

# THOMAS TRAHERNE AND THE AFFECTIONS OF THE SUBLIME

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**Let me begin** by saying that I cannot thank you all enough for allowing me to be part of this special weekend with you. Some of you may know this is actually my second visit here to St. Mary's. In 2006, I was a Fulbright Scholar at Cardiff University, working on a book about John Milton. It was a very odd time for me. I was to be in Wales for six months; my wife, Alison, was back in the U.S., pregnant with our first child. I had never been away from my wife for that long, never spent any significant time in the U.K., and certainly never knew the anxiety of expecting a child – one who was, incidentally, almost seven years in the making. For the first five months of the grant, I definitely had a very tumultuous spirit. In many ways, it was one of the best times of my life. As an American, I had been reading and studying the literature of England for years, but in so many ways I had always felt a little disconnected as an American. But now, given the opportunity to spend time here and to visit places I had only really read about it, I felt like I was a part of the world, culture, and history to which I had in large part dedicated my life.

**I was working** and enjoying my time here, but I was also counting down the days until my return home with both sadness and relief. Shortly before I was supposed to return, Richard Birt sent me a letter reminding me of the annual Traherne Festival. I had been working on Traherne for years, had just published an annotated bibliography of scholarship, and had just finished putting together the first essay collection ever devoted to his work. After receiving Richard's letter, I knew I wanted to come. I knew I would feel an intellectual excitement at being here, the place where Traherne once preached, and I suppose, baptized children, walked the grounds, and thought about his vision of God and mankind. But my actual reaction to this place was far more than just an intellectual one. The moment I walked up the hill to the church, not by the main road, but by a short cut someone had directed me through, I experienced an inexplicable sense of peace and a feeling of joy. All of the anxiety seemed to just peel away, sloughed off by, should I dare say, a sensation of felicity. Later in the day, I sat outside for some time, and what I felt more than anything else were the sensations of love. I thought about my wife, my unborn child, Catherine, and just felt tranquility in knowing that love was there. . . in the same way as it was here.

**Is it all that surprising** that here at this place a Traherne enthusiast should feel those affections of love? I cannot explain why this place meant so much to me – not exactly. The people here were, and still are, quite wonderful. One of my best and most special memories is of Denise Inge and Donald Allchin driving me through the countryside – they really will never know how memorable that was for me. Traherne and his work had always played a vital part in my life, so being at a place so connected to him was obviously important. I was also going to be back with my family soon, so again, that I would enjoy my visit here goes without saying but the feelings I had were something beyond all that. I felt what I would call the affections of the sublime at this place, and it is exactly those affections that permeate Traherne's work and now extend to the very structures of creation here. Many of us who work on Traherne writings have spent a good bit of time in recent years really trying to pin down Traherne the man, Traherne the theologian, Traherne the product of an age. And it is right to do so. But I must admit that I find myself returning not to Traherne the 17<sup>th</sup> century citizen, the theologian and Anglican – but to that original, almost mystic vision – the somewhat ungraspable presence of awe and transcendence that marked those initial reads of his work. I find myself returning to Traherne's realm of the sublime, the place where we transcend the physical, the sensual, and reach a state of something else, something beyond touch and beyond language. The historical, cultural contexts are vital, but our experience tells us that art often produces a state that is beyond "sources," beyond identifiable, definable contexts.

**So as I speak to you to today**, I speak of Thomas Traherne as a writer of the sublime. Of course, I am certainly not the first to imply this fact about Traherne's artistic and religious vision. Bertram Dobell, the editor of the first edition of Traherne which appeared at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mentions the "sublime" nature of Traherne's writing numerous times in the introduction to the poetry and Centuries. C.S Lewis also commented on the great sublimity of Traherne's work (as you may or may not know, Lewis was a great fan of Traherne, calling the Centuries "almost the greatest work in English"). More recently, Jan Ross, the current editor of the ongoing *Complete Works of Traherne* (published

