THE POETICS OF THE INCOMPLETE IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS TRAHERNE (CA. 1638-1674)

A dissertation presented

by

Tanya Zhelezcheva

to
The Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of

British Literature

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
November, 2011
THE POETICS OF THE INCOMPLETE
IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS TRAHERNE (CA. 1638-1674)

by

Tanya Zhelezcheva

Abstract of Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in the Graduate School of Northeastern University
November, 2011
Abstract

This dissertation attends to the problems of the practice of writing in the early modern period and more particularly in the works of the seventeenth-century poet and prose writer Thomas Traherne (ca. 1638-1674). His works, which were discovered for the first time during the end of the nineteenth century and have been emerging in a series of chance discoveries throughout the twentieth century, are only now being read more fully for the first time. The dissertation, which takes into account the unfinished status of Traherne’s manuscripts, focuses on Traherne’s practice and method of generative writing in the context of seventeenth-century theories of discourse. It draws attention to the unfinished state in which the manuscripts have come to us and argues that these texts are informed by the physical and immediate practice of writing, rather than by prevalent theories of discourse or rhetoric, still less by any mystical imperative. In addition, the dissertation outlines the features of the genre of the non-finito work. Chapter 1, “The Problem of Exhaustible Writing,” outlines the problem of writing exhaustively and explaining everything thoroughly; it argues that for Traherne, the project dissipates because exhaustibility becomes associated with death and sin. Chapter 2, “Traherne’s Non-finito Closures: Rhetorical Moves, Syntactical Structures, and Typographical Markers,” examines the formal features of closure and resistance to closure and argues that closure is continually rewritten as a new beginning in Traherne’s work. Chapter 3, “Ways of Centrifugal Writing,” establishes the connection between centripetal forces of writing and the topoi of natural images and argues that the generative forces of nature permeate the process of writing, leading to an energizing condition of non-closure. The
final chapter, “Unsystematic Trajectories: The Flow of a Non-Systematic Procession,” extends the discussion in the previous chapter by pointing to the paradox of *arche, telos*, and the writing of anti-closural texts, where the practice of writing is not preceded by a theory of writing.
**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td><em>Centuries</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td><em>Christian Ethics</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td><em>Commentaries of Heaven</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Dobell Poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td><em>Poems of Felicity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KG</td>
<td><em>Kingdom of God</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td><em>Love</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNB</td>
<td>Philip Traherne’s Notebook (Thomas’ Notebook)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF</td>
<td><em>Roman Forgeries</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td><em>Seeds of Eternity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td><em>Select Meditations</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV</td>
<td><em>Sober View</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents

Abstract of Dissertation .................................................................................................................. 2

Abbreviations .................................................................................................................................. 5

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................ 6

Introduction: Centuries of Oblivion ............................................................................................... 7

Chapter 1: The Problem of Exhaustible Writing ............................................................................ 78

Chapter 2: Traherne’s *Non-finito* Closures: Rhetorical Moves, Syntactical Structures, and Typographical Markers ..................................................................................................................... 109

Chapter 3: Ways of Centrifugal Writing ....................................................................................... 160

Chapter 4: Unsystematic Trajectories: The Flow of a Non-Systematic Procession .................... 198

Works Cited .................................................................................................................................... 261
Introduction: Centuries of Oblivion

In the *Centuries*, in the last unfinished century, Traherne offers a meditation on the infinite artwork:

Infinity of Space is like a Painters Table, prepared for the Ground and field of those Colors that are to be laid thereon. Look how great he intends the Picture, so Great doth he make the Table. It would be an Absurditie to leav it unfinished, or not to fill it. To leav any part of it Naked and bare, and void of Beauty, would render the whole ungratefull to the Ey, and argue a Defect of Time and Materials, or Wit in the Limner. As the Table is infinit so are the Pictures. Gods Wisdom is the Art, his Goodness the Will, his Word the Penicill, his Beauty and Power the Colors, his Pictures are all his Works and Creatures. infinitely more Real, and more Glorious, as well as more Great and manifold then the Shadows of a Landscape. But the Life of all is, they are the Spectators own. He is in them as in his Territories, and in all these, views his own Possessions. (C 5.5)

There is a movement in this passage: initially there is a tendency toward the finished—the canvass has to be finished, but soon thereafter, hesitation steps in: the painting is vast, and it can hardly be finished. God’s ability to engage in continual creative acts—rather than His ability to produce a finished infinite painting—is the manifestation of His perfection. In the paragraph preceding this one, Traherne’s focus is on language; he quotes from Pico della Mirandola’s oration “On the Dignity of Man,” where Mirandola admires the potential for metamorphosis in man. Traherne comments on Mirandola’s writing style: “Any man may perceiv, that He permitteth his fancy to wander a little Wantonly after the maner of a Poet: but *most* deep and serious things are secretly hidden under his free and luxuriant Language” (C 4.78). Poetic wanton wanderings, “free and luxuriant Language,” a continual engagement with the act of creation of the unfinished and infinite work of art—these themes are the focus of this dissertation, and these themes invite the question about compositional completeness. I argue that in Traherne’s texts, each moment of composition finds generative potential; each moment of his writing
proliferates into new ones, and the strong generative potency of language can be severed only by the chance event of the death of the author.

The scholarship on Traherne can be divided into three waves of criticism. The first wave comprises of those who are enthusiastic about Traherne’s style as well as those who find it repetitive and loose; the second wave comprises of critics who placing Traherne amidst Christian mystics and finding coherence in his works through mystical paradigms aim to refute those who claim that Traherne is not a poet craftsman. The third wave of criticism returns to the enthusiasm of the earlier critics and respond to the scholars of the second wave by pointing that the looseness of Traherne’s works is a central feature of his writing which needs no justification. The third wave of criticism, to which my dissertation belongs, is characterized by acknowledging the tendencies toward looseness and disorganization in Traherne’s works. However, these tendencies have not been explored fully for two reasons. Some of the scholars in this group are ambivalent in their assessment of these qualities because even though they admit them, they also make a brief case for the coherence in Traherne’s works. Others recognize these features in the works, but have projects other than the one I am advancing in this dissertation, i.e. that Traherne’s works are written in the non-finito mode. My aim is to isolate and develop the case for open composition in Traherne's works.

This dissertation takes up the work of the scholars of the third wave of criticism and explores in depth the looseness of Traherne’s writing. I focus on the unfinished aspect of Traherne’s manuscripts in order to delineate the mechanisms of the forces of writing which defer or propel closure, so we can better understand Traherne’s practice and method of generative writing. I argue that by paying attention to the centrifugal and
centripetal forces of writing—those forces which tend toward dissipation and digression rather than the centripetal forces—those tending toward a center—we can better understand that Traherne’s practice of writing precedes the theory of writing. My argument is also a response to the critics of the second wave of criticism because it takes the unfinished nature of Traherne’s manuscripts more seriously. I argue that reading Traherne’s works as unfinished allows us to pay attention to the practice of composition rather than to the production of a theory of writing. Reading the works as unfinished is aided by an examination of the centrifugal forces of Traherne’s writing enable us to see how the texts eschew the codification of a theory of writing.

The neglect of the nature of the unfinished work can be partially explained through the problem of authorship and the various confusing aspects concerning the printing of Traherne’s works, problems which I discuss in detail below. But the neglect of compositional completeness has a lot more to do with the apologetic defenses of Traherne’s style written by scholars from the second phase of Traherne criticism in response to scholars from the first wave who found the looseness of Traherne’s style problematic. The second wave of scholars applied models of coherence on Traherne’s work, models which, I would argue, while valuable as a way of providing a perspective of understanding of Traherne’s works, do not adequately account for an aesthetic of writing which does not privilege compositional completeness. I take the inconsistencies and exceptions to the unifying meditative patterns, which are suggested by scholars from the second wave of criticism, as the dominant features of the method of organization of Traherne’s works. Subsequent scholarship looks more favorably on the divergent and loose features of Traherne’s writing, but these have not been fully explored yet.
However, what should be noted about scholars in the first wave of criticism is that they did not take sufficiently into account the unfinished state of the works, a premise which is foundational for my argument and an issue which is not settled yet among scholars. The unfinished Centuries presents a special interest to scholars, who comment on its finished status, but even if it is difficult to make a convincing argument that the Centuries is a finished work—it contains the number 11 with no text beneath, signaling that more text is to be written—such arguments are still made. For instance, in the introduction to the Centuries in the first volume of his edition, Margoliouth (1958) notes that technically the work is unfinished because after the tenth century, there appears the number eleven, and, therefore, “Traherne, at one time at any rate, thought of going on” (vol. 1, p. xi). Yet, in the footnotes to the tenth paragraph of the fifth century, Margoliouth enthusiastically points out: “I cannot but look on [the Centuries] V.10 as a triumphant and perfect conclusion. How could Traherne have gone beyond it? The Centuries are not unfinished” (vol. 1, p. 297). The Church’s Year Book can also be understood as unfinished; Margoliouth (1958) and Marks (1966) consider it a fragment because it contains only part of an ecclesiastical year. However, in her Introduction to the fourth volume of the complete works of Traherne, Ross makes the claim that the CYB is a complete, self-contained work (Ross vol. IV p. xxxiii). Select Meditations can also be understood as an unfinished work. Even Traherne’s printed works, which one might argue Traherne would have had more control over their final shape, does not demonstrate that coherence is the dominant force.

The larger significance of this study is to address the issue of multiple editions in the early modern period and the ways in which print and manuscript culture create
dynamic modes of writing and reading texts. Further, Traherne brings attention to the unfinished as a genre, especially in the context of seventeenth-century shifting paradigms of understanding the universe as open and infinite. More narrowly, this study contributes to our understanding of Traherne as a writer rather than as a mystic or a theologian. It further allows us to understand how Traherne complicates our definition of perfection; unlike other writers and artists who consider the unfinished as imperfect, Traherne allows us to think of the unfinished as the perfect state of the genres he approaches. Perfection for Traherne does not seem to be defined by stasis; instead, he understands it in terms of progress and infinite development. His works also allow us to think not just of momentum but also of the moment. He brings to our attention the necessity to speak about the dynamic reception and interpretation of a text rather than to seek the rules for ultimate closure and interpretation.

In the rest of the chapter, I outline in much more detail the phases through which the assessment of Traherne’s works has passed through and the ways in which my dissertation contributes to the field. I then explore those areas which complicate our reading of Traherne such as the dates of discovery, the printed editions, and the problem of authorship. Finally, I conclude with a review of the literature on the non-finito. Early critical responses to Traherne mirrored Traherne’s fascination with Pico della Mirandola’s prose; some scholars were enthusiastic about the exuberance especially in the Centuries. The enthusiastic language which scholars used to discuss Traherne led to another questionable placement of Traherne: he was easily and frequently linked to the Romantics (Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth), and, in fact, he was dubbed a precursor of the Romanics. As a result, a number of studies between 1940s and 1980s aimed to
demonstrate the coherence of his poems and his prose. One of the first anonymous reviews in 1903 after Traherne’s discovery set the tone for a difficult acceptance: Traherne is not of “first order” (Anonymous 1903 94), and he has no technique. Such criticism culminated with T. S. Eliot’s 1930’s statement that Traherne is “more a mystic than a poet” (590), which clinched his image as a happy recluse. His poetry took a lot more bashing than his prose. The chief complaints about the poetry were its repetition, abstractness, the defective meter (Massingham 1914, Squire 1918, Wilson 1925). Apologists for his art explained his craft as “studied artlessness” (Towers 1920 p. 1029), but even among those who like him the consensus is that his prose is a lot better than his poetry. Note, for instance, Leishman (1934) judging Traherne as “a greater poet in prose than in verse” (219). Hobhouse (1936) admits that the poetry is substandard and the prose is worthy of attention while Iredale (1935) argues that the method through which Traherne merges philosophy and poetry is flawed. Daniels (1940) criticizes Dobell for being over-enthusiastic about Traherne’s discovery, and expresses skepticism toward Traherne’s image as a happy recluse by stating that Traherne’s weakness is his “introspective sentimentality” (92) and goes on to say that his poetry is not skillful. Similarly, Grierson (1947) and Altick (1950) lament the quality of the verse. Among the scholars who have participated in this trend is: Cohen (1963) who, in comparing Traherne to Vaughan, concludes that Traherne is “less skillful” (185) than Vaughan. Gladys Wade’s 1944 study only contributes to the solidification of the image of Traherne as a reclusive mystic and a writer of lively and loveable prose but of inadequately skillful poetry was confirmed. Traherne’s biography is not of any substantial help in allowing scholars to determine the extent to which he was politically and socially involved. We
know few biographical facts about Traherne, and what we thought we knew about him in 1940s (Wade) has been under serious reconsideration. The son of a shoemaker, he studied at Oxford during the Interregnum, and in 1657 he was presented with the living of Credenhill, Herefordshire. Some of the facts about his life are debatable. Gladys Wade asserts that “[i]n 1667 Traherne left his rectory at Credenhill to become private chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman, Lord Keeper of the Seal, and it seems probable, never saw Herefordshire or his Herefordshire friends again” (88). More recently, however, Julia Smith has asserted that: “[t]he whole of Traherne’s brief residence at Teddington was overshadowed by illness and death” (207). Thus, we have not only few biographical facts; we do not know the chronological order of his works, and we are not aware of his audience.

Only with Margoliouth’s 1958 edition of Traherne’s Dobell poems and the Centuries was the image of the unskillful poet challenged, and scholars now had a useful tool: Margoliouth distinguished clearly between Philip’s and Thomas’ versions and printed both versions of the poems side by side. He also printed The Poems of Felicity, initially edited by Bell, but this time with a clear indication that these were Philip’s rendition of Traherne’s original. But even with Margoliouth’s call to distinguish between the brothers’ versions, scholars writing on Traherne were not as careful. Cappuzzo (1964) also thinks that the poetry is not at a high level, but does not blame Traherne’s philosophy for this flaw; rather, he states, in what I consider to be a misguided judgment, the flaw is rooted in Traherne’s syntax and the presence of the ‘fantastical’ in his works. Salter (1964) also thinks that the poetry is lacking but finds the flaw in the tension between the poet and the mystic, which enter into an “antagonistic” relationship (111). In
a review of Clements’ and Stewart’s works on Traherne, Drake disagrees with both
scholars over their enthusiasm with Traherne and states that Traherne should be discussed
as a “splendid failure” (503).

The first wave was followed by a discussion on how Traherne’s mysticism is the
source of his craftsmanship: Traherne’s works are perceived as disorganized, but they
also carefully follow the stages of enlightenment as outlined by various mystics. Some
scholars have tried to offer non-mystical sources as a way of demonstrating the coherence
in the works, but both groups of critics aim to impose coherence in Traherne’s works.
Various unifying paradigms have been discovered or imposed on the most widely
commented works by Traherne, and the quarrel has been about which of these patterns is
most valid. The arguments on the ways in which coherence emerges in Traherne’s works
hinge on the premise that Traherne prefers to blur sequential boundaries, a problematic
move because his works—The Centuries, Select Meditations, and The Kingdom of
Heaven—are structured sequentially, either numerically or alphabetically, and provide
the formal grounds for a project based on an infinite sequence of meditations. Yet, unity
presupposes an end, and the problem in Traherne’s texts is that they are not designed to
have a formal ending.

Of course, there are exceptions to the kind of mystical studies which are done on
Traherne. Salter (1964), for instance, uses St. Bernard of Clairvaux in order to show that
Traherne is disorganized and that, in comparison to St. Bernard, Traherne is unoriginal:
“Traherne cannot be said to have added anything to what St Bernard has written of love.
In fact he leaves much out. What he writes does not possess the order and clarity of St
Bernard’s work” (128). The distance between St. Bernard and Traherne as suggested by
Salter is so vast that in 1985, Matar came out with a brief study on St. Bernard’s influence on Traherne pointing out the stages of love in St. Bernard—self-love, love of God because of self-love, love of God for God’s sake, and love of the self for God’s sake (182-83)—not to demonstrate the coherence of the structure of the *Centuries* but to show that Traherne used St. Bernard because he needed a starting point which would address Hobbes’ premise that self-love does not turn men into brutes but ennobles them (183).

Hints of Traherne’s intended coherence and systematic exposition of his beliefs are evident very early in side notes, such as in Itrat-Husain’s 1948 study which states that “Thomas Traherne alone of all the mystical poets of the seventeenth century has tried to give us a systematic exposition of his philosophy” (264). While the theme of systematic thinking in Traherne is taken up by various scholars to defend Traherne’s status as a writer, and also most recently in Sluberski, the coherence found in Traherne’s works through the imposition of various stages of mystical enlightenment represents a significant portion of the scholarship.

In 1958 John Wallace, who recognized the principle of *enchainment* in Traherne’s poetry as discussed by M. Denonain, asserted that Louis Martz’s thesis in *The Poetry of Meditation*—that understanding the poetry of meditation allows us to acknowledge that metaphysical poetry was a consequence of a religious tradition—was supported much more strongly by Traherne than by George Herbert. Wallace found that the Jesuit model of meditation fits the progression of Traherne’s poems in the Dobell sequence and argued that the poems can be divided into composition of place, pre-meditation, and a three-part analysis based on memory, understanding, and will. Even though Wallace finds that the
Jesuit progressive meditation explains the progression of Traherne’s poems, he states: “So skillfully has Traherne ensured the continuity of these sections that it would not always be easy to fix the demarcation between them had not the titles of the poems indicated the exact lines of division” (80). Wallace seems to hinge his argument both on the continuity of Traherne’s poems as well as on the distinct stages of progression. But since he aims to show that the sequence of the Dobell poems progresses through different stages, the argument that the stages are not clearly discernible only weakens Wallace’s original claim. Further, if Traherne intended a clear separation of the discrete stages of progression, then he could have done so: the Centuries are structured in paragraphs. The Dobell sequence weakens Wallace’s argument because of the titles—there are other poems whose titles begin with the definite article. Further, it is weakened because many times it is difficult to point out where one poem begins and another ends.

Cox (1971) brings another direction to the argument on coherent organization in Traherne. He argues that the Centuries follow the stages of meditation as understood by the neoplatonists, the “Renaissance synthesis of Plato” (11) rather than medieval mystics like Bonaventura; yet, Cox makes an important caveat: Traherne blurs the stages and that is why these sequences are not understood clearly. He finds focal places where Traherne summarizes his main points, and he claims that “[f]rom two such summary statements we can recover his principle of order” (Cox 11) even though he recognizes that Traherne’s “characteristic style is rather loose and rambling” (Cox 11). Cox points out a connection between Traherne’s schema and Whichcote’s and Gale’s:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traherne</th>
<th>Whichcote</th>
<th>Gale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God (C I)</td>
<td>illumination</td>
<td>intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World (C II)</td>
<td>persuasion</td>
<td>discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self (C III)</td>
<td>mental conviction</td>
<td>faith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, these correspondences are not convincing. Cox points out that Whichcote’s three stages of Platonic philosophy are dialectical versions of Gale’s, but it is not clear why Whichcote’s persuasion would not correspond to Gale’s intelligence or Whichcote’s illumination does not respond to Gale’s faith or why Whichcote’s mental conviction does not correspond to Gale’s intelligence. The additional stage of satisfaction in Whichcote and Gale’s imitation are not convincingly expanded in Cox’s article. They are suddenly introduced, and it seems that they are added only to fit Traherne’s fourth and fifth century to the neoplatonic schema. It seems that one of the most convincing points in Cox’s article is Traherne’s last paragraph of the second century:

So that whatsoever will Profit in the Mystery of Felicity, must see the Objects of His Happiness, and the Maner how they are to be Enjoyed, and discern also the Powers of His Soul by which He is to enjoy them, and perhaps the Rules that shall Guid Him in the Way of Enjoyment. All which you have here GOD, THE WORLD, YOUR SELF. (C 2.100)

But it only explains themes which Traherne is interested in rather than an overarching schema for all of the Centuries. Further Cox himself points that within each century Traherne uses other schemas: “Although Traherne refers to the traditional faculties of understanding, will, and memory, and although a portion of Century I proceeds according to a meditative sequence recommended by such Anglican writers as Joseph Hall and Daniel Featley, the Centuries as a whole is governed by Platonic notions of contemplation” (Cox 13). Considering that the overarching schema does not account convincingly for the fourth and the fifth centuries, the presence of other schemas—like those drawn from Hall and Feately—only suggests that Traherne’s looseness of using any
system which dominates the texts. In fact, at the end of the article, Cox admits that the system he has identified is barely perceptible:

The Platonic principles Traherne chose for the *Centuries* enabled him to affirm that man could still attain spiritual perfection, but, to this reader at least, his success in handling these principles is questionable. What J. V. Cunningham has observed about Marvell’s “Coy Mistress” also holds true for Traherne’s *Centuries*: its form serves as an expandable filing system. But whereas the details in Marvell’s poem do not obscure its syllogistic structure, the details of Traherne’s prose devotion virtually overwhelm its Platonic structure. The simplicity of Traherne’s *schema* makes disposition of such an amount of explanation and exhortation nearly impossible—the parts dominate the whole. It is no wonder, then, that the *Centuries* has so often been thought a haphazard collection of meditations. Order is indeed present, but it is not sufficiently in control.

In this lack of control, the *Centuries* is very much of its time. By the early 1670s, the meditative tradition was close to its end. The very conception of stages of spiritual perfection had depended on conviction of the hierarchic unity of Creation. When the conviction began to dissipate, so too did the devotional tradition it had informed. (Cox 23-24)

Cox points to a shadow of a possible organizing principle, but with a serious caveat thereby placing under suspicion the whole enterprise of finding an overarching schema which fits the organization of the *Centuries*.

Balakier (1989) takes another route to exploring the presence of coherence in Traherne’s works. By using Roger Bacon’s insistence on science made possible through experience, Balakier argues that the structure of Traherne’s works is based on experience. Balakier divides the Dobell sequence poems into three stages based on Roger Bacon’s understanding of experience: I. Experience, II. Understanding, and III. Synthesis. However, Balakier notes that there are poems which do not directly fit into this sequence and calls them “accidentals,” a category which does not seem to fit the importance which he gives them later and their role in the coherence of the sequence which he ascribes to
them. The “accidental” poems only make the case for the presence of centrifugal forces in Traherne’s works much stronger.

A more specific understanding of Traherne’s mysticism is offered by Louis Martz in his *The Paradise Within* (1964) where he argues that Traherne follows the Augustinian model of meditation and that his primary source was St. Bonaventura’s *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*. Martz asserts that Century I develops the Preparation; Centuries II-IV focus on the Threefold Way of the Creatures, the Image of God, and the Principles of Being and Good; Century V deals with Repose (Martz 1964 p. 57).

The study has also drawn some criticism; Cox points out that Traherne could not have been familiar with Bonaventura, except perhaps through a summary found in a commonplace book (Cox 10). But Martz admits that Traherne was able “to create his own original exploration of the mind” (Martz 55). Martz’s work has been critiqued by scholars who argue that Traherne’s is far less structured than the Bonaventuran meditations suggest, but Martz in fact makes, even if subtly, the argument about looseness in Traherne’s writing in the first part of his chapter on Traherne. The third section of the chapter where Martz argues that Traherne’s repetition is reminiscent of Augustine’s is well-known to scholars, but what has remained neglected is Martz’ acknowledgement that the potentials in each meditation are experienced through a “repetitive, digressive, darting movement” (51): “Each meditation exists in its own present, and yet it holds the seed of future meditations, and it remembers the meditations past. . . . The only stability lies in the present cognition of truth that exists in the mind’s reflection of the eternal light, by which the mind creates, or discovers, its own true inner word” (Martz *Paradise Within* 53-54).
However, even if Martz’ makes an argument for the progressive and digressive movement of the *Centuries*, I consider Martz to belong to the group of scholars who focus on imposing a structure on Traherne not only because this is the major part of his argument which circulates among Traherne scholars but also because he privileges, albeit with caveats, a schema which orders the *Centuries* in a coherent even if admittedly modified pattern. Martz argues that the first century is the equivalent of the premeditation stage in Bonaventuran meditation; the core of a premeditation is that “it exhorts the reader to kindle the proper desires, and then evokes those desires through fervent meditation on the Cross and cries of prayer to the Crucified Christ” (Martz *Paradise Within* 58). Martz admits that Traherne’s treatment of the Cross is not emphatic, but the argument that only the first century aims to enkindle desire seems too narrow. An example from the first century Martz quotes a section from the first century:

> Evry thing is ours that serves us in its Place. The Sun servs us as much as is Possible, and more then we could imagine. The Clouds and Stars Minister unto us, the World surrounds us with Beauty, and Air refresheth us the Sea revives the Earth and us. The Earth it self is Better then Gold because it produceth fruits and flowers. And therefore in the Beginning, was it made Manifest to be mine, because Adam alone was made to Enjoy it. (C 1.14)

The fuller version of Century 1.14 is strikingly similar, however, to Century 3.55. Here is C 1.14:

> When Things are ours in their Proper Places, nothing is needful but Prizing to Enjoy them. God therfore hath made it infinitely Easy to Enjoy, by making evry Thing ours, and us able so Easily to Prize them. Evry thing is ours that serves us in its Place. The Sun servs us as much as is Possible, and more then we could imagine. The Clouds and Stars Minister unto us, the World surrounds us with Beauty, and Air refresheth us the Sea revives the Earth and us. The Earth it self is Better then Gold because I produceth fruits and flowers. And therefore in the Beginning, was it made Manifest to be mine, because Adam alone was made to Enjoy it. By making One, and not a Multitud, God evidently shewed One alone to be the End of the World, and evry one its Enjoyer. For evry one may Enjoy it as much as He. (C 1.14)
However, a similar theme could be found in part of *Century III:*

That any thing may be found to be an infinit Treasure, its Place must be found in Eternity, and in Gods Esteem. For as there is a Time, so there is a Place for all Things. Evry thing in its Place is Admirable Deep and Glorious: out of its Place like a Wandering Bird, is Desolat and Good for Nothing. How therfore it relateth to God and all Creatures must be seen before it can be Enjoyed. And this I found by many Instances. The Sun is Good, only as it relateth to the Stars, to the Seas, to your Ey, to the fields, &c. As it relateth to the Stars it raiseth their Influences; as to the Seas it melteth them and maketh the Waters flow; as to your Ey, it bringeth in the Beauty of the World; as to the fields; it clotheth them with Fruits and flowers: Did it not relate to others it would not be Good. Divert it of these Operations, and Divide it from these Objects it is Useless and Good for nothing. And therfore Worthless, because Worthles and Useless go together. (C 3. 55)

Both century 1.14 and 3.55 open with the proper place of objects (“their Proper Place” [1.14], “its Place must be found in Eternity,” and “there is a Place for all Things. Evry thing in its Place is Admirable” [C 3.55]). Both passages then proceed with a list of natural objects. The passage from C 1.14 lists the Sun, the clouds, the stars, the world, the air, the sea, and the earth. The passage from C. 3.55 lists the sun in relation to the stars, the seas, the eye, and the fields. Both passages then seem to enkindle desire, and I suggest that the development of Traherne’s *Centuries* is only based very loosely on a mystical paradigm, and that it should be examined from a different point of view. I have limited myself to providing only these arguments because my purpose is not to debunk Martz’ argument, but to demonstrate some of the invalid aspects.

If the mystical paradigms served to respond to the challenge that Traherne is not a skillful writer because his writing is loose and disorganized, Traherne’s involvement with the politics and science was a way to challenge the image of Traherne as an isolated
happy mystic. This aspect of Traherne studies is important to my research in so far as my argument contributes to identifying the unruly nature of Traherne’s writing.

Scholars who have dealt with situating Traherne among the variety of political and religious discourses can be divided into two subgroups: those who focus on Traherne’s isolated ideas and those who demonstrate that Traherne’s ideas were deeply engaged with contemporary debates. The second group of scholars, then, challenges the image of Traherne as an isolated mystic and creates an image of a religious thinker who was interested in and responded to the concerns of his contemporaries.

Nabil Matar has made the most significant contribution to this aspect of Traherne’s works. In his 1982 article on the Thanksgivings, he argues that the Thanksgivings as well as Select Meditations are intensely political and religious works. Challenging previous assumptions, Matar argues that for Traherne political involvement is essential for each person. The Thanksgivings specifically also demonstrate Traherne’s interest in the nature of monarchy. Matar has written a number of articles which attempt to place Traherne in the late seventeenth-century milieu, and, unlike other scholars who have used the connection between Traherne’s writing and another mystic as a way to prove the existence of coherence in Traherne’s works and therefore the quality of his craftsmanship, Matar establishes Traherne’s dependence on St. Bernard of Clairvaux in Christian Ethics in order to demonstrate Traherne’s political involvement and especially his opposition to Hobbes. Traherne depended on St. Bernard in order to oppose Thomas Hobbes’ philosophy, and in fact the whole of Christian Ethics is to be understood as an
opposition to Hobbes. Stanley Stewart advances a similar argument: while the *Centuries* and *Select Meditations* share similarities, the latter is much more concerned with political issues than the former. For instance, the speaker in the *Centuries* could be understood as a spiritual guide and that of the *Select Meditations* is interested in political issues.

Discussing the seventeenth-century shift on the understanding of the role of the sun, Matar (1984) comments that Traherne prefers the Ptolemaic system, which places the human being at the center.

The pervading attention to mysticism and the metaphysical quality of Traherne’s work as well as Traherne’s place in seventeenth-century literature are questioned by Christopher Hill. Taking as his task to correct the limited view of Traherne’s environment which Gladys Wade depicts in his biography, Hill establishes Traherne’s place among later seventeenth-century religious thinkers, i.e. those who were actually Traherne’s contemporaries rather than only those of the age of Thomas Aquinas, Lancelot Andrews, and Donne which Wade focuses on in her biography. Hill argues that Traherne is not a radical nor is he an high Anglican, and outlines the historical and political causes which prompted Traherne’s publication of *Roman Forgeries*. Hill proves that Traherne participated in the most urgent political and religious debates of his age. He notes that the history of Protestantism is such that this movement was not considered as secured in England in the 1640s, and the perceived threat of popish plots was so great that men, who were on the royalist side, sometimes supported the parliament. There was also a marked interest in fourth-century theological texts which helped sustain many of
the anti-Catholic claims; Traherne’s *Roman Forgeries* participates in this tradition.

Although Hill relies on the currently largely discredited autobiographical information in his analysis of Traherne’s place in late seventeenth-century discourses, we still get a good sense of how Traherne’s works are not necessarily the product of an isolated labor but emerge out of contentious early modern discourses.

Like Hill, Jordan (1985) also points out the problem that Traherne is more frequently placed in the company of early seventeenth-century writers and therefore his image as a recluse is being maintained. However, Jordan places him in the company of writers like Daniel Featley, Bishop Joseph Hall, Thomas Fuller, Sir Matthew Hale, Richard Baxter, and Matthew Barker and argues that Traherne could be understood as a writer who participated in the new meditative movement in which the individual has a more pronounced function. This is a study which, while dealing with Traherne’s meditative practices, nevertheless aims to establish Traherne not as a reclusive character but as an active participant in the seventeenth-century meditative tradition.

Matar’s work deepens our understanding of Traherne’s involvement with contemporary debates in a number of articles. He (1988) shows that like John Smith, Nathaniel Culverwel, and Peter Sterry understood God as infinite. Matar (1992) also shows how Traherne was involved with Anglican theology through noting Traherne’s references to “the new Jerusalem” and the “Papal antichrist.” In his reading of the *Centuries*, Matar (1994) points out that because Traherne does not establish a connection between Charles II and the biblical David, therefore Traherne was critical of Charles II.
In two articles published in 1988, Julia Smith extends Matar’s arguments on Traherne’s involvement in seventeenth-century religious disputes. In “Attitudes toward Conformity and Nonconformity in Thomas Traherne,” she indicates a paradox in Traherne: like the non-conformists he was interested in private worship, but unlike them, he was interested in the unity of the Anglican church. In the end, she concludes that Traherne is more like the moderate Baxter rather than like the separatist Bunyan. In her article “Thomas Traherne and the Restoration,” Smith argues that we need to think of Traherne as much more involved with the events of the Restoration, and the evidence is predominantly found not in Traherne’s most popular, and earliest discovered work, the Centuries but in Select Meditations. Hawkes (1999) takes a different approach to understanding Traherne’s involvement with his contemporaries. He makes Traherne relevant by showing Traherne as a writer who is deeply engaged with the hot topics of his day and argues that Traherne’s work critiques market economy. Hawkes pays attention to topoi like value, worth, and prize, topoi generally neglected in Traherne’s work. In an attempt to historicize Traherne, Lynne Greenberg examines Traherne’s leveling of borders in the context of enclosures and seventeenth-century agricultural and legal reforms and concludes that “Traherne’s repeated reliance on spatial, topographical, and legalistic tropes levels borders as quickly as he constructed them and is as ‘groundbreaking’ in his poetics as Digger Gerrard Winstanley in his politics” (35).

Another way in which the image of the happy recluse was challenged had to do with providing Traherne’s interest in science. Atomic theory (Clucas), the body
(Sawday), as well as the gravitation tropes (Balakier) in Traherne’s writing have been discussed in an attempt to demonstrate Traherne’s involvement with his contemporaries.

In another attempt to expand the image of Traherne as a mystic, Garnier (1985) goes even further than Matar (1984) in positioning Traherne with respect to Newtonian physics and discusses the mathematical nature of Traherne’s themes of circulation and infinite capacity. Such a discussion signals the lack of validity of the arguments which aim to impose a structure of coherence on Traherne’s most discussed prose work, *The Centuries*; Garnier notes: “The structure of Traherne’s *Centuries* is based on the equally arbitrary grouping of fragments or essays into bunches of one hundred, a chance arrangement of random slices and nuclei very much like Pascal’s *Penseés*, which may pass as a twin pattern to the scientific world-picture developing at the time” (Garnier 61). Garnier points out that until the 1980s the scientific worldviews of Henry More were not brought in any close relationship to Newton’s more respected scientific achievements, a move which is to the detriment of scholars and especially to the detriment of understanding Traherne. Garnier distances Traherne from scholarly interpretations focusing on the mystical elements in Traherne’s works as well as from associating him with the Romantic poets:

Traherne’s texts deserve to be examined and experimented upon from a formalistic viewpoint. What will, hopefully, appear in that reading is a series of recurring faults, in the mineral sense of the word, that is, in other words, of divergences, broken or duplicated patterns. Desire sets the whole machinery going—but nothing like some vague yearning or confused Romantic craving. There is something formal, if not outright mathematical to it, in its very disorder of figments, mirrored images and muted outburst of energy. (62)
The most insightful aspect of Garnier’s work seems to me to be the attention on the flaws in Traherne’s works; these flaws are akin to the accidentals which Balakier (1989) points to in his examination of the Dobell sequence in conjunction to Roger Bacon’s model of understanding. Garnier’s flaws as well as Balakier’s accidentals allude to these elements in Traherne’s writing which account for its uniqueness and which I aim to discuss in this dissertation.

Most recently Balakier (2010) has made the connection between the experiential nature of early modern science and Traherne’s emphasis on experience as it relates to Traherne’s concept of felicity. Balakier’s discussion, however, branches into cognitive science. Making reference to neurophysiological research, it leaves out the theological works which are a likely influence on Traherne’s thinking. Even though Balakier recognizes experience as a theme in Traherne’s writing, he does not explore it as a potential route toward questioning compositional completeness. In fact, he argues that the Centuries are coherently structured, an argument which he made in his 1989 study, and which he elaborates by stating that Traherne has a much more in-depth understanding of felicity than is currently understood, a concept which opposes Hobbesian materialism but at the same time borrows from it.

Another way in which Traherne’s involvement of the world is being demonstrated is through his use of genres which were popular in the late seventeenth century. Such is the case which Ponsford (1986) outlines in his 1986 study where he argues that the Thanksgivings is representative of the imitation genre because of Traherne’s uses some of
the characteristics of this genre, namely the “spiritual fusion of personalities” and “fidelity to the model” (Ponsford 1986 7). The implications of Belvins’ (2005) argument on Traherne’s use of the Pythagorean eye as an infant eye through which the adult could regain innocence is that Traherne is widely read and that he was involved in what his contemporaries considered important.

Another way of resisting the image of Traherne as a recluse involves demonstrating Traherne’s familiarity and borrowing from his seventeenth-century contemporaries. Matar (1987), for instance, addresses the presence of George Herbert’s “To All Angels and Saints” in Traherne’s Church’s Year Book and his allusion to “Jordan II” in “The Author to the Critical Peruser.” Likewise, Ponsford (1987) establishes a connection between Milton and Traherne, claiming that Traherne was influenced by Milton. The evidence rests on the shared pun: guilt/gilt. By discussing the shared pun on guilt/gilt in Milton’s “The Passion” and Traherne’s “The City,” Ponsford (1987) makes the case that Milton was one of Traherne’s sources. However, it is worth remarking that “The City” is one of the poems which at this point we have only in Philip Traherne’s handwriting, and the extent to which Philip Traherne modified his brother’s version is debatable. A case could be made that Thomas Traherne was influenced by Milton, but that cannot rest on Philip’s editing of Thomas’ poems. One could refer to Thomas’ possible familiarity with Paradise Lost as evidenced by the presence of the phrase “Palpable Obscurity” in The Kingdom of God (KG XLII.23) which could be an allusion to Milton’s “palpable obscure” (PL II.406). It should be noted, however, that The
*Kingdom of God* is not an autograph manuscript and that Traherne’s usage of the phrase is very different from Milton’s: Satan’s usage of the phrase is scare tactics; Traherne’s usage of the phrase demystifies Satan’s scare tactics.

Scholars falling in the third wave of criticism find it problematic to impose a structure on Traherne’s works and thereby prove that because his works are coherent, therefore he is a good writer. These scholars acknowledge the presence of freedom in the works and aim to reverse the initial judgment on the looseness in Traherne’s works as a symptom of a lack of craft. My own dissertation falls into the last wave of Traherne criticism, and it constitutes a contribution to Traherne studies because no elaborate or book-length discussion of the importance of both the style and the unfinished exists to date. My argument contributes to the most recent wave of criticism on Traherne, and as such it invites a rethinking of the conclusions advanced by earlier criticism. I propose that the criticism on Traherne can be roughly categorized into three chronological phases. Most of these scholars have focused on the Dobell poems and the *Centuries* simply because these were the most widely available texts at the time. However, *The Thanksgivings* have also been under the scrutiny of those in search of unity in the work. Ronald McFarland, for instance, argues that these poems are not spontaneous but constitute a planned sequence (7). However, he and other critics, like Joan Webber (*The Eloquent “I”* 1968), concede that the unifying patterns they argue for are not entirely consistent or conclusive. Similarly, Anthony Low (1978) also comments that the meditative structure in Traherne is lacking.
In his 1958 edition, Margoliouth provides a summary of the *Centuries* “[i]n order to give the reader a guiding thread, and to show that Traherne does not ramble though he may digress” (Margoliouth vol. 1 p. 235). Subtly, this is an attempt to make Traherne more readable and to provide an orientation (“to guide”) the reader into what seems to be an outpouring of abundance. Such outpouring is rarely intended to be an orienting or a stabilizing force. In fact, its main point is to reorient the reader and place the reader in a dynamic writing at the moment. In his footnote for the poem “Admiration” found only in Philip Traherne’s revision of *The Poems of Felicity*, Margoliouth takes a different approach; he states that Philip was skilled at creating a coherent sequence in the poems: “This poem carries on the thought of the last, cf. especially lines 8-9. It may have been written independently and at a different time, but Philip is good in his arrangement of the order of the poems” (Margoliouth, vol. 2, p. 374 “Admiration”).¹ The implication in this statement is that Thomas’ concerns could have been anything but creating coherence among the poems.

In “A Letter concerning this book from the publisher to the bookseller” which appears in *A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation* (1699), George Hickes writes:

> Had the Author liv’d to Publish it, it would have come abroad with greater advantage; for there are some places, which seem to require the hand of the same Architect who made them, to reform ’em, but they are but few, and such as only

---

¹ This statement is interesting on several levels: first because it implies that Thomas was not looking for a coherent organization; second, because of the complexity of judging the date of composition of the poems. Third, “Admiration” could have been written independently or perhaps it could have been written in a different context, or it could have been a poem which was an extension or a revision of a previously composed text. For instance, in *Commentaries of Heaven* (vol. 2), there is a heading “Admiration,” and the poem “Admiration,” which appears in *The Poems of Felicity* could have been intended for inclusion in that section even if currently we have no markings on the text that Traherne or the scribe intended such an inclusion.
need to be made a little more correct or plain, and we must not wonder that there are some uncorrect, and obscure Passages in a Book which is so full of Thoughts, and composed in *Numbers*, or numerous Periods, which tho of the *freer* sort, are not so easy for an Author to express his thoughts in, as plain and unconfined Prose. (qtd. in Margoliouth xxx-xxxi)

This passage is important because it alerts us to the attitude of a seventeenth-century writer—Hickes was a nonjuring divine who was interested in publishing septentrional works—toward Traherne’s writing. The description of Traherne’s text as one of the “*freer sort*” allows us to consider the possibility that his writing has elements which bring Traherne closer to the rhetoric used by enthusiasts. Nigel Smith points out that the “fierce enthusiasm and violent language of the early Quakers led many to fear them as socially subversive phenomenon” (9); it could be that the allusion to “freer sort” has to do with such a subversive element and needs either a justification or, in the best case, a polite apology so that the subversive elements in the prose do not draw too much attention to themselves.  

Sharon Seelig observes that there is a structure in the poems but qualifies her argument by stating that they follow the “leaps and circle of Traherne’s mind” (109). Seelig (1981) goes even further by stating that external structures need not be imposed on Traherne even if she misplaces the fluidity—or what I call centripetal writing and unsystematic structures—in mental perceptions:

---

2 Nigel Smith also points that the language of the new sects had political overtones: “The search for a new government and worship promoted a change in the language of the new sects. [...] In the late 1640s and early 1650s it is possible to identify a group of individuals with various radical religious affiliations who adopted a perfectionist or illuminist stance, and who were interested in mystical and spiritualist literature. The connection between radical Puritanism, especially its enthusiastic elements, and mysticism has been denied in an article which shows how the processes of mystical illumination were antipathetic to the immediate revelation demanded by the enthusiasts. The enthusiast claimed to be where the mystic wanted to go.” (Smith 2, 17)
Although a strong case may be made for the Dobell Folio as a coherent whole, one may question whether these are wholly adequate descriptions of its structure. Wallace himself plants the seeds of doubt: "So skillfully has Traherne insured the continuity of these sections that it would not always be easy to fix the demarcation between them had not the titles of the poems indicated the exact lines of division." [. . .] The reader who, like myself, finds no such clear indications in the titles will be the more dubious about this scheme. As for the threefold progression Clements outlines, it of course reflects the traditional Christian pattern of spiritual development, but it does not follow that this is Traherne's own pattern—or indeed that the poems are arranged in any sort of narrative, chronological sequence.

The Dobell poems do, I would argue, reflect Traherne's own spiritual development, not in the form of a simple linear progression, but in a virtuoso treatment of time and perspective. They do not merely represent innocence followed by its loss and restoration, but an ever-widening perception of the meaning of that original state and a recapitulation of the child's vision from the broader, maturer perspective of the adult poet. Although many have found in Traherne's insistence on his own radiant vision and in his use of the first person a forgetfulness of anyone and anything else, the Dobell Folio is in fact a carefully didactic and persuasive whole by which Traherne tries to bring the reader to see as he sees. His technique involves a manipulation of persona and tense, not as in Herbert to create distance between reader and persona, but rather to create identity. (Seelig 110-111)

Seelig expresses the doubts about clear progression in Traherne’s writing and that whatever stages of illumination can be observed, they cannot easily be seen as stages of progression. Stages of progression can be measured on the temporal plane; however, Seelig dismisses that possibility even if she insists on Traherne’s manipulation of tense and persona. Seelig cites Clements as guilty of imposing a unifying structure on Traherne’s works, but it is fair to point out that Clements also takes a stand against Wallace’s imposition of the three to five part structure of the Jesuit meditational exercise on Traherne’s poems: Wallace is “trying to fit Traherne’s poetry into an uncongenial mold and pattern, one which Traherne did not in fact attempt to follow strictly” (7).

A stronger response against unity as the governing principle in Traherne’s work was issued by Malcolm Day who claims that “the disagreements about the ordering of the
topics and how many meditations in each century are taken up with each topic are an
indication of the irrelevance of these topics as the structural basis of the whole work”
(106). He adds that “attempts to analyze Traherne’s poetry in the light of some special
mystical patterning, either of whole poems or of imagery, have been illuminating but not
entirely successful” (Day 19). Day notes that the structure of Christian Ethics soon
collapses: “Traherne’s design of the Ethics is patterned after the same broadly
Aristotelian-scholastic approach to the virtues taken by most Renaissance works on
ethics. But this Aristotelian framework soon grows dim under the layers of Traherne’s
Neoplatonic and speculative rhetoric: the piling of synonyms, the repetitions, and the
parallel syntactic structures that seek to disclose the center of his thought” (Day 25).
Commenting on the Thanksgivings, Day argues that the ninth Thanksgiving poem is not
an “integral part of the sequence” because its style is “more mature and sophisticated”
(Day TT 79). In other words, Day’s study enacts the pull toward coherence and the
renunciation of its binding forces. Like Day, A. Leigh DeNeef acknowledges the
usefulness of the meditative stages when applied to the Dobell poems, but adds: “none, I
think, reveals the central imaginative urgency that holds the sequence together or shapes
its internal development” (139). The way in which DeNeef uses Heidegger and Lacan is
to demonstrate the “generative structures” in Traherne’s texts while Derrida helps us
understand the production of meaning in the text.

This group of critics has not only objected to the unifying step-by-step meditative
patterns but has freed Traherne’s compositional practices of any theoretical stagnation,
and it has also proposed ways to explain his craft. The way in which these critics discuss Traherne’s texts is by defining them as open-ended. These scholars also note that the formal features of Traherne’s text—repetitions and catalogues—which earlier critics found deficient explain the open-ended nature of Traherne’s style. Robert Ellrodt comments on Traherne’s composition and style: “Everything [is] projected onto the same level plane, an impression enhanced by the constant enumerations, the litanies of nouns and epithets. A mind that seeks to grasp a multiplicity of objects at a time is tempted to resort to mere accumulation, often disregarding dialectical and even temporal co-ordination” (182). Similarly, Stanley Stewart notes that “[t]he underlying principle of organization appears to be additive” (70). Stewart makes another useful comment: Traherne’s works resist the narrative structure (The Expanded Voice 1970). He points out that “the principle of organization in Christian Ethics appears to be as unguided” as it is “regulated” (Stewart 66); he further notes that “[a]lthough in chapter 3 Traherne outlines the plan of discussion, he does not follow it” (Stewart 66). But even though Stewart notices the lack of coherence in some of Traherne’s works, he shows that the Dobell poems are a coherent and unified sequence, and he bases his argument on Philip Traherne’s revisions: “Of all of Philip’s additions to what I shall call “Divine Reflections,” all but one involve the inclusion of poems from the Dobell sequence in the exact order that we find them in Bodleian MS. Eng. Poet c. 42. This may suggest that Philip was aware of his brother’s structural intention; if so, he was, in effect, the first
critic to recognize the structure of the lyric as a group, which he attempts to be guided by and also to enhance” (158).

King makes Traherne’s haphazard structure to be his originality, and by doing so King creates a Traherne who is not a philosopher or a thinker: “Traherne’s originality is not originality of thought but of procedure—he does not carry ideas forward to a new synthesis or a deeper analysis but uses them, as they are, as the stuff of spiritual experience. He does not move beyond the ideas of God and world already available to him, yet he has the freedom of those ideas, transforming all in an intellectually irresponsible but spiritually accurate way into the house of felicity” (King 1972 p. 121).

King also observes the faulty connection between Traherne and mystical paradigms; pointing out that source studies do not tell us much about Traherne—“it is surprisingly difficult to pin him [Traherne] down to any particular source” (King 1972, p. 122)—King elaborates on the problems of applying the stages of mystical development to Traherne’s prose. King states that both Martz (Paradise Within) and Carol Marks (“Cambridge Platonists”) end their discussions tentatively: Bonaventura proves useful to some extent in understanding The Centuries and similarly the Cambridge Platonists are also useful, but Traherne is neither a dedicated follower of Bonaventura nor of the Cambridge Platonist. None of these scholars, however, has argued that Traherne’s texts deliberately and by design resist closure. The closest the critics have come to the notion of Traherne’s resistance of closure is in claiming that his texts are erosive of boundaries (Stewart).
Reading Thomas Traherne (1637?-1674) today is to read him for the first time since two centuries of oblivion. Traherne published only *Roman Forgeries* (1673) during his lifetime, and while he prepared the manuscript of *Christian Ethics*, it did not appear in print until 1675. Through surprising discoveries, many more manuscripts as well as works published in the eighteenth century came to be identified as Traherne’s in the course of the twentieth century. Legend has it that William T. Brooke, found both the *Centuries* as well as what is now known as the Dobell Folio, which includes the poems (Dobell Poems) as well as the *Commonplace Book*. However, as we know from Dobell’s papers, both manuscripts were discovered at two separate occasions in April of 1897. Interestingly, Alexander Grosart, who came in possession of both manuscripts has actually owned one of them—not known which one—at some point. Furthermore, he has owned one more, *The Church’s Year Book*. In 1910, H. I. Bell found another sequence of poems known as *Poems of Felicity* written in Philip Traherne’s hand and edited by him. In 1932, Gladys Wade, who published an edition of Traherne’s poems and *Centuries*, announced that she has identified another manuscript as Traherne’s—the *Hexameron*, a work anonymously published in 1717. In 1935, Dobell’s son acquired another manuscript of Traherne’s, the *Early Notebook*. Twenty-nine years later, in 1964, James Osborn found another manuscript through a bookseller, a manuscript which contains the *Select Meditations*, “A Prayer for Ash Wednesday,” “A Meditation,” as well as two treatises: one on the “treating of the Soul” and another “of Love to God and man”.
The most startling story of discovery belongs to the *Commentaries of Heaven*, a manuscript which found its way in a New York auction room twice in the nineteenth century (1844 and 1854) but surfaced in the twentieth century first in a smoldering fire outside of Liverpool. In 1967, it was saved from the fire by Mr. and Mrs. Wookey who were vacationing and brought the manuscript to their home in Canada. Mr. Wookey, a businessman, expressed no interest in the authorship nor in Traherne’s significance but nevertheless kept it in a strong-box. A graduate student came to work at his house, when the student learned about the manuscript and brought it to the attention of his professor. In 1981, Elliot Rose identified “Commentaries of Heaven” as Traherne’s work, and the discovery was announced in March of 1982 in TLS. In 1984, the manuscript once more found its way to an auction room in New York.

