

from J Hillis Miller, "Creation Of Self In Gerard M. Hopkins"  
*ELH*, Vol. 22, No. 4. (Dec., 1955), pp. 293-319.

The self for Hopkins, in the very first moment in which it recognizes itself, recognizes itself not as a lack, an appeal, but as a plenitude. It does not need to seek something outside of itself as a source of its life, because that life has already been given. One finds oneself, from the beginning, a "throng and stack of being, so rich, so distinctive." No one could be less like Mallarmé, for whom the moment of self-consciousness was the moment of a paralyzing sense of emptiness. Nor does self-awareness for Hopkins depend, as it does in the long tradition coming down from Locke, on sense perception of the external world. Much less does it depend on a *relation* to that world. No, Hopkins' *Cogito* is neither a purely intellectual self-consciousness arrived at by putting in doubt and separating from oneself everything which seems to come from the outside, nor is it the Lockean self-awareness which springs out of psychological nothingness in the moment of sensation. It is, like the first, entirely interior, entirely independent of the exterior world, since, for Hopkins, "when I compare myself, my being myself, with anything else whatever, all things alike, all in the same degree, rebuff me with blank unlikeness; so that my knowledge of it, which is so intense, is from itself alone."

The first moment of self-awareness is, then, not a thought, but a deeply organic sense experience which permeates the whole being, as in the famous formula of Condillac: "I am odor of rose." But it is a "taste of *oneself*," not of anything whatsoever which comes from the outside: "The development, refinement, condensation of nothing shows any sign of being able to match this to me or give me another taste of it, a taste even resembling it." ~ The self is already fully existent as soon as one is aware of oneself at all, and seems to form an eternally subsisting tasting of oneself which prolongs itself from moment to moment as long as one endures. Since it remains exactly the same through time, it is apparently indestructible. If it extends beyond disembodied consciousness, it is only to include a minimal sense of one's incarnation, minimal because it is a sense of incarnation in a simple, spaceless body which is wholly undifferentiated, wholly made up of a single taste.