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FORM AFTER WHITMAN:
A LATERAL STEP TO HOPKINS, BERRYMAN, AND THE ART
OF STRICT WILDNESS

by
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The free verse paradigm, introduced by Walt Whitman, arose in answer to the poetic crisis of its time, well-articulated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Free verse's particular answer to the "crisis of versification" which prompted its development, however, necessarily denied other answers, such as that offered by Gerard Manley Hopkins' sprung verse, and set the stage for its own crisis, a lack of tension and expressiveness: free verse relied on the viability of traditional forms, rhythms, and rhymes in order to be expressive in the breaking of them but destroyed the scaffolding of its own form—the expressive tension it created in opposing itself to traditional metrical schemes—by defeating its predecessor and becoming the new norm. Responding to this problem, Robert Hass has encouraged poets to "make form," responding to a crisis of poetic formlessness, much as Coleridge did two centuries before to a crisis of strict poetic form.

Hopkins' work is applicable to the current poetic crisis because it garners much of the 'freedom' of Whitman's free verse without giving up the discipline and expectation of traditional metrical schemes. Both he and John Berryman, a twentieth century poet who can be considered a practitioner of sprung verse, favor densely stressed lines, control of and facility with meter, and a range of grammatical variances. They are simultaneously immersed in the natural rhythms of the spoken language and straining against those rhythms. Their poems defy expectations they continually create and recreate themselves (as opposed to those existing only in the reader's memory) and are thus more resistant to obsolescence than Whitman's free verse. Both Hopkins and Berryman "make form," as I show in close readings.

Sprung verse is well-suited to passionate emotions and may be the natural conclusion of an age that can look back on both the exhaustion of traditional metrical schemes and the limitations of free verse.
Maxim: No to formless wildness; no to the rigorous strictness of rigor mortis; yes to strict wildness (Viereck 193).

We are an age that loves the idea of freedom. Since the modernists, originality has been one of the most valued aesthetic principles not only in the arts but in all areas of our lives, but in poetry at the very least, what Paul Fussel says is true: "'Freedom' is not a virtue in meter--expressiveness is" (Wesling 147). In order to be both free and expressive, freedom needs restriction: in the context of the everyday, theories and laws shape and reshape the ground from which our free acts spring and provide a backdrop against which they might be "read." Traditional metrical schemes once provided such a backdrop for free verse; the power of free verse depends on its deviation from expectation created by traditional metrics lingering in both the audience and the poet.

Donald Wesling's account of poetic evolution, the most complete I've seen, places non-traditional poetic forms in the context that necessitates their birth,¹ that of High Romantic poetics. When Samuel Taylor Coleridge produces the initial work toward a non-traditional meter² in resistance to what he calls "shape as superinduced" and in favor of

¹See also Walter J. Ong, who addresses Hopkins' context by focusing on the rhythms of particular poets he would have read such as Spenser, Pope, and Keats.
²"Eolian Harp" in 1795, followed in 1797 by "Christabel," Coleridge's "experimentum crucis for an insurgent meter" (Wesling 32).
"form as proceeding" (cited in Wesling 30), the preference for "conversational poems" and an "organic" form which "shapes as it develops itself from within" (cited in Ferguson et al. 1892) constitutes an "innovation so complete that from 1795 form as proceeding is the manner of writing all poets will have to contend with" (Wesling 31). Wesling calls the following period, 1795 to 1855, "a crisis of versification . . . of stylistic pluralism, the absence of a period style that would permit an effortless choice of forms for certain subjects." During this time, "the nature, function, and identification of the fundamental unit of versification [becomes] a thoroughly vexed issue" (Wesling 87-8). The publication of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass in 1855 and the later development of prose poetry by Baudelaire Mallarmé, Rimbaud and others, redirects that vexation by definitively blurring the paradigm of traditional metrical schemes and consequently loosening the "rules for normal research" (Kuhn cited in Wesling 90), and beginning "a time of paradigm testing, of the sort that according to [Thomas] Kuhn 'occurs only after persistent failure to solve a noteworthy puzzle'" (Wesling 90). Gerard Manley Hopkins writes during a time period similar to Whitman's and constitutes a similar blurring of the traditional paradigm. Both Whitman's free verse and French prose poetry later find followers, while Hopkins' sprung verse remains largely unimitated, a result of circumstances I'll discuss later. Whatever the circumstances, the moderns settle the crisis of
versification in 1910 and begin the pursuit of a new paradigm3 (a unique historical situation of its own), which Wesling addresses in the abstract:

While every last embellishment of the one paradigm is worked out in detail, certain possibilities of the paradigm itself, and many possibilities within the language but outside the paradigm, are unseen; the less seen, perhaps, the more these possibilities become the nemesis of the reigning paradigm. (91)

The free verse paradigm, begun with Whitman and established as of 1910 by the Modernists, arises in answer to the poetics of its time. In the course of its embellishment, however, that which it denies remains its nemesis and sets the stage for the current crisis, which might well be called the "crisis of free verse."

