

unspeakable visions:
The Innovative Poetry and Prose of
Gerard Manley Hopkins
and
Jack Kerouac

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Introduction

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.

Walter Pater ¹

As early as five centuries before Christ, critics and artists were striving to make connections between the different disciplines of art. Plutarch quoted Simonides, who lived from 556-468 B.C., as saying, "Painting is silent poetry, and poetry painting that speaks."²

The link between one art form and another has always been important, and poetry often finds itself at the center of the debate. The difficulty of defining art, and of making standards by which to judge art, adds to the confusion. Can something which stimulates one sense intellectually stimulate another? Would a truly perfect piece of art transcend its form? Throughout history, many artists have certainly tried; Walter Pater, in his treatise of the Renaissance, stated unequivocally that *all* artists "aspire towards

¹ Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione," *Studies in the History of the Renaissance: Walter Pater: Three Major Texts* (New York: New York UP, 1986), 156

² Plutarch, *De Gloria Atheniensium*, III, 346.

the condition of music.” As the art culture has progressed, artists have been more expressive on this theme.

Gerard Manley Hopkins and Jack Kerouac, of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have been credited with the attempt to imitate music with their writing. These artists strove to extend themselves beyond their chosen form by pushing the limits of the form. Both tossed aside conventional approaches to grammar, form and meter and refused to accept the dictionary-imposed limits to the English language in their missions to truly transcend their single art form and extend the impact on the readers’ senses.

The relationship of music to the other arts is an important one, as Pater has noted extensively.³ He explains how the particular characteristics of music transcend each piece’s subject to convey a pure artistic expression.

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it. That the mere matter of a poem, for instance, its subject, namely, its given incidents or situation—that the mere matter of a picture, the actual circumstances of an event, the actual topography of a landscape—should be nothing without the form, the spirit, of the handling, that this form, this mode of handling, should become an end in

³ “Giorgione,” 153-168.

itself, should penetrate every part of the matter; this is what all art constantly strives after, and achieves in different degrees.⁴

So, Pater explains, because the subject is not the central image of music, because the “mode” in music is the most important, and in fact the central theme of the art form, it is therefore the ultimate art form. All other art aspires to emulate that particular property, the ability to immerse the audience in the artistic effects of the piece of art without becoming bogged down in the subject. Art is, he explains, an expression that is more concerned with the merits of the way in which the art form is used than it is with the subject. “Art, then, is thus always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material.”⁵ Pater depicts artists as striving to attain a complete non-reliance on subject, and on logical, temporal thought. The goal of all art, Pater would argue, is not conscious thought, but a purely sensory experience for the audience.

Gerard Manley Hopkins and Jack Kerouac, both innovators in their own rights, subscribed to Pater’s philosophy. Hopkins and Pater were close friends, and most probably discussed this idea; we know that Hopkins wrote often about music and was very interested in it.⁶ Kerouac, too, was a great lover of music, especially jazz; the music is almost synonymous with the “Beat

⁴ “Giorgione,” 156.

⁵ “Giorgione,” 158.

poetry” of which Kerouac was the father.⁷ Just to read the best of their work is to know what Pater meant when he wrote of “pure perception;” both of the artists went beyond the conventional limits of poetry and prose to forge a new sound which would emulate music, and which would work towards transcending the mundanity of subject and celebrate the pure artistry of the form.

Though Hopkins and Kerouac subscribed to similar philosophies, they used very different methods of achieving their goals. Hopkins was concerned with the process of crafting a metrical masterpiece, carefully selecting the perfect words or combinations of words, creating new ones if necessary, to fit into his complicated metrical forms. Kerouac, on the other hand, was a proponent of “spontaneous”⁸ poetics, and would write for hours on end, without revision, to create his masterpieces as they came to him, mad but unchangeable.

Hopkins wrote journal entries simply on the etymology of words; he was fascinated with the complexity of the structure of language, and was preoccupied with the process of crafting a poem. Critics recognize his efforts to fully explore the English language in his poetry:

Hopkins’s language, as idiosyncratic and indeed transgressive as it may seem in the history of English poetry, is part of a vigorous,

⁶ Cary Plotkin, *The Tenth Muse*, (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois U.P., 1989), 127.

⁷ John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers U.P., 1991), 48-9

⁸ “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose,” *Evergreen Review* 2 (Summer 1958) 72-3.

broad, and multiform movement in the study of language in England that extends far beyond the precincts of formal comparative grammar.⁹

Hopkins' journals and papers are a testament to this embrace of philology. Many of his entries will be simply an exploration of the roots of a single word, and many others will be only a few words long, descriptions of the weather or of plants or animals. In all of these entries we see his unusual approach to language and its descriptive powers; on July 24, 1868, he wrote "At sunset great bulks of brassy cloud hanging round, which changed their colour to bright reds over the sundown and to fruittree-blossom colour opposite; later a honey-brown edged the Dent Blanch and Wiesshorn ridge." and on March 17, 1871, "In the morning clouds chalky and milk-colored, with remarkable oyster-shell moulding."¹⁰ Hopkins constantly strives to use just the right words to describe sights, even if he must create new associations to do so, such as calling clouds "brassy" or describing a waterfall with the word "coffee-foam."¹¹ His etymology entries show how he attempts to link meanings of words with their roots, and to connect the words he uses by both connotation and root. In 1864 he wrote:

Gulf, golf. If this game has its name from the holes into which the ball is put, they may be connected, both being from the root

⁹ *Muse*, 136.

¹⁰ *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Ed. Humphry House, completed by Graham Storey. (London: Oxford U.P., 1959) 205.

¹¹ *Journals and Papers* 180.

meaning hollow. *Gulp, gula, hollow, hold, hilt, κοιλος, caelare* (to make hollow, to make grooves in, to grave) *caelum*, which is therefore same as though it were what it once was supposed to be a translation of *κοιλου, hole, hell*, ('The hollow hell') *skull, shell hull* (of ships and beans.)¹²

He also attempts to capture the idiosyncrasies of sounds in the pages of his journal; for instance, in several journal entries in the 1860s, he works to describe the song of the cuckoo:

(1865, May 15) The cuckoo's second note sounds nearer than his first.

(1866) May 20. ... Cuckoos calling and answering to each other and the calls being not equally timed they overlapped, making the triple *cuckoo*, and crossed.

(1869) June 28. The cuckoo *has* changed his tune: the two notes can scarcely be told apart, that is their pitch is almost the same...

July 8 or 9. Heard the cuckoo—very tuneless and wild sound?

This is just one example of Hopkins' endless struggle for perfection in word choice. He analyzes the sound of the cuckoo, for example, in the journal so he may be able to reproduce the sound of a bird in his poetry, so that he can write, 10 years later:

Repeat that, repeat,
Cuckoo, bird, and open ear wells, heart-springs, delightfully sweet,
With a ballad, with a ballad, a rebound,
Off trundled timber and scoops of the hillside ground, hollow
hollow hollow ground:

¹² *Journals and Papers* 25.

¹³ *Journals and Papers* 62, 137, 190-91.

The whole landscape flushes on a sudden at a sound.¹⁴ Here is the journal notation in action; Hopkins uses the “triple cuckoo, and crossed” idea with his words and meter in this poem fragment. He repeats “hollow hollow hollow” and the reader can hear the second note nearer than the first in line one; Hopkins adds an extra syllable for the first “note” and drops it in the second for a quicker, shorter sound to imitate the cuckoo’s song he so carefully recorded years earlier. He overlaps words as the song of the cuckoos “overlapped,” modifying “ground” with both “hillside” and “hollow hollow hollow.” The poem is, as well, “tuneless” and “wild”; Hopkins uses heavy consonants such as “d” and soft, toneless ones such as “h” to create the tuneless effect when the fragment is read aloud. “On a sudden at a sound” is quick, yet without much change in stress, to produce a sound which closely resembles the song of the cuckoo.

One can see the endless process of writing a simple five-line poem fragment; for Hopkins, the procedure is the better part of writing. His best poems are the careful crystallization of decades of contemplative observation and practically endless revision. Kerouac, on the other hand, is the prophet of spontaneity. A critic calls his writing “ragged and grammatically suspicious.”¹⁵ In fact, one of Kerouac’s literary “Beliefs and Techniques” is “28.

¹⁴ *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose*, Ed. W.H. Gardner, (London: Penguin Books, 1985) 80.

¹⁵ Regina Weinreich, *the spontaneous poetics of Jack Kerouac* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois U.P., 1987) 1.

Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better.” Another is “22. Dont think of words when you stop but to see picture better.”¹⁶ Kerouac is a proponent of almost careless writing; he would write for hours on end, typing furiously: his Beat epic *On the Road* was written in a three-week burst of typing about which author Truman Capote complained, “That isn’t writing; it’s typing.”¹⁷ Kerouac also denounced revision. “No pause to think of proper word but the infantile pileup of scatological buildup words till satisfaction is gained, which will turn out to be a great appending rhythm to a thought and be in accordance with Great Law of timing...no *revisións*.”¹⁸ Regina Weinreich argues that Kerouac was not the creator of spontaneous prose; William James and Gertrude Stein began with experimentation in spontaneity in the late nineteenth century. “But more than following in any direct line from these influences, Kerouac...attacked the concept of revision at a moral level, because it acted as a kind of secondary ‘censorship imposed by the unconscious.”¹⁹ Kerouac’s ideas about the purity of writing spontaneously mirror some of Pater’s ideas about the superiority of form over subject. Kerouac writes that the “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” include

¹⁶ *Good Blonde and Others*, ed. Robert Creeley, (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1993) 72-3.

¹⁷ Ann Charters, Introduction, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) ix.

¹⁸ “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose,” *Good Blonde* 69-70.

¹⁹ *spontaneous poetics*, 3.

