From Darkness to Light explores from a variety of angles the subject of museum lighting in exhibition spaces in America, Japan, and Western Europe throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Written by an array of international experts, these collected essays gather perspectives from a diverse range of cultural sensibilities. From sensitive discussions of Tintoretto's unique approach to the play of light and darkness as exhibited in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice, to the development of museum lighting as part of Japanese art's self-fashioning, via the story of an epic American painting on tour, museum illumination in the work of Henry James, and lighting alterations at Chatsworth, this book is a treasure trove of illuminating contributions.

The collection is at once a refreshing insight for the enthusiastic museum-goer, who is brought to an awareness of the exhibit in its immediate environment, and a wide-ranging scholarly compendium for the professional who seeks to proceed in their academic or curatorial work with a more enlightened sense of the lighted space.

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Cover image: Jacopo Tintoretto, The Adoration of the Magi, Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice (graphic elaboration by Pier Giovanni Possamai, The University of Venice, Ca' Foscari). Cover design: Anna Ga...
In hundreds of paintings, Tintoretto presented a world without sun. Clouds swamp the sky, ripples of mist veil the horizon, candles and torches do not shed light, fires and fireplaces glow red in the distance. Still, his paintings are soaked in light. My chapter will be a short journey into the life and works of Jacomo Robusti, in search of that mysterious source that makes the world’s darkness visible.

The exciting and tormented existence of Tintoretto can be summarized — just as in the title of this book — as a journey from darkness to light. His painting is characterised by the revelation of light, and it transcends the traditional opposition between drawing and colour. As a result, those who write about Tintoretto are drawn inescapably to luminous metaphors. He has been compared to a beacon, to a thunderbolt, to a fire flower, to lightning, to a torch.

In 1648 Carlo Ridolfi, his earliest biographer, wrote that his brush was a ‘lightning which terrified everybody with a thunderbolt’. In 1660 Marco Boschini, one of the most acute interpreters of his painting,
strikingly summarized Tintoretto’s nature in his *Carta del Navegar pittoresco*. Tintoretto, he wrote, ‘came into the world with a torch in his hand’.² It is with this image that I am going to begin my story.

Tintoretto’s apprenticeship is undertaken during the night. A young artist looking for a master, he is trying to teach himself the art of painting. At this time his name is Jacomo Robusti aka Tentor (the dyer), and he is not yet Tintoretto — but I will refer to him using his more famous name. He has managed to copy the small clay models of Michelangelo’s statues in the Florence Cappelle Medicee — the very famous *Dawn, Twilight, Night* and *Day*, ‘which he studied especially, making numberless drawing after them in the light of an oil lamp [*lucerna*]’ — as Ridolfi wrote — ‘in order to compose, thanks to the strong shadows made by those lights, strong forms in high relief.’³

This biographer also informs us that Tintoretto ‘practiced making small wax and clay models, dressing them up with rags, carefully showing their limbs under the drapings of the clothes, inside small houses and perspectives made with wood and cardboard, placing small lights for the windows, arranging thus light and shadows.’⁴ Therefore in this preliminary stage of his study, lights and tiny flames were used by the painter in order to perfect his drawing and learn to give relief to forms.

Several years have gone by. Now Tintoretto sells small paintings in the Mercerie, as do many young painters, and those who are unknown and do not have patrons. They exhibit their work in the shops of the Venice commercial area. ‘And among the things he exhibited there were two portraits, one of himself with a relief in his hand, and one of his brother playing the cythara, as if it were night, in such a terrific way that everybody was astounded’.⁵

His self-portrait made before he was thirty (ca.1546–48, Philadelphia Museum of Art) also portrays the painter ‘as if it were night’ — it is the only established self-portrait among his many early canvasses. He emerges from the black background of the canvas as if he were coming to meet us. Light — coming from an invisible source outside the

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⁴ Ibid., p. 8.
⁵ Ibid., p. 10.
painting — falls on his face, giving relief to his handsome features and making his penetrating blue-green eyes shine.

Therefore, in this second stage of his development, the illusion of night becomes a technical way to give relief to his own talent. Indeed, the following couplet was composed regarding his early portraits:

Si Tinctorettus noctis sic lucet in umbris,
exorto faciet quid radiante Die?6

Tintoretto is besieged by night from the beginning. He works in a mezzanine in San Cassan — and in that dark area of Santa Croce mezzanines have tiny windows, darkened by the shadows of the palaces. However, he also works in a metaphorical darkness, as his name is still unknown. The young painter sees his opportunity to emerge from this metaphorical darkness by means of the night: his ability to create the illusion of darkness elicits wonder and respect. Tintoretto creates this artificial night by arranging a small theatre of the tiny models in his study. His fiery talent needs darkness.

