

## GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS DRAFTS THE LIGHT

“...I am writing a popular account of Light and the Ether...and my hope is to explain things thoroughly and make the matter, as far as I go in it, perfectly intelligible.”

–Hopkins

Empedocles taught fire behind the eye: the eye’s diaphanous membrane lets loose those leaves of light which congregate to the perceived body. Plato, to a degree, agrees: fire, fawn-fire, leaps from forests in the deep eye, mingles with sunlight, erects a Body of Vision: a sill, swelling and shriveling, ruled by swivels of its soul, where things touched by light—body, body of a boy, the beauty of him—“enter seer through the eyes.” ~~But the eye is a limb of the mind, and the mind is eyes of Christ. Channels to teeming charnel: whiskers on barleystalks and river’s skin two million brushstrokes, boys lanky as barleystalks; sea flashing silver, coiled tiger; boys with striped socks and damp lips, Malebranche in laps, under an ash; and a blot on the long ash, and blonde down burls of thigh, and its rushes, and its moles, and the fruit on the ash, the hitch and plait of the shirt taut in the teeth, the slip of hip, and it’s a thrush on the ash when the eye is a hand of flesh and the hand fills the hand fills.~~ To Aristotle, light is satiation (Actuality) of a medium wishing (Potentiality) transparency; objects with potentiality to color, when in light, attain actuality to color. Color, via air, enters the glassy nave of the eye and thence rides blood down to the heart, that gatherer-of-senses, the Sensus communis. Vision, says Aristotle, is the soul of the eye, the Final Cause breathing purpose into animal.

~~But the eye is a branch of mind.~~ The ancients were wrong: the soul witnesses light, mote among mote, but does not forge it. Light performs out of doors. How, then, the sojourn in the eye? Look—boys dive into the Liffey; they float there, ~~skin~~ The tiger ocean reels the river in and with it a garland of ripening boys. Space intervening the eye and ~~but~~ what it sees is not empty, being infused with such riparian fluid, the Ether, which bears light just as water bears boys to the sea. ~~Vision happens in a kind of estuary: the eye is limb of the~~ The ethereal medium, posits Newton, is far more rarefied than air, more elastic, and upon contact vibrates more minutely: the vibrations of air “made by a man’s ordinary voice succeeding at more than half a foot or a foot distance, but those of ether at a less distance than the hundredth-thousandth part of an inch.” Ether palpitates, expanding and compressing: when crumbs of light take compressed ether-parts, the denseness brought about by compression Reflects light; when ether expands, light sluices into interstice between two vibrations (as the drop of the foot through an imagined step), and is Refracted. Vision, then, is a happening in mingles of ether and sparked flesh. In the eye’s proscenium, the Retina, is the sheer meshing (like pithwork under an orange rind) of the ends, or Capillamenta, of the Optic Nerve. Light sets these pulsing, and the nerve carries vibration into the sensorium of the brain, which translates movement to color, to vision, vision of the beauty of a boy, vision of the beauty of this vision of a boy.

But ether is so rarefied as to be invisible, and still ether folds light. One sees light but not ether. Where, then, ends ether, where begins light? Put another way: ether is self, say, and light desire. Is desire self? Certainly not, yet each acts upon the other. ~~Lord, why does my desire make me in your eyes?~~ When one is desirous, what is meant is "I am alight in desire, light with desire, heavy with it," inside all that yearning, self and desire intertwined. Carrying this through, then: ether is a thing forever alight with desire; take light away, and there is no need for ether. Yet, light propagates. So, something shall bear it.