A RE-EVALUATION OF THE POETRY OF THOMAS TRAHERNE

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by

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ABSTRACT

Although Thomas Traherne has been recognized as a significant writer of the seventeenth century, and although his importance as a thinker and a prose writer has been acknowledged, the magnitude of his achievement as a poet has not been adequately appraised.

This study attempts to reveal the excellent quality of Traherne's poetry by closely examining his versification, his diction and his use of figurative language, aspects of his work which are generally overlooked by the critics. Preliminary consideration is given to biographical data, trends in Traherne criticism, and problems relating to his manuscripts.

Traherne's versification is the result of careful planning. In his purposeful use of both traditional verse forms and highly patterned stanzas he achieves poetic excellence. The simplicity and limited scope of Traherne's diction is well suited to his style of poetry, and the frequent use of abstract words is essential to his unique communication of spiritual truth. Perhaps the strongest illustration of Traherne's success as a poet is, however, his masterful use of imagery and symbolism. As his poems are studied in sequence his skilful development of image patterns and comprehensive symbols becomes apparent.

Traherne's relationship to the other metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century is unmistakable, yet he is one of the most independent and individualistic of the entire group. His work is also a part of the mystical tradition in literature, a fact which in no way diminishes the artistic quality of his poetry.

Throughout this thesis Traherne's poetry is systematically defended against numerous unfounded attacks, which are clearly the result of critical bias or lack of thorough analysis. If the greatness of Traherne's poetic achievement is to be realized, it is imperative that the body of his poems be viewed as an artistic totality.

This thesis has been examined and approved by:

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INTRODUCTION

To most students of English literature the name Thomas Traherne means very little. Many who have slight knowledge of his work find it abstruse and irrelevant -- a part of the seventeenth century to which they do not, perhaps cannot, relate. The content of Traherne's work is so austerely religious and his style so seemingly remote that many modern readers find his work unpalatable. His few prose works which were published in the seventeenth century indicated keen scholarship and theological depth, but they were not deemed particularly significant when compared with the excellent prose literature of the period. Thomas Traherne's claim to greatness rests with the more recently discovered works of poetry and poetic prose.

The circumstances surrounding the discovery of these works appealed to the modern imagination. The three manuscript volumes[1] containing some seventy-five poems, and the poetical prose work Centuries of Meditations lay unknown for over two hundred years. They were discovered and published by Bertram Dobell and H. I. Bell in the period from 1898 to 1910. The world was fascinated by the resurrection of the work of this intense individual whose name had been all but forgotten.

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[1]Bodleian MS. Eng. poet. c. 42; British Museum MS. Burney 392; Bodleian MS. Eng. th. e. 50.

The excitement of the discovery initially produced a good deal of interest in Traherne, but as the novelty wore off it seemed that there had been little genuine appreciation of the works for their own sake. As the years went by a number of critics undertook some analytical study of the Centuries, but Traherne's poetry all too often remained the victim of misunderstanding and neglect.

It is as a poet that this thesis wishes to portray Traherne. He was, of course, many other things as well: a Christian philosopher, a skillful prose writer. As a poet, however, he deserves far greater recognition than he has yet received. He is an outstanding figure in the midst of the metaphysical movement in the poetry of his day, working, as he does, within the mystical and orthodox religious traditions, yet demonstrating intense individualism. His unique contribution to the body of English poetry should bring to his name the distinction and honour which he deserves.

As a background to the actual evaluation of his poetry there are three areas which should be considered. First, there is the biographical material which enables us to see his writing in the context of his life. Then there is that body of critical work on Traherne which has appeared in the past seventy years. Finally, there is the problem of ascertaining the degree of authority the manuscripts of his poems have.

Chapter one summarizes the known data pertaining to Traherne's life and discusses some of the theories that have

been proposed pertaining to the obscure periods of his life. It is noted that many of these intriguing suppositions have a very weak foundation. From what is known of his life, however, we can recognize him as a man whose character and life-style were consistent with the high ideals and religious fervour expressed in his poetic work. The chapter concludes with a brief description of Traherne's total works.

Chapter two gives a selective but detailed account of the significant critical work that has been published on Traherne since 1900. More detailed description is given of those books and articles which deal with his poetry. It is noted that although the past decade has seen a great revival of interest in both the poetry and prose of Traherne, there has not been a sufficient in-depth study of his poetry as artistic work. During the past half century there has been a great deal of adverse criticism of Traherne's poetry which remains largely unanswered.

Chapter three deals with the relationship between the two existing manuscripts of Traherne's poetry, the autograph Dobell folio and the Burney manuscript prepared by the poet's brother Philip. The usual position taken by critics regarding Philip's interference with his brother's poems is presented. Other explanations for the many discrepancies between the two manuscripts are also discussed; the Burney manuscript may be more authoritative than is generally assumed. It is pointed out that the poems unique to the Burney manuscript must be studied as a very important part of the body of Traherne's poetry.

Following this background study there is the actual analysis of Traherne's poetry which includes a study of his versification, his diction, and his use of imagery and figurative language.

Chapter four discusses the many unfounded attacks that have been directed against the versification of Traherne's poems. His complex stanza patterns and use of rhyme and meter are shown to be the result of genuine poetic craftsmanship. His form is always sensitively adapted to the mood of the individual poems and to their thought content.

Chapter five studies the diction of Traherne's poetry. His choice of words, although often deprecated as narrow, repetitious and overly abstract, is shown to be perfectly justified. A list of the major words in his poetic vocabulary is presented and analyzed in relation to the main movements of his thought. The continuity and expanding connotations of his diction are seen to be especially impressive when his poetry is considered as an artistic whole. His purposeful use of concrete terms, the significance of infrequent verb use, and the relationship of his diction to that of his contemporaries are also discussed. The chapter concludes with a closer consideration of a number of poems which clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of Traherne's poetic diction.

Chapter six deals with Traherne's use of imagery and figurative language. His attitude toward metaphoric style is clarified, and we observe his ability to make concrete the abstract

in his own unique way. His major image patterns attain the stature of symbols. His concepts of childhood and light are studied as illustrative of the unfolding development of his symbols. The chapter concludes with an analysis of a number of poems which reveal the often unrecognized magnitude of Traherne's sensory appeal.

The conclusion of this study in chapter seven makes a final appraisal of Traherne's poetic achievement. He is discussed in relation to some of the major trends of thought that were current in his period and in relation to the metaphysical movement in particular. His poetry is compared to the work of a number of other metaphysical poets. Finally, he is looked at in the context of the mystical tradition, and we see that his mysticism is an asset rather than an obstacle to his poetic achievement.

The present study will confine itself to a consideration of the poems found in the Dobell folio and Burney manuscript. The small group of other poems,[2] although interesting, are not especially relevant to the reappraisal of Traherne's poetic achievement.

This thesis does not attempt to study exhaustively all of the areas relating to Traherne's poetry, but it does explore such subjects as versification and diction, areas in which

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[2]The nature of these poems is indicated by H. M. Margoliouth on pages xvi-xxiii of his introduction to his edition of Traherne's work, Thomas Traherne: Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958).

Traherne has been often attacked, but never systematically defended. It coherently integrates the known facts and theories with new insights, so that Thomas Traherne's poetic achievement will be more fully realized and his work exposed for further study.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LIFE OF THOMAS TRAHERNE

All successful poetry has relevance to the universal experiences of humanity. The unique expression of experience that we find in Traherne's poetry is more understandable in terms of his own life. In many cases this relevance is enhanced when the reader has acquired a knowledge of the life and personality which produced the poetry. An awareness of the poet's worth is heightened when his work is placed in the proper context of his life and times.

In view of this, the present study will begin with a general account of the available facts relating to Traherne's life, and the circumstances of life in mid-seventeenth-century England which would have affected him.

In this area we are greatly indebted to Gladys Wade whose study of Traherne[1] gives a lengthy account of the poet's life. Miss Wade's industrious attempt at reconstructing his life is certainly admirable. She has managed to produce a detailed narrative which closely resembles a complete biography. Much of her material, however, is so suppositional that it needs to be handled cautiously.

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[1]Gladys Wade, Thomas Traherne (New York: Octagon Books, 1969, c.1944).

Using her material selectively, as well as the biographical data established by others, we can arrive at a fairly accurate understanding of many aspects of Traherne's life which enhance our appreciation of his poetry.

Traherne's life spans the middle decades of the century - decades that were the most turbulent of that restless period. The serenity of his outlook stands out sharply against the uncertainties and misgivings of his contemporaries. The turmoil of the Civil War permeated his childhood, the tensions of the Commonwealth experiment overshadowed his university career, and the reckless frivolity of the Restoration contrasted with the sobriety of his mature years. Still his joyous affirmation of the infinite goodness of God and the sublime spirituality of man are as intense as if he were a resident of Paradise.

Existing records are inadequate in determining the exact date of Traherne's birth. From the Brasenose College Registers, however, comes the fact that he was fifteen on March 1, 1653. Hence, he was born between March 1, 1637 and March 1, 1638. It therefore seems most reasonable for the purpose of convenient reference to place his birth in 1637.

Anthony Wood's Athenae Oxonienses[2] indicates that Traherne was the son of a Hereford shoemaker. Although no record of his birth has been found in the parish registers of Herefordshire, it is probable that he was born in the city of Hereford. His

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[2]Anthony Wood, Athenae Oxonienses (ed. P. Bliss, 1817), iii, col. 1016.

relationship to any recorded family of Trahernes in that area is equally unproven, but it is possible that an entry in the Lugwardine parish register refers to the baptism of the poet's brother Philip. It is an entry for the year 1635 which reads "Philip ye son of Thos. Treherne and Mary his wife, baptized Aug. 9th 1635".[3] The possibility of the poet's family having connections in Lugwardine is further strengthened by Wade's findings on the scarcity of the name Philip among the Traherne families of Herefordshire[4] and by the direct reference to his brother's return from Lugwardine which Traherne makes in Leaping over the Moon.

One other area of interesting speculation about Traherne's family background concerns the wealthy innkeeper Philip Traherne who was made mayor of Hereford in 1622 and who died in 1645 when Thomas would have been a child of eight. If Thomas Traherne was related (perhaps a nephew) to this man it would explain certain facts about his life which are otherwise mystifying. Although his father, as a shoemaker, is thought to have been a man of low income, Thomas was, according to Wood, admitted to Oxford as a commoner.[5] Moreover, it seems that he was not educated at the grammar school attached to Hereford Cathedral which would

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[3]This information is given in a letter from M. L. Dawson to the Times Literary Supplement, September 29, 1927, p. 667.

[4]Wade, op. cit., p. 32.

[5]Wood, op. cit., iii, col. 1016.

have been the only public school available to him. It appears that "the rolls of the grammar school, extant for at least part of the period of Traherne's schooling, do not contain his name or his brother's".[6] Yet at the age of fifteen he was prepared for university entrance. It is possible that both Thomas and Philip were educated by a private tutor provided at the expense of a wealthy relative, possibly Philip Traherne, mayor of Hereford.

The possibility of such a relationship is supported by passages which Wade has pinpointed in the Centuries and Poems[7] which seem to indicate exposure to wealth and to a new group of people early in the poet's life. The poem Poverty is possibly indicative of an inn/tavern setting. On the basis of these interesting but inconclusive facts, and certain theories on the fate of the poet's parents,[8] Wade postulates that he was placed while still a young child in the care of his relative, the wealthy Philip Traherne. She sums up her argument by stating that:

> Certainly someone made possible the excellent education of both Thomas and Philip, and a prolonged stay for Thomas at Oxford. Who more likely than the one well-to-do Traherne of the day, the generous, hot-tempered old pagan whose inn I suggest afforded a home for a period to a "sad and desolate" little boy?[9]

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[6] Wade, op. cit., p. 38.

[7] Ibid., p. 34.

[8] Ibid., p. 31.

[9] Ibid., p. 37.

It should be realized that this theory which is so popular with Traherne's biographers[10] is based upon certain assumptions which are not necessarily correct. Wood's reference to Traherne as "as shoemaker's son of Hereford" does not necessarily mean that Traherne's early life was spent entirely in the town of Hereford. He and his brother may have spent their early years in a town near Hereford and may have received their education in a school of which the records are unknown. Furthermore, the fact that Traherne was the son of a shoemaker does not necessarily mean that he lived the whole of his life in poverty. The shoemaking trade could have been profitable enough to finance the education of Thomas and Philip under a private tutor. Those who base their arguments on passages in the Poems and Centuries of Meditations which refer to experiences of deprivation, should realize that such passages tend to represent the general experiences of Man rather than personal biographical facts. Traherne may have experienced some poverty in his early years, but his works also make many references to exposure to material wealth in these years.[11] There does not necessarily have to be a dramatic change from rags to riches at a point in time when he left his father's home for that of "a rich uncle".

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[10] The biographers referred to here include Gladys Wade, Angela Russell and K. W. Salter (see bibliography).

[11] Such references are found in the poems Wonder and The Apostacy.

For these reasons we must conclude that some of the interesting theories about Traherne's early life are so inconclusive that they have minimal relevance to the appreciation of his work.

Certain information pertaining to Traherne's university career is found in his writings. The third Century gives an account of his intellectual and spiritual development. Wade imaginatively elaborates on it in her chapter "The First Period at Oxford". We do know for sure that he went through a period of disillusionment, during which he sensed a purposelessness in his quest for knowledge.[12]

In October 1656 Traherne took his Bachelor's degree and "fourteen months later he was presented to the living of Credenhill in the county of Hereford".[13] The record of the appointment in the Lambeth Palace Library[14] gives the names of a number of men who seem to have acted as referees in confirming Traherne in this appointment. The fact that these were known as devout Puritans indicates that Traherne was not openly antagonistic to Puritan doctrine.

It is quite possible that Traherne did not immediately take up his duties as rector of Credenhill since he was, at twenty, four years under the legal age for assuming such a

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[12] Centuries of Meditations, III, 36-37.

[13] Angela Russell, "The Life of Thomas Traherne", Review of English Studies, n.s. VI (1955), 34-43.

[14] Lambeth Palace Library, manuscript 999, f. 161.

responsibility. Also, it is assumed that there was a somewhat lengthy return to Oxford prior to his receiving the Master's degree in 1661. Wade proposes that Traherne did not actually reside at Credenhill until 1661. Since the church records only go back to 1662 they are of little value in this respect.

Wade has been proven incorrect in placing Traherne's ordination in 1657.[15] He was ordained on October 20, 1660 by the Bishop of Oxford. The fact that he was ordained immediately following the Restoration seems to imply that his loyalty to the Anglican church was unquestioned in spite of the Puritan referees at the time of his appointment to Credenhill. His writings also reveal him to be more of an Anglican than a Puritan in his thinking. It is very possible that he did not really begin his work as rector until he could do so as an outright Anglican.

It is not surprising that Traherne took little interest in the heated religious controversies of the period. The bickering must have seemed idle and unnecessary in the light of his profoundly simple interpretation of the relationship between God and man. To him the conflicts within the church would appear to be based on superficial matters which had little relevance to real Christianity.

The only specific records of the Credenhill years are the Parish Registers which date back to 1662. The account of these

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[15] K. W. Salter, "The Date of Traherne's Ordination", Notes and Queries, n.s. I (1954), 282.

records given by Margoliouth[16] was based on Angela Russell's article in the Review of English Studies in 1955.[17] Several of their statements concerning these records have been corrected by Lynn Sauls[18] on the basis of a closer examination of the transcripts. These corrections are significant in ascertaining Traherne's presence in Credenhill in the early 1660's.

Neither Traherne's handwriting nor signature is present in the 1662 and 1663 records. On this point Russell stands uncorrected. The details for the subsequent years are presented by Lynn Sauls as follows:

> Those for 1664 and 1665 are written and signed in Traherne's own hand . . . . The one for 1666 is written and signed by 'William Browne Churchwarden'. It also contains the signature of 'Tho Treherne' in a hand very different from Traherne's but very similar to Browne's. The transcript for 1667 is signed by Traherne and Brown, but the record itself is in the hand of William Payne, churchwarden from 1668 to 1670. All but the last two lines of the transcript for 1668 are also in Payne's hand. Those two lines are written by Traherne. The document is signed by both. The transcripts for 1669 and 1670 are written and signed by Payne; that for 1671 by 'James . . . Browne, Churchwarden'.[19]

Sauls does not correct Russell's statement that Traherne's signature, although "barely decipherable", occurs again in the

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[16] H. M. Margoliouth, ed., Thomas Traherne: Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings, Vol. I. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. xxv.

[17] Russell, op. cit.

[18] Lynn Sauls, "Traherne's Hand in the Credenhill Records", Library, XXIV, 50.

[19] Ibid., p. 50.

1672 record.[20] If this is actually the case it cannot indicate anything more than a brief visit to his old parish. Indeed, from what we know of his life in 1672 it is surprising that he continued to have a sense of clerical responsibility toward Credenhill. It is possible that another clergyman was the unofficial rector of Credenhill at this time, just as Traherne himself acted as the unofficial rector of Teddington while the Bridgeman family was in residence there.[21]

From these facts we observe that the years 1664 and 1665 seem to be those in which Traherne's residence in Credenhill is most certain. An absence of some duration during 1666 seems probable from the warden's attempt to forge his signature. He did at least visit the parish in 1667 and 1668 after he had taken up permanent residence in London. It is also important to bear in mind that he may have resided in Credenhill prior to 1662 in the period for which we have no extant records. Nevertheless, the fact that the warden did not even attempt to indicate Traherne's signature in 1662 and 1663 may possibly indicate up that up to this point he had not actually taken up his duties as rector. Such a circumstance would, of course, make his stay in the parish very short - about two or three years.

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[20] Russell, op. cit., p. 41.

[21] See K. W. Salter, Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet (London: Edward Arnold, 1964), p. 19.

These records shed significant light on the character of Thomas Traherne. The possibility that his time spent in Credenhill was quite brief in comparison to the period of his official responsibility raises the unhappy subject of absenteeism. Such a circumstance seems unreconcilable with the distinct impression we receive of Traherne as a person of sincere and unselfish commitment to the spiritual life. Unfortunately there can be no explanation for this puzzling situation until more information is uncovered.

It is clear that these Parish Registers require more careful examination. They should be studied in relation to other comparable records. If more was known about the procedures in the keeping of church records during that period those of Credenhill might be able to yield more conclusive information on the life of Thomas Traherne.

Traherne seems to have been a very affable person who formed warm friendships with a number of people. One of the most influential relationships in his life sprang from his acquaintanceship with Mrs. Susanna Hopton.

His Centuries are quite pointedly directed to a specific individual - a highly esteemed lady friend for whom he seems to have had no particularly romantic attachment. Wade makes the reasonable assumption that the anonymous recipient of the Centuries was actually Susanna Hopton, "the friend who cherished for twenty-five years after Traherne's death the manuscript of

his ardent Contemplations upon the Mercies of God, and then preserved it for all time by having it printed by Dr. Hickes".[22]

This woman is also directly connected with another of Traherne's works. The Meditations and Devotions on the Life of Christ were published by Spinckes in 1717 from a manuscript in Mrs. Hopton's own handwriting. She was thought to have been the author. This was proven incorrect by the realization that The Soul's Communion with her Saviour, published by Philip Traherne in 1685, was actually a condensed portion of the work published in 1717 from Mrs. Hopton's manuscript copy. Thomas Traherne was the author of both. It seems that "Spinckes' edition is the original version of that work written for Mrs. Hopton's use".[23]

These facts, along with the detail that Philip Traherne married Susanna Hopton's only neice, indicate close connections between the poet and this woman. She was known as a person of great piety and strong character, and the probability of her prolonged relationship with Traherne as both patron and personal friend sheds some light on the generally obscure circumstances of his life.

Gladys Wade describes a number of areas in which Mrs. Hopton might have had a significant influence on Traherne's

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[22]Wade, op. cit., p. 79.

[23]Ibid., p. 157.

life.[24] From a practical viewpoint her contribution was outstanding in cherishing and preserving his manuscripts. Perhaps the Dobell folio was one of those entrusted to her keeping. Even more important was the encouragement and inspiration he could have received as a writer from the responsiveness of a like-minded person. In Susanna Hopton he would find an enthusiastic audience for the expressions of spiritual insight and mystical ecstasy which were far beyond the intellectual scope of ordinary men and women.

In 1667 Traherne was appointed chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman, Lord Keeper of the Seal. This meant leaving the rural simplicity of Herefordshire life to become a member of a great and influential London household. Wade points out that the acceptance of this post, although denying him the peace and seclusion he had come to value, was essential if he was to have the "richer, more varied contact with life"[25] which his energetic intellect required.

Sir Orlando Bridgeman, a Cambridge graduate, was a highly respected lawyer, and a staunch Royalist. Angela Russell makes use of Wood's record in her description of the stimulating environment in which Traherne found himself, as she notes that:

> Bridgeman's house in Essex Court was frequented by the leading clergy of London, and his other chaplain, a Cambridge man, Hezekiah Burton, was

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[24] Ibid., p. 85-88.

[25] Ibid., p. 89-90.

> a friend of divines such as Tillotson, Stillingfleet, and Baxter, and a correspondent of Henry More, the mystical philosopher.[26]

Here Traherne had more leisure and greater stimulation for his writing than ever before. The peaceful security of the Bridgeman household provided a stable setting from which he could observe the political and moral decadence of Restoration society. His prose writings give many indications of his keen awareness of the life around him. He nevertheless remains an incurable optimist, expressing his view of the times in these words:

> I know very well that the Age is full of Faults, and lament it; but withal I know, it is full of Advantages. As Sin abounds so does Grace also superabound. Never so much clear knowledge in any Age: Learned Ministers, multitudes of Sermons, excellent Books, translated Bibles, studious Gentlemen, multitudes of Schollers, publick Liberty, Peace and Safety: all great and eminent Blessings.[27]

In 1672 a crisis arose in the conflict between Sir Orlando's Christian integrity and the unprincipled monarchy which he had tried to support as a divinely-appointed instrument. He found he could not serve God and Mammon, and Royalist loyalties gave way to Christian convictions. He refused to sanction grants to the King's mistress, or to give the Seal for the Declaration of Indulgence. He was deprived of his office. Completely crushed, he moved his household to the villa in Teddington which became

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[26] Russell, op. cit., p. 41.

