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Key Concepts in Thomas Traherne's Poetry

dalnych nakazów, sugestii i porad. Dalej rozważa autor uwagi dopisywane do oficjalnych ogłoszeń oraz różne zniekształcenia i adaptacje tych ostatnich. Kolejne wyróżnione grupy to napisy o treści pseudo-rewelacyjnej, służące i analogie do pewnych ogólnie znanych sloganów i wreszcie niekonwencjonalne definicje. Nie jest to z pewnością prezentacja kompletna, obejmuje jednak, jak się wydaje, najbardziej typowe przykłady grafitti. Artykuł kończy się próbą wyciągnięcia pewnych ogólnych wniosków dotyczących natury omawianego zjawiska.

"Traherne, Thomas /1637-1674/ a writer of religious works, both in prose and verse, "Christian Ethicks"/1675/, "Poems"/1903/, and "Centuries of Meditations"/1908/, marked by originality of thought and by a remarkably musical quality".<sup>1</sup> So much the latest edition of the renowned "Oxford Companion to English Literature". We can add to that one or two paragraphs or short chapters in scholarly books on the seventeenth century metaphysical poetry. But, all in all, Traherne remains now almost virtually unknown and his literary output is practically neglected. Certainly, it would be a gross simplification and, at the same time, an undue objection against the critics of English literature if we maintained that there are no articles and critical analyses devoted exclusively to Traherne's works. But it is true as well that with the tremendous progress that has been made in literary criticism in the last fifty years there is hardly an area of English literature which would not be explored so far. Accordingly, the fact that we can find not more than ten critical books on a particular author indicates that his literary output received only a minor attention on the part of the critics. Moreover, in considering the state of research on a particular writer it is indeed fundamental to take into account the date of publication of the scholarly analysis. It is especially true in the light of the fact that the approaches to literature from the beginning of our century differed considerably from the present state of literary criticism. And this divergence of attitudes is represented in some of the articles and books on Traherne. Because indeed the history of Traherne scholarship could be an excellent - although obviously simplified - survey of the development of critical thought from the beginning of our century onwards. Likewise, the criticism on Traherne constitutes a good material for the sociology of literary reception as, on the basis of it, we can observe an interesting evolution of the attitudes of critics to his literary creation. But before we shall explain this undoubt-

edly interesting point we should - it seems - relate a very bizarre and mysterious way in which the manuscripts of Traherne's poems were discovered and recognized. As S. Stewart recounts it "it was at the turn of the twentieth century when, quite by accident William T. Brooke came upon two manuscripts in a London bookstall. Convinced the poems were Vaughan's he showed the manuscripts to A. Grossart who decided to buy them. In the same year, however, Grossart died and the material fell into the hands of another famous bookman: B.E. Dobell. He studied the manuscripts closely coming to regard them as the work of someone other than Vaughan. At this juncture, Brooke led Dobell to a volume entitled "A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation", an anonymous book. Soon Dobell realized that the two manuscripts were written by the same person. Moreover, in the preface to the "Thanksgivings" the author is identified as having once been in "the service of the late Lord Keeper Bridgeman as his Chaplain". Finally, the entry in Athenae Oxonienses brought the connection between Bridgeman and Traherne to light, and in 1903 Dobell published for the first time an edition of Traherne's poetry".<sup>2</sup>

