

Like a great Ring of pure and endless light: On mysticism in Henry Vaughan's Silex Scintillans

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Abstract

This paper deals with mystical imagination in Henry Vaughan's major collection Silex Scintillans (1650, 1655). The first part focuses on the definition and basic forms of mysticism in Vaughan's work (especially the unified vision of his world and the dialogical nature of the poetic self). The second part traces the sources of his mystical vision to his association with Hermetic philosophy and discusses the imagery connected with it (i.e. the doctrine of the sentient nature of all reality, the problem of the quintessence and the images taken from the alchemical tradition). The third and final section links Vaughan's mystical vision of the world with some of the principles of modern ecological thought. The article aims to present a reassessment of Vaughan's mystical poetry as a source of inspiration for understanding the vital relation between the intuitive and rational understanding of human existence and its relation to other forms of life.

Keywords: Henry Vaughan, mysticism, Hermeticism, English poetry, environmental awareness

1. Introduction

The work of **Henry Vaughan** (1621–1695) represents a distinctive type in English metaphysical poetry: while clearly following the meditative line of his great predecessor **George Herbert** (1593–1633), he developed his own distinctive style, deeply indebted to the Hermetic philosophy of his twin brother **Thomas** (1621–1666). His devotional poetry is energised by a series of major oppositions (darkness/light, mute/musical cosmos, death/life etc.) whose source can be related to some of the basic tenets of Hermeticism. In that sense, he also represents a distinctive type of mystical poet and a visionary, whose “redeemed” sight sees the reality of organic, animated relations behind the veil of supposedly solid and lifeless objects.

This article will focus on the type of Hermetic mysticism we find in his central collection *Silex Scintillans*, published in two versions in 1650 and 1655.¹ I will argue that Vaughan’s mysticism is not only a central element in his work, but also a key to his understanding of the role of poetry in translating the content of a specific spiritual experience. I will therefore explore the different aspects of his mysticism – the concept of unity, forms of unification, hermetic principles – and finally, I will discuss the ecological aspects of his thought in relation to his vision of the sacredness of the whole of “Creation”. In that sense, I seek to offer a reassessment of Vaughan’s work, focusing on the role of this kind of poetry in cultivating an integral ecological awareness and the intuitive relation to the organic essence of natural reality.

2. *The living, the living, he shall praise thee: towards a unified vision of the world*

The first edition of Vaughan’s central collection (1650) opens with an emblem capturing the key image of the work: it shows a crying flint with a human countenance struck by God’s hand with a rod and arrows.² The author explains the emblem in the following Latin poem: “*Surdus eram, mutusque silex*” (“I was a deaf and mute flint”); in other words, the state “before conversion” was a state of inanimate, lifeless and insentient objects. However, when struck by God’s hand, the flint (i.e. the Biblical “heart of stone”) turns into a heart of “flesh”³:

*Accedis propior, molemque et saxea rumpis
Pectora, fitque caro, quod fuit ante lapis.*

(“You draw nearer and break that mass which is my rocky heart, and that which was formerly stone is now made flesh.”) (Vaughan 137)⁴

The emblem thus expresses a truly *substantial* change: the stone acquires life and a new capacity to communicate, i.e. it re-enters the dialogical dimension of the human existence *before* and *in* God.

Vaughan goes on to explain his poetic endeavour as a capacity to utter the reality of the new existence in the “Author’s Preface to the Following Hymns”. Poetry can either be “idle words” wittily dealing with “sensual” and thus unworthy subjects (139–140), or it can provide “nourishment or help to *devotion*” leading to the “refinement” of the spirit. Thus it “will *procure* for us (so easily communicable is that *loving spirit*) some small *prelibation* of those heavenly refreshments” (142). The author, therefore, suggests that the mission of poetry is to endow the reader with “redeemed sight”, which literally informs the “original”, “created” reality with a sense of an integral “holy”⁵ *unity* of all existence, springing from the unified and uni-versal⁶ “fountain of living waters” (Vaughan 144). Moreover, this new, redeemed sight should provide the engaged reader with an acute awareness of a *fully animate* reality.