Given such beginnings, one might imagine that Tintoretto will become a painter of the night. On the contrary: he becomes the painter of light. This is how his colleague and art theoretician Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo defined him, having met him and having seen him work: he is the master of ‘what is light’, the master of ‘reflected lights […] inferior to no one’.7

I have not seen every single painting created by Tintoretto, in spite of so many years of research on this favourite painter of mine. But I feel I can say that in the 200 or 350 paintings by Tintoretto (the question of attribution is controversial) the sky is never clear. The sun rarely shines; it is never at its zenith; it is almost always invisible. A radiant sun appears only twice in his work, in two youthful ‘fables’: the Phaeton (1542, Modena Galleria Estense) and the Zeus and Semele (1543–44, Padua Museo Civico). But the Sun here is a mythological divinity — and Tintoretto derived it from a literary source, Ovid’s Metamorphoses. It is a narrative feature, a deadly sun, lacking any metaphoric or artistic connotation. In those early experiments Tintoretto is interested in the

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6 Ibid., p. 10. Ridolfi does not specify who the ‘kind spirit’ was who wrote these lines.
foreshortening, the plastic rendering of figures, in the ‘sottinsu’ (seen from below), not yet in luminous effects.

Tintoretto instead is the painter of clouds: he will paint them in any form, consistency, and colour. Thick and white as cotton wool; frayed and misty, of a livid blue; white and golden in the sky where the sun has set; black like cannonballs; orange, lit up by the lightning of a storm as by the flash of a camera.

Almost all the scenes painted by Tintoretto are set at the limits of the day: at its beginning, at dawn, or at its ending, at twilight and at sunset (the most extraordinary example of this ‘ora magica che volge al desio’ is the Two Marys (1582–87) on the ground floor of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Thus, among all the works Tintoretto painted between 1537 (the date of his beginning as an independent master) and 1561, only a single one is set in what we could define, in cinema terms, ‘esterno notte’. It is *Judith and Holophernes*, dated unanimously around 1550 (Museo del Prado). Tintoretto challenges and subverts iconographic convention from his earliest work (his most striking talent is his capacity for invention) and in this painting he does not set the scene of the beheading in the dark tent of the sleeping commander, but on its threshold. Judith, followed by her handmaid (who is carrying the white bag in which to wrap up Holophernes’s head), advances with sword outstretched towards the victim, who is asleep on his back. In the sky, a thin crescent moon shines. But even though the moon is in its first quarter, it is not a dark night. In the dark blueish-grey sky one can make out the (white) clouds, and Judith does not need a torch or a light to aim with her blade at Holophernes’s jugular vein. The painter’s creativity is expressed in the foreshortening of the sleeping man and the drappings of the curtain. In this painting — maybe intended as a ceiling picture — light still has a purely narrative function. This is the only narrative moon in all of Tintoretto’s oeuvre: all the other moons, scythes as thin as eyelashes, are attributes of the Immaculate Conception.

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8 Or else they are full moons; globular, orange, luminous halos, as in *The Agony in the Garden* and in the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, both in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. The latter moon was painted by Tintoretto between 1578 and 1581: there are no lights or lamps in the painting, as it is not yet night. The orange light dripping from the roof comes from the moon: but it cannot be seen, and indeed we only see its halo. The result is flickering, unnatural, metaphysical light without a source, ‘gratuita come la grazia’: every thing, every presence achieves ‘further meaning, even if remaining visibly its own self’; see Adriano Mariuz, *L’adorazione dei pastori di Tintoretto. Una stravagante invenzione* (Verona: Scripta edizioni, 2010), p. 34.
Instead Tintoretto paints many ‘night interiors’. Although he masters a notable sensitivity to landscape, and although gardens, woods, countryside, rivers and lakes appear sporadically in his work and are painted with great virtuosity, his imagination recurs more often to the placing of figures in a closed space. This could be defined as a ‘scene’, and it will acquire more and more theatrical characteristics as time goes by. Well, how does Tintoretto lights up his dark interiors, which lack windows or doors?

It will surprise the viewer to discover how scanty and rare are diegetic lights in Tintoretto’s work — that is, the sources of light inside the representation, visible in the painted scene. One can count them on one hand and classify them in two categories: the taper (or the tapers); and the torch (fiaccola).

