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Divine Allurement
Beauty in the Theological Vision of Thomas Traherne

By

David Merrill

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

At the

University of Durham
Department of Theology and Religion

2017

Abstract

Through an in-depth exploration of his literary theory, doctrine of creation, anthropology and doctrine of sanctification, this thesis examines the essential role that beauty plays in the theological vision of Thomas Traherne. Through an analysis of Traherne's poetry and prose, Chapter 1 identifies the purposive nature of Traherne's literary output to be one of allurement. Combating previous claims that Traherne's poetry and prose lack an inherent link between form and content, I argue that through the irreducible interrelation of literary form and content Traherne crafts literary objects of contemplation, that being beautiful are inherently alluring.

Since Traherne understood his poetry and prose to be mimetic of creation, Chapter 2 examines Traherne's doctrine of creation. For Traherne, creation is the divine speaking forth, a manifestation of God-self in corporeal beauty, that when truly encountered, calls to, and allures human desire. I argue that Traherne understands beauty through Christian Neoplatonism, in that beauty is the shining forth of the transcendent good, and as such bears the inherent quality of allurement.

Chapter 3 examines Traherne's theological anthropology, tracing Traherne's understanding of desire and freedom. Taking special care to identify humanity's capacities for perception and apprehension, this chapter shows how the human has been uniquely created to receive and be allured by God's self-disclosure in creation.

Chapter 4 examines the evolving nature of human perception through Traherne's understanding of the four estates (innocence, misery, grace, glory). Having established the centrality of perception for a true sight of beauty and proper directionality of desire, I argue that the central purpose of Traherne's oeuvre is the transformation of perception. As literary objects of contemplation, Traherne invites the reader to encounter his work as an echo of the divine allurement in creation, and most acutely known in the Incarnation.

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Declaration

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and no part of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or in any other university for a degree.

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Soli Deo Gloria

David Merrill
June, 2017

Introduction

Central Argument

At the heart of Thomas Traherne's (c.1637-74) theological vision sits the image of God, the divine lover, who in freedom and desire creates all things as an act of divine self-expression. The key moment of this creation is the creation of humanity, the *imago dei*, imbued with freedom, expansive capacities and brimming with infinite desire. These are the two primary actors in Traherne drama, and it is the union of these two desiring subjects that act as the *telos* of his theological vision. God desires this union, and this union constitutes human teleology, although for Traherne, God's gift of freedom must not be compromised through an act of divine force or coercion to affect this union. Instead, Traherne envisions God as one who attracts, woos and allures the image bearer back into union with God-self.

This central image of God, who with infinite desire allures the *imago dei* back into union with God-self has been articulated in recent Traherne scholarship.¹ What has not been adequately dealt with in the scholarship is Traherne's understanding of the *means* of this allurement. How is it that God allures human desire and allures the soul back into union with God-self? This is the central question of this thesis, and the simple answer is: beauty. Drawing on a rich tradition of Christian Neoplatonism, especially the Platonism of Florentine humanist Marsilio Ficino, Traherne understood created beauty as a primary location of both divine self-disclosure and divine allurement. Corporeal beauty is where heaven touches earth, it is the shining forth of uncreated beauty, goodness and love. Corporeal beauty is where God is most accessible and most alluring.

To claim that beauty, for Traherne, functions as that aspect in the creation that naturally allures and attracts desire is almost intuitive in its simplicity, and maybe goes without saying. Of course we desire what we perceive to be beautiful, good and lovely. Why else would we choose what we choose? However, in identifying beauty as an aspect of the divine allurement – the loving wooing of human desire – beauty turns out to be a previously unexamined central hub in Traherne's theological vision. For Traherne, beauty bears a dynamic and purposive nature; its purpose is to disclose, allure, and invite an encounter with itself. As fundamentally an act of communication, the encounter with beauty finds its proper end as the human person is drawn toward her end in relational union with God.

¹ See especially Denise Inge, *Wanting like a God: Desire and Freedom in Thomas Traherne* (London: SCM Press, 2009).

A close examination of beauty in Traherne's oeuvre offers a distinct advantage to earlier scholarship. What will be shown throughout this thesis, is that beauty understood as a purposive act of allurements, functions as a thread that stitches together Traherne's overall thought and literary purposes. Traherne's understanding of God, creation, humanity, spiritual formation, and overall pastoral purposes are made intelligible when viewed through the lens of the beautiful.

This Study in the Wider Scholarship

Beauty in Traherne and the history of Traherne scholarship

A happenstance discovery of a collection of poems and a prose work at the turn of the twentieth century brought a little-known seventeenth century Anglican priest - Thomas Traherne - to light and sparked a century of analysis and criticism. As the turn of the twenty-first century was approaching another substantial collection of Traherne's writings were discovered that has greatly augmented, if not challenged our previous understanding of this enigmatic figure.² The seemingly unified portrait of Traherne as a naïve mystic, oblivious to pain and suffering, that dominated the twentieth century has come under review in recent studies of the writer. The following offers a few of the major shifts in Traherne scholarship through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

As will be discussed more fully in Chapter 1, early twentieth century Traherne scholarship is primarily literary criticism and is noticeably ambivalent. Bertram Dobell, publisher of both Traherne's *Poetical Works* (1903) and *Centuries of Meditation* (1908), waxes eloquently about these newly discovered manuscripts, while H.I. Bell, publisher of Traherne's *Poems of Felicity* (1910)³ strikes a more critical tone in his assessment of Traherne's poetic and literary acumen. Following Dobell and Bell, early criticism primarily viewed Traherne as a poet, often culling his prose works, abstracting their poetic content, and compiling them with poems from the Dobell and Bell sequences. As a poet, Traherne has

² For a full account of the manuscripts, see Peter Beal, 'Thomas Traherne', *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts* <<http://www.celm-ms.org.uk/introductions/TraherneThomas.html>> (accessed 9 June 2017).

³ H.I. Bell, *Traherne's Poems of Felicity* (Oxford, 1910), xxix. For other critical readings of the poetry see Robert. Ellrodt, *Seven Metaphysical Poets: A Structural Study of the Unchanging Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 91. Antoinette B. Dauber, "Thomas Traherne and the Poetics of Object Relations," *Criticism* 23, no. 2 (1981): 120. Elizabeth Jennings, *Every Changing Shape* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 1996).

often been compared alongside other seventeenth century metaphysical poets,⁴ George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, John Donne, Richard Crashaw, and others, and measured against these poets has often been found lacking.⁵

There have been key shifts in Traherne scholarship due mainly to the discover of new Traherne manuscripts throughout the twentieth century. Traherne's status as a poet, however, was greatly enhanced in the mid-century through the publication of H.M. Margoliouth's two volume *Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings* in 1958. A key component of this volume was the identification of those poems that appear in both Dobell's sequence and Bell's, and placing them on adjacent pages.⁶ This highlighted the differences between the two, revealing more clearly how the editor of the *Poems of Felicity* – Phillip Traherne – had altered Thomas' originals. For subsequent literary critics – especially A.L. Clements⁷ – this helped to undercut H.I. Bell's more critical reception of Traherne's poetry. What Clements and others have also argued is that the more authentic Dobell sequence should be read as an entire unit, analysing each poem with reference to where it sits in the sequence, not as a single entity as part of a compilation of poems.⁸ One key emphasis of this shift in Traherne scholarship was identification of distinct purposes in his poetry and prose, which began to erode the narrative that Traherne was simply a naïve optimist. A growing need to read Traherne's poetry in conversation with this prose works – especially, *Centuries of Meditation* and *Christian Ethicks* – also emerged in this period.⁹

⁴ A term first used by Samuel Johnson in 1744 in a less than favorable way.

⁵ See J. B. Leishmann, *The Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne* (Oxford, 1934), p. 220, 222; Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience* (New York, 1936), p. 364, 370; Margaret Willy, *Three Metaphysical Poets*. (London: Longmans, Green, 1961). Robert. Ellrodt, *Seven Metaphysical Poets.*; Patrick Grant, *The Transformation of Sin: Studies in Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, and Traherne* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UnivP, 1974). For a reassessment see: John Malcolm Wallace, "Thomas Traherne and the Structure of Meditation," *ELH* 25, no. 2 (June 1, 1958): 79–89. And Malcolm M. Day, "'Naked Truth' and the Language of Thomas Traherne," *Studies in Philology* 68, no. 3 (July 1, 1971): 306.

⁶ Thomas Traherne, *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings*, ed. H. M Margoliouth, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958). For a positive view of Philip's editing see Bell, and Gladys Wade: Gladys I. Wade, *Thomas Traherne* (Oxford University Press: London ; Princeton, 1944), xii.; Gladys I. Wade, "The Manuscripts of the Poems of Thomas Traherne," *Modern Language Review* 26 (1931): 407.

⁷ A. L. Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970). A. L. Clements, "On the Mode and Meaning of Traherne's Mystical Poetry: 'The Preparative,'" *Studies in Philology* 61, no. 3 (July 1, 1964): 500–521. For a more muted critique of Philip's editing see ⁷ Cedric C. Brown and Tomohiko Koshi, "Editing the Remains of Thomas Traherne" 57, no. 232 (2006): 771.

⁸ See also, Day, "'Naked Truth' and the Language of Thomas Traherne," 306. Wallace, "Thomas Traherne and the Structure of Meditation."

⁹ Stanley Stewart, *The Expanded Voice: The Art of Thomas Traherne*, First Edition, First Printing edition. (Huntington Library Pr, 1970).

The effort to form a more robust and nuanced reading of Traherne led commentators to look more extensively into the mystical¹⁰ and philosophical elements of his thought. Clements provides a mystical reading of Traherne's oeuvre, while, Franz K. Wohrer, has sought to establish Traherne's status as a genuine mystic.¹¹ In close connection with these mystical readings, Carol L Marks has done well to pinpoint the philosophical influences of Marsilio Ficino, Hermes Trismegistis, and well as his kinship with the Cambridge Platonists.¹² Paul Cefalu has also rightfully balance a Neoplatonic reading of Traherne by noticing Thomistic and Aristotelean elements in his thought, and Kathryn Murphy has shown how Traherne provides a counter narrative to the nominalism of Thomas Hobbes.¹³ This thesis will follow

The discovery of new Traherne manuscripts in the second half of the twentieth century were key in formulating a clearer picture of his thought. Two key discoveries were the *Commentaries of Heaven*, which was rescued from a burning rubbish tip in 1967, and *The Kingdom of God*, which was found in in the Lambeth Palace Library and properly attributed to Traherne by Jeremy Maul in 1997. These two manuscripts, which are comprised primarily of prose works, and their publication in the first three volumes of *The Works of Thomas Traherne*, edited by Jan Ross,¹⁴ went a long way to ground Traherne in his historical and theological¹⁵ context. Denise Inge's far-reaching study – *Wanting Like a God* – on Traherne's

¹⁰ Alison J. Sherrington, *Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, First Edition edition. (St. Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 1970).; Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*. Keith W. Salter, *Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet* (London: EArnold, 1964).

¹¹ Franz K. Wohrer, *Thomas Traherne: The Growth of a Mystic's Mind* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Pr, 1982).

¹² Carol L. Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism," *PMLA* 81, no. 7 (December 1, 1966): 521–534. Carol L. Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus.," *Renaissance News* 19, no. 2 (July 1, 1966): 118–131. Carol L. Marks, "Traherne's Ficino Notebook," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 63, no. 2 (1969): 73–81.

¹³ Kathryn Murphy, "Thomas Traherne, Thomas Hobbes, and the Rhetoric of Realism," *The Seventeenth Century* 28, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 419–439. A good deal of work has also been done in relation to Traherne's natural philosophy: Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the Effect of the "New Science" upon Seventeenth Century Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 192–3. James Balakier, "Thomas Traherne's Dobell Series and the Baconian Model of Experience," *English Studies* 70, no. 3 (1989): 233–247.; as also, Jan Ross' introduction in *The Words of Thomas Traherne, Vol III*.

¹⁴ Thomas Traherne, *The Works of Thomas Traherne. Vol. I-III*, ed. Jan Ross, vol. 1-3 (Cambridge [England]; Rochester, N.Y.: D.S. Brewer, 2005, 2007). All subsequent primary source references will be drawn from this, now six volume, series.

¹⁵ For a study of Traherne's Christology see: Alison Kershaw, "The Poetic of the Cosmic Christ in Thomas Traherne's *The Kingdom of God*" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, 2005). For a discussion of Traherne's understanding of sin see Patrick Grant, "Original Sin and the Fall of Man in Thomas Traherne," *ELH* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 1971): 40–61. Grant, *The Transformation of Sin*. William H. Marshall, "Thomas Traherne and the Doctrine of Original Sin," *Modern Language Notes* 73, no. 3 (March 1,

understanding of desire and freedom is the best example of this twenty-first century move.¹⁶ Elizabeth Dodd's monograph on Traherne's notions of innocence also views Traherne as primarily a theologian, with distinctive theological aims, but enhances Inge's reading, through a theologically and philosophically perceptive examination of Traherne's literary aims as revealed in his use of language.¹⁷ This current study builds on Inge's exploration of human freedom and desire and extends Dodd's identification of Traherne's theologically grounded literary aims – especially the role of allurements in his work. In exploring the place of the beautiful in Traherne's thought, this study seeks to maintain a constructive link between previous Traherne scholarship that looked at him through various lenses – literary, philosophical, mystical, historical, theological – while seeking to understand how beauty functions as a divine allurements. As a corollary to Dodd's work, this study will also seek to understand how Traherne both understood the world to be alive with divine allurements, and how his own literary output is an act of allurements; the alluring nature of beauty in creation being mirrored in his own oeuvre.

Recent Theological Aesthetics

Identifying the topic of beauty as a previously unexamined aspect of Traherne's theological vision not only positions this study within the flow of Traherne scholarship, it also naturally places this study within the context of recent theological studies on beauty. A brief survey of the current conversation reveals that Traherne could function as a helpful interlocutor in current theological aesthetics.¹⁸ A seminal voice in twentieth century theological aesthetics is of course, Hans Urs von Balthasar.¹⁹

L. Clifton Edward shows a close affinity to Traherne in his recent work *Creation's Beauty as Revelation*. Following in a long line of Christian Neoplatonism, of which Traherne

1958): 161–165. Edmund Newey, “‘God Made Man Greater When He Made Him Less’: Traherne’s Iconic Child,” *Literature and Theology* 24, no. 3 (2010): 227–241. Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne’s Poetic Theology: “Were All Men Wise and Innocent...”* (Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 95–7.

¹⁶ Inge, *Wanting like a God*. Inge’s historical move follows A. Leigh DeNeef, *Traherne in Dialogue: Heidegger, Lacan, and Derrida* (Duke University Press, 1988), 3.

¹⁷ Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne’s Poetic Theology*.

¹⁸ For a longer exploration see James McCullough, *Sense and Spirituality: The Arts and Spiritual Formation* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015).

¹⁹ See especially his five volume series, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*.

belongs, Edwards understands created beauty to be revelatory of God,²⁰ and when seen, created beauty draws the human person out of herself toward divine beauty. As Chapter 2 will show, Edward's natural theology – what he calls 'creational theology' – closely mirrors that of Traherne. Objectively rooted in God, created beauty invites a subjective experience in the human person, which when truly seen orients the soul toward God:

...an experience of ... perceptual beauty could orient one to God's nature: that is, by focusing our attention on what is perceptually desirable, valuable, and interesting for its own sake, we would also be orienting ourselves to what is ultimately most desirable, valuable, and interesting for its own sake, namely God.²¹

In addition to linking beauty and desire in his theological aesthetics, Edwards mirrors Traherne (see Chapter 4) in identifying the need to develop epistemic practices²² to cleanse our customary apprehensions of the world to more fully discern the Being of God in created beauty.

In *Christian Ethicks*, Traherne sees that his primary task in this work was to 'elevate the Soul', 'refine it Apprehensions', and 'excite' its 'Desire' by presenting a clear vision of the beauty of virtue.²³ That moral behaviour and virtue is primarily a matter of true vision is argued for by Stanley Hauerwas:

Modern moral philosophers have failed to understand that moral behavior is an affair not primarily of choice but of vision... When we assess other people, we do not consider just their solutions to particular problems; we feel something much more elusive which may be called their total vision of life... Our morality is more than adherence to universalizable rules; it also encompasses our experiences, fables, beliefs, images, concepts, and inner monologues.²⁴

The interconnectedness of vision and moral behaviour comports well with Traherne's own efforts in *Christian Ethicks* to refine and reform human apprehension. Traherne's own art could be understood as a prolonged effort to provide his reader with an aesthetic experience of the world with, as Hauerwas describes, 'a clarity which startles us because we are not used to looking at the real world at all.'²⁵ As with Hauerwas, David Baily Harned understands the effectiveness of good art as constituted in its ability to 'initiate us more fully to the

²⁰ L. Clifton Edwards, *Creation's Beauty as Revelation: Toward a Creational Theology of Natural Beauty* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 5.

²¹ Ibid., 69.

²² Ibid., xiii.

²³ *Christian Ethicks*, 3.

²⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, "The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 2, no. 1 (1972): 38.

²⁵ Ibid., 40.

particularity of the things and situations we confront and the emotions we feel.’²⁶ For Harned and Hauerwas, art’s invitation to look closely at a particular object works to train the mind to see and attend more truly to what is real. This emphasis on attention is also seen in Timothy Gorringer.²⁷ Chapter 1 will look at these aspects in Traherne.

Another contemporary voice in theological aesthetics is David Brown. Amongst other things, Brown’s belief in the significant epistemological place of the emotions and the imagination, and art’s unique role in impacting these human capacities²⁸ resonate with Traherne’s thought (see Chapter 3). Brown’s articulation of the sacramental, and aesthetic experience, also finds links with Traherne’s notions of his own poetic art (Chapter 1), and creation as a divine self-expression (Chapter 2). Brown states,

In a proper sense of the sacramental, the mediation is not purely instrumental; instead the material symbol says something about God in its own right, and so it is an indispensable element in assessing both the immediate experience and any further significance it may have.²⁹

Aidan Nichols, taking a phenomenological approach to art and beauty, mirrors Traherne’s own emphasis on the need for attentiveness, purity of vision, and contemplation in our vision of God’s creation. Nichols says of art:

Art requires and releases an *askesis* or discipline of vision so that we learn how to look with a purity of insight into the heart of human life. Such looking shifts our whole way of reading the significance of the world. In its wake we find our own existence reshaped from the experience of what we have seen.³⁰

Part of this *askesis*, for Traherne is the purging of a fallen vision of reality, that we might view God’s creation with pure eyes. The phenomenological approach, with its emphasis on the encounter with the truly ‘other’, in the sense that aesthetic experience is not mere projection, rescues theological aesthetics from mere subjectivism.³¹ In the same way, Traherne’s understanding of created beauty as divine self-expression ontologically rooted in God, means that to encounter the beauty of creation is to encounter the divine ‘other’. The

²⁶ David Baily Harned, *Theology and the Arts* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 30.

²⁷ T. J. Gorringer, *Earthly Visions: Theology and the Challenge of Art*, 1st Edition edition. (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011), 22.

²⁸ David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience*. (Oxford University Press, 2004), 21–25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁰ Aidan Nichols, *Art of God Incarnate: Theology and Image in Christian Tradition*, 1st Edition edition. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1980), 100.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

divine other reaches into our subjective aesthetic experience and in ‘its wake we find our own existence reshaped from the experience’.

The themes on beauty expressed in Edwards, Hauerwas, Harned, Gorringer, Brown and Nichols – creation, desire, virtue, formation, *askesis*, vision, contemplation, attention, purity – are ones that will be woven throughout this work. Naturally, to the degree these recent voices shape my reading of Traherne, they will have implicit impact on the shape of the current study, however, their explicit impact will be muted in favour of historical voices on beauty that bore direction influence on Traherne’s own thought.

Beauty and Allurement

As was argued above, beauty and allurement are closely aligned in Traherne’s thought. The idea of the beautiful plays an important role in Traherne’s understanding of the essential nature of God, the human person, as well as his articulation of the human person in its glorified state in union with God. In addition to acting as a descriptor of God and the glorified soul, beauty also plays a dynamic role in Traherne’s theological vision. Beauty is descriptive of that moment of encounter with the divine other. Beauty is a central aspect of God’s self-communication and allurement of God’s lover. This study will primarily use the language of allurement instead of its corollary, attraction. The reason for this comes from Traherne’s own preference for this language. His usage echoes God’s words to unfaithful Israel through the prophet Hosea: ‘Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her...and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth’ (Hosea 2: 14,15 KJV). This exemplified in his entry ‘Allurement’ in *Commentaries of Heaven*, that concludes with a poem that begins with the lines:

Awake my Soul, and soar upon the Wing
Of Sacred Contemplation; for the King
Of Glory wooes; he’s pleased to allure
Poor feeble Dust! Altho thou art impure,
He condescends, vouchsafing to come down
That with his Glory he might Ashes crown.³²

Why God ‘wooos’ and is ‘pleased to allure’ – rather than God ‘attracting’ – is because the language of allurement takes the idea of attraction and imbeds it more properly within the divine-human relational dynamics. Inanimate objects like magnet and planets attract, while God relationally attracts via allurement. Divine allurement, through the beautiful, represents a

³² *Commentaries of Heaven*, v. 2, 368. Hereafter this work will be called *Commentaries*.

key claim in the current work. Traherne's usage of other key terms will be explained throughout the thesis, but allurements should be understood to be foundational.

Summary

What this thesis seeks to do is to draw together the history of Trahernian scholarship, and through a close examination of Traherne's primary works, and primary influences (not least of which was the Bible), to reveal Traherne's understanding of beauty as the existential point of contact between heaven and earth, and the location of divine allurements through the beautiful. The human encounter with beauty is deeply nuanced and complex, including issues of epistemology, the doctrine of creation, personal purity, vision and the refinement of apprehensions. Since the encounter with beauty should be understood as just that, a non-discursive encounter with another, the unfolding chapters should be viewed as a multifaceted exploration of this lived encounter. As such, the encounter with beauty will be explored firstly through a literary lens, then through a philosophical and theological lens, then an anthropological lens, and finally, through the lens of spiritual formation. The lens this thesis applies to Traherne's work is the one that sees Traherne as a spiritual guide, who through the use of beauty in his own work, seeks to allure desire toward his theological vision, and ultimately affect transformation in his readership. Beauty, then, will remain a strand that weaves its way throughout this work.

Chapter 1 examines Traherne's literary theory to pinpoint how he used literary form to communicate his theological vision and how that form reveals very distinct literary and aesthetic purposes. The chapter confronts the charges made that Traherne's poetry lacks any connection between form and content, and that its solipsistic character causes it to lack any connection with its audience. As the chapter rebuts these claims by showing an organic connection between form and content, and outlines a clear set of literary purposes aimed at an audience, the chapter will argue that a clear way to envisage Traherne's poetry and poetic prose is to see it as a collection of beautiful literary objects of contemplation. The chapter uses Traherne's poem 'The Author to the Critical Peruser' to come to these conclusions for this poem represents Traherne's clearest explication of his poetic purposes. As beautiful literary objects, the poems function as irreducible (form and content co-inhere to form one thing) objects to be perceived by the eyes. The fact that they are beautiful, or bear an aesthetic quality, makes them objects that capture the eyes and allure the audience. As objects of contemplation, however, the sensual nature of the objects themselves inherently point to a

reality beyond finite corporeality. Being irreducible these objects are never dissolved into the infinite, however, they find their greatest meaning when experienced and enjoyed contemplatively, when they are rooted in and point to the infinite reality they ‘embody’. Traherne’s poetry and prose prove to be mimetic both of God who has condescended and made God-self an object of human knowledge in the creation, and more acutely revealed the divine nature through the Incarnation. Traherne’s doctrine of creation and Incarnation set the agenda for both his poetic form and his poetic purposes.

Chapter 2 is primarily concerned with the metaphysics of what Traherne calls God’s kingdom. It looks closely at Traherne’s *The Kingdom of God* in the attempt to identify his understanding of how God relates to God’s creation. Integrating the Psalmist’s praise – ‘The heavens declare the glory of God’ (Ps. 19.1) – and Paul’s belief – that ‘the invisible things of [God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen’ (Rom. 1.20) – Traherne understands creation to be a divine act of self-communication. As such, Traherne identifies three primary divine attributes that have been communicated into the metaphysics of God’s kingdom: beauty, goodness and love. Drawing on, and modifying, the long tradition of Christian Neoplatonism, Traherne identifies love as the center or ‘Form’ of God’s kingdom, which flows out into goodness, and both love and goodness flow into the visible beauty of creation. What corporeal beauty does is reveal the love and goodness it springs from, and ultimately speaks forth the divine goodness, love and beauty in the divine essence: ‘The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we Come to the Knowledge of God himself.’³³ Not only does ‘the Beauty of the Visible World’ manifest the essence of God, it captures desire and allures the soul back into union with God. It is this rhythm – God speaking forth the divine essence into creation and drawing the creation back into union through the allurements of beauty – that undergirds Traherne’s entire metaphysics. This Neoplatonic schema is greatly modified by Traherne’s insistence on divine freedom and his insistence on the abiding and essential place of the corporeal world. In this chapter I retain the term ‘Neoplatonism’ and even ‘Christian Neoplatonism’, more as a way to point to a historical era of Platonizing philosophy that turns to Plotinus as its initiator, noting that the term Neoplatonic is somewhat contentious, anachronistic³⁴ and a term Traherne would have

³³ *Kingdom of God*, 496, known hereafter as *Kingdom*.

³⁴ The term ‘Neoplatonism’ finds its origins in the early 19th century: N. E. Tigerstedt, *The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato. An Outline and Some Observations*, Comment. Hum. Litt.; LII (Helsinki: Soc. Scient. Fennica, 1974).

been unfamiliar with. Plotinus, Marsilio Ficino³⁵ and Traherne would have simply understood Neoplatonism as a continuation of the Platonic tradition. I will use the term Christian Neoplatonism as shorthand for a form of Christian Theology and spirituality that is influenced by Platonic thought, that has been passed on to Traherne through the Church Father (exemplified by Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa), Pseudo Dionysius, Aquinas, Ficino, and even the English Renaissance Humanists. Traherne's indebtedness to this tradition will be explicated in Chapter 2.

The first half of Chapter 3 identifies how Traherne's notion of humanity as the *imago dei* –coming from God, mirroring God and finding its *telos* in union with God – functions as the organizing principle of his theological anthropology. Since Traherne defines God as 'all Act', and the freedom of the divine will is essential to the divine nature, God creates humankind as the image of God in power that through a free movement of the will she might become the *imago dei* in Act. Traherne's articulation of the *telos* of the soul in these terms shows strong resonances with the doctrine of *theosis* historically understood. Being that *theosis*, closely aligns Christology and Anthropology, this section ends by examining how Incarnation functions as the theological foundation of Traherne's anthropology.

The second half of the chapter seeks to articulate Traherne's epistemology. Here it will be seen that the human person has been uniquely constituted to come to know God in God's full self-expression in creation (Chapter 2). The section identifies the role played by the body, the soul and the union of body and soul in Traherne's epistemology. Throughout this chapter, beauty is seen to be both a description of the *telos* of the soul in relational union with God (a deified soul is beautiful), and an essential quality of allurements that awakens desire in the human perceiver. As a transition into Chapter 4, the chapter ends noting that the 'Will' may be 'deceived with false Allurements,' or 'Stirred up with the Beauty of what is Good'. Traherne's central task is to work for the latter.

Chapter 4 examines Traherne's understanding of the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption and glory, as reimagined in the personal drama of the four estates of the soul: innocence, misery, grace and glory. Having established that clear vision is a key component to true vision of beauty and subsequently of God, this chapter examines human vision and apprehension as it evolves through the four estates. Space is given in this chapter to highlight, and in some cases, give a more orthodox account of some of Traherne's more enigmatic

³⁵ Michael J. B. Allen, "Ficino's Lecture on the Good?". *Renaissance Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 30.

claims. One of the central claims of this chapter is that Traherne's primary audience are those in the estate of grace, namely those redeemed and part of God's community, yet still exercising their will in the face of 'two Kinds of Allurements': 'Earthly' and 'Divine'.³⁶ As such, Traherne articulates the journey through the four estates out of his own pastoral concern to lead the reader along the path toward the estate of glory. For Traherne, the beatific vision, acts as the teleological alluring reality, the final object of human desire, thus it is the beauty of God, the beauty of heaven that speaks in all true experiences of beauty, and as such, properly allures the soul heavenward. As a spiritual guide to souls in the estate of grace, Traherne offers the spiritual discipline of solitude as the proper place to enter into the delights of heaven while on earth, and to reform the apprehensions through the ongoing practice of solitude.

³⁶ *Commentaries*, v. 2, 367.

Chapter One - Traherne's Literary Form: Crafting Contemplative Objects of Allurement

Trahernian scholarship began around the turn of the twentieth century with the publication of a collection of poems in 1903 – almost 230 years after his death. After publishing *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne* in 1903 – which had been rescued from a London bookstall a few years prior – Bertram Dobell published *Centuries of Meditation* five years later.¹ In Dobell's estimation, the poetry, though good, was far inferior to the prose of the *Centuries*. H.I. Bell has a soberer account of the poetry in his introductory remarks to the collection of poetry he discovered and published under the title: *Poems of Felicity*. Bell even goes as far as to say, 'it is probably true to say that Traherne is not a poet at all...Not infrequently we meet with the flattest of prose; and very rarely is there any vital connection between form and content.'² In addition to Bell's claim that Traherne's poetry displays a disconnect between form and content, Dauber suggests a disconnect between 'writer and reader': 'Traherne defeats genre by writing poems which bypass the rhetorical situation; they address no one, are spoken into space rather than at an audience.'³ Similarly, Robert Ellrodt sees Traherne's entire oeuvre as expressing an extreme egocentrism: 'With Traherne we move from egocentricity to a kind of solipsistic illusion, at least in his record of the alleged intuitions of his infancy.'⁴ What these early commentators fail to do however, is adequately discern the purpose of Traherne's work, which for C.S. Lewis is the first task of any true critic:

The first qualification of judging any piece of workmanship from the corkscrew to a cathedral is to know *what* it is – what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used.⁵

Malcolm Day, echoing Lewis, cautions against the premature judgements made by Bell and others based on poetic or aesthetic tastes foreign to Traherne's intended purpose:

In reading Traherne we must be cautious about judging what may seem like flat metaphor or an uninspiring phrase, for underlying such apparent failures may be ideas or esthetic intentions to which we are not accustomed to respond....we cannot

¹ Stewart, *The Expanded Voice*, 6.

² Bell, *Traherne's Poems of Felicity*, xxix.

³ Dauber, "Thomas Traherne and the Poetics of Object Relations," 120.

⁴ Robert. Ellrodt, *Seven Metaphysical Poets*, 91.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 1.

adequately appreciate the nature of the full effect of his art unless we become better acquainted with the... motivations behind it.⁶

In this chapter I seek to counter Bell's claim that Traherne's writings lack a connection between form and content, and Dauber and Ellrodt's claim that Traherne's solipsism and defeat of genre deny any real thought for his reader. In so doing, I hope to offer a clearer picture of the nature and purpose of his work, by discerning his 'esthetic intentions'.

The impression one gets from these early critics (especially Bell) is of a Traherne who was not adequately able to utilize poetry as a literary form to communicate his expansive thought, whereas the *Centuries* provided a medium more conducive to his spiritual vision.⁷ Malcolm Wallace⁸ and A.L. Clements⁹ rightly reject the view that Traherne's poetry was poorly conceived, and instead show that the poetry of the Dobell sequence reveals a unified whole, and each poem should be read and understood in relation to its location in the sequence, for 'they make their deepest impact when read in a particular way as parts of a continuous whole.' The form of Traherne's poetry is not a barrier to his content, instead it is the role of the critic to attempt to see 'the organic relation of content to form and style', which is clearly seen in his poetry.¹⁰ Clement provides a counter voice to Bell and Dauber (and the impression given by Ellrodt) by finding a clear relation between form and content in Traherne's Dobell sequence, which bears a purposive relation to his reader; namely to 'make their deepest impact'.

This chapter will examine Traherne's literary forms and see how they are used to communicate his distinctive theological vision, by locating Traherne within a larger historical context and flow of ideas. Traherne's poem 'The Author to the Critical Peruser' provides the most revealing glimpse into what Traherne understood his poetry and prose to be doing, thus the themes found in this poem will set the agenda for the rest of the chapter. The chapter begins with an analysis of this poem. After establishing that Traherne's poetry and poetic prose are best understood as objects of contemplation, the next section explores poetry's

⁶ Day, "'Naked Truth' and the Language of Thomas Traherne," 306.

⁷ This sentiment is echoed throughout the first half of the 20th century and is exemplified in Elizabeth Jennings who comments: 'Traherne's formal, disciplined poems lack the accessibility, the immediacy of his *Centuries of Meditation*. It is as if the poetic forms were a barrier to the content and we, his readers, can seldom penetrate that barrier.' Jennings, *Every Changing Shape*. In this study I agree that Traherne's prose is superior to his poetry, but will also agree with Clements' assessment that the poetry must be examined alongside the prose to provide a full picture of Traherne's theological and aesthetic vision.

⁸ Wallace, "Thomas Traherne and the Structure of Meditation."

⁹ Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vii.

capacity to express truth. King David is identified as a key source of emulation and inspiration for Traherne. Next, the chapter identifies how Traherne understood poetry to have a unique capacity to mediate the transcendent to the senses, and then we combat Dauber in showing how Traherne functions as a rhetorician. The final two sections follow the shift toward the reader in the first stanza of ‘The Author to the Critical Peruser’; looking first at the dynamics of the allurements of human desire and then the dynamics of human cognition. What will be found throughout is that Traherne’s literary works find their *telos* in the transformation of his literary audience. Traherne writes with a keen eye to the interplay of content, form and audience and, as such, crafts literary objects that invite a contemplative response. Additionally, these crafted objects are beautiful, and as such, inherently attract desire. The next section will guide us through some of these major themes.

1.1. Traherne’s Poetic Form

In Traherne’s introductory poem – ‘*The Author to the Critical Peruser*’ – in the collection *Poems of Felicity*, we find an apt starting point in our attempt to locate his literary and aesthetic theory. *Poems of Felicity* is a collection of poems compiled by Traherne’s younger brother Philip in the early eighteenth century, years after Thomas’ death in 1674. Of the 61 poems found in *Poems of Felicity*, 22 are also found in the Dobell manuscript. In Margoliouth’s edited volume *Thomas Traherne: Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings* he places these 22 poems on adjacent pages, enabling a clear comparison between the poems in Thomas’ hand and those in Philip’s. Gladys Wade suggests that Philip alters about thirty-five percent of Thomas’ originals,¹¹ with the proper assumption that the other poems in *Felicity* have been equally altered.¹² These alterations have received mixed reviews: early commentators Bell¹³ and Wade¹⁴ generally thought Philip improved on Thomas’ work, while later commentators, notably Margoliouth¹⁵ and Clements,¹⁶ considered Philip’s editing a disaster. Whatever we think of the alterations, Philip’s editing of Thomas in *Poems of*

¹¹ Gladys I. Wade, *Thomas Traherne*, xii.

¹² Brown and Koshi, “Editing the Remains of Thomas Traherne,” 771.

¹³ Bell, *Traherne’s Poems of Felicity*, xxv–xxvi.

¹⁴ Gladys I. Wade, “The Manuscripts of the Poems of Thomas Traherne,” 407.

¹⁵ Thomas Traherne, *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings*, ed. H. M Margoliouth, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), xv.

¹⁶ Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, 106.

Felicity (especially revealed in Philip's two introductory poems to the sequence), reveals an early attempt to translate Thomas to a new audience;¹⁷ this coming from a translator Thomas in *Select Meditations* refers to in the best of terms: 'And cannot I here on earth so Lov my Friends!...my Brother!. Ye wise and Holy Sages!'¹⁸ It is this familial love and knowledge between the brothers that makes Philip an insightful early commentator and translator. In the following I am less concerned in discerning how Philip either improved or corrupted Thomas' text, and more interested in seeing how the early pages of *Poems of Felicity* reveal how Traherne's younger brother and early commentator viewed him as a purposive poet.

The poem we have set out to explore – 'The Author to the Critical Peruser' – sits amid three seemingly introductory poems that follow the work's title page. The title page reveals a common theme to be explored later in this thesis. The full title reads: 'POEMS of FELICITY / Vol. I. / Containing / Divine Reflections / On the / Native Objects / Of / An Infant=Ey'. Given the history of the manuscript it is safe to assume the title is Philip's own, and we may thus deduce that he discerned Thomas' work bore a divine quality, possibly a reference to its divine source and purpose, but most certainly an expression of its (divine) value. In Chapter 4 we argue for an understanding of 'infant ey' to be something akin to pure apprehension, as imaged in the perception of the infant, while 'Native Objects' are all created objects seen through these pure eyes. What Philip understands these poems to be is a prolonged reflection on the objects seen truly by the pure eyes of the infant subject. What will become clear below is that Philip understood these 'Divine Reflections' not as solipsistic egocentricity (per Ellrodt) but as part of Thomas' purpose to purify the senses to more approximate the purity of the infant eyes.

As was just mentioned, following the title page are three introductory poems, the first is signed by Philip, the second is by Thomas and the third is by 'THE PUBLISHER', presumably also by Philip or another close associate of Thomas. In the first poem, 'THE DEDICATION', Philip names the purpose for printing 'These sacred Relicks he hath left behind' (l. 9), to be for the public good:

Be pleas'd then to accept
This Off'ring I have kept
Too long in Privat; since it may becom
A Publick Good

¹⁷ Brown and Koshi, "Editing the Remains of Thomas Traherne," 771.

¹⁸ Thomas Traherne, *Select Meditations*, ed. Julia Smith (Manchester England: Carcanet Press Ltd., 2009), 27.

more precisely claims that ‘Traherne’s language is inherently poetic, both in its poetry and its prose.’ She continues,

It is poetic because it is irreducible: it cannot be deconstructed since it contains meaning within the mode of discourse. A poetic approach therefore provides the most appropriate assessment of Traherne’s symbolic, emblematic and sacramental use of language...the ‘logic’ of Traherne’s theology is not found in adherence to philosophical or doctrinal principles but in the movement of the affections through poetic and rhetorical devices.²¹

Dodd identifies two essential components of my reading of Traherne. First, Traherne’s poetic theology is irreducible, the ‘meaning’ of the text is imbedded in the interrelation of form and content. Secondly, Traherne crafts these literary objects of contemplation for the purpose of arousing, awakening and attracting the affections. Traherne understood that unless the affections are moved to desire the good, God, or as he will say below, ‘The naked Truth, the will remains idle and asleep.’ In contrast to Dodd’s claim, however, Chapter 2 will argue that Traherne’s ‘philosophical and doctrinal principles’ are not to be marginalized, for they provide the metaphysical ‘logic’ for his literary goal of moving the affections.

If, as objects of contemplation, Traherne’s poetry invites contemplative engagement, its ultimate purpose lies outside itself. The poem above concludes with the following lines:

And let the Soul that borrows hence a Spark
Of Light, so blow it into a Flame
Of Holy Lov, as may not in the Dark
Suppress the Benefit: but to God’s Name
Giv all the Thanks and Prais (whom the Author meant
To honor) and not him the Instrument.
(ll. 25-30)

If the poem hits its mark in fanning into ‘Flame’ ‘Lov’, ‘Thanks and Prais’ to God, the poet, the ‘Instrument’, the mediator, fades into the background as the divine is glorified, seen and loved. What Philip Traherne offers in these two poems is the image of Traherne’s life and poetry as primarily pastoral, seeking to awaken the eyes to the beauty of divine love, and enflame the soul to love the divine. Philip discerned a clear set of purposes in Thomas’ poetry. It is unsurprising then, that between his two introductory poems Philip would place²² a poem where Thomas clearly articulates his poetic purpose. We turn now to Thomas’ own, ‘The Author to the Critical Peruser’.

²¹ Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne’s Poetic Theology: “Were All Men Wise and Innocent...”* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 21.

²² Brown and Koshi highlight the fact that Philip not only alters some of Thomas’ poems but creates a new sequence of poems by compiling them from various sources: Brown and Koshi, “Editing the Remains of Thomas Traherne,” 773. It is thus important to remember Philip’s hand in both editing and ordering the poems.

In the opening stanza of the poem, Traherne introduces what he understands to be his poetic vocation. In this stanza Traherne presents himself as one who has ascended mountains and there become acquainted with ‘the highest Mysteries’ and ‘inward Beauties’ associated with the ‘naked Truth’. Poetry, for Traherne, represents an appropriate form to reveal these ‘highest Mysteries’, but poetry becomes revelatory only when the language deployed can be described as ‘simple’, ‘transparent’ and ‘lowly’.

The naked Truth in many faces shewn,
Whose inward Beauties very few hav known,
A simple Light, transparent Words, a Strain
That lowly creeps, yet maketh Mountains plain,
Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense
And keeps them there; that is Our Excellence:
At that we aim; to th’ end thy Soul might see
With open Eys thy Great *Felicity*,
Its Objects view, and trace the glorious Way
Wherby thou may’st thy Highest Bliss enjoy.

(ll. 1-10)²³

Traherne makes it explicit that his poetic goal is to take things mysterious and hidden and bring them to the ‘simple Light’, bringing ‘down the highest Mysteries to sense’. Line 7 marks the shift from themes of revelation to reception; a turn to the reader: ‘At that we aim; to th’ end thy Soul might see / with Open Eys thy Great *Felicity*’. Traherne’s poetry hits its mark when it displays ‘the highest Mysteries to sense’ – becoming an ‘Object’ of the eyes – but it finds its *telos* in enabling its reader to ‘trace the glorious Way’ toward the enjoyment of its ‘Highest bliss’. This rhythm of ‘highest Mysteries’ to sense to ‘Highest Bliss’ bears a Christological echo when we consider the language Traherne deploys here. Traherne’s language of ‘Truth’, ‘Light’, ‘Word’s’, and ‘see’, bear a close resemblance to the prologue of John’s Gospel. In John 1 we find Jesus called ‘the Word’ (v. 1), ‘the true light’ (v. 9), ‘the Word’ who ‘became flesh and dwelt among us’, ‘full of grace and truth’ (v. 14), for the dual purpose of making known the unseen ‘Father’, and to offer ‘the right to become children of God’ (v. 12). Another player in John’s prologue is John the Baptist. His role – ‘as a man sent from God’ (v. 6) – is ‘to bear witness about the light’ (v. 7), who having served his purpose professes ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’ (John 3:30). If Philip Traherne’s poem above is accurate to Thomas’ own sense of vocation, his poetry should be seen as a herald and witness to a God who images divinity in the person of Christ.

²³ ‘The Author to the Critical Peruser’, 84-6.

John's prologue hints at the humility of Christ's incarnation – that the Word who is God (v. 1), through whom all things are made (v. 3), put on flesh –, but Paul's Christological hymn in Philippians 2 overtly looks to Jesus' self-emptying, or '*kenosis*', as our exemplar of humility. Paul's account of Christ's humility begins with Christ as the form of God, who humbly took on human flesh, and reaches the apex of humility on the cross. But in response to this chosen path of humility God exalts Jesus' name above all other names 'in heaven, on earth and under the earth' (Phil. 2:6-11). I suggest that this understanding of Incarnation provides the theological substructure for Traherne's claim that a humble poetic form contains the highest potentiality to reveal 'inward Beauties' and 'highest Mysteries'.

Additionally, Traherne's humble form bears a beauty most suited to display 'Objects' of felicity to the eyes, and guide the soul to her 'Highest Bliss'. For the poem to be efficacious the 'Objects view[ed]' must bear an aesthetic quality (that mirrors the 'inward Beauties' of 'naked Truth') that they might be desirable objects, for the eyes must be allured not merely informed. Contemplation and allurement are closely aligned in Traherne's thought. In a poem at the end of his entry 'Allurement' in *Commentaries of Heaven*, Traherne connects the two:

Awake my Soul, and soar upon the Wing
Of Sacred Contemplation; for the King
Of Glory woos, he's pleased to allure
Poor feeble Dust!²⁴

Dodd aptly describes these lines as 'both a description of God's manifold expressions of love in creation and a linguistic act of allurement.'²⁵ The content of these lines is clear – God woos and allures the human soul and 'Sacred Contemplation' is the means to be so allured – but the purpose of these lines is to awaken desire for the God who allures, and woo the soul to 'soar upon the Wing / Of Sacred Contemplation'. For Traherne it is the mystery of the hypostatic union that grounds his linguistic aspirations, and his meditation on 'The Cross of Christ' seeks to both illuminate his reader and allure the reader to contemplate the beauty therein:

The Cross of Christ is the Jacob's ladder by which we ascend into the highest heavens. There we see joyful Patriarchs, expecting Saints, Prophets ministering Apostles publishing, and Doctors teaching, all Nations centering, and Angels praising. That Cross is a tree set on fire with invisible flame, that Illuminateth all the world. The flame is Love: the Love of His bosom who died on it. In the light of which we see how to possess all

²⁴ 'Allurement', *Commentaries*, vol. 2, 367-8.

²⁵ Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne's Poetic Theology*, 82.

the things in Heaven and Earth after His similitude. For He that suffered on it was the Son of God as you are: tho' He seemed only a mortal man...²⁶

The cosmic, heavenly and illuminating love of God is nailed to the cross, the highest mysteries are brought down into the form of 'mortal man', that we might 'ascend into the highest heavens'. What seems only a mortal man dying on a cross – a single corporeal object of contemplation – when illuminated by the light of heaven is revealed to be the Son of God with 'Love' in 'His bosom'. The 'poetic prose' seeks to allure the reader to contemplate this single object, for in doing so the soul is allured toward her 'Highest Bliss'.

As 'The Author to the Critical Peruser' continues, Traherne offers an account of a contrasting poetic 'Strain' that differs from his own humble form.

No curling Metaphors that gild the Sence,
Nor Pictures here, nor painted Eloquence;
No florid Streams of Superficial Gems,
But real Crowns & Thrones & Diadems!
That Gold on Gold should hiding shiningly
May well be reckon'd baser Heraldry.

(ll. 11-16)

Contrasting Traherne's own language that is 'simple' and 'transparent', Traherne's opponents use language to gild, paint and hide through excessive intricacy and eloquence. Instead of using poetic form to reveal those things that are hidden, these poets through the excesses of 'curling Metaphors' and 'painted Eloquence' actually make the realities they point to more remote and obscure. Below we will discuss more fully the apparent tensions in Traherne's usage of metaphor while disavowing 'curling Metaphors'. Traherne goes on to say that he will use 'An easy Stile drawn from a native vein, / A clearer Stream than that which poets feign' (ll. 17-18). It is this style that is 'fit to win Esteem', for those 'In Meteors speak, in blazing Prodigies, / Things that amaze, but will not make us wise' (ll. 20, 23-24). In contrast to these, it is truth, wisdom, inward beauty and the like that Traherne professes his style will reveal. To these ends Traherne adds the goal 'To make us Kings indeed! Not verbal Ones, / But reall Kings, exalted unto Thrones [...] / Letting Poetick Strains & Shadows go' (ll. 33-34, 36). It is the 'reall' Traherne seeks to turn his gaze toward, and hence the gaze of his readers. The true sight of these 'Objects' of 'Felicity' offers the promise of 'reall' kingship, with real 'thrones', for as Traherne explains in the *Centuries of Meditation*, you 'are to perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are

²⁶ *Centuries*, I, 60.

in it who are every one sole heirs as well as you.’²⁷ Kingship is already true of humanity, it falls on us to perceive it to be true, and it is the growing purity of his reader’s perception that Traherne’s poetry seeks to enable.

Various attempts have been made to articulate a conceptual context for Traherne’s claims to spurn metaphor, while seemingly deploying it at various points. Cynthia Saenz seeks to locate these statements within ‘the seventeenth-century linguistic debate over the use of metaphor’,²⁸ seeing Traherne as in alignment with ‘the conformist Restoration establishment with its emphasis on religious unity, plain speaking, and antagonism toward metaphor.’²⁹ This ecclesial call for ‘plain speaking’ is also echoed in seventeenth century discussions of natural science. In his 1667 work *The History of the Royal Society* Thomas Sprat lays out the goals of communication of the society to be to ‘Remedy’ the ‘luxury and redundancy of speech’ by returning ‘back to [a] primitive purity’ exacting ‘from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expression; clear senses; a native easiness; bringing all things as the Mathematical plainness, as they can.’³⁰ Though Traherne does seem to show affinity to the *zeitgeist* of his age in his call for linguistic simplicity, he still holds an abiding place for the panoply of literary forms as proper ‘faces’ of ‘naked Truth’. To account for this Alison Sherrington offers a mystical reading:

Although Traherne’s search for a plain style leads him to sweep aside many of the poetic conventions of his day, it is evident even in this poem that he accepts the use of simple conventional symbols; for example, the naked expression of Truth is the “Simple Light” needed to guide the reader along “the glorious Way”. Since mysticism consists in an experience which is in the most literal sense ineffable, the use of symbols is inevitable in mystical writing, and conventional ones would be those most clearly understood by the reader.³¹

Traherne’s usage of metaphorical images within a poem decrying the use of ‘curling Metaphors’, is understood by Sherrington, not as Traherne using metaphor as such, instead utilizing ‘simple conventional symbols’, that would be ‘clearly understood by the reader’. Sherrington’s point affirming Traherne’s desire that his reader would understand is well taken, though muting Traherne’s irony in using metaphor while decrying metaphor by calling

²⁷ *Centuries*, I, 29.

²⁸ Cynthia Saenz, “Thomas Traherne’s View of Language in Restoration England” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1997), 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁰ Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal-Society of London, for the Improving of Natural Knowledge*. (London: printed by TRfor J. Martyn and J. Allestry, 1667), Sect. XX.

³¹ Sherrington, *Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, 4–5.

it symbol seems unhelpful. I suggest (and I will say more to this below) that Traherne's ironic usage of metaphor – and symbol – is precisely because he understands his work to be mystical in nature, mystical in the sense that it finds its *telos* in mystical union with God. Seen in this light, what Traherne does is less ironic, and more of an attack on the customary conventions of the lyric form. Traherne's problem with his contemporaries is that their poetry uses 'curling Metaphor' to induce an idolatrous delight in the finite poetic object itself, bringing glory to themselves and their 'Poetick Strains' instead of awakening the delight of and for God through the enjoyment of the crafted object. The poetic object may be beautifully adorned, but it fails to function as a clear mirror of our 'Highest Bless' if the language invites the reader to terminate their desire in the object itself.

For our current purposes, Carol Johnston's Petrarchan reading is most valuable for the matter at hand. Johnston locates Traherne's introductory poem in an ongoing debate about 'the use of metaphor in the tradition of Petrarch and the English anti-Petrarchan tradition.'³² Johnston sees in Traherne's emphasis on sight and objectification a fusion of poetic and painting theory. She locates Traherne's aesthetic theory amid poetic disputes stemming from the style handed down by the Italian Renaissance poet, Petrarch (1301-1374), and the painting theories of linear perspective: 'This exchange with poetics and painting results in Traherne's forging a unique poetic language, one predicated upon the non-representational metaphor'.³³ Johnston sees that Traherne 'argues for metaphor with literally no distance between subject and comparison. "Things" simply appear in his poems, he argues, in non-referential language.'³⁴ It might be most fitting, following Johnston, to speak of Traherne's poetry as literary objects crafted to replicate the immediate experience of sight. Other commentators seem to hit on a similar theme in Traherne. Barbara Lewalski suggests that in Traherne's 'incantatory list[s]' of 'beauties or joys or glories' there is a hope that 'such naming will call forth the essence of the things.'³⁵ Alison Karshaw sees that in Traherne's effort to reveal naked Truth and inward beauties he practices 'simple and unadorned acts of naming', which are 'often completely bare of adjectives.'³⁶ In a similar vein A. L. Clements

³² Carol Ann Johnston, "Heavenly Perspectives, Mirrors of Eternity: Thomas Traherne's Yearning Subject," *Criticism* 43, no. 4 (October 1, 2001): 379.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Johnston, "Heavenly Perspectives, Mirrors of Eternity," 382.

³⁵ Barbara K. Lewalski, "Thomas Traherne: Naked Truth, Transparent Words, and the Renunciation of Metaphor," in *John Donne and the Seventeenth-Century Metaphysical Poets*, ed. Harold Bloom, Modern Critical Views (New York: Chelsea House, n.d.), 356.

³⁶ Karshaw, "The Poetic of the Cosmic Christ in Thomas Traherne's The Kingdom of God," 285.

of verse to divine creation, thus linking his own act of creation with the divine *poesis*.³⁹ This shift is alluded to in the first line: ‘naked Truth in many faces shewn’. For Traherne, creation is the many-faced manifestation of the transcendent God, the plenitude that flows forth from divine simplicity. Sherrington sums up Traherne’s poetic vocation with relation to this truth: ‘For Traherne, the true poet is one who sees Truth naked and presents it naked, though “in many faces shewn” (l. 1). He is one who leads his reader to find the One in the many, to share his vision of God immanent in all things and of all things thus united in God.’⁴⁰ In Traherne’s estimation, however, there are many who use poetry as a means to win esteem for themselves as opposed to looking to the divine *poesis*. Traherne uses a rich layering of complex images to develop the contrast between his poetry and others, by deploying the metaphor of nakedness and clothing.

I cannot imitate their vulgar Sence
 Who Cloaths admire, but not the Man they fence
 Against the Cold; and while they wonder at
 His rings, his precious Stones, his Gold & Plate;
 The middle piece, his Body & his Mind,
 They over=look; no Beauty in them find:
 God’s Works they slight, their *own* they magnify,
His they condemn, or careless pass them by;
 Their woven Silks & wel=made Suits they prize,
 Valu their Gems, but not more precious Eys:
 Their Useful Hands, their Tongues & Ruby Lips, [...]
 Nor yet the *Soul*, in whose concealed Face,
 Which comprehendeth all unbounded Space,
(ll.37-47,55-56)⁴¹

In his diatribe against certain poets who seem more interested in style or eloquence, Traherne reminds the reader that his poetry seeks to display the ‘naked Truth in many faces shewn’. The superficial clothing only acts to distract whereas the contemplation of naked creation (in all its ‘faces’) properly orients the mind to truth. The primary distinction between the image of a face and of clothing is that the face is intrinsically linked to truth and acts as a manifestation of truth, while clothing covers and conceals, drawing attention to itself over and above the object it hides. For Traherne, however, the true poetic vocation is to craft

³⁹ Elizabeth Dodd suggests that ‘a poetic approach to Traherne’s theology pays attention to *poesis* and so finds it the creative use of language a conversation with the creator God.’ Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne’s Poetic Theology*, 21.

⁴⁰ Sherrington, *Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, 4.

⁴¹ ‘The Author to the Critical Peruser’, 85.

objects that, like ‘faces’, point beyond themselves to the divine craftsmanship, and the God they mirror.

Traherne gives us a picture of what should be the soul’s orientation to the external and internal beauty of the human person in his *Centuries of Meditation*:

Suppose a curious and fair woman. Some have seen the beauties of Heaven in such a person. It is a vain thing to say they loved too much. I dare say there are ten thousand beauties in that creature which they have not seen: They loved it not too much, but upon false causes. Nor so much upon false ones, as only upon some little ones. They love a creature for sparkling eyes and curled hair, lily breasts and ruddy cheeks which they should love moreover for being God’s image, Queen of the Universe, beloved by Angels, redeemed by Jesus Christ... But these excellencies are unknown. They love her perhaps, but do not love God more: nor men as much: nor Heaven and Earth at all. And so, being defective to other things, perish by a seeming excess to that...⁴²

The Truly discerning lover sees the ‘beauties of Heaven’ in the ‘fair woman’ before his eyes. Love is defective when it narrows its gaze to appearance and fails to penetrate to the essence of a thing, or more accurately, fails to see the beautiful object in relation to God, an image of God, and beloved of God. In the same way, the poet that seeks to display their poetic skill through the excessive clothing (or ‘curling metaphor’), obscures the many faces of ‘naked Truth’ through its ‘painted Eloquence’. Instead of leading the reader to ‘trace the glorious Way’ to their ‘Highest Bliss’, the ‘florid Streams of Superficial Gems’ invites a superficial enjoyment of the beautiful and finite object itself, severed from its ontological depth in God. For Traherne, however, it is the beatific vision shining within and through the finite object that is to be discerned, that the divine face might beckon the soul through its ‘many faces shewn’.

Traherne’s oeuvre does not simply consist of poetry, for it seems one literary genre was insufficient to illumine ‘The naked Truth in many faces shewn’. Regarding his prose works, Stanley Stewart notices in Traherne an ‘additive and dramatic’ form that he terms an ‘open form’, which utilizes repetition that has an ‘incantatory, almost numinous effect’:

Traherne piles up the words and phrases, taking pains to proliferate synonyms, as if the mere weight of the word itself ... were enough to summon forth the essence of the universe in this small part.⁴³

Stewart sees in Traherne’s prose what many above perceived in his poetry, his final claim echoing Traherne’s understanding of the relation existing between the particular object (‘small part’, ‘many faces’) and its ontological rootedness in God (‘naked Truth’, ‘essence of

⁴² *Centuries*, II, 68.

⁴³ Stewart, *The Expanded Voice*, 70–71.

the universe'). The proliferation of genres mirror Traherne's belief that it is fitting for the simplicity of 'naked Truth' to be made known through 'many faces'. What Stewart and others show is that many of the literary goals found in the poetry are also present in Traherne's many prose works. I agree with Jennings – echoing T. S. Eliot – who discerns poetry within Traherne's prose: 'Eliot has indicated that literature may often be genuinely poetic even when it is not presented in the forms of conventional verse.'⁴⁴

In using the paradoxical phrase 'open form' to describe Traherne's literary form, Stewart identifies a paradoxical element in Traherne's usage of form and genre. When Traherne professes to disavow both 'curling Metaphor' and 'Poetick Strain' in a poem articulating his poetic vocation, he shows an ambivalence to what might be understood as the customary rules that govern genre. Speaking of Traherne's poetry, Dauber sees Traherne rejecting genre as such: 'Traherne, flatly refusing to fashion his poems into objects, largely eschews the historical genres that will give them ready-made shapes...Traherne defeats genre...[and] is so determined to keep his poems from assuming fixed shapes that he blocks new genres from emerging.'⁴⁵ The result for Dauber, is that Traherne breaks the contract between writer and reader that genre provides, thus severing any connection between Traherne's poetry and an audience: '[Traherne's poems] address no one, are spoken into space rather than at an audience.'⁴⁶ I agree with Dauber's claim that Traherne eschews the customary rules associated with genre, thus refusing to allow his poems to become *mere object*, but reject the claim that his poems are thus shape-less and audience-less. Instead, Traherne refuses to make his poems into *generic* objects, precisely because he wants them to function as contemplative objects and his way of doing this involves eschewing convention to push the reader beyond immediate appearances, i.e. beyond the surface forms they will be familiar with. In transgressing the customary rules associated with genre, Traherne does not 'defeat genre', he invites the reader to refrain from terminating their enjoyment in the immediate appearances of the finite object and instead, through contemplation, to find the signified within (through, beneath and behind) the signifier.

We set out at the beginning of this section to trace some of the major contours of Traherne's literary and aesthetic theory. What I have begun to argue is that to see his literary theory as an aesthetic theory is fitting, for what Traherne seeks to do in his poetry and prose

⁴⁴ Jennings, *Every Changing Shape*, 84.

⁴⁵ Dauber, "Thomas Traherne and the Poetics of Object Relations," 120.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

is to craft literary objects of contemplation, that are most properly received as contemplative objects of sight. As a visionary craftsman of poetry and prose, however, Traherne reveals a certain ambivalence to his own sense of literary vocation. In one sense, he conceives that his poetry and poetic prose bear the lofty capacity to bring ‘down the highest Mysteries to sense’, but ironically for Traherne, this is most successfully done when some of the customary components of the poetic genre are marginalized (i.e. ‘curling metaphor’) for the sake of ‘simple’, ‘transparent’ and ‘lowly’ words. Echoing the Christological reality that the incarnate Word humbly took on the form of a servant that he might image the transcendent Father in corporeal flesh, Traherne understood the ‘highest Mysteries’ to be most suitably manifest in a lowly form. What we will notice in this and in future chapters is that, though these literary objects of contemplation are said to be manifest in simple and transparent words, there is an inherent aesthetic quality to them. As objects of beauty, Traherne’s poetry and prose have an attractive quality, they allure as they illumine. There is genuine purpose in Traherne’s work, and beauty plays an important role. Malcolm Day argues that in Traherne’s *Christian Ethicks* he ‘attempts to change the reader into a new self by presenting him with so vast and irresistibly attractive a vision that he will be turned into perfect love and knowledge.’⁴⁷ Day’s comments sidestep Traherne’s understanding of the rigours of virtue, but Traherne’s goal of presenting an attractive vision of the virtuous life is duly noted. In this we see Traherne offering to his reader’s sight ‘Objects’ of ‘Felicity’ that are charged with ‘inward Beauties,’ that once seen, allure the soul to ‘trace the glorious Way’ to their ‘Highest Bliss.’ Traherne’s objects are simple that they might be accessible and revelatory, and beautiful that they might attract desire and move the will. In future chapters, we will examine the metaphysical realities of beauty as they pertain to God, creation and the allurements of humankind. The task at hand is to discern these dynamics within the objects of his literary form. To further elucidate how Traherne understood the efficacy of the written word to move the desiring soul, this chapter will locate him amid a broader and longer discussion regarding literary form, its capacity to reveal truth and its role in moving the soul.

1.2. Literary Form and Truth

In the third century of *Centuries of Meditation* Traherne articulates his spiritual autobiography; retelling his own experience of fall from original innocence into the customs

⁴⁷ Malcolm M. Day, *Thomas Traherne* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 43.

of this world, his return to God by the gracious aid of God, and his *telos*, characterized by the fruition of our nature in glory and full communion with God in the beatific vision. In this ‘return’ Traherne is drawn along by his insatiable desire for felicity, and ‘implicit faith in God’s goodness.’⁴⁸ In this state he learns that all things created are good in their place, namely ‘in Eternity and in God’s Esteem,’⁴⁹ and that the most ubiquitous things of nature most clearly express God’s infinite goodness: ‘For nothing is more natural to infinite goodness, than to make the best things most frequent; and only things worthless scare.’⁵⁰ Denise Inge finds a principle in Traherne that ‘real treasure is judged to be so by its ubiquity, its utility and its simplicity.’⁵¹ Just as the ubiquitous, useful and simple things of creation are to be highly valued (‘Air, Light, Heaven and Earth, Water, the Sun, Trees’)⁵² and contemplated, Traherne’s literature as a mimetic art seeks to be useful and through the usage of simple language that manifests the ‘naked Truth’ in its ‘many faces’.

Along with the contemplation of the goodness and beauty of creation, Traherne’s desire for felicity leads him to the Bible, and therein finds another man who shared his same theological vision. In the midst of thinking no other ‘man in the world had had such thoughts before’, Traherne sees ‘clearly in the person of David’⁵³ his own natural impulses to experience communion with God in creation.

1.2.1. Poetic Mimesis and King David

For Traherne, David functions as the ideal man and exemplar of his theological poetics. In meditation 69 of the third century Traherne turns from meditation to poetry to express the glorious life of David. The poem begins ‘In Salem dwelt a glorious King, / Raised from a shepherd’s lowly state;’ who ‘By many great and bloody wars / He was advanced unto Thrones / but more delighted in the stars.’ We see Traherne juxtaposing ‘Salem’ (Hebrew for ‘Peace’) with ‘bloody wars’ and contrasting the tempting delights of ‘precious stones’ or ‘gold and silver’ with David’s greater ‘delight in the stars’ for ‘The Words of God were his sublime reward’. In stanza 2, the poem continues to praise David for

⁴⁸ *Centuries*, III, 53.

⁴⁹ *Centuries*, III, 55.

⁵⁰ *Centuries*, III, 53.

⁵¹ Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 94.

⁵² *Centuries*, III, 53.

