

Wordsworth and Traherne: Metaphysical or Romantic?

Somaye Ghorbani

English Language and Literature, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

Email: qurbani.h@gmail.com

Zakarya Bezdoode

English Language and Literature, University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran.

Email: z.bezdodeh@uok.ac.ir

Abstract The present paper offers a comparative study of the poetry of the seventeenth century Metaphysical poet Thomas Traherne and the prominent Romantic poet William Wordsworth. Reflecting on the controversy over determining the scope of comparative studies, Susan Bassnett argues that comparative studies in literature do encompass as well those studies conducted on the works of authors writing in the same language. Furthermore, comparative studies need not focus on incongruent and dissimilar elements in the works of the compared authors. Accordingly, the present article attempts to conduct a comparative study of the works of two English poets belonging to two different literary traditions and separated from each other by a span of more than a hundred years. Reading the poetry of the two in the light of the cultural, historical, and literary contexts of their production and the intellectual and philosophical presumptions of their authors, we found out that there are a number of characteristic features common in the poetry of the two which connect their literary productions through invisible thematic and structural threads through the years. These resemblances include the two poets' inclination towards an experience of the sublime that reverberates in their poetry, the celebration of childhood visionary innocence, glorification of nature and natural beauty, pantheism, mysticism, and the philosophical and spiritual concept of felicity or joy.

Key words Sublime; Pantheism; Metaphysical poetry; Mysticism; Childhood visionary Innocence

Authors **Somaye Ghorbani** is PhD graduate of English language and literature at University of Tehran and Lecturer at University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran. Her research interests include Diaspora Literature, Postcolonial Studies, World

Literatures, and Comparative Studies; **Zakarya Bezdoode** (Corresponding Author) is Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature at University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran. He has taught English Literature at University of Kurdistan since 2007. His research interests are contemporary English and Kurdish fiction, Renaissance and comparative literature. He has published fifteen articles on these topics. His published work is available at: <https://research.uok.ac.ir/~zbezdoode/>

A Note on the Life and Works of Thomas Traherne

The Metaphysical poet Thomas Traherne was born in either 1636 or 1637 in Hereford, England. He was educated at Hereford Cathedral School and received his Bachelor's degree from Oxford University in 1656 and his Master's in 1661. He received as well a Bachelor of Divinity in 1669. In 1656 after receiving his Bachelor's from Oxford, Traherne took holy orders and in 1657 he was admitted to the rectory at Credenhill, Herefordshire. He was ordained priesthood after the restoration of the monarchy and the return of King Charles II. Traherne died of smallpox circa 1674 at the age of 37 or 38.

Traherne was a prolific writer and during his life produced a miscellaneous body of writings. He was, however, an unrecognized figure during his lifetime and his works were not known or appreciated until long after his death. *Roman Forgeries*, published in 1673, was the only work published during the poet's lifetime, and *Christian Ethics* followed soon after his death in 1675. The majority of his writings, poetry and prose, remained unknown for almost two centuries until the accidental discovery of two of his manuscripts by William T. Brooke at a London bookstall in 1896. These two manuscripts, one poetry and one prose, were first mistakenly attributed to Henry Vaughan, Traherne's contemporary Metaphysical poet. Brooke, who came to know of the significance and worth of the manuscripts, informed Dr. Grosart of his important discovery. Dr. Grosart bought the manuscripts and decided to publish them in the new edition of Vaughan's collected poems. Ironically however, he died before accomplishing his plan. His personal library was sold and the manuscripts found their way to Bertram Dobell who examined the poems and decided that they were in fact written by Thomas Traherne. In the meanwhile, Brooke informed Dobell of another poem called "The Ways of Wisdom" that he found in a small booklet in the British Museum. This poem had a meaningful stylistic resemblance to the discovered manuscripts. Although the booklet had no author's name on it, its prologue offered a clue to the unknown author's identity.

