

ELIZABETH S. DODD

BOUNDLESS  
INNOCENCE IN  
THOMAS TRAHERNE'S  
POETIC THEOLOGY

'Were all Men Wise and Innocent ...'



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*I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord*  
Psalm 26.6

# Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne's Poetic Theology

'Were all Men Wise and Innocent ...'

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# Foreword

The discovery since the nineteenth century of a series of works by Thomas Traherne has been astonishing and felicitous, important both for literature and theology. I vividly remember the irrepressible delight of Jeremy Maule, usually a very sober scholar, when I happened to sit next to him at lunch just after he had recognised Traherne's handwriting on a substantial manuscript in the Lambeth Palace Library. He then shared some of what he had transcribed from *The Kingdom of God*, and at once it was clear that here was a text to be ranked with the best we already had by Traherne. It combined intelligence, imagination, exuberance, poetic genius and theological profundity, and it seemed to leap across the centuries with its energy and attractiveness undiminished.

Maule's and the other discoveries, along with the works previously available, have set a difficult challenge. It is the task of doing justice to all of the seventeenth-century context: the poetry, the poetic prose, the concepts, the theology, the philosophy, the immense range of reference and allusion, the reception history and Traherne's relevance to current issues. There have been some outstanding contributions focused on Traherne's writings, and he has been influential on a growing number of scholars, thinkers and members of the educated public.

Elizabeth Dodd has succeeded in developing the diverse skills and disciplinary expertise needed to engage with the many dimensions of Traherne. She knows the seventeenth century well and her literary, philosophical and theological knowledge enable her to read Traherne sensitively and with deep understanding of his subject matter. She also covers the whole field of Traherne scholarship, commenting on it perceptively. But beyond all that she is able to do two things that are vital for the full appreciation of Traherne today: she has a dazzling array of concepts that help to redescribe, analyse and explain Traherne's thought and her knowledge of current Christian theology allow him to take his proper place as a one of the wisest Christian thinkers.

As a theologian myself, I am especially impressed by this retrieval of Traherne for twenty-first-century religious thought. In my opinion Traherne is among the

greatest Anglican thinkers and writers. Dodd shows herself to be a constructive theologian, and, with innocence as her lens, she not only illuminates the fascinating mind and expression of Traherne but she also recovers for current theology a rich, neglected theme that goes to the heart of living before God and with other people in the midst of the complexities of life.

David F. Ford  
University of Cambridge

# Acknowledgements

I first encountered Thomas Traherne during my Master of Theology studies under the supervision of Susan Hardman-Moore at Edinburgh University. With the guidance and unstinting support of David Ford at Cambridge University, my initial interest in Traherne and innocence developed into its current form. Along the way I have received encouragement from and enjoyed stimulating engagement with a variety of people. In particular I am grateful for conversations with Denise Inge, Julia Smith, Richard Birt, Ronald Blythe, Kathryn Murphy, Douglas Hedley and Edmund Newey. Fellow travellers with Traherne include Cassandra Gorman, with whom I organised a Traherne symposium in Cambridge and am editing a collection of essays. I am also grateful for the chance to test out ideas on the Ford at Home seminar, the Cambridge University Christian Theology seminar, the American Academy of Religion and Society for the Study of Theology conferences, the Traherne Festival in Credenhill, Herefordshire and the King's College London RIST seminar.

The Bodleian Library, British Library, Lambeth Palace Library, Folger Shakespeare Library and Beinecke Library in Yale have been extremely accommodating in providing access to the manuscripts. I have benefited from the generosity of the Domestic Research Studentship funded by Mark Pigott, along with funds from Cambridge University Divinity Faculty, the AHRC, Hawkshead Grammar School Fund and the Dorothy Mandelstrong Fund of John Ruskin School, Coniston. Finally, this would not have been possible without the unstinting support of my family and friends. I am particularly grateful to my parents, who have supported me in my journey with Traherne, and to my husband George, who has given up a lot for me to spend time with my 'other man'.

Sections of Chapter 2 have appeared in *Literature and Theology* as "Perfect Innocency By Creation" in the Thought of Thomas Traherne', and material contributing to Chapter 6 appeared in 'The Sacramental Image of the Child in the Thought of Thomas Traherne, and Its Theological Significance', in *Understanding Children's Spirituality*, edited by Kevin E. Lawson.