Free verse as we know it is dead, or at least on its way out. Free verse relies on the viability of traditional forms, rhythms, and rhymes in order to be expressive in the breaking of them; traditional expectation is necessary because "the reader [has] to be able to hear what he [is]..."

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3Robert Bridges, Hopkins' friend and executor of his poetry after his death, was obviously not satisfied with this new paradigm, however: in 1914, he said, "the old forms are worn out. We have got to find new ones. We shall find them," and four years later published Hopkins' poems (Schneider 45).
not hearing" (Hass 70). The Modernists come to dominate poetic theory, and ultimately marginalize any but their own rhythms. During their heyday, those practicing or advocating traditional verse (such as Eliot, Yeats, Crane and others) serve largely to enliven free verse with the struggle. Later resurgences (such as New Formalism) have been flat and unconvincing. The moment Pound's mantra "make it new" becomes dogma, traditional expectation is lost, and his mantra becomes a contradiction in terms. In the words of Peter Viereck, "Modernism (meaning image, not lilt; 'conversational' line, not meter) is now the outdated Royal Academy it once rightly fought" (189). Robert Hass, as well, says, "Free verse has lost its edge, become neutral, the given instrument" (70). The tension and expressiveness of free verse is dependent on the notion of "freedom," and "freedom" is defined in opposition to traditional metrical schemes, which have not only been decisively abandoned but attacked. As established, the tension between meter and freedom is inherently transitory: free verse has destroyed the scaffolding of its own form—the expressive tension it creates in opposing itself to traditional metrical schemes—by defeating its predecessor and becoming the new norm.

How, then, to recreate that expressive tension when the Formalist resurgence has inadvertently reminded us that a return to traditional forms won't help? Robert Hass discusses this question in his essay "One Body: Some Notes on Form," where he advocates "making form" as an expressive
alternative to either returning to traditional metrical schemes or having no form at all. He cites Pound: "Verse consists of a constant and a variant," and rephrases: "that is, the music of the poem as it develops imposes its own restrictions" (65). He says a poem must have a "coherent sense of being" (61), in which sense and poetic features work together to make the poem "occur" (59). He's concerned with "the form of a poem, the shape of its understanding. The presence of that shaping constitutes the presence of poetry" (58). Since both tradition and its absence have lost their effect, now each poem must create its own "tradition"—an underlying structure made up of syntax, meter, rhyme, sense, and other poetic features—that creates expectancy and works with and against itself and its mother language in the creation of the energetic, cohesive "shape of its understanding."

It is interesting that after 200 years of paradigm questioning, testing and embellishment, Hass' "making form" bears so much resemblance to Coleridge's "form as proceeding," though Coleridge arises out of traditional verse and Hass out of free verse. Hass reiterates the Romantic premises that generated the free verse revolution in the first place, though he is obviously unsatisfied with results thus far, having expressed unease with the current state of free verse. Additionally, Hass is a practitioner of prose poetry, the "other," less dominant paradigm to emerge from the crisis of versification, but none of the
poems he offers as tentative examples of "making form" are prose poems, a fact which may suggest the degree to which Hass, like Coleridge, has vision but as yet has found no solution he considers satisfactory. Perhaps it would be helpful to look not only to paradigms that are fully compatible with the dominant free verse but to one which encompasses its inherent nemesis. That which is rendered invisible beside free verse may be relevant to the poetic crisis of our time.\footnote{F.O. Matthiessen agrees: "Much the most searching examination of the general problem presented by Whitman's form was made by . . . . Gerard Manley Hopkins" (144). His essay provides a good overview of the relationship between the poetry of Hopkins and Whitman.}

Hopkins' work is particularly applicable to our current poetic crisis because it garners much of the "freedom"--the remaking of "poetry closer to a personal rhythm and an idea of speech," the "greater randomness of stress [and] unpredictability of measure in the poem's rhythms" (Wesling 140-3)--of Whitman's free verse without giving up the discipline of traditional metrical schemes. Sprung verse and free verse are similar enough that Robert Bridges, a fellow poet and correspondent of Hopkins', calls "The Leaden Echo" an imitation of Whitman, to which Hopkins responds "by denying conscious reappropriation" (Wesling 40). Hopkins writes, "I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living" (cited in
Both are irregular rhythms. There the resemblance ends. The pieces of his read were mostly in an irregular rhythmic prose: this is what they are thought to be meant for and what they seemed to me to be . . . . In a matter like this [sprung rhythm] a thing does not exist, it is not done unless it is wittingly and willingly done . . . . This savagery of his art, this rhythm in its last ruggedness and decomposition into common prose, comes near the last elaboration of mine. For ["The Leaden Echo"] is very highly wrought. The long lines are not rhythm run to seed: everything is weighed and timed in them. Wait till they have taken hold of your ear and you will find it so. (Cited in Wesling 140)

