Chapter 2

Poems of Felicity (1) and St Augustine's *Confessions*: Sight and Sin

Traherne's Two Sequences

There are two major sequences of Traherne's shorter poems, the *Dobell Poems*, a manuscript in Traherne's own hand that was edited by Bertram Dobell and first published in 1903, and *Poems of Felicity*, a further manuscript selection prepared after Traherne's death by his brother Philip, but never actually published until 1910, after its identification and editing by H.I. Bell; the full title, *Poems of Felicity Containing Reflections on the Native Objects of An Infant-Eye*, sounds as if it was given by Thomas, but could have been decided upon later by Philip. A number of the poems selected by Philip for publication also occur in the selection made by Traherne himself and a comparison of these reveals that Philip edited his brother's work not only to modernise spelling and punctuation and 'improve' their metrical regularity, but also to gloss over theologically heterodox thoughts. Nevertheless, without Philip's good intentions (misguided or not), there would be significantly less of Traherne's poetry to study. Frequently, only those poems of the sequence that do not appear in the *Dobell Poems* are published, or they are printed out of order, but the sequence repays reading as Philip originally organised it.[1]

1. *Poems of Felicity* is published complete in its original order in *Traherne* 6. To compare the versions edited by Philip with those in the *Dobell Poems*, see H.M. Margoliouth (ed.), *Traherne: Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), Vol. 2, in which the poems are printed opposite each other but not in their original order. The first published editions were: Bertram Dobell (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne, B.D.* (London: published by the editor, 1903); and H.I. Bell (ed.), *Poems of Felicity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910).

A Brief Outline of Both Sequences

Both sequences contain so much material that it is easily possible to lose sight of their direction of travel. Thus, it may be helpful to suggest an approximate outline to bear in mind when studying individual poems. The sequences follow a similar pattern (unsurprisingly, since Philip chose many of the poems that Traherne included in his own selection). Both can be said to follow the progress often identified by Calvinist preachers,[2] which moves through the four estates of innocence, misery or sin, and grace, finally reaching the estate of glory. This was seen as the path followed by the whole of humanity through history, from Adam and Eve's fall in Eden from innocence into the misery of sin, then to the estate of grace made possible by the love and forgiveness of Christ's acceptance of death on the Cross and, ultimately (for the saved), to the estate of glory. Traherne discerns the same path within his own life, being seduced from the innocence of infancy to corruption by the 'gaudy trifles'[3] of the world, after which he recovers from misery to grace (a turning point marked in *Poems of Felicity* by his discovery of the Bible). Traherne also writes of a related progression, from the clear perception of the infant, who before speech unselfconsciously takes in the wonders of God's creation, through to the misguided sight which values 'Vain costly toys', before he has the capacity to comprehend 'with new and open eyes' not only infinite space, but also all time, in other words, the whole range of God's creation.[4] 'Comprehension' for Traherne is not only *understanding*, but also *inclusion* within the soul or mind. This comprehension of 'All ages and all worlds' leads to the fourth estate of glory and to *theosis*, or participation in the divine nature, which is the goal to which both sequences are directed:

> A vast and infinite Capacity,
> Did make my bosom like the Deity,
> In whose mysterious and celestial mind
> All ages and all worlds together shined.[5]

Theosis

To the modern reader, Traherne's claim that his bosom becomes 'like the Deity' appears presumptuous, almost verging on the blasphemous, but

2. The Church of England was initially strongly Calvinist. It was the attempt to move away from this position, especially under Archbishop Laud, that led to many of the theological disagreements of the early seventeenth century.
3. *Traherne* 6, p. 121, 'Dissatisfaction', l. 47.
4. Ibid., p. 7, 'Eden', l. 27; p. 21, 'The Approach', l. 30.
5. Ibid., p. 26, 'Silence', ll. 75-78.

theosis, or divinisation, is a concept found in the Church Fathers who wrote in the first centuries of Christianity, to whom the theologians of the newly created Church of England turned to establish that their own Church was indeed truly rooted in the authentic teaching of the Early Christian Church and not introducing heretical 'new traditions'. In his *Apologia pro Ecclesia Anglicana* (1562), the Elizabethan bishop, John Jewel, writes, 'we do show it plainly that God's holy Gospel, the ancient bishops, and the primitive [early] Church do make on our side, and that we have not without just cause left these men, and rather have returned to the Apostles and old Catholic fathers [early theologians of the universal church]'.[6]

One such 'father', the fourth-century bishop, St Gregory of Nazianzus (referred to elsewhere by Traherne[7]), writes: 'Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become gods for his sake, since he for our sake became man.' St Irenaeus (see above, Chapter 1.iv) also writes about the need to follow 'our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through his transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself'.[8] The biblical authority for this is found in St Peter's second epistle: Peter writes of being 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1: 3-4, AV). Although the concept does not sound very Protestant, it is, in fact, accepted by Calvin in his commentary on Peter's epistle, albeit with the significant qualification implied by the word 'eventually': 'Let us then mark, that the end [purpose] of the gospel is, to render us eventually conformable to God, and, if we may so speak, to *deify us* [my italics].'[9]

The western tradition is heavily influenced by Augustine from whom the sequence of the four estates outlined above basically derives. The Fall is less of a calamity in the eastern tradition which is more focused on *theosis*. There is no emphasis on original sin, an Augustinian rather than a biblical concept (albeit derived from St Paul's Epistle to the Romans).[10] *Theosis* is

6. John Jewel, *Apologia pro Ecclesia Anglicana* (1562), trans. by Lady Anne Bacon as *Apologie or Answere in Defence of the Churche of Englande* (1564) (accessed at www.anglicanlibrary.org, 20 May 2020). Anne Bacon was the mother of Francis. An 'apologia' is not an apology but an argument to rebut criticism. 'Catholic' is being used in its earlier, non-sectarian, meaning of 'universal'.
7. E.g. *Traherne* 5, *Centuries*, III, 65, and in 'Angel' in *Traherne* 3, *Commentaries of Heaven*, 2.
8. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, V, Preface.
9. I am indebted to Robert Arakaki for his thoughts on *theosis* and the quotations above from St Gregory of Nazianzus and Calvin in 'Theosis and our Salvation in Christ' at blogs.ancientfaith.com/orthodoxbridge/theosis-and-our-salvation-in-christ (accessed on 29 March 2020).
10. The validity of St Augustine's reading of Romans is challenged from the Orthodox viewpoint by David Bentley Hart in *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and*

deification not in the sense of becoming some kind of demi-god, but in the sense that we become truly/fully human as epitomised by Christ, the 'second Adam', whose likeness was borne by the first Adam before the Fall. Christ's incarnation restores humanity to what it was at the time of Adam – in perfect communion with the Creator.

