

looking proposal that Virginia adopt a gradual emancipation plan along the lines of those ultimately implemented in New York and Pennsylvania and whose mien seems to have been virtually ideal for a judge, could barely stand this son-in-law and political disciple of Patrick Henry. While St. George aligned himself with the Jeffersonians, Hamilton makes him seem strikingly Federalist. (In this sense, his portrait is markedly different from that offered by Tucker's kinsman Mary Haldane Coleman in her 1938 *St. George Tucker: Citizen of No Mean City*.)

Remarrying in his old age, St. George Tucker grew to loathe public affairs. Here, he seems to have been much like the contemporaries portrayed by Jan Lewis in *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (1983). Leaving the Virginia Court of Appeals, Tucker found happiness in the bosom of his family.

Hamilton's Tuckers differ from Lewis's Jefferson clan in their patriarch's determination to adapt to the times, to find some way to maintain their ascendancy, and in the seeming absence of religion from their thinking in both St. George's and Beverley's generations. Likely St. George's adaptability, his willingness to cast off Virginia's old ways, can be explained by their newness to him; unlike John Randolph and Thomas Jefferson, Tucker did not have the ways of the planter in his bones. The relative absence of religion from their correspondence must be explained in some other way—perhaps by their enduring Episcopalianism.

While this volume will be of interest mainly to scholars, then, it represents a significant contribution to our understanding of Revolutionary and Jeffersonian America. Written in a felicitous style and sprinkled with some of the memorable prose of its subjects, this latest addition to the University of Virginia Press's "Jeffersonian America" series is a worthy tome.

A Poet-Cleric's "Little Booke"

Mary E. Slayton

Waking Up in Heaven: A Contemporary Edition of *Centuries of Meditations*, by Thomas Traherne, edited by David Buresh, *Spencerville, Md.*: Hesus Press, 2002. xxv + 323 pp.

WHEN EDMUND SPENSER prefaced *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) with a poem "To His Booke," he captured an Elizabethan author's parental concern for a child, long under the shadow of his wing, about to venture across "stormie seas," where many of England's literary treasures were pirated. Still, after taking every precaution, he commanded it, "Goe little booke: thy selfe present...."

A century after *The Shepheardes Calender* presented itself auspiciously, another British poet, Thomas Traherne (1637?-1674), lay dying. Unlike Spenser, he had not protected his little books by dedicating them to a powerful patron like "the noble and virtuous gentleman most worthy of all titles both of learning and chivalry, M. Philip Sidney." Except for an anonymous theological treatise, none of Traherne's works had even been published. Some he left in Hereford with a friend, Mrs. Susanna Hopton. The rest, and all of his books, the Anglican cleric stipulated in his will, "I give to my brother, Philipp."

The polar opposite of his brother, Philipp did not fully comprehend the poet's writings. His insensitive editings and manglings had, at times, almost deci-

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mated them. But Thomas Traherne was not worried. Placing his life's work and "infant's soul" in the hands of God, he fell into a deep "sleep of music," certain that his Creator would safeguard his manuscripts and he would "awake in Heaven." After the poet-cleric died and was buried on October 10, 1674, his anonymous manuscripts tumbled off the white cliffs of Time.

In the winter of 1896–1897, a London bibliophile, William T. Brooke, scavenging through a barrow of books about to be trashed, spied two very old yet well-preserved works, penned in the same small, neat handwriting. Intuiting their value, he purchased them for a few pence. Convinced they had been written by Henry Vaughan (c1622-1695), he showed them to Dr. Alexander Grosart, an expert on Elizabethan and Jacobean texts. Grosart bought and intended to centerpiece them in a magnificent new edition of Vaughan's poems. But he died in 1899 before the work was completed.

Purchasing Grosart's vast library, Charles Higham, a bookseller, urged his friend and man of letters, Bertram Dobell, to study Brooke's discovery. A poet himself, Dobell was struck by the beauty of these deeply religious writings, filled with extraordinary spiritual joy and graced by the gift of song. He was soon convinced that Vaughan, a restrained and quiet Royalist, who practiced medicine in Newton, could not have written them.

Then Brooke remembered having read a poem, possibly by the same exuberant author, in an anonymous volume in the British Museum. The book stated that its author had been in the service of the late Lord Keeper Bridgeman as his chaplain. Dobell soon discovered that Sir Orlando Bridgeman once had a chaplain named Thomas Traherne. Suspecting that the cleric might have studied at Oxford University, he pored through Anthony à Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses* and learned that Traherne, "a shoemaker's son of Hereford...took one degree in Arts, left the

house for a time, entred into the sacred function, and in 1661 he was actually created Mast. of Arts." About that time, he became Rector of Credenhill and then was appointed Domestic Chaplain of Sir Orlando Bridgeman, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal and Minister of Teddington.

In 1903, Dobell edited and published Traherne's *Poetical Works* and, in 1908, his *Centuries of Meditations*. In 1910, Dr. H. I. Bell collected more of the author's poetry under the title *Poems of Felicity*. Later on, Gladys I. Wade, a gifted Australian scholar and critic, edited the first definitive edition of Traherne's verse, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne* (1932). In 1934, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch followed that with an anthology of the poet's work entitled *Felicities*. Wade's doctoral dissertation at the University of London, *Thomas Traherne: A Critical Biography* (1944), became the standard biography of the poet.

