MOMENTUM AND THE SPIRIT'S PASSAGE
IN VAUGHAN

CHAPTER NINE

DISCURSIVE LANDSCAPES OF PILGRIMAGE

Religious verse of the kinds that the metaphysicals, Milton, Ralph Knevet, Henry Colman, Mildmay Fane, and Christopher Harvey wrote was basically a post-Elizabethan and with exceptions pre-Restoration phenomenon. Although a number of earlier poets translated psalms and wrote poems of pious supplication, they did not go extensively into confessional or meditative verse. That Knevet did so only after circumstances halted his Supplement of the Faerie Queene indicates something of the impetus that civil disruption gave to meditational forms, together with the model that Herbert set for Colman’s Divine Meditations, Harvey’s The Synagogue, or the Shadow of the Temple (1640), Crashaw’s Steps to the Temple (1646), and Vaughan’s Silex Scintillans (1650). Vaughan did not take up the devotional verse for which he is chiefly remembered until what is usually described as a personal turnabout in the late 1640s. Seventeenth-century religious lyricists generally elected either to explore institutional affiliation (such as Herbert’s with the Anglican temple) or to pursue independent spiritual guests. One of the significant developments in that devotional and meditational literature is passage “on the way” that converts religious experience into landscape terms, or landscape into expressive and revelatory form. The readability of setting becomes central both to lyric address and poet-God relations. As Vaughan indicates, such topographies and the spiritual wayfaring conducted within them can be equivalents to
church and doctrine, to psychological states, to social conditions, or to some mixture. Which of these is primary is not so much at issue as the kind of metaphoric equivalency and progress that topographical juxtapositions make possible. Whatever analogous realms appear must be read first in objects and substances whose surfaces are matters for relatively copious description and interpretive concern. Meditational topics and terms of petition follow from the literal path.

It is less the rhetorical elaboration of setting, then, than prose traditions and homiletic literature that prepare for the plain way. Vaughan reflects that literature to some extent, but the most remarkable itinerants to grow out of it are Bunyan's. In Christian's dreamscape pilgrimage proceeds through psychological, social, and doctrinal states that exceed those of comparable journeys in their elaborate naming of characters and use of dialogue to expand and clarify placements. Actually, although Bunyan followed Vaughan by over a decade, the two bear comparison not only in their casting of spiritual states as topographical progresses but also as outsiders for whom the solitary journey has no exact institutional or social equivalents. Bunyan is more revealing than Herbert in this instance because of Vaughan's recurrent desire to allegorize nature as a "way" and to posit a first-person figure as pilgrim-poet through a succession of poems. Vaughan of course wrote from outside the Puritan regime of the 1650s, as Bunyan wrote from outside the restored church. The marginality of each may have contributed to his emphasis upon the hermeneutic conditions of pilgrimage and upon an implicit theory of signs embedded in place. Each sets up new ways of reading those signs even while he draws upon age-old biblical types and figures. Primarily, what links them is a sense shared with Milton and Marvell of the exploratory figure of solitude locatable by topographical keys. Despite Vaughan's recollection of a sizeable portion of Herbert's lexicon of images and themes, he could not find in Herbert so unchurched a journey, in which meditational and spiritual stages are marked by mountains, flowered graves, fountains, stars, and sun.

When Christian takes a few steps with By-ends, however, the language is very much like Vaughan's in converting incident "along the way" into spiritual planes. Bunyan heaps up an unusual number of titles for places and for those whose journeys, guided by convenience and ease, make up negative examples. We continue to be aware of all the circumstances of pilgrimage—the wicket-gate, the slough, valleys, palaces, overhanging mountains, and of course
the polarizing ends of movement, the City of Destruction and Mount Zion. But the added terminological abundance of the By-ends episode complicates the straight way with easy ways. The secular world contains a multitude of mislabeled paths, each an outlook or a vocabulary of enticements and choices that in effect mark a mode of discourse. By-ends of course is from the well-populated town of Fairspeech and has “many rich kindred there.” He is a fellow citizen of Lords Turn-about, Time-server, and Fairspeech, and of Messrs Smooth-man, Facing-both-ways, Any-thing, and Parson Two tongues—obviously none of them straight talkers. To solidify his family credentials, he has married the daughter of Lady Feigning, bred “to such a pitch” that “she knows how to carry it to all, even to prince and peasant.” In case the reader should miss the point in all this, Bunyan has By-ends condemn himself from his own mouth, since where he comes from they never “strive against wind and tide” and are zealous only when religion goes “in his silver slippers” and walks in the sunshine. As the Christian world knows, this is no way to go on a pilgrimage. Undeceived, Christian leaves By-ends to the more fitting company of Mr. Hold-the-world, Mr. Money-love, and Mr. Save-all, as molded by the schoolmaster Love-gain in the arts of “getting, either by violence, cozenage, flattery, lying, or by putting on a guise of religion”—combinations of banking interests and social mobility that Bunyan knew had always ruled the world and assumed would continue to do so. The regions that these and other backsliders and turnabouts inhabit become externalized maps of the wavering spirit, from corners of which desire to get ahead whispers to the will to relax and abide. At every turn of Bunyan’s road, such enticements catch the eye and misdirect the vagabond feet. Dialogue turns concourse into discourse and makes advancement through doctrinal categories, psychological and social disorders. Spiritual vacillation is associated with faulty doctrine and requires straightening out by characters like Interpreter and Evangelist. Thus at several stations, Bunyan takes the opportunity to reiterate and interrogate, to clarify, reaffirm homiletic truths, and finish Interpreter’s work of expounding and teaching. The end justifies the metaphoric means by which “feigned words, as dark as mine,/Make truth to spangle and its rays to shine,” as Bunyan remarks in his apology. Localities become special kinds of loci communes based not on the art of oratory but on Puritan teaching, with emphasis upon deeds.

