

‘With, all down darkness wide, his wading light?’: Light and dark in Gerard Manley Hopkins’s ‘The Candle Indoors’ and ‘The Lantern out of Doors’

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Abstract

This article explores the symbolic values of light and darkness in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins was fascinated by oppositional discourses and as such his poetry is resonant with dichotomous systems of metaphor; his struggles with faith and doubt, and his search for positivity in the midst of depression are both articulated through the oppositional concepts of light and dark. The candle functions uniquely within this metaphoric structure, as it breaches the bounds of darkness while still making it more ever-present. This article explores how Hopkins utilises the candle and its semiological expression to draw attention to the liminality of his beliefs.

Key words: Gerard Manley Hopkins, light, candle, faith, dualism, poetry, Victorian, gaze, power, darkness

Gerard Manley Hopkins was a poet inspired by, and very much interested in, processes of light and vision. Within his works he presents a flexible structure of metaphor that is based on the relationship between light and dark. These interchangeable elements come to symbolise Hopkins’s spirituality and religion, as well as the challenges his beliefs were subjected to, while also outlining a very nuanced interest in perception and the principles of sight. Dennis Sobolev identifies what he terms ‘the split world’ of Hopkins as he explores the ‘semiotic phenomenology’ of his writing: ‘To put it briefly “semiotic phenomenology” as it is understood here—proceeds from the grounds that are transcendent to the distinction between the subject and the object, the physical and the imaginary, nature and culture, or any other metaphysical distinctions of the “kind”’ (Sobolev 2011: 4). What Sobolev suggests is the dichotomous liminality of Hopkins’s ideas and poetry. The most prominent example of this may well be Hopkins’s own notion of the ‘inscape’: the term, itself a portmanteau of words connoting the inner being (in, inside, interior) and the outer experience (scape, landscape, escape), attempts to address what Hopkins saw as

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reconcilable differences between the inner character or 'essence' of something and the object itself (Philips 2009: xx). Also, his use of the term 'instress' crosses similar binaries, as it is most commonly associated with the impression, or feeling, something may relate to the careful observer.

There is a clear connection between Hopkins's interest in perception, his religious beliefs, and his use of dialectically-related terms in his poetry. In 'I wake and feel', Hopkins definitively uses darkness as a symbol for his own mental struggles and depression. In the sonnet's opening lines, he writes: 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day./ What knows, O what black hours we have spent.' (ll. 1-2) Day and night are connected in a way that makes them inseparable from each other, yet Hopkins emphasises the bleak state of mind of the speaker by asserting that day has no power over the lingering darkness of night. It is a symbol of the 'other', a threat to religious positivity that may further be witnessed in the connection of life and death as Hopkins writes: 'And my lament/ Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent/ To dearest him that lives alas! Away.' (ll. 6-9) The 'dead letters' that represent his empty prayers to God are juxtaposed by the fact that God 'lives alas!'. Again, Hopkins finds poetic resonance within discourses of liminality, or the spaces in between oppositional concepts. Even the form of this poem is indicative of his interest in ideas of opposition and the transitional areas in the centre. The sonnet is made up of four stanzas, two pairs of two with wildly different qualities. The first two quatrains, which detail the speaker lying in bed sleepless, adhere to the traditional sonnet form of Iambic Pentameter, while also using an ABBA rhyme scheme. However, the poem turns around its midpoint to become something darker and introspective. Firstly, and most obviously, the quatrains transition into tercets, providing a sense of the speaker's argument advancing and becoming more pronounced while also exposing some of the fragility of mind in the poem's textual unconscious. The volta, which occurs around the caesural 'away' (l. 9) that is separated from the rest of the sentence on line 8, creates a division between God and the speaker's sleeplessness and consumption by depression. This is further exaggerated by the deviation from the iambic form in line 9: 'I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree.' (l. 9) This line is made up of 12 syllables in a distinctly alexandrine meter. It allows the speaker's statement to be emboldened in the immediate post-volta and stresses the 'I', further

cementing the isolation the speaker feels when his prayers are not answered. This poem encapsulates the oppositional metaphoric scope of light and dark within Hopkins's poetry, something that may be envisioned to represent his struggles with faith and doubt in the poems 'The Lantern out of Doors' and 'The Candle Indoors'.