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# Abbreviations

ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
<i>ATR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
<i>ELH</i>	<i>English Literary History</i>
<i>ELR</i>	<i>English Literary Renaissance</i>
<i>HLQ</i>	<i>Huntingdon Library Quarterly</i>
<i>JHI</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LT</i>	<i>Literature and Theology</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i>
<i>MT</i>	<i>Modern Theology</i>
<i>N&amp;Q</i>	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
NPNF <sup>1</sup>	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 1
NPNF <sup>2</sup>	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), < <a href="http://www.oxforddnb.com">http://www.oxforddnb.com</a> >
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), < <a href="http://www.oed.com">http://www.oed.com</a> >
<i>PBSA</i>	<i>Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Papers of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>PQ</i>	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
<i>TLS</i>	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>
<i>TT</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigilae Christianae</i>

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# Introduction

## Argument of the Book

Innocence is an inchoate term, but it is also a rich and compelling means of expressing human perfection. The rich history of innocence in Christian thought is easily obscured by modern theoretical frameworks, such as Enlightenment ideas of the state of nature, the Romantic ideal of the child or psychological theories of paradisaal archetypes. This book traces a path into the multifaceted innocence of Christian thought through the Anglican divine, Thomas Traherne (c.1637–74). Traherne has been closely associated with innocence through his meditations and his poetry on childhood. He stands at a crucial point in the history of innocence, since his work looks forward to the Enlightenment praise of nature and the Romantic ideal of the child and backwards to the Church Fathers and the Latin roots of Christian innocence. The current renaissance in Traherne studies, which arose out of the discovery of new manuscripts, has highlighted the need for further work to review this theme and its significance in his thought.<sup>1</sup>

Traherne's language of innocence has often been met with wonder, incredulity and scepticism. It has been viewed as evidence of a nostalgic, sentimental or utopian vision. This book contends that these responses stem from a fundamental misconception of the meaning of innocence for Traherne. The identification of innocence primarily with a state of nature, virgin childhood or the Garden of Eden associates it with inexperience, naïveté or a mythical lost paradise. Traherne's work, by contrast, builds on a tradition of interpretation that identifies innocence as an aspect of holiness, associated with harmlessness, guiltlessness, sinlessness, simplicity and sincerity.

This monograph is based on two premises. The first is that formulations of innocence in contemporary theology would profit from greater sensitivity to historical manifestations of the idea. The second is that Traherne's notion of

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<sup>1</sup> For details of the manuscripts, see Peter Beal, 'Thomas Traherne', *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts*, <<http://www.celm-ms.org.uk/introductions/TraherneThomas.html#>> (accessed 1 Oct. 2014).

innocence is in urgent need of a reassessment that is attentive to its sources, its intellectual context and its theological orientation. Traherne was a poet as well as a priest, so this book seeks to uncover his poetic theology of innocence by assessing its grammar and poetic voice. This historical, contextual and theological re-reading of Traherne's language of innocence presents a new perspective on its place in his thought, not as a lost paradise but as a stable feature of the spiritual life.

## **(Re)introducing Thomas Traherne**

An understanding of the critical context is key to the significance of this study. The Introduction therefore commences with a survey of the development of Traherne studies from early literary criticism, through the historical turn, to more recent theological interpretations. On this foundation the discussion then turns specifically to interpretations of innocence in his works, before introducing the overall framework and approach of the book.

### *Early Criticism: Traherne as Romantic Precursor*

Traherne's significance for the history of innocence has lain hitherto in his status as a precursor to the Romantic praise of childhood. The association between Traherne and the Romantics goes back to the first publication of his *Poetical Works* by Bertram Dobell in 1903. Dobell likened Traherne's poems of childhood, such as 'Eden', 'Wonder' and 'Innocence', to William Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode' and William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*.<sup>2</sup> This comparison was consolidated by later literary critics, such as Rose Macaulay, who called Traherne a 'Wordsworthian mystic', and Kenneth Hopkins, who claimed to 'hear the very voice of Wordsworth' in Traherne's 'Eden'.<sup>3</sup> As discussed below, this early Romantic association persisted in later interpretations of the theme of innocence.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Traherne, *The Poetical Works*, ed. Bertram Dobell (London: The Editor, 1903), lxxvii–lxxxii; William Wordsworth, *The Collected Poems*, ed. Antonia Till (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 701–4; William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> Rose Macaulay, *Some Religious Elements in English Literature* (London: Hogarth, 1931), 104–5; Kenneth Hopkins, *English Poetry: A Short History* (London: Phoenix House, 1962), 118.

There are indeed striking ostensible similarities between Traherne's lyric poetry and that of Blake and Wordsworth. Consider the haunting reminiscences between Traherne's 'little Adam in a sphere of joys' and the 'Child of Joy' of Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode'. In Traherne's newborn declaration 'How Like an Angel Came I down!' one can see Wordsworth's divine child descending to earth 'trailing clouds of glory'. Wordsworth reminds his readers that 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy', while Traherne's rejuvenated child can 'see beneath, as if I were above the Skies'. Wordsworth describes how, in infancy, everything was 'Apparell'd in celestial light', while Traherne's 'Infant-Ey' sees everything in the 'anchient Light of Eden'. For Wordsworth, this primitive innocence is corrupted by 'dialogues of business, love, or strife', while Traherne laments the education that ties us to the 'outward Bondage of Opinion and Custom'.<sup>4</sup> Such easy comparisons account for the strength of Traherne's Romantic associations, but they must also be read against the background of nineteenth-century revivals of seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry, which most likely coloured early interpretations of Traherne as a 'new' metaphysical poet.<sup>5</sup>