⁵³ *Centuries*, III, 66.

spurning the typical trappings of kingship, the ‘fading honours, and false pleasures / Which are by mortals so much prized;’ and instead ‘placed his happiness in other treasures’: divine pleasures. Stanza 3 explores David’s capacity as musician, creating songs of worship that ‘filled all the Jewish quire’. David’s greatest treasure, however, was ‘in a silent night to see / The moon and Stars’ for ‘Enflam’d with Love it was his great desire, / To sing, contemplate, ponder, and admire.’ The contemplative gaze at creation is where Traherne sees his greatest kinship with the Hebrew king. After exploring David’s capacity as ‘prophet’, ‘judge’, ‘sage’ stanza 4 again locates his greatest enjoyment when he ‘Did as a poet praise the Deity.’ Stanza 5 provides a summation of David’s greatness as a poet and divine. The stanza begins with one of what Lewalski calls Traherne’s ‘incantatory list[s]’⁵⁴:

A shepherd, soldier, and divine,
A judge, a courtier, and a king,
Priest, angel, prophet, oracle, did shine
At once when he did sing.
Philosopher and poet too
Did in his melody appear;
All these in him did please the view
Of those that did his heavenly music hear
And every drop that from his flowing quill
Came down, did all the world with nectar fill⁵⁵

In the exercising of his poetic vocation David created ‘heavenly music’ that bore the marks of all his various capacities. This catalogue of Davidic roles can be especially instructive, for in it Traherne affirms that within the poetic genre David acts as ‘Priest, angel, prophet,’ and ‘oracle’, all four roles carrying the general purpose of mediation. The angel is a divine messenger, the prophet is the mouthpiece of God, the oracle is acquainted with transcendent realities and the Priest calls God’s people to respond to God’s heavenly communications through praise and worship. David not only mediates directly from the Divine to human, he also mediates a proper and divine view of creation to the dull human person. In stanza 6 David is said to have ‘had a deep and perfect sense / Of all the glories and the pleasures / That in God’s works are hid’ for ‘Sense did his soul with heavenly life inspire,’ and in stanza 7 he is said to have a ‘clear soul and open sight / Among the Sons of God’. The clarity of David’s soul and sight imbue his physical senses with a capacity for pleasure unavailable to others, and in the Psalms David is seeking to draw others into his heavenly vision. Traherne

⁵⁴ Lewalski, “Thomas Traherne: Naked Truth, Transparent Words, and the Renunciation of Metaphor,” 356.

⁵⁵ *Centuries*, III, 69.

concludes his poem in stanza 8 with a final statement of Davidic capacity and a personal aspiration of imitation

All arts he then did exercise;
And as his God he did adore
By secret ravishments above the skies
He carried was before
He died. His soul did see and feel
What others know not: and became,
While he before his God did kneel,
A constant, heavenly, pure, seraphic flame.
Oh that I might unto his throne aspire,
And all his joys above the stars admire.⁵⁶

The ‘heavenly, pure, seraphic flame’ that David was, inspires Traherne to ‘aspire’ to the same. This Trahernian longing – as we will see more clearly as we discuss Traherne’s usage of the pronoun ‘I’ in a later section – carries with it the implied invitation for the reader to also enter into this same Davidic vision of the world. What this stanza also exemplifies is Traherne’s understanding of ‘All arts he then did exercise’ as somehow manifestations of the ‘secret ravishments above the skies’. Poetry’s capacity to bring ‘down the highest Mysteries to sense’ in *The Author to the Critical Peruser* (l. 5), is seemingly expanded to all arts.

In the following meditation Traherne returns to the meditation genre and explores further his encounter with the person of David. In this passage, we see that Traherne goes beyond the desire to see and enjoy as David did, for here he ‘perceived that [they] were led by one Spirit’.

When I saw those objects celebrated in his psalms which God and Nature had proposed to me, and which I thought chance only presented to my view, you cannot imagine how unspeakably I was delighted, to see so glorious a person, so great a prince, so divine a sage, that was a man after God’s own heart, by the testimony of God Himself, rejoicing in the same things, meditating on the same, and praising God for the same. For by this I perceived we were led by one Spirit, and that following the clue of Nature into this labyrinth, I was brought into the midst of celestial joys: and that to be retired from earthly cares and fears and distractions that we might in sweet and heavenly peace contemplate all the Works of God, was to live in Heaven, and the only way to become what David was, a man after God’s own heart.⁵⁷

David’s contemplative gaze toward the ‘Works of God’ sanction the very move of Traherne to follow the ‘clue of Nature’ and contemplate nature as a means to commune with God and ‘live in Heaven’. The notion of being ‘led by one Spirit’ could carry with it both the sense of being kindred spirits with David, as well as the notion of being led by the same Spirit, namely

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *Centuries*, III. 70

the Holy Spirit. As was mentioned above David functions as the idealized man for Traherne, one he longs to imitate further. This Trahernian longing to imitate David is far from an isolated impulse. It can be understood more clearly when compared to larger English Renaissance and Early Modern notions of poetic mimesis.

Ben Jonson's notebook *Discoveries* (published posthumously in 1641) provides a helpful starting point in locating mimesis in early modern English poetic thought.

The third requisite in our poet, or maker [after natural wit and exercise] is imitation, to be able to convert the substance, or riches of another poet, to his own use. To make choice of one excellent man above the rest, and so to follow him, till he grow very he: or, so like him, as the copy may be mistaken for the principle. (ll. 3056-3062)⁵⁸

Michael Ponsford contends that Traherne's 'poetic method fulfils exactly the demand of the most important literary genre in Restoration period, the formal Imitation.'⁵⁹ Jonson's words above were typically applied to the imitation of classical authors, but Traherne 'uses David as a model in much the same way.'⁶⁰ Traherne is not alone in his praise of David's divine poetry, for in *An Apology for Poetry*, Sir Philip Sidney also deems the Psalms 'chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the unconceived excellence of God.'⁶¹ David's imitation of God's creation in the Psalms makes him a prime poetic exemplar for it was understood that 'a poet whose art truly mirrored nature had an immediacy and relevance to all ages, rather than a limited application to the poet's own age.'⁶² There are two levels of mimesis here. Traherne looks to David as his literary exemplar, finding in David the perfect expression of literature's ability to translate the ineffable within the realm of poetic objects. In this way, David plays the role of mediator. Additionally, David functions as exemplar of a true contemplation of God within God's creation. As a Psalmist, David crafts liturgical objects of contemplation used to draw Israel into the praise of God; as a lover, David is ravished by divine contemplations as he discerns God in the objects of creation. What Traherne lauds in David, and attempts to embody in his own work is the perpetual gesture toward creation, the divine work.

Ponsford argues that utilizing the Psalms as Traherne's primary mimetic referent allowed him a form to express his 'mystical ascent toward felicity' without the threat of

⁵⁸ Ben Jonson, *The Complete Poems*, Penguin classics (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 448.

⁵⁹ Michael Ponsford, "Men after God's Own Heart : The Context of Thomas Traherne's Emulation of David," *Studia Mystica* 9, no. 4 (December 1, 1986): 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 5.

censure in an age suspicious of religious enthusiasm.’⁶³ Admitting the Bible’s protective role in sanctioning Traherne’s thought must not distract from the greater reality that his oeuvre does reflect his primary debt to the Bible; especially the Psalms and the Pauline corpus. In general, the exaltation of David and the imitation of his poetry was part of Traherne’s desire to commune with the ancient author. Ponsford sees his aim as ‘the spiritual fusion of his own personality with that of David,’ for the discovery of David was ‘really the discovery of a second self, allowing their personalities to merge.’⁶⁴ In David, Traherne discovered a glorious example that he might imitate in both his impulse to ‘contemplate all the Works of God’ and express those contemplations in verse, and therefore to become like David ‘a man after God’s own heart.’

In the meditations following the poem to David, Traherne explores various Davidic psalms that show David contemplating the ‘Works of God’ and humankind’s place in those works. Some of Traherne’s primary theological emphases are presented in these psalms: humankind’s exalted place in God’s creation (Psalm 8), God’s character expressed in his creation and his laws (Psalm 19), the injunction to praise God in response to his self-communication in his acts (Psalm 22); amongst others.⁶⁵ In chapter two we look to Traherne’s metaphysics to articulate how God expresses God-self in creation, but the fact that God does this is of utmost importance to Traherne.

...there are many Sublime and Celestial Services which the World doth do. It is a Glorious Mirror wherein you may see the verity of all Religion: Enjoy the Remainders of Paradice and Talk with the Dietie. Apply yourself Vigorously to the Enjoyment of it. For in it you shall see the face of God: and by Enjoying it, be wholly Converted to Him.⁶⁶

The self-revelatory nature of creation – ‘*The Heavens declare the glory of God...*’⁶⁷ – theologically and philosophically grounds Traherne’s spiritual impulse to contemplate creation, and following David, explore the capacity of language to mirror this divine communication to his reader. Mimesis of the creation makes sense for Traherne, because ‘in it you shall see the face of God’.

⁶³ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁵ *Centuries*, III, 71-94.

⁶⁶ *Centuries*, II, 17.

⁶⁷ Psalm 19 as quoted in *C. III*, 72.

As in other places, these twenty-three meditations from century three reveal Traherne's 'additive and dramatic'⁶⁸ style, adding psalm upon psalm to express his point. The sheer volume of evidence from the psalms echoes the rhetoric of Erasmus in *De Copia* (or *De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia*) where we see the Dutch humanist espousing the rhetorical form of fullness, plenitude and the practice of exploring a variety of ways to say the same thing. This layering of quotes from the Psalms seems to provide both rhetorical waves of naked Truth, while also communicating Traherne's indebtedness to the Bible (especially the Psalter) for his content and most assuredly his poetic form. Commenting on the *Centuries* Stewart states, 'when at its best, Traherne's prose conveys a sense of onrush, as if the speaker is inundated by a tide of thoughts, which overflow the restraints of the English period.' This fullness and plenitude that overflows in Traherne's prose both reveals an inner overflow of Traherne's own soul, while echoing Erasmus' rhetorical form of fullness; both being mimetic of God's self-expression of divine simplicity in the plenitude of created objects. As we saw above, the primary restraint Traherne places on his mimetic, 'additive and dramatic' style is that his language would be transparent, functioning as a mirror not an idol. An idol invites the veneration of the object itself, while Traherne's mirroring objects invite an enjoyment of the object, as it were, in God.

The polyphonic nature of the Bible carries forth into written text the idea expressed above that creation is divine self-expression in a multitude of form. The usage of various genres and multitude of voices express a dynamic text meant to engage the reader from every possible angle with divine Truth. Both in David and in the Bible as a whole we find Traherne encouraged to seek God's naked Truth in all His works, in its many faces. According to Traherne the 'Bible was His book from Heaven',⁶⁹ the location for God's direct communication with the created. One might see an echo of this in Traherne's belief that his poetic form seeks to express 'The naked Truth in many faces shewn.' The Bible reveals a layered text, and if Traherne is right about its divine origin, it reveals a God eager to utilize a vast array of genres and human voices to express truth in its 'many faces'. David Ford, in his book *Christian Wisdom*, sees in scripture not merely a location of revelation but a location of divine allurements, acting on the heart and imagination, as well as the mind. Ford finds this same quality in Traherne's prose:

If Christian wisdom is concerned to correspond thoughtfully, in many "moods", to God and God's purposes, the desire for this needs to be aroused; the heart and

⁶⁸ Stewart, *The Expanded Voice*, 70.

⁶⁹ *Centuries*, III, 32.

imagination must be moved as well as the mind. Here the narrative and the poetry of scripture come into their own, together with the sort of prose exemplified by Thomas Traherne. Concepts and metaphors play off each other to evoke the desirability and riches of wisdom and the God of wisdom... Heart and mind are educated together and are stretched to engage passionately in their own search for wisdom.⁷⁰

What Ford suggests is that the biblical text carries within the interworking of form and content the potentiality for a holistic encounter with its reader; arousing the desire and shaping the imagination as much as informing the mind. I agree with Ford's assessment, that Traherne's own prose bears this same intended *telos*, namely to arouse desire, or more precisely 'to evoke the desirability and riches of wisdom and the God of wisdom.' Taking his cue from creation, the Bible, and King David in particular, Traherne's poetic prose seeks to evoke the 'inward Beauties' of 'naked Truth' revealed in its 'many faces' (or many objects, be they literary, biblical or created), that their latent desirability might be seen, enjoyed and allure the reader to their 'Highest Bliss'. As will become clear in Chapter 3, Traherne understood this allurements in the broadest possible terms: including the bodily senses, the imagination, the mind, the will and the heart.

In classical literature, we see continued engagement with the question of the interaction of form and content – more specifically the relation of poetry and truth –, and we can affirm with certainty that Traherne's humanist education would have informed him of this history. In the following section, we extend our exploration of form and content beyond the Bible into the classic disagreement between Plato and Aristotle as to the capacity of poetry as a form capable of revealing truth.

1.2.2. Poetry and Truth: 'The naked Truth in many faces shewn'

Traherne tells us in the *Centuries* that during his education at Oxford he was taught the subjects of 'Logic, Ethics, Physics, Metaphysics, Geometry, Astronomy, Poesy, Medicine, Grammar, Music, Rhetoric all kinds of Arts, Trades, and Mechanisms,' and was later taught that all these that 'adorned the world pertained to felicity.'⁷¹ This vast array of subjects is in no way problematic to Traherne for they all have a place in his vision of felicity, however, the deficiency arose in the fact that he had no tutor that could relate all of

⁷⁰ David Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, Cambridge studies in Christian doctrine; 16 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

⁷¹ *Centuries*, III, 36. This list is a good example of Traherne's cataloguing style, a style, as we have observed, is later used in his glorification of King David, the quintessential 'Renaissance man'.

these to his primary desire for happiness.⁷² In this list we see subjects that at times were historically at odds. Plato and Aristotle held divergent views regarding the efficacy of poetry to reveal truth. Victor Hamm describes this in the following way:

[Plato] denied poetry any claim to truth, in both the logical and the moral senses of the word: —the logical, because poetry, according to him, imitates an imitation of reality and is thus thrice removed from the truth of the Ideas; the moral, because poetry is a lie, a fiction that “feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up.” Aristotle was the better philosopher here. He saw that poetry grew out of man’s mimetic and harmonic instincts, and that, though dealing in fictions, it was akin to philosophy in its adumbrations of the universal: “Poetry, therefore, is more philosophical than history, for poetry tends to express the universal, while history describes the particular.”⁷³

Though Aristotle does deal with lyric poetry in his *Poetics*, his primary referent in the section quoted (Chapter 9) is the poetry of ‘stories or Plots’: namely the fictions of ‘Comedy’ and ‘Tragedy’. With the similar point of reference, Plato wrote in a culture immersed in the epic poetry of Homer, and was concerned that poetry, unexamined by reason, could move the soul toward the vicious life. In the *Republic* Plato states: ‘there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry’.⁷⁴ What constitutes an ironic twist for Plato, however, was that he places his critique of mimesis (or imitation) in the mouth of Socrates, the great protagonist in his favored genre; the dialogue. The ironic move to place a critique of mimesis for its obscuring nature in the mouth of one other than oneself; a fundamental mimetic act.⁷⁵ One commentator remarks:

Plato's remarkable philosophical rhetoric incorporates elements of poetry. Most obviously, his dialogues are dramas with several formal features in common with much tragedy and comedy (for example, the use of authorial irony, the importance of plot, setting, the role of individual character and the interplay between *dramatis personae*). No character called “Plato” ever says a word in his texts. His works also narrate a number of myths, and sparkle with imagery, simile, allegory, and snatches of meter and rhyme.⁷⁶

Plato’s dialogues reveal the literary genius of their creator. Form and content work together not only to inform but to affect change in his readers, to move them toward the Good as articulated by Socrates, the lover of wisdom.

⁷² *Centuries*, III, 37.

⁷³ Victor M. Hamm, *Language, Truth & Poetry* (Marquette University Press, 1960), 53–54.

⁷⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 607b5-6.

⁷⁵ For a helpful discussion in locating Plato’s views on poetry both in his historical setting and the ways by which he utilizes poetic conceits to argue his point see Charles L. Griswold, “Plato on Rhetoric and Poetry,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2014., 2014.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

In response to Plato's apparent denigration of poetry, Sir Philip Sidney, in *An Apology for Poetry*, offers a similar retort,

But now indeed my burden is great; now Plato's name is laid upon me, whom I must confess, of all philosophers I have ever esteemed most worthy of reverence, and with great reason, since of all philosophers he is the most poetical.⁷⁷

For Sidney, what Plato banishes from his *Republic*, is not the poet as such, but the abuses and false doctrine of the poets,⁷⁸ and retains the poetic form for its capacity to teach and move to virtue.

For if it be, as I affirm, that no learning is good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue, and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as Poetry, then it is the conclusion manifest that ink and paper cannot be to a more profitable purpose employed.⁷⁹

Sidney's belief in the efficacy of poetry to move the will toward virtue – identifying Plato's primary attack on poetry as an attack on the abuses of some – provides a Renaissance antecedent to Traherne's own understanding of the place of poetry in rousing the will toward virtue. We will pick this thread up below.

Traherne's own critique of 'Poetic Strain' and 'curling Metaphor' in the midst of a poem expressing the lofty capacities of poetry does bear some resemblance to Plato's own ironic move. If Plato's remarks about poetry are primarily directed at the cultural hegemony of the epic poetry of Homer, Traherne's remarks seem to be directed at poets whose use of poetic conventions (possibly Petrarchan) have buried truth to the point of inaccessibility within their baroque form. Traherne's personal lyric poetry seems distant from Plato's critique of epic poetry and Aristotle's praise of comedy and tragedy for their capacity to express the universal, but I would suggest that it is the interaction of the particular (lyric) and the universal (epic) that constitutes an important feature in Traherne's literary theory.

J. Neville Ward, in a book on devotional writing makes the following claim about lyrical poetry:

Poetry is the kind of language in which a whole situation is presented and its feeling communicated, so that you know what it means to see a certain segment of reality with your whole feeling self, to contemplate a person or an object sympathetically enough for it to exercise its full force upon you. Pages of prose could be written to set out what Blake's poem 'The Sick Rose' is about, but, however full such treatment might be, something, indeed the all-important thing, eludes that procedure. You can

⁷⁷ Philip Sidney, *An Apology For Poetry (Or The Defence Of Poesy): Revised and Expanded Second Edition*, ed. R. W. Maslen (Manchester University Press, 2002), 106.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 102.

find the poem real, and presumably share something at any rate of the experience of the poet, only by living encounter. You have simply to read the poem and you will come face to face with it.⁸⁰

For Ward, as for Traherne, poetry is especially suited to portray reality as from a single vantage point, the experience of a single subject. What the poet produces is something irreducible, an object only to be known through living encounter. Poetry invites a sympathetic and contemplative encounter, that the ‘full force’ of this particular segment of reality might encounter my ‘whole feeling self’. For Rowan Williams, the poet bears a unique capacity to express truth, in all its harsh realities, while also remaining open to the hope of grace: ‘The hope of grace cannot absolve us from that fanatical attention to *particulars*, to what the world is, to the linguistic past, without which our notions of “experience” and “reality” will be cheap and trivial.’⁸¹ Williams’ emphasis on the harshness of the ‘*particulars*’ seems distant from Traherne’s general optimism and blissful ignorance of the ‘infant eyes’ – or as Ellrodt has claimed Traheren’s ‘solipsistic illusion’⁸² – but he does show a fanatical attention to ‘*particulars*’. These particulars, however, have been somehow transfigured in the light of heaven, as they mirror the divine: ‘You never enjoy the world aright, till you see how a sand exhibiteth the wisdom and power of God’.⁸³ For Traherne, the true contemplative look at or the look within is inherently a look toward God: ‘For as in Water, the face of Heaven is represented; so is the Nature of God in the Soul of Man’.⁸⁴ This theological notion that all is transfigured and seen aright when seen in the light of heaven, shapes the type of poetic objects of contemplation Traherne produced, but leaves him open to the charge that his particular segment of reality may in fact appear ‘cheap and trivial’.

Ben Quash, following Han Ur von Balthasar, seems to strike a similar tone as Williams, as he argues with von Balthasar that drama bears a superior capacity to lyrical poetry to express truth and reality.

Von Balthasar says that th[e] “lyricism” [exemplified in J. Neville Ward] results in a “romanticism remote from reality” and in the Church produces a pious but largely “affective” theology. Drama’s appropriateness to the expression of Christian

⁸⁰ J. Neville Ward, *The Following Plough* (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 111.

⁸¹ Rowan Williams, “Poetic and Religious Imagination,” *Theology* 80, no. 675 (May 1977): 185.

⁸² Robert. Ellrodt, *Seven Metaphysical Poets*, 91.

⁸³ *Centuries*, I, 27.

⁸⁴ *Seeds of Eternity*, vol. 1, 233.

theology, meanwhile, is demonstrated in the interaction of individual (lyric) persons with one another, and with the collectively-held content of Christian faith.⁸⁵

Though Traherne has often been described as a proto-romantic, he would understand his descriptions of childhood apprehensions as the most rooted in reality: ‘So those things would appear to us only which do to children when they are first born. Ambitions, trades, luxuries, inordinate affections, casual and accidental riches invented since the fall, would be gone, and only those things appear, which did in Adam in Paradise...Every man naturally seeing those things, to the enjoyment of which he is naturally born’.⁸⁶ As emblems of pure apprehension, Traherne will continually turn to Adam and the infant as objects of contemplation, with the expressed purpose of ‘prepar[ing] the senses’ to see truly: ‘Every one provideth objects, but few prepare senses wherby, and the light wherein, to see them.’⁸⁷ Traherne’s poetic instinct to transform apprehensions, rather than express raw reality, as it were ‘since the fall’ seems to echo Paul’s admonition to the Philippians: ‘Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.’⁸⁸ As for lyric poetry producing ‘largely affective theology’, Traherne’s poetry bears this out. Being mimetic of divine love, which ‘hath been doing all things to awaken and allure us to Good Works’,⁸⁹ Traherne’s poetry and poetic prose seeks to ‘allure the affections to love God’. Elizabeth Dodd articulates this perfectly in a section heading dealing with this subject: ‘Alluring the Soul: An Affective Theological Poetics’.⁹⁰ Traherne’s contemplative objects, which at first might seem naïve, or a ‘solipsistic illusion’,⁹¹ as Ellrodt describes them, are for Traherne, both more ‘natural’ (more descriptive of reality) and more truly alluring. The contemplation of the true, the good and the beautiful both cleanses the apprehensions and ‘allure[s] us to Good Works’. For Sidney, the poet’s goal is to both ‘delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach, to

⁸⁵ Ben Quash, “Real Enactment: The Role of Drama in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *Faithful Performances*, ed. Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 23.

⁸⁶ *Centuries*, III, 5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁸ Phil. 4:8 (Authorized Version)

⁸⁹ *A Sober View*, 59.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne’s Poetic Theology*, 81.

⁹¹ Robert. Ellrodt, *Seven Metaphysical Poets*, 91.

make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved'.⁹² Sidney's goals of delighting, teaching and moving the soul align closely with Traherne's own.

If Traherne's lyric hones in on the *particular*, inviting the reader to see God and all things in the mirror of the grain of sand or the human soul, Traherne also shows affinity to the totalizing picture presented in prose, philosophy and epic poetry. Traherne's *The Ceremonial Law* is an epic poem that traces the history of Israel from Adam to Moses, especially the sojourn in the wilderness. Reflecting both Aristotle's understanding of epic in the *Poetics*, and the Renaissance epic (especially that of Milton), Dodd sees that epic 'is apparent in a totalising tendency that is found in the projects of universal synthesis: *The Kingdom of God*, *Commentaries of Heaven*, *Centuries of Meditation* and *The Ceremonial Law*'.⁹³ However, Traherne's poetic impulse perpetually leans toward the lyric, causing these works of 'universal synthesis' to be shot through with the immediacy of Traherne's own intense personal experience. This interplay of epic and lyric elements can be seen in Traherne's playful exploration of the language of heirship in the *Centuries of Meditation*:

You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars: and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are in it who are every one sole heirs as well as you.⁹⁴

What begins as the lyric 'sole heir' is expanded to all. The intensity of the particular is maintained while the universal – all 'men' – is included in the vision. For Traherne, the particular is never swallowed up in the universal. In this, Traherne, seems to show affinity to Quash's description of drama as the genre that places the individual lyric voice in a community of particular voices, 'sole heirs'. For Traherne, this holds true for individual voices as it does for the individual grain of sand. The movement of particular to universal goes in both directions. In the theological register, 'The naked Truth in many faces shewn' is a reference to divine simplicity, the transcendent Trinity, communicating God-self in 'many faces' of creation; as Traherne describes:

God is 'Infinitely high' and inaccessible 'without some Condescension of his, wherein he is pleased for our Sakes to clothe himself with some Visible Appearance'.⁹⁵ God reveals God-

⁹² Sidney, *An Apology For Poetry (Or The Defence Of Poesy)*, 87.

⁹³ Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne's Poetic Theology*, 42–3.

⁹⁴ *Centuries*, I, 29.

⁹⁵ *Kingdom*, 476.

self in this way that we might both know him and desire him. Following Augustine's notions of enjoyment, Traherne explains: 'To Enjoy God...is to rest in him, as the compleat and Satisfactory Object of all our Desires. Which since our Soul is So insatiably Ambitious and Covetous, implies a transcendent, and Invincible Perfection in our last Object'.⁹⁶ The transcendent is made immanent in creation that the soul's insatiable desire might finds its *telos* in its true 'Satisfactory Object'. According to Traherne's 'Author to the Critical Persuer', he perceive his poetry as mimetic of this divine communication and allurement in creation. Traherne's lyric invites the reader to contemplate the particular object with her 'whole feeling self', while his epic tendencies invite the reader to see the particular within the context of the whole, within *The Kingdom of God*, within the 'naked Truth'.

Within Traherne's theological poetics, we have defined what he means by 'the naked Truth in many faces seen', but what of his claim that the poet bears a unique capacity to 'Bring down the highest Mysteries to sense'? This claim is theologically rooted in the Incarnation, but in the following section we will see a Renaissance referent in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

1.3. 'Bring[ing] down the highest Mysteries to sense'

As we seek to discover Traherne's understanding of the role of the poet as one who mediates between the transcendent and immanent realms it will be helpful to quote again the opening stanza from the poem *The Author to he Critical Peruser*:

The naked Truth in many faces shewn,
Whose inward Beauties very few hav known,
A simple Light, transparent Words, a Strain
That lowly creeps, yet maketh Mountains plain,
Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense
And keeps them there; that is Our Excellence:
At that we aim; to th' end thy Soul might see
With open Eys thy Great *Felicity*,
Its Objects view, and trace the glorious Way
Wherby thou may'st thy Highest Bliss enjoy.

(ll. 1-10)

Traherne presents himself here as one who has been initiated into a vision of the world that has enabled him to discern in the 'many faces' (or visible manifestations) of the 'naked Truth' 'inward Beauties very few hav known'. Traherne, the visionary, then assumes the role of the mediator, seeking to bring 'down the highest Mysteries to sense' 'to th' end thy Soul

⁹⁶ Ibid.

might see/With open Eys they Great *Felicity*.' As mediator, Traherne the poet is seeking to expose the visible 'Objects' of '*Felicity*' so the reader may be given a path to their 'Highest Bliss'. The idea of a poet as a kind of mediator between the transcendent and immanent worlds can also be found in an early work of Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

As Shakespeare's play has unfolded to this point the four mismatched lovers have left the Athenian court in the light of day and entered the forest at night, and through their strange and dreamlike encounters with Puck are transformed with their love now rightly directed to their true partners. Upon emerging from the forest, the now properly matched lovers tell their story to soon-to-be-married Theseus and Hippolyta who respond with this famous dialogue, which puts into the mouth of Theseus the skeptic most likely Shakespeare's own theory of the poet-mediator.

Hippolyta: 'Tis strange my Theseus, that these lovers speak of.

Theseus: More strange than true: I never may believe

These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,

Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend

More than cool reason ever comprehends.

The lunatic, the lover and the poet

Are of imagination all compact:

One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,

That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,

Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:

The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,

Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;

And as imagination bodies forth

The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen

Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing

A local habitation and a name.

Such tricks hath strong imagination,

That if it would but apprehend some joy,

It comprehends some bringer of that joy;

Or in the night, imagining some fear,

How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

Hippolyta: But all the story of the night told over,

And all their minds transfigured so together,

More witnesseth than fancy's images

And grows to something of great constancy;

But, whosoever, strange and admirable.⁹⁷

In Theseus' long speech he overtly takes on the role of the sceptic, opposing the 'shaping fantasies' of 'antique fables' and 'fairy toys' and affirming the true comprehensions of 'cool

⁹⁷ *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, Act V, Scene 1, lines 1-27; as found in Malcolm Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 55.

reason'. From one perspective Theseus' words form a direct affront to the witness of the four lovers, while at the same time, in the midst of his attack, he articulates a beautiful image of the unique role the poet plays in mediating heaven and earth. After lumping together 'The lunatic, the lover and the poet', showing the hallucinations of the madman and the lover he speaks of the frenzies of the poet:

The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Theseus' usage of the word 'frenzy' both echoes the classical understanding of the poetic frenzies being inspired by the muses, while also verbally linking the poet to the raving madman and the frantic lover. The irony then, of Shakespeare placing such a beautiful picture of the poetic vocation in this unbelieving mouth mirrors our discussion of Plato's rather ambivalent relationship to poetic and literary form above. The link is more overtly made by Shakespeare when he sets his play in Athens in antiquity, the birth place and time of Plato's *Dialogues*. In the same way Plato, the literary genius, speaks ill of poetic form, Theseus pays poetry the greatest compliment by affirming that it holds within it the capacity to mediate heaven and earth. The roving eye of the poet is able to take 'The forms of things unknown' and turn 'them to shapes', giving them 'A local habitation and a name'. In a similar way, Traherne sees the poet as standing in the gap between the transcendent, unknown mysteries of God and the world of local habitations when he says that the poet 'Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense/ And keeps them there; that is Our Excellence:/At that we aim'.⁹⁸

According to Shakespeare and Traherne one of the primary 'aim[s]' of the poetic form is to use the pen to create bodies for the incorporeal, in a sense objectifying the highest mysteries so as to give them 'a local habitation and a name'. The Word has become flesh.

Hippolyta responds to Theseus' long speech by noticing the miraculous transformation that has come over all of the four lovers. Instead of being mere 'fancy's images' the way 'all their minds [are] transfigured so together' speaks of 'something of great constancy'. Though their stories seem quite strange to both Hippolyta and Theseus their transformed minds speak of their encountering something in the woods. Commenting on this dialogue from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Malcolm Guite sees in Hippolyta and Theseus

⁹⁸ 'The Author to the Critical Peruser', ll. 5-7

the interrelationship of reason and imagination: 'Theseus and Hippolyta each make a speech defending a particular way of knowing: reason on the one hand the imagination on the other. But the context in which they set out their different viewpoints is a preparation for marriage. The entire play is a kind of preface to their marriage and it concludes with a blessing of their marriage bed.' For Guite, the marriage of these two symbolize the need to bring together the epistemological spheres of the apprehending imagination with the comprehensions of cool reason.⁹⁹ According to Guite, 'The purpose of imagination, in its playfulness and poetry in particular, is to be a bridge between reason and intuitive apprehension, to find for apprehension just those shapes, those local habitations and names, that make for comprehension.'¹⁰⁰ We see a similar interrelation of intuitive knowledge and reason in Traherne's third century when speaking of his childhood apprehensions he says,

All appeared new, and strange at first, inexpressibly rare and delightful and beautiful. I was a little stranger, which at my entrance into the world was saluted and surrounded with innumerable joys. My knowledge was Divine. I knew by intuition those things which since my Apostasy, I collected again by the highest reason.¹⁰¹

The childhood intuitive knowing, which is coupled with the capacity to see all things as 'delightful and beautiful', is 'collected again by the highest reason.' Traherne goes on to 'body forth' his childhood intuitions in the famous and poetically rich following meditation when he begins 'The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown.'¹⁰² The child – the 'little stranger' – functions as an emblem of true apprehensions, where intuition and reason meet, where the bodily senses, imagination, and reason offer true knowledge of reality to the will where it 'Produceth Lov'. When the world is seen by pure eyes into a pure soul it reveals the divine: 'The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we Come to the Knowledg of God himself.'¹⁰³

Communicating transcendent mysteries is not the end of the poetic goal, for as Guite continues 'the heart of that art is to express heaven in earthly terms and move us through comprehension of earth to the apprehension of heaven; so we glimpse "heaven in ordinary", and are invited through the close, original observation of particular earthly things, to be, in

⁹⁹ Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry*, 64.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰¹ *Centuries*, III, 2

¹⁰² *Centuries*, III, 3

¹⁰³ *Kingdom*, 489.

Heaney's phrase, "like a rich man entering heaven through the ear of a raindrop".¹⁰⁴ Guite's belief in the efficacy of the poetic imagination are corroborated by the words of Shakespeare and the recently deceased poet Seamus Heaney, and are in fact reflected in Traherne's 'The Author to the Critical Peruser' for after he has just argued for the mediatory role of the poet he explains:

At that we aim; to th' end thy Soul might see
With open Eys thy Great *Felicity*,
Its Objects view, and trace the glorious Way
Wherby thou may'st thy Highest Bliss enjoy.
(ll. 7-10)

Seeing the 'Objects' of '*Felicity*' with 'open Eys' is the epistemological starting point for tracing 'the glorious Way' to one's 'Highest Bliss'. Since in Traherne's view of the world, heaven is perpetually shining forth through the ordinary and common things, to find enjoyment and divine allurements in the creation simply depends on our ability to see. Herein we find Traherne's famous, 'you never enjoy the world aright, till you see how a sand exhibiteth the wisdom and power of God: And prize in everything the service which they do you, by manifesting His glory and goodness to your Soul'.¹⁰⁴ And in the next meditation he professes, 'Your enjoyment of the world is never right, till every morning you awake in Heaven; see yourself in your Father's Palace; and look upon the skies, the earth, and the air as Celestial Joys: having such a reverend esteem of all, as if you were among the Angels.'¹⁰⁵ It is the priestly impulse of the poet – to mediate divine mysteries as objects of sense – that prompts Traherne to translate his own transfigured childhood visions of the world into words that then work to transfigure the eyes of the reader. In this method, Traherne turns the attention of the reader not to rarities of the physical world or even the rare mystical experience but to an experience of the world where one can see 'The Glory of God and the Light of Heaven appearing everywhere'.¹⁰⁶ Traherne's poetry and poetic prose seeks to mirror this ubiquitous theophany, that is for all the people and is to be perceived right down to the very atoms of creation. The poet's vocation of 'Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense', of course, is most powerfully manifested in the Christian understanding of the Word becoming flesh.

¹⁰⁴ *Centuries*, I, 27.

¹⁰⁵ *Centuries*, I, 28.

¹⁰⁶ *Centuries*, III. 34.

In our earlier discussion of the poem ‘The Author to the Critical Peruser’ we traced the notions of Incarnation in the Prologue to John’s Gospel and Paul’s discussion of Incarnation, death, humility and glorification in Philippians 2. I argued that Incarnation theologically grounds Traherne’s usage of a humble form:

A Simple Light, transparent Words, a Strain
That lowly creeps, yet maketh Mountains plain,¹⁰⁷

The poetic irony is that the humble ‘Strain/That lowly creeps’ is the poetic form that most communicates the transcendent mysteries and ‘maketh Mountains plain’. What Incarnation also does is reveal God’s willingness to make God-self known in a particular, singular, object of sense.

Jesus Christ has humbled himself and taken up ‘a local habitation and a name’, and taken up the vocation of revealing the Father, bodying forth the divine within the corporeal world. In this act, God has allowed God-self to be objectified. The writer of 1 John speaks to the concrete nature of Christ’s incarnation when in the introductory remarks he refers to three of the five senses when articulating the way Jesus’ early followers experienced his earthly ministry:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.¹⁰⁸

The ‘Word of life’ was manifested bodily to these early followers, and this body they were able to experience with their senses (sight, touch and hearing). Christ, the eternal *μονογενής* (the unique or only-begotten) Son of God, has been made available to them as a body, a body that was wrapped in swaddling clothes and burial clothes, anointed with precious perfume and severely whipped, died on a cross and was raised. This rather earthly body, however, through the word and deed ministry of Jesus, was perpetually imaging the previously unseen Father. In the earthy earthly ministry of Christ we see the light of heaven perpetually shining through. At the Transfiguration the light of heaven bursts through the physical body of Christ and allows Peter, James and John a glimpse behind the veil, but – as we saw above – it is the

¹⁰⁷ ‘The Author to the Critical Peruser’, ll. 3-4.

¹⁰⁸ 1 John 1:1-4, (KJV).

cross whereby we see the best example of divine self-expression. Traherne speaks of the cross in this way:

The Cross of Christ is the Jacob's ladder by which we ascend into the highest heavens. There we see joyful Patriarchs, expecting Saints, Prophets ministering Apostles publishing, and Doctors teaching, all Nations centering, and Angels praising. That Cross is a tree set on fire with invisible flame, that Illumineth all the world. The flame is Love: the Love of His bosom who died on it. In the light of which we see how to possess all the things in Heaven and Earth after His similitude. For He that suffered on it was the Son of God as you are: tho' He seemed only a mortal man...¹⁰⁹

This rather grotesque and human activity of Roman execution is transformed and transfigured as it is incarnated by the author of life. This man, Jesus, who 'seemed only a mortal man' is in fact 'the Son of God', who has taken the common form of man and common criminal and infused it with divinity. 'The Cross of Christ' is therefore a 'Jacob's ladder', a place of theophany, a place where we exclaim with Jacob 'Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not...this is none other than the house of God...the gate of heaven.'¹¹⁰ The fully human act of incarnation is the central divine act of communication, that illuminates the world and pours forth divine love. We hear in the voice of the author of 1 John the exuberance of one who has seen, touched and heard from the incarnate Word, and is now eager to incarnate into words what he has known so that his reader's 'joy may be full'.¹¹¹ This same exuberance to communicate can be seen as Traherne describes another primary mode of divine self-expression when he says, 'you never Enjoy the World aright, till you so lov the Beauty of Enjoying it, that you are Covetous and Earnest to Persuade others to Enjoy it'.¹¹² The creation and incarnation provide the theological basis for Traherne's profound belief in the goodness of created things as divine self-expression. The poet, then, imitates the divine by 'Bring[ing] down the highest Mysteries to sense/And keep[ing] them there', so that the incorporeal might in taking a body become an object of felicity, a 'Jacob's ladder by which we ascend into the highest heavens.'

The Incarnation represents the clearest expression of the divine creator speaking forth within the corporeal world of the created. The author of Hebrews explains:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by

¹⁰⁹ *Centuries*, I, 60.

¹¹⁰ Gen. 28: 16, 18 (KJV)

¹¹¹ 1 John 1:4.

¹¹² *Centuries*, I, 31.

the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high¹¹³

This divine communication *par excellence* now sits at ‘the right hand of the Majesty’ and mediates heaven and earth for us. This Jesus, continues Hebrews, is our ‘great high priest’ who because of his Incarnation is not ‘an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.’ Because of his high priestly ministry the follower of Christ is able to ‘come boldly unto the throne of grace’ to ‘obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.’ If the Incarnation is the divine self-communication *par excellence*, the high priestly ministry is the archetype and inspiration for any attempts of the Christian poet to use the poetic form to mediate the incorporeal and the corporeal, the spiritual and the physical, heaven and earth. The poetic craft is therefore mimetic of the divine self-expression in creation, the bible and most acutely in the person of the Incarnate Word. The poem as a particular object – an object of contemplation – acts as a mirror of the movement of Incarnation; seeking a ‘local habitation and a name’, that it might draw the reader heavenward.

1.4. Traherne the Rhetorician

The history of western thought reveals an ambivalent relationship between the philosopher and the rhetorician. As we observed above, though Plato discouraged the use of poetic form for its tendency to obscure the truth (for Homer speaks lies regarding history and the gods), we see him employing a vast array of poetic and rhetorical devices to persuade his audience. Probably listening more closely to his teacher’s practice than his words, Aristotle, when discussing the efficacy of the spoken word (oration or rhetoric) to move the soul is much more positive than Plato. In his *The ‘Art’ of Rhetoric* he defines rhetoric in the following way:

Rhetoric then may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever ...to be able to grasp [the skill of rhetoric], a man must be capable of logical reasoning, of studying characters and the virtues, and thirdly the emotions – the nature and character of each, its origin, and the manner in which it is produced.¹¹⁴

It should be noticed that though Aristotle affirms the ability of the rhetorician to persuade with reference to ‘any subject whatever,’ he affirms the need for the student of rhetoric to

¹¹³ Heb. 1:1-3

¹¹⁴ Aristotle, *The ‘Art’ of Rhetoric*, I ii translated by J. H. Freese, (Loeb, 1947), 15, 17.

study logical reasoning, the emotions and virtue. Cicero, also, while quoting Crassus affirms that there is ‘no more excellent thing than the power, by means of oratory, to get a hold on assemblies of men, win their goodwill, direct their inclinations wherever the speaker wishes, or divert them from whatever he wishes.’¹¹⁵ Later, in his work on oration, Cicero laments the schism that took place between the study of rhetoric and philosophy: ‘the two groups of students were separated from each other, by Socrates and then similarly by the Socratic schools, and the philosopher looked down on eloquence and the orator on wisdom...’¹¹⁶ Whether Socrates is to blame for this schism or not, history does reveal a certain rivalry between the rhetorician and the philosopher. Quintilian continues the attempts by Cicero to integrate oration and philosophy by affirming that the first essential for a ‘perfect orator’ ‘is that he should be a good man, and consequently we demand of him not merely the possession of exceptional gifts of speech, but of all the excellences of character as well.’¹¹⁷ One commentator notes that for the Humanist Petrarch, Cicero is to be praised above Aristotle – especially as he represents the dry rationalism of Scholastic philosophy and theology – ‘for his ability to join moral wisdom with eloquence, thus appealing to the emotional as well as the intellectual nature of human beings, the will as well as the intellect. Aristotle is too narrowly intellectual to stir people to moral action.’¹¹⁸ It is precisely the goal to ‘stir’ through an appeal to both the intellect and the emotions (affect) that constitutes Traherne’s rhetorical aim. In this way he carries forth the Ciceronian as well as the Humanist project. However, as we proceed, we will see that, following Sidney, Traherne understood the allurements of poetry and poetic prose as the most effective way to stir the soul to virtue and full flourishing in relational union with God.

Traherne’s Oxford education – which included the study of ‘Logic, Ethics, Physics, Metaphysics, Geometry, Astronomy, Poesy, Medicine, Grammar, Music, Rhetoric all kinds of Arts, Trades, and Mechanisms’¹¹⁹ – would have introduced him to these works that praised the rhetorical art. There is a strand of thought, however, that denies any rhetorical place in Traherne’s work. Antionette Dauber acts as representative of this strand of thought when she

¹¹⁵ Cicero, *De Oratore (On the Orator)*, I viii, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (2 vols, Loeb, 1948), 23.

¹¹⁶ Cicero, *De Oratore*, III xix, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (2 vols, Loeb, 1948), 59.

¹¹⁷ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria (Education of an Orator)*, trans. H. E. Butler (4 vols, Loeb, 1921-2) 9.

¹¹⁸ Charles Garfield Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*, 2nd ed., New approaches to European history 37 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23.

¹¹⁹ *Centuries*, III. 36.

asserts that Traherne's poems 'bypass the rhetorical situation; they address no one, are spoken into space rather than at an audience'.¹²⁰ And later in response to Traherne's repeated use of the first person pronoun 'I' she states that 'It need hardly be noted that the speaker's singular presence fills the poems so completely that no corner remains from which the author might signal to the reader.'¹²¹ Since we have already argued for the way Traherne is guarded from utter solipsism by his understanding of the soul's relation to God and creation, we will use the remainder of this section to counter Dauber's claim that Traherne speaks 'into space rather than at an audience.'

The greater swell of Trahernian scholarship stands in opposition to the above claims made by Dauber. A. L. Clements claims that Traherne writes from the stance of someone who has already achieved felicity and is 'concerned to reveal its meaning.' Identifying Traherne as an authentic mystic he continues by stating that 'he writes out of, not toward, the mystical experience.' In the 37 poems of the Dobell Folio MS., Clements sees Traherne as the mystic who is seeking 'to guide others along the path he has taken'.¹²² In a similar vein, Allison Sherrington, commenting on the poem 'The Author to the Critical Peruser' (quoted above) states 'The tone of the introductory poem is that of the mystic and prophet who writes primarily because he must express his experiences and share them with others...'¹²³ John Malcolm Wallace, in agreement with Louis Martz, suggests the poems of the Dobell sequence 'constitute a complete five-part meditation which fulfils all the major conditions of a Jesuit exercise', and goes on to caution that 'to read Traherne's poetry, as first and foremost, a solipsistic or Neo-Platonic document is to miss at once the catholic foundation of his art...'¹²⁴ These commenters see Traherne as a spiritual guide seeking to actuate a certain experience in the reader. Presenting his view as a modification and expansion of the findings of Clements and Martz, Malcolm Day states 'The terms of Christian Neoplatonism, modified by Traherne's own exuberant vision, powerfully affected the whole range of his expression, controlling and shaping his language toward the spiritual and esthetic goals he held.' He goes on to 'suggest that the most important influence upon his language is his concern to recreate

¹²⁰ Dauber, "Thomas Traherne and the Poetics of Object Relations," 120.

¹²¹ Ibid., 121.

¹²² Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, 7.

¹²³ Sherrington, *Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, 3.

¹²⁴ Wallace, "Thomas Traherne and the Structure of Meditation," 80–81.

that vision, to bring it about both in himself and in his reader.’¹²⁵ More specifically Day suggests that Traherne’s primary goal is the ‘transformation of the Mind’ of his readers. This concern to expand, ‘reshape or “infinite” the mind’, ‘becomes the most significant influence behind his language.’¹²⁶ I agree with Day that abstraction and paradox are two key methods utilized by Traherne to bring about an infinite mind, however, what I see as Traherne’s primary aesthetic goal is a reshaping of the mind through a vision of the beautiful. Abstraction and paradox remind the reader of the essential ineffability of the vision, but its aesthetic quality is what allures the desire. It is this dynamic of allurements that we are most interested in.

To more fully counter the claim that Traherne ‘bypass(es) the rhetorical situation’, we must expand our search beyond the poems to the prose. Looking at Traherne’s two works of meditation (i.e. *Centuries of Meditation* and *Select Meditations*), Tomohiko Koshi identifies distinctive usages of the first-person pronoun ‘I’. In *Select Meditations* (an earlier work than the *Centuries*), the “I” presents himself as one “sent thither From God Almighty the maker of Heaven and Earth, to teach Immortal Souls the way to Heaven” (III.83)’. In addition to being heaven-sent the ‘speaker is assigned the persona of a seeker after, or explorer of, divine knowledge and truth...[T]he reader is asked to identify with the “I” in his exploration of various meditative themes.’ In *Select Meditations* ‘the “I” is constructed so as to involve the reader in mutual communication and to invite him to participate in the literary performance of the text itself. The style and rhetoric of the text can thus be seen to function as a means of artful communication with the reader.’¹²⁷ In contrast to the exploratory language of the *Select Meditations*, which act to invite the reader to participate in the unfolding of the treatise, the ‘I’ in the *Centuries of Meditation* ‘seems to speak to the reader from the vantage point of someone in the know about essentials concerning Felicity.’¹²⁸ In *Centuries*, Traherne explicitly reveals his own rhetorical goals when he exclaims ‘you never Enjoy the World aright, till you so lov the Beauty of Enjoying it, that you are Covetous and Earnest to Persuade others to Enjoy it’.¹²⁹ The explicit desire to ‘Persuade others’ to share in the speakers enjoyment of the world purports well with Koshi’s overall thesis. What at first

¹²⁵ Day, “‘Naked Truth’ and the Language of Thomas Traherne,” 307.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 308.

¹²⁷ Tomohiko Koshi, “The Rhetoric of Instruction, and Manuscript and Print Culture in the Devotional Works of Thomas Traherne” (unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Reading, 2004), 41–42.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 63.

¹²⁹ *Centuries*, I, 31.

seems like solipsism, in Traherne's usage of the first-person pronoun, turns out to be an act of persuasion, an allurements, an invitation to the reader to share in his vision of the world.

It would go beyond the scope of the current thesis to give a full account of the many rhetorical and didactic devices at work throughout Traherne's prose. I have included discussions on the rhetoric of both the poetry and the meditations because these are the more challenging genres in discerning rhetorical devices. Since we have been able to locate didactic and rhetorical ends in these works how much the more should we find them in overly didactic and rhetorical works as *Commentaries of Heaven, Kingdom of God* (quoted above), his anti-Catholic polemical work entitled *Roman Forgeries*, and his aptly titled work *Inducements to Retirednes*; a work seeking to allure his reader to the practice of solitude and contemplation by articulating its virtues and revealing its desirability.

Following his Humanist and Classical predecessors, Traherne's poetry and poetic prose follows the Ciceronian project of utilizing rhetoric to move the will through an appeal to both the intellect and the affect. To be moved by the good, the will must desire the good, and perceive something desirable and beautiful within the good. What Traherne's poetics provide, through the interaction of form and content, are irreducible and desirable objects of contemplation that are more properly encountered than read. Traherne deploys a rhetoric of allurements, a rhetoric mimetic of the divine allurements in creation. In inviting his reader to contemplate the object, however, Traherne's literary practice reveals that the finite object is properly seen *when* it functions as a mirror, a 'many face' of the 'naked Truth'. The poem functions most truly as an object of contemplation when perceived as a mirror of the infinite.

In the following section, we build on the notion of contemplation as perceiving finite objects as mirrors of infinity and see that contemplation sits at the center of Traherne's notions of enjoyment and felicity. This section represents a shift in our discussion from examining Traherne's modes of expression to examining modes of reception. What is it to properly receive 'With open Eys thy Great *Felicity*'?¹³⁰

1.5. The Veil and the Allurements of Desire

Traherne's notions of contemplation constitutes an integration of the growing field of experimental science in 17th C. England – a close looking at the particular – with the Christian mystical tradition (heavily influenced by Platonism), which asserts that God can be

¹³⁰ 'Author the Critical Peruser', I, 8.

discerned within or through the corporeal object of contemplation.¹³¹ Following Aquinas and others, Traherne also understood contemplation to be key in the enjoyment of God's creation.¹³² The great hindrance to contemplation, however, is the perennial problem of sin. In an entry entitled 'Aristotle's Philosophy' in *Commentaries of Heaven* Traherne blends Platonic ideas of recollection with an Aristotelean epistemology to describe learning as the recovery of a prelapsarian mode of knowing:

For Learning is but an Acquisition of that Knowledg which we enjoyed by Nature, that which was lost by Sin being recovered by Labor. As therfore Aristotle being resolved to reduce Philosophic to rules of Art and Reason, utterly rejected that Mythologick, Symbolical Mode of Philosophizing, which his Predecessors, Thales, Pherecydes, Pythagoras and Plato had introduced; so do we strip nature of her vail, and expose her in her nakedness to the Ey of the Beholder. Beaus tho a vail (tis confessed) addes much to Beauty, becaus it kindles a Desire of Seeing Things forbidden; the Scales upon our Eys supply the place of a vail upon the face of nature, and make her, in her simple and naked difficult to be conceived.¹³³

As I will discuss more fully in Chapter 4, it is the pure apprehensions of the infant that are 'enjoyed by nature', not the recollections of the Plato's preexistent soul. The problem is sin, not bodies, and as such sin has placed 'Scales upon our Eys' and a 'vail upon the face of nature'. 'Labor' and, as we will see below, divine grace are required to cleanse and restore fallen human epistemology. However, though the veil acts as a barrier to seeing nature 'simple and naked', and its source is human sin, its beauty functions as an allurements: 'it kindles a Desire of Seeing Things forbidden'. The veil is, as it were, used for good. Kathryn Murphy notices that a primary purpose of Traherne's *Commentaries of Heaven* was to 'transfigure his language from the estate of misery to the estate of glory.'¹³⁴ From the perspective of fallen epistemology the veil is a barrier to knowledge, but from the perspective of heaven, its beauty allures us to contemplate its hidden 'forbidden' nakedness. The beauty of the veil works for our good.

¹³¹ For an analysis of Traherne's views on science see Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *The Breaking of the Circle*, 192–3.; as well as Jan Ross' introduction in *The Words of Thomas Traherne, Vol III.*; Traherne shows the influence of scientific discover in *Kingdom of God*, 350 and 422 'The Creation of Insects affords us a Clear Mirror of Almighty Power...'

¹³² On Aquinas and contemplation see Josef Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (South Bend, Ind: St Augustine's Press, 1998), 65–6.; as it relates to *Centuries*, III, 69 'Intelligence is the tongue that discerns and tastes them, knowledge is the Light of Heaven, Love is the Wisdom and Glory of God, Life extended to all objects is the sense that enjoys them. So that Knowledge, Life, and Love are the very means of all enjoyment, which above all things we must seek for and labour after. All objects are in God Eternal: which we by perfecting our faculties are made to enjoy.'

¹³³ *Commentaries, Vol 3*, 201.

¹³⁴ Murphy, "Thomas Traherne, Thomas Hobbes, and the Rhetoric of Realism," 434.

Traherne explores the ideas of beauty, the veil, and allurement again in *Kingdom of God*. Here the focus shifts away from the veil as scales on the eyes due to sin, and identifies the veil with the incomprehensible nature of God and his Kingdom.

Nevertheless, because the Kingdom of God is Infinite in Beauty, Light and Glory, we will Endeavor to rend the Vail; that at least by a Chink, (if we remove it not wholly) we may See into the Beauty of Holiness, and admire the Secret of the most holy place: for that which discourages Timorous Spirits, animates the Courageous; and the very Incomprehensibleness of its Nature, which seemeth to reprove us, shall be the Allurement, Inviting us to Consider it all.¹³⁵

This passage provides a second layer of Traherne's ideas of the dynamics of beauty and allurement of the veil. The quote from the *Commentaries* identifies the veil as the surface beauty of nature, the clothing, that if seen with veiled eyes makes opaque the naked beauty it hides. The 'Scales upon our Eyes' function similar to the excessive use of curling Metaphor used by those Traherne critiques in his poem 'Author the Critical Peruser', that clothe instead of reveal. But unlike the opaque poetic objects, the surface beauty of God's creation, even when seen through veiled eyes, allure the soul. In the above quote from *Kingdom of God*, identifies the veil with the incomprehensible nature of God and God's kingdom. What 'seemeth to reprove us' to accept our finitude, and, as it were, know our place, actually animates Traherne's exuberance. For Traherne, this is actually its purpose, for far from being finite, Traherne believes the soul to be infinite, able to contemplate the kingdom in its entirety. Beauty in this quote is teleological, it draws the insatiable soul to 'rend the Vail, that...we may See into the Beauty of Holiness'. If the entry on 'Aristotle's Philosophy' above revealed that the surface beauty of creation works to awaken a certain Desire to 'See the Things forbidden', the 'Incomprehensible' 'Beauty of Holiness' allures by being hidden and secret.

But what of divine aid? Is there a place for God's particular action in the dynamics of beauty and allurement, or does God simply entrust the creation to the dynamics of beauty and allurement already established through prevenient grace? Traherne identifies the need for divine aid in the following:

For the Kingdom of GOD, is as full of Riches, as it is of Mysteries: In it are *hid all the treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*: And he that is able to do more for us, then we are able to ask or think, is able to reveal even this unto us.¹³⁶

Traherne goes on to stack various Bible passages that express God's role in revealing the

¹³⁵ *Kingdom*, 258

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

divine mysteries that inherently allure the soul. Quoting Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church¹³⁷ Traherne prays '*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of Glory, may give unto you the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation, in the Knowledge of him, the Eyes of your Understanding being Enlightened, that you may know what is the Hope of his Calling, and what the Riches of the Glory of his Inheritance in the Saints*'. In quoting this Pauline prayer that is brimming with epistemological terms (wisdom, revelation, knowledge, eyes, understanding, enlightenment, know) Traherne affirms the central need for Divine illumination, which is granted when we pray. Prayer is the central act that unites 'Special Grace' with prevenient grace imbedded within human volition and the structures of allurement in the creation. Traherne speaks of prayer in *A Sober View* in this way:

So that Prayer is the Key of Heaven by which we unlock the Heavenly Treasure, and derive those things to our selves which by Nature we cannot have: It is the Jacobs Ladder by which we Ascend: that we may receive all Heavenly Gifts of Knowledge and Grace.¹³⁸

'by Nature we cannot have', but through prayer, God gives 'all Heavenly Gifts of Knowledge and Grace'. Prayer represents the place of cooperation between divine and human volition: God desires to give but invites us to ask, seek and knock.¹³⁹ This cooperation of heaven ('Special Grace') and earth (prevenient grace) in the act of prayer gives Traherne the licence to speak of both divine aid and human effort in the gaining of wisdom and the reformation of the eyes. Traherne concludes this paragraph in *A Sober View* by quoting 'James 1.5. If any of you lack Wisdom let him ask it of God' and the line before he quotes 'Rev. 3.17.18', which integrates the notions of divine gift and human effort: 'I counsel Thee to buy of me Gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich...And anoint thine Eyes with Eye salve that thou mayest see'.¹⁴⁰ Traherne's idea that the 'Contemplation of [creation] is the Means of our transformation' is predicated both on the need for Divine aid, and the need to exercise our will in asking God for 'all the Heavenly Gifts of Knowledge and Grace.'

Prayer as the 'Key of Heaven' sits as the backdrop for Traherne's understanding of learning stated above: 'Learning is but an Acquisition of that Knowledge which we enjoyed by Nature, that which was lost by Sin being recovered by Labor.' By prayer we ask for divine illumination as we 'Labor' to learn. This acceptance of the human labor needed to 'strip

¹³⁷ Ephesians 1.17,18.

¹³⁸ *Sober View*, 81.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 'Math 7.7.8'.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

nature of her vail' provides a space for the new science to function as a proper source of knowledge. What sits at the bottom of the scientific endeavor is the belief that 'the World' reveals God:

Ancient philosophers have thought God to be the Soul of the World. Since therefore this visible World is the body of God, not His natural body, but which He hath assumed; let us see how glorious His wisdom is in manifesting Himself thereby. It hath not only represented His infinity and eternity which we thought impossible to, be represented by a body, but His beauty also...¹⁴¹

At the root of Traherne's desire to 'strip nature of her vail' is the belief that at its bottom this search will lead us to God, for the world 'discovers the being of God unto you' and 'opens His nature'.¹⁴² Echoing the words of Proverbs 25.2 ('It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter'), Traherne saw the scientific endeavour (the searching into concealed matters) as one location for the inherent human capacities to be 'exercised about their objects'. Traherne believed that

All objects are in God Eternal: which we by perfecting our faculties are made to enjoy. Which then are turned into Act, when they are exercised about their objects; but without them are desolate and idle; or discontented and forlorn.¹⁴³

Scientific exploration of the phenomenal world exercises our capacities, turning them 'into Act'. When the capacities of the insatiable soul are left as mere potentialities and not turned into act they remain 'desolate', 'idle', discontent 'and forlorn', but 'by 'perfecting our faculties we are made to enjoy' them all. Traherne's belief in the interrelation of 'Special' and prevenient grace – with their dual postures of labor and receptivity – allows Traherne to talk about the labors of scientific inquiry as a portion of the contemplative life. As A. L. Clements shows 'in Traherne's poetry, the means of expression are suited to the mode of apprehension – what is the author's and what is to become the readers' mode of apprehension: direct, immediate, intuitive, open-eyed'¹⁴⁴, Traherne's poetic goals are in alignment with the scientific: namely to 'keep their drawsy Faculties awake' and 'rowz thy Sens, if not thy Sight renew'.¹⁴⁵ Traherne's poetic objects of contemplation are mimetic of God's creation, and thus the type of encounter he seeks in his poetry and poetic prose is akin to the encounter with God in creation. We will speak more in Chapter 4 of Traherne's notions

¹⁴¹ *Centuries* II, 22.

¹⁴² *Centuries*, II, 1.

¹⁴³ *Centuries*, III, 69.

¹⁴⁴ Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, 59.

¹⁴⁵ 'THE PUBLISHER To the Reader', 86-7.

of the purification of the faculties.

We have tried to show that Traherne's many modes of expression directly relate to his understanding of human modes of apprehension. However, the 'open-eyed' mode of apprehension is hindered by the veil of sin and the incomprehensibility of God's kingdom. The veil, which at first seems like a deterrent (and in fact it remains a deterrent until the veil is rent), functions as an allurement, attracting the desire through its beauty: the beauty of the veil upon our eyes attracting through the beauty of corporeal matter, and the beauty of God's kingdom attracting through the incomprehensible beauty of our final end. With divine aid, the veil upon the eyes can be removed like scales, through the volitional act of prayer. Traherne understood his poetry and prose to work in concert with God's work in prevenient and 'Special Grace' by mirroring these dynamics of God's kingdom in his literary objects of contemplation. Traherne crafts beautiful objects of contemplation that awaken desire and uses the corporeal 'stuff' of language to awaken the mind to the incomprehensible beauty of God and God's kingdom. The first move is to capture the eye, the second is to awaken desire for the divine.

Below, I will briefly sketch how a few central components to the new scientific method are assimilated within Traherne's theological vision; namely the place of experience (and its cognate experiment) and the place of testing in response to doubt. In Traherne's engagement with natural science he reveals the belief that 'naked Truth' has many faces, and his exploration of the natural sciences plays a role in shaping his literary form.

1.6. Experimentation, Testing and Epistemology

The famous 'Autobiographical' third century of the *Centuries of Meditations* presents itself as Traherne's own spiritual journey from childhood innocence, through the fall and to eventual redemption. This century begins by introducing the major theme of childhood's 'pure and virgin apprehensions' that will drive the rest of century and crops up through Traherne's *oeuvre*.¹⁴⁶ What is key for our current discussion is that Traherne's primary pedagogical tool to purify the senses in this century will be an appeal to experience; namely, his own experience. Traherne presents himself as one who is much experienced in these apprehensions and therefore has the ability to lead the reader to their own rediscovery of this childlike vision. In linking the third century to Traherne's other theme of Felicity, Tomohiko

¹⁴⁶ *Centuries*, III, 1.

Koshi does well to notice the following:

The story which the “I” recounts as his own has an obviously didactic function. What is important to recognise here is that the narrating of the spiritual development is closely bound up with the “experimental” methodology employed in the Century by which to teach the reader how to achieve the proper enjoyment of Felicity.’¹⁴⁷

Koshi is correct in noting the didactic function in Traherne’s experimental methodology. What must be affirmed, however, is that the use of the first person pronoun ‘I’ in the third century is not *merely* a didactic tool, as if the stories of spiritual development and ‘virgin apprehensions’ are mere poetic conceits. Instead, the authenticity of Traherne’s experience acts as the goal or ‘control group’ whereby the reader is to compare her own experiments in apprehension. In the following century the use of the first person ‘I’ is replaced with the second person ‘He’,¹⁴⁸ and with this shift comes the inductive move from specific individual experience to general ‘principles’,¹⁴⁹ but in century three Traherne maintains the immediacy of his own particular experience. The immediacy of Traherne’s experimental methodology invites the reader to test his findings against their own existential world, moving the reader from the world of abstraction to the immediacy of experience.

Traherne’s emphasis on human experience and experimentation seems to align with the spirit of his age. Experiential evidence derived from human experience is precisely what helps Descartes navigate through his method of doubt, coming to the conclusion that the only thing he could not doubt were his current thoughts of doubt, and to doubt he had to exist, therefore the famous ‘I think therefore I am’.¹⁵⁰ Traherne too, shows a radical move to the human subject as a location for attaining true knowledge, but what grounds his epistemological certainty begins not with Descartes’ methodology of doubt but with a trust in God’s goodness. In his *Seeds of Eternity*, Traherne outlines some of his ideas regarding the human person and especially the human soul. He begins this work by stating ‘Humanity, which is the Handmaid of true Divinity, is a noble Part of Learning, opening the best and rarest Cabinet in nature to us, that of our Selvs: Which it doth either by discovering the Excellencies of our Bodies, or the faculties of our Souls.’¹⁵¹ What later thinkers would name

¹⁴⁷ Koshi, “The Rhetoric of Instruction, and Manuscript and Print Culture in the Devotional Works of Thomas Traherne,” 68.

