Two Types of Traherne *Centuries*

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Commentary on Traherne's *Select Meditations* has focused on the similarity between this recently discovered work and the *Centuries*. In announcing the discovery James Osborn wrote, "'To me it reads like Thomas Traherne,'" and Louis Martz responded, "'You are absolutely right, this is Traherne.'"[1] There were good reasons for this judgment, not the least of which was the catalogue description to which John Hayward had drawn Osborn's attention. The manuscript was designated *Select Meditations: Four Centuries*, and since this "unknown major work" was arranged in the same form as the *Centuries*, Louis Martz, observing "characteristic phrasing, along with [Traherne's] characteristic spelling and punctuation (or lack of punctuation)," and a typical reliance on Augustinian techniques and aims of repetition, inferred that Traherne had a "planned set of Centuries fully in mind."[2]

Although my present aim will be to show how these works differ, let me concede first that one can without difficulty find passages in both works which are strikingly similar in diction, syntax, and theme. As for method of organization, many readers will recall that in the *Centuries* Traherne links various entries, forming clusters of meditations on particular themes: "Your Enjoyment of the World is never right"; "Yet further, you never Enjoy the World aright . . . ," and so on.[3] Likewise, in *Select Meditations*, often meditations amplify motifs enunciated in preceding entries. The theme of *Select Meditations* III.8 is familiar to Traherne readers: "For I being a Divine Lover of all Angels and Men am concernd in their felicity as much as mine own."[4] Since God's goodness reflects itself in infinite ways, it follows that in order for man fully to enjoy all men of all ages his soul must be infinite too. Hence, God could not create man "of limited comprehensions, becaus that would be a loss of infinit Happiness." This view is a spatio-temporal leitmotif

of *Select Meditations*. Traherne's idea of "Comprehension" includes history and space no less than man's intellectual faculties. If the universe possessed only one image of the Deity, it would fill "Eternity." But in fact God multiplied the treasures of the cosmos to fill eternity. So that man's capacity to internalize God's "Comprehension" is a miraculous capacity—akin to art—to beget pictures of God's Kingdom. "It [Comprehension] is a Rasa Tabula" prepared to receive the impress of an infinity of discrete causes of happiness.

Returning to Traherne's method of organization, the movement from *Select Meditations* III.8 to III.9 represents a brief hiatus in a single thought affirming multiplication of times and spaces as occasions of happiness. Even the opening conjunction of the entry gives a sense of thematic flow: "Because He would provide Innumerable pleasures for his Image to Enjoy, therefore did he creat infinit varieties and kinds of things, and multiply the Treasures of his Eternal kingdom by wants and supplies" (III.9). The remainder of the entry considers the single sense behind these manifold varieties of impressions man receives. So in both works meditations blend into suites of meditations on various themes, which in turn unfold as *Centuries*.

Besides this structural similarity, particular meditations appear almost interchangeable. Consider two examples, the first from *Select Meditations*:

> Shadows in the water are Like their substances. And so reall that no Painter can againe Express them. even here beneath the sun is seen, and the face of Heaven. O give me more of that Spirit wherby we strongly Lov and Delight each in other. wherby we Liv in each other Soul, and feel our Joys and sorrows. The father is crowned in God the Son, The Eternal Son in God the father. And both Obeyed in Obedience to the H Ghost. one will in three persons . . . All Treasures are the fathers in the son All joys are the Sons in the H. Ghost. The H. Ghost is the Lov of the father and the Son Dwelling in us. or to Speak plainly seene by us. For as the sun when it shines on a Mirror, is seen within it: So Love when it is seen, Ravisheth the soul becaus it toucheth it. and it Dwelleth in the understanding by which it is seen, and the Sight of it Enflameth the Soul with Lov againe. the Love Seen is the Lov returned. or elss exchangeth, Dwelling there and Begetting its.Similitude. Three Persons united in Lov, are one in Essence: or whatever

> Difficulty is in that word, one by the Best of all possible unions. (II.72)

As in Traherne's most anthologized poem ("Shadows in the Water"), so here the speaker exults in the water-mirror's capacity to reflect more than surface reality. Since this capacity eludes the most sophisticated strategies of art, the speaker's prayer for an increase of the vivifying spirit behind it makes imaginative sense. The mirror image, with its sense of an interchange between object and self, conveys a hint of the mystery of love, ultimately, of communion among members of the Trinity. Love moves within the Godhead as light emanates from the sun throughout the cosmos—warming, begetting, returning—all without the slightest loss of substance or power.

This is precisely how Traherne employs the figure in the *Centuries:*

> . . . Lov is the Spirit of GOD. In Himself it is the Father, or els the Son, for the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the father: In us it is the H. Ghost. The Lov of GOD being seen, being GOD in us. Purifying, Illuminating, Strengthening and Comforting the Soul of the Seer. For GOD by shewing communicateth Himself to Men and Angels. And when He Dwelleth in the Soul, Dwelleth in the Sight. And when He Dwelleth in the Sight Atchieving all that lov can do for such a Soul. And thus the World serveth you as it is a Mirror wherin you Contemplat the Blessed Trinity. for it Plainly sheweth that GOD is Lov, and in His being Lov you see the Unity of the Blessed Trinity, and a Glorious Trinity in the Blessed Unitie. (I, 80)

These meditations are replete with apposite and synonymous utterances. In both, the mirror image shadows forth the mystery of divine conjunction within the Trinity. In both, the "Spirit" of God is "Lov," in both expressed by the begetting act of giving "His Son" (*"GOD by Loving Begot His Son"* [I, 78]). In both, God's "Spirit" in man is the embodiment of the "H. Ghost." In both, God's love, by being seen, touches and in so doing radiates and returns, unchanged.

