

The Devil's Étude

An Exercise in Polyphony

by [Jeffrey Burghauser](#) (August 2022)



Crows in Winter, N. C. Wyeth, 1941

This song of Lucifer's was a dwelling on his own beauty, an instressing of his own inscape, and like performance on the organ and instrument of his own being[.]—Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Notes From a Long Retreat" [\[\]](#)*

The glances of women say I am the pin
Existence stuck into itself till it hurt.

I'm sipping espresso, and fastened within
A pucker-necked infantry sweater, alert,
Commanding, inside a repurposed château—
An affable, elderly interviewee
Who (decades ago) ran a gas chamber. Oh,
I love how this résearcher marvels at me!

She's sketching my essence's arches & camp-
Ānīli. However, there's something amiss:
That cornice, that turret, that octagon lamp,
That spire. For reasons that silently hiss,
She cannot gain purchase on all of my damp
Divisions. She's frustrated (pity the youth!)-
Upset as a dentist who struggles to clamp
Her pliers upon a decay-softened tooth.

For I am the pin whose proximity pricks.
According to Radner, august, middle-aged
Rousseau wrote to Boswell in seventeen six-
Ty-something (...and just before Boswell engaged
The Master aware that a language foresees
Its matrix, as Time must occasion the Clock):
"Although you're malicious, I find it's a pleas-
ing malice—a malice I do not dislike." [\[†\]](#)

And Boswell himself was a sketcher of men;
His *Life* of the Master, as good as may be
Expected from someone whose competent pen
Lacked all sense of irony. She isn't he,
However; and Johnson, I'm not. [*Flames confess*
Christ's Majesty.] Johnson says where words belong,
And I am the doer of what, were it less
Inevitable, would be Perfectly Wrong.

"You ask what I think I deserve—I, who stood,
Defending my people...without me—I'll show
Statistics, reports—the catastrophe would
Have turned out, believe me, a hundred—or no:

A *thousand* times bloodier. I had the nerve,
A Soldier, restoring respect for the Laws,
For Heritage. What do I think I deserve?
A good place to start: this Tribunal's applause."

However, my register's intimate now:
"You never will know me unless you agree
The loveliest smell that a life may allow
Is cigarette smoke in the summer. Some tea?"
My anger is racing with more absolute
Dispatch than a droplet of sweat through a square
Of terrycloth. Every passion is brute,
And every name is a lame *nom de guerre*.

The glances of women [*O Heaven above!*]
Say I am the pin [*Sweet Jerusalem's pen*]
Existence stuck into [*composed me for love.*]
Itself till it hurt. [*Glory, find me again,*
Corrupted;] I'm sipping espresso, [*the quote*
You noticed & mastered] and fastened within
A pucker-necked infantry sweater, [*by rote,*
Undone with errata.] alert, [*Thus, begin,*]

Commanding, [*Salvation! Some mercy, my Lord;*
Some mercy.] inside a repurposed château—
An affable, [*There, on the emerald sward*
The maidens are] elderly [*dancing. So show*
Me everything] interviewee [*Jesu has.*
So show me some mercy consistent as snow,]
Who (decades ago) ran [*astonishing as*]
A gas chamber. [*treason. Some mercy, Lord.*] Oh,

I love how this *résearcher* marvels at me,
Conjecturing what I might do in the night,
For I am inventive & lethally free,
The panic of those asking "Who?" in the night.
Behold her examining one of the tin
And amethyst brooches I strew in the night.

The suppliant's story transparently in-
Sincere in the daytime is true in the night.

A nocturne. O listen. It's either the din
Of innocent love or a coup in the night.
unrighteousness moistly was shedding its skin,
And leaving it drifting, a clue in the night.
I grin at your wince at this harrowing grin;
You shiver. I recognize you in the night.
O frozen moon, [*Let me be Your violin,*
O Heaven!] alone as a Jew in the night.

The glances of women say I am the site
Where Roux bottles culture this genus of Sin.
Unfortunate questioner, try as you might,
Alas, neither you nor your scholarly kin
Shall tally amid such disordering, light-
Bewildered & damp Dionysian spin
Exactly how many of Heaven's despite-
Ed angels can dance on the head of a pin.

[*] Quoted in Ellsberg, Margaret R. *The Gospel in Gerard Manley Hopkins*. (Walden, New York: Plough Publishing House, 2017). p. 186.

[†] Radner, John B. *Johnson and Boswell: A Biography of a Friendship*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. p. 42.

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