Going Nowhere: The Stranger and Pilgrim in the Journal of George Fox.

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Abstract
This article examines the rhetoric and poetics of movement and stillness in early Quaker culture. George Fox urged Friends to ‘stand still’, and stillness was valued as the godly heart of the meeting for worship. Nonetheless, the lives of Fox and other early Public Friends were insistently peripatetic, and Fox’s Journal is largely structured around accounts of his travels. How, then, might we understand the place of the journey and the rhetoric of movement in early Quaker practice and culture? By means of a close analysis of the figure of the stranger in Fox’s Journal and a comparative reading of this text in relation to seventeenth-century pilgrimage literature, the article argues that the early Quakerism’s conception of the inward light as a unifying force reframed the meanings of travel in a way that informed both the practice and the writings of early Friends.

Keywords
George Fox, Journal, stranger, pilgrimage, journeys, movement, stasis, rhetoric, potential space.

George Fox’s persistently peripatetic life is a defining instantiation of early Quakerism. The movement was born in the early 1650s of the journeys made by its wandering founder, and it was sustained and spread by the journeys of those who were convinced by him of the truth of the Quaker message. In the middle years of a century whose political and social upheavals produced multiple uprootings and unseatings, radical religion was itself one of the sites and engines of unsettlement, literal as well as metaphorical, and not infrequently productive of itinerant preachers or prophets. The journeys of Fox’s near contemporaries, the Seeker Richard Coppin and the Ranter Lawrence Clarkson, for example, were also strikingly protracted, and the prophetic work of both Anna Trapnel and Elinor Channel was dependent on or resulted in the leaving of home and community and the undertaking of journeys. Early Quaker journeying is, from this perspective, of a piece with a more general radical religious restlessness characteristic of these turbulent times.
However, the early Quaker movement differs from these other religious radical contexts in being fundamentally premised on the itinerancy of its ministry, initially that of Fox and the first convinced, such as Farnworth and Nayler, and soon after by the so-called Valiant Sixty, the ‘Publishers of Truth’ or travelling ministers who from 1654 onwards took the movement to southern England, in the first instance, and then beyond, most notably to Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and the Atlantic colonies, to spread the Quaker word. Their success in bringing people to a state of ‘convincement’ of the Quaker tenet of the inward light, and in settling meetings in many of the places to which they travelled, is well known. As a foundation for the proselytising of the ideas of Fox and his fellow Friends, itinerancy was clearly instrumental and highly effective in bringing about the extraordinary growth and spread of the movement during these years.

While there was without doubt, therefore, a ministerial pragmatics to the itinerancy of the early Friends as a means of establishing and spreading the movement, there was also a cultural commitment to this practice that went beyond the need for it to be spread and secured. Travel did not just carve out the channels by means of which the Quaker message reached new communities, but it also informed the movement’s conceptual vocabulary, its habitual modes of expression, its ways of describing its beliefs and its practices to its members, its converts and its opponents. It is to the dimension of Quaker travel as a potent and defining element within the broader culture of the early movement that this article will attend. Rather than focusing on the history of early Quaker travel – the practicalities of where and by what means and to what ends Quakers travelled – my interest is in the rhetoric and the poetics of Quaker travel, in particular as embodied in the figure and journeys of George Fox narrated in his *Journal*. Fox extolled Friends to let their lives preach: that is, to serve as acts of persuasive communication to bring those who witnessed them closer to God.1 Fox’s own habitually itinerant life might accordingly be understood and analysed as an act of preaching: a practiced predicatory rhetoric, an address made to those encountered by means of the special conditions of the journey, seeking to persuade addressees of the power and truth of the Quaker message. Furthermore, if the journeys undertaken by Fox can be understood as rhetorical acts, the poetics of these journeys might be analysed in the language and the structure of those journeys’ traces, in the narration of the *Journal* itself. Organised around Fox’s itinerant life, this extended account allows consideration of the ways in which his journeys are not simply the subject of the narrative, but also form its structure. As textual acts of predicatory rhetoric, as well as accounts of a preaching life, Fox’s journeying will be
analysed as both medium and message: as a practiced and embodied rhetoric, and as it is inscribed and memorialised in his *Journal*.

This analysis of the rhetorical importance of travel to the early movement and its structuring presence in Fox’s *Journal* is underpinned by a question originating in a puzzling tension generated by this habitual itinerancy when considered as a part of wider Quaker culture and practice: namely, why travel when you’ve already arrived? Fox’s constant mobility, together with that of the other first Publishers of Truth, seems to run counter to one of the most far-reaching implications of the founding Quaker belief in the inward light, a light that was understood as universal (it shone within everyone, and promised salvation to all who turned to that light and lived within it), and unifying (it abolished the widely held distinctions between life in this world and in the next, the human and the divine). On the one hand, the inward light brought to the movement a lexicon and a set of practices premised on movement. To be ‘moved of the Lord’ was both a literal description of the impetus to undertake a journey, and a metaphorical description of a prompt from God to speak or act more generally. On the other hand, Quakers were also insistent that the godly heart of belief – both its origin and its destination, as it were – was stillness. As early as 1652, Fox wrote an epistle entitled ‘To Friends, to stand still in Trouble, and see the Strength of the Lord’, which, in its insistent reiteration of on tropes of stillness and of movement, and its oscillation between them, exemplifies the centrality of this idea:

*Stand still* in that which is pure, after ye see your selves; and then *Mercy* comes in. After thou seest thy *Thoughts*, and the *Temptations*, do not think, but submit; and then *Power* comes. *Stand still* in that which shews and discovers; and there doth Strength immediately come: And stand still in the *Light*, and submit to it, and the other [the Tempter] will be hush’d and gone …. Your Strength is to *stand still*, after ye see your selves; … *David* fretted himself, *when he look’d out*; but when he was *still*, no *Trouble* could him move: When your *Thoughts* are out, abroad, *then Troubles move you*: But come to stay your *Minds* upon that *Spirit*, which was before the *Letter*; … *stand still* in that *Power*, which brings *Peace*.²