[27] Quoted from Christian Ethicks, pp. 568-569 by Russell, op. cit., p. 42.

his permanent residence for the remaining two years of his life and that of Traherne's.

That Traherne should have loyally supported his employer in these tragic circumstances is to be expected from the knowledge we have of the poet's character. The boldness of his commitment to this politically disgraced figure is evidenced in the fact that he courageously dedicated his Roman Forgeries (published in 1673) to Sir Orlando.

It was during these last two years at Teddington that he must have prepared Roman Forgeries for publication. He was, at the same time, concluding his larger work, Christian Ethicks which appeared in print shortly after his death in October, 1674. The Centuries of Meditations (probably worked on over a period of time) was a spiritual diary which remained uncompleted at the time of his death.

Traherne was the close companion of Bridgeman during the last days of his life.[28] He remained with the family during the months following his employer's death on June 25, 1674. In September Traherne became ill himself and thought it wise to prepare his will. This document[29] indicates that he had accumulated little in the way of material possessions other than his books which he entrusted to his brother. His meager savings

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[28]Wade, op. cit., p. 103.

[29]Quoted by Wade, op. cit., p. 104.

were designated for his friend John Berdo and the servants of the Bridgeman household. He remembered each individual in his immediate circle of acquaintances with a small sum of money as a humble token of his esteem.

He was buried on October 10 beneath the reading desk in the church at Teddington.

The account of Traherne's life given in the preface to the Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God provides a fitting sumation to this chapter. This work, otherwise known as the Thanksgivings, was published anonymously in 1699 by Dr. George Hickes, a non-juring priest. The lavish praise he accords Traherne in this preface indicates that the poet was highly respected by those who knew him. His manner of life harmonized with the intense spirituality of his writing:

> He was a Divine of the Church of England, of a very comprehensive Soul, and very accute Parts, so fully bent upon that Honourable Function in which he was engaged; and so wonderfully transported with the Love of God to Mankind, with the excellency of those Divine Laws which are prescribed to us, and with those inexpressible Felicities to which we are entitled by being created in, and redeemed to, the Divine Image, that he dwelt continually amongst these thoughts, with great delight and satisfaction, spending most of his time when at home, in digesting his notions of these things into writing, and was so full of them when abroad, that those that would converse with him, were forced to endure some discourse upon these subjects, whether they had any sense of Religion, or not. And therefore to such he might be sometimes thought troublesome, but his company was very acceptable to all such as had any inclinations to Value, and Religion.

> And tho' he had the misfortune to come abroad into the World, in the late disordered times when the Foundations were cast down and this excellent Church laid in the dust, and dissolved into Confusion and Enthusiasme; yet his Soul was of a more refin'd allay, and his judgment in discerning of things more solid, and considerate than to be infected with that Leaven, and therefore became much in love with the beautiful order and Primitive Devotions of this our excellent Church. Insomuch that I believe he never failed any one day either publickly or in his private Closet, to make use of her publick offices, as one part of his devotion, unless some very unavoidable business interrupted him. He was a man of a cheerful and sprightly Temper, free from any thing of the Sourness or formality, by which some great pretenders to Piety rather disparage and misrepresent true religion, than recommend it; and therefore was very affable and pleasant in his conversation, ready to do all good Offices to his Friends, and Charitable to the Poor almost beyond his ability. But being removed out of the Country to the Service of the late Lord Keeper Bridgman, as his Chaplain, he died young, and got early to those blissful Mansions, to which he at all times aspired.[30]

Traherne's Works

Traherne's reputation in recent years has been based on the late-discovered volumes containing the Centuries of Meditations and his poetry. He did, however, write a number of other prose works which, although not sufficient in themselves to make him great, are an important part of his totality as a thinker and artist.

The following list of the extant works of Traherne is given by K. W. Salter as an appendix to his work on Traherne:

1. Roman Forgeries, by A Faithful Son of the Church of England (1673).

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[30] Quoted by Russell, op. cit., pp. 34-35, from Contemplation, sigs. A_3v - A_4v.

2. Daily Devotions, consisting of Thanksgivings, Confessions and Prayers, by a Humble Penitent (1673).

3. Christian Ethicks (1675).

4. The Soul's Communion with Her Saviour. The original, 'reduced' by Philip Traherne, and published by him with that title (1685).

5. A Serious and Patheticall Contemplation of the Mercies of God, in several most Devout and Sublime Thanksgivings for the Same. Published 'by the Reverend Doctor Hickes at the request of a friend of the Author's' (1699).

6. Hexameron or Meditations on the Six Days of Creation, and Meditations and Devotions on the Life of Christ. Published by Nathaniel Spinckes as Parts I and II of A Collection of Meditations and Devotions in three Parts. Part II, Meditations and Devotions on the Life of Christ, is the original, unreduced, of No. 4 above. Part III of the collection is a reprint of No. 2 above (1717).

7. Poems of Thomas Traherne. Published by Bertram Dobell. Contains the poems in the Dobell Folio MS. (1903).

8. Centuries of Meditations. Published by Dobell, from the untitled octavo Dobell MS. (1908).

9. Poems of Felicity. Published by Dr. Bell, from the British Museum MS. Burney 392, which is Philip Traherne's copy of a now lost original (1910).

10. The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne. Edited by Gladys I. Wade, and published by P. J. and A. E. Dobell. Contains the poems of Traherne from all sources (1932).

11. Thomas Traherne, Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, two volumes (1958).[31]

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[31] K. W. Salter, Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet, p. 138.

Some works of Traherne are still in manuscript. These are:

1. "The Book of Private Devotions". An octavo Dobell MS., (Bodleian MS. Eng. th. e. 51).

2. A small collection of early verse. Also a Dobell MS., otherwise known as "Philip Traherne's Notebook", (Bodleian MS. Lat. misc. f. 45).

3. "A Commonplace Book", the second half of the Dobell folio, (Bodleian MS. Eng. poet. c. 42).

4. A student's notebook, (British Museum Burney MS. 126).

Detailed descriptions of this material has been given by Margoliouth[32] and Wade.[33]

The Book of Private Devotions is otherwise known as The Church's Yearbook. The "student's notebook" has been on occasion referred to as the "Ficino" notebook since it quotes a great deal from Ficino.

There is one addition to be made to this list given by Salter. In 1964 a new Traherne manuscript was revealed to the world by Dr. James M. Osborn[34] of Yale University. Dr. Osborn obtained the small octavo volume entitled "Select Meditations" from a Birmingham bookseller and identified it as the work of Traherne. It is mutilated and incomplete, containing 376 out of an original 468 meditations. The total new material amounts

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[32]Margoliouth, ed., op. cit. pp. xii-xxii.

[33]Wade, op. cit., pp. 240-257.

[34]James M. Osborn, "A New Traherne Manuscript", Times Literary Supplement, October 8, 1964, p. 928.

to about 60,000 words, not including two prose treatises at the end amounting to 9,000 words. The account given in the Times Literary Supplement reveals that this manuscript is an important contribution to the body of Traherne's work which certainly deserves publication. It is difficult to understand why it has not received any critical attention in the ten years that have elapsed since its discovery.

Having noted the scope of Traherne's writings we will next consider the body of literature pertaining to Traherne which has accumulated since the turn of the century.

CHAPTER TWO

TRAHERNE CRITICISM, 1900-1972

Traherne scholarship dates from the publication of his poems in 1903 and in 1910. His few prose works which had appeared in print much earlier had received no critical attention since the magnitude of Traherne's literary significance was not then apparent.

This chapter will summarize the work done on Traherne during the twentieth century. Certain areas and aspects of his work have been thoroughly studied and sensitively appraised by literary critics. Other areas of his work have been virtually overlooked, while his poetry has frequently been grossly misjudged. The need for the type of study undertaken in this thesis becomes apparent when we consider how little genuine appreciation his poetry has received.

When the poems of the Dobell folio appeared in print in 1903 they were accompanied by a lengthy introduction written by the editor, Bertram Dobell. Dobell began by pointing out Traherne's similarity to, yet independence of, such metaphysical poets as Herbert and Vaughan. He then launched into a sketchy account of Traherne's life, using supportive extracts from the Centuries and other bibliographical data available. His conclusions regarding Traherne's achievement and personal characteristics are quite reasonable with the exception of the unfounded

judgement that Traherne was "one of those rare and enviable individuals in whom no jarring element is present . . . who enjoy an existence of entire serenity".[1]

Dobell is to be commended for his appreciative account of Christian Ethicks which includes a number of representative extracts. Traherne's prose works, other than the Centuries, are usually overlooked by critics.

Dobell's appreciation of Traherne's poetry is unique in the early years of Traherne criticism. He speaks warmly of the absolute spontaneity and profound sense of beauty and sublimity which make Traherne essentially a poet.[2] He acknowledged Traherne's absolute sincerity in stating that:

> With Traherne poetry was no elegant recreation, no medium for the display of a lively fancy, no means of exhibiting his skill as a master of metrical effects, but the vehicle through which he expressed his deepest convictions and his profoundest thoughts.[3]

Dobell is one of the few who has given Traherne some of the credit he deserves as a poet. He places him "in the front rank of his class".[4] He emphasizes the consistency of Traherne's

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[1]Bertram Dobell, "Introduction" as written for the first edition of 1903 and revised for the second edition of 1906, repr. in G. I. Wade, ed., The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne (London: P. J. & A. E. Dobell, 1932), p. xxi.

[2]Ibid., pp. lxv-lxvi.

[3]Ibid., p. lxvii.

[4]Ibid., p. lxix.

poetic excellence as well as the remarkable coherence and interdependence within the poetic sequence of the Dobell folio. Traherne is presented by Dobell as a fascinating individual whose poetry can be best appreciated by readers who are sympathetic with the poet's particular viewpoint. We must agree that the reader's response to so individualistic a poet as Traherne depends very much on subjective elements. It is difficult, however, to agree with Dobell's poorly based comments about the shortcomings which Traherne's poems supposedly demonstrate when read objectively.[5] He suggests that Traherne's narrowness of scope, concentration of thought, and irregularity of versification are artistically offensive. This thesis will demonstrate the error of such an opinion.

Other than this appraisal by Dobell with which Traherne's poetry was released to the public there was little valuable criticism in the early decades of the twentieth century. The first periodical publication on Traherne's work was William C. Hall's article[6] which competently surveyed the discovery of the manuscripts and the known biographical data, and commented on the excellent poetic quality of Traherne's writing. A few years later expression was given to a less favourable view of Traherne's

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[5]These negative comments are found on pages lxxiii-lxxvi of Dobell's introduction.

[6]Rev. William C. Hall, "Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne", The Manchester Quarterly, XXIII (1904), 376-382.

work in P. E. More's "Thomas Traherne",[7] which suggested that Traherne was never quite a poet. This was the beginning of a long series of unsubstantiated negative judgements on the quality of Traherne's poetry. The depreciation of his poetry during this period ranges from the simple preference for his prose as more successful[8] to pointed accusations that his poetry is "weak in lyrical quality",[9] is "little more than versified prose",[10] and that his imagery "is seldom rich".[11]

R. M. Jones' work Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries[12] focused mainly on the religious nature of Traherne's thought as evidenced in the Centuries. Gladys Willet's essay[13] made a strenuous attack on his poetry, stating that his "true medium was prose, not verse".[14] She

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[7]P. E. More, "Thomas Traherne", Nation, LXXXVIII (1909), 160-162.

[8]Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, Mysticism in English Literature, Cambridge Manuals of Science and Literature (Cambridge, 1913), p. 78.

[9]Percy H. Osmond, The Mystical Poets of the English Church (London, 1919), p. 239.

[10]J. C. Squire, Books in General by Solomon Eagle (Second Series), Essay Index Reprint Series (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971) [c. 1920, c. renewed 1947], p. 25.

[11]Ibid., p. 25.

[12]R. M. Jones, Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (London: MacMillan, 1914).

[13]Gladys Willett, Traherne (An Essay) (Cambridge, 1919).

[14]Ibid., p. 18.

further states that "metre and rhyme did not help his genius but hampered it",[15] and she continues by stating that "he is always something of an amateur . . . [having] no real command of his medium".[16]

In the nineteen twenties there were a number of periodical articles which commented on several areas relevant to the study of Traherne: his biography,[17] his 'metaphysical' affinities,[18] and certain similarities to later writers such as the Romantic poets; the Victorian, Robert Browning; and the philosopher, George Berkley.[19] The main interest in this period, however, was in Traherne's mysticism. Even in this area he does not escape criticism. He is judged as displaying a detachment of spirit which makes his appeal limited,[20] and as a self-centered, subjective idealist, blind to the stern realities of life.[21]

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[15] Ibid., p. 18.

[16] Ibid., p. 24.

[17] Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, "Traherne, Crashaw and Others", Studies in Literature, first series, III (1918-1930), Putnam, 142.

[18] F. Towers, "Thomas Traherne: his Outlook on Life", Nineteenth Century and After, LXXXVII (June 1920), 1024-1030.

[19] Such affinities are discussed by E. N. S. Thompson in "Mysticism in Seventeenth Century English Literature", Studies in Philology, XVIII (1921), 170-231; and in "The Philosophy of Thomas Traherne", Philology Quarterly, VIII (April 1929), 97-112.

[20] F. Towers, op. cit., p. 1029.

[21] E. N. S. Thompson, "Mysticism", (footnote 19), pp. 209,216.

A. D. L. Wilson's article "A Neglected Mystic: Thomas Traherne"[22] praises the vitality and sustained enthusiasm of his poetry, and perceptively recognizes that his mysticism is the servant of his poetic genius, rather than its master.

In the nineteen thirties Traherne's fame increased and he began to receive attention from such well-known critics as T. S. Eliot, J. B. Leishman, and Helen White. Eliot's appraisal of Traherne's work was, however, unfavourable. He accuses Traherne of writing poetry which is monotonous, has too much to say, and lacks the richness and variety of imagery which poetry needs.[23] Eliot takes the popular approach of comparing Traherne's poetry unfavourably with the prose of the Centuries. Like a number of other critics, he regards Traherne's mysticism as having a debilitating effect on his poetry.

Leishman deals mainly with the philosophical and theological basis of Traherne's poetry, devoting some attention to the interesting similarities between Traherne's poetry and Wordsworth's Prelude.[24]

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[22]A. D. L. Wilson, "A Neglected Mystic: Thomas Traherne", Poetry Review, XVI (1925), 11-22, 97-104.

[23]T. S. Eliot, "Mystic and Politician as Poet: Vaughan, Traherne, Marvell, Milton", Listener, III (1930), 590-591.

[24]J. B. Leishman, Metaphysical Poets (Oxford, 1934), pp. 169, 183.

White's book, Metaphysical Poets,[25] devotes two chapters to Traherne. She esteems him the most original of the metaphysical poets. She believes that Traherne "sums up his time, predicting the directions of the future", and states that "of all these poets we have been studying, Traherne is the most fully and immediately personal".[26] While placing Traherne in the context of the metaphysical stream, White's criticism is very important in the recognition of the uniqueness of his genius.

A number of lesser known critics also published material on Traherne in the nineteen thirties. Gladys Wade's article, "The Manuscripts of the Poems of Thomas Traherne",[27] indicated the serious implications of Philip Traherne's revisions of many of his brother's poems. In the ensuing decades Miss Wade was to beome one of the major Traherne scholars.

A work by Queenie Iredale, which also appeared in the nineteen thirties,[28] acknowledges Traherne's importance as a seventeenth century thinker, but remarks on the "superficial

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[25]Helen C. White, Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience (New York: Collier Books, 1962). This subject was published originally by MacMillan, c. 1936.

[26]Ibid., p. 298.

[27]Gladys Wade, "The Manuscripts of the Poems of Thomas Traherne", Modern Language Review, XXVI (1931), 401-407.

[28]Queenie Iredale, Thomas Traherne (Oxford: Blackwell, 1935).

defects which a more conscious artist could have easily avoided".[29] She does provide the reader with an interesting documentary on Traherne's life, the influence of his reading, his view of nature, and his specific works, many of which are relatively unknown. She comments quite critically upon his poetry, noting "rhythmical imperfections and awkward phraseology",[30] as well as "ill chosen rhymes and vain repetitions",[31] and its narrowness of scope. Iredale's work also considers at length the nature and significance of Philip's alterations to the original poems. Although this book makes some worthwhile observations it contains a considerable body of criticism which is negative and poorly founded. In this respect it began what was to become a trend among later studies concerning Traherne's poetic work. Iredale suggested that Traherne's poetry suffered from the strength of his spiritual commitment.[32]

The first important book on Traherne appeared in the nineteen forties. Gladys Wade's Thomas Traherne[33] which was published in 1944 examined every area of Traherne's life and

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[29] Ibid., p. 3.

[30] Ibid., p. 66.

[31] Ibid., p. 66.

[32] Ibid., p. 7.

[33] Gladys I. Wade, Thomas Traherne (New York: Octagon Books, c. 1944, reprinted in 1969).

work. Miss Wade's contribution was discussed in the previous chapter, and will be referred to again in the course of this thesis.

Allan H. Gilbert's comprehensive article "Thomas Traherne as Artist"[34] also appeared in this decade. This study deals with such topics as Traherne's life, the Centuries, the relationships between the two extant manuscripts of Traherne's poems, the biblical origins of his use of light imagery and the concept of Childhood, and the remarkable universality and freedom from formalized religion in his intensely devotional poetry.

During the nineteen forties such writers as R. B. Daniels[35] and E. A. Peers[36] contributed to the body of criticism which was very unappreciative of Traherne's poetry. During this period there appeared in print a collection of newly discovered critical commentaries by Francis Thompson. It was revealed that Thompson, too, had been very unimpressed by the poetry of Traherne.[37]

On the subject of Traherne's work as a whole, however, there was some positive commentary. ʿItrat Ḥusain's book,

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[34]Allan H. Gilbert, "Thomas Traherne as Artist", Modern Language Quarterly, VIII (1947), 319-341, 435-447.

[35]R. B. Daniels, Some Seventeenth Century Worthies in a Twentieth Century Mirror (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), pp. 91-96.

[36]E. A. Peers, Behind that Wall (New York: Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1948), pp. 169-181.

[37]Francis Thompson, Literary Criticisms, ed. Terence L. Connolly (New York: Dutton, 1948), pp. 89-95.

The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century[38] expresses great appreciation for the philosophical intricacies of Traherne's thought, but it does not discuss the literary qualities of his work. An article written by Frances Colby[39] also provided valuable insights on Traherne's philosophy.

In the nineteen fifties the few known facts pertaining to Traherne's life received additional study by such writers as K. W. Salter,[40] Angela Russell,[41] and Margaret Willy.[42] In this period, too, there was a good deal of negative criticism of Traherne's poetry. Both Gerald Bullett[43] and K. M. Burton[44] depreciate Traherne's poetry in favour of his prose while

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[38] Itrat Husain, The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1948), pp. 264-300.

[39] Frances L. Colby, "Thomas Traherne and Henry More," Modern Language Notes, LXII (1947), 490-492.

[40] K. W. Salter, "The Date of Traherne's Ordination", Notes and Queries, n.s. I (1954), 282.

[41] Angela Russell, "The Life of Thomas Traherne", Review of English Studies, VI (1955) 34-43.

[42] Margaret Willy, Life was Their Cry (London: Evans, 1950), pp. 57-60.

[43] Gerald Bullett, The English Mystics (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1950), p. 110.

[44] K. M. Burton, Restoration Literature (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p. 164.

Rosalie Colie[45] and William H. Marshall[46] wrote articles dealing largely with the philosophical aspects of Traherne's prose.

An article by John Malcolm Wallace[47] which appeared in 1958 was very significant. The writer treats Traherne's poetry as an exemplification of the ideas which Louis Martz presented in The Poetry of Meditation.[48] Wallace discusses the structural organization of the Dobell folio collection as a complete five-part meditation demonstrating all the conditions of a Jesuit devotional exercise. This article is outstanding because of its unique appreciation of the careful craftsmanship behind the poems of the Dobell folio. Wallace's discussion of the traditional meditational pattern within which the poems were produced works toward "a balanced view of Traherne's orthodoxy and originality".[49]

During the nineteen sixties there was great critical interest in the work of Thomas Traherne. In the years from 1960 to 1969 five books were published which gave an in-depth

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[45]Rosalie L. Colie, "Thomas Traherne and the Infinite: the Ethical Compromise", Huntington Library Quarterly, XXI (1957), 69-82.

[46]William H. Marshall, "Thomas Traherne and the Doctrine of Original Sin", Modern Language Notes, LXXIII (1958), 161-165.

[47]John Malcolm Wallace, "Thomas Traherne and the Structure of Meditation", Journal of English Literary History, XXV (1958), 79-89.

[48]Louis Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1954).

