13/2/79

CHRISTIAN NATURE MYSTICISM

in the Poetry

of

VAUGHAN, TRAHERNE, HOPKINS, and FRANCIS THOMPSON

by

Alison Janet Sherrington, B.A.(Hons.), M.A.

A THESIS

submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

[DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY]

Degree of Master of Arts awarded.

Department of English

University of Adelaide

October 1977

Awarded March 1978

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

In all mystical nature poetry, the Absolute is perceived in natural objects or scenes; but in specifically Christian mystical nature poetry, it is the transcendent triune God who is perceived in the visible creation. The vision of God transcendent yet immanent is the main feature which distinguishes Christian nature mysticism from Romantic nature mysticism, and of the four poets of this study, Vaughan is perhaps the most successful in attaining a balanced vision of the transcendence and the immanence of God. The general pattern which is revealed in their poetry is that Hopkins and Vaughan apprehend God as primarily transcendent, whereas Traherne and Thompson apprehend him as primarily immanent.

In the first section, Experience, it is found that all four poets feel a tension between the sensuous and the spiritual which is resolved only when there is a right relationship between God and the self; unlike the Romantics, they cannot find spiritual satisfaction in nature apart from the transcendent God. When this relationship has been established, they can attain a deeper knowledge and love of God through an appreciation of nature, and in their poetry one can trace stages in their journey towards a mystical vision of his presence in the created world. Closely related to their attitudes to nature are their attitudes to childhood, for regained childlikeness is for them an important facet of Christian nature mysticism. Vaughan and Hopkins are not as optimistic about the purity of children and nature and

about the possibility of attaining childlikeness in adult life as are Traherne and Thompson.

Common to all mystical writers is the problem of attempting to express the inexpressible, and symbolism is an inevitable outcome of this struggle. In the second section, Symbolism, it is shown that the four poets' use of nature symbols—of light, of water, and of plant and garden—points up the problem of how to celebrate God's immanence without disregarding his transcendence. In some of Thompson's poetry, Christianity and pantheism appear to exist side by side as separate strands, while at times Traherne, particularly in his use of sun symbolism, concentrates on the Light within him to the point of virtually disregarding the transcendence of that Light.

The last section, Expression, deals with the relationships between the kinds of spiritual awareness experienced by the four poets and the more literary aspects of their expression—imagery, style, and structure. There seems to be a link between the degree to which their vision emphasizes God's immanence in nature, and the degree of generality or vagueness and of structural looseness in their poems. Perhaps the reason for this link is that a desire for freedom from restraint, for personal expansion, is more fully satisfied by divine immanence than by divine transcendence. Thus the liberty in Traherne and Thompson is in marked contrast with the strict control in Hopkins, who feels strongly a need for restriction. The restrained freedom in Vaughan is consistent with his more balanced vision of the transcendence and the immanence of God.

STATEMENT

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I have at times referred to my book, Mystical Symbolism in the poetry of Thomas Traherne (St. Lucia, Queensland, 1970), which was originally my Master of Arts thesis. The Board of Research Studies of the University of Adelaide granted me written permission to use material from this previous work, provided that I acknowledged such contributions from it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I should like to thank all those who have helped me with my work in any way. For valuable suggestions and for encouragement, I am chiefly indebted to Professor Colin J. Horne of the University of Adelaide, to Dr Livio Dobrez and Dr David Parker of the Australian National University, Canberra, and to Professor Wesley Milgate, formerly of the Australian National University. I am also indebted to the staff of the Barr Smith Library of the University of Adelaide for their courteous efficiency in procuring material for me, and to the Australian National University for granting me permission to read in and borrow material from the Menzies and Chifley Libraries after I moved to Canberra.

PREFACE

In my study of Christian nature mysticism in the poetry of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Francis Thompson, I have had to quote so frequently from their poems that it would have been cumbersome to mention on each occasion the edition from which the quotation is taken. The following are the editions from which I have quoted:

Martin, L.C. (ed.). Henry Vaughan: Poetry and Selected Prose. Oxford Standard Authors. London, 1963.

Margoliouth, H.M. (ed.). Thomas Traherne: Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings. 2 vols. Oxford, 1958.

Gardner, W.H. and MacKenzie, N.H. (eds). The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 4th ed. rev. London, 1967.

Meynell, Wilfred (ed.). Francis Thompson: Poetical Works. Oxford Standard Authors. London, 1937.

When Philip Traherne's version of a poem is printed in Margoliouth's edition as well as Thomas Traherne's original, I have considered only the original version.

Within each chapter, a page reference to one of the above editions is given only when a poem is being mentioned for the first time. If the page reference is to the page on which the poem begins, as it most often is, it is bracketed thus: All Flesh (p.347), l.36. In Meynell's edition of Thompson's poems, however, the lines of poetry are not numbered, and therefore, when quoting from one of his long poems, it sometimes seemed preferable to refer to the page from which the quotation comes. Such references are in the following form: From the Night of Forebeing, p.210, ll.17-20.

Unless otherwise stated, Bible quotations are from the Authorized Version. Whenever the exact wording

of a Bible passage seemed important, I have quoted from the version which the particular poet would probably have used.

In the following pages I have at times referred to my book, Mystical Symbolism in the poetry of Thomas Traherne (St. Lucia, Queensland, 1970), which was originally my Master of Arts thesis. The University of Adelaide specifies that a thesis should not contain any material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma; but because the topic approved for my doctoral thesis was related to the topic of my previous thesis, the Board of Research Studies granted me written permission to use material from this previous work, provided that I acknowledged such contributions from it. Self-reference was therefore unavoidable in this thesis.

A. J. S.

University of Adelaide

1977

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Evelyn Underhill has defined mysticism as "the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order".[1] As most people have experienced momentarily some degree of "harmony with the transcendental order", tinges of mystical feeling are common in literature whenever exceptionally wide and deep consciousness is suggested. Expression of rudimentary mystical vision is therefore not the prerogative solely of mystics, those rare souls who, having made it their chief concern to achieve "complete harmony with the transcendental order", in large measure succeed in so doing. Of the four mystical poets to be considered in this study, Traherne is probably the only one whom most readers would agree to call a mystic.

By tradition mysticism has been divided into two kinds in accordance with the methods of spiritual seeking which give rise to it. Mystics such as the fourteenth-century author of The Cloud of Unknowing travel the via negativa; conscious mainly that the Absolute is intellectually incomprehensible and unable to be perceived by the physical senses, they shut out the visible world and speak of God in negative terms. Mystics such as Traherne travel the via positiva; conscious mainly that the Absolute is made manifest in all people and all things,

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1 Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness, 12th ed. rev. (London, 1930), p.xiv.

they fill their minds with images of the visible world and attempt to describe God in positive terms. Since "the two ways necessarily coexist in any fully religious experience",[1] all mystics exhibit some characteristics of both types of mysticism. It is, however, the mysticism of the affirmative way which more commonly and naturally finds expression in poetry, with which it shares the image-making faculty.

Since English mystical poetry has arisen predominantly from experiences of the affirmative way, it may in my opinion be usefully classified according to the major sources of its imagery into two broad categories—mystical love poetry, in which the Absolute is perceived mainly in another person, and mystical nature poetry, in which the Absolute is perceived mainly in natural objects or scenes.[2] It must be understood, however, that nature mysticism does not necessarily imply any less love of the Infinite One than what I find convenient to call "love mysticism". Wordsworth and Shelley provide striking examples of nature mysticism and love mysticism respectively.

It is natural that the more common type of mysticism in specifically Christian poetry should be love

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1 Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, VI (New York and London, 1968), 252.

2 In this study I use the word "nature" to include everything (excluding human beings) which is not made by man and which can be perceived by the physical senses; whereas I use the word "creatures" in its seventeenth-century sense to include human beings and all other created things, animate or inanimate, but particularly those of the visible world.

mysticism, since a mystical poet who is vitally concerned with his relationship with the personal triune God will easily perceive him in the Person of Christ incarnate, or in a human loved one whose relationship with the poet provides an analogy for the poet's relationship with God. Crashaw, Patmore, and Christina Georgina Rossetti are poets who stand firmly in this tradition of Christian love mysticism.

With the publication of the first part of Vaughan's Silex Scintillans in 1650 a different kind of Christian mysticism made its appearance in English poetry—what I shall call "Christian nature mysticism". Vaughan, no less than Crashaw, is concerned with his relationship with the personal triune God; yet most of his poems reveal a perception of this Infinite One in objects of the visible creation, and nature imagery predominates over imagery drawn from Church symbols and closely related to the life of Christ. In Rules and Lessons (p.267) he exhorts his reader thus:

> Walk with thy fellow-creatures: note the hush
> And whispers amongst them. There's not a Spring,
> Or Leafe but hath his Morning-hymn; Each Bush
> And Oak doth know I AM; canst thou not sing? (ll.13-16)

It is remarkable that his younger contemporary, Traherne, though an Anglican clergyman, went even further than Vaughan in his concentration on seeing God in the beauty of his world. Yet Traherne's poems, despite their virtual lack of specifically Christian symbolism, remain specifically Christian in their underlying ideas, and there is seldom any doubt in the reader's mind that it is the triune God, and not Platonic Reality or Truth or Beauty, with whom he

feels a close kinship:

> His Wisdom Shines in Spreading forth the Skie,
> His Power's Great in Ordering the Sun,
> His Goodness very Marvellous and High
> Appears, in evry Work his Hand hath done.[1]

In the deistic Age of Reason there was only one good English poet whose utterance is consistently and authentically mystical, Blake; and he is beyond the scope of this study because his Christianity is submerged in an elaborate personal mythology. The religious poetry of Cowper and Smart is notable, and occasionally Smart's poetry in particular shows flashes of Christian nature mysticism, especially in A Song to David, the Seaton poems, and Rejoice in the Lamb; but these flashes are never sufficiently sustained to enable him to be classed as a mystical poet.

I found it necessary to exclude from this study perhaps the greatest of English mystical nature poets, Wordsworth. He did eventually turn to Christian orthodoxy, but so far from being specifically Christian are his best and most characteristic poems, such as the Tintern Abbey lines, that they introduced into English poetry that Romantic, pantheistic worship of nature against which nearly all succeeding Christian mystical nature poets have had to struggle in order to maintain their vision of the God who is a Person, and who is above and beyond as well as within all things. Coleridge, Emily Brontë, Clare, and Tennyson were also excluded from this study, even though their poetry contains visionary elements and nature is one of their primary concerns. Coleridge's later, orthodox Christian poems such as A Hymn tend to be philosophical

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1 The Improvment (II,30), ll.13-16.

assertions of mystical ideas rather than mystical utterances; the vision of Emily Brontë and Clare in their few mystical or semi-mystical poems is not specifically Christian; and the few flashes of mysticism in poems such as In Memoriam fail to establish Tennyson as a mystical poet.

Two nineteenth-century English poets who did write some specifically Christian mystical nature poetry which is notable as literature are the strikingly different Hopkins and Francis Thompson.[1] Hopkins saw the world "charged with the grandeur of God" and, lifting up heart and eyes, brought "Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour";[2] Thompson saw "God focussed to a point" in a blade of grass and

> Christ walking on the water
> Not of Gennesareth, but Thames![3]

Nevertheless it must be admitted that few of Thompson's poems are in this category, as he himself realized:

> Alas, and I have sung
> Much song of matters vain.[4]

The closer one moves to the present day the more difficult becomes the task of selection, for one is faced with several minor English poets, including Evelyn Underhill, Kathleen Raine, and Elizabeth Jennings, some of

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1 I chose to confine this study to poets who lived or are living in Britain.

2 God's Grandeur (p.66), l.1; Hurrahing in Harvest (p.70), ll.5-6.

3 All Flesh (p.347), l.36; The Kingdom of God (p.349), ll.23-24.

4 Retrospect (p.236), ll.1-2.

whose work seems an authentic expression of Christian nature mysticism. Of this group of professing Christians, Kathleen Raine at first appeared suitable for inclusion because of the strength of the mystical element in many of her poems, such as Ex Nihilo, and their high literary value. Nevertheless, after further consideration I decided not to include her in this study, since it seemed to me that her vision is becoming more Neo-Platonic and less Christian. Thus I could find no twentieth-century English poet of considerable stature who has written enough specifically Christian mystical nature poems to warrant inclusion.

Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Francis Thompson, the four poets whom I consider to be true and notable representatives of the narrow stream of Christian nature mysticism in English poetry, share to differing extents the special problems imposed by their particular kind of vision and by their attempt to express it, and they try to solve these problems in different ways and with varying degrees of success. My general aim in this study is to investigate the effects of their particular vision on their poetry, and especially the effects of their vision of God transcendent yet immanent, since this is the main feature that distinguishes Christian nature mysticism from Romantic nature mysticism. The belief that God is a Person is another basic feature that distinguishes Christianity from Romanticism, but in Christian nature poetry this belief is seldom as evident as the belief in God's transcendence, whether or not God is apprehended as primarily transcendent or primarily immanent.

In the first section, Experience, some of the main

aspects of the four poets' religious experience are explored. The tension between outward and inward, between the sensuous and the spiritual, is felt in all forms of mysticism, but it is felt in a special way in those forms which depend mainly on the via positiva, since they do not demand a rejection of the visible world but rather a cleansing of the senses so that it may be apprehended in a spiritual way. The more physically sensuous the mystical poet's appreciation of outward beauty is, the more keenly is this tension felt and the more painful is the process of the purgation of the senses, which may even necessitate a wholehearted temporary subjection to the via negativa. For Christian mystical lovers of nature, an important facet of this tension between outward and inward is the temptation to try to find spiritual satisfaction in natural beauty without thinking beyond it to the Creator himself. Once this temptation has been overcome, and their perception of the God-bearing image has been purified, their spiritual appreciation of nature can grow towards a mystical vision of God's presence in the created world. Like most mystical lovers of nature, they associate such a vision with their experience in early childhood, and a reverence for the purity of childhood is revealed in much of their work. Closely associated with childhood is Eden, the earthly paradise of the childhood of man, and one can trace the tension between the ideas of immanence and transcendence which is revealed in the four poets' attitudes to childhood and Eden.

The last chapter of the Experience section is concerned not only with the poets' experience but also with

their use of the child and Eden symbols. Common to all mystical writers is the problem of attempting to express the inexpressible, and symbolism is an inevitable outcome of this struggle, though the writer is painfully aware of even its inadequacy to suggest the ineffable. The second section, Symbolism, is an exploration of the four poets' use of nature symbolism to express their vision, and this exploration shows that they are not always successful in their attempt to attain a balanced vision of God as both transcendent and immanent. The last section, Expression, deals with the relationships between the four poets' varying kinds of vision and the more literary aspects of their expression, and the evidence suggests that a vision of God as primarily transcendent results in the use of features of imagery, style, and structure that differ from the features found in the work of poets who see God as primarily immanent.

Only some of the poems of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson can be considered mystical, but since a great many of their more ordinary poems provide insights into those which are on this spiritually elevated plane, I have felt free to make use of any of their poems in this study. In many different ways, these poets have made specifically Christian contributions to our appreciation of the world around us.

SECTION I

E X P E R I E N C E

Chapter 1

ATTITUDES AND FEELINGS TOWARDS NATURE

The beauty of the natural world is celebrated in much of the poetry of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Francis Thompson. One feels the ecstasy of Vaughan's awakening to the life of a new day:

> heark! In what Rings,
> And Hymning Circulations the quick world
> Awakes, and sings;
> The rising winds,
> And falling springs,
> Birds, beasts, all things
> Adore him in their kinds.
> Thus all is hurl'd
> In sacred Hymnes, and Order, The great Chime
> And Symphony of nature.[1]

One responds to the joyful tone of Traherne's numerous simple descriptions of natural beauty:

> when first I in the Summer-fields
> Saw golden Corn
> The Earth adorn,
> (This day that Sight its Pleasure yields)
> No Rubies could more take mine Ey.[2]

One catches the poignancy of Hopkins's lament for trees wantonly destroyed by man:

> My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,
> Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,
> All felled, felled, are all felled.[3]

One is overwhelmed by the opulence of Thompson's nature imagery:

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1 The Morning-watch (p.255), ll.9-18.

2 The World (II,92), ll.37-41.

3 Binsey Poplars (p.78), ll.1-3.

Who made the splendid rose
Saturate with purple glows;
Cupped to the marge with beauty; a perfume-press
Whence the wind vintages
Gushes of warmèd fragrance richer far
Than all the flavorous ooze of Cyprus' vats?[1]

A Christian appreciation of nature is different, however, from a Romantic one. Romantic mystical poets do not express a yearning for a relationship with a personal God, or even with a Power which is above and beyond as well as within the natural world. Wordsworth is generally content to be a "worshipper of Nature" feeling the presence of "something" that "rolls through all things"; and it is significant that Shelley, feeling the "awful shadow of some unseen Power", identifies it as "Intellectual Beauty" and confesses that he worships "every form containing [it]".[2] On the contrary, Christian mystical poets yearn towards a God who is personal and transcendent, as well as immanent; a deep love of nature is evidenced in the poetry of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson, yet they all experience the inadequacy of nature in itself to satisfy their spiritual needs.

Of these poets, Traherne and Thompson are the most explicit in their expression of the inadequacy of nature, since some of their poems portray a time in their lives when they attempted to find substitutes for God in earthly pursuits, including the appreciation of the visible world, and then found that, in themselves, these had to be

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1 Ode to the Setting Sun, p.100, ll.9-14.

2 Lines Composed Above Tintern Abbey, ll.152, 93-102; Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, ll.1, 81-82.

rejected. Indeed, Traherne's rejection of the worldly at such a time of spiritual seeking is so heartfelt that he is capable of applying very harsh terms to all external objects, whether natural or man-made. Few readers of his poems Solitude (II,98) and Dissatisfaction (II,103) would detect in them anything approaching nature mysticism of any kind, unless they were familiar with their place in the whole body of his poetry.

Solitude is set in the silence of the countryside, and is based on the poet's boyhood memory of a feeling of utter desolation and loneliness which overcame him one dark evening when he realized that he had lost his earlier instinctive joy in nature:

> Not all the Land,
> Not all the Skies,
> Tho Heven shin'd before mine Eys,
> Could Comfort yield in any Field to me (ll.4-7).

In vain did he search all the surrounding scene to try to recapture happiness, but because of his spiritual blindness he "pin'd for hunger at a plenteous Board" (l.24). Dimly he began to perceive that he lacked some "hidden Good" apart from the visible world, some "Blessedness, / Beside the Earth and Sky" (ll.51, 35-36), which could restore his relationship with his surroundings. He looked to the natural world to show him what he longed for, only to discover that all the things around him were indifferent towards him, even "sullen" (l.41), in their conspiracy of silence against him:

> The shady Trees,
> The Ev'ning dark, the humming Bees,
> The chirping Birds, mute Springs and Fords, conspire,
> To giv no Answer unto my Desire (ll.53-56).

His melancholy was lifted temporarily by the sound of church

bells ringing in the distance, for he hoped that they might reveal where he could find happiness; but the sound proved as empty to him as the external beauty of church ritual (ll.75, 89-93), and he remained in despair of regaining "Eden fair" and "the Soul of Holy Joy" in this world:

> Felicity! O where
> Shall I thee find to eas my Mind! O where! (ll.113-115; 119-120)

Like Solitude, Dissatisfaction depicts a search, not specifically for God, but rather for "Felicity"; but here the seeker begins in a state of mental exhaustion and with a sense of imprisonment in the body:

> In Cloaths confin'd, my weary Mind
> Persu'd Felicity (ll.1-2).

Traherne's tormented longing for a state of bliss and his conviction of his spiritual sickness and poverty led him to rush feverishly in all directions looking for something to satisfy him and seeking advice from others, all to no avail. He had little idea of what could give him happiness, or where he could find it, but he knew that it was his inner being that desperately needed some illumination: "Will nothing to my Soul som Light convey!" (l.8). His searching of sky and earth was fruitless (stanza 2); similarly, he rejected as meaningless the prospect of material wealth, and he found only evil, misery, or vanity in town life and in the fashionable customs of men (stanzas 3-4), which appeared "sensless as Trees" to him (l.57). Despairingly he turned to philosophy, only to find that, instead of giving a positive direction to his search, it merely indicated where happiness could not be found (stanza 5).

Finally he was forced to acknowledge that nothing earthly would satisfy his spiritual hunger. He therefore

waited yearningly for a supernatural revelation, "a Book from Heven", and was sure that it would provide the answer for him by showing how to enjoy bliss with God and the angels (stanza 6). His intense longing to know the secrets of heavenly life and the causes of heavenly bliss led to a joyful and confident expectation that his desire would be satisfied. This hope was not disappointed; the Bible supplied his need, and thus the poem ends triumphantly (stanzas 7-8).

Since there are few poets who have celebrated the glories of the universe as tirelessly as Traherne, and there are few Christian poets who have so consistently emphasized God's immanence in all things,[1] it is rather startling to find him dismissing space as "empty" (l.23), the ground as "worthless" (l.39), and trees as "sensless" (l.57). The explanation is found in the lines,

> Weary of all that since the Fall
> Mine Eys on Earth can find (ll.71-72);

with characteristic restless discontent, Traherne clutched at one thing after another and then flung it away when it failed to yield Felicity, yet all the time he was dimly aware that the fault lay within himself rather than in the external world. In childhood he had been "A little Adam in a Sphere / Of Joys",[2] and it is significant that even in Dissatisfaction he was not prepared to reject the visible

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1 The assertion that Traherne emphasizes God's immanence will be clearly demonstrated throughout much of this study.

2 Innocence (II,14), ll.52-53. One is reminded of Wordsworth's ode, Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood. The theme of childhood innocence will be examined in Chapter 3 of this study.

world permanently, for he took it for granted that the bliss of angels includes "All / Things visible or invisible" (11.96-97). Through Christian experience Traherne knew that a right relationship with the world is dependent on a right relationship with God, but he is unusual in the weight of his emphasis on the meaninglessness and worthlessness of even nature itself to the unregenerate man.

Unlike Traherne, Thompson in The Hound of Heaven (p.89) stresses God's pursuit of the soul rather than the soul's pursuit of God, and he tells how for a long time he tried desperately to escape from this unrelenting, "tremendous Lover" (1.32). However, this is merely another aspect of the same experience of spiritual seeking; the person who attempts vainly to find satisfaction apart from God is really searching for God without knowing it, as God's words to Thompson make clear: "I am He Whom thou seekest!" (1.181). This is true even if the fleeing self is fully aware of the divine love-chase, for then the explanation lies in its fear of a commitment to God which is mistakenly conceived as a surrender of everything else:

> (For, though I knew His love Who followèd,
> Yet was I sore adread
> Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside) (11.19-21).

From a wider viewpoint, a person's search for spiritual satisfaction is always felt by Christian mystical writers to be prompted by God, and even poems such as Dissatisfaction may therefore be regarded as dealing ultimately with God's desire for man.

In his feverish attempt to escape from God, Thompson tried to find shelter and contentment in human friendships (11.16-24), in absorption into the cosmos

(ll.25-33), in all created things, God's "servitors" (ll.34-45), in the love of little children (ll.52-60), in a deep understanding of nature (ll.61-104), and in poetic imagination and skill (ll.124-129). Only when he had nothing else to turn to and knew that his "days [had] crackled and gone up in smoke" (l.122), only when he accepted his own complete unworthiness and powerlessness, was he ready to submit to God and to hear him say:

> All which thy child's mistake
> Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
> Rise, clasp My hand, and come! (ll.174-176)

He realized at last that the sorrow and suffering caused by his waywardness were merely a part of the pattern of God's all-embracing love:

> Is my gloom, after all,
> Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
> (ll.178-179)

The mannered section in which Thompson recounts his attempt to share the "delicate fellowship" afforded by an empathy with the forces of nature (ll.61-104) is particularly interesting for the light it sheds on the extent to which he was influenced by the pantheism of much Romantic poetry and by the literary conventions which had grown up in the wake of the great Romantic poets; and indeed, it seems probable that his own sensibility had much in common with the Romantics and their imitators. The temptation to substitute nature for God is dealt with at greater length than any of the other temptations, and the vocabulary of this section seems even further removed from ordinary speech than is usual in Thompson's verse:

Let me twine with you caresses,
. . . . . .
Quaffing, as your taintless way is,
From a chalice
Lucent-weeping out of the dayspring (ll.64-72).

I do not doubt the intensity of his feeling, but his stilted and conscious striving for literary effect is so marked here that a reader could be excused if he failed to find the section convincing, especially since Thompson seems to be trying to imitate Shelley, whom he greatly admired, and to whom he attributed—not altogether justly, in my opinion—the practice of "[standing] in the lap of patient Nature, and [twining] her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions, to see how she [would] look nicest in his song."[1] Thompson dwells on his personification of nature and weaves poetic fancies about it with such abandon that one cannot but assume that pantheism had some attraction for him, and it is perhaps significant that he succeeded to some extent in finding shelter in nature from the pursuit of God:

I in their delicate fellowship was one—
Drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies (ll.74-75).

These lines remind one of Vaughan's "rifling" of nature's secrets in Vanity of Spirit (ll.11-13);[2] but whereas Vaughan searched the whole creation so that he might ultimately transcend nature in his upward journey to God, Thompson submitted himself to nature to lose himself and be absorbed in it. Eventually, however, Thompson found the natural world unsatisfying without God, just as Traherne had.

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1 The Works of Francis Thompson, ed. Wilfred Meynell (London, 1913), III, 18.

2 This poem (p.248) will be examined in Chapter 2 of this study (pp.47-52).

Like Thompson, Hopkins stresses the part which God plays in bringing man home to him, and the suffering which his love for man necessitates. In the first part of The Wreck of the Deutschland (p.51), he portrays the panic felt by the person who cannot escape from the necessity to decide between the overwhelming majesty of God and the terror of hell:

> The frown of his face
> Before me, the hurtle of hell
> Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?
> (stanza 3, ll.1-3)

The pursuit image was probably at the back of the poet's consciousness, for later he maintains that it is "the heart, being hard at bay," that is forced, even against its will, to accept or reject God absolutely (stanza 7, l.8; stanza 8). Stanzas four and five tell of the consequences of Hopkins's wholehearted surrender to God; inwardly he feels sustained and steadied by grace, and he is able to find something of the mystery of God's personality in the terror of thunder as well as in the beauty of stars and sunset.

The first part of The Wreck of the Deutschland differs from Dissatisfaction and The Hound of Heaven in that Hopkins concentrates mainly on the moment of crisis, of decision, in his spiritual life—the moment when he found God. This explains why, instead of a section devoted to the inadequacy of nature in itself to satisfy his needs, there is a stanza dealing with the way in which nature helps to reveal God to the self that has submitted itself to him and "[wafts] him out of it" (stanza 5, l.3). By "wafting" God out of starlight, Hopkins probably means to express the idea

of beckoning to him who is immanent in the starlight and thus bringing him out of it and into his own being.[1] However, not even this stanza is free of the violence and terror and suffering expressed in the rest of the poem; the thunder is as much a part of God's glory as the stars and the sunset, and the following stanzas make it clear that Hopkins sees the beauty and terror of Christ's earthly suffering and sacrifice in the intense bliss and agony felt by human beings in response to "stars and storms", Christ's pressure on their lives (stanza 6, l.5). The mention of "the world's splendour and wonder", under which lies the God whose mystery must make a vivid impact on one and be both dwelt on and emphatically proclaimed, and the stern, passionate violence of the poem coupled with exquisite descriptions such as "dappled-with-damson west" (stanza 5), suggest that Hopkins's very sensuous appreciation of outward beauty had been spiritualized only by a painful process of purgation. There is support for this opinion in his earlier poems; in The Habit of Perfection (p.31) he commands,

> Be shellèd, eyes, with double dark
> And find the uncreated light (ll.9-10),

and in Nondum (p.32) he laments that

> We see the glories of the earth
> But not the hand that wrought them all (ll.7-8).

Inability to find God in and beyond the visible creation often stems from a failure to keep the senses cleansed, and a consequent temptation to appreciate natural beauty in a

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1 "Waft" means "to convey lightly through water or air", but it also has the obsolete meaning, "to beckon to" (Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, 2nd ed.).

merely sensuous way, without giving sufficient thought to the Creator himself. One suspects that Hopkins often had to battle with this temptation, even after he had submitted himself wholly to God; and Vaughan was aware of it, as is shown by his lines:

> Search well another world; who studies this,
> Travels in Clouds, seeks Manna, where none is.[1]

It is clear, then, that Christian mystical lovers of nature cannot be satisfied with merely a sensuous and aesthetic response to natural beauty, or an empathy with natural forces; on the other hand, it is false to assume that their feeling for nature never includes any of the elements which are generally thought of as Romantic, since, like the Romantic mystical lovers of nature, they do perceive the Absolute as immanent in the external world. This perception of God's immanence often leads them towards animism, and sometimes, if not sufficiently balanced by a perception of his transcendence, even towards pantheism, for a person's conscious beliefs may not always retain control over his instinctive feelings. Moreover, though Christian mystical nature poets hold most of their beliefs in common, each appreciates nature in an individual way, partly because of some differences between them in their personal beliefs or in the beliefs which they share with the periods in which they live. But, just as a poet's feelings may rebel at times against his own beliefs, so his ideas may sometimes be unrestrained by the common assumptions of his day. It is true that in order to re-create imaginatively and as

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1 The Search (p.235), ll.95-96.

precisely as possible the poets' attitudes and feelings towards nature, an understanding of their beliefs and the beliefs of their ages is required; nevertheless, this very understanding can lead one astray unless it is matched by a willingness to approach the text of the poems themselves with a mind and a poetic sensibility free from preconceived ideas or personal prejudices.

A comparison of two nature poems inspired by the same biblical passage will not only illustrate something of the diversity of Christian attitudes and feelings towards nature, but will also reveal in both poems a tendency which is the usual result of sensitivity to natural beauty—the tendency towards "Romantic" elements of feeling. The poems are Vaughan's "And do they so?" (p.263) and Hopkins's sonnet Ribblesdale (p.90). Vaughan headed his poem with Beza's version of Romans 8:19: "Etenim res Creatæ exerto Capite observantes expectant revelationem Filiorum Dei" ("For created things watching with head stretched forth await the revelation of the sons of God"), and in two manuscripts Hopkins quoted "Nam expectatio creaturae", the beginning of the same verse, as an epigraph for Ribblesdale.[1] In the Douay Version, a Catholic translation which Hopkins preferred to other English Bible translations, Romans 8:19 reads: "For the expectation of the creature waiteth for the

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1 W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie, eds The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 4th ed. rev. (London, 1967), p.281.

revelation of the sons of God."[1]

It is clear that the two poets have interpreted St. Paul's words in different ways, and that Vaughan's imagination has seized upon the words "exerto Capite", which are peculiar to Beza's translation. With childlike literalness, Vaughan gleefully and eagerly accepts what he takes to be a biblical justification for the idea that all created things, even those of the vegetable and mineral realms, are alive and have feelings. There is a sense of wonder and perhaps also of excitement in the opening lines:

> And do they so? have they a Sense
> Of ought but Influence?
> Can they their heads lift, and expect,
> And grone too?

The Bible seems to have confirmed an intuition dear to him, one which involved a rejection of the seventeenth-century attitude that the "inanimate" creation, being "dull", "dead", and "senslesse", has little significance apart from man. Even the Hermetic theory of "Influence", which assumed that all the creatures responded instinctively to celestial control, was inadequate to satisfy Vaughan or to explain his sense of spiritual sympathy with them. The final lines of the stanza,

> Go, go; Seal up thy looks,
> And burn thy books,

are indicative of his impatient distrust of the physical appearances of things and of the human rational faculty.

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1 In an early letter, Hopkins made his preference for the Douay Version clear (Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins Including His Correspondence with Coventry Patmore, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott, 2nd ed. rev., London, 1956, pp.41-42).

Unlike Vaughan, Hopkins does not intellectually accept the biblical verse as literal truth, but takes the more usual view that St. Paul was merely making poetic use of personification for a moral purpose when he attributed hope and patience even to inanimate nature.[1] Nevertheless, his explicit statement in Ribblesdale that earth has "no heart to feel" is contradicted by other aspects of the poem which lead the reader to suspect that Hopkins cannot help feeling sometimes that earth actually is a sentient being. According to him, earth "appeals" to heaven and makes a "strong . . . plea" to God, and its continued existence for such a long time is not only guiltless but also in some way meritorious, as the strongly-stressed word "well" indicates: "Thou canst but be, but that thou well dost". Moreover, the rather startling pathetic fallacy at the end, by which man's careless disobedience to God is said to bid earth wear "brows of such care, care and dear concern", seems to go beyond the conscious, artistic use of a figure of speech, especially since the words "of such care" seem to mean "of such care as these brows are", and thus to indicate that Hopkins is thinking of a particular feature of Ribblesdale which he has experienced as the earth's frown. This reading

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1 To Thomas Aquinas, Romans 8:19 does not even refer to the subhuman creatures, but to man (Ross Garner, Henry Vaughan: Experience and the Tradition, Chicago, 1959, p.100); Calvin, in his commentary on this passage (first published in 1540), states firmly that "By personification . . . Paul represents all the parts of the world as being endowed with sense", and that "Paul ascribes hope to them by personification" (Calvin's Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, trans. Ross Mackenzie, Edinburgh, 1961, p.173); and the annotation on Romans 8:19 by Rev. Dr. Challoner in the revised Douay Version of 1847 explains the verse in terms of "a figure of speech".

is given some support by one of Hopkins's letters to the journal Nature, in which he says: "While these changes were going on in the sky, the landscape of Ribblesdale glowed with a frowning brown".[1] The lack of strict logical consistency in the poem does not damage it, however, and this is probably because, despite the statement in the third line, the emotional overtones have to some extent prepared the reader for the pathetic fallacy, which is felt as an intensification (though an odd one) of the vaguely Romantic suggestiveness of the repetitive apostrophe at the beginning: "Earth, sweet Earth, sweet landscape".

I think that "And do they so?" and Ribblesdale provide evidence to suggest that both Vaughan and Hopkins (though Vaughan much more than Hopkins) were capable of feeling, with Wordsworth, that the whole creation is sentient. The question of the extent to which Christianity can accept the concept of the sentience of all nature, including even minerals, is a complex one; whereas Romanticism easily accepts this concept as a foundation for the animistic belief that all nature has a living soul, a belief which in turn becomes the basis for the pantheistic identification of God with the universe. Most critics, however, try to dissociate Vaughan and Hopkins from any sentiment or idea that savours of Romanticism, and Ross Garner even attempts to explain Vaughan's feeling towards natural objects wholly in terms of orthodox Christian ideas.

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1 The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London, 1935), p.166.

Garner argues that a belief in the sentience of the whole creation can be understood by reference to the Christian belief in habitual grace, the grace which sustains all creation and which, quoting Hooker's Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, he defines as the "perpetual aid and concurrence of that Supreme Cause of all things" which enables man and the creatures rightly to "perform the functions allotted to" them. When dealing with the line "Yet stones are deep in admiration" in Vaughan's poem The Bird (p.331), he asserts that ". . . the operation of a sustaining grace is deducible from the existence and nature of God", and that it is this grace which accounts for the stones being "deep in admiration" as a fact.[1] I fail to see how stones can be thought to have sentience merely because they are upheld by habitual grace, even if this sentience is on only a subconscious level, as Garner tries to prove in a discussion of "And do they so?".

Briefly, Garner's argument is as follows. In "And do they so?" the poet longs for God's grace, for forgiveness and salvation, while nature longs for liberty, for the renewal which will free it from the corruption imposed upon it by man's Fall. "In fact, the whole point of the poem is the difference between the order of nature and the order of [saving] grace". Vaughan emphasizes how disadvantageous to human beings are will and reason, since they make sin possible; the other creatures cannot sin because they are without these attributes, and therefore, Garner assumes,

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1 The Unprofitable Servant in Henry Vaughan, University of Nebraska Studies, N.S. No.29 (Nov. 1963), pp.25-26.

without consciousness.[1] His assertion that "The life of the creatures of Vaughan's poem does not include consciousness"[2] is not completely convincing to me, for it fails to recognize the possibility that Vaughan may have conceived of all subhuman creatures as endowed with some form of consciousness which, because it includes neither rationality nor free will, is outside God's scheme for man—the scheme of salvation by grace through faith. It is more satisfactory to assume that stones which literally "admire" and "expect", as they do in Vaughan's poems, must have conscious feelings, than to attempt to force all of the poet's sentiments into a strictly orthodox Christian mould.