Indeed, the two poets differ in the way they "create the effect of a higher degree of attention in the reader" against the backdrop of the Tennysonian iambic norm: "the effects of crescendo, resolution, and the like are more
tightly packed than in ordinary poetry (Hopkins), or much more loosely strung (Whitman)" (Wesling 143). Hopkins is immersed in inscape and instress, sound features like rhyme, emphatic stress and alliteration, monosyllables, and forcing the metrical line to accommodate the "natural rhythm of speech" (Hopkins cited in Wesling 117), while Whitman revels in personality, cognition, freedom from the metrical line, and endlessly unfolding stanzas.

Hopkins' originality has been questioned because of his similarity to both traditional and free verse poets. Hopkins does not deny his affiliation with formal verse—in fact, his insistence that his poems are highly wrought separates him from many free verse poets, and the great pains he takes to define his rhythms in terms of foot and line suggest his desire to be accepted in the formal crowd—while his rhythms nonetheless appear free enough to trip Bridge's suspicion of Whitman's influence. Hopkins straddles both worlds, naming "brief instances or hints in Shakespeare, Milton, and Campbell, in nursery rhymes and weather saws, in Anglo-Saxon verse and its 'degraded and doggrel'(sic) survival in Piers Plowman" as precedents, but "he never [calls] them sources" (Schneider 43). In discussion with Bridges, he does not claim his "New Rhythm"

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5 See Philip Hobsbaum: "What Hopkins has described [in his theories] is . . . the manner in which the rhythm of English verse, when effective, has always proceeded. So, far from being an innovator, he pointed to a traditional process of verse which his own period . . . was in danger of forgetting" (54).

6 Schneider elsewhere makes a case that Swinburne is a neglected predecessor to Hopkins (51).
to be "altogether new," but he does claim to be the first who "[uses] it and [makes] it the principle throughout" a poem (cited in Schneider 43). Hopkins himself, then, claims only to be original in degree and application: he recognizes the potential of brief moments in the work of earlier poets and magnifies those moments into a practice—a significant origination.

While sprung verse's practitioners are few, they nonetheless include John Berryman, who writes between 1937 and 1971.7 Hopkins and Berryman are notable for their densely stressed lines, control of and facility with meter, and range of grammatical variances. Simultaneously immersed in the natural rhythms of the spoken language and straining against those rhythms, their poems defy expectations they create themselves (as opposed to those existing only in the reader's memory) and thus are more resistant to obsolescence than Whitman's free verse. Hopkins and Berryman simultaneously evoke and deny tradition; it's precisely the irregular features of sprung rhythm, fashioned by disciplined ears into cohesive units of meaning, that "make

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7John Berryman is of course not the only poet who experiments with techniques recognizably similar to Hopkins', though they are most marked in his poetry. Peter Viereck makes a case similar to mine for the return to a more structured "freedom," what he calls a "strict wildness," in poetry, the innovation of which he does not attribute to Hopkins but rather to late Yeats (which would have been well after Hopkins' publication) as containing "flexible extra-beat tetrameters," "quick, half-suppressed extra beats," and accent that strains "excitingly against the meter instead of numbingly with it." Viereck says these characteristics "would have reformed our language's traditional meters from within and thereby made unnecessary the free-verse revolution from without" (189-90).
form" for both Hopkins and Berryman, as we'll see in the context of close readings.

The speaker of Hopkins' "(Carrion Comfort)" struggles with his spiritual unworthiness—his egotism and imperfection—in the face of his God. As the poem begins, the speaker is attempting to stave off despair, into which, after a brief moment of hope, he plunges for the longest emotionally cohesive section of the poem. Then, over an indeterminate amount of time, the speaker returns to rationality, only to question again his worthiness.

Hopkins borrows more directly from traditional forms than does Berryman a century later, though traditional influence is marked in both of them. "(Carrion Comfort)" is at first glance a Petrarchan sonnet, the first stanza eight lines rhymed abbaabba, and the second stanza six lines rhymed cdcdcc. There the similarity ends. The first line begins with a stressed syllable and never grants the expected readjustment to iambics, and the lines are not in five even feet but first six then seven measures consisting of a stress and a varying number of unstressed syllables, consistent with Hopkins' definition of sprung rhythm. What we expect to know, we do not (in sense and sound as well as form), and in this way Hopkins lays the groundwork for the capture of our attention.