[49]Wallace, op. cit., p. 89.

study of Traherne's writings. Two of these dealt exclusively with Traherne; the remaining three, which we will consider first, dealt with Traherne's work in the context of a larger topic. Marjorie Nicolson's The Breaking of the Circle [50] analyzes Traherne's relationship to the 'new science' of the seventeenth century, giving particular attention to the influential philosophy of the Cambridge Platonist, Henry More. Miss Nicolson relates Traherne's use of both the concept of infinity and the symbol of the sphere to the changing thought of his age. She judges Traherne to be "the seventeenth century climax of the poets of 'aspiration'".[51] She points out that the greatest exponents of aspiration were scientists "who . . . spoke a language as enthusiastic as Traherne's own".[52]

Louis Martz's The Paradise Within[53] is another publication of the nineteen sixties which dealt with Traherne's work in the context of a larger topic. Martz shows profound insight into Traherne's work as a prose writer, but does not give much attention to his poetry. His commentary on Traherne deals almost exclusively with the Centuries of Meditations. Martz

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[50]Marjorie Hope Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

[51]Ibid., p. 173.

[52]Ibid., p. 179.

[53]Louis Martz, The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne and Milton (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1964).

makes an interesting point in comparing Traherne with the young Milton on the basis of his "exhuberant optimism".[54]

Margaret Willy's pamphlet Three Metaphysical Poets[55] was another of the books published between 1960 and 1969 which gave serious consideration to Thomas Traherne. She gives some attention to Traherne's least studied works: Roman Forgeries, Christian Ethicks, and the Thanksgivings. Her view of his poetry is, however, not entirely favourable. She writes:

> Too often the long, cumulative lists of attributes or blessings sprawl . . . into trite and repetitive diffuseness. Traherne as a poet lacked the discipline to prune superfluous verbiage, cut out the meaningless, redundant phrase used merely to achieve a rhyme; while the rhyming itself is frequently facile and expected enough to result in a jingle.[56]

The two books devoted entirely to Traherne which were published in the nineteen sixties were Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet by K. W. Salter,[57] and The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne by Arthur Leo Clements.[58] The unfortunate limitation of Salter's work is that it deals rather restrictively with

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[54] Ibid., p. 35.

[55] Margaret Willy, Three Metaphysical Poets (London: published for the British Council and the National Book League by Longmans, Green & Co., 1961).

[56] Ibid., p. 36.

[57] K. W. Salter, Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet (London: Edward Arnold, 1964).

[58] Arthur Leo Clements, The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

the mystical aspects of the content of Traherne's writing and fails to present an artistic appreciation of the structure of his work. Salter claims that "Traherne is a mystic before he is a poet",[59] and that in Traherne's case the poetry is "less fine than the experience".[60] Salter's book was very thoroughly reviewed by Carol Marks[61] and John Carey.[62] Carey was perceptively critical of Salter's one-sided approach.

Clements' book is very comprehensive, giving great emphasis to the elements of medieval mysticism in Traherne's work. It systematically analyzes the poems and emphasizes the recurring image patterns, but it displays so great a preoccupation with the mystical nature of Traherne's thought that once again the treatment of Traherne's poetic form is limited.

There were a number of significant periodical articles on Traherne published between 1960 and 1964. Carol Marks' "Thomas Traherne's Commonplace Book"[63] explored a hitherto untouched area. Elizabeth Jennings' article[64] which focused on the

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[59]Salter, op. cit., p. 113.

[60]Ibid., p. 119.

[61]Carol Marks, Review of K. W. Salter's Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet, Renaissance News, XIX (1966), 60-62.

[62]John Carey, Review of K. W. Salter's Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet, Modern Language Review, LXI (1966), 499.

[63]Carol Marks, "Thomas Traherne's Commonplace Book", Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, LVIII (1961), 458-465.

[64]Elizabeth Jennings, "The Accessible Art: A Study of Thomas Traherne's 'Centuries of Meditations'", Twentieth Century, CLXVII (1960), 140-151.

Centuries of Meditations took a negative attitude toward Traherne's poems. She describes them as "artifacts - sealed off, separate, curiously unattainable",[65] something to be admired, but not participated in. Thomas Staley's "The Theocentric Vision of Thomas Traherne"[66] sees Traherne's poems as a contemplative expression of the divine harmony. An article by Harold G. Ridlon[67] discusses the significance of unspoiled perception in Traherne's poetry, giving special attention to the poem Infant-Ey. Melvin G. Williams' "Thomas Traherne: Centre of God's Wealth"[68] presents the Christian justification for Traherne's extreme possessiveness and egocentricity. James Osborn's article[69] reports on the discovery of a new Traherne manuscript and has been noted in our earlier account of Traherne's known works.

The latter part of the decade also saw the publication of a large volume of critical articles on Traherne. Carol Marks produced four articles on such subjects as the influence of

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[65] Ibid., p. 141.

[66] Thomas F. Staley, "The Theocentric Vision of Thomas Traherne", Cithara, IV (1964), 43-47.

[67] Harold G. Ridlon, "The Function of the 'Infant-Ey' in Traherne's Poetry", Studies in Philology, LXI (1964), 627-639.

[68] Melvin G. Williams, "Thomas Traherne: Centre of God's Wealth", Cithara, III (1963), 32-40.

[69] James M. Osborn, "A New Traherne Manuscript", Times Literary Supplement, October 8, 1964, p. 928.

Traherne's reading,[70] his relationship to Cambridge Platonism,[71] and his writing of the "Church's Yearbook".[72] Thomas Harrison's article "Seneca and Traherne"[73] also dealt with the influence of Traherne's reading upon the content of his work, while M. M. Mahood[74] discusses Traherne's thought in relation to Berkleism and to the 'new humanism' of the seventeenth century. Joan Webber[75] comments upon the excellence of Traherne's prose style. The intricacies of Traherne's philosophy continued to fascinate critics as can be seen from George Guffey's "Thomas Traherne on Original Sin",[76] and Malcolm Day's "Traherne and the Doctrine

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[70]Carol L. Marks, "Thomas Traherne's Early Studies", Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, LXII (1968), 511-536; Carol L. Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus", Renaissance News, XIX (1966), 118-131.

[71]Carol L. Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism", Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXXXI (1966), 521-534.

[72]Carol L. Marks, "Traherne's Church's Yearbook", Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, LX (1966), 31-72.

[73]Thomas P. Harrison, "Seneca and Traherne", Arion, VI (1967), 403-405.

[74]M. M. Mahood, Poetry and Humanism (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1967), pp. 98, 301. Copyright London: 1950.

[75]Joan Webber, "'I and Thou' in the Prose of Thomas Traherne", Papers on Language and Literature, II (1966), 258-264.

[76]George R. Guffey, "Thomas Traherne on Original Sin", Notes and Queries, XIV (1967), 98-100.

of Pre-Existence".[77] Robert Uphaus's "Thomas Traherne: Perception as Progress"[78] discusses the relationship between perception and salvation in Traherne's thought. Certain articles dealt more specifically with Traherne's poetry. Among these were Donald Korte's analysis[79] of the poem The Estate as a key to understanding Traherne's work, and David Goldknopf's "The Disintegration of Symbol in a Meditative Poet"[80] which gives an excellent account of the basis of Traherne's abstract imagery. Goldknopf's article describes Traherne as finding "a quite satisfactory poetic equivalent for a complex concept and condition".[81] It points out that Traherne tends to "'soften up' the material world, infusing spirituality into it through transparency".[82]

The early nineteen seventies saw the publication of two more books on Traherne's poetry. Stanley Stewart's work The Expanded Voice[83] begins by defending Traherne's poems against

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[77]Malcolm M. Day, "Traherne and the Doctrine of Pre-Existence", Studies in Philology, LXV (1968), 81-97.

[78]Robert Uphaus, "Thomas Traherne: Perception as Progress", University of Windsor Review, III (1967), 19-27.

[79]Donald M. Korte, "Thomas Traherne's 'The Estate'", Thoth, VI (1964), 13-19.

[80]David Goldknopf, "The Disintegration of Symbol in a Meditative Poet", College English, XXX (1968-69), 48-59.

[81]Ibid., p. 53.

[82]Ibid., p. 54.

[83]Stanley N. Stewart, The Expanded Voice (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1970).

the attacks of critics who have classed them as inferior on the basis of false assumptions about the nature of poetry. He points out the sequential structure of both the poems of the Dobell folio and of the poems peculiar to the Burney manuscript. The poems of the Dobell folio are studied in some depth. Stewart sees Traherne's poems as "attempts at radical destruction of limits and boundaries".[84] He recognizes the predominance of the theme of reconciliation throughout Traherne's work.

Alison Sherrington's book Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne[85] deals with the traditional origins and aesthetic achievement of Traherne's symbolism. It studies his use of the senses, and the symbols of light, water, space, child, king, and marriage. Miss Sherrington points to the vagueness and generality of Traherne's symbols as the source of the "spacious grandeur"[86] which his poetry achieves. An article published during this same period by Malcolm Day[87] brings out a similar thought about the expansive effect of Traherne's language and the spiritual excitement that the sense of infinity produces.

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[84] Ibid., p. 212

[85] Alison J. Sherrington, Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1970).

[86] Ibid., p. 118.

[87] Malcolm M. Day, "'Naked Truth' and the Language of Thomas Traherne", Studies in Philology, LXVIII (1971), 305-325.

Another recent publication on the subject of Traherne is Richard Jordon's The Temple of Eternity[88] which studies Traherne's eternity-time concept and its effect on the Centuries of Meditations. Although he appraises the artistic coherence of Traherne's work Jordan concentrates on the content of Traherne's thought much more than on his artistic form.

One other significant article appeared in the early nineteen seventies. It was Ben Drake's "Thomas Traherne's Songs of Innocence"[89] which is a critique of Clements and Stewart's books. Although Drake points out several genuine weaknesses in the approaches of these two authors his extremely depreciating tone is unjustified. He overlooks the value of their contribution. He does, however, make some worthwhile observations on the manuscript problems.

In the years since 1959 there have been a number of dissertations presented which relate to Traherne's work. Several of these have been critical editions of his prose works,[90] while

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[88]Richard D. Jordan, The Temple of Eternity (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1972).

[89]Ben Drake, "Thomas Traherne's Songs of Innocence", Modern Language Quarterly, XXXI (1970), 492-503.

[90]Three dissertations of this type are:
Carol L. Marks, "A Critical Edition of Thomas Traherne's 'Christian Ethicks'" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1964). Abstract in Dissertation Abstracts, XXIV, 5411-5412A.
Richard L. Sauls, "A Critical Edition of Thomas Traherne's Meditations on the Creation" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1972). Abstract in Dissertation Abstracts, XXXIII, 1741A.
Lawrence Melvin Tanner, "Thomas Traherne's 'Centuries of Meditations': A Critical Introduction and Annotations for the 'First and Second Centuries'" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1959). Abstract in Dissertation Abstracts, XX, 3310-3311A.

others have appraised specific aspects of his Centuries of Meditations.[91]

This survey has made mention of the majority, but by no means the entirety, of the books and articles written on Traherne since the discovery of his major works some seventy years ago. Those which make little significant impression on the trends of thinking concerning Traherne have been omitted.

It has been essential to survey the nature of Traherne criticism up to the present time in order to realize the many areas which need attention either because they have not been thoroughly examined, or because they have been subjected to critical bias. Traherne's poetry has been underestimated for both of these reasons. Although the poems have received a measure of sound analysis recently, the critics have tended to focus heavily on the philosophical aspects of Traherne's thought, or on a single aspect of his technique. There is a need for a comprehensive study of the practical aspects of his poetry which, when considered as a totality, represent a poetic excellence which has been largely unrecognized.

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[91]Three dissertations of this type are:
Kenneth John Ames, "The Religious Language of Thomas Traherne's 'Centuries'" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1967). Abstract in Dissertation Abstracts, XXVIII, 3173A.
Zenas Johan Bicket, "An Imagery Study in Thomas Traherne's 'Centuries of Meditations'" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arkansas, 1965). Abstract in Dissertation Abstracts, XXVI, 4624A.
Brian W. Connolly, "Knowledge and Love: Steps toward Felicity in Thomas Traherne" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1966). Abstract in Dissertation Abstracts, XXVIII, 1047A.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROBLEM OF MANUSCRIPTS

Before making a serious study of Traherne's poetic achievement it is necessary to establish the authority of the texts as fully as possible. The chief manuscripts involved are the Dobell folio,[1] commonly referred to as D, and the Burney manuscript,[2] commonly referred to as F since it was first published under the title Poems of Felicity. D contains thirty-seven of Thomas Traherne's poems and F contains fifty, twenty-two poems being common to both. Although Thomas Traherne also wrote a number of free verse compositions entitled "Thanksgivings", and some twenty-nine poems which are found in other manuscripts and printed works,[3] we can regard the seventy-five poems of D and F as the

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[1] Bodleian MS. Eng. poet. c. 42.

[2] Poems of Felicity, British Museum MS. Burney 392.

[3] Fourteen of these additional poems are found in the published prose works, Christian Ethicks (1675) and Meditations on the Six Days of Creation, published by Nathaniel Spinckes as Part I of A Collection of Meditations and Devotations in three Parts, (1717). The remaining fifteen of these additional poems are found in various manuscripts: The Church's Year Book (also referred to as The Book of Private Devotions), Bodleian MS. Eng. th. e. 51; Philip Traherne's Notebook, Bodleian MS. Lat. misc. f. 45. The poems in the latter manuscript are identified as a collection of early verse (see Gladys Wade, Thomas Traherne, pp. 247-250), and the poems of the Meditations on the Six Days of Creation are thought to be early work as well (see H. M. Margoliouth, ed., Thomas Traherne: Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings, p. xvi).
All twenty-nine of these additional poems are included in Margoliouth's edition of Traherne's work.

main body of Traherne's poetic work. This chapter will consider the authority of these two manuscripts.

Since D is indisputably an autograph copy its text is clearly authoritative, but it is unlikely that it represents the original state of these thirty-seven poems. There are several reasons why it should be considered a later copy rather that the earliest form of the poems. Firstly, the tenth poem of the D sequence, The Approach, also occurs in Traherne's prose work, the Centuries, in what Margoliouth judges to be an earlier form.[4] Secondly, the poems of D are arranged in an order which clearly indicates a planned sequence of thought moving from simple concepts to more complex ones, and building each stage in the progression of ideas carefully on the stage preceeding it.[5] It is improbable that the shape and cohesion of thought that we find in the arrangement of the poems of D could have occurred in the author's first written version of these poems. Thirdly, the D manuscript exhibits very few false starts and whole line changes such as we would expect to find in an original working copy. In fact, the first two poems of D are completely clean except for the markings inserted later by the poet's brother Philip. Since the manuscript of the Centuries exhibits many deletions, insertions, and changes of intention demonstrating

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[4]Margoliouth, op. cit., p. xiv.

[5]This aspect of the Dobell folio is very well discussed by A. L. Clements in Chapter III of his The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969). In this area Clements is indebted to Wallace's article "Thomas Traherne and the Structure of Meditation".

it to be the working copy, we can expect that D would exhibit similar frequent alterations if it were the original manuscript of these poems. Our conclusion must be that D is a descendent of the archetype manuscript X which contained the first authorial version of the poems. Any revisions incorporated in the author's preparation of D would of course be more authoritative than the version in X.

Let us now consider the degree of authority of manuscript F which has long been recognized as a transcription of Thomas Traherne's poetry prepared by his brother Philip Traherne.[6] The title page of this volume directly attributes to Thomas Traherne the sixty poems which follow. Much has been written by critics concerning the relationship between D and F.[7] It is generally accepted that Philip's annotations in D indicate that he used D in his preparation of F, although it has been suggested by Allan H. Gilbert[8] that Philip did not obtain possession of D until after his completion of F. There is, however, little evidence to support this latter view. It is most reasonable to conclude that Philip was in possession of D during the

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[6]Margoliouth, op. cit., p. xiv.

[7]This issue has been discussed by Margoliouth (pp. xiv-xvi), Wade (pp. 112-113, 175), Clements (pp. 63-64, 102, 108, 144), and Allan H. Gilbert in "Thomas Traherne as Artist", Modern Language Quarterly, VIII (1947), 319-341.

[8]Gilbert, op. cit., p. 333.

time in which he worked on F. To have made such copious markings in D after F was completed would have been most unnecessary.

Few critics have given much thought to the possible nature of the lost manuscript from which Philip copied the thirty-eight poems which have no counterparts in D. Could it have been manuscript X, Thomas's foul papers containing the earliest form of his poetry, or was it a companion volume to the D manuscript containing poems in a comparable state of revision? The latter possibility is unlikely. If the author had prepared a revised clean copy of these thirty-eight poems it would have been most obvious to have included them in the large folio we refer to as D. This manuscript has ninety-seven leaves the first seventeen of which are occupied by the thirty-seven autograph poems. The remaining leaves of D are filled with extracts and notes from Traherne's reading. These prose selections comprise what is now called the Commonplace Book. Because of the inclusion of this other material in the D folio following the seventeen pages of poetry, Margoliouth observes that the poems of D must have "been considered a completed selection"[9] and that they must have been entered some time before the end of Traherne's life since there is evidence of so much subsequent work.

If Philip was using a second manuscript which was also an autograph fair copy it would have had to be produced much earlier

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[9]Margoliouth, op. cit., p. xiii.

than D. The possibility of an earlier fair copy is also improbable. The possible period during which Traherne could have been writing mature poetry lasts only ten to fifteen years since he died at the early age of thirty-seven. If, as Margoliouth has reasonably suggested, the poems of D were entered quite a while before the end of Traherne's life; and if, as was shown above, any clean manuscript comparable to D had been produced much earlier than D, the possible ten to fifteen year period becomes far too short to allow for the author's production of a clean revised copy of the thirty-eight poems which are not included in D. We can therefore conclude that D represents the only fair copy of his poems that Traherne ever produced.

This conclusion is further supported by the fact that no fair copy of the Centuries has survived and it is unlikely that such a copy ever existed. Although the Centuries were possibly begun as early as the Credenhill years it seems that he was continuing the work right up to the time of his death.[10] This work resembles a spiritual diary which an author quite naturally feels no inclination to revise and rewrite. Many critics have noted the similarity between the Centuries and the poetry in respect to the state of mind revealed. Since they share the same intensity of introspection it is possible that a certain hesitancy to prepare a clean copy for the view of others applied to both the Centuries and the Poems.

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[10]Salter, op. cit., p. 16.

Our conclusion then is that the revised clean copies of Traherne's poems as found in manuscript D are unique, the brevity of his life-span affording him no opportunity to edit the majority of his poems. It therefore follows that the poems which Philip included in F, which are not represented in D, must have been transcribed from manuscript X which contained unrevised material. Manuscript X was probably the author's working copy containing the earliest versions of his poems. If, indeed, Philip had possession of these foul papers they would most likely have included all seventy-five of the known poems of F and D as well as a number of others. From Philip's marginal entries in D we know that he was working from another manuscript of at least 133 pages in length in which poems occurred on pages 1, 2, 3, 9, 12, 124, and 133. It was probably a folio volume with each page divided into two columns since poems of 54 lines 18 lines, and 30 lines are located on pages 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

Philip's markings in D have been identified to such an extent[11] that we can be certain that he used D extensively in the preparation of F, even though in the foul papers he probably had the originals of the twenty-two poems he chose from the D manuscript. In transcribing these poems it seems reasonable that he would rely on the cleaner revised versions in D rather than on the versions in manuscript X, even though X may have

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[11]Margoliouth indicates all of Philip's markings in his editorial notes to the poems.

contained the versions of the poems that he was first familiar with. Although Philip may have made a number of wilful alterations in the poems he copied from D, there is a great possibility that some of the variants between the poems of D and their counterparts in F are due to Philip's decision to use the earlier version found in X rather than a word or phrase in D that did not strike his fancy.

Nevertheless, the poems of F which have counterparts in D are virtually valueless as representations of Traherne's work. A version known to be authorial is obviously preferable to one based on a combination of doubtful sources, even if one of these sources may have been the author's original version. The facts and proposals presented in the preceeding paragraphs become very useful, however, in shaping our attitude to those poems which are extant only in the F version.

The greatest manuscript problem for a student of Traherne's poetry is the treatment of those poems for which no actual authorial version exists. Critics have long been disturbed by the number of seemingly audacious changes which Philip made in the thirty-seven poems he copied from D, and have assumed that there is a proportionate amount of non-authorial material in the thirty-eight poems which are found only in F. Clements judges that "the poems found only in F are of little worth in themselves in measuring Traherne's poetic stature or attempting to comprehend his mysticism".[12] He also claims that "the failure of many

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[12]Clements, op. cit., p. 5.

later critics to estimate properly the nature and extent of Philip's editing has unjustly deflated Thomas's poetic stature".[13] Such an approach fails to do justice to the body of poetry peculiar to the F manuscript. Many of Traherne's finest creations are found in this group. There is a need to reconsider the degree of reliability of Philip's transcriptions.

The manuscript of F affords us clues as to the extent to which Philip deviated from his copy. Although such evidence is very speculative we should consider the possibilities which it suggests. Margoliouth treats these clues as very reliable,[14] but in most cases the evidence they represent is inconclusive.

There are a number of instances when Philip began to write a word or phrase and then deleted it in favour of something significantly different. There are some 133 examples of such altered intention in the thirty-eight poems peculiar to F. In about 90 of these cases it is possible to construe what might reasonably have been Philip's first intention. For example, in News, line 13, "leav" is deleted and replaced by "change". Another example occurs in The World, line 23, where "desire" is deleted and replaced by "request". In such cases as these the

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[13] Ibid., p. 4.