In 1997 Laetitia Yeandale and Julia Smith found an eighteen-hundred line unfinished poem, “The Ceremonial Law” in the Folger Shakespeare Library. And in the same year, Jeremy Maule announced the finding of another manuscript containing four more works and a fragment: *Inducements to Retirednes, A Sober View of Dr. Twisses His Considerations, Seeds of Eternity or the Nature of the Soul, The Kingdom of Heaven*, as well as the fragment on love.

At the time Traherne became sort of a sensation, a number of works and manuscripts became associated with him: the *Centuries*, the Dobell Poems, *The Commonplace Book, Roman Forgeries, Christian Ethics, The Church’s Year Book*, and the *Thanksgivings*; the latter was published anonymously in 1699. Readers of Traherne,
however, could not actually read most of what was discovered. In 1903, Dobell published the Poems, and, in 1908, he published the *Centuries*. Since the database Early English Books Online did not exist at the time, the seventeenth- and the eighteenth-century editions of *Roman Forgeries*, *Christian Ethics*, *The Souls Communion with Her Savior*, *The Thanksgivings*, and the *Hexameron*, were in essence unavailable to scholars. The *Thanksgivings*, edited by Douglas Chambers, were published in 1941. Margoliouth’s valuable edition came in 1958, and it included the *Centuries*, the Dobell poems, and the poems which appear in other works, e.g. *Christian Ethics*. He also included *The Thanksgivings*. *Christian Ethics* appeared in its entirety some ten years later, in 1968. Twenty-nine years later came out Julia Smith’s edition of *Select Meditation*, a work whose discovery was announced in 1964; she did not print the whole manuscript, however, because for her Traherne’s authorship of the other sections of the manuscript is uncertain. Only since 2005, with Jan Ross’ first multi-volume edition of Traherne’s works can readers of Traherne undertake the task of appreciating him more carefully. Currently, four of the eight planned volumes have been published, and these contain the following works: *Inducements to Retiredness*, *A Sober View*, *Seeds of Eternity*, *The Kingdom of Love*, the fragment on Love, *Commentaries of Heaven*, *Church’s Year-Book*, the *Thanksgivings*, and the *Hexameron*.

Part of the debate was also on the question of the value of Traherne’s poetry rather than his prose. Most of the published works in the early 20th century aimed to demonstrate his craft as a poet, and the poetry was culled from various works, much of
the prose remaining unavailable in the twentieth century. A notable example is 

*Commentaries of Heaven*, a large manuscript which is organized alphabetically and consists mostly of prose passages. Its discovery was announced in 1982, and only the poetry was printed in 1989 by D.D.C. Chambers. Even more limited was the perspective which other editions offered: Julia Smith and Anne Ridler printed selected passages.

It is not only the delay between the discovery of the manuscript and its printing that are the problems associated with understanding Traherne. Rather the practices of editing Traherne’s works have been misaligned to his manuscripts.

Editors print with a purpose, as in Margoliouth, whose edition aimed to persuade readers that Thomas’ poetic skill is on par while his brother Philip is to blame for the low quality of his work. Editors tend to print selections of Thomas’ manuscripts as if expecting to find the essence of his finished work. Yet as Peter Beal remarks:

> each individual poem in the MSS [is] edited variously in Dobell, Bell, Margoliouth, Ridler, and Chambers. It should be noted that it is not always certain exactly what constitutes an individual poem, in cases where there are different ‘parts’ numbered ‘I’, ‘II’ or ‘III’. Editors have not agreed, for instance, whether Bells is or not two separate poems . . . while Chambers has commented: “Both “Affairs” and “Affections”, for example, have poems in which the parts are different or separate but obviously connected. In some cases, as in “Ages” and “Attendance”, it is quite obvious, either form the prosody or the theme, that the poems are separate entities.” Alan Bradford, for his part, observes in his Penguin edition (p. xvi): ‘As long as the poem in each set are printed together, it makes little practical difference whether we regard them as two-part poems, as separate poems that happen to have the same title, or even as innovative “double poems.”’ (Beal 482)

> When the manuscript is considered to be the work, then we need to think about how to discuss poems which are literally under erasure, as is the case in the Early Notebook with the poem “Rise noble soule and come away”, a poem which consists of
four stanzas, does not contain a title, is initialed by Traherne, and markedly concludes with “Finis”, while all of it is under erasure. Margoliouth’s edition does not present the poem as it appears in the manuscript. We learn from the notes that stanzas 1-3 are on one page while stanza four is at the bottom of the next page. The gap between stanzas 3 and 4 is filled with “Latin verses, including two deleted lines, on the theme Sperne voluptates” (Margoliouth 405).

Printing the manuscript as a work also means that some poems are not privileged over others. Margoliouth, for instances, prints 12 poems from the Early Notebook, but these are not all which are in the manuscript. From Beal we know that Thomas has copied Stode’s lyric “I saw air Chloris walke alone” with a Latin version in a double-sided format (Beal 482).

Other seventeenth-century writers also pose a problem for editors complicated by the multiple variants in multiple hands of his poems. This transcription of his poetry is a challenging endeavor. Editing such texts has been for the most part guided by the question of authorial intentions: the collating of versions had the purpose of arriving at the author’s original idea of the poem. But an examination of the text from the point of view of manuscript culture necessitates a different approach to editing, and what that approach might be is still a challenge.

Typically, holograph texts are presented and thought of as finished texts, but what about authorial revisions? Milton’s holograph of the Trinity Manuscript of “Lycidas,” for instance, makes us think about all graphical elements on the page—the curving of the
line of written text, the spots of ink (which might indicate later additions), the type of hand at each line of the manuscript, etc. A manuscript of this kind lets us consider the process of composition even if it does not necessarily allow us to talk about the authorial intentions.

As exciting as the discovery of Traherne’s manuscripts is and as forbidding as the laps in publication of his manuscripts and seventeenth- as well as eighteenth-century works has been, so much more puzzling have been the problems of authorship, problems which have plagued Traherne scholarship for the most of twentieth century. Readers of Traherne’s work were vigorously debating about his merits as a writer, a debate which began to taper off in the late 1980s, and the problems with the authorship can explain the context of this debate. It is frequently noted also that the negative reception of some critics of Traherne’s work has been explained with the time of his discovery, when the metaphysical poets were fashionable, a trend which reached its point of maturity with T. S. Eliot’s essays on metaphysical poets. When Dobell published the Centuries and the poems, he started the confusion. Readers indeed were reading Thomas Traherne work in the Centuries, but they were reading Philip’s version of Thomas’ poems in Dobell’s edition of Thomas’ poetry because Dobell printed Philip’s corrections rather than Traherne’s version of the poem. Thomas’ authorship was muddied severely early on with I. H. Bell’s 1910 edition of Poems of Felicity as Thomas Traherne’s poems rather than Philip’s version of Traherne’s poetry. I. H. Bell also assumed that the Ficino Notebook belonged to Thomas’ nephew, Philip Traherne’s son, whose name is Thomas Traherne.
The matter was muddied even more by Gladys Wade whose 1932 edition also provided Philip’s corrections of the poems and kept Thomas’ original in the footnotes.

Margoliouth’s 1958 edition is fundamental to the history of the reception of Thomas’s work because the debate about the quality of Traherne’s work and his status as a poet continued to be questioned. His edition had a purpose in mind: to prove that Thomas was a good poet. To that end, he published both Thomas’ and Philip’s versions of the poems side by side. As important as Margoliouth’s edition is to straightening one problem, it created another. He thought that Thomas Traherne’s *Early Notebook*, a 396-page notebook, belonged to Philip rather than Thomas, a perception which was corrected in 1968 by Carol Marks. In this case, the lack of modern edition of the work has been a saving grace for scholars since the *Early Notebook* is not printed to date, but Margoliouth printed only some of the poems form that manuscript, and he attributed all but one of them to Thomas Traherne, which he suspected could not be written by Traherne because of the topic. Further, he did not publish the Dobell sequence and the *Poems of Felicity* sequence of poems in their original order, so while the edition resolved one major problem, and continues to be helpful, scholars needed another tool through which to continue the evaluation of Thomas’ work.

Anne Riddler’s 1966 edition of the Dobell poems, the *Poems of Felicity* and other poems as well as selections from the *Centuries* is somewhat helpful since she recollated Margoliouth’s text so that Dobell’s poems are first and not juxtaposed to Philip’s revisions and Philip’s revisions of *The Poems of Felicity* appear second. It is unfortunate
that her edition did not provide the order and versions of both poem collections in their entirety. In 1967, Anne Riddler corrected the misconception that some of the poems are Thomas’ and announced that four of the poems in the Early Notebook are copies from Quarles’ Sion Sonets (1625) as well as Quarles’ Hadassa or the History of Queen Esther (1621), and a fifth poem is copied from 1626 manuscript anthology transcribed by Ralph Crane, but containing poems, which Traherne apparently copied, by William Austin of Lincoln’s Inn. This poem, which Traherne copied selectively, omitting six lines total at different places, was also published posthumously by Austin’s widow in Devotions Augustiniae Flamma (1635). Peter Beal adds that one of the poems, which is not published in Margoliouth’s edition, is from William Strode and that another one is of uncertain authorship.

Select Meditations, the manuscript which surfaced in 1964, was the subject of debate because its authorship was questioned by Douglas Chambers. In a correspondence published in the TLS, Chambers and Louis Martz exchanged letters, Martz defending Traherne’s authorship. Select Meditations was actually not written in Traherne’s hand, but as Julia Smith establishes in 1997, it is indeed Traherne’s work since among other things, one of the poems appears in Christian Ethics. Perhaps because of the debate on the authorship of Select Meditations, the usefulness of Margoliouth’s edition was not heeded properly, and scholars’ discussions of Traherne poetry were without regard to Philip’s or Thomas’ versions.
A work whose authorship is still debated is the *Meditations on the Six Days of the Creation*. It was first published by Nathaniel Spinckes in 1717 as the first part of *A Collection of Meditations and Devotions*. It was first attributed to Traherne by Gladys Wade in her 1932 edition of Traherne’s poetry. In 1936, Helen C. White challenged Wade’s ascription, but various scholars have supported the argument that the *Meditations on the Six Days of the Creation* is Traherne’s work.

Early scholars have made attempts to date Traherne’s work, but currently the consensus is that such a task is not going to yield fruitful results because most of the manuscripts were composed over a long period of time, and since Traherne does not make many specific references but makes only general references, dating the texts becomes not just tricky but also impossible.

At this point it seems to make sense also to presume that the manuscripts, or at least some of them, were written at the same time and also were composed over a long period of time: a neat stemma needs to be replaced with the concept of the polygenesis of the manuscript. Furthermore, some of the manuscripts were also not originally written in a notebook format but were bound after being assembled from various papers. The process of composition then challenges our concept of ‘date of writing.’

As this dissertation aims to show, the abundance of matter, which Traherne diligently encountered in his work has created the project of the management of *copia*. The master organizational principles that emerge in some works—the numerical organization in the *Centuries*, the alphabetical and cross-reference organization in
Commentaries of Heaven and The Commonplace Book, or the master plans in Roman Forgeries, Christian Ethics, A Sober View—are only to be broken, and it is no surprise then, that the works cannot be finished.

The model which I use for discussing the ways in which the forces of closure and resistance to closure operate in Traherne is based on Terence Cave’s study on sixteenth-century French works, The Cornucopian Text. This study investigates the problems of writing which erupt in ‘practice’ (xiii) and proposes that French Renaissance authors like Ronsard, Rabelais, and Montaigne aim to create their authorial selves through imitation and fragmentation of old texts, and in the process, centripetal forces—those tending toward a center or closure—and centrifugal forces—those tending toward deferral of closure—are continually at work in their writing. Since language is fallen, these authors feel the tension between the centripetal and the centrifugal forces. Unlike Cave, I am not concerned with the authorial persona that emerges out of Traherne’s texts. The issue of the fashioning of the authorial self does not emerge in Traherne scholarship, and it might be a useful venue of investigation, but my intention with this dissertation has been to focus on the way the centripetal and centrifugal forces operate in order to find out how his texts work. My findings, therefore, do not center on the establishment of the authorial self but have led me to discuss the practice of writing. As a critical work, my dissertation participates in the discourse which shapes the perception of Traherne’s image, and as such, its argument depicts a Traherne who is thoroughly a writer, rather than primarily a secluded or a socially engaged mystic or an engaged theologian.
I use a pair of terms which I adopt from Cave’s study. First, I borrow the term centrifugal and centripetal writing. Centrifugal writing stands for writing which is loosened and which aims at proliferation and resistance to both closure and completion. Centripetal writing stands for writing which controls the deviousness of language. Centrifugal writing is most often achieved through various metaphors associated with abundance while centripetal writing is most often achieved through references of ethical themes. In addition, I consider that closure and non-closure seem to be concepts which are like the two faces of a coin. Special events in life (birth, graduation, marriage) could be perceived as closures, but they could also be viewed as the beginning of a new phase of one’s life.

The terminology which I use in my argument aims to provide fewer terms because the proliferation of definitions related to closure and non-closure does not seem to me to be useful to my approach. I distinguish between a closed/finished text and one which is unfinished; the unfinished text can fall into two categories: diegetic and incomplete. I do not consider, for instance, a poem which fails to work out a resolution but has a formal closure as incomplete or unfinished; I treat it as a formally closed poem. A text which fails to work out closure but has formal closure also does not fall into my categories of the diegetic unfinished and the incomplete. A text which simply ends is an unfinished text; for instance, Traherne’s Centuries, which ends with the number eleven after the tenth paragraph of the fifth gathering, is an example of a diegetic closure.
Similarly, if the work is missing its opening, even if it has closure, I would consider it to fall under the category of the unfinished text.

My methodology of referring to Traherne’s works is informed by Traherne’s method of writing. For him intertextuality is present in the way in which he worked with the texts of others and in the ways in which he seemed to have composed the texts. Jan Ross cites a number of examples where Traherne does not always acknowledge his sources. Furthermore, the beginning and ending of the quotes is not consistently identified (Ross vol. 1 xxii-xxiii). The examples are important enough for my own methodology so I need to cite Ross in full:

In *A Sober View* where Traherne is arguing for one doctrinal position over another as he does with Twisse and Hammond’s treatise, are not however always clearly marked, which leads to a confusion about Traherne’s own interpretation of the doctrine of election. In chapter XXIII of *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne uses the sections copied in the *Commonplace Book* under ‘Fire’ and ‘Firmament’ from Part II of Theophilus Gale’s *The Court of Gentiles*, referring to him as ‘the learned Gale’ in a list of contemporary divines and philosophers (line 54); but the whole of lines 12-72 is made up of extracts from Gale. He does not, however, identify Gale as his source until line 59 and that for the brief section that follows. In chapter XI of the same treatise, lines 1-33 are comprised of a lengthy quotation from Ralph Cudworth’s 1647 sermon preached before the House of Commons. Traherne never mentions Cudworth but freely uses him. A similar thing occurs in *Seeds of Eternity* (lines 361-365) where Traherne has a brief quotation in both Latin and English from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (1.85), which he does not identify. It is a common quotation used often by Christian apologists, such as Lactantius in his *Divine Institutions*, and has two different renderings in Latin. One follows Ovid; the other changes the last word of the line ‘videre’ to ‘tueri’. Traherne follows the latter, so that he is not quoting Ovid directly but from another source; and it is possible the whole section around the quotation is also not entirely Traherne’s. A variation of the quotation in English also appears in *Meditations on the Six Days of the Creation* for the meditation on the sixth day. (Ross vol 1. p. xxii-xxiii)

Nearly the whole of ‘Antichrist’ [a section from *Commentaries of Heaven*], including the chart delineating the numbers 666, is taken from George Downname’s *A Treatise concerning Antichrist* (London, 1603). For ‘Antiquitie’ Traherne relied not only to Downname but also on John Jewel’s *A Replie unto M.*
Hardinges Answear (London, 1565), A Defence of the Apologie of the Churche of Englande (London, 1567) and An Exposition upon the two Epistles of the Apostle Sainct Paule to the Thessalonians (London, 1583) as well as John Rainoldes’s The Summe of the Conference between John Rainoldes and John Hart: Touching the Head and the Faith of the Church (London, 1584), all sources directly linked to Roman Forgeries (London, 1673). (Ross vol. 2 p. xxiii)

Such quotations are to be found also in the Centuries where Pico della Mirandola is cited for a number of paragraphs. We also need to be skeptical about the sources which Traherne acknowledges because these sources are frequently incorrect. For instance, Traherne attributes a maxim to Seneca and quotes it in Commentaries of Heaven, Centuries, and Christian Ethics, but this maxim is not in the Senecan corpus.

Traherne also does not record his auto-citations. For instance, one passage appears in the Commonplace Book and in the Commentaries of Heaven (see “Astronomie” in CH), and a poem from the Centuries appears in the Dobell folio. Jan Ross acknowledges further connections among the manuscripts:

The intimate connection between the Commonplace Book and Commentaries of Heaven is evident by the many cross-references in both manuscripts as well as corresponding topics. Of over two hundred cross-references in the Commentaries, forty-five refer directly to topics in the Commonplace Book. Of fifty-one cross-references in the Commonplace Book four appear as topics in the Commentaries: ‘Admiration’, ‘Arithmetic’, ‘Astronomie’ and ‘Atom’. Both manuscripts also share a few topic headings: ‘Aristotles Philosophie’, ‘Astrologie’, ‘Atom’ and ‘Authoritie’.” (Ross vol. 2 p. xxi).

Jan Ross also highlights the connections among the manuscript is not only based on the similarity of the texts but also on the time of composition:

Traherne probably composed several works simultaneously, shifting material from one manuscript to another, sometimes using the same organization. Traherne’s ‘A treatice of Atoms’ in The Kingdom of God follows the same line of argument and has a similar organization as his discussion under ‘Atom’ in the Commentaries (vol. 3, p. 236-
249) follows that outlined in ‘Meditations and Devotions for Ascention Day’ in the ‘Church’s Year Book’ (Ross vol. 2 p. xxiii)

Considering that some of these versions could have been composed at the same time or resumed after a long hiatus, one needs to think not in terms of the traditional stemma but in terms of the polygenesis of the manuscripts. The manuscripts are linked not only because of the placement of the same text in different contexts but also because of the contemporaneous composition process.

In addition to borrowing sources without acknowledging them appropriately, or whenever acknowledging them citing them incorrectly and in addition to fragmenting and dispersing his own writing in the space of his own works, one should also add that one last feature which further consolidates Traherne’s intertextuality is that it is impossible sometimes to point out where one poem finishes and another begins.

I use Traherne’s intertextuality in two major ways. First, I use Traherne’s intertextuality to explore not complete poems or works, but the potentials for non-closure in his texts as they appear throughout his work. Because I have kept in mind that I am reading a transcription of Traherne’s manuscripts and because Traherne himself copied passages from one work into another, I do not analyze poems for their meaning thereby treating poems as complete. I do not treat their sequence as complete nor as

---

worked out. My approach to referring to Traherne’s works is guided not by the goal to produce an exhaustive analysis of specific works but by my project of pointing to generative rhetorical strategies. I trace writing practices to the extent that they are traceable, and I have been able to outline them thereby reaching a preliminary closure since the genre of my work requires it.

The second way in which I use Traherne’s intertextuality is to contrast his methods of non-closure, whenever possible, to other sixteenth- or seventeenth-century writers. Considering that we do not know much about Traherne and exactly which writers he was familiar with, it may seem problematic to put Traherne in the context of various mid sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers. The contrasts with other writers is not intended to provide an exhaustive account of how Traherne’s methods of rhetorical copia and of the topoi on cornucopia contrast to those of other writers although occasionally I have attempted to demonstrate these differences. And whenever I have done so, my work only begins to point to a more comprehensive study on the treatment of the unfinished in the early modern period and to the ways in which different methods of the unfinished appear in the works of early modern texts.

The chapters do not theorize a practice of writing but propose how the practice of writing creates a theory of writing. My first chapter, “The Problem of Exhaustible Writing,” argues that one of the problems of writing, which exists in Traherne’s works is the project of writing exhaustively and explaining everything thoroughly; that project dissipates because exhaustibility becomes associated with death and sin. The second
chapter, “Traherne’s Non-finito Closures: Rhetorical Moves, Syntactical Structures, and Typographical Markers,” examines the formal features of closure and resistance to closure and argues that closure is continually rewritten as a new beginning in Traherne’s work. The third chapter, “Ways of Centrifugal Writing,” establishes the connection between centripetal forces of writing and the *topoi* of natural images and argues that the generative forces of nature permeate the process of writing leading to an energizing condition of non-closure so that the text tends toward entropy. The final chapter, “Unsystematic Trajectories: The Flow of a Non-Systematic Procession,” extends the discussion in the previous chapter by pointing to the paradox of *arche*, *telos*, and the writing of anti-closural texts where the practice of writing is not preceded by a theory of writing.

The literature on the unfinished burgeoned throughout the 1970s and 1980s, an interest that could be explained with the appeal which indeterminacy held at the time: it is not the finished which was of concern, rather than that which resisted coherence and which provided an anti-teleological reading. In this section, I aim to provide a chronological overview, by no means exhaustive, and to show that the unfinished is present in all literary periods whether its presence was suppressed, held in high regard, or resisted.

A brief survey—by no means complete—of the unfinished and of the theory of complete works is due in this discussion. Aristotle’s postulate outlined in his *Theory of Tragedy* that a tragedy should have a beginning, middle and an end dominate our sense of
what a complete work is about. Like Aristotle, in *De Inventione* (I.LII 98-LVI 109), Cicero outlines the five parts of a rhetorical composition. Judicial orations have also been divided into five parts: introduction (*exordium, proemium*), narrative (*narratio*), evidence (*argumentatio, probatio*), refutation (*refutatio*), and close (*peroratio, epilogus*). From the beginning of the discourse to the end, the orator aims to make his listeners be predisposed to his speech and adjusts his rhetoric to the emotions of the listeners.

Appolodurs was considered mad for breaking his finished statue because it was not perfect. Provided that a statue were unfinished, Pliny surmises that the death of the artist is the reason for the sculpture’s unfinished state. In that case, the viewer, rather than the nature of the work, was considered more important by Pliny the Elder because it allowed the viewer to compose an ending based on what the work already shows (xxxv.145).

Turning our attention to endings in writing, we need to be reminded of Hermogenes’ *On Types of Style*, where he discusses the *clausula* in solemn style. Endings of *clausula* are better when two conditions are met: the rhythm of the last word should consist of at least three syllables and words containing vowels which require the mouth to open more are preferable for ending the *clausula*. Medieval rhetoric was also concerned with closure. Cassiodorus (*6th c.*), Alcuin (*end of 8th c.*), Brunetto Latini (*mid 13th c.*), and Matthew of Vendome’s *Ars versificatoria* (*c. 1170*) agree on five types of conclusion: recapitulation, petition for audience’s indulgence, display of boasting, expressing thanks to the muses (*McGerr 17*). Similarly, Geoffrey of Vinsauf (*early 13th c.*) is concerned with envoy which concludes the poem. The strong ending, as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is
of special importance for medieval writers, who conclude their narratives with various genres—prayers or summaries. The question of explicitness, however, raised questions about closure. Peter Abelard makes a case that the most complete and explicit sentence is the infinite sentence, and hence, he poses the difficulty of achieving completion. That which is yet to be said has a potential for meaning, but explicitness is achieved in an unending sentence (Highley 78-79). The unfinished occupies its own category, and among the unfinished narratives we might add the French anonymous romance Flamenca as well as Guillaume de Lorris’s Roman de la Rose. In discussing the latter, we might have to talk about polygenesis since it was finished about half a century later by Jean de Meun. Of particular interests is Joufroi de Poitiers, a fragmentary old French romance, which creates a tension between the rhetoric of incompletion and interruption evident in the motif of largesse and poetic inventio thereby questioning the status of literary writing (Dragoneti 95-119). The poetics of the troubadours distinguished between troubar leu or plan (“easy, clear composition”) and trobar clus (“closed, obscure composition) (Dragoneti 98). Joufroi de Poitiers is considered a clear composition, but its clarity always denotes something hidden; its rhetoric of incompletion and interruption focuses on unveiling the richness of the commonplace speech and on understanding “literature as a writing about the impossible” (Dragoneti 119). Petrarch presents an interesting case. Like Traherne’s Centuries and other prose works, the Canzoniere is a medley of genres but to a larger extent; it includes sonnets, ballads, madrigals, among others. Like Traherne, Petrarch made important choices about his text: he wrote poetry in the
vernacular, but he also gave it a Latin title and provided Latin annotations. Traherne did not frame his writing with Latin annotations, but he has a number of statements which demonstrate his attention to clarity of writing and the transparency of prose and poetic writing. Unlike Traherne, he recorded meticulously the dates of composition of his works, and we know that he composed his Canzoniere for a period over forty years. The Canzoniere pose much the same problems as Traherne’s Dobell poems, for instance: are they meant to produce a coherent narrative, or are they disparate parts gathered together? We know that Petrarch experimented with nine versions in order to offer a coherent structure of his work. The Rerum Vulgarium fragmenta, the title which Petrarch gave to what we are most familiar with as Canzoniere or Rime, conveys the tension between the desire for a coherent fabula and one which resists order (Picone). Picone notes that despite Petrarch’s attempts to give coherence to the disparate fragments, Petrarch failed to find that which will explain the transformation of his love for Laura into his love for God (Picone 48). Picone speculates that the problem with Petrarch’s works is that it was not written with the end in mind but with “view to its development and not its conclusion” (Picone 50). Leaving authorial intentions aside, by foregrounding the potency of the unfinished narrative rather than the authorial control over the material, McGerr, who discusses the tension between conventions for closure and the production of multiple meanings, brings up another set of unfinished texts: Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, House of Fame and the Legend of Good Women. Michelangelo’s unfinished

---

4 For a detailed review of the history of interpretation of the unfinished in Chaucer, see McGerr 3.
statues are of special importance because while other artists and writers have left unfinished works, the *non-finito* as a theme dominates the scholarship on Michelangelo. The consistently expressed desire to bring his projects to completion did not make it any easier for Michelangelo to achieve his purpose. Various ways of understanding the unfinished sculptures are proposed by experts on Michelangelo’s unfinished works. Hegel’s understanding of arts as three stage process beginning with the most material stage evident in architecture, passing through sculpture, and finishing with the most spiritual stage made manifest in painting, poetry, and music does not accommodate easily for Michelangelo’s works because he used a non-spiritual medium for his spiritual message. Henry Thode, the preeminent Michelangelo scholar, argues that Michelangelo’s later understanding of sculpture as insufficiently spiritual medium led him in his later life to abandon his works. Interestingly, Michelangelo did not abandon his paintings: all of them are completed. Other scholars after Thode continued the line of argumentation suggesting that Michelangelo’s unfinished sculptures should be appreciated in their *non-finito* state. Herbert von Einnem understands Michelangelo’s unfinished statues as figures bound by God, in which case freeing the figures by the stone would be a sin, and that is the point at which Michelangelo stopped working on the statue. Creighton E. Gilbert proposes another understanding of Michelangelo’s works based on the discrepancy between the artist’s avowed desire to finish them and his abandonment of his projects. Examining the most neglected aspects of Michelangelo’s works—two finished statues of an unfinished larger project from his late period to which
most of the unfinished works are from belong—Michelangelo’s sonnets, where the unfinished is thematized, Gilbert argues that the theme of the sculptures used in the sonnets does not outline Michelangelo’s theory of art but speaks of the life experiences which were important to him; such experiences included the death of a closed one and the realization that the unfinished is a mark of the artist at that moment of creation when the work exhibits control over the artist: “The work is neither done nor polished, but is at a point that perforce engages the artist” (63).

Some of the most relevant sources on the finished and unfinished with respect to Traherne are theological and much earlier than the Italian Renaissance. St. Irenaeus, whose work is familiar to Traherne, comments on the theological implications of the unfinished. Irenaeus refers to the perfect and unending fulfillment of humankind, relying on the Greek definition of ‘telos’ as perfection, fulfillment and ending. Telos is not an ‘end’ for Irenaeus but ‘fulfillment.’ He borrows this meaning from the first-century world of financial transaction where paid financial receipt was fulfilled. Gregory of Nyssa, another theologian with whom Traherne was familiar, makes a distinction, echoed in the work of Chapters on Knowledge by Maximus the Confessor. Gregory of Nyssa states that sensual things have a limit, just like a cube has its limits; however, virtue cannot have a limit “because every good is by its nature unlimited” (81). Nyssa’s rhetorical question on the overwhelming nature of the limitlessness can be found in Traherne’s prose: “How can a man reach the boundary he is looking for if it does not

---

exist?” (Nyssa 82). Similarly, Nyssa’s disciple, Maximus the Confessor, states that natural things reach perfection when they stop to grow, but where knowledge of God is concerned, continual growth is perfection:

All things created in time according to time become perfect when they cease their natural growth. But everything that the knowledge of God effects according to virtue, when it reaches perfection, moves to further growth. For the end of the latter becomes the beginning of the former. Indeed, the one who by practicing the virtues keeps in check the substance of past things begins other, more divine patterns. For God never ceases from good things, as he never began them. (C I. 35)

It is important to note that the structure of his work resembles the structure of Traherne’s Centuries in that both a composed in short paragraphs grouped in hundred. The theological interpretation of telos and infinite progress is discussed also by Cyril of Alexandria, who commenting on John 19.30 in his Commentary of St. John’s Gospel, Book 12, interprets Christ’s “it is finished” as a repayment done in full. Closure as in ‘perfection,’ then, becomes an eschatological term rather than a protological one. And as I demonstrate, the tension between telos and arche is significant for Traherne’s infinite writing.

Renaissance understanding of the unfinished is not explored extensively. Paul Barolski acknowledges the central role of Ovid’s Metamorphosis in Italian Renaissance art, where the non-finito is a way to point to the creative act. Barolski’s main point is that the Renaissance unfinished owes to Ovidian metamorphosis and the confusion which transformation poses. He points to Lorenzo di Medici’s “Ambra”, Michelangelo’s Battle

---

of the Lapiths and Centaurs and Prisoners, Titian’s sketches, Ariosto’s unfinished cantos, and Monataigne’s Essays, all of which evoke the ovidian notion of metamorphosis and the non-finito aesthetic. Of particular interest for Barolski is Piero di Cosimo’s The Discovery of Honey which contains a strange mixture of urbanity and uncouthness. The finished work, Barolski suggests, is that which has a finish as opposed to the one which exhibits the crudeness of a sketch or echoes a reminiscence of the uncouth rustic.

Seventeenth-century definitions and practices of both closure and non-closure are varied. The Civil War could have harnessed the desire for stability and closure, and at the same time, it could have made instability more pronounced and could have spurred writers to find rhetorical moves to convey the instability. One might think of a vogue emerging in the seventeenth-century desire for stability, a vogue indicated by the titles of works which suggests fullness and completion, as in The Compleat Angler (1655) (Beurline 51). Some poets sought to express closure through silence; George Herbert’s “Redemption,” “The Collar,” and “Love III” might be understood as examples of strong forces of closure that operate through silence. Whereas in Herbert the silence is an acknowledgement of the imperfection of language and of contemplative stillness, in Donne’s “As due by many titles I resign” we might question the forces of closure because this sonnet can be interpreted with and without closure (Linville 150).7 Ben Jonson gives a different way of examining the coexistence of closure and copia, a surprising move from a poet who associates closure with the condition of being “drie’d up” as well as with

---

7 In the 1633 sequence of the Holy Sonnets, the ending of “As due by many titles I resign” is left without closure.
the lack of productivity and sloth as exemplified by “An Ode. To Himself.” Beaurline outlines two instances of copia: the first, of infinite linear progression, and the second, of a limited space, which can be endlessly divided in half (54). For Johnson, as Beaurline suggests, variety achieved with a limited set of ideas or characters is the preferable model for copia.

Izaak Walton’s 1675 edition of The Life of Donne provides a different closure than the 1640 edition. In the former edition, Donne’s physician, Dr. Simeon Fox, convinces Donne to agree to monumentalize himself in whatever form is agreeable to him. Donne does not take long to request a life-size portrait. He is depicted as lying in bed, facing east and waiting for the Second Coming. We are informed that the portrait was fully finished:

he thus stood with his eyes shut, and with so much of the sheet aside as might shew his lean, pale, and death-like face, which was purposely turned toward the East, from whence he expected the second coming of his and our Saviour Jesus. In this posture he was drawn at his just height; and when the Picture was fully finished, he caused it to be set by his bed-side, where it continued, and became his hourly object till his death; and, was then given to his dearest friend and Executor Doctor Henry King, then chief Resentiary of St. Pauls, who caused him to be thus carved in one entire piece of white Marble, as it now stands in that Church. (Walton 72)

This edition seems to offer a proliferation of closures to such an extent that the closural forces of monuments can be questioned: do they become occasions for proliferation, each monumental closure producing another? Stephen Dobranski offers a different view of the procedures for closure in early modern complete editions of the works of writers such as Sidney, Johnson, Donne, Milton, and Herrick. Dobranski claims that a paradox is at work in such editions: in order for an edition to convey the suggestion that it has been
carefully crafted by the author, an edition had to demonstrate that it has carefully chosen
omissions. In some cases, these omissions are manifested as including an unfinished
poem. For instance, Sidney’s *Arcadia* (1655) includes a poem in order to stabilize
Sidney’s reputation, Johnson’s *Works* (1616) omit a poem, Donne’s *Poems* (1633)
include fragments, Herrick’s *Hesperides* (1648) include two unfinished poems.

Dobranski argues that the unfinished in these works functions primarily to establish the
newly developed early modern sense of authorship and the Renaissance practice of active
reading (Dobranski 20-25). Further, the books-in-progress phenomenon, Dobranski
explains, is accommodated by the manuscript culture where unfinished works circulate
freely (4), and it also confirms the quality of the writing (8): it is so good, it is worth
publishing even incomplete.

But the function of the unfinished has been explained in other ways. Burton
adheres to the baroque understanding of history where rhetorical *copia*—the abundance
and unruliness of the narrative—is used to elevate heroes, and, as a result, Burton creates
myths which aim to affect the reader deeply (Vicari 153-161). Dryden, whose own work
bears the signs of non-closure—all of his prose is in prefaces or introductions or in
conversation—attributes national characteristics in prose which favors variety.

Sometimes rhetorical excess is not explained at all; rather it serves as the occasion for an
apology as in Margaret Cavendish’s “An Apology for Writing So Much Upon This
Book” in her *Poems and Fancies* (1664). More recent scholarship has explored the

---

8 One wonders about the significance of generative writing in Donne’s epistles (on the
extravagance of his epistles, see DeStefano). Equally interesting are Marvell’s overdeveloped
problem from other perspectives. As T. S. Eliot would have it, another understanding of the unfinished, the overly developed or the formless seen in Lancelot Andrewes’ sermons is closely linked to the incommunicable. Unlike Kathleen Weatherford who points out that for Donne the psalms’ “shutting up” offers the most powerful endings (195), Holly Faith Nelson argues that the linear progression and narrative coherence in Henry Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans* is made impossible not because of the working out of an authorial persona but because of the disruptions caused by the Civil War and that the disorientation and fragmentation is reenvisioned through the polyvocality of the Psalms. Examining the function of early modern encyclopedias, Lawrence Sullivan points to yet another source for the unfinished: a reexamination of the systematization of human knowledge was the corollary of the voyages (316). As a dynamic model of

images in, for instance, “Upon Appleton House” and “To His Coy Mistress”; on Marvell, see T. S. Eliot “Andrew Marvell.”
circumscribing knowledge, the encyclopedia as a genre promises stability, but Francis Bacon’s encyclopedic model leaves “conceptual space for every species of knowledge” (Sullivan 317). *Encyclopedia Britannica*, launched in 1768, was to become the culmination of circumscribing knowledge, a project stimulated by the Scottish Enlightenment (Sullivan 316). Digression, as a form of the unfinished, can also be interpreted as a shield against inquiry and resistance to aggression against the disenfranchised, against the religious dissenters, and against the sexually ambivalent (Cotterill).  

The sense of fragmentation is no less diminished in the eighteenth century. In fact, looking forward to the Romantics, who are considered to provide the most examples of *non-finito* with such works as Shelley’s “The Triumph of Life,” Elizabeth Harries asserts that the Romantic fragment was not a new departure because during the 1750s deliberate fragments proliferated (Harries 2-5). She argues that “the Romantic fragment is not a completely new departure, that it depends on the fragmentary procedures and justifications that developed, at least in part, in the later eighteenth century” (5), an argument which is questioned when one considers the works of Donne, Jonson, Bacon, Burton, Harrington, and other seventeenth-century writers. Harries finds the significance of the *non-finito* in eighteenth-century writers in its capacity to provoke an ethical response from the readers, and she exemplifies her thesis with Lawrence Sterne’s works.

---

9 A number of European sources need to be mentioned here; Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptameron* (1558) is an example of a work which recognizes that completion in this world is made possible only by acts of faith (Bernard 318). Deferral of endings in Marino’s 5123-line poem is achieved through catalogues and digressions. On pictorial *copia* finding its way into rhetorical *copia* in Peter Rubens see Lusheck.
whose asterisks and blanks aim to “galvanize the reader” (45). Sterne’s narrative non-
finito has attracted the attention of other critics as well. Marcia Allentuck argues that unlike other critics who assert that Tristram Shandy is a complete work, she argues that it is not and supports her argument by pointing to Sterne’s familiarity with the discussion on non-finito in Dryden’s translation of Du Frensnoe’s Art of Painting as well as to David Hume’s essay “Of Tragedy.” Allentuck asserts that Sterne plays with closural effects, but the forces of closure never dominate the work (150). Taking as a starting point Allentuck’s argument, Eric Rothstein goes on to assert that during the eighteenth century, the non-finito was a mode of understanding works so that even finished and completed ones were thought of as unfinished. The juxtaposition which Rothstein uses is between writers like Jonson, who liked brevity, Cowley, who is known for his detailed descriptions, and writers like Milton, Addison, or Archibald Alison who create sketches in order to evoke the ideal presence. The value of the non-finito lies in inspiring the reader to participate in the creation of the work, a way of reading which even writers of complete works wanted to embrace. Reading with non-closure in mind is seen as a way of achieving ideal presence as well as perfection.

Nineteenth-century non-closure is primarily known from the works of Byron, whose Don Juan was, in the words of Jerome McGann, “not a poem which develops but a poem that is added to” (60). Twentieth-century examples of works which resist closure are also known; such one instance is Ezra Pound’s The Four Cantos, the preeminent work for the modernist movement, which was written between 1915 and 1962.
Balachandra Rajan comments that *The Four Cantoes* is a “poem of contestation, not between genres . . . but between holistic objective and the fragmentary method” (18).

Carlo Emilio Gadda, whose unfinished crime novel *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1956; trans. *That Awful Mess on Via Merluana*) is an experiment with language. Commenting on the interpretation of Gadda’s *Pasticciaccio*, Robert Rushing argues that previous scholars on Gadda have tried to place the problem of the unfinished either in supplying an ending or in depicting the image of the neurotic writer. As a result, Rushing shows that the general consensus is that Gadda seems to underestimate knowability, determinacy, and certainty. Rushing argues that “the unfinished is a promising cognitive model, a way of coming to know (an epistemic adventure) that is neither an appropriation of the object of knowledge nor a rejection of knowledge” (134).10 Wallace Stevens’ poetry also belongs to the same category of poetry which resists closure. Lyn Heijinian has also attracted attention as a contemporary poet who challenges the concept of closure and uses it as a way to enable readers’ participation.11

Tracing the history of the emergence of the interest in non-closure will allow us to see the theoretical pressures which shape scholarly pressures as well as the problems of definition and the significance of non-closure and closure.

---

10 On the influence of the unfinished in contemporary music, see Pierre Boulez in Umberto Eco 218. Boulez, the polemical French composer, who wanted opera houses to be burned and brought to the scene several pianos, harps, and percussions notes that “there are no general structures within which a particular thought can be described” (qtd. in Eco 218).

11 On Heijinian, see Stephanie Fritz: “Heijinian invites her readers to leave behind false notions of completeness and to make reading an adventure in which the gaps, the white spots on our mental maps, are not pasted over with closed stories but left open for experimentation” (234).
During the 1980s because of the peak of the importance of literary theories, the discussion on closure became especially prominent so that in 1984, *Yale French Studies* dedicated a special issue on poetic closure where the editor, Hult, asked, “Can the closure of the literary work be rethought as a necessary and unshakeable illusion?” (v). Umberto Eco’s *The Open Work*, originally published in 1962, not translated until 1989, was acclaimed as a work which anticipated contemporary arguments. Eco’s argument insisted on the revolutionary and democratic nature of open texts also insisted on the emergence of the open text in the baroque, most ostensibly to be taken up in the modern period thereby making the open text a modern phenomenon.¹² Studies on anti-closural texts were written in response to the formalist emphasis on the unity of the work: valuable works of art have unity, the argument goes, and in Aristotelian terms, a work is unified and meaningful only if it has a beginning, middle, and an end. The latter is especially important for the meaning-making process. Barbara Hernstein Smith’s seminal *Poetic Closure* (1968) makes a strong argument for the importance of closure; one of her governing assumptions is that closure gives readers pleasure.

Frank Kermode’s *A Sense of and Ending* (1967) discusses the Aristotelian claim that closure produces meaning; he explores how endings construct meaning in a narrative, and argues that the modern sense of crisis—the constant expectation of an ending, which he views as a consequence of apocalyptic thinking—creates the impetus in a novel: in the novel, the ending is both immanent and imminent. Kermode points out

---

¹² On the neobaroque openness of texts in Djuna Barnes, see Monika Kaup.
that “[t]he great majority of interpretations of Apocalypse assume that the End is pretty near. Consequently the historical allegory is always having to be revised; time discredits it. And this is important. Apocalypse can be disconfirmed without being discredited. This is part of its extraordinary resilience” (Kermode 8). In narratives, closure works in similar ways: its constant expectation and revision propels the narrative rather than undermines it. The stages of crisis rather than temporal endings make endings in novels and in theology to work. Marianna Torgovnik’s 1981 study in Closure in the Novel, who espouses the same assumptions as Barbara Hernstein Smith, admits that it is “fairly easy to define forms of endings distinctly; it is much more difficult to find examples from literature that absolutely fit our definitions” (12). She turns her attention to producing a taxonomy of endings in the novel. In order to accomplish this she provides terminology which enables her to discuss closures in novels. The debate on the existence of closure includes one more group of scholars who argue that “The notion of ending is . . . ‘undecidable’” (Miller 3).

The problems of the open text vary from locating its origins to providing a clear definition and examples which fit the definition, a note which Torgovnik makes with respect to closure.13 While Eco’s work has been received positively as a precursor of much of what has been written on the open text, his work has also received criticism. The most poignant one comes from medievalists. Rosemarie McGerr observes that for a

---

13 “It is fairly easy to define forms of endings distinctly; it is much more difficult to find examples from literature that absolutely fit our definitions. We cannot, then, explain how closure works in novels merely by labeling endings with formal terms like epilogue and scene.” (Torgovnik 12)
writer who has a demonstrated affinity to the medieval period, the argument that open
texts emerge in the baroque cannot hold. In her work, which contributes to a growing
body of literature on Chaucer and the open text, Rosemarie McGerr argues that Chaucer’s
narratives can be understood as open texts.

In his study on sixteenth-century French writers, Terence Cave examines
theoretical works on *copia*, primarily focusing on Erasmus’s works, and three French
writers: Rabelais, Ronsard, and Montaigne. He specifies the connection among these
writers:

All three vernacular writers, no less than Erasmus, revert insistently to past texts,
both by explicit reference and by implicit allusion, and constitute their own
identity by a perpetual confrontation with alien writing. All three evoke images
of a lost past, of a Golden Age in which textual interrogation was enacted; all
three entertain the possibility of a future in which the *devenir* of their text will be
resolved, even if, for the *Essais*, that resolution can only be the death of their
author. Between the past and future, the texts inhabit a fragile and ambivalent
present, in which images of youthful exuberance (the sexual or Bacchic
mythologies of Rabelais and Ronsard) alternate with images of old age and
exhaustion. (Cave 325)

Cave points that the resolution in Montaigne’s texts is possible only with the death of the
author. Cave also addresses the forces of centripetal and centrifugal forces of closure as a
way to address the tension inherent in language. The centripetal forces are those which
tend toward a center and focus the text thereby leading to closure and conclusion whereas
the centrifugal forces are those which lead to the proliferation and dispersal of meaning.

Cave takes into account the practice of writing of a text, an emphasis which is also seen
in American poets like Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, whose works emphasize the
act of composition.
The problem of the nature of the open text is further complicated by the need for a rigorous definition, as manifested by the sheer volume of the terminology to describe the phenomenon; besides open texts, we have incomplete, unfinished, and cornucopian texts and texts working through *copia*; texts with anti- and non-closure, or narratives that fail to produce a solution; ones that work by addition; diegetic endings/ closures (which are mere stopping of the text and thereby marking the text as unfinished); and also “double endings” in female plots (Ingersoll 15). Partly, this *copia* of terminology is due to an interest in distinguishing between a text with unresolved tensions, multiple meanings,\(^{14}\) and the mere stopping of a text. It is not surprising that in the midst of these definitions, some scholars have resisted providing any definition of non-closure, on the grounds that ultimately “there is no possibility to decide whether a text is closed or open” (Taha 267), an assertion which assumes the validity of the concepts of closure and openness.

Raymond la Charite focuses on rewriting rather than on the polarity which beginnings and endings of texts provide. At the other extreme is an argument that closure does not exist; in fact, a valid argument has been made by Paul Zumthor who focuses on the oral text: “viewed in this way, an “authentic” text does not exist. From one performance to another, one slides from nuance to nuance, or even to an abrupt mutation. In this zone of gradations, where is one to trace a demarcation line between what is still the “work” and what has already gone past it? . . . The notion of plagiarism would have no more meaning

\(^{14}\) The contrast between tension at the end of an unfinished text and multiple meanings is pointed by McGerr.
in this context than that of author’s rights” (Zumthor 35). Zumthor’s insight into oral texts is further extended by Anne Klink’s work on manuscripts as open texts; her point is that clear mapping of the relationship of the manuscripts of a work might not be possible in cases like *Cursor Mundi*, and she points to the importance of considering the polygenesis of some manuscripts rather than the project of creating a stemma, which neatly depicts the family tree of a manuscript. Openness has also been defined by negation: “the unfinished is other than ruin” states Thomas McFarland (4), and it is not a fragment (Berry 119). The unfinished also appears as omission in early modern publications; Dobranski asserts that the early modern writers deliberately authorized editions of their works in order to assert their authority over the published text. For the argument which I am trying to advance in this dissertation, the most problematic aspect of definitions of non-closure is that some works which can be understood to have an ending in Aristotelian sense are considered be open-ended. For instance, Robert Adams argues that Euripides’ *Bacchae* is an open-form work because instead of providing catharsis it ends without providing a resolution. Similarly, Shakespeare’s plays may also be considered open-works.

---

15 Discussing American poetry, Esdale points that the attention Wordsworth placed on reminiscence gave rise to the importance of closure in poetry. Nineteenth-century American poets rebel against such conventions, an act which is evident in Whitman’s continual expansion of *Leaves of Grass* and Emily Dickinson’s refusal to publish her poems and thereby settle on one final version: “The open or ‘democratic’ form of their poetry and their statements (in essays and letters) about a poetry that embodied the present circumstances, including the act of composition itself, were foundational for the Modernist poets of the early twentieth century. In general, modern (since 1800) poems have tended to have an open form, while the degree of closure in the content varies widely” (Esdale 287-88).

16 On the open-ended nature of ancient texts, see Stephen Nimis.
The definitions of ‘closure’ are similarly abundant: one could distinguish between endings, closures, deictic endings (“Finally,…”), instances of premature closures, and preclosures. Most of these definitions are guided not just by an interest in creating a taxonomy of closures but also by an interest in knowing where closure starts. Two scholars—Kermode and Brooks—bring us very close to the implications of the concept of ‘pre-closure’ and the significance of the question on where closure begins; Kermode argues that closure in novels is immanent rather than simply imminent, and Peter Brooks asserts that the plot in a novel starts with a metaphor but proceed metonymically and closing with a similar to the opening metaphor. Kermode’s immanent closure can be located in apocalyptic narratives where the continual expectation of the end creates a sense of crisis; in fact, he locates the modern sense of crisis in apocalyptic narratives. The continual expectation of the end, the sense of crisis, indicates that the ending does not occur at the end but is already present in each subsequent moment. Similarly, Brooks’ assertion that narratives move metonymically also indicates that closure is already present in all scenes preceding closure, so that when closure is reached, one feels that proper closure has been arrived at. Yet, asking where exactly pre-closure begins seems, at worst, an unfruitful question, and, at best, a highly specialized one applicable only to some works.