Donald Wesling has developed a technique of scansion he calls "grammetrics," which marks not only the poem's
metrical units and rhythm but breaks in conventional grammar as well. The technique is an attempt to provide a visual tool for reading what Wesling aptly calls the "mutual scissoring" of grammar and meter, a tool useful in the reading of both Hopkins and Berryman. I'll use his grammetrics, in which we "let the asterisk (*) mark a break in syntax and the slash (/) a break between separate measures" (Wesling 131). Like Wesling, I scan Hopkins in the falling rhythm he called for.

1
Not,* I'll/ not,/ * carrion/ comfort,* Dōs/pair,*
not/ feast ēn/ thee;/
2
Not ēn/ twist/*—slack they may/ be—*these/
lāst/ strands ēf/ man (Hopkins 99)

As the poem begins, the grammatical and metrical breaks of the line are disjunct. Mimetic of the speaker's experience, "The line falters from one kind of division to another, alternately, sound and sense never coinciding" (Wesling 131). Such frequent division of the line—whether by grammar, meter, or word divisions—serves to isolate, and thus emphasize, nearly every syllable (Wesling 131) and create an intensely saturated line, especially in combination with the intensifying alliteration and consonance in the line: "carrion comfort," and "feast . . . thee," all heavily stressed. Three of the nine isolated words in line 1 are the word "not," including the first word
of the line (and the line is immediately followed by a fourth). Here, the repetition of this word and the delay of information—in their particular metrical settings—creates a sense of resistance that is apprehended previous to the literal sense of the sentence. For the reader is unable to immediately understand the line's denotation: at first, "Despair" might be a verb, what the speaker won't do; not until the end of the first line do we realize "Despair" is most likely personified, and the addressee. The resistance, a major theme in the poem, both precedes and outlives the address, as we'll see in later lines.

After the isolated, stressed syllable "twist," line 2 is decidedly less saturated, as the grammatical breaks relax. The mimetic insertion "--slack they may be--" is the only grammatical break in the line, and because it is much less disruptive than the previous insertions as well as a predominantly slack measure ("be" is only lightly stressed), it plays a major role in the release of tension in line 1, as does the soft alliteration and assonance of "last strands of man." "These," the only other isolated syllable in the line, is the last of a series of unstressed syllables, and thus only minimally perceived.

This release plays into the poem's next move:

3 In me/* or,* most/ weary,/* cry I/ can no/
   more.* I/ can;
4 Can/ something,/* hope,/* wish day/ come,/* not
choose/ not to/ be.

The release continues through the end of the poem's first sentence, and is somewhat consummated with "more.* I," which ends the poem's first sentence and emotional vector on a heavy stress, but allows little more than a brief caesura to mark the transfer to the next vector. Here, according to Wesling's reading,

*I can no more,* though the ending of a sentence, [is] open prosodically on both ends, one syllable in each of the bracketing measures. By this we see the cry is not a final cry. Its use of an auxiliary verb with no main verb and object is immediately, in the next sentence, shown to be incomplete, when possible actions and objects are brought in. That constitutes a negative definition of despair as self-regarding, lacking objects (132).

The speaker makes the same realization at this moment, and is to some degree, in line 4, pulled away from potential despair into a momentary hope. Grammatical breaks line up with metrical breaks in an unprecedented marriage of sound and sense. "Man," of line 2, rhymes with "can," which links
the two words in the ear and expresses a first (if flimsy) bit of hope for the human condition. We get repetition of the word "can," while "not" is again repeated—we can still feel the underlying struggle—but this time as a double negative, canceling out all but its ghost. The line ends with "be," stressed and isolated. The speaker will choose to "be."

This peace is short-lived, as the speaker's state of mind turns on the stanza break. The choice to "be" is immediately undercut, then doubly undercut, with the repetition of "but," each time isolated:

5  But/* ah,* but/* Oh* thou/ terrible,/* why
   wouldst thou/* rude* on/ me/*

6  Thy/ wring-world/ right foot/* rock?/* lay ā/
   lion/limb ā/gainst me?/* scan*

7  With/ darksome dē/vouring/ eyes* my/ bruised/
   bones?* ānd/ fan,/*

8  ō* ā/ turns of/ tempest,* me/* heaped thēre;*
   me/* frantic/ to ā/void thēe ānd/ flee?/

With these lines, the speaker sinks into the despair he means to fight. The isolated reversal "but"--the occurrence of some unarticulated thought--is twice repeated and punctuated by an isolated exclamatory insertion. The address is redirected to "thou terrible"--the speaker's God--in line 5, the true terribleness (as in exciting terror
or awe) of whom is asserted by the phrase's termination in a triple compounded grammatical break, the first of the sentence. Then the energy of resistance from line 1 is recalled in lines 5-8 in the form of questions: "Why wouldst thou . . . ?" We are back to the heavy grammatical breaks of line 1, perhaps even more intense here, as these are not insertions but transpositions: lines 5-6, grammatically rearranged, might more easily read "thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude rock thy wring-world right foot on me?"