[14] This is indicated by Margoliouth in his introductory comments (p. xvi), in his notes to the poems, and in the variants which he chooses to print in cases where Philip demonstrates a change of intention.

word first written could be taken to represent a complete variant.[15]

In other cases of altered intention the whole of what Philip originally intended to write is virtually irrecoverable. This is true of about 43 of the 133 false starts in the poems peculiar to F. One example of this occurs in line 6 of The Return in which Philip deleted "outwar" after "I";[16] another example occurs in line 103 of Dissatisfaction where Philip began with "My", deleted it, and wrote "For this did fail". We can never determine what Philip had actually begun to write in these situations. Nevertheless, Margoliouth has attempted to reconstruct by conjecture a possible original in several of these cases.[17]

Margoliouth generally assumes that Philip's false starts are close to Thomas's original wording. In 77 cases he prints as his text a wording that Philip had deleted. Margoliouth implies that his preference for the rejected wordings is based on the idea that these rejected wordings are recognizable as

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[15]In line 13 of News Philip's first intention was "That it could leav its dwelling-place", while his final version read "That it could change its dwelling-place". In line 23 of The World Philip's first intention was "Which Dives more than Silver doth desire", while his final version read "Which Dives more than Silver doth request".

[16]Philip's final version of the line read "When least I could an Error see."

[17]One example of this occurs in Margoliouth's note to line 48 of The Inference.

more poetic and more characteristic of Traherne's style. Such subjective judgements do not constitute tangible criteria. In many cases the deleted version which Margoliouth has chosen to print makes no apparent improvement in the poem.[18]

Let us consider again the poems which Philip copied from the autograph manuscript D. If it could be demonstrated that Philip's false starts in these poems are close to the autograph original in a high percentage of cases Margoliouth's approach would be justified. One could then feel that a wording first written and then deleted by Philip would very likely represent what Thomas intended. Unfortunately a close study of the variants in the poems common to D and F reveals that this is not consistently the case.

Of the 94 false starts in the F version of these thirty-seven poems many are concerned merely with capitalization. Of those that constitute more substantial changes, only 35 are fairly accurate indications of what Thomas had written in D, while between 20 and 25 show deletions which are in no way similar to what Thomas had written in D. These figures do not include false starts which seem to be mere technical errors in copying. Let us consider one actual case by way of illustration. In Wonder, line 60, Philip first wrote "In undivided wealth

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[18]For example Margoliouth prints "The Skies abov so sweetly then did smile" in preference to "The azure Skies did with so sweet a smile", (The World, l. 49) in another case he prints "Meer outward Shew their Fancy blinds", in preference to "Or sottish Vanity their Fancy blinds", (Dissatisfaction, l. 55).

combine", then deleted it and wrote "To make me rich combine". Neither is at all similar to what Thomas wrote in D, "Did not Divide my Joys, but shine", yet this is a situation where, if the D version was not extant, Margoliouth would favour the first wording which Philip wrote as the more authoritative. There are numerous other examples in the poems common to D and F where Philip's deleted wordings would be most misleading to an editor who believed he could reconstruct D on the basis of their evidence. We must also remember that F demonstrates more than one hundred major variants from D which are not accompanied by a deletion or erasure of any kind.

There are, however, several very significant cases in which Philip's final wordings are closer to D than his deletions. One of these occurs in line 48 of Nature where Philip first wrote "vast", and then substituted "wide"; the D reading is "Wide". Another of these cases occurs in line 15 of Eas where Philip deletes the wording "Curious Dress" in favour of "glorious Robe" which is exactly the wording Thomas used in D.

Another vital factor in our appraisal of this multiplicity of variants is the probability that Philip was also working from the poet's foul papers, as we discussed above. The distinct likelihood of this must naturally produce a more lenient attitude toward the variants displayed in Philip's manuscript since any of them might be derived from the author's original version.

These considerations are most relevant to our treatment of the poems for which no actual authorial version exists. The

assumption that they contain a large proportion of non-authorial material is not necessarily valid. We need not be reluctant to use the text which Philip produced since a knowledge of Thomas's habits of diction, prosody, imagery and thought enable us to recognize the work as substantially his own.

We should note here that the apparent lack of poetic quality in some of the F poems is undoubtedly due to the unrevised nature of manuscript X, as was discussed earlier. Also, the many false starts, insertions and alternate readings which foul papers would certainly demonstrate clearly accounts for the higher percentage of false starts which Philip made in the poems he copied only from X than in those he copied primarily from D.

It is crucial that the poems found only in F be studied as a vital part of Traherne's poetic achievement for they emphasize a dimension of Traherne's emotional and intellectual thrust not fully developed by the poems of D.

One of the most obvious contrasts between the poems of D and those peculiar to F is the frequency of concrete imagery in the latter group. Such poems as Solitude, On Christmas-Day, and The Odour have an appeal to the senses that is entirely absent from the poems of D. The poems that Traherne selected to place in the D manuscript were more broadly philosophical in thought, more impersonal in subject, and more abstract in symbolism than many of those that he excluded. The poems peculiar to F contain more direct references to Christianity and to specifically religious typology. There are a number of references to churches

and the Bible, and frequent allusions to scripture and orthodox theology, as can be seen from the following examples from F:

> . . . the Bride
> Of God His Church,
> (Felicity, ll. 13-14.)

> Sin is a Deviation from the Way
> Of God:
> (Adam, ll. 3-4.)

> . . . my Savior's precious Blood
> Sprinkled I see
> (The World, ll. 13-14.)

> Clad in my Savior's Righteousness;
> (On Christmas-Day, l. 70.)

> . . . who dy'd
> Upon the Cross for me:
> (Bells, ll. 60, 61.)

> Joys in the New Jerusalem.
> (The City, l. 60.)

Although they resemble the poems of D in all substantial aspects of form and content, the poems extant only in Philip's manuscript provide us with evidence of a facet of Traherne's creative talent which enchances rather than detracts from his excellence as a poet. This study will therefore consider examples from both manuscripts in its evaluation of Thomas Traherne's poetic achievement.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRAHERNE'S VERSIFICATION

Much of the negative criticism of Traherne's poetry has been directed specifically against his versification. Critics such as Gladys Willett have depreciated his poetry in favour of his prose referring especially to the mechanics of his poetic style:

> Traherne's true medium was prose, not verse: there is hardly a thought in his poems which he has not expressed more finely in the "Centuries of Meditations". Meter and rhyme did not help his genius but hampered it.[1]

Such disapproval seems to have been caused chiefly by Traherne's great variety of stanza patterns and his complexity of meter and rhyme scheme. Doris Wilson accuses him of defective workmanship and claims that his "position among the English poets has been and will be questioned . . . he ignored nearly all the laws of prosody".[2] She has given no specific evidence to support her charge of defective workmanship, and her accusation concerning Traherne's disregard for the "laws of prosody" seems very unreasonable since a poet is in no way obliged to follow established precedents. The metaphysical poets characteristically deviated from traditional norms. The poetry of

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[1]Gladys E. Willett, Traherne (An Essay) (Cambridge, 1919), p. 18.

[2]A. Doris L. Wilson, "A Neglected Mystic", Poetry Review, XVI (1925), 180-181.

John Donne is not condemned for its irregularity of meter and complexity of stanza pattern. Like Donne, Traherne did not write poetry which imitated the work of his predecessors; there was no conscious conformity to traditional established patterns. His verse frequently reminds us of the highly patterned stanzas used by other poets of the period such as Herbert and Quarles. In essence, however, his verse forms are arrestingly unique. He develops the patterned stanza to as complex a form as can be found in any metaphysical poetry. His use of it shows genuine poetic skill rather than poetic weakness.

This analysis of Traherne's versification will first consider his use of the couplet form, and then move to the complex stanza forms and special devices in line length which are particularly characteristic of him.

Traherne uses the couplet rhyme scheme exclusively in eighteen poems. Seven of these are written in the traditional pentameter couplet. In these poems he uses enjambment within the couplet but tends to treat each individual couplet as a self-contained unit of thought. In his longer couplet poems, Nature and Silence, we find only a few instances of the syntax running over from the second line of one couplet to the first line of the next. There is often, however, an unbroken flow from the first line of a couplet into the second, as we can observe in Dumness:

> Before that Living Vehicle of Wind
> Could breath into me their infected Mind
> Before my Thoughts were levend with theirs, before
> There any mixture was; the Holy Door,
> Or Gate of Souls was closed, and mine being One
> With in itself to me alone was Known.
> (11. 25-30)

Donne's use of the couplet is similar to Traherne's in that the phrasing of the first line of the couplet frequently runs over into the second. Both Donne and Traherne rarely use such enjambment to link one couplet to the next. These lines from Good Friday 1613. Riding Westward illustrate Donne's use of the couplet:

> If on these things I durst not looke, durst I
> Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
> Who was God's partner here, and furnish'd thus
> Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom'd us?
> (11. 29-32)

Henry Vaughan's use of enjambment in the pentameter couplet is also comparable to Traherne's as can be seen from his poem Isaac's Marriage. Crashaw, on the other hand, frequently lets his phrasing run over from one couplet into the next; an example of this is found in lines 1 to 6 of Musicks Duell.

Of Traherne's eighteen poems written in couplets only seven are in the standard iambic pentameter, the form known as the "heroic couplet". The remaining eleven are composed of stanzas with lines of varying length. The rhyme scheme of such stanzas is, of course, aabbccdd and so on, but a definite stanza pattern is established by the arrangement of line length. One example is the poem Another which is arranged in four-line stanzas with five feet in each of the first three lines and

four feet in the final line; we can represent it metrically as 5554. Such a stanza is a slight variation on the "heroic couplet" form, the only change being that every fourth line is one foot shorter than the others. In other poems, however, Traherne displays an even more unconventional use of the couplet. In The Demonstration the couplets are structured into a more complex six-line stanza pattern of line length 553445.

Complexity of stanza pattern generally involves intricacy of rhyme scheme. Traherne's verse does display much complexity of rhyme scheme, but it was with his arrangement of line length that he achieved his most intricate stanza patterns. By examining the couplet poems which he wrote in stanzas we can see how he experimented with varied line lengths while keeping the uniformity of the couplet rhyme. In The Approach of line length 45 45 45 and Consumation of line length 34 34 44 he creates a hesitant contemplative effect by the pairing of a short and long line within the couplet.

Five of Traherne's couplet poems are composed of much longer stanzas. Right Apprehension written in eight-line stanzas of line length 45 45 22 45 has the striking effect of a short dimeter couplet in the midst of much longer lines. This abrupt couplet serves to emphasize crucial points in the thought of the poem, as we can see from these lines from the first and third stanzas:

How wise was I
In Infancy!
(11. 5-6)

What Men should prize
They all despise;
(11. 21-22)

On Leaping Over the Moon of line length 54 33 22 54 54 also uses the dimeter couplet, but it is introduced by a trimeter couplet so that the effect created is one of a gradual diminishing and then an expanding to the type of couplet with which the the stanza began. Several of his other couplet poems, The Recovery of line length 44 45 44 34 55, Goodness of line length 54 42 55 33 22 55 display great complexity, but the irregularity of rhythm is resolved by a return to the pentamenter couplet at the end of the stanza.

The complexity of stanza pattern in these couplet poems is very typical of Traherne. This becomes more apparant as we turn our attention to the much larger body of poems in which he uses varied rhyme schemes rather than the couplet. There are fifty-five of these poems, some forty of which have long stanzas of eight or more lines. In the poems with shorter stanzas we can occasionally recognize the structure of a traditional standard verse form such as the "long ballad" form in Ease and the "stave of six" in The Improvement. Such conventional stanzas are, however, the exception rather than the rule for Traherne.

The complexity of Traherne's long stanzas has been a 'thorn in the flesh' for many critics. Douglas Bush makes the sweeping accusation that "the undisciplined quality of his verse reflects the undisciplined quality of his temperament and

his religious experience".[3] Even if Bush fails to see any beauty in Traherne's intricate verse forms he has no basis for labeling them as "undisciplined". Traherne's pattern of rhyme and meter obviously took great skill and painstaking care, especially in the repetition of them in stanza after stanza. My Spirit contains seven impressive stanzas of seventeen lines each. Their rhyme scheme and line length may be represented as follows:

ababa ccd eee fggf dd
43443 555 225 4325 44

Having made this unreasonable accusation against the quality of Traherne's verse Bush unfairly generalizes his accusation to include even the poet's temperament and life.

It is interesting to compare Traherne's versification with that of John Donne. Donne does not tend to use such long stanzas as Traherne, but nevertheless creates equal complexities of rhyme scheme and line length. Two good examples of this are his poems The Legacie and The Canonization the stanza patterns of which can be represented respectively as follows:

abba ab cc
4445 45 55

abba ccc dd
5454 445 43

What is more complex in Donne's case than in Traherne's is the actual meter. Traherne rarely uses anything but the iambic foot, whereas Donne regularly interposes trochaic and dactylic

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[3]Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660 (Oxford, 1962), p. 148.

meters for special effect such as in Song, which begins "Go and catch . . .". The unusual combination of meters is obvious in the fifth line of that poem which reads "Teach me to hear Mermaides singing". Donne also displays a tendency to conclude his stanzas with a triplet rhyme in comparison with Traherne's more conventional use of the concluding couplet.

Vaughan's verse style also contrasts with Traherne's in that he frequently uses the simple four-line stanza or no stanza at all. When he does use longer stanzas he seldom attempts usch intricate patterns as we find in Traherne's poems. Nevertheless, in his stanzaless poem Distraction Vaughan achieves a very striking effect with irregular line lengths. In this case, however, he keeps to the couplet rhyme scheme and does not attempt to repeat the complex pattern of line length. In respect to versification he was not as daring a craftsman as Traherne.

There are numerous instances of complex stanzas in Traherne's work. Patterns that seem at first bewildering and almost random, are seen, on closer examination, to be carefully planned on the basis of several artistic principles. A number of his poems use lengthy stanzas of complex line length patterns, but use rhyme scheme that falls into a neat series of couplets and quatrains. One of these is News of rhyme scheme abab cc dd ee fgfg, another is Churches II of rhyme scheme aa bccb dd efef gg hh. A number of other poems by Traherne use complexity of both rhyme scheme and line

length which is resolved into couplets or quatrains at the end of the stanza. One such poem is The Person which may be represented as follows:

abcabc dede ff gg hh
243342 4433 42 54 55

There are about twenty cases of such long complex stanzas ending in a couplet, nearly always a pentameter or tetrameter couplet. Another principle underlying the artistry of Traherne's stanzas is the frequent relationship between line length groupings and rhyme groupings of the lines. Christendom is a good example; its stanzas have the following pattern:

aa bcbc dd ee
33 5444 22 55

This chapter has thus far considered the mechanical aspects of Traherne's versification independently of his content in an attempt to demonstrate the artistic skill involved in producing such patterns. To fully appreciate Traherne's poetic craftsmanship it is necessary to also evaluate the interdependence of form and content. The blending of these two elements was one of the chief concerns of seventeenth century poets. The artistic balance of matter and manner was a major achievement of Donne and his successors. In this area Traherne's poetry also demonstrates high quality.

This is, however, an aspect of Traherne's work which has been unjustly attacked. One critic, K. M. Burton, has suggested that Traherne's "form and rhythm contribute little to the

meaning of the words".[4] It was Dr. Bell, one of the earliest editors of Traherne's poems, who initiated the frequent attacks on Traherne's poetry in respect to the relationship between form and content.[5] Only recently have scholars undertaken serious studies of his poetry which have resulted in the refutation of many earlier judgements. A. L. Clements in his opening chapter reveals the lack of basis for Bell's accusation that there is no connection between form and content in Traherne's poetry.[6]

Let us now consider several specific passages of poetry in which thought and feeling are intensified by Traherne's skillful use of irregular verse forms. The heroic couplet form lends itself quite readily to discursive argument, to philosophical rather than emotional matters. Traherne uses this form very appropriately in the poem Dumnesse which begins:

> Sure Man was born to Meditate on Things,
> And to Contemplate the Eternal Springs.
> (ll. 1-2)

Silence, another poem written in heroic couplets, begins:

> A quiet Silent Person may possess
> All that is Great or High in Blessedness.
> (ll. 1-2)

The poem Nature offers another example of the effective use of the pentameter couplet form. Its discursive tone is apparent

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[4]K. M. Burton, Restoration Literature (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1958), p. 164.

[5]H. I. Bell, ed., Traherne's Poems of Felicity (Oxford, 1910), pp. xxviii-xxvix.

[6]Arthur Leo Clements, The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 3-4.

in these opening lines:

> That Custom is a Second Nature, we
> Most Plainly find by Natures Purity.
> (ll. 1-2)

In each of these cases Traherne proposes a thesis in the opening lines and goes on to develop it logically without the dramatic expostulations and emotional overtones which are usually characteristic of his verse.

The simple stanza forms were also used by Traherne for specific subjects. The Instruction which is written in octosyllabic quatrains with ballad rhyme scheme is a didactic poem which begins "Spue out thy filth, thy flesh abjure". The tone is one of direct rebuke. Such strong words coming in short, unembellished lines make for an abruptness which is almost an affront to the reader. The form and matter are perfectly matched. Ease is very appropriately written in the smooth flowing heroic stanza. It begins gracefully with the words:

> How easily doth Nature teach the Soul,
> How irresistible is her Infusion!
> (ll. 1-2)

The subject matter of Innocence also requires a simple direct form of expression. It is composed of three types of quatrains which may be represented as follows:

aabb cdcd efef
5554 4444 4344

In this poem Traherne achieves simplicity by the use of end-stop lines and heavy stress on the iambic meter, as can be observed in this passage which comprises the central quatrain of the first stanza:

No Darkness then did overshade,
But all within was Pure and Bright,
No Guilt did Crush, nor fear invade
But all my Soul was full of Light.
(ll. 5-8)

Traherne seldom uses the same stanza pattern more than once. Like Donne he let his thoughts flow freely into a natural pattern of meter and rhyme scheme. He ends his verse paragraph at the first appropriate stopping place. The stanza thus produced usually had from eight to sixteen lines of very irregular length. It then remained to repeat the same pattern in additional stanzas which further developed the thought content of the first.

We can see how the form of such stanzas evolved from the content by examining the first stanzas of a number of poems. The title of each of these poems indicates a specific mood which is borne out by the mechanical aspects of the verse form.

I. Solitude

How desolate!
Ah! how forlorn, how sadly did I stand
When in the field my woful State
I felt! Not all the Land,
Not all the Skies,
Tho Heven shin'd before mine Eys,
Could Comfort yield in any Field to me,
Nor could my Mind Contentment find or see.
(ll. 1-8)

The dimeter first line makes a slow beginning which is continued by holding the first syllable of the second line to make a sponaic foot: "Āh! hōw fŏrlōrn, . . .". The dragging movement reinforces the meaning of the words "desolate" and

"forlorn". The tempo picks up a little in the third line, but is slowed down again by the pause after "felt" in the fourth line. The contracting effect of lines three to five diminishing by one foot successively is suited to the negative mood of the content. The stanza concludes with references to comfort and contentment which flow naturally into longer smoother lines.

II. Dissatisfaction

In Cloaths confin'd, my weary Mind
Persu'd Felicity;
Throu ev'ry Street I ran to meet
My Bliss:
But nothing would the same disclose to me.
What is,
O where the place of holy Joy!
Will nothing to my Soul som Light convey!
In ev'ry House I sought for Health,
Searcht ev'ry Cabinet to spy my Wealth,
I knockt at ev'ry Door,
Askt ev'ry Man I met for Bliss,
In ev'ry School, and College, sought for this:
But still was destitute and poor.
(ll. 1-14)

This is one of the most irregular stanzaic patterns in all of Traherne's work. The jarring movement reflects the discontent and restlessness being expressed. The internal rhyme of the first and third lines make the first few lines come across in sudden thrusts: two dimeters, a trimeter, two dimeters, and a monometer. This uneven movement is changed abruptly by the sweeping pentameter of the fifth line which has no especially heavy accents. This is followed by another monometer which rhymes with the first, and then, in lines seven to ten, the poet uses a pair of couplets of uneven length, each having a four-foot and a five-foot line. The thought of

the poem expresses the faint hope that the poet feels as the search continues, and this feeling is very appropriately expressed in the expanding movement of lines eleven to thirteen which have three, four and five feet respectively. The disappointment expressed in the final line of the stanza is anti-climactic and is accompanied by a return to the four foot measure.

Apart from its very irregular metrical pattern, this poem is significant as one of the few in which Traherne uses some unrhyming lines. The whole structure of the stanza in terms of meter, line length and rhyme scheme is rough and unsettling, giving little impression of balance and order. This is perfectly in keeping with the subject - dissatisfaction. The poet has achieved the desired integration of matter and manner.

III. Dreams

'Tis strange! I saw the skies;
I saw the Hills before mine Eys;
The sparrow fly;
The Lands that did about me ly;
The reall Sun, that hev'nly Ey!
Can closed Eys ev'n in the darkest Night
See throu their Lids, and be inform'd with Sight?
(ll. 1-7)

The dream-like tone is created by the slow smooth flowing meter, the soft consonant sounds of the s's, h's and l's, and the long vowel sounds of "strange", "saw", "skies", "mine" and the long i sound being repeated in nearly all the rhyming words.

IV. Insatiableness I

No Walls confine! Can nothing hold my Mind?
Can I no Rest nor Satisfaction find?
Must I behold Eternity
And see
What things abov the Hev'ns be?
Will nothing serve the Turn
Nor Earth, nor Seas, nor Skies?
Till I what lies
In Time's beginning find
Must I till then for ever burn?
(ll. 1-10)

This poem is another apt illustration of Traherne's adaptation of structure to meaning. The opening series of questions require that the rhythm move quickly to the end of the line. There is a pause on the last syllable of each line indicating the sense of expecting an answer. The frequent use of short lines somewhat restrains the movement and gives the reader a sense of uneasiness.