The Elizabethan theologian and philosopher, Richard Hooker, makes clear that *theosis* is not a human activity, but starts with Christ's love:

> We are in Christ because he knoweth and loveth us even as parts of himself. No man actually is in him but they in whom he actually is. . . . We are therefore adopted sons of God to eternal life by participation of the only-begotten Son of God, whose life is the well-spring and cause of ours.[11]

Traherne describes the benefits of this 'participation' in *Centuries of Meditations*:

> To be the sons of God is not only to enjoy the privileges and the freedom of His house, and to bear the relation of children to so great a father, but it is to be like Him and to share with Him in all His glory and in all His treasures.[12]

Itrat-Husain says that union with God was 'for Traherne more a form of *philosophical contemplation*. . . . [It] was to be achieved in three stages, in which the senses in observing the world, reason in apprehending it, and the soul in loving and valuing it were to play their respective parts.'[13] The sequences are focused on the way in which the soul moves from being an image of God to achieving a true identity with God, with less of the emphasis on sin and punishment that is normally found in western theology.

Universal Salvation (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2019), e.g. pp. 132-38.

11. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book 5, Chap. 56, p. 7, in *The Works of That Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr. Richard Hooker: With an Account of his Life and Death by Isaac Walton*, repr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), Vol. 1, p. 625.
12. *Traherne* 5, p. 139, *Centuries*, III, 97, ll. 6-9.
13. Itrat-Husain, 'Thomas Traherne, the Mystical Philosopher', in *The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1948), p. 297. This chapter remains a helpfully lucid introduction to Traherne's theological thought, albeit written before the more recent discoveries of his work and therefore heavily dependent on *Centuries of Meditation*.

I. Personal Confession

To whom tell I all this? . . . And to what purpose do I this?
St Augustine, *Confessions*[14]

To the end thy soul might see
With open eyes thy great felicity
Traherne, 'The Author to the Critical Peruser'

It may seem strange in a book devoted to placing Traherne's poetry in the context of other seventeenth-century poets and writers to start by drawing comparisons with the work of St Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a late-Classical Church Father who wrote in prose. However, Augustine was enormously influential, especially in the Western Latin-speaking Church, and his use of autobiographical material in his *Confessions* appears to provide a model for Traherne's own approach both in the two sequences and also in the first two thirds of *Centuries of Meditations*, III, in which Traherne writes of his childhood. In particular, his realisation that he could find all that he needed in the Bible (*Centuries*, III, 27-29; *Poems of Felicity*: 'Dissatisfaction', 'The Bible') suggests a parallel to the climax of Book VIII of *Confessions* when Augustine hears a voice telling him to pick up a copy of the Bible and read it. Traherne seems to be making use of Augustine, even though what he has to say about childhood innocence and, by implication, original sin, is written *against* Augustine. The *Confessions* would have been well known to Traherne's contemporaries; Traherne himself would presumably have read it in Latin but the English translations by Sir Tobie Matthew (1624) and William Watts (1631) – whose translation, reprinted in Traherne's lifetime (1650), is used here – would have ensured wide knowledge. The *Confessions* is sometimes described as an autobiography but, as Robin Lane Fox points out, 'it is a prayer, addressed by Augustine to God, but intended to be overheard by readers'.[15] In it, Augustine reviews his past life, including his childhood, and considers the nature of his mind and memory and the purpose of his creation. In the last four books he provides a broader context, enabling the reader to see him as an everyman figure. In this way he provides

14. *St Augustine's Confessions Translated: And With Some Marginal Notes Illustrated*, by William Wats [*sic*] DD (London: Abel Roper, 1650), Book II, Chapter 2, paragraph 1 (hereinafter, e.g. II.ii.1). All quotations from St Augustine's *Confessions* are taken from the 1650 edition of the translation by William Watts, but I have modernised the spelling. William Watts (c.1590-1649) was rector of St Alban's, Wood Street, London.
15. Robin Lane Fox, *Augustine: Conversions and Confessions* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), p. 2. Writing about Traherne, Newey warns of the danger of the 'autobiographical fallacy', *Children of God*, p. 15.

a model for anyone writing about their own experience in relation to God for the benefit of others, both in terms of honesty (there is no point in trying to deceive an omniscient God) and of purpose. This is how he explains his motive for writing and his target audience:

> To whom tell I all this? For to Thee I tell it not [he is addressing God]; but before Thee relate it to my own kind, the human kind, even to so small a part of it as may light upon [come across] these writings of mine. And to what purpose do I this? Even that both myself and whosoever reads this, may bethink ourselves *out of what depths we are to cry unto Thee*.[16]

In the 'The Author to the Critical Peruser' at the opening of *Poems of Felicity*, Traherne also insists on honesty, the 'naked truth', but typically his purpose is not that the reader focus on the depths of human depravity (as in much Calvinist thought derived from Augustine), but that they may the 'highest bliss enjoy':

> The naked truth in many faces shown,
> Whose inward beauties very few have known,
> A simple light, transparent words, a strain
> That lowly creeps, yet maketh mountains plain,
> Brings down the highest mysteries to sense
> And keeps them there; that is our excellence:
> At that we aim; to the end thy soul might see
> With open eyes thy great felicity,
> Its objects view, and trace the glorious way
> Whereby thou mayest thy highest bliss enjoy.[17]

The *Confessions* are a confession of faith as well as of sin (the title might be better translated as 'Testimony') and, like them, the *Poems of Felicity* are not merely a confession of sin (as in 'The Instruction', which starts: 'Spew out thy filth') or the ponderings of a thoughtful man about God and the nature of the human soul, but also an account of discovering and turning to God. Underlying both works is a desire to praise God, although the reason for doing so is different in emphasis. Famously, Augustine writes:

> yet this man, this part of what Thou hast created, is desirous to praise Thee; Thou so sweetly provokest [incitest] him, that

16. *Confessions*, II.iii.1.
17. *Traherne* 6, p. 84, ll. 1-10.