In certain ways, then, the *Centuries* and *Select Meditations* resemble the sequences of meditations, thoughts, or prayers of Joseph Hall, Alexander Ross, Anthony Stafford, William Struther,

Thomas Fuller, Abraham Fleming, and others—works belonging to the interesting if minor tradition of the century. But having recognized the similarities between Traherne's contributions to this tradition, we ought also, in the spirit of Hobbes, to "observe their differences, and dissimilitudes."[5] Comparison shows that often the speaker of *Select Meditations* expresses himself in a manner atypical of the *Centuries'* spiritual guide. In his diction, for instance, he is often, like the learned *wunderkind* of *Roman Forgeries,* stiffly pedantic: "This He [God] Efflagitates by all his endeavors" (III.48). The analogous uses of this verb cited in the *OED* indicate the intended and unintended humor of such high-flown diction. (Thomas Shadwell's Sir Formal talks like this.)[6] Probably Traherne could have framed the identical sense with a less exotic verb, but he could not have done so and preserve what this particular choice tells us about the speaker's character.

In other more important ways, *Select Meditations* is closer to *Christian Ethicks* (1675) than to the *Centuries.*[7] Notwithstanding Traherne's disclaimer in the former work that he will not treat ground covered by "the Author of *The whole Duty of Man*" (p. 3), a glance at the Table of Contents shows that in fact he does discuss "Vertues" in apposite practical terms. It would be fair to say that the topics and their treatment take their rise, not from *The Cloud of Unknowing,* but from *Nicomachean Ethics*: "Of Justice," "Of Prudence," "[Of] Courage," "Of Temperance." Likewise, in *Select Meditations,* the central portion of The Fourth Century is given over to these so-called classical virtues (Meditations 57 through 60), which Traherne calls "Cardinal vertues" (IV.61). To these he adds, as he does in *Christian Ethicks,* "Theological vertues, faith Righteousness Holiness and Humility" (IV. 62). Again, both works are concerned with ideas of virtue involving conduct—not a notable concern of the *Centuries.* In *Select Meditations* IV.60 we read: "Temperance is the Execution of what Prudence Advised . . . It settles them Effectualy in the Golden mean. There is a Temperance in Gesture Speech and Lov." And in *Christian Ethicks,* temperance moderates between "Words and Materials," yielding pleasure as the end-result of practiced virtue, which is "seated in the Golden Mean" (p. 172). Not just the idea, but the very sequence of words seems strikingly similar: "In matters of Art, the force of *Temperance* is undeniable. It relateth not only to our Meats and Drinks, but to all our Behaviours, Passions, and Desires" (p. 171). The connection is all the more clear if we recall that this passage precedes a quatrain which is identical in all

but minor orthographic details from that closing *Select Meditations*:

> All musick Sawces Feasts Delights and Pleasures,
> Games Dancing Arts. consist in Governd Measures.
> much more do words and Passions of the mind[?],
> In Temperance their Sacred Beauty find. (IV.60)

Pursuing this comparison, *Select Meditations* is more concerned than is the *Centuries* with pleasure and pain in the ordinary senses of these terms. Consider, for instance, the analysis in the Third Century of the former work of the root cause of unhappiness, namely, impaired memory. At first glance, this theme may sound familiar to readers of the *Centuries*, especially as the speaker goes on to say that men often forget their true calling as heirs to all things. The variety of objects in nature emanates from one infinite source, and its function is to multiply men's treasures. So in earthly emblems they perceive, if memories serve, the ultimate authority of God: "For the person of a King and the Benefit of His office ought to prevail, whoe is most Beautifull in His Naked Authority: But a Blinded people that see noe Truth would tread upon Authority without some Ensigns Exhibiting it to them, in such Ideas as they can see: And this intimateth the Original of Kings their use and glory" (III.10). I doubt that we find anything quite like this pronouncement of the King's rule by divine right in the *Centuries*; nor do we find a figure like "Naked Authority" there either. In fact, the speaker of *Select Meditations* is concerned with the nature and origins of government in a way the guide of the *Centuries* is not. For that matter, *Select Meditations* considers the importance to man of institutions—school, church, kingship—in a manner unlike anything we find in the *Centuries*.

It is more than coincidental that in *Select Meditations* civil and ecclesiastical authority receive the highest praise, for both reflect the same need in man as he exists in society. In the Third Century, the speaker declares that in his original "Estate of Innocence" man, being ruled by "Lov," was subject to no one: "A king to Aid, protect and Defend, but that there was no occation. For Lov Naturaly makes all a king, a freind, a sovereign" (III.11). Since each man took delight in the other's "Glory," virtue was exhibited in all man's activities. He required "noe Judicature, nor higher power" to control him. But with the Fall came sin, which "Bred Inequality" among men. As a consequence, acts of compassion which once governed man's relations "became a Burden," and the

world was transformed into a frightening place. Hence, the need for government:

> Then did Citties need a Governor, Societies a Gardiner, Kingdoms a Phisitian to Pluck up those noysom weeds, to Heal those diseased to Terifie with punishments, to Alure with Rewards, to here the cry of orphans, to plead the caus of the Needy, to Strengthen the hands of the weak, and to be an impartial judge of Right and wrong, Banishing and Suppressing those Dreadfull poysons that Sin introduced. so that the office of kings is exceeding Glorious wheather they be Beloved or no: provided they understand and Discharge their Duty. for they are Healers and Correctors of Natures Malice, Restorers of the world to Its first Beauty, Rules of Justice Equity and Right, Rulers among the God, Shepherds over the flock of the Almighty, Conduits of Living and Refreshing waters, Defenders of the poor, and Like God fathers to the fatherless and Husbands to the widdow. . . . (III.11)

I have quoted this passage at length because of its appeal to social values. Here, compassion, not "Felicity," is the end of virtue. In *Select Meditations*, the world's ills are not just chimeras of "Thought," but external realities of disease, injustice, poverty, and so on. The speaker admires sovereigns insofar as they "Tender" to the "Needy" (a duty once vested in all men), and thereby assure their own and their subjects' "Glory."

