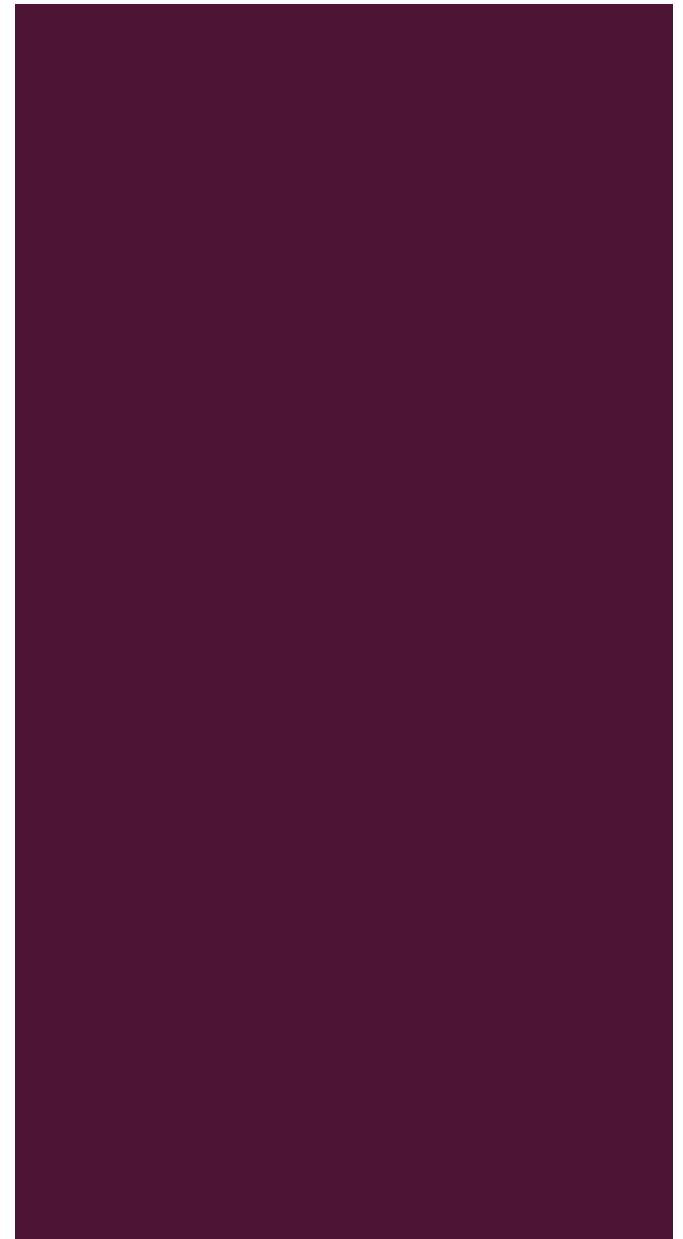


- "I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark, Not Day"
by Gerard Manley Hopkins -
Comprehensive Analysis



CONTEXT

- Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark, Not Day' is a deeply personal and spiritual poem that reflects the poet's profound sense of despair, spiritual torment, and alienation from God. Written during a period of intense emotional and spiritual suffering, the poem belongs to Hopkins' 'terrible sonnets,' a series of poems that grapple with feelings of desolation, self-loathing, and a sense of separation from divine grace. Hopkins uses vivid imagery and dense, complex language to explore themes of spiritual desolation, internal suffering, and the idea of being lost or forsaken. The poem also touches on the notion of self-inflicted torment and the human condition of existential suffering.

STANZA BY STANZA ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2:

- "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day. / What hours, O what black hours we have spent"
- The poem opens with a stark image of waking into darkness, rather than daylight, reflecting the speaker's emotional and spiritual state. The word 'fell' suggests something oppressive or heavy, emphasizing the suffocating nature of the darkness the speaker experiences. This darkness is not merely physical but symbolic of the spiritual and emotional desolation that the speaker feels upon waking. The repetition of 'what hours, O what black hours' underscores the length and intensity of the speaker's suffering, marking the passage of time as a source of torment rather than relief. The speaker's use of 'we' suggests a deep internal conversation, possibly addressing their own heart or soul.

LINES 3-4:

- "This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went! / And more must, in yet longer light's delay."
- In these lines, the speaker reflects on the night and the torment their heart has experienced. The 'sights' and 'ways' that the heart has seen and traveled during the night suggest a mental or emotional journey filled with anguish. The speaker anticipates more suffering to come, as the 'light's delay' (the absence of divine or emotional relief) continues. This prolongation of suffering indicates that the speaker sees no immediate end to their despair, and that their emotional or spiritual torment will persist for some time.

LINES 5-6:

- • "With witness I speak this. But where I say / Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament"
- Here, the speaker emphasizes the depth and sincerity of their suffering by stating that they speak 'with witness'—as if calling upon a higher authority or truth to testify to their pain. When the speaker says 'hours,' they are not merely referring to brief moments of suffering but rather to a much longer period, stretching into 'years' and encompassing their entire 'life.' The speaker's 'lament' is therefore not just for the immediate moment but for a lifetime of spiritual anguish and alienation. This sense of prolonged suffering adds weight to the poem, as the speaker feels trapped in an unending cycle of despair.

LINES 7-8:

- "Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent / To dearest him that lives alas! away."
- The speaker's suffering is expressed through 'cries countless,' which suggests an overwhelming, repetitive outpouring of grief and despair. These cries are compared to 'dead letters,' letters that have been sent but never received, reinforcing the speaker's sense of isolation and hopelessness. The 'dearest him' likely refers to God, from whom the speaker feels estranged. The phrase 'lives alas! away' conveys a deep sense of sorrow and abandonment, as the speaker's cries to God are unanswered, as though God is distant and unreachable. The speaker's spiritual isolation is thus likened to being abandoned by a loved one who is absent or indifferent.