V. The Vision

Flight is but the Preparative: The Sight
Is Deep and Infinit;
An me! tis all the Glory, Love, Light, Space,
Joy Beauty and Varietie
That doth adorn the Godheads Dwelling Place
Tis all that Ey can see.
Even Trades them selves seen in Celestial Light,
And Cares and Sins and Woes are Bright.
(ll. 1-8)

A specific study of Traherne's use of meter reveals that his poetry is written almost entirely in iambic rhythm. The above passage indicates, however, that he occasionally makes use of a different sort of metrical foot in order to create variation and emphasis. In this stanza the accented first

syllable makes an emphatic opening and draws attention to the word "Flight" which is in itself a rather unexpected word in this context. The spondaic feet in the third and fourth lines give emphasis to the exclamatory tone and the lofty images. The rhythm of the last line is also striking. The iambic beat is accentuated by heavily accenting the important words in contrast to the insignificant words such as "and".

VI. My Spirit

My Naked Simple Life was I.
That Act so Strongly shind
Upon the Earth, the Sea the Sky,
That was the Substance of my Mind.
The Sence itself was I.
I felt no dross nor Matter in my Soul,
Nor Brims nor Borders, such as in a Bowl
We see, My Essence was Capacitie.
That felt all Things,
The Thought that Springs
Therfrom's it self. It hath no other Wings
To Spread abroad, nor Eys to see,
Not Hands Distinct to feel,
Nor Knees to Kneel:
But being Simple Like the Deitie
In its own Centre is a Sphere
Not shut up here, but evry Where.
(ll. 1-17)

Traherne's use of effective metrical variation is further illustrated by this stanza. In it we can also observe the use of diminishing lines that we noted above in the poem Solitude. The negative thrust of the thought is supported by the successive decrease in length of lines eleven to fourteen.

Traherne's use of enjambment is another significant aspect of this stanza from My Spirit. Lines two and seven allow for

no pause at the end. The grammatical structure sweeps the reader quickly into the next line for the conclusion of the phrase. The pace of the poem is accelerated at these points because it omits the pause which normally comes at the end of the line. This change of pace adds variety to the movement of the poem and also serves to emphasize the thought.

In conclusion we must acknowledge that Traherne's versification displays both technical skill and artistic sensitivity to the requirements of his topics. The structure of his stanzas, although complex and rugged, is appropriate to his thought and his harmonizing of form and content compares favourably with that of the important poets of his era.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRAHERNE'S POETIC DICTION

The range of Thomas Traherne's poetic vocabulary is not extensive, nor is his choice of words very unusual. Indeed, the diction he uses is characteristic of the writing of his period. Recognizing the limitations of his diction, however, does not require us to downgrade it in any way. A close examination of Traherne's use of words will reveal that in respect to diction his content has found its suitable and inevitable form.

A common complaint voiced by the many critics of Traherne's diction is that he uses abstractions and repetitions to excess.[1] Abstractions and repetitions are definitely observable characteristics of his poetry, but the possibility that the use of them may be poetically justified does not appear to have occurred to many of his critics. Stanley Stewart is correct in attributing much of the critical disinterest in Traherne as a poet to the common assumption "that good poetry requires concrete diction".[2] K. W. Salter, another competent

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[1]Such complaints have been made by a number of critics, notably:
Margaret Willy, Three Metaphysical Poets (London, 1961), p. 36;
J. C. Squire, Books in General (Freeport, N.Y., 1971), pp. 23-24;
Gladys E. Willett, Traherne (An Essay) (Cambridge, 1919), p. 36.
R. B. Daniels, Some Seventeenth Century Worthies in a Twentieth Century Mirror (Chapel Hill, 1940), p. 95.

[2]Stanley N. Stewart, The Expanded Voice (San Marino, Calif., 1970), p. 139.

Traherne critic, recognizes the fact that Traherne hardly ever intends to give a sense of the materialistic world, but instead uses deliberate lists of general items which function efficiently with "words serving as pointers"[3] for his expansive concepts.

Let us begin our survey of Traherne's diction by examining the information presented in the tables on pages 77 to 79. These tables present the major nouns, adjectives and verbs used throughout the seventy-five poems of the Dobell and Burney manuscripts. On the basis of these tabulations some general observations can be made.

It is immediately obvious that abstractions are the staple of Traherne's vocabulary. Although this fact has often constituted an obstacle to the understanding of his poetry, honest study reveals that the repetitive use of certain abstract words is well justified thematically.

Use of Nouns

The ubiquitous presence of such nouns as God, Man, Soul, Heaven, and Eternity clearly demonstrates the poet's deep concern that Man find spiritual well-being through a right relationship with God. The nouns, love, joy, bliss, pleasure, glory, and delight, serve to convey the exuberant overflowing

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[3]K. W. Salter, Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet (London, 1964), p. 115.

TABLE I - NOUN ROOTS

Words in Order of Frequency	Number of Occurrences
Joy, (joyful, joyous)	155
Soul	144
Thing	126
God, Godhead	118
Ey, Eye	112
Love [noun and verb]	108
Heaven, (heavenly)	96
Thought	95
Earth, (earthly)	88
Sky	86
Man, Men, Mankind	83
World	76
Pleasure (pleasant)	71
Treasure, Treasury	67
Bliss	60
King, Kingdom, (kingly)	59
Glory	57
Sence	56
Light	54
Delight [noun and verb]	54
Work [noun and verb]	50
Life, (living)	48
Sun	47
Gold, (golden)	45
Eternity, (eternal)	39
Beauty, (beautiful)	38
Sphere	33
Stars	32

TABLE II - ADJECTIVE ROOTS

Words in Order of Frequency	Number of Occurrences
Great, (greatness)	74
Divine, (divinly)	44
Sweet, (sweetness, sweetly)	44
Glorious, (gloriously)	40
Endless	35
Infinite, (infinitely)	34
Rich, (riches)	33
Pure, (purely)	33
High	32
True, (truth)	32
Fair	30
Bright, (brightness, brightly)	27
New, (newly)	25
Sacred	25
Holy	23
Precious	21
Strange	19
Happy, (happiness)	16
Little	15
Inward	14
Perfect	14
Empty	13
Silent, (silence)	13
Wide	12
Clear, (clearly)	11

TABLE III - VERB ROOTS

Words in Order of Frequency	Number of Occurrences
See	140
Shine	52
Appear	47
Praise	37
Know	35
Possess, (possession)	27
Prize	21
Esteem	20
Enjoy, (enjoyment)	18
Feel	16
Behold	16
Receive	15
Walk	13
Talk	11
Burn	10
Teach, Instruct	10
Hear	9
Reign	8
Create	7
Confine	7
Seek	7

of the spiritual benefits of his religious experience. The words Thought(s) and Thing(s) are high on the list because they express a major distinction between the spiritual and the material which is the basis of much of Traherne's thinking. Traherne's concern centers around the contrast between the inner life of thought which is essentially spiritual, and the temporal, material world of things.

Use of Adjectives

Table II indicates that in this area also Traherne's thinking has been largely abstract. His use of adjectives also reflects a response to life which is uniquely his own. The frequency of great, glorious, and high is indicative of his soaring enthusiasm. He expresses his almost unbelievable optimism by using extremely positive terms: divine, sweet, rich, pure, true, fair, and bright. His preoccupation with the concept of vastness is also conveyed by deliberately chosen modifiers such as endless, infinite, and wide. There are practically no negative words in this count of his most frequently used adjectives.

Use of Verbs

Traherne's use of verbs also reveals the main movements of his thought. The whole of religious experience is described in stages: perception (see, appear, feel, behold); understanding (know, receive, possess); appreciation (prize, esteem);

and elation (praise, enjoy). Stewart has observed that in the poems of the Dobell folio the verbs tend to imply linear and spatial movement or expansion.[4]

Use of Concrete Terms

Traherne's diction is not entirely abstract. When he does use concrete terms they tend to form a number of image clusters which specifically reinforce many of his abstractions. Eye, light, sun, clear, and ear relate to one of his key ideas - perception. The sun-stars-seas-air and the eye-hands-tongue-ear-feet groupings convey the two different aspects of God's handiwork in which he continually rejoices.

The overlapping of the image clusters is an indication of the continuity of his thought which ultimately ignores the organization of categories. One example of this is the manner in which the images of royalty (king, throne, reign, wealth) overflow into the images of riches (wealth, gold, silver, pearl).

Traherne's image patterns will be analyzed more thoroughly in the next chapter. At this point it is sufficent to observe that he does particularize his concepts by using concrete words when it is to his purpose to do so.

Proportion

The language of Traherne's poetry falls into the category which Josephine Miles describes as "characterized by the infre-

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[4]Stewart, op. cit., p. 170.

quent verb, heavily loaded with noun modifications".[5] An examination of her chart on "proportions in English poetry"[6] reveals some interesting trends in frequency of use of the various parts of speech by seventeenth-century writers. She presents the adjective/noun/verb ratio for a number of seventeenth century poets as follows:

	adjective/noun/verb	
Jonson	2 / 4 / 3	
Herrick	2 / 4 / 3	
Herbert	2 / 4 / 3	predicative
Donne	2 / 3 / 3	
Marvell	2 / 3 / 3	
Vaughan	2 / 3 / 3	
Waller	2 / 5 / 3	balanced
Dryden	2 / 5 / 2	
Blackmore	3 / 5 / 2	adjectival
Milton	3 / 4 / 2	

In the predicative group verbs are more frequent than adjectives, while in the adjectival group the reverse is true. Miss Miles suggests that the poets she selected indicate the average proportions in word usage for that century. It would seem from

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[5]Josephine Miles, Style and Proportion (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 7.

[6]Ibid., p. 16.

her study that the adjectival style was not nearly as common as the predicative style in seventeenth-century poetry. Her chart goes on to show, however, that in the eighteenth century poetry was almost exclusively adjectival.

How does Traherne fit into this picture? An examination of the chart of Traherne's word usage presented earlier shows that adjectives tend to rank higher than verbs in respect to frequency. We can estimate that the adjective/noun/verb proportions would be 3/5/2 in his case. This suggests that Traherne's poetic diction resembled a style that was more characteristic of the eighteenth century than of the seventeenth.

Traherne's Diction in the context of his period

Traherne's diction is not especially unusual in the context of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, in order to ascertain the types of word use which are most typical of his poetic style and thought patterns, we need to examine areas in which his word usage markedly resembles or deviates from what was current in the literature of his day.

Josephine Miles, in a discussion of John Donne's diction,[7] mentions certain word clusters as characteristic of some seventeenth century poetry. The frequent use of friend, fate, God, grace, and nature in the early and late century classical and moral writings was not shared by Donne, nor by Traherne, for though Traherne uses God extensively, nature is rather rare

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[7]Josephine Miles, "Ifs, Ands, Buts, for Students of Donne", in Peter A. Fiore, ed., Just So Much Honour (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), pp. 273-291).

in his usage, and his use of friend, fate, and grace is quite insignificant. Miss Miles points out another group of words,[8] fair, bright, high, heaven, earth, and night, which characterized the religio-aesthetic mid-century styles of Sandys, Crawshaw, Marvell, Waller and Milton. With the exception of night this group of words is prominent in Traherne's poetry.

A study of words that were not so widely common in seventeenth century poetry, but which were especially used by an individual poet, provides an interesting connection between Traherne and some of his contemporaries. Herbert's dust and stone occur, although less noticeably, in Traherne's work. Vaughan's star, and Shakespeare and Jonson's sweet appear quite frequently in Traherne's poetry as well.

Miles quotes bring, call, grow, hear, kiss, sing, feel, shine, and sleep as the typical verbs used by Herrick, Herbert and Vaughan.[9] Of these only shine and feel are frequent in Traherne's work.

Although Traherne's diction is in harmony with the mid seventeenth century trends his work shows special emphases which distinguish him from his contemporaries. His most prominent word, joy, had never been a key word in poetic diction until Herbert's wide use of it. It did not, even then, become generally popular with poets until the eighteenth

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[8] Ibid. p. 274.

[9] Ibid. p. 289.

century.[10] The words endless, infinite, eternity, and wide rank very high in Traherne's work as an expression of his characteristic theme of vastness. A number of his exultant affirmations are expressed by the words bliss, treasure, glorious, rich, pure, precious, and perfect which are not found to any appreciable extent in the work of other seventeenth century poets.

It is in his use of verbs that the individuality of Traherne's diction is most apparent. His key verbs, see and know, are also widely used by his contemporaries. But frequent use of shine is unusual, except in the case of Vaughan. The word praise, also commonly used by Traherne, is not extensively used by any other poet with the possible exception of Sidney. Traherne's frequent use of possess, prize, esteem, and enjoy is another notable characteristic of his verb use not evident in the poetry of other seventeenth century writers.

A number of key words in Traherne's poetry reflect current prose diction more than poetic diction. Thought and thing were widely used by the prose writers of the century. The word pleasure occurred more frequently in prose than in poetry until Crabbe's work in the mid eighteenth century. Sence first became a prominent prose word in Bacon's writings, but did not become common in poetry until the end of the seventeenth century.

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[10] Miles, Style and Proportion, p. 85.

The Effectiveness of Traherne's Diction

A consideration of Traherne's use of words in their poetic context is best achieved by an analysis of a number of poems in which the diction is especially characteristic and effective. The meaning of Traherne's words becomes more clearly defined by our awareness of their accumulative impact.

The first poem of the Dobell sequence is one of the few by Traherne that has become fairly well known.

The Salutation

These little Limmes,
These Eys and Hands which here I find,
These rosie Cheeks wherwith my Life begins,
Where have ye been,? Behind
What Curtain were ye from me hid so long!
Where was? in what Abyss, my Speaking Tongue?

When silent I,
So many thousand thousand yeers,
Beneath the Dust did in a Chaos lie,
How could I smiles or Tears,
Or Lips or Hands or Eys or Ears perceiv?
Welcom ye Treasures which I now receiv.

I that so long
Was Nothing from Eternitie,
Did little think such Joys as Ear or Tongue,
To Celebrat or See:
Such Sounds to hear, such Hands to feel, such Feet,
Beneath the Skies, on such a Ground to meet.

New Burnisht Joys!
Which yellow Gold and Pearl excell!
Such Sacred Treasures are the Lims in Boys,
In which a Soul doth Dwell;
Their Organized Joynts, and Azure Veins
More Wealth include, then all the World contains.

From Dust I rise,
And out of Nothing now awake,
These Brighter Regions which salute mine Eys,
A Gift from GOD I take.
The Earth, the Seas, the Light, the Day, the Skies,
The Sun and Stars are mine; if those I prize.

Long time before
I in my Mothers Womb was born,
A GOD preparing did this Glorious Store,
The World for me adorne.
Into this Eden so Divine and fair,
So Wide and Bright, I com his Son and Heir.

A Stranger here
Strange Things doth meet, Strange Glories See;
Strange Treasures lodg'd in this fair World appear,
Strange all, and New to me.
But that they mine should be, who nothing was,
That Strangest is of all, yet brought to pass.

Specific parts of the anatomy are named sixteen times in the first twenty-five lines, establishing an almost non-mystical delight in the physical body as a gift of God. This continues through the Dobell sequence with special emphasis in stanzas one and four of The Preparation. This appreciation of the body reaches its full expression in The Person as can be seen from these lines:

My Tongue, my Eys,
My cheeks, my Lips, my Ears, my Hands, my Feet,
Their Harmony is far more Sweet;
Their Beauty true. . . .

(ll. 60-63)

This theme is climaxed in the last two poems of the volume with such passages as ". . . my Lims are Treasures" (The Estate, line 14); "Wine should flow/ From every Joynt I owe" (The Estate, lines 25-26); and "Men's Sences are indeed the Gems . . . Their Eys the Thrones . . . Their Tongues the Organs" (The Enquirie, lines 19, 21, and 23).

The poem The Salutation reveals other interesting aspects of Traherne's diction. The word "Abyss" (line 6) is related to Traherne's emphasis on infinity. Infinity is the eternal realm in which the material world and the spiritual world meet; the endless space surrounding the material world merges with the endless eternity in which God dwells. The concept of endlessness has great significance in Traherne's view of experience. The word "Abyss" has positive connotations for Traherne. It is not the 'bottomless abyss' of eternal punishment, but rather the unbounded experience where the individual is closest to the Infinite One himself. In this poem Traherne uses "Abyss" to describe the potential soul being divinely kept in the eternity without beginning. In a later poem, The Approach, he uses the word "Abyss" to describe the immeasurable joy of his spiritual experience: "In deep Abysses of Delights," (line 35).

Another striking word in The Salutation is "Dust", "Beneath the Dust did in a Chaos lie" (line 9). This word is not common in Traherne's poetry, but when he does use it, it creates a striking effect. It occurs in the poem, Silence: "In Dust and Ashes lying on the floor," (line 12). He is clearly using the word in the biblical sense to connote the frailty of man's physical form. In the first example, "Beneath the Dust . . . ", the sense of the remoteness of man's origin is intensified by the context. God formed Adam's body from the dust of the ground. The phrase "Beneath the Dust" suggests that the origin of man's soul was even more rudimentary than that of his body. There is in this

line a sense of the soul being brought up from the depths of nothingness.

The word "Nothing" is used twice: "Was Nothing from Eternitie," (line 14) and "But that they mine should be, who nothing was," (line 41). In The Approach the word is used again in the same sense: "From Nothing taken first I was," (line 31). By repeated use in similar contexts the unspecific word nothing becomes particularized. Traherne uses it to denote the state of nonbeing of the soul before it is brought into being by God - "From Nothing taken first I was".

In the fourth stanza of The Salutation there are three nouns which reinforce one another in much the same way as the anatomy words do. They are "Gold", "Pearl", and "Wealth". In the following chapter on imagery the significance of the "richness" cluster will be discussed in depth. These three words also draw our attention to a certain technique of Traherne's diction. Although he uses commonplace words which are frequently abstract and general, he enhances their meaning by repetition and grouping. The vagueness of "Wealth" is lessened by the appearance of "Gold and Pearl" four lines earlier. "Gold" and "Pearl" are concrete words but they are nonspecific since they can appear in numerous contexts with varying connotations. By following them up with the word "Wealth" Traherne clarifies their function. They simply expand the sense of richness. These words are part of a major group in Traherne's poetic diction; they recur incessantly throughout his poetry.

Stanza six of The Salutation gives us three reminders of Traherne's biblical roots. "Eden" (line 35) is the most obvious since it is habitually used to denote a place of beauty, peace and fellowship with God. Traherne uses it occasionally in his other poems in a similar context. The phrase "Mother's Womb" (line 32) is used in reference to God's knowledge of the individual before birth. This echoes the Psalmist: "Thou has covered me in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13). The phrase "Son and Heir" (line 36) reflects the New Testament concept of spiritual inheritance: "An if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). The word "heir" is relatively common in Traherne's poetry, yet it is not a popular or very colloquially used concept. It seems obvious that Traherne was directly influenced by St. Paul's frequent use of it.

So far we have considered some of the key nouns of the poem, The Salutation. The adjectives also reveal important characteristics of Traherne's word use.

He skillfully conveys both colour and light by his use of modifiers. "Rosie", "Yellow" and "Azure" are specific hues; the two occurrences of "fair" near the end of the poem reinforce the sense of the beautiful colours of nature. The sense of light comes through even more strongly, especially in the latter half of the poem, with words such as "Burnisht" (line 19), "Brighter" (line 27), "Light" (line 29), "Day" (line 29), "Sun" (line 30), "Stars" (line 30), and "Bright" (line 36). The idea of brightness is introduced in stanza four with "Burnisht", is heightened

near the beginning of stanza five with "Brighter", then becomes intense in the last two lines of stanza five with four references to it. In stanza six the concept is less emphasized but still maintained by the use of the word "Bright".

The poem has two instances of repetition in use of modifiers. The first occurs in lines 17 and 18: "Such Sounds to hear, such Hands to feel, such Feet,/ Beneath the Skies, on such a Ground to meet.". The word "such" occurs four times. It is a word which would be completely unobtrusive if used once, but here, because of repetition, it becomes a pointed conveyor of breathless enthusiasm.

In the last stanza the repeated word is "strange". The passage is especially beautiful:

A Stranger here 37
Strange Things doth meet, Strange Glories See; 38
Strange Treasures lodg'd in this fair World appear, 39
Strange all, and New to me. 40
But that they mine should be, who nothing was, 41
That Strangest is of all, yet brought to pass. 42

The first line of the stanza uses "Stranger" with its usual connotations of alienation - the speaker feels himself to be a misfit. This feeling is maintained by the use of the word "Strange" in the next two lines. The realization of generous and undeserved endowment of God comes in line 41 as a sharp contrast to the preceding feeling of strangeness. Then in the final line the word is given an amazing twist. "Strangest" has become a very effective expression of the miraculous and unbelievable goodness of God.

The Vision is another poem of the Dobell sequence which is especially interesting in respect to diction:

The Vision

Flight is but the Preparative: The Sight
Is Deep and Infinit;
Ah me! tis all the Glory, Love, Light, Space,
Joy Beauty and Varietie
That doth adorn the Godheads Dwelling Place
Tis all that Ey can see.
Even Trades, them selvs seen in Celestial Light,
And Cares and Sins and Woes are Bright.

Order the Beauty even of Beauty is,
It is the Rule of Bliss,
The very Life and Form and Caus of Pleasure;
Which if we do not understand,
Ten thousand Heaps of vain confused Treasure
Will but oppress the Land.
In Blessedness it self we that shall miss
Being Blind which is the Caus of Bliss.

For then behold the World as thine, and well
Upon the Object Dwell.
See all the Beauty of the Spacious Case,
Lift up thy pleasd and ravisht Eys,
Admire the Glory of the Heavnly place,
And all its Blessing prize.
That Sight well seen thy Spirit shall prepare,
The first makes all the other Rare.

