

= Thomas Traherne =

Thomas Traherne MA (/ tr??h??rn / ; 1636 or 1637 ? ca . 27 September 1674) was an English poet , clergyman , theologian , and religious writer . Little information is known about his life . The intense , scholarly spirituality in his writings has led to his being commemorated by some parts of the Anglican Communion on 10 October (the anniversary of his burial in 1674) or on September 27 .

The work for which Traherne is best known today is the Centuries of Meditations , a collection of short paragraphs in which he reflects on Christian life and ministry , philosophy , happiness , desire and childhood . This was first published in 1908 after having been rediscovered in manuscript ten years earlier . His poetry likewise was first published in 1903 and 1910 (The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne , B.D. and Poems of Felicity) . His prose works include Roman Forgeries (1673) , Christian Ethics (1675) , and A Serious and Patheticall Contemplation of the Mercies of God (1699) .

Traherne 's poetry is often associated with the metaphysical poets , even though his poetry was unknown for two centuries after his death . His manuscripts were kept among the private papers of the Skipps family of Ledbury , Herefordshire , until 1888 . Then , in the winter of 1896 ? 97 , two manuscript volumes containing his poems and meditations were discovered by chance for sale in a street bookstall . The poems were initially thought to be the work of Traherne 's contemporary Henry Vaughan (1621 ? 95) . Only through research was his identity uncovered and his work prepared for publication under his name . As a result , much of his work was not published until the first decade of the 20th century .

Traherne 's writings frequently explore the glory of creation and what he perceived as his intimate relationship with God . His writing conveys an ardent , almost childlike love of God , and is compared to similar themes in the works of later poets William Blake , Walt Whitman , and Gerard Manley Hopkins . His love for the natural world is frequently expressed in his works by a treatment of nature that evokes Romanticism ? two centuries before the Romantic movement .

= = Biography = =

Very little information is known about Thomas Traherne 's life . According to antiquarian Anthony à Wood (1632 ? 1695) , Traherne was a " shoemaker 's son of Hereford " born in either 1636 or 1637 . Bertram Dobell identifies this shoemaker as John Traherne (b . 1566) . However , other sources indicate that Thomas was the son of Philipp Traherne (or Trehearne) (1568 ? 1645) , a local innkeeper and twice Mayor of Hereford , and his third wife , Mary Lane . His birth or baptism is not recorded in parish registers .

Traherne was educated at Hereford Cathedral School and matriculated in Brasenose College , Oxford , on 2 April 1652 , receiving his baccalaureate degree on 13 October 1656 . Five years later he was promoted to the degree of Master of Arts (Oxon .) on 6 November 1661 , and he received a Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) on 11 December 1669 .

After receiving his baccalaureate degree from Oxford in 1656 , he took holy orders . The following year he was installed as the rector at Saint Mary 's Church in Credenhill near Hereford . He was appointed to the post at Credenhill on 30 December 1657 by the Commissioners for the Approbation of Public Preachers although at the time , he was not an ordained priest . A curious note appended to the record of his appointment is that Traherne counted upon the patronage of Ambella , Countess Dowager of Kent . Traherne served in this post for ten years although he was not ordained priest until after the restoration of the monarchy and the return of King Charles II . He was ordained at Launton near Bicester by Robert Skinner (1591 ? 1670) , the Bishop of Oxford , on 20 October 1660 .

In 1667 he became the private chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman , 1st Baronet , of Great Lever , the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal to King Charles II , at Teddington (near Hampton Court) in Middlesex . Traherne died of smallpox at Bridgeman 's house at Teddington on 27 September 1674 and was buried in St Mary 's Church , Teddington on 10 October 1674 . He was interred under the

church 's reading desk . According to Anthony à Wood , Traherne " always led a simple and devout life ; his will shows that he possessed little beyond his books , and thought it worth while to bequeath his ' old hat . ' "

It is assumed , although largely unsubstantiated , that Traherne 's studies at Oxford may identify his Royalist leanings at a time when the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell had deposed the monarchy after the English Civil War . The city of Oxford had been the centre of the Cavalier cause and the headquarters of the King 's forces before its surrender in May 1646 and the university was regarded as a focus of Royalist sentiment during the Interregnum . The claim that Traherne may have been a Royalist may be bolstered by an inscription on the tombstone of Philipp Traherne , thought to be his father , which eulogises Philipp 's fidelity to , and zeal for , the Royalist cause .