Accordingly, after a meticulous study of these manuscripts and examining their stylistic features, Dobell decided that they were all Traherne's. He published the 1896-discovered poem manuscript in 1903 under the title of *Poetical works* and the prose as *Centuries of Meditation* in 1908. Another collection of poetry known as *Poems of Felicity* was published in 1910 based on the manuscript found in the British Museum. The Lambeth manuscripts (manuscripts in the library of Lambeth Palace) also include *Inducements to Retiredness*, *A Sober View of Dr Twisse*, *Seeds of Eternity*, *The Kingdom of God*, and the fragmentary *Love*. Traherne's famous *Commentaries of Heaven* was found accidentally when it was burning on a rubbish heap in Lancashire. It was not identified as Traherne's until 1981. "The Ceremonial Law," an unfinished epic poem of 1,800 lines, was discovered in 1997 by Smith and Laetitia.¹

Introduction

T. S. Eliot's seminal essay "On Metaphysical Poets," published in 1921 altered the way Metaphysical poets were evaluated during the previous two centuries in the context of English literary history and English literary studies. In this essay, Eliot champions the style and poetic capabilities of this group of so-called Metaphysical poets—originally a pejorative term employed first by Dryden and after him adapted by Johnson to emphasize the supposed artificiality of their poetic practice—and enumerates as one of the key features of their poetry what he terms "association of sensibility." What is controversial about this article, however, is that there is not even a single reference to Traherne and his poetry in it. Although, at the beginning of the twentieth century some of the manuscripts of Traherne's poetry and prose had been recently discovered and a handful of collections of them, for instance the 1903, 1908 and 1910 collections, had been published, Eliot paid no heed to Traherne's poetry and did not mention his name along with the rest of the Metaphysicals and expelled him, so to speak, from the pantheon of Metaphysical poets. Likewise, in his 1930 article, "Mystic and Politician as Poet," Eliot devaluates Traherne's literary talents as a poet and regards him more of a "mystic than a poet" (qtd. in Johnston 377). In this article, Eliot argues that Traherne magnifies the importance of religious and political discussions of his day at the cost of sacrificing language and poetic form.

In *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne* (1969), Clements endeavors to modify the prejudiced evaluations of Traherne's poetry under the influence of Eliot's

1 The biographical information about the poet's life and works is mostly provided based on *Traherne: An Essay* (2016); a book written by Gladys Willett.

dismissing of him as a mystic rather than a poet. Clements maintains that such examinations of Traherne's poetry are "general, superficial, and disappointing" (500) in that they do not relate the poet's mysticism—that is, the content of the poems—to the form and style of his poetry and the congruity between the two.

In "Thomas Traherne's Songs of Innocence" (1970), Drake reviews Clements and Stewart's tenets about Traherne's poetry. He argues how these two critics' meticulous study of Traherne's poetry and prose gives a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of his works and links his literary practice to that of the rest of the Metaphysical poets and in this way provides a better critical stance from which to praise Traherne's literary practice as a poet. In "A Poet Comes Home: Thomas Traherne: Theologian in a New Century" (2004), Inge argues how Traherne can be regarded, besides being a poet, as a thinker and theologian in our time whose writings deal with the problems the modern man faces and whose mystical and spiritual tenets can be healing at a time when modern man encounters new ethical problems.

In his study of Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1999), Jonathan Wordsworth considers the "theme" of Wordsworth's poem to be "the human mind" which is "a subject truly modern" (179). He believes that the poet, unlike his predecessors, "has looked inward" and has composed his "new epic" based on "a godlike capacity that we are assumed to have in common" (179). He also considers "education through the sublime" as another key theme of the *Prelude* (184).

In his "Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*" (1999), Scott McEathron argues that Wordsworth had "little interest in systematic philosophy" (146) and believes that unlike his friend and collaborator, i.e. Coleridge, Wordsworth found his psychic education not through "books and tales of the supernatural" but through "a full-scale immersion in the sometimes frightening infinitude of the natural world" (146). According to McEathron, in *The Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth speaks with a "patiently confident and self-commanding" voice; a voice that originates from his unflinching faith in the power of nature; a faith which reveals his "abiding faith in the human mind" (154).