This early association with the Romantics ensured his status within histories of childhood. By the mid-twentieth century, Traherne became an exemplar of a pre-Romantic praise of childhood and a precursor to a Romantic ideal of innocence, alongside Henry Vaughan.<sup>6</sup> He also developed a degree of significance through studies which identified him as a metaphysical poet, alongside George Herbert and John Donne as well as Vaughan.<sup>7</sup> Although not the greatest of these poets, Traherne has nevertheless been seen as an exemplar of this movement, due to his theological concerns. David Reid called him 'the

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Traherne, 'Innocence', *Dobell Folio*, in *The Works of Thomas Traherne*, ed. Jan Ross (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005–), vol. 6, 10; id., 'Wonder', *Dobell Folio*, 4; id., 'The Approach', *Dobell Folio*, 21; Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, III 4, 8, in *The Works of Thomas Traherne*, vol. 5; Wordsworth, 'Immortality Ode'.

<sup>5</sup> For a suggestion of a new Romantic revival in the early twentieth century, when Traherne was rediscovered, see Arthur H. Nethercot, 'The Reputation of the "Metaphysical Poets" during the Age of Johnson and the "Romantic Revival"', *SP* 22 (1925), 131–2.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. George Boas, *The Cult of Childhood* (London: Spring Publications, 1990), 45; Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9–10.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Jean-Jacques Denonain, *Thèmes et formes de la poésie 'métaphysique'* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956), 254–81; James Blair Leishman, *The Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934); Helen Constance White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience* (New York: Macmillan, 1936); Margaret Willy, *Three Metaphysical Poets* (London: Longmans Green, 1961), 31–43.

most metaphysical of Metaphysical poets since only he puts forward a system of theological philosophy.<sup>8</sup> This association ensured Traherne's inclusion in popular anthologies of seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry, albeit in a minor role.<sup>9</sup>

Traherne's Romantic associations also led to critiques of his work. Douglas Bush identified him with naïveté and optimism, arguing that, unlike Blake, he 'never graduated from songs of innocence to songs of experience'.<sup>10</sup> A similar, although more sympathetic, assertion can be found in Dorothy L. Sayers' opinion that, unlike Wordsworth or Dante Alighieri, Traherne was able to hold on to the innocence of his youth.<sup>11</sup> While not a critique in itself, this view is conducive to the accusation that Traherne's poetry of childhood is regressive or elevates a static ideal of childhood innocence.

Post-Romantic critiques of the Romantic ideal of childhood have had an important effect on interpretations of innocence in the works of Thomas Traherne.<sup>12</sup> Literary critics Charles Sommerville and Hugh Cunningham saw a paradox between the nineteenth-century idealisation of childhood and the common reality of abuse and neglect.<sup>13</sup> Judith Plotz identified this with a dangerous nostalgic social conservatism and sentimentalism.<sup>14</sup> Traherne's status as a pre-Romantic tied him to these critiques. Leah Marcus, for example, saw his faith in infant innocence as symptomatic of a wider cultural malaise and nostalgic conservatism within a period of change, similar to that of the eighteenth-century Romantics.<sup>15</sup> Comparisons of Traherne's lyric poetry with Romantic poetry of childhood have implicitly associated his idea of innocence with nostalgia and sentimentality, idealism and utopianism.

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<sup>8</sup> David Reid, *The Metaphysical Poets* (Essex: Pearson Education, 2000), 253.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Colin Burrow (ed.), *Metaphysical Poetry* (London: Penguin, 2006), 243–50.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 158.

<sup>11</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers, 'The Beatrician Vision in Dante and Other Poets', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 2 (1958), 3–23.

<sup>12</sup> On the post-Romantic loss of innocence, see Keith D. White, *John Keats and the Loss of Romantic Innocence*, *Costerus* NS 107 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Charles John Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood* (London: Sage, 1982), 131–2; Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representatives of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 151–63.

<sup>14</sup> Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), xiii–xvi.

<sup>15</sup> Leah S. Marcus, *Childhood and Cultural Despair: A Theme and Variations in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), 42–93.