‘Standing still’ is here aligned with the state of submission necessary to assent and be subsumed by the inward light, and with it divine mercy, power, strength and peace. Opposed to this nexus of enlightened associations is another, however, connected to being ‘out, abroad’. This place of fretful and restless agitation is associated with thoughts, temptation and trouble. Movement in this account arises not from an impetus originating with the
indwelling light of the Lord, but is both sign and part of a state of scattered and outward-looking confusion, to be dispelled in the manner that David had banished his own cares: ‘when he was still, no Trouble could him move’. In the early Quaker lexicon, therefore, movement is ambiguous. It could emanate either from the Lord, or from trouble. Stillness, however, does not share this constitutional uncertainty, but brings with it the clarity and singularity of godliness.

If early Quaker culture comprehended movement both as divine impetus, in the initial and transformative turn to the light, and as the anxious agitation of carnal temptation and trouble, and if these triangulate with the stillness of experience of and in the light, then how might we understand the restlessness at the heart of early movement? If believers had, by turning to the light, already arrived at their longed-for destination of union with the indwelling Christ, we might ask where the wayfaring Quaker was going. If the light within rewrote the promise of Christ’s future return as already fulfilled, and therefore always present in this time and this place, what kind of holy journeys were Fox and his fellow Friends making? And if silence and stillness were the ideals of Quaker practice, the states closest to the divine towards which everything tended, why seek that stasis in, or by means of, a rhetoric and practice of movement? That which was desired – the redemptive grace of God – was already present, here, in this world and this life; so why not stay put, stand still, and dwell peacefully and attentively in that inward light?

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George Fox’s itinerancy is inaugurated early in his account of his life narrated in his Journal. In the opening pages, he is at pains to establish his singularity and his difference from his family and community by recounting his assumption of the status of a stranger. Becoming a stranger, indeed, conferred the position which then required and produced the itinerant godly life.

Fox narrates his accession to the condition of the ‘stranger’ as precipitated by a sense of alienation from his family and peers. Included in his account is an incident that proved to be a turning point. As a young man of nineteen, he visited his cousin, a ‘professor’ of religion from another village, who invited him to drink some beer with him and another professor. Fox was thirsty; he valued the company of the godly; and so he agreed. After having ‘a glass apiece’, his companions urged him to keep drinking, a request which grieved him, and so –
having paid for the drinks thus far – he left his companions. However, he could not as easily leave behind the affective state occasioned by the incident, and his sense of disturbance, or trouble, remains with him. ‘I returned home,’ he wrote, ‘but did not go to bed that night, nor could not sleep, but sometimes walked up and down, and sometimes prayed and cried to the Lord’. Fox’s mental and spiritual agitation is made manifest in his nocturnal walking, an act of both symbolic and literal restlessness and disturbance. The Lord responds to his cries with a command: ‘Thou seest how young people go together into vanity and old people into the earth; and thou must forsake all, both young and old, and keep out of all, and be as a stranger unto all.’ Consequently, Fox writes, ‘at the command of God, on the 9th day of the Seventh Month [September], 1643, I left my relations and brake off all familiarity or fellowship with young or old.’ Leaving home is the necessary precondition and adjunct to the sloughing off of the old way of life, and the assumption of a new: one productive of him as a stranger.

The assumption of the position of the stranger requires separation from young and old, the former because of their predilection for vanity, as witnessed by the drinking incident, and the old, more opaquely, because they go together ‘into the earth’: perhaps a reference to the grave, and consequently to a preoccupation with death, rather than the necessary attention to a life lived in the light. It seems as if the problem represented by both is their status as carnal attachments – they tie Fox back into the social. Just as Christian needs to leave his wife and family at the beginning of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, so Fox needs to free himself from the trammels of social and familial attachments. While the former separation is allegorical, however, the latter is literal. At this stage in his *Journal*, all such attachments are experienced as impediments or distractions. For example, Fox suggests that marriage would hinder his spiritual progress: ‘my relations would have had me married, but I told them I was but a lad and I must get wisdom’. Nonetheless, despite these refusals and separations being expressly identified as enactments of God’s command, they cause him some unease: ‘I thought, because I had forsaken my relations I had done amiss against them’, he writes, but this thought arises within a ‘temptation to despair’, and can thus be withstood.

These early pages of the *Journal* identify relationality – his network of social and familial bonds and responsibilities – with a variety of fallen concerns: with the distraction of meaningless social convention, as on the occasion when he accidentally steps on a flowerbed when discussing religion with a priest, ‘at which the man was in such a rage as if his house had been on fire’; with corrupt carnality, as when his cousin urged him to keep drinking; with
humiliation, as when an ‘ancient priest … told my troubles and sorrows and grieves to his servants, so that it got among the milk-lasses, which grieved me’; and with the spiritual confusion and alienation always occasioned by the teachings of both Puritan priests and separatist preachers, who were ‘all miserable comforters’. Through these failed encounters, Fox learns to fear ‘all company, … all carnal talk and talkers, for I could see nothing but corruptions’. The world and its creatures are fallen, their carnality contagious, an impediment to the spiritual seeker.

Only once Fox ceases to look for guidance and comfort from such social mediations, and recognises definitively that ‘all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been’; and that therefore ‘all the world could do me no good’, can he find his way to the truth: ‘when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition”’. Only when he relinquishes the sociality through which the world works by turning to the enlightenment of the indwelling Christ, and does so ‘experimentally’, or experientially, rather than through the mediation of ‘any man, book, or writing’, does he find the truth and solace he seeks. And this new condition of living in the light is figured as standing in contrast to the restless instability of carnality: while people’s minds do run in the earthly, after the creatures and changeable things, and changeable ways and religions, and changeable, uncertain teachers, their minds are in bondage. And they are brittle and changeable, and tossed up and down with windy doctrines and thoughts, and notions and things.