I think it must be admitted that those forms of Hermeticism which, like Romanticism, tend to idealize the material, come closer than does Christian theology to giving a philosophical justification for the belief that all creatures have feeling. We have seen that in "And do they so?" Vaughan mentions the popular Hermetic theory of "influence", accepting it but at the same time going beyond it in his ideas concerning the life in all things; and one can detect a similarity between these ideas and those of his twin brother, Thomas, a Hermetic philosopher who declares:

> The normal, celestial, ethereal part of man is that whereby we do move, see, feel, taste and smell, and have a commerce with all material objects whatsoever. It is the same in us as in beasts, and it is derived from heaven . . . to all the inferior earthly

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1 Henry Vaughan: Experience and the Tradition (Chicago, 1959), pp.98-99, 103-104. In his use of the word "grace" in these pages, Garner evidently excludes habitual grace.

2 Ibid., p.98.

> creatures. . . . Neither should any wonder that I affirm this spirit to be in minerals because the operations of it are not discerned there. For shall we conclude therefore that there is no inward agent that actuates and specifies these passive, indefinite principles whereof they are compounded?[1]

Nevertheless, in my opinion it would be just as much a mistake to try to explain the element of animism in Vaughan's attitude towards nature wholly in Hermetic terms as to try to explain it wholly in Christian terms, for his tendency towards animism seems to result from an intuitive response to the natural world rather than from any formulated body of doctrine. Similarly, as I have pointed out, though Hopkins's conscious attitude towards nature could never be described as animistic, the tone of Ribblesdale indicates that there is probably an element of animism in this later poet's instinctive feelings, too, however weak that element may be.[2]

If there are some features of "And do they so?" and Ribblesdale that are suggestive of Romanticism, others certainly are not. In much Romantic poetry one finds a deification of either nature or man, or of both, but in neither of these poems is there any hint of such pantheism. Instead, both Vaughan and Hopkins are aware of natural objects as fellow-creatures in the hands of a transcendent

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1 The Works of Thomas Vaughan Mystic and Alchemist (Eugenius Philalethes), ed. Arthur Edward Waite, with new foreword by Kenneth Rexroth (New York, 1968), pp.40-41. Hermeticism will be further discussed in Chapter 4 of this study (pp.92-95).

2 In this study I use the word "animism" to mean "The attribution of a living soul to inanimate objects and natural phenomena" (The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed.).

Creator and Sustainer. Hopkins pictures the dale as being constantly given out and laid down by God as the creation flows out from him, and implies that part of the appeal which earth makes to heaven is her obedient and constant production of leaves and grass; similarly, according to Vaughan some creatures in their upward striving "rise to seek [God], and with heads / Erect peep from their beds" (11.25-26).[1] Vaughan's use of the word "pedigree" in reference to mineral or vegetable objects, probably in the sense of "distinguished descent", is indicative of his deep respect for all creatures because they are God's. He can even wish to be

> a stone, or tree,
> Or flowre by pedigree,
> Or some poor high-way herb, or Spring
> To flow, or bird to sing,

but the reason for this wish sets it firmly in a Christian context:

> Then should I (tyed to one sure state,)
> All day expect my date (11.11-16).

Humility before nature is so pervasive in Vaughan's poetry that, as Elizabeth Holmes points out, the "ladder" or "scale" of creation reaching through various rungs of being to the throne of God is reversed in it;[2] he contrasts himself unfavourably with the "lower" creatures which, unlike him, do not "stray / A giddy blast each way"

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1 The words "heads / Erect", like "heads lift" in the first stanza, were suggested to Vaughan by the words "exerto Capite" in his text.

2 Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy (Oxford, 1932), pp.34-35, 47.

(l.18), seems to regret that he has been endowed with free will which makes him "sadly loose" (l.17), and minimizes the significance of man's rôle in the spiritual realm:

> Can they [other creatures] their heads lift, and expect,
> And grone too? why th'Elect
> Can do no more (ll.3-5).

In Ribblesdale one feels that the "ladder" is damaged, but not reversed. Man is guilty by comparison with nature, certainly, but Hopkins never doubts that in God's eyes man is far more important than the earth, and he stresses the earth's weakness and its dependence on man as well as on God. Earth can "only be"; God "o'er gives all to rack or wrong" because of the Fall of man;[1] man is earth's eye, tongue, and heart, the high priest who should consciously give glory to the Creator and plead with him for the redemption of the whole creation; man is "the heir" to all creation; and nature can be despoiled indiscriminately by selfish and self-willed man. This difference of emphasis need not be due to any difference between the conscious beliefs of one poet and those of the other; indeed, it can be accounted for partly by the probability that Hopkins, unlike Vaughan, is inspired not only by Romans 8:19 but also by the verse following it: "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him that made it subject in hope" (Douay Version). I think, however, that the main reason for the difference lies in the dissimilarity between the kinds of poems and between the

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1 Perhaps there is a hint of the results of the Fall in the words "louchèd low grass". "Louched" is a dialect word for "slouched" (Gardner and MacKenzie, op. cit., p.282).

periods in which they were written.

Behind "And do they so?" is felt the tradition of the literary expression of personal religious meditation; it is a very private poem in which Vaughan communes with himself and with God in a solitude which seems remote from the affairs of the world, despite the mention of the "fancies, friends, or newes" (l.34) which he ascetically considers tempting distractions from the life of the spirit. It is his concern with and deep consciousness of his own imperfections rather than those of mankind as a whole that make it natural for him to place himself at the bottom of the "ladder" of creation. It also leads him, as if in private prayer, to emphasize by repetition the contrast between himself and the other creatures, and to intensify his plea for steadfastness so that what is in stanza two a desire to be "a stone, or tree" becomes in stanza four a yearning for redemption that is probably also an implied desire for death, either physical or mystical:

> Sure, thou wilt joy to see
> Thy sheep with thee.

With childlike intimacy, Vaughan pleads that by Christ's saving blood God may make him faithful to him and thus constant in his hope of resurrection, like the seeds which "grone for [him], / Their liberty" (ll.29-30).[1] At the same time, his humility is balanced somewhat by a joyful trust that, like the lost sheep of the parable,[2] he will be saved;

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1 The allusion is to Romans 8:21-22.

2 Luke 15:4-7.

and his reference to God's rejoicing at the return of the lost sheep may indicate that he had some sense, however slight, of man's greater worth in God's sight and his greater spiritual potential than that of the other creatures.

By contrast with "And do they so?", Ribblesdale is in a degree a public poem, and it does not seem to spring so immediately from meditation on the biblical text. Behind it are felt the ravages of Victorian industrialization and materialism; Hopkins sorrows for the general guilt of mankind as it is evidenced by the wanton destruction of natural beauty. His tenderness for our motherly "rich round world" is nevertheless matched, possibly even exceeded, by his tenderness for "dear and dogged man", who is careless about his salvation. Man is meant to be God's heir to eternal life as well as to creation,[1] but instead he acts as Adam's "heir" to a "selfbent" which causes him to disregard God, and the exaggeration (possibly deliberate) in the words "bare" and "none" in the sestet is a result of Hopkins's deep concern for mankind. The poem is public not only in its subject-matter but also in its art; the poet's emotion has been externalized, objectified, and dignified. The neat structure and the verbal economy make Vaughan's less controlled meditation seem somewhat loose and verbose by comparison, and any use of repetition is more studied than Vaughan's:

That canst but only be, but dost that long—

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1 Romans 8:17 refers to Christians as heirs of God.

Thou canst but be, but that thou well dost.

The second person singular apostrophe to Earth, the dwelling on the words "leavès" and "louchèd", the alliterative patterning, the unusual order of some words (for example, "this bids wear / Earth brows"), the question in the sestet followed immediately by the exclamatory "Ah"—all these rhetorical features are perfectly in keeping with the nature of the poem. Hopkins's intellect is almost completely in control; I say "almost" because, as I have already stated, the poem seems to me to be slightly animistic in feeling, despite the poet's contrary belief.

This comparison of "And do they so?" and Ribblesdale has provided an illustration of the way in which two minds, inspired by the same biblical passage and holding most of their beliefs in common, yet react differently towards their source of inspiration and thus reveal the marked individuality of their attitudes and feelings and of the ways in which they express them. It has also laid bare the animistic feeling which is often present in poetry written by lovers of nature, whether or not their conscious beliefs are animistic.

From animism it is an easy step to pantheism, and not all Christian nature poets are as successful as Vaughan and Hopkins in avoiding a pantheistic tendency, as has been suggested in the discussion of The Hound of Heaven in this chapter (pp.17-18). It is because Thompson has found the lesson of nature's inadequacy such a bitter one that he sets it forth so starkly in Of Nature: Laud and Plaint (p.308), which begins boldly: "Lo, here stand I and Nature, gaze to gaze, / And I the greater", and goes on to state clearly:

> Hope not of Nature; she nor gives nor teaches;
> She suffers thee to take
> But what thine own hand reaches,
> And can itself make sovereign for thine ache
> (p.311, ll.23-26).

But the poem ends in a gentler mood; Thompson realizes that he has been unfair to Nature, since there is indeed one sure way to her heart:

> For know, this Lady Nature thou hast left,
> Of whom thou fear'st thee reft,
> This Lady is God's Daughter, and she lends
> Her hand but to His friends (p.313, ll.24-27).

This is the Franciscan truth which all Christian mystical nature poets are forced to learn.

As a nature poet Traherne is exceptional for the comparative lack of sensuousness in his appreciation of nature, and he goes even further than Thompson in his depreciation of the beauties of nature when unaccompanied by the beholder's thoughts of the Giver: "These are but Dead Material Toys".[1] Unlike the other three poets, he makes the worth and meaning of the material creation almost completely dependent on man, partly because of the intensity of the spiritual desolation he had experienced before finding God. In Solitude, his terrifying discovery that the natural world is indifferent towards him leads him to exclaim:

> Ye sullen Things!
> Ye dumb, ye silent Creatures, and unkind!
> How can I call you Pleasant Springs
> Unless ye eas my Mind! (ll.41-44);

while in Dissatisfaction he re-creates in staccato rhythms the unbearable panic which he felt when his expectation of finding Felicity in earthly things of one kind or another

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1 Desire (II,177), l.38.

was disappointed:

> My Thirst did burn;
> But where, O whither should my Spirit turn! (11.49-50)

Unlike Thompson, Traherne never seems in any danger of deifying subhuman nature, though there are occasional suggestions of animism, as in "To the same purpos" (II,132), where the child feels that the moon is following him from place to place.

This chapter has shown that, to differing extents and in different ways, all four Christian mystical nature poets—Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Francis Thompson—experience a tension between outward and inward, between the sensuous and the spiritual, which can be resolved only when a right relationship has been established between God and the soul; moreover, this tension is felt all the more poignantly because these poets are all keenly sensitive to the beauty of the external world. It is only through suffering that they reach beyond nature and attain their vision of a transcendent God immanent in all things; and even then, some of their attitudes and feelings towards nature are not always easy to distinguish from those of the Romantic mystical nature poets.

Chapter 2

STEPS TOWARDS CHRISTIAN NATURE MYSTICISM

The four poets of this study, being Christians, do not regard their appreciation of the external world as an end in itself, however great the pleasure they take in nature and however strong their leaning towards animism. Nevertheless, towards nature they express so many different attitudes and such innumerable gradations of feeling that it is difficult to decide at what point one is justified in using the word "mystical" to describe a poem or a passage of poetry by one of them, or even, at times, to decide whether specifically Christian attitudes and feelings are present. Hopkins's exquisitely tender poem, Binsey Poplars (p.78), seems on a first reading to be a lament expressing only feelings which are common to all nature lovers confronted with the evidence of man's destructiveness; yet a deeper reading reveals connotations which link it to the whole body of Hopkins's religious writings. The divine significance of his beloved aspens, hinted at in the image of the trees catching the sun, the life-giving principle, and holding it within themselves, is strengthened by the line "O if we but knew what we do", which seems to echo the words of Christ from the cross, "they know not what they do."[1] Furthermore, for a reader familiar with Hopkins's theological speculations about the relationship between Christ's selfhood and the selfhood of each created thing, the lines

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1 Luke 23:34 (Authorized and Douay Versions).

"Strokes of havoc unselve / The sweet especial scene" evoke the Scotist idea of "the presence of God's design or inscape (that is, Christ) in inanimate nature".[1] As in Ribblesdale (p.90), Hopkins sees man's attack on natural beauty as one aspect of his rebellion against God and his consequent wounding of Christ.

Not only is it sometimes difficult to recognize the mystical element in a poem by Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, or Francis Thompson, but, as has been shown in Chapter 1, it is also difficult at times to discover what particular relationships with nature these poets experience. Binsey Poplars is a more poignant lament than Vaughan's The Timber (p.332) or Thompson's A Fallen Yew (p.142), but this does not necessarily indicate that Hopkins's sympathy with nature is deeper than that of the other two poets. The greater poignancy of the lament for the felled poplars is probably due to Hopkins's greater poetic powers, his more highly-charged spiritual reverberations, and the greater suffering occasioned by his conviction that the poplars have been utterly destroyed, lost for ever. Thompson pictures the fallen yew as maintaining its spiritual identity in a shadowy after-life (stanzas 8-9), and Vaughan's sorrow is tempered both by his consciousness of new growth succeeding the old (stanza 2) and by his belief that the tree is not utterly dead, since it still responds to the approach of its former enemies, the fierce storms (stanzas 4-5). It is Vaughan, more than Hopkins or Thompson, who imagines what it

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1 Christopher Devlin, ed. The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London, 1959), p.109.

feels like to be a tree nurtured for many years by natural forces and then struck down, and his poem The Bird (p.331) reveals a similar empathy with creatures.

Despite the many difficulties, it is useful to try to classify the Christian nature poetry of the four poets according to the kind of spiritual appreciation of nature which they express in it. In this way some of the main steps in their progress towards mysticism will be revealed, and it will also become clear that the unequivocal expression of an attained Christian nature mysticism is rare indeed.

Perhaps the simplest kind of Christian nature poem is that in which the poet's pleasure in the beauty of the external world leads his thoughts and feelings upward to the Creator in praise and thanksgiving. Of this kind is Hopkins's well-known Pied Beauty (p.69); and Thompson's Sing, Bird, Sing ends with the familiar turn of thought, though the expression has a touch of originality in the metaphor by which the bird's ascending notes are identified with a "winding stair":

> Surely otherwhere
> Thy morning walks are trod,
> Yea, thy winding stair
> Leads to God.[1]

Pleasure directed upward in this way forms part of the groundwork of Christian nature mysticism, but the emotions and perceptions inspired by it are usually not of a sufficiently deep and refined quality to be called mystical.

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1 The Man Has Wings: New Poems and Plays by Francis Thompson, ed. Terence L. Connolly (New York, 1957), p.55. The title for this poem was supplied by the editor.

To a Snowflake (p.333) may perhaps be said to border on the mystical because of Thompson's delicate awareness of the paradoxicality of existence and the harmonious working of the Divine in the inter-relationships of the natural realm. The snowflake is strong in its fragility and mighty in its tininess—a perfect miniature work of art wrought by God from vapour with his tools of wind and frost.

Traherne's mysticism stems largely from an intellectual and emotional intensification of thankfulness for the material creation, and some of his poems, notably The Vision (II,26) and The Odour (II,120), reveal his method of meditating on the relationships of God, man, and nature.[1] For him, the beauty of the external world is not in itself sufficient cause for thankfulness to the Creator, since this beauty can properly be perceived only in its relationship to the beholder. Traherne asserts that the key to the pattern of creation is found only by the man who knows that he, together with every other human being, is the sole possessor of everything, the sole reason for the existence, beauty, and use of every creature. At the heart of this mystery is God, the great Giver of gifts, concentrating the fullness of his love on each single person and receiving thankful love in return:

> For till His Works my Wealth became,
> No Lov, or Peace did me enflame:
> But now I have a DEITY.[2]

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1 The Vision and The Odour are discussed in detail in my book, Mystical Symbolism in the poetry of Thomas Traherne (St. Lucia, Queensland, 1970), pp.8-11, 15-18.

2 Poverty (II,101), ll.54-56.

In Admiration (II,122), Traherne ecstatically pictures all non-human creatures of the spiritual and material realms bowing down before man, admiring him and serving him with pleasure.

Some Christian poets appreciate nature not only because its beauty and its service to man inspire them to give thanks to God, but also because it can afford them spiritual lessons. For didactic purposes, seventeenth-century poets often employ the popular conventional emblematic method, whereby a picture is first placed before the reader's mind and then given a rather arbitrary interpretation. Thus in E. M.'s emblem book Ashrea (1665), a picture of a woodbind entwining two trees is accompanied by the motto,

> Thus, while two foster deadly hate,
> A third steps in to end debate;
> Makes Peace, unites both Hearts and Hands,
> How blest is he who makes such bands![1]

The influence of the emblem poets is discernible in much of Vaughan's work, though often only incidentally; in The Palm-tree (p.324), for example, there seems to be a forced comparison of the "weights" of the down-hanging leaves with "death / And sin" (stanza 2), and The Water-fall (p.374) begins with a verse-paragraph shaped on the page in order to create a more vivid visual impression of the emblem, the water-fall, before the spiritual meaning is explicitly applied to it. By intellectualizing, the emblem poet superimposes a meaning on his emblem, thus relating the

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1 Illustration facing p.202 in Rosemary Freeman, English Emblem Books (London, 1948).

physical to the spiritual in a way which usually seems somewhat laboured and artificial, particularly to readers of the present day. The emblematic method must therefore be modified considerably if it is to be an effective means of expressing a mystical vision of reality—a vision in which all things, physical and spiritual, are unified by a deep awareness of the Divine. A common modification of this method is the substitution of a personal experience or vision for an objective physical emblem, and the treatment of the spiritual meaning or lesson in such a way as to reveal how inseparable it is from the experience in which it is rooted. Sometimes an experience and its meaning are fused in a few striking words, as when Thompson asserts that "all the springs are flash-lights of one Spring" and beholds "each resurgent morn . . . more near the Perfect Morn".[1]

In many of his poems, Vaughan presents an experience and succeeds in linking it in a convincing manner with the meaning it has for him. "I walkt the other day (to spend my hour)" (p.312) is inspired by a personal meditation on the hidden winter life of a root which in the spring will again produce a "gallant flowre" (l.4) as it did formerly, just as the person for whom the poet is mourning (probably his younger brother, William) has a life which is hidden in God (ll.61-63) and which, by implication, will be fully manifested when his resurrected body, like the flower, "[Comes] forth most fair and young" (l.28). The personal nature of the experience from which the meditation arises is

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1 From the Night of Forebeing, p.210, l.26; p.216, l.5. This poem will be discussed further in Chapter 3 of this study (pp.79-80).

evident to the reader, for Vaughan well conveys the curiosity of his search for the root and his excitement on finding it. In the third stanza the pace of the verse quickens; there is only one punctuated pause (l.17) and it actually heightens the sense of apprehension and expectation. There is a fine touch of realism in the vagueness of the line, "Then taking up what I could neerest spie" (l.15); all the concentration is on the search, not on details such as the tool used for digging. E. I. Watkin has pointed out that Vaughan's observation of nature is not always accurate, since it is impossible for a root covered by soil to be green as he affirms (ll.20-21).[1] Strangely, for the reader this mistake seems to strengthen the validity of the poet's experience; psychologically, it is very probable that Vaughan, who constantly associates greenness with life and hope, should imagine that the root he has so eagerly searched for is green.

In this poem there is no sense of strain or of a forced didacticism in the transition from the experience to its significance, for in the fifth stanza the root is subtly identified with the poet's deceased loved one by a skilful use of personalizing metaphor. The words "I threw the Clothes quite o'r his head" (l.29) powerfully evoke a human death-scene, and this evocation is reinforced by the lines,

> And stung with fear
> Of my own frailty dropt down many a tear
> Upon his bed (ll.30-32).

The significance becomes more explicit in the words, "Happy

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1 Poets and Mystics (London and New York, 1953), p.289.

are the dead!" (1.33), but the root is not forgotten, for the lines

> What peace doth now
> Rock him asleep below? (ll.34-35)

seem to refer to both the root and the person whose death is mourned. Clearly, the experience of finding the buried root which will rise as a flower has become fused in Vaughan's mind with his conviction that his loved one is really still living, and this helps to explain why the doctrine of the resurrection of the body so strongly pervades the poem, though it is never explicitly stated. Even the lines

> O thou! whose spirit did at first inflame
> And warm the dead (ll.43-44),

though they refer mainly to the creation of the world, seem in their context to point to the resurrection also, the new creation.

Like Vaughan, Hopkins is capable of fusing his observation of nature with the spiritual significance he sees in it. Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves (p.97) falls roughly into two main sections, a description of the coming of night and an interpretation of it as an image of the death and judgment that await us all; yet after reading the poem one realizes that this interpretation is implicit in the description from the very beginning, where the approach of evening is seen as the inexorable, mysterious, and all-embracing end of time (ll.1-2). The stars which appear after the soft yellow and grey tones of the sky have faded are harsh and even threatening by comparison; they "overbend us, / Fíre-féaturing heaven" (ll.3-5). There is a violence in the poet's expression of the terrifying disintegration of all the familiar things of day—"self ín self steepèd and

páshed" (1.6)—and their metamorphosis into starkly contrasted blackness and "bleak light" so that sharply silhouetted trees are seen as "beakleaved boughs dragonish" because they evoke a sense of doom about to strike like a menacing beast (11.9-10). It is significant that the light is bleak, for Hopkins, a lover of earth's "dapple" and of life's variety, gains no comfort from the realization that judgment will involve a strict separation of black from white, wrong from right (1.12), especially since the coming of night brings him a vision of hell rather than a hope of heaven (11.13-14).

Poems by Traherne such as Shadows in the Water (II,127), On Leaping over the Moon (II,130), and "To the same purpos" (II,132), in which lessons are drawn from experience, are complicated by being based on childhood memories. Although the adult's interpretation is not applied arbitrarily to the experience, it can never be perfectly fused with it. This imperfect fusion is most clearly seen in "To the same purpos", where the rather garrulous first stanza describing in a very homely way a young brother's feeling that the moon has been following him precedes a fervently didactic explication of the doctrine of "the inheritance multiplied"; the moon and stars, we are told, "serv wholy ev'ry One / As if they served him alone" (11.17-18). Poems like "To the same purpos" may perhaps be thought of as a variation of the kind to which belong "I walkt the other day (to spend my hour)" and Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves. Another variation of this kind is that in which the lesson seemingly taught by nature is first accepted, and then rejected because of its inadequacy as an

image of a Christian belief. Vaughan's Resurrection and Immortality (p.230) and Hopkins's That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection (p.105) are striking examples of poems in which nature's apparent lesson is rejected.

Resurrection and Immortality takes the popular seventeenth-century form of a dialogue between the body and the soul in which the body's view is shown by the soul to be limited. The body, picturing a moth bursting forth in newness of life from its silk cocoon and winging its way upward, suggests timidly that God will surely treat human beings as kindly as he treats the silkworm; but the soul loftily criticizes the body's lack of perfect faith and argues that since "no thing can to Nothing fall" (l.25), the body as well as the soul will be preserved. Though "laid aside" like a cocoon, the body,

> Like some spruce Bride,
> Shall one day rise, and cloath'd with shining light
> All pure, and bright
> Re-marry to the soule (ll.45-49).

Hopkins's vision of nature in flux as a Heraclitean fire leads him at first to a view which is even more limited than that held by the body in Vaughan's poem. The endless process of creation and destruction in "nature's bonfire" seems to point relentlessly to the destruction of man's mind as well as his body, and this thought is unbearable to Hopkins (ll.9, 11-13). Suddenly he is lifted from the shipwreck of despair by a strong renewal of his Christian faith in the resurrection (ll.15-18), a faith which transcends the evidence of the natural realm.

In many of Vaughan's poems, observation of nature

is used to emphasize the contrast between subhuman creatures and man, but nearly always to the latter's disadvantage. In The Constellation (p.302) the ordered movement of the stars and their obedience to God are seen as a reproach to man's disgraceful conduct in both religious and political life, and in Man (p.311) the faithfulness of birds, bees, flowers, and stones to God's "divine appointments" (l.10) is held up as an example. Sometimes the example that is read from nature is more specific; in The Showre (p.242) Vaughan sees raindrops born of mist rising from a "drowsie Lake" as an image of the tears which he should weep in repentance for his spiritual sloth, the "lazie breath" of his prayers (ll.1, 8). His constant eagerness to "hear / The world read to him" is an integral part of his aspiration towards that higher life of the spirit which he sees imaged in nature:

> All things here shew [man] heaven; Waters that fall
> Chide, and fly up; Mists of corruptest fome
> Quit their first beds & mount; trees, herbs, flowres, all
> Strive upwards stil, and point him the way home.[1]

Similarly, Hopkins interprets the reaching upward of the boughs of an ash as "old earth's groping towards the steep / Heaven whom she childs us by".[2]

Poems in which nature is shown to afford man lessons or examples are generally characterized by very obvious didacticism. A more mystical kind of poem expressing a higher spiritual aspiration is that in which the poet reveals a method of seeking direct experience of

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1 The Tempest (p.293), ll.17-18, 25-28.

2 (Ashboughs) (p.185), ll.10-11.

God in or through nature. One expression of such a method is Vaughan's Vanity of Spirit (p.248), which deserves close study.

In Vanity of Spirit the reader is presented with an account of the mentally exhausted poet leaving his "Cell" to lie beside a spring (ll.1-2). The word "Cell" indicates a hermit-like existence of studious meditation, and one supposes that, having failed to find God through human knowledge or wisdom, Vaughan turned to the natural world to continue his search. Since water is a symbol of purification and regeneration, and morning was for him a time of expectancy, the words "a shrill spring tun'd to the early day" suggest that he was hopeful of hearing a message that would enable him to share the harmony of the universal order. Here for a long time he felt an agonized longing for a knowledge of God, whom he apprehended as the Source of a beauty which brightens the darkness of this world (ll.3-4), and as the powerful Creator of perfect order who surrounds the corrupt world of man with the eternal realm, "this glorious Ring" (ll.5-6). He also "beg'd" and "gron'd" to enter into a personal relationship with God and to learn how to find Truth through spiritual illumination (ll.7-8).

As was seen in Chapter 1 (pp.29-30), Vaughan's usual attitude to man is that, even if he is potentially higher in the ladder of creation than the subhuman creatures, his spiritual attainment is in fact lower than theirs; he "Sleeps at the ladders foot".[1] Vanity of Spirit

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1 The Tempest, 1.39.

is exceptional in its more conventional emphasis on man as the head of the natural order who yet is able to transcend it, for Vaughan describes his search for God as beginning with a summoning of the whole of nature, a passing upward "Through all the Creatures" (ll.9, 13-14). This section of the poem is puzzling because it is difficult to know exactly what kind of spiritual or intellectual activity is being described. His claim that he "Broke up some seales, which none had touch'd before" (l.10) could suggest that he was engaged in either a philosophical or an experimental enquiry which led him to make discoveries about nature's secrets; moreover, his imagery of nature's womanhood seems to have been influenced by the writings of his brother Thomas, a Hermetic philosopher and scientist who remarks: "But, methinks, Nature complains of a prostitution, that I go about to diminish her majesty, having almost broken her seal and exposed her naked to the world."[1] There is some evidence that the poet did carry out practical investigations into the workings of nature, and that he had little regard for theorizing about it or for studying only its outward appearance. In "I walkt the other day (to spend my hour)" he characterizes himself as "I whose search lov'd not to peep and peer / I'th' face of things" (ll.8-9), and in a letter to John Aubrey dated 28 June 1680, he speaks of his "attendance vpon (rather than speculations into) Nature" and asserts that he "had butt litle affection to the skirts

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1 The Works of Thomas Vaughan, ed. Arthur Edward Waite (New York, 1968), p.81.

& lower parts of learning".[1] On the other hand, Vaughan's mention of the spring in line seventeen may indicate that the setting remains constant throughout the poem, and he is hardly likely to have investigated the secrets of nature experimentally and made scientific discoveries while lying beside a spring one morning. Furthermore, his search through all the creatures both stems from and results in a highly spiritual yearning. Despite words which could suggest the exercise of scientific curiosity, it seems probable, therefore, that in Vanity of Spirit Vaughan is describing his systematic use of a traditional meditative method—meditation on the second "book" of divine revelation, the Book of the Creatures—in his attempt to transcend the natural world and thus to see God. We are told that St. Francis "beheld in fair things Him Who is the most fair, and, through the traces of Himself that He hath imprinted on His creatures, he everywhere followed on to reach the Beloved, making of all things a ladder for himself whereby he might ascend to lay hold on Him Who is the altogether lovely";[2] a popular meditational work in the seventeenth century was Robert Bellarmin's The Mind's Ascent to God by a Ladder of Created Things, originally written in Latin in 1615; and in "I walkt the other day (to spend my

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1 The Works of Henry Vaughan, ed. L. C. Martin, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1957), pp.692-693.

2 "St. Bonaventure's Life of St. Francis", trans. E. Gurney Salter, in The Little Flowers of St. Francis. The Mirror of Perfection. St. Bonaventure's Life of St. Francis, Everyman's Library (London, 1963), p.358.

hour)" Vaughan prays:

> Grant I may so
> Thy steps track here below,
> 8
> 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.

The discoveries Vaughan claims to have made in the ascent up the ladder of creation which he describes in Vanity of Spirit were probably as spiritual or mystical as they were intellectual.

Presumably because his meditation was so intensive and passionate that it seemed to grant to him alone a revelation of nature's intimate secrets, Vaughan describes it in terms of an eager, unbridled deflowering of the natural world (ll.9-14). This "rifling" gained in spiritual value when, in his reading of the Book of Nature, he was led from the lower creatures to himself as representative of man, the highest rung on the ladder of the material creation. It is fitting that in such a private poem he should examine himself specially rather than man generally; and searching within himself, he found trickles of the "mighty spring" and echoes from "th' eternall hills" (ll.14-18). Vaughan's diction here is in accord with the prevalent philosophical idea of his time that man is a microcosm because he contains within himself the whole natural world in miniature, but it is obvious that he is referring primarily to the spiritual experience of finding "strange" intimations of his kinship with nature and with God. The literal and the figurative seem fused, so that the "Traces, and sounds" which he found within are of the

spiritual realm, symbolized by the spring and the hills, as well as of the Welsh scenery in which he had seen traces of God. This illumination was just clear enough to enable him to discern within his soul the neglected, ancient, and broken divine image, which promised to reveal to the joyful poet the mystery of God, if it could be unified again. However, the illumination did not last quite long enough for him to be able to put together and read the message of God within him and yet beyond him; even these intimations of the Divine were withdrawn, and he was left grief-stricken (ll.19-29). The poem ends with a poignant longing for death; oppressed by a feeling of God's inaccessibility, Vaughan wanted to cast off the "veyls" of his physical existence, which prevented his soul from seeing the divine Light in the darkness of this life.

Vaughan, then, is largely unsuccessful in his spiritual search, though to him God is Light, and he does experience a partial illumination. It is clear, however, that Vanity of Spirit depicts a more advanced stage in the soul's seeking than is depicted in Traherne's Solitude (II,98) and Dissatisfaction (II,103), the first part of Hopkins's The Wreck of the Deutschland (p.51), or Thompson's The Hound of Heaven (p.89).[1] Vaughan knows whom he is seeking, and in one sense he has already found God; what he now desires is nothing short of a mystical revelation, a seeing with the eye of the soul, and his yearning is so intense that he would "most gladly dye"—either a physical

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1 These poems were discussed in Chapter 1 of this study (pp.13-20).

death or a spiritual death to the self—"to buy / But one half glaunce" (11.33-34). It is characteristic of him as a lover of nature that he should choose the method of meditation on the Book of the Creatures; but it is no less characteristic of him that he should end by feeling the impossibility of spanning the distance between himself and the divine Light in this way. Apprehending God as primarily transcendent rather than immanent, he was always aware of the great gulf between "Corruption" and "this glorious Ring" (1.6).

Like Vaughan, Hopkins was often held back from the fullness of the mystical experience of God in nature and was at times oppressed by a sense of the transcendent God's inaccessibility. Even his ecstatic sonnet Hurrahing in Harvest (p.70) bears signs of the intense and conscious effort of rising to the spiritual through the sensuous, and the sensuous is never completely abandoned in his soul's ascent. The first quatrain is devoted to an enthusiastic description of a harvest scene which makes a powerful impact on the poet because all the parts are unified in his apprehension. The "barbarous" beauty of the stooks is matched by the wildness of the changeable sky in which the flecks of soft cloud look like "Meal-drift" and thus correspond to the grain below. Instinctively aspiring towards the Source of the unity of all things, Hopkins directs his heart and eyes, his spirit and senses, wholly towards finding Christ in the beauty of the sky, and his depiction in the second quatrain of this concentrated activity reveals that it is fully as physical as it is spiritual. The rhythm of the following lines, with the

crescendo and accelerando effect of the increasing length of the clauses, seems to imitate joyous physical movement:

> I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes,
> Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour.

At the same time, by emphasizing the stages in the poet's spiritual and emotional response to Christ, it reveals the lack of complete spontaneity in his mystical experience. Nevertheless, his search for Christ is rewarded with considerable success; he is able to commune lovingly with him through his living presence in nature, and the joy of this communion leaves Hopkins far more satisfied than Vaughan felt after the meditation on the creatures described in Vanity of Spirit. The sestet illustrates that once Hopkins has broken through the veil of the material world at one point and found the Reality beyond, everything is transfigured. The hills, massively solid yet delicately coloured, become a manifestation of the glory of Christ's sovereignty in its majestic strength and gentle sweetness, and such discoveries of his presence everywhere are described as personal meetings which to some extent enable the beholder to rise above physical appearances and cast away the sensuousness of ordinary human existence. Scrupulously honest as always, Hopkins is careful, even in the excitement of the climactic final lines, not to claim for himself an experience of perfect mystical union with Christ, for the word "half" implies its incompleteness:

> The heart rears wings bold and bolder
> And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him
> off under his feet.

Even in mystical nature poetry which is thoroughly Christian in its assumptions and context, the poet's vision

is often theocentric rather than specifically Christocentric, perhaps because it is God the Father who is most often envisaged in the rôle of Creator. Thus in "I walkt the other day (to spend my hour)" Vaughan expresses his apprehension of divine immanence by a general reference to "thee / Who art in all things, though invisibly" (ll.53-54). One of the distinctive features of Hopkins's vision of God's presence in nature is that usually it is specifically Christocentric as well as partly sensuous. In Hurrahing in Harvest the sensuousness is closely related to the Christocentricity, for the greeting which Jesus gives in reply to the poet's aspiration is compared with the greeting of "looks" and "lips", and the hills are pictured as his shoulder. The physical quality of Hopkins's spirituality is probably due partly to the emphasis given to the sensuous and the aesthetic in the Catholic sacramental tradition. This emphasis is related to the Catholic interpretation of the doctrine of Christ's Real Presence in the bread and wine of the Communion, and is manifested in such practices as the use of images of Christ and the Virgin as devotional aids. That Jesus as Man, as a physical Being, was vivid in Hopkins's imagination is attested by his intimation in a sermon of 1879: " . . . for myself I make no secret I look forward with eager desire to seeing the matchless beauty of Christ's body in the heavenly light."[1] Moreover, it was natural for Hopkins to associate the patterns of the created world with Christ's physical existence, since he held the

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1 The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Christopher Devlin (London, 1959), p.36.

Scotist view that Christ's incarnation was such an essential part of God's scheme of creation that he would still have come into the world in human form even if man had not fallen.[1] It is not surprising, then, that mysticism and sensuous aestheticism are inextricably blended at times, even in those poems of his, such as The Windhover (p.69) and Binsey Poplars, which are not explicitly Christian; though within a poem one can usually trace a progression from a mainly aesthetic to a mainly spiritual response to natural beauty. This progression is particularly striking in The Starlight Night (p.66), where, significantly, Hopkins seems to assert that a full aesthetic appreciation of a starlit sky can be attained only by the spiritual discipline of "Prayer, patience, alms, vows". It is as if the aesthetic is for him a portion of the spiritual.