The last section of the introductory part of *Silex Scintillans* – a prayer – stresses precisely that: this unity is an *organic* one, the world has been given a new breath of life (i.e. it has been – theologically speaking – “recreated”),⁷ and it sings a hymn:

The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. [...] Therefore shall thy songs be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. (144)

The poet thus introduces the reader to the sources of his poetic imagination, to his unified vision of the world, based on a sense of intuitive, living intimacy with the rest of the “created” cosmos. In this new consciousness, also known as the “graced consciousness”,⁸ all reality seems to be traced back to the unfathomable centre of the divine mystery. Thus it can also be seen as the source of *communion*, i.e. of the dialogical nature of human existence.

The above-mentioned fundamental oppositions of Vaughan’s poetry – especially those of light and darkness and life and death – find their resolution and reconciliation in a vision of the world which is traditionally understood as “mystical”, i.e. unified and integral despite the apparent paradoxes and irreconcilable contradictions.⁹

In order to understand the specific imagery and language of Vaughanian mysticism, we need to explore his links with Hermeticism, since this doctrine profoundly formed (and in-formed) his vision.

3. *A quickness which my God hath kissed: mysticism and Hermeticism*¹⁰

The most fundamental doctrine of Hermeticism is the belief in the sentient character of all reality ignited by the Divine Spark. This Spark is the agent of recollection of the unity of Creation.¹¹ From now on, the reality is animated, inspired with the Spirit which enlivens it. Elizabeth Holmes' study on the relation between Vaughan and Hermetic philosophy¹² stresses two aspects: on the one hand, his conscious initiation into Hermetic philosophy, and his own deep inner experience "interpenetrated" by the (omni)presence of the "living Spirit":

His intercourse with this (i.e., sentient) Nature alternates between conscious discipleship and a kind of unconscious interpenetration of himself with a 'Spirit' which his special philosophy taught him to find in the objects of Nature, but which he could not have found, had not some inner experience of his own sharpened his investigation. (Holmes 6)

In his excursions into Hermetic philosophy, Henry Vaughan was inspired by his brother Thomas, an eminent Hermetic philosopher.¹³ Interestingly, Holmes finds Henry's relation to Hermeticism somewhat "less credulous" than his brother's, but definitely "more religious" (Holmes 16). For Henry, the world was made sentient primarily by the experience of God's presence; it is thus personal and dialogical.

In *Silex Scintillans* such an experience is typically associated with *strong visual images*:

Stars are of mighty use: the night
Is dark, and long;
The road foul, and where one goes right,
Six may go wrong.
One twinkling ray
Shot o'er some cloud,
May clear much way. ("Joy of my life! while left me here", 177)

And walking from his sun, when past
That glimmering ray
Cuts through the heavy mists in haste
Back to his day [...] ("Silence, and stealth of days", 181)

Affliction thus, mere pleasure is,
And hap that will,
If thou be in't, 'tis welcome still;
But since thy rays
In sunny days
Thou dost thus lend
And freely spend,
Ah! what shall I return for this? ("Cheerfulness", 184)

The sense of the divine presence floods the world with light and “quickness” blessed by God’s personal involvement: “But life is, what none can express/A quickness which my God hath kissed” (“Quickness”, 308).¹⁴ Perhaps the best example of this vision can be found in “The Morning-Watch”: as the day breaks, “night” and “sleep”, as symbols of muteness and lifelessness, are filled with an overwhelming energy of new life.¹⁵ Seemingly lifeless inanimate objects are seen participating in “the symphony of nature”, tuned by the presence of the divinity in an act of prayer, i.e. spiritual communication:

O how it bloods,
 And spirits all my earth! hark! 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 hurled
 In sacred hymns, and order, the great chime
 And symphony of nature. Prayer is
 The world in tune,
 A spirit-voice,
 And vocal joys,
 Whose echo is heaven’s bliss.