*The Historical Turn: Traherne in Biographical and Intellectual Context*

The historical turn in Traherne criticism has distanced him from the Romantics, from the label of poet of childhood and felicity and from the idea of innocence altogether. Contextual studies have rooted his work in his biographical and intellectual context. Read in the light of his biography, Traherne is no Blakean nature mystic but a conformist and even cosmopolitan figure.<sup>16</sup> He grew up in royalist Hereford during the turmoil of civil war. Under the Cromwellian protectorate, he attended Brasenose College in Oxford (c.1653–56), then under puritan direction. He was appointed to the living of Credenhill, 10 miles outside Hereford, in 1657. Like many young clerics, Traherne quickly conformed to the Restoration of the monarchy, was episcopally ordained in October 1660 and signed the Act of Uniformity soon after its promulgation in 1662.<sup>17</sup> During his career Traherne was not tied to rural Herefordshire. His occasional absences from Credenhill are attested to by his failure to sign the Parish records for the years 1662–63, 1669–71, 1673 and possibly 1666.<sup>18</sup> He continued to visit Oxford, where he attained his BD in 1669. His thesis on the ‘Counterfeit Antiquities of the Church of Rome’, published as *Roman Forgeries* (1673), mentions a debate with a Catholic on the steps of the Bodleian.<sup>19</sup> Traherne also had links to intellectual circles in London. After 1669, he was appointed chaplain to the former Keeper of the Seals and patron of Cambridge Platonists, Orlando Bridgeman at Teddington, where he died and was buried on 10 October 1674.<sup>20</sup> Traherne shared his work with a circle of acquaintances, some of whose responses appear in marginal annotations in his manuscripts. References to his death by Sir Edward Harley, John Aubrey and George Hickes – in his preface to Traherne’s *A Serious and Pathetical*

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<sup>16</sup> On Traherne’s biography, see esp. Julia J. Smith, ‘Traherne, Thomas (c.1637–1674)’, *ODNB*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> On the large number of students and Commonwealth clergy who quickly conformed to the Act of Uniformity, see Ian M. Green, *The Re-establishment of the Church of England, 1660–1663* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 155–77.

<sup>18</sup> See Angela Russell, ‘The Life of Thomas Traherne’, *Review of English Studies* 6/21 (1955), 41; cited in H.M. Margoliouth, ‘Introduction’, in Thomas Traherne, *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings* (2 vols, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), vol. 1, xxv; corrected in Richard Lynn Sauls, ‘Traherne’s Hand in the Credenhill Records’, *The Library* 24 (1969), 50.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Traherne, ‘Advertisement to the Reader’, in *Roman Forgeries, or a True Account of False Records* (London: S.& B. Griffin for Jonathan Edwin, 1673), B7.

<sup>20</sup> See Anthony Wood, *Alumni Oxonienses 1500–1714*, ed. Joseph Foster (Oxford: Parker & Co., 1892), vol. 3, 1016.

*Contemplation of the Mercies of GOD* (1699, also known as the *Thanksgivings*) – attest to the high opinion in which he was held for his character and piety.<sup>21</sup> However, none of the works published around Traherne's lifetime enjoyed notable popularity as none was reprinted, and so a generation after his death Traherne virtually disappeared from view.

From this angle, Traherne appears as a Restoration Anglican priest who was loyal to the national church, albeit with puritan influences from his youth.<sup>22</sup> His career suggests a gentleman priest and eclectic intellectual, who participated in devotional circles such as the Kington group and maintained links to the philosophical school of Cambridge Platonism.<sup>23</sup> His works reveal a theologian engaged in polemical religious debates with the Roman Catholic Church and the radical opinions of Socinians, Quakers, Anabaptists and enthusiasts.<sup>24</sup> The collaborative construction of his manuscripts portrays a figure fully immersed in contemporary devotional culture.<sup>25</sup> Any assessment of Traherne's theology of innocence ought not to be divorced from this context.

The historical turn has distanced Traherne from the image of an innocent rural mystic, but it has also identified the diverse philosophical sources that underlie his language of innocence.<sup>26</sup> Early source criticism, by Carol Marks and others, situated Traherne as philosophically related to Cambridge Platonism.<sup>27</sup> The sources of this school lay in Neoplatonist patristic texts,

<sup>21</sup> See Margoliouth, 'Introduction', in Traherne, *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings*, vol. 1, xxviii–xxix, xxx–xxxii.

<sup>22</sup> See Julia J. Smith, 'Attitudes towards Conformity and Nonconformity in Thomas Traherne', *Bunyan Studies* 1/1 (1988), 26–35; ead., 'Thomas Traherne and the Restoration', *Seventeenth Century* 3/2 (1988), 203–22; Nabil Matar, 'The Anglican Eschatology of Thomas Traherne', *ATR* 74/3 (1992), 289–303; id., 'The Political Views of Thomas Traherne', *HLQ* 57/3 (1994), 241–53; on radical puritan influences on Restoration spiritual language, see Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> See Malcolm M. Day, *Thomas Traherne* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 1–4.

<sup>24</sup> See Denise Inge, 'Thomas Traherne and the Socinian Heresy in *Commentaries of Heaven*', *N&Q* 54 (2007), 412–16; Nabil Matar, 'A Note on Thomas Traherne and the Quakers', *N&Q* 28 (1981), 46–7; for a contrary assertion of Traherne's radical influences, see Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1993), 202–3.