Were it not for that emphasis, The Pilgrim’s Progress might be accused of making too thorough a conversion of the way into a
well-figured story and the conduct of an argument for its own sake. The extension of the tropes threatens to make a talkative demonstration, ornamented by fantasies. To purge it of excess in that line, Bunyan makes clear on several occasions the distinction between sincere, useful language and language as display. That distinction comes forward thematically in Faith’s exposure of Talkative and the futility of talk by itself. Truly profitable dialogue may have the rhetorical graces of a Say-well but not with Say-well’s motives or Talkative’s spiritual weakness. Faith’s truthfulness is accordingly blunt and provocative; it is designed to guide spiritual movement and its rejections of worldly motives, just as Christian’s renarrations and wayside summaries are designed to keep straight the road he is actually walking.

Bunyan’s proliferation of titles and places makes for a different topographical intricacy than that of other allegorical places of the renaissance, even of the protestant homiletic tradition. The multiplying of faces and names around By-ends and in Vanity Fair discredits all secular analogues to the celestial city and therefore a good deal that passes as valuable experience elsewhere. As soon as a representative of worldliness speaks he flies into a discrepancy. In effect, all profane discourse wanders in error, in a terrain where fallacies start up at every turn and are shot down by sharp-eyed quoters of scripture. By-ends’ dialogue is an animated extension of a discourse he is obliged to carry on as the logic of his category of error. He cannot talk like Evangelist any more than Evangelist can talk like Parson Two-tongues. Like him, others tend to be simultaneously components of a theological argument and psychological locations or sources of motive, the terrain and its population being an externalizing map of mind and a social topography but above all a set of instructions. Bunyan stresses the functional graphia of topography—the writing out of a realm inscribed everywhere for guidance.

That practice of emblematic sign-posting we discover also in devotional poetry, but as we might expect lyric is concerned less with narrative continuity and the construction of instructional stages than with the enigmas and interpretive prospects of particular places and spiritual states. Vaughan inherited the labeled regions and the otherworldliness of pilgrimage from sources in common with Bunyan, but his byways are less available to moral translation. The demand for an overall direction and an ultimate conclusion is equally strong but harder to convert into a storied progress. In “I Walkt the other day,” for instance, Vaughan’s pilgrim is puzzled by
a discrepancy between the “face of things” and their truth. Destination is subordinate to the exploring of their evasions. The structure of the poem looks to be narrative and is indeed episodic, but it is also inconclusive and suspended, and physical movement gives way early to a meditational probing:

I Walkt the other day (to spend my hour)
Into a field
Where I sometimes had seen the soil to yield
A gallant flowre,
But Winter now had ruffled all the bowre
And curious store
I knew there heretofore.

Yet I whose search lov’d not to peep and peer
I’th’face of things
Thought with my self, there might be other springs
Besides this here
Which, like cold friends, sees us but once a year,
And so the flowre
Might have some other bowre.9

The flower’s interpretability is complicated by an allusion to Herbert’s “Peace,” a poem that is itself concerned with ways of conducting a search for ultimate repose. Herbert transcends nature’s instability in abandoning caves and gardens for biblical types, and once the search is keyed to the right doctrine, peace comes forward as its product. Here, Vaughan’s pilgrim is more casual in his initial walk, and nature’s store is somewhat random. The hard season puts out of sight the easier rewards of other occasions, and so the pilgrim must dig and pose “Many a question Intricate and rare.” Actually, his first lesson is similar to Herbert’s not only in “Peace” but in “The Flower,” “Vertue,” and other poems: nature’s curious offerings and the speaker himself are very frail. First readings are in error. Only the dead are beyond the wintry state and the treacheries of bowers.

Were nature’s bowers clearly of no value, however, their attractions would be less serious. As it is, whatever is fair and young extends glimpses of paradise, without which regeneration would lack a psychology and stages of growth. The creative spirit itself after all assumes topographical forms and is their source. An apt interpreter therefore finds it veiled in masques and shadows:

O thou! whose spirit did at first inflame
And warm the dead,
And by a sacred Incubation fed
With life this frame
Which once had neither being, forme, nor name,
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Grant I may so
Thy steps track here below.

That in these Masques and shadows I may see
Thy sacred way,
And by those hid ascents climb to that day
Which breaks from thee
Who art in all things, though invisibly;
Shew me thy peace,
Thy mercy, love, and ease.

Vaughan’s “O thou!” is typical of his personal lyric crossings, which seek to short-circuit the longer evasions of nature and the pilgrimage through it. The walk does not produce fine doctrinal distinctions of Bunyan’s sort. The pilgrim as poet-interpreter or bard wishes to see further into the products of the sacred Incubation and make its breaking day his own awakening. As eternal day descends, it must somehow work free of topographical clues. To read mercy, love, and ease into “all things” invisibly is to translate those things, as doctrine springing “From a poor root” raises “it to the truth and light of things” and makes it less and less rootlike.