by Boydell and Brewer) dedicated a whole chapter to Traherne and the Sublime in her doctoral dissertation, stating that the context of the sublime “encompasses both his religious and his literary ideal. . . and by understanding the religious sublime in Traherne, we can move toward a way of criticizing his prose and poetry.” But what is the sublime? That is the problem, isn’t it? It is a term that has been and is still used very indiscriminately. These kinds of concepts are often very difficult to define – similar, I would say, to even Traherne’s notion of “felicity,” which means happiness or joy, but seems to suggest so much more. The word *sublime* comes from the Latin *sub limen*, literally “below the lintel or top of the door frame,” but this was used metaphorically even in Latin; *sublimis* is something lofty, high, elevated. Now, the word “sublime” is still used to denote something lofty and elevated, but its implications are more nuanced than we often ascribe to the concept. It has come to be a vague word describing that which inspires awe, or something akin to powerful emotions, difficult to describe. Still, the term does have a more stable meaning in the context of the thinkers who have dealt with it. Therefore, I would like to talk about Traherne and the sublime in relation to some of the notions of what the sublime is, and what I hope to demonstrate is that Traherne’s sublime vision is one that is intricately connected to a transhistorical narrative of the sublime. That is, not only does understanding the sublime help us understand Traherne and his views of man, God, and the creation as a whole, but Traherne can help us better understand the longstanding philosophical treatment of the sublime itself.

**The ancient Longinus**, in his treatise “On the Sublime,” considered the sublime as a kind of rhetorical effect one might find in literary discourse. He ties it with “elevated language” that stems from both inspiration and aesthetics. He states that there are 5 sources for such language of the sublime:

There are, it may be said, five principal sources of elevated language. Beneath these five varieties there lies, as though it were a common foundation, the gift of discourse, which is indispensable. First and most important is the power of forming great conceptions. . . Secondly, there is vehement and inspired passion. These two components of the sublime are for the most part innate. Those which remain are partly the product of art.

He continues to discuss those sources that are products of art, such as “noble diction,” and “dignified and elevated composition” as other elements of sublime rhetoric. But it is those two innate qualities that are most relevant for a discussion of Traherne.

**For Traherne**, grand conception and “vehement and inspired” passion are the defining characteristics of his poetic endeavors. (I include the prose *Centuries* for being fundamentally poetic in nature). His ideal of an all-inheriting mankind as a perfection of creation both outside and within, and the quest for a state of pure

“Felicity” where we transcend the limitations of the world, are all parts of his own great conception. He writes:

The naked Truth in many faces shewn,  
Whose Inward Beauties very few hav 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 th’end thy Soul might see  
With open Eys thy Great Felicity,  
Its Objects view, and trace the glorious Way  
Whereby thou may’st thy Highest Bliss enjoy.

No curling Metaphors that gild the Sence,  
Nor Pictures here, nor painted Eloquence;  
No florid Streams of Superficial Gemss,  
But real Crowns and Thrones, and Diadems!!!!

Traherne clearly writes of big things, big conceptions, and the underlying passion that accompanies nearly all of his writing is obvious and exceeds even the celebratory tone of a Crashaw, or even, later, a Whitman.

**Despite the idea** or demonstration that passionate language can depict and even promote the sublime, Longinus and Traherne both share the idea that lofty language cannot substitute for sublime ideas. As Traherne says, “no curling metaphors that gild the sense”; as Longinus states it, though not quite as directly, despite the power of language, “stately language is not to be used everywhere, since to invest petty affairs with great and high-sounding names would seem just like putting a full-sized tragic mask upon an infant boy.” Longinus continues:

figurative language possesses great natural power, and. . . metaphors contribute to the sublime; and at the same time . . . it is impassioned and descriptive passages which rejoice in them to the greatest extent. It is obvious, however, even though I do not dwell upon it, that the use of tropes, like all other beauties of expression, is apt to lead to excess.