Paradoxically, the entrapment or stasis of bondage arises in the agitated movement of all that is changeable; and conversely, Fox’s own constitutional itinerancy arises from the peaceful stillness of the Quaker perception of godliness, renewed through his life as a ‘stranger in the earth’.

However, separation from carnality and from those who continue to dwell within its darkness is only one element within the assumption of the identity of the stranger by Fox in the early pages of the Journal – or, rather, it is the first stage in the establishment of a new kind of relationality, in which the primary bond is with the divine: ‘I had not fellowship with any people … but with Christ’. To establish and sustain this bond, he takes his distance from the fallen: ‘having forsaken all evil company, and taken leave of father and mother and all other relations,’ he writes, he ‘travelled up and down as a stranger in the earth, which way the Lord
inclined my heart’. To be ‘a stranger in the earth’ is to add a new dimension to the figure of the stranger: it makes him not only a stranger to carnality, but it also opens him to God. As specified in Psalm 119, from where the phrase is taken, to be a stranger in the earth is the necessary precondition to receiving the guidance of God’s command: ‘I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me’. Syntactically and semantically, the divine command follows his self-declaration as a stranger.

By this account, the stranger dwells on the constantly reinscribed border between the fallen world and an identification with the divine call; he simultaneously embodies refusal of the one and openness to the other. However, the position inhabited by Fox vis-à-vis these two constituencies – the divine and the worldly – brings the two together in a way quite particular to Quaker theology, which at once confirms the border between them and collapses it. For those continuing to dwell in darkness, union with the divine remained inaccessible. To live in the light, however, was to experience the dissolution of the division between human and divine and the conceptual continuity of the two categories. This, in turn, required a reframing of the relationship between the juxtaposed lives in this world of those dwelling in the light and those continuing to dwell in darkness. The figure of the stranger was instrumental in this act of reframing.

In his seminal essay on the figure of the stranger, the early twentieth-century sociologist Georg Simmel argued that the figure of the “stranger” presents the unity of two phenomena: ‘the liberation from every given point in space’, on the one hand, and ‘the conceptual opposite to fixation at such a point’, on the other. He figures, that is, the union of a literal and a conceptual liberation from stasis or ‘fixation’. Simmel’s interest was in the stranger as a phenomenon of urban modernity, in the stranger not as ‘the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow’. Fox-the-stranger, on the other hand, was precisely the wanderer who came and went. Furthermore, he inhabited very different kinds of social space from those of Simmel’s stranger: he was as much a creature of the hamlet and the market town, of the colonial settlements of New England and Barbados, as of the cities of London and Bristol. Nonetheless, for him too the assumption of the position of the stranger offered a means to bring together and unite a lived and a conceptual phenomenon, constituted in and dwelling on this border of carnality and godliness. The forsaking of carnal relationality with its attendant false starts, distractions and corruptions brought him to be a literal stranger, on the move from one place to another,
‘liberated from every given point’, but also, figuratively, it remade him as ‘the conceptual opposite to fixation’, disencumbered and therefore able to open himself and others to the indwelling light. In Fox’s *Journal*, therefore, the stranger unites the literal and the conceptual, the practice and its symbolism.

The stranger’s unification of the literal and the conceptual constitutes him as the point of contact between two systems of meaning. In Fox’s case, the boundary between the two is complicated by its being cross-cut by another, dividing enlightenment from darkness. Fox, however, as one dwelling in the light, does not so much occupy the border between these two sets of polarised terms, but, through his own enlightened state and his preaching of the universality of that light, serves as a bridge between them. He points to the existence of these two distinct domains, each by definition incompatible with the other, and he provides a way to link them. In his position at a border, and in his embodiment of the way across, he puts the two into mobile and dynamic relation with each other. As such, the figure of Fox-the-stranger brings into being a kind of transitional space between two sets of distinct and incommensurable phenomena: the literal and the figurative, the enlightened and the benighted. He serves, to borrow from the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips’s discussion of transitional phenomena, as both bridge and passport, linking ‘what might seem, without this connection, to be two incompatible worlds’, and providing both the means and permission to cross over from one to the other. In psychoanalytic terms, transitional phenomena are used to negotiate the relation between self and other, and they do so by constituting what D. W. Winnicott, who developed the concept, called ‘potential space’, a third space of creative negotiation, reconciliation and combination. This space is used initially in the infant’s work of separation from the primary carer, but Winnicott suggested (somewhat in passing) that in later life it is associated more with the spaces of transformation generated by culture and religion: ‘This intermediate area of experience,’ he wrote, ‘throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living’. Such spaces, he suggested, serve as ‘a resting place for the individual engaged in the perpetual task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated’. These spaces were still to be understood as transitional, but rather than helping the work of separation of self from other, the potential space of culture or religion comprises, on the contrary, ‘a state in which the reality of the separate self (and “real object”) is called into question’. In other words, the potential space of religion and art challenges rather than confirms the hard-won autonomy or
separateness of the human subject. It is a space of the active and generative interrogation and reconfiguration of distinct realities, a place where their interrelation is newly discovered.

The space offered by the figure of Fox is transformative or transitional in its reminder of the route from darkness to a life in the light of the indwelling Christ. It might also, and slightly differently, be understood as specifically potential space, in a number of ways. First, its potential derives from its participation in the omnipotence of the divine; ‘the Lord’s power was over all’ is one of the most frequent refrains of Fox’s Journal, and the repeated invocations of that power in the voice of Fox is one of the textual formations that helps produce the two as co-extensive. Secondly, it is potential space in that the transformations or transitions promised to those dwelling in darkness by the ‘turn to the light’ are latent rather than actual; it is therefore potential because it is prospective, a promise for the future, but a promise that might be refused by those to whom it is offered as well as accepted. The potential of this space, that is, is not always realised. Finally, this transformative promise marks out the potential space as inherently dynamic, rather than fixed. Dynamism suggests energy, and it is this energy that both drives the turn to the light, and moves Fox and other Public Friends from one place to the next. ‘I was moved of the Lord’, wrote Fox repeatedly in another of the refrains of the Journal, insisting on the divine origin of the motive force of his journeying as of his actions more generally.