Barbara Hernstein Smith and Marianne Torgovnik provide taxonomies of closures in poetry and the novel respectively; both acknowledge that closure entails gradations, i.e. there are strong or weak closures. Chaucer’s Legend of the Good Woman is a telling
example: the last sentence—“This tale is seyd for this conclusion”—suggests that the ending is about to follow; no conclusion follows, however.

The motivations for resistance to closure demonstrate a concern over the reader’s freedom to interpret (Eco) or that closures give pleasure (Barbara Hernstein Smith). For Eco, endings force “a range of rigidly preestablished and ordained interpretative solutions . . . [that] . . . never allow the reader to move outside the strict control of the author” (6).17 Resistance to closure is justified also from a feminist perspective; Teresa de Lauretis critiques narratives as oppressive patriarchal constructions (192). Michelangelo Picone argues that the resistance to closure is an acknowledgement of the unknowability of truth. Rhetorically, it is also a sign of the writer’s assertion of his (primarily) authorial power (Dobranski).18 Terence Caves points to the potential of *copia* to suspend categories: *copia*’s function is to override the duality of words so that one gets at the irreducible. In somewhat stronger terms, Balachandra Rajan suggests a different angle of thinking about resistance to closure without denying the validity of the notion of closure; he insists that the valorizing power of closure needs to be interrogated, and in fact resistance to closure is an interrogation of logocentrism. The author-related issues on non-closure are much simpler to point; the author is incapable of closure because non-closure is a way of

---

17 Consider also Fritz who forcefully asserts that completeness does not exist considering that all knowledge is situated.
18 To Dobranski’s list of authors who carefully omitted works in the published edition of their complete works could be added numerous manuscripts which are left unfinished among which is Lancelot Andrewes’ Laud manuscript which involved many hands in its production.
knowing and a refusal to appropriation of knowledge (Rushing) or that chance prevents
the author form finishing a work as in *Tristram Shandy*. ¹⁹

The attack on the significance of closure produced a number of defenses. Peter
Rabinowitz points that readers’ perception of the ending of a work is not the privilege of
open fictions only; in other words, a reader perceives a work as closed or open because of
the work’s reputation or the period in which it was produced. Wayne Booth is definite
that denying the existence of closure is a tough call even for those works which are
qualified as closed; in fact, he states that hardly any work can be classified as completely
open. Terry Eagleton’s discussion of closure is more definite; he argues that “the idea
that all closure is oppressive is both theoretically sloppy and politically unproductive . . .
It is not a question of denouncing closures as such . . . but of discriminating between its
more enabling and more disabling varieties” (Eagleton 67).

The significance of closure has been argued from a number of vantage points.
Barbara Hernstein Smith values it because it gives readers pleasure. Focusing on fables,
Richter acknowledges that “the aesthetic pleasure of endings is at least as much due to
achieved completeness as to good closure devices” (170). Torgovnik takes a moderate
approach in which she claims open endings are not inherently better than closed endings
(202-208), and she adds that the study of closure allows both critics and readers a

¹⁹ Elizabeth Harries sees *Tristram Shandy* as a work where the unfinished serves to invite the
reader to participate in the work: “Tristram’s attempts to galvanize the reader, to make the reader
a partner in the production of the text, are subtle indications of Sterne’s interest in and
dependence on the non-finito. His blanks, asterisks, and outlines (of characters, of scenes, of
gestures) are designed to let “the imagination fill up the sketch.” Sterne’s novels depend on the
“fertile . . . obscurity” . . . of the unfinished” (Harries 45).
different way of “evaluating and organizing personal experience (5). Libertson sees closure in a different light; he points to its potential to “define the irreducible separateness of the self” (1001-2). Yet the notion of an ‘open ending’ is a kind of oxymoron, which need to be examined in discussions of the existence of closure.

Considering the critics’ ambivalence as to the existence of closure or non-closure, it is not surprising that the definition of closure will present challenges. Torgovnik states that it is “fairly easy to define forms of endings distinctly; it is much more difficult to find examples from literature that absolutely fit our definitions” (12). She devises a series of terms which allow her to discuss closure. Terms like preclosure, ending (Taha) and the contrast between completeness and closure (Richter) have been added to the discussion. The provenance of preclosure—whether in the text or in the reader—has been of interest to Lohaver. Most notably, Peter Brooks brings up closure in narratives as already ingrained in the text’s beginning. Completeness and closure are distinguished by Richter, who states that “Anyone who has ever written himself into a corner appreciates . . . the distinction between completeness and closure. Typically, you find yourself in a rhetorical ‘corner’ when you exploit the known devices for achieving a sense of climax too early in the work so that you have brought your piece to an end before saying everything you meant to” (169). Good closure, for Richter, becomes that which is also accompanied by completeness. To accommodate the needs of the reader and the realities of the text, Taha addresses a compromise in which ending is associated with the written text while closure is determined by the reader (261); all texts therefore have closure, but
the reader determines whether the forces of closure are strong or so weak that an open ending is produced.

The knotty problem of the definitions of closure and non-closure, the problem of terminology notwithstanding, is exemplified neatly in two articles on George Herbert’s poems. Patricia Parker interprets George Herbert’s “Redemption”, “Love” and “The Collar” as works which do not have closed ending, and as poems which emphasize the liminal status of language. Herbert’s search for a final referent is an impossible endeavor (222-223). Kathleen Weatherford advanced the opposite argument: Herbert’s poems exhibit a profound sense of closure. She opens her discussion by referencing seventeenth-century attitudes to closure. She brings up Donne’s discussion of the Psalms and Donne’s claim that the psalms are effective because of their powerful conclusions. Donne states that the “shutting up” is the most profound closural force in the psalms (Weatherford 195). Weatherford reads the silence at the end of these poems as an instance of strong closure (196).

The debates over the definition of closure—in fact questioning its existence—have not prevented discussions of the methods of closure. The most foundational work on the topic is Barbara Hernstein Smith’s where a number of closural approaches are outlined: features regarding the formal structure of a poem; those concerning the thematic arrangement of a work; and finally those which are independent of the poem’s formal or thematic features and function as strong closural forces. At the end of her work, she

---

20 ‘Shutting up’ emerges as a theme in Lancelot Andrewes as well (Brightman).
acknowledges the reader’s attraction to open texts, texts which are defined by the readers’
perception: her last chapter is entitled “Coda: Beyond Closure”. In addition, in the last
section of her book, she discusses failures of closure and anti-closure in modern poetry.

The formal and thematic methods which bring about closure have been discussed
most extensively in novels. Some of the identified methods of closure are thematic,
others are based on formal features, still others are closer to serving as definitions of
closure. Patricia Parker (1979) identified typological, fixed and abyss or catastrophic
 endings (Parker 4-5). Mere stopping is identified by Mitchell-Boyask as diegetic closure
(290), while Barbara Hernstein Smith defines it as a feature of real life rather than of
fiction: “Things in life stop—e.g. a baby’s cry, but a poem ends” (Smith 2). Rhonda
Wilcox points out that when closure works as an addition, it could materialize in the form
of deus ex machina (“closure which . . . breaches the aesthetic contract” 329) or as the
good news ending.

As has become clear until now, the definitions of closure and non-closure are
intertwined in many cases, and it should come as no surprise that diagetic closure is
considered a method of closure and a method for non-closure. In this category, we could
also add the self-announcing closure (as in Chaucer’s “This tale is sayd for this
conclusion” [qtd. in McGerr 1]), which, because it is weak, could be considered a method
of non-closure. We could also include Rabelais’ choice of “arresting the flow of words
arbitrarily” (Cave 206). Cave observes that in French Renaissance writers “The desire to
write dominates over the meditation of a writing technique” (26), and the techniques
which he refers to are writing through free association, the notebook method of composition, which originates in the imitation of the Italian humanists as well as in the late medieval sermon; Cave also addresses briefly the ‘processing’ technique of thematic and dialectic classification, which considers copia a storehouse (27). What these techniques have in common is the dismemberment of an old text. Bacon’s method of generation is closely linked to the scientific method of investigation; his notebook method of writing is based not on accumulation but on the principle of inquiry: “Bacon’s method of generating structures and loci is the inquiry method rather than the dialectical and cognitive method” (Moss 272). Veperateus explains that the dialectical and cognitive method of copia aims to expound on a short statement so that “it is developed more fully and copiously” (qtd. in Moss 173). In other words, copia does not aim to make the part stand for more, as in works where the forces of closure are strong, but awaits the production of a method which allows one to handle copia.

Rajan foregrounds the method of deferral in Spenser’s The Faerie Queene. Also examining The Faerie Queene, Alpers points to the linking between long and numerous chapters rather than to a larger organizing principle as another method of non-closure. Jerome McGann argues that Byron’s Don Juan is not as a work “that develops . . . but a poem that is added to” (qtd. in Rajan 139). Edmund Smyth cites several other methods of non-closure: enumeration, the theme of the extraordinary, the use of quotations, and the incorporation of other texts (7). On the reverse of the methods pointed by Cave, McGann, and Smyth is the method of deliberate omission which is discussed by
Dobranski in his work on early modern book production where authors assert their authorial presence through the omission of some of their works in their complete published editions. In oral performances, Zumthor acknowledges that *copia* is achieved by the mere presence of an individual performer.

Ruins are the inversion of generative *copia*. Commenting on Walter Benjamin, Buck-Morris argues that for Benjamin the baroque focuses decay on the natural (Buck-Morris 170) but the failed material can be elevated to allegory (Buck-Morris 164). Unlike baroque poets, 20th-century poets associate decay with the political (Buck-Morris 170). Ruins also are a reminder of one of the most obvious methods of copia: the writers’ inability to finish his work because of the death of the author, and the authorial intention allows McGerr to divide the methods of resistance to closure to explicit and implicit. But the authorial incapacity to finish a work is also complicated by another instance where an artist is incapable of conveying the ideal message; in other words, it is the matter which prevents a writer to put closure on the work.
Chapter 1: The Problem of Exhaustible Writing

This chapter deals with the problem of exhaustibility and the ways in which Traherne finds a way to solve the problem which exhaustibility poses for him. My argument is that Traherne aims to be exhaustive in his writing but finds out that this is a project which presents a difficulty because of his subject matter, which is inexhaustible. He finds out that exhaustibility is associated with death and sin. As a result he makes several unsuccessful attempts to use moderation as a solution to the problem, but since moderation is not his way of writing, he moves on to another solution. That solution, which is most clearly seen in “The City,” is related to descrying the world, a concept of special importance in Traherne’s corpus. The last section of the chapter outlines the significance of the project of descrying the world; Traherne is able to use descrying as his rhetorical move because he privileges wonder over the constriction of logic.

Referring to a passage from The Commentaries of Heaven, Jan Ross also observes that Traherne’s meta-commentary is aimed at “stimulat[ing] the readers’s curiosity” (Ross vol. 2 xxvi): “Some thing here is too mysterious, Wait a little and expect somewhat longer, it shall clearly be revealed. Vid. Fountain” (CH “Affection” 453-54). These lines, however, do not simply aim to perk the reader’s curiosity or aim to instruct the reader. I would argue that they are part of the process of a continually deferred clarity. Ross also argues that Traherne aims to educate his audience: “Traherne encourages his reader to continue to the end of the subject and not to be satisfied with only portions of it” (Ross vol. 2 xxvi), and the quote she brings up is from CH “Arithmetick” where Traherne states: “More of its Excellency see in its uses” (CH “Arithmetick” 8-9); this note does not only gesture toward educating the reader. It is a rhetorical move which is also marked by
the continual revelation and pealing off of layers of meaning ever to be revealed and ever
to present that which is concealed. There is a continual promise for exhaustibility: “if he
will look for the word, Invisible: he shall be satisfied. He is displeased at the Maner
whereby GOD hath chosen to reveal himself: but if he will see Revelation, and search the
(word) Scripture, he shall find Redress. [. . . ] Let him turn to Bounty, Blessedness,
Goodness, Wisdom, Reason, Providence, Glory, Liberty, Soul, Comprehension, Gods
Works, Ways, Laws, Counsels, etc. and evry one of these Words shall be fountains of
Live and Understanding to him” (CH “Atheist” 202-210). And that promise is
continually deferred.

The continual deferral of closure in Traherne functions as an enactment of the
rhetorical turn. In his poems on thoughts, the speaker recognizes the rhetorical
construction of reality:

Ye brisk Divine and Living Things,
Ye great Exemplars, and ye Heavenly Springs,
Which I within me see;
	Ye Machines Great,
Which in my Spirit God did Seat
Ye Engines of Felicitie, (“Thoughts. I” 1-6)

I know not by what Secret Power
Ye flourish so: but ye within your Bower,
More beautiful do seem,

[. . . ]
	. . . What were the Skie,
What were the Sun, or Stars, did ye not lie
In me! And represent them there

This excerpt of what appears to be the first of the thoughts series poems indicates the
importance of the rhetorical construction of the self as well as of the surrounding world.
Early in the poem, the speaker establishes the metaphysical origin of thoughts; by
claiming that they are “Divine and living Things” as well as that they are “Heavenly Springs”, we can see that the speaker grounds thoughts on a metaphysical plane.

Traherne also borrows the Hobbesian vocabulary by claiming that the thoughts are “Machines Great”, and by doing so the speaker works toward transforming the problems of Hobbesian theory of the mechanical functioning of the world. He does so by offering an understanding of the world that is not grounded on known principles of operation and by stating that their origins is also unknown (“I know not by what Secret Power / Ye flourish”). The importance of thoughts for the speaker lies in their power of naming the outward world: naming outwardness (as expressed in lines 44-46) acquires a level of importance which verges on both creating, transforming, and making reality visible as well as on celebrating reality. Only though naming the outside world can reality be celebrated. In “Thoughts. I,” the speaker exclaims:

O ye Conceptions of delight!
Ye that inform my Soul with life and Sight! (“Thoughts. I” 49-50)

The self as well as its relation to the outward world is based on the continual act of rhetorical construction.

Ambitious works like The Kingdom of God or Commentaries of Heaven are a symptom of a writer who aims toward the exhaustible. The assumption is: once we cover all ground, we’d know the kingdom of heaven. These texts necessarily bring about the issue of brevity; Traherne is blamed by his contemporaries of his proclivity for profuse writing and talking, and he acknowledges it as a fault, but the tension between brevity and copia surfaces a number of times in these texts. In The Kingdom of God, Traherne writes, “In respect of the Soul that is Subject to him, much might be said: I shall Study Brevitie” (XLII 239-40). But here we also see a moment where Traherne is trying to
circumscribe knowledge while at the same time he has found another *loci* for copia. He fails to submit to the demand of circumscribing his text, a rhetorical feature which defines the project of an encyclopedia, such as *Commentaries of Heaven*. And the failure to circumscribe his approach can be argued on two grounds; first, Traherne’s topic does not allow a constricted approach to writing and second, there are various instances in the text which demonstrate that he refuses to follow his own previously stipulated boundaries.

Traherne discusses the topic of astronomy in his *Commentaries of Heaven*, and could elaborate on it, but remarks: “These Observations I thought meet to add upon the usefulness of Astronomie. But its Parts, and varieties I omit for Brevitie: desiring to treat of those things that I hav not seen already mentioned, I refer the Reader to the Books already Extant upon the Subject” (CH “Astronomie” 213-216). Such a statement serves as the closure for the section. Brevity is Traherne’s excuse for ending the section, but it is not a closure. We have a ceremonial closure in the poem which follows the pre-text for ending the section. And in a sense, one might argue, we seem to have attempts at double closure but with no stronger forces of closure operating at the end of the section.

The first instance can be seen in KG. Since Traherne’s subject matter is inexhaustible, he gives up on the task of circumscribing the project, a rhetorical gesture evident in the same chapter which I referred to above. This chapter, like many others contains prose and poetry, and the copious subject matter in this case is expressed in poetry where Traherne’s speaker observes:

```
To Act on obligations yet unshewn,
To Act upon Rewards, as yet unknown,
To Keep Commandments whose Beauty is unseen,
To Cherish, and retain a Zeal between
```
Sleeping and Walking, shews a Constant Care,
That Care a lov in truth, so Great, and rare,
That no Ey-Service may with it Compare. (KG XLII 319-25)

Traherne aims to write about the undemonstrated, the unknown, and the unseen. As a writer, he approaches his own text in much the same manner: his grand plan is not known, but is yet to be seen. It has a tentative structure based on an alphabetical order, but that does not allow the subject matter to be circumscribed. On the contrary, it is a productive structure, which allows the text to grow.

The unknown is a trope also in the poem “Desire” where the speaker exclaims:

And ever me Enflame,
With restlesse longing Heavenly Avarice,
That never could be satisfied,
That did incessantly a paradice
Unknown suggest, and som thing undescried
Discern, and bear me to it (D “Desire” 7-12)

As in the KG so in “Desire” the speaker’s work tends toward the unknown. This poem goes on to adumbrate the project on which Traherne finally settles: “som thing undescried [to] / Discern.” But as it shapes up the projects, it also gives us an understanding of the ways in which the unknown and the inexhaustible are to be managed.

The second instance of Traherne’s failure to circumscribe his text is seen in his drafting process as well as in the only work, which was published during his lifetime, Roman Forgeries. The Commentaries of Heaven, for instance, shows that establishing the internal and peripheral boundaries of the text is a process always under revision. In her introduction to her edition of CH, Jan Ross shows that the last word of Traherne’s project is “Zeal” because under the heading “Of Acceptance in GOD” Traherne provides no clear design of his work; he seems to be changing the boundaries of his project as he...
writes: “Perhaps also as the Sun hath upon the remotest Stars, we shall find its Influence in Generation, Eternity, Bounty, GOD; yea in the furthest of all Words, Trinity, the World, Zeal” (308-311). The continual revisions in Traherne’s thinking process are revealed by the list of three words where we would expect only one: “the furthest of all Words.” The list of three words—“Trinity, the World, Zeal”—allows us to see Traherne’s thought process in action. It seems as if initially Traherne thought that Trinity would be the last word in his encyclopedia, and Trinity seems to be a fitting ending of a project dedicated to unveiling heaven. But then he seems to have thought that there are more letters in the alphabet after T, and he thought of another word which is also fitting his project: World; it’s a word which suggests both comprehensiveness and at the same time the possibility of encapsulating the circle of knowledge, which is Traherne’s encyclopedic project. But, then, it seems, that he remembered that the last letter of the alphabet is Z, and then he thought of “Zeal.” Such revisions in the act of writing are rather like thinking aloud—or dictating aloud to a scribe or to self—and they are not rare in Traherne’s work. Stanley Stewart notes that Traherne does not follow the outlines he proposes in Roman Forgeries, the only book which was published during his lifetime; Christian Ethics was published a year after Traherne died. Since outlines are always tentative, always a matter of a rough sketch rather than a firm commitment, we cannot take for granted that Traherne took Zeal as the boundary for his project.

As I pointed out above, Traherne’s promise toward inexhaustibility is complicated by both his topic and his way of writing. He attempts to find a solution to the problem of inexhaustible boundaries through justifying moderation, a solution, which does not get him far since this is a topic which is rarely found in his text. Yet, I want to bring up those
instances where he discusses the topic in order to point out that this is a solution to the problem of inexhaustibility which does not get him very far. The examples can be grouped in three categories: an appeal to moderation through nature; through arts; and through poetics.

The idea that nature observes limits, and therefore it follows the principle of moderation is found in the *Centuries*. In C 3.20, Traherne explains that God uses wise methods of circumscribing unwanted excess:

And that God by Moderation Wisely Bounding His Almighty Power, had to my Eternal Amazement and Wonder, made all Bodies far Greater then if they were infinit: there not being a Sand nor Mote in the Air that is not more Excellent then if it were infinit. How Rich and Admirable then is the Kingdom of GOD; where the Smallest is Greater then an infinit Treasure! Is not this Incredible? Certainly to the Placits and Doctrines of the Scholes: Till we all Consider, That infinit Worth shut up in the Limits of a material Being, is the only way to a Real Infinity. GOD made Nothing infinit in Bulk, but evry thing there where it ought to be. Which, becaus Moderation is a vertu observing the Golden Mean, in som other parts of the former Poem, is thus Expressed. (C 3.20)

These are the final lines of this paragraph. C 3.21 offers the poem to which Traherne refers. C 3.20 is on the theme of limitation, and the argument that Traherne makes is that limitations allow small items to be valued. Grandeur is not to be appreciated, rather boundedness is, and “nothing infinit in Bulk” becomes Traherne’s motto. Of course, in a different passage Traherne remarks that that which is most valuable is abundant—the air we breathe is much more valuable than gold since we need air more, and air is created in bulk. In the last sentence of C.20, Traherne does not seem to speak with conviction about the value of moderation.

C 3.21 consists of a poem, and the passage we are concerned with is:

Did waters from the Centre to the Skies Ascend, twould drown whatever els we Prize The Ocean bounded in a finit Shore
Is better far because it is no more. (C 3.21)

This passage echoes an earlier one C 2.11:

Even as the Sea within a finit Shore
Is far the Better ‘caus it is no more. (C 2.11)

But the echo is also to be found in CE “As in a Clock” (IV):

A Sea that’s bounded in a finite shore,
Is better far because it is no more.
Should Waters endlessly exceed the Skies,
They’d drown the World, and all whate’er we prize.
Had the bright Sun been Infinite, its Flame
Had burnt the World, and quite consum’d the same.
The Flame would yield no splendor to the Sight,
Twould be but Darkness though ’twere Infinite.
One Star made Inifinite would all exclude,
An Earth made Inifinite could ne’er be view’d.
But all being bounded for each others sake,
He bounding all did all most useful make. (CE IV 13-24)

But while Traherne expresses the idea of moderation in this poem and endorses it in C 3.20, in the poem in CE, his writing goes against the principle of moderation because he does not simply offer a version of what we read in C 3.21 but an elaboration. The four paraphrased lines have spilled over into eight more lines. The topic is moderation, but his writing does not follow the principle of moderation. One might argue that the Centuries were written after CE, an argument already advanced, then Traherne instead practices brevity as his prose style develops the eight-line elaboration in CE is contracted into four lines in C 3.21. However, I want to underscore the tension between brevity and copia in Traherne’s work. On various occasions, he attempts to follow brevity as a guiding principle in writing, but he is not nearly as successful with brevity as he is with copia. Furthermore, the mere tension between copia and brevity signals that the concept of moderation has not been carefully conceptualized in his work, a point which again
points to the failure of the method of moderation. Note also that the idea of excess lurks in the next lines of “As in a Clock IV”:

And which is best, in Profit and Delight,
Though not in Bulk, he made all Infinite.
He in his Wisdom did their use extend,
By all, to all the World from End to End.
In all Things, all Things service do to all:
And thus a Sand is Endless, though most small. (CE IV 25-30)

The topic here is no longer moderation but the infinite service of bounded matter. We are not to pay attention to an item with moderate dimension but rather to an image which sends us to the extremes of both directions: “a Sand is Endless.” There is not even a trace of the idea of moderation any more.

Two sections in CE, XXII and XXIII, explicitly deal with moderation; the former, as the title heading suggests, focuses on the “Temperance in Matters of Art, as Musick, Dancing, Painting, cookery; Physick, &c. In the works of Nature; eating, Drinking, Sports and Recreations: In occasions of Passion, in our Lives and Conversations. Its exercise in Self-denial, Measure, Mixture and Proportion.” In this section, he makes an argument that art needs temperance; the prose, as indicated above, is mixed with poetry so there is a couplet which he includes:

All Musick, Sawces, Feasts, Delights and Pleasures,
Games, Dancing, Arts consist in govern'd Measures;
Much more do Words, and Passions of the Mind
In Temperance their sacred Beauty find. (CE 326)

A few lines later, in the prose section, he points out:

All kind of Excellence in every sort of Operation springs from Temperance. A curious Picture, a melodious Song, a delicious Harmony by little invisible motions of the Pen or Pencil, or by Ductures scarce perceivable in the throat, or fingers, finisheth the Work, where Art is the only power of performing. (CE 327-28)
Art, just like cooking or dancing is subject to temperance. Traherne pays his due respects to temperance, but he forgets it in his own prose. Certainly he points out that moderation is a condition for the finished state of a work. His work, however, does not exhibit moderation and, hence, remains unfinished. He opens a section with a statement suggesting a strengthening of the argument: “NOR is it unlawful to alter the Natural Complexion by care and Study” (333). The paragraph continues with the juxtaposition of the “Humors of the Soul” (333) and acquired virtues which are achieved by choice. He wraps up the paragraph thus: “This of Temperance in the Government of our Humors” (334). Yet the next paragraph opens with a sentence which continues to elaborate on the idea of humors: “I shall add but one Note more, and that is, That a wise man discards the Predominancy of all Humors, and will not yield himself up to the Empire of any: for he is to live the life of Reason; not of Humor” (334). There is no temperance in his art. Rarely does Traherne manage to achieve moderation in his writing, and even at moments where does that, his next move proves that his writing does not follow such a principle.

Finally, Traherne gives up altogether the standard definition of moderation. In the next chapter in CE, Traherne offers a radically different definition, which has little to do with observing boundaries: “MODERATION is not so called from Limiting and Restraining, but from Moderating and Ruling” (349). Moderation, then has much more to do with choice rather than with limitation and with setting up boundaries. He continues his definition by explaining the new economy of the principles of moderation, something which he cannot do without recourse to antinomies:

If Reason require that a Thing should be Great, it is the part of Temperance to make it so. Where Reason requires it is a point of Moderation to enlarge and extend Power: Nay to stretch it out to the utmost of its Capacity if Wisdom order it, is but equal. To moderate Almighty Power is to limit or extend it, as Reason
requires. Reason requires that it should be so limited and extended, as most tends to the perfection of the Universe. (CE 349)

The antinomy we encounter is linked to the notion that moderation enlarges and extends power. The enactment of such a principle is evident in this paragraph; after Traherne states “Where Reason Requires it is a point of Moderation to enlarge and extend Power,” he performs the principle he discusses by continuing to say after the colon: “Nay to stretch it out to the utmost Capacity if Wisdom order it, is but equal.” The subsequent explanation continues to be an exercise in moderation understood as a choice for extension and contraction—radical moves between two extremes which know no middle ground. The previous chapter concludes with a statement which allows us to consider that Traherne aims to provide a mystical definition of moderation: “That we, by vertue of his Grace infused, may live in the Image of his Eternal Moderation, and attain that extremity of Bliss and Glory, which he hath (exceeding his Almighty Power) by an exquisite and mysterious Temperance in all his Operations, Divinely attained” (CE 340-41). This idea is continued in the subsequent chapter, XXIII, where moderation becomes synonymous to the working out of problem of personal freedom. Once more we encounter a paradox: “THUS did GOD by infinite Moderation, and by a sublime and transcendent Temperance prepare his Kingdom, and make every Thing exquisite in his whole Dominion, to the praise of his Glory, and the satisfaction of his infinite and Eternal Reason” (CE 352). Traherne exerts himself in his writing once more: the emphatic opening “THUS did GOD,” the subsequent vocabulary which partakes nothing of the conventional definition of moderation through the use of paradoxes—we have a temperance which is not temperate but “sublime and transcendent” whose goal is not the creation of moderate “things” but “exquisite.” The back and forth between the
rationalization of conventionally understood moderation and of his mystical definition
continuously take turns. For instance, the following excerpt opens with an attention to
the conventional definition of moderation but later it switches to a definition which has
little to do with restriction and much more with the inexplicable ways in which things fall
into place:

NOW if GOD himself acquired all his Joyes by Temperance: and the glory
of his Kingdom is wholly founded in his Moderation: We may hope that our
Moderation and Temperance in its place, may accomplish Wonders, and lead us
to the fruition of his, by certain steps and degrees, like those that are observed in
the Womb towards Manhood, and in the School of our Childhood towards perfect
Learning.
TOO much Rain, or too much Drought will produce a Famine: the Earth is made
fertile by the seasonable mixture of Heat and Moisture. Excess of Power may
overwhelm, but moderation is that which perfecteth and blesseth the Creation.
ALMIGHTY Power is carried far beyond itself, or really is made Almighty, by
virtue of that Temperance, wherein Eternal Wisdom is eternally Glorified. (CE
353)

In the first paragraph, moderation becomes synonymous to a gradual process, while in the
second, moderation is used in its conventional definition. In the third paragraph, the
definition of moderation is juxtaposed to its antinomy: temperance creates an almighty
power. I would conclude this part of my argument by referring to Chapter XXI of CE,
where Traherne includes a couplet which exemplifies the conventional notion of
moderation: “For there are certain Periods and fits Bounds, / Which he that passeth, all
his Work confounds” (351), a notion which he here dismantles and is ultimately not using
in most of his writing. Decorum is thematized in his writing but has no place in the
practice of writing.

The third area which poses a question for the utility of moderation in Traherne’s
solution to the problem of exhaustibility is in his reference to Aristotle in CH, where
Traherne explains that Aristotle need to be regarded high for imposing order in the sciences, clearly marking their domains:

He was the first that collected the dispersed Members of Philosophie into one Body or Systeme for before, learning was very imperfectly distinguished into Arts and Sciences, the boundaries of them lying very Rudely and confusedly (CH “Aristotle” 52-56)

Just like decorum in writing depends on the establishment of fit boundaries in style, so does the order in the sciences depend on establishing proper boundaries which define each one of them. This example as well as my analysis of Traherne’s slippage into proliferating prose and eschewing the conventional understanding of moderation as limitation demonstrates the tension between the forces of closure and restriction and those of productive copia and abundance. The theme of limitation, then, is not about the limits of discourse, but about the limits of objects, a theme which proves central for Traherne for the solution of the problem of writing exhaustively on an inexhaustible subject.

The promise of the textual exhaustibility of the inexhaustible is only seemingly and temporarily resolved by the practice of moderation. But what brings Traherne to a rejection of this project is the connection which he finds between exhaustibility and sin and death. A number of poems exemplify this problem.

One of the poems which I want to address is rather short and can be easily cited in full:

Oh how injurious is this wall of sin
That barres my Saviour and bolts me in! (PNB “Oh how injurious” 1-2)

Commenting on “Oh how injurious,” Margoliouth states that Traherne uses the image of the wall and points to other instances of such usage: “Insatiableness I,” “Hosanna I,” C
3.17, and he adds that the attention to this image “may have originated in his childish wonderings about space” (Margoliou vol. 1 404). However, Margoliou did not know that this was not Traherne’s poem. In 1967, Anne Ridler discovered that the first four poems in Philip Traherne’s Notebook are from Quarles’s Sions Sonets (1625). The notebook itself is wrongly attributed to Philip Traherne because it has Philip Traherne’s name but contains poems in Thomas Traherne’s handwriting. Ridler argues that “Oh how injurious” is Sonnet 7 from this collection.

What is interesting about this poem is that it is a divine sonnet sequence in which the bride and the bridegroom exchange a sequence of several sonnets. It is a sonnet sequence of intense passion where expressions like “O How his beautie sets my soul on fire!” (sonnet 7) are the norm. The stanza from which Traherne takes the excerpt is also characterized by intense amorous affection:

```
Behind the fleetness of his nimble feet;
The Roe-bucke, and the Hart were ne’re so fleet:
The word I spake, flue not so speeedie from me,
As Hee, the treasure of my soule comes to me;
Hee stands behind my Wall, as if in doubt
Of Welcome; Ah, this *Wall debarres him out:
O, how injurious is this Wall of sin,.
That barres my Lover out, and bolts me in! (sonnet 7 stanza 7)
```

The marginal comments in the 1625 edition states that “Wall” stands for “The weakness of my flesh.” This sonnet is unusual in that it brings up the topic of the wall between the lovers. Previous sonnets explain the desire and admiration that the bride and the bridegroom have for one another. Traherne, whose prose is dominated by a sense of inexhaustibility and rapture, does not select passages which would have been most consistent with his project. One could make an argument that Traherne traces the legitimacy of this topos. By investigating the ramifications of Traherne’s borrowing of
and adoption of the metaphor of sin as a wall in his own prose through Quarles we can understand how exhaustibility becomes connected to sin and death and how such a connection constitutes another reason which helps Traherne to abandon the project of exhaustibility. That Traherne changes “Lover” for “Savior” in the verse he copies could be a sign for transcribing the verse from memory, something which Ridler does not mention, and it could also be a sign of Traherne’s interest in bringing down the eroticism of the divine sequence and in linking it to an infinite God, an adjective which Marjorie Hope Nicolson explains was reserved only for the divine, as a response to which Nicolas of Cusa determines that while only God can be infinite, the universe is indeterminate.

In what Margoliouth calls Philip Traherne’s Notebook but has subsequently been established as Traherne’s notebook, William Austin’s poem (1635) was copied by Traherne. The section copied in the notebook is a part of a 118-line meditation on Job 17:13. In this poem, the images of enclosure, powerlessness, and hopelessness collide. Enclosure does not function as a way to establish a location of security or a powerful vantage point. It serves as a location from which exhaustibility is possible. The speaker laments:

I, and my Fathers House: Alasse! Alasse! What is my fathers House! And what am I! My fathers House is Earth; where I must lie: And I a worme, noe man: that fits noe roome, Till like a worme, I crawle into my Tombe. The wombe was first my Grave; whence since I rose, My body Grave-like doth my Soul Inclose: This body like a Corp’s with sheets o’re spread, Dieing each Night, lies buried in a Bed. (PNB “a Serious and a Curious night-Meditation” 6-14)
The images of a house, a worm, a room, crawling, a tomb, a womb, a grave, a “body Grave-like,” a burial in bed create a sense of isolation and hopelessness. However, by the end of the poem, the speaker has accepted his fear of enclosures:

Thus when the worlds vaine Toyles my soul hath wearied;
I, in my body, Bed and house lie buried.
Then have I little Cause to feare my Tombe;
Since this wherein I lie, my Grave’s become. (PNB, “a Serious and a Curious night-Meditation” 21-24)

Enclosures are fearful, and by the end of the poem, the speaker announces that “Then have I litle Cause to feare my Tombe.” It is a dark poem in which one comes to terms with the body as a way of closure: “Since this wherein I lie, my Grave’s become.” The body becomes not only the symbol of closure but also a precursor and an enabler of exhaustibility. Dust becomes a marker of exhaustibility. The metamorphosis and transformation which the poem outlines—the body becoming dust—is one of exhaustion and annihilation. Traherne’s project of exhaustibility has been undercut by the forces of annihilation; the Christian topos of death undercuts the exhaustiveness of his rhetorical stance. Traherne is then to seek a working out of this problem.

The impetus of abandoning the project of exhaustibility of the inexhaustible subject matter is made stronger by the connection between exhaustibility and the demarcation of clearly defined private spaces. Traherne voices an objection against such separation among the individuals on a number of occasions, one of which is in CE where he states that it is “a wicked folly [for man] to restrain himself to the miserable Contentment of a Cell, or Cottage, and to delight in nothing but some fragments of the Creation, that in Comparison of the whole are infinitely Defective” (67). Joseph Beaumont, a writer working in isolation in Hadleigh in Suffolk after being ejected from
Peterhouse, Cambridge in 1644, composed *Psyche* where, like Traherne, he makes his speaker advance an argument against self-chosen social isolation:

The Inns by silken and by purple Things  
Were Taken up; each Gallant must have room;  
Room for his great Self; Room for those He brings  
To make Him greater; Room for what doth come  
Swelling about him, his fond State and port,  
Which in a Chamber must alone keep Court. (Beaumont, *Psyche*, stanza 135)

Joseph Beaumont’s *Psyche* is 40,000 lines, and it is estimated that it is four times longer than Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. The parallels between Beaumont and Traherne are interesting—both of them write profusely, both of their craftsmanship is not appreciated to date, and both of them opposed social isolation.

In “Thoughts I” the images and the problem of confinement are evident. The body’s physical limitations are enhanced by its outward limitations; it cannot move as easily as thoughts can. There is no reference to what circumscribes a thought, and, thus, its boundaries are unknown and unquestioned; perhaps one could say that they are not established, but the astonishing aspect about a thought is its mobility. A thought is not subject to the demands of space and time in the same way in which the body is. Stanza 6 demonstrates the problem most obviously:

The Ey’s confind, the Body pent  
In narrow Room: Lims are of small Extent.  
But Thoughts are always free.  
And as they’re best,  
So can they even in the Brest,  
Rove ore the World with Libertie:  
Can Enter Ages, Present be  
In Any Kingdom, into Bosoms see.  
Thoughts, Thoughts can come to Things, and view,  
What Bodies cant approach unto.  
They know no Bar, Denial, Limit, Wall:  
But have a Liberty to look on all. (F “Thoughts I” 61-72)
The body as well as the limbs are the borders of the self, and the self’s restrictions are set off by the liberty and proliferation of thoughts: “Thoughts are always free.” Thoughts may be located but their location is never stable and restricting. Their locations vary: “in the Brest”, “ore the World with Libertie”, “Can Enter Ages,” can “Present be / In Any Kingdom,” “into Bosom see”. Finally, invoking images of limitation, the speaker explicitly states that thoughts are not subject to what renders the body impotent: “They know no Bard, Denial, Limit, Wall.”

The solution to the dilemma to write indefinitely and exhaustively could be found the “The City” where Traherne privileges the project of naming, or proclaiming, inward and outward copia as a way to solve the problem of writing infinitely and exhaustively about a subject which is inexhaustible.21 The attention to the outworldly rather than the interest in that which is inwardly located in Traherne is noted by Pat Pinsent. Pinsent compares Traherne to Herbert and concludes that Traherne is outwardly oriented whereas Herbert is inwardly looking. Pinsent arrives to this conclusion by examining where both poets locate Christ: in Herbert Christ is “indoors” while for Traherne he is “indoors” (Pinsent 235). What I aim to achieve in this section is not a comparison between two authors but to demonstrate the larger implications of Traherne’s outwardness and his writing. I focus here on various tropes in order to outline how copia works in the poem. My argument is that ‘descrying’—the act of noticing the world or assigning thoughts to it to which I referred earlier—serves as a centrifugal force—a force of copia—in Traherne’s writing.

The poem opens with the speaker listing various enclosed structures:

What Structures here among God’s Works appear?
   Such Wonders Adam ne’r did see
   In Paradise among the Trees,
   No Works of Art like these,
   Nor Walls, nor Pinnacles, nor Houses were.
   All these for me,
   For me these Streets and Towers,
   These stately temples, and these solid Bowers,
   My Father rear’d:
   For me I thought they thus appear’d. (F “The City” 1-10)

The enclosed spaces which he mentions are various “Structures,” “Walls,” “Pinnacles,”
and “Houses.” The “Streets and Towers” serves a horizontal and vertical orientation
markers. The horizontal borders of the streets are matched vertically by the tall structures
of the towers. In the next stanza, the poet refers to other closed spaces, e.g. “many
Mansions” (13). The stanza ends with more complicated references to enclosure: all
seemed “Environ’d with Eternity” (20). The OED points to another usage of “environ’d”
in Traherne; the reference in the OED is to CE where Traherne writes: “The holy soul of
a quiet man is . . . invironed with its own repose” (384). In both cases—in “The City”
and in CE—the sense of creating boundaries collapses or is subject to a way of being
rather than a method of confining rhetoric. The fourth stanza opens with attention to
motion: “The living Peeple that mov’d up and down” (31). The reference to the
horizontal and vertical axis evokes a sense of spaciousness. If stanza one to four set up a
context of spaciousness, the subsequent stanzas establish a contrast between private
property and property which belongs to no one. For instance, in stanza five, the speaker
juxtaposes the “Heavens . . . Which did my richer Wealth inclose” (41-42) to the “little
Privat Cabinet / In which my Gems to set” (43-44). The speaker does not conceive of
private property; in fact, he thinks of the whole world belonging to him and to everyone
else:
[ . . . ] I thought the whole Earth’s face
At my Dispose:
No Confines did include
What I possesst, no Limits there I view’d;
On evry side
All endless was which then I spy’d. (F “The City” 45-50)

If stanza five only sets up the stage for localized and narrowed down private property and juxtaposes it to the grandeur of accepting the whole world as one’s own, the following stanza, launches an explicit critique of private property:

‘Tis Art that hath the late invention found
Of shutting up in little Room
Ones boundless Expectations: Men
Have in a narrow Penn
Confin’d themselves: Free Souls can know no Bound (F “The City” 51-55)

The early modern notion of private property, the speaker claims, does not provide security and does not provide a responsibility toward the whole world. To that extent, Traherne’s art opposes what is construed as the art of “the late invention.” The newly developed fad for private space establishes boundaries which are in stark contrast with Traherne’s notion of copia both in prose and in the created world. Private property localizes and establishes a myopic view of the world. The speaker traces the lamentable progress from perceiving the whole world as “boundless” (61), “illimited” (62), and as having “No Terms or Periods” (63) to having a very narrow and localized perception of the world in which the modish custom entails “shutting up in little Room / Ones boundless Expectations” (52-53). More important than private property, however, is another popular custom: “Tho we are taught / To limit and to bound our Thought” (69-70). The subsequent stanza opens up with another opposition to the custom of private property:

Such Treasures are to be valu’d more
Than those shut up in Chests and Tills,
Which are by Citizens esteem’d,
To me the People seem’d (F “The City” 71-74)

The final two stanzas of the poem are mirror images of each other. Stanza 8 focuses on what the city can do for the speaker: “The City doth encrease my glorious Store” (75) and that increase is possible because of the variety of enclosed spaces—structures, rooms, cabinets. Stanza 9 focuses on what the city cannot do:

Nor can the City such a Soul as mine
Confine; nor be my only Treasure:
I must see other Things to be
For my Felicity
Concurrent Instruments, and all combine
To do me Pleasure. (F “The City” 81-86)

The increasing wealth and the increasing combinations of wealth are guaranteed by God: “And God, to gratify / This Inclination, helps me to descry / Beyond the Sky / More Wealth provided, and more high” (F “The City” 87-90). The tension which we have seen so far between encircling knowledge or private property and collapsing the boundaries of such enclosures is transformed. More specifically, the boundaries are understood in a radically different way—they no longer stand for exhaustibility, death and sin. They stand for signs which represent the inexhaustible abundance of the created world. The project of descrying, or revealing the world, is a project which enables the speaker to defamiliarize himself with the material reality. This is an approach of a radical shift of viewing, experiencing, and reading the world.

The enactment of descrying, or recognizing and announcing the multifariousness of the external or internal world, is evident in “Hosanna.” The opening echo is an emphatic declaration of the renouncing of the confining image of the wall which we previously discussed:
No more shall Walls, no more shall Walls confine
That glorious Soul which in my Flesh doth shine:
No more shall Walls of Clay or Mud
Nor Ceilings made of Wood,
Nor crystal Windows, bound my Sight,
But rather shall admit Delight.
The Skies that seem to bound
My Joys and Treasures,
Or more endearing Pleasures
Themselves becom a Ground:
While from the center to the utmost Sphere
My Goods are multiplied every where. (F “Hosanna” 1-12)

Yet the echo bounces off the sounds and emphasizes a sense of space even if expansive.
By the third line, the force of the echo has become more distant where instead of “No
more shall Walls” the phrase has become loosened not by the introduction of specificity
(“Clay,” “Mud”) but by the introduction of the coordinate conjunction “or” which
interjects the looseness in the phrase “No more shall Walls of Clay or Mud.” The walls
and various other images of confinement are no longer read as images of exhaustion, as a
sign of sin and death but as a way to render the world into thoughts, i.e. to descry it. That
which circumscribes now makes the world readable and cornucopian; these images now
“rather shall admit Delight” (6). Traherne is interested in rendering the invisible reality
become visible, and the only way in which that can be accomplished is through his use of
language or thoughts; in other words, his project of proclaiming all of the created world is
an act of descrying which he develops in his works. The materiality of nothingness is
now acknowledged as a sign to be read rather than dismissed as a sign of exhaustion:
“The Skies that seem to bound / My Joys and Treasures, / [. . . ] / Themselves becom a
Ground” (7-8, 10). The skies are not a ground to be read rather they are an unnoticed
materiality. The project of descrying the world is one which resolves the dilemma of
exhaustibility. Exhaustibility need not be achieved, but to say something or rather to attempt to say something is what becomes of central concern to Traherne.

As we have discussed so far, Traherne’s project is resolving the problem of writing exhaustively on an inexhaustible topic. He approaches two solutions to the problem of writing one of which is moderation, moderation is especially problematic for him since as a writer he knows nothing of moderation as a practice but only as a *topos*. The second solution to the problem of writing about the inexhaustible is that of descrying reality. This is the solution to which he most successfully abandons himself. What remains unexplored yet is the significance of the approach of descrying reality, and an examination of “Wonder” will demonstrate how the project of descrying reality reveals that Traherne privileges aesthetics over the practice of ownership as well as the spheres of logic and ethics. Before I open the discussion, I would like to quote the poem in full:

Wonder

1
How like and Angel came I down!
How Bright are all Things here!
When first among his Works I did appear
O how their GLORY me did Crown?

5
The World resembled his *Eternitie*,
In which my Soul did Walk;
And evry Thing that I did see,
Did with me talk.

2
The Skies in their Magnificence,
10
The Lively, Lovely Air;
Oh how Divine, how soft, how Sweet, how fair!
The Stars did entertain my Sence,
And all the Works of GOD so Bright and pure,
15
As if they ever must endure,
In my Esteem.
A Native Health and Innocence
Within my Bones did grow,
And while my GOD did all his Glories shew,
I felt a Vigour in my Sence
That was all SPIRIT. I within did flow
With Seas of Live, like Wine;
I nothing in the World did know,
But 'twas Divine.

Harsh raged Objects were conceald,
Oppressions Tears and Cries,
Sins, Griefs, Complaints, Dissentions, Weeping Eys,
Were hid: and only Things reveald,
Which Heav’nly Spirits, and the Angels prize.
The State of Innocence
And Bliss, not Trades and Poverties,
Did fill my Sence.

The Streets were pavd with Golden Stones,
The Boys and Girles were mine,
Oh how did all their Lovly faces shine!
The Sons of Men were Holy Ones.
Joy, Beauty, Welfare did appear to me,
And evry Thing which here I found,
While like and Angel I did see,
Adorn’d the Ground.

Rich Diamond and Pearl and Gold
In every Place was seen;
Rare Splendors, Yellow, Blew, Red, White and Green,
Mine Eys did everywhere behold,
Great Wonders clothd with Glory did appear,
Amazement was my Bliss.
That and my Wealth was evry where:
No Joy to this!

Cursd and Devisd Proprieties,
With Envy, Avarice
And Fraud, those Feinds that Spoyl even Paradice,
Fled from the Splendor of mine Eys.
And so did Hedges, Ditches, Limits, Bounds,
I dreamd not ough of those,
   But wanderd over all mens Grounds,
   And found Repose.

    Proprieties themselves were mine,
    And Hedges Ornaments;
   Walls, Boxes, Coffers, and their rich Contents
   Did not Divide my Joys, but shine.
   Clothes, Ribbands, Jewels, Laces, I esteemd
   My Joys by others worn;
   For me they all to wear them seemd
   When I was born.

As I have pointed out in the Introduction to the dissertation, the popular image of Traherne that emerged is that of a happy mystic who has secluded himself from the realities of the world. Scholarship on Traherne’s mysticism abounds and has been most pronounced during the first and second wave of criticism. Qualifying the type of mysticism which Traherne demonstrates has been the subject of some debate: is his experience similar to post-Reformation mystics or does it partake of the experience of pre-Reformation Roman Catholic mystics? Is he a nature mystic or a love mystic? Is he a Cambridge Neoplatonist or an Anglican mystic or perhaps even a Puritan mystic? Two of the influential studies on mysticism on Traherne, that of Wallace and Martz, associate him with Roman Catholic mystics. Some have suggested that his writings express considerable affinity to the mysticism of the Greek rather than the Latin fathers of the church. In recent years, the notion of the isolated mystic has been challenged by the

---

22 Fleming (1913); Spurgeon (1913); Willett (1919); Thompson (1921); Underhill (1925); Eliot (1930); Martz (1954); Wallace (1958); Spenser (1963); Clements (1964); Salter (1964); Clements (1969); Sherrington (1970); Staff (1970); Staff (1970); Sauls (1971); Ichikawa (1972); Jordan (1972); Hanley (1973); Low (1978); Seeling (1981); engages with Martz and Wallace on the coherence; admits there’s coherence, but a different one, one which focuses on the poems as expressing “an ever-widening perception of the meaning of that original state and a recapitulation of the child’s vision from the broader, maturer perspective of the adult poet.” (111) Wohrer (1982); Jordan (1985); Matar (1985).
work of a number of scholars.\textsuperscript{23} These studies aim to offer a counter response to Traherne’s status as an isolated happy recluse. I would argue that both the debates on his mysticism as well as his engagement with emerging science and interest in the political future of England create an image of Traherne who is a mystic of and in the world. Indeed the speaker in “Wonder,” a speaker who is interested in the perception of childhood wonder, seems to admit to ignoring the world: “I nothing in the World did Know, / But ’twas Divine” (23-24). Here the speaker appears focused only on the divine to the exclusion of what does not belong to the world of a mystic. This line also evokes the speaker’s proactive attention to mystical reality. Furthermore, the speaker seems focused on ignoring reality. Not only does he point out that “Harsh ragged Objects were conceal’d, / Oppressions Tears and Cries, / Sins, Griefs, Complaints, Dissentions, Weeping Eys, / Were hid” (25-28) but he also addresses the “Curs’d and Devis’d Proprieties, / With Envy, Avarice / And Fraud, those Feinds that Spoyl even Paradice, / Fled from the Splendor of mine Eys” (49-52). Both sets of lines indicate that the speaker ignores the harsh realities of the world. Hence, one could surmise that the poem indeed only confirms the established image of Traherne as a happy mystic who hides from the problems of world. Earlier scholars also emphasized Traherne’s reclusive mysticism because there are various examples throughout all of Traherne’s texts which support the thesis that the speaker, including the one in “Wonder,” adopts a passive stance. Yet emphasizing only the poet’s desire to conceal the harsh reality makes for an incomplete reading of the poem, and in fact, of Traherne’s works in general, because it undervalues an aspect of Traherne’s understanding of the importance of the act of descrying, which is

\textsuperscript{23} Hill (1985); Matar (1988); Smith “Attitudes toward Conformity and Nonconformity in Thomas Traherne” (1988) and “Thomas Traherne and the Restoration” (1988); Matar (1994); Hawkes (1999); Greenberg (2008)
an act of translating the outward world rhetorically as well as an act closely connected to the act of admiration. Writing copiously is made possible by noticing the world as well as by admiring it. Therefore, understanding the proper place in Traherne’s works of the act of descrying reality through admiration will lead us to understand how that act of descrying is one which demonstrates agency on the part of the speaker. Therefore, the notion of passivity of the speaker needs to be fine-tuned.