It seems to me that, unlike Vanity of Spirit, Hurrahing in Harvest may properly be called a direct expression of Christian nature mysticism; in it the reader is presented with a vision of the world transfigured, yet God's transcendence and immanence are held in balance. God's Grandeur (p.66), though less ecstatic, reveals a similarly mystical vision of the world;[2] but such a balance is particularly difficult to achieve, and Vaughan's and Hopkins's deep awareness of God's transcendence more than of

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1 In some "meditation points" of 1884, for example, he notes: "The love of the Son for the Father leads him to take a created nature and in that to offer him sacrifice. The sacrifice might have been unbloody; by the Fall it became a bloody one" (ibid., p.257).

2 This will be shown in Chapter 4 of this study (p.101).

his immanence may account for the rarity in their poems of explicit expressions of their personal experience of God's presence in nature. Vaughan's instinctive animism, supported by Hermetic beliefs, seems to have made it relatively easy for him to feel a spiritual kinship with other creatures and thus to enjoy "The great Chime / And Symphony of nature"; and this sense of harmony with nature was particularly powerful when he himself was "in tune" with God as he perceived nature to be.[1] Nevertheless, his experience of the illumination of the external world, though less sensuous and probably more spontaneous than Hopkins's, is usually concentrated on a mystical feeling of nature's adoration of the transcendent God:

> Walk with thy fellow-creatures: note the hush
> And whispers amongst them. There's not a Spring,
> Or Leafe but hath his Morning-hymn; Each Bush
> And Oak doth know I AM.[2]

In some of Vaughan's poems, however, there are brief indications of an intense sensitivity to the Divine within nature as well as above it, near yet far:

> Ther's not a wind can stir,
> Or beam passe by,
> But strait I think (though far,)
> Thy hand is nigh.[3]

In The Stone (p.350) he even claims to have been granted a direct revelation of the communion maintained between God and all subhuman things in the natural world; a communion

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1 The Morning-watch (p.255), ll.17-19.

2 Rules and Lessons (p.267), ll.13-16.

3 "Come, come, what doe I here?" (p.250), ll.11-14.

which, in the context of this poem, is seen as a warning to mankind:

> But I (Alas!)
> Was shown one day in a strange glass
> That busie commerce kept between
> God and his Creatures, though unseen (ll.18-21).

Vaughan's love of nature is so pervasive in most of his poetry that one may be surprised to find him dismissing the world as "this dead and dark abode" in the last stanza of his poem, The World (p.299), especially since this poem, as most readers agree, contains evidence of the poet's personal experience of the numinous:

> I saw Eternity the other night
> Like a great Ring of pure and endless light (ll.1-2).

To explain the paradox, one need not necessarily assume that, by "the world", Vaughan here means only the corrupt world of sinful humanity, though of course this is his chief meaning in this context. Values change according to perspective, and Vaughan would no doubt see even the world of the material creation as a "dead and dark abode" by comparison with the living light of his eternal spiritual home.

Traherne's mysticism, by contrast with Vaughan's, is of a peculiarly intellectual and anthropocentric kind. He seems hardly at all to appreciate nature in and for itself, for he deeply sees and feels God's presence in it only when he thankfully perceives that, by the Creator's loving care, all things are related in their uses to everything else, and are gifts to every man:

> In all Things, all Things service do to all:
> And thus a Sand is Endless, though most small.

> And every Thing is truly Infinite,
> In its Relation deep and exquisite.[1]

These perceptions may seem more philosophical than spiritual; nevertheless, the reader of Traherne's poetry cannot doubt that the vision which stems from such intellectual and emotional roots is genuinely mystical. Through apparently simple descriptions of nature gleams the "something more" or the "something beyond" seen by the illuminated man,[2] and for him "a Sand, an Acorn, or a Bean" must be "clothd with Endless Glory" before it can be "truly seen".[3] In a great number of his poems the vision which he presents is of a world transfigured by the radiance of divine Light, a radiance which is, moreover, so fully focussed on each person that each one can claim it as wholly for himself alone:

> The Light which on ten thousand faces Shines
> The Beams which crown ten thousand Vines
> With Glory and Delight, appear
> As if they were,
> Reflected only from them all for me,
> That I a Greater Beauty there might see.[4]

In direct expressions of God's immanence he uses very general terms, yet the fervour and sincerity of personal experience shine through such assertions as

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1 "As in a Clock" (II,186), ll.29-32.

2 Sherrington, op. cit., pp.107-108.

3 The Demonstration (II,156), ll.25-27. Cf. the opening lines of Blake's Auguries of Innocence:

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour.

4 Goodnesse (II,182), ll.13-18.

His Glory Endless is and doth Surround
And fill all Worlds, without or End or Bound,

and

[God] is a Glorious Bright and Living Flame,
That on all things doth shine,
And makes their Face Divine.
And Holy, Holy, Holy, is his Name.[1]

Akin to Traherne's vision of the infinity of a grain of sand is Thompson's conviction that

Nature is whole in her least things exprest,
Nor know we with what scope God builds the worm.[2]

Like Vaughan, however, he is capable of a deep appreciation of nature apart from man, and his feelings seem instinctively animistic. In All Flesh (p.347) he addresses a blade of grass, picturing the tender and harmonious working with God and with one another of all the forces of nature in its creation and growth, and rising to a fine climax of visionary power:

Epitomized in thee
Was the mystery
Which shakes the spheres conjoint—
God focussed to a point (ll.33-36).

Thompson's sense of harmony with God and with nature brings home to him the mystery of man's humble yet exalted place in creation; he is poised between the blade of grass and God himself:

My one hand thine, and one
Imprisoned in God's own (ll.47-48).

It could be urged that in this poem Thompson's vision of nature is not truly mystical; that the line "God focussed to a point" refers merely to the transcendent God's act of

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1 Thoughts IV (II,179), ll.33-34; The Anticipation (II,159), ll.112-115.

2 The Heart II (p.320), ll.10-11.

creation in fashioning the blade of grass. This can be only a matter of opinion, but I think these words are meant to express far more. Earlier in the poem there are lines which seem to me to indicate a mystical apprehension of divine immanence:

> One grass-blade in its veins
> Wisdom's whole flood contains (ll.5-6);

moreover, there is ample evidence in other poems such as The Kingdom of God (p.349) that Thompson was sensitive to the invisible world within and behind the visible one:

> O world invisible, we view thee,
> O world intangible, we touch thee,
> O world unknowable, we know thee,
> Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The angels keep their ancient places;—
> Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
> 'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
> That miss the many-splendoured thing (stanzas 1, 4).

The poetry of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Francis Thompson illustrates an impressive range of ways in which the man who is redeemed by Christ's salvation can attain a deeper knowledge and love of God through an appreciation of nature. Except for Traherne's work, comparatively few of their poems would be considered by most readers to be expressions of a truly mystical vision or feeling of God's presence in nature; but a great number of their poems are, undeniably, expressions of stages in their journey towards such a mystical illumination of the world around them.

Chapter 3

CHILDHOOD AND EDEN

A believer's concept of God as his father, the source of his being and the Person on whom he is intimately dependent for help, guidance, support, and indeed all blessings, both spiritual and material, leads him to the concept of himself as a child of God. A normal child accepts his parents' love and care naturally, and responds spontaneously with his affection. Thus in mystical writing the attainment of a right relationship with God is often pictured as the attainment of childlikeness. Christ himself is recorded in Mark 10:15 as saying, ". . . Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein", and this is usually taken to mean that a trustful humility that simply and naturally accepts a place among God's people as a gift rather than a right, is necessary for entrance upon the blessings and responsibilities which God gives to those who receive him. One is therefore not surprised to discover the theme of childhood simplicity in the work of the four Christian poets of this study.

There are, however, two additional reasons for their interest in this theme. One is the prevalence in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries of Neo-Platonic ideas of childhood purity and insight. Thomas Vaughan's remark that ". . . Nature in her simplicity [of childhood] is much more wise than some men are" is fairly typical of a

significant strand in the philosophical opinion of his age, for during the seventeenth century there was a "change in attitude toward the nature of man", a "growing conviction that man was born [totally] good, even since the Fall".[1] As well as broad currents of thought such as the respected Jewish doctrine of the innocence of earliest childhood, there were specific influences such as the writings of Jacob Boehme, which were much translated into English in the seventeenth century, and some of which were known to Thomas Vaughan. Boehme, believing in the purity and instinctive wisdom of little children, likens angels to them and recommends seekers after divine truth to cultivate the childlike spirit.[2] In protest against the increasingly utilitarian values of the eighteenth century, Romantic writers elevated the child into a symbol of unspoilt imagination and sensibility, and Rousseau's cult of original virtue in the child came to full flowering in the poetry of Blake and Wordsworth.[3] Wordsworth's great ode, Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood, in which the child is hailed as "Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!"

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1 The Works of Thomas Vaughan, ed. Arthur Edward Waite (New York, 1968), p.396; A. E. Davidson, "Innocence Regained: Seventeenth-Century Reinterpretations of the Fall of Man", Dissertation Abstracts, XVII (1957), 847.

2 L. C. Martin, "Henry Vaughan and the Theme of Infancy", in Seventeenth Century Studies, presented to Sir Herbert Grierson, ed. John Purves (Oxford, 1938), pp.248, 252-253; Elizabeth Holmes, Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy (Oxford, 1932), pp.23, 55.

3 Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society: a Study of the Theme in English Literature, rev. ed. with an introduction by F. R. Leavis (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1967), pp.29, 31, 33, 44.

(l.114), had a powerful influence on Romantic and post-Romantic sensibilities. In a letter of 1886, Hopkins confesses:

> There have been in all history a few, a very few men, whom common repute, even where it did not trust them, has treated . . . as having seen something, whatever that really was. Plato is the most famous of these. . . . human nature in these men saw something, got a shock; wavers in opinion, looking back, whether there was anything in it or no; but is in a tremble ever since. Now what Wordsworthians mean is . . . that in Wordsworth when he wrote that ode [on Immortality] human nature got another of those shocks, and the tremble from it is spreading. This opinion I do strongly share; I am, ever since I knew the ode, in that tremble.[1]

The other, more important reason for the interest of the poets of this study in the theme of childhood simplicity is that Vaughan, Traherne, and Thompson in particular—it will become clear that Hopkins does not idealize childhood so much—are lovers of nature who recognize that the adult's spiritual appreciation of nature is dependent on his regaining of a childlike state, since either their intuition or their own experience teaches them that the child possesses a clarity of vision that is lacking in the ordinary adult. Traherne's very individual interpretation of Christ's teaching recorded in John 3:3, ". . . Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God", emphasizes the uncorrupted child's sensitive insight into the glory and the divine origin of the natural world:

> Grit in the Ey or the yellow Jandice will not let a Man see those Objects truly that are before it. And therfore it is requisit that we should be as very

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1 The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London, 1935), pp.147-148.

> Strangers to the Thoughts Customs and Opinions of men in this World as if we were but little Children. So those Things would appear to us only which do to Children when they are first Born. Ambitions, Trades, Luxuries, inordinat Affections, Casual and Accidental Riches invented since the fall would be gone, and only those Things appear, which did to Adam in Paradice, in the same Light, and in the same Colors. GOD in His Works, Glory in the Light, Lov in our Parents, Men, our selvs, and the Face of Heaven. Evry Man naturaly seeing those Things, to the Enjoyment of which He is Naturaly Born.[1]

Implicit in such praise of childhood vision is the belief that its source lies in the child's spiritual union with the Deity and therefore with nature, a union which must be regained in adult life. To his question, "Know you what it is to be a child?" Thompson replies, "It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism . . ."; and baptism symbolizes, among other things, union with Christ. Moreover, he asserts that ". . . Nature . . . lives in the life of God: and in so far, and so far merely, as man himself lives in that life, does he come into sympathy with Nature, and Nature with him."[2] For the poets of this study, therefore, regained childlikeness is an important facet of Christian nature mysticism, though a belief in the child's union with nature need not be specifically Christian. Coleridge attributed to the child "that intuition of things which arises when we possess ourselves as one with the whole", as opposed to the ordinary adult vision "which presents itself when . . . we think of ourselves as separated beings, and place nature in antithesis to the mind, as object to subject, thing to thought, death to

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1 Centuries III, 5.

2 The Works of Francis Thompson, ed. Wilfred Meynell (London, 1913), III, 7, 82.

life."[1] It is significant that Traherne, the only one of the four poets who seems to have succeeded in regaining a spiritually childlike state as a permanent possession, is also the only one whom most readers agree in calling a mystic. It is to be expected, then, that a detailed exploration of the meaning which childhood has for the four poets, both experientially and symbolically, will afford valuable insights into their relationships with God and nature.

In my book, Mystical Symbolism in the poetry of Thomas Traherne, I discussed in detail Traherne's use of the child symbol and how it differs from the traditional Christian use (pp.70-82). His unorthodox tendency to attribute a state of sinlessness to the young child is frequently complicated by an unorthodox tendency to equate innocence with purity of vision and sin with limitation of vision. Moreover, the idealized child figure of his poems discerns the great mystical truths of the immanence of the spiritual within the material, the spiritual boundlessness of all things, and, above all, the greatness of his own heritage, since all things are God's gifts to him. This emphasis on the exalted self is foreign to those ideas of humility which are usually implicit in the use of the child symbol in traditional Christian literature. Certain similarities and differences between Traherne's and Vaughan's attitudes to childhood were also noted. Traherne, unlike Vaughan, "feels no yearning for the past, because he has become a 'child' again and experiences in adulthood a

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1 Quoted by Coveney, op. cit., p.85.

spiritual richness beyond the reach of the literal child" (p.70); both poets "speak reverently of the innocence of their own early days of 'white, Celestiall thought'[1] when in their simplicity they knew nothing of sin, evil, or guilt and felt very close to the Father, and both stress the importance of becoming children again by regaining this early purity" (p.73). However, "Vaughan never shows any tendency to identify innocence with purity of vision as Traherne does", for "The somewhat Platonic child of The Retreate sees 'shadows of eternity' in natural objects primarily because he has just left the eternal realm and still remembers its greater glory," while the sinless child of Traherne's poem Wonder (II,6) is wholly occupied with the present (p.78).

Since Christians traditionally regard heaven as their spiritual home, the place to which they go after this life to be with God their father, many of them find it easy to accept the Platonic idea of the soul's pre-existence in heaven, even though it is outside the scope of orthodox Christianity.[2] One would expect this Platonic idea to be particularly attractive to poets who celebrate the innocence of childhood, and in the writings of the four poets of this study there are indications of such an attraction. Vaughan's The Retreate, as has been noted, is overtly Platonic in this respect, and in his poem Distraction

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1 Vaughan, The Retreate (p.249), l.6.

2 It need not, however, be entirely contrary to Christian orthodoxy, since a Christian could argue that the soul has existed for all eternity as a potential soul in the mind of God.

(p.243) one can trace a background of thought and feeling in which Platonic concepts of the pre-existent spirit's light becoming imprisoned in the body's darkness are blended with Christian beliefs. He laments, "I find my selfe the lesse, the more I grow" (l.10), and he implies that when he was born, his pre-existent winged soul was "Coffin'd in / This quicken'd masse of sinne", his body (ll.17-18). The older he becomes, the more is his light diminished and his being fragmented by worldly temptations and distractions, until he feels that he is merely "crumbled dust" (l.1) which needs God's light to unify it and keep it under control. In Her Portrait, Thompson makes poetic use of the idea that his idealized lady (Alice Meynell) "lighted on our frosty earth" from a "far Paradise", and claims that the sweetness of God's presence in her seraphic soul reminds him of his own pre-existent state:

> At the rich odours from her heart that rise,
> My soul remembers its lost Paradise,
> And antenatal gales blow from Heaven's shores of spice
> (p.80, ll.1-12).

Though Hopkins does not express in his poetry a belief in pre-existence, there is evidence that he did not dismiss its possibility, for in his comments on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola he remarks: ". . . it may be maintained that the mind has no bound from space nor even from time, for it may exist after death and may have existed before birth."[1] Even Traherne, "who loves this life so much that he feels already in Heaven"[2] and is therefore

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1 The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Christopher Devlin (London, 1959), p.124.

2 Sherrington, op. cit., p.40.

comparatively uninterested in a life before or after this one, seems to toy with the idea of pre-existence, as in the first line of Wonder: "How like an Angel came I down!" Since the pre-existent soul is always assumed to be sinless, the poets' fascination with this Platonic idea and with childhood innocence is related to their experience of God's immanence in man; and it will become clear that this in turn is related to their experience of his immanence in nature.

So powerfully does Traherne feel God's immanence in himself and others that, even in the poem Innocence (II,14), where he is a little bothered by the problem of the doctrine of Original Sin, he tentatively attributes complete sinlessness to the young child.[1] In the fourth section of the poem he suggests three possible explanations for the fact that in his own early childhood he "felt no Stain, not Spot of Sin" (l.4): perhaps "Nature is so pure, / And Custom only vicious"; or perhaps God miraculously removed his guilt very early; or perhaps he found perfect happiness one day early in his life (ll.37-42). But he is not really interested in such speculations, and in the fifth section he quickly goes on to picture himself in early childhood as an unfallen Adam, and to affirm once more that "Within, without me, all was pure" (l.59). Thompson likewise does not question the purity of childhood, though his poems do not give the reader the impression that he necessarily believes young children to be absolutely sinless, probably because one is aware that he usually regards them from the perspective of adult guilt and that

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1 See ibid., p.76.

his values are therefore comparative. Thus in To Olivia (p.16) he expresses a sense of guilt so deep that he fears the child will be sullied by any association with him:

> White flake of childhood, clinging so
> To my soiled raiment, thy shy snow
> At tenderest touch will shrink and go (11.3-5).

Again, in The Hound of Heaven he recounts his feeling that, in the period before he submitted himself to God, he was prevented from finding spiritual satisfaction in friendships with little children because their guardian angels protected them from him (p.90, 11.24-30). Thompson is also far more conscious than Traherne of the limitations of childhood and of the superiority of the mystical knowledge which the adult can attain. In An Anthem of Earth he explicitly claims that only the adult who has experienced suffering can discern deep mystical truth:

> Not to the boy, although his eyes be pure
> As the prime snowdrop is
> . . . . . ;
> Not to such eyes,
> Uneuphrasied with tears, the hierarchical
> Vision lies unoccult (p.265, 1.25—p.266, 1.1).

Indeed, it seems probable that when Thompson writes of the "innocence" of childhood he means "lack of a knowledge of sin" as much as "sinlessness". In Of Nature: Laud and Plaint he dwells on the impossibility of trying to recover the vision which the literal child has of the world's wondrous newness, since this vision springs partly from his lack of familiarity with nature:

> The wonder in a wondrous sight
> Was wondrous simple, as our simple God—
> Yet not dulled, daily, base (p.309, 11.27-29),

and partly from his ignorance of sin and suffering and evil:

> No extreme rites of penitence avail
> To lighten thee of knowledge, to impart
> Once more the language of the daisy's tale,
> And that doctorial Art
> Of knowing-not to thine oblivious heart!
> (p.311, ll.15-19)

Because Vaughan, like Thompson, regards childhood from the perspective of adult sinfulness, it is difficult to discover whether or not he believes small children to be perfectly sinless. He seems to express this belief in The BURIAL Of an Infant (p.282), though lines such as

> For ere thou knew'st how to be foul,
> Death wean'd thee from the world, and sin (ll.7-8)

need not be a denial of the doctrine of Original Sin, if this doctrine is thought to mean only that "all men inherit a common human nature that is corrupt inasmuch as it possesses a positive downward tendency to evil."[1] Though in The Retreate, Childe-hood (p.357), and Looking back (p.434) Vaughan praises childhood almost as highly as Traherne does, there are indications in the first two of these poems that his child figure is probably not felt to be completely sinless. There is ambiguity in his description of his early days as a time

> When yet I had not walkt above
> A mile, or two, from my first love,[2]

for though it could refer merely to the child's distance, in time and in physical development, from the state of his previous existence, it is more likely that the words "first love" are meant also to allude to the words of Christ in

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1 E. J. Bicknell and H. J. Carpenter, A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, 3rd ed. rev. (London, 1955), p.179.

2 The Retreate, ll.7-8.

Revelation 2:4: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Similarly, his depiction of childhood as "Dear, harmless age! the short, swift span, / Where weeping virtue parts with man"[1] suggests that even this period, though "harmless" in comparison with adult life, is a time when virtue scarcely holds its own against the weaknesses of human nature.

Of the four poets of this study, it seems that only Hopkins has a strong personal conviction of the truth and importance of the doctrine of Original Sin in its relationship to children. At the same time, however, he rejoices in finding evidence of some natural goodness still shining in them and in adults. Thus in The Wreck of the Deutschland (p.51) he addresses his heart as "O unteachably after evil, but uttering truth" (stanza 18, l.5), and in Brothers (p.87) he is moved to exclaim,

> Ah Nature, framed in fault,
> There's comfort then, there's salt;
> Nature, bad, base, and blind,
> Dearly thou canst be kind (ll.38-41).

Because he is deeply conscious of the fragility of any goodness in human nature, he fears for the young and begs Christ to win for himself "Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy" before it "sour with sinning".[2] These ideas are not unusual in themselves, but what is noteworthy is Hopkins's almost obsessive emphasis on them, together with the intensity of feeling behind his expression of them. Sometimes his fear that innocent young lives are about to be

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1 Childe-hood, ll.31-32.

2 Spring (p.67), ll.12-13.

corrupted seems to become agonizing for him, as in the final stanzas of The Bugler's First Communion (p.82) and of On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People (p.196). The latter poem, an unfinished one written at the end of 1886, late in Hopkins's life, is perhaps the most revealing of his poems in this regard. His first reaction to the portrait of the young brother and sister is to grieve for the transience of their physical beauty:

> O I admire and sorrow! The heart's eye grieves
> Discovering you, dark tramplers, tyrant years (ll.1-2).

Then, almost immediately, this grief is transmuted into fear lest the beauty of their souls be as transient; the young people are too "frail" for him to exclaim confidently, "Happy the father, mother of these!" (stanza 2). As Paul L. Mariani remarks, ". . . Hopkins' esthetic perspective has narrowed considerably; he cannot look upon the portrait for long without moral concerns edging insistently into the forefront."[1] It even occurs to him that the spiritual beauty which seems to be reflected in the physical beauty of the brother and sister may be largely an illusion, since they may not have turned their gaze towards Christ. Thus he anxiously enquires of the pictured brother,

> Where lies your landmark, seamark, or soul's star?
> There's none but truth can stead you. Christ is truth
> (ll.19-20).

But even if their spiritual beauty is a reality, what assurance is that? asks the poet. The very fact of their goodness may make evil forces all the more eager to attack

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1 A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (Ithaca, New York: Copyright © 1970 by Cornell University), p.267.

them, just as physical beauty is so often devastated by destructive forces:

> Worst will the best. What worm was here, we cry,
> To have havoc-pocked so, see, the hung-heavenward boughs?
> (11.31-32)

At this point Hopkins cries "Enough" (1.33). The contemplation of impending evil has become unbearable, and indeed some readers feel that it may be evidence of a lack of psychological balance. Eleanor Ruggles, for example, speaks of his "irredeemable despondency" and his "self-sustaining apprehensions".[1] In any case, the depth of Hopkins's conviction that even little children, though "innocent" in comparison with adults, are by no means sinless is a natural consequence of his experience of God as primarily transcendent, as above and beyond man more than within him; and this comparative pessimism about human nature is at the opposite pole from Traherne's bold optimism.

It is significant that the two poets who do not question the purity of childhood are those who are the most willing to picture themselves as having attained or retained a childlike state in adult life, though it is evident that, while the child of Traherne's poems enjoys a comparatively independent existence,[2] Thompson thinks that God's true children should feel humbly dependent on him and begs forgiveness for sometimes rebelling "against love's arms".[3]

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1 Gerard Manley Hopkins: a Life (London, 1947), pp.151, 206.

2 See Sherrington, op. cit., pp.76-77.

3 Love and the Child (p.138), l.9.

Thompson's feeling of kinship with children leads him occasionally to identify himself with them, as in Daisy (p.3):

> Two children did we stray and talk
> Wise, idle, childish things (ll.11-12),

and in the last line of To My Godchild (p.14): "Look for me in the nurseries of Heaven"; though it is probable that this fellow-feeling stems partly from the fact that he was a very dependent person throughout his life. For him, Alice Meynell was the lady whom "The man in me calls 'Love,' the child calls 'Mother'", and Wilfred Meynell was the "Father, Brother, Friend" to whom he clung unashamedly.[1] Nevertheless, his poem Field-Flower (p.331) makes the Romantic claim that poets look on innocent nature with childlike simplicity, "As baby looks on baby" (l.32), and it seems likely that Thompson, when not overwhelmed by a sense of guilt, was inclined to attribute to himself an essential innocence. One is therefore not surprised to find that in some poems his vision of God's immanence in human beings, though not as extreme as Traherne's, is quite daring; in Scala Jacobi Portaque Eburnea (p.75), for example, Alice Meynell's soul is likened to Jacob's ladder stretching from earth to heaven.

Unlike Traherne and Thompson, Vaughan yearns for childhood but always feels that it is beyond his grasp. He longs to "travell back", but his soul "staggers in the way";[2] he realizes that childhood is

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1 In Her Paths (p.85), last line; To Wilfred Meynell (p.142), l.5.

2 The Retreate, ll.21, 28.

> An age of mysteries! which he
> Must live twice, that would Gods face see,

but "through a long night" he sees only its "bordering light" and is moved to exclaim,

> I cannot reach it; and my striving eye
> Dazles at it, as at eternity.[1]

Looking back is a happier poem, but even the title underlines its nostalgic tone; he gains pleasure from the memory of childhood, but he has not reached it, for, like God, it is beyond him more than within him. When he thinks of his adult self as a child of God, he is deeply aware of his sinfulness and dependence and emphasizes God's rôle as father; in Day of Judgement (p.232) he even ascetically begs for his fatherly punishment:

> let me now begin
> To feele my loving fathers Rod
> Killing the man of sinne! (ll.30-32)

He never loses sight of God's tenderness, however, and in Admission (p.285) he is pictured as divine mother: "Wee are thy Infants, and suck thee" (l.17).

Hopkins, like Vaughan, makes no claim to the attainment of childlike innocence or simplicity. Only too aware of his inadequacy and shortcomings, he prays for fearless trust in God like that which an infant feels in its mother, acknowledging before him, "Bad I am, but yet thy child."[2] Although he does weigh God's merciful love against his just mastering of souls, as when he describes him as "Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung" and as "mighty

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1 Childe-hood, ll.35-36, 41-42, 1-2.

2 Nondum (p.32), last two stanzas; "Thee, God, I come from, to thee go" (p.194), l.13.

a master, . . . a father and fond",[1] one feels that he always retained some fear in his relationship to the God who was so far above him, and in this connection the following passage from a sermon of 1879 is revealing: "The thought of [Christ's] gentleness towards children, towards the afflicted, towards sinners, is often dwelt on . . . . But for my part I like to feel that I should have feared him."[2] It is all the more natural, then, that he should picture himself as a child of the Virgin Mary, whom he could approach without fear, and at the end of his tender poem, The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe (p.93), he prays to her: "Fold home, fast fold thy child."

A study of the poetry of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson reveals that their attitudes to childhood are closely related to their attitudes to nature, and one of the reasons for this is theological. Many Christians have applied the doctrine of Original Sin to nature as well as to man; man, the head of the material creation, is so closely associated with nature that by his Fall he is believed to have corrupted it as well as himself. In Book X of Paradise Lost, Milton deals with the consequences which man's sin had on the world around him. Sin and Death were admitted to Paradise

> Both to destroy, or unimmortal make
> All kinds, and for destruction to mature
> Sooner or later (ll.611-613),

and by God's command sun, moon, planets, and winds altered

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1 The Wreck of the Deutschland, stanza 9, l.7; In the Valley of the Elwy (p.67), l.14.

2 Op. cit., ed. Devlin, pp.37-38.

the earth's climate so that extreme cold and heat were produced, as well as

> sideral blast,
> Vapour, and Mist, and Exhalation hot,
> Corrupt and Pestilent (ll.693-695).

Man's sin also introduced discord among the irrational creatures so that they

> Devourd each other; nor stood much in awe
> Of Man, but fled him, or with count'nance grim
> Glar'd on him passing (ll.712-714).

In The First Anniversary, Donne laments that "as mankind, so is the world's whole frame / Quite out of joint", and that "Both beasts and plants [were] curst in the curse of man" (ll.191-192, 200). Likewise Vaughan declares in Corruption (p.271) that man

> drew the Curse upon the world, and Crackt
> The whole frame with his fall (ll.15-16),

and Hopkins affirms that God "o'er gives all to rack or wrong"[1] and in a sermon of 1880 presents a very pessimistic view of the present state of the world: ". . . everything is full of fault, flaw, imperfection, shortcoming; as many marks as there are of God's wisdom in providing for us so many marks there may be set against them of more being needed still, of something having made of this very providence a shattered frame and a broken web."[2] On the other hand, Traherne and Thompson, who do not feel so strongly the gulf between God and man and who are more inclined to regard young children as sinless, tend to regard this world as an Eden or paradise to those who can "purely

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1 Ribblesdale (p.90), l.8.

2 Op. cit., ed. Devlin, p.90.

see".[1] As one would expect, Traherne is more optimistic about this life than is Thompson, who takes pleasure in trying to visualize the afterlife, as in To My Godchild; but the later poet too can at times find paradise around and within him, and laments that it is hidden from others because they have allowed themselves to become estranged from spiritual realities:

> 'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
> That miss the many-splendoured thing.[2]

Because Eden or heaven is Traherne's constant, present possession, there is a curiously timeless quality about his descriptions of nature. God's immanence is so manifest to him at all times that he does not yearn for childhood, for morning, for spring. For him, the world is eternally bathed in "noontide brilliance" and Christ's love can constantly warm and bring life to our souls, thus turning our spiritual winter into spring, just as, at Christmas, Christ "Makes Winter, Spring" by filling people with joy and inspiring them to decorate their houses with bays, holly, and ivy.[3] Thompson is much more aware of suffering and death, so it is not surprising that often, as in The Mistress of Vision (p.181), he dwells on the high price of attaining mystical illumination, the price of an inner striving which reaches the point of a spiritual death to self which is eternal life:

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1 Traherne, The Preparative (II,20), l.60.

2 The Kingdom of God (p.349), ll.15-16.

3 Sherrington, op. cit., p.39; On Christmas-Day (II,110), ll.9-12, 19-24, 35-37, 74-77.

Die, for none other way canst live.
. . . . . .
When thy seeing blindeth thee
To what thy fellow-mortals see;
. . . . . .
Search no more—
Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore
(XX, ll.13-21).

Nevertheless, his powerful apprehension of God's nearness, of his presence everywhere, gives him a vision which rises above the imperfection of this world. In From the Night of Forebeing: An Ode After Easter (p.204) he celebrates the coming of spring and reads the signs of the seasons in personal and universal terms. In the winter of his desolation he is unable to share the earth's new life and joy, but he sympathizes with it, remembering the springtime of his life, his childhood,

When I, I too,
Was once, O wild companions, as are you,—
Ran with such wilful feet (p.206, ll.19-21),

and seeing, in the present, hopeful foreshadowings of "far days when I too shall rejoice" (p.206, l.30):

all the firsts are hauntings of some Last,
And all the springs are flash-lights of one Spring.
Then leaf, and flower, and fall-less fruit
Shall hang together on the unyellowing bough;

and

I do hear
From the revolving year
A voice which cries:
'. . . . . .
All dies, and all is born;
But each resurgent morn, behold, more near the Perfect
Morn.' (p.210, ll.25-28; p.215, l.31—p.216, l.5)

In personal terms, his approaching spring is "a resurrection not only to a mature joy, but also to a fresh world of

poetic inspiration";[1] in universal terms, the season of spring foreshadows the resurrection of the body and a new earth under Christ's rule, as the biblical imagery reveals:

> Green spray showers lightly down the cascade of the larch;
> The graves are riven,
> And the Sun comes with power amid the clouds of heaven!
> (p.207, ll.11-13)

Although Vaughan, too, looks forward to the resurrection, the judgment, and the new life thereafter, his hope of an imminent resurrection is stimulated not so much by the goodness and beauty in man and nature as by their corruption. He feels that since the world is gradually getting worse in every way its present form must surely come to an end soon, and thus begs:

> Dear Lord! make haste,
> Sin every day commits more waste,
> And thy old enemy, which knows
> His time is short, more raging grows.[2]

In the same poem as in others, Vaughan clearly relates his pessimism about this life to the religious and political turmoil caused by the dissension between the Puritans and the Royalists:

> Nor moan I onely (though profuse)
> Thy Creatures bondage and abuse;
> But what is highest sin and shame,
> The vile despight done to thy name (ll.31-34).

But this turmoil is for him merely one evidence of the Fall, which, he believes, initiated a process of universal decay, for "man brought forth sin, and sin decay".[3] This belief in the progressive degeneration and dissolution of the world,

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1 J. C. Reid, Francis Thompson: Man and Poet (London, 1959), p.153.

2 The day of Judgement (p.367), ll.27-30.

3 Ascension-day (p.315), l.40.

common up to the time of the Restoration, was an extension of the belief that nature was corrupted at the time of the Fall, and is reflected in Shakespeare's King Lear. Gloucester, realizing that Lear is mad, exclaims:

> O ruin'd piece of nature! This great world
> Shall so wear out to nought (IV. vi).

In the "sordid turbid time" of Victorian materialism Hopkins finds evidence of the constant deterioration of man and his works:

> Our make and making break, are breaking, down
> To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's first slime.[1]

God originally created man from primeval mud to become the crown of nature, but our physically and spiritually unhealthy activities and concerns, besides literally breaking us down to the final dust of death, are also figuratively, and perhaps even literally, breaking us down to primeval slime. "The statement . . . that man is returning to his 'first slime' is a challenging inversion of the Darwinian thesis [that man is ever evolving towards a higher state of perfection] and at the same time a bitter taunt: 'this, it seems, is the only destiny man is fit for.'"[2] Unlike Vaughan, however, Hopkins does not seem to believe necessarily that fallen nature as well as man is continuously suffering further decay, except at the hands of

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1 The Sea and the Skylark (p.68), ll.10, 13-14. These lines may indicate that Hopkins harmonized the evolution theory with a fairly literal interpretation of Genesis by thinking of Adam and Eve as the first real human beings, the first creatures with human souls, to have been evolved from slime by God's creative power.

2 W. H. Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889): A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition, II (London, 1949), 248.

destructive man.

As is to be expected, it is Vaughan who looks back most longingly to Eden. In Ascension-day he beautifully pictures the unfallen world in the traditional way as a place of unchanging springtime freshness with translucent sky and constantly fine weather (ll.39-48), and in many poems he gains pleasure in meditating on the "white dayes" and "calme, golden Evenings" of the Old Testament patriarchs,[1] who, he thinks, lived in a relatively uncorrupted world, a world not far removed from Eden, and enjoyed closer communion with God than is now possible:

> still Paradise lay
> In some green shade, or fountain.
> Angels lay Leiger here; Each Bush, and Cel,
> Each Oke, and high-way knew them.[2]

In particular, he is convinced that, since the link between heaven and earth has become more tenuous, the rainbow, the symbol of God's promise not to destroy the earth again by flood (Genesis 9:8-17), has suffered a diminution of its beauty:

> How bright wert thou, when Shems admiring eye
> Thy burnisht, flaming Arch did first descry!;

whereas now, God's bow "Looks dim . . . in the Cloud".[3] By contrast, in The Kingdom of God Thompson declares:

> The angels keep their ancient places;—
> Turn but a stone, and start a wing! (ll.13-14)

It must be remembered, however, that the later poet's language here is not as literal as Vaughan's, for the

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1 The Search (p.235), ll.26, 24.

2 Corruption, ll.23-26.

3 The Rain-bow (p.345), ll.3-4; Corruption, ll.33-34.

"angels" to whose presence Thompson testifies are not visible figures bearing messages from God, but rather are they symbolic of the "world invisible" of God's kingdom among us (l.1).