¹⁴⁸ *Centuries*, IV, 2.

¹⁴⁹ *Centuries*, IV, 1.

¹⁵⁰ Of course, from the realization of his own ontological reality, Descartes builds a rather optimistic system, inclusive of God and cosmos.

¹⁵¹ *Seeds of Eternity*, Vol 1, 233, hereafter referred to as *Seeds*.

anthropology or psychology Traherne simply calls ‘Humanity’, or the study of humanity. We see further what he means by calling ‘Humanity’ the ‘Handmaid of true Divinity’ a few paragraphs down. Notice Traherne’s almost naïve trust in the sureness of this epistemological location:

Because the Soul naturally desires to see the Lineaments of its own face, Humanity is Delightfull which displayeth its features. It is admirable, because it unfoldeth Wonders that are incredible; but more because it doth it in a maner so plain and easy, for its Objects are within us; It is therefore the most certain of all Sciences, because we *feel* the Things it declares, and may by Experience, prove all it revealeth.¹⁵²

Since the ‘Objects’ of inquiry are within, the affirmation or the falsification of the various claims made regarding the nature of the human person are easily displayed, for they can be tested against immediate human ‘Experience’. In our chapter on theological anthropology we will more fully unpack Traherne’s use of the motif ‘the Soul naturally desires’, but here we must notice his strong belief in the epistemological weight of personal experience. As we have seen, our human experience can be shrouded by a veil that causes us to misapprehend our experiences of the world and ourselves but even these misapprehensions act as a sign that points to a true apprehension.

As Traherne continues the paragraph quoted above he reveals what provides the ontological basis for the human soul, which then acts as the epistemological grounding for human experience. He continues praising the study of ‘Humanity’ by stating,

It is Sublime because by it we are allied to heaven, in it all the Glories of the Celestial Kingdom are apparent and by it are made near and familiar. For as in Water, the face of Heaven is represented; so is the Nature of God in the Soul of Man, where the Cause and End of His Creation, together with the Beauty of Religion, the Nature of Blessedness, and the Excellency of Nature in general as well as Mans in particular are unfolded.¹⁵³

The inward gaze into the soul is instantly a reflected gaze into the very ‘Nature of God’, ‘the Cause and End of His creation’. Not only ‘is the Nature of God in the Soul of Man’ revealed, but so is the ‘Beauty of Religion’ and the ‘Excellency of Nature’ ‘unfolded’. In this system the growing modern solipsism is replaced by a subjectivity that finds its objectivity in the fact that it comes from the hand of God and functions as a mirror or image of the divine. For Traherne a look inward is a look upwards. (In chapter three we will explore further the human soul as a mirror of the divine.)

Though both Traherne and Descartes begin their theological reflections from epistemological hope and trust, Descartes’ attempt to defeat doubt through a skeptical method

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

is contrasted by Traherne's pedagogical convictions in fore-fronting divine goodness. In the *Centuries*, Traherne is driven along in his existential quest in his third century by an 'implicit faith in God's goodness.'¹⁵⁴ In his empiricism he is much more akin to Aristotle than his modern counterparts. Dupré claims that Aristotle was the 'thorough empiricist, but his empiricism, unlike that of seventeenth-century philosophers, rather than being derived from doubt, is rooted in a total trust of the order of nature.'¹⁵⁵ For Traherne, this trust comes from a firm belief that 'the invisible things of [God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made'.¹⁵⁶ Empiricism is no threat to Traherne, for if Paul's words to the Roman church are true (and Traherne would affirm their truth), to those who see the world aright they will see God in the internal and external phenomenon of creation. To those whose experience had led them to doubt the existence of a benevolent and loving creator God, Traherne suggests a test.

In chapter five of *The Kingdom of God*, after a lengthy argument for the necessity of a God to be infinitely good, Traherne concludes,

His Kingdom therefore is Evry way Complete: For else the Soul would meet with causes of Complaint, and be partly Miserable, partly Happy; and as infinitely Miserable, as Infinitely Blessed. God therefore gav it a power, to contemplate, and Examine those things, that having found out the perfection of his Works, it might Admire, and Adore him, with Infinit Complacency, Lov him and delight in him, with Infinit Ardor, and with a desire, that is Evryway Compleat...

Traherne sees in the human soul a God-given power to 'Examine' the objects of God's kingdom so that when perceiving the 'perfection of his Works' might properly respond with admiration, adoration, love, desire, and 'ascribe all the Glory to him, that is due unto his Name.'¹⁵⁷ Since this ability to 'Examine' is of the nobility of humankind and is actually a capacity given by God, Traherne continues in the next paragraph by saying, 'Neither is it Boldness in the Soul, to make such Enquiries, but a Modest confidence of his Infinit Excellency, that it will Endure the Test. And the more diligently it is tryed, be the more approved.' This unwavering trust propels Traherne's insatiable soul to confidently 'Test' the

¹⁵⁴ *Centuries*, III, 53.

¹⁵⁵ Louis K. Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 27.

¹⁵⁶ Romans 1:20.

¹⁵⁷ *Kingdom*, 274. This of course is the exact opposite response to those in Romans 1 who should have discerned God in creation but instead 'when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened'. Romans 1:21 Authorized Version.

validity of God's kingdom and let truth lead where it will. As the above paragraph continues Traherne locates the purpose of his divine testing in the context of love:

It is a Wise, and Profitable Study, to find out those Reasons, wherupon we should Lov him Infinitely, and to inform our selvs of the Truth, and Realitie of his Infinite Beauty. This Propension is the Glory of the Soul; and impartial Inclination, to Admire all that is Good, and to Censure all that is Evil, wherever it find it, being the Similitude of God, which being infinitely secure of his own perfection, he gav unto Man, with such an Illimited power, and Libertie to use it, that we may freely try it, even against himself. He will not be beholding to us, to lie for God... If he be not altogether Lovely, we may out with it freely, and publish it for ever.... He will hav us to Lov him heartily, or not at all.... Our most Secret thoughts are open before him; if we cannot Approv him in our hearts and Souls, All our outward Defences, will be but Hypocriticall, and painted Sepulchres, full of Rottenness at the Core, or in other Words, full of Dead Mens Bones, and all uncleanness.¹⁵⁸

Truth must be followed wherever it leads. Any perceived defects found in the nature of God or actual defects found in the soul's love for God must be exposed for what they are. The soul will not stand for any defect in its most beloved object, and 'He will hav us Lov him heartily, or not at all.' In this passage the reader is struck by the 'Truth, and Realitie of his Infinite Beauty' who is 'infinitely secure of his own perfection' weighed against the 'Hypocriticall' soul whose 'outward Defences' can not hide the 'Rottenness at the Core'. This paragraph at once reveals a thinker who is much versed in the contours of the human psyche (even using such psychological terms like 'secure' 'inclination' and 'Defences') while also with a keen eye on the modes of speech that might convince that psyche to, as it were, 'come into the light'.

These previous two sections have been an exploration into issues of epistemology or what Traherne called in our introductory poem 'The naked Truth in many faces shewn'. In Chapter 3 we explore more fully Traherne's epistemology, but we offered a brief word here to more fully substantiate the claim that Traherne's literary theory was deeply influenced by his desire to affect change in his literary audience. He understood his writing to be mimetic of and a pointer to the dynamics of divine allurements in the beauty of creation. Traherne crafted beautiful literary objects of contemplation for the beatification of his audience:

At that we aim; to th' end thy Soul might see
With open Eys thy Great *Felicity*,
Its Objects view, and trace the glorious Way
Wherby thou may'st thy Highest Bliss enjoy.¹⁵⁹
(ll. 7-10)

¹⁵⁸ *Kingdom*, 274.

¹⁵⁹ 'Author the Critical Peruser', 84.

1.7. Conclusion

Using Traherne's 'The Author to the Critical Peruser' as the scaffolding to organize our exploration of his literary theory, we have come to see that Traherne's language was deeply indebted to what he discerned as his poetic vocation; namely to craft literary 'Objects' of contemplation for the 'fruition' of his literary audience. With reference to Traherne's Natural Theology, these objects are mimetic of divine creation; with reference to Traherne's Christology, the simple and humble form of these objects mirror the divine *kenosis*. As Christ came in humble form, so Traherne's saw that 'A simple Light, transparent Words, a Strain / That lowly creeps' most truly 'maketh Mountains plain'. Jesus, the humble image of the transcendent Father, theologically grounds Traherne's poetic form and literary purposes.

As mimetic, both of God's creation and Christ's Incarnation, Traherne sees the poet as the one who 'Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense'. As an object of sense, Traherne seeks to craft poetic objects that are beautiful and allure the eyes, but as objects of contemplation these sensual objects perpetually point beyond themselves to the reality they try to embody. The allurement in the beautiful form mirrors the allurement of the veil upon the beauty of nature, whereas the contemplative impulse allures the soul beyond the finite object toward its infinite source. What we gain by affirming that Traherne's poetry and poetic prose can be best described as literary objects of contemplation is that it enables us to affirm two primary components in Traherne's theological poetics. The first is that the objects themselves constitute an irreducible object whose literary form and content work together to form a beautiful object that allures the eyes. Secondly, the beauty of Traherne's simple form awakens the reader, and redirects the reader to the uncreated beauty this literary object seeks to mirror.

In this chapter, we have introduced a lot of themes that will get deeper consideration as the thesis unfolds. What each chapter will do is look at the aesthetic encounter from a different angle, and consider how beauty works in Traherne's theological system as a principle of allurement, attracting desire and drawing the soul toward its highest bliss. In this chapter, we have looked at the type of aesthetic and contemplative encounter Traherne is trying to induce in his literary output. In Chapter 2 we will explore the metaphysics of this encounter. Chapter 3 will deal with the desiring subject and how beauty works on the individual soul, and Chapter 4 will look at Traherne as spiritual guide, leading his reader through toward the estate of glory through the reformation of desire and the cleansing of the

eyes. Presently we turn our gaze toward Traherne's doctrine of creation to find that his literary theory of allurements is mimetic of the substructures of the cosmos.

Chapter Two - God, Beauty and the Metaphysics of God's Kingdom

2.1. God and God's Kingdom

We come now to a question – or cluster of questions – that are of utmost importance. The essential question might be articulated in this way: what type of universe does Traherne inhabit whereby his literary theory actually works? In other words, what are the deep structures of God and God's creation that uphold Traherne's literary and pastoral goals? And closely related to these questions: how are we to think of God's relationship to God's creation? As might be deduced from the direction of the questioning, this chapter will argue for a basic convergence between the structures of Traherne's literary theory, his understanding of the deep structures of the cosmos (metaphysics) and the nature of God. I will also be arguing that beauty plays a central role in the structures of God's kingdom, both as a 'bodying forth' of the divine beauty that resides in God's essence and as an alluring force that 'Enflameth us to Lov'¹ God. With regards to corporeal beauty Traherne affirms that 'The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we Come to the Knowledge of God himself.'² We will discuss the human recipient of divine beauty more fully in the following chapters, but before we are able to do this we must first identify how Traherne sought to articulate the interrelation of God and God's creation.

Depending heavily on Traherne's *The Kingdom of God*, and its central imagery of God as king,³ and God's creation as God's kingdom, the chapter will progress in the following way. As a way into this discussion of Trahernian metaphysics, we will look at the creation as an act of communication, or a divine speech-act. Since creation-as-divine-speech implies a human recipient of this communication, we will take a preliminary look at Traherne's epistemology in relation to his metaphysics and bring into view both Plato and Aristotle; asking, which of these two was Traherne's primary influence in his philosophical-theological constructs? After this section on Plato and Aristotle we will explore the content of this speech-act, and find that for Traherne the creation is a communication of the very person of God; for God is seen in the creation. In this section, we will unfold how Traherne

¹ *Kingdom*, 318.

² *Kingdom*, 496.

³ See *Kingdom*, 255; for a cluster of images that describe the creation's relation to God see *Kingdom*, 337.

understood the various attributes of God, and how they are manifest in the creation, paying special attention to the divine attributes of beauty, goodness and love. For Traherne, God's essence flows out into creation so as to draw it back to God-self (the *exitus-reditus* as St. Thomas articulated it). The language used to articulate God's causal relation to God's creation (e.g. calling creation an 'emanation' or God's 'body') raises the question: does God create necessarily or is God free? The same question posed to Aquinas – 'just as the sun does this necessarily, so does God necessarily produce creatures'?⁴ – we will pose to Traherne. We will therefore, take time to answer this charge that God creates necessarily, and so seek to place his language of emanationism alongside his Thomist understanding of God as Pure Act, which carries with it an affirmation of divine freedom in creation. A crucial part of this discussion is Traherne's positing not just desire but 'want' (i.e. lack) in God; thus time will be given to explore this idea in Traherne's thought. We will conclude by noticing Traherne's understanding of matter, along with his belief that the human person acts as the 'Golden Link' unifying the spiritual world with the corporeal. As we progress through Traherne's metaphysics we are going to continue to see that beauty plays a crucial role as the principle of allurements in God's kingdom, working to capture desire and move the will. For now let us turn to Traherne's understanding of a creation that 'declare[s] the glory of God' (Psalm 19:1, KJV).

2.2. Creation Speaks: '*The Heavens declare*'

The belief that God's creation reveals the nature of God is such a commonplace in Traherne's writings it takes on an axiomatic character. As we saw in the last chapter, Traherne comes to this high view of creation, through his own intuition and experience, and it is only later that he finds in King David a kindred spirit espousing the same. Traherne finds direct evidence of this expressive view of nature in Psalm nineteen:

[David's] joyful meditation in the nineteenth psalm directeth every man to consider the glory of Heaven and Earth *The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth [His] handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not*

⁴ Louis K. Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 27. Norman Kretzmann discussed this in Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?," in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Cornell University Press, 1991), 208–28.

*heard. Their line is gone throughout the earth, and their voice to the end of the world.*⁵

The collection of communication language ('speech', 'declare', 'showeth', 'uttereth', 'language' and 'heard') argues for a creation that actively shouts forth the nature of its creator. This Psalm also speaks of the ubiquitous nature of this communication. All are invited to see God in the creation, for 'there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.'

Though the ironic nature of a creation that speaks with an inaudible voice is not properly expressed until later translations of this Psalm,⁶ Traherne picks up this irony in his poem '*Dumnesse*'. In this poem, Traherne explores the purity of apprehension of the child in its pre-lingual and pre-auditory state. It is the child's advantage that she is both deaf and mute for then she is open to receive 'The Heavens' as 'an Orakle', free from distractions.

... Thus was I pent within
 A Fort, Impregnable to any Sin:
 Till the Avenues being Open laid,
 Whole Legions Enterd, and the Forts Betrayd.
 Before which time a Pulpit in my Mind,
 A Temple, and a Teacher I did find,
 With a large Text to comment on. No Ear,
 But Eys them selvs were all the Hearers there.
 And evry Stone, and Evry Star a Tongue,
 And evry Gale of Wind a Curious Song.
 The Heavens were an Orakle, and spake
Divinity: The Earth did undertake
 The office of a Priest; And I being Dum
 (Nothing besides was dum;) All things did com
 With Voices and Instructions; but when I
 Had gaind a Tongue, their Power began to die.
 (ll. 53-68)⁷

In an ironic twist, this rather fanciful image of a pre-auditory and pre-lingual state reveals that for Traherne it is the 'Dum' child that is able to receive the creation, which is alive with divine speech. When the child's mind is quieted and protected from the incessant noise that would soon come, it had the cognitive space and clarity to discern divinity in everything from the humble stone to the exalted star. Though the infant apprehensions are lost when she

⁵ C. III, 71.

⁶ One example is the NRSV's translation of vs. 3-4: 'There is no speech, nor are there words;/their voice is not heard;/ yet their voice goes out through all the earth,/and their words to the end of the world.'

⁷ '*Dumnesse*', 22.

receives both ‘Tongue’ and ‘Ears’ the poem ends with the hope of recapturing these apprehensions: ‘Yet the first Words mine Infancy did hear / ...got such a root / Within my heart / ...let the Enemies hoop, Cry, roar, Call, / Yet these will whisper if I will but hear, / And penetrat the Heart, if not the Ear.’⁸ In Chapter 4 we will discuss further the nature of Traherne’s understanding of innocence and the recollection of those early apprehensions of God in nature. At the moment we need to see that for Traherne creation is a divine speech-act, which is ubiquitous and constant and therefore all anyone must do is tune his or her ear to its sound.

If we are to examine the nature of a communicative creation from a slightly different angle we can see that the heavens (and the earth) are not simply a sounding board for divine speech. Instead we see Traherne positing a creation that has been imbued with the very nature of a communicative God. Traherne begins chapter twenty-four of *Kingdom of God* describing a creation that is ‘Communicativ after [God’s] Similitude’.

As evry Being hath a Spark of Excellency which it deriveth from the Nature and Power of GOD, So hath it the Stamp of his Omnipresence, and the Character of his Goodness impressed upon it; And is So far Communicativ after his Similitude, as it is Excellent in Nature.⁹

Since God has communicated (‘Stamp[ed]’ or ‘impressed’) his own ‘Nature and Power’ to creation it has become a principle of nature to do likewise. There are dire consequences when the creature refuses to communicate itself in God’s similitude,

For whatsoever is so Tenacious of it self, that it is altogether Incommunicable, being Divested of all uses, It is unprofitable lumber in the place which it Filleth; It is Cut off like a Withering Branch from the Root of the World, and may not be Accounted any Part of the univers, becaus it is Divided, and Standeth alone; for it is as incapable of being aided by other Bodies as it is of assisting them.¹⁰

There is an echo here of Jesus’ words found in John 15, where he calls himself the ‘true vine’ and his disciples the nutrient dependent branches. In this image those who fail to ‘abide’ in Christ, also fail to ‘bear fruit’ and are therefore cut off and thrown away.¹¹ The biblically literate seventeenth century reader of this text would have certainly heard the echoes of Christ’s words from John 15, while also noticing Traherne’s expanded scope, from a small collection of first century disciples to the very ‘univers’. Incarnation, of course, is the archetype of this divine self-giving. For Traherne, God is ever communicating himself for the

⁸ ‘*Dumnesse*’ ll. 79, 81, 82, 86-88.

⁹ *Kingdom*, 381.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See John 15: 1-10.

sake of creation and the way to live properly in this creation is to respond in one's own self-giving. Traherne explains it in this way, 'Evry thing therfore receiveth from all, and communicateth to all, after its Kind and manner,' and even more to the point, 'all Beings Exchange themselvs for each others Sake to one another, and are united together.'¹² This principle of communication 'impressed' into the creation by God functions as a principle of union, drawing all things together in a mutual interplay of receiving and giving.

Traherne's mind, ever shaped by the impulse to trace an effect back to its cause (or more precisely in this case a type and its archetype), notices that the sun is God's 'visible Image and vice gerent' in this respect 'that it is the cause and Fountain of all Emanations.'¹³ The sun is the exemplar of this system of exchanging oneself for the sake of the other, and therefore mirrors the divine self-giving. This methodology of tracing the effect back to its cause leads Traherne to find a more essential principle that enlivens this principle of self-giving and unity. For Traherne love functions as the 'Form' that enlivens and unites the whole universe. As Traherne argues for love as the Form of the universe he will reveal two epistemological methodologies. One begins with observations from the visible world – 'what do I see around me?' – and following the new inductive scientific method argue for principles that make sense of the observed. In addition to a method of induction, Traherne will also look to revealed truth to make sense of the metaphysics of the observed physics. So in arguing for love as the 'Form' he turns to the Bible's proclamation that 'God is love' as proof of love's worthy place as the form of God's kingdom, while also seeking expressions of this in the visible creation. These two methods for coming to epistemological certainty have been described as exploring the text of scripture and the text of nature.¹⁴ Thinkers have described this search for certainty in the binaries of deduction vs. induction, Cartesian mind vs. scientific experimentation, or Platonic forms vs. Aristotelian observation – or, as it were, knowledge as the recollection of Platonic Forms known by the souls in its pre-embodied state vs. Aristotle's knowledge gained through empirical observation received through the senses. There has been some debate in recent decades relating to that last binary, namely the attempt to label Traherne as fundamentally Platonic (more accurately Neoplatonic) or Aristotelian, in

¹² *Kingdom*, 381.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ From the poem 'Dumnesse' quoted above we can see that Traherne did think of creation in this way for he calls it a 'large Text to comment on' ll. 58.

his orientation to the acquisition of true knowledge.¹⁵ In a chapter looking at God's self-expression within and through creation these questions of epistemology mirror Traherne's belief that the creation was made for humankind; a self-expression to the human recipient. So before continuing our discussion of God's self-expression in his creation, we will try to unravel seemingly Platonic and Aristotelian elements to see whether Traherne does posit one as preeminent over the other.

2.3. Aristotelian or Platonist?

It can be a nebulous task to locate any historical thinker squarely within any particular school of thought. Even the most self-professed member of a philosophical school typically adds a bit of nuance or development; Plotinus' relation to Platonism is an excellent example of this. Classifying a relatively late thinker like Traherne is especially difficult. He lived in a time of unprecedented availability of ancient writers (Plato, Aristotle, Hermes Trismegistus, Cicero, et al), who along with the Bible and its Patristic, Medieval, Renaissance and early Anglican commentators provided a vast array of content for the insatiable mind of Traherne to read, comment on and assimilate into his own thought.

With that caveat in mind we will proceed by isolating two primary influences – Plato and Aristotle – for other than the Bible, these two thinkers are preeminent within the history of Western thought, and this influence is felt within Traherne's oeuvre. Having isolated these two thinkers, the most natural next step, then, is to discern which of these two philosophers is more influential on Traherne's thought. Of the binary of Plato vs. Aristotle stated above, who reigns supreme?

Paul Cefalu, unsatisfied with the attempts by previous critics to reconcile Traherne's Aristotelian and Platonic elements by calling him 'an eclectic in whose work Platonism predominates'¹⁶, seeks to locate Traherne within an Aristotelian (and therefore for Cefalu a Thomistic) framework, over and above a Platonic framework. For Cefalu, 'most of the mystical and Platonic elements of Traherne's prose and poetry are consistent with neo-

¹⁵ Mark McIntosh, and Clements provide a more Platonic reading, while Paul Cefalu rightly notice the Aristotelean/Thomist elements of Traherne's thought. See Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*. Mark Allen McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth: The Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2004), 245. Paul Cefalu, "Thomistic Metaphysics and Ethics in the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Traherne," *Literature and Theology* 16, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 248–269.

¹⁶ Cefalu, "Thomistic Metaphysics and Ethics in the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Traherne," 249.

scholasticism, but few of the neo-scholastic elements are consistent with Platonism.’¹⁷ To substantiate his claim, Cefalu states that ‘Traherne’s Thomistic conception of God as pure Act’ (which will be discussed below) ‘is not assimilable to Plato’s conception of the demiurge or Plotinus’ notion of the Unitive One, both of which are first principles whose ontological status is beyond categories of potency and act altogether.’¹⁸ Cefalu’s neo-scholastic reading of Traherne helps to isolate some of the more incoherent elements of a Neoplatonic reading, exemplified by A.L. Clements’ ‘assertion that Traherne needs to return to a selfless, egoless state, which Clements redescribes as his “essential self”’¹⁹ (an essential self devoid of an ego or self), as well as Clements’ claim that Traherne’s mysticism is akin to Meister Eckhart’s, who in following Plotinus, understood God as ‘beyond existence and being’²⁰, which is contradictory to Traherne’s understanding of God as ‘*ens quatenus ens*’²¹ (‘being as being’). We will discuss the weight of Cefalu’s statements below.

Though we will assent to Cefalu’s claim that Traherne shows substantial evidence of being influenced by both Aristotle and Thomas, we will also argue that Traherne is in fact eclectic, and shows signs of assimilating Thomas, Aristotle *and* Plato (among many others) within his theological vision. One might argue that if Traherne is in fact a neo-scholastic in any way it is his tendency, as described Dupré, to ‘unite squarely opposed elements and strongly diverging tendencies within a single coherent vision.’²² St. Thomas is a prime example of this, as he shows the influence of Christian neo-platonic theologians like Augustine, Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius and Aristotelian’s like his teacher Albert the Great, and preeminent Muslim scholars Avicenna and Averroes. Thomas does show the substantial influence of his Aristotelian predecessors, but a part of his overall project is to assimilate Aristotle within a Christian context that has been heavily influenced by Platonism. Pitting Aristotle against Plato would have also been foreign to many early followers of Platonic thought. Lloyd Gerson shows that most early Platonists saw great convergence between Aristotle and Plato and in the era where ‘middle platonism’ transitioned to ‘neo-

¹⁷ Ibid., 249.

¹⁸ Ibid., 249.

¹⁹ Ibid., 250.

²⁰ Ibid., 253.

²¹ ‘Being as Being’, a view that, according to Traherne, ‘is the proper Notion whereby Plato, and Pythagorous (before him) expressed GOD, traduced originally from Exod. 3.14.’ *COH*, ‘Of Aristotles Philosophie’ ll. 43-45.

²² Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 29.

platonism', 'roughly from the middle of the third century C.E. to the middle of the 6th, Aristotelianism and Platonism were widely studied and written about on the assumption that they were harmonious philosophical systems.'²³ Traherne, also notes that within this same era the commentators of Aristotle included 'Porphyrie a Platonist', as well as 'Ammonius the Disciple of Proclus' and Simplicius' who were 'Platonists in like maner.'²⁴ As we will see below, Traherne seems much more inclined to follow the lead of early neo-platonists, scholastics, and Renaissance thinkers like Marsillio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who drew heavily from both Plato and Aristotle. Within this spirit of integration, however, we will still ask if Traherne does elevate one philosopher over the other, in what way, and how this Traherne's usage of both Plato and Aristotle impacts his doctrine of creation.

Traherne included two entries in his *Commentaries of Heaven* entitled 'Aristotle' and 'Of Aristotles Philosophie'. In these entries Traherne displays ambivalence in his judgment of Aristotle. To Traherne, Aristotle is preeminent in the fact that he is

first Compiler of all the sets and legitimate Systems of evry kind of Wisdom, Art, Prudence and Science, He was the first Former and father of Ethicks, Oeconomicks, Politik, Opticks, Physicks ... being the only person that assigned to evry one of them its proper office Object and End, and taught us how in the famelie of Learning, like Brothers and Sisters, they related to each other.²⁵

Along with praising Aristotle's ability to create systems of thought – which is echoed in the great scholastic *Summa* – as we saw in the previous chapter, Traherne also praises Aristotle for his mode of expression when he quotes Ammonius by saying,

'The form of Aristotles Writings is evry Way exact as to Phrase. For the Philosopher ever avoids Rhetorical flourishes, and wholly endeavors to set forth the Nature of Things.' So Aristotle 'utterly rejected that Mythologick, Symbolic Mode of Philosophizing, which is predecessors, Thales,... and Plato had introduced.'²⁶ Traherne praises Aristotle's clarity of expression, but in *Seeds of Eternity*, he says that Aristotle's fault in his *De Anima* was that he articulates the many faculties of the soul but they 'appear like Lims and Members chopt into Pieces' because he fails to identify the proper objects of these capacities, and the 'Sovereign end to which they tended. Aristotle's anthropology is anaemic for he fails to explicate the soul's 'Symmetrie and Proportion', and in failing to identify how its 'Powers can be drawn

²³ Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 2.

²⁴ 'Aristotle', *Commentaries*, Vol. 3, 195.

²⁵ 'Aristotle', *Commentaries*, Vol. 3, 191.

²⁶ 'Of Aristotles Philosophie', *Commentaries*, 201.

from Eternity to Eternity, and its Inclinations brought from God to God' the soul is 'presented like a broken Monument, whose fragments are seen, but lying in the Rubbish. For the Glory and Beauty of the Object Springeth from the Union of all the Parts'.²⁷ For Traherne, Aristotle's teleology is anaemic. Without God, as the transcendent Good and final object of desire, the soul loses its symmetry, beauty, purpose and felicity. Though Traherne praises Aristotle for his clarity, his finite teleology makes his philosophy insufficient in articulating a full theology of creation.

Traherne also locates pride as Aristotle's biggest vice. In Aristotle's attempt to raise himself above previous philosophers he unfairly misrepresents them. We get a sense of Traherne's ambivalence toward Aristotle in the following quote:

Wherefore as in refuting others, he is scarcely to be Saluted; so in his Demonstrating of Things, I would have him to be embraced with both Arms. Among other his Defects he is suspected of Pride, for that he seems to demolish the Remains of all other mens Learning, that he might be the Sole Prince of Philosophie in the World. for this cause he mis-recites their Opinions.²⁸

For Traherne, Aristotle fails to acknowledge that his most important doctrines are in fact derivative of previous philosophy and ultimately from the Hebrew text. For example, Aristotle's idea of '*first Matter*' is 'Nothing else, but some broken fragments of those Traditions which Plato had received originally from the Jewish Church, touching the first Chaos, of which all things were created.'²⁹ Traherne also traces Aristotle's thought about God as the '*first Mover*' back through Plato to the Hebrew Scriptures. For Aristotle 'is very Copious in his Philosophizings on the *first Mover*; proving that he is Immovable One Eternal, Indivisible Being, void of all Quality, etc. Wherin he exactly follows Plato, and the Scripture Revelation of GOD.'³⁰ With these, and with further examples, Traherne traces the many ways Aristotle is conformable to Platonic doctrines, with the majority of these being derivative of the Hebrew texts. For Traherne at least, the wisdom of Ancient Greece remains a proper source of knowledge because the Hebrew texts were heavily influential to Greek philosophy. Traherne's high view of human intellect and reason as gifts of common grace also warrants his search for knowledge within the Greek philosophical tradition.

With regards purely to intellectual acumen, Traherne perceives himself as following Plato's lead in deeming Aristotle 'the Intellect of his Scholae' and 'The Philosopher of Truth.'

²⁷ *Seeds*, 236-7.

²⁸ 'Aristotle', *Commentarie*, 190.

²⁹ 'Of Aristotles Philosophie', *Commentaries*, 197.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Aristotle uses his intellect to organize ‘the dispersed Members of Philosophie into one Body or Systeme’.³¹ This being said, Aristotle fails in relation to divine matters for, he ‘was ready to entertain such Notions of GOD and his Providence, as were agreeable to the Model of his reason, but such as depended purely on Tradition he rejected as not Agreeable to a Philosopher.’³² Traherne sees the great irony in this, for someone ‘so Sagacious in studying after the Properties of Effects’, shows himself most ignorant when pondering the nature of the ‘Sovereign Cause’.³³ Instead of following his own edict that ‘no Evidence should be required greater then the Nature of the Thing will bear’, Aristotle rejected all other traditions ‘which his corrupted Nature could not comprehend or reduce to Demonstration.’³⁴ Aristotle’s system of cause and effect was unable to account for divine or transcendent causation, making him irreconcilable with Traherne’s understanding of God’s freedom to act on or within God’s creation. For Traherne, God by definition is not confined to the mechanistic world of cause and effect and therefore cannot be reduced to his method of Demonstration. Traherne continues his thinly veiled critique of the limited scope of scientific exploration of his own day in the following:

But Aristotle (as Simplicius observs) confining him self to the Sphere of his own Reason, would needs examine Divine Matters by Nature, and admit nothing, but what was grounded on Natures Light, or rather on his own *Corrupt Reason*: whence he lost the Beauty of all such *Oriental* Traditions, as would not stoop to his Proud Ratiocination, as before. Howbeit for those Methods in every Science, wherof he was the father, the World owes far more to him then to Plato.³⁵

As the ‘father’ of science Aristotle is supreme within the natural sphere of cause and effect, however there is an inherent defect when seeking knowledge of entities and events not constrained by this closed system.

[Aristotle] did not well, in rejecting all Tradition, for there are many Things relating to the Historie of GOD almighty which are of great Importance for our Illumination, yet cannot be conveyed to us by any other Light, then that of Tradition. for faith and Authoritie are the only Means wherby the Knowledg of History is attained, the Subject matter therof being Emergent Affairs, Voluntary, free, or Accidental Transactions, which are not capable of a Logical Demonstration...because there is no...necessary Dependence of one upon the other.³⁶

³¹ ‘Aristotle’, *Commentaries*, 189.

³² ‘Of Aristotles Philosophie’, *Commentaries*, 199.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 203.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

As Traherne continues he affirms the place of reason to critique the claims conveyed in tradition, for ‘Traditions may justly be examined by the Rules of Reason’³⁷. So it is not reason as such that Traherne is here critiquing, it is Aristotle’s false assumption that scientific inquiry provides the only sure method of inquiry. For Traherne, history relays the occurrence of ‘Emergent Affairs’, events whose cause comes from Divine or human volition and events that are mere accidents, that cannot be reduced to ‘Logical Demonstration’ (or what would later become Newtonian physics), and therefore, are inaccessible to Aristotle’s method. What is most fundamentally at stake in Traherne’s argument against Aristotle is freedom, divine and human.

According to these two articles in *Commentaries of Heaven*, Traherne reveals an ambivalent attitude to the Aristotle’s philosophy. In his role as the ‘father’ of scientific method, the ‘father of Ethicks, Oeconomicks, Politiks...’ and in the clarity of his expression, Aristotle is to be praised. In matters not constrained by the closed system of cause and effect (*a la* Divine and human volition) we are to more closely follow Plato, for in quoting Quintilian, Traherne says that Plato ‘seems to me to be inspired, not with the Ingenie of a Man, but with a certain Delphic Oracle.’³⁸ For Traherne, contrary to Quintilian, Plato’s Delphic inspiration is not derived from Apollo, but from the ‘*Jewish Traditions*’, and this is where its superiority lies:

If you enquire which the World is most endebted to? comparing them in Metaphysicks and Divine Contemplations, tis evident that Aristotle was far inferior to Plato. And the reason is apparent. For Plato delighting much in *Jewish Traditions*... he therby obtained great Notices of *Divine Mysteries*, especialy such as Related to the Origene of the Unvers, the Spiritual Nature and perfection of GOD, the Immortalitie of the Soul etc.’³⁹

We proceed, then, in affirming that for Traherne Aristotle reigns supreme in the sphere of natural philosophy and clarity of thought, with the caveat that his most important doctrines are derived from Plato. Outside the scope of natural science (metaphysics, theology, the world’s origins, the immortality of the soul) Plato reigns supreme, with the caveat that Plato offers an imperfect expression of the ‘Scripture Revelation of GOD’. For Traherne, ‘who gives them each, tho in different regards, a preeminence over the other’,⁴⁰ both Aristotle and Plato are influential on his thought. Together, and balanced against each other, these two

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., ll. 202.

³⁹ Ibid., ll. 202-3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., ll. 202.

Greek thinkers offer Traherne a more robust picture of reality. If Aristotle excels more in the finite realm and Plato the transcendent, the integration of the two mirrors Traherne's belief that the poet 'Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense',⁴¹ which as we argued in Chapter 1, is mimetic of God's act of creation. In creation, God has come down, God has made God-self known in what 'he has made', thus Traherne follows Aristotle in looking intently at the objects of creation. But as objects of creation, they are objects of contemplation, and when truly seen help to 'trace the glorious way' to 'thy Highest Bliss'.⁴² It is this perpetual movement between heaven and earth (transcendence and immanence) that reverberates throughout Traherne's doctrine of creation. Neither is swallowed up in the other, instead there is constant conversation.

2.4. Divine Self-Revelation

Above we observed that for Traherne the created order is a divine communication, a speaking forth of the divine person(s). The transcendent God has made, and continues to make, God-self known in the immanent world of the senses. The God who speaks is heard in the creation. The divine presence is therefore available to all who are prepared to receive it; a central idea in Traherne that will be expounded more fully in Chapter 4. In his emphasis on showing the natural goodness and beauty of the creation Traherne is making a concerted effort to counterbalance what he perceives as his contemporaries' sin of losing touch with the blessedness of God's gift of creation. In *The Kingdom Of God* Traherne raises up the 'Heathens' as a chastisement to his fellow Christians, who though they fell into idolatry and 'ought much rather to hav Considered how much more Beautifull and Glorious their Author was'⁴³ were right to have their hearts 'melted' and induced to the adoration and praise of creation. Traherne goes on to explain,

Nevertheless they Condemn us, who in the Light of the Gospel hav more Stupid and obdurate Hearts then they; for being so litle Sensible of the Brightness and Glory of these things, and having so mean a Regard, and Estimation for them Even professed Christians despise them. They are not Gods, but Gods Gifts. They hav none of their own; but his Divinity is apparent in them. The little Reverence, we giv unto them, is an Error in the other Extreme, as great, as theirs. ⁴⁴

⁴¹ 'Author the Critical Peruser', l. 5.

⁴² Ibid., ll. 9-10.

⁴³ See Romans 1.20

⁴⁴ See *Kingdom*, 364.

In Traherne's exuberance to reveal the majesty of creation he seeks to overtake and baptize a pagan, pantheist view of the created order. In Traherne's usage of pagan idolatry to chastise his fellow Christians he refrains from 'overcorrecting' toward paganism when he says, 'They are not Gods, but Gods Gifts', therefore affirming the distinct place God has in relation to the cosmos. God, as distinct from creation, offers the creation as both an expression of divinity and as a gift to the receptive soul. As the above shows, Traherne has stern words against those who with 'Stupid and obdurate Hearts' refuse to receive this gift. A refusal of this gift is a refusal of God, for 'his Divinity is apparent in them.'

In the *Centuries* Traherne shows a similar zeal to reveal the beauties of creation and persuade his reader to see and enjoy the world as he does.

...you never enjoy the word aright; till you so love the beauty of enjoying it, that you are covetous and earnest to persuade others to enjoy it. And so perfectly hate the abominable corruption of men in despising it, that you had rather suffer the flames of Hell than willingly be guilty of their error. There is so much blindness and ingratitude and damned folly in it. The world is a mirror of infinite beauty, yet no man sees it...It is the Paradise of God.⁴⁵

The strength of the language deployed in these passages from *The Kingdom Of God* and the *Centuries* remind us that one of Traherne's central purposes was to persuade and awaken his reader to a right enjoyment of creation. In this enjoyment there is a certain rightness, justness and orderliness that bears an aesthetic quality and is here called 'the beauty of enjoy[ment]'. Below we will discuss further this interrelation of beauty, order and justice, while also exploring the world as a 'mirror of infinite beauty', but what these passages remind us of is that whenever Traherne provides content of a metaphysical nature he is doing so within a broader project of awakening his reader to see creation as a divine gift waiting to be received, enjoyed and given thanks for.

These themes of enjoyment and divine self-giving are picked up in *The Kingdom Of God* where Traherne again returns to a definition of God as an 'Infinit, and Eternal Act', who cannot be enjoyed 'in Idleness, and Vacuitie...but in his Elections and operations.' After returning to the theme of cause and effect by stating 'causes are Enjoyed in the Glory of their Effects', he goes on to describe a God who must condescend to be enjoyed.

God Especialy is So Infinitely high... it is Impossible to see him, or know him, or discern him, without some Condescention of his, wherein he is pleased for our Sakes to clothe himself with some Visible Appearance; at least Some Intelligible One, that

⁴⁵ *Centuries*, I, 31.

may be objected, and made Visible as it were to the Understanding: Which can be no other then the Act, wherein all his Wisdom, and Goodness appeareth.⁴⁶

This passage expresses a clear ontological distinction in Traherne's mind between the transcendent God and the creation, while also affirming God's causal relationship to the creation. God has objectified God-self in the creation, and as we will discuss more fully in Chapter 3, this act of condescension has made God-self accessible to the understanding. Adding to the images given of the creation as a type of divine-speech which carries within it the 'Stamp of his Omnipresence, and the Character of his Goodness impressed upon it', this passage speaks of the creation as a garment worn by this transcendent deity. Deploying this imagery invites Traherne's reader to imagine how 'God's invisible qualities – his 'eternal power and divine nature'⁴⁷ – might be seen in the contours of this beautiful garment.

In the *Centuries*, Traherne strengthens the imagery of the creation as a divine garment by borrowing from 'Ancient philosophers' who argued that the 'World' is God's assumed body. 'Ancient philosophers have thought God to be the Soul of the World. Since therefore this visible World is the body of God, not His natural body, but which He hath assumed; let us see how glorious His wisdom is in manifesting Himself thereby.' The imagery of the 'World' as divine body is deployed here to further emphasise God's appearance in creation. In using this term, Traherne, places his ideas in conversation with ancient pagan philosophy,⁴⁸ therefore a clear distinction must be made between a Plotinian cosmology (creation emanates naturally from the transcendent One without the exercise of the will)⁴⁹ versus a God who is ontologically distinct from the creation, and therefore chooses to create.⁵⁰ Traherne provides this distinction when he affirms that the creation is God's

⁴⁶ *Kingdom*, 476.

⁴⁷ Rom. 1.20 (KJV)

⁴⁸ Plato's *Timaeus* provides an account of the world, which is picked up by Plotinus in his *Enneads*. Traherne may have had Plotinus' three metaphysical hypostases (the transcendent One, the mind or *Nous*, and the Soul or world soul) which necessarily emanates or radiates downward from the One, to the *nous*, and then to Soul, when speaking of the 'world soul'. In *Ennead* V.1[10] Plotinus speaks of the *nous*, radiating naturally from the unitary principle of the One, which 'may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance' (V.1[10].6, 30-31) in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 2nd ed / revised by B.S. Page. (London: Faber, 1956). Traherne, as did many Patristic theologians, utilizes the image of the sun and its rays to speak of God's emanations in creation, but this image is always coupled with the affirmation of God's freedom and ontological distinction from creation.

⁴⁹ It must be noted however, that emanation ['Emanationem'] is not a word used by Plotinus, but one used by Aquinas (*Summa theologiae*. Pars I. qu. XLv. Art. 1). Additionally, the idea that Plotinus understood this to be a natural or necessary emanation from the One must have been imported by later commentators for he entitles *Ennead* VI.8 [39] 'On the Freedom and Will of the One'. This cosmology of Neoplatonic emanationism may have been passed to the scholastics through Pseudo Dionysius and Erigena.

⁵⁰ According to Andrew Louth, the Nicean doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, the idea that God created out of nothing, means 'that there is a complete contrast between God and the created order, between uncreated and

assumed body not his natural body, and comes about by the exercise of the wisdom of a divine agent. Calling the world an assumed body also brings together the notions of creation and Incarnation in Traherne's thought. Traherne's discussion of the hypostatic union in *Kingdom of God* draws a clear distinction between God's relation to all of creation and God's special relation to 'Human Nature', but there are clear resonances between these acts of embodiment:

remember that the Humane Nature is Hypostatically united unto God: the Greatest Elevation that was absolutely Possible: And that GOD himself dwelleth in a Body for evermore⁵¹

Traherne language of the world as the body of God – finding resonances both with Plotinian cosmology and Incarnation – works to forms in the reader's mind a closer link between the creator-God and the creation. Traherne continues in this century by positing that the creation reflects the divine in the following way:

[For the world] hath not only represented His infinity and eternity which we thought impossible to, be represented by a body, but His beauty also, His wisdom, goodness, power, life and glory, His righteousness, love, and blessedness: all which as out of a plentiful treasury, may be taken and collected out of his world.⁵²

The notion of the 'world' in the *Centuries* – which in the *Centuries* Traherne deploys to mean all of creation⁵³ – and its parallel 'the Kingdom' in *Kingdom of God*, is at its foundation a divine self-expression. And because of this, one can enjoy the world and contemplate the world, and at the same time be enjoying and contemplating God. This designation of creation as divine self-expression allows Traherne the freedom to scour the created order to find the character of God. In the following quote from *Kingdom of God* we can see the interworking of these ideas of creation as gift to be enjoyed and creation as divine self-expression.

For God giveth himself to be Enjoyed, by doing for us all those things that pleas and delight us. In the Beauty and Excellency of those, his Glory shineth, in the Goodness of those his Goodness is Enjoyed; for purity of those, his Holiness is Admired, for

self-subsistent, and that which is created out of nothing by the will of God.' Louth goes on to conclude that because of this doctrine 'The Orthodox freed themselves from an aspect of Platonism' which was the doctrine of emanation found in the cosmologies of Plato and Plotinus. For a robust discussion of the impact of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* see chapter five of Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵¹ *Kingdom*, 493.

⁵² *Centuries*, II, 21.

⁵³ See *Centuries*, I, 18 'The WORLD is not this little Cottage of Heaven and Earth. Though this be fair, it is too small a Gift. When God made the World He made the Heavens, and the Heavens of Heavens, and the Angels, and the Celestial Powers. These also are parts of the World: so are all those infinite and eternal Treasures that are to abide for ever, after the Day of Judgment.'

their Usefullness and Order his Wisdom Adored, his Highness Magnified for their Sublime Exaltation, and his Lov in their preparation pleased, and Glorified.⁵⁴

Again, we see the causal relation between God and creation, but as we have noticed already Traherne typically articulates this within the context of Divine expression to and for the sake of the human person ('God giveth himself to be Enjoyed'). This provides a deeply relational quality to Traherne's metaphysics. This is why, as we will see below, the metaphysical weight of God's kingdom does not rest most essentially on goodness or beauty, it rests on love. Goodness and beauty are expressions of this love that lies at the root. When all is stripped back, the two notions that guide Traherne's metaphysics are: God loves and desires God's creation, and the creation at its most fundamental level, desires its king.

The expressive quality of the 'Kingdom' provides endless opportunities for the human person to receive the communications of God therein. As we saw above, God's 'unapproachable essence' can only be comprehended through the divine condescension of creation. Instead of speaking of the creation as a putting on of a garment Traherne here speaks of the creation – following the language of the *Centuries* – as God's body.

His Kingdom! Why It is the Condescension of him that is Inaccessible! His unapproachable Essence is made Manifest therby. He that is too high to be Comprehended in him self, appearing as it were in that Body, becomes Familiar. It is too Manifold and Great to be uttered, We will speak of it by Degrees, and take in its Single Perfections, one by one. They are refined Essences. We will receiv them quietly, and chew them Gently, that we may perfectly digest them.⁵⁵

It would prove helpful to remember Traherne's words in 'The Author to the Critical Peruser' when he states that his poetic 'Strain', though humble, 'Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense / And keeps them there; / that is Our Excellence: / At that we aim; to th' end they Soul might see / With open Eys they Great Felicity'.⁵⁶ As we explored in Chapter 1, the doctrine of the Incarnation theologically grounds Traherne's understanding of the poetic task, but Traherne's explicit referent in the poem is in fact creation. As a mimetic art, Traherne's poetry seeks to mirror creation as the divine 'Condescension of him that is Inaccessible'. Now if creation is this 'bodying forth' of divine transcendence one of the functions of creation is to reveal the divine, bringing 'the highest Mysteries to sense'. In conjunction with this revelatory role – as we saw in the poem '*Dumnesse*' 'The Heavens were an Orakle, and spake

⁵⁴ *Kingdom*, 280.

⁵⁵ *Kingdom*, 337.

⁵⁶ 'The Author to the Critical Peruser' ll. 3-8.

/ *Divinity*: The Earth did undertake / The office of a Priest'⁵⁷ – the creation functions in a priestly role, mediating divinity to the human soul and drawing her back into union with God. It is within the dynamism of the divine allurements – drawing the creation back into union – that we find Traherne's notions of beauty. We will come to this shortly.

In this section, we have explored Traherne's various articulations of the relation between God and God's creation. We have used the idea of divine self-expression as a gloss to encapsulate the various terms Traherne uses for the way God reveals God's-self within creation. Traherne describes the creation as the 'face', 'body', 'cloth[ing]', 'text', 'Manifestation' and 'Communication' of God. One single metaphor is insufficient for Traherne as he tries to describe the way the divine 'Cause' is in the effect. This section concludes with a lengthy quote that offers a collection of images (or similes) to describe the way the creation relates to the creator. The full quote is provided because it shows (instead of merely describing) Traherne's complex usage of simile; one simile building on another, which modifies a third, all the while gesturing towards a reality that words, as it were, cannot wrap their arms around.

[The Kingdom] relates unto God in no Mean Capacitie. As the Effect to the Cause, the Image to the person, the Son to the Father. the Stream to the fountain. This Image is no Ordinary, but a Great and Living picture: The Light of his Countenance being sealed upon it: It relates unto him, As a Kingdom to the King. A Kings Highness is in the Kingdom. As a Bride to the Bridegroom: which is the Glory and Delight of her Husband: As a Temple to the Deitie: For God doth Inhabit it. It is the House of GOD, where in he dwelleth, and is Adored. He dwelleth in his Kingdom, not as in other Temples, where he is the object of the Adorers Thoughts and Affections only. But as the Skill of an Architect dwelles in his Work, and the Face of a Spectator in the Mirror he beholds. As the Virtu of the Sun dwels in the Trees and Herbs it inspireth, and a Fountain in the stream, so does the Fullness of the Godhead lodg in his Kingdom.⁵⁸

As we have been arguing up to this point, Traherne inhabits a universe that from first to last is a divine self-expression. The array of images deployed to try and articulate this creator-creation interaction shows to the reader that each stand-alone image (simile or metaphor) seeks to reveal one aspect of this interaction. As a whole, the various images work in concert, revealing an aspect veiled by another image. The cumulative effect of Traherne's language is two-fold. In one sense, the close relation between God and creation compels Traherne to examine the created order to locate its intrinsic goodness. However, the exploration, meditation and contemplation of the creation functions as a spiritual exercise

⁵⁷ *Dumnesse* ll. 63-65.

⁵⁸ *Kingdom*, 337.

precisely because ‘the World’ acts as a mirror that reveals the face of God. In this way the creation functions as a priest, mediating the presence of God, and beckoning the soul toward union with the divine. In the following section we will explore more deeply how ‘the Fullness of the Godhead’ is lodg[ed] in his Kingdom’ by looking at the divine attributes of beauty, goodness and love as communicated in the metaphysical structures of creation. We enter into Traherne’s metaphysics through beauty for as we will see below it functions as the expression or communication of goodness and love.

2.5. God Speaks in Beauty, Goodness and Love

2.5.1. *Beauty: ‘to know God...is to see the beauty of infinite Love’*

In the *Centuries*, Traherne is, as it were, taken up with the essential beauty, goodness and love of God. For Traherne, knowledge of God is authentic when the human soul apprehends God as beautiful, good and lovely. He explains,

To know GOD is Life Eternal. There must therefore some exceeding Great Thing be always attained in the Knowledge of Him. To know God is to know Goodness. It is to see the beauty of infinite Love...To know Him therefore as He is, is to frame the most beautiful idea in all Worlds. He delighteth in our happiness more than we: and is of all the other the most Lovely Object.⁵⁹

God, here, is called ‘Goodness’, ‘infinite Love’ and ‘the most Lovely Object’, and true apprehension of this divine object produces an experience of, or encounter with beauty. When God is seen God is visualized as ‘the beauty of infinite love’ and when God is known ‘as He is’, the soul frames ‘the most beautiful idea in all Worlds.’ There is an inextricable link between the divine qualities of beauty, goodness and love. On the one hand, according to Traherne, beauty is the accessible manifestation of God’s love and goodness (the quality perceived by humankind), while on the other hand beauty seems to go right down to the very essence of God. Touching the very essence of God and yet accessible to the human eye, beauty plays an important role in Traherne’s metaphysics. In this section we will examine beauty, as it relates to goodness and love.⁶⁰ We will also seek to locate Trahernian aesthetics

⁵⁹ *Centuries*, I, 17.

⁶⁰ These are not the only divine attributes spoken of by Traherne – for below we will speak of divine wisdom and truth – but since beauty, goodness and love are so often spoken of together and function centrally in Traherne’s metaphysics we will deal with them as a unit.

within a longstanding tradition of Christian Neoplatonism, through the lens of the Renaissance Platonist Marsilio Ficino.

We begin our exploration of divine beauty in chapter eight of *Kingdom of God* where Traherne speaks of the very being of God as infinitely beautiful.

GOD is so All Sufficient that his Being is his Happiness; But the Reason is then because his Being is of Such a Kind, that it is infinitely Beautifull and includes the Fruition of all Delights in its own Existence.⁶¹

Within the divine essence there resides a wellspring of all sufficiency and happiness, and as such it is 'infinitely Beautifull', for in God's beauty resides the 'Fruition of all Delights'. Of the infinite beauty of God's 'Being' Traherne continues by calling it 'a Mine of Infinit Treasures and Pleasures, an Abyesse of infinit Wonders, a World of Mysteries a boundless Infinity of Illimited Excellencies.' Traherne connects the economic and immanent life of God in the following: 'As Infinitely profitable and pleasant to himself, so Infinitely Delightfull and Conducive to others the Fountain of Infinit Emanations, and the Fruition of its offspring.' He utilizes the platonic language of emanation to describe how, the 'All Sufficient' God flows forth in creation and is then the 'Fruition', true desire and proper end of that creation. The being of God is 'so Beautifull because it is at once infinitely convenient to himself, and others; So profitable to all that his Creatures hav Infinit Cause to Rejoyce in it as well as He, and He, and Evry thing that can Rejoyce as well as all.' We can see here how Traherne envisaged God's beauty as a bearer of mutual beatitude to God-self and God's creation. It is God's 'Being', perceived as beautiful that is 'Infinitely Delightfull' and 'Eternaly Desirable'.

Traherne explains:

The Reasons of its Amiableness and Beauty are Innumerable, but this one affordeth us Matter Enough for our present Contemplation. In this very Respect alone (that is Infinitely profitable to it Self, and others) it is Infinitely Delightfull, and for this alone is it Eternaly Desirable.

The mutual profitability of God's essence is of such a character that a fitting response to its beauty is one of delight and the attraction of human desire. God is the proper object of human insatiable desire, for unlike creaturely objects, 'It is never Weary of it Self, nor can its Beauty wax old, nor his Glory decay'.⁶² Having no defect, and no end, divine beauty allures human desire to the only object sufficient to answer its insatiability. Traherne summarizes these themes of divine beatitude communicated for creaturely beatitude by speaking of it as a 'Shining forth',

⁶¹ *Kingdom*, 315.

⁶² All the above quotes come from *Kingdom*, 315.

If we Examine the Nature of the Blessedness of God, it consisteth in the perfection of his Life, the pleasure which he taketh in doing good, the Beauty and Delight of his Eternal Essence, and in the glory of the same Shining forth upon all, and Secured in the Fruition of it self, and all other Things, by its infinit Greatness⁶³

The plenitudinous beauty of God's essence flows forth into the creation and draws it through desire back into union with the divine. The language of 'Shining forth' of divine 'emanations' and the return through desire bears the distinct imprint of Christian Neoplatonism, especially the Platonism of Marsilio Ficino. We know that while Plato's influence on English thinking came a great deal earlier than Ficino – the fifteenth century Renaissance translator and commentator of Plato, Plotinus, Hermes Trismegistus, et al. – the existence of a notebook in Traherne's own hand, which contains Latin versions of Ficino's introductions to the Platonic dialogues (amongst other things), provides a direct link between the two thinkers.⁶⁴ Ficino's influence on Traherne has been well-documented,⁶⁵ especially as it relates to his anthropology, but few have examined Ficino's influence on Traherne's theological aesthetics.

In Ficino's introduction to *Greater Hippias*, copied in Traherne's own hand, we find that Socrates defines beauty and the Beautiful as nothing other than the following:

Beauty is the resplendence of the greatest Good, shining in things that are perceived by the eyes, the ears, and the mind, and through them turning the faculties of sight, hearing, and the mind towards the Good itself. This is why it is that beauty is manifest as a circle of divine light, issuing from the Good, coming to pause in Good, perpetually returning through Good to the Good. This mystery, that he claimed to have learnt from the Sybil Diotima, Socrates revealed not to the sophists, but to his disciples.⁶⁶

We notice in this translation from the *Ficino Notebook* the interworking of the Good and the Beautiful in Socrates' definition of beauty. Beauty functions as the 'resplendence of the greatest Good' and is 'manifest as a circle of divine light'. Beauty makes the transcendent Good accessible to the 'faculties of sight, hearing, and the mind', echoing Traherne's poet

⁶³ *Kingdom*, 287.

⁶⁴ For a closer examination of the influence of Marsilio Ficino on English Platonism see Sears Jayne, "Ficino and the Platonism of the English Renaissance," *Comparative Literature* 4, no. 3 (1952): 214–238. In the end he concludes 'Where Ficino affected English Platonism most powerfully was in the theory of love and beauty which passed for Platonism in English poetry' (p. 238). naturally the English poetry of Spencer, Shakespeare et al. would have also been familiar to Traherne.

⁶⁵ See Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 20, 132, 136, 139–41, 153, 214. Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism." Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus." Sicherman, "Traherne's Ficino Notebook."

⁶⁶ *Ficino Notebook*, Burney MS 126, fol. 20. I am deeply indebted to Professor Ann Moss, who is currently working on an Oxford Critical Edition of the *Ficino Notebook*, and was kind enough to share her translation of the Latin text found therein.

who ‘Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense’, which is mimetic of God who is ‘pleased for our Sakes to clothe himself with some Visible Appearance’.⁶⁷ What beauty does in the receptive soul is to turn its ‘faculties’ to ‘the Good itself’. In the Christian tradition the Good is subsumed within God, so that in Traherne he can speak of beauty as the divine self-expression that works to capture human desire and draw the soul back into its divine source and end. As we will see below – when we shift our focus more acutely on the nature of goodness – Traherne articulates the interrelation of beauty and goodness in similar ways to the Ficino quote above.

As we saw above, after Ficino recounts Socrates’ definition of beauty he mentions the source of this definition as the ‘sybil Diotima’, who we find in Plato’s *Symposium*. In Ficino’s *De Amore*, he explores the themes of love and beauty found in the *Symposium*. Though Traherne does not include portions of the *De Amore* in his *Ficino Notebook* we know he would have at least been generally aware of its ideas through Ficino’s other works. Sears Jayne suggests a more direct influence of the *De Amore* on Traherne as well as fellow poets John Donne and Henry Vaughan, and Cambridge Platonists, Henry More, Peter Sterry and others.⁶⁸ In Speech II, chapter 2 of this work, Ficino speaks of divine beauty and love and shows his indebtedness to Pseudo-Dionysius in his view.

This divine beauty has generated love, that is, a desire for itself, in all things. Since if God attracts the World to Himself, and the World is attracted, there exists a certain continuous attraction (beginning from God, emanating to the World, and returning at last to God) which returns again, as if in a kind of circle, to the same place whence it issued. And so one and the same circle from God to the World and from the World to God is called by three names. Inasmuch as it begins in God and attracts to Him, it is called Beauty; inasmuch as emanating to the World it captivates it, it is called Love; inasmuch as returning to its author it joins His work to Him, it is called Pleasure. Love, therefore beginning with Beauty, ends in Pleasure. This was expressed in that famous hymn of Hierotheus and Dionysius the Areopagite, where these theologians sang as follows: “Love is a good circle which always revolves from the Good to the Good.”⁶⁹

For Ficino, ‘When we say “Love,” understand “the desire for beauty.” For this is the definition of love among the philosophers.’⁷⁰ According to Ficino, it is love that reaches out for and longs for the divine beauty, which is God. Beauty inspires a longing for union with

⁶⁷ *Kingdom*, 476.

⁶⁸ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, 2nd rev. ed. (Dallas, Tex: Spring Publications, 1985), 22.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

the Good, which is described as love. We have already seen that Traherne, also, articulates the divine as infinitely beautiful and therefore the proper object of human desire and love. As we turn again to Traherne's own words in *The Kingdom of God* it will be helpful to notice this platonic echo; namely, that creation flows forth from the divine essence and finds its fruition in its return to its divine source. Not all of Traherne's cosmology and theories of love and beauty are drawn directly from Ficino – for similarly to Ficino, Traherne reveals an eclectic array of sources – but we can affirm that Christian Neoplatonism, through the thought of Ficino, plays a substantial role in Traherne's understanding of beauty, goodness and love.

In the eclecticism of Ficino's theory of beauty, we see him attempting to synthesise a Platonic theory of beauty defined 'as an abstract universal existing separately in the mind of God' with an Aristotelian understanding which 'defined beauty as an abstraction generated by the individual human mind from many particular sense experiences.'⁷¹ In the following quotes from the thirty-fifth chapter of *The Kingdom of God* we also see Traherne navigating the relationship between a transcendent abstracted beauty located in the essence of God with the human experience of that beauty expressed in the outward acts of God. Taking up again the imagery of God as king and creation as 'his Kingdom' Traherne states;

His Kingdom is the Treasure of his Life and Beauty, becaus he lives by ruling it. For to Rule and Live in God are one. He lives in Erecting, in Supporting, in Actuating, in Continuing, and Crowning his Kingdom. And as all Life is sweet that is most so, that is spent in the most Excellent Action about the Highest Object.⁷²

Having defined how 'His Kingdom is the Treasure of his Life' he goes on to describe how it is the 'Treasure' of his 'Beauty' by taking up again the image of the world as God's body, and expanding it to include all divine activity.

In Beautifying which he beautifies himself, as in making it Magnificent he clothes himself with Majestie. Beauty is a Delightfull thing, for the sake of which many other things, that serv to no other purpose then its Increas are Esteemed. Since God is a Simple and Eternal Act, whose Beams are his operations, The several and various Acts that proceed from his Essence, tho they are one in him, being yet distinct in the Creatures, are like unto Armes and Toes, and fingers. Of which if any perisheth, the Body is Defective: So that none of them can be missing. they are all Immutable, tho pure and free, being in all their Perfections Stable, and Everlasting.

In describing God's activity as beautiful, Traherne is able to take all the various acts of God and organize them within an aesthetic of order and proportion. In the same way that

⁷¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 14.

⁷² This and the below quotes come from a single paragraph found in *Kingdom*, 453.

Traherne's literary theory bears the mark of the beautiful so do his physics and metaphysics, and in the coming chapters we will see the aesthetic strand in his ethics.

As Traherne continues in this passage from the *Kingdom of God* he turns to the human recipient of this beautifully ordered collection of divine activity.

His Beauty seemeth to depend upon them [God's activity], because our sight of it really doth depend upon them. But it really dependeth on his Will, and Essence, on which all outward operations depend in like Manner.

The beauty of God's activity reveals the divine beauty of God's essence, for his activity springs forth from 'his Will, and Essence'. In this way God is enfleshed, as it were, in beauty so that 'our sight' might perceive God in human experience; the transcendent God has come down to sense. It is important to notice – as we stated above – that this act of God's essential beauty emanating forth is an act of the will, and not, as some Platonists would affirm, a necessary overflow of the transcendent 'One'. Traherne goes on to describe the causal relation between created and uncreated beauty, while also locating beauty within the Trinitarian economy.

His Beauty is not the Effect, but the cause of his Operations: And yet if we should say, it is the Effect, we should not Lie, for it is begotten of it self: It is unbegotten in the Father, begotten in the Son and proceeding in the Holy Ghost. His Beauty being an Essence, arising, and Springing of its own Pleasure, and the Cause of all other Beauty whatsoever.

The central place that beauty plays in Traherne's theology becomes undisputable as he places it right in the middle of the traditional formulations of the divine Trinity. Located at the very centre of God's essence, beauty then flows forth into all other forms of beauty perceived by the human soul. Divine beauty is on display to the perceptive mind in the embodied beauty of the corporeal world, for 'His Beauty and Glory are made as it were Visible in the House of his Kingdom.'⁷³

The incorporeal beauty of God's essence is made visible within the created world; these are sentiments echoed throughout the Trahernian oeuvre. As we saw in the previous chapter, Traherne is unfazed by the theological and aesthetic threats the new science had posed. In fact, the expansive view of the heavens served to excite his poetic and speculative endeavours, for a creation of infinite space only served to enhance the glory of God its creator. This infinite kingdom was a kingdom of abundance, as mirror of divine abundance. In Traherne's encyclopaedic *Commentaries of Heaven*, he includes an entry entitled 'Abundance' where he seeks to bring together older theories of aesthetics of order and

⁷³ *Kingdom*, 454.

proportion – which in some ways were built on the finite cosmology of Ptolemy and Aristotle – with his new understanding of infinite space and divine abundance. He begins, ‘As Order is the Goodness, so is Proportion the Beauty, of Goodness it self.’⁷⁴ In these words and what is to follow we see a small window into his understanding of the interrelation of beauty and goodness. As this entry continues Traherne links this quasi definition of beauty and goodness with the human receptivity of these realities in the phenomenal world.