This stress on social order is, I think, atypical of the *Centuries*, as is the speaker's awe in *Select Meditations* of the established church. He values social control: "The Government of a church Established by Laws is a Great fortress in which the welfare of Millions is Concerned. A Bulwark hindering his [Satan's] Ancient Revels, wher He was sole Lord over Pagan Kingdoms" (III.24). In contrast, the guide of the *Centuries* is less sanguine about "the church of England," not because he espouses dissenting views, but because he is serenely indifferent to external features of behavior.[8] The speaker of *Select Meditations* not only holds to the patriotic notion that all men are in debt "to the church for her Education," he pursues this line of thought to a point of assault on dissenters:

> And for every Trifle and for evry Scruple must they all Abandon her [the Church] and lay her wast!

> O prodigious and unreasonable men! And do you think that it is unlawfull that she should be united! must we all be Independent, And cannot we Live, unless we pluck up her roots, and pull down her Hedges: do you verily beleiv it unlawfull for kings and parliaments and Elders in a National Manner to Covenant with God that they will be his people, and Employ their Power and Authority for his Glory. Is it unlawfull for Kings and Lords and Senetors to Establish christian Religion in their Dominion; to Advance His Ministers and Erect Temples wherein they may sing his praises? verily such men have I seen in the world, and their thoughts are so absurd, that [it] is even a part of felicity to detect and hate them. (III.25)

In this context, "felicity" bears little similarity to the conceptual use made of that term in the *Centuries*, where no connection exists between "felicity" and hatred. In *Select Meditations*, religious experience, like kingship, is conceived in public terms. Thus, the implicit ecclesiastical perspective differs little from the rhetoric of such Royalists as James I or George Gifford, which uniformly insists that the praiseworthy, "Naked Authority" of bishops and kings cannot be challenged, far less overturned. "But O the wickedness of Ignorant Zealots!" cries the speaker of *Select Meditations*, "who Contemn thy Mercies and Despise the union the Beautifull union of thy Nationall church! every way thou art provoked to Anger, by Open profaness and Spirituall wickedness. And by the Ignorance of both, Despising thy Mercies O Lord when our citties and Teritories are united by Laws in the fear of thy name . . ." (I.85). This is anti-left rhetoric worthy of James Stuart himself. For comparable sentiments in the Traherne canon we must turn, not to the *Centuries*, but to *Roman Forgeries* (1673).[9] And this point is borne out by, say, the diatribe against "The Atheist" (*Select Meditations*, IV.34), which splits hairs in a contentious manner similarly reminiscent of Traherne's polemic against Rome.

Having noted the similarity between *Select Meditations* and the two works published during Traherne's lifetime, we are in a position to consider a major issue of Traherne criticism, namely, its preoccupation with "autobiography." In light of the preceding remarks, and since the norms of autobiography seem shaped in our minds by the writings of Howell, Evelyn, Baxter, Bunyan, George

Fox, Edward Herbert, and, of course, Pepys, it is odd that of all his works critics focus on the *Centuries* as the sourcebook of "Traherne's own history."[10] I doubt that we think of even the Third Century as "autobiographical" in the sense applied to the seventeenth-century diarists just mentioned. And yet Traherne could and did write straightforward autobiographical prose, in the front matter of *Roman Forgeries* (the passage is reprinted in its entirety in Margoliouth, I, xxix-xxx).

What is striking here is, first, the vivid detail. We are constrained to think of the unfolding narrative within a context of sense perceptions and memories. Such and such an event transpired, not in an imaginary, ideal University, but at a particular spot ("the Quadrangle") on a particular occasion ("One Evening, as I came out of the *Bodleian Library*") within a certain college among a congregation of them at Oxford. The passage unfolds with the very woof and warp of autobiography: "I was saluted . . . The Gentleman came up to us . . . He told me, that the Church of *Rome* . . . I desired him to name me *One* . . . ," including the give and take of emotional confrontation ("*Tush, these are nothing but lyes*, quoth he . . . Sir, answered I . . ."). This anecdote has an immediacy not unlike that, say, of Lord Herbert's account of Sir John Ayres' attack on him "in a place called Scotland-Yard."[11] As in Herbert, so in Traherne, the diarist records a particular setting with particular people at a particular time of day. And the scene unfolds in a sequence of sturdy predicates: "saluted," "told," "spent," "agreed," "turned."