Moreover, the initial imagery – characterised by the sharp distinctions of day and night and muteness and music – turns into a transforming experience of reconciliation: the climax of the poem “undoes” the above-mentioned oppositions in a vision of a mysterious intimacy with the divine:

The pious soul by night
 Is like a clouded star, whose beams though said
 To shed their light
 Under some cloud
 Yet are above,
 And shine, and move
 Beyond the misty shroud
 So in my bed
 That curtained grave, though sleep, like ashes, hide
 My lamps, and life, both shall in thee abide. (179)

This sense of unity and intimacy in *Silex Scintillans* transforms not only the world of visual sensations; it also includes an experience of *timelessness embracing all of reality*. In one of the most famous of Vaughan’s poems, “The World”,

eternity becomes a transparent vision (“bright shoots of eternity”, “a white, celestial thought”, “The heavens (some say)/ Are a fiery-liquid light [...]”) uniting the fragmented sensations of our time-consciousness:

I saw Eternity the other night,
Like a great *Ring* of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright,
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years
Driv’n by the spheres
Like a vast shadow moved; in which the world
And all her train were hurled [...] (227)

In the first two lines, the poem contrasts *night* and *light*; the latter, “transparent”, aspect of the vision being stressed with the following rhyme *bright*. The meaning of the vision is to illuminate the presence as if it were some form of time-less assembly of the past. Interestingly, the following rhyming pair (“years” and “spheres”) stresses precisely this transformation of the temporal into the spatial dimension of reality. The sequential, complex aspect of time is unfolded and unified in a single, transparent dimension. Finally, the past is vested with its time-less significance:

The darksome states-man hung with weights and woe
Like a thick midnight-fog moved there so slow,
He did not stay, nor go;
Condemning thoughts (like sad eclipses) scowl
Upon his soul,
And clouds of crying witnesses without
Pursued him with one shout.
Yet digged the mole, and lest his ways be found
Worked under ground,
Where he did clutch his prey; but one did see
That policy,
Churches and altars fed him; perjuries
Were gnats and flies,
It rained about him blood and tears, but he
Drank them as free.

The central opposition of *light* and *darkness/night* is reiterated in the final stanza of the poem, where that *unifying* aspect of the vision (joining time and place), as a moment of transparency, climaxes in the surprisingly personal re-signification of the initial “*Ring* of pure and endless light”: the *Ring* becomes a wedding ring of the “bridegroom” for the “bride”, i.e. for the intimate union of God and the soul:

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

In the Hermetic tradition, the fundamental unity of reality is often related to the concept of the “Essence” (or *materia prima*) which lies at the heart of things: this essence fundamentally enables the transformation of the reality (e.g. in alchemy), since the core, the “womb” of the reality, is the same. In *The Three Principles of Divine Essence*, Jacob Böhme (1575–1624) equates the “pure and clear” essence of things with the quintessence, i.e. with the outcome of the final stage of alchemical refinement:

[...] a thing that separateth, and bringeth the pure and cleere, from the impure: and that bringeth the life of all sorts of Spirits, or all sorts of Essences, into its highest [...] degree [...] Yea it is the cause of the shining, or of the lustre: it is a cause that all creatures see and live. (105)

Vaughan uses this Hermetic/alchemical imagery in his “Resurrection and Immortality”: in a clear allusion parodying John Donne’s “Broken Heart”,¹⁶ he unfolds a vision of the world regenerated after being destroyed and refined in the fire of suffering. The alchemical process of refinement then qualifies the believer to enter and re-enter the intimacy with the Creator, before the latter finally “remarries the soul”:

[...] For no thing can to Nothing fall, but still
Incorporates by skill,
And then returns, and from the womb of things
Such treasure brings
As *Phoenix*-like renew’th
Both life, and youth
For a preserving spirit doth still pass
Untainted through this mass,

Which doth resolve, produce, and ripen all
That to it fall;
Nor are those births which we
Thus suffering see
Destroyed at all; but when time's restless wave
Their substance doth deprave
And the more noble Essence finds his house
Sickly, and loose,
He, ever young, doth wing
Unto that spring,
And source of spirits, where he takes his lot
Till time no more shall rot
His passive cottage; which (though laid aside,)
Like some spruce bride,
Shall one day rise, and clothed with shining light
All pure, and bright
Re-marry to the soul, for 'tis most plain
Thou only fall'st to be refined again. (152-3)

The vision is refined to its Essence/substance – which, however, does not lose its capacity to be enlivened. For the “religious” Vaughan, the re-enlivening of the dead reality finds yet another significance in the trans-substantiation “wonder” of the Communion. In “Holy Communion” Vaughan reiterates this fundamental transformation of the dead matter into the living *materia*: dead things are not only made alive, they become sentient:

Welcome sweet, and sacred feast; welcome life!
Dead I was and deep in trouble;
But grace, and blessings came with thee so rife,
That they have quickened even dry stubble;
Thus souls their bodies animate
And thus, at first, when things were rude,
Dark, void, and crude
They, by the Word, their beauty had, and date; [...] (217)

Nevertheless, even in this poem the imagery of *trans-substantiation* is transformed into the “religious” language of the personal dialogue between the human and the divine party. Ultimately, the intimacy between God and the believer at the end of the poem is that of a sacrificial marital union:

O rose of Sharon! O the lily
Of the valley!
How art thou now, thy flock to keep,
Become both *food*, and *shepherd* to thy sheep. (218)

Such a *communion* thus seems to present a vision of a creative intimacy, an animated universe overflowing with life. In that sense, it can be seen and conceived as a *poetic* world: a world vested with signs and symbols and a world which needs to be communicated, i.e. literally shared with others.

Such a vision accommodates a new reading of the world: the world becomes a house, an *oἶκος*, in which men can – using the Hölderlinian/Heideggerian expression – “dwell”, or – to be more precise – “dwell poetically”:

For dwelling can be unpoetic only because it is in essence poetic. For a man to be blind, he must remain a being by nature endowed with sight. A piece of wood can never go blind. But when man goes blind, there always remains the question whether his blindness derives from some defect and loss or lies in an abundance and excess.¹⁷

This type of reading of the world, which restores it to a fully human dwelling, reveals the surprisingly topical relevance of Vaughan’s work, namely its intuitive ecological awareness.

4. Seeing the joy of creation: Vaughan’s mysticism and eco-thought

As a lifelong student of Vaughan’s works, Alan Rudrum pointed out that the poet’s visions of the unity of “Creation” in theological terms gain a surprisingly new and topical significance in relation to our contemporary ecological considerations.¹⁸ The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1912–2009) created a remarkable system of ecological thought, known as “deep ecology” based on the idea of the self-realisation of different life forms of the planet and the need to respect them.¹⁹ Naess traces the origins of his eco-philosophy to his childhood experiences of watching life in shallow seawater and his identification with nature (cf. Naess 2). In fact, the intuitive faculty plays an important role in defining his approach: ecological consciousness is built up in natural sympathy with nature, as in the case of ecological field workers:

To the ecological field worker, the equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom. Its restriction to humans is an anthropocentrism with detrimental effects upon the life quality of humans themselves. This quality depends in part upon the deep pleasure and satisfaction we receive from close partnership with other forms of life. The attempt to ignore our dependence and to establish a master-slave role has contributed to the alienation of man from himself. (Naess 28)

Diane K. McColley thus summarises Naess’s concept of the ecological self as the self who matures in proportion to his/her ability to identify with other forms of life (McColley 289). In that sense, ecological awareness has a “deep” vision: a

vision of the fundamental unity of all life forms and their respective roles in constituting our environment, our space of life.