During the research for my biography of Tintoretto, I explored the role Bramin (Abramino) Milan played in the artist’s life. He was a friend of his — in 1567 he became godfather to one of his sons, Giovanni Battista — his patron and commissioner (an authoritative member of the Scuola di San Rocco, whose guardian grande he became in 1583). Bramin Milan was a speziere (spice merchant) at Melon, with a shop on the Rialto, and he specialized in the sale of wax. In reading the documents that concerned his trade, I learnt that one could obtain candles of any shape,

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weight, price and colour, and candles made of white wax were the most expensive, while the yellow ones were the most vulgar. In Venice, candles were used extravagantly, more for religious than functional purposes: one lit a candle to express devotion, to pray, rather than to create light. This was generally the purpose of Tintoretto’s ‘tapers’. We find them in various works of his, including two with the same subject: the *Presentation of Christ at the Temple.*

In the first painting, created in 1547–48 for the altar of the guild of fishermen (*compravendi pesce*) and displayed in Santa Maria dei Carmini in Venice, a crowd, witnessing the event, emerges from a black background. These extras hold in their bare hands four very long and thin white candles. The presence of candles is not incidental. The liturgical calendar commemorates the Presentation of Christ in the Temple on 2 February, called ‘Candelora’, that is the day when ‘candles were blessed and every lamp was lit up in the churches.’ This was done to remind people of the words of Simeon the Just, who, according to Luke, took Jesus in his arms, recognizing in him ‘the light that enlightens people.’ The *chiaroscuro*, of which Tintoretto will become the master, is still crude in this painting, the shadows are ‘roughly carved’, according to Pallucchini, who, however, appreciated the constructive density revealed by the young artist.\(^{10}\)

In the second painting, produced a few years later (between 1550 and 1555) for the altar of the guild of the barrel-makers (*botteri*) and now displayed in the Gallerie dell’Accademia in Venice, there are only two candles, thicker and shorter, surmounted by a red-golden flame and stuck into silver candle holders. In this painting, however, the light flows in from above, from an invisible opening — and, a little less powerfully, from the left, through an equally invisible window or door. For the first time we observe that the source of light is outside the painting. The candles have merely ritual and ornamental functions; they are only a homage to the feast of the Candelora and to the logic of composition, which the painter does not break as yet. But his light is no longer physical.

The torch (*fiaccola*) appears in the best night interior of Tintoretto’s early period, his *Saint Roch Cures the Plague-Stricken* in the Church of San Rocco (painted when he was thirty-one, in 1549).

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We see a torch (fiaccola), but the flame is white and it does not send out any light. In the background there is a window, through which the moonlight streams. The figures, however, are illuminated by a light source from the left, outside the painting: as if someone had opened a door. Otherwise the light of the painting is all internal: it is spread out by the flesh of the diseased, by the halo of the saint.

This spectacular night scene is unusual within Tintoretto’s work. Only from the 1560s does his research concentrate on light. But his first night effect experiment is still naif.

His Last Supper was painted for the altar of the Most Holy Sacrament in the Church of San Simeone at the beginning of the 1560s, perhaps a little after 1561. We see, quite visible and almost tawdry, a chandelier. It is an unusual object, since, oddly enough, in the many interiors painted by Tintoretto, hardly any chandeliers are present. There are two in another of his paintings of the same period, The Wedding at Cana — painted in 1561 for the refectory of the Padri Crociferi, now in the Church of the Salute in Venice. They hang from the coffered ceiling of the nuptial banquet: they are silver, decorated with ribbons. But the white candles fixed in their arms are not burning: the feast takes place in the daytime and they have a purely ornamental function within the painting.¹¹

¹¹ A lamp had also appeared in a painting of the 40s (ca.1546): Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This work, in a private collection in Bologna, is accepted as autograph in the catalogue by Pallucchini-Rossi (vol. 1, p. 347) but several other scholars deny its attribution to Tintoretto. I will limit myself to underlining that one sees in it a strange portable lamp.
As the Gospels tell, the Last Supper takes place on the evening of Shrove Thursday in the room of a house in Jerusalem (available to Jesus and his disciples thanks to a woman who sympathized with Christ). Tintoretto painted the subject of the Last Supper many times, but never in the same way. In the older version, painted for the Church of San Marcuola (1547), he was content to present a humble and dark room, lacking any illumination (no torch, lamp or lantern). The sources of light, a stronger one on the right and a more feeble one on the left, are both outside the scene.

