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Henry Vaughan and William Wordsworth¹

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Wordsworth had a copy of the first edition of Vaughan's poems in his private library! This testimony, which seems decisive in proving Vaughan's influence on Wordsworth, was given by Richard Chenevix Trench (1807-86), a poet and Anglican archbishop, whose philological work contributed to the scientific study of language and gave the first impulse to the great *Oxford English Dictionary*, and who, of all persons (one could reasonably assume), would have nothing to do with false witness. In the second edition of *A Household Book of English Poetry*, published in 1870, the Most Reverend Trench, annotating Vaughan's 'The Retreat' and connecting it with Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', adduces, allegedly, a 'proof', which he could not provide two years earlier in the first edition:

I proceeded in my first edition to say, 'I do not mean that Wordsworth had ever seen this poem when he wrote his. The coincidences are so remarkable that it is certainly difficult to esteem them accidental; but Wordsworth was so little a reader of anything out of the way, and at the time when his Ode was composed, the *Silex Scintillans* was altogether out of the way, a book of such excessive rarity, that an explanation of the points of contact between the poems must be sought for elsewhere.' That this was too rashly spoken I have since had proof. A correspondent, with date July 13, 1869, has written to me, 'I have a copy of the first edition of the *Silex*, incomplete and very much damp-stained, which I bought in a lot with several books at the poet Wordsworth's sale.'²

This testimony seemed to endorse the comment Francis Turner Palgrave (1824-1897) had made in *The Golden Treasury*, published in 1863, suggesting the close relationship between Vaughan's poem and Wordsworth's poem.³ And since Trench's assertion was

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper, first presented in Japanese at the 41st Annual Conference of Japan Association of English Romanticism in October, 2015, and read at the 24th Colloquium of The Vaughan Association in April, 2019.

² *A Household Book of English Poetry*, 2nd edn., ed. Richard Chenevix Trench (London, 1870), p. 411.

³ According to John T. Shawcross, 'Kidnapping the Poets: the Romantics and Henry Vaughan', in *Milton, the Metaphysicals, and Romanticism*, ed. Lisa Low and Anthony John Harding (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 188, the first person who placed Vaughan and

repeated by Alexander B. Grosart (1827-1899), who compiled and published Vaughan's complete works in 1871, a number of readers and scholars have passionately asserted the direct intertextuality between Vaughan and Wordsworth. And perhaps, the legend of Wordsworth's indebtedness to Vaughan gathered frills and embellishments as it spread. For example, the Revd William Clare, in the introduction to his reprint of *Silex Scintillance* (1885), believed that Wordsworth's copy was 'well read and with notes in his own handwriting', and likewise in 1922, L. R. Merrill said that Wordsworth's was 'much-thumbed copy of Vaughan's poems'.⁴ The authoritative editions of Wordsworth's works published by OUP have inherited a myth by preserving until the second edition of 1970 the similarly unwarranted annotation of the editor Ernest de Sélincourt (1870-1943), who stated that Wordsworth 'certainly knew' Vaughan's poem.⁵ We should be aware, however, that this kind of statement is based on the anonymous letter addressed to Archbishop Trench, which has not been discovered even now.

In fact, already in 1935, Helen N. McMaster pointed out that what Trench had said in the first edition must have been correct.⁶ Indeed, there is no mention of Vaughan's name either in Wordsworth's letters or his sister Dorothy's writings. And in 1819 when Wordsworth compiled a collection of poems dedicated to Lady Mary Lowther (d. 1863), while his choices were Shakespeare, Pope and other eighteenth-century poets, together with seventeenth-century poets such as Wither, Marvell, Carew, and even Samuel Daniel, he did not include Henry Vaughan.⁷ Furthermore, as June Sturrock has pointed out, in September, 1814, Wordsworth sent to the compiler of *A Complete Edition of the Poets of Great Britain* (1792-95) a list of poets who he thought should be added to the next collection, but as in the first collection, Vaughan's name did not appear in his suggested

Wordsworth side by side was 'Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, in *Horae Subsecivae*, II (1861)'. In the tradition of anthologies of poetry, even the one published in 2008 puts Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' immediately after Vaughan's 'The Retreat': *Penguin's Poems for Life*, selected by Laura Barber (pp. 29-35).

⁴ See *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, 3 vols. ed. Donald R. Dickson, Alan Rudrum, and Robert Wilcher (Oxford: OUP, 2018), i, lx.

⁵ *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 5 vols. (1947; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn., 1970), iv, 466. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Mysticism in English Literature* (Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1970), first published in 1913 and reprinted in 1970, also seems to have continued to believe in Vaughan's direct influence on Wordsworth: 'The Retreat, ... must have furnished some suggestion for the *Immortality Ode*', p. 58). Gene Ruoff, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Making of the Major Lyrics, 1802-04* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1989), p. 256 also asserts that Wordsworth was 'almost certainly acquainted' with Vaughan.

⁶ Helen N. McMaster, 'Vaughan and Wordsworth', *Review of English Studies*, 11 (1935), pp. 313-325.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 319-320.

list.⁸ Judging from all this circumstantial evidence, two conclusions follow. At least at the time when Wordsworth wrote the poem which we feel bears close parallels to Vaughan's poem, he did not know the Welsh poet. Or alternatively, although he knew him, Wordsworth was so much influenced by Vaughan that he deliberately avoid any mention of him whatsoever. One of these conclusions must be true. To my regret, however, I cannot give evidence for the latter possibility here, though it is an attractive one. Rather, by comparing and contrasting the two poets, and by finding a point of contact between them (as Archbishop Trench noted) in places other than those in which a direct influence might be assumed, I would like to elucidate the essential characteristics of their poems.