Not “selectivity” of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement, like a fist coming down on a table with each complete utterance, bang! (the spacedash) — Blow as deep as you want — write as deeply, fish as far down as you want, satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind.²⁰

Kerouac embraces the ecstatic, unpremeditated flow of words which, coming from the open mind which seeks to “satisfy” only itself, will be “true” in whatever terms the reader wishes to accept. If the words come from nowhere but the writer’s mind, Kerouac argues, they will be right no matter how grammatically correct or true to the dictionary they are. Of course, Kerouac advocated an almost drug-induced state of consciousness while writing, of which neither Hopkins nor Pater would have approved (in fact, none of the nineteenth-century literati would have approved of Kerouac). Partly a product of his rebellious generation and partly a product of his never-ending search for self-knowledge, the idea of writing in something of a “trance” pervades Kerouac’s writing philosophizing.

If possible write “without consciousness in semi-trance” (as Yeats’ later “trance writing”), allowing sub-conscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so “modern” language what

²⁰ *Good Blonde* 69.

conscious art would censor, and write excitedly, swiftly, with writing-or-typing-cramps, in accordance (as from center to periphery) with laws of orgasm, Reich's "beclouding of consciousness." *Come* from within, out — to relaxed and said.²¹ Kerouac, then, expounds a writing process that is both euphoric and tortuous, exploring oneself and taking the center of one's thoughts and exposing them, raw, on the paper. Without thought, revision, outlines or even consciousness, the writer should simply lay his innermost thoughts bare on his manuscript, so that the audience can react to the truth of the artist rather than some contrived and therefore impersonal expression of convention. This spontaneous burst of thought is most crystallized in Kerouac's Mexican romance, *Tristessa*:

I pray at the feet of man, waiting, as they.

As they? As Man? As he? There is no He. There is only the unsayable divine word. Which is not a Word, but a Mystery.

At the root of the Mystery the separation of one world from another by a sword of light.—²²

Although Kerouac strays so far from grammar as to be occasionally more poet than prosaist, his style emphasizes that freedom from tradition and convention which he advocates so passionately. His departure from normal sentence structure and rules of grammar is more because his thoughts run so quickly that the traditional English sentence cannot keep up. Writing, Kerouac explains,

²¹ *Good Blonde* 70-71.

should come straight from the thoughts which are freshest and deepest in your consciousness; therefore, many times the sentence will not have a subject, verb and predicate with all of the prepositional phrases in order.

We see, however, that the “word” is always utmost in Kerouac’s mind. Even his most seemingly reckless paragraphs can be analyzed to show careful thought which might approach the tedious crafting of Hopkins’ work. The above passage explores religion, mass appeal of the gods of drugs, the search for truth, the importance of literature and the hopelessness of day-to-day living in the drug-addicted slums in which the novel is set. Many of the characters of this novel, especially Tristessa, are constantly searching for something, something of which they are not quite sure, something which may not even exist, but they feel must in some way be connected to religion; and must in some way be found through drugs. They do not, however, understand how the world works, or why they have been relegated to the slums, destined to rely on hallucinogenic substances for brushes with joy. They desire to question everything, but are afraid to, for fear they will find the wrong answer. Kerouac, the artist in the midst of drugs and misery (Kerouac is, in some incarnation or another, the central figure in all of his novels) is struggling to compromise the Catholic religion he grew up with and many of these people cling

²² Jack Kerouac, *Tristessa* (New York: Penguin Books, 1960) 43.

to with the reality of suffering and misery in his poetry. At the same time, he falls deeply in love with the “junk-racked”²³ Tristessa. Kerouac is at once confused, euphoric, questioning and afraid, as this passage indicates. He is, however, at all times sure that there is something greater than he that drives the world, who has planned his destiny; perhaps the “sword of light,” perhaps the Biblical-Classical “Word” with echoes of both the first verse of the Gospel of John²⁴ and of the almost sacred nature of literature, which Kerouac strives so hard to create himself.

Kerouac’s ideas about writing are the essence of what is called the “Beat” generation of writers. The origin of the word “Beat” was a discussion between Kerouac and John Clellon Holmes; though Kerouac coined the idea, Holmes was responsible for its dissemination and acceptance into the mainstream of literary critics and authors. Kerouac describes the origin of the word in one of his essays:

That wild eager picture of me on the cover of *On the Road* where I look so Beat goes back much further than 1948 when John Clellon Holmes (author of *Go* and *The Horn*) and I were sitting around trying to think up the meaning of the Lost Generation and the subsequent Existentialism and I said “You know, this is really a beat generation” and he leapt up and said “That’s it, that’s right!” It goes back to the 1880’s when my grandfather Jean-Baptiste

²³*Tristessa* 52.

²⁴John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (King James version).

Kerouac used to go out on the porch in big thunderstorms and swing his kerosene lamp at the lightning and yell "Go ahead, go, if you're more powerful than I am strike me and put the light out!" while the mother and the children cowered in the kitchen....²⁵

The word "beat" probably comes from the drug world, where the word means "cheated, robbed, or emotionally and physically exhausted."²⁶ This was Kerouac's inspiration, in part; he was the prophet of an entire generation of individuals who were "lost" in the traditions and constraints of a world in which they did not believe. They were, as Kerouac said, "down and out but full of intense conviction,"²⁷ "hipsters" who had lost their way but not their ideals, without money but not without a work ethic, subterranean heroes of the generation which believes in humanity and poetry more than anything else. Gilbert Millstein of *The New York Times* said the Beat generation

was born disillusioned; it takes for granted the imminence of war, the barrenness of politics and the hostility of the rest of society. It is not even impressed by (although it never pretends to scorn) material well-being (as distinguished from materialism). It does not know what refuge it is seeking, but it is seeking.²⁸

The Beat generation was one of the driving forces behind Kerouac's writing, and the idea was an important part of his literary conceptualization.

²⁵ "On the Origins of a Generation," *Good Blonde*, 57.

²⁶ Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee, *Jack's Book*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978) 170.

²⁷ "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," *Good Blonde*, 47.

Hopkins and Kerouac both strove to extend the limits of the literary conventions they knew so well but could not believe in. They both believed in a purpose somehow beyond themselves; Hopkins was deeply religious and a dedicated priest, a member of the Society of Jesus; Kerouac was also a Catholic who explored many religions, including Zen and Buddhism, before returning in the end to Catholicism. They strove, through their writing, to represent the truths of the universe; Hopkins was more concerned with reproducing the sounds, sights and emotions of God's creation and his struggle with the relative propriety of poetry, while Kerouac worked to reproduce the sounds of jazz, the intense struggles of his generation and the joys of writing, drinking and the open road, and most importantly explicate the mysteries of his world in the rhythm of his prose.

²⁸ Gilbert Millstein "Books of the Times," *The New York Times*, 1957.

‡ Chapter 1 ‡

It is a happy thing that there is no royal road to poetry. The world should know by now that one cannot reach Parnassus except by flying thither.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Critics have often been loath to applaud the artist who does not conform, although many such artists have been the greatest creators and thinkers of all time. James Joyce, for example, took a simplistic mind set and turned it into a new literary convention in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Henry James refused to write a novel which met his predecessors' page requirements and engineered the short story. William Blake created his own theory of the universe and, in essence, his own religion. Hopkins and Kerouac deserve pages in these annals as well; Hopkins created the ideas of "inscape," "instress," and "sprung rhythm," and Kerouac named the beat generation and acted as the prophet of spontaneous prose. Conformity has often been the exception, rather than the rule, in truly great art, and some critics have explained the benefits of going beyond one's limits to blaze new trails for artists to come.

Pater, himself, could not advocate absolute conformity to form in art. His belief in the purity of good art naturally led to a more forgiving opinion of art which approached the edges of critical presumptions:

Critical efforts to limit art *a priori*, by anticipations regarding the natural incapacity of the material with which this or that artist works, as the sculptor with solid form, or the prose-writer with the ordinary language of men, are always liable to be discredited by the facts of artistic production...it will be useless to protest...that poetry might not touch prosaic subjects as with Wordsworth, or an abstruse matter as with Tennyson. In subordination to one essential beauty in all good literary style, in all literature as a fine art, as there are many beauties of poetry so the beauties of prose are many, and it is the business of criticism to estimate them as such;... ²⁹

Pater, though he believed strongly in the inherent sanctity of art, was not above accepting art which tended to push the conventional limits. William Wordsworth was clearly one of Pater's literary heroes, and he was quick to defend the unusual use Wordsworth made of "common" language in his poetry:

A writer, full of a matter he is before all things anxious to express, may think of those laws, the limitations of vocabulary, structure, and the like, as a restriction, but if a real artist will find in them an opportunity,....Ninety years ago, for instance, great mental force, certainly, was needed by Wordsworth, to break through the consecrated poetic associations of a century, and speak the language that was his, that was to become in a measure the language of the next generation. ³⁰

²⁹ "Style," *Appreciations, Walter Pater: Three Major Texts*. 393-4.

³⁰ "Style," 397, 399.

Pater therefore could see with unusual clarity that true artists must not submit to the rules he learned in grammar school, but could in some cases break these rules for the good of his art. Wordsworth used the words of the "common" people to the great consternation of many of his classically-trained contemporaries, but slowly gained a new respect and acceptance for the words which the lower classes used. Literature, and especially poetry, became something which had a wider appeal for the population at large thanks to the efforts of Wordsworth and a little help from the technological advances of the printing press. In John Donne's time, for instance, only about two percent of the population could read and even fewer could get their hands on copies of one of his poems (which were not even published until a few years after his death, in 1633, as was often the case in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). The artist, therefore, wrote for only a few of his friends and literary contemporaries. Wordsworth changed much of this by making literature more accessible to a much larger portion of the population. He also led the way for other writers and artists to break some of the traditional literary conventions, prompting Pater to embrace "lawless"³¹ activities of this sort in his criticism. Pater was a defendant of art, first and foremost; the form or conventions of the art were much less important to him, as to many good critics. Art, however, must defend its own place in

³¹ "Style," 396.

history simply on its own merits, and art which corresponds with the convention of literary styles and which is easier to label will find the task of defending itself against the ravages of criticism and time much easier. Art of the variety of Wordsworth must display even more skill, talent, and artistic genius to win the battle than the conventional art. Pater will argue, though, that this battle is a worthy one and the critic should become involved.