In the passage from *Roman Forgeries*, Traherne distinguishes himself from other characters in the action, while discriminating one event from all others in the history of the world. This is surely not Traherne's aim in the *Centuries*, not even in the so-called "autobiographical" Third Century.[12] Lacking here is that precision noted in the account of the argument in front of the Bodleian. The emphasis in the *Centuries* is not on temporal details, but on generalities—images of light and shade rather than description, "thoughts" rather than dialogue. The speaker here recalls, not the sensation of riding "a Hobby hors," but the difficulties faced in valuing its existence. If history concerns real events, then his past plays no part in it: "The Glass of Imagination was the only Mirror, wherin any thing was represented or appeared to me" (I, 116). Though he remembers not one conversation in his whole life, he does recall the feeling of "being Swallowed up . . . in . . . idle talk." Experience in the way that Lord Herbert thinks of it has been transformed into dream:

> Being Swallowed up therfore in the Miserable Gulph of idle talk and worthless vanities, thenceforth I lived among Shadows, like a Prodigal Son feeding upon Husks with Swine. A comfortless Wilderness full of Thorns and Troubles the World was, or wors: a Waste Place covered with Idlensss and Play, and Shops and Markets and Taverns. As for Churches they were things I did not understand. And Scoles were a Burden: so that there was nothing in the World worth the having, or Enjoying, but my Game and Sport, which also was a Dream and being passed wholy forgotten. (I, 118)

Here, the self has been absorbed by a literary being more suitable to the truth of the feelings expressed. The audience must infer a setting of particular buildings and people from a bare substance of unadorned nouns: Shops, Markets, Taverns, Churches, Schools. Then too, the parable of the Prodigal Son bears part of the narrative burden. This familiar tale expresses the truth, not of one "life," but of life. Hence, the dreamlike landscape composed of shadows, allegorical associations and abstract nouns emphasizes a theme of separation between the child and his rightful inheritance.

It seems to me that the speaker of the *Centuries* is unconcerned with the raw materials of experience, mindful instead of their implied meanings and motives. Accordingly, raw experience—history—never quite penetrates these meditations. Even the thinking of a speaker who seems preternaturally self-conscious is subject to the distorting effects of reverie. Consider this passage, which is often cited as autobiographical:

> Once I remember (I think I was about 4 yeer old, when) I thus reasoned with my self. sitting in a little Obscure Room in my Fathers poor House. If there be a God, certainly He must be infinit in Goodness. And that I was prompted to, by a real Whispering Instinct of Nature. And if He be infinit in Goodness, and a Perfect Being in Wisdom and Love, certainly He must do most Glorious Things: and giv us infinit Riches; how comes it to pass therfore that I am so poor? of so Scanty and Narrow a fortune, enjoying few and Obscure Comforts? (I, 119)

We find precious little narrative precision here. Apparently, on one occasion, this speaker recalls, he either thought he was or was in

fact approximately four years old. Such an autobiographical assertion might apply to anyone or everyone whose memory even minimally operates. On this occasion, which the speaker only tentatively recalls (when he was or thought he was), he also "reasoned," and this not with others but with himself. If memory serves, he was seated, but upon what piece of furniture, if any, he does not say. Nor does the reader know what kind of room desolate of furnishings this remembering "I" occupied. Indeed, the room, like the "few . . . Comforts" of his "Fathers poor House," remains "Obscure." So, one might add, does the language of the reminiscence itself, which fits well into an unfolding sequence of assertions about the speaker's past, all calculated to obscure the sense of personal identity: "I lived among Shadows, like a Prodigal . . ." (I, 118); "Yet somtimes in the midst of these Dreams, I should com a litle to my self" (I, 119); "Som times I should be alone . . . when suddainly my Soul would return to it self, and forgetting all Things in the whole World which mine Eys had seen, would be carried away to the Ends of the Earth . . ." (I, 119). We can agree, I think, that these events are not like those characteristic of Herbert or Evelyn or Pepys.

Here and elsewhere in the *Centuries* the speaker and the landscape disappear in ever widening spatial and temporal perspectives. The diction moves from obscure room to earth to sky to infinity. In such a context, the speaker is like the Prodigal Son, not in his distance from a particular ancestor, but in his alienation from treasures rightfully bestowed by the Father upon all. Traherne's allusiveness, then, adds density to the meaning of the immediate episode, but it fictionalizes the speaker as well. This child occupies no particular room, but the "World." His birth was coeval with "Creation."[13] Nor do we find here an isolated instance of this "conceit." In the *Centuries*, Traherne often employs rapid transitions from immediate perception of an object to the uttermost reaches of space and time. We cannot fully explain this strategy by locating antecedents in mysticism and Plato, though recognition of the importance of such analogues may be helpful.[14] It is one thing to lend one's voice to a commonplace (man as microcosm), but quite another to make the spatial and temporal possibilities of that commonplace integral to a work's perspective and design. Henry Cuffe held that the various epochs of every life bore the impress of all the ages. In a manner like Traherne's, he took the figure of man as an "*Analogicall world*"[15] literally:

> Man the *Epitome* of the whole *world*, *Lord* of the *creatures*, in regard of that perfect analogie and resemblance betweene him and the great worlds frame, is not unfitly by the Learned, both *Divines* and *Philosophers*, termed, The *Lesser world*: for there is nothing in the vaste compasse of this universall circumference, whose likenesse and lively representation we have not summarily comprised in man, as in a most perfect compendium and abridgement. (pp. 1-2)

More than a reiteration of themes found in *Timaeus*, more than a reiteration of the theory of "correspondences," this view accords to the individual a cosmic reality. Within each life all time and space have been compressed. The diction, especially Cuffe's use of adjectives, stresses the expansive qualities of the microcosmic figure. In this wholeness—in his universality—man resembles "the great worlds frame."