It is through his articulation of Quaker theology, both in his meetings and in his lived exemplification of it, that Fox-the-stranger most actively embodies an intermediate and potential space in which the boundary between distinct categories is called into question, most fundamentally and distinctively the boundary between the human and the divine. While the dominant Calvinist Puritan theology of the seventeenth century was structured around the absolute and incommensurate division between the carnal self and the divine other, with the promised union with the Father reserved for the elect in the afterlife, the Quaker teaching of the inward light undoes precisely this separation, as the indwelling light dissolves the boundary between the creator and his creation. As a stranger, separated from family and community, and dwelling in the light that dissolves the absolute fallen distinction between human and divine, Fox’s presence distinguishes between (or ‘discerns’) the worlds of the carnal and the spiritual, but it also actively bridges them, in a way that the more dominant Calvinist configuration of faith around the unbridgeable constituencies of a predestined elect and reprobate expressly and constitutionally could not.
The ‘potential space’ produced by Fox’s presence and message shares one further characteristic with the framework of transitional phenomena conceptualised by Winnicott: that is, the means whereby such a space can be generated can be offered for people’s use, but it cannot be imposed. Such a space has, in effect, to be co-created by Fox’s preaching and by the ‘tender’ hearers who assent to it by ‘sinking into’ the undifferentiated space of the light within, which itself dwells in the ultimate, continuous and timeless potential space of divine plenitude. If the receptivity is not present in the hearer, the potential of the space remains unrealised; it becomes, in effect, dead or fixed space, as the hearer is confirmed in a place of carnal darkness, separated from the light of the indwelling Christ. The dynamic of the potential space is therefore initiated by the power of the Lord, but it is also reproduced – its energy renewed – through accession to the potential of the inward light.

The ‘stranger in the earth’ – in the earth, notably, but not of it – is separated from the attachments of home and community, but continues to pass through the social world, making available his transitional presence as an impetus to turn to the light. On his arrival among the people of Kendal in 1652, Fox writes that ‘my life was offered up amongst them, and the mighty power of the Lord was seen’; the offering of his life is coupled with the power of the Lord. The potential space engendered by this figure offers to end the differentiated estrangement of human and divine in this world, renewing the unbroken continuity of the two by the turn to the universal inward light. Fox-the-stranger is thus a transitional figure in that his is a mediating presence of that which is itself immediate: the unifying power of the inward light.

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Fox is also a transitional figure because he himself is more often than not in transit: on the move, journeying from one place to another. As was the case in Simmel’s formulation of the stranger, the figure of Fox is also premised on a particular relation to space, stasis and movement. His separation from his family and community did not reproduce him as a solitary figure. On the contrary, to maintain his presence as that of a stranger, he had ceaselessly to seek the company of others, whether the enlightened, the ‘tender’ (open to convincement) or those hostile to his message. As Simmel put it, ‘In spite of being inorganically appended to it, the stranger is yet an organic member of the group’; that is, the stranger and the group are co-
constituted, formed and confirmed by an encounter with the other. This is particularly apparent with the figure of the stranger in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Israelites are reminded that ‘the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt’. The stranger, in this instance, provides an opportunity for hospitality, in post-hoc recognition of their own earlier experience as strangers in a strange land. In the New Testament, the figure of the stranger is still more profoundly constitutive of those whom he encounters, offering an occasion for the the reception or rejection of Christ: the welcome given to a stranger, ‘the righteous’ are assured, is also a welcome given to him. The stranger is a means for the separation of the elect from the reprobate: the righteous who welcome the stranger are heirs to ‘life eternal’; those who shun him ‘shall go away into everlasting punishment’. The arrival of a stranger is a defining moment in the spiritual life of the community, resonant with scriptural associations, confirmatory of the soteriological of the group encountered, and further constitutive of the movement of which he was a part.

For Fox to continue to undertake the work of the stranger required him, therefore, to be in relation to others, for it necessitated their recognition of him, and their subsequent acceptance or rejection of him, as such. This, in turn, made him a traveller, for staying in one place would lead to his incorporation, to use Eric Leed’s term, into the social body. Consequently, the stranger relies on his own repeated excorporation to maintain his identity as an outsider. In order never to be at home, never fully to be known, he has always to be on the move, preempting the recognition and attachments that would arise from incorporation. Consequently, the stranger-traveller also becomes legible in relation to the figures of the exile and the pilgrim. Fox was not an exile in the sense of having forcibly to leave his home, for while his departure was commanded, it was also chosen; moreover, in leaving his home, he left too any association of it as a place of ‘incorporation’ or belonging; it never figured as a place of longed-for return. Neither was he a pilgrim in the sense of a traveller journeying towards a shrine or holy place, for Quakerism (like Protestantism more generally) vigorously rejected such notions and practices. Nonetheless, in its defining biblical context – a context to which Fox’s invocation of the word ‘stranger’ also alludes – the stranger is also an exile and a pilgrim in that he is an alienated wanderer in the service of the divine.

In his exploration of the origins and meanings of the literary pilgrimage across time and across different Christian formations, Philip Edwards traces the term and its conceptual
associations back to its defining instance in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Recalling the faithful who lived before the advent of Christ, the author of Hebrews recalls God’s commandment to Abraham and his people to go from home to ‘a land that I will show thee’:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The faithful are made ‘strangers and pilgrims on the earth’ by their continuing expectation of reaching the promised land; their faith, future-directed, separates and alienates them from their present lives in this world. It is as a metaphorical composite of all three – traveller, stranger and pilgrim -- that the faithful are enjoined to undertake and understand their mortal lives.