<sup>25</sup> See Tomohiko Kohi, 'The Rhetoric of Instruction and Manuscript and Print Culture in the Devotional Works of Thomas Traherne' (PhD thesis: University of Reading, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> On Traherne as mystic, see e.g. Louise Collier Willcox, 'A Joyous Mystic', *North American Review* 193/667 (1911), 893–904.

<sup>27</sup> On Traherne and Cambridge Platonism, see Thomas O. Beachcroft, 'Traherne and the Cambridge Platonists', *Dublin Review* 186 (1930), 278–90; Frances L. Colby, 'Thomas

Marsilio Ficino's translations of Platonist works and Renaissance Platonists such as Pico della Mirandola and Nicholas of Cusa.<sup>28</sup> Traherne's contemporary influences included the Oxford Platonists Thomas Jackson and Theophilus Gale, Cambridge Platonists such as Henry More and John Everard's translation of Hermes Trismegistus.<sup>29</sup> As will be discussed, Christian Platonist notions of pre-existence, innate ideas, spirit and the divine attributes have important implications for Traherne's depiction of innocence.

Traherne was not a Platonist alone. His loose 'affinities' with contemporary Platonists indicate his philosophical eclecticism, which reflects the eclecticism of seventeenth-century Neoplatonism in general.<sup>30</sup> Later contextual studies have related Traherne to a variety of contemporary intellectual trends. These include Aristotelian metaphysics and ethics, particularly on notions of happiness, value

Traherne and the Cambridge Platonists: An Analytical Comparison' (PhD thesis: Johns Hopkins University, 1947); Carol L. Marks, 'Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism', *PMLA* 81/7 (1966), 521–34; for a summary of scholarship on Traherne's Platonism, see George R. Guffey, *Traherne and the Seventeenth-Century English Platonists, 1900–1966*, Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 11 (London: Nether Press, 1969).

<sup>28</sup> On the Church Fathers' influence on early modern Platonism, see D.W. Dockrill, 'The Heritage of Patristic Platonism in Seventeenth-Century Philosophical Theology', in G.A.J. Rogers, J.M. Vienne and Y.C. Zarka (eds), *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics and Religion* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1997), 55–77; for important surveys of seventeenth-century Platonism, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trans. James Pettegrove (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1953); Gerald R. Cragg (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Charles A. Patrides (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists* (London: Arnold, 1969); Daniel Pickering Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 132–63; Douglas Hedley and Sarah Hutton (eds), *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity: Studies on Platonism and Early Modern Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> The general studies cited above do not mention Traherne (cf. Sarah Hutton, 'Platonism in Some Metaphysical Poets: Marvell, Vaughan and Traherne', in Alan Baldwin and Sarah Hutton [eds], *Platonism and the English Imagination* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 163–77); on Traherne's links with Henry More, see G.R. Sherer, 'More and Traherne', *MLN* 34 (1919), 49–50; Frances L. Colby, 'Thomas Traherne and Henry More', *MLN* 62 (1947), 490–92; on Traherne's hermetic influences, see Carol L. Marks, 'Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus', *Renaissance News* 19/2 (1966), 118–31; on Oxford Platonism, see Sarah Hutton, 'Thomas Jackson, Oxford Platonist, and William Twisse, Aristotelian', *JHI* 39/4 (1978), 635–52; on Gale's influence, see Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660–1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 101.

<sup>30</sup> See George Robert Guffey and Carol L. Marks, 'Introduction', in Thomas Traherne, *Christian Ethicks* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), xxviii.

and the desire for the good,<sup>31</sup> although such interpretations generally stop short of identifying Traherne as an Aristotelian. Kathryn Murphy, for example, identifies Traherne's deliberate adaptation of Aristotle as evidence of his philosophical eclecticism.<sup>32</sup> Traherne interpreted Aristotle through his Oxford scholastic education and the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Nevertheless, fundamental structures of Aristotelian philosophy, such as the distinction between substance and accident, have a bearing on Traherne's philosophy of innocence. His miscellaneous notions have also been identified with a changing philosophical environment that included the emergence of Baconian experimentalism, atomism, the anti-Hobbesian reaction and the rise of the Royal Society.<sup>33</sup> Under these contemporary influences, Traherne's notions of innocence are very much of their time.

Traherne's compound philosophy defies simple definition, drawing on Florentine and Cambridge Neoplatonism, scholastic Aristotelianism, experimentalism and the New Science. Traherne defined himself as 'a Philosopher a Christian and a Divine'. Since he also thought that 'a Divine includes a Philosopher and a Christian, a Christian includes a Divine and a Philosopher, a Philosopher includes a Christian and a Divine', these three designations were synonymous.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> James Skeen, 'Discovering Human Happiness: Choice Theory Psychology, Aristotelian Contemplation, and Traherne's Felicity', *Quodlibet Journal* 5/2-3 (2003), <<http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/skeen-choice.shtml>> (accessed 1 Jan. 2012); David Hawkes, 'Thomas Traherne: A Critique of Political Economy', in *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 191-212; Paul Cefalu, 'Thomistic Metaphysics and Ethics in the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Traherne', *LT* 16/3 (2002), 248-69.

