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LEWIS CARROLL AND G. M. HOPKINS:

CLERGYMEN ON A VICTORIAN SEE-SAW

AMONG THE VICTORIAN IMMORTALS, no two contemporaries induce more curious comparisons than Lewis Carroll and G. M. Hopkins. These deeply religious Oxford men never met, so far as can be ascertained; and they were at once so similar and so dissimilar that, if they had met, it may be doubted whether they would have hit it off. Their resemblances and contrasts have been left largely unexplored.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) was born in 1832 and died in 1898. Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) was twelve years younger but died earlier. Both found difficulty, for different reasons, in acknowledging their creative work, which was opposed to Victorian convention. Both were earnest bachelor clergymen — one Anglican, the other Roman Catholic — who led restricted, academic, ascetic lives, but enjoyed a rich variety of personal interests. Each, in his own way, was a poet. The two were also copious letter-writers. They even looked alike. They had in common a love of art, and both were amateur practitioners of merit. Hopkins's sketches of flowers, plants, and trees show him to have been the more accomplished draughtsman; Dodgson's drawings for *Alice in Wonderland* reveal private anguish and rise on occasion to an almost Blake-like intensity. On the other hand, Dodgson was a mathematician and logician; Hopkins a classical scholar. Dodgson became one of the best photographers of his time; Hopkins had no interest in the art and craft of the camera. Music meant relatively little to Dodgson, and in listening to "first-rate music" he found "a sense of anxiety and labour"; Hopkins was a really talented musician and song-writer with an individual gift of

melody. Throughout his life Dodgson was fascinated by the stage; he remained an active theatre-goer; Hopkins, as a Jesuit priest, kept away. For Dodgson, children were "three-fourths of my life", and he had an unusual but inspiring pre-occupation with little girls. Hopkins became aware of the beauty of young manhood, "in mansex fine": the Tuke-like bathing-scene in *Epithalamion* provoked Professor C. C. Abbott to remark that "there is something not altogether subdued to the Christian purpose in this side of the poet's work."

These contemporary geniuses shared a developed sense of humour and a scientific analytical approach to language. Dodgson was a dedicated humorist from childhood. Young Hopkins made delightfully entertaining drawings for children, but his intense refinement lent itself to a dry intellectual humour that evaporated to the vanishing point toward the end of his austere life. In their twenties, however, both men looked at the world in a comparable humorous spirit. They viewed the wording over a shop-front, for example, with the same sense of observant amusement. Dodgson's glimpse of the lettering DEALER IN ROMAN CEMENT sparked off an overwrought story called *Novelty and Romancement* (1856). Writing to Robert Bridges in 1866 about his conversion to Roman Catholicism, Hopkins jested: "Trumpery, Mummery, and G. M. HOPKINS Flummery Designer. Removed to the Other Side of the Way."

Both men, as has been noted above, were poets, but for Dodgson this has been contested. Although in *The Hunting of the Snark* he wrote the longest and best sustained nonsense poem in the language, there are some who would consider him as no more than a prolific writer of light verse. The title of poet in its full meaning has nevertheless been accorded him by Walter de la Mare and others by their judgment that the *Alice* books — with their dream-like atmosphere, landscapes and transitions — are essentially poetic works. Hopkins, on the other hand, is generally accepted as a major poet. F. R. Leavis has called him "one of the most remarkable technical innovators who ever wrote", and has asserted that there is no poet later than Shakespeare with whom Hopkins can profitably be compared. Shakespeare's name has also been invoked on behalf of Dodgson, not only because he wrote a book full of immortal characters that has been translated into more than forty languages, but also because his work has been up-graded (at the same time that he has been personally degraded) by critics of the Freudian school. "From our point of view," pronounced Sir Herbert Read on their behalf, "Lewis Carroll has affinities with Shakespeare".

But leaving Shakespeare, whose appearance in critical discussions is often

a sign of desperation, we come to the area in which the Hopkins-Dodgson comparison is chiefly interesting. Both men welcomed the challenge of the complicated, and both were absorbed in the study of words. For an author with Dodgson's training as a logician, this involved a didactic emphasis on meaning—"Pay attention to what you are saying!" Hopkins, too, hoped for precision, though he did not always find it, and both writers left scope for Empsonian "ambiguities". In coining his peculiar words, Hopkins went back to Anglo-Saxon and Old English with high seriousness; such a determined philologist might have made a professional lexicographer. Already at nineteen he was comparing "the connection between *flag* and *flabby* with that between *flick* and *flip*, *flog* and *flap*, *flop*". This would have been more than Dodgson's humour could stand.

Professor W. H. Gardner has described Hopkins as "the greatest master of the poetic compound word in English." We need not quarrel with that description; but a statement by Miss E. E. Phare, who wrote a study of Hopkins as early as 1933, is surely less accurate: "There is no Victorian poet", she said, "whose innovations strike the eye as odd, bizarre, far-fetched, in the degree that those of Hopkins do."