Childhood

The most remarkable features which Vaughan's 'The Retreat' and Wordsworth's 'Ode' have in common, the extent of which does not seem mere accidental, are the idea of a happy childhood blessed by God, and the belief that the older we grow, the farther we move away from that blessing. Recollecting his childhood, Vaughan's poem begins with these lines:

Happy those early dayes! When I
Shin'd in my Angell-infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white, Celestial thought[.]

(‘The Retreat’, lines 1-6)⁹

Similarly, Wordsworth's poem begins with the recollection of his shining early days which he can no longer enjoy:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light[.]

⁸ June Sturrock, 'Wordsworth and Vaughan', *Notes and Queries*, 24 (1977), pp. 322-323.

⁹ All quotations from Vaughan's verse are taken from *The Works of Henry Vaughan*. Hereafter, they are accompanied by references to line numbers in the text.

When Wordsworth says that ‘Heaven lies about us in our infancy!’ (line 66), he is in the same state as Vaughan in his childhood, in which the latter describes himself as shining as if he were an angel, or more precisely, capable of being identified with light itself. Growing into adulthood simply means becoming more distant from the source of light, that is, estranged from God. For example, the acquisition of language, which is one of the concrete processes necessary to be involved in this world, is for Vaughan a pitiful and painful incident in which ‘I taught my tongue to wound / My Conscience with a sinfull sound’ (lines 15-16). Likewise, describing a child’s growth negatively, Wordsworth refers to his ‘newly-learned art’ (line 93) of language, in which he ‘fit[s] his tongue / To dialogues of business, love, or strife’ (lines 98-99) as if it were the speech of actors in Shakespearean tragedies, which he has to learn in this life of ‘endless imitation’ (line 108).

Even in their beginnings, however, there seems to be a subtle difference between the two poems. While they both use the adjective ‘celestial’, what it modifies is different, shifting each poet’s emphasis. In using this word, Vaughan wants to convey the sacredness of ‘Celestiall thought’ which the soul in childhood retains. On the other hand, for Wordsworth, the hallowedness he wants to emphasize is that of nature before his eyes, which seems to be wrapped in ‘celestial light’. Consequently, though both poets regard the process of growth as involving a movement away from heaven, Vaughan describes it as a child’s soul becoming alienated from God whereas Wordsworth describes it as a child becoming separated from the ‘celestial light’ which he used to behold in nature.

When yet I had not walkt above
A mile, or two, from my first love,
And looking back (at that short space,)
Could see a glimpse of his bright-face[.]

(‘The Retreat’, lines 7-10)

The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest,
And by the vision splendid

¹⁰ All quotations from Wordsworth’s verse are taken from *William Wordsworth: The Poems*, 2 vols. ed. John O. Hayden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982). Hereafter, they are accompanied by references to line numbers in the text.

Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

(‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’, lines 72-77)

When the two poets look at nature with an infant’s eyes, however, their poetic lines closely resemble each other. For Wordsworth, his childhood was ‘the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower’ (lines 178-179), and for Vaughan, it was the time when

... on some *gilded Cloud, or flowre*
My gazing soul would dwell an houre,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity[.]

(‘The Retreat’, lines 11-14)

Yet, as far as Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’ is concerned, what is decisively different from Vaughan’s attitude is that he feels ‘eternity’ in nature in the present, as opposed to the past: he says,

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

(‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’, lines 203-204)

Wordsworth does entertain ‘a thought of grief’ (line 22) as the divine brilliancy which nature used to reveal gradually disappears with the passage of time in his life. Despite this, or because of it, the ‘Ode’ may be trying to be a palinode, a poem in which the poet retracts the sentiment of sorrow he felt before. He declares that even the humblest flower enables the poet as a prophet and a seer to feel ‘the eternal deep’ (line 113), and what should be emphasized is that that revelation is not limited to our early days. We know that probably just one day before Wordsworth began to write this ode, he composed the verse in which he sang ‘My heart leaps up when I behold / A rainbow in the sky’ (lines 1-2). The poem shows his burning desire and earnest determination to maintain ‘natural piety’ (line 9) regardless of age.

In Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’, he shows a forward-looking attitude, and says positively to all things in nature that ‘in my heart of hearts I feel your might; / I only have relinquished one delight [of childhood] / To live beneath your more habitual sway’ (lines 190-193). By contrast, Vaughan sets the limits of the glory and brilliance of nature in childhood, and

desires to make a 'retreat' to the past, which seems impossible to him. As far as Vaughan is concerned, the verb 'feel', which in Wordsworth typically indicates an empirical mode of perception, has to be used in the past tense, 'felt', as in '[I] felt through all this fleshly dresse / Bright *shootes* of everlastingnesse' ('The Retreat', lines 19-20). One of the reasons for his sense of loss may be that the poem was composed during the Civil War and its aftermath, in the historical context in which Vaughan's political faction had to make a military retreat. And another, perhaps simpler, reason is the idea inherent in Vaughan of *contemptus mundi*, which many seventeenth-century poets inherited from mediaeval Christianity. Apparently in a way similar to Wordsworth, but in fact quite differently, Vaughan describes a person gazing meditatively at a flower in 'The World':

The doting Lover in his quaintest strain
Did there Complain,

...