<sup>32</sup> See Katherine Murphy, "Aves quaedam macedonicae": Misreading Aristotle in Francis Bacon, Robert Burton, Thomas Browne and Thomas Traherne' (PhD thesis: University of Oxford, 2009), 228.

<sup>33</sup> For an unusual interpretation of Traherne's Dobell poems as using Baconian inductive epistemology, see J.J. Balakier, 'Thomas Traherne's Dobell Series and the Baconian Model of Experience', *English Studies* 70 (1989), 233-47; on Traherne's anti-Hobbesian realism, see Murphy "Aves quaedam macedonicae", 244-55; Guffey and Marks, 'Introduction', in Traherne, *Christian Ethicks*, xxiii; on the anti-Hobbesian reaction, see Helen Thornton, *State of Nature or Eden? Thomas Hobbes and His Contemporaries on the Natural Condition of Human Beings* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005); on Traherne and the scientific revolution, see Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the Effect of the 'New Science' Upon Seventeenth Century Poetry* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1950), 173-9; Robert Ellrodt, 'Scientific Curiosity and Metaphysical Poetry in the Seventeenth Century', *MP* 61/3 (1964), 180-97; on Traherne's atomism, see David Reid, 'Traherne and Lucretius', *N&Q* 45 (1998), 440-41.

<sup>34</sup> Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, IV 3; see also Thomas Traherne, 'Philosophic', *Commonplace Book* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS.Eng.Poet.c.42), 78r 1-78v 2, citing

The organising frame of Traherne's philosophy was its theological trajectory.<sup>35</sup> Traherne's sometimes eclectic philosophical compilations were oriented towards a theological end, just as the 'glimmering Light of Nature' of pagan philosophy, he thought, was rightly judged by divine revelation.<sup>36</sup> Just as Ralph Cudworth saw 'Religion [as] the Queen of ... all pure *Naturall knowledge*', Traherne adopted a spiritual philosophy rooted in seventeenth-century devotional culture and congruent with his theological vision.<sup>37</sup>

The framework of Traherne's philosophy is found in ruling ideas such as love, felicity and innocence. Innocence, as will be seen, is expressed through the language of Neoplatonism, anti-Hobbesianism, Aristotelianism, experimentalism and atomism. These voices combine to construct a polyphonic vision of innocence. The consequent philosophical ambivalence or confusion creates a philosophy in motion where the principles and doctrines that loosely structure the works are given life by the very themes that disorganise them. In this sense, Traherne's is a poetic theology, according to Pico della Mirandola's account of Homer, who 'permitteth his fancy to wander a little Wantonly after the maner of a Poet: but most deep and serious things are secretly hidden under his free and luxuriant Language'.<sup>38</sup>

### *Twenty-First-Century Interpretations: Traherne as Anglican Theologian*

A recent revival of interest in Traherne as both theologian and poet has built on the findings of contextual studies but has found a coherent theological poetics underlying his compound philosophical eclecticism. This latest development

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Theophilus Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles* (4 vols, Oxford and London, 1660–78), vol. 2, 295–6; on Traherne as a 'Christian, Platonist, Mystic', see Gladys Irene Wade, *Thomas Traherne: A Critical Biography. With a Selected Bibliography of Criticism*, by Robert Allerton Parker (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944), 215–38.

<sup>35</sup> On the theological bent of Traherne's Platonism, see John E. Trimpey, 'An Analysis of Traherne's "Thoughts I"', *SP* 68 (1971), 101; Gerald Harvey Cox, 'Thomas Traherne's *Centuries*, a Platonic Devotion of "Divine Philosophy"', *MP* 69/1 (1971), 10–24.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Traherne, 'Aristotle', *Commentaries of Heaven, Part 2*, in *The Works of Thomas Traherne*, vol. 3, 192; on the discovery of this manuscript, see Elliott Rose, 'A New Traherne Manuscript', *TLS* (19 Mar. 1982), 324; for a similarly theological Platonism, see John Smith, 'Concerning The True Way or method of attaining to Divine Knowledge', in *Select Discourses* (London: J. Flesher, 1660), 1, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Ralph Cudworth, *A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons at Westminster, March 31, 1647* (Cambridge: Roger Daniel, 1647), v–vii.