This account is quite significant for our analysis as it points to two important assumptions about Traherne. First, the authorship of some of his works - like parts of his biography - are shrouded with a veil of uncertainty. Second, and more important, Traherne is but a very late discovery for English literature. And, taking up the point we have left above, we shall see that the discovery of the manuscripts of Traherne's poems constitutes an excellent example of the typical reception of a literary text by critics. We are not surprised then to find that "Dobell's edition of 1903 of Traherne's autograph poems had a favourable early critical response" which led to the fact that "the early reviewers and critics before 1910 excessively inflated Traherne's reputation".<sup>3</sup> But the reasons for this early fascination with Traherne are more complex. We should remember that the discovery of his manuscripts coincided with the newly developed demand and vogue for the metaphysical poetry, which culminated a few years later in a series of brilliant articles written by T.S. Eliot. Secondly, and here the case of uncertain authorship is significant, the critics had very good reasons to be so enthusiastic as the poems they analysed were undoubtedly written by Traherne himself. It was in 1910 when H.I. Bell published Philip Traherne's version of Thomas's poems entitled "Traherne's Poems of Felicity" that there came a period of negative criticism and deflated statements. As A.L. Clements explains "Gladys I. Wade's edition of "The Poetical Works

of Thomas Traherne", the standard edition between 1972-1958, compounded confusion, for it was based on her mistaken assumption that /Philip's/ "corrections as a whole are marked improvements".<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, until the mid 50's the critics got to great pains in deprecating Traherne's poetry basing their opinions on Bell's negative assumptions and Philip's feeble versions of Thomas's poems. The year 1958 is the turning point in Traherne criticism when H.M. Margoliouth published his excellent two-volume edition of Traherne's "Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings". It is - it seems - the appearance of this publication that initiates a new, we can say, "modern" period of Traherne scholarship. And as Jordan notes "it took until 1960's for the explosion that had taken place in other areas of literary research to reach Traherne". He adds, however, that "some of the new Traherne scholarship has been like that of the past; some of it has gone on to examine Traherne's poetry in terms of the New Criticism and some has been research into Traherne's ideas, sources and influences".<sup>5</sup> The only scholarly book from the "pre-Margoliouth" period which deserves mentioning here is Gladys I. Wade's "Thomas Traherne: A Critical Bibliography"/1944/. This book is significant for at least two reasons. One of them is the fact that in Wade's book all of the faults and mistaken assumptions of the early criticism are brought to a sharp focus. Secondly, as her book was undoubtedly the most influential work on Traherne at that time, it set a certain pattern of viewing his poetry for others to follow. As an example of her erroneous approach and serious misapprehension of Traherne's poetry we can quote her remarks on his "Meditations on the Six Days of the Creation". Thus, she maintains that Traherne's "Hexameron" is "the least satisfactory work" of his as it "is built on an intellectual conception no longer tenable. The modern reader" - she continues - is sundered from Traherne's "literariness of interpretation by all the scientific discoveries of the centuries between, by the very hypothesis of evolution, by a new conception of the relationship between religion and science; in these meditations he therefore feels himself taken into an unreal world of myth. The unreality unfortunately tends to infect whatever is of more enduring value there."<sup>6</sup> And on top of that she ends her analysis of this collection of meditations with a statement which is - to paraphrase her own words - "built on an intellectual assumption which is never tenable": "Approaching them /meditations/ as literature no qualifications are needed /sic ?!/: our business is then to understand, not evaluate the author's mental attitude; and certainly English literature contains no other song of