..., while he his eys did pour
Upon a flowr.

('The World', lines 8-9, 14-15)

The flower gazed on by this fond earthly man signifies, of course, his beloved lady. The verb 'pour', making his gaze fluid, evokes the image of a lover shedding tears for his unrequited love. Vaughan describes the lover of this world as vain and foolish. Supposing Wordsworth had read this poem by Vaughan, it might have been said that the 'thoughts that do ... lie too deep for tears' of Wordsworth, who likewise gazes on a flower in the last line of the 'Ode', were the result of his adaptation of Vaughan's poem. These thoughts are quite different from, or diametrically opposite to, the secular grief of this world, representing a lofty thought turning toward the eternal world that exists beyond sentimental, selfish tears. There is no evidence here of Wordsworth having adapted Vaughan's lines. It is evident, however, that for Vaughan earthly creatures assumed a corrupt and despised nature as a consequence of the Fall. The retreat Vaughan wished to make, then, was the retreat from this world. That is why, in the last lines of 'The Water-fall', Vaughan seeks eagerly for 'my invisible estate' (line 37), in spite of the fact that the waterfall before his eyes taught him God's providence, saying 'Not this with Cataracts and Creeks' (line 40).

The Doctrine of the Preexistence of the Soul

Another common theme which underlies both Vaughan's 'The Retreat' and Words-

worth's 'Ode' is the doctrine of the preexistence of the soul. Assuming his previous state of existence, Vaughan calls this life 'my second race' (line 4). And when Wordsworth says that he has run 'Another race' (line 200), it seems as if he reiterates the earlier poet's expression, though perhaps the common source of the image of life as a race was Saint Paul's in the New Testament (e.g. *Heb.* 12:1). Furthermore, in Vaughan's 'The Water-fall', contemplating the stream of water, the poet states that our souls came from 'a sea of light' (line 18).¹¹ Similarly, Wordsworth's 'Ode' says that our souls, though now travelling far inland, originate in the 'immortal sea' of our previous life:

Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither[.]

('Ode: Intimations of Immortality', lines 163-165)

Interestingly enough, both poets' expressions of the doctrine of the preexistence of the soul imply further that they believed in reincarnation or metempsychosis. Donald R. Dickson has pointed out that 'The notion of circularity had a powerful appeal to Vaughan because it imaged ... the entire rhythm or motion of the created universe',¹² but I would add that the circularity of water conveys the idea of reincarnation. For example, the following lines in Vaughan's 'The Water-fall' may be assumed to say that each human soul, like each water drop, comes back to this world where the poet now meditates. If 'thee', which the poet addresses here, indicates the waterfall before him, these lines, evoking the image of a global water circulation, clearly imply that every soul returns to this world by the providence of nature.

... those drops are all sent back
So sure to thee, that none doth lack[.]

('The Water-fall', lines 19-20)

Wordsworth, too, though adding later in his life an explanatory and defensive note on his own pagan way of thinking,¹³ wrote meaningful poetic lines which, comparing our

¹¹ Cf. 'Thomas Vaughan explicitly supports the doctrine [of preexistence of souls]', see *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, iii, 1282: 'The Soule but quits her Courte to see the Countrey'.

¹² Donald R. Dickson, *The Fountain of Living Waters: The Typology of the Waters of Life in Herbert, Vaughan, and Traherne* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), p. 146.

¹³ See *William Wordsworth: The Poems Volume One*, ed. John O. Hayden, p. 979.

souls to stars, referred to another world where the stars had once set before they rose again in this world. That world ambiguously signifies not only the sphere of ‘God, who is our home’ (line 65) but also this very world, namely, this same world that our souls used to inhabit with our old bodies before they were reborn with our new bodies:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:

(‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’, lines 58-61)

The implication of Wordsworth’s belief in reincarnation can be found, as Robert Zimmer has pointed out, in a passage of his first ‘Essay upon Epitaphs’ written in 1810.¹⁴ There, too, the rising of the sun indicates birth, the setting, death, as in the above lines from the ‘Ode’ composed between 1802 and 1804.

As, in sailing upon the orb of this planet, a voyage towards the regions where the sun sets, conducts gradually to the quarter where we have been accustomed to behold it come forth at its rising; and, in like manner, a voyage towards the east, the birth-place in our imagination of the morning, leads finally to the quarter where the sun is last seen when he departs from our eyes; so the contemplative Soul, travelling in the direction of mortality, advances to the country of everlasting life; and in like manner, may she continue to explore those cheerful tracts, till she is brought back, for her advantage and benefit, to the land of transitory things—of sorrow and of tears.¹⁵

If death is birth, birth death, into what sphere are we supposed to be born, or die and go? Into the next world of everlasting life or into this transitory world of sorrow and tears, i.e., this same world again? Granted that for Vaughan and Wordsworth the doctrine of the preexistence of the soul, and reincarnation, were ideas they had in common, as is often suggested by the poems of the former, and as the latter explained in his note to the ‘Ode’, it may safely be said that they are ‘an ingredient in Platonic philosophy’.¹⁶ For example, in *Phaedo*, Plato tries to illustrate the immortality of the soul by arguing for

¹⁴ Robert Zimmer, *Clairvoyant Wordsworth: A Case Study in Heresy and Critical Prejudice* (San Jose: Writers Club Press, 2002), pp. 9-10.