The maximum luminosity is shed by the white, patched up, tablecloth. The figure of Christ and the haloes of the apostles radiate out light. There is no diegetic light either in the San Felice Last Supper (1559, now in the Church of Saint-François-Xavier, Paris). In the San Simeone Last Supper on the contrary, Tintoretto concentrates his attention on the search for ‘lume’ (light) (‘di lume’). The chandelier, hanging from the ceiling, looms above the table where Christ and his apostles are sitting. It is a cumbersome metal — perhaps silver — structure, with fourteen candles on two levels. In the painting one can also see a servant, carrying a tall taper, burning with a high flame. Although the shadows of the light on the bodies and the spaces around are interesting, the experiment — perhaps entrusted to his studio by Tintoretto — cannot be said to be successful.

But it has taught the painter a lot. Immediately after, between 1563 and 1564, he paints his most atmospheric ‘esterno notte’, the Transportation of Christ to the Tomb — the altarpiece of the Bassi family’s chapel in the Church of San Francesco della Vigna (commissioned by Zuanne, who died around 1561, and by Zuan Alberto). When the altar was taken apart, the canvas was mutilated and reduced, and we can have only have a partial idea of the original composition (represented by a surviving etching). The scene takes place in the evening — as told in the Gospel of Mark. Joseph of Arimathea has asked and obtained from Pilate permission to take down Christ’s body from the cross and to bury it in his own tomb. Two women, at the entrance of the place where the body of the Saviour will be placed, are holding in their bare hands two very tall candles. These are very similar to those we saw in the Church of the Carmini: but this time the yellowish light radiating from the small flames illuminates the night. It is Tintoretto’s first night scene with a ‘natural’ light — in the sense that the light irradiates from
its source. Tintoretto’s biographer Ridolfi mentions the suggestiveness of this effect: ‘the servants with the lights that make lighter the darkness of the night’. However, the golden light that irradiates throughout the painting, and envelops not only the two women but also the body of the dead Christ, does not come really — or only — from those small flames. They are rather the reflection of a supernatural light that reveals the scene — as secret as the transportation of the body that should be done discreetly in order not to be observed — and makes it vibrate with pity and emotion. An even more powerful effect is achieved in the painting created shortly after (ca.1564) for the Scuola Grande di San Marco.

![Fig. 1.3 Tintoretto, The Finding of the Body of St Mark, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, ca.1564. Wikimedia. Public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacopo_Tintoretto_-_Finding_of_the_body_of_St_Mark_-_Yorck_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacopo_Tintoretto_-_Finding_of_the_body_of_St_Mark_-_Yorck_Project.jpg)

We are inside a dark church in Alexandria. This time there are three sources of light: one from the back of the church where a character holds a torch (fiaccola) in order to light up the contents of a tomb that has just been opened. But a blazing light radiates from the bottom

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of the tomb, and we cannot see what produces it. The second source of radiance is the tiny flame of a candle, a wax cylinder held by the bare hand of a man busy guiding the movements of those stealing the bodies placed in the wall tombs. This small flame, just like the taper in San Rocco, is white and emits no light. It only sends out a thread of smoke that dissolves towards the ceiling of the vault. The third source of luminescence — and the main one — is invisible. It comes from the right, but the painter does not offer any naturalistic explanation for it. The wall of the church is continuous: there is no door back there. This unreal light envelops the figures in the foreground: the legs of a woman, who is trying to free herself from the grip of a man who is possessed by devils, a kneeling blind man and the foreshortened corpse lying on the floor. The shadow projected by the body of the possessed person is one of the most intriguing in all of Tintoretto’s work: a brown stain on the rust-coloured floor. The painting communicates the impression of some esoteric, mysterious, hallucinated ritual. Although the overall effect is extremely realistic — including the chalk-like colour of the corpse — the effect produced by these contradictory lights is absolutely visionary.

In Saint Roch in Prison, Comforted by an Angel, dating from 1567, we glimpse a metal (perhaps silver) chandelier, beyond the grate that forms the background wall.

