

Philip West. *Henry Vaughan's Silex Scintillans: Scripture Uses*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. xii + 271 pp. \$70.00. Review by ALAN RUDRUM, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY.

Henry Vaughan's verse is saturated in biblical reference, and it may seem odd that a book-length study has not appeared before now. Until 1976, Vaughan's editors appeared to think that readers would catch such references for themselves. Even had that been true, to notice a reference does not dispose of questions of interpretation. Certainly, the appearance in 1985 of Chana Bloch's *Spelling the Word: George Herbert and the Bible* might have suggested the need for a similar attack on Vaughan. How many, one wonders, have set out only to be repulsed by the dragon Difficulty? Two British dissertations to my knowledge were never completed, and probably others elsewhere. Philip West's book is then to be welcomed; it appears at a good moment for Vaughan studies, stimulated as they have been in the past few years by the scholarly contributions to *Scintilla*. I shall be recording some disagreements, but my overall impression is easy to summarize: this is a welcome, stimulating, and very intelligent contribution to the discussion of Vaughan's work.

A section which should generate ongoing discussion is the second chapter, "Patriarchs and Pilgrims." It opens with a reminder of Sir Robert Filmer's argument "that royal power was absolute—given directly by God, and placing the monarch above earthly laws—and moreover patriarchal, like a father's power over his family" (23). West points out, in reference to "The Constellation," that Vaughan was "thinking patriarchally when he saw the execution of Charles I as an almost Oedipal monstrosity," and argues that Vaughan's writings "deploy patriarchal figures in a far more politically nuanced fashion than his modern readers have realized" (25). Without question, West has given more thought to Vaughan's meditation on the patriarchs than previous critics, and the resulting discussion is of great interest, though in some instances his revisionist conclusions may be overstated. He points out that in *The Mount of Olives* (1652) and in the 1655 *Silex Scintillans*,

“Vaughan draws on the Protestant view that Jacob is a type of the invisible church of the elect, forced to flee into the desert to escape Esau’s murderous revenge . . . in the 1650s, the fleeing elect are suffering Anglicans, forced out of God’s church by reprobate rebels” (25-26). He considers, however, that this view has been incorrectly ascribed to the earlier *Silex* (1650) and his extended discussion of “Regeneration,” the opening poem of the 1650 *Silex*, headed “JACOBS BED” takes issue with the argument of Summers and Pebworth that “*Jacob’s bed*” is a “church in nature” (34). He sees it rather as a figure for the holiness of churches—“a strongly Anglican idea in an age when Puritans increasingly disdained ecclesiastical buildings” (25). West points out that the Ordinance of 1645 putting the *Directory for Public Worship* into practice asserted flatly that “no place is capable of any holiness under pretence of whatsoever Dedication or Consecration” and sees “Regeneration” as “belonging to an Anglican tradition of revering churches which became highly unacceptable to Puritans at precisely the time Vaughan turned to God” (40). He considers that Summers and Pebworth misinterpret the historical context of the poem and concludes that Ruth Preston Lehmann got it right in arguing that *Jacobs Bed* is not “a grove that resembles a church, but a church interpreted as a grove” (40). Unfortunately, most of West’s readers will be unable to evaluate Lehmann’s argument, in a Ph.D. thesis of 1942, for he simply quotes her conclusion from Ross Garner’s *Henry Vaughan: Experience and the Tradition* (1959).

The historical evidence seems less clear to me than it does to West. Churches in South Wales may not have been closed by the time Vaughan wrote “Regeneration,” but a good deal had happened which might be held to support the view of Summers and Pebworth, rather than that of Lehmann. The attack on Anglican forms of worship was initiated well before the 1651 Act for the Propagation of the Gospel in Wales, and Royalist incumbents were ejected well before then too: sequestrations were carried out under military authority in Brecknock as early as 1645, and in Bedfordshire Thomas Vaughan’s father-in-law, Timothy Archer, was dispossessed some time before October 15, 1644 and imprisoned in the Fleet for

eighteen years (Donald Dickson, ed., *Aqua Vitæ: Non Vitis*, [reviewed below] xix). Much of the literary evidence in my view works against West's interpretation, for example the way in which the natural world is treated as sacred space in "Rules and Lessons," which is also in the 1650 *Silex*; Anglican approval of the work of Boehme, who constantly exhorted his readers to seek God in Nature; clear evidence that both Thomas and Henry Vaughan, in opposition to the Calvinists of their time who interpreted the non-human world in purely instrumental terms, saw Christ's redemption as being for the whole Creation; and the close relationship between "Regeneration" and the Vision of Thalia in Thomas Vaughan's *Lumen de Lumine*, in which the protagonist found himself "in a Grove of Bays. The Texture of the Branches was so even, the Leaves so thick, and in that conspiring order, it was not a wood, but a Building. I conceived it indeed to be the Temple of Nature, where she had joyn'd Discipline to her Doctrine" (Alan Rudrum, ed., *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984: 304). I discussed the imagistic and intellectual relationship between "Regeneration" and this work of Thomas Vaughan's in a 1963 essay with which West does not engage.