**The sentiment** in both cases, for both writers, is basically that one can go overboard trying to add verbal fluff to sublime conceptions, or even worse, trying to use such language to make something appear to have shadows of the sublime. Impassioned rhetoric can only go so far. So really, despite the grand potential of an artistically manipulated language, Traherne, like Longinus, asks for true big conceptions, those things that we might call sublime. Traherne even uses the word itself in the opening to *Century Three*: “WILL you see the infancy of this sublime and celestial greatness?” Perhaps the most famous section of *Centuries*, and a passage where passion – a passion more in *theme* than in rhetorical effect – clearly dominates the context, I quote not only to illustrate my point of passionate expression, but also because I so enjoy reading this moving meditation:

The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things: The Men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal Cherubims! And young men glittering and sparkling Angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. . . . Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day. . . something infinite behind everything appeared which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. . . . The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine; and I the only enjoyer of it. I knew no churlish proprieties, nor bounds, nor divisions: but all proprieties and divisions were mine.

**I believe this is exactly** the notion Longinus had of a lofty theme or grand conception – one with impassioned language, but also one that does not puff itself up with rhetorical or poetic fluff. The sublime effect here is innate in the sentiment itself, the language organic to it. Again, Traherne engages in exactly the kind of enterprise that Longinus might have viewed as part of the Sublime’s great conception, passion, and elevated style. Could any description sum up Traherne’s work better than Longinus’ statement that “our soul is uplifted by the true sublime; it takes a proud flight, and is filled with joy and vaunting, as though it had itself produced what it has heard.” Longinus’ view of the Sublime is a bit more of an aesthetic construct than what might be found in later thinkers. Great conception can be the result of conscious reflection, and passion can be represented. But it seems clear that whenever a thinker desires to express himself in this way, there must be a written manifestation of such grand thought that it can both reflect the speaker’s personal spirit, as well as move the reader toward an understanding or an experience of those grand conceptions.

**Traherne’s connection** with Longinus’ view of the sublime is, I think, fairly obvious in a general sense, but Longinus’ conception of the sublime is one, finally, of literary construction. Traherne, however, finds the sublime in a more sophisticated philosophical and, ultimately, theological realm. To understand Traherne’s notion of the sublime, of beauty, of love, we have to at least begin with a more philosophical orientation. Immanuel Kant, for instance, in “Critique of Aesthetic Judgment,” spends a substantial amount of time dealing with the Sublime and Beauty, specifically how the Sublime is different from Beauty. According to Kant, Beauty represents something finite, whereas the Sublime represents a more infinite state. Kant writes: “The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of an object,

and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of *limitlessness*, yet with a superadded thought of its totality.” Traherne’s work has frequently been noted to emphasize the concept boundlessness and the infinite. Consider, for example, Traherne’s conception and exposition of God’s nature (a nature that is subsequently passed down to mankind). This notion of the infinite, of boundlessness, of God’s formless and therefore, limitless essence is the totality of God in Traherne. Traherne even suggests that God cannot have a form because it would imply that bodies are themselves infinite:

[I]f He should take upon Himself a visible body, that body must represent some of His perfections. What perfections then would they have that body to express? If His infinity, that body then must be infinite. [That would not be a body at all.]

**But even more interesting** is the interplay between the finite and the infinite in Traherne. The fact is, Traherne spends a considerable amount of time talking about sensible, tangible things. Things, I think, constitute Kant’s view of the beautiful. Traherne’s pleasure at apprehending the trees or children, all the aspects of physical creation, are true sources of joy, but they are in themselves limited joys. The goal seems to be to locate and apprehend the intangible essence behind the physical manifestation. This is of course a very Platonic notion; consider Traherne’s celebration over the beauty of mankind’s own body, which becomes a source of a more intense connection with God’s essence:

The naked things  
Are most sublime, and brightest show,  
When they alone are seen :  
Men’s hands than Angels’ wings  
Are truer wealth even here below :

For those but seem.  
Their worth they then do best reveal,  
When we all metaphors remove,  
For metaphors conceal,  
And only vapours prove.  
They best are blazon’d when we see

The anatomy.  
Survey the skin, cut up the flesh, the veins  
Unfold : the glory there remains :  
The muscles, fibres, arteries, and bones  
Are better far than crowns and precious stones.