> he even delighteth to praise Thee. For Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart cannot be quieted till it may find repose in Thee.[18]

Despite their differences, there can be no doubt that, like Augustine, Traherne 'delighteth to praise' God.

II. Sight, Memory and the Soul

A visive eye things visible doth see;
But with the invisible, invisibles agree.
Traherne, 'Sight', lines 23-24

Yet did not I swallow them into me by seeing.
Augustine, *Confessions*[19]

Both Traherne and Augustine recognise the important role that the senses play in providing the mind/soul with information. In 'Nature' Traherne writes, 'My senses were informers of my heart.'[20] This information is then held in the mind by the memory. Although Augustine does not give primacy to the sense of sight above the other senses in the way that Traherne does, nevertheless, sight does lead him to philosophical speculation about the nature of the mind and the memory's ability to hold images greater than itself:

> Great is this force of memory, excessive great . . . who can plummet the bottom of it? Yet is this a faculty of mine, and belongs unto my nature; nor can I myself comprehend [contain/understand] all that I am. Therefore is the mind too strait [narrow] to contain itself: not of capacity enough to hold there what should be there. Is the memory therefore without [outside] the mind, or rather is it not within it? How then is not the mind sufficient to contain all itself? A wonderful admiration [amazement] surprises me, and an astonishment seizes me upon this.

Augustine's solution to this dilemma of how the mind/soul can contain things far larger than itself, such as mountains, rivers and stars, is the conclusion that what the mind holds are the images, the Platonic 'ideas', or

18. *Confessions*, I.i.1.
19. *Confessions*, X.viii.6.
20. *Traherne* 6, p. 144, l. 7.

ideal forms, that are, according to Plato, true reality: 'Yet did not I swallow them into me by seeing, when as with mine eyes I beheld them. Nor are the things themselves now within me, but the images of them only.'[21]

Traherne's response to this conundrum is rather different. He takes up the thought that the mind may be 'without itself and not within' and starts 'Insatiableness I' explosively, 'No walls confine! Can nothing hold my mind?' Since humans are made in the image of God, he assumes that his mind, like the Deity's, can comprehend everything because it contains 'an endless space':

> The thoughts of men appear
> Freely to move within a sphere
> Of endless reach; and run,
> Though in the soul, beyond the sun.
> The ground on which they acted be
> Is unobserved infinity.
>
> Traversing through the sky,
> Though here, beyond it far they fly:
> Abiding in the mind
> An endless liberty they find:
> Throughout all spaces can extend,
> Nor ever meet or know an end.
>
> They, in their native sphere,
> At boundless distances appear:
> Eternity can measure;
> Its no beginning see with pleasure.
> Thus in the mind an endless space
> Doth naturally display its face.[22]

This ability to range through space and time does indeed present the soul as made in the image of God. John Mason (1646?-94), an evangelical parson and one of the first people to write hymns as opposed to metrical psalms, describes God in similar terms in 'A General Song of Praise to Almighty God':

> How great a being, Lord, is thine,
> Which doth all beings keep;
> Thy knowledge is the only line
> To sound so vast a deep;

21. *Confessions*, X.viii.5 and 6.
22. *Traherne* 6, pp. 188-89, 'Consummation', ll. 1-18.

Thou art a sea without a shore,
A sun without a sphere;
Thy time is now and evermore;
Thy place is everywhere.[23]

Clearly, the God-like thoughts that 'Though in the soul' can run 'beyond the sun', let alone that can see the 'no beginning' of time, are not simply dependent upon physical sight and, in the poem called 'Sight', Traherne distinguishes between his 'visive' eyes (his physical eyes) and the inward 'infant-eye': 'A visive eye things visible doth see; / But with the invisible, invisibles agree.'[24]

In this he proves not to be so distant from Augustine's thinking as might at first appear. In Book X, Chapter xi, Augustine puzzles over how things that his senses have never experienced can still be vivid in his mind and he suggests that they had always been present within him:

> Wherefore we find that to learn these things of which we suck not in any images by our senses, but perceive within by themselves, without images, as they are; is nothing else but by meditating to gather together those same notions which the memory did before contain more scatteringly and confusedly.[25]

This appears very similar to the explanation that Traherne offers in the fourth stanza of 'Sight', when he writes of finding 'in [his] mind' things 'beyond the sky':

I know not well
What did me tell
Of endless space: but I
Did in my mind
Some such thing find
To be beyond the sky
That had no bound; as certainly
As I can see
That I have foot or hand
To feel or stand:
Which I discernèd by another sight
Than that which graced my body much more bright.[26]

23. John Mason, 'A general song of praise to Almighty God', in *Poets of the 17th Century*, ed. by John Broadbent (New York, NY: Signet Classics, 1974), p. 449.
24. *Traherne* 6, p. 174, 'Sight', ll. 23-24.
25. *Confessions*, X.xi.1.
26. *Traherne* 6, p. 175, 'Sight', ll. 37-48.