The poems, written in 1877 and 1879 respectively, reflect a similar diurnal tendency, and portray a system of symbols that are given deeper meaning when considered in terms of their cultural and personal context. At this period in Hopkins's life, he had reconverted to follow Jesuit principles after deciding that his poetry did not conflict with his religious principles following his Scotus-inspired idea of 'inscape'. This was his last major religious reinvention, after many years of pursuing an order that could satisfy his anxieties that poetry was too self-indulgent for a pious man to write. He also suffered from extreme depression during the later years of his life in the late 1870s and 1880s, up until his death in 1889. Sobolev identifies the influences that spurred his depression: 'Different and heterogeneous factors contributed to his mental condition: his intellectual loneliness and incessant self-scrutiny, the growing feeling of the disappearance of God from his life, and his alleged failure both as a preacher and a poet' (Sobolev 2011: 200). He was also extremely overworked and experienced the depths of poverty, which must have also contributed to his faltering mental state.

His faith and doubt in himself, his religion, and his poetry expressed a similarly dichotomous ideology to that which may be seen in his poetry. Indeed, his own father, who died when the younger Hopkins was eighteen, portrayed this dichotomy in poetry that conveyed a similar melancholy. Norman White outlines the senior Hopkins's poem 'My Inheritance' as an indicator of the family's 'ancestral fate' of being 'somewhat too rash in love and hate;/ Too soon depressed, too soon elate'. Manley Hopkins expresses his depression through the semiotic oppositions of 'love/hate' and 'depressed/elate'. White suggests that this 'hereditary characteristic of the Hopkinses is what later came to be known as a manic-depressive temperament' (White 1990: 140-49). His depression does not exist in a vacuum, but in relation to his happiness. This duality seems to be largely rooted in the irreconcilable gulf the younger Hopkins felt between his own happiness and depression, as well as that that he felt between piety and poetry. John C. Kelly writes that:

His burning of his early poems and his long silence as a poet are symptoms of his puritanical fear of beauty and joy. His loving contemplation of nature and the writing of verse could have been accompanied by prayer. But that would not satisfy the canons of the worst kind of Victorian spirituality: inhibitions masquerading as dogma. The contemplation of nature and the making of verses must be essentially prayer in themselves. Hysterical, terrified flight from all things lovely was supposed to be necessary to him who would live the full devotional life of the Church.

(Kelly 1998: 421-30)

There was an incompatibility between how Hopkins wished to convey the natural world through his poetry and the Catholic ideology he followed. Hopkins was extremely sensory, and valued the sight of things as inspiration—as previously mentioned, this was a major influence in his moulding of the notion of ‘inscape’. Yet this was another important element that contributed to his doubt in the collaboration of faith and poetry. John C. Kelly writes that if poetry

deals with images, [it] must deal with the singular and the material. The things of the spirit are free from materiality. All that such poetry can do is record the sensations felt in the blood and felt along the heart that sometimes accompany the movements of the spirit [...] If one must write the kind of poetry that was native to Hopkins, rich in sensuous imagery, then I do not see how it can be purely spiritual.

(Kelly 1998: 428)

Reverend Kelly engages with the struggle Hopkins must have encountered when writing the poetry that provided him with a means of escape, or indeed ‘inscape’, in the very much spiritually and religiously informed society that he was part of, and in the company that he kept. Indeed, at various points in his life, Hopkins ‘purged’ his work, burning collections of his own unpublished letters, poems and prose. Michael Matthew Kaylor draws attention to a letter sent by Hopkins to his associate Robert Bridges in 1868 after a request for a poem: ‘I cannot send my *Summa* for it is burnt with my other verses: I saw they wd. Interfere with my state and vocation’ (Hopkins 2006: 144). Hopkins’s reservations about poetry and religion led to the limited amount of work that was posthumously published. Fortunately, Robert Bridges eventually became poet laureate, placing him in an ideal position to edit and publish Hopkins’s remaining works, which he did in 1918.