**Those naked things** are sublime indeed, according to Traherne, but are they not actually the beautiful? It is the intangible glory beneath them that approaches the sublime, not their physical presence. It is worth noting, again, the skepticism of metaphor here, as well as of language to adequately express the grander conceptions of

God – “Their worth they then do best reveal /When we all metaphors remove, / For metaphors conceal.” Here in this passage as a whole, Traherne virtually dissects the human body – the bounds of humanity, the most limiting aspect of human existence – and he attempts to explicate spiritually the beauty of that closed system. There is a beauty there, and Traherne celebrates that beauty, but it is the “glory” of that beauty that Traherne seeks to touch: “the Glory there remains.” God’s glory is limitless and it is through the beautiful that the limitlessness of the sublime can be reached. Traherne discusses “the infinite behind everything,” the “churlish” nature of “bounds” and “divisions.” Traherne raises God and ultimately mankind to a transcendent, sublime state that knows no bounds, no limitations, only infinite possibility. From the entry “Affections” in *Commentaries of Heaven*, he writes:

An Omnipresent Vastness doth Surround  
His Majesty, which is without all Bound.  
Sweetness and Ardor, Zeal and Violence,  
Excess of Lov, joynd with an Excellence  
So great, might justly ravish and Enflame  
Us, while his Glory only doth the same:  
What shall we say to Endless Benefits  
And Obligations which no Bounds admits  
Exceeding Fancy Limit Term and Measure  
And over flowing with all kind of Pleasure.

He loves to be our sole and whole Delight  
Because his Goodness is most infinite.

And in other places, Traherne consistently writes that God’s infinite nature fountains down to us, to our soul, to our love, as in:

Love is deeper than at first it can be thought. It never ceaseth but in endless things. It ever multiplies. Its benefits and its designs are always infinite

or

An infinite Lord, who having all Riches, Honors, and Pleasures in His own hand, is infinitely willing to give them unto me. Which is the fairest idea that can be devised.

or

You never know yourself till you know more than your body. The Image of God was not seated in the features of your face, but in the lineaments of your Soul. In the knowledge of your Powers, Inclinations, and Principles, the knowledge of yourself chiefly consisteth. Which are so great that even to the most learned of men, their Greatness is Incredible; and so Divine, that they are infinite in value.

**Traherne clearly sees “beauty”** in the dissected human form, but what he strives for is the infinite presence of the sublime, a state the limited capacities of body cannot reach. Somehow the limitations of the beautiful must inspire the soul upward – at least that is what Traherne

suggests (reminiscent perhaps of Henry Vaughan gazing on a flower and seeing shadows of eternity in them).

**Even mankind’s interaction with God** is one that does not reflect a typical conceptual limitation. This is one of the characteristics that I think makes Traherne very different from the other metaphysical writers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In Traherne, there is a disorganization and formlessness to God. Traherne typically does not “talk” to God in his meditations; that would seem to imply form. Donne, for instance is able to address God directly:

Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I  
Except you enthrall mee, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

Herbert, in a moment of personal disillusionment at the closing of “The Collar,” is about to hear, presumably, God himself exclaim “Child,” as he responds, “my Lord.” And there are similar examples of relatively accessible relationships between the speakers of various works and God throughout the body of 17<sup>th</sup> century religious writing. And Traherne does do some of this, in the prayers of “The Thanksgivings,” for example. But generally, unlike much other 17<sup>th</sup> century religious writing which tends to personify God to make him more reachable, Traherne often places God in a much more unperceivable realm. God is not brought down to our level, but rather we are expected to rise up to our own potential for transcendence in order to communicate – or perhaps a better way to put it – to “coexist” with a transcendent, infinite, bodiless God. Sure, he talks about God all the time, but his connection with God is usually tied to a kind of intangible infinite capacity, and it is a capacity that is transferred to mankind. Traherne’s connection to God is a connection to the infinite nature of God’s essence. Traherne writes:

He is one infinite Act of KNOWLEDGE and WISDOM, which is infinitely beautified with many consequences of Love. . . His greatness is the presence of His soul with all objects in infinite spaces: and His brightness the light of Eternal Wisdom. His essence also is the Light of Things. . . And we are to grow up into Him till we are filled with the fullness of His Godhead. We are to be conformed to the Image of His glory: till we become the resemblance of His great exemplar. Which we then are, when our power is converted into Act, and covered with it, we being an Act of KNOWLEDGE and WISDOM as He is: When our Souls are present with all objects, and beautified with the ideas and figures of them all. [i.e. when our souls have infinite capacity]

I once counted in Century Two alone nearly 250 uses of the root word *infinite*, and even more in the other four Centuries, plus other uses of *bound*, *border*, and *boundlessness*. And as quoted above, this same sentiment is found in the *Commentaries* and in other works. What seems clear is that Traherne’s notion of transcendence is one of a sublime boundlessness (in the Kantian sense).

Traherne does see beauty in the world as that which is identifiable in the object, but all such things are meant to lead one to a grander state of the sublime, where we leave the realms of the confined and find the true essence of Felicity in the Sublime, and in the infinite.

**Kant's overall philosophy** of the sublime is much more involved than I can express here, but the interaction of the tangible beauty of the world with the transcendent sublime is something that compliments Traherne's views of the natural world being a kind of physical marker for God's sublime essence. There seems to be in Kant, just as has historically been pointed out in Traherne, the suggestion of an overly simplistic, overly optimistic view of the sublime. There are other views of the sublime, however, that are very different from Kant's, but that I would argue are still very much part of Traherne's vision of the world and the theological quest of mankind within this world.

**Edmund Burke's view** of the sublime took a slightly different form; he viewed that which is terrible or horrible as a fundamental aspect of the Sublime: "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature . . . is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other." Although the "degree of horror" is indeed part of Burke's assessment of the sublime, the important point to remember is that such terror or horror is the result of astonishment and THAT quite clearly connects to Traherne's religious experience. I am not sure there has been any other writer, certainly any early modern writer, whose work exhibits any stronger sense of astonishment: astonishment at the world's beauty, at his consumption with the ideas of Godhead, infinity, natural perceptions, and the miracle of his own existence: "All appeared new, and strange at first, inexpressibly rare and delightful and beautiful. I was a little stranger, which at my entrance into the world was saluted and surrounded with innumerable joys. My knowledge was Divine." This joy over the surprise, the astonishment of creation, of what has been given by God, is everywhere in Traherne. One can hardly turn a page without feeling the sensations of that overwhelming surprise. Considering Traherne's emphasis on taking a claim on the world, the presence of astonishment seems organic to Traherne's vision. Traherne himself states that "If God be yours, and all the joys and inhabitants in Heaven, if you be resolved to prize nothing great and excellent, nothing sublime and eternal, you lay waste your possessions, and make vain your enjoyment of all permanent and glorious things." But what about the terrible? This is the rub with Burke's sublime. Is there really an element of what Burke would call the "terrible" in a writer like Traherne, a writer whose childlike optimism has even

been criticized by scholars as being naive and unsophisticated?