That imaginative prose should be the special and opportune art of the modern world results from two important facts about the latter: first, the chaotic variety and complexity of its interests, making the intellectual issue, the really master currents of the present time incalculable—a condition of mind little susceptible of the restraint proper to verse form, so that the most characteristic verse of the nineteenth century has been lawless verse;... ³²

In other words, the contemporary opinion of anything should take into account its contemporariness: whether or not the piece of art correctly reflects its time, as well as how correctly the piece of art follows the conventions of the previous generation of artists. The nineteenth century, Pater argues, was itself a lawless time, so the verse produced in that time should reflect that.

Spontaneity, as well, is a sore point with many critics, who argue that writers simply use spontaneity as a theoretical without ever truly realizing it. M. H. Abrams, arguing for the romantic writers, writes that romantics used the “spontaneous, the inspired,

³² “Style,” 396.

and the self-evolving in the psychology of invention," without committing oneself "so far to the elected figure as to minimize the supervision of the antithetic qualities of foresight and choice."³³ Abrams "suggests that the idea of spontaneity does not preclude the possible imposition of its own restrictions."³⁴ In other words, many critics see spontaneity as largely self-contradicting. True spontaneity, they might argue, would be impossible, because of the mechanical restrictions of writing as well as the subconsciously preconceived notions of style, subject and structure that a writer cannot escape. Spontaneity for the literate writer, Abrams would argue, is simply an instrument of style and not truly a method of writing without any forethought whatsoever. Abrams does, however, argue the case of the literary outlaw:

...genius, however free from prior precept, is never free from law; knowledge, diligence, and the reflective judgment, as a preliminary and accompaniment to creation, are necessary but not sufficient conditions to the highest aesthetic achievement; eventually, the work of imagination must start spontaneously into independent life and by its own energy evolve its final form in the same way that a tree grows. Acting thus under 'laws of its own origination,' achieving works each of which is unique, the genius gives the laws by which his own products are to be judged; yet these laws are universal laws which he himself must necessarily

³³ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Norton, 1953), 224.

³⁴ *spontaneous poetics* 3.

obey, because his composition proceeds in accordance with the order of the living universe.³⁵

The Abrams model is very workable for the works of Hopkins and Kerouac. In other words, the artist's act of creation when he breaks the old rules of style, grammar, etc. is not only a fresh artistic masterpiece but also the rulebook for the artist's subsequent creations, as well as the rulebook for the generation to follow him. The "living universe" idea is an easy way to connect the styles of Hopkins and Kerouac, both of which followed rulebooks of the artists' creation. One could argue, even, that Kerouac's work was in some way a descendant of the innovations of Hopkins; certainly, many of their words are similar, many of their sentences follow similar patterns. One could argue that, for instance, that "softly bellysweet"³⁶ necessarily follows from "wind-beat whitebeam"³⁷ and that "now I go in, death or no death, and sleep the sweet sleep of white angels"³⁸ is the natural literary descendant of "Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess / Thy terror."³⁹ That the literary world is a living one, in which the sins of the fathers are visited on the sons and grandsons, is an interesting one which can be defended with the works of Kerouac and Hopkins.

³⁵ *Mirror and Lamp*, 225.

³⁶ *Subterraneans*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) 3.

³⁷ "The Starlight Night," *Poems and Prose*, 27.

³⁸ *Tristessa*, 46.

³⁹ "The Wreck of the Deutschland," *Poems and Prose*, 13.

‡

No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Hopkins, indeed, forged his own rules of literature. He conceived a very complex set of literary theories which he called “inscape,” “instress,” and “sprung rhythm.” Inscap and instress are related in Hopkins’ canon; he coined the terms around 1866 to describe the aesthetic principles he felt he had discovered. W. H. Gardner explains the two terms in his introduction to Hopkins’ writing:

As a name for that ‘individually-distinctive’ form (made up of various sense-data) which constitutes the rich and revealing ‘oneness’ of the natural object, he coined the term *inscape*; and for that energy of being by which all things are upheld, for that natural (but ultimately supernatural) stress which determines an *inscape* and keeps it in being — for that he coined the name *instress*.⁴⁰

Inscap, then, is the soul, so to speak, of an object. The inscap is the root of all perception of something; though the common observer might not be able to identify the inscap, the inscap defines the object and sets it apart from all others. The instress is the energy which allows the inscap to connect with the senses of the observer; it is the communication between the inscap and its

⁴⁰ Introduction, *Poems and Prose*, xx.

audience, and at the same time it is the universal quality of being which imposes order on all things. Inscapè would be equated with what Hopkins poetically called “the dearest freshness deep down things;”⁴¹ and instress would be the cause of “my heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird, — the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!”⁴² Inscapè is much easier to grasp and describe than instress, but they are both rather ephemeral terms which, though they drive the entire body of Hopkins’ poetry and prose, are very difficult to emulate. Hopkins himself recognized the unusual nature of his theorizing:

No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness ... But as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling *inscapè* is what I above all aim at in poetry. Now it is the virtue of design, pattern or *inscapè* to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped.⁴³

Hopkins, therefore, acknowledges his place in the innovators of literature, although he would not likely have used such a grandiose term to describe himself. Hopkins’ “vice” of becoming queer is Abrams’ active role in the “living universe.”

⁴¹ “God’s Grandeur,” *Poems and Prose*, 27.

⁴² “The Windhover,” *Poems and Prose*, 30.

⁴³ Letter to Robert Bridges, 1879 *Poems and Prose*, xxii.

It is Hopkins' idea of "sprung rhythm," however, which is most important to the idea of his poetry and its aspirations "to the condition of music." He wrote about the effects of sprung rhythm in his preface to his book:

Sprung rhythm, as used in this book, is measured by feet of from one to four syllables, regularly, and for particular effects any number of weak or slack syllables may be used. It has one stress, which falls on the only syllable, if there is only one, or, if there are more, than scanning as above, on the first, and so gives rise to four sorts of feet, a monosyllable and the so-called accentual Trochee, Dactyl, and the First Paeon. And there will be four corresponding natural rhythms; but nominally the feet are mixed and any one may follow any other....In Sprung Rhythm, as in logaeodic rhythm generally, the feet are assumed to be equally long or strong and their seeming inequality is made up by pause or stressing. ⁴⁴

So, for example, we have lines from "The Wreck of the Deutschland" which conform to the monosyllabic form: "Jèsu, hèart's ligh't," and "Àh! There wàs a hèart righ't!" (stresses added) and "Stànching, quen'ching òcean of a mòtionable mind," which is an example of paeons, with the stressed initial syllable followed by three unstressed feet. Hopkins uses this sprung rhythm because he believes it is the natural and even divinely inspired rhythm.

Sprung Rhythm is the most natural of things. For (1) it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is

⁴⁴ "Author's Preface," *Poems and Prose*, 9-10.

perceived in them. (2) It is the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music, so that in the words of choruses and refrains and in songs written closely to music it arises. (3) It is found in nursery rhymes, weather saws, and so on; because, however these may have been once made in running rhythm, the terminations having dropped off by the change in language, the stresses come together and so rhythm is sprung.⁴⁵

Sprung rhythm, therefore, represents more than a meter. The rhythm, in Hopkins' verse, is part of the subject, a device to mirror the rhythms of everyday language, of music, of the natural rhythms of the world we hear each day. Hopkins' rhythm is the slightly more modern equivalent to Wordsworth's common language; Hopkins simply takes it a step further and several years of research deeper to reflect the unconscious sounds of human life. So when Hopkins writes, "Nothing is so beautiful as Spring —"⁴⁶ he is not commenting only on the facial beauty of the season, but also the underlying natural rhythms of birth, life, and the song of the thrush. "The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing," is not only describing the music but also imitating it in the most basic way.

For Hopkins, this "Sprung Rhythm" was a departure from what he viewed as the artificial rhythm which so many English poems imposed upon their writing. He writes that, when

⁴⁵ "Author's Preface," *Poems and Prose*, 11.

⁴⁶ "Spring," *Poems and Prose*, 28.

perfection and its pursuant intractable order are undertaken, arts may suffer:

Perfection is dangerous because it is deceptive. Art slips back while bearing, in its distribution of tone, or harmony, the look of a high civilization towards barbarism. Recovery must be a breaking up, a violence, such as was the Preraphaelite school....We may perhaps conclude...that conventionalism is not the confession of incapability; but on the other hand it will not express the truth to say it is absolutely chosen for its own sake without reference to the conditions and difficulties of Art. But as the metre and rhymes, conditions and restrictions of verse, are the unexpected cause of the rise of all that we call poetry, so do the conditions of painting, sculpture, and the rest of the arts contain their greatness, their strength and their decline.⁴⁷

Hopkins believes that the order imposed by conventions such as meter, style and rules about form is both beneficial and destructive to art; it can both create a universal method for expression and limit the expression of the genius. Hopkins creates his own limits, imposing them far outside the traditional ones. He uses both sprung rhythm, parallelism and unusual word-crafting to do so.

Parallelism is another of Hopkins' favorite devices. He explains that parallelism is one of the unusual beauties of verse which help to differentiate it from prose.

If the best prose and the best poetry use the same language...why not use unfettered prose of the two?...it is plain that metre,

⁴⁷ "Health and Decay in the Arts," *Journals and Papers*, 79.

rhythm, rhyme, and all the structure which is called verse both necessitate and engender a difference in diction and in thought.... But what the character of poetry is will be found best by looking at the structure of verse. The artificial part of poetry, perhaps we shall be right to say all artifice, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism. ⁴⁸

Hopkins shows that he is dedicated to poetry, and defends its unique character. He explains that the structure of verse is “continuous parallelism,” which requires a greater “emphasis of thought” than prose.

...parallelism is of two kinds necessarily—where the opposition is clearly marked, and where it is transitional rather or chromatic. Only the first kind, that of marked parallelism, is concerned with the structure of verse—in rhythm, the recurrence of a certain sequence of rhythm, in alliteration, in assonance and in rhyme. ⁴⁹

Hopkins believed the advantage of poetry over prose was the intrinsic value of its structure. Parallelism is an innate part of the beauty of verse, and Hopkins carefully explores each aspect of poetry so as to take full advantage of it. Hopkins is concerned with carefully analyzing and explicating every characteristic of poetry. He uses this tedious but comprehensive research to craft his deliberate poetry.