When the speaker actively discerns reality—that is he continues his project of descrying it—he receives a response from the world which does not depend on his active approach which demonstrates his lack of agency: “Every Thing that I did see / Did with me Talk” (7-8). While the speaker uses his agency to carry out his project of descrying reality, his agency is not operative in the environment’s response to his project. Another example which centers on Traherne’s non-agency is evident in the third stanza, where the speaker is no longer involved with the project of revealing reality; instead, God is the agent of revealing reality: “God did all his glories shew” (19); the manifestation of reality here does not depend on the speaker’s agency. In stanza four, the speaker encounters the same situation where “Only Things reveal’d, / Which Heav’nly Spirits, and the Angels prize” (28-29). The presence of “Things . . . Which Heavn’nly Spirits, and the Angels prize” (28-29) does not depend on the speaker’s agency as the passive stance makes this apparent. In stanza five, the speaker is once more in a passive role: “Joy, Beauty, Welfare did appear to me” (37). One of the most evocative passages in the poem is stanza six where there is a subtle interplay between the passive and active voice:

Rich Diamonds and Pearl and Gold
In Evry Place was seen;
Rare Splendors, Yellow, Blew, Red, white and green,
Mine Eys did everywhere behold,
Great Wonders clothd with Glory did appear,
Amazement was my Bliss. (41-46)

The stanza opens with the passive voice (41-42); one might imagine that the status of the speaker who is observing the world is questioned because we are not told who actually does the seeing, who looks at the “Rich Diamonds and Pearl and Gold.” Because the first two lines open with a passive voice, the reader’s expectation for the subsequent lines is that they might continue the scheme. When line 43 is read, one expects that line 44 would lead into an auxiliary verb and a past participle, which is the construction in the previous two lines. Instead, the reader is offered not a passive voice construction, but a reversal of the conventional syntactic order where the object comes first and is later followed by subject and verb; thus, lines 43-44 enact the positioning of the object in front of the speaker’s/reader’s eyes: instead of “Mine Eys did everywhere behold / Rare Splendors, Yellow, Blew, Red, white and green” the object, “Rare Splendors…” comes first. The subsequent line, 45, is a conventional subject-verb construction, but as in the previous set of constructions, here the speaker is missing, but in this case, the speaker is missing both grammatically and semantically. In line 46, the construction is much simpler. The previous lines, 45, used a similar construction, but it was made heavier by the use of the emphatic ‘did’; in line 46, all emphasis is eliminated, and there is only a faint semantic echo of the speaker through the possessive pronoun “my.” The whole stanza associates the seeing with the speaker through a metonymy: the eyes of the speaker perform the project of descrying the world. The next line also reveals the passive status of the speaker where the “Great Wonders . . . appear” and are not necessarily seen by the speaker. It seems that in this stanza every effort has been made by the poet to make himself unobservable, but yet the agency of the self is present only in the practice,
or act, of observing and acknowledging outward reality; the aim seems to be an act of seeing and experiencing reality rather than an assertion of the self.

The play between passivity and agency on the part of the speaker is accompanied by a careful insistence on transforming closural forces into non-closural. The significance of Traherne’s project of descriing reality is thus made apparent: Traherne descries reality by using wonder, and this approach—an unofficial tactic in de Certeau’s terms— informs Traherne’s interpretation of all else that the world offers to the observer. In the poem, the forces of exhaustibility and closure run parallel to the forces of copia and inexhaustibility. The forces of closure are associated with ownership which is most evident in stanza seven:

Cursd and Devisd Properties,
   With Envy, Avarice
And Fraud, those Feinds that Spoyl even Paradice,
   Fled from the Splendor of mine Eys.
And so did Hedges, Ditches, Limits, Bounds,
   I dreamd not ought of those [. . .] (49-54)

In this stanza, the speaker points the exhaustive aspect of private ownership whose function is to destroy rather than to proliferate. The exhaustive aspect of private ownership is also demonstrated through its agency to not make itself available to the eyes of the speaker: it “Fled from the Splendor of mine Eys.” The notion of exhaustibility is also seen in the speaker’s commentary on “Hedges, Ditches, Limits, Bounds.” As a compilation of images which denote the circumscription and narrowing of the gaze and of the geographic terrain, they assume the function of a closural force.

---

24 In his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau makes an important distinction between tactics and strategy. Strategies, he claims, used by institutions to control citizens whereas tactics is what citizens use to maneuver though the corridors of power by evading it.
In cases where attention to limitations emerges, the copiousness of the perceived limitation is revealed at an unpredictable point in Traherne’s texts. In “Wonder,” it emerges in two subsequent stanzas. If stanza seven reveals the limitations of properties and their closural force, in stanza eight these properties are viewed in a different light; instead of describing the properties through adjectives as in stanza seven (“Cursd and Devisd Properities”) in stanza eight, these properties are reshaped into a predicate noun: “Properties themselves were mine.” From a passive description, we move toward an action as well as an affirmation of the self, the self being consistently placed in the background: it is the difference between self-centeredness and a creative self.

One of the crowing achievements of Traherne’s prose and poetry is its insistence on the limitations of structure and its celebration of the non-finito, whether in metaphysical or in compositional terms. My dissertation provides ample evidence in all chapters of how structures are continually challenged and collapsed only for new structures to be revealed, which themselves are to uncover further multiplicity. The poem “Wonder,” showcases the play between closural ‘how?’”, the ‘how’ of analytic and systematic thinking to the ‘how’ of wonder and admiration. Stanza one has the strongest compilation of the aesthetic “how”: the poem opens with

How like an angel came I down! How Bright are all Things here!

... O how their GLORY me did Crown? (1-2, 4)

Stanza two provides continues to echo the aesthetic ‘how’ (“Oh how divine, how soft, how Sweet, how Fair” [11]), and the fifth stanza gives us the final one: “O how did all their lovely faces shine!” (35).
By the end of the poem, the aesthetic ‘how,’ which needs no answer and is of a different epistemological order than the ‘how’ which belongs to logic, informs the answer to the ‘how’ which belongs to logic. The call to wonder, which occupies the place between logical wondering (i.e. reasoning) and creative abandonment of the necessity for answers, permeates Traherne’s writing and functions as a force for non-closure.
Chapter 2: Traherne’s *Non-finito* Closures: Rhetorical Moves, Syntactical Structures, and Typographical Markers

Malcolm Day observes that “Traherne has a tendency to trust his own intuitive reason and to move beyond the structures of things to the ideas that underlie them” (28), and the way in which he achieves the movement beyond structures is through “new additions” (28). Stanely Stewart acknowledges the role of structures in Traherne’s works from a different angle by emphasizing their open-ended nature. But what scholars have not noted so far is that Traherne’s prose functions from the vantage point of having achieved perfect closure and having found the source of generative abundance which allows it to create and play with structures. Understanding that Traherne’s works operate from the vantage point of perfection defined as continual abundance also helps us to see the paradoxical quality about Traherne’s prose and poetry: despite the continual exertion of the prose, it is in a constant state of rest. The abandonment of the restraining conditions of closure is a manifestation of the continual taking up of a cessation, and the taking up of a cessation is, in turn, the necessary condition for a state of a continual exertion and abandon of structures.

Although the formal features of Traherne’s texts and its looseness has been discussed, these topics generally are used to argue for the coherence in Traherne’s writing rather than to serve as a premise of the much more obvious argument that these writings are written in the *non-finito* mode. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which endings are disrupted in Traherne’s texts. I argue that there are several models of writing which are centered on syntactical structures, rhetorical strategies—ranging from invention and style to arrangement,—and typographical markers that serve to create a *non-finito* mode
of writing. Understanding these models will allow us to understand better the nature of the perceived looseness in Traherne’s works; further, it allows us to see that the process rather than the theory of writing is emphasized in Traherne’s texts.

I Problems of Introductions and Closures

A carefully analysis of Traherne’s use of ‘fullness’ as well as of his use of the commonplaces of beginnings and endings demonstrates that his prose and poetry does not operate in the domain of “either/or” (either hopelessness or hopefulness); rather, it continually proliferates because it is in the domain of “and . . and,” a paratactic feature of his writing, which finds expression on syntactical as well as on rhetorical, stylistic, and typographical levels.

In this section, I examine a number of passages which establish the distinction between the concepts of cessation as exhaustibility and as fruition. Closure, understood as fruition, beckons Christ’s final words on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30); the Greek tetelestai stems from the root telos, indicating the end, the goal or the settled debt. But paradoxically, closure, or telos, can be seen in Traherne’s Christian Ethics, where closure is fruition, and as such, it renders some spiritual practices and virtues—such as faith, hope, and repentance—unnecessary:

For all these Occasional Vertues are but Temporary, when our Life, and this present World are past and gone as a Dream, Love, and Joy, and Gratitude will be all that will continue for ever, in which Estate, Wisdom and Knowledge, Goodness and Righteousness, and True Holiness shall abide, as the Life and Glory into which the Souls of all that are Blessed will be transformed. Repentance shall be gone, and Patience cease, Faith and Hope be swallowed up in fruition, Right Reason be extended to all Objects in all Worlds, and Eternity in all its Beauties and Treasures, seen, desired, esteemed, enjoyed. (CE 50)
The anti-teleology that emerges in this passage points to fulfillment rather than to exhaustibility. All schemes and pre-given postulates—of hope, of repentance, of patience—lose their significance in the light of the final goal: they are “swallowed up in fruition.” In the prose, fruition takes precedence over predetermined schemes and maps. Maps and contracts between reader and writer are dispensable: the antithesis of hopefulness becomes, not hopelessness, but playful being, i.e. fruition. This understanding of fruition reflects Traherne’s method of writing.

If closure in Traherne takes on the meaning of exhaustion as well as the sense of fruition and copia, then the Dobell “Fullnesse” contributes to our understanding of Traherne’s concept of fruition as indefinable and as oscillating between act and being. The approach to defining the indefinable is strengthened by enumeration of comparisons as well as by the use of disorienting deixis. The opening leads us directly into a definition which challenges one’s ability to locate ‘that’: “That light, that Sight, that Thought” (Dobell, “Fullnesse” 1). The resistance to locating fullness is achieved in two ways: by the use of deixis and by the use of abstract nouns. Light, sight, and thought are present but non-haptic approaches to definition, are the first attempt at a definition of ‘fullness.’ But subsequent attempts to definition are not clearer; they center around similarly abstract nouns: “The Mirror of an Endless Life” (5), “A Spiritual World Standing within” (7), “It is a Fountain or a Spring” (15); other definitions include comparisons to a shadow, centre, sphere, root of hope, golden chain, stone, and endless benefit. The abstractness is compounded by the use of deixis, which is just as abundantly used in the poem (“within” [7], “this” [12, 14], “from whence” [17], and “here” [20]).

The Dobell “Fullnesse,” which like the Dobell “The Apprehension,” interrogates the
possibility of completion from the start on one more level: the poem does not seem finished; it opens with stanza “I,” which is not followed by subsequent stanzas, a gesture which could be interpreted as the poem’s receptivity to further elaboration. In playing with the tension between act and being, the poem offers not only an antithesis of closure and copia but also a complication of our understanding of fruition: fruition, or fullness, is not a static concept; it entails the coexistence of act and being. On a number of occasions, the speaker points out that the fullness is his source of strength. The first time he indicates this is when the speaker states that these elements are “the only Act to which I may/ Assent to Day” (3-4). Fullness is understood as an act. Further, the speaker indicates that fullness is “My Power exerted, or my Perfect Being, / If not Enjoying, yet an Act of Seeing” (9-10). These lines use a chiasmic structure to indicate that power is being while exertion is perfection. The chiasmus reveals that perfection is not static, but is governed by dynamism. “If not Enjoying, yet an Act of Seeing” (10) points to the oscillation between act and being: enjoying is to be construed as an act while seeing, which is also an act is not nested in a phrase that has transformed the act into being. However, even if fruition is a complex concept in Traherne’s works, closure as a formal feature—even as mere stopping, or diagnostic closure (Barbara Hernstein Smith 2), cannot be eschewed. How do these texts transform closure into fruition?

In De Caelo, a work to which Traherne refers to in The Commentaries of Heaven (“Aristotle” 146), Aristotle observes the principle of entropy: “Generated things are seen always to be destroyed” (279b20). We know that Traherne appreciated some of Aristotle’s ideas and especially his division of the sciences into specific areas. But the notion of the degeneration of created matter constitutes a point of divergence for both
writers. If Aristotle claims that created things tend toward destruction, in Traherne’s writing closures may lead to entropy, but they do not lead to destruction; rather the prose or poetry uses closure as a point of metamorphosis of the themes previously taken up. My interest in bringing up Aristotle’s notion of degeneration of matter is guided by the project for this dissertation: what enables the *non-finito* mode of writing in Traherne’s texts? Much has been written on how Traherne enacts his faith in his writing, and therefore his mysticism or philosophy affects his writing style, an argument with which I agree. But considering that Traherne’s image as a philosopher, a mystic, and a theologian have been strengthened by past scholarship and his image as a writer challenged, I am interested in developing an understanding of his poetics. Traherne writes with a general suspicion toward language. He favors transparent language, without curling metaphors. Such distrust in his tool, or perhaps blind trust in the possibility of transparent language, is another reason—besides the praxis of theology— which generates anti-closural writing focusing on the practice rather than the production of a rhetorical theory.

One particular way in which the distrust in language is manifested is through a dispersal of commonplaces: he writes not in an “either/ or” but in an “... and” mode. Before I begin my discussion of the formal ways in which Traherne’s writings achieve anti-closure, I will outline several conflicting commonplaces, or thematizations, of beginnings and closures in order to suggest how beginnings and endings create the *non-finito* mode of writing in Traherne. Anti-closural strategy, variety of commonplaces, or thematic irresolution, is the focus of the subsequent two chapters, but here I would like to examine it specifically in relation to beginnings and openings be it of poems from the
Dobell sequence or of the paragraphs in either the *Centuries* or in *Select Meditations*. I argue that the commonplaces on beginning, ending, or closure create a thematic irresolution, which prohibits the development of strong closural forces, and thereby form a text which is anti-closural. In a sense, I am testing out Barbara Hernstein Smith’s thesis on weak closures or anti-closures in modernist texts, and my conclusion is that thematization, as anti-closural strategy—is favored in Traherne’s writing. This is not to make a modernist out of Traherne. In fact, Smith admits that a coherent chronological overview of how closure works collapses under the many exceptions, and Traherne’s works would constitute one of them.

The Dobell poems contain several commonplaces which can be grouped in broad terms as (1) known beginnings and endings, (2) unknown beginnings, and (3) transformed closures. These broad groupings already highlight the potential antinomies in Traherne’s work which lead to irresolution and effectually to anti-closure.

I would like to discuss each group in more detail. For the first group, known beginnings, I would like to bring up two examples: one from “The Anticipation” and another from “The Circulation.” In the Dobell “The Anticipation,” the speaker expresses the notion of endings as well as infinity having their beginning in “the Father”:

Can He becom the End,
To whom all Creatures tend?
Who is the Father of all Infinities! (D “The Anticipation” 5-7)

In “The Anticipation,” Traherne expresses the idea of endings finding their source in beginnings. In other words, there is a cause and effect relationship between both. He uses a familiar trope of God as the source and end of all; by pointing out this connection, the knowability of both beginning and ending becomes apparent. As the exclamation mark at
the end of the sentence indicates the collapse of end into beginning is not entirely logical, and therefore its alogical construction contributes to the irresolution of this commonplace.

In the fourth stanza of “The Anticipation,” the speaker finds the sameness in the beginnings and endings. There is no gap between the two concepts:

The End in Him from Everlasting is  
The Fountain of all Bliss.  
From Everlasting it  
Efficient was, and Influence did Emit,  
That caused all. Before  
The World, we do Adore  
This Glorious End. Because all benefit  
From it proceeds. Both are the very same.  
The End and Fountain differ but in Name. (D “The Anticipation” 28-36)

If earlier in the poem, the speaker insists on endings as dependent on beginnings, in the fourth stanza he expands our understanding of the relationship between both by stating that endings predetermine beginnings.

But the relationship between beginning and ending is not simple. What constituted an occasion for an amazement in “The Anticipation” is reversed as a given in “The Circulation” where the idea that God contains both beginnings and endings is stated in a different mode. The speaker expresses an understanding of God’s only possible self-sufficiency:

All things do first receiv, that giv.  
Only tis GOD above,  
That from, and in himself doth live,  
Whose All sufficient Love  
Without Original can flow  
Which Mortal Man can take Delight to know  
He is the Primitive Eternal Spring  
The Endless Ocean of each Glorious Thing. (D “The Circulation” 68-75)
God’s love and God himself does not have a beginning or an ending. All else receives and then gives. Proliferation in a text is only made possible by a thematically rich source, a beginning which guarantees proliferation of the text: thematically and structurally. The two significant meanings of “primitive” cited in the OED are that of predecessor and derivation. The “Primitive Eternal Spring” is the spring which is a predecessor, but naming the predecessor seems an impossible task. That from which substance is derived is proliferating fountain, a theme which is so important for Traherne in his thematic expositions and in this method of writing.

Besides the thematization of known beginnings and endings, the second one which operates in Traherne’s texts is that of unknown beginnings. What I want to highlight here is that the coexistence of both tropes, even though alogical and one that could easily be turned into an either/or relationship, takes on an “and … and’ relationship because both commonplaces coexist in these texts and instead of producing stasis, or closure which leads to exhaustibility or Aristotelian destruction of the argument, they produce a non-finito, anti-closural mode of writing.

One such trope of unknown beginnings is met in “Ease” where the speaker is in rapture with owning the whole world and with his inability to understanding the source:

All, all was mine, The fountain tho not Known,  
Yet that there must be one was plainly shewn.  
Which fountain of Delights must needs be Lov  
As all the Goodness of the things did prov.  (D “Ease” 83-86)

The interesting aspect of this particular excerpt from “Ease” is that it seemingly offers an argument: it uses vocabulary from deliberative rhetoric (“tho,” “yet,” “plainly shewn,” “must needs be,” “prov”). However, the trope which is being used here—the unknowability of the source—as a concession to a major argument for the knowability of
the source reappears in “Nature” where the unknowability is foundational for the proliferation of abundance.

The speaker continues with his speculations about the unknown source; it is an answer about beginnings—the beginning must be love, but it is always accompanied by the unknowability of beginning:

Vast unaffected Wonderfull Desires,
Like Inward, Nativ, uncausd, hidden fires,
Sprang up with Expectations very strange,
Which into New Desires did quickly change. (D “Nature” 39-42)

The unknowability of beginnings is overt, and it is closely tied to the proliferation and inexhaustibility evident in the speaker’s admiration for the metamorphosis of the old into new desires. While the origin of beginnings is hidden (“uncaused, hidden fires”), their function is to proliferate and erase closures. All beginnings have a power (“sprung up”), which guarantees their metamorphosis into “New Desires.”

Besides the themes of known beginnings and endings as well as of unknown beginnings, a third theme that circulates in Traherne’s writing is that of transformed closures. This is typically expressed through the theme of the container, a theme which is reminiscent of Marjorie Hope Nicolson’s discussion of the breaking of the circle, where she explains that for early modern writers the application of concepts typically associated with God transferred to men (175). The images of containers which I have gathered cannot be traced in a way that demonstrates the connection which Nicolson suggests with respect to the transfer of adjectives from God to men; however, they are in line with Nicolson’s argument of the expansion of the previously ordered universe.

In “The Anticipation,” the image of the bosom becomes synonymous to reception and containment, in other words as an image introducing the forces of closure, and in its
capacity to reflect back and disperse it becomes synonymous with proliferation and liberty:

From Everlasting His felicity
Compleat and Perfect was:
Whose Bosom is the Glass,
Wherin we all Things Everlasting See.
His Name is NOW, his Nature is forever. (D “The Anticipation” 22-26)

The bosom, the container, become also a reflecting mirror in which “we all Things Everlasting See.” That which contains also reflects back. The container becomes a synonym for the end, but the function of the end is destabilized because of its potent capacity to provide and proliferate. This passage also demonstrates Traherne’s understanding of perfection. The speaker claims that “From Everlasting His felicitie/Compleat and Perfect was” (“The Anticipation” 22-23), a phrase which implies that God’s happiness knows perfection and also a finality. However the subsequent lines of the quoted stanza demonstrate that perfection is understood in dynamic terms: the receptivity of the glass makes room for all and thereby for infinity. The image of the container metamorphoses from that which establishes limits to that which originates abundance.

Neither God nor the soul are the only containers of joys. In fact, nature itself is a resource of containers which have the property to surpass its boundaries. In the Dobell “Nature,” the speaker declares:

The Spaces fild were like a Cabinet
Of Joys before me most Distinctly set:
The Empty, like to large and Vacant Room
For Fancy to enlarge in, and presume
A Space for more, removd, but yet adorning
These neer at hand, that pleasd me evry Morning. (D “Nature” 75-80)
In this passage, the theme of rooms and cabinets is a continuation which can be traced throughout the whole poem of the capacity to find “Secret Rooms in Times and Ages more” (D “Nature” 63). Both the capacity to find containers and the containers themselves have unlimited power. The speaker also changes the description of the containers and rooms to spaces: “But yet there were new Rooms, and Spaces more, / Beyond all these, Wide Regions are and are” (D “Nature” 71-72). The passage is also interesting because it opens with an implied attention to imposing order on that which is unruly: the reference to cabinet suggests that there is a method to organizing an unwieldy large space. But by the next line, the reference to an abstract noun like “joys” obviates the need for structured order suggested by the image of the cabinet; the preference further unsettles the notion of what might be “most Distinctly set”. Another example of the unsettling of a limited space can be seen in lines 78-80 where the reference to “a large and Vacant Room” suggests clearly established boundaries: there is nothing in the room which would complicate its space. Rather its largeness and vacancy clearly establish a space of containment. Yet these almost crisp boundaries are metaphors rather than physical objects, and thereby their limitation is questionable. This passage is particularly knotty because of its construction: what does “Empty” (75) and “removed” (79) refer to? And the proximity and sudden remoteness of these cabinets or spaces which look like “large Vacant Rooms” is puzzling and disorienting. It is perhaps instructive that Philip revised this passage heavily. Here is his, much clearer, version:

Whose endless Spaces, like a Cabinet,  
Were fill’d with various joys in order set.  
The Empty, like to wide and vacant Room  
For Fancy to enlarge in, and presume  
A Space for more, not fathom’d yet, implies  
The Boundlessness of what I ought to prize. (F “Nature” 71-76)
There is much more didacticism in Philip’s version (“implies / The Boundlessness of what I ought to prize”); he is also more specific about the metaphoric room: in his version it is “wide” whereas in Thomas’ version it is “large.” Philip clearly establishes a speaker for the poem: the presuming is done by the speaker, and the prizing is enforced on him as well. Thomas’ version, on the other hand, suggests the speaker’s renunciation of pleasure to the extent that the speaker is lost in what is being viewed rather than established clearly as a guardian of morality. In Thomas’ version of the passage, there is a constant conversion of the spaces which serve as containers and limiters to images which collapse the boundaries. Such attention to disruption of order, or order which always seems to be deferred, suggests the potential for deferral of closure and for proliferation of ideas.

The soul is frequently presented as a container, but this image comes with qualifications. Its boundaries are erased as soon as they are set. Further, its boundaries are difficult to establish and pinpoint:

A Secret self I had enclosd within,
That was not bounded with my Clothes or Skin,
Or terminated with my Sight, the Sphere
Of which was bounded with the Heavens here:
But that did rather, like the Subtile Light,
Securd from rough and raging Storms by Night,
Break through the Lanthorns sides, and freely ray
Dispersing and Dilating evry Way:
Whose Steddy Beams too Subtile for the Wind,
Are such, that we their Bounds can scarcely find. (D “Nature” 19-29)

We will return to this passage later again, but for now the point that is important to make is that the definition of the boundaries of the soul are ambiguous: the soul is contained, but its boundaries are effusive; they are “rather, like the Subtile Light.” The properties of such boundaries seem to be stronger than the physical boundaries of “Clothes or Skin.”
The self, then, as it is enclosed resists closure. Its boundaries are such that they create the condition for the soul to “Freely ray/ Dispersing and Dilating evry Way.” The transformation of closures is evident also in the faculties of the soul. It is not only the soul but its faculties also that have the capacity to be contained and to proliferate:

... Shall the fair and brave
And great Endowments of my Soul lie Waste,
Which ought to be a fountain, and a Womb
Of praises unto Thee? (D “The Estate” 7-10)

The endowments of the soul have the same characteristics as God: they do not need to be transformed in order to become a fountain and a womb “of praises”; rather their nature is to have these attributes. But of most interest in this passage is the coexistence of “a fountain, and a Womb” because both are antonyms in this case: the former rejecting enclosure, the latter implying the security of enclosure. The faculties of the soul have the capacity to do both: to erect barriers as well as to produce copia.

“The Circulation,” offers an elaboration of the idea of containment:

The Soul a Vessel is
    A Spacious Bosom to Contain
    All the fair Treasures of his Bliss
Which run like Rivers from, into the Main,
And all it doth receiv returns again. (D “The Circulation” 80-85)

One of the laws according to which Traherne’s prose operates, then, is that there are areas where the ideas are contained—in a stanza or in a paragraph in the Centuries—and whatever is contained is later returned freely and profusely. That second rhetorical move, the return, guarantees the method of the repetition, which is so unpalatable for most critics. Each stanza or a paragraph functions as a starting point, an eddy of ideas where the centripetal forces unite and contain the ideas and where the centrifugal forces disperse them freely. The above quoted lines are the ending of the poem, and it may be significant
that the final word is “again”—a gesture mirroring the theoretical and experiential approach to writing and anticipating the proliferation of the ideas contained by this ending. Closure is prepared to be overflown and erased, and this process continues indefinitely.

“The Estate” is one of the poems which most clearly demonstrates the movement toward anti-closure in Traherne’s works. The poem opens with positioning the reader in medias res:

But shall my Soul no Wealth possess,  
No Outward Riches have?  
Shall Hands and Eys alone express  
Thy Bounty? Which the Grave  
Shall strait devour. Shall I become  
With in my self a Living Tomb  
Of Useless Wonders? (D “The Estate” 1-7)

The question of using and giving of the soul’s riches comes only after their containment has been discussed in the preceding poems, and therefore, the questioning in the opening of the poem suggests an erasure of the closure in the previous poems. My reference to “The Estate” in relation to the poem which precedes it is not to suggest that there is an easily outlined progressive structure in the sequence of poems but to stress that the diversity of commonplaces that circulate among the poems is a way not only to create anti-closural text but to immerse the reader in the practice of writing rather than in the argument of a particular theory of writing.

**II Rhetoric**

**Arrangement: Erasing Introductions: Destabilizing Exordium**

One of Traherne’s methods of erasing closure is through unwriting the opening sentences in the paragraphs of the *Centuries*. Opening sentences in the paragraphs of the
Centuries are used to erase the closure in the previous paragraph. In the second century, paragraph three, the last sentence obtains closural status because of its conclusive announcement: “Till you see that the World is yours, you cannot weight the Greatness of Sin, nor the Misery of your fall, nor Prize your Redeemers Lov.” The forces of closure are not strong, however, because the introductory sentence of the following paragraph undermines the closural forces in the previous sentence. When a sentence opens with a repetition of a key phrase from the previous sentence, the forces of closure are erased: “The Misery of your fall ariseth Naturaly from the Greatness of your Sin.” The erasure of closure is not expected because the last sentence in 2.3 has a closural force, but nevertheless the closure becomes of less import, its strength—questionable as it is—is further undermined and because of the randomness of the choice in the repeated key phrase one could presume that one is under the pressure of proliferation and irresistible plenty. Similarly, in the second century, paragraph twenty opens with “Hence we may know the Reason why God appeareth not in a visible manner, is because indeed he is invisible” (C 2.20). The adverb ‘hence’ serves to erase closure. The paradox is that the paragraph opens with the middle—*in medias res*—rather than with a beginning. The sequence of paragraphs 22 and 23 is another case in point. In 2.22 Traherne makes an argument that action determines the presence of “Life”:

> His Power is evident by Upholding it all. But how shall His Life appear in that which is Dead? Life is the Root of Activity and Motion. Did I see a man sitting in a Chair, as long as he was quiet, I could not tell but His Body was inanimat: but if He stirred, if He moved his Lips, or stretched forth his Arms, if He breathd or twinkled with his Eys: I could easily tell He had a Soul within Him. Motion being a far great Evidence of Life, then all Lineaments whatsoever. (C 2.22)

If this passage presents a principle of a way of living, then writing can be understood also as action. According to the emphasis on motion and action, the act of writing—continual
writing—needs to be understood as far more important than the act of creating outlines and schemes through which the themes are expressed. He exhibits a number of strategies of writing continuously, one of which is surveying a topic: “Let us therefore survey their [the living creatures in the world] order” (C 2.22). But it also provides an instance in which the reader experiences being in the midst of the writing process.

In the final third of the paragraph where the strategy of surveying the world is used, the project of this paragraph changes: the paragraph opens with an attention to man’s motion as a manifestation of life, an observation which could serve as closure and as an instance of theorizing (“Motion being a far greater Evidence of Life, then all Lineaments whatsoever.”). Then a contrast by analogy is established with reference of “a dead picture.” A return to the theme of motion as life follows, but the theme is reworked with attention to motion in nature: “the Winds blow, the Seas roar, the Waters flow, the Vapours ascend, the Clouds flie, the Drops of rain fall, the Stars march forth in Armies, the Sun runneth Swiftly around the World” (C 2.22). And next we are brought into the moment of writing—we observe the practice of writing. There is a snag in Traherne’s argument: “But the Wheels in Watches mov, and so doth the Hand that pointeth out the figures. This being the motion of Dead things.” The argument seems done away with. No further examples are provided of how motion can signify presence of dead objects, a move which is not unusual for Traherne.

The moment of the dissolution of the argument, and, in effect, its closure, is used as an occasion to bring up the argument on life again: “Therefore hath GOD created Living ones [things]: that by Lively Motions, and Sensible Desires, we might be sensible of a Diety” (C 2.22). This is an important section in the paragraph because such a
redirection allows Traherne to continue discussing progress, generation, and life in God. The turn in the opposite direction—elaborating on all moving dead things—may metamorphose Traherne’s work into one similar to Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. But this snag in the argument—that dead objects might also move—metamorphoses into an elaboration of the argument: motion signifies life, and it also signifies God’s presence. Thus, halfway into the paragraph, we are in the moment of writing because what follows is an enumeration of the qualities of all living creatures. Were we examining a polished work, the snag could have been cleared away, and there might have been no mention of dead things moving, and the thesis that motion represents both life and God should have been offered at the opening of the paragraph.

The change of topic from dead things that move to all the qualities of animated things creates occurs by a list of examples in no particular order: “They [the living ones] Breath, they see, they feel, they Grow, they flourish, they know, they lov. O What a World of Evidences. We are lost in Abysses, we are now absorpt in Wonders, and Swallowed up of Demonstrations. Beasts Fowls and Fishes teaching and evidencing the Glory of their Creator. But these by an Endless Generation might succeed each other from Everlasting” (C 2.22). Such a random list is followed up by an announcement of a structured survey of nature: “Let us therefore survey their Order, and see by that whether we cannot Discern their Governer” (C 2.22). But that plan quickly collapses; after a sequential outline of the sun, the moon, the stars and their influence on herbs and flowers, and the latter’s influence on cattle, etc.—“The Sun and Moon and Stars shine, and by shining minister influences to Herbs and flowers. These Grow and feed the cattle: the seas also and springs minister unto them, as they do unto fowls and fishes. All which are
subservient unto man a more Noble creature” (C 2.22)—this sequence does not continue with further surveying of other objects from the world but with extension of the focus on man’s abilities: “All which are subservient unto man a more Noble creature, endued with understanding to admire His Creator Who being King and Lord of this World, is able to Prize all in a Reflexiv maner, and render Praises for all with Joy, living Blessedly in the fruition of them” (C 2.22). The paragraph ends by changing the direction of the argument: “None can question the Being of a Deity, but one that is ignorant of mans Excellencies, and the Glory of his Dominion over all the Creatures” (C 2.22). This idea is not elaborated in the same paragraph; it seems to serve as a closure of paragraph 22. However, the subsequent paragraph 23 erases the closure in the example on man. The paragraph opens with an adverbial phrase, indicating the positioning of the reader in *medias res*: “Abov all, man Discovereth the Glory of GOD: who being himself Immortal, is the Divinest Creature. He hath Dominion over all the rest and GOD over Him” (C 2.23). The topic changes almost without any preliminary warning: if the previous paragraph indicated the outward representation of life to man’s capacity to discover the glory of God, how the paragraph (C 2.22), or for that matter any other, will develop and why a minor point from the main argument is elaborated on is not indicated nor justified. Similar examples of erasure of closure can be found in subsequent paragraphs where the opening sentences bring the reader in *medias res*. Paragraph 2.26 uses the adverb “therein”: “You are able therein to see the infinit Glory of your High Estate” (C 2.26). The adverb serves to position the reader in a context, to envelop the reader—not to give the reader a destination—because in a sense the destination is arrived at—but to extend and expand the reader’s end. Another way through which the continuation of the prose is
established is through the adverb ‘but’: “But GOD being infinit, is infinitly Righteous” (C 2.28). This is the opening sentence of paragraph 2.28, and an open with an adverb indicating contrast suggests that an idea has already been expressed before paragraph 2.28. The contrast indicates that what has been expressed in the preceding paragraphs is not complete; “But” is a sign of the taking up of a conversation which had already begun, and it metamorphoses the previously finished topic into an ongoing discourse.

Paragraph 29 opens with a middle through the use of “further” which indicates the taking up of a new thought and signifies a continuation and obliteration of the closure in 2.28: “Lov further manifests it self in joining Righteousness and Blessedness together” (C 2.29). While 2.29 has its own closure, it is erased in the subsequent paragraph, once more through the use of an adverb: “Yet Lov can forbear, and Lov can forgive” (C 2.30). The logical relationship in the sequence of these paragraphs is further extended—and closure continually erased through the use of another adverb—“but”—which juxtaposes contrasting views on love, the subject matter of this sequence: “But Lov can never be reconciled to an Unlovely Object, and you are infinitly unlovely by Despising GOD, and His Lov is long. Yea one Act only of Despite done to the smallest Creature made you infinitely deformed” (C 2.30). The expletive ‘yea’ further contributes to the construction of a body—the middle—of a speech rather than the careful carving out of a beginning, middle, and end.

Erasure of closure can also be seen in the sequence of paragraph 34 – 36 in the second century. Paragraph 34 ends with a conclusive “thus”: “And thus the Works of God serv you in teaching you the Knowldg of our Lord and Savior.” “Thus” can be understood as a force of closure tending toward the completion of an argument.
However, it is erased twice in the subsequent paragraphs by pointing of “another reason” and a “[y]et further reason” in support of the closural “thus”: “Another reason for which our Redemption was denied to Angels and reserved only to be wrought by our Savior, is the Dignity of man. for the Redemption of their Soul is Precious, and ceaseth for ever” (C 2.35) and “Yet further another reason why this Office was delegated to none of them, was this . . .” (C 2.36). Such double erasure is typical for Traherne’s approach. The double erasure is a renunciation of the project of formation of master systems which guarantee self-awareness and control of one’s being and becoming. It is an approach of complete surrender to the unknown and a way of unknowing the world as well as the act of writing.

The sequence of paragraphs 37 and 38 are instances of continual erasures of closure. Compare, for instance, the opening statements: “Finaly another reason, was the Dignity of our Saviors Person. Who being infinitly more Excellent then all Angels, was in his condescentions infinitely more Acceptable” (C 2.37) and “How then should we be saved?” (C 2.38). Both statements indicate that the topics have been extended, and closure either deferred or erased. Interestingly, ‘then’ indicates the arrival to a closure, but if the question is not answered, or if the only valid answer that this question can receive is a continual response, then closure will endlessly be resisted.

The continual erasure of closure brings to light the question of accessibility of beginnings. Traherne is not puzzled by ambiguities in the narrative. On the contrary, “Intricacies obstruct a little at present. Yet even these make for our Happiness. For while we scarcely can tell how it Cometh to pass that the soul should be thus an Infinit Sphere; we see the Triumphs of Eternal Power over all its Difficulties” (C 2. 93). In the previous paragraph Traherne notes that “every Intelligence being a sphere and centre at the same
time” (C 2.92), and this echoes Traherne’s attitude toward his own writing: each paragraph is its own sphere, and none is to be undermined.

**Copia: Erasing Closures: “What if” is a model of writing which enables closure to be erased, extended, and postponed**

Another way in which Traherne writes the *Centuries* is through taking up a variation on a main topic and thus creating a cluster of consecutive paragraphs which continually erase the closure in the first paragraph. Such an approach is taken up in the second *Century* in paragraphs seven to twelve. Century 2.7 adjures the reader to

Place yourself therefore in the midst of the World as if you were alone: and Meditat upon all the Services which it doth unto you. Suppose the Sun were absent, and conceive the World to be a Dungeon of Darkness and Death about you: you will then find His Beams more Delightfull then the Approach of Angels: and loath the Abomination of that Sinful Blindness, whereby you see not the Glory of so Great and Bright a Creature, because the Air is filled with its Beams. (C 2.7)

Century 2.7 serves as the source from which all subsequent paragraphs take up their theme, and it is also the paragraph whose closure is being continually erased, extended, and postponed. This paragraph serves as the starting point, as the source of radiance, that which needs to be opened. It is, indeed, opened through the subsequent paragraphs. Several of the effects of the sun are enumerated in century 2.8: the sun “raiseth corn to supply you with food, it melteth Waters to Quench your Thurst, It infuseth Sence into all your Members, It illuminates the World to entertain you with Prospects, It surroundeth you with the Beauty of Hills and valleys, It moveth and laboreth Night and Day for your Comfort and Service; It sprinkleth flowers upon the Ground for your Pleasure” (C 2.8). Subsequent paragraphs list other possibilities and effects. Century 2.9, for instance, is an occasion for wonder; what if the sun did not move?: “Did the Sun stand still that you
might have a perpetual Day, you would not know the sweetness of Repose: the Delightful vicissitudes of Night and Day, the Early Sweetness and Spring of the Morning the Perfume and Beauty in the cool of the Evening, would all be swallowed up in Meridian Splendor” (C 2.9). Century 2.10 provides a different possibility: what if there were two suns?: “Were there two suns, that day might be alike in both Places, standing still, there would be nothing but Meridian Splendor under them and nothing but continual morning in other places, they would absolve and Dry up all the Moysture of the Earth, which now is repaired as fast as it Decayeth” (C 2.10). Paragraph 2.7 is further extended through a rumination on another possibility: “Had the Sun been made one infinit Flame” (C 2.11). The effects of this possibility are that “it had been worse then it is, for there had been no Living; it had filled all Space, and devoured all other Things. So that it is far better being finit, then if it were infinit” (C 2.11). The closure of this sequence is made impossible because the opening sentences of the subsequent paragraph announces that the reader has just entered into that which has been opened: “Entering thus far into the Nature of the Sun, we may see a little Heaven in the Creatures. And yet we shall say less of the rest in Particular: tho evry one in its Place be as Excellent as it: and this without these cannot be sustained” (C 2. 12). The deixical pronouns—“this” and “these”—function as invitations for substituting the topic and for following the sketch of the method in order to elaborate on the topic. Century 2.12 provides the same method as outlined in paragraphs 8 to 11 but in a much more condensed form.

In *Select Meditations*, Traherne uses the same model for erasing closure. For instance, in the second century, the connection between paragraphs two and three is one of continuing the same theme. Paragraph 2, which is very short, opens with the phrase
“The Best of all possible lives is that wherein the best of all possible things are after the Similitud of God enjoyed” (SM 2.2), and the subsequent paragraph opens with the same phrase: “The best of all possible things are God, His essence, Attr[i]butes, works, counsels, Laws, wayes, And whatsoever else is include[d] in these” (SM 2.3).

A variant of this model is seen in the second century in Select Meditations, where, in paragraph 92, Traherne takes up the phrase “walked up and Down” (SM 2.92), and reintroduces it not in the subsequent paragraph but in paragraph 94 where he states “we walk up and down a-mong the Sons of men” (SM 2.94). The gap between the two paragraphs where the repetition happens leads us to see Traherne in the moment of unplanned writing. His Select Meditations, as all of his manuscripts, is a work in progress, where planning is always subject to revision. It is a model for writing which renounces control and accepts the unknown; in fact, it invites the unknown. Such an invitation is encountered in Select Meditations 2.99. The paragraph opens thus: “To Him that is the Author of these delights, the fountain of these Beauties, the contriver and framer of these Glories, the giver of all riches, the Life and Guid of all affections: let my Soul in this world doe Eternal Homage. with Him let me walk as my Eternal freind, and daylie be engaged in those employments that will most delight Him” (SM 2.99). This first sentence serves as an introduction, taking up an idea from the previous paragraph—as indicated by the pronouns “these.” As an introductory sentence, however, it has very strong forces of closure derived from its solemn tone and its rhythm. What is to follow after the twice repeated invitation “let me”? It announces an intention for a homage, but the sentence gestures towards a renunciation of control because it is not the pre-established control which the conscious and deliberate writer will use to develop his
homage, but his soul, an unpredictable guide. The force of closure in this sentence seems also to be derived from the closing of the century. It appears in the penultimate paragraph, where the intention to pay daily homage seems to be subverted. The final paragraph enacts the desire in paragraph 99 since it offers a prayer to God: “Keep my heart o lord always sencible of my created worthyness!” (SM 2.100). The final and closing passage of the second century, however, does not offer a thematically strong closural force. Its closural force is derived primarily in the promised change of mode: the homage was planned or rather desired, and a prayer is offered. Yet the final prayer is not so much an homage as a complain to God for the speaker’s felt lack of understanding from others: “There is a Great gulph set between us” (SM 2.100).

A similar continuation of a phrase, but without a gap between the paragraphs, is carried out elsewhere; in this case, there is not only no gap but the two paragraphs are numbered in the same way. In order to distinguish between the two paragraphs, I will name them 94 and 94a. Paragraph 94 opens with “The Little Actions of our confined being, as we walk up and down a-mong the Sons of men, are like our Body compared to our soul, contemptible, feeble, worthless, shells and husks” (SM 2.94). The phrase “Little Actions” is echoed in paragraph 94a where Traherne writes, “Acts of charity, mercy, Almes Deeds, and Justice: are Such Diminutiv Things compared with the Grandures of this Eternal Sphere, that a Soul possessing it selfe seemes to behold them, from a-bove the Heavens, and to see the Limited person doing them, like an Ant beneath” (SM 2.94a). This example is not a confluence of two paragraphs because there are no signs which indicate that 94a is a revision or an elaboration of 94. This could be a mere
case of mis-numbered paragraphs. Closure seems to be erased in the sense that the first paragraph takes up a theme, which is elaborated in the subsequent paragraph. Occasionally, in Traherne’s prose writing, there are gaps between the paragraphs in the Centuries and in Select Meditations. For instance, in the fourth century of Select Meditations, chapter 36 concerns the theme of enlargement. It opens with “To Enlarge the Certainty whereby we beleiv that there is a God, doth Enlighten and Beautify the Soul that walks in Communion with Him” (SM 4.36), and it ends with an exclamation and an expression of the desire to live in a godly way: “O that my [soul] Could always feel that it Selfe is; and Liv for ever even every moment the Life of God” (SM 4.36). The subsequent paragraph does not take up the topic of enlargement or the same mode of exclamation. Instead, it asserts that the rationale behind a particular theological question is not sufficient in order to stimulate an answer: “Wheather Angels or men are most Glorious creatures is a needless Question, by reason of the Greatness of the Love between us” (SM 4.37). The theme of the whole paragraph concerns the power of the human being: “men have a Power to beget their Similitude, which is Greater then to creat a whole world” (SM 4.37). However, the idea of the human body and the value of the human being has been taken up by previous sections. In the fourth century in paragraphs 34 and 35, the theme of the body plays a major role. Traherne concludes paragraph 34 by stating:

A Dead carcase hath the Lineaments of a man: but Speech alone and motion Discover the Presence of a Soul. A Quiet Body (tho infinit and Eternal) would never shew the Being of a God, but the motion of the Sun, and the Flowing of the streames, the veggiation of the Plants and the Life of beasts, the Ascents of vapors, and carrying Seas into the Skies, and the falling of raign, the Alternat chang of night and Day, the moving winds, and unchangeable Seasons of the Delightfull year, shew a Living and Eternal Deity ruling all, in such a manner that no Language can Speak his Glory, Thus hath God revealed Himselfe in a Body more
Abundantly without, he hath done it also within [Note that this is the last sentence of the paragraph and it does not end with a period; there is no punctuation mark] (SM 4.34)

The theme of the body is continued in the opening of the subsequent paragraph: “Had He made a Body infinit in Bulk, tho it had been from everlasting, it would have been to no Purpose, there being non to observe, or find out” (SM 4.35).

There is a gap between paragraphs 37 and 38. Paragraph 37 ends with a closure pointing to the superiority of human beings: “Abraham was the Blessing of all Ages, we of Angels” (SM 4.37). However, the next paragraph establishes a gap because it does not take up the same theme immediately and is not written in the same mode. It employs epideictic rhetoric and a confessional mode:

O with what a Love thou Lovest me! Who hast created Heaven and Earth for me, Redeemed me by the Bloud of thy Son, Purchased all mankind to be my Treasures, Advanced me by thy Holy Laws to the Throne of God, Beautified all Ages with thy ways for me, made me thy Sole and Peculiar friend, Intended me in all Things just as thy selfe, made me Like Jesus Christ the Head and End of all Thy creatures, Given me a Nature So Excellent, that neither cherubim nor seraphim, nor any creature infinitely Higher, exceeding the Being which thy Divinity made me. (SM 4.38)

It is only near the end of the sentence where Traherne takes up the theme of the superiority of the human being. The paragraph is not long, and the two sentences after the one quoted above conclude the paragraph with a different theme: “I Fall down before Thee, and Annihilateing my Selfe Adore thy Glory” (SM 4.38). In the second century, again in Select Meditations, Traherne uses once more the theme of journeying: “The Little Actions of our confined being, as we walk up and down a-mong the Sons of men, are like our Body compared to our soul, contemptible, feeble, worthless, shells and husks” (SM 2.94). Here like in the passage from the poem the directions of the journey are not only on the horizontal plain but can be traced on the vertical as well, and in fact a
three-dimensional plotting trajectory could be outlined. However, the point is not in following the trajectory, but in being aware of its complexity and immensity. These examples demonstrate that the gaps only seem to create opportunities for solid forces of closure. In fact, they establish closures in order only later to be subverted. The gaps also indicate a very open approach to the structure of Traherne’s texts, which is governed by desire for continuation and elaboration, for different ways of expressing movement and the reaching of an end, which is the fulfillment of desire.