Despite his conviction of nature's continuing corruption, Vaughan is sometimes able to delight ecstatically, as Thompson does, in those times which signify a new beginning and thus point back to Eden or forward to the resurrection; mornings are experienced as new creations and dawn is considered the only fit time for Christ's second coming.[1] Perhaps Vaughan's finest expression of the symbolic significance of morning is in Rules and Lessons (p.267):

> Mornings are Mysteries; the first worlds Youth,
> Mans Resurrection, and the futures Bud
> Shrowd in their births (ll.25-27).

Hopkins, too, looks back to "that cheer and charm of earth's past prime",[2] and in the sestet of God's Grandeur (p.66) he delights in the coming of day as evidence that by God's care an Edenic freshness still lies at the heart of nature, despite all that man can do to tarnish it. In his sonnet Spring he likewise associates the year's joyful youth with the earth's perfect beginning (ll.10-11), an association which for him would be strengthened by the idea that "May is Mary's month",[3] since his Catholic belief in her Immaculate Conception, her birth without Original Sin, would lead him

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1 The Day-spring (p.437), l.13; The Dawning (p.283), ll.13-14.

2 The Sea and the Skylark, l.12.

3 The May Magnificat (p.76), l.1.

to think of her as a new Eve, as Thompson did.[1]

It is noteworthy, however, that Hopkins's nostalgia for an Edenic past has little of the intensity of Vaughan's yearning, probably because his application of the doctrine of Original Sin to nature apart from man is not as pessimistic as the earlier poet's. Indeed, Wendell Stacy Johnson claims that ". . . Hopkins is more reluctant than almost any of his contemporaries to see the world of landscape and animal as a fallen world."[2] Not only does he emphasize the beauty and purity of the natural world in comparison with guilty man and find that "Only the inmate does not correspond";[3] he also, as in Binsey Poplars (p.78), sees nature as the innocent victim of man's wanton destructiveness and of his degraded materialistic society in "shallow and frail" towns.[4] The second quatrain of God's Grandeur is a particularly powerful protest against man's insensitivity to God and his creation, an insensitivity which leads him to sully the very soil. So vivid to Hopkins's sensibility is the contrast between nature and man that he rejoices exceedingly in the wildness of unchecked nature and takes a special and perverse delight in the luxuriant growth of weeds. "Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet", he cries at the end of Inversnaid (p.89);

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1 See, e.g., Thompson's Assumpta Maria (p.222), stanzas 2, 4, 5.

2 Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Poet as Victorian (Ithaca, New York: Copyright © 1968 by Cornell University), p.42. Used by permission of Cornell University Press.

3 In the Valley of the Elwy, l.11.

4 The Sea and the Skylark, l.9.

and the beginning of Spring seems a deliberate challenge to conventional tastes:

> Nothing is so beautiful as Spring—
> When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush.

Vaughan also contrasts man and nature to man's disadvantage, as in "And do they so?" (p.263); nature has fallen, but it is through no fault of its own, and even in its decaying state it is far lovelier than fallen, vicious man. This conviction, reinforced in the poet's mind by the troubles of his period, resulted in his retirement from city life to the solitude of the Welsh countryside and in his use of the retirement theme so common in the literature of the seventeenth century. It is significant, however, that the only poems in which Vaughan compares the countryside with Eden, apart from those in which he refers specifically to mornings, are those in which he contrasts it with the city or idealizes the peacefulness of spiritual life in the country as opposed to the religious wrangling taking place in the outside world. In Retirement (p.436) he powerfully describes cities as "Cages with much uncleanness fill'd" (l.20) and goes on to conclude that

> If Eden be on Earth at all,
> 'Tis that, which we the Country call (ll.27-28),

while in The Bee (p.446) he claims that

> When truth and piety are mist
> Both in the Rulers and the Priest (ll.7-8)

it is best to retire to the country, where "something still like Eden looks" (l.23).

We have seen that, to differing extents, the four poets of this study associate their own literal childhood or the childhood of others with the "childhood" of the human

race, represented by the unfallen Adam in Eden. Attitudes to the doctrine of Original Sin do not of themselves, however, provide the deepest explanation for the close link between the childhood and Eden symbols in Christian poetry. As has been shown, Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson all attribute purity of some kind both to young children and to nature, either absolutely (as Traherne tends to) or by contrast with adults. It is therefore natural for them to believe that children, since they have felt little or nothing of the alienating power of sin, are spiritually very near to God and his creation and can perhaps see nature with a clarity of vision which the adult ordinarily lacks. Moreover, it is probably the child's vision of nature, as much as his innocence, which makes childhood attractive to many nature poets, especially to those who, like Traherne and Thompson, feel God's immanence more powerfully than his transcendence. In poem after poem Traherne extols the insight of the "Infant-Ey",[1] and at times Thompson feels that as an adult he is irredeemably separated from nature. In To Daisies (p.324) the later poet concentrates in particular on the unselfconscious beauty of the simple flowers, implicitly comparing it with the little children's lack of self-awareness:

> Or be but conscious ye are fair,
> And I your loveliness could bear;
> But, being fair so without art,
> Ye vex the silted memories of my heart! (ll.15-18)

Like Traherne, he senses the mystical truth that the child's growing consciousness of himself as a being separate from

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1 See Sherrington, op. cit., p.79.

everything else is inextricably bound up with his gradual loss of purity, and that the adult is ordinarily so imprisoned within himself that he cannot break down the barrier separating him from his surroundings. Thus the daisies seem "untouchable" (p.325, 11.25-26):

> And though ye shine to me so near,
> So close to gross and visible sense,
> Between us lies impassable year on year (p.325, 11.17-19).

Nevertheless, when the adult does break down the barrier by entering into a close relationship with God and thus with nature, his vision is far superior to the child's; only a childlike adult is capable of deep mystical insight, for his knowledge of sin has made it possible for him to attain freedom from its power. Thus, of the four poets of this study, Traherne, who seems to have permanently regained a childlike state, and Thompson, who to a much lesser degree probably experienced "childhood" at rare moments, are aware of the limitations of the literal child's vision in comparison with the mystic's vision. In Right Apprehension (II,123) Traherne explains that

> What Newness once suggested to,
> Now clearer Reason doth improv, my View:
> By Novelty my Soul was taught
> At first; but now Reality my Thought
> Inspires (11.33-37),

and Thompson similarly writes of the vision which only the adult is capable of attaining in the section of An Anthem of Earth beginning "In a little strength" and in Of Nature: Laud and Plaint.

In The Retreate Vaughan admits that he cannot reach "childhood" (11.27-28) and idealizes the child's vision; but he claims no more for it than the ability to see

a "glimpse" of God and "Some shadows of eternity" in natural beauty (ll.9-14). Deeply conscious, moreover, of his weakness and of God's transcendence, he does not expect to be able to attain even as much exterior illumination as his child figure enjoys. Unlike Vaughan, Traherne, and Thompson, Hopkins never idealizes the child's vision as opposed to the ordinary adult's, perhaps because he does not have as strong a belief in childhood purity; and in Spring and Fall (p.88), the one poem in which he deals with a young child's feelings about a natural scene, "Margaret" precociously senses change, decay, and death, "the blight man was born for" (l.14), figured forth by trees in autumn. How different from the timeless Eden experienced by Traherne's symbolic child!

In the study of childhood and Edenic experience and symbolism in the poetry of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson, there emerge clear patterns which reflect the poets' differing religious awareness. In general, Vaughan and Hopkins, who emphasize God's transcendence more than his immanence, are not as optimistic about the purity of children and nature and about the possibility of attaining childlikeness in adult life as are Traherne and Thompson, who emphasize God's immanence more than his transcendence. Because Vaughan and Hopkins are lovers of children and nature, however, they are impelled towards a more optimistic view of them than their conscious beliefs and their experience of God's transcendence would suggest. Thus, like Traherne and Thompson, they are open to the Platonic idea of the soul's pre-existence (though Hopkins mentions it only in

his prose) and they seem at times to disregard the implications of the doctrine of Original Sin—Vaughan mainly in his treatment of childhood, and Hopkins mainly in his treatment of wild nature. Nevertheless, the basic patterns remain, and they will be seen to have important links with the patterns which are revealed by a study of the poets' use of other symbols.

SECTION II

S Y M B O L I S M

Chapter 4

LIGHT: EXTERIOR ILLUMINATION

Symbolism is inevitable in mystical writing, for it is one of the most illuminating means by which a writer can attempt to express what he feels is not directly expressible in words. In mystical experience, the two major symbolic modes of awareness and comprehension correspond to the *via positiva* and the *via negativa* respectively. Looking out on the world around him, a person may be granted such a deep awareness of the spiritual significance of material objects that for him they will become symbols without necessarily ceasing to be concrete realities as well; alternatively, looking into the world within him, and rejecting all images of material objects, he may be granted such a deep experience of God that he will afterwards be driven to accept earthly things as symbols in order to communicate something of his experience by means of an analogy between the physical and the spiritual realms. Although in practice most mystical experiences involve both the *via positiva* and the *via negativa* and there can therefore be no absolutely clear-cut distinction between the two kinds of mystical symbolism, it is convenient, when dealing with a symbol as pervasive as light, to try to concentrate first on these four poets' use of it in their apprehension and expression of the illumination of the world without and to leave for another chapter a discussion of their use of it to express the experience of interior

illumination. Though Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson all sense God's presence in nature, their use of light symbolism, like their treatment of childhood and Eden, reveals differences in their experiences and attitudes, differences which point up the problem facing all Christian nature poets—how to celebrate God's immanence without disregarding his transcendence.

When Vaughan expresses his experience of God's presence in this world by means of light symbolism, he characteristically resorts to the Hermetic terminology of the divine seed of star-fire in all creatures, and the resultant bonds of magnetic sympathy uniting earthly things to the heavenly bodies. The cock, being a solar bird, bears within it a "Sunnie seed", a "glance of day", which impels it to watch longingly for the dawn; the star is attracted to the spiritual beauty of the earthly creature which intensely desires its superior "vitall fire".[1] Critics have long debated how seriously Vaughan accepted the Hermetic ideas found in his poems. Some, such as Elizabeth Holmes and A. W. Rudrum, tend to the view that Vaughan's context is as Hermetic as it is Christian,[2] while others, notably Ross Garner and J. D. Simmonds, take pains to defend his

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1 Cock-crowing (p.322), ll.1-2, 7; The Starre (p.323), ll.1-2, 17-18.

2 See Elizabeth Holmes, Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy (Oxford, 1932), and A. W. Rudrum, "Henry Vaughan's 'The Book': A Hermetic Poem", AUMLA, XVI (1961), 161-166.

Christian orthodoxy.[1] To me, most of Vaughan's poems seem overwhelmingly and profoundly Christian in feeling and purpose, despite the use of esoteric terms. In Cock-crowing, for instance, the cock, pictured as an example to man, inspires the poet to a more earnest longing for purity and for oneness with a primarily transcendent God:

> If such a tincture, such a touch,
> So firm a longing can impowre
> Shall thy own image think it much
> To watch for thy appearing hour?
> If a meer blast so fill the sail,
> Shall not the breath of God prevail?
>
> O thou immortall light and heat!
> . . . . . .
> Seeing thy seed abides in me,
> Dwell thou in it, and I in thee (ll.13-24).

Yet the terminology of this poem bears a striking resemblance to the following passage by Thomas Vaughan, who, like other Hermetists, often seems to identify the spirit of man with the Spirit of God: "The Soul . . . is guided in her operations by a spiritual, metaphysical grain, a seed or glance of light, simple and without any mixture, descending from the first Father of Lights. For though His full-eyed love shines on nothing but man, yet everything in the world is in some measure directed for his preservation by a spice or touch of the First Intellect."[2] Nevertheless, it seems to me a mistake to dismiss all the poet's expressions of Hermeticism as mere metaphors and to assume that, because he

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1 See Ross Garner, "Hermeticism in Vaughan: Attitude or Metaphor?", in Henry Vaughan: Experience and the Tradition (Chicago, 1959), and J. D. Simmonds, "Vaughan's 'The Book': Hermetic or Meditative?", Neophilologus, XLVII (1963), 320-328.

2 The Works of Thomas Vaughan, ed. Arthur Edward Waite (New York, 1968), p.81.

was a sincere Christian, he would be incapable of assimilating specifically Hermetic ideas; for he probably lacked the philosophical sophistication to be fully aware of that ultimate incompatibility of Hermetic dualistic or Manichaean tendencies with orthodox Christian monism which Ross Garner discusses.[1] Moreover, it is probable that the individual emphasis of Henry Vaughan's interpretation of some elements of Hermetic belief helps him to avoid the pantheism inherent in most forms of Hermeticism and of nature mysticism, and therefore reinforces the essentially Christian character of his experience of God's immanence.

The dualistic stream of Hermetic thought begins by regarding all matter as evil and all spirit as good, and goes on to reject evil, and therefore matter, as outside the Creator's scheme. It can ultimately lead to a tendency to reject the existence of matter, "a denial of the material in idealism", whereby the concrete reality of objects of external perception is attenuated, and the spirit immanent in matter is believed to be "a highly refined sort of the same thing" as matter; hence the pantheism of many forms of Hermeticism.[2] Thus Thomas Vaughan maintains that "The influences of the spirit animate and quicken the matter and in the material extreme [the element of earth] the seed of the spirit is to be found", and that "out of the union of spiritual and natural substances riseth a perfect compound, whose very nature and being consists in that union."[3]

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1 Henry Vaughan: Experience and the Tradition, passim.

2 Garner, ibid., pp.102-105.

3 Op. cit., pp.199, 394.

Despite the animistic feeling which can be detected in some of Vaughan's poems, and which I have discussed in the first chapter of this study (pp.23-28, 33), his thought-stream does not follow the typical Hermetic pattern. Since, as has been illustrated in the previous chapter (pp.77, 80-85), he takes the orthodox Christian monistic view that the whole earthly creation of matter and spirit, though corrupted by man's Fall, is essentially good, he does not feel impelled to spiritualize matter almost out of existence and ultimately to identify it with God. The star-fire is, for him, neither identical with God's Spirit nor inherent in matter; rather, it is created and implanted in matter by a transcendent God who graciously stoops to immanence in these seeds of light and, through their infusions, in matter itself. In Cock-crowing, the "Father of lights" is said to have "confin'd" in the cock a "little grain expelling night" (ll.1-3, 8)—probably the night of its corrupted nature as well as the literal darkness around it—and thus manifesting to the poet the glory of his immanence. Likewise, in The Bird (p.331), the typically Hermetic lines

> For each inclosed Spirit is a star
> Inlightning his own little sphære

are immediately followed by the qualification that this light is "fetcht and borrowed from far" (ll.19-21).

Vaughan's mindfulness of the "confinement" or "enclosedness" of the star-fire within creatures is related to his mindfulness of all the limitations that physical life imposes on the soul, and is in keeping with his experience of a God who is always beyond him, and who is at the same time both revealed and hidden by the material creation. His

extreme reticence as a Christian nature poet may be gauged from the fact that in his poems he never explicitly claims to have seen the Light of God himself in the world around him. Perhaps he comes nearest to such a claim in Cock-crowing:

> O thou immortall light and heat!
> Whose hand so shines through all this frame,
> That by the beauty of the seat,
> We plainly see, who made the same (ll.19-22).

But even here, the emphasis is placed firmly on the transcendence of God's creativity, and it is his hand, his creative power, which "shines through" the beauty of nature. Similarly, in Retirement (p.295) God is pictured as enthroned above the sky, and the stars are conceived of as visible means by which he affords us some weak revelations of his Light. God is he

> Who on yon throne of Azure sits,
> Keeping close house
> Above the morning-starre,
> Whose meaner showes,
> And outward utensils these glories are
> That shine and share
> Part of his mansion (ll.1-7).

When we turn from Vaughan to Traherne, the veil separating the human soul from the God who is immanent in all things seems to fall away almost completely; veiled light becomes naked light in the poetry of one who was evidently granted the experience of exterior illumination far more constantly and powerfully than Vaughan, and who lacks Vaughan's humility and restraint in the expression of mystical apprehension. In poems such as The Apostacy (II,95) Traherne emphasizes the shining sacredness of everything, especially the natural creation, to the eyes of the uncorrupted child:

Set off with hev'nly Beams,
My Joys were Meadows, Fields, and Towns (11.26-27).

Moreover, he constantly insists that this illuminated vision is available to the regenerated adult, and even claims in Admiration (II,122) that the earth may appear a star (1.13).[1] It is not surprising, then, that he does not hesitate to state directly that he sees God in this world. Thus he declares in The Approach (II,36) that "Now in this World I him behold" (1.33) and in The Enquirie (II,82) that "his GODHEAD in his Works doth shine" (1.36). It is perhaps difficult for the post-Romantic reader, accustomed as he is to so many expressions of the divinity of nature, to appreciate the boldness of Traherne's claims concerning God's immanence; but some indication of this boldness may be found in the alterations to his poems made by his more cautiously orthodox brother, Philip, in whose weakened version the line quoted from The Approach becomes "Now in this World I Him discern", while the words quoted from The Enquirie become "His God-head in His Works appears Divine".[2]

Traherne's instinctive tendency to deify this world, to elevate it not only to the position of heaven but also to the position of God the Son as Mediator and Saviour,[3] is modified by two other basic elements of his

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1 This claim is in no way weakened by the exclamatory "It cannot be!" in line 21. The poem as a whole makes it clear that by "It cannot be!" Traherne means to assert more strongly than ever that, however amazing or even incredible his claim is, it is nevertheless true.

2 II,39; II,85.

3 Alison J. Sherrington, Mystical Symbolism in the poetry of Thomas Traherne (St. Lucia, Queensland, 1970), pp.40, 54, 57, 98, 99-100, 105, 131-132.

thought. One is his constant awareness of God as the great Giver of all the treasures of the world to man; the other is his tendency to deify man, a tendency very much stronger than his instinct to worship nature. Unlike Vaughan, Hopkins, or Thompson, he pictures man as the divine creature who can endow the whole material creation with life and meaning:

> Like sprightly Streams
> My Thoughts on Things remain;
> Or els like vital Beams
> They reach to, shine on, quicken Things, and make
> Them truly Usefull; while I All partake.[1]

Indeed, according to his circulation theory, without man everything would be almost meaningless, even to the Creator himself.[2] "The son of God, Traherne looks about him with godlike eyes which transform earth into heaven. God's creation is his, since he himself is a divine spirit. In a sense he not only possesses but creates the natural world, for nature fulfils its purpose only to the extent that he beholds and uses it".[3] Traherne's emphasis on the creative partnership of God and man in the enjoyment of the world goes far beyond the ancient and continuing belief that the earth was created for man, who was given dominion over it.[4] It is a highly unusual emphasis in Christian thought and is ambivalent in its implications. While it undoubtedly steers him away from nature-worship, it leads him very close to a

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1 Hosanna (II,149), ll.56-60.

2 Sherrington, op. cit., pp.50-51, 52-53, 56.

3 Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, I (New York, 1939), 568.

4 Genesis 1:26, 28.

worship of man. Orthodox Christians apprehend God as the transcendent Being who is immanent in all things through constant infusions of his sustaining grace; Traherne, however, while not denying this orthodox view, seems sometimes to imply that the lower creation is sustained almost as much by a transcendent human grace as by the grace of God.

One of the distinctive differences between Vaughan and Traherne on the one hand and Hopkins and Thompson on the other is a difference in the degree of self-awareness. The reader gains the impression that, by comparison with the post-Romantic poets, the seventeenth-century poets are somewhat naïve about any heretical tendencies such as can be ferreted out by modern critics. Secure in their basic Christian beliefs in an age secure in its faith, they are free to express their experiences of the Divine with a greater confidence and ease than are available to poets of an age harassed by doubt and self-distrust. Christian poets of the Victorian era are forced to contend with the full pressure of the first waves of shock which followed the humanistic idealism of the Romantic period. Taught by the great Romantics, they can see themselves and the world around them in a new way; but just as clearly they can see the basic incompatibility of the Romantic and the Christian views of man and the world. Neither Hopkins nor Thompson is able to free himself completely from the strain caused by his realization of the opposing nature of these views. Thus, for example, while Traherne can joyfully accept an exalted rôle for man as the creature for whom the material world exists and for whom it is illuminated by God and also,

in a sense, by man himself, Hopkins wrestles with the problem of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, a problem which ultimately bears on the relationship between the Creator and all his creatures. In the early fragment beginning "It was a hard thing to undo this knot" (p.129), he first accepts and then rejects the thoroughgoing Romantic view that "The rainbow shines, but only in the thought / Of him that looks." The knot is not, however, really undone by his conclusion that

> The sun on falling waters writes the text
> Which yet is in the eye or in the thought.

Of the four poets of this study, perhaps Hopkins is by nature the least mystical, and that because of his extremely strong sense of his own distinctive self as separate from everything around him. In his comments on the First Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, he writes: ". . . when I compare my self, my being-myself, with anything else whatever, all things alike, all in the same degree, rebuff me with blank unlikeness".[1] Even his very early unfinished poem, Il Mystico (p.111), however, reveals a desire to pass beyond the confines of the self so that, like Ezekiel, he might see "the common earth and air / . . . limn'd about with radiance rare" (ll.59-60); yet the vagueness of his conception of such an experience is reflected in the language of the poem. In the Romantic manner he dwells on the indefiniteness of a rainbow's lines and colours (ll.109-122) and pictures the desired mystical experience as the self-gratifying ecstasy

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1 The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Christopher Devlin (London, 1959), p.123.

of being "Melted in the dizzy bow" (ll.140-141), but these descriptions of "sweet uncertainty" (l.121) seem to me to lack that depth of conviction which a truly Romantic poet such as Shelley would have been able to achieve. Years of deepening spiritual experience lie between Il Mystico and the maturity of perception in poems such as God's Grandeur (p.66) which reveal that, on rare occasions, Hopkins could forget his self-separateness by contemplating the natural world uplifted by and vibrant with infusions of the divine Light. In God's Grandeur he achieves an exquisite balance in his expression of God's immanence and transcendence. It is because God majestically "charges" the world with lightning energy from above that his power "flames out" from even the smallest things; it is because his "bright wings" lovingly hover over the world that nature is continuously being renewed and morning triumphs over the darkness of night. Here the reader feels the poet's harmony of soul, mind, emotions, and physical senses, and is reminded of the passionate intellectuality of such comments on the First Principle and Foundation as this: ". . . a being so intimately present as God is to other things would be identified with them were it not for God's infinity or were it not for God's infinity he could not be so intimately present to things."[1]

The balance in an apprehension of God as both transcendent and immanent is always a delicate one, however, especially in the post-Romantic period; and even when such a balance is attained, it is extremely difficult to express

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1 Ibid., p.128.

because of its paradoxical quality. Hopkins's poem The Starlight Night (p.66) suffers from this strain felt by the poet, and has been subjected to biting criticism, especially from Yvor Winters:

> In no other literary period, I think, save our own, would a poet who was both a priest and a genuinely devout man have thought that he had dealt seriously with his love for Christ and his duty toward him by writing an excited description of a landscape: this kind of thing belongs to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the period of self-expression and the abnegation of reason. . . . Hopkins' method . . . is to employ the landscape as the immediate motive for a feeling which is too great for it, and then to append the perfunctory moral as a kind of theoretic justification.[1]

This kind of criticism seems to me to stem equally from the poet's failure to find images adequate to realize his experience and from the critic's failure to link the poem with Hopkins's other writings. Further consideration of The Starlight Night may therefore prove fruitful.

Yvor Winters apparently assumes that from the fourth to the sixth lines, from "Down in dim woods" to "farmyard scare", the poet is directing the reader's attention downwards from sky to earth; otherwise he would surely have referred to Hopkins's description of a skyscape rather than to his "excited description of a landscape". I think that this interpretation is incorrect and that throughout the sonnet the reader's imaginative gaze is meant to be fixed on the starlit sky, in which Hopkins sees correspondences with earth's beauty. Support for my reading

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1 "Gerard Manley Hopkins", in Hopkins: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1966), p.48. Yvor Winters's essay is from his book, The Function of Criticism (Denver, 1957).

is given in the last five lines:

> Look, look: a May-mess, like on orchard boughs!
> Look! March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows!
> These are indeed the barn; withindoors house
> The shocks. This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse
> Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows.

Here the "May-mess" and the "March-bloom" of the stars are overtly compared with blossoming orchards and with yellow-flowering sallows respectively, and the old-fashioned word "spouse" and the mediaeval word "hallows" are surely meant to bring to mind old paintings in which God and the saints of his bride, the Church, are pictured in a heaven situated above the stars. Hopkins is fond of the biblical imagery of heaven as a barn into which the saved are gathered as wheat;[1] for instance, the early poem beginning "He hath abolished the old drouth" (p.18) contains the lines,

> But I shall when the shocks are stored
> See the salvation of the Lord (11.8-9),

and in The Wreck of the Deutschland (p.51) he asks,

> is the shipwrack then a harvest,
> does tempest carry the grain for thee? (stanza 31, 11.8-9)

In the context of The Starlight Night, it is therefore natural for the night sky to become an image of the barn of heaven, an image which incidentally provides an associational link with the homeliness of the earlier farmyard scene.

Furthermore, I disagree with Yvor Winters's implication that in this poem one of Hopkins's primary intentions is to deal with his duty toward Christ. Rather, the poet describes an ecstatic personal experience in an uninhibited manner, and then shows the reader that he, too,

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1 Matthew 13:30.

can share this experience, if he is willing to pay the spiritual price of "Prayer, patience, alms, vows" for it (1.9). Moreover, Hopkins's ecstasy in nature is not mainly self-gratifying here, since it points away from the self to Christ and to Christ's communion with his saints and with all his creatures. Though The Starlight Night was not written till early in 1877, it was probably based on such an experience as that which Hopkins recorded in a note dated 17 August 1874: "As we drove home the stars came out thick: I leant back to look at them and my heart opening more than usual praised our Lord to and in whom all that beauty comes home".[1] I cannot therefore consider the end of the poem as a "theoretic justification" for feelings aroused by a solely aesthetic appreciation of a natural scene, even though, as has been shown in Chapter 2 of this study (pp.52-55), the poet does tend to treat the aesthetic as a portion of the spiritual and seems at first to concentrate mainly on his aesthetic response to beauty.

Perhaps Hopkins's failure to express his appreciation of a starlit sky in a completely satisfying way is due partly to his living in an age when there was no longer any commonly accepted pattern of thought concerning the relationship of all things in the material and spiritual realms to one another and to God. Vaughan could express his mystical apprehension of the unity of the whole creation in concrete Hermetic terms of star-fire and magnetism; Hopkins at times probably senses this unity in a similar way, but is

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1 The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Humphry House and Graham Storey (London, 1959), p.254.

at a loss to express his apprehension of earth in heaven and heaven in earth other than by the use of metaphors and similes which ostensibly celebrate sensuous beauty in an unusually fanciful way. It is therefore understandable that some critics have accused him of forcing a Christian colouring upon an essentially Romantic poem. Certainly, even in the specifically Christian sestet, the emphasis is on God's immanence rather than on his transcendence, for the reference to Christ's mother underlines the significance of his incarnation for the whole creation. The transcendence of God is not forgotten, however. Like Vaughan, Hopkins does not identify the starlight or the earthly lights to which it is related with the true Light, but sees them rather as the "barn", which is for him the outer shell of God's veiled mystery; furthermore, his deliberate evocation of a primitive picture of heaven as a place above the sky directs the reader's thoughts towards the God who is unutterably above and beyond us all, despite the presence of his gracious Spirit in all things.

The self-conscious post-Romantic strain experienced by Hopkins and revealed in some of his nature poems is even more intense in the poetry of Francis Thompson. The mature Hopkins is uneasy about his methods of celebrating sensuous beauty and at times suspects that he is not giving sufficient prominence to the expression of his primary belief, his belief in God's objective transcendence; but no matter how excited his descriptions of nature may be, he has none of Thompson's instinct to worship it. Thompson's poetry is a fascinating embodiment of the

contradictions in his personality, for the reader is made aware at the same time both of his spiritually authentic Christianity and of his "almost overmastering romantic inclinations".[1] He is particularly fond of using the sun as a symbol of Christ, and for this he has ample precedent in the Christian tradition; but his method of hymning the physical sun is often extravagant and semi-pagan, even though his purpose is ultimately seen to be Christian. It is both interesting and instructive to examine the sun symbolism in his two long sun odes, the early Ode to the Setting Sun (p.95) and the later Orient Ode (p.195).

In the Prelude to Ode to the Setting Sun one senses the poet's regret that the sun no longer receives from men the homage which he himself gives to it in some degree, despite his consciousness that in pre-Christian antiquity such homage was mere flattery and that it is the cross of Christ which should now be the object of his reverence (stanzas 3-6). When the cross in the field at Storrington Priory, where the poem was written,[2] is illuminated by a ray of sunlight, Thompson is enabled to make the traditional association between the diurnal death of the sun and Christ's death, and thus between suffering and triumph (stanza 7). This explanation of his instinctive reverence for the sun seems to him sufficiently satisfactory to justify the writing of the lengthy Ode proper, which hymns the sun as the victor over death by its constant

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1 Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, V (New York and London, 1962), 82.

2 Everard Meynell, The Life of Francis Thompson (London, 1926), p.75.

rebirth, and as the giver of life, light, and heat to the whole creation. Again the reader can sense the poet's regret that he must give up the richly imaginative pantheism of Greek mythology:

> Now that the red glare of thy fall is blown
> In smoke and flame about the windy sky,
> Where are the wailing voices that should meet
> From hill, stream, grove . . . . . .
> . . . . . ?
> . . . . . .
> Where is the Naiad 'mid her sworded sedge?
> The Nymph wan-glimmering by her wan fount's verge?
> The Dryad at timid gaze by the wood-side?
> . . . . . .
> Why withers their lament? (p.101, ll.6-24)

Realizing the futility of pantheism, he yet craves for it, and can find some measure of comfort towards the end only by remembering once more that he is at liberty to reverence the sun as a "type memorial" of Christ (p.103, l.5). I cannot but suspect that the resignation expressed in the After-Strain to the Ode is partly a resignation to the suffering involved in purifying his vision of the world so that the cross may be victorious in his own life. Although I do not agree entirely with J. C. Reid, in whose opinion "The religious conclusion is imposed almost as an after-thought" on the poem,[1] there is certainly a lack of perfect harmony between the two strands of feeling in this poem.

Orient Ode is far more consistently Christian in its imagery than Ode to the Setting Sun, yet much of this imagery seems forced. The pantheistic strand of feeling is probably no weaker than in the earlier poem, despite Thompson's apparently greater self-confidence and his

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1 Francis Thompson: Man and Poet (London, 1959), p.75.

consequently less apologetic tone, which enable him boldly to assert,

> If I too shall adore [the sun],
> Be it accounted unto me
> A bright sciential idolatry! (p.200, ll.3-5)

Coventry Patmore's influence is strongly pervasive, particularly in the constant emphasis on the cosmic nuptial ritual as a type of the marriage of Christ and his Church, and the reader is in doubt as to how genuinely sacramental is much of the vision expressed in the poem. One feels at times that Thompson is saying, "This is how I, as a Christian poet, ought and wish to see the world, and I hope that I do see it in this way, at least sometimes." His own confusion about the sacramentality of his vision is epitomized in the line, "To thee, O Sun—or is't perchance to Christ?" (p.201, last line); and in the final lines of the ode he seems in the Romantic manner to be trying to convince himself as much as the reader that he is a true "Singer" and "seer".

In neither of these odes is Thompson able to maintain a truly balanced Christian vision of God as the Sun illuminating the world, such as that which Hopkins expresses in The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe (p.93). Here the sun's light transmitted through air symbolizes God's incarnation through Mary so that man might be drawn to him without being blinded by his "glory bare" (ll.94-113), and this comparison seems to flow naturally from Hopkins's personal experience of an illuminated world which points firmly beyond itself to the Creator and Redeemer. Thompson does come to realize clearly that his experience is not

always as harmonious as he has hoped, and in a later poem, Retrospect (p.236), he has the courage to admit this:

> What profit if the sun
> Put forth his radiant thews,
> And on his circuit run,
> Even after my device, to this and to that use;
> And the true Orient, Christ,
> Make not His cloud of thee? (11.9-14)

The clear-sighted contrast here between the physical sun and the true Sun is similar to that in Vaughan's The Recovery (p.439), in which the poet claims that he has no inclination to bow down to the sun and praise it "like blind Persians", since "I have a Sun now of my own" (stanza 2).

Of the four poets of this study, perhaps Vaughan is the most consistently successful in maintaining a clear vision of the transcendent Deity while at the same time apprehending God's Light mediated through the light of the material world. Traherne's vision of transcendent Light is sometimes clouded by an unbalanced concentration on immanent Light in external objects; and Hopkins, despite the strictness of his theology, cannot always escape completely the influence of Romantic aestheticism, in expression if not necessarily in thought and feeling. In much of Francis Thompson's poetry of exterior illumination, Christianity and pantheism appear to exist side by side as separate strands, despite the poet's attempts to subdue the pantheistic strain altogether, or at least to make it subservient to Christianity. It is in Thompson's sun odes that one can see most clearly the lack of harmony of thought, feeling, and expression which results from a failure to attain adequately that vision which one has sufficient spiritual maturity to

glimpse and to covet—an integrated vision of the immanence of transcendent Light.

Chapter 5

LIGHT: INTERIOR ILLUMINATION

Interior illumination is in general a rarer experience than exterior illumination, because by its very nature it can be granted only to those who are able to enter upon the *via negativa*. In its purest form, this method of spiritual seeking involves at least a temporary rejection of all images of material objects, and is therefore an especially difficult path for lovers of the natural creation to follow. Perhaps that is why, paradoxically, mystical nature poets seem sometimes to experience the *via positiva* and some measure of the *via negativa* simultaneously, so that the distinction between the world without and the world within is blurred or even lost completely. Even Thompson, who in his poems shows little capacity for the *via negativa*, appears to have intimations of this kind of fusion. Thus he claims for himself and every true poet the ability to reach, through contemplation, a state of being in which the expanded self seems to be filled with and yet surrounded by the material creation

> Till, all containing, he exalt
> His stature to the stars, or stars
> Narrow their heaven to his fleshly vault.[1]

His use of "or" instead of "and" does not, in my opinion, indicate that the state in which the universe seems to contract itself and fill his being is an alternative one to

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1 *Contemplation*, p.190, ll.10-12.

that in which his being seems to expand itself and fill the universe while at the same time containing it. On the contrary, the word "or" here indicates an alternative way of trying to express the one experience of the blurring of the distinction between the outer and inner worlds. Similarly, it is at times almost impossible for the reader to judge whether a particular use of symbolism flows mainly from an exclusive experience of the spiritual significance of material objects or from an experience of the via negativa which, as always, has required expression by means of an analogy between the spiritual and the physical realms. In The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe (p.93), the "world-mothering", light-transmitting air "minds" Hopkins of the Virgin Mary, whose function, he believes, is to "Let all God's glory through" to man (ll.1, 112-113, 16, 30); but at the same time, the poet's inner experience of God's mercy through Mary compels him to make the analogy between her and the air:

> I say that we are wound
> With mercy round and round
> As if with air: the same
> Is Mary (ll.34-37).

Though the type of illumination experienced by Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson can sometimes be only a matter of conjecture, it seems clear, however, that when they attempt to express in some measure an experience of God's presence within themselves and his activity in their lives, their abiding sense of God's presence in nature inevitably leads them to make frequent use of natural objects and processes as symbols. In this chapter I shall try to concentrate on the differences revealed by a study of

the four poets' uses of light symbolism to express their apprehension of the illumination of the world within.