Hopkins’ most important and unusual technique is his singular use of words. He combines words in unheard-of ways to

⁴⁸ “Poetic Diction,” *Journals and Papers*, 84.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

express his careful observations of the world around him. He thoroughly considers each possible descriptive word about a certain animal, cloud or idea to obtain the perfect synthesis of that object. He also explores the connotations of different, related words so that the ones he chooses will best describe the essence of the object, or its "inseparability." He records many of his etymological explorations in his journal:

Dhu in one or more of the Celt languages is *black*.—Gaelic e.g. *Donuil Dhu*—*Donuil the Black*. In above names it enters into *Dun* and *Dow*, perhaps *Dougha*, *Dou-* being *blue*, originally *black*. But perhaps *gla* is *blue*, and we may compare *glacum* or *glacum* or *glacum*, Latin—or rather probably Latinizing of native word—for the *blue-dye* producing plant, woad....³⁰

He thoughtfully untangles all the origins and connections of a word before choosing it for his poetry. He also draws upon his careful observations of natural occurrences (as above) to decide upon the perfect words for his poetry. It is, however, in the poetry, not the journals, where the reader sees the way in which Hopkins takes the English language into his own hands.

Towery city and branchy between towers;
 Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmed, lark-charmed, rook-racked, river-
 rounded;
 The dapple-eared lily below thee; that country and town did
 Once encounter in, here coped and poised powers;³¹

³⁰ "Early Diaries (1864)," *Journals and Diaries*, 13.

³¹ "Duns Scotus's Oxford," *Diaries and Diaries*, 40.

Hopkins manipulates not only the rhythm and philosophy of his poetry, but also the basic word structure. He combines words to create a new and better description: “bell-swarmèd,” “river-rounded,” and “branchy”; none of these words have a dictionary meaning, but all evoke very distinct images of the town. The reader can see the towers of the city, tempered with the branches of the trees, and all the life among them; but sees it much more distinctly when lost in the rhythm of “bell-swarmèd, lark-charmèd, rook-racked, river-rounded” than in a more conventional or prosaic version of the same observations. With the new combinations of words, the reader not only sees, but hears, and feels, Oxford and the life it supports. Plotkin says Hopkins “extends” his words “both grammatically and semantically”⁵² to achieve these associations. Obtaining the perfect mix of adjectives to describe a certain observation is Hopkins’ goal; and the grammatical limits of the English language must be extended to accomplish this end. One critic writes about the way Hopkins uses connections between words which might be etymological, or simply a similar sound, to connect his reader to the subject of the verse. “This unexpected patterning and logically superfluous linkage galvanizes otherwise inert language and gives the reader the feeling that he is participating in an organically developing

⁵² *Muse*, 89.

process.”⁵³ Hopkins’ use of inscape and ample liberties with word structure, Bender says, “expanded the possibilities of poetic form and of the English language.”⁵⁴ Bender believes that Hopkins’ creation of words goes further than simply an esoteric philological choice. “When Hopkins creates new words...he forces the reader to ask not only *what* does this word signify, but *how* does it come to bear meaning.”⁵⁵ Bender, too, subscribes to the “living universe” theory, in his belief that the word choices Hopkins makes will take the reader both backwards, to the roots of that word and of similar words, as well as forward, so that the new word will color the reader’s future observations and perhaps become a part of his lexicon.

The new sound of Hopkins’ words comes partly from his unusual combinations of qualifying nouns and his use of other parts of speech as descriptors, and partly from his striking use of syntax. For example, in “The Windhover,” Hopkins writes:

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!⁵⁶

Instead of writing, “The fire that breaks from thee then is told a billion times lovelier,” and “...pride, plume, buckle here” Hopkins carefully inverts his syntax to achieve the maximum result in

⁵³ Todd K. Bender, “‘Scope,’ ‘Scape,’ and Word Formation in the Lexicon of Hopkins,” *the Fine Delight*, Francis L. Fennell, ed. (Chicago: Loyola U.P. 1989) 124.

⁵⁴ “Lexicon of Hopkins,” *the Fine Delight*, 115.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

rhythm, rhyme and meaning. This was a sharp aversion from the mainstream of contemporary English thought:

The syntax of English, and even of English poetry, is relatively resistant to manipulation; yet Hopkins needed the freedom to place words where he wanted to if he was to create the density of phonetic texture than would make his pattern of sound perceptible, coherent—meaningful....The result is an interruption and a partial suppression of discursive argument in favor of the expression of connections of meaning rooted in similarities of sound. ⁵⁷

Plotkin explains that Hopkins' technique was far too compact to conform to the conventional syntactical rules, and he was much more concerned with sound than propriety. Therefore he connected his meanings to the sounds to create an even more complex and eloquent product. For instance, the inversion of "a billion / Times" with "told lovelier, more dangerous" emphasizes both the vastness of billion and the dichotomy of being both lovely and dangerous, as well as taking advantage of the rhythm of "billion," and its similarity to "sillion" and "vermilion" in the next stanza. The reader can also see the effect of the alliteration of "Times told" and the successive lines beginning with "B" which would have been lost if the syntax had been "buckle / Here." Plotkin insists that "Hopkins's syntactic manipulations are for the most part in the service of the individual word—the privileged

⁵⁶ "The Windhover," *Poems and Prose*, 30.

object of scrutiny and concern in nineteenth-century English philology—and the patterns of sound and sense that can be created with it.”⁵⁸ The above reading of “The Windhover” is in agreement with Plotkin; we can see the emphasis on “billion” and “chevalier” (with the rhyme with “here”), accomplished by rhythm, rhyme and syntax.

In all these ways, Hopkins takes the English language a little further than it have ever been taken before. He brought in his own theories of poetic inspiration and structure, and forged his own rules of grammar, syntax and rhythm to extend the limits of the poetic form. As Plotkin concludes,

...by raising the element of sound, both as a bearer of meaning and as an abstraction, to the level of a constitutive organizing principle of poetic language, by conspicuously reducing (though never dissolving) its function as referent to the sensuous manifold, he reintegrated it into this manifold as a homogeneous constituent—no longer sign but substance, not meaning something but being

⁵⁷ *Muse*, 133.

⁵⁸ *Muse*, 134.

something. Hopkins wished his poetry not to be deciphered but, like revelation, to “explode.”⁵⁹

We can see this “explosion” in a poem like Hopkins’ unfinished “Epithalamion,” in which a man dives into a pool, a metaphoric equivalent to wedlock. A portion of the poem can be said to “explode”:

By there comes a listless stranger: beckoned by the noise
He drops towards the river: unseen
Sees the bevy of them, how the boys
With dare and with downdolphinry and bellbright bodies huddling
out,
Are earthworld, airworld, waterworld thorough hurled, all by turn
and turn about.

This garland of their gambols flashes in his breast
Into such a sudden zest
Of summertime joys
That he hies to a pool neighbouring; sees it is the best
There; sweetest, freshest, shadowiest;
Fairylane; silk-beech, scrolled ash, packed sycamore, wild
wychelm, hornbeam fretty overstood
By. Rafts and rafts of flake-leaves light, dealt so, painted on the air,
Hang as still as hawk or hawkmoth, as the stars or as the angles
there,
Like the thing that never knew the earth, never off roots

⁵⁹ *Muse*, 135.

Rose. Here he feasts: lovely all is! No more: off with — down he
 dings
 His bleached both and woolwoven wear:
 Careless these in coloured wisp
 All lie tumbled-to; then with loop-locks
 Forward falling, forehead frowning, lips crisp
 Over finger-teasing task, his twiny boots
 Fast he opens, last he offwings
 Till walk the world he can with bare his feet
 And come where lies a coffer, burly all of blocks
 Built of chance-quarried, self-quained rocks
 And the water warbles over into, filleted with glassy grassy
 quicksilvery shives and shoots...⁶⁰

In this portion of Hopkins' poem, all of his techniques come together so that the poem extends beyond its subject and plays upon the readers' senses. His sprung rhythm is carefully worked in with constant enjambment so that the reader is almost as breathless as the man must be in the spring air: "sees it is the best / There; sweetest, freshest, shadowiest;" the reader stops briefly after each breathless list of adjectives or nouns, only to fall into another one, so that we are overwhelmed or "leafwhelmed" (as Hopkins indicates in the second line of the poem) in the wood. The reader often falls upon a succession of monosyllabic stresses such as "flake-leaves light" or "lips crisp" which repeat, not only stresses, but also

⁶⁰ "Epithalamion," *Poems and Prose*, 85-86.

sounds to emphasize the words and the internal rhythm. He uses his own coinages such as “downdolphinry,” “bellbright” and “offwings” to describe in syntactically and grammatically unusual ways this mundane occasion so that it seems almost otherworldly. Phrases such as “never off roots rose” make use of the syntactic inversion to emphasize the fantastic nature of the place. Also, when Hopkins uses the word “Fairyland” to describe the place, but surrounds it with completely natural images: “sweetest, freshest, shadowiest” and “silk-beech, scrolled ash, packed sycamore” we can see that this otherworld is really in our own world. Hopkins uses all these images as a metaphor for marriage, so that we slowly realize that the partial reality we are hearing is a celebration of the universally ordinary but individually singular institution of wedlock. The unaware man, the unmarried person, comes upon a “bevy” of boys enjoying the water, or Hopkins’ symbol for “spousal love” and realizes that he, also, wants to experience this, so he “hies” to a hidden pool, a pool which seems to be from another world, and carelessly, breathlessly, dives into the water, or wedlock. The reader can see at once his apprehension and his eagerness, his sense of urgency and his fear of the unknown. The reader can also reproduce these feelings in the rhythm of the poetry; this is Hopkins’ ultimate goal. In “No more: off with — down he dings / His bleached both and woolwoven wear: / Careless these in coloured wisp / All lie tumbled-to” we read quickly,

carelessly, the syllables fall over one another, but in “Forward falling, forehead frowning, lips crisp / Over finger-teasing task” the reader is forced to slow down the pace so he can articulate the difficult alliteration. The reader feels everything the poem’s subject is feeling, so he need not analyze the subject as carefully as I have here. One must simply read the poem aloud to experience the river, wood and water and their attendant metaphorical meanings. This, perhaps, is what Hopkins means by “explode.”