In his introductory chapter West asserts that his critical reorientation is not in conflict with other approaches, in particular "the long tradition of attention to Vaughan's alchemical and hermetic imagery" (5). However, he might have done well to give that "long tradition" rather more attention, since Vaughan's use of Scripture (the passages he evokes, and the meanings he elicits) is often connected with hermeticism. This is so, for example, in his use of Romans 8:19-22, the New Testament's most important passage on the theology of nature. West's inattention to this aspect of Vaughan's work becomes clear when he writes, of a 1989 article of mine, that it "falters only where it tries to read for doctrine poems whose emphasis is firmly on *discipline*" (120). Discipline and doctrine are not so easily separated, as the quotation from Thomas Vaughan above suggests, and it is a demonstrable fact that both the Vaughans enunciated *doctrines* which are biblical, closely related to doctrines set forth by hermetic authors such as Paracelsus; relatable, if some-

what idiosyncratically, to contemporary Anglicanism; and plainly opposed to the neo-Calvinism of their time. I invite readers to read Vaughan's "The Book," and then the article to which West refers, and, if they think me mistaken on this point, to let me know where and why.

Naturally, in his chapter "Patriarchs and Pilgrims," West deals with "Isaac's Marriage" of which he writes that "it is the only text which Vaughan decided to revise for the 1655 edition of *Silex*, suggesting that he continued to value and want to perfect it" (53-54). He goes on to say that Vaughan "requested" that 'Isaacs Marriage' be reset with alterations, adding in a note that this interpretation is based upon internal evidence (64 and n. 6). These remarks need to be put into context. The first part of the 1655 edition of Henry Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans* is made up of unsold sheets of the 1650 edition, with the exception of leaves B2 and B3, which were reprinted. These leaves run from line 75 of "The Search," the poem before "Isaac's Marriage," to the end of "The British Church," which immediately follows it. The latter, a poem of some twenty lines, is thus the only complete poem, apart from "Isaac's Marriage," on those leaves. Four brief passages of "Isaac's Marriage" are amended and one error introduced. What West writes, of course, makes some sense. Vaughan's introduction of revisions does indeed suggest that he continued to value the poem. However, the phrase "the only text which Vaughan decided to revise" is misleading, in carrying the implication that Vaughan valued the poem uniquely. The likeliest explanation for the revisions is that those sheets were spoiled in the printing house and for that reason Vaughan was asked to supply fresh copy. Given the opportunity, he may well have wished to revise a number of poems, but publishers were no more likely than they are now to accede to the wishes of an author whose work had already left them with unsold sheets on their hands. I have recently published an article on this poem, in the German journal *Connotations*, and will here confine myself to saying that the ecstatic description of Isaac's prayer, followed by the extended simile beginning at line 53, are both quintessential Vaughan and at some remove from the biblical account.

Its sexually-charged and masculine language (of undressing, piercing, scattering) calls into question West's description of the poem as a "curiously prim meditation on the nuptials of Jacob's father," as the wording of that description fails to take into account the significance of the marriage of Isaac in biblical typology. Jean Daniélou's *From Shadows to Reality* appears in West's bibliography, and might have been usefully drawn upon in discussion of "Isaacs Marriage."

In general, however, this book is so enlivening to read because its author has clearly made good use of, and enjoyed, his opportunity for research. I liked especially his exposition of the evidence that Royalists connected Charles Stuart, who was crowned King of Scotland in 1651, with the suffering Jacob. The Stone of Destiny was thought to be the same one on which Jacob had slept at Bethel. That Charles could not sit on it at his coronation, because it had been removed to Westminster in 1297, would, West suggests, have symbolized to Vaughan the disturbance of the patriarchal line from Jacob's day. Whatever particular reservations one might have, West's discussion of Vaughan's meditation on the patriarchs, and their relevance to contemporary Anglican sufferings, is an important contribution to understanding.

Donald R. Dickson, ed. *Thomas and Rebecca Vaughan's Aqua Vita: Non Vitis* (British Library MS, Sloane 1741). Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001. liii + 270 pp. \$35.00
Review by ALAN RUDRUM, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY.

Insofar as modern students of literature are aware of Thomas Vaughan (1621-1666), it is as the twin brother of the poet Henry Vaughan. Yet during his lifetime, being of a more swashbuckling disposition, he made more stir in the world than did Henry. His work was known outside Great Britain and was read in German translation through the eighteenth century. Substantial extracts were copied into commonplace books on both sides of the Atlantic. Like his twin, he published prolifically during the period 1650-1655 and is generally regarded as the most notable alchemical or