The speaker continues to sink into despair through the end of the stanza, a move marked by the grammatical isolation of "my" in line 7 and "me" twice in line 8, as well as "rude" in line 5, and "rock" in line 6.

The transfer of the address and the corresponding intensification of despair (and its poetic manifestations) raises the question of with whom exactly the speaker is wrestling: Despair (a manifestation of his own human wretchedness) or "thou terrible"? This is a central concern of the poem, and will be revisited in lines 13 and 14.

The third stanza begins with the anaphoristic use of "why," which functions as a succinct repetition of the previous four lines, this time in recall, as the speaker has submitted to his God over the indeterminate time/space of the stanza break and resolved the despair of the previous four lines, if not solved the spiritual dilemma.

9 Why?* That my/ chaff might/ fly;* my/ grain/*
lie,/ sheer and/ clear. /

10 Nay in/ all that/ toil,* that/ coil,* since/* (seems)* I/ kissed the/ rod,/*

11 Hand/ rather,* my/ heart* lo!/* lapped/
strength, stole/ joy, would/ laugh,/* cheer.*

The poem returns to more conventional grammar as the speaker answers (uncharacteristically unemphatically) his earlier, despairing questions. Four of the six isolations in line 9 rhyme with "why," which pulls these words together and focuses the line on "why . . . fly, my grain lie," which, in Hopkins-speak, is an important metaphor: the revelation of his inscape. However, he negates that answer immediately in the next line and we're back to frequent grammatical breaks, most showing active thought, similar to the insertions in lines 2, 5, and elsewhere. He uses an alternative ("that toil, that coil"), two insertions ("(seems)" and "lo!"), and an expansion ("I kissed the rod, / hand rather"). The speaker is again struggling, though less intensely than in the first stanza.

It's that very cheer that has caused the speaker to suspect that the purpose of his toil might not be to winnow his metaphoric chaff from grain, because, as we see in the next line, he suspects the toil has not done that, but shown him that his "grain" is far from "sheer and clear."

12 Cheer/ whom though?* The/ hero whose/ heaven-
Was his cheer from religious rapture or hubris, or both? Though the darkness is "now done" and the speaker has submitted to God, he still struggles with the condition of his inner nature (inscape), and what really happened in "that night, that year," a time period of which he can't be sure. The grammetrics are interesting. "Foot trod Me" is both heavily stressed and grammatically unspecific—thus emphasized—and while there's more evidence to suggest that "foot trod Me" is an alternative to "flung me," it can be read as self-deprecating ("foot trod" as an adjective modifying "me."). There are several groupings of isolated syllables here: "fought/ him?* O* which/ one?*," "each/ one?* That/ night,* that/ year," and "I/* wretch* lay/ wrestling/ with* (my/ God!)/* my/ God." All emphasize moments of intense, even disorienting struggle. "Wretch" is particularly interesting because, as an inserted adjective (and thus without context), the reader can't be sure—as perhaps the speaker is unsure—of whether or not the speaker is now or once was a wretch.

This poem has no tidy ending. Throughout, the speaker is actively engaged in thought, as evidenced by frequent
insertions, instances of self-correction, and unusually
dynamic emotional vectors, particularly for a form that
initially recalls the sonnet.

Though Hopkins' prosody, technically, sounds almost
laughably lenient ("Sprung rhythm . . . 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"
[Hopkins cited in Preminger 1208-9]), Hopkins is religiously
governed by a good ear. He uses sound features to
instantaneously solidify rhythms—and create the expectation
of their continuation—and then almost as instantly to
replace them. Line 8 is an example in "(Carrion Comfort)"
the line begins with the stressed alliteration of "turns . . .
tempest" over two trochees and a third suggested trochee
(created by the coinciding punctual and grammatical breaks)
that becomes dactylic after the division. The new dactyls
are then solidified by the rhyme of "me . . . me . . . thee
. . . flee." This is a technique Berryman later employs as
well.

