

appendix they provide a detailed description of the most important editions of the *Mythologiae* from 1567 to 1653. We must be grateful to them for this clear, correct, and eminently readable translation and for the scholarly apparatus attached to it that makes it all for more useful for early modern scholars.

Jacob Blevins, ed. *Re-Reading Thomas Traherne: A Collection of New Critical Essays*. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, 2007. xviii + 254pp. \$39.00. Review by A. LEIGH DENEFF, DUKE UNIVERSITY.

For many students of late seventeenth-century literature, Thomas Traherne is readily characterized by an unbridled optimism about man and his potential for recovering the blessed state of Felicity, about the glories of infancy and childhood, and about his own capacity to see God everywhere. While scholars have long recognized that his charming delight in things is not really pre-Romantic, they have generally accepted that Traherne's intellectual lineage can be tracked smoothly through the idealisms of Christian mysticism and Cambridge Platonism. *Re-Reading Thomas Traherne* complicates this relatively serene overview. As Alan Bradford puts it in his excellent Epilogue, the author who emerges from this collection "is an oxymoronic figure more complex, contradictory, and controversial than we had once imagined him to be."

Although Traherne was an indefatigable writer, much of his work remains either unpublished or inaccessible. This material includes Roman Forgeries, the enormous *Commentaries of Heaven*, the notebooks, and, until recently, the newly discovered Lambeth manuscript. Admittedly, the work that is available is not trifling—*Centuries of Meditation*, *Christian Ethics*, *The Church's Yearbook*, *the Dobbell poems*, *Poems of Felicity*, etc.—but any attempt to summarize Traherne's thought or to trace its development is practically impossible. Presumably, completion of the Boydell and Brewer definitive edition of Traherne's works (the first volume of the projected eight appeared in 2005) will provide a basis for a more encompassing survey, although it will still be difficult to trace development over a life we know so little about. As a result, scholars are left in the position of suggesting plausible avenues for further inquiry drawn from re-readings of available texts. The positive side of this state is that virtually all approaches seem promising; the negative side is the difficulty of proving their staying power over the broader stretches of a canon still in the

process of being formed. So there inevitably gathers about Traherne studies both the excitement of a new beginning and the resignation of a certain belatedness.

There is no question that the nine essays in this volume pose significant, sometimes shocking challenges to traditional Traherne scholarship. Susannah B. Mintz, for example, in "Strange Bodies: Thomas Traherne's Disabled Subject," takes issue with overzealous views of Traherne's glorification of the body as proof of God's perfect handiwork by tracing images of deafness and muteness in his poetry. She notes that while Traherne tends to idealize the sense of sight, deafness and muteness become symbols of, as well as deliberate preparation/protection for, a hermetically-sealed existence, for a "solitary inwardness associated with mystical apprehension of God." Images of physical impairment, in other words, are structurally necessary in order to establish "a superior sense of selfhood." At one level, this argument would seem to repeat the charge of solipsism often levelled at Traherne, but Mintz's catalogue of the language of physical disability drives towards a darker point. The deaf-mute, Mintz insists, is conceptually powerful to Traherne "only to the extent that it is read figuratively, not actually." Such symbolic appropriation of disability is, she argues, an erasure of the social/material circumstances of the time, and critics who continue to celebrate Traherne's "so-called 'vision'" are only perpetuating this erasure.

Lynne A. Greenberg continues the focus on Traherne's language in "Cursd and Devised Proprieties: Traherne and the Laws of Property." Greenberg's general argument is that Traherne's work reflects the steady reconfiguration of property law in the late seventeenth-century. Building upon the historical work of Christopher Hill and others, Greenberg suggests that Traherne's "landscape of the mind" fluctuates between the views of such Interregnum radicals as Digger Gerrard Whitstanley (communal rights of access, boundless public lands) and the more proprietary rights of an emerging class of landowners (private boundaries, hereditary rights, the responsibility to increase the value of property by proper use of it). She is thus able to demonstrate a closer connection than has been noted between Traherne's writing and the material conditions of Herefordshire, one of the earliest counties to experience widespread enclosure.

Cynthia Saenz is interested in Traherne's view of language itself. In "Language and the Fall: The Quest for Prelapsarian Speech in the Writings of

Thomas Traherne and his Contemporaries,” Saenz, like other authors in this collection, tries to position Traherne more carefully within his Restoration context. She shows that Traherne agrees with Willet, Hughes and other Biblical commentators on the pure qualities of Edenic speech; that his views of infancy and childhood align him with a Latitudinarian (Whichcote, More, Smith, Cudworth) and Pre-Nicene tradition; and that his celebratory embrace of all forms of diversity—including linguistic—can be seen as a revisionist view of the destruction of the Tower of Babel as a *felix culpa*. Saenz’s point here is not that Traherne is interested in language reform *per se*, but rather that he sees his task as cleansing human perception by teaching his readers how to praise and to “prize.” As Traherne puts it in *Commentaries of Heaven*, man’s (here Adam’s) duty is “to Prize all the Blessing he had so newly received. And not only prize them but . . . to prize nothing over or under its value, but evry thing according to the measure of its goodness. . . .” Saenz’s suggestion that Traherne espouses three states of perceptual development is less convincing than her demonstration that Traherne’s embrace of linguistic diversity often forces him into ambiguous and contradictory arguments about the dangers as well as the potentials of language.