Prior to his creative outburst that resulted in his arguably most well-known poem, ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’, Hopkins had not written poetry for many years, yet it was this calamitous accident that kick-

started his writing career in the latter part of his life. Father Jones, who was somewhat of a mentor to Hopkins in his time at St. Buenos, encouraged him to write on the tragedy, after he ‘made a vague suggestion about its being a good occasion for a pious set of verses inculcating a moral lesson from a sad event’; however, ‘Hopkins heard a more inclusive invitation than the Rector actually extended’ (Martin 1991: 297). Inspired by tragedy, Hopkins’s creative energy was re-energated, as he once again discovered an outlet for his own inner conflicts. Robert Bernard Martin claims that ‘[a]s a man he was torn apart when he was in doubt, but it was precisely when he was impelled, perhaps neurotically, to examine all aspects of a problem, including its unattractive side, that his poetry came fully alive. Poetically, he probably thrived more on uncertainty than on unadulterated happiness’ (Martin 1991: 297). This creativity that springs from doubt may be witnessed in much of the poetry from his latter career, and is expressed in ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ as ‘Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,/ And after it almost unmade, what with dread,/ Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?/ Over again I feel thy finger and find thee’ (ll. 5-8).

‘The Lantern out of Doors’, the first of the two candle-based poems Hopkins produced, was composed in 1877 at St. Bueno’s, and was followed by companion piece ‘The Candle Indoors’ in 1879. The former has been suggested to have a ‘sense of bereavement’ (Mariani 1970: 80-81) by the editor of the fourth edition of the published collection of Hopkins’s poems Professor Mackenzie, whereas ‘The Candle Indoors’ appears to speak more of hope and spirituality than its companion. Hopkins had always been proficient in his semiotic use of light and vision as metaphor, and it was something he adapted in his use of dichotomous opposition as the two poems create distinctly different perspectives of the same idea. Alan Heuser suggests that ‘[l]ight, shade, and colour fill Hopkins’s early verse’ (Heuser 1958: 10), and this was something that continued in his later work, although subtly altered in its pairing with its diametrically opposite metaphorical concept. Heuser charts the development of his interest in light and optics as he writes:

In early verse he took up the position of observer stationed at the mermaid’s rock or at the alchemists’ window to survey a nature dispersing itself in change. But he was more than observer in his desire to see behind the maze [...] Then the spectators

post became that of the 'fixed eye', absorbed in contemplation, intent on penetrating to meaning and being. (Heuser 1958: 14-15)

Within the 'Lantern' and 'Candle' we may see a more microcosmic example of this visual evolution as the spectatorship Hopkins yearned to enact also opened himself up to the scrutiny of potential gazes. The two poems exemplify the ongoing battle between faith and doubt that Hopkins almost constantly fought, as well as the binary aspects of the resultant depression, and his fascination with the existential ideas thrown up by his own 'inscape'. They also show how the gaze itself may be subverted and turned to scrutinise Hopkins himself.