Edwards’s study takes this verse from Hebrews as the point of origin for a centuries-long literary engagement with the idea of pilgrimage. Tracing its impact and legacy through the derivations and evolutions of the words ‘strangers’ and ‘pilgrims’ from the original Greek (ξένοι καὶ παρεπιδήμοι, or xenoi kai parapidemoi), to the Latin of the Vulgate (peregrini et hospites), early French and German translations, and into successive versions of the English Bible, he demonstrates that both ‘strangers’ and ‘pilgrims’ connote ‘travellers who are temporarily residing in a territory which is not their own’; as such, the two terms are largely synonymous.

‘Peregrinus’, from which the English word ‘pilgrim’ comes, ‘meant a wanderer, a traveller from foreign parts, an alien, and it is in these senses that it is used in the Epistle to the Hebrews’. The condition of exile is not that of absence from a worldly homeland, but the state of perpetual and constitutional exile experienced by the godly ‘as they made their way through this world and this life’. Edwards demonstrates the continuation of this broad association into the use of ‘pilgrim’ in English in a resonant quotation from a Lollard tract: “Eevery citizen of the hevenli countre is a pilgrim of this world for al tyme of this present lijf”. Aligning himself with the work on medieval pilgrimage of Dee Dyas, Edwards argues that this sense of ‘life-pilgrimage’ (‘that is, life conceived as a pilgrimage towards a heavenly destination’) was the primary meaning of the concept, whereas ‘place-pilgrimage’ (the ‘actual journeys to actual shrines’ associated with Catholic religious practice and rejected by the Protestant reformers) was both secondary and subordinate to the former. Moreover, as Edwards points out, in its figuring of the human life as a journey, the primary meaning of ‘pilgrimage’ is metaphorical; the Catholic place-pilgrimage simply and secondarily made that journey literal.
Edwards’s discussion concludes that the New Testament author of Hebrews compacts in the phrase ‘strangers and pilgrims’ both the Old Testament sense of exile – ‘the Jews seeing themselves as a displaced people, enforced wanderers in search of the Promised Land’ – and ‘the spirit of alienation from the life around them which inspired early Christians, dedicated to a wholly new purpose’.33 This doubled sense offers a concise but suggestive perspective on the figure of George Fox as both a stranger and a wanderer. He might be understood as a pilgrim, that is, not in the sense of a future-directed traveller to a holy shrine, but in the foundational Biblical sense of the spiritual traveller passing through this world but alienated from it. This metaphorical identification is intensified, however, by both his practised itinerancy and by his Journal’s narrative reliance on his journeys. Might the figure of pilgrim resonate within the preaching rhetoric of Fox’s life? And might the Journal’s account of that itinerant life share the structures and dynamics of the literary pilgrimage in its making literal of the metaphor of the life-pilgrimage, staging the journey and the events befalling the traveller as richly imbued with spiritual significance?

One of the best-known incidents in Fox’s Journal, and indeed in Quaker history and mythology, unquestionably lends itself to such an interpretation: namely, his ascent of Pendle Hill, in Lancashire, in 1652:

As we went I spied a great high hill called Pendle Hill, and I went on the top of it with much ado it was so steep; but I was moved of the Lord to go atop of it; and when I came atop of it I saw Lancashire sea; and there atop of the hill I was moved to sound the day of the Lord; and the Lord let me see a-top of the hill in what places he had a great people to be gathered.34

Striking in this account is Fox’s fusion of the physical landscape through which he was travelling with the spiritual contours of the environment to which he bore witness. The ascent of Pendle Hill is presented as physically arduous: the words ‘top’ or ‘atop’ occur five times in these few lines, each reiteration compounding the sense of the hill’s steepness causing him ‘much ado’. But – as the importance given this account in Quaker history attests – the real importance of Pendle Hill lies its prominence in Fox’s spiritual landscape. ‘Moved of the Lord’ to climb the hill, and, once there, ‘moved to sound the day of the Lord’, the sense of a man toiling up ‘atop of the hill’ gives way to that of a spiritual being in a spiritualised landscape. The physical prospect that opens out on the summit of Pendle Hill precipitates the spiritual ‘vision’ of ‘a great people to be gathered’ and the places in which they dwelt. The
topography of Fox’s vision gives form to its articulation, and suggests the rich possibilities for Quaker discourse of the blending of a sense of place with spiritual commentary.

Fox’s merging of the topographical and the spiritual in his narration of this incident, and its status as a symbolically significant way-station on a longer journey, aligns it with a longstanding English literature of pilgrimage in which the external and the internal journey are intertwined. This body of writing was both pre-Reformation, including such texts as the medieval *Piers Plowman*, whose narrator ‘Wente wide in this world wondres to here’, but it also continued to thrive after the Reformation. Even though Protestantism abolished the place-pilgrimage as a corrupt and theologically faulty Catholic exercise, premised on the erroneous idea that fallen human subjects might, by their own efforts, intervene in their spiritual destiny and improve their prospects of salvation, the metaphor of life-pilgrimage continued as strongly as ever as a powerful and pervasive way of conceptualising the internal processes by which an individual should conceive of and conduct their spiritual life as they navigate and endure the travails of this life. While Calvin condemned journeys to holy sites, he also wrote that ‘Christ teaches us to travel as pilgrims in this world’. Such journeys were now to be interior, however, and to be understood and undertaken only metaphorically.