Mens Woes shall be but foyls unto thy Bliss
Thou once Enjoying this:
Trades shall adorn and Beautify the Earth,
Their Ignorance shall make thee Bright,
Were not their Griefs Democritus his Mirth?
Their Faults shall keep thee right.
All shall be thine, becaus they all Conspire,
To feed and make thy Glory higher.

To see a Glorious Fountain and an End
To see all Creatures tend
To thy Advancement, and so sweetly close
In thy Repose: To see them shine
In Use in Worth in Service, and even Foes
Among the rest made thine.
To see all these unite at once in Thee
Is to behold Felicitie.

To see the Fountain is a Blessed Thing.
        It is to see the King
Of Glory face to face: But yet the End,
    The Glorious Wondrous End is more;
An yet the fountain there we Comprehend,
        The Spring we there adore.
For in the End the Fountain best is Shewn,
    As by Effects the Caus is Known.

From One, to One, in one to see All Things
        To see the King of Kings
At once in two; to see his Endless Treasures
    Made all mine own, my self the End
Of all his Labors! Tis the Life of Pleasures!
        To see my self His friend!
Who all things finds conjoynd in Him alone,
    Sees and Enjoys the Holy one.

There are several groups of words in this poem which reflect Traherne's favourite themes. The theme of infinity is indicated by "Deep and Infinit" (line 2), "Space" (line 3), "Spacious" (line 19), "Endless" (line 51) and the repeated use of "all". The imagery of light is another distinct aspect of Traherne's poetry which is made very prominent by the diction of this poem: "Light" (lines 3 and 7), "Bright" (lines 8 and 28), and "shine" (line 36). These words create an emphasis on vision which is the main thrust of the poem. Forms of "see" and "eye" occur eighteen times, and there is a reference to blindness in line 16. We can see how the consistency of Traherne's poetic diction reinforces his major concepts.

Traherne's cataloguing technique has been frequently noted, and almost as frequently criticized. In the first stanza of this poem there are two examples of such listing. The first occurs in lines 3 and 4 and has seven items: "Glory, Love, Light,

Space,/ Joy Beauty and Varietie". This list does not seem to represent a very homogeneous group, but all these words are closely related to the subject being described, "the Godheads Dwelling Place". The abstract attributes "Love", "Joy", and "Beauty" are commonly associated with God who is the ultimate of all such virtues. "Light" is the most common metaphor for God both in scripture and in literature. "Space" and "Varietie" bring out Traherne's own thinking - for him God is, above all else, infinite and diversified for He cannot be contained inside a man-made framework, be it physical or mental. The rise of scientific knowledge in the seventeenth century had given great prominence to the concept of space; astronomy had made men aware for the first time of the unending reaches of the universe surrounding the globe. For Traherne such knowledge had great religious significance as confirmation of the eternal God. Hence the words "Space" and "Varietie" are appropriate attributes of the God who encompasses all. "Glory" is appropriately placed at the head of the catalogue so that the other terms can be seen as an expansion of its meaning. By placing "Light" and "Space" in the midst of the virtuous attributes Traherne gives justification to the word "Varietie" which concludes the list.

Line 8 of The Vision has another example of Traherne's listing technique: "And Cares and Sins and Woes". Words of negative connotation are infrequent in Traherne's poetry. When he does refer to the unhappy state of the unredeemed, words such as these are his typical choice. It is significant that

he equates unhappiness "Woes" and problems "Cares" with sinfulness. "Woes" occurs again in line 25. "Ignorance" (line 28), "Griefs" (line 29) and "Faults" (line 30) are all attributes of the same fallen situation. Those who are unredeemed partake, by definition, of all the negative characteristics, which Traherne commonly lists in catalogue form: "Oppressions Tears and Cries,/ Sins, Griefs, Complaints, Dissentions, Weeping Eys," (Wonder, lines 26 and 27).

It is important to recognize the polarity of Traherne's thinking if we are to appreciate the strong negative and positive valences of all his major words. Virtually everything pertains either to God, (eternity, goodness, joy, and beauty), or, alternatively, to fallen man, (temporality, sin, grief, and strife). Many of his words are quickly recognized by the reader as having distinct positive or negative implications. Other words which are neutral in general speech are used by Traherne as representative of the desirable or undesirable. The words "vain" and "confused" (line 13) recur throughout his poetry representing the negative state. "Trades" which is mentioned twice in this poem (lines 7 and 27) is also a word frequently used to represent the works of man in the sense of carnality, as opposed to the works of God. The negative words in Traherne's vocabulary are not, as already noted, especially frequent. Their combined effect, however, gives a clear picture of the area of experience which is in direct contrast to the

realm of blessedness about which, towards which, and from which Traherne writes.

The positive element of Traherne's diction is characteristically strong in The Vision. There is pointed repetition of such words as "Bliss", "Beauty", "Blessed", "Treasure", and "Enjoy". These are very emotional words. Traherne's ability to maintain a state of genuine exuberance is very often amazing. Stanza two is especially interesting in this respect because of his skillful blending of the rational and emotional elements. The words "Order" (line 9), "Rule" (line 10), "Form" (line 11) and "Caus" (lines 11 and 16) indicate his consciousness of the harmony between the realms of feeling and reason.

In the last three stanzas of The Vision Traherne achieves an impressive climax of emotion by the repetitive use of several words. One of these words is "see": "To see a Glorious Fountain" (line 33); "To see the Fountain" (line 41). Line 41 is more intense than line 33 because the article "a" has changed to "the" and "Fountain" has been italicized. Line 42 uses the word "see" again and builds up to a climax with the juxtaposition of "King/ Of Glory" with "face to face". Traherne uses the most majestic phrase he can find to depict the grandeur of God and couples it with the everyday intimacy of "face to face". The situation is reminiscent of Isaiah, chapter 6.[11] The phrase

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[11]"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne . . . my eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts." Isaiah 6:1,5.

"face to face" is itself of New Testament origin.[12]

"Fountain", another significantly repeated word, has already been used twice (lines 33 and 41). Now in line 43 the word "end" becomes part of the repetitive pattern as well. It occurs three times in five lines, while "fountain" is repeated twice more (lines 45 and 47). Traherne uses repetition to create tightness and intensity of feeling. In the last stanza the accumulative effect is even greater. "King of Kings" (line 50) is an intensification of the word "King" in the previous stanza. "Endless" (line 51) and "End" (line 52) have a similar intensity due to repetition. In this final stanza the word "one" is also used repetitively: "From One, to One, in one to see All Things" (line 49), "At once in two" (line 51). These lines convey the blending of "all things" (lines 49 and 55) into the unity or oneness of God - "the Holy one" (line 56).

These stanzas are magnificently constructed to achieve the greatest possible effect from the use of appropriate words. The overlapping and repetitive use of certain groups of words combined with the constant doubling back in the progression of the thought, is a means of intensifying the emotional impact of the poem. It is typical of Traherne that the power of his words lies not so much in the words themselves as in their placing and repetition. The repetition takes the form of both

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[12]"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face:" I Corinthians 13:12.

rapid succession of the same words in a given poem (as in The Vision) and repeated use of certain words in varying contexts but with a continuity of implications (as in The Salutation). Traherne characteristically sounds out the multiple dimensions of a word until it is shaped into a unique intensity of meaning. His sensitive use of words achieves an artistic excellence which is especially apparent when his diction is viewed in a series of poems rather than in isolated passages. The coherence of his poetic work is due largely to the consistency he displays in his subtle development of the connotations and denotations of the words he habitually uses.

CHAPTER SIX

TRAHERNE'S IMAGERY

Traherne's place among the important poets of the seventeenth century is further confirmed by his successful use of imagery. Imagery constitutes perhaps the most important element in Traherne's work. The basic ingredient of imagery is imagination . Imagination is involved both in the poet's production of images and in the reader's responsiveness to them. Traherne was a man of great imagination, but his was an imagination very different from that of most poets. His mind was oriented toward heaven rather than earth. Many critics have unfairly suggested that his lack of concreteness makes him less a poet. If Traherne's subject matter - spiritual reality, the relation of the eternal soul to the eternal God - is justifiable subject matter for poetry then his manner of expressing it cannot be condemned simply because it differs from the style used by poets dealing with more temporal subjects.

Some misunderstanding about Traherne's poetic theory has resulted from a misreading of The Author to the Critical Peruser, intended as the first poem of a volume Traherne hoped to publish. Some readers take this poem as an indication that all figurative language was suspect in Traherne's thinking. In examining Traherne's use of imagery we should look closely at what he says in this poem about poetic practice.

His purpose in writing poetry is to present "The naked Truth" (line 1), "A Simple Light, transparent Words," (line 3). He will use "No curling Metaphors that gild the Sence,/ Nor Pictures here, nor painted Eloquence;" (lines 11 and 12). In a sense he is trying to disassociate himself from the general trends of poetry: "A clearer Stream than that which Poets feign,/ Whose bottom may, how deep so'ere, be seen," (lines 18 and 19). Traherne does, however, outline the basis of his disapproval so that we can understand the specific aspect of poetic writing which he so abhorred.

Throughout The Author to the Critical Peruser he is emphasizing clarity and directness. He rejects poetry which substitutes the artificial for the real, expressing his condemnation in such words as "gild(ed)" (lines 11 and 62); "painted" (line 12); "Superficial" (line 13) and "Shadows" (line 36). For him the purpose of poetry is to reveal truth, not to entertain with clever conceits: "Things that amaze, but will not make us wise," (line 24). For him words can never be an end in themselves: "To make us Kings, indeed! Not verbal Ones," (line 33). He feels that many writers of poetry have misplaced values. They appreciate the outward things rather than the inner, the things of man rather than the things of God. His view of such writers is expressed in these lines:

> I cannot imitat their vulgar Sence
> Who Cloaths admire, not the Man they fence
> Against the Cold; and while they wonder at
> His Rings, his precious Stones, his Gold and Plate:

> The middle piece, his Body and his Mind,
> They over-look; no Beauty in them find:
> God's Works they slight, their own they magnify,
> His they contemn, or carless pass them by;
> (ll. 37-44)

The result of this is emptiness: "idle Fancies, Toys, and Words," (line 61), having outward glamour but no inner value: "(Like gilded Scabbards hiding rusty Sword)" (line 62).

It thus materializes that what Traherne is objecting to is not figurative language as such, but the frivolous and extravagant use of it in poetry which is earthbound, which does not "trace the glorious Way / Whereby thou may'st thy Highest Bliss enjoy," (lines 9 and 10). If this poem was meant to be a general attack on poetic language it would be completely irreconcilable with the fact that it is itself especially rich in imagery and figures of speech. Early in the poem he introduces us to a complex image:

> . . . a Strain
> That lowly creeps, yet maketh Mountains plain,
> Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense
> And keeps them there;
> (ll. 3-6)

Here the comprehension of spiritual abstractions is expressed in terms of the biblical lowering of mountains.[1] In this first division of the poem the ubiquitous image of physical vision as a metaphor for spiritual vision also occurs: "thy Soul might see / With open Eys thy Great Felicity," (lines 7 and 8).

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[1] "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low." Isaiah 40:4.

This imagery of vision is closely related to the imagery of light which Traherne uses extensively. Light used as a symbol for understanding, truth, and knowledge is so commonplace that we almost overlook it as a poetic image. Traherne's consistent use of it, however, goes beyond the usual clichés. In line 3, "A Simple Light, transparent Words", light is a metaphor for truth, and words which reveal truth rather than conceal it are compared to the transparency of glass through which light can be seen. Another metaphor describing verbal clarity is the transparency of water mentioned in lines 18 and 19. In line 36 the word "Shadows" indicates the state where the light of truth is hidden or blocked.

The imagery of wealth (including the concept of kingship) is also very prevalent in The Author to the Critical Peruser. The shining quality of these forms of richness blends well with the imagery of light and vision. Traherne uses his imagery both literally and figuratively. Spiritual riches, although abstract and subjective, are literally classifiable as wealth since such things as joy, peace, and love are universally sought after. Traherne continually expresses this spiritual wealth in terms of the wealth which is physically discernable: "gold", "pearl", "jewels". He is, however, careful to make the distinction between the two types of wealth: "(no) . . . Superficial Gems,/ But real Crowns and Thrones and Diadems!" (lines 13 and 14); "exalted unto Thrones;/ And more than Golden Thrones!" (lines 34 and 35).

It is interesting to observe how the imagery of wealth can be used negatively as well as positively. In one section of this poem he uses objects of richness as metaphors for material values in contrast with his use of the human body as a symbol of the value of God's creation. He places "Rings", "precious Stones", "Gold and Plate", "Silks", and "Gems" on the side of materialism, and counterposes it with "precious Hands", "polisht Flesh", and "saphire Veins". Through his choice of adjectives he indirectly compares these parts of the body with jewels. The consciousness of two conflicting types of riches is thus maintained. His complex literal and figurative use of wealth imagery is a genuine poetic achievement.

Lines 25 to 30 contain some specific sensory imagery: walking on "Shing [sic] Banks", talking among "flow'ry Meads". These lines are also rich in allusions.[2] In lines 29 and 30 there is a beautiful image of the springs of holy water from Parnassus flowing from the pen of the inspired poet:

> Derive along the channel of our Quill
> The Streams that flow from high Parnassus hill.
> (ll. 29-30)

"Ransack all Nature's Rooms" (line 31) is another richly imaginative expression. It metaphorically conveys the idea of the poet eagerly seizing every possible experience of natural beauty.

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[2]The Tagus is a river flowing through Spain and Portugal which seems to have had romantic connotations for Traherne. The Pactolus is a river in Italy which was famed in ancient times for its golden sands.

In this poem, The Author to the Critical Peruser, Traherne uses clothing in an almost symbolic sense to represent that which is outward and vain: "Who Cloaths admire, not the Man . . ." (line 38); "Their woven Silks and wel-made Suits they prize" (line 45); "Take vulgar Souls; who gaze on rich Attire" (line 63). Such imagery of clothing does not belong to any of Traherne's major groups of images, but it does recur in a number of his poems, reflecting many of his major themes and emphases.

The concept of Space is strongly emphasized in Traherne's work. In The Author to the Critical Peruser he first introduces the concept in line 52 in reference to the anatomy: "I'th' wel-compacted bredth and depth and length / Of various Limbs" (lines 52 and 53). The words "bredth and depth and length" are surprising in this context since combined in this way they suggest great magnitude as well as planned proportion. Here, the infinite pattern of the universe is being suggested as a metaphor for the finite pattern of the human body. The microcosm reflects the macrocosm. In mentioning the soul in line 55 Traherne speaks more directly of infinity: "Which comprehendeth all unbounded Space" (line 56). In Traherne's thinking astronomical space and spiritual eternity naturally merge, producing the beautiful blending of time and space described in lines 58 to 60:

> The Length of Ages and the Tracts of Land
> That from the Zodiac do extended ly
> Unto the Poles, and view Eternity.
> (ll. 58-60)

This poem, The Author to the Critical Peruser, has introduced us to both the poetic theory and the poetic practice of Traherne in respect to imagery and figurative language. The poem is very important in that it brings in most of his major types of imagery: vision, light, the body, wealth and kingship, space and eternity, and also water. The only major image which does not occur in the course of this poem is the concept of childhood. A detailed consideration of this poem has also enabled us to appreciate the tremendous continuity of thought which Traherne achieves by the merging of one image cluster with another.

Symbolism

In considering Traherne's use of imagery throughout his poetry as a whole we quickly become aware of the prominence of symbolism. Mention has already been made of Traherne's tendency to use an image in both a literal and metaphorical sense. A symbol can be loosely described as meaning both what the words express and something more besides. A symbol is broader than a metaphor both in the breadth of area over which it applies, and in the depth and permanence of its meaning. Traherne's main image groups mentioned above recur with such consistency that their symbolism is unmistakable. Alison Sherrington describes this technique aptly in the following passage:

> The thick clusters of subjectively associated images which are characteristic of Traherne's poems . . . contribute to the reader's overwhelming conviction of the symbolic nature of external

> objects in much the same way as the recurrence of favourite imagery does. Paradoxically, the atmosphere is rarefied rather than thickened by such long lists, because a distinctive impression of any one object or of the total scene is rarely offered, and the accumulation of generalities is the simpliest way to achieve an effect of spacious grandeur.[3]

Sherrington thus indicates that the very aspects of Traherne's imagery which may seem most like limitations (i.e., subjectivity, repetition, and generality) are those which elevate it to the level of symbolism. Lack of concreteness and particularity is not a fault when the poet's intention is to cause the reader to contemplate eternity. He achieves this focus on the eternal world by restricting himself to images of rudimentary significance such as light, water, gold, and the circle. What might otherwise be very commonplace imagery is repeatedly given great symbolic force because of the traditional and philosophical sources from which it is drawn and the repetitive and emphatic way in which it is used.

One method of studying Traherne's imagery in greater depth would be to examine each of his image groups individually. This approach has, however, been already applied quite expertly to Traherne's poetry by two recent critics. Both Alison J. Sherrington[4] and A. L. Clements[5] have explored the symbolic

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[3]Alison J. Sherrington, Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1970), p. 118.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Arthur Leo Clements, The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

functions of the recurring images. For this reason it is not the intention of this thesis to analyze all his major symbols in detail. It is necessary, however, to examine several of them in order to show the remarkable consistency and coherence which Traherne achieves in his poetry by his handling of sybolism.

K. W. Salter has noted that in Traherne's poetry the child "becomes a symbol . . . of direct and immediate knowledge of reality."[6] Another critic points out that the meaning of childhood in Traherne is "biblical in origin, mystical in tradition, and symbolic in import".[7] In nine of the first ten poems of the Dobell folio the significance of childhood is specifically dealt with. These poems demonstrate remarkable cohesion as the development of the child symbol flows smoothly from one poem to the next. The opening poem The Salutation ends with the infant soul coming from nothing yet receiving all things. The next poem of the Dobell folio is Wonder which opens with the same idea of the child's momentous entrance into the world: "How like an Angel came I down!" (line 1). It deals with the child's unique perspective of the things around him, and his total unawareness of the fallen world.

The third poem Eden continues in the past tense, "I/ Saw . . . ", "I knew not . . . " (lines 6, 7 and 8). Traherne is

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[6]K. W. Salter, Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet (London: Edward Arnold ltd., 1964), p. 25.

[7]Clements, op. cit., p. 8.

still emphasizing the purity of childlike perception: "Simplicitie /Was my Protection when I first was born." (lines 38 and 39). The next poem Innocence continues in the same vein except that the absence of sin and self-seeking is specifically expressed: "No Lust, nor Strife,/ Polluted then my Infant Life." (lines 27 and 28). The slow but steady development of thought in these first four poems comes to a climax with the line "I must becom a Child again." (Innocence, line 60).

At this point the reader is forced to acknowledge the symbolic function of the child. It is wrong to assume from these poems that Traherne is glorifying literal childhood. "I must becom a Child again" is not to be taken literally. It is reminiscent of Christ's "Ye must be born again", and Nicodemus's puzzled response, "How can a man be born when he is old?" (John 3:3,4). On another occasion Christ expressed himself more directly: "Except ye be converted and become as little children . . ." (Matthew 18:3). Traherne, too, is using childhood figuratively as a symbol of the state of mind which is simple, sensitive, and responsive to God. It is essential that the individual arrive at this state if he is to be fulfilled spiritually, hence: "I must becom a Child again."

This climactic declaration is followed by the poem The Preparative which unexpectedly, but characteristically, doubles back to the beginning again and considers the infant's state preceding self-conscious: "Before my Tongue or Cheeks were to me shewn,/ Before I knew my Hands were mine," (lines 4 and 5). The

child image remains virtually the same except that it is now used openly as representative of a condition of soul which is attainable after literal childhood has passed: "Felicitie / Appears to none but them that purely see," (lines 59 and 60).

The Instruction, the sixth poem of the Dobell folio, is a didactic poem which directly advocates the use of childhood as a model:

> Unfelt, unseen let those things be
> Which to thy Spirit were unknown,
> When to thy Blessed Infancy
> The World, thy Self, thy God was shewn.
> (ll. 5-8)

The next poem The Vision does not mention childhood directly, but the description of redeemed perception parallels the earlier descriptions of childlike perception, except that it is now on a more conscious level, and is hence more meaningful.

The short ecstatic poem The Rapture follows next in the Dobell sequence. The poet has carefully prepared us for the exuberance which begins with the words:

> Sweet Infancy!
> O fire of Heaven! O Sacred Light!
> How Fair and Bright!
> How Great am I,
> (ll. 1-4)

In the context of what has gone before we recognize that this poem is far from being an extravagant exaggeration of the child's spiritual experience. "Sweet Infancy" is the state of

the adult soul newborn into the family of God. This is borne out by the fact that this poem uses the present tense while the poems referring to literal childhood are in the past tense. The movement of the poet's thought has reached the point of childhood in the midst of maturity. This is a basic tenet of New Testament Christianity: ". . . of such is the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 19:14).

The ninth poem of the Dobell sequence The Improvement moves away from childhood as a dominant image, but the last three stanzas make a very important distinction between the unconscious perception of actual childhood and the mature awareness of God which comes in later years:

> But Oh! the vigor of mine Infant Sence
> Drives me too far: I had not yet the Eye
> The Apprehension, or Intelligence
> Of Things so very Great Divine and High.
> (ll. 67-70)

> That was enough at first: Eternitie,
> Infinity, and Lov were Silent Joys;
> (ll. 73-74)

> . . . so at my Birth
> All these were unperceivd, yet did appear:
> Not by Reflexion, and Distinctly known,
> But, by their Efficacy, all mine own.
> (ll. 81-84)

The Approach is the final poem of this group comprising the first ten poems of the Dobell folio. Here childhood is presented in relationship with the other stages of religious experience. The individual's closeness to God in infancy

(lines 7 to 8 and 13 to 14) is followed by a hardening and turning away (lines 9 to 12, 15 to 16, and 19 to 24). Ultimately, however, God's love wins him back and renews his perception:

> But now with New and Open Eys,
> I see beneath as if above the Skies;
> (11. 25-26)

The memories of childhood are very meaningful:

> And as I Backward look again,
> See all his Thoughts and mine most Clear and Plain
> (11. 27-28)

> That Childhood might it self alone be said,
> My Tutor, Teacher, Guid to be,
> Instructed then even by the Deitie.
> (11. 40-42)

From these ten poems we can appreciate the great continuity of Traherne's thought, and how the presence of the child image contributes to that continuity. It is an image which is often literal - Traherne does make direct observations on childhood. It is, nevertheless, also used figuratively to represent the simplicity of godliness, as it does in biblical usage.