**Style—Paratactic erasure of hypotactic closure**

Malcolm Day’s observation on Traherne’s use of design directs our attention to a dichotomy in Traherne’s craft; commenting on Traherne’s *Centuries*, he claims that this work has a design “however faint that design may become by the piling up of smaller, sometimes partial structures which blend and flow into each other” (107). The piling up of partial structures reveals the coexistence of paratactic—coordinate—and hypotactic—subordinate—structures. The paratactic structure is associated with coordinate clauses evident in Traherne in his enumerations and catalogues; the hypotactic structures are those involving subordination, and, hence create a design. Day asserts that “Traherne’s tendency to trust his own intuitive reason and to move beyond the structures of things to the ideas that underlie them is again revealed in this new addition to the list” (28). Similarly, Carol Selkin points out that the catalogues “reflect . . . the eternal and infinite One that underlies the apparent multiplicity of phenomena” (233). Paratactic structures, then, erase hypotactic ones, and announce the multiplicity and cornucopia of the created world.
Barbara Herrnstein Smith, however, acknowledges that paratactic structures pose a problem for closure because this structure does not provide any limitations to its length or its order. This structure is also characterized by more freedom (Smith). As Smith points out,

In a non-paratactic structure (where, for example, the principle of generation is logical or temporal), the dislocation or omission of any element will tend to make the sequence as a whole incomprehensible, or will radically change its effect. In a paratactic structure . . . (where the principle of generation does not cause any one element to ‘follow’ from another), thematic units can be omitted, added, or exchanged without destroying the coherence or effect of the poem’s thematic structure. (Smith 99)

Rather than aiming for logical progression, Selkin argues that Traherne’s prose achieves simultaneity (233). Day echoes the ideas on spontaneity: “Traherne’s Centuries are rather like nature itself—an analogy Traherne would have liked—which pours out and scatters its form in apparent chaos but keeps beneath its bewildering excess a straight and regular line” (107). Similar observation regarding Christian Ethics is made by Stewart, who claims that “The connection [within Christian Ethics] is again one of appropriate association rather than logic” (69).

The source of Traherne’s paratactic structures have been pointed to be Hebraic poetry, the cumulative effect of King James Bible, a translation itself inspired by the structures of Hebraic poetry (Day 149), as well as Lancelot Andrewes (Day 80). Day claims that the context in which Traherne was writing his paratactic poetry and prose resists “[t]he models for religious lyric to which Traherne could reasonably look” (144); such models of “conventional, metrical and rhymed verse forms” came from Donne, Herbert, Denham, Waller, and Milton (Day 144).
Paratactic texts, however, are of special interest in this chapter because they are non-directive syntactical means through which the process of writing is emphasized. Stephanie Fritz explains that parataxis “takes sentences out of their narrative sequence and highlights the importance of each sentence as a separate textual unit in order to retrieve and preserve all possible contexts and implications a word, a phrase, or a sentence as a whole may have. Connotative value . . . unfolds in its entirety beyond the . . . immediate meaning of a sentence or passage” (216). The relationship between parataxis and hypotaxis is explained in somewhat different terms by Alison Tate, who states that “Noun phrases which are paratactically juxtaposed can be taken as appositional, and thus coreferential, or alternatively as discrete items, as in a list. The one form of association can be taken as redefinition or metaphor, the other is metonymic: the presence or absence of coreferential identity is the basis of the contrast between metonymic and metaphoric relationship” (Tate 139-40). In both cases, parataxis is understood as foregrounding haecceity and metonymy. Metaphors are notoriously absent from Traherne’s work. Day argues that Traherne avoids the metaphor because it “tends to fix the soul’s vision upon temporal relationship between things instead of upon the relation of temporal things to eternity” (146). The metaphoric imagery as well as the incarnated hypotactic schemes are erased by experiential parataxis. The control inherent in metaphors is erased by the liberty of praise in paratactic structures. The paths which metaphors assume control over are dispersed by paratactic structures which disperse the unifying control of metaphor. Parataxis allows the writer to carve out a space for the obsessive control of hypotaxis used in metaphors.

25 Note Stephanie Fritz’s work on Lyn Hejinian’s “My Life” (Fritz).
What we will try to demonstrate now is how paratactic structures enable Traherne’s text to be always at the point of starting again, rather than aiming to arrive at closure through hypotactic structures. There are number of ways in which parataxis is manifested in Traherne’s prose and poetry: piling of synonyms, bracketing, repetition, parallel syntactic structures, and hyperbole.

**Catalogues**

The principle of cataloguing is perhaps one of the least favorite aspects of Traherne’s works. Gladys Willett writes that “This habit [enumeration] is, indeed, one of Traherne’s besetting sins, not only in the “Contemplation,” but in all his works. The trick of ‘cataloguing’ is a fault in any writer, but more particularly in a poet: it merely deadens the sense of the reader, who cannot fit the meaning of the author to a dozen objects at once. Traherne spoils some of his best passages in the ‘Contemplation’ with strings of words in opposition to each other” (Willett 35-36). Balfour Daniels is no less critical of this technique when he asserts that it exacts the reader’s patience (91-96), and Christopher Hill states that Traherne’s worst poetry includes “boring catalogues” (25). Allan Gilbert does not evaluate Traherne’s use of the device, but understands his uses of lists of words “as though he were following the rhetoricians who treated *accumulatio*” (446). Attempts are made to understand Traherne’s use of catalogues. Arthur Clements as well as George Harvey and Louise Wilcox acknowledge that this device was used by Whitman; Clements elaborates that it is also used by the Elizabethans as well as to Welsh poets, who knew it as Dyfalu.

Catalogues can serve a number of functions. Ronald McFarland states that the device is most successfully used in the *Thanksgivings* and fits the genre. He also claims
that Traherne uses it to suggest “abundance, magnitude, munificience” (9). Carl Selkin outlines a different function: catalogues disintegrate logical schemes, a point with which I concur. He elaborates that one catalogue serves to make “one sentence out of many” (Selkin 94). While McFarland acknowledges Traherne’s interest in generative structures, Selkin, who emphasizes the reductive quality of the catalogues, stands in contrast to McFarland’s argument. Selkin’s argument, however, does not seem to hold in the light of the seventeenth-century language movement as well as with Traherne’s expressed resistance to it. The seventeenth-century was also a period of time that showed overt signs of control over language, most notably seen in the universal language movement where enumeration is used to obtain control over communication and interpretation. In the attempt to create a scheme for universal language, Bermudo, a Spanish member of the Jesuit order whose biography eschews modern scholars, published a broadsheet containing a summary of his invention which aimed to enable international communication through mathematical notations of the vocabulary (Maat 24). He divides the words into a number of classes—some semantic, some linguistic (Maat 25). Under each class, subclasses are enumerated. The category is assigned a roman numeral whereas a subclass is listed as an Arabic numeral. For instance, XIV.4 means ‘horse’ because XIV indicates the class of beasts, and 4 indicates ‘horse’ (Maat 25). But Bembo is only a minor figure in the universal language movement who used enumeration. Descartes emphasized the importance of systematical enumeration as the foundation of philosophical language (Maat 323). Georgie Dalgarno also used enumeration in their schemes of the universal language (Maat 57). Jan Ross explains that in *The Commentaries of Heaven*, Traherne dismisses the universal language movement because
abridgement does not reveal the glory of God (xxxvi). Indeed, for Traherne enumeration functions as an invitation for the reader’s or the hearer’s creative participation, and as such, it is not a project inviting closure. I will extend McFarland’s argument and argue that instead of trying to condense the text, the catalogues are another device which enables Traherne to resist closure.

Catalogues are surely not unique for Traherne. The device could be an oral residue as in the list of epithets in Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The Boke Named the Governor*. But it is also a way of expressing an attitude to plenty. In “To Finde God” from Robert Herrick’s *His Noble Numbers* the poetic speaker expresses a concern and a frustration with parataxis. The poem opens with the impossible demand to distinguish between the floods, to count “the motes, dust, sands, and spears/ Of corn, when summer shakes his ears” (9-10). Such a frustration with impossibility is echoed also in Donne’s “Goe, and catche a falling starre” as well as Marvell’s “Had we but World enough, and time.” While Herrick’s reluctance to engage with the impossible ends with the ultimate resignation for anyone’s access to it—“This if thou canst; then shew me Him / That rides the glorious Cherubim” (15-16), Traherne’s approach is much different: there is an exhilaration at the prospect of enumerating endlessly the riches of the created world.

From the point of view of the reader or viewer, enumeration can be perceived to have a stifling effect. Eric Rothstein discusses the ways in which the text becomes visual; e.g. in the description of a landscape, the reader starts thinking that they see the landscape rather than hear about it. He explains that “minute and laborious enumeration, the poetic analogue to Dutch genre painting, smothers imagination. The intellectual use of imagery in metaphysical poetry tends to restrict meaning so as not to allow for imaginative
expansion, and tends not to be part of a sensory action; this is, perhaps, the context for Pope’s comment to Spence that “Donne had no imagination” (Rothstein 322). Herrick’s enumerations are also very festive as in “To Live Merrily, and to trust to Good Verses,” where the poetic speaker drinks for a number of famous Latin writers and creates a catalogue of their names: Homer, Ovid, Catullus, Bacchus, Tibullus. Interestingly the reference to Catullus highlights the preference of brevitas to closure while Propertius, with his elegies, suggests the genre of ultimate closure.

In Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy, the enumerations are striking, and with their imperative voice, they serve as a method for engagement with the reader: “consider of it . . . examine it . . Ryle thyself then with reason, satisfy thy selfe, accustome ty selfe, weane thy selfe from such fond conceipts, vaine feares, Strong imaginations, restless thoughts” (103). He uses catalogues, not just to connect with the audience but also to enumerate specific details: “Besides those strange gestures of staring, frowning, grinning, rolling of eyes, menacing, ghastly looks, broken, pace, interrupt, precipitate half-turns [the jealous man] . . . will sometimes sigh, week, sob for anger . . . swear and belie, slander any man, curse, threaten, brawl, scold, fight; and sometimes again flatter and speak fair, ask forgiveness, kiss and call, condemn his rashness and folly, vow, protest and swear he will never do so again” (280).

Donne also uses lists, but in a different way than Traherne. In sonnet VII of Holy Sonnets, the speaker is confounded by the misfortunes of life:

At the round earth’s imagined corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o’rthrow.
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes,
Shall behold God and never taste death’s woe. (1-8)

The apocalyptic tone of these repetitions summon the world, but there is not even a hint of the joy which Traherne sees in Donne’s “numberless infinities.” Like Burton, Donne uses the imperative mood in his lists, but unlike Burton, he attends to God rather than to his audience:

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o’erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new. [. . . ]
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again. (1-4, 11)

The tone in “Loves Growth” is much more playful. The idea of love’s growth is familiar to Traherne as well, but Traherne does not approach the topic in the same way. In fact, when Donne’s speaker contemplates love’s increase, there are no lists, no enumerations. Rather the speaker reminisces of “Gentle love deeds, as blossoms on a bough,/ From loves awakened root bud out” (19-20) and acknowledges that “love such additions take” (22). The poem concludes with an affirmation of increase, but again, there is no dramatic repetition:

And though each spring doe add to love new heat,
As princes in times of action get
New Taxes, and remit them not in peace,
No winter shall abate the springs encrease. (25-28)

Traherne’s enumerations differ from his predecessors. They are an expression of his resistance to logical analysis and predetermined schemes. He does not aim only to engage the audience because his enumerations are predominantly nouns rather than verbs in the imperative. The sequences which Traherne creates in his prose resist the
universalizing and totalizing tendencies. In Donne, the patterns may be more easily established than in Traherne.

**Paratactic structures**

The use of paratactic structures is a way of beginning anew; they are both an expression of gratitude and an act of empowerment and participation. An important example revealing Traherne’s agenda for catalogues can be seen in the *Centuries*:

> Therefore hath GOD created Living ones: that by Lively Motions, and Sensible Desires, we might be sensible of a Deity. They Breath, they see, they feel, they Grow, they flourish they know, they lov. O what a World of Evidences. We are lost in Abysses, we now area absorpt in Wonders, and Swallowed up of Demonstrations. Beasts Fowls and Fishes teaching and evidencing the Glory of their Creator. But these by an Endless Generation might succeed each other from Everlasting. Let us therefore survey their Order, and see by that whether we cannot Discern their Governer. The Sun and Moon and Stars shine, and by shining minister influences to Herbs and flowers. these Grow and feed the Cattle: the seas also and springs minister unto them, as they do unto fowls and fishes. (C 2.22)

The moments when Traherne uses lists can be construed as moments of absorption in wonders, of being “lost in Abysses,” or of the state of being “Swallowed up of Demonstrations.” These are not moments of contracting the space or the time or the experience. Traherne aims at a resistance to closure. Further, just like the whole universe is subdued to the process of “an Endless Generation” so is Traherne’s writing: one idea begets another.

The scope of Traherne’s enumerations is not to be underestimated. He opens chapter XXV of *The Kingdom of God* with an enumeration of epic proportions:

> Had a man been allwayes in one of the Stars, or Confined to the Body of the Flaming Sun, or surrounded with nothing but pure AEther, at vast and prodigious Distances from the Earth, acquainted with nothing but the Azure Skie, and face of Heaven, little could he Dream of any Treasures hidden in that Azure vail afar off. or think the Earth (which perhaps would be Invisible to him, or seem, but a
Needle’s Point, or Sparkle of Light) in any Measure Capable of such a World of Mysteries as are comprehended in it. Should he be let down on a Suddain, and see the sea, and the Effects of those Influences he never Dreamed of; such Strange Kind of Creatures; Such Mysteries and Varieties; such distinct Curiosities; Such never heard of Colors; such a New and Lively Green in the Meadows; such Odiferous and fragrant Flowers; such Reviving, and Refreshing Winds; such Innumerable Millions of unexpected Motions; Such Lovely, Delicate, and Shady Trees; So many Brisk, and Beautifull, and melodious Birds; Such Fluent Springs; and silver Streams; Such Lions and Leopards, and foure footed Beasts; such innumerable Companies, and Hosts of Insects; Such an Ocean of Fishes, Whales, and Syrens, surprising him in the sea; Such Kidneys of Wheat in the Fat, and abundant Valleys; Such Quaries of Stone, and So Many Mines, and Mettals in the Hills: Such Fruits and Spices; such Robes and Attires; So many kinds of Gems, and precious Stones; Such cities, and villages; Such Multitude of Boyes and Girles in the Streets; such Men, such Beautifull Women upon Earth; such Intelligent and sagacious spirits; Such High, and Heavenly Minds; Such Divine and all Commanding Souls; such a Gradual Ascent from Sands to Spires of Grass, from Grass to Insects, from these to Birds, from Birds to Beasts, from Beasts to Men, from Earth to Heaven: Such Dominion over the living Creatures; such combinations of States, and Common Wealths; Such Kingdoms and Ages; Such Bookes, and universities; such Colleges and Libraries; Such Trades and Studies; Such occupations and Professions; Such Retirements and Devotions; Such Altars and Temples; Such Holy Days, and Sabbaths; such vows and prayers; such Joys and Pleasures; Such Solemnities, Songs, and Praises; Such Sabbaths, Holy Days Sermons, Sacraments, and Ministers; Such Histories And Recordes; such Arts and sciences; such Oracles, and Miracles; Such Prophesies and Visions; such Virtues and Graces; such Sufferings and Persecutions; Such Deaths and martyrdoms; such Lov and fidelity; such Faith, and Hope, and Desire; Such obligations, such Lawes, Such Duties and Examples; Such Rewards and Punishments; He would think himself fallen into the Paradise of God, a Phœnix nest, a Bed of Spices, a Kingdom of Glory. To see the union of all these; the Solitary and Idle Heavens, that are so many Thousand Millions of Leagues removed, So Busy here, and so Divinely Active; the Sun applied to proper objects, and all his Beams so Richly usefull; (KG XXV)

The paratactic structure renouncing control and concern of knowledge announces “A Centre without Period, Limit, or Bound!” (KG XXV), and such is Traherne’s approach to enumeration. It does not aim for precision in the overall details. However, it does not sacrifice precision; it emphasizes the importance of a creative approach to expression.

The power of naming through listing, enumerating, and piling up gives force to the prose.
It serves both as a closure and as a starting point in subsequent sections. It is a thesaurus of closures and beginnings at the same time.

Like Elizabethan writers who number their sonnets, Traherne numbers the paragraphs in his prose. Traherne does not frequently make use of consecutive numbers within a paragraph, although he uses numbers to organize all of his work. However, the numbered lists clearly demonstrate Traherne’s approach to multiple destinations and the understanding that each destination has already been arrived at; they are not closures and erasures of closure. Consisting of only three items, the first list is rather short:

He giveth unto one all Things, wholly to be enjoyd
He giveth one Thing to all, by each wholly to be enjoyed
He maketh the Enjoyers to enrich the Enjoyment. (SM 4.31)

The next list consists of seven items (SM 4.32) and concludes with “All in all conspiring and meeting There,” a closure which indicates that the ending and the beginning have merged.

Traherne’s paratactic structures create a sense of abundance and plenty. While their vocabulary is limited, they defamiliarize the reader with reality. To defamiliarize reality is a method of erasure of closure: one is able to see all ordinary objects. One of the ways in which he achieves this is through a combination of parallel structures, as evident in The Kingdom of God where he discusses the operations of an atom:

When in all Its Operations I behold an Atom and see it representing my GOD unto me: When I behold a Mirror of his Essence, in it and a Temple of his presence, a Token of his Lov, and an offspring of his Will, an attendant upon his Throne, an object of his Joy, a Spectacle of his Ey, a Work of his Hand, a Subject of his pleasure, and a Means of his Glory! Me thinks his Holiness that Suffers him not to make any thing less Excellent then is possible, becomes Visible in a Manner, and Shines most Divinely. (KG XIX)
As Traherne continues with this passage, he switches from enumeration of phrases to lists of words and then again to phrases:

When I further behold it in all Ages at once serving me in all its Motions, Transmutations, Peregrinations, Changes, Services, Ends and Uses, and discern the Benefits of all its Works in the Sun, in the Moon, in the Air, in the Earth, in the Sea, in the Stars, in the Beams of Light, in the Influence of Heaven, in Men, in Beasts, in fowls, in fishes, in Trees, in Jewels, in Fruits, in Flowers, in all the Elements, and Creatures wherever it hath been is, or will be Working, from the Day of its Creation to this Moment, and from this Moment to the End of the World [. . . ] (KG XIX)

There is no reason for the paratactic structure to close. Traherne approaches these enumerations without planning. They are an enactment of his freedom.

Although a much rarer feature of Traherne’s repertoire, a negative enumeration can be found in his works. In Christian Ethics, such a structure is evident:

WHILE there was not Sin, there was no need of Penitence; while there was no Pain or Misery, no Patience; Without wrongs and Injurious there is no use of Meekness; nor place for Alms-deeds, where there is no Poverty: no Courage, where are no Enemies. In Eden there was no ignorance, nor any Supernatural verities to be confirmed by Miracles; Apostles therefore and Prophets, Ministers and Doctors were superfluous there, and so were Tythes and Temples, Schools of Learning, Masters and Tutors, together with the unsavoury Duty incumbent on Parents to chastise their Children. For as all would have been instructed by the Light of Nature, so had all been Innocent, and Just, and Regular. (CE 45-46)

Such a list could seem that it aims at closure. Yet the point that Traherne makes is that the abundance in the world—of institution, of employments, of virtues—is justified. In Christian Ethics, there is also another example of a use of enumeration in which the theme as well as the form become intertwined. Traherne discusses knowledge through the use of lists:

KNOWLEDGE is that which does illuminiate the Soul, enkindle Love, excite our Care, inspire the mind with Joy, inform the Will, enlarge the Heart, regulate the Passions, unit all the Powers of the Soul to their Objects, see their Beauty, understand their Goodness, discern our Interest in them, form our Apprehensions of them, consider and enjoy their Excellencies. All Contentments, raptures, and
Extasies are conceived in the Soul, and begotten by Knowledg, all Laws, Obligations and Rewards are understood by Knowledg: All Verties and Graces of the Mind are framed by Knowledge, all Advantages are by it improved, all Temptations discerned, all Dangers avoided, all Affairs ordered, all Endowments acquired; all the Ornaments of Live, all the Beauties of the inward Man, all the Works of Piety are affected by Knowledge. (CE 58-59)

The benefits of knowledge are innumerable and the only method for deployment is through catalogues. Knowledge as well as the cataloguing method resist closure.

**Repetitions**

Traherne is censured for his repetitious use of the first person singular pronoun. In *Select Meditations*, he admits that

The Ignorance of man maketh those Things obscure that are Infinitely Easy, those things ugly that are in them selves Beautiful, those Things inconvenient that are in them selves Blessed. Here I am censured for Speaking in the Singular number, and Saying I. All these Things are done for me. Felicity is a Bird of Paradice So Strang, that it is Impossible to flie a mong men without Loseing some feathers were She not Immoral. There it shall be our Glory and the Joy of all to Acknowledge, I. I am the Lords, and He is mine. Every one shall Speak in the first Person, and it shall be Gods Glory that He is the Joy of all. Can the freind of GOD, and the Heir of all Things in Heaven and earth forbear to say, I. we must attend the Reverence Due unto our Persons. And so far yeld to the corruptions of men, as to strengthen our Influence in Bringing them to Glory. Their Incapacity hath made that saying Eminent and necessary. Silere Tibi, Laus est. (SM 3.65)

Here is a statement against theories of repetition. The author does not recognize theoretical postulates: the theory of decorum, of not emphasizing the authorial and personal “I,” is violated. The germs of a theory of repetition of the first person pronoun which can be seen in this paragraph (“Every one shall Speak in the first Person [. . .] Can the friend of GOD, and the Heir of all Things in Heaven and earth forbear to say, I”) are not sustained elsewhere suggesting that theoretical postulates are not a primary concern for the author. Rather, his writing emerges out of experience. Rules are erased and others created for a singular use.
In fact, the opening chapters from *Select Meditations* are brief, which could be taken to mean that the manuscript was an exercise in brevity and a restraint of *copia*. However, that exercise failed, because as the chapters continue the paragraphs become longer. Traherne’s repetitions can be understood as an admiration of the trajectory which the same topic could follow. It is a reflection of an admiration for an idea or a theme and at the same time it is a joyous experiential attentiveness to the circumstances in which the same idea will find itself. Such are the examples which we have already discussed above, in the *Centuries* where Traherne takes up the same topic either in subsequent paragraphs or in paragraphs followed by a gap of the discussion on the same topic.

There is a different method of repetition, however, exhibited on a micro-level, i.e. within the confines of a single paragraph. For instance, in *Select Meditations*, Traherne writes:

> God is happy in Himselfe, and Happy in us. Happy in eternity, Happy in Time, Happy in Heaven, Happy in Earth, and So Shall we. Happy in the creation, in the Redemption, in the day of Judgement, and soe Shall we. Happy in His works, Happy in his Laws, Happy in His ways, Happy in his counsels, Happy in the Glory of his Eternal Kingdom; and so Shall we. who must of necessity be Transformed into his Divine Image, that we may thereby becom one with Him. Since therefore in all these courts and Treasures of eternituy our Happiness is found, we ought to Apply our Thought and mind of these Things. (SM 4.29)

There is a repetition of a number of phrases. First, the noun “happy” and also, what seems to function as a refrain, the phrase “and so shall we.” As the passage beings, “and so shall we” has a closural force, but that force is undermined by the subsequent repetition of the phrase. The act of repetition of these phrases is an enactment of the content of his writing: he applies his “thought and mind of these Things.” Traherne’s rhapsodic enumeration of the phrases “Happy in [+ noun/pronoun] and “So Shall we” could be read as the intersection of two tracks; the former stable and constant, and the
latter aspiring to become an inseparable part of the first. Only after the third repetition of “and so Shall we” does Traherne provide an elaboration of the referent for “we” whereby the aspiration of the second voice is revealed: “that we may thereby becom one with Him.” The taking up of the elaboration on the second voice creates if not a fusion of both voices at least an expansion of the second. While in the opening lines the second voice appears only in a staccato fashion, near the end of the sentence, it turns into an elaborate didactic with much less balanced repetition. The last period contains a passive structure (“our happiness is found”) and an active didactic phrase (“we ought to”). Such language and use of language in Traherne relegates human potential and ability to actively search for and find value and copia; the stress falls on discovery of copia through the repetitions and variation of structures as well as on their application, and Traherne’s writing style is influenced and guided by this principle: he continually erases closure because the only possible answer to the questions he asks is an infinite one: “But How God should Deifie us is an Infinit Question. An Infinit Question must have an Infinit Answer, for none other can solve it” (SM 4.7).

In the Centuries, we are presented with a different function of the erasure of closural forces; the continual deferral of closure is manifested by repetition and amplification: repetition acquires the force of deferral of closure only when the repetition occurs unexpectedly. By creating an argument, the sequence of paragraphs 13, 15 and 16 in the second century in Select Meditations is structured to work as a closed structure. Paragraph 13 opens with a question, an apt method of beginning an discussion: “Could the seas serv you were you alone, more than now they do?” and paragraph 15 elaborates
on the posed question by providing an answer in its opening sentences, “The world serves you, as in serving those Cattle which you feed upon, so in serving those Men, that Build and Plow, and Plant, and Govern from you” (2.15). Paragraph 16 seems to lead us to the conclusion: “These services are so Great, that when you enter into them, they are ample fields and Territories of Joy: tho on the outside, they seem so contemptible, that they promise Nothing” (2.16). Yet, this closure is undermined in Century 2.17 which Traherne re-opens thus: “Besides these immediate Pleasures here beaneath, there are many Sublime and Celestial Services which the World doth do” (C 2.17). Cessation does not seem possible for Traherne.

Hyperboles

The critical assessment of Traherne’s use of hyperboles is not extensive. Stewart points out that Traherne conveys powerful emotions when he uses hyperbole, the “heaping figure,” outlined by Puttenham in 1589 The Art of English Poetry (142). Similarly, Ellrodt claims that “Hyperbolies are [Traherne’s writing’s] most frequent expression in the poems and, unlike Donne’s, they are never tinged with a sense of deliberate (and occasionally ironic) excess. He mainly speaks of the divine” (277). So, Traherne’s aim seems to be to enflame the mind—to enable copia—rather than to puzzle it—to stifle it—with paradoxes (Ellrodt 277). Ellrodt also suggests that Traherne uses hyperbole in order to convey wonder, while Donne uses this figure in order to convey deliberate excess (277). This device is used not only as a way to express the unspeakable but also as a way to enable Traherne to resist closure.

Hyperbolies can also signal the arrival at the truth. In his discussion on the hyperbole, Vickers cites Erasmus’ conclusion that “By this lie we come to truth” (143).
Similarly, in his essay “Of Love,” Bacon endorses the trope: to speak in hyperboles is comely only in sacred and secular love (Vickers 148). However, hyperbolical excesses are censored in published writing. Joan Bennet recognizes that Sir Thomas Browne deleted a hyperbolical phrase from one of his editions:

he [Browne] goes on to say that he is not only a child of the Reformation but a willing servant of one particular reformed Church, ‘the Church of England, to whose faith I am a sworne subject, and therefore in a double obligation, subscribe unto her Articles, and endeavour to observe her Constitutions’ [I, 5]. In the MSS he added, ‘No man shall reach my faith unto another Article, or command my obedience to a Cannon more’. This challenging phrase he deleted in the authorized edition, but retained the rest of the sentence to which it was prelude: ‘whatsoever is beyond, as points indifferent, I observe according to the rule of my private reason…’ (55)

Henry King’s *Sermon Preached at St. Paul’s* (1640) also avoids hyperboles and is characterized by an absence of fluidity and preference for logical arrangement (Ronald 70). A similar criticism against the use of hyperbole is seen in Dudley North’s essay (written 1610-1612) in which he criticizes the new poets on the grounds that they use enjambment and too much hyperbole: they “thinke nothing good that is easie, nor any thing becomming passion that is not exprest with an hyperbole above reason” (qtd. in Trotter 28). Indeed, Cowley’s collection of poems, *The Mistress*, demonstrates the poet’s skill but lack of pathos. One of Cowley’s faults is that he uses hyperbole to no avail. Like some of his contemporaries Traherne is skeptical of the hyperbole. In the Dobell “My Spirit,” the speaker announces the obsoleteness of the device:

To its Creator tis so near  
   In Lov and Excellence  
      In Life and Sence,  
In Greatness Worth and Nature; And so Dear;  
   In it, without Hyperbole,  
The Son and friend of God we see. (D “My Spirit” 80-85)
However, Traherne is not consistent with his intentions; he seems to oppose the elevated vocabulary of the metaphysical poets. The way in which Traherne aims to express the reality he experiences makes it impossible for him not to use hyperboles: “They that see to that Middle, Converse only with base and Feeble things” (KG 13.110-01). In the Centuries, he admits that hyperbolic language is insufficient and inadequate means for representing endless goodness: “all Hyperbolies are but little Pygmies, and Diminutive Expressions, in Comparison of the Truth” (2.52). Similarly, in Thanksgivings for the Body, Traherne seems to emphasize the trope’s inadequacy:

All Tropes are Clouds; Truth doth it self excel,
Whatever Heights, Hyperboles can tell. (“Thanksgiving for the Body” 339-40)

He seems to have given up on the resistance to a particular vocabulary and to be carving out his own method and language. In The Kingdom of God he explains:

Vacuitie, Vanitie, Darkness and Horror were on the other side, and nothing to be gained but Loss and Deformitie. Do you not See that all Demonstration lies in the utmost Height of things, and that nothing is Infallible, but what is Incredible, or at least seemeth so? and that nothing is possible, but what seems Impossible to be proved? This ariseth from the Nature of God, which hath made the Truth infinitely Sublime, and far abov the Reach of all Hyperbolies: tho they be κάθ’ ύπερβολήν εἰς ύπερβολήν. Hyperbolies piled one upon another as the Apostle speaketh up to the Heavens: Truth soaring abov them all in the utmost Extremities of Bliss and Glory, being Infinitely deep, and Clear at the Bottom, it is no where Truth where it is Imperfect. (KG 15.100-10)

Vickers’ exhaustive survey of the use and attitude toward the hyperbole includes a brief mention on Traherne’s use of the trope in Centuries 2.52 and 2.54 (148). However, he does not discuss that passage in the New Testament to which Traherne refers.

Traherne’s use of hyperbole is indicative of his poetics of the unfinished. He explains that hyperbolic language is indispensable for his topics of discussion:

That every Thing indeed is an Infinit Treasure is an Infinit Paradox to Some understandings; but Infinitly Sweet, becaus truth is so Great, that in Divine Things
there can be no Hyperbolie. every thing must be an Infinit Treasure becaus the Agent and the workman is Infinit: And becaus the Spectators are of Infinit Capacity, Depth and Reach: [. . .] Neither was it Possible to be otherwise. the Best things being alwayes necessary, and upon the Admission of a God unavoydable. (SM 3.7)

Traherne does not use only the cataloguing device as a way to resist closure, but also the hyperbole. While he does not discuss the cataloguing device explicitly, he comments on his use of hyperbole: it is the most suitable method of discussing the most superb subject. The subject matter guides the method.

III Syntax

One of the most outstanding and unique characteristics of Traherne’s prose is its rhapsodic quality, which seems to be achieved through a never-ending sentence structure. Not finishing a sentence is not original with Traherne. We might recall George Herbert’s sonnet ending with an unfinished sentence where the syntax is suspended. In Traherne, sentences are not always left unfinished, but they certainly strive toward infinity. We will look at one example from Christian Ethics. The sentence in question is:

When we see and understand their Excellence, and Esteem them according to the transcendent value that appeareth in them, we adorn our selves with their fair Ideas, we enlarge and beautifie our Souls with Bright and clear Apprehensions, and which is much more, with regular and well ordered Affections, we enrich our selves, and increase our Greatness (in the fruition of his Gifts) we are lively, and pleasant, and vigorous Creatures, full of Knowledge, and Wisdome, and Goodness, and fit to offer up all these things unto his again, while we empty them as Helps and Advantages in that Service which we pay unto him: for our Love to himself is enkindled by these Incentives, and while we sacrifice our selves and them unto him, we delight in nothing more then to see him, that is so Great in Love and Bounty, the Author and Possessor of all his Glories. (CE 99)

Through an analysis of the three functions of the coordinate conjunction ‘and’ we can see that the erasure of closure is manifested by creating an ambiguity and by reinventing phrases where the sentence could end. First, ‘and’ is used in an ambiguous way because
the conjunction is placed continually within a list of adjectives: (a) “lively, and pleasant, and vigorous” and (b) “Knowledge, and Wisdome, and Goodness.” However, ‘and’ is not used continually between the longer phrases; instead of “we are . . ., and full of . . ., and fit to . . .,” which is the structure which the writer employs in the shorter paratactic sections, Traherne writes: “we are . . ., full of . . ., and fit to . . .”.

A similar ambiguity and unsettling of the reader’s expectations are visible in another section: “we adorn our selves with their fair Ideas, we enlarge and beautifie our Souls with Bright and clear Apprehensions, and which is much more, with regular and well ordered Affections.” In this section of the period, the use of ‘and’ is ambiguous because instead of introducing a main clause, as promised by the phrase “which is much more,” Traherne introduces a paratactic clause for the subordinate clause: “with Bright and clear Apprehensions, and . . . with regular and well ordered Affections.” Rather than “we adorn . . ., we enlarge, and [we + verb],” Traherne unsettles our expectations by the introduction of a subordinate rather than a coordinate clause. Further, it is notable that ‘and’ seems to be used to connect smaller phrases rather than major sections. The larger phrases are linked through silence. Ambiguity of ‘and’ as well as the use of silence are methods of allowing the sentence to continue ad infinitum.

**IV Typographical Markers**

Commenting on Traherne’s use of his bracketing device in the Thanksgivings, Malcolm Day asserts that it is a less effective device than what Traherne is doing in the Centuries. Day states: “That this style [of the Centuries] is a more complex and subtle manipulation of the bracketing device with which Traherne experimented in the Thanksgivings is also clear, especially if the parallel structures are set out in brackets for
the sake of comparison” (125). Day admits that the bracketing device allows Traherne to reflect directly “as a mirror does, the plenitude of God” (81). While the effectiveness of the bracketing device might be arguable, it is an apt method for Traherne who is committed to the process of writing profusely. It is another device which allows Traherne to erase closure. Brackets are not metaphors for him; they do not constitute a metaphorical way of opening any subject matter. In his journal, George Fox uses the opening as a metaphor for his experience of God’s love for him. His narrative makes the ‘opening’ a synonym for understanding:

One day, when I had been walking solitarily abroad, and was come home, I was taken up in the love of God, so that I could not but admire the greatness of His love; and while I was in that condition it was opened unto me by the eternal light and power, and I therein clearly saw that all was done and to be done in and by Christ, and how He conquers and destroys this tempter the devil, and all his works, and is atop of him; and that all these troubles were good for me, and temptations for the trial of my faith, which Christ had given me. (84)

While Traherne is cited to have had visions, such an experience as Fox’s is notably absent from his currently known manuscripts. Fox continues to use the concept of ‘opening’ in his narrative when he encounters a believing crowd: “Thus the Lord gave me a good opportunity to open things largely unto them. All was quiet, and many were convinced; blessed be the Lord” (140).

Traherne’s bracketing device is of a different kind. He opens in order to create more opportunities not as a privileged knower of divine knowledge. Traherne is concerned with the continual participation of the created into the uncreated. In the Thanksgiving for the Body, he is very much interested in ordinary objects:

Therefore thou providest for me, and for me they build, and get and provide for me

My Bread
Clothes,
Drink,
Bed,
Books,
My Household Stuff, Utensils,
Furniture.
The use of Meats, Fire, Fuel, &c.
They teach unto me, provide for me. (“Thanksgivings for the Body” 310-318)

For Traherne, the bracket is a device which embraces and propels the movement of his prose. Earlier in the Thanksgivings for the Body, he uses another bracketing device, but to a much smaller scale than he could have used it:

Even for our earthly bodies, hast thou created all things.
Visible.
All things Material.
Sensible.
Animals,
Vegetables,
Minerals,
Bodies celestial,
Bodies terrestrial,
The four elements,
Volatile Spirits,
Trees, herbs, and Flowers,
The Influences of Heaven,
Clouds, Vapors, Winds,
Dew, Rain, Hail, Snow,
Light and Darkness, Night and Day,
The Seasons of the Year.
Springs, Rivers, Fountains, Oceans,
Gold, Silver, and precious Stones.
Corn, Wine, and Oyl,
The Sun, Moon, and Stars,
Cities, Nations, Kingdoms. (“Thanksgivings for the Soul” 242-64)

Instead of using the bracket for the whole catalogue of “all things” he limits its use to the first three. In “Thanksgiving for the Soul,” the bracketing device seems to introduce a different voice. It is as if at this moment, the poem’s writer has a proliferation of thoughts. The use of italics as well as the positioning of the prayer—next to rather than before or after the admiration passage—expresses the simultaneity of Traherne’s writing. There is no room for closure, but for proliferation of polyvocality.
I Admire, O Lord, thine infinite Wisdom;  
In advancing me to the similitude  
Of thine eternal Greatness.  
A greatness like Thine  
Has thow given unto me.  
(“The Thanksgivings for the Soul” 76-81)

For Traherne the bracketing device is a technical method of opening a subject. A few lines after this passage, Traherne uses brackets twice in the same line:

A living Greatness:  
A Soul within:  
That receiveth all things.  
Spiritual.  
Heavenly.  
A Greatness Divine.  
Intelligent.  
Profitable.  
That doth not fill,  
But feeleth all  
Things. Receiveth,  
Seeth, disconcerneth,  
Enjoeth them.  
(“Thanksgivings for the Soul” 82-89)

The absence of a bracket between the vertical list and the italicized explanation may challenge the reader’s perception of how to read the text for it employs both vertical, descending, and horizontal, left to write, ways of reading the passage.

These are not the only ways in which Traherne resists closure. In fact, one of the most evident methods for resisting closure is encountered in the same Thanksgivings:

Wonderfully sufficient in all its Powers,  
Objects  
Material,  
Immaterial.  
For all  
Operations  
Earthly,  
Heavenly,  
Temporal,  
Eternal;  
A work worthy of Immortality! (‘Thanksgivings for the Soul” 179-86)

This sequence continues to expand, refusing to seek closure. Such a method is taken up continually throughout the whole Thanksgivings. While the growth, or opening of the passage here was possible only in one direction, Traherne is not limited to one-
dimensional resistance to closure. Consider this passage where the opening progresses both to the left and to the right:

The Oyl
The Gold

\{ \}

wherewith
We Crown,
The Holy Angels,
The Saints,
Thy Son,

Our selves in them,
And thee in all.

(“Thanksgivings for the Soul” 429-35)

Traherne interrupts a sentence structure with his the brackets, thereby resisting closure.

In *Thanksgivings for the Glory of God’s Works*, the sentence seems to erupt midway:

And in serving them \{ \}

Bless
Enrich
Serve

Me thy Servant.

(“Thanksgivings for the Glory of God’s Work” 230-32)

Traherne uses the bracketing device more intensely, as if there is an eruption in the narrative.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to show the technical methods through which Traherne resist closure. As I tried to show he erases closure through taking up the same topic in the opening lines of his paragraphs in the *Centuries* as well as in *Select Meditations*. He erases closure, and he also uses weak beginnings which propel the text’s resistance to closure. On a micro level, the period structure which he employs tends toward the endless. The use of paratactic structures is typical for Traherne, and it constitutes another device for resisting closure. Finally, his discussion of the method
which he uses in his praise of the created world reflects his composing practices that resist closure and resist following predetermined schemes.
Chapter 3: Ways of Centrifugal Writing

There are a multitude of studies referring to the use of the theme of nature in Traherne’s works, but most of them offer only a brief mention of Traherne’s interest in the topic. These studies can be divided into several groups: studies connecting nature (1) to Traherne’s mysticism, (2) to Traherne’s resemblance to the Romantics, (3) to the way in which Traherne understands nature, as well as (4) to the way in which Traherne is to be evaluated as a writer. Nature imagery in Traherne’s works has received a somewhat in-depth attention in several studies. The topic is linked to Traherne’s mysticism and, in general, the argument is that mysticism is made possible by perceiving God through nature (Martz 1964, Salter 1964, Grant 1971, Sherrington 1970, Day 1982). Martz specifies that such a perception of nature constitutes only one of the several stages that lead to illumination in Traherne while Seelig specifically makes the distinction that for T nature “was not … a puzzle or a labyrinth, not the truth obscured, but a luminescent and satisfying vision” (104). Nevertheless, Sherrington points that Traherne’s imagery in general are vague and that therefore his is a mystical symbolism. Another use of the nature imagery in Traherne is related to development of seventeenth-century science. Malcolm Day’s overview study, Thomas Traherne (1982), shows that “Traherne’s Centuries are rather like nature itself—an analogy Traherne would have liked—which pours out and scatters its form in apparent chaos but keeps beneath its bewildering excess a straight and regular line” (107). On a much larger scale, Nicolson (1950) as well as Ellrodt (1964) discuss the treatment of the universe, which constitutes nature on a grander scale, in Traherne’s works: Nicolson alerts us to the notion that infinity destroyed the circle of perfection and acknowledges that Traherne’s perception of the universe as
limitless; Ellrodt, takes a much larger leap in his discussion of the universe, rather than nature, in Traherne, and focuses on the lack of tension in Traherne between reason and science.

Sherrington (1970) and Day (1982) provide the most focused attention on Traherne’s poetics; Sherrington, who discusses the most dominant themes in Traherne, concludes that Traherne’s imagery is vague. Much briefer than Sherrington’s is Day’s treatment of nature, which, however interesting, remains unexplored sufficiently. Despite the studies and pervasive recognition of the use of nature as a *topos* in Traherne’s works, no study accounts for the use of the *topos* in relation to Traherne’s poetics. By examining the use of nature in Traherne’s text, I aim to expand on Day’s observation that Traherne’s writing progresses in natural *non-finito* expansion.

Examining the nature *topoi* allows us to understand the significance of the looseness in Traherne’s writing. I argue that by analyzing the nature *topoi* we can see that the looseness in Traherne’s writing can be understood as a renunciation of rhetorical, syntactical and ontological stability. With the exception of DeNeef’s study, a complex understanding of Traherne’s writing has not been achieved. DeNeef finds that the interest in Traherne’s poetry for us is that it is an attempt to think Being-in-the-world. By bringing Traherne in dialogue with Heidegger, Lacan, and Derrida he tries “to reveal the thinking that validates and authorizes his poetry” (20). He argues that Traherne’s “imagination, continually returning to either a Heideggerian lack or a Lacanian want, must obsessively attempt to fill such abysses with [Derridian] ‘more’” (21). I understand DeNeef’s borrowed concept “Being-in-the-world” as the generativity and fluidity which I attempt to trace in Traherne’s writing. If that is the case, then, my treatment of the theme
of nature in relation to rhetorical, syntactical, and ontological stability, is an interpretation in the same vein of DeNeef’s work but from a rhetorical rather than philosophical perspective.

Like DeNeef’s argument, my own also contributes to understanding the interesting ways in which Traherne’s poetry and prose work. However, if his argument highlights Traherne’s originality as a thinker, my argument leads us back to the writing as well as to his mysticism. As I have outlined in the introduction in much more detail, studies on Traherne’s writing fall into three phases: those that are enthusiastic about it, those that strongly question the enthusiasm of other scholars, and those who begin to aim to understand the open-ended nature of his works. The major problem of scholars who find Traherne’s prose problematic is its looseness and its repetitiveness. In this dissertation, I make an attempt to argue that the looseness should be understood as open-endedness. And, in this chapter, in particular, I attempt to show the role of repetition. My claim is that the repetition in works like the Centuries or Select Meditations and, in fact, his meditative prose in general, found throughout his works, need not be approached as a deficiency; it is a deficiency if one’s expectations are to experience a text with a beginning, middle, and end. It is a work which can be experienced within perceived time limits, and where one could make a statement such as: “I’ve read the Centuries” or for that matter any other work. However, in understanding Traherne, the notion of ‘having read’ a text is not helpful. Rather, not only the experience but the continual experience of the text is significant. In this sense, repetition is not a vice, but a required features which belongs to a different aesthetic and a different set of expectations.
In the previous chapter, I outlined the ways in which paratactic and hypotactic structures relate to closure. I argued that the resistance to closure in Traherne’s texts is governed by the liberality of paratactic connections: lists accommodate non-closure. I also suggested that hypotactic structures, through their subordination, tend to create focused meaning that leads to closure. In Traherne’s texts, hypotactic closure is erased by paratactic unruliness. I borrow this terminology from Terence Cave’s *The Cornucopian Text*. In his chapter on imitation, Cave discusses Erasmus’ *Ciceronianus* and Dolet’s counter-attack *De imitatione ciceroniana*:

Dolet’s prevailing vision of a unified, centripetal universe of discourse is most clearly illustrated by his reaction to Erasmus’s claim that Cicero’s identity is inaccessible and inimitable. . . . What Dolet envisages is a pure, self-sufficient domain of language, whether potential (in all men) or actual (in Cicero) and generated by a universal nature; and this suprapersonal vision is defended with extraordinary energy against Erasmus’ corrosive view of a centrifugal nature dispersing itself in infinite number of irreducible personal identities. (Cave 51)

At the beginning of his discussion of Rabelais, Ronsard, and Montaigne, he points to the use of centrifugal forces at work in the texts of these writers:

The redeployment and re-grounding of *topoi* is, of course, a major preoccupation of French Renaissance writing in general. Rabelais, Ronsard, and Montaigne are caught, in their different ways, in the same problem: the resistance of alien fragments within a new formal context tends to disrupt the movement of the text towards a stable meaning, and thus draws attention to the mode of operation rather than to the product of the writing system. As a corollary, this same phenomenon blocks the possibility of full thematic closure. The major French Renaissance texts are characteristically reflexive, dialogic, and open-ended. Written in the shadow of an impossible idea, they proliferate in order to question themselves and to lay bare their own mechanisms. Thus they inevitably represent *copia*, or cornucopia, as centrifugal movement, a constantly renewed erasure of their origins. (Cave 182)

I use centripetal writing to refer to writing which aims toward closure; it is writing where a central idea starts to take shape and, therefore, the text tends toward a terminus.
Centrifugal writing tends toward unruliness; it is writing which is open-ended formally, syntactically, and grammatically.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss how Traherne’s texts outline the natural connection between instability in the created world and one’s way of maneuvering through it. A case can be made that for Traherne non-systematic structures are natural and the easiest to detect and follow.

In the Dobell versions of Traherne’s “Ease” and “Nature,” the non-systematic approach is the most natural approach for teaching. For Traherne, the seeming confusion of unplanned trajectories and the restriction of mechanical structures are matched by nature’s infusion. In the Dobell “Ease,” the speaker exclaims:

How easily doth Nature teach the Soul,
How irresistible is her Infusion! (Dobell “Ease” 1-2)\textsuperscript{26}

The most adaptable pedagogical method is nature’s irresistible infusion. As we shall see the infusion is deployed through themes of nature. More importantly, unlike mechanical explanations of natural phenomena, which seventeenth-century scientists were interested in understanding, nature’s method of demonstration and teaching is characterized by ease.

\textsuperscript{26} A note needs to be added here about the editions. The manuscript known as the Dobell folio acquired the name of its discoverer. As the first of many twentieth-century manuscript findings, the Dobell poems are most widely discussed simply by virtue of having been available to the attention of scholars than other manuscripts. The Dobell poems are closely tied to another manuscript sometimes called Poems of Felicity. Initially, Poems of Felicity was attribute wholly to Thomas Traherne. However, much later, scholars noted that Poems of Felicity was a copy of Thomas’s poems in his brother’s hand. Philip Traherne, Thomas’ brother, arguably took away much of the beauty of the poems. Because the Dobell poems and The Poems of Felicity share a number of poems, it is a common practice to indicate the source first and then follow it with the title of the poem, e.g. Dobell “The Improvement.” The standard abbreviation for The Poems of Felicity is F and D for the Dobell poems.
A comparison of Thomas Traherne’s “My Spirit” and Philip Traherne’s revision of the same poem demonstrates Traherne’s interest in writing that resists closure as well as idealizes structures. The continual regeneration of nature’s bounty and cycles is echoed in Thomas Traherne’s writing. Unlike his brother, Philip Traherne, Thomas Traherne focuses on language which tends toward continual generation. The Dobell “My Spirit” conveys once more Thomas’ style of writing, which tends toward dispersing itself everywhere while remaining at the same spot. One of the interesting sections of this poem is the sixth stanza, which in Dobell reads as follows:

A Strange Extended Orb of Joy,
   Proceeding from within,
Which did on evry side convey
It self, and being nigh of Kin
   To God did evry Way
Dilate it self even in an Instant, and
Like an Indivisible Centre Stand
At once Surrounding all Eternitie.
   Twas not a Sphere
   Yet did appear
One infinit. Twas somewhat evry where.
   And tho it had a Power to see
   Far more, yet still it shind
   And was a Mind
Exerted for it saw Infinitie
   Twas not a Sphere, but twas a power
   Invisible, and yet a Bower. (D “My Spirit” 98-102)

In this stanza, the speaker directs our attention to the proliferation of the direction which is expressed in such phrases as “A Strange Extended Orb,” “Which did on evry side convey [. . .],” “evry Way/ Dilate it self even in an Instant.” This is an orb which stands still and at the same time dilates in numerous directions. The orb is also “somewhat every where,” and its characteristic state is the process of exertion: “was a Mind/ Exerted,” suggesting a continual growth. By the end of the stanza, the image of the
sphere is collapsed into “a power”: an image not visually definable, but one of kinesthetic implications. The abstractness of the image is underscored by the insistence on its invisibility: “but twas a power / Invisible.” Such a revision of the image at the end of the poem is even more rapidly reconstructed into a bower: “but twas a power / Invisible, and yet a Bower.” One is left with an impressionistic understanding of the essence of the image being transformed from one place onto another, surpassing the Ovidian metamorphosis. The reference to the “Bower,” perhaps an odd one here, is a symptom of the connection between writing and natural images.