It was as such that seventeenth-century writers such as John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne and John Bunyan embraced the idea of the Protestant pilgrimage. Sometimes they figured their explorations of the spiritual life simply as a journey, as in Donne’s ‘Good Friday 1613. Riding Westward’, his meditation on the crucifixion stirred by his own journey towards the west, ‘when my soul’s form bends towards the east’; and it was also the case in Thomas Traherne’s ‘Walking’, which develops its figurative engagement with the traversal of a landscape from the observation that ‘To walk abroad is, not with eyes, / But thoughts, the fields to see and prize’. More particularly, however, some writers developed the idea of the internal and individual life-pilgrimage, but always, insistently, as a metaphorical one, as an unambiguous figure or allegory through which to explore the contours, the landmarks, the privations and the promise of the spiritual life. The opening stanzas of Herbert’s ‘The Pilgrimage’ exemplify the extended metaphorical literary engagement of the Protestant life-pilgrimage:

I travelled on, seeing the hill, where lay
My expectation.
A long it was and weary way.

The gloomy cave of Desperation

I left on th'one, and on the other side

The rock of Pride.

And so I came to phansies medow strow’d

With many a flower:

Fain would I here have made abode,

But I was quickened by my hour.

So to cares cops I came, and there got through

With much ado.\(^{38}\)

Herbert’s pilgrimage is an arduous one. Just as Fox had ‘much ado’ to arrive ‘atop of the hill’, so too Herbert’s pilgrim had ‘much ado’ on his long and weary way through his own spiritualised landscape. The irregular line lengths enact the stopping and starting, stumbling and pausing the journey comprises. The poem conveys an extraordinary sense of how the questing and troubled believer makes sense of his life through a religious framework premised on obstacle and entrapment. First, the ‘cave of Desperation’, then the ‘rock of Pride’, ‘phansies medow’ and ‘cares cops’ threaten the progress of this pilgrim; later in the poem, it is the ‘wilde of passion’ and the disappointment of the ‘lake of brackish waters’ that he finds on top of the ‘gladsome hill’ of hope that impede his journey. Just as was the case for Fox in his account of Pendle Hill, so in this poem the physical world is a text that reveals, for those who care to look, the will of God. Pendle Hill prompts in Fox a vision of a new movement; Herbert’s pilgrim finds a bleaker landscape of doubt, disappointment and temptation, where earthly hope and rest are repeatedly exposed as illusory. Both texts, however, take the conventional Christian equation between life, landscape and journey as their foundation, and extend its metaphorical possibilities in accordance with the rhetorical and theological task in hand.

The terms and trajectory of Herbert’s poem are so ostentatiously and relentlessly metaphorical that they read almost like a prototype or miniature of the most famous Protestant pilgrimage text, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. There, in his ‘Author’s Apology’, Bunyan answers anticipated objections to his dependence on ‘fancy’ or the imagination (which was also one of Herbert’s snares in ‘The Pilgrimage’), by reminding
readers of the biblical precedent: ‘The prophets used much by metaphors / To set forth truth; yea, who so considers / Christ, his Apostles too, shall plainly see, / That truths to this day in such mantles be.’ Divine truth dwells within these figures, he asserts: ‘My dark and cloudy words they do but hold / The truth, as cabinets enclose the gold’. Furthermore, the purpose of Bunyan’s tale is to teach his readers how to live metaphorically too: his fancies will instruct them to read the circumstances of their own lives as ephemeral and insubstantial, meaningful only for the spiritual meanings embedded in the material shell:

This book will make a traveller of thee,
If by its counsel thou wilt ruled be;
It will direct thee to the Holy Land,
If thou wilt its directions understand:
Yea, it will make the slothful active be,
The blind also delightful things to see.

The aim is to detach readers from the distractions, the empty promises, of their human lives, played out in ‘the wilderness of this world’, and to fix their eyes instead on the Celestial City and on ‘Life, life, eternal life’. The assiduous reader, Bunyan suggests, will find that the book exposes this world as transient and unreal, a mere shadow or figure of what is to come, and will thereby be converted to the greater reality of metaphorical pilgrimage. Life on earth in this model is distinct from, but also a metaphorical engagement with, the life to come. Readers are warned to distrust the contours of the material and social world and their apparent significance, to distrust the glittering appeal of its temptations and its pitfalls; instead, we are to read these as metaphors of the greater spiritual reality of a life lived with a view to the afterlife. In this way, the book will make a ‘traveller of thee’, focusing the mind on the journey from this life to the next, as the traveller, a pilgrim ‘for al tyme of this present lijf’, makes his way to ‘the hevenli countre’. For Bunyan, to live metaphorically in this way was, paradoxically, to live more truly.

The metaphorical model is a fundamentally binary one. It works, to use I. A. Richards’ terms, through the distinctness of the tenor (the subject under scrutiny) from the vehicle (the metaphorical term itself), the analogical relation between them reliant on the common grounds on which they meet. In Bunyan or Herbert’s hands, their metaphors rehearse the terms of this life as distinct from the next life which is also understood as a binary: this moment as distinct from the time to come; the inward as distinct from the outward; and, underlying all of these, the human as distinct from the divine. Thomas Luxon in his study of
Puritanism and allegory, argues that ‘no version of Christianity is more committed than Calvinism to the absolute separation between this world and the next’:

God is everywhere represented in his creation, especially in ‘man,’ but our ontological realm and God’s remain as distinct from each other as figure and thing figured, except in the single exceptional case of Christ’s sojourn on earth. Even in his Christology Calvin emphasizes the distinction between, rather than the combination of, the divine and human. The divine is never human; soul is never body; this world is never changed into the next, or mingled with the next; the eternal does not participate in the temporal. The divine may manifest itself in the human, ‘hid under a humble clothing of flesh,’ but the two remain as distinct as sign and thing signified. In this world is no fulfillment, only signs and shadows.44

It is not that there is no correspondence between the two binary terms – indeed, their very polarity structurally finds a profound relation between them. But it is the case that for Puritans such as Bunyan, and indeed for Herbert too, the two worlds exist on different planes, and are incommensurate with each other. On the one hand, the two terms are utterly distinct – as Luxon puts it, ‘The divine is never human, the soul is never body’. The two are to be understood in contradistinction to each other. But on the other hand, the two are also to be understood as yoked together in a fundamental and contrasting relation; and in particular, the greater spiritual reality is figured by the lesser, grosser yet also more shadowy material forms. Divine truth is both hidden in and revealed by illusion and distraction. So this world and this life are to be read, carefully, avidly and ceaselessly, for the metaphorical truths they tell about the spiritual life. And the metaphorical relation – the ‘grounds’ – forms a conceptual and interpretative bridge between these two polarised terms, and allows, or invites, a crossing of the border between them.