The consistency of Traherne's use of the child image as a symbol is equally apparent in the poems of the Burney manuscript, as these examples illustrate:

> And made an Infant once again:
> (An Infant-Ey, l. 40)

> . . . to the Womb,
> That I may yet New-born becom.
> (The Return, ll. 11-12)

> But little did the Infant dream
> That all the Treasures of the World were by,
> And that himself was so the Cream
> (News, ll. 43-45)

> My virgin-thoughts in Childhood were
> Full of Content,
> (The World, ll. 29-30)

Traherne's use of light imagery, which was discussed in reference to The Author to the Critical Peruser, is another area of strong symbolism. Although light symbolism is frequent in mystical and religious writings Traherne's use of it shows particular uniqueness and originality.

A general aura of brightness permeates virtually every poem and shining objects abound. Indeed, it does not seem that Traherne visualizes anything of positive value that does not have the characteristic of emanating or reflecting light.

Traherne appears to have thought very deeply about the physical nature of light in using it to describe spiritual vision in the poem An Infant-Ey:

> The visiv Rays are Beams of Light indeed,
> Refined, subtil, piercing, quick and pure;
> And as they do the sprightly Winds exceed,
> Are worthy longer to endure:
> They far out-shoot the Reach of Grosser Air,
> Which with such Excellence may not compare.
> (ll. 7-12)

Since light is faster, more penetrating, and more lasting than any other physical force it is the most fitting image for the things of the spirit. Traherne senses, however, that even the light image falls short of describing the essential soul of man,

as he expresses it in these lines:

> . . . for tis more Voluble then Light:
> Which can put on ten thousand Forms,
> Being clothd with what it self adorns.
> (My Spirit, ll. 32-34)

Here too we find a poetic expression of the nature of light itself. In Nature Traherne describes his inward self by using light imagery:

> . . . like the Subtile Light,
> Securd from rough and raging Storms by Night,
> Break through the Lanthorns sides, and freely ray-
> Dispersing and Dilating evry Way:
> Whose Steddy Beams too Subtile for the Wind,
> Are such, that we their Bounds can scarcely find.
> (Nature, ll. 23-28)

Such a sustained simile is rare in Traherne's poetry but the expression of his personal grasp of spiritual reality in terms of the traditional light image is very typical of the way his imagination functions.

We have already noted that Traherne's figurative language most frequently takes the form of symbolism. He makes numerous cursory references to light in which an awareness of its symbolic import is taken for granted. The following lines use light imagery in this way:

> . . . all my Soul was full of Light.
> (Innocence, l. 8)

> Their Ignorance shall make thee Bright,
> (The Vision, l. 28)

For Traherne light is essentially a symbol of God. A number of times the image of light is used in relation to a particular attribute of God - wisdom. The Improvement refers three times to God's wisdom as shining forth (lines 4, 13 and 38). In The Enquirie we find a similar use of light imagery in "His Wisdom Shines, on Earth his Lov doth flow," (line 29). Here wisdom is expressed in terms of light, while love is expressed in terms of water.

Since the immortal soul is the mirror of the immortal God, the image of light, as though by reflection, applies to the soul as well:

> My Soul a Spirit infinit!
> An Image of the Deitie!
> A pure Substantiall Light!
> (My Spirit, ll. 71-73)

Light is also frequently used by Traherne to symbolize the soul's state of knowledge of God and fellowship with Him.

Fire imagery is a form of the light symbol which Traherne often uses very originally and effectively. The following examples will serve to show the variety, as well as the consistency with which fire imagery occurs:

> A little Spark,
> That shining in the Dark,
> Makes, and encourages my Soul to rise.
> (Fullnesse, ll. 25-27)

> Vast unaffected Wonderfull Desires,
> Like Inward, Nativ, uncausd, hidden fires,
> (Nature, ll. 39-40)

Thy Love receivd doth make the Soul to burn.

And those Affections which we do return,
Are like the Lov which in Himself doth burn.
(The Estate, ll. 42, and 55-56)

Who is a Glorious Bright and Living Flame,
That on all things doth shine,
And makes their Face Divine.
(The Anticipation, ll. 112-114)

Fire, consistent with the function of light symbolism, conveys both the innate spirituality of man which reaches upward and the relentless power of God's love which reaches downward.

What is even more significant about Traherne's use of the light symbol is the way in which he blends it with his other major images. By considering the relationship of light imagery to other types of imagery we will more clearly grasp the tremendous continuity of Traherne's figurative language.

References to the body and the physical senses make up a large part of Traherne's concrete imagery. Because of Traherne's thematic emphasis on right perception references to the eye and vision are very prominent. The relationship of light to such imagery of sight is immediately obvious:

How wise was I
In Infancy!
I then saw in the clearest Light;
But corrupt Custom is a second Night.
(Right Apprehension, ll. 5-8)

This extract shows how the symbols of light and childhood are brought together in the context of perception. Traherne's concern is more with inward perception than with outward, hence

thought ranks high among his subjects of emphasis. Even this is related to light, as illustrated by this line: "My Contemplation Dazles in the End", (The Anticipation, line 1).

The images of mirror and sun are also used repeatedly in relation to the prevailing light symbolism, as this passage illustrates:

> And is my Soul a Mirror that must Shine
> Even like the Sun, and be far more Divine?
> (Amendment, ll. 34-35)

The shining quality associated with both concrete wealth and abstract glory links the imagery of royalty with that of light in such lines as these:

> We Princes might behold
> With glitt'ring Scepters there
> In-laid with Gold
> (Churches II, ll. 25-27)

Light is also repeatedly associated with the very important image of the circle or sphere.[8] The following lines are good illustrations:

> I was an Inward Sphere of Light,
> (The Preparative, l. 15)

> O Wondrous Self! O Sphere of Light,
> (My Spirit, l. 103)

> Encircled in a Sphere of Light.
> (Adam, l. 36)

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[8]The significance of this image in seventeenth century thought has been thoroughly studied by Marjorie Hope Nicolson in The Breaking of the Circle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

The interlocking of the symbols of light and the circle is especially significant in view of the importance of the circle and sphere concept in so much of Traherne's poetry. It is especially prominent in the poems of the Burney manuscript. The circle or sphere which has profound mystical significance holds an outstanding place in Renaissance philosophy, as Nicolson's study has shown. In Traherne's poetry this ubiquitous image appears as the globe of the earth, the orb of the eye, and even such mundane things as the curve of a bell or a bowl. Traherne's use of this symbol culminates beautifully in these lines from The Review II which was probably intended as the last poem in Traherne's planned volume:

> My Child-hood is a Sphere
> Wherin ten thousand hev'nly Joys appear:
> (ll. 1-2)

> Which makes my Life a Circle of Delights:
> A hidden Sphere of obvious Benefits:
> (ll. 9-10)

By focusing on the symbols of childhood and light, and the other image patterns to which they relate, we have observed the excellence of Traherne's style as demonstrated by his consistent use of simple yet profound symbolism. In one or two isolated poems Traherne's use of such images as water, wealth, and the eye might not seem very impressive. It is only when a group of his poems is considered as a whole that the beautiful coherent pattern of his figurative language is permitted to emerge. He uses a technique of repetitive imagery

which continually reinforces, broadens and deepens the thematic and poetic impact.

The Senses

A discussion of Traherne's use of figurative language would be imcomplete without a consideration of its sensory appeal. His poetry has been so often depreciated on the grounds of its being too otherworldly and lacking in immediacy that a vindication of his position is necessary.

We have already noted that Traherne was less concerned than other poets with the concretizing of the abstract. He did not often try to epxress universals in terms of the commonplace experiences of daily living. This does not imply, however, that he was unable to stimulate the imagination of his reader by the skilful use of sensory language.

Some of the poems which present the best examples of Traherne's sensory appeal are found in the Burney manuscript or near the end of the Dobell sequence. The following excerpts are therefore pertinent to a reevaluation of Traherne's poetic achievement.

The vivid capturing of a moment of time is a form of sensory appeal that Traherne employs only rarely. In Solitude, however, he has created a poignant scene as the setting for the emptiness and frustration he experienced at one stage of his life. He describes it in this beautiful passage:

They silent stood;
Nor Earth, nor Woods, nor Hills, nor Brooks, nor Skies,

Would tell me where the hidden Good,
Which I did long for, lies:
The shady Trees,
The Ev'ning dark, the humming Bees,
The chirping Birds, mute Springs and Fords, conspire,
To giv no Answer unto my Desire.
(ll. 49-56)

The poem Poverty, which happens to come next in the Burney sequence, provides another example of the creation of moment of experience:

As in the House I sate
Alone and desolate,
No Creature but the Fire and I,
The Chimney and the Stool, I lift mine Ey
Up to the Wall,
And in the silent Hall
Saw nothing mine
But som few Cups and Dishes shine
The Table and the wooden Stools
Where Peeple us'd to dine:
A painted Cloth there was
Wherein som ancient Story wrought
A little entertain'd my Thought
Which Light discover'd throu the Glass
(ll. 1-14)

Here again sensory detail is deliberately used in the creation of mood. The pensive and melancholy atmosphere reflects the sense of deprivation which the child experiences.

Traherne's ability to convey the unhappy and tragic aspects of daily life is demonstrated in these vivid lines from Dissatisfaction:

Dirt in the Streets; in Shops I found
Nothing but Toil. Walls only me surround
Or worthless Stones or Earth;
Dens full of Thievs, glutted with Blood,
Complaints and Widows Tears: no other Good
Could there descry, no Hev'nly Mirth.
(ll. 37-42)

The poem On Christmas-Day is a beautiful blending of sound and sense, form and meaning. Its rich sensory appeal is apparent in these passages:

Shall Dumpish Melancholy spoil my Joys
While Angels sing
And Mortals ring
My Lord and Savior's Prais!
(ll. 1-4)

Their Houses deckt with sprightly Green,
In Winter makes a Summer seen:
They Bays and Holly bring
As if 'twere Spring!
(ll. 9-12)

Shall Houses clad in Summer-Liveries
His Praises sing
And laud thy King,
And wilt not thou arise?
Forsake thy Bed, and grow (my Soul) more wise,
Attire thy self in cheerful Liveries:
Let pleasant Branches still be seen
Adorning thee, both quick and green;
And, which with Glory better suits,
Be laden all the Year with Fruits;
Inserted into Him,
For ever spring.
(ll. 25-36)

Who makes things green, and with a Spring infuse
A Season which to see it doth not use:
Old Winter's Frost and hoary hair,
With Garland's crowned, Bays doth wear;
The nipping Frost of Wrath b'ing gone,
To Him the Manger made a Throne,
Du Praises let us sing,
Winter and Spring.
(ll. 41-48)

In the next few stanzas of the poem On Christmas-Day Traherne develops, with great sensory detail, the metaphor of new clothes representing the garments of righteousness and, to a lesser

extent, the metaphor of the Christian as a "branch" of Christ. Both of these images are very obviously derived from the New Testament. Towards the end of the poem the sound imagery is heightened by the introduction of church bells.

This leads us directly into the next poem Bells in which Traherne makes skilful use of sound imagery in such passages as these:

> Hark! hark, my Soul! the Bells do ring,
> And with a louder voice
> Call many Families to sing
> His publick Praises, and rejoice:
> Their shriller Sound doth wound the Air,
> Their grosser Strokes affect the Ear,
> That we might thither all repair
> And more Divine ones hear.
> (ll. 1-8)

> Exalted into Steeples they
> Disperse their Sound, and from on high
> Chime-in our Souls; they ev'ry way
> Speak to us throu the Sky:
> Their iron Tongues
> Do utter Songs,
> And shall our stony Hearts make no Reply!
> (ll. 16-22)

The resonance of the sound effects and the continuous use of the bell image make this an outstanding poem of sensory appeal through which Traherne expresses his vibrant emotional response to life.

The use of smell imagery in The Odour has a very powerful sensuous appeal. In the following passages taste and tactile sensation blend richly with the pleasant odours:

These Hands are Jewels to the Ey,
Like Wine, or Oil, or Hony, to the Taste:
(ll. 1-2)

Sweet Scents diffus'd do gratify Desire.

Can melting Sugar sweeten Wine?
Can Light communicated keep its Name?
Can Jewels solid be, tho they do shine?
From Fire rise a flame?
(ll. 12-16)

Thus Hony flows from Rocks of Stone;
Thus Oil from Wood; thus Cider, Milk, and Wine,
From Trees and Flesh; thus Corn from Earth;
(ll. 31-33)

What's Cinnamon, compar'd to thee?
Thy Body is than Cedars better far:
Those Fruits and Flowers which in Fields I see,
With thine, can not compare.
Where ere thou movest there, the Scent I find
Of fragrant Myrrh and Aloes left behind.
(ll. 55-60)

These lines bear a strong resemblance to the "Song of Solomon" in the expression of spiritual relationship by means of vivid sensuous imagery.

A final example of Traherne's imaginative appeal to the senses is found in the poem Goodnesse, the last poem of the Dobell sequence. In this poem many of his key symbols are used with beautiful concreteness, showing the harmonious relationship of God, Man and Nature:

The Light which on ten thousand faces Shines
The Beams which crown ten thousand Vines
With Glory and Delight, appear
As if they were,
Reflected only from them all for me,
That I a Greater Beauty there might see.
(ll. 13-18)

The Sun doth Smile
Upon the Lillies there, and all things warme
Their pleasant Odors do my Spirit charm.
(ll. 58-60)

Their Lips are soft and Swelling Grapes, their Tongues
A Quire of Blessed and Harmonious Songs.
Their Bosoms fraught with Love
Are Heavens all Heavens above
And being Images of GOD, they are
The Highest Joys his Goodness did prepare
(ll. 65-70)

The imagery of Traherne's poetry is well planned, coherent and artistically adapted to the thought content. It frequently demonstrates very powerful sensory appeal. So we see that Traherne's use of imagery serves to confirm his place among the significant poets of his period.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRAHERNE: METAPHYSICAL AND MYSTIC

This final chapter will consider Traherne's poetry in relation to the metaphysical style which characterized so much of seventeenth century verse, and the mystical contemplative tradition of which he was undeniably a part. More important still, this concluding section will show that in his level of poetic achievement Traherne is comparable with the majority of the acclaimed poets of his day.

In spite of the increasing volume of critical writings on Traherne in the last two decades he remains relatively unknown. Many books on the poetry of the seventeenth century completely ignore his contribution. In Grierson's anthology of 1921[1] and Walton's publication of 1955[2] there is no mention made of Traherne. Critical texts as well frequently overlook him. Williamson's A Reader's Guide to the Metaphysical Poets[3] which discusses six poets including Crashaw and Cowley simply omits Traherne. Many such books make only the slightest reference to

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[1]Herbert J. C. Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921).

[2]Geoffry Walton, Metaphysicals to Augustan (London, 1955).

[3]George Williamson, A Reader's Guide to the Metaphysical Poets (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968).

the work of Traherne: Summers' The Heirs of Donne and Jonson;[4] Wallerstein's Seventeenth Century Poetic;[5] and Sharp's From Donne to Dryden.[6]

The critical imbalance of such a situation is apparent to those who are familiar with Traherne's work. He merits far more recognition as a seventeenth century poet than he has yet received. The best of his poetry compares favourably with any of the period.

Although intensely individualistic and perhaps the least imitative of the minor poets of the period, Traherne was very much a man of his century. His thinking often reflects the chief concerns of the period. It is important that he be understood in terms of his unique response to his intellectual environment.

There has been a great deal written about the philosophical content of Traherne's work, and his relationship to medieval and Neo-Platonic thinkers. The influences of his reading have been well studied, as well as some interesting affinities with the Cambridge Platonists. Such studies apply to Traherne's prose more than to his poetry. Since Traherne's thought content has

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[4]Joseph H. Summers, The Heirs of Donne and Jonson (Oxford: University Press, 1970).

[5]Ruth Wallerstein, Seventeenth Century Poetic (University of Wisconsin Press, 1950).

[6]Robert Lathrop Sharp, From Donne to Dryden (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1965).

been so well studied by a number of critics this discussion of his relationship to the significant trends in seventeenth century thought will preclude areas already researched.

Helen White speaks of the intellectual climate of the seventeenth century as being "highly critical, [and] intensely self-aware".[7] Traherne shared this propensity for close analysis of the quality of life. He challenges the shallowness and corruption that causes men to chose the worst rather than the best in life:

> But giv to Things their tru Esteem,
> And then what's magnify'd most vile will seem:
> What commonly's despis'd, will be
> The truest and the greatest Rarity.
> What Men should prize
> They all despise;
> The best Enjoiments are abus'd;
> The Only Wealth by Madmen is refus'd.
> (Right Apprehension, ll. 17-24)

Like many others of his day Traherne realized the need for a renewal of life that would be in harmony with the will of God.

Helen White uses the phrase "self-awareness" to describe the mood of the period. This quality is so intense in Traherne's work as to have evoked the accusation that he is blatantly egotistical. The personal pronouns I, my, and mine are predominant in practically every poem, but they reflect not inward looking egotism, but the outreaching awareness of himself on the most personal level as a representative of every man. This kind of

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[7]Helen White, The Metaphysical Poets (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 39.

self-awareness was a characteristic of seventeenth century mentality.

Seventeenth century writing was characterized by a tone of seriousness and sincerity. This characteristic is found in its most consistent form in the writings of Thomas Traherne. There is not a moment in the course of his poetry or prose when he is not completely serious-minded. He is always disturbingly sincere.

White also describes the seventeenth century as expressing a "mood of release and renewal of the wonder of life".[8] This is certainly a most aptly worded description of the mood of Traherne's poetry. The following passage is an excellent example:

> 'Twas thou that gav'st us Caus for fine Attires;
> Ev'n thou, O King,
> As in the Spring,
> Dost warm us with thy fires
> Of Lov: Thy Blood hath bought us new Desires
> Thy Righteousness doth cloath with new Attires.
> Made fresh and fine let me appear
> This Day divine, to close the Year;
> Among the rest let me be seen
> A living Branch and always green,
> Think it a pleasant thing
> Thy Prais to sing.
> (On Christmas-Day, ll. 73-84)

The joy of spiritual renewal and enthusiasm for the good things of life are dominant strains in his poetry.

There were, however, a number of facets of seventeenth century life which had little effect on Traherne. Such things as confusion of ideas, multiplicity of sects, variation of

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[8] Ibid., p. 44.

opinion on important issues, and revolutionary tendencies in religion are never alluded to in his poetry, and seldom discussed in his prose. He was, nevertheless, very aware of these disturbing currents. His response was to transcend the level of existence where such matters would arouse concern or even interest. He does not deny the existence of confusion and variation in the thought of his period, or the serious problems precipitated. His contribution, however, is to show the unity and serenity which exists in the inner life of the man who chooses to know God before everything else and live on a plane that is undistrubed, if not untouched, by the problems of

> . . . the Sloth Care Pain and Sorrow that advance,
> The madness and the Miserie
> Of Men.
>
> (Eden, ll. 4-6)

Metaphysical Poetry

Traherne should be seen not only in the broad context of the seventeenth century, but also in the specific context of that movement in poetry known as 'metaphysical'. Grierson defines such poetry as being "inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and of the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence".[9] Traherne's poetry is certainly in harmony with such a broad definition. It is necessary, however, to relate it to some of the more specific characteristics discernible in the work of the metaphysical poets.

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[9]Grierson, op. cit., p. xiii.

The word metaphysical was first applied as a label expressing disapproval of that particular type of poetry. Dryden used it in accusing Donne of perplexing minds with "nice speculations on philosophy".[10] The deep concentration and intellectual probing which metaphysical poetry required of its readers did undoubtedly cause many minds to become perplexed. Such demanding qualities are very apparent in Traherne's poetry, as the following passage illustrates:

> Tis more to recollect, then make. The one
> Is but an Accident without the other.
> We cannot think the World to be the Throne,
> Of God, unless his Wisdom shine as Brother
> Unto his Power, in the Fabrick, so
> That we the one may in the other know.
> (The Improvement, ll. 1-6)

Such writing draws the reader along with each step of the intricate argument. Although Traherne is frequently repetitious and prosaic in his sentence structure his profound insights are often expressed with great conciseness and economy of language. He describes the universe "beyond the spheres" as

> No empty Space; it is all full of Sight,
> All Soul and Life, an Ey most bright,
> All Light and Lov;
> Which doth at once all things possess and giv,
> Heven and Earth, with All that therein liv;
> It rests at quiet, and doth mov;
> Eternal is, yet Time includes;
> A Scene abov
> All Interludes.
> (Felicity, ll. 19-27)

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[10] John Dryden, "A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire", prefixed to The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis (1693), K II 19.

The use of paradox gives great compression and intensity to the thought.

The preference for certain verse forms is an aspect of the concentrated style of the metaphysical poets. The use of simple forms such as couplets or quatrains, or stanzas created for the particular poem is a metaphysical characteristic which applies precisely to Traherne, as was observed in the earlier chapter on Traherne's versification.