In generating the accelerated pace of that “O thou!” Vaughan transposes the music and cadence of the stanza. The casual narrative opening “I walkt the other day (to spend my hour)” has allocated moments of the itinerary to stanzaic parts with some exactness without over-running the lines to any great extent. Significance arises from such walks more or less as it will, and the formal unit accords with the moments. Even so, the opening stanza turns upon that casualness with a sense of irony in the first of the poem’s several reversals (“But Winter now had ruffled all the bowre”). The contrast between wintry bleakness and what will “e’r long / Come forth most fair and young” disrupts the fabric of description and the leisure of narrative. The frequency of contrastive movements thereafter signals the unfolding of an ever more intense spiritual search until in the petition itself Vaughan turns measured stanzaic development into an on-rushing enjambment, gathering the last three-stanza section into a single crescendo. The difficulty is to translate one sort of movement and the lesser rewards of field walking into the “Light, Joy, Leisure, and true Comforts” of quite another movement. One way to link them would be simply to make one a proleptic sign of the other. But the pilgrim stands suspended between realms, capable of interrogating the places of his walk but not of bringing forth spiritual counterparts—hence the petitionary mode of the conclusion and the return to the careworn sense of exile.
By comparison to Bunyan’s anxiety-ridden, unsteady, but true progress, Vaughan’s way not only in “I walkt” but in other topographical progresses is less detailed, and the completion of the journey is more vaguely postponed. Vaughan is obviously less concerned with the familiar types of Vanity Fair and the attractions of the social order, nor does he line the way with specific enemies lying in wait to lure the pilgrim into ditches of folly or quagmires of sin. These differences in technique amount to a different discourse and different conduct of an investigation. They assume less confidence in the open teachability of doctrine and a significant residue of religious mystery in scripture itself. Vaughan’s mode in “I walkt” is after all quintessentially lyric and is not instructional in the way of a gathered Puritan sainthood; it makes intensified personal approaches both to things and to the spirit represented obscurely in them, incubated in forms, hovering in names and substances. Settings like the fountain of “Regeneration” and the fields of “I walkt” do not offer the poet the hermeneutic aids of an Interpreter or Palace Beautiful, despite the questions “Intricate and rare” one might address to them. Whether we come from Bunyan, Herbert, or such earlier pilgrimages as Redcross’s, then, we are struck by the spiritual trauma of Vaughan’s pilgrim figures, the cause of which is a gap between realms and a difficulty in the messages that “hid ascents” permit. The suggestiveness of descriptive language cannot be separated entirely from that signifier-referent hiatus and the structural complexity that comes of the poet’s going back and forth between the spirit “in all things, though invisibly” and the things themselves.

QUESTING WITHOUT REACHING AFTER FACT OR SYSTEM

Vaughan uses both Donnean conceits and Bunyanesque walking allegories, but his pathways and their figures are less cerebral. Unlike the Coleridge that Keats thought he saw, he does not try to coerce half-knowledge into enlightenment and thereby let escape “a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery.” Not that he is entirely content with doubt, as Keats on occasion thought poets should be; but his best poetry assumes its inevitability and when it turns to direct address presupposes a considerable distance between speaker and object. Settings for the elusive spirit are difficult even from the vantage points of biblical typology. They are vague enough at times to suggest solipsism, although Vaughan as the swan of Isca is also the genius of a particular region. He is often a poet of halting and broken momentum
toward the paradisal terrain he would prefer to inhabit and a con­structor of structural irregularities, which go with being unsettled.

I do not mean to suggest that Vaughan has no use for reason, but he expects less of it than Donne and less of doctrine than Herbert. A sign of his restlessness in this regard is the proximity of wilder­ness and the forsaking of enclosures. As he views the apocalypse, for instance, it undoes all directions and locations, as in “Day of Judgement” a consuming fire rushes to all points of the compass almost instantaneously and makes further pilgrimage unnecessary,

When through the North a fire shall rush
And rowle into the East,
And like a fire torrent rush
And sweepe up South, and West.

The ascension series at the beginning of Part 2 of Silex Scintillans contrasts celestial soaring with the limitations of those who are not yet ready for deliverance. The pilgrim himself, in spirit at least, takes the loftier way:

I soar and rise
Up to the skies,
Leaving the world their day.

To soar is clearly not a rational process. The abandonment of Herbert’s enclosure and possession for wilderness is the topog­raphical equivalent to impatience with plodding logic and its ser­vant discourse. As the saved on the last great day run “in their white robes to seek the risen Sun,” he imagines their impressive transformation. When the visionary company have departed in “Ascension-Hymn,” he is acutely aware of the distance between his place and theirs:

They are all gone into the world of light!
And I alone sit lingering here;
Their very memory is fair and bright,
And my sad thoughts doth clear.
I see them walking in an Air of glory,
Whose light doth trample on my days.

Although walking and soaring both have the potential to solve heaven’s mysteries, only death will completely unveil them. The pilgrim’s central project may be to decipher his surroundings and locate the divine spirit within them, then, but he seldom builds bridges for the reader to cross between one kind of observation and another.

It would be a mistake to find Vaughan’s experience of the semi­vagabond state too greatly different from that of other Christian pilgrimages, but economies of nature are more common elsewhere,
and they are primarily that which provides bridges to providence, as in Herbert's itemization, for instance:

Who hath the vertue to express the rare
And curious vertues both of herbs and stones?
Is there an herb for that? O that thy care
Would show a root, that gives expressions!