So if the metaphorical relation is fundamental to Protestant pilgrimage literature, as Luxon suggests, what becomes of it in Quaker discourse? Does Fox’s metaphorised landscape render his journey an instance of Protestant pilgrimage, an internal journey made external through the interpretation and translation of the earthly terrain into a spiritual one? Do Fox’s journeys share with the literary pilgrimages of Herbert and Bunyan an emphasis on the revelation of a greater spiritual reality immanent in the contours of this fallen world? Certainly, there can be little doubt that the Pendle Hill incident resonates with the sonorous and double-voiced power of myth, its literal features enriched by the apprehension of a greater metaphorical truth. Fox’s hill is in this sense akin to Herbert’s: both Fox and
Herbert’s pilgrim find spiritual insight by undertaking their arduous ascents. However, the comparison is complicated by the two accounts’ differing relation to the metaphorical. Where Herbert’s pilgrim’s journey is only metaphorical, Fox’s is also literal; the meanings he elicits from the landscape emerge from Pendle Hill, near Clitheroe in Lancashire, not from an unlocated, unnamed, imagined hill, representative only of the traveller’s apprehension of a relation between effort and expectation. Contrary to Calvin’s intention that all pilgrimages be internal, Fox and the other early Public Friends reclaimed the spiritual journey as a literal and lived phenomenon. In so doing they assume a position of what the historian Michel de Certeau calls ‘social delinquency’:

Social delinquency consists in taking the story literally, in making it the principle of physical existence where a society no longer offers to subjects or groups symbolic outlets and expectations of spaces, where there is no longer any alternative to disciplinary falling-into-line or illegal drifting away, that is, one form or another of prison and wandering outside the pale.45

De Certeau’s words have an uncanny applicability to the situation of the early Quakers. In their early years they were seen as social as well as religious delinquents: vagrants, madmen, Roman Catholic sympathisers, Ranters or blasphemers. Moreover, de Certeau’s references to displacement, prison and wandering point to three of the indexical social and spiritual identifiers of early Friends. Quakers habitually took the story literally: they refused the metaphoricity of the Protestant spiritual journey and made it literal, exploiting its rhetorical and polemical potential to preach the inward light, make new convincements, and reveal the simultaneous godliness and ungodliness of the world through which they moved.

However, to take the Pendle Hill episode as indicative of a broader narrative strategy in Fox’s Journal would be to take the exception as the rule. The rest of the Journal includes few episodes with such metaphorical resonance.46 The Pendle Hill incident is so arresting precisely because of its singularity, but also because of the familiarity of the reading strategies it invites. As with the literary pilgrimages of Bunyan and Herbert, the Pendle Hill account responds to conventional reading practices, its symbolism offering the pleasures of interpretation: the revelation of the spiritual in the material, the eternal in the particular. Were the journeys recounted in the Journal more systematically amenable to such readings, they would render the narrative mode strikingly more conventional, less ‘delinquent’, than the journeys themselves.
This is not, however, the case. Much more typically, Fox’s *Journal* offers a bare itinerary of his route, with little obvious metaphorisation, sense of a laborious progression towards an ultimate destination, or mystical adumbration of the spiritual in the material. The journeys are generally conducted on firmly social and geographical terrain; they are mundane and repetitive in their formulation; they terminate, or are interrupted, but never reach the completion offered by the ‘chair’ (or bier) of Herbert’s poem or the Celestial City of Bunyan’s allegory. A random page from the *Journal* (this is from 1656) shows the typically prosaic tone and accretive, rather than progressive, account of his journeys:

And after, we passed from Exeter through Cullompton and Taunton and visited Friends and had meetings amongst them and declared the word of life unto them. And from thence we came to Podimore, to William Beaton’s, and on the First-day we had a mighty large meeting there…

And from thence we came to John Dandoe’s where we had another precious meeting: and the Lord’s power was over all and many were convinced…

And from thence we came to Bristol the Seventh-day night, to Edward Pyott’s house…

If Christian walks with one eye on the shimmering Celestial City on the horizon, Fox’s account has him wandering from village to town, from Friend to adversary, with purpose but without apparent direction. After the progressive, future-directed opening pages of the *Journal*, where the young Fox seeks a spiritual framework in accordance with his beliefs and proclivities, the narrative becomes, as here, accretive or cumulative, instead of end-directed. Like its subject, it proceeds, rather than progresses; one event succeeds another, but more often than not does not, in any obviously causal way, lead to it. In its offering of the journeys simply as, for the most part, journeys in the most literal and practical sense, in its refusal of the progressive logic of more conventional narrative as well as of the double-voiced discourse of the allegorical or symbolic pilgrimage texts, the *Journal* is in some ways as delinquent as its protagonist.

Such narrative delinquency is not the result of anything intrinsic to Fox’s journeys. It is not that these did not lend themselves to metaphorisation. As the Pendle Hill incident demonstrated, the endurance required and the challenges encountered had much in common with the obstacles and traps encountered by Herbert and Bunyan’s pilgrims. Fox’s *Journal* could have made of him a Quaker pilgrim, a ‘Christian’ whose journey, with its rigours and privations, was the literal and historical counterpart of the metaphorical Protestant pilgrimage
texts, reading and writing the material details of landscape, way, terrain, orientation and gradient as metaphor, saturated with spiritual and soteriological significance. Fox’s was a journey that, in other authorial hands, could easily have become another metaphorical providentialist narration.