As it can be discerned, among the numerous studies conducted on the poetry of these two poets, no comprehensive study has comparatively scrutinized the poetic practice of the two poets so far. Among the reasons that have hindered such an undertaking, one can name the, considerably long, gap of time that exists between the two poets' eras; a time distance that resulted in the classification of the poetic practice of the two under two different literary movements; a classification which itself results from the inflexible cut-and-dried categorizations of the dominant

version of literary history. Yet, another reason might be sought elsewhere, in the dominant theories of comparative studies of literature which disvalued comparative studies of this sort in the first place due to the two poets' common national and linguistic origins.

Discussion

As late as the 1970s, it was held by critics working in the realm of comparative literature that one could not engage in comparative studies if the writers who were to be compared to each other were writing in the same language. As Susan Bassnett argues, "attempts to define comparative literature tended to concentrate on questions of national or linguistic boundaries" (5). For a comparative study to be "authentic," it was believed that the act of comparison "had to be based on an idea of difference: texts or writers or movements should ideally be compared across linguistic boundaries" and, accordingly, it was deemed pointless to compare two or more writers in terms of the resemblances and common aspects shared among their works (5). What is more, the activity of comparing authors writing in the same language was regarded futile and was not included in the realm of comparative literature. Against this circumscribing approach to comparative studies, however, Bassnett argues that any act of comparison is valuable and acceptable as long as it takes into account the "historical context" of the composition and the reception of the texts in question (8-10).

Traherne's style has been compared to that of poets like William Blake, Gerard Manley Hopkins and the American poets Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. It has also been discussed that there are Romantic elements in Traherne's poetry. But no detailed study has been conducted to painstakingly scrutinize such elements.

Stylistically and thematically, there are noteworthy resemblances between the poetry of these two poets. Since the great bulk of Traherne's poetry remained literally unknown until the twentieth century, it is largely improbable that his work had influenced Wordsworth. Traherne, however, can be regarded a Metaphysical poet who anticipated Romanticism prior to its due historical time. His Romanticism resembles that of Wordsworth's and the common elements in the poetry of the two can be summarized as follows.

The concept of sublime, having its origins in Longinus's treatise "On Sublime," found a detailed exploration in Edmund Burke's 1757 *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* and Immanuel Kant's 1790 *The Critique of Judgment*. In his article "The Picturesque, the Beautiful and the sublime," Nicola Trott enumerates different kinds of sublime in Romantic

poetry. According to his definitions, Wordsworth's sublime can be included under natural sublime (78) or what Keats terms "Wordsworthian or Egotistical Sublime" in his 1818 letter to Richard Woodhouse (27 October 1818, Selected Letters, 147-8) due to the poet's sublime descriptions of nature and his sensibility towards the natural landscape. It can also be labeled as transcendental sublime because of the transcendental experience of the infinite achieved through the subject's encounter with nature.

In his article "Infinity is Thine: Proprietorship and the Transcendental Sublime in Traherne and Emerson," Jacob Blevins traces the same kind of transcendental sublime in Traherne's poetry. Traherne has "an interest in essentially the same kind of experiential movement from finite beauty to the infinite state of sublimity" (Blevins 186). Sublime experience through the encounter with and understanding of infinity has its ground in the two poets' sacramentalization of the external nature as well as human soul or psyche. In Wordsworth's version, the sublime encounter with nature and its vastness and beauty brings about a kind of transcendental experience of infinity. For instance, in his *Prelude*, he remembers a nocturnal scene wherein he observes the beauty of moonlight:

There I beheld the emblem of a mind
That feeds upon infinity, that broods
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
Its voices issuing forth to silent light
In one continuous stream; a mind sustained
By recognitions of transcendent power,
In sense conducting to ideal form [...] (*Prelude*: Book Fourteen: Conclusion
[The Vision on Mount Snowdon], *Norton Anthology*, Vol. II, 386)

Or in his *Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*, nature brings about "a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused" (ibid. 206).