And if an herb hath power, what have the starres?
A rose, besides his beautie, is a cure.
Doubtlesse our plagues and plentie, peace and warres
Are there much surer then our art is sure.

"Providence"

That economy suggests human possession and home ground even if the poet lacks precise words to say just how, as Hakluyt's navigators and Purchas's pilgrims aim to possess and use what providence puts before them—one by mapping, the other by translating geographical features into allegory. Vaughan's pilgrims must forgo even the edenic remnants they find in nature if they are to discover the way to regeneration. As "Ascension-Hymn" explains:

Dust and clay
Mans antient wear!
Here you must stay,
But I elsewhere;
Souls sojourn here, but may not rest;
Who will ascend, must be undrest.

And yet some
That know to die
Before death come,
Walk to the skie
Even in this life; but all such can
Leave behinde them the old Man.

This rings with proverb assurance and clarity along a string of rhymes until metaphoric death replaces the real one and we find those who somehow walk the skies "Even in this life." Faith may fill in where reason falters, but even scripture sometimes recedes from reach. The lost Son can no longer be tracked in "The Pursuite," and again no Evangelist or Palace Beautiful makes a timely appearance to offer individual instruction. The single beam of light the sun leaves the pilgrim in "Mans Fall, and Recovery" serves mainly to remind him of the general dispossession of humankind.

In "Regeneration," which conducts Vaughan's most noteworthy pilgrimage, it seems doubtful that the viator ends much closer to his goal than he begins; the spirit's evasiveness is unceasing. The exterior world initially reflects the pilgrim's condition, and subsequently certain figures take up stations as though as signs for
crossroads. But progress is notable for its abruptness and lack of distinct way-stations. When a second spring arrives, it reflects upon the first one's incapacity to thaw the heart and suggests something approaching the paradise that eye and ear find in accord with inner wishes:

The unthrift Sunne shot vitall gold
A thousand pceces,
And heaven its azure did unfold
Chequr'd with snowie fleeces,
The aire was all in spice
And every bush
A garland wore; Thus fed my Eyes
But all the Eare lay hush.

Splendor momentarily thrusts aside dissatisfaction, and presumably the speaker need not puzzle himself about significance when such blessings shower down and the sun gives a foretaste of paradise. But the spirit refuses to grant him personal applications of doctrine and indeed declares that its only statement is precisely this nondeclaration. It comes and goes as it pleases, whether in visiting the soul in exegetical acts that turn the letter into truth or in visiting poets as their muse.

Vaughan is especially anxious about the latter guidance. "Re­generation" follows a confessional preface that attacks secular verse (including presumably Olar Iscanus) and endorses Herbert as a model of sacred writing. The blasted infant buds of the opening stanza and the sin that eclipses the mind thus no doubt reflect both the usual errors of youth and a brief career of errant poems. "Re­generation" makes an opening demonstration of a new poetics as permeated with vital gold as the scriptural text, its unthrift sun, allows. The poem does in fact have moments of brightness and rained-down abundance and seems on the verge of discovering not only the transcendent paradise of gospel but a real presence in the worded here and now. The pilgrim listens to every sound and watches keenly every stirring leaf in hopes that the rushing wind heralds that presence. But the poem is equally given to sudden turns away:

I turn'd me round, and to each shade
Dispatch'd an Eye,
To see, if any leafe had made
Least motion, or Reply,
But while I listning sought
My mind to ease
By knowing, where 'twas, or where not.
It whisper'd; where I please.
It is at that point of greatest expectations that the baffling message comes and refuses to be a message. The colloquy it extracts, "Lord, then said I, On me one breath, / And let me dye before my death!" is a desperate one—despite the receptive state induced by the hushed silence and despite the unthrifty sun. The plenitude of scent and of signs only intensifies the absence of sound that might confirm some intent behind the snowy fleeces. The problem is to get from one spiritual plane to another and to finish the journey. Scriptural parallels offer assistance, but I find them less decisive here than other interpreters do.  

Vaughan treats each turn of the spiritual work not as a stage in exegesis but as a personal trial. That passages in scripture are themselves written in metaphoric code appears to mean that they are intended to veil their secrets. Vaughan's expectations in "Regeneration" are both keen and beyond fulfillment. By comparison, not only Bunyan but Traherne tends to stress the certainties of landscape and the reachability of its blessings, as in the simplicity of youth:

All appeared New, and Strange at the first, inexpressibly rare, And Delightful, and Beautiful. I was a little Stranger which at my Entrance into the World was Saluted and Surrounded with innumerable Joys. My Knowledge was Divine. I knew by Intuition those things which since my Apostasie, I Collected again, by the Highest Reason.

The Corn was Orient and Immortal Wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The Dust and Stones of the Street were as Precious as GOLD. The Gates were at first the End of the World. The Green Trees when I saw them first through one of the Gates Transported and Ravished me; their Sweetness and unusual Beauty made my Heart to leap.

Traherne finds less to puzzle over and less to feel guilty about. If one encounters deceptions, these do not stem from inherent enigmas of place. In contrast, when Vaughan turns to search the shadows and listens intently for something to quiet desire, he is instructed in effect to wait: either preparation has not been complete or the receptacle is not sufficient for the burden. The spirit that whispers to him will not be invoked for visionary privileges, as Milton's will, and will not codify itself into rites of passage, as the poem has suggested it might at first. Even to institute a House of Holiness or Hill of Contemplation might be to lessen it by explanation. The best that Vaughan's pilgrim can expect is thus an intermittent divine presence that leads him on.