The use of conceits was an outstanding aspect of metaphysical verse and one which stemmed from a strong intellectual emphasis. As Helen White points out, these poets derived intellectual satisfaction from seeing "a complicated matter reduced to simplicity, a mass of discordant elements brought to unity".[11] This was the rationale behind the conceit; it was more than an imaginative exercise. Although Traherne's use of conceits is not as frequent or as extreme as that of other metaphysical poets there are many examples of his skill in handling this particular poetic device. One of these occurs in The Evidence:

> His Word confirms the Sale:
> Those Sheets enfold my Bliss:
> Eternity its self's the Pale
> Wherin my tru Estate enclosed is:
> Eash ancient Miracle's a Seal:
> Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs, Patriarchs are
> The Witnesses; and what their Words reveal,
> Their written Records do declare.

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[11] Ibid., p. 86.

All may well wonder such a 'State to see
In such a solemn sort settled on me.
(ll. 1-10)

The poem News further illustrates Traherne's use of the conceit:

News from a forein Country came,
As if my Treasures and my Joys lay there;
So much it did my Heart enflame,
'Twas wont to call my Soul into mine Ear:
Which thither went to meet
Th' approaching Sweet,
And on the Threshold stood
To entertain the secret Good;
(ll. 1-8)

In this second example the conceit of the personified soul is continued some twenty lines further. Such a sustained image is unusual in Traherne. It occurs occasionally in the case of personification such as the picturing of Truth as a young woman in The Design. His sustained conceits lack the concreteness which is found in his more typical and briefer metaphors such as his description of thoughts in the following passage:

Like Bees they flie from Flower to Flower,
Appear in Evry Closet, Temple, Bower;
And suck the Sweet from thence,
No Ey can see:
As Tasters to the Deitie.
(Thoughts I, ll. 73-77)

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the metaphysical poets is, as Grierson says, their "peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination".[12] If this is indeed the major accomplishment of these poets, and an important common denominator in tying together the diverse group, it is certainly

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[12]Grierson, op. cit., p. xvi.

a characteristic which is shared by Thomas Traherne. If the blending of lofty passion with highly rational thought is an indication of their mastery of this style of poetry, then Traherne is among the greatest of them. Where in seventeenth century verse could one find a more impressive balance of emotion and reason than in these lines?

> To see the Fountain is a Blessed Thing.
> It is to see the King
> Of Glory face to face: But yet the End,
> The Glorious Wondrous End is more;
> And yet the fountain there we Comprehend,
> The Spring we there adore.
> For in the End the Fountain best is Shewn,
> As by Effects the Caus is Known.
>
> From One, to One, in one to see All Things
> To see the King of Kings
> At once in two; to see his Endless Treasures
> Made all mine own, my self the End
> Of all his Labors! Tis the Life of Pleasures!
> To see my self His friend!
> Who all things finds conjoynd in Him alone,
> Sees and Enjoys the Holy one.
> (The Vision, ll. 41-56)

Traherne's relationship to the metaphysical movement should also be examined in more detail by comparing his poetry with that of Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw and Cowley, the most significant representatives of the group.

John Donne

In his poems of both love and religion Donne exhibits his fascination for analyzing psychological factors. In such poems as Song and A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning he deals with the parting of lovers. Woman's Constancy and The Constant Lover

consider the altercations of mind that are possible even after an ardent commitment to one's lover. A Hymn to God the Father concludes with a confession of his own tendency to sinful doubt. These themes are indicative of the psychological probing which goes on throughout the whole of Donne's poetry.

The same sort of psychological curiosity is evidenced in the poems of Traherne. He repeatedly compares the child's state of mind with that of the adult whose sensibilities are sated and often corrupted. He is continually analyzing the inner workings of his own mind and soul; he seeks, and indeed achieves, an understanding of his own mentality as a harmonious part of the mind of God himself.

Traherne also resembles Donne in his grasp of the relationship between body and soul, which he expresses in such poems as The Person, The Estate, and The Enquirie. His presentation of this theme is much simpler than Donne's, yet in many ways it is more profound.

Although this typically metaphysical interest in the human psyche is common to both Donne and Traherne there is a distinct difference in Traherne's application of it. Traherne is less interested in the quirks and ironies of human psychology. He deals with the basic essence of humanity as a creation of God. There is a difference too in the very manner and tone of their approach to such subjects. Traherne tends to be dogmatic and direct. This is especially obvious in a deeply probing poem such as My Spirit.

One of the most remarkable things about Donne's poetry is his unusual depth and range of feelings. Traherne has the depth, but not the range of Donne. Traherne's tonal quality is relentlessly optimistic, aspiring, and enthusiastic. Donne's emotions are excitingly diversified; Traherne's are serenely focused. Donne displays the conflict between the old and reformed faiths; Traherne presents only the personal aspects of religion which are perfectly harmonious.

The emotional quality of their poetry, however, has much in common. Both are intensely personal in their treatment of religion. Grierson says of Donne, that "the thought in his poetry is not his primary concern but the feeling".[13] This is certainly true of the best poetry of Traherne.

George Herbert

This deep personal commitment is also shared by George Herbert. Like Traherne, he had felt the lure of a brilliant career in the great world but had chosen rather the simple life of humility and service.

The imagery of both Traherne and Herbert is fundamental and uncluttered, but in Herbert's case it is far more concrete and specific. Traherne's imagination could never produce anything as homey as

> The Stars have us to bed;
> Night draws the curtain, which the sun withdraws;
> (Man, ll. 31-32)

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[13] Ibid, p. xxviii.

Herbert is obviously a very deliberate craftsman. This characteristic is not so immediately obvious in Traherne because his use of language is not as highly concentrated as Herbert's. Traherne's poetry gives the impression of a spontaneous flow of feeling, yet closer consideration reveals very deliberate planning. The handling of such complex stanza patterns; the growth of his simple, but increasingly connotative images in poem after poem; the amazingly coherent sequences of his poems; and the beautiful harmonizing of form and content are not the result of a mere spontaneous flow. They indicate careful poetic craftsmanship.

Herbert's sequence of poems is based on the idea of a church building, and an awareness of the Church as institution of God's grace. This is not a major aspect of Traherne's work, but in the poems of the Burney manuscript there are several examples of a similar trend of thought. The two poems entitled Churches bring out the deep symbolism of "Those stately Structures" (Churches I, line 1). More independent of the framework of the institutionalized Church, Traherne's thought moves within a broader and freer philosophical realm.

It is the quality of serenity and certainty which Herbert and Traherne share in contrast with Donne. Although they lack Donne's dramatic tension and variety, their poetry exudes a sense of unity and totality which his range of emotion does not afford.

Henry Vaughan

Traherne has been more often linked with Henry Vaughan than with any other metaphysical poet. When first discovered his poetry was actually attributed to Vaughan. Although Vaughan was greatly influenced by Herbert, his work is less austere. He was closer to Traherne in his sheer enjoyment of life, and more light-hearted than either of them.

Perhaps it is his childlike simplicity and purity which caused Vaughan's poetry to be so closely identified with Traherne's. His use of the word white as an image of innocence and holiness parallels Traherne's use of pure. Both use the simple language of a child and treat childhood as a symbol for the trusting humility and openness which defines true spirituality. These extracts from Vaughan's The Retreate and Traherne's Wonder will illustrate their similarity in the use of the child concept:

> Happy those early dayes! when I
> Shin'd in my Angell-infancy
> Before I understood this place
> Appointed for my second race,
> Or taught my soul to fancy ought
> But a white, Celestial thought,
> When yet I had not walkt above
> A mile, or two, from my first love.
> (The Retreate, ll. 1-8)

> How like an Angel came I down!
> How Bright are all Things here!
> When first among his Works I did appear
> O how their GLORY me did Crown?
> The World resembled his Eternitie,
> In which my Soul did Walk;
> And evry Thing that I did see,
> Did with me talk.
> (Wonder, ll. 1-8)

Both poets develop the idea of the child's learning wrong values and developing sinful outlooks.

Both Vaughan and Traherne see right perception as being essential to a right relationship with God. Both were concerned with the veil that had come between the soul and the vision of God's created and eternal glory. Vaughan uses the images of darkness and light, night and day:

> Then having lost the Sunne, and light
> By clouds surpriz'd
> He keeps a Commerce in the night
> (The Pursuit, ll. 5-7)

> . . . . Lamps that light
> Man through his heap of dark days;
> (Son-dayes, ll. 6-7)

Traherne also uses light imagery, but tends to focus particularly on vision itself. He sees the problem as the distortion of the individual's sight, a type of blindness, rather than an all-engulfing night:

> O that my Sight had ever simple been!
> And never faln into a grosser state!
> (An Infant-Ey, ll. 19-20)

> But now with New and Open Eys,
> I see beneath as if above the Skies;
> (The Approach, ll. 25-26)

Vaughan differs from Traherne, however, in other aspects of his imagery. By his abrupt use of dazzling metaphors Vaughan achieves a dramatic suddenness quite unlike Traherne's smooth

though potent use of figurative language. This technique of Vaughan's is apparent in the following passage:

> O Father of eternal life, and all
> Created glories under thee!
> Resume thy spirit from this world of thrall
> Into true liberty
>
> Either disperse these mists, which blot and fill
> My perspective (still) as they pass,
> Or else remove me hence unto that hill
> Where I shall need no glass.
> (They are All Gone into the World of Light, ll. 32-40)

The language of the first six lines of this passage is abstract and lofty. Even the word "mists" fails to evoke a specific concrete image. The thought culuminates with a startlingly mundane image, "unto that hill / Where I shall need no glass". Because of the austere context the thought sweeps beyond the level of the commonplace and becomes truly climactic. There is a greater intensity and concreteness in Vaughan's imagery than in Traherne's, but in the poetry of both, earthly phenomena are raised above their natural significance to the level of mystical meaning.

The basic themes of Vaughan's poetry are quite similar to Traherne's. Both poets deal with the traditional Christian concepts of repentance and renewal, and also with the Hermetic-Christian images of the microcosm and the macrocosm. The mystic leanings of both are seen in their emphais on the Divine presence in Nature and in their passionate yearning for God. For Vaughan, however, there was always the sense of seeking and of mystery,

for Traherne there was the stronger joy of attainment. In this sense Traherne goes deeper into the mystic experience than Vaughan; he arrives at the state of peace and contemplation.

Traherne also surpasses Vaughan in the area of logically structured reasoning. Vaughan is less concerned than the other metaphysical poets with the organized developemnt of his thought, whereas Traherne pursues a philosophical line of thought with an intellectual thoroughness that is remarkable in a poetic context.

Richard Crashaw

Traherne's poetry resembles that of Richard Crashaw in being highly emotional, frequently to the point of ecstasy. Crashaw's emotional pitch is indicated in the following passage:

> Oh what delight, when revealed Life shall stand
> And teach thy lips heaven with her hand;
> On which thou now maist to thy wishes
> Heap up thy consecrated kisses.
> (Hymn to St. Teresa, ll. 129-132)

These lines of Crashaw's are, however, not as high-pitched as this very typical expostulation of Traherne's:

> O Joy! O Wonder, and Delight!
> O Sacred Mysterie!
> My Soul a Spirit infinit!
> An Image of the Deitie!
> (My Spirit, ll. 69-72)

The works of both poets are characterized by exclamations, but those of Traherne are more consistently expressions of joy.

Crashaw's are often expressions of longing and seeking:

> Come love! Come Lord! & that long day
> For which I languish, come away.
> (Hymn in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, ll. 51-52)

> Oh sweet contest of woes
> With loves, of tears with smiles disputing!
> (The Weeper, ll. 91-92)

This latter example illustrates the bittersweet quality in Crashaw's expression of emotion. The sense of pathos does not decrease the richness of Crashaw's intense religious feeling; in fact, for many readers his mixture of joy and pain is perhaps more palatable than the uncompromising purity of Traherne's joyful exultation. We must, however, acknowledge that Traherne's expression of emotion is far more unique and individualistic than Crashaw's.

One critic describes Crashaw's poetry as based on "an inspiring affirmation, perhaps closest to Traherne's, but rare even in its own day, of the power of love - in Crashaw's case religious love".[14] Traherne shares this intense emphasis on spiritual love. Both he and Crashaw struggle to communicate the deepest aspects of religious experience, but the difficulty of expressing the inexpressible is manifested differently in each. Traherne speaks in very personal terms of abstract generalities:

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[14] John T. Shawcross and Ronald David Emma, eds., Seventeenth Century English Poetry (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1969), p. 320.

> The very Day my Spirit did inspire,
> The World's fair Beauty set my Soul on fire.
> (Nature, ll. 5-6)

Crashaw, on the other hand, speaks in terms of saintly and biblical material from which he derives concrete images which are very minute and specific:

> What bright, soft thing is this,
> Sweet Mary, thy fair eyes' expense?
> A moist spark it is,
> A watery diamond;
> (The Tear, ll. 1-4)

The problem which can result from Traherne's approach is a lack of immediacy, and failure to stir the imagination of a reader who finds it difficult to relate to abstractions. The problem which can result from Crashaw's approach is the ludicrous effect created by expending extravagant emotion on the mundane and trivial. It is very difficult for modern readers to appreciate that such things as the tears of Mary Magdalene and the breasts of the Virgin Mary were far from mundane and trivial to Crashaw. For him, a Renaissance Catholic influenced by the medieval mystical traditions, such things trascended the material world. He felt justified in expanding them as important symbols of religious truth.

In this respect Crashaw's poetry is much more inaccessible and restricted than Traherne's. This can be illustrated by considering a rather difficult passage from the works of each. Traherne describes the soul of man in these lines:

But being Simple like the Deitie
In its own Centre is a Sphere
Not shut up here, but evry Where.
(My Spirit, ll. 15-17)

It may indeed require some effort to penetrate Traherne's full meaning in using the complex sphere symbol, but there is certainly much to be gained in doing so. These typical lines of Crashaw's pose a different sort of problem:

Such the maiden gem,
By the wanton spring put on,
Peeps from her parent stem
And blushes on the manly sun:
This watery blossom of thy eyen,
Ripe, will make the richer wine.
(The Tear, ll. 25-30)

The diversity of metaphors is overpowering. To penetrate the meaning of this passage is perhaps as difficult as in the case of Traherne's lines above, but it is doubtful if the imagination of the modern reader would be expanded or even sharpened in any worthwhile sense by close analysis of Crashaw's farfetched conceit. Traherne's imagery, on the other hand, is so philosophically rudimentary that grasping it is an intellectual, as well as an imaginative achievement. To overcome the difficulties in reading Crashaw's poetry we must be willing to suspend modern taste in figurative language and to enter into the most idiosyncratic aspects of the seventeenth century point of view. It is a far more rewarding experience to learn to appreciate Traherne's poetry; we must merely suspend modern materialistic values and our own idiosyncratic assumption that the concrete and particular represent the greater reality.

Abraham Cowley

A portion of the poetry of Abraham Cowley has been loosely identified as metaphysical. His verse is not especially religious and hence lacks the emotional intensity of Donne and his successors. The works of Cowley and Traherne have little in common for Cowley's themes were secular rather than spiritual and his tone public rather than intimate.

In his lack of elaborate conceits and the prose-like movement of his very irregular lines Cowley's style bears some resemblance to that of Traherne. His verse, however, gives no indication of the profound juxtaposition of thought and feeling, and of personal experience and eternal values, which was Traherne's chief metaphysical characteristic.

Although a contemporary of Traherne, Cowley was in thought and style a poet of a later period, and much less a metaphysical poet than Traherne.

Mysticism

The aspect of Traherne's writings that has held the most fascination for critics in the past few decades has been his mysticism. Two of the major books on his poetry have titles which actually specify this quality: Clements' The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne[15] and Sherrington's Mystical Symbolism in Thomas Traherne.[16] Both these works demonstrate that

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[15]A. L. Clements, The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

[16]Alison J. Sherrington, Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1970).

Traherne's unique poetic quality does indeed grow out of his mystical vision and the contemplative tradition.

Since this important area has been so thoroughly researched the present study will consider it only briefly, profiting from the scholarship of such writers as Clements and Sherrington, and especially from Helen White's The Metaphysical Poets.[17] The deep interest in Traherne's mystical qualities is well based for Traherne's poetic excellence is largely dependent upon the powerful impact of his mysticism.

Mysticism is such an essential part of the background of the metaphysical movement that Helen White devotes her first chapter to it. She demonstrates most perceptively the many basic similarities between the realms of poetry and mysticism, noting that, "both alike belong to the field of contemplation rather than of action . . . in each case the satisfaction of the hunger, the final justification of the experience, is to be found in the experience itself".[18] She points out that neither poetry nor mysticism is willing to remain passive, and that "it is upon the materials of the experience as they exist within himself and not upon the source of those materials that the poet or mystic works".[19]

The realization that the poetic and mystic experiences have so much in common helps us to recognize the harmony of these two elements in Traherne's poetry. The allegation by some critics

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[17] Helen White, op. cit.

[18] Ibid., p. 13.

[19] Ibid., p. 16.

that there is conflict between his poetry and his mysticism is unreasonable.

Mysticism is, however, more dependent on an application of the will than poetry is; there is more choice and effort involved in the process whereby one becomes a mystic than that by which he becomes a poet. In Traherne we see a man with the gift of poetic skill choosing to pursue the way of mystic contemplation.

The focus of mysticism differs from the usual focus of poetry in that it is constantly fixed on one point of reference - God himself. The poet's gaze is less concentrated and more autonomous. This does not mean that the singleness of the mystic's vision cannot produce great poetry, but merely that it cannot produce great range and variety. Traherne's poetry has often been depreciated for this very thing by those who judge variety of subject to be a criteria of poetic excellence.

The most obvious contrast between poetry and mysticism concerns the importance of expression. For the mystic, the expression of his experience does not provide the ultimate satisfaction; that is found only in the vision of God. It is not essential that he express himself in words. For the poet, verbal expression is essential and the poem is itself the climax of the experience. Traherne is one of those for whom the creation of a work of art is less important than the experience being expressed. But this does not deny that the expression is a work of art any more than we can say that the Psalmist was an inferior poet by being first a seeker and then a singer. White

sums it up in the following passage:

> . . . the end of the mystical poet is silence, the silence of contemplation before which beauty even is a little thing. But until that end, the mystical poet is a poet, and more a poet for his mysticism.[20]

Thus we see that the quality of Traherne's poetry is enhanced by his mysticism. It is very true, as Geraldine Hodgson has noted, that "the essence of Traherne's mysticism . . . is to be found at its highest in his poems".[21]

One of the unique things about Traherne's mysticism is its portrayal of serenity. The agonizing struggle is less intense for it is seen in retrospect. As Clements points out, he "writes out of, not toward, the mystic experience".[22] Although this represents a loss of the dramatic heartrending struggle such as we find in the works of St. John of the Cross, and John Donne, it also represents a gain of powerful and sweeping affirmation, such as we find in this passage:

> No more, No more shall Clouds eclyps my Treasures,
> Nor viler Shades obscure my highest Pleasures;
> No more shall earthen Husks confine
> My Blessings which do shine
> Within the Skies, or els abov:
> Both Worlds one Heven made by Lov,
> In common happy I
> With Angels walk
> And there my Joys espy;
> With God himself I talk;
> (Hosanna, ll. 25-34)

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[20] Ibid., p. 35.

[21] G. E. Hodgson, English Mystics (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., 1922), p. 250.

[22] Clements, op. cit., p. 7.

Sherrington feels that such a firm conviction of the exalted position which man can and should attain tends to make Traherne's mysticism "curiously homocentric or even egocentric".[23]

Although unique in many ways, Traherne's mysticism has an obvious traditional basis. Clements discusses five of Traherne's key ideas and seven of his major symbol groups in relation to the mystical tradition. Sherrington's approach is quite similar; she indicates the originality with which Traherne uses some of the traditional mystical symbols. One interesting result of Traherne's strong mysticism is that his symbols are less specifically religious than those of the other seventeenth century religious poets; his use of light, water, and the circle imply universal significance. For this reason his poetry is less impenetrable to a reader unversed in religious and biblical typology than is the poetry of a writer like Herbert. Traherne's language is broadly mystical rather than specifically Christian.

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[23]Sherrington, op. cit., p. 129.

CONCLUSION

At the close of the nineteenth century Thomas Traherne was completely unknown as a writer. His published works had been out of print for almost two centuries, and his unpublished manuscripts were as yet undiscovered. By the middle of the twentieth century his reputation as mystic philosopher and skilful prose writer had been firmly established. Today he is beginning to be recognized as a seventeenth century poet of some considerable stature. At the very least a successful poet must have something worthwhile to say and the technical ability to say it well. Traherne certainly had something worthwhile to say. The proliferation of critical works on his philosophical thinking indicates appreciation for the religious significance of his thought, and for its sound intellectual structure. The question arises as to the ability of the poet to successfully express his thought through the mastery of various poetic techniques. Traherne's meaningful poetic fusion of content and form has never been adequately established. His considerable significance as a seventeenth century poet has thus remained obscure.

This thesis has closely analyzed Traherne's poetry in the technical areas of versification, diction, and figurative language, and has shown that he does indeed have the ability to effectively communicate his thoughts through the medium of poetry. This thesis has also attempted to place Traherne's

work in the context of the literature of the period. His poetic style is shown to be at least comparable to that of the representative metaphysical poets of his day.

Without the vision of ultimate reality which his unique mysticism affords Traherne would have had nothing to communicate. His personal expression of religious truth produced poetry. His poems are works of art.

Traherne's contribution to English literature is much greater than is generally acknowledged. By carefully reevaluating his verse this thesis has attempted to vindicate Traherne's poetic art, and to confirm him as an important poet of the seventeenth century.

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