Is it not an Infinit Miracle, that we who are born to Vanities and Miseries, should Suddainly be Surrounded with Joys and Treasures? Yea rather is it not a greater Miracle, that they who are born into a World of Delights, should inherit nothing but Complaints and Poverties! In the Light of Wisdom it is Evident that Man is born to Abundance, and that All Things are full of Celestial Treasures. For since Order and Proportion is the Goodness of Goodness, as there is an Abundance of, so there must be an Order in, the Things that are: And as there are Abilities, so there must be Powers in Things to Delight them: an Abundance of Powers in Beings filled with Order and Beautie.⁷⁵

We see Traherne bringing together various ideas at once in this passage. For one, since ‘All Things are full of Celestial Treasure’, their essential goodness demands that there must be ‘Order and Proportion’ in them. Secondly, since ‘Man is born to Abundance’ his ‘Abilities’ must have corresponding objects that are ‘answerable’ to them. Traherne thus affirms that man’s insatiable capacities are ordered to the ‘Powers in Things to Delight them.’ Traherne is enabled to continue to affirm the aesthetic qualities of order and proportion while also affirming divine abundance as expressed in a ‘World of Delights’. He is able to do this by positing a rich array of ordered correspondences: God and creation, God and humankind and human capacities with the abundance of God’s creation.

Traherne’s belief in the order and proportion of the *cosmos* as an expression of divine goodness and beauty seems to include *all* objects therein. Even human sorrows and the location of eternal damnation ‘Conspire to perfect the Beauty of GODs Kingdom’.

Least He should be sated with Joys he hath Sorrows also to Quicken his Appetite. and to Entertain his soul with more Delightfull Wonder, even Hell it self is a Region of Joys. Nothing failing of yeelding Him Delight that is Wise and Blessed. For all Conspire to perfect the Beauty of GODs Kingdom, and a Sublimier Quintessence of Delights and Pleasures being by infinit Wisdom Extracted out of evry thing is offered to the Lips of all her Friends. So that a Man is never right, till as a Part in the Univers he Correspond with all: and discharge the office allotted to him, perceiving the Place wherin He stands which is that of a Possessor Spectator and Enjoyer.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ ‘Abundance’, *Commentaries*, Vol. 2, 53.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 57.

Even the odious agonies of hell are transformed into beauty – or perceived to work together for good⁷⁷ – by the ‘Wise and Blessed.’ If Hell is included within the aesthetic quality of God’s Kingdom, the inference is that all things conspire to beautify the kingdom. The ubiquity of beauty in Traherne’s theology and cosmology cannot be more forcefully stated. Within a *cosmos* that is imbued with order and proportion, humankind finds its proper place as it lives in accordance with this order by being a ‘Possessor Spectator and Enjoyer’ of it. Putting aside these issues of the way the human must learn to ‘Correspond’ to this beautifully ordered *cosmos* for the moment we turn more directly to Traherne’s understanding of divine goodness as expressed in God’s Kingdom.

2.5.2. Goodness: ‘*Beauty of GOD is Goodness*’

As we observed above – ‘As Order is the Goodness, so is Proportion the Beauty, of Goodness it self.’ – goodness and beauty are closely aligned in Traherne’s thought. As we will see below, there is an active principle within true beauty that moves it to communicate itself, and without this principle beauty would remain idle within itself. Traherne begins by drawing an inference from the observed nature of created things.

Examine a Creature’s propensions well; and it is not Beauty, but Goodness that Inclines a Beautifull Person to giv him self away. For were there not som Goodness hidden underneath it, Beauty alone could not desire to Expose it self to the Fruition of another.⁷⁸

The ‘hidden’ element that moves beauty to be the object of delight and fruition of another is goodness. As Traherne continues he affirms that beauty must have an ‘Ey’ to perceive it, that beauty might ‘feel it self in anothers Esteem’. If beauty is not occasioning joy and delight in an observer it remains ‘unperceived by itself’ ‘or if perceived, very troublesome, and grievous.’ However, ‘That which moves [beauty] so to please, and be pleased with others Admirations; that which causeth it to delight in the Extasies of Admirers, is Goodness.’ Traherne, working his way from created to divine goodness affirms, ‘And by how much the Greater his Goodness is, by so Much the More is it prone to delight in others; and in itself, for being delightfull to them.’⁷⁹ This upward move to divine goodness comes in the declaration,

⁷⁷ See Romans 8:28.

⁷⁸ *Kingdom*, 414.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

But the Beauty of GOD is Goodness, and his Power Act, and his Activity Enjoyment
For his Beauty is the Goodness of an Eternal Act, Immutably, and freely
Communicating it self for ever.⁸⁰

This statement seems to form a definitive construct in the way Traherne thought about the beauty of God. Drawing from the ‘Thomistic conception of God as pure Act’⁸¹ – meaning that God is eternally actuating his power to act, perpetually turning power into act – Traherne sees beauty as the goodness of this ‘Eternal Act’. In this construct we are reminded of Socrates’ statement in Ficino’s *Greater Hippias* that ‘Beauty is the resplendence of the greatest Good.’⁸²

The nature of God as ‘the greatest Good’ encircled in beauty should cause God to be the primary object of desire however,

The Disease of Human life is that it is sensible of Inferior Wants, but not Apprehensive of Eternal Fullness. And the Infirmitie which attends Created Beauties, is that they aspire to be beloved, Esteemed, and Admired, but do not look up to the fountain of all Love, and Honor, for their Satisfaction.⁸³

The problem is twofold: divine beauty is forgotten for ‘Inferior Wants’ and ‘Created Beauties’ who long to be loved and ‘Esteemed’ refuse to look up to the love and delight of God. As Traherne continues he asserts that it is necessary ‘that Beauty should be Esteemed, and Seen, and Acknowledged... Nay it is as Just, and as fitly desired, that being delightfull, it should be delighted in; as truly Injurious, that it should be despised.’⁸⁴ The moral imperative in these words is quite striking; it is proper and just for delightful objects to be delight in, and the failure to do so is ‘truly Injurious’. The imperative is described in the following,

it is our Duty Either to desire Beauty, that we may be pleasing, or being Perfect in all Amiableness, to rejoyce with Infinit Joy, that we are pleasing to him. And it is our Goodness so to do... The Emulation wherby we covet to be Esteemed of the most excellent Persons, but supremely of him, being all these in us, as his desire of esteem is at once all these in him.⁸⁵

Again the imperative is twofold: the human soul must desire divine beauty and/or become an object of divine desire by ‘being Perfect in all Amiableness.’ The moral ‘should’ in Traherne’s mind springs forth from a certain aesthetic formulation of order and proportion in

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Cefalu, “Thomistic Metaphysics and Ethics in the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Traherne,” 249. For a thorough exploration of Traherne’s usage of Thomism see Cefalu’s article.

⁸² *Ficino Notebook*, Burney MS 126, fol. 20.

⁸³ *Kingdom*, 414.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the very foundations of the created order. The human person is to live justly within this created order by giving each object its proper due, while also being a proper object (a beautiful object) of God's joy and delight.

In the above quote from *The Kingdom of God* we see Traherne's mind roving from metaphysics to ethics and back again, which again, reveals that Traherne saw great convergence between God, creation, humankind and morality. When Traherne speaks of metaphysics or ethics he can easily move between them for his innate sense was that they are all integrated into one comprehensive whole. In this way the beauty of God, which communicates through the prompting of the goodness hidden within, calls to human desire and allures it back into union with God. Goodness in Traherne's system provides the impulse for communication; for going outside of itself. To explain this communicative impulse in the nature of the divine goodness Traherne likens God to a nursing mother whose discomfort is eased by the nursing child.

His Goodness is delighted with all the Perfection of his Treasures, and the Streams by which it overflows are as Sweet unto it, as a Nurses Milk is to her in its Effusions, which is if withheld of no Delight. It wranckles within the Bosom if by too long detention it curdle there, whereas the child that Eases his Mother of the Burden is Dear and precious, the Milk in the Act of communication most Sweetly felt; while it feeds and support the yong one.⁸⁶ For Goodness delighteth in anothers Happiness; the very Notion of it consisteth in Lov and Kindness. It is all to another. For that is not conceived to be Goodness, which only designs it self. We preserve ourselvs by som other Qualitie, but Goodness carries us to others.⁸⁷

Divine goodness *must* act – it is within the nature of divine goodness to act because God is pure act – and human happiness is divine goodness' proper end. For this reason goodness 'taketh infinit pleasure in the Means of anothers Happiness.' Divine goodness is infinitely interested in the communication of happiness to its creation. If the human response to divine beauty is for contemplation, joy and desire of God, the human response to divine goodness is felicity. In fact Traherne links divine beauty and goodness, with human desire and flourishing. We will explore these themes more in Chapter 3.

Traherne provides one of his most definitive definitions of divine goodness in the ninth chapter of *Kingdom of God* when he says, 'Divine Goodness is an Active and Eternal Principle Stirring up it self without Obligation or Reward, to doe the Best and Most Excellent

⁸⁶ In *Confessions* 1.6.7, 1.7.11 and elsewhere, Augustine also uses the imagery of the consolation of a mother's milk to speak of God's sustaining and consoling activity.

⁸⁷ *Kingdom*, 452.

things. It is Proper only to God.’ After linking its activity to the active principle in God Traherne continues by saying of divine goodness that

Its Excellency is Supreme, Its beauty Infit, its Measure Endless, its Nature Ineffable, its Perfection unconceivable. It is a Living and Eternal Act, of free, and undeserved Love, an Indeficient and undrainable Ocean of Bounty, which can never be fathomd, or by finit Degrees be perfectly received.⁸⁸

We get the sense that Traherne is attempting to engulf his reader within the limitless nature of ‘Divine Goodness’, that she might be allured to enter into its nature of boundless beatitude. Traherne goes on to explain that God’s goodness ‘is Invisible in its Essence, but apparent in its Effects, Incomprehensible, but Manifest Enough to be believed and Adored.’⁸⁹ Affirming again, Gods causal relation to creation, Traherne show the great deal of access the human person has to this active and divine goodness. This causal relationship is stated elsewhere as Traherne calls goodness the cause of beauty when he says that ‘goodness is Evryway Good, the Effect is Beautifull’⁹⁰, and in stating that ‘The Beauty [goodness] conferreth on its Object is its own’,⁹¹ Traherne again links goodness and beauty.

Divine goodness plays a more foundational role in Traherne’s metaphysics than does beauty – following a Neoplatonic system whereby beauty is the ‘resplendence of the greatest Good’ – for as we have now seen, goodness is the cause of the beautiful. A beautiful object is good due to a hidden goodness, and this goodness within also functions as the active principle enabling the beautiful to go outside itself so as to be perceived in the ‘Ey’ of the beholder.

Goodness resides in the very bones of Traherne’s metaphysics. In *Kingdom of God*, Traherne returns to his Aristotelian understanding of God as the ‘Efficient Cause’ of the world to articulate the location of goodness in his metaphysics:

This Goodness is the first perfection of the Efficient Cause of the Worlds creation Which of necessity derives an Immediate Excellency into all the Creatures, because it is the most Communicativ and Activ Principle that is.⁹²

We include this formulation of goodness as the ‘first perfection of the Efficient Cause’ because as we transition into looking at divine love we will find Traherne speaking of love as *the* efficient cause of God’s kingdom. In calling goodness the first perfection and calling love

⁸⁸ *Kingdom*, 295.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Kingdom*, 298.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Kingdom*, 295.

the efficient cause we can see that for Traherne Beauty flows from Goodness and Goodness in turn flows from Love. However, before we transition into looking at love directly, it will be helpful to see how the ‘Communicative and Active Principle’ of goodness – which embeds an ‘Immediate Excellency into all the Creatures – acts as the organizing principle in human epistemology. Traherne begins,

If then there be any Goodness in the Deitie, why its properties should not be there I cannot tell. For all that is Essential to Goodness, must of necessity be, where Goodness is. Goodness in God is as capable of Interests, as in any other. The more great it is, the greater are its Concernes. If then the Goodness of God be Infinit, the Consequences are visible, his Goodness alone is an Oracle interpreting the sence and meaning of all the World.⁹³

Since divine goodness is diffused into all creation, goodness functions as the proper hermeneutical lens by which the human soul is to make sense of her surroundings. We noticed in the previous chapter Traherne’s deep trust in divine goodness to help guide his search for knowledge but it is helpful within this section on goodness to be reminded of goodness’ role in helping to shape human perception. For Traherne God’s ‘Goodness alone is an Oracle interpreting the sence and meaning of all the World.’

2.5.3. Love

Traherne provides his most extensive exploration of the metaphysical nature of love in chapter 32 of his *Kingdom of God*. In the introductory paragraph of this chapter Traherne seeks to establish the primacy of love within God’s kingdom as ‘the best of all possible things’. ‘The best of all possible Things being made, it will Communicate its Goodness to all the Residue, and cloath them with the Best of all Possible Beauties, and inspire them with the Best of Excellencies... We will begin with Lov, becaus it is the very Life and form of his Kingdom.’⁹⁴ That love is ‘the best of all possible things’ becomes clear as the chapter continues. In addition to identifying love in this way, in this introduction, he has also links love with both goodness and beauty.

As Traherne continues in chapter 32 he argues for the supremacy of love based on the biblical assertion in 1 John 4:8 that ‘God is love’, and therefore fit to function as the ‘Form’ of God’s Kingdom.

That Lov is the very best of all possible things is Manifest, becaus it is the very Nature and Essence of GOD, and so peculiar that Nothing beside it, can be like unto

⁹³ *Kingdom*, 299.

⁹⁴ *Kingdom*, 433.

it. That Lov is the Form of God's Kingdom appeareth, becaus Lov is in his Dominion, what the Soul is in the Body, the fountain of all the Beauty Life and Happiness therein.⁹⁵

As the form, love function as the 'the fountain' and its presence can be felt and discerned throughout the entirety of 'GOD'S Kingdom'. Traherne elaborates on the nature of the Form below.

It is the office of the Form to inspire, to animat, and to Actuate, to distinguish, and to give the essence to the Matter it informes. Since therfore Love doth inspire the Kingdom of God with Excellency, animate the Same with Happiness, and Actuat all its parts with Beauty, uniting them together, enriching them with Life, and giving them the Glory to it which is the Essence of the same; we may look upon it as the Spirit or Form of GOD'S Kingdom and Immediatly conclude the Essence of his Dominion to be answerable to his own because the Lov which inspires it, is so neer and so like unto him, as the Form, It is in evry part the Cause and the Manner of all their union.⁹⁶

We find here some clarity as to how Traherne envisaged the creator/creation interaction. God 'made' 'the best of all possible things' and as we have seen, it is love. This love is not identical with the deity but 'is so neer and so like unto him' that so far as it is possible God has communicated the excellency of his essence into the creation through the vice regency of love.

Adding to the titles for love as the 'Spirit or Form of GOD'S Kingdom', drawing again on Neoplatonic images, Traherne defines love as the 'Soul and Dæmon of the World'.

This Lov which is the great Soul and Dæmon of the World, infuses all the Lustre into God's Kingdom. It is answerable to his own in evry Communicable and Created Excellency: Nay (which is more) in evry imaginable and Desirable Perfection.⁹⁷

Calling love the 'the great Soul and Dæmon of the World' Traherne might be drawing on a few ideas from Platonism. Plotinus used the term 'Soul' to speak of the third metaphysical hypostasis (the One, Mind and Soul), which acts not as the principle of life but as the 'principle of desire for objects that are *external* to the agent of desire.'⁹⁸ The soul, or principle of desire, causes the agent to move toward the object that will satiate this desire. In Plato, love also carries with it the idea of *eros* or desiring love. In the *Symposium* Socrates' teacher Diotima, states that 'Love, from lack of good and beautiful things, desire these very

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 434.

⁹⁸ Lloyd Gerson, "Plotinus," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2014., 2014, accessed January 13, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/plotinus/>.

things that he lacks.⁹⁹ Diotima continues by calling love ‘a great spirit’ or daimon, which acts as intermediary ‘Interpreting and transporting human things to the gods and divine things to men.’ Love as an intermediary is needed, for as Diotima continues ‘God with man does not mingle; but the spiritual is the means of all society and converse of men with gods.’¹⁰⁰

Andrew Louth suggests that while the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* denies any intermediary space between God and man ‘Early attempts by Christians to formulate an understanding of God’s relation to the world had made use of such an intermediate zone, which they identified with the *Logos* of God.’ Louth continues;

The problem posed by the Arian controversy was how to rethink the understanding of God’s relationship to the world, now that no such intermediate zone could be admitted, and the conclusions of such rethinking were dramatic: Arius consigned the Word to the created order; the Orthodox consigned him to the realm of the (now strictly) divine. Nicaea can then be seen, as Friedo Ricken has put it, as a “crisis for early Christian Platonism”. The Orthodox freed themselves from an aspect of Platonism...¹⁰¹

By positing love as the ‘Form’, ‘Soul’ ‘Dæmon’ and ‘Spirit’ of God’s kingdom, whether intentional or not, love does some of the metaphysical work of Arius’ *Logos* without assuming the Christological problems of Arianism. Love bears some resemblance to Arius’ understanding of the *Logos*, for like Arius’ Christ, love is the most Excellent *Being* in all Worlds,¹⁰² and as Dæmon, love mediates a God who is not inaccessible like Plato’s deity, but is fully present in, yet distinct from, all things. In addition to understanding love as mediator, a Plotinian understanding of soul and a Platonic understanding of love also carry with them the sense of *eros*, or desiring love, which as we will continue to see forms a main theme in Traherne’s theology. When Traherne refers to love as the ‘Form’, ‘Soul’, ‘Dæmon’ and ‘Spirit’ of God’s kingdom, we see that Traherne understood love as a richly textured theological and metaphysical reality, which functions as the center and fountain of God’s kingdom. We will spend the remainder of this section further exploring the way that love acts as the metaphysical center of God’s kingdom.

Adding to the above titles given to love, the primacy of love is articulated elsewhere in the *Kingdom of God*. If we remember that Traherne calls goodness ‘the first perfection of the efficient cause’, while in the quote below he calls love *the* efficient cause of all things.

⁹⁹ Plato, *Symposium* 202D as translated in Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, Loeb classical library (London: Heinemann, 1925).

¹⁰⁰ Plato, *Symposium*, 202E.

¹⁰¹ Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 74.

¹⁰² *Kingdom*, 312, emphasis mine.

Using the language of ‘Efficient’ and final causation to speak of the ‘Being’ of ‘Lov’, Traherne draws on a formulation he has already used of God: ‘The Efficient and the final Cause is God himself’.¹⁰³

As Nothing is Capable of being the Efficient cause, so Nothing can be the End of all, but Lov. For nothing but Lov can Delight in the Glory and Happiness of all, Nothing but lov can take pleasure in the Beauty and Excellence of all. Lov which alone is able to be the Efficient Cause and the End of things is the most Excellent Being in all Worlds.¹⁰⁴

In articulating how ‘neer and so like unto’ God love is, Traherne seems to blur the boundaries between the two, possibly merging the Arian *Logos* with the Trahernian ‘Lov’. However, Traherne’s articulation of Incarnation as explored in Chapter 1, coupled with his designation of ‘Lov’ as ‘neer’ and ‘like’ God and calling ‘Lov’ a ‘Being’, argue against a simple merging of *Logos* and ‘Lov’ in thought. Calling the ‘Being’ ‘Lov’ a clear mirror of divine love, might be the best way to understand Traherne’s usage here. In addition to showing the ‘neer[ness]’ between divine and created love, the above also shows how all goodness, beauty and the like are subsumed under love as their cause and end. He continues in this vein when he says that love

hath as Many interior perfections, and Excellencies in it, as the Sublimity of its Relation importeth. This Freedom from Anxiety, Vexation and Care, this pleasure and Beauty, these Inward Harmonies, and outward Agreeablenesses to other things, these Delights and Benefits, which it receiveth and Imparteth, are Parts of its Perfection.¹⁰⁵

Love carries within itself a whole collection of aesthetic qualities, perfections and ‘Excellencies’ that flow forth in ‘outward Agreeablenesses to other things’ and ‘Imparteth’ or communicates these internal perfections to the creation. In these words, Traherne again works to subsume the realities of goodness and beauty under the supreme entity, love.

In the same way that divine beauty and goodness, when communicated to the creatures works to beautify and imbue goodness on itself, love functions within this same system of reciprocity. As Traherne continues the above quote he articulates the nature of love as it communicates love to its object and receives in return. He begins, love

can Enjoy Nothing, but by giving away, yet by giving them away, it receiveth all things. It doth all things for it self, yet it doth all things for others. It preferres it Self, yet it preferres others. It altogether mindeth its own Satisfaction, but its own is to be the Happiness of other Persons. It solely intendeth its objects Bliss, and its own Glory. It soley intendeth its own glory, yet its objects Bliss. It designeth the Glory of its

¹⁰³ *Kingdom*, 256.

¹⁰⁴ *Kingdom*, 312.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

object wholly, and is what it designeth, its objects Glory. Its own Bliss is its objects Glory, its own is its objects Bliss.¹⁰⁶

Traherne seems to realize how incongruous his words sound to typical human experience whereby it is only at the expense of another that an individual soul climbs to greater bliss and glory. Traherne was well aware that ‘The Burden of our Corruption presses us down, and we are accustomed so much to Malevolence, and Mishap, that our Experience makes us Blind, Sin make us acquainted with nothing but Affronts, and abuses, which causes us to assume the ‘Slavish Apprehensions’ and ‘Narrow Expectations’ of those around us.¹⁰⁷ To this mind Traherne continues by exploring the essential unity of God’s creation, and the beauty available to all.

These seeming Repugnances are Reconciled in its Nature with Infinit Sweetness, being Various Differences, intended in Simple unitie. The Unitie is Indivisible, yet includeth diversities innumerable. And Evry diversity is a Several face, or Appearance of Beauty. and Evry Appearance an Infinit Realitie, and Evry Realitie a Glorious delight to all Spectators. And Evry delight in all the Creatures, its own Enjoyment, both as it is their delight, and the Mirror, wherein it discernes its own Realitie.¹⁰⁸

We notice in these words the interaction of the ‘Simple unitie’ of love and the ‘innumerable’ ‘diversities’ that spring from love. In these words we hear an echo of an ancient question of how the diversity of objects that we see originated from an ultimate principle of simple unity, or as Traherne states, loves ‘Unitie is Indivisible’. As Traherne has already articulated, however, this unity is seen not so much in singularity but in internal ‘Harmonies’, which then enables it to assume within itself ‘diversities innumerable’. The diversities are an expression of the unity of love as their source, and so each object becomes a ‘Several face, or Appearance of Beauty.’ Not only is beauty shared with the created objects, so is ‘Infinit Realitie’, which then enables it to be an object of delight. In calling ‘Evry Appearance an Infinit Realitie’ Traherne marginalizes the part of the platonic schema (especially that of Plotinus) that posits a hierarchy of being within its cosmological construct and, therefore, denies the real being of corporeal matter.¹⁰⁹ We will see in the coming chapters that the human person plays a special role in the created order, but here we notice that Traherne rejects the ontological hierarchy so prevalent in most Neoplatonic schemes; there is no privileged portion of creation that has received more of the divine goodness, beauty and love.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 313.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 312.

¹⁰⁹ In *Ennead* II.4 [12].5, 35-39, Plotinus denies any real being in physical matter, instead describing it as darkness and lacking any goodness. We will discuss Traherne’s view of matter below.

One last intriguing thing to notice in these words is how love ‘discerns its own Realitie’ in the ‘Enjoyment’ of sharing in the delight of all creatures. Again Traherne discerns a moral imperative to delight, for when the soul delights in the beauty of creation, this delight is mirrored back to the divine, providing an opportunity for love to discern itself in the delight of the object.

We have seen that Traherne utilizes similar formulations when speaking of created love and God – for God is love – while also showing how Traherne attempts to maintain the Nicean distinction between God and creation. We have also noticed the similar language and formulations used for love as those used of both beauty and goodness. In this similar vein we notice that Traherne provides direct statements with regards to love and beauty. He states outright that beauty manifested in creation is a sign of love as its source in the following: ‘That Love was the Original of things is Manifest by their Beauty.’¹¹⁰ He also calls love ‘the fountain of Goodness’¹¹¹. With regards to beauty Traherne makes the following remarks pertaining to love.

As in Qualitie of Inclination it resembles the Lov of GOD, being prone to Delight in others Happiness, and to Cloath it self with Beauty, that it might becom Desirable, to lov Beauty and Delight in it, to take pleasure in good Works, and to be profuse in Giving.¹¹²

Cloathing itself in beauty, love attracts the desire of the delighted soul, bestowing felicity and delight. The allure of beauty draws the soul into the reciprocal giving and receiving of love. This clear identification of beauty as the entity that draws desire is echoed again in chapter thirteen of the *Kingdom of God*, where Traherne points the reader to the Beauty of God, for God’s beauty not only ‘obligeth us to admire him It Enflameth us to Lov him,’ and calls us to ‘Enjoy him’.

And the Beauty which we undertook to discover in his Being, upon the Single Account of its Profitableness unto all, consisteth in this, that while it obligeth us to admire him It Enflameth us to Lov him, it maketh us able to delight in his Happiness, and while it is Infinitely profitable to Him self, it delighteth us with Endless pleasure, becaus we Lov him in all his Appearances Attributes Perfections, which are infinitely Profitable to us in him, and in us to him, becaus it is delightfull to those who Enjoy him, and to him especialy, whose pleasure it is to be enjoyed. Infinit Mysteries, Perfections, Beauties, and pleasures are interwoven here with most agreable Harmonies.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ *Kingdom*, 310.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹¹² *Kingdom*, 434.

¹¹³ *Kingdom*, 318.

The central purpose in Traherne's contemplation of the dynamics of mutual 'Profitableness', is that his reader might 'discover' divine 'Beauty' 'in his Being', for once discovered God's beauty initially invites admiration, but then 'Enflameth us to Lov him'. This dynamic of divine beauty enflaming love for God is extended to all creation 'because we Lov him in all his Appearance'. God's love and beauty are mirrored, imaged, embodied, and made objects of the intellect, enjoyment and delight, that human desire might be enflamed to love God, and allured back into union with God.

For Traherne, love, as the Form of God's Kingdom, functions as a principle of union¹¹⁴, linking all things together into one entity. Traherne remarks 'What a Strange and Mysterious Being is Lov, which unites the Soul to the Goodness of her objects, feeds upon their Sweetness, and produceth the pleasure that is felt in the Enjoyment!'¹¹⁵ Love makes enjoyment possible. It allows the human soul to feast on the very love, goodness and beauty of its object. And love which is the 'very essence of God' draws us with desire into union with 'Eternal Lov'.

What can the Soul of Man desire more then that God should be Infinit and Eternal Lov? Lov which is the fountain of all Benefits, Honors, and Pleasures, Lov which is the Glory and Happiness of its Object, Lov which is the Tender, and compassionat Principle, its Objects Bliss and Security. Lov which is the End of all Endeavors, and the Soul of Enjoyments Lov which is the Wary, and circumspect affection, studying all ways how it may pleas, and oblige its Object, Lov which Crowns its Object with Delights and Pleasures, and the more it is, is the more pleasing: Lov is infinit and Eternal in God, Nay tis God! for God is Lov, and he that dwelleth in Lov, dwelleth in God, and God in him. The very essence of God is Lov unto all, and Lov unto me.¹¹⁶

Love is the unifying reality that calls 'objects' back into union with their 'subjects'. In this unifying force of love, the lover and beloved experience each other in enjoyment. God has not only taken the place of lover, he also becomes object, namely the object of human love. The human desire and capacity to enjoy an object come from this same capacity in God,

For GOD is an Infinit object, and an Infinit Enjoyer: And all the Created Enjoyers are like him, objects of his and Each others Enjoyment. But Lov efflagitates and calls for our Return. As it is the Fountain of Life and operation, it is the Form of God's Kingdom. All the fragrancie that is in sweet perfumes, all the Fructifying power in Trees, all the Lustre in precious Stones, all the splendor of the Sun and Stars, all the Influences of Heaven, are actuated by Lov, and by Lov Enjoyed.¹¹⁷

As God is an object to be enjoyed and an enjoyer seeking objects to enjoy, God has created

¹¹⁴ *Kingdom*, 433.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 435.

¹¹⁶ *Kingdom*, 477.

¹¹⁷ *Kingdom*, 434.

humankind as ‘Created Enjoyers.’ The love of God has infused the created order with countless objects to enjoy and part of the human calling is to do just that, enjoy them.

Since ‘Lov efflagitates and calls for our Return’ the luster infused into the creation draws us ever more deeply into union with the divine. We conclude this section with one substantive expression of this process of moving through the enjoyment of created things up into the enjoyment of their creator. Notice how for Traherne, created objects provide the enjoyer with ‘Strength’, ‘Norishment’, ‘Zeal’ and the like, for the soul’s upward journey to God.

For in evry Person,... being able to Lov, not a Person, a Famelie, a City, and a kingdom, an Age; an Univers, but all Kingdoms and Ages, and Persons intirely; It can Exceed the World, and be present abov the Heavens; Lov Angels and Cherubims and Seraphims; And when it hath met with all that is Created and Swallowed it up in its embraces, Continu as Empty and Greedy as before, Surmounting these it seeks and Enquires after the Author and Creator of them, and is so far from being Cloyed, or Wearied, or over powered by Created objects, That it acquires Strength, and is more Enflamed, and excited by these to Lov the Deitie. ... So that the More it Loves their Glory and Beauty; the more Violently doth it Esteem and affect the Deitie, the more Ardently desire him, and delight in him.¹¹⁸

For Traherne, love permeates the entirety of his metaphysics, physics, ethics; the whole of his theological vision. Love is both the cause and source of all created objects, and the means for those objects to be drawn back into union with love. As we have seen above, Traherne posits created ‘Lov’ as the ‘best of all possible things’, the form of God’s kingdom, and the mirror of God’s essence. It is the fountain of creation’s goodness and beauty, and functions as the expression – the speaking forth – of the essential love, goodness and beauty found in the deity. It is ‘so neer and so like him’ but distinct from God. To show how creation is the expression of divinity, Traherne calls the creation the garment and body of God. It is in creation that the transcendent qualities of God are made known to the created ‘enjoyers’ that they might enjoy God in what God has made. For ‘the Riches wherby God hath commended His Lov unto us, are the Works of Nature, wherein his Wisdom and Goodness and Power are seen, the Sons of Men and the Holy Angels’ and therefore ‘they are the Seals and Pledges of His Love, which nevertheless is infinitely more Glorious and Excellent.’¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Ibid.; Traherne’s words here echo those of Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium* where she says ‘Beginning from obvious beauties he must for the sake of that highest beauty be ever climbing aloft, as on the rungs of a ladder, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies; from personal beauty he proceeds to beautiful observance, from observance to beautiful learning, and from learning at last to that particular study which is concerned with the beautiful itself and that alone; so that in the end he comes to know the very essence of beauty,’ Plato, *Symposium* 211.C.

¹¹⁹ ‘Action’, *Commentaries*, Vol. 2, 189.

If we were to create a summary formulation of Traherne's metaphysics we might say; God as Love communicates his love that love might be the Form of God's kingdom, this love acts as the fountain of goodness and love (full of goodness) communicates itself in the created order as beauty. The embodied beauty of the corporeal world communicates divine goodness and love to the receptive soul – through its vicegerent, created love – and draws it back into union with its creator. The soul gains nourishment for its Godward ascent as it feasts on and properly enjoys the delightful beauty of God's creation gift.

One problem with assuming a metaphysical structure that resembles that of the Neoplatonists is the problem of divine agency and freedom. If Socrates is correct in saying that 'beauty is manifest as a circle of divine light, issuing from the Good, coming to pause in Good, perpetually returning through the Good to the Good'¹²⁰, the question remains can the 'Good' or more accurately God, refrain from creating, and refrain from expressing divine essence in the beauty of creation? Is God constrained to create and to create in a certain way? Is divine will even involved in this metaphysic or does the world simply spring forth from the divine essence? As we have already seen how Traherne modifies the platonic metaphysic that centered on the 'the Good' with one centered in divine love, we will see below how Traherne further modifies his metaphysic to accommodate divine agency and freedom.

2.6. Creation and Divine Freedom

We begin our discussion of the nature of divine freedom with a set of categories by which we can locate the ways various schools of thought articulate divine freedom in relation to the created order. In his attempt to locate the view of divine freedom held by Immanuel Kant, Christopher Insole posits five possible categories or ways to express God's relation to the world. We will use these same categories in our own attempt to define Traherne's own articulation of divine freedom in creation. The categories are as follows:

1. Emanation 1 (Pantheism): God is identical with the world; where one represents things 'as if the world itself were God' (*LPR* 28: 1092)¹²¹.
2. Emanation 2: God is separate from the world, but where the world necessarily comes into being, and does so in the form that it does, without it being willed by God; where 'God is regarded as the cause of substances by the necessity of his nature' (*LPR* 28: 1092)

¹²⁰ *Ficino Notebook*, Burney MS 126, fol. 20.

¹²¹ *LPR*, is an abbreviation used by Chris Insole to denote a work of Kant's entitled: *Philosophische Religionslehre nach Pölitz* (1817). *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, in *Rational Theology*, 28: 993-1126.

3. Necessary Free Creation: God is separate from the world, but the divine will necessarily chooses to create a world, and, given God's perfect goodness, the divine will necessarily creates the best really possible world. God could not do otherwise than to create a world, and to create this world, from all really possible worlds.
4. Contingent Free Creation 1: God can choose whether or not to create a world, but, if God does decide to create a world, God must choose the best possible world out of all really possible worlds.
5. Contingent Free Creation 2: God can choose whether or not to create a world, and can choose any really possible world.¹²² [Divine freedom is not constrained to make the best of all possible worlds]

At times – especially when speaking of God as ‘the Fountain of Infinit Emanations, and the Fruition of its offspring’,¹²³ which shows an affinity to Neoplatonic cosmologies (Emanation 2), as well as his steady affirmation of the closeness between the divine and the creation (Emanation 1) – Traherne seems to endorse one of the first two views articulated above. As we will see below, however, Traherne's ever present affirmation that creation comes forth from an act of the divine will, quickly brushes these two categories aside. In Traherne's cosmology, as we shall see below, God is not compelled to create, but instead is allured to create through desire. In addition to eliminating categories 1 and 2, we can eliminate ‘Contingent Free Creation 2’ if we remember Traherne's belief that God has created the ‘best of all possible things’: ‘The best of all possible Things being made, it will Communicate its Goodness to all the Residue, and cloath them with the Best of all Possible Beauties, and inspire them with the Best of Excellencies’.¹²⁴ We can therefore, quickly narrow our search to ‘Necessary Free Creation’ and ‘Contingent Free Creation 1’. To help us differentiate whether Traherne fits into the third or fourth category we must discern how he speaks of divine necessity and divine freedom as it pertains to the divine will. As we progress we will begin with Traherne's understanding of God's will as it relates to his essence, how divine will relates to God as ‘Eternal Act’, all the while exploring how these relate to freedom and necessity within that divine act.

According to Traherne, God's essence and God's will are inseparable; they are unequivocally linked in divine simplicity. There is no divine existence without divine willing. Contained within the closing chapter of his *The Kingdom of God* Traherne offers the following paragraph.

¹²² Christopher J. Insole, *Kant and the Creation of Freedom: A Theological Problem* (OUP Oxford, 2013), 16.

¹²³ *Kingdom*, 315.

¹²⁴ *Kingdom*, 433.

But perhaps you will Say GODS Essence is independent, and had he never Willed, nor done any Thing, had all ways been Compleat and Eternal. In answer wherunto we affirm, Gods Will and Essence to be one. Suppose he had Willed Nothing? Then Verily he had not been... Being Infinitely Simple there is no Difference between himself, and his Will, his Will is his Wisdom...¹²⁵

Rejecting a theology, whereby the divine being can ‘Compleat and Eternal’ in a state of inactivity, Traherne identifies God’s essence with God’s will. In the same vein Traherne, as I show below, borrows a Thomistic formulation which names God as pure act, containing no mixture of potentiality.¹²⁶ For Traherne, as for Aquinas before him, God’s essence is tied in with the actuation of his power/capacity to act. There is no existence for the divine person if you ‘Remove his Will’, and God’s will must be expressed in an ‘Eternal Act’. In the following Traherne describes the eternal act that is God in the context of the internal life of the Trinity.

I Know that his Essence is his Blessedness, but it is a Voluntary and Eternal Act, begetting, begotten, and proceeding to all Eternitie. An Act that is the Fountain, and the End of all things. The Wellspring and Fountain of the Beginning it self, the Beginning of evry Creature, the Life and Spirit in Evry Creature... Eternaly Including all Beauties, infinitely Free, and yet as Infinitely Necessary, Instantaneous and yet still Eternal.¹²⁷

The eternally acting life of the Trinity is the ‘Wellspring and Fountain’ of both itself and ‘all things’. God as the self-existing one (or as God says to Moses in Exodus 3.14 ‘I AM THAT I AM’) is the ‘Fountain’ of all other existence. As with God’s essential goodness, beauty and love, God’s act is ‘enriched’ with the world and beauties it brings about. We notice at the end of this quote Traherne makes two strange claims about God as Act. One is that God’s act is ‘infinitely Free, and as yet Infinitely Necessary’ and Instantaneous and yet still eternal.’ We will explore the first of these paradoxes next and later consider the eternality and instantaneous nature of God’s act.

Traherne, again, picks up the theme of freedom and necessity when he says that God’s act is ‘infinitely free for our Happiness and Honor and yet infinitely necessary for our Joy and Security. Free becaus a voluntary Act, necessary becaus from all Eternitie’.¹²⁸ In the first usage of the term ‘necessary’ it is spoken in relation to ‘our Joy and Security’, namely God’s eternal Act is necessary for human flourishing. The second instance where God’s act is

¹²⁵ *Kingdom*, 496.

¹²⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, I.9.1.

¹²⁷ *Kingdom*, 325.

¹²⁸ ‘Act’, *Commentaries*, Vol. 2, 183.

deemed ‘necessary’ is apparently rooted in its eternal nature, namely the eternal nature of God’s act. If God’s essence is pure act, and God’s essence is ‘from Eternitie’, at every moment in that eternity God’s act is necessarily operative. One might say that because God is pure actuality with no admixture of potentiality and actuality, God by nature of his essential nature is pure Act. Since for Traherne ‘The Deitie being neither the Power of filling Eternity, nor the Will, but the Act: The Pure and Simple; or Eternal Act, in which the Beauties of all Acts are at once completed’,¹²⁹ God necessarily exists and acts as he is. Since God is, God is ‘Pure’, Simple’, ‘Eternal Act’, and the ground, beauty and end of ‘all Acts’.

We have noticed a few instances whereby Traherne uses the term ‘necessity’ in relation to God’s essence as pure act, but we must realize that these instances are dwarfed by his usage of freedom in conjunction with divine activity. If we remember again that ‘The Act of [God’s] Will [is] His infinit and Eternal Substance’¹³⁰ it is essential to discern the nature or quality of that act for its quality speaks directly of the essential nature of God. For Traherne, it is incorrect to speak of God as Pure Act as being compelled by anything external or internal to his nature. He affirms, ‘It is the Glory of God, that he is a free, and Eternal Agent. Had any thing been before him to compell him, had he acted by an Inward Principle of Necessitie, without Desire, and Delight, he had been Passiv, and dishonorable.’¹³¹ Affirming God’s freedom in this way seems to overtly negate ‘Necessary Free Creation’ as described above, for in this view ‘the divine will necessarily chooses to create a world, and... God could not do otherwise than to create a world.’ It seems that all of Traherne’s language that speaks of God’s emanations, creation as God’s body, divine necessity and the like should be subsumed under what has been named ‘Contingent Free Creation 1’. In this view ‘God can choose whether or not to create a world’ but when God does ‘God must choose the best possible world out of all really possible worlds’. When speaking of God’s activity, Traherne rejects any view that says God was compelled by any external force or internal principle. Having tentatively located Traherne’s understanding of God’s freedom in the act (or ongoing act) of creation there is still one question that needs answering before we look close at Traherne’s understanding of God as Act, and the answer may cause us to reexamine what we have just affirmed. The question centers around the question ‘why’. If God is not compelled by any kind of internal principle or external force why does God choose to create?

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ ‘Accident’, *Commentaries*, Vol. 2, 119.

¹³¹ *Kingdom*, 500.

The simple answer to the above question is that God created because God wanted to. Traherne says it more eloquently in the following, where he speaks of the possibility of not creating the best of all possible worlds.

wheras he is a free Agent, he might possibly hav forborn a Matter of Such infinit Importance, but he was caried to the utmost Height of all possible Glory with a Desire enflamed with infinit Beauty and with such Zeal preferred the most Excellent things that he would not for all Worlds, hav swerved one Hairs Bredth from the Mark of Perfection,

and God has therefore embedded a ‘fixt Principle’ or ‘universal Law in the Nature of things,

That the Best should be desired, and the Worst refused. it is the Basis and foundation of all Laws the Impartial Measure of Integrity.¹³²

God is moved to create by a desire that is ‘enflamed with infinit Beauty’. Traherne leaves the space for the possibility for God not to create or as he says ‘forborn a Matter of Such infinit Importance,’ but instead God is moved by desire to create, and that desire is enflamed by beauty. This same ‘infinit Beauty’ that enflames God’s desire to create is the same ‘infinit Beauty’ that enflames the human soul with love for God.

Later in this chapter in *Kingdom of God* Traherne speaks of the possibility of God not creating as a temptation, while speaking of the possibility to create as an allurement.

Nothing can tempt him to diminish a Syllable from the Perfection of his Work, but all things allure him to make them, and to make them perfect... No Beauty that way towards, no Goodness.... All Eternal Idleness is an uncouth thing: and the Life of Power is Operation.

Instead of the divine agent choosing ‘Eternal Idleness’ God considers the goodness and beauty of creating and is allured to bring these things about.

All Worlds allured him to make them. all Angels and Men, all Beauties and perfections all Delights and Treasures, all Joys and Honors allured him to make them. All that he Saw his Omnipresence and Eternitie Capable of, Invited him unto them. His own Wisdom, and power allured him: So did the Hallelujahs, and praises of all his Creatures. His own Goodness pricked him on: and the utmost Heights being most desirable, were most pleasing. He Contemplates the Perfection of the Eternal Act, which he hath Exerted, and rests in the Beauty of it with Joy and Complacency.¹³³

In Belden Lane’s colorful description of his encounter with Traherne’s *Centuries of Meditation* while being immersed in the beauty of the Ozark Mountains, he rightfully locates desire, want and allurement as divine qualities God has imbedded in the very structures of the universe. These divine qualities provide the principle of movement seen in all the things that

¹³² *Kingdom*, 327.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 329.

constitute the *cosmos*. He claims: ‘*Want is the universal, alluring activity that permeates the entire cosmos.*’ While watching his copy of the *Centuries* fall into a pool he recounts:

As the book was being drawn to the pool by an irresistible force we call gravity, the limbs of the nearby cedar tree were responding in turn to the lure of the sun, its roots simultaneously reaching deep into the earth toward water. Birds were singing to their mates with songs of intricate precision... Everything was pulsing with want. All of it disclosing a truth as common to science as it is to spirituality, that “the unity of the world rests on the pursuit of passion.”¹³⁴

For Traherne, the allurements and desires observed in the created order (and perceived by Lane and others) mirrors the desire and want found in God. In utilizing the categories of desire and allurements Traherne is able to maintain that God is a ‘free agent’ who by an act of the will chooses to create. However, Traherne’s usage of the term ‘want’ (with its double idea of lack and desire) when describing God, appears problematic, for how can we affirm that there is any lack in God? It is to this question that we now turn.

In the *Centuries* Traherne explores an attribute of God that sits within the same orbit of meaning as desire and allurements. Traherne tells us ‘The heathen Deities wanted nothing, and were therefore unhappy, for they had no being. But the Lord God of Israel the Living and True God, was from all Eternity, and from all Eternity wanted like a God.’¹³⁵ In her book, *Wanting Like a God*, Denise Inge explores how Traherne’s usage of the term ‘want’ in his seventeenth century context carried with it the notion of both lack and desire.¹³⁶ A God who wants both feels the lack and reaches out for fulfillment in desire. God ‘wanted the communication of His divine essence, and persons to enjoy it. He wanted Worlds, He wanted Spectators, He wanted Joys, He wanted Treasures. He wanted, yet he wanted not, for he had them.’¹³⁷ Traherne acknowledges the ‘strange’ nature of his wanting God and anticipates the objection of positing want in God when in the next meditation he states, ‘This is very strange that God should want. For in Him is the fullness of all Blessedness: He overfloweth eternally. His wants are as glorious as infinite: perfective needs that are in His nature, and ever Blessed, because always satisfied.’¹³⁸ Traherne’s wanting God is a profound paradox, an infinite abyss

¹³⁴ Belden C Lane, “Thomas Traherne and the Awakening of Want,” *Anglican Theological Review* 81, no. 4 (September 1999): 656.

¹³⁵ *Centuries*, I, 41.

¹³⁶ Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 28–30.

¹³⁷ *Centuries*, I, 41.

¹³⁸ *Centuries*, I, 42

being eternally filled by the ‘fullness of all Blessedness’. Want and enjoyment are equally operative in God, for ‘He feels them both.’

His wants put a lustre upon His enjoyments and make them infinite. His enjoyments being infinite crown His wants, and make them beautiful even to God Himself. His wants and enjoyments being always present are delightful to each other, stable, immutable, perfective of each other, and delightful to Him.¹³⁹

For Traherne, God’s wants infinitely enhance his enjoyments. Denise Inge suggests that Traherne utilizes the term ‘want’ because of its layered and ambiguous meaning. ‘The ambiguity creates space for the competing claims of his paradoxical concepts – the empty soul that is full of infinity, the abundant God who is full of want...’¹⁴⁰ At the end of the above quote Traherne pushes the paradox even further. He takes what seems to be an expression of a dynamic movement in God between infinite want fulfilled by infinite bounty and describes them as ‘stable’ and ‘immutable’. God’s immutable stability comes not from a stasis akin to the pagan deities, who knew no lack, but from the homeostasis of infinite bounty fulfilling an infinite capacity. As we will see below, it is out of this dynamic, stable and immutable movement in God – this ‘space’ in the deity – that creation finds a place.

Reading Traherne’s statements as an intended paradox finds more traction when considering his usage of paradox in earlier passages of the *Centuries*. In his introductory meditation to the first century Traherne promises the reader he would fill this book with ‘Truths you love without knowing them’,¹⁴¹ and a few meditations later, beginning with a quote from Psalm 78, he states,

*I will open my mouth in Parables, I will utter things that have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. Things strange yet common, incredible, yet known; most high, yet plain; infinitely profitable, but not esteemed.*¹⁴²

From the outset, Traherne acknowledges his words will sound paradoxical and strange. The paradox of a God who wants is another of these strange utterances, but in agreement with Inge, an utterance not without purpose. I agree with Malcolm Day, when he states that Traherne utilizes paradox to expand, ‘reshape or “infintize” the Mind,’¹⁴³ helping the mind and soul to expand beyond the limiting nature of words and theological systems so as to more closely approximate and receive the infinite divinity.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 73.

¹⁴¹ *Centuries*, I, 1.

¹⁴² *Centuries*, I, 3.

¹⁴³ Day, “‘Naked Truth’ and the Language of Thomas Traherne,” 308.

Returning, then, to God's purpose for creating, Traherne asserts that it is for our good that God is full of want and treasure. 'Want in God is treasure to us. For had there been no need He would not have created the World, nor made us, nor manifest His wisdom, nor exercised His power, nor beautified Eternity...and these he had from all Eternity.'¹⁴⁴ How can Traherne posit need in the deity? If God needs, and creation becomes the answer to that need does God relinquish divine freedom in creation? Would Traherne not simply be affirming option 3 – 'Necessary Free Creation' – as articulated above? Traherne attempts to answer by positing want and enjoyment in God's eternal nature. The want of a world and the answer to this want in God occur contemporaneously, for God in his essence transcends the confines of space and time. 'He had, and from Eternity He was without all His Treasures. From Eternity He needed them, and from Eternity He enjoyed them. For all Eternity is at once in Him, both the empty durations before the World was made, and the full ones after.'¹⁴⁵ Because God is transcendent God is not constrained by the temporality of space and time, but because eternity is contained in God, God has the ability to act within the sphere of space and time. Traherne makes a similar claim in *The Kingdom of God* when he says that God's act 'is Indivisible and yet infinit, altogether, Transcendent to Time and Place, Permanent and yet successive too, for it includeth all its Successions in its own permanency. And all its Permanency is wholly by Succession forever to be Enjoyed.'¹⁴⁶ God's Transcendence contains 'Time and Place' and Successions, but the act is 'Enjoyed' by us when the infinite act is, as it were, revealed within the confined of temporal time and place. For Traherne, the paradox of a God who wants is only incongruous if viewed from a finite perspective. Above we saw that the beauty of God's essence 'seemeth to depend upon' the beauty of God's external activity, but this is only the case because 'our sight' of God's beauty depends on God's beautiful activity. 'His beauty is not the Effect, but the cause of his Operation.'¹⁴⁷ It is an issue of our epistemological finitude that causes the incongruity of the paradox, and a function of the paradox to draw the soul into the infinite perspective. From a finite perspective Traherne's words sounds like 'Necessary Free Creation,' whereby 'the divine will necessarily creates' for 'God could not do otherwise', however, at least for Traherne,

¹⁴⁴ *Centuries*, 1, 42.

¹⁴⁵ *Centuries*, 1, 44.

¹⁴⁶ 'Act', *Commentaries*, Vol. 2, 182.

¹⁴⁷ *Kingdom*, 453.

divine freedom is safeguarded as he places God's want in the transcendent realm, outside of time and space.

Traherne pushes the bounds of orthodoxy when asserting a God who 'wants', but at least in Traherne's mind, he is guarded against heterodoxy by placing this paradox within God's transcendence. Denise Inge places less emphasis on Traherne's own turn to the transcendent – presumably for its lack of clarity in resolving the issues – and posits that for Traherne a God who wants is essentially passionate, and lack in God should be conceived more as capacity than a human experience of lack.¹⁴⁸ I do agree that Traherne attempts to articulate a passionate God, however, in positing lack in God, he sits on the fringes of orthodoxy. Where in Traherne's theology might we find clues as to why he feels confident in positing lack in God?

I suggest that his speculations regarding the dynamics of enjoyment in God's nature (that enjoyment is the fulfillment of lack and want) stems from his theological anthropology; especially his understanding of the *imago dei*, and, as we saw in Chapter 1, his high trust in the epistemic weight of human experience. In meditation 40 we see that Socrates mirrors his notions of deity by '*needing the fewest things; for the Gods needed nothing at all*', however, in meditation 44 Traherne contrasts Socrates by affirming the best way to mirror the divine is by 'wanting like a God': 'You must want like a God that you may be satisfied like God. Were you not made in His Image?' As we noted in Chapter 1 and will discuss more fully in Chapter 3, Traherne's high view of the *imago dei* – 'For as in Water, the face of Heaven is represented; so is the Nature of God in the Soul of Man'¹⁴⁹ – means that the soul is a true source for coming to knowledge about God. A passage in *Inducements to Retirednes*, where Traherne professes to be able to 'Discern Adams Thought' and 'Discover even Gods' thoughts, provides evidence for Traherne's trust in coming to true knowledge about the 'Nature of God'. A marginal gloss in this manuscript from Traherne's editor speaks to the weight of this claim: 'This is not soe pertinent and profitable as it is daingerous, and Inconvenient and seemingly Arrogant if not Impious'.¹⁵⁰ I will refrain from calling Traherne 'Arrogant' or 'Impious', but note that this early editor identified something unique in Traherne's thought. For Traherne, the internal dynamics of want and enjoyment in the human soul function as a mirror of want and enjoyment in God. This trust in the human soul's ability

¹⁴⁸ Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 74.

¹⁴⁹ *Seeds*, 233.

¹⁵⁰ *Inducements*, 30

to mirror the divine life – ‘if at least it be not defiled with guilt’¹⁵¹ – pushes Traherne to the edge of orthodoxy, but his notion of want in God cannot be sidelined, for human and divine want are the ‘cements between God and us’: ‘Wants are the ligatures between God and us, the sinews that convey senses from Him into us, whereby we live in Him, and feel His enjoyments.’¹⁵² Want is a central notion not only in Traherne’s conception of enjoyment but in his conception of union with God; the end of the mystical journey.

For Traherne, God creates because God wants to. God is moved to create by desire, allurement and want, and yet provides the answer to those wants through his eternal and infinite act. In positing want in God, Traherne provides a very distinct reason for creation, but we must not diminish the paradox of this formulation. I want to suggest, in agreement with Inge and Day, that the paradox functions in the *Centuries* as a meditative tool used to help expand the soul beyond the confines of discursive formulations into a more infinite, transcendent perspective. Additionally, Traherne’s idea of a wanting God, links the very human experience of lack and enjoyment to God, inviting the reader to see that the existential angst that accompanies their insatiable desire mirrors God and functions as the ‘band and cements between God and us’. Want in God is treasure to us. For Traherne, God remains free to create but is allured to create by the beauty of the idea of creation in the divine mind. The dynamics of the beautiful creation alluring God to create, are echoed in the beauty of creation that allures the human soul into relationship with God. The paradox used in the *Centuries* in positing a wanting God mirrors the allurement of divine beauty, by calling the human soul beyond a finite perspective into an infinite one.

I have tried to show that though Traherne does utilize the language of Emanationist’s accounts of creation, and often seems to endorse what looks like ‘Necessary Free Creation’, Traherne’s repeated insistence on divine freedom in the act of creation confirms his belief in ‘Contingent Free Creation (whereby God can chose to create or not, but if God does he creates the best of all possible worlds). The weight of the evidence points us toward ‘Contingent Free Creation’ but Traherne’s speculations positing want in God in the *Centuries*, makes any kind of definitive statement impossible. For Traherne, the perceived incongruities of some of his more paradoxical statements arise in large part to the limited nature of fallen human epistemology. It is only in the transcendent realm (beyond space and time) where Traherne’s paradoxes find full congruity. In positing various paradoxes in the

¹⁵¹ *Seeds*, 234.

¹⁵² *Centuries*, I, 51.

divine essence Traherne seeks to hold together not only divine want and plenitude but the parallel idea of divine freedom and the compulsion to create the best of all possible worlds. God in Traherne's oeuvre is a passionate God, longing to create and communicate God's essence within the creation. Traherne is aware of the profound incongruities of positing a wanting God, and instead of relieving the resulting tensions he presses into the paradox in an attempt to approximate a transcendent reality. So in the final analysis we find that for Traherne God creates because God wants to, and while affirming the full scope of want in God, Traherne also affirms divine freedom in the expression of God's essence as pure act. In the following section we explore further how Traherne attempted to articulate the inner working of God as Act, for in it we see further how Traherne viewed God as distinct from creation, though as we have seen above, intimately linked with it.

2.7. God's Internal and External Act

As we continue to explore the nature of God as pure Act Traherne gives clues as to how he understood this essential nature of God as it stood in relation to the things God's act produced. We have already seen that God is transcendent of time and place and thus distinct from creation (*creatio ex nihilo*), and this act is eternally operative in the nature of the divine Trinity, for 'his Essence is his Blessedness, but it is a Voluntary and Eternal Act, begetting, begotten, and proceeding to all Eternitie.'¹⁵³ For Traherne, however, this eternal act is obviously productive of things outside its own existence. Below we examine how Traherne articulated the relation between God, whose essential nature is pure act, and the external and successive effects of this act. Traherne begins by affirming God's act as the actuation of his 'Almighty power':

When Almighty power is wholly exerted, the effect must needs be Eternal, and Endless. The Act in it self is the Substance, and the effect its Shadow.¹⁵⁴

As Traherne continues he repeatedly affirms the distinction between the act and its effect, or 'Shadow', but the nature of the effect as coming from the divine cause infuses glory into the effect.

The Work produced is one thing, the Act producing it another; But there is a Resemblance, that is fit and absolute between them. The Nature of the Act standeth in one thing, the Nature of the object in another. The Glory of the Act is one, of the Subject another. The thing perhaps is Solid and Material that is wrought; the Act is

¹⁵³ *Kingdom*, 324.

¹⁵⁴ *Kingdom*, 340.

Invisible, and the Essence of it Spiritual: for the substance Of the Act is its pure Motion.¹⁵⁵

We notice Traherne's insistence to differentiate the essential nature or substance of 'the Act' and the nature of the object produced, but in the same breath seeking to show how they are closely related, for the one is utterly dependent on the others. Traherne continues this line of argument by noting the essential and internal qualities of the act and the 'External' effect of God's act.

Almighty power turning into Act, produceth an Infinit Effect in two Respects. The one is Essential, the other is External, the one within it self, the other Consequential. The one is Identical, the other different. The one is the same with the Act it self, the other distinct from it.¹⁵⁶

And though there is a distinction between the nature of the Act and the effect of that Act, the cause communicates infinite 'Excellency' to the effect.

The Excellency of the Work dependeth upon the Act, wherby it is produced. The Glory of the Act is the Cause of the Work.... The Act of God is Eternal, an Infinit Fountain of all Good things, filling Eternitie with Living Streams. What is so perfect in its Fountain, cannot be mean in its Emanations.¹⁵⁷

Though we find Traherne affirming the distinction he concludes with the image of a fountain and its streams, which speaks of the close relation between the God's Act and the effect of that act.

The causal relation between God's eternal Act and the effects of that act imbue an excellence into the effect. Traherne picks up this theme again later in *The Kingdom of God*. In speaking again of divine activity – divine potentiality turned into act – Traherne says 'Its perfection, and vigor appears in the lively Act of its Exertion. And the Glory of the Cause in that of the Effect is made most apparent. All the Honor, and pleasure it acquireth is in the Act, and by the Effect it produceth. If Gods Kingdom be the Shadow of his Act, and in all these respects his Treasure, it is wonderfully Excellent'.¹⁵⁸ Calling 'God's Kingdom' the 'Shadow of his Act', is not using the term in a pejorative way. For Traherne a 'Shadow' of God's act is not devoid of true existence like the shadows in Plato's cave, instead the shadow is simply the effect that flows from a cause. Again, Traherne takes terms from a whole collection of Neoplatonic sources (e.g. 'emanation', 'body', 'world soul', and now 'shadow') and modifies them to fit into his own unique form of Christian Neoplatonism. Before we look

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ *Kingdom*, 340.

¹⁵⁸ *Kingdom*, 454.

at another way Traherne modifies the Neoplatonic schema (namely in his understanding of physical matter) we will look at how Traherne's understanding of 'Act' (both divine and human) interacted with the idea of the beautiful.

Traherne, again speaks of a distinction between the internal and external nature of God's activity. He explains that 'immanent Actions' 'are those wrought in the Author', and 'Transuent' are the external manifestations of the immanent actions. Traherne begins by speaking of actions in general, but it becomes apparent he is speaking of human actions.

Immanent Actions are those which are wrought in the Author, and End in the Power out of which they are Exerted. Because they pertain to Spiritual Beings, generally, they are invisible. As all the Actions of the Soul are by which it moveth the Affections. Howbeit they are Real; and in order of nature. Superior to all Transeunt Actions, before them in Time, and the fountain of them. The less of Matter they have they are the more Divine.¹⁵⁹

Immanent actions are interior, prior, and 'Superior to all Transeunt Actions' and though they find their expression within the material realm, they are more spiritual (non-material) and thus more divine. Traherne continues by affirming this hierarchy of human and divine activity, while identifying locating beauty as an aspect of immanent action:

[God's] Immanent Actions, and His Essence are one. His Immanent Actions therefore must needs be most infinitely Excellent since they compose His Essence. In us they are the clarity and Splendor of Souls, the features and Colors composing their Beauty. Which Beauty is in Him His Essence, in us an Accident. Because we are som thing beside that Beauty, and from us it may be removed. He is the Beauty, and the Beauty of GOD is GOD.¹⁶⁰

Beauty, act and essence are united in the divine being. The human soul takes on beauty as an 'Accident. Because' unlike God 'we are som thing beside that Beauty', and become beautiful through an act of the will. Chapter 3 will provide a full exploration of human activity understood as beautiful, but at present it is good to notice that beauty lies right at the center of both the divine act and the human act. In the divine simplicity, God's activity can be described as beautiful, good and lovely.

2.8. God's Act and Matter

At first when speaking of the nature of matter Traherne confirms a belief in the 'Deadness' 'Beaseness' and Barrenness' of its 'Nature'. These sentiments comport well with the negative views of matter found in certain Neoplatonic sources. In the *Enneads*, Plotinus

¹⁵⁹ 'Action', *Commentaries*, 188.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 188-9.

denies any real being in physical matter, instead describing it as darkness and lacking any goodness.¹⁶¹ As we will see below, however, Traherne turns these negative views of matter on their head and offers the picture of matter as dead but having been infused with infinite worth by its creator.

That God determined to make a visible World, is apparent by the Work: And the Reason why he did so, was that his Wisdom, and Goodness might be Magnified by Infusing Worth into those things which being not at all in his Essence, were apparently remote from, and incapable of any use, or Value For what Service can Material Things do to Spiritual, or how should Bodies that are by Nature forreiners unto Life, be raised up to the possession of Honor, and Happiness: The difficulty was his allurements; being Infinitely wise, he Contrived a Way to Surmount their Incapacity, and overcome the Barrenness of their Nature: by making their Deadness and Baseness the Ground, and foundation of Endless Glory.¹⁶²

In one breath we see Traherne affirming, in Plotinian fashion, the utter distance between the divine and matter, but for Traherne, by divine act, God raises up the dead and base to infinite glory. God is allured to glorify matter by the difficulty of doing so. He continues by showing ‘what Service’ ‘Material Things’ can ‘do to Spiritual’.

for tho the Angels were Created, with the Holy Seraphims, and Cherubims, yet were they but Immaterial Powers, made to see all other Solid, and Material objects; and were it not for this Great, and Aspectable World which affordeth them Infinit Varieties of delight, it is to be feared their Capacities would be Idle, and their powers rust for Want of Employment.¹⁶³

Matter serves the angels by providing an ‘Infinit Varieties’ of objects for angelic delight.

Creation is essential for angelic contemplation:

For the Wisdom and Goodness of God were not So much Seen in the wideness of Eternity, or in Creation of Illimited and Immortal powers, as in the Glorious Univers which is If I may so Speak the very centre of Gods omnipresence, and the Kernel of eternity.¹⁶⁴

In creation, the ‘Wisdom and Goodness of God’ are ‘Seen’ and contemplated by spiritual beings. For without the creation of matter the spiritual entities would be idle for ‘want’ of objects to exercise their capacities of contemplation.

Speaking of the same theme from a slightly different angle, Traherne also speaks of the great service bodies offer to spiritual beings. Not only do human bodies service human souls by allowing them to receive the world, but this service is also rendered to the angels,

¹⁶¹ Plotinus, *Ennead* II.4 [12].5, 35-39

¹⁶² *Kingdom*, 481.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 482.

who likewise receive the world through mediatory role played by the human body/soul.