¹⁵ *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), iv, 53.

¹⁶ *William Wordsworth: The Poems Volume One*, ed. John O. Hayden, p. 979.

the cyclic process of generation, from life to death, and from death to life. Referring to 'an ancient tradition', by which he meant perhaps Orphism, or the philosophy of Pythagoras, Plato explains the thought that 'the souls of men who have died ... go [to the nether world] from here and come back here again and are born from the dead. Now if this is true, if the living are born again from the dead, our souls would exist there' (70c).¹⁷

However, there is a distinct difference between the two poets in the way in which they treat the ideas of the fountainhead. It may be assumed that this shows a difference in the way each poet believed in the doctrine. For Vaughan, his Christian belief does not appear to be in conflict with the pagan doctrine, whereas for Wordsworth, as at least one annotation he added in his later career manifests, he seems to have had some reasons for exculpating himself from a charge of paganism (for instance, towards Coleridge, who adamantly denied the doctrine of the preexistence of the soul). Wordsworth, nevertheless, understood that, though it is doctrinally and rationally impossible to claim the return of our souls to this world, he should sing it as a poet who tries to express the natural feelings of a human being. Elsewhere than in 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', we can find an interesting case of Wordsworth's employment of the heresy, in which he tries to make 'for my purpose the best use of it I could as a Poet'.¹⁸ For example, in the poem entitled 'The Two April Mornings', Wordsworth narrates the story of a father, who has lost his dearest daughter. In the poem, while 'bright and red / Uprose the morning sun' (lines 1-2), Matthew says 'The will of God be done' (line 4). Thus, he seemed to have accepted, or at least tried to accept, the providence of the Christian God. When he was walking by 'the steaming rills' (line 10), however, he let out a sad sigh, and asked why, saying, while fixing his eye on the top of an eastern mountain, that 'Yon cloud with that long purple cleft' (line 21) brought to his mind what had happened thirty years before on a similar morning. It was nine years after he had been bereft of his daughter Emma. He stood alone by her grave in the churchyard, and he was feeling the strongest emotions ever, when he met a girl 'as happy as a wave / That dances on the sea' (lines 51-52):

'And, turning from her grave, I met,
Beside the churchyard yew,
A blooming Girl, whose hair was wet
With points of morning dew.

¹⁷ Plato, *Phaedo*, 70C, in *Plato: With an English Translation, I, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (London: William Heinemann, 1960), p. 243. See also 72A: 'the living are generated from the dead, just as much as the dead from the living. ... the souls of the dead exist somewhere, whence they come back to life' (p. 251).

¹⁸ *William Wordsworth: The Poems Volume One*, ed. John O. Hayden, p. 979.

In addition to the series of images inevitably associated with the concept of rebirth — those of spring, morning, and the eastern sky from which the sun rises — Wordsworth deploys carefully the imagery of water in such a way that it reminds the reader of the circulation of water as a law of nature. Just as Vaughan in ‘The Water-fall’, comparing life to a stream, and a waterfall to death, implies the return of souls by saying that water, having once reached the ocean, comes back to the same place on earth, so in Wordsworth’s poem, what is especially effective is the imagery of the cyclic process in which water evaporates, becomes clouds, and descends again as dewdrops. Water, although it changes its form, never ceases to exist. The morning dew glistening on the hair of the girl Matthew met by Emma’s grave serves the function of suggesting the possibility that the soul of his daughter has come back to earth, taking the shape of this ‘blooming Girl’. Still more, in terms of poetic emotions, the reader would not feel any qualms about sympathizing with a father who believes in the pagan doctrine of the return of the soul, feeling that his dead beloved daughter was reborn and had come back to him. That is why Matthew, looking at her many times, sighed, and for fear that he should be deprived of her again, ‘did not wish her mine!’ (line 56)

Intellectual Symbol and Emotional Symbol

In poetic tradition, as the treatment in Robert Herrick’s ‘To Daffodills’ or Andrew Marvell’s ‘On a Drop of Dew’ exemplifies, the dew represents life or a soul, and the transience of it.¹⁹ In seventeenth-century poems, it often conveys a theological or moral lesson. On the other hand, in the case of Wordsworth the dew works largely as an effective device for arousing emotions in Matthew as a father and in the sympathetic reader of the poem. Here, we may find a vital difference between Vaughan and Wordsworth. It may be said that it is a functional difference between intellectual symbol and emotional symbol, even a fundamental difference between a seventeenth-century poet and a Romantic poet. Creatures in Vaughan’s poems are divine characters in the Book of Nature, which serve as a conduit to convey God’s providence and lessons to deepen the Christian faith. So, Vaughan’s dew represents, just as manna in the Old Testament does, the grace of God:

¹⁹ Cf. ‘To Daffadills’, lines 19-20: ‘Or as the pearles of Mornings dew / Ne’r to be found againe’, in *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick*, 2 vols., ed. Tom Cain and Ruth Connolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), i, 119; ‘On a Drop of dew’, line 19: ‘So the soul, that drop’, in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (2003; Harlow: Pearson, revised edn. 2007), p. 41.