THE CALENDAR OF PILGRIMAGE

The Christian calendar places the soul's research among objects in the differing lights that special moments cast. That calendar is
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set for Vaughan as for Herbert and the tradition largely by the
events of Christ’s life, which pilgrims use to mark their own stages.
“Ascension-day,” for instance, like other days of the Son, will bring
divine force definitively into play, and the quickened soul thinking
ahead to it can see its deliverance:

Thy glorious, bright Ascension (though remov’d
So many Ages from me) is so prov’d
And by thy Spirit seal’d to me, that I
Feel me a sharer in thy victory.

Or since that day is quite exceptional, the soul can turn to Sunday’s
foretaste of victory:

1.
Bright shadows of true Rest! some shoots of blisse,
Heaven once a week;
The next worlds gladness prepossest in this;
A day to seek;

Eternity in time; the steps by which
We Climb above all ages; Lamps that light
Man through his heap of dark days; and the rich,
And full redemption of the whole weeks flight.

2.
The Pulleys unto headlong man; times bower;
The narrow way;
Transplanted Paradise; Gods walking houre;
The Cool o’th’ day;

The Creatures jubile; Gods parle with dust;
Heaven here; Man on those hills of Myrrh, and flowres;
Angels descending; the Returns of Trust;
A Gleam of glory, after six-days-showres.

3.
The Churches love-feasts; Times Prerogative,
And Interest
Deducted from the whole; The Combs, and hive,
And home of rest.

The milky way Chalkt out with Suns; a Clue
That guides through erring hours; and in full story
A taste of Heav’n on earth; the pledge, and Cue
Of a full feast; And the Out Courts of glory.

Vaughan lists Sunday’s attributes in a copious mode, gathering
nearly three dozen figures from society, nature, and theology in a
looseness that points up the sundry satisfactions of spirit. The dif­
ferences from Bunyan and Herbert are again notable in that mis­
cellany. Herbert’s “Prayer I,” which provides the technique of
other Vaughan poems as well as this one, arranges its objects with
much greater care. Although both octave and sestet mix concrete
and abstract terms for prayer, the octave stresses physical measurements and movements from earth to heaven and back. The sestet, less active, pursues the placid results. So delivered, words have some of the stability and permanence of peace as well as the exalted style of men well dressed, heaven descended.

Although Vaughan mentions a similar seeking and climbing in "Son-dayes," his concern is weekly deliveries of the divine, and since Sundays are but a sample, a "Clue," he is simultaneously aware of an undelivered remainder. His images make a series of propositions, each dropped as the next appears, so that progress through them means continual displacement rather than a crossing from the temporal to the eternal. Although the opening theme is sustained, varied, and insistent, every metaphor comes as though a new term of praise. That Sundays have so many sides, all of them new contacts with God, testifies not merely to the poet's ingenuity but to the fullness of their gifts. Any structural development beyond amplification would violate the repetitive nature of those lamps that come regularly to light "man through his heap of dark days." To demonstrate its point, the poem need document only "the rich, / And full redemption of the whole weeks flight."

Vaughan's Sabbath makes certain contacts with eternity possible without speech—paradoxically best by "bright shadows of true Rest"—which is to say by a light revealed as shadow. The scent of spices, the smile of the day star, and the primrosed fields suggest a "posting intercourse and mirth / Of Saints and Angels" to clarify earth. But on ordinary days, the poet cannot expect such declarations, and the year obviously contains more of such than it does church holidays. Creatures in their sullen mysteries then refuse to speak. In one surprising stop, in fact, in "The Stone," the pilgrim finds even mute plants turning against man and serving as spies, which gives a new twist to the world's obscurity. Informing objects cannot be bribed as human witnesses can and do not consent readily to any gainful ill, as women do: "No gold nor gifts can them subdue." Instead, Vaughan finds a sinister truthfulness in them:

They hear, see, speak,  
And into loud discoveries break, 
As loud as blood. Not that God needs  
Intelligence, whose spirit feeds  
All things with life, before whose eyes,  
Hell and all hearts stark naked lies.

The very stones will accuse men, then, in the end, as scripture has said they will. God has them do so because "ev'n mans own eye / Must needs acknowledge" them to be just:
Hence sand and dust
Are shak'd for witnesses, and stones
Which some think dead, shall all at once
With one attesting voice detect
Those secret sins we least suspect.
For know, wilde men, that when you erre
Each thing turns Scribe and Register,
And in obedience to his Lord,
Doth your most private sins record.

This goes beyond the passage from *Joshua* (24.27) that Vaughan cites, since *Joshua* intended merely to erect a monument in testimony to God's covenant with his people. Because everything bears witness here, not even savages are too remote to lack a confessional; "ev'ry bush is somethings booth." Nature becomes not a general book of types and symbols or a kind of church but a ledger of specific misdeeds; all lyric approach to it is choked off by the sins it must report.