Kevin Laam, in “Thomas Traherne, Richard Allestree, and the Ethics of Appropriation,” compares Traherne’s *Christian Ethics* (1675) with Allestree’s *The Whole Duty of Man* (1658) and *The Art of Contentment* (1675), in part to complicate the usual distinction between “popular” and “elite” audiences. Since Traherne directly incorporated portions of Allestree’s extremely popular *Whole Duty* into his work, this comparison is appropriate and overdue. In a sustained and detailed reading of all three works, Laam is able to reveal both similarities (for Traherne, *Christian Ethics* is not, as sometimes argued, just a plan for thought, but for pragmatic ethical action) and differences (Traherne is not, as Allestree, sounding an Anglican call for conformity). Laam is surely correct in arguing that traditional distinctions between “modes” of seventeenth-century writing have often led to a failure to put Traherne into conversation with his own contemporaries.

Focusing largely on *Centuries of Meditation*, Raymond-Jean Frontain, in “Tuning the World: Traherne, Psalms, and Praise,” sets Traherne’s use of the Psalms in the context of late seventeenth-century tensions between private acts of devotion and renewed emphasis on the ecclesiastical custom of communal singing. Although many scholars have traced the tradition in which

Psalm-singing was promoted as a model by which an individual might participate in the spiritual renovation of the world, the Psalms are still often seen as individual acts of praise rather than public ones. Frontain's reminder of this tradition—from Paul, through Athanasius, Jerome, Richard Rolle, Langland and Erasmus—serves to buttress his argument that Traherne's goal in the *Centuries* is to promote “a circle of praise” that derives from Paul to Traherne to Mrs. Hopton and, eventually, to the reader of the printed volume. The model of David, in this reading, saves Traherne from the charges of solipsism by teaching him and us that “private prayer is now part of a larger, cosmic operation.” In this argument, Frontain, like Laam, calls useful attention to the often arbitrary divisions scholars have tended to draw between private and public, popular and elite modes of seventeenth-century writing.

Finn Fordham, in “Motions of Writing in *The Commentaries of Heaven: The 'Volatility' of 'Atoms' and 'Aetym's'*,” insists that Traherne's modes of composition (particularly his revisions) not only reveal “the intentions and preoccupations of his work,” but actually shape much of its visionary substance. This is a rather grand claim, but Fordham's careful analyses of discrete passages in the *Commentaries* is convincing. Examining what he calls “the fault-lines” of the text, Fordham shows three kinds of revision at work in the *Commentaries*: 1) eliminating doubt, especially in instances where linguistic representation might be suspect or imperfect; 2) eliminating confusion, since writing “upon the wing” may produce disordered consequences; and 3) eliminating “affections,” particularly those of premature pleasure and enjoyment that might weaken the logic of a specific argument. Fordham's detailed readings demonstrate in material form the paradoxes of a writer of such polixity continuously anxious about writing itself. This is not only an important new perspective on the *Commentaries*, but a compelling argument for a facsimile edition of this immense, fascinating, but still relatively unknown work.

One of the more surprising arguments in the collection comes from Carol Ann Johnston, who proposes, in “Masquing/Un-Masquing: Lambeth MS. 1360 and a Reconsideration of Traherne's ‘Curious’ Visual Language,” that the poet uses the court masque as “the fundamental structure in his imaginative spiritual configuration of interior space.” Johnston is fully aware of the apparently contradictory nature of this assertion, particularly for someone with clear anti-royalist and anti-court sentiments, but her argument is based upon competing seventeenth-century theories of perspectival versus linear

vision. In her account, Traherne constructs perception as a three-part process (compare Saenz): 1) the pre-spectival anamorphic vision of a child, decentered and fractured, unable to bring the whole world into focus; 2) the single-point, totalizing perspective of faithless adulthood, which offers a broader and more coherent but also falsely objectified view; and 3) the Christian vision—"a rediscovery of decentered perspective through the visual field of linear perspective, offering the Christian the best of both visual systems." Johnston suggests that, to Traherne, the cosmos is crisscrossed with centric rays, from God and from the faithful: multiple souls watch God watch each of them (a combination of multiple frames and centrist points). And this enclosed visual cosmos "finds its perfect expression in the image of the court masque as [Inigo] Jones designed it." Presumably this means that all perspectives in the masque converge on the king, but when Johnston subsequently argues that the king is the only figure who can view the masque correctly, the analogy becomes somewhat shaky. Even if one assumes that Traherne understood the masque as Inigo Jones did, it is not clear that visual field of the masque is equivalent to the mirrored vectors of God and the faithful each seeing correctly because each is seeing as the other. Whatever the validity of Johnston's argument about the importance of the masque in Traherne's account of human vision, she has certainly provided an entry into the relatively unstudied Lambeth MS.