Traherne speculates that ‘forasmuch as Immortal Souls, if Men were born blind, could never perceiv the Light, and Beauty of the Material World, without that Organ of Sight, on which it is impressed, it is probable that the Angels See not the World immediatly in it Self, but as it appears in the Apprehension of Man’.¹⁶⁵ As the natural link between the spiritual and corporeal world, the human soul and body work as priests of God’s kingdom, offering the physical to the spiritual and mediating the spiritual to the physical. At the center point of Traherne’s metaphysics stands the human (constituted as body and soul), or ‘the Golden Clasp’ (as Hermes calls him) uniting all extremes,

and as the Sovereign Head wherin all Visibles, and Invisibles are fitly concentred, and Meet together. For neither can immaterial Spirits Enjoy the Glory of the Day, or use the Light, or Need the Sun, or feed upon Air, or Eat, or Drink: Nor can Dust and Ashes see into the cause and End of Things, or Weigh the Lov and Goodness of the Donor, or Sing, or Celebrat his Everlasting Prayses. Therefore by a Miracle of Eternal Wisdom, the Way was found to Joyn, and unite these two together, that as the one did reap the Benefit, the other might return the Glory. Man having all Things in Common with the Beasts, and Angels.¹⁶⁶

As ‘the Golden Clasp’, God creates the human person to function as the metaphysical center of God’s kingdom, mediating the corporeal and spiritual through its embodied soul. The sensuous body receives the beauty, goodness, delight, pleasure, etc. of the corporeal ‘World’ and offers these apprehensions to the spiritual world through its spiritual soul. Thus, ‘the use and Perfection of the World depends upon Man as much as that of the Body does upon the Soul’,¹⁶⁷ for the World finds its *telos* in entering the soul, through the senses. For Traherne, the material world has been imbued with infinite worth by the infinite wisdom of God, who is spurred on by the challenge of performing such a feat. This corporeal world is brought to perfection as it enters the realm of the spiritual through the mediating human body and soul. It is therefore imperative in Traherne’s system that the corporeal world be properly enjoyed by humanity. The corporeal world, infused with divine beauty, allures humankind into the contemplation of it, but as it is contemplated, the corporeal beauty is offered to the spiritual soul and the spiritual realm that is might be enjoyed. Before exploring more fully Traherne’s ‘high’ anthropology in the next chapter we will touch again on some of the key components of his metaphysics.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 483.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

2.9. Conclusion

We have proposed in this chapter that Traherne displays an eclectic metaphysic, incorporating Platonic, Aristotelian, and scientific elements within his fundamentally Christian understanding of God and God's kingdom. It is Traherne's belief that God is distinct from creation, and yet the words deployed in describing God's relation to the world (calling creation 'an emanation', God's 'garment', and God's 'body') attest to his belief in the intimacy creation enjoys with God. For Traherne, as we saw in his introduction to the *Kingdom of God*, utilizes Aristotelian categories of causation when calling God both the efficient and final cause of God's kingdom; meaning creation finds its source and ultimate end (or *telos*) in God. As source of creation, God communicates God-self within the spiritual and corporeal objects of God's kingdom; the essence of God is seen in what God has made. We, therefore, looked at the divine attributes of love, goodness and beauty, and the way they have been communicated within the metaphysical and physical properties of God's creation. Borrowing a generally Platonic schema, we suggested that though love is metaphysically prior to beauty, beauty is the divine attribute most accessible to the human perception. It is for the reason of allurements that God has clothed God-self with the beauty of creation, for beauty captures desire and the soul attracted by divine beauty tends towards God, its final end. If the universe is brimming with desire, what captures desire is perceived as the beautiful.

One problem we identified in borrowing this Platonic schema of the world going out from God and then tending towards God as its final end is the question of volition in God. We noticed that one of Traherne's favourite ways to speak of God is to describe God as Act, for God's essence is Pure Act (or Actuality). Though Traherne utilizes emanation language (which carries the sense of a natural flowing forth), he attempts to curb claims of compulsion or necessity in God's act of creation by overtly denying any necessity in God and repeatedly affirming divine freedom and volition. We did, however, notice some tension as we considered again God's reason for creating. We concluded that God created because God wanted to, and this is fine as long as by 'want' we simply mean God desired to, but as we saw in the *Centuries*, Traherne affirms both lack and desire when utilizing the term want. Though God's infinite lack is answered by his infinite bounty, when Traherne places infinite want and bounty in the eternal transcendence of God he fails to guard himself from the charge that creation must necessarily come forth as an answer to God's lack. Since Traherne

is fully aware of the strange nature of these words, we proposed that in light of his pastoral purposes in this work he posits want and bounty in God as a divine paradox, quite possibly as a pedagogical device to aid his readers to transcend beyond the formal structures of discursive argumentation to see things as they truly are, in their essence. Additionally, I suggested that Traherne speculating about the dynamics of lack and enjoyment in God are undergirded by his 'high' anthropology; namely that the nature of God can be discerned in the face of the soul. For Traherne, want experienced in the human mirrors want in the divine life, and vice versa.

As we concluded the body of this chapter we noticed Traherne's high view of the human as a unified constitution of body and soul. The human body/soul plays a key role in Traherne view of God's kingdom for it mediates the corporeal and the spiritual. The many ways God has manifested God-self within the created order can now be offered back to the spiritual world through the contemplation and enjoyment of the human. We noticed in our introduction that corporeal beauty plays a key role in this rhythm of *exitus-reditus* for 'The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we Come to the Knowledge of God himself.'¹⁶⁸ As Traherne explains 'Fancy Receiveth the Idea by the Ey, recommendeth it to the Understanding, which transferreth it to the Will; Where it Produceth Lov, many times as Violent, and Strong as Death, Love Tyranizeth, and rageth with Desires...' As beauty is received into the human person through the eyes, into the 'Fancy', then to the 'Understanding', then to the 'Will', it 'Produceth Lov' which rages with 'Desires'. Now that we have described how Traherne articulated the metaphysical bones of God's Kingdom we now turn more fully to the place of the human person within this beautiful Kingdom.

¹⁶⁸ *Kingdom*, 496.

Chapter Three - Traherne's Theological Anthropology

Humanity, which is the Handmaid of true Divinity, is a noble Part of Learning, opening the best and rarest Cabinet in nature to us, that of our Selvs: Which it doth either by discovering the Excellencies of our Bodies, or the faculties of our Souls. together with the Graces and vices of either.¹

The central purpose of this chapter will be to come to a clear understanding of Traherne's theological anthropology by discerning how he understood 'Humanity', to be 'the Handmaid of true Divinity'.

The first half of this chapter identifies how Traherne's notion of humanity as the *imago dei* –coming from God, mirroring God and finding its *telos* in union with God – functions as the organizing principle of his theological anthropology. Since Traherne defines God as 'all Act', and the freedom of the divine will is essential to the divine nature, God creates humankind as the image of God in power that through a free movement of the will she might become the *imago dei* in Act. Traherne's articulation of the *telos* of the soul in these terms shows strong resonances with the doctrine of *theosis* historically understood. Given that *theosis* closely aligns Christology and Anthropology, we end this section by examining how Incarnation functions as the theological foundation of Traherne's anthropology.

The second half of the chapter seeks to articulate Traherne's epistemology, more specifically asking how Traherne can make the claim that 'The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we Come to the Knowledg of God himself.'² Here we find that the human person has been uniquely constituted to come to know God in God's full self-expression in creation (Chapter 2). The section identifies the role played by the body, the soul and the union of body and soul in Traherne's epistemology. Throughout this chapter we will see that beauty is both a description of the *telos* of the soul in relational union with God (a deified soul is beautiful), and an essential quality of allurements that awakens desire in the human perceiver. As a transition into Chapter 4, we end the chapter noting that the 'Will' may be 'deceived with fals Allurements,' or 'Stir'd up with the Beauty of what is Good'. Traherne's central task is to work for the latter.

¹ *Seeds*, 233.

² *Kingdom*, 496.

3.1. 'The Nature of God in the Soul of Man':³ Traherne's Theological Anthropology

3.1.1. *God 'Hath made my Soul the Image of his own'*⁴

We noticed in Chapter 1 Traherne's belief that 'as in Water, the face of Heaven is represented; so is the Nature of God in the Soul of Man,'⁵ thus it is not surprising that the doctrine of the *imago dei* plays an important role in Traherne's theological anthropology. The poem, '*Thanksgivings for the Soul*' sets this doctrine at its center. As the *imago dei* the soul is enabled to both receive the divine presence – becoming 'A living Temple of thine Omnipotence'⁶ – in addition to being commissioned to live in accordance with that image; actively 'Living in thine Image' / Towards all thy Creatures'.⁷ In this section we will explore the human soul as the image of God both in its receptive or passive capacities/powers as well as the mandate to turn passive power into act - becoming the image in Act. What we are going to see as we proceed is that much of the Theology Proper (e.g. divine attributes, divine freedom, etc.) expressed in chapter 2 is mirrored in the *imago dei*, and the end for which the image is created is to 'live the Life of God, live to God, live in Communion with God, live to all other things in God, while GOD himself liveth in them Blessed forever.'⁸ For Traherne, this is the good life, the life of felicity in relational union with God.

We begin by taking a brief look at the passive powers of the soul. With reference to the soul's capacity for God, Traherne – quoting Ephesians 3.18, 19 – gives thanks to God 'For giving me a Soul / Able to comprehend with all Saints the length, and / breadth, and depth, and heighth of the Love of God, which / passeth Knowledge, that I might be filled with all the fullness of God. *Eph. 3.*'⁹ What we have seen up to this point in Traherne's '*Thanksgivings for the Soul*' is that God 'Hath made my Soul the Image of his own:' and in so doing Traherne sees 'The similitude of thine Infiniteness' / 'printed in it.' The infinity imprinted in the soul makes it insatiable 'Because nothing can fill it / ... An infinite Abyss, / So made by the perfection of thy presence'. It is fitting for the soul to be an insatiable abyss

³ *Seeds*, 233.

⁴ *Thanksgivings for the Soul*, ll. 103.

⁵ *Seeds*, 233.

⁶ *Thanksgivings for the Soul*, ll. 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 510-511.

⁸ *Kingdom*, 426.

⁹ *Thanksgivings for the Soul*, ll. 92-96.

for the ‘Life of God’ ‘having all Goodness, and Beauty in it self, and desiring infinitely to be seen, and to be Enjoyed, he made Capacities fit for his Essence, and Passive Powers, that might answer his Activ Omnipotence.’¹⁰ The infinite capacities of the divine image are made to receive the Divine, for we have been given ‘Passive Powers’ perfectly prepared for God’s ‘Activ Omnipotence.’ What we will see, however, is that for Traherne, these ‘Passive Powers’ find their *telos* in activity, ‘For he made us his Image in power, that we might be capable of Making our Selvs So in Act, and that with infinit pleasure.’¹¹ Turning ‘power’ into ‘Act’ is Traherne’s primary schema within which he speaks of anthropology, teleology, spiritual growth, the virtues, human freedom, the will, love, etc. and we will keep this schema in mind as we progress.

Traherne follows a well-trodden path in Christian theology in affirming that human souls, proceeding forth from the ‘Hands’ of God, are ‘made in his image’. Where Traherne is distinctive is that instead of emphasising the static attributes in the human creature that constitute the *imago dei*, he identifies the ‘Image’ as something to be attained through activity. If Traherne does point to one faculty that most images the divine it is the human will, for like God ‘the Will is the Man’.¹² The human was created with the potential to become the image, but invited to actuate that potentiality;

to cloathe themselves with higher Beauty, and Perfection, in this utmost height of all possible Compleatness; they were Capable of infinit Attainments of Bliss, and Glory, Of which they were not yet partakers: for they were to attain his Image.¹³

God, by making ‘his image’ ‘Agents’, made them

Capable of Innumerable. And Endless Excellencies, which they might receiv from themselves, and their own Actions...For their own Operations were Ordained to be the Means by which they Should be cloathed, and Crowned with their utmost Perfection.¹⁴

These same sentiments are echoed in Traherne’s ‘*Thanksgivings for the Soul*’ when he writes ‘Thou makest thy Bride *All Glorious* within; / And her own Works / Shall praise her in the Gates, / While she is chiefly beautiful / To thee her God, / Shineth in thine Image’.¹⁵ For ‘A Power in this have we received O Lord’ to do the ‘Good Works’ you

¹⁰ *Kingdom*, 426.

¹¹ *Kingdom*, 457.

¹² *Sober View*, 133.

¹³ *Kingdom*, 456.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ ‘*Thanksgivings for the Soul*’, ll. 406-411.

‘Desire’ and

By doing them ourselves we are made thine image
That we should have the Glory,
Of being Crowned with the Beauty,
Of our own Works;
Is not less but more thy Glory.¹⁶

In the poetry and prose, Traherne affirms the idea that God has created ‘his image’ in a state of potential, but in so doing God has endowed the *imago dei* with a freedom to choose to obey and choose ‘The Work of Love’, which works to clothe and crown the soul with beauty.

For Traherne, human freedom images divine freedom, for

As GOD freely made the World, and is a Voluntary fountain of His own Operations, which is His Honor and Glory so are we made indeed fountains of our own Actions that by things so Beautifull, we might appear before Him in Glory.¹⁷

A beautiful action is one done in freedom which can be characterized as a ‘Work of Love’, and in this way images divine freedom. Traherne does, however, detail an essential distinction between God and the soul, for God is pure act, while the soul is pure power waiting to be actualized.

In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne describes the soul ‘made in his image’ as a ‘naked Power, being divested of all Substance beside, it is next to Nothing, and yet it is the most Glorious Being in the whole World.’ Though the soul is ‘Glorious’ and images God, Traherne takes pains to differentiate her from the divine essence in the following:

[The soul] differs from God inevitably in these following things, It had a Beginning, it received its Being from another, it was made out of Nothing, it dependeth on another, it is Mutable, it may be turnd into Nothing, it is compounded of Power and Act, wheras God is all Act, it is obliged, and owes all it has to its Author, it is compounded of Essence and Existence, and is a Substance subject to Accidents. And the reason is, because its Act is not it self, but is Accidental to it.¹⁸

After summarizing the essential nature of the soul as a creature, created *ex nihilo* (and therefore ontologically distinct from God), Traherne labels God’s essential nature as ‘all Act’ while ‘Act’ in the soul is ‘Accidental’ to its essential nature, which is ‘naked Power’. We get the sense here of the soul balancing on the precipice of non-being, for it is described as ‘next to nothing’, ‘made out of Nothing’, and ‘may be turnd into Nothing’, and for Traherne, nothingness is the result of inactivity. On the other hand the soul’s ‘naked Power’ may be turned into act, and as it does it can be described as ‘compounded of Power and Act’. The

¹⁶ Ibid., ll. 436, 445, 450-454.

¹⁷ ‘Action’ *Commentaries*, 193.

¹⁸ *Kingdom*, 461.

Soul's 'Essence and Substance is pure power, which varies its Existence when it turneth into Act.' Traherne describes this varied 'Existence' of moving from power to act by first describing the 'Privation' that is the Soul in inactivity:

For in evry Act or Manner of Appearance; It may be Simple Power, as the Soul seemeth to be in a long swoon, or a Dead Sleep, where we can Imagine Nothing but a black Vacuitie, a Cessation, and a meer Privation of Life in the Body.¹⁹

The language utilized here ('long swoon', 'Dead Sleep', 'Nothing', 'black Vauitie', 'Cessation', 'Privation') speaks to Traherne's belief that this state is an affront to the soul for as he describes elsewhere the human person has been endowed with 'an Active Soul that cannot rest but in Employment'.²⁰

As the soul progresses, however, its 'Simple Power' is partially turned into Act and becomes 'compounded of power and Act'.

[The soul] may be compounded of power and Act, as it is when the Soul having Power to think and Desire Innumerable Things, thinks of one, or Desires this or that in Particular without thinking or desiring the residue: for then its Power is in Part Exerted, and so it is partly Act, and partly Power.²¹

The soul, endowed with the capacity and 'Power to think and Desire' all things, thinks and desires one at the exclusion of the rest. This is better than a soul that is 'in a long swoon, or a Dead Sleep', but is still insufficient for the insatiable and 'Active Soul' that must be employed fully. It is only in 'all Act' that the soul is fully transformed, turning the divine Image 'in power' into the divine image 'in Act.' Traherne holds out hope that in Heaven this will be the case when he says of the soul:

It may be all Act, as I Suppose we shall find it to be in Heaven, when it is the Temple of God, even his Omnipresence, and Eternity, Goodness and Power, Blessedness and Glory. For then it shall See all it can See, and Know all it can Know, and desire all it can desire, all its Power to Love, and to rejoyce, and Praise and Enjoy shall be Exhausted, by the Innumerable Multitude of its objects. No Dram of it being left Idle, or unemployed. And when all its Power is wholly Exerted, it will be all Act.²²

For Traherne, 'It is the Glory of the Soul that it is capable of being changed into the Divine Image' by turning 'Simple Power' into 'all Act.' Had the soul not been made as 'Simple Power' and instead was a 'composition of Substance and Power, its power might be turned into Act, but its Substance would be unalterable.' However, if the soul's substance is 'all

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Sober View*, 94.

²¹ *Kingdom*, 461.

²² Ibid.

Power, it may be all Act', and for Traherne, this is what we find.²³ The soul is made as 'Simple Power' so that by the free exercise of its will it might be turned into Act like the deity. As we continue we see that the soul not only becomes like the deity, but is united with the deity through participation.

It is the *telos* of the soul that all its created capacities or potentialities would be actualized, and in this state the soul becomes like God, 'being changed into the Divine Image'. Traherne presses *imago dei* language, when he describes the soul as Act sharing in divine substance, for when the soul is fully actualized 'this Act so like God, and in other Things so Substantial, that in a Duly qualified Sence, its Substance is of the same Kind with the Substance of God, all life and Power transformed into Act, yet voluntarily Existing for evermore.'²⁴ This statement is 'Duly qualified' by remembering the essential differences between God and the soul stated above, for what God is in God's essence is acquired by the active soul, whose essence is power but whose act is accidental. When Traherne speaks of the the active soul being of the same kind of substance as God he couches this in the language of participation in God and relational union with God. For in Heaven, when all power is act, the 'Soul will be in God, and God in the Soul, their Union and Communion will be compleat and Perfect.'²⁵ This union of God and the soul brings the soul into the divine life, for in this state the soul 'seeth all that God Seeth, and loveth all that God loveth, and hates all that God hates, and desires all that God desires, and rejoyceth in all wherin God rejoyceth; when all that displeaseth God, is displeasing to it, and all that God Esteemeth, is Esteemed by it'. This soul is all act when, like God, 'it Extendeth to all objects in all immensities, and reacheth at once to all things in all Eternities, and distinctly apprehendeth all Particulars in all their circumstances, Qualities, and operations.' It is then that 'its power [is] poured out, and Transformed; and the Act wherein it appeareth will be so like God, that the Sun in a Mirror will not more resemble the Sun in the Heavens, which is as much as can be said.' In this state 'the Soul will be in God, and God in the Soul, their Union and Communion will be compleat and Perfect.'²⁶ Now partaking in the divine nature – or 'the Substance of God' – the soul has been united with God, being made divine through participation in the divine.

Traherne's articulation of the process of sanctification as divinization or *theosis* is

²³ Ibid., 463.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 462.

²⁶ *Kingdom*, 461-2.

notable, but not unique in the Christian tradition. The doctrine of *theosis* finds its most forceful articulation in Athanasius in his fourth century work *De Incarnatione*, where he claims that ‘the Son of God became man so that we might become God’,²⁷ but we also find earlier articulations of the doctrine in Irenaeus²⁸ and Clement of Alexandria. Clement is a helpful example because he, like Traherne, links self-knowledge with knowledge of God, knowledge of God with being made like God, and being made like God as being made like God in beauty. He explains in his discourse ‘On The True Beauty’:

For if one knows himself, he will know God; and knowing God; he will be made like God...he is made like to God; he is beautiful; he does not ornament himself; his is beauty, the true beauty, for it is God; and that man becomes God, since God so wills.²⁹

For both Traherne and Clement, the divine image in humankind warrants a robust self-knowledge, for this knowledge opens up knowledge of God. Not only this, this knowledge of God leads to being made like God, whereby the *imago dei* comes to participate in the nature of God; the divinized soul made beautiful by divine beauty.

Denise Inge notices the prevalence of the doctrine of *theosis* amongst seventeenth century divines. She finds that ‘Lancelot Andrewes, Richard Hooker and Jeremy Taylor (all of whom Traherne read and/or copied) pondered the wonder of humanity becoming a partaker of the divine.’ Even the great English reformer ‘Thomas Cranmer describes how “the Son of God, taking unto him our human nature, and making us partakers of his divine nature, ... doth so dwell naturally and corporeally in us, and maketh us to dwell naturally and corporeally in him.”’ We notice that the mutual indwelling language used here by Cranmer is also seen as Traherne articulates the union with God made available to the human. Inge also notices how Ralph Cudworth assumed the *theosis* doctrine, yet couching it in Platonic terms when he claims that “the Gospel is nothing else but God descending into the World in our Form ... that he might allure, and draw us up to God, and make us partakers of his Divine Form”.³⁰ As with Cudworth, allurement plays a key role in Traherne’s understanding of sanctification, for the free soul must not be compelled or forced, so instead God chooses to ‘allure, and draw us up’. What makes Traherne unique within the traditional articulations of *theosis*, is not that he is unique in any one particular point, but that he integrates the notions

²⁷ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, LIV.

²⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, preface.

²⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Book III, Chapter 1.

³⁰ Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 132.

of beauty, participation and platonic allurement into one coherent system. For Traherne, the creation is a primary location for God's communication of God-self (the apex and clearest self-communication in creation being the unique Incarnation of the uncreated Word) and the beauty of creation is, as it were, the 'front lines' of God's allurement of the soul. The perception of beauty within the creation opens the soul to discern God's uncreated beauty in the created, which allures and draws the soul into union with God. Running concurrent to this process of coming to know God in the beauty of creation is the process of full actualization (becoming the image of God in Act), whereby the soul in union with God is beautified, becoming an object of desire herself. We will return to Traherne's articulation of beauty in the soul as the initiator of sanctifying union between God and the soul, but first it will be helpful to notice how he thinks grace (or divine 'Gift') fits into his understanding of *theosis*, which we have already noticed places substantial emphasis on human volition.

In Chapter 2 we explored the influence of the Platonism of Marsilio Ficino on Traherne's thought, seen especially in his *Ficino Notebook*. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola is another influential figure from Platonic Academy of Florence who is also found copied in the *Ficino Notebook*. Pico's influence on Traherne has been well documented and is especially seen when Traherne defines sanctification/*theosis* as self-actualization: turning power into act by a free movement of the will.³¹ In the following, Traherne attempts integrate this notion of self-actualization with the notion of all things as a gift from God. After articulating the process of sanctification as a movement from the image of God in power to the image of God in Act, which is brought about by the free choice of the human agent, Traherne seeks to locate divine grace or 'Gift' in this process. The soul, finding its *telos* in union with God, is now filled with all the fullness of God, with the reward that 'Gods Knowledg and Lov will be in the Soul.' Traherne continues by affirming that the soul has acquired this reward as a 'Gift' from God:

And tho the Soul is never able to acquire this, but by an immediat Gift, which it greedily and joyfully maketh use of. yet when it hath finished those Works, which God hath given it to do, and promised to reward with this Gift, God looketh upon it with as much Pleasure As if it had acquired all this by its own Power becaus the infusion was annexed to the discharge of Such Works, and it had Capacities, and Powers, that Naturaly led to this Beatifick Vision, or Divine fruition.³²

Divine gratuity is seen in the nature of the soul as it has come from the hand of God made in

³¹ For the best examination of Pico's influence on Traherne's notion of freedom and self-actualization see *Ibid.*, 142–5.

³² *Kingdom*, 462.

the image of God and naturally tends toward God, for the ‘Capacities, and Powers’ of the soul ‘Naturally’ lead it to the ‘Beatifick Vision, or Divine fruition.’ A primary divine capacity in the soul is the power of choice – the ability to turn power into act – so God provides ‘Works’ for this soul to do by its own volition, that it might crown its created beauty with the beauty of virtuous actions. This too is a gift, for without the freedom to choose, the soul could not become the image in Act. Lastly, in heaven, the soul is rewarded with the ‘Gift’ of life in union with God; divine knowledge and love in the ‘Beatifick Vision, or Divine fruition.’ We will speak more on God’s grace when we speak of Redemption in Chapter 4, but here we see that divine gratuity permeates Traherne’s understanding of power and act, but it does so without undermining the freedom of the human agent, for this would undercut the gratuitous gift of *freedom* given to the soul at creation.

We spent a great deal of time in the previous chapter showing that according to Traherne God is an ‘Eternal Agent’ who freely creates with ‘Desire’ and ‘Delight’. What we did not notice, however, is the direct link Traherne makes between divine freedom and the freedom endowed to God’s image bearer. In the following Traherne makes this link:

It is the Glory of God, that he is a free, and Eternal Agent....To give us therefore the Power of Doing all that is Excellent, without the Necessitie of doing it, is the vertical Point, the very Zenith, or utmost Hight of our Exaltation.³³

‘It is the Glory of God, that he is a free, and Eternal Agent’, and God has glorified ‘us’ by bestowing this gift. In Traherne’s *A Sober View* he explores human freedom in similar terms to those used of God above. Notice how Traherne links freedom with love and beauty:

Now Love is a free Affection which cannot be compeld, nor be without freedom. Neither Obedience, nor Ingenuity nor Gratitude is in them Unless they Spring from Love which is free, unless they are Willingly performed and with Desire. If God doth them instead of the Soul; if the soul be forced...their Beauty is destroyed.³⁴

As God is not compelled but acts with desire, so are the loving actions of the ‘Soul done’ without compulsion and ‘with Desire’. It is the nature of love that it ‘is a free Affection which cannot be compeld, nor be without freedom.’ We have already established the central place love plays in Traherne’s theology in the previous chapter, so along with the centrality of love comes the centrality of freedom. Acts that ‘Spring from Love which is free’ are acts that are beautiful, and expressions of a beautiful soul. To be stripped of this freedom destroys the beauty of a good act: ‘If God doth them instead of the Soul...their Beauty is destroyed.’

The gift of freedom bestowed on the *imago dei* provides the space for actual love to

³³ *Kingdom*, 500.

³⁴ *Sober View*, 55-6.

occur and for this love to be the wellspring of activity, thus imaging the deity in loving activity. Traherne also sees the human free agent imaging divine activity by having an internal and an external component to their activity. We noticed in the previous chapter that Traherne differentiates between God's external ('Transuent') activity and internal ('Immanent') activity. It is the 'Immanent Actions' of God – the internal and eternal act that constitutes God's essence as pure act – which are most noble and beautiful. Traherne explains:

The Nobility of Immanent Actions therefore is worthy to be enquired, and diligently lookt into, because they are the fountain, and the Life of Beauty Prais and Excellency. Even in the Deity they are Superior to all His Works, more Excellent in Nature, more Beautifull to be seen, and more Beneficial.³⁵

Both divine and human agents have what Traherne here calls 'Immanent Actions'. The immanent actions of the free agent function as the fountain of its 'Transuent' activity, which in God is 'Superior to all His Works'. For Traherne, as the human agent is transformed from the image of God in power to the image of God in act, it takes on this beauty as seen in God's essence as pure act. This essential beauty in God is acquired by the soul as 'an Accident' when power is turned to act. Traherne describes the beauty of God and beauty of the soul below:

His Immanent Actions, and His Essence are one. His Immanent Actions therefore must needs be most infinitely Excellent since they compose His Essence. In us they are the clarity and Splendor of Souls, the features and Colors composing their Beauty. Which Beauty is in Him His Essence, in us an Accident. Because we are something beside that Beauty, and from us it may be removed. He is the Beauty, and the Beauty of GOD is GOD.³⁶

The progress of putting on the image of God in act is described here as the beautification of the soul. What the soul was as the image of God in power (or potentiality) is turned into act and Traherne describes this new state by using the aesthetic terms of 'Color', 'clarity' and 'Splendor'. What God is in God's essence ('He is the Beauty') we become as 'an Accident'. Like God, whose interior acts are superior to the exterior, Traherne is most concerned with the beauty of the 'Immanent acts' of the human soul, for they function as the 'fountain' of the 'Transuent'. A beautiful soul will be known by its external actions, but Traherne keenly knows it is the intensions of the soul that make an action good or bad, so it is the 'Immanent Actions' of the soul he is most concerned with. He explains the logic of this in the following:

The falling of a Mans Arm upon anothers Head, and Killing Him with the Burden of a

³⁵ *Commentaries*, 'Action', 189.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Sword, is no more then the falling of a Beam, without the Intent wherwith it is guided. And this makes the Actions of fools and Mad Men so vain and Worthless, even when they chance to hit upon the most Illustrious Deeds.³⁷

It is the intention of an action – located in the immanent act – that constitutes a good and beautiful act.

The *theosis* of the soul – becoming divine through participation in God – affects beauty in the soul, and for Traherne this also affects our union with God. We have spent a great deal of time outlining in Chapter 2 how Traherne saw how God chose to clothe God-self with beauty so as to affect love and turn human desire back to him. In clothing God-self with beauty God becomes an object to be seen, admired, delighted so as to capture desire and direct our desire heavenward, thus alluring the soul back into union. What occurs, for Traherne, when the soul is beautified through *theosis* is that it becomes a beautiful object in God's esteem. Traherne explains that 'it is as necessary, that Beauty should be Esteemed, and Seen, and Acknowledged; as it is that Life Should inspire its Being: Nay it is as Just, and as fitly desired, that being delightfull, it should be delighted in; as truly Injurious, that it should be despised.'³⁸ As it is 'Just' for divine beauty to be 'Esteemed, and Seen, and Acknowledge' so it is for created beauty. However 'the Infirmitie which attends Created Beauties, is that they aspire to be beloved, Esteemed, and Admired' and are just to do so, 'but do not look up to the fountain of all Love, and Honor, for their Satisfaction.'³⁹ We find that for Traherne, God, acting in perfect justice, is offering the satisfaction of our desire to be 'Esteemed of the most excellent Persons',⁴⁰ and admires our beauty, but 'that GOD desires and delights in it, does Generaly Pass for nothing'.⁴¹ Knowing that God is both a beautiful object of delight and lover of created beauty, 'it is our Duty Either to desire Beauty, that we may be pleasing, or being Perfect in all Amiableness, to rejoyce with Infinit Joy, that we are pleasing to him.' A soul formed into the image of God in act is a beautiful object, capable of both fully enjoying the beauty of God and being an amiable and beautiful object of divine esteem, admiration, desire and delight. Between the beautified (and deified) soul and God resides a mutual desire and delight, affecting further growth in union between lovers. What affects desire in the other is beauty in the object.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *Kingdom*, 414.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

3.2. Incarnation

What *theosis* has done in its historical articulation is draw together various aspects of Christology and Theological Anthropology as they intersect in the doctrines of Soteriology and Sanctification: ‘God became man that we might become gods’. Christ, as the new humanity, provides the way to human teleology in relational union with God, while also forming the measure of that new humanity. In Chapter 4 we will see how as the measure of true humanity, Christ is to be both the prime object of contemplation and imitation; here we will see how Incarnation provides the theological space for Traherne to speak of the union of body and soul. This brief section will show how Incarnation grounds Traherne’s anthropology and will act as the transition between Traherne’s discussion of the soul and his discussion of the body.

We noted in Chapter 2 that ‘A Relation to God Exalts the smallest Existence to transcendent Height’,⁴² and this is most acutely seen in the incarnation, whereby Christ is hypostatically united with all human nature, even its body.

If this be not Enough remember that the Humane Nature is Hypostatically united unto God: the Greatest Elevation that was absolutely Possible: And that GOD himself dwelleth in a Body for evermore, that our Savior is a Man, yet the most Absolute and Perfect Creature... that we are Members of his Body, of his flesh, and of his Bones: that we are exalted in him, and to Sit with him in the Heavenly Places...and that the fullness of the Godhead dwelleth in him Bodily⁴³

As Traherne continues he explores the soteriological implications of this hypostatic union, whereby God is ‘made Sin, and a Curse for us’,⁴⁴ and we will speak of this below. What he emphasizes in this passage is Christ’s bodily nature, for even Christ’s mystical body (the Church) is given ‘flesh’ and ‘Bones’, for ‘we are Members of his Body, of his flesh, and of his Bones’. In the incarnation, Christ has taken up into himself what is ontologically distinct from himself, raising it up to ‘the Greatest Elevation’, for ‘GOD himself dwelleth in a Body for evermore’. We will remember from the previous chapter that in the *Centuries* Traherne claims that ‘this visible World is the body of God, not His natural body, but which He hath

⁴² *Kingdom*, 337.

⁴³ *Kingdom*, 493.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

assumed',⁴⁵ and this body is assumed so as to manifest 'His Love'⁴⁶ and 'His Beauty'.⁴⁷ What Jesus does in assuming a particular body is an extension and intensification of God's infleshing activity throughout creation since 'the beginning' (Gen. 1.1, John 1.1). In creation 'his invisible attributes' (Rom. 1.20) are manifest as 'all things are made through him' (John 1.3) while in Jesus the Word has become flesh – taken 'a local habitation and a name' – as the unique image of the Father: '[Christ] being the Brightness of his fathers Glory and the Express Image of His Person his Wisdom and Goodness'.⁴⁸ This act of divine self-revelation finds its fruition in Christ, the God made flesh. If we recall Traherne's belief that the individual body is a microcosm of the visible world, the hypostatic union – God's assumption of a particular body which is a microcosm of all bodies – provides Traherne with a way to articulate God's relation to the cosmos without the fear of pantheism. This is a union that is not done away with after Christ's earthly ministry, for as Traherne reminds the reader, 'GOD himself dwelleth in a Body for evermore'.

As Incarnation elevates the body in the hypostatic union, so does Incarnation provide the measure for how the spiritual soul can and should interact with the corporeal in all humanity. Quoting Colossian 2.9, Traherne finds warrant for this belief in the soul's capacity to communicate spiritual matters to the corporeal body in the hypostatic union.

For which Cause it is Sayd Concerning our Savior, that the Fullness of the Godhead dwelleth in him Bodily. That is, his Body is replenished with the Glory, and Power of the GODHEAD, and all the Joy and Vertu therof by the Mediation of his Soul, which is an Infinit Temple of the Deitie, is effectually Expressed, and dwelleth there in a Corporeal Maner.⁴⁹

For Traherne, the body – enabled 'by the Mediation of his Soul' – carries within itself the capacity to receive the divine being, this is most clearly seen in the incarnation. Traherne fails to offer a full Cappadocian Christology in not arguing how the 'Humane Nature is Hypostatically united unto God' in these two accounts of *The Kingdom of God*, for his main purpose is to simply assert hypostatic union and show how the person of Christ theologically grounds his anthropology. For Traherne, Christ is 'the Great Exemplar' of true humanity, image of *theosis* and object of imitation.⁵⁰ As such, the Incarnation theologically grounds

⁴⁵ *Centuries*, II, 21.

⁴⁶ *Centuries*, I, 90.

⁴⁷ *Centuries*, II, 20.

⁴⁸ 'Second Adam', *Commentaries of Heaven*, Vol. 2, 228

⁴⁹ *Kingdom*, 488.

⁵⁰ ⁵⁰ 'Second Adam', *Commentaries*, 228.

Traherne's high view of bodies and souls, their interaction, and as we will see below, the importance of this interaction for his epistemology. Having now shown how Christ is the measure of true humanity, and how *theosis* is humanity's *telos*, we turn our analysis overtly toward Traherne's theological anthropology, or as he will call it, the study of 'Humanity'.

3.2.1. 'Humanity' 'the Handmaid of true Divinity'

Traherne begins his treatise on the soul by explaining that 'Humanity, which is the Handmaid of true Divinity, is a noble Part of Learning, opening the best and rarest Cabinet in nature to us, that of our Selvs'. By 'Humanity', Traherne means both the quality of being human and the study and discovery of that quality. What 'Humanity' constitutes is the discovery of the 'the Excellencies of our Bodies, or the faculties of our Souls. together with the Graces and vices of either.'⁵¹ As we might deduce from the work's full title – *Seeds of Eternity or The Nature of the Soul in which Everlasting Powers are Prepared* – the human body, though exalted above other corporeal entities, is second to the soul in importance and glory. Traherne's understanding of the *image dei* doctrine leads him to find in the soul the direct reflection of God, 'For as in Water, the face of Heaven is represented; so is the Nature of God in the Soul of Man,'⁵² and it is for this reason that he is able to claim 'Humanity' as the 'Handmaid of true Divinity'. As we will see below, as image bearers, 'Humanity' as an object of inquiry not only reveals the face of God it also opens the 'rarest Cabinet' of all nature through its nature as micro-cosmos. For Traherne, the study of the microcosm opens the nature of the macrocosm.

In *Seeds of Eternity*, it is the soul's rootedness in God – 'the Nature of God in the Soul of Man' – that warrants a thorough examination of 'Humanity'. As such, the soul – like other objects of divine self-expression – is to be contemplated, and its beauty is to allure this contemplation: 'As Beauty allures the Eys of Beholders, so doth it especialy delight its own, those therfore that are very amiable contemplat themselvs frequently in a Mirror.'⁵³ Is Traherne espousing Narcissus' vice; to gaze upon my own beauty? Is this not an overt contradiction to Biblical notions of humility? For Traherne, his earlier articulation of the soul's rootedness in God warrants an internal gaze, for in it God is imaged. Traherne, aware of the possible objections to both glorifying the beauty of the soul and admonishing the

⁵¹ *Seeds*, 233.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

reader to contemplate that beauty, answers the reticent reader:

And if any Scruple further remain, as if it were Dangerous to look into the Soul, for fear of growing Proud by the Contemplation of its Excellencies, all the Causes of Loving GOD appear within it, and the highest sence of its Excellency, while we remember him that made it, will make us humble even to the Depth of that Nothing out of which we were created.⁵⁴

True contemplation – namely, contemplation that sees the soul as a divine gift and image – actually functions as the antidote to pride. Delighting in the glory of the human person, instead of diminishing divine glory, actually acts to enhance it. This enhancement occurs as the soul both passively mirrors back the divine nature, and as we saw above, beautifies itself by transforming the image of God in power into the image in act. It is human creaturely-ness that forms the basis of humility: ‘Excellency, while we remember him that made it, will make us humble’.

In addition to actually diminishing pride and inducing us to love God, Traherne believed the soul ‘must be studied bec: the Contempt of the Soul ariseth from ignorance, the Care and Esteem of it, only from the Sight of its Beauty and Glory. How Prodigal are men of their own Souls, bec. they know not the valu of them! How Atheistical and unbelieving!’⁵⁵ In calling those whose ‘Contempt of the Soul ariseth from ignorance’ both ‘Atheistical and unbelieving’ he may be referring to those who are truly unreligious and unbelieving, and thus take no care for the soul, or he may be speaking to fellow clerics, whose theology diminishes the ‘Beauty’, ‘Glory’ and ‘valu’ of the soul. The little we know of Traherne’s biography tells us that he was educated in a puritan college at Oxford (Brasenose College), being later appointed to the parish of Credenhill in 1657 and approved by puritans, *but* in 1660 sought episcopal ordination, ‘well in advance of needing to do so.’⁵⁶ In light of Traherne’s history with the puritans, a group heavily influenced by the teachings of John Calvin, it is illuminating to notice that Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in a similar way to Traherne’s introduction to *Seeds of Eternity*.

Calvin begins the *Institutes* in this way: ‘Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.’ As Calvin continues we see further agreement with Traherne, for he acknowledges that the knowledge of God and self ‘are connected together by many ties, it is

⁵⁴ Ibid., 236.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 6, 15, 16.

not easy to determine which of the two proceeds and gives birth to the other. For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without realizing ‘that the endowments’ we possess must have been given from a divine benefactor. In addition to this, says Calvin, ‘those blessings which unceasingly distil to us from heaven, are like streams conducting us to the fountain’ namely God. What comes next and what shapes the tenor of the rest of this first chapter, however, runs counter to Traherne’s overall message. For Calvin, when the human turns their gaze to God, God’s goodness acts as a rebuke to the fallen soul, for her sin is illuminated in the presence of God’s perfection. The purpose of this God-ward gaze is to awaken a ‘feeling of ignorance, vanity, want, in short, depravity and corruption’, so as to bring about humility and repentance. For Calvin ‘So long as we do not look beyond the earth, we are quite pleased with our own righteousness, wisdom, and virtue; we address ourselves in the most flattering terms, and seem only less than demigods.’ Therefore, when the human looks to God as the ‘standard’ of what is perfect ‘righteousness, and wisdom, and virtue’, he is convinced that he ‘is but rottenness and a worm’, and within him is a ‘world of misery’.⁵⁷

In view of Calvin’s emphasis on the human soul as a world of misery, made up of rottenness and resembling a worm (when compared to God), Traherne’s depiction of the soul as one of ‘Beauty and Glory’ stands out. In *Seeds of Eternity*, we do find Traherne gesturing towards the corruption of the Fall when he states that ‘for of all Pleasures, the greatest (next to the Sight of God himself) is to see the face of ones own Soul: if at least it be not defiled with guilt’.⁵⁸ Traherne also follows Calvin, and the Christian tradition, in affirming the defilement of the soul and its need for repentance when describing the soul’s fallen state, or as he often referred to it, in the ‘Estate of Misery’. Where Traherne differs from Calvin is that instead of the knowledge of God acting as the impetus for repentance, Traherne sees the true knowledge of the created ‘Perfections of My Soul’ and the ways by which ‘I hav defiled so excellent a creature’, as the impetus for repentance. He goes on to explain:

For that God hath put such Amiable and Noble Features within my Soul, and composed it of so many great and wonderfull parts, is the Highest Obligation wherof Nature is capable. But that I have defiled them, the greatest Caus of self abhorrence and Revenge. For the greater my Shame is, the greater is my Humiliation: the greater my Excellency was, the greater my shame is, and the greater my repentance.⁵⁹

It is the defacing of such a beautiful object that induces such great shame, humility and

⁵⁷ John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, Ch. 1. As found in John Calvin, *The Institutes Of The Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 1–3.

⁵⁸ *Seeds*, 234.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 235.

eventual repentance for Traherne, and it is the nobility of its features that call us to care for it. For as we saw above the care and esteem of the soul comes ‘only from the Sight of its Beauty and Glory.’ Did Traherne’s audience but see ‘how Divine and Glorious’ are the soul’s ‘Noble Features’ ‘they would know them to be immortal, and if not reverence, yet tender themselves, and fear to sin, and desire Glory.’⁶⁰ So for Traherne, meditating on the glorious capacities of the created soul brings about various responses including; giving thanks to God for giving such a gift, remorse and repentance for defiling such a beautiful object, the acceptance of God’s renewing work in the soul (which we will examine thoroughly in Chapter 4), the desire to properly care for this divine gift and, finally, the desire for glory.

As we will see below, the desire for glory comes about in the meditation on the capacities of the soul through realizing that the soul has been made with infinite capacities and insatiable desire, so the look inward awakens a longing for the infinite object. This longing is only satiated in the ‘Estate of Glory’, where we will enjoy God as the infinite object of our longings. What I want to notice here, however, is that for Traherne, the dialectic of knowledge of God and knowledge of self does not take the same shape as the one posited by Calvin. Calvin’s dialectic is a conversation between the internal misery of the ‘worm’-like human soul and the seemingly external good God, while Traherne’s knowledge of self is a gaze at the soul within, which mirrors the Divine, ‘For as in Water, the face of Heaven is represented; so is the Nature of God in the Soul of Man’.⁶¹ Thus, Traherne speaks of the study of ‘Humanity’ as delightful heavenly food, for heaven is within:

What feedeth the Soul with the Apprehensions of Heaven and the Delights of GOD must needs be Excellent: and such is the Deep and Serious Study of true Humanity.⁶²

We proceed noting Traherne’s distinctly sanguine theological anthropology, that sits near but it is at times at odds with more Puritan articulations of the study of ‘Humanity’. The following sections will constitute a thorough exploration of three aspects of Traherne’s view of ‘Humanity’: the body, the soul, and the union of body and soul. We note that for Traherne the contemplation of the soul finds value in providing heavenly nourishment, and encouragement to care for the body and soul, but affirm that our primary purpose in the following will be to discern Traherne’s epistemology, especially discerning how the human person comes to knowledge of God. The critical question in the following section is: how is

⁶⁰ Ibid., 236.

⁶¹ Ibid., 233. However, Traherne, does refer to his soul as ‘a poor Worm’ in *Commentaries*, (Vol. 2, 368) so it would be wise not to overplay this distinction.

⁶² Ibid., 236.

the human body vital in Traherne's theology and epistemology?

3.2.2. *'The Excellencies of our Bodies'*

We began chapter 1 examining Traherne's poem 'The Author to the Critical Peruser'. In this poem, Traherne seeks to differentiate his poetic form from those poets who obscure the 'naked Truth' through their usage of opaque 'pictures' and 'curling Metaphors that gild the Sence', thus creating 'Things that amaze, but will not make us wise.' These poets admire the clothing of their 'Pöetick Strains', but fail to see and display the naked beauty of God's Works. Traherne goes on:

and while they wonder at
[Humankind's] 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
...
Their woven Silks and wel-made Suits they prize,
Value their Gems, but not their useful Eys:
Their precious Hands, their Tongues and Lips divine,
Their polisht Flesh where whitest Lillie join
With blushing Roses and with saphire Veins,⁶³

Unlike his opponents who obscure the beauty of God's naked creation, Traherne, seeks to magnify its 'Beauty' through the glorification of the much 'over-looked' 'middle piece, his Body and his Mind'. As we saw in the last chapter the human body-soul, functions as the 'middle piece', or 'Golden Link'⁶⁴ of God's kingdom, translating the corporeal to the spiritual and vice versa. In glorifying the body, Traherne seeks to combat those poets who 'over-look' its beauty, while also seeking to 'repell that opinion as a vulgar Error, that maketh [the body] the impediment and prison of the mind' and instead 'looking on it as a glorious Instrument and Companion of the soul'.⁶⁵ For Traherne, the body is a beautiful creation of God to be contemplated, as well as a 'glorious Instrument' to be used for the good of the soul. The body as an object of contemplation and an 'Instrument' to be used are not in conflict for Traherne. In fact, often the instrumental value of the body is precisely the beauty to be contemplated (for instance the 'useful Eys'), while Traherne also speaks of the beauty of the body in the attempt to allure the reader to care for and use her body properly. As we

⁶³ 'Author to the Critical Peruser', ll. 39-43, 45-49.

⁶⁴ *Seeds*, 238.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 240.

will see below, the bodily senses play a vital ‘Instrumental’ role in Traherne’s epistemology.

For Traherne, God’s ‘Kingdom being partly Visible, partly Invisible, is absolutely the Best that power could Effect Wherefore we will at this present shew, that God hath done more in making his Image [visible], then if he had only made it Spiritual and Invisible Like himself in Glory.’⁶⁶ As we noticed in chapter two, the corporeal nature of the world – and the human body as the ‘Darling and Delight of the whole World’⁶⁷ – is far from problematic for Traherne. The body plays an essential role in Traherne’s system, it is not to be seen as an impediment of our minds. In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne echoes these same sentiments: ‘Our Bodies are not, as Som Imagine them, Enemies to be used, with all kind of Rigor; They are Vessels worthy the Treasures they inclose; and you must believ they are very Dear to the Power, which Created them.’⁶⁸

For Traherne, the human body is the apex of corporeal creation. The body is where ‘all Material Objects are truly Crowned in their use, and End.’⁶⁹ We will discuss below the mechanics of how the bodily senses act as the receptacles of the delights and pleasures of the corporeal world, offering them to the intellectual soul, but we notice here that the visible world finds its ‘End’ in the body. By ‘End’, Traherne means that the body is uniquely constituted to receive – via the senses – the corporeal world, enabling the soul to receive the world as a divine gift, and – via the soul – offer the world back to God. The world’s final end is God, but its corporeal nature finds its corporeal *telos* in the bodily senses. In addition to being the ‘End’ of ‘all Material Objects’, Traherne also believed the body to be a microcosm of the corporeal world. He conjectures,

with great Probability it may be supposed, that there is nothing material in heaven or Earth, or under the Earth or in the Sea, even to the Deepest minerals, or remotest Influences, or highest Stars, wherof some portion is not present in the Body of man, that litle World within it self, made to rule and possess the Greater.⁷⁰

Traherne finds proof for the superiority of human bodies above other bodies in its very physiology. ‘Wherin as the Body of Man excelleth all other Bodies of Beasts and fowls and fishes, so it is evident therby the he was made to reign over them...and as the [beauty?] of his Countenance is more bright and excellent then all, so is his Erect stature a Prerogative of

⁶⁶ *Kingdom*, 481.

⁶⁷ *Seeds*, 240.

⁶⁸ *Kingdom*, 488.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Seeds*, 240.

Majesty and freedom from above.’ After quoting Ovid’s *Metamorphosos*, I 76 – ‘God gave to man a lofty countenance / That he to heaven might his face advance’ – Traherne finds in the human body a sign of its *telos* in God compared to the bodies of animals: ‘They look downward return unto the Earth, he looking upward ascendest into heaven.’⁷¹ All corporeal life finds its end in the human body and the physiology of the human body points to its final end in God.

The claims for human superiority over the animals would have been uncontroversial in his seventeenth century context, but Traherne strikes a curious chord when he speaks of the corporeal human as superior to the angels. After speaking of the human failure to act as the angels who guide their affects by reason, Traherne states, ‘It is not by Nature, but Accident, that Men fail to do so. That therefore we do not guide our affections by Reason, is no Essential Difference between Men, and Angels.’ Since our corporeality is no natural hindrance to being guided by reason, bodily sense should not be conceived of as an impediment: ‘Since therefore our Senses are without Impediment, superadded to our Inward, and Spiritual Powers, it seemeth that our Humane Nature is more than Angelical, because we have one Way more then they, to feel, and Enjoy all Objects, Visible, and Invisible’.⁷² The sensual nature of the human body prepares the human person for the types of enjoyment naturally unavailable to angels, but possibly made available to the angels through the human body: ‘The Angels see not the World immediately in it Self, but as it appears in the Apprehension of Man’. Without the aid of humankind, Traherne conjectures that angels might ‘perhaps’ ‘see’ the world ‘in God, whose Infinite Knowledge is the Light of Angels, and Comprehendeth all Things. But even then they meet with the Apprehension of Man in the that knowledg of God’. As Traherne concludes this thought he moves beyond speculations about angelic apprehension to his central point that without human bodily senses ‘the Interior, and more Noble Uses of the World wherein the Chiefest Part of its Beauty lies, would be cut off from the Conception of the Womb, were no Visible Creatures Capable of reaping the fruit, and Benefit of the Whole Creation.’⁷³ The noble use of the bodily senses, as we will see saw in Chapter 2 and will see more clearly below, is the communication of ‘God himself’: ‘The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we

⁷¹ Ibid., 241.

⁷² *Kingdom*, 489-90.

⁷³ *Kingdom*, 482.

Come to the Knowledg of God himself.’⁷⁴ Chapter 2 provided an extended picture of how God reveals God-self in the beauty of creation, as we proceed we will see how the human body-soul comes to knowledge of God through this self-revelation.

3.3. Epistemology

3.3.1. *The Bodily Senses*

Now that we have shown Traherne’s high view of the human body, and therefore revealed it as a proper object of contemplation, we turn to Traherne’s understanding of the body as an indispensable instrument to be used properly. It is the body’s instrumental value that is of particular importance to this study, for as we will see it is through the bodily senses that we receive the World, and the divine beauty therein.

In Traherne’s ‘Thanksgivings for the Body’ we are reminded again of the body’s place as the *telos* of the created world:

For our Bodies therefore, O Lord, for our earthly Bodies, hast
thou made the World: Which thou so lovest, that thou hast
supremely magnified them by the works of thy hands:
And made them Lords of the whole Creation.
Higher than the Heavens,
Because served by them:
More glorious than the Sun,
Because it ministreth to them:
Greater in Dignity than the material World.
Because the end of its Creation.⁷⁵

We see in these words that the ‘Creation’ serves, ‘ministreth’ and finds its end in the human body, who, as we will see below, are uniquely positioned to offer the creation back to God in praise in worship. We are also reminded in this poem, that for Traherne, the incorporeal angels enjoy the corporeal world through the senses of the human body: in our bodies ‘do the Angels enjoy the visible Heavens. / The Sun and Stars, / Thy terrestrial Glories, / And all thy Wisdom / ... Thou makest us treasures / And joys unto them; / Objects of Delight, and spiritual Lamps, / Whereby they discern visible things.’⁷⁶ We are thus reminded that for

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ ‘Thanksgivings for the Body’, ll. 222-231. In Thomas Traherne, *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings*, ed. H. M Margoliouth (Herschel Maurice) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 220.

⁷⁶ Ibid., ll. 387-390, 395-398.

Traherne humankind is the 'Golden Claspe' of God's kingdom,⁷⁷ uniting the corporeal and spiritual elements of God's kingdom.

A reoccurring theme in Traherne's work is the glory of the sensual nature of the human body, for it acts as a recipient of the created world. In 'Thanksgiving for the Body' he calls the body 'A sphere of Sense, / And a mine of Riches', and continues his celebration of the body's senses by magnifying

The spacious Room
Which thou hast hidden in mine Eye,
The Chambers for Sounds
Which thou hast prepar'd in mine Ear,
The Receptacles for Smells
Conceal in my Nose;
The feeling of my Hands,
The taste of my Tongue.

The capacities of the bodily senses find their *telos*, for Traherne, in praise to God, 'But above all, O Lord, the Glory of Speech, whereby thy / Servant is enabled with Praise to celebrate thee.' What is received by the 'Eye', 'Ear', 'Nose', 'Hands', and 'Tongue' acts as the impetus for praise to God. Traherne elaborates on the inspiration of his praise as he continues in this poem, giving praise 'For

All the Beauties in Heaven and Earth,
The Melody of Sounds,
The sweet Odours
Of they Dwelling-place
The delectable pleasures that gratifie my Sense,
That gratify the feeling of Mankind.
The Light of History,
Admitted by the Ear.
The Light of Heaven,
Brought in by the Eye.⁷⁸

We find Traherne giving thanks for the 'delectable pleasures that gratifie' all 'my Sense', and we note especially the eye's capacity to receive 'All the Beauties of Heaven and Earth' as well as 'The Light of Heaven'. The sense of sight is preeminent, but here Traherne praises the 'Excellency of the five senses'. For 'All the Pleasures, and Delights in the World depend upon them; all Harmonious Sounds, Beautiful Sight, fragrant Odors, Delicious Tastes, alluring Tongues, and pleasing Contacts, are conceived in the sence'.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Kingdom*, 483.

⁷⁸ 'Thanksgivings for the Body', ll. 89-90, 92-112.

⁷⁹ *Kingdom*, 487.

It is difficult to read a page of Traherne and fail to read him using the term ‘Enjoyment’, and the body is essential for Traherne’s understanding of enjoyment. Speaking of the sense of smell he states, ‘The Nostril admitteth all odors, and calleth man into communion with God in the Enjoyment of Incense and Sweet Perfumes: the fragrancie of which is so delicious that the divinest Enjoyments of Heaven are compared to pleasant odors.’ Moving to the sense of taste Traherne continues, ‘The Tongue is affected with Pleasant Tastes, and by it we receive the Benefit of fat and luscious Wines, Marrow, kidnies of wheat, Butter Milk and Honie, with all that inviteth the richest Epicures to excess and Gluttony’. Traherne points to the ‘Epicures’ as an example of ‘excess and Gluttony’, but more as examples of the delightful and alluring force of the sense of taste. However, as we will see below, the virtuous enjoyment of both the body and soul far exceeds that of the ‘Epicures’. As Traherne continues he locates the eyes and ears as able to receive and enjoy the beauty of the visible world and the beauty and order of ‘all Ages’.

The Ey openeth upon the whole World, and letteth in the Beauty of all the Univers, informing the Soul with the Glory of Heaven and Earth and as it were inspiring the Matter and Greatness of them filleth Man with their Excellency and Perfection. The Ear converseth Invisibles into the Soul of men, and by it doth he communicat with all Ages, admiring the Magnificence and order of the Same, delighting in the Riches and Beauty of them, and walking in all their Light and Glory.⁸⁰

We notice that when Traherne speaks of the ‘Ey’ and ‘Ear’ the language shifts from the simple enjoyments of taste and smell to the higher orders of ‘informing the Soul’ and conversing ‘Invisibles into the Soul’. We also see that the ears capacity to ‘communicat with all Ages’, admiring their ‘Magnificence’, ‘Order’, ‘Riches’ and ‘Beauty’, thus enabling the soul to walk ‘in all their Light and Glory’ is an extension of the eye’s ability to inform ‘the Soul with the Glory of Heaven and Earth’. The glory and beauty the ‘Ey’ is enabled to receive in the present the ear is enabled to receive in ‘all Ages’. The ears and eyes seem to have special capacities for illumination, mostly unavailable to the other three senses. There seems to be a hierarchy of the senses in Traherne’s thought. Read in this way, those senses most tied to the limited experience of corporeal life (touch – which we notice is not discussed in the quotes above –, taste and smell), are to be fully enjoyed but remain inferior because their enjoyment is primarily tied to finite matter. A hierarchical reading of the senses proves problematic for contemporary discussions of disability, a point well-made by Susannah

⁸⁰ For this and the above quotes see *Seeds*, 242.

Mintz.⁸¹ If the senses of sight and hearing are elevated above the others, what of the blind and deaf? Traherne's hierarchy is softened when at times he speaks of the sense perception as one unified reality. As we will see below, as he describes the mechanics of his epistemology sense perception is communicated to the mind as all the bodily sense are organizes within what he calls 'the common sense', which is then offered to the faculties of intellection. Likewise, though the ability to see (a primary metaphor for knowledge in Western thought)⁸² is of primary importance for Traherne's epistemology and theology – 'The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we Come to the Knowledge of God himself'⁸³ – in addition to the eyes denoting the bodily sense of sight – as is exemplified by his poem 'The Preparative' – the 'Ey' also functions as a symbol of 'my Soul', which amongst other things he describes as a 'All Life, all Sence / A Naked Simple Pure *Intelligence*' (ll. 13-14, 21-22). I agree with Susannah Mintz that Traherne's discussion of the bodily senses leaves no meaningful space for a robust theology of disability, but stop short of associating him with ableism.

It is this epistemological process – coming to the knowledge of God through the beauty of the visible world – that this section is primarily interested in. It is through the bodily senses (especially the sense of sight) that the human soul receives knowledge of God. In contrast to Henry More, who maintained the idea that the human mind is created with an innate understanding of God, Traherne's epistemology rejects innate ideas: a set of ideas 'imprinted in the mind at its first creation'.⁸⁴ Where More claimed 'the mind of man is not "a Table book in which nothing is writ"',⁸⁵ Traherne begins his *Centuries of Meditation* by claiming 'An empty book is like an infant's soul, in which anything may be written. It is capable of all things, but containeth nothing.'⁸⁶ Where Traherne does seem to affirm innate ideas is in the sphere of morality. K. Murphy notes Traherne's rejection of Thomas Hobbs'

⁸¹ Susannah B. Mintz, "Strange Bodies: Thomas Traherne's Disabled Subject," in *Re-Reading Thomas Traherne: A Collection of New Critical Essays*, ed. Jacob Blevins (Tempe, Ariz: ACMRS, 2007), 1–20.

⁸² See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁸³ *Kingdom*, 489.

⁸⁴ G. A. J. Rogers, "Locke, Newton, and the Cambridge Platonists on Innate Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 2 (1979): 191.

⁸⁵ C. A. Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists*, The Stratford-upon-Avon library ; 5 (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), 222. In Rogers, "Locke, Newton, and the Cambridge Platonists on Innate Ideas," 192. The link between Traherne and the Cambridge Platonists is well documented, this is most notably seen in Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism."

⁸⁶ *Centuries*, I, 1.

belief that there is no ‘common Rule of good and Evill’ in his *Leviathan* by emphasizing in the *Christian Ethicks* ““Transcendent Virtues” which are “incumbent on us by the Law of nature [...] as Eternal Duties in all Estates for ever to be exercised. [...] They were enjoyed in the Estate of Innocency, without any need of a positive Law, by the very nature of GOD and the Soul, and of things themselves [...]” Virtues are both real and transcendent, derived from innate ideas, and obligatory by the law of nature, not through any externally imposed force or social contract.’⁸⁷ In Traherne’s *Commonplace Book* he quotes Theophilus Gale’s *Court of the Gentiles* where he says that ‘these common seeds of natural light are a private Law, which God has deeply engraven on mens Conscience, and is universally extensive to all’ though to a ‘*great* measure obliterated, and defaced by the *fall*. It is also by *Divines* generally termed the *Light*, or *Law of Nature*, because it flows in, and with, and from Human Nature’.⁸⁸ Though Traherne does affirm a certain *a priori* knowledge of the divine law ‘engraven on mens Conscience’, the image of the *tabula rosa* (empty slate) or ‘empty book’ brimming with capacity but ‘containeth nothing’ best describes Traherne’s epistemology. In fact, as we will see below, the infinite capacities of the soul (whereby the infinity of God is imprinted on the soul) creates an insatiable desire – or teleology – that is felt by the soul as want (denoting both lack and desire). Traherne asks in the *Centuries* ‘Do you not feel yourself drawn by the expectation and desire of some Great Thing?’⁸⁹ In addition to an infinite capacity that longs for ‘some Great Thing’, Traherne also affirms God-given faculties (especially reason) that aid the soul in this search. Paul Cefalu is correct in asserting that ‘Traherne’s theory of cognition is fundamentally Thomistic in its thoroughgoing empiricism’, – though we may question whether calling Aquinas a ‘thoroughgoing’ empiricist in the form of Locke is entirely accurate – and we will see that Aquinas’ cognitive theory – that ‘sensory cognition is responsible for understanding the *particular* nature of an external object’ while ‘intellectual cognition is responsible for understanding the essence of *universal* nature’⁹⁰ – bears close resemblance to Traherne’s own theory of knowledge.

We have seen in this section that Traherne held to a very exalted view of the corporeal world and the human body in particular. The human body is both microcosm and *telos* of all corporeal existence. The human body is the ‘World’s’ final end, because through

⁸⁷ Murphy, “Thomas Traherne, Thomas Hobbes, and the Rhetoric of Realism,” 423–424.

⁸⁸ *CB*, fol. 82^v.1 as quoted in Marks, “Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism,” 526.

⁸⁹ *Centuries*, I, 2.

⁹⁰ Cefalu, “Thomistic Metaphysics and Ethics in the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Traherne,” 256. [emphasis mine]

the bodily senses the body is enabled to receive the delights of God's corporeal creation and offer them to the spiritual world; either as a place for pure spirits to enjoy the pleasures of matter or through an act of praise to God. In addition to the bodily senses providing a bodily receptacle for the spiritual world to receive the corporeal world, the bodily senses (especially the eyes and ears) act as the first stage in our knowledge of God. It is for this reason that Traherne exhorts the reader to perceive the beauty of creation, for in seeing the beauty of God's creation – and recognizing it as God's creation-gift to humankind – the human comes to knowledge of God. In the midst of praising God for the many gifts given to the body Traherne exclaims 'What then, O Lord, hast thou intended for our Souls, who givest to our Bodies such glorious things!/ ... My Body is but the Cabinet, or Case of my Soul', a 'Case' we are to contemplate and gives thanks for but ultimately realize its primary purpose is to be a 'Companion to the Soul'. It is to the 'Soul' that we now turn.

3.3.2. *The Soul: 'The Sight of [the Soul's] Beauty and Glory'*

We noticed above Traherne's belief that 'the Contempt of the Soul ariseth from ignorance' but 'the Care and Esteem of' the soul, 'ariseth' 'only from the Sight of its Beauty and Glory.'⁹¹ A primary purpose of Traherne's *Seeds of Eternity* is to affect a care for the soul in his reader, by providing a 'Deep and Serious Study of true humanity'. Traherne defines the study of 'True Humanitie' as the study of the 'interior endowments Qualities and Inclinations of the Soul.'⁹² We begin our 'Deep and Serious Study of true humanity' by continuing to answer the epistemological question posed above. We noticed above that the body in Traherne's theory of knowledge is essential in receiving the world through the senses, but now we must locate the soul's essential place in receiving and organizing the information given to it by the senses. The epistemological question comes within a broader question of Traherne's understanding of the interaction of the soul and body. This 'Union of Soul, and Body' is 'so Misterious, that Neither the Cause, nor Manner of it is generally known,...and 'the Manner of it I Ingeniously confess, my knowledg is lost, and swalled up in Admiration.' This mystery of the union of body and soul causes Traherne to ask, 'why my Soul, that can See Eternity, and be present by an Act of Intelligence, with all Immensity Should be tyed to my Body. I can give no Reason but Gods will'.⁹³ Though shrouded in

⁹¹ *Seeds*, 236.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Kingdom*, 483-4.

mystery, this union is essential in Traherne's system, for Traherne's embodied soul forms both the basis for his understanding of humankind as microcosm and 'Golden Claspe'⁹⁴ of creation, his theory of knowledge.