'The Lantern Out of Doors', a traditional sonnet in some aspects (fourteen lines, mostly iambic), but also one that deviates slightly from the form (altered rhyme scheme, use of quatrains and tercets, counterpointed lines), conveys an image of a speaker who gazes at a traveller's glowing lantern in the dark, which soon sets him to religious speculation. The first line of the poem sets up the dichotomous relationship between the oppositional concepts of light and dark in a typically iambic meter: 'Sometimes a lantern moves along the night.' (l. 1) The imagery and meter convey movement, transition, and emphasise the claustrophobic nature of the enveloping darkness. The rhythm is basic, with alternating unstressed and stressed iambic feet, however, the second line, while also seemingly iambic, disturbs this through its punctuated pauses. The full-stop at the end of the first line makes it sound declarative, but the fragmentary line that follows halts its progression. The form of the poem reflects the necessary grasping for perception in the darkness that the speaker experiences, and conveys the speaker's questioning of who it is that bears this light in the night. We may witness this in the assonance of the false vowel 'w' that is repeated in lines 3-4: 'I think; where from and bound, I wonder, where,/ With, all down darkness wide, his wading light?' (ll. 3-4). The rhythm begins to catch on itself, the false vowel sounds of 'where', 'wonder', 'with', 'wide', and 'wading' constructing a mental image of the unsurpassable obscurity of the dark scene Hopkins creates. This also has the effect of foregrounding and emphasising the role of light in both a visual and semiological sense. The speaker is 'bound' by the darkness, captured in obscurity, as his treatment of perception recreates his wavering faith and the difficulty he sometimes has of seeing 'his' light. The image of a distant light amidst the darkness evokes images of hope, enlightenment,

and even creation: 'And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from darkness' (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*: 11). This sets up an associative semiotic dichotomy between light and darkness, perception and obscurity, as well as the similarly binary concepts of faith and doubt. Each opposition has obvious positive and negative connotations; however, due to the figure of the lantern, or candle within, these oppositions may be cast into flux as the liminal space between such ideas is explored. Paul L. Mariani elaborates on the significance of the meandering lantern:

The single winding light against the encircling 'marsh air' gloom which the speaker sees moving in the valley is a fine, existential image for the unsteady flickering quality of life as we see it even in those closest to us. No matter how we may try to pierce through the darkness, a particular life will at best present only a fragmented picture with large gaps between bright flickerings, and with life's final phase enshrouded in isolation and darkness, the last act known only to God and the soul.

(Mariani 1970: 103)

The fragility of the candle flame set against the darkness, and its potential associations of hope among despair, and life against death, bring to mind French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard's work on the semiotics and philosophical meaning of such a light source. Bachelard suggests that '[o]f all the objects in the world that invoke reverie, a flame calls forth images more readily than any other' (Bachelard 2012: 1). This occurs in the speaker of this poem, as Hopkins moves from exterior observation to a kind of internal reverie in the second quatrain.

Hopkins aligns images of light with personal identity in the second stanza, as he describes how 'Men go by me, whom either beauty bright/ In mould or mind or what not else makes rare' (ll. 5-6). The lantern's light sets him on the path of reverie; he begins to see light as a quality that is embodied in people as he describes the 'Rich beams' that 'rain against our much-thick and marsh air' (ll. 7-8). The opening line of the second quatrain of the octave repositions the metrical emphasis into a spondee, as the lexical feet 'men' and 'go' reinforce the transition to a more insular subject matter. The subtle change of meter creates a much more intimate feeling than the 'wading' obscurity of the first quatrain. Hopkins seems to be extolling the value of those individuals who can cast light on his own obscurity and depression, correlating the overt connection between the self and candle with an intimate link between himself and his associates. This may potentially be an acknowledgment

to the influence of close friend Robert Bridges. Robert Bernard Martin states that in 1877, the year of this poem's composition, it was '[a]s if the return to writing poetry had fanned his need of greater warmth in Bridges' friendship' (Martin 1991: 256-57), before quoting a letter from Hopkins that impelled Bridges to use Hopkins's Christian name in their correspondence. The potential reference to Bridges' 'rich beams' of influence that he held over Hopkins that may be extinguished when 'death or distance buys them quite' further embellishes the idea that it may represent the two friends who only saw each other 'an average of once a year' (Martin 1991: 257) in the twelve years leading up to Hopkins's death.