In contrast to Traherne’s draft of the poem, Philip Traherne’s revision differs in major ways, and the primary difference is constituted in Philip’s stronger closural forces. All line endings in Traherne’s draft are thematically inert, yet they are rendered much more powerfully in Philip’s version:

A strange extended Orb of Joy
   Proceeding from within,
   Which did on evry side display
   Its force; and being nigh of Kin
   To God, did evry way
   Dilate its Self ev’n instantaneously,
   Yet an Indivisible center stay,
   In it surrounding all Eternity.

   ‘Twas not a Sphere;
   Yet did appear
One infinit: ‘Twas somewhat evry-where.
   And what it had a Power to see,
   On that it always shin’d:
   For ‘twas a Mind
Exerted, reaching to Infinity:
   ‘Twas not a Sphere; but ‘twas a Power
   More high and lasting than a Tower. (F “My Spirit” 85-102)

This passage has been singled out by Gladys Wade in her *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne* as exemplary of Philip’s desire to clarify and improve Thomas
Traherne’s work. In the quoted stanzas, there is only one instance in which Traherne’s passage demonstrates an expectation of closure. Philip’s attention to eternity (“always shin’d”) is much more powerful than Traherne’s “still it shind” because “always” unequivocally promises resistance to closure while Thomas’ “still” suggests an expectation of closure. Yet, Traherne’s version is far more consistent with sustaining weak closural forces than his brother’s. Traherne prefers paratactic structures as in “Dilate it self even in an Instant, and” (91) whereas Philip favors hypotactic structures as in “Dilate its Self ev’n *instantaneously*/ Yet” (91), where “*instantaneously*” is visually interesting for the reader since in the manuscript it would be underlined. Philip uses only one word (“*instantaneously,*”) which becomes the end of the line while Traherne’s phrasing is much weaker; his version ends with a coordinating conjunction: “in an Instant, and.” In Philip’s choice of ending, the line seems powerful: “*instantaneously*” is not only orally but also visually longer than Traherne’s jagged “in an Instant, and.” In Traherne’s version, each stanza emphasizes the state of fragmentation. In line 91 as well as in line 92, the attention to punctuation is the same. Traherne prefers no punctuation, as if to confound the readers if they should hold their breath; Philip is much more helpful in the sense that the readers are not in suspense: the readers are given a visual sign to take a shallow breath and proceed to the next line. In line 92, Traherne writes: “Like an Indivisible Centre Stand” while Philip’s version is “Yet an Indivisible Center stay, / In it [. . .]”. In Traherne’s case, the lack of punctuation creates a sense of disorientation; it serves as a nervous closure. Philip’s “stay,” with the accompanying comma, promises closure and orients the reader: we are in the middle of a period. A third instance, where the same attention to punctuation at the end of the line is evident appears in line 100
where Traherne prefers “Exerted for it Saw infinitie” (100) while Philip revises it as “reaching to Infinity.” The lack of punctuation in Traherne’s version creates a weak and an unsettling closure.

Traherne’s centrifugal rather than centripetal forces are derived also from his use of paratactic rather than hypotactic structures, a point which is explored elsewhere in this dissertation. He prefers “And was [. . .]” (99) rather than Philip’s hypotactic “For ‘twas [. . .]” (99). Traherne prefers to establish comparisons of similarity as in “Like and Indivisible Centre” (92) rather than a relationship of subordination as in Philip’s variant: “Yet an Indivisible Center” (92). Another centripetal force for Traherne is his preference for vague expressions while Philip favors concrete vocabulary and ways of expression.

In line 97, both Philip and his brother open with a paratactic structure, but Traherne’s expression “And tho it had” (97) is more abstract than Philip’s “And what it had a Power to see” (97). In Philip’s case “what” is much more concrete and suggests an emphasis on that which had been seen while in Thomas’ variant the object is not of concern; there is a sense of moving on and of centripetal forces rather than centering centrifugal forces. Like Thomas’ closures, Thomas’ openings are also much weaker than Philip’s. For instance, Traherne opens a line by “It self, [. . .]” (89) whereas Philip opens much more forcefully: “Its force [. . .]” (89). The self, inaccessible and resisting definition, can hardly catch up with the power of “Its force.” Philip’s language as well as the opening of his revisions focus on a concrete and localizable language as in “In it [. . .]” (93); in contrast, Traherne directs our attention to time—that which is not visibly identifiable: “At once” (93). Later in the passage, Philip again insists on location which is evident in his “On that [. . .]” (98) while Traherne prefers to establish a comparison and thus go beyond
a particular location: “Far more [. . .]” (98). Again, Philip is much more visually oriented as demonstrated in his choice of “display” (88) instead of Traherne’s abstract and ambiguous “convey” (88). Finally, in the last two lines, Traherne creates a contrast between Power and Bower, which his brother revises as Power and Tower. Traherne’s pair is bucolic and creates the image of an eternal capacity for receptivity. The naturalness of Thomas’ “Bower” stands in contrast to the fixedness and stability of Philip’s “Tower.” Philip’s choice is a forceful closure with militaristic overtones echoed in the relation of Tower and Power.

As we have seen from the previous example, Traherne and his brother differ in their understanding and appreciation of the theme of resistance to closure. One might suspect that besides Traherne’s insight into nature’s pedagogical potential, the root of his interest in resistance to closure lies in the lifelessness of mechanical structures and a priori patterns. Further, mechanical and fossilized structures and a priori patterns deprive life of uniquely responsible action:

The Final Cause, or End of Life is, that the Glory of the univers might be usefull, and Enjoyed. It is founded in perception, for whatsoever is able to Apprehend, liveth. Were we to define it therfore, we should say. That Life is an Abilitie to Apprehend, and Move. For whatsoever liveth is able to Conceiv, and move in like manner: at least inwardly, by its very Conception and Desire. [. . .] They that would by meer Mechanical Operations Solv all the Phænomena of Life, are all as absurd in their Attempt, as it is possible for men to be: For tho we may shew the Way how objects are Applied to the Organs of Sense; how Sounds do enter the ear, and Smite upon the Drum; How Figures, and Colors Enter the Ey, and are Represented upon the Retina, in the Brain, or carried by the optick Nerv to the Fancy; How Smels in fumy Exhalations pervade the pores in the Nose, and Tastes in more Solid Juices permeat those of the Tongue: Finally, how tangible Qualities affect the Nerves, and Stir the Fibres that are Rooted in the Brain, and communicat their Impression by Motions of the Nervs, and Stir the Fibres, or Spirits there: yet what that is, that has Power to perceiv the least effect, Impression, or Idea, that is made in the Brain, any more then a looking-glass perceivs the Images that are in it, or a Lute the Quaverings of the Strings that are
touched; can by no Principles merely Mechanical ever be unfolded. (KG XXVIII 7-28)

While the technical accounts of how the body works, or how images are registered by the eye on the retina, or how smells and other senses are perceived can be tracked down, Traherne announces a resistance to a predetermined schema of understanding. Any explanation is bound to be idealized or to introduce concepts which will idealize its conceptualization. He objects to the mechanical understanding of human perception thus: “Yet what that is, that has Power to perceiv the least effect, Impression, or Idea, that is made in the Brain, any more then a looking-glass perceives the Images that are in it, or a Lute the Quaverings of the Strings that are touched; can by no Principles merely Mechanical ever be unfolded” (KG XXVIII 25-28). No explanation can unravel the minutiae of the world. Instead of precision in mechanical explanations one needs to consider infusion.

While ultimate mechanical explanation is not possible, the new project which Traherne undertakes is to provide multiple verbal and textual explanations and discussions of the processes which resist mechanical explanation:

I Should not Speak this, did I not Know that the Scriptures Mention a Pluralitie of them, and that the Soul takes pleasure to Expaciat infinitly in the Territories of Bliss, and the fields of Glory. (KG XXV 224-226)

This passage insists on the pleasure of such a project. “Expaciating infinitly” is nevertheless focused on “the Territories of Bliss, and the fields of Glory.”
“Here [an] Aphorism and there a Song: here a supplication and there a Thanksgiving. Thus we do bespangle our way to Heaven.” (SM 4.18)

In the second part of this chapter, I outline centrifugal movements which are evident both in nature and in Traherne’s writing. In Traherne’s works, infinite explication is the norm, and it is achieved through the use of centrifugal, open-ended forces which resist closure. The centrifugal forces unfold through the ambiguity between the active and passive verbs denoting dispersal—bespangled, bestrewing, sprinkled, spreading forth. An analysis of a number of passages, which thematically refer to the *topos* of dispersal demonstrates that the forces of resistance to closure are latent and are grammatically expressed through subordination. The centrifugal forces emerge out of a way of being; they are forces of their own potency. An examination of select passages demonstrates that centripetal and centrifugal forces create vortexes on several occasions in which both forces create a productive ambiguity where the forces of closure and resistance to closure meet, but where the latent forces of resistance are never exhausted. Thus Traherne injects in his discourse the trace of the inexplicable, that residue which is subject to infusion rather than to clearly identifiable principles. More importantly, these passages reveal Traherne’s way of writing. Because the centrifugal forces are not subject to authorial control, one could infer that Traherne’s way of writing, then, is a function of his way of being. The centrifugal force presents itself as an untheorizable latent dynamism.

The Dobell “The Improvment” outlines the ways in which God unfolds centrifugal forces in nature:

> His Wisdom Shines in Spreading forth the Skie,  
> His Power’s Great in Ordering the Sun,

---

27 *Select Meditations* here on abbreviated as SM.
His Goodness very Marvellous and High
Appears, in every Work his Hand hath done.
And all his Works in their varietie,
Even scattered abroad delight the Eye. (Dobell “The Improvment” 13-18)

The starting points of discussion in this stanza are the phrases “in spreading forth
the Skie” and “Even scattered abroad.” Both phrases depict the act of unfolding. They
denote non-linear and non-logical arrangement: “spreading forth” or “scattered abroad”
could not be orderly acts. The passage also contains active centripetal forces at work,
noted by verbs like “ordering” as well as “done.”

The co-existence of these dichotomous verbs produces a tension in this stanza
regarding the themes of flow and pattern. Traherne juxtaposes “Spreading forth” to
“Ordering”; as a result, the finality of the past tense of the verb “done” is juxtaposed to
the disorder suggested by “scattered abroad.”

While this dichotomy might be clearly outlined, it is in fact more sophisticated,
preventing one from uncovering simple principles at work in these passages. For
instance, while the verb “ordering” might suggest an imposition of a predetermined
pattern, the continuous form of the verb suggests that the pattern could be ever unfolding.
“Ordering the Sun” could also suggest a clearly marked pattern according to which the
sun operates. Even then, however, the interaction with various other unfolding patterns
could serve as a continually expanding centrifugal force. This passage allows us to see
how resistance to closure enables a continual and productive enactment of principles.

As I pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the paradox between stability
and exertion is a manifestation of Traherne’s loose style. Note, for instance, the tension
emerging at the comma after the verb “Appears” in the stanza quoted above. One could
think that God’s goodness appears “Marvellous and High” creating a sense of a mirage;
“Appears” in this case is synonymous to “seems.” But “Appears” also carries a sense of finality as in “it is there,” “it has shown up,” “it is manifested,” and the process of its unfolding is completed and exhausted. The sentence, however, does not end with the verb “Appears.” On the contrary, the speaker unfolds its meaning, announcing how and where God’s Goodness is to be seen: “in every Work his Hand hath done.” But even this passage brings up an ambiguity between the forces of closure and those of resistance to closure, for as soon as the passage evokes the centrifugal forces of dynamic revision and production carried by the prepositional clause (“in every Work . . .”), the centripetal forces of closure are brought up with the reference to the past participle “done.”

A common practice in the seventeenth century, irregular capitalization is considered a special feature of Traherne’s writing. Editors also frequently comment on the difficulty of adopting Traherne’s manuscripts to print because the characteristic features of his handwriting—capitalization and spelling among them—are lost. Dobell (1903) points out that “It would have been an interesting thing could the whole of Traherne’s poems have been reproduced in the same style, for, as the reader will see, there is a picturesqueness, a beauty, and a life about the manuscripts which is lost in the cold regularity of type” (Dobell ixxv). In the above quoted stanza, the dynamic of the forces of stasis and centrifugal forces is enacted in the usage of capital letters in the verbs and the nouns. As the passage opens, both verbs and nouns are capitalized, as are some adjectives (“Great,” “Marvellous and High”), but in the second half of the passage, in the last three lines, the nouns are capitalized (“Works,” “Hand,” “Work,” “Eye”) whereas the

---

28 On upper-case and lower-case, see Melvin Wolf (on 2-r in 16th-c printed texts from manuscripts), David Foxton (on simplification of typography to indicate status). On the scribal (rather than typographic) aspect of capitalization in Emily Dickinson’s poems, see Jerome McGann. On editorial practices of Shakespeare’s editions, see Andrew Murphy as well as Orgel and Keilen.
verbs are not capitalized (“done,” “scattered abroad,” “delight”). But this principle runs parallel to what seems to establish itself as an undercurrent principle, rather than an accident or an exception: in the last three lines one verb (“Appears”) and one noun (“varietie”) follow the reverse principle of capitalization.

The phrases of significance for us from this passage—“spreading forth” and “scattered abroad”—are in subordinate positions. The subordinated position of the verbs carrying the meaning of dispersal suggests that the forces of productive generation are always in the background; they create an undercurrent and suggest a way of being which overflows into a way of becoming.

The pitting of the centrifugal and the centripetal forces is at play also in stanza three of the Dobell “The Person,” a stanza, which Philip Traherne deleted in his manuscript of the *Poems of Felicity*, perhaps because of its attention to the body. The speaker delights in men’s bodies constituting points of infinity: they disperse an abundance of rays of light.

They [men’s bodies] were not made to be alone:  
But made to be the very Throne  
Of Blessedness, to be like Suns, whose Raies,  
Dispersed, Scatter many thousand Ways.  
They Drink in Nectars, and Disburs again  
In Purer Beams, those Streams,  
Those Nectars which are caus’d by Joys. (D “The Person” 33-39)

The ambiguity in this passage emerges from the past participle of “disperse.” That the sun’s rays are “Dispersed” indicates a finished act. The present tense of the verb “Scatter,” however, imposes a different interpretation, which changes the status of “dispersed” to an adjective—“rays which are dispersed.” Instead of a final and exhausted act of dispersal, the reader is asked to revise the reading of the passage to rays whose
quality is to be dispersed and which continually scatter. This is an interpretation which hinges on the centripetal and the centrifugal forces operating in the text. The present tense of the verb “scatter” creates a continual condition for the dispersal of the rays. One could also point out that the past participle “dispersed,” which grammatically functions as an adjectival past participle rather than a predicate, and the present tense of the verb “scatter” could exchange places easily, thus underlining the thin line between the forces of closure and the forces of resistance to closure. This passage is further complicated by the multiplication of dispersal; the proliferation of centrifugal forces is instantiated by the movement from “dispersed” to “Scatter many thousand ways” and then again to “Disburs again.” “Scatter” with its elaboration “many thousand ways” constitutes another vortex of proliferation. Similarly, “Disburs,” which is already a bearer of forces of resistance to closure becomes a vortex of copia through its coupling with “again.”

The ambiguity and the balance between exhaustibility and continual and non-systematic productivity unfolds in the rest of the stanza where “drinking” and “disbursing” are juxtaposed: both “drink” and “disburs” are used as active intransitive verbs—“they Drink in Nectars, and Disburs again / In purer Beams.” The forces of closure and those of resistance to closure meet once more. The former verb deploys the centrifugal forces of unity and finality, while the latter unfolds the productive and refining forces of resistance to closure. The generative centrifugal forces are in subordinate position; they are like undercurrents which cannot and should not be ignored, always there, always changing the relationships among the operative principles and even the principles themselves.
A manifestation of the grammatically subordinate position which the forces of resistance to closure occupy is to be found in “Admiration” (F), in which the speaker makes a point that the scattered flowers on the ground are created for the glory of the addressee:

The Lilly & the Rosy-Train
Which, scatter’d on the ground,
Salute the Feet which they surround,
Grown for thy sake, O Man: that like a Chain
Or Garland they may be
To deck ev’n thee: (F “Admiration” 23-28)

The opening of the stanza immediately draws our attention to the subordinate position in which the theme of dispersal is positioned: the flowers are scattered on the ground, and the force behind this act is not revealed. The being of the flowers—rather than an external force—has to do with their being scattered. The action verb in this line is that “The Lilly & the Rosy-Train . . . salute the Feet.” As the passage unfolds, one could notice a dichotomy being formed between that which is scattered and that which gathers to surround: both “scatter’d” and “surround” are parts of “which-clauses.”

The theme of dispersal appears in an active rather than passive position in “The World” (F), a poem, which demonstrates that God’s way of creative composition is through an unpremeditated process:

The choicest Colors, Yellow, Green, and Blew
Did on this Court
In comly sort
A mixt variety bestrew; (F “The World” 73-76)

The colors of nature are placed together in an artless and unpremeditated way, and the aesthetics of the natural collocations are most appealing. In this passage, Traherne uses the active rather than the passive form of the transitive verb “bestrew” denoting how
nature actively disperses “it self.” While the use of the active verb could suggest that the speaker unfolds the centripetal force of closure through the finality of what is bestrewn by nature, a comparison with Robert Herrick’s nominalization of the verb “bestrew” (“strewings”) demonstrates that the present tense of Traherne’s poem carries centrifugal forces. A nominalized “bestrew” unleashes the forces of closure, an outcome which becomes evident in Herrick’s “To Perilla”:

Then lastly, let some weekly strewings be
Devoted to the memory of me;
Then shall my ghost not walk about, but keep
Still in the cool and silent shades of sleep. (Herrick “To Perilla” 15-18)

Unlike Traherne, Herrick uses the image of the act of strewing flowers to denote closure: “strewings” of flowers serve as a closural force of the closural act of burial. The ritual of mourning ensures, according to the speaker, that the speaker will find rest, or will “keep/Still” rather than “walk about.” Unlike the final stage of mourning—the action of strewing flowers,—the phrase “walk about” suggests aimless wondering; it is an indefinable act, one which is resistant to mapping and representation. Further, unlike Traherne, Herrick does not develop space for creative freedom. The use of the image of “bestrewing” demonstrates the sense of freedom, which Traherne injects in his discourse.

The examples so far from “The Improvement,” “The Person,” “Admiration,” and “The World” demonstrate that the centripetal forces are primarily positioned in subordinate clauses or are part of a description, making them part of the essence of the object they are associated with. Such are the underlying divine creative energies. Now we will turn our attention to see how Traherne connects these forces of generation to his writing.
In Select Meditations, as in “The World” (F) active verbs are linked to centrifugal forces of dispersal:

Here [an] Aphorism and there a Song: here a supplication and there a Thanksgiving. Thus we do bespangle our way to Heaven. (SM 4.18)

The verb “bespangle” which denotes the centripetal force at work in Traherne’s prose is used as an active verb, but this verb is not linked to Traherne’s way of writing. Rather it refers to his way of life, his way of being. Writing might be construed as Traherne’s way of being, and if so, then, being informs his becoming, as revealed in his writing. Two more important points need be made regarding this passage. First, the centrifugal force of resistance to closure is emphasized not only by the emphatic “do” but also through the emphasis marked by the prefix “be-“ to “bespangle.” The OED defines the prefix as an intensifier of meaning (as in be-spatter, be-stir, be-strew) and one which identifies an approximate location (as in behind, below, beneath, benorth, between, beyond). And second, in SM the themes of “Bespangled” and of undetermined locations such as “here . . . and there . . .”, demonstrate a non-systematic organizational flow rather than a structured and explainable, even idealized, pattern. This is an approach unhindered by pre-established schemes. One follows only desire rather than preconceived notions. Traherne’s method of writing takes up the liberality and copiousness as well as the resistance to mechanical and idealized explanations.

Unlike the passage from Select Meditations, a passage from The Kingdom of God places the theme of dispersal in a subordinate position and connects these centrifugal forces to the unfolding of the kingdom of God:

The Treasur...
and down in our Discourse of the Regions, and Tracts of his Dominion. (KG XXVI)

“[B]eing scattered” denotes subordination and passivity. It denotes the passivity of the always present and an always-unfolding centrifugal force. Its position of passivity and subordination functions also as a way to characterize “The Treasures of his Kingdom.”

In the subsequent period, Traherne clarifies that the centrifugal forces are at work in his prose, but he does not indicate that he is in control of these forces: “so that they be sprinkled up and down in our Discourse of the Regions, and Tracts of his Dominion.”

The subject who performs the action remains unnamed. The strategy of unfolding objects at random requires not simply a relegation of controlling structures but the adoption of the stance of passive receptivity which is grammatically marked by Traherne’s use of a paratactic structure.

Based on the examples, which we have surveyed so far, Traherne emerges as a writer in whose works the subordinate position is taken up by the act of unfolding. He believes that “The Maner is often times more then the Thing” (CH “Attainment” 97) because without it “we had lost the Actual Experiment of our own Goodness” (CH “Attainment” 112-13). The problem with attainment for Traherne is that it takes away all occasion of Desire, and breeds a just and full Acquiescence in his present Condition. Where Expectation and Endeavor remain there can be no Attainment. Which is apparently true, bec. in whatsoever we think attained puts a Period to desire, and gives us rest: in relation to that thing attained, there can be no more Expectation nor Endeavor. (KG “Attainment” 64-69)

In this context, positioning the forces of resistance to closure in the background and, in fact, in the passivity of his prose and further relegating control over them is an example of a practice which theorizes. The notion of a theory which preexists the practice of writing is challenged. The importance of such an undercurrent generative force could also
lie in Traherne’s understanding and appreciation of explainable mechanisms. Such an approach to writing and to understanding the created world seems to contradict Traherne’s project of clearly explaining the kingdom of God, by avoiding the ambiguity of beclouding of metaphors. What becomes clear from these examples is that Traherne enacts a latent dynamism in his prose and poetry; he creates a practice which theorizes, not a theory to be practiced.

“Clouds here and there like Winged Charrets flying” (Dobell “Nature” 55)
As we saw in the previous section, Traherne uses both passive and active verbs through which to express the latent dynamism of the always-unfolding centrifugal forces. This final section will outline the ways in which natural elements (fire, clouds, flowers, and sponges) and the qualities of natural elements (porousness) help propel the centrifugal forces in his writing.

In the Dobell “Nature,” the topos of fire is used as a generative force and as a way to endorse non-schematic and non-analytical processes of thinking and composition. As soon as the speaker encounters an object that seems to create a sense of an ending and closure he uncovers its potential for that which serves for a beginning: each ending is rather a beginning. We saw the enactment of this idea in the Centuries, but it is elaborated and thematized in the Dobell “Nature”:

Yet all prepard that I might ever be
With som Great Workman, som Great Deitie.
But yet there were new Rooms, and Spaces more,
   Beyond all these, Wide Regions ore and ore,
And into them my pent-up-Soul, like fire
Did break, surmounting all I here admire. (D “Nature” 71-74)
Here the speaker recounts the education he has received by others, and immediately envisions other potentials: “But yet there were new Rooms, and Spaces more” (71-74). Again, one can notice another imagery resisting clear-cut lines of representation—fire. The imagery of combustion serves as a metaphor for Traherne’s method of resistance to closure: combustion does not follow a proper and clean dismantling of the object. Earlier in the poem Traherne has used the same imagery when he expresses the notion that his soul is carried on “its Angels Wings” (30) and “Pierc’d through the Skies immediately” (31). Such a combustible trajectory is impressive, but the journey is also a messy business, one whose boundaries are rough and not clearly marked.

The speaker in the Dobell “Nature” is troubled by questions related to the limits of beauty and treasures and craves “without Controll” (50) for a world “That needs must flourish ever, never fade” (52), a world which is governed by opulence and a renunciation of control. One of the elements in such a world, the speaker imagines, is the clouds: “Clouds here and there like Winged Charrets flying” (55). The deixical dispersal of the clouds in “Nature” echoes the “winding sheets, or Shrouds” of the Dobell “The Demonstration.” The “winding Sheets, or Shrouds” seem to be one way of expressing dilation and expansion into the unknown. The Dobell “The Demonstration,” uncovers the dynamics of generative poetic development through the attention to shapelessness of the vaporous matter. In the Dobell “The Demonstration” “winding sheets, or Shrouds” undergo the metamorphosis of “irresistible . . . Infusion” (2), which is further elaborated in the Dobell “Nature” where the speaker uses the diffusiveness of deixical pronouns—“here and there”—to indicate a resistance to closure and systematic ordering. Further, the
amorphous shape of the clouds as well as their elusive positioning propels the text toward open-endedness.

Both the Dobell “Nature” and “The Demonstration” use the amorphous qualities of objects—a cloud or a shroud—in order to propel the text and to adumbrate an environment which resists clear defining or mapping. However, while the world might be constantly growing and while the clouds could be a part of the ever proliferating and enjoyable creative liberty, Traherne does not renounce the goal of seeing clearly. In “The Demonstration,” the image of the function of the clouds in the context of Traherne’s project takes on a clearer shape: the clouds may be offering an opportunity for enjoying the world, but they are not the way to see the world clearly.

In the Dobell “The Demonstration,” a didactic poem about how to read the world, the speaker teaches the reader where to look for clarity, and clarity is not in the closeness of the clouds but in the distance of the bright sun:

As in the Air we see the Clouds  
Like Winding Sheets, or Shrouds;  
Which tho they nearer are obscure  
The Sun, which Higher far, is far more Pure. (D “The Demonstration” 7-10)

A number of dichotomies emerge out of this stanza: clouds vs sun; closeness vs distance; and obscurity vs purity. However, these dichotomies are challenged by the implied position of the speaker. His presence is only implied, like the latent dynamic force outlined above. The dichotomy is challenged by the implied position of the speaker. The poem’s opening adumbrates the textual space:

The Highest Things are Easiest to be shewn,

29 In his Commonplace Book, E. M. Forster reminisces on the shapelessness and immensurability of an evening cloud: “The evening sky behind Fellow’s building. A cone of cloud . . . mottled with pink and gold—both faint, and the word mottled is too strong. Immensely large aesthetically speaking. I have no idea of its linear measurements” (174).
And only capable of being *Known.*
A Miste involvs the Ey,
While in the Middle it doth lie;
And till the Ends of Things are seen,
The Way’s uncertain that doth stand between. (D “The Demonstration” 1-6)

The created space emphasizes the middle through references such as “While in the Middle it doth lie” (4) as well as “The Way’s uncertain that doth stand between” (6).

Such referents clearly establish the position of the speaker:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Things</th>
<th>Middle, nearer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easiest Shown</td>
<td>Obscure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Miste, Clouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ends of Things</td>
<td>Way that doth stand between</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yet, as the poem continues, the speaker’s position becomes more complicated and needs revision. For instance, in stanza 3, the objects to which the speaker draws the reader’s attention are located close to the ground: “a Sand, an Acorn, or a Bean,” objects which fall under the category closest to the speaker, as represented in the figure above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Things</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>(ground)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Miste</td>
<td>?“a Sand, an Acorn, or a Bean” -- (I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ends of Things</td>
<td>Way that doth stand between</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>?“a Sand, an Acorn, or a Bean”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The introduction of objects located closer to the ground than the “Highest Things” like the sun to the already established dimensions unsettles the clearly established dichotomies as well as, and even more importantly, the position of the speaker. With the mention of grounded objects, the position of the speaker floats, and in fact it assumes precisely the latent dynamism which is outlined above.

The challenge, which the position of the speaker as well as the sand, the acorn, and the bean pose is that it is not easily adopted in linear context like print. However, in this instance, in the above cited examples (1-6), the visual presentation of the text echoes
the special position of the subjects: the line which refers to the medial position of the mist is visually positioned in the middle; the first two lines of the poem start to the left while line four is indented in print only once, which creates a medial space for the line referring to the mist. That Traherne was careful about the spatial positioning of the lines of his poetry can be seen from the editing of the manuscript. In the Dobell “The Circulation,” lines 29-34 were first written so that line 32 stands out to the left:

All Things to circulation owe
    Themselves; by which alone
They do exist: They cannot shew
    A Sigh, a Word, a Groan,
    A Colour, or a Glips of Light [. . . ] (D “The Circulation” 29-34)

However, as Margoliouth remarks for line 32 “Traherne began to write this line too much to the left, erased “A Sigh, a Word” and began again in the proper place” (Margoliouth vol. 2 388). The way the lines are presented in Margoliouth’s edition are like this:

All Things to circulation owe
    Themselves; by which alone
They do exist: They cannot shew
    A Sigh, a Word, a Groan,
    A Colour, or a Glips of Light [. . . ] (D “The Circulation” 29-34)

I draw attention to the way in which Traherne uses the special position of the letters to emphasize the importance of the special position whether of the speaker or of the admired object.

As a pedagogical poem, then, “The Demonstration” does not propose a coherent pedagogical system but a practice that theorizes. In the *Centuries*, he expresses this opinion:

The Maner is in evry thing of greatest Concernment. Whatever Good thing we do, neither can we pleas God, unless we do it *Well*: nor can He pleas us, whatever Good He does, unless He do it *well*. Should He giv us the most Perfect Things in Heaven and earth to make us Happy, and not giv them to us in the Best of all
Possible Maners, He would but Displeas us, and it were Impossible for Him to make us Happy. It is not Sufficient therfore for us to Study, the most excellent Things unless we do it in the most Excellent of Maners. And what that is it is impossible to find till we are Guided thereunto by the Most Excellent End. with a Desire of which I flagrantly Burned. (C 3.38)

The method of teaching cannot be outlined clearly. Traherne outlines neither a theory of a pedagogical system nor the process of nature. He adumbrates an enactment of the theory, and, in this sense, his speaker is continually located in the textual meanwhile.

In our discussion of centrifugal movements, the image of the flowers already appeared in such phrasing as bestrewn, bespangled, scattered, demonstrating the continual unfolding of the latent and dynamic centrifugal force. In the next section, I focus on the function of the image of the flower. I show that the image of the flower demonstrates the dichotomy between cessation as well as the unfolding of open-endedness; I also argue that the delicacy of the natural images constitute a protean amorphousness, an amorphousness which is also connected to thoughts.

The Dobell “Nature” has brought to our attention amorphous images of the natural world: fire and clouds. It also brings up the image of flowers, a topos so popular with Andrew Marvell, for instance. Traherne’s speaker admires the enormity of the created world and the freedom of space and movement which it creates: the clouds are “here and there like Winged Charets flying” while the “Flowers [are] ever flourishing, yet always Dying” (56). Death and cessation are not themes frequently found in what is currently established as Traherne’s focus. However, these few lines might be explained through Traherne echoing George Herbert’s “The Flower,” in which the speaker encounters the unfolding of his renewed poetic energies:

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I live and write:
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing: O my only light,
    It cannot be
    That I am he
On whom thy tempests fell all night. (Herbert “The Flower” 36-42)

Herbert’s speaker compares his renewed spirits to the rebirth of the flowers—“How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean / Are thy returns! Even as the flowers in spring” (1-2)

and his “shriveled heart” (8) to the cycle of the flowers:

It was gone
    Quite underground; as flowers depart
To see their mother-root, when they have blown,
    Where they together
    All the hard weather,
Dead to the world, keep house unknown. (Herbert “The Flower” 9-14)

Unlike Herbert, Traherne does not take up the theme of constantly dying flowers, but the renewed vitality of the flowers is alluded to by Herbert’s poem. The language of gliding clearly echoes Traherne’s theme of bespangled and amorphous and irretraceable shapes and trajectories.

In fact, in Donne’s “Loves Growth” the image of the grass and references to natural renewal are used to demonstrate the resistance to closure and exhaustibility. For Donne’s speaker, love’s endurance is comparable to the endurance of the grass:

I scarce beleeve my love to be so pure
    As I had thought it was,
    Because it doth endure
Vicissitude, and season, as the grasse; (Donne “Loves Growth” 1-4)

After winter is over, love, declares Donne’s speaker, is ready to “bud out”:

Gentle love deeds, as blossomes on a bough,
    From loves awaken’d root do bud out now. (Donne “Loves Growth” 19-20)

The renewal of love is integrated in the regeneration of nature. Love’s inability to cease and especially its open-endedness—“love such additions take” (22)—determine the
unfolding of a text. The poem’s ending, however, raises strong centripetal forces—forces which are brought about by summarizing and stating the main point of the poem.

    And though each spring doe adde to love new heate,
    As princes doe in times of action get
    New taxes, and remit them not in peace,
    No winter shall abate the springs encrease. (Donne “Loves Growth” 25-28)

The mathematical reference to addition, which explains love’s growth idealizes the method through which it proceeds, and it is starkly juxtaposed to the imperfection of the princely demand for taxation not through growth but through war and destruction. Traherne’s text is much less idealized even though, like Donne’s, his makes use of natural images to work through the process of filling in space and empty pages.

    The image of the flowers is used in a sense to renounce control but more importantly to establish a medium, always progressing, always resisting closure by giving up control and renouncing itself to the unfolding of natural centrifugal energies. For Traherne, the erasure of closure manifests itself with a preoccupation for the formless and always unique act of fruition.

    Flowers and the process of natural growth resist closure. Besides this function, the flower functions as a metaphor for the imperceptibility and the delicacy of a thought, a notion which reminds one of the formless shape of a cloud:

    A Delicate and Tender Thought
      . . . is the fine and Curious Flower
      Which we return, and offer every hour: (D “Thoughts II” 1, 7-8)

We could, in fact, retrace the image of the flower to the thought and from the thought to the soul.

    In the Centuries (2. 87) Traherne evokes the metamorphosis of the soul into a thought:
GOD hath made it Easy to convert our Soul into a Thought containing Heaven and Earth, not that it should be Contemptible because it is Easy: but don, because it is Divine. Which Thought is as easily Abolished, that by a Perpetual Influx of Life it may be maintained. ... We likewise ought to Shew our infinit Lov by Upholding Heaven and Earth, Time and Eternity, GOD and all Things in our Souls, without Wavering or Intermission: by the perpetual Influxe of Our Life. To which we are by the Goodness of All Things infinitly Obliged. Once to ceas is to draw upon our selvs infinit Darkness, after we hav begun to be so Illuminated: for it shews a forgetfulnes and Defect in Lov: and it is an infinit Wonder that we are afterward restored. (C 2.87)

The invisible soul becomes manifest through thoughts, and this process, as is characteristic of Traherne, is easy “because it is Divine.” Traherne inserts the notion not of the “flux” but of the “influx” which echoes the subordinate structure of the centripetal force as well as the importance of porousness, which we will discuss later. Moreover, this passage once more brings up the notion of closure: cessation of infinite thoughts is “infinit Darkness.” The centripetal force then is located in “forgetfulnes and Defect in Lov,” but such notions are not present simply on an ethical level for Traherne. Through the continual focus on each created thing, the text enacts the forces of resistance to closure.

So far we have seen that the natural images of the cloud, fire, and flowers convey the irresistible latent centrifugal force. But Traherne’s repertoire includes another image from nature: fragrances. Like the flowers, odor, in “The Odor,” a poem found only in Philip Traherne’s handwriting, becomes a manifestation of life. I would discuss this poem briefly because, as with all poems in The Poems of Felicity, it is rife with questions about authorial (Thomas’) and editorial (Philip’s) intentions.\(^{30}\) The poem is praise of the

---

\(^{30}\) One example of such a confusion appears in line 41. Margoliouth informs us that there is a deleted indefinite article, ‘a’, between the two words in “at distance”: was that a Slip on the part of Philip or was that a revision? This question also begs another one: what is in the nature of an editorial slip?
human body; the comparison between the human body and natural images sustain the poem:

    Thy Body is than Cedars better far:
    Those Fruits and Flowers which in Fields I see,
       With thine, can not compare.
    Where ere thou movest there, the Scent I find
    Of fragrant Myrrh and Aloes left behind. (F “The Odour” 55-60)

The poem concludes with praise of the quotidian use of “sight, taste, and smell”:

    But what is Myrrh? What Cinnamon?
    What Aloes, Cassia, spices, Hony, Wine?
    O sacred Uses! You to think upon
       Than these I more include.
    To see, taste, smell, observ; is to no End,
    If I the Use of each don’t apprehend. (F, “The Odour” 61-66)

The body’s utility, its capacity to produce is represented by analogy to smell. Even if the emphasis is on the quotidian, the dominant metaphor—odor—is not mechanical. Like the irregular shape of the fire and the formlessness of the cloud, odor belongs to the same family of shapeless images. It adds, however, a new dimension, visual nonrepresentability: both the fire and the clouds, even though their shapes are unrepeatable, are visible natural objects; unlike them, the (non-)image of the odor is invisible, just like the human thought, which is made visible through the metaphor of “the fine and Curious Flower” (D “Thoughts II” 7). But the mere resistance to visual representation of fragrances makes thematic representability all the more important.

    While the themes of fire, clouds, and flowers focus on shapelessness of matter, the theme of porousness extends the same line of unfolding of the open-ended text. The theme of porousness, another element in Traherne’s repertoire, is enacted structurally throughout Traherne’s work.
In *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne focuses on the way in which natural particles communicate. First, he classifies visible matter into (1) superficial, (2) working by reflection of colors, and (3) inward, focusing on inwardness. He continues to explain that the smallest impenetrable particle is that of light, whose defining quality is its non-porousness:

The Communication of all visible and corporeal Beings is two fold, either outward and Superficial, or Deep and Inward. The one is a Communication and Figures and Colors by Reflexion, the other of Spirits and Interior Qualities by Transpiration. The Sun is the Principal Cause of both. For the Particles of Light being most truly Impenetrable, becaus Non-porous; and all Atoms the only Non-porous things in the World; by their Inward fullness of Matter excluding all other Matter out of themselves, they cannot penetrate where they meet, but rest Contiguous, or move by Each other; or if one of them be so fixed, that it cannot mov, it will reverberat the other, Which is the Ground of Reflexion. (KG XXIV 21-29)

The problem with non-porous matter is that it does not penetrate the surface and instead remains contiguous. As chapter 5 demonstrates, Traherne is interested in conveying the idea of interpenetration structurally through the use of brackets as well as italics, the irregular lines of his poetry as well as the use of his punctuation and the use of capitalization. Here he outlines only the importance of the notion of porousness, but throughout all of his work he enacts it. It is important to note that he does not aim to theorize his writing; his writing practices theorize his writing.

A few lines after the above passages on non-porous atoms, Traherne observes:

That these Inward Communications are more real then the other, is manifest, because these are Communications not of Shadows and Images, but things of themselves, Substances being imparted in their own Essential Parts and Spirits. For the Particles of Light that are immited into their Pores, when united to the Particles of the Thing, which they loosen, are in all vital Wights, and Vegetables, by a Balsamick Humor, wherein they are Invested, united to the Subject: (KG XXIV 74-76)
Traherne explains that non-porous articles cannot interpenetrate but need to remain contiguous. But all matter is porous; its crevices can always be filled with pores of light. Here he outlines the way in which nature works, but his observation implicates his way of writing. He uses a few themes—joy, insatiableness, infinity—which one could understand as the solid non-porous objects and reshapes them continually in his writing, each time they are renewed through their unrepeatable shape.

We come across another version of the theme of porousness: ductility. In “Right Apprehension,” the speaker expresses a concern for assigning “tru Esteem” (1) to various objects. He is concerned that “A Globe of Gold” (41) is valued more highly than “The Earth’s rare ductile Soil” (57). Notice that the mass of gold is initially referred to as a “globe,” which is a perfect geometrical form, unlike the imperfect and difficult to define natural objects such as a fire, cloud, or flowers. A contrast establishes itself between the qualities of the “Globe of Gold” and the “ductile Soil.” The “Globe of Gold” is “Barren, . . . Untill’d and Useless” (42) while the “ductile Soil, / . . . duly yields unto the Plowman’s Toil” (57 – 58). The hardness of the gold as well as its impenetrability is further emphasized by its description as “a Metalline Massy Globe” (44), which can never benefit from being adorned by natural objects: “Trees, Flowers, Grass, or Corn” (43). The hardness of the golden globe “binds” (45) whereas its “Splendor blinds” (46).

Obdurateness is not a part of the relationship between the landowner and the earth:

He too well Knows
That no Fruit grows
In his Obdurateness nor yields
Obedience to the heavens like the Fields (F “Right Apprehension” 70-72)

The theme of impenetrability is extended to the qualities of a misdirected landowner:

But being, like his loved Gold,
Stiff, barren, hard impenetrable; tho told
He should be otherwise: He is
Uncapable of any hev’nly Bliss.
His Gold and he
Do well agree;
For he’s a formal Hypocrite,
Like that Unfruitful, yet on th’ outside bright. (F “Right Apprehension” 73-80)

Like the hardened gold, the owner who is focused on gold, is “Stiff, barren, hard
impenetrable” (74).

One might also add that the case concerning the impenetrability of the gold is
enacted in the form of the poem: as if to make the case even stronger that the globe’s
form is non-porous, the stanza in which it is described (41-48) is closed off with a
complete sentence ending with a period whereas the stanza describing the ductile
qualities of the soil extends to the middle of the subsequent stanza (57-68).31 The stanza
on the globe is short and does not extend:

A Globe of Gold must Barren be,
Untill’d and Useless: We should neither see
Trees, Flowers, Grass, or Corn
Such a Metalline Massy Globe adorn:
   As Splendor blinds,
   So Hardness binds;
No Fruitfulness it can produce;
A Golden World can’t be of any Use. (F “Right Apprehension” 41-48)

In contrast to the self-contained stanza on the golden globe, the stanzas on “ductile Soil”
are porous, a condition which is achieved through the lack of punctuation and the
overflowing of the stanzas. This rather long passage is worth citing:

---

31 Note a reversed use of the gold / earth’s amorphousness in Donne’s Elegy 14 “Love’s
Progress.” The speaker does not evaluate all objects in the way in which he describes them here.
This approach is preserved for the evaluation of gold:
   I, when I value gold, may think upon
   The ductileness, the application,
   The wholesomeness, the ingenuity,
   From rust, from soil, from fire ever free. (11-14)
The Earth’s rare ductile Soil,
Which duly yields unto the Plow-man’s Toil,
Its fertile Nature, gives Offence;
And its Improvement by the Influence
Of Hev’n; For, these
Do not well pleas,
Because they do upbraid Mens hardened Hearts,
And each of them an Evidence imparts

Against the Owner; whose Design
It is that Nothing be reputed fine,
Nor held for any Excellence,
Of which he hath not in himself the Sense.
He too well knows
That no Fruit grows
In his Obduratness nor yields
Obedience to the Heavns like the Fields:

But being, like his loved Gold,
Stiff, barren, hard impenetrable; tho told
He should be otherwise; He is
Uncapable of any hev’nly Bliss. (F “Right Apprehension” 57-77)

The ductility of the soil has soaked through the lines of the verse. The verses permeate each other to the effect that it is difficult to pin down a particular segment or stanza which gravitates toward a focused theme. The stiffness and obdurateness of the lover of gold in the stanza quoted above is challenged by the overflow of one stanza into another, but language itself can be redeemed of obdurateness and stiffness.

Traherne’s enactment of the topics which he takes up is also to be seen in the topic of the sponge. In some passages, it is used to adumbrate the cycle of giving and receiving or to represent the idea of what constitutes an inadequate tool for the project of measuring infinity. The image of the sponge, however, unfolds the forces of cornucopia. For instance, in the Dobell “The Circulation” the speaker uses the sponge in order to establish an analogy: the sponge cannot give until it has received neither can we give before we receive:
A Spunge drinks in that Water, which
    Is afterwards exprest.
A Liberal hand must first be rich:
    Who blesseth must be Blest.
The Thirsty Earth drinks in the Rain,
The Trees suck Moysture at their Roots,
Before the one can Lavish Herbs again,
Before the other can afford us Fruits. (D “The Circulation” 43-50)

This is a poem, which takes up an unpopular Christian dogma; typically, giving takes precedence over receiving. Traherne reverses the movement. He establishes a list of other analogies from nature: earth, trees, herbs, and fruits. Before the earth gives off fruit it has to receive rain: “The Thirsty Earth drinks in the Rain” (47); before the tree “can afford us Fruits” (50), they must be watered: “The Trees suck Moysture at their Roots” (49). These natural elements function in the same way in which the invisible spiritual world functions.

In The Kingdom of God, the sponge takes on the role of an inadequate instrument through which to measure infinity:

    The Earth is 22600 2/22 Miles in Compass; and yet Many of those Stars, that seem litte Sparkles are abundantly Greater: Their Multitude is Innumerable, their Distances both from the Earth and from Each other, unconceivable: yet are all these in respect of GOD, but a little Point, in whom this vast and unmeasurable World is as a Spunge in the Ocean, or a little Diamond in the Highest Heavens; nay infinitly lesse if you Suppose it to be confined. (KG XXI 67-73)

The sponge is really a powerless tool, which cannot absorb the moisture of the ocean. It serves to establish an analogy between the smallness of the earth and the grandeur of the universe.

The functionality of the sponge, as all else, which Traherne observes from the natural world, circulates yet again. While the image of the sponge might be used in order
to extend the reciprocity of giving and receiving as well as to suggest its inadequacy as a tool of receiving, it is also used to unfold the forces of cornucopia:

As Spunges gather Moisture from the Earth
(Which seemeth Drie,) in which they buried are;
As Air infecteth Salt; so at my Birth
All these were unperceivd, yet did appear:
   Not by Reflexion, and Distinctly known,
   But, by their Efficacy, all mine own. (D “The Improvment” 79-84)

The speaker notes the imperceptible route through which the world meets the person:
“Not by Reflexion, and Distinctly known / But, by their Efficacy” (83-84). These lines echo the process described earlier in the stanza: the process through which the air infects the salt is as imperceptible as the way in which sponges gather moisture from the seemingly dry earth. One might also recall that processes which resist clear outline are referred to in Select Meditations, especially the reference to “bespangle.” One meets the world not by assuming a position of ultimate knowledge but by being incarnated into the world without one’s knowledge. One can never become fully conscious of the meta-discourse; one is imperceptibly intertwined in the webs of communication, where various traces resist explication and objectification.

A similar concern regarding the existence of the immeasurable, amorphous, and imprecise natural images as representations—metaphors or manifestations—of God are expressed in Robert Herrick’s “To Find God” in His Noble Numbers. In this brief poem, quoted fully below, the speaker directs a number of challenges to the reader, concerning the proof for God’s existence:

Weight me the fire; or canst thou find
A way to measure out the wind?
Distinguish all those floods that are
Mixed in that wat’ry theater,
   And taste thou them as saltless there,
As in their channel first they were.
Tell me the people that do keep
Within the kingdoms of the deep;
Or fetch me back that cloud again,
Beshivered into seeds of rain.
Tell me the motes, dust, sands, and spears
Of Corn, when summer shakes his ears;
Show me that world of stars, and whence
They noiseless spill their influence.
This if thou canst; then show me Him
That rides the glorious cherubim. (Herrick “To Find God”)

The imagery with which Herrick’s speaker confronts the reader echo images which we have examined in Traherne. Both poets are concerned with that which cannot be measured or that which cannot be counted. Both of them use the image of the fire: Traherne uses it for its force while Herrick uses it for its amorphous state. Herrick challenges the reader to “Distinguish all those floods” while Traherne speaks of the subtle ways in which air penetrates moisture. Herrick’s challenge consists in the impossibility to preserve the shape of a cloud while Traherne reveals the joy of a cloud’s shapelessness and dispersal into the sky. Traherne adumbrates the process of the circulation and discusses the porosity of natural objects while Herrick challenges the reader to the impossible project to count the fallen “motes, dust, sand, and spears / Of Corn, when summer shakes his ears” (11-12). Finally, while Traherne is interested in noting “bespangled” and “bestrewn” trajectories, Herrick observes a similar quality in the stars: “They noiseless spill their influence” (14); the act of spilling is as amorphous and unrepeatable as the act of bestrewing. While the general direction can be outlined, the details are unrepeatable; it is unique for each object. Both Traherne and Herrick refer to natural objects whose shape or processes defy clear logical mapping or reconstruction. Unlike Herrick, Traherne adopts the paradoxes of nature in his own writing.
Chapter 4: Unsystematic Trajectories: The Flow of a Non-Systematic Procession

In the opening paragraph in the preface “To the Reader” in *Christian Ethics*, Traherne announces that his project is “to excite their [men’s] Desire, to encourage them to Travel, to comfort them in the Journey, and so at least to lead them to true Felicity, both here and hereafter.” This is not an unfamiliar motif for religious writers. In fact, the mystical stages of development are explained through the metaphor of the journey. Establishing a pattern of progression, especially in Traherne’s works, has been an important question because it provides one with a sense of security of approaching his works. Clements suggests that Traherne uses the general pattern of Christian progress of the soul: innocence, fall, and redemption (16) while Slater argues that the stages familiar from medieval Christian mysticism are valid for Traherne: preparation, purification, illumination, and perfection.

Yet motion is for Traherne of special importance, so much so that motion could be viewed as “The form of Bliss” (CE VII 24). Journeys and trajectories become a way of manifesting spiritual reality. Traherne is always describing objects in motion and circulation, and he prefers to see that which is moving rather than that which is steady or motionless. He considers it a greater wonder to see things moving than to see them standing.

