infantile. In this sense, I’d emphasize here less the religious dimensions (at least in the sense of *ideas* about God and transcendence) of the Call, and more the performative, primitivist, regressive, even infantile aspects of the Call.

Consider, in this same archaic or aboriginal mode, Hart Crane’s cubist style, that is, the simultaneity of planes (of time and event), as also in Joyce, Faulkner, Eliot, et al.: the presentation of planes at the same level of perspective without hierarchizing, or – in painterly terms – foregrounding and backgrounding. Perhaps the most important effect of this simultaneity, compared to conventional linear narrative modes, is that it collapses hierarchies; cubist art, in other words, is also a kind of regression – e.g., the primitivist models Picasso and others were finding in African and other pre-perspectival art, art without background or foreground. These artists were interested in an art of simultaneously perceived surfaces, which might return artist and viewer to an Edenic time when we had not yet understood that some parts of the perceived object world are distant, others near.

As another example of the urge to move back in time or down into nature and the body, consider Williams’ mantra in “Paterson”: “To begin again.” Williams finds himself always at the beginning, never progressing, always at a fresh moment, discovering. It is a predicament and a gift to be always beginning, and always “again.” The cycle, the myth of the eternal return (in Eliade), Hopkins’ “freshness,” the move from the modern linear to the ancient cyclical vision, but also the notion of the eternal instant and the means of experiencing it – these are ideas often associated with Eastern religions, particularly Zen (See, for example, Shunryu Suzuki’s book *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*), but they are also Christian and pre-Christian, even pre-Socratic --as in Heraclitus’s emphasis on the ever-flowing, changing nature of Nature.

To locate these ideas in the American literary ethos, one might begin with Emerson’s call for a fresh, unsophisticated poetry commensurate with a new continent. This call for newness, freshness, and the recourse to infantile modes (incantation, repetition, long breath lines, inclusive rhetorical embrace, etc.) – first answered by Whitman and then subdued for the first half of the twentieth century, has not, since then, diminished in volume or urgency in America: one sees it in the many post- World War II poets who followed Emerson’s idea of power as movement rather than repose, of his prizing of the “shooting of the gulf,” the idea of the poem as the trace of an ongoing process rather than as an artifact: the Black Mountain Poets, the beat poets, the many poets influenced by Asian aesthetic modes and procedures and by “action” painting in the U.S. In this regard, what makes Hopkins a modern, even a postmodern, is the celebratory and performative dimension of his poetry: “The Windhover,” for example, as the “doing-be” of a thing – the emphasis on action (the poem’s and the bird’s), rather than on portraiture or still life.

The other version of the “call” to poetry may seem less inspired, more theoretical or metaphysical, and yet it may lead to the same place. It concerns less the poet’s stance toward the world and more the nature of signs themselves and our relation to them. The poet who seemed most consistently conscious of this nature, until recent times at least, was Wallace Stevens.

With Stevens’ “The Idea of Order at Key West,” we see explicitly what a call to, by, and of poetry might mean – that is, the poem illustrates how the call occurs and what it performs. The poem at several points comes close to questioning whether there even exists a world prior to or separate from our representations of it, and offers a testimony to language that performs what it argues: that the poet is “the single artificer of the world / In which she sang.” A body that is “wholly body,” like the sea, cannot be seen or understood, cannot be experienced, until we make its cry “ours.” That is, its inarticulate “cry” (its urge to be transformed) causes our counter-cry, which is the point at which perception and experience occur. Later in the poem it is our lights upon the water that allow us to see the water, even though, as A.R. Ammons suggests in “Corsons Inlet,” the mastery is suspect: do we really master the night, fixing and emblazoning zones, or arranging and deepening the night?

Here I'll digress to "Corsons Inlet" for purposes of comparison: Ammons, in what seems much more a "nature" poem than the metaphysical meditation that is "The Idea of Order" – though both poems involve a stroll by the sea-- emphasizes not the blessedness of the "rage for order" but rather its illusion. He suggests that the way we make the world is the way it makes us, both spheres being subject to entropy, to dissolution and constant reconfiguration, so that the "eddies of meanings" the poet allows himself (echoing Whitman, for whom it is the *self* that eddies at the close of "Song of Myself") resemble the eddies he sees in the streams he passes in his stroll along the Jersey shore. The poet here claims to be "released from forms / from the perpendiculars, / straight lines, blocks, boxes, binds / of thought," into, instead, the apparently less structured "hues, shadings, rises, flowing bends" of immediate perception. "Corsons Inlet" goes after Hopkins's "freshness deep down things" in its rejection of closure ("I have reached no conclusions, have erected no boundaries") but it claims "to make / no form / of formlessness:" (Ammons's famous colon always indicating infinite connectedness and the impossibility of separation and division).

The "rage for order" is "blessed" but, Ammons might say, it is also cursed; a "maker's rage" is an obsession, an inability to let things be. Stevens' "Idea of Order," in this sense, concerns logocentricity (as I think Paul Mariani suggests); it concerns the urge to *get it right* in words, to get at Nature and represent it, speak it. But to do so is also to get "ourselves and ... our origins" right. Thus, more positively, it is not to supplant nature with words, so much as to transform it, as Rilke also suggests when he speaks of human beings as "the bees of the invisible."

But the illusion, much though I love "Corsons Inlet," may all be on Ammons's side. How, after all, can one "make / no form / of formlessness"? Even to say so is to make form. This primacy of representation is acknowledged much more in Stevens (and, since his time, Ashbery and many others) than in Ammons.

"The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain," as a last example, is a Stevens' poem whose title mocks yet also reinscribes the aspiration suggested in its title. The poem is not a mountain, but a mountain lacks what the poem offers: a place where the reader (or writer) can "be complete in unexplained completion" (here Stevens is careful not to suggest the poem as an explanation or a foundation). On *this* mountain, the poet has "recomposed the pines / shifted the rocks and picked his way among clouds // For the outlook that would be right." This is a place where the writer/reader can "lie and...Recognize his unique and solitary home."

I'll end this with a question. One of the most difficult things to convey to students is the idea of a poem as performative or celebratory, as an action rather than a statement. For them, usually, a poem is about content. What was the writer's point here? they wonder. What exactly was Sylvia Plath suffering when she wrote this poem about her father? The medium (in the latter case, the ghastly nursery rhymes and brilliant Satanic repetitions) goes unnoticed. The students focus on moral and message – and particularly on biography if they have access to it, which is of course why the New Critics, faced with such students, wanted to block that access.

Both of the views of the "call" that I've outlined suggest that we are called into language as much as into the world; in both cases we are "possessed" by it. Both versions should lead us to doubt the received view of language as informative and content-based.

So this is the question, whether or not it has an answer: which of the two species of the call to poetry – the pre-rational, "mad," archaic, incantatory, infantile, participatory nature of the poem (which reminds us that it is not self-expression); or the post-structuralist realization of language as constitutive of the world, of signs as referring to other signs and not something existing outside of signs, the sense Stevens develops so beautifully (and which equally reminds us that the poem is not self-expression) – which of these is most likely to wrench readers out of their familiar mode of viewing the world as content, of viewing language as a vehicle, and bring them instead to see the surface – the matrix, I might have said, if three movies had not now worn the word out – the thick performative and linguistic materiality of the poem?