= = Writings = =

Much of Traherne 's work remains unpublished . He was not known during his lifetime , and only one of his works was published before his death in 1674 and two others were published shortly thereafter . Of his published work , almost all appeared posthumously , and most of it in the 20th century . Several unpublished manuscripts are held in museums , private collections and university archives , including the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford , the British Library in London and the Beinecke Library at Yale University in New Haven , Connecticut .

Traherne was an inconsequential literary figure during his lifetime and his works were not known or appreciated until long after his death . As a country priest he led a devout , humble life and did not participate in literary circles . Only one of his works , *Roman Forgeries* (1673) , was published in his lifetime . *Christian Ethicks* (1675) followed soon after his death , and later *A Serious and Patheticall Contemplation of the Mercies of God* (1699) , which was published as the work of an anonymous author whose character and background were discussed in a brief introduction by the publisher . From 1699 until the re @-@ emergence of his work with Bertram Dobell 's editions in 1903 , Traherne 's work fell into obscurity . If not for the chance discovery of an anonymous manuscript , his work and reputation might have been lost .

= = = Publication history and posthumous success = = =

At Traherne 's death in 1674 most of his manuscripts were bequeathed to his brother Philipp . After Philipp 's death they apparently passed into the possession of the Skipps family of Ledbury in Herefordshire , where they languished for almost 200 years . In 1888 the family 's assets were dissolved , yet the manuscripts did not re @-@ emerge until 10 years later .

In the winter of 1896 ? 97 , William T. Brooke of London discovered some anonymous manuscripts in a " barrow of books about to be trashed " or a " street bookstall " . Brooke thought that they might be lost works by Henry Vaughan and showed them to Alexander Grosart (1827 ? 99) , a Scottish clergyman and expert on Elizabethan and Jacobean literature who reprinted rare works . Grosart agreed that the manuscripts were by Vaughan and planned to include them in an edition of Vaughan 's works that he was preparing for publication . Grosart died in 1899 and the proposed edition was never completed . Grosart 's collection , including the manuscripts , was purchased by Charles Higham , a London bookseller , who asked his friend Bertram Dobell (1842 ? 1914) to examine them . Dobell was convinced that they were not by Vaughan and soon discovered that they were by Traherne . The manuscripts , which included poetry as well as a collection of contemplative paragraphs " embodying reflexions on religion and morals " , were published as *Centuries of Meditations* .

More Traherne manuscripts have since been discovered that have yet to be catalogued . In 1997 Jeremy Maule , a Fellow of Trinity College , Cambridge , discovered more works by Traherne among 4 @,@ 000 manuscripts in the library of Lambeth Palace , the London residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury . The Lambeth manuscripts , mostly prose , encompass four complete works and a fragment of a fifth : *Inducements to Retiredness* , *A Sober View of Dr Twisse* , *Seeds of Eternity* , *The Kingdom of God and the fragmentary Love* . The manuscript of *Commentaries of*

Heaven was found burning on a rubbish heap in Lancashire . A manuscript discovered in 1996 in the Folger Library in Washington , DC , by Julia Smith and Laetitia Yeandle was later identified as an unfinished 1 @, @ 800 @-@ line epic poem by Traherne entitled " The Ceremonial Law . "

= = Analysis and interpretation = =

= = = As a metaphysical poet = = =

Traherne was among about twelve Anglican lyricists labelled by Samuel Johnson as " the Metaphysical Poets . " While Johnson did not favour their work , and implied that their poetry was pretentious and obscure , the label has endured and has become respected as that of a school of poets . Their poetry " combined passionate feeling with intellectual rigor , " and " sought to express deeply felt religious and secular experiences in the form of highly intellectual poems . " The metaphysical poets , Traherne included , exhibited an " avid interest in science " drawing upon " imagery from all the new and exciting areas of scientific learning : astronomy , mathematics , geography , medicine " in their works .