... 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

(‘Providence’, lines 26-30)

This explains why, in the case of Vaughan, even if, in admiration, he calls to a thing or a creature in nature by a Wordsworthian apostrophe, the purpose of the poet is not a manifestation of his own emotions or awaking sympathy in the reader. For example, in ‘The Water-fall’, even when Vaughan exclaims:

What sublime truths, and wholesome themes,
Lodge in thy mystical, deep streams!

(‘The Water-fall’, lines 27-28),

the poet does not feel as much exaltation as Wordsworth. Ultimately, what he wants to emphasize is the truth, or the divine message that God, who directs a stream of water, can guide human beings to the heavenly home. The modifier, ‘sublime’, too, signifies loftiness or sophistication in an intellectual and conceptual sense, as the *OED* defines it: ‘4. Of ideas, truths, subjects, etc.: Belonging to the highest regions of thought, reality, or human activity’. It does not mean what the waterfall must have evoked in the eighteenth century or in the age of Wordsworth, that is: ‘Of things in nature and art: Affecting the mind with a sense of overwhelming grandeur or irresistible power; calculated to inspire awe, deep reverence, or lofty emotion, by reason of its beauty, vastness, or grandeur’ (*OED*, 7).²⁰

²⁰ As for the theme of waterfalls in the visual arts, it may be interesting to compare, for example, the two pictures we can see in Galleria degli Uffizi, Italy: *Waterfall with Fishermen* (1768) by Claude Joseph Vernet (1714-1789) and *Landscape with Waterfalls* (1616) by Martin Ryckaert (1587-1631). On the one hand, the former has a quality of fierceness such as we can find in pictures by Salvator Rosa (1615-1673). On the other, though depicted with a picturesque ruin, the latter has a contemplative quality, suggesting in the corner of the picture the biblical scene in which Moses as a baby is washed down the river. In terms of the emblematic meanings the image of a waterfall connotes, more analogous to Vaughan’s is the one depicted in *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1620) by Pieter Lastman (1583-1633), now in the National Gallery, London. There, while in the foreground the apple Joseph is holding refers to the original sin of Adam and Eve, from which Christ will redeem mankind, in the background the waterfall seems

The same thing can be said about a rainbow. Vaughan's 'The Rain-bow' reminds the reader of the covenant made between God and man after Noah's flood, and when the poet says 'I can in thine see him' (line 16), it serves the same function as the picture of a God-like figure sitting on the top of a rainbow in Francis Quarles's emblem book (*Emblemes* [1634], Book III, Emblem XIV). Vaughan's rainbow is emblematic.²¹ By contrast, at the centre of Wordsworth's poem about a rainbow is his feeling of exaltation: when the poet sees it, he exclaims 'My heart leaps up' (line 1). Unlike Vaughan in 'Anguish', who says that if he cannot write a true poem to praise God, 'Or let me dye!' (line 20), Wordsworth says that if he has lost the childlike ability to be emotionally moved, 'Or let me die!' (line 6). For it was his emotion that was closely bound up with 'natural piety' (line 9). In the 'Ode', too, Wordsworth's 'Child of Joy' (line 34) sees the light of God 'in his joy' (line 71). And in the final analysis, the reason why he praises childhood is that he wants to maintain that early joy:

O joy! That in our embers
Is something that doth live

('Ode: Intimations of Immortality', lines 130-131)

to represent the Fall and the resurrection. The concept of the sublime, which means producing an overwhelming sense of awe or other high emotion through being vast or grand, is of course theorized by Edmund Burke (1729-1797) in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of the Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). The origin of the word, however, lies in *On the Sublime* reputedly written by the first-century Greek rhetorician Longinus. There, the word signifies one of the rhetorical means by which an orator excites the audience. The argument of Longinus was widely prevalent in seventeenth-century England either in a Latin version or an English one. The first English translation by John Hall (1627-1656), *Peri hypsous, or Dionysius Longinus of the Height of Eloquence* (London, 1652) uses, not the word 'sublime', but 'height'. What intrigues us is that already in this old argument on the sublime it was a concept closely bound up with emotions. Longinus states that 'the *bravest* and most *shining* parts of Speech are *Height*' (p. ii), and that 'these sublimities do not only *win*, but *astonish* their Hearers' (ibid.). He also asserts that '[those sublimities] that have within them *force* and an *irresistible violence* orepell [*sic*] the hearer and overcome him' (p. iii), and that 'indeed naturally our souls are so enflamed by true *heights* that they generally *elevate* themselves, and in a *transport* of *joy* and *wonder* own and father those great things that are presented to them, as if themselves had *produced* them' (p. xi). And he emphasizes that '*fountains* of *sublime* Eloquence' (p. xii) are '*fierce and transporting passion*' (ibid.). Curiously enough, however, as the first and foremost of the causes of the sublime, he specifies '*regular vastnesse of thought*' (ibid.) If Vaughan read Longinus's argument on the sublime, it must be this point that he agreed on.

²¹ In other words, as S. L. Bethell said, 'For Wordsworth the reality was nature, and one felt there was something behind it; for Vaughan the reality was God and the eternal order: temporal things were significant only because they bore the "signatures" of their eternal antitypes', cited in *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, i, lx.