HOPKINS AND BROWNING: VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF TRANSCENDENCE

Arundhati Sanyal

*Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!*

– G.M. Hopkins, *The Windhover*

Paul Mariani's reading of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry and the eventual discussion that followed underscored the importance of transcendence both as a theme and an important component of the structure and perception inherent in the poet's conception of images. The poem "The Windhover: To Christ Our Lord" in following the Ignatian tradition of meditation describes an image in its detailed beauty and power of action and then seeks to reveal a higher significance or inner parallel between the image and that of Christ's life as revealed to Christians. The plan of the poem is to rise beyond the tangible image and description of the falcon and explore its immanent meaning as revealed through poetic inspiration. In reading this poem, I was struck by some comparisons between Hopkins and an earlier Victorian "great" Robert Browning (1812-1889). There are obvious parallels between the language of the poetry of these two, especially in the exploratory audacity of both as they seek to "break" the form of the words, re-invent Anglo-Saxon words and word order in order to craft a supple and new-hewn language in their poetry. Less obvious perhaps is the thematic parallel between the two poets in their desire to introduce transcendence as a conceptual structure on which some of their important poems rest. This is all the more interesting because Browning does inhabit a more distinctly "secular" with an objective perspective than does Hopkins who is driven by the fervor of a chosen belief system. Yet transcendence in its innate sense of the ability or desire to look beyond the obvious and the tangible makes its presence felt in both of their poetry. In this short journal, I will explore such a theme of transcendence in Robert Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi" and Gerard Manley Hopkins' "The Windhover: To Christ Our Lord" and indicate a possible trajectory between these poets that points to a typical nineteenth-century impulse to look beyond the obvious image, in other words, transcend the material into the spiritual.

Why are the Victorians so interested in transcendence? I think this is a result of the scientific examination of the principles of existence that become so important and spectacular in the mid-nineteenth century. It is impossible to ignore the works of Charles Darwin or Lyell in anthropology and geology that begin to suggest an empiricist reading of the origins of life and the planet itself. Most famously, these are re-readings of the Biblical interpretation of creation and the pre-eminent role played in it by man, the noblest of God's creations. Darwin implies through his research that we are at the end of a narrative of survival that is arduous and filled with ignoble struggle for survival in the midst of a mechanical and organic process to propagate as a species. The Hobbesian perception of man's life as "nasty, brutish, and short" seems to be reinforced by the scientific observations of Darwin and Lyell. It is in response to this that for the nineteenth-century idealist, poet, and thinker the focus shifts to a renewed search for inspirational beauty, poetry, and idealism within Nature. For the religious poet, the very act of creation needs to be reinforced by a stronger belief in the ability to transcend the mechanical and discover the spirit immanent in all being. For Hopkins the resolution to this problem lies in his perception of Nature, not as a metaphoric expression of God, but an absolute form as the driving force in nature. For him entire Nature embodies and is divine purpose. The poet's inspiration and task lies in the ability to see this embodiment. In a journal entry of 1873 he writes, "The world is full of inscape and chance left free to act falls into an order as well as a pur-

pose." His poetry becomes the means through which this "inscape" becomes visible to him and his readers and his poetry's success lies in its ability to make evident "the chance left free" fall "into an order as well as a purpose." The poem becomes a metaphor for this order that is pre-existent in nature.

Robert Browning is by and large a humanist whose perception of Nature comes through the characters he loves to draw in his dramatic monologues. A failed dramatist, he becomes a successful poet by creating portraits of idiosyncratic, eccentric, and compelling figures who are able to embody specific characteristics of the time period they inhabit. These characters are captured in still life as it were and the poet re-creates the background of the era and the history of the character through the monologue that he gives to the character. Like a dramatist, Browning likes to work behind the scenes as he creates the voice and character of his dramatis persona. Browning focuses most spectacularly on the artist who is aware of his own vulnerability to evil or imperfection, even as he is able to envision or imagine what perfection is. It is the tantalizing play on these two aspects of the artistic existence that Browning dwells on most in these poems. The artist's life becomes for Browning the history of man's life; a struggle to attain the ideal. It is an unattainable ideal and to that extent it is also the reason why the artist strives or exists: Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,/Or what's a heaven for" ("Andrea del Sarto").

In "Fra Lippo Lippi" Browning engages in the dialogue between late medieval principles of art and the new humanism of an emerging Renaissance art that finds expression in the monologue of Fra Lippo Lippi. The dialogue is focused on the purpose of art with the Carmelite friars to whose order Lippo belongs stressing spirituality by negating the material in absolute terms:

Your business is not to catch men with show,/With homage to the perishable clay,/But lift them over it, ignore it all,/Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh./Your business is to paint the souls of men.

This is transcendence taken to its literal extent and ironized, of course. Lippo on the other hand discovers transcendence through the perception of the material and the sensual: "This world's no blot for us,/Nor blank - it means intensely, and means good:/To find its meaning is my meat and drink."

Spoken like the true humanist Browning wants him to be. However, there is transcendence too. It is through the perception of the beauty of this material world that the poet is able to look beyond the material into the spiritual:

You've seen the world/-The beauty and the wonder and the power,/The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,/Changes, surprises,- and God made it all!/-For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,/For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,/The mountain round it and the sky above,/ Much more the figures of man, woman, child,/These are the frame to? What's it all about?/ To be passed over, despised? Or dwelt upon,/ Wondered at? Oh, this last of course, you say.

The perception of nature, its celebration and enjoyment comes through an essential experience and immersion in the objects of Nature, which then makes possible a movement beyond its ostensible materiality to discover an immanent spirit.

There is a similar robust acknowledgment of Nature and its offerings in Hopkins' "inscape." Transcendence emerges through such acknowledgment and celebration. In "The Windhover" the poetic voice carves out a niche for himself and for us where a particular object in nature automatically begins to fall into place in the poetic perception as more significant than the rest; the "landscape" differentiates itself into "inscape" as it were at the point where the creative mind can grasp transcendence. The flight of the bird in all its beauty, majesty, and perfection reminds the poet of the beauty and perfection of Christ's passion and the unity of the poem achieved in the language of the first and second movements is one achieved through the perception of a parallel between the bird's motion and Christ's life through the various stages of his passion.

Hopkins did not think too highly of Browning. There is the famous derogatory note on Browning's dramatic style by Hopkins where he alludes to his poetic persona as that of "a man bouncing up from the table with his mouth full of bread and cheese and saying that he meant to stand no blasted nonsense" (www.norton.com/nrl/english). This could, of course, be a direct allusion to the poem "Fra Lippo Lippi" where Browning indeed is portraying the young Lippo munching his first bread in the monastery after a long period of intermittent starvation. Hopkins was alluding to the overly dramatic and buoyant verve in Browning's personae who bring the mundane and the spiritual/philosophical together in disregard for any explanatory transition between the two. Browning's Lippo is irreverent, to say the least, and is celebrating his irreverence because it gives him an insight into the kind of transcendence that is truly meaningful. His irreverence makes it possible to ignore the false dichotomies between the material and spiritual world in art. Browning's language and structure in the poem enacts this by creating Lippo's dramatic voice that crosses the two worlds fluently and shows how immersion in the one gives him insight into the other.

I see a certain similarity between Browning and Hopkins in that they both have their poetic goals set beyond the immediate perceptible worlds. While Hopkins is more obviously steeped in the reverential perception of his world that leads him to transcending insights, in Browning the drama, the fascinating persona, the world of Renaissance Italy that he re-creates all ultimately are informed by the speaker's passion for art and what it can show of God's beauty and purpose. In the words of J.P. Mackey who writes in an essay titled "Hopkins and God: A View from Theology": "Imagination and its characteristic vision already encompasses the concept of revelation, and does so at any depth or height of reality we may care or dare to visit" (1-2). Such revelation takes the form of a transcending vision in both the poems "The Windhover" and "Fra Lippo Lippi" in ways that show the respective poets to be kindred spirits in quite different contexts.