For Traherne, the source of infinity is at times the soul itself and at other times the nature and natural beauty:

Few will believ the Soul to be infinit: yet Infinit is the first Thing which is naturaly Known. ... That things are finit therefore we learn by our Sences. but Infinity we know and feel by our Souls: and feel it so Naturally, as if it were the very Essence and Being of the Soul. (Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, qtd.)

in Blevins, 186)¹

In *Commentaries of Heaven*, Traherne articulates his dissatisfaction with those “philosophers and moralists” who “did not understand ‘the Excellency of Souls’” (qtd. in Ross, *The Works Vol. II*. xxvii)

The discourse of sublimity popularized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe was, according to Heiland, an “important aesthetic discourse” of the time which emerged to “efface” the hitherto dominant Cartesian dualisms and “bianrisms” (113). Among such binarisms were the binarisms of mind and body, here and there, now and then, which penetrated, in a way, into most of philosophical argumentations. Through their pantheistic beliefs, both Wordsworth and Traherne depart from this Cartesian legacy. In both poets, the sublime experience of infinity nullifies the dualisms of here and there, now and then, self and other, for this experience brings about a kind of pantheistic unification with the One, the Creator. In “Amendment” Traherne asks, “Are men made Gods? And may they see / So wonderful a thing / As God in me?” (Traherne, in Willett 81).

Transcending the boundaries of the finite world and the sublime experience of the infinite inaugurate, according to Blevins, “the journey to felicity, to the experience of divine joy that exists only in the realm of the infinite” (186). It can be argued that the kind of transcendental sublime that can be experienced through one’s encounter with infinity has its root in the two poets’ Platonic ideas concerning the boundlessness of the human soul and its exemption from all material limits and restrictions. The desire for the sublime experience can also be related to humanity’s fundamental desire for emancipation from all boundaries and confines; a desire which also manifests itself in the two poets’ rejection of the rules and standards established by the literary tradition as the authentic norms and obligations for producing literary texts. It can be noted, furthermore, that for both poets the natural or transcendental sublime is linked to a kind of religious sublime (Trott 84; Blevins 187) that has its roots in the pantheistic thoughts of the two poets.

One of the key concepts common in the poetry of Traherne and Wordsworth is their philosophy regarding child and childhood innocence. The idea of childhood and the glorification of childhood innocence is one of the key motifs in the poetry of both poets. Dodd calls this idea regarding childhood innocence “innocency by creation” which “means that one is created innocent by God; it is a relational status infused by grace and set in motion by love” (216). Both poets regard childhood as a pivotal stage in one’s psychological and spiritual development. The concept of

1 The spelling and punctuation idiosyncrasies are due to Traherne’s special style of writing.

childhood innocence has its roots back in the philosophy of Plato. Plato believed that the soul is immortal and exists independently from the body both before birth and after death and that the soul of a person before birth dwells in the realm of *Ideas* where it has direct and unmediated access to eternal *Ideas* and to transcendental Truth. According to Plato, at the moment of birth and the child's entrance into the material world, the child's access to this Ideal world is ruptured and this rupture results in the total loss of the spiritual knowledge of the child; a process which cannot be undone after birth. This spiritual and intuitive knowledge can only be gradually recollected, so Plato argues in his *Phaedo*, by philosophical discipline in the course of life.