We must think of the speaker of the *Centuries* in light of such a metaphoric conception. This protagonist is, in a way the speakers of *Roman Forgeries*, *Christian Ethicks*, and *Select Meditations* are not, a literary composite. The latter works also make generous use of allusion and quotations; and we know that Traherne permitted others to make entries in several of his "works." But this openness, which bears important traces in both *Christian Ethicks* and *Select Meditations*, does not provide the defining feature of the speaker's identity, as, I believe, it does in the *Centuries*, where the speaker presents himself, for the most part, as someone else. Not only are his reader and himself one (two sexes merging in a single act of authorship), but that fusion is only one of many:

> 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; infinitly Profitable, but not Esteemed. Is it not a Great Thing, that you should be Heir of the World? Is it not a very Enriching Veritie? In which the Fellowship of the Mystery, which from the beginning of the World hath been hid in GOD, lies concealed! The Thing hath been from the Creation of the World, but hath not so been Explained, as that the interior Beauty should be understood. It is my Design therfore in such a Plain maner to unfold it,

> that my Friendship may appear, in making you Possessor of the Whole World. (I, 3-4)

The quotation from Matthew in *Centuries* I.3 ("I will open my Mouth in Parables") tells the reader that one among the chorus of voices he will hear in the work belongs to Christ. In this context, allusion functions to proclaim a multiplex identity. The speaker has introduced himself as the reader's friend. Later, as the Prodigal Son, he will be the subject of the parable. Now, as Prophet-Redeemer, he is the author of that parable, a composite of Matthew and of Christ. It follows, then, that he speaks under the unction of the Holy Ghost. Imitating Christ, who addressed the multitude, he is at once a prophet, the immediate reference of the Word prophesied, and the end of that prophecy as well. Just as in Christ all time has been redeemed, so in the speaker time's secrets lie revealed.

Calvin's remark on the relevant text from Matthew may help explain the full complexity of Traherne's allusiveness here: "Matthew does not mean, that the psalm, which he quotes, is a prediction which relates peculiarly to Christ, but that, as the majesty of the Spirit was displayed in the discourse of the Prophet, in the same manner was his power manifested in the discourse of Christ."[16] Christ's quotation from the Psalms not only imparts a heightened diction, but overtones of prophecy. It suggested to early readers of the Gospels that Christ was himself the fulfillment of the Old Testament "Word." Now, Traherne's protagonist, as the imitator of David and of Christ, likewise claims a double heritage of the Law and Gospel. And when he quotes from Thomas à Kempis, he further emphasizes the *Imitation of Christ* motif, implicitly submerging his ego in an expanded authorship of familiar and powerful literary and biblical voices.

Few ideas are more frequently stated in the *Centuries* than that touching the speaker's enjoyment in transcending the limits of place and time, which truth gains expression only as norms of personal history are muted. Thus, the speaker in reading Scripture increases his enjoyment by exponentially expanding his purview by "10000 Ages" (I, 125). In this light we may be in a better position to consider the so-called "autobiographical" sequences in *Century* III. In one of these, we read:

> When I came into the Country, and saw that I had all time in my own hands, having devoted it wholy to the study of Felicitie, I knew not where to begin

> or End; nor what Objects to chuse, upon which most Profitably I might fix my Contemplation. I saw my self like som Traveller, that had Destined his Life to journeys, and was resolved to spend his Days in visiting Strange Places: who might wander in vain, unless his Undertakings were guided by som certain Rule; and that innumerable Millions of Objects were presented before me, unto any of which I might take my journey. fain I would hav visited them all, but that was impossible. What then I should do? Even imitat a Traveller, who becaus He cannot visit all Coasts, Wildernesses, Sandy Deserts, Seas, Hills, Springs and Mountains, chuseth the most Populous and flourishing Cities, where he might see the fairest Prospects, Wonders, and Rarities, and be entertained with greatest Courtesie: and where indeed he might most Benefit himself with Knowledg Profit and Delight: leaving the rest, even the naked and Empty Places unseen. . . . (I, 141)

We can probably agree that this is not "autobiography" as we find it in Lord Herbert or Bunyan or Pepys. Traherne's speaker went into the country, but whether he traveled east or west or north or south or by day or by night alone or in company we do not know. In this sojourn, no bridges are crossed because there are no rivers to flow beneath them. The reader is led by this experienced traveler not into a particular country or region or county but "into the Country," where inconveniences of coach travel present no problem. The speaker's thoughts turn immediately to questions of temporal and spatial limits. Like the proper study of "Felicity," which invests knowledge with the vivifying virtue of desire, this tourism of the mind transcends limitations imposed on more mundane travelers. Here and often elsewhere in the *Centuries*, description moves away from particular landscapes to a comprehensive view of history.

It is not so much that the "meaning" of a figure—an image, for instance, of a mirror or of travel—is so different when Traherne employs it in the *Centuries* from its use, say, in *Christian Ethicks* or *Select Meditations*. Rather, it is the rhetorical emphasis that is so. In the latter works, Traherne places more trust in sense and reason. In the *Centuries*, he writes about a neo-Platonic conception of self-love which affirms a realm of being inaccessible to both. Thus, the way of "Felicity" taught by his spiritual guide takes up

where pathways of the various disciplines end. Nature, the proper domain of academic studies, demands an understanding of limits, which vary only in degrees. Accordingly, animals may be distinguished from creatures lower on the chain of being by their self-love; and by the same "rational Methods" God designed man able to "lov others better then" himself. This explains why, although "self Lov is the Basis of all Lov," it is, paradoxically, also true that, if unalloyed by a transcendent spirit or intent, "Self Lov is Dishonorable" (I, 197). God created the world and made man in his image in order that He might enjoy Himself in his creation, that is, out of self-love. Through man's intellect God enjoys an aspect of creation inaccessible through other creatures. In this way love is truly like the Trinity: "By Loving it does Dilate and Magnify it self" (I, 82). Rightly, love is the means by which one "Expandest and Enlargest [the] self" (I, 39), thus escaping the impoverishment of a narrow and "Dishonorable" self-love.[17]

Understanding this shift of emphasis may help us more fully appreciate the moral and institutional themes in *Select Meditations*, all of which presuppose values existing within the flow of human time. Individuals recite the Creed, partake of the Eucharist, learn about "the Day of Judgment" and "the Forgivness of Sins" and all the other "Articles" of the faith (III.58).[18] In *Select Meditations*, the audience ("T. G." and "S. H." [II.38]) provides the tutor with an opportunity to serve the established church and state. In contrast, the guide of the *Centuries* cautions his reader against uncritical belief in what the schools dispense as knowledge, to be wary of "Defectiv" tutors (I, 132). This contrast shows more than different attitudes toward one of society's most important institutions; it presents the reader with two quite different characters. One is interested in political issues shaped by pressures of history. The other is anxious to extricate his reader from precisely such pedestrian concerns.