Hopkins strains elsewhere against his own prosody by
compressing almost completely some syllables, such as the
second syllable of "bruised" in line 7, and by creating what
he calls "hovering stress": verbalized stress compelled
onto metrically unstressed syllables, generally accomplished
in "(Carrion Comfort)" through the use of heavy alliteration
or assonance, or by placing a word with semantic weight in
an unstressed position, as with "wring-world," "right foot"
and "strength stole." In "Spring and Fall," he creates a similar effect through the establishment of metrical precedent. Here are the last five lines:

11 Sorrow's spring's are the same.
12 Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
13 What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
14 It is the blight man was born for,
15 It is Margaret you mourn for. (Hopkins 89)

"Margaret," normally a trochee, here is stressed on two or even three of its syllables, largely because of the pattern in the previous four lines of adjacent stresses, as in "springs are," "mouth had," "heart heard," "ghost guessed," and "blight man." Additionally, the stress—marked by Hopkins—on "is" in line 14, and the auditory similarities between the two lines, tends to compel, again by precedent, stress onto nearly every syllable in line 15. Thus, we have the potential for up to eight verbally stressed syllables in a theoretically four-stress accentual line, for as Wesling says, "how can we dare ignore any one of them?" (117)

John Berryman, writing over half a century after Hopkins, is more firmly situated in free verse than is Hopkins. While his poems issue from a different historical context, his primary techniques and the reasons for his expressive success remain similar. He has created "an
inspired poetry that manages miraculously to combine extremes of passion with great technical rigour" (Peresa cited in Ciani 208), in a way uniquely pertinent to his subject, as Hopkins did before him. In Berryman's dream song "29," one of 385 dream songs, Henry (the speaker, who "talks about himself sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, sometimes even in the second" [Berryman vi]) is in the midst of an internal, "spiritual" struggle, like that of Hopkins' speaker in "(Carrion Comfort)," though Henry's struggle is not with a divine figure. Henry is haunted by a nameless thing that is not only of profound gravity and implication but irreconcilable with what he "knows." In the last stanza, we learn that the "crime" is heinous, but may be purely an invention of his imagination or perhaps a "crime" of art (and thus a crime with only existential "moral" implications), as the dream songs make clear elsewhere that Henry is a poet, and the writer of the dream songs. Ultimately, imagination and the creative impulse may be both crime and salvation, as it is his ability to "reckon" that (uneasily) soothes the guilt. Homicidal impulses in this poem replace the explicit suicidal potential in Hopkins' "(Carrion Comfort)," but there is plenty of each of these--and lust as well--in other dream songs. Berryman shares with Hopkins an affinity for passionate emotions of whatever sort, and sprung rhythm is, in their poetry, appropriate to them all.

Daniela M. Ciani compares more extensively the subject matter and
I've scanned Berryman's dream song "29" according to what I believe to be the poem's "technical" scansion. Still, my scansion is highly debatable at moments: when is a string of audibly slack syllables in an otherwise iambic line scudded (to use Wesling's term) and thus "extra-metrical" (Preminger 1209), and when is it deserving of its full count, perhaps causing trochaic or incomplete feet later? I scanned largely for full iambs, since this appears to be the poem's overriding meter, though Berryman frequently creates trochaic rhythms as well. As in "(Carrion Comfort)," above, I've marked grammetrical breaks. Berryman, like Hopkins, will mark intended stresses in his poetry if they're not entirely clear, as he does here with "so" in line 2:

1 There sat/ down,* once,/* a thing/* on Hen/*ry's heart/*

2 so heavy,* if/ he had/ a hun/dred years/

3 & more,/* & weep/ing,* sleep/less,* in all/*

creative "attitudes" of Hopkins and Berryman. She says, "Most strikingly similar in the two poets is their material: a combination of personal and public tensions; private dramas and anguish which are set against, and indeed derive from, the reality of the outside world; a reality, which, when considered in its social and cultural aspects, is a source of incomprehension and depression" (210). She says the similarities between the two poets "can be better illustrated if conceived in the context of the poetics of memory" (208). She very briefly addresses the relationship of form and content, calling tension "inevitable" (215) due to Hopkins' precept of "speech framed for contemplation," and says that "for both poets the solution, a much-suffered one indeed, lies in the practice of poetry conceived as a mastery of form and language, for the structuring of its own contents" (210). Ciani does not look at the formal features of either Hopkins' or Berryman's poetry in detail, an area this paper addresses.
Berryman establishes the expectation of iambic rhythm immediately with a metrically simple first line that is further strengthened first by the grammatical isolation of "once" and "a thing" ("a" is hardly perceptible), and then by the breath-like alliteration of "Henry's heart." So far, everything seems fine: the rhythm of this first line is basically even, and the diction and logical pattern is like that of a "traditional fairy tale" (Siegel 182).  

Everything begins to crash, however, when the line turns: the heavy stress on the first two syllables followed by a measure of unstressed syllables (further diminished by the punctual and grammatical break in its center) is more than just a substitution, since two measures are involved, and places compounded stress on "so heavy." Suddenly, we feel the full weight of the "thing," and that weight is not lifted but reinforced by the stressed "h" alliteration in the rest of line 2. In Hopkins fashion, Berryman has caused the unstressed syllables to fade away, while increasing stress on the stressed syllables. In line 3, the compression intensifies, as the unstressed "and" is compressed to the barely voiced "&." Stressed syllables are emphasized by the resulting isolation of every syllable in "& more,* & weep/ing,* sleep/less,*" and by the rhyme of

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9For a fascinating and exhaustive discussion of John Berryman's iconic syntax, see Siegel's essay.
"weep" and "sleep," all of which contributes to the illusion of falling rhythm established by the punctual breaks.