At several points in the present collection, individual authors suggest that Traherne's texts are haunted by uncanny others of various kinds—the disabled others in Mintz's article, the "faithless" adults in Johnston's essay. Gary Kuchar, in a brilliant study of "Traherne's Specters: Self-Consciousness and Its Others," provides a theoretical basis for these figures of dialectical and uncanny otherness. As Kuchar sees it, self-consciousness, to Traherne, is understanding the soul's potential as a teleologically oriented image of God. Indifference—living without being fully conscious of how one's mind animates things, including the self—is to live as if the world had never been created, to live in a radically de-animated state of life-in-death. Traherne calls this uncanny life-in-death a dumb show. (Compare not only the masque form suggested by Johnston but the artificial mechanistic model of the state proposed by Hobbes). Using models of spectral otherness drawn from Freud, Derrida, Lacan and, less anachronistically, Jacob Boehme, Kuchar convincingly argues that this actively indifferent and spectral other is not merely the opposite of the fully

conscious self, but its double, “the inhuman dimension within human subjectivity itself,” a self-negating “dead puppet” (Kuchar recalls Restoration “Punch and Judy” shows). What haunts Traherne, Kuchar argues, is fear of the future as an on-going dumb show in which human actions are not “emanations of gratitude but are materializations of something radically inhuman [i.e., indifferent] and yet profoundly familiar.” Such a view may seem overwhelmingly negative to those reluctant to view Traherne through any post-modern lenses. But Kuchar’s broader point is that by analyzing Traherne’s early diagnosis of the paradoxical effects of modern disenchantment, we can better appreciate his precarious historical position “between Renaissance Neoplatonism, with its epistemological optimism and overall vision of the harmonious relations between soul and cosmos, and the demystifying force of seventeenth-century natural philosophy, exemplified by the objectifying and epistemologically skeptical thought of Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, and the Royal Society.”

James J. Balakier also takes up the question of consciousness in “Traherne, Husserl, and a Unitary Act of Consciousness,” but his models are quite different from those of Kuchar. Arguing that Husserl gives “theoretical strength” to a budding area of Traherne studies and that Traherne work itself “affirms Husserl’s notion of an ultimate transcendental self,” Balakier seems intent on countering some lingering ideas of Traherne as a sentimentalist or a light-weight idealist, or of his writings as exhibiting “an immature, facile optimism.” In urging us to take Traherne seriously, Balakier invokes the “scientific studies” of modern-day psychologists and physiologists who have described the “fourth state” of consciousness (waking, sleeping and dreaming being the other three) in a variety of documents published primarily by Maharishi International University Press. Balakier surveys Traherne’s writings for characteristics of the “Wondrous Self,” as Traherne calls it in “My Spirit” (the Dobell poems), and discovers, unsurprisingly, that such qualities “correlate with the personal descriptions of the fourth state of consciousness collected by researchers.” Whether that correlation “points clearly” to the validity of the “fourth state” or whether Traherne’s own statements about his interior consciousness are “validated by [modern] research findings,” Balakier seems to be fighting a battle that, in this collection at least, is long over.

In his introduction, Jacob Blevins hopes that *Re-Reading Thomas Traherne* will serve as the beginning of a new era in Traherne studies by making inaccessible works more widely known, by better positioning Traherne within his

own historical contexts, and by bringing analyses of his work more directly into contact with modes of contemporary criticism. While it is difficult to predict what “Thomas Traherne” will emerge from the Boydell and Brewer definitive edition, there is little doubt that he will be in the very good hands of a new generation of thoughtful and promising young scholars. The essays collected here show a richness of historical engagement and careful textual analysis that promise the new era in Traherne studies should be both exciting and challenging. Whether this will be enough to bring Traherne to center stage in late seventeenth-century studies or leave him in the wings with a few dedicated enthusiasts remains to be seen.

Linda Levy Peck. *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xvi + 431 pp. + 48 illus. \$38.00. Review by ELENA LEVY-NAVARRO, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-WHITEWATER.

If not quite a luxury good itself, *Consuming Splendor* with its 48 illustrations certainly is pleasing to the eye. It also offers a wealth of examples that will be of interest to scholars of literature, art history, and history. Levy Peck offers a bold corrective to previous history that sees the eighteenth century as witnessing the emergence of a market for luxury goods. Such a market actually started much earlier in the seventeenth century, Levy Peck argues. Her analysis also seeks to correct the tendency in the previous scholarship to see this market as emerging with the rise of the “middling group” (352). In turning to the seventeenth century, she asks us to consider how the crown and court contributed to this luxury market. In particular, Levy Peck seeks to redirect our attention to King James and the powerful Jacobean aristocracy, who instituted projects to modernize London and England generally. King James had plans to improve urban infrastructure, encourage foreign exchange, and improve the manufacture of luxury goods in Britain itself.

To make this argument, Levy Peck examines the emergence of “shopping” among the upper classes, and elites in particular (chapters 1 and 2), the rise of the new desires for luxury goods among these same groups (chapters 3 and 4), and the increased attention on architectural improvements both in London residences of the elite and in the broader urban landscape (chapter