In 1855, when Hopkins was eleven, Dodgson parodied Anglo-Saxon poetry in some famous lines:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
 All mimsy were the borogoves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.

These lines were not published to the world until they appeared as the first verse of "Jabberwocky" in Chapter I of *Through the Looking-Glass* in 1872. The Anglo-Saxonisms were explained in Chapter VI by Humpty Dumpty, who made use of a glossary that Dodgson had compiled seventeen years earlier. Thus *brillig* is four in the afternoon; *slithy* derives from "lithe" and "slimy", and *mimsy* from "flimsy" and "miserable"; a *tove* nests under sundials, and the *wabe* is the grass-plot that surrounds a sundial; a *borogove* is a shabby bird that looks like a live mop; *mome* means "from home" (i.e. lost), a *rath* is a green pig, and *outgribing* is something between bellowing and whistling with a kind of sneeze in the middle. Tenniel's drawing, a Whipsnade fantasy, helps us to visualize the scene in "the wabe".

Hopkins did not enjoy *Alice in Wonderland*, and, if he read *Through the Looking-Glass*, one would expect him to have been irritated by "Jabber-

wocky", since it made fun of a derivative process that Hopkins had long taken extremely seriously. Several of Lewis Carroll's words, in fact, would not have looked out of place in Hopkins's vocabulary. One thing is certain: if Hopkins had written that stanza with a full background of scholarship, he would have needed more space. It might almost have gone like this:

Tove-slithy, see, O see, how through brillig-hour they gyre,
 In mother-wabe eager, lithe-a-gimble by dapping sun-fire.
 Yet ah! faint borogove mop-mimsy droops to fall;
 Mome rath, care-cumbered, gribes out his sullen call.

That exercise must be taken as sincerest flattery; without detracting from Hopkins, it suggests the contrasting attitudes of these eminent philologists. The truth is that when Hopkins, in his committed search for beauty, was cascading hyphens and coining words like *trambeams*, *betweenpie*, *fallowboot-fellow*, and *downdolphinry*, his humour was under rigorous suppression and it is not his fault, of course, that *gaygear* and *girlgrace* now sound like the names of Chelsea *boutiques*.

But that other "master of the poetic compound word", Lewis Carroll, did firmly intend to employ his verbal imagination in providing amusement. He completed "Jabberwocky" with four more stanzas, of which this was the first:

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
 The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
 Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
 The frumious Bandersnatch!"

Clearly "Jabberwocky" had a hold on Dodgson's mind, for he resumed his commentary on its words and characters in the preface to *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876) and in the text of that poem. There we learn that *frumious*, applied to the Bandersnatch, is a mixture of fuming and furious, and that the Jubjub's scream, which "rent the shuddering sky", resembled "a pencil that squeaks on a slate". Again, Hopkins's approach to this stanza might have been more elaborate, more dramatic:

"Watch where on purple pinion, brute-strong, passion-dark — ah my dear, love's lad, beware! —

Old snapjaw grindgroans jabberwock will clash and claw the air.

What next? The plumèd jubjub, sky-a-shudder-squeak-slate, stay not to match;
 Still more, *all-fume-and-fury*, frumious, shun, O my heart, the bandersnatch!"

In the remaining stanzas Dodgson used the words *uffish*, *whiffling*,

tulgey, burbled, vorpal, galumphing, beamish, frabjous, and chortled. Some of these were inspired revivals rather than direct inventions, but as a practical innovator Dodgson was strikingly successful by the test of popular usage; the compounds *galumph* and *chortle* have been credited to his account in the Oxford English Dictionary, as has that "chimerical animal", the *snark*.

Thus a comparison between the Catholic religious poet and the Anglican nonsense-genius puts them at opposite ends of a Victorian see-saw, on a delicate balance of motive and conscience. They were both, we must recognize, lonely men of integrity who wore themselves to the bone, whose literary achievements reflected an inner tension between the creative urge and an imposed self-discipline, who used comparable material for entirely different purposes. As clergymen and teachers they were neither of them very effective. They were at the same time laborious scholars and creative artists.

But Dodgson, prickly, pedantic, conservative as he could appear, preserved a childlike simplicity; his rebellious humour asserted itself to the last. Hopkins's unsparing radical intellectuality tended to make his poetry dangerously refined, indeed obscure and precious — a tendency superbly transcended in his greatest poems. As is shown in his famous letter to Bridges in favour of Communism, Hopkins, had he lived later, might have been seen in the role of the Marxist Jesuit with a gift for confusing double-talk. Not so Dodgson, whose prophetic intuition nevertheless served him even in foreign affairs. On Dodgson's only trip outside England, in 1867, he went straight to Moscow and then came back again — and it seemed to him, watching "the lights at Dover, as they slowly broadened on the horizon, as if the old land were opening its arms to receive its homeward bound children."

ROWING IN SLEEP

James Tipton

Rowing in sleep, my long hands heavy,
I move, hollow as a dream,
down into moonlight, into sea;
to lost ballerinas on the sand, waves
washing at their legs, their feet
dancing in another land.