WORKS CITED

Browning, Robert. *Browning Poems: 1835-1864*, ed W.T. Young. Cambridge University Press: London 1984.

Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Poetry of the Victorian Period*, ed J.H. Buckley. Glenview: Scott Foresman, 1965.

Mackey J.P. "Hopkins and God - A View from Theology" Essay, G.M. Hopkins International Summer School
<http://www.gerardmanleyhopkins.org/lectures> June 11, 2004.

HONESTY AND VOCATION

Brigeth Rivera

*The truth is that we are always moving toward
mystery and so we are far closer to what is real when
we do not see our destination clearly.*

– Rachel Naomi Remen

One of the books that has influenced me since I was an undergraduate is Parker J. Palmer's *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. From the first time I read it I began to think about the importance of finding my vocation. However it is when I have returned to it over the year that I find it has helped me the most by reminding me to keep things in perspective and continue searching for my "calling" in life. I consider myself a fortunate individual for having had the opportunity to attend a university that, while concerned with academics, is also very interested in helping students find their true selves. As part of the Intersections program, a group that focused on vocational discernment at Boston College, I had the chance to attend a first-time retreat that changed my life, although at the time I was not aware of the influence it would have on me. It was at this time that I was given Palmer's book and I spent an entire weekend with a small group of my Boston College peers, faculty, and administrators reading, reflecting, and discussing many things that dealt with vocation and its importance in all of our lives. It was during this retreat that I began to realize the significance of finding one's true calling and, perhaps more importantly, the necessity for honesty in this search.

Finding my vocation has meant much more than finding my "calling" in life. Discovering one's true vocation is a complicated, confusing, and at times, a lifelong process. However, despite the difficulty in this particular task, surprisingly enough, one of the key factors that make the search easier is honesty. Being honest with both ourselves and with those around us is necessary in order for anyone to find their true calling, however this can be very difficult. True vocational discernment involves going beyond certain forces and obstacles that keep many people from realizing their true calling, but surprisingly the most difficult obstacles stem from within. Although we may complain that "others" have led us toward the wrong path, in reality this occurs because we fail to listen to ourselves. Staying honest to our innermost callings can keep us all in a path that leads to the realization of our vocations. And although there is no right or wrong path, we must remember that there are always lessons to be learned, regardless of the path we choose to take. These lessons shape us, our lives, and ultimately help us discover who we really are and perhaps even what we are meant to be.

As any young girl who admires and loves her father, I grew up wanting to emulate my father. However, instead of attempting to copy his career, what I should have aimed to imitate was the fact that my father has not been driven by ambition, but by the love he has for two things, medicine and his family. My father's success cannot be attributed simply to his hardworking nature; it is his vocations as a father and a doctor that contribute greatly to his accomplishments. Because he has always loved what he does, he has been able to gain something while at the same time contributing something positive to those around him, myself included. Yet as clear as this may seem to me now, it was not so a few years ago. I was on what one may call the "wrong path," doing something I was unhappy and unsatisfied with. Although I do not like to think back to the many unhappy hours spent in a laboratory, I must always remember that it was while I was on that "wrong" path that I learned the most about myself; it was the discoveries I made while doing something that did not satisfy me that eventually allowed me to realize what my true vocation was. While away on my first vocational discernment retreat I was asked a simple question that, to my surprise, was very difficult to answer. What makes you happy? I listed a number of things, but about 99% of those things were related to others. I only had a couple of things that made me inherently happy; things that I kept to myself because I was afraid to share them with those around me. I realized that my only

escape during the two years when I was immersed in science courses was the one English class I took each semester. Had I stopped and listened to myself I would have realized that all along I had been doing what made me happy, however I had concentrated the most on the things that made my family happy. It was easier for me to keep my eyes focused on a goal that was not really mine and ignore the many signs that were in front of me informing me of the one thing I was really looking for during those two years, the one thing that truly made me happy. As Naomi Remen states, "The purpose underlying life often wears the mask of whatever has our attention at the time" (289). In order to find that purpose we must remember that although keeping our eyes in the big picture is important, we cannot keep our eyes closed and ignore the many things that go on around us or worse, within us, especially those things that bring us extreme joy. After all, it is those small things that help us learn the most about ourselves and our place in this world.

In "The Idea of Order at Key West" Wallace Steven expresses certain ideas that are central to the search for a vocation. Like those searching for their true calling, the speaker introduces an individual, the "she" in the poem, who is searching for something that seems to be necessary for more than just her own satisfaction. Finding one's true vocation gives one a sense of peace, a peace that is reached only after being true and listening to ourselves. The "she" in Steven's poem can represent more than just a poet and her message; it can symbolize any individual. We all have something to offer to our community and the world, however in order to do that we must reach beyond the obvious and overcome the many obstacles that obstruct our true "song." As Steven's "she" sings "beyond the genius of the sea" (line 1), we too must reach beyond the intense forces surrounding us that can keep us from listening to our innermost voices. As Palmer suggests, letting our lives speak for themselves and hence listening for the voice of vocation instead of looking for it, will allow us to come closer to understanding what God intended for us and our lives. As Steven writes, there are "constant cries" that do not belong to us (l. 5-6), but we must separate ourselves from those oppressive influences and carefully discern what it is we want and hence are meant to do. Once we do that our vocations will reveal themselves to us and we will feel more satisfied and become more beneficial to those around us.

"Who am I?" is a key questions while discerning one's vocation. One motive of finding one's true calling can be that it benefits the individual, but another, and perhaps a more important one, is that it also benefits the community. Similarly, poetry is often more of an individual thing; however, just any other true vocation, it ends up affecting others in a positive way. As Palmer states:

...true vocation joins self and service, as Frederick Buechner asserts when he defines vocation as 'the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need' [vocation] starts with the self and moves toward the needs of the world. (16)

After this poetry seminar it became clear to me that poetry is indeed a calling, just like teaching. Like any other true vocation, the poets we discussed are able to satisfy themselves and many others with their writing, not simply because they are gifted, but because this is what their lives were meant for. The poetry enhances something; it lightens up certain things depending on the individual. Regardless of the personal suffering, happiness, or transcendence expressed in the many poems we have examined, one thing is similar. All of these poets have been able to share a piece of themselves with others, both during and beyond their time. It is perhaps the open honesty that they express in their works that allows the rest of us, regardless of our differences, to connect with them even for just a short moment. During this seminar I was awakened and forced to reach within myself, both to share and understand those around me, all because of the words that stemmed from individuals who have found their true vocation.

WORKS CITED

- Palmer, Parker J. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. 2000.
- Remen, Rachel Naomi. "The Path." *My Grandfather's Blessings*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2000. 288-289.

THE POET'S WORD AS TALISMAN

Melinda D. Papaccio

*And yet, like Lazarus, to feel the slope,
The sod and billow breaking, – lifting ground,
– As sound of waters bending astride the sky
Unceasing with some Word that will not die!*

– Hart Crane, *The Tunnel*

The Chinese consider brush calligraphy a sacred practice in which the act of writing a word, in the form of a pictographic character, involves both artistry and spirituality. The character that represents a word is believed to have “chi” or a divine energy of its own that we can tap into. For this reason the pictographic image of a word is sometimes hung in an appropriate part of the house to act as a talisman that will bring good luck, peace, joy, or any number of other blessings to the family that lives within.