**With all respect**, I think the readings of Traherne have been too simplistic; I would argue that the horrible, the terrible, and that which frightens are all also implicitly behind Traherne's Christian construction of the Sublime. It is the fear of the finite, of death, of evil in the world, that is what being enraptured with God replaces. The optimism of Traherne, which has been so well noted, is really displacement of fear – a fear of the world without an infinite God, without infinite capacity, and without infinite love. To put it another way, Traherne's Felicity, the joy that permeates his work, is dependent on an equal acknowledgement of the terrible, of that which Traherne cannot bear, neither for himself nor for other Christians. When he expresses that as a child he had a pure vision, he implies that now, as an adult, he knows the "realities" of the world:

I knew not that there were any sins, or complaints or laws. I dreamed not of poverties, contentions or vices. All tears and quarrels were hidden from mine eyes. Everything was at rest, free and immortal. I knew nothing of sickness or death or rents or exaction, either for tribute or bread.

Here he recalls the childlike astonishment at the beauty of the world, but he contrasts that with "sins," "complaints," "poverties," and "vices" that he would come to know as a grown man. Still, despite his knowledge of the world, he still finds and preaches felicity, joy, happiness. One might say that Traherne expresses the sublime in its entirety. The terror of the world in some ways is the foundation of the sublime, only that terror is sublimated, displaced in joy, Glory, and the spiritual ecstasy of forgoing the physical world and entering the realm of God. In one of my favorite passages:

Being swallowed up therefore in the miserable gulf of idle talk and worthless vanities, thenceforth I lived among dreams and shadows, like a prodigal son feeding upon husks with swine. A comfortless wilderness full of thorns and troubles the world was, or worse: a waste place covered with idleness and play, and shops, and markets, and taverns. As for Churches they were things I did not understand, and schools were a burden so that there was nothing in the world worth the having, or enjoying, but my game and sport, which also was a dream, and being passed wholly forgotten. So that I had utterly forgotten all goodness, bounty, comfort, and glory: which things are the very brightness of the Glory of God.

It is as if the terrible of creation, the possibility of a world without God – the ultimate horror – is what allows Traherne to approach Felicity at all. Consider this passage from Traherne: it contains all the elements, all the characteristics that we have been discussing here – the infinite, the sublime, and even the dreadful:

What other couldst Thou intend by it but that I might infinitely please Thee? And having the power of pleasing or displeasing, might please Thee and myself infinitely, in being pleasing! Hereby Thou hast prepared a new fountain and torrent of joy greater than all that went before, seated us in the Throne of God, made us Thy companions, endued us with a power most dreadful to ourselves, that we might live in sublime and incomprehensible blessedness for evermore. For the satisfaction of our goodness is the most sovereign

**I feel sort of an academic duty** to at least touch on the fact that contemporary attitudes toward the sublime, I would say, have become less artistic and less spiritual and have shifted to the psychological. Burke's horrible of the sublime, as well as independent developments in 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural and psychological theory, really provide the foundation for current attitudes of the sublime into the modern era, and it is not surprising that attitudes about Traherne are certainly to be affected by those attitudes as well. We encounter modern – postmodern if you will – conceptions of the sublime that are constructed from Kant, Burke, even Longinus, but there are newer questions concerning the “reality” of this state, or rather a subject's acceptance of it. Popular in French post-structuralism, Jacques Lacan approaches the sublime as leaning toward the ordinary object that takes on what he calls “the impossible-real object of desire” that functions as a structural substitute for true desire; it occupies the sacred/forbidden place of *jouissance* and that alone gives it the characteristic of sublimity; in other words there is not anything inherent in the thing itself – we just need something to fill that lack, whether it is God, or something else. This, of course, is contrary to the conception of Kant, who would have assigned “the everyday object” to the more limited, formed constraints of the beautiful. However, it does at least remind us of Traherne's kind of passionate outcry and seemingly uncontrollable and near inarticulate pleasure derived from ordinary things: children; rocks in the street; trees. In a sense they become objects of transference to the sublime. More in the tradition of Burke's “terrible,” however, Slavoj Zizek views the Sublime as more of a cover up for what we most fear; Catherine Belsey describes Zizek's view as this: “Zizek's sublime object is neither beautiful, nor pleasurable and satisfying. On the contrary, as the symptom of an apparently universal pathology, the sublime object is at worst a materialization of forbidden “jouissance,” and at best no more than a mask of death.” This certainly has theological and psychological implications – that religious sublimity is an attempt to actually sublimate the horrible, the unimaginable, the death drive itself. I have no intention of getting bogged down in this, but it is important to see that certain aspects of the sublime are present even in these newer discussions: fear, happiness (a very, very loose translation of Lacan's *jouissance*), the need