III. Temptation

sweet enticing joys
Fulke Greville, *Caelica*, Sonnet 2

abominable loves crackled round about me
Augustine, *Confessions*, III.i

all my pleasure was in sin
Traherne, 'An Infant-Eye'

One poet influenced indirectly by Augustine through his Calvinist upbringing is Fulke Greville. His sonnet sequence, *Caelica*, is addressed to a 'celestial one', just as *Astrophel and Stella*, the sonnet sequence of his close friend, Sir Philip Sidney, is addressed to Stella, a 'star'. Although *Caelica* was started in Sidney's lifetime, Greville continued to work on it over a long period and it was not finally published until 1633, five years after his death. At first sight, it has little to say of religious import; it appears almost as a commentary on the sequence of Sidney. Like Augustine, however, Greville tells of unfulfilling sexual relationships, drawing on personal experience to reveal the corrupting effect of the Fall. The first two sonnets[27] at once make it clear that this is not just the sort of 'Petrarchan' poetry about sighing lovers parodied by Donne and others; sometimes, it is true, the lover is infatuated but, at other times, he is ironic, flippant, cynical and, by the end, deeply serious as well. The opening verse of the first sonnet describes the mistress with hyperbole as the embodiment of all kinds of desirable (and abstract) things:

> Love, the delight of all well-thinking minds;
> Delight, the fruit of virtue dearly loved;
> Virtue, the highest good, that reason finds;
> Reason, the fire wherein men's thoughts be proved;
> Are from the world by Nature's power bereft,
> And in one creature, for her glory left.
> (Sonnet I, lines 1-6)

However, in the second poem this paragon of virtue and delight has become a raging 'dog' and, although this is obviously a metaphor, it is one that brings with it undertones of sexual disgust and violence:

27. Fewer than half of Greville's poems are sonnets in the modern sense of fourteen-line poems with a formal rhyme scheme but they are sonnets in the early modern sense of being lyric poems.

Fair dog, which so my heart dost tear asunder,
That my life's blood, my bowels overfloweth,
Alas, what wicked rage concealest thou under
These sweet enticing joys, thy forehead showeth?[28]
(Sonnet II, lines 1-4)

The world of sexual corruption that Greville portrays has something in common with Augustine's Carthage 'where a whole frying pan full of abominable loves crackled round about me'.[29] Like Augustine, Greville uses personal material to raise wider issues, and the turning point comes in the closing group of sonnets in which 'woe and lust' are seen as mere 'shadows' to be driven away by the 'light of life'; God only finally offers redemption when 'man be overthrown':

[The] light of life doth all these shadows war
Of woe and lust, that dazzle and enthral,
Whereby man's joys with goodness bounded are,
And to remorse his fears transformèd all;
His six days' labour past, and that clear star,
Figure of Sabbath's rest, raised by this fall;
For God comes not till man be overthrown;
Peace is the seed of grace, in dead flesh sown.[30]
(Sonnet 96, lines 41-48)

Thus, Greville finally reaches 'Sabbath's rest', the 'repose' in God of which Augustine writes. At one point in *Poems of Felicity*, the very sequence of titles indicates a 'restless' yearning similar to that of both Greville and Augustine: 'Solitude' is followed by 'Poverty' and 'Dissatisfaction'. There is also a brief acknowledgement of the temptations of sexual desire, such as 'a woman's hand' or 'a beauteous skin'.[31] However, these feelings are overwhelmed by his gratitude for the physical senses, and especially sight, which enable him to delight in creation's beauty that brings him closer to God. His delighted response contrasts with Augustine's feeling that he was wrong to rush 'headlong upon those beautiful things that Thou hast made', since worldly beauty kept him at a distance from God:

28. Greville, in *The Works in Verse and Prose Complete of the Right Honourable Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, ed. by A.B. Grosart, 4 vols (printed for private circulation, 1870), Vol. 3, *Caelica*, pp. 9 and 10, Sonnets 1 and 2.
29. *Confessions*, III.i.1.
30. Greville, *The Works*, *Caelica*, Sonnet XCVI. (misnumbered XCVII), p. 125, ll. 41-48.
31. *Traherne* 6, p. 98, 'An Infant-Eye', ll. 43-44.

> Too late began I to love Thee, O thou Beauty both so ancient and so fresh, yea too, too late came I to love Thee. For behold, Thou wert within me, and I out of myself, where I made search for Thee: deformed I, wooing these beautiful pieces of Thy workmanship. Thou indeed wert with me; but I was not with Thee: these beauties kept me far enough from Thee: even those, which unless they had their being in Thee, should not be at all.[32]

Augustine recognises beauty as in some sense an image of God's glory, but is much more cautious than Traherne, because physical beauty can also tempt humans to sin.

IV. The Dangers of Sight

But wantonness and avarice got in
Traherne, 'An Infant-Eye'

The pleasure of these eyes of my flesh
Augustine, *Confessions*

Sense is a spy
Greville, *Caelica*, Sonnet 6[33]

Augustine is acutely aware of what he calls 'the pleasure of these eyes of my flesh'[34] (*voluptas oculorum istorum carnis meae*, which is sometimes translated as 'the lust of my eyes' in acknowledgement of Augustine's echo of St John's warning against being seduced by worldly things: 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world.'[35]). Traherne regards sight as a great gift but, nonetheless, he too is well aware of the dangers of being led astray by 'a woman's hand' or 'beauteous skin' and finding 'all [his] pleasure . . . in sin', as in these stanzas where he writes of being seduced by false sight, by 'feeble and disabled sense':

> But wantonness and avarice got in
> And spoiled my wealth; (I never to complain
> Can cease, till I am purgèd from my sin

32. *Confessions*, X.xxvii,1.
33. *Traherne* 6, p. 98, 'An Infant-Eye', l. 37; *Confessions*, X.xxxiv.1; *The Works in Verse and Prose of the Right Honourable Fulke Greville*, Vol. 3, p. 13, Sonnet VI.
34. *Confessions*, X.xxxiv.1.
35. 1 John 2:16.

And made an infant once again:)
So that my feeble and disabled sense
Reached only near things with its influence.