The artist in the mall stroked black ink on the thin white paper with the sweep of her brush. There was a sense of intention in her every movement. On the partition behind her hung four framed Chinese characters. Below each one was an English word: luck, love, joy, wealth. “What do these mean?” I asked, pointing to the characters she was creating. “Patience” she said. “It’s two things: endure and heart.” Lovely. Patience allows the heart to endure. For the heart to endure one must have patience. I turned this over in my mind and thought about how poetic the Chinese expression of this word seemed. I imagined giving this to someone as a gift. It reminded me of another time in my life....

“Pazienza” she said several years ago during a particularly trying day with my infant twins. I didn’t realize it at the time, but with that word my mother-in-law had given me a precious talisman. It was merely a word, meaning “patience” – but not a mere word at all. This one word, presented with love, strengthened our bond as mothers. She meant it as an offering – from an experienced mother, a grandmother, to a novice. This is what you’ll need to get by, it implied. Depend on it to enable your heart to endure the trying times.

It was profound, this gift of a word and I keep it in my heart as a talisman to ward off disaster, just as for hundreds of years southern Italians have given their children the golden horn to ward off the “malocchio” or evil eye. According to folklore of the old world, the horn talisman is only protective if it is given to you in an act of love, usually in an effort to connect the generations. For an Italian the golden horn is a talisman of protection. Likewise, the Chinese bring the artistic pictures of words into their homes to act as talismans, conduits of positive energy. Italian or Chinese, at work here is essentially the idea of the logos – the word – the human expression of a concept that can work like a prayer, one that can be invoked in times of need. I carry my mother-in-law’s word in my heart to this day. When I access my memory of it, her sweet voice, in that beautiful, rough Neapolitan intonation, sounds like a mantra, a one-word prayer that soothes my spirit and enables me to transcend the moment.

Language is humanity’s greatest creation, but perhaps also, in the way we think of our native language as our “mother tongue,” it is possible that language creates us as well. John Berryman, in one of his later poems titled “Phase Four” recognizes the talismanic function of words, and their ability to help us re-create ourselves as more spiritual beings:

*I will begin by mentioning the word
'Surrender' – that's the 4th and final phase.
The word. What is the thing, well must be known
In Heaven. 'Acceptance' is the phase before.*

These words, "Acceptance" and "Surrender," in the context of spirituality, serve as talismans, verbal amulets that the artist holds on to, accesses the power of, in order to get closer to God. Clearly, these words are the focus of the poem because they were important to Berryman. But to the reader who also yearns for connection to the divine, the poem becomes a gift that invites us to meditate upon these potent words. I can imagine the Chinese representations of them, hanging on Berryman's wall, perhaps along with the words for the first and second phases, infused by the calligrapher with spiritual power. Words like this can act as talismans; they can center us, heal us, and help us transcend the here and now. They can change our lives, or at least provide us with that "momentary stay against confusion" Robert Frost said poetry provides.

But too often words are used to create confusion, to mask the truth. Clearly today the word is too often used as a political tool. Our invasion of Iraq has spawned a multitude of examples: do we call it a preemptive action or a unilateral attack, is it prisoner abuse or torture, is it a quagmire, another "Vietnam"? The poet Dante recognized the danger those who used words to dissemble and mislead posed to humanity, so he placed them in the bowels of Hell because their sin is more deadly to mankind than even the blasphemers, the violent criminals who maim and kill, the adulterers, or the usurers. In the 8th Circle of Hell, he places the Counselors of Fraud, those who have mislead their fellow man, most often by means of their falsifying words. But even below them lies the giant Nimrod, the first monster of mass emotion, whose words are nonsense, his speech is a perversion of language. The difficulty of passing by this monster symbolizes the difficulty of seeing beyond the senseless babbling of those who would use language to betray us. Nimrod and his empty, meaningless jibberish, seem a very real presence in our world today. If we're wise we will, as Dante's poet-guide Virgil recommends, "waste no words, but leave him where he stands" (*The Inferno*, XXXI, 79).

At a time when the precious resource of language is so often misused to manipulate us, I think of another word that resonates like a prayer – truth. I turn to poetry for truth, for it is the poet's calling to use language to express a truth as he or she sees it. I have come to trust in this, as I have come to trust in the healing capacity of prayers and words that act as mantras to enable me to transcend. They are talismans, as odd as the idea may seem, because they serve the same purpose as the physical amulet – the Italian horn, the crucifix, the Star of David, and all the many other symbols used by believers of all faiths to signify connection to the divine that is so essential for humanity. They link us to the unseen world of our belief, they call us to transcend the moment and connect to something larger than ourselves.

Referring to the word as spiritual talisman is appropriate, coming as it has from an old Islamic word, "talismani," which referred to the muezzin, or the cleric who calls the faithful to prayer. He is an intermediary, like Hart Crane's "bell rope that gathers God at dawn." The muezzin, or "talismani," like the bell, calls the faithful to stop their daily toil and make a connection to the divine. And the relationship of the caller to those he calls is symbiotic, their relationship reciprocal. So the talisman, whether it is an object, a person, or a word, calls us to a deeper experience, to heal us, to enlighten us, to bring us closer to the divine. It is something we can carry with us, around our necks, in our pockets, in our hearts, to remind us of a truth we hold dear, to help us make sense of life, or to help us carry on in a difficult world. And it is as important to the giver as it is to the receiver. When *nonna* makes a gift of a gold crucifix or Italian horn to her grandchild, the gift is as important for her to give as it is for the child to receive. Nonna's gift is a physical manifestation of her desire to connect herself and her grandchild with the divine, creating a sacred trinity of their own that mirrors the Christian holy trinity. At its most spiritual or philosophical, poetry functions the same way; and so a poem can feel like a precious offering from the poet to the world. We want to treasure it; to treasure the words that the poet has given to his thoughts or feelings. Those words, infused with meaning, are gifts, as necessary for the poet to give as they become for us to receive.

In the most ancient sense, the quintessential talisman is the Word as Logos, the most fundamental way we have to connect with the divine. Heraclitus said that the "Logos is representative of the world to God as well as God to the world." There needs to be the link, the intermediary, and it is the Logos, or the Word. This was crucial for John of the Gospel who left us with the concept that has haunted and inspired some of the greatest poets. The passage is well known: "In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." His presentation of Jesus as mani-

festation of that Logos, the Word, enables us to better understand His divinity. And it also helps us to better understand the reciprocal relationship of the giver to the given.

In this light, the fact that Jesus was God made flesh was as necessary for God as it was for man. This is what I've always seen in Michelangelo's Cistine Chapel fresco, *The Creation of Adam*, which depicts the tender connection of God to man and man to God. The link is the Logos, the Word. Christ as Logos connects us to God, the Word connects us to the divine. Creator and Creation are linked by the Logos, the Word, the manifestation of a Truth. The Word functions as talisman by helping us to transcend, to heal ourselves, and grow closer to God. So too is the talismanic quality of poetry – in the best, and often most difficult, poetry the poet as maker and giver is called to use the Word to express the transcendent. He is called to create this gift, the talisman, that is imbued with the power of his yearnings to make some sense of existence, and in the most profound examples, to express inklings of divinity.