Pantheism and Hermeticism

And it may be said that what is called Wordsworth's pantheism is one with his feeling of joy in nature. Near Tintern Abbey, he sang as follows:

I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

('Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting
the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798', lines 93-102)

Such words as 'the living air' and 'All thinking things' indicate that Wordsworth's pantheism is connected with a kind of animism. If the definition of pantheism is contradictory to the concept of the Christian God of monotheism, we may have to say, as John Shawcross asserted, that 'There is nothing pantheistic about Vaughan's use of nature'.²² It is certain, however, that both Vaughan and Wordsworth equally admitted the presence of 'A motion and a spirit, that ... rolls through all things'. Vaughan states that all things have senses, and observed in 'The Night' that '*trees* and *herbs* did watch and peep / And wonder' (lines 23-24). According to him, it is the Omnipotence that 'make[s] Clay / A spirit, and true glory dwell / In dust, and stones' ('The Check', lines 34-36). He was a poet who looked at a flower and could feel that 'Within [its] sacred leaf did lie / The fulness of the Deity' ('The Night', lines 17-18), and could believe that 'Each *Bush* / And *Oak* doth know I *AM*' ('Rules and Lessons', lines 15-16). If the definition of pantheism does not square with Vaughan's idea of Christianity, we may call it panentheism.

Apart from the question of whether or not pantheism is shared by the two poets, in Vaughan's poem entitled 'Religion', there seems to be both a thread in common, and a little later a difference, or rather, an interface between the two:

²² Shawcross, 'Kidnapping the Poets: the Romantics and Henry Vaughan', p. 193.

My God, when I walke in those groves,
And leaves thy spirit doth still fan,
I see in each shade that there growes
An Angell talking with a man.

....

Nay thou thy selfe, my God, in *fire*,
Whirle-winds, and *Clouds*, and the *soft voice*
Speak'st there so much, that I admire
We have no Conf'rence in these daies;

Is the truce broke?

(‘Religion’, lines 1-4, 17-21)

Indeed, Vaughan’s spiritual commerce with God is expressed in the present tense here, but, unfortunately, it does not last long, like sparks from a flint. On the one hand, Wordsworth can find, or at least try to find, continuous delight in nature, but on the other, Vaughan, like a lover gazing on a flower in ‘The World’, has to be brought back to the melancholy state in which he looks at the things of nature vacantly. More often than not, as in the poem ‘Vanity of Spirit’, all he can find is ‘Traces’ (line 16), and ‘Echoes beaten from th’ eternall hills’ (line 18). For, as a consequence of the sins and death of human beings, the poet’s eyes cannot see God: ‘This veyle ... / ... shadows thee from me’ (‘Cock-crowing’, lines 39-40). What we must admit, nonetheless, is that while the Christian thought of *contemptus mundi* invited him to disregard this world and the things of this world, Vaughan’s writing, as Elizabeth Holmes’s study pointed out in the early twenty century, reflects a strong influence of hermeticism, in the extent of which he can be said to be exceptional among seventeenth-century poets.²³ It may safely be assumed that when Vaughan was in a state where he could perceive a deity in all things in the universe, his thought was the same as that of hermeticists. For example, a mystic, Valentine Weigel (1533-1588) says in his book published in England in 1649:

God is whole without us, and also whole within us. ... We have God every where with

²³ Elizabeth Holmes, *Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1932), see especially p. 26ff.

us, whether we know it, or know it not.²⁴

Also, Henry Vaughan's twin brother and the alchemist, Thomas, frequently refers to the immanence and omnipresence of God in all things in the universe: for instance, he says,

Certainly He built and founded Nature upon His own supernatural centre. He is in her and through her, and with His Eternal Spirit doth He support heaven and earth —as our bodies are supported with our spirits.²⁵

A homogeneous thought is expressed by Vaughan's contemporary, the poet and mystic, Thomas Traherne (1637-1674). His poem entitled 'Wonder', for example, begins with an exclamation uttered as he looks back on his childhood, but immediately after this, the second line praises the divine brightness in the present tense: 'How like an Angel came I down! / How Bright are all Things here!' (lines 1-2, my emphasis).²⁶ These lines may signify that not only an infant's sensation in the past, but also a perception of the grown-up can, feel the existence of God nearby. Another contemporary mystic, Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), seems to be closer to Vaughan: he says that when 'the outward World was a Paradise', 'the divine Essence sprang forth and budded through the Earthly, the Eternal Life through the Mortal'.²⁷ Using similar botanical imagery, Thomas Vaughan wrote that 'man in his original was a branch planted in God and that there was a continual influx from the stock to the scion'.²⁸ The reason why Henry Vaughan could feel 'Bright *shootes* of everlastingnesse' ('The Retreat', line 20) in his childhood is that he shared the same ideas as those of Boehme and Thomas Vaughan.

One important causal factor behind the fact that Wordsworth's 'Ode' shows a close approximation to Vaughan's 'The Retreat' is perhaps the influence of the hermetic idea of childhood, which both of them shared and separately absorbed. Concerning a child, Hermes Trismegistus says:

Consider, O Son, the Soul of a Childe, when as yet it hath received no dissolution of

²⁴ Valentine Weigel, *Astrologie Theologized* (London, 1649), p. 8.

²⁵ Thomas Vaughan, *Lumen de Lumine or A New Magical Light* [1651], in *The Works of Thomas Vaughan: Eugenius Philalethes*, ed. Arthur Edward Waite (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1919), p. 297.

²⁶ *The Works of Thomas Traherne*, 6 vols., ed. Jan Ross (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), vi, 4.