‡

riffs always seem spontaneous as if they were improvised in the heat of performance.

Albert Murray

Stomping the Blues

Kerouac’s innovations, in many cases, imitate Hopkins’; they are similar in scope and unexpectedness, and they replicate Hopkins’ theories in several ways. Kerouac deeply disliked convention and tradition, and constantly strove to find a place for himself beyond that tradition. His development of the idea of spontaneous prose, though it may not have been his originally, was

nonetheless a proactive one. Kerouac wrote spontaneously because that was how he believed writing must be. Therefore the idea was, to him, his alone.

My position in the current American literary scene is simply that I got sick and tired of the conventional English sentence which seemed to me so ironbound in its rules, so inadmissible with reference to the actual format of my mind as I had learned to probe it in the modern spirit of Freud and Jung, that I couldn't express myself through that form any more. How many sentences do you see in current novels that say, 'The snow was on the ground, and it was difficult for the car to climb the hill'? By the childish device of taking what was originally two short sentences, and sticking in a comma with an 'and,' these great contemporary prose 'craftsmen' think they have labored out a sentence. As far as I can see it is two short sets of imagery belonging to a much longer sentence the total imagery of which would finally say something we never heard before if the writer dared to utter it out. Shame seems to be the key to repression in writing as well as in psychological malady. If you don't stick to what you first thought, and to the words the thought brought, what's the sense of bothering with it anyway, what's the sense of foisting your little lies on others? what I find to be really 'stupefying in its unreadability' is this laborious and dreary lying called craft and revision by writers, and certainly recognized by the sharpest psychologists as sheer blockage of the mental spontaneous process....⁶¹

⁶¹ "The Last Word," *Good Blonde and Others*, 159.

Kerouac's writing was defined by this lack of revision and dedication to the first draft. A major part of Kerouac's work, and his joy, is what he calls in this passage "dar[ing]"; the tremendous audacity it took to write one's "first thought," the initial response to the world which was, in Kerouac's personal *weltanschauung*, the only correct one. One of his friends tells the story of a time when Kerouac wrote one of his small books of poetry, *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*. "I remember he came down one morning and he'd written *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, and he said, 'Last night, Locke, I knew exactly what it meant.' This morning he had no idea—gone."⁶² Kerouac believed strongly in the process he described as "spontaneous." This was just a small part of his philosophy of the Beats and the Beat generation, which permeated his prose. Kerouac's explanation of the Beats was part of his constant work to define what he was doing, and to establish his own codex of literature. As Gary Snyder, a friend of Kerouac's, said, Kerouac set his own standards and influenced most of the writers of the late twentieth century:

Jack was, in a sense, a twentieth-century American mythographer. And that's why maybe those novels will stand up, because they will be one of the best statements of the myth of the twentieth century....I much appreciated what he had to say about spontaneous prose, although I never wrote prose I think it influenced my journal writing a lot....I think that I owe a lot to Jack in my prose

⁶² Locke McCorkle as quoted in *Jack's Book*, 209.

style, actually. And my sense of poetics has been touched by Jack for sure.⁶³

Kerouac tried to capture the spirit of the generation in his style, as much as in what he said, in the “mythography” Snyder speaks about. Another friend of Kerouac’s, Peter Orlovsky, explained Kerouac’s spontaneity:

Jack really went home and wrote for hours and hours and hours, continuously over the years. That’s a writing-sitting, or a composing-sitting or creative-art-sitting. It’s not the same as letting go. That’s another kind, just being aware of mind in space, or mingling of mind and space....⁶⁴

The Beats themselves were something of a rebellious group, and Kerouac attempted to articulate this with his writing style. As explained above, the Beats were named by Kerouac but were a generation with its own life and beliefs. Malcolm Cowley, an editor who was the *de facto* champion of the Beat generation, explained its essence in *The Literary Situation*:

There was one fairly large group that refused to conform and waged a dogged sort of rebellion—against what it is hard to say, because the group had no program, but possibly against the whole body of laws, customs, fears, habits of thought, and literary standards that had been accepted by other members of the generation.... Often they talked about being “underground” and called themselves “the beat generation.”...In two respects they

⁶³ Gary Snyder as quoted in *Jack’s Book*, 202–203.

⁶⁴ Peter Orlovsky as quoted in *Jack’s Book*, 194.

were like the conventional majority of young people: they had no interest in politics, even as a spectator sport, and they were looking for something to believe, an essentially religious faith that would permit them to live at peace with their world.⁶⁵

Kerouac, therefore, was seeking to express this angst in a way which went beyond mere philosophizing and approached Pater's principle of art and its transcendence of subject; Kerouac wrote in a way which broke the rules, in order to express the essence of a generation which was searching for new rules in which to believe.

In order to develop his writing style and express the Beat generation, though, Kerouac felt he must experience everything that generation had, and learn the truths of the universe for which that generation was seeking. He was seeking the truth, or all the truths — of writing, of religion, of beauty. John Clellon Holmes explained Kerouac's quest:

A Zen master would have said about Kerouac, "He is a seeker." He was a seeker. Jack wasn't a Zen, he was a Mahayana Buddhist. He always thought Zen was intellectual. The point is that Jack was struggling with the meaning of life. "Why am I alive? Why should I stay alive?"...Jack was, and remained to the end, a Catholic—in terms of the highest idea of the Catholic vision of the world. He didn't look upon life as chaos, even in the Zen sense of happenings that come to something or don't. He tried like mad

⁶⁵ Malcolm Cowley as quoted in *Jack's Book*, 186-187.

with Buddhism. Nobody understood Buddhism as deeply as Jack that I have ever known. ⁶⁶

Religion was a big part of Kerouac's search, and he fully explored both Catholicism and Buddhism to find the universal truths which would make him whole, in the end returning to his boyhood Catholicism. He was wracked with the guilt of generation which knew no shame, and the stress, along with the drugs, eventually killed him. But before it did so, he wrote it all into his novels and poetry. One of the best examples of his search for religious truth is the novel *Tristessa*, the startling account of his love for a Mexican junky. In the novel we can see his passion for women, his search for God, and his spontaneity:

And all the previous ensalchichas and papas fritas of the year before, Ah Above, what you doin with your children?...You with your sad compassionate and nay-would-I-ever-say-unbeautiful face, what you doin with your stolen children you stole from your mind to think a thought because you were bored or you were Mind—shouldna done it Lord, Awakenerhood, shouldna played the suffering-and-dying game with the children in your own mind, shouldna slept, shoulda whistled for the music and danced, alone, on a cloud, yelling to the stars you made, God, but never shoulda thought up and topped up tippy top Toonerville tweaky little

⁶⁶ John Clellon Holmes as quoted in *Jack's Book*, 219-220.

sorrowers like us, the children...⁶⁷

This is the central image of the novel, and it serves as a microcosm of the novel itself, a complaint against a God Kerouac cannot ignore or stop searching for. He was always very conscious of God in his writing and in his life, just as he was conscious of his literary style and the way it influenced the prose he wrote. When he writes spontaneously, the reader is constantly aware that he is actually participating in the writing process, and is part of an unfolding life, not just a fantastical story. Kerouac's work is almost frightening real, because one who will read carefully will realize that *he lived it*, Kerouac experienced these things and lived these lives. At the time when his books were being published, this was even more the case:

Most books that come out are contained. That is, "I want to read that book." But what happened when *On the Road* came out was "I want to know that man." It wasn't the book so much as it was the man. He became more and more confused as it went on....I had phone calls from people that I knew saying, "I've got to meet this man. ~~Got~~ to. You know him. I've got to meet him." And I said, "What are you talking about? Read his book." "No, no. It's not that. He knows everything..."...This so discombobulated him that for the rest of his life he never, never got his needle back on true north.

⁶⁷ *Tristessa*, 88-89.

Never.⁶⁸

This unusual personal involvement in novels stems partly from Kerouac's incredibly intimate writing style. He concludes *Tristessa* with the phrase, "I'll write long sad tales about people in the legend of my life—This part is my part of the movie, let's hear yours"⁶⁹ Kerouac's conclusion of the novel without punctuation is almost as if he is waiting for the response of the reader, as if the novel is nothing but a dialogue between the reader and Kerouac. In a way, it is; Kerouac uses the spontaneous prose and the personal style to question the readers as well, to help him find the truth. The beginning of *The Subterraneans* similarly involves the reader in the writing process:

Once I was young and had so much more orientation and could talk with nervous intelligence about everything and with clarity and without as much literary preambing as this; in other words this is the story of an unself-confident man, at the same time of an egomaniac, naturally, facetious won't do—just to start at the beginning and let the truth seep out, that's what I'll do—. It began on a warm summernight—ah, she was sitting on a fender with Julien Alexander who is . . . let me begin with the history of the subterraneans of San Francisco . . .⁷⁰

Kerouac's tone is at once conversational and musical, leading us gently into his story, without any harsh concepts or difficult-to-say

⁶⁸ John Clellon Holmes, as quoted in *Jack's Book*, 241.

⁶⁹ *Tristessa*, 96.

⁷⁰ *Subterraneans*, 1.

words, almost whispering the story to the reader. Allen Ginsberg says of the tone Kerouac uses “he reveals consciousness itself in all its syntactic elaboration, detailing the luminous emptiness of his own paranoiac confusion.”⁷¹

When Kerouac uses the tools Hopkins chose so carefully, he does it in a less careful but nonetheless deeply-thought process. Kerouac, too, makes use of syntactic inversion (what Ginsberg calls “syntactic elaboration”), twisting his parts of speech around so that the words will flow more easily, with a more rhythmic grace. When we read a passage such as one of his endless descriptive ones: “little rings under the eyes, that thin patrician slowly hawked nose, those luscious lips, those sad eyes—and the music of her voice, the complaint of her song, when she talks in Spanish to others...”⁷² we can see all of Hopkins’ tools: the inversion in “thin patrician slowly hawked nose,” the alliteration in “luscious lip,” the repetitive structure of “the music of her voice, the complaint of her song.” All of these work together for an equally musical passage, in which we see Tristessa so clearly without having to struggle with visualization. Because we see with Kerouac’s bleared eyes, we see the important parts of Tristessa, and the other parts need not be mentioned. Kerouac is very concerned with extending the limits of his prose so that he can speak directly to the reader.