Indeed, Vaughan's identification with the Creation seems intuitive and simple: in "Repentance", it is expressed as a litany of praise on the magnificence of nature, though tainted with a sense of distance, i.e. a rupture between humans and the rest of Creation. Man sees the unity and is aware of being "part of it", but lacks the original spark of life which animates the innocent reality beyond human sin:

The blades of grass, thy creatures feeding,
The trees, their leaves; the flowers, their seeding;
The dust, of which I am a part
The stones much softer than my heart,
The drops of rain, the sighs of wind,
The stars to which I am stark blind,
The dew thy herbs drink up by night,
The beams they warm them at i'the light,
All that have signature or life,
I summoned to decide this strife,
And lest I should lack for arrears,
A spring ran by, I told her tears,
But when these came unto the scale,
My sins alone outweighed them all. (206–207)

The final comment reiterates the vital, self-defining and self-constituting relationship of finite man and infinite God: defining oneself means succumbing to the trap of finality. In fact, only the infinite source overcomes the "profaneness", "defects" and "pollutions of the body" unconfined:

He is the centre of long life, and light,
I am but finite, He is infinite.
O let thy *justice* then in him confine,
And through his merits, make thy mercy mine! (208)

Vaughan is not only aware of the fundamental unity of Creation in his "co-substantial" relation to it; he also thematises the vital links between the things we use and their natural origins. He, the poet, is writing a book, and he wonders about the fate of the various subhuman life forms that needed to be transformed to become the substance for the poet's work:

Eternal God! maker of all
That have lived here, since the man's fall;
The Rock of ages! in whose shade
They live unseen, when here they fade.
Thou knew'st this *paper*, when it was
Mere *seed*, and after that but *grass*;

Before 'twas *dressed* or *spun*, and when
Made *linen*, who did *wear* it then:
What were their lives, their thoughts & deeds
Whether good *corn*, or fruitless *weeds*.

Thou knew'st this *tree*, when a green *shade*
Covered it, since a *cover* made,
And where it flourished, grew and spread,
As if it never should be dead.
Thou knew'st this harmless *beast*, when he
Did live and feed by thy decree
On each green thing; then slept (well fed)
Clothed with this *skin*, which now lies spread
A *covering* o'er this aged book,
Which makes me wisely weep and look
On my own dust; mere dust it is,
But not so dry and clean as this.
Thou knew'st and saw'st them all and though
Now scattered thus, dost know them so. ("The Book", 309)

The poem climaxes in an implicit question: what will happen to the wasted life energy of the substances from which the book is made? Vaughan, the Christian, answers with a reference to Revelation 9:3–4 ("And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads."²⁰): everything has its own place, i.e. both in the original design and in the final consummation:

O knowing, glorious spirit! when
Thou shalt restore trees, beasts and men,
When thou shalt make all new again,
Destroying only death and pain,
Give him among thy works a place,
Who in them loved and sought thy face! (310)

As I have pointed out earlier, the natural world in Henry Vaughan's poetry is holy:²¹ the mystical intuition cannot accept a commodifying interaction with the environment, i.e. it cannot see the environment as a mere collection of dead products to be used and wasted. While man – "the high priest" of Creation²² – risks his own "death", since he can freely break the vital bond with his divine origin, the natural phenomena cannot. In fact, they are always at least potentially transparent signs of the original vitality of all reality: even when fallen and rotting, they seem to retain a hint of their original vitality. The tree in "Timber" retains its sensibility towards the signs of time, the signs that humans miss:

But thou beneath the sad and heavy line
Of death doth waste all senseless, cold, and dark
Where not so much as dreams of light may shine,
Nor any thought of greenness, leaf, or bark.
And yet—as if some deep hate and dissent,
Bred in thy growth betwixt high winds and thee,
Were still alive—thou dost great storms resent
Before they come, and know'st how near they be. (262)

The fallen trunk remains a *sign*, even though its vitality is gone. It never sinks into the oblivion of mere waste. Thus it seems to point to the “more” of reality, to its spiritual inexhaustibility.