These differences, moreover, reflect alternative views of history and of the self. Even the conventional diction of mysticism is shaped in its impact by such compelling thematic differences. Thus, in the Third Century of *Select Meditations*, we find this prayer, which would not be out of place in Antonio de Molino or Jacopone da Todi: "O Let me Annihilate my Selfe, and vindicat thy Glory" (III.71). Again, the speaker exults: "I fall down before Thee, and Annihilateing my Selfe Adore thy Glory" (IV.38). And yet the latter prayer for self-annihilation is only a prelude to

entries on the classical virtues: Prudence, Courage, Justice, Temperance (IV.57-60). The treatment here of these "Cardinal vertues" (IV.61) would go unnoticed, I think, in *Christian Ethicks*. The rhetorical impetus is not toward union *with* but vindication *of* the Deity. In the *Centuries*, on the other hand, the rhetorical aim is toward an imitation of Christ that would annihilate boundaries between the self and others, between the one and other places, between the present and other times.

This essentially ecstatic viewpoint insists upon the basic incompleteness of individuals. Matthew, David, Christ—by encompassing their voices in his thoughts, the speaker merges with them: "a New Light Darted into all his Psalmes, and finaly spread abroad over the whole Bible" (I, 148). This is not so much a prayer for self-annihilation as the answer to it: "There I saw Moses . . ."; "There I saw Jacob . . ."; "There I saw GOD leading forth Abraham"; "There I saw Adam in Paradice . . ." (I, 149). If I understand Traherne's practice here, the "Word" changes the guide of the *Centuries* in a way unmet in *Select Meditations*. So the link to the following meditation, "In Salem dwelt a Glorious King," a poem which introduces a Psalmic section, elaborates this theme of a composite personality. Like the speaker with his expanded consciousness, David was a comprehensive soul:

> 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 Melodie appear;
> All these in Him did pleas the View
> Of Those that did his Heavenly musick hear. . . .
> (I, 151-52)

In light of these and apposite examples, perhaps we ought to question Margoliouth's "historical" focus on *Centuries* I.80. Indeed, we might question the relation of this or any other passage in the work to the "real world" of autobiography. Margoliouth wonders whether *Centuries* I.80 refers to the distance ("100 miles") between London and Herefordshire, or to that between Oxford and Kington,[19] believing the entry to be the moment at which the *Centuries* most precipitously converges upon "fact." Accordingly, the exhortations that Mrs. Susanna Hopton look beyond the "Treasures" of "Courts and Taverns" must be explicit moral

instruction of a kind familiar to readers of such seventeenth-century books of piety as *The Whole Duty of Man* and *Christian Ethicks*. Surely there is nothing "Strange" about "Life" conceived in such quotidian terms. The miles that stood between these two friends, with pot-holes and highwaymen, might explain the apocalyptic vision that only Doomsday can bring them together again: "You will at last be seen by me and all others, in all your Thoughts and in all your Motions" (I, 43). But in this context history assumes limits which hardly fit the expansive perspective that we have been discussing, and it provides a less than visionary conception of the good life. Indeed, *Centuries* I.80 reads much like the fifth decade of the Fourth Century of *Select Meditations*. Both concern, not the flaming sphere in which the Cherubim dwell, but terra firma, where pagan virtues work as well as "Felicity," and "Justice is a Kind of Bartering of ware: A communicativ vertue Exercised in giving and receiving, to the common Benefit and Good of all" (IV. 59). With this comparison in mind, what cities *Centuries* I.80 might designate is less important than the hard fact that Traherne, after trying to revise the entry, chose to delete it instead.[20]

It seems to me that the very specificity of the passage, which invites such inferences as Margoliouth's, does not fit the governing poetics of comprehension and abstraction in the work. The spiritual guide of the *Centuries* is closer to the thinking of Peter Sterry, who held that true knowledge of the self is impossible "*in any One Man, of in any One Particular Thing.*"[21] Paradoxically, to know himself a man must look outward as well as within. In this way the speaker's past merges with the shaping substances of others' lives. Such a mechanism is typical of neither history nor autobiography. Understandably, then, the *Centuries*' spiritual guide declares that he will unfold the secrets of "a Strange Life," one not limited to place or time, one requiring the reader's lively presence "with Things that were before the World was made." In the state to which the acts of that life are present, "Infinity is but one Object":

> This is the Space that is at this Moment only present before our Ey, the only Space that was, or that will be, from Everlasting to Everlasting. This Moment Exhibits infinit Space, but there is a Space also wherein all Moments are infinitly Exhibited, and the Everlasting Duration of infinit Space is another Region and Room of Joys. Wherin all Ages appear together, all Occurrences stand up at once, and the

> innumerable and Endless Myriads of yeers that were before the Creation, and will be after the World is ended are Objected as a Clear and Stable Object, whose several Parts extended out at length, giv an inward Infinity to this Moment, and compose an Eternitie that is seen by all Comprehensors and Enjoyers. (I, 229)

"Comprehensors" embody in one moment of perception all of eternity; all occasions "stand up" as if they will their own obliteration. Comprehension implies not only understanding, but spatial and temporal inclusion.

