

Child Image in Thomas Traherne's Poetry

Mahshid Faroughian

Persian Gulf University of Boushehr, mahshid.faroughian@gmail.com

Abstract

The child's entrance into the wondrous communion with creation is the beginning of gifts, the first thing which God bestows to every infant. Distracting a child's senses towards adult, vain opinion and custom is a bereavement that spoils the child's native ability to perceive knowledge about his true nature. To make the point positively, a child's moral formation should be accomplished in continuation with his knowledge of creation and his natural place in it. Traherne is sure that by curiously and physically entering into nature and focusing on it, the child is able to be aware of the influences of his entity, and his virtues. The natural world actually talks to the child. Nature like skies, air, and stars are his tutors. The child's nature is essentially good, cooperative and caring. Natural environment provides a meaningful context in which a child can be formed in the appropriate way. The child should stick to his essence which is godly, follow nature, avoid sinister and deceptive appearance of earthly life in order to regain paradise and be united with God again.

Keywords: Thomas Traherne's poetry, Child Image, "Wonder", "Innocence", "Salutation", *Centuries of Meditations*

Introduction

Thomas Traherne (1636 or 1637– ca. 27 September 1674) was an English poet, religious writer, theologian and clergyman whose life is not so much clear. The best known work of Traherne is the *Centuries of Meditations*, which is a collection of short paragraphs about happiness, Christian life and ministry, philosophy, desire and childhood. His poetry include *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne, B.D.* and *Poems of Felicity* first published in 1903 and 1910 respectively. His prose works such as *Roman Forgeries*, *Christian Ethics*, and *A Serious and Patheticall Contemplation of the Mercies of God* written in 1673, 1675, and 1699.

Although Traherne's poetry remained unknown for about two centuries, he is still considered as one of the metaphysical poets with the same features of theirs. Traherne was among about twelve Anglican lyricists labelled by Samuel Johnson as "the Metaphysical Poets." While Johnson did not favour their work, and implied that their poetry was pretentious and obscure, the label has endured and

has become respected as that of a school of poets. Their poetry "combined passionate feeling with intellectual rigor," and "sought to express deeply felt religious and secular experiences in the form of highly intellectual poems" (Wikipedia). The metaphysical poets, Traherne included, exhibited an "avid interest in science" drawing upon "imagery from all the new and exciting areas of scientific learning: astronomy, mathematics, geography, medicine" in their works (Wikipedia).

Traherne's poetry and prose works have been described in oxymoronic terms as "bafflingly simple" (Drake, 52) Traherne delves into issues such as the origins of faith, the nature of divinity and the faith, and the innocence of childhood and his style seems to enforce with verse that takes on the form of an incantation. At the core of his work is the concept of "felicity", that highest state of bliss in which he describes the essence of God as a source of "Delights of inestimable value" (167). The significance of childhood and being a child is a considerable theme which is repeated in most of Traherne's poems. The purpose of this study is to search for all child images Traherne depicts in his poems like "Wonder", "Innocence", "Shadows in Water", and "Salutation." The aim of the author is to find the concepts Traherne has dedicated to a child and how he defines "childhood." In order to reach this goal, all these poems besides "The Recovery", "Solitude", and some parts of *Centuries of Meditations* have analyzed by the author to find the different concepts Traherne has dedicated to child, childhood, and special features like felicity they have. By putting these features near each other and making a conclusion the real target of Traherne's poetry will be revealed. The author hopes that this essay will be useful for the researchers who are interested in the study of 17th century literature and Traherne's poetry.

Traherne's writings frequently explore the glory of creation and what he perceived as his intimate relationship with God. His writing conveys an ardent, almost childlike love of God, and is compared to similar themes in the works of later poets William Blake, Walt Whitman, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. His love for the natural world is frequently expressed in his works by a treatment of nature that evokes Romanticism—two centuries before the Romantic Movement. One great passion