A house, a woman's hand, a piece of gold,
A feast, a costly suit, a beauteous skin
That vied with ivory, I did behold;
And all my pleasure was in sin:
Who had at first with simple infant-eyes
Beheld as mine even all eternities.

O die! die unto all that draws thine eye
From its first objects: let not fading pleasures
Infect thy mind; but see thou carefully
Bid them adieu. Return: Thy treasures
Abide Thee still, and in their places stand
Inviting yet, and waiting Thy command.[36]

For Traherne there are still true 'treasures' waiting to be seen, if he can view them with 'infant-eyes' and 'die unto all that draws [his] eye / From its first objects'. So, at the close of 'The Person', he can write:

Thy gifts, O God, alone I'll prize,
My tongue, my eyes,
My cheeks, my lips, mine ears, my hands, my feet;
Their harmony is far more sweet,
Their beauty true. And these, in all my ways,
Shall be the themes and organs of thy praise.[37]

While Traherne gives priority above all to his 'eyes', as the title of the whole sequence makes clear (*Poems of Felicity Containing Reflections on the Native Objects of An Infant-Eye*), Augustine returns to the dangers of 'these eyes of my flesh':

> Mine eyes take delight in fair forms, and varieties of them: in beautiful and pleasant colours. Suffer not these to hold possession in my soul; . . .
>
> Oh how innumerable toys made by divers arts and manufactures, both in our apparel, shoes, vessels and such like works; in pictures also and divers feigned images, yea and these

36. *Traherne* 6, p. 98, 'An Infant-Eye', ll. 37-54.
37. Ibid., p. 164, 'The Person', ll. 59-64.

> far exceeding all necessary and moderate use, and all pious significations, have men added to tempt their own eyes withal: outwardly following after what themselves make, inwardly forsaking Him by whom themselves were made . . .

Nevertheless, despite the more severe tone, Augustine, too, rejoices in beauty; he continues:

> For mine own part, O my God and my beauty, I even therefore dedicate an hymn unto Thee, and do sacrifice praise unto my Sanctifier; because of those beautiful patterns which through men's souls are conveyed into their cunning hands; which all descend from that beauty which is above our souls, which my soul day and night sighed after.[38]

Greville, too, enjoys beauty, but is alert to the dangers of being seduced by sight:

> Eyes, why did you bring unto me those graces,
> Graced to yield wonder out of her true measure,
> Measure of all joys, stay to fancy-traces, *fixed point to guide my fancy*
> Model of pleasure?
>
> Reason is now grown a disease in reason,
> Thoughts knit upon thoughts free alone to wonder;
> Sense is a spy, made to do fancy treason,
> Love go I under.[39]

The false impressions conveyed by eyes that 'do fancy treason' (i.e. betray his imagination, leading it astray) provoke Greville's disillusionment, which is expressed most bitterly in Sonnet LXIV, when, rejected himself, he sees through Caelica's 'many worths', and sees only her promiscuity. With heavy and contemptuous irony, however, he still thinks her 'heart a heavenly place'; 'heavenly' in that it is capable of infinite expansion, but only to house all her other lovers:

> Caelica, when I did see you every day,
> I saw so many worths so well united,

38. *Confessions*, X.xxxiv.1, 3 and 4.
39. Greville, The *Works*, *Caelica* p. 13, Sonnet VI, ll. 41-48.

As in this union while but one did play,
All others' eyes both wondered and delighted: . . .

And since my fall, though I now only see
Your back, while all the world beholds your face,
This shadow still shows miracles to me,
And still I think your heart a heavenly place:
For what before was filled by me alone,
I now discern hath room for everyone.[40]

The bitterness of the epigrammatic final couplet is matched by Traherne's scathing irony in the first two short, exclamatory lines below, his colloquial expression given additional stress by the rapid rhyming of 'divine' with 'fine'. He, too, shows his awareness of the dangers of 'tinsel things' and trivial 'toys' and that he knows well how the eye can be distracted by what is superficially attractive, but ultimately trashy:

O fine!
O most divine!
O brave! They cried; and showed
Some tinsel thing whose glittering did amaze,
And to their cries its beauty owed;
Thus I on riches, by degrees,
Of a new stamp did learn to gaze; *of a new kind*
While all the world for these
I lost: my joy turned to a blaze.[41] *an evanescent flash*

However, if viewed aright through 'infant-eyes', the world, which is God's creation, can point to God. Neither Traherne nor Augustine is a pantheist, but 'natural theology' (reading from the 'Book of Nature', as it were) does still point to God. Nevertheless, as John Spencer Hill puts it, 'the beauties of nature [are no] more than symbols of the transcendent Creator whose immanence and omnipresence they render intelligible'.[42] At this point in the *Confessions* Augustine's rhetorical questions make clear that God is transcendent as well as immanent, he is not only to be found *in* nature, for he has 'no need to be contained by something':

40. Greville, The *Works*, *Caelica* pp. 75-76, Sonnet LXIV, ll. 1-4, 9-14.
41. *Traherne* 6, p. 113, 'The Apostacy', ll. 73-81.
42. John Spencer Hill, *Infinity, Faith, and Time: Christian Humanism and Renaissance Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p. 50.

> Do therefore the heaven and the earth contain Thee, seeing Thou fillest them? Or dost Thou fill them, and there yet remains an overplus of Thee, because they are not able to comprehend Thee? If so, into what dost Thou pour whatsoever remaineth of Thee after heaven and earth are filled? Hast Thou need to be [Do You really need to be] contained by something, Thou who containest all things; seeing that what Thou fillest, by containing them Thou fillest?[43]

For Traherne, writing after Copernicus, the universe has suddenly expanded dramatically far beyond anything that Augustine could have imagined, and his 'insatiable' soul, made in the image of God and capable of conceiving both infinite space and eternity, revels in a God revealed in a universe that is both infinite and eternal:

> We first by nature all things boundless see;
> Feel all illimited; and know
> No terms or periods: but go on
> Throughout the endless throne
> Of God, to view His wide eternity;
> Even here below
> His omnipresence we
> Do pry into, that copious treasury.
> Though men have taught
> To limit and to bound our thought.[44]

A little later he takes up the theme in 'Insatiableness II':

> This busy, vast, enquiring soul
> Brooks no control:
> 'Tis very curious too.
> Each one of all those worlds must be
> Enriched with infinite variety
> And worth; or 'twill not do.
>
> 'Tis nor delight nor perfect pleasure
> To have a purse
> That hath a bottom of its treasure,
> Since I must thence endless expense disburse.