Wordsworth's and Traherne's notion of childhood, although originated from Plato, is somewhat different in that, unlike the philosopher, both poets believe that the spiritual insights of the child and her access to an ultimate Truth is not instantaneously interrupted at the moment of birth, but is immediately available to the child during her childhood. This immediate childhood vision is recoverable in adulthood if one trains oneself to look at the world the way a child does. For Wordsworth, "The child is the Father of man" ("My heart leaps up", in *Norton Anthology*, Vol. II, 306). In "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," he interprets birth as "but a sleep and a forgetting" (ibid. 309). However, he believes that the soul of man, which he interprets as "our life's Star" is not devoid of vision and understanding. Nor does it come in "entire forgetfulness" or "utter nakedness," for it comes from God (ibid. 309). In poems like "Shadows," "Eden," "Innocence," "Wonder," and "Childish Thoughts," Traherne, likewise, celebrates childhood visionary innocence. "Innocence" is a song praising childhood innocence. It seems to be a remembrance of childhood, a remembrance through which the poet links childhood to innocence. He remembers childhood as a state where

No inward inclination did I feel
 To avarice or pride: my soul did kneel
 In admiration all the day. No lust, nor strife,
 Polluted then my infant life.

No fraud nor anger in me mov'd,
 No malice, jealousy, or spite;
 All that I saw I truly lov'd.
 Contentment only and delight

Were in my soul [...]
 [...]
 Whether it be that nature is so pure,
 And custom only vicious; or that sure
 God did by miracle the guilt remove,
 And make my soul to feel his love So early [...]. (25- 40)

In these lines, he becomes quite Platonic, for he maintains that as we human beings move away from our true divine nature and become polluted by culture, the gradual process of losing the purity of our souls inaugurates. This is a tenet which reverberates Rousseauian philosophy. However, Traherne believes that such a lost Edenic innocence can be regained and, like Wordsworth, he endeavors to regain that state: a state he calls felicity. In “The Apostasy,” for instance, Traherne invites the reader to go back to the prelapsarian Edenic simplicity wherein humans did not know about “superficial joys” (Traherne, in Willett 40). Childhood is the state in which humans are still endowed with this Edenic simplicity. It is the unspoiled state of bliss where God “in our childhood with us walks” (“Childish Thoughts,” *ibid.* 7). It is a state where

The world resembled his eternity,
 In which my soul did walk;
 And everything that I did see
 Did with me talk. (“Wonder,” *ibid.* 4)

It is in our childhood that we understand and feel God’s love in its purest sense. The child intuitively God’s love and finds it “Rich, infinite, and free” (“Poverty,” *ibid.* 44). That is why in “Innocence,” the poet cries, “I must become a child again” (*ibid.* 14). The child is, as Newey maintains, “an iconic focus for Traherne’s understanding of the whole shape of human life” (227).

In some of his poems, Traherne complains that, like Blake’s iconic child, he has lost his childhood innocence as a result of the experience achieved in mature life. Still, such innocence can be regained and when it is regained, it is combined with reason, understanding, and maturity and is hence more valuable. That is the reason why in “Innocence,” Traherne declares,

What ere it is, it is a light
 So endless unto me
 That I a world of true delight

Did then and to this day do see. (in Willett 13).

Likewise, in “Ode: Intimations on Immortality,” Wordsworth complains about the gradual dullness of his imagination brought about by age to him. In this poem, he is vigorously looking for “something that is gone” (in *Norton Anthology*, Vol. II. 309); something he is not able to see anymore (ibid. 308). He wonders “Whither is fled the visionary gleam?/ Where is it now, the glory and the dream?” (309). Nevertheless, the equilibrium and joy –a joy which is intermingled with a deeper understanding and wisdom– he finds in nature as “the anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,/ The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/ Of my moral being” (“Tintern Abbey,” *Norton Anthology*, Vol. II. 260-1) is a “recompense” for what he has lost.

The concept of bliss or felicity in Traherne’s poetry has its parallel in the concept of joy in Wordsworth. In “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth says,

[...] And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused, (ibid. 260)

For Traherne felicity is the highest state of bliss. It involves a quest for the divine and essential truth of creation. Felicity is a “non-material bliss” for one’s happiness (Balakier 19). It is, in Clements words, “a state beyond pleasure and pain, a state including yet transcending joy and suffering;” it is “the state of blessedness” (83). What Donne and Herbert might have termed “Love” is “Felicity” for Traherne (Drake 502). For Traherne, the “overriding factor in human endeavors,” is, as Balakier argues, “the natural tendency of the mind to move in the direction of increased happiness” (24). Accordingly, for Traherne, the human soul intends naturally to move in the direction of achieving happiness and felicity. The soul’s natural predilection towards this state of blessedness must not, however, be interpreted as a “naïve or Pan-glossian optimism” (Clements 30): “There is one law in Heaven and Earth above, / That by one Inclination all should be / Led and attracted to felicities” (Traherne, “Who made it first,” 168-170).