Creation compared with "Traherne's".<sup>7</sup>

Of the more recent Traherne scholarship we should certainly mention some titles which made a greater contribution to the development of Traherne criticism than their too speculative and too biographical predecessors. Certainly, one of the best studies of Traherne's literary output is R.D. Jordan's "The Temple of Eternity: T. Traherne's Philosophy of Time"/1972/. The main objective of his work is to "define Traherne's view of the nature and relationship of time and eternity and to trace the influence of that view in other elements of his thought and art".<sup>8</sup> His analysis of Traherne's formulations on time and eternity in their "relationship to past philosophical considerations of the subject and to the views of Traherne's contemporaries not only establishes the place of the concepts in the history of thought but also shows the unique extent to which Traherne worked out the details".<sup>9</sup> And although Jordan writes that his interest "in this study is both philosophical and literary" he seems to be much more interested in "establishing more securely Traherne's position in philosophy" and history of ideas and "to show how one concept, eternity-time, was systematically and consistently developed by him".<sup>10</sup> The most detailed and informative study in Traherne's symbolism and use of imagery is A.J. Sherrington's "Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of T. Traherne"/1970/. In the introduction to his book, Sherrington justifies quite rightly the need for this kind of study on the basis of his observation that "hitherto most critics have confined themselves to a discussion of Traherne's philosophical and mystical ideas, virtually excluding specific consideration of him as a symbolist or a poet". Some critics - he continues - in the course of a discussion of his philosophy, mention that the symbolic use of the sphere, the sun, the human eye and the mirror is derived from Plato and Plotinus, but the only symbol whose meaning has been explored in any detail is the child".<sup>11</sup> Concluding his argumentation with a statement that "no close study of the whole pattern of Traherne's mystical symbolism" has been done so far he offers his book as "a study of the significance he /Traherne/ gives to traditional symbols and the aesthetic result of his symbolic vision".<sup>12</sup> This well-planned book - "the seven chapters bear the names of his /Traherne's/ key symbols : Senses, Light, Water, Space, Child, King, Marriage" - accomplishes successfully its not an easy task of "showing the links connecting the symbols within the group, and the links connecting the group to other groups".<sup>13</sup> Another important study of Traherne that deserves mentioning is S. Stewart's "Expanded Voice"/1970/. Stewart's book, unlike Sherrington's, is an

attempt at giving an account of not only Traherne's poetry but also of the whole of his varied literary output. Thus, again unlike the majority of critics, he included into his analysis - apart from poems and Centuries - such overtly unpopular Traherne's works like : "Roman Forgeries", "Christian Ethics" and "Hexameron". That absorbs Stewart's attention in Traherne's works is his singular style and technique of writing. Therefore, interestingly enough, in the conclusion to his book he postulates that "the drift of Traherne's technique is toward an 'open' form, representing a process of association, like reverse".<sup>14</sup> Likewise, he claims that the frequent instances of inconsistency in Traherne's writings are "not only a structural feature but a distinguishing mark of the speaker's temperament".<sup>15</sup> For Stewart Traherne's style and technique is seen as one which constantly aims at the destruction of all kinds of attitudinal and syntactic boundaries and limits. Similarly, when he comments on Traherne's presentation of landscape, the setting of place and time he concludes that in desolate-ating them Traherne "attenuates the means by which readers ordinarily orient themselves to follow action and character development".<sup>16</sup> Stewart suggests also an interesting, although marred with unjustified allegations of subjectivism and self-centeredness, point of on Traherne's narration : "the dominant voice is that of an anti-character, an egotist being, whose soul expands by a process of perfect narcissism, one who like a loose syntax of the work itself, bears no limits of space and time. Hence - Stewart concludes - the author tries to erode the expected distinction between author and audience, just as he tries to destroy the integrity of beginning, middle and end."<sup>17</sup> Finally, we should mention the book which culminates, as it were, the long tradition of studies in the mysticism of Traherne. A.L. Clements in his "The Mystical Poetry of T. Traherne"/1969/ assumes quite rightly that "Traherne should not be narrowly designated a meditative poet" as "many distortions might lie in trying to fit Traherne's poetry into an unoriginal mould and pattern of a particular meditative tradition".<sup>18</sup> Unlike most of the critics of Traherne's mysticism he admits that "Traherne must have had some knowledge of meditative patterns", being at the same time aware that "we should not demand that Traherne follow strictly these patterns but rather expect that he would have reshaped them to meet his own particular and poetic needs".<sup>19</sup> And it is in this characteristic that Clements sees Traherne's uniqueness and originality of literary creation. Because indeed, it is not uncommon for the critics to get to great pains in trying to adjust comfortably Traherne's works to a particular meditative tradition. The best example of this approach would be I.L. Martz's<sup>20</sup> conception of Traher-

ne's inspiration in writing his "Genturles" by St. Augustine, and more specifically, St. Bonaventure's contemplative patterns; and P. Grant's theory that "Traherne has a place among these thinkers who, in the cause of latitude, peace and reason, sought to revive the spirit of an early Christianity and who looked to the Pre-Nicene Fathers" - 21 and especially to St. Irenaeus - for inspiration.