![Fig. 1.4 Tintoretto, Saint Roch in Prison, Comforted by an Angel, Church of San Rocco, Venice, 1567. CC BY-NC-ND, http://www.scuolagrandesanrocco.org/home-en/tintoretto/church/](image)

Inside the prison there is no artificial light. If, behind the grate, we perceive a fleet of very black clouds floating away in front of the
moon, it is because of a light that enters from the left, from an invisible opening outside the painting. But once more, the main source of light is immanent. It is the angel, and his halo; it is the white clothes of the sick and of their nurses and assistants. It is a paradoxical light — not a naturalistic but a metaphysical light. Since the back wall is a grate the figures should be ‘controluce’ (backlit), but the light arrives from the opposite side, from where we are standing — and where the painter is. The painting is undoubtedly naturalistic, and even hyper-realistic in some details. But by now we know that the more Tintoretto presents reality in its daily and prosaic details, the more he reveals it as an appearance — the reflection of something else.

The decoration of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco allows him to thematise the clash between darkness and light. In their totality the canvasses represent a sort of epiphany of light. More than once the analogy between Tintoretto’s ‘sacred poem’ and the Gospel of John and his theology of light has been observed.\(^{13}\) In the numberless night scenes created in the last twenty years of his activity (and not only for this Scuola), Tintoretto experiments with more and more daring luminous effects, or, to use Pallucchini’s word, ‘integral’ effects. At times he includes new sources of light in his paintings, such as the fireplace or the comet. At other times he annihilates these sources totally in order to develop an unreal refraction, a sort of emanation or mysterious phosphorescence, which represents the acme of his research.

The paintings ‘with a fireplace’ belong to the first series. There are three of them — painted more or less in the same period: between 1575 and 1580. None of these fireplaces is in fact a real source of light. The first appears in the *Christ Washing the Feet of the Disciples* (now at the London National Gallery): it lies in the background, but the fire is hidden by a figure, and only a puff of smoke can be seen (the more pulsing light comes from the golden halo that encompasses Jesus’ head). The second fireplace, in the *Last Supper* of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, sends out only a few weak beams of light, as the fire is dying out. The illumination of the painting comes from Jesus’ halo and from a door to the right at the back of the room, which cannot be seen. The third fireplace, seen in *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, is a naturalistic detail, an

atemporal fragment of daily life, which offers a contrast with the main scene, whose protagonists are the Saviour, Martha and Mary. The main action is represented in the foreground. In the kitchen at the back, a female servant is stirring something with a wooden spoon in the pot on the fire, but no flame is visible, only smoke.

Even the comet emits only a weak light the first time Tintoretto paints it, in the *Adoration of the Magi* (1581–82).

The sun has just gone down behind the snow-capped mountains; outside there is still some light but the illumination of the painting does not come from the star shining in the sky in a gap in the clouds, on the top part of the canvas. Nor does it come from the comet that has guided the Magi on their journey, and now emits only a trace of light. The real illumination comes from the background and from Mary’s and Jesus’ haloes.

Finally, after experimenting with every possible light trick in his use of ‘lumeggiature’ and shadows in his haggard Flagellation of Christ in Vienna and in Prague, in his last works Tintoretto experimented with the effect of embers and with a lamp with a double flame. *The Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence* is an extraordinarily suggestive night scene, with an indeterminate date, but probably painted around 1580–85. On
the left the flame of an enormous taper (torch) stands out, but in the darkness the rust-coloured embers and the fire burning brightly under the grate stand out even more. The reddish light falls onto the saint’s legs — and not only from below, as it should. The reflections of the light and the glimmerings of the burning coals in fact vie with each other to illuminate the bodies and faces of the people present, generating contradictory effects. The reverberation seems to make the embers crackle. The result is an unsteady image, like a photograph out of focus because the subjects moved when it was taken.

In The Last Supper in the Church of San Giorgio Maggiore (1591–92), a metal chandelier with a double flame (perhaps inspired by Roman archaeology) hangs from the ceiling above the table, in the shape of a ship or boat, with globular spheres descending from its lower curve in a decreasing series: one can even see the wicks. Jacomo’s chandelier radiates a magic and transcendent luminescence, in which diaphanous disembodied angels dance. This angelic group of immaterial spirits, revealed, animated and at the same time corroded by the light, confers on the scene the sense of a mystery unfolding. But the luminous focus of the painting is Christ, who, at the end of the table, in a position that is seemingly decentered, radiates a magnetic and searing light, which annihilates perspective, upsets the sense of the composition, and disintegrates every rule of vision. Reality, with its still life, the poor,
concrete everyday things, coexists with supernatural evanescence — the matter with the spirit. But the first would have no meaning without the second. In these works, Tintoretto writes with light.