Post-war interest in English mystical poets waned as captains of industry reconstructed "the real world." Still, in 1958, a two-volume set of Traherne's *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings*, edited by H. M. Margoliouth, was reproduced with the author's original spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Then, in the mid-1960s, a Mr. and Mrs. Wookey of Lancashire, seeing a little book smoldering on a heap of trash, flicked ashes off its cover and brought it home. Taken with them to Canada, it was identified as the poet's *Commentaries of Heaven* in 1981. In 1997, at the Folger Library in Washington, D.C., Laetitia Yeandle and Julia Smith discovered Traherne's unfinished poem "The Ceremonial Law," filled with 1800 lines of heroic couplets. In 2002, Denise Inge's *Thomas Traherne, Poetry and Prose* featured more of the poet's unpublished work. That same year David Buresh brought out *Waking Up in Heaven: A Contemporary Edition of Centuries of Meditations*.

As Buresh indicates, Traherne's masterpiece is "divided into four sets of one hundred numbered paragraphs. The

manuscript concluded with a fifth set of only 10 paragraphs. Because the numbered paragraphs were initially viewed as separate meditations, the name, *Centuries of Meditations* [added after the author's death], was logically derived from the grouping of several hundred (*i.e.*, *Centuries of*) meditations." Stymied critics agree that Traherne's prose poem cannot be easily summarized. Yes, as K.W. Salter points out in his *Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet*, its

...main purpose [announced in the first *Century*] would seem not to record his meditations but to instruct and encourage "his friend" (almost certainly Mrs. Hopton) in the way of enjoyment which he calls Felicity, "to sing and rejoice and delight in God".... The second *Century* follows on without any real break from the first, but the third has a separate character; it contains Traherne's account of his own progress in the enjoyment of Felicity. The fourth *Century* aims at setting out the "principles" of Felicity, and the unfinished fifth is concerned with the mystical theme of God as both the Way towards, and the Object of, the seeker for Felicity, "The Infinity of God is our Enjoyment."¹

But that is just the floor plan of Traherne's "Palace of Delights," termed by C.S. Lewis "almost the most beautiful book (in prose, I mean, excluding poets) in English."

Waking Up in Heaven's bibliography and notes indicate how many analyses of the *Centuries* have already been published. Rather than ploughing those reaped fields, Buresh digs into Traherne's text, updating verb forms, pronouns, capitalization, punctuation, and paragraph breaks, captioning untitled sections and subsections. Once the book's "carefully planned trail" is blazed, "the gate is open.... When we arrive at the edge of paradise, Traherne surveys the land, describing for us what he sees."

What he saw influenced writers as diverse as Owen Barfield, Annie Dillard, T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis, Thomas Merton, Dorothy

L. Sayers, and Dallas Willard. Traherne, Buresh reminds one, "has been likened to Wordsworth, Blake, Whitman, and Thoreau for his joyful, poetic writing about nature and man; to St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Julian of Norwich, and Thomas à Kempis for his theology; to Dante, Milton, and Bunyan for his imagination; and to the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets—George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, and John Donne—for his devotional meditative poetry."

Critics regard the third *Century* as "the most perfect thing Traherne wrote." It is remarkable not simply for capturing persuasively for the first time in English literature the "sweet and curious apprehensions" of an innocent child: "Once I remember (I think I was about 4 years old when) I thus reasoned with myself, sitting in a little obscure room in my father's poor house: if there be a God, certainly he must be infinite in goodness: and that I was prompted to by a real whispering instinct of nature." Nor is it just a bucolic evocation of "silent trees and meads and hills" and "that burning thirst which nature had enkindled in me from my youth." But it also delves deeply into the "infinite things of God" and "the person of David," the "sweet psalmist of Israel," apprehended as "a new light darted into all his Psalms, and finally spread abroad over the whole Bible." In fact, as Buresh points out in his "Appendix B: Scripture References," there are more than eighty allusions to the Psalms in the *Centuries*.

So deep was Traherne's admiration for the shepherd-king that he sought to "become what David was—a man after God's own heart." "I was delighted to see so glorious a person, so great a prince, so divine a sage.... I perceived we were led by one spirit, and that following the clue of nature into this labyrinth, I was brought into the midst of celestial joys. And that to be retired from earthly cares and fears and distractions, that we might in sweet and heavenly peace contemplate all the

works of God, was to live in heaven, and the only way to become what David was....” Indeed, the rhythm of the Psalms, Wade noted, “largely determined Traherne’s prose-rhythms, and their device of varied reiteration his own reiterations.”


Although, during England’s civil wars, Oxford had been a garrison and headquarters of the King, Brasenose College, in Traherne’s time, was peaceful but Puritan. The period when he studied there coincided, roughly, with the last eight years of the Protectorate; Oliver Cromwell was the University’s chancellor for part of that time. Exactly how the young, mystical Traherne flourished under the gray spires of Oxford is baffling.

He would no doubt have fared better at the other ancient English university, where he would have had more in common with Cambridge Platonists like Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), Nathaniel Culverwell (1618-1651), Joseph Glanvill (1636-1680), John Rust (1626?-1670), John Smith (1616-1652), Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), and, especially, Henry More (1614-1687). The latter, like Traherne,

“owes a great deal to Plotinus, to whom the phenomenal world was not evil nor burdened with the defilement of original sin, but was simply the ‘image’ or reflection of the highest perfection of the world above, a realm sought beyond all images, from the image to the prototype.”²

“Having been at the University,” Traherne declared in the third *Century*, “I saw there were things in this world of which I never dreamed: glorious secrets and glorious persons past imagination.... There I saw into the nature of the sea, the heavens, the sun, the moon and stars, the elements, minerals, and vegetables. All which appeared like the king’s daughter, all glorious within.” And surely the poet, as he saw, at the end of his masterpiece, “the everlasting hills,” never dreamed that for centuries “glorious persons past imagination” would meditate on the “glorious secrets” of his little books after “God’s finger touch’d him, and he slept.”


1. London, 1964, 22. 2. George A. Panichas, “Henry More: Cambridge Platonist,” *The Reverent Discipline: Essays in Literary Criticism and Culture* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1974), 317.



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