Syntactically, lines 1-3 are equally interesting. In line 3, "them" is plural while "time" is singular, a relationship that makes the radical intimation that Henry himself is not sure if he's talking about a series of individual events or an ongoing time period: to agree in tense, the words would need to read either "them times" or "that time." This reading must be tempered, however, by the fact that throughout the dream songs Henry regularly slips into "blackface" (Berryman vi), manifest as black vernacular. The blackface here introduces another thing of which Henry, perhaps, cannot be sure: his own racial and cultural origins. Additionally, he has left out a significant number of non-essential words in this line in particular: with these words replaced, lines 2-3 would read, "so heavy, that if he had a hundred years / & more, & if he were weeping, and sleepless, in all them time." The opening lines of dream song "29" are intensely saturated--Hopkins-esque--and of sometimes indeterminate meaning.

Nonetheless, everything is briefly sorted out in line 4, when the meter returns to the expected iamb and simple, startlingly cohesive, syntax:

```
4 Henry/ could not/ make good./*
```
Even here, the prosody strains mildly against expectation with a marked emphasis on "make," which serves only to emphasize the clarity and gravity of the statement, and thus of the previous turmoil. Then, just as abruptly, we're back to the disruption of sense. Line 5 begins as if in the middle of a thought, seemingly lacking a subject, or revisiting a subject that preexists, but only in Henry's mind:

5 Starts a/gain* al/ways* in Hen/ry's ears/*

6 the lit/tle cough/ somewhere,/ an o/doūr,* a chime./*

Here, more conventionally than in line 1 of Hopkins' "(Carrion Comfort)," information is withheld, placing the line's emphasis on the abruptness of the "start," and its location "in Henry's ears." The inverted syntax seems to suggest, in a delayed fashion, that what "starts again" is "the little cough somewhere, an odour, a chime." However, this is ambiguous; and even if we accept this assumption, we still must question what exactly is "the little cough somewhere . . . ." The fact that "starts" requires a singular subject suggest that what is starting is singular with at least three potential manifestations; perhaps these are psychological remnants of the real, as yet unnamed "thing."
Line 7 begins, again abruptly, with the clear, iambic articulation of a phrase that appears to be the continuation of a thought that has been more developed than we are privy to, either over the stanza break or beneath the text of the first stanza:

```
7 And there is/ another thing/ he has/ in mind/*
8 like a grave/ Siamese face/* a thousand years/
9 would fail/ to blur/ the* still/ profiled/*
   reproach/ of.* Ghastly,/*
10 with open eyes,/* he attends;/* blind;/*
11 All the/ bells say:/ too late;/* This/ is not/
   for tears;/*
12 thinking.*
```

Most notable in this stanza is the extra measure in line 9, the only six-measure line in the poem save lines 11 and 16, though line 11 is still shorter than line 9 by two unstressed syllables, and line 16 can arguably be read as five measures with an excess of scudded syllables. Line 9 can be read as nothing other than six horrified measures. The stressed consonance in "still profiled reproach of," serves to emphasize the mild irregularity of the line and prepare us for "Ghastly"—an extra foot (and feminine ending) set even farther out from the line by its punctual and grammatical isolation and the massive breath it single-handedly consumes. Line 10 echoes that horrified rhythm
with a palpable, sounded silence before the spondee on "blind," also created by the combination of a comma and a grammatical break. Lines 11 and 12 echo that horror through similar silences before "This" and "thinking." The horror is unspeakable—a reading strengthened by the lack of specified subjects in lines 11 and 12 (What "bells"--the chime in line 6? What is "this"? "Thinking" what?).

The last stanza begins with another conjunction that again suggests the continuation of a previous thought:

```
13  But* ne/ver did* Hen/ry,* * as/* he thought/* he
     did,*
14  end an/yone/* and hacks/ her bo/dy up/*
15  and hide/ the piec/es, where/* they may/* be
     found./
16  He knows/: he went ov/er ev/eryone,/ &
     no/body's/ missing./*
17  Often/* he* reck/ons,* * in/* the dawn/* them
     up/*
18  Nobody/* is e/ver missing./
```