The spirit is not totally capricious for Vaughan, however, or Sundays would not be so regular and the final judgment so certain. Like Herbert, Vaughan addresses a considerable number of confessional lyrics directly to God and to his representatives, including light. He also knows something of Traherne's uncomplicated communion of childhood and the delights of rendering daily tribute. Indeed, he finds morning birds more easily interpreted than we might expect and in awakening poems reinforces celebration with something close to certainty when the moment is right. As Jonathan Post has observed in noting the distinction between "The Morning-watch" and "The Evening-watch," Vaughan prefers the early hour and offers it an adamic hymn (p. 196). In "Providence" water and timely sustenance come by mysterious means, but by comparison to the wealth of states and powers of kings they are less subject to abrupt removal. This the birds themselves know:

none can sequester or let
A state that with the Sun doth set
And comes next morning fresh as he.

Poor birds this doctrine sing,
And herbs which on dry hills do spring
Or in the howling wilderness
Do know thy dewy morning-hours,
And watch all night for mists or showers,
Then drink and praise thy bounteousness.

No doubt they have their kinship with poets as birds do elsewhere, and it is recurrence of new life in the face of wilderness deprivations that brings them to song. At a creaturely level, what appears to the senses is often interpretable; one humanized dimension of
providence is its daily economy. Or as Vaughan remarks in “The Bird” concerning similar alternations of tribulation and blessings, hymns come forth more cheerfully for the good buffeting of sullen storms, which mark a special providential calendar:

Hither thou com' st: the busy wind all night
Blew through thy lodging, where thy own warm wing
Thy pillow was.
And now as fresh and cheerful as the light
Thy little heart in early hymns doth sing
Unto that Providence, whose unseen arm
Curb'd them, and cloath'd thee well and warm.
All things that be, praise him; and had
Their lesson taught them, when first made.

So hills and valleys into singing break,
And though poor stones have neither speech nor tongue,
While active winds and streams both run and speak,
Yet stones are deep in admiration.

That deep admiration of stones should not be underestimated, nor should the more familiar heralding of dawn by a bird capable of exemplifying what Vaughan in “Cock-Crowing” calls a transplanted “seed”:

Father of lights! what Sunnie seed,
What glance of day hast thou confin'd
Into this bird? To all the breed
This busie Ray thou has assign'd;
Their magnetisme works all night,
And dreams of Paradise and light.

The source of life is the same as the source of the clarity that enables one to interpret it. Daybreak is valuable not only for what it reveals directly but also for what it hints, as in “Rules and Lessons”:

Mornings are Mysteries; the first worlds Youth,
Mans Resurrection, and the futures Bud
Shrowd in their births: The Crown of life, light, truth
Is stil'd their starre, the stone, and hidden food.
Three blessings wait upon them, two of which
Should move; They make us holy, happy, rich.

However, birds of light “Chirping their solemn Matins on each tree” are likely to be counterbalanced by the heavy notes of “dark fowls.” Enlightened moments, like Sundays, tend to appear as interludes in any fuller reading of Vaughan. Actually, a veil falls even between the poet and the crowing cock. It brings forth an urgent petition to the cock to cross to the perfect day that it heralds, which in “Cock-crowing” constitutes the poet’s true destination and the end of calendar days:

Onely this Veyle which thou hast broke,
And must be broken yet in me,
This veyle, I say, is all the cloke,  
And cloud which shadows thee from me.  
This veyle thy full-ey'd love denies,  
And onely gleams and fractions spies.

O take it off! make no delay,  
But brush me with thy light, that I  
May shine unto a perfect day,  
And warme me at thy glorious Eye!

Such apòstrophes are exclamatory precisely because of the incompleteness of the journey.

Vaughan's alternation of dark and light moments shows in several brilliant metaphoric beginnings that trail off into doubts or into moralizing and make the structure of his poems appear disproportionate and the ends anticlimactic at times. His hold upon favorable moments is somewhat strengthened by the vocabulary of hermetic philosophy and alchemy, which interprets the indirect ways of providence working in a variety of nature's forms. But that vocabulary is closer to an intuitive dualism than to rational science. In the hermetic way as a negative state or preparation, to take one phase of it, the soul moves toward light's purity only paradoxically, by way of dark, which is both a spiritual abandonment and an absence of signs. Although it is also a preparatory blank that disciplines the pilgrim's crossing, as Vaughan suggests in "Resurrection and Immortality," even resurrection takes the way of mortification, doomsday the way of destruction:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a preserving spirit doth still passe} \\
\text{Untainted through this Masse,} \\
\text{Which doth resolve, produce, and ripen all} \\
\text{That to it fall;} \\
\text{Nor are those births which we} \\
\text{Thus suffering see} \\
\text{Destroy'd at all; But when times restles wave} \\
\text{Their substance doth deprave} \\
\text{And the more noble Essence finds his house} \\
\text{Sickly, and loose,} \\
\text{He, ever young, doth wing} \\
\text{Unto that spring,} \\
\text{And } & \text{source of spirits, where he takes his lot} \\
\text{Till time no more shall rot} \\
\text{His passive Cottage; which (though laid aside,)} \\
\text{Like some spruce Bride,} \\
\text{Shall one day rise, and cloath'd with shining light} \\
\text{All pure, and bright} \\
\text{Re-marry to the soule, for 'tis most plaine} \\
\text{Thou only fal'st to be refin'd againe.}
\end{align*}
\]