Traherne scholars are at a disadvantage because of the little that is know about Traherne’s journeys. In a writer’s life, journeys could have a different effect on understanding his work; Traherne’s trips and perhaps longer periods of residence in London would enrich and shape our understanding of his career. Gladys Wade’s
biography of Traherne promoted an image of a Traherne as an isolated mystic, but Wade also argued that Traherne left his parish at Credenhill in 1667 to become a chaplain for Sir Orlando Bridgeman never to return to Herefordshire again (88). However, in the new entry on Traherne in the Dictionary of National Biography, Julia Smith makes the case that Traherne spent only the last few months in Teddington. Smith points out that “Traherne was to remain rector of Credenhill until he died in 1674; apart from some temporary absences he was, as his churchwarden reported in 1673, ‘continually resident amongst us’ until early in the year of his death (205) and that “The whole of Traherne’s brief residence at Teddington was overshadowed by illness and death” (207). She mentions several trips between Credenhill and Oxford, “returning to Oxford to take his MA in November 1661 and BD in December 1669” (207). He was also in London in 1673 to arrange the publication of Roman Forgeries. If we do not assume that the status and craftsmanship of Traherne’s works depends on establishing coherence in his works, then the topos of the journey, including its arche, the stages of its progress, and telos need reconsideration. In this chapter, I use the topos of the journey as an entry into the problem of unsystematic structures in Traherne’s texts. My argument is that Traherne’s way of writing tends toward that which is non-systematic and unstructured.

The main purpose and argument of this chapter is to outline the ways in which Traherne’s prose enacts its attention to untraceable trajectories. The project seems almost paradoxical in its presentation: how does one find and present that which is untraceable? Yet there are topoi which allude to the direction of a journey which does not follow a mechanical structure. I approach the unsystematic journey through a multi-faceted
problem, which was important for Traherne and his contemporaries: the process of mechanical processes which work by degrees and which moves between *arche* and *telos*. One side of the problem is that if the process of mechanical operation is given validity, especially theological validity, one’s responses to the question of God’s omnipotence are severely limited. Another aspect of the problem is the argument that if God is omnipotent, He could have created the perfect world at once rather than make it achieve perfection by degrees, and thereby bear pain? Further, if the process by degrees were a non-existent concept, two concomitant problems arise; first, Traherne will have to do away with the concept of exertion which permeates his texts; second, a problem which Traherne’s texts raise has to do with the precise definition of *telos*: is man, God’s perfect creation or His perfecting creation? In the remaining three sections of the chapter, I discuss the special case of ‘flowing’ in irretraceable trajectories as well as the problem of groundless space, where the unsettling zones of maximal proximity and panoramic disorientation are at work. As we will see, the texts demonstrate an imitation of the principle of entropy seen in nature, where order tends toward disorder. In *The Cornucopian Text*, Terence Cave observes that in the Renaissance texts which he discusses “[t]he principle of abundance is contaminated by the principle of entropy” (201). In Traherne’s texts, abundance, multiplicity, and spiritual life are defined by entropy, where entropic disorder is not understood as exhaustibility and chaos but as an abundant play.

Traherne frequently creates a sense of a process which develops by degrees and is accompanied by an exertion of all powers. A number of problems emerge from such a type of movement: first, the problem of pain (pain exists because the perfect world was
not created immediately) and the problem of God’s omnipotence (if God is omnipotent, can He exert Himself continuously?).

The movement by degrees is not a Trahernean invention. Psalms 120-134, sung on the ascent to the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, are a model for a journey, which develops by degrees. Traherne’s contemporaries were also interested in this topos. Herrick’s *Hesperides* (1648) “attempts to suggest a complete progression of delights (itemized in the “Argument of his Book”): rising by degrees, he sings of simple nature (the external world), of the movement of the seasons, of men and women who take part in the festivals of the year, of the role of love in these celebrations, of divine gifts that come from the air (such as dew and rain), of the allegorical meaning of things, and at last of darkness and the final things of life” (Beaurline 54). In the Julia poems from *Hesperides*, Herrick demonstrates the infinite class structure: all about her is celebrated (Beaurline 54). In contrast to Herrick’s interested in the movement by degree, John Ray, discussing moderation rather than the infinite progress by degrees in his *A Persuasive to Holy Life* (1700), insists on Puritan temperance rather than on the excesses of infinite growth (Ray 36).

Sidney’s sonnet 2 of *Astrophil and Stella* demonstrates a speaker defeated by degrees. Sidney’s speaker’s notion of gradual progress by degrees tends toward exhaustibility and ultimately death. The sonnet’s opening lines are:

> Not at first sight, nor with a dribbed shot
> Love gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed,
> But knowne worth did in mine of time proceed,
> Till by degrees it had full conquest got. (Sidney *Astrophil and Stella* Sonnet 2 1-4)

On the difference between gradual and immediate in Milton, see Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance* (1979), p. 12.
Here’s an interesting take on what the gradual method of understanding the self is like. Sidney’s speaker is in the throws of unrequited love. Gradual understanding—“known worth”—is more painful than Cupid’s shot. Sidney’s speaker experiences an understanding which leads to his falling in love. Unlike Traherne’s texts where the enamored love for the multitude of God’s manifestations produces writing that flows, Sidney’s speaker is ever struggling with his writing. Each sonnet is a step, one that is forced, meticulous, and clearly identifiable through the block format of each sonnet. Sidney’s sonnets proceed clearly defined steps as suggested by the visual block format of the sonnet.

A consequence of the approach of Sidney’s speaker to becoming familiar with love is that all he is left with is a paradoxical state of being, one which is torturous for him but which he has to name fortunate: “Now even that footstep of lost libertie / Is gone, and now like slave-borne Muscovite, / I call it praise to suffer Tyrannie” (9-11). Sidney’s speaker is also exasperated by what he perceives as his reality, which is not the source of copia and enjoyment because he is now bound to refashion his reality: “And now employ the remnant of my wit, / To make myself believe, that all is well, / While with a feeling skill I paint my hell” (12-14). The point of Sidney’s sonnet 2 is the speaker’s gradual perception of his “known worth,” which, however, is not a method of copia, even if gradual perception in some contexts could facilitate copia. In Sidney’s case, it is a method of exhausting the somatic energy of the speaker at the expense of the vivid depiction (enargia) of the speaker’s “feeling skill.”

Traherne justifies the process by degrees which tends toward fruition, and he achieves it through a familiar procedure—man was not created perfect because trials
make “felicite more Wellcom” (KG XLII 175). Further, proceeding by degrees is a matter of control and presumes control over the trajectory:

While in those pleasant Paths we talk
‘Tis that tow’rds which at last we walk;
But we may by degrees
Wisely proceed
Pleasures of Lov and Prais to heed,
From viewing Herbs and Trees. (D “Walking” 49-54)

The end of the poem aims to guarantee the freedom of the movement; the movement will not be without fulfillment. Yet the centrifugal force is at its highest in the concluding lines where there is an encouragement that each herb and each tree become the theme of praise. There is a sense of ordered progress, but such ordering is only partially in Traherne’s works.

Unlike his contemporaries, Traherne does not seem to emphasize the concept of a process which works by degrees because it is a rhetorical move which explains the problem of pain, and therefore it also justifies dogmas. According to Aristotle’s definition, the ending, the final cause, resolves the problem of perpetual growth: “The final cause is a telos, and that sort of telos which is not for the sake of something else, but for whose sake everything else is; so that if there is to be a last term of this sort, the process will not be infinite; but if there is no such term, there will be no final cause, but those who maintain the infinite series eliminate the good without knowing it” (Aristotle Metaphysics 994b9-13). In other words, the process by degrees guarantees the extinction and existence of the final fruition. But for Traherne, preserving the procedure

---

33 “If there is some telos of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else, clearly this must be the good and the chief good.” (Aristotle EN 1094a18-22)
that works by degrees is a matter of guaranteeing the existence of a dynamic and cornucopian world.

SM 3.36 adumbrates the dichotomy between process happening gradually as well as a process happening at once. Elimination of time and space are at issue. That is partly Traherne’s point—that if events happen at once, the concept of “process” ceases to exist. Since Traherne appreciates productivity and variety, he does not want to eliminate this process. He justifies even pain and suffering and trials, because trials open an opportunity to display courage and valor, and without such opportunities, the display of courage and valor becomes non-existent. In SM 3.36, Traherne explains the benefits of proceeding by degrees toward a goal (“Eternity of Delight” SM 3.36):

He Advanced Thee, by Admitting Thee into an Eternity of Delights. But why do I not See them all at once? at once Thou mayst see them in a more clear manner, if thou wouldst be more Solicitous and more Diligent. But had He made Thee to see them all at once, thy Joys had been Alterd. which would have been infinitely Inconvenient Since they are the Best that can be. . . . God loveth for special Reasons to proceed by Degrees. Why doeth he not make all fruite perfect in the beginning? Becaus then he had only had ripe fruiteres, now He hath Buds and Blossoms and Green ones, as well as Ripe ones. Now he Hath all: the very time that was Empty, before they Grew, is in its place a Treasure. Had He Seated all in the kingdom of Glory, the kingdom of Glory Had been Infinitly Less, then now it is. (SM 3.36)

The process by degrees, of the ripening of the fruits leads to the type of by degrees process which culminates in an achievement of a telos. But the goal itself—“an Eternity of Delights”—constitutes a process by degrees where telos is non-existent. The benefit of a process is that it contains a variety of stages. In contrast, the achievement of desire excludes process. Traherne’s text aims toward achieving both: a process with and without a goal, so that proliferation and variety can coexist. The process of cornucopian abundance is guaranteed by God’s generosity. He can “distribute his Favors in divers
Degrees and Measures, with a variety as infinit almost as there are Objects to whom they are distributed” (SV XXVIII 23-24). These words echo Traherne’s interest in irretraceable and unsystematic trajectories, trajectories which also make room for that which is systematic.

The problem of not eliminating the process by degrees is that it is inadequate in explaining events. Mechanical operations, as well as mechanisms which work by degrees cannot provide an adequate explanation. The irretraceable and unsystematic journey, the zone of maximal proximity and of groundlessness become the only possible response to that which cannot be explained. This approach and skepticism toward the clarity and explanation is taken up in *The Kingdom of God*:

Life is so Mysterious, a Miraculous a Being, and So Sublime in order of Nature; that as it is superior to all Material things, So is it more Difficult to be Conceived. Its Efficient and Final Causes are assignable: But its material Cause is almost Impossible to be understood, and so is its Formal: Its Instrumental Causes are Easily unfolded. As far as we Can Wade, we will proceed into the Mysterie. God is the efficient Cause of Life; Parents and Organized Bodies in Terrestrial things, the Instrumental. The Final Cause, or End of Life is, that the Glory of the univers might be usefull, and Enjoyed. It is founded in perception, for whatsoever is able to Apprehend, liveth. Were we to define it threfore, we should say. *That Life is an Abilitie to Apprehend, and Move.* For whatsoever liveth is able to Conceiv, and more in like manner: at least inwardly, by its very Conception and Desire. It hath the Principle of Spontaneous or Arbitrary Motion in its Body, tho perhaps it may Want the Instruments, whereby its Body should be moved; an Abilitie to conceiv, or think it must hav of Necessity, and without that there is no Living. They that would by meer Mechanical Operations Solv all the Phænomena of Live, are all as absurd in their Attempt, as it is possible for men to be: For tho we may shew the Way how objects are Applied to the Organs of Sense; How Sounds do Enter the Eare, and Smite upon the Drum; How Figures, and Colors Enter the Ey, and are Represented upon the Retina, in the Brain, or carried by the optick Nerv to the Fancy; How Smels in fumy Exhalations pervade the pores in the Nose, and Tastes in more Solid Juices permeat those of the Tongue: Finally, how tangible Qualities affect the Nerves, and Stir the Fibres that are Rooted in the Brain, and communicat their Impressions by Motions of the Nervs, or Spirits there: yet what that is, that has Power to perceiv the least effect, Impression, or Idea, that is made in the Brain, any more then a looking-glass perceives the Images that are in it, or a
Lute the Quaverings of the Strings that are touched: can by no Principles meerly Mechanical ever be unfolded. (KG XXVIII 1-28)

Here Traherne indicates that he does not agree that mechanical methods of operation can explain the mystery of life. Mechanical operations are retraceable and understandable. They provide control and power. Ultimate control and power are to be renounced, however. The metaphor of “wading” used to describe one’s path suggests that the mystical in life resists clear representation and is therefore untraceable. A trace is seen, but the whole and the totality of knowledge are resisted. Wading in water leaves no visible marks, pressed on the surface, except for a period of time. Traherne mentions that certain mechanical operations can be understood but others, the ultimate stroke of understanding the mystery of life, is always hidden.

The second problem that the process by degree poses is God’s exertion, which verges on the question whether a final goal can be reached. Traherne explores both options, and he also suggests different reasons why one is preferable to the other.

In the KG XIII, he outlines a process by degrees which reaches closure (“till it be consummate with its Period”), but it embraces the process by degrees as well as its centrifugal forces:

So that evry Moment there is a New Increase, And the greatness of our Reciprocall Love growes everlastingly till it be consummate with its Period, which is never attained, as long as there is Room or Time for actions to be multiplied which being renewed, and Repeated to all Eternitie, makes the greatness of our Lov and pleasure infinitely infinite. For least the End to which all this tendeth, should never be attained, which being infinitely Amiable, it is absurd to say, becaus God is infinite in power, and able to atchiev it: His Almighty power so worketh, that in an Instant all this is infused. (KG XIII 175-83)

This passage makes the important point that the generative forces of the process by degrees which tends toward no telos, a point which is echoed also in KG XXXI (“Where
Infinit Wisdom and Power is not only Exerted, but infinitly Multiplied, and Enjoyed wholly by innumerable Persons” (KG XXXI 179-80). But it also raises the important question of God’s exertion. The implications of infinite exertion challenge God’s omnipotence, a challenge issued in KG XVI and worked out here as well as elsewhere:

Some Men say that Almighty power can never be Exerted. A Strange Paradox; And the Reason they giv is as strangely Absurd: [...] And they think their Arguing to be plausible, thus: Power Infinit can never be Exhausted. [...] For tho they think it possible for almighty power to proceed Endlessly, in making things more and more perfect, yet will it never come into their thoughts how he Should attain the last of all those things he is still able to make. His Almighty Power can never come to the End of Eternity, and therefore neither to that End of it self in its Operations. To it is able in it self to make them, yet it cannot make them bec: beginning at the smallest and proceeding by degrees, it can never come to the highest and the greatest. But is it necessary to begin at the smallest? may not the Best be made first? they Consider not, that Almighty power can do that at first, which it can do at last: Nor well Remember, that Wisdom begineth with its End, and conceiveth the Idea of that first for the Sake of which it determineth to make all other things. (KG XVI 16-7, 79-80, 88-99)

The title of the section from which the above excerpt comes from opens with a period:

“.An Objection answered implying that Almighty power cannot Exert it Self. Another Solved touching Gods Infinitie.” This graphic gesture in a sense provides an answer to the challenge—God had already started from the end, from that which is the best. A period, that which defines an ending, is inverted to suggest a beginning.

The answer to the challenge of God’s exertion is also outlined in SM 3.90:

That Almighty God Should never make an Infinite Creature, is impossible to beleiv. Yet he hath made [the] best that can be, which cannot be Less, becaus Almighty power When wholly Exerted can never rest but in infinit Attainment. tis the highest the most excellent attainment, but if it hath made then the Best that can be, it hath made [it] infinite. Yea but can He not infinitly Preceed? yes. Then infinitly more perfect then the most Perfect may be made. He can make a Sand, a creature above that as Glorious as the Sun. Another a bove that as far as the Sun is above the Sand, And so Proceeding by infinit Steps, for ever. But if He Pleas to Exert all His Power, And at one infinit Endeavor attain a creature that shall include them all: beyond that He can go no further, because infinit Differences
and Degrees of Excellency are at once attained. Hath He don this? yes. How Shall we know: Because He hath made a creature infinitely most Perfect. (SM 3.90)

In the Centuries, Traherne cites passages from Pico della Mirandola’s oration on the dignity of man: “for which caus Picus Mirandula admirably saith [. . . ] What in this World was most Admiraible?, Answered, MAN” (C 4.74). Similarly, in The Commentaries of Heaven, under the section entitled “Acquaintance,” Traherne concludes with a poem addressed to the dichotomy between man having the goal of finding out “all the Treasures of Eternitie” (238) and man becoming “the Great and Spacious End / Of all GODs Works” (243-44). In this poem, Traherne reverses the direction of the journey: one does not walk toward a goal, one is the goal. The collision of arche and telos into one is seen also in KG as well as in SE. In KG, Traherne admits that it is a strange fact that the sun would be the father of itself, and a son to itself (KG XX 114-117). Similarly, in SE the same idea is echoed: “the Deitie is the fountain and the End of Things” (SE 441).

Ultimately for Traherne, the progress by degrees is not as important as the act of continual movement and variety. In Christian Ethics, we encounter a pindarique poem which is especially revealing of Traherne’s understanding of variety. He does not accept the static states in life but endorses movement, energy, and employment. In this poem, the speaker gives us the insight that contentment is a lamentable psychological state:

Contentment is a sleepy thing!
If it in Death alone must die;
A quiet Mind is worse than Poverty!
    Unless it from Enjoyment spring!
That’s Blessedness alone that makes a King! (CE VII 1-5)

Later the speaker specifies that “True Joyes alone Contentment do inspire, / Enrich Content, and make our Courage higher. / Content alone’s a dead and silent Stone:” (CE
VII 10-12). This is quite unlike what we find in *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe’s father had instructed him to seek contentment in life, but Traherne does not seek this. For him exertion is a lot more important. This poem answers the question regarding the level of surprise in one’s way of life: “Employment is the very life and ground / Of Life itself; whose pleasant Motion is / The form of Bliss:” (CE VII 22-25). Traherne’s employment endorses Crusoe’s adventures. In fact, in *Christian Ethics*, Traherne admits that continual exertion during one’s life is the normative state of being:

PERFECT life is the full exertion of perfect power. It implies two things, Perfection of Vigour, and perfection of intelligence, and activity of life, reaching through all Immensity, to all Objects whatsoever; and a freedome from all Dulness in apprehending. An exquisite Tenderness of perception in feeling the least Object, and a sphere of activity that runs parallel with the Omnipresence of the Godhead. (CE 18)

The theme of exertion is not only scattered throughout Traherne’s works, but we find that Traherne thematizes it and enacts it in his writing. In the Dobell “My Spirit,” the speaker defines the “extended orb of Joy” (D “My Spirit” 86) as “a Mind / Exerted for it saw Infinitie” (D “My Spirit” 99-100). The extended orb revises its limits, but it is ambiguous if this state is finalized or continually revised. We can find the answer in *Seeds of Eternity* where Traherne states that the divine soul “is able to prie without restraint or Limitation into all Existences” (SE 431-32). Further, exertion is a constitutive part of love. In the unfinished fragment on “Love,” Traherne writes: “An Act of Love is the Power of Loving exerted freely: and when it is exerted, it is by its Essence Good and Gracious to its object (Fragment on “Love” 123-124). Since “the power of loving is exerted freely” then exertion is intimately linked with freedom. For Traherne, exertion and movement are the normative state of life.
Herbert’s sonnet “A Wreath” develops a familiar *topos*—the journey toward God is straightforward but man’s ways are crooked. Thus a contrast is established between a straight and correct path of movement to the right *telos* and the wavy and crooked path to the right *telos*. The sonnet is about the crooked journey which Herbert’s speaker takes and is compared to the straight line which his life should follow:

A wreathed garland of deserved praise,
Of praise deserved, unto thee I give,
I give to thee, who knowest all my wayes,
My crooked winding wayes, wherein I live,
Wherein I die, not live: for life is straight,
Straight as a line, and ever tends to thee,
To thee, who art more farre above deceit,
Then deceit seems above simplicitie.
Give me simplicitie, that I may live,
So live and like, that I may know, thy wayes,
Know them and practise them: then shall I give
For this poore wreath, give thee a crown of praise. (Herbert “A Wreath” 1-12)

Unlike Traherne, Herbert sets up a different contrast. The crooked path needs mending. For Traherne, there’s a wrong goal, which produces dark paths, but there is also the right goal, which could lead to a multitude of right goals; at the same time the trajectory between the *arche* and the *telos* might be obscure and untraceable. This is especially well demonstrated in the opening of the *Centuries*.

Like his contemporaries, Traherne explores the problem of a journey tending toward the wrong *telos*. In SM 2.11, Traherne echoes the idea expressed in the Dobell “The Design”: “the Great Queen / Of Bliss . . . . and the Soul, no one Pretender ought / Thrust in, to Captivat a Thought” (D “The Design” 33-36). In SM 2.11, people are ready to take up paths which are not necessarily distinctly devised, and the goal shapes the trajectory:
By corrupting them selves and turning after vanity they have Blinded the world and me in like manner. Thick Darkness covereth the Nations, and Gross Darkness the people. which is chiefly contracted by their Inventing and following other Treasures, for by magnifying Riches of their own Devising, they have Covered the Treasures of Innocent Eden, forgotten the Delights of God, Buried in oblivion them selves and the world; Eclipsed the clear and open Joys of True Felicity. (SM 2.11)

The path is not determined by the proper goal and final destination; the “pretenders” have assumed the rightful place of “the Great Queen of Bliss.” Like other instances, however, the path is not clearly identified, and is subject to continual modification and invention. When the pretender stands between the soul and its bliss, the distance is dark and the road imperceptible.

The right way to determine the goal is explained in various places, but in SM 4.6 there is an important example: “Over the Gate of Apollos oracle there was this Inscription. Know thy selfe. As if by that alone we were Directed to the Treasuries of all understanding, to the Abisses and Depths of wisdom and Knowledge. For he that Knows the Powers of the Soul, Shall See Himselfe an infinit Creature” (SM 4.6). The difference between the right goal and the Pretender-telos is that with the former the path is clear while with the latter the path is dark. The difference between the two is that on the journey toward the right goal, the path can be associated with creative freedom. With the latter, it was associated with destructive chaos. Yet, the right goal does not always guarantee a clear path. In the Dobell “The Demonstration,” the speaker makes the case that that journeys oriented toward the right goal are not always clear and cannot be clearly explained.

In Christian Ethics, Traherne provides another poem, which delineates the same line of juxtaposition between right and wrong telos:
Mankind is sick, the World distemper’d lies,  
Opprest with Sins and Miseries. 
Their Sins are Woes; a long corrupted Train  
Of Poyson, drawn from Adam’s vein,  
Stains all his Seed, and all his Kin  
Are one Disease of Live within.  
They all torment themselves!  
The World’s one Bedlam, or a greater Cave  
Of Mad-men, that do always rave. (CE VI 1-9)

The speaker depicts a world governed by chaos. This is not the world which is spacious because the subjects are “oppressed with Sins and Miseries” (2). The sense of claustrophobia and chaos lurks in these few lines. Traherne also gives us the trajectory which the subjects of his poem have created—“a long corrupted Train / of Poyson” (3-4)—and immediately follows this by stating its sources (arche): “drawn from Adam’s vein” (4). The end of the poem also suggests the haphazardness of the world through the description of the world as a bedlam. Not only is the world haphazard. In fact, as we shall see haphazardness is not strange to Traherne, but its claustrophobic darkness is what separates it from what Traherne values. The world which Traherne describes here is a cave which is full of raving mad-men. The world which Traherne describes in the rest of his poetry and which he endorses is filled with infinite trajectories.

In the Dobell “Wonder” the speaker reveals that the conditions for journeying toward the wrong telos are self-destructive since they flee from the speaker’s eyes without any effort on the part of the speaker:

Cursd and Devisd Properties,  
With Envy, Avarice  
And Fraud, those Feinds that Spoyl even Paradice,  
Fled from the Splendor of mine Eys.  
And so did Hedges, Ditches, Limits, Bounds,  
I dreamd not ought of those,  
But wandered over all mens Grounds,  
And found Repose. (D “Wonder” 49-52)
As soon as Traherne’s speaker points out that the “Cursd and Devisd Properties” (49) have left on their own, he reveals a different world; the speaker is wandering through all boundaries which are placed in the terrains which he surveys. He is wandering “over all mens Grounds.”

A familiar generative force is the deferral in narratives. Balachandra Rajan outlines the acts of deferral in Spenser’s The Faerie Queene which produce a text filled with centrifugal forces, a text which is conditioned to continue ad infinitum. A similar outline of the proliferating journey is to be seen F’s “Dissatisfaction,” in which Traherne’s speaker creates a taxonomy of telos: a telos of cessation and a telos of continual fruition. Before the speaker finds the right telos, he poses the goal of finding the telos of fruition. The poem opens thus: “In Cloaths confin’d, my weary Mind / Persu’d Felicity; / Throu ev’ry Street I ran to meet / My Bliss:” (F “Dissatisfaction” 1-4).

These lines are conspicuously indented, and the indentation seems to emphasize the meeting’s occurrence. The end of the line is like the end of the goal—to meet someone; it is a signal of the fruition of “bliss.” The poem continues with a description of the speaker’s tele:

O where, the place of holy Joy!
Will nothing to my Soul som Light convey!
In ev’ry House I sought for Health,
Searcht ev’ry Cabinet to spy my Wealth.
   I knockt at ev’ry Door,
Askt ev’ry Man I met for Bliss,
   In ev’ry School, and Colledg, sought for this:
   But still was destitute and poor. (F “Dissatisfaction” 7-14)

The speaker elaborates that his next tele is connected to searching the skies, and the stars, but the telos is not fulfilled. And his next step of the journey is a return: “Then back
dissatisfy’d / To earth I came; among the Trees, / In Taverns, Houses, Feasts, and Palaces, / I sought it, but was still deny’d” (F “Dissatisfaction” 25-28). The arche for these multiple tele is what is highlighted in the title: dissatisfaction. Later in the poem he states that the propelling force behind the proliferating journey is his thirst: “My Thirst did burn.” The search of the right telos is still problematized: “But where, O whither should my Spirit turn! / . . . / But then, Where is? What is, Felicity?” (F “Dissatisfaction” 50, 66).

With respect to the taxonomy of tele evident in Traherne, a comparison with George Hebert’s use of telos would demonstrate that even though Herbert also makes use of tele along moral grounds (right/ wrong), and even though he also makes use of the commonplace of the crooked path of the sinner, his poetry, as is most evident in “A Wreath,” shows that there is a methodological process of development where each line begins with the ending of the previous line: the poetry enacts a methodology which is starkly unpalatable and uncustomary for Traherne. Unlike Herbert, Traherne, as seen in “Dissatisfaction”—and other examples would not be difficult to come by—uses the jagged lines, the focus on verbs as a starting point which proliferate in multiple directions as a way to break free from any perceived methodologies. If there is gesturing toward using a methodology—such as a reference to how a particular passage, or even a chapter, would be developed,—the gesturing becomes merely part of the overflow and unsystematic rendition of ideas.

The other tele which Traherne lists are: philosophy and books or sages. He issues a challenge to philosophy: “canst thou descry / My Bliss?” (59-60). The speaker’s journey arrives at an end, and closure, when he finds out that he is looking “For som fair
Book, fill’d with Eternal Song” (78). The speaker is not precise in his language because the deixical pronouns obfuscate the text: “O that! my Soul: for that I burn: / That is the Thing for which my heart did yern” (F “Dissatisfaction” 79-80). Traherne’s speaker is looking for an “Eternal Song,” for a song which is continually being written, and which does not simply resist closure, for resistance requires effort.

As soon as the speaker realizes what he is looking for, he posits various other tele: not so much in the form of a question and a goal but as a form of praise and a telos. He has already arrived but at the same time the journey continues:

What Sacred Ways! What hevn’y Joys!
Which Mortals do not see?
What hidden Springs! What glorious Things
Abov!
What kind of Live among them led may be
In Lov!
What Causes of Delight they have!
What pleasing joyous Objects God them gave!
This mightily I long’d to know;
Oh, that som Angel these would to me shew! (F “Dissatisfaction” 85-94)

The ambivalence of these expressions is in their exclamatory function. Such statements could easily be converted into a question by the change of the speaker’s intonation or by the change of the punctuation. An exclamatory statement indicates the finality and the arrival, the fruition and closure of an event. An interrogative statement would announce the starting point of the journey; it could constitute the arche and could indicate the direction into which the journey will steer. These expressions can easily tip over the side of a question, thereby becoming a starting point rather than an end point of the journey.

Having discovered his goal, Traherne’s speaker rejoices:

O this! In this I hop’d for Bliss;
Of this I dreamt by night;
For this by Day I gasping lay;
Mine Eys
For this did fail: For this, my great Delight
The Skies
Became, in hopes they would disclose
My Sacred Joys, and my desir’d Repose. (F “Dissatisfaction” 99-106)

There is drama in this poem because the Bible as the answer to his quest is not specified until the end of the poem. The speaker is in the midst of celebration and the use of the deixical pronouns (“this”) as well as their repetition (“this” is repeated six times) in the whole stanza. As someone in the midst of joy, the speaker is not interested in orienting the reader in the environment; the deixical pronouns indicate an immediacy of presence and sharing of the same context. The deferral of the answer is sustained until the end of the poem (“but still deny’d, / I sought in ev’ry Library and Creek / Until the Bible me supply’d” [F “Dissatisfaction” 110-112]). Finding the answers does not constitute the ending of the speaker’s journey. On the contrary, the journey begins with the understanding of the answer.

Irretraceable trajectories are not specifically Traherne’s domain, but he explores them to a considerable extent. Some of his contemporaries use the image of irretraceable journey in different ways from Traherne. In “To Perilla,” Herrick’s speaker concludes the poem with the end of the physical journey and with the speaker’s involvement in it: “Then shall my ghost not walk about, but keep / Still in the cool and silent shades of sleep” (Herrick “To Perilla” 17-18). The image of the walking is exhausting and becomes a symbol of the speaker’s restlessness. The speaker’s restless directionless walking contrasts with the paradox of Traherne’s joyful directionless journey which has already found its rest.
Traherne develops the idea of confronting a baffling terrain in KG, where aiming to resolve the problem of pain, he sets out to explain that one’s development and final glory depends on the ultimate dependence and respect for God. He points out that stepping into the final realm, the top ladder, might be disorienting considering that one is not prepared for such a stage. He contemplates: “It is not Seldom that too Great a Light blindeth the Eys, and the Excessiv Glory of too Strong a Splendor turneth into a Palpable Obscurity. Thus God by Reason of the Transcendent Glory of his Essence, dwelleth in that Light which is inaccessible: Which being abov the Reach of our Understanding, Solomon calleth the Thick Darkness” (KG XLII 22-26). The trajectory which Traherne outlines toward the final cause takes place in “a Palpable Obscurity” (KG XLII 23), a phrase which is reminiscent of Milton’s “palpable obscure” (PL 2.406). While Satan’s use of the phrase aims to discourage his listeners to take up the journey to earth by making the journey sound impossible as well as undesirable, Traherne’s use of the phrase offers the phrase as a way to indicate God’s unknowability. For Milton’s Satan, the state of not knowing is a state of fear; for Traherne, the state of not knowing is the state of expecting God’s variety, which can include fear: “Righteousness and Judgment are the Habitation of his Throne, yet Clouds and Darkness go before his face, because the Beauty of it is unknown” (KG XLII 29-30).

Stanley Stewart notes the processes through which Traherne’s works operate: “Extend, expand, flow, stream: those elements of diction which erode the idea of set position in a frame of space tend also to undermine the integrity of isolated moments and of particular biographies” (Stewart 131). For Traherne, the uncertain is normative even when the speaker tends toward the right telos. In fact, the conditions of the journey are
unknownable. The Dobell “The Demonstration” makes this point clear, where the speaker explains that

The Highest Things are Easiest to be shewn,
And only capable of being Known.
A Miste involves the Ey,
While in the Middle it doth lie;
And till the Ends of things are seen,
The Way’s uncertain that doth stand between. (D “The Demonstration” 1-6)

These verses convey the idea that the way from point A to point B—between the eye and the object—is unknown. There is no certainty and no security in finding the way: “The Way’s uncertain that doth stand between,” i.e. between the eye and the object. Further the matter between the eye and the object is mist or clouds, which obscure the way to the desired end. The end, however, is clear. A few lines later the speaker asserts that there is “No Certainty, where no Perfection’s shewn” (16); in the area where there is no perfection, there is insecurity, and there is also lack of clarity. Traherne acknowledges that the goal is what can be known: “The Highest Things are . . . only capable of being Known.”

In the opening of the Centuries, Traherne is outlining the unknown and unknowable goal for his journey. Traherne openly declares: “We lov we know not what; and therefore evry Thing allures us. . . . So is there in us a World of Lov to somewhat, tho we know not what in the World that should be. There are Invisible Ways of Conveyance by which we tend to it. Do you not feel yourself Drawn with the Expectation and Desire of som Great Thing?” (C 1.2).34 From the very start of the Centuries, Traherne announces that both the goal of the journey as well as the trajectories

34 Notice the similarity between this statement and what the author of The Cloud of Unknowing states: “It is enough that you should feel moved lovingly by you know not what, and that in this inward urge you have no real thought for anything less than God, and that your desire is steadily and simply turned towards him” (Penguin, 1978, Ch 34, p. 101).
which he outlines are unknown and are going to be untraceable. There are “Invisible Ways of Conveyance” which are not plotted out logically but toward which we “tend.” To “tend” toward a certain way is not the same as to adopt a knowing and powerful perspective of knowing one’s goal and knowing as well as possessing the goal. Traherne strengthens this impression of “tending toward a goal” through his use the verb “draw”: he asks his reader if she does not feel “Drawn with the Expectation and Desire of Som Great Thing?” Such a magnetic reaction is figured in other poems but in starkly different environment. For instance, in Sir John Suckling’s “Against Fruition [2],” the speaker discusses a magnanimous desire, the one to which Traherne refers to in C 1.2. In Suckling’s “Against Fruition [2]” (Fragmenta Aurea [1646]), the speaker expresses the notion that the male expectation is too much for any woman to satisfy: “That monster expectation feeds too high / For any woman e’er to satisfy” (“Against Fruition [2]” 15-16). Since men do not like easy victories, he advises women to defer the fruition:

Then, fairest mistress, hold the power you have,
By still denying what we still do crave;
In keeping us in hopes strange things to see,
That never were, nor are, nor e’er shall be. (Suckling “Against Fruition” 23-26)

The monster expectation and the monstrous desire are part of the game of control and possession. In Traherne, there is no such control and no question of possession. But the relationship which Suckling outlines is giving women power over men through the manipulation of unfulfilled desire.

Besides the sequential narrative, which can employ deferral strategies, Traherne uses spatial disposition as a centrifugal force as a generative method. The point that he establishes is that temporal dispositions are countered by spatially irretraceable trajectories. In SM 3.99, he uses the image of the linear journey which explodes in a
proliferating at-onceness. In SM 3.99, Traherne writes a poem, which he opens with a description of his trajectory in life:

My Growth is Strange! at first, I onely knew
The Gates and streets mine Infancy did veiw
In those first walls. But Thence my nimble Ey
In Speedy Sort did to the mountains flie
Command the fields and make the Eden Mine
Which round about these Citty wals did shine,
Then other Citties at a Distance found
In unexpected Sort my Powers Crownd.
Then Seas, and Lands that were beyond the seas
New Kingdoms Distant did my spirit Pleas
Yea all the nations of the Peopled Earth
Became my joy my Melodie and mirth
My Light my wealth, The Skies those higher Things
The Sun the Stars the Holy Angels Wings
All These Adorned at once my Heavenly sphere
And round about me did my Joys appear. (SM 3.99 1-16)

The interesting point about this passage is that the paths that are taken are not preconceived and pre-established. There is no predestination at work. The speaker finds his own development “strange,” and the speediness with which directions are changed is also surprising. The speediness seems to reflect the kinds of gaps, which we noticed earlier. The element of surprise and unexpected change of direction is emphasized through repetition: the speaker first mentions the phrase “Speedy sort” and later the phrase “unexpected Sort.” Further, the language indicating the consecutive progression of the events, expressed through such vocabulary as “at first,” “Infancy,” “Thence,” and “Then” does not indicate preconceived or a predetermined plan of the development of the events; however, it shows a linear progression of events. The end result of the surprising turns of events is that “All These Adorn at once my Heavenly sphere / And round about me did my Joys appear.” All of the consecutive events seem to be occurring simultaneously. They are no longer organized in a consecutive linear order since they
appear “round about” the speaker. Once the speaker has arrived at the moment of immediate occurrence (“at once-ness”) every object proliferates: the nations proliferate into “my joy my Melodie and mirth / My light my wealth” (SM 3.99 12-13), and the centrifugal force which we just observed is followed by a centripetal force: “The Skies those higher Thinks / The Sun the Stars the Holy Angels Wings / All These Adorned at once my Heavenly Sphere.” In this phrase, the speaker sums up the proliferation which he observes from the natural and heavenly world—the skies, the sun, the stars, and “the Holy Angels Wings.” These worlds are explicitly summarized into “All These” and brought together to the same location: “my Heavenly sphere.” But the centripetal force is met once more by a centrifugal force because the following line employs the proliferating movement of the centrifugal force—the objects move “round about me.” The phrase “at once” seems to be the vortex where the two forces meet since it brings together the diversity. But as we have seen earlier, an act which occurs at once subtracts from abundance because it eliminates the possibility of an act which develops through a process. In fact, the infinite play among the elements is a celebration of creativity and abundance.

Spatial dispositions challenge chronological outlines in another way—through a trajectory which cannot lead back to its arche. C 2.22 makes this case:

Motion being far greater Evidence of Live, then all Lineaments whatsoever. Colors and features may be in a dead picture, but Motion is always attended with life. What shall I think therfore when the Winds Blow, the Seas roar, the Waters flow, the Vapours ascend, the Clouds flie, the Drops of rain fall, the Stars march forth in Armies, the Sun runneth Swiftly round about the World? Can all these things move so without a Life or Spring in Motion? But the Watches mov, and so doth the Hand that pointeth out the figures. This being a motion of Dead things. Therfore hath GOD created Living ones: that by Lively Motions, and Sensible Desires, we might be sensible of Deity. They Breath, they see, they feel, they Grow, they flourish, they know, they lov. O what a World of Evidences. We are
lost in Abysses, we now are absorpt in Wonders, and Swallowed up of Demonstrations. Beasts Fowls and Fishes teaching and evidencing the Glory of their Creator. But these by an Endless Generation might succeed each other from Everlasting. Let us therefore survey their Order, and see by that whether we cannot Discern their Governer. The Sun and Moon and Stars shine, and by shining minister influences to Herbs and flowers, these Grow and feed the Cattle: the seas also and springs minister unto them, as they do unto fowls and fishes. All which are subservient unto Man a more Noble creature, endued with understanding to Admire His Creator Who being King and Lord of this World, is able to Prize all in a Reflexiv maner, and render Praises for all with Joy, living Blessedly in the fruition of them. None can Question the Being of a Dietie, but one that is ignorant of Mans Excellencies, and the Glory of his Dominion over all the Creatures. (C 2.22)

Not only does it return us to the point which Traherne makes in his attempt to resolve the problem with continual progress but it also outlines a procedure for arriving to the cause rather than to a telos which has propelled the action of search. It demonstrates a way of thinking; Traherne uses his unstructured and unidentifiable journey as a thinking and even writing procedure. The order which he describes of tracing back to the origin is made difficult because of the continual proliferation of the subjects: “these by an Endless Generation might succeed each other from Everlasting”—would such an “Endless Generation” collapse and prevaricate the linear mode of tracing the trajectory back? So let’s retrace the passage:

Sun + Moon – Herbs + Flowers – Cattle – Seas + Springs – Cattle, Fowls and Fishes — Man – Creator – Praise

It seems that the passage starts to falter at the third round: first, the sun and the moon are explained as the causes for the herbs and the flowers; second, the herbs and the flowers minister to the cattle. At this point, Traherne does not continue with tracing back the continuum simply because he needs to amplify the connections. One might think that it is not a uni-linear connection which leads to the cause because the subsequent
explanation thickens the trajectories. Instead of one trajectory leading to the cattle, we are provided with two: the first is the herbs and the flowers and the second is the seas and the springs. However, the subsequent move does not continue toward a cause and effect; at this point, Traherne thickens one of the traces along the trajectory: he continues with the connection to cattle, fowls and fishes. Only later to reach to man, creator and praise. When Traherne reaches to the stage in which he deals with “man” he no longer establishes causes and effects or rather effects leading back to a cause because he surpasses the creator and reaches to praise. He is not only absorbed in abysses from which he cannot find his way back. He does not want to find his way back and provide a guarantee for his trajectory. The journey is unrepeatable.

The trajectories are not only irretraceable; they are also very delicate. The speaker from F’s “Admiration” pauses on the “lylly and Rosy Train” (23) which creates an identifiable but very delicate trajectory. The irretraceability of the trajectory is conveyed through an appropriate vocabulary. The speaker from the Dobell “The Wonder” admits to such a trajectory: “But Wandered over all mens Grounds, . . .” where “wandered” especially in the phrase “wandered over” does not suggest a straightforward and linear trajectory. The same theme is echoed in SM 2.93, where the speaker aims to establish both a location and a space: “because He is Eternal, and eternaly here, infinit in Essence and Infinitly here, therefore can we walk over all the Regions of his Eternity and Infinity here, walk over all within our selves whose souls have neither Limits Walles nor Borders” (SM 2.93). The repetition of “here” creates a space. The contrast between “here” and “all the Regions of his Eternity” as well as “within ourselves” enlarges the space. He establishes three spaces: the location “here”; the spaces created by God’s
infinity; and the interior space. The reference to “here” in comparison to the other spaces indicates a one-dimensional space; it establishes a plane of reference, the horizontal axis. But when he mentions “all the Regions of his Eternity” as well as “ourselves whose souls have neither limits Walles nor Borders,” he evokes the image of space with multiple horizontal as well as vertical frames of reference. The verbal phrase “walk over” creates the image of spaciousness and its repetition strengthens the multidimensionality of these phrases. The image of “walk[ing] within ourselves” suggests another image of spaciousness. The passage only seems to delineate a precise trajectory; on the contrary, defining a space which has no borders creates the space for a now which has no essence. Traherne challenges the notion of traceability in terrains which are unruly as well as in terrains which are fairly uniform. For instance, in KG XXIV, Traherne focuses on the straight line of the “Transpirations of the earth” to the sun, but he concludes that they are “in direct Lines approaching towards it” and only “by Accident” related to the earth (KG XXIV 164-167). In other words, the earth “stand[s] in the Way of their Passage to the Sun” (KG XXIV 171). Even though he discusses the straight line to the sun, his main purpose is to indicate the difficulty along the way and, in effect, the impossibility of a straight line:

I am tedious here, but the benefits will be Endless. For upon the Knowledg of these things, we are able Intelligently to have Communion with GOD; to admire his Art; and See his Skill; to Adore his Widsom, Goodness and power; to delight in the Methods and proceedings of his Work: To Survey the difficulties though which a Way is hewn (as it were) throu so many Rocks before he can attain his End; and the many Intricacies, and turnings and Windings through which his Providence passeth, before his Work can be Expedite, and free from Inconveniences, is Good: That we discern the Council, and Advice that is taken, in so deep, and Intricate a Design, So long as Wary a Contrivance: That we may believ in GOD. (KG XXIV 214-223)
Nature’s processes are properly speaking irretraceable; they challenge idealized and cleaned-up representations. Traceability idealizes, cleans up, and creates uniformity. But idealization would deprive Traherne of his approach which allows messiness to occur even in his own work. A similar trajectory is outlined in the Dobell “The Enquirie” where the speaker states:

Even Holy Angels may com down  
To walk on Earth, and see Delights,  
That feed and pleas, even here, their Appetites.  
Our Joys may make a Crown  
For them. And in his Tabernacle Men may be  
Like Palmes we mingled with the Cherubs see. (D “The Enquirie” 13-18)

These lines create the distinction between act of “com[ing] down” and “walk[ing] on Earth.” The vertical movement is supplemented by a horizontal one but is complicated by the references to “mingling.” The initial movement in the stanza is clearly marked so that it designates the horizontal and the vertical axes, but by the end of the stanza, the clarity of the trajectories become blurred and irretraceable. The mingling of men and cherubims is like the mingling and natural dispersal of the growth of palm trees. Nature does not follow mechanically established rules of operation; similarly, the interaction between the human and the divine cannot be clearly and mechanically explained away.

A journey which flows resists mechanical and clearly delineated structures, but it is also necessarily related to aquatic imagery: streams, springs, rivers. The metaphor for fluidity, the themes with which it is associated, overflows into other categories of knowledge. Marjorie Hope Nicolson’s The Breaking of the Circle (1950) concentrates on the ways in which Francis Bacon’s experimental “new learning” destroyed the “circle of perfection” associated with the Ptolemaic geocentric universe. The geocosm (the study of earth), macrocosm (the universe), and microcosm (man) neatly fit into concentric
circles, but their stability was shattered by causes which have provided for a lively debates among historians of science. Nicolson believes that the connection between the development of science and its influence on poetry is uni-directional: science influences poetry, but not *vice versa*. Certainly, Traherne’s contemporaries had to deal with the different way of thinking regarding William Harvey’s discovery. William Harvey’s discovery of the circulation of the blood through the heart, which might have been borrowed from Arab sources, was announced in 1616 and published in 1628. Harvey’s reliance on mechanical ideas found expression in his discovery of circulation of the blood, a discovery which would substitute Galen’s theory of the consumption of the blood by the body, hence the practice of blood letting. However, in *From Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (1957), Alexandre Koyré argues that the seventeenth-century scientific revolution was not prompted by Galileo’s and Newton’s discoveries but by a shift in perspective. And so, Traherne stands on the cusp of two important periods. One of them discards the neatly ordered geocosm, microcosm, and macrocosm and seeks to establish a reliance on reason and experimentation rather than on the alogical mysticism and revelation; for Koyré, for instance, this first strand claims its origin from Nicolas Cusanus’ mystical writings where Cusanus reserves the adjective ‘infinite’ to God but claims that the world needs to be understood as indeterminate. The other period which Traherne’s writings straddle is associated with an emphasis on the mechanical operations of nature sought eventually, especially during the Enlightenment, to bring about order, symmetry, freedom, and happiness through reason. Traherne was writing in this pivotal time and is closely associated with the Cambridge Platonists, who were able to reconcile the opposition between logic and faith. It is through writers like Traherne that Edward
Grant’s thesis in *Much Ado About Noting: Theories of Space and Vacuum from the Middle Ages to the Scientific Revolution* (1981) finds its validity. Unlike Koyre, Grant argues that it was the divinization of space that brought about the scientific revolution rather than Copernican heliocentric cosmology or Newtonian physics. In this section, I would like to draw attention to the theme of fluidity, which stands in contrast to the Hobessian mechanical interpretation of the world. I would particularly demonstrate connections between these themes and how they are enacted in Traherne’s writing style. The *topos* of the water is a familiar device for exploring various themes, including the theme of trajectories—planned or unplanned. In *Arcadia*, Sidney plays with the idea of the way in which the environment influences the character’s way of thinking. When in Book 3, Dorus, the Prince of Musidorus, is treated with the vehemence of romance lover who should hide his feelings, his emotional pain is revealed to the reader in the following manner: “Then he (as one, who fallen in the bottom of some deep water, coming to float above, in sight of land receiveth some comfort, though still in danger) began to reassemble his dispersed spirits again, looking more cheerfully. But ere his thoughts (every one of them overflowing another) could settle themselves in words, she [Pamela] preventing the violence of so sudden a change, did call to her sister” (610). Dorus’s thinking mirrors his environment. The disarray of the water waves has dispersed Dorus’s spirit as well as his thoughts. The connection between mind and words is also explored in the interaction between Zelmane and Gynecia; in her address to Zelmane, Gynecia says that the thoughts are the overflows of the mind (655). The *topos* of the water is also used in seventeenth-century poetry, as in Herrick’s “The Hourglass” where the hourglass is filled with “many wat’ry syllable” (8) as well as in Charles Cotton’s “To My
Dear and Most Worthy Friend, Mr. Isaak Walton” (1689), where Cotton’s clear writing style is echoed in his poetry: “A Southern gale to curl the Stream” (31). As in Sidney, the metaphor of fluidity is used to describe ways of poetic styles. Beaumont, for instance, through his possible influence by Gregory Nazianzen, was not in favor of Spenser’s rhymes because he preferred “fluid rather than patterned forms” (Trotter 69). The mystical paradox of overflowing and inexhaustible water fountain is figured in Sir John Dehman as well as in Richard Crashaw whose writing styles reshape the paradox. On the one hand, we have the famous lines by Sir John Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill” (1642-68)) which creates a sense of balance and poise: “Though deep, yet clear; though gentle, yet not dull; / Strong without rage, without o’erflowing full” (191-192). On the other hand, stands Richard Crashaw whose jagged style reflects the ebullience of the stream:

Hail, sister springs,
Parents of silver-footed rills!
Ever-bubbling things!
Thawing Crystal! Snowy hills,
Still spending, never spent! . . . (Crashaw “The Weeper” 1-5)

Both Denham and Crashaw center around the paradox of impossibility to overflow, a paradox familiar to mystical writers like Gregory of Nyssa.