In “And do they do so?”, Vaughan refers to the Pauline concept of the throes and sighs of subhuman creatures, waiting for the moment of liberation from the curse of Adam (cf. Romans 8:19–22).²³ As Diane K. McColley has pointed out, Vaughan engages in an interesting controversy with Aquinas, and some other influential Christian thinkers, as regards the participation of the subhuman world in the final consummation of the *parousia*. Together with Thomas Browne and Paracelsus, Vaughan is convinced that the shapes of things cannot have just a functional and temporal relevance²⁴: they also reflect the intimate, personal relation of the Creator to the Creation (Cf. McColley 274).

In the beginning of “And do they do so?”, the author defines the *status quaestionis* of the issue: i.e. what is the reality of this expectation when confronted with the functional understanding of their existence:

And do they so? have they a sense
Of ought but influence?
Can they their heads lift, and expect,
And groan too? why the elect
Can do no more: my volumes said
They were all dull, and dead,
They judged them senseless, and their state
Wholly inanimate. (Vaughan 188)

Nevertheless, after a short and clear answer: “Go, go; seal up thy looks,/And burn thy books”, the poem turns into a discussion of the misery of man, who, by contrast, is incapable of experiencing this fullness of the experience of time, i.e. time as advent. In fact, it is man who is in danger of being wasted in time, without hope for the final consummation, without the joyful experience of “liberty”:

I would I were a stone, or tree,
Or flower by pedigree,
Or some poor high-way herb, or spring
To flow, or bird to sing!
Then should I (tied to one sure state,)

All day expect my date;
But I am sadly loose, and stray
A giddy blast each way;
Oh let me not thus range!
Thou canst not change. (188)

The creatures are of different sorts (“Some [...] Erect peep from their beds;/ Others [...] Sigh there, and groan for thee,/their liberty”); however, all of them are firmly aware of their place in the order of things. As regards the final telos of all things, therefore, no creatures can be merely functionalised, consumed and lost (as Aquinas and others suggest in relation to the “dumb animals and plants”); they return back to their origin: “O brook it not! why wilt thou stop/After whole showers one drop?/Sure, thou wilt joy to see/Thy sheep with thee (189). The unified vision of life – so typical of the mystics – thus describes a full circle in the joy of belonging, i.e. in the joy of overcoming the tension between the subject and the object in the Naessian logic of the indivisible (cf. McColley 289). This indivisibility makes us aware of the impossibility of a functional and consumerist type of thought in relation to the mystery of life and the needs of the various life forms to be fully enjoyed – and thus, necessarily, also protected.

5. Conclusion

As we have seen, Henry Vaughan’s mystical poetry thematises the reality of a unified, organised world, i.e. a world abounding in life. Vaughan’s sense of this union is religious in the literal, etymological sense of the world: it is a binding (re-ligio from re-ligare, re-connect) and a personal relation. The personal aspect not only re-enlivens the reality; it necessarily transforms it into a place of dwelling, which – given its overwhelmingly symbolic nature – tends to be a poetic one. In line with the Spanish mystics of the Siglo de Oro (St John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila), the German/Silesian mystic Angelus Silesius (Johannes Scheffler), or, indeed, his English predecessors (especially Robert Southwell and George Herbert), the spiritual experience in Vaughan finds its ultimate expression in the art of poetry. This is not an experience of abstract reasoning, distanced from the experiential aspect of reality; it brings us back to the vital core of the experience itself.