⁷¹ Allen Ginsberg, introduction to *Tristessa*.

But I would also like to compare spontaneous composition of prose and verse to the incomparable, heartbreaking discipline of the fire ordeal. You had to get through the fire “to prove your innocence” or just die in it “guilty”—there was certainly no chance to stop and think it over, to chew on the end of your pencil and erase something....To break through the barrier of language with WORDS, you have to be in orbit around your mind, and I may go up again if I regain my strength. It may sound vain but I’ve been wrestling with this angelic problem with at least as much discipline as Jacob.⁷³

This shows Kerouac’s dedication to the principle of crossing borders, breaking through barriers, and extending limits. He valued spontaneity because it was a part of his generation, a part, he said, of the “Space Age,” and was necessary in a time in which the “spacetime continuum” moved too quickly to stop and “chew on the end of your pencil.” Kerouac was writing in the immediate present, about what he knew in that very instant, because the next morning it may have been forgotten forever. Rewriting, revising, in a world such as this would be the same as changing the unalterable truth which could never be recovered. This was of the utmost importance to Kerouac: to capture the truth of *now*.

Although Kerouac disdained conventional ideas of English prose, he worshipped the unlimited capabilities of the English language. Kerouac was in love with words, and he celebrated

⁷² *Iristessa*, 73.

them with his spontaneous prose and with his poetry. To read some of his prose is to understand how carefully and lovingly he thought of the concept of words, of unlimited possibilities of language:

also the sudden gut joy of beer when the visions of great words in rhythmic order all in one giant archangel book go roaring thru my brain, so I lie in the dark also seeing also hearing the jargon of the future worlds-damajehe eleout ekeke dhkdkdk dldoud, --d, ekeoeu dhdhdkehgyt-better not a more than lther ehe the macmurphy out of the dgardent that which strangely he doth mdodudltk dip-baseeaatra-poor examples because of mechanical needs of typing, of the flow of river sounds, words, dark, leading to the future and attesting to the madness, hollowness, ring and roar of my mind which blessed or unblessed is where trees sing-in a funny way-well-being believes he'll go to heaven-a word to the wise is enough-... ⁷⁴

Here, Kerouac is almost childishly enjoying the possibilities of a future in which he, and other writers like him, are allowed to take advantage of English, to write from the depths of their souls. He could almost be writing an example of the "living universe" philosophy: Kerouac can feel the flow of otherworldly words, and is celebrating them. Not only is he writing about words, but he is writing with words, and this is something of a euphoric exercise in the beauty of the sound of letters, the feel of the keys of the

⁷³ "The Last Word" *Good Blonde*, 190-191.

⁷⁴ *The Subterraneans*, 42.

typewriter beneath his fingers. He finds words to be almost holy: he quotes a Biblical reference for his writing philosophy. "...in Mark 13:11. 'Take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.'" ⁷⁵ Here, he is clearly making the link between God and words, both of which should be revered. Kerouac enjoys, not only the meaning, but the sound of words, and always tries to replicate the sounds of human voices in his writing.

Only time I ever saw Tristessa cry, was when she was junk sick on the edge of Old Bull's bed, like a woman in the back pew of a church in daily novena she dabs at her eyes—She points to the sky again, 'If my friend dont pay me back,' looking at me straight, 'my Lord pay me back—*more*' and I can feel the spirit enter the room as she stands, waiting with her finger pointed up, on her spread legs, confidently, for her Lord to pay her back—'So I geev every-things I have to my friend, and eef he doan pay me back'—she shrugs—'my Lord pay me back'—standing alert again—'*More*' and as the spirit swims around the room I can tell the effective mournful horror of it (her reward is so thin) now I see radiating from the crown of her head innumerable hands that have come from all ten quarters of the Universe to bless her and pronounce her Bodhisat for saying and knowing that so well

In this passage, Kerouac combines the religious intensity of Tristessa's feelings with the reality of the sound of her voice and

⁷⁵ "The First Word," *Good Blonde*, 190.

the difficulty she has with the English language in a desperate exploration of sound and sense. Kerouac loves words, and is in search of something more than words in which to believe, and the best of his work underscores that. A much subtler yet even more desperate example is another passage from *Tristessa* in which Kerouac longs to be able to express to the people of the Mexico City slums the truths he thinks he has found:

I wish I could communicate to all their combined fears of death the Teaching that I have heard from Ages of Old, that recompenses all that pain with soft reward of perfect silent love abiding up and down and in and out everywhere past, present, and future in the void unknown where nothing happens and all simply is what it is. But they know that themselves, beast and jackal and love woman, and my Teaching of Old is indeed so old they've heard it long ago before my time.⁷⁶

In this passage, Kerouac writes of communication and the oral tradition of the "Teaching of Old," an abstract concept that he never explicates and probably cannot be. But the writing of something, for Kerouac, is almost a way of ridding himself of its guilt, so in this case he is relieving himself of the responsibility of these poor and downtrodden people. For instance, after he wrote *On the Road*, Holmes said,

He wanted to break loose and he didn't want to have to pause for anything, so he wrote *On the Road* in one long paragraph about

⁷⁶ *Tristessa*, 33.

120,000 words long. It was unparagraphed, using all the original names and everything. He just flung it down. He could disassociate himself from his fingers, and he was following the movie in his head.⁷⁷

Kerouac had the power of memory and disassociation to purge himself of these stories in his head in single sittings (although some of the single sittings were several days long⁷⁸). He felt that the only true way to express the stories in one's head was to write them as those stories appear, unvarnished, straight from the thoughts of the writer.

⁷⁷ Holmes as quoted in *Jack's Book*, 156.

⁷⁸ "Jack had written [*The Subterraneans*] in the space of three nights, assisted by benzedrine..." *Jack's Book*, 185.

‡ Chapter 2 ‡

His songs were those mysterious rumbling, rambling blues that you hear with low-register guitar and unknown words....Print can't read like he sounded...

Jack Kerouac

In all the works of Kerouac and Hopkins, one of the most exciting unifying themes is the relationship of sound to sense. Both of these authors are incredibly concerned that their writing sound the meaning, that one could read the work phonetically without understanding any of the words and still assimilate the underlying beauty and meaning of the literature.

Both Abrams and Pater write of the link between music and poetry, explaining that, in the eighteenth century, music was the art form most expressive of "spirit and emotion," articulating the only accepted public form of extreme passion.

Music, wrote Wackenroder, "shows us all the movements of our spirit, disembodied." Hence the utility of music to define and illustrate the nature of poetry, particularly of the lyric, but also of poetry in general when this came to be conceived as a mode of expression. Friedrich Schlegel was of the opinion that when Simonides, in a famous phrase, characterized poetry as a speaking picture, it was only because contemporary poetry was always

accompanied by music that it appeared superfluous to him to remind us "that poetry was also a spiritual music."⁷⁹

Poetry, many of the critics and philosophers remind us, is really a kind of music in itself. Hazlitt said of poetry "It is the music of language, answering to the music of the mind...There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion. Mad people sing."⁸⁰ Music, therefore, is the standard by which good poetry and prose is judged, and sometimes the poetry almost imitates music in sonorousness and emotion. In Hazlitt's opinion, poetry inspires an almost musical response:

The best general notion which I can give of poetry is, that it is the natural impression of any object or event, by its vividness exciting an involuntary movement of imagination and passion, and producing, by sympathy, a certain modulation of the voice, or sounds, expressing it.⁸¹

In other words, the impressions recorded by the poet or prosaist induce the reader to imitate the "object or event" in a way which approaches melody. The intellectual and emotive responses to a piece of poetry, therefore, are the reader's attempt to relate poetry to music.

Pater felt that music was the ideal, or perfect, art form, and that good poetry would attempt to imitate music's abstraction.

⁷⁹ *Mirror and Lamp*, 50-51.

⁸⁰ William Hazlitt, "On Poetry in General," *Complete Works*, v, 12.

⁸¹ *Complete Works*, v, 1.

In music, then, rather than in poetry, is to be found the true type or measure of perfected art. Therefore, although each art has its incommunicable element, its untranslatable order of impressions, its unique mode of reaching the "imaginative reason," yet the arts may be represented as continually struggling after the law or principle of music, to a condition which music alone completely realizes; and one of the chief functions of aesthetic criticism, dealing with the products of art, new or old, is to estimate the degree in which each of those products approaches, in this sense, to musical law.⁸²

Music, therefore, is the ideal to which all other art forms aspire, the perfect rule by which all other art must be measured. Thus critics of poetry and prose must judge how well the writing "approaches...musical law." In the criticism of Hopkins and Kerouac, this idea is quite apropos, as both of the writers were greatly aware of the sound of their work, as well as the way in which the words, by rhythm and tone alone, conveyed the writers' ideas. We must see how well the poetry and prose of Hopkins and Kerouac addresses, not the "mere intelligence," but is penetrated by the "informing, artistic spirit."⁸³



Music when sweet voices die

Vibrates in the memory

⁸² "Giorgione," 159.

⁸³ "Giorgione," 157.

*Odours when sweet violets sicken
Live within the sense they quicken.*

Percy Bysshe Shelley

One of Hopkins' great fascinations was with the nature of beauty. His most famous essay deals with how beauty should be conceived and in what, exactly, beauty lies. He asks the question, is beauty measured by the relation of one object to other similar objects? Or is it measured by regularity? Or, on the other hand, is beauty simply a visceral reaction the causes of which cannot be determined? In any case, Hopkins differentiates from the parallel and the opposing, or the chromatic and diatonic, parts of beauty and concentrates on the problem of poetry, which is both regular, with its rhythm and meter and sets of rules by which to judge all verse, and visceral, with its appeal to emotions in the ideas expressed by the words of the poetry. Speaking of a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley, Hopkins' narrator says,

Shelley must either have put before his mind an idea which he wishes to embody in words, namely, as we said before, the place of memory in love, or else the idea rose in the forms of expression which we read in the poem in his mind, thought and expression indistinguishable. The latter I believe to be the truer way of regarding composition, but be that as it may, one or the other must have been the case, must it not? ⁸⁴

⁸⁴ "On the Origin of Beauty," *Journals and Papers*, 109-110.