In poem after poem Vaughan uses light symbols, usually in association with his longing for the experience of interior illumination. Indeed, it becomes clear to the reader that, despite this poet's love of the material creation, he values the illumination revealing God's immanence in his soul much more highly than the illumination revealing God's immanence in external nature. One can therefore understand why some critics, notably R. A. Durr, think that Vaughan "cannot, without extensive qualifications, be called a nature poet", since "neither the motive for, nor the object of, [his] poetry [can] be found in nature." Thus Jean-Jacques Denonain declares: ". . . la Nature offre une simple image, qui contient un enseignement pour l'homme. . . . Et c'est bien là le principal rôle que Vaughan découvre dans la nature." The latter critic holds this opinion in too extreme a form, however, since he seems to ridicule even the idea that Vaughan has any special sensitivity towards nature.[1] For me, Vaughan's nature images and symbols, whether they express exterior or interior illumination, usually carry within them a vibrancy which could not arise merely from an awareness of their conventional meanings and of their edifying uses. Vaughan's literal acceptance of the Hermetic theory of the stars' influence, for example, cannot fully explain the power of

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1 On the Mystical Poetry of Henry Vaughan (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp.9, 18; Thèmes et Formes de la Poésie "Métaphysique": Etude d'un aspect de la Littérature Anglaise au Dix-Septième Siècle (Paris, 1956), pp.310-313.

his analogy in The Favour (p.326) between the gracious "glance of love" shown to him by God (ll.1-2) and the ray of sympathy dispensed by a star to its watchful kindred herb:

> Some kinde herbs here, though low & far,
> Watch for, and know their loving star.
> O let no star compare with thee!
> Nor any herb out-duty me!
> So shall my nights and mornings be
> Thy time to shine, and mine to see (ll.7-12).

Even though the comparison is used as an admonition, it is resonant with deep feeling, and those final two lines seem to make explicit what is already implicit in the poem—the poet's sense of kinship with the herb.

The Favour, though it is a very short poem, reveals a great deal about Vaughan's mystical experiences. He is particularly conscious of their brevity, their rarity, and the transcendence of their Source; ordinarily he sees only rare glances of God's love, and then only "from above" (ll.1-3). These increase his longing for that God on whom he is utterly dependent, so that he feels like a "starv'd Eaglet" (ll.5-6) unable to soar towards the sun to fulfil the purpose of its being as can the bird in his poem The Eagle (p.398).[1] His deep humility finds expression even in such details as the comparison of himself with an eaglet rather than an eagle, and with a herb which, though "low & far" from heaven, is capable of "out-dutying" him. Moreover, just as the eaglet is dependent on the sun, so is the herb dependent on its star, and the poet may have had in mind not only general Hermetic ideas about the stars but

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1 According to Vaughan, Nature made the eagle "to express / Our souls bold Heights in a material dress." (The Eagle, ll.57-58).

also the more particularized Kabalistic belief quoted by Thomas Vaughan: "There is not an herb here below but he hath a star in heaven above; and the star strikes him with her beam and says to him: Grow."[1] A notable feature of The Favour is its lack of any reference to the light of the human soul; it is God who shines, not Vaughan, and man's primary duty is to await and see the revelation of the divine Light (l.12). The line "O let no star compare with thee!" is not merely a plea for further experiences of God's grace, for it also serves to point up the utter inadequacy of the comparison of God with a star. The poet realizes that the sun, with which God has already been implicitly compared in the poem (l.6), is a more fitting symbol of such overwhelming Light.

A study of Vaughan's use of the sun as a symbol for God reveals a remarkable consistency of vision. Even in the opening poem of Silex Scintillans, a poem headed with a dedication to Jesus Christ (p.223), he gives Christ all the credit for his inspired sacred poetry, and asks,

> If the Sun rise on rocks, is't right,
> To call it their inherent light? (ll.19-20)

While not denying that there is some light in the human soul, he is always mindful that the Creator is its ultimate source, that it is a very feeble light by comparison with God's Light, and that it is entirely dependent on him. Thus in the third stanza of Disorder and frailty (p.276) the poet characteristically portrays his own "weak fire" as a "Poor, falling Star" whose dying flames can be raised to life only

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1 Works, ed. Waite (1968), p.299.

by the transcendent power of the Sun, God the Comforter or Holy Spirit; and in Midnight (p.251) he compares himself unfavourably with the stars, wishing that

> each beame
> My soul doth streame,
> With the like ardour shin'd (ll.8-10).

Hardly ever does Vaughan presume to use sun imagery in reference to man's soul, and on those rare occasions he usually offsets the sun imagery by his pervasive veil imagery. In Easter-day (p.289) he urges man to be sun-like in dispersing the clouds and mists of sadness and spiritual blindness (ll.1-2, 9-10, 15), and in The Holy Communion (p.290) he affirms that

> Spirits without [God] die,
> And blackness sits
> On the divinest wits,
> As on the Sun Ecclipses lie (ll.17-20).

His reference in Ascension-Hymn (p.316) to the sun-like shining of even man's body in Eden is followed immediately by a stanza which emphasizes the body's present state of corruption (stanzas 4-5). It is not surprising, then, that in poems such as Unprofitablenes (p.273), Mount of Olives (p.310), and The Favour, Vaughan is far more conscious of Light shining upon him from above than of Light shining within him, despite the fact that these poems seem clearly to arise from personal experiences of interior illumination and therefore, to some extent at least, of God's immanence within him. Both his emphasis on the transcendence of the Source of his inner light and his extreme reticence in the expression of his spiritual experiences are particularly evident in Mount of Olives, where he writes feelingly of the time

> When first I saw true beauty, and thy Joys
> Active as light, and calm without all noise
> Shin'd on my soul (ll.1-3).

It is noteworthy that he claims to see, not God, but "true beauty", that he speaks of God's joys instead of God himself, and that he pictures these joys shining on, not in, his soul. Near the end of the poem Vaughan does declare that he himself shines, but only as he is "fed" by God (ll.22-24). It is clear that for him, God is the only true Sun; all other light is but a reflection:

> I am so warm'd now by this glance on me,
> That, midst all storms I feel a Ray of thee (ll.16-17).

His comparatively bold claim in Unprofitablenes that "I . . . all the day / Wear in my bosome a full Sun" is balanced at once by the explanation: "such store / Hath one beame from thy Eys" (ll.11-13). One simply cannot imagine that this poet would ever claim the "full Sun" within him as his own "inherent light", as Traherne tends often to do.

It is Traherne's attempt to express his sense of the unlimited possibilities of his soul during experiences of interior illumination that leads him unconventionally to employ sun symbolism for the human soul as well as for God himself; and it seems that an unorthodox belief in the identity of his inmost self with God is often implicit in such symbolism. Furthermore, the worlds of spirit and sense seem at times so inseparable to him that he compares even the human body with the sun, maintaining in The Estate (II,78) that human bodies were made "to be like Suns, whose Raies, / Dispersed, Scatter many thousand Ways" (ll.35-36). Unlike Vaughan, for whom the human soul is a star imprisoned in the tomb of the body, Traherne believes that on earth the

"Sunnie seed" of light in the human soul is free to become "A vital Sun", and the "glance of day" to become "An Endless and a Living Day", for the spirit has a miraculous power to shine unhindered through the flimsy veil of flesh.[1]

Though, as I have already shown, Francis Thompson shares Traherne's concentration on Light immanent in external objects,[2] he does not share his concentration on Light immanent in himself. Rather, his poetry often reveals a lack of spiritual assurance and a tendency to self-depreciation. By contrast with the child Monica Meynell, whom he sees as a "creature sunlit", he feels like "a spark among dank leaves";[3] while in Retrospect (p.236) he honestly acknowledges that his soul is a "disorbed" star which has not submitted itself to the call of its Sun, Christ (stanza 3). Unlike Vaughan, he does not even dare to claim that Christ, the true Sun, sometimes dwells powerfully within his being.[4] There are several possible explanations for the comparative poverty of Thompson's experience of God's immanence in himself, apart from the fact that interior illumination is normally a result of greater spiritual maturity than that which is required for exterior illumination. Perhaps the ill-health from which he almost

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1 Vaughan, "They are all gone into the world of light!" (p.318), ll.29-36, and Cock-crowing (p.322); Traherne, The Preparative (II,20), ll.17-18, and An Hymne upon St Bartholomews Day (II,202), ll.1-4. For a detailed discussion of Traherne's use of the sun as a symbol for the human soul, see my book, pp.36-39, 41, 45.

2 See Chapter 4 of this study (pp.96-97, 105-110).

3 Sister Songs, p.48, ll.28, 32.

4 Retrospect, ll.13-14.

constantly suffered prevented him from ever experiencing that general sense of well-being which seems to have played some part in Traherne's apprehension of God within him. Moreover, because of the conflict between Thompson's Christian beliefs and his opium addiction, there was a sense of guilt associated with this ill-health; and an acute consciousness of sin would be conducive to a kind of humility which Traherne seems to lack. One would therefore expect that, even if Thompson did at times experience a deep awareness of God's immanence within him, he would be much more cautious than Traherne in the expression of such experiences.

The conflict within Thompson between Christianity and Romanticism is, however, more profound than the conflict between Christianity and opium addiction. We have seen in the previous chapter of this study that Thompson's Christian odes addressed to the sun seem partly pantheistic, and Hoxie Neale Fairchild has convincingly argued that pantheism, "the ascription of numinousness to a feeling of cosmic unity and interfusion", often results partly from a Romantic faith in the natural goodness and capacities of mankind.[1] There seem to be two apparently opposite manifestations of the Romantic preoccupation with the self, both of which are clearly evinced in the poetry of Shelley. On the one hand there is the tendency to assume that man's capacities are limitless; on the other hand this humanistic idealism, when shattered by a confrontation with the hard realities of man's

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1 Religious Trends in English Poetry, III (New York, 1949), 3-18, 504.

limitations, readily becomes a preoccupation with and approbation of one's own suffering and hypersensitivity. There is some evidence to suggest that Thompson's lamentations about being "a spark among dank leaves" are a product of a Romantic preoccupation with the self as well as a Christian realization of dependence on God, just as, when he was not overwhelmed by a sense of guilt, he tended to attribute to himself an essential innocence.[1] Thus in Sister Songs he presents a picture of himself as an innocent, suffering spirit of light confined in a weak body:

> Who seem, in this dim shape's uneasy nook,
> Some sun-flower's spirit which by luckless chance
> Has mournfully its tenement mistook (p.33, ll.14-16),

and in Laus Amara Doloris (p.273) he hymns Pain, the result of sin, as an "austere goddess" (l.15) at whose hands poets are fated to suffer more than others, in this world and possibly in the next one, too. As Fairchild pertinently asks, "Is there perhaps more pride than humility in his claim to a deeper, more distinguished damnation than need be dreaded by ordinary sinners who cannot soar so high? Has he fully succeeded in Christianizing the toplofty conception of genius which he derives from Shelley?"[2]

Like Thompson, Hopkins alludes only very rarely and briefly to Light immanent within him; but this is to be expected of a poet who, like Vaughan, apprehends God as primarily transcendent, even in experiences of interior illumination. He resembles the earlier poet, too, in his

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1 See Chapter 3 of this study (pp.68-70, 73-74).

2 Religious Trends in English Poetry, V (New York and London, 1962), 82.

awareness of how weak the "fading fire" in his soul is, and of how dependent he is on God as he is "swayed about / Mote-like in [his] mighty glow".[1] In Hopkins's poems, however, it is not only the rarity and brevity of his allusions to the immanence of Light within him that is noteworthy, but also the generality of such allusions. When, for example, in The Wreck of the Deutschland (p.51) he addresses Jesus as "heart's light" (stanza 30, l.1), there is nothing to indicate whether he is thinking primarily of his own heart or of the heart of every Christian, except that the personal tone of his address may indicate the former interpretation. The partial and general nature of Hopkins's claims to illumination within cannot, in my opinion, be explained wholly as the result of humility and a consequent reticence in expression, though these doubtless played some part. It is striking that whereas Vaughan pictures God shining down calmly upon him, Hopkins's most intense experience of light gained by the via negativa is of a God who is forced to lash him into submission by lightning-strokes and "With an anvil-ding / And with fire in him forge [his] will".[2] It is true that Vaughan and Thompson, and even Traherne, do sometimes experience God's activity in their lives more as purifying divine Fire than as blissful divine Light, but there is little in the work of these three poets to indicate that they underwent such violent and agonizing spiritual suffering as Hopkins did. Traherne's references to God's

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1 The Candle Indoors (p.81), l.9; "Thee, God, I come from, to thee go" (p.194), ll.3-4.

2 The Wreck of the Deutschland, stanzas 2, 9, 10.

work of refining his soul, notably in the poem Bells (II,113), emphasize the potential glory of the human soul more than its suffering, and one gains the impression that at times Thompson welcomes pain's "Pentecostal flame"[1] partly as evidence of his status as a true poet. Vaughan's quiet pleas that God may "touch with one Coal / [His] frozen heart" and melt the "mountains of cold Ice" in him[2] seem to indicate that his ardent desire for purification is not balanced by an equally intense consciousness of the agony which this might involve. Nevertheless, his emblem of the flashing flint (p.215) suggests that his initial experience of conversion was similar in kind if not in degree to some of Hopkins's sufferings, and this is borne out by the final stanza of The Tempest (p.293), which conjures up the violence of the image of the "age-old anvil" in Hopkins's sonnet, "No worst, there is none" (p.100):

> Lord! thou didst put a soul here; If I must
> Be broke again, for flints will give no fire
> Without a steel, O let thy power cleer
> Thy gift once more, and grind this flint to dust!

Perhaps it is the post-Romantic poet's strong consciousness of his self-distinctiveness that makes it so painfully difficult for him to submit to God.

When one considers Hopkins's poetry as a whole, one is left with the impression that the seeming absence of God from the self is a far more insistent theme than the presence of God within the self, and J. Hillis Miller has very ably traced those emotive and intellectual patterns in

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1 Laus Amara Doloris, p.276, l.14.

2 Dressing (p.287), ll.3-4; Love-sick (p.328), ll.11-12.

the poet's work which help one to understand why this should be so.[1] As early as February 1879, Hopkins explained to Bridges: "Feeling, love in particular, is the great moving power and spring of verse and the only person that I am in love with seldom, especially now, stirs my heart sensibly and when he does I cannot always 'make capital' of it, it would be a sacrilege to do so."[2] This sense of isolation from the God whom he loved increased with the years, culminating in the Dublin period of desolation during which the six sonnets of 1885 (Nos 64-69, pp.99-103) were wrung from him. "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day", he cries with chilling shrillness (No. 67, p.101). Yet even in this dark period he never abandons completely the hope that God's unforeseen smile will light "a lovely mile" of his terrible pilgrimage (No. 69, p.102), and that he is unconsciously being more and more transformed to the image of Christ.[3] God is withholding from him the consolation of the feeling of his presence, yet Hopkins can still cling bravely to the belief that God is nonetheless present within him, as in all things.

Hopkins's experience of a "winter world"[4] is not unusual among those who seek a close relationship with God, and it is surely no coincidence that Thompson cries out in

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1 See "Gerard Manley Hopkins", in The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers (Cambridge, Mass., 1963).

2 The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London, 1935), p.66.

3 See the fragment, "Hope holds to Christ the mind's own mirror out", p.186.

4 To R. B. (p.108), l.13.

desolation,

> Winter with me, alack!
> Winter on every hand I find:
> Soul, brain, and pulses dead;[1]

or that Vaughan, though recognizing that God "smiles" on him, feels in times of trial that "Winter is all my year".[2] Of the four poets of this study, Traherne is the only one who, after his initial spiritual regeneration, seems not to have suffered from any absence of Light. It is interesting to note, however, that Hopkins and Thompson, unlike Vaughan, specifically associate their periods of spiritual desolation with a lack of poetic inspiration, and that this lack of inspiration is felt by them as a heavy additional burden in those dark times. Hopkins's lament, "I want the one rapture of an inspiration",[3] is paralleled by Thompson's:

> My lips have drought, and crack,
> By laving music long unvisited.[4]

One cannot but recognize the Romantic influence in the outlook of these two poets, since they are deeply concerned with artistic creativity and expression as well as with the spiritual well-being of themselves and their readers. Thompson, in particular, has a very high conception of the rôle of poetic genius, and in his desolation clings to the hope that

> Thou only seest in me, so stripped and bare,
> The lyric secret waiting to be born.[5]

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1 From the Night of Forebeing, p.211, ll.5-7.

2 Idle Verse (p.278), ll.6, 24.

3 To R. B., l.10.

4 From the Night of Forebeing, p.211, ll.12-13.

5 Ibid., p.212, ll.7-8.

So far as one can judge from the work of these four poets, it seems that Traherne, and to a lesser extent Vaughan, experienced interior illumination more frequently and on a more deeply mystical level than Hopkins and Thompson did; and this may perhaps be explained partially by the differences between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. One would expect nature lovers of the post-Romantic period to find the _via negativa_ more difficult than their counterparts of an earlier age found it, since the great Romantic poets had opened up new avenues of sensibility in the relationship between man and the world around him. In their experiences of interior illumination, however, Vaughan and Traherne are far more sharply distinguished one from the other than in their experiences of exterior illumination. While Vaughan maintains a proper Christian balance in his vision of God's transcendence and immanence, Traherne, who is the more mystically gifted of the two, is so excited by his experiences of God's immanence within him that, in his use of sun symbolism in particular, he naïvely concentrates on the Light within him to the point of virtually disregarding the transcendence of that Light. Vaughan would never have claimed, as his younger contemporary did, that during a mystical experience his soul was

> An Endless and a Living Day,
> _A vital Sun_ that round about did _ray_
> All Life and Sence.[1]

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1 _The Preparative_, ll.17-19.

Chapter 6

WATER

Though light is the most pervasive symbol found in mystical literature, other symbols are needed to express non-illuminative experiences in the writers' relationships with God. Indeed, even the apprehension of the Deity immanent in external objects and in oneself may be expressed in terms other than those of light, and it is not uncommon to find, in particular, a mingling of light and water symbolism, as when Traherne maintains in Nature (II,60) that the "fountain of Delights" which "must needs be Lov" "shines upon [him] from the highest Skies" (11.85-87). In Mount of Olives (p.310), Vaughan expresses the comfort of interior illumination in terms of light, water, and other symbols and images, relating them all to the image of the coming of spring:

> When first I saw true beauty, and thy Joys
> Active as light, and calm without all noise
> Shin'd on my soul, ...
> . . . . . .
> Odors, and Myrrh, and balm in one rich floud
> O'r-ran my heart, and spirited my bloud,
> My thoughts did swim in Comforts . . . . .
> . . . . . ;
> So have I known some beauteous Paisage rise
> In suddain flowres and arbours to my Eies,
> And in the depth and dead of winter bring
> To my Cold thoughts a lively sense of spring (11.1-21).

Conversely, lack of illumination, and therefore of spiritual satisfaction, may be expressed not only as darkness but also as dryness or thirst, as in Hopkins's "My own heart let me more have pity on" (p.102):

> I cast for comfort I can no more get
> By groping round my comfortless, than blind
> Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
> Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet (11.5-8).

The experiences which seem most naturally to give rise to water symbolism, however, are repentance, regeneration, purification, and satisfying communion with God. Water, as a source of life and a means of cleansing, is a traditional and appropriate symbol for the Holy Spirit's regenerating power and purifying love experienced in the lives of all who repent and believe, and Christ himself symbolized the Holy Spirit by the water which satisfies thirst.[1] It is instructive to compare and contrast the ways in which the four poets of this study use water symbolism, and to do this most effectively I shall begin with Traherne, whose use of this symbolism reveals yet again a far greater concentration on divine immanence than is found in the work of the other three poets.

In poems such as Thoughts IV (II,179), Traherne makes it clear that, for him, the creatures of the material world are some of the living waters of divine Love which stream from the Fountain of Eternal Life, since they can afford him spiritual nourishment and communion with the Creator. Moreover, at times he tends to think of his own soul or mind as a self-sufficient fountain or spring refreshing itself, and in Fullnesse (II,58) he barely avoids identifying his soul with God as the Fountain which sustains his life. Similarly, instead of seeing the human soul as a finite water-drop in relation to God, the infinite Ocean, he

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1 John 4:14; 7:37-39.

sees it too as an infinite ocean, as in lines 61-74 of the poem Silence (II,44); and in the first stanza of Goodnesse (II,182) he marvels at the mystery of an Infinity of infinities, of an infinite Ocean of drops which are themselves infinite. His use of the fountain and ocean symbols to describe human souls and the creatures of the material world, as well as God himself, parallels his daring use of the sun symbol, and is part of his consistent tendency to identify the Giver with his gifts—a tendency which sometimes brings his Christianity very close to pantheism, especially to that type of pantheism which deifies man.[1]

Traherne's boldness in his use of the fountain and ocean symbols is not paralleled in the work of the other three poets. Vaughan's desire in The Passion (p.261) to be "One constant spring" (l.49) is a desire to repent continuously of his sins and to sorrow for his part in Christ's sufferings, while in The Dawning (p.283) his prayer to be like "this restless, vocall Spring" rather than like a stagnant puddle is a prayer for spiritual purity and heavenly thoughts in the course of an active life of service to God (ll.29-44). In "Thee, God, I come from, to thee go" (p.194), Hopkins's image of himself as a fountain flowing continuously from God bears no suggestion of self-sufficiency, but rather emphasizes his constant dependence on him (ll.2-3). Perhaps Thompson tends towards Traherne's boldness when he asks, in the sixth stanza of the Prelude to

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1 The peculiarities of Traherne's use of water symbols are illustrated in my book, pp.47-58.

Ode to the Setting Sun (p.95),

> What wild divinity makes my heart thus
> A fount of most baptismal tears?

This question, however, is immediately followed by the explanation, "Thy [the sun's] straight / Long beam lies steady on the Cross", which points to an experience of partial illumination leading to purgation, an experience in which this poet is more dependent on God as his true Fountain than Traherne seems at times to be.

Thompson's traditional image in Any Saint of man as a dew-drop drunk up by God the Sun[1] is in keeping with his consciousness of his own weakness by comparison with God; but such a consciousness, though it is an essential component of spiritual health, can lead to a self-pitying glorification of weakness or of sensitivity to suffering, and Thompson is not always successful in avoiding this form of absorption in self. Thus in The Hound of Heaven he dwells just a little too much on his sorry condition, even picturing his spiritually paralysed heart as "a broken fount, / Wherein tear-drippings stagnate" (p.93, ll.12-13). Likewise, in the final stanza of The Cloud's Swan-Song (p.335) he pictures the core of his being, not as a mere water-drop, but as a sea, and claims that "With tears ascended from the heart's sad sea" he could sing a song to Death that would immortalize him as a poet. It is clear from the rest of the poem, however, that Thompson believes that the condition for his attaining such artistic

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1 P.221, stanzas 6-7. Cf. Marvell's image of the soul as a drop of dew which is "Congeal'd on Earth: but does, dissolving, run / Into the Glories of th' Almighty Sun" (On a Drop of Dew, ll.39-40).

excellence would be the attainment of a spiritual excellence grounded in trusting to God and obeying him. He wishes that his own poetic faculty revealed an inner humility before God and before the experiences of life like that which he discerned in his "brother" the cloud. This cloud appealed to the poet not only because of the beauty of the skyscapes which were evoked by his meditation on it, or because it, too, like himself, was a lonely wanderer, but also because it placed itself completely at the mercy of heaven's will instead of trying to go its own way. Thus, at its death, it was able to weep "more gracious song" in the release of its shower than any the poet could compose (p.338, stanza 5).

Traherne's optimism concerning the nature and state of his soul is entirely alien to Vaughan and Hopkins, and the former recognizes very unflattering pictures of his spiritual condition in lessons afforded by the workings of external nature. In The Showre (p.242) Vaughan, conscious of his laziness in prayer, compares himself unfavourably to a "drowsie Lake" exhaling moisture too heavy to ascend far before falling again to earth; the shower from the lake at least softens the earth, but he still lacks tears of true repentance to soften his hard and slothful heart. His poem The Storm (p.254) provides startling contrasts with Traherne's thought. The sight of a flooded river red with mud brings home to him the humbling thought that his own blood, unlike the swollen river,

> Is not a Sea,
> But a shallow, bounded floud (ll.1-3).

Moreover, while the river waters are whipped up only by storms and wind, it is just when he is at ease and free of

external suffering or affliction that tempests as fierce as the river's "mountain'd wave" rage most in his blood (stanzas 1-2). Thus he begs for that true repentance which will produce a storm of water and wind, of sorrowful tears and prayerful breath, to purge him of sinful rebelliousness and raise him upwards to God. On the contrary, Traherne's characteristic thought-patterns tend almost to dispense with the necessity for suffering, repentance, and spiritual struggle, and, seeing his soul as a boundless ocean, he would have found little consolation in Vaughan's assurance in The Water-fall (p.374) that each soul is indeed a drop in the river of life which flows from and back to God the Sea:

> Why, since each drop of thy [the stream's] quick store
> Runs thither, whence it flow'd before,
> Should poor souls fear a shade or night,
> Who came (sure) from a sea of light? (ll.15-18)

The actual scene of the stream with the waterfall had a deep aesthetic appeal for Vaughan as a poet, as we see particularly in his patterning of the first twelve lines into a visual and auditory emblem of a waterfall, and in the lines:

> Dear stream! dear bank, where often I
> Have sate, and pleas'd my pensive eye (ll.13-14);

but, as always, his appreciation of nature is greatly enhanced and deepened by the "sublime truths, and wholesome themes" (l.27) afforded by it.

Like Vaughan, Hopkins is intensely dissatisfied with himself. Even in his youth he sees his friends' lives as "fresh brooks" by comparison with the "salt sand-teasing waters shoaly" of his own life,[1] and at times suffers so

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1 "Myself unholy" (p.26), l.4.

much spiritual dryness that God seems inaccessible and his own soul seems hardened against his attempts to shed tears of true repentance. "My prayers must meet a brazen heaven", he cries at the opening of an early poem on this theme (p.27). For him, the soul must be purged violently by an overwhelming and inescapable confrontation with the Passion of Christ the Saviour before it can be steadied and sustained by the gospel as well-water fed by a mountain stream remains calm and at a constant level.[1] Even after this experience the Christian can never slacken in his efforts to become more Christlike, and these will inevitably involve the tears and sighs of repentance and sorrow for sin.[2] Hopkins does not, however, emphasize the softening and cleansing power of the actual tears of repentance nearly as much or as frequently as Vaughan, who in Anguish (p.362) even expresses a desire to weep blood or to make himself "all tears, a weeping lake" (stanza 2) and at the end of Joy (p.325) gives this stern advice to his soul:

> So in sighs and unseen tears
> Pass thy solitary years,
> And going hence, leave written on some Tree,
> Sighs make joy sure, and shaking fastens thee.

Vaughan's preoccupation with grief for sin is at the opposite pole to Traherne's conviction that failure to enjoy the world is sinful ingratitude to the Creator; nevertheless it is not a morbid preoccupation with grief for its own sake:

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1 The Wreck of the Deutschland (p.51), stanzas 6-8, 4.

2 "Hope holds to Christ the mind's own mirror out" (p.186), ll.1-6.

> But as shades set off light, so tears and grief
> (Though of themselves but a sad blubber'd story)
> By shewing the sin great, shew the relief
> Far greater, and so speak my Saviors glory.[1]

Moreover, it seems probable that his belief in the great value of tears for spiritual cleansing is strengthened by his interest in alchemy. Thus in The Sap (p.309) he speaks of cleansing tears as "A powerful, rare dew, / Which only grief and love extract" (ll.40-41), and in Love-sick (p.328) he prays that God, the divine Fire, will refine his heart and melt the mountains of ice in him (ll.11-13).

Thompson seems to share something of Vaughan's conviction of the sacramental value, not only of pain, but also of the tears occasioned by it, and in these lines from his early poem The Passion of Mary it is probable that the word "tears" is not merely a figurative expression for pain:

> The salt tears in our life's dark wine
> Fell in it from the saving cross (p.137, ll.3-4).

He seems to make little distinction, however, between tears of repentance, which are a positive tribute to God, and tears occasioned by other forms of suffering. Often he is concerned mainly with the particular sufferings of poets and of himself as a poet, as in To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster, where he pleads with Manning's spirit to ask the angels what place God reserves in the afterlife for one such as he, a poet destined to give himself unsparingly to the service of "The impitiable Dæmon, / Beauty", regardless of the pain, the "sacrificial tears", and the probability of damnation that he believes this service inevitably involves (pp.110-113). It is significant that his depiction of Adam

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1 The Timber (p.332), ll.41-44.

and Eve's banishment from Eden as the time when "Sin knew the bitter first baptismal rite" (p.276, l.30) occurs in Laus Amara Doloris (p.273), a poem which dramatically begins:

> Implacable sweet daemon, Poetry,
> What have I lost for thee!

One is not surprised to discover that such an emphasis on the poet's baptism of pain can become, paradoxically, a glorification of the poet's essential purity, which gives him a special insight into nature:

> To me
> Thy [God's] world's a morning haunt,
> A bride whose zone no man hath slipt
> But I, with baptism still bedript
> Of the prime water's font.[1]

There is an obvious link between this claim and Thompson's praise of Shelley as a childlike person in his early essay on that Romantic poet: "Know you what it is to be a child? . . . It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief".[2] The humanistic and pantheistic tendency in Thompson's thought and feeling is revealed by contrast with Vaughan's concentration on giving glory to God transcendent, even for the grace to weep. Tears, the latter claims, are sent by God; they are drops from the streams in heaven.[3] Thus, for him, they are closely associated with the cleansing, healing, and

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1 Carmen Genesis, final stanza, p.229.

2 The Works of Francis Thompson, ed. Wilfred Meynell (London, 1913), III, 7.

3 The Agreement (p.365), l.61; The Timber, ll.49-56.

nourishing water flowing from God the Fountain, and this association is explicit in poems such as the two entitled Jesus weeping (pp.338, 339). In the first of these poems, the tears which Jesus shed on Palm Sunday over the spiritual blindness and the imminent destruction of Jerusalem are described as "Soul-quickning rain, this living water", and as "live-dew" for which "the starv'd earth groans" (ll.9-16). In the second poem, the "tears of love" which Jesus shed on the death of his friend Lazarus are described as "healing tears" and as "Dew of the dead! which makes dust move / And spring" (ll.10-12); and the poet concludes that in his pilgrimage to heaven he should practise "A grief, whose silent dew shall breed / Lilies and Myrrhe" in his soul (ll.48-49), since the Almighty Lord, despite his power to raise the dead, grieves over the sinful condition of mankind which causes death.

In traditional Christian symbolism, God, as the Giver of life and the crucified Saviour, is not only a Fountain of water, but also a Fountain of blood which paradoxically cleanses and whitens the sin-stained soul. Unlike Traherne, whose mind often turns to the concept of the creatures of the material world streaming from the divine Fountain, Vaughan characteristically associates the Fountain with specifically Christian sacramental symbolism, sometimes tinged with alchemical associations. Christ's blood is Vaughan's "Dew, and springing wel", "our sap, and Cordial" which will preserve us against decay; Christ's heart is "The well, where living waters spring"; Christ is

> The Fuller, whose pure blood did flow
> To make stain'd man more white then snow.[1]

Sometimes he uses water symbolism in a more general way, as in Misery (p.306), where there is a sharp contrast between the "headlong and loose" waters of the poet's "spilt thoughts" which, having turned away from God,

> Take the down-rode to vanitie,
> Where they all stray and strive, which shal
> Find out the first and steepest fal (ll.9-16),

and, on the other hand, the shower of grace outpoured into his soul when he calls upon God:

> thou com'st, and in a showr
> Of healing sweets thy self dost powr
> Into my wounds, and now thy grace
> (I know it wel,) fils all the place (ll.49-52).

Similarly, Hopkins writes of his spiritual dryness, his thirst for God, being satisfied with "rivers" and with "merciful dew",[2] and in The Wreck of the Deutschland refers to Christ's new birth into the world through the utterance of the leading nun as a "released shower" (stanza 34); but his urgent cry, "Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain", is primarily a plea for creative inspiration. He feels that he cannot "breed one work that wakes", just as Thompson, unable to render "undying song", feels like "A Thirst made marble".[3] As was noted in the previous chapter of this study (pp.123-124), both poets associate spiritual desolation with the additional burden of a lack of poetic

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1 Disorder and frailty (p.276), ll.18-19; The Sap, ll.26-30; The Feast (p.371), ll.32-33; Ascension-Hymn (p.316), ll.35-36.

2 "He hath abolished the old drouth" (p.18), ll.2-3.

3 "Thou art indeed just" (p.106), ll.13-14; A Double Need (p.341), ll.2, 14.

inspiration.

Thompson, however, is more Romantic than Hopkins in that he values poetic genius much more highly. He refers to the "skiey-gendered rain" of his "music", claims that the high thoughts of poets are dangerous divine drink, and calls a poet a "conduit running wine of song".[1] In this last example, as in the comparison of himself with a "fountained nymph" in A Double Need (l.9), there is a hint that Thompson tends to appropriate the fountain symbol for poets in general and for himself in particular, though in Christian tradition it is reserved for God. He is fond of archaisms, and the archaic meaning of "conduit" is "fountain". His use of the fountain symbol for poets may nevertheless be merely a reference to literary tradition, in which the springs of Helicon were regarded as the source of poetic inspiration.

Hitherto in this chapter, I have dealt mainly with those types of water symbolism which arise from experiences which are at the lower stages of mystical ascent—tears of repentance, leading upwards to the regenerating and purifying streams flowing from the Eternal Fountain. Of the four poets of this study, only Traherne extends the concept of the spiritual flow from God to man to the fuller concept of a circular flow from God to man and back to God. It is noteworthy, however, that Traherne conceives of this flow mainly as a stream of material gifts to man which are transmuted by man's love into spiritual gifts to God. Since it was generally believed in the seventeenth century that

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1 Retrospect, p.237, ll.18-19; The Dread of Height (p.192), ll.1-11; Contemplation, p.190, l.5.

there was a circular flow from fountain, by means of stream, to ocean, and back to fountain, one can understand why, in Traherne's poems, Fountain, Stream, and Ocean are symbols not only for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit respectively, but also for God, the material creation, and man respectively.[1]

Perhaps the highest kind of mystical experience which gives rise to water symbolism is that in which the self in close communion with God is swallowed up in him, submerged in the divine Ocean. The four poets all have some intimations of this experience, though they prefer to speak of God's gifts or attributes rather than of God himself as the Ocean. Vaughan feels interior illumination as a state of being in which his thoughts "swim" in the comforts of spiritual consolation, and Traherne, in order to express the spiritual marriage between God and the Church, sees himself as one among millions of people "bathing" in the pleasures given by God.[2] The significance of Hopkins's depiction of the five nuns of the Deutschland wreck "bathing" in God's "fall-gold mercies" (stanza 23) is deepened if one realizes that in Epithalamion (p.197) the poet explicitly recognizes water as a symbol of spousal love (l.47). In The Hound of Heaven, Thompson hears God's voice as a "bursting sea" around him when the divine love-chase is over at last and he is forced to submit to God (p.93, last line). The most detailed and sustained expression in the work of these poets

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1 For a fuller discussion, see my book, pp.50-51, 54-58.

2 Mount of Olives, l.10; Goodnesse, l.7.

of the experience of being surrounded, protected, and nourished by God is in my opinion Hopkins's The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe (p.93), even though it deals with God's mercies only as they are believed to be transmitted through Mary. In this poem, Hopkins seems conscious that he is substituting air for the more usual water symbol; air is

> My more than meat and drink,
> My meal at every wink (ll.11-12),

a "fine flood" which uplifts us and "laps" around us, a "bath of blue" (ll.51, 77, 95). Another variation of submergence in the divine Ocean is Thompson's capacity to become submerged in the whole universe, a capacity which he ascribes to every true poet and expresses in Shelleyan imagery:

> like a city under ocean,
> To human things he grows a desolation,
> And is made a habitation
> For the fluctuous universe
> To lave with unimpeded motion.[1]

In view of the emphasis which Thompson places on God's immanence in nature, this variation of the mystical experience is to be expected, and is paralleled by Traherne's bathing in pleasures. Traherne usually emphasizes God's immanence in man, and it is clear from the rest of Goodnesse that the highest pleasures prepared for him are all the other people in whom the image of God's goodness lives (stanza 6).