²⁷ Jacob Behmen, *Signatura Rerum: Or the Signature of All Things* (London, 1651), p. 49.

²⁸ Thomas Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagica, or A Discourse of the Nature of Man and his State after Death* [1650], in *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, p. 10.

[i.e., by] its Body, which is not yet grown, but is very small: how then if it look upon it self, it sees it self beautiful, as not having been yet spotted with the Passions of the Body, but as it were depending yet upon the Soul of the World. But when the Body is grown and distracteth, the Soul it ingenders Forgetfulness, and partakes no more of the Fair, and the Good, and Forgetfulness is Evilness.²⁹

Likewise, Boehme, reminding the reader of an episode in the bible, in which Jesus told his disciples, who were disputing among themselves ‘who should be the greatest’, that ‘If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all’, and ‘took a child, and set him in the midst of them’ (St. Mark, 9:34, 35, 36), says as follows:

Little Children are our Schoolemasters till evill stirre in them, ... they bring their sport from the Mothers wombe, which is a Remnant of Paradise: but all the rest is gone till we shall receive it againe.³⁰

Similarly, Vaughan asks, ‘Since all that age doth teach, is ill, / Why should I not love childe-hood still?’, and insists that we should learn, not from experience, but from ‘Childe-hood’:

How do I study now, and scan
Thee, more then ere I studied man[.]

(‘Childe-hood’, lines 19-20, 39-40)

In order to ‘inherit everlasting life’, Jesus Christ suggested, ‘many that are first [should] be last; and the last [should] be first’ (Matthew, 19:29-30). Wordsworth’s well-known, almost revelatory words, ‘The Child is father of the Man’ (‘My heart leaps up when I behold’, line 7) may just be saying the same thing in a different way. And still more important than this prophetic quality of the poem is that Wordsworth describes childhood as filled with joy, like Boehme. Concerning the condition of souls in the next

²⁹ *The Divine Pymander of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus, in XVII Books*, trans. John Everard (London, 1649), pp. 51-52.

³⁰ Jacob Behmen, *XL. Questions concerning the Soule* (London, 1647), p. 130. In the same treatise, he writes that ‘many times a Childe is more blessed then one that is old, who hath the Devill for his Guest’ (p. 68). In the final analysis, however, Boehme, espousing traducianism, thinks that there are no children that do not inherit the original sin from their parents: ‘no soule is borne into this world without sinne, how honest soever the Parents be; for it is conceived in the Earthly seed, and bringeth the *Turba* of the body with it, which also hath begirt the soule’ (p. 79). For him, the idea of a sinless soul having ‘the New Birth’ is ‘a mere fable’ which ‘the Anti-Christ’ tells (p. 80).

world, Boehme, explaining that ‘in Heaven there is an humble simple Childrens Life’,³¹ prophesies as follows:

We shall lead a life like children, who rejoice and are very merry in their Sports; for there will be no sadness in our hearts, or feare of any thing: but a delightfull Recreation with the Angels.³²

We may recall that by retreating into childhood, Vaughan wants ‘by mere playing [to] go to Heaven’ (‘Childe-hood’, line 8). And likewise, Wordsworth’s souls observe children playing on the seashore of the eternal world:

Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.
(‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’, lines 164-168)

It seems undeniable, of course, that Wordsworth, living a real life, does experience a sense of distance from his childhood. But, precisely because of that, he seems to fill his poem with exquisite joy. In it, he tries to participate in joyful songs of spring birds, little lambs’ skips of joy, and, addressing ‘Ye that pipe and ye that play’ (ibid., line 173), says, ‘We in thought will join your throng’ (ibid., line 172). Wordsworth’s addressees, ‘Ye that ... today / Feel the gladness of the May’ (ibid., lines 174-175) are, in Boehme’s manner of expression, angels compared to children:

I will liken them [Angels] to *little* Children which walk in the Fields in *May*, among the *Flowers*, and pluck them, and make curious Garlands and Poseys, carrying them in their Hands *rejoicing*, ... So do the holy Angels likewise, they ... walk together in the curious *May* of Heaven, ... and make Use of the beautiful heavenly Flowers for their Play or Sport ... and rejoice in the delicious pleasant *May* of God.³³

³¹ Ibid., p. 115.

³² Ibid., p. 129.

³³ Jacob Behmen, *Aurora*, trans. John Sparrow, in *The Works of Jacob Behmen*, 4 vols., ed. G. Ward and T. Langcake (1656; London, 1764-1781), i, 107-108. Boehme’s influence on seventeenth-century poets includes not only Vaughan but also, without doubt, Thomas Traherne. For example, retrospectively on the golden age of his childhood, Traherne says: ‘The Boys and Girles were mine, / Oh how did all their Lovly faces Shine!