In order to do this he no longer needs to represent material props. His last painting, the *Deposition in the Tomb*, painted in 1594, a few months before he died, for the chapel of the dead in the Church of San Giorgio Maggiore, is a night scene. But nobody lights candles or torches. In this canvas, which is a funeral and a will and testament, Tintoretto takes up and transcends the idea he first explored in the fine painting he created between 1578 and the beginning of the 80s, *Tarquin and Lucretia* (now in the Art Institute of Chicago). Here too he had done away with any source of light. The rape is a claustrophobic and anxiety-laden night interior, generating a surreal, almost metaphysical effect. The room where the attack takes place has no windows (Lucretia has no way out). Neither a torch nor a flame light the scene. It is as if the viewer (and the painter) were present in the room. In the dark, they can perceive objects made incongruous and absurd by the fluid brush stroke that allows them to be only intuited: a statue, the shadow of the bed. The light in the painting is the tender, as if fluorescent, flesh of the helpless woman.

Thirty years earlier, the subject of the *Transportation of Christ to the Tomb* had inspired Tintoretto to paint one of his few real night scenes. This time he chose to light the night not with torches but with faith. The sun is setting behind the Hill of Golgotha, and the shroud that envelops Christ and the body of the Magdalene are sufficient to illuminate the other figures with light.

In the cloudy world of Tintoretto, immersed in a perennial twilight, neither torches, nor fires, nor candles, nor chandeliers, nor lanterns, nor fireplaces, nor embers are sufficient to dispel darkness and to illuminate the visible. God and the sacred — the halo, the Holy Spirit — are the lights of the world. There is only one exception, the reflection of God on earth, which retains for the artist the same holy value: the flesh of human beings. Men — wounded, sick, suffering, and women — radiant in their beauty.

The light in Tintoretto’s paintings is never a natural light (it is not the sunlight), nor is it an artificial light (it is not produced only by a recognisable source). It is not a direct light, as Lomazzo intuitively understood, but it is ‘reflected’. Tintoretto’s light is immaterial, spiritual, and at the same time oneiric. It is the light of a vision. We are in the dark
and something appears to us that does not really exist, and which will vanish as soon as we turn around.

This unexpected and precarious light communicates to the viewer a sense of bewilderment. The feeling of unsteadiness produced by Tintoretto’s paintings has always been attributed to the movement of his figures, caught up in a vortex that prevents them from having solidity. But in reality the effect of movement is intensified by the effect of the light — indeed it would not exist without it.

Moreover, the sense of uneasiness and bewilderment is intensified by the ambiguity the painter represents to us. Humble and prosaic things — objects familiar from our daily lives: two wicks, some wooden stools, a patched up tablecloth, a cat, a sandal, the copper hanging over the kitchen — are accompanied by things and presences in which we place faith and hope, which we dream of, we pray for, we wish for, we remember, but we don’t really own. Nothing is ever what it seems. Tintoretto perhaps sought to represent the inconsistency and vanity of every single thing, even the things he painted with the utmost realism; indeed, those things especially. Therefore Tintoretto is the antithesis of Caravaggio, even if he foreruns and seems to forecast him.

Only God is real. And on this earth God (the reflection of God) is humankind — the frailty of men and their desperate courage, and the beauty of women.

I believe that this uniqueness and at the same time duality of God, who is Man, expresses the most profound meaning of the Christian faith, and that Tintoretto has been able to represent this through light — beyond any rule or ideological imposition.

Whether due to intuition, will, or the reflection of his convictions, Tintoretto has become the painter of light, yet night was necessary to him to his very end. In one of the few narrative passages of his biography, Ridolfi writes that Tintoretto spent most of his time at home. He worked all the time — moved by a creative fire, by love of glory, by the material necessity of feeding a large family. He went out occasionally and unwillingly. ‘When he was not painting, he stayed most of the time in his study, set in the furthest end of his house, where in order to see it was necessary to light a lamp at every hour.’

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This dark room was womb, cradle, secret space to him: a sort of interior and most private camera obscura (only his nearest relatives were allowed in), where he did nothing, or so it seemed, but where in fact he did everything. It was there, where he rested, that ghostly figures emerged, the characters he would draw and then paint on his canvasses. Only in the darkness, lit by a single light, could he invent freely and fire his imagination.

I wish to take leave of Tintoretto imagining him just like this: igniting a light. Remember Boschini: ‘he was born with a light in his hand.’

This very simple daily action is also a metaphor for every artistic creation: in order to ‘see well’ in the darkness surrounding us, one has to ‘light a lamp’.