A study of water symbolism in Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson sharply delineates Traherne's optimism

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1 Contemplation, p.190, ll.13-17.

concerning the nature of man, whereby even the fountain and ocean symbols may be appropriated for the human soul, by contrast with the more sober attitudes of the other three poets, who always recognize their dependence on God's grace. Traherne seems to have had what William James calls the "healthy-minded temperament", "the temperament which has a constitutional incapacity for prolonged suffering", and which may become the basis for a religion which teaches that "The best repentance is to up and act for righteousness, and forget that you ever had relations with sin."[1] On the contrary, Vaughan and Hopkins could not ignore evil and the need for repentance and purification, and most of Vaughan's water symbolism is related to tears. Thompson is, as usual, the most difficult to classify, for in him the conflict between Christianity and Romanticism results in a highly ambivalent attitude towards himself as man and poet.

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1 The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (London, 1902), p.127.

Chapter 7

PLANT AND GARDEN

To express the experience of spiritual growth and development, mystical writers often use romance symbolism, whereby the relationship between God and the soul is pictured as a courtship leading to a spiritual marriage. Thus Traherne at times describes God as the wooer and husband of his soul,[1] and the biblical echoes in Thompson's Arab Love-Song (p.134) imply that the speaker of this poem is God:

> Leave thy father, leave thy mother
> And thy brother (ll.10-11).[2]

However, unlike mystical love poets, mystical nature poets frequently substitute the symbolism of plant-growth for romance symbolism, thereby expressing the intimacies between God and the soul in non-human terms.[3] Even the marriage relationship of the individual believer with God and with the Church, Christ's Body of all faithful ones, may be partly portrayed by plant symbols, most typically as the union of branch with tree or vine, as in the words of Christ recorded in John 15:5: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." In the poem

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1 Another (II,165); Love (II,167).

2 Cf. Matthew 10:37: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me".

3 The terms "love mysticism" and "nature mysticism", as used in this study, were defined in the Introduction (p.3).

On Christmas-Day (II,110) Traherne prays,

> Among the rest let me be seen
> A living Branch and always green (ll.81-82),

and in Hopkins's early poem, Barnfloor and Winepress (p.16), Christ is the vine on whose wood Christians are so grafted that

> We scarcely call that banquet [of Holy Communion] food,
> But even our Saviour's and our blood (last stanza).

Similarly, in another early poem by Hopkins, Rosa Mystica (p.38), the Virgin Mary, the rose-tree in God's gardens, bears Christ, the rose-blossom whose five natural petals are multiplying as the number of believers grows. The poet begs Mary, "Make me a leaf in thee, mother of mine" (stanza 7, l.6); but since it is doubtful whether any of the four poets of this study actually achieved the state of mystical union with God, one is not surprised to find that in their poetry the soul is nearly always an individual plant rather than a branch or petal.

In some of their poems, however, the soul is pictured as a plot of ground which must be cultivated in order to yield grain or flowers or fruits, virtues pleasing to God; and when the symbolism of plant-growth merges thus into garden symbolism, nature mysticism often tends towards love mysticism, since the garden is an archetypal symbol for the soul of the beloved. The lover in the Song of Solomon, traditionally understood to represent God, describes his "spouse" as a "garden inclosed" and a "fountain of gardens", and she responds by bidding the wind, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, to "blow upon [her] garden, that the spices thereof may flow out", and by inviting her "beloved" to "come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." (4:12-16)

Guillaume de Lorris, in his allegorical poem of courtly love, the Roman de la Rose, pictures "the mind of a young girl living in the world of courtly society" as "a rose-plot surrounded by a hedge inside [a] larger garden",[1] and this poem had a powerful influence on the literature of several centuries. It was translated by Chaucer and his imitators, and the descriptions of the garden of love which appear in many mediaeval poems often seem inspired by it. Later in this chapter I shall discuss the ways in which the poets of this study use garden symbolism, but first I shall concentrate on their use of the symbolism of plant-growth.

Though in Right Apprehension (II,123) Traherne, contrasting the earth's fertile soil with man's hardened and barren heart which refuses to admit God, claims that

> no Fruit grows
> In his Obduratness nor yields
> Obedience to the Hevens like the Fields (ll.70-72),

he usually emphasizes man's spiritual fruitfulness when he uses the symbolism of plant-growth. In Dumnesse (II,40) human nature is regarded as the good soil which nourishes the first impressions of infancy (ll.79-84), in Thoughts II (II,172) a good human thought is described as "the fruit of all [God's] Works" and as a "fine and Curious Flower" (ll.3, 7), and in The Inference II (II,141) pious thoughts are valued as "Seed-plots of activ Piety" (l.17). From the poem On Christmas-Day, one gains the impression that he does not consider it impossible or even difficult to achieve his desire to "Be laden all the Year with Fruits" (l.34), and in

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1 C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (London, 1936), p.119.

Goodnesse (II,182) he offers an idealized vision of the people of God as grape-bearing vines glorified by and responsive to the divine Sun. Traherne's bold optimism concerning human nature even leads him to exalt the body as a positive spiritual advantage to man, and in Admiration (II,122) he goes so far as to suggest that the body's uses, symbolized by odours, can give pleasure to God and his angels:

> Can Bodies fill the hev'nly Rooms
> With welcom Odours and Perfumes!
> Can Earth-bred Flow'rs adorn Celestial Bowers
> Or yield such Fruits as pleas the hev'nly Powers!
> (ll.8-11)[1]

The poem as a whole makes it clear that the interrogative form of these exclamatory lines, far from expressing doubt, is the poet's method of asserting very strongly that, however incredible his suggestion may appear, he himself is convinced of its truth.

In striking contrast with Traherne, Hopkins emphasizes his spiritual fruitlessness in this life. As early as 1865 he laments that the hard, poor soil of his soul is so chilled by memories of his past wastefulness that he cannot expect to produce a good yield of grain, and when he examines himself he concludes that there is no goodness in either his inner life or his outward actions. "My sap is sealed, / My root is dry", he cries, pondering on the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 12:33: ". . . the tree is known by his fruit."[2] One is reminded of his plea of 1889, "Mine,

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1 For a discussion of Traherne's symbolism of taste and smell, see my book, pp.14-19.

2 "See how Spring opens with disabling cold" (p.26); "Trees by their yield" (p.169), ll.1-8.

O thou lord of life, send my roots rain",[1] though in this later poem he is concerned with poetic inspiration as well as with spiritual progress, as was pointed out in the previous chapter of this study (p.136). The field of Hopkins's soul is not a place of rest but a place of constant struggle and purgation:

> There is your world within.
> There rid the dragons, root out there the sin.
> Your will is law in that small commonweal . . . .[2]

Moreover, the virtues in this inner world are the stern ones of self-denial and obedience which provide a suitable soil in which patience, "Natural heart's ivy", may take root.[3] It is little wonder that he has to advise himself to cease self-torment and give comfort and joy a chance to grow in his heart.[4] Implicit in The May Magnificat (p.76) is the idea that the growth of Jesus within the Virgin Mary, and by analogy his growth in the believer's soul, is like the coming of spring to the earth; but it is significant that Hopkins makes no claim to a personal experience of such mystical ecstasy.

Unlike Hopkins, Vaughan expresses, in The Morning-watch (p.255), an ecstatic experience of the coming of a spiritual spring to his whole being:

> O Joyes! Infinite sweetnes! with what flowres,
> And shoots of glory, my soul breakes, and buds! (ll.1-2)

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1 "Thou art indeed just, Lord" (p.106), l.14.

2 "The times are nightfall" (p.186), ll.9-11.

3 "Patience, hard thing!" (p.102), ll.4-6.

4 "My own heart let me more have pity on" (p.102), ll.3-4, 11-12.

The dew of God's grace "Blouds, / And Spirits all [his] Earth" so that his very body, as well as his soul, is in harmony with the waking world of nature in its adoration of the Creator (ll.7-18). The Morning-watch is, however, exceptional in the utter joyfulness of Vaughan's response to God and in the exuberance of his consciousness of spiritual flower-bearing; for, unlike Traherne, he never dwells on the pleasure God receives from his productiveness, but always emphasizes his dependence on divine grace to produce any good thing. Of himself he is "no Lilie", but merely a thorn or a weed; yet within him, like a seed under the ground, is the kingdom of God, so that he can hope to be able to offer God at least "one poor Blossome", and at times the garden of his soul is miraculously responsive to God's love:

> And here in dust and dirt, O here
> The Lilies of his love appear![1]

Vaughan seems to have learnt the secret of reliance upon God more perfectly than did Hopkins, and his striving for spiritual growth is consequently not such a lonely, depressing struggle as it was for the later poet. Instead of ruthlessly searching for sins to be rooted out by sheer will-power, Vaughan quietly prepares himself to learn the lessons taught him by his heavenly Father's discipline. He recognizes the necessity for affliction, acknowledging that it is only the change of frosts and showers that prevents him from being overgrown by wild weeds and thistles; thus he can feel genuinely thankful for sufferings as well as for

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1 Cock-crowing (p.322), l.48; Repentance (p.280), ll.69-70; The Seed growing secretly (p.346); Praise (p.286), ll.45-56; The Revival (p.437), ll.13-14.

joys, and can trustingly rest on God:

> Blest be thy Dew, and blest thy frost,
> And happy I to be so crost,
> And cur'd by Crosses at thy cost.[1]

Unlike Vaughan and Hopkins, Thompson does not picture his soul as a place of weeds, except in From the Night of Forebeing, where the stony, "weed-choked plot" is the field of his poetic inspiration (p.212, ll.15-17). The only purely spiritual "weed" that he complains of is the immortal one of God's love, which he at first fears may choke the flowers of ordinary human pleasures and affections.[2] He is aware that his tarnished self makes a sad contrast with the "happy daisies white" in a child's soul; nevertheless, though his spirit languishes in the shade of his weak body, it is still essentially a sun-flower, and it remains so sensitively responsive to the purity of children that a child's kiss

> makes the sudden lilies push
> Between the loosening fibres of the heart.[3]

Thompson's comparison of his soul with a mournful sun-flower reminds one of Vaughan's poem The Sap (p.309), in which the poet is a "sapless Blossom" which is in danger of forgetting its heavenly origin (ll.1-2); but whereas Vaughan vigorously exhorts himself and others to regain spiritual health by feeding on our sap, Christ's blood (ll.26-36), Thompson, in the Romantic manner, tends to glorify human nature even in its weakness. He describes a healthy, happy sun-flower as

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1 Affliction (p.292); Love, and Discipline (p.296), ll.7-9.

2 The Hound of Heaven, p.93, ll.5-7.

3 Sister Songs, p.48, ll.25-28; p.33, ll.14-16; p.31, ll.7-8.

"heartless", presumably because, unlike himself, it lacks the sensitivity which brings suffering;[1] furthermore, as was suggested in previous chapters (pp.73-74, 120, 134), he seems to believe in his own essential innocence. Perhaps that is why, even during a time of spiritual and artistic aridity, he can be confident that by a natural cyclic process he will again become joyfully fruitful both as man and as poet, and that his periods of fruitfulness do all point toward that state of being which will be enjoyed after the resurrection of the body:

> How many trampled and deciduous joys
> Enrich thy soul for joys deciduous still,
> Before the distance shall fulfil
> Cyclic unrest with solemn equipoise!
> . . . . . .
> Then leaf, and flower, and fall-less fruit
> Shall hang together on the unyellowing bough.[2]

It is noteworthy that Thompson often seems to understand suffering in a fairly impersonal way, as belonging to the very nature of things, whereas Vaughan and Hopkins place a greater emphasis on the personal and transcendent God who allows suffering to fall upon particular people for particular reasons. Those poems in which Vaughan sees himself as a languishing or a flourishing plant are intimate revelations of his communion with such a God, and some of them deserve close study.

Perhaps Vaughan uses the plant as a symbol of his soul most profoundly in the short poem Unprofitablenes (p.273), which is so rich in meaning that Ross Garner has

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1 Sister Songs, p.33, l.18.

2 From the Night of Forebeing, p.210, ll.17-20, 27-28.

devoted a whole book to it.[1] Vaughan's attitudes in this poem could hardly be more opposed to Traherne's. Though God's grace sustains the plant at all times, his immanent presence is actually felt only on the seemingly rare occasions granted by him. "'Unprofitablenes' . . . is a poem of divine transcendence; the visitations are made from a heavenly home to a place of apparent exile. That is not only implied by the images of wildness and storm, but by the tone of nostalgia and longing."[2] Moreover, it is impossible either to earn God's grace or to repay him for it; from God's point of view, the plant can only ever be "a thankless weed", powerless to enhance the "wreath" of his glory with even one leaf or to yield him any better odour than "a stench, or fog". Vaughan has taken to heart the words of Christ in Luke 17:10: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

Unprofitablenes reveals a remarkable degree of spiritual maturity, even by comparison with many other poems by Vaughan. Mount of Olives (p.310) presents a similar experience of the joy of God's visit to his soul, so that his "wither'd leafs again look green and flourish" (l.23); but there is not such a deep sense of his own fruitlessness or of the unmeritability of grace, and the poem ends in a more usual way, with thanksgiving. Disorder and frailty

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1 The Unprofitable Servant in Henry Vaughan, University of Nebraska Studies, N.S. No.29 (Nov. 1963).

2 Garner, ibid., p.47.

(p.276) is a sensitive expression of his struggle for spiritual survival and growth in the face of almost overwhelming adversities:

> But while I grow
> And stretch to thee, ayming at all
> Thy stars, and spangled hall,
> Each fly doth tast,
> Poyson, and blast
> My yielding leaves; sometimes a showr
> Beats them quite off (ll.20-26).

However, despite his plea in the final stanza that for the sake of Christ God may preserve, nurture, and guide the seed of his being, one feels that in this poem his regret over his sorry state is largely for himself; he pities his own condition:

> Not one poor shoot
> But the bare root
> Hid under ground survives the fall.
> Alas, frail weed! (ll.27-30)

Similarly, the laments of Hopkins and Thompson that theirs is an arid winter world in which they are unable to bear fruit remain somewhat bounded by a consciousness of the keen pain felt by the self. In Unprofitablenes Vaughan's love of God enables him to take another step and transcend self; he is dismayed when he realizes that he cannot enhance God's glory.

The growth of the plant-soul corresponds to the spiritual courtship; the depiction of a garden of the soul, a paradise within, often indicates a preparation for the longed-for mystical marriage. Thus in A Fallen Yew Thompson's description of the "heart's heart" as an "immurèd plot" (p.144, l.11) leads to the thought that, if we make the right choice, our "ultimate heart's occult abode" can become "a bower untrod, / Built by a secret Lover for His

Spouse" (p.145, ll.1-5). In the work of the four poets, perhaps only Vaughan's Regeneration (p.226) and Thompson's The Mistress of Vision (p.181) may be interpreted as being built upon the symbol of the garden paradise within, and it is instructive to compare and contrast these poems. Hopkins's spiritual field could hardly be called a paradise; and only rarely, as in Thoughts II, does Traherne refer explicitly to an inner paradise (l.9), though he very frequently uses the word "bower" to denote the restful meeting-place of his soul with God. In My Spirit (II,50), for example, he claims that, during a mystical experience, his soul is

> A Deep Abyss
> That sees and is
> The only Proper Place or Bower of Bliss (ll.77-79);

and here, as in some other poems by Traherne, notably Felicity (II,90), "Bliss" seems to be a name for God. His reminiscence of Spenser illustrates how completely the language of erotic pleasure can be transfigured to express spiritual love. In The Faerie Queene, the "Bowre of blis" is "Of her fond fauorites so nam'd amis" (II.xii.69), because the merely external "blis" is in reality false and vicious; but in Traherne's poem, the "Bower of Bliss" is his very soul, the "only Proper Place" where God can meet with him in an intimate and loving relationship.

In Regeneration Vaughan describes his journey towards a garden and his wanderings in it; but there is a very great difference between this poem and seventeenth-century poems on the theme of retirement, such as Marvell's The Garden. Although Marvell's garden is idealized, it is not purely symbolic, for it belongs to the phenomenal world

external to himself. Moreover, the possibility of

> Annihilating all that's made
> To a green Thought in a green Shade (ll.47-48)

is dependent on the setting; nature is the channel of such a mystical experience. But though, in The Garden, Marvell glances at a kind of nature mysticism, the reader is left in doubt as to whether the poet had actual personal experience of it. He is first and foremost the skilful artist, perfectly poised and in such complete control of his subject that the picture of his bird-soul waving in its plumes "the various Light" is followed immediately by the playful final stanza beginning

> Such was that happy Garden-state,
> While Man there walk'd without a Mate.

By contrast, Regeneration is an intensely personal and mystical poem, but it is a nature poem only insofar as it contains symbolic nature imagery. Vaughan's nature mysticism is not explicit here, and may perhaps be inferred only from his predilection for the sensitive use of nature symbolism in the expression of deep mystical truth.

Regeneration is a visionary portrayal of the stages of Vaughan's spiritual life, beginning with his first feeble attempts to seek meaning in life by "stealing abroad" when he is still in bondage to sin, and ending with his prayer for the mystic death to the self, which is at the same time spiritual marriage with God, rebirth in Christ, and the birth of Christ in the virgin soul. "Storm'd" by God, he awakens to the fact that his attractive worldly life is merely a false spring, and that his inner landscape is in reality ugly and wintry. Thus he makes his purgative

pilgrimage upwards to the point where he is humbled to discover that, despite his painful striving, relatively he is still spiritually empty because of the heavy weight of his past pleasures; the pinnacle of this particular mountain of purgation is a very long way off from his desired union with God. He is nevertheless directed onwards to "a faire, fresh field", the "Virgin-soile" of the heart, where Christ the Way, the Ladder of Jacob's dream,[1] is to be found; and thence he is led farther to the very centre of his inner garden, a sacred grove. His conversion or spiritual resurrection has brought "a new spring" to his soul, so that it has become a paradise within him, quickened and illuminated by Christ the Sun and permeated by the sweet odour of his presence.

There has been some disagreement among critics as to the meaning of the seventh, eighth, and ninth stanzas, though it is generally agreed that the fountain symbolizes Christ, "the well of living waters in us and the font of our spiritual baptism".[2] For most critics, the lively and heavy stones represent regenerate and unregenerate souls respectively; but R. A. Durr has pointed out that the stones may be "elements of one soul",[3] and this interpretation seems to me more consistent with the poem as a whole, if the setting is indeed within Vaughan's individual being. The incompleteness of his regeneration is further emphasized by

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1 See John 1:51.

2 R. A. Durr, On the Mystical Poetry of Henry Vaughan (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p.92.

3 Ibid., p.94.

the "banke of flowers". "These flowers are the gifts of God, the virtues and perfections flourishing in the soul under His grace",[1] but some of them are sleeping; his soul is not wholly unfolded to the Sun, not wholly filled with love and desire for God. Thus Vaughan becomes aware of his need for the Holy Spirit to "blow upon [his] garden" and transform it utterly, and the poem ends with poignant longing instead of with the joy of spiritual fulfilment.

Thompson, too, is conscious that he has a very long way to travel along the mystic way before he may attain a death to the self; but, unlike Vaughan, he seems to desire chiefly the spiritual vision which is one of the consequences of this death, rather than the death itself. The Mistress of Vision is an obscure poem about which there has been marked disagreement among critics. At one extreme, the Reverend John O'Connor, in a commentary first published in 1918,[2] interprets every detail in the light of Catholic theology and mystical tradition; at the other extreme, John Walsh declares that the poem is "an attempt, almost feverish, at mystical symbolism, and has little but cleverness left for a second reading."[3] J. C. Reid admits that ". . . the poem does have a religious dimension"; but he sees in it memories of opium visions, and identifies the "pervasive sense of trance, of suspended time", as

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1 Ibid., p.95.

2 Reprinted in R. L. Mégroz, Francis Thompson: The Poet of Earth in Heaven: A Study in Poetic Mysticism and the Evolution of Love-Poetry (London, 1927), pp.265-274.

3 Strange Harp, Strange Symphony: The Life of Francis Thompson (New York, 1967), p.147.

characteristic of the effect of opium.[1]

Many verse paragraphs of The Mistress of Vision are probably mainly phantasy, yet more than one level of deep meaning is discernible. The secret garden whose warden, Life, "Sits behind the fosse of death" (I, ll.4-5) is a garden of the utmost purity, poetry, and love:

> The lily kept its gleaming,
> . . . . . .
> And the flowers of dreaming
> Palèd not their fervours,
> . . . . . .
> And the roses were most red . . . (V)

The "flowers of dreaming" are probably poppies, which in The Poppy (p.5) Thompson associates with the dreams of poets, and, because of his opium addiction, with his own dreams in particular. This garden appears to be both the heaven of the afterlife and the inner paradise of holiness and of poetry reached only by renunciation and sacrificial love:

> On Calvary was shook a spear;
> Press the point into thy heart—
> Joy and fear!
> All the spines upon the thorn into curling tendrils start (XV).

"The Lady of fair weeping, / At the garden's core" (III, ll.1-2) is both the Virgin Mary, who, Thompson believed, "kept heaven real and open" to him,[2] and the poet's Muse:

> And with her magic singing kept she—
> Mystical in music—
> That garden of enchanting
> In visionary May (XXIII, ll.3-6).

The "vision" sought is both the Beatific Vision of the saints in heaven and the vision attainable in this life by saints and true poets. The desired mystical vision of the

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1 Francis Thompson: Man and Poet (London, 1959), pp.142-143.

2 O'Connor, in Mégroz, op. cit., p.273.

world is that of the oneness of all things in God,

> When to the new eyes of thee
> All things by immortal power,
> Near or far,
> Hiddenly
> To each other linkèd are,
> That thou canst not stir a flower
> Without troubling of a star (XXII, ll.1-7);

and such external illumination is a sign that one has found the inner paradise also:

> O seek no more!
> Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore
> (XXII, ll.13-14).

The influence of Romantic thought and feeling may be found in The Mistress of Vision, especially by contrast with Regeneration. There is a glorification of human suffering and of the poet's rôle, and in his emphasis on vision as the desired end, Thompson does not seem as selfless as Vaughan. Furthermore, God's immanence in nature and man's ability to see it are given greater prominence than God's transcendent power to raise the longing soul to union with himself; there is a tendency to forget that God bestows special favours on whom he chooses, not necessarily on all who try hard to merit them. Vaughan, on the contrary, hears the "rushing wind" whisper, "Where I please", and, realizing his utter dependence on God's grace, begs:

> Lord . . . , On me one breath,
> And let me dye before my death! (ll.69-82)

Once again, then, there emerges a general pattern similar to that revealed in all the other chapters on symbolism. Vaughan, and especially Hopkins, apprehending God as primarily transcendent, emphasize their spiritual unproductiveness and thus provide a stark contrast with

Traherne who, apprehending God as primarily immanent, emphasizes man's spiritual fruitfulness, sometimes dwelling on the pleasure God receives from it. Thompson's vision of God's immanence is similar to Traherne's, but, because of the conflict within him between Christianity and Romanticism, he is, as usual, enigmatic, tending to glorify human nature even in its weakness.

SECTION III

E X P R E S S I O N

Chapter 8

IMAGERY

The preceding chapters have provided abundant evidence that the experiences and attitudes of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Francis Thompson had a profound effect even on the way in which they used traditional mystical symbols which are almost universally understood. Conversely, their different uses of these symbols have clearly demonstrated that, though these poets are all within the tradition of Christian mysticism—a tradition which demands that both the transcendence and the immanence of God be kept in view—Vaughan and Hopkins are inclined farther towards the apprehension of divine transcendence than are Traherne and Thompson, who particularly emphasize divine immanence in man and divine immanence in nature respectively. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relationships between the kinds of vision achieved by these four poets and the imagery in their poems.

Mystical poets face special difficulties in expression merely because, even when they focus their attention on concrete things, they are conscious of something more than and other than the concrete, something which cannot easily, or even at all, be expressed with either sensuous or logical precision. Moreover, just as language is inadequate to cope with the mystical insights of the poet, so in turn is much critical theory inadequate to cope with mystical poetry. Despite the continuing influence

of the poetic aesthetic of the late nineteenth-century French Symbolists, who saw poetry as an attempt to evoke the otherness or the spiritual aspect of things, many modern critics, especially those in the English tradition, consider the vagueness with which mystical insights are so often expressed to be an inherent weakness of mystical poetry. The unnecessarily limiting assumptions that some critics hold about the subject-matter and the nature of poetry can be illustrated by the following assertions of H. R. Swardson: ". . . the conception of an other 'real' world behind this one, apprehensible only by the reason or mystic intuition, seems to destroy the stuff of poetry, the concrete world our senses and feelings respond to. . . . if poetry is necessarily concrete and particular . . . , then any such otherworldly tendency . . . is latently antipathetic to poetry."[1] Certainly, a conception of the spiritual behind the material must tend to "destroy" or dissolve the concrete world, but I do not regard this concrete world as the only "stuff of poetry". Even when Traherne describes his soul in very abstract imagery, one can respond imaginatively both to the deep spiritual mystery of his experience of mystical union with the world, and to his struggle to convey this mystery:

> A Strange Extended Orb of Joy,
> Proceeding from within,
> Which did on evry side convey
> It self, and being nigh of Kin
> To God did evry Way

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1 Poetry and the Fountain of Light: Observations on the Conflict between Christian and Classical Traditions in Seventeenth-Century Poetry (London, 1962), p.29.

Dilate it self even in an Instant, and
Like an Indivisible Centre Stand
At once Surrounding all Eternitie.[1]

The fact that mysticism is so often expressed in vague ways leads us to the question of whether there is a link between the type of mystical vision experienced by a poet and the degree of vagueness in his expression; and since the subject of this chapter is imagery, the question here is the more specific one of a link between type of vision and degree of imagistic generality. We have seen in previous chapters that Vaughan's and Hopkins's vision emphasizes God's transcendence, while Traherne's and Thompson's vision emphasizes God's immanence, and in this chapter we shall see that Vaughan's and Hopkins's imagery is more concrete than Traherne's and Thompson's. This points to the possibility that in mystical nature writing there may be a direct link between the vision of God transcendent and imagistic particularity on the one hand and the vision of God immanent and imagistic generality on the other, and that transcendent vision may therefore be more conducive than immanent vision to the writing of the kind of poetry most admired by critics of the "concrete" tradition. It must always be remembered that such possibilities cannot be proved because there are many other factors involved in the writing of poetry, the most important ones being the poet's native artistic ability and his experience of this world. One would expect that some poets are more able than others to express their vision with as much clarity and precision

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1 My Spirit (II,50), ll.86-93.

as that vision will allow. Nevertheless, in the case of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson, one can trace patterns of thought and feeling and expression which are consistent enough to lend strong support to the possibility of a relationship between the degree to which their vision emphasizes God's immanence in nature and the degree of generality in their imagery. The tracing of these patterns will occupy most of this chapter.

One of the keys to an understanding of imagery in the work of the four poets of this study seems to me to be their differing attitudes to space and size, and finally to infinity. Just how different the attitudes of mystical writers can be may be seen by contrasting Traherne's passion for the infinite with Coventry Patmore's fear of it. In the chapter on space symbolism in my book, I have amply illustrated Traherne's passion, which took him even to the point of finding it necessary "to defend God's wisdom in limiting the size of human bodies" and of other created things, and to comfort himself with the thought that true infinity of understanding, usefulness, and delight is greater than literal vastness (pp.60-61). On the contrary, in Legem Tuam Dilexi Coventry Patmore reacts intensely against the concept of infinity, and juxtaposes against it such words as "braced", "confined", "constrain'd", "cloister'd", and "prison'd":

> The 'Infinite.' Word horrible! at feud
> With life, and the braced mood
> Of power and joy and love . . . (ll.1-3)

Even God has revealed himself, not as Infinity, but as "One / Confined in Three"; and it was the devils who, in

their rebellious pride, made infinity their goal (11.7-11). As he sees it, something of a devilish "bond-disdaining spirit" (11.16-17) is in all created forms, but God's gracious law curbs this "furious power" (1.22) and sets strong bounds to it:

> But for compulsion of strong grace,
> The pebble in the road
> Would straight explode,
> And fill the ghastly boundlessness of space (11.18-21).

Thus, if one is to find freedom and joy within God's law, one must welcome the limits which he imposes on one's life and, like him, build "bulwarks 'gainst the Infinite" (11.31-36). For the "soul select", specially chosen by God for a close relationship with him, this will mean embracing bonds, including "The fetters of the threefold golden chain", the monastic vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity (11.57-77). How totally opposed this is to Traherne's view that one must refuse to accept any spiritual restrictions! In The City (II,142) the earlier poet paints an idealized picture of the city of Hereford as it appeared to him in the innocence of childhood—a fabric of glorious structures all built for him by God, his father, and filled with people, his living treasures. His possessions were boundless both in time and space; everything seemed "Environ'd with Eternity", and

> No Confines did include
> What I possest, no Limits there I view'd (11.19-20, 47-48).

For Traherne, the pity is that "we are taught / To limit and to bound our Thought" (11.69-70), and only insatiable souls like his ever recover the vision of infinity and thus regain their freedom. One of his main convictions is that

'Tis Art that hath the late Invention found
Of shutting up in little Room
Ones boundless Expectations: Men
Have in a narrow Penn
Confin'd themselvs: Free Souls can know no Bound (ll.51-55).

There is some direct evidence in Hopkins's poems that his attitude to space and size is akin to Patmore's and that he too feels some need for enclosedness, for restriction. In The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe (p.93) he paints a horrifying picture of a world without its protecting mantle of air in order to impress on the reader how comparatively unattractive to us "God's infinity" would be if it had not been "Dwindled to infancy" (ll.94-109, 18-19), and he ends with the plea to Mary:

Worldmothering air, air wild,
Wound with thee, in thee isled,
Fold home, fast fold thy child (ll.124-126).

In Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves (p.97), some of the foreboding and horror of the inexorable coming of evening, here symbolizing the coming of the Day of Judgment which will overwhelm us all, are engendered by the felt vastness of the vault of night when the detail of earth's "dapple" is obliterated. It is a vastness conjured up and reinforced in the first two lines by all the means at the poet's disposal —denotations, connotations, assonance, and rhythm:

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable,' vaulty,
voluminous, . . . stupendous
Evening strains to be time's vast,' womb-of-all,
home-of-all, hearse-of-all night.

Furthermore, as one would expect, Hopkins's landscape drawings such as "Shanklin, Isle of Wight 1866" are built up from minute details, and the descriptions in his journals also bear witness to his habit of microscopic vision: "The Horned Violet is a pretty thing, gracefully lashed. Even in

withering the flower ran through beautiful inscapes by the screwing up of the petals into straight little barrels or tubes. . . . there was nothing in itself to shew even whether the flower were shutting or opening". Even when describing large things he achieves at times an almost eccentric degree of particularity: "It [the sun] was all active and tossing out light and started as strongly forward from the field as a long stone or a boss in the knop of the chalice-stem".[1]

In his poetry his need for restriction results in a use of detailed, particularized imagery similar to that in his prose descriptions. The sunset is "the dappled-with-damson west"; stars are "March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows"; "silk-sack clouds" are wild, "wilful-wavy" "meal-drift" moulding and melting across skies.[2] It is not merely a limitation of the impression of space and size that is involved, but also that limitation which is implicit in all definition; each object or scene is pinned down by its individual distinctiveness, and its sharp outlines prevent any blurring into other objects or scenes. This treatment of nature is opposed to much of that of the Romantic poets, for even the more concrete among them, such as Wordsworth, often projected their emotions into objects, and recognized that there could be value in vague, indefinite and

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1 The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Humphry House and Graham Storey (London, 1959), plate 24, between pp.456 and 457; pp.211, 196.

2 The Wreck of the Deutschland (p.51), stanza 5, l.5; The Starlight Night (p.66), l.11; Hurrahing in Harvest (p.70), ll.3-4.

indefinable suggestiveness. Thus, whereas Wordsworth, though not in one of his best poems, describes clouds lying

> In listless quiet o'er the ethereal deep
> Scattered, a Cyclades of various shapes
> And all degrees of beauty,[1]

and Shelley evokes

> dewy morn, and odorous noon, and even,
> With sunset and its gorgeous ministers,
> And solemn midnight's tingling silentness,[2]

Hopkins, with his passion for objective truth, tries to stand back from nature and look hard at it; he "does not want to melt into the totality, to expand into vagueness, or to lose the sharp taste of himself in a possession of the 'all.'"[3] Never forgetting that the infinite God objectively exists above and beyond both man and nature, he lacks Traherne's expansive confidence in his own ability to possess the infinite, and prefers instead to approach God with more humility through the "thisness" of individual created forms. With effort he is able to see God's immanence in nature, but his vision is not so overpowering as to blur distinctions or to etherealize matter almost out of existence. Patiently he bores down through the thick weight and the solid actuality of matter, bringing all his senses into play to find the "inscapes", the innumerable aspects of Christ's incarnated form. It is the distinguishing feature of kingfishers to "catch fire", whereas dragonflies "draw flame"; but "Each mortal thing does one

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1 To the Clouds, ll.76-78.

2 Alastor, ll.5-7.

3 J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p.286.

thing and the same", for merely in fulfilling its own nature by its characteristic activity it shows forth Christ, the head of creation. Just as Christ said, ". . . for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth", so each thing at a lower level gives testimony to the truth, crying out, "What I do is me: for that I came."[1]

This Scotist view of the creation provides an ideal solution to Hopkins's problem, for it enables him to see Christ in nature without surrendering either his vision of God's transcendence or his vivid realization of the sensuous physicality of material things. By the standards of many critics, his poems benefit from that concreteness and originality of imagery which result from a conviction that the unity of all things in Christ can be found only by the individual particularization of "skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow" or of "Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls".[2] On the other hand, this clinging to the solidity of matter generally prevents him from attaining a transfigured vision of the world, a vision more fully expressive of God's immanence; and thus in his nature poetry, poetry which deals with the material realm, he seems to me the least mystical of the four poets of this study.

In his attitude to space and size, Vaughan is closer to Hopkins than to Traherne, despite the tremendous impact on the sensibilities of most seventeenth-century philosophers and poets of the "new" astronomy, which was

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1 John 18:37 (Douay Version); "As kingfishers catch fire" (p.90), ll.1, 5-8.

2 Pied Beauty (p.69), ll.2, 4.

really a return to the pre-Ptolemaic cosmology of Pythagoras. The sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century witnessed what Marjorie Hope Nicolson has called "the breaking of the circle" of the Ptolemaic cosmology by the idea of infinity. The Copernican hypothesis that the sun, not the earth, was the centre of the universe was followed by Tycho's declaration that there was no Aristotelian circle of fire between the earth and the moon and by Kepler's demonstration that the planets move about the sun in ellipses instead of in circles. In 1572 and again in 1604 a nova or "new star" had been observed in the heavens, and finally in 1610 came the publication of Galileo's Sidereus Nuncius, in which he announced his discoveries of unseen stars in profusion and of mountains on the moon. This last discovery seemed a proof that the moon and probably the planets were worlds like our own, and this concept of a plurality of worlds, when linked with the Neo-Platonic concept of a God of plenitude who delighted in superabundant creation, led inevitably to the idea of an infinity of worlds in an infinity of universes revolving around their suns, the fixed stars. Already in the late sixteenth century the Neo-Platonic philosopher Bruno had conceived of infinite space, infinite time, and an infinity of worlds, and in 1646 the influential Cambridge Platonist and poet, Henry More, published his poem, Democritus Platonissans; or, An Essay upon the Infinity of Worlds Out of Platonick Principles.[1] While daring spirits like

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1 This information was obtained from Nicolson's books, The Breaking of the Circle, rev. ed. (New York, 1960) and Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory (New York, 1959).

Traherne exultantly soar out into this newly found space, Vaughan rejects the new apparent proof of the infinity of the universe and an infinity of worlds. Instead, he seeks refuge in the limited Ptolemaic concept of the universe as a neat series of perfect spheres within the outermost circle of the fixed stars, and in Vanity of Spirit (p.248) refers to the Creator's work of bending the spheres and circling in the earth with a "glorious Ring" (ll.5-6). Moreover, he often finds God in little things and feels a sympathy with the lowliest of creatures, such as birds, flowers, and stones. He pities the bird upon whose "harmless head" storms have beaten, and the "poor stones" which can neither move nor speak, and he values the praise which the star-fire of their spirits impels them to render to God. He is intensely aware that "Each tree, herb, flowre / Are shadows of his wisedome, and his Pow'r."[1]

However, there are other tendencies in the patterns of Vaughan's thought and feeling which to some extent offset his preference for the restricted and the small. He is convinced that "seeds a kinred fire have with the sky",[2] that there is a "commerce" between earth and heaven, a "sympathy" between the various planes of existence. Thus, despite his limited cosmology, he does nevertheless exercise a cosmic imagination, and with such a remarkable degree of constancy that the network of magnetic forces binding his Hermetic universe together gives the

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1 The Bird (p.331), ll.1-22; Rules and Lessons (p.267), ll.95-96.