This may sound at first like rhymed philosophy, as though from a spiritualist opposite of Lucretius translated from Latin. But it has a greater love of paradoxes to go with a touch of Bunyan in its
animation. Its strong interactions of soul and matter, light and dark, sickness and health, falling and rising are less enigmatic in this case, thanks partly to the certainty of the hermeticism. “Resolve, produce, and ripen” is a surprising sequence when we realize the responsibility that bodies are being assigned for the development of their inmates. Even so, incarnation or its duration is still dangerous to the soul and undercuts the value of pilgrimage: long life is not really educative but degenerative. The “spruce” bride of the resurrection has some of Bunyan’s awakening and upspringing energy after that prolonged crisis. In a typical Vaughan rhythm of visions that open out and close down again, the passage offers a sense of ascension before returning to the voice of epigram or proverb. Superimposed on this rhythm of realizations is a pattern of rhymed lines, the couplings of which toll off alternating longer and shorter phrases until a pair of iambic pentameter lines completes the narrative course and its summing up. Unevenness is thereby curbed more than usually as doctrine finds its voice, but of course only by way of a futuristic promise that leaves some dissatisfaction with the current life. Only when bodies are fully permeated with spirit will they conform to it.

The hermetic vocabulary of “Resurrection and Immortality” helps Vaughan assess the incarnation and the interpenetration of moments far apart by calendar measure but close at hand in vision. “Preserving,” “untainted,” “substance,” “essence,” and the release of light all have chemical implications in which the mysterious knitting of material and immaterial substances follows certain rules. Pursuing the course of those rules, the stanza wavers and then develops a crescendo of the kind that can make Vaughan’s philosophical passages an adventure. However, the pilgrim’s capacity to find allegorical significance in such mixtures of chemical and esoteric tropes is usually insufficient compensation for the persistent darkness of bodies, and Vaughan does not always seem to know the relative weight of the soul’s trials or how they work toward the ends it desires.

Getting doctrine from objects to exploit for poetic purposes is not really at issue, except in a few hermetic poems like this one, nor is the dramatic sense that the poems often lack: rather what seems to be missing is a perception of depths that make the viator pull back from the spiritual edge and call upon intelligence. Ideally, his sustaining powers should dwell simultaneously in the wits and in the feelings. But the urgency of Vaughan’s excursions onto mountainsides is somewhat blunted by a generalizing habit he shares with his times and its sententious capsules. Perhaps the best that
such moralizing can produce comes in “Regeneration,” which combines confession with emblem and uses both to fend off “cliffs of fall / Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed” (in Hopkins’s words), as in the impressive mixture of mountainous extremity and introspective assessment in the initial disequilibrium that sets the question in motion:

Storm’d thus; I straight perceiv’d my spring
Meere stage, and show.
My walke a monstrous, mountain’d thing
Rough-cast with Rocks, and snow;
And as a Pilgrims Eye
Far from reliefe,
Measures the melancholy skye
Then drops, and rains for grief,
So sigh’d I upwards still.

Getting to the pinnacle quickly at the outset, Vaughan’s speaker finds scales there that weigh smoky pleasures and late pains. They serve not as comforts but as a focal point that draws the mind from its internal state to an emblematic judgment before the poet proceeds to the next part of the landscape.

We might expect reinforcements by some stronger developmental principle at this juncture if Vaughan is to follow up the allegory of the mountain and its scale or make the process of regeneration something akin to that of Christian’s journey. As it is, by turning to the “unthrift Sunne,” he leaves hanging what has preceded. Without much elaboration he drops the idea of the false spring and the provocations of eclipsing clouds and storms that lead to it. But the dreamlike rapidity of movement and the abrupt transitions are effective in their own right, as are the economy of phrasing and the unexpected vistas. Vaughan changes scenes adeptly even where he does not propel one from another by any logic we can anticipate or paraphrase. One reason the intelligence cannot take the initiative or even keep pace is that the spirit places enigmas in every element, not merely in its whispering of “where I please.” The questing soul is thus always in danger of being drawn too far into things that promise to be decipherable but turn out to be traps. In “The Tempest” even the hermetic mind may follow its chemical curiosity too ardently down quasi-scientific byways:

Sure, mighty love foreseeing the descent
Of this poor Creature, by a gracious art
Hid in these low things snares to gain his heart,
And layd surprizes in each Element.

All things here shew him heaven; Waters that fall
Chide, and fly up; Mists of corruptest fome
Quit their first beds and mount; trees, herbs, flowres, all
Strive upwards stil, and point him the way home.

Such things are interpretable seeds, and "all have their keyes, and set ascents." But man, "Though he knows these, and hath more of his own, / Sleeps at the ladders foot." Tricked into companionship with leaf and flower, "hugs he stil his durt."

Liberating men from the dictates of the body and from things converted into signs is one of the tasks of the negative way and the emptying moment. The answer in "The Night" to the abundance of clues is blankness, and to confusion, an act of faith:

There is in God (some say)
A deep, but dazling darkness; As men here
Say it is late and dusky, because they
See not all clear;
O for that night! where I in him
Might live invisible and dim.

Such descents are practice for the greater obliteration that inspires the ascension poems and "Resurrection and Immortality." They are the reverse side of Sundays. The lingering doubts of "some say" are brushed aside by the wishful equivalent to apostrophe in "O for that night!" But nothing in the poem is more impressive than the visualizing of night's blocking of interferences and its own substantial gifts. Unlighted dew, soft calls, and the attachments of like things make up a network of catches for the soul. The regular returns of night are types of the cycle that will complete the course of natural forms; they assist hermetic wisdom's penetration to secret ties within and beyond mere chemistry, the more powerfully for their escape of reason and possession.