As we continue into Traherne's theory of knowledge we must keep in mind that all objects of knowledge are subsumed within our primary object of knowledge, namely God. It is for this reason that God has given the human body/soul capacities for knowledge. For as Traherne says, God 'having all Goodness, Beauty in it self, and desiring infinitely to be seen, and to be Enjoyed, he made Capacities fit for his Essence, and Passive Powers, that might answer his Activ Omnipotence.'⁹⁵ The human epistemological capacities find their end in knowledge of God, for God is the fitting object of their 'Passive Powers' and spacious 'Capacities'. As we will see below, to fully see God's 'Goodness and Beauty', Traherne identifies both passive and active elements within human cognition:

And because it was Impossible to see his Goodness and Beauty in the meer outward appearance of Visible Things, and much of his Glory did lurk in the Secret and hidden Properties of his Creatures, he gav So great a Measure of life to the Soul, that it might be able to discern the Invisible qualities, and virtues of his Creatures.⁹⁶

If the body is able to see the outward appearance of divine beauty, the soul is able to actively discern the 'Secret and hidden' elements of God's 'Goodness and Beauty', discerning the 'Invisible qualities' lurking in the visible creatures. Divine wisdom has created proper faculties to come to knowledge of God through the body and soul, for it is fitting for God to be known and loved by God's creation: 'For the Higher and more Perfect the Glory, and Beauty of God is, the less can it Endure to be Widdowed, as an object without its Facultie', therefore God prepared human faculties with the capacity to receive God so that 'he might be at once seen, and admired, and Enjoyed, in all his Workes, in all his Excellencies, and Perfections; and the Soul at the same time Blessed in all the varieties of his Eternal Kingdom'.⁹⁷ For Traherne, it is right, proper and good, that 'the Glory, and Beauty of God' be discerned and enjoyed by the human body/soul, for the height of beauty and of glory is desire, and this desire, this love, drives the opening up of the enjoyment of God's being to others. We now look at Traherne's understanding of the structures of the human faculties that allow the human soul to receive God's self-expressed beauty.

⁹⁴ *Kingdom*, 483.

⁹⁵ *Kingdom*, 426.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

We have already seen that Traherne's epistemology shows close affinities to that of Thomas Aquinas. For Traherne, what the body receives from the senses it offers to the mind, through what he calls the 'Common Sence, Memorie, and fancy'; capacities which are housed in the organ of the brain. He describes it in this way:

Besides the five outward Senses of the Bodie, there are three inward senses of the Mind, more peculiarly ascribed therunto, because they so Deerly within, and hidden in an Invisible Centre, that they do not Exist in the Exterior Organs, but in the Brain alone. Common Sence, Memorie, and fancy: To which I think foresight might be added as a fourth.⁹⁸

We begin with the 'Common Sense' because 'the Immediat Objects of the common Sence, are all the Senses of the body, for the common Sence is an Internal power, to which all Sounds, and Sights, and Tasts, and Smells and feelings are brought from all the Parts of the Body'.⁹⁹ The 'Common Sense' is the internal capacity to organize all the sense data received from the body, acting as a 'Simple Perception of all the Motions of Every Sence and consequently of all the Objects occasioning their Impressions.'

If the 'Common Sence' is a 'Simple Perception' that receives its data directly from the bodily senses, the fancy is able to function with a great deal more freedom. The fancy works to 'Govern all Images', either directly present to the 'Common Sence' or 'Absent'.

Traherne defines the fancy in the following way:

the fancy is the Power of Imagination, that is an Interior Abilitie, to Creat, or raise, at least to use, and Govern all Images, as it self pleaseth, in the Mind, proposing the Ideas of any Thing possible, or Actual, present, or Absent to the Common Sence, and affecting the Mind therewith, as if it were present.¹⁰⁰

As the 'Power of Imagination' the fancy works to 'Govern all Images' so as to propose their 'Ideas' to the mind. Traherne's usage of various binaries – linked by the conjunction 'or' (e.g. 'Creat, or raise', 'possible, or Actual', 'present, or Absent) – when articulating the capacities of the fancy (or imagination), reveals that the fancy deals with both what is and what could be. In one sense the epistemological function of the fancy is to receive the images Actual and present to the Common Sence, and to 'raise', 'use' and 'Govern' these 'Images'. The fancy's 'Power of Imagination' also carries within it the ability to 'Creat' 'possible' images and ideas 'Absent to the Common Sence'. The ability of the mind to create images is also explored in the *Centuries*, where Traherne speaks of the mind creating not only mere

⁹⁸ *Kingdom*, 486-7.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

images but whole worlds. 'God hath made you able to create worlds in your own mind which are more precious unto Him than those which He created; and to give and offer up the world unto Him, which is very delightful in flowing from Him, but as much more in returning to Him.' The fancy, then, plays an essential role in the human's vocation of mediating the physical world and translating it to the spirit, for as Traherne continues the 'Thought of the World, or the World in a Thought, is more excellent than the World, because it is spiritual and nearer unto God', and is especially excellent when offered to God by 'the voluntary Act of an obedient Soul.'¹⁰¹ What makes the 'World in a Thought' more excellent than the corporeal world is that as a thought it has reached its fruition when returned to God as an act of contemplation and praise. In the act of intellection, the corporeal world finds its end in God. In Traherne's epistemology it is the imaginative power of the fancy to create images of things actual or possible, which are then proposed to the Mind as 'Ideas'.

Traherne continues in his discussion of the epistemological structures of the human mind by speaking of the 'Memory', which represents to the mind things from the past and 'Foresight', which represents to the mind things that 'are yet to come'.

And that the Memory is a Power of reviving Ideas, that were in the fancy or common Sence before, representing them anew in Relation to Time past. Foresight being an Ability of so doing with a sence; that the Objects whose Ideas they are; are yet to come.¹⁰²

The 'Ideas' the fancy and 'Common Sence' affect the mind with in the present are stored in the memory to be represented anew in the future, while the 'Foresight' presents to the mind 'Ideas' of 'Objects' that 'are yet to come.' So in this present moment Traherne's mind is affected by sense data from the 'Common Sence', 'Ideas' either actual or possible from the imaginative faculties of the fancy, as well as these objects from things present or past.

Now that we have defined some of the epistemological faculties of the body and soul, we can come to a clearer understanding of how beauty affects the soul. In *Seeds of Eternity* Traherne describes the essentially Thomistic elements of his epistemology by stating 'the Optick Nerve, and the Retina, or Curtain spread abroad to receive Ideas, and represent them to the mind, with all the other instruments and vessels of the Memory fancy and Common sence'.¹⁰³ Again, noting the central place of the sense of sight, in the *Kingdom of God*, Traherne describes this process but moves the process through the understanding to the 'Will;

¹⁰¹ *Centuries*, II, 90.

¹⁰² *Kingdom*, 487.

¹⁰³ *Seeds*, 240.

Where it Produceth Lov’.

Fancy Receiveth the Idea by the Ey, recommendeth it to the Understanding, which transferreth it to the Will; Where it Produceth Lov, many times as Violent, and Strong as Death, Love Tyranizeth, and rageth with Desires.¹⁰⁴

The external object is received into the fancy ‘by the Ey’, it is taken into the imaginative capacities of the fancy, and is then recommended ‘to the Understanding’. Being recommended to the understanding it is transferred to the Will, whereby a choice is made regarding it. For Traherne, the choice here is not between love and hate, for as he says ‘it Produceth Lov’, hate is not an option. What the ‘Will’ – informed by the ‘Understanding’ – does choose is the nature of love produced. We will remember from the *Centuries* when describing a man’s love for a ‘fair woman’ Traherne states:

It is a vain thing to say they loved too much. I dare say there are ten thousand beauties in that creature which they have not seen: They loved it not too much, but upon false causes. Nor so much upon false ones, as only upon some little ones. They love a creature for sparkling eyes and curled hair...which they should love moreover for being God’s Image, Queen of the Universe, beloved by Angels, redeemed by Jesus Christ, an heiress of Heaven, and temple of the Holy Ghost...

Initially love seems excessive but is proven anemic because rooted in a temporal beauty, which itself is not fully discerned. When the temporal beauty of ‘that creature’ opens the soul to discern her worth in relation to God, and subsumed within the soul’s love for God, the love we have for another creature can never be excessive, for ‘no man can be in danger by loving others too much, that loveth God as he ought.’¹⁰⁵ Returning then, to Traherne’s epistemological formulation in *The Kingdom of God*, we see the love and desire produced in the soul as a result of what is received by the ‘Ey’, ‘fancy’, ‘Understanding’ and ‘Will’ can be both properly ordered to God or disordered. The disordered or anemic love comes from an infatuation with corporeal beauty, which terminates in the enjoyment of the beautiful object itself. Ordered love is constituted as a robust enjoyment of the beautiful object itself, as an object rooted in God. That Traherne is speaking of both ordered and disordered love becomes clear as Traherne continues by describing the panoply of effects of this love in the soul: for love ‘produceth Joy, Despair Hope, fear, Sorrow, Anger Ambition, Jealousy, care, Anxiety, Emulation, Envy a Whole Army of Delights, and Terrors, according to the different Events, or Successes of the same.’¹⁰⁶ When the mind misapprehends the ‘World’, as the man whose

¹⁰⁴ *Kingdom*, 489.

¹⁰⁵ *Centuries*, II, 68.

¹⁰⁶ *Kingdom*, 489.

love is based on false or little causes, the love produced is disordered, and the signs of this love are ‘Despair’, ‘fear’, ‘Sorrow’ and the like. When this epistemological process succeeds, however, the eyes and ears become the recipients of the very nature of God, for as we have noted above,

The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we Come to the Knowledg of God himself. By the Ear we are informed with all his Ways and by these two his Wisdom, and Goodness enter into the Soul, his Power, his Blessedness, his Glory.¹⁰⁷

For Traherne, the knowledge of God is available to the human perceiver in ‘The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World’, which includes the beauty of the ‘fair woman’. God has made God-self known in what God has created, and God has bestowed upon the human body and soul the faculties to receive this self-expression. For Traherne this self-expression is admitted – primarily through created beauty and glory – in the ‘Ey’, into the fancy, then recommended to the understanding and transferred to the ‘Will’. The knowledge of God received from the glory and beauty of creation produces ‘Lov’ for God in the Will, and this love (echoing Song of Solomon 8.6), which is ‘Violent, and Strong as Death, Lov’ which ‘Tyranizeth with Desires’ naturally shapes the ‘Will’ to choose in accordance with that ‘Lov’. We can now see why a proper apprehension of divine beauty and glory in the visible world is essential for Traherne’s overall theological system. Divine beauty and glory is communicated in the creation, and the human soul has been endowed with faculties to discern this divine beauty in the visible beauty (in the fancy, understanding, and will), and when properly discerned in the soul this visible beauty produces love. When the raging desires of love are directed to its proper end the soul is drawn into union with God, its source and end. We postpone a fuller discussion of misapprehension of divine beauty, disordered love and disordered desire when we discuss Traherne’s articulation of the four estates (Innocence, Misery, Grace and Glory) in Chapter 4.

So far we have spoken of the way by which corporeal objects are taken into the soul through the senses, the common sense, fancy, understanding and the will, but this has only taken into consideration part of the interaction of body and soul for Traherne. For Traherne, the human as the ‘Golden Claspe’ not only communicates corporeal objects to the spiritual, it also communicates the spiritual to the corporeal. Before affirming that ‘all the Sences commend their objects together with their Perceptions to the Will and understanding. especially by means of the fancy Memory and Common Sence’, Traherne states that ‘by

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

reason of the vicinity and Neighborhood of the Soul' the senses receive 'a Brightness reflected upon them' similar to the reflections of the sun upon the moon. In addition to this illuminating function, 'all the Conceptions and Pleasures of the Soul are diffused through the body, and most sweetly and powerfully communicated to the Sences'.¹⁰⁸

In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne describes this process of communication between body and soul by using similar language seen above. He describes this communication in the following:

Nor is it altogether Impossible, but that Infinity, eternity, and Love may be Communicated by the Intellect to the Sences, and brought down as it were to the Vessels, and Capacities of the outward Man, Even as it is Possible that the Relishes, and Tastes of the Body may be Imparted, and Conveyed to the Understanding.

This communication is made possible by the 'Personal Union' of body and soul. This union is 'So perfect that all in the Soul may be transmitted to the Body, all in the Body transmitted to the Soul, either Partaking with the other in all its Affections.'¹⁰⁹

3.3.3. *Trahernian Epistemology and the Experience of Beauty*

The communication of body and soul in Traherne's theological anthropology – most clearly seen in the incarnation – not only provides the basis for his understanding of the human as the 'Golden Clasp' (mediating corporeal and spiritual entities), this communication also enables a level of understanding and enjoyment of the 'Objects' of God's creation not available to either the beasts or the angels. For in humankind

the same Objects may be Enjoyed in a Twofold Manner. All Seperat and Immaterial Existences Enjoy them Spiritually. But Man who is a Person in whom a Body and Spirit are united, may Enjoy them both Ways, Spiritually by his Soul, and Corporeal by his Body.¹¹⁰

The 'Twofold Manner' by which the human 'Person' can enjoy the world enables 'Man' to enjoy God in this 'Twofold Manner', for as we have already seen, Traherne viewed creation as the divine self-expression. So endowed with a soul and a body, the union of these parts allows the human to enjoy divine beauty as expressed in both the 'Visible' and 'Invisible qualities' of God's creatures. As we saw above, Traherne explains in this way:

And because it was Impossible to see [God's] Goodness and Beauty in the meer outward appearance of Visible Things, and much of his Glory did lurk in the Secret and hidden Properties of his Creatures, he gav So great a Measure of life to the Soul,

¹⁰⁸ *Seeds*, 242.

¹⁰⁹ *Kingdom*, 488.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

that it might be able to discern the Invisible qualities, and virtues of his Creatures.¹¹¹ God's 'Goodness and Beauty' are discerned both with the corporeal eyes of the body and with the 'Inward Ey' of the soul.¹¹² The corporeal eyes are able to discern the visible beauty of the 'World' and experience a type of enjoyment fitting to its capacities as a corporeal entity. We might describe this as the immediate experience of pleasure attached to seeing a beautiful object, an object pleasing to the eye. The pleasures of the senses (in this case, the pleasure of corporeal beauty) resembles the bodily pleasures of 'Beasts' who 'by the Absence of a Soul; I mean a rational and Diviner Soul' are unable to discern an objects origin or end.¹¹³ But 'Man', endowed with a rational soul, is

an inquisitive and restless Creature, and Knowing that there is an Original and End, he is not contented to see the sury or Colour of things, to taste their Qualities or smell their Odors, or take in their apparent Brightness or Beauty, but feeleth an Instinct strongly moving him to know from whence this Creature came, and whither it tendeth.¹¹⁴

The 'apparent Brightness or Beauty' of the physical object is insufficient to content the inquisitive soul. The rational soul must search to find if the source and end of this object is good or bad, deriving from hatred or love, for 'evry thing deriveth the Greater part of its Goodness from its Original and End: and indeed to the reason cannot be either Good or bad, but as the fountain and End is so, from, and to which, it proceedeth.'

For Traherne, the experience of corporeal beauty induces not contentment or the experience of catharsis. On the contrary, the glory and beauty of physical universe when perceived awakens an immediate experience of delight that soon turns to want. We find Traherne, describing this process in the following:

A man when he seeth the Glory of the univers, is apt to be delighted with what he beholds: and certainly would be so, were he like a Beast incapable of more information, bec. his sence recommends nothing but what is excellent in it unto him. yet he is dissatisfied in the midst of all the Splendor of Heaven and Earth and immediatly enquires, (tho perhaps for no more at first then bare curiosity) Whether it began, and what was the original of so Divine a Being, and to what End and purpose it was created?¹¹⁵

The sight of so 'Divine a Being' awakens discontentment in the perceiver until the object's source and end are discovered. This discontentment begets a desire in the soul to find a

¹¹¹ *Kingdom*, 426.

¹¹² 'The Preparative', 11, l. 30.

¹¹³ *Seeds*, 242.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

source and end ‘answerable’ to so ‘Divine a Being’, which for Traherne, leads the soul to God, creation’s ‘original’ and ‘End’. What at first sounded like a static epistemological truism – ‘The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we Come to the Knolwedg of God himself’ – actually resembles much more of a process in Traherne’s epistemology, because, as he continues, here ‘on Earth’ our apprehensions of God are ‘Dim, and Dull’, but these dull apprehensions do ‘beget a liking’ or seed which flowers into ‘a Lov so vehement in Heaven’.¹¹⁶ In Chapter 4 we follow the evolving nature of the apprehensions as the soul sojourns through the four estates. In the estates of Misery and Grace (where life on earth is lived) the apprehensions are dull, creation is veiled, but as in ‘*Commentaries of Heaven*’ ‘the Vail (tis confessed) addes much to Beauty, becaus it kindles a Desire of Seeing Things forbidden’.¹¹⁷ Corporeal beauty induces desire for incorporeal, uncreated, and infinite beauty. The dissatisfaction and desire brought on by the veiled apprehension of corporeal beauty compels a searching in the intellect to find this object’s source and end. Traherne’s epistemology resembles a *process* as a result of sin and the corruption of humankind’s ‘perfect Apprehensions’. For Traherne this is a process of learning, ‘[for] learning is but an Acquisition of the Knowledg which we enjoyed by Nature. that which was lost by Sin being recoverd by Labor.’¹¹⁸ In *Centuries of Meditation* Traherne recounts the ‘pure and virgin apprehensions’¹¹⁹ of the world in his childhood. In this estate ‘All appeared new, and strange at first, inexpressibly rare and delightful and beautiful... My knowledge was Divine. I knew by intuition those things which since my Apostasy, I collected again by the highest reason.’¹²⁰ Chapter 4 will include a longer discussion of these portions of the *Centuries* and *Commentaries*, but for the present discussion we notice that for Traherne knowledge is linked to apprehension, and proper apprehension occurs when the ‘World’ is seen in the light of Heaven, coming from the hand of God and tending toward God. Corporeal beauty, when seen through veiled eyes, informs the soul of God as its source through a *process* of learning, while, when this same beauty is seen through unveiled eyes, God is discerned in the immediate and intuitive apprehensions of the World.

We have seen, that for Traherne, the beauty of ‘Nature’, though dim in this life, and

¹¹⁶ *Kingdom*, 489.

¹¹⁷ ‘Of Aristotles Philosophie’, *Commentaries*, Vol. 3, 201.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Centuries*, III, 1.

¹²⁰ *Centuries*, III, 2.

perceived through veiled eyes, creates a hunger and thirst in the soul to search out the source and end of ‘so Divine a Being’. As we have argued above, however, the soul does not merely receive corporeal images and ideas from the senses, it also communicates its infinite capacities to the ‘Capacities of the outward Man’. Traherne explains in the following:

Nor is it altogether Impossible, but that Infinity, eternity, and Love may be Communicated by the Intellect to the Sences, and brought down as it were to the Vessels, and Capacities of the outward Man, Even as it is Possible that the Relishes, and Tastes of the Body may be Imparted, and Conveyed to the Understanding.¹²¹

Later in this chapter Traherne explains that human ‘Souls are first affected by their Senses, and their Senses then affected by their Souls’, then provides a few examples of how this works. The following is one such example:

The Sight of a Mans Son moveth him with Compassion, Compassion maketh his Bowels to yern, and yerning of his Bowels produceth a sence in his vital Parts, far different from the Sight of his Eys.¹²²

The image received into the soul by the eyes is transformed into compassion, which is then communicated back to the body, effecting feelings in the senses consonant with that compassion.

The reasonable soul also works to correct what it receives by the eye. We saw above that the beast is unable to discern the cause and end of its current experience of beauty or pleasure due to the lack of a reasonable soul. Even those with a reasonable soul are prone to make mistakes based on what their eyes see, but in this case the ‘Error is in the understanding’ not the sense. To explain this, Traherne uses the example of ‘The Brightness and Glory of illuminated Objects [that] seems to be their own, because the Light Immediately comes from them, and the Eye discernes not the Myserie of its Reflection.’¹²³ This is the mistake of the ‘Heathen’ who ‘were by the Beauty and Glory of the Creatures tempted to Idolatry’,¹²⁴ as well as the scientist who comes to false conclusions about the natural world by an ‘Error’ in the understanding. For Traherne,

the Work of Reason is to correct the Ey...for Reason finds out the Mistake of sence, or rather makes up its Omission. The Ey is not mistaken...The Error is in the understanding...for the office of sence is not to judg of first and last, but simply to judg of immediat Appearances.

So with the eyes we perceive that the ‘Splendid Bodies are the immediate fountains of the

¹²¹ *Kingdom*, 488.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Kingdom*, 353.

¹²⁴ *Kingdom*, 364.

Rays flowing from them', but with the reason it is perceived that 'the Rays flowing from them are borrowed from another Ocean, or fountain of Light'.¹²⁵ In this way, the reason corrects the eye by discerning another source whereby the immediate object receives its light. The beauty, glory and splendor of the object itself remains undiminished, but through the reason the object is seen in its proper relation to its ultimate Divine source and end. Seeing an object in its relation to God enhances the immediate experience of the eyes, allowing it to approximate Traherne's childhood apprehensions whereby 'something infinite behind everything appeared which talked with my expectations and moved my desire.'¹²⁶ When the reason discerns that the source and end of a beautiful object be bad or full of hate, it finds the immediate object distasteful, but when the object is seen to have goodness and love as its source and end, the object can be enjoyed both for its immediate beauty imbued on it by its source, and love God more for giving the soul such a gift. The 'particular Gift is but a Token and Pledge of more', for it orients the heart to the source of that gift from which 'a million' 'other things' 'may proceed'.¹²⁷

But what if the object we perceive with the senses appears to be ugly, bad or distasteful? If we come to the conclusion, through the reason, that God is the source and end of such things, how are we to reconcile a good God with a bad object? Traherne, steeped in the belief that love and goodness are the metaphysical foundations of God's kingdom, and the key hermeneutical tools from which to see all reality claims that 'Nay tho the thing be bad, when the fountain is Good and the End Good, it is yet Delightfull.' He offers an argument from medicine to prove his point.

Aloes and Coloquintida are condemned by that Power, to which they are bad; that is by the Sence, where unto they are distastefull: but when a Good friend, or Skilfull and faithfull Physician prescribes them, and it evidently appeareth that those Bitter Drugs proceed from care and love, and the end of them is the Continuance of Ease and Life, those Bad things become Good to the reason of a man, and the Love from which they came delighteth him the more, bec. it doth violence to it self for his recovery.¹²⁸

It is within this hermeneutical framework that in the *Centuries* Traherne speaks of the grotesque realities of the cross of Christ as if transfigured by a soul enabled to search out the beauty, goodness and love that acts as the source and end of such a tragedy. For Traherne,

The Cross is the abyss of wonders, the centre of desires, the school of virtues, the

¹²⁵ *Kingdom*, 353-4.

¹²⁶ *Centuries*, III, 3.

¹²⁷ *Seeds*, 244.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

house of wisdom, the throne of love, the theatre of joys, and the place of sorrows; It is the root of happiness, and the gate of Heaven.¹²⁹

Traherne continues by stating, ‘The Cross of Christ is the Jacob’s ladder by which we ascend into the highest heavens.’ Though we perceive on the cross ‘this poor, bleeding, naked Man...exposed lying and dying upon the Cross,’ this narrow vision is transfigured by discerning the truer realities hidden within this scene. Traherne, at the height of poetic fervor, writes,

That Cross is a tree set on fire with invisible flame, that Illuminateth all the world. The flame is Love: the Love in His bosom who died on it. In the light of which we see how to possess all the things in Heaven and Earth after His similitude. For He that suffered on it was the Son of God as you are: tho’ He seemed only a mortal man.¹³⁰

The cross becomes the location whereby the grotesque, the ugly and the bad are transfigured by ‘The flame of Love’ proceeding from his ‘His bosom who died on it.’ Divine love and goodness has the capacity to – as the Apostle Paul states – ‘work all things together for good’ (Rom. 8.28), and for Traherne this is most clearly seen on ‘The Cross’. All human perception of realities – perceived as good or bad, beautiful or ugly – are properly perceived in relation to the cross. For ‘It is a Well of Life beneath in which we may see the face of Heaven above: and the only mirror, wherein all things appear in their proper colours: that is, sprinkled in the blood of our Lord and Savior.’¹³¹ We will engage a longer discussion of the cross, soteriology and the reformation of perception in Chapter 4, but here we must notice that reason – with its capacity to search out an object’s source and end – and the central location of the cross in Traherne’s epistemology, takes our discussion of beauty beyond the mere perception of corporeal beauty, showing that beauty for Traherne is only beauty to the degree that it participates in and flows from divine love and goodness. True perception sees the corporeal world as good for as we saw in Chapter 2, if ‘the Goodness of God be Infinit, the Consequences are visible, his Goodness alone is an Oracle interpreting the sence and meaning of all the World.’ We move now from mere perception of beauty, to the love and desire induced in the soul of the one effected by beauty.

As we noted above, Traherne’s epistemology does not end when ‘the Object’ is known, for ‘Fancy Receiveth the Idea by the Ey, recommendeth it to the Understanding, which transferreth it to the Will; Where it Produceth Lov,’ which ‘rageth with Desires.’¹³²

¹²⁹ *Centuries*, I, 58.

¹³⁰ *Centuries*, I, 60.

¹³¹ *Centuries*, I, 59.

¹³² *Kingdom*, 489.

The *telos* of an object received by the 'Ey' is love and desire. Traherne's 'Diviner Soul' is 'able to prie without restraint or Limitation into all Existences; to use that fancy, to command the Memory, to excite those Passions and employ those Affections, which the merit and Nature of that object requires, on which it pondereth.' Devoid of a rational soul the beast is unable to 'look into the original or End of things, nor penetrate into their hidden Qualities and virtues with their understanding, they cannot rejoyce in them, or love or desire them, nor esteem nor admire them' for 'the Master wheel is wanting, and all the lesser wheels depending therupon are quiet, and as it were unhinged for any such purpose whatsoever.'¹³³ '[T]he Master' wheel – the soul – has a central place in receiving the objects of the Ey and coming to know 'the merit and Nature of that object', which excites the passions and employs the affections. For Traherne, the

Reason, as it is the more noble and Superior facultie, so is it more concerned: and stirs up the Passions and Affections of the Mind with greater Power; being infinitely more affected with what is pleasant or displeasing in the Original and end of things, then it is possible for the Sence to be with what is sweet or distastefull in their present Quality, or sensible Appearance.¹³⁴

What is of utmost importance to Traherne is the Love, Desire, Passion and Affection that is affected in the rational soul, for these are the *telos* of his epistemological process. The object seen by the eye constitutes the genesis of this process, but the end occurs when the 'Passions and Affections of the Mind' are stirred with 'greater Power' by the reason, and cause the person to Act in accordance with that Love, Desire, Passion and Affection. It is Love, produced in the Will, which is Traherne's primary concern, for the soul finds its end when it turns power (or pure potentiality) into act, in the image of God. And for Traherne, the 'Will' is to be 'Stird up with the Beauty of what is Good',¹³⁵ this is how beauty functions in Traherne's theological vision.

3.4. Traherne's literary task: 'to excite Desire'

What Traherne offers in the above is not merely a description of the dynamics of beauty and desire in the uniting love of God and God's image, the aesthetic of the language itself is an act of allurements. Traherne is not merely articulating a certain vision of the good life, the life

¹³³ *Seeds*, 242.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹³⁵ 'Abuse', *Commentaries*, Vol. 2, 68.

of felicity or fruition in union with God, he is attempting to allure his reader to desire this image of the good life. In his *Christian Ethicks*, Traherne positions himself as one who does ‘not speak much of *Vice*...because I am intirely taken up with the abundance of Worth and Beauty of *Vertue*, and have so much to say of the positive and intrinsick Goodness of its Nature.’ Having been ‘taken up’ by the beauty of virtue, Traherne professes that ‘my business is to make as *visible*, as it is possible for me, the lustre of its *Beauty*, *Dignity*, and *Glory*: By shewing what a necessary Means *Vertue* is, how sweet, how full of Reason, how desirable in it self...’ He adds later, ‘my Office is, to carry and enhance *Vertue* to its utmost height, to open the Beauty of all the Prospect, and to make the *Glory* of *GOD* appear, in the Blessedness of Man’. We could continue to pile evidence of Traherne’s desire to reveal the beauty of virtue and life in God, for evidence abounds, but what is important to notice is that he attempts to make ‘*visible*’ this beauty so as to awaken desire and draw the reader along the ‘Journey’ toward full felicity in God. He beings his introductory chapter of *Christian Ethicks* entitled ‘*To The Reader*’, in the following way:

THE design of this Treatise is...to elevate the *Soul*, and refine its Apprehensions, to inform the Judgment,...to purifie and enflame the Heart, to enrich the Mind, and guide Men...in the way of *Vertue*; to excite Desire, to encourage them to Travel, to comfort them in the Journey, and so at last to lead them to true Felicity, both here and thereafter.¹³⁶

Malcom Day’s comments that in the *Christian Ethicks* Traherne ‘attempts to change the reader into a new self by presenting him with so vast and irresistibly attractive a vision that he will be turned into perfect love and knowledge’,¹³⁷ is true in that he notices Traherne’s ‘presenting’ a ‘vast and irresistibly attractive a vision’ but in using the quasi-magical language of being ‘turned into perfect love’ misses Traherne’s understanding of the process or ‘Journey’ of transformation. The beautiful and irresistibly attractive vision is emphasized in the Traherne’s ethical work so as to capture desire and draw the reader along the path to true felicity; ‘to encourage them to Travel, to comfort them in the Journey, and...to lead them...’. Traherne articulates a beautiful vision of the virtues so that natural human desire might want the virtuous life, and being led by desire might attain the fruition of this life in felicity. It is in this aspiration that Traherne reveals a keen understanding of the power of one’s *vision* of the good life, the life of felicity, the image we point our desires and endeavor to achieve. It is to this space, the heavenly space of the beatific vision, that Traherne speaks,

¹³⁶ *Christian Ethicks*, 3.

¹³⁷ Day, *Thomas Traherne*, 43.

and it is desire for the beatific vision that he hopes to awaken. In Chapter 4 we will explore how the heavenly estate of glory functions in Traherne's purposes to allure the soul along the path toward the beatific vision.

3.5. The Abused Soul: songs of the 'Syren'¹³⁸ or the allurement of God

What we have explored thus far has been the nature of the human person (body and soul) as coming from the hand of God – as made in the image of God in power – and how the image in power naturally moves toward its end in the beatific vision as it actualizes its natural potentiality – turning the image of God in power into the image of God in act. We have seen that in Traherne's epistemology, knowledge of God and the 'World' begins with the reception of the senses – especially the eyes – then assimilated through the mediation of the common sense into the rational soul, where the ideas interact with the fancy, memory, foresight, offered to the Will, which produces love. Traherne's high anthropology, rooted in his Christology, places the human body/soul the 'Golden Clasp' centrally in his cosmology, honoured with the task to mediate – through her epistemological structures – the corporeal world to the spiritual. What we have explored thus far are the ways by which God is discerned by the soul in the beauty of creation, which occurs when this epistemological process succeeds. What we have left unexplored is that for Traherne humankind has gone sideways. The powers of the body and soul, given by the hand of God, which find their proper fruition in union with God have been 'misemployed'. The human soul has been corrupted, for it has been allured not by divine beauty but instead has been 'deceived with false Allurements'. In his entry entitled 'Abuse' in the *Commentaries of Heaven* Traherne explains:

A Mans Soul is Abused, when his Powers are misemployed: As when his Understanding is busied in Contriving Mischief, His Will deceived with false Allurements, His Desire Greedy of Vanity. It is Abused also when it is not Employed: As when his Understanding is Neglected, that may see All Things, and it sees Nothing; his Will is not Stirred up with the Beauty of what is Good; his Powers are Empty, and his Affections idle. It is Abused also when its Powers and Inclinations through Neglect lie loose in Confusion, unknown, and mingled together. for as an Eagle trims her Pens, and primes and Orders and Displays her feathers, So ought the Soul to single out its Powers, and to marshal its Inclinations, and to Dress it self by keeping its faculties in Settlement and Order. It is Abused also, by a Confinement and Imprisonment. when its Powers are Contracted and lie in a Dungeon, which like

¹³⁸ 'The King of Glory doth my Soul allure. / Not like the Syren to Deceitful Joys, / Whose Charm, whose Beauty, whose Embrace destroys' 'Allurement' *Commentaries of Heaven*, Vol. 2, 368.

Beams may be Extended, and Shine at Libertie to all Eternitie.¹³⁹

For Traherne it is the soul that is either ‘misemployed’ or ‘not Employed’ that is abused. Instead of having a Will that is ‘Stird up with the Beauty of what is Good’, the abused soul is either is ‘deceived with [the] fals Allurements’ of the siren’s song, or ‘Contracted’ as ‘in a Dungeon’. Defining human fruition or *theosis*, as becoming like God in act, both the misemployed and the unemployment of the soul are deemed to be sin; missing the mark of human teleology. The soul ought to ‘single out its Powers, and to marshal its Inclinations’ so as to keep ‘its faculties in Setlment and Order’ and turn all its powers into act. Through and abuse and neglect, however, this is not the state we find ourselves. Instead we have ‘Neglected’ our souls and fallen into corruption. In Chapter 4 we follow this journey of creation, fall, redemption and glory, through Traherne’s articulation of the four estate: the estates of innocence, misery, grace and glory.

¹³⁹ ‘Abuse’, *Commentaries*, 68.

Chapter 4: The Reformation of a Soul

This chapter looks at Traherne as a shepherd of souls. It will explore his understanding of the journey of faith through the *lenses* established thus far: beauty, sight, perception, apprehension, knowledge, desire and allurement. The chapter will seek to establish how the soul's apprehension of beauty changes along this journey through the four estate of innocence, misery, grace and glory, and the impact of this change on the allurement of desire. A question weaved throughout the chapter is: how, as spiritual guide, does Traherne seek to reform the apprehensions of his readers?

The central purpose of this chapter is to analyze Traherne's understanding of the 'Journey' of transformation – from misery, as lost innocence, through grace to glory – and the means he employs to 'guide Men' along that journey. It has been arguing that a primary Trahernian method to 'encourage them to Travel' on this journey is the excitation of 'Desire' by making 'as *visible*, as is possible' the '*Beauty...and Glory*' of the life of 'true Felicity' in union with God. Beauty and the apprehension of beauty are two essential ideas in the life of ongoing spiritual ascent, so this chapter will look closely at Traherne's 'design' to 'elevate the *Soul*, and refine its Apprehensions' so that the soul might be properly allured by divine beauty as communicated in created beauty.¹ We will proceed by locating these questions of beauty and human apprehension within Traherne's understanding of sanctification as a journey through the four estates of innocence, misery, grace and glory. My central claim is that as the beautiful soul is enabled to properly see beauty, so the deformed soul in misery has lost this ability, thus, for Traherne, redemption and sanctification in the estate of grace, is constituted as the interrelated refinement of both the soul and the 'Apprehensions'. This growing clarity of sight – as a mirror of the soul – reconstitutes human desire, and prepares the soul for divine allurement.

The chapter unfolds as if chronologically through the four estates. In discussing the estate of innocence, we begin by exploring the orthodoxy of Traherne's understanding of innocence, and what role grace has in this estate. This section explores how Traherne subverts the common use of language (e.g. his positive usage of 'Avarice' and the infant claim of 'mine'). We also use Augustine's use-enjoyment distinction to position Traherne's language of use, abuse and enjoyment in a longer theological tradition. This section is the largest, not because a return to innocence represents human teleology, but because innocence

¹ *Christian Ethicks*, 3.

is the ‘Patern of our Life on Earth’:² the *telos*, of course is glory. The chapter transitions into the estate misery through a discussion of the estate of trial, which constitutes all life before the estate of glory. Here we find that human freedom is central to human teleology. Two defining aspects of the estate of misery are that the fall into misery comes as both a result of the abuse of human freedom, and the corrupting influence of the ‘customs and manners of men’. The section on the estate of grace identifies the divine capacity of grace to bring beauty, goodness and love, out of deformity, evil and hatred, and how Christ works to reconcile those in misery back into relational union with God. Traherne offers the spiritual discipline of solitude (‘Retirednes’) as medicine to heal the apprehensions of those in the estate of grace, and as the location of heavenly enjoyments on earth. The chapter concludes with the estate of consummation, fruition and teleology: the estate of glory. It shows how, for Traherne, the beatific vision is that ‘some great thing’³ that allures the soul in every estate.

4.1. The ‘fourfold estate of innocency, misery, grace and glory’

In meditation 43 of the third century of Traherne’s *Centuries of Meditation* he locates fitting objects of human contemplation. Beginning with the contemplation of the essence, attributes and works of God he moves to the contemplation of ‘man, as he is a creature of God, capable of celestial blessedness, and a subject, in His Kingdom, in his fourfold estate of innocency, misery, grace and glory.’ As the meditation continues Traherne identifies what aspects of each estate to contemplate, for even the estate of misery – where ‘we have [Man’s] fall, the nature of Sin, original and actual; his manifold punishments, calamity, sickness, death’ – finds a place in Traherne’s contemplations. Below, we will analyze more deeply Traherne’s understanding of and persistent call to contemplation, for it functions as an essential practice in the life of faith. In addition to affirming the place of contemplation in the reader’s ascent toward God, the above meditation from the *Centuries* succinctly introduces the ‘fourfold estate’ that humankind must pass through on its journey toward God.

Diane Elizabeth Dreher traces the idea of the ‘fourfold estate’ of humankind back to its roots in Augustine’s *Enchiridion* and *Confessions*. In the *Enchiridion*, Augustine explains that ‘the history of God’s people had been ordered by successive temporal epochs... The first period was before the law; the second under the law, which was given through Moses; the

² ‘The Second Adam’, *Commentaries*, 227.

³ *Centuries*, I, 2.

next, under grace which was revealed through the first Advent of the Mediator.’⁴ The fourth estate was ‘the Glory of the Second Coming and the Last Judgement.’⁵ Dreher traces the recapitulation of these historical epochs in Augustine’s own autobiography in the *Confessions*, which then becomes the template for later understandings of the need for the individual Christian to recapitulate – or pass through – these epochs. Dreher notes that one major development away from Augustine in later articulations of the estates is that for Augustine ‘the first estate for the individual was not edenic innocence, but ignorance, appetite, and original sin, from which one falls into a more serious state of sin.’⁶ We will see below that Traherne’s understanding of the sacramental regeneration of infant baptism allows him to hold both original sin and the innocence of the infant together. In his 1627 commentary on Romans, Thomas Wilson seems to follow Augustine’s schema by stating there is ‘a threefold estate of God’s children; the first is corruption (they were enemies.) The second is of grace: they are justified and reconciled. The third is of glory: they shall be saved’ but then goes on to add, ‘There is a fourth not named here, to wit; the state of innocency by creation.’ Then he asserts ‘Every true Child of God must passe through all these.’⁷ Dreher provides a summary statement of how the estates were thought of as they ‘appeared in the works of most of the major religious writers of the period, including Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Bunyan, Traherne and Milton.’⁸

As he progressed through life from childhood to maturity, an individual of this period was believed to pass through the four spiritual “estates” of Innocence, Misery, Grace, and Glory, which paralleled the four states of Christian history: Eden, the Fall, the Redemption, and the Last Judgement. Each redeemed Christian thus recapitulated the history of his race, falling from the relative innocence of childhood into the State of sin and Misery, where he remained until a dramatic “conversion experience” reenacted the Redemption on a personal level, bringing him into the State of Grace. Then, assured of his election, he looked forward to the State of Glory in the afterlife.⁹

Though Traherne places less emphasis on the conversion experience (which carried substantial weight as a pointer to the assurance of election in the more Calvinistic circles of

⁴ *Enchiridion*, Augustine, p. 410 in Diane Elizabeth Dreher, *Fourfold Pilgrimage: The Estates of Innocence, Misery, Grace and Glory in Seventeenth Century Literature* (Washington, D.C: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982), 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷ *A Commentary on the Most Divine Epistle of S. Paul to the Romans* (London, 1627), p. 153 in Dreher, *Fourfold Pilgrimage*, 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

the Puritans), progress through the estates of ‘Innocence, Misery, Grace, and Glory’ forms the scaffolding for his account of the God-ward journey.

In the following, we will explore the ‘fourfold estate’ in Traherne’s thought, taking special care to locate beauty and the perception of beauty in the estates. What will become clear as we progress through Traherne’s understanding of the estates is the plasticity of human perception and the inherent interrelation of human perception and human spiritual formation. Chapter 2 showed us that beauty has an objective quality, being ontologically rooted in divine love, however chapter three showed us there is a subjective element to beauty, in that beauty as a divine self-expression was made to be perceived by the human subject, whose epistemological apparatus is not a set of static capacities. Instead, for Traherne, the pure soul, who is growing in ever increasing beauty, has the clarity of sight to truly perceive this divine self-expression, with the result that her desire is properly allured by divine beauty. We begin with the estate of innocence.

4.2. The Estate of Innocence: ‘I seemed as one brought into the Estate of Innocence’¹⁰

4.2.1. The Problem of Innocence and orthodoxy

Some of Traherne’s most beloved, puzzling and sometimes polarizing prose comes from the early meditations of the *Centuries*’ third century. Traherne’s account of his own childhood innocence which enabled ‘Those pure and virgin apprehensions I had from the womb’, are both consonant with some of the literary and theological currents described above and possibly at odds with Augustinian understandings of the child as a fallen creature. K.W. Salter drew close parallels between Traherne’s thought on original sin and the need for divine grace and the thought of Pelagius,¹¹ but it should be mentioned that he wrote before the discovery of some of the key manuscript evidence noted below. A more fruitful approach is taken by Patrick Grant, who locates Traherne in the Irenaean school, taking pains to show the many connections between the two thinkers.¹² Edmund Newey agrees with this approach, stating that ‘the importance of Irenaeus to Traherne cannot be doubted’ as is witnessed in

¹⁰ *Centuries*, III, 2.

¹¹ See Keith W. Salter, *Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet* (London: E Arnold, 1964), 130–135.

¹² For an extended exploration of Irenaeus’ Christology and Soteriology see chapter six in Grant, *The Transformation of Sin*.

Traherne's many explicitly or implicitly references to Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* in his *Roman Forgeries*; which is an indictment on Salter's Pelagian reading, for this work was published in Traherne's lifetime. Newey, though affirming Traherne's indebtedness to Irenaeus, argues against the type of dichotomous interpretation of Traherne, whereby the Augustinian and Pauline elements of his theology are marginalized in favor the Irenaean elements. Instead, Newey, points to passages in *Christian Ethicks*, *Select Meditations* and *Kingdom of God* where Traherne speaks of original sin in ways similar to Augustin and even Calvin. In *Christian Ethicks* Traherne calls Adam's 'Posterity' 'born Sinners' who 'never were sensible of the Light and Glory of an Innocent Estate', and in *Kingdom of God* Traherne speaks of the 'Blindness of my Childhood' and the mistakes of 'Childish Apprehensions [that] take Lustre, and Splendour to be the Greatest Glory, because it most affecteth the Ey with Material Beauty'.¹³ We can bracket this second quote from *Kingdom of God* because its usage of the term 'Childish' bears the negatives associated with childhood, denoting immaturity and ignorance. What is curious about the first quote calling all of Adam's posterity 'born sinners' is that it seems to conflict with Traherne's claim from the *Centuries* that he had 'Those pure and virgin apprehensions... from the womb'. This seems to align more closely with Irenaeus' idea that the child, like Adam, is born into childhood innocence,¹⁴ but the quote from *Christian Ethicks* seems to be more Augustinian; what, then, are we to do with these two strands of Traherne's thought? In response, Newey seeks to move the discussion away from the apparent theological tension by claiming Traherne's usage of the child is not simply to be seen as an emblem of the historical estate of innocence but instead Traherne sees the child as 'an icon of the whole human condition, from the natural childhood enjoyed by Adam and Eve before the Fall to the more wonderful adoptive relationship with God brought about in Christ.'¹⁵ Agreeing with Newey's separation of childhood from innocence, Elizabeth Dodd claims that Traherne's usage of the idea of innocence is also not to be understood as a simple 'return to childhood', or return to a prelapsarian innocence, instead, like the child, innocence is to be seen as operative in all the estates.¹⁶

¹³ Newey, "'God Made Man Greater When He Made Him Less,'" 233.

¹⁴ Grant, *The Transformation of Sin*, 186.

¹⁵ Newey, "'God Made Man Greater When He Made Him Less,'" 235.

¹⁶ Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne's Poetic Theology: "Were All Men Wise and Innocent..."* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 16.

What Dodd offers to our current theological question – regarding the Augustinian, Irenaean, and possibly Pelagian strands of Traherne’s language of childhood innocence and guilt – is to claim that the innocence of the first estate is a ‘graced innocence’, received by the child through the sacramental regeneration of infant baptism. That this is a ‘graced innocence’ and not a natural innocence (therefore not Pelagian) is evidenced in Traherne’s Augustinian claims that all are ‘born sinners’ as seen above, to which Dodd adds from Traherne’s *Churches Year-Book*: ‘No Child is so Contemptible and polluted in the Dungeons of the Womb, As I was then.’¹⁷ Dodd, points to Traherne’s entry entitled ‘Baptism’ in *Commentaries* to show that Traherne believed in both baptismal regeneration and the legitimacy of infant baptism over and against the Anabaptist John Tombes, who wrote a ‘three-part treatise against paedobaptism.’¹⁸ In the *Commentaries*, Traherne claims that ‘evry one [is] Regenerated, that is Baptized, in a Sacramental Maner.’ It is sacramental in nature because the end of baptism ‘is not to Sanctify us; but to signify to us the Mysterious Maner of our Sanctification.’ As a signifier, baptism outwardly reveals an inward reality brought about primarily through repentance and belief: ‘A man is converted, regenerated, illuminated, New born and Sanctified, when he is changed within, when he repents and believes...not when he is sprinkled with Water without doing these.’ ‘Nevertheless’ we receive baptism in a ‘Sacramental Maner’ because as ‘the Bread is said to be our Saviors Body, or the Wine his Blood’, in baptism ‘he is said to be buried with Christ by Baptism into his Death, to be regenerated therin, and made a child of God a Member of Christ, and an Heir of the Kingdom of Heaven’.¹⁹ The heirship of the infant is pointed to throughout Traherne’s works as we will see below, and is made theologically viable for Traherne as he argues that baptism functions in the same way in the church as circumcision functioned in the covenant with Abraham:

Baptism came into the Church in the Place of Circumcision: which was a Seal of the Covenant of Grace made to Abraham and his Children. As therefore on the one side our Children may be Baptized, and it is Impietie to forbid them; so on the other side we must not ascribe more to Baptism then the Apostle did to Circumcision. It is a Clearer Sacrament, but does not give the Person Baptized the least Libertie or Security in Sin.²⁰

For Traherne, the door is wide as to who can receive baptism, but no guarantee of the perseverance of the baptized is offered in this sacrament. To further argue against the

¹⁷ Traherne, *Churches Year Book*, 163, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁹ ‘Baptism’, *Commentaries*, Vol. 3, 449-450.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 450-1.

‘Anabaptists’, Traherne offers another argument for infant baptism when he deduces from Jesus’ words in Matthew 19.14 – ‘*Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven*’ – that ‘He received them, layed his Hands on them, and blessed them, before they actually repented or believed’ and in so doing this ‘makes a Distinction between Men and Infants, and deals with both according to their Capacities.’²¹ For, Traherne, baptism is offered to an infant as a sign of their inclusion in the community of faith, which makes them a ‘child of God a Member of Christ, and an Heir of the Kingdom of God’.²² However, baptism also makes a moral claim on the infant, for if they fail to keep their vows this baptismal blessing may be lost: ‘A Heathen cannot, but an Infant Baptized may become an Apostate.’²³ If Traherne carries over this quasi-technical definition of apostate as one who has fallen away after having been baptized, it is curious to note that he defines the loss of the pure apprehensions of infancy as ‘my Apostasy’ in the seemingly Pelagian account in the *Centuries*: ‘I knew by intuition those things which since my Apostasy, I collected again by the highest reason.’²⁴ The overall impression one gets while reading this third century is that innocence is something bestowed naturally to the newborn infant – ‘Those pure and virgin apprehensions I had from the womb, and that divine light wherewith I was born...’²⁵ – but Traherne’s usage of the language of apostasy at least leaves space to find even in the *Centuries* a gesture toward this innocence being ‘graced’, received *via* infant baptism.

For Traherne, according to Dodd, ‘Baptismal regeneration is the model of graced innocence. The graced, rather than natural innocence of the baptised child provides a foundation for Christian living.’²⁶ I agree with Dodd and Newey, that for Traherne both the child and innocence denote not a simple return to the natural innocence of childhood, but are ideas and tropes in Traherne that are operative in the entire Christian journey. As we will notice below, when Traherne speaks of a return to the Eden-like estate of the innocent child, his primary concern is growth in the purity of soul and clarity of apprehensions represented

²¹ Ibid., 451.

²² See *Sober View*, 81 for a repeat of this argument. A marginal note in the pen of a critical reader speaks to contemporary opposition to Traherne’s view: ‘Tho: I beleieve this most Congruous to Truth...you will find thos much Opposed’.

²³ ‘Baptism’, *Commentaries*, 453.

²⁴ *Centuries*, III, 2.

²⁵ *Centuries*, III, 1.

²⁶ Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne’s Poetic Theology*, 96.

by the infant, which finds its end in the 'Beatific Vision' not in Eden. I also agree with Dodd, in showing that infant baptism is the sacramental basis for reconciling Traherne's claims for childhood innocence in the *Centuries* and the poetry with the affirmation of original sin found elsewhere. Though calling childhood innocence a graced innocence makes sense of both of these Trahernian strands, Traherne's strong emphasis on nature as a gift from God should caution us from making too much of the distinction between nature and grace in his thought.²⁷ For Traherne, free grace is the fountain of all of God's actions toward creation – 'as free Grace was the fountain of the Creation, and of the Redemption, so we see it the Fountain of the Sanctification of the World'²⁸ – while within the sphere of redemption and sanctification he points to the need for an additional gift of 'Special Grace' to 'walk in the Commandments of God', therefore we ask for this grace 'by Diligent Prayer.' It is the God-given, natural, Biblical mandate to pray, that opens up the heavenly sanctifying grace to the one in the natural state of prevenient grace: 'Prayer is the Key of Heaven by which we unlock the Heavenly Treasurie, and derive those things to our selves which by Nature we cannot have: It is the Jacobs Ladder by which we Ascend: that we may receive all Heavenly Gifts of Knowledge and Grace.'²⁹ Whether the estate of innocence is technically natural or graced, to 'Ascend' 'Jacobs Ladder' necessitates prayer, a free movement of the will to ask for divine aid.

What the above cautions the reader of Traherne from doing is attempting to read him and understand him through a single theological lens, or by simply working with a single text. In Traherne we find that his wide reading, his varied use of genre, and his varied purposes in writing these texts contribute to the eclecticism of Traherne's oeuvre and act as a reminder that we must place his various works in conversation (in this case the *Centuries* alongside the *Commentaries* et al), if we want a fuller picture of his thought. Doing this, however, often identifies tensions between these texts that may or may not be reconcilable. Our attempt above, to ease the tension between the Irenaean elements in the *Centuries* and poetry, and the Augustinian elements found elsewhere, by positing innocence as a 'grace innocence', are offered tentatively so as not to diminish the unique poetic and theological impact of each individual text.

²⁷ For a long discussion of Traherne's blurring of the boundaries between nature and grace see *Ibid.*, 59–67. For a discussion of gift in Traherne see Mark A. McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth* (New York: Independent Publishers Group, 2004), 245.

²⁸ *Sober View*, 76.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

Noting these tensions – and noting again Traherne’s usage of Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* in his *Roman Forgeries* – we turn again to Traherne and Irenaeus’ ideas on childhood innocence, which converge on many levels, and echo some of the points we made regarding the soul in the previous chapter. As Grant argues, for both thinkers, ‘Adam’s paradisaical situation is that of an innocent child, a special creature of God whose fulfillment is to become godlike’,³⁰ and like Adam, the child’s vision remains ‘intact in its innocence, though at a distance from God, to whom the infant must grow.’³¹ As we have observed, the soul as the image of God in power must be brought to maturity as it is transformed into the image in act, for this is the proper teleology of the human will. Following Newey and Dodd’s arguments above (which integrates both the Irenaean and Augustinian strands in Traherne) we call the innocence in Traherne’s autobiographical statements in the *Centuries* a graced innocence. According to Dodd (and others) this graced innocence is a provisional state which warrants ‘a progression to a new and higher innocence.’³² These claims of a ‘new and higher innocence’ should be read in the context of Traherne’s power/act distinction. This higher innocence accompanies the soul that has become fully actualized in glory. Similarly, as we saw above, Newey calls the child ‘not simply a recollected authorial self, but at once a poetic trope and a theological icon’, for ‘the child is not simply emblematic of the first of these estates, but shares in them all...’³³ As a poetic trope, Newey reminds the reader to consider the literary currency of the idea of childhood innocence in seventeenth century poetics as noted above by Dreher and others, while also noting the theological significance of the child as an icon of the Christian as adopted into God’s family. I agree with Newey on both these points, for the notion of adoption makes the most sense of Traherne’s insistence of being ‘sole heir of the World.’ What I will emphasize here, however, – especially as we explore the *Centuries*’ third century – is the way the child functions as a theological icon of purity; the purity of soul which enables the purity of apprehensions. Purity of sight will be the lens through which we explore Traherne’s understanding of the estates.

The innocence of the child is a grace innocence, received through baptism, but since this is a provisional innocence Traherne reminds his reader that ‘All they that are baptized

³⁰ Grant, *The Transformation of Sin*, 192.

³¹ Ibid., 187.

³² Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne’s Poetic Theology*, 56. Thomas Traherne, *Happiness and Holiness: Thomas Traherne and His Writings*, ed. Denise Inge, Canterbury studies in spiritual theology (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), 148–149. Kershaw, “The Poetic of the Cosmic Christ in Thomas Traherne’s *The Kingdom of God*,” 184–186.

³³ Newey, “‘God Made Man Greater When He Made Him Less,’” 228.

ought to remember and keep their vows. A Heathen cannot, but an Infant Baptized may become an Apostate.’³⁴ The baptized child is inaugurated into an estate of graced innocence but for Traherne this innocence is something which can be lost (in apostasy) and is to be found, but the innocence to be found is not a simple return to ‘Eden’ but the fruition of innocence in glory; the image of God transformed into act. So for Traherne, childlike innocence is both an estate which is lost on the soul’s historical and linear journey toward the beatific vision, and a key element of the life of faith. For this reason, Traherne explains in *Commentaries of Heaven*, ‘the Estate of Man in Eden’ is to be contemplated and desired for it forms the ‘Patern of our Life on Earth’:

the Estate of Man in Eden compared to that of Glory differeth as much as Infancy from perfect Manhood, yet is that Estate the Patern of our Life on Earth, to which here beneath we ought to aspire, to which all Wisdom directs, and felicity allures. For the first things are the most perfect, and the Rule of them that follow. Hence is it that we are Commanded, to consider from whence we are falne, and to repent. Rev. 2. That is to remember all the Beauty and Glory to which we were ordained and to lead that Kind of Life which in Paradiſe was provided, leaving all the Vanities and Disorders of this present evil World.³⁵

So we turn now to the ‘Estate of Man in Eden’ – the paradisaical life of innocence – for to do so is to turn to ‘the Patern of our Life on Earth’, which as the ‘Patern’ provides the standard we are to measure our lives by. As we turn to the estate of innocence, we will build on Newey’s exploration of the child and Dodd’s analysis of innocence by showing that – for the purposes of my argument – Traherne’s innocent child is primarily to be seen as an image of *purity*; the image of the pure soul with pure and true apprehensions. He states in the *Centuries*: ‘Our Saviour’s meaning, when He said, *He must be born again and become a little child that will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven* is deeper far than is generally believed. It is not only in a careless reliance upon Divine Providence, that we are to become little children,...but in the peace and purity of all our soul.’ As he continues, this peace and purity are seen to be expressed in the infant’s purity of habits, of mind and of sight, which for the adult are gained when we ‘disrobe’ and ‘unclothe our souls of evil habits’:

For we must disrobe ourselves of all false colours, and unclothe our souls of evil habits; all our thoughts must be infant-like and clear; the powers of our souls free from the leaven of this world, and disentangled from men’s conceits and customs. Grit in the eye or yellow jaundice will not let a man see those objects truly that are before it.³⁶

³⁴ ‘Baptism’, *Commentaries*, 543.

³⁵ ‘The Second Adam’, *Commentaries*, 228.

³⁶ *Centuries*, III, 5.

The purity of soul and purity of sight are inextricably linked for Traherne. This is a belief not original to Traherne, for we could read this and what is to follow as a long commentary on the following beatitude in Jesus' Sermon the Mount: 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.'³⁷ Traherne's infant-like thoughts and apprehensions constitute a pure vision that is able to see 'those objects truly that are before it,' which, as we have argued, reveals the divine. It is the purity of apprehension, and the soul's perception of beauty that we will analyze as we continue.

4.2.2. The Estate of Innocence: 'Those pure and virgin apprehensions I had from the womb'

If it is true that, 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God', we find the emblem of this epistemological purity in Traherne's depiction of the 'pure and virgin apprehensions' of infancy. Traherne begins his much-discussed autobiographical third century of his *Centuries of Meditation* with the invitation, 'WILL you see the infancy of this sublime and celestial greatness? Those pure and virgin apprehensions I had from the womb, and that divine light wherewith I was born are the best unto this day, wherein I can see the Universe.' Traherne concludes this meditation with the claim; 'Certainly Adam in Paradise had not more sweet and curious apprehensions of the world, than I when I was a child.' At the outset Traherne identifies the child's pure and virgin apprehensions with those of Adam in Paradise. The 'child' and 'Adam' are recurring tropes used by Traherne to speak of the estate of innocence. The central characteristic of the soul in this estate is purity, the pure soul enabling pure apprehensions. In turn these pure apprehensions enable the infant to truly 'see the Universe' and discern the divine therein, which as we will see below, properly directs human desire to its proper end.

In this first meditation Traherne locates the source of the child's apprehensions as 'the Gift of God' and therefore Traherne encourages the reader to 'pray for them earnestly', additionally Traherne proposes to *teach* these apprehensions through a methodology of experience.³⁸ In the fourth century Traherne will teach by expositing certain 'principles' and precepts that anchor one in the life of felicity,³⁹ but here the method of choice is autobiography: these apprehensions 'are unattainable by book, and therefore I will teach them

³⁷ Matthew 5:8 (KJV).

³⁸ *Centuries*, III, 1.

³⁹ *Centuries*, IV, 1.

by experience.’ These God-given apprehensions and the divine light are of central importance to Traherne for he calls them ‘the greatest gifts His wisdom could bestow, for without them all other gifts had been dead and vain.’ So by ‘the Gift of God’ these Adamic, childlike, ‘pure and virgin apprehensions’ ‘attended me into the world, and by His special favour I remember them till now.’⁴⁰ This ‘special favour’ of God which enabled Traherne to remember these apprehensions provides the impetus for him to share them with his reader, that they too might share in these apprehensions. What becomes clear in the fourth centuries’ shift to a method of displaying ‘principles’ that ‘lie buried in books’⁴¹ is that the methodology of experience in century three is utilized to ‘fit a man for contemplation’:

HAVING spoken so much concerning his entrance and progress in Felicity [in century three], I will in this century speak of the principles with which your friend endued himself to enjoy it. For besides contemplative, there is an active happiness, which consisteth in blessed operation. And as some things fit a man for contemplation, so there are others fitting him for action: which as they are infinitely necessary to practical happiness, so are they likewise infinitely conducive to contemplation itself.⁴²

Traherne understood the active and contemplative lives to be distinct but interrelated (we will speak more to this in a later section). What these lines also show is that in these autobiographical meditations of the third century – where Traherne speaks ‘much concerning his entrance and progress in Felicity’ – the type of experience he is attempting to ‘teach’ is the pure, virginal, immediate, and intuitive experience of contemplation. The existential nature of contemplation necessitates that it be taught by experience, and as we will see below, the growth in the purity of apprehensions – and therefore the growth in true sight, or contemplation – necessitates a thorough exploration of one’s life of experience. In this third century Traherne invites such a thorough exploration.

As Traherne progresses into the second meditation of this autobiographical century he explores the quality of these ‘virgin apprehensions’: ‘All appeared new, and strange at first, inexpressibly rare and delightful and beautiful.’⁴³ This adjectival rich sentence devoid of nouns directs the focus away from the objects seen and centers it on the nature of the apprehensions. This approach is given explanation in Traherne’s poem ‘*The Preparative*’ where in the sixth stanza he states ‘Tis not the Object, but the Light / That maketh Heaven;

⁴⁰ *Centuries*, III, 1.

⁴¹ *Centuries*, IV, 2.

⁴² *Centuries*, IV, 1.

⁴³ *Centuries*, III, 2.

Tis a purer Sight. / Felicity / Appears to none but them that purely see.’⁴⁴ As we discussed in Chapter 2, the ubiquity of divine omnipresence communicates a divine quality on all created objects, thus the seemingly humble or exalted appearance of an object is inconsequential. In fact, Denise Inge rightly identifies the objects for Traherne that are most to be treasured embody the qualities of ‘simplicity, commonness or ubiquity, and utility’.⁴⁵ Traherne identifies ‘Air, Light, Heaven and Earth, Water, the Sun, Trees, Men and Woman, Cities, Temples etc.’ as true treasure but denigrates the ‘feigned’ and ‘scarce treasures of ‘Rubies, Pearls, Diamonds, Gold and Silver’, ‘For nothing is more natural to infinite goodness, than to make the best things most frequent’.⁴⁶ As Traherne’s ‘little stranger’ enters into the world the clarity of soul prepares its apprehensions to receive these treasures as divine expressions.

I was a little stranger, which at my entrance into the world was saluted and surrounded with innumerable joys. My knowledge was Divine. I knew by intuition those things which since my Apostasy, I collected again by the highest reason...I seemed as one brought into the Estate of Innocence.⁴⁷

The ‘highest reason’ is the vehicle for the re-collection of these infant apprehensions, and therefore intuition is not at odds with reason, instead, the immediate apprehensions of intuition are the goal that ‘highest reason’ tends toward. What seemed to come naturally to Traherne’s infant must be regained in the life of sanctification, and these explorations of Traherne’s infant apprehensions play a key pedagogical role in facilitating this.

In the quote above, the virgin apprehensions of the little stranger⁴⁸ prepare him for a certain experience of the world, characterized as ‘new’, ‘strange’, ‘rare’, ‘delightful’, ‘beautiful’, and here this ‘little stranger’ is ‘surrounded with innumerable joys.’ By telling of these apprehensions through the vividness of his first person experience Traherne seeks to both inform and awaken. The pedagogical purpose is to awaken in the reader these same intuitive apprehensions he had in his infancy, apprehensions we have already labeled as contemplative. He seems to do this by inviting the reader to both participate in these apprehensions and measure their own experiences against Traherne’s own (in Chapter 1 we called Traherne’s experience the ‘control group’). The *Centuries* is an experiential text in

⁴⁴ ‘*The Preparative*’, Vol. 6, 12.

⁴⁵ Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 97.

⁴⁶ *Centuries*, III, 53.

⁴⁷ *Centuries*, III, 2.

⁴⁸ In the final stanza of his poem ‘*The Salutation*’ whereby he speaks of coming into being out of nothing again uses the language of the ‘stranger’: 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...’ in Vol. 6, 4.

large part because it is attempting to teach the intuitions of contemplation, a form of knowing that is not contained in books because its reception is contingent upon the purity of the apprehensions, which are contingent on the purity of soul. Exploring the infant's knowledge and experiences of allurements locates a standard the reader is enabled to weigh their own experiences against, while also inviting the reader to empathically participate alongside these apprehensions; possibly finding places of convergence and divergence.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, Traherne uses the term 'Ey' as shorthand for the whole epistemological process, beginning with corporeal sight and ending in knowledge and love. This movement from sight to knowledge is mirrored in the material above: 'My knowledge was Divine. I knew by intuition those things which since my Apostasy, I collected again by the highest reason.' Knowledge was immediate and intuitive. These intuitions were not due to a set of 'innate ideas' impressed on the infant's mind, but intuitions derived from properly viewing the world with pure eyes. The child's knowledge is divine, able to see things as they are through the contemplative gaze of its virgin apprehensions. The intuitive knowledge gained through the purity of his epistemological apparatus is lost in Traherne's 'Apostasy', but regained in Traherne's 'progress in Felicity' by the 'highest reason'.