Traherne 's poetry and prose works have been described in oxymoronic terms as " bafflingly simple . " Traherne delves into issues such as the origins of faith , the nature of divinity and the faith , divinity , and the innocence of childhood and his style seems to enforce with verse that takes on the form of an incantation . At the core of his work is the concept of " felicity " , that highest state of bliss in which he describes the essence of God as a source of " Delights of inestimable value . " It is a quest for this divine and essential truth that Traherne is said to exemplify a " playful but passionate exposition , denoting both a profoundly enlivening experience and a practical set of interrelated abstract principles . " Traherne mixes mystical elements and seeks to explain issues of truth , knowledge , and the faculties of the mind and heart by methods of theological and rational examination . He seeks to explain the " Principle of Nature " in which through his inclination to love truth (" Light ") and beauty seek him to identify felicity as its source and a natural experience . Traherne argues that man can only experience this felicity by understanding the will of God and divine love and he describes the beauty of this in childlike terms . In a poem called " The Recovery " , Traherne claims :

= = = Theology and ethics = = =

Traherne was also concerned with the stability of the Christian church in England during the period of the Restoration . In some of his theological writings , Traherne exhibits a passion for the Anglican faith and the national church that is evident in his confrontations with Roman Catholicism and Nonconformism during this time of political and religious upheaval . The recent discoveries of previously unknown manuscripts further establish Traherne 's reputation as an Anglican divine and his works offer fresh and comprehensive arguments on ongoing theological arguments regarding the nature of divinity , ethics and morality , and the nature of sin .

For instance , Traherne passionately critiques Roman Catholicism in *Roman Forgeries* (1673) ? the only work published during his lifetime . It is a polemical treatise in the form of a dialogue between two men ? a Protestant and a Roman Catholic . Relying on the Scriptures and the pronouncements of the First Council of Nicaea to formulate the idea of a legitimate church authority , Traherne criticises the state of the contemporary Catholic Church and claims through a conspiracy theory that because the Vatican has had control over the manuscripts that the Catholic Church was in a position to corrupt , misuse or suppress documents to support its claim to authority . The abusive nature of the narrator 's critique of the Church of Rome is in sharp contrast to the tenor of Traherne 's poetry or his other writings on theological topics . However , Traherne takes a less polemic tone in the posthumously published *Christian Ethicks* (1675) in which he explores theological implications of Calvinist thought on freedom and necessity . In this work , Traherne refuses to define ethics as a secular phenomenon ? instead pointing to a firm reliance on the will of

God . Because of human limitations and failings , one cannot build a suitable and coherent moral system of beliefs ? those virtues must derive from a divine source and their reward from perceiving the infinite love of God at the root of all things .

Given some of the autobiographical and confessional material in his works (notably in *Centuries of Meditations*) , Traherne must have suffered from a lack of faith in his formative years at Oxford . He describes this as a period of Apostasy and that he later found his way back to faith :

" I knew by intuition those things which since my Apostasy , I collected again by the highest reason . My very ignorance was advantageous . I seemed as one brought into the Estate of Innocence . All things were spotless and pure and glorious : yea , and infinitely mine , and joyful and precious , I knew not that there were any sins or complaints or laws . "

Traherne dedicated considerable examination to the subject of sin and its place vis @-@ a @-@ vis the church doctrines . In the recently discovered work , *A Sober View of Dr Twisse* , Traherne discusses sin and salvation within the frame of a larger discussion of questions of election and reprobation . Traherne writes :

" He was excluded the Kingdom of Heaven , where nothing can enter that hates God , and whence nothing can be excluded that loves him . The loss of that Love is Hell : the Sight and Possession of that Love is Heaven . Thus did sin exclude him Heaven . "

= = = Mysticism and divine union = = =

Traherne 's works are inherently mystical in that they seek to understand and embrace the nature of God within his creation and within man 's soul . Traherne seems to describe his own journey of faith in *Centuries of Meditation* , which was likely written when Traherne was at Credenhill ? a work that is noted for its " spiritual intensity , " and " the wide scope of the writer 's survey " which includes " all heaven and earth he takes for the province of the pious soul " . Traherne 's work is said to look " upon the hidden things of the soul , and , in them , he sees the image of the glory and love of God " and " the eternal theme of the goodness and the splendour of God . "

In the spirit of the gospels , Traherne 's " great theme is the visionary innocence of childhood , " and his writings suggest " that adults have lost the joy of childhood , and with it an understanding of the divine nature of creation . " Traherne seems to convey the idea that paradise can only be rediscovered and regained through reacquiring this childlike innocence ? a state which " precedes the knowledge of good and evil " and seems to be composed of a boundless love and wonder .