It is not always clear how we are to reconcile the expectation of blessedness with Vaughan's frequent indeterminacy, or abstractions like "The Crown of life, light, truth" with vestiges of the creator embedded obscurely in nature. But Vaughan is perhaps less inconsistent in addressing actual sites than he seems at first. Casual and idiomatic turns of phrase find a middle ground between visionary hope and the stock of unreliable things on which it feeds. His balancing of what lies at hand with panoramic sweep sometimes have startling results, as in the opening of "The World," justifiably one of his most celebrated passages:

I Saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright,
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,
Driv'n by the spheres
Like a vast shadow mov'd, In which the world
And all her train were hurl'd.

This surpasses anything that previous allegorists venture and puts in succinct terms Vaughan's blend of temporal and visionary lyric loci. Perhaps a habit of solitude on the margins without the prospect of an intimate audience was necessary before this blend could be found. Certainly in moving from the Jonsonian poet of the small circle in *Poems* (1646) to the poet of a shattered courtly community surrounded by what he considered to be the madness of warrior saints, Vaughan felt more keenly than most the poet's isolation and reduced public role, though he made a virtue indeed of adversity. It helped to have Herbert's ease with common language as a model, just as the satiric portions of what follows the opening vision of "The World" benefit from Donne. The first line has the casual tone almost of a report of an evening's outing, but the vision itself appears to come from no particular occasion or predictable time.

The transition from lyric to irony and to Bunyanesque types who ignore such visions suggests something of Vaughan's flexibility and skill in the unfolding of a capacious stanzaic unit. He rarely attempts to combine wit and lyric as Donne and Jonson do once he assumes the vatic voice of *Silex*, but the main body of "The World" consists of an incisive rendering of the complaining lover, statesman, miser, and "down-right Epicure." The view from eternity encourages some such estimation of "time in hours, days, years," but only the capacity to portion out the dramatic movement of the vision in the idiomatic voice of the down-to-earth prophet makes the marriage of levels possible. The contrast of tones and attitudes is perhaps even more Blakean than Bunyanesque in the address to fools:

> Yet some, who all this while did weep and sing,
> And sing, and weep, soar'd up into the Ring,
> But most would use no wing.
> O fools (said I,) thus to prefer dark night
> Before true light,
> To live in grots, and caves, and hate the day
> Because it shews the way,
> The way which from this dead and dark abode
> Leads up to God,
> A way where you might tread the Sun, and be
> More bright than he.
> But as I did their madness so discusse
> One whisper'd thus,
> *This Ring the Bride-groome did for none provide
> But for his bride.*

Nothing about eternity can be fully vocalized, but the speaker carries the spiritual crossing into lecture, in an address that he can
make. Within the cave, one cannot walk or soar, and yet in nearly all the ordinary days of the year one is confined there. Favored ones who walk grandly may "tread the Sun," but they must be chosen to do so. The final whispered message eludes all those who persist in their madness. The poet himself is not yet delivered, and that postponing of completion we come to expect: as the desire for conclusion pushes ahead, the interpretive process lingers.

The encounters of Vaughan's pilgrims with places and special moments are more intense for the presence-absence of the spirit in masques and shadows and, paradoxically, in prodigious gifts of nature as well. Those pilgrims find fewer sure footholds to prevent falling than Christian does; tenor and vehicle are less securely joined than a name like Worldly Wiseman joins them. Consequently, surfaces call attention to themselves. But Vaughan is less fully aware of the implications for metaphor of the evasiveness of objects than one might expect, especially by comparison with Marvell in poems like "A Dialogue between the Resolved Soul, and Created Pleasure" and "On a Drop of Dew." Sometimes wavering between lyric apostrophe, confession, and elegy, sometimes combining all three, as in "I walkt," Vaughan feels the enticements of the spirit's near presence and yet knows too the great distance to paradise. That the spirit shatters its gold into a thousand pieces is both prodigal in generosity and disunifying. If the various modes are not always coherently sorted out and logically sequenced, his better lyrics nonetheless make passage through what he believes to be parts of a single realm. They create their own topographical blend of concrete image and suggestive symbol shading into allegory. No one balances lyric possession and celebration with quite his sense of their limits and their local recollections of the sacred incubation that feeds "with life this frame." His sense of end things is also his own. As the concluding poems of both Silex I and Silex II indicate ("Begging" and "L'Envoy"), the search goes on. If "The new worlds new, quickning Sun" remains certain, the end draws off. The interim yields some social and religious programming but no reformation progress or Herbertlike communion. Corruption will grow until the sickle of Revelations thrusts in. The poet meanwhile expects some transfers of authority and insight directly to him, but mainly he must cope with postponement. Things that will appear in eternity's "cloudless glass" without "blemish or decay" are observable beforehand only behind "This long worn veyl." The function of the text is to juxtapose, cross back and forth, and ultimately to petition, in the one kind of apostrophe that means most to Bunyan and Herbert, too: "Dear Lord, do this!"
The viscous Air, where'sere She Fly,
Follows and sucks her Azure dy;
The gellying Stream compacts below,
If it might fix her shadow so;
The stupid Fishes hang, as plain
As Flies in Chrystal overt'ane;
And Men the Silent Scene assist,
Charm'd with the Saphir-winged Mist.

"Upon Appleton House," 673–80