As we all know, this idea of timeless duration is a favored topic of mystical writing. Mystics imitate Christ by their enjoyment of "Secret Ravishments" (I, 152) transcending time. The Fifth Century is an extended meditation on such an endless moment: "It is an Object infinitly Great and Ravishing"; "Evry Man is alone the Centre and Circumference of it" (I, 227). In the radiance of "Light and Beauty," varieties of individual events and character lose their distinct outlines. Since this "Beatifick Vision" is "Incomprehensible," it follows that it will not yield to definitive description. Hence, the guide's tentativeness, his interruptions of himself, his willingness to be the speaker of others' lines. Individuality is a fault, precision an imperfection. The only "Theatre Magnificent enough" for the "Acts" of the Almighty must be infinite: "As sure as there is a Space infinit, there is a Power, a Bounty, a Goodness a Wisdom infinit, a Treasure, a Blessedness, a Glory" (I, 228).

In this context, as the speaker tries to grasp in the fleeting voice of a present moment all that is, was, and will be, niceties of grammar give way to an onrush of thoughts. "Words," says the speaker of *Select Meditations*, "are but feeble Barren Things" (I.100), but he is not convincing. In the *Centuries*, the spiritual guide makes imprecision of language an integral part of his way of seeing the world. In *Select Meditations* II.66, union between God and man has something to do with the Sacrament. Here, moral instruction and one's conduct in church are related, important concerns (IV. 52). It is only a short mental step in this earthly vision to the speaker's description of the splendors one finds in cities (IV.48). He does talk about "the Hypostatical union" between God and man, but in his hortatory tone he seems more in character with his thoughts about "Doomsday" (III.98) and the Fall. The latter topic, which explains man's misunderstanding of that "Hypostatical

union," occupies a good part of the Third Century of *Select Meditations*.[22] Finally, the discussion of "the Hypostatical union" seems academic and argumentative. This tutor may claim that "Words are but feeble Barren Things" (l. 100), but he conveys no confidence in this commonplace. Rather, unlike the guide of the *Centuries*, the solid scholar of *Select Meditations* believes in himself, in learning, in the "christian Laws" of England, and, finally, in the magistrates who enforce them (l.86).

Not only is *Select Meditations* more argumentative than the *Centuries*, but it is so with respect to questions of little moment in the latter work. Different characters betray different attitudes, show concern for different ends. Preoccupations of the speaker of *Select Meditations* are those of the preceptor, who would give his audience the benefit of his wisdom, much of which is directly aimed at "getting on in the world." He offers himself as a moral tutor and model. This is not the strategy of the *Centuries*' spiritual guide, who is worthy of emulation only insofar as he effaces himself. Deficiencies of the individual voice are lost in a more amplified diapason—a chorus of voices from the near and distant past. Traherne uses abstract nouns effectively to convey this sense of inclusion. By their eccentricity, particulars dismay. In order to approximate the *Centuries*' ideal, capacious perspective, the reader must unlearn the most compelling sense of life, namely, that of time's limits. The briefest interval must coincide with the totality of all appreciative acts.

Accordingly, transive verbs, vehicles of the tensed and limited world, surrender that hegemony acceded to by minds whose limited vision reflects the insular constraints of custom.[23] The movement of *Centuries* IV.97 is typical of the treatment of this theme: "General and Publick concernments seem at first unmanageable," we read, but the meditation unfolds a vision of "Immensity, the Wideness of the world, and the multitude of Kingdoms" (I, 222-23). The soul is one with this infinite extension: it "is" and "is able to do all Things." This shift of perspective trivializes not only the mundane sense of "General and Publick concernments," but all limiting conceptions of the self: "Nothing is too Great, nothing too Heavy, nothing unweildy; it can rule and manage any thing with infinit Advantage." In this perspective, Christ is at the center of history because in one act of love He bonded all actions of all times within one moment. John Wall had written: ". . . he that created summer and winter, knoweth the congruity of times."[24] In a similar vein, in the *Centuries*, we read:

> Eternity is a Mysterious Absence of Times and Ages: an Endless Length of Ages always present, and for ever Perfect. For as there is an immovable Space wherin all finit Spaces are enclosed, and all Motions carried on, and performed: so is there an Immovable Duration, that contains and measures all moving Durations. (I, 229)

The presence of any time or times, by being understood, contradicts the essential characteristic of Eternity, which is at once "Endless" and "always present." A similar mystery surrounds the truth that infinite space exists in the most infinitessimal grain of sand. Clearly, the means of one's acquaintance with "the World" is itself a mystery. Time, like the Scriptures from which so great a portion of the *Centuries* is fashioned, cannot fully be known by logic or intellect or will. For these, like the speaker of *Select Meditations*, are creatures of an isolated and therefore faulty being.

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NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, all books published before 1700 bear a London imprint. In quotations from early printed books I have regularized the use of *i* and *j* and *u* and *v*, disregarded meaningless capitals and small capitals, expanded contractions, and silently corrected obvious printer's errors.

1 James M. Osborn, "Thomas Traherne: Revelations in Meditation," in *The Author in His Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism*, ed. by Louis L. Martz and Aubrey Williams, intro. by Patricia Meyer Spacks (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 211, 208, and his "The Osborn Collection, 1934-1974," *The Yale Library Gazette*, 49 (1974), 154-211.

2 See Louis L. Martz, *The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne, and Milton* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 208, 211.