In this respect , Traherne 's work is often compared to the abounding joy and mysticism found in the works of William Blake , Walt Whitman , and Gerard Manley Hopkins . According to Traherne scholar Denise Inge , Traherne 's introduction of a child 's viewpoint to narrate his theological and moral premises was unknown or certainly unappreciated in the literature of this time . His poems frequently explore the glory of creation and what he perceived as his intimate relationship with God . He drew deeply on the writings of Aristotle and on the early Church Fathers for his concept of Man and human nature . Little mention is made of sin and suffering in the works that have dominated 20th @-@ century criticism , and some critics have seen his verse as bordering upon pantheism (or perhaps panentheism) .

Traherne is heavily influenced by the works of Neoplatonist philosophers and several of his contemporaries who were called the Cambridge Platonists . The Cambridge Platonists were latitudinarians in that they argued for moderation and dialogue between the factions of Puritans and High Churchmen in the Anglican church . They believed that religion and reason could be in harmony with one another based on a mystical understanding of reason ? believing that reason rose beyond mere sense perception but was " the candle of the Lord " and an echo of the divine residing within the human soul . Reason was both God @-@ given and of God . Indeed , critic K. W. Salter notes that Traherne " writes of the senses as if they were spiritual and of the spirit as if it were sensuous . "

However , according to Gladys Wade 's 1946 biography of Traherne , she distinguished that the Cambridge Platonists " wasted their energies on Hermetic and Cabalistic and Rosicrucian lore , and on incredible experiments in magic and necromancy , " and remarked that Traherne 's mysticism

was " perfectly free from any taint of this . "

Another great passion that is depicted in Traherne 's work is his love of nature and the natural world , frequently displayed in a very Romantic treatment of nature that has been described as characteristically pantheist or panentheist . While Traherne credits a divine source for its creation , his praise of nature seems nothing less than what one would expect to find in Thoreau . Many scholars consider Traherne a writer of the sublime , and in his writing he seems to have tried to reclaim the lost appreciation for the natural world , as well as paying tribute to what he knew of in nature that was more powerful than he was . In this sense Traherne seems to have anticipated the Romantic movement more than 130 years before it actually occurred . There is frequent discussion of man 's almost symbiotic relationship with nature , as well as frequent use of " literal setting " , that is , an attempt to faithfully reproduce a sense experience from a given moment , a technique later used frequently by William Wordsworth .

= = Legacy = =

Because Traherne 's works were lost for 200 years after his death they did not influence other writers until the 20th century . Indeed , while Samuel Johnson included him in his criticism of what he termed " metaphysical " poetry , many of Johnson 's contemporaries did not know of Traherne . Since their rediscovery , however , they have influenced the thought and writings of Trappist monk , social activist , and author Thomas Merton , crime writer and Christian humanist Dorothy L. Sayers , poet Elizabeth Jennings and Christian apologist C. S. Lewis . Lewis called *Centuries of Meditations* " almost the most beautiful book in English . "

In 1939 the English composer Gerald Finzi (1901 ? 1956) completed writing a cantata for solo voice (typically a soprano or tenor soloist) and string orchestra entitled *Dies natalis* (his Opus number 8) of which four movements are settings of writings by Thomas Traherne : " The Rapture " , " Wonder " , " The Salutation " and (the only prose piece among the four) an extract from *Centuries of Meditations* . In each of these pieces , the text chosen by Finzi reflects the joy and wonder of a newborn child 's innocent perspective on the world and the wonderment in being born into a world of such beauty . The first performance of the cantata was delayed until 1946 because of the Second World War .