In other words, though the ideas, or subject matter, of the poet can be judged separately from the structure of the poem, they must be taken as a whole to truly experience the beauty of the piece of art. Hopkins explains that Shelley could have written the same idea without the rhythm of, for instance, "Music, when sweet voices die / Vibrates in the memory," but the expression and sense of appreciation would be different, because of the loss of the sound of the expression. The parallelism of structure in the grammar, or lack of it, imparts meaning to the words, as well as the rhythm, rhyme and the emphasis of syllables. The sound, therefore, does impart meaning to the poem. We have, for example, Hopkins' sonnet "As kingfishers catch fire":

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
 As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
 Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
 Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
 Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
 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.*⁸⁵

Sound and meaning are immutably linked in Hopkins' work. This poem deals with Hopkins' view of nature and its relation to poetry, and is also very concerned with words, with speaking and with the self, or inscape of objects. But beyond the analytical conclusion

⁸⁵ "As kingfishers catch fire," *Poems and Prose*, 51.

one might draw from dealing simply with the meaning of the ideas expressed by the words is the sound of those words and their structure. The internal rhyme heavily accents the important words which relate, not only to the meaning of the sentences, but also to the rhythms with which the poem is read aloud. The reader will unconsciously accent "ring," "tells," "tongue," "name," "Selves," and "speaks" when the poem is read aloud, and even a glance at the poem will pick out words such as "ring" and "tells." The important parts of the poem, then, the words we feel more than hear, are the ones which tell the story. From the words above, "ring tells tongue name selves speaks," we can understand the idea behind the poem, more of a feeling of understanding the soul of the poem (Hopkins' precious inscape) than an actual expression of "mere intelligence." A critic says of this poem,

Each slight change in the pattern of sound from word to succeeding word marks a shift in the poet's perception, as he sees things anew in each succeeding moment. But the altered perceptions expressed in the sound changes in each series are not innate in the poet (as Muller contends words are not innate in

mankind); they arise from the analogous “ringing” of objects in nature.⁸⁶

To take this idea a little further, we hear rather than understand the meaning of this poem, just as Hopkins can hear the “ring” of nature which expresses the inscape of the parts of nature. In other words, the music of the poem gives emphasis to its meaning, and can in fact *be* the meaning of the poem. Sprinkler theorizes about Hopkins’ ideas of language in this way:

For Hopkins, poetry is the structuration of language, and language is structure by laws and relations that are intrinsic to itself. Poetry mimics language (as the ending of “That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire” mimics one of the etymological series in Hopkins’s notebooks), and language mimics itself. No such thing as a natural language (an originally imitative or interjectional language) is available to the poet...⁸⁷

Sprinkler might not agree that the sound alone has meaning, but the sound, linked with the inextricable etymological and rhythmical background and relationships of words, forges a most powerful chain of significance. The sound gives weight to the meaning, and the sound is an important part of the meaning of the poem. Hopkins has not quite transcended his subject, in Sprinkler’s analysis, but he has come very close, bringing in a whole new speculative perspective to the poems. However,

⁸⁶ Michael Sprinkler, “A Counterpoint of Dissonance”: *The Aesthetics and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), 61.

⁸⁷ *Counterpoint of Dissonance*, 64-65.

Sprinkler finds the relationship of writing to speech (and we remember that natural speech is one of Hopkins' models for his sprung rhythm) is part of the meaning of poetry.

Speech is a language that is original and natural, the key to interpreting writing....The effect of this...is to make writing subservient to speech, for writing is merely the convenience men adopt to preserve language. Writing is not language but only represents language graphically. Language truly resides in speech, of which writing is but a pale and inadequate image.⁸⁸

Hopkins probably places more faith in writing than does Sprinkler, but the idea of speech as the true language helps to explicate Hopkins' reliance on sound to convey a large part of his message. Hopkins' own journals defend Sprinkler's ideas of the relationship of language to speech, however. Hopkins takes it further than does Sprinkler, emphasizing rhythm:

Poetry is speech framed for contemplation of the mind by the way of hearing or speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning. Some matter and meaning is essential to it but only as an element necessary to support and employ the shape which is contemplated for its own sake. (Poetry is in fact speech only employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape's sake—and therefore the inscape must be dwelt on...)...[verse] might be composed without meaning (as nonsense verse and choruses—'Hey nonny nonny' or 'Wille wau wau wau' etc.) and then *alone* it would not be poetry....But if it has

⁸⁸ *Counterpoint of Dissonance*, 70.

a meaning and is meant to be heard for its own sake it will be poetry if you take poetry to be a kind of composition and not the virtue or success or excellence of that kind...⁸⁹

Hopkins places more emphasis on the superiority of sound to words in the meaning of the poem. He does, however, take into account the meaning of the words, which are of utmost importance, but not the sole importance, in his writing.

Hopkins takes this interest in the meaning of sound and brings his love for music into it. Especially in his later life, his interest in music, and musical structure as it relates to poetry, is obvious from his journals and letters, and he suggests the importance of reciting and even singing his verse. In a letter to Robert Bridges, Hopkins writes of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves":

Of this long sonnet above all remember what applies to all my verse, that it is, as living art should be, made for performance and that its performance is not reading with the eye but loud, leisurely, poetical (not rhetorical) recitation, with long rests, long dwells on the rhyme and other marked syllables, and so on. This sonnet shd. be almost sung.⁹⁰

Hopkins' concentration on the stress of the words and syllables in his poems is obvious from his emphasis on rhythm and his liberal usage of stress marks, almost as if he were composing music. Here it can be seen that, in a way, he was doing so. Plotkin approaches

⁸⁹ *Journals and Papers*, 289.

⁹⁰ *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott, (London: Oxford U.P., 1995), 246.

the idea that Hopkins attempts to write poetry that, beyond the possibility of composing music to which to set the words, is actually music itself:

The musical analogy may not ultimately suffice to account for the rhythm or meter of Hopkins's verse, however frequent his references to music are and however persistent his interest in it (Ludwig, *Barbarous in Beauty* 204-06); but we do know that at the time he was composing his lectures at Manresa House he had turned seriously to 'learn something about music.'⁹¹

We see that Plotkin could not accept the idea of Hopkins' poetry actually imitating music; he argues that Hopkins was simply interested in its structure, in the Jesuit hymns and in playing music himself. However, I would argue that Hopkins' confirmed interest in music, combined with his theories about the structure of music and its relation to rhythm, and his letters in which he suggests poems be sung, would lead the reader to an appreciation of his poetry as music itself. Sprinkler approaches corroboration of my theory:

⁹¹ *Muse*, 125.

Hopkins's interest in musical structure is well known. What led him to study music, in particular the theory of composition, was his belief that poetry and music share a common foundation in certain principles of nature. This belief in the correspondence of music and poetry to natural laws can be seen in two letters....There are in nature, Hopkins believed, principles of symmetry and harmony governing the sequences of sound that the human ear recognizes as music. Poetry, when it achieves genuine beauty, reproduces these sequences.⁹²

Hopkins, then, could be seen as Pater's prototype of a poet whose work approaches music, or even has a music of its own. The rhythm which Hopkins creates in his poetry is an imitation of the rhythms in nature, an imitation that transpires from careful study and recording of these rhythms. Thus the endless notations of clouds, bird song, patterns of nature and weather in Hopkins' journals are his way of making a record of those "principles of symmetry and harmony" that will ultimately be reproduced in his poetry. Simply reading a poem aloud would suffice as defense of this claim. For instance, one of Hopkins' most critically acclaimed poems, "The Windhover," is a celebration of a bird and its symbolism. Most critics agree that this poem is a religious one which compares the windhover to Christ; one, at least, believes this

⁹² *Counterpoint of Dissonance*, 73.

is an allegory of poetry and the act of writing.⁹³ Either way, it can be appreciated best read aloud, and “shd. almost be sung.”

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
 dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his
 riding

Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
 High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
 In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,

As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl
 and gliding

Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
 Stirred for a bird — the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

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!

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
 Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,

Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.⁹⁴

Here are all of Hopkins' careful observations and endless crafting, in a musical synthesis which has caused endless speculation as to its meaning. Sprinkler has the most engaging theory: he argues “the song or the flight of the bird becomes the poet's own voice, of his vocation, in the original sense of a ‘calling or summons,’ as a

⁹³ *Counterpoint of Dissonance*, 4.

⁹⁴ *Poems and Prose*, 30.

poet....The poem is [also] a figurative response to the figures of Romanticism.”⁹⁵ It is a very careful poem of incredible complexity; some critics explain how the poem “buckle[s]” at the beginning of line 10, and then rebuilds itself again to the height of the end of the poem, with the “gold-vermilion,” a regal and exalted image. It is not only a studious description of the flight of the windhover, or kestrel (which “hovers” in flight with its head toward the wind), but also a introspective exploration of Hopkins’ own “inscape” as well as, if Sprinkler’s theory is correct, the creation of a poetic voice. The poem is addressed to Christ, and therefore may be about him; those who agree with this theory point the words such as “dauphin,” “ecstasy,” “gall” and “gash” as assertive proof of the fact. There is not, however, a unanimous reading of the poem, so I would focus on its musicality. The sprung rhythm, with monosyllabic feet for emphasis, in lines 12-14, is a wonderful beat that causes tone changes almost akin to singing. Reading those last three lines aloud, one can find the voice rising to the height and pause with “Shine,” holding the note for a moment before continuing to the “blue-bleak embers,” lower in tone and slowly read, almost sighing with “ah my dear,” then another rise of tone and quicker pace into “Fall, gall themselves,” and the pure melody of “gash gold-vermilion,” almost worth repeating. This poem is one to be sung.

⁹⁵ *Counterpoint of Dissonance*, 6-7.

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...he wails, he bops, he bangs, this man who was sent, stoned and stabbed is now down, bent and stretched-out -- he is home at last, his music is here to stay, his history has washed over us, his imperialistic kingdoms are coming.