As with Wordsworth, felicity for Traherne is experienced most fully during one’s childhood, for as he argues in his poem “Eden,” a child’s soul before birth is in heaven in a state of Edenic pleasure and tranquility. In the moment of birth and during its infancy, the child experiences the same heavenly peace and joy: “As Eve, / I did believe / Myself in Eden set,” (“The Apostasy,” in Willett 19-21). Traherne

believes that the first feeling a new-born child experiences is love and the child's eyes find beauty in anything they behold. This state of childhood bliss present in the poetry of both poets can be compared to the Lacanian state of the imaginary; the first stage in the tripartite stages of a person's psychological development, for at this stage of bliss, the state before the child's entrance into the symbolic realm of language, the child has no experience of "loss," but rather has an unmediated access to the "Real," which is, for both Wordsworth and Traherne, a kind of mystical and intuitive truth about human soul and psyche.

Another concept which relates Traherne and Wordsworth's practices together is their common concern for intuition. Wordsworth challenged the rigid rationalism of the Neoclassical period which put too much credit on rationality, reason, and common sense. Almost two centuries before him, Traherne criticized the same thing. Although he did not reject rationalism, Traherne did not regard it as sufficient for a complete understanding of the human situation. Besides reason, he put emphasis on imagination and the knowledge acquired through intuition as vehicles for guiding human beings in the journey of life. In fact, in all of his poems, there is a dialectics between reason and imagination; a dialectics which brings to mind what T. S. Eliot termed "association of sensibility" which is a key characteristic of the Metaphysical poetry. As Blevins argues, "although Traherne consistently expresses the joy of experiencing the world via the senses, the senses are finally a failed path to felicity; only within the imagination and mind can such a higher state of experience exist" (187). One of the adjectives Jan Ross employs to describe Traherne's poetry is the word "imaginative" (*The Works Vol. I. xiv*). The poet's "Shadows in the Water" is a conspicuous manifestation of such imaginativeness. In this poem, Traherne imagines the possibility of a parallel world behind his own where:

By walking men's reverséd feet
I chanced another world to meet;
Though it did not to view exceed
A phantom, 'tis a world indeed,
Where skies beneath us shine,
And earth by art divine
Another face presents below,
Where people's feet against ours go. (41-48)

One of the reasons for Traherne's emphasis on imagination and intuition can be traced back to the influence that Neo-Platonists, Cambridge Platonists, and

Latitudinarians had on his thoughts (Inge 34). According to Cambridge Platonists, reality is not known by physical sensations alone, but by a kind of intuition that exists behind and beyond the material world of everyday perceptions. As Balakier creeds, Traherne criticizes those who “dismiss the non-material ground of knowledge” (26) and those who circumscribe themselves simply to scientific practice, for it is “incapable of giving the mind what it most desires,” (ibid. 37) the kind of satisfaction “which only bliss can produce” (37).

The concept of intuition is linked, as well, to the concept of felicity. In fact, felicity brings about knowledge through intuition. It brings about a “prelapsarian knowledge of God and the world” (Ross, *The Work Vol. II.* xxix). Related to the concept of felicity and intuition is the pantheism which is at the heart of Traherne and Wordsworth’s poetry. This pantheism is partly brought about by the special importance of nature and natural beauty to these two poets. Through observing and contemplating on the book of nature and natural beauty, one recognizes the greatness of God. Every part and parcel of nature mirrors the beauty of God and God’s hand can be seen and discerned in every creation. Nature is the source of inspiration for both poets. In *Centuries of Meditation*, Traherne recalls that when he was a boy, he “som times tho seldom visited and inspires with New and more vigorous Desire after that Bliss which Nature Whispered and Suggested to me” (Traherne, qtd. in Balakier 25).