Thus, the books we have listed above can be treated as the most representative examples of the attitudes and approaches adopted by modern critics of Traherne. They cover also the major areas of literary investigation in relation to Traherne: time and space, symbols and images, technique and mode of presentation and finally mystical roots and inspirations. After this introductory survey of the state of research on Traherne let us have a look at some of the most significant concepts and assumptions that are present in his writings.

Admittedly, Thomas Traherne - poet, prose writer, scholar and seriously devout man never managed to achieve due recognition both in his own times and at the turn of this century when his major works were discovered and published. Ironically enough, he went unnoticed while the whole of his literary output is filled with profound love of man and is ultimately directed at the good and spiritual progress of others rather than himself. It took the critics of Traherne at least fifty years to realize this simple and basic truth and purge him of the repeated allegations of self-centredness, subjectivism and egotism. The fact that Traherne uses heavily the first person singular pronouns: "I" - 439, "my" - 479, "me" - 212 times <sup>22</sup> cannot possibly be treated as a sign of egotism. It can only be viewed as Traherne's particular and specific mode of presentation all the more appropriate as it stems from the great tradition of all kinds of mystical writings. Likewise, it is wrong - it seems to me - to base one's interpretation of Traherne's poems and to explain "sudden shifts of tense, outbursts of ecstatic passages, and that marked pervasive joy" on the assumption that "there are cogent evidences that Traherne not only travelled the via mystica but also reached at least as far as illumination, and very probably *salvific*, arrived at the contemplative final destination, union." <sup>23</sup> It is all the more surprising that this argumentation - the truth of which we have no means of knowing - is presented by A.L. Clements - one of the best critics of Traherne's poetry. Yet, although obviously too speculative, his interpretation draws our attention to one very important characteristic of Traherne's poetry and prose: namely its mystical/vertical direction. The reverberated message of his poems appears to be received by the speaker, then it is filtered

through his singular perception of the reality and ultimately directed at someone else to accept it. To simplify it all, this is mysticism combined with didacticism: God's divine inspired by the Deity preaches the truth in order to transform the spiritual life of others. But apart from didacticism which is certainly one of the most distinctive features of Traherne's works this method of creation is a reflection of another sphere of influence on Traherne. The underlying concept of this method is a Platonic premise of an objective existence of the ideal reality. As a matter of fact, we can say that Traherne was an advocate of the same ideals as Ralph Cudworth the leader of an intellectual group of the Cambridge Platonists, the poet laureate of which was Thomas Traherne himself. Thus, as "they were idealists, and maintained the spiritual constitution of the universe" he believed that "sense can reveal only appearance; reality consists in 'intelligible forms', which are 'not impressions printed on the soul without, but ideas vitally protended or actively exerted within itself'". <sup>24</sup> But there is no point in enlarging on Traherne's affiliations to Plato and especially Neo-Platonism as this problem together with the question of Traherne's relation to the Cambridge Platonists has been the object of the greatest interest of the critics. <sup>25</sup> But certainly, it would be erroneous not to mention probably the most important and direct area of mystical experience for Traherne, namely that of the Bible. It is sufficient to have a look into any collection of the metaphysical poetry to realize the extent to which the Holy Scripture influenced the writings of such poets as J. Donne, G. Herbert, H. Vaughan, R. Crashaw, to name only the most important. But the Bible, in its immense diversity - being one of the richest source books of human thought - never gives a uniform inspiration; so different poets were attracted by different parts of the Scripture. Traherne, with his winsome philosophy of felicity, relied mostly on the optimistic and "brighter" parts of the Bible: Genesis, Psalms and the New Testament. Moreover, even if he meditates on the creation of man and his later fall he does not investigate man's depravity and his utter wretchedness but rather "sympathizes" with him and points to Jesus Christ who brings consolation and regeneration. Therefore, the New Testament with its message of love and redemption seems to be more in accord with the overtly serene philosophy of Traherne. For, how deeply rooted in the New Testament is, for instance, the concept of the innocent, i.e., of a sheep or a child; the concept so pivotal in the writings of Traherne. The image of happy infancy combined with an acute awareness of continuing influence of the surrounding world appears almost on every page of his works:

So that with much ado I was corrupted; and made to learn the Dirty Devices of this World, which now I unlearn, and become as it were a Little Child again, that I may enter into the Kingdom of GOD. 26

Because indeed, Traherne is very consistent both in his philosophy and poetry. He has a carefully worked out set of ideas concerning especially man's present state of existence, the possibility of his breaking away from the "worldly" bondage, man's relation to the Deity and the means of attaining the ultimate union with God. But he is also a poet who is conscious of the purpose of his literary creation and the poetic means he employs in achieving it. And his poetic creed, like the message he tries to convey in his poetry and prose, is again a very singular one. It is especially true in the light of the fact that Traherne was writing in the times when wit, conceits and all kinds of intellectual stunts were a common practice in poetry. Traherne on the other hand, postulates something entirely different and opposite. He aims at :

The naked Truth in many faces shewn,  
Whose inward Beauties very few have known,  
A Simple light, transparent words, a Strain  
That lowly creeps, yet maketh Mountains plain,  
Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense  
And keeps them there;

/ "The Author to the Critical Peruser", ll.1-6/

This conception of poetic creation, considered by many as minimalistic, if not simplistic, is again very indicative of Traherne's turn of mind and his peculiar philosophy. If we looked closer at these six first lines of this poem we could notice that almost every line, and very often almost every word in this short extract is charged with extra meaning and constitutes, as it were, a separate concept. Thus, we have the word "Truth" which sets immediately the whole passage in the context of Platonic philosophy. It is not that Plato was nearer the truth or the concept of truth played any specific function in his philosophy. What is crucial here is the fact that Traherne, by making the "Truth" the main and ultimate objective of his poetic creation presupposes, in a way, its prior and objective existence both in the realm of the matter and in the realm of the ideas. Moreover, he makes it plain that the poet is only successful if he is able to reach it and relate it in verse. Almost as important as the word "Truth" is the adjective that modifies it. The "naked" performs a dual function in this line. First, it adds to and reinforces the concept of "Truth"

abstracting it, as it were, and removing it in this way more to the sphere of the ideas. Second, and more important, is a very subtle way in which this word brings in and touches on one of the key points of Traherne's philosophy : his acute awareness of and fastidious sensitivity to the contamination of man's spiritual existence. The phrase "naked Truth" - however trivial and banal - gets a new and deeper dimension if we view it with the whole body of Traherne's writings in mind. The first passage - and it must be stressed that it is one of many similar pieces - that comes here to mind and is at the same time very telling and revealing is the already quoted third meditation of the Ill Century, where Traherne expounds his philosophy of unlearning. Therefore, we are not surprised that even the Truth is covered with a coat of grown "dirt" and contagious tumour which has to be torn off to make it live, shine and radiate its beauty on others. And the kind of beauty Traherne values most is not the glare and sham of the outer surface but "inward Beauty". Accordingly, if we combine the two images into one : "the inward Beauty of the naked Truth" we shall instantly notice that Traherne seems to be almost obsessively preoccupied with tracing and discovering the essence and core of things. When we read Traherne's poems we have the feeling that he perceives the reality and every element of it as world muffled with some corrupting and contaminating veil which has to be removed from almost every object to give them life and freedom - the main attributes of spiritual development. Likewise, it is interesting to observe that it is really very difficult to set the limits to which Traherne is busy stripping off the veil and tracing down the "inward Beauty of the naked Truth". It seems that he is not even content with finding the very essence of the real objects. To me, he tries to look even further than that and wants to reach the realm of the ideal. His ultimate purpose is then to expose the pre-image of the world, to show the world in its elementary and perfect state. For what other type of experience is represented in a passage - one of many - like that :