43. *Confessions*, I.iii.1.
44. *Traherne* 6, p. 186, 'The City', ll. 61-70.

Sure there's a GOD (for else there's no delight),
One infinite.[45]

Since Traherne's own desire for God is boundless, he can only be satisfied by an infinite God whose creation is 'illimited', or boundless. In *Centuries*, II, 80, he puts it like this:

> Infinite Love cannot be expressed in finite room: but must have infinite places wherein to utter and show itself. It must therefore fill all eternity and the omnipresence of God with joys and treasures for my fruition [enjoyment]. And yet it must be expressed in a finite room: by making me able in a centre to enjoy them. It must be infinitely expressed in the smallest moment by making me able in every moment to see them all. It is both ways infinite, for my soul is an infinite sphere in a centre. By this you may know that you are infinitely beloved: GOD hath made your spirit a centre in eternity comprehending all: and filled all about you in an endless manner with infinite riches: which shine before you and surround you with divine and heavenly enjoyments.[46]

Traherne's 'busy, vast, enquiring soul' is contained in the 'finite room' of his body, but being an 'infinite sphere' can 'all things boundless see' and 'view his wide eternity' with 'infant-eyes', thus 'comprehending all'.

V. Innocence and Original Sin

Who shall bring to my remembrance the sin of my infancy?
Augustine, *Confessions*

To infancy, O Lord, again I come,
That I my manhood may improve
Traherne, 'The Return'[47]

Both Traherne and Augustine read from the 'Book of Nature' but, above all, of course, they draw heavily on the Book of Scripture. The famous passage in *Confessions* when Augustine, in a state of spiritual distress, retreats into a garden and hears a voice repeatedly telling him to read the Bible, '*Tolle lege, tolle lege*' ('Take up and read, take up and read') is paralleled by Traherne

45. Ibid., p. 188, 'Insatiableness II', ll. 13-24.
46. *Traherne* 5, pp. 81-2, *Centuries*, II, 80, ll. 2-12.
47. *Confessions*, I.vii.1; *Traherne* 6, p. 98, ll. 1-2.

in 'Dissatisfaction', when, 'Weary of all that since the Fall / Mine eyes on earth can find' and surrounded by those who likewise had failed to see the truth in the Book of Nature ('Their eyes being all put out with dust'), he is granted the Book of Scripture and then 'the Bible me supplied [gave me all that I needed]'.[48] In the immediately following poem he learns from the Bible that he is a 'son of God' (Romans 8:16-19) and made in 'His image' (Genesis 1:27) and also a 'king' (perhaps Psalm 8:5-6):

> That! That! There I was told
> That I the son of God was made,
> His image. O divine! And that fine gold,
> With all the joys that here do fade,
> Are but a toy, comparèd to the bliss
> Which heavenly, God-like, and eternal is.
> That we on earth are kings;
> And, though we're clothed with mortal skin,
> Are inward cherubins; have angels' wings;
> Affections, thoughts, and minds within,
> Can soar through all the coasts of heaven and earth;
> And shall be sated with celestial mirth.[49]

It is hard to believe that Traherne's echoing of Augustine's taking up of the Bible is not conscious. They both delight in what the Bible says and especially the Psalms. 'Oh, how was I inflamed towards Thee [God] by them!' writes Augustine, while in *Centuries*, III, 66, Traherne writes, 'Methought a new light darted in into all his [David's] psalms, and finally spread abroad over the whole Bible.'[50] Their interpretation of the Psalms, however, differs markedly when it comes to original sin. The opening of *Poems of Felicity* follows the same order as in the *Dobell Poems*, describing the innocence of the infant. Traherne says of his infant self, 'No fraud nor anger in me moved, / No malice, jealousy or spite.'[51] Augustine cannot remember his own infancy, but has observed other infants (presumably including his own son) and, with a strong sense of the inescapable burden of original sin, sees nothing innocent about infancy at all: 'Who shall bring to my remembrance the sin of my infancy? For in thy sight can no man be clean from his sin (Job 25:3); no, not an infant of a day old.'

48. *Confessions*, VIII.xii.2, and *Traherne* 6, pp. 121-22, 'Dissatisfaction', ll. 71-72, 56 and 112.
49. *Traherne* 6, p. 123, 'The Bible', ll. 1-13.
50. *Confessions*, IX.iv.2; *Traherne* 5, p. 124, *Centuries*, III, 66.
51. *Traherne* 6, p. 95, 'Innocence', ll.32-33.

Later in the same chapter he echoes Psalm 51:5, asking a rhetorical question that clearly expects the answer 'nowhere and never': 'Now, *if I were shapen in iniquity, and in sin conceived by my mother*,(Psalm 51:5), where, I beseech thee, O my God, in what place, Lord, was I, thy servant, where and when was I innocent?'.[52]

Significantly, Traherne, writing about the Psalms in *Centuries*, III, after describing his childhood and discovery of this 'Book from Heaven', chooses to comment, not on verse five of Psalm 51, as Augustine does ('Behold I was shapen in wickedness and in sin did my mother conceive me'), but on verse seventeen, emphasising God's mercy ('a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt Thou not despise'). Traherne would have recited this verse twice daily as one of the opening sentences for both Morning and Evening Prayer in the 1662 revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* and he clearly valued it, since it also opens Meditation 93 in *Select Meditations*:

> A broken and contrite heart is made up of knowledge, sorrow and love: knowledge of our primitive felicity in Eden, sorrow for our fall, love to God so gracious and redeeming; knowledge of our happiness in being redeemed, sorrow for sin against our Redeemer, love to God yet continuing favourable and gracious.[53]

This 'knowledge of our primitive felicity in Eden' is what enables sinners to understand not simply the greatness of their fall, but also to know to what they are redeemed, which in turn reveals the full generosity of the love that Jesus has manifested through his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension, enabling redeemed sinners to offer thanks. As Traherne puts it in *Centuries*, II, 5, quoting Revelation 2:5:

> *Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent*, which intimates our duty of remembering our happiness in the estate of innocence. For without this we can never prize our Redeemer's love: He that knows not to what he is redeemed cannot prize the work of redemption. . . . Since therefore by the Second Adam [Jesus], we are restored to that we lost in the first: unless we value that we lost in the first, we cannot truly rejoice in the second. But when we do, then all things receive an infinite esteem, and an augmentation infinitely infinite, that follows after: Our Saviour's love, his incarnation, his life and death, his resurrection, his ascension into Heaven, his intercession for us

52. *Confessions*, I.vii.1 and 3.
53. *Traherne* 5, p. 134, *Centuries*, III, 83; ibid., p. 264, *Select Meditations*, I, 93.

> etc. being then seen, and infinitely prized, in a glorious light: as also our deliverance from Hell, and our reconciliation unto God.[54]

This makes clear why childhood innocence and Eden are so central in Traherne's writings, for from the memory of these springs the ability to recognise the full value of Christ's restoration of what is lost, which enables Christians to rejoice gratefully in his redemption of humanity. Nevertheless, despite the clash between claiming to be able to remember being innocent and accepting the doctrine of original sin, Traherne does not appear to rule out the latter, writing of what 'we lost in the first [Adam]'.

Although Augustine was the first to use the actual expression, 'original sin', the idea has much earlier roots. He finds support for the concept by drawing on the Genesis narrative of Adam and Eve and God's judgement after their sin, especially as interpreted by St Paul in Romans 5:12: 'Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned', and again in I Corinthians 15:21-2: 'For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'

Quite apart from Biblical authority, Augustine takes his observations of the greediness and demanding nature of babies as further evidence:

> I myself have seen and observed a little baby to be already jealous; and before it could speak, what an angry and a bitter look it would cast at another child that sucked away its milk from it. . . .
>
> But may this pass for innocency, that a baby full fed, should not endure a poor foster-child to share with him in a fountain of milk plentifully and freshly flowing, though destitute of succour, and having but that only nourishment to sustain its poor life withal?[55]

Later he describes how as a boy he would steal food from home and cheat in his games with other children, whilst being angry if they tried to retaliate and cheat him, and asks the rhetorical question: 'Is this that childish innocency? It is not, Lord, it is not. . . . Thou therefore, O our King, hast allowed of the character of humility in the stature of childhood, when once Thou saidest: *To such belongeth the Kingdom of God*'.[56]

54. Ibid., p. 51, *Centuries*, II, 5, ll.4-16.
55. *Confessions*, I.vii.1 and 2.
56. Ibid., I.xix.3. The reference is to Matthew 18:3, Luke 18:17 and John 3:3.

Augustine evidently lays the emphasis on the word 'humble' in the following verse ('Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child . . .' Matthew 18:4), suggesting that Christ's words about the child are merely directing us to remember the child's powerlessness and copy its necessary humility; in Augustine's opinion Christ is definitely not suggesting that little children can enter the 'kingdom of heaven' by virtue of their innocence.[57] Writing on what he describes as Augustine's 'defining notion' of original sin, Alistair McFadyen says, 'It is important to realize that what is communicated is sin itself (guilt), not merely a tendency towards sin or an incapacity for the good. Sin is primarily a state we are in, only secondarily an act.'[58] This is entirely different to what Traherne says at the close of 'Innocence', which appears to be a denial of original sin and an affirmation of the child as a model to emulate:

> Within, without me, all was pure:
> I must become a child again.[59]

Traherne does, however, explain his interpretation of Christ's words in *Centuries,* III, 5, distinguishing between the *childish* sinfulness of the kind that Augustine condemns and the *childlike* purity which frees us from 'evil habits' and 'the leaven of this world':

> Our Saviour's meaning when he said, He must be born again and become a little child that will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven is deeper far than is generally believed. It is not only in a careless reliance upon Divine Providence that we are to become little children, or in the feebleness and shortness of our anger and simplicity of our passions, but in the peace and purity of all

57. The whole passage from St Matthew's Gospel reads: 'And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven' Matthew 18:2-4 (AV). Augustine does not refer in *Confessions* to Jesus's other words about children quoted in Matthew 11:25: 'I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes' but, when he preaches on this verse in Sermon XVII, he is clear that 'babes' signify the humble; there is no mention of innocence.

58. Alastair McFadyen, 'Sin', in Adrian Hastings, Alastair Mason and Hugh Pyper (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 667.

59. *Traherne* 6, p. 96, 'Innocence', ll. 64-65.

> our soul; which purity also is a deeper thing than is commonly apprehended, for we must disrobe ourselves of all false colours [pretences], and unclothe our souls of evil habits. All our thoughts must be infant-like and clear, the powers of our soul free from the leaven of this world and disentangled from men's conceits and customs. . . . And therefore is it requisite that we should be as very strangers to the thoughts, customs and opinions of men in this world as if we were but little children.[60]

The value of getting free from 'the leaven of this world' and regaining the innocent vision of childhood can be supported by reference to another saying of Jesus that Augustine does not refer to, Jesus's words in St Matthew 11:25: 'Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes'.