The poet's passion for the word as talisman is apparent in the poetry of both Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens. In "To Brooklyn Bridge" and "The Idea of Order at Key West," respectively, the poets focus on the intensity of the artist's effort to infuse the Word, the Logos, with meaning. In his paean to the bridge, Crane praises the artistry that created the bridge that for him is both orphic "harp" and Christian "altar" by "fury fused." It has become the "threshold" for the suffering who seek, plead, with words, for connection: "the prophet's pledge," "prayer of pariah" and "the lover's cry." For Crane the bridge has become a talisman, the conduit, the centering Logos that calls to it those yearning for connection to the divine. So too has Wallace Stevens expressed the poet's need to use the Word to create a way in, a way to approach the threshold, the "portal" back to the divinity from which we've come when he says:

*O blessed rage for order...
The maker's rage to order words of the sea
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred
And of ourselves and of our origins.*

In "The Mermen" Hart Crane accesses the evocative nature of the Word. The Cross in the poem is evidently the name of a sunken ship but the word carries deeper meanings that allow the poet to show us that it is not simply a ship that has been wrecked. As the poem progresses Crane transforms the ship into the Christian Cross which becomes a talisman of salvation, the thing that can help us connect to God. But he laments that the Cross has "sunk" – suggesting the loss of faith in the modern world. But there is hope: the "mermen," the inverse of the mythical sirens who lead men to their destruction, ask that modern men, "idols of Futurity," leave them alone to ponder and explore the treasures of The Cross. Here the Cross becomes a talisman of an ancient truth; despite the fact that the modern world has allowed it to sink below the surface, the Cross still "gleams" with the Logos – the "human Face" of Jesus. For Crane, the Logos, the Word, became the precious amulet, the talisman that enabled him to ponder, and in varying ways connect to the Divine.

In "Voyages IV" Crane seems to hope for some revelation of the divine in the beauty of the tropical paradise, for the Word made flesh, the "incarnate word/The harbor shoulders to resign in mingling/Mutual blood." This Word which enables the "mingling," "transpiring," "gathering" that leads to something sublime, to the divine: "The secret oar, and petals of all love." It seems that he seeks, through the word, as did Dante, to bear witness to "the Love that moves the sun and other stars." In "Voyages VI" Crane exults in the creative power of the word, its divine power to create a talisman of pure beauty: "Creation's blithe and petalled Word/To the lounged goddess when she rose." Here the Word is the creative force which causes the divine (the "goddess") to come alive and communicate with humanity, if only with her eyes. The poem ends with the concept of the "imaged Word," which is reminiscent of the Chinese spiritual brush calligraphy, the Word that is an image, the symbolic Word, and its talismanic power to evoke a spiritual response in us:

*The imaged Word, it is, that holds
Hushed willows anchored in its glow.
It is the unbetrayable reply
Whose accent no farewell can know.*

The poet's Word becomes eternal. It transcends his own mortality. The "unbetrayable reply" is the gift of a divine truth that brings that moment of illumination that Dante, Crane, Williams, and Berryman searched for, and seemed to find in the poet's word. The gift the poet gives to us is, like my mother-in-law's word, like the Chinese symbol for it, a talisman of truth, a conduit to the transcendent, which lives on long after the giver is gone.

FRACTIONED IDIOM: POETRY AND THE LANGUAGE OF AUTISM

Kristina Chew

..... *thy swift*
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,

– Hart Crane, *To Brooklyn Bridge*

There's not a moment when poetry is not with me and I'm not reading the world as a constant project of poetry. For instance:

A fuzzy black line across a raggedy field of green. It's a narrow, shallow ditch that divides the school playground from the playing fields. The kids all run for it and run up and down it, over, and over, and over over over over.

"They always run to that ditch first and then they run back and forth," observes one aide in Charlie's special education class. "I wonder why."

The kids are four boys and a girl, my son Charlie's classmates, a room of six children with autism, a neurobiological disorder that causes severe impairments in social ability and communication and, very often, an obsession for routine and sameness. I look at the ditch and think, it gives the children something to orient themselves to in the vast bigness of the grassy field. The black line is equivalent to Wallace Stevens' jar in Tennessee in "Anecdote of the Jar." It makes order by its being there. It is an anchor in an endless space. Similarly, a child with autism can find that one detail in the landscape and cling to it as the sole criterion for making sense of a world of stimuli, sounds and smells and sights.

Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry can too be experienced as a mass of sound and images, as in lines 6-9 of "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire":

.....*in pool and rutpeel parches*
Squandering ooze to squeezed | dough, crúst, dust; stánches, stárches
Squadroned masks and manmarks | treadmire toil there
Fóótfretted in it.

Or from 57, "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies...":

Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves--goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying What I do is me: for that I came.

How to construe the words in the first line--how do the verbs relate to the nouns; which nouns function as subjects, which as objects – "that being indoors"? "each"? "Dwells" and "spells" rhyme but there are internal rhymes too: "selves," "itself," "myself." Language is stripped down to its essentials, to nouns and verbs and adjectives. These lines represents an aspect of the very experience of language for a child with autism who struggles just to distinguish among the phonemes

and vowel sounds of words and who is most comfortable using language that is concrete. Abstract notions – “truth,” “faith” – are particularly difficult to conceptualize and grasp. Hopkins heaps up things – the pool, the “ooze squeezed to dough, crust, dust,” a splintering slice of bread (the Host?). Lines like “shéer plód makes plough down sillion” from “God’s Grandeur” have the same kind of gnarling music reminiscent of a Baroque fugue. Hopkins’ poetry engulfs us in language as sound and image, each syllable so over-stuffed with sounds and potential meaning that it can be unbearable.

What if this was how we had to talk to each other, in such a fractioned idiom, in bits and pieces of word-sounds knowable only to ourselves? We think Hopkins’ poetry difficult – what, then, is the life of a child with autism who experiences language and the world as a continuous difficult poem steeped in metaphors, verbal echoes, word plays? A child with autism uses language as a “fractioned idiom” because he experiences language and the world as fragments of a difficult poem steeped in metaphors, verbal echoes, word plays. The language of “too much” is a child with autism’s experience of language: Too many sounds, stimuli, stuff. “Idiom” is from the classical Greek word *idiotes*, “private citizen”; a cognate word, “idiolect,” refers to a private language. The language of a child with autism can be classified as a language for a community of one. Children with autism can repeat a word or phrase over and over obsessively. They can engage in video scripting, in reeling off the dialogue of a favorite show word for word. They may make non-linguistic sounds (such as incessant humming) that are self-stimulatory. They may equate things that have nothing more to do with each other than that both words have a common sound, such as *girl* and *squirrel*.

Hopkins’ poetry indeed approaches an idiolect in his overwrought syntax and diction.

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?*

“Generations have trod, have trod, have trod”: That’s how Charlie plays with language, as so much dough and dirt. He would hear the *ear* in “seared” and “bleared” and “smeared”; the sound *ear* may be all he hears. *Girl* and *squirrel* are equated because of that inner *ir* and the ending curl of *l*. Just to listen to the sounds of “God’s Grandeur” is a far-fetched approximation of Charlie’s experience of language. If we feel bafflement at this mass of words, imagine a child with minimal speech and cognitively disabled trying to make sense from the nonsense of the language everyone else utters.

It is a frivolous claim I am about to make, certainly to my fellow parents of children with autism whose days are filled in advocating for their child’s educational rights in IEP meetings, telling that child that he cannot rewind a 30-second snippet of a videotape incessantly while anticipating a full-blown tantrum if the TV is turned off, and looking at his fingers as the other children on the playground chases each other in a game of tag. It is a ridiculous claim: Learning to read poetry can go a long way in decoding the language and limited communication skills of children with autism. A child with autism is all the time putting down a jar in some Tennessee in a “blessed rage for order ... / The maker’s rage to order words of the sea.” These words from Wallace Stevens’ “The Idea of Order at Key West” crystallize this necessity for order, for routine and sameness, of a child with autism: Barbies in a line across the floor, a tower of blocks that *must* be placed atop a certain shelf. Half a cinnamon raisin buckle spread thinly with cream cheese every day.