In Vaughan’s work, the link between poetry and mysticism is a process of mutual explanation: mysticism finds its authenticity in the experiential richness and lucidity of language, and poetry acquires its ultimate dignity in its non-functional, “sacramental” mediation. Not surprisingly, therefore, Vaughan’s poetry thus also thematises a non-functional, respectful approach to the world around us, based on a living sympathy with all species of our planet: in the end, our environmental consciousness presupposes not only factual knowledge, but also this non-functional understanding of the value of life and the resplendent beauty of the world.

Henry Vaughan may not be the greatest of the English Metaphysicals, but his acute sense of the mystery and fragility of life makes him still a relevant poet, even in a non-religious age.

Notes

¹ Usually referred to as *Silex I* and *Silex II*. Besides *Silex Scintillans* and poems scattered in his or his friends' prose works (*Flores Solitudinis*, 1654; *Hermetical Physic*, 1655; *The Chemists' Key*, 1657, or Thomas Powell's *Humane Industry*, 1661), Vaughan published three other collections of poetry: *Poems with the Tenth Satire of Juvenal Englished* (1646), *Olor Iscanus* (1651), *Thalia Rediviva: The Pastimes and Diversions of a Country-Muse in Choice Poems on Several Occasions* (including some poems of his brother Thomas, 1678). *Silex* presents by far the most voluminous, original and concentrated work by Henry Vaughan. Unlike other collections, it contains no occasional poems, translations and other such pieces which are abundant in other collections. The acuteness of the spiritual vision in *Silex Scintillans* makes it a truly unique achievement in his oeuvre, whose value has gained recognition by broad critical consensus. I therefore restrict the discussion of his poetry to this collection only.

² Thomas O. Calhoun (*Henry Vaughan, the Achievement of Silex Scintillans*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1981) discusses the "missing emblem" in the later 1655 edition. His conclusion is the following: "It is safe to assume that Vaughan considered his emblem for *Silex Scintillans* 1650 as an authentic biographical statement, but not as a limitation or final definition of himself. By 1655, the emblem of a flinty heart struck by arrows and converted into a human countenance was no longer singularly appropriate" (222).

³ A clear allusion to Ezekiel 36:26: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

⁴ All quotations are based on Alan Rudrum's classic edition of *The Complete of Poems of Henry Vaughan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976). The typographical differentiation is the author's, unless stated otherwise.

⁵ In fact, the origin of the word (OE *hālig*; related to *hāl* whole) refers to the sense of unity, integrity. See <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/holy>, 10 January 2016.)

⁶ I am referring to the literal meaning of the word uni-versal, i.e. turning around a single point/centre.

⁷ Cf. Arthur L. Clement's comments on this aspect of Vaughan's poetry in the following words: "All things are empty and as nothing unless God fills them. [...] All things in the universe are not isolated fragments but interdependent parts of the whole, sustaining one another. All things flow from God and return to Him, Who is the fountain, means, and

end. Arthur L. Clement. *Poetry of Contemplation: John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, and the Modern Period*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 162.

⁸ See the definition in the classic study by Richard McBrien *Catholicism* (London: Geoffrey Champan, 1994): “Mysticism [...] is the graced transformation of consciousness that follows upon a direct or immediate experience of the presence of God leading to deeper union with God (1052).

⁹ Definitions as well as analyses of mysticism are innumerable; however, here I will restrict myself to the core meaning of mysticism in the Christian tradition, i.e. the apprehension of the divine presence. See e.g. the definition we find in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (ed. A. Holder, London: Blackwell, 2005): “The experience of oneness or intimacy with some absolute divine reality is at the heart of what has come to be commonly identified as mysticism” (444).

¹⁰ Here I draw and expand on my earlier discussion of the topic in my monograph on English metaphysical poets. See *Concepts of Harmony in Five Metaphysical Poets* (Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2012), 168–174.

¹¹ Cf. Dion Fortune and Gareth Knight. *Principles of Hermetic Philosophy*. (Thoთ Publications: Loughborough, 1999), 16.