2 The Tempest (p.293), l.36.

reader an impression of spaciousness, though it is an ultimately restricted spaciousness. Even some stones "in the darkest nights point to their homes, / By some hid sense their Maker gave", and

> Some kinde herbs here, though low & far,
> Watch for, and know their loving star.[1]

One is not surprised to discover that he hopes not only for the resurrection of the body but also for its ascension into heaven. In Ascension-day (p.315) he shares imaginatively in Christ's victorious ascension:

> I soar and rise
> Up to the skies,
> Leaving the world their day,
> And in my flight,
> For the true light
> Go seeking all the way (ll.9-14);

while in Ascension-Hymn (p.316) he praises Christ, who alone can

> Bring bone to bone
> And rebuild man,
> And by his all subduing might
> Make clay ascend more quick then light (ll.37-42).

Related to Vaughan's cosmic imagination is his historical imagination, by which he projects his thoughts back to the "white dayes" and the "calme, golden Evenings" of the Hebrew patriarchs.[2] Even the picture of nature presented in his poems is sometimes an idealized one coloured with biblical reminiscences, such as that of "a land flowing with milk and honey" in the following address to the rainbow, the token of God's covenant that never again will the earth be destroyed by a flood (Genesis 9:8-17):

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1 Man (p.311), ll.23-25; The Favour (p.326), ll.7-8.

2 The Search (p.235), ll.24-26.

When thou dost shine darkness looks white and fair,
Storms turn to Musick, clouds to smiles and air:
Rain gently spends his honey-drops, and pours
Balm on the cleft earth, milk on grass and flowers.[1]

Related to these opposing tendencies in Vaughan's emotive and intellectual patterns is his highly individualistic use of imagery. He is often concerned with particular things in nature, yet he is not interested in the particularities of these things; the reader is not told what kind of flower it is whose root the poet presumably went to the trouble of searching for under the ground in winter, nor what kind of dead tree it is with which he feels deep empathy.[2] The impression of generality is heightened by the fact that, as in the work of most seventeenth-century poets, there is no description of landscape, and therefore little sense of place. Moreover, the particular creatures which interest him most are those, such as oaks and springs, which could equally well belong to the Holy Land or to Wales; and indeed he even writes of a palm, a tree which is certainly alien to the natural scenery of his native land.[3] On the other hand, when he is concerned with the larger and more general aspects of nature such as air and light, he sometimes tends to particularize them by treating them as concrete objects:

Ther's not a wind can stir,
Or beam passe by,

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1 The Rain-bow (p.345), ll.9-12.

2 "I walkt the other day (to spend my hour)" (p.312); The Timber (p.332).

3 The Palm-tree (p.324).

But strait I think (though far,)
Thy hand is nigh.[1]

Perhaps it is the combination of the particular with the general that gives Vaughan's imagery its unique quality, and this combination is ultimately the result of his mode of mystical apprehension.

Unlike Hopkins, Vaughan does not reconcile "full sensuous delight in the physical beauty of Nature with an awareness of the Divine glory manifest in that beauty",[2] probably because his awareness of God's immanence is more natural to him, more powerful, and more constant than Hopkins's, and is less dependent on the visual sense. Instead of separating himself from the objects of nature in order to observe and describe them minutely, he allows himself to become attuned to the sentient life which is within them and by which they are all related to one another and to God. Thus his poetry lacks both the rich sensuousness and the sharp delineations one finds in Hopkins's work, and "nature as a reality is attenuated",[3] as in his description of the "poor root"

Which all the Winter sleeps here under foot
And hath no wings
To raise it to the truth and light of things,
But is stil trod
By ev'ry wandring clod.[4]

Compared with Hopkins, then, Vaughan tends to expansion and

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1 "Come, come, what doe I here?" (p.250), ll.11-14.

2 E. C. Pettet, Of Paradise and Light: A Study of Vaughan's "Silex Scintillans" (Cambridge, 1960), p.92.

3 L. Spitz, "Process and Stasis: Aspects of Nature in Vaughan and Marvell", Huntington Library Quarterly, XXXII (1969), 141.

4 "I walkt the other day (to spend my hour)", ll.37-42.

diffusion, and to a rarefied imagery which etherealizes matter in order to express his awareness of a spiritual realm within the material realm itself.

Some critics, noting the generalized impression created by the blurring together of suggestive images in some of Vaughan's poems, have concluded that he is to a certain extent a Romantic born out of his time. Robert Ellrodt declares that "Son génie propre s'oriente plutôt vers les états vagues de l'âme 'romantique'",[1] and William Empson finds a Romantic effect of "dreamlike or hypnotic intensity" in lines such as these from "Joy of my life! while left me here" (p.253):

> Gods Saints are shining lights: who stays
> Here long must passe
> O're dark hills, swift streames, and steep ways
> As smooth as glasse (ll.17-20).

As Empson points out, the reader's mind does not separate the "evanescent but powerful suggestions" of these lines; all "are dissolved in your mind . . . into an apparently direct sensory image which cannot be attached to any one of the senses."[2] It is worthwhile noting, though, that in the same stanza Vaughan's image of the saints as stars guiding us throughout our earthly pilgrimage is unexpectedly brought down to earth and transformed into a homely image of the saints as candles:

> But these all night
> Like Candles, shed

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1 L'inspiration personnelle et l'esprit du temps chez les poètes métaphysiques anglais, première partie, tome II (Paris, 1960), 181.

2 "An Early Romantic", Cambridge Review, May 31, 1929, p.496.

Their beams, and light
Us into Bed (11.21-24).

It seems to me that in Vaughan's poetry there is a direct relation between his "Romantic" vagueness of expression and his apprehension of divine immanence; and this apprehension is sufficiently developed for Hoxie Neale Fairchild to feel that his mysticism has a pantheistic quality that reminds one of Wordsworth.[1] Unlike the Romantic mystical poets, however, Vaughan is deeply conscious that divine grace is not inherent in nature, but infused into it by a transcendent God. All natural objects are aware of and dependent on God, of whose power and wisdom they are merely "shadows", and to whom they offer up praise:

> There's not a Spring,
> Or Leafe but hath his Morning-hymn; Each Bush
> And Oak doth know I AM.[2]

Indeed, the previous chapters of this study have shown that Vaughan's main emphasis is on God's transcendence rather than on his immanence; and in my opinion he can appear pantheistic only when contrasted with poets such as Herbert and Hopkins, whose sense of divine immanence is not nearly as highly developed. Moreover, the feeling of expansiveness and vagueness evoked by his imagery is limited by the restrictions imposed by his attitude to space and size, an attitude which is ultimately related to his powerful apprehension of God's transcendence. As has been noted in Chapter 4 (p.95), even the star-fire in each creature is for

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1 Religious Trends in English Poetry, I (New York, 1939), 567-568.

2 Rules and Lessons, 11.95-96, 14-16.

him an enclosed and therefore restricted light.

Vaughan's cosmic imagination pales before the audacities of what John Walsh calls Thompson's "space rapture", "induced by contemplation of illimitable distances, unimaginable sizes, inconceivable immensities—by the sheer, staggering mystery of it all."[1] His imaginative portrayal of space is comparable with that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in The Blessed Damozel, where the dizzy distance between heaven and the earthly universe below is evoked through the eyes of the damozel: ". . . looking downward thence / She scarce could see the sun" (11.29-30). The divine love-chase in The Hound of Heaven is pictured by Thompson on an awe-inspiring, cosmic scale:

> Across the margent of the world I fled,
> And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,
> Smiting for shelter on their clangèd bars;
> Fretted to dulcet jars
> And silvern chatter the pale ports o' the moon
> (p.89, 11.25-29).

Similarly, Ode to the Setting Sun (p.95), Orient Ode (p.195), An Anthem of Earth (p.259), and many other poems by him contain space imagery. The rising sun, for example, is hymned in inflated terms:

> Through breachèd darkness' rampart, a
> Divine assaulter, art thou come!
> God whom none may live and mark!
> Borne within thy radiant ark,
> While the Earth, a joyous David,
> Dances before thee from the dawn to dark.[2]

At times, however, ". . . large cosmic forces are handled

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1 Strange Harp, Strange Symphony: The Life of Francis Thompson (New York, 1967), pp.227-228.

2 Orient Ode, p.196, 11.14-19.

with a . . . too easy assurance which tends to trivialise them"; "Thompson . . . is shrinking the cosmos to the dimensions of his own dreams."[1] Thus he swings the earth a trinket at his wrist, and angels pelt each other with handfuls of stars.[2] In The Blessed Damozel, Rossetti, too, compares cosmic bodies with little things; the earth spun "like a fretful midge" (ll.35-36), and

> the curled moon
> Was like a little feather
> Fluttering far down the gulf (ll.55-57).

But in their contexts these descriptions, far from trivializing the universe, actually emphasize the vastness of space separating the blessed damozel in heaven from her lover on earth, whereas, as John Walsh has noted, "In Thompson's personal universe the stars . . . are nearly always small enough to be held in the hand".[3] Contrariwise, Thompson often uses grandiose terms for little things; the snowflake is

> Insculped and embossed,
> With His hammer of wind,
> And His graver of frost,

and

> One grass-blade in its veins
> Wisdom's whole flood contains:
> Thereon my foundering mind
> Odyssean fate can find.[4]

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1 Peter Butter, Francis Thompson, supplement to British Book News, No. 141 on Writers and Their Work (London, 1961), p.14; J. C. Reid, Francis Thompson: Man and Poet (London, 1959), p.105.

2 The Hound of Heaven, p.93, l.2; A Judgement in Heaven (p.145), l.5.

3 Op. cit., p.231.

4 To a Snowflake (p.333), ll.20-22; All Flesh (p.347), ll.5-8.

There are several factors which probably all contribute to the unexpected scale of Thompson's comparisons, his couplings of large and small. Everard Meynell and Pierre Danchin emphasize his "desire to link up the sights and sensations of the universe" to express the mystery of its unity. According to this view, the poet's microscopic vision is the corollary of his astronomic vision, for both affirm the mystical truth that "thou canst not stir a flower / Without troubling of a star".[1] M. H. Abrams and J. C. Reid associate his treatment of space and size with his opium addiction. Abrams refers to "the extraordinary mutations of space" in Thompson's poetry as an effect of opium, and Reid declares that "In such circumstances, the writer often sees himself as God, the great spirit dominating the cosmos, swinging planets like bracelet-ornaments, using stars as playthings, precisely as Thompson treats the universe in his poetry."[2] His projection of himself outwards into the cosmos and his desire to dominate it can, however, be understood without reference to opium. Thompson was profoundly influenced by the Romantic spirit, and this kind of expansiveness may be one of the manifestations of the Romantic preoccupation with the self and the consequent desire for one's capacities to be limitless. Shelley indulged in cosmic expansiveness,

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1 The Life of Francis Thompson (London, 1926), p.154; Francis Thompson: La Vie et l'Œuvre d'un Poète (Paris, 1959), p.259; The Mistress of Vision, p.187, ll.6-7.

2 Abrams, The Milk of Paradise: The Effect of Opium Visions on the Works of De Quincey, Crabbe, Francis Thompson, and Coleridge (New York, 1971), p.47; Reid, op. cit., p.34.

notably in Prometheus Unbound, and it is clear from his essay on Shelley that Thompson admired this great Romantic and felt a kinship with him. To Thompson, Shelley is a child whose "box of toys" is the universe; and moreover, one of the characteristics of the child is his ability "to live in a nutshell and to count [himself] the king of infinite space".[1] I think that Thompson's expansiveness is as much an aspect of his Romantic inclinations as is his tendency to pantheism, which has been discussed previously (pp.17-18, 105-110); and indeed it is possible to discover a psychological association between the desire for unrestricted freedom and the tendency to pantheism revealed in a concentration on the vision of God's immanence in the material realm at the expense of the vision of his transcendence. Hoxie Neale Fairchild, who defines Romanticism as "faith in human energy" and pantheism as "the ascription of numinousness to a feeling of cosmic unity and interfusion", maintains that "The taproot of romanticism . . . is an eternal and universal and primary fact of consciousness: man's desire for self-trust, self-expression, self-expansion. That is why the interfusion experience is so precious to the romanticist: by effacing all distinctions and boundaries it permits unlimited outward projection of personal energy."[2]

Another facet of Thompson's expansiveness is the

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1 The Works of Francis Thompson, ed. Wilfred Meynell (London, 1913), III, 18, 7.

2 Religious Trends in English Poetry, III (New York, 1949), 5, 3.

opulent splendour and extravagance, even violent flamboyance, of much of his imagery. Strikingly bold and exotic descriptions like this one of a poppy seem strangely Oriental:

> With burnt mouth, red like a lion's, it drank
> The blood of the sun as he slaughtered sank,
> And dipped its cup in the purpurate shine
> When the Eastern conduits ran with wine.[1]

An important factor in the total effect of such imagery is the use of strong colours. Unlike Vaughan, whose comparatively pallid and conservative imagery is in keeping with his choice of green and white as favourite colours, Thompson is attracted by the intensity of colours such as red and purple. This preference may be due in part to Pre-Raphaelite influence, for Hopkins, too, has a predilection for intense colours which he expresses in a letter of 1880: ". . . I remember that crimson and pure blues seemed to me spiritual and heavenly sights fit to draw tears once".[2] There is, however, a great difference between the ways in which Hopkins and Thompson use strong colours. In Hopkins's poetry they help to differentiate one thing from another, to sharpen the contrasted outlines of individual things; thus "blue-bleak embers . . . gash gold-vermilion" and

> Star-eyed strawberry-breasted
> Throstle above her nested
>
> Cluster of bugle blue eggs thin
> Forms and warms the life within.[3]

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1 The Poppy (p.5), ll.5-8.

2 The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London, 1935), p.38.

3 The Windhover (p.69), ll.13-14; The May Magnificat (p.76), ll.19-22.

Thompson usually prefers to describe objects or scenes which have an indeterminate or ephemeral beauty, often with colours running into one another so that one gains an impression of bright but soft-edged hues:

> Who girt dissolvèd lightnings in the grape?
> Summered the opal with an Irised flush?[1]

More often than most other poets, he goes further than this running together of different colours and blends different senses together:

> Thy visible music-blasts make deaf the sky,
> Thy cymbals clang to fire the Occident,
> Thou dost thy dying so triumphally:
> I see the crimson blaring of thy shawms![2]

Synaesthesia in Thompson's poetry may be the expression of "a stage in . . . reaching through the senses towards something beyond",[3] for he possesses a very strong apprehension of a spiritual realm within the visible world, and it seems probable that, as in Vaughan's poetry, this apprehension is related to many kinds of vagueness and diffuseness of imagery. However, Thompson's generality and abstractness seem more marked than Vaughan's, and this may possibly be linked with the corresponding lack of a constant and strong awareness of God's transcendence. More than in Vaughan, words are often used mainly for their emotional connotations, or to express a spiritual state, or, especially in his later poems, to evoke symbolic vision:

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1 Ode to the Setting Sun, p.100, ll.21-22.

2 Ibid., p.96, ll.20-23.

3 Peter H. Butter, "Francis Thompson's Imagery", in The Hound of Heaven: A Commemorative Volume, ed. G. Krishnamurti (London, 1967), p.32.

> Washed with new fire to their irradiant birth,
> Reintegrated are the heavens and earth;
> From sky to sod,
> The world's unfolded blossom smells of God.[1]

Despite the sensuousness of his imagery, then, Thompson rarely gives the reader any feeling of the concreteness of material things, and one critic goes so far as to declare that he "looked much more to the imagined natural world of literary tradition than to the experience of nature itself."[2] Certainly he has little interest in observing or describing the detail of natural objects.

Traherne, with whose imagery I have dealt at some length in my book (pp.107-119), has much in common with Thompson. Most of his images are on a large scale, he tends to magnify small things, there is little feeling of solidity, and there is a lack of detailed nature-observation. He prefers the general to the particular and the indefinite to the definite, he avoids the limitation of definition, he lacks restraint, and he achieves an effect of spacious grandeur by the accumulation of generalities. Nevertheless, his passion for the infinite and his tendency to deify man are so powerful that they enable him to go one step farther than Thompson and dominate space without ever trivializing the universe in any way. His experience leads him to maintain that the human soul can expand indefinitely to include everything in itself:

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1 From the Night of Forebeing, p.208, ll.2-5.

2 Paul van Kuykendall Thomson, Francis Thompson: A Critical Biography (New York, 1961), p.88.

> For so my Spirit was an Endless Sphere,
> Like God himself, and Heaven and Earth was there.[1]

Moreover, his poetic expression is even more etherialized than Thompson's because it lacks richness, variety, and sensuousness in its imagery; his expansiveness is revealed in other ways. On the contrary, in one aspect Traherne's vision may be regarded as more concrete than Thompson's: the earlier poet always experiences nature freshly and at first hand.

In this study of the imagery of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson, a very definite pattern emerges. The deeper the passion for the infinite, the stronger the tendency to vagueness, and the greater the concentration on the vision of divine immanence at the expense of the vision of divine transcendence, perhaps because the former vision satisfies more fully the expansive desires of the human soul. Since nature poetry deals with the material realm, it seems most mystical when nature is pictured as transformed by the divine immanence; yet such a vision most invites the tendency to vagueness. It therefore seems no coincidence to me that Hopkins, who in his nature poetry is perhaps the least mystical of the four, is usually considered a very good poet, particularly by critics of the "concrete" tradition, while Traherne, perhaps the most mystical, is appreciated as a poet by very few readers. Many of Thompson's poetic weaknesses may be traced to the pantheistic tendencies of his mode of vision, and even

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1 Silence (II,44), ll.85-86.

Vaughan, who from the Christian point of view usually attains a very apt balance between transcendence and immanence, is considered by some critics to be too vague in his expression.

Chapter 9

STYLE

A poet's mode of vision may affect not only his choice of symbols and images, but also his method of using them. We have seen, for example, that the traditional kind of Christian humility before God transcendent not only evokes that type of light symbolism by which the human soul is pictured as a mere star by comparison with the divine Sun, but may also be conducive to a particularity in the use of images which contrasts with the imagistic generality of mystical writers like Traherne, who more daringly celebrate God's immanence in matter. It is my conviction that the relationship between a poet's experience of divine Reality and his mode of expression is much more deeply rooted than has as yet been revealed in this study. Accordingly, in this chapter I shall explore some of those more detailed aspects of poetic style which may be associated with the kinds of vision achieved by Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Francis Thompson.

In the previous chapter Hopkins's need for restriction emerged very clearly from a consideration of his imagery (pp.164-167, 179), but it may be objected that a poet whose style is so original must surely have felt some need for artistic freedom. This is undoubtedly so; yet he himself recognized that he had freed himself from the shackles of conventional metre, diction, and syntax, only to embrace far stricter bonds in what Hoxie Neale Fairchild

describes as "a hectically agonized straining after inscape and instress".[1] It is as if in art, as in life, he was impelled to demand impossibilities of himself, to feel free to impose on himself more and more severe limitations. ". . . I have of myself made verse so laborious", he confesses to Robert Bridges in a letter of 1879.[2] His sensibility needed the concentrated intensity, the dynamic directness, and the disciplined objectivity of a highly dramatic art, an art which he felt required a frequent use of the excited, staccato immediacy of sprung rhythm. The sense of rigid control is given prominence by its contrast with the sensuous richness of his often synaesthetic imagery:

> And the azurous hung hills are his world-wielding shoulder
> Majestic—as a stallion stalwart, very-violet-sweet!—
> These things, these things were here and but the beholder
> Wanting.[3]

Harold Whitehall traces most of the distinctive elements of the style of Hopkins's middle period, the period when he wrote most of his nature poems, back to a possible source in sprung rhythm. Alliteration, internal rhyme, word repetition, and assonance are used, he maintains, "to reinforce . . . the strong positions in the rhythmic pattern". "To write sprung rhythm, he was obliged to use alliteration, internal rhyme, assonance and word repetition.

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1 Religious Trends in English Poetry, V (New York and London, 1962), 85.

2 The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London, 1935), p.66.

3 Hurrahing in Harvest (p.70), ll.9-12.

To use these devices, he needed new compounds and syntactic shortcuts."[1] It is probable, however, that his predilection for consonance and assonance springs also from his belief in the essential unity behind all differences, since for him all things—sounds as well as objects—equally contain Christ. Thus, for example, it is partly because of the repetition of "l", "s", "w", and "t" sounds, and the assonance in "wielding" and "sweet", that the paradoxical images of the stallion and the violets become fused with each other and with the "hung hills" of blue air. Similarly, the various listed things in poems such as Pied Beauty (p.69) and "As kingfishers catch fire" (p.90) seem to be regarded as if in apposition to one another. It is not surprising that Hopkins was strongly attracted to the harmonic techniques of Welsh poetry, and that in a letter of 1877 he asserts: "The chiming of consonants I got in part from the Welsh, which is very rich in sound and imagery."[2] Moreover, he sometimes employs these harmonic techniques in lines which are not basically in sprung rhythm, and in the following passage from The Sea and the Skylark (p.68), mainly conventional metre is thereby endowed with the effect of being sprung:

> Left hand, off land, I hear the lark ascend,
> His rash-fresh re-winded new-skeinèd score
> In crisps of curl off wild winch whirl, and pour
> And pelt music, till none's to spill nor spend (11.5-8).

Even the poet himself later felt obliged to apologize for

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1 "Sprung Rhythm", in The Kenyon Critics, Gerard Manley Hopkins (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1945), pp.49, 54.

2 The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, op. cit., p.38.

the obscurity caused here by technical intricacies: "It was written in my Welsh days . . . when I was fascinated with . . . consonant-chime, and, as in Welsh englyns, 'the sense', as one of themselves said, 'gets the worst of it'; in this case it exists but is far from glaring."[1] One suspects that at times the difficulties in his poems are due partly to a baroque love of intricacy for its own sake, which in turn seems to stem from a desire for a restriction of choice, for an extraordinarily detailed precision of musical ornamentation.

What Elisabeth W. Schneider calls Hopkins's "passionate exactitude" of language and imagery[2] sometimes extends beyond what can ordinarily be expected of the medium of words, even when words are the vehicle of poetry. Often in his work, single words function grammatically in more than one way, as do "leaves" and "blooms" in "The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush / The descending blue"; or they express more than one denotation, as does "magnify", meaning both "enlarge" and "praise", in

> How she [Mary] did in her stored
> Magnify the Lord;

or they play on two nuances of one basic meaning, as does "ware" in "wáre of a wórld where bút these' twó tell"; or they evoke words similar in sound, as does "told" in "a virginal tongue told"; or they draw attention to themselves by syntactic displacement, as does "fair" in "have fair

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1 Ibid., p.163.

2 The Dragon in the Gate: Studies in the Poetry of G. M. Hopkins (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), p.12.

their fling".[1] He is even capable of presenting the reader with deliberately ambiguous syntactic structures; the final sentence of the sonnet Spring may be read not only as a prayer to Christ to save "Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy", but also as a directive to such innocent minds to lay hold on Christ in their lives:

> Have, get, before it cloy,
>
> Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
> Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
> Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

The result of such crammed complexity is that, in Hopkins's poetry, the words themselves tend to take on the concreteness and distinctiveness of individual physical things, just as his images do; and in the previous chapter of this study (pp.166-167) we have seen that this emphasis on solidity is in keeping with his emphasis on God's transcendence and that it generally prevents the attainment of a vision more fully expressive of God's immanence.

In the consistent density of his mature style Hopkins is unmatched by any of the other three poets, though Vaughan occasionally approaches Hopkins's concreteness and economy of diction and his intensity of harmony and rhythm, usually for only a few lines, as in Unprofitablenes (p.273):

> 'Twas but Just now my bleak leaves hopeles hung
> Sullyed with dust and mud;
> Each snarling blast shot through me, and did share
> Their Youth, and beauty (ll.2-5);

or in The Proffer (p.321):

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1 Spring (p.67), ll.6-7; The May Magnificat (p.76), ll.31-32; Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves (p.97), l.13; The Wreck of the Deutschland (p.51), stanza 17, l.8; Spring, l.8.

O poys'nous, subtile fowls!
The flyes of hell
That buz in every ear, and blow on souls
Until they smell
And rot (ll.13-17).

As with Hopkins, Vaughan's fondness for alliteration and assonance is probably due in part to the influence of Welsh poetry, but, as one would expect of a poet who was calmer and perhaps more assured in his spiritual life, he uses these musical devices with moderation and with a natural grace that shows little or no trace of that straining after the impossible in intricacy that sometimes mars the later poet's expression. It is interesting to note, too, that the second line of Unprofitablenes, when read in the most natural way, falls into sprung rhythm: "'Twas but Júśt now my bleák leáves hópeles húng"; but here there is no Hopkinsian sense of a rigid rhythmic control. At the opposite extreme, however, Vaughan is capable of couching banalities in conventional, regular rhythms and forced rhymes:

Thus by the Crosse Salvation runnes,
Affliction is a mother,
Whose painfull throws yield many sons,
Each fairer than the other.[1]

Indeed, so uneven in quality is Vaughan's poetry that it would be inaccurate to speak of his "style", were there not some features of his work that are recognizably and characteristically his.

The difficulty of identifying the characteristics of Vaughan's style is due not only to variations in poetic quality, but also to opposing tendencies in his manner of

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1 "Thou that know'st for whom I mourne" (p.247), ll.45-48.

expression, tendencies which spring from his need for both restraint and freedom; and in my opinion these stylistic paradoxes are related to his balanced vision of God as both transcendent and immanent. His poetry is seldom as simple as it appears. Apart from occasional Latinisms or special Hermetic terms, as in poems such as "Sure, there's a tye of Bodyes!" (p.260), his diction is usually deceptively clear, yet E. C. Pettet has pointed out that there are Hermetic overtones even in his favourite word "green", since benedicta viriditas was for the alchemists the essence and wonder of the vegetable world.[1] If one takes these overtones into account, much of Vaughan's work gains in symbolic suggestiveness, as does the last stanza of Love, and Discipline (p.296):

> For as thy hand the weather steers,
> So thrive I best, 'twixt joyes, and tears,
> And all the year have some green Ears.

Similarly, when he uses favourite terms such as those associated with light and clouds, one feels not only the special significances they have in the particular poem, but also the other connotations they have taken on through their use in image-clusters which recur again and again in his work. Thus, for example, the "clouded starre" of The Morning-watch (p.255) evokes the "One twinkling ray" of "Joy of my life!" (p.253), with all its connotations of secret magnetic influences and of the communion of saints. Often in his best poems words seem at the same time to have both a precise core of denotative meaning and a hazy aura of

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1 Of Paradise and Light: A Study of Vaughan's "Silex Scintillans" (Cambridge, 1960), p.73.

connotative feeling built up through repetition of ideas with a somewhat limited vocabulary. The expansiveness of this emotional aura is quite foreign to the mature work of Hopkins, who usually succeeds in placing deliberate restrictions on the connotations as well as on the denotations of his diction.

Vaughan's combination of the general and the particular is matched by his easy juxtaposition of the abstract and the concrete, the spiritual and the homely. In the third stanza of "Joy of my life!" God's saints, after being symbolized by stars, are charmingly compared with candles which "light / Us into Bed", while at the end of The Dawning (p.283) he intimately prays that Christ will grant him the grace to be ready for his second coming to this world, so that

> Thou'lt find me drest and on my way,
> Watching the Break of thy great day.

Occasionally Vaughan achieves a rare degree of spiritual intensity by heightening this kind of juxtaposition. The last stanza of Quickness (p.375) is almost startling in its contrast between the false and the true life:

> Thou art a toylsom Mole, or less
> A moving mist
> But life is, what none can express,
> A quickness, which my God hath kist.

Here the effectiveness depends not only on the concreteness of the "toylsom Mole" and the "moving mist" in contrast with the inexpressible "quickness", but also on the poet's juxtaposition of an abstract noun, "quickness", with a concrete, active, physical verb, "hath kist". The abstractness of "quickness" is enhanced by its breadth of

meaning, for, while denoting "vital principle", it also has connotations of animation and of acuteness of perception.

Another paradox in the work of a poet so relatively diffuse as Vaughan is his opposing tendency to compression and concentration, a tendency which, as I have shown, is more typical of Hopkins, whose need for such restriction is in accord with his strong emphasis on the transcendence of God. On the one hand, some of Vaughan's words or phrases seem simply to fill in space, usually to complete a rhyming line, as in these examples from The Search (p.235):

> And here (O fate!)
> I sit, where once my Saviour sate (ll.27-28),

and

> The skinne, and shell of things
> Though faire,
> are not
> Thy wish, nor pray'r (ll.81-84);

on the other hand, in a single phrase of the same poem he can intensify his meaning by using the word "heaven" in its more unusual sense, "to make heavenly", and by loading the word "walks" with two denotations, "periods of walking" and "places for walking": "He heav'nd their walks" (l.61). The best-known examples of this power of his thus to energize the spiritual are in The Morning-watch:

> This Dew fell on my Breast;
> O how it Blouds,
> And Spirits all my Earth! (ll.7-9)

Similarly, Vaughan's fairly loose and long-cadenced rhythm, which is so often undistinguished or even mechanical, is sometimes varied by shortened lines which Edmund Blunden

describes as "powerful abruptnesses".[1] Thus one feels a heightening of dramatic tension when in The Stone (p.350) the poet suddenly exclaims "But I (Alas!)" (l.18), and when at the end of Anguish (p.362) he cries out

O my God, hear my cry;
Or let me dye!——

Just as Vaughan's imagery and diction are restricted in their vagueness and abstractness, so are the other elements of his style limited in their diffuseness; and, as was shown in the previous chapter (pp.171-175), this sense of a restricted freedom is what one would expect of a poet with a powerful apprehension of both divine immanence and divine transcendence.

As the quality of Thompson's poems is still more uneven than that of Vaughan's, most readers of poems such as Sister Songs (p.19) and A Corymbus for Autumn (p.115) are forced to admit that occasional passages of true genius are often intermingled with "a large amount of irritating rubbish",[2] and the inconsistency makes it difficult to generalize about his "style". Furthermore, even in his earlier poems he could deliberately choose different styles to suit his purpose; the Wordsworthian simplicity of Daisy (p.3) contrasts with the more characteristic imagistic and verbal extravagance of Ode to the Setting Sun (p.95). Any discussion of Thompson's art is also complicated by the fact that, under the influence of Coventry Patmore, he strove in

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1 On the Poems of Henry Vaughan: Characteristics and Intimations (London, 1927), p.46.

2 Fairchild, op. cit., V, 78.

his later poems to restrain his loose imagination, and finally achieved the quieter, more austere tone of The Kingdom of God (p.349). One feels, however, that Thompson, unlike Hopkins, was not by nature drawn to restraint; and most of the poems dedicated to Patmore, such as Orient Ode (p.195) and From the Night of Forebeing (p.204), are still marred by some effusive displays of exaggerated enthusiasm:

> Now is no time for sober gravity,
> Season enough has Nature to be wise;
> But now discinct, with raiment glittering free,
> Shake she the ringing rafters of the skies
> With festal footing and bold joyance sweet,
> And let the earth be drunken and carouse![1]

Both Hopkins and Thompson have been labelled "baroque" by some critics, but Thompson's love of intricacy and over-ingenuity is of a very different kind from Hopkins's, for its source is a desire for freedom in decoration, rather than a desire for restriction of choice; and in this he is more typical of Baroque art than Hopkins. Instead of restricting his choice of words in accordance with a preconceived detailed pattern of sound, Thompson's love of the ornate frees him to indulge in verbal affectations such as inversion and in a lavish decorativeness of imagery and diction that tends at times to obscure the thought or feeling instead of clarifying it. It is true that at his best, as in The Hound of Heaven (p.89), the spiritual, emotive, and imaginative impulse behind the poetry is so strong that it sweeps the reader onward, despite the sometimes extravagant style; but in his less successful work, such as the Proem to Sister Songs, the

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1 From the Night of Forebeing, p.205, ll.4-9.

reader is constantly wearied and detained by accumulations of ingenious words and images which almost bury the main patterns of the poet's thought, emotion, and imagination:

> Of thy two maidens somewhat must I say,
> . . . . . .
> Ere eve has struck and furled
> The beamy-textured tent transpicuous,
> Of webbèd cœrule wrought and woven calms,
> Whence has paced forth the lambent-footed sun
> (p.20, ll.16-22).

Thompson's expansive Romantic propensities make him as word-intoxicated as he is space-intoxicated, and much of his diffuseness results from an emphasis on the connotations and sounds of words at the expense of their denotations. Pierre Danchin maintains that Thompson chose many unusual words because of their density of meaning, and that this choice stems from a desire for conciseness and economy;[1] but it seems more probable that, because of his inflated concept of the distinctiveness and importance of poetry as opposed to the more ordinary uses of language, he preferred odd words for their own sake, and, as Frederick B. Tolles and J. C. Reid maintain, sought to create a special language for poetry.[2] In a bardic manner he often chooses over-descriptive or over-mellifluous words from any source, with the result that his poems abound in Latinisms, compound words, and rare, archaic, or obsolete words. The universe wears a "vidual curch" until the sun rises; rainbows

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1 Francis Thompson: La Vie et l'Œuvre d'un Poète (Paris, 1959), pp.345-348.

2 "The Praetorian Cohorts: A Study of the Language of Francis Thompson's Poetry", English Studies, XXII (1940), 63; Francis Thompson: Man and Poet (London, 1959), p.100.

"maniple" the passing shower; and he hopes to sing of the sun's deeds "In worship-warranting moiety".[1] Lois I. Nichols even refers to Thompson's frequent use of Latinate present and past participles, sometimes coined, as an "addiction", and notes also his fondness for abstractions pluralized.[2] Clouds are "Washed in the lambent waters of the sun"; the rose is "Saturate with purple glows"; his flesh affirms "The preparate worm"; and evening "lit her glimmering tapers / Round the day's dead sanctities".[3]

Thompson's lack of emotional restraint, the superabundance of his imagery, and the gorgeousness of his vocabulary are matched by the looseness of his rhythms. Enjambement is freely used, and the length of the lines often varies seemingly in accordance with his fancy. Usually, however, the effect of such variation is not merely chaotic, or even haphazard, and on closer examination the main principle behind it appears to be the free expression of the degrees of emotional intensity experienced by the poet. The following lines from Ode to the Setting Sun demonstrate how he can heighten the lyrical movement of his verse by increasing the length of the lines as his level of feeling rises to a soaring rapture:

> When the angels rose-chapleted
> Sang each to other,

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1 Orient Ode, p.201, l.13; Ode to the Setting Sun, p.96, l.14; Orient Ode, p.200, l.16.

2 "Francis Thompson: Flight and Fall", Thought: A Review of Culture and Idea, XXXVI (1961), 119.

3 From the Night of Forebeing, p.206, l.4; Ode to the Setting Sun, p.100, l.10; To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster, p.110, l.12; The Hound of Heaven, p.91, ll.24-25.

> The vaulted blaze overhead
> Of their vast pinions spread,
> Hailing thee brother;
> How chaos rolled back from the wonder,
> And the First Morn knelt down to thy visage of thunder!
> (p.98, ll.7-13)

The Romantic love of freedom, or even licence, reflected in many facets of Thompson's most characteristic style is what one would expect of a poet who, despite his Christian convictions, at times barely manages to restrain his pantheistic tendency to worship nature, a tendency which, as we have seen, is revealed in the ways in which he uses traditional symbolism.