The transition of the speaker's positivity, as he moves from speaking of those who inspire him with their luminosity, to his ruminations on death and distance continue into the sestet. The first line again combines images of life and light, as the repetition of 'Death or distance' is said to 'soon consume them: wind' (l.1). This line suggests the speaker's inability to trace the light mentioned in the first quatrain once it moves beyond his view, while in its enjambment it also places emphasis on the word 'wind'; Hopkins states that what he means is 'how the eye winds/only in the sense that its focus or point of sight winds and that coincides with a point of the object and winds with that' (Hopkins 2009: 235). However, the word also adds value to the metaphor of the candle as representative of the fragility of life as the other elemental meaning of the word threatens the light source. It represents the threat of extinguishment of the candle, and therefore in effect the end of perception and life. This is given much more credence when examining the rhyme scheme of the final sestet of the sonnet; in the first tercet the rhyme scheme follows the established pattern (wind, end, mind), but then Hopkins toys with the traditional sonnet ending structure by eschewing the standard rhyming couplet, reversing the rhyme from a CDC form to DCD. This has a disorientating effect on the poem, especially after the distinctly ABBA format of the opening octave. It creates a system of half rhymes between the phonetically similar lexemes, destabilising the sonnet as Hopkins moves to a much more spiritual discussion. The poem begins to flicker, like the light of a candle, in a reflection of Hopkins's own fears and doubts.

He frets he will lose connection with the 'rich beams' that he eyes after, affirming his ideas of the importance of perception through the

maxim 'out of sight is out of mind' (l. 11). Ultimately, however, Hopkins places his faith in religion at the denouement of the sonnet, drawing together his inability to perceive the lantern in the darkness with Christ's omniscience. He juxtaposes the notion of 'out of sight is out of mind' through the emphasis the meter puts on the opening of the next line 'Christ minds' (l. 12). Again, there is a potential variability of meaning here, as this utterance may be construed to refer to the religious mind or how Christ 'minds' in the sense of caring, or indeed through holy omniscience. The poem, as a whole, appears to speak of the difficulty of remaining pious in the face of doubt, be it religious or personal. Doubt becomes analogous with obscurity; the speaker's attempts to delineate and identify the lantern of the title are representative of the internal struggles of depression and the difficulty of clinging on to positivity. Yet the speaker still finds hope in Christ, his 'first, fast, last friend' (l. 14).

'The Candle Indoors', written in 1879 and intended as a companion piece to 'The Lantern Out of Doors', covers similar themes from a slightly altered perspective, as may be assumed from the title. This is important, as semantically 'Out of doors' and 'Indoors' have very different connotations—the former is clearly less safe than the latter, there is more ambiguous potential of threat in the 'outdoors'. This is embodied in the poem's form and wordplay, as it presents themes and imagery found in 'The Lantern Out of Doors' in a subtly different way. Unlike its predecessor, which positioned the speaker amidst the dark obscurity that triggered his rather negative ratiocinations, 'The Candle Indoors' places the speaker in a much closer proximity to the light, therefore altering perceptions of the light itself, its associations, and the presence of the pressing darkness at the circumference of the illumination. Instead of musing on 'where,/ with all down darkness wide, his wading light', the speaker instead describes the effects of candle-light with intimate focus. They 'muse at how its being puts blissful back/ With yellowy moisture mild night's blear-all black'. (ll. 2-3). The switch from the alliterative 'w' sound in 'Lantern' to the repetitive 'b' sound creates a much more open and positive tone to the stumbling thickness of the previous poem's false-vowel assonance. This is reinforced by the poem's subject matter in this initial quatrain, as instead of gazing in from the darkness towards the light, Hopkins is instead enveloped in the candle's immediate aura and looks out past the confines of the illumination towards obscurity. Still, however, the candle's physicality and attributes

as both physical object and phenomenological light source cause these perceptions to remain fragile. It only ‘puts [...] back’ the ‘all black’ of night with ‘yellowy moisture’. It is a damp light that seeps into darkness, softening its edges as opposed to eliminating it completely. It emboldens the darkness beyond, creating a liminal transition space between light and dark that emphasises the discourse between binary archetypes of metaphor, while also aligning with the corollary oppositions of religious faith and doubt, as well as states of depression.