¹² Elizabeth Holmes. *Henry Vaughan and Hermetic Philosophy* (New York: Haskell House, 1966).

¹³ Thomas Vaughan published a number of Latin treatises on the topic – e.g., *Anima Magica Abscondita*, *Anthroposofia Theomagica*, *Magia Adamica* or *Lumen de lumine*.

¹⁴ “The Peripatetics [Aristotelians] look on God, as they do on carpenters, who build with stone and timber, without any infusion of life. But the world, which is God’s building is full of spirit, quick, and living.” Thomas Vaughan, *Anthroposofia Theomagica*. “The Author to the Reader”, sig. B3^v. Quoted from A. Rudrum’s notes to the *Complete Works of Henry Vaughan*, 557.

¹⁵ “But unlike Herbert, Vaughan sees nature as more than symbol. ‘The Morning-Watch’ concerns not only the renewal of the self but also the renewal of nature, and in Vaughan the two are closely related or at one. After all, divinity graces, animates, and pervades the self and all creation. As in the poem beginning ‘And do they so?’ Vaughan sees all of nature filled with a kind of intelligence, a sense, and a desire for God.” Clement 160.

¹⁶ Here I am referring to lines 25–32 of the poem:

Yet nothing can to nothing fall,
Nor any place be empty quite ;
Therefore I think my breast hath all
Those pieces still, though they be not unite ;
And now, as broken glasses show
A hundred lesser faces, so
My rags of heart can like, wish, and adore,
But after one such love, can love no more.

¹⁷ M. Heidegger: “Poetically man dwells”. Quoted from the English translation of Albert Hofstadter. Cf. Martin Heidegger. *Philosophical and Political Writings*. Ed. by Manfred Stassen (New York: Continuum, 2003). 277.

¹⁸ Cf. Alan Rudrum. “‘For the Earth shall be all Paradise’: Milton, Vaughan, and the Neo-Calvinists on the Ecology of the Hereafter.” *Scintilla* 4 (2000): 39–52; or “Henry Vaughan, The Liberation of the Creatures, and Seventeenth-Century English Calvinism.” *The Seventeenth Century* 4 (1989): 33–54.

¹⁹ Cf. e.g. Arne Naess. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. (CUP: Cambridge, 1989).

²⁰ For this reference I am indebted to Alan Rudrum’s notes to his edition of Vaughan’s *Complete Poems* (641).

²¹ “The basic experience is an overwhelming conviction that the objects confronting [the mystic] have a numinous significance and importance, that the existence of everything he is aware of is holy. And the basic emotion is one of innocent joy, though this joy can include, of course, a reverent dread. So long as the vision lasts the self is ‘noughted,’ for its attention is completely absorbed in what it contemplates; it makes no judgment and desires nothing, except to continue in communion with what Gerald Manley Hopkins called the inscape of things” (13, 14). W. H. Auden. “Introduction” to *The Protestant Mystics*. Ed. Anne Fremantle (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 13, 14. Cf. also Clement 152.

²² Awake, awake! hark, how the *wood* rings,

Winds whisper, and the busy *springs*

A consort make;

Awake, awake!

Man is their high-priest, and should rise

To offer up the sacrifice (“Christ’s Nativity, 199).

²³ “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”

²⁴ “I answer that, since the renewal of the world will be for man’s sake it follows that it should be conformed to the renewal of man. Now by being renewed man will pass from the state of corruption to incorruptibility and to a state of everlasting rest, wherefore it is written (1 Cor.15:53): ‘This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality’ [...] On the other hand, dumb animals, plants, and minerals, and all mixed bodies, are corruptible both in their whole and in their parts, both on the part of their matter which loses its form, and on the part of their form which does not remain actually; and thus they are in no way subjects of incorruption.” Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Part Three, Supplement, Question 91, Article 5. English translation quoted from <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/5.htm> . 10 January 2016. Translation of the English Dominican Order.

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