<sup>38</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. A. Robert Caponigri (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1956), 55; see Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, IV 78.

was galvanised by the discovery of *The Ceremonial Law* and the Lambeth manuscript in 1996–97.<sup>39</sup> The former is an epic poem based on Genesis and Exodus, and the latter contains four theological treatises: *Inducements to Retirednes*, *A Sober View of Dr Twisses his Considerations*, *Seeds of Eternity* and *The Kingdom of God*. At the forefront of theological reinterpretations of Traherne is Denise Inge's description of him as 'no naive optimist or rural songster but a serious thinker, debater, theologian and visionary'. For Inge, Traherne's effusive style and sometimes heterodox eclecticism does not diminish the coherence of his theology.<sup>40</sup> Mark McIntosh is noted for his theological interpretation of works that have been hitherto dismissed as merely devotional 'spirituality'. He has highlighted the depth of Traherne's Trinitarian vision of discernment, in which participation in the world as God's gift leads to divine perception.<sup>41</sup> David Ford sees in Traherne's unconventional poetic prose a creative impulse towards *epektasis*, which epitomises the role of praise as 'perfecting perfection'.<sup>42</sup> Ford follows others who have identified the distinctiveness of Traherne's theology in his poetic language.<sup>43</sup> Poetry transcends the boundaries of quotidian language, creating space for Traherne's expansive theological vision. This monograph adopts a similar approach by identifying key features of Traherne's poetic theology of innocence not in his stated doctrinal positions but in the tone, mood, genre and grammar of his work.

As an Anglican divine, Traherne has been interpreted according to commonly identified features of Anglican spirituality, such as the latitudinarian irenicism of

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<sup>39</sup> See Jeremy Maule, 'Five New Traherne Works: An Overview of London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 1360' (typescript of notes from a talk presented to the Thomas Traherne Conference, Brasenose College, Oxford, 30 July 1997); Julia J. Smith and Laetitia Yeandle, "Felicity Disguised in Fiery Words": Genesis and Exodus in a Newly Discovered Poem by Thomas Traherne, *TLS* (7 Nov. 1997), 17.

<sup>40</sup> Denise Inge, *Wanting Like a God: Desire and Freedom in the Thought of Thomas Traherne* (London: SCM, 2009), 3–4, 262; for another defence of Traherne's theological vision, see Calum Donald MacFarlane, 'Transfiguration as the Heart of Christian Life: The Theology of Thomas Traherne (1637?–1674) with Special Reference to "The Kingdom of God" and other Recently Discovered Manuscripts' (PhD thesis: University of Southampton, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Mark Allen McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth: The Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge* (Edinburgh: Alban, 2004), 11–13.

<sup>42</sup> David Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 235–7.

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. L. William Countryman, *The Poetic Imagination: An Anglican Spiritual Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000).

an Anglican *via media*.<sup>44</sup> As will be argued in Chapter 2, Traherne's middle way was not a narrow tightrope between the extremes of radicalism and Catholicism but an expansive vision that aimed to encompass all things. Several scholars have interpreted Traherne as part of a cataphatic tradition within Anglicanism and have seen in his spiritual writings a sacramental affirmation of the body.<sup>45</sup> As discussed in Chapter 6, Traherne's approach to the world as a physical sacrament of God's presence has implications for his presentation of spiritual innocence, and his theology of the Fall addressed in Chapter 3 also demonstrates elements of a *via negativa*. Thomas Merton and Donald Allchin identified Traherne's as a 'theology of praise'. Praise is both the substance and the trajectory of Traherne's theology, which is brought to birth, lived and consummated in praise.<sup>46</sup> It is not joy alone, but the preservation of dialogue with God through all the stages of life. This monograph looks at different manifestations of that ongoing dialogue.

A key theme in interpretations of Traherne as an Anglican divine has been the theological role of the affections. Esther de Waal's assertion of Traherne's 'passionate sense of relatedness to the physical world around him' stresses both the affective centre of his theology and its sacramental manifestation.<sup>47</sup> An affective interpretation of Traherne chimes with recent accounts of Anglican spirituality, such as Rowan Williams' defence of Anglicanism's 'passionate patience' and Alan Bartlett's view of the tradition's 'passionate balance'.<sup>48</sup> Traherne's work has the potential to contribute to further exploration of the affective aspect of Anglican spirituality. His theology arguably finds its coherence in the passions of joy, wonder and desire, as they are expressed in the intentional, subjunctive

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<sup>44</sup> William J. Wolf, 'The Spirituality of Thomas Traherne', in id. (ed.), *Anglican Spirituality* (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse, 1982), 49–68.

<sup>45</sup> See Anne Ridler, 'The Essential Thomas Traherne', in A.M. Allchin, Anne Ridler and Julia Smith (eds), *Profitable Wonders: Aspects of Thomas Traherne* (Oxford: Amate, 1989), 9–21; Gavin Kuchar, "'Organs of thy Praise": The Function and Rhetoric of the Body in Thomas Traherne', in Kathryn Duncan (ed.), *Religion in the Age of Reason: A Transatlantic Study of the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York: AMS, 2009), 59–81; Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 80–83.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), 133–4; A.M. Allchin, 'The Whole Assembly Sings: Thomas Traherne', in *The Joy of All Creation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 78–89.

<sup>47</sup> Esther de Waal, *Lost in Wonder: Rediscovering the Spiritual Art of Attentiveness* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), 158.