The sound of the sea in “The Idea of Order at Key West” before order is given to it is the pre-verbal voice *before language* and so “inhuman.”

*The water never formed to mind or voice,
Like a body wholly body, fluttering
Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,*

*That was not ours although we understood,
Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.*

Though non-linguistic, the sounds the ocean makes are somehow true, "veritable," precisely in that they are not "former to mind or voice." The ocean splashes, and that is what it has to say. The relationship between ocean and singer – between the stuff of the song and the maker of it – is a coincidence, as "[t]he ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea / Was merely a place by which she walked to sing." What the singer produces is more than "sound alone" and the poem's speaker seems almost to regret that her song cannot be simply that.

*If it was only the dark voice of the sea
That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
Repeated in a summer without end
And sound alone.*

The singer's song is "more," "more even than her voice, and ours" and has some sense, some message to it, in contrast to "the meaningless plungings of water and the wind" and the other massive vaguenesses that follow, "distances" so great they are not simply unreal but melodramatically so ("theatrical"). We can hear the distinct sound of the words of the poem's singer automatically: "grinding" vs. "gasping," "she" and "sea," "word" not "wind." We hear "... *she* [my emphasis] and not the sea." This singer can be equated to that displaced English speaker and to a child with autism. Just as a speaker of English only would hear "meaningless plungings" amid people conversing in Arabic or Vietnamese and strain to understand, so Charlie hears the sound when people talk but struggles to figure out the words.

The singer's song brings the multifarious material of the world into focus. The connection suggested is the sort of magical link between Orpheus and nature: Orpheus' musical power is such that he has only to play his lyre and the very trees move and the wild beasts are lulled and tamed.

*..... And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.*

The singer's self-absorption in the world of her singing describes the tendency of a child with autism to speak, sing, and act only in accordance to her own world. She is sole creator, the "single artificer of the world / In which she sang," and the connection between what she sings of and herself is so absolute that the "sea" of which she sings is one with her. The singer sings because she must create – this is the "blessed rage" – order out of the inarticulate "words of the sea." By figuring out how she makes this order, we can learn to see an order that was not there; my learning to "read" Charlie has taught me about how he orders and experiences the world through actions that had seemed unexplainable.

In the last stanzas, the narrator of "The Idea of Order at Key West" is surprised that the town – a synecdoche for the world – has an order all on its own. The narrator is able to discern order in the "glass lights" of the fishing boats which "mastered the night and portioned out the sea," meting and doling out the night and (again) the sea into units. Unlike the singer,

the lights create an order that stays as they “[fix] emblazoned zones and fiery poles”; indeed, this is a deeper, richer order that “enchants,” that makes the world magical. The lights and the singer alike create the last line’s “ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.” “Keener” recalls “acutest,” used to describe how the singer brings the sky into the finest focus. “Ghostlier demarcations” is oxymoronic as it describes forms that are distinct yet shade-like: The end result of the “blessed rage for order” is, oddly enough, sounds that are indistinct, muted, still and ever yet unknowable to an outside party.

Minnesota summer, sweet smell of green gardens. A street of woodframe houses straight out of Garrison Keillor (he indeed has a house in St. Paul). We are going on a walk. Jim holds Charlie’s hand (our boy wobbles; walking is new) and can he scream.

Though the official document from the Minnesota Children’s Hospital Child Development Center has yet to come, we know the Charlie has autism and that a need for sameness in all aspects of his life is part of this strange new disorder – condition – that, we know we will soon be informed, will be part of our lives until the end and beyond because individuals with autism live to their full span of life.

“He only wants to go *right*,” says Jim. He grabs one hand and I the other; Charlie screams, Charlie curls his legs and head back into an arch and we lift-drag him left. (Passers-by do not stare; their faces are iced over in the effort to ignore us.) I don’t remember when Charlie put his feet down (he did) as we simultaneously, silently mused about how strong his arm sockets must be.

Somedays we would walk right from the walkway from our house, and sometimes left, and Charlie screamed, screamed less, shrieked. Stopped. He did not say “no” because (at that point – he was just over two years) he could not. Sometimes we walked to a playground on Selby Avenue. Everything was made of wood or metal, like a huge steep slide that fell at a near-vertical angle. But Charlie’s favorite part of the playground was a red dab of paint. It was the result of a careless paint job to the metal posts. The red spot was a dot to the rest of the playground but, there on the second wood plank step, it was all that Charlie would look at. And look at obsessively, hanging onto the post and staring and not letting go of the post and backarching crazily when we coaxed him to go up the next step. We pulled, yanked, dragged, carried Charlie away from that spot and made him play, or go through what motions of it we could manage till we all slogged home.

The red paint was one thing Charlie knew did not change and that he could count on. In a world of fast cars, streams of sound, seering heat, snow drifts, it was the splattered center.

Poetry is an act and art of making. Autism is not poetry. It is a medical condition and individuals with autism suffer in ways that no one has any words for. “Imagine that you had a piece of duct tape over your mouth,” I heard one father of an 18-year old say. “What would you do? Would you stop talking? Would you hit? Hit yourself? Because people stop talking to you.” Thanks to the techniques and tools used to read poetry, I can make more sense of what an individual with a cognitive disability is “saying” when he arranges numbers in patterns of three, shuffling them with cardsharp dexterity. Poetry is not autism; the poetry of autism is an illegitimate phrase. The day-to-day struggles of this disability preclude any attempt at aestheticizing this disability.

This essay is not an attempt to claim that poetry, through reading it or writing it, has anything to do in treating a child with autism. What I am suggesting here is that the techniques by which we analyze and interpret poetry have some use in figuring out the verbalizations and non-verbal behaviors of children with autism. There is no sense – it’s sheer nonsense – even to think of “comparing a child with autism to a poem,” a cognitively disabled child and a bit of literature. But there is some use in using the literary elements of metaphor and metonymy, assonance and alliteration, even meter, in decoding a child’s communicative attempts or even, simply, what seems to be “bizarre” behavior--staring at a red-pain rhombus.

“Poetry is life; it should change everything around it. Do only what changes you.”

A poet wrote this to me at the end of a letter that advocated for the study of poetry both classical and modern, as, ultimately, more "cheering to the soul." We ask of Charlie that he be in this world and learn to change with its changes. Charlie always needs order; it is our task to step in and intervene when his rage for order overcomes him, when he insists on always going into the shallow end of the swimming pool, then across to the ladder, up and off the diving board, and back across the pool; when he must have an apple waffle, a blueberry waffle, and two oranges after school and an eight-pack of sushi following a bike ride. We have him jump into the deep end of the pool; I don't buy enough apple waffles or oranges and he has to make do with whatever's in the refrigerator; I nudge the cars he's lined up according to the floorboards across the room. We stopped buying sushi.

Charlie is after order and so am I. I watch him, little hawk, always in a rush raging to interpret his novel orderings, the fragmented ditties his voice pipes on.