Jack Kerouac

"The Beginning of Bop"

If the beat generation could claim its own inscape, jazz expressed that identifying uniqueness most accurately. Jazz, in a way, was the instress of the beats. The poets had jazz-poetry sessions in which one artist would play an instrument to accompany another artist reading his poetry or prose. When one critic describes the beat generation, he argues that one of the biggest influences on the generation was the "phenomenon of hipsterism...."

Hipsterism was centered on the jazz experience, the ecstatic self-transcendence, the emotional catharsis, the exaltation and affirmation provided by creating or listening to jazz music (in

something of the same manner that a tribe is centered upon a shaman or a cult upon a prophet).⁹⁶

For Kerouac, jazz was expressive of his generation, jazz was a complement to poetry and a reason to write prose. Jazz was a rebellious sound, a music that sounded like the beats felt, talented and passionate but not quite socially acceptable. Jazz could be translated into his idea of writing; a spontaneous rhythm, a beat which shocked the old and impassioned the young, “riffs” which had never before been heard, which brought the classes and races together. Kerouac understood the jazz musicians, and could read their expressions and their harmonizing as a declaration of their wild passion for life. One of his friends, David Anram, quoted him as saying about the jazz musicians, “These guys are where I get so much inspiration from and learn so much from. They are the true poets of the streets.” Anram went on to comment that Kerouac’s interest was not simply scholarly, but

he actually saw past all that misery and degradation and suffering, with his own drinking habit himself, and he could see the soulfulness, the tragedy, and the true poetic vision some of these people really had — as if they were in touch with this great beatific light.⁹⁷

Kerouac believed in jazz and saw it as part of the poetry he was trying to express in his novels and in, especially, *Mexico City Blues*.

⁹⁶ Gregory Stephenson, *The Daybreak Boys: Essays on the Literature of the Beat Generation*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U.P., 1990), 5.

⁹⁷ David Anram as quoted in *Jack’s Book*, 246-247.

He said of this volume of poems, "I want to be considered a jazz poet blowing a long blues in an afternoon jam session on Sunday. I take 242 choruses; my ideas vary and sometimes roll from chorus to chorus..."⁹⁸ Critics write that "Kerouac's analogy with jazz is exact. Some of the choruses read like scat singing played back at slow speed, words 'blown' for their musical values or their punning link to the subject matter that Kerouac had in mind."⁹⁹ Jazz was at the heart of the beat generation, and Kerouac was attempting to capture that heart, the inscape of the beats.

Though Kerouac wrote many essays about jazz, he is most eloquent on the subject in his novels, which are the best examples of his spontaneous writing. When he wrote about jazz in his novels, it was a part of the narrative, not a piece in itself, and the descriptions are smoother. The reader who can become caught up in the ease of the storytelling in, for instance, *The Subterraneans*, will feel the rhythms of jazz as they fit into the narrative much more acutely.

...but definitely the new bop generation way of speaking, you don't say *I* you say 'ahy' or 'Oy' and long ways, like oft or erstwhile 'effeminate' way of speaking so when you hear it in men at first it has a disagreeable sound and when you hear it in women it's charming but much too strange, and a sound I had already definitely and wonderingly heard in the voice of new bop singers

⁹⁸ Kerouac as quoted in *Jack's Book*, 190.

⁹⁹ Gifford and Lee, *Jack's Book*, 190.

like Jerry Winters especially with Kenton band on the record *Yes Daddy Yes* and maybe in Jeri Southern too-... ¹⁰⁰

The unstudied rhythms of Kerouac's writing carry the reader with him into the "bop," but closer analysis reveals the sounds and unplanned beat of jazz. The sentence is without caesura for several lines, almost as if the horn player is "blowing" until he is blue in the face and breathless, just as the reader becomes almost exhausted until the word "strange," after which a very brief pause is taken, but not long enough to drive into the next several-line phrase, again without stops. Kerouac's writing drives the reader breathless to imitate the reckless trumpet or saxophone, drowning out the cries of the crowd with its endless riffs. Kerouac's use of dashes imitates the unusual repetitive short musical phrases of a jazz musician, as well, as in the following passage:

...to hear Bird, whom I saw distinctly digging Mardou several times also myself directly into my eye looking to search if really I was that great writer I thought myself to be as if he knew my thoughts and ambitions or remembered me from the other night clubs and other coasts, other Chicagos—not a challenging look but the king and founder of the bop generation at least the sound of it in digging the eyes, the secret eyes him-watching, as he just pursed his lips and let great lungs and immortal fingers work, his eyes separate and interested and humane, the kindest jazz musician there could be while being and therefore naturally the

¹⁰⁰ *Subterraneans*, 7.

greatest—¹⁰¹

Kerouac's passion for the jazz musician is evident in this passage, as his storytelling mirrors the sound of the trumpet which overtakes the audience just as the expression of the musician mesmerizes Kerouac, and draws him in to the musician's own emotions. The reader, as well, is drawn toward Kerouac's emotions until he reacts with him. He sets the reader up to feel the sexual tensions, even more quickly, more sporadic and more breathless than jazz sessions.

Quick to plunge, bite, put the light out, hide my face in shame, make love to her tremendously because of lack of love for a year almost and the need pushing me down—our little agreements in the dark, the really should-not-be-tolds—...But I cannot in confession betray the innermosts, the thighs, what the thighs contain—and yet why write?—the thighs contain the essence—yet tho there I should stay and from there I came and'll eventually return, still I have to rush off... ¹⁰²

The reader experiences the uncertainty and the new sexual rhythms with Kerouac, just as the reader can feel the beat of the jazz drums, the blow of the trumpet. Kerouac uses the same techniques to express the physical and emotional sexual anxiety.

Though Kerouac has been seen with the breathless, loud jazz beat in the above passages, he can also slow down for what can only be called "blues," a completely different tone with the same

¹⁰¹ *Subterraneans*, 14.

techniques and underlying rhythm of spontaneity. In *Tristessa*, for instance, Kerouac has a theme which is much more of a lament than the breathless story-telling (although it is also sad) of *The Subterraneans*. In this passage, Kerouac is dealing with a different kind of music, and the melody is slower, more infinitely painful:

that face so expressive of the pain and loveliness that went no doubt into the making of this fatal world,—a beautiful sunrise, that makes you stop on the sands and gaze out to sea hearing Wagner's Magic Fire Music in your thoughts—the fragile and holy countenance of poor Tristessa, the tremulous bravery of her little junk-racked body that a man could throw up in the air ten feet—the bundle of death and beauty—all pure Form standing in front of me, all the racks and tortures of sexual beauty... ¹⁰³

Again, Kerouac deals with his sexual reactions to a woman, but he is much more mature and aware of the fragile emotions of the woman in this novel. He has begun to lose his love to drugs, and it is an achingly slow and lucid realization. The symbols of sea and torture are both gentler and more real, more immediate than the images in the above passages, which are blunt and down-to-earth.

Kerouac carefully emulates the rhythms of the music which has become the inscape of the beat generation in the spontaneity, unusual caesura, and changeable rhythm of his prose. The whole of Kerouac's work, sporadic, spontaneous, beautiful yet raw, could be expressed with the description of his lover in *The Subterraneans*,

¹⁰² *Subterraneans*, 16.

Mardou: "I love her but this song is . . . broken—but in French now . . . in French I can sing her on and on . . ." ¹⁰⁴ Kerouac's song, too, is broken, uncertain of its language, but certain of the powerful emotions behind the language, behind the utterances.

¹⁰³ *Tristessa*, 52.

¹⁰⁴ *Subterraneans*, 50.

Conclusion

Throughout the experiences and poetry and prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Jack Kerouac, the careful reader will see that both of the writers strove to extend the limits of their chosen art form. They worked carefully to establish their own rules for the constantly changing world of literature, creating what could be called their own chapter in the "living universe" of art culture history.

Both of the men strove to emulate the rhythms they felt best expressed the world around them. Both were certain that the intellect is affected by the constant bombardment of nature and culture on one's senses; perception goes beyond mere observation and classification, to the "inscape," the "zen" of an object, an experience, an emotion. Whatever Hopkins and Kerouac came into contact with, they felt they must record and imitate perfectly the way that thing affected them. Hopkins did so with great care and constant revision, Kerouac with wild abandonment, often in a drugged trance; but both were striving to reach the same goals, to capture the sensations they felt so strongly on the page before them, to imitate nature with their poetry, to write words which sounded, not just meant.

The problem of the very different methods of reaching common goals still remains, however. How is it that both Kerouac

and Hopkins strove to capture nature's rhythms, but one was successful with careful revision and one did so with blind passionate, almost thoughtless, typing? How could two such different men achieve similar results?

Perhaps it is the passion for words, the adoration of the English language, its history and its glory, which both men shared. Kerouac approached his writing with a religious fervor; for him, writing was a part of his search for faith. Hopkins was a Jesuit priest and he wrote to and about God; his words often came from the Bible, from hymns, and from his intimate relationship with God's creation. Both were fascinated with the creation of words, with the possibilities of the "conventional sentence" if one was to approach it in an unconventional way.

Their shared zeal for the incredible potential of the English language is the common thread which runs through the vivid tapestries of their work. The reader becomes caught up in the emotion of the words, the sound and the excitement of the breathless sprung rhythm, and forgets the mundanities of grammar and structure. Hopkins produces this result carefully, while Kerouac does it recklessly; but the underlying emotion is the same, the fierce ardor for the words at their most basic level. So the reader finds himself lost in the wonder of the rhythm in:

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. ¹⁰⁵

The reader cannot stop to think about periods or commas or word choice but becomes a part of Kerouac's "grey tragedy," as well, in

Since beginningless time and into the never-ending future, men have loved women without telling them, and the Lord has loved them without telling, and the void is not the void because there's nothing to be empty of.

Art there, Lord Star?—Diminished is the drizzle that broke my calm. ¹⁰⁶

The threads are the same; the methods are different, but the result is an unusual quality of sound which transcends subjects, transcends thought, gets right at the inscape of the poet or prosaist's innermost views of the creation of an unconventional God.

¹⁰⁵ "God's Grandeur," *Poems and Prose*, 27.

¹⁰⁶ *Tristessa*, 59.

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