<sup>48</sup> Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004), 8; Alan Bartlett, *A Passionate Balance: The Anglican Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007).

and optative moods.<sup>49</sup> By assessing the grammatical moods of Traherne's poetic theology, this book draws out the hidden passions, affections and apprehensions of innocence.

A theological assessment of Traherne's work ought also to take account of his position as a priest during the post-Restoration development of Anglican identity. A commitment to this role is evident in *Church's Year-Book*, a manual of prayers and devotions that promotes the public festivals of the national church.<sup>50</sup> The treatises of the Lambeth manuscript are informed by the language of the King James Bible and the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, and the prayers of *A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of GOD* are indebted to a daily reading of the Psalms. An assessment of Traherne as an Anglican theologian would therefore be thoroughly contextual but may also draw on the insights of current scholarship on the distinctive features of Anglican spirituality.

## **The Innocence of Thomas Traherne: Aspects of Interpretation**

### *Modern Frameworks*

So far, it has been shown that general developments in Traherne criticism have important implications for understanding his vision of innocence and that innocence in his works ought to be interpreted through an approach that is both contextual and theologically and philosophically aware. Looking more closely at assessments of Traherne's idea of innocence, it appears that interpretation has been coloured by several modern intellectual frameworks. Identifying innocence as a natural or psychological state and associating it with naive optimism or solipsism, these approaches distance Traherne from seventeenth-century Anglican devotion.

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<sup>49</sup> On the 'affective turn' in scholarship on early modern philosophy, see Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis, 'Introduction', in eid. (eds), *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 1–9; on desire in Traherne's theology, see Belden C. Lane, 'Thomas Traherne and the Awakening of Want', *ATR* 81/4 (1999), 651–64; Carol Ann Johnston, 'Heavenly Perspectives, Mirrors of Eternity: Thomas Traherne's Yearning Subject', *Criticism* 43/4 (2001), 377–405.

<sup>50</sup> See A.M. Allchin, 'Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving', in Allchin, Ridler and Smith (eds), *Profitable Wonders*, 22–37; on Traherne as a high-church Anglican, see Barry Spurr, 'Felicity Incarnate: Rediscovering Thomas Traherne', in E.R. Cunnar and J. Johnson (eds), *Discovering and (Re)covering the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 273–89.

In some interpretations, Traherne represents a natural innocence that is akin to the Enlightenment or Romantic 'state of nature'. Traherne's praise of nature has long been identified as a central theme in his work and associated with his respect for childhood.<sup>51</sup> These two themes have been united through the idea of a 'natural innocence'.<sup>52</sup> More specifically, Keith Salter associated him with a defence of the natural innocence of childhood, part of a modern secularising shift away from the orthodox Augustinianism of original sin. He defined Traherne's theology of original sin as a forerunner of the 'Romantic heresy' of Pelagianism.<sup>53</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the imposition of an Enlightenment or Romantic state of natural innocence upon Traherne obscures the theological principles and the traditions of Christian thought which underlie his work. Chapter 3 will address his theology of original sin.

Some mystical and poetic readings of Traherne have inclined towards a psychological interpretation of innocence. Franz Wöhrer's empirical approach to mystical experience imposed psycho-phenomenology upon the seventeenth-century context, tracing the development of Traherne's 'mystical consciousness' from the infant state of innocence.<sup>54</sup> Robert Ellrodt interpreted Traherne's child through Piagetian developmental theory, identifying infant innocence with the pantheistic solipsism of the unformed individual.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Sharon

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<sup>51</sup> On Traherne's praise of nature, see Margaret Bottrall, 'Traherne's Praise of the Creation', *Critical Quarterly* 1/2 (1959), 126–33; on Traherne's not as a nature-mysticism but as a 'mysticism through nature', see Henry R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the Seventeenth Century* (London: A.&C. Black, 1965), 116–18; Jeannie DeBrun Duffy identifies Traherne's praise of nature with seventeenth-century Protestantism ('Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne and the Protestant Tradition of Meditation upon the Book of Creatures' [PhD thesis: Brown University, 1973]); it has also been read through modern ecological issues (see Diane Kelsey McColley, *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007], 55–6); for the most recent contribution, see Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 305.

<sup>52</sup> See e.g. Daniel O'Day, 'Quest for Childhood: A Critical Study of Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne' (PhD thesis: Columbia University, 1972), 216.

<sup>53</sup> Keith William Salter, 'Thomas Traherne and a Romantic Heresy', *N&Q* 200 (1955), 153–6; T.E. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism', in Herbert Read (ed.), *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1936), 111–40.

<sup>54</sup> Franz K. Wöhrer, *Thomas Traherne: The Growth of a Mystic's Mind. A Study of the Evolution and the Phenomenology of Traherne's Mystical Consciousness* (Salzburg: Salzburg University, 1982), 99–135.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Ellrodt, *Seven Metaphysical Poets: A Structural Study of the Unchanging Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 91, 93–4, 97–8; see Jean Piaget, *The Moral*