The candle intimates human activity in the second quatrain, as Hopkins begins to link the image of the candle with the internal qualities of faith. He uses the candle as a means to access the ‘inscape’, which resonates in Gaston Bachelard’s musings on the nature of the candle as it is ‘no longer an object of perception. It has become a philosophical object’ (Bachelard 2012: 22). It becomes an object that may be read by Hopkins, which in turn becomes a semiological sign of familial activity and Godliness. The second quatrain of the octave details Hopkins’s interpretation of the candle as implying night-work (‘What task what fingers ply’ [l. 5]), before considering the workers’ dedication to God. Upon asking this, the poem transitions to the inscape of the self and the internal flame that represents faith. Robert Boyle suggests that ‘there are two types of candle and two indoor places involved, one the real candle in someone’s house and the other Hopkins’s own fire of life, the vital candle set up in his heart, lighted by Christ’ (Boyle 1961: 74).

The candle becomes a symbol of the self, Hopkins imploring the sonnet’s reader to ‘Mend first and vital candle in close heart’s vault;/ You there are master, do your own desire;’ (ll. 10-11). This link between the candle and individual identity is also one explored by Bachelard; it is what he calls the ‘living lamp’, suggesting that ‘[w]hat burns well burns high. Consciousness and the flame have the same destiny in verticality’ (Bachelard 2012: 19). Hopkins’s close friend Robert Bridges criticised the central metaphor in this poem, to which Hopkins responded: ‘Though the analogy in the Candle sonnet may seem forced, it is an “autobiographical” fact that I was influenced and acted on the way there said’ (Hopkins 1955: 85). Hopkins seems to be basing this poetic moment on reality, suggesting that he did indeed experience these feelings in the light of a candle—encouraging Bachelard’s ideas on the link between reverie and flame-light. Although the candle as a symbol of the human spirit may be strongly obvious, it is at the same time subtly

nuanced. The candle flame's fragility speaks excellently for the fallibility of life, as it may be snuffed in an instant or burn over time. The light the candle creates is also extremely intimate, creating an image of solitude that vignettes an individual within a focused area of illumination. The candle represents major aspects of Hopkins's life; the candle's reflexive relationship with darkness mirrors his lapses into doubt; the focused limits of its light represents the interiorised ideas of instress and inscape, as well as the isolation and solitude he often felt while pursuing his Jesuit piety.

The final two tercets that make the closing sestet of the sonnet follow the unorthodox rhyme scheme established in the closing lines of 'The Lantern Out of Doors', with the initial CDC rhyme being reversed to make a DCD in the final stanza. This places emphasis on the central foot of each rhyme, in this case 'vault' and 'liar', as Hopkins becomes much more self-reflective. John Pick argues that 'Hopkins turns upon himself and closes with a terrifying question that echoes all the priest's own yearning for perfection and his anguished fear that he has himself failed in himself to live up to what he expects of others' (Pick 1966: 97). Hopkins's turning the poem's gaze upon himself is very apt for a poem which, in connection with its companion piece, observes the potential issues of differing viewpoints and perspectives. Hopkins appears to find hypocrisy in his own questioning of the night-workers dedication to God—'God to aggrandise, God to glorify' (l. 8)—when his own faith so often wavered. He asks of himself 'What hinders? Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault/ In a neighbour deft-handed?' (ll. 12-13). He has become 'beam blind', unable to see the 'rich beams' of life and inspiration due to his own darkness of mind. He dwells on his guilt at criticising others but not addressing his own faults.