The Journal, however, does not represent Fox’s journey as a literary pilgrimage in this way. Despite its structural reliance on his travels, it makes little of their detail. As a rule, it does not specify along which routes Fox travelled, how long the journeys took, the nature of the terrain, whether the ways were arduous, whether he was alone or with a companion. It is rare that he specifies whether he was on horseback or on foot, more frequently simply noting that he ‘passed on’ from, or ‘came to’, a place. Quaker memoir is notable for its general lack of interest in the details of daily life, but here that tendency encompasses the new routine of Fox’s protracted travels. Indeed, the journeys come to seem incidental, a mere background on which the pauses in, or interruptions to, the journey are plotted. There is little narrative encouragement to a reading of the journeys as spiritually significant in any kind of analogical way. In a pilgrimage narrative, the journey and the destination, as well as the obstacles and interruptions, yield meaning; but in Fox’s account the journey becomes the norm against which the light and shade of the pauses and the encounters constitute the narrative focus.

A narrative structured by an account of a journey in which the journey is incidental and where the destination is irrelevant, constitutes Fox’s account less as a literary pilgrimage, perhaps, than as a literary para-pilgrimage, a spiritual journey that inverts many of the coordinates of the more conventional place-pilgrimage or its literary rendition. In Fox’s Journal, the journey and its pauses are constructed in accordance not with the conventional two-world Calvinist model of the life-pilgrimage, where the pilgrim voyages through the fallen world en route to the ‘the hevenli countre’, but with a very different Quaker theological inflection. This is, on the one hand, still a ‘two-world’ model, though quite distinct from the Calvinist one described by Luxon. However, rather than their being indicative of this world as against the next, in the Quaker interpretation the two worlds both attach to lives lived in this world, the one in darkness, the other enlightened. These worlds are as sharply demarcated and distinct as are the fallen world and the ‘the hevenli countre’ in the Calvinist model. On the other hand, a life lived in the light is itself premised on a ‘one world’ model, the indwelling Christ returning the promise of a future union with the divine to this life, in this world, which is thereby revealed to be of a piece with ‘the hevenli countre’. Indeed, one
might rewrite the terms of Luxon’s characterisation of the incommensurate two-world basis of Calvinism (‘The divine is never human; soul is never body; this world is never changed into the next, or mingled with the next; the eternal does not participate in the temporal’) to suggest that in Quakerism, in a life lived in the inward light, the opposite of each of these propositions is true.48 The divine is also human, in that there is ‘that of God in every one’; soul is also body, in that both are continuous with their divine creator; this world can be changed into the next, or mingled with the next, by the act of turning to the light within; and in all of the above, the eternal participates in the temporal.

In Fox’s para-pilgrimage, therefore, the journey is undertaken through a world that is at once fallen and redeemed, its state continuous with the spiritual condition of its denizens. The journey is to be understood as differing from that of the Catholic place-pilgrimage, for there is no destination any holier than the present one, but also from the metaphorical terms of the more conventional Protestant life-pilgrimage of the literary tradition, for the longed-for union with the Father has already been realised in a literal sense in this life, by means of the turn to the light. The future-directed impetus of the life-pilgrimage loses its motive force, as there is no longer a future distinct from the present, as Christ’s promised return has been realised. Simultaneously, the sense of the journey through this world requiring the eschewal of earthly temptations and pitfalls in order to keep in view the ultimate arrival at a better place is also dissolved. Life in this world, fallen for those still dwelling in darkness, can be redeemed and restored to its prelapsarian condition by means of the turn to the light. Fox the stranger and counter-pilgrim, alienated without being exiled, a wanderer on a spiritual journey that rewrites the characteristics of the pilgrimage, is moved of the Lord in order to move others towards this accession to the light within. Such a journey has no ultimate destination, either earthly or spiritual. Instead, it pauses in the places where darkness persists but where light might be acknowledged. The movement is not progressive, because there is no place distinct from the one he already inhabits. To travel under these circumstances is to encounter more of the same. It is to go nowhere.

Author Details

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3 Fox, Journal, pp. 2-3.
4 Fox, Journal, p. 4.
5 Fox, Journal, p. 4.
6 Fox, Journal, pp. 6, 5-6, 6.
7 Fox, Journal, p. 12.
8 Fox, Journal, pp. 11 (with allusion to Rom. 11:32), 12, 11.
10 Fox, Journal, p. 12.
11 Fox, Journal, p. 10.
12 Ps. 119: 19.
16 Winnicott, ‘Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena’, p. 3.
18 ‘…sink down in that which is pure’: Fox, Epistle 10, p. 11.
19 Fox, Journal, p. 121.
22 Mt. 25:34-46. See too Heb. 13:2: ‘Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.’
23 Mat. 25:46.
26 Heb. 11:13.
27 Edwards, Pilgrimage and Literary Tradition, p. 6
29 Edwards, Pilgrimage and Literary Tradition, p. 6.
30 Edwards, Pilgrimage and Literary Tradition, p. 6. Serendipitously, Winnicott was interested in Wycliffe and the Lollards: “My feeling is that I am a natural Lollard,” he wrote, “and would have had a bad time in the 14th and 15th centuries”; Phillips, Winnicott, p. 38.
33 Edwards, Pilgrimage and Literary Tradition, p. 7.
34 Fox, Journal, pp. 103-4. The concluding words ‘to be gathered’ were added by Thomas Ellwood in the first published edition of the Journal in 1694; they are not present in the main source used by Nickalls for his edition, the Spence Manuscript.


40 Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, p. 34.

41 Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, pp. 36-37.

42 Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, pp. 39, 125, 41.


46 Where such metaphorisation exists, it is for the most part not in the *Journal*, but in the notebooks of his American journeys, describing the forests and estuaries of the new Atlantic colonies he visited in the 1670s rather than in the more familiar English terrain.

47 Fox, *Journal*, p. 269.