After speaking of the child's divine knowledge Traherne strikes a curious chord by praising the child's *ignorance*: 'My very ignorance was advantageous.' Like the prelapsarian Adam, the child is devoid of the knowledge of good and evil. Ironically the veil over the eyes of the child that keeps him ignorant of the effects of the fall are to his advantage. Traherne explains:

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. I dreamed not of poverties, contentions or vices. All tears and quarrels were hidden from mine eyes.... I knew nothing of sickness or death or rents or exaction, either for tribute or bread.⁴⁹

'I knew not', 'I dreamed not', for all the effects of the fall were 'hidden from my eyes', for in the estate of innocence, the child is ignorant of the contours of the life of the sin-inaugurated 'parenthesis'. The hiddenness of the objects of misery is a constant refrain when speaking of the estate of innocence in Traherne's poetry. In the fourth stanza of the poem '*Wonder*', Traherne writes:

Harsh ragged Objects were conceald,
Oppressions Tears and Cries,
Sins, Grievs, Complaints, Dissentions, Weeping Eys,

⁴⁹ *Centuries*, III, 2.

Were Hid: and only Things reveald,
Which Heav'nly Spirits, and the Angels prize.
The State of Innocence
And Bliss, not Trades and Poverties,
Did fill my Sence.

Traherne continues with the idea of certain things being 'Hid' in stanza seven where he writes:

Cursd and Devisd Proprieties,
With Envy, Avarice
And Fraud, those Feinds that Spoyl even Paradise,
Fled from the Splendor of mine Eys...⁵⁰

With this last line Traherne echoes the language of 'divine light' used in the *Centuries*, a light that causes all darkness to flee. When reading the collection of 'raged Objects' hidden from Traherne's infant eyes we hear both an echo of Paradise lost, as well as an eschatological hope.⁵¹ These lines also speak of the restoration and fruition of these virginal apprehensions in the estates of grace and of glory. What characterizes the infant's apprehensions is that her purity enables a true viewing of all things, those objects that find their being in God are seen, those inaugurated by sin and fashioned by the customs of humankind remain unseen.

I agree with Newey, and to a lesser degree Clements, that the best way to understand these accounts of Traherne's childhood ignorance is to see the sin and darkness that flees from 'the Splendor of [his] Eys' in the context of the Augustinian understanding of 'evil as the privation of good.'⁵² In this view substance and goodness are interchangeable, thus evil is understood as a privation of being.⁵³ Only solid realities are discerned by the pure apprehensions of Traherne's iconic child, and to reconstitute this vision an unlearning or purging is required. In the poem '*The Instruction*' he writes of the purging of the customary apprehensions of misery for the sake of the 'Great and Stable' objects seen by the 'Purer Eys at first'. He begins:

'Spue out thy filth, thy flesh abjure;
Let not Contingents thee defile.
For Transients only are impure,
And Aery things alone beguile.

Unfelt, unseen let those things be

⁵⁰ 'Wonder', Vol. 3, 5-6. ll. 25-32, 49-52.

⁵¹ Traherne echo's the ecological hope of Isaiah 55:1 and Revelation 21.

⁵² Newey, "'God Made Man Greater When He Made Him Less,'" 235.

⁵³ A. L. Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 29-30

Which to they Spirit were unknown,
 When to thy Blessed Infancy
 The World, they Self, thy God was shewn.

All that is Great and Stable stood
 Before thy Purer Eys at first:
 All that in Visibles is Good
 Or pure, or fair, or unaccurst.

Whatever els thou now dost see
 In Custom, Action, or Desire,
 Tis but a Part of Miserie
 In which all Men in Earth conspire.⁵⁴

The poem begins with the admonition to ‘Spue out they filth, thy flesh abjure’, and at first it is unclear if Traherne is using the language of ‘flesh’ to speak of matter itself, for if he is telling the reader to reject matter as such this becomes problematic for our overall argument. As the poem unfolds, however, it becomes clear that Traherne uses flesh in much the same way as Paul in Romans 8, where flesh represents an engagement with matter that is autonomous and severed from its source in God. In this severed state, flesh is raised up in opposition to ‘Spirit’, and no longer points to God as its source and end, but instead has, as it were, a life of its own, shaped by the autonomous customs, actions and desires of humankind. For Paul, ‘if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die’ (Romans 8:13), for the life of flesh (seen as a corruptive, disintegrating and privative) naturally leads to full disintegration in death. Perceiving the world as mere matter – i.e. philosophical materialism – anchors one’s heart to the contingent and transient qualities of matter, which constitutes a movement away from seeing what is ‘Great and Stable’ and ‘Good’ to simply perceiving ‘Aery things’. The ignorance of the child, however, leaves these ‘Aery things’ ‘Unfelt’ and ‘unseen’, and in the ‘Blessed Infancy / The World, they Self, thy God was shewn.’ These ‘Purer Eys’ see both the visible world and the divinity that functions as its source and end; the visible and invisible are both seen: ‘Before thy Purer Eys at First: / All that in Visibles is Good’. Properly perceived, the World both ‘Visibles’ and ‘in Visibles’ true reality, true being. The world ‘Visibles’ when the ‘highest Mysteries’ are brought down to ‘sense’; through the creation of visible matter. The invisible is made visible so that the ‘Soul might see,’ and properly seeing with the pure eyes of the infant, the soul might ‘trace the glorious Way’ toward union with the ‘in Visible’ God.⁵⁵ This is the intended relation of the invisible and visible, and this way of seeing is open

⁵⁴ ‘*The Instruction*’, Vol. 6, 13.

⁵⁵ ‘*The Author to the Critical Peruser*’, 84.

to these infant apprehensions. The infant's apprehensions facilitate true knowledge through the medium of ignorance, because what the child is ignorant of – sin, death, knowledge of evil – properly speaking, has no being, no created substance. To fixate on these 'Aery things' is to value a vapor above a solid, which for Traherne is inherently corrupting. Ignorant of these 'Aery' nothings, however, the purified apprehensions are at liberty to see the objects of creation as they truly are, 'Great and Stable' coming from the hand of God. Objects seen in their ontological stability and metaphysical greatness are objects properly seen, and as we will see below, this pure apprehension naturally leads to a blessed allurements of insatiable desire.

But first we must consider where beauty sits in this discussion of purified and virginal apprehensions? Traherne concludes the poem '*The Preparative*' – a poem in the Dobell sequence just before '*The Instruction*' – by locating beauty right in the center of the 'pure', 'serene', 'disentangled' and 'unpossest' spirit of the pure soul. The pure soul is most prepared to perceive and receive beauty into itself. In the final stanza Traherne concludes:

A Disentangled and a Naked Sence
 A Mind that's unpossest,
 A Disengaged Brest,
 An Empty and a Quick Intelligence
 Acquainted with the Golden Mean,
 An Even Spirit Pure and Serene,
 Is that where Beauty, Excellence,
 And Pleasure keep their Court of Residence.
 My Soul retire,
 Get free, and so thou shalt even all Admire.⁵⁶

The last line in this poem – 'My Soul retire, / Get free' – parallels and should be seen in conversation with Traherne's previous poem, '*Innocence*' – where he concludes, 'I must become a Child again'.⁵⁷ To become a child again is to bring about the texture of soul described above: a 'Sence', 'Mind', 'Brest', 'Intelligence' and 'Spirit' that is free from the entanglements that disquiet the soul and cloud the mind. Clements sees this admonition to 'Get free' within a poem entitled '*The Preparative*' as pointing to the purgative state of the *via mystica*, a stage of preparation, whereby the would-be contemplative is to retire and enter a process of purging that it might 'spue out thy filth'; namely the infectious poisons of the world's customs, actions and desires.⁵⁸ Once purged the spirit is pure and serene, and

⁵⁶ 'The Preparative', 12-13.

⁵⁷ '*Innocence*', 10.

⁵⁸ Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, 68.

sufficiently prepared to receive the kingly presence of beauty, excellence and pleasure, into their ‘Court of Residence’. For Traherne, the purging and the reordering of the soul – which is ‘Acquainted with the Golden Mean’ – is preparation for a proper vision. He speaks to this two poems later when he begins, ‘Flight is but the Preparative: The Sight / Is Deep and Infinit’ for this sight comes from order within, a beautiful soul enabled to properly perceive beauty and experience true pleasure: ‘Order the Beauty even of Beauty is, / It is the Rule of Bliss, / The very Life and Form and Cause of Pleasure’.⁵⁹ This ordered and beautiful soul is free to apprehend beauty in its full depth of being, grounded in the very beauty of God. When this divine beauty is received within the ‘Court’ of the soul, it produces an experience of pleasure – for beauty and pleasure are often linked for Traherne – and as we will see below, this received beauty and pleasure work to allure the insatiable desire of the edenic soul.

In the poem ‘*Eden*’ Traherne draws the lines that link the edenic ignorance of the child and the allurements of desire. ‘*Eden*’ is the third poem of the Dobell sequence – after ‘The Salutation’ and ‘Wonder’ – and continues the themes of childhood innocence, ignorance and simplicity explored in the previous two poems. Seen through the infant’s virginal gaze the object of creation

were so Great, and so Divine, so Pure,
 So fair and Sweet,
 So True; when I did meet
 Them here at first, they did my Soul allure,
 And drew away my infant feet
 Quite from the Works of Men; that I might see
 The Glorious Wonders of the DEITY.⁶⁰

These divine treasures when received by the contemplative gaze of the infant’s eyes, naturally allure and draw ‘away [his] infant feet’ from the vanity of invented riches to the true and solid riches of God. The purity of eyes, coming from a purity of soul, produces a rightly constituted purity of love and desire, and rightly directed desire moves the feet toward ‘The Glorious Wonders of the Deity’. For Traherne, the contemplative and active lives are one; what the soul sees as beautiful, amiable and desirable naturally constitutes the direction of the internal movements of the will – ‘they did my Soul allure’ – which then, directs the external manifestations of the will – ‘And drew away my infant feet’. This poem directly mirrors the epistemological structures from *The Kingdom of God* discussed in Chapter 3: ‘Fancy Receiveth the Idea by the Ey, recommendeth it to the Understanding, which

⁵⁹ ‘*The Vision*’, 14.

⁶⁰ ‘*Eden*’, 8.

transferreth it to the Will; Where it Produceth Lov, many times as Violent, and Strong as Death, Love Tyranizeth, and rageth with Desires.’⁶¹

Elsewhere in the *Kingdom of God* Traherne speaks of the pure soul springing into action through desire, while likening the soul, and its freedom of activity to ‘a Watch wound up’.

The Soul when made, like a Watch wound up, is apt to go of it self; If the Wheels be not Entangled with grit and their Teeth full of filth, the Spring that Commands them, will draw them about by a gentle Threed, and direct the Hand to point out the Hours for a Day together. as if the Dead Workmanship were Endued with understanding: And indeed, that of the Author is imputed to it; his Knowledg that made the Automaton being Infused into Its Motions, and directing their procedure to a Certain End that makes it usefull to the Enjoyer.⁶²

Like the watch, the soul is radically dependent on its creator for its very existence, but the ‘Author’ has infused the ‘Workmanship’ with a freedom of movement and choice fitting to its existence, and made for a ‘Certain End’. Like the watch, the freedom of the soul comes from a freedom of movement in its internal parts and a freedom of movement toward its intended goal. True freedom, for Traherne, rests on its internal purity of soul and proper teleology, a diminishing of either constitutes the diminishing of freedom.

Like the watch ‘the Knowledge of its Creator’ infuses ‘a Life wherby [the soul] is able to guide it Self’. He continues:

Appetite and Desire are the spring that urge it, the Wheels are the Affections and powers of the Mind; Its Inclination is the Thred that draws them about, and if they be not Encomberd with Earthy Distractions, opprest with pleasures, and disturbed with Cares, the Index of the Mind will follow the Sun, and its Regular Motions sympathize with the Deitie, so will it point out the Hours of Eternitie, for the pleasure and Glory of him that wears it. Felicitie being the End of all its Operations.⁶³

The soul, as ‘Watch wound up’, springs into action by the propulsion of the ‘Appetite and Desire’, and in this way it can be said to ‘go of it self’. The desire and appetite provide the vital energy to the movement of the soul. Below this quote in *Kingdom of God*, Traherne identifies what the soul naturally ‘desires and prefers’ as what we have already described as most readily seen by the pure eyes of the infant, namely, ‘What is most Amiable and Beautifull, Deep and Infinit, Solid and Secure, most Safe and Delightfull, most sweet and pure, most truly Compleat, most real and perfect’.⁶⁴ Since ‘The Soul is Insatiable, and cannot

⁶¹ *Kingdom*, 489.

⁶² *Kingdom*, 270.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

be Satisfyed with any limited, or finite Thing', these adjectives most properly describe the divine, for 'God is the Greatest Treasure to the Soul' who 'cannot be Beautifull, unless he is Infinitely so; nor Good, unless he be Infinitely Good...'.⁶⁵

Though the soul is insatiable and only finds its true enjoyment in God, the image of the watch suggests more than desire is needed to ensure the soul attains its goal. For the soul to attain its *telos*, the affect and the mind must function in tandem as 'Wheels', and thus must be 'not Encomberd with Earthy Distractions, opprest with pleasures, and disturbed with Cares'. Like the description in the '*The Preparative*', the freely moving soul is 'pure', 'serene', 'disentangled' and 'unpossest'. The third piece of this image is that of the 'Thred' – the 'Inclination' of the soul – which draws the soul along toward its intended purpose. This image emphasizes three interlocking movements of the soul; the first is the desire that springs the soul into movement, then the synchronized movements of the affection and the mind, which are lead along by the thread of the inclinations. In likening the soul to a watch, Traherne affirms the distinct functions in the soul without unduly elevating one faculty over another. If any of these are not working properly – i.e. anemic desire, 'opprest' affections, a 'disturbed' mind, or a wayward inclination – the free movement of the soul toward its end grinds to a halt. However, when pure and free, the infant soul (and the redeemed soul moving toward this freedom) reaches its end in 'Felicitie', a state where Glory abounds and pleasure is no longer oppressive. In this clockwork soul, the

Index of the Mind will follow the Sun, and its Regular Motions sympathize with the Deitie, so will it point out the Hours of Eternitie, for the pleasure and Glory of him that wears it. Felicitie being the End of all its Operations.

This concluding line acts as the culmination of what has been a dialectical exploration of the ideas of freedom and order in relation to the human soul. Echoing Paul's admonition to 'Walk in the Spirit' (Gal. 5:16) and what we have already said about deification, the ordered soul's 'Regular Motions sympathize with the Deitie', and this divine sympathy enables the soul to 'point out the Hours of Eternitie', a fittingly paradoxical description of the expansive freedom that comes to the well-ordered (or divinized) soul.

The interrelation of purity and knowledge seen in *The Kingdom of God* and Traherne's poetry is mirrored in the autobiographical portions of the *Centuries*. The blessed ignorance and 'Simplicitie' of the infant's eyes protect him from the objects of vanity (objects of privation) enabling the eyes to see 'the works of God in their splendour and

⁶⁵ Ibid., 271-2.

glory', and how 'Heaven and Earth did sing my Creator's praises'.⁶⁶ Creation as a divine self-expression (the subject of Chapter 2) finds its fitting recipient in the virginal gaze of the infant, a vision veiled to 'Vanitie' but unveiled to 'the works of God in their splendour and glory'. In this state not only was it true that 'My knowledge was Divine', but Traherne's orientation toward time bears a divine quality, for 'All Time was Eternity, and a perpetual Sabbath.' As we saw above from the *Kingdom of God*, when the 'Regular Motions' of the ordered soul are in sympathy with God, the soul's relation to time is divine: 'All time was Eternity' to the soul that 'point[s] out the Hours of Eternity'.

4.2.3. Traherne's Subversive Language: 'Mine', 'Avarice'

At this point, it might be helpful again to consider Traherne as a pedagogue, and highlight that in this third century he has chosen to teach by experience. As has been shown above, Traherne's usage of the first person 'I' naturally reaches toward the reader; inviting both an exploration of the reader's life of desire, as well as offering a training in contemplative sight. As the century continues, the richly layered interplay of personal experience and theological construct subsumed within the image of the child encounters the reader through the common experience of children; namely the childish claim of 'mine': 'All things were spotless and pure and glorious: yea, and infinitely mine'. At the word 'mine', we can at once recollect our own experience with a child's self-referential claims of 'my horse', 'my castle', 'my mountain', 'my sky', 'my mommy', and instead of chuckling at the audacity of the claims, Traherne invites the reader to see in them a pointer to what, for Traherne, is true. If we follow Newey and see Traherne's usage of the biblical idea of the follower of Christ as a child of God and therefore co-heirs with Christ,⁶⁷ the child's claims of 'mine' are the whispers of a deep theological truth. Traherne concludes this second meditation with a sense of wonder: 'Is it not strange, that an infant should be heir of the whole World, and see those mysteries which the books of the learned never unfold?'⁶⁸ This childlike tendency to claim 'mine' is carried into the next meditation where Traherne says,

The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces.

⁶⁶ *Centuries*, III, 2.

⁶⁷ Newey sees that Traherne uses the child as an icon, pointing to key theological ideas found in the Gospels and Paul of being children of God, adopted into God's family, and heirship with Christ. For Newey the child functions as an icon of the Christian's life of participation in God. See Newey, "'God Made Man Greater When He Made Him Less,'" 2, 5, 11, 13.

⁶⁸ *Centuries*, III, 2.

The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it.

The themes of being heir and enjoyer of the world has already been introduced in Traherne's first century where he takes the childlike understanding of the world being 'mine' 'and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it' and expands that to all humankind. 'You never enjoy the world aright...till you...perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are in it who are every one sole heirs as well as you.'⁶⁹ The tension created by Traherne's usage of the seemingly vicious childish claims of 'mine' is here transformed into a dynamic tension, that opens wide to the paradox that all are 'sole heirs'. The child, who sees the world as Adam in in the garden, acts as the pattern for a proper perception of the world, and this perception is two-pronged; first, it properly perceives the world in its pure apprehensions, and second, it perceives this world to be a divine gift, a divine gift that is mine alone; and ironically more mine when also yours alone. This paradox of the multiplicity of 'sole heirs', which speaks to Traherne's belief in divine superabundance and invites the reader to experience this abundance, for God's particular love for the individual is not swallowed up in divine *agape* for the world, but magnified in the multiplicity of heirs.

In Traherne's *Seeds of Eternity*, he again speaks to this two-pronged pattern of perception – i.e. properly perceiving the abundant worth and beauty of the world and perceiving oneself to be its sole heir – we noted above, but here it is articulated as two desires, a desire to see 'things excellent' and a desire to possess. Since *Seeds of Eternity* is primarily a treatise seeking to explore the beauty and worth of the human soul, the object of Traherne's perception and possession is not 'the world' in a general sense but the soul. The soul is a fitting object of contemplation for 'of all Pleasures, the greatest (next to the sight of God) is to see the face of ones own Soul', and as 'As Beauty allures the Eys of Beholders, so doth it especially delight its own, those therefore that are very amiable contemplat themselves frequently in a Mirror.' And it is fitting for the beauty of the soul to allure us to contemplation for 'all Nature is a Lover of Pleasure, but Innocent nature loves that pleasure which is Sincere and Pure; and extremely loves it because it is Sublime and Substantial.' It is not only fitting to contemplate the soul because of its beauty and worth, but also because our second desire – the desire to possess – is already the case, for it is our 'own Soul' we contemplate, we are our soul's true heirs. We see again that innocent nature is allured toward

⁶⁹ *Centuries* I, 29.

and loves the sincere, pure, sublime and substantial. As Traherne describes these two natural desires we note that not only does he utilize the potentially problematic language of ‘possession’, but in describing this desire to possess he utilizes a whole collection of deliberately provocative terms – ‘violently’, ‘covet’, ‘Cruel’ and ‘Jealously’ – that the historical church has more closely associated with vice.

Two things there are concurring to make the Contemplation of the Soul delightful; its own Worth, and our Interest. for as we naturally desire to see Things excellent, and most violently long for things infinitely so; we likewise ardently covet to have them ours, and with Cruel Jealously long to have them in our Possession.⁷⁰

Though in this context Traherne is contending for the contemplation of the soul as the most excellent object of contemplation – for what can be ‘more Excellent than the Interior Proprieties and Endowments of the Soul’ – these two desires (to see things excellent and to possess them) are essential for the enjoyment of any object. The seemingly vicious language used to describe these desires echoes the description of love found in Song of Solomon 8:6, and goes a long way to articulate the fervency of this desire to possess the excellent and beautiful. Additionally, in assuming the provocative language of vice to describe this desire to possess, Traherne highlights the potential for virtue or vice inherent in these twin desires. In the entry ‘Avarice’ in *Commentaries of Heaven* Traherne presents this antithesis. In the first half of this entry he treats avarice as a cognate of the good insatiability of the insatiable soul, which is only fulfilled in God: ‘God is an infinite Treasure. and the proper Object and Joy of that Desire which is called Covetousness’, so that ‘All his Attributes must be the Treasures of the Soul before its Avarice can be delighted and filled.’ After Traherne asks ‘Whether Avarice be a Virtue or a Vice’ he states that ‘Greedy Nature is abominable, because such are ungrateful generally, that are insatiable’ and ‘They that eagerly thirst after Gold and Silver, are Servile and Base, mean Spirited, and of vile Dispositions...’ However, if Avarice ‘be employed in the Divinest of Things, and feedeth upon those Objects that are most Sublime, in the Court of Heaven an insatiable Desire is an infinite Virtue’. Kathryn Murphy argues that in the *Commentaries of Heaven* Traherne’s purpose is to ‘translate and transfigure’ the common usage of language, most clearly exemplified in Thomas Hobbes’s nominalism, ‘from the estate of misery to the estate of glory.’⁷¹ We are unable to give a full account of Hobbes’s nominalism here, but agree that at least in the case of ‘Avarice’, its true

⁷⁰ *Seeds*, 233-4.

⁷¹ Murphy, “Thomas Traherne, Thomas Hobbes, and the Rhetoric of Realism,” 434.

meaning for Traherne is found when seen in its glorified state. Avarice's restless desire is inherently teleological:

Our Union and Communion with him is founded upon the Desire wherewith we are Carried in a restless insatiable Maner, to all that is or can be Excellent...Nothing maketh us so proper and fit for God, as that Habit of Soul, wherby we surmount all finit things, and rest only in that which is infinit. Avarice after Millions of Attainments continuing in us, leadeth us to all the fulness of God, it maketh him the proper Element of the Soul, wherein alone it can live and move with Delight...' ⁷²

Along with properly directed Avarice finding it *telos* in relational union with God, this 'Union and Communion' also constituting the proper consummation of human freedom, which is enabled to 'live and move with Delight'. So we find that Traherne's assumption of seemingly vicious language is part of his overall project to move the Christian sensibility away from the attempt to suppress insatiable desire ('Avarice' in the estate of misery) toward a deep belief that all the manifestations of desire are to find their final end in God. Thus the desire we have must be deepened, purified and redirected.

What the above shows is that a defect in the ability to see an object's true 'Worth' misdirects the desire to possess the finite, or rather, causing it to seek to possess as if the objects were finite and could be 'mine' alone. In contrast, the infant or redeemed eyes see objects rooted in their divine source, therefore imbued with infinite worth and beauty. These eyes are 'Acquainted with the Golden Mean' and able to see all things as God does, in their proper places. This pure vision enables the eyes to see everything as an 'infinite treasure' rooted in the divine esteem:

That anything may be found to be an infinite treasure, its place must be found in Eternity and in God's esteem. For as there is a time, so there is a place for all things. Everything in its place is admirable, deep, and glorious; out of its place like a wandering bird, is desolate and good for nothing. How therefore it relateth to God and all creatures must be seen before it can be enjoyed. ⁷³

When seen truly 'All things [are] infinitely beautiful in their places, and wholly yours in all their places.' ⁷⁴ This beauty and worth causes the infant to desire to possess – and proclaim 'mine' – but as we saw in the *Centuries*, since 'every one [are] sole heirs as well as you', ⁷⁵ this pure desire to possess is inherently nonexclusive, for to truly enjoy we must see how it 'relateth to God and all creatures'. Furthermore, since the infant eyes are able see finite

⁷² 'Avarice', *Commentaries*, Vol. 3, 406-7.

⁷³ *Centuries*, III, 55.

⁷⁴ *Centuries*, IV, 38.

⁷⁵ *Centuries*, I, 29.

objects as they are rooted in their infinite source – this being exemplified most truly in the reflective nature of the soul whereby the ‘Nature of God [is seen] in the Soul of Man’⁷⁶ – in a modified sense, the infant sees the finite object imbedded in divine infinity, and therefore, unbounded and inexhaustible. What the child sees is that the world is mine, namely, that the world was made to find its end in God, through the reception and enjoyment of the embodied *imago dei*. The corporeal world is made for the senses of the body, which as the ‘Golden Link’ embraces the world and offers it to the soul, which offers it back to God as an act of praise. For, Traherne, what is most truly and deeply mine – the human soul – is the object most to be prized and enjoyed (next to God), but this object is most truly itself and most to be loved when it points beyond itself and mirrors the very ‘Nature of God’.

Traherne critiques the vicious claims of ‘mine’ which ‘Fled from the Splendor of mine Eys’, in the seventh stanza of poem *Wonder* quoted above:

Cursd and Devisd Proprieties,
With Envy, Avarice,
And Fraud, those Feinds that Spoyl even Paradice,
Fled from the Splendor of mine Eys.
And so did Hedges, Ditches, Limits, Bounds,
I dreamd not ought of those,
But wanderd over all mens Grounds,
And found Repose.⁷⁷

In these symbols of ownership, commerce, limits, grasping, Traherne is critiquing a growing contemporary carving up of the English countryside for personal use,⁷⁸ while also claiming that to the pure in heart, even these ‘Hedges’ fail to limit their ability to freely receive all creation as a divine gift. These seemingly bounded things fail to hinder the infant’s joy and possession, for as the poem continues,

Proprieties themselvs were mine,
And Hedge Ornaments;
Walls, Boxes, Coffers, and their rich Contents
Did not Divide my Joys, but shine.⁷⁹

Traherne’s infant eyes penetrate the fantasy of perceived personal ownership and possession, to see that all things (even those things ‘owned’ by the rich) are a portion of his nonexclusive

⁷⁶ *Seeds*, 233.

⁷⁷ ‘*Wonder*’, 6. ll. 49-56.

⁷⁸ Lynne A. Greenberg and Jacob Blevins, “‘Cursd and Devised Proprieties’: Traherne and the Laws of Property,” in *Re-Reading Thomas Traherne: A Collection of New Critical Essays* (Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS, 2007), 21–35.

⁷⁹ ‘*Wonder*’, 6.

inheritance. The possession Traherne speaks of, then, is not one of vicious grasping but one received through the act of contemplation, and experienced as enjoyment.

Returning, then to these twin desires – the desire to apprehend and the desire to possess – we see that for Traherne, our enjoyment depends on our interest in an object, and our interest depends on our ability to see the worth of an object, to see its beauty and prize its worth. Enjoyment is the culmination, the possessing of that object, for ‘all Objects are naturally within us (in an Objective Manner) that are enjoyed by us; to the intent they may most deeply and intimately be ours’.⁸⁰ But what is most ‘deeply and intimately ours’ is our soul, and as we observed above, the purest way to possess the soul is to see that it, above all creation, most truly mirrors the divine nature. What Traherne is describing here is not the possession of a finite object that we hem in with a hedge or wall or coffer, instead, it is through contemplation that we most ‘deeply and intimately’ possess an object, and see that object ontologically rooted in God, and enjoyed in the divine esteem.

4.2.4. Use and Enjoyment in Traherne and Augustine

Traherne’s understanding of humanity’s reception, and enjoyment of the world as a divine gift bears an illuminating resemblance to Augustine’s famous ‘*usus-fruitio*’ distinction in Book I of his *De Doctrina Christiana*. For Augustine there are objects to be used (*usus*) and objects to be enjoyed (*fruitio*) (*De Doctr.* 4.3), ‘to enjoy (*Frui*) a thing is to hold fast to it in love for its own sake (*propter se ipsam*)’ whereas ‘to use something is to apply whatever it may be to the purpose of obtaining what you love’ (4.4). Thus the proper and sole object of enjoyment is God for God is our *summum bonum*, or ultimate good and end, and proper termination of our enjoyment (5.5), whereas all other objects are to be used for the sake of this final enjoyment. For Augustine, all created objects are to be used for they are ontologically inferior to God and thus cannot be loved *propter se ipsam* (‘for its own sake’), and are thus to be used as instruments to bear us to our eschatological home. At first blush, Augustine’s use-enjoyment distinction, found in the early parts of his *De Doctrina Christiana*, seems antithetical to Traherne’s constant refrain to enjoy the world. So how, as I said above, does Traherne’s understanding of enjoyment show signs of resemblance with Augustine’s ‘*usus-fruitio*’ distinction?

⁸⁰ *Seeds*, 234.

The first location of continuity between Traherne and Augustine is the debt they both have to a form of Christian Neoplatonism that sees created goods as things to aid the soul on its eschatological journey back to God. Augustine calls this use, while Traherne calls this enjoyment, but as we will see in a later section, Traherne also positively speaks of using the creation, which he opposes to the abuse of creation. Later in Book I of *De Doctrina*, Augustine clarifies further what he means when speaking of the use of creation, more specifically the use or enjoyment of the human creature. For Augustine, even the image bearer is unworthy to be enjoyed or loved for its own sake (*propter se ipsam*), ‘For if something is to be loved on its own account, it is made to constitute the happy life’ (20.40) instead the love and self and neighbor is to be subsumed within a singular love for God: ‘any other object of love that enters the mind should be swept towards the same goal as that to which the whole flood of our love is directed’ (22.43). These sentiments are echoed in the *Centuries* where the singular love for ‘a curious and fair woman’ is not excessive but anemic, for it fails to love her as related to God – as ‘a child of God’ – and fails to love God more as a result of loving her: meditation ends with the admonition ‘no man can be in danger of loving others too much, that loveth God as he ought.’⁸¹ For both Augustine and Traherne, proper (or ordered) love and enjoyment of created things occurs when that enjoyment is constituted within our love for God, or as Augustine state we enjoy them ‘in God’. Later in the Book I Augustine explains ‘When you enjoy a human being in God, you are enjoying God rather than that human being. For you enjoy the one by whom you are made happy’ (37.79). Augustine admits that ‘the idea of enjoying someone or something is very close to that of using someone or something together with love,’ for existentially ‘when the object of love is present, it inevitably brings with it pleasure as well’, but ‘if you go beyond this pleasure and relate it to your permanent goal,’ per the definition given above, ‘you are using it’. For Augustine the temporal objects of love, pleasure and enjoyment are to only be enjoyed ‘in God’ and per the terms set forth can only be objects of use, but in his definition of ‘use’ there is a great deal of space to properly enjoy the created.

For Traherne, the world is to be unashamedly enjoyed, but like Augustine it is to be enjoyed with reference to God (as a divine gift and harbinger of God’s love). In chapter 39 of the *Kingdom of God* Traherne echoes Augustine ontological hierarchy when he differentiates the gifts of God and God in God-self:

What are Worlds in Comparison of God? Nothing and less then Nothing altogether

⁸¹ *Centuries*, II, 68.

Vanitie! All the presents that Love can bestow are Nothing in Comparison of the Beauty of that Lov from which they proceed; But Gods Lov is Infinitely Greater then all, Loves more Wise, more Ardent, more Constant, and therefore far greater then the Pledges which it Communicates to us.

However, Traherne spurns any kind of distinction between the enjoyment of God and the enjoyment of God's gifts when he says:

But to Enjoy God is Infinitely Greater then all this Were not Enjoyment of all Worlds, and the Enjoyment of God one. It doth not lessen the Enjoyment of God, but Enhance it, for being So perfect, that in the Enjoyment of God, all Enjoyment is included; the Enjoyment of ones self and of all being therin alone Sincere, and clear.

Traherne's unashamed celebration of the enjoyment of the creation and its creator strikes a different tone than Augustine's, and acts as a corrective to Augustine's core argument that creation is to be used and only God is to be enjoyed. For Traherne 'all worlds are far better then themselvs As they are Tokens, and Pledges of Gods Lov, it is Impossible to Enjoy them without Enjoying him' and 'On the other side it is Impossible to Enjoy God without Enjoying them: For God being an Infinit, and Eternal Act, cannot in Idleness, and Vacuitie be Enjoyed, but in his Elections and operations.' These two modes of enjoyment are inextricably linked for Traherne, but with his typical exuberance agrees with Augustine's claim that only God is to be enjoyed for God's sake own sake. Traherne explains:

To Enjoy God is to take Complacency, and delight in him, for being what he is, and doing what he does Loving what he Loves, requiring what he requires: It is to rest in him, as the compleat and Satisfactory Object of all our Desires. Which Since our Soul is So insatiably Ambitious and Coveteous, implies a transcendent, and Invincible Perfection in our last Object; and no less a Perfection in the Manner of our Enjoyment. For it were Impossible to rest in him as the compleat and Satisfactory Object of all our Desires, could our Thoughts Extend any further then he, either to better Objects, or better Powers, then he hath prepared and proposed. The Manner of our Enjoyment is Compleat, the Condition, the Means, and the End of our Enjoyment is compleat and perfect.⁸²

For both Traherne and Augustine, God is our final object of enjoyment, and resting place for the satisfaction of all our desires. Created objects are given as manifestations and signs of divine love and are to be enjoyed as harbingers of divine love. Since for Augustine all things are both signs and things, and for Traherne these things are signs of God's infinite love for humankind, creation is to be received and possessed as a gift of God's love, a gift that receives infinite signification through its relation to its inexhaustible source. For Traherne,

⁸² *Kingdom*, 476.

this richly textured way of receiving and enjoying the world is exemplified most clearly in the pure vision of the infant.

We conclude the above discussion with the following summary: the contemplative gaze of the child's innocent apprehensions sees by immediate intuition the beauty of creation, and discerns its infinite excellency in God; this pure vision of the substantial and real awakens a desire to possess and enjoy this beauty – which for Traherne is the infant's birthright – and this collection of desire and affection functions as the vivifying spring to the movements of the soul. These pure apprehensions mirror the purity of soul, and in this estate of pure sight the world is enjoyed in God and affects an ascent toward God.

4.2.5. *The Vision: 'An Antepast of Heaven'*

We come finally to the content of Traherne's vision, where adjectives are now coupled with nouns, but these rather common nouns – corn, wheat, dust, stones, gates, trees, men, maids, boys, girls, city – are strangely transfigured in the penetrating sight of the infant. Traherne begins with a curious conflation of corn and wheat:

The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy... Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite behind everything appeared which talked with my expectations and moved my desire. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven.⁸³

At first we are struck by the sheer commonness of the objects viewed by the infant Traherne – wheat, dust, trees – for, as has been shown, 'Tis not the Object, but the Light / That maketh Heaven; Tis a purer Sight.'⁸⁴ With this 'purer Sight' the infant sees through the veil of finite physicality and temporal 'Day' to view each object's true beauty and value as it springs forth from the infinite beauty, goodness and love of God, and stands in divine eternity. The convergence of time, space, eternity and infinity imbues an aesthetic balance to the Traherne's vision, all things abiding in their proper places. The balance, order, beauty, ecstasy, eternity and infinitude of this vision causes Traherne to express the parallel lines 'The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven.' The second image 'Heaven'

⁸³ *Centuries*, III, 3.

⁸⁴ 'The Preparative', 12.

seems to build on the first image 'Eden'. Heaven is the fruition of Eden. In the poem '*Innocence*' Traherne speaks of the 'Ravisht sense' of his 'Sight of Innocence' which he then calls

An Antepast of Heaven sure!
 I on the Earth did reign.
 Within, without me, all was pure.
 I must become a Child again.⁸⁵

The pure childhood apprehensions function as the pattern for true apprehensions here on earth, for they inaugurate us into the kingly life of Adam, sole heir of the earth. However, this ravishment is an 'Antepast', a foretaste, that wets the appetite for the fruition in heaven. For the infant in the *Centuries* these pure apprehensions of created objects 'transported and ravished me' but they pointed beyond themselves: 'something infinite behind everything appeared which talked with my expectations and moved my desire.' The coronation of the infant heir is not a consummation – the earthly king was made for heaven – but the infant heir's expectations and desires are properly moved by the infinite something made manifest in the beauty and worth of these finite objects before him.

As argued above, the estate of innocence constitutes a relative innocence, a preliminary step on the way to heaven. Traherne's desires to 'become a Child again', because in innocence the vision and desire are pure, and he is aware something has been lost, an apostasy has come. Traherne finishes the above meditation from *Centuries* after claiming that 'all the World was mine' with the lament, 'So that with much ado I was corrupted, and made to learn the dirty devices of this world. Which now I unlearn, and become, as it were, a little child again that I may enter into the Kingdom of God.' We regress into those estates that constitute the long parentheses, the shadow of death, that came as the beauty of innocence was abused and corrupted. The possibility of this abuse comes about because humankind has been placed in an estate of trial, an estate where the soul has been placed at a distance from God, an estate where a true exercise of the will is possible. We turn now to the Estate of trial as a way into, and the defining quality of the estates of misery and grace.

⁸⁵ '*Innocence*', 10.

4.3. The Estate of Trial: '[I]t was better to be made in a State of Trial'⁸⁶

In chapter 42 of *Kingdom of God* Traherne looks squarely at the 'State of Trial' the estate all human souls find themselves prior to the fixed estate after death. That God would place his beloved in such a perilous estate of freedom strains our very concept of a good and loving God. Traherne paints a utopian picture of life were there no estate of trial:

Had the Soul been made in the Image of God, and Immediatly seated in the Throne of Glory, there had never been any Trial, or Imperfection at all, never any hazzard, or Sin, never any Temptation fear or Allurement: but all Security, Peace, and Joy, Obligation, Love, and Gratitude, union, and communion in the Beatifick Vision: Nothing being seen but pleasures and Praises, nothing heard but Hosannahs, and Hallelujahs throughout Eternitie, Nothing but Holiness, and Beauty Delight, and Melodie. This is the common Conception of the World.⁸⁷

A life without trial, sin, or false allurements, sounds like just the type of world a good and loving God would produce. If the 'Beatifick Vision' is to be the thing that properly allures us, what is to be lost if we are so allured? Traherne asks a similar question in his poem

'*Thanksgivings for the Body*': 'But why would the Lord take pleasure in creating an earthly / Body? Why at all in making a visible World? Couldst thou not have made us immortal Souls, and seated us immediately in the throne of Glory?'⁸⁸ Why a body, why a world, why not souls eternally raptured in the 'union, and communion in the Beatifick Vision'? Based on what we have discussed above we might anticipate Traherne's response: without an estate of trial necessity replaces liberty and the soul loses its glory. Traherne offers a direct answer to the above quote from *The Kingdom of God*:

Had God Created his Image in immediate Glory, the Beauty of Goodness being clearly seen, would immediatly have attracted its Desires, and hav ravished its affections for evermore: so that there had been no Consultation no Debate, no Trial, but a swift, and Rapid Union of Souls unchangeably abiding for ever. Liberty had been Excluded, and necessity only, tho a Gratefull Necessity imposed upon it. Now for the soul to Act by necessity destroys its Glory.⁸⁹

Up to now we have been arguing that Traherne is seeking to do precisely this, namely to turn the reader's gaze to the 'the Beauty of Goodness', and work to purify her apprehensions, so that the clear sight of this beauty might attract desire and ravish the affections. But, ironically, creating 'his image in immediate Glory...destroys its Glory.' 'Trial' and 'Liberty'

⁸⁶ *Kingdom*, 495.

⁸⁷ *Kingdom*, 496.

⁸⁸ '*Thanksgivings for the Body*', ll. 170-173.

⁸⁹ *Kingdom*, 500.

are essential, for as we have already seen as image bearers we must be as God is and ‘it is the Glory of God, that he is a free, and Eternal Agent’, and to give us this liberty ‘is the vertical Point, the very Zenith, or utmost Height of our Exaltation.’⁹⁰ Traherne provides a similar argument in his poem ‘*Thanksgivings for the Body*’.⁹¹ It is the proper exercise of liberty that marks the soul’s ascent, and provides the means for the beautification and glorification of the soul. If placed in ‘immedate glory’ the sight of God’s beauty would infuse us with pleasure but ‘rob us of the Beauty and Glory of the Action’, for action is ‘chiefly requisite to our Consummation’.⁹² Like the free-moving parts of the watch, described above, the divine watchmaker has created the soul’s free movements with a definite teleology; to transform power into righteous, beautiful and glorious acts.

The poetry of Genesis two and three points to this morally essential distance from God in the prelapsarian innocence of Adam, but also reveals the radical diminishing of freedom as a result of its misuse. For Traherne, God places the human person in an estate of trial so the soul might be given the space to act freely and in turning power in the act progress toward its ‘Consummation’. In Traherne’s entry ‘Avarice’ in *Commentaries of Heaven* the free and proper movement of insatiable desire (also called avarice or covetousness) ‘leadeth us to all the fulness of God...wherein alone it can live and move with Delight’.⁹³ Obedience in freedom begets greater and greater expressions of freedom, while abused freedom begets an ever-growing bondage. There is no ‘righteous Kingdom’ without freedom, and no freedom without an estate of trial. In this estate the ‘humble and obedient Servants’ of God are invited to be objects of God’s delight, enabling God to see ‘Ingenuity, Thanksgiving, Fidelity, Wisdom, and Love’; essential qualities of Traherne’s beautiful soul.

Trial is a hallmark of all human existence before the estate of glory. For Traherne, the estate of trial is the life of faith, the life of trust in a seemingly ‘absent Benefactor’. The divine self-expression spoken of in Chapter 2 is veiled in this estate, for as Traherne reminds the reader ‘We Walk by faith, and not by Sight’,⁹⁴ therefore we act ‘in a Glimmering imperfect Light to honor him whom we see not’ but we are to act by faith as if we did see. Traherne concludes:

For Man to Act, as if his Soul did see

⁹⁰ Ibid., 498, 500.

⁹¹ ‘*Thanksgivings for the Body*’, ll. 174-181, 200-204

⁹² *Kingdom*, 501.

⁹³ ‘Avarice’, *Commentaries*, Vol. 3, 407.

⁹⁴ *Kingdom*, 501.

The very Brightness of Eternitie;
 For Man to Act, as if his Lov did burn
 Above the Spheres, even while tis in its urne;
 For Man to Act, even in the Willderness,
 ...
 To Keep Commands whose Beauty is unseen,
 To Cherish, and retrain a Zeal between
 Sleeping and Waking, shews a Constant Care,
 That Care a Lov in Truth, so Great, and Rare,
 That no Ey-Service may with it Compare.⁹⁵

These lines of verse speak both of the struggle and hardship of obedience in the estate of trial and the glory obtained by the faithful soul. We feel the tension of the life lived by the Christian ‘between Sleeping and Waking’, and the pastoral encouragement to take ‘Constant Care’ to stay awake. The ‘Act’ of the soul in the estate of trial is an act in the dark, therefore the abundant need for faith and hope.

The theological virtues of faith and hope speak of an eschatological reality ‘Above the Spheres’, beyond this current ‘Willderness’, where ‘Sight and Lov are so individually united in the Beatifick Vision that is Life Eternal to know God.’⁹⁶ Faith and hope (and love in the dark) are hallmarks of the virtuous life in the estate of trial, thus Traherne’s pedagogical efforts are directed to strengthen these theological virtues. Traherne’s discussion of the fancy – as discussed in Chapter 3 – within his Thomist epistemology proves helpful here. The fancy, as the recipient of both sense data and data derived from the imagination, enjoys a great deal of flexibility. The fancy, or imagination, can propose ‘the Ideas of any Thing possible, or Actual, present, or Absent to the Common Sence, and affect the Mind therewith, as if it were present.’⁹⁷ The freedom of the fancy – to do as it ‘pleaseth’ – and its capacity to govern both images received from the common sense and images it seemingly ‘Creat[es], or raise[s]’ means that in the estate of trial this capacity must be trained, and the shape of this training mirrors the fancy’s two-pronged capacity. In one pedagogical move, Traherne points the eyes to corporeal beauty world that they might be transfixed by this divine self-expression. Traherne’s next move is to point to the beauty that is inaccessible to the senses, a beauty corporeal beauty points to. In the estate of trial – an estate of faith, in the dark – divine beauty is often felt as want, lack, ‘vacuitie’, ‘Hunger’ or ‘Desire’, thus Traherne seeks to shape the Christian imagination in such a way that even the darkness is received as the

⁹⁵ *Kingdom*, 501-2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Kingdom*, 487.

silhouette of the good and beautiful. Traherne explains this phenomenon in his description of the 'Intelligible Appetite'.

The Objects of the Intelligible Appetite is all the GOOD, the vacuitie and Capacity of the Soul can Suggest to its Desire. Hunger in the Dark, supplying the Place of Beauty in the Light: the meer Absence of Good things creating a Sence, like the Knowledge of them.⁹⁸

The 'GOOD' is experienced as both 'Beauty in the Light' and 'Hunger in the Dark', but primarily as 'vacuitie', 'Capacity', 'Hunger' and 'Absence'. What is experienced as a privation in this estate, however, is transfigured into a messenger of hope, a 'Sence' and knowledge of the good understood by the shape of the 'vacuitie and Capacity' in its absence. Both beauty in the light and hunger in the dark point to divine goodness as their source and end. The Christian imagination Traherne is seeking to encourage in his readership is one that has eyes to receive the beauty of creation as a gift and messenger of divine goodness, while also being able to see the contours of divine beauty and goodness in the experience of 'Hunger in the Dark', that through the eyes of faith she might be allured (as by beauty) by the goodness and love of God.

Since the estate of trial is characteristic of the estates prior to heaven, we will explore these ideas when we speak of the estate of grace below, but now we turn to the estate that comes when the freedom afforded us in the estate of trial is misused and abused. We have turned away from divine beauty and by the abuse of our will made of our soul 'An ugly Object'.

That for our perfect Glory,
 Thou didst adventure into our hands
 A Power of displeasing thee.
 Which very confidence of thine ought more to oblige me,
 Than all the things in Heaven and Earth, faithfully to love thee.
 But wo is me, I have sinned against thee.
 I have sinned, O Lord,
 And put an Object before thee
 Which thou infinitely hatest.
 An ugly Object,
 Of infinite Deformity;
 From which it is impossible
 Thou Should'st turn away thine eyes.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ 'Appetite', *Commentaries*, 143.

⁹⁹ 'Thanksgivings for the Soul', ll. 460-472.

4.4. 'In the estate of misery, we have his fall, the nature of Sin, original and actual'¹⁰⁰

4.4.1. *The Fall: Abuse and Misapprehension*

How is it that the human soul, in the euphoric state of innocence would be so inclined to abuse her freedom and act against her own felicity? Where might we find the genesis of this abuse of power? What is the nature of this miserable state? How does this fall affect one's perception of the world and enjoyment of the world?

For Traherne, 'the Estate of Man in Eden' is the 'Patern of our Life on Earth', and the estate of misery is a falling away from this, therefore Traherne directs his reader to remember that 'we are Commanded, to consider from whence we are falne, and to repent.'¹⁰¹ So if in the estate of innocence the soul naturally receives the world as a divine self-expression and gift to be accepted and used for our good, the mark of the estate of misery is the abuse of nature, a 'Turning away from the Use of Things.' Traherne discusses the notion of abuse in the *Commentaries*, and in his definition of 'abuse' juxtaposes abuse with use.

Abuse, if we consider the Importance of the Word, is a Turning away from the Use of Things. So that not to Use those Things which we ought, is truly to Abuse them. It signifies also a Wrong Use; for then we Abuse, when we use Things in another Maner, to another End, then was by Nature intended. If therfore GOD intended His Abundance to be Used, not to Use them is to Abuse them. And if he Designed the Use of them to consist in Honoring, and in Serving Him, by and for; to turn them against Him, is more to Abuse them.¹⁰²

To abuse an object is to use it for 'another End, then was by Nature intended.' Used abusively, the object that was intended to bring honor and service to God, are now used 'against Him'. In our discussion above, we sought to balance Traherne's exhortation to 'enjoy the world' against Augustine's use-enjoyment distinction in his *De Doctrina Christiana*. In his use-abuse distinction, Traherne seems to echo Augustine's claim that an 'improper use of something should be termed abuse' (4.4). For Augustine, disordered attachment to created things impedes our heavenward journey, thus causing us to abuse creation (4.3). In a qualified sense, as we saw above, Traherne's understanding of abuse and use show continuity with Augustine's view. Traherne's entry, 'Abuse', in the *Commentaries* explores the genesis of this abuse, in the disobedient eating of the forbidden fruit.

¹⁰⁰ *Centuries*, III, 43.

¹⁰¹ 'The Second Adam', *Commentaries*, 227.

¹⁰² 'Abuse', *Commentaries*, 64.

Naturally, Traherne turns to Genesis and to Adam – the archetype of innocence – to further describe the origin of sin. ‘When Adam was first placed in Paradiſe, the Great Abuse that could hav been put on all Things, ſeemeth to be a Contempt of their Excellency.’ However this ſin was ‘too great for him to be Guilty of in the Eſtate of Innocency the Trial of his Obedience was made to Conſiſt in a Smaller Thing. Wherin nevertheless a Secret Abuse of all Things and Creatures was contained, as well as Uſe. In the Act of Chusing about the forbidden fruit, he could uſe them all, or Abuse them all.’ By ‘Contemplating their Beauty and Obeying Him. I uſe them all; but by Diſobeying Him I deſpiſe and loſe them, and yet uſe their Strengths and miniſtries againſt Him.’¹⁰³ The contemplation of beauty and obedience to God are two primary components to a proper uſe of the world. For Augustine, when uſed properly the creation is uſed to ‘aſſiſt us and give us a boost, ſo to ſpeak, as we preſs on towards our happineſſ’ (4.3), and for Traherne, abuſe of creation miſdirects this ‘boost’ and forms it into a weapon againſt God.

For Traherne, uſe and teleology are cloſely aligned; an object finds it proper uſe in fulfilling its proper end. Traherne locates the fall in the rejection of creation’s ‘End’ as a divine ‘Gift of His Lov to Man’:

GOD being infinit in Goodneſſ and Bounty, deſigned to Creat a World, and to fill it with Great and Amiable Creatures, all which being Divine and Beautifull he would make a Gift of His Lov to Man. Whom he raiſed up for this End, that He might Enjoy the Happineſſ of being the Lord over them; ... uſing all the Creatures to Beautify Himſelf with Lov and Knowledg... This being the End of GODs Deſires, it is a Sin to Deſpiſe the Effect of ſo Great Bounty, a very great Sin not to receiv and uſe it. A Sin againſt GOD, againſt Nature, againſt the Creatures, againſt our Selves againſt all the Things in Heaven and Earth¹⁰⁴

In addition to claiming with Augustine that created beauty and goodneſſ are to be uſed to aid us in our journey home, Traherne further claims that Adam was to uſe ‘all the Creatures to Beatify Himſelf with Lov and Knowledg’, that he might be an object of God’s enjoyment. However, to deſpiſe this gift, and reſuſe to ‘receiv and uſe it’ reſults in a multilayered ſin againſt God, Nature, all Creatures, ourſelves and all things. This is a cataſtrophic and ubiquitous rebellion. ‘How Grievous this Sin is’? Traherne aſks as he continues, ‘we may ſee that, It was a Sin too Great for Man to be Guilty of in the Eſtate of Innocency.’ This ſin cannot be committed by one who has received God’s creation with ‘Open Eys’. Traherne explains that a preceding corruption of ‘Forgetfulneſſ and Blindneſſ’ opens the door for the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 69-70

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

despising of God's gift:

No man can with Open Eys despise so Beautifull and Glorious a Gift, as GOD and All Things. No man can Willingly contemn Abundance. Even Sinners cannot do it, being Redeemed; till first they are corrupted with Forgetfulness and Blindness. And then, a Man may strike the fairest Beauty in the whole World.¹⁰⁵

There is an initial corruption, and contrary to Augustine, this corruption is not pride but forgetfulness and blindness. Adam is blinded to the 'Divine and Beautifull' world, blinded to it as a 'Gift' and harbinger 'of His lov to Man.' Once the soul has lost vision of the beauty and glory of God's gift the human agent is enabled to abuse the world and 'strike the fairest Beauty in all the World'. This loss of vision and understanding forms the 'Gate, or Inlet to all other Sins.'

Losing sight and knowledge of God as our ultimate object of love and delight causes 'a Disorder so great, that it occasiond a change in the Oeconomie of the World.' The natural powers of the soul, now devoid of true riches from God, go roving about looking for other riches and pleasures to satisfy them:

so when once we have made our selvs enemies by sin, if GOD alloweth us Time and Libertie, Nature provoketh us to Lust and Sensualitie, because having no Delight in Him, and having defiled and Despised his Riches, we seek for Riches and Pleasures of our own. Upon which all the vices break in which naturaly follow Narrow fals invented Riches.¹⁰⁶

When infinite desire is stricken by 'Forgetfulness and Blindness' – in *A Sober View* he uses the term '*Inconsideration*'¹⁰⁷ – human *eros* (desiring love), which is meant to find delight in God, seeks after vain riches, and deforms desire into 'Lust and Sensualitie'. To the blinded soul God's 'Allurements are made in vain, and Abused' when desire is deformed into lust. For in desire the soul enjoys the finite objects of creation in God and as a gift from God, but lust and sensuality crave riches severed from God as the source of all good things.¹⁰⁸

We noted Traherne's debt to the theology of Irenaeus above, and here we see – as Grant rightly argues – that in both Irenaeus and Traherne the 'idea of sin as misevaluation.'¹⁰⁹ In *A Sober View*, he argues that what sits at the root of this misevaluation, or as Traherne would say 'Misapprehension', is failure to know God as love. For Traherne, 'The first thing

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 70-1.

¹⁰⁷ *Sober View*, 92.

¹⁰⁸ See Romans 1:18-32, for an account of the downward spiral of the soul who loses sight of God as creator.

¹⁰⁹ Grant, *The Transformation of Sin*, 188.

the Devil persuaded our first Parents in Paradise was that God did not love them Enough', and was somehow withholding something from them that was good. The Devil 'chiefly assaulteth our Faith' by getting us to disbelieve that '*God is Love*' for when he succeeds 'he knoweth what follows Naturally, the Pyson is taken, the seed is sowed...and it will grow up in Alienation and Enmity against him.' Traherne here, is combating those who would posit hate in God. This 'sour and bitter Doctrine of Gods Eternal Hatred' causes those who ought 'to come with Joy and Melody into his Presence' instead 'through fear and Dread, they first think basely of themselves and dislike GOD,' and are 'finally estranged from him.' A true apprehension of God is to see that '*God is Love*: and Love is infinit in Goodness and Bounty; Love delighteth in it object's Happiness; Love is the Fountain of all Joys; Love is Communicative and Distributive of its Treasures; Lov is infinit in its Riches: Love designs the Exaltation of its Creature: Love is Holy, Wise, and Glorious: Love is that Joy and Prais of All.'¹¹⁰ For Traherne, to understand God as anything other than love sows 'Alienation and Enmity', and proliferates heterodoxy.

The above quote from *A Sober View*, Traherne's treatise on election. In it he seeks to tread a *via media* between the Arminianism of Dr. Twisse and the Calvinism of Dr. Hammonds.¹¹¹ In this treatise Traherne raises up Nero two times to exemplify the interrelation of the nature of one's soul and her perception. In this example, he contrasts the misapprehension of Nero – which he compared to the Calvinist view of Dr. Hammonds – with the pure apprehension of Melanchthon:

This Mistake of Dr Hammonds, if we consider its Original is one of the most innocent Mistakes that may be. For as Nero being Adulterer him self thought all the World Adulterers, and the chastest Catoes and Lucretia's Counterfeits: as Melanchthon seeing the beauty of Divine truth, when he was a yong man and inexperienced, thought verily he should convert all the World: so this Great and Worthy Divine, being him self ravished with the Beauty of Eternal Truth, with which he was always present, thought it was impossible for any man not to see it, or seeing it, not to be transformed, and transported with it.¹¹²

The pure apprehensions of 'inexperienced' Melanchthon allowed him to see 'the beauty of Divine truth', and that all who saw as he did should 'be transformed, and transported with it.' It is unsurprising to find Traherne raising up Melanchthon as an example of moderation to counter the more extreme Calvinist view of double-predestination, for as Wallace shows, 'In

¹¹⁰ *Sober View*, 195.

¹¹¹ For an extended discussion of Traherne's treatment of freedom in *A Sober View* see Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 153–62.

¹¹² *Sober View*, 91-2.

the seventeenth Century...Melanchthon came to symbolize a moderate, ethical, ceremonious, and patristic-inspired Protestantism of the sort that emerged in the Church of England among those Anglicans who opposed the more Puritan and Calvinist program that had long been promoted for the English church.¹¹³

In contrast to Melanchthon, as Traherne says elsewhere, Nero measured ‘others by himself, and Knowing his own baseness, he thought it impossible, but that evry Ones nature should be inwardly bad, because his own was so Extremely vile, and was to him the measure of all the World.’ Traherne acknowledges that to ‘Measure others by himself, appears very Rational’, and ‘It is just in it self that Man should Measure all things by himself, because he is the model, and Perfect of them: But being fallen and corrupted he hath lost himself, and till he be raised up again by Grace, doth unjustly’ do so.¹¹⁴ For Traherne, the pernicious elements of certain forms of Calvinism that posit hate in God and natural vileness in humankind, stems from epistemological corruption brought on by sin. We project our internal vileness onto God, our fellow image bearers and the world around us, and assume that corruption is ‘natural’. However, in Traherne’s epistemology of experience, instead of measuring the world by our vileness, the world rebukes the vileness of the disordered soul:

All things were well in their proper places, I alone was out of frame and had need to be mended. For all things were God’s treasures in their proper places, and I was to be restored to God’s Image. Whereupon you will not believe, how I was withdrawn from all endeavours of altering and mending outward things. They lay so well, methought, they could not be mended: but I must be mended to enjoy them.¹¹⁵

What Traherne is keenly aware of, however, is that misapprehension and inconsideration of ‘outward things’ was a hallmark of the estate of misery. For ‘Grit in the eye or yellow jaundice will not let a man see those objects truly that are before it’,¹¹⁶ and because this blindness ‘*separates the Soul from the most Glorious Objects*’, the miserable soul is guarded against the healing efficacy of these divine objects. Traherne explains:

But Inconsideration separates the Soul from the most Glorious Objects, and as the most forcible Plaster if not applied will not heal the Wound, so neither Eternity it self, nor Divine Love, nor the Beauty of Holiness, nor infinit Goodness, nor all those will do any thing upon that Soul that is divided from them.

¹¹³ Dewey D. Wallace, “The Anglican Appeal to Lutheran Sources: Philipp Melanchthon’s Reputation in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 52, no. 4 (1983): 366.

¹¹⁴ *Sober View*, 292.

¹¹⁵ *Centuries*, III.60.

¹¹⁶ *Centuries*, III. 5.

4.4.2. *The Fall: 'the customs and manner of men'*

Inconsideration, blindness, and its cognates form the basis of Traherne's own fall into sin in the *Centuries*. Following Irenaeus' idea that Adam is both an archetypical head, and an 'everyman', and that as Adam's innocence in Eden is the innocence of a child, the Adamic fall is rehearsed in Traherne's own fall from childhood innocence.¹¹⁷ In Traherne's autobiographical third century, he articulates how one's misapprehensions or true apprehensions are communicated to others. He begins by defining the good impact his own soul can have on another:

Since therefore we are born to be a burning and shining light, and whatever men learn of others, they see in the light of others' souls: I will in the light of my soul show you the Universe. Perhaps it is celestial, and will teach you how beneficial we may be to each other.¹¹⁸

What becomes quickly clear, however, is that this natural influence souls have on each other becomes the impetus for Traherne's own fall into misery, for in the next meditation he laments: 'The first Light which shined in my Infancy in its primitive and innocent clarity was totally eclipsed insomuch that I was fain to learn all again. If you ask me how it was eclipsed? Truly by the customs and manners of men.' '[A]ll the celestial, great, and stable treasures to which I was born,' were 'wholly forgotten' by these men, and replaced with 'rude, vulgar and worthless things'. '[B]y the evil influence of a bad education' Traherne was taught not to treasure his divine birthright.¹¹⁹

As Traherne continues he sets up an antithesis between human custom and nature, and in so doing he offers one of his most polarizing claims, a claim that, as we saw above, has caused some to call him Pelagian:

I clearly find how docible our Nature is in natural things, were it rightly entreated. And that our misery proceedeth ten thousand times more from the outward bondage of opinion and custom, than from any inward corruption or depravation of Nature: And that it is not our parents' loins, so much as our parents' lives, that enthrals and blinds us. Yet is all our corruption derived from Adam inasmuch as all the evil examples and inclinations of the world arise from his sin.

We bracket the discussion of Traherne's understanding of original sin, for we spoke of this

¹¹⁷ Grant, *The Transformation of Sin*, 184–185.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 7.

above. What is at the fore in this context is the profound goodness of nature and the evil corrupting influence of human custom. What is lost for Traherne is ‘my pure primitive virgin Light’, the ‘apprehensions’ which ‘were natural, and umixed’, and though naturally ‘more prone to good and excellent things’, ‘I was quickly tainted and fell by others.’¹²⁰ The natural, for Traherne, bears ontological solidity, for it comes from the hand of God, while custom come from the hand of humanity and has sin as its fountain. The natural is not simply what feels natural or comes naturally, for often our sense of what is natural is actually ‘preternatural’,¹²¹ and is derived from human custom. But what was the dynamic that caused the evil examples and inclinations of custom to affect the fall into misery?

Traherne’s fall from a pure apprehension of the world (and thus a true apprehension of the worlds treasures) is affected by the ‘rotten’ thoughts of others:

Thoughts are the most present things to thoughts, and of the most powerful influence. My soul was only apt and disposed to great things; but souls to souls are like apples to apples, one being rotten rots another. When I began to speak and go, nothing began to be present to me, but what was present to me in their thoughts. Nor was anything present to me any other way, than it was so to them. The glass of imagination was the only mirror, wherein anything was represented or appeared to me.

The fallen epistemological structures of others infected Traherne’s own mind through the medium of the distorted thoughts of these others. What was previously present in the imagination (the glories of God’s creation) had now been replaced by the ‘riches of man’s invention’: ‘As for the Heavens and the Sun and the Stars they disappeared, and were no more unto me than bare walls, So that the strange riches of man’s invention quite overcame the riches of Nature’.¹²² The fragile purity of the infants thoughts ‘by degrees vanished, my thoughts (as indeed what is more fleeing that a thought?) were blotted out’.¹²³ In Traherne’s four poems entitled ‘Thoughts’ in the Dobell sequence he praises both the divine qualities of thoughts – ‘Ye Thoughts and Apprehensions are / The Heavenly Streams which fill the Soul with rare / Transcendent Perfect Pleasures’¹²⁴ – yet ‘So Tender’ and ‘So Prone, so Easy, and so Apt to fade’, thus the need for ‘Continual Care’.¹²⁵ In the estate of misery these tender thoughts were not properly cared for, and thus faded away.

¹²⁰ *Centuries*, III.8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁴ ‘*Thoughts*. I’, 63.

¹²⁵ ‘*Thoughts*. II’, 66.