The figure of the candle itself takes on extended meaning when considering it within its contemporary nineteenth-century context, and a close analysis of the object itself may yet still illuminate Hopkins's poem further. The candle maintained a uniquely individual quality in this period due to the mass influx of networked and industrial light sources. In comparison to the gas lighting that was introduced to towns and cities in the 1830s, and the electricity that challenged it in the latter half of the century, the candle was distinctly more intimate, and cultivated a much closer psychological relationship with its bearer. As Virginia Mescher states, '[w]ith candles, one did not have to be concerned with spilled

lamp fuel; broken or exploding lights or replacement of chimneys, wicks, and other lamp hardware. Candles also offered more portability and were more economical than lamps' (Mescher, 2008). They were also more readily available following innovations in their mass production, as well as due to the capability of producing rushlights in one's own home. Michael Faraday's first Christmas Lecture in 1860 was on the subject of candles, the scientist stating that '[t]here is no better, there is no more open door by which you can enter the study of natural philosophy than by considering the physical phenomena of a candle' (Faraday 2011: 1). The candle could inspire not only scientifically, but also just as much philosophically, and as may be seen in Hopkins's poems, spiritually and emotionally, too.

There was a connection that emerged between individual and light in this period; a connection that can deepen our appreciation of the duality of Hopkins's companion poems. To further establish this relationship, it is imperative to again consider the traits of candlelight. It was overtly individual; lighting historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes that much of the public resisted the invasiveness of illumination networks in favour for the control and agency they could achieve with the solitary, portable candle flame:

By keeping their independent lights, people symbolically distanced themselves from a centralised supply. The traditional oil-lamp or candle in a living-room expressed both a reluctance to be connected to the gas mains and the need for a light that fed on some visible fuel [...] the open light succeeded to the place that had been occupied by the ancient hearth fire. (Schivelbusch 1995: 162)

Gaston Bachelard interpolates this idea into something much more psychological and philosophical than Schivelbusch's historical viewpoint, as he speaks of the inherent perceptions of flame-lights:

The electric lightbulb will never provoke in us the reveries of this living lamp. We have entered an age of administered light. Our only role is to flip a switch. We are no more than the mechanical subject of a mechanical gesture. We cannot take advantage of this act to become, with legitimate pride, the subject of the verb 'to light'. (Bachelard 2012: 64)

What Bachelard and Schivelbusch address is the comparative agency and psychological relationship the candle was imbued with in the face of

other light sources' introduction in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The quality of the candle's light, its efficacy in comparison to the other bearers of illumination in this period, must also be considered. Candles are described by Charles Dickens as in effect making darkness more pronounced. Describing Miss Havisham's room in *Great Expectations*, he states how '[c]ertain wintry branches of candles on the high chimney-piece faintly lighted the chamber, or, it would be more expressive to say, faintly troubled its darkness' (Dickens 1996: 84). The nature of candlelight symbolism suggests the fragility of the boundaries between light and dark; it only permits perception within a comparatively small space, capturing its bearers within a blinding aura of illumination while also emboldening the darkness beyond and opening up potential gazes that scrutinise from within the obscurity.

Hopkins's poems expose this idea, as they each intimate how agency, power and the mind interact when confronted from different perspectives. Jacques Lacan's theories on 'the Gaze' are vital to understanding the operation of this literary candlelight. Lacan's early work was largely influenced by Sigmund Freud, and mostly psychoanalytic. Later in his career, however, he began to be interested in techniques and psychologies of vision. His work on the Gaze developed from his theories on the 'mirror stage', a key part of a child's development when the division between the real and imaginary becomes firmer. This discord between symbol and reality is at the heart of the Gaze, Lacan summarising it as:

In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call the Gaze.

(Lacan 1998: 73)

Slavoj Žižek elaborates on Lacan's theory: 'the eye viewing the object is on the side of the subject, while the Gaze is on the side of the object. When I look at an object, the object is already gazing at me, and from a point at which I cannot see it' (Žižek 2000: 104). Within the candle itself there is a divergence of the relationship between subject and object, of bearer and recipient of the Gaze. By the nature of its light, the candle multiplies the role of 'object' within the structure: it both attracts the Gaze yet enables the subject to achieve perception of other objects. The

Gaze is drawn towards the candle from the outside, as may be seen in ‘The Lantern Out of Doors’, yet in the aura of light it disperses, the Gaze is then drawn to what is illuminated—as in ‘The Candle Indoors’. The poems express Lacan’s definition of the Gaze as ‘denoting at the same time power (it enables us to exact control over the situation, to occupy the position of the master) and impotence (as bearers of the gaze, we are reduced to the role of passive witnesses to the adversary’s action)’ (Zizek 2000: 72).

