

Crossing the Border

Swimming between two words

I remember nothing of my experience of being smuggled across the border from Germany into Austria to be with my maternal grandparents, except that, at some point, I must have been flown from Berlin to another location to make the border crossing possible. I was just over three years old and I remember looking out of the window of the aeroplane and thinking that I was looking at stars, when I was told (on good authority!) that what I thought were stars were in fact the lights of the cities over which we were flying.

This was confusing enough, but nothing could have prepared me, some three years later, for the bewilderment of coming to Australia as an unaccompanied displaced person of six years' of age, on the converted American aircraft carrier re-named 'The Nelly', crossing into the equator zone, where it was behoving of the adults who had charge of me to allow me to be intimidated by King Neptune, whose space and domain I had obviously violated, and for which I must now be punished with much rattling of chains, and shaking of Trident and threatening to cast me into the hissing sea.

And then there was the man whom I met at the Melbourne wharf who appeared to me to be a perfect stranger but was in fact, as was pointed out to me by those who knew best, my father... whom I had not seen for over three years.

Of course, much of my young boy's confusion was based on incomplete information, and false assumptions. *Cf. Davy Crockett, pedestrian crossings, and the Queen's mysterious connections with rain!*

But before we look down our noses at children and think that our maturity into adulthood, and our transfer into the 21st century guarantees us immunity from confusion, think again!

What would you say, for example, if you were told that the entire way we're seeing and hearing and experiencing the world right this minute, is an illusion, and that there is a profound contradiction between what we *think* is out there, and what is *actually* there?

That the particle object that we observe to occupy one location only, actually turns into a wave as we turn our attention away from it, and that behind our back, it is now occupying multiple locations at one and the same time?

And what would you think if you were told that you are 99.99% empty space, and that if you had eyes to see, you (your entire being and molecular structure) are actually blinking in and out of existence billions of

times per second, and that you never really ever touch anything, and that nothing actually touches you, and *that touch itself is an illusion?*

And what if I told you that ‘Superstring’ theory in Quantum mechanics which claims to be close to solving the serious contradictions at the heart of physics proposes the existence of at least 11 dimensions?

Would you not say that this is the stuff of dreams, of pure fantasy and the imagination, and that life could not possibly and actually, be that paradoxical and self-contradictory, and still hold itself together as a Unity?

So what has all this to do, this morning, with the sacred text?

Well basically this: I suggest that it is only as we distance ourselves from the familiarity of *what we think we know* about the world of the Old and New Testaments that we begin to realise just how alien and divided that Biblical country actually is, and that therefore the unity that finally emerges from that chaos is equally as remarkable as the unity that emerges, unexpectedly, from the Superstring Theory of Quantum Mechanics.

Curiously, the landscape that our readings throw up to us is, like the Quantum world, positively riddled with antitheses and paradox:

The violence of the heavens being torn apart, the softness of the Spirit like a dove descending and then transforming itself into the force that drives Jesus out into the desert the God who loves and affirms, who sustains through angels and the animals in the wild, and the hatred of Satan, the angel of light who comes to undermine, tear down and destroy the good news that the Messiah is here, that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near, but that the Christ is powerless and too far away to help the Baptist who must be arrested and die, and that the time is not yet, after all

of life and death
of destruction and regeneration
of freedom and imprisonment
of the conflict of the flesh and the spirit, which *The Last Temptation of Christ* explores so brilliantly in novel and film.

It would seem that the ‘truth’ for which the psalmist longs, does not take us to quiet and tranquil places – rather, throws us, unceremoniously into a desert of testing, of doubt and self-questioning.

The nightmarish landscape, in fact, of Gerard Manley Hopkins: *read ‘I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day...’ 44 Holy Sonnets*

The man of faith’s single-minded love and loyalty is rewarded with ‘dark’ not ‘day’.

We see here Hopkins, a man wracked by the contradiction of his perceived calling as a priest, and his calling as a poet, which the fundamentalist Church of his day said was irreconcilable and impossible... a man torn in two, who would have destroyed all of his poetry were it not for the gentle voice of reason and love which he discovered in God's ministering angel, Duns Scotus, the Scottish theologian, who argued for the 'thisness' of things, that by truly discovering and then being ourselves, we thereby '**glorify** **God**' the unified 'field theory' that saved Hopkins' poetry and sanity.

cf., St Paul's 'cracked mirror': we look as through a glass darkly: with the promise that in the end, after the devastation, faith, hope and love will remain

my big birthday bash: my father who turns 84 this year was quite emotional: photo of the nun... a mother who dies, a son who dies, a son who lives, a surrogate mother who sustains life

The story of Ellie's birthday, and the butterfly story: refer to the butterflies.

Brothers and sisters we are surrounded and frustrated in life by contradictions at every turn.

St Paul's tells us in Romans 8, that the whole cosmos in fact has been subjected to frustration and confusion by a God who has subjected it in hope, that like a woman in travail, who feels that her entire life is at ransom, something new and wonderful is nevertheless being born.

Let us, then, draw near to God and to faith.

Like the psalmist let us trust and wait on God, knowing that we will not be put to shame.

Clarity of vision will come, understanding will come.

I finish with this sonnet from Hopkins:
(Carrion Comfort): 41