HENRY VAUGHAN

The Book

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;

5 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, and 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.

15 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.

25 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 amongst Thy works a place
Who in them loved and sought Thy face!

Peace

My soul, there is a country
Far beyond the stars,
Where stands a wingéd sentry
All skillful in the wars.
5 There, above noise and danger,
Sweet Peace sits crowned with smiles.
And One born in a manger
   Commands the beauteous files.¹
He is thy gracious friend,
10    And (O my soul, awake!)
Did in pure love descend
   To die here for thy sake.
If thou canst get but thither,
   There grows the flower of peace,
15    The rose that cannot wither,
Thy fortress and thy ease.
Leave, then, thy foolish ranges;²
1650    For none can thee secure
But One who never changes,
   Thy God, thy life, thy cure.

Man

Weighing the steadfastness and state
Of some mean things which here below reside,
   Where birds, like watchful clocks, the noiseless date
And intercourse of times divide,
Where bees at night get home and hive, and flowers,
   Early as well as late,
Rise with the sun and set in the same bowers;

I would (said I) my God would give
The staidness of these things to man! for these
10    To His divine appointments ever cleave,
   And no new business breaks their peace;
The birds nor sow nor reap, yet sup and dine;
   The flowers without clothes live,
Yet Solomon was never dressed so fine.¹

15    Man hath still either toys or care,²
He hath no root, nor to one place is tied,
   But ever restless and irregular
   About this earth doth run and ride.
He knows he hath a home, but scarce knows where;
1650    He says it is so far
That he hath quite forgot how to go there.

He knocks at all doors, strays and roams,
Nay, hath not so much wit as some stones³ have,

¹. Ranks.
². Rovings.
¹. As indicated below, lines 27–28, the poem is on the loss of Vaughan’s brother—not his twin brother Thomas, the hermetic philosopher, who did not die till 1666, but his younger brother William, who died in July, 1648.
². The miner fixes his lamp halfway down the dark shaft, ventures a little beyond it, but then beats a hasty retreat.
Which in the darkest nights point to their homes,

   By some hid sense their Maker gave;
Man is the shuttle, to whose winding quest
   And passage through these looms
God ordered motion, but ordained no rest.

1650

A Rhapsody

Occasionally¹ written upon a meeting with some of his friends at the Globe Tavern, in a chamber painted overhead with a cloudy sky and some few dispersed stars and on the sides with landscapes, hills, shepherds, and sheep.

Darkness and stars i’ the midday! they invite
Our active fancies to believe it night;
For taverns need no sun but for a sign,
Where rich tobacco and quick tapers shine,

And royal, witty sack,² the poet’s soul,
With brighter suns than he doth gild the bowl;
As though the pot and poet did agree
Sack should to both illuminator be.

That artificial cloud with its curled brow
Tells us ’tis late; and that blue space below
Is fired with many stars; mark, how they break
In silent glances o’er the hills and speak
The evening to the plains; where, shot from far,
They meet in dumb salutes, as one great star.

The room, methinks, grows darker, and the air
Contracts a sadder color and less fair;
Or is ’t the drawer’s³ skill: hath he no arts
To blind us so we can’t know pints from quarts?
No, no, ’tis night; look where the jolly clown⁴
Musters his bleating herd and quits the down.

Hark! how his rude pipe frets the quiet air
Whilst every hill proclaims Lycoris fair.⁵
Rich, happy man! that canst thus watch and sleep,
Free from all cares, but thy wench, pipe, and sheep.

But see, the moon is up; view where she stands
Sentinel o’er the door, drawn by the hands
Of some base painter that for gain hath made
Her face the landmark to the tippling trade.
This cup to her, that to Endymion give,⁶

1. I.e., on a casual occasion. A “rhapsody” need imply nothing more than an emotional fantasy. Vaughan being so often a poet of solitary, mystic visions, this poem is welcome in placing him in London, amid a merry company, with a glass in his hand.
2. Sherry, the favored wine of Jonson and Herrick, among others.
3. The artist, and the tapster.
4. Rustic.
5. The shepherd painted on the wall is piping the praises of his imagined mistress Lycoris; the imaginary tune echoes from the painted hills.
6. In mythology, Artemis the moon goddess fell in love with the shepherd Endymion, and he with her.
"'Twas wit at first, and wine, that made them live. Choke may the painter! and his box disclose No other colors than his fiery nose; And may we no more of his pencil see Than two churchwardens and mortality.  