This is how pantheism is linked to mysticism in the poetry of both Traherne and Wordsworth. In fact, the praise of nature in the poetry of the two is not a passive one and accordingly, the term nature/natural poetry would be a completely unsatisfactory label for the poetry of both. For it is not the celebration of nature for its own sake. It is a contemplative act which results in a higher and more sophisticated understanding of the world and its Creator. That is why Wordsworth says,

A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. [...]
 [...]
 [...] well pleased to recognize
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being. (“Tintern Abbey,” *Norton Anthology*, 260)

And this is how studying nature leads to a kind of philosophical mysticism. Traherne maintains, “in every Place and Thing we shall see GOD continually” (qtd. in Ross, *The Works*, Vol. II. xxxi).

Furthermore, both poets were living and writing in an age which witnessed, due to growing scientific discoveries as well as the birth of new philosophical trends—which were in contrast to the preceding classical orthodox philosophies—, an increasing inclination towards skepticism and atheism. Traherne, however, so Ross argues, remains “a compelling apologist for the Christian religion” (*The Works*, Vol. I. xiv). Like Traherne, Wordsworth maintained his pantheistic thoughts and his spiritual vision of the world in spite of the skepticism and agnosticism proliferating in his times.

Another characteristic which links Traherne’s poetry to that of Wordsworth is the former’s “radical experimentation with language” (Johnston 378). It is frequently discussed that the Metaphysical poets rejected the earlier Petrarchan tradition before them. They regarded Petrarchan conceits as hackneyed (Lessenich 3-4). To them, it had become, through indiscriminate adaptation and imitation, a kind of mannerism which had to be rejected if poetry was to rescue from banality. This rejection found its first voice in Shakespeare’s sonnets where, for instance, he wrote his beloved’s eyes were nothing like the sun (Sonnet 130, in *Norton Anthology*, Vol. I. 1074). It found its fullest expression in the poetry of the Metaphysicals, especially in John Donne’s. Johnston argues that the same current found its way into the poetry of Traherne. Like other Metaphysical poets, he was under the influence of anti-Petrarchan movement (379-381). Like Wordsworth who wanted to purify the language of poetry from its artificiality brought about by Neoclassical tradition, Traherne endeavored “to move poetry back to a pre-Petrarchan innocence” (Johnston 383). On the other hand, his poetic practice seems somehow different from that of metaphysical poets like Marvell and particularly Donne in that his poetry lacks the so-called artificiality of the baroque style. The number of conceits and metaphors in his poetry is fewer than those in Donne’s poetry for instance, and in this way, his poetic practice is somehow different even from the baroque style in which it is usually included. The language of his poetry is, according to Johnston, “non-metaphorical” and more like the language of prose than poetry to his readers (379). Among all the choices available to him, including the Petrarchan tradition before him and the contemporary style of Donne and other Metaphysical poets, Traherne, like Wordsworth, favors a new kind of poetic language which shuns “the guileless hyperbole of poetry typical of the end of the Petrarchan era in the English Renaissance” (ibid. 380) and welcomes the simplicity and intimacy of everyday

language.

Conclusion

As Bassnett legitimizes comparing the works of two authors writing in the same language as one of the many possible trajectories of comparative studies, the present paper offered a reading of Wordsworth's and Traherne's select poems in the light of their resemblances and the common elements they share. Writing under different cultural, historical and literary circumstances and belonging to two different literary traditions, the two poets, nonetheless, share key thematic features which originate from their similar, though not necessarily identical, views about creation, the world, and the human being's place in it. The two poets share a specific philosophical outlook towards the world which relates their works together in spite of the temporal gap of more than a century between them. This resembling philosophical vista shows itself in the thematic similarities that are discernible in the poetry of the two. Among such resemblances one can name the two poets' inclinations towards the experience of the sublime and the manifestations and reverberations of this experience in their poems, the glorification of childhood visionary innocence and the wisdom this innocence catalyzes, the celebration of nature and natural beauty, pantheism, mysticism, and the spiritual and philosophical concept of felicity or joy.