Pure Empty Powers that did nothing loath,  
Did like the fairest Glass,  
Or Spotless polish'd Brass,  
Themselves soon in their Objects Image cloth.  
Divine Impressions when they came,  
Did quickly enter and my soul inflame.  
Tis not the Object, but the Light  
That maketh Heaven; Tis a Purer Sight.  
Felicity  
Appears to none but them that purely see.

But this stanza from "The Preparative", ll. 51-60/ is also very characteristic of Traherne's frequent usage of all kinds of vocabulary pertaining to eyes, sight and vision. On the other hand it is not surprising, especially that most of the metaphysical poetry is interested in exploring the mysterious relation between the sphere of the senses and the sphere of the soul. Yet, in none of the poets of the seventeenth century do we find so extensive use of the imagery of eyes, sight and light. Moreover, in his treatment of these images Traherne is once again very original and innovative. First, he singles out the sense of sight from the five main senses :

For Sight inherits Beauty, Hearing Sounds,

The Nostril sweet Perfumes

All Tastes have hidden Rooms

Within the Tongue; and Feeling Feeling Wounds

With Pleasure and Delight: but I

Forgot the rest, and was all Sight, or Ey.

Unbodied and devoid of Care,

/"The Preparative", ll. 31-37//

Second, having become "an unbodied and devoid of Care" "Ey" he treats the sense of sight as the means of perceiving and understanding of not only the material world but also of the perfect world of the ideas. The eyes, then, can cross the elusive border between the two realms and penetrate into the quiddity of the ideal objects and comprehend their essence :

Then was my Soul my only All to me,

A Living Endless Ey,

Far wider then the Skie

Whose Power, whose Act, whose Essence was to see.

I was an InwardsSphere of Light,

Or an Internuntable Orb of Sight

An Endless and a Living Day,

A vital Sun that round did RAY

All Life and Sense,

A naked Simple Pure Intelligence.

/"The Preparative", ll. 11-20//

The degree of Traherne's originality in the treatment of certain images and his undisputable harbingerhood of the ideas of Romanticism can be noticed if we juxtapose this stanza with the passage which appeared two hundred years later in Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on "Nature" :  
Standing on the bare ground, - My head bathed by the blithe air,  
and uplifted into infinite space, - all egotism vanishes. I become  
a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of

the Universal Being circulate through me. I am part or parcel of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances, master or servant, is then trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. <sup>27</sup>

It is really very singular to find that the concurrence of the ideas and images of the two authors is so profound. Certainly, we have to reflect the theory of the possibility of Traherne's influence upon the great American romantic; if only on the basis of the fact that Traherne's poems and major prose works were not published until the beginning of our century. But this outstanding similarity which is observed here can be surely explained by the mutual fascination of the two "mystics" with Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought; the thought which fostered a belief that "the visible world is representative of the invisible, that the properties, forms and notions of the one were copies, images and shadows of the attributes, qualities and laws of the other". Accidentally, it is very surprising that apart from occasional mentions of Traherne's affiliations to the method and thought of Romanticism there is hardly any satisfactory and thorough study of this undoubtedly absorbing relation. <sup>28</sup> And indeed, the seeds of romantic philosophy can be observed on almost all levels of Traherne's literary creation. We have already noticed that, for example, in the domain of language Traherne prefers "transparent words/a Strain that lowly creeps yet maketh Mountains plain" to poets who :

... speak Zumzummin words, and tell

A Tale in tongues that sound like Babel-Hell;

In Meteors speak, in blazing Prodigies,

Things that amaze, but will not make us wise.

He thinks it best to use :

No curling Metaphores that Eild the Sense

Nor Pictures here, nor painted Eloquence;

No Florid Streams of Superficial Gems,

But real Crowns and Thrones and Diadems!