The Origin of Wordsworth's Hermeticism

Even if the influence of hermeticism on Vaughan is unmistakable, where did the same influence in Wordsworth come from? It is known that Wordsworth possessed two works of Boehme in the Rydal Mount library, but it is still speculative to suggest that at the time when Wordsworth composed the 'Ode', he had already owned, and moreover, had read them.³⁴ One of the strongest possibilities, however, is that Wordsworth learnt about Boehme via Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It has been pointed out that at the beginning of the 'Ode', there are some intertextual connections to Coleridge's work, and in particular, it has been noted that the baby described in lines 86-90 refers to Hartley, Coleridge's eldest son.³⁵ On the other hand, Coleridge says of Hermes Trismegistus in a letter dated on 19th November, 1796 that the writings of 'philosophy-dreamers [like] Tauth [i.e., Thoth]' are one of 'my darling Studies'.³⁶ Concerning Boehme, too, Coleridge expressed great interest in this mystical thinker in the second half of 1790, and mentions him many times in his letters and books.³⁷ The English translation of Hermes Trismegistus by John Everard existed at least in the edition of 1786, and the complete works of Boehme had been published from 1764 to 1781.³⁸ What seems to be decisive is that alongside the

/ The Sons of Men were Holy Ones' ('Wonder', lines 39-41). He regards it as 'An Antepast of Heaven' ('Innocence', line 62), and thinks that 'I must becom[e] a Child again' (ibid., line 65). See *The Works of Thomas Traherne*, vi, 5, 10. And of course, the thought that childhood is an innocent period of life in which we are spiritually wholesome is biblical and Neo-Platonic, but when George Herbert (1593-1633), whom Vaughan saw as his spiritual teacher, wrote 'The growth of flesh is but a blister; / Childhood is health' ('H. Baptisme (II)', lines 14-15; *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox [2007; Cambridge: CUP, 2011], p. 153), it may be argued that Boehme had some effect on his lines, too.

³⁴ *Transactions of the Wordsworth Society, Nos. I-VI*, rpt. (Brussels: Jos. Adam, 1966), VI, p. 217, records *De Signatura Rerum* (1651) and *Theosophick Philosophy unfolded* (1691). Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Mysticism in English Literature*, p. 62, remarks of a certain passage of Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' that 'it closely resembles the accounts given by Plotinus and Boehme of similar experiences'. Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p. 17, based on Newton P. Stallknecht's argument, suggests 1797-8 as the date of Wordsworth's reading Boehme's works.

³⁵ See Selincourt's notes to 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', lines 1-6, 86-90, in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, iv, 466.

³⁶ *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume I 1785-1800*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 156.

³⁷ *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Marginalia I*, ed. George Whalley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 554. See also Kiran Toor, 'Coleridge's Chrysopoetics: Alchemy, Authorship, and Imagination' (Ph.D. thesis, the University of London, April 2007), p. 145.

³⁸ Lewis William Brüggemann, *A View of the English Editions, Translations and*

following passage in Boehme's *Aurora* —

Dost thou think thou shalt *not* have enough in this world? O blind Man! ... Is not Heaven and Earth thine? Nay, *God* himself too? What dost thou bring into this World, or what dost thou take along with thee at thy going out of it? Thou bringest an *Angelical* Garment into this World, and with thy wicked Life thou turnest it into a Devil's Mask or *Vizard*.³⁹

— Coleridge quoted as one of his marginalia the lines from the poem of his close friend, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality':

Not in entire forgetfulness
Nor yet in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of Glory do we come
From God who is our Home.
HEAVEN LIES ABOUT US IN OUR INFANCY!
WORDSWORTH.⁴⁰

It is true that Coleridge's notes were written in the margin after February, 1808 when he had obtained this copy of *Aurora* from Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859). Curiously enough, however, some of the other marginalia in the same copy of *Aurora* bear the date of 1800, and there are some places where the dates are not simply mistaken, and it is not impossible to think that they indicate when those specific ideas and words occurred to Coleridge's mind.⁴¹ Furthermore, the beginning of the second line cited by Coleridge varies from the words of the poem Wordsworth published in 1807: 'And not in'. Does this variant, or inaccuracy, stem simply from Coleridge's mistaken memory? Or, alternatively, did it happen due to Wordsworth's transmitting by word of mouth rather than by the written text? At any rate, given the explicit evidence that Coleridge had read Boehme much earlier than Wordsworth published his 'Ode', it would be highly plausible that affectionately looking at Coleridge's eldest baby newly born in 1796, the two Romantic

Illustrations of the Ancient Greek and Latin Authors, with Remarks (Stettin, 1797), p. 7; *The Works of Jacob Behmen*, ed. G. Ward and T. Langcake, 4 vols. (London, 1764-81).

³⁹ *The Works of Jacob Behmen*, ed. G. Ward and T. Langcake, i, 75. Elsewhere, Boehme observes that 'our soules are Children begotten of Gods seede, our heavenly body, which the heavenly soule weareth, commeth out of the Divine Body' (*XL. Questions concerning the Soule*, pp. 52-53).

⁴⁰ *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Marginalia I*, ed. George Whalley, p. 593.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 553, 555, 577.

poets might have a conversation to the effect that Boehme says such and such about children and angels, and thereby Wordsworth might have been encouraged to read the same passage in *Aurora*, the book which Coleridge owned. And more importantly, what Coleridge's note written in the margin strongly suggests is that at least one of the points of contact between Vaughan and Wordsworth was hermeticism such as that represented by Jacob Boehme.

For Vaughan, however, nothing changed the fact that this world was not the Garden of Eden. All human beings, including himself, have been driven out of it and are wandering as exiles. By contrast, Wordsworth as an heir to Paradise is writing his poems surrounded by the glorious things of nature. What enables him, though not Vaughan, to do so may be his implicit trust in feelings, which surpasses human thinking, reasoning, and doctrines. For Wordsworth, it is possible 'Thanks to the human heart by which we live, / Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears' ('Ode: Intimations of Immortality', lines 201-202).

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