Line 13, like many of Berryman's lines, is difficult to scan because the line's spoken rhythm--created by the transposition of several phrases--is most closely anapestic, the rhythm of nonsense rhymes, with an unstressed first foot that could, in a dangerous mood, be viewed as "roving over" from line 12, one of Hopkins' habitual techniques and a move
that would oddly link the gravity of "thinking" with the sudden anapests of line 13, a very Henry-like move that might enact and explain his "thinking." Perhaps, too, those anapests continue into the first foot of line 14, where they are suddenly broken when Henry is momentarily slammed back into iambic by a graphic, present tense flashback or imagining that he "hacks her body up." In lines 16-18, the horror and immediacy of that image is somewhat resolved by the predominance of extra-metrical slack syllables, for Henry knows he cannot find a victim for his crime. Still, he's not completely assured, as evidenced in two places: the intense inversions of line 17 suggest turmoil and places "them up" grammatically isolated at the end of both the sentence and line, where their awkwardness tends to compel a stress onto the semantically and prosodically unstressed "them," an emphasis which isolates these words and suggests the reckoning is bloodily precise. Then, the final line of the poem leaves us with a haunting elucidation of his unease: following almost immediately their predecessor "nobody's ever missing," each of the three slack syllables in "Nobody is ever missing" must be taken seriously. The effort required to give them voice and the additional stress their silence compels onto "ever" conveys both an inability to believe the lack of evidence and a studious relief that the lack of evidence may (for the time being) be the truth.
Though Hopkins writes in falling rhythm and Berryman generally in iambs, both write sprung verse. Their rhythms are percussive, energetic, and emotionally mimetic and dynamic\textsuperscript{10} to such a degree that they are qualitatively distinguishable from any other poet's. Their thinking is active and energetic. Both poets saturate the sense of their lines through the use of grammatical breaks and sound features that syntactically isolate and emphasize words or compel stress onto some syllables while diminishing the stress of already unstressed others. Most distinguishing is that these techniques, when applied with the control and fearlessness of Hopkins and Berryman, vitalize the link that exists between rhythm and emotion: the real triumph is their ability to establish a baseline rhythm, strain against that rhythm for emotional nuance,\textsuperscript{11} and reestablish a new rhythm as immediately and often as the most passionate of emotions can ricochet.

Sprung verse never acquired a following, despite its versatility. This may be a result of Hopkins' delayed publication in 1918, 29 years after his death (Abrams et al. 1579). By this time, "free verse was already established as the most versatile insurgent style" (Wesling 134). There may be other factors as well: while "turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding" (Ferguson et al.\textsuperscript{10}See Schneider for an illustrated catalogue of the ways in which sprung rhythm is "new" (51-83). \textsuperscript{11}Ong says Hopkins "found" this "tradition of a sense-stress rhythm . . . the interpretive rhythm of English" (158).
Whitman is sounding his barbaric yawp, Hopkins writes poem after poem declaring the glory of God, even in poems such as "(Carrion Comfort)" where there is struggle involved. His subject matter is narrow and his consideration of it can seem melodramatic or sentimental. Even Berryman, whose presentation is more varied than Hopkins' and integrates more conflicting emotions, trusts our fascination with the fascinating John Berryman, only thinly veiling his subject and frequently revisiting—in all its psychological manifestations, but generally cynically and wittily—what haunts him. He has been labeled by the contemporary critical establishment a confessional poet, almost critical shorthand for historically mediocre. Sprung verse is best suited to passionate emotion, but passionate emotion has been underexplored in recent poetry.

Still, sprung verse might well be the natural conclusion of an age that can look back on both the exhaustion of traditional metrical schemes and the limitations of free verse. Sprung verse, as a solution created in response to the same crisis, is no less free than free verse, but resurrects traditional metrics long enough to deny them, vitalizing both form and freedom. Berryman, whose poetry embraces not only conversational rhythms but colloquial diction and thoroughly non-religious sentiment, may well be more significant than Hopkins for most late twentieth century poets grappling for direction. With his secular themes, he broadens the explored scope of sprung
verse, though his work only hints at what may be found. Much is left unexplored, leaving a rich field for forthcoming poets who will add their own themes. Whatever the theme, sprung rhythm allows the poet to be master—not slave—of form and garner the emotion inherent in sound and rhythm without losing control of that emotion's expression. It satisfies both the high romantics and Hass, as it is conversational in syntax, organic in form, and full of "edge" (Hass 70) created by the mutual sharpening of traditional and free verse as they strike and veer in close quarters.

In sprung verse we have a model that will not tame as it guides, whatever the nature of our passionate persuasions, for the practice is adaptable not only to despair, spiritual reckoning, guilt, and self-loathing but also to "joy and awe and praise . . . ." Hopkins' hope for a personal language of belief, the religious basis of sprung rhythm, has disappeared; the legacy is a freestanding method, capable of several uses" (Wesling 134). Sprung rhythm embraces all the contradictions of the human psyche; but before its potential can be realized, we'll need a generation of poets with hindsight, foresight and the courage to face their own as yet nameless "things."
Works Cited


Works Consulted