Philip, himself a clergyman in the Church of England, seems to have had reservations about his brother's lack of emphasis on original sin (not to mention Article IX of the 39 Articles, 'Of Original or Birth-sin'). In 'Innocence', where Thomas had written of his childhood, 'A joyful sense and purity / Is all I can remember' (*Dobell Poems*), Philip amends to: 'A joyful sense exempt from fear / Is all I can remember.' To be 'exempt from fear' is quite different from being 'pure'.[61]

Nevertheless, Traherne does not completely deny original sin, as can be seen by the opening of this poem from *Christian Ethics*, the book he published in 1673, just before his death:

> Mankind is sick, the world distempered lies,
> Oppressed with sins and miseries.
> Their sins are woes; a long corrupted train
> Of poison, drawn from Adam's vein,
> Stains all his seed, and all his kin
> Are one disease of life within.
> They all torment themselves!
> The world's one Bedlam, or a greater cave
> Of madmen, that do always rave.[62]

Nor does Traherne only write of 'mankind's' sinfulness in general terms. In *Centuries*, III, 49, he acknowledges his own sins as well:

60. *Traherne* 5, pp. 95-96, *Centuries*, III, 5.
61. Traherne 6, p. 9. ll. 10-11 and p. 94, ll. 10-11.
62. *Christian Ethicks*, XXV, 'Of Meekness', p.201.

Sin!
O only fatal woe,
That makest me sad and mourning go!
That all my joys dost spoil,
His kingdom and my soul defile!
I never can agree
With thee![63]

There is no sign here of Traherne denying the reality of sin, but he does insist on the validity of his own infant experience: 'Within, without me, all was pure.' What emerges later in the poem from *Christian Ethicks* is a confidence in the saving grace of Christ. There is no fear of a lack of prevenient grace, that grace that enables sinning humans to repent as the necessary preliminary to forgiveness. When Cranmer's original 42 articles were revised by Archbishop Parker at the start of Elizabeth I's reign and reduced to the 39 that are still printed at the back of the *Book of Common Prayer* today, one article that was omitted was that which came immediately after the one on original sin. Entitled 'Of Grace', it implies that God positively offers grace, although humans do not have to accept it; significantly, there is no reason to fear that it will be withheld:

'And although those that have no will to good things, he maketh them to will, and those that would [that desire] evil things, he maketh them not to will the same, yet nevertheless he enforceth not the will.'[64]

In this stanza from 'Mankind is sick', it is as if that missing article has been restored; God is longing to forgive us and give us peace:

And while we feel how much our GOD doth love
The peace of sinners, how much move, *persuade*
And sue, and thirst, entreat, lament, and grieve,
For all the crimes in which they live,
And seek and wait, and call again
And long to save them from the pain
Of sin, from all their woe!
With greater thirst, as well as grief we try
How to relieve their misery.

63. *Traherne* 5, p. 117, *Centuries*, III, 49.
64. Oliver O'Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1986, repr. 1993 with slightly different pagination), p. 139, 'Article X' of the 1553 Articles. For a more nuanced discussion of the treatment of original sin in the Articles, see O'Donovan, Chapter 5, pp. 65-75.

The thought that God 'long[s] to save' us and 'entreat[s]' us to repent is followed by a delighted expression of the felicity that such forgiveness leads to:

> The life and splendour of Felicity
> Whose floods so overflowing be,
> The streams of joy which round about his throne
> Enrich and fill each holy one,
> Are so abundant, that we can
> Spare all, even all to any man!
> And have it all ourselves!
> Nay have the more! We long to make them see
> The sweetness of Felicity.[65]

One key element of Traherne's thought that Philip did preserve in his editing of his brother's work was the importance of innocent sight, as can be seen from the title page which he prepared for the printer, where the full title is *Poems of Felicity (Vol. 1) Containing Reflections on the Native Objects of An Infant-Eye*.[66] Traherne describes the innocent perception of the 'infant-eye' in 'The Preparative', one of the poems selected for both sequences. In its closing stanza Traherne again writes about the need to be 'disentangled', as he had in the passage quoted above from *Centuries*:

> A disentangled and a naked sense, *the sense of sight*
> A mind that's unpossessed,
> A disengagèd breast,
> A quick unprejudiced intelligence
> Acquainted with the Golden Mean, *the avoidance of extremes*
> An even spirit, quiet, and serene,
> Is that where Wisdom's excellence
> And pleasure keep their court of residence.
> My soul get free,
> And then thou mayest possess Felicity.[67]

In other words, the adult, having been corrupted from his initial innocence at birth, needs to become 'disengagèd' and recapture the 'infant-eye' that

65. Traherne, *Christian Ethicks*, XXV, pp.202-3.
66. *Traherne* 6, p. 81, *Poems of Felicity*; sadly, no one has yet identified Vol. 2, which was probably never prepared, but this does imply that there were once more poems waiting to be discovered.
67. Ibid., p. 101, 'The Preparative', ll. 61-70.

sees the true value of God's creation, which proves to be as great as it was in Paradise. Writing about his childhood in the *Third Century*, Traherne puts it like this: 'Certainly Adam in Paradise had not more sweet and curious [exquisite] apprehensions of the world, than I when I was a child.'[68] Therefore, he argues in 'The Return' that the childlike adult, like Adam and Eve before the Fall (whom Irenaeus also saw as children), when they had not yet 'learnèd to be poor' through misvaluing God's creation, should thank God and 'adore' Him:

> To infancy, O Lord, again I come,
> That I my manhood may improve:
> My early tutor is the womb;
> I still my cradle love.
> 'Tis strange that I should wisest be,
> When least I could an error see. . . .
>
> My God, Thy bounty then did ravish me!
> Before I learnèd to be poor,
> I always did Thy riches see,
> And thankfully adore:
> Thy glory and Thy goodness were
> My sweet companions all the year.[69]

The perception and appreciation of God's ravishing 'bounty' and 'riches' through recalling that time when Traherne 'least . . . could an error see' are key themes which recur in *Poems of Felicity* and will be considered further in the next chapter.

68. *Traherne* 5, p. 93, *Centuries*, III, 1, ll. 10-12.
69. *Traherne* 6, pp. 98-99, 'The Return', ll. 1-6, 13-18.