= = Veneration by the Anglican Church = =

In commemoration of his poems and spiritual writings , Thomas Traherne is venerated as a saint within Anglicanism and is included in the Calendar of Saints in many national churches within the Anglican Communion . The Anglican Communion does not have a formal process of sainthood and canonisation as is found in the Roman Catholic tradition , but has frequently " recognised or ' canonised ? people of great holiness , sometimes by a formal process and sometimes by popular acclamation or local custom . The commemoration of Traherne is held on either 27 September (the date of his death) or 10 October (the date of his burial) . In 2009 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the United States approved the following Collect for the observation of Traherne 's feast day :

" Creator of wonder and majesty , who didst inspire thy poet Thomas Traherne with mystical insight to see thy glory in the natural world and in the faces of men and women around us : Help us to know thee in thy creation and in our neighbors , and to understand our obligations to both , that we may ever grow into the people thou hast created us to be ; through our Savior Jesus Christ , who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth , one God , in everlasting light . Amen . "

Observed on 27 September

Episcopal Church in the United States

Observed on 10 October

Church of England

Anglican Church of Korea

Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (also known as the Hong Kong Anglican Church)

= = Works and publications = =

= = = Published during Traherne 's life and times = = =

1673 : Roman Forgeries , Or , A True Account of False Records Discovering the Impostures and Counterfeit Antiquities of the Church of Rome (London : Printed by S. & B. Griffin for Jonathan Edwin , 1673) .

1675 : Christian Ethicks : Or , Divine Morality . Opening the Way to Blessedness , By the Rules of Vertue and Reason (London : Printed for Jonathan Edwin , 1675) .

1699 : A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God , In Several Most Devout and Sublime Thanksgivings for the same (London : Printed for Samuel Keble , 1699) .

1717 : Meditations on the Creation , in A Collection of Meditations and Devotions , in Three Parts . (London : Published by Nathaniel Spinkes . Printed for D. Midwinter , 1717) .

= = = Later compilations and editions = = =

1903 : The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne 1636 ? ? 1674 (edited by Bertram Dobell) (London : Dobell , 1903) .

1908 : Centuries of Meditations (edited by Dobell) (London : Dobell , 1908 ; Cosimo Inc . , 2007) ISBN 1602067252

1910 : Traherne 's Poems of Felicity (edited by H. I. Bell) (Oxford : Clarendon Press , 1910) .

1932 : The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne , faithfully reprinted from the Author 's Original Manuscript , together with Poems of Felicity , reprinted from the Burney manuscript , and Poems from Various Sources (edited by Gladys I. Wade) (London : P. J. & A. E. Dobell , 1932) .

1941 : A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God , In Several most Devout and Sublime Thanksgivings for the same (edited by Roy Daniells) (Toronto : University of Toronto Press , 1941) .

1958 : Centuries , Poems , and Thanksgivings 2 volumes (edited by H. M. Margoliouth) (Oxford : Clarendon Press , 1958) .

1966 : Meditations on the Six Days of the Creation (edited by George Robert Guffey) (Los Angeles : William Andrews Clark Memorial Library , University of California , 1966) .

1966 : Poems , Centuries , and Three Thanksgivings (edited by Anne Ridler) (London : Oxford University Press , 1966) .

1968 : Christian Ethicks (edited by Carol L. Marks and Guffey) (Ithaca : Cornell University Press , 1968) .

1989 : Commentaries of Heaven : The Poems (edited by D. D. C. Chambers) (Salzburg : Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg , 1989) . ISBN 9780773405844

2005 ? 2017 : The Works of Thomas Traherne (series edited by Jan Ross) (Melton , Suffolk , UK : D.S.Brewer) in 9 volumes . ISBN 9781843840473 (complete set) Volume I : Inducements to Retirednes , A Sober View of Dr Twisses his Considerations , Seeds of Eternity or the Nature of the Soul , The Kingdom of God (2005) . ISBN 9781843840374

Volume II : Commentaries of Heaven , part 1 : Abhorrence to Alone (2007) ISBN 9781843841357

Volume III : Commentaries of Heaven , part 2 : Al @-@ Sufficient to Bastard (2007) ISBN 9781843841364

Volume IV : Church 's Year @-@ Book , A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of GOD , [Meditations on the Six Days of the Creation] (2009) ISBN 9781843841968

Volume V : Centuries of Meditations and Select Meditations (2013) ISBN 9781843843276

Volume VI : Verse : from the Dobell Folio , Poems of Felicity , The Ceremonial Law (not yet published)

Volume VII : Roman Forgeries , Christian Ethicks : or , Divine Morality (not yet published)

Volume . VIII : Commentary and Index (not yet published)

Volume IX : Notebooks (not yet published)