LINES 9-10:

- • "I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree / Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;"
- The speaker identifies themselves as 'gall' and 'heartburn,' both symbols of bitterness and internal pain. These metaphors suggest that the speaker's entire being is consumed by suffering, with 'gall' evoking a sense of bitterness and 'heartburn' symbolizing intense, burning pain. The speaker attributes their suffering to 'God's most deep decree,' suggesting that they believe their anguish is part of God's will or divine plan. However, this decree is 'bitter,' forcing the speaker to 'taste' their own suffering. The phrase 'my taste was me' suggests that the speaker's very identity has been consumed by their suffering—what they experience is not just an external force but something intrinsic to their being.

LINES 11-12

- "Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse. / Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours."
- In these lines, the speaker describes their body and spirit as being filled with a 'curse.' The imagery of 'bones,' 'flesh,' and 'blood' suggests that this curse is not just spiritual but physical as well—every part of the speaker's being is infused with suffering. The phrase 'selfyeast of spirit' introduces a metaphor in which the speaker's own spirit is likened to yeast that sours 'a dull dough.' This metaphor suggests that the speaker's inner self (the 'yeast') is responsible for their own suffering, which 'sours' or corrupts the spirit. The use of 'dull dough' implies that the speaker's life has become bland, heavy, and without vitality due to this internal corruption.

LINES 13-14:

- "I see / The lost are like this, and their scourge to be / As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse."
- The poem concludes with the speaker reflecting on 'the lost,' possibly referring to those who are spiritually damned or alienated from God. The speaker compares their own suffering to that of the lost, suggesting that they share a similar fate of being consumed by their 'sweating selves'—the internal torment that comes from self-awareness and spiritual isolation. However, the speaker believes that the suffering of the lost is even 'worse' than their own, hinting at a sense of impending doom or eternal torment. This closing reflection reinforces the speaker's sense of existential despair and spiritual alienation, as they view their suffering as part of a larger, universal condition of separation from divine grace.

KEY THEMES

- The central theme of the poem is spiritual despair, with the speaker expressing a profound sense of alienation from God. The speaker's cries to God are compared to 'dead letters,' emphasizing the futility of their attempts to reach out to a divine presence that feels distant and unresponsive. The sense of abandonment and separation from God runs throughout the poem, as the speaker grapples with the idea that their suffering is both endless and divinely ordained.
- Quotes:
 - 'Cries countless, cries like dead letters sent / To dearest him that lives alas! away.'
- These lines capture the speaker's feeling of abandonment and the futility of their attempts to connect with God.

SPIRITUAL DESPAIR AND ALIENATION

THE BURDEN OF SUFFERING AND SELF- LOATHING

- The speaker's suffering is both physical and emotional, with imagery of 'gall,' 'heartburn,' and 'blood' emphasizing the depth of their torment. The speaker's suffering is not only external but also internal, as they describe their spirit as 'souring' like yeast in dough. This metaphor highlights the idea that the speaker's suffering is self-inflicted or intrinsic to their identity, contributing to a sense of self-loathing.
- Quotes:
 - • 'I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree / Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;'
- These lines emphasize the speaker's internalization of their suffering and the bitterness of their existence.

The poem reflects on the inescapable nature of time and suffering, with the speaker suggesting that their suffering extends beyond the immediate moment into 'years' and 'life.' This sense of prolonged torment adds to the speaker's despair, as they see no end to their anguish and no relief from their spiritual isolation. The repetition of 'hours' and the suggestion that 'light's delay' will continue further emphasizes the relentless passage of time and the speaker's belief that their suffering will endure.

- Quotes:
- • 'What hours, O what black hours we have spent / This night!'
- The repetition of 'hours' underscores the speaker's awareness of the passage of time as a source of torment.

THE INESCAPABILITY OF TIME AND SUFFERING

MOOD OF THE POEM

- The mood of *I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark, Not Day* is one of profound despair, bitterness, and spiritual desolation. The speaker's tone is deeply introspective and anguished, as they reflect on their sense of abandonment by God and the weight of their suffering. The imagery of darkness, gall, and heartburn contributes to the poem's oppressive, claustrophobic mood.

LITERARY DEVICES

METAPHOR

- Hopkins uses metaphors throughout the poem to describe the speaker's suffering and sense of alienation. The speaker's soul is compared to "selfyeast of spirit," which sours "dull dough," symbolizing internal corruption and spiritual decay.

IMAGERY

- Vivid imagery of "gall," "heartburn," and "blood" conveys the physical and emotional intensity of the speaker's suffering. The use of "dead letters" as a metaphor for unanswered prayers adds to the poem's sense of spiritual isolation.

ALLUSION

- The reference to "dead letters" alludes to letters that are undelivered or ignored, symbolizing the speaker's feeling that their prayers or cries for help are not being heard by God.

REPETITION

- The repetition of words like "hours" and "cries" emphasizes the speaker's awareness of time and the overwhelming nature of their suffering. This repetition reinforces the sense of being trapped in a cycle of torment.

CONCLUSION

- Gerard Manley Hopkins' *I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark, Not Day* is a haunting meditation on spiritual despair, isolation, and the burden of suffering. Through vivid imagery and dense, introspective language, Hopkins conveys the speaker's profound sense of abandonment and alienation from God, as well as the internal torment that comes from self-loathing and the inescapability of time. The poem's relentless focus on darkness, suffering, and spiritual desolation creates a mood of existential anguish, as the speaker confronts the terrifying possibility of being forsaken by divine grace.