/"The Author...", ll. 21-24, ll. 11-14//

And finally he pronounces his poetic creed explaining that the purpose of his poetry is : "To make us Kings indeed. Not verbal Ones/ But real Kings, exalted unto Thrones;". We observe also that in the sphere of the imagery we can find a variety of convergent points. Thus, apart from the heavy emphasis that Traherne places on the images of sight, eyes and light we should distinguish his, probably second important, imagery complex: namely that of infancy, childhood and innocence. And it would be indeed very difficult to find a critical paper or a



book on Traherne which would make no notice of the figure of child in his writings. But again, like most of Traherne's imagery, the concept of child has been grossly misunderstood for a long time. As A.L. Clements explains "some of the earliest critics took the central theme of childhood in a biographical, sentimentally nostalgic and too literal sense. Therefore, it was also often mistaken for a kind of solipsism or as a psychological regression. But an explanation of the theme of childhood is to be found neither in these views nor in mid-seventeenth century disappointment with Renaissance faith in knowledge nor in 'Enthusiastic' revolt against culture and learning. There can be no question - he claims - that the meaning of childhood in Traherne is biblical in origin, mystical in tradition and symbolic in import". 29

The best passage to prove this overtly convincing assumption is the first meditation from the III Century :

"Will you see the Infancy of this sublime and celestial Greatness? Those Pure and Virgin Apprehensions I had from the Womb, and that Divine Light wherewith I was born, are the best unto this day, wherein I can see the Universe. By the Gift of God they attended me into the World, and by this special favour I remember them till now. Verily they seem the greatest Gifts His Wisdom could bestow, for without them all other Gifts had been Dead and Vain. They are unattainable by Book, and therefore I will teach them by Experience. Pray for them earnestly: for they will make you Angelical, and wholly Celestial, Certainly Adam in Paradise had not more sweet and Curious Apprehensions of the World, than when I was a child. In this marvellous meditation in miniature we can also see all the major characteristics of Traherne's singular philosophy of unlearning. Similarly, we can notice that like in the writings of the Romantic period, a child with its uncontaminated perception of the world occupies an exceptional position in the hierarchy. When Traherne comments on the consciousness of a child he says :

A learned and a Happy Ignorance  
Divided me,  
From all the Vanities,  
From all the Sloth Care Pain and Sorrow that advance,  
The madness and the Miserie  
Of Men.  
/Eden", ll. 1-6/

The feature that is most characteristic of the child's mind is for Traherne "Ignorance". But this plainly negative designation is modified by the two preceding adjectives: "learned" and "Happy". The most surprising and seemingly out of place is the former adjective which, if put together with "Ignorance", produces a jarring paradox.

However, this astonishing "learned Ignorance" receives its proper meaning when we realize that the modifying role of the adjective is so far-reaching that it transforms its "positive" semantic denotation onto the noun nullifying, as it were, the overtly "negative" semantic load of the noun itself. Interestingly enough, Traherne manages then to dislocate the meanings of the words; his "learned Ignorance" becomes ultimately a near synonym of "Knowledge" - a word which should be semantically its antonym. Moreover, the second adjective which immediately modifies "Ignorance", i.e. "Happy" is also a vital one here. Its semantic denotation is also complex and rich. On the one hand, it refers directly to jaunty and frolicsome moments of infancy and early childhood. On the other hand however, being a synonym of "felicitous", the word "Happy" carries with itself the complexity and diversity of the concept of "Felicity". For as Traherne writes in his 56th meditation of the III Century :

...It was the infinite Wisdom of God, that did implant by Instinct so strong a Desire of Felicity in the Soul, that we might be excited to labour after it, tho we know it not, the very force where with we covet it supplying the place of Understanding. That there is a Felicity we all know by the Desire after, that there is a most glorious felicity we know by the Strength and Vehemence of those Desires; And that nothing but Felicity is worth of our Labour, because all other things are the means only which conduce unto it.