In this new estate of misery, the soul was now severed from the divine riches of creation, through a misevaluation of true treasure, and through a corrupting of the epistemological structures. The beauty and glory of creation ‘disappeared’ to Traherne’s eyes through the ontological misevaluation of his teachers. It would have been easy for ‘nurses’ and ‘parents’ to teach the truth, ‘For nothing is so easy as to teach truth because the nature of the things confirms the doctrine’, but to teach the child to value what is most fundamentally a privation ‘is deadly barbarous and uncouth to the child; and makes him suspect all you say, because the nature of the thing contradicts your words.’ The result of this teaching is that in the child you ‘blot out all noble and divine ideas, dissettle his foundation, render him uncertain in all things, and divide him from God.’¹²⁶ This severance from external objects of true value means at its core a severance from God.

One important result of this foundational severance is the alienation of the soul from body which creates disorder in the child’s epistemological structures. We discussed in Chapter 3 the importance of the bodily senses for Traherne’s epistemology, but in *The Kingdom of God* Traherne says of the senses: ‘They were made Immortal in the Beginning, because their Senses were united to Rational and Intelligible Powers, and by the union did Partake of all their Excellencies: Sin only broke the Bond, and canceled the Privelege.’¹²⁷ For Traherne, the epistemological disorder that follows Adam’s first sin is imbedded in the evil desires and value structures of the world, creating two worlds where there was once one:

Truly there are two worlds. One was made by God, the other by men. That made by God was great and beautiful. Before the Fall it was Adam’s joy and the Temple of his Glory. That made by men is a Babel of Confusions: Invented Riches, Poms and Vanities, brought in by Sin: Give all (saith Thomas à Kempis) for all. Leave the one that you may enjoy the other.¹²⁸

The descent into misery is the descent into the world ‘made by men’ whereby the ‘great and beautiful world’ ‘made by God’ is met by a soul no longer able to see or hear the divine self-expression. It is to this soul that Traherne says ‘pray for Ey Salv’,¹²⁹ and ‘Leave the one that you may enjoy the other’, but he also offers his own soul as a counter to the corrupting influences that created rot in his own soul: ‘I will in the light of my soul show you the Universe. Perhaps it is celestial, and will teach you how beneficial we may be to each

¹²⁶ *Centuries*, III, 11.

¹²⁷ *Kingdom*, 421.

¹²⁸ *Centuries*, I, 7.

¹²⁹ *Kingdom*, 268.

other.’¹³⁰ So we proceed now to the estate of grace – the mixed estate as we saw above, ‘between / Sleeping and Waking’¹³¹ – taking special care to note how Traherne conceived of this movement from the world constituted by vanity and privation to the world of ontological solidity, received by the pure in heart.

4.5. The Estate of Grace

Denise Inge rightly argues that ‘the estate of grace is an estate of progress, of reconciliation and of trial. It is a mixed estate, the estate in which we live the vast majority of our lives – the place where virtue may grow out of affliction.’ And because this is ‘the estate in which we live the vast majority of our lives’ this is the estate ‘that almost all of his work in some way refers.’¹³² For the sake of clarity, Inge, suggests identifying the third estate as the estate of trial,¹³³ but I suggest that the ubiquitous nature of divine grace makes it an apt title to give to this mixed third estate. The pure apprehensions of the estate of innocence, the privations and darkness of the estate of misery and the allurements of the beatific vision in the estate of glory are all at work in the estate of grace.

Grace is a theologically rich notion in Traherne that constitutes ‘the fountain’ of all of God’s activity of creation, redemption and sanctification:

And as a free Grace was the fountain of the Creation, and of the Redemption, so we see it the fountain of the Sanctification of the world; and richer and more Sublime at last then at the first.¹³⁴

Holding these three divine activities together as flowing from God’s ‘free Grace’, Traherne is disinclined to draw a strong distinction between the theological notions of nature and grace. Creation (and created human capacities: i.e. human freedom) and salvation history alike flow from the gratuitous, simple and eternal divine act. As such, in Traherne’s articulation of redemption and ongoing sanctification he maintains a strong insistence of both divine and human freedom; both being aspects of divine grace. Divine grace in redemption does not destroy human freedom, instead any free will act in accepting God’s free gift of grace ‘is to be ascribed to’ God, for it is ‘purely of the Grace of God in giving a Savior that these Powers

¹³⁰ *Centuries*, I, 6.

¹³¹ *Kingdom*, 502.

¹³² Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 162–163.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Sober View*, 76

and Operations were bestowed upon Miserable Sinners'.¹³⁵ As we progress we will see that Traherne is less concerned with parsing a hard line of demarcation between human and divine agency in redemption, for all human capacities are to be understood, received and exercised as divine gift.

The estate of misery, the estate of the 'Reprobate' and 'Apostate', is an estate of privation: the privation of goodness, beauty and light. What was created good and beautiful has been defaced, leaving the soul both ugly and blind. But, God responds to our sad estate and acts toward the creation in a deeper, richer and more Sublime way than was seen at the first. The capacity of God to bring good and beauty out of evil and deformity - 'working all things together for good' (Rom. 8.28), with the new creation outstripping its original – is a central idea running through Traherne's notion of redemption and salvation.

In the estate of misery 'When God saw that they erred, their Crime was as The Blood of Dragons, and the Venom of Aspes unto them; the Grapes of Sodom, and the bitter Clusters of Gomorrah were no so grievous and distasteful,'¹³⁶ yet in 'convert[ing] such worthless and Horrid Creatures' God's 'Free Grace is exalted to the utmost Zenith.'¹³⁷ God's Grace, being the free movement of God's love – the fountain of God's goodness, wisdom, beauty, etc. – toward God's creation, 'wrought a greater Wonder' in redemption, for instead of good being brought into being out of nothing, now good must be brought out of evil.

He wrought by his Almighty power for his names Sake...a greater Wonder then when he first Created all out of Nothing. It is a dreadfull and amazing verity. He brought Good out of Evil, Light out of Darkness, Happiness out of Misery, Joy out of Sorrow, Glory out of Shame, Lov out of hatred, Holiness out of Sin, and Beauty out of Deformity. He overturned the Course of Nature, which now was corrupt as Man had done before when it was divine and blessed. for as Sin turned all into a Curse, he turned all into a Blessings,

and God's 'Irresistible Grace and Providence upheld and Established a more Glorious Kingdom then the first'.¹³⁸ This more glorious kingdom is what flows forth when God graciously communicated God-self to a creation that has become corrupt and accursed. God's ability to bring 'Good out of Evil, Light out of Darkness...', and Beauty out of Deformity' is humankind's only hope of rescue in the estate of misery ('Happiness out of Misery'), and a defining mark of the estate of grace.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 134.

¹³⁶ *Kingdom of God*, 291.

¹³⁷ *A Sober View*, 76.

¹³⁸ *Kingdom of God*, 291.

In *A Sober View*, Traherne extends the theme of God bringing good from evil, while emphasizing how God brings ‘Beauty out of Deformity’ and ‘Lov out of hatred’. God’s capacity to bring goodness, beauty and love into a world deformed by sin is an extension of God’s gracious work of creation, for as we argued in Chapter 2, love, goodness and beauty form the metaphysical bones of God’s creation – love being the ‘fountain of Goodness’ and made manifest in beauty.¹³⁹

In the following from *A Sober View*, God responds to the privation of beauty brought on by ‘Mans Deplorable Apostasie’ by doing a new work of beautification. Traherne begins by exploring the hopelessness of God’s ‘Righteous Kingdom’ brought about by ‘Mans universal Rebellion against redeeming Grace.’

By this Rebellion of theirs his Righteous Kingdom was wholly laid waste...the Hoped for Beauty was all abolished, and nothing but the Beauty of Darkness and Torment to ensue in its Place. When loe God Almighty deviseth a New Means, ...making his Absolut and Free Grace the fountain of all Beauty in all Ages: and turning Mans Deplorable Apostasie and final Rebellion into an occasion of much further Goodness Mercy and Grace then could at all be conceived.¹⁴⁰

This is not the rebellion of the heathen, but that of the redeemed, the baptized (infant or adult), therefore the apostate, who has fallen into rebellion ‘from the State of Grace’.¹⁴¹ For Traherne, the apostate is not left in ‘final Rebellion’ but God ‘worketh an unheard of thing which could not miscarry’. According to the *Centuries*, Traherne sees himself as one of these apostate, gifted with the pure apprehensions of innocence and yet fallen from this state. The ‘Hoped for Beauty’ of God’s righteous kingdom is removed, leaving misery and the ‘Beauty of Darkness’ in its place. However, God’s Goodness, Mercy and Grace – in Christ¹⁴² – works a new beauty out of the privation of beauty. In this new work of ‘Grace’ toward the apostate, God reveals that ‘his Absolut and Free Grace’ is ‘the fountain of all Beauty in all Ages’. Beauty springs forth naturally from divine grace in all estates, but we find in the estate of misery and grace, the difficulty of creating beauty from deformity necessitated a ‘further Goodness Mercy and Grace’ and thus a more glorious beauty.

What is most essential, and most foundational in Traherne’s understanding of creation and salvation history is not goodness or beauty, but love. As love is the form of God’s kingdom (this love being a creature, the best of all creation, the wellspring of creation, and

¹³⁹ *Kingdom*, 310, 312.

¹⁴⁰ *Sober View*, 159.

¹⁴¹ ‘Apostasie’, *Commentaries*, Vol. 2, p. 124

¹⁴² *Sober View*, 159.

communication of the divine essence), love is the source of all gratuitous divine acts toward God's creation. It is the principle of union that draws God's kingdom together, enabling enjoyment of God's creation, enjoyment of God, and union with God.¹⁴³ The great enemy in Traherne's system is hatred, for hatred removes these enjoyments, severs this union with God and excludes us from the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. But God, the divine alchemist, has worked to bring a greater expression of divine love to the creature than she would have ever known in the estate of innocence. Traherne describes the movement of love to hate as a natural movement brought on by sin, for 'When Man was faln into Sin, all the Natural Consequences of Sin becam Natural,'¹⁴⁴ which when compared to 'the Estate of Innocency were [actually] Accidental and Preternatural', but – as we will see below – God's response to 'Man... faln into Sin' is to be 'Termed Supernatural'.¹⁴⁵ Traherne continues to explore the notion of the natural, while describing this movement from love to hate, in the following:

Man therfore naturally loving to be Beloved, naturally loveth him that loveth him. And for this caus he naturally loved God in the Estate of Innocency: Because God loved him. But being faln into sin, and all Nature telling him it was unpardonable; the Holiness and justice of God assured him, it could never be forgiven; and that consequently he must Eternally be Hated. God seemed all turned into HATRED TO HIM.¹⁴⁶

The structure of divine holiness and justice that are imbedded in 'Nature', naturally condemns the sinner, and as God is seemingly 'all turned into HATRED TO HIM', 'he naturally Hated God' and so was excluded from 'the Kingdom of Heaven'. The loss of this mutual love between the self and God is Hell, whereas 'The Sight and Possession of that Love is Heaven.'

Later, following Augustine, Traherne names this divine love as the Holy Spirit: 'the Holy Spirit is the LOVE of the Father and the Son, which proceeding from them appeareth to the Understanding in the Means of Grace and Dwelling in them (for they that see it receive it)'.¹⁴⁷ To misperceive God as all hatred, is to reject the Spirit of God and abide in hell, whereas to receive it is to receive the Spirit and abide in heaven. But to the one excluded from heaven, God offers 'a New Abyss and Mine of Love', that 'Make Sinful Man's Joy and Lov greater than before':

¹⁴³ *Kingdom*, 433-434.

¹⁴⁴ *Sober View*, p. 132.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 133

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

But when GOD was pleased above all Imagination to reveal a New Abyss and Mine of Love unhopd, unexpected, in giving a Savior, the Winter was past, the Night of Darkness was gone, the very self same Principle of self Preservation made it natural again for man to love and rejoyce in God; his Guilt, his Danger, and the Sense of his Loss making his Happiness greater then before... All which Graces being Natural Results of God's Lov in giving a Savior, attend his Son like so many Angels; and becaus they proceed from above, and make Sinfull Man's Joy and Lov greater then before, are Termed Supernatural. Both as compared to our Nature falne, and our Nature Innocent. Even in Innocence we could not love God so much as now we may do, And before we were redeemed being Sinners we could not love him at all.¹⁴⁸

Not only does this 'New Abyss' of divine love make 'it natural again for man to love' God, but this love is greater. Human fallenness both elicits a deeper and more profound expression of divine love toward 'man', it elicits a great love in the soul toward God. The love of the one in the estate of innocence is outstripped by the love of the redeemed. This soul has known the privation of divine love in the estate of misery, and the joy, delight, love and enjoyment of God's love breaking into their 'Night of Darkness'. That this new experience of divine love makes 'Sinfull Man's Joy and Lov greater then before', reveals again a deep conviction in Traherne that lack, struggle, darkness, are experiences that, when redeemed, function to enhance the enjoyment and love of God when the lack is filled. In the *Centuries* it is want that enhances enjoyment (I. 43 'Infinite Wants satisfied produce infinite joys), in *Kingdom of God* struggle and blindness of the estate of grace and trial increase the value of a virtuous life (ch. 42 'For Man to Act, even in the Wilderness/... To Keep Commands whose Beauty is unseen/... doth Increase the Valu of his Deeds), and in *A Sober View*, as we have seen, the privation of love, goodness and beauty in the estate of misery enhances the love, goodness and beauty in the estate of grace. As such, the estate of grace is superior to the estate of innocence, thus, the goal of the Christian journey should not be conceived as a simple return to this childlike state. In describing the estate of grace, Traherne pivots from seeing Adam as the exemplar – for he exemplifies the estate of innocence – and instead locates Christ as both savoir and proper example to those who inhabit this estate, for he teaches us 'how in the midst of Evil Customs and Corruptions to live a Life of Happiness and Glory.'¹⁴⁹ In the following we explore these two Christological aspects in Traherne's theology.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 133.

¹⁴⁹ 'Second Adam', *Commentaries*, Vol. 2, p. 227. 'Our Savior therfore who came to dissolv the Works of the Divel, as well as to make Satisfaction for Sin, cometh into the World to teach us by his Example how in the midst of Evil Customs and Corruptions to live a Life of Happiness and Glory.'

4.5.1 *The Reconciling Work of Christ*

Traherne makes his clearest statements regarding the saving and reconciling work of Christ in his entry 'Atonement' in his *Commentaries of Heaven*. In this entry Traherne identifies the 'Socinians' – a Unitarian sect who denied the divinity of Christ and saw the imitation of Christ as efficacious for salvation – as his primary foil. To defend an orthodox view of the atonement – a doctrine opaque to natural reason for it is supernatural, alien and a mystery – Traherne turns to the biblical texts, and espouses an atonement theory that is in conformity to the reformed notion of penal substitution. Christ, the incarnate divine Son of God, is the means of this atonement, the setting 'at one those Persons that were divided',¹⁵⁰ by offering up himself as 'the Propiciation, or Satisfaction which is made to Divine Justice for man; or the Sacrifice which is offered and accepted in his Steed.'¹⁵¹ This is an incredible mystery to Traherne: 'that GOD should appear in his own flesh, to put away Sins in the End of the World, was so unconceivable, and so incredible among men, that without Evidences infinitely Strong and Clear, it is impossible to believ it.' For Traherne, this mystery is prefigured in the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant, which now functions as a 'Schole Master to bring us to Christ.' For the 'Jewish Sacrifices were ordained to this purpose, that they might shew and testifie a Truth recorded, that without Shedding of Blood there is no Remission,'¹⁵² while also testifying that 'it is impossible for the Blood of Bulls and Goats to take away sins', thus only 'in virtu of his Blood, who is the Lamb of GOD, that taketh away the Sins of the World.'¹⁵³ For Traherne, the language of penal substitution makes the most sense the divine revelation. The Atonement is a divine supernatural act, springing forth from God's love and perfect wisdom. Echoing our discussion of divine freedom and constraint in Chapter 2 Traherne affirms, 'God can do nothing but the most perfect Action, and to Glorify his Mercy without satisfying his Justice, was not so perfect as to satisfy and Glorify both together.'¹⁵⁴ To those who would want to argue for God having 'absolute Power', thus 'able to do any Kind of Evil', Traherne argues that

it is impossible with GOD to lie, and impossible for him to deny himself. Not as if GOD were not able to do these things if he would, but he cannot incline his mind unto them, or rather will not: tis inconsistent with his Wisdom and Goodness, the

¹⁵⁰ 'Atonement', *Commentaries*, Vol. 3, 364.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 365.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 368.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 367-368.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 372.

impossibility doth not arise from a Defect of Power, but from his Perfection.¹⁵⁵ Divine justice, wisdom and love are united in Christ's free gift of atonement. The atonement, at its core, is a loving act: 'Sin was the Occasion, but Love the Original of this Atonement. It springeth from a Lov infinite'. The love of the Father toward the creation causes God to send the Son, but the Son is not compelled by the Father, instead 'so great was [the Son's] Lov to God and man, that for the sake of both he died for us.'¹⁵⁶ Seeing the desire of the Father to be reconciled to humankind, and being himself driven by love, Christ offered himself: 'His Death proceeded from this Lov.'¹⁵⁷ The repugnance of the image of a divine Father who offers up his son for the sake of another is appeased for Traherne in the image of the preexistent Son offering up *himself* for the sake of love.

4.5.2. *Christ as Exemplar*

Having articulated how Christ brought about reconciliation between God and humankind through his atoning death, Traherne turns to Christ as exemplar of the life of felicity.

Our Savior therefore who came to dissolv the Works of the Divil, as well as to make Satisfaction for Sin, cometh into the World to teach us by his Example how in the midst of Evil Customs and Corruptions to live a Life of Happiness and Glory...He is not only the Redeemer but Teacher of Mankind. The Prophet as well as Priest, the Means as well as End of the World...As He is the Sacrifice purchasing Eternal Glory, so is He the Way leading to it.¹⁵⁸

For Traherne, Christ is both 'Redeemer' and 'Teacher', the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:1). Thus, Jesus is the giver of life and the measure of the good life. He is the 'Great Exemplar by imitating whom we gain our Perfection', for containing 'all Beauty Perfection and Happiness' he is the 'only Meritorious Life of Prais and Imitation'. Superior to Adam, and more accessible than the Father, Jesus functions as the proper object of our adoration and imitation: 'being far more Excellent then the Life of Adam, in this only differed from that of God that it appeared in a Body, being therby more accommodated to human Imitation.'¹⁵⁹ Christ being the 'Brightness of his fathers Glory and Express Image of His Person' is humankind's true and proper object of imitation, thus for Traherne, a proper object of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 373.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 370.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 371.

¹⁵⁸ 'Second Adam', *Commentaries*, 227-228.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 228.

contemplation.

As a true object of imitation, distinct from the Father who ‘is purely Spiritual and ...superior therefore to the Notice of flesh and Blood’, and Adam whose innocence was ‘in peace’, we are to affix our eyes on Christ, who won ‘all Beauty Perfection and Happiness’ amongst the trials of the estate of grace:

His Life excelleth Adams also, in that amid the Poverties and Riches of this World, the Contrary Opinions and Practices of men, the Sins and Curses that oppress the Earth all which make it difficult to be innocent He remained Blessed. for Adam lived in peace, He in War Adam Enjoyed He Triumphed. Now evry Man knoweth that Victory and Triumph are far more sweet then Quiet Possession: and not only more Sweet but more Glorious.¹⁶⁰

It is virtuous act in the life of trial that is most glorious and nearest to our own experience.

our Savior being a man Subject to passions as we are, and compassed with Infirmities hath taught us to reconcile the Multiplicity of Human Actions and Necessities to the Unity of Blessedness, and notwithstanding the Temptations wherewith we are surrounded, to live the Life of Adam still, to which we are again restored.¹⁶¹

More accessible than the Father and superior in virtue to Adam, Christ is the proper object of imitation and contemplation.

Being the true object of imitation, all of Traherne’s notions of full humanity – the image of God in act – are summed up in Jesus Christ, and actualized in the individual human life through their willing imitation. Just as in the *Centuries* where Traherne proclaims ‘You never enjoy the world aright’ til you ‘perceive yourself the sole heir of the whole world’¹⁶² so Jesus is the rightful heir of creation: ‘being the only Begotten son of GOD, was the sole Heir of all Worlds’.¹⁶³ What theological grounds Traherne’s claim in the *Centuries* is precisely the reality that Chris was ‘sole Heir’, for by his atoning work on the cross, the human soul is brought back into the family of God. Quoting Romans 8.14 Traherne states ‘For as many as are led by the Spirit of GOD are the Sons of GOD. v.14.’¹⁶⁴ One misconception of the notion of the imitation of Christ that Traherne seems to espouse – when he states ‘by Transforming our selv into whose Image we are to attain our Blessedness’¹⁶⁵ – is that after having repudiated Socinianism and Pelagianism by arguing for the atonement theory given above,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 229.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² *Centuries*, I, 29.

¹⁶³ ‘Second Adam’, *Commentaries*, 230.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 231.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 228.

sanctification appears to be the autonomous human will striving to be like Christ. However, by raising Christ up as exemplar of full humanity, the example set by Jesus is one of active and willing submission to God: ‘thy will be done’. Christ’s example of ‘doing the will of the Father’, an example of active submission, is pointed to by Traherne when he includes various passages from Romans 8 to theologically ground his notion of imitation.

But ye are not in the Flesh, but in the Spirit if so be the Spirit of GOD dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Ro. 8.9. And if Christ be in you the Body is dead becaus of Sin, but the Spirit is Life becaus of Righteousness. v.10. For as many as are led by the Spirit of GOD are the Sons of GOD. v.14. ¹⁶⁶

What at first sounds like a glorification of the human capacity to remake the self, in the power of the self, actually turns out to be call to active submission to Another; to be led by the indwelling ‘Spirit of GOD’. For Traherne, the will must never, as it were, go to sleep, but as a creature made divine through participation, must remain actively open to the filling and leading work of God. Traherne offers a *via media* between the determinism of some forms of 17th C. Calvinism, and the radical human autonomy seen in some forms of Humanism and Pelagianism.

This distinction being made, the role of Christ as an object of imitation and meditation is key in Traherne’s thought. As exemplar, Christ shows what it looks like to be properly related to all objects. The life of Christ

attained the Measure and Maner of GOD becaus being the Brightness of his fathers Glory and the Express Image of His Person his Wisdom and Goodness extended to all Objects in Heaven and Earth, He filled all Things as the Apostle Speaketh even the Omnipresence and eternity of GOD, Seeing Prizing and Enjoying all Things as His Father doth. ¹⁶⁷

It is Christ’s life that truly exemplifies Traherne’s notions of ideal humanity, thus as he continues he explores more fully how the life of Christ reveals humankind’s teleology.

It was the most Perfect [life] becaus all Wisdom and Happiness were accomplished in it. For all objects being wholly understood, and all Duties actually performed, all the Powers of the Soul employed; and all its Inclinations satisfied, all Treasures possest and Pleasures enjoyed, and all these by His fruition communicated to others, No Wisdom could exceed this, nor was there any place left for further Happiness. ¹⁶⁸

As an object of imitation and meditation, Christ reveals what it is to be properly related to all objects. Grounded in this theological conviction, the pastoral impulse that permeates

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 231.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 228.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 228-9.

Traherne's writings is the need to reveal objects of meditation and cleanse the eyes to properly see and relate to these objects.

4.5.3. Traherne as Spiritual Guide

As we observed above, Traherne's stated purpose in *Christian Ethicks* was to 'elevate the *Soul*, and refine its Apprehensions...to purify and enflame the Heart...and guide Men...in the way of *Vertue*; to excite Desire, to encourage them to Travel, to comfort them in the Journey, and at last to lead them to true Felicity, both here and hereafter.'¹⁶⁹ But what does the refinement of 'Apprehensions' have to do with progress along the journey toward 'Felicity'? In *Christian Ethicks* Traherne points to the excitation of desire for virtue by 'opening the the Nature of *Vertue* it self, thereby to display the marvellous Beauty of Religion', which implies the notion of presenting virtue as an object of desire. What is implied in the *Christian Ethicks* is overtly stated in two other introductory statements.

On the title page of Traherne's *Commentaries of Heaven* it reads: 'Commentaries of Heaven. Wherein The Mysteries of Felicity are opened and ALL THINGS Discovered to be Objects of Happiness. EVRY BEING Created and Increated being Alphabetically Represented (As it will appear) In the Light of GLORY...the Transcendent Verities Of the Holy Scriptures and the highest Objects of the Christian faith are in a Clear Mirror Exhibited to the Ey of Reason: in their Realitie and Glory.'¹⁷⁰ This expansive project, which only reaches to the word 'Bastard', is driven along by the conviction that 'ALL THINGS' are to be 'Discovered to be Objects of Happiness'. If this is the case, Traherne can 'in a Clear Mirror' exhibit these objects to the 'Ey of Reason', but Traherne is keenly aware that without the purity and refinement of heart, the soul is isolated from these objects. Traherne called this phenomenon inconsideration: '*But Inconsideration separates the Soul from the most Glorious Objects*, and as the most forcible Plaster if not applied will not heal the Wound'.¹⁷¹ Inversely, the steady application of these '*Glorious Objects*' were the cure to '*Inconsideration*'. Traherne continues this medicinal imagery as he describes his mission to those afflicted with the blindness of inconsideration: 'we that discover their sores are Charitable in our desire towards them, and therefore at once open their disease, and unvail the Cure.' The cure is long and sustained meditation on these glorious objects, namely 'Eternity', 'Divine Love', 'the

¹⁶⁹ *Christian Ethicks*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ *Commentaries*, 3.

¹⁷¹ *Sober View*, 92.

Beauty of Holiness' and 'infinite Goodness',¹⁷² while paying attention to the fact that all things are objects of happiness as expressions of divine love.

We remember from Chapter 2, that for Traherne, God is both 'Infinitely high' and transcendent but chooses to condescend and 'for our Sakes to clothe himself with some Visible Appearance; at least Some Intelligible One, that may be objected, and make Visible as it were to the Understanding'.¹⁷³ God has objectified God-self for our sakes, that we might come to know God in God's many appearances. This, of course, is the impetus behind Traherne's perpetual turn to the objects of creation as proper objects of meditation and contemplation, because when properly seen and enjoyed they disclose the divine, and allure the desire. As we saw in Traherne's metaphysic and ontology in Chapter 2 and his anthropology in chapter 3, the corporeal object plays a central and abiding place in his understanding of humankind's 'Journey' toward 'true Felicity'. God's act of condescension theologically grounds, and provides the pattern for Traherne's 'aim' as a poet. In Chapter 1 we explored Traherne's poem '*The Author to the Critical Peruser*'. The first ten lines read:

The naked Truth in many faces shewn,
Whose inward Beauties very few hav known,
A simple Light, transparent Words, a Strain
That lowly creeps, yet maketh Mountains plain,
Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense
And keeps them there; that is Our Excellence:
At that we aim; to th' end thy Soul might see
With open Eys thy Great *Felicity*,
Its Objects view, and trace the glorious Way
Wherby thou may'st thy Highest Bliss enjoy.
(ll. 1-10)

It is the 'Excellence' and 'aim' of Traherne's poetry to bring down the highest mysteries to sense. To this end, Traherne spurns what he calls 'curling Metaphors' that obscure the naked truth, and instead utilizes a humble 'Strain That lowly creeps'. What he hopes these 'transparent Words' would do is awaken the soul to an open-eyed view of the corporeal objects of creation, that they might be discerned as objects of felicity, mirroring the highest mysteries they reflect and drawing the soul along the way to its 'Highest Bliss'. As mirrors of infinite bliss, the finite object is never dispensed with, collapsed into the spiritual, nor swallowed up in infinity. Instead, as argued by Dorothy Sayers, in concert with Dante's depiction of the beautiful Beatrice as guide through the rings of heaven, corporeal beauty

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ *Kingdom*, 476.

functions as a perpetual guide on the ascent toward the beatific vision.¹⁷⁴ This being said, however, a true vision of corporeal beauty comes only when the object is seen ‘In the Light of GLORY’, for the light of the beatific vision is ever shining forth, beckoning, alluring and drawing along those in the estate of grace. If seeing all objects in the light of glory constitutes a proper perception and reception of all objects, what practical pastoral advice does Traherne offer as a means to grow in this pure apprehension?

Not surprisingly, after having already articulated human teleology as the soul fully actuated, growth in virtue is central to Traherne’s understanding of growth in purity. He defines virtue as follows:

For those Virtues which are the End of all, are Nothing but the Affections modified, and Completed: the Affections of the Mind formed by Prudence, and rightly imployed about their Proper Objects, being Of Infinit Excellency, becaus all Virtues are made of affections, all Glory is acquired by Affections, and all Felicitie by affections Enjoyed. These therfore abov all things God desires, as the Cream, and Perfection of all his Works.¹⁷⁵

For Traherne, growth in virtue is constituted as the reformation of the affections, which find their completion in being ‘rightly employed about their Proper Objects’. Prudence plays an essential role in reordering the affection, because for Traherne ‘Prudence is the general Overseer, and Governour of all’¹⁷⁶ the virtues, working to properly enact each virtue as circumstances on earth demand. The centrality of the life of virtue to the life of felicity has been adequately dealt with by Denise Inge in her two volumes, *Happiness and Holiness* and *Wanting like a God*, thus I would like to highlight a more particular, specific and practical spiritual practice offered to reform the affections around their proper objects.

In chapter four of *Kingdom of God*, Traherne makes various references to John Chrysostom’s Mathew Homilies,¹⁷⁷ while making an extended argument for solitude as an essential spiritual practice along the way toward the ‘Beatifick Vision’:

If we will not apply our Minds to these Eternal Objects, How shall we apprehend them? If we will not stand at the Threshold, and observ the things that are without Saith St. Chrysostom, how shall we hasten to Enterin? If we doe Not read and Meditate, retire from the World, and Labor to Learn, If we will not pray for Ey Salv, that we may See, how Shall we be made partakers of the Beatifick Vision?¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ For Sayers’ whole argument see Dorothy L. Sayers, “The Beatrician Vision in Dante and Other Poets,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 2 (January 1, 1958): 3–23.

¹⁷⁵ *Kingdom*, 425.

¹⁷⁶ *Christian Ethicks*, 153.

¹⁷⁷ See *Kingdom*, marginal gloss on 266, 268.

¹⁷⁸ *Kingdom*, 268.

It is in applying the mind to these ‘Eternal Objects’ of divine self-expression (see Chapter 2) that we apprehend them. To ‘apply our Minds’ means to ‘read’, to ‘meditate’, to ‘Labor to Learn’, and to ‘retire from the World’. All these human actions are then coupled with the prayer to God for ‘Ey Salv, that we may See’, for purity of sight is that essential quality affecting the capacity to ‘be make partakers of the Beatifick Vision’. What Traherne is suggesting is a spiritual discipline of attention; a long meditation and study of the eternal objects of God’s kingdom. What *The Kingdom of God* itself provides for the reader is just such an extended meditation on God’s kingdom, a location to read, study and meditate on the nature of God and God’s kingdom. The spiritual discipline most suited to this prolonged meditation is solitude, the act whereby we ‘retire from the World’. It is in this place of retirement that the soul is most prone to receive and enjoy the world as God does, or as Traherne characterizes this, ‘To Enjoy things in the Image of God, is the best Way, wherby they can be Enjoyed.’ To enjoy things in God’s image is to enjoy them with a mind at peace: ‘In quiet and in Peace, with Holy Reverence and Godly fear, with Joy and Thanksgiving, Attention, and Devotion prepare thy Mind.’¹⁷⁹ Retirement, for Traherne, was both the training ground for the reformation of the affections and apprehension, and the location for the true enjoyment of God’s kingdom.

The manuscript¹⁸⁰ that contains *Kingdom of God* as its culminating work, contains a work entitled *Inducements to Retirednes* as its introductory work. As the title implies, the work functions as a prolonged argument for the virtues of solitude. What the treatise is not is an argument for solitude as the only good mode of living, instead Traherne finds in solitude the place of preparation and recuperation from a public life,¹⁸¹ and the proper place for the true enjoyment of God’s kingdom to those in the mixed estate of grace. Seeking to navigate a *via media* between the active and contemplative lives, Traherne looks to Christ as the exemplar:

when we Consider the Great Skill that we stand in need of, and the Abundance of Work that we hav to do; our Saviors Example may seem more Eligible: whose Proportion of Retirement, was ten years, to one of Exposure. For the Term of His Concealed Life was Thirty full yeers, and that of His Publick less then Three. He

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 268-269.

¹⁸⁰ This MS was discovered by Jeremy Maule in 1997 in the Lambeth Palace Library and published in 2005 in Traherne, *The Works of Thomas Traherne. Vol. I*, vol. 1, p. .

¹⁸¹ Jan Ross rightly finds in *Inducements* a ‘contribute to the active-contemplative life controversy’ that has been both a historical debate and one much alive in 17th C. England. She identifies the treatise as a possible response to, and attempt to mediate, Sir George Mackenzie’s 1665 treatise that *Preferred Solitude to Publick Employment* and John Evelyn’s 1667 treatise *Public Employment and an Active life, Prefer’d to Solitude...* Ibid., 1:xxi.

Spending ten parts of His Time in Secret towards God, that He might spend one profitably among men. Not but that he was able much Sooner to hav gon abroad: but this He did for our Example... Our own Weakness and Corruption doth more Necessitat us, then that of other men... And how full of Light ought he to be, that would resist the Current of their Customs and Opinions?¹⁸²

For Traherne, in the ongoing life of mission and sanctification, the ‘Current’ of the world’s ‘Customs and Opinions’ buffet and tempt God’s ambassadors. Solitude acts as the location of preparation and recovery for the active life, and is the more blessed and heavenly state. While the active life is one of mission, toil and depletion, solitude is the state more to be desired, for in retirement the place where we ‘remain fixed in God’ and ‘abide unmoved in that Centre wherein the Soul is a Temple of infinite Glory’. In short, solitude is a foretaste of heaven: ‘a Pledge or Fore-Earnest of all the Glory that shall be revealed,’¹⁸³

Retirement is a place of refreshment along life’s journey. It is in retirement that the soul enjoys ‘that Wine, which is sold in the Tavern He hath prepared for His Pilgrims’,¹⁸⁴ and enters that rest which, again, is a foretaste of heaven:

We call Retirement the Centre of Rest, becaus of the fruition of our last End. By many it is esteemed the Place of Repose, becaus therin we are removed from Anxieties and Dangers, Griefs and Troubles. But for this cause it is an Arbor only, not the Centre of Rest and Repose. When we enter into Rest, we enter into Heaven. Rest therfore is a Comprehensive Word, and signifies more then Men do imagine. It is not a Ceasing from Employment, for man without Employment is a restless Creature. but a Varietie and fulness of Business.¹⁸⁵

The rest Traherne proposes is found in the soul’s fruition, whereby the soul, as image of God in power is turned into Act. In solitude, ‘Man’ finds that he has ‘the best Objects, to be Employd upon, the best Offices to be Employd in, and the Best Faculties to be Employd at all’. However, solitude is an ‘Arbor’, a discipline enjoyed on the journey, but not the journey’s end. The employments of solitude point to this heavenly ‘End’ where the capacities of the soul are fully employed around the ‘most Excellent’ objects:

But God him self being one Object and most Excellent, all other Things Objects too, and most Excellent; His Soul an Agent and most Excellent, the Employment of it, in the Divine Image, and most Excellent: the Soul attains herein its End: for which it was made by being made to Covet the most Excellent Things.¹⁸⁶

To be ‘made to Covet the most Excellent Things’ leads the soul along the journey of turning

¹⁸² *Inducements*, 13-14.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

power into act in the employment of the soul's capacities around God, and all things in God. It is the most excellent objects the soul desires, and it is in solitude that the soul most approximates this heavenly employment.

So what is it precisely about 'Retirement' that enables the soul to live the life of heaven? Traherne's first response to this question is that retirement allows for the introversion or internalization of all objects. To gaze inward is to gaze upon eternity: 'Because Eternity is contained in the Soul, a Man in finding Him self findeth Eternity... in finding Him self he findeth All Things. For All Things are contained in Eternity.' As the logic is pressed forward, 'in Retirement alone a Man findeth Him self, in Retirement along he findeth All Things.' It is here that Traherne includes the notion of restless desire: 'Nor can there be any Rest, till he findeth All Things his Delights and Treasures.' A few delights will not suffice for the fruition of the soul, 'All things' must be found within. 'Things are best found, when they are found within. for then they are our Own, and Exalted Highest. Without, we meet with som, few, little things. But All, we find within.'¹⁸⁷ Thus, retirement is essential, for it enables the internalization of all objects, and makes them most truly mine.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, later in the Lambeth Manuscript, Traherne both articulates how introversion is inherently extroversion, in that 'the Nature of God [is represented] in the Soul of Man'¹⁸⁸ (in *Seeds of Eternity*), and how this process of the introversion of external objects occurs. In *The Kingdom of God* we saw that fancy is the capacity to receive sense data from the body, which it then transforms into images and offers these images to the understanding and will. As a summary of his epistemology, Traherne claims, 'The Glory, and Beauty of the Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we Come to the Knowledg of God himself.'¹⁸⁹ Traherne's epistemology enables an abiding place for the body in his theory, however, it is the full application of the soul around these corporeal objects that help fulfil their teleology. The bodily eyes are of great value, but for Traherne, 'GOD is an Object only of the Inward Ey', and in solitude the human body/soul is enabled to contemplatively pierce an object's corporeal finitude and find God as its 'fathomless Depth'.

Whatsoever els entertaineth our Ey is Little and Obscure, Unless a fathomless Depth of Infinity and Valu be seen within it. for till God in evry thing be seen, Nothing is Pleasant. Nor is any thing Pleasant till it is Enjoyed. Since therfore God cannot be

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸⁸ *Seeds*, 233.

¹⁸⁹ *Kingdom*, 489.

seen in any Thing, but Retirement, where we may Meditat without Disturbance on the Endless Depth of Things; in Retirement alone may God be Enjoyed.¹⁹⁰

This pure gaze is equipped with the capacity to discern God in all things. What solitude enables is space to ‘Meditat without Disturbance on the Endless Depth of Things’, and in a practical sense, avail oneself to the enjoyment of God. As the corporeal world is internalized in the soul it enters the sphere of the infinite, the unbounded and eternal, and the soul finds all objects to be manifestations of the divine, and locations for union with God. What it takes then is ‘Recollection of the Mind, which is a Retirement of Soul, or Thought into it self’, that the soul might be ‘present in Spirit with any Object’, which requires a retirement ‘into our Thoughts from all outward Things that are before our Eys’.¹⁹¹ For, Traherne it is essential that corporeal objects are internalized, and thus spiritualized, that they might be applied to the soul ‘as the most forcible Plaster’.¹⁹²

Traherne’s whole theological project runs counter to the notion of retirement that sees it as mere idleness:

Idle and Dumb Retirement is Death. but True Retirement is Life is Rest and Heaven. True Retirement is Retirement, not from Vanity to Nothing, but from Vanity to Glory.¹⁹³

To be idle is the great enemy of felicity, whereas true retirement is characterized as that heavenly rest which is best characterized as power turned to Act. Not only does Traherne contrast true retirement to idle retirement, he contrasts it with mere aloneness. For Traherne solitude is both active and relational. When I retire ‘I retire into God: And lov all Mankind in Him, after His Similitude.’¹⁹⁴ It is in retirement that we more fully appropriate God’s omnipresence, ‘Who is All in all, and therefore All in us. All His Omnipresence is in us, and therefore are we Temples of His Omnipresence’. Having acknowledged this theological reality, Traherne exclaims ‘Oh what an Individual Union ought there to be between Him and us, who is wholly within us!’ The ubiquitous nature of divine omnipresence takes on a particular nature, an ‘Individual Union’, when in retirement God, and God in all other objects, are existentially found to be within. ‘Since while they are without we are Ignorant of

¹⁹⁰ *Inducements*, 6.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹² *Sober View*, 92.

¹⁹³ *Inducements*, 21.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

them; but as they are within, they may be Known and Enjoyed.’¹⁹⁵ This internalization actualizes divine omnipresence for the individual and forms the basis for all knowing and enjoying; all things must be known within to be truly enjoyed.

Two simultaneous, and almost coterminous, realities occur as a result of the progressive internalization of God in all objects: ‘Enlargement’ and ‘Employment[s]’. Within the unbounded space of the mind or spirit, in ‘Retirement’ the soul is free to be truly actualized around its proper objects, and in the internalization of these objects the soul is enlarged.

Retirement being the Repose of the Soul, and the field of Mens true Enlargement. wherein with God he may walk at libertie and never be bounded, is that wherein he may ever meet with New Recreations and never be Weary, New Beauties, Employments Diversions deceiving the old, taking up his Soul, and Drawing Him by their Allurements to an Everlasting Life of Happiness and Glory.

What is gained in these ever-expanding enlargements and employments is a soul that more and more approximates the divine life; a growth characterized as *theosis*: the divinization of the soul through participation in God; a soul expanded and fully employed around the enjoyment of the world ‘in the Divine Image’.¹⁹⁶ That the soul might be made infinite through its full actualization constitutes the *telos* of the Christian life in glory. What retirement does is it invites the soul into this glorified existence in the estate of grace, feeds it with ever ‘New Recreations’, ‘New Beauties’ and ‘Employments’, these naturally ‘taking up his Soul, and Drawing Him by their Allurements’ toward his final end in happiness and glory. In solitude, Traherne’s pastoral and theological purposes find their end, for it is in retirement that the soul is free to be properly engaged around all objects as they are found within, and be allured by the beauty of these objects toward her final end in union with God. As a pastor, theologian and writer, Traherne can articulate objects of contemplation for his reader to engage with, but without the discipline of solitude to internalize, enjoy and be allured by these objects, the soul remains ignorant of them and their impact is void.

In *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne describes the efficacy of the prolonged meditation upon the beauty and perfection of God within the notion of reciprocity.¹⁹⁷ As we have already discussed, divine beauty both allures the soul to look and admire God and ‘Enflameth us to Lov him’. The continued meditative gaze upon God’s perfections and beauty calls forth an

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹⁷ Denise Inge provides a helpful discussion of Traherne’s notion of reciprocity in Inge, *Wanting like a God*, 244–252.

ever growing expansion of our love for God, which therefore works to expand our capacity to see the beauty and perfect of God '[s]o is there a perpetual and Eternal Reciprocation here'. '[I]n the first Instant of the Beatifick Vision all objects are seen in God. Their Beauty enflameth our Lov,' but 'our Lov that answers the Beauty must be Equal in fervor and Extent therunto'. What meditation does for Traherne, is it invites the soul to gaze upon divine beauty, that its capacity to love God might grow to match this beauty. He describes this process of 'Reciprocation' here:

For as Water begets Ice, and Ice begets Water, the Perfection we receiv from God makes us to admire, and Love his Perfection, and the Love of his Perfection increases ours; and the more our Perfection is increased, the more we admire his, and the more we admire it, the more perfect we are. which manifestly tends to an Illimited growth of Happiness and Pleasure. That Being which is thus infinitely productive, operates as a Cause, while it is an object of our Meditation.¹⁹⁸

Growth in love for God comes by contemplating the perfection and beauty of the divine 'Being', where also 'all objects are seen in God.' God, the source of all perfection, gives without restraint, the sight and reception of that perfection causes admiration and love, but through the active 'Love of his Perfection' the soul's capacity to admire and love are expanded, allowing a fuller gaze and receptivity to the perfections of God, and so on. This upward 'spiral' movement of sight, admiration and love, leads to 'an Illimited growth of Happiness and Pleasure', and occurs while God is 'an object of our Meditation.' It is this process of reciprocity that clarifies Traherne's claim early in *The Kingdom of God* that 'Contemplation' of God's kingdom 'is the Means of our transformation from Glory to Glory'.¹⁹⁹ What is required to cure 'Men of [their] Slavish Apprehensions' is not a momentary ecstatic experience, but a 'long acquaintance' with divine love and beauty, that we might come to 'Know it by Degrees'.²⁰⁰

Thus, in *Inducements to Retirednes* Traherne offers an extended allurement to the life of solitude. The work shows how as a foretaste of heaven, retirement is inherently alluring to those who know their truest desires. Retirement is the place of enjoyment and employment, a place where the soul is expanded with the objects of God and creation. In the estate of grace and trial, retirement functions as the location of rest and recuperation, preparation for the active life, and protection from the vanities found in the world. Thus in the mixed estate of grace, what is needed is

¹⁹⁸ *Kingdom*, 318.

¹⁹⁹ *Kingdom*, 259.

²⁰⁰ *Kingdom*, 313.

‘A Steddy and Stable Resolution Accompanied with devout prayer to overcome all the Enticements and Allurements of this World, that we may remain fixed in God... For as nothing can be more Deformed, then leightly to forsake infinit Beauty, and to go a Whoring from it after other Vanities: so neither can any thing be more Advantagious, then to abide unmovable in that Centre wherin the Soul is a Temple of infinit Glory.’²⁰¹

This is the choice for Traherne; will you abide in that centre, remain fixed in God, and experience all the heavenly allurements and enjoyment found therein, or will you be removed from that centre through the following after vain ‘Enticements and Allurements’. For Traherne, solitude is the appetizer of heaven, drawing and alluring the soul toward its final end. Glory is ever reaching into the life of grace, enticing and alluring, thus it is only fitting that we finish this chapter with an account of the estate of glory. Traherne helps to make this transition by articulating the differences but interrelations between the estate of trial, grace and faith and the estate of glory, where we ‘clearly seeth the beauty of God’s face’:

This visible World is wonderfully to be delighted in, and highly to be esteemed, because it is the theatre of God’s righteous Kingdom. Who as Himself was righteous, because He made it freely, so He made it that we might freely be righteous too. For in the Kingdom of Glory it is impossible to fall. No man can sin that clearly seeth the beauty of God’s face because no man can sin against his own happiness; that is, none can when he sees it clearly, willingly, and wittingly forsake it, tempter, temptation, loss, and danger being all seen: but here we see His face in a glass, and more dimly behold our happiness as in a mirror; by faith therefore we are to live, and to sharpen our eye that we may see His glory, we are to be studious and intent in our desires and endeavours. For we may sin, or we may be holy.²⁰²

4.6. The Estate of Glory

Echoing Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13:11-13, the life of grace is one of the dim mirror, but as a child is related to adulthood, so is the dim vision of the estate of grace related to the vision of the estate of glory. In ‘the Kingdom of Glory’ faith will give way to sight, face-to-face sight, and this sight will lead to knowledge, the ability to know God as I am ‘fully known’. Following Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians ‘and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another’ (2 Cor. 3:18), Traherne grounds his understanding of sanctification as growth in one’s ability to see, know, love and enjoy ‘the beauty of God’s face’. Glory constitutes the consummation of this journey, where ‘we all, with unveiled face’ will behold

²⁰¹ *Inducements*, 9.

²⁰² *Centuries*, II, 97.

‘the glory of the Lord’, and likewise be transformed. In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne finds another expression of this transforming vision in the words of ‘S. John’ in 1 John 3:1-2:

We are so Mysterious that S. John saith, Behold what Manner of Lov the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God: Therefore the World Knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we Shall be, but we know, that when he Shall appear, we shall be like him, for we Shall See him as he is. To See him as he is, is a Transforming Vision: Being capable of beholding how Good it is to be like him, his Infinit Beauty when we See him Clearly will make it impossible to refuse his Similitude, or to forbear to delight in it Eternaly.²⁰³

The passage quoted by Traherne finishes with a moral imperative in verse 3 similar to Traherne’s own: ‘And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.’ Growth in purity of life and of sight in the estate of grace is linked to the hope of the ‘Transforming Vision’ of God in glory. This eschatological hope grounds Traherne’s entire theological project. The beatific vision, as the location of human teleology, is the end of all virtues, the proper object of desire and affection, the place of happiness and enjoyment, and as such, for Traherne, all forms of true vision and enjoyment in the estate of grace participate in and point to the vision of God’s transforming and delightful ‘Infinit Beauty’. It is Traherne’s goal then to awaken and sharpen the amorphous ‘desire of some Great Thing’²⁰⁴ in the *Centuries* to a clear-sighted and alluring vision of God, the soul’s true object of desire.

Traherne’s characterization of heaven as a blessed or beatific vision has a long history in the Christian tradition. Severin Kitanov traces the idea of beatific vision and beatific enjoyment in Augustine – especially his distinction of ‘use’ and enjoyment’ in *On Christian Learning* explored above – and how this idea is relayed to medieval scholastics through the mediation of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*:

Based on New Testament allusions to the indescribable experience of heavenly bliss in the presence of God, the concept of beatific enjoyment became a staple of Christian systematic theology thanks to Church Father and Saint Aurelius Augustine. St Augustine developed the concept both as a way of giving a teleological orientation to Christian learning and as a way of distinguishing the Christian ideal of heavenly beatitude from rival philosophical – Neo-Platonic and Stoic – conceptions of human flourishing. St Augustine’s concept and treatment of enjoyment were passed on to medieval scholastic theologians as a result of the systematizing effort of Peter Lombard.

A primary question that arose in vast collection of medieval commentaries on Lombard’s *Sentences* was how the enjoyment of God occurred in the human person: Is heavenly

²⁰³ *Kingdom*, 479.

²⁰⁴ *Centuries*, I, 2.

enjoyment experienced as a perfection of the will as love, or a perfection of intellect as knowledge? Reformed theologian, Herman Bavinck, identifies this distinction and finds a mediating voice in Bonaventure:

In theology, theologians have disputed whether this blessedness in the hereafter formally had its seat in the intellect or in the will and hence consisted in knowledge or love. Thomas claimed the former, Duns Scotus the latter, but Bonaventure combined the two, observing that the enjoyment of God (*fruitio Dei*) was the fruit not only of the knowledge of God (*cognitio Dei*) but also of the love of God (*amor Dei*) and resulted from the union and cooperation of the two.²⁰⁵

Francis Turretin, a Swiss-Italian Calvinist theologian and contemporary of Traherne, articulate this more synthetic and holistic view of the beatific vision in the following: ‘Sight contemplates God as the supreme good; love is carried out towards him, and is most closely united with him; and joy enjoys and acquiesces in him. Sight perfects the intellect, love the will, joy the conscience’.²⁰⁶ Traherne’s usage ‘beatific vision’ should be read in concert with Augustine, Bonaventure and Turretin.

We begin our construction of a Trahernian notion of the beatific vision from, as it were, the ground up. Matter, as we thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2, as a location of divine self-expression, calls forth an experience of the beatific vision within the beauty of the corporeal world.

Now what uses Could Matter possibly be put to, more Excellent then these? To Manifest the Glory and the Lov of God; to Minister to the Felicitie of Men, and Angels; to foment their Affections, Praises, and Thanksgivings; to oblige, and stir them up, to all Holy, and virtuous Actions; to incline and transform their Souls to the Divine Image; to Exhibit the Invisible Things of God, even his eternal Power, and Godhead, even to the Eys of his Creatures... to Enflame Evry Soul, that Enjoyes their Beauty with the Highest observations; to Employ all the Powers, and Inclinations of the Mind, in the Continual Enjoyment of the Beatifick Vision? ²⁰⁷

What is so striking about this passage is the radical availability of the beatific vision to those not yet in the estate of glory. The beatific vision is not something simply for the hereafter, the alluring beauty of God’s face shines forth in corporeal beauty, and may be seen with those who have eyes to see.

²⁰⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Vol. 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, Div of Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 722.

²⁰⁶ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol. 3: Eighteenth Through Twentieth Topics*, First edition. (Phillipsburg N.J: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2012), 609. For an exploration of the beatific vision in the Reformed Tradition see Kyle Strobel, “A Spiritual Sight of Love: Constructing a Doctrine of the Beatific Vision | Union Resources,” accessed October 23, 2017, <https://www.uniontheology.org/resources/bible/biblical-theology/a-spiritual-sight-of-love-constructing-a-doctrine-of-the-beatific-vision>.

²⁰⁷ *Kingdom*, 428.

Building up from corporeality in general to human bodies in particular, Traherne has a very clear place for enjoyment and pleasure of bodies in his understanding of heaven. As is often the case with Traherne, he begins to explain the great pleasure awaiting the body in glory, by first explain its opposite. For ‘by considering the Vast, and powerfull Degrees of Pain’ the body is capable on earth and more fully in hell,

we may see what Joys, and Pleasure their Bodies are capable of in Heaven. For the Body was made to be a Vessel of Pleasure, not of Pain. And how Many, and how Great the Pleasures are with it, may conceiv, and feel, they only know, that enjoy the same. No Tongue is able to Express, No Heart able to Conceiv the Strength, and fullness of Bodily Delights, their variety, and perfection is so Great upon Earth, much more in the Heavens..²⁰⁸

As in the beatific vision there will be the enjoyments of the will and intellect, so there will be bodily delights that ‘No Tongue is able to Express, No Heart able to Conceiv the Strength’. The sensuous nature of heavenly delights expressed in the above reminds us that though elsewhere Traherne will follow the tradition and subjugate bodily pleasure to those of the intellect and will in the rightly ordered soul, the body was designed for pleasure and thus pleasure is a created good. Bodily pleasure is a perfection of the body, the ‘fullness of Bodily Delights’ in the estate of grace – ‘upon Earth’ – are oriented to this heavenly delight when enjoyed, as it were, in God.

As discussed in Chapter 3, in the economy of enjoyment, humanity exceeds the angels, enabled to enjoy object two ways, ‘Spiritually by his Soul, and Corporeal by his Body’,²⁰⁹ which is enabled by mutual communicability between body and soul. In *The Ceremonial Law* Traherne picks up this same thread where he poetically contemplates the glow of Moses’ face upon conversing with God on Mt. Tabor: ‘We cannot long be conversant with Light / That is Divine, Eternal, Infinite, / And ever Blessed; but we shall become / Like Myrrors formed into the glorious Sun!’ (ll. 24-27).²¹⁰ The poem ends with the pastoral plea for his readers to be filled with this same ‘Heavenly Blessedness’ that they might ‘fill [other’s] Tents with that Diviner Light / Which in the Mountain ravished our Sight’ (l. 58, 62-3). For Traherne, these heavenly delights of the beatific vision are for both here and hereafter. Traherne invites his reader into his own ravishments of sight, that their ‘Healing Darts’ might be communicated abroad, for the singular enjoyments of Moses on the

²⁰⁸ *Kingdom*, 487.

²⁰⁹ *Kingdom*, 488.

²¹⁰ *The Ceremonial Law*, Vol. 6, 239.

mount have been made available through the death and resurrection of Christ: ‘Whose Dying Body purchasd all this Bliss’ (l. 23).

We have talked throughout this thesis about Traherne’s notion of God ‘Himself being Power from all Eternity transformed into Act’, and as such, Traherne’s primary way to speak of sanctification or *theosis*, is the process of turning power into act. In Heaven humanity reaches its *telos*:

It may be all Act, as I Suppose we shall find it to be in Heaven, when it is the Temple of God, even his Omnipresence, and Eternity, Goodness and Power, Blessedness and Glory. For then it shall See all it can See, and Know all it can Know, and desire all it can desire, all its Power to Love, and to rejoyce, and Praise and Enjoy shall be Exhausted, by the Innumerable Multitude of its objects. No Dram of it being left Idle, or unemployed. And when all its Power is wholly Exerted, it will be all Act.²¹¹

The enrapturing beauty of the divine face not only transfixes the soul, it transforms her and draws her into union; enabling her to see ‘All Things...in God’.²¹² In this relational union – where ‘the Soul will be in God, and God in the Soul, their Union and Communion ‘being’ compleat and Perfect’ – the divinized soul relates to all objects as God does:

When it seeth all that God Seeth, and loveth all that God loveth, and hates all that God hates, and desires all that God desires, and rejoyceth in all wherein God rejoyceth... when it Extendeth to all objects in all immensities, and reacheth at once to all things in all Eternities...then is its power poured out, and Transformed; and the Act wherein it appeareth will be so like God, that the Sun in a Mirror will not more resemble the Sun in the Heavens²¹³

The vision of God is an alluring vision, for God is the infinite object that answers our infinite desire. Contemporaneous to this, the vision of God is a transforming vision, whereby the soul is made infinite so as to accommodate the divine. Within this consummating union the fully actualized soul is to see, desire and love all objects as God does. This is the nature of the active rest that so allured Traherne’s insatiable soul. It is these notions of glory, as the location of human teleology, that guided his pastoral desire to use his pen to, in some way, trace the beautiful contours of heaven in the attempt to allure and reform human affections, desires and love toward their proper object and end in God.

²¹¹ *Kingdom*, 461.

²¹² *Kingdom*, 497.

²¹³ *Kingdom*, 461-2.

Conclusion

The central image of Traherne's theological vision is of God, who creates as a self-communication, imbues freedom on his image bearer, and allures human freedom through the beautiful. Beauty function as both a description of objects – God, creation, and the beatified soul – and the location of encounter between the divine and human desiring selves. The dynamics of lover, alluring the creation back into union with God through the allurement of beautiful, is mirrored in Traherne's own literary works. Beauty, goodness and love are highlighted in Traherne because he seeks to create an aesthetic encounter, mimetic of the divine allurement in created beauty. To contemplate the beautiful, is to fix the eyes upon the location of divine self-disclosure and allurement, and through a 'steady gaze', transform the desire. It is in the encounter with the beautiful, where heaven reaches out toward the bodily senses and allures the soul to 'trace the glorious Way' toward her 'Highest Bliss'.¹

Beauty functions in Traherne's oeuvre as a literary echo of the divine allurement in creation. As mimetic of creation, Chapter 1 argued that the best way to understand Traherne's literary style and purpose, is to see his poetry and prose as his attempt to craft literary objects of contemplation, that when encountered, awaken an aesthetic experience which naturally captures and allures human desire. Through and exploration of Traherne's understanding of God, beauty, God's relation to creation and the metaphysics of God's creation, Chapter 2 grounded Traherne's literary purposes in his doctrine of creation. In Chapter 2, creation was seen to be divine self-expression, a speaking forth of God's essence, that through beauty, functions as a perpetual allurement of God's creatures. Chapter 3 closely examined the recipient of this divine allurement, the *imago dei*, who finds her *telos* in full actuality and relational union with God. Since God will not coerce or force, human desire may be allured by the divine beauty or allured by the 'Syren', 'whose Beauty, whose Embrace destroys'.² Chapter 4 explores how the human soul goes sideways, as it were, and follows the false allurements of the siren.

In Chapter 4's exploration of the four estates, Traherne as spiritual guide came into clearer focus. In view of Traherne's epistemology, Chapter 4, showed that his descriptions of innocence, innocence lost, regained and glorified, are placed in their proper setting when seen as a prolonged literary effort to refine the vision, to clearly discern God in God self-

¹ 'Author to the Critical Peruser', *The Works*, V. VI, 84.

² 'Allurement', *Commentaries*, 368.

revelation. To see creation with the pure eyes of innocence, is to truly see beauty and come to knowledge of God, and as such, to be properly allured toward the soul's true and infinite object of desire. To affect change in his reader, Traherne provides literary objects of contemplation, points the reader to the objects of creation as beautiful objects of contemplation, and presents solitude as the best location for the contemplative to encounter these objects of allurement. Traherne seeks to purify the vision – a mirror of the pure and well-ordered soul – because he understands that when the world is seen with pure eyes, it's 'unusual beauty' makes the 'heart to leap', and 'something infinite behind everything appear[s] which talk[s] with my expectation and move[s] my desire'.³

A fitting conclusion to this work comes in the form of a poem that has been quoted in part in Chapter 1, but in its entirety, expresses the central drama of this study. It comes as the conclusion of Traherne's entry 'Allurement' in his *Commentaries of Heaven*, and begins with the image of the divine lover alluring Traherne's desiring soul.

Awake my Soul, and soar upon the Wing
Of Sacred Contemplation; for the King
Of Glory wooes; he's pleased to allure
Poor feeble Dust! Altho thou art impure,
He condescends, vouchsafing to come down
That with his Glory he might Ashes crown.

The King of Glory, who stoops down to allure 'Poor feeble Dust', has arms to draw close and lips to kiss:

Canst thou attend to any other charmes?
Or chuse out better and Diviner Armes
To lodg in! Or can any Smiles but his
Attract or melt or please thee with true Bliss!
O Glory! O Delight beyond compare!
O Ravishments of Joy! What great and rare
And Heavenly Tidings doth his Gospel Bring!
The Lord of Hosts, the GOD of Armes, the King
Of Blessedness, in all the Majesty
And Power and Beauty which the Angels see,
Salutes and Kisses a poor Worm!

It is to affect union with the *imago dei*, that God stoops down and allures, but the will may be allured by God or by 'a Syren', thus she must choose the path of flourishing or of destruction.

The King of Glory doth my Soul allure.

³ *Centuries*, III, 3.

Not like a Syren to Deceitfull Joys,
 Whose Charm, whose Beauty, whose Embrace destroys,
 But like a GOD surrounded with the Glory
 Of Times and Ages in their longest Story.

The poem then shifts to the heavenly court, where ‘Whole Hosts of Seraphims’ and ‘Armies of Saints’ ‘Bow down and Worship’, and ‘evry Creature his high praises sings’, but the divine lover rends the heavens to chase after God’s dead and leprous ‘friend’ and ‘Bride’:

Yet he is pleasd to make my Soul his friend.
 Nay more, his Bride! Can any Comprehend
 The Sweetness of his Love, and Extasie
 Of my Estate! His Lov doth magnify
 A Leper, and a very Beggar prize
 Exalting Lazarus above the Skies.

The images of healing and resurrection touch on the aspects of redemption and atonement discussed in Chapter 4. At this point, the poem takes a familiar turn, expressing how the creation functions as a shining forth of the divine love for humankind.

The Sun comes like a Bridegroom forth, to shew
 The Shining of his Love to me below
 And evry Star from far doth by a Glance
 Of twinkling Light imply my Happy Chance.
 The Moons a Messenger that steals by Night
 In to my Bedchamber, Her face is Bright
 ...
 The very Earth is made a Paradice
 And clad in Sweet and Royal Liveries,
 Of Curious flow’rs: It Emulates the Skies
 And by its Riches shews from whence she came
 The silver springs and Streams my Soul inflame
 While passing by they lick and kiss my feet
 Milk Hony Gold Arabian Spices, sweet Perfumes
 Wines Oyles all these he from abov
 Doth send as Sacred Tokens of his Love.
 My very Body was his Gift

The body as ‘his Gift’ receives these divine communications into the soul, that the objects of creation might be encountered as ‘Sacred Tokens of his Love’. The boundless plenitude of the divine love, pours out into the creation that my soul might be ravished and my appetites satisfied:

It stops not here, it over flows all Shores,
 And while my ravishd soul his Love adores
 It makes all men and Angels my Delights
 And satisfieth all my Appetites.

The encounter with divine love envelops the whole human self: mind, soul and body. And if the encounter of divine love through the beautiful creation were not enough, God sends ‘Apostles Prophets Patriarchs Maryrs’ and ‘His Word,’ as ‘Ambassadors’ of ‘his Lov.’ This chorus of allurement is efficacious to subdue the proudest heart:

No kind and tender Mother doth allure
 Her Child so Winningly, No virgin sure
 So lovs her Lov, nor ever was there seen,
 A Proud, but tamd, enflamd, heart-wounded Queen
 Subdud by Love, whose Lov did tyrannize
 So much ore her, as his Above the Skies
 Doth him enflame. His Essence is all Love
 His Lov is infinit it is above
 All Measure and Excess

The poem reaches its apex as Traherne adds to the chorus of allurement, the wooing of the soul by the direct agency of the Trinitarian life.

He wooed me by his Son.
 I can no more. What hath his Goodness don!
 His Spirit is a Secret Agent too,
 The H. Ghost him self comes down to woo
 He speaks for GOD and whispers in the mind,
 Kissing the Ear that to his Mouths inclind.

To this divine act of allurement, Traherne offers his own pen as an extension of this wooing, for now the poem shifts from Traherne describing God’s allurement of his own soul to the true intension of the poem; an allurement of his reader’s soul:

The Rhetorick of all the Worlds employd
 To Woo for him; and if thou art not cloyd,
 My Soul, with Kindnesses, His Crown and Throne
 And Endless Kingdom all conspire in one,
 His Soul, thy Soul, and all his Friends say Come;
 GOD is alone thy Glory and thy Home.

Traherne’s whole rhetorical purpose becomes clear in these lines. The whole force of his poetry and prose finds its *telos* in the union of the two desiring subjects: the alluring God and desiring soul.

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