for transcendence from this world in its material form. Still, discussions of the sublime are changing; as a result, discussions of Traherne must change as well.

**What should be clear** is that the dialogue on the sublime is historical, significant, and ongoing, and despite the various theories of the Sublime, only through witnessing or experiencing the sublime “in action” in some way can we begin to engage in a discussion that goes beyond the theoretical. Therefore, I would argue that my discussion on Traherne here today shows that Traherne can aid in the transhistorical discussion of the sublime, that is, we understand the sublime better having read Traherne; similarly, those discussions of the Sublime can better help us understand the complexities and sophistication present in what often appears as Traherne's very simple vision. The sublime is not a simple concept, it is both innate and constructed through art. It provides pleasure, peace, and joy, but it calls attention to the lack of those things and exposes the very worst of what we encounter. With regard to the subject of the Sublime, Traherne's work serves as a kind of case study for the shifts in the sublime. We can use Traherne to look at the techniques of “elevated” speech and grand conception that Longinus felt were integral to sublime art. We can examine, with Kant in mind, how boundlessness and the formless are paradoxically articulated within the bounds and forms of language: Traherne attempts to do just that – and through Traherne perhaps we can better understand both the separation and connection beauty has to the sublime, both of which Traherne engages. With Burke and later the post-structuralists, Traherne's optimistic vision of the world can be looked at more as a response and mask to the terror of the sublime's unknowns, and God and religion as a construct that allows us to function within that terror. We can look at how his optimism is pitted against his fears, and how sublime transcendence becomes crucial to psychological self-preservation.

**All of these issues** of the sublime are at work in an accessible way in Traherne – at least in a more accessible way than in the work of many others. Although one could argue from a psychological standpoint that the sublime undermines all art, Traherne writes in a way that exposes those cracks and fissures of the sublime and allows us entrance into them, and just as Traherne believes God passes His infinite capacity to him, so Traherne passes it on to us, and through that we find our own affections of the sublime.

**So I end today with this.** Once again I am here at St. Mary's, my wife at home with. . . you guessed it – my nine-day-old newborn – a son, John Michael. I am anxious to be both here and there; my heart fills at once with joy, then with fear, even terror. But once again, this place does ease me; I can feel Traherne

here, his undying commitment to joy and to love. Perhaps the joy of a new child is the sublime; the fear and terror that follow, the inevitable element of the sublime that Burke knew. What I do know is that Traherne sensed the sublime in all things. What looks tangible is infinite, what appears to have bounds, boundless. Traherne teaches us that when all other affections are acknowledged, fought with, and finally stripped away, we are left with the greatest affection of the sublime:

Our Affections meet either with sensible Objects, or Insensible objects may be Affected by us in one sence, but not in another, We may Affect them so far as to change our selvs, but cannot produce any change in them by our meer Affection. Bec. We cannot affect them with a sence of what we feel and doe. But objects endued with understanding are capable of being affected by us both ways. We can love them and move them to love, rejoice in them and cause them to rejoice, be angry with them and make them angry, griev because of them, and cause them to riev; fear them, desire them, hope for them, flie from them, persue them, despair of them ...and impress fear desire hope Despair etc. in them...One living Object affecting another Actively and passively at the same time. The sight of their Beauty produceth Lov in us, and the sence of our love produceth Hope Love Joy and desire in them. And thus it may be said of all the Affections.

Traherne reminds us of the sublimity of love, and that is his legacy.