CLOSER TO THE TABLE

Robert T. McGovern

*Throughout my whole life during every minute of it,
The world has been gradually lighting up and blazing before
my eyes until it has come to surround me
entirely lit up from within*

– Teilhard de Chardin

In many ways de Chardin describes the poet. He describes the struggle from unknowing to knowing, from the depths of darkness into brilliant illumination. While those around the poet struggle to understand, the writer burns to release the fire contained within. The relief comes through the torrent of words and emotions, desperately seeking escape through language, which is sometimes inadequate. Their words are a veil between this world and the next in which only they, the poet, can breach. Within my own academic journey, I have encountered many poets along the way; some, I merely step over, but others hold me momentarily spell-bound by their inner breadth, depth, and linguist cadence. Because I am always racing here or there, I rarely get back to those poems for which I long to read and contemplate again. But for three days in May: I stopped, I read, I listened, I encountered.

I had heard of Gerard Manly Hopkins prior to the seminar, but I had never read his work before. The seminar began with poet and biographer, Paul Mariani, introducing a bit of Hopkins' life and then reading the opening poem, "The Windhover." It recalls Hopkins' personal struggle to give himself over to the Church, as a Jesuit priest. The windhover, a small, in fact the smallest, of falcons is riding the wind and becomes Hopkins' muse and guide for us, a century and some later. The bird is stationary (hovering) and riding the wind currents as it catches the attention of the poet. The bird, on many levels, represents us, I suggest. How many times do we, like, Hopkins' bird, hover or remain stationary, as we try to make a decision? We can go either way. And, as Robert Frost would suggest, the road we choose will make all the difference. This is what struck me about this poem. We were not passed the title, and I was already with Hopkins, staring up into the sky to spy the small bird, watching his next move. The wind and salt air was refreshing. It had been sometime since I had the time to enjoy such a breeze. Hopkins, at the point of a major decision in his life, is literally grounded; he is juxtaposed against a windhover who is free and anything but grounded. I could not help but compare Hopkins and the small falcon. The bird, according to the speaker, is "in his ecstasy," as was Hopkins, on some level, with his decision to commit himself fully to his vocation. There is a sense of transcendence in this work, a reaching backward and forward at the same time. It seems the more you sit with it, the more it speaks. It is from this poem that Gerard Manley Hopkins gives us a peek at his life, at his journey to priesthood and his Christianity, all within the space of his sonnet. He, much like Hart Crane, "condenses eternity" when he speaks. In many ways his poem, like his Christ, is the Alpha and the Omega; it is both the beginning and the end.

"The Windhover" is a metaphor for Hopkins' transformative journey moving from the outside to the inside of his church. It is also a metaphor for the Crucifixion and struggle of Jesus Christ manifested in the words of the poet. This is most evident in the last line of the poem: "Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold vermilion." The fall can refer to Christ or the fall of mankind. The gall is representative of the drink that was offered to Christ, as he hung dying on the cross. The gash is representative of the mark of the solder's lance in Christ's side – seeking to confirm death. And most interesting, is Hopkins' use of gold as an adjective for vermilion. The OED defines "vermilion" as "Cinnabar or red crystalline mercuric sulphide, esp. in later use that obtained artificially, much valued on account of its brilliant scarlet colour, and largely used

as a pigment or in the manufacture of red sealing-wax; also, any red earth resembling this and similarly used as a pigment." The poet mixes gold with brilliant scarlet. It is the precious metal forged by humankind that is mixed the precious blood of Christ, forged by sacrifice. This becomes, on some level, analogues to Hopkins' personal vocational sacrifice.

Hopkins did go on to become a Jesuit priest and, I later learned, so did one of Paul Mariani's sons. Paul remembered his son's ordination in his own poem, "Quid Pro Quo." Because, I suggest, that Mariani's poem relates and connects, on some level, with Hopkins, I include the end here:

*this son,
this gift, whom I still look upon with joy & awe. Worst,
best, just last year, this same son, grown
to manhood now, knelt before a marble altar to vow
everything he had to the same God I had had my own
erstwhile dealings with. How does one bargain
with a God like this, who, quid pro quo, ups
the ante each time He answers one sign with another? (28)*

Paul Mariani, on another level, in another, time describes the same sacrifice that Gerard Manley Hopkins makes in "The Windhover." He, Mariani, asks how does one bargain with God? How indeed?

Thomas Merton in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* writes:

At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusions, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, but from which God disposes our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. . . It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. (142)

I could not leave this seminar without thinking of Merton's words written almost one-hundred years after Gerard Manley Hopkins' death. The point of nothingness, of which Merton refers, is the windhover who poised for all eternity. He hovers, awaiting our decision. It is a decision, as Merton suggests that is "inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will." It is like a "pure diamond" or as Hopkins would say, like "gold vermilion."

In the end, while the seminar was a breath of fresh air and an academic learning experience, it was also wonderful in that I was left hungering for more. I was left with more questions than answers, which by all accounts is a good thing.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS AND BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: POETS OF DECLINE

Stephen Martin

*Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil*

– Gerard Manley Hopkins, *God's Grandeur*

*Shelter line stretchin' round the corner
Welcome to the new world order*

– Bruce Springsteen, *The Ghost of Tom Joad*

One of the many things that struck me in this seminar is the similarity between certain poems Gerard Manley Hopkins and his social philosophy in general, and the lyrics of many of the songs of Bruce Springsteen. Talking to Paul Mariani confirmed this insight, so given my lack of poetic scholarship I decided to flesh out a little bit of this connection. Why undertake this analysis other than curiosity? As Prof. Mariani mentioned, song writers like Springsteen can be seen as (pardon my blasphemy) as more important in one sense than Hopkins -- they reach millions more people. So it is valuable to investigate the fruitful parallels between Springsteen and a more established poet and religious thinker like Hopkins in the aim of understanding better the relationship between religion and contemporary culture.

Two powerful works that offer instructive parallels are Hopkins' *Tom's Garland* and Springsteen's *Youngstown*. Their themes are similar enough that I decided to move back and forth from Hopkins to Springsteen in briefly analyzing their respective poems in their very similar narratives and analyses of the industrial capitalism of their time.

Hopkins subtitles his elliptical *Tom's Garland* "Upon the Unemployed," thus noting the anguish caused by the emerging industrial capitalism of his time was producing. The subtitle gives at least some clue to the reader as how to read it, though the garland itself is not "upon the unemployed." In fact, in Hopkins' own comments on the poem he remarks that "they are outcasts from it [being 'garlanded'] and have neither security nor splendour; that they share care with the high and obscurity with the low, but wealth or comfort with neither." The work can be seen as a poetic expression of Hopkins' attraction to the efforts of communism and socialism to overturn this order.

Springsteen's focus in *Youngstown* is also "on the unemployed" of industrial capitalism in this case the enormous layoffs that resulted from manufacturing plant closings, particularly the closing of steel plants in Ohio and Pennsylvania. While Hopkins is writing about the destructive effects of early industrial capitalism, Springsteen is writing about the emergence of post-industrial capitalism, but the cause is the same for both -- the refusal of mutual responsibility among the wealthier classes for those lower on the economic ladder and for the commonweal itself.

In *Tom's Garland* Tom is employed, a "navy" (line 4 - a day laborer) garlanded with "squat and surly steel" referring to the circle of steel pegs on his boot that cast up sparks as he drags his feet on the walk home from work. By emphasizing the importance of the lowliest part of one of the lowliest members of society -- the pegs on the bottom of the day laborer's boot, Hopkins' is applying St. Paul's words in I Corinthians 12 to his time; what should be an equal place in the "body"

or commonweal for these day laborers, isn't. It is the navvies who do the work of industrial society. They "mammoth" (line 12) or "trench, tunnel, blast" (notes), they are the "mainstrength" of industrial society (line 13), yet all they receive is freedom from hunger, ease from care, and fine clothing. These benefits are also symbolized by garland – these are their reward instead of instead of "advantage, glory and public fame" (notes) that goes to the "higher" classes.