Should we go now a-wandering, we should meet With catchpoles, whores, and carts in every street, Now when each narrow lane, each nook and cave, Signposts and shop-doors pimp for every knave, When riotous sinful plush and telltale spurs Walk Fleet Street and the Strand, when the soft stirs Of bawdy, ruffled silks turn night to day, And the loud whip and coach scolds all the way, When lust of all sorts and each itchy blood From the Tower-wharf to Cymbeline and Lud Hunts for a mate, and the tired footman reels 'Twixt chairmen, torches, and the hackney wheels.  

Come, take the other dish; it is to him That made his horse a senator. Each brim Look big as mine! The gallant, jolly beast Of all the herd (you’ll say) was not the least.  

Now crown the second bowl, rich as his worth, I'll drink it to; he that like fire broke forth Into the Senate's face, crossed Rubicon, And the state's pillars, with their laws thereon, And made the dull gray beards and furred gowns fly Into Brundisium, to consult and lie. This to brave Sulla! Why should it be said We drink more to the living than the dead? Flatterers and fools do use it. Let us laugh At our own honest mirth; for they that quaff To honor others do like those that sent Their gold and plate to strangers to be spent.  

Drink deep; this cup be pregnant; and the wine Spirit of wit to make us all divine, That big with sack and mirth we may retire Possessors of more souls and nobler fire, And by the influx of this painted sky And labored forms, to higher matters fly; So, if a nap shall take us, we shall all After full cups have dreams poetical.  

Let's laugh now, and the pressed grape drink Till the drowsy day-star wink,

7. The two churchwardens would record the painter's death (mortality).  
1. I.e., from the eastern to the western side of London. Statues of Lud and Cymbeline, legendary kings of ancient Britain, stood at Ludgate, near St. Paul's Cathedral.  
2. The pairs of men who carried sedan chairs.  
3. The Roman emperor Caligula made his horse Incitatus a priest, a senator, and a consul.  
4. Julius Caesar.  
5. Lucius Cornelius Sulla did as much as any man before Caesar to destroy the ancient constitution of Rome. The poem was written and published under the parliamentary regime against which Vaughan had borne arms; the combination of anti-republican, antisenatorial Romans being toasted suggests that a certain amount of covert treason may have been talked in the old Globe Tavern.
And in our merry, mad mirth run
Faster and farther than the sun;
And let none his cup forsake
Till that star again doth wake;
So we men below shall move
   Equally with the gods above.

I Walked the Other Day (To Spend My Hour)

I walked the other day (to spend my hour)¹
   Into a field
Where I sometimes had seen the soil to yield
   A gallant flower;
But winter now had ruffled all the bower
   And curious store
I knew there heretofore.

Yet I, whose search loved not to peep and peer
   I’th’ face of things,
Thought with myself there might be other springs
   Besides this here,
Which, like cold friends, sees us but once a year;
   And so the flower
Might have some other bower.

Then taking up what I could nearest spy,
   I digged about
That place where I had seen him to grow out,
   And by and by
I saw the warm recluse alone to lie²
   Where fresh and green
He lived of us unseen.

Many a question intricate and rare
   Did I there strow,
But all I could extort was, that he now
   Did there repair
Such losses as befell him in this air,
   And would ere long
Come forth most fair and young.

This past, I threw the clothes quite o’er his head,³
   And stung with fear
Of my own frailty dropped down many a tear
   Upon his bed;

1. I.e., my hour of contemplation.
2. The flower is evidently a tulip or other such perennial, hence an emblem of the soul in its relation to the body.
3. I.e., replaced the soil over the plant.
Then sighing whispered, *Happy are the dead!*
*What peace doth now Rock him asleep below?*

And yet how few believe such doctrine springs
From a poor root
Which all the winter sleeps here underfoot
And hath no wings
To raise it to the truth and light of things,
But is still trod
By every wandering clod.

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

That in these masks 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;
Show me thy peace,
Thy mercy, love, and ease,

And from this care where dreams and sorrows reign,
Lead me above
Where light, joy, leisure, and true comforts move
Without all pain;
There, hid in thee, show me his life again,
At whose dumb urn
Thus all the year I mourn.

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4. Masks and shadows of the “real” (material) world.
5. Presumably the allusion is to Vaughan’s deceased brother William. But the poet has chosen to be unspecific.