Traherne's love of freedom is expressed in a very different way from Thompson's. The later poet revelled in a freedom to exploit language, imagery, and emotion through elaboration and ornamentation, whereas the earlier poet desired freedom from the trammels of language altogether, perhaps because his vision of the world was more consistently, and perhaps more intensely, mystical. In my book I have dealt at some length with the style of this seventeenth-century poet (pp.107-121). He displays such remarkably little interest in words for their own sake that his diction and syntax are extremely simple and his rhythm is uncomplicated to an unusual degree:

> How easy is it to believ the Skie
> Is Wide and Great and fair? How soon may we
> Be made to know the Sun is Bright and High,
> And very Glorious, when its Beams we see?[1]

Moreover, the very few figures of speech admitted into his poetry, unlike the conceits characteristic of the

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1 Ease (II,64), ll.9-12.

seventeenth-century metaphysical poets, are eminently clear and natural:

> Drown'd in their Customs, I became
> A Stranger to the Shining Skies,
> Lost as a dying Flame.[1]

Nevertheless, his enthusiastic, expansive nature and his lack of restraint are clearly displayed in his diffuseness: his repetition of general images and ideas and his catalogues of words. Sometimes, as in the following lines from The Salutation (II,4), such catalogues are effective as rhapsodic enumeration:

> The Earth, the Seas, the Light, the Day, the Skies,
> The Sun and Stars are mine; if those I prize (ll.29-30);

but they frequently result in verbose clumsiness, as in these lines from Speed (II,68):

> Fields, Mountains, Valleys, Woods,
> Floods, Cities, Churches, Men, for me did shine (ll.17-18).

To an amazing degree Traherne attained his stated aim of writing "transparent Words";[2] and his loosely woven simplicity is diametrically opposed to the opacity of Hopkins's diction as revealed in the solid density of such lines as these:

> Towery city and branchy between towers;
> Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmèd, lark-charmèd, rook-racked,
> river-rounded.[3]

Such a striking difference is part of the wider contrast between the liberty of Traherne's generality and the discipline of Hopkins's particularity, and the previous

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1 The Apostacy (II,95), ll.60-62.

2 The Author to the Critical Peruser (II,2), l.3.

3 Duns Scotus's Oxford (p.79), ll.1-2.

chapter of this study has demonstrated the relationships between a passion for freedom and an emphasis on God's immanence, and between a desire for restriction and an emphasis on God's transcendence.

The pattern which emerges from a study of the style of the four poets is similar to the pattern revealed by the study of their imagery in Chapter 8. Hopkins's economical, strictly controlled, particularized style contrasts with the diffuseness, generality, and freedom of the styles of Traherne and Thompson, while Vaughan's style is marked by opposing tendencies toward these extremes. The latter's diffuseness by comparison with Hopkins is indicative of the strong attraction which freedom from restraint tends to hold for those who glimpse God's immanence in nature, even when their vision of God's transcendence is more powerful than such glimpses.

Chapter 10

STRUCTURE

In this final chapter in my study of Christian nature mysticism in the work of my chosen four poets, I shall explore those wider aspects of poetic expression which may be termed "structural", and endeavour to associate these aspects with the varying modes of spiritual awareness experienced by the poets. It seems appropriate to deal first with those features of poetic structure which are most closely related to style, and afterwards to deal with the general structure of whole poems.

We have seen that Hopkins's vision of God as primarily transcendent is in accord with his need for restriction, a need which is reflected in both his imagistic particularity and his rigidly controlled, though very original, style. His originality is not primarily the result of a love of artistic freedom, and most certainly does not spring from a lack of restraint. Rather, it is because of the strictness of his adherence to his own highly individual standards of poetic utterance that his poetry sometimes borders on the eccentric. Elisabeth W. Schneider rightly declares that in his poetry "Both form and language are . . . paradoxically on the one hand severe and on the other wayward, extravagant, sometimes outlandish";[1] but this "waywardness" is of a very special kind that cannot be

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1 The Dragon in the Gate: Studies in the Poetry of G. M. Hopkins (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), p.13.

mistaken for licence.

In his attempt to form each poem into an extremely intricate pattern of sound and meaning, Hopkins experimented laboriously not only with metre, diction, and syntax, but also with rhymes, sometimes even daring to split a word into two parts so that the first part forms an end-rhyme in his scheme, and the rest of the word begins a new line of poetry. Thus in the sonnet, The Windhover (p.69), he emphasizes the regal aspect of the falcon by dividing the word "kingdom" to rhyme the first line with all the other lines in the octave, since "king-" rhymes with both the other three masculine endings and the four feminine endings. Similarly, in the octave of Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves (p.97), the chaotic merging of objects into one another as evening advances is imitated by the breaking of the word "astray" into two parts. The rhyming of "stupendous" with "overbend us", "end, as-", and "end us" illustrates to what extent Hopkins could disregard convention in his concentration on the spoken rather than the written word. Other ingenious rhymes which spring from the originality of his concepts of language and poetry include "Saviour" and "gave you a" in Hurrahing in Harvest (p.70) and "rounded" and "town did" in Duns Scotus's Oxford (p.79); but his unusual rhymes are sometimes more bizarre than successful, as the following lines from The Loss of the Eurydice (p.72) show:

> Death teeming in by her portholes
> Raced down decks, round messes of mortals (ll.39-40).

Nevertheless, even "portholes" and "mortals" may be

defensible, if read in the light of the fact that sprung rhythm, more than conventional metre, places an unusually strong emphasis on the stressed syllables of words at the expense of unstressed syllables. Hopkins's use of regular rhyme schemes in nearly all his poems bears further witness to the strictness of his versification.

Compared with Hopkins's careful craftsmanship, Vaughan's use of rhyme often seems lax, but this apparent laxity could be due partly to his Welsh pronunciation of English, as in his rhyming of "s" and "z" sounds, and to the influence of Welsh poetic practice. More freely than most English poets, he rhymes plurals with singulars, for example, "winds" with "mind" in the first stanza of Regeneration (p.226), and "thoughts" with "nought" in the first stanza of the song at the end of The Search (p.235); and sometimes he even rhymes a stressed word with a syllable that is unstressed both in the natural speech rhythm and in the metre, for example, "thee" with "glorie" in the third stanza of Mount of Olives (p.244), and "Sun" with "contraction" in The Resolve (p.265). His very frequent use of partial rhymes, such as "this" and "accesse" in the second stanza of The Showre (p.242) and "dust" and "huske" in The Pursuite (p.244), is unusual for his time and often seems to have no particular artistic purpose, though to the modern ear it is not unpleasant or even very obtrusive. Occasionally, however, Vaughan uses partial rhymes to very good effect, as in Regeneration, where the difficulty of his stumbling upward pilgrimage is emphasized not only by the breaks within the lines, but also by the consonance of

"last" and "plac'd" and of "falls" and "scales":

> So sigh'd I upwards still, at last
> 'Twixt steps, and falls
> I reach'd the pinacle, where plac'd
> I found a paire of scales (ll.17-20).

Similarly, as Joan Bennett has observed, he sometimes employs the device of "making an imperfect rhyme scheme reflect an inharmonious mood", like Herbert before him.[1] Thus in The Check (p.275) both the partial rhymes and the irregular rhyme scheme help to mirror the restless urgency of his didactic concern:

> View thy fore-runners: Creatures giv'n to be
> Thy youths Companions,
> Take their leave, and die; Birds, beasts, each tree
> All that have growth, or breath
> Have one large language, Death.
> O then play not! but strive to him, who Can
> Make these sad shades pure Sun (ll.25-31).

Despite the comparative freedom of Vaughan's use of rhyme and rhythm, there is nevertheless an opposing tendency in his verse towards the discipline of formal order, and, as James D. Simmonds has noted, his "most basic, constant patterns" are the symmetrical couplet and quatrain, and various combinations of these forms. Moreover, in his use of couplets and quatrains, "Vaughan usually respects the integrity of the unit, and limits his inventiveness to modulations of its internal structure."[2] It is noteworthy that in Rules and Lessons (p.267), where each stanza consists of a quatrain followed by a couplet, enjambement occurs at the end of the quatrain in only three stanzas out

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1 Five Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, Marvell (Cambridge, 1964), p.82.

2 Masques of God: Form and Theme in the Poetry of Henry Vaughan (Pittsburgh, 1972), pp.44, 49, 52.

of the twenty-four, while in Cock-crowing (p.322), The Night (p.358), and The Agreement (p.365), which have the same rhyme scheme as Rules and Lessons, there is no instance of enjambement at the end of a quatrain. Since the metrical pattern of The Night is more complex than that of the other three poems because of the differing lengths of the lines within each stanza, this poem is a most excellent example of what Simmonds calls "Vaughan's achievement of flexibility and variety within a unified form".[1] Such liberty within restraint reveals his need for a restricted freedom in poetic expression, a need which is in keeping with his mode of mystical awareness, as the previous chapters of this study have shown. His apprehension of God as primarily transcendent, which is linked with a tendency towards discipline, is balanced by his intense apprehension of God's immanence, which is linked with a tendency towards freedom.

Like Vaughan, Thompson uses rhyme very freely at times, perhaps even negligently. Stressed syllables are sometimes rhymed with unstressed syllables, but in this practice he is not as daring as Vaughan occasionally is, since the rhyme does not run counter to both the natural speech rhythm and the metre. In Orient Ode, the stressed word "well" rhymes with the final syllable of "miracle", which, though unstressed in the speech rhythm, is stressed in the metre:

> Knów'st thoŭ mĕ nót, Ŏ Sún? Yeă, wéll
> Thoŭ knów'st thĕ áncient míracle (p.199, ll.7-8);

likewise, in Contemplation (p.188), the unstressed word "is"

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1 Ibid., p.62.

rhymes with the final syllable of "energies", which, though stressed in the metre, is unstressed in the speech rhythm:

> The hill, which sometimes visibly is
> Wrought with unresting energies (ll.7-8).

He uses partial rhymes frequently, as in the consonance of "well" and "miracle" and of "is" and "energies", and in the assonance of "days" and "face" in The Poppy (p.7, ll.9-10). In some poems, these liberal methods of choosing rhymes are paralleled by his use of a very irregular rhyme scheme in which rhyming words are sometimes separated by several lines, as are "mysteries" and "secrecies" in the ninth verse paragraph of The Mistress of Vision (p.181):

> Many changes rise on
> Their phantasmal mysteries.
> They grow to an horizon
> Where earth and heaven meet;
> And like a wing that dies on
> The vague twilight-verges,
> Many a sinking dream doth fleet
> Lessening down their secrecies.

It is possible that, as Pierre Danchin has claimed, Thompson seeks, by all these means, to make rhyme only a simple unobtrusive echo.[1] In any case, the freedom of his rhyming, which is a feature of many of his poems, is suited to one of his favourite poetic forms, the irregular ode, in which the length of the lines varies according to the rhythmic flow of thought and feeling:

> Let me twine with you caresses,
> Wantoning
> With our Lady-Mother's vagrant tresses,
> Banqueting
> With her in her wind-walled palace,
> Underneath her azured daïs,

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1 Francis Thompson: La Vie et l'Œuvre d'un Poète (Paris, 1959), pp.392-393.

Quaffing, as your taintless way is,
From a chalice
Lucent-weeping out of the dayspring.[1]

In his later odes, Thompson attempted to emulate Coventry Patmore by paying careful attention to the pauses and by basing his metrical practice more strictly on the temporal value of the line. But this restraint is foreign to his temperament, and some of his later poems lose in spontaneity at least as much as they gain in form. Indeed, Lois I. Nichols goes so far as to maintain that The Dread of Height is "cramped in the Patmorean metrical strait jacket",[2] and it does seem that, in this poem, his attention to technical matters inhibits the freedom of his expression and complicates his syntax:

> Yea, who shall secure
> But I, of height grown desperate,
> Surcease my wing, and my lost fate
> Be dashed from pure
> To broken writhings in the shameful slime
> (p.194, ll.21-25).

Not all of his poems are so irregular, for Thompson had the capacity to use many different poetic forms to suit his purpose, just as he could write in many different styles. When he chooses a conventional stanza pattern, however, his need for freedom sometimes asserts itself in his tendency to add one or two extra lines to some of the stanzas, as in The Poppy (p.5), a tendency which is probably related to his rather sudden lengthening of some of the lines in his more irregular poems, particularly at the ends of sentences:

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1 The Hound of Heaven, p.91, ll.3-11.

2 "Francis Thompson: Flight and Fall", Thought: A Review of Culture and Idea, XXXVI (1961), 122.

> And others, in far prospect seen,
> Newly loosed on this terrene,
> Shot in piercing swiftness came,
> With hair a-stream like pale and goblin flame.[1]

Similarly, even the dignified blank verse of one of his nature odes, An Anthem of Earth, is unusually irregular, and gives the impression of having been poured forth spontaneously:

> Linking such heights and such humilities
> Hand in hand in ordinal dances,
> That I do think my tread,
> Stirring the blossoms in the meadow-grass,
> Flickers the unwithering stars (p.266, ll.8-12).

In the previous chapters of this study we have seen that both Thompson and Traherne apprehended God as primarily immanent, and that this apprehension is in keeping with their need for freedom in poetic expression. Like Vaughan and Thompson, Traherne exercises considerable liberty in his choice of rhyming words; though, as in the case of his older contemporary, it is difficult at times to be certain that words which form partial rhymes in modern standard English were not pronounced by him as true rhymes, because of his seventeenth-century provincial accent. Besides the frequent use of assonance and consonance, as in "Limmes" and "begins" and "long" and "Tongue" in the first stanza of The Salutation (II,4), and the rhyming of stressed and unstressed syllables, as in "Eternitie" and "See" in the third stanza of the same poem, there are occasionally some odd rhymes in his work, such as "Way" and "enjoy" in The Author to the Critical Peruser (II,2, ll.9-10) and "was" and "pass" at the end of The Salutation. One would expect that

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1 Sister Songs, p.25, ll.14-17.

a poet who so dislikes restrictions would avoid regular rhyme schemes and conventional metrical patterns, yet Traherne chooses the most common verse forms of his period, either heroic couplets or, more frequently, various stanza patterns. Moreover, his stanza forms are often very complex, and he never repeats one of them in any other poem. However, as I have pointed out in my book (pp.122-123), these forms usually do not seem to be restrictive to his thought, emotion, or expression, which, in his poetry as in his prose, reflect the expansive range of his consciousness. Instead of condensing ideas and feelings in the metaphysical manner, and compressing them into the formal framework of the verse, he appears to take pleasure in allowing them to flow out freely into the mould he has chosen. This effect of freedom in pattern-making rather than restriction by it is made possible mainly by the looseness, simplicity, and diffuseness of his imagery and style, whereby "he multiplies enumerations or repeats ideas or catalogues virtually synonymous symbols" with extraordinary facility:

> A Delicate and Tender Thought
> The Quintessence is found of all he [God] Wrought.
> It is the fruit of all his Works,
> Which we conceive,
> Bring forth, and Give,
> Yea and in which the Greater Value lurks.
> It is the fine and Curious Flower,
> Which we return, and offer evry hour.[1]

Nevertheless, Traherne sometimes finds difficulty in maintaining some of his more complicated stanza patterns, as is evidenced by the disjointed rhythm and the forced rhyme of the second stanza of My Spirit (II,50).

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1 Thoughts II (II,172), ll.1-6.

An examination of the general structure of whole poems reveals Traherne's love of freedom more clearly than does an examination of the more detailed features of their structure, such as rhyme schemes. In my book (pp.121-124) I have discussed his failure to make each poem clearly an artistic unity, a failure which seems to stem mainly from his passion for the infinite and his consequent refusal to accept severe restrictions. The symbols on which most of his poems are based, such as those of vision and the child, are too large and general to be used as powerful unifying devices in the total structures, and when he introduces lesser symbols in the course of a poem, he moves easily from one symbol to another without using them to create a closely woven design. Because of his preference for working on a very large scale, symbols and images often have greater significance in the structure of the series of poems in the Dobell Folio Manuscript than in the structure of any one poem, just as some poems are more meaningful in the total pattern of thought in the series than in isolation. His passionately effusive nature cannot submit to that kind of strict economy in the use of words and images that is necessary for the neat construction of a poem. Instead of letting symbols make their own impact, he frequently either introduces them as comparisons after their meaning has already been stated, or interprets them after he has used them. Occasionally, as in Goodnesse (II,182), he seems to make some attempt to employ symbolism as a structural device, but the detailed examination of this poem in my book (pp.124-126) reveals that, even here, two of the six stanzas

are largely unnecessary repetition. As Rosalie L. Colie remarks, "in the language of the imagination [Traherne's] obsession with God's greatness demanded tautology and infinite progression."[1]

Thompson resembles Traherne in that "he was not one whose genius could be made to submit to conscious control in any great degree",[2] and this lack of restraint is revealed in the looseness of the general structure of most of his poems, no less than in his free treatment of the more detailed aspects of their structure. In some of his poems, especially longer ones like Sister Songs (p.19) and The Sere of the Leaf (p.151), the logical links are so tenuous that there is not even any clear sequence of idea or incident, and only occasionally does he attain a poetic form sufficiently controlled to be both organically united with the content and aesthetically pleasing in itself, as in The Hound of Heaven (p.89) and To a Snowflake (p.333), and supremely in The Kingdom of God (p.349), with its simplicity and economic intensity. The little-known but appealing poem, To Daisies (p.324), published only posthumously, provides a suitable example of some of the structural weaknesses in Thompson's work. Not only is it relatively short, and therefore manageable within the framework of this chapter, but it is also typical of the poet in both its form, that of the irregular ode, and its content.

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1 Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox (Princeton, 1966), p.168.

2 John Walsh, Strange Harp, Strange Symphony: The Life of Francis Thompson (New York, 1967), p.142.

The poem opens with one of those strikingly colourful images which are a feature of his style: "Ah, drops of gold in whitening flame / Burning". Almost immediately, the flowers become symbolic of the simplicity and transitoriness of childhood by being actually named as "Daisies, that little children pull", a title that is emphasized by its repetition a few lines further on. This association of them with the vulnerability of childlike innocence brings pain rather than pleasure to the poet, and the first indication of the reason why such "weak things" can hurt a grown man is found in the implications behind the metaphor by which the daisies are identified with young, artless girls, who, while remaining unattainable, all unwittingly arouse men's admiration. Towards the end of the verse paragraph, these implications are clarified when he pleads with the daisies either to hide their beauty from him, or to make that beauty bearable by losing their innocence of it, so that they will no longer arouse distressing memories, presumably of his own childhood innocence. All the major themes of the poem have now been introduced, though, as one would expect of Thompson, in a rather indirect way at first.

The rest of the poem consists of two more verse paragraphs, both longer than the first, in which is developed the theme that the daisies are essentially beyond his reach because his joyful early innocence is irretrievable. Up to this point there has been little verbal waste, but now the texture becomes looser. The poet indulges in the far-fetched image of himself as a ghost who

is barred from contact with physical beings, and then, dissatisfied with the image, attempts to adjust it to suit his purpose better:

> Such wonder is on you, and amaze,
> I look and marvel if I be
> Indeed the phantom, or are ye?

The lines which follow seem unnecessarily abrupt in their contrasting plainness, and, in view of the poem as a whole, they amount to a statement of the obvious:

> The light is on your innocence
> Which fell from me.

The only really effective lines in the second paragraph, in my opinion, are the next six, in which the daisies are pictured as belonging to a distant country, his childhood, from which he is separated by the bounds of time. The last five lines are largely redundant.

The final verse paragraph is of a quality more in keeping with the first, despite some weaknesses. The image of the flowers being "anchored" in "alienated days", "while Time's stream / Has swept [him] past them", is a variation on the image of the lost country, to which it adds very little. This is followed by the dream image of the dead face, an image which Thompson over-develops, thus introducing a more sentimental strain: the face comes back

> With tears, because for old embrace
> It has no arms.

This sentimental strain is heightened by the next few lines, which treat of his personal childhood memories of daisies in a more lengthy and explicit manner than is perhaps warranted. The climactic final lines vividly and dramatically display the contrasting effect of the daisies

on the poet as a child and as an adult, though the closing violent image of his "slaughtered joy" seems inconsistent with the tone of the poem as a whole.

To Daisies, with its partly repetitive accumulation of thoughts and images, illustrates in a small compass the lack of real structural power in most of Thompson's poems. Like Thompson, Vaughan has often been criticized for what F. E. Hutchinson calls his "deficiency in architectonic faculty",[1] and there is no doubt that some of his poems are marred by a lack of coherence, often the result of diffuse moralizing. Thus, after the inspired, sensitive opening of The Timber (p.332), he descends to a laboured and tedious straining after lessons to be drawn from the dead tree. In some poems the ideas, instead of progressing in a logical manner, tend to evolve by means of association, and at times this results in a chaotic accumulation of superfluous associations, as in White Sunday (p.319), where the political and religious quarrels of his age carry him away from the ostensible subject.

Nevertheless, the tendency to looseness and confusion which is evident in many of Vaughan's poems is usually counterbalanced by an opposing tendency to the restraint of a design unified by imagistic links, or of a formal arrangement of thought, just as the clear pattern of his verse form stabilizes the rhythmic suppleness of his poetry. Distraction (p.243) and Ascension-Hymn (p.316) are not very tightly organized, but they are held together by

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1 Henry Vaughan: A Life and Interpretation (Oxford, 1947), p.162.

their basic imagery: in the first poem by the antithesis between the dust of the flesh and the light of the spirit, and in the second by the image of the body as the garment of the spirit. Similarly, Louis L. Martz has demonstrated that, in varying degrees, the structure of some of Vaughan's poems is based on the traditional meditative pattern of the composition of an image or scene, followed by an analysis of it (that is, an interpretation of its significance), and finally by a colloquy with God, one of the finest examples of this structure being the poem, "I walkt the other day (to spend my hour)" (p.312).[1] He has also pointed out that often in his poetry, "what appear to be digressions . . . are really exploratory sallies", "a roving search over a certain field of imagery", in the manner of Augustinian meditation.[2] Thus in The Search, the thought of Jacob's well gives rise to some bracketed lines (23-27) which picture the simple and innocent lives of the Hebrew patriarchs, and which may seem at first to digress from the poet's imaginative search for Christ in the places associated with his life on earth; but a closer reading reveals that they heighten the contrast between Jacob and his descendants in their relationships with God, a contrast which is an integral part of the general pattern of thought in the poem. In the structure of Vaughan's poems there is frequently a kind of restricted spaciousness akin to that of

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1 The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century (New Haven, 1954), pp.64-66.

2 The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne, and Milton (New Haven and London, 1964), pp.24-25.

his Hermetic cosmic imagination,[1] for, as Simmonds observes, the "basic stresses [of his poetry] are between disintegration and wholeness, freedom and control."[2]

In my opinion, most critics have placed too much emphasis on the tendency to structural disintegration in Vaughan's poems, and have neglected to recognize sufficiently either their opposite tendency, or the fact that in quite a large number of poems, especially shorter ones like The Showre, Midnight (p.251), and Unprofitablenes (p.273), he does achieve neatness of form. The Showre is based on a slight variation of the traditional meditative pattern, the emblematic method of reflecting on natural phenomena by means of a description, an interpretation, and a moral application; but it is unlike the typical emblem poem in that the poet, instead of employing the simple formula of image or symbol plus commentary, makes the spiritual lesson of the necessity for repentance for laziness implicit in the description of the shower whose origin is in the mists rising from the "drowsie Lake": "Thou fall'st in teares, and weep'st for thy mistake" (stanza 1). Such a union of the literal and the symbolic is at the opposite pole from their forced yoking in The Timber, and in varying degrees it is not uncommon in Vaughan, one of the finest examples being Unprofitablenes. The presence of this kind of union in a poem is often an additional force for unity in its total structure.

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1 See previously, pp.169-170.

2 Op. cit., p.62.

Hopkins resembles Vaughan in that the form of many of his poems is based on the traditional meditative pattern. Both Alan Heuser and David A. Downes have related Hopkins's characteristic sequence of sensation, intuition, and response to the Ignatian variety of meditation, in which the senses play a particularly important rôle.[1] This sequence of feeling is clearest in sonnets such as Spring (p.67), In the Valley of the Elwy (p.67), and The Windhover, perhaps because the sonnet form of octave plus sestet is admirably suited to what Downes calls the "leap from mortal to immortal beauty" that is fundamental to Ignatian meditation.[2] In the best poems, such as God's Grandeur (p.66) and Hurrahing in Harvest, the natural and supernatural elements are fused; but in a few, such as The Starlight Night (p.66) and perhaps The Windhover, the comment on the intuitively perceived significance of an experience or image seems imperfectly unified with the vivid description of it. Even when he fails to achieve a perfect whole, however, the design of the poem is so closely woven and so logically conceived that the general impression is one of neatness and restriction to a degree not found in any of the other three poets of this study. Furthermore, this effect of patterned spareness is intensified by his frequent employment of imagery and symbolism as structural devices to draw the poetry into a tight framework. At the end of God's

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1 Heuser, The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London, 1958), pp.50, 52; Downes, Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of His Ignatian Spirit (New York, 1959), p.152.

2 Ibid., p.77.

Grandeur, the dawn and the "bright wings" of the Holy Ghost evoke the grandeur of God flaming out "like shining from shook foil", and in Spring there is a close association of springtime with Eden and innocence.

This exploration of the structural aspects of the poetry of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Thompson reveals that Traherne, with his extreme liberty of form, is once again diametrically opposed to Hopkins, with his extreme restraint. Thompson is close to Traherne in the looseness of most of his poems, while Vaughan, though unrestrained by comparison with Hopkins, is nevertheless closer to him than to Traherne in his need for restriction. The implication is clear: there seems to be a relationship between the degree to which the vision of these poets emphasizes God's immanence in nature and the degree of looseness in the structure of their poems.

C O N C L U S I O N

Christian nature mysticism, the perception of the transcendent and personal triune God in natural objects or scenes, is rare in English poetry, and the rarity is attributable partly to the difficulty of attaining and maintaining a vision of God as both transcendent and immanent. Of poets who lived or are living in Britain, only Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins, and Francis Thompson are, in my opinion, true and notable representatives of this kind of mysticism, but their nature poems are by no means always on a mystical level. Romantic nature mysticism, which disregards God's transcendence, is more common than Christian nature mysticism in English poetry from Wordsworth onwards.

Despite the great diversity of Christian attitudes and feelings towards nature, there are certain basic features common to Christians; the four poets of this study all experience the inadequacy of nature in itself to satisfy their spiritual needs, and learn the necessity for a right relationship between the transcendent God and the self. Nevertheless, since Christians share with the Romantics a belief in God's immanence, their feeling for nature often includes animistic elements, and sometimes even a pantheistic tendency which is at odds with their conscious beliefs.

The spiritual appreciation of nature expressed in the work of the four selected poets ranges from a simple directing of their thoughts and feelings upward to the Creator in praise and thanksgiving for natural beauty, to a

truly mystical vision or feeling of his presence in nature. Between these extremes lie expressions of the stages in their journey towards such a rare vision; and, in ascending order, the main steps appear to be the drawing of a spiritual lesson from a natural object, the fusion of an observation of nature with the spiritual significance seen in it, and the deliberate seeking of a direct experience of God in or through nature. Explicit expressions of a personal experience of God's presence in nature are particularly rare in the poems of Vaughan and Hopkins, probably because of their deeper awareness of God's transcendence than of his immanence.

The four chosen poets, recognizing that a spiritual appreciation of nature is dependent on the attainment of a right relationship with God as their father, often picture such an attainment as the regaining of a childlike state, especially since all except Hopkins associate a vision of God's immanence in nature with their own Edenic experience in early childhood. Both experientially and symbolically, however, there are variations in the meaning which childhood and Eden have for them; Vaughan and Hopkins, who apprehend God as primarily transcendent, are not as optimistic about the purity of children and nature and about the possibility of attaining childlikeness in adult life as are Traherne and Thompson, who apprehend him as primarily immanent. The comparative pessimism of Vaughan and Hopkins are at the opposite pole from the bold optimism of Traherne, who alone seems to have succeeded in regaining a spiritually childlike state as a

permanent possession. His powerful experience of God's immanence leads him to present the little child as sinless and this world, rightly seen, as an Eden or paradise. Because Vaughan and Hopkins are lovers of children and nature, however, they are impelled towards a more optimistic view of them than their conscious beliefs and their experience of God's transcendence would suggest. Thus Vaughan speaks reverently of the innocence of his early days, and Hopkins rejoices in the wildness of unchecked nature.

Symbolism is one of the most illuminating means by which a writer can attempt to express the inexpressible, and the four poets' use of nature symbols—of light, of water, and of plant and garden—points up the problem of how to celebrate God's immanence without disregarding his transcendence. Perhaps Vaughan is the most consistently successful in maintaining an integrated vision of the immanence of transcendent Light, for his mindfulness of the "confinement" or "enclosedness" within creatures of the star-fire which God has created and implanted in them is in keeping with his experience of a God who is at the same time both revealed and hidden by the material creation. On the other hand, Traherne's vision of transcendent Light is sometimes clouded by an unbalanced concentration on immanent Light in external objects; and in the post-Romantic period the balance in an apprehension of God as both transcendent and immanent is predictably delicate. Hopkins, despite his primary belief in God's objective transcendence, cannot always escape completely the influence of Romantic

aestheticism in his expression. This self-conscious post-Romantic strain is still more intense in Thompson's poetry of exterior illumination, where Christianity and pantheism sometimes appear to exist side by side as separate strands.

An abiding sense of God's presence in nature leads the four poets of this study to make frequent use of natural objects and processes as symbols of God's presence within themselves and his activity in their lives. It seems that Traherne, and to a lesser extent Vaughan, experienced interior illumination more frequently and on a more deeply mystical level than Hopkins and Thompson did, perhaps because, in the post-Romantic period, the via negativa would presumably have been even more difficult than usual for lovers of nature. However, while Traherne, particularly in his use of sun symbolism, at times naïvely concentrates on the Light within him to the point of virtually disregarding the transcendence of that Light, Vaughan maintains a proper Christian balance in his vision of God's transcendence and immanence. In the many poems in which he uses light symbols in association with his longing for the experience of interior illumination, Vaughan is deeply conscious of the brevity and rarity of his mystical experiences, and of the Creator as the ultimate source of the comparatively feeble light in his soul.

Traherne's use of the fountain and ocean symbols to describe human souls and the creatures of the material world, as well as God himself, parallels his daring use of the sun symbol, and is part of his consistent tendency to identify the Giver with his gifts—a tendency which

sometimes brings his Christianity very close to pantheism, especially to that type of pantheism which deifies man. His optimism concerning the nature and state of his soul is entirely alien to Vaughan and Hopkins, who cannot ignore evil and the need for repentance and purification. Most of Vaughan's water symbolism is related to tears, but, unlike Thompson, he gives glory to God transcendent even for the grace to weep. In Thompson, the conflict between Christianity and Romanticism results in a highly ambivalent attitude towards himself. On the one hand, he is conscious of his own weakness by comparison with God; on the other hand, he is not always successful in avoiding an absorption in self which is in accord with his tendency to disregard the distinction between tears of repentance and tears occasioned by other forms of suffering.

Mystical nature poets frequently use the symbolism of plant-growth to express the experience of spiritual growth and development, and when Traherne uses such symbolism, he usually emphasizes man's spiritual fruitfulness, sometimes dwelling on the pleasure God receives from it. In striking contrast, Hopkins emphasizes his spiritual fruitlessness in this life, and pictures the field of his soul as a place of constant struggle and purgation. Although Vaughan is at times conscious of spiritual flower-bearing, he more often expresses a deep sense of his unproductiveness, and he is very unlike Traherne in his constant emphasis on his dependence on divine grace to produce any good thing from among the weeds of his soul. Thompson is, as usual, enigmatic, tending to

glorify human nature even in its weakness. Thus, during a time of spiritual and artistic aridity, he is still confident that by a natural cyclic process he will again become joyfully fruitful both as man and as poet; similarly, in his vision of an unattained inner paradise of holiness and of poetry, he gives greater prominence to God's immanence in nature and man's ability to see it than to God's transcendent power to raise the longing soul to union with himself.

The different ways in which the four poets of this study use traditional mystical symbols clearly demonstrate that Vaughan and Hopkins are inclined farther towards the apprehension of divine transcendence than are Traherne and Thompson, who particularly emphasize divine immanence in man and divine immanence in nature respectively. The kinds of spiritual awareness experienced by the four poets are related not only to their use of symbols but also to the more literary aspects of their expression. A desire for freedom from restraint, for personal expansion, has two main effects: it leads to a concentration on the vision of divine immanence at the expense of the vision of divine transcendence, and it also strengthens the tendency to vagueness which is found in most mystical writing. Furthermore, in itself the vision of nature transformed by divine immanence, since it is a vision which does not cling to the solidity of matter, invites the tendency to vagueness more than does the vision of nature created and sustained by God transcendent. The passion for the infinite which etherializes Traherne's imagery forms a contrast with

Hopkins's need for restriction, a need which results in a detailed, particularized treatment of nature which is opposed to much of that of the Romantic poets. The restricted spaciousness of Vaughan's imagery and his combination of the particular with the general probably result from his mode of mystical apprehension, with its apt balance between transcendence and immanence. Thompson's Romantic desire for unrestricted freedom and his tendency to pantheism may partly account for the unexpected scale of his comparisons, and for the splendour and extravagance of his imagery, as well as its generality and abstractness.

The styles of the four poets reflect their varying modes of vision as much as their imagery does. Hopkins's love of intricacy seems to stem from a desire for a restriction of choice, and it is an impression of rigid control that one gains from the crammed complexity of his verse, with its concrete, economical, distinctive diction. Vaughan's style is marked by opposing tendencies, for just as his imagery and diction are restricted in their vagueness and abstractness, so are the other elements of his style limited in their diffuseness. The source of Thompson's love of intricacy and over-ingenuity is a desire for freedom in verbal and imagistic decoration, and his lack of emotional restraint is reflected in the diffuseness of his expression and the looseness of his rhythms. Traherne's verbal transparency is diametrically opposed to Hopkins's verbal opacity, and his enthusiastic, expansive nature and his lack of restraint are clearly displayed in his diffuseness.

An exploration of the structural aspects of their

poetry reveals a similar pattern. The strictness of Hopkins's versification is matched by the closely woven and logically conceived designs of his poems, and the total effect is one of neatness, restriction, and patterned spareness. Vaughan's use of rhyme and rhythm is comparatively free, but there is nevertheless an opposing tendency in his verse towards the discipline of formal order, just as his tendency to looseness and confusion is usually counterbalanced by a tendency to the restraint of a design unified by imagistic links, or of a formal arrangement of thought. Thompson's lack of restraint is revealed in the looseness of the general structure of most of his poems and in the freedom of his rhyming. Traherne's poems are very loose in their design, often repetitive, and seldom clearly unified; with his extreme liberty of form, he is once again diametrically opposed to Hopkins, with his extreme restraint. The evidence powerfully suggests that there is a link between the degree to which the four poets' vision emphasizes God's immanence in nature, and the degree of generality or vagueness and of structural looseness in their poems.

A study of Christian mystical nature poetry leaves one with a strong impression of the fragility of this mode of writing. Since nature poetry deals with the material realm, it seems most mystical when nature is pictured as transformed by the divine immanence; yet such a vision most invites not only a tendency to vagueness and looseness, but also a tendency to disregard the transcendence of God, and thus to become Romantic rather than Christian. Of the four

poets of this study, Hopkins, who most insists on God's transcendence, and who in his nature poetry is perhaps the least mystical, is usually considered a very good poet, particularly by critics who are of the "concrete" tradition; on the other hand, Traherne, who most insists on God's immanence, and who is perhaps the most mystical, is appreciated as a poet by very few readers. Many of Thompson's poetic weaknesses may be traced to the pantheistic tendencies of his mode of vision, and there is an inclination to vagueness and disintegration even in the poetry of Vaughan, whose vision of God's transcendence is more powerful than his glimpses of God's immanence in nature.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

CONTENTS

Since this bibliography is designed to be as helpful and as precise as possible, some repetition of items in different sections is unavoidable.

The A sections list all consulted editions of the particular poet's works in chronological order.

The B sections list consulted writings which contain more than mere references to the particular poet, and thus include many writings which do not deal exclusively with him.

The section entitled Writings about Mysticism does not include material which deals almost exclusively with one of the four poets.

The section entitled General Reference Material does not include material which has already been listed in one or more of the previous sections.

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