Hopkins’s poems encapsulate this idea: the mutable binary of power and passivity that is so inherent within the candle’s material and illuminatory qualities, aligning with similarly fluid oppositions of faith and doubt, hope and depression, and piety and poetry. Consider the perspective shifts of the poems; in ‘The Lantern Out of Doors’, the speaker gazes in at the lantern that ‘interests our eyes’ (l. 2), causing Hopkins to muse on the identity of the individual who wanders the ‘darkness wide’ (l. 4). Hopkins’s perspective in this imagery places him within darkness. He battles with his own perception amidst the obscurity as he begins to look for the light of inspiration or religion, as he searches for the ‘beauty bright’ and ‘rich beams’. He is gazing inward, isolated from the light yet still yearning for it. His agency, and the control he has over defining his own self is obscured, as he states: ‘What most I may eye after, be in at the end/ I cannot, and out of sight is out of mind’ (ll. 10-11). His position within the darkness is reflected in his despair. Hopkins at once holds both power and agency over the object of the Gaze, in this case the traveller’s lantern, as he observes from a distance, but also passivity and potential threat as he stands amidst the darkness. This reflects the liminal mental state of Hopkins in the latter years of his writing life: he suffered from an internal struggle between his depression and the need to find light in religion.

The altered perspective of ‘The Candle Indoors’ subtly changes this gaze-based reading. In this poem, the speaker, or Hopkins, finds himself within the candle’s light, which gives him a much firmer sense of control than his position in darkness. The candle pushes back the obscure darkness, but due to the efficacy of the candle’s light, it does not eradicate the threat and ensure perception totally—it merely ‘puts [...] back’ the dark with a damp, moist light. It is within the candle’s light that Hopkins ponders the inner candle, another potential indicator of the dichotomous concepts of light and dark within his *inscape*. He finds that

within this illuminated aura ‘You there are master, do your own desire’ (l. 11). Just as the candle suggests agency, and the side of Lacan’s Gaze that denotes power, Hopkins finds the potential to motivate his inner self. His doubts, however, ‘hinder’ him, as he again uses binaries of light and dark symbolism to question his own piety, asking himself if he is ‘beam-blind, yet to a fault’ (l. 12). The mutable characteristics of candlelight, and its flexible relationship with the Gaze, embody Gerard Manley Hopkins’s beliefs, love of poetry, and the relief he finds in it, as well as representing his fears, doubts, depression and pious guilt. The candle’s associations pivot within the centre of these oppositional concepts. It held a relationship with the individual that other contemporary light sources could not. However, due to the liminality of candlelight’s boundaries of light and dark, it embodies both safety and threat. The frayed edges of light make the relationship between light and dark more fluid, encapsulating Hopkins’s ‘split consciousness’ (Sobolev 2011: 301). Sobolev succinctly details this as he writes of how

[I]n the visionary sonnets the celebration of the visionary gleam of nature is contaminated by the acute awareness of the unredeemed materiality of human existence. And, conversely, in the dark sonnets the awakening gloom of human existence is lightened by the biblical substructure of its presentation, by glimmering hope and, finally, by an almost heretical feeling of the unusual intimacy with God.

(Sobolev 2011: 301)

We are presented with a dual-Hopkins here by Sobolev, a man who was at once overawed and honoured by his seemingly contradictory life as a Jesuit priest and poet. In these two poems, we are presented with a shifting narrative gaze, as Hopkins pivots around the binary duality of light and dark, which has the effect of reinforcing the different critical perspectives Hopkins applied to his self, his faith and his work. At the centre of these relationships is the liminal space of the candle, which Hopkins, in a typical example of *inscape*, internalises into something that focuses on the liminality of the spaces between binary concepts of light and dark, and by semiological extension, the dichotomous relationship between faith and doubt.

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