And it is not surprising that the words which make up the concept of Felicity are Traherne's favourites. Accordingly, if we consult "A Concordance to the Poetry of F. Traherne" we shall see that these words belong to most frequent in his writings: "joy" /83/, "joys" /99/, "delight" /65/, "pleasure" /40/, "pleasures" /39/. 30

At this point one feels tempted to end this sketchy survey with so happy and felicitous conclusion had it not been for a seemingly minor fact that this joyurous submersion in the eternity of bliss produces a slightly odd psychological effect. It is a sensation of surfeit ; of surfeit which incites you to thinking whether these poems and meditations are really "Poems of Felicity" or maybe very dramatic cravings for this felicity of someone who is aware of his present miserable condition. Do they really express faith and doctrinal truths or rather they reflect obsessive and traumatic longing for and desire to revert in his life-time to the state of pelagapsarian Adam in his perfect locum Amoenum. Paradoxically, the answer is not vital here, but what seems to be important is the fact that once you come to such questions you are in the very heart of the metaphysical poetry -

the poetry which is concerned with the ultimate nature of being and knowing.

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11. Sherrington, A.J., Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne, 1969, pp. 1-6
12. *ibidem.* / my underlining /
13. *ibidem.*
14. Stewart, op. cit., pp. 208-214
15. *ibidem.*
16. *ibidem.*
17. *ibidem.*
18. Clements, loc. cit.
19. *ibidem.*
20. cf. Martz, L.L., Paradise Within, New Haven and London 1964
21. cf. Grant, Patric, The Transformation of Sin: Studies in Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne, 1974
22. ed. Guffey, George Robert, Thomas Traherne: A Concordance to the Poetry of T. Traherne, University of California Press.
23. Clements, loc. cit.
24. Harvey, op. cit., p. 207.
25. cf. Beachcraft, T.O., "Traherne and the Cambridge Platonists" Dublin Review, CXXXVI, pp. 278 - 290
- Colby, F.L., "Thomas Traherne and Henry More", Modern Language Notes, LXII, 1947, pp. 490-492
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26. All quotations of Traherne's poems and prose are taken from H.M. Margoliouth, ed., T. Traherne: Centuries, Poems and Transcriptions, 2 vols. Oxford University Press 1958. /my underlining/
27. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature, "Nature".
28. cf. Wilson, Cecil H.S., "Traherne and Wordsworth", London Quarterly and Holborn Review, July 1939, pp. 355-358
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29. Clements, loc. cit.
30. Guffey, loc. cit.

#### S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł niniejszy, celowo noszący bardzo ogólny tytuł - "Kluczowe problemy poezji Thomasa Traherne'a" - jest próbą perspektywicznego spojrzenia na spuściznę literacką tego tak fascynującego, lecz jednocześnie, niedocenianego - nawet w kręgach specjalistów literatury angielskiej - przedstawiciela siedemnastowiecznej angielskiej poezji metafizycznej. Rozważania o węzłowych aspektach poezji Traherne'a są poprzedzone próbą przeglądu najważniejszych prac krytyczno-literackich o nim od momentu pierwszej publikacji jego wierszy i medytacji na początku naszego stulecia aż do prac zupełnie współczesnych. W części zasadniczej artykułu, autor niniejszej pracy kładzie głównie nacisk na źródła inspiracji poezji Traherne'a, sposób i technikę poetyckiego obrazowania oraz podstawowe symbole i motywy jego wierszy i medytacji.

Celem autora tej publikacji nie jest analiza krytyczno-literacka wybranego materiału poetyckiego lecz raczej uwytknienie tych elementów jego poezji, które wydają się być niejako "motywami wiodącymi" jego wierszy i stanowią jednocześnie o wielkiej indywidualności i specyficznej oryginalności Traherne'a na tle relatywnie jednolitej angielskiej poezji metafizycznej siedemnastego wieku.