3 H. M. Margoliouth, ed., *Thomas Traherne: Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), I, 13, 15.

4 *Select Meditations* III.8. I am indebted to Stephen R. Parks, Curator of the Osborn Collection, for permission to consult over an extended period of time, and to Professor Louis L. Martz, for permission to quote from a negative microfilm of MS. Osborn 88 (OSB 88); all citations from *Select Meditations* in my text are based on my examination of that microfilm. See James M. Osborn's "A New Traherne Manuscript," *Times Literary Supplement* (8 Oct. 1964), p. 928. I have for convenience italicized *Select Meditations*; references will be to the "Century" and "Meditation."

5 *Leviathan* (1651), p. 33.

6 Note in particular the context of the speech in Act II, *The Virtuoso* (1676), p. 29.

7 The thematic connection was, to my knowledge, first noted in *Christian Ethicks*, ed. by Carol L. Marks [Sicherman] and George Robert Guffey (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968), esp. pp. xxi-xxxiii, but the point is also amply documented in the footnotes. All citations from this work in my text will be from this admirable edition, which not only makes *Christian Ethicks* available to scholars, but, because of its solid "General Introduction" and rich annotation, provides valuable insight into Traherne's intellectual backgrounds.

8 This point was stressed recently by Robert Ellrodt, "George Herbert and the Religious Lyric," in *English Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Christopher Ricks (London: Barrie

9 For a more extensive discussion of "The Rhetoric of *Roman Forgeries*," see my book, *The Expanded Voice: The Art of Thomas Traherne* (San Marino, Cal.: The Huntington Library, 1970), ch. 2.

10 Gladys I. Wade, *Thomas Traherne* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1944), p. 184.

11 *The Life of Edward Lord Herbert of Cherbury* (Strawberry Hill, 1864), pp. 87-88.

12 I am aware that René Wellek and Austin Warren single out Gladys I. Wade, Traherne's major biographer, as an example of misguided biographical procedures, but in fact her remarks ("In tracing this personal history, I am accepting as literal fact Traherne's own references and allusions in his *Centuries of Meditations* and in the two autobiographical cycles of his poems" [p. 27]) are not unusual; see René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), pp. 214-15. For remarks similar in their assumptions, see William K. Fleming, *Mysticism in Christianity* (London: Robert Scott, 1913), p. 190; C. J. Stranks, *Anglican Devotion: Studies in the Spiritual Life of the Church of England Between the Reformation and the Oxford Movement* (London: SCM, 1961), p. 119; A. L. Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969), p. 127; Itrat-Husain, *The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948), pp. 265-66; R. A. Durr, *Poetic Vision and the Psychedelic Experience* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1970), esp. pp. 159 and 234-35; and Sharon C. Seelig, "The Origins of Ecstasy: Traherne's 'Select Meditations,'" *English Literary Renaissance*, 9 (1979), 419-31.

13 Joan Webber, *The Eloquent "I": Style and Self in Seventeenth Century Prose* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1968), ch. 1; see also William Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," *New Literary History*, 5 (1973-1974), 363-81. I am indebted to the late Miss Webber for suggestions about Traherne's speaker in the *Centuries*. My differences with her on the Third Century should also be evident.

14 Traherne's Platonism was recognized by critics and editors early in the century, and has been the subject of much critical commentary. See Elbert N. S. Thompson, "The Philosophy of Thomas Traherne," *Philological Quarterly*, 8 (1928), 97-112; T. O. Beachcroft, "Traherne and the Cambridge Platonists," *Dublin Review*, 186 (1930), 278-90; J. B. Leishman, *The Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934), pp. 188-224; Itrat-Husain, *Mystical Element*, pp. 264-300; Carol L. Marks [Sicherman], "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism," *PMLA*, 81 (1966), 521-34; Gerard H. Cox, "Traherne's *Centuries*: A Platonic Devotion of 'Divine Philosophy,'" *Modern Philology*, 69 (1971), 10-24.

15 Henry Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life* (1607), p. 11; hereafter, citations from Cuffe in my text will be from this, the first, edition.

16 *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, tr. and ed. William Pringle (Edinburgh, 1845), II, 129.

17 For the relation of this idea to the Gnostic doctrine of "emanations," see esp. Carol L. Marks [Sicherman], "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism," *PMLA*, 81 (1966), 521-34; other discussions are cited in fn. 15, above.

18 See also *Select Meditations* II.66: "Those that think our union with God so Incredible. are taught more in the Sacrament. He gives Himselfe to be our food. is united to us. Incorporated in us, for what doth he intimate by the Bread and wine, but as the Bread and wine are Mingled with our flesh, and is Nourishment Diffused through all our Members. so he is Lov mingling with our Lov as flame with flame, Knowlege Shining in our knowledge as Light with Light An Omnipresent Sphere within our Sphere." I am aware that the prose meditation, *Select Meditations* III.58, is preceded by a verse entry, "And now my Soul Enjoy thy Rest," separately numbered III.58.

19 See Anne Ridler's rejoinder to Margoliouth in regard to *Centuries* I.80 in her edition of *Thomas Traherne: Poems, Centuries and Three Thanksgivings* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. xvi.

20 Margoliouth accurately writes: "A large cross deletes the whole section after the changes mentioned below had been made" (I, 251).

21 Peter Sterry, *The Teachings of Christ in the Soule* (1648), sig. A4v.

22 See my chapter on *Christian Ethicks* (1675) in *The Expanded Voice*, pp. 45-73, esp. 57-60.

23 Traherne's attitude toward "Custom" is, perhaps surprisingly, very much like Milton's; see *Centuries* III, 5-9.

24 John Wall, *Jacobs Ladder* (Oxford, 1626), p. 46.