Their works also share stylistic resemblances that come from their departure from the previously dominated literary traditions, namely, Petrarchan tradition for one and Neoclassicism for the other. Finding the current literary traditions of their times insufficient for the kind of poetry they had the propensity to compose and for the kind of philosophical concepts they had in mind, the two poets departed from the monotonous repetitions and mannerisms brought to the poetic practice as a result of their contemporaries' indiscriminate copying of the canonical writers. Instead, they tried to rejuvenate poetry by introducing new themes and new stylistic features into the poetic practice of their times.

Works Cited

- Abram, M. H., Stephen Greenblatt (eds.). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Vol. 1 & 2. 8th ed. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.
- Balakier, James J. "The Competing Early Modern Epistemologies of Thomas Hobbes and Thomas Traherne: The Grounds of Felicity." *The McNeese Review* 47 (2009). 18-47.
- Bassnett, Susan. "Reflections on Comparative Literature in the Twenty-First Century." *Comparative Critical Studies* 3. 1-2 (2006). 3-11.
- Blevins, Jacob. "Infinity is Thine: Proprietorship and the Transcendental Sublime in Traherne and

Emerson." *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* 25. 3 (2012). 186-189.

- Clements, A. L. *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969.
- Dodd, Elizabeth S. "'Perfect Innocency by Creation' in the Writings of Thomas Traherne." *Literature & Theology* 29. 2 (Jun. 2015). 216-236.
- Drake, Ben. "Thomas Traherne's Songs of Innocence." *Modern Language Quarterly* 31. 4 (Dec. 1970). 492-503.
- Eliot, T. S. "The Metaphysical Poets." *Times Literary Supplement*. Ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921. Retrieved from: http://www.uwyo.edu/numimage/eliot_metaphysical_poets.htm
- Heiland, Donna. "Historical Subjects: Recent Fiction about the Eighteenth Century." Rev. *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21 (Feb. 1997). 108-122.
- Inge, Denise. "A Poet Comes Home: Thomas Traherne, Theologian in a New Century." *Anglican Theological Review* 86. 2 (Spring 2004). 335-348.
- Johnston, Carol Ann. "Heavenly Perspectives, Mirrors of Eternity: Thomas Traherne's Yearning Subject." *Criticism* 43. 4 (Fall 2001). 377-405.
- Keats, John. *Selected Letters: John Keats*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Lessenich, Rolf P. "The 'Metaphysicals': English Baroque Literature in Context." *GOEDOC*: University of Bonn, 1999. 1-50.
- McEathron, Scott. "The Picturesque, the Beautiful and the Sublime." *A Companion to Romanticism*. Ed. Duncan Wu. Blackwell: Oxford, 1999. 144-156.
- Newey, Edmund. "'God made Man Greater when He made Him Less': Traherne's Iconic Child." *Literature and Theology* 24. 3 (2010). Published by Oxford UP, 2010. 227-241.
- Plato. *Phaedo*. Trans. David Gallop. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Stewart, Stanley. *The Expanded Voice: The Art of Thomas Traherne*. San Marino: Huntington, 1970.
- Traherne, Thomas. *The Works of Thomas Traherne*. Ed. Jan Ross. Vol. 1. Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2005.
- . *The Works of Thomas Traherne*. Ed. Jan Ross. Vol. 2. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007.
- Trott, Nicola. "The Picturesque, the Beautiful and the Sublime." *A Companion to Romanticism*. Ed. Duncan Wu. Blackwell: Oxford, 1999. 72-90.
- Willett, Gladys. *Traherne: An Essay*. Cambridge: FB & c Ltd, 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.forgottenbooks.com/en/books/Traherne_10145475