In *Youngstown*, the protagonist and his father had worked in the plant: "daddy" worked the furnaces before and after fighting in World War II, keeping them "hotter than hell." Likewise the son after fighting in Viet Nam becomes a "scarfer" [working the torches], "a job that'd suit the devil as well." Not only does their work, their main strength, benefit their employers, it serves the commonweal. Among other things, it built the cannonballs and later "the tanks and bombs that won these country's wars." Just as for Hopkins' Tom, industrial capitalism provides the basic needs and relatively care-free life outside the workplace: "taconite coke and limestone fed my children and made my pay." There is even an aesthetic element to this good of order, "Them smokestacks reached like the arms of god into a beautiful sky of soot and clay." (Clearly Springsteen is not as worried here as Hopkins characteristically is about the effect of industrialization on the environment.)

Hopkins' focus on the proletariat is a reversal of England's (and our) giving first place to those crowned with privilege and wealth. As Norman Mackenzie comments, "... Hopkins viewed English society as founded on wrecking, but the poor got none of the spoils, they came from it then and thereafter." This is the message of Line 7-8: "Commonweal, Little I reck ho! Lack level in, if all had bread echoes"(which Mackenzie reads as "if all had bread, I would not much mind inequalities of status in the Commonwealth"). This may express a more communitarian ideal but still it echoes Marx's view that capitalism only makes workers' conditions worse despite workers (proletariat) doing the lion's share in creating wealth.

There is wrecking here too in *Youngstown*, when the corporation that owned the mill decided they weren't able to compete in the emerging global markets. On September 19, 1977, "Black Monday," the Lykes Corporation closed their *Youngstown, Ohio* "Campbell Works" steel plant without any prior announcement, laying off nearly 5,000 workers. As the protagonist's father says, "Them big boys did what Hitler couldn't do."

The corporation did nothing to retrain its life-long steel-workers, help find new jobs or aid them in any way. Instead, it simply closed up shop, and left the community with nothing but miles of abandoned steel mill buildings. It would not even provide *Youngstown's* community service agencies access to worker records, leaving them to identify layoff victims and providing them with no means to assist laid-off workers with unemployment claims, retraining or psychological assistance. As the song says, "Once I made you rich enough, enough to forget my name" (in more ways than one). They also refused to entertain attempts by workers to buy the Campbell Works and run it on their own. Shortly after Lykes' closing, other steel companies closed their plants. Unemployment rates in *Youngstown* and surrounding communities reached as high as 30%.

These are the unemployed described by Hopkins that are bred by industrial revolution and who share the obscurity of the low but the care of the high. "This, by Despair, bred Hangdog dull; by Rage, Manwolf; worse; and their packs infest the age" – their frustration leads then to either despair and dullness over their fate; or to rage and social destruction.

Similarly, the unemployed of *Youngstown* (and the devastated community) end up with plenty of care and no reward. Springsteen's protagonist follows Hopkins' temptations of despair and rage. But Springsteen combines the two in a despair that almost in a rage refuses even the solace of a promise of heaven: "When I die, I don't want no part of heaven, I would not do heaven's work well. I pray the devil comes and takes me to stand in the fiery furnaces of hell."

Neither Hopkins nor Springsteen here provides a route to redeem the social order. However, in the "Communism" letter quoted above Hopkins does see value in movements like socialism and communism that wish to overturn society on behalf of those on the lower rungs. In other poems he also strongly evokes religious resources for hope of redemption. For Springsteen in *Youngstown*, there seems only resignation and even a suppressed rage that ends up even further debilitating the protagonist of the song - making him only good for the "fiery furnaces of hell." This is a theme regarding social

change throughout his work. However, though in song after song he takes the side of the oppressed (and has given vast amounts of money to soup kitchens, the veterans movement and others), he never offers much hope to his protagonists, or to his audience. I think my point here can be supported here by the fact that in only one of his songs ("The Ghost of Tom Joad" and even here not in his own words, but in John Steinbeck's from *The Grapes of Wrath*) does the person decide to fight back against exploitation. In all his others, the toil of work and the hurt of unemployment are either run away from, transcended/escaped from in some way (finding some way to put up with it), or the sinful social order is accommodated to in some way. There seems no hope of redeeming the social order.

Nevertheless, like the poetry of Hopkins, and like the lyrics of Springsteen's forbearers in the American "working-man" poetic tradition – Walt Whitman, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan – Springsteen's popular verse can be seen as a crucial element in overcoming structural evil, of unmasking that evil, presenting the victims in a sympathetic light, and engaging the conscience of hearers. What is missing though is a vision that Hopkins provides in *God's Grandeur* and many of his other poems – of a hope in something more powerful than the evil that threatens to trod over the goodness of human spirit and the land.

- 1 Thanks to my fellow participant in the seminar, Anthony Scigliano, for his close reading and several helpful comments on the draft of this paper, and to Paul Mariani for an educational and inspirational work.
- 2 In the (very much too long) paper I originally envisioned I had planned on extending this comparison toward themes of redemption of the evils they point out, for example as this goes on in Hopkins' *God's Grandeur* and Springsteen's *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Also, a third step could take into account Springsteen's recent turn to a more explicit religiosity in songs themed around the 9-11 World Trade Towers attack like *My City of Ruins* and *The Rising*, compared to the similar topic and theme in Hopkins' *Wreck of the Deutschland*.
- 3 I am using the fourth edition of *The Poems of Gerald Manley Hopkins* which includes notes by Hopkins, many extensive, on each of his poems to help his readers understand them, especially the marks of emphases he was pioneering. In these notes, you can get the sense he couldn't always understand his readers' frustrations. For example, after explaining the multi-layered symbolism of his use of garland in *Tom's Garland*, he declares, "O, once explained, how clear it all is!" though at least for me the key is "once explained."
- 4 See his famous 1871 "Communism" letter to Robert Bridges in Hopkins' *Letters*, pp. 27-28. Thanks to Prof. Mariani for pointing this out.
- 5 As opposed to Hopkins' time, before the decline in manufacturing, low-skilled union workers often made more with a high school education than college-graduates did in their first years out of college.
- 6 Norman H. Mackenzie, *Reader's Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 189. The quote is from Hopkins' Communist letter noted above, where going against even liberal-minded Victorians, and Catholic social teaching, he condones the idea that the "old civilization and order must be destroyed."
- 7 Mackenzie, 191.
- 8 See the account of Youngstown, Ohio in *Journey to Nowhere: The Saga of the New Underclass* (NY: Doubleday, 1985), which Springsteen says helped inspire his song.
- 9 Don Burgham. "Ethics, the Law and a Plant Shutdown at Youngstown," June 30, 2002. June 30, 2004
<http://www.burghamfamilytree.com/Ethics%20of%20a%20shutdown%20in%20Youngstown.htm>
- 10 Anthony Scigliano offers this valuable insight, "does this connect with the Steel furnaces and then is it a kind of solace of the familiar?"
- 11 Though his songs and concert performances are themselves a source of almost transcendent joy - the religion of rock and roll and in Springsteen's legendary giving of himself in concerts a celebration of the work ethic itself.
- 12 See Jim Cullen *Born in the U.S.A.: Bruce Springsteen and the American Tradition* (NY: HarperCollins, 1997) and Bryan K. Garman *A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).