



# Dacey, Philip. Gerard Manley Hopkins Meets Walt Whitman in Heaven and Other Poems [review]

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is one of the strengths of his approach. He anticipates certain objections to his methodology and proceeds in a level-headed fashion to address them. He never presses. For these reasons, when this book goes into a second printing, he should clean up his text. This book merits it.

*The City College, New York*

ARTHUR GOLDEN

Philip Dacey. *Gerard Manley Hopkins Meets Walt Whitman in Heaven and Other Poems*. Wood Engravings by Michael McCurdy. Great Barrington, Mass.: Penmaen Press, 1982. 98 pp. 900 copies. Hardcover \$22.50, paperback \$8.50, signed edition \$75.00.

This collection of poems, a sustained, intense vision of the English Jesuit poet, half historical, half invented, will surely evoke mixed reactions in any lover of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Its best, and certainly to students of Whitman its most interesting poem, is the long dialogue which gives the book its title.

Many of the shorter poems seem curiously contradictory. Dacey, who is certainly steeped in Hopkins's poetry, successfully imitates the poet's idiosyncratic diction. A good deal less successfully he employs the characteristic Hopkins alliteration, assonance, and consonance. His attempts to parallel Hopkins's equally idiosyncratic rhythms are least successful of all: too often his lines jolt and jerk, making ear and eye stumble through the poem.

But the form of these poems is often more satisfactory than their substance. Where Hopkins is concrete, Dacey is abstract. Where Hopkins presents and dramatizes, Dacey argues. And though the Manichean conflict between flesh and spirit gives tension to Hopkins's verse, Dacey makes it the very substance of his vision. In Hopkins's letters to and dialogues with Bridges, in his soliloquies, in his dreams, Dacey's Hopkins is obsessed with the heavy load of the body. And in at least one of them, "Hopkins to Bridges," Dacey uses the image of Christ on the cross to dramatize with startling explicitness the homosexual element in this conflict. It is an explicitness which the poet himself would certainly repudiate with horror.

But in the long title poem Dacey is more successful. Readers of Whitman will enjoy and appreciate the portrait of the poet as Walt challenges his younger alter ego to accept the world and the flesh. Based on Section 11 of "Song of Myself," and on Thomas Eakins's painting "Swimming Hole," this long poem dramatizes the poet of "Leaves of Grass" who here again, in many of his own words, sings to the English poet a song of himself and compels the younger man to accept the beauty and reality of the body. Whitman fans will, on the whole, endorse Dacey's book for this poem, leaving the admirers of Hopkins to prefer his own poems to any of Dacey's.

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