Like his contemporaries, Traherne uses the image of the water and its associations with the construction of reality, and this imagery further influences his own writing style, creating prose which is flowing and infinitely overflowing where the boundaries of the moment do not exist; arche and telos do not bracket the moment. Like his contemporaries, Traherne is interested in the connection between flow and the mind, and in his works, the connection is extended to his writing. In SM 3.65 (“Too much openness and proneness to Speak are my Diseas. Too easy and complying a Nature. Speaking too
much and too Long in the Best Things”), Traherne famously expresses a concern for his profuse style of expression, and in KG he echoes the anxiety associated with boundlessness:

The Effusions and profusions of an Impotent Mind, and loosness and effeminacy of an unbridled Spirit, the Easiness of one that Pours out himself upon leight occasions, nay the uneasiness of a Dissolute and watery Estate, wherein there is a proneness to waste, and Expend its Essence in vain overflowings, becaus the Soul is weary of it self; all these are far from him: And yet with Infinit desire doth he Communicate himself becaus his Goodness is Infinit. [. . .] And being able to contain, where holiness and Honor require; is Infinitly desirous to abound there, where Holiness and Honor Command. (KG XXVIII 205-214)

Occasionally, he makes various metatextual gestures (“I shall study brevitie” KG XLII 240) which appear to steer the prose within accepted or created borders; nevertheless his writing creates a proliferation of space through the *topos* of overflowing, itself an unsystematic trajectory. His prose follows the disorderly flow which he outlines here. It is possible that Traherne would express the above view in order to fit seventeenth-century conventions, which did not value his overflowing writing style. Despite Traherne’s disavowal of this style, his writing continually exhibits such a style. Further, Traherne’s characterization of “effusions and profusions” signify “looseness and effeminacy of unbridled Spirit. Nevertheless his writing demonstrates such profusion, and what I am arguing is that Traherne characterizes his writing style in such a manner as a way to respond to the demands of his contemporaries. I would also presume that he might have wanted to create a prose which fits seventeenth-century norms, but he continually produces prose which is exactly what he opposes. I would argue that Traherne’s prose can be understood through a different aesthetic: instead of demonstrating “uneasiness of a Dissolute and watery Estate,” Traherne’s prose suggests freedom of restrictive boundaries and a joy of infinitely irretraceable trajectories.
Traherne’s prose represents an aberration in the early modern movement toward plain prose style, a movement which Morris Croll argues originated in the sixteenth century and constituted a reaction against the Ciceronian overly oratorical style. In contrast, the style which Bacon, Browne, Montaigne, and Pascal developed, termed anti-Ciceronian, Attic or baroque, represented a philosophical shift toward the a more contemplative, natural, and spontaneous expression which closely imitated the movements of the inquiring mind. In *The Senecan Amble*, George Williamson distinguishes between three trends within the anti-Ciceronian style: curt (associated with Justus Lipsius), loose (associated with Montaigne), and obscure (Bacon). The anti-Ciceronian style is considered written style, closely linked and stimulated by the development of printing technologies, an argument advanced by Water Ong in his *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* (1971) and *Orality and Literacy* (1982). The Ciceronian style is associated with elaboration, formality, and most importantly with its oratorical appeal. If the Ciceronian style belongs to the realm of oral genres, the anti-Ciceronian belong to the realm of script. One of the points of contention among scholars is the place which the plain prose style occupies within the anti-Ciceronian movement. Its most vivid manifestation is seen at the end of the seventeenth century, perhaps with Shaftesbury’s critique of the “Senecan Amble.” Scholars argue whether it represents a new phenomena (Foster R. Jones, *Ancients and Moderns*) or if it is a natural outcrop of the anti-Ciceronian movement (Morris Croll and George Williamson). For F. R. Jones, the plain prose style was not a natural outcrop of the anti-Ciceronian movement but a development in opposition to the anti-Ciceronian style before the Restoration; for him, the development of science and especially the work done by the Royal Society after the
Restoration promoted the plain prose style. More recent scholars have questioned his thesis and argued that the relationship between the development of prose style and science is not necessarily causal and have tried to account for other factors that affected the development of prose style such as the interest in universal language schemes (Knowlson), polite letter writing (William Fraser Mitchell), and the exposure to more languages through trade (Maat). This brief survey of the development of prose style in the seventeenth century allows us to place Traherne in the midst of what scholars have recognized to be a dense terrain where the causal relationships between prose style and social, political, and religious forces created tense connections. Placed in this background, Traherne’s emphasis on the overflowing of language as well as on the metalinguistic insistence on brevity, clarity, and transparency of language as expressed in the shorter generic choices—poems, paragraphs, chapters, encyclopedia entries, cross references—makes him a complex representative of the post-Restoration phase of the development of prose style.

Flowing could emerge out of—flow out of—“Corrupted Intrails” (D “Dumbnesse 15), and in this sense it creates a linear trajectory even if such a trajectory is difficult to trace back. However, Traherne also explores another option in which a space is being created, where the subject and object positions are challenged and are easily exchangeable. The difference in the subject – object relation emerges in two passages. In “Wonder,” for instance, the speaker feels that space is located within: “I within did flow / With Seas of Life, like Wine” (D “Wonder” 21-22); however, in the Centuries, Traherne advises the reader that the sea should be felt to flow inside the self: “You never Enjoy the World aright, till the Sea it self flowth in your Veins, till you are Clothed with
the Heavens, and Crowned with the Stars” (C 1.29). In the Centuries, the *topos* of space within is preserved (“till the Sea it self flowth in your Veins”), but what is added is the space without: “you are Clothed with the Heavens, and Crowned with the Stars.” Most importantly, the excerpt from the *Centuries* implies that there is a goal which is to be achieved, a goal expressed by a limiting “till.” Yet the flow of the sea is goalless: it has neither an *arche* nor a *telos*. The whole space becomes both an *arche* and a *telos*. There is no finality but a continual preset moment which always responsive to action.

The notion of ease of movement is transformed in the Dobell “Speed” where the focus is on the liquidity of matter and its direction: “The Liquid Pearl in springs, / The usefull and the Precious Things / Are in a Moment Known” (D “Speed” 1-3). The second stanza continues with the description of the *topos* of liquidity:

```
True Living Wealth did flow,
In Chrystall Streams below
My feet, and trilling down
In Pure, Transparent, Soft, Sweet, Melting Pleasures,
Like Precious Diffusive Treasures,
At once my body fed, and Soul did Crown. (D “Speed” 7-12)
```

The speaker’s unstructured journey seems to be influenced by the treasures which he encounters along the way: both are liquid and inform each other. Not forgetting that we have Traherne’s writing in a manuscript form, we may note that the double “ll” in both “Chrystall” and “trilling” is an orthographic visual representation of the wealth, which is “trilling down.” The journey now has taken a vertical direction. More importantly, the world is liquid; it does not operate on the basis of boundaries. Wealth flows in crystal streams; pleasures are melting; treasures are diffusive. Boundaries may exist, but they resist stability and clear definition. It is a world which operates through the paradox similar to the one used in mystical literature, especially as seen in the author of *The*
Cloud of Unknowing, by questioning the role of prepositions, confounds all spatial understanding:

AND if ever thou shalt come to this cloud and dwell and work therein as I bid thee, as this cloud of unknowing is above thee, betwixt thee and thy God, right so put a cloud of forgetting beneath thee; betwixt thee and all the creatures that ever be made. Thee thinketh, peradventure, that thow art full far from God because that this cloud of unknowing is betwixt thee and thy God: but surely, and it be well conceived, thou art well further from Him when thou hast no cloud of forgetting betwixt thee and all the creatures that ever be made. (The Cloud of Unknowing Chapter 5)

In The Epistle to the Privy Counsel in The Cloud of Unknowing, the anonymous author advises the reader to strive toward “that naked, unseen awareness of your own existence” (p. 169, Ch 4) or the “unseeing seeing” (p. 174 Ch 5). Similarly, in Traherne, despite the overt desire for clear language, the confounding of space is prominent in his writing. Traherne’s reference to directions—“below” and “down”—does not create a sense of height but of distance and depth. The speaker does not locate himself in the middle of the height and the depth points. Rather true wealth is located and flows abundantly below his feet. Everything flows below and beneath him, but the reference to “At once” suggests the contraction of process, and obstructs all efforts to reconstruct the trajectory of the fruition of the wealth. His body is fed and his soul is crowned even though all wealth proceeds from him.

The topos of the flow unsettles the distinctions between gathering and dispersal or origin and telos. It is a condition in which the identities are preserved but they appear to be one. Gathering and dispersal are unstable in C 3.75 where Traherne writes of God gathering the streams—“He gathereth the Waters of the Sea together” (C 3.75)—and later, in C 3.78, of dispersal of the streams: “There is a River the streams whereof shall make Glad the City of God” (C 3.78). God may gather the streams together, but the
subsequent paragraph focuses on the dispersal of the river into streams. Traherne’s prose continually tends between gathering and productive dispersal. The prose is positioned between telos and arche and achieves no resolution.

Similarly, the source and the goal becomes blurred—the flow out and into each other. The Dobell “Silence” the soul, the spring, and the goal become metaphors for God, and the ocean becomes the metaphor for the poetic “I.” In a watery environment, the boundaries between the subject and the objects as well as the source and the goal become blurred. “[M]y pure Streams” (D “Silence” 56) exist in the boundaries of the “One Golden Stream, one Spring, one only End” (D “Silence” 64). The “I” becomes “the Ocean of his Pleasure” (70) and the ocean is the source of “The Living Springs and Golden Streams” (72). But the next line makes the speaker their goal: “My Bosom was an Ocean into which / They all did run” (73-74).

Verbal copia manifests itself through praises: Traherne prays to God to send him the Holy Spirit in order that he may “overflow with Praises and Thanksgivings” (1. 95). The movement toward verbal abundance continues: as a consequence of the Holy Spirit, Traherne will also be filled with “riches of thy glory” (C 1.95). The same paragraph continues with a ripple effect of the same phrase: “let me see them all, let me feel them all, let me enjoy them all” (C 1.95). There is no mechanical repetition. The trajectories are not retraceable. The freedom and ease with which these phrases are strewn together is echoed in the Dobell “Speed” where the speaker describes how “We plough the very Skies” (57). Traces are not left; the trajectories are irretraceable, and one swims in the abundance where “the Seas with Amber flow” (F “Admiration” 12).
Traherne explores the image of the flow in more concrete terms in KG, where Traherne discusses the seas and the rivers in the created world, and he specifically emphasizes the impossibility for the journey to be retraced: “and that not one Way, but innumerable Enlarging springs and Rivers from its Womb, and making the passage which it seems to deny, more Easy by Navigation” (KG XXVI 26-28). This passage indicates the way in which Traherne’s prose imitates his writing style. As we have already seen, Traherne’s definition of the journey depends not only on the presence or absence of a telos but also on the impossibility to have the trajectory retraced. His writing operates in a similar way—mechanical operations and easily identifiable structures are relegated for the experience of writing. Outlines and metatextual ordering are soon dismissed and left unattended. Stanley Stewart points out that in Christian Ethics “[s]tructurally, the paragraphs, the sentences, and the chapters of the Ethics do not develop logically. Indeed, we have no basis for predicting the way in which the chapters will unfold, what virtues will be included, and where” (65). Stewart further notes that

[t]he principle of organization in Christian Ethics appears to be as “unguided” as it is “regulated.” Succession of one thought to another is frequently alogical, or it may contradict earlier discussion completely. Although in chapter 3 Traherne outlines a plan of discussion, he does not follow it. . . . [T]he author violates the boundaries he himself has set up on the justifiable grounds of completeness. He exceeds the limits precisely because they are “limited and bounded.” . . . The underlying principle of organization appears to be additive. As the discussion develops from moment to moment its plan changes, so that inconsistency is one of the features added along with other unplanned material. The additions, the anomalies reflect the sense of wonder which surpasses the orderly norms of public discourse. (Stewart 66, 68, 70)

Like nature, Traherne’s writing is borderless. Referring to a disorienting space, he writes of “The terror and majestie of its [the sea’s] shoreless appearance, the plain and unknown Extent of Waters” (KG XXVI 14-15). Like the sea’s resistance to providing marks of
orientation, Traherne’s writing is resistant to a stable pointer. Like the shoreless sea, his writing also defies margins, borders, and limits, and as a consequence his prose has captivated his readers in the same way in which Traherne describes that the borderless sea creates a sense of grandeur as well as confusion in its observers.

We find the enactment of the irretraceable trajectory in another passage of SM, where flow is the gravitational force of writing and dispersal. In the second century, in the Select Meditations, Traherne uses the theme of journeying: “The Little Actions of our confined being, as we walk up and down among the Sons of men, are like our Body compared to our soul, contemptible, feeble, worthless, shells and husks” (SM 2.94). He establishes an analogy—actions and being versus body and soul—and comments that human actions, including their trajectory, are like the body compared to the soul: “contemptible, feeble, worthless, shells and husks” (SM 2.94). So it might seem that the trajectory of human actions does not indicate freedom of movement but rather feebleness of actions and energy: the actions are “Little” and they compare to one’s being as “contemptible, feeble, worthless, shells and husks.” Here, the directions of the journey are not only on the horizontal plain but can also be traced on the vertical trajectory, and, in fact, on a three-dimensional plotting trajectory: up and down establish the vertical axis while “among” establishes the three-dimensional plane. However, the point is not in following the trajectory but in being aware of its complexity and immensity. The whole paragraph is short, and its continuation is worth discussing:

The Little Actions of our confined being, as we walk up and down among the Sons of men, are like our Body compared to our soul, contemptible, feeble, worthless, shells and husks. all the Glory being of the Inward man. yet as the body is inhabited by the Soul, it is a Glorious Jewel. And so those feeble and little Actions, which man doth in External affaires, as Animated and flowing from the Soul within, have an imputed Greatness by the Inward Sphere, and a spiritual
Depth or value like [t], but all the works of joy and Glory are Radically there,
And thence doth all the Beauty and valu flow which is on the Inside of evry
operation. (SM 2.94)

The point that he is trying to make is that the feeble actions acquire greatness through
being “inhabited” or “infused” (untraceable trajectory) so that their greatness is
“imputed” and is “a spiritual Depth or value like” “the Inward Sphere,” but “the works of
joy and Glory”—which stand in contrast to “The Little Actions”—are “Radically there”
i.e. in the “Inward Sphere.”

The works of joy and glory are located in the “inward Sphere,” but the sentence
does not allow us to see that location easily: the deixis “there” as in “Radically there”
makes the reader defer his reading and search for the referent for “there.” We have
searched for the referent for “there” mentioned above, and next we are made to turn our
attention to the subsequent step: the coordinating conjunction “and”; that movement
(“And thence”) with its emphatic “doth” propels us upward and brings us to an area
where not actions but “Beauty and valu flow.” Like Traherne, we are moving up and
down the lines of the text to find what we are looking for and we enact these “little
Actions of our confined being.” The author’s unfolding of the ideas is not completed but
is continued by a subordinate conjunction (“which”), as if returning us back to the source:
“which is on the Inside of evry operation”; thus we locate the centrifugal force once more
in a subordinate clause. Traherne is being arbitrary in his cessation of the paragraphs in
the Centuries, and it seems that he is practicing his rule of brevity, but his themes
guarantee proliferation, which is soon to follow.

As the passage continues, another contrast is established: feebleness vs glory;
actions vs soul; outwardness vs inwardness. But Traherne creates a reversal: the body is
also glorious because it is inhabited by the soul. By the middle of the passage, that which has been “contemptible, feeble, [and] worthless” is transformed into “a Glorious Jewel.”

The generative force of the “feeble and little Actions” is conditioned by “the Soul within.” But this passage also makes another point regarding the generative and centrifugal force: its qualities are that it animates and that it enables flow. The qualities of the generative force contract to a structured line movement and do not necessarily establish a traceable trajectory. Further, the centrifugal force is located “within.” Its inwardness is indicative of its subordinated and latent power.

In this section, I outline a number of the dynamic centrifugal and irretraceable procedures which Traherne uses. The constitutive elements of the journey are its \textit{arche} and its \textit{telos}. They appear in a number of combinations and function as the centrifugal and centripetal force in Traherne’s texts. The taxonomy of \textit{telos} is a taxonomy of the centrifugal forces at work in Traherne’s texts. While Traherne creates a sense of proliferation through the image of at-once-ness, his other productive strategy is to outline a proliferation of goals towards which his journey tends.

The poetry of Traherne’s contemporaries typically establishes a one-directional journey. Vaughan’s “The Retreat” from \textit{Silex Scintillans, Or Sacred Poems} (1650) is about the speaker who compares the direction of his journey to that of others:

Some men a forward motion love,  
But I by backward steps would move,  
And when this dust falls to the urn  
In that state I came return. (Vaughan “The Retreat” 29-32)

In this passage, the speaker indicates that the directions in which people walk are forward or backward. He states that other people prefer to move forward and to make progress, while he prefers to move backward, presumably to the age of innocence or to God?
Donne and Beaumont explore the east–west relationship as a goal for the journey. For instance, Donne’s “Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward” and Beaumont’s “The Journè” as well as “Epiphanie Oblelution” (1652) play with the westward and eastward direction which each person follows. In “Goodfriday, 1613” Donne’s speaker is in the midst of the tension between internal east and external westward direction. Donne’s “Goodfriday” poem admits of the haphazardness of the journey when its origin stems from corrupt interests: “Pleasure or business, so our souls admit / For their first mover, and are whirled by it” (7-8). The whirling, irregular, motion of “pleasure or business” obstruct the linear east/west movement of the speaker. Donne’s poem embraces various other linear juxtapositions where the speaker is either face to face or with his back toward Christ:

Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
They’re present yet unto my memory,
For that looks towards them; and thou look’st towards me,
O Savior, as thou hang’st upon the tree;
I turn my back to thee . . .
Restore thine image so much, by thy grace,
That thou may’st know me, and I’ll turn my face. (Donne “Goodfriday” 33-37, 41-42)

Initially the speaker’s memory is directed towards the whole world as well as toward Christ’s crucifixion, the suffering of his mother, as well as nature’s response to it. Such an internal gaze is reciprocated by Christ looking back at the speaker: “For that looks towards them; and thou look’st towards me” (35). The speaker changes directions at this point by turning his back to Christ. While initially Christ was looking toward him, later the speaker turns his back toward Christ. At the end of the poem, the last two lines, Donne depicts another reciprocal relationship, in which he turns back to look at Christ’s face. Donne’s speaker continually takes either/or positions: either looking toward Christ
face-to-face or setting himself with his back toward him. He does not adopt other
vantage points other than those two poles.

In Beaumont’s “The Journè” (1652), the speaker also establishes the dichotomy
between the right telos and wrong telos; if the speaker does not aim at the right telos, he
will dive into a precipice, where one encounters not a clear path but the dangers and
disorientation of a precipice. Beaumont’s speaker is initially set out to meet his parents,
but before leaving, he asks for divine guidance for his journey:

      MY Parents deer to see to day
    My Duty summons me away:
    Yt must my heart first wait on Thee
    Great Father both of them & me.
    To guide my journè that I may
    Remember still Thou art my Way!
    Thou art my Way, & yf of Thee I miss,
    My playnest path will prove a Precipice. (Beaumont “The Journè” 1-8)

Like his contemporaries, Traherne occasionally seems to have his speaker guided toward
a single direction. The speaker’s attraction to the world is poised on the verge of the
outward and the inward; while his soul is “taken up with Joy / Did seem no outward thing
to note, but / flie All Objects that do feed the Eye” (D “Innocence” 14-16). There are no
perceived obstacles along the trajectories, and the trajectory seems almost focused and
one-directional as well as one-dimensional. But the one-directional and focused journey
is not normative in Traherne. Unlike his contemporaries, Traherne does not juxtapose
east and west, but brings east, west, south and north all together. Traherne makes use of
the typical argument that the journey is much more important than the final destination;
movement rather than creation are of interest to his speaker:

      To bring the Moisture of far distant Seas
      Into a point, to make them present here,
      In virtu, not in Bulk; one man to pleas
With all the *Powers* of the Highest Sphere,
From east, from West, from North and South, to bring
The pleasing *Influence* of evry thing;

7
Is far more *Great* then to Creat them there
Where now they stand; His *Wisdom* more doth shine
In that, his *Might* and *Goodness* more appear,
In recollecting; He is more *Divine*
In making evry Thing a Gift to one
Then in the Parts of all his Spacious *Throne*. (D “The Improvement” 31-42)

The deixical pronoun “there” (37) indicates the dimension of the speaker. Another interesting thing about this passage is the echo, which almost sounds like alliteration, created between “there” and “where.” The end of one line is echoed in the beginning of another, as if to create the impact of distance and space, which the poem thematizes and structurally emphasizes. The word “there” indicates the stability of an item, which is emphasized in the following line by the phrase “Where now they stand.” In other words, creating motionless subjects is not admirable. Stasis is not as favorable as *potentia*.

This anxiety is not much different from what Michel de Certeau describes in *The Mystic Fable*, a desire motivated by a perceived lack of presence and melancholy. In *The Mystic Fable*, de Certau aims to discuss the origins of mysticism as a reaction against institutionalized religion. One of the work’s most insightful claims is that the mystic speaks in *fables*—a discourse which mediates between orality and writing as well as variety of discourses whose circumscriptions is challenging:

Reformed Christians thought that if the institutions, having become corrupt, were destined to be mute, it was nevertheless possible to hear the teaching spoken Word in the Scriptures. Exegesis, from the seventeenth century on, undermined that confidence. Therefore, the spirituals sought elsewhere and otherwise what could, and what *should* speak. . . .

As early as the thirteenth century . . . since the time when theology became professionalized, spirituals and mystics took up the challenge of the spoken word.
In doing so, they were displaced toward the area of the ‘fable.’ They formed a solidarity with all the tongues that continued speaking, marked in their discourse by the assimilation to the child, the woman, the illiterate, madness, angels, or the body. Elsewhere they insinuate an ‘extraordinary’: they are voices . . . —voices grown more and more separate from the field of meaning that writing had conquered, ever closer to the song or the cry. Therefore, their movements traverse an economy of the written work and die out, it seems, with the triumph of writing. So it is that the passing figure of mystics continues to ask us what remains of the spoken word. (de Certeau 13)

The kind of fable which de Certeau outlines permeates Traherne’s discourse: it traverses between orality of places where there is a clear addressee, and it dives into textuality in instances where typography is most pronounced, as, for instance, in the use of parenthesis and columns which challenge the reader to know the starting point from which the text should be read in sequence, and what sequence precisely needs to be followed. But in a discussion of Hieronymous Bosch’s The Garden of Delights, de Certeau comments on the spatial overflowing in the painting and the “nomadization of space” (de Certeau 63) linking this development to the scientific expansion and transference of the infinite to space:

It is the eve of the modern period, which will compromise the circumscription with the experience of an infinite universe. When that time comes, the disappearance of outer limits will bring, for a long period, the labor of “stopping” and stabilizing the internal forms, of delimiting, distinguishing, and classifying units. In Bosch, the metamorphic process alters the internal divisions. It creates an undefined becoming (an overflowing temporalization) of the beings placed within a fixed framework. There things pass, flow by, change. (de Certeau 62-63)

The same metamorphosis and overflowing are to be seen in Traherne’s works. It is a search which is stimulated by an unquiet spirit: “My roving Mind / Search’d evry Corner of the Spacious Earth” (F “Solitude” 17-18). Traherne links the metamorphic movement toward overflowing with the search in which one never overtakes its object (Pelikan 164); this is expressed in variety of ways, one of which can be seen in C 3.52:
When I came into the Country, and saw that I had all time in my own hands, having it wholly 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 have visited them all, but that was impossible. What then I should do? Even imitat a Traveller, who because He cannot visit all Coasts, Wildernes, Sandy Desserts, 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. For which caus I made it my Prayer to GOD Almighty, that He, whose Eys are open upon all Things, would guid me to the fairest and Divinest. (C 3.52)

Traherne explains that he will submit the choice of the locations which he will visit to God’s guidance. Traherne further wonders if he should choose the most popular destinations or if he could direct himself to the places most rarely visited. Donne and Beaumont use this trope but in ways which are different from Traherne. Both Donne and Beaumont exploit the significance of the journey in eastward and westward direction, but none of them repositions the journey and proliferates its directions. Traherne, on the other hand, as much as he seeks guidance quickly gets lots in his own narrative: there is a contrast in the desire for being “guided by som certain Rule” and the enumeration that follows in ebbs and flows a couple of lines later (“He cannot visit all Coasts, Wildernes, Sandy Desserts, 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”).

The *topos* of the soul tending toward many goals—the wandering soul—is present also in Francis Quarles whom Traherne copied in his notebook. Quarles’ emblem is
much closer to what we find in Traherne. The speaker’s soul is carried and even
“hurried.” The soul is enamored by every object which presents delight to the soul:

Ev’n so my soul, being hurried here and there,
By ev’ry object that presents delight,
Fain would be settled, but she knows not where;
She likes at morning what she loathes at night; (Quarles Embleme IV 11-14)

The sense of loss of control and lack of consciousness and deliberate outlining of the
trajectory is conveyed through the hurried state of the soul. These lines also echo a
familiar Trahernean expression for an indefinable location: “here and there.” Unlike
Traherne, Quarles speaker clearly observes the soul’s inconstant desires—“She likes at
morning what she loathes at night” (14). Unlike Traherne, Quarles’s speaker does not
want to achieve stasis: “fain would be settled, but she knows not where” (13).

In C 3.53, Traherne continues his meditation on the discovery of his trajectory. He
has learned to see every place as a source of copia:

And What Rule do you think I walked by? Truly a Strange one, but the Best in
the Whole World. I was Guided by an Implicit Faith in Gods Goodness: and
therefore led to the Study of the most Obvious and Common Things. For thus I
thought within myself: GOD being, as we generally believ, infinit in Goodness, it
is most Consonant and Agreeable with His nature, that the Best Things should be
most Common. for nothing is more Naturall to infinit Goodness, then to make the
Best Things most frequent; and only Things Worthless, Scarce. Then I began to
Enquire what Things were most Common: Air, Light, Heaven and Earth, Water,
the Sun, Trees, Men and Women. Cities Temples &c. These I found Common
and Obvious to all: Rubies Pearls Diamonds Gold and Silver, these I found
scarce, and to the most Denied. Then began I to consider and compare the value
of them, which I measured by their Serviceableness, and by the Excellencies
which would be found in them, should they be taken away. And in Conclusion I
saw a Real valuableness in all the Common things; in the Scarce, a feigned. (C
3.53)

In this paragraph of the Centuries, Traherne writes about his method of discovery of his
trajectory. That which is most abundant in the natural world will constitute his changing
goals, and the journey from goal to goal does not follow predetermined rules. The natural world: the rivers, the trees, the flowers, the air. The most common things for Traherne are those that are not materially touched: light, air, heaven, Sun. The materially available for kinesthetic experience are: earth, water, trees, men and women. His method of determining his journey is if something is of usefulness. Through his approach of inversion and of proliferating goals the trajectories from goal to goal become untraceable. The theme of profusion appears once more; we shall see this theme most prominently in Chapter 5, but here we see once more the way Traherne uses this topic and enacts it.

Here is the example from “Churches II” where the speaker delineates the proliferation of a goal; were there only one church, most people would not be able to attend its services. However, there are many churches dispersed everywhere, which also means that there are many goals. Churches constitute centrifugal force for irretraceable and infinite trajectories:

But now we Churches have
In ev’ry Coast, which Bounty gave
Most freely to us; now they sprinkled stand
With so much care and Lov,
In this rich vale, nigh yonder Grove
That we might com in ev’ry Land
To them with greater Eas; lo, we
Those blest Abodes neglected see:
As if our God were worse
Because His Love is more,
And doth disburse
Its self in greater Store; (F “Churches II” 33-44)

The point of this passage is that the churches are much more and people do not appreciate the bounty and leave the churches empty. The churches appear to be a continual manifestation of proliferation. The proliferation of churches multiplies the traveling trajectories. Moreover, the trajectories seem to be continually multiplying because of the
inexhaustibility of God’s love. The disbursement is not an indication of equal
distribution resulting in exhaustibility; rather one observes continual distribution of an
ever expanding generosity.

It is not just the external world, including nature’s abundance, from which
Traherne draws his store of goals for his trajectories. The proliferation is centered on the
body. The speaker creates a goal out of the body’s organs:

My Tongue, my Eys,
My cheeks, my Lips, my ears, my Hands, my Feet,
Their Harmony is far more Sweet;
Their Beauty True. And these in all my Ways
Shall Themes becom, and Organs of thy Prais. (D “The Person” 60 - 64)

Like the external world, the body becomes the map and the space where various other
trajectories are to be outlined.

The proliferation of goals toward a goal and the search which is never overtaken
by its goal is indicated in the Dobell “The Design,” where the arche of the journey as
well as the trajectory are ambiguous. In the Dobell “The Design,” the generative source
(arche) is not clearly defined because Traherne uses the deixical pronouns “it” and “her”
but not in a consistent way. The poem is worth quoting in full:

The Design

1
When first Eternity Stoopd down to Nought,
   And in the Earth its Likeness sought,
When first it out of Nothing framd the Skies,
   And formd the Moon and Sun
   That we might see what it had don,
   It was so Wise,
   That it did prize
Things truly Greatest Brightest fairest, Best.
   All which it made, and left the rest.

2
Then did it make such Care about the Truth,
Its Daughter, that even in her Youth,  
Her face might Shine upon us, and be known,  
    That by a better fate,  
It other Toys might Antedate,  
        As soon as shewn;  
And be our own,  
While we were hers; And that a Virgin Love  
Her best Inheritance might prove.

3  
Thoughts undefiled, Simple, Naked, Pure;  
    Thoughts Worthy ever to endure,  
Our first and Disengaged thoughts it lovs,  
    And therfore made the Truth,  
In Infancy and Tender Youth,  
        So Obvious to  
Our Easy view  
That it doth prepossess our Soul, and proves  
The Caus of what it all Ways moves.

4  
By Merit and Desire it doth allure;  
    For Truth is so Divine and Pure,  
So Rich and Acceptable, being seen,  
    (Not Parted, but in Whole)  
That it doth Draw and force the Soul,  
        As the Great Queen  
Of Bliss, between  
Whom and the Soul, no one Pretender ought  
Thrust in, to Captivat a Thought.

5  
Hence did Eternity contrive to make  
The Truth so fair for all our Sake  
That being Truth, and Fair and Easy too,  
    While it on all doth Shine,  
We might by it becom Divine  
    Being led to Woo  
The Thing we view,  
And as chast Virgins Early with it joyn,  
    That with it we might likewise Shine,

6  
Eternity doth give the richest Things  
To evry Man, and makes all Kings.  
The Best and Richest Things it doth convey
To all, and evry one.
   It raised me unto a Throne!
      Which I enjoy,
   In such a Way,
That Truth her daughter is my chiefest Bride,
   Her Daughter Truth’s my chiefest Pride.

7
All mine! And seen so easily! How Great, how Blest!
   How soon am I of all possest!
My Infancie no Sooner Opes its Eys,
      But Straight the Spacious Earth
   Abounds with Joy Peace Glory Mirth
      And being Wise,
   The very Skies,
And Stars do mine becom; being all possest
   Even in that Way that is the Best. (D “The Design”)

In the notes to the poem, Margoliouth points out that “it” consistently refers to “Eternity” and that “her” consistently refers to “Truth,” Eternity’s daughter. He notes that the meaning of “her” changes in the sixth stanza, where “her” refers to Eternity rather than to Truth. However, I would take issue with this proposition. While I agree that “it” consistently refers to “Eternity” in stanzas 1 and 2, the case for stanzas 3 and 5 are not so easily argued. Perhaps the ambiguity is not intentional. But nevertheless it could have an important role in the reading of the poem. Eternity “made the Truth, / In Infancy and Tender Youth, / So Obvious to / Our Easy view.” Does the Truth prepossess the soul or is “it” Eternity which does so? And what is “it” that “all Ways moves”?

One might think that the subsequent stanza might provide the answer, but the ambiguity persists; “it” might refer to Eternity as much as to Truth:

4
By Merit and Desire it doth allure;
   For Truth is so Divine and Pure,
So Rich and Acceptable, being seen,
      (Not parted, but in Whole)
   That it doth Draw and force the Soul,
As the Great Queen
Of Bliss, between
Whom and the Soul, no one Pretender ought
Thrust in, to Captivat a Thought. (D “The Design” 28-36)

This stanza, like stanza 5, carries the ambiguity between “it” and “her.” Does “it” refer to the “Merit and Desire” of Truth or of Eternity? What forces the soul toward “the Great Queen of Bliss”? Eternity or Truth? In these cases, it seems that Margoliouth’s observation that Traherne uses “it” and “her” consistently to refer to Eternity and Truth respectively cannot stand.

One might argue that the ambiguity of the pronouns’ referents is symptomatic of the trajectory which Traherne outlines elsewhere. The vocabulary which he uses—“allure” (28), “Draw and force the Soul” (32), “Being led to Woo” (42)—is indicative of a trajectory which recognizes not premeditation but being and becoming. The cause, after all, is both Eternity and Truth, but more importantly, in the state of being drawn, in the state of desire, the soul does not investigate the causes and effects of its attraction to the created world.

Traherne also creates inversions of the proliferation of goals by placing the trajectories in an increasingly deepening space. In SM 3.27, he distinguishes between two types of journeys: “For before I had Bodily Journeys I was immediately Present in any kingdome, and Saw the people in it, Trees Ground and Skies in as strong a Light, as ever I saw the Kingdom where I am” (SM 3.27). One type is the journey of physical travels, the other of imaginary ones which create the inverted space of various irretraceable trajectories. Similarly, in the Centuries, he positions both the speaker and the readers on a journey destined towards a depth: “O what a World of Evidences. We
are lost in Abysses, we now are absorpt in Wonders, and Swallowed up of Demonstrations” (C 2.22). Traherne is not interested in finding his way of the depths and abysses which he imagines; the sense of proliferation, of abundance is further emphasized by the plural for “abyss.” His absorption and state of being “Swallowed up” suggests a renunciation of control over the journey within these depths. Traherne’s use of “swallow” in Commentaries of Heaven in the section on “Appetite” redefines the word: “[A]s a Moral Life,” he writes, “shall be swallowed up of Immorality, and not destroyed” (CH “Appetite” 593) in the sense that being swallowed up does not bring about destruction but fruition. The passage in CH continues by stating that the bodily appetites will be “Extinguished not in the Death, but Perfection of them” (CH “Appetite” 594-95). In the passage from C 2.22, Traherne is governed by a productive sense of abandonment, abundance, and generation. He resumes control over his trajectory aiming to delineate it: “Let us therefore survey their Order, and see what that whether we cannot Discern their Governor” (C 2.22). Yet he renounces this project because first, the order of the trajectory becomes difficult to establish, and second because the order of the trajectory is not of interest to him, and neither is having control over it. The trajectory of a journey inward is governed by abandonment of control and proliferation. The inversion of the centrifugal and untraceable force in the KG is approached through delight: “These territories are delight themselves being Treasuries full of Treasures. Did we understand the necessitie and Service of the Sea, we Should make our Transitions with as much delight as the Psalmist did” (KG XXVI 4-6). The uncharted territories in the sea defy the necessity for following established roads. Totalizing patterns and panoptic control are relegated; uncharted territories provide the beginning and the perfection of life: “Life is
so Mysterious, and Miraculous a Being, and so Sublime in order of Nature; that as it is superior to all Material things, So is it more difficult to be Conceived” (KG XXVIII 1-3).

The inversion also functions as a method of writing. We can approach understanding Traherne’s writing process through his approach to life. In *The Kingdom of God*, he points out:

Let us single out any Sand upon the Sea Shore. The Combination of Parts, that we behold in this sand may hereafter be dissolved. And when the Particles are corrupted or mouldred away; Som of them may mingle with Water, others may turn into Air, others be moved into earth, and becom one with it. Let us follow this one, and leav the Residue to their Several Fortunes. This one from the earth may be carried into a Root, or Seed, and breath up at last into a Spire of Grass, be Eaten by a Beast, assist in the form of Nourishment, and pass into Flesh: that Flesh may be eaten by a Man, and become part of his, for a Considerable Season. Thence it may be evaporate in a Steam, and continu in an Exhalation, till it turn into Air. That Air may be rarefied, and born up by the Sun; and for ought we Know absorpt into that Fiery Vortex, Glittering there, and assisting as a Part of that Flaming Globe. Thence it may be darted in a Beam to a Star, and be either fixed in one of those splendid orbes, or reflected in an Influence, and travail to the Moon, or perhaps to the Earth: It may chance in falling to dip into the Sea, and penetrate a Fish like a Ray of Lightening, suppose a Whale, or a Dolphin. There it may Act, and minister among its Fellows (The Animal, Material, and Vital Spirits) obeying the Impressions of a Sensitiv Soul, till at last it Escape, and for the Varietie of delight enter an Oyster, and mingling there in som transparent Drop, be fixed in a Pearl. It may come from so base an Original to a Ladie’s Neck, Sit at a King’s Table, be advanced to his Throne, or Crown, or Scepter. And Infinit Liberty it has, and upon the Account of its Divine Original may enter the Thought of an Holy Angel. (KG XIX)

Several points need to be noted in this passage. First, among the number of verbs indicating the movement of the grain of sand, three groups stand out: verbs reflecting vertical movement (e.g. born up, falling in to dip into), verbs not indicating dimensional properties (e.g. eaten, assisting, absorpt into, travail to, penetrate, minister among, escape, enter, mingling, fixed in), and a group of verbs which take up the prepositions “in” or “into” (e.g. turn into, moved into, carried into, assist in, pass into, evaporate in, continue in, turn into, absorpt into, darted in, fixed in, reflected in, dip into, mingling in, fixed in).
The point of these verbs is to indicate the “Infinit Liberty [the grain of sand] has” as well as the purpose for which this trajectory is carried out—“for the Varietie of delight.”

A special group of verbs also indicating a movement within and which do not carry the prepositions “in” or “into” is used. Examples of such verbs are: “penetrate a Fish like a ray of Lightening, suppose a Whale or a Dolphin,” “enter,” “minister among,” and “mingling.” This group is of special interest because it indicates that even a movement within is not necessarily clearly graphed. How is the trajectory of a ray of lightening penetrating a fish different from the movement of a person entering a room? These phrases as well as the whole group of verbs carrying the prepositions “in” or “into” indicate a movement “within” rather than a movement “into.”

The significance of this passage lies in its connection to Traherne’s writing process. In the same way in which Traherne observes this particle’s movement in different environments “for the Variety of delight” so does he also take up topics and place them in different circumstances. We have seen this in the passage on the possibilities of the sun’s benefits as well as with the different topics which he takes up in the midst of a topic which he has already begun to discuss. Furthermore, the way in which Traherne positions quotations from the Psalms and Scripture is similar to what he describes in this passage. He takes up a passage from the Psalms and traces its trajectory and circulation. The generative movement here is constituted by the liberated movement in and out of various locations. The attention to particles and their circulatory trajectories might be closely linked to the atomic theory which was popular in the seventeenth century. Stephen Clucas explains that

In the seventeenth century the atom motivated a field of interrelated metaphors, used (and abused) by professional language-brokers such as poets (especially, but
not exclusively, scientific poets), sermon-writers and political pamphleteers, and imposed upon scientists who needed to draw upon the imaginative resources of the poet in order to describe (or condemn) the invisible beyond our every day perceptions. This imperceptibility of the atom-world sanctioned its imaginative heterogeneity, the images used to bring it before the ‘mind’s eye’ could reassure, or it could terrify. (Clucas 328)

Clucas argues that Traherne spiritualizes the function of the atom even though he accepts its physical existence. Likewise, I would argue that the particle’s movement in the passage cited above demonstrates Traherne’s understanding and acceptance of atomic theory; it also makes evident Traherne’s creative approach to finding the generative movement in a scientific theory.

Traherne’s use of inversion contrasts with Margaret Cavendish’s use of it. Margaret Cavendish’s “Of Many World in This World” opens with a clear indication of the interest of her speaker into the possibilities which space opens: “Just like unto a Nest of Boxes round, / Degrees of sizes within each Boxe are found. / So in this World, many may Worlds more be, / Thinner, and lesse, and lesse still by degree” (Cavendish “Of Many Worlds in This World” 1-4). Her approach to using the notion of inverting realities creates a sense of infinite minimalism, an approach which is in contrast to Traherne’s. Further, throughout the whole poem, Cavendish’s speaker remains on the surface; she ends the poem by discussing “The Head of one small, little, single Pin. [. . .] Pendents in each Eare” (Cavendish “Of Many Worlds in This World” 14-16). Her focus on outwardness is in contrast to Traherne’s use of infinite interiority. Further, while Cavendish focuses on minimalist objects, Traherne’s interiority creates a sense of infinite expansion and growth.

Unlike Cavendish’s outward minimalism, Traherne’s method of proliferation and minimalization has depth. The generative method of focusing on any goal along the right
way has a variant, in which Traherne focuses on miniature objects, a variant observed by Stewart: “Even more typical of Traherne, however, is the use of the miniature . . . as the passage unfolds, the focus shifts to the particular and small in such a way as to suggest an implosion from macrosom to microcosm . . . Traherne uses synecdoche in such a way as to subvert the distinction between part and whole” (125-126). One must point out that the interest in the miniature is not seen only in Traherne, an interest taken up by Richard Lovelace who “can be particularly charming about little animals; a grasshopper, a fly, a snail, move him to affectionate contemplation” (Wedgwood 81). Traherne operates in several zones: the spirit and the matter: “There is in a man a Double selfe, according as He is in God, or the world. In the world He is confined, and walketh up and Down, in Little Roome: but in God He is every where” (SM 2.92). This passage indicates that the order then does not matter because one is everywhere at the same time. There is certainly no reason also to plan the route, because there is a position from which the destination has always already been reached.

The Dobell “The Estate” operates precisely through this dynamic of close-up to a panoramic view. While in the Centuries the method of resistance to closure is sequential thematic dilation of the topics, in the Dobell “The Estate” the method of resistance to closure is achieved through the dynamic perception of the body; the body’s organs function as instruments of dilation and resistance to closure. They are presented in a close-up, and then after being the focus of attention, they are extended into a panoramic shot:

My Palate ought to be a Stone
To trie thy Joys upon:
And evry Member ought to be
A Tongue to Sing to Thee,
There’s not an Ey that’s fram’d by Thee,
But ought thy Life and Lov, to see.
Nor is there, Lord, upon mine Head an Ear,
But that the Musick of thy Works should hear.
Each Toe, each Finger framed by thy Skill,
Ought Oyntments to Distill.
Ambrosia, Nectar, Wine should flow
From evry Joynt I owe,
Or Things more Rich; while all mine Inward Powers
Are Blessed, Joyfull, and Eternal Bowers. (D “The Estate” 15-28)

The above passage is interesting for a number of reasons. First, we learn that imagining possibilities for resisting closure, such as we have seen in the *Centuries* is not the only method of resisting closure. Here the method of resisting closure is not through intellectual scenarios but through various ways of experiencing reality: sight, taste, hearing, smell. Yet because the speaker encourages the use “evry Member” (16) to become a way of experiencing reality, we might not presume that the reader is limited to the senses of sight, taste, hearing and smell. The stress falls on the reader’s individual experience and way of life as well as on multiplicity of coexisting experiences.

Such movement from the minimal to the telescopic echoes seventeenth-century scientific discourse, from observing that which has not been seen before through Galileo’s telescope to the uncovering of worlds within worlds through the microscope, a move which was made more pronounced in the seventeenth century by two of Traherne’s contemporaries: Anton van Leeuwenhoek of Holland, who corresponded with the Royal Society in England, as well as Robert Hook whose *Micrographia* was the first attempt at accounting for observations made through a microscope.

Second, the function of the sealed off bodily organs—toes, fingers—should be to emanate matter: the organs “Ought Oyntments to Distill” (24). The idea of dilation and the lack of predetermined direction implied through dilation announces the possibilities
and the productive dynamism and the potential of the body. This is a striking idea because Philip Traherne removes completely the passage which reveals a radical way of experiencing reality in the context of eighteenth-century audience. Thomas’ speaker comments on the bodily organs—both the visible and in invisible ones:

They ought, my God, to be the Pipes
And Conduits of thy Prais.

Mens bodies were not made for Stripes,
Nor any thing but Joys.

They were not made to be alone:
But made to be the very Throne
Of blessedness, to be like Suns, whose Raies,
Dispersed, Scatter many thousand Ways.

They Drink in Nectars, and Disburs again
In Purer Beams, those Streams,
Those Nectars which are causd by Joys.
And as the Spacious Main
Doth all the Rivers, which it Drinks, return,
Thy Love received doth make the Soul to burn. (D “The Ease,” 29-42)

Bodily organs are compared to suns. The potential for the existence of two suns was discussed in the *Centuries* in order to uncover the benefits of the existence of one sun only. However, in the above passage every organ becomes like a sun. Further, none of the human organs have a predetermined way of praising God. Rather, like the sun, their rays are “Dispersed, [and] Scatter many thousand Ways” (36). Each organ is a focus for multiple possibilities; each possibility in turn becomes the subsequent focus of other potentials, and the process of closeup and panoramic views is repeated endlessly with a changing topical focus. Such a method establishes not only prose and poetry resisting closure but also it enables the dynamic of the irretraceable trajectory.

In “My Spirit,” Traherne writes about the obliteration of a telos. The action, the speaker declares, does not originate from a centre and is not directed toward a remote object. Rather there is no barrier between the subject and the object, between *arche* and
telos, and that perhaps creates a space in which the speaker is in the presence of what Bakhtin calls “maximal proximity.” In such a condition, the speaker’s trajectory is not linear and is not re-traceable. In a state of maximal proximity, the subject loses the ground to establish a distance and outline objects.

The poem’s first stanza outlines the unnecessary status of the journey; the journey is not necessary—it does not accomplish much nor does it even accomplish proliferation:

It [my spirit] hath no other Wings
To Spread abroad, nor Eys to see,
Nor Hands Distinct to feel,
Nor Knees to Kneel:
But being Simple like the Deitie
In its own Centre is a Sphere
Not shut up here, but evry Where. (D “My Spirit” 11-17)

These lines announce the lack of usefulness of journeying and of all conditions which enable the journey: wings, eyes, hands, knees. Wings are necessary for the travel, and the rest—eyes, hands, knees—are necessary to observe the new destination. Yet within the last two lines of the first stanza, the speaker has placed the reader—has made the reader travel?—into a different location and dimension where the limitation of a “here” has collapsed under the pressure of the zone of maximal proximity.

The poem’s second stanza outlines the distance between the arche and the telos, the subject and its object:

It Acts not from a Centre to
Its Object as remote,
But present is, when it doth view,
Being with the Being it doth note. (D “My Spirit” 18-20)

There is no movement in this case. The distance is obliterated. One is in the zone of maximal proximity where the subject loses the power and grounding to establish subject and object distinctions. What is gained is the collapse of the subject / object distinction.
Philip Traherne’s version of this stanza focuses our attention on the journey much more than Traherne does. Compare, for instance, Philip’s version:

It acts not from a Center to  
Its Object, as remote;  
But present is, where it doth go  
To view the Being it doth note: (F “My Spirit” 18-21)

Where Thomas’ speaker views, Philip’s goes; where Thomas’ speaker repeats “Being” twice, Philip’s “view[s] the Being it doth note.” In Philip’s version, there is much more emphasis on movement and on the journey, while Thomas’ version is much more static but suggestive.

The next few lines of the same stanza confirm these observations. Traherne speaks of an engine that works, while Philip speaks of an engine that moves:

Whatever it doth do,  
It doth not by another Engine work,  
But by itself; which in the Act doth lurk. (D “My Spirit” 22-24)

Whatever it doth do,  
It doth not by another Engine mov,  
But by and of itself doth Active prov: (F “My Spirit” 22-24)

Thomas may not speak about journey in this poem, or emphasize it nearly as much as his brother does, but he has something which Philip does not. Thomas speaks of an irretraceability of an act: “which in the Act doth lurk” while Philip takes an objective and distanced stance and in a sense obliterates the maximal proximity which Traherne’s poems aims to establish by having the speaker speak of an “Activ prov.” Proof emerges out of a stance where there is a distance between the subject and the object. The whole poem, as we have seen so far, aims to question and dislocate this distance, but in one stroke, Philip’s brother, perhaps subject to eighteenth-century enlightenment forces,
creates a distancing and objective relationship between the subject and the object and takes the unruly mysticism out of the poem.

In the fourth stanza, the poem mentions a journey which is implicitly questioned:

But yet of this I was most sure,  
That at the utmost Length,  
(So Worthy was it to endure)  
My Soul could best Express its Strength.  
It was so Indivisible, and so Pure,  
That all my Mind was wholly Evry where  
What ere it saw, twas ever wholly there  
The Sun ten thousand Legions off, was nigh: (D “Silence” 52-59)

The first four lines of this stanza zeroes in on the potency of the soul: its strength continues regardless of the distance. The next four lines exemplify the way in which the speaker zooms in and out of the picture. He seems to suggest that zooming out is not an option. The last line of the stanza summarizes the main point of stanza four: what is remote is “felt even here” (68). Stanza five, seems to enact the obliteration of the subject-object distinction. It revels in exclamations, which consist of fragments, where there is no possibility to distinguish between a subject and an object. In stanza 6, we notice that sight is associated with being. The poem enacts the dynamism from a zone of proximity, where all grounding is lost, to a zone of distance and panoramic views where the subject is at once powerless and groundless. Such dislocations evoke the mysticism which I cited above from The Cloud of Unknowing: all prepositions, which structure reality, are rendered suspect.

This chapter has demonstrated the non-systematic use of the trajectory in Traherne’s works. Mechanical, predictable, and idealized trajectories are subverted so that Traherne’s topics as well as his own prose operates in ways which resist identification and clear outlining. Such an approach endorses art which happens in the
zone of maximal proximity. It creates a space where arche and telos are separate but coexist. It creates a polivocal zone guaranteed by praises and joy.
Works Cited


Miller, J. Hillis, ed. *Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute.*


Ray, John. *A Persuasive to a Holy Life, from the Happiness That Attends It Both in This World and in the World to Come*. Ed. Printed by Sam Smith and